

THE UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH IN ENGLAND FROM c. 850 TO c. 1100.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis approaches the interdisciplinary subject of death through four chapters, each focusing on different aspects of dying, death and burial in the late Anglo-Saxon period.

Chapter one provides a general survey of the primary sources, and then outlines the theoretical and methodological background to the study, derived primarily from social anthropology, and sets out the basic questions which arise.

Chapter two considers different ways in which dying and death were imagined and interpreted, and is based primarily on poetic and homiletic sources. It discusses the questions of whether death is seen as intrinsic to creation, what purposes it serves and what relation there is, if any, between the kind of life a person leads and the kind of death she or he might expect. It looks at the ways in which the body was constructed as a sacred and vulnerable space, continually under attack. This chapter also explores the differences between the states of living, death and dying, and the ways in which the period of dying was perceived as particularly important.

Chapter three focuses on the more concrete issues of the body and the grave, surveying the archaeological evidence for different kinds of burial practice in late Anglo-Saxon England. It also brings in evidence from wills, poems, homilies and law codes, clarifying a complex network of attitudes to the corpse in the grave and the grave in the landscape.

Chapter four is a case study of the sources for the dying and death of King Edward the Confessor, drawing on the more general themes discussed in the previous chapters. Edward is a particularly suitable subject for this analysis as the sources which describe his death do so for very different reasons, perceiving and presenting the king in a number of different ways.

TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BAR BS	British Archaeological Reports, British Series
BAR SS	British Archaeological Reports, Supplementary Series
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
EETS OS	Early English Texts Society, Original Series
EETS SS	Early English Texts Society, Supplementary Series
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>HE</i>	Bede. <i>The Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> . Ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors. (Oxford, 1969)
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris, 1841-64)
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
Whitelock, <i>EHD</i>	D. Whitelock (ed), <i>English Historical Documents c. 500-1042</i> . (London, 1955)

INTRODUCTION

i. Theory and Methodology

The subject of this discussion is death, and how people in England responded to it, in texts, images, rituals and burial practice, between *circa* 850 and *circa* 1100. In its broad approach, it analyses the understanding of the dying and dead body and the ways in which it was socially and culturally constructed. It also considers the different means by which this society tried to make imaginative sense of death. These are topics which have seen a surge of interest in recent years from historians, sociologists and anthropologists. However, despite this trend, and despite the rich corpus of surviving material, the early medieval period and Anglo-Saxon England in particular have remained largely unexplored. This is true even for recent works which might have been expected to cover these topics. The current study is an attempt to fill part of this gap. It uses data from historical, art-historical, literary and archaeological sources, on the grounds that an attempt to reconstruct cultural ways of thinking permits — in fact it demands — that as wide as possible a range of different kinds of evidence be considered.

The chronological parameters of this thesis, from *c*850 to *c*1100, are dictated by a number of factors, paramount among which are the archaeological data. These are complex and difficult to date with precision for many reasons. Soil in churchyards undergoes continual disturbance, which means that stratigraphic relations between graves are hard to identify. The burial rite in this period is predominantly unfurnished,¹ with the result that

¹ H. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Pre-Conversion England c.600-c.850*. BAR British Series 261 (1997), p. 17.

there is little in the way of diagnostic material culture other than the occasional coffin nail or shroud pin. Nonetheless, these graves signal ideology through their structures and the ways in which the body was treated. As one of its main themes, the study takes the changes in burial practice which become visible in the ninth century and continue in use for over three hundred years. One of the reasons for including the thirty years or so after 1066 is that the Norman Conquest seems to have had very little immediate impact on the archaeology of burial practice, either above or below the ground.² The archaeological data, however, do not stand alone, and the thesis makes continual reference back and forth between the textual and material sources of evidence. Post-Conquest material is also included because of the nature of the historical data which form the subject of chapter four. With the probable exceptions of the verse entries in the C and D texts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and Book I of the *Vita Eadwardi*, all the sources for the death of Edward the Confessor were certainly produced after the Battle of Hastings.³

In terms of geographical parameters, the thesis confines itself to England including the Danelaw, with the proviso that non-Christian practices as such do not fall within its remit. Where non-Christian burials, or accounts of burials, are considered, it is only for the sake of the light that they shed on the attitudes of the mainstream Christian culture to dying, death and burial.

The centuries under consideration here were officially Christian in ideology, as are the data they produce, but late Anglo-Saxon attitudes to dying and death cannot be understood simply by assuming that they correspond with Christian orthodoxy, primarily because no such orthodoxy existed during this period. Indeed, the problems of the

² A. Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and Landscape* (Stroud, 1999), pp. 181-82.

³ Although Edward was not canonised until 1161, he will usually be referred here to as 'the Confessor' in order to distinguish him from Edward the Martyr.

significance of the dead body and the precise fate of the soul between death and final judgment have continued to challenge theologians to the present day. Thinking about death is never consistent, and perhaps cannot be consistent. Binski describes medieval thought about death in general as 'protean'⁴ while Brandon relates the wide range of beliefs he describes to the fact that

in the matter of eschatological doctrine the Church, while affirming belief in the resurrection and judgment of the dead, never attempted to define its teaching about them....Varieties of belief could be held which, on analysis, are found to be contradictory.⁵

Nonetheless, it may be argued that the centuries under consideration here were a particularly experimental period. This is partly because before the papacy of Innocent III (1198-1216), there was no official papal endorsement of the nature or location of Purgatory. This state of affairs allowed rival theories about the dead soul to compete for existence.⁶ During the ninth to eleventh centuries, in addition, the network of parish churches and their associated graveyards was beginning to take shape as a new kind of norm, replacing an earlier and less regulated system of burial.⁷ Under these circumstances, the development of new strategies where death was concerned takes on an unusual degree of visibility.

Ideas about the living body and the dead body cannot be kept wholly separate. There were various approaches to sexuality and the body, and to theological orthodoxy, at work within the Anglo-Saxon Church during this period. This is most visible in the context of the tenth-century Benedictine Reform when communities of clerks were systematically

⁴ P. Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996), p. 214.

⁵ S. Brandon, *The Judgment of the Dead: An Historical and Comparative Study of the Idea of the Post-Mortem Judgment in the Major Religions* (London, 1967), pp. 113-14.

⁶ J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 174-75.

⁷ R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London, 1989), chs. 4 and 5.

replaced by celibate monks,⁸ and ideas about the wider desirability of celibacy were becoming more prominent in the work of writers like Abbo of Fleury.⁹ The ways in which the body was seen as differently vulnerable in life and death will be explored below, as will the understanding of the bodily resurrection at the Last Judgment. Gatch has drawn attention to the differences between the eschatological traditions in the earlier tenth-century Vercelli and Blickling homilies, with their ‘internal contradictions’ and ‘confused...incompatible pictures’, and the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan, which he shows to be more rigorous and consistent.¹⁰ In considering the available evidence for late Anglo-Saxon attitudes to death, therefore, one should not expect to encounter a single narrative or set of beliefs. Indeed, consistency should not necessarily be prized above contradiction when evaluating the evidence: dying and death are complex and highly variable biological processes, and are therefore amenable to many different kinds of interpretation even within the one culture. Furthermore, death is often perceived as a source of profit as well as one of loss on many levels from the most pragmatic to the most transcendent, and one might expect to see this reflected in the surviving material.

ii. Previous Studies

⁸ D. H. Farmer, ‘The Progress of the Monastic Revival’ in D. Parsons (ed.), *Tenth Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia* (London, 1975), pp. 10-19, 12-13.

⁹ E. Dachowski, ‘*Tertius est optimus*: Marriage, Continence, and Virginity in the Politics of Late Tenth- and early Eleventh-Century Francia’ in M. Frassetto (ed.), *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York and London, 1998), pp. 117-29.

¹⁰ M. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 7-8.

It was asserted above that recent studies relevant to this thesis have left the material from later Anglo-Saxon England relatively unexplored. The following paragraph is a form of annotated bibliography of these works.

Paxton, in his study of the development of the liturgical practices connected to dying and death, concentrates on the Carolingian material up to 850.¹¹ Geake also concentrates on the period up to 850, and her study is an analysis of the cultural affiliations of grave-goods rather than a consideration of attitudes to death *per se*.¹² Daniell, in a wide survey of the evidence for later medieval death and burial, defines his Middle Ages as 1066 to 1550.¹³ Daniell and Thompson do not have the space to go into detailed analysis, although they provide a useful overview of Anglo-Saxon material.¹⁴ Binski, while claiming to cover ‘the period between the late Roman Empire and the Reformation’ barely touches on pre-Conquest evidence,¹⁵ like Boase, who concentrates on late and art-historical subjects.¹⁶ Brown’s focus of interest is on Late Antiquity,¹⁷ while the collection of essays edited by Kay and Rubin deals only with issues of embodiment in the later Middle Ages.¹⁸ Le Goff’s controversial work on the development of Purgatory devotes only thirty pages out of four hundred to what he terms the ‘doctrinal stagnation’ of the whole of early medieval Europe,¹⁹ whereas Bynum at least acknowledges that ‘no one can be more keenly aware

¹¹ F. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (New York, 1990), pp. 1-2.

¹² Geake, *Grave-Goods in Conversion Period England*, *passim*.

¹³ C. Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550* (London, 1997), p. vii.

¹⁴ C. Daniell and V. Thompson, ‘Pagans and Christians: 400-1150’ in P. Jupp and C. Gittings (eds.) *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 65-89.

¹⁵ Binski, *Medieval Death*.

¹⁶ T. Boase, *Death in the Middle Ages: Mortality, Judgment and Remembrance* (London, 1972).

¹⁷ P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London, 1989).

¹⁸ S. Kay, and M. Rubin, (eds.), *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester, 1994).

¹⁹ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 96.

than I how much [this book] loses by omitting the early Middle Ages in which materialist conceptions of bodily resurrection were elaborated in new ways'.²⁰ Geary deals with Continental material,²¹ as does McLaughlin.²² Murray's magisterial work on medieval suicide explicitly omits the first millennium because of the paucity of evidence.²³ Gatch deals only with the preservation of patristic thought on eschatology in Anglo-Saxon England;²⁴ elsewhere he discusses the eschatological preaching of Ælfric and Wulfstan, but again his interest is primarily in their use of sources and only secondarily in any cultural context or social function.²⁵ In this his work is very similar to Grundy's survey of Ælfric's theological writing on death and judgment.²⁶ O'Brien O'Keeffe has raised some fascinating issues concerning the living body as subject in late Anglo-Saxon England but her argument does not extend to the dead body,²⁷ while Reynolds' important study of the archaeology of Anglo-Saxon law is concerned with one particular kind of death only, that of the executed criminal.²⁸ By providing an interdisciplinary analysis of dying and death in England in this period, therefore, the present study will attempt to fill in some of the areas omitted by the works referred to above. It will make an effort to recover what Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, in their assessment of the influence that the awareness of death has on the human psyche,

²⁰ C. W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995), p. xvii.

²¹ P. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Cornell, 1994).

²² M. McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayers for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca and London, 1994).

²³ A. Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages. Volume 1: The Violent against Themselves* (Oxford, 1998), p. vii.

²⁴ M. Gatch, *Death: Meaning and Mortality in Christian Thought and Contemporary Culture* (New York, 1964).

²⁵ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*.

²⁶ L. Grundy, *Books and Grace: Ælfric's Theology*, King's College London Medieval Studies VI (Exeter, 1991), pp. 212-66.

²⁷ K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Body and Law in late Anglo-Saxon England' in *Anglo-Saxon England 27* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 209-32.

²⁸ A. Reynolds, 'The Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries' in G. De Boe and F. Verhaege (eds.), *Death and Burial in Medieval Europe* (Zellik, 1997), pp. 33-41.

term the *death system*,²⁹ the cultural orientation towards death, of late Anglo-Saxon England. The data will be interpreted with the assumption that textual and material cultures are not merely reflective of their society but also function, intentionally or unintentionally, as shapers of that society.

iii. Structure of the Present Study

This analysis of the late Anglo-Saxon death system will be achieved through four chapters, each with a different focus, which, taken together, will provide a general overview of the theories and practices associated with dying, death and burial. The present chapter provides a general survey of the primary sources from Anglo-Saxon England. It then outlines the theoretical and methodological background to the study, derived primarily from social anthropology, and sets out the basic questions which arise from the combination of the general theoretical approaches and the particular data. Each of Chapters Two to Four takes a different discipline as its focus, although all aim ultimately to participate in an interdisciplinary analysis.

Chapter two considers different ways in which dying and death were imagined and interpreted, and is based primarily on poetic and homiletic sources. It discusses the questions of whether death is seen as intrinsic to creation, what purposes it serves and what relation there is, if any, between the kind of life a person leads and the kind of death she or he might expect. It looks at the vulnerability of the body in life and death and the ways in which it was constructed as a sacred and vulnerable space, continually under attack. This chapter also explores the differences between the states of living, death and dying, and the

²⁹ R. Kastenbaum, and R. Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death* (New York, 1976), pp. 146-59.

ways in which the period of dying was perceived as particularly important. Death and dying emerge as very different things, death being an inevitable and uncontrollable event whereas dying is a process during which one can moderate one's behaviour. In many of these texts, someone's reaction to the approach of death is used as an epitome of his whole life. Many of these texts function as a kind of implicit *ars moriendi*, from which the audience could have learned important lessons to help in understanding their own approaching deaths.

Chapter three focuses on the more concrete issues of the body and the grave. It surveys the archaeological evidence for different kinds of burial practice in late Anglo-Saxon England, including the treatment of the body, the construction and location of the grave, and the evidence for grave markers. It puts the archaeological data into context by bringing in evidence from wills, poems, homilies and law codes, clarifying a complex network of attitudes to the corpse in the grave and the grave in the landscape.

Chapter four is a case study of the sources for the dying and death of King Edward the Confessor. While it focuses on historical data, it draws strongly on the more general themes discussed in the previous chapters. Edward is a particularly suitable subject for this analysis as the sources which describe his death do so for very different reasons, perceiving and presenting the king in a number of different ways.

Death is a mercurial subject: if you try to pin it down it wriggles away. To mix metaphors, La Rochefoucauld famously compared death to the sun, in that you can look directly at neither of them.³⁰ This elusiveness, or dazzle, has two effects on the present study. The first is that some of the writers under discussion here run into difficulties when they try to describe or analyse death too closely and, as a result, their accounts are riddled

³⁰ cited in D. J. Enright (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Death* (Oxford, 1983), 39.

with contradictions. The second is that attitudes to death are sometimes easier to see if viewed through the filter of a connected subject. These subjects include ideas of kingship, heroism and sanctity, the understanding of the living body and its relationship with the soul, the function of disease and the location of sin in the living body, and attitudes to the past and the construction of reputation and memory in a culture of mixed oral and literate traditions. This process of illumination works in both directions. Cultural priorities and obsessions often become clearer at moments of crisis, and much of the data analysed here could be filed under 'Crisis Management Strategies'. As a result, interrogation of what might be termed 'death testimonies', which are highly amenable to contemporary ideological manipulation, can clarify substantial issues, such as the legitimacy of succession of power, and supplement other methodologies of enquiry into the cultures of the past.

CHAPTER 1

STUDYING DEATH

i. The Nature of the Sources: Literature, Archaeology, History

In the following section, the primary data will be examined and their relevance to the present argument established. Attitudes to death are expressed in almost every kind of surviving evidence, and here each discipline will be broadly considered in turn, with the perspective of the thesis remaining ultimately interdisciplinary. In some ways the essential questions — authorship, date, place, message and audience — transcend disciplinary boundaries, but they translate very differently, depending on whether one is interrogating a piece of embroidery, a Latin saint's life by a named author, an anonymous passage of vernacular poetry or an equally anonymous grave. (The decision has been made to put translations of the primary sources in the main body of the text, with the original in the footnotes, in the hope that this will make the text read more easily).

The surviving corpus of Old English poetry is the arena in which many of the ideas about death in late Anglo-Saxon society were embodied and dramatised. The debate about the date of these poems is unlikely ever to be resolved, but the major codices all date from the tenth or early eleventh centuries. There are four main codices containing the surviving Old English poetry; these are British Library Cotton Vitellius A. xv (the *Beowulf*

manuscript) and Bodleian Junius 11 (the Junius Manuscript), the Vercelli Book (in the Cathedral Library at Vercelli) and the Exeter Book (in Exeter Cathedral Library).³¹ The other manuscripts containing verse number some ninety in total and their contents have been edited together.³² In total, approximately 30,000 lines of poetry in Old English survive. Almost all of these poems are explicitly Christian and many are based on Biblical, Apocryphal or hagiographical sources, although those sources are often manipulated in unexpected ways, as in the case of *Genesis B*, in a process which Irvine terms 'absorption and transformation'.³³ The original contexts and audiences of the poems are unknown; here they will be discussed on the assumption that, while the poems may or may not have been originally produced at the same time as their manuscripts, they were clearly of interest in the tenth and eleventh centuries and can be discussed in the context of that period. The fluid and intertextual nature of Old English poetry, with its traditional vocabulary, results in what Pasternack calls 'anonymous polyphony',³⁴ with each structural segment from the half-line to the whole work referring to many other poems, not quoting directly but drawing from a well of common tradition. As a result, Old English poetry provides a reflection of the assumptions and interpretations acceptable to the culture as a whole, rather than the perspective and understanding of a single poetic voice.

³¹ F. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Boston, 1950); G. P. Krapp (ed.), *The Junius Manuscript*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records I (New York, 1931); G. P. Krapp (ed.), *The Vercelli Book*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records II (London, 1932); G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, (eds.) *The Exeter Book*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records III (London, 1936).

³² E. V. K. Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records VI (London and New York, 1942).

³³ M. Irvine, 'Anglo-Saxon Literary Theory Exemplified in Old English Poems: Interpreting the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*', *Style* 20 (1986), pp. 157-81.

³⁴ C. Pasternack, 'Anonymous polyphony and 'The Wanderer's' textuality' in *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (Cambridge 1991), pp. 99-122.

Old English literature is conventionally divided into poetry and prose, and the vernacular prose texts on which the present study draws most heavily are the homilies, primarily those by Ælfric and those from the anonymous Blickling and Vercelli manuscripts. While the subject matter of much of both poetry and prose derives ultimately from Latin sources, it is possible to see different traditions informing the ways that the two modes treat some important topics, including death. We do not know whether our definitions of poetry and prose would have been recognised by the producers and recorders of this literature; the scribes certainly did not differentiate between poetry and prose in the way that they laid out the words on the page. There are texts which are hard to categorise, in particular the heightened alliterative ‘prose’ which Ælfric uses in his homilies and the irregular forms of ‘verse’ which appear in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. Shippey suggests that a more useful approach might be to divide the modes into ‘song’ and ‘speech’ rather than ‘poetry’ and ‘prose’,³⁵ a useful distinction particularly in that it highlights the mixed oral and literate nature of the culture, with orality and literacy forming two ends of a spectrum rather than being polarised states.³⁶ It is also worth bearing in mind that other kinds of documents, such as the vernacular wills which come under discussion in chapter three, not only grow out of an oral tradition, but are themselves, as documents, no more than the record of an oral and public performance.

While all the poetry under consideration here is in Old English, the prose is in both Old English and Latin. The most important Latin texts under consideration here are the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and the *Vita Eadwardi regis qui requiescit apud Westmonasterium*. Barlow brackets these together as ‘secular biography’, associating them

³⁵ T. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London, 1972), p. 16.

³⁶ K. O’Brien O’Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, CSASE 4 (Cambridge, 1990), p. 21.

with the *Vita regis Rotberti Pii*,³⁷ though, as noted above, the *Vita Eadwardi* also draws on hagiographical traditions. In some of these texts, the boundary between the genres of literature and history blurs to the point of dissolution; as Keynes accurately notes of the *Encomium Emmae*, '[it] represents the triumph of literary artifice over historical truth; and while truth is still there, it is a truth which lies hidden in the artifice.'³⁸ The description of Cnut's death and burial in the *Encomium Emmae* corresponds point for point with the ideal of Christian kingship, and therefore it may tell us very little about how Cnut actually died. It is nonetheless very informative about what this culture hoped and expected to achieve through the ritual surrounding the death of a king. By interrogating their testimonies about death, and by understanding the relationship between ideal practice and the account in a particular narrative, it is possible to come to a clearer idea of the purposes that these polemical texts were originally intended to perform.

The difference between Latin and Old English prose is not simply one of language; the choice of language presupposes different potential audiences, and even if the individual members of those audiences happened to be the same people they would have been listening to, or reading, the different genres in different ways. Much Old English prose, as noted above, is very similar in style to verse and must have drawn strength from its access to that same vernacular and intertextual tradition. Latin prose, with its much smaller audience and its status as a second, prestige language, is intertextual in different ways, referring to a wider European literature and often produced in England by scholars who were not necessarily themselves Anglo-Saxons. While the literatures in both languages are

³⁷ F. Barlow, (ed and trans), *The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster*, (revised edition, Oxford, 1992), p. xxi.

³⁸ S. Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint' in A. Campbell, (ed.) *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Camden Classic Reprints 4 (Cambridge, 1998; originally published 1949), p. lxxi.

self-conscious and elaborately wrought, it is perhaps easier to generalise more widely about the culture of Anglo-Saxon England on the basis of the vernacular texts than it is to do so on the basis of the Latin ones.

Furthermore, in common with the other sources of evidence, Anglo-Saxon literature can only provide a partial and prejudiced window on the death system as a whole. This is particularly the case because many of the surviving texts were intended to be didactic rather than descriptive. Accounts of the deaths of saints like Edmund of East Anglia or sinners like Herod offer paradigms, as do the instructions for the management of death and burial offered by the law codes, the *ordines* or the *Regularis Concordia*. Ideals may be social as well as religious. Georg Scheibelreiter has examined the deaths of Frankish bishops and comes to the following conclusions about bad episcopal death:

We may consider unexpected death to be the clear opposite of a death that has been announced in a dream or a vision.... Moreover, a sudden death brought great disadvantages for the bishop who came from a noble family: he had to dispense with the solemn staging of his death, as was required by his rank. Apart from the negative sensation which was caused by a sudden death, this was the way in which ordinary people died.³⁹

Clearly, in Frankia at least, an unprepared death was not only spiritually but socially disastrous. It is therefore very difficult to find passages in which any disquiet with the death system is expressed, or examples of funerals which went wrong. Identifying such moments of disquiet is one of the particular aims of this thesis. Potential clashes between the ideal and the real may be more visible when the archaeological sources, which reveal

³⁹ G. Scheibelreiter, 'The Death of the Bishop in the Early Middle Ages' in D. Loades (ed.), *The End of Strife*, (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 32-43, 41.

many elements of burial practice not prescribed in the texts, and the documents are read together.

The mortuary behaviour of Migration and Conversion Period England, between the fifth and the seventh centuries, is a well-trodden field,⁴⁰ but the ground has been less comprehensively explored from the late eighth century onwards. When it comes to excavating churchyards which in many cases are still in use, or have been in use until recently, there are often particular problems of access and interpretation. As a result, there is a strong bias in the available data from this period towards cathedral and minster sites and away from both rural and urban parish churches. However, this bias mirrors that of the documentary sources in that both favour a small but highly visible social subset of prestigious men connected in some way to the Church, so we know most about the burials of the people who generated most of the written information about dying, death and burial.

The cremation or inhumation cemeteries of the pre-conversion and conversion periods, with their elaborate grave goods, strongly-marked regional variations and complex structures including barrows, disappeared by the early eighth century. This change is usually associated with the spread of Christianity. The positioning of cemeteries also changed, and Geake asserts that 'no churchyard cemetery developed from a burial site in use before the seventh century'.⁴¹ If this is so, England differs from both Frankia and Scandinavia when those areas were undergoing comparable processes of conversion and consolidation.⁴² The earlier Anglo-Saxon burial practices were succeeded by much less diagnostic forms of burial, with a tendency towards shallow, unfurnished and apparently

⁴⁰ For useful overviews see P. Rahtz, T. Dickinson and L. Watts (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries 1979*, BAR British Series 82, (Oxford, 1980), and M. Carver, (ed.) *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe* (Woodbridge, 1992).

⁴¹ Geake, *Grave-Goods in Conversion Period England*, p. 135.

⁴² Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 39.

uncoffined graves in field cemeteries with little evidence of any associated buildings. From the ninth century, there are further major changes, resulting in more elaborate coffins and graves. If these developments were observed in a prehistoric context, they might well be interpreted as evidence of the immigration of a new cultural group or the result of a change in ideology, and elements of English burial practice may indeed be ascribable to the influence of Scandinavian settlers.⁴³ It has also been suggested that some of the new developments have their origins in a revival of Roman practices,⁴⁴ and again this may well be the case. However, the changes in burial practice as a whole must be interpreted as the result of developments within Anglo-Saxon culture, society and belief, as I hope to demonstrate. These developments include the growth of the parish church system, the consecration of churchyards, the reintroduction of both public and private penance, and the Church benefiting financially from its growing monopoly on burial.

The variety of burial practices in this period includes many different elements within a narrow and well-established range of parameters. From *circa* 900 onwards, charcoal burial, iron-bound wooden coffins, sarcophagi and structured graves begin to appear all over England. There is no obvious regional or national distribution to these practices overall, although the earliest securely-dated examples of many of them come from later-ninth-century Winchester. Similar and approximately contemporary developments occur in French contexts, although dating here is even more of a challenge as many cemeteries started as pre-Christian extra-mural burial sites.⁴⁵ In a survey of burial practices in the Oise

⁴³ B. Kjølbjæ-Biddle, 'Iron-bound coffins and coffin-fittings from the pre-Norman cemetery' in M. Carver (ed.), *Excavations at York Minster, Volume I, Part 2: The Finds*, pp. 489-521, 504-5.

⁴⁴ M. Carver, *Underneath English Towns: Interpreting urban archaeology* (London, 1987), p. 95

⁴⁵ M. Durand, *Archéologie du Cimetière Médiéval au Sud-Est de l'Oise. Revue Archéologique du Picardie* (1988), pp. 198-9; M. Colardelle, *Sépulture et Traditions Funéraires du Ve au XIIIe siècle ap. J-C dans les Campagnes des Alpes Françaises du Nord*, (Grenoble, 1983).

region between the sixth and sixteenth centuries, Durand comments that '[a]u niveau des techniques d'inhumation, le Moyen Age n'a rien inventé'. He does not seem to consider that this very conservatism is in itself interesting, remarking only that the people carrying out the inhumations may have been unaware whether their actions had a functional or a ritual purpose — 'l'usage des vases à encens dont les contemporains ne savaient plus très bien s'ils étaient destinés à chasser les mauvaises odeurs ou les démons'.⁴⁶ The French material furnishes an important context for English burial practices, however, showing that structures such as stone or tile-lined graves, or pillow-stones supporting the head, occur in other contemporary Christian burial rites.

Assuming that burial has a symbolic function as well as the practical function of disposal, it may be that there are many different kinds of message being encoded here, or that essentially simple messages are being expressed in complex and various ways. This complexity may be elucidated by examining contemporary discussions of death, burial and the body and putting the burials in context.

There have been some interesting theoretical analyses of pre-conversion and conversion period mortuary behaviour, in particular the structuralist analyses by Julian Richards on cremation urns⁴⁷ and Ellen-Jane Pader on inhumation burials.⁴⁸ Martin Carver has fruitfully compared the rich graves and associated structures at Sutton Hoo to the artistic genres of epic or drama, seeing the burial ground as 'a theatre, in which each burial is a composition, offering, with greater or lesser authority, a metaphor for its age.'⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Durand, *Archéologie du Cimetière Médiéval au Sud-Est de l'Oise*, pp. 198-9.

⁴⁷ J. D. Richards, *The Significance of Form and Decoration of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Urns*. BAR 166. (Oxford, 1987).

⁴⁸ E-J. Pader, *Symbolism, Social Relations and the Interpretation of Mortuary Remains*. BAR SS 130 (Oxford, 1982).

⁴⁹ M. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings?* (London, 1998), p. 139.

However, little attempt has been made to engage in a similarly creative way with the burial practices of the ninth to eleventh centuries. Reasons for this include difficulty of access to burial sites, which often form part of churchyards still in use, and the near-total absence of grave goods. As Boddington accurately observes, these burials have often been ‘viewed with some degree of indifference by Anglo-Saxon archaeologists’, but the variety of burial practices found even within the one site suggests that mortuary behaviour is potentially an extremely rich source of information.⁵⁰ In the course of this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that late Saxon burial practice, both for professional exponents of Christianity and for the laity, was a field of experiment in which many cultural assumptions and anxieties were explored and dramatised.

It might be tempting simply to categorise these innovative practices as ‘Christian’ and assume that this is a sufficient explanation, and indeed this is what most archaeologists have done. However, as Paxton points out in his study of the development of Christian ritual for the dying and the dead, ‘most areas of religious life in Christian Europe were characterised more by diversity than by uniformity before the twelfth century’.⁵¹ It is a salutary reminder that even when the broad outlines of ritual practice are understood, it is not possible to apply a neatly algorithmic formula to unlock the reasoning behind particular forms of mortuary behaviour. The Church did not prescribe any one particular form of burial, and the physical state of the corpse was officially declared to be unimportant;⁵² the disposal of corpses was therefore a field in which considerable experimentation could and did take place. Burial is often seen as having more to do with the concerns of the living

⁵⁰ A. Boddington, *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo-Saxon Church and Churchyard*, English Heritage Archaeological Report 7 (London, 1996), p. 69.

⁵¹ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, p. 1.

⁵² Binski, *Medieval Death*, p. 200.

than with those of the dead; here it will be suggested that the burial practices of late Anglo-Saxon England are best viewed in terms of a partnership between the living and the dead, in the context of conflicting and ill-defined eschatological doctrines.

In many ways, this thesis aims to engage with the broader cultural context rather than with specific historic events. However, it draws on many historical sources, and the particular problems of each source will be addressed in detail in the appropriate place. The division between historical and literary sources is not always very useful: here wills, law-codes, guild statutes and chronicles will be studied for their imagery, rhetoric and narrative as much as for the nuggets of historical information they may contain.

Historical sources are employed most particularly in chapter four, which uses the *Vita Eadwardi*, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and the Bayeux tapestry to anatomise the different ways in which the death of Edward the Confessor was constructed and understood. The *Vita Eadwardi* overlaps in some ways with the genre of hagiography, which is also drawn on extensively throughout the thesis. Hagiography differs from biography in that the former is not only interested in the details of the individual life, it is also, and primarily, interested in that life in so far as it reveals Christ working through his saints.⁵³ In reading these texts, one must be aware of the implicit models being used by the authors as well as their sources and the ways in which they intended their text to be used.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles are also considered, both in that they record many deaths and often use the event of a death as short-hand for the events of a whole year, and in that they preserve several commemorative poems on the deaths of kings and other significant figures, including a panegyric on Edward the Confessor. They raise issues about

⁵³ T. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 5-7.

public and officially-sanctioned commemoration, and how a culture chooses to define itself in relation to its past.

The Bayeux tapestry presents particular challenges in that it is couched in the symbolic language of images, as well as in a brief Latin commentary, and, given its status as a unique survival, its symbolic language is often obscure. Nonetheless, it is possible to read it as a sustained analysis of the complex nature of Christian kingship and the impact of death on its constituent elements. By attempting an understanding of the assumptions about death and dying that inform these texts, it is possible to clarify greater problems in historical methodology and the interpretation of ancient documents. This case study sheds light on one of the most problematical issues in early English historical studies, namely the circumstances of William the Conqueror's succession, and responses to that event.

The thesis also considers the legal context of dying, death and burial, bearing in mind that law-codes present particular problems, in that they are often derivative, they are designed both to reflect and to structure society, and that they may forbid the very activities which are most commonly practised. Wills are evaluated as a form of biography and a means of commemoration of both oneself and one's family, and as a primary channel of communication between the dead and the living. The historical sources raise questions about the ways in which burial was controlled and deaths were recorded, and how common cultural assumptions about dying, death and commemoration could be used to further particular political and ecclesiastical ends.

To draw together such disparate kinds of evidence from literary, archaeological and historical sources into a coherent whole is something of a challenge. The following section turns to the work of a range of influential anthropological thinkers in order to establish a

range of questions which can be applied to all the different ways in which a culture reveals its attitudes to death.

ii. The Anthropological Context

Over the last century, the ways in which death has been treated at different times and in different cultures have been the focus of much anthropological interest. While many details of a death system are culture-specific, some insights have emerged from these studies which are generally applicable without being reductive, and some of these will be summarised in the following pages. Applying these concepts to Anglo-Saxon England allows us to see how a particular culture reacted to the universal challenges posed by death. It also clarifies the extent to which death is a social construct rather than an unambiguous biological fact. An anthropologically-derived approach is also valuable in that it encourages the student to discard as many of his or her preconceptions as possible about the culture under discussion. Anglo-Saxon society may appear deceptively familiar to someone approaching it from a contemporary English perspective, but it must instead be studied as something alien, as Hill points out in the context of his analysis of the kinship structures in *Beowulf*.⁵⁴ By taking anthropological models and comparing them with the extant sources, it is hoped that this study will evade ‘the pitfalls of “common sense” explanations of cultural data’, as the anthropologists Huntington and Metcalf term them in their critique of historical studies of death.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ J. M. Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto, 1995), pp. 13-14.

⁵⁵ R. Huntington and P. Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 21 and pp. 133-88.

The following section is a survey of the most relevant anthropological studies of death systems in various societies and the theories that result, with an assessment of their applicability to the last two and a half centuries of Anglo-Saxon England. The discussion of these studies is structured thematically rather than chronologically, and considers issues such as the function of ritual and the understanding of the culturally-drawn boundaries of purity and corruption. It also looks at how anthropologists have tried to understand various kinds of changing relationships, such as those between the individual and the group, the body and the soul, and the dead and the living. Although these issues and relationships have here been expressed in terms of paired opposites, these pairs do not represent simple dichotomies, as will become clear.

There are several basic questions which this thesis sets out to answer concerning the nature and interpretation of the data, which are as follows:

- ◆ What kinds of deaths are recorded? Whose? How and where?
- ◆ How are accounts of death and dying used by the authors under consideration?
- ◆ What medical and theological understandings of death underpin the ways in which death is discussed?
- ◆ How are these understandings reflected in the archaeological record of mortuary behaviour?
- ◆ How did the various communities — monastic, guild, court — respond to the deaths of their members?
- ◆ What kind of commemorative and memorial practices were employed?.

In order to answer these questions, various conceptual tools drawn from anthropological discussions of mortuary behaviour will be employed, and the following section summarises these and assesses their usefulness. Among the most important of these are the works of the structuralist anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner.⁵⁶ They addressed themselves to the questions of the relationship between the change and development of an individual from birth to death, and the ways in which his or her society chooses to mark those changes, and their well-known conceptual models of the *rite de passage* and *liminality* will be of particular relevance here. I shall also be using the insights of Robert Hertz into the understanding of the corpse as a natural symbol of moral phenomena,⁵⁷ and the works of Émile Durkheim on the tension between the individual and his or her identification with society, and how this is reflected in death-related behaviour.⁵⁸ The work of Clifford Geertz on cultural change is also taken into consideration.⁵⁹ These writers provide useful frameworks for understanding the ambiguities and contradictions that, over and over again, we find associated with dying and death in the surviving sources from late Anglo-Saxon England.

The pioneer of structuralist anthropology was Arnold van Gennep, whose model of the *rite de passage* has proved highly influential. His seminal work on ritual, *Les Rites de Passage*, which was not translated into English until 1960, was a vast cross-cultural analysis of the nature and function of ritual, demonstrating for the first time the basic

⁵⁶ A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, translated by M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee, (London, 1960); V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London, 1969), especially chapter 3, *Liminality and Communitas*.

⁵⁷ R. Hertz, 'A contribution to the study of the collective representation of death' reprinted in R. Needham, and C. Needham, *Death and the Right Hand* (New York, 1960), pp. 27-86.

⁵⁸ É. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York, 1965); *Suicide: A Sociological Study* (New York, 1951).

⁵⁹ C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (reprinted London, 1993, originally New York, 1973).

similarities of the structure of ritual in many different societies. He was also among the first anthropologists to consider the function of a ritual in context, rather than interpreting it merely as a fossilised survival of archaic practices.

Van Gennep saw the life-long development of the individual within society as a progress through a series of socially-imposed rites of passage marking significant boundaries and journeys from one stage of life to the next. Each rite involves elements of separation from the old self, followed by a period of transition and finally incorporation into a new identity. The rituals associated with death are the most significant of these. They provide a model and a metaphor for the others whereby, for example, one might be described as dying out of childhood in order to be reborn as a young adult, or dying out of the world to new life as a member of a religious order, inverting the natural order in which birth precedes death rather than following it. In the context of funerary rites, Van Gennep also stresses the importance of the central, transitional stage where images of change and themes such as fertility or a journey take precedence.⁶⁰ Van Gennep's ideas have been widely and usefully applied in works such as Loring Danforth's powerful study of the rituals and songs associated with contemporary Greek ceremonies of burial and disinterment.⁶¹

Although Van Gennep developed his ideas in the context of his work on a wide range of cultures, these ideas may not apply with equal force to all societies. Nonetheless they have been used fruitfully in the context of medieval Europe. In his study of the development of the Western Christian liturgy for the dying and the dead from the seventh to the ninth centuries, Paxton acknowledges the influence of Van Gennep's model on his

⁶⁰ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 146.

⁶¹ L. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton NJ, 1982), pp. 35-6.

work, as well as the importance of Turner's development of the concept of liminality and Geertz's theories of ritual as cultural performance.⁶² Binski also recognises the applicability of Van Gennep's work to medieval cultures, in particular to the ways in which the rites associated with final unction were seen as creating a liminal zone which the anointed person entered and from which, should they recover from their illness, it would be impossible to return.⁶³ In the present study, the concept of transition, the central element in the rite of passage, will emerge as a particularly useful way of understanding the way dying is presented as a heightened and privileged experience in some of the texts under discussion.

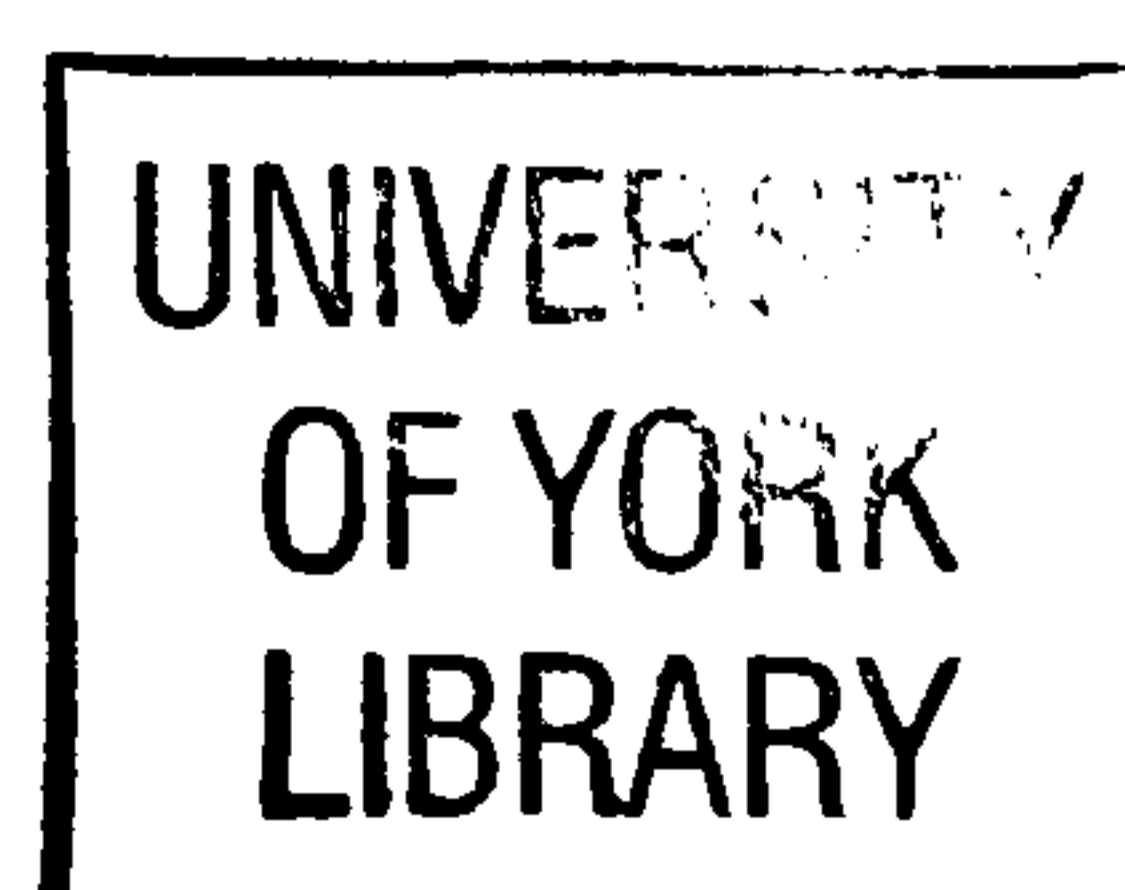
Van Gennep identifies the mourners as sharing the transitional, liminal status of the deceased, their lives temporarily in suspension. They are still intimately involved with the dead person and their actions often decide the fate of the soul. Rituals associated with controlling this fate may include ways of incorporating the soul into a specific group of the dead, paralleling the roles filled by the individual while alive.⁶⁴ This is an interesting light in which to read the prescriptions for and accounts of the different kinds of funerals in tenth and eleventh century England. The thesis examines guild statutes, saints' lives, rules for the conduct of bishops' funerals and descriptions of the deaths of kings to see how the role and status of the living person determines her or his treatment in death.

Ways in which the living identify with the dead also need to be borne in mind when reading accounts of the fate of the dead soul in the interim period between death and final judgment, and the ways in which the dead soul and its body relate to the living. It is

⁶² Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, pp. 5-9.

⁶³ Binski, *Medieval Death*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ Binski, *Medieval Death*, p. 52.



necessary to be aware that the living are not only connected to the dead at funerals and related rituals. Kligman, in her study of contemporary funeral practices in Eastern Europe, reminds us that the dead are the focus of attention, not only at funerals, but also under many other different circumstances, including during prolonged or recurrent periods of mourning, at festivals, in dreams and during religious rites.⁶⁵ There are therefore numerous kinds of sources which we might examine in order to see what kinds of contact the living have with the dead in Anglo-Saxon England, and whether there are any cultural spaces where the dead intrude upon the living in unexpected ways.

Van Gennep's contemporary, Robert Hertz, applied the idea of liminality even more specifically to mortuary behaviour. Hertz was one of Durkheim's students, a group of early twentieth-century sociologists whose work is particularly relevant here as they applied themselves to the sociology of religion, working on mortuary behaviour, sacrifice, sin and penitence and body symbolism,⁶⁶ all themes which will be explored in the course of this thesis. In contrast to Van Gennep's wide range, Hertz focused on the peoples of Indonesia and analysed rites in which the body and soul are thought to evolve in parallel after death, illustrating his argument in particular with examples from Borneo. There, as the corpse decays, the soul becomes less personal and more threatening to the survivors; when at last only clean bones remain, the soul is free to leave for the land of the ancestors. The physical state of the body in decay thereby becomes a means of evaluating the state of the soul. This model, although originally developed for the study of a very different culture, has wide-ranging implications for medieval beliefs about the life of the body after death.

⁶⁵ G. Kligman, *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (Berkeley, 1988).

⁶⁶ Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 7.

Hertz also suggested a tripartite scheme of the participants in death ritual that provides a useful template for breaking down the structure of any particular ritual and examining how it functions, the three parts being:

- ◆ The soul and the community of the dead;
- ◆ The mourners and the community of the living;
- ◆ The corpse and the burial.

Each of these three groups participates with each of the other two and in each relationship a different aspect of the society's attitude to death is explored.

This model can also be applied to broader social structures, as it allows for two-way communication, in a different model from the temporal and linear structure of the rite of passage. Communication between the living and the dead may continue, with either the dead soul or the dead body understood as having the function of speech or some other means of making contact. This is a concept picked up on and elaborated by Geary as a way of exploring the continuing reciprocal relationships between the dead and the living in medieval culture. He compares the role of the dead to the anthropological model of the senior age class in certain tribal societies, his stress being on 'the ways in which these two social groups of the dead and living once formed a single community'.⁶⁷

Van Gennep was also very influential on the structuralist anthropologist Victor Turner, who expanded the idea that the central part of a rite of passage consists of a transitive and heightened state. Like Hertz, Turner saw the corpse as an embodiment and a

⁶⁷ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 5.

source of dramatic metaphor for such liminal experiences. He argued that all rites of passage, in their attempts to mark and make sense of change, are a way of familiarising the members of a society with the changes that will inevitably accompany death. The frontier separating the living from the dead may be seen as the structure underlying all understanding of separation and otherness within a culture.⁶⁸ Turner expanded the concept of liminality to apply it to space as well as time, whence it has been applied widely within archaeology. To give but one of many possible examples, Roberta Gilchrist uses it as a means of understanding the positioning of various different kinds of hospitals within the later medieval townscape.⁶⁹ In the late Anglo-Saxon context, ideas of boundaries, liminality and special, transitional areas connected with death assumed great significance, as the Church took over the power to decide who was buried where. Furthermore, Anglo-Saxon England seems to have become the first place in Christendom where consecrated churchyards were established, thus making the contrast between those buried in Church-approved contexts and those who were excluded all the sharper.⁷⁰ In the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination, concepts of exile, isolation, journeying and the voluntary embracing of liminal status are extensively explored as metaphors for death.

The concept of the rite of passage leads directly on to questions about the function of ritual within society. Whereas in the nineteenth century anthropologists had understood ritual activities as fossilised remnants of more primitive stages of human development, twentieth-century theorists were more likely to perceive them as part of the social mechanism, with the function of creating, preserving and enhancing the bonds between the

⁶⁸ Turner, *Ritual Process*.

⁶⁹ R. Gilchrist, 'Christian bodies and souls: the archaeology of life and death in later medieval hospitals' in S. Bassett (ed.), *Death in Towns 100-1600* (Leicester 1992), pp. 101-13.

⁷⁰ H. Gittos 'Church Precincts and Anglo-Saxon Consecration Rites', in A. Reynolds (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Burial*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph (forthcoming 2000).

members of a given society. Émile Durkheim was interested in the degree to which the individual is integrated into the community and saw ritual as reaffirming a sense of unity and identity by stressing collective actions and ideas. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim examines the funerary ritual of the Warramunga of Australia, among whom the emotion and ritual associated with a funeral can provoke extremely violent reactions of self-mutilation. Durkheim noted that this violence was not random, with different reactions being manifested by people of different ages and sexes, and concluded that even such apparently anarchic and extreme behaviour can be profoundly reassuring. He suggests that prescribed behaviour provides a template for those who, for whatever reason, do not feel the emotions appropriate to the event. Thus, by participating in affirmative ritual, a sense of solidarity is encouraged among a group that would otherwise be threatened and fragmented by its loss of one of its members.⁷¹ Ritual can thus play a normative role, educating its participants about socially appropriate forms of behaviour and ways of reacting to moments of stress. R. C. Finucane applies this model to the deaths of late medieval kings, criminals, saints and those excluded from Christian burial, asserting that 'death ritual was not so much a question of dealing with a corpse as of reaffirming the secular and spiritual order by means of a corpse.'⁷² This approach is an interesting one to apply to different accounts of Anglo-Saxon funerals, with their varying emphases on the importance of the comparatively private liturgical activity at the bedside or the more public ritual of the funerary procession. Texts such as the *Vita Eadwardi* in which the interest is focused less on the liturgical activity at the death bed, and more on the public

⁷¹ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

⁷² R. C. Finucane, 'Sacred Corpse, Profane Carrion: Social Ideals and Death Rituals in the Later Middle Ages' in J. Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London, 1981), pp. 40-60, 41.

commemoration of the dead person, are perhaps in themselves analogous to the funeral ritual, drawing the wider audience of readers into a vicarious participation in the communal response.

The anthropologists whose arguments have been brought to bear on the present discussion so far employed primarily structuralist approaches and sought functionalist explanations for ritual. Such approaches can be limiting, however, falling into the trap of describing an artificial, ideal state of affairs, rather than the ever-changing and pragmatic way ritual is used in the real world. These models are less useful as a means of analysing the process of change, therefore. A functionalist approach loses its usefulness when a particular social usage is seen to fail in its function. If the changes in the Anglo-Saxon death system between the ninth and the late eleventh centuries, and in particular the changes in burial practice, are to be understood, therefore, additional conceptual tools must be employed.

One influential critic of a simple functionalist approach is Clifford Geertz, who sees change rather than stasis as the normal condition of most human societies, with change and discontinuity deriving from the interplay of *culture*, 'beliefs, expressive symbols, and values' on the one hand, and *social structure*, 'the ongoing process of interactive behaviour' on the other.⁷³ Although both culture and social structure are integral and necessary parts of human society, they often clash in practice, both with each other and with the individual members of that society. Geertz dramatizes this abstract idea of the clash of the interdependent constituent elements of society by analysing the funeral of a ten-year-old Javanese boy at which traditionally effective practices collided with the changing social

⁷³ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 144-45.

patterns imposed by urban life, and as a result the ritual collapsed, with a great traumatic effect on the boy's family. Geertz sees this story as

a microscopic example of the broader conflicts, structural dissolutions, and attempted reintegrations which, in one form or another, are characteristic of contemporary Indonesian society.⁷⁴

He describes the boy's funeral as 'a particular case of a ritual which failed to function properly' but does not explain why he selected a funeral to illustrate this kind of functional failure. However, such failures are peculiarly visible in the context of funerary ritual, for several reasons. If a different kind of ritual, such as a wedding or a baptism, does not go according to expectation and fails to fulfil its function, there may be scope for restaging the ceremony. Given the finality of a death and the inevitable and rapid ensuing process of decay, a failed funerary ritual presents a much more problematic experience for the participants as there is no opportunity to try again. Furthermore, funerals are often unexpected and have to be planned at short notice, and participants may well be in a state of shock. A funeral which fails to perform its function of separating the living from the dead and reincorporating each properly back into their appropriate place, therefore, can have long-lasting traumatic effects, something which is very much a problem in contemporary British society.⁷⁵ Funerals, therefore, may be particularly revealing occasions, during which a culture's priorities and flash-points are laid bare.

In what ways can we identify a potential clash between the ideal of a funeral and the ways in which funerary ritual was actually carried out? The majority of the funerals

⁷⁴ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 146-47.

⁷⁵ T. Walter, *Funerals: and how to improve them* (London, 1990); *The Revival of Death* (London, 1994), pp. 156-7.

described or prescribed in the surviving texts from late Anglo-Saxon England show ritual performing its function flawlessly; archaeology, on the other hand, reveals a much less uniform state of affairs, with burial practices used which are not mentioned in the texts. This suggests that the ideal and the real may have come into conflict, or at least that burial practice may have been much more variable and experimental than the texts suggest.

Another model for revealing and understanding conflict and change is posited by Geary, who combines anthropological, archaeological and historical methodologies in order to illustrate and explain conflicting attitudes to the dead in early medieval Frankia and Scandinavia.⁷⁶ He argues that cases where a church stands over a demonstrably pre-Christian burial, or where pre-Christian burials have been exhumed and then reburied within a church, demonstrate a practice of 'retroactive conversion', bringing the pagan ancestors within the fold of Christianity. Such practices may be visible in the archaeological data but 'not articulated; indeed... difficult to reconcile with orthodox Christianity'.⁷⁷ Archaeology, therefore, allows a different perspective on a culture from that offered by documents. Collating the information from these different kinds of sources may reveal some of the 'broader conflicts, structural dissolutions, and attempted reintegrations' to which Geertz draws our attention.

Ritual practices are closely connected to mythology. Myths distil, in a dramatic and metaphorical way, many of the beliefs which inform a society, and they link 'the individual to transindividual purposes and forces'.⁷⁸ Myths about the origins of death form an important part of what Davies terms 'words against death', the human capacity for

⁷⁶ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 35ff.

⁷⁷ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 39.

⁷⁸ J. Campbell, *Myths to Live By* (London, 1972), p. 57.

constructing rhetorical methods for coping with loss and change.⁷⁹ In the current study, the crucial Christian myth is that of the Fall of Man, at which point, according to the Book of Genesis, death entered the world and humanity began its life of exile and decay, with God, Man and Nature in a state of conflict as much as a state of harmony. The events of Genesis 1-5 are retold in several different contexts in Old English literature, and each retelling chooses to highlight or ignore different elements of the story in strikingly different ways (chapter two).

The other great Christian myths concerned with death are of course Christ's death and resurrection, and the general resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming. The latter will not be a main focus of this study because eschatological thought has already been extensively dealt with by Gatch,⁸⁰ although it will be touched on, particularly in the discussions of the relationship between soul and body. The death of Christ is relevant here primarily as an *exemplum*, providing a model for the Good Death which the Christian can apply to his own experience and circumstances, and as a referent for the accounts of the deaths of saints.

The Anglo-Saxons did not receive their Christian myths raw, as it were. By the time of the conversion there was already a vast body of patristic commentary on the Old and New Testaments, and a huge amount of speculative writing on the questions of death and original sin, the role of body and soul in salvation, and the nature of both Christ's resurrection and the general resurrection at the Last Judgment. As we shall see below, Anglo-Saxon writers drew on sources from Tertullian and Augustine to Julian of Toledo and Martin of Braga in their quest for authoritative material that would help them to make

⁷⁹ D. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites* (London, 1997), pp. 144-45.

⁸⁰ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*.

sense of death. However, while their use of patristic source material is noted, it is not the focus of this discussion. Here, the interest is not so much in whence they derived their material as in what use they made of it.

There are various ways in which the dead continue to be at the forefront of the awareness of the living. In an Anglo-Saxon context, one would come across reminders of the dead incorporated into the landscape in the form of barrows, gallows, gravestones or churches. One would also find them as saints, in the litany or in the physical form of relics. The names of the dead would be encountered in *Libri Vitae*, and deceased friends and associates would be brought back to mind through commemorative masses. The deeds of dead heroes, such as Edmund of East Anglia or Byrhtnoth of Essex, would continue to be recounted, and, in the latter case at least, woven or embroidered.⁸¹ The wishes of the dead, expressed in wills, would continue to shape the lives of the living. This complex industry of commemoration was constructed by the living in two ways, either when anticipating their own deaths, or when looking back at the dead and shaping their memories. The relationship between an individual's identity in life and the way in which he or she is remembered after death is very complex and can be explored in a number of different ways.

The immediate problem for a community in which a death has occurred is to decide exactly what has been lost. In what ways is the community affected, and how should the survivors respond? When reading narrative accounts of death beds and funerals, it is necessary, therefore, to be aware of the relationship between the dead individual and his social function. As has already been noted, different kinds of funerals were considered appropriate for kings, bishops or guild members, indicating that social identity was not lost

⁸¹ *Liber Eliensis*, ed. E. O. Blake (Royal Historical Society, London 1962) II, 63, p. 136: 'Uxor quippe eius, nomine Ælfleda domina, eo tempore quo vir idem suus interfectus est et humatus... cortinam gestis viri sui intextam atque depictam in memoriam probitatis eius huic ecclesiae donavit'.

in death. Hertz stresses the importance of what happens at death to the social personality as well as the individual one:

Death does not just end the visible bodily life of the individual; it also destroys the social being grafted upon the physical individual, and to whom the group attributed great dignity and importance. His destruction is tantamount to sacrilege, implying intervention of powers of the same magnitude as the community's but of a negative nature. Thus when a man dies, society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken in the very principle of the faith it has in itself.⁸²

Hertz's remarks were made in the context of his study of tribal cultures in Borneo, people for whom *kin* and *society* were near-synonymous terms. His ideas take on added ramifications in the case of individuals, like kings, who in effect fulfilled several different roles. Clearly, most deaths in a larger society are significant for only a few of its members, but, where the death of a leader is concerned, Hertz's observations retain their relevance even for the complex culture of late Saxon England. This is particularly clear in the case of King Edward the Confessor, whose different identities as king, saint and ordinary Christian soul are explored in the accounts of his death and dying. As will be demonstrated (chapter four), these accounts of secular and saintly ideals are in conflict, and found to be ultimately irreconcilable, creating particular challenges for the authors commemorating Edward.

The question of identity is not only important for understanding what happens at the moment of death, it is also important in the process of memorialisation. In commemorating the dead, the survivors are faced first with choosing who is to be commemorated, then in what medium, and finally what aspects of the dead individual are to be recorded. Neither the textual nor the archaeological record provides a passive mirror of society, and all our

⁸² Hertz, 'Collective Representation' in *Death and the Right Hand*, p. 77.

sources are the culmination of a series of such choices on the part of the survivors, who decide how the dead are to become part of their group identity.

The enduring aspects of the dead may be represented by images and structures; they may also be represented in texts. The ways in which literacy affects the construction of memory and attitudes to the past are discussed by Patrick Hutton. He stresses the difference between *repetition*, the stuff of unconscious habits of mind, and *recollection*, the conscious and ongoing reconstruction of the past to meet the changing demands of the present. The media available to a society define the working of its memory: an oral culture will have a different way of commemorating the past from one even partially literate. Hutton argues that, in a culture with a literate élite, that élite will become the official guardian of collective memory whereas the illiterate majority may have only a shallow awareness of past time. From the advent of literacy, the official version of the past becomes fixed: ‘Memories—fluid, dynamic and ever-changing in the repetitions of oral tradition—could thenceforth be framed in more enduring representations of the past.’⁸³ Thus the practitioners of literacy become the custodians of the dead; it is their responsibility to record the present as it becomes the past and to decide what is significant about it. This is an instructive light in which to read such different texts as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and *Beowulf*, fascinated as they both are with memory and mortality, funerals, and the poetic commemoration of the deaths of kings.

The dead may be remembered with love and respect; they may also be perceived as polluting and dangerous. The way in which Hertz understood the funeral rites of Borneo illuminates many issues connected with purity. Hertz saw the body as consisting of *wet* or fleshy and *dry* or bony elements. At death, the body begins a process of transformation from

⁸³ P. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, 1993), pp. xxi-xxii.

something wet and dangerous into something dry and safe, with the soul of the dead person continuing to pose a threat during the period of decay.⁸⁴ Similarly, in many Anglo-Saxon texts, there is a fear of bodily corruption and the spiritual pollution it potentially represents.⁸⁵ References to virginity and decay make it clear that the body, alive and dead, was understood as something treacherous, in need of containment and control. Mary Douglas, in her structuralist analysis of the relationships between social pollution and the body, explores cultures that cherish virginity and are uncomfortable about the sexual processes of the body, commenting that such cultures perceive the body 'as an imperfect container which will only be perfect if it can be made impermeable'.⁸⁶ As will become evident (chapter three), England in the tenth and eleventh centuries was precisely such a culture, with virginity in life and incorruption after death becoming almost synonymous, and huge disquiet about the permeability of the body manifesting itself in the radical changes in burial practices which appear from the ninth century onwards. Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle postulates a penitential context for these changes in burial practice,⁸⁷ an overwhelmingly probable interpretation which extends the body's role in the quest for salvation into the grave, and is part of a broader cultural understanding of the interconnected nature of body and soul.

In the outline of theoretical approaches above, an attempt has been made to refer continually to the primary data of which this thesis is an analysis, thereby establishing the relevance of these anthropologically-derived models to the English culture of a thousand

⁸⁴ Hertz, 'Collective Representation' in *Death and the Right Hand*, p. 43.

⁸⁵ Danforth, *Death Rituals of Rural Greece*, p. 51.

⁸⁶ M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London 1966), pp. 157-58.

⁸⁷ B. Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Disposal of the Winchester Dead over Two Thousand Years' in *Death in Towns*, pp. 210-47.

years ago. In the chapters that follow, Anglo-Saxon art, literature and burial practice come more directly under the microscope. The next chapter, concentrating on literature, analyses the ways in which death and dying were understood imaginatively. It establishes the difficulty of thinking coherently about death, and shows how within one culture, and even within the works of one writer, contradictory ideas may battle against each other. It examines the complex physiology of dying, and how the body's behaviour was made sense of within the framework of Christian mythology. Finally, it looks at a number of poetic and homiletic works about death, and how these texts might have been used by people concerned by the challenge of how to respond to the idea of their own approaching end.

CHAPTER 2

IMAGINING DEATH

i. The Origin and Function of Death

The first part of this chapter examines a range of imaginative narratives about death in which its origins, nature and purpose are discussed and its inevitability is debated. This is done first on a global scale. The discussion then shifts to the individual body as a locus of struggle and decay. This leads on to a further discussion of texts which consider the range of potential human reactions to dying and death. The focus of the argument is on poetic and homiletic material, in which many of the relevant issues find their most dramatic expression. These texts reveal a complex imaginative negotiation between death's often brutal physical facts and the sophisticated theological and metaphysical interpretations which those facts are made to carry. The texts not only shed light on theology, however, they also illuminate what Ariès terms 'the background of common ideas that was taken for granted',⁸⁸ visible in the metaphors and turns of phrase their authors selected to convey their meanings in the vernacular. At one level Gatch's assertion, that the Anglo-Saxon discussions of death are primarily a reworking of their patristic inheritance, is true,⁸⁹ but on other levels, as will become clear, these authors encountered challenges in translating that

⁸⁸ P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, (London, 1981), p. xiii.

⁸⁹ Gatch, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, pp. 79-80.

inheritance into Anglo-Saxon culture, and the process of translation revealed problems and inconsistencies which they did not hesitate to explore.

The question of the role that death plays in Creation is never satisfactorily resolved in the texts under consideration here. Mutually conflicting concepts are found in the works of the same author and even within the same piece of writing. The first texts under discussion are those relating to the myths of the Creation and Fall. A summary of the account in the Book of Genesis will be given first in order that the versions in the poem *Genesis B* and in Ælfric's homilies *De Falsis Diis* and *In Octavis Pentecosten* may be compared with it.⁹⁰ Ælfric and the *Genesis*-poet represent opposite ends of the spectrum of Anglo-Saxon orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and their descriptions of pre-lapsarian Eden and the advent of death raise contradictory issues about the presence or absence of death in God's blueprint for Creation. Is death seen as an external and invasive enemy, or something always already present? Is it perceived as a punishment, or something more akin to a force of nature, unleashed by the Fall?

Death is not a monolithic concept, and the chapter goes on to explore the variety of deaths presented in a range of texts. The different experiences that come under the heading 'Death' are seen as developing and changing through Christian history, with new kinds of 'artificial' death such as murder and execution being added to 'natural' deaths from disease or old age. The characterisation of death can also change in relation to the age of its victim. The texts discussed in this section all connect the existence of death to the Fall of Man.

This connexion is less clear, however, in the next texts under discussion, the Exeter Book *Maxims* (*Maxims I*) and Cotton *Maxims* (*Maxims II*), where death is presented as a

⁹⁰ In order to avoid confusion, the title of the poem *Genesis* will be uniformly italicised and the Biblical Book of Genesis will not.

morally neutral event. Although the texts differ in detail, both share an understanding of death as part of Creation's intrinsic ebb and flow. Again, death is dealt with from an abstract rather than from an individual perspective.

The discussion then moves on to consider the role played by the individual human body in this drama. It is demonstrated that the body was perceived as treacherous and constantly under attack, both in life and death. Paradoxically, it is perceived both as powerful, capable of either saving or damning the soul, and impotent, bestial and earthy. These images describe both the living and the dead body, strengthening the argument that, in some ways, the body was really never thought of as dead and inert.

The next sections turn to the question of the connexion between an individual's life and death. The discussion here is broadened to include the subject of dying and the possible attitudes one might adopt in the face of one's own death. In this discussion, the importance of choice and control as part of the human anticipation and experience of dying will be explored. Preparation for death leads on to a discussion of dying as a separate and liminal state, clearly distinct from either life or death. The poems *The Fates of the Apostles* and *The Fortunes of Men* both explore particular examples of death and the ways in which human beings can prepare themselves for their death, whatever form it may take. These 'catalogues of death' can be read as a form of *ars moriendi*, as can accounts of both good and bad deaths elsewhere in poetic and homiletic material, where the material often has an explicit or implicit didactic function. This theme is expanded in the concluding section, where the relationship between the life and the death of an individual is considered. Particular attention is given to the dying and death of St Edmund from Ælfric's *Lives of the*

Saints,⁹¹ Herod from Ælfric's homily on the Holy Innocents⁹² and Holofernes in the poem *Judith*.⁹³

In chapter one, it was established that myths are a dramatic articulation of belief and ritual, and that myths about the origins of death are an important part of the human ability to construct ways of coping with loss and change.⁹⁴ Globally, many such myths suggest that death was not originally part of the human condition but only came about through accident or transgression, and contain not only an account of death's origins but also a promise that mortality will one day be defeated.⁹⁵ While this interpretation of the relationship between people and mortality forms the universal framework of the Christian understanding, some of the texts under discussion here explore, with varying degrees of explicitness, the contradictory idea that death *is* in fact intrinsic to the human condition. It is not argued here that any of these contradictions is exclusive to Anglo-Saxon thought, only that they are indubitably present in Old English writings. In the first writers to be considered, Ælfric and the *Genesis* poet, this unorthodox and inconsistent idea may be a reflection of the difficulty of imagining a universe in which death, decay and change play no part. As a result, Eden, in their imaginations, already contains death in some form.

In the Genesis narrative in the Bible, God forms Adam out of dust (*de limo terrae*) and breathes life into him in 2:7; in 2:8-9 he sets him in the garden which contains two trees in particular, the tree of life (*lignum vitae*) and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

⁹¹ Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints, Volume II*, ed. W. Skeat, EETS OS 94 & 114 (reprinted as one volume, Oxford, 1966), pp. 314-334.

⁹² Ælfric, *Natale Innocentium Infantum*, in P. Clemoes, (ed.) *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, The First Series*, EETS SS Vol 17 (1997), pp. 217-223.

⁹³ Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, pp. 99-109.

⁹⁴ Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief*, pp. 144-5.

⁹⁵ J. Dunne, *The City of the Gods* (New York, 1965).

(*lignum scientiae boni et mali*).⁹⁶ In verse 17 the fruit of the latter tree is forbidden to Adam on pain of death (*in quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris*). In verses 21-25, God makes Eve from Adam's rib: they are described as being of one flesh (*duo in carne una*) and naked without shame (*non erubescabant*). In 3:4 the serpent tells Eve that the fruit will not cause death (*Nequaquam morte moriemini*) but rather give them knowledge. It is worth noting that, even if at this stage there is no death in Eden, the *idea* of death is present, articulated and given force by both God and the serpent. Having eaten the fruit, Adam and Eve feel shame and are cursed by God with toil, labour and death, and are expelled from Eden lest they go on to eat from the tree of life as well and become immortal (*ne forte mittat manum suam, et sumat etiam de ligno vitae, et comedat, et vivat in aeternum*). Thenceforth the way to the tree of life is guarded by cherubim and a flaming sword. Chapter 4 tells the story of Cain and Abel and the first murder, and in 5:5 Adam dies after living nine hundred and thirty years. This economical narrative treats, in compact mythic form, the central issues of human origins, the nature of sentience, sapience and self-consciousness, the reasons for our inhabiting an entropic universe, and the obligations people have to one another within society.

A myth as rich as this can be used in many different contexts and read in many different ways. Thus, in the Vercelli Book homily XIX, for which there is no extant single source,⁹⁷ the story of the Creation and Fall is part of a narrative of human origin in Christ, in which the eternal nature of the Son is stressed (*se sunu is ece God*) together with his involvement in Creation. It is explicitly Christ who prohibits eating of the fruit of the tree; the Vercelli homilist specifies the banned tree as the *tree of life*, known as the fig-tree (*pe is*

⁹⁶ All Latin Biblical quotations are from *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam* (Madrid, 1985); all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

⁹⁷ *The Vercelli Homilies*, ed. D. Scragg, EETS OS 300 (Oxford, 1992), Introduction to XIX, p. 311.

genemned lifes treow [7 we hit nemnað fictreow]), in contrast to the prohibited tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis: ‘Through that tree Christ himself forewarned Adam and Eve and said to them both that on the same day that they ate the fruit of that tree they should perish.’⁹⁸

In Ælfric’s homily *De Initio Creaturae*, by contrast, the same story is used to demonstrate how God tested Adam by giving him the opportunity to obey or disobey his prohibition, within the context of the relationship between master (*hlaford*) and servant (*þeowa*).⁹⁹ Ælfric’s interpretation has its origins in Augustine’s writing on the Fall,¹⁰⁰ with its stress on ‘the folly and shame of man’s disobedience’.¹⁰¹ These two examples show how the same Biblical account could be interpreted and mediated to serve different purposes in different contexts.

This examination of texts which explore death’s origins starts with the Old English poem *Genesis*, in order to establish beyond all doubt that unconventional understandings of the subject were available in Anglo-Saxon England. It then moves on to Ælfric, establishing the more orthodox position, showing the difference between his perspective and that of the *Genesis*-poet, and demonstrating that even within orthodoxy there was inconsistency.

Genesis, from the Junius manuscript, is a composite work, consisting of *Genesis A*, which is a close though expanded retelling of the Bible story, containing within it the interpolated *Genesis B*, which is much less close to the Biblical account. The composite text is the first of the four poems in the Junius manuscript, the only wholly poetic Old

⁹⁸ ‘Be ðam treow Crist sylf forewarnode ægðer Adam ge Euan. 7 him sæde bam þæt swa hwylcum dæge swa hie þæs treowes bleða æton. hie sceoldon forweorðan’. Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, XIX, ll.30-48, p. 317.

⁹⁹ Clemons, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies, The First Series*, I, ll. 70-83, p. 181.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. H. Bettenson (London, 1972), XIII.

¹⁰¹ Grundy, *Books and Grace*, p. 93.

English codex, the other poems being *Exodus*, *Daniel* and *Christ and Satan*. The first three poems, which are written in one hand and entitled Liber I, are usually perceived as having a structural and thematic unity, and it has been suggested that the whole manuscript may have provided a vernacular monastic lectionary for the Easter Vigil,¹⁰² with *Genesis* in particular examining the nature of evil and providing guidance for the Christian seeking salvation.¹⁰³ The dates for the composition of the Junius poems are much debated, with dates from the seventh to the tenth century being postulated;¹⁰⁴ *Genesis B*, because of its relationship to the *Heliand*, is generally dated after the beginning of the ninth century.¹⁰⁵ As Lucas notes, the critical tendency has been to separate out the two poems and discuss them as different texts,¹⁰⁶ but the discussion here will treat the poem as a coherent whole, whatever its antecedents.

As noted above, *Genesis B* retells, but differs greatly from, the Bible story with the result that, as Shippey points out, it ‘is both guided by orthodoxy and menaced by heresy’.¹⁰⁷ Remley describes it as ‘a poem that seems to have no identifiable source of any kind’.¹⁰⁸ Whereas the Biblical account of the Temptation and Fall is contained within the twenty-four verses of Chapter 3 of Genesis, in the Old English poem it is expanded to take up nearly seven hundred and fifty lines (235-964), drawing on works of patristic exegesis to

102 P.G. Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Genesis, Exodus and Daniel*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 16 (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 3-4.

103 S. A. J. Bradley (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1982), pp. 9-12.

104 Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse*, p. 2, n.2.

105 A. Doane, *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon Genesis B and the Old Saxon ‘Vatican Genesis’* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1991), p. 46.

106 P. Lucas, ‘Loyalty and Obedience in the Old English *Genesis* and the Interpolation of *Genesis B* into *Genesis A*’, *Neophilologus* 76 (1992), pp. 121-35, 121.

107 Shippey, *Old English Verse*, p. 148.

108 Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse*, p. 149.

incorporate both moral and allegorical interpretations.¹⁰⁹ The proximate source for *Genesis B* is an Old Saxon poem of which twenty-five and a half lines survive, and it has been postulated that continental, folkloric and Irish traditions inform its narrative,¹¹⁰ while its more distant antecedents have been described as ‘a tissue of reminiscences from the Christian Latin poets’.¹¹¹ Its author must have been aware of the differences between his biblical and his secondary sources, and the poem should be seen as a sustained attempt to resolve some of those sources’ contradictions.

The poet of *Genesis* tells his story in a powerful and compelling way, and the composite *Genesis* poem is the most developed treatment of the theme of the Fall of man and the entrance of death into the world in Old English literature. *Genesis B*, in particular, differs from the Biblical account in the emphases it chooses to place on different aspects of the story. As the poet tells it, the serpent convinces Eve that it is God’s will they eat the fruit (551ff, 704ff), making Eve seem less culpable than in the Biblical version.¹¹² By this means, responsibility for original sin and death is transferred from humanity to the devil. By contrast with Eve and Adam’s greater innocence, the outer world is made harsher than it is in the Biblical *Genesis*. After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve not only become aware of their nakedness and consequent shame, but are also suddenly conscious of their physical vulnerability in a newly-hostile environment in which tempests, hailstones, thunder and storms might harm them at any moment (799ff), in addition to which they can hear the

¹⁰⁹ T. Hill, ‘The Fall of Angels and Man in the Old English *Genesis B*’ in L. E. Nicholson and D. W. Frese (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1975), pp. 279-90, 289.

¹¹⁰ M. Benskin and B.O. Murdoch, ‘The Literary Tradition of *Genesis*: Some Comments on J.M. Evans’ *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 76 (1975), pp. 389-403, 395.

¹¹¹ D. Calder and M. Allen, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 3, and Appendix II for a translation of the Old Saxon fragment.

¹¹² A. Renoir, ‘Eve’s I.Q. Rating: Two Sexist Views of *Genesis B*’ in Damico and Olsen, *New Readings on Women*, pp. 262-72.

distant raging of hell-fire (791ff). As a result, the contrast between their pre- and post-lapsarian conditions of innocence and guilt is presented in a much more dramatic, chiaroscuro light than it is in the poet's Biblical source.

There are also important differences in the poet's attitude to immortality and death. Although, even in Genesis, the concept of death is present in the garden, in the poem it is present in a much more aggressive and tangible form, and, even had Adam and Eve remained immortal, they would still have experienced change and a journey from earth to heaven. The poet thus typically resists images of static perfection in favour of process and development.

Most significantly for the present discussion, while the Bible refers only briefly to the two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the poem develops their descriptions in considerable detail. It devotes thirty lines to the tree of life and what it terms the tree of death in a tradition ultimately derived from Christian Latin poets such as Prudentius,¹¹³ and also present in gnostic thought.¹¹⁴ It is in this presentation of the trees that the poem differs most seriously from the view promulgated by Ælfric, clearly expressed in a passage (derived from Isidore of Seville and ultimately from Wisdom 1:13) in which death is unambiguously excluded from God's blueprint:

Death was not made by God nor was it growing on the tree, but it was the case that, should [Adam] break that little command then he would at once be mortal, and he would never die should he be so blessed that he would entirely obey that easy command.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ J. Evans, 'Genesis B and its background' in *Review of English Studies*, New Series 14 (1963), pp. 1-16 and 113-123, 10.

¹¹⁴ Hill, 'Fall of Angels', pp. 279-80.

¹¹⁵ 'Næs na se deað þurh Drihten gesceapen ne on ðam treowe aweaxen, ac hit wæs swa þeah þæt gif he tobræce þæt litle bebod þæt he wære syððan sona deadlic, and he næfre ne swulte gif he swa gesælig wære þæt he þæt eaðelice bebod eallunga geheolde.' S. J. Crawford (ed.), *Exameron Anglice, or the Old English Hexameron* (reprinted Darmstadt, 1968), p. 66, ll. 438-9 and cf Isidore, *De Ordine Creaturarum Liber*, caput

By bringing the tree of death with its poisonous fruit into the foreground, in a way quite different from either the Biblical version of the story or from Ælfric's response to it, the *Genesis* poet makes this into a very different story. In the Bible, death is the punishment, inflicted from outside, for eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; in *Genesis* death is already growing in the garden, before the serpent ever sets his prelapsarian foot in it:

And beside them stood two trees, which were laden with food and covered with fruit, just as God the Ruler, high Heaven-King, had set with his hands, so that children of men might choose between good and evil, each person [choose between] weal and woe. The fruit was not the same!¹¹⁶

This already-present if latent disaster is recognised by Ericksen in her discussion of *Genesis B* and the Augustinian concept of the *regio dissimilitudinis*, the state of being unlike God, where she points out that '[t]he dissimilarity of the fruit reflects the potential transformation of the garden into a land of unlikeness',¹¹⁷ stressing the inbuilt possibility of change.

The poet begins this passage by bracketing the trees together and stressing the common elements in their nature: they stand side by side, they are both are laden with edible fruit and they are both made by God. However, he then swiftly undercuts this superficial equation by asserting their much more important differences. He begins this opposition by describing the tree of life:

X, 13 (Migne, *PL*, LXXXIII, p. 941), 'Non enim in arboris natura mortiferum aliquid inesse credendum est, aut etiam ut boni et mali scientiam facere ualeret sed mandati Domini transgressio quo praeceptum est ne de hoc ligno comedent, mortem effecit.'

¹¹⁶ 'And him bi twegin beamas stodon/ þa wæron utan ofætēs gehlædene,/ gewered mid wæstmē, swa hie waldend god,/ heah heofoncyning handum gesette,/ þæt þær ylde bearn moste on ceosan/ godes and yfeles, gumena æghwīlc,/ welan and wawan. Næs se wæstm gelic!' *Genesis B*, ll. 460-467.

¹¹⁷ J. Ericksen, 'Lands of Unlikeness in *Genesis B*', *Studies in Philology* XCIII (1996), pp. 1-20, 9.

The first one was so pleasant, beautiful and shining, graceful and lovely, that was the tree of life; he would live ever after, exist in the world, who ate of that fruit, so that ever after age would not injure him nor severe illness, but he would forever be at once among pleasures and have his life and the protection of the Heaven-King here in the world, and have assured dignity in the high heaven when he should go hence.¹¹⁸

There is a clear distinction made here between the earthly paradise of Eden *on worulde* and the *hean heofon* which is the ultimate destination of the soul who has eaten of the tree of life: immortality is not seen as taking place permanently on earth. The nature of the journey between the world and heaven *þonne he heonon wende* is not specified but clearly some kind of transition is envisaged, even if death is not involved. This distinction between the earthly paradise and heaven is found elsewhere,¹¹⁹ but it is not universal; in his homily *Epiphania Domini* Ælfric identifies *neorxenawang* (paradise) with humanity's true home (*ure eard soðlice*), the *eðel* to which we will ultimately return.¹²⁰ There seems, therefore, to be considerable uncertainty as to whether Eden is to be identified with heaven. The *Genesis* poet refers to *lif* as something specific to earth (473). This again implies that existence will be something different in heaven, something which is not *lif* even as Adam knew it, even if it is not *deað*. Movement from one state to the other is perhaps envisioned as akin to the assumption of the Virgin Mary.¹²¹ The poem therefore chooses to emphasise

118 'Oðer wæs swa wynlic, wlitig and scene, / liðe and lofsum, þæt wæs lifes beam;/ moste on ecnisse æfter lybban,/ wesan on worulde, se þæs wæstmes onbat,/ swa him æfter þy ylde ne derede,/ ne suht sware, ac moste symle wesan/ lungre on lustum and his lif agan,/ hylde heofoncyniges her on worulde,/ habban him to wæron witode geþingþo/ on þone hean heofon, þonne he heonon wende.' *Genesis B*, ll. 467-476.

119 Ælfric's source for part of *De Falsis Diis*, discussed below, is the *De Correctione Rusticorum* of Martin of Braga, where Adam is told *si præceptum Domini servasset, in loco illo cælesti sine morte succederet* (quoted in J. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric, A Supplementary Collection*, Volume II EETS 260 (Oxford, 1968), p. 678).

120 Clemons, *Catholic Homilies, First Series*, VII, ll. 248-255, p. 240.

121 Cf. Ælfric's homily, *Assumptio Sanctae Mariae Virginis* in Clemons, *Catholic Homilies, First Series*, XXX, pp. 429-38.

a particular understanding of how human life would have been without the Fall, resisting the idea that pre-lapsarian existence could be eternal and unchanging. Instead, it foregrounds change and development even within the context of sinless, sexless, disease-free and immortal life.

Having dealt with the Tree of Life, the poet now turns to its dark companion. While, in the Bible, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is beautiful and delicious (*quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum, et pulchrum oculis, aspectuque delectabile*), in the Old English poem it becomes an object of horror:

Then there was the other, wholly black, dim and dark; that was the tree of death, which bore many kinds of bitterness. Each person must become aware of both evil and good, their ways in this world. He must ever after live with sweat and sorrow, in torment, whoever tasted that which grew on the tree.¹²²

In *Genesis*, the first tree offers an image of perfection, a version of human experience without story, reproduction, age or illness, despite the poet's insistence on there being a journey from the earthly paradise to heaven. The second tree, by contrast, reveals a future of work and change, *mid swate and mid sorgum*, variety (*bitres fela*) and the agony of decision-making and choice. These contrasting qualities are further explored in the discussion of the earthly and resurrection bodies in the next chapter, and in the different presentations of the life of Edward the Confessor in chapter four below.

Once he has outlined the life of sorrow resulting from eating of the tree of death, the *Genesis* poet goes on to discuss the nature of mortality in terms of a slow stripping away of the pleasures of life and control (*drihtscipes*) as death approaches:

¹²² 'þonne wæs se oðer eallenga sweart, / dim and þystre; þæt wæs deaðes beam, / se bær bitres fela. Sceolde bu witan / ylða æghwilc yfles and godes / gewand on þisse worulde. Sceolde on wite a / mid swate and mid sorgum siððan libban, / swa hwa swa gebyrgde þæs on þam beame geweox.' *Genesis B*, ll. 477-483.

Old Age must deprive him of deeds of courage, joys and power over men, and Death must be decreed to him. For a little while only he must enjoy his life, and then seek out the darkest of lands, in the fire. There he must be servant to devils, for the longest time, where is the greatest of all dangers to mankind.¹²³

Interestingly, death, when newly entered into the world, takes only one form, that of *yldo*, the fate which will eventually overtake Adam himself. Only as death matures, as it were, will it appear in different incarnations, such as murder.

In the description of the first tree, immortality and salvation were identified with each other; in the description of the second, death and damnation are as intimately connected. Of course, before the Incarnation and the Harrowing of Hell, all souls were condemned to torment, but there is no indication within this poem that Adam and Eve's stay in *þonne landa sweartost* is to be temporary, although the Harrowing of Hell is discussed in *Christ and Satan* later on in the Junius manuscript. In this the *Genesis* poet differs from other versions of the story such as Vercelli homily XIX (discussed above), where the length of Adam's stay in hell is scrupulously calculated:

Nine hundred winters and thirty winters Adam lived in this world in labour and distress, and then went to Hell, and there endured grim punishment for five thousand winters and two hundred winters and eight and twenty winters.¹²⁴

Thus, by making Eve and Adam's situation appear hopeless, the poet continues in his tendency to exaggerate the differences between experience before and after the Fall that we

¹²³ 'Sceolde hine yldo beniman ellendæda,/ dreamas and drihtscipes, and him beon deað scyred./ Lytle hwile sceolde he his lifes notan,/ secan þonne landa sweartost on fyre./ Sceolde feondum þeowian, þær is ealra frecna mæste/ leodum to langre hwile.' *Genesis B*, ll. 484-489a.

¹²⁴ 'Nigon hund wintra 7 þritig wintra Adam lifde on þysse worulde on geswince 7 on yrmþe, 7 syððan to helle for, 7 þær grimme witu þolode fif þusend wintra 7 [twa hund wintra 7] eahta 7 .xx. wintra'. Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, XIX, ll.45-48, p. 317.

have already seen at work in his insistence on Eve's comparative innocence and in the particular terrors facing Adam and Eve after the expulsion from Eden.

The description of the trees of life and death appears in the context of the devil's advance on Eden, a scene imbued with irony in that the devil and the audience know what is going to happen while Adam and Eve remain ignorant.¹²⁵ The devil's knowledge is only of potential disaster, however, while the audience is forced to witness the narrative unfolding with the awful inevitability of hindsight. The stress on the devil's knowledge of the tree's true nature is constantly reiterated between ll.442 and 495, with particular emphasis (489-90) on his awareness of the inevitable damnation ensuing from the Fall. The result of this, once more, is to bring death into the garden even before the fruit is taken: it hovers in the background, waiting for its cue. Later on in the poem (ll.717b-723a) that cue, the eating of the fruit, is explored in more detail:

From the woman he received hell, and the journey hence, although it was not called that but was named fruit; it was nonetheless the sleep of death and the fetters of the devil, hell and the journey hence and the damnation of heroes, the murder of men, that they took for food, that accursed fruit.¹²⁶

The apparently innocuous fruit, *ofet*, appears as nourishing *mete* but in fact already contains within it the seeds of decay, death and damnation, with no hint of eventual redemption.

Death is embodied in the fruit again two hundred lines later, in *Genesis A*, when God as Judge, in a foretaste of Doomsday, sentences Adam and Eve to hard labour and death: 'until the foul sickness that you yourself gulped down with the apple grips you hard

¹²⁵ Ericksen, 'Lands of Unlikeness', p. 10.

¹²⁶ 'He æt þam wife onfeng/ helle and hinnsið, þeah hit nære haten swa,/ ac hit ofetes noman agan sceolde;/ hit wæs þeah deaðes swefn and deofles gespon,/ hell and hinnsið and hæleða forlor,/ menniscra morð, þæt hie to mete dædon,/ ofet unfæle.' *Genesis B*, ll.717b-723a.

around the heart; because of that you shall die.’¹²⁷ In the next two lines, the poet alerts his audience to the personal relevance of this episode, with his emphatic use of *hwæt* and *nu*, *we* and *us*: ‘Listen, we now hear where cruel harms and worldly misery awoke for us.’¹²⁸ By using *onwacan*, to awake, rather than a verb such as *scieppan*, to create, to describe the events of the Fall, the poet is once again suggesting that death and sorrow were already there, sleeping in the fruit. To the writer who put together the poems *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*, death was always an accident waiting to happen. By starting his Creation narrative with the Fall of the Angels (*Genesis A*, ll.20-77; *Genesis B*, ll.246-437), he has prepared us for an understanding of the rot at the heart of things even before the creation of man: the serpent already in the garden and the worm in the apple. By presenting immortality as something which involves transition from earth to heaven (*Genesis B*, ll.467-476), he suggests that change is inherent in Creation. By using traditions which refer to the tree of death rather than the strictly Biblical tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he establishes death as an intrinsic part of that Creation.

In his discussion of the poem’s analysis of loyalty and obedience, Lucas concludes that the interpolation of *Genesis B* into *Genesis A* ‘added a new dimension to a theme already present’.¹²⁹ This is also the case with the poet’s analysis of death’s role in creation, where the compiler’s adoption of *Genesis B* must represent a decision to convey a particular and unorthodox interpretation of man’s relation with mortality. However, while unorthodox attitudes may be at their most explicit here, the following section demonstrates

127 ‘oðþæt þe to heortan hearde gripeð/ adl unliðe þe þu on æple ær/ selfa forswulge; forþon þu sweltan scealt.’ *Genesis B*, ll.936-938.

128 Hwæt, we nu gehyrað hwær us hearmstafas/ wraðe onwocan and woruldyrmðo.’ *Genesis B*, ll.939-40.

129 Lucas, ‘Loyalty and Obedience’, pp. 132-33.

the difficulty even Ælfric encountered when it came to the challenge of creating an imaginative description of a world in which death plays no part.

In contrast to the poet of *Genesis B*, Ælfric is often seen as the mouthpiece of orthodoxy, scrupulous and highly discriminating in his use of sources.¹³⁰ Ælfric was greatly concerned about the accurate transmission of the orthodox teachings of the Church and presented himself as a reliable mouth-piece of mainstream belief. Although he relies on earlier homiliaries, particularly those of Paul the Deacon and Haymo,¹³¹ his predecessors are themselves dependent on earlier writers, predominantly Bede, Augustine, Gregory and Jerome, the indisputable voices of authority. This view of Ælfric's work has been questioned, however, and it has been shown by Malcolm Godden and Allen Frantzen that Ælfric could be highly selective in his approach to his sources, capable of considerable, if subtle, manipulation. As Frantzen notes, despite Ælfric's much-vaunted care for accuracy, he is nonetheless capable of re-presenting even Biblical narrative for his own ends, as when he rewrites the story of Lot and the Sodomites.¹³² Joyce Hill usefully contextualises Ælfric's work, exploring the lengths to which he went to establish an imposing authorial persona, and differentiating between his attitudes towards his sources as text and his attitudes to them as theology.¹³³

It remains the case, nonetheless, that Ælfric was among the foremost teachers and preachers of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, the greatest vernacular writer

¹³⁰ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 14-15.

¹³¹ C. Smetana, 'Ælfric and the Early Medieval Homiliary', *Traditio* XV (1959), pp. 163-204; 'Ælfric and the Homiliary of Haymo of Halberstadt', *Traditio* XVII (1961), pp. 457-69.

¹³² M. Godden, 'Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 16 (1985), pp. 83-100; A. J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago, 1998), pp. 212-3.

¹³³ J. Hill, 'Ælfric, Authorial Identity and the Changing Text' in D. G. Scragg and Paul. E. Szarmach (eds.), *The Editing of Old English* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 177-89.

produced by the English Benedictine Reform movement.¹³⁴ The homilies and saints' lives discussed in this chapter were written to be disseminated among parish priests as a source of vernacular material for preaching on the appropriate feast days. In the Preface to the First Series of his Catholic Homilies, Ælfric is very critical of other English books (*manegum Engliscum bocum*) which repeat foolish and dangerous ideas (*gedwyld*), although he does not specify what kind of books they were or what was wrong with them. Godden suggests that the Blickling and Vercelli collections of homilies, which predate Ælfric, might well have been termed *gedwyld*,¹³⁵ and it seems likely that *Genesis B* would have fallen into the same category.

Ælfric's concern to keep his work intact and uncorrupted by the potentially heretical ideas of other writers is unusual, and in fact his work was often excerpted, recopied, and altered in the process of textual transmission, as Mary Swan makes clear.¹³⁶ While Ælfric's concern to avoid error cannot be called into question, this does not preclude originality in his writing, and he can be very free in his treatment of his source material. In Clemoes' words,

Ælfric omits, condenses, expands, rearranges, synthesises two or more interpretations, rejects one in favour of another, imports examples or parallel texts, reminds us of something he has dealt with more extensively elsewhere.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ D. H. Farmer, 'The Progress of the Monastic Revival' in D. Parsons (ed.), *Tenth Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia* (London, 1975), pp. 10-19, 16.

¹³⁵ M. Godden, 'Ælfric and the Vernacular Prose Tradition' in P. Szarmach and B. Huppé (eds.), *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds* (New York, 1978), pp. 99-118, 99-100.

¹³⁶ M. Swan, 'Holiness Remodelled: Theme and Technique in Old English Composite Homilies' in B. Kienzle (ed.), *Models of Holiness in Medieval Sermons* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1996), pp. 35-46.

¹³⁷ Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies, First Series*, p. 150.

As a result, his work is never simply a transmission or a reflection of his sources but always a new composition. Where he uses traditional patristic interpretations, he often combines images in telling ways; where he improvises on a traditional theme his writing may be even more informative.

Ælfric explores the idea of death in Eden in his homily *De Falsis Diis*, one of the homilies for unspecified occasions.¹³⁸ He begins his exposition of the nature of the true God with a brief account of Creation in which he describes the advantages of prelapsarian life in order to bring home to his audience how much they have lost through *Adames gylte* (l. 58), and how much they can win back through obedience to God's commands (ll. 66-69). His source for lines 28 to 196 is the *De Correctione Rusticorum* by the sixth-century writer Martin, Archbishop of Braga, but Ælfric greatly extends and develops the ideas found there.

In his description of Eden, Martin of Braga reports God as having told Adam that if he followed His precepts, he would enter heaven *sine morte*. Ælfric uses this two-word phrase as the spring-board for an extended exploration of what it would be like to live in a world without death, using a variation on the conventional way of describing the *locus amoenus* or 'earthly paradise' through a series of negatives. This convention dates back to Homer and Virgil and is drawn on elsewhere in Old English literature.¹³⁹ However, while it is a familiar mode of describing landscape, its use here by Ælfric to describe death seems to be unique. There are what might be termed 'positive' catalogues of death elsewhere in Old English literature, such as *The Fortunes of Men* and *The Fates of the Apostles*, poems which will be discussed later on in this chapter; in his catalogue of 'negative deaths' in *De Falsis Diis* Ælfric combines the two traditions.

¹³⁸ Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, Vol. II, XXI, pp. 676-712.

¹³⁹ C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature*, (London, 1967), pp. 30-31.

No fire injured him, though he might step on it with his feet, nor might any water drown the man though he encounter the waves unexpectedly, nor might any wild beast, nor dared any of the serpent-kind, to injure the man with the bite of its mouth. Nor might hunger nor thirst, nor wearisome chill, nor any great heat, nor sickness, afflict Adam in that land.¹⁴⁰

Ælfric does not say ‘*there was no fire...*’, instead he gives the impression that these fatal dangers all existed but were inhibited by God from affecting Adam. As a result, the effect of this passage is to conjure up an image of the fragile human creature menaced from all sides, treading a precarious path among the various deaths that are prevented from attacking him.¹⁴¹ At this stage Adam does not see the potential dangers lurking around him; it is only after the Fall that his eyes are opened (cf *Genesis B*, ll. 791-820). Whereas, in the Biblical version of Genesis, Eden is a harmonious and fruitful place, in Ælfric’s text it is not a place where delightful things happen, but somewhere where terrible things are prevented from taking place.

It is worth noting that all the kinds of death in Ælfric’s list are natural enemies: fire and water, animals, hunger, thirst, weather and disease. He does not mention murder or other kinds of violent death in this context. This is in distinct contrast to *The Fortunes of Men* (discussed in detail below), which, in addition to weather, hunger and wild beasts,

¹⁴⁰ ‘Him ne derode nan fyr, þeah þe he mid fotum on stope, ne nan wæter ne mihte þone mannan adrencan, þeah þe he on yðum urne færlice. Ne nan wildeor ne mihte, ne nan wrymcynn ne dorste derian þam menn mid hys muðes slite. Ne hungor ne þurst, ne hefigtime cyle, ne nan swiðlic hæte, ne seocnyss ne mihton Adam geswencan on þam earde’. Ælfric, *De Falsis Diis* in Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, Vol. II, XVII, ll. 36-43, pp. 678-9.

¹⁴¹ There may be a conventional *topos* governing Ælfric’s choice of the specific kinds of death he lists here, as three of them crop up again in a passage in *De Octavis Pentecosten* where he stresses God’s power to resurrect the body of every man, whether he had been drowned, or eaten by wild beasts or whether ‘fire had burned him swiftly to dust and that dust become scattered with winds’, in a text which is a near-translation of his source material from Julian of Toledo: ‘wære he on wæter adruncen, oððe hine wilde deor æton, oððe hine fyr forbærnde færlice to duste, and ðæt duste wurde toworpen mid blædum’. Ælfric, *De Octavis Pentecosten*, J. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, Volume I, EETS 259 (Oxford, 1967), XI, ll.333-335, p. 433.

cites warfare, brawling and the gallows as contemporary dangers. Ælfric's omissions suggest that his list of the types of death disabled in Paradise was carefully chosen, in the awareness that murder, manslaughter and execution only entered the world in the generation after the expulsion from Eden. This awareness is also signalled by the poet of *Genesis A*, who describes the blood of Abel soaking into the earth and causing the growth of a perverted and unnatural tree:

Woe was raised up after that slaughter-stroke, a litter of sorrows. From that twig afterwards, ever longer and stronger, there grew fierce and evil fruit. The branches of that crime spread wide across mankind; its harm-twigs struck the children of men hard and sore (they do so still), from them the copious fruits of every kind of evil began to sprout.¹⁴²

The *hearmtanas* (harm-twigs, 992) of this tree continue to lash sinful and suffering humanity. Its fruits are *bealwa gehwilces* (every kind of evil, 994), emphasising the twofold horror occurring when necessary death becomes unnecessary murder, and the way in which original sin differs from the sins we can choose whether or not to commit. That this distinction between 'natural' and 'artificial' death was widely recognised is also suggested by a very similar passage in *Maxims I* (192-3), in which it is stated that feud (*fæhðo*) only came into the world after the earth swallowed Abel's blood (*sippan...swealg/eorðe Abeles blode*).¹⁴³ This new growth is the evolutionary successor of the Tree of Death from *Genesis B*. Read in conjunction with Ælfric's catalogue, the texts create a movement

¹⁴² 'æfter wælswege wea wæs aræred,/ tregena tuddor. Of ðam twige siððan/ ludon laðwende leng swa swiðor/ reðe wæstmæ. Ræhton wide/ geond werpeoda wrohtes telgan,/ hrinon hearmtanas hearde and sare/ drihta bearnum,(doð gieta swa),/ of þam brad blado bealwa gehwilces/ sprytan ongunnon.' *Genesis A*, ll. 987-995a.

¹⁴³ For a discussion of the horror of swallowing blood in both Old English and Anglo-Latin literature, and its origins in Biblical injunctions, see A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the 'Beowulf'-manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 64ff.

through a continuum of the understanding of death. They start with death from natural causes present but disabled in Eden, to natural causes of death present and active in the world, and finally to the current situation, in force since Cain's murder of Abel, where both natural and man-made causes of death hold sway. These causes are neatly summarised in a passage in *The Seafarer*:

Always one of three things will be doubtful to each man before his allotted day:
disease or old age or sword-violence will deprive of life the doomed man about to die.¹⁴⁴

The Seafarer gives us two natural forms of death (*adl*, *yldo*) and one man-made form (*ecghete*); the order in which the poet cites them may be a reference to the order in which they entered the world.

Given that all nature became subject to death at the Fall, all kinds of death could be termed 'natural', with the exception of the man-made varieties such as murder. As we have seen from Ælfric and *The Seafarer*, distinctions are drawn between death from different kinds of cause: old age and disease on the one hand and violence on the other. This is not the only division between different kinds of death, however. In his homily *De Octavis Pentecosten*, Ælfric postulates a different kind of division between types of natural and unnatural death, drawing heavily on the *Prognosticon Futuri Saeculi* of Julian, the late seventh century Bishop of Toledo. This treatise on death and eschatology was clearly influential on Ælfric's thought as he also prepared a Latin homiletic epitome of it.¹⁴⁵ The *Prognosticon* in turn relies heavily on other authorities, most notably Augustine.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ 'Simle þreora sum þinga gewhylce/ ær his tiddege to tweon weorpeð: /adl oððe yldo oððe ecghete /fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.' *Seafarer*, ll. 68-71, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, pp. 143-147.

¹⁴⁵ E. Raynes, 'MS Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 and Ælfric', *Medium Ævum* 26 (1957), pp. 65-73.

¹⁴⁶ Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric, A Supplementary Collection*, Vol. I, pp. 407-410.

Pope stresses that this homily elucidates eschatological topics ‘on which a lay congregation in particular might not be adequately informed’ and that, in its treatment of its source material, it keeps ‘to the things that come closest to the concerns of a relatively simple congregation’.¹⁴⁷ The first ninety-three lines, which do not appear to have a particular source, summarise the events of the Incarnation and connect them to the church year from Christmas to the Octave of Pentecost, providing a context of salvation for the following account of the Fall. From line ninety-four, the homily is a close paraphrase of the *Prognosticon*, with the occasional insertion of a relevant comment or quotation from elsewhere. One such insertion, also present in Ælfric’s Latin epitome, is the already-cited quotation from Wisdom 1:13: *Ne gesceop God þone deað, ne he soðlice ne blissað on manna forwyrde*, (God did not make death, nor truly does he rejoice in man’s perdition). Here Ælfric once again makes explicit the orthodox understanding of death so undermined by the poet of *Genesis*, hammering the point home for his presumably unsophisticated audience.

That crucial fact established, he returns to the *Prognosticon*, offering a tripartite analysis of death based on age:

But through the devil’s envy death came into this world. He comes in three ways, as it is well known: *Mors acerba, mors inmatura, mors naturalis*. That is, in English, the bitter death, the unripe death and the natural death. The bitter death is so-called which is among children, and the unripe death, among young people, and the natural, that which comes to the old.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric, A Supplementary Collection*, Vol. I, p. 409.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Ac ðurh þæs deofles andan se deað com on ðas woruld. On ðreo wisan he cymð, swa swa hit fullcuð is: *Mors acerba, mors inmatura, mors naturalis*. Þæt is on Englisc, se bitera deað, se ungeripode deað, and gecyndelica. Se bitera deað is gecweden þe bið on cildum, and se ungeripoda deað, on geongum mannum, and se gecyndlica, þe becymð þam ealdum.’ Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric, A Supplementary Series*, Vol. I, XI. ll.110-117, p. 420.

Ælfric chooses here to endorse a point of view that suggests that not all kinds of death are similar, or equal. While this may not seem surprising initially, it raises issues which need to be explored, in particular the question of a culture's attitude to the deaths of the young. This is also connected to the all-important issue of whether someone's way of living is connected to their way of dying, and to the time and manner of their death.

Some deaths in this homily are posited as more acceptable and timely than others, in a structure which is recognisable from a contemporary Western perspective, living as we do in a culture where the deaths of children are rare.¹⁴⁹ Reconstructing the demographics of Anglo-Saxon England is problematic but Rubin suggests that child mortality was in the region of thirty percent and only half the population survived into their twenties. It was rare to live into one's forties, and nine out of ten people were dead before their fiftieth birthday.¹⁵⁰ High child mortality might logically suggest that parents felt less attachment to those children, as Lawrence Stone has contentiously argued.¹⁵¹ However, as Gottlieb points out in this context, 'mere logic is inadequate to explain the workings of human behaviour and thought' and in the late medieval and early modern periods there was a wide range of responses to the deaths of children, which suggests a similarly wide range of emotional reactions.¹⁵² Sally Crawford maintains that there was considerable investment in child-care, basing her argument on data such as the incidence of adult skeletons found with conditions such as cleft palate, which prevents babies from suckling. She also supports

149 D. Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain' in J. Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London, 1981), pp. 187-242, 231.

150 S. Rubin, *Medieval English Medicine*. (New York, 1974), p. 50.

151 L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London, 1977), p. 81; C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London, 1984), pp. 81-82.

152 B. Gottlieb, *The Family in the Western World, From the Black Death to the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 132-38.

Rubin's claim for high child mortality.¹⁵³ For Ælfric, as for Julian, many if not most people would have therefore died at a stage of life which, in this scheme of things, was deemed unnatural. *Ne gesceop God þone deað* for anyone, but particularly not for the young. There is no suggestion here that those who die young may have deserved their early death, but, as we shall see shortly, this interpretative scheme co-exists in Ælfric's thought with a contrary tradition in which one's life and the time and manner of one's dying and death are intimately linked. Before moving on to these value-laden narratives of personal death, however, there is one more category of text to consider, the gnomic verse of *Maxims* in which death is even more impersonal, in that it does not seem to be understood as the result of any human action.

ii. Value-Free Death

In the poetry, chronicles, saints' *Lives* and sermons which furnish the bulk of the evidence in this chapter, it is rare to find a neutral account of death, one which teaches no moral lesson. Either the writers discuss death as an abstract concept in order to make their audience aware of what they have lost through the Fall, or, as we shall see, they are dealing in exemplary deaths, with heroes and villains as their stock in trade. The discussions of the origin and purpose of death considered above make it clear that death was considered as an abstract as well as a particular concept by Anglo-Saxon writers, but 'abstract' does not mean 'neutral'. All the texts we have considered so far have interpreted death's activity in the world as the result of human error.

¹⁵³ S. Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud, 1999), pp. 94-5.

A very different perspective is found in the gnomic verse, however. This very ancient form of verse is closely related to precepts and proverbs and, like them, expresses universal, even self-evident, truths and articulates general advice.¹⁵⁴ Many of these texts which make up this genre are preserved in pre-Christian as well as Christian contexts, and there is a continuing debate over the 'Christian' as opposed to the 'archaic' nature of the Old English poems.¹⁵⁵

The following passage on the nature of the world appears towards the end of the Cotton *Maxims*:

Good shall contend with evil, youth with age, life with death, light with darkness,
troop with troop, foe with another, enemy with enemy strive over land, charge with
sin.¹⁵⁶

The passage begins boldly enough with its contrast of good and evil but its binary oppositions soon break down. Youth is not the opposite of age in the same way that good is the opposite of evil, and the relationship between light and darkness is different again. It is unclear, therefore, how the poet intends that life and death should be related to each other: are they wholly incompatible opposites, like good and evil, or two ends of a naturally connected spectrum with many intervening shades, like youth and age, or part of the natural ebb and flow of the world, like light and darkness? To complicate matters further, by the

¹⁵⁴ C. Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry*, (Oxford, 1993), esp. pp. 1-12.

¹⁵⁵ R. H. Dammers, 'Unity and Artistry in *The Fortunes of Men*', in *American Benedictine Review* 27, (1976), pp. 4614-19; N. D. Isaacs, 'Up a Tree: To See *The Fates of Men*' in Nicholson and Frese, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 363-75; K. Swenson, 'Death Appropriated in *The Fates of Men*', in *Studies in Philology* 88 (1991), pp. 123-39.

¹⁵⁶ 'God sceal wið yfele, geogoð sceal wið ylðo,/ lif sceal wið deaðe, leoht sceal wið þystrum,/ fyrð wið fyrde, feond wið oðrum,/ lað wið laþe ymb land sacan,/ synne stælan.' *Maxims* ll. 50-54a, Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 57.

end of the passage the two sides have been collapsed into each other — *fyrð wið fyrde*, *feond wið oðrum*,/ *lað wið laþe* — separate identities lost in their struggle for territory and their mutual acrimony.

The wise man puzzles over this chaos, trying to understand what is part of God's plan for the world and what comes from the devil, and which side is fighting for justice, but there are no easy answers:

Ever shall the wise man consider the labour of this world. The felon shall hang, fairly pay for the crime he did before to mankind. God only knows whither the soul shall go hereafter, and all the spirits who turn to God after their deathday, awaiting doom, in God's embrace. What is to come is dark and secret; only God knows it, the saving Father.¹⁵⁷

Here the chaotic world of men, in which apparent opposites battle each other, is contrasted with the perfect knowledge of God, in which everything is reconciled. Only from that divine perspective can even such an apparently easy question as the fate of the criminal's soul be answered. This conceptual framework of conflict and reconciliation is central to the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the role of death in the world.

The theme of a quest for order in an apparently disorderly world is also found in the Exeter *Maxims*. The poet moves from the subject of sex and reproduction to that of death via an image of autumnal trees reminiscent of both the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*: 'A tree has to shed its leaves on the earth, its branches have to mourn.'¹⁵⁸ The image of the grieving tree,

157 'A sceal snotor hycgean/ ymb þysse worulde gewinn; wearh hangian/ fægere ongildan þæt he ær facen dyde/ manna cyne. Meotod ana wat/ hwyder seo sawul sceal syððan hweorfan,/ and ealle þa gastas þe for Gode hweorfap/ æfter deaðdæge, domes bidað/ on Fæder fæðme. Is seo forðgesceaft/ digol and dyrne; Drihten ana wat,/ nergende Fæder.' *Maxims II* (Cotton), ll. 50-63a, Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 57.

158 'Beam sceal on eorðan/ leafum liþan, leomu gnornian.' *Maxims I* (Exeter), 25b-26, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 157, and cf. *Iliad*, vi, 46 and *Aeneid*, vi, 309-10.

like the image of light contending with darkness in the Cotton *Maxims*, suggests a repetitive, cyclical understanding of the relationship between life and death, and one in which death is part of the order rather than the disorder of the universe. The poet goes on:

The eager voyager must go forth, mortal men must die and every day prepare for parting from the world. God alone knows where the death will come from that passes hence out of [our] knowledge. The new-born make up the numbers that disease takes away; thus there are just as many of mankind on earth, nor would there be a limit to the number of people on earth, if He who made the world did not lessen them.¹⁵⁹

In this somewhat Malthusian interpretation, sex and reproduction necessitate death, not because they are in themselves sinful but because otherwise the world would become overpopulated. In the emphasis (reiterated in ll. 35 ff.) that only God knows when and whence *se cwealm* will come, the poet is stressing the need for every individual to be continually ready for the death that awaits them. However there is no suggestion that death is seen specifically as a punishment either for the individual or for mankind as a whole; rather, it is one of a series of regrettable inevitabilities, like winter or famine. There are patristic antecedents for this passage, most notably from Tertullian (and ultimately from the Book of Job), but the poet of the Exeter Book *Maxims* is unusual in his reluctance to impute moral values to the natural world.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ 'Fus sceal feran, fæge sweltan/ ond dogra gehwam ymb gedal sacan/ middangeardes. Meotud ana wat/ hwær se cwealm cymeþ, þe heonan of cyþþe gewiteþ./ Umbor yceð, þa æradl nimeð;/ þy weorþeð on foldan swa fela fira cynnes,/ ne sy þæs magutimbres gemet ofer eorþan,/gif hi ne wanige se þas woruld teode.' *Maxims I* (Exeter), ll. 27-34, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 157.

¹⁶⁰ 'Summum testimonium frequentiae humanae, onerosi sumus mundo, vix nobis elementia sufficiunt, et necessitates arctiores, et querelae apud omnes, dum iam nos natura non sustinet. Re vera lues, et fames, et bella, et voragines civitatum, pro remedio deputanda, tanquam tonsura inolescentis generis humani.' (What most frequently meets our view (and causes complaint), is our teeming population: our numbers are burdensome to the world, which can hardly supply us from its natural elements; our wants grow more and more keen, and our complaints more bitter in all mouths, while Nature cannot sustain us. Indeed, plague, and famine, and wars, and earthquakes have to be regarded as a remedy for nations, as the means of trimming the luxuriance of the human race.) Tertullian, *Liber de Anima*, Chapter XXX (Migne, *PL*, II, p. 700).

All the texts that have been considered so far in this chapter share a didactic purpose. They are concerned to explain how the world came to be as it is, and to locate the place of humanity within it. They establish the presence of death as one of the greatest puzzles and challenges of Creation, and they attempt to justify its purpose and origins. They also suggest how human beings *en masse* should respond to it. But, despite their authoritative tone, the picture they paint is inconsistent, with the difficulty of imagining a world without death proving too much even for such a clear thinker as Ælfric. Death is presented as natural and yet unnatural, as implicit in Creation yet not made by God, both as a punishment and as a way of making room for the next generation. This string of paradoxes should not be perceived as a failure, however. Instead, it is indicative of a culture continually grappling with one of the most interesting of philosophical problems. John Bowker raises similar points in his summary of a survey of attitudes to death in the world's major religions:

Frequently irreconcilable opposites are maintained between traditions, and even in conjunction in the same tradition. But that is not because...the religions are yet again exhibiting their incompetent refusal to face facts, but because the facts of experience demand an attitude of both-and, not an attitude of either-or. In regarding death as both an enemy and a friend, the religions are, as ever, resisting the fallacy of the falsely dichotomous question.¹⁶¹

In the next section, the focus of debate turns to the subject of the body under threat in death and life and shows that, here too, ambiguity and contradiction are the order of the day.

¹⁶¹ J. Bowker, *The Meanings of Death*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 209.

iii. Body and Soul in Battle

This section examines the images which were used to understand the interaction of body and soul both before and after death, and the place of death in that interaction. These include the understanding of the body as a sacred space and the home of the soul; body and soul as the battleground between the forces of good and evil; the ways in which good and evil deeds are physically manifest in the body; and the ways in which decay or its absence are described and interpreted. It demonstrates that body and soul were seen as reflexively related throughout human experience from birth to last judgment, connected yet in conflict, and that the intervention of physical death was only a stage in their development and their joint passage through time into eternity. This understanding of the body/soul relationship is in line with the orthodox Christian vision, and the following discussion examines the application and articulation of that orthodoxy, expressed in media ranging from liturgy to literature and art, and through a range of practices from preaching and healing to burial.

The first sources to be examined will be those that illuminate the ways in which sin and virtue are manifested physiologically, and those that examine the relationship between body and soul before, at and after death. These sources include the poems *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Dream of the Rood* and *Christ III*, homilies, law codes and hagiography. This section will be followed by a close analysis of the poem *Soul and Body*.¹⁶²

It was demonstrated earlier in this chapter that, according to Genesis and in the eyes of the Church, death was an accidental development in the world, resulting from original

¹⁶² All quotations from the *Soul and Body* poems will be taken from Moffat's edition of the Vercelli and Exeter texts in parallel; here the Vercelli version will be cited except where there are significant differences between the two versions. D. Moffat, *The Old English Soul and Body*, (Woodbridge, 1990).

sin. All people are affected by original sin and therefore all die, but death and decay played no part in God's design for humanity. Inherent in this understanding is a paradox: death is both natural in that all nature dies, and unnatural in that, for humanity at least, it is the result of the Fall. Dying and rotting can never be neutral biological processes, free of moral implication; they are by definition tokens of sinfulness. It is evident from poems such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin*, all from the Exeter Book, that the world's immanent decay played a significant part in the way Anglo-Saxon writers interpreted their surroundings. In *The Wanderer*, man and middle-earth deteriorate in parallel: 'They swiftly gave up the hall, the proud thanes and kinsmen. So this middle-earth each and every day decays and falls.'¹⁶³ This forms a poignant contrast both to God's immutability and to His original design for creation. *The Ruin* shows plague putting an end both to men and to their constructions: 'They fell in widespread slaughter, days of plague came, death took all the brave men; their ramparts were laid waste to the foundations, the city decayed.'¹⁶⁴ In *The Seafarer*, the beauty of the natural world in spring serves only as a reminder of the passing of time and the need to ready one's soul for its journey:

The groves take on blossom, the cities grow fair, the fields gleam, the world hastens; all encourages one eager of spirit and soul to the journey, the one who thus thinks to travel far on the flood-ways.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ '...hi færllice flet ofgeafon,/ modge maguþegnas. Swa þes middangeard/ ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð and fealleþ.' *The Wanderer*, ll. 61b-63, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 135.

¹⁶⁴ 'Crungon walo wide, cwoman woldagas,/ swylt eal fornom secgrofa wera;/ wurdon hyra wigsteal westen staðolas,/ brosnade burgsteal.' *The Ruin*, ll. 25-28a. Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, pp. 227-28

¹⁶⁵ 'Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,/ wongas wlitigiað, woruld onetteð;/ ealle ða gemoniað modes fusne/ sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð/ on flodwegas feor gewitan.' *The Seafarer*, ll. 48-52, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 144.

In order to understand how people, their souls and bodies, became embroiled in the transitory and decaying sublunary world, it is appropriate at this point to consider again the passage in the Old English *Genesis* describing the murder of Abel by Cain:

Fury surged up in the heart of the man [ie Cain], he was white with wrath, angry from envy. He did the ill-advised deed with his hands, killed his kinsman, his own brother, and shed his blood.¹⁶⁶

The blood soaks into the soil, ‘the earth swallowed the murder-blood, the man’s gore’,¹⁶⁷ in a dramatic image of human violence being absorbed by and becoming one with the natural world. This is a parody of impregnation, in which creation conceives murder through the vital fluid of Abel’s blood.

The theme of dying by violence recurs in *The Seafarer* in the passage (referred to above) which explores the precariousness of life. We already know that the joys of the Lord are dearer to the speaker than *his deade lif* (64-65). He goes on to say that man cannot know precisely how or when he will die, but he can be sure that death will come, and that it will be caused by ‘disease or old age or sword-violence’.¹⁶⁸ This passage encapsulates a whole world-view in almost telegrammatic form. Those who do not die of illness will die from violence or senility, each of the three presenting a different range of possible reactions. Disease was an embodiment of the war between good and evil whose battleground was every human soul; by embodying sin it makes the sin public, but it gives

166 ‘Hygewælm asteah / beorne on breostum, blatende nið, / yrre for æfstum. He þa unræden / folmum gefremede, freomæg ofslöh, / broðor sinne, and his blod ageat.’ *Genesis A*, ll. 980b-984, Krapp, *Junius Manuscript*, p. 32.

167 ‘Cwealmdreore swealh/ þæs middangeard, monnes swate’. *Genesis A*, ll. 985b-986, Krapp, *Junius Manuscript*, p. 32.

168 ‘Simle þreora sum þinga gewhylce/ ær his tiddege to tweon weorþeð:/ adl oððe ylðo oððe ecghete/ fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.’ *The Seafarer*, ll. 68-71, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, pp. 145.

the sinner time to repent and the chance to suffer bravely. Old age likewise gives time and concomitantly, perhaps, wisdom and understanding of the right way to conduct one's dying. Those risking a violent death might do well to bear the possibility always in the front of their minds. *Adl*, disease, was no more part of God's plan than death was, but, while death is universal, disease comes in many forms and is rather more selective about whom it visits; disease therefore may represent specific sins rather than the burden of guilt under which all labour from birth.

This idea of invasion and corruption worked on many different levels and was as true of the Body Politic as it was of the individual body: political events such as Viking raids, or natural disasters such as famine or floods, could be seen as the result of sin just as much as plague could. In his *Institutes of Polity*, Archbishop Wulfstan makes it explicit where the remedy, the *bote*, is to be found:

And if it happen that misfortune befall the people, through an army or famine, through plague or mortality, through failure of crops or bad weather, then let them earnestly consult (*rædan*) how amends (*bote*) for this may be sought from Christ, with pure fasts, and with frequenting churches, and with humble prayers, and with alms-givings.¹⁶⁹

Priests, like doctors, could both read and consult (*rædan*) to discover the best cure.¹⁷⁰ *Bote* can mean a literal cure in a medical context or, as here, a more ritualised form of remedy, and this passage makes an interesting comparison with the medical texts discussed below.

¹⁶⁹ 'And gif hit geweorðe þæt folce mislimpe þurh here oðþon hunger, þurh stric oððe steorfan, þurh unwæstm oððe unweder, þonne rædan hi georne, hu man þas bote sece to Criste mid clænlicum fæstenum and mid cyrcsocnum and mid eadmedum benum and mid ælmessylenum.' K. Jost, *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical": Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York*, Schweizerische Anglistische Arbeiten (Bern 1959), p.168: *Be godes þeowum*.

¹⁷⁰ By contrast, Cain's murder of Abel was *unræden* — 'He þa unræden/ folmum gefremede' *Genesis B* ll. 982b-3a, Krapp, *Junius Manuscript*, p. 32.

Prayer and penitence could not guarantee a literal cure either to the nation or to the individual, though both might be granted the strength to bear their suffering and reflect upon their predicament. This understanding of the Body Politic conflates ideas of the individual, the nation and the king: the spiritual and physical health of each of these three affects the others (as we shall see in chapter four). Wulfstan's *Institutes of Polity* may be a work of political theory but the message here is the same that emerges from his homilies: that reform of the state, of the church and of the interior moral world of the individual form a continuum.¹⁷¹

In other contexts, however, the association of sin and physical affliction might be more specific: different sins and virtues could be intimately associated with different areas of the anatomy. Bede demonstrates this when he tells us of the neck tumour suffered by St Æthelthryth of Ely, which she apparently ascribed directly to her youthful vanity in wearing pretty necklaces.¹⁷² However, Æthelthryth, or Bede in speaking for her, seems to have been unusually literal-minded: as we shall see in the case of *Soul and Body*, there was no general expectation of a universal correlation between a particular sin and a particular form of disease, deformity or decay. In *Christ III*, the narrator bewails the fact that we cannot always immediately see the effect of sin on our souls, which would prompt us to repentance:

Alas, if only we could see in our souls the terrible crimes, the wounds of sin, in the body the evil thoughts, with our eyes the unclean inner thoughts.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989), p. 13.

¹⁷² B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. (Oxford, 1969), Book IV, p. 19.

¹⁷³ 'Eala, þær we nu magon wraþe firene/ geseon on ussum sawlum, synna wunde,/ mid lichoman leahtra gehygdu,/ eagam unclæne ingeþoncas!' *Christ III*, ll. 1312-15, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 39.

This state will only last until Judgment, however, for then the eyes of God, the heavenly host and the devils will be able to see the sinful soul through a body become diaphanous as glass.¹⁷⁴

Sin's characterisation in terms of wounds as well as sickness — ...*ond ic synnum fah,/ forwundod mid wommum* (and I [was] stained with sins, wounded with guilt. ll. 13b-14a)¹⁷⁵ — intentionally recalls the wounds that the sinless Christ suffered for humanity on the Cross. The poet of *The Dream of the Rood* describes the nails fixing Christ to the Cross as arrows: *eall ic wæs mid strælum forwundod* (I was all wounded with arrows. l. 62b) and in *Christ II* the arrows are explicitly equated with the spiritual damage resulting from sin:

He [God] sends thence his messengers, holy from the heights, hither that they may shield us against the harm-doers' painful arrow-shooting, lest the hostile ones should cause wounds, when the devil sends forth bitter arrows at God's people from his deceitful bow. Therefore we must keep watch strongly against the sudden shot, ever wary, lest the poisonous spear, the biting weapon, the sudden artifice of enemies, pierce the body. That is a perilous wound, the most ghastly of gashes.¹⁷⁶

Without heavenly aid and God's *scyld*, we cannot protect ourselves against the devils' penetrating and poisoned onslaught despite all the defences of the *banloca*, bone-lock, the tough physical structure of the body. These images are not unusual: Anglo-Saxon literature and illustration are riddled with references to the body being shot with arrows of both sin

¹⁷⁴ 'Beoð þa syngan flæsc/ scandum þurhwaden swa þæt scire glæs...' *Christ III*, ll. 1281b-2, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁵ *The Dream of the Rood*, Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, pp. 61-65.

¹⁷⁶ 'He his aras þonan,/ halig of heahðu, hider onsendeð,/ þa us gescildað wið sceppendra/ eglum earhfarum, þi læs unholdan/ wunde gewyrcen, þonne wrohtbora/ in folc godes forð onsendeð/ of his brægdbogan bitearne stræl./ Forþon we fæste sculon wið þam færscyte/ symle wærlice wearde healdan,/ þy læs se attres ord in gebuge,/ biter bordgeleac, under banlocan,/ feonda færsearo. Þæt is frecne wunde,/ blatast benna.' *Christ II*, ll. 759b-771a, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 24.

and disease, both delivered by supernatural beings. This belief is reflected in words like *ælfsgoða* (hiccough), *wæterælfadle* (water-elf disease) and the charm against a stitch in which a little spear is repeatedly exhorted to come out of the afflicted person's body: 'Ut lytel spere, gif her inne sie! (Out, little spear, if you be in here!).¹⁷⁷ Malicious creatures attacking a man whose body is stuck full of arrows are shown in the Eadwine or Canterbury psalter, illustrating Psalm 37 (38): *Quoniam sagittae tuae infixae sunt mihi* (because your arrows are fixed in me).¹⁷⁸ This image is discussed by Karen Jolly as part of a wider treatment of magic and medicine within a late Saxon Christian perspective, in which she makes the point that a physical affliction may have had different kinds of spiritual origin: it being immediately the result of 'elfshot' need not preclude its ultimate source being Christ or the devil.¹⁷⁹ Augustine ascribes the successful persecution of Christians to the inspiration of demons, but argues that this was ultimately to the Church's advantage and God's glory, as so many martyrs were created.¹⁸⁰ The motif of the arrows of sin has a Pauline origin in the injunction to take up the shield of faith to protect oneself against the fiery darts of the evil one, from Ephesians 6:16: *in omnibus sumentes scutum fidei, in quo possitis omnia tela nequissimi ignea extinguere* (in everything taking up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the fiery arrows of the most evil one).¹⁸¹

Even when *adl*, *yldo* and *ecghete* have spared someone for the time being, he or she is vulnerable to attack; in a passage using the same vocabulary in the same order as the lines

¹⁷⁷ Metrical Charm 4 *Wið Færstice*, l. 6, Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 122.

¹⁷⁸ *The Canterbury Psalter*, Facsimile with introduction by M. R. James, (London, 1935); M. Gibson, T. A. Heslop and R. Pfaff (eds.), *The Eadwine Psalter: Text, Image and Monastic Culture in Twelfth Century Canterbury* (London, 1992).

¹⁷⁹ K. L. Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context*, (London, 1996), pp. 136-38.

¹⁸⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. H. Bettenson (London, 1972) X.21, pp. 401-3.

¹⁸¹ Ephesians, 6:11-17.

of *The Seafarer* quoted above, the *Beowulf* poet, through the mouth of Hrothgar, comments on the dangerous state of a successful man unaware of his own pride (*oferhygda*):

He lives in joy; nothing of disease or old age (*adl ne ylðo*) leads him astray, nor does malicious sorrow darken his spirit, nor does any strife show its sword-hatred (*ecghete*) but all the world goes with him as he wills; he knows nothing of a worse danger until within him his portion of pride grows and flourishes...¹⁸²

The imagery here is of sin as a fifth columnist. Having once gained entry, it works to destroy the individual from within, playing on the delights and desires of the vulnerable body which should be the soul's *weard* and *hyrde* but whose moral sense is comatose (*bið se slæp to fæst* 1742b). The verbs which describe the action of sin, *weaxan* and *wridan*, both have strong connotations of plant growth.¹⁸³ We have been told that the man wields *side rices* (wide kingdoms), but his pride will grow vaster than empires, sprouting and flourishing in an image reminiscent of the tree springing from Abel's blood in *Genesis*. The *Beowulf* poet goes on to make it clear who is responsible for planting the seed of Pride while the soul is asleep:

The killer is very near, he who from his bow shoots with wickedness. Then in his heart is the helmeted man struck with a bitter [*or biting*] arrow — he cannot defend himself — by the crooked, strange commands of the accursed spirit.¹⁸⁴

182 'Wunað he on wiste; no hine wiht dweleð/ adl ne ylðo, ne him inwitsorh/ on sefa(n) sweorceð, ne gesacu ohwær/ ecghete eoweð, ac him eal worold/ wendeð on willan; he þæt wyrse ne con/ oð þæt him on innan oferhygda dæl/ weaxeð ond wridað....' *Beowulf* ll. 1735-1741a, Klaeber, *Beowulf*, p. 65.

183 For a discussion of the pairing of alliterating verbs and homiletic style in Hrothgar's 'homily', see P. Clemoes, 'Style as a Criterion for Dating the Composition of *Beowulf*' in C. Chase (ed.), *The Dating of 'Beowulf'* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 173-85.

184 'bona swiðe neah,/ se þe of flanbogan fyrenum sceoteð./ þonne bið on hrepre under helm drepen/ biteran stræle — him bebeorgan ne con -/ wom wundorbebodum wergan gastes.' *Beowulf*, ll. 1743b-1747, Klaeber, *Beowulf*, p. 65.

The words in this passage move between the literal — solid objects such as the *flanbogan*, the *helm* and the *stræle* — and the more abstract — *fyrenum* and *wundorbebodenum*. Some words straddle the two: *biteran* is both bitter and biting, and *hreþer* denotes both the breast and the thought and emotions contained therein. *Bebeorgan* (used again in 1757a) has connotations of both a burial mound (*beorh*) and a defended place (*burh*), suggesting that the body is an artificial structure constructed in the same way as a building or a barrow, as the home of the soul and possibly as its grave. This ambiguity of language, moving between abstract and concrete, bridges the gap between the visible world of the body and the invisible world of the soul and makes it clear that these attackers are capable of doing harm in both.¹⁸⁵

The man's *oferhygd* leads him to covetousness and anger (*he...gytsað gromhydig*), his sin spreading like cancer through the body and leading him to ignore his inevitable fate (*forþgesceaft*) of death and dissolution: 'At the end it happens that the transitory body falls, the death-doomed one decays...'.¹⁸⁶ The paired verbs, *dreosan* and *feallan*, that are used here to describe the body, are used in *The Wanderer* to chart the decay of the world (*Wanderer* ll. 61-3, quoted above), hinting at a parallel understanding of microcosm and macrocosm. The decline of the body is contrasted both with heritable but corrupting worldly wealth and with *ece rædas* (eternal rewards).

As Hrothgar draws to a conclusion, he returns to the theme of the catalogue of deaths, expanding on his original trinity of *adl*, *ylde* and *ecghete*:

¹⁸⁵ Compare the very similar passage in Vercelli homily IV, ll. 308-10: 'Þonne hæfð þæt diofl geworht bogan 7 stræla. Se boga bið geworht of ofermettum, 7 þa stræla bioð manigra cynna swa swa mannes synna bioð....' Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 102.

¹⁸⁶ 'Hit on endestæf eft gelimpeð,/ þæt se lichoma læne gedreoseð,/ fæge gefealleð...' ll. 1753-1755a, Klaeber, *Beowulf*, p. 65.

Soon afterwards it will be that disease or the sword will deprive you of power, or the grip of fire, or the whelm of flood, or the blow of a blade, or the flight of a spear, or terrible old age; or the brilliance of your eyes will leave and grow dark; suddenly it will be that death, warrior, will overpower you.¹⁸⁷

In a world where even the most magnificent of fighting men is beset by so many internal and external dangers, there is no room for complacency. Thus, from a range of sources, an image of the body as a sacred and endangered space emerges. The fragile and permeable shell of self is under attack from many different directions, by assailants both visible and invisible.¹⁸⁸

The soul was as vulnerable as the body to the devil's arrows: Ælfric, in his homily *Item in Letania Maiore Feria Tertia* gives an account of the Vision of Fursey, ultimately derived from Bede,¹⁸⁹ but full of descriptive elements absent from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Whereas Bede only refers to 'constant wicked accusations' of 'evil spirits' hindering the soul's passage to heaven, Ælfric uses the familiar imagery of the bow-wielding devil: 'The fighting devils shot their arrows of sin towards the soul but the devilish arrows were fended off through the shielding of the armed angel....'¹⁹⁰ Thus, in Ælfric's version, even after death and separation, soul and body continue to undergo parallel experiences of assault by enemies who penetrate and invade their sacred space, the

¹⁸⁷ 'Eft sona bið/ þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafodæs getwæfeð,/ oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm,/ oððe gripe meces, oððe gares fliht/ oððe atol ylðo; oððe eagenas bearhtm/ forsited and forsworced; semninga bið/ þæt ðec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð.' ll. 1762b-1768, Klaeber, *Beowulf*, p. 65.

¹⁸⁸ For a broader anthropological perspective on images of the body as a building, a city and a microcosm in need of protection against external attack, both physical and spiritual, see M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York, 1959), esp. p. 49 and pp. 175ff.

¹⁸⁹ *HE*, III,19.

¹⁹⁰ 'þa deoflu feohtende scuton heora fyrenan flan ongean ða sawle. Ac ða deofellican flan wurdon þærrihte ealle adwæscte þurh ðæs gewæpnodon engles scyldunge' *In Letania Maiore Feria Tertia*. Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series (Text)*, ed. M. Godden, EETS SS 5 (Oxford, 1979); XX, ll. 62-4, p. 192.

devils' arrow-showers matched by the armies of worms that menace the corpse, a motif that will be more fully explored in the analysis of the poem *Soul and Body* below.

The body was under attack from many different directions in the Anglo-Saxon imagination. The Beasts of Battle *topos* in its many guises stresses the horror of a body lying unburied, as does the illustration of a man-eating wolf in Vatican Reg Lat 12 and the gruesome description of Grendel consuming corpses in *Beowulf*. *The Wanderer* laments the fates of the unburied: 'One of them a bird bore away over the deep sea, one the grey wolf divided in death, one the sad-faced man concealed in an earth grave'.¹⁹¹ The formulaic nature and frequent occurrence of the Beasts of Battle *topos* suggests that it was seen as a necessary part of thinking about death in battle and elsewhere, something without which no account was complete.

Griffith suggests that the *topos* had its origins in 'a particularly morbid and macabre observation of real events', a turn of phrase which surely owes more to a modern rather than an Anglo-Saxon sensibility, and goes on to argue that through repetition it became 'formulaic' and 'fixed', implying that it thereby lost its power to shock.¹⁹² However, the 'real events' to which he refers, like the 'real events' of bodily decay, were not only part of normal life, but also carried a moral weight when depicted in a literary context. While the formulaic nature of the *topos* cannot be contested, it is not only found in poetry. Ælfric draws on it in his pastoral letter to Wulfsige when he needs an unexpected image to describe ravening priests:

191 'sumne fugel oðbær/ ofer heanne holm, sumne se hara wulf/ deaðe gedealde, sumne dreorigheor/ in eorðscræfe eorl gehyde'. *The Wanderer*, ll. 81b-84, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 136.

192 M. S. Griffith, 'Convention and Originality in the Old English 'Beasts of Battle' Typescene' in *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1992), pp. 179-99, 184.

Some priests rejoice when men die, and they gather about the body, just like greedy ravens when they see a corpse in holt or field, but it is fitting for a priest to accompany the men who belong to his parish into his minster; and he must not travel into another district to any corpse unless he be invited.¹⁹³

Ælfric's striking simile of priests as carrion-seeking birds shows that the theme should not only be seen as referring to battles but occurs in other contexts as well. In his *Passio Sancti Edmundi*, St Edmund's head is protected by its virtue and remains untouched by the 'greedy and hungry' wolf, in a neat inversion of the *topos*.¹⁹⁴ When the motif of the human body as food occurs in Vercelli Homily IV — *Eala, ðu wyrma gecow 7 wulfa geslit 7 fugle geter* (Alas, you chewed thing of worms and bitten thing of wolves and torn thing of birds)- it is part of the soul's description of the body as 'Godes ansaca', God's enemy.¹⁹⁵ 'Morbid and macabre' it may be, to be eaten by scavengers, but it was a part of life which needed to be confronted in a society that perceived itself as violent and lived very close to the food chain. Deaths like these form part of the fate of *ecghete* and as such the *topos* was a reminder to warriors to keep their souls in good order.

The theme of the body under attack from without is ubiquitous, and always appears to be morally significant. In the sources which discuss the ways in which the body can be broken down after death, it almost always expressed entirely in terms of being eaten by worms or by the beasts of battle: only very rarely is any awareness shown of the internal catabolic processes of decay. Similarly, bodies in art may be shown being cut up (as in the

¹⁹³ '[182] Sume preostas fægnað þonne men forðfarað, 7 gegaderiað hy to þam lice, swa swa grædige hremmas þær þær hy hold geseoð, on holte oþpe felda; [183] ac hym gebyrað to bestandenne þa men þe gehyrað to his hynnyse, into his mynstre; [184] 7 he ne sceal na faran on oþres folgoþe to nanum lice, butan he gelapod sy.' D. Whitelock, M. Brett and C.N.L. Brooke, *Councils and Synods of Great Britain with Other Documents Relating to the English Church. Volume 1, Part 1. 871-1066* (Oxford, 1981), p. 295.

¹⁹⁴ Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, pp. 324-6; here the Vikings had removed the head in the first place so that it might not be buried, *þæt hit bebyrged ne wurde* (l. 132).

¹⁹⁵ Scragg *Vercelli Homilies*, IV, pp. 265-6.

Bayeux tapestry) or eaten (as in the *Wonders of the East*) but they are never shown in decay, and I have not been able to find a single contemporary representation of a skull or other human bones. This convention adds to the impression that sin, dying, death and decay were perceived as a continuum of violent assault from without on the vulnerable and sentient body and soul.

Being eaten, whether by worms, by wolves or by ravens, means that the human being literally becomes part of the animal, and the importance of the difference between humans and animals is a recurring theme. Examples range from Ælfric's insistence that God *ne sealde nanum nytene ne nanum fisce nane sawle* (gave no soul to animals or fishes) and the Wulfstaniaan rhetoric of *la, hwæt byð betweonan mannes and nytenes andgyte, gyf he nat ne witan nele, butan þæt he on starað?* (Lo, what difference is there between the understanding of a man and an animal, if he doesn't know, and doesn't want to know, unless he can see it?) to the damned and anguished Soul crying to the Body:

For it would have been very much better for you that you had been, at the beginning, a bird or a fish in the sea, or an ox on earth, ploughing for food, plodding in the field, a beast without comprehension, or the worst of wild creatures in the waste, if God had willed it so, yea, though you had been the most terrifying of dragons, if God had willed it so, than you had ever been made man in the world...¹⁹⁶

By sinning, one can be cast out not merely from community or Church, but from the whole human race, losing one's claim to have been made in God's image.

There is therefore a spectrum of virtuous and sinful behaviour that has Christ — the perfect human being — at one end and people who have rendered themselves inhuman

¹⁹⁶ 'Forðan þe wære selre swiðe mycle.../ þær ðu wurðe æt fry(m)ðe fugel oððe fisc on sæ./ oððe on eorðan neat ætes tilode,/ feldgangende feoh butan snyttro,/ oððe on westenne wilddeora/ þæt wyrreste, þær swa god wolde./ ge þeah ðu wære wyrmcynna/ þ(æt) grimmeste, þær swa god wolde,/ þonne ðu æfre on moldan man gewurde...' *Soul and Body*, l. 76 and ll. 79-86, Moffat, p. 57.

through sin at the other, and both body and soul are situated along this spectrum. This understanding has social and legal as well as spiritual ramifications. The theology of guilt embedded in parts of the body was closely reflected in the legal and penal codes issued in the period, as sin and crime were very closely identified. This closeness is most demonstrable in the tenth and early eleventh century, when Archbishop Wulfstan was closely involved in the drawing-up of law codes under kings Æthelred and Cnut, but is evident earlier. Alfred used the Bible as a source for general legal principles and the Laws of Ine, promulgated in the late seventh century, link the concepts of ‘the salvations of our souls and the security of our kingdom’.¹⁹⁷ There are legal penalties for sundry crimes which aim to punish the part of the body most implicated: the Laws of Alfred (871-899) specify that a thief is to lose the hand which committed the crime and a slanderer to have his tongue slit. Free men could commute their mutilation into a fine by paying the appropriate proportion of their wergild, but a slave who raped another slave was punished by castration without the option of a cash substitute.¹⁹⁸ The law codes become more specific over time: Ine 18 and 37 (688-694 but only known through Alfred’s incorporation of it into his own code two centuries later) mention that a *ceorl* caught in the act of stealing is to lose a hand or a foot, whereas Athelstan’s Code issued at Grately (II Athelstan, 924-939) stipulates that a false moneyer should lose his hand, which is then to be displayed at the mint.¹⁹⁹ Attitudes towards punishment and the body were not static but changed considerably through time, especially in regard to the increasing preference for mutilation

¹⁹⁷ D. Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042* (London, 1955), pp. 331-32 and p. 364.

¹⁹⁸ Laws of Alfred in Whitelock, *EHD*, 6-6.1, 25.1, 32, pp. 372ff.

¹⁹⁹ Laws of Alfred in Whitelock, *EHD* 14.1, p. 384.

punishments instead of execution, since the former allowed the criminal the chance to repent and save his soul (II Cnut 30:3b-5).²⁰⁰

Athelstan II:23.1 is also the first code to go into details about the nature of trial by ordeal, which treats the body as a text in which guilt or innocence can be read, specifying how deep a body must sink in the case of trial by water and how long before the criminal's hand can be unbound in the ordeal by iron. Ordeals were clearly important spiritual experiences as well as legal ones:

If anyone pledges [to undergo] the ordeal, he is then to come three days before to the priest whose duty it is to consecrate it, and live off bread and water and salt and vegetables until he shall go to it, and be present at Mass on each of those three days, and make his offering and go to communion on the day on which he shall go to the ordeal...²⁰¹

The spiritual cleansing undergone before the ordeal made a palimpsest of the body, so that sin and crime, hitherto inscribed in invisible ink, might be more clearly read after the body has been through the ordeal. Experiences like execution, mutilation and trial by ordeal should also be understood as public performances, designed not only for the criminal but also for the spectators. The punished body incorporates wider lessons for the onlookers to take to heart.²⁰² In these legal texts, the relationship between soul and living body is clearly based on sin and virtue. The body and its senses are the vulnerable entrances through which temptation may enter and damage the soul; the damaged soul in turn affects the body, made manifest in disease. This theology has exact parallels in the legal treatment of the body, in those cases where the evidence of a person's crime is made indelible through the

²⁰⁰ P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Vol. I: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 126-27.

²⁰¹ Laws of Alfred in Whitelock, *EHD*, 23, p. 385.

²⁰² O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Body and Law', pp. 227-32.

mutilation of the guilty part of the body. As is evident elsewhere in this discussion, the legal punishment of the dead body did not always end at the moment of death, nor did death put an end to the changes that sin and virtue might work upon the body.

While it is understandable that the soul's well-being should be thought to affect the living body, it may seem less obvious that it should influence the corpse. However, this is manifestly the case, both at the moment of death and later. First, let us look at the body, soul and death of Edward the Confessor, as described by his anonymous biographer in Book II of the *Vita Eadwardi*.²⁰³ Given that the author is striving to present Edward as a holy man and perhaps as a fully-fledged saint,²⁰⁴ how is this ~~is~~ expressed physiologically? Firstly, there is the stress on Edward's chastity throughout life, secondly there is the description of his body in life, and thirdly there is the portrait of his corpse at the moment of death. The two descriptions of his body stress similar aspects of his appearance. The living king is tall, fair and rosy-cheeked:

Distinguished by his milky white hair and beard, full face and rosy cheeks, thin white hands, and long translucent fingers; in all the rest of his body he was an unblemished royal person.²⁰⁵

The description is ethereal, the king a diaphanous and etiolated figure of milk and snow, only the pink of his cheeks attesting to his health and liveliness. It may have no basis in reality and is possibly derived from a portrait of St Audemer,²⁰⁶ but its historical accuracy is irrelevant here in comparison with the spiritual point that the author is making. He is

²⁰³ F Barlow, (ed and trans), *The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster* (Oxford, 1992). This text, its background and the circumstances of its production will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four below.

²⁰⁴ F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (London, 1970), p. xxiii.

²⁰⁵ '...capillis et barba canitie insignis lactea, facie plena et cute rosea, manibus macris et niueis, longis quoque interlucentibus digitis, reliquo corpore toto integer et regius homo.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, p. 18.

²⁰⁶ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. 71.

emphasising Edward's purity and beauty: his chaste soul shining through his flesh. Barlow notes the relevance of the word *integer* to Edward's reputation for chastity, but *integer* has a wider semantic range than this and should be understood in the context of the discussion above of the ways in which the arrows and deceits of the devil might breach the ramparts of both body and soul. Edward's gleaming body is a coat of spiritual mail, impervious to the fiendish bombardment, and in death it becomes even more radiant:

Then could be seen in the dead body the glory of a soul departing to God. For the flesh of his face blushed like a rose, the adjacent beard gleamed like a lily, his hands, laid out, whitened, and were a sign that his whole body was given not to death but to auspicious sleep.²⁰⁷

His *faustus sopor* is part of the reward for his virtue, in contrast to the soul whose *slæp... bið to fæst*, against which Hrothgar warned Beowulf. His body shimmers with light and colour, the verbs (*ruberet, canderet, albescerent*) presenting his body as changing and growing more beautiful as we watch. The beauty of the body is a foretaste of the joys of the saved at the time of resurrection, as expounded in Vercelli Homily IV. This homily discusses the moment of the reunion of the body and soul:

Beloved men, let us imagine how gladly and how joyfully and how fairly and how mildly the soul will speak to the body... Then the body breaks into manifold colours; at first he is of ordinary man's colour, then next of the fairest man's colour, then next he is of the beauty of flowers, lilies and roses. And then it follows that he has a colour like gold and silver and the most valuable gems and precious stones; and next he glitters like a star and shines like the moon, and glows like the sun when it is most brightly shining.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ 'Erat tunc uidere in defuncto corpore gloriam migrantis ad deum animae, cum scilicet caro faciei ut rosa ruberet, subiecta barba ut lilium canderet, manus suo ordine directae albescerent, totumque corpus non morti sed fausto sopori traditum signarent.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, p. 80.

²⁰⁸ 'Men þa leofestan, utan geðencan hu glædlice 7 hu wynsumlice 7 hu fægre 7 hu mildlice heo sprycð, sio sawl, to hire lichaman... Þonne bryt se lichoma on manigfealdum bleon; ærest he bið on medmicles mannes hiwe, þonne æt nehstan on þam fægerestan manes hiwe; swa æt nehstan þæt he þara wyrta fægernesse, lilian 7

The homilist goes on to say that the body and soul are now indistinguishable and united in praising God. Death and disembodiment do not affect the soul's capacity to suffer: rather, as Ælfric says, all the potential for pain and pleasure inherent in the body seems to be transferred at death to the soul, 'Truly, as books tell us, the soul has the likeness of the body in all its limbs, and it experiences pleasure and pain....'²⁰⁹ Echoing this, the soul is often represented as either a clothed or a naked human body, as in the *New Minster Liber Vitae*.²¹⁰ The visualisation of the soul in bodily form strengthens the imagery of them as kinsmen, sometimes twins, each of whose experiences affects the other even when they are far apart.

In God's original creation, before the Fall, body and soul were intended as inseparable elements of a complete being. The combination forms the essence of human nature, in a bipartite state denied to animals: 'He did not give a soul to any animal or fish, but their blood is their life and as soon as they are dead they completely come to an end.'²¹¹ Death is commonly defined as the separation of the soul and body in a tradition derived from patristic writing.²¹² In *Genesis A*, God, exiling Adam, decrees that he shall suffer division of body and soul — *þe is gedal witod/ lices and sawle* (ll. 930b-931a). This understanding of death means that it can be seen as falling into the category of mutilation

rosan, 7 þonne swa forð þæt he hæfð gelic hiw golde 7 seolfre 7 swa þam deorwyrðesta[n] gymcynne 7 eorcnanstanum; 7 æt nehstan þæt he glitenað swa steorra, 7 lyht swa mone, 7 beorhtaþ swa sunna þone hio biorhtust bið scinende...' Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies* IV, ll. 153-61, p. 96.

²⁰⁹ 'Seo sawul hæfð soðlice, swa swa us secgað bec, þæs lichman gelicnysse on allum hyre limum, and heo gefret softnysse oððe sarnysse.' Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, Vol. II, XI, ll.216-219, p. 426.

²¹⁰ BL Stowe MS.944 6v-7r, illustrated in C.R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective* (Manchester 1982), pp. 104-105.

²¹¹ 'He ne sealde nanum nytene ne nanum fisce nane sawle. ac heora blod is heora lif. 7 swa hraðe swa hi beoð deade. swa beoð hi mid ealle geendode.' Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies: First Series, Primus Sermo de Initio Creaturae*, I, ll. 108-110, p. 182.. Punctuation reproduced as it is in the text.

²¹² Augustine, *City of God*, XIII, 6, p. 515.

punishment discussed above, with not merely the body being affected but the very constituent parts of human identity being amputated from each other and the human being losing its all-important integrity, the quality establishing it as unique in the living world.

Body and soul are characterised as ‘the kinsmen that previously were at one’ in *Soul and Body*,²¹³ and they remain linked even after separation: the body continues to reveal the state of the soul long after the two have gone their separate ways. Bodily preservation betokens the soul's sanctity, as evidenced by the incorruption of St Cuthbert, the miraculous *post mortem* healing of St Æthelthryth's tumour or the continuing vitality of St. Edmund's hair and nails in Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*. The soundness of Edmund's body is a sign confirming the literal nature of the bodily resurrection at the end of time, ‘that God almighty may raise man whole out of the ground again on the day of judgment’.²¹⁴ Conversely, bodily decay while still alive betokens the sickness of a soul which may have undergone the living death of sin ‘for the soul of the man who sins does not live’.²¹⁵ The absolute virtue of an Edward or, as we shall see, an Æthelwold makes the body absolutely beautiful, more beautiful dead than alive, whereas the absolute corruption of a Herod results in the body being devoured by worms even while alive. This kind of living death is referred to elsewhere by Ælfric, in his sermon *Dominica V in Quadragesima*: ‘He is dead in eternal death, he who is fore-ordained to eternal death; he lives in the body and is nevertheless truly dead.’²¹⁶

213 ‘þa sybbe þe ær samod wæron’, *Soul and Body*, l. 4, Moffat, p. 49.

214 ‘On þyssum halgan is swutel and on swilcum oþrum þæt god ælmihtig mæg þone man aræran eft on domes dæg andsundne of eorþan’. Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, p. 332.

215. ‘for ðam se ðe syngað, hys sawul ne leofað’. Pope, *Homilies of Aelfric: A Supplementary Collection.*, Vol. I, VI, ll. 139-142, p.318.

216 ‘Se bið dead in ecum deaðe. se ðe is forestiht to ðam ecum deaðe; He leofað on lichaman. And is swa ðeah soðlice dead’. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, XIII, ll. 164-6, p. 132.

All these disparate texts share an understanding of the body and soul as being intimately and reciprocally related. Often, the body is presented as the tool of the controlling soul, but it is never quite that simple; the soul itself could contain contrary impulses. Body and soul, mind and will, were engaged in a battle for supremacy and there does not seem to have been a coherent and consistent understanding of either the relative status of body and soul, or the constituent elements of the soul. There was, however, considerable contemporary interest in the nature of the soul; Godden has examined the ways in which it was conceived by Alcuin, Alfred and Ælfric.²¹⁷ He distinguishes between two traditions: a classical one and a vernacular one. The former is represented by the authors just named and inherited by them from Plato, Boethius and Augustine, which identified mind with soul. Augustinian tradition, deriving from the *De Trinitate*, held that the soul was made in God's image and endowed with the three faculties of memory, understanding and will, to allow humanity awareness of its tripartite maker.²¹⁸ In contrast to this was the English tradition, evident in vernacular poetry and metaphor. This differentiated between mind, which was often conceived of in physical terms (as with the term *hreoðer* in *Beowulf* l. 1745, discussed above), and soul.

In *Soul and Body*, the body is shown as independently powerful and wilful, able to override the protesting soul, which is seen as its helpless prisoner; the Damned Soul cries *eardode ic þe on innan, ne meahte ic of ðe cuman* (I dwelt within thee, I might not come out of thee. l. 33). Likewise, the saved soul cries *Eala, min dryhten* (alas, my lord. l. 138b) to

²¹⁷ M. R. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind' in M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (eds.), *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies presented to Peter Clemoes on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 271-298.

²¹⁸ S. McKenna (ed.), *Saint Augustine: The Trinity* (Washington D.C., 1963); B. Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography and the Art of the Monastic Revival* (Cambridge, 1990), 6; Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, 43ff.

its Body. In *Exeter Book Riddle 43*, however, the relationship of dominant and subordinate is seen in reverse, with the body the potentially treacherous servant of the soul: ...*gif se esne/ his hlaford hyreð yfle* (if the retainer serves his lord badly ll. 8b-9).²¹⁹ The same riddle refers to body and soul as brothers — *Ne wile forht wesan/ broðor oðrum* (Nor shall one brother be afraid of the other. ll. 10a-11b)— perhaps remembering the example of Cain and Abel, and suggesting the potential of a more equal partnership.

Elsewhere, the body is represented as all-powerful. In a sermon partially ascribed to Wulfstan, the soul is imagined as the body's prisoner, unable to see, through the windows of the eyes (*lichamlicum eagan*), the glories of paradise; he compares our plight to that of the child of a sinful female prisoner (*sum forworht wif don on carcern*), born and brought up in the dungeon till he is an adult, and knowing nothing else:

Although his mother tells him that she saw sun and moon, stars and streams, mountains and fields, swimming fish and flying birds and running horses, serpents and wild animals and everything that we see, I know that it will seem doubtful to him whether she is telling him the truth.²²⁰

At death, the king will *onlucan þæs carcernes duru* (unlock the prison-door); until then we must rely on faith and miracles, and someone unwilling to do so is no better than a beast, in a passage already quoted above:

Lo, what difference is there between the intelligence of a man and that of an animal, if he does not know and refuses to know anything except what he is looking at?²²¹

²¹⁹ Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. 204.

²²⁰ 'ðeah ðe his modor him secge, þæt heo gesawe sunnan and monan, steorran and streamas, muntas and feldas, fleotende fixas and fleogende fugelas and yrnende hors, wyrmas and wildeor and eal, þæt we geseoð, ic wat, þæt hine wile tweogan, hwæder heo him soð secge.' Napier, *Wulfstan*, I, 3.

²²¹ 'La, hwæt byð betweonan mannes and nytenes andgyte, gyf he nat ne witan nele, butan þæt he on starað?' Napier, *Wulfstan*, I, 4.

There are some themes which the different depictions of the soul-body relationship have in common. The body was not merely a mortal shell for the soul but potentially its greatest enemy. Created immortal and happy, soul and body together had been damaged by original sin and lost their happiness but were redeemed by the Incarnation and given a second chance. The soul was contained in the body rather than being part of the body; both were immortal, to be separated at death and reunited at the Last Judgment. The immortal soul, its gaze fixed on salvation, was imperilled by the sins of the ever-changing body, distracted by the pleasures of the transitory world it inhabited. Even a bad soul, that turned away from God, was thought superior to the body.²²²

The idea of the divided and conflicting individual, whose moral decisions are reflected in his corporeal state, is most graphically realised in the poem *Soul and Body*. The poem exists in two versions, and the differences between them are very telling, forming one of the few places where the clash between the ideal and the real becomes audible. The Vercelli Book, which also contains a homiletic address of the Soul to the Body, is one of the main homiletic compilations with a unifying theme of penitence and remorse. Bradley sums up the Vercelli homilies, saying that they ‘seem chosen to serve the chief purpose of penitential meditation upon themes familiar to A[nglo-] S[axon] spirituality — the Lord's death, one's own death, the death of this world, judgment, the punishment of worldly guilt and the joys of heaven...’²²³ Vercelli Homily IV, whose description of the appearance of the saved body was discussed above, is one of the closest Old English prose analogues,

²²² Augustine, *The Trinity*, VIII, 3, p. 250.

²²³ Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 109

though it is not directly related to the poem.²²⁴ *Soul and Body* also appears in the Exeter Book, a purely poetic compilation. The poem is preserved in both the Vercelli and the Exeter Books: it is extremely rare for an Old English poem unconnected with Bede to survive in more than one version, which suggests that it may have been a popular and highly significant text.²²⁵

The two poetic versions are similar, but not identical. Both start with a damned soul haranguing its culpable body. That verbal assault of soul on body is the entire thesis of the Exeter Book version. In the Vercelli text, this is followed by a much briefer, contrasting passage in which a saved soul describes the delights of heaven awaiting the Body when the two are eventually reunited; this is much briefer and less competent poetically and fits awkwardly next to the first part: it has been convincingly argued that it is a later addition.²²⁶ As far as the present argument is concerned, it does not matter whether the poem was composed as a whole, or whether the 'saved soul' passage represents a later writer's response to an extant text. In either case, the struggle between the desired, problem-free association of decay/sin and preservation/virtue, and the less tidy reality, is equally interesting. The passages dealing with the damned soul are all but identical in each manuscript and may be treated as one and the same poem. While the theme of the poem is common in medieval literature, no immediate source in either Latin or Old English has been identified.²²⁷ Where the theme occurs in early sources such as the work of Pseudo-Augustine²²⁸, it is as a didactic *memento mori*, which is its probable purpose here.

224 Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, IV, pp. 87-107. Moffat, *Soul and Body*, pp. 34-5.

225 Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, pp. 54-9; Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, pp. 174-78.

226 P. Orton, 'Disunity in the Vercelli Book *Soul and Body*', *Neophilologus* 63 (1979), pp. 450-60.

227 L. Dudley, 'An Early Homily on the "Body and Soul" Theme', *JEGP* 8 (1909), pp. 225-53.

228 *Sermons* 49 and 58, Migne, *PL*. XL, pp. 1332-4 and 1341-2.

Curiously, it is the more explicitly didactic Vercelli Book that contains the more ambitious and problematic text, in which the poet also raises the question of the state of the virtuous body in the grave.

In the Old English poem, the damned soul is compelled every seven days to seek out its buried Body and revile it for sins committed in life.²²⁹ The soul has been entirely at the mercy of the living Body, although the Body is no more than an *eorðfæt* (l.8a), a vessel of clay in which the Soul was forced to dwell, *flæsce befangen* (l.34a), having been sent by God's own hand from heaven (ll. 27b-28). Despite death, the two are still linked by their chains of sin. In the Exeter Book version, there is no sense that the Body, surely as much God's handiwork as the Soul, is capable of regeneration and transfiguration at the end of time; the stress on the nitty-gritty of decay seems to preclude this, even though the Soul reiterates terms of abuse such as *eorðan fulnes* (l. 18a) and *lames gelicnes* (l. 19a) which remind the reader of the creation of Man and the paradoxes of resurrection.²³⁰

The corpse is identified entirely with material pleasures — food, wine, the flesh, gold and silver — but although represented as an object it is still credited with the ability to make choices (l. 42). The anguished Soul contrasts the Body's living *fyrenlustas* (evil desires, l. 44b) and pleasure in the table (*wiste wlanc and wines sæd*, l. 39) with its own thirst for *godes lichoman, gastes drynces* (l. 41) — God's body and spiritual drink, the essential food of communion. The Body indulged itself but condemned the Soul to *heardan hungre* (l. 31).

²²⁹ R. Willard, 'The Address of the Soul to the Body' *PMLA* 50 (1935) pp. 957-83.

²³⁰ Cf passages on the Resurrection from Ælfric's homily *Dominica I Post Pascha*: 'He worhte Adam of lame. Nu ne mage we asmeagan hu he of ðam lame flæsc worhte, and blod ban and fell, fex and næglas.' Clemons, *Catholic Homilies, First Series*, XVI, ll. 118-20, p.311.

Just as sin and virtue are contrasted by reference to the right and wrong sort of food, so is decay expressed in terms of eating. This resembles the passage in *The Fortunes of Men*, discussed below, where the child fed by its parents becomes in turn food for ravens and wolves. Here, the Soul taunts, ‘Nor are you more loved as a companion by any of the living, not by mother nor father, nor any of your kin, than by the black raven’.²³¹ The Body is referred to as *wyrma gyfl* (titbit of worms, l. 22b and l. 124b), *wyrmum to wiste* (pleasure for worms, l. 25a), dismembered inch by inch and digested by armies of mould-worms, *moldwyrmas manige*, led appropriately by *Gifer* (Gluttony) with needle-sharp teeth. Punishment here takes the form of appropriate mutilation, just as it does in the law codes. Decay is not something intrinsic to the body: it is only visualised in terms of external attack, penetration and punishment.

Although *Soul and Body* is set before the Day of Judgment, both its characters are already undergoing torment. The Soul spends every seventh day reviling the Body and during the intervening week seems to be in hell — *hellegrund* (l. 104). The Body, although still on earth, experiences tortures similar to those that the damned souls of *Christ III*, also in the Exeter Book, will undergo for all eternity — *wyrma slite/ bitrum ceaflum* (ll. 1250b-1251a) — the bite of worms with sharp teeth.²³²

The Body will still have to face judgment, but the only possible fate for such a loathsome object seems to be damnation. The Soul tells the Body that it would have been better created a beast of burden, a bird or even the nastiest of the dragon family — *wyrma cynna/ þæt grimmeste* (ll. 84b-85a) — than so to have abused its opportunity for salvation.

²³¹ ‘ne eart ðu þon leofra nænigum lifigendra/ men to gemæccum ne meder ne fæder/ ne nænigum gesybban þonne se sweart hrefen.’ *Soul and Body*, ll. 53-55.

²³² Cf ‘hy wælgrimme wyrmas slitað/ and heora ban gnagað brynigum tuxlum.’ *Judgment Day II*, ll. 211-212, Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 64.

Through sin, the Body has renounced its claim on human shape itself, as much as if it had actually been transformed into an animal.

In the Vercelli version, the damned soul's address is followed by a much shorter speech by the saved soul. In this the poet is confronted by a problem. Whether or not the saved soul passage was written by the same poet, it is presented as one poem in the manuscript.²³³ Confusingly, the first part explains decay in terms of punishment but the second finds that it cannot deny that decay happens to most of us, with only the outstanding examples of some of the saints as exceptions. As a result, the same words are used as in the earlier part, but in a much more muted way and, having changed their context, they change their meaning. It is now with *lustum* (joy. ll. 131 and 134) that the soul seeks out its *lamfæt* (earth-vessel. l. 131), regretting that it cannot lead its *wine leofesta* (dearest friend. l. 135) and *dryhten* (lord. l. 138) to salvation straight away. Apologetically, it contrasts its own state, *faegere gefrætewod...arum bewunden* (fairly adorned...wrapped with mercy. ll. 135a and 136a), with the wretched condition of the body: *ah þe wyrmas gyt/ gifre gretap* (worms yet eat you. ll. 136b-137a). Nonetheless, the half-line *wyrmum to wiste* appears again in this part of the poem: the saved are 'pleasure for worms' just as much as the damned are. Nonetheless, the message brought by the saved soul is one of reassurance: the decay the body suffers is no more than the human condition, glossed over; the worms only *gretap* it, in contrast to the previous battalions who *reafiað, drincað, totyhð, þurhsmyhð* and *þurhiteð* the damned body. Glory awaits it.

The fact that decay happens to the good while sin cannot be relied on to manifest itself physiologically adds to the sensation of unease and mistrust that characterises these

²³³ Although the loss of at least one folio means that we do not have the end of the address of the saved Soul, the missing section is unlikely to have consisted of more than a few lines. Krapp, *The Vercelli Book*, p. xxxix.

accounts of body and soul. One can never be sure of one's spiritual health; the only certain thing is that there is always scope for more compunction and penitence, in order to *synrust þwean* (*Christ III*, 1320a), anoint the canker of sin.

iv. The Importance of Dying

Having first surveyed a range of texts in which death was treated from a global and impersonal perspective, then examined narratives which considered generic bodies and souls, we now move on to the question of how individuals can learn to conduct their lives in an awareness of death. While death is random and unpredictable, one can regain control by moderating one's life in anticipation of death. Although the genre of the *Ars moriendi* had not yet arisen, anyone wishing to learn the 'art of good dying' would have found these exemplary texts very useful.²³⁴ This section first examines the concept of dying as a separate category, both in contemporary understanding and in Anglo-Saxon medical texts, before going on to look at particular examples from hagiography, homilies, poetry and the *Regularis Concordia*.

On first approach, life and death seem in opposition to each other; on closer examination this polarity breaks down in two different ways. First, a still-living individual can be perceived as 'dying' to society in various ways, through outlawry or exile, isolation in an institution or through being in a persistent vegetative state, while conversely a dead

²³⁴ Nigel Llewellyn associates the rise of the genre of books on dying well with Protestant attempts to 'balance the traumatic effects of the loss of Purgatory' following the Reformation: N. Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual c.1500-c.1800*, (London, 1991), pp. 29ff. But there was an extensive literature of the *ars moriendi* type from at least the end of the fifteenth century, and Clare Gittings argues on the basis of wills that there was already a greater focus on conducting the moment of death before the Reformation: C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England*, (London, 1984), pp.22ff.

body can exhibit, or be believed to exhibit, some very lively characteristics. In the previous section on the body, we have seen how permeable the membrane between life and death, body and soul, this world and the next, can be. Behaviour appropriate to one state, therefore, can manifest itself in the other. Second, there is an important intermediate form of existence, that of dying. While dying may involve some aspects of living and some of being dead, it can also be perceived as a wholly other condition, often a peculiarly privileged one.

The conceptual tools of liminality and the rite of passage, with its stages of separation, transition and reincorporation, were outlined in the previous chapter and need not be recapitulated in detail here.²³⁵ The following discussion explores a group of Anglo-Saxon texts that examine the transitional stage of dying and the related rituals in order to demonstrate their awareness of the importance of this liminal state.

Dying is not a simple concept. Before looking in more detail at the early medieval experience of dying, I want to consider a contemporary discussion of the subject in order to demonstrate how far from clear-cut the subject is. In a recent attempt to summarise modern medical thinking about dying, and to analyse how death occurs in individual organisms (rather than at cell level), Cotton defines dying as ‘a condition incompatible with the continuation of life’, therefore either not the same as life, or a very particular kind of life. He then goes on to qualify this by adding that ‘not all death is preceded by dying and not all dying is inevitably followed [immediately] by death’.²³⁶ ‘Dying’ in his particular definition, therefore, is not something that everyone experiences, nor is it easily measured or understood. Appositely enough, given the case of St Edmund of East Anglia which will

²³⁵ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*.

²³⁶ D. Cotton, ‘Death: the individual’ in *Progress in Pathology: Volume One* 1995, pp. 1-11, 1.

be discussed shortly, Cotton's paradoxical example of someone who seems dead, but is in fact dying, is someone who has just been decapitated: this seems at first ridiculous, but in fact the heart is still beating, there is recordable brain activity and the body's cells could still potentially be cultured, which means that the body still meets most of the medical criteria for being alive. Thus it is clear that complex cultural responses to dying are grounded in equally complex biological behaviour. Dying is not an event but a process and (*pace* the claims of detective fiction) there is no such as thing as 'the time of death', only the period of death.²³⁷

This physiological activity needs to be put in the context of an early medieval culture ^{which} ~~who~~ believed that body and soul were intimately connected in life and in death, and that the dead body would be reanimated at the Last Judgment. In a tradition going back to the patristic writings of Tertullian, Jerome and Augustine, the resurrected body was conceived as solidly physical and recognisable as the individual it had been on earth.²³⁸ The living body on earth, the dead body in earth and the resurrection body on Judgment Day formed a continuum. Disease, death and decay were imbued with moral interpretations and both the living and the dead body were believed to demonstrate the state of the soul. The soul's death might even occur while the individual is still alive, a common theme, here expounded in Vercelli Homily IX:

There are three deaths taught in books: that is the first death here in the world when a man is overcome with many sins; then there is the second death when soul and body separate; then the third death is ~~the one~~ that the souls must dwell in hell.²³⁹

²³⁷ Cotton, 'Death: the individual', p. 7.

²³⁸ Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, p. 9, n.14.

²³⁹ 'þonne syndon ðry deaðas liornode on bocum: þæt is þonne se æresta deað her on worulde þæt se man mid manegum synnum oferhealden bið; þonne is se æftera deap þære sawle gescead 7 lichoman; þonne is se þrida deað þæt þa sawla sculon eardigan on helle.' Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, IX, ll. 32-35, p. 162.

This subject will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, in which imaginative identification with the dead body will be explored; here it suffices to point out that, to the Vercelli homilist, spiritual death can precede, coincide with, and come after biological death, and that it is perceived both as an event and as a process. In this reading, there is no such thing as a permanently deceased and abandoned body, only a body in stasis, awaiting the end of time; the grave becomes an analogue to, or even an extension of, the death-bed. At this period there was no consistent understanding of what happened to either the body or the soul between death and judgment: the concept of Purgatory was not to be codified until the late twelfth century.²⁴⁰ Poetic and homiletic texts suggest that the buried body was often seen as in some way still sentient, enclosed in the grave as if imprisoned. As will become clear in the next chapter, an exploration of the late Anglo-Saxon death-bed is thus a productive means of understanding the archaeology of their mortuary behaviour.

While on the subject of the medical understanding of dying, it is worth asking whether there is any evidence that dying is considered as a separate state of existence in the Anglo-Saxon medical texts, the *Leechbooks* and *Lacnunga* in the vernacular, and various associated Latin works. It turns out that the subjects of dying and death are rarely discussed in medical contexts, but that the few references made to these topics are very interesting.

There were, broadly speaking, three different kinds of medical practice in Anglo-Saxon England: the classical, deriving from Hippocratic and Galenic theories such as the four humours; the folk, which was magical as much as medical; and the ecclesiastical, which tended to interpret disease as God's will and the doctor's role as one of care rather than cure, seeking remedy in penance and prayer. There are almost no references to death

²⁴⁰ Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, p. 5.

in these works, which is in itself interesting, suggesting that death was not primarily understood as a medical event. However, there are three very different passages which suggest that dying was indeed perceived as a separate state from either living or death.

The first of these passages is from *Leechbook III*, part of one of the major Anglo-Saxon medical compilations which also contains Bald's *Leechbook*. The remedies conventionally end with a variation on the formula *he bið sona hal* (he will soon be well);²⁴¹ only very occasionally is an alternative suggested, as in this cure for dysentery:

If the gruel and the drink remain inside, then you may cure the man, if they flow out, it is better for you that you do not deal with him; his fatal illness is upon him.²⁴²

Here dying is understood as a biological inevitability, resulting inexorably from a particular phase of a disease. All the doctor can do is stand and let nature take its course. There is no indication in this text that the patient's disease or death are the merited result of sinful actions. This stress on the physiological indications of dying is paralleled in the next passage, which occurs in the eleventh-century *Canterbury Classbook*, a compilation deriving ultimately from a Mediterranean source:

Galen says: what signs of death appear in the human body? The brow becomes red, the eyebrows slacken, the left eye becomes smaller, the tip of the nose becomes white, the chin falls, the pulse runs ahead, the feet grow cold, the belly shrinks, a young person is wakeful, an old person is sleepy.²⁴³

²⁴¹ M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 40.

²⁴² 'Gif se briw 7 se drinc inne gewuniað þu meht þone man gelacnian, gif him offleogeð him bið selre þæt þu hine na ne grette; him biþ his feorhadl getenge.' T. O. Cockayne (ed.), *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, 3 vols., Rolls Ser. (London, 1864-6), p. 320.

²⁴³ 'Dicit Galienus: In humano corpore que signa mortifera apparent? Frons rubet, supercilia declinantur, oculus sinister minuitur, nasi summitas albicat, mentum cadit, pulsus ante currit, pedes frigescunt, uenter defluit, iuuenis uigilans, senex dormiens.' *Canterbury Classbook* 426r, quoted in Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 51; A. G. Rigg and G. R. Wieland, 'A Canterbury Classbook of the Mid-Eleventh Century (the "Cambridge Songs" Manuscript), *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975), pp. 113-30.

Both this passage and the preceding one rely on traditions of understanding the human organism which do not presuppose a moral cause for disease. Although medicine and theology remained closely connected throughout the Middle Ages, there was a medical awareness of the ‘mechanistic physics’ of the body which did not rely on, and often clashed with, a religious interpretation.²⁴⁴ In neither of these passages is there any suggestion that the dying process might be a special kind of spiritual experience, in distinct contrast, as we shall see, to other kinds of texts. Furthermore, the users of these books might well have imported their own spiritual significance to the illnesses they witnessed.

The third passage, a very different one, deals with troublesome pregnancies. It appears in *Lacnunga*, a commonplace book which mixes medical remedies derived from classical sources with Irish and Germanic secular and Christian charms. It is particularly interesting in the context of this discussion because of the way that the growing life of pregnancy is both associated with and contrasted with dying:

The woman who cannot give birth to her child. Go to the grave of a dead person and then step three times over the grave and then say these words three times: ‘This be a remedy for me for the loathsome late [slow] birth; this be a remedy for me for the grievous dismal birth; this be a remedy for me for the loathsome imperfect birth.’ And when the woman is with child and she goes to her husband in bed, then let her say: ‘Up I go, step over you; with a living child, not with a dying one; with a full-term one, not a doomed one.’²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ D. Jacquart and C. Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, (Princeton NJ, 1988), pp. 194-97.

²⁴⁵ ‘Se wifman se hire cild afedan ne mæg. Gange to gewitenes mannes birgenne 7 stæpe þonne þriwa ofer þa byrgenne 7 cweðe þonne þriwa þas word: “Þis me to bote þære laþan lætbyrde; þis me to bote þære swæran swærtbyrde; þis me to bote þære laðan lambyrde”; 7 þonne þæt se wif seo mid bearne 7 heo to hyre hlaforde on reste ga, þonne cwepe heo: “Up ic gonge, ofer þa stæppe; mid cwican cilde; nallæs mid cwellendum; mid fulborenum, nalæs mid fægan.”’ J. Grattan and C. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text “Lacnunga”* (Oxford, 1952), p. 188.

This charm demonstrates the common magical assumption of the efficacy of analogy, the principle that there is a meaningful connexion between two things that are similar in some way.²⁴⁶ In this case, the first part of the charm draws an inverted parallel between the pregnant woman containing the foetus and the grave containing the corpse. In the second part the marriage bed is associated with life, in implicit contrast to both the *mannes birgen* which she has just visited and the death-bed against which the charm is a prophylactic. In addition, the second part opposes living and dying children, the *cwican* and *fulborenum cild* with the *cwellendum* and *fægan* one. Both *cwellendum* and *fægan* explicitly refer to dying rather than death, but dying is not perceived as inexorably leading to death. The *fæg* child can be turned around and set back on the path to life again.

Although there is very little evidence from the Old English medical texts, what there is suggests that, both in the classically-derived tradition and in the popular imagination, dying was marked out as a particular state, contrasted to and distinct from either living or being dead. The binary opposition of life and death is mediated, therefore, by the intervening condition of dying. This was not something experienced by everyone, nor did it always mean the same thing. In the medical discourse inherited from the classical world, it might simply indicate that death is approaching. In the magical/medical world of the charms, however, it is closer to suspended animation with either life or death as the potential outcome. The discussion now turns to descriptions of dying with a more overtly Christian and didactic purpose, in order to establish a third way in which dying could be understood.

The first part of this chapter concentrated on texts in which life and death are perceived as mutually hostile, but an examination of the Anglo-Saxon medical texts

²⁴⁶ W. Nöth, 'Semiotics of the Old English Charm', *Semiotica* 19 (1977), pp. 59-83, 66.

suggests that this is not the only possible interpretation. An examination of the accounts of the death beds of two important figures, Æthelwold of Winchester and (for the second time) Edward the Confessor, demonstrates that the experience of dying could be perceived as a very extraordinary time, during which the normal rules of Creation were bent if not broken. The following section analyses two passages of Latin prose, one from the *Vita Æthelwoldi* by Wulfstan Cantor, written after 996, and the other from the *Vita Eadwardi Regis*, written by an anonymous author in the mid-eleventh century. Other than the Bible, they are the first passages in Latin to be considered in this discussion. They are quite different in style from the Old English texts, employing images and turns of phrase belonging to the patristic and classical traditions. Most notably, they share a highly sensuous attitude towards the beauty of the body of the dying man. Peter Brown discusses this *topos* in the works of Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus in terms of what he describes as a Virgilian aesthetic and quotes Gregory's description of the corpse of Gregory of Langres: 'His blessed face was so filled with glory that it looked like a rose. It was deep rose red, and the rest of his body was glowing white like a lily.'²⁴⁷ Like Gregory of Tours, the authors under discussion here use vivid images to describe moribund corpses in order to challenge the idea that life and death are opposites. Æthelwold and Edward become exaggeratedly alive in the moment of their deaths.

In both of the following passages, the moment of linear historical time when dying occurs resembles a prism through which the light of eternity is refracted. They are not unique in this. As we have seen, Ælfric notes that the incorruption of St Edmund's body is

²⁴⁷ P. Brown, 'Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours', in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), pp. 222-250, 226-7

a miracle confirming the literal nature of the bodily resurrection at the end of time,²⁴⁸ while his account of Herod's dying (discussed below) confirms the truth of the pains of eternal damnation. In the following description of Bishop Æthelwold's body at the instant of his death, Wulfstan Cantor writes:

Those who were present have witnessed to us that the holy man's corpse was suddenly changed and renewed; it was suffused with a whiteness as of milk, and became lovely with a rosy redness, so that his face in a way looked like that of a seven year old boy; in this observed change of the flesh there appeared even on earth some hint of the glory of the resurrection.²⁴⁹

Wulfstan here relies on the antique descriptive tradition already mentioned,²⁵⁰ using it to create a series of paradoxes. He associates the corpse of the elderly bishop with milk and its connotations of nourishment and purity, as well as with roses and the freshness of youth. Wulfstan also uses the beauty of Æthelwold's corpse as a means of bringing together different periods of historical time, connecting the present to the bishop's long-distant boyhood. In addition, he ties his theme of bodily perfection to the chronology of salvation, anticipating the eternal body of the resurrection.

The motif of the transfiguration of the holy body in dying returns in one of Anglo-Saxon England's best-recorded death-beds, that of Edward the Confessor. The subject of Edward's dying will be touched on only briefly here, as he is dealt with exhaustively in chapter four. Edward's dying forms the centre-piece of Book II of the *Vita Eadwardi*,

²⁴⁸ 'þæt God ælmihtig mæg þone man aræran eft on domes dæg andsundne of eorþan.' Ælfric, *Lives of Three English Saints*, ed. G. I. Needham, (London, 1966), pp. 43-59, 57.

²⁴⁹ 'Testati uero nobis sunt qui ibi praesentes aderant exanime corpus sancti uiri subita inmutatione fuisse renouatum, lacteo candore perfusum roseoque rubore uenustum, ita ut quodam modo septennis pueri uultum praetendere uideretur, in quo iam quaedam resurrectionis gloria per ostensionem mutatae carnis apparuit.' *Wulfstan of Winchester: The Life of St Æthelwold*, M. Lapidge, and M. Winterbottom (eds.), (Oxford, 1991), pp. 62-3.

²⁵⁰ Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', pp. 226-27.

written from 1065-1067 by an anonymous writer in the circle of Edith, Edward's Queen. Among other aims, it attempts to establish Edward as both an excellent king and a saintly exemplar of chastity.²⁵¹

In the *Vita*, Edward's death comes after a long illness in which he has been inert and speechless. All this changes as his period of dying begins, and this is explicitly ascribed to miraculous intervention: Edward's dying provides him with a privileged platform from which he can both experience visions and recount them. Time is broken up and rearranged as past, present and future become conflated in this visionary context; Edward is visited by two long-dead monks whom he knew in his youth, who instruct him about the future of England after Edward's own death. Edward is simultaneously in the past with his friends, the dead monks, in the present as he lies dying, and in the future as he sees the coming disasters. The monks' language seems almost to break under the strain of conveying this sense of conflated time, using a past tense to describe the future when the dying Edward reports them as having said that a year and a half after his own death God gave England into enemy hands:

...within a year and a day after the day of your death God *delivered* [italics mine] all this kingdom, cursed by him, into the hands of the enemy, and devils shall come all through all this land with fire and sword and the havoc of war.²⁵²

Like Æthelwold's body, Edward's becomes more beautiful as he dies. We are told that his flesh blushed, his beard shone, his hands grew white and that he seemed asleep rather than dead. The anonymous author is at pains to convey the idea that what seems like

²⁵¹ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. 256 and Appendix 1.

²⁵² '...tradidit deus post obitus tui diem anno uno et die una omne hoc regnum a se maledictum in manu inimici, peruagabunturque diaboli totam hanc terram igne, ferro, et depredatione hostili.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 116.

death is not a termination of any kind. He reports Edward's last words as intended to comfort the Queen: 'Fear not. I shall not die now, but by God's mercy regain my strength.'²⁵³ On the surface, this might sound as if Edward is unaware that he is dying, but the author takes care that his audience should interpret the king's meaning correctly, and adds, 'Nor did he mislead the attentive, least of all himself, by these words, for he has not died, but has passed from death to life, to live with Christ.'²⁵⁴ The *Vita Eadwardi* was intended to be a topical and influential document, bolstering the status of Edward's widow. By using the death-bed, with all its special connotations, as the context for the king's vision, the anonymous author both reinforces Edward's reputation for virtue and absolves him of responsibility for the catastrophes that happened to England in 1066. The king is dying, therefore he is on a higher platform, able by God's grace to see beyond the trammels of earthly time and space.

Æthelwold, whose death-bed in 971 was examined above, was the Bishop of Winchester and one of the great architects of the Benedictine Reform movement of the middle of the tenth century. The central document of that movement is the *Regularis Concordia*, drawn up to ensure the conformity of England's monasteries to one agreed rule.²⁵⁵ Although its ultimate model, the *Rule of St Benedict*, had ignored the subject of what to do with dying and dead brethren,²⁵⁶ the original *Rule* had been revised and expanded as part of the Continental reform.²⁵⁷ By the mid-tenth century there was a

253 'Ne timeas, non moriar modo, sed bene conualescam propitiante deo.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 124.

254 'Nec in hoc dicto diligentem, utique se, fefellit; non enim mortuus est, sed cum Christo uicturus de morte ad uitam migravit.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 124.

255 T. Symons, 'Regularis Concordia: History and Derivation' in *Tenth Century Studies*, pp. 37-59, 39.

256 *The Rule of St Benedict*, ed. J. McCann (London, 1976).

257 G. Brown, 'The Carolingian Renaissance' in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1-51, 25.

complex set of rituals concerning dying, death and burial available for both religious and laity.²⁵⁸

In the ideal world of the *Regularis Concordia*, the ailing monk is to announce his illness to his community and enter the liminal region of the sick-house, the *domum infirmorum*.²⁵⁹ While his illness endures, he has no more direct contact with the brethren: news of his condition is to be carried to the community by a designated brother. Should his condition seriously worsen, he is to be visited by the whole community (*cum omne congregatione*) singing the Penitential Psalms, anointed and given the Eucharist. Should the brother fail to improve, this ceremony is to be performed every day, except for the anointing, until his death. As death draws near ‘all shall assemble to assist his passing’ (*convenientque omnes ad tuendum exitum eius*). Dying thus becomes a performance, a community activity, with an involved audience participating in the salvation of the dying soul.

There is a little evidence that any kind of communal activity other than liturgical took place around the death bed. Ælfric, in his Pastoral Letter for Wulfsige III, warns priests against joining in ‘heathen songs’, ‘loud laughter’ and eating and drinking in the presence of the corpse, all of which he terms *hæðenscype* and perceives as spiritually dangerous.²⁶⁰ These injunctions have antecedents in Continental law-codes, but Ælfric returns to the subject in his *Life of St Swithin*, drawing a similar picture:

²⁵⁸Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, p. 200.

²⁵⁹ *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement*, ed. T. Symons (London, 1953), Chapter XII, pp. 64-68.

²⁶⁰ ‘Ge ne scylan fægnian forðfarenra manna, ne þæt lic gesecan buton eow mann laðige þærto. Þænne ge þærto gelaðode syn, þonne forbeode ge þa hæðenan sangas þæra læwedra manna 7 heora hludan cheahchetunga. Ne ge sylfe ne eton ne ne drincon, þær þæt lic inne lið, þe læs þe ge syndon efenlæce þæs hæðenscypes þe hy þær begað’. Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, *Councils and Synods*, p. 218 and n. 2, citing Leo IV, *Homiliae* (Migne, *PL CXV*, p. 681): ‘Carmina diabolica, quae nocturnis horis super mortuos vulgus facere solet, et cachinnos quos exercet, sub contestatione Dei omnipotentis virtute’.

At one time men were watching a dead body, as is customary, and there was a certain foolish man, making fun in an inappropriate way, and he said to the men, as if in play, that he was Swithin....²⁶¹

The wake is only the context here for providing incidental detail for the miracle story in which Swithin punishes his impersonator by felling him with a stroke, from which the blasphemer only revives fully after confessing and begging pardon at Swithin's tomb.

Ælfric could have left the story there, but instead he chooses to expand its moral:

It is also to be known that those men behave unwisely who play in stupid ways by the bodies of dead men, and bring in foul behaviour with their play, when they must rather mourn the dead and dread for themselves the coming of death, and pray for his soul without any foolishness. Certain men also drink by the bodies of dead men throughout the night, most inappropriately, and blaspheme against God with their idle speech. Beer-drinking is not fitting around the corpse, but instead holy prayers are appropriate there.²⁶²

One should not only refrain from impersonating the saints, but should also behave with decency around the bodies of the dead, praying for the soul of the departed and deriving valuable lessons therefrom regarding one's own mortality. Ælfric's interest in the topic suggests that there is a whole area of secular activity around the corpse which has been rendered almost entirely invisible to our eyes, at least as far as documentary evidence is

²⁶¹ 'Hwilon wacodon menn swa swa hit gewunelic is ofer an dead lic, and ðær wæs sum dysig mann plegol ungemetlice, and to þam mannum cwæð swylce for plegan, þæt he swyðun wære....' *Ælfric's Lives of Saints Volume I*, ed. W. Skeat, EETS OS 76 & 82 (reprinted as one volume, Oxford, 1966); XXI, ll. 290-293, p. 459.

²⁶² 'Is eac to witenne þæt menn unwislice doð þa ðe dwollice plegað æt deadra manna lice and ælce fulnysse þær forð-teoð mid plegan, þonne hi sceoldon swyðor be-sargian þone deadan and ondrædan him sylfum þæs deaðes toyme, and biddan for his sawle butan gewede georne. Sume menn eac drincað æt deadra manna lice ofer eallē þa niht swiðe unrihtlice and gremiað god mid heora gegaf-spræce, þonne nan gebeorscype ne gebyrað æt lice ac halige gebedu þær gebyriað swiþor.' Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints*, Vol I, XXI, ll. 307-317, p.460.

concerned. It is possible, however, that a reconsideration of archaeological evidence might provide a broader context for understanding the late Anglo-Saxon death bed..

The first distinctive feature of dying in these accounts is the way that, while it is going on, the experience of time becomes confused. The second is the associated transfiguration of the body as the soul leaves it. Thirdly, there is the death-bed as a rostrum from which the words of the dying person have peculiar weight. Finally, particularly visible in a monastic context, there is the involvement of the community in creating a space in which to die. It might be argued that none of these rituals or beliefs is likely to leave any trace in the archaeological record, and this may be literally true. Nonetheless, there is enough evidence to float the hypothesis that one way of understanding late Anglo-Saxon burial practices is to read them as analogues or even as extensions of the death bed.

Bed-burials of people who may well have been Christian have occasionally been found in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries of the conversion period,²⁶³ two to three centuries before the writing of the texts under discussion here. More relevantly, from the ninth century onwards Anglo-Saxon cemeteries show an increase in the complexity and variety of grave structures and a greater concern for preservation,²⁶⁴ suggesting that the people burying the body were extending their care into the mysterious world of the corpse's *post mortem* existence. The dead body was perceived as still liminal, still changing, still dying: *non enim moriar*, the dying Edward is quoted as saying. In the *Regularis Concordia*, the ritual for the dying, held at the bed-side, progresses seamlessly into the ritual for the burial, held around the grave. To go to the other spiritual extreme, some late Saxon criminals seem to have been executed in their graves, an example of the literal conflation of death-bed and

²⁶³ G. Speake, *A Saxon Bed Burial on Swallowcliffe Down* (London, 1989), p. 124.

²⁶⁴ Carver, *Underneath English Towns*. p. 95.

grave.²⁶⁵ In the Christian universe, both are merely stations on the body's journey towards the terminus of the Last Judgment and God's ultimate verdict. These are ideas about burial practice which were to become common currency in later centuries, but which were taking concrete and expressive form in England for the first time in the centuries under consideration here. They will be explored more fully in the following chapter.

v. Learning How to Die: *The Fortunes of Men* and *The Fates of the Apostles*

The texts considered in the previous section concentrate on the immediate approach of death: dying in its narrowest and most obvious sense. Elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon literature there is a sense that the definition of the period of dying can be extended to cover the whole of human experience. The following section looks at two poems which see life as a preparation for death, albeit in very different ways. While one text warns against death as a random disaster, the other exhorts its readers to embrace death as a welcomed challenge.

The poems *The Fortunes of Men* and *The Fates of the Apostles* are found in the Exeter and Vercelli Books respectively and are thus preserved in approximately contemporary late tenth century contexts. Both poems consist in part of lists of various ways of dying: *The Fates of the Apostles* describes in turn the deaths of each of the twelve companions of Christ, while *The Fortunes of Men* catalogues various untimely deaths as part of a series of events that might occur throughout life. Both poems end with a religious petition: *The Fates of the Apostles* ends, as it began, on a highly personal note, with the

²⁶⁵ Eg Skeleton 65 from the execution cemetery at South Acre, Norfolk. J. Wymer, '1996 Barrow Excavations in Norfolk, 1984-88' in *East Anglian Archaeology* 77, pp. 58-89 and p. 73, Plate XIX.

poet, Cynewulf, incorporating his runic signature into his prayer and asking for a specific response from the reader; *The Fortunes of Men*, on the other hand, concludes with a general exhortation to gratitude for God's gifts to mankind, a somewhat challenging injunction after the list of dreadful fates you might encounter, which are cited in the poem.

These two poems demonstrate two different ways of reacting to death, one active and the other passive. *The Fortunes of Men* emphasizes that no one knows how he will die: one can only resign oneself to the continuous possibility of a potentially abrupt and violent termination. In contrast, *The Fates of the Apostles* seeks to transcend even the most painful of deaths and to take control back into the hands of the dying person by representing death as only a hurdle on the track to heaven. In keeping with this distinction, the poems also differ in that *The Fortunes of Men* sees death as the end whereas *The Fates of the Apostles* offers it as a beginning. In *The Fates of the Apostles*, we come to a text in which the manner of one's living and the manner of one's dying are intimately linked.

The Fortunes of Men is part of the extensive genre of Old English wisdom poetry; passages from *The Fortunes of Men* are closely paralleled elsewhere in Old English poetry and indeed in the same codex. As we have seen, similar litanies can be found in *The Gifts of Men*, *Beowulf*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, *Christ II*, Ælfric's homilies and the Exeter Book and Cotton *Maxims*. The subject of the poem is the different kinds of lives that men may lead, the talents they may display and the deaths they may encounter. Barbara Raw, in her analysis of the poem, suggests that '[t]he main theme of *The fortunes of men* is man's helplessness',²⁶⁶ but, as will be argued here, that is only part of the poet's intent.

The poem's structure highlights the poet's interest in death. It begins with a description of a couple giving birth to a child and bringing him up lovingly, unaware of the

²⁶⁶ B. Raw, *The Art and Background of Old English Poetry* (London, 1978), p.73.

potential disasters in store (1-9). It then moves on to its list of death and disaster (10-57), before continuing by describing a range of the skills and pleasures available to human beings (58-92) and closing with praise of God's artistry and an invitation to give Him thanks (93-98). The theme of death is thus emphasized in two ways, firstly in that it takes up nearly half the poem (forty-seven lines out of ninety-eight) and secondly in that it is in an unexpected place, confounding the usual order of birth, life, and death. This ingenious playing with expectation means that the poet's main theme, that death can happen at any time, is built into the structure of the whole poem as well as being visible on the small scale in his anecdotes of the different forms that death may take.

There are nine different deaths listed in *The Fortunes of Men*: being eaten by a wolf; killed by famine, or by bad weather, or by a spear; dying in battle; falling from a tree, being burned and being hanged; and provoking a fatal quarrel in the mead hall. Interpretations of these vary: Neil Isaacs uses comparative anthropological material to connect them with rites of passage and initiation, suggesting that '[e]very item of the catalogue ... can be related somehow to the narrative accounts of the trials, tests, ordeals, or other special activities of men of knowledge and power...'.²⁶⁷ K. Swenson sees the fates of falling, hanging and burning and exile (one of the forms of living death which finds its way onto the list)²⁶⁸ as indicative of a liminal condition, arguing that

[these are the] possible fates of an individual excluded from society, an outcast deemed a criminal, a sacrifice or a scapegoat. Whether outlawed or simply killed, the person becomes isolated, a creature society uses to help define its borders.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Isaacs, 'Up a Tree', p.366.

²⁶⁸ *Wræc* (exile) appears as the first in a list of ways in which the pains of Hell can be experienced on earth in Vercelli homily IX. Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, ll. 85ff, p.166.

²⁶⁹ Swenson, 'Death Appropriated', p. 127.

These interpretations raise some interesting issues but go too far in their desire to see this poem's catalogue of death as marking out a group that were special and distinct from the rest of Anglo-Saxon society. Certainly, the poet suggests that the deaths he lists are separate from normal life, but only in the sense that our individual fates are unknowable and that therefore we need to be wary. The poet uses violent and abrupt ways of dying as a synecdoche to dramatise his sense that violence and abruptness is the real nature of all forms of death. Swenson is right in drawing attention to the stress on liminal states, but fails to see that all the dead, not merely some of them, have become the inhabitants of a marginal zone.

The poet goes on to describe talents given by God, morally neutral activities such as skill at games, gold-smithing and falconry, none of which precludes any of the fates mentioned earlier. Although the poet does describe a man who overcomes misfortunes in youth *mid godes meahum* to live a long and prosperous life surrounded by his family, there is no mention of his death, and we are not encouraged to make any connexion between a virtuous or sinful life, and a good or bad form of death.

The poem starts in neutral mode with birth, not death, ascribing the arrival of a child to God's intervention: 'Very often it happens, through God's might, that a man and woman in this world produce a child through birth....'²⁷⁰ This archetypal scene resonates with echoes of the post-lapsarian Adam and Eve from *Genesis*, bringing up the first murderer and his victim *in woruld*. The parents are anxious for the child's well-being, they tend and teach him — *tennaþ and tætaþ* — but the focus is on the child's bodily rather than its spiritual life, on the physicality and energy of *geongan leomu* and *liffæstan leoþu* (young

²⁷⁰ 'Ful oft þæt gegongeð, mid godes meahum,/ þætte wer ond wif in woruld cennað/ bearn mid gebyrdum...'. *Fortunes of Men*, ll. 1-3a, Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, 154-6.

limbs and lively joints). Having produced a child, the parents seem like little gods in charge of their creation: ‘So they ferry him and feed him, father and mother. guide him and garb him...’,²⁷¹ until this illusion of parental omnipotence is demolished: ‘God alone knows what the winters will bring him as he grows up!’²⁷² *God ana wat* perhaps, but the poet is prepared to hazard a few guesses. The next section of the poem moves immediately to the fates in store for some of these cherished children, with equal stress on their physicality rather than their spirituality. The first death is being devoured by a wolf: instead of being fed by its parents, the child has now itself become food. The second cause of death is *hungor*, again a poignant contrast to the care given by the parents. Later on, the hanged man also becomes food for the black raven, who *nimeþ heafodsyne*, steals his eyes. Dead bodies are broken down in the food chain as quickly as possible.

Apart from starvation, all the deaths listed are brutal and sudden; the poet has no interest in the slow processes of disease, in death in or after childbirth, or in death in old age. Even death from starvation is depicted as a rapid thief: *Sumne sceal hungor ahiþan* (hunger shall steal one, 15a). Nor are his corpses shown in prolonged decay. Instead, they fall apart or are dissected in dramatic ways, raising terrifying images for an audience who, as will be argued in chapter three, had a great emotional investment in the idea of the intact corpse as a promise of salvation. As a result of this hectic pace, the dying bodies in *The Fortunes of Men* have no opportunity to learn from their experience of dying.

The moment of division between life and death, when soul and body part company, is mentioned three times: ‘...bereaved of soul, he falls to the earth, his spirit is on the

271 ‘Fergaþ swa ond feþað/ fæder ond modor,/ giefað and gierwaþ.’ *Fortunes of Men*, ll. 11-12a.

272 ‘...God ana wat/ hwæt him weaxendum winter bringað!’ *Fortunes of Men*, ll. 12b-13.

journey';²⁷³ '...his life has fled away';²⁷⁴ '...life-separation comes quickly to him'.²⁷⁵ However, the destination of these souls is unknown, the nature of their *sib* never identified, their deaths never placed in a context of heavenly judgment. Only two of the poet's dead men are judged in any way, the hanged man and the man who provokes another to kill him, and they will leave a bad reputation behind them on earth rather than journey to heavenly condemnation. *Bið him werig noma* (his name shall be cursed), the poet says of the first. The word *werig* derives from *wirgan*, to curse, to do evil.²⁷⁶ This word does not appear to be used in reference to damned souls but rather to have associations with curses and blasphemy uttered by living men, and with judicial punishment, often being used to translate *maledicere* and *blasphemare*. It therefore seems likely that the poet is telling us his hanged man is condemned by his fellows, rather than damned by God. The poet then comments of the second, killed in a meadhall brawl, that men will tell tales of his drunkenness and refers to him as a *sylfcwale* (suicide). The question of the kind of memory you leave behind is clearly of considerable importance to the poet of *The Fortunes of Men*, and will be considered in connexion with forms of commemoration in greater detail in the following chapter.

Living and dying in this poem are not part of the same plot: they are linked by 'and' rather than 'because'. God plays the role of a Boethian Providence rather than a personal Lord who has entered historical time: 'So with art the Saviour of the hosts throughout the world shaped the skills of men, and appointed and guided the fate of every member of

²⁷³ '...sawle bireafod,/ fealleþ on foldan, feorð biþ on siþe.' *Fortunes of Men*, ll. 25b-26.

²⁷⁴ 'biþ his life scæcen.' *Fortunes of Men*, l. 39b.

²⁷⁵ 'þær him lifgedal lungre weorðeð' *Fortunes of Men*, l. 45.

²⁷⁶ J. Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v. *wirgan*, p. 1237.

mankind on earth.’²⁷⁷ The concluding exhortation mentions neither heaven nor hell, nor are these ultimate fates referred to anywhere else in the poem. Nonetheless, this work was produced in a Christian context even if Christ is nowhere mentioned. So, what understanding of human experience was the poet trying to communicate? What lessons should we take away from the poem?

The poem’s ostensible subject is life and death, only by inference is it about life and dying. The poet is concerned to demonstrate that, no matter how successful you may be in life, at the glamorous skills of goldsmithing, board-gaming or book-learning, appalling fates lurk round every corner. His poem is a sustained plea against complacency, reminding the reader to be aware of the raven, the noose and the breaking branch. If one is alive to unlooked-for danger and is always ready to depart, one’s after-life will be very different from that of the man who has not so prepared himself. One should always be aware of and grateful for God’s gift of life (ll. 93ff). The underlying message is close to that of Bede’s

Death Song:

Before the necessary journey, none becomes so wise that he need not think out, before his going hence, what of evil or of good will be judged to his soul, after the death-day.²⁷⁸

Thus Barbara Raw’s understanding of the poem as being about powerlessness is true in only the most limited of senses.²⁷⁹ Although death may be a random disaster striking from

²⁷⁷ ‘Swa wrætlice weoroda nergend/ geond middangeard monna cræftas/ sceop and scyrede and gesceapo ferede/ æghwylcum on eorþan eormencynnes’. *Fortunes of Men*, ll. 93-98. Cf. e.g. *Consolatio Philosophiae*. Book IV, Metre VI and also *Maxims II*, ll. 50-55, Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 57.

²⁷⁸ ‘Fore them neidfæræ nænig uuiurthit/ thoncsnottura than him tharf sie/ to ymbhycggannæ, ær his hiniongæ,/ huæt his gastæ godes æththa yflæs/ æfter deothdæge doemid uueorthæ’. Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 107.

²⁷⁹ Raw, *Art and Background of Old English Poetry*, p. 73.

outside, an external contingency of fate which one cannot control, one can always be on one's toes, governing one's preparation for and reaction to it.

The difference between a focus on death and one on dying becomes clear when *The Fortunes of Men* is compared with *The Fates of the Apostles*.²⁸⁰ The former poem emphasizes death as the end of earthly existence, whereas the latter sees it as the beginning of heavenly life, parading the apostles before us as role models of good dying.

Cynewulf starts the poem in an intense and intimate mode, his persona evoking a sense of pathos and identification in the reader. He articulates the universal human condition by speaking in the voice of a soul fearful of death and damnation who finds new hope and consolation in considering the ends of Christ's companions. These were chiefly bloody, with only John escaping martyrdom, but the brutality is more than countered by the certainty that these faithful souls found the immediate way to heaven. Their lives before death are interesting only in that they are a making ready of the soul for salvation.

Death is identified as a journey from the first line of the poem when Cynewulf characterises his persona as *siðgeomor*, journey-mournful. *Forðsið* and *sið* are very common Old English words for death and might be thought to have no more metaphorical impact than the Modern English 'pass away', but Cynewulf unpacks the implicit metaphor by showing how the earthly voyages of the apostles anticipate their travels after death, with Simon and Thaddeus described as *siðfreme*, bold in journeying, (l. 77a) on their way to Persia. At the beginning of the poem, we do not know what kind of *sið* is worrying the speaker; by the conclusion the examples of the apostles have shown us the journey towards death that he has in mind. *Sið* is further clarified in such passages as, 'thence [John] sought

²⁸⁰ *The Fates of the Apostles* in Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, pp. 51-4.

through the journey the way of life, the joys of heaven, the bright abode of happiness.²⁸¹ John's brother James, likewise, is not *siðes sæne* (sluggish on the journey. l. 36a) and the theme returns at the end of the poem with renewed emphasis, with Cynewulf now mining the rich seam of exile imagery that runs through Anglo-Saxon writing. Echoing the vocabulary of the beginning of the poem, he asks for prayers for *geomrum me* (wretched me, l. 89b) and goes on:

How I shall need friends, more gentle on the journey, when I must all alone seek out my long home, the unknown place, and leave my body behind, this share of earth, plunder of battle, for the pleasure of worms.²⁸²

Although the journey must be undertaken alone, the presence and intercessory prayers of friends are still vital. Cynewulf reaches out to embrace his entire readership under the name of *freonda* by weaving his runic signature into the next passage before returning again to the theme of the journey:

I must go far hence, onwards to another place alone, seeking the native land and setting off on the journey, I myself not knowing where, from this world. The dwelling place is unknown, the native land and the realm, as they are to every person unless he enjoy a divine spirit.²⁸³

Framed by these personal statements are the examples of twelve men who may well have had *godcundas gastas*, whose faith is the model for the Everyman figure with whom Cynewulf identifies his poetic voice and to whom he refers — *swa bið ælcum menn*. The

²⁸¹ 'þanon lifes weg/ siðe gesohte, swegle dreamas,/ beorhtne boldwelan'. *Fates of the Apostles*, ll.31b-33a.

²⁸² 'Hu, ic freonda beþearf/ liðra on lade, þonne ic sceal langne ham,/ eardwic uncuð, ana gesecan,/ lætan me on laste lic, eorðan dæl,/ wælreaf wunigen weormum to hroðre.' *Fates of the Apostles*, ll. 91b-95.

²⁸³ 'Ic sceall feor heonan,/ an elles forð, eardes neosan,/ sið asettan, nat ic sylfa hwær,/ of þissa worulde. Wic sindon uncuð,/ eard ond eðel, swa bið ælcum menn/ nemþe he godcundes gastes bruce.' *Fates of the Apostles*, ll. 109b-14.

apostles *do* know their destination or at least have a good idea of it: we are told that Andrew *ece geceas/ langsumre lif* (chose eternal and lasting life, 19b-20a) and Philip *ece lif...gesohte* (sought eternal life). Bartholomew was granted *wuldres dream,/ lifwela leofra* (joy of glory, dearer heavenly wealth, 48b-49a) and Thomas *wuldres leoht* (light of glory, 61b), while Simon and Thaddeus gave up *þas lænan gestreon,/ idle æhtwelan* (these transitory riches, useless wealth, 83b-84a) to gain *dream æfter deaðe* (joy after death, 82a). The theme of eternal wealth contrasted with the riches of the world is picked up in the runic passage by which Cynewulf identifies himself to the reader (98a-105a). He explores the paradox that only by one acknowledging oneself to be in the shifting, liminal condition of traveller and exile, can one discover the single solid, reliable truth:

But let us all the more eagerly call to God, send our prayers to bright creation, that we might enjoy those mansion, homes in the height, there is hope the greatest, where the king of angels rewards the pure with prizes everlasting. Now and always his praise shall stand, great and famous, and his power continues, eternal and ever new, throughout creation.²⁸⁴

Both *The Fortunes of Men* and *The Fates of the Apostles* are concerned with imparting information, not for its own sake but as a means to an end. Both consider the mutable world with anxiety and turn for reassurance to the vision of an enduring and omniscient deity. Their foci differ, however. Cynewulf contrasts the gruesome deaths of the apostles with their radiant hereafter, the prospect of which consoles him even when contemplating his own corpse becoming the sport of worms (*weormum to hroðre*, 95b); the

²⁸⁴ ‘Ah utu we þe geornor to gode cleopigan,/ sendan usse bene on þa beorhtan gesceaft,/ þæt we þæs botles brucan motan,/ hames in hehðo, þær is hihta mæst,/ þær cyning engla clænum gildeð/ lean unhwilen. Nu a his lof standeð,/ mycel and mære, ond his miht seomaþ,/ ece ond edgiong, ofer ealle gesceaft.’ *Fates of the Apostles*, ll. 115-22.

heaven he envisions is a personal one, where the *halga heap* of the apostles are *freondas* in need. Cynewulf's characters are active and powerful, even when being battered to death:

We have heard how James [the Less] in Jerusalem underwent death in front of the priests. Through the blow of a cudgel he fell, resolute, blessed in spite of their envy. He now has eternal life with the king of glory, reward for the battle.²⁸⁵

James, *stiðmod* and *eadig*, is the perfect *exemplum* for those who also want to earn eternal rewards. The poem as a whole explores the paradox that what is apparently the most painful and humiliating form of death can in fact be the most glorious and heroic, with the right form of preparation.

However, not everyone has the opportunity to be cudgelled to death, just as not every monk would have slipped quietly away surrounded by his community singing the seven Penitential Psalms. While the fates of the apostles are very different from the quiet, liturgy-embedded ideal of the *Regularis Concordia*, they are just as unreal and paradigmatic. Where does this leave the people who had to respond to less idyllic forms of death?

In her analysis of *The Fortunes of Men*, Raw argues that '[w]hereas in heroic poetry death is a splendid thing, here it is a sign of failure and humiliation.'²⁸⁶ This is only part of the story, however. It is certainly true that the hanged man in *The Fortunes of Men* is the epitome of impotence, reduced to an object:

²⁸⁵ 'Hyrde we þæt Iacob in Ierusalem/ fore sacedum swilt þrowode./ Ðurh stenges sweng stiðmod gecrang./ eadig for æfestum. Hafað nu ece lif/ mid wuldorcynning wiges to leane.' *Fates of the Apostles*, ll. 70-74.

²⁸⁶ Raw, *Art and Background*, p. 73-4.

Nor can he defend himself with his hands against the evil creature, the hateful thief of the air, his life has fled and he is devoid of feeling, hopeless of soul, pale on the gallows-tree, he submits to fate, covered with the mist of death.²⁸⁷

However, the poem as a whole is focused not on the *humiliation* of death but on its random and arbitrary nature. The poet takes great care not to link a person's intrinsic moral worth with either their God-assigned talents or the kind of death they encounter. His deaths do not correspond to the kind of didactic model explored above. Raw's comment should perhaps be reworded as a question: 'When death corresponds with a cultural paradigm of heroism, martyrdom or the peaceful, anticipated death-bed, it can be splendid. Does this therefore mean that death which does not correspond with these ideals is a sign of failure and humiliation?' The poem is a sustained effort to answer this question in the negative, and perhaps thereby to offer a huge amount of reassurance to people like the mothers in lines 14-15 and 46-47, grieving for the children killed by wolves or burned to death. How they lived is what matters, says the poet, not how they died.

These two poems seem at first to be sharply opposed, representing two ends of the spectrum of possible attitudes to death available in the Christian thought of late Saxon England. But at heart their topic is the same: the degree of control the dying person has, not over the means of death but the mode of dying — and the whole of life is spent dying.

vi. Death in Life and Life in Death: Herod, Holofernes and Edmund

The Fates of the Apostles summarises twelve deaths in a kind of shorthand, in which very little detail is given. Cynewulf relies on the audience knowing his story already: all he

²⁸⁷ 'noþer he þy facne mæg folmum biwergan/ laþum lyftsceapan, biþ his lif scæcen,/ ond he feleleas, feores orwena,/ blac on beame, bideð wyrde,/ bewegen wælmiste.' *Fortunes of Men*, ll. 38-42a.

has to do is prod their memories by providing a name, a place and a way of dying. In other didactic texts, an account of a single death is anatomised in great detail, and three such accounts form the subject of the next section. The first of these is the dying and death of Herod from Ælfric's homily on the Holy Innocents,²⁸⁸ which gives a graphic illustration of the ways in which the frontiers between death and life can break down in its description of the decay of the king's still technically living body. The second account is the killing of Holofernes from the poem *Judith*, a clear-eyed analysis of the way in which the worst sort of death results from a wilful abandonment of control. By way of contrast, this chapter concludes with another passage from Ælfric, the dying and death of Edmund of East Anglia. Here, the recent past is presented in such a way as to make it clear that the fates of the apostles are still available to the inhabitants of tenth and eleventh century England. Edmund also forms an interesting contrast to Herod, in that the latter's vicious body starts rotting while he is still alive, whereas Edmund's virtuous corpse continues to speak, grow and exhibit other lively signs.

In the experience of dying, the normal boundaries between life and death may become permeable and capable of being transgressed in both directions, as has already been noted in the case of Edward the Confessor. Different kinds of living experience could foreshadow the pains of hell. Exile, for example, is one such experience, and is explicitly described as a foretaste of damnation in Vercelli Homily IX:

²⁸⁸ *V Kalendas Ianuarii Natale Innocentium Infantum*, Clemons, *Catholic Homilies, First Series*, I, pp. 217-223.

The first likeness [of Hell] is called exile, because exile is a great torment for anyone to whom it occurs, for at once food and drink please him no longer, nor are gold and silver assigned to him, nor is there any honour for him to rejoice in.²⁸⁹

The same passage compares Hell to *oferyldo* (extreme old age), *deað* (death), *byrgen* (the grave), and *tintrega* (torture). (The combination of living (*oferyldo*, *tintrega*, *wræc*) and dead experiences (*deað*, *byrgen*) is particularly interesting and will be explored in more detail in the discussion of burial in the next chapter.) These worldly experiences represent fissures in human life through which intimations of immortal damnation can creep. The converse is also true: there are aspects of earthly life which foreshadow the joys of heaven, mostly manifested in the lives of the saints. Given the ambiguous status of the dying, recounting their experience is an obvious context in which preachers and teachers could explore the nature of salvation and damnation in graphic detail. In Ælfric's narratives of dying, he is concerned either to hold up an example of greatness as a model for his flock to emulate or to give an account of wickedness as an awful warning. Good dying involves seeing death as only a stage on the road to heaven, a way of seeing in which one focuses so hard on the distant goal that death blurs into insignificance.²⁹⁰ It is always in some degree an *imitatio Christi*, a fully conscious acceptance of a death which one has anticipated and for which one has readied one's soul. The approach of a good death may be announced in a dream or a vision, allowing time for the staging of a proper death bed. The *Regularis Concordia* assumes that death can be seen coming and prepared for in the appropriate way: 'When therefore the sick brother is nearing his end, the *tabula* shall be struck and all shall

²⁸⁹ 'Sio æreste onlicnes is nemned wræc, for ðan se wræc bið micles cwelmes ælcum þara þe he to cymeð, for ðan hine sona ne lysteð metes ne drynces, ne him bið læten gold ne seolfor, ne ðær ne bið ænig wuldor mid him ðæt for wynsumige.' Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, IX, ll. 85-89, p. 166.

²⁹⁰ Ariès, *Hour of Our Death*, pp. 13-14.

assemble to assist his passing.’²⁹¹ The *ordines* for the prayers for the sick and burial also take it for granted that dying and death will be properly stage-managed.²⁹²

In contrast, a bad death is one for which one is not ready, and in which one either denies that death is coming, or altogether fails to notice its approach.²⁹³ In his homily on the Nativity of the Innocents,²⁹⁴ Ælfric provides the awful warning of the slow dying of King Herod, whose arrogance and sinfulness literally cause his body to disintegrate, giving him while still alive both a foretaste of bodily decay and of the pains of hell to be suffered by his soul:

It was made clear in each of the torments what he would suffer eternally after death. Indescribable disease seized him: his body burned on the outside with long-lasting heat and he was all swollen together inside and bursting. He took great delight in food, but no meal could satisfy his greed... Dropsy overran him under the girdle to the extent that his limbs swarmed with worms, and stinking poison flowed incessantly from his swollen feet...²⁹⁵

The common *topos* of the dead body riddled with worms takes on new horror when the body is still alive. The king is also afflicted with intolerable itching, bloating, revolting halitosis, sleeplessness, nightmares and a stroke, but none of this causes him to repent.

²⁹¹ ‘Eo igitur in extremis agente, pulsetur tabula conueniantque omnes ad tuendum exitum eius.’ Symons, *Regularis Concordia*, pp. 64-65.

²⁹² S. L. Keefer, ‘Manuals’ in R. W. Pfaff (ed.), *The Liturgical Books of Anglo-Saxon England*, Old English Newsletter, Subsidia 23 (Kalamazoo, 1995), pp. 99-109.

²⁹³ Scheibelreiter, ‘The Death of the Bishop’, 41.

²⁹⁴ Ælfric’s main source for the death of Herod was the homiliary of Haymo of Halberstadt which he follows fairly closely, although in one place where Haymo simply implies that Herod was off his food as a symptom of his disease, Ælfric tells us that there was no food that could sate his hunger, although *him wæs metes micel lust*. Sweet, *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, ll. 141-43, p. 74, and ns. on pp. 251-52.

²⁹⁵ ‘...and eac geswutelode on hwilcum suslum he moste æfter forðsiðe ecelice cwylmian. Hine gelæhte unasecgendlic adl: his lichama barn wiðutan mid langsumere hætan, and he eal innan samod forswæled wæs and toborsten. Him wæs metes micel lust, ac ðeah mid nanum ætum his gyfernesse gefyllan ne mihte... Wæterseocnesse hine ofereode beneoðan þam gyrde to ðan swiðe þæt his gesceapu maðan weollon, and stincende attor singallice of ðam toswollenum fotum fleow...’ Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies, First Series*, V, ll. 125-34, p. 221.

The description of Herod's agony is compounded of several different elements, as his arrogance and sinfulness literally cause his body to disintegrate. In the first place, it is perceived as divine vengeance (*godcundlice wracu*, 137) for his massacre of the children of Bethlehem and his intention to kill Christ. It is a very particular kind of punishment, however, carefully tailored for both his body and his soul and including features normally only encountered after death. Ælfric specifies that Herod experienced every torture (*hwilcum suslum*, 138) that he would eternally undergo after damnation (*he moste æfter forðsiðe ecelice cwylmian*, 138-9). Among the traditional pains of Hell, Herod experiences great heat and cannot sate his hunger no matter how much he eats. In addition, his body is riddled with worms (146), in a foretaste of the experience of the corpse in the grave. Despite his suffering, Herod does not repent; on the contrary, he is so addicted to this world that he tries to cure himself by bathing in the Jordan, to no avail. His attempt at a cure for his body, rather than for his soul, only increases his resemblance to a living corpse:

But as soon as he was led into the bath, his whole body relaxed, so that his eyes turned in the likeness of a dying man, and he lay speechless without understanding.²⁹⁶

He remains *butan andgite* to the end. Indeed, when he feels death approaching, he compounds his sins by killing himself with his knife. The peculiar horror of Herod's crimes makes him an appropriate subject for this kind of a microscopic study of a truly bad death, and Ælfric connects the nature of the king's sins with his way of dying when he comments:

²⁹⁶ 'Ac ða ða he wæs in ðissere beðunge geled, þa wearð se lichama eal toslopen, swa þæt his eagan wendon on gelicnyse sweltendra manna, and he læg cwydeleas butan andgite.' Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies, First Series*, V, ll. 144-47, pp. 221-22.

Such was the death of Herod, who wickedly plotted against the coming of the heavenly prince, and impiously killed the innocent little ones who were of an age with Him.²⁹⁷

In Ælfric's homily, Herod becomes a portmanteau example of the horrible kinds of dying the wicked can expect; he dies in slow motion, with the writer lingering on every detail of his suffering. Paradoxically, Hell becomes the ultimate expression of the transitional zone of liminality, somewhere where one is always dying and never dead.

The second example of individual, exemplary death to be discussed here is the decapitation of the warrior Holofernes in the poem *Judith*.²⁹⁸ The poet begins the section leading to his death with a description of Holofernes that underlines the man's arrogance: he is of the *deofolcunda*, *galferhð* and *bealofull* (a member of the devil-kind, licentious and wicked. ll. 61-2). Backed up by a drunken crowd of his men, he goes off to seek his bed where the unwilling Hebrew captive, Judith, is waiting for him, But this image of unbridled power is continually undermined by our awareness of his imminent fate as he approaches the tent, 'where he was to lose his life, at once, within one night. He was then awaiting his end, unpleasantly on earth, just such as he had previously earned....'²⁹⁹ His fuddled state adds to the sense of foreboding; he is *druncen* and his men are *winsade*, wine-sated. Earlier in the poem we have seen him exhorting them to ever greater intoxication (ll. 30-13). Holofernes is thus presented powerful in a worldly sense, he is *se rica* (the great man. l. 68)

297 'þyllic wæs Herodes forðsið, þe manfullice ymbe þæs heofenlican æþelinges tocyme syrweðe, and his efenealdan lytlingas unscæððige arleaslice acwealde.' Clemons, *Catholic Homilies, First Series*, V, ll. 164-66, p. 222.

298 Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, pp. 99-109. The relevant passages of the poem are 61-131b and 171-186a. For a survey of *Judith*'s relationship to its source and a summary of criticism, see A. W. Astell, 'Holofernes's head: *Tacen* and Teaching in the Old English *Judith*', in *Anglo-Saxon England* 18 (1989), pp. 117-33.

299 'þær he sceolde his blæd forleosan,/ ædre binnan anre nihte. Hæfde ða his ende gebidene/on eorðan unswæsligne, swylcne he ær æfter worhte...' *Judith*, ll. 63b-65.

and *þearlmod ðeoden gumena* (stern-minded prince over men. l. 66), but he is both sexually and spiritually impotent.³⁰⁰

Holofernes is so drunk that he collapses and passes out (l. 67b), enabling the woman whom he had been planning to rape to assault him instead while he is unconscious, with his own sword. The poet spins out the account: the first blow fails fully to decapitate him and in between blows he lingers *on swiman... druncen ond dohlwund. Næs ða dead þa gyt...* (unconscious... drunken and wounded. He was not yet dead... ll. 106-7). Only when Judith strikes again is he killed.

Holofernes has freely renounced all control over his life and as a direct result he is unaware of approaching death even at the last minute. We see him descending the scale of unconsciousness, sliding ever more out of control, from arrogance to drunkenness to stupor to death. But death is not the bottom rung of this ladder.³⁰¹ Once his head is off, Holofernes' soul is pulled down into a kind of damnation that has echoes of being buried alive:

The foul corpse lay behind, dead, the spirit moved in another direction deep under the ground and there was laid low, bound in agony for ever after, wrapped round with worms, tied with torments, harshly imprisoned in hellfire, after the journey hence. There would never be reason to hope, overwhelmed with darkness, that he might come out of that wormy prison, but he shall stay for all eternity without end in that dark home, without joy or hope.³⁰²

300 J. Chance in 'The Structural Unity of *Beowulf*: The problem of Grendel's Mother' in Damico and Olsen *New Readings on Women*, pp. 248-61, esp. 255.

301 D. K. Fry, 'The Cliff of Death in Old English Poetry', in *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry*, ed. J. M. Foley, (Columbus OH, 1987), pp. 213-33.

302 'Læg se fula leap/ gesne beæftan, gæst ellor hwearf/ under neowelne næs 7 ðær genyðerad wæs/ susle gesæled syððan æfre,/ wýrmum bewunden, wítum gebunden,/ hearde gehæfted in hellebryne/ æfter hinsíðe. Ne ðearf he hopian no/ þýstrum forðylmed, þæt he ðonan mote/ of ðam wýrmsele, ac ðær wunian sceal/ awa to aldre butan ende forð/ in ðam heolstran ham hyhtwynna leas.' *Judith*, 111b-121.

The repetition of past participles — *gesæled*, *bewunden*, *gebunden*, *gehæfted* (bound, wrapped, tied, imprisoned) — reinforce the sense of lost control. *Judith*'s author makes it clear that your life, your dying and your ultimate fate are intimately connected. Holofernes' death *per se* is no more horrible than many of the fates of the apostles, but they go to their deaths open-eyed and clear-headed. Holofernes has chosen spiritual oblivion, and his death and damnation are the inevitable result.³⁰³ He falls within *The Fortunes of Men* category of *sylfcwale*, suicide, in that his drunken actions provoke someone else to kill him.

Holofernes has not only condemned himself but, as the worst sort of leader, has also imperilled his men by encouraging their literal and spiritual drunkenness. They too are doomed. After following the downward path of the soul, the poet returns to Holofernes' tent to show Judith putting the decapitated head into her bag, leaving the body for the Assyrian soldiers to discover. The mutilated torso symbolises the damaged fortunes of the Assyrians and foreshadows the imminent mutilation and death in battle of the soldiers themselves, which are first anticipated and then described in some detail in lines 285-296.

While Herod experiences the pains of death and damnation in his dying body, the third and last example manifests the joys of life and salvation through the behaviour of his corpse. King Edmund of East Anglia was martyred by the Viking army in the 860s. His life, or rather his death, was first commemorated in Latin by Abbo of Fleury in the late tenth century and adapted into English by Ælfric not long afterwards in his *Lives of the Saints*.³⁰⁴ Ælfric's intention in his writings, whether in Latin or the vernacular, was to teach, whether

³⁰³ '[*Judith* is] a poem obsessively concerned with intellection and reasoning, with examples of men whose minds and judgments are clouded by emotion, desire, drink, or simply by the trappings of civilisation, to their detriment and disaster': M. F. Godfrey, 'Beowulf and *Judith*: Thematizing Decapitation in Old English Poetry' in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 35 (1993), 1-43, 12.

³⁰⁴ Abbo, *Passio Sancti Edmundi*, ed. T. Arnold, *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, Rolls Series (1890), I; Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, pp. 314-35; and for Ælfric's treatment of his sources see D. Bethurum, 'The form of Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*' in *Studies in Philology*, xxix (1932), pp. 519-28.

from the pulpit, in the classroom or elsewhere. Needham makes the point that the *Lives* were probably for private rather than for homiletic use but their purpose is still didactic.³⁰⁵ By translating Abbo's *Passio Sancti Edmundi* from Latin into English, Ælfric was making the example of an important English saint available to a wider audience. He is one of only four English saints whom Ælfric chooses to emphasise with a narrative, the others being Æthelthryth, Swithin and Oswald. As O'Brien O'Keeffe points out, the account of Edmund's death contains so many inversions of the secular, heroic model that it could be read as a critique of that model, portraying a lord who does not wish to outlive his thegns, replacing ideals of vengeance with those of sacrifice, and justifying a refusal either to fight or to flee by citing Christ's death as inspiration.³⁰⁶

In Edmund's case, *passio* is an accurate description of both Abbo and Ælfric's narrative, as we are not told about the king's whole life, only the tale of how he came to suffer and die. Ælfric starts with a brief paragraph on the king's character, presenting an unshadowed portrait of power mediated through virtue. The shadows fall from without, in the form of the Viking fleet and its leader Hinguar's plan for a protection racket. Their understanding of power entirely lacks a moral framework, as articulated by Hinguar's messenger:

Now he commands you to give over your hidden hoards of gold and your heirlooms, and that you become his underking, if you wish to live, for you do not have the power to withstand him.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Needham, *English Saints*, p. 23.

³⁰⁶ K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Heroic Values and Christian Ethics' in M. Godden and M. Lapidge (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.107-25, 115-116.

³⁰⁷ 'Nu het he þe dælan þine digelan goldhordas and þinre yldenra gestreon ardlice wið hine, and þu beo his underkyning, gif ðu cucu beon wylt, for ðan þe ðu næfst þa mihte æt þu mage him wiðstandan.' Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, p. 318.

The stark opposition between the heathens' greed and Edmund's selflessness is pointed up by the king's refusal to execute the messenger *for ðan þe ic Criste folgie* (because I follow Christ) and his conscious desire not to outlive his people:

I want and desire this in my heart, that I should not remain behind alone after my dear thanes, who were, in their beds, with their children and wives, suddenly slain by these pirates.³⁰⁸

Whereas Holofernes had wilfully endangered his men's skins and souls, Edmund identifies himself with the wider group and sees his life as less important than the lives of his people: '...I would rather fall in battle, if my people could enjoy their land.'³⁰⁹ He demonstrates an active submission to God's will that enables him to look through death and see heaven beyond: 'I will joyfully be slain by you, if it is as God ordains.'³¹⁰ The Vikings are relegated to the role of God's ignorant tools in the crafting of another glorious martyr. This is the same emotional world we encountered in *The Fates of the Apostles*, with the serene hero outfacing the worst that the heathen can throw at him.³¹¹ The archetype for this is Christ enduring mockery, torture and death before Herod and Pilate, and on the Cross.³¹² Edmund's imitation of Christ becomes explicit when the main Viking contingent arrives:

308 'þæs ic gewilnige and gewisce mid mode, þæt ic ane ne belife æfter minum leofum þegnum, þe on heora bedde wurdon, mid bearnum and wifum, færlice ofslagene fram þysum flotmannum.' Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, p. 318.

309 '...me nu leofre wære þæt ic on gefeohte feolle, wið þam þe min folc moste heora eardes brucan.' Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, p. 318.

310 'Ic bliðelice wille beon ofslagen þurh eow, gif hit swa God foresceawað.' Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, 320.

311 All too literally at times. A close Chronicle parallel to this scene comes in E (s.a.1012), where the Vikings martyr Ælfheah of Canterbury, who has refused to be ransomed, by pelting him with cattle bones and hitting him on the head with an axe.

312 E.g. Luke 23;11 and 35-38.

Then King Edmund...stood in his hall, mindful of the Saviour. and threw away his weapons: he wanted to follow the example of Christ, who forbade Peter to strive with weapons against the cruel Jews.³¹³

Like Christ, Edmund is bound, beaten and scorned. He is then shot with arrows *swa swa Sebastianus wæs*, each step reinforcing his eligibility for canonisation.³¹⁴ His isolation and defencelessness are emphasised by the different ways the Vikings torture him and the range of weapons they use: ropes, rods, whips, arrows and either an axe or a sword to cut his head off. During the torture he calls on Christ three separate times, to the fury of Hinguar who, perceiving that *se æþela cyning nolde Criste wiðsacan* (the noble king would not forsake Christ), orders his execution. His head comes off at once and his soul's entry into heaven is immediate.³¹⁵ This is as different a decapitation as one could imagine from Holofernes' messy and unconscious butchering and establishes Edmund as experiencing the best of all possible deaths. It should also be noted that though his severed head encounters a wolf who is *hungrig 7 grædig*, it remains undevoured, unlike the less holy dead of *The Wanderer* or *The Fortunes of Men*.

Ælfric takes pains to establish the credentials of his narrative, claiming at the beginning that Abbo's source Dunstan of Canterbury had had the whole tale from Edmund's own sword-bearer, and that later one of Edmund's men had hidden from the heathen and witnessed the martyrdom. However, while his account of the events of Edmund's death may be impeccable, his interpretation of motive may be less so. There is

313 'Hwæt þa Eadmund cyning... stod innan his healle, þæs Hælendes gemyndig, and awarep his wæpna: wolde geæfenlæcan Cristes gebysnungum, þe forbead Petre mid wæpnum to winnenne wið þa wælhreowan Iudeiscan.' Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, p. 320-322.

314 'Through the direct imitation and repetition of the actions of Christ, a saint became more fully identified with the divine *virtus*.' T. Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 113.

315 'mid anum swencge... his sawul siþode gesælig to Criste'. Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol. II, XXXII, p. 322.

little evidence that heathens were interested in persecuting or converting Christians. although Edmund fears he will be required to abandon his faith. The Vikings may have seen their execution of Edmund as being politically or financially motivated, or simply as an act of random brutality, as in the death of Ælfheah of Canterbury, but the historical Hinguar (Ívarr) is unlikely to have become *wodlice yrre* (insanely angry) and have been provoked to murder by Edmund's ostentatious faith, as Ælfric would have us believe.³¹⁶ However, the plot requires that Edmund die defending his faith, not his politics or his treasure-house. By adapting Abbo's *Passio* into English, Ælfric wants to make it clear that martyrdom remains relevant to the congregations of his own day, that dying gloriously for Christ at the hands of the pagans is still a possibility, now and in England.

This survey, focusing on Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the soul and body from a range of documentary and material sources, suggests that these two elements of human existence were seen not as partners but as enemies. Their separation at death was something to be dreaded; while there was always the possibility of salvation, the chance of an eternity in hell greatly outweighed it in the minds of those who produced our evidence. It was probably Archbishop Dunstan who was responsible for the minatory beginning of Edgar's Code of c.963:

³¹⁶ Godden comments that '[t]he attack is conceived as a religious conflict culminating in an act of martyrdom: Edmund's rejection of Viking political control is closely identified with his refusal of the Viking demands to forsake his God.... As a model for comprehending the Viking troubles it is strikingly different from the piece *De Oratione Moysi* [also by Ælfric]: neither the wrath of God nor the approach of apocalypse has any place here....' Godden's article considers a range of works by Ælfric and Wulfstan in order to elucidate their understanding of the pagan assault as part of God's plan for England. M. Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Saxon England' in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies presented to E.G. Stanley*, ed. M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 130-62, 137-8.

Then I and the Archbishop command that you do not anger God, nor deserve a sudden death in this present life, nor indeed eternal Hell in that to come, with any withholding of what is due to God.³¹⁷

And we hear the same tone sixty years later: *wa þam þonne þe ær gearnode helle wite!* (woe to them who previously earned the pains of hell) as Archbishop Wulfstan admonishes in the Laws of Cnut.³¹⁸ This is the tone of voice one might expect to hear from a law code written by a homilist, focusing on the perils of transgressing both royal and divine will. But in general these texts threaten with the stick of hell rather than tempt with the carrot of salvation.

The next chapter will show how evidence for an overriding concern for the integrity of the body emerges from the archaeological data, both in the high status burials found in cathedral contexts and by implication, at the other end of the scale, in the careless and mutilated punishment burials. Both the documentary and the archaeological evidence suggest that it was in the ninth century that the Christian ideology of the drama of soul and body in resurrection began fully to permeate English culture and to affect burial practice at all levels.

This drama is brought to life in the poetry. In the first part of *Soul and Body*, the divided human identity is framed in terms reminiscent of the Freudian pairing of the Eros and Thanatos principles. The Body is obsessed with the moment, the pleasures of transient, fleshly existence; the Soul denies these and turns inward, employing its faculties of memory, understanding and will to concentrate entirely on events which will occur after

³¹⁷ 'Þonne beode ic 7 se ærcebisceop þæt ge God ne grymman, ne naþer ne gearnian ne þone færlican deað þises andweardan lifes, ne huru þone towardan ecere helle, mid anegum oftige Godes gerihta.' The Ecclesiastical Section of King Edgar's Code Issued at *Wihthorpesstan* (IV Edgar, 1.4). Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, *Councils and Synods*, p. 107.

³¹⁸ Christmas, 1020x1022. Whitelock *et al.*, p. 481.

death. The battle between the two creates the dynamics and dilemma of human existence. There seems to be no possibility here of reconciliation. This is equally apparent in *Christ III* and *Judgment Day II*, where the bulk of the text concentrates on the portion allotted to the goats rather than the sheep, and human nature seems to consist of an eternal reciprocal revulsion between the corporal and the spiritual.

As we shall see in chapter three, fear of damnation also emerges in sources such as the guild statutes and the law codes, where increasingly elaborate machinery, sponsored by church, state and private citizen, is beginning to take shape. The burial practices are designed to preserve the body's shape, like coffins and pillow stones, or its very substance, in an attempt to minimise its sinfulness. If a rotten body is by definition sinful, then one can derive hope from the thought of an embalmed body, its integrity maintained.

CHAPTER 3

CONSTRUCTING DEATH

i. Memory, Landscape and Community

This chapter surveys the archaeological data from graves dating from the early ninth to the late eleventh century and attempts to put the surviving evidence for mortuary behaviour into its cultural context. This poses particular challenges as the Church never prescribed an ideologically correct Christian form of burial;³¹⁹ therefore, while we have ample evidence for a culture which was fascinated by funerary practices and capable of constructing elaborate graves, the mortuary behaviour of that culture can be seen as highly experimental and variable within certain well-defined parameters.

Anglo-Saxon burials have several different aspects which can be analysed separately. There is the funeral itself, usually the last time in which the living and the dead will inhabit the same space and participate in the same activities. Then there is the structure of the grave and the way in which the body has been made ready for burial, invisible to the living after the grave has been filled but nonetheless of continuing significance in a belief system which saw corpses as playing an important role in salvation. Thirdly there is the superstructure of the grave, wooden or stone markers, a shrine, a building. Finally, there is the context of a burial which may be within a church, within a special burial area which

³¹⁹ D. Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief' in P. Wormald, D. Bullough, and R. Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 177-201, 186.

may or may not be consecrated and enclosed, in an apparently neutral area with no associated buildings or boundaries, or in a location which implies intentional exclusion, such as in an execution cemetery or among pagan graves.

Burial mounds, buildings, churchyards and gravestones change the physical environment in which people live, and inscribe the memory of the dead into the enduring landscape. Additionally, as Geary notes, *memoriae* in a medieval society consisted not only of memory itself, but also of trophies and relics, churches and altars, calendars and necrologies, and the performance and utterance of ritual in time and space celebrating both the ordinary and the extraordinary dead.³²⁰ The dead are remembered through actions as well as structures, in which the community of the living continually reconstitutes itself relative to the community of the dead, as members of the former group are continually moving into the company of the latter.

Anglo-Saxon England had several different kinds of community, both lay and ecclesiastical, which consciously commemorated their dead members,³²¹ and the ways in which they did so form an important part of this chapter. One recurring question is the extent to which secular and religious ideas about reputation and commemoration coincided or conflicted. It is one thing to be ‘most eager for praise’ (*lofgeornost*, *Beowulf*, 3182b)³²² but to be *over-eager* runs the risk of valuing the opinion of men over that of God. Ælfric pairs *lofgeorn* with *licetung*, deceit, flattery, and uses it to explain the meaning of *idel gylp*,

³²⁰ Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, p. 18.

³²¹ On the interpenetration of different groups and levels of society, see P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989), 133 and 136-7.

³²² For a discussion of the vexed issue of *lofgeornost*, see S. B. Greenfield, ‘The Authenticating Voice in *Beowulf*’ in *Beowulf: Basic Readings* ed. P. S. Baker (New York and London, 1995), pp. 97-110, 97, and *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (London and Boston 1972), pp. 39-43.

vain boasting, which he includes in a list of eight *heafod-leahtras*, chief sins.³²³ A Wulfstania text couples *lofgeorn* with *liðie* just as the *Beowulf* poet does, but here they are qualities to be warned against:

Then is a true evil, although I say it: some of us are in the habit of being too pliant and too eager for praise; and we are complaisant with people because of friendship and through this we flatter useless things too often and are silent all too often regarding the truth.³²⁴

It is an over-simplification merely to contrast lay and ecclesiastical attitudes to commemoration and reputation: the tensions described here existed not only between social groups but also within them, and indeed within the individuals belonging to those groups. The interests of churchmen and statesmen were not always opposed.³²⁵ Magennis, in his study of the Old English poetic understanding of community, characterises the period from the battle of Brunanburh to Cnut's reign, as 'one of growing intellectual and ideological confidence but also of political anxiety and instability'.³²⁶ In attitudes to reputation, both confidence and anxiety are visible, with the high-profile connexions between lay magnates and churches at this period representing a desire for security and continuity in an unstable world. Thus, the internal conflicts and contradictions, which we have already seen to be common in discussions of the part death plays in human existence, emerge again in the context of commemoration.

³²³ 'Se sefoða leahter is iactantia gecweden, þæt is ydel gylp on ængliscre spræce þæt is ðonne se man bið lofgeorn and mid licetunge færð, and deð for gylpe gif he hwæt dælan wile, and bið þonne se hlisa his edlean ðære dæde and his wite andbidað on ðære towardan worulde.' Skeat, *Lives of Saints, Vol. I*, XVI, pp. 356-58, ll. 300-305.

³²⁴ 'Ðonne is hit yfel soð, þeh þæt ic secge: sume we synt gewunode, þæt we syn to liðie and to lofgeorne; and we willwyrdað mannum æfter freondscipe and þurh þæt olæcað oftost on unnyt [and] soþes geswygiað ealles to swyþe.' Jost, *Die "Institutes of Polity: Civil and Ecclesiastical"*, pp. 262-7.

³²⁵ Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*. p. 4.

³²⁶ H. Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge 1996), p. 5.

This discussion begins with an evaluation of the role of the burial mound in the late Anglo-Saxon world-view. The practice of burying the dead in mounds, or of raising mounds over graves, was no longer how Christian Anglo-Saxons buried their dead. Nonetheless, it was a practice that played a powerful role in their cultural imagination, associated with the burials of ancestors, foreigners, heathens and criminals. An analysis of the ways in which such disturbing burials were perceived in the texts may help to establish how the authors of these texts understood the burials of their own Christian culture.

After considering the nature of reputation, this chapter will ask whether people were concerned about their reputations after death and to what lengths they went to create an image that would survive *post mortem*. The chapter then continues by surveying the ways in which Christians inscribed themselves into the landscape, looking at grave memorials and at the elite practice of founding proprietary churches and monastic houses. In connexion with this, it considers a group of late Anglo-Saxon wills and the ways in which they seek to transcend death by creating networks of protection both for family members who are already dead and for those as yet unborn.

The focus then moves on to the actual graves themselves. From the early ninth century onwards, trends such as charcoal burial become much more common in the archaeological record and spread rapidly, becoming diagnostic of late Anglo-Saxon burial practice. This section evaluates the new forms of burial and attempts to understand them in the light of many of the issues surrounding the imagination of death which were explored in the last chapter.

The most obvious way of building commemoration of the dead into the landscape is to construct a visible grave, though this is not the only option: cenotaphs may be erected or

buildings, gardens and other public or private places created, and these are often given the name of the dead person. This section will examine the range of such memorial landscapes available to the inhabitants of late Anglo-Saxon England, focusing in particular on burial mounds and buildings.

In the account of the death and burial of Beowulf, the creation of such a landscape is described. As part of his will, the dying king dictates the terms of his burial: he is to be cremated and then interred in a particular kind of grave, a barrow, set prominently on a headland. He will become a landmark by which seafarers can navigate (ll. 2802 ff.), to be known as *Biowulfes biorh* (l. 2807b). He hopes to become part of the terrain, incorporated into the very land which, as he has just reminded his young friend Wiglaf (ll. 2729 ff.), he has shielded for fifty years, still protecting and aiding the sailors who will use his barrow to steer by. Beowulf's people put the king's wishes into practice, creating the barrow as the most visible and enduring part of an extended and complex funeral ritual.³²⁷

By the year 1000, the approximate date of the *Beowulf* manuscript, a barrow was an ambiguous and multivalent object, but not an unfamiliar one. Although neither barrow-burial nor cremation was an option for the English Christian in the late Saxon period, furnished burial mounds for cremated bodies were being constructed in the Danelaw, at Ingleby in Derbyshire, up to c. 900.³²⁸ Ingleby also produced many cenotaph mounds which seem never to have contained bodies. In the 1950s, Posnansky suggested that these represent a transitional stage for imperfectly-Christian Scandinavians whose dead were

³²⁷ Robinson summarises much of the debate about this passage as part of his argument that it represents Beowulf's apotheosis: F.C. Robinson, 'The Tomb of Beowulf' in *The Tomb of Beowulf and Other Essays on Old English* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 3-19.

³²⁸ There are some sixty barrows at Ingleby, dated on the stylistic evidence of metalwork to the end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth centuries. M. Posnansky, 'The Pagan Danish Barrow Cemetery at Heath Wood, Ingleby: A Preliminary Excavation Report' in *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* LXXV (1955), pp. 140-44.

actually buried in churchyards; recent excavations have confirmed the impression that some of these carefully constructed mounds were indeed empty.³²⁹ Furnished burials from this period have also been found within churchyards in Yorkshire,³³⁰ Derbyshire and Cumbria.³³¹ Although there was never any Christian proscription of grave goods, the normal churchyard burials of this period are unfurnished, which suggests that these rare examples demonstrate a compromise solution to the problems of salvation. Mound-building lasted even longer in the Isle of Man and was also part of the high-status burial ritual of contemporary Scandinavia and the isles.³³² The last Danish monarch to receive such a burial was Gorm the Old, who died in 958/9, and another wealthy Danish barrow burial, at Mammen, has been dated even later, to after 971.³³³ The elaborate and richly-furnished boat burial containing three people on Sanday in Orkney, dated to between 875 and 950, was inserted into a natural mound.³³⁴ Literature and song may have been media for information about contemporary non-Christian burial practices: although little is known about friendly contact between England and Scandinavia in the tenth century, there were skaldic poets at the court of Æthelred the Unready.³³⁵ Therefore, while it may seem probable that the *Beowulf* manuscript, written between 975 and 1025, was produced for an audience who would never have witnessed or taken part in a funeral involving barrow burial, this cannot be taken for granted. However, this is not to argue that the ritual

³²⁹ The results of these excavations, by Dr Julian Richards of the University of York, are as yet unpublished, but an interim report can be found at <http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/staff/sites/ingleby/menu.htm>

³³⁰ L. P. Wenham *et al*, *St Mary Bishophill Junior and St Mary Castlegate*, Council for British Archaeology, The Archaeology of York, Volume 8, Fascicule 2 (London, 1987), p. 80.

³³¹ M. Posnansky, 'The Pagan Danish Barrow Cemetery at Heath Wood, Ingleby: 1955 Excavations' in *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* LXXVI (1956), pp. 40-51.

³³² J. D. Richards, *Viking Age England* (London, 1991), pp. 102 ff.

³³³ J. Graham Campbell, *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (Oxford, 1994), p. 41.

³³⁴ O. Owen and M. Dalland, *Scar: A Viking Boat Burial on Sanday, Orkney* (East Linton, 1999), pp. 24-25, 188.

³³⁵ M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London, 1993), 6.

language and actions performed at Beowulf's funeral should be seen in some way as 'authentically pagan', only that the poem's portrayal of paganism made sense to a Christian audience in the reign of Æthelred or Cnut.

In addition to these contemporary barrows, earlier barrows, whether Neolithic, Bronze Age,³³⁶ or conversion period, were still in use — or rather re-use — as *cwealmstowa*, places of execution and burial for criminals.³³⁷ As will become clear from the discussion later in this chapter, the trend in Christian burial from the ninth century onward stresses the importance of the integrity of the corpse and its inclusion within the Christian community. For those who had excluded themselves from society, however, and had been executed, the punishments inflicted by Church and State did not end with death. Groups of burials which show clear signs of execution are often found on the peripheries of hundreds or other administrative areas and in association with earlier barrow burials.³³⁸ These burials are created in conscious contravention of the ideals of dying and death discussed in the previous chapter: notable features include unusual positions of the body (kneeling, face down, decapitated, bound wrists), careless grave construction and inter-cutting graves, random alignment, multiple burials, evidence that heads were displayed on posts, and dress fittings, suggesting that bodies were clothed not shrouded. Sites include Stockbridge Down, Hampshire, where, in addition to forty-three burials, there were two postholes, possibly the setting for a gallows like that illustrated in Cotton Claudius B. iv, and a man-made mound.³³⁹ At Walkington Wold, East Yorkshire, a dozen secondary

³³⁶ S. Semple, 'A fear of the past: the place of the prehistoric burial mound in the ideology of middle and later Anglo-Saxon England', in *World Archaeology* Vol 30 (1), pp. 109-26.

³³⁷ Reynolds, 'Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries', pp. 33-41.

³³⁸ The best known of these is Sutton Hoo, where there are two groups of punishment burials with Carbon-14 dates ranging from the seventh to the eleventh century (pers. comm. M. Carver).

³³⁹ N. G. Hill, 'Excavations on Stockbridge Down, 1935-6' in *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* 13, pp. 247-59.

burials had been inserted into a barrow. The majority of these were decapitated and the skulls had been buried together in the barrow; many lacked mandibles and may have been displayed on posts prior to burial.³⁴⁰ The marginal location of these and similar sites, and their association with earlier barrows, suggests that even in death these people were exiled from their communities, to join the *mearcstapas*, the walkers on the borders (*Beowulf*, 103a). It has also been suggested that the executions were staged to put onlookers in mind of Calvary: several sites produce graves containing three bodies who, hanged together on a gallows set on a mound, may have invoked images of Christ hanging between the thieves on Golgotha.³⁴¹ South Acre, Norfolk, the only suggested *cwealmstow* to have been excavated in its entirety, produced examples of tied burials, decapitated burials, burials in groups of two or three, as well as the one in which the victim appeared to have been executed while already kneeling in his grave.³⁴² The cemetery at South Acre lies at a place where three hundred-boundaries meet, confirming the impression of liminality. The phrase *heaðenan byrgels* appears in charter boundaries from the tenth century and may refer to both pre-Christian cemeteries and to execution sites, reinforcing the exclusion of the executed.

Burial mounds clearly figured prominently in the later Anglo-Saxon imagination as well as in their landscape and could have suggested the burial of heroic yet imperfect pagan ancestors, of still-pagan or newly-Christian Danes,³⁴³ or of Englishmen who had excluded

³⁴⁰ J. E. Bartlett, and R. W. Akey, 'Excavations on Walkington Wold, 1967-1969' in *East Riding Archaeologist* 1:2 1972, pp. 1-93. Recent excavations at Cottam, also in the Yorkshire Wolds, uncovered a pit in the centre of a mid-Saxon settlement which contained a female skull lacking a mandible. Faunal evidence suggested the pit had been open for some time. (pers. comm. Julian Richards).

³⁴¹ Reynolds, 'Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries', pp. 33-41.

³⁴² Wymer, 'Barrow Excavations', pp. 58-89.

³⁴³ R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe from Paganism to Christianity 371-1386* (London, 1997), p. 393; R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, (London, 1989), p. 165.

themselves from the Christian community.³⁴⁴ Each of these three groups of people represents a different aspect of otherness. This awareness of barrows as representing something different from, yet defining, the living, Christian community, is also reflected in the eerie associations of barrows in Old English poetry, as in the Cotton *Maxims*, where a barrow (*hlæw*) is seen as being the proper home for a dragon.³⁴⁵ This association also emerges in place names such as Drakelow in Derbyshire.³⁴⁶ By extension, therefore, the people buried in these mounds may also have been perceived as something other than human. These supernatural and superstitious interpretations of the burial mound have been comprehensively surveyed by Sarah Semple, in a paper which argues that burial mounds continued to be places of overwhelming cultural significance throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, although the precise nature of that significance shifted through time.³⁴⁷ Barrows usually stood in comparatively remote areas, often on boundaries which might themselves be roads or rivers, route-ways along which people passed but not where they lived. To be connected with barrow burial was to be outside the mainstream of English Christian society: the inhabitants of barrows were the dangerous, the damned or at best (like Beowulf) the doubtfully-saved.

Having established some of the things that the ideal Christian burial did *not* consist of, it is now time to ask how the Christian population who are the focus of this study chose to be buried. In the *Vita Eadwardi*, King Edward is shown as planning his burial long before his death when he becomes intimately involved in the refoundation of the buildings and community of Westminster Abbey, and on his death bed he restates his desire to be

³⁴⁴ Carver (pers. comm) has speculated that some of the unexcavated mounds at Sutton Hoo might be from the Viking period. See also M. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings?* (London, 1998), p. 165.

³⁴⁵ *Maxims II*, 26, Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 56.

³⁴⁶ E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names* (Oxford, 1960), p. 150.

³⁴⁷ Semple, 'Fear of the Past', p. 123.

buried there: 'Let the grave for my burial be prepared in the minster in the place which shall be assigned to you.'³⁴⁸ Edward's request is characteristic of high-status burial arrangements: the elite chose either to found a monastery of their own or endorse an existing foundation. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles were concerned to record the time and place of the death and burial of some of these people, recording that Earl Godwin was buried at the Old Minster, Winchester,³⁴⁹ and Earl Siward at St Olave's, the church he had founded in York.³⁵⁰ The *Encomium Emmae* describes Cnut's burial, also at the Old Minster, Winchester,³⁵¹ and, as we shall see in the following section, many of the lesser nobility were also concerned to arrange for their burial in association with a particular church in their wills. These churches represent not only sacred buildings but also people involved in sacred actions, in particular the continuing labour of liturgy and prayer.

The implicit contrast between the church-associated burial and the barrow is one way in which barrow burials can be seen as negatively defining Christian practice: if barrow burial came to stand for something marginal, isolated and inert, the Christian ideal, in contrast, is one of centrality and busy activity. The Christian elite chose to be buried in or near towns and centres of political importance, or at least to be surrounded by a monastic establishment. Barrows suggested loneliness, Christian burial meant staying part of the community, continually being reincorporated into that community through the Mass.

Written wills of the period, like the *Chronicle*, are another source which reveal concern for the destination of the body and the way in which the testator wishes

³⁴⁸ Book I, chapter vi; and Book II: 'Fossa sepulchri mei in monasterio paretur, in eo loco qui uobis assignabitur.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, p. 80.

³⁴⁹ P. Conner (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A Collaborative Edition, Volume 10: The Abingdon Chronicle, A.D. 956-1066 (MS C. With reference to BDE)*, (Cambridge, 1996), s.a. 1053.

³⁵⁰ Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, C, s.a. 1055.

³⁵¹ Campbell, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Book III, 1, p. 39.

posthumously to be remembered. The surviving wills, some sixty in number,³⁵² date from the early ninth century onwards and are preserved as single sheet charters and in monastic cartularies where they record bequests to the religious houses, in particular to Abingdon (Oxon), Bury (Suffolk), Winchester (Hants) and Christchurch, Canterbury (Kent). They differ from modern wills in many respects, crucially in that while a modern will is defined as a ‘unilateral written disposition to take effect on the death of the testator’,³⁵³ its Anglo-Saxon predecessor was a bilateral, oral disposition, often containing elements that took effect within the lifetime of the testator.

By definition, we can only know in detail about the Anglo-Saxon written will, but behind every one of these documents stands an oral performance, made publicly, in the presence of the king and the other beneficiaries. The written document was only a record of the witnessed oral performance and not a legal requirement: many, probably most, oral wills of the ninth to eleventh centuries were never recorded in writing.³⁵⁴

The oral nature of the wills is reflected in their language: a will is often called a *cwyde*, literally ‘speech’, giving us the modern *bequeath*; to die intestate is to be *cwydeleas*. The language of the wills, English rather than Latin, may point to their being close transcriptions of the original speeches,³⁵⁵ although it is possible that many of the texts have

³⁵² Approximately sixty vernacular charters containing *post obit* gifts and customarily classed as wills survive from the pre-Conquest period: B. Danet and B. Bogoch, ‘Orality, literacy and performativity in Anglo-Saxon wills’ in J. Gibbon (ed.), *Language and the Law* (New York, 1994), pp. 100-35, 100.

³⁵³ H.D. Hazeltine, ‘General Preface: Comments on the Writings Known as Anglo-Saxon Wills’ in Whitelock, *Wills*, pp. vii-xi, vii.

³⁵⁴ This is of course true in the later medieval period as well: Clanchy asserts that the will was primarily oral until the thirteenth century, even when it became the norm for it to be written down: M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307* (2nd ed. Oxford 1993), p. 254. By the thirteenth century a nuncupative will was presented by its witnesses to the probate officer, by whom it was written down: M. M. Sheehan, ‘English wills and the records of the ecclesiastical and civil jurisdictions’ in *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988), pp. 3-12, 4 and *The Will in Medieval England*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies: Studies and Texts VI (1963), pp. 186-187. Written wills were not legally required until 1677: Danet and Bogoch, ‘Orality, literacy and performativity’, p. 106.

³⁵⁵ Hazeltine in Whitelock, *Wills*, p. xv.

been edited in the copying process, with the bequests that later scribes found irrelevant being omitted. The relationship between the oral ceremony and the production of legal documents is uncertain and may have differed from case to case.³⁵⁶ The language of some wills suggests that a document was written to be read out in public,³⁵⁷ but in other cases some charters seem to have been drawn up after the event.³⁵⁸ Certainly, the phrasing of many of the wills assumes an audience: Æthelwold's will of the mid-tenth century emphasizes this, ending his will with 'then I wish that the things be shared out for my soul just as I now said to the friends with whom I spoke'.³⁵⁹ The members of that original audience of the *cwyde* are sometimes mentioned: Ordnoth and his wife announced their will in the presence of the community of the Old Minster, Winchester, probably in the late tenth century.³⁶⁰ At the reading of a modern will, the testator is safely buried; when an Anglo-Saxon will was made public the testator, or testatrix, was at the centre of the action and expecting to live for some time to come.³⁶¹ The making of the will is the first step in the creating of a memorial and is itself part of that memorial, creating a carefully-articulated picture of the individual and how he or she stands in relation to land and treasure, to family, associates, dependants and slaves, to religious institutions and God. Making a will is also a highly visible way of letting it be known that one is anticipating one's death, an important part of the foreseen and stage-managed ideal demise.

³⁵⁶ For a discussion of the circumstances of charter production, see S. Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word' in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 37-62, 44.

³⁵⁷ Danet and Bogoch, 'Orality, literacy and performativity', p. 105, citing the will of Æthelstan, which addresses *þe minne cwyde gehyron rædan*, [those] who hear my will read.

³⁵⁸ Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word', p. 44.

³⁵⁹ 'þonne wylle ic þæt þæt sie gedeled fore mine sawle swa swa ic nu þam freondum sæde þæ ic to spræc.' F. E. Harmer (ed.), *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914), p. 33.

³⁶⁰ 'Þis is seo gewitnes ðe Ordnod. Wile habban godæs 7 his hirede on ealdan mynstre. þ[æt] is þ[æt] he 7 is wif cwæden on heora gewitnesse....' Whitelock, *Wills*, V, p. 18.

The reciprocal, contractual nature of the wills is exploited by the testators in order to control their own burials. Of the thirty-nine wills collected by Whitelock, eight explicitly designate the church where they wish to be buried.³⁶² A further fifteen begin the will with a bequest to a church 'for my soul', the position of the clause as much as its content implying that this gift was particularly important.³⁶³ The churches mentioned in these wills range from major foundations such as the Old and New Minsters, Winchester,³⁶⁴ to monasteries established by the testators themselves, like Wulfric, who leaves the bulk of his estate to the monastery that he himself had refounded at Burton-on-Trent.³⁶⁵

Some of the churches and monasteries mentioned in these documents seem to have been purely family affairs. This is only to be expected in a period when local magnates were investing widely in the provision of estate churches.³⁶⁶ Blair suggests that by the middle of the tenth century these new private churches were becoming more important than minsters, in rural areas at least.³⁶⁷ Wealthy people might favour several churches in their wills, but often one in particular is the beneficiary of marked generosity.³⁶⁸ In the wills of Ælfgar, Ealdorman of Essex, and his daughters Æthelflæd and Ælfflæd, many estates are

³⁶¹ Lowe, p. 38.

³⁶² Whitelock, *Wills*. The wills in question are those of Ordnoth and his wife (?late tenth century), V, p. 17; Ælfgifu (966x975) VIII, p. 21; Æthelmær (971x982-3), X, p. 25; Æthelwold (after 987), XII, p. 31; Archbishop Ælfric (1003x1004), XVIII, p. 53; Ætheling Æthelstan (1015), XX, p. 57; Mantat (?1017x1035), XXIII, p. 67; Leofgifu (1035-1044), XXIX, p. 77.

³⁶³ Whitelock, *Wills*. Theodred (942xc.951), I, p. 3; Ælfheah (c.968x971), IX, p. 23; Brihtric and Ælfswith (973x987), XI, p. 27; Ælfhelm (975x1016), XIII, p. 31; Æthelric (before 995), XVI (I), p. 43; Wulfric (1002x1004), XVII, p. 47; Wulfwaru (984x1016), XXI, p. 63; Thurketel (1035x1040), XXIV, p. 69; Thurketel Heyng (first half of C11), XXV, p. 71; Bishop Ælfric (1035x1040), XXVI, p. 71; Wulfsgige (1022x1043), XXVII, p. 75; Thurstan (1043x1045), XXXI, p. 81; Wulfgyth (1046), XXXII, p. 85; Edwin (mid-to-late C11), XXXIII, p. 87; Sifflæd (late C10 or C11), XXXVII, p. 93.

³⁶⁴ Whitelock, *Wills*, eg V, p. 17.

³⁶⁵ Whitelock, *Wills*, XVII, p. 47.

³⁶⁶ J. Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 162 and 318-20.

³⁶⁷ J. Blair, 'Secular Minster Churches in Domesday Book' in P. H. Sawyer (ed.) *Domesday Book: A Reassessment* (London, 1985), pp. 104-42, 119.

³⁶⁸ Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, pp. 140-1.

left to the otherwise unattested monastic house at Stoke-by-Nayland, Suffolk.³⁶⁹ This is an unusual cluster of wills from one family, and it affords us a glimpse into the ways in which these monasteries could become an extension of the family, and might even be seen as a substitute for kin.³⁷⁰

Ælfgar, writing between 946 and 951, makes it clear that his lands at Lavenham were to go to his grandchildren, should any be born, and only to Stoke should they be childless:

And I grant the estate at Lavenham after our lifetime to my daughter's child if it be God's will that she have any... and if she has no child, the estate is to go to Stoke for our ancestors' souls.³⁷¹

Clearly his intention is that the land should go with his descendants into the future; it is only in the absence of those unborn grandchildren that the estate is to do a U-turn, as it were, and to be used instead for the benefit of dead ancestors. Stoke is a recurring subject of interest to Ælfgar: he leaves the usufruct of Peldon and Mersea to Æthelflæd, 'on the condition that she keep it as best she may [to pass on] to Stoke for my soul and for [those of] our ancestors'.³⁷² Ælfgar leaves estates to other monastic houses as well as Stoke, but Stoke is mentioned in six different clauses and the other houses — Bury St Edmund's, St Mary's Barking, Christchurch Canterbury and St Paul's, London — are referred to only once each although all were larger and better known. In the event, neither of his daughters

³⁶⁹ Ælfgar's will survives in two fourteenth-century Bury cartularies; Æthelflæd's and Ælflæd's wills survive together in an early eleventh-century Bury charter. Whitelock, *Wills*, pp. 103-4 and 137.

³⁷⁰ V. Thompson, 'Women, Power and Protection in Tenth and Eleventh Century England' in N. James Menuge (ed.) *Women and the Law in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 1-18.

³⁷¹ 'And ouer vre aldreday ic an þat lond at Lauenham mine douhter childe gif þat god wille þat heo ani haueð... and gif heo non ne habbe gange it into Stoke for vre aldre soule.' Whitelock, II, pp. 6-7.

³⁷² 'on þe red þat heo do þan hirde so wel so heo bet may into Stoke for mine soule and for ure aldre.' Whitelock, *Wills*, II, p. 19.

appears to have had surviving children, and Lavenham and other estates can be traced through first Æthelflæd's and then Ælfflæd's wills on their way into the hands of the community at Stoke. Æthelflæd, who made her will between 975 and 991, leaves the great bulk of her estate to her sister, with the proviso of reversion to Stoke: 'And it is my wish that Lavenham should go to Stoke after the ealdorman's death and my sister's'.³⁷³ Ælfflæd's husband, Byrhtnoth, Ealdorman of Essex, was killed at Maldon in 991, but Ælfflæd clearly retained the usufruct of the estates until her death, probably in the first decade of the eleventh century.

Ælfflæd may have been the last surviving member of her immediate family: certainly there seems to be a new anxiety in her will's attitude to the preservation of the monastery of Stoke. At the beginning of the will, she addresses the king directly, asking for his protection:

And I humbly pray you, Sire, for God's sake and for the sake of my lord's soul and for the sake of my sister's soul, that you will protect the holy foundation at Stoke in which my ancestors lie buried, and the property which they gave to it as an immune right of God for ever.³⁷⁴

She takes pains to stress family connexions, referring to *mine yldran* (my ancestors) eight times, specifying which bequests were originally made by her father and which arrangements had been made by her sister, and she is also very concerned that various lands, including her *morgengifu*, should go to Ely, Byrhtnoth's burial place. None of these three wills states where the body of the testator is to be buried, but Ælfflæd appears to use

³⁷³ '7 ic willæ þ[æt] Lauanham go into Stoce ofær þes æaldermanes dæg 7 mire swuster.' Whitelock, XIV, pp. 36-37.

³⁷⁴ '7 þæ leof æadmodlice bidde for godes luuan. 7 for mines hlafordæs sawle lufan. 7 for minræ swystor sawlæ lufan þ[æt] þu amundie þa halgan stowæ et Stocæ þæ mine yldran on restap. 7 þa are þæ hi þiderin sæadon a to freogon godæs rihte'. Whitelock, *Wills*, XV, pp. 38-9.

the phrase *mine yldran* to refer to her father and sister, and it may be their burials at Stoke to which she is referring in the address to the king quoted above. We do not know whether she intended to join them at Stoke or for her body to follow her husband's to Ely.

Like most wills of the period, Ælfflæd's contains many contractual elements: she promises land and treasure to the king in return for his guaranteeing the will, and she leaves estates to the church, presumably for the sake of her soul, although, unusually, she nowhere uses this phrase. Ælfflæd's will, however, also describes contractual relationships that are to come into effect while she is still alive. In the last two clauses she bequeaths estates to two men, both named Æthelmær, on condition that they assist her during her life as well as after her death. The first clause reads:

And I grant to the ealdorman Æthelmær the estate at Lawling after my death, with its produce and its men, just as it stands, on condition that during my life he shall be a true friend and advocate and to my men, and after my death, be a true friend and advocate of the holy foundation at Stoke, where my ancestors lie buried, and its property.³⁷⁵

The word for advocate, *forespeca*, can refer to people or documents. A godparent or a preface can equally be a *forespeca*, producing words before, or in front of, something else and the widowed Ælfflæd clearly feels that her own voice is inadequate and that she, as well as Stoke, needs protection while she is still alive.

This impression of insecurity is reinforced by the second clause:

And I grant the estate at Liston to Æthelmær my [...e] with the produce and with the men just as it stands, and humbly pray him that he will be my true friend and

³⁷⁵ '7 Ic gean Æðelm[æ]re ældorman þes landes æt Lellinge ofer mine deg mid mete. 7 mid mannum, æalswa hit stent on þet gerad þ[æt] he beo on minum life min fulla freod. 7 forespreca. 7 mira manna. 7 efter minum dege beo þara halgan stowe. 7 þeræ are ful freod. 7 forespeca æt Stocæ þe mine yldran on restap.' Whitelock, *Wills*, XV, p. 40. This Æthelmær is probably the son of ealdorman Æthelweard, Ælfric's patron.

protector during my life, and after my death will help to secure that my will and my ancestors' wills may stand.³⁷⁶

Unfortunately there is a hole in the manuscript after the phrase *Eðelmere mines*, so the precise relationship between Ælfflæd and the second Æthelmær is unknown. She asks him to be her *mundiend*, protector, in the sole occurrence of this word in Old English. The estates she uses to create these two relationships, Lawling and Liston, are not mentioned by either Ælfgar or Æthelflæd and may not have been family property, nor do they seem to have come from Ælfflæd's husband, Byrhtnoth. They may thus have been her own property, free from the constraints imposed by earlier members of her family and available for her to dispose of as she wished. Nonetheless, the protection of herself and the graves of her family was clearly her paramount concern. Though we do not know the precise relationship of the two legatees to Ælfflæd, they were not her kin, or not close enough to be identified as such. In these two clauses, Ælfflæd is using such freedom of manoeuvre as she has to construct fictive kinship relationships in order to preserve the identity of her family, even after the deaths and burials of its individual members.

By chance, her concern with memorialisation is also known from the *Liber Eliensis*, which mentions that Ælfflæd gave Ely a tapestry in memory of her husband.³⁷⁷ The circumstances of the composition of *The Battle of Maldon* are unknown, but it has been argued that it is based on the depiction of events of that tapestry.³⁷⁸ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne hypothesises that Byrhtnoth's 'probably illegitimate' daughter, Leofflæd, may have

³⁷⁶ '7 ic gean þes landes æt Lissingtune Eðelmere mines [...]e mid mete. 7 mid mannum ealswa hit stent, 7 hine eadmodlice bidde þ[æt] he min fulla freod. 7 mundiend beo on minum dege. 7 efter minum dege gefelste þ[æt] min cwide 7 mira ylðran standan mote.' Whitelock, *Wills*, XV, p. 40

³⁷⁷ Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, II, 63, p. 136.

³⁷⁸ For an argument that the tapestry depicted Byrhtnoth's death, see U. Schwab, 'The Battle of Maldon: A Memorial Poem' in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. J. Cooper (London and Ohio 1993), pp. 63-85, 84; and Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective*, pp. 133-35, for an argument that it did not.

commissioned the poem, and that ‘the social configuration of women of high birth with access to clerics and their resources is responsible for a great deal of vernacular literature, including the commemorative and frequently lineage-oriented genres of historiography and hagiography’.³⁷⁹ Poem, testament and textile add to the picture that is taking shape of a various and sophisticated industry of commemoration on which a wealthy woman like Ælfflæd could draw.

Thus a family monastery with its burials becomes a substitute for living family. Ælfgar, in the middle of the tenth century, hopes that his estates will pass into the hands of his daughter’s children, with Stoke only as a second best. He is anticipating his family continuing, with his children and their children continuing to patronise the family monastery. Ælfflæd, making her will some fifty years later, has perforce to look back rather than forwards. In the absence of descendants, protecting her family interests means preserving Stoke as a family memorial. We do not know whether her wishes were respected in the short term, but within three generations Ælfflæd’s attempts to influence events had proved in vain: by 1066 the estates she had left to Stoke were in a variety of private hands and no-one remembered that the religious house had ever existed.³⁸⁰

In the discussion of burial mounds above, a distinction was drawn between the isolated, lonely barrow and the Christian burial surrounded with liturgical activity. Further evidence for the way in which the Christian dead could continue to be at the heart of the concerns of the living comes from the surviving guild statutes. The late Saxon care for the dead body (discussed below) is paralleled by the increasingly institutionalised care for the departed soul. It is in this period that the first documents relating to guilds and

³⁷⁹ J. Wogan-Browne, ‘The Hero in Christian Reception: Ælfric and Heroic Poetry’ in *La Funzione dell’Eroe Germanico*, pp. 323-46, 345-46.

³⁸⁰ Whitelock, *Wills*, p. 105, n.19.

confraternities appear, and it is clear from these that their primary religious concern was care for the souls of dead members. Although the four surviving Anglo-Saxon sets of statutes are connected with minster churches, they are lay-oriented organisations.³⁸¹ In fact the only religious obligation which all of them enjoin is care for the bodies and souls of dying and dead guild members,³⁸² a point to which Coonaert draws attention:

Enfin leur caractère religieux est marqué dans un témoignage de confiance en Dieu, mais de ce point de vue il n'y a de prescriptions précises qu'en ce qui concerne les obsèques de confrères.³⁸³

The four sets of pre-Conquest guild statutes which survive are from Abbotsbury (Dorset), Bedwyn (Wiltshire), Cambridge and Exeter.³⁸⁴ By the time that the statutes were set down and preserved, in the cases of Exeter and Cambridge, in gospel-books, the guilds had become closely associated with churches, but, Coonaert argues, they had their origins in pre-conversion fellowships,³⁸⁵ and communal feasting and drinking remained an important ritual element of guild membership.³⁸⁶ All are voluntary associations, concerned with issues of violence and peace-keeping,³⁸⁷ with guild-membership creating relationships of obligation similar to those imposed by kin.

The Abbotsbury Guild Statutes of the second quarter of the eleventh century go into considerable detail about guild members' obligations:

³⁸¹ G. Rosser, 'The Anglo-Saxon Guilds' in *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition 950-1200*, ed. J. Blair (Oxford University Committee for Archaeology: Monograph no. 17, 1988), pp. 31-34.

³⁸² S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 67-78.

³⁸³ E. Coonaert, 'Les Ghildes Médiévales (V^e- XIV^e siècles). Définitions, Evolution', *Revue Historique*, cxcix (1948), pp. 22-55, 37.

³⁸⁴ Whitelock, *EHD*, pp. 557-60.

³⁸⁵ Coonaert, 'Les Ghildes Médiévales', p. 43.

³⁸⁶ E. John, *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester 1996), pp. 23-4.

³⁸⁷ P. Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England* (2nd ed., Cambridge 1977), pp. 297-8.

And if death come to any of our companions, each guild member shall pay a penny at the body for the soul or shall pay as for three guild members. And if any of us fall ill within sixty [miles], ~~th~~^{en} we are to find fifteen men to fetch him, and if he is dead, thirty; and then bring him to the place that he desired in his life. And if he die nearby, someone shall tell the steward which place the body should go to, and the steward shall then inform the guild members, as many as he may either ride to or send to, that he is to come and honourably attend the body and bear it to the minster and earnestly pray for the soul.³⁸⁸

The statutes are particularly concerned that every dead member should have money enough for *þære sawle*, that bodies should be brought home, to the place of burial *þe he to gyrnde on his life*, and that the dead man's associates should know of the death in order that they may attend the corpse, carry it to the church and pray for its soul. The earliest guild statutes impose little or no other religious obligation on their members; in their concern for mutual support after death these are a secular parallel to the monastic prayer confraternities. It is clear that prayer for the dead, in contexts like these, was a personal obligation; such ~~r~~ relationships should be seen in the context of gift-exchange rather than commercial activity, as McLaughlin concludes for France at the same period.³⁸⁹

Abbotsbury is the most elaborate of the surviving sets of statutes; the Cambridge statutes are similar, although they go into less detail: a guild-brother who fails to escort the body is to be fined a sester of honey, and the guild must contribute half the expense of the funeral feast. In this context, what is striking is the guild-members' commitment to a very public show of solidarity with the sick or dying, and that the dead merited twice as many

³⁸⁸ 'And gyf ænigum on urum geferrædene his forðsið getide, sceote ælc gegylða ænne peningc æt þam lice for þære sawle oððe gylde '...' gegyldum. 7 gyf ure ænig geuntrumod sy binnan syxtig '...' þonne findon we fiftyne menn þæt hine gefeccon, 7 gyf he forðfaren sy, XXX; 7 þa hine gebringon to ðære stowe þe he to gyrnde on his life. 7 gyf he on neawyste forðfaren sy, warnige man þone stiwerd to hwylcere stowe þæt lic sceole, 7 se stiwerd warnige syððan ða gegyldan, swa fela swa he mæge mæst to geridan oððe to gesendan, þæt he þærto cumon 7 þæt lic wurðlice bestandan 7 to mynstre ferian, 7 for ðære sawle georne gebiddan.' Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, *Councils and Synods*, pp. 518-9.

³⁸⁹ McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, pp. 13-14.

attendants as the merely ailing. Displaying guild allegiance was a public affair. Thirty men, presumably escorting a bier, riding up to sixty miles through the country, would have had a high profile, as would a rallying of most of the members to usher the body to the church. Nor did their commitment end with the funeral. Bedwyn requires surviving guild members to pay for five Masses or psalters each and to contribute to a feast on the thirtieth day after death. Exeter requires six Masses or psalters, and also lays down that two Masses are to be sung at each meeting, one for the souls of the living members and one for those of the dead. While this last practice is not directly connected with the funerals of guild members, it continues the practice of identifying the dead brethren as a continuing element in the life of the community. Clearly, one's membership of the guild did not end with death: someone's identity as a guild-member dictated the conduct of his death-bed, burial and secular commemoration, and, through the repetition of the Mass, he was continually reincorporated into the company of the guild.

The evidence from guild statutes, wills, the *Regularis Concordia* and the other sources considered in this chapter and the last, when taken together, paints a picture of extensive networks of communities connected either by blood or the ties of socially-constructed fictive kinship relationships. One of the chief concerns of these communities — perhaps the single most important concern in the case of the lay networks — was to ensure appropriate forms of burial and commemoration for their dead ancestors or companions. The concern for the dead was not wholly concentrated on the soul, however. In the burial practices of the period there is clear evidence of great concern for the well-being of the corpse in the grave.

ii. Burial Practice

This section considers the different elements that made up burial practice in England in the ninth through eleventh centuries, putting them in the context of a range of documentary sources, concentrating primarily on poetry, sermons and homilies. It will also take into account the development of the *ordo* for the dying and dead, and the changing modes of penitential practice. By these means, it provides the framework for understanding the intellectual and emotional context of these burials. It argues that the innovations in the treatment of the corpse in the late Anglo-Saxon period can be understood as the result of several different developments within society, most importantly the increased interest in penance and bodily purity which resulted from greater exposure to Continental religious thought.

While the later Anglo-Saxon Church was interested in burials in so far as it made money out of them, it was not interested in prescribing the form that burials should take. Nor did the Church — in England or elsewhere — offer precise guidelines about what happened after death either to the body or to the soul. It is in this grey theoretical area, therefore, that we should locate the visible remains of belief about the fate of the body and soul, namely the burials themselves. From *circa* 800, burial practice begins to take on many different forms within a narrow and well-established range of parameters. While many graves remain simple — shallow, unfurnished — others become more complex and do so in a number of different ways. There is no obvious regional distribution to these practices, and they are also found on the continent.³⁹⁰ Their commonest forms (which represent either new developments or a great increase in popularity for old ones) are

³⁹⁰ Durand, *Archéologie du Cimetière Médiéval au Sud-Est de l'Oise*, pp. 198-99.

charcoal burial, iron-bound wooden coffins, sarcophagi and stone-lined graves, and these crop up all over England, from Exeter to Durham, although, as we shall see, the percentage of graves with innovative practices varies considerably from cemetery to cemetery. Assuming that burial performs the function of communication as well as simply the practical function of disposal, are there therefore many different kinds of message being communicated here? Can this complexity be elucidated by examining contemporary discussions of death, burial and the body? It seems probable that it can, given that the documentary sources were generated by the same people who produced many of the burials under discussion, people associated with high status monastic and episcopal centres. Analyses of the contradictions within thought about death as a whole, and medieval Christian thought in particular, were summarised in chapter one and have been explored in many different forums in this work. This should make it clear that it is not enough, when discussing these burial practices, to categorise them as 'Christian' and assume that that is a sufficient explanation. It is a salutary reminder that even when we understand the broad outlines of ritual practice it is not possible to apply a neatly algorithmic formula and thereby unlock the reasoning behind particular forms of mortuary behaviour.

The first part of the following discussion outlines the burial practices under consideration, with the intention of giving a representative survey of the burial types under discussion, demonstrating their geographical range and showing that burials of this period are overwhelmingly found in association with churches. The majority of the examples come from urban or cathedral contexts: this represents a bias in the data, perhaps because of the monopoly on burial held by minster churches until late in the period, perhaps because of the comparative lack of excavation of rural and urban parish churchyards. This

notwithstanding, it may be no accident that the earliest examples all seem to come from major monastic centres: as noted above, these are precisely the places where one might expect the purpose and process of Christian burial to receive most consideration. The smaller churches cannot be ignored, however, especially since even such a small and short-lived cemetery as Raunds Furnells produced what Boddington terms ‘an almost bewildering display of different grave arrangements’, a display which he attributes to the ‘spontaneous activities’ of ‘the deceased’s kinsfolk’.³⁹¹ It is to be hoped that the following discussion will shed some light on this ‘spontaneity’.

Burials of this period present a particular set of challenges. In the first place, there are peculiar difficulties of access, in that they often form the lowest layer of churchyards which are still or have been until recently in use. Furthermore, a millennium or so of continuous reuse results in a gallimaufry of intercutting graves. Thirdly, the digging of graves lifts and removes deposits from earlier stratigraphic contexts and scatters them around the surrounding area. Another complication is that many of the burial practices which emerge in the context of later Anglo-Saxon England continue until the early thirteenth century and are therefore hard to date with precision unless sealed by a datable layer, as at York, where the Norman cathedral foundations and a cobbled area from c. 1080 lie above the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian burial ground.³⁹² In addition to the general problems these sites present, there are particular challenges, such as modern road-widening, posed by urban churchyards: these are usefully summarised by Julia Barrow.³⁹³

³⁹¹ A. Boddington, *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo-Saxon Church and Churchyard*, English Heritage Archaeological Report 7 (1996), p. 69.

³⁹² D. Phillips, *Excavations at York Minster Volume II: The Cathedral of Archbishop Thomas of Bayeux* (London, 1985), pp. 44-46; M. Carver, *Excavations at York Minster Volume I: From Roman Fortress to Norman Cathedral, Part I, The Finds* (London, 1995), pp. 75 ff.

³⁹³ J. Barrow, ‘Urban Cemetery Location in the High Middle Ages’, in *Death in Towns*, pp. 78-100, 78-9.

Bearing these caveats in mind, it is nonetheless possible to see that from the ninth century new types of burial emerge in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. There are other well-dated sites besides York, including the graves from the minster site at Castle Green, Hereford, where burial came to an end in the mid-twelfth century,³⁹⁴ and from the manorial church at Raunds Furnells in Northamptonshire, where the graveyard was in use from the mid-tenth to the late-twelfth centuries.³⁹⁵ Excavation near Norwich Castle produced evidence of a probable timber church and associated graveyard which seem to have been in use from c.1000 to the period of the construction of the Castle between 1067 and 1075.³⁹⁶

In general, there is some continuity in practice from the Middle Saxon Period, in that bodies continue to lie supine, with their heads to the west, in unfurnished graves: it is the nature of the graves themselves that changes. Each of these developments represents a different and experimental reaction to elements of contemporary belief about the body and soul after death, as will be discussed fully below. The changes fall into three basic categories:

- burials in which a foreign substance, most commonly charcoal, is mixed with or scattered over the soil in the grave;
- burials in which the body is buried in an elaborate container;
- burials where the grave itself has been constructed from materials such as tile, stone or chalk.

³⁹⁴ R. Shoesmith, *Excavations at Castle Green, Hereford* (CBA Research Report 36, 1980), pp. 4-5.

³⁹⁵ Boddington, *Raunds Furnells*, p. 6.

³⁹⁶ B. Ayers, *Excavations within the North-East Bailey of Norwich Castle, 1979*, *East Anglian Archaeology* 28 (1985), pp. 1, 3 and 14-19.

Absolute dates for these changes are hard to establish, but the first of these new practices seems to be charcoal burial, which occurs in an early context at several sites, including Winchester, York and Hereford.³⁹⁷ In this kind of burial, charcoal is spread uniformly within the grave cut and the corpse, either coffined or uncoffined, laid on top. At several sites, including York and St Mark's Lincoln, the practice with coffined burial was then to scatter or pack more charcoal around the coffin.³⁹⁸ Burial S80, from Hereford, had charcoal scattered thickly on the bottom of the grave cut, then charcoal mixed with clay packed around the coffin, and finally a top layer of charcoal mixed with grain.³⁹⁹ Charcoal burial is often found in combination with other kinds of innovative burial practice, such as iron-bound coffins or stones used to support the head. At some minster sites, such as Exeter, about fifty per cent of the excavated burials use charcoal; at others, such as the urban parish churches of St Helen on the Walls, York, and St Nicholas in the Shambles, London, the genre is represented by only one example at each site.⁴⁰⁰ The small church at the manor site of Raunds Furnells, despite total excavation of the churchyard, produced no full-scale charcoal burials at all, although pieces of charcoal were present in four per cent of the graves.⁴⁰¹

It has been suggested that the charcoal was designed to absorb malodorous bodily fluids and might therefore be particularly associated with burials which took place some

³⁹⁷ B. Kjølbye-Biddle, 'A Cathedral Cemetery: problems in excavation and interpretation', *World Archaeol.* 7 (1975), pp. 87-108; B. Kjølbye-Biddle, 'Dispersal or concentration: the disposal of the Winchester dead over 2000 years' in *Death in Towns*, pp. 210-45; Shoesmith, *Excavations at Castle Green, Hereford*, p. 25.

³⁹⁸ B. J. Gilmour, and D. A. Stocker, *St Mark's Church and Cemetery* (Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology, 1986), pp. 15-20.

³⁹⁹ Shoesmith, *Castle Green*, p. 25.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Schofield, D. Palliser and C. Harding, *Recent Archaeological Research in English Towns*, (CBA, 1981), pp. 36-7; Carver, *Underneath English Towns*, p. 95; A. Thompson, 'St Nicholas in the Shambles' in *Current Archaeology* 6, pp. 176-79.

⁴⁰¹ Boddington, *Raunds Furnells*, p. 37.

time after death.⁴⁰² However, there are reasons for disagreeing with this functionalist interpretation. Most importantly, several skeletons were found at Raunds where there had been time for advanced decay, evidenced by bone tumble, to occur before burial, but no charcoal burials were found at that site. In addition, there are several sites, as noted above, where charcoal was added to the grave after a coffined burial had been placed within it. At this point in the ceremony, any need for deodorant would have been obviated by the process of filling the grave cut with soil. Furthermore, burial S80 from Hereford, described above, shows evidence of considerable complexity, and the mixture of charcoal and grain implies a symbolic element in the burial, representative perhaps of resurrection. Other explanations than the functional must be sought, and here it will be argued that the charcoal was part of an attempt to extend the process of salvation into the grave, an explanation which would, no doubt, have seemed highly pragmatic and functional to the people involved in constructing these graves. Carver has ascribed the practice of charcoal burial to a desire to preserve the body, particularly at Durham where he suggests that St. Cuthbert's legend may have been the catalyst for an interest in embalming.⁴⁰³ The absorbent faculty of charcoal may well have given the impression that a corpse thus treated would remain supernaturally sweet, but one need not postulate a particular attachment to St Cuthbert to argue for a more universal interest in the preservation of the body.

In many graves, it is impossible to be sure what the body was buried in: any shrouding material has long since disappeared (although the erratic occurrence of shroud

⁴⁰² Boddington, *Raunds Furnells*, p. 70. M. Carver, 'Early Medieval Durham: The Archaeological Evidence' in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Durham Cathedral*, ed. N. Coldstream and P. Draper, B.A.A. Conference Transactions 3 (London, 1980), pp. 11-19, 13.

⁴⁰³ M. Carver, 'Early Medieval Durham: The Archaeological Evidence' in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Durham Cathedral*, ed. N. Coldstream and P. Draper, B.A.A. Conference Transactions 3 (London, 1980), pp. 11-19, 13.

pins points to wide use), as have most coffins constructed entirely of wood. That such coffins were used is known from Barton-on-Humber, where thirty-four dating from the ninth to tenth centuries were found in a good state of preservation.⁴⁰⁴ A variation on this appears at Norwich, where none of the one hundred and thirty individuals recovered seems to have been buried in a coffin, but three burials (graves 2067, 1143 and 1212) appear to have been lined with planks, tightly constraining the skeletons found therein.⁴⁰⁵ Similar planked burials were also found at Southampton.⁴⁰⁶ Since wood rarely survives, iron coffin fittings may be the only clue that a coffin was ever present. It is therefore hard to be sure whether a rise in the incidence of coffin fittings means that the total number of coffins in use is increasing, or whether they are merely becoming more elaborate. Such coffins appear at Winchester in the mid-ninth century, and at Hereford and elsewhere in the tenth century. A related practice is found at York, where four burials are in what appear to be domestic storage chests, complete with locks. A rare and expensive alternative to wood is the stone sarcophagus, of which examples have been found at Winchester, York, Raunds and Kirkdale.⁴⁰⁷

A related practice is that of outlining and supporting the corpse with stones. Sometimes only the head is treated this way, in what is variously termed a 'pillow' or 'ear-muff' arrangement. This is a widely-occurring practice with a lot of variation, often found

⁴⁰⁴ I. Panter, 'Well-Travelled Coffins', *Interim*, 19:3 (Autumn 1994), pp. 26-35; W. Rodwell and K. Rodwell, 'St Peter's Church, Barton-upon-Humber: Excavation and Structural Study, 1978-81', *Antiquaries Journal*, LXII (1982), pp. 283-315.

⁴⁰⁵ Ayers, *Excavations within the North-East Bailey of Norwich Castle*, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁰⁶ P Holdsworth, 'Saxon Southampton: a new review' in *Medieval Archaeology* 20 (1976), pp. 26-61, 59 and fig.27.

⁴⁰⁷ A. Boddington, 'Chaos and Disturbance in an Anglo-Saxon Cemetery' in A. Boddington (*et al*), *Death, Decay and Reconstruction: approaches to archaeology and forensic science* (Manchester, 1987), p. 30; P. Rahtz, and L. Watts, 'Kirkdale Anglo-Saxon Minster', *Current Archaeology* 155 (December 1997), pp. 419-22.

in conjunction with coffined burial, as at Raunds where overall fifty-five per cent of the burials had some kind of stone arrangement, which Boddington interprets as 'protective', 'aesthetic' and indicative of 'compassion and care'.⁴⁰⁸ At Barton on Humber, Rodwell and Rodwell point out that 'the rite is usually attributable to the mid-to-late Saxon period and tends to be associated with uncoffined burials'.⁴⁰⁹

The third innovation involves constructing the grave in some enduring material: chalk or mortar floors at Lincoln, London, and York; cist graves of stone or mortar at London, York, Hereford and Raunds; graves lined with stone or tile at Raunds, London and Rivenhall in Essex.⁴¹⁰ Many of the graves from the north-east bailey of Norwich Castle had much more chalk in the fill than is to be found in the surrounding soil, and Ayers suggests that they may originally have been provided with a capping of chalk, and that some graves may in addition have contained dense, crushed chalk at the head or feet.⁴¹¹

It should be remembered, as noted above, when seeking an origin for these burial practices that they are not exclusive to England, although the contemporary evidence from the Continent is at least as complex and illegible as the English material. Pillow-stones and anthropomorphic coffins have been found in French burials, but these can only be dated approximately within the period, and Durand, goes no further in his analysis than the suggestion that these tombs evidence a ritual practice in which 'il y a volonté de maintenir droite la tête du défunt.'⁴¹² More recently, Galinié has stressed the need for more regional

⁴⁰⁸ Boddington, *Raunds Furnells*, pp. 38-40, 48.

⁴⁰⁹ W. Rodwell and K. Rodwell, 'Barton on Humber', in *Current Archaeology* 78 (1981), pp. 208-215, 212.

⁴¹⁰ W. Rodwell and K. Rodwell, 'Excavations at Rivenhall Church, Essex. Interim Report', *Antiquaries Journal*, LIII (1973), pp. 219-31.

⁴¹¹ Ayers, *Excavations within the North-East Bailey of Norwich Castle*, p. 19

⁴¹² Durand, *Archéologie du Cimetière Médiéval au Sud-Est de l'Oise*, p. 199.

studies and closer dating.⁴¹³ In the same volume, surveys of the burial types found in various regions of France provide many parallels for the English data, including tombs made from chalk, tiles, planks and stones, and evidence for wooden coffins both with and without metal fittings or nails.⁴¹⁴

What end could these innovative burial practices have been intended to achieve? What function were they designed to perform? One common theme that the new kinds of burial emerging in this period all have is that they control and confine the body in new and more elaborate ways. Whether it is confined, surrounded by stones, laid on charcoal or interred in a built grave, all these different structures serve the purpose of defining the area in which the body lies, both protecting it and imprisoning it. The cemetery as a whole, in both urban and rural contexts, was becoming a different kind of space, consecrated and bounded. It was during this period in England that proprietary churches were first established in any number, often with an area around the church enclosed for use as a burial ground.⁴¹⁵ Lawrence Butler stresses the importance of the churchyard boundary, marking ‘the edge of resurrectible life’, and he highlights the involvement of the community in maintaining the boundary in good repair.⁴¹⁶ So the new emphasis on the construction of the grave can be seen as an analogue of the boundary of the graveyard itself, a further demarcation of sacred space, both imprisoning and protecting the corpse.

⁴¹³ H. Galinié, ‘Introduction’ in H. Galinié and E. Zadora-Rio (eds.), *Archéologie du Cimetière Chrétien* (Tours 1996), pp. 9-13, 10.

⁴¹⁴ C. Pilet, ‘Chrono-typologie des tombes de Normandie’, pp. 251-255; É. Lorans *et al*, ‘Chrono-typologie des tombes en Anjou-Poitou-Lorraine’, pp. 257-269; M. Colardelle *et al*, ‘Typo-chronologie des sépultures du Bas-Empire à la fin du Moyen-Âge dans le Sud-Est de la Gaule’, pp. 272-303; all in Galinié and Zadora-Rio, *Archéologie du Cimetière Chrétien*.

⁴¹⁵ W. Rodwell, *The Archaeology of the English Church*. (London, 1981), pp. 140-4.

⁴¹⁶ L. Butler, ‘The Churchyard in Eastern England 900-1100: Some Lines of Development’ in P. Rahtz, T. Dickinson and L. Watts (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries 1979*, (BAR British Series 82, 1980), pp. 383-88.

At this period, therefore, burial practices are very sharply polarised: either one is buried as part of the Christian community in consecrated ground, or one is excluded from that community and buried in unconsecrated ground.⁴¹⁷ This polarity is as visible in the law codes as it is in the burial practice, unsurprisingly as high-ranking ecclesiastics such as Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, were the compilers of these codes.⁴¹⁸ From the late ninth century onwards, with the promulgation of Alfred's law code, Christianity was becoming ever more closely identified with the English state. By the reign of Edgar (959-975) it is hard to distinguish between the secular and sacred institutions, with their aims and interests, officially and rhetorically at least, becoming identified with each other— 'all sins became crimes, and all crimes sins', as Frank Barlow puts it.⁴¹⁹ Unrepentant sinners could be punished by exclusion from Christian burial, as it says in the code Wulfstan compiled for the Northumbrian priests: 'If he die in his sins, then he forfeits clean burial and God's mercy'.⁴²⁰

One might expect that this and other similar laws would serve as a winnowing process, successfully keeping the bodies of the pagan or the sinner out of consecrated ground, and that therefore the bodies of those buried *within* the Christian community would be less problematic than the corpses of those who were excluded. However, this does not seem to have been the case. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe has examined the ways, in tenth and eleventh century law, in which the death penalty was with increasing frequency replaced with mutilation, a punishment which did not harm the soul and left the living

⁴¹⁷ A. Reynolds, 'Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries', pp. 33-41.

⁴¹⁸ D. Whitelock, 'Wulfstan and the Laws of Cnut' in *English Historical Review*, LXIII (1948), pp. 433-52.

⁴¹⁹ Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 449ff.; F. Barlow, 'The Holy Crown' in F. Barlow, *The Norman Conquest and Beyond*, (London, 1983), p. 6.

⁴²⁰ 'Gif he þonne on ðam unrihte geendige, þolige he clænes legeres 7 Godes mildse.' 'Northumbrian Priests' Law of 1020 x 1023', clause 62, in Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, *Councils and Synods*, p. 455.

scope for repentance.⁴²¹ As a result, there must have been many people bearing the signs of punishments such as amputation, embodied and highly visible reminders of sin and its penalties. Even for those who escaped state-inflicted retribution, the relationship between soul and body was a spiritual minefield. As we have seen in chapter two, a reading of the contemporary sermons and homilies suggests that there was a great and growing mistrust of the body, both of the living body and its appetites, particularly sexuality, and of the dead body. This is visible in the penitential texts as well as in the complex ritual practices that were developing around the death bed. It is this mistrust of the body, I suggest, that provides the rationale for the burial practices that emerge in the later Anglo-Saxon period.

The next section looks at attitudes to the body in homilies and in one poem which occurs in a homiletic context. The homilies fall broadly into two categories, the first being the anonymous, early tenth century group in the Blickling and Vercelli manuscripts, the second the body of work produced by Ælfric, Abbot of Eynsham and Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.⁴²² All the homilists draw heavily on the work of Carolingian scholars and treat at length the topics of penitence and eschatology. The earlier homilies, however, do not mention the subject of *public* penance, and their tone is more lurid and sensational.⁴²³ One of the great achievements of the Benedictine Reform, therefore, may have been to create an agreed standard of regulated confession and penance, a set of guidelines on this most important and frightening matter, that was profoundly reassuring.

421 K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Body and Law', pp. 214-15.

422 *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, ed. R. Morris, EETS 58/63/73 (London, 1880); Wulfstan, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. D. Bethurum, (Oxford, 1957).

423 A. J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Jersey, 1983), p. 157.

In *Sauwle þearf* (Soul's Need), the eighth Blickling homily, the anonymous homilist enjoins his congregation:

...and above all, remember that they [ie the rich] will never return here, but their bodies shall lie in the earth and turn to dust, the flesh become foul and swarm with worms and pour down and ooze at all the joints.⁴²⁴

Although the predicament of the corpse in the grave is a common theme in Old English writing — and generally in medieval Christianity — this description is a particularly graphic one for the period, with its vivid image of the flowing body. The context is a sermon on the renunciation of earthly pleasures. The homilist is referring particularly to the rich, and the contrast between their worldly splendour and the disgusting fate awaiting them. He makes his point in particular by contrasting the control exercised by the wealthy man while alive — his ability to choose rich clothes, maintain wives and concubines, to entertain lavishly and support hosts of flattering hangers-on — with the total loss of control in the grave. The homilist's description emphasizes two forms of decay: the external attack from the 'swarming' worms and the 'pouring, oozing' processes generated by the treacherous body itself.

In concentrating on the wealth of the rich man and that wealth's inevitable departure, the homilist omits the fact that the poor and virtuous will be subject to the same process of decay. In general, the association between virtue and incorruptibility is strong in the thought of this period, to the extent that the author of the Vercelli version of the poem *Soul and Body* argues himself into a corner, interpreting decay both as the result of sin and

⁴²⁴ '...& ofor þæt næfre efngeyndige hider eft ne cumað, ah heora lichoman licggað on eorðan & beoþ to duste gewordne, & þæt flæsc afulað, & wýrmum awealleð, & neþer afloweþ, & beoþ gewitene from eallum heora gefogum.' Morris, *Blickling Homilies*, p. 101.

as the result of a natural process. As we saw above (Chapter 2), the poet is confronted by a problem. In the first part of the poem he has equated decay, particularly in the form of worms, with punishment but in the second part, dealing with the saved body and soul, he also mentions worms attacking the body. Here, clearly, they cannot be a concomitant element of damnation and instead become nothing more than an unpleasant part of the experience of burial. The implicit conclusion is that, even when dead, the body is ambiguous and disturbing, with the bodies of the virtuous as well as the vicious manifesting signs of decay. The result is that the quest for a reliable indication of virtue is doomed to failure: the fact that decay happens even to the good adds to the sensation of unease and mistrust that characterises these accounts of body and soul.

Only by being a saint — and a virgin saint at that — might one escape the horrors of decay altogether. In Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*, he gives two examples who were preserved incorrupt because of their virginity rather than any other virtue; it is noteworthy that they are both English, Edmund of East Anglia and Æthelthryth of Ely. Of Edmund, Ælfric says: 'His body, which lies undecayed, tells us that he lived in this world without fornication and journeyed to Christ with a clean life'.⁴²⁵ Of Æthelthryth, he points out that her incorrupt body is a demonstration of the truth of the general resurrection at the Last Judgment and goes on to say that her perpetual virginity is an example, not to monks, but to the laity, giving the example of a thane and his wife who renounced sex after having three sons and thereafter lived together chastely for thirty years. As a result, when the thane died: 'The angels of the Lord came at the time of his death and carried his soul with song to

⁴²⁵ 'His lichama us cyð þe lið unformolsnod þæt he butan forligre her on worulde leofode and mid clænum life to criste sipode.' Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris* in Skeat, *Lives of Saints*, Vol. II XXXII, ll. 186-8.

heaven'.⁴²⁶ This was a reward normally saved for the saints, whose earthly bodies are already perfect and fit for heaven. In seeing virginity or chastity as desirable for everyone, not just for monks and nuns, Ælfric is in tune with the thought of reformed monasticism, as exemplified by the work of Odo, Abbot of Cluny (926-44). This is a change from earlier thinking: Alcuin, in the previous century, had been quite clear that chastity is equivalent to the angelic life, only monks should try, and it would be far too demanding for the ordinary Christian.⁴²⁷ In Ælfric's writings, by contrast, the stakes are raised for everyone, the boundary between purity and corruption redrawn.

The imagined ideal of the resurrection body will be discussed in more detail shortly. The fear of burial makes even more sense if it is perceived as not only intrinsically unpleasant but also as something which might hinder one's chances of obtaining that perfected physical state at the resurrection. As we have seen, the note of horror is sounded elsewhere in the Vercelli Book, in Homily IX, which lists five earthly experiences which are thought to give a foretaste of damnation, these being exile, extreme old age, death, burial and torture. Of burial, the homilist says:

Then the fourth likeness of hell is called burial, for the roof of the house is bowed down over his breast, and he is given the least part of all his treasure, that is, someone sews him into a length of cloth. After that three bedfellows have him, and they are dust and mould and worms.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ 'And drihtnes englas comon eft on his forð-siðe and feredon his sawle mid sange to heofonum.' Ælfric, *St Æthelthryth* in Skeat, *Lives of Saints*, Vol. I, XX, ll. 128-30..

⁴²⁷ P. Jestic, 'Why Celibacy? Odo of Cluny and the Development of a New Sexual Morality' in Frassetto, *Medieval Purity and Piety*, pp. 81-115.

⁴²⁸ 'Ðonne is þære feorðan helle onlicnes byrgen nemned, for þan þæs huses hrof bið [gehnæg]ed þe him onufan ðam breostum siteð, 7 him mon þonne deð his gestreona þone wi[r]sestan dæl, þæt is þæt hine [mon siw]eð on anum [hræg]le. Hafað him þonne syððan þry gebeddan, þæt is þonne grot 7 molde 7 wyrmas.' Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, IX, p. 168.

This picture of a shabby, oppressive, dirty place is one of the most detailed portraits of the grave in Old English literature. It is highly emotive and affective, presenting the corpse in the grave as something still aware of its predicament and inviting the audience to imagine themselves sympathetically in the corpse's place. While the image is part of a widespread medieval literary *topos*, it also seems to be a fairly literal description of the contemporary grave. The mention of the grave-roof over the breast is reminiscent of the one stone marker found *in situ* at St Mark's, Lincoln, which was over the chest area of the burial. There is almost no surviving fabric evidence for the use of shrouds in late Saxon burial, with the exception of a female skull from an otherwise simple burial from St Nicholas Shambles in London which had a fragment of cloth adhering to it.⁴²⁹ However, shroud pins have sometimes been found, and the position of the skeleton can also indicate whether it was buried tightly wrapped. The manuscript illuminations of the deaths of patriarchs from BL Cotton Claudius B. iv (Plate 3) and the depiction of the death of Edward the Confessor in the Bayeux tapestry (Plates 1 and 2) show the corpses closely swaddled.⁴³⁰ However, a shroud was not necessarily considered suitable for all. The *Regularis Concordia* specifies that a monk is to be buried in clean clothing (*mundis uestimentis*), listing shirt, cowl, stockings and shoes.⁴³¹ The stress on *cleanliness* is noteworthy in this context, in contrast to the dirt and mould of the grave. Cleanliness may also have been in Ælfric's mind when he wrote:

⁴²⁹ W. White, *Skeletal Remains from the Cemetery of St Nicholas Shambles* (Museum of London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1988), p. 18.

⁴³⁰ Gilmour and Stocker. *St Mark's Church*, p. 16; F. Stenton, *et al.*, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (London, 1965).

⁴³¹ T. Symons (ed and trans), *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement* (London, 1953); pp. 64-68.

The dead body is wound with a shroud, but that shroud does not rise readily with the man, because a shameful shroud does not befit him but rather the spiritual garments that God provides for him.⁴³²

Here the contrast is between the earthly shroud, soiled by contact with the corpse and the earth, and the divinely pure raiment to be worn in heaven. The Vercelli homilist's association of shrouds with low status and Ælfric's understanding of them as 'shameful' or 'ignominious' (*huxlican*) give them strong penitential associations.

Ælfric makes the observation just quoted in the context of a discussion of the Last Judgment and the nature of the resurrection body. Although bodies, with their garments, are to be transformed at Doomsday, he nonetheless depicts revived bodies as recognisable individuals, derived from the ones that went into the grave:

Each man yet shall have his own height in the size that he was before as a man, or that he should have had had he become fully-grown, those who departed in childhood or adolescence. Just as God shaped in soul and body, both male and female, and created them human...so he also at Doomsday raises them from the dead, both males and females, and they dwell ever so without any lust either good or evil, and no man after will ever take a wife, nor any woman take a husband, nor shall they beget children. Nor shall the holy ones in heaven have any blemish or ill-health, or be one-eyed, although he was before lame in his life, but his limbs shall be all sound to him, in shining brightness, and tangible in his spiritual body.⁴³³

⁴³² 'Man bewint þone deadan gewunelic mid reafe, ac ðæt reaf ne arist na ðe hraðor mid þam men, for ðan he ne behofað þas huxlican reafan, ac þære gastlican gyrlan ðe him God foresceawað.' Pope, *Ælfric, Homilies: A Supplementary Series*, Vol. I, XI, ll. 339-42. pp. 433-34.

⁴³³ 'Ælc man hæfð swaðeah his agene lenge, on ðære mycelneysse þe he man wæs ær, oððe he beon sceolde, gif he fulweoxe, se ðe on cildhade oððe samweaxen gewat. Swa swa God gesceop on sawle and on lichaman ge [w]æpmen ge wifmen, and geworhte hi to men... swa he eac on Domes-dæg of deaðe hi arærð, ge weras ge wif, and hi wuniað æfre swa, butan ælcere galnysse, ge gode ge yfele, and nan wer syððan ne gewifað næfre, ne wif ne ceorlað, ne hi cild ne gestrynað. Ne ða halgan ne beoð þe to heofonum sceolon on ænigre awyrdnysse, oððe wan hale, oððe anegede, þeah ðe he ær wære lama on his life, ac his lima beoð him ealle ansunde, on scinendre beorhtnysse, and grapiendlice on ðam gastlican lichaman.' Pope, *Ælfric, Homilies: A Supplementary Series*, Vol. I, XI, ll. 308-25, pp. 432-33.

It is worth noting his stress that, while there will be gender in heaven, there will most definitely not be any sexual activity. As touched on above, in his life of Æthelthryth, Ælfric recommended virginity even for the laity and there is a close connexion between virginity in life and failure to rot after death. The resurrection body, the idealised self, has no fertility, disease or deformity: in fact it is no longer part of any biological process. At the perfect death bed, such as that of the great Benedictine reformer, Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, who died in 984, the fallible body is transformed into the perfect body, as we saw in the previous chapter. Wulfstan presents Æthelwold's corpse in two lights: on the one hand it partakes of the asexual beauty of children; on the other it foreshadows the sexlessness of the resurrection body. The perfect corpse, therefore, is also one in which growth, change and decay are absent. In this case, one might also expect to see this sympathy for the body and desire to protect it, and to make it perfect, manifest in the forms of burial practice under discussion here. Precisely such desires may be reflected in the range of burial practices which further separate the corpse from the soil, such as the mortar-lined graves and the stone sarcophagi. These constructions fall into a category I would term 'clean burial' (*clæne legere*, in the words of the Northumbrian Priests' Law quoted above). This involves the creation of a drier, harder space around the body, separating it from the 'three bedfellows' of dust, mould and worms, particularly the last. Worms are perceived not only as intrinsically revolting but also as an embodiment of decay and a worrying intimation of the pains of hell, and the texts cited above attest to the horror of worms and their association with damnation.

I want to conclude this section by looking in some more detail at the revival of penitential traditions in the English church. Penance, particularly public penance, involves

a culture of paradox in that it requires ostentatious humility, and this paradox may provide a rationale for the great increase in the popularity of charcoal burial. By the time Æthelwold of Winchester died in 984, his church was experiencing the culmination of the period of the reform initiated by Alfred. For over a hundred years, Continental scholars working in England, such as Grimbald of Saint Bertin and Abbo of Fleury, had been serving as a channel for Carolingian Reform ideas about the church, of which the institution of penance was one of the most important.

The proper practice of penance requires bishops able to oversee public penance and monastic scriptoria able to produce sufficient copies of the penitentials. Both types of institution had been severely disrupted in England by the Viking invasions. Although there had been an ancient penitential tradition in England from the seventh century, the formal structures of penance had to be reintroduced as part of the Alfredian reconstruction. However, Frantzen argues that ‘Alfred’s laws show that penitential discipline had not altogether disappeared’ and stresses the dangers of arguing that, because there are no surviving penitentials from the earlier ninth century, there was no penitential practice of any kind.⁴³⁴ If there is a penitential element to charcoal burial, this would explain why it appears sporadically, at Hereford for example, in burials of the eighth century, but later becomes so widespread. In the tenth century, developed penitential practice was reintroduced from the Continent, where the reforms of Charlemagne had revived public penance from 813 onwards. By the late tenth century, confession and penance had once again become, ideally at least, universal practices; penance might be performed privately, on the instructions of one’s confessor, or publicly, under the supervision of a bishop. Whereas, as noted above, the earlier collections of homilies, Blickling and Vercelli, make

⁴³⁴ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, pp. 124-27.

no reference to public penance, by contrast Ælfric and Wulfstan both discuss it at length and by 1009 it is being used as a political tool: VII Æthelred prescribes three days of universal fasting, confession, psalmody and penance in response to invasion by one of the Viking 'great armies'.⁴³⁵

In step with this, the *ordo* for the dying and dead had become increasingly penance-oriented. The reforming monk Benedict of Aniane regularised Carolingian commemorative practice in 816 and 817, decreeing that all monastic houses should sing the seven Penitential Psalms for the dead. He also, as Paxton puts it, 'brought a new element of personal guilt and responsibility into the penitential quality of the prayers for the dead'.⁴³⁶ In the Saint-Denis sacramentary of the late 860s, the seven Penitential Psalms are also to be sung around the bed of a dying monk or nun. It is this tradition that informs Chapter XII of the *Regularis Concordia*, which prescribes that, when a monk feels himself to be in his last illness, the entire community is to gather around him singing the Penitential Psalms, the litanies and the prayers. Should the brother die, the singing of these psalms is to accompany him to the grave and, still singing, the monks are to return to the church and complete the psalms prostrate before the altar. For the next seven days, one of the Penitential Psalms is to be sung after each of the regular church offices. Although there is no such detailed description of lay practice, it is clear from the four surviving sets of guild statutes that there was a comparable ideal of gathering at the bed of the dying person, escorting him to the grave, and purchasing Masses and psalms for the dead man's soul.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Whitelock, *EHD*, pp. 409-11.

⁴³⁶ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, p. 140.

⁴³⁷ Exeter Guild Statutes of c. 900-950 in Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, *Councils and Synods*, p. 59.

In Psalm 101:4 (one of the seven Penitential Psalms), there is the verse *Quia defecerunt sicut fumus dies mei, et ossa mea sicut cremium aruerunt* (For my days consume away like smoke and my bones are burned as a firebrand). This text might have provided the basis for the idea that burnt oak brands — the usual wood used in charcoal burial, and the wood of the Cross as Kyølbye-Biddle points out — were an appropriate context for a burial.⁴³⁸ Ashes were also an ancient symbol of the penitent, and in his homily for Ash Wednesday, Ælfric stresses the contrast between the ‘clean ash’ (*clæne axan* 1.17) on the heads of the penitent and the dust to which they will moulder (*manna lichaman þe formolsniað to duste* 1.28), beseeching his congregation that, even if they can’t manage sackcloth (33 ff), they go to church to be ashed: ‘now let us do this, at least, at the beginning of our Lent, that we strew ashes on our heads to signify that we ought to repent of our sins’.⁴³⁹ This is followed by the tale of a foolish (*un-gerad*) man who refused to be ashed and announced his intention of having sex with his wife instead (*sæde þæt he wolde his wifes brucan*). Unsurprisingly, given the context, he was killed shortly afterwards, when he was attacked by a pack of wild dogs and, in the process of defending himself, ran himself through with his own spear. Death by one’s hand in this manner has associations reminiscent of the death of Herod and clearly is not intended to be seen as accidental, but rather as a wilful bringing down of fate: ‘He was buried then, and a great burden of earth lay upon him within seven days of him refusing that small amount of ash’.⁴⁴⁰ Thus ashes, which ‘signify that we ought to repent of our sins’ are again associated with burial: ashes may not be quite the same as charcoal, but they are not very different from it. Ash is an

⁴³⁸ Kyølbye-Biddle in *Death in Towns*, p. 231.

⁴³⁹ ‘Nu do we þis lytle on ures lenctenes anginne þæt we streowiað axan uppan ure heafda to geswutulunge þæt we sculon ure synna behreowsian.’ Skeat, *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, Vol. I, XII, ll. 37-39.

⁴⁴⁰ ‘He wearð ða bebyrged and him læg onuppan fela byrðena eorðan binnan seofon nihton þæs ðe he forsoc þa feawa axan.’ Skeat, *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, Vol. I, XII, ll. 56-58.

outward symbol of inner compunction and penitence, the cleansing of the soul. Ash was also involved in the ceremonies for the dedication of churches, both scattered on the floor and mixed with holy water, salt and wine, for the purpose of aspersion.⁴⁴¹ There is thus a network of ideas associated with ash which would make it a peculiarly appropriate medium for burial.

By this period, the mechanics of penance and confession were complex and extensive, and it was never too late for the penitent to turn to God, even at the moment of death. The ideal, for professional religious and layman alike, was the creation of a kind of spiritual hammock of confession, penitence, Mass, psalmody and prayer, constructed by one's community to carry the soul to heaven, an analogue to the bier which carried one to the grave. In this period, the concept of Purgatory had not yet been defined or institutionalised but there was nonetheless a very strong desire to help the souls of the dead.⁴⁴² By covering the body or the coffin with charcoal, symbol of penance, the mourners were hoping to extend the process of contrition into the grave.

To conclude, there are many different social, cultural and religious elements which make up the reasoning behind late Saxon mortuary behaviour. One underlying factor which could profitably be further explored is the context of increased stability and wealth in the period from the reign of Edward the Elder to that of Edward the Martyr, which might have encouraged more display in burial, the use of stone or iron-bound coffins for example. This is a factor apparently at odds with many of the arguments I have made for burial as a drama of penance and humility. But burial is often the locus of expression of conflicting ambitions. To have the kind of ostentatiously *humble* burial I have been discussing might

⁴⁴¹ D. Parsons, 'Liturgical and Social Aspects' in Boddington, *Raunds Furnells*, pp. 58-66, 62.

⁴⁴² Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, p. 127.

itself be a sign of status: only the wealthy or well-connected would have access to the foreign visitors, the books and the travel which exposed them to the latest Continental developments in religious thought.

The most important idea, though, is this ubiquitous sense of the body, both alive and dead, as something treacherous. At any stage in life, one's appetites, particularly sexual appetite, might betray one into damnation. Despite the efficacy of deathbed penance, body and soul still faced the unknown. The dead and decaying body was something out of control, a reminder of sin and temptation, that needed to be both controlled and protected. The range of different modes of burial represents a variety of experiments designed to guarantee salvation, in the absence of hard and fast guidelines from the Church itself. In charcoal burial, we see a desire for a display of humility, and a wish on the part of the survivors to extend the penitential process by proxy, even after death. In the elaborate coffins and constructed graves, there is a desire both to control the corpse and keep it in its proper place, and to protect it from the worst ravages of the worms.

CHAPTER 4

EDWARD THE CONFESSOR, A CASE STUDY

i. The Sources

The previous three chapters have attempted both to describe and to analyse the ways by which Anglo-Saxons met the challenges of mortality, looking at the imaginative rationales they employed and constructed, the social strategies they deployed, and the mortuary behaviour they practised, all in the context of anthropological insights into ways in which human society and culture may work. In this chapter, the discoveries outlined in the work so far are applied to the accounts of a single man's experiences of dying and death. Edward the Confessor is a particularly appropriate subject as his death produced a range of reactions differing in language, medium and purpose.

There are three very different main sources for the death of Edward the Confessor: the *Vita Eadwardi* (already encountered twice in these pages) in Latin verse and prose; the Bayeux tapestry, a series of embroidered images with a small amount of Latin text;⁴⁴³ and the entries in Old English verse and prose, surviving in four manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.⁴⁴⁴ All the sources agree on the importance of the events around Edward's dying and death; but each provides a different perspective. In this section, the

⁴⁴³ Stenton, *The Bayeux Tapestry*.

⁴⁴⁴ C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles in Parallel* (Oxford, 1892); B. Dickins, *The Genealogical Preface to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Four texts edited to supplement Earle-Plummer)*, Occasional Papers: No. 11 (Cambridge, 1952); G. N. Garmonsway, (trans), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1953).

background to each source will be dealt with in turn, establishing, as far as possible, their origin, their agenda and their intended audience; in the next section I shall consider the broad issues raised by the sources; finally I shall interrogate each source in turn for what it can tell us about Edward's dying and death.

The *Vita Eadwardi regis qui requiescit apud Westmonasterium* is the earliest life of Edward, written in Latin verse and prose and attributed to a monk of St Bertin in Flanders.⁴⁴⁵ It survives in a single manuscript, BL Harley MS 526, written c.1100. The *Vita Eadwardi* is a complex text and its purpose has been debated, with the discussion about purpose depending very much on the proposed date of the text. In the 1920s Bloch argued that it was produced at Wilton, some time in the first two decades of the twelfth century, with the aim of appearing to be a mid-eleventh-century document in order to foster a cult of Edward's widow Edith Godwin's daughter,⁴⁴⁶ but his arguments have been refuted, particularly by Heningham and Barlow. Heningham suggests that the text was produced shortly after Edward's death in order to celebrate Edward and Edith, and Edith's family,⁴⁴⁷ and in a later article she proposes 1068-70 as a date for the composition of the work, which she perceives as a unified whole with a commemorative function.⁴⁴⁸ Barlow accepts the topicality of the *Vita Eadwardi*,⁴⁴⁹ but divides the work into two halves, Book I and Book II, written either side of the fateful events of the autumn of 1066. He suggests that the purpose of the former is to celebrate the House of Godwin, a purpose made

⁴⁴⁵ R. W. Southern, 'The first life of Edward the Confessor' in *English Historical Review*, lviii (1943), pp. 385-400; Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, pp. xlv-lix.

⁴⁴⁶ M Bloch, 'La Vie de S. Édouard le Confesseur par Osbert de Clare' in *Analecta Bollandiana*, xli (1923), pp. 5-131.

⁴⁴⁷ E. K. Heningham, 'The Genuineness of the *Vita Æduuardi Regis*' in *Speculum*, xxi (1945), pp. 419-56.

⁴⁴⁸ E. K. Heningham, 'The literary unity, the date, and the purpose of The Lady Edith's Book: "The Life of King Edward who rests in Westminster"' in *Albion*, vii (1975), pp. 24-40.

⁴⁴⁹ Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, pp. xviii-xxxiii.

meaningless by the battles of Stamford Bridge and Hastings in which Edith's brothers died. Book II thus represents a salvage attempt, with the writer hoping to please Edith by celebrating Edward as a saint after his death in January 1066.⁴⁵⁰ Stafford also accepts the topicality of the work, although she seems to have changed her mind about its date, describing the anonymous author in 1983 as 'overtaken by events',⁴⁵¹ but by 1997 preferring to see the whole text written together in the aftermath of the Conquest rather than interrupted by it and arguing that it demonstrates 'an essential unity'.⁴⁵² The problem with this latter interpretation is that it requires Edward to be represented as a saint in both parts of the work; the argument that this is not the case is fully explored in the relevant section of the present discussion. Barlow's argument about the date is accepted by Gransden and John,⁴⁵³ and his interpretation will also be followed here. In this reading, the *Vita Eadwardi* consists of two separate lives of Edward, the one almost entirely composed during his lifetime and presenting him as a peripheral figure compared to Godwin and his sons and daughter, the other written shortly after Edward's death and moving him to the centre, concentrating on his spiritual biography, with his dying and death as the focus of interest.

The Bayeux tapestry also presents many problems of classification and interpretation. Though long associated with the town of Bayeux where it is kept today, it was probably made not in Normandy but in England; the argument is based on several

⁴⁵⁰ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, Appendix A, pp. 291-300.

⁴⁵¹ P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1983), p. 5.

⁴⁵² P. Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 40-48.

⁴⁵³ A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550 to c.1307* (London, 1974), pp. 60; E. John, 'The Return of the Vikings' in J. Campbell *et al.*, *The Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford, 1982), p. 221.

grounds including those of spelling and letter forms.⁴⁵⁴ It is likely to have been designed in a Canterbury monastery,⁴⁵⁵ and Francis Wormald has argued convincingly for St Augustine's on the basis of parallels in contemporary manuscript illuminations.⁴⁵⁶ The debate over its origins continues, however, with Grape recently arguing for a Norman provenance.⁴⁵⁷ Gameson counters Grape's arguments point by point, and stresses the importance of seeing the tapestry as 'reflect[ing] the interpenetration of Anglo-Saxon and Norman culture'. Gameson agrees with most other commentators, including Grape, on the importance of the role of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, Earl of Kent and half-brother of William the Conqueror, as its probable patron.⁴⁵⁸ The date of the tapestry therefore is presumably some time between the battle of Hastings in 1066 and Odo's fall from grace and imprisonment by William in 1082.⁴⁵⁹

Although very little survives in the way of early medieval needlework, there is evidence to suggest that it could be a sumptuous and high status art.⁴⁶⁰ The surviving embroidered vestments from St Cuthbert's coffin and the fragment preserved in Maaseyck in Belgium show how rich ecclesiastical textiles could be.⁴⁶¹ Narrative accounts of the actions of the great may often have been commissioned: we have already seen that, at the end of the tenth century, Ealdorman Byrhtnoth's widow Ælflæd gave Ely a tapestry in

⁴⁵⁴ R. Lepelley, 'Contribution à l'étude des inscriptions de la Tapisserie de Bayeux' in *Annales de Normandie* xiv, 1964, pp. 313-41.

⁴⁵⁵ N. P. Brooks and H.E. Walker, 'The Authority and Interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry' in *Anglo-Norman Studies I: Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge, 1978), pp. 1-34.

⁴⁵⁶ F. Wormald in Stenton, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 32

⁴⁵⁷ W. Grape, *The Bayeux tapestry: monument to a Norman triumph* (Munich, 1994).

⁴⁵⁸ R. Gameson, 'The Origin, Art and Message of the Bayeux Tapestry' in *The Study of the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed R. Gameson (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 157-211.

⁴⁵⁹ D. Bates, 'The Character and Career of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux' in *Speculum* 50 (1975), pp. 1-20.

⁴⁶⁰ C. R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective* (Manchester, 1982), pp. 129-87.

⁴⁶¹ Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, pp. 185-86.

memory of her husband, depicting his deeds.⁴⁶² Despite the everyday materials of which it is made, the status of the Bayeux tapestry has never really been in dispute, although one might question whether a great magnate such as Odo would in fact have sponsored the production of such an artwork, given that contemporary tastes identified costly materials with beauty: Dodwell quotes Goscelin (one of the suggested authors of the *Vita Eadwardi*) remarking that the embroidery at the convent at Wilton ‘delighted by its richness’.⁴⁶³ It is also still a matter of debate where it was displayed, how often and on what occasions, and who made up its original audience. By 1476, it was being displayed every June in the nave of Bayeux Cathedral,⁴⁶⁴ but many commentators have argued that a secular hall, either in England or in Normandy, was a more probable original context for its display, whether on grounds of its occasionally risqué content,⁴⁶⁵ or its size and shape, and the political nature of its subject matter.⁴⁶⁶ Brilliant has attempted to reconstruct the original disposition of the tapestry in a baronial hall, relative to the entrances, and linking feasting scenes to the position of the high table.⁴⁶⁷ Gameson counters his arguments by pointing out that some scenes could have had vastly increased significance in a cathedral setting, if, for example, ‘the oath swearing scene was positioned near to an altar or reliquary’.⁴⁶⁸ No overall consensus has been reached, either on the tapestry’s original context or on its original audience.

⁴⁶² Blake *Liber Eliensis*, II, 63, p. 136.

⁴⁶³ Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, p. 25, n.11.

⁴⁶⁴ Gameson, ‘Origin, Art and Message’, p. 174.

⁴⁶⁵ C. R. Dodwell, ‘The Bayeux Tapestry and the French Secular Epic’ in *Burlington Magazine* 108 (1966), pp. 549-60.

⁴⁶⁶ D. Bernstein, *The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry* (London 1986), pp. 104-107.

⁴⁶⁷ R. Brilliant, ‘The Bayeux Tapestry: A Stripped Narrative for their Eyes and Ears’ in Gameson, pp. 111-38.

⁴⁶⁸ Gameson, ‘Origin, Art and Message’ in Gameson, p. 175.

Debate also continues over whether the tapestry depicts an English or a Norman version of events, although it is generally assumed that the intention of the narrative is political and ethnically-oriented. Cowdrey points out that there may have been more than one Norman version of the story of the Conquest, and that the tapestry's high-lighting of the role of Odo and its insistence on Harold's regal status may not have been very gratifying to William.⁴⁶⁹ Cowdrey also argues that, while the tapestry as a whole shows Harold in a good light, not as the unmitigated usurper one might expect from a story-teller hoping to please a Norman patron, there is a possibility that the marginal figures undercut this presentation and suggest 'that he is not the model knight that he seems to be'.⁴⁷⁰ Conversely, while Bernstein also sees the tapestry as intentionally full of 'ambiguity and insinuation', in his interpretation it is telling a purportedly pro-Norman tale while constructing scenes that are multivalent and open to subversive readings by an Anglo-Saxon audience, with the border figures providing a continuous encoded commentary.⁴⁷¹ Hicks refutes this, arguing that the animal ornament in the borders is purely decorative and cannot be construed as part of the narrative.⁴⁷² Gameson contrasts the narrative in the tapestry to the unabashedly sycophantic Norman texts, *Carmen de Hastingæ Proelio* and William of Poitiers' *Gesta Guillelmi* and concludes that while on the whole the tapestry favours the Norman perspective it is remarkably even-handed.⁴⁷³

The relationship of the tapestry to contemporary written sources has also generated much critical discussion. Brooks and Walker emphasise its uniqueness and its

⁴⁶⁹ H. Cowdrey, 'Towards an Interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry' in Gameson, pp. 93-110, 97.

⁴⁷⁰ Cowdrey in Gameson, pp. 98-99.

⁴⁷¹ Bernstein, *Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry*, pp. 162-64.

⁴⁷² C. Hicks, 'The Borders of the Bayeux Tapestry' in *England in the Eleventh Century* ed. C. Hicks (Stamford, 1992), pp. 251-66.

⁴⁷³ Gameson, 'Origin, Art and Message' in Gameson, pp. 202ff.

independence from contemporary documentary sources, ascribing its similarities to the accounts of William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers to their all deriving from a common version of events acceptable to the Norman elite.⁴⁷⁴ No single documentary source for the tapestry survives, but the similarity between the description of Edward's death-bed in the *Vita Eadwardi* and the depiction of the scene in the tapestry suggests there is a connexion between them.⁴⁷⁵ If Barlow's interpretation of the date of the *Vita Eadwardi*, summarised above, is correct, then the *Vita Eadwardi* almost certainly predates the tapestry.

The complexity of the tapestry's imagery is reflected in the lack of critical consensus about its meaning, a debate which extends to the scene under consideration in this discussion, Edward's funeral and death-bed (Plates 1 and 2). Binski interprets the death-bed scene as representing Edward's bequest of the kingdom to Harold,⁴⁷⁶ as do Brooks and Walker, who stress the parallels between the tapestry and the *Vita Eadwardi*, and the links between the death-bed scene and the depiction of Harold enthroned. Cowdrey also uses the *Vita Eadwardi* to identify the depicted figures but, analysing the hand gestures, he suggests that Edward is confirming his grant to William and trusting Harold to work towards this end, while Harold and Archbishop Stigand are conspiring the usurpation.⁴⁷⁷ Barlow admits the scene and its caption are ambiguous but on balance comes to the same conclusion as Cowdrey.⁴⁷⁸ Gameson merely acknowledges that, by placing the dying Edward and the enthroned Harold next to each other, the designer is stressing their

⁴⁷⁴ Brooks and Walker in Gameson, p. 67.

⁴⁷⁵ Brooks and Walker in Gameson, p. 73.

⁴⁷⁶ Binski, *Medieval Death*, pp. 34-5.

⁴⁷⁷ Cowdrey in Gameson, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁷⁸ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. 251.

causal connexion.⁴⁷⁹ Thus, the interpretation of the events at Edward's death bed is crucial for an understanding of the tapestry's narrative as a whole: an elucidation of the ideas of dying and death underpinning the composition of the scenes may therefore clarify the entire work.⁴⁸⁰

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, the third source, are an eternally problematic group of texts, needing to be understood not as a monolithic whole but rather as a kaleidoscope of continually shifting voices, modes and genres. Written at different times and places, under different circumstances, and mostly surviving in later compilations and copies, the separate strands composing them are now very hard to unpick and identify, and the practice of editing and referring to them as a single entity needs continually to be called into question. Death and burial are frequent subjects of interest from the earliest entries in the Chronicle,⁴⁸¹ although, as Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe points out, the description of these events is highly conventional and the dead people so described are usually inert: 'bodies appear modestly and unremarkably in the *Chronicle*, for almost always they are quite dead'.⁴⁸² The death of Edward the Confessor is treated in all the four manuscripts that cover 1066, but this discussion will concentrate on the C (British Library Cotton Tiberius B i) and D (British Library Cotton Tiberius B iv) versions, which emphasise Edward's death with a commemorative poem.⁴⁸³ C and D appear to have relied on a common source for some of their information, hence the coincidence of the poem in the entry for 1065 (*recte* 1066) in versions of the Chronicle that otherwise differ significantly. However, the

⁴⁷⁹ Gameson in Gameson, p. 195.

⁴⁸⁰ V. Thompson, 'Kingship-in-Death in the Bayeux Tapestry', *Reading Medieval Studies* XXV (1999), pp. 107-21.

⁴⁸¹ J. Campbell, 'The Church in Anglo-Saxon Towns' in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 139-54, 141.

⁴⁸² O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Body and Law', p. 211.

⁴⁸³ G. P. Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, Volume 6, MS D* (Cambridge, 1996).

complexities of the interrelationships of the Chronicle manuscripts with sources no longer extant have been extensively and authoritatively dealt with elsewhere, and need not be explored in detail here.

Central to any analysis of the poem on Edward's death in the Chronicle are questions about where the C and D Chroniclers got their material from, what their purpose was in including it, and who they thought might read it. The Chronicle in its various versions relies on many different kinds of sources, from monastic annals to hypothesised pre-Alfredian 'sagas'.⁴⁸⁴ From 937 onwards there are several entries containing verse, and Gransden suggests that these 'archaic' poems 'must have appealed to the audience of the Chronicle' without going into the question of who that audience might have been.⁴⁸⁵ However, she does make the point that the chronicler of Æthelred's reign identifies himself with the ruled rather than with the rulers, which implies that, though the annals up to the early tenth century were rewritten to aggrandise the house of Wessex, later entries were not so closely supervised; the process of the compilation of the Chronicle and the degree of court involvement is still a hotly debated topic.⁴⁸⁶ Douglas and Greenaway suggest similar independence of mind on the part of the writer or writers of the Abingdon-associated C version, which is critical of Earl Godwin although the earl himself was well-disposed towards Abingdon.⁴⁸⁷ John, discussing the same text, points out that, although the annal appears to express individual opinion, 'annals are not normally private or personal things'.⁴⁸⁸ He takes it for granted that the author of these annals was a monk and that he

⁴⁸⁴ C. L. Wrenn, 'A Saga of the Anglo-Saxons' in *History*, New Series XXV(1940-1941), pp. 208-15.

⁴⁸⁵ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 40.

⁴⁸⁶ A. Smyth, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Questioning Old English History and Historians' in *The Historian*, Spring 1996, pp. 2-7.

⁴⁸⁷ D. C. Douglas and G.W.Greenaway, *English Historical Documents 1042-1189* (London, 1953), p. 107.

⁴⁸⁸ John, *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 172.

was probably expressing the attitude of the authorities at Abingdon, and comments that '[t]he author is using the abbey's time and materials to write his book, and his fellow monks would normally read it or at least know what was in it.'. However, Campbell suggests that the 'creative forces' behind the chronicles were court-centred. They would have provided the monasteries from time to time with an official version of events to be duly incorporated into the narrative of national history, and he argues that the majority of the poems should be read in this light.⁴⁸⁹ Dumville highlights the Chronicle's stress on 'military struggles and their political repercussions' instead of the Vikings' effect on the lives of churches and monasteries;⁴⁹⁰ again, this may suggest a secular origin for these narratives.

Even when potentially court-derived materials, like the poems on battles and the deaths of princes, were included, they may change their meaning as they change their context. A monastic chronicler and a court poet might have considered a wholly different range of virtues to be laudable in a king. We might therefore see Edward presented differently in the prose and verse descriptions. Binns, developing an idea from Hunter Blair, suggests there was a lost York Chronicle which both drew on and influenced contemporary Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian court poetry.⁴⁹¹ Was there a similar culture active at the English court which produced texts such as *Brunanburh* (A, B, C, D, *s.a.*937) or the *Redemption of the Five Boroughs* (A, B, C, D, *s.a.*942)? Certainly, there

⁴⁸⁹ A. Campbell, *The Battle of Brunanburh* (London, 1938), pp. 35-6.

⁴⁹⁰ D. Dumville, 'Ecclesiastical Lands and the Defence of Wessex in the First Viking-Age' in *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Ecclesiastical and Cultural Revival* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 29-54, 31.

⁴⁹¹ A. L. Binns, *The Viking Century in East Yorkshire* (East Yorkshire Local History Society 1963), pp. 46-52; P. Hunter Blair, 'Symeon's History of the Kings' in *Archaeologia Aeliana* XVI (1939), pp. 87-100; Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. xiv.

was a thriving tradition of skaldic verse at the courts of Cnut,⁴⁹² both in Scandinavia and possibly also in England.⁴⁹³ Most of the poetic entries in the Chronicle, with the notable exception of *Brunanburh*, have been studied as history rather than as poetry,⁴⁹⁴ but Campbell draws attention to the ‘very creditable’ technical qualities of the poem on the death of Edward the Confessor, and argues that traditional poetry must have continued to have had a powerful appeal, even if only to a limited audience.⁴⁹⁵

Questions of purpose and audience also need to be addressed. Did the Chronicler transmit the poem on Edward’s death just as he found it? Its survival in two manuscript traditions suggests that he did. Did he perceive a difference in the significance of material recorded in verse as opposed to prose? As well as the poems, there are also entries written in a heightened prose, such as that on the death of William the Conqueror (E, *s.a.* 1086 *recte* 1087). Whitelock compares the entries in D for 959 and part of 975 to the alliterative style of the homilies of Archbishop Wulfstan of York as well as, in the case of the former example, to Ælfric’s translation of the Book of Judges.⁴⁹⁶ Does this imply that the Chronicle was written to be read aloud, and if so under what circumstances? It may be that these are questions which cannot be answered, but in order to understand the representation of the death of Edward in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, they must be asked.

ii. Issues Raised By The Sources

⁴⁹² Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, pp. 22-4.

⁴⁹³ R. Frank, ‘King Cnut in the verse of his skalds’ in A.R.Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, (London, 1994), pp. 106-124.

⁴⁹⁴ A. Mawer, ‘The Redemption of the Five Boroughs’, *English Historical Review* XXXVIII, 1923, pp. 551-57.

⁴⁹⁵ Campbell, *Brunanburh*, p. 37.

⁴⁹⁶ Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 74 n.10 and p. 78 n.1.

Although cultures respond differently to the common challenges imposed by death, anthropological theorists such as Hertz and Van Gennep have proposed ways of understanding these responses that may fruitfully be applied to many different societies. In this final chapter, some of those theories are applied to the three main sources for the dying and death of Edward the Confessor. In some ways, therefore, Edward serves here as a microcosm for his society. However, he also serves as a representative of his class, the small group of elite males with Church connexions who both generated and are themselves the subjects of the vast majority of the surviving documentary evidence from Anglo-Saxon England. In addition, of course, Edward was an individual and the narratives of his dying and death refer to a unique event. Furthermore, Edward was doubly unique in that, as king, he was the sole inhabitant of the apex of his pyramidal society. The deaths of kings create particular challenges for the societies they lead, challenges which help to construct the narratives of those deaths. The accounts of Edward's dying and death are further complicated by his role as a candidate for canonisation. Thus, tensions exist between the socially imposed *personae* of king or saint and the individual. This analysis will attempt to unfold those tensions and reveal Edward at the moment of his death, both as an individual and as an exponent of his culture.

The deaths of kings are a special category in the catalogue of mortality, because the king represents his people and his death can be perceived as affecting the entire kingdom and even the fabric of the universe.⁴⁹⁷ The king's death and the associated funeral rites, therefore, are public events and represented as such in both the *Vita Eadwardi* and the Bayeux tapestry, where the emphasis is on the ritual display of Edward's funeral rather than on the private liturgical activity at his death-bed. If a major function of ritual, and mortuary

⁴⁹⁷ Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 122.

ritual in particular, is to strengthen social bonds and assert communal identity in the face of death,⁴⁹⁸ we would expect this to be exaggerated in the case of a royal death, where the entire nation is implicitly caught up in participation.

The narratives of Edward's death are made more complex still by his potential sainthood. He is unambiguously referred to as a saint by the author of the *Vita Eadwardi*, and certainly considered exceptionally virtuous by the Chronicle writer, although he was not officially canonised until 1161.⁴⁹⁹ Michael Lapidge, discussing the canonisation of St Æthelwold, emphasizes the importance of the role of the Church hierarchy in the process; he argues that, in tenth-century England, becoming a saint was a question of having the equivalent of a good public relations firm, requiring 'no more than a well-publicised translation and a well-circulated *vita*'.⁵⁰⁰ Barlow suggests that at the time of Edward's death there was an initial court-based impulse towards canonisation which never really got off the ground.⁵⁰¹ The question of the reason for the lapse of almost a century is one that has been fully explored elsewhere, particularly by Barlow in the passages referred to above; more relevant to this discussion is the way in which the nascent hagiographical elements, particularly in the *Vita Eadwardi* and to a lesser degree in the Chronicle, complicate the narrative of the king's death. In theory, the roles of king and putative saint should be compatible, one succeeding the other, in that one can only rule a country while alive and only become a saint after death. In practice, in Edward's case at least, the essential incompatibility of these two models of masculine perfection is manifested in death: the act of dying is the defining success in the life of a saint but the final failure in the life of a king

⁴⁹⁸ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, pp. 385-92.

⁴⁹⁹ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, pp. 256-85.

⁵⁰⁰ M. Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher' in B. Yorke (ed.), *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, (Woodbridge, 1988), p. 113.

⁵⁰¹ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, pp. 256-57.

who thereby abandons his kingdom. An excess of piety can also be seen as a failure in a living king; Van Caenegem cites Robert the Pious and Edward the Confessor as examples.⁵⁰²

The example of Edward as both king and saint is not unprecedented. Among the long litany of Anglo-Saxon royal saints, his paternal uncle, Edward King and Martyr, stands out as the most nearly contemporary example.⁵⁰³ However, telling the story of Edward the Confessor's death presented his chroniclers with some peculiar challenges. Few of the earlier royal saints had actually been ruling kings,⁵⁰⁴ and those who had been almost invariably became martyrs, while others were kings who had exchanged their crown for a tonsure, thus generating less tension between their roles. The seventh-century king Oswald was one of the few exceptions to this; when Bede came to write Oswald's life into the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, he found it a challenging task convincingly to combine the narratives of warrior-king and saint.⁵⁰⁵ Similar challenges are encountered and explored in the accounts of Edward's dying and death in the Chronicle and the *Vita Eadwardi*.

This contradiction between terrestrial failure and celestial success is part of the common Christian experience of death, but it is exaggerated to an extreme in Edward's case. His death is both as bad as it can be and as good as it can be. On him rests the responsibility for the well-being of the whole nation, so the potential disasters resulting from his death are much greater than those resulting from the death of a commoner. Conversely, in both the Chronicle and the *Vita Eadwardi*, there is no doubt about the

⁵⁰² R. Van Caenegem, 'Government, Law and Society' in J.H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350-c.1450*, (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 187-88.

⁵⁰³ S. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 1-4.

⁵⁰⁴ D. Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), p. 141.

⁵⁰⁵ C. Stancliffe, 'Most Holy and Victorious King' in C. Stancliffe and E. Cambridge (eds.), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to English Saint* (Stamford, 1988), pp. 33-83.

immediate destination of his soul: it goes straight to heaven, with the texts admitting no doubt or delay, and the second part of the latter text unambiguously attempts to convince its audience of Edward's sanctity. Such contradictions and dualities are fundamental to the study of death, as discussed in the general introduction to this thesis; nonetheless Edward is presented as a surprisingly liminal figure, given his central role in his society. He shifts back and forth across the boundaries between several different roles: those of exceptional saint and ordinary sinner, of living man and dead one, of someone who controls and someone who is controlled by death and, above all, of success and failure.

iii. Edward's Dying and Death in the *Vita Eadwardi*

The manuscript of the *Vita Eadwardi* (hereafter *VE*) is entitled *Vita Eadwardi regis qui requiescit apud Westmonasterium*, but the manuscript dates from c.1100 and there is no indication that this was the title given by its anonymous author, or that he would have recognised his work, thus designated. His initial intention was not solely to honour King Edward, but rather, by writing in praise of Edward, Godwin and Godwin's sons, implicitly to honour Edith, Edward's wife and Godwin's daughter, the woman holding this complex web of relationships together. Edward and Edith are described in the present tense in the Prologue to Book I, which strongly suggests that the work was at least started before the king's death in January 1066; he is also depicted as 'flourishing', suggesting the work was begun before his illness struck in the autumn of 1065.⁵⁰⁶ Barlow points out the similarities between Book I and the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, produced for Edith's mother-in-law,⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁶ '...floreat ut canis niueo splendore uenustis', Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book I, Prologue, p. 6.

⁵⁰⁷ A. Campbell, (ed.) *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, (reprinted Cambridge 1998), with a supplementary introduction by S. Keynes.

suggesting that a better description of the *VE* as originally conceived might be the ‘Encomium Edithae reginae’.⁵⁰⁸ It must be kept in mind that the portrait of Edward in the *VE* was written to serve the purposes of Edith as both wife and widow. Book II is imperfect, and Barlow attempts a reconstruction by referring to later eleventh and twelfth century writers’ accounts of Edward’s miracles.⁵⁰⁹

In order to understand the death of King Edward, it is first necessary to look more closely at the idea of the death of the king. As established in the general introduction, it is a familiar idea in anthropology that after a death, the family, the kin, sometimes the whole community, needs to re-establish the links between the living, using ritual to weave life’s fabric back into a recognisable shape. A monarch, *in loco parentis* to the whole nation, needs an appropriately exaggerated ritual; Huntington and Metcalf go further and suggest that ‘the king-as-hero encounters a death that is the archetype of the end of Everyman’,⁵¹⁰ doing battle on his subjects’ behalf right up to the end. They also stress the particular challenges that arise from the king’s problematic corpse: if the monarch embodies political stability, his bodily decay can represent and even engender political disorder.⁵¹¹

How do these broader issues translate into the context of the culture under discussion here? Reference has already been made to the number of saints produced by the Anglo-Saxon royal houses, and it has been argued that there was a tradition of sacral kingship reaching back before the Conversion. Well into the Christian period, genealogies trace royal descent from Woden, a figure associated in later sources with madness, poetry,

⁵⁰⁸ Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, p. xxii.

⁵⁰⁹ Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, pp. xxxvii-xli.

⁵¹⁰ Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 122.

⁵¹¹ Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 154.

battle and death.⁵¹² The concept of royal sanctity was encouraged within Christianity in the states of Western Europe at this period and was strengthened by the developing theology of kingship.⁵¹³ During the eighth century, kingship had become a sacrament throughout Christian Europe, and the Legatine Councils of 786 had declared it anathema to kill a king, identifying him as ruling by God's will.⁵¹⁴ Hunter Blair draws attention to the Chronicle's descriptions of royal succession and its use of the phrases *feng to rice* (took the kingdom) and *to cyninge gehalgod* (was consecrated king), the latter first appearing *sub anno* 787, and goes on to trace the development of the coronation ritual towards a concept of Christ-identified kingship.⁵¹⁵ Do these concepts of the specialness of the king and the traumatic impact of his death inform the narrative of Book I of the *VE*?

We are fortunate in having more than one narrative dealing with the Christian life and death of an English king in the mid-eleventh century. In the following section a comparison is made between the presentation of Cnut in the *Encomium Emmae* and Edward in the *VE* in an attempt to establish the ideals informing their portraits. The similarities between the *Encomium Emmae* and the first part of the *VE* extend beyond the circumstances of their commission. Both praise a woman by celebrating the men with whom she was associated; the *Encomium Emmae* concentrates on King Cnut, the *VE*, while most interested in Godwin and his sons, has a lot to say about King Edward. The whole of the *VE* has been described as 'a piece of hagiography',⁵¹⁶ but this is really only true of the depiction of Edward in Book II. The representation of the king in Book I makes more sense

⁵¹² W. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Manchester, 1970), 28-33.

⁵¹³ J. Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World' in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 52-87.

⁵¹⁴ C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850* (London, 1995), p. 171.

⁵¹⁵ Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 204-208.

⁵¹⁶ Stenton in Stenton, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 11.

when read in the light of Anglo-Saxon theories of Christ-identified kingship, derived ultimately from the thought of late Carolingian ideologues, but developed in England particularly by Ælfric.⁵¹⁷ By comparing the passages on Cnut in the *Encomium Emmae* and Edward in Book I of the *VE*, in particular the sections dealing with their piety and death, the less-than-hagiographical nature of Book I can be demonstrated. This can most easily be done in the form of a series of tables, using Campbell and Barlow's translations:

⁵¹⁷ John in Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 205-6.

	<i>Encomium Emmae</i>	<i>Vita Eadwardi</i> , Book I
Personal Piety	<p>[Cnut] indeed became a friend and intimate of churchmen, to such a degree that he seemed to bishops to be a brother bishop for his maintenance of perfect religion, to monks also not a secular but a monk for the temperance of his life of most humble devotion.</p> <p>(Book II, 19; p.35)</p>	<p>Otherwise [Edward], of his free will devoted to God, lived in the squalor of the world like an angel, and 'at the accepted time' he zealously showed how assiduous he was in practising the Christian religion... He used to stand with lamb-like meekness and tranquil mind at the holy offices of the divine mysteries and masses, a worshipper of Christ manifest to all the faithful... (Book I, 6; p.63)</p>

	<i>Encomium Emmae</i>	<i>Vita Eadwardi</i> , Book I
Building Churches	<p>[Cnut] built and dignified churches, he loaded priests and the clergy with dignities...</p> <p>Consequently what church does not still rejoice in his gifts? But to say nothing of what he did for those in his own kingdom, Italy blesses his soul every day, Gaul begs that it may enjoy benefits, and Flanders, above all, prays that it may rejoice in heaven with Christ. (Book II, 19-20; p.37)</p>	<p>The king, therefore, being devoted to God, gave his attention to [St Peter's, Westminster]... And especially because of his love of the Prince of the Apostles, whom he worshipped with uncommon and special love, he decided to have his burial place there. Accordingly he ordered that out of the tithes of all his revenues should be started the building of a noble edifice, worthy of the Prince of the Apostles; so that, after the transient journey of this life, God would look kindly upon him, both for the sake of his goodness and because of the gift of lands and ornaments with which he intended to ennoble the place. (Book i, 6; p.69)</p>

	<i>Encomium Emmae</i>	<i>Vita Eadwardi</i> , Book I
Dying and Death	<p>And so this great king, after he had returned from Rome, and had lingered in his own kingdom some little time, having well arranged all matters, passed to the Lord, to be crowned upon his right hand by God himself the creator of all. (Book II, 23; p.39)</p>	<p>...within the festal days [of Christmas]. King Edward, the beloved of God, languishing from the mental illness he had contracted, died indeed to the world, but was joyfully taken up to live with God. (Book I, 7; p.83)</p>

	<i>Encomium Emmae</i>	<i>Vita Eadwardi</i> , Book I
Burial and Mourning	<p>The Lady Emma, his queen, mourned together with the natives, poor and rich lamented together, the bishops and clerics lamented with the monks and nuns; but let the rejoicing in the kingdom of heaven be as great as was the mourning in the world... These buried his lifeless body, but let those lead his spirit aloft to be rejoiced over in everlasting rest. Mortals alone wept for his departure, but for his spirit let the heavenly citizens as well as mortals intercede. Let us earnestly pray God that his glory may increase from day to day; and since he has deserved this by his benevolence, let us pray every day: ‘May the soul of Knútr rest in peace. Amen.’</p> <p>When Knútr was dead and honourably buried in the monastery built at Winchester in honour of St Peter, the lady, Queen Emma, remained alone in the kingdom, sorrowing for the bitter death of her lord and alarmed at the absence of her sons. (Book II, 24 — Book III, 1; p.39)</p>	[Book I of the VE has nothing to say on these subjects]

A comparison of these passages clearly demonstrates that, while Edward is represented in Book I as a picture of kingly virtues, he is no more a saint here than Cnut is in the *Encomium Emmae* and, indeed, the author of the latter work takes much more interest in the subject of his king's death and burial. So, in Book I of the *VE*, we are given a noble and godly but still earthly king, fond of hunting (Book I, 6; p.63) and too ready to listen to the calumnies of his Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert of Jumièges, against Earl Godwin (Book I, 3; p.33). The living Edward, while a paradigm of virtue, is no better than a Christian king should be, and is rivalled in piety by his wife (Book I, 6; p.65), and in authority by the king-maker Godwin, who is five times described as a 'father' to the nation (Book I, 1, pp.11 and 15; i, 4, p.43 and i, 5, p.47). The interest in the personal piety of both kings does no more than establish them as part of a tradition dating back to the height of the Benedictine Reform in the late tenth century when, as Deshman makes clear, the role of earthly monarch was not only identified with the roles of Christ the King and the priest, but also took on elements of monastic ideology, exemplified above all in the *Regularis Concordia* and the New Minster Charter.⁵¹⁸

The description of the death of Cnut confirms the expectations set up in the analysis of kingly death above, whereas the description of Edward's death in Book I of the *VE* confounds those expectations. The author of the *Encomium Emmae* emphasizes the grief felt by Cnut's subjects, and the ways in which both national and international ritual institutions commemorated him. He goes on to invite the reader to join in the commemoration, stressing the presence and importance of the king's soul in heaven; and he

⁵¹⁸ R. Deshman, 'Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus: Early Medieval Ruler Theology and the Anglo-Saxon Reform', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22, 1988, pp. 204-240.

contrasts Cnut's assimilation into the company of heaven with the isolation of the widowed Emma, whose social being has been fundamentally altered through her bereavement.⁵¹⁹ The author of the *VE*, in contrast, deals with Edward's death in less than a sentence, the closing sentence of Book I. By mentioning the king's 'mental illness' (*animi egressitudine*), he makes the death sound like a blessed relief. He provides no description of the ritual surrounding the king's dying, death and burial, other than the earlier reference to Edward choosing Westminster as his intended mausoleum (*elegit ibi habere sibi locum sepulchri*, Book I, 6, p.68). Stafford, arguing for a post-Conquest date for the whole work, sees this reference as having 'ominous undertones...of dire events to come',⁵²⁰ but if the author had wanted to presage disaster he would have been able to do so much more explicitly. A medieval magnate who *failed* to anticipate his death, and to invest in his tomb and the church containing it, would be behaving in a much more 'ominous' fashion. By planning his burial, Edward was behaving in a fashion characteristic of his rank and era: this is clear from the descriptions of the death of Godwin and his burial at Old Minster, Winchester (quoted below), and of the burial at St Olave's, York, of Siward, earl of Northumbria, elsewhere in the *VE*.⁵²¹ The author also shows no interest in the country's response to the king's death. Indeed, he spends much more ink and effort on the description of Godwin's death than he does on Edward's:

In the second year after the earl and his sons had been reconciled to the king, and the whole country had settled down in peaceful tranquillity, that earl of happy memory died; and at his obsequies the people showed great grief and recalled with sighs and many tears this father, their and the kingdom's protector. He was buried with fitting

⁵¹⁹ Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 65.

⁵²⁰ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, p. 43

⁵²¹ 'Nec multo post tempore occubuit etiam moriens Northumbrorum dux Siwardus... sepultusque est in ea quam ipse a fundo construxerat in beati Olavi regis et martyris <honore> ecclesia.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book I, 5, p.48.

honour in the monastery they call the Old Minster at Winchester, to which church he had given many gifts of ornaments and rents of lands for the redemption of his soul. However his oldest — and also his wisest — son, Harold, was, by the king's favour, appointed to the earldom in his place; and at this the whole English host breathed again and was consoled for its loss.⁵²²

Clearly, this writer is as capable as the author of the *Encomium Emmae* of perceiving the import of a leader's death and writing it up in the grand style. He stresses the universal grief and sense of loss, describing Godwin yet again as the nation's *pater*, and he highlights the important, public funeral at a major religious centre with which Godwin was intimately identified. When he describes the 'whole English host' as 'breath[ing] again', there is a sense that the nation has been holding its breath for a long period of time, in a state of suspended animation during the obsequies, waiting to see how this disastrous loss would be resolved. His phrase for the English is *Anglorum exercitus* which can mean 'army of the English' or simply 'multitude of the English', stressing the vulnerability of the nation by the implicit comparison to an aimless army that has lost its general. But in the last sentence consolation is at hand. Harold is another Godwin — 'he wielded his father's powers even more actively and walked in his ways' (*uices celebrat patris intentius, et eiusdem gressibus incedit*). This remark may have had considerable resonance: Deshman draws attention to the concept of the *via regia*, a Carolingian metaphor for kingship which was drawn on by Æthelwold, and quotes the prologue to the *Regularis Concordia* as saying

⁵²² 'Reconciliatis ergo duce et eius filiis cum rege, et omni patria in pacis tranquillitate conquiescente, secundo post hęc anno obiit idem dux felicitis memorię, exequisque suis in luctum decidit populus, hunc patrem, hunc nutricium suum regnique memorabant suspiriis et assiduis fletibus. Tumulatur ergo condigno honore in monasterio quod nuncupant ueteri Wintonie, additis in eadem ecclesia multis ornamentorum muneribus et terrarum redditibus pro redemptione ipsius animę. Subrogatur autem regio fauore in eius ducatu filius eius maior natu et sapientia Haroldus, unde in consolationem respirat uniuersus Anglorum exercitus.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book I, 5, p.46-47.

that its monastic customs are for those who ‘walk humbly in the royal road of the commandments of the Lord’.⁵²³

Edward is mentioned as the means by which Harold succeeded his father — *regio fauore* — but his role in this succession drama is minimal and easily missed. Barlow, in his discussion of the date of Book I, argues convincingly that it was started while Edward was still alive, probably in the autumn of 1065, and that Edward’s death did not change the author’s grand plan; he terms Edward ‘a relatively minor character’.⁵²⁴ This is surely the key to understanding the peculiar way in which Edward’s death is glossed over. It was undoubtedly a hugely significant event and it came at a time of great national uncertainty: the king was childless, and at various times had half-promised the kingdom to Sveinn of Denmark, William of Normandy and Edward the Exile.⁵²⁵ There had been a growing shadow over his reign: would his death result in a palace coup, a civil war, an invasion by foreign powers? But all this is ignored: in the view of the *VE*’s author, the real succession had already taken place in 1053 when Harold stepped into Godwin’s shoes. Despite the friction between the sons of Godwin that remains unresolved at the end of Book I, the country is presented as being in a safe pair of hands already, and Edward’s death can be treated almost parenthetically.

At the beginning of Book II, the author of the *VE* asks his Muse:

Amid the many graves, hurt by the death
Of lords, what, Clio, are you writing now?
Where are the riches that you pledged to me?

⁵²³ Dushman, ‘*Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus*’, p. 231.

⁵²⁴ Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, pp. xxx-xxxii.

⁵²⁵ Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, p. xviii.

For all the value of the work is lost.⁵²⁶

In Barlow's interpretation, this suggests that the battles of Stamford Bridge and Hastings had rendered the original purpose of the text meaningless, that Edith's role as daughter and sister had been wholly devalued, and that all that was left to her was her position as Edward's childless widow, hence the decision to recreate herself as the chaste spouse of a saint. This reading explains the wholly different attitude to Edward's death displayed in Book II. Whereas, as we have seen, in Book I, Edward's death is deliberately underplayed, taking up a single sentence, Book II goes to the other extreme, with his long dying, death and public funeral covering five pages.⁵²⁷ In Book I, the succession is scarcely an issue. The author deals with the problem of a childless king even before he describes Edward's accession in 1042, by reporting a vision seen by Brihtwald, Bishop of Wiltshire (d.1045):

...he saw the blessed Peter, first of the apostles, consecrating the image of a seemly man as king, assign him the life of a bachelor, and set the years of his reign by a fixed reckoning of his life. And when the king even at this juncture asked him who of the generations to come would reign in the kingdom, Peter answered, 'The kingdom of England belongs to God; and after you He has already provided a king according to His own will.'⁵²⁸

Stafford describes Brihtwald's experience as 'a famous vision' and implies that knowledge of it must have been current at the time of Edward's accession to the throne, arguing that the original purpose of the vision was to underline his fitness for kingship and his chaste

⁵²⁶ 'Quid, rogo, quid scribis tot circumsepta <sepultis>, / celsa Clio, regum saucia morte ducum? / Quo sunt tot promissa michi tua ditia rerum / ordine? Nempe operis omne decus periit.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, pp. 84-85.

⁵²⁷ Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, pp. 117-27.

⁵²⁸ '...uidet beatum Petrum, apostolorum primum, decentem hominis personam in regem consecrare, celibem ei uitam designare, regnisque annos sub certo uite calculo determinare. Quem etiam hic poscentem de subsequentis regni regnatura posteritate, hac edocet responsione, 'Regnum,' inquit, 'Anglorum est dei; post te prouidit sibi regem ad placitum sui.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book I, 1, p. 15.

life before marriage, but that Edith re-used it to provide '[h]ints at celestial reasons for her childless marriage'.⁵²⁹ However, the stress in the passage just quoted is not on chastity as a virtue; rather, it sets childlessness up as a potential problem, with the authoritative voice of St Peter providing reassurance that God has everything in hand. As noted above, Godwin is frequently described as England's 'father' and Edith's relationship to Edward is described as being 'more like a daughter than a wife';⁵³⁰ by extension Godwin and Edward are closely identified, and Edith's brothers are by implication equated with Edward's non-existent sons. With the added ingredient of Brihtwald's vision, Book I becomes more than ever a recipe for making Harold's succession seem both natural and inevitable.

Book II is very different from Book I. Edward has moved from the margins to the centre, with his dying and death becoming the climax of the story. In Book I, he fades ignominiously out of the narrative in its closing pages, prevented only by his timely 'sickness of the mind' (*egrum...animum*) from starting a civil war against the advice of his councillors, cursing the rebels (*deique super eos imprecatus est uindictam*), unable to support Edith or to save her brother Tostig from exile, and eventually dying slowly (*languescens*) from the same mental illness. The identities of Edward as an individual and Edward as king have become entirely separated, and Edward has undergone social death, what Mulkay defines as 'the cessation of the individual person as an active agent in others' lives'.⁵³¹ If Edward was genuinely as ill as the author of the *VE* makes out, some of his active powers as king during his illness must have been delegated, perhaps shared out

⁵²⁹ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, p. 260.

⁵³⁰ 'In quo non tam uidebatur illi uxor esse quam filia'. This chapter is missing in the manuscript and has been reconstructed by Barlow from the *Speculum historiale de gestis regum Anglorum* of Richard of Cirencester, which 'would seem to supply about half the Anonymous's lost c[hapter] 2.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, pp. xxxix-xl.

⁵³¹ M. Mulkay, 'Social Death in Britain' in D. Clark (ed.), *The Sociology of Death: theory, culture, practice* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 31-49, 33.

among more than one person. Other areas usually overseen by the king may simply have been put on hold, like the Shropshire lawsuit mentioned in Domesday which was postponed during Edward's illness.⁵³² In the *VE*, Edward also loses his functions as a general, with his armies disobeying him, and as a husband: the queen is isolated 'confounded by the quarrel of her brothers and...bereft of all support by the powerlessness of her husband, the king.'⁵³³ Before Edward's death, Edith's distress at his *impotentia* and, perhaps more importantly, at the friction between her brothers had plunged the whole palace into premature mourning.⁵³⁴ The court fears the future evils (*futura mala*) of the civil war (*bellum ciuile*) which has already been presaged, but it is the antagonism between Harold and Tostig Godwineson which generates the disquiet, as much as if not more than Edward's illness. Edward has already died as far as his social roles are concerned some time before he dies as a biological entity.

In Book II, by contrast, his death-bed is the stage for a triumphant resurgence of temporal and spiritual power; Edward himself now becomes the mouth-piece for divinely-inspired visions, transcending time and space, as well as being able to make his will, granting the kingdom to Harold, arranging for his dependants to be protected and reminding his audience where he wants to be buried, with an ensuing description of a magnificent public funeral. Edward's dying and death now show all the characteristics one would expect from the death of someone identified with his land and people.

The section of the manuscript covering Book II is defective, describing Edward's birth and recounting two miracle stories before skipping straight to his death-bed; Barlow

⁵³² P. Clarke, *The English Nobility under Edward the Confessor* (Oxford, 1994), p. 9.

⁵³³ 'Dissidio confundebatur fratrum...regis mariti impotentia destituebatur'. Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book I, 7, p. 80.

⁵³⁴ '...quibus inconsolabiliter fuis totum palatium in luctum deciderat', Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book I, 7, p. 80.

interpolates miracle stories from Osbert of Clare, Sulcard of Westminster and 'Florence' of Worcester but accepts the entire narrative of Edward's dying and death as part of the original work. By contrast to Book I, Edward's political life disappears in Book II. Instead of the upheaval of his youth and exile, and Edward's accession in middle age and ensuing complex relations with the House of Godwin, we are given a version of Edward's history in which all secular, biographical events are removed:

King Edward of happy memory was chosen by God before the day of his birth, and consequently was consecrated to the kingdom less by men than, as we have said before, by Heaven. He preserved with holy chastity the dignity of his consecration and lived his whole life dedicated to God in true innocence. God approved this as an acceptable burnt offering, and with profound love made him dear to men and worshipful among the citizens of heaven. For, as we have learnt from the joint testimony of good and fitting men, God glorified him in this life of corruption by these signs.⁵³⁵

Miracle stories follow, though they are not told with great confidence or authority. The author of the *VE* adds a comment to his first story of miraculous healing which suggests that the case for Edward's saintly status still required a little special pleading: 'Although this seems new and strange to us, the Franks aver that Edward had done this often as a youth when he was in Neustria, now known as Normandy'.⁵³⁶ All the other miracle stories are very similar accounts of Edward's bathwater curing blindness. In this reading, it is not the minutiae of daily biography that are significant: the only things that matter are Edward's *uera innocentia* and *sancta castimonia*. His life had been mapped out before his birth and

⁵³⁵ 'Felicissime mentionis rex Ædwardus ante natalis sui diem deo est electus, unde ad regnum non tam ab hominibus quam, ut supra diximus, diuinitus est consecratus. Cuius consecrationis dignitatem sancta conseruans castimonia, omnem uitam agebat deo dicatam in uera innocentia. Quam deus in holocaustum acceptionis approbans, ex affectu intimo eum fecit carum hominibus, et uenerabilem cum supernis ciuibus. Nam sicut bonis et idoneis uiris contestificantibus comperimus, his in hac corruptibili uita signis glorificauit eum deus.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 1, pp. 90-92.

⁵³⁶ 'Quod licet nobis nouum uideatur, hoc eum in adolescentia cum esset in Neustria, que nunc Normannia nuncupatur, sepius egisse Franci testantur.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 2, p. 94.

conducted without change or development, in static perfection, in distinct contrast to this *corruptibilis uita*. Edward's miracles are all ones of healing, stressing again the contrast between the imperfect world and his own implicit perfection; it is only when the narrative of his death and dying gets under way that we are returned to the mutable, sublunary world of politics, and then only to be told that Edward's disease had 'freed [him]...from the affairs of a secular ruler', allowing him to contemplate death and experience visions. There is thus a reiterated contrast between the timeless perfection of the kingdom of heaven, of which Edward partakes as a predestined saint, and the messy, diseased and corruptible world of lesser mortals.

When Edward does fall ill, he does so in a very different way from the barren and scrofulous woman who is the subject of his first cure. Her ailment is grotesque:

A certain young woman...had an infection of the throat and those parts under the jaw which, from their likeness to an acorn, are called glands. These had so disfigured her face with an evil-smelling disease that she could scarcely speak to anyone without great embarrassment.... Those diseased parts that had been treated by the smearing of the king softened and separated from the skin; and, with the pressure of the hand, worms together with pus and blood came out of various holes.⁵³⁷

This passage demonstrates the difference between the illness of an ordinary person and the illness of a saint: the dying Edward, in contrast to the scrofulous woman, has no symptoms but frailty (*corpus fragile*) and weakness (*languor*). Heffernan acknowledges the complexity of the *VE* by recognising the political as well as the hagiographical implications of this episode, commenting that it not only demonstrates the way in which Edward's life

⁵³⁷ 'Iuuencula...patiebatur circa fauces et sub ipsis maxillis, quas ad similitudinem glandis nuncupant glandulas, quę ita totam faciem corruperant morbo et nimio fetore, ut uix alicui loqueretur absque grandi confusione.... Liniente rege morbus medicatus a crusta mollescit et soluitur, ducenteque manu a diuersis foraminibus uermes plene cum sanie et sanguine egredientur.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 2, p. 92.

was an *imitatio Christi*, but also that it may stand ‘as a political allegory, with Christ reaching out in mercy to the beleaguered Saxon England after the recent debacle at Hastings’.⁵³⁸ In the following section, Edward’s dying and death will be analysed step by step, followed by an attempt to put the narrative in its broader, political context.

By the time the author of the *VE* reaches the scene of the dying Edward’s bedside, his miracle stories have prepared the audience for the extraordinary, and they are not disappointed. The narrative, which starts with Edward’s realisation of his approaching death and ends with his funeral and a reference to miracles continuing at his tomb, can be broken down into several sections:

1. The dying king has a vision of coming disaster for England.
2. He repeats it to the attendants at his bedside, who include Harold, Edith and Archbishop Stigand.
3. They discuss its meaning, with a long sermon-like commentary by the author attacking England’s clergy and Stigand in particular.
4. Edward makes his will, leaving England to Harold.
5. He takes communion and dies, leaving a beautiful corpse.
6. Public rituals are performed around the corpse.
7. Miracles of healing continue at his tomb.

This account of the death-bed, instead of being a timeless *imitatio Christi*, is deeply embedded in contemporary politics. Within the frame of the familiar events of the saint’s death-bed, the author of the *VE* places his carefully-selected interpretations of recent

⁵³⁸ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 5-6.

history. By putting his words into Edward's dying mouth, the author attempts to give them overpowering authority. As far as the political significance of this scene is concerned, there is no reason to argue with Stafford's interpretation that Edith is attempting to exculpate herself, Edward and Harold from any blame for the Conquest by shifting responsibility onto the sinful clergy who had incurred God's wrath; blaming the sins of the people, if not specifically of the clergy, for potential or actual invasion is a traditional explanation going back through Wulfstan and Bede to Gildas.⁵³⁹ More germane to this discussion are the questions of how the death-bed scene is constructed, and what special qualities of the idea of the death-bed led the author of the *VE* to choose it as the platform for the most important part of his message in Book II.

The author of the *VE* is not interested in describing the physical environment of the death-bed, other than making it clear that Edward died 'in his palace home' (*domo palatii*), in a room big enough to accommodate perhaps ten people. It is not clear whether Edward was literally in a bed, as Edith is described as 'sitting on the floor warming his feet in her lap'.⁵⁴⁰ The author is much more concerned with constructing the emotional and political relationships between Edward and his attendants: he names Edith, Harold, the Norman or Breton steward Robert FitzWimarch (who was a relative of Edward's)⁵⁴¹ and Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury, as well as a few more (*paucis aliis*) present at the king's request. Barlow suggests that '[t]he author, or his informant, could have been among this unspecified group',⁵⁴² but Edith herself could easily have provided the author with her preferred interpretation of events.

⁵³⁹ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, pp. 44-45.

⁵⁴⁰ '...terre assidens, eiusque pedes super gremium suum fouens,' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 118.

⁵⁴¹ Clarke, *The English Nobility Under Edward the Confessor*, p. 116.

⁵⁴² Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 119.

The narrative is one of interiority, with the author focusing on the dramatic experience Edward's soul undergoes while his body is comatose. Edward is aware that death is approaching, although interestingly he is described as resigned not to death itself but to the 'funeral rites' (*funeribus exequiis*), the work's emphasis thereby shifting away from the idea of death as the end and towards the idea of the ritual process, which will help to escort Edward's soul to Heaven and provide a common focus for the mourning nation. As will be demonstrated, the idea of death as an end is continually avoided and denied in the text.

The ways in which Edward retreated from his various social roles as king, general and husband in Book I were explored above; here in Book II he also retreats from his role as embodied human being, constrained by linear time. The complete passivity and speechlessness enforced by his illness paradoxically liberate his soul:

For indeed, being now freed by the protection of the spirit of God from the affairs of a secular ruler, he could through heavenly contemplation enjoy more easily a vision of the future. While his frail body was being sustained by the hands of the devout awaiting his death, becoming drowsy because of his body's heaviness, he was instructed infallibly about those things which we for our sins bear at the present time.⁵⁴³

His illness becomes a means of guaranteeing the truth of the vision, with Edward praying that, should the vision have been false, God will deny him the strength to recount it; in fact he becomes so eloquent that he is equated with the healthiest (*sanissimo*). Reaction to Edward's vision and opinions about his state of health become a touchstone by which the

⁵⁴³ 'Namque exemptus rebus secularis tyranni ex aduocatione spiritus dei, liberius fruitur uisione futurorum ex contemplatione celesti. Cum inter manus deuotorum in funerea expectatione corpus sustentatur fragile, corporeo sopitus pondere, eorum edocetur certitudine, quæ pro peccatis nostris presenti patimur tempore.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 116.

members of Edward's audience can be judged: it is used as a means of criticising Archbishop Stigand, the notorious pluralist,⁵⁴⁴ who alone queries the truth of the vision:

And while all were stupefied and silent from the effect of terror, the archbishop himself, who ought to have been the first either to be afraid or to give a word of advice, with folly at heart whispered in the ear of the earl that the king was broken with age and disease and knew not what he said.⁵⁴⁵

The *infatuatum cor* of the archbishop is contrasted with the queen and the rest of the witnesses 'who had been wont to know and fear God in their hearts' and could recognise that Edward was not raving, feverish or senile, but had been privileged with a vision from a higher plane. As we have already seen, the author of the *VE* uses the common cultural understanding of the specialness of the death-bed (explored above in chapter two) to score his political point.

Linear time and familiar space are also broken up within the vision itself, as was shown in the discussion of this passage in chapter two. Edward is visited by two long-dead monks who are foreigners, well-known to him long ago in his youth in Normandy. Their foreignness emphasizes the strangeness of the visionary experience, as does the fact that they are no longer alive: they appear in both a time and a place where they are unexpected. These voices from the past have come to predict the future: Edward is experiencing a conflation of different times comparable to the eternal perspective of heaven. This is reflected in the monks' use of language, where they use the past perfect to describe the future:

⁵⁴⁴ Stigand held both Winchester and Canterbury, and was also criticised for not being a monk. F. Barlow, *The English Church 1000-1066* (London, 1963), p. 209.

⁵⁴⁵ 'ipse archiepiscopus qui debuerat uel primus pauere, uel uerbum consilii dare, infatuato corde submurmurat in aurem ducis senio confecto et morbo, quid diceret nescire.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 118.

...within a year and a day after the day of your death God *has delivered* [italics mine] all this kingdom, cursed by him, into the hands of the enemy, and devils shall come through all this land with fire and sword and the havoc of war.⁵⁴⁶

This implies that the fate is inescapable; in God's understanding of time it has already happened (as indeed it has from the author's point of view). The limits of rational human language are strained to breaking by the difficulty of describing Edward's dying glimpse of eternal perspective. This understanding of the dying as inhabiting a different kind of universe from either the living or the dead, able both to rise above earthly constraints and to communicate directly with those still earth-bound, gives Edward's vision extraordinary force. The author reinforces Edward's prestige as a prophet by pointing out the truth and continuing relevance of his words, that even as he writes 'many thousands of the people are thrown down, the kingdom is ravaged by fire and plunder' (*igne et depredatione*), but that people have not yet listened and repented.

Something of Edward's new prestige is carried over into the next part of the narrative, where the king comforts his attendants and makes his nuncupative will. The author presents Edward as paternal and powerful, fully in control of himself:

When he was sick unto death and his men stood and wept bitterly, he said, 'Do not weep, but intercede with God for my soul, and give me leave to go to Him. For he will not pardon me so that I shall not die who would not pardon Himself so that He should not die'.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ '...tradidit deus post obitus tui diem anno uno et die una omne hoc regnum a se maledictum in manu inimici, peruagabunturque diaboli totam hanc terram igne, ferro, et depredatione hostili.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 116.

⁵⁴⁷ 'Adgrauato ad mortem cum sui starent et flerent amare, 'Nolite' inquit, 'flere, sed deum pro anima mea rogate, michique eundi ad deum licentiam date. Non enim michi ne moriar propitiabitur, qui sibimet propitiari noluit ne non moreretur.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 122.

Despite Edward here identifying his death with Christ's, the political aspect of the narrative is still very much to the fore. He goes on to identify Edith as a daughter-figure once again (*in loco carissimae filiae*) and goes on to commend her and the whole kingdom (*Hanc... cum omni regno*) to Harold's care, together with all Edward's foreign followers (among whom the author may well be numbering himself), going into suspiciously precise detail about the protection to be offered them. As Stafford notes, the narrative is 'studiedly ambiguous', with the vocabulary used to describe Harold and his role, *nutricium* and *tutandum*, more redolent of regency than actual kingship.⁵⁴⁸ Barlow suggests that Edith is being put forward as Edward's heir here, or at least that Edith is suggesting that she should have the power to endorse the next king from among the throne-worthy.⁵⁴⁹ This would make sense if we read this scene as part of Edith's attempt to reposition herself after Hastings. Harold's role is down-played and Edith herself comes to the fore as a significant political player whose backing should be valued by any claimant to the English throne. The uncertainties about the precise date of Book II make it very hard to interpret the political nuances of the scene, but it is clear that this death-bed pronouncement is meant by the author of the *VE* to be the final word, superseding any earlier arrangements.

Edward then goes on to specify the details of his burial and how he wants the news of his death to be promulgated:

Let the grave for my burial be prepared in the minster in the place which shall be assigned to you. I ask that you do not conceal my death, but announce it promptly in all parts, so that the faithful can beseech the mercy of Almighty God on me, a sinner.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, p. 47, n.60.

⁵⁴⁹ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, pp. 299-300.

⁵⁵⁰ 'Fossa sepulchri mei in monasterio paretur, in eo loco qui uobis assignabitur. Mortem uero meam queso ne celetis, sed celerius circumquaque annuntietis, ut quique fideles pro me peccatore deprecentur clementiam dei omnipotentis.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 124.

Whereas in Book I, the description of Westminster Abbey had cited the monastery's beautiful environment and its proximity to London, the extent of Edward's gifts, the details of the architecture of the nave, crossing and tower, and even the way in which worship was able to continue throughout the rebuilding, here the *monasterium* has become nothing more than a shadowy back-drop for Edward's burial. Again, Edward seems powerful and in control, able to stage-manage his own funeral.

Despite the apparent concern for the destination of his bodily remains, the real focus of interest is Edward's spiritual journey. He invites the whole nation to participate in prayers for his soul and is presented as humble, unable to visualise himself as the triumphant Christian hero we have already been assured he is. As with other saints' deaths, Edward is a model of how the Christian should die, a fore-runner of the developed *ars moriendi*. He is not afraid of death, looking right through the moment of death to the evaluation of his soul and the eternal life beyond. As noted above, even in the context of a discussion of the disposal of Edward's corpse the idea of death as a closure is contradicted, when Edward speaks his last words, to the weeping Edith:

“Fear not,” he said, “I shall not die now, but by God's mercy regain my strength.” Nor did he mislead the attentive, least of all himself, by these words, for he has not died but has passed from death to life, to live with Christ.⁵⁵¹

The author is concerned that there should be no ambiguity: we are not to imagine that Edward believes he is going to recover, despite his statement that he is not going to die —

⁵⁵¹ “Ne,” inquit, “timeas, non moriar modo, sed bene conualescam propitiante deo.” Nec in hoc dicto diligentem, utique se, fefellit; non enim mortuus est, sed cum Christo uicturus de morte ad uitam migravit.’ Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 124.

non moriar — endorsed by the author, who is quite explicit. He does not tell us that Edward's body has died while his soul has gone to heaven, or that his body has died but will be revived at the general resurrection. In a narrative whose central fact is a particular death, the very occurrence of that death is denied: *non enim mortuus est*. This is an extreme expression of the standard medieval Christian understanding of the dead: Geary stresses the continuing reciprocal relationships between dead and living and the continual two-way traffic of prayer and intercession,⁵⁵² while the ideas that the saints continued to live in their bodies or relics after death, and that those bodies or relics were powerful agents, are of course commonplaces of medieval thought. However, the denial of the very existence or occurrence of death is rarely expressed in such literal and reiterated terms. Here perhaps it has political overtones: Edward is not dead inasmuch as he lives on in Edith.

In his vision, Edward experienced time in an unusual way, with figures from the past describing the future to him in his present, using a past tense, and it was argued above that this represents an attempt to express the all-encompassing timelessness of the eternal perspective. Something of this appears again in the description of the moment of death, with the fact of death once more being aggressively denied:

And so, coming with these and like words to his last hour, he took the viaticum from the table of heavenly life and gave up his spirit to God the Creator.... Then could be seen in the dead body the glory of a soul departing to God. For the flesh of his face blushed like a rose, the adjacent beard gleamed like a lily, his hands, laid out straight, whitened, and were a sign that his whole body was given not to death but to auspicious sleep.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵² Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁵³ 'His itaque et huiusmodi perueniens ad extremum, sumpto a celesti mensa uitę uiatico, deo creatori suum reddidit spiritum.... Erat tunc uidere in defuncto corpore gloriam migrantis ad deum anime, cum scilicet caro faciei ut rosa ruberet, subiecta barba ut lilium canderet, manus suo ordine directę albescerent, totumque corpus non morti sed fausto sopori traditum signarent.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 124.

While the author admits in one sentence that this is indeed a *defunctum corpus*, he denies it in the next: *totumque corpus non morti sed fausto sopori traditum signarent*. Edward's corpse is a remarkably lively and beautiful one, blushing, gleaming and whitening, and compared to lilies and roses, in an aesthetic that, as noted in chapter two, Peter Brown traces back into Antiquity and terms Virgilian. 'Flowering plants' are among the many images for the resurrection body discussed by Bynum, but her survey concentrates on patristic and high medieval theology, it highlights martyrs' rather than confessors' bodies, and it contrasts understandings of the living and the dead body without examining the different and liminal experience of dying.⁵⁵⁴ In the narrative of Edward's dying, it is the glory of the blessed soul departing that provides this transforming energy, turning the corpse of a old man who has died after a long illness into a paradigm of sweetness and shining beauty, anticipating the condition of the resurrection body. As the saint dies, linear historical time and eternity come together. (As we have seen, human time and God's time similarly coincide in the description of Bishop Æthelwold's body at the instant of his death.)⁵⁵⁵

By denying the fact of Edward's death so insistently, the author of the *VE* stresses the king's continuing presence in the life of the nation. His physical departure has apparently caused disaster and many more, if less significant, deaths:

...he gave up his spirit to God the Creator on the fourth of January, foreshadowing a funereal and mournful head, if we may use the expression, of the new year, on account of which we should be obliged to observe the whole body of months become weak with tribulation and manifold slaughter.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁵⁵ *Wulfstan of Winchester: The Life of St Æthelwold*, pp. 62-63.

⁵⁵⁶ '...deo creatori suum reddidit spiritum, pridie scilicet nonas Ianuarii, funereum et lugubre presignans caput, ut ita dicamus, initiantis anni, per quod totum corpus mensium perpendere haberemus tribulatione languidum iri et clade multiplici'. Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 124.

The miserable *corpus* of the year is in stark contrast to Edward's radiant *corpus* (described in the following sentence), but the apparent disaster contains the seeds of salvation. It is by heeding Edward's vision, possibly made public or even created for the first time in the *VE*, that the nation as a whole can find redemption, and it is by venerating his holy corpse that individuals can be cured:

Having revealed him as a saint while still living in the world, as we wrote before, at his tomb likewise merciful God reveals by these signs that he lives with Him as a saint in heaven. For at the tomb through him the blind receive their sight, the lame are made to walk, the sick are healed, the sorrowing are refreshed by the comfort of God, and for the faith of those who call upon Him, God, the King of kings, works the tokens of his goodness.⁵⁵⁷

In the closing line of the whole work, we are reminded that God is *rex regum*, identifying the saintly king on the earth as an echo of the supreme King in heaven.

Given this presentation of Edward as a panacea for both the universal and individual ills of the English, it is not surprising to find that grief at his death is represented as all-encompassing:

And so the funeral rites were arranged at the royal cost and with royal honour, as was proper, and amid the boundless sorrow of all men. They bore his holy remains from his palace home into the house of God... And so, before the altar of St Peter the Apostle, the body, washed by his country's tears, is laid up in the sight of God.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁷ 'Reuelatum uero, ut supra texuimus, sanctum adhuc uiuentem in mundo, ad eius quoque tumbam propitia deitas his signis reuelat sanctum uiuere secum in celo, cum obtentu eiusdem ibi illuminantur ceci, in gressum solidantur claudi, infirmi curantur, merentes consolatione dei reparantur, et pro fide cuiusque deum inuocantis insignia pietatis suę rex regum deus operatur.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 126.

⁵⁵⁸ 'Parantur ergo illa funebria regio, ut decebat, sumptu et honore, et cum omnium infinito merore. Deferunt eius felices exequias a domo palatii in aulam dei... Sicque coram altare beati Petri apostoli conditur corpus patrię lacrimis lotum ante conspectum dei.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 124.

Here at last we find Edward's funeral being described in an appropriately royal manner, quite unlike the way it was dealt with in Book I. It is as if the author is trying to recreate the public ceremonies for people who had been unable to participate in them personally. The comparatively private liturgical activity at the death-bed is almost entirely ignored, with mention being made only of the taking of the *viaticum*, although, from the ninth century, unction, confession and reconciliation had also been part of the death-bed ritual.⁵⁵⁹ By contrast, the public liturgical commemorations are described in some detail as having three phases. First comes an account of the funerary procession, which followed by a day and a night of prayers and psalms. He then describes the day of the funeral, which was celebrated with sung masses and relief of the poor. Finally, he details the thirty days after the funeral, marked by more masses, psalms and alms-giving.

Edward is thus presented as having a_λ ideal and complex funeral, with the burialⁿ performed in the context of the Penitential Psalms and the celebration of mass. The need for the singing of masses and psalms is paralleled in contemporary guild statutes,⁵⁶⁰ while the importance of the thirtieth day after death is also stressed in the arrangements for the funeral of a bishop and the acts of charity it involved, laid down at an early eleventh century bishops' synod:

(5) And when any bishop dies, then each bishop shall himself sing three masses for the soul, unless he wishes to do more; and besides those, let him know he should perform thirty masses and thirty evensongs and thirty nocturnes; and distribute for the soul a pound, half at the masses and half for the almsmen; and free one man for the soul; and feed one needy man for thirty days.

⁵⁵⁹ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, p. 168.

⁵⁶⁰ Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, *Councils and Synods*, The Abbotsbury Guild Statutes, pp. 516ff

(6) And on the thirtieth day he should bathe as many needy men as he possibly can, and give them all food and drink, and help them with clothing if he wants to do anything.⁵⁶¹

The day of burial, the week after burial and the thirtieth day are all high-lighted in Jewish traditions,⁵⁶² and these days continued to be important in Christian practice, although practice was not codified, with some traditions enjoining commemorative masses only on those days, while others prescribed daily masses, with more elaborate rituals on the special days.⁵⁶³ By the eighth century, the masses for the dead had developed such that they were said on different days according to the status of the soul of the deceased: professional religious would have mass said on the day of their death and the virtuous laity three days after death, but deceased penitents would have to wait until their relatives had done penance on their behalf for the seven or thirty days following.⁵⁶⁴ This penitential tradition, which we have already touched on in the discussion of charcoal burial in chapter three, informs the prescription for ritual behaviour on the death of a bishop quoted above. It is also present in the account of Edward's commemoration, with its stress on charity (*recreatione pauperum* and *multis auri libris in sublevatione diuersi ordinis pauperum*) for the redemption of Edward's soul (*pro redemptione ipsius animae*).

Though the funeral is structured in the expected way, it is on an appropriately grand scale, and the alms-giving is magnificent:

⁵⁶¹ [5] 7 þonne hwylcum bisceope forðsið gebyrige, þonne singe ælc bisceop sylf þreo mæssan for þa sawle butan he furþor wylle; 7 butan þam, wite he þæt he gefylle XXX mæssena 7 XXX æfensanga 7 XXX uhtsanga; 7 gedæle for þa saule an pund, healf wið mæssan 7 healf ælmesmannum; 7 gefreoge anne man for þa sawle; 7 anne þearfan fede XXX daga. [6] 7 æt þam þritigeþan dæge gebaðige swa feala þearfena swa he mæst mæge 7 þam do eallum æt 7 wæt, 7 to wæde fylste gyf he hwæt wylle. Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, *Councils and Synods*, p. 404

⁵⁶² G. Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* (London 1977), pp. 5-11.

⁵⁶³ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, pp. 135-36.

⁵⁶⁴ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, pp. 67-68.

They...offered up prayers and sighs and psalms all that day and the following night. Meanwhile, when the day of the funeral ceremony dawned, they blessed the office of the interment they were about to conduct with the singing of the masses and the relief of the poor.... They also caused the whole of the thirty days following to be observed with the celebration of masses and the chanting of psalms, and expended many pounds of gold for the redemption of his soul in the alleviation of different classes of the poor.⁵⁶⁵

The author does not specify who was involved in the organisation and performance of the funeral, using a faceless third person plural throughout his account — *Deferunt, celebrant, beatificant, prosecuntur* — giving the impression that the entire population bewailed their loss and participated in the king's exequies, and that a great many of them benefited from his charity. The account is measured and stately. Unlike the E Chronicle, it avoids dates, giving no hint that Edward died one day and was buried the next. Also, by stressing the thirty days following the death, the author distracts attention from the day of burial, the day on which Harold was crowned. He thereby suggests that Edward remained pre-eminent in the awareness of the English people for a month after his funeral, perhaps beginning that process of writing Harold out of the story which culminates in Domesday Book.

One of the ways in which an individual might approach the prospect of his dying and death may be elucidated by examining the role of St Peter in the *Vita Eadwardi* and perhaps, through this, the part he played in Edward's personal piety. Other than Edward himself, very few saints are mentioned in the *VE* (and Edward is only represented as a saint in Book II). Sts Benedict, Olave and Audemer (Omer) appear in passing as the dedications

⁵⁶⁵ ‘...precesque et gemitus cum psalmodiis celebrant tota illa die cum nocte succedenti. Orta interim die funeste celebritatis, decantatione missarum et recreatione pauperum officium beatificant perficiendi funeris.... Totum quoque a primo die tricenarium celebratione missarum, decantatione prosecuntur psalmodum, expensis pro redemptione ipsius anime multis auri libris in subleuatione diuersi ordinis pauperum.’ Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book II, 11, p. 124-6 and n.332.

of the churches at Wilton, York and Saint-Omer in Flanders; and St Edith of Wilton is referred to once as one of Edward's ancestors and his wife's namesake. The one exception to this is St Peter, who is not only frequently referred to, but also appears and speaks in person, in Brihtwald's vision. In fact, Peter seems to be remarkably important in Edward's life, present in Brihtwald's vision at the beginning of his reign, becoming the particular focus of his devotion at Westminster Abbey and watching over his tomb. Is there any particular reason for stressing the importance of St Peter?

St Peter's importance is first hinted at in the vision of Bishop Brihtwald. The Bishop sees the saint consecrating an anonymous man as king, a man who, we are assured, is Edward. Peter also sets 'the years of his reign by a fixed reckoning of his life' (*regnique annos sub certo uite calculo determinare*), and promises that the succession has been taken care of by God. Peter thus endorses the idea of Edward's rightful succession to the throne.

The saint's association with ideas of endorsement and continuity is strengthened by the way his name is used later on in Book I, 5, in the episode in which Bishop Ealdred goes to Rome to receive his pallium as archbishop of York. This is initially denied due to a breach of canon law; in addition to failing to receive the pallium, Ealdred is deposed from his position as a bishop and sent away in confusion. In this first part of the story, St Peter's name is not used as a synonym for Rome or the pope. However, when Ealdred's party has to return to Rome after being attacked by robbers, the pope changes his mind and both reinstates Ealdred and awards him his pallium. This episode is described in two sentences, in the first of which the papal court is associated with 'the holiness of St Peter' (*a beati Petri pietate*) and in the second with 'the bounty of St Peter' (*ex beati Petri largitate*). The pope's motives were to keep the prestige of Rome high in England, 'so that they would

persevere in their kingdom in greater fidelity and worship of that apostle' (*ut scilicet in regno suo in eiusdem apostoli persisterent ampliori fidelitate et ueneratione*). Again, Peter is associated with ideas of continuity and sponsorship; clearly, his recommendation is worth having.

St Peter next appears when Edward refounds the 'insignificant' (*paruo*) monastery at Westminster. Despite the importance of its position on the Thames near London, it is its dedication which proves the real attraction to the king when he comes to build his mausoleum in Book I, 6:

because of his love of the Prince of the Apostles, whom he worshipped with uncommon and special love, he decided to have his burial place there. Accordingly, he ordered that out of the tithes of all his revenues should be started the building of a noble edifice, worthy of the Prince of the Apostles; so that, after the transient journey of this life, God would look kindly upon him... there was no weighing of the cost, past or future, as long as it proved worthy of, and acceptable to, God and St Peter.⁵⁶⁶

This passage introduces the crucial point that distinguishes St Peter from the rest of the company of Heaven: he is directly, physically, involved in the process of salvation. he is God's doorkeeper, the holder of the keys of heaven (*Et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum*, Matthew 16:19). St Peter is finally invoked at Edward's interment at the end of Book II: 'And so, before the altar of St Peter the Apostle, the body...is laid up in the sight of God.' There are no other sources that suggest a context for Edward's particular devotion, but a comparison with the available information about Cnut may be illuminating.

⁵⁶⁶ 'potissimum autem ob amorem principalis apostoli, quem affectu colebat unico et speciali, eligit ibi habere sibi locum sepulchri. Precipit deinde ex decimis omnium reddituum suorum initiari opus nobilis edificii, quod deceret apostolorum principem, quatinus propitium sibi pararet deum post huius vite cursum labilem...nec impensa siue impendenda pensantur, dummodo deo et beato Petro dignum et acceptum probetur.' Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, Book I, 6, p. 69.

In the *New Minster Liber Vitae* (BL Stowe MS 944 f6r-7r), there is a series of images, starting with Cnut and Emma offering an altar cross to New Minster, Winchester, whose dedication was to St Mary and St Peter (Plate 5). Cnut is being crowned and Emma veiled by attendant angels; Christ in a mandorla hovers above the cross, with Mary to his right, above Emma, and Peter to his left, above Cnut. At the bottom, a row of arches frames a group of monks, presumably from the New Minster. In his discussion of this picture, Gerchow concentrates on the reciprocal exchange of gifts and the ways in which the image affirms Cnut's claim to the English throne.⁵⁶⁷ The following folios have a two-page depiction of the Last Judgment, in which St Peter is shown twice. On the right (fol. 7r, Plate 4), on the top level of the picture, he is beckoning the saved into the courts of heaven; in the distance a tiny figure of Christ, again in a mandorla, is the focus of their devotion. In the middle Peter stands between a devil and an angel, each of whom clutches a book. The devil is also trying to haul a human soul off with him, but Peter intervenes by hitting the devil on the head with his keys and thus rescuing the soul. In the bottom register, an angel, like Peter in that he carries keys but otherwise differentiated clearly by having wings and no tonsure, casts the damned into the jaws of hell and locks the doors on them. On the left (fol. 6v), angels usher souls towards Peter, while two tonsured figures, one of whom is identified as *Algarus*, look on. Gerchow interprets the scene as a dramatisation of the process of commemoration in a *liber vitae* in his article on prayers for Cnut,⁵⁶⁸ but does not comment on the bottom register. Elsewhere he misreads it, mistakenly identifying the angel in the lowest level as St Peter: 'In der untersten Szene schließt Petrus das Tor der Hölle und

⁵⁶⁷ J. Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut: The Liturgical Commemoration of a Conqueror' in Hicks (1992), pp. 219-238, 223.

⁵⁶⁸ J. Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut', p. 222-24.

überlaßt die Verdammten dem weitaufgerissenen Höllenschlund.’⁵⁶⁹ The role of Peter is an important one, however, as he is clearly involved not with the whole process of the Last Judgment but only with the elements of selecting the blessed and leading them into heaven. Christ, in this image, becomes a tiny background figure whose role in the drama of salvation is to acknowledge Peter’s decisive actions. In this manuscript, Peter becomes more than the doorkeeper of heaven; by actively intervening to rescue the soul from the devil he becomes an embodiment of intercessory prayer, associated specifically with royal devotion.

The author of the *VE* uses the importance of St Peter in Edward’s hierarchy as a way of exploring issues of influence over what happens after death, and access to the power of prayer. The stress on Peter’s primacy (*primus apostolorum*) and the repeated use of the title of Prince of the Apostles (*apostolorum principis*) may also explain Peter’s appeal to royalty. The account of Brihtwald’s vision implies that Peter is watching over the whole of Edward’s reign, from his coronation to its anticipated end with his death, and the rebuilding of Westminster Abbey implies that Edward has made good use of his special relationship with the saint. In the last glimpse we are given of the king he is permanently ensconced next to Peter’s altar.

iv. Edward’s Dying and Death in the Bayeux Tapestry

In Book II of the *VE*, the dying and death of Edward take up nearly five pages; by contrast they occupy only two scenes of the Bayeux tapestry. They are, however, scarcely

⁵⁶⁹ [In the lowest scene, Peter closes the door of Hell and leaves the damned to the yawning mouth of Hell] J. Gerchow, *Die Gedenküberlieferung der Angelsachsen Mit einem Katalog der libri vitae und Necrologien* (Berlin 1988), p. 166.

less important for understanding the whole work. As noted above, the Bayeux tapestry probably used the *Vita Eadwardi* as one of its sources for the scenes depicting Edward's death and burial.⁵⁷⁰ Its designers were faced with the challenge of packing a complex narrative into a few inches of embroidery and as a result these scenes are among the densest in the whole work, with the funeral seemingly happening before the death, and the dying and dead Edwards apparently cohabiting. This raises questions about the understanding of the moment of death, the death-bed as a place of empowerment and the control the dead might have over the living. It also raises issues of royal identity in death, ideas later developed as the concept of 'the King's two bodies'. In this reading, the question of the background of the designer of the tapestry becomes paramount. The tapestry has often been described as 'secular',⁵⁷¹ but a political narrative need not imply a secular narrator. As discussed above, the general consensus on both historical and art historical grounds is that the Canterbury monastery of St Augustine's is the most likely provenance. Canterbury seems to have been something of a history factory: Brooks and Walker point out that one of the closest textual parallels to the tapestry's version of Harold's Norman expedition is Eadmer of Canterbury's *Historia Novorum* (written shortly after 1100) and that the author of the *VE* also probably had Canterbury connexions.⁵⁷² Therefore there may well have been a common culture shared by the generators of both the words and the images under discussion here, and we should not expect the understanding of dying and death to be less sophisticated in the tapestry than it is in the *VE*. The language of images is not the same as the language of words, however, and the tapestry needs to be read carefully in terms of its

⁵⁷⁰ Brooks and Walker in Gameson, p. 73.

⁵⁷¹ Brilliant in Gameson, p. 111; Dodwell in Gameson, p. 47; Bernstein, *Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry*, pp. 104-107.

⁵⁷² Brooks and Walker in Gameson, pp. 70-73; Barlow, *Vita Eadwardi*, p. xlvi.

symbolic language and the ways in which the designer has manipulated time and space to convey complex ideas in his visual medium.

In toto, there are five images of Edward in the tapestry. He introduces the entire work, shown in the role of powerful, enthroned monarch, before disappearing for nearly half the length of the tapestry in its surviving state and then reappearing to die. Images of Edward thus form parentheses to the narrative of Harold's adventures in Normandy, providing a wider context for interpreting Harold's behaviour: he is the king's man, no landless adventurer or exile.

In this introductory image, Edward is given great authority, seated on his throne, feet on a stool, crowned, holding his sceptre upright, framed by an elaborate architectural canopy; though seated he is as tall as or taller than the standing figures of Harold Godwineson and his companion. The only inscription is EDWARD REX. Edward's posture also suggests power: though his body is angled towards the viewer, his face and right hand are focused on the men in front of him, who hold up their hands, perhaps in supplication. This is an icon of the public face of the king, with little hint of the human being inhabiting the role. Edward is distinguished as an individual only by his beard, but even this may be intended less as a realistic detail than as a symbol indicating age and venerability, just as the crown he wears on his death-bed indicates his royal status and potency.

With Edward's presence and power established at the very beginning, the tapestry's designer feels free to take the story over the Channel; as soon as Harold returns to England we are confronted with four more images of Edward: enthroned, shrouded on his bier, on his death-bed and being laid out for burial. Representations of Edward in the seat of power

and carrying regalia thus introduce and conclude the first section of the narrative. The second scene of Edward enthroned is followed by the scenes of the king's funeral, dying and death, a narrative structure which has two obvious peculiarities. One is that Edward's burial is sandwiched between two images of him still alive; the second is that the scenes of the death-bed and the shrouding appear to be taking place simultaneously in different rooms in the same building. We are presented with two statements of the same paradox: how can a man be alive after his own funeral, and how can he be alive and dead at the same time?

This is one of several places in the tapestry where the narrative deviates from its usual left-to-right flow. This may well have been an established convention in the vocabulary of visual story-telling: Martin Biddle compares the technique in the tapestry to a piece of late tenth or early eleventh century sculptural frieze from Winchester, which, he argues, shows episodes from the life of the hero Sigmund in which adjacent narrative scenes are pointing in different directions.⁵⁷³ Gameson identifies five such scenes altogether in the tapestry; other than Edward's death-bed and burial, they are all scenes in which two figures or groups of figures encounter each other as they approach from different directions, or in which one figure approaches while the other figure stays still.⁵⁷⁴ This is not the case, however, in the scenes of Edward's death and burial, and another explanation must be sought. Both Gameson and Bernstein emphasise the causal connexion between Edward's dying words and Harold's coronation and claim this is sufficient grounds for the complex structure, but if the designer had wished to make this point with great clarity there would have been other methods available to him. Bernstein illustrates his argument by rearranging the scenes so that they flow in the expected chronological order: (1) death-bed,

⁵⁷³ M. Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1965: fourth interim report' Appendix, in *The Antiquaries Journal* XLVI (II), 1966, pp. 329-32.

⁵⁷⁴ Gameson in Gameson, pp. 195-96.

(2) shrouding, (3) burial, (4) Harold being offered the crown. He goes on to claim that this would mean ‘Now that King Edward is dead we offer you the crown’ rather than the actual meaning (in his reading): ‘As Edward instructed in his last days, we hereby offer you the crown.’⁵⁷⁵ This argument is invalid: Bernstein appears to assume that the images and captions actually used were the only possible designs available. Brooks and Walker suggest that the arrangement of the scenes reflects the speed at which events occurred, with Edward’s death and burial and Harold’s coronation happening within forty-eight hours, and again stress the importance of causality: ‘Had the funeral scenes followed the death of King Edward in the tapestry, Harold’s accession to the throne would have appeared widely separated from the death of the Confessor.’⁵⁷⁶ Like Bernstein, they are underestimating the ingenuity of the designer, who did not use these scenes simply because they were the only ones available to him, and then juggle them around until they fell into a causally apt though chronologically inept pattern. Other options must have been available. He could, for example, have shown Edward handing the crown to Harold on the death-bed, or omitted the scene of the shrouding and used a double-decker structure in which the death-bed took place in the upper register and the funeral in the lower. He could have used his access to the written word in the captions to make an unambiguous statement along the lines of HIC EDWARDUS DEDIT HAROLDO CORONAM, just as earlier we have HIC WILLELM DEDIT HAROLDO ARMA. The ambiguity of the scene as it stands may stem less from our ignorance than from the designer’s original intention.

If the causal explanation is insufficient to clarify the tapestry as it stands, can an exploration of the depiction of dying and death in these scenes provide any more light?

⁵⁷⁵ Bernstein, p. 121.

⁵⁷⁶ Brooks and Walker in Gameson, p. 80.

While the functional and political explanation is part of the reason for the tapestry's arrangement, it overlooks the complexities which the structure allows the designer to explore. These complexities arise from the blurring of the boundaries between life and death. As we have seen from the reading of the *VE* above, these boundaries are shifting, allowing Edward both to converse with the already dead and to foresee England's future beyond his own death, letting him look right through death, the very existence of which is denied, to eternal life, and enabling the transformation of his corpse at the moment of death. If the *VE* was indeed influential on the designer of the tapestry, then some of these complexities might well be reflected in the embroiderer's very different medium.

These shifting boundaries are delineated in the tapestry by the numerical symmetry of Edward's five images. In two scenes he is alive and on his throne, in two he is a shrouded corpse and in one he is on his death-bed. This last image corresponds very closely to the central, transitional stage of the *rite de passage*; it comes after the funeral and physically positions the king in such a way as to show that he is on the boundary between life and death. He is wearing his crown, his upper body is vertical, and his right arm is gesturing, all in ways very similar to the position in which he is shown in the two pictures of him enthroned. However, his lower body is horizontal and entirely covered with material, as it is in the two pictures of his corpse. This state of being half-alive and half-dead is more powerful than colloquial use of those adjectives would usually imply. Edward is 'neither here nor there; [he is] betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial';⁵⁷⁷ he is no longer the vertical king nor yet the horizontal corpse.

⁵⁷⁷ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 95.

The scene which is most closely connected visually with Edward's death-bed is the scene immediately below it, of Edward's corpse, captioned ET HIC DEFUNCTUS EST: both 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' the king has an attendant at his head who has his arms around him and a priest standing behind his body. The double-decker structure of this composition, with 'the perfect 'social' body above — the man in life — and the imperfect 'natural' body below',⁵⁷⁸ is a striking foreshadowing of the cadaver or *transi* tombs of the later Middle Ages, and in fact it is to *transi* tombs that Binski is referring in the observation just quoted. There is no suggestion that there is any relationship between the tapestry and these tombs, which emerge in England c. 1400 out of a tradition of *gisant* tombs going back to the late twelfth century and the idea of a life-like effigy accompanying royal corpses at funerals which is first observed in England in 1327.⁵⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the iconography is very similar and it is worth asking whether or not similar ideas, perhaps opposing life against death, body against soul, or perfection against corruption, may be informing Edward's image here. Are there any relevant, contemporary ideas about duality and identity which could be applied to Edward?

The idea that a king had two identities, one pertaining to himself as a mortal individual and the second as the embodiment of an immortal role, was beginning to be codified in this period. The development of Christ-identified kingship in Anglo-Saxon thought was looked at above, but the anatomy of the double nature of the monarch is first dissected in the anonymous Norman tractate *De consecratione pontificum et regum*,⁵⁸⁰ which is discussed at length by Ernst Kantorowicz.⁵⁸¹ Although the tractate was written

⁵⁷⁸ Binski, *Medieval Death*, p. 147.

⁵⁷⁹ Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England*, p. 188.

⁵⁸⁰ G. Williams, *The Norman Anonymous of ca. 1100 AD: Toward the Identification and the Evaluation of the So-called Anonymous of York*, Harvard Theological Studies XVIII (Cambridge, Mass 1951).

⁵⁸¹ E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton 1957).

c.1100, Kantorowicz stresses that its author was old-fashioned, 'a champion of ideals...of Anglo-Saxon England... he actually sums up the political ideas of the tenth and eleventh centuries'.⁵⁸²

The anonymous Norman author focuses on the idea of the *persona gemina* or *mixta*, which was used to understand the relationship between the sacred and the secular when they coincide in one body. He takes as his archetypes the kings and high priests of the Old Testament, describing them as having two persons, *una ex natura, altera ex gratia*.⁵⁸³ By extension, Christian kings were the anointed representatives of Christ on earth: as Christ had two different kinds of essential being, so must the king in parallel. The tractate also distinguishes between the role and the individual person, taking as his example Tiberius Caesar, who may have been vile as Tiberius but was none the less venerable as Caesar. Although the concept of the 'king's two bodies' was not to be fully developed in a legal context for several centuries, there is a clear understanding in the eleventh century of the spiritual complexities of the king's situation.

De consecratione pontificum et regum establishes three different identities for a king: his sacramental nature, his public position and his individual personality. Likewise, the tapestry offers three images of the dying and dead Edward for consideration, each exploring a different aspect. In Edward on his death-bed, we see the empowered monarch disposing of his kingdom; in the crownless corpse we are given the weak, vulnerable everyman; on the cross-bedecked funeral bier lies the triumphant Christian, destined for incorporation within the fabric of Westminster Abbey. The time-reversal serves two functions, firstly to slow down the pace of the narrative and force the audience to ponder

⁵⁸² Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 60.

⁵⁸³ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 46.

the riddles being posed, secondly to emphasise continuity, extending Edward's living presence into the period immediately after his death, just as in the *VE*. In a discussion of Dinka and Shilluk kingship that draws on Kantorowicz's analysis of the 'two bodies', Huntington and Metcalf suggest that

the most powerful symbol for the continuity of any community, large or small, simple or complex, is, by a strange and dynamic paradox, to be found in the death of its leader, and in the representation of that striking event.⁵⁸⁴

The last representation of the living Edward shows him not only dying but very probably making his will; having made a will, a dead man is literally continuing to hold sway over the living, his desires still active and powerful. Unlike the *VE*, the tapestry does not give us any explicit information about the contents of Edward's will, and that suggests that perhaps, to the tapestry's designer, it did not matter. It is the fact of there being a crowned and anointed king that is paramount, rather than the identity of the man inhabiting the role. Edward does not really die until a worthy successor has been found. With hindsight, Harold cannot have been worthy of kingship, and therefore kingship was taken away from him. The tapestry gives us three iconic images of kings (originally there may well have been four, as the most popular suggestion for the tapestry's lost *finale* is a scene of William's coronation).⁵⁸⁵ This would explain the even-handedness of the tapestry, neither indubitably pro-English nor pro-Norman, despite the amount of critical effort which has been expended in attempt to identify its bias. The narrator's primary purpose is to stress continuity and reassurance that things are going as they should, an interpretation close to Gameson's conclusion that the tapestry 'projects this same clear and awesome message:

⁵⁸⁴ Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 182.

⁵⁸⁵ Cowdrey in Gameson, p. 96.

that the Normans now hold England because God in his infinite wisdom and just judgement gave it to them.’ This programme of reconciliation is in direct contradiction to Bernstein’s argument that the tapestry represents a subversively pro-English concealed narrative. Edward’s death is so important in the tapestry because it is the catalyst for the rest of the story; in a way he continues to live, as we see Harold and William struggling for Edward’s crown, to take on his identity. As the early modern exponents of the doctrine of ‘the king’s two bodies’ would have put it: ‘the king is dead; long live the king’.

v. Edward’s Dying and Death in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.

The last of the major sources for Edward’s death is the only one in English, the texts collectively known as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. Four manuscripts cover the events of 1065-1066: A (Parker), E (Laud), C (one of the Abingdon chronicles) and D (sometimes called the Worcester chronicle). The A manuscript of the Chronicle was written up retrospectively,⁵⁸⁶ and is the most taciturn, saying only ‘In this year King Edward died, and Earl Harold took the kingdom and held it for forty weeks and a day.’⁵⁸⁷ E has:

In this year the minster at Westminster was hallowed on Holy Innocents’ day, and king Edward passed away on Epiphany Eve and was buried on Epiphany in the newly consecrated church at Westminster. Earl Harold succeeded to the kingdom of England as the king granted it to him and also as men had chosen him, and he was anointed king on Epiphany.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ J. Batley (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A Collaborative Edition., Volume 3: MS A* (Cambridge, 1986), p. xli.

⁵⁸⁷ ‘Her forðferde Eaduard king, 7 Harold eorl feng to ðam rice 7 heold hit .xl. wucena 7 ænne dæg’. Batley, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*, p. 83.

⁵⁸⁸ ‘On þissum gearre man halgode þet mynster æt West mynster on Cilda mæsse dæg. 7 se cyng Eadward forðferde on twelfta mæsse æfen. 7 hine mann bebyrgede on twelftan mæsse dæg innan þære niwan halgodre circean on Westmynstre. 7 Harold eorl feng to Engla landes cyne rice swa swa se cyng hit him geuðe. 7 eac

E then goes on to give accounts of Stamford Bridge and Hastings. C and D, on the other hand, have virtually identical and much longer entries, with a brief prose description of Edward's death and burial, followed by a poem on his life and death, and concluding with a reference to Harold's succession. It is on the C and D versions that this discussion will focus.

C (BL Cotton Tiberius B i) has its origins in a copy of a lost Abingdon Chronicle, continued up to 1066. The manuscript also contains the Old English translation of Orosius' *Historia aduersum paganos septem libri*, the Old English verse *Menologium* (a survey of the ecclesiastical year) and *Maxims II*; as Conner notes, all these can be seen as consciously chosen by the manuscript's compiler or compilers to interrelate with the Chronicle: Orosius's *Historia* establishes a universal context for English history; the *Menologium* provides the Christian significance of any particular date within the year; and the gnomic verse of *Maxims II*, with its stress on the importance of universal order and received wisdom, could represent a parallel to the Chronicle in its attempt to turn raw experience into authoritative text.⁵⁸⁹ The Chronicle is the last item in the manuscript and is defective, ending in the middle of Stamford Bridge. The entries for 1065 and 1066, covering Edward's death, are in one scribal hand.⁵⁹⁰

D (BL Cotton Tiberius B iv) was found in Worcester but seems in part at least to have been copied from a northern exemplar, possibly from York.⁵⁹¹ It was probably the

men hine þær to gecuron. 7 wæs gebletsod to cyng on twelftan mæsse dæg.' J. Earle and C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, Volume I (Oxford, 1892), pp. 195-96.

⁵⁸⁹ P. Conner (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A Collaborative Edition, Volume 10: The Abingdon Chronicle, A.D. 956-1066 (MS C. With reference to BDE)*, (Cambridge, 1996), p. xix.

⁵⁹⁰ Conner, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, C, p. xxix.

⁵⁹¹ Clark, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, p. xix.

only work in the manuscript as it originally stood, although some writs of Cnut have since been appended.⁵⁹² It is hard to pinpoint scribal changeover points, but again the entry covering Edward's death and burial seems have to been written in one hand.⁵⁹³

From 937 onwards, with *The Battle of Brunanburh*, poetry plays an increasingly important role in the Chronicle. In the following catalogue, I include all examples both of indisputable verse and of the heightened alliterative prose most familiar from the vernacular homilies of Ælfric and Wulfstan. The boundaries between these two registers are not always clear; Plummer prints D, E, F 959 and D, E 975 as verse, whereas Whitelock terms them rhythmical, alliterative prose.⁵⁹⁴ To summarise the contents of the different Chronicle MSS, there are the following verse or heightened prose entries:

937 (*Brunanburh* in A, B, C, D),

942 (*Redemption of the Five Boroughs* in A, D),

959 (alliterative prose on King Edgar in E, possibly written by Wulfstan),⁵⁹⁵

973 (poem on Edgar's coronation in A),

975 (A, B, C: poem on Edgar's death; D and E: different poem on Edgar's death; D also has a possibly Wulfstanian passage of alliterative prose on the terrible state of the nation),

979 (alliterative passage on death of King Edward the Martyr in E),

1011 (poem on the martyrdom of Archbishop Ælfheah in E),

1036 (poem on the murder of Prince Alfred in C),

1057 (alliterative prose on the death of Edward the Exile in D),

⁵⁹² Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D*, p.x.

⁵⁹³ Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D*, p. xiii.

⁵⁹⁴ Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, pp. 74 and 77.

⁵⁹⁵ K. Jost, 'Wulfstan und die angelsächsische Chronik' in *Anglia*, xlvii (1923), pp. 105-23.

1065 (poem on the death of Edward the Confessor in C and D),

1067 (poem on the virginity of Princess Margaret in D),

1087 (poem and prose on the death of William the Conqueror in E).

It is clear from this survey that these entries serve a predominantly commemorative function: eight out of twelve are produced in reaction to the deaths of nationally important figures, of whom four are kings (Edgar, Edward the Martyr, Edward the Confessor and William the Conqueror), two are Æthelings (Prince Alfred and Edward the Exile), and one is an archbishop (Ælfheah of Canterbury). Of the other entries, two describe nationally important battles against the armies of the Danelaw and their allies, and one covers the coronation of Edgar in 973. The only entry that apparently does not refer to an event of obvious national significance is the passage on Margaret's reluctance to marry (D, 1067). However, it stresses her genealogy and the importance of her marriage, and it may be that the Chronicler was concerned to emphasise her relevance to the displaced English royal family, despite what Stafford terms her 'dynastic marginality'.⁵⁹⁶ The focus of the poetic entries is overwhelmingly on matters of royal and military interest; the one subject pertaining to the church, the martyrdom of Ælfheah (E, 1011), is also of political interest, given that he was a hostage of the Danish host. Campbell suggests that, in the tenth century at least, most of the entries were court-generated and sent out to monasteries to be incorporated into their individual chronicles;⁵⁹⁷ this is surely even more likely to be the case

⁵⁹⁶ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, p. 91.

⁵⁹⁷ Campbell, *Brunanburh*, pp. 34-42.

with the poetic entries, as Opland argues, hypothesizing a tradition of court eulogy that flourished from the period of Athelstan's reign.⁵⁹⁸

Barlow asserts that the common source for the Chronicle entry for 1066 'was certainly written after the close of that year'.⁵⁹⁹ He does not say whether he believes the same to be true of 1065, but given that it ends 'and here earl Harold was consecrated king and he endured little peace therein while he ruled the kingdom',⁶⁰⁰ it seems likely that the prose entry on Edward's death was also written with the benefit of hindsight. The poem does not fit this pattern and seems to have been written immediately after Edward's death. Its chronological range extends back in time fifty years to the Danish Conquest of 1016 but it fails to narrate any event occurring after the moment that Edward's soul leaves his body. Harold's succession is mentioned, but only in the context of the bequest made during Edward's lifetime. This suggests that the poem was composed and perhaps also disseminated within a very few days of Edward's death; it may even have been produced for performance in the context of his funeral, given that no reference is made to his burial. (This is in contrast to the poem on Edward's brother, Prince Alfred, which was clearly composed after his funeral, since it describes him as buried at Ely Cathedral, 'at the west end, very near to the steeple, in the south *porticus*'.)⁶⁰¹ The poem on Edward sums up the king's life in light of his death in ways that make it clear that the poet was aware of a wide range of Old English poetic conventions and modes of language. Its language is traditional

⁵⁹⁸ J. Opland, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: A Study of the Traditions* (New Haven, Conn, 1980), pp. 172-77.

⁵⁹⁹ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. xxii.

⁶⁰⁰ '7 her wearð Harold eorl eac to cyngge gehalgod, 7 he lytle stilnesse ðæron gebad þa hwile þe he rices weold'. All quotations from the D MS are from Cubbin's edition; all translations unless otherwise specified are my own.

⁶⁰¹ '...æt þam west ende/ þam stype ful gehende, on þam suð portice...'. Chronicle, C 1036. I am following E. Fernie, *The Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons* (London 1983), p. 114-15.

and internally repetitive, with the line ‘wintra gerimes welan brytnodon’ occurring twice, referring both to Edward and to Cnut, and Edward’s soul twice described as ‘soðfæst’.

The poem begins with the announcement of Edward’s death:

Here King Edward, Lord of the English,
sent his righteous soul to Christ,
his holy ghost into God’s keeping.⁶⁰²

This instantly establishes itself as a very different kind of narrative from the drily factual account, in the preceding prose, of Edward’s death on the fifth of January and burial on the sixth. Whereas the prose was only concerned with Edward as king, the verse extends its interests to include the state and destination of his soul. This is typical of the poem’s attitude to history: everything is personalised, made relevant both to Edward’s spiritual condition and his life experiences. From the standpoint of his death the poem constructs a highly selective biography, looking back to the Danish conquest and Edward’s ensuing exile (ll.16-21), to the twenty-four years of his reign (ll.6-8), to his overlordship of Welsh, Scots, British, Angle and Saxon subjects (ll.9-11), to his entrusting the kingdom to Harold (ll.29-34), and to the moment of his death (ll.1-3 and 25-29).

The poet presents his protagonist in terms of two figures familiar from Old English literature: the spiritual champion who actively seeks salvation even though this is only available through death, and the worldly hero who is generous to his warriors and protects his kingdom, whose one failure is to die. This deployment of a mixture of heroic and spiritual modes is familiar in Old English literature, and found elsewhere in Chronicle

⁶⁰² ‘Her Eadward kingc, Engla hlaford,/ sende soðfæst sawle to Criste,/ on Godes wæra gast haligne.’ ll. 1-3.

poems such as *The Redemption of the Five Boroughs*.⁶⁰³ The different understandings of death mean that the two roles are incompatible, but in Edward's case the poet dodges his *impasse* by giving two interwoven accounts: in one, death is something desirable and under control; in the other it is to be dreaded and mourned.

In the passage quoted above, Edward is presented as active and powerful, despatching his soul to its sacred destination as if it were a registered parcel, comparable to Edgar in 975, who 'chose for himself another light' (*ceas him oðer leoht*). The following lines, treating his temporal political career, confirm this image: he is described as a 'noble ruler' (*freolic wealdend*) possessing 'royal majesty' (*kyneprymme*), he is the son of Æthelred (*byre Æþelredes*) but, unlike his *unræd* father, he is 'cunning in council' (*cræftig ræda*) Edward is established as a *rex justus* who has fulfilled his duties as king for 'twenty-four winters and a half' (*.xxiiii.... wintra gerimes... 7 healfe tid*).

However, the poet's focus is not wholly on things of this world. Edward is represented as only passing through: 'he dwelt here in the world for a while.'⁶⁰⁴ In his youth, by contrast to the days of his kingship, he had dwelt in the paths of exile (*wunode wræclastum*), deprived of his kingdom (*lande bereafod*), with no settled home (*wide geond eorðan*). The theme of exile in Old English poetry is best known in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*,⁶⁰⁵ and the young Edward shares features with their anonymous heroes, who have been seen as representing the archetype of the Christian soul.⁶⁰⁶ *The Seafarer* and *The*

603 J. Thormann, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Poems and the Making of the English Nation' in A. Frantzen and J. Niles (eds.), *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity* (Gainesville, FL 1997), pp. 60-85, 67.

604 'He on worulda her wunode þrage', l. 4.

605 G. V. Smithers, 'The Meaning of the *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*' in *Medium Ævum* xxvi:3 (1957), pp. 137-53.

606 Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 321ff and 329ff.

Wanderer are often characterised as ‘elegies’;⁶⁰⁷ Rosemary Woolf identifies them both as examples of the genre of *planctus*, laments in a fictionalised voice bewailing a death or other intense loss, and associates them with the eulogies performed at Beowulf’s funeral.⁶⁰⁸ Although the voice in the poem on Edward is not personalised in any way, it may be productive to see all these texts as contributing to a culturally important literary genre dealing with loss, with the loss through death of a king as a significant subset of that genre. While *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* do not often specify their lost lords as kings *per se*, their vocabulary is redolent of rule. *The Wanderer* has *goldwine* (35), *winedryhten* (37), *mondryhten* (41), *waldend* (78), *mabpumgyfa* (92) while *The Seafarer* has *dryhten* (41, 43), *cyningas* and *caseras* (82), *goldgiefan* (83) and *æpelinga bearn* (93). In *The Wanderer*, the hero, like Edward, has to ‘tread the paths of exile’ (*wadan wræclastas*, 5) after the fall of kinsmen (*winemæga hryre*, 7). Like the Seafarer on the ice-cold sea (*iscealdne sæ*, 14), Edward’s exile takes him abroad, and it is emphasized in the Chronicle poem that the island of Britain is surrounded by cold waters (*Swa ymbclyppað ceald brymmas*, 12).

Unlike the heroes of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, Edward appears to find an earthly end to his exile when he returns to England after twenty-eight years of Danish rule (the poet counts from 1014, including Sveinn Forkbeard in his reckoning). Once he is reinstated as king, the poet apparently loses interest in the details of his career until death arrives. However, the stress in the passage on Edward and the nature of kingship before the mention of his exile is on worldly goods and power, the king as ruler. After the passage on exile the emphasis is on spiritual virtues, the king as protector. Edward is cheerful (*wæs a bliðe mod*) and innocent (*bealu leas*), pure (*clæne*) and merciful (*milde*), and his virtues are

⁶⁰⁷ R. Björk and J. Niles, *A Beowulf Handbook* (Exeter, 1998), p. 209.

⁶⁰⁸ R. Woolf, ‘*The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and the Genre of Planctus*’ in Nicholson and Frese, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 192-207.

presented as the result of his triumphing over his potentially disastrous experience of exile and adversity. The poet may be drawing an implicit contrast between transient worldly goods and eternal glories (*swegles leoht*, 28), the same kind of contrast as Cnut draws in the preamble to a charter discussed by Deshman:

Although we are... defiled by the transitory possessions of this world, yet we may purchase the eternal reward of heavenly life with these crumbling riches, and therefore I Cnut, by the grace of God king of England....⁶⁰⁹

The royal wealth, wisely disposed of, can help rather than hinder the king's salvation.

So far, despite his twenty-eight year exile, Edward has been consistently presented as powerful. However, towards the end of the poem, the poet returns to the subject of the king's death and interprets it in a completely different way from his first account:

The noble Edward ruled the realm
land and people, until there came suddenly
bitter death and took at such cost
the lord from the earth; angels carried
his righteous soul into heaven's light.⁶¹⁰

Death here is presented as unexpected (*lunger*) and unwelcome (*bitera*), depriving the English nation of something precious (*deore*), in distinct contrast to the way it is described in the poem's opening lines. This is a salutary reminder that Edward's death does not only affect Edward. The poet is highly aware of the historical and geographical stage for Edward's achievements, he uses a wide range of vocabulary to describe England —

⁶⁰⁹ R. Deshman, 'Christus rex et magi reges: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art' in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 10 (1976), pp. 368-405, 404-5.

⁶¹⁰ 'Eadward se æðela, eðel bewerod,/ land 7 leode, oðþæt lunger becom/ deað se bitera, 7 swa deore genam/ æpelne of eorðan; englas feredon/ soþfæste sawle innan swegles leoht.' ll. 24-28.

worulda, eorðan, lande, rice, Engla landes and *eðel* — and describes him as ruling Angles, Saxons, British, Scots and Welsh, in a narrative of English national myth-making going back to Bede.⁶¹¹ From this pragmatic and political viewpoint, death is the enemy and Edward its helpless victim. The poet is working from two perspectives, celestial and terrestrial. From the former, Edward's death is a triumph. From the latter, it is a disaster. The poet has combined different poetic modes, making it clear both that he is well-acquainted with traditional Old English verse and that he is capable of producing work firmly located within that tradition. Funerary conventions are often conservative, if not rigid, and the ceremonies around Edward's bier offer themselves as an obvious environment for the composition of this poem.

The model for understanding the death of the king, proposed earlier in this chapter, has proved a valuable tool for an analysis of the different testimonies about Edward's death. Firstly, it clarifies the different purposes of Books I and II of the *VE*. Only by seeing how the function of the king as the embodiment of the nation was shifted, in Book I, away from Edward and on to Godwin, is it possible to understand why Edward's death is virtually ignored in the first part of the narrative. More generally, the concepts of dying and death are explored in the *VE* in an extremely complex way. The writer successfully tackles the issue of death being a disaster for a king and a triumph for a saint through Edward's vision and death-bed warning: the dead Edward continues to fight, both for England as a whole and for his individual subjects. Central to his thesis is the idea of the death-bed as an extremely powerful platform, and dying as a special experience. The author's purpose is also didactic, to give the reader a model of a virtuous death-bed and, by his stress on public

⁶¹¹ N. Howe, *Migration and Myth-Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (Yale, 1989), p. 69.

involvement in the funeral and commemoration, to emphasise the continuing role the community has to play in the journey of the individual soul.

An understanding of beliefs about royal death has also led to insights on the Bayeux tapestry. An exploration of the complex ideas the tapestry's designer was conveying clears him from charges of technical incompetence or muddled thinking. It also places the tapestry even more firmly within the context of Providential history: though it depicts primarily secular events, it interprets those events as evidence of God working within history to safeguard the institution of anointed kingship.

The argument that writings about death are particularly prone to internal contradictions is exemplified in the poem on Edward's death in the C and D Chronicles. Edward's eulogist needs to show that the king was a great secular ruler who left his kingdom in good hands as well as a suitable earthly representative for Christ, a perfect Christian and a much-mourned father-figure. He therefore attempts to paint an almost Cubist picture of death as something inevitable, something glorious and something catastrophic.

CONCLUSION

Some of the conclusions drawn in this thesis might appear to be obvious. It is hardly astonishing to read that the Anglo-Saxons shared the same beliefs about the origins of death or the resurrection of the body as the rest of Christian Europe, or, indeed, to hear that they confronted the same questions about death that have taxed every human society including our own. To say, 'there is no such thing as a really dead body in medieval Christian thought' is scarcely original. However, the thesis has explored many aspects of attitudes to death that were particular to this time and place, and has shown that an understanding of a culture's death system can also increase understanding of wider questions. It has also taken advantage of the great wealth of data from the different fields of literature, history, art and archaeology, all of which shed light on the great cultural preoccupation of death.

At the beginning, reactions to death are described as 'Crisis Management Strategies'. This has remained a common theme throughout. The examination of texts which show the dead and living body alike as continually under threat demonstrate that the body itself was seen as a permanent locus of crisis. While penitential practices, in theory at least, kept the living body in check,⁶¹² the dead body was more of a challenge. Texts such as *Soul and Body* show that the corpse was potentially the source of both terror and reassurance, an object which the living might abhor or cherish, or both. The dead bodies of saints such as Edmund exemplified both ends of the spectrum: objects of veneration which could also be very dangerous to those who attacked them.

⁶¹² Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, 3.

The continuing potency of saints' bodies introduces another main theme of the thesis: the uncertainty about what happened at death, and about when death actually occurred. The thesis adduces numerous examples of the ways in which life, dying and death were thought to be interconnected, and shows that the body in the grave was the object of interest, speculation and sympathy. The general Christian belief in the resurrection of the body, combined with the particular historical circumstances of the rapid spread of parish churches and the innovation of consecrated churchyards, combined to make late Anglo-Saxon burial practice a field of cultural experimentation. The absence of a formulated doctrine of Purgatory adds to the importance of this experimentation. Lacking guidelines, but aware of the central role of the body in the general resurrection, the buriers of the dead were attempting to prolong the processes of penance and salvation by the very structures of the graves. The innovation of constructing a hard, dry place around the bodies separates them from the soft, worm-ridden, organic earth, which implies decay and concomitant damnation. At the same time, the importance of the boundary of consecrated ground, and the boundedness of the graves, suggests that even the bodies of the Christian faithful were seen as dangerous in some way, needing containment and separation.

This need for separation is even more visible in the graves of the sinful dead. The mutilated bodies found within pre-Conversion cemeteries may mean that the pagan Anglo-Saxons welcomed their executed members back into the community *post mortem*: death itself was punishment enough.⁶¹³ For the Christians of the ninth to eleventh centuries, however, punishment extended to the criminals' dead bodies, excluded from holy ground, buried still bound, contorted, face down, among pagan burial mounds, around the gallows, or next to the stakes on which heads were displayed.

⁶¹³ Andrew Reynolds (pers. comm.).

The excluded nature of the criminal's burial is in contrast to the communal Christian ideal. The thesis demonstrates through the guild statutes, the *Regularis Concordia*, and the wills, that people were prepared to go to great lengths in order to have their community attend their death-bed, to have a socially and spiritually appropriate funeral, to be remembered in prayers and masses, and to preserve the memories of their deceased relations. One of the recurrent themes of the thesis has been the problem of distinguishing between the ideal and the real. In texts such as Ælfflæd's will, it is possible to examine some of the challenges people encountered when trying to commemorate their dead in fitting ways. The ideal standard of dying and death was a demanding one and one that, in the natural way of things, cannot always, or even usually, have been met. *The Fortunes of Men* is a powerful, even transgressive, attempt at separating the life a person leads from the death they die, providing a fascinating counterpoint to the more usual interpretation encountered in the works of Ælfric or *The Fates of the Apostles*. The thesis has also examined the ways in which these texts, with their exploration of death, could be used by people wishing to meditate on their own coming deaths.

Another important and recurrent topic of interest is the difficulty of thinking coherently about death. This is evident on a cultural scale when the fatalist, value-free attitude of the *Exeter* and *Cotton Maxims* is contrasted with the personal and judgmental approach evident in more explicitly doctrinal Christian texts. It is visible in the Vercelli version of *Soul and Body*, where the poet tried to represent decay both as punishment for sin and as a natural and inevitable side-effect of burial. It is evident even in the work of such a clear thinker as Ælfric, in his analyses of the Fall, where his assertion that 'God did

not make death' sits uneasily with his extended passage on the kinds of death that were unable to assault Adam in Eden.

Chapter one explored the various different theoretical approaches to death that have informed the thesis, sometimes more, sometimes less explicitly. Chapters two and three analysed ways in which death was imagined, and how the dead might be disposed of and commemorated. The ideas behind the first three chapters come together in chapter four where they are brought to bear on the testimonies reporting the dying and death of Edward the Confessor. The close study of the *Vita Eadwardi*, the Bayeux tapestry and the commemorative poem in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles shows how these death testimonies can illuminate other general issues, such as the nature of kingship, as well as offering new insight on particular questions such as the legitimacy of the succession to the English throne in 1066.

The methodologies developed in this thesis might fruitfully be applied to other areas. One such field is the iconography of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian grave-markers. Their imagery is often of worm- or dragon-like creatures, animals which, as we have seen, are a continual topic of interest in writings about the body in the grave. *Wyrm* is a word with a wide range of reference in Old English and analogies might be drawn between the dragon in its barrow guarding treasure and the worm/dragon on the gravestone guarding the treasure of the dead body, still crucially important in the drama of salvation. There is also scope for exploring the double nature of the worm/dragon as both defender of the body (on the gravestone) and attacker of the body (in the soil).

Another interesting area of exploration would be to look at Old English discussions of the deaths of kings, extending the scope of the study at least to the Peterborough

Chronicle's account of the death of William the Conqueror. Such discussions survive in different genres ranging from homilies and *Vitae* to chronicles and poetry. One result of such a study might be to trace the sources of some of the entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles; another might be to evaluate the extent to which English literary traditions survived both the Danish and the Norman Conquests. In addition, it might shed light on changing attitudes to the dead after the Norman Conquest.

This thesis has limited itself to examining primarily male experience, chiefly because of the nature of the data. However, Anglo-Saxon England was a place where men and women played different social roles, expressed in language, in dress and material culture, in social function and legal standing and, until the middle of the seventh century, in the grave.⁶¹⁴ Female experience can be hard to identify, however, as the bulk of surviving evidence from the period not only deals exclusively with men, it also treats the male experience as normal. When generalisations are made about human life or nature, they are usually made on the basis of male experience. However, it may be possible to unpick some of this evidence, in order at least to ask questions about the differences between male and female experiences of dying and death.

On the basis of her research among modern Western women, Sally Cline suggests that one difference is that men perceive death as an external foe to be fought and perhaps defeated, hence the modernist medical understanding of the death of the patient as the failure of the doctor. Women on the other hand, she argues, understand death as something they carry within them.⁶¹⁵ This contrast may have been much sharper in pre-modern cultures than it is today. Death in childbirth for both mother and child was much more

⁶¹⁴ C. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 39-40.

⁶¹⁵ S. Cline, *Lifting the Taboo: Women, Death and Dying* (London 1995), p. 24.

common and inevitably undershadowed women's attitudes to sexuality and procreation. In addition, Cline suggests, a mother may be aware not only of the birth but also of the implicit death of the child she carries. Interestingly, the theme of a mother mourning her child is widely explored in Old English poems such as *The Fortunes of Men*. A close study of attitudes to the body, to childbirth and to the deaths of children might therefore shed light on whether death was perceived differently by men and women. The different social roles played by men and women in connection with death and mourning are also of interest. Binski suggests that women were gradually phased out of medieval funerary rituals and their roles taken by men instead.⁶¹⁶ This may be seen as part of the process of professionalisation at this period, through which an overwhelmingly male-dominated Church was able to take over the rituals and practices connected with death that formerly had been carried out by the family or other members of the laity.

Carved stones, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, gender roles and relations: the diversity of potential subjects for further research is a reflection of the way in which the awareness of death conditions almost every human activity. Concomitantly, conclusions drawn from the study of death can be profitably applied to many different kinds of historical, archaeological and literary evidence. As Christian Morgenstern wrote

Who the living would explain
He must enter death's domain.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁶ Binski, *Medieval Death*, p. 52

⁶¹⁷ Cited in Enright, *Oxford Book of Death*, p.ix.

PLATE 1

The Bayeux Tapestry, Funeral of King Edward. Reproduced from L. Thorpe, *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion* (London, 1973), plate 31.



PLATE 2

The Bayeux Tapestry, Death Bed and Shrouding of King Edward. Thorpe, *Bayeux*

Tapestry, plate 32.



PLATE 3

The Shrouding of Joseph from the *Canterbury Hexateuch* (BL Cotton Claudius B IV), fol. 72v. Reproduced from C. R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective* (Manchester, 1982), p. 160.

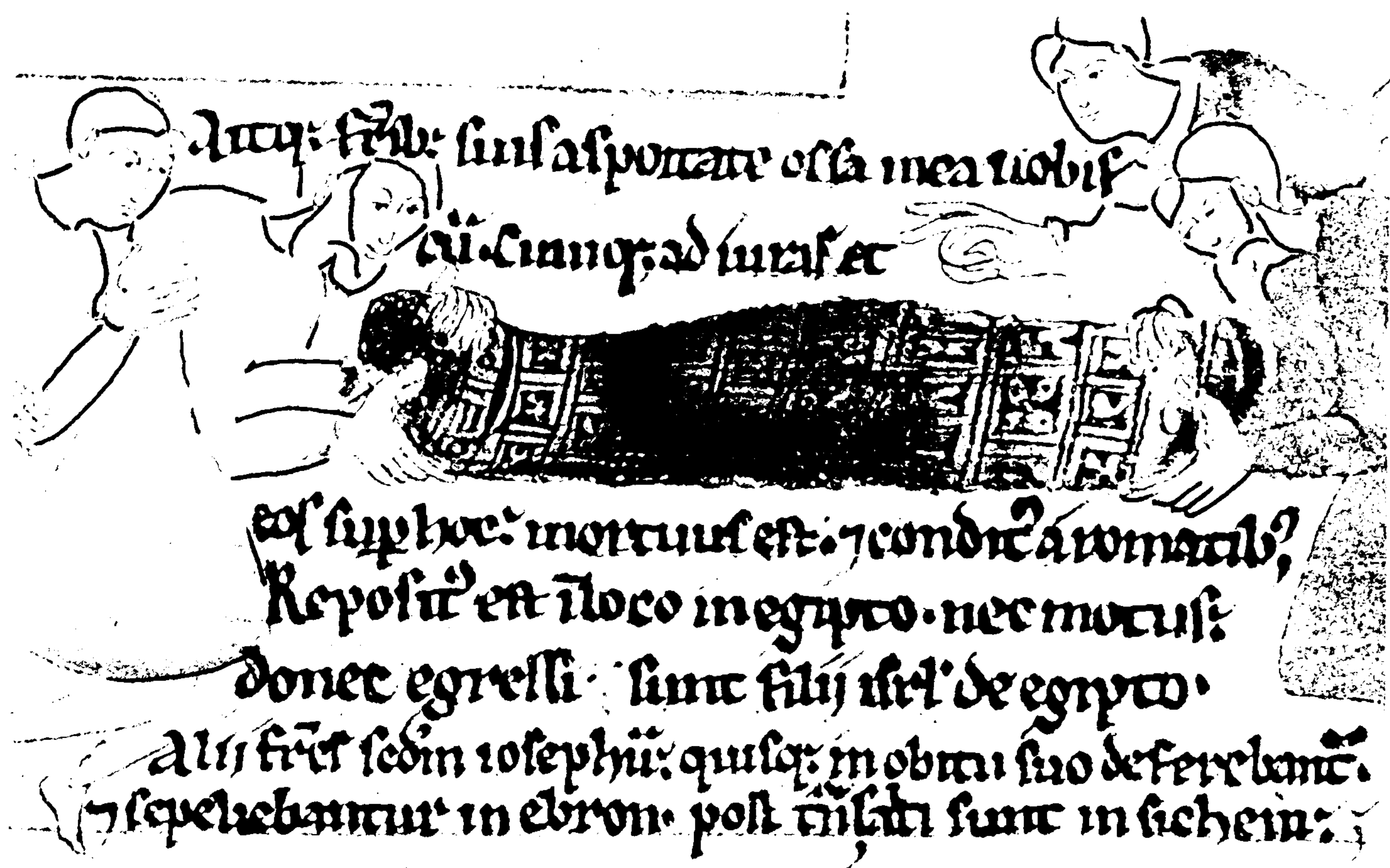


PLATE 4

The Last Judgment from the *New Minster Liber Vitae* (BL Stowe MS. 944, fol. 7).

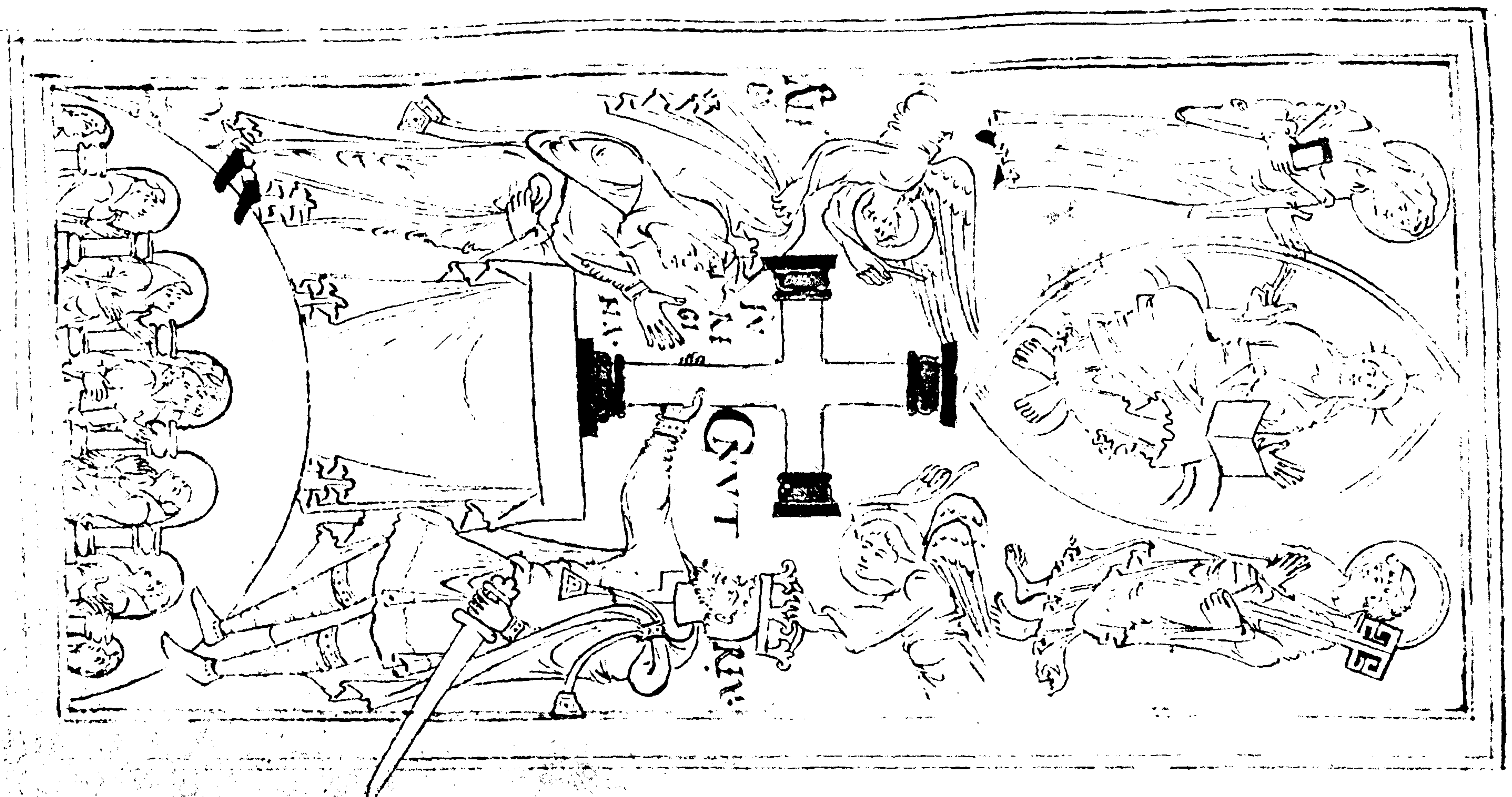
Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, p.105.



PLATE 5

King Cnut and Queen Emma from the *New Minster Liber Vitae*, fol. 6. Dodwell, *Anglo-*

Saxon Art, p. 177.



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