

Landscapes of Conversion in Eighth-
Century Hessia

An Interdisciplinary Approach to the
Anglo-Saxon Mission of St Boniface

Volume 1

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Abstract

This thesis is the first large-scale study of the mission of the Anglo-Saxon Saint Boniface to Hessa, a region in the centre of modern Germany, between 721 and 754. The aim of the study is to explore in more detail than has so far been achieved three aspects of the Bonifatian mission in Hessa: first, his formative years in Wessex and the political context of Hessa before his arrival; second, the ways in which the Anglo-Saxon missionaries represented certain aspects of mission in their literary discourse with Insular and Roman contacts; third, the specific challenges of the mission and the methods used by the missionaries to overcome them.

The thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach that has not yet been attempted in Bonifatian studies. The historical sources chiefly include the surviving letters of Boniface and his associates as well as the later *vitae* of Boniface and several other figures connected to his mission. The archaeological sources include furnished burials, fortifications, settlements and ceramics. These sources are brought together with the aid of a considerable amount of original toponymical and topographical research within Hessa itself.

The thesis is divided into three parts. In Part I, after an introduction and historiography (chapter 1), the theoretical and methodological foundations of the thesis are established (chapter 2).

In Part II, Boniface's early years in the West Saxon church (chapter 3) and the development of Frankish rule in Hessa between the early sixth century and the beginning of Boniface's mission (chapter 4) are contextualised more fully than previous studies have attempted. In chapter 3 several features of the church and kingdom of Wessex are identified that would fundamentally inform Boniface's approach in Hessa. In chapter 4 a new model for the development of Frankish influence in Hessa up to 721 is outlined, and its significance for the Bonifatian mission discussed.

Part III focuses attention on the Bonifatian mission in Hessa. Chapter 5 offers a broad overview of the mission: important chronological matters are discussed and clarified and the progress and development of the mission between 721 and 754 is outlined. It is argued that Boniface made a concerted attempt to evangelise Saxony from 739 onwards, but that his efforts were thwarted by growing political instability

on the Hessian-Saxon borderlands and the opposition of elements of the Rhineland Frankish church to his mission.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore two important aspects of the mission. First (chapter 6), the letters of Boniface and Lul are subjected to careful textual analysis. Second (chapter 7), several specific features of the Hessian mission are explored in more detail. In chapter 6 a distinction is identified in the nature of the literary discourse between the missionary community and papal Rome on the one hand, and the missionary community and the Insular Anglo-Saxon church on the other. The argument is made that the literary representation of the mission in letters between Anglo-Saxons, in contrast to letters between Anglo-Saxons and Rome, reflected a distinctive conceptualisation of continental mission that combined emotive themes of *peregrinatio*, suffering and the concept of *Germania* as an ancestral homeland that had been ensnared by Satan.

In chapter 7 the Bonifatian mission in Hessa is examined from several viewpoints. Using topographical and toponymical evidence, an original argument is put forward for the existence of numerous pagan cult sites within Hessa that together constituted part of a pre-Christian 'sacred landscape'. This is followed by an examination of the earliest ecclesiastical foundations of Hessa. New observations and arguments are proposed concerning the development of Hessa's early ecclesiastical landscape during Boniface's mission, and this landscape is then discussed in relation to the 'pagan' landscape which it was intended to supplant. This is followed by a detailed discussion of Boniface's attempts to gain material support for his mission through his dealings with the Frankish clerical and lay élites, with a special emphasis, using original charter-based research, on his relationship with the local secular élites of Hessa. Finally, the ways in which Boniface evangelised and instructed the population of Hessa and attempted to maintain control of his mission territories are examined.

By taking a broad, contextualising, interdisciplinary approach, this study illuminates the ways in which Boniface, strongly influenced by the structure of the West Saxon church, made practical attempts to establish a coherent ecclesiastical network in a politically volatile region where pagan customs and identity were deeply inscribed in the landscape. Through the textual analysis of the letters, the dissertation also presents the argument that the conceptualisation of mission as an inherently painful *peregrinatio* encouraged Boniface and his fellow missionaries, despite

circumstances of extreme adversity in Boniface's final years, not to abandon their largely thwarted evangelisation of the Hessian-Saxon borderlands. In doing so, the study offers invaluable new perspectives on and insights into the Bonifatian mission in Hessa.

The second volume of the thesis contains: three appendices giving the results of the textual analysis of the letters of Boniface and Lul discussed in chapter 6; two appendices listing the grantors of property to Hersfeld and Fulda referred to in the discussion of charter evidence in chapter 7; and all figures and plates referred to in the first volume.

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Abbreviations

<i>Ann. Fuld.</i>	Anon., <i>Annales antiqui Fuldenses</i> , in <i>Annales et chronici aevi Carolini</i> , ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hannover, 1826), pp. 337-414
<i>Ann. Laures.</i>	Anon., <i>Annales Laureshamenses</i> , in <i>Annales et chronici aevi Carolini</i> , ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hannover, 1826), pp. 22-39
<i>Ann. Mett.</i>	Anon., <i>Annales Mettenses priores</i> , ed. B. von Simson, MGH SS rer. Germ. 10 (Hannover, 1905)
<i>Ann. Petav.</i>	Anon., <i>Annales Petaviani</i> , in <i>Annales et chronici aevi Carolini</i> , ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hannover, 1826), pp. 7-18
<i>Ann. reg. Franc.</i>	Anon., <i>Annales regni Francorum</i> , ed. F. Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6 (Hannover, 1895)
ASC	J. Bately, ed., <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i> , Vol. 3, MS A (Cambridge, 1986)
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BHL	Society of Bollandists, eds., <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis</i> (Brussels, 1898-1901); H. Fros, ed., <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis, novum supplementum</i> (Brussels, 1986)
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
FH	<i>Fundberichte aus Hessen</i>
<i>Fred. Cont.</i>	Anon., <i>Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV</i> , ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 2 (Hannover, 1888), pp. 1-193
HE	B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds., <i>Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> (Oxford, 1969)
HJL	<i>Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte</i>
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
Capit.	Capitularia regum Francorum
Conc.	Concilia

Ep.	Epistolae
DD Kar.	Diplomatum Karolinorum
Epp. sel.	Epistolae selectae
Poetae	Poetae Latini medii aevi
SS	Scriptores
SS rer. Germ.	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum
SS rer. Merov.	Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum
SS Auct. ant.	Scriptores Auctores Antiquissimi
OE	Old English
OHG	Old High German
ON	Old Norse
OS	Old Saxon
PL	Patrologia Latina
<i>RGA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde</i>
S	Charter number in P. H. Sawyer, <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography</i> (London, 1968)
SSCI	Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo
Tangl	M. Tangl, ed., <i>Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus</i> , MGH Epp. sel. 1 (Berlin, 1916)
<i>UBH</i>	H. Weirich, ed., <i>Urkundenbuch der Reichsabtei Hersfeld, erster Band</i> , Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck XIX.1 (Marburg, 1936)
<i>UBF</i>	E. E., Stengel, ed., <i>Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda, erster Band: Die Zeit der Äbte Sturmi und Baugulf</i> , Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck X.1 (Marburg, 1958)
<i>Vita Bonifatii</i>	Willibald of Mainz, <i>Vita Bonifatii auctore Willibaldo</i> , in <i>Vitae Sancti Bonifatii archiepiscopi Mogutini</i> , ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover, 1905), pp. 1-58
<i>Vita Sturmi</i>	Eigil, <i>Eigilis vita S. Sturmi abbatis Fuldensis</i> , ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 2 (Hannover, 1829), pp. 365-377

Note on proper names and Latin translations

Throughout this thesis I have used the standard English form of continental place-names where they exist; hence Cologne instead of *Köln* and Rheims instead of *Reims*. There is some variation among Anglophone academics in their use of personal names of figures attached to the Bonifatian mission. I have used the form Lul in preference to Lull or Lullus, and Sturm instead of Sturmi or Sturmus. Otherwise I have followed the prevailing Anglicised form of personal names; where the prevailing form is not clear, for the sake of consistency and ease of reference I have used the form as it appears in the index of Frank Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England* (1971; 3rd revised edition 2001).

Unless otherwise stated in the relevant footnote, all Latin translations in the thesis are my own. All English translations of the Vulgate are from Douay-Rheims. In my Latin transcriptions I have followed precisely the orthography of the published edition cited, including variant spellings and the editor's use of consonantal *v* or *u*.

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Part I

Foundations

Metaphors of a Magnifico

Twenty men crossing a bridge,
Into a village,
Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,
Into twenty villages,
Or one man
Crossing a single bridge into a village.

This is old song
That will not declare itself . . .

Twenty men crossing a bridge,
Into a village,
Are
Twenty men crossing a bridge
Into a village.

That will not declare itself
Yet is certain as meaning . . .

The boots of the men clump
On the boards of the bridge.
The first white wall of the village
Rises through fruit-trees.
Of what was it I was thinking?
So the meaning escapes.

The first white wall of the village...
The fruit-trees...

Wallace Stevens, *Harmonium* (1923; revised 2nd edition, New York, 1931), p. 22

Chapter One

Introduction and Historiography

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Geismar

Wherever or whenever it started, it probably started with a prayer. Perhaps it started in a small stone church, with a kneeling man beseeching the protection and support of God and his patrons, Saint Peter, Saint Paul, maybe also Saint Bridget, since the church was dedicated to her and she had guarded it thus far. After the prayer, a procession: defining and challenging the world through action, evoking history – the past and the future, known equally to God – by pacing in file out of the church, past the graveyard and down the steep, dry streets of the hilltop town. It had to be a dry day, a good day for tree felling. People watched the procession, people followed it, warriors, farmers, craftsmen, women and children, none of whom had never seen anything quite like it before. The man led the procession through the thick-barred gate of the town wall, and onto the road that wound to the river below, slipping down the contours to the crossing place. Beyond the river was a village, where people also waited patiently, powerless to act, perhaps unwilling, as the twenty men clumped over the bridge towards them. They filed past the white walls of the village, past the fruit-trees, chanting a strange language in a stranger accent, and climbed the path that led beyond the paddocks.

Here, in the bright air of a forest grove, they came to the monstrous oak that bore the name of a demon. The monk at the head of the procession, middle-aged, humbly dressed, yet taller by a head than those around him, stepped forward and began the next act of the drama. His sharp eyes were fixed upon the gnarled face of the ancient enemy, on the writhing branches within which Thor had ensnared the people of this country since the Fall. Perhaps the monk cut the first notch himself, perhaps he commanded others to do it. But he had friends at his back and an act to perform, and, just as it was right to raise his hands to heaven in prayer, so it was right to bring this oak crashing down to the ground.

It was not a quick job, and there was no thunderbolt from heaven, no godly breath of wind, to help the fellers as they hacked through the ancient wood: old enough, perhaps, to have seen Drusus march by this spot with his legions seven hundred years before. The tree came down, the praise resumed, the event drew to its uncertain close. It would be up to each man and woman present to decide what it all meant, though some already knew, had always known, even if they now berated themselves for ever doubting that it would come to pass.

This event, or an event like this, would be remembered, embellished, dramatised and eventually recorded a generation later by a man who had not been there, had possibly never met anyone who had been. It would pass into the realm of hagiography and myth, and while this would transform much of the substance of the event, it would help generate that much more precious thing: meaning. Men may have wielded the axe, but the oak had fallen by an act of God's will. Perhaps the breath of God had not caused the oak to crash and split into four equal parts, but what did that matter? The ritual, in following the will of God, had made that will manifest. By acting in and through the world the fellers had changed it. The old ways were coming to an end, the ancient demons were being uprooted from the very earth, the landscape was being reborn in Christ, just as each person within it was to be reborn in him. For this truth lay in the hearts of the missionaries: they saw that the world was to be transformed, and then they saw it transformed at their own hands.

1.1.2 Landscape and meaning

Fact can be an elusive thing. I am quite sure that the Anglo-Saxon missionary Saint Boniface felled a sacred pagan oak near Geismar, in the modern German *Land* of Hesse, in 723 A.D. The rest of the above scene is conjecture. We do not know that Boniface began by praying in a church atop Büraburg, a Frankish hillfort over the Eder from Geismar, nor that he led a procession across the river, nor that the people of Geismar lifted not one finger to save their doomed temple. Each of these fictions is, however, very plausible. Less plausible is that exactly twenty men clumped across the bridge, or that the walls of the village were painted white, or that they rose to view through fruit trees. These details serve only to recall us to the poem of Wallace Stevens quoted before this introduction, and to the message it contains: if fact is elusive like the transient clumps of boots on a wooden bridge, then meaning is

slippery like the eels of the Eder beneath. Meaning cannot declare itself, but must be sought out and snatched from the stream. Where we look, and what we catch, are different for each of us. Sometimes it happens that our own search for meaning brings us to the squirming fishnets of others; and there, too, we are never sure what we may find.

The demolished *Donareiche*, the ‘Oak of Thor’, has lain at the foot of Boniface’s reputation since his martyrdom in 754 (see plate 1). It symbolises the achievement which posterity has granted Boniface in the label ‘Apostle of Germany’: namely, the overthrow of the pre-Christian gods in what is now Germany, and their replacement by Christ. Yet when I began my studies, it occurred to me that what religious tradition has always treated as a primarily *symbolic* event had in 723 a *literal* aspect which was deserving of further study. Robert Markus has shown that until the fourth century, Christianity, in contrast to the pagan religions of the Mediterranean, was markedly unconcerned with attaching holiness to places: God, as Augustine insisted, was everywhere, most of all within oneself, and was not to be put in a four-walled box like a pagan idol.¹ Yet one lesson we can learn from Geismar is that, for Boniface and his missionary companions, paganism and Christianity were as much about places as people. The paganism of eighth-century Hessians involved belief and behaviour, but both of these were fundamentally integrated into the landscape: thus the landscape itself became contested.

This thesis is above all an attempt to discover the nature of this contest, and in so doing I have treated the physical landscape in which the mission took place not as a naked arena, but as a crucible of cultural conflict and conversion, at the heart of which, both physically and spiritually, stood the Geismar shrine. Superimposed upon the physical landscape were other landscapes, more abstract yet equally influential on the outcome of the mission, which will appear throughout the coming chapters: the landscapes of politics, of shifting boundaries of settlement and control, of movement and trade, of ecclesiastical governance and religious devotion. Practicality and convention demand that these landscapes be categorised and illustrated as distinct entities, hence the abundance of figures in the additional volume of this thesis, but the starting principle of any historical enquiry, especially those concerned with a

¹ R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 139-155.

particular region, must be that no aspect of human social life has ever existed in isolation.

This multi-dimensional view of landscape and history guided my study from the outset. My specific questions came to centre on the missionary community itself, most especially on the relationship between the description and symbolic representation of the mission in the letters written by Boniface and his companions to their supporters outside the mission field on the one hand, and the regular trials and experiences of the mission as they experienced it on the other. The portrayal of the mission according to particular *topoi*, formulas and motifs can to some extent be reconstructed from the one hundred and fifty or so letters surviving from the mission, most of which were written to or by Boniface. The trials, experiences and results of the mission must be reconstructed through more multifarious means, including the use of historical, archaeological, toponymical, geographical and anthropological sources.

Taken alone, either of these two perspectives of portrayal and experience would give us an intriguing but two-dimensional insight into the community of Anglo-Saxon missionaries in Hessa. Only by combining the two perspectives can we approach a three-dimensional understanding of their worlds of meaning: how they viewed the world, how they understood and defined their place within it, and why they acted the way they did. By the end of this thesis I will have shown that the Christian missionaries in Hessa sought to confront and 'convert' the pagan landscape as well its pagan inhabitants; that Geismar was merely one disputed shrine among many; and that the highly symbolic portrayal of the mission by Boniface and his companions both reinforced and was reinforced by their missionary strategy.

I have divided this thesis into three parts: Foundations, Context and Mission. With the first part, comprising chapters one and two, I intend to establish the historiographical, theoretical and methodological bases of my study. The remainder of this chapter I shall devote to a brief historiography of Bonifatian studies, the archaeological study of northern Hesse and archaeological approaches to landscape studies, and state how intend to contribute to each area. In chapter two I will outline the theoretical and methodological foundations upon which my study is founded.

Part two of the thesis, chapters three to five, will present the context of Boniface's missionary career pertaining to Hessa more fully than previous studies have done, examining his West Saxon origins and the topographical and political context of Hessa around the time of his arrival in 721. The purpose of establishing

context in this way is to assist in our comprehensive understanding of the many complex aspects of the Hessian mission under study.

In part three, chapters five, six and seven, we come to consider the mission itself. First we shall clarify the chronological course of his mission from 721 until his death in 754 (chapter 5), then examine both its symbolic portrayal in the letters of Boniface and his companions (chapter six) and the complexities and difficulties of the Hessian mission and the methods undertaken by the missionaries in overcoming them (chapter seven). We shall see that Boniface was able to conceive and establish a stable and coherent ecclesiastical system in Hessa, the primary purpose of which was the thorough Christianisation of the native population, and that his attempts to expand this successful phase of his mission into Saxony, though initially successful, proved disastrous. Yet despite the immense hardships involved and the ultimate frustration of the Saxon mission, Boniface and his Anglo-Saxon companions shared a powerful conceptualisation of missionary *peregrinatio*, traces of which remain in the discourse of the surviving letters, that allowed them to endure and adapt to the most serious of setbacks. Chapter eight will form my conclusion.

1.2 Historiography

1.2.1 Boniface as a modern saint and historical figure

I will not begin, like Boniface, in Devon, but in Erfurt, main city of the German *Land* of Thuringia and one of the original bishoprics founded by Boniface in the eighth century. If one takes the most direct route from Erfurt to Fulda, Boniface's most famous monastery and his eventual place of burial, one must pass through an open, hilly region known as the Rhön. There are few prettier parts of Germany. The Rhön has none of the spectacle of the Bavarian Alps, or the Wagnerian drama of the middle Rhine, or even the forboding wildness of the nearby Thuringian forests, but is a country cleared and tamed by centuries of quiet agriculture, its hilltops stripped of trees, its valleys and rocky slopes devoted now to pasture and moorland: prime hiking country, a nature lover's paradise of wide skies and cluttered hamlets with warm, welcoming names like *Humfershausen* and *Apfelbach*. In the eighth century, this region was occupied by a tribe known as the Graffelti, one of the principal groups targeted by Boniface's mission and the one which lay at the very heart of his

territory.² He wrote a letter in 751 – at this time an old man of failing eyesight and indomitable willpower – informing the Pope in Rome that he had founded a monastery at Fulda *in medio nationum predicationis nostrae*, in the midst of the peoples to whom he had been preaching, and requesting that he be allowed to retire and die there.

Quattuor etenim populi, quibus verbum Christi per gratiam Dei diximus, in circuitu loci huius habitare dinoscuntur, quibus cum vestra intercessione, quamdiu vivo vel sapio, utilis esse possum.³

Shortly after Boniface's death, Fulda began to store charters which describe an ongoing process of settlement expansion and foundation in the Rhön,⁴ documenting the development of landholding in the region which led to the landscape we see today. But while farmers were clearing woodland and striking fence posts into the earth, Boniface and his followers and successors were uprooting and transforming the spiritual and social landscape in a way that was equally fundamental, and even more long-lasting.

Not far south of Fulda, on the road between the villages of Heubach and Oberzell, a tiny hut covers a spring known as *Foarzbürrn*. The name is derived from *Bonifatius-Born* and means 'the Boniface spring'; it first appears as *Fartzborn* on a map of 1732, but its origins probably lie in much older cultic practices.⁵ A little over a kilometre away stands an oak called the *Bonifatiuseiche*. The present tree is less than a century old, but was planted to replace an older oak of massive size, some fourteen metres high, which fell in 1923. This tree was known as the 'thousand-year Boniface oak', granting it dubious if not impossible antiquity, and was reputed to have been

² On the early medieval tribal territories in the region of modern Hesse, see F. Backhaus, 'Die Gaue vor und nach 900' in *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen*, ed. F. Uhlhorn, F. Schwind and E. E. Stengel (Marburg, 1984), pp. 41-43.

³ 'For four peoples to whom, through the grace of God, we have been preaching the Word of Christ dwell around about this place, as is well known, and I can with your intercession still be useful to them as long as I have life and wisdom.' M. Tangl, ed., *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH Epp. sel. 1 (Berlin, 1916), ep. 86, p. 193, l. 31 to p. 194, l. 1. The four peoples, though unnamed here, were probably the Hessians (west), Thuringians (east), Saxons (north) and either Graffelti or Bavarians (south).

⁴ W. Schlesinger, 'Zur politischen Geschichte der fränkischen Ostbewegung vor Karl dem Großen' in *Althessen in Frankenreich*, ed. W. Schlesinger, Nationes 2 (Sigmaringen, 1975), pp. 9-61 (p. 51). On the charters of Fulda, see chapter seven below, section 7.3.3.

⁵ M. Mott, 'Der Name "Bonifatius" in den Flurbezeichnungen' in *Bonifatius: Vom Angelsächsischen Missionar zum Apostel der Deutschen*, ed. M. Imhof and G. K. Stasch (Petersberg, 2004), pp. 195-202 (pp. 197-199).

used as shelter by Boniface and his followers on a journey between Fulda and Mainz.⁶ That this claim, and the many others like it scattered across Hesse, pay little notion to our concepts of historical plausibility does not reduce their significance here. For they demonstrate how names and traditions can become rooted in the landscape, stubborn and enduring, forever evolving, outlasting even the most formidable oak.

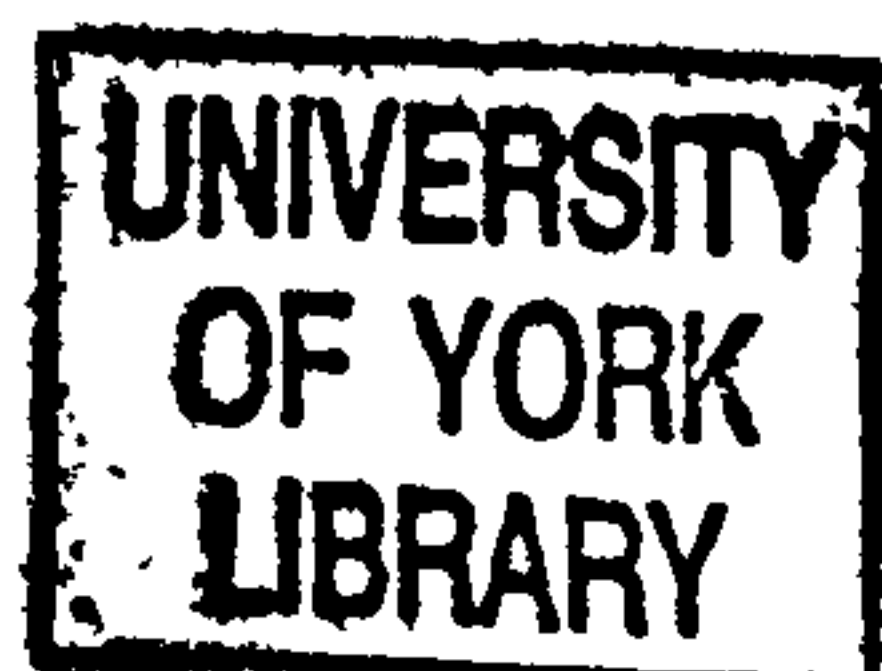
It so happened that on the day of my journey from Erfurt to Fulda, during a bicycle pilgrimage of sorts in the summer of 2004, defeated by the fatigue of crossing the Thuringian mountains and by a determined westerly wind that seemed to blow from the crypt of Fulda itself, I decided to find lodgings at one of the little farming villages of the Rhön. I told the middle-aged landlady of the pension that I was in the opening stages of a study on Boniface, and was surprised when she appeared to have no idea who he was. I explained that he was a missionary from England who had helped convert much of central Germany in the eighth century, including the Rhön. 'Ah,' she replied, somewhat enlightened, 'wahrscheinlich *Katholisch*.'

Fame was a strange thing, I concluded, if it could bring me from England to the heart of Boniface's missionary territory on the 1250th anniversary of his martyrdom, a year marked by exhibitions, celebrations and at least two stage dramatisations of his life and death, and yet not reach a woman who lived not half an hour's drive from his place of rest in Fulda. It reminded me how all saints' cults, no matter when or where the saint in question lived, are constructions of particular times and places, not least the cult of St Boniface, Apostle of the Germans, missionary, reformer and martyr, whose well-documented life has been embellished, if not with pure fictions, at least with *emphases* that he himself would have found rather surprising. One certainly wonders what he would have made of having his own name attached to a spring mere kilometers from his place of rest, when he spent so much energy condemning such nature-focused cultic behaviour, and despised Christians who permitted or encouraged it.⁷

That the figure of Boniface, almost since the moment of his death in 754, has been appropriated and interpreted according to a galaxy of interests and biases was especially evident in the promotional media for the 1250th anniversary celebrations in Fulda. Today Boniface is a national symbol of German Christianity as a whole and

⁶ Ibid., p. 199.

⁷ Ironically enough, at the papal Synod of 745 a letter of Boniface was read aloud in which he angrily accused the heretic and former bishop Aldebert of dedicating chapels to himself near certain springs. See Tangl, ep. 59, p. 111, l. 11 to p. 112, l. 12.



not just of German Catholicism, despite the origins of this symbol in early nineteenth-century, anti-Lutheran Catholic nationalism.⁸ From the beginning of the Cold War he was also adopted as a political symbol of anti-Communist, Christian Western Europe, and his significance exaggerated to an extent that no modern historian could justify. *Bonifatius ist nicht nur Apostel der Deutschen*, proclaimed the West German Chancellor Adenauer at Fulda's 1200th anniversary celebrations of Boniface's martyrdom in 1954,

er ist ein Europäer [...] [Bonifatius] war nicht nur Begründer und Gestalter eines Gefüges neuer Bistümer, er erweckte neben seiner kirchlichen Arbeit durch seine Reise nach Frankreich und Italien das Gefühl der Zusammengehörigkeit in den Völkern Westeuropas.⁹

The fall of the Iron Curtain has inspired renewed academic interest in the early medieval Christianisation of Europe as a whole, and Boniface the Western European has yet to find his political role in this new schema. One highly popular publication of 2004 was an illustrated guide to the *Bonifatiusweg*, 'the Boniface Route', a historical pilgrimage which traces Boniface's travels from Devon to Salzburg, taking in Paris, the Netherlands, the Rhineland, central Germany and Bavaria en route.¹⁰ The subtitle of the book, *Die Wurzeln Europas Entdecken* – 'Discover the Roots of Europe' – and the emotive evocation of Crediton, Boniface's semi-legendary birthplace, as 'the Bethlehem of Europe' hint at Boniface's potential role as a symbol of European unity, but the Europe of the *Bonifatiusweg* remains implicitly Western. This is not to say that Boniface's cult is in danger of neglect: far from it. Continental publications on Boniface, both popular and academic, have only increased in number in the last two decades, and the jubilee of 2004 saw a re-energising of his public reputation and veneration.

⁸ W. Müller, 'Jubiläen und Heiligengedenken: von den mittelalterlichen Ursprüngen bis zum Heiligenkult des 19. Jahrhunderts' in *Bonifatius – Apostel der Deutschen: Mission und Christianisierung vom 8. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. F. J. Felten, Mainzer Vorträge 9 (Stuttgart, 2004), pp. 115-130 (p. 128); S. Weichlein, 'Bonifatius als politischer Heiliger im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert' in *Bonifatius*, ed. Imhof and Stasch, pp. 219-234 (pp. 219-226).

⁹ 'Boniface is not only the Apostle of the Germans. He is a European [...] [Boniface] was not just a founder and designer of a network of bishoprics, but, aside from his work for the Church, through his journeys in France and Italy he awoke a sense of unity among the peoples of Western Europe.' Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 233-234.

¹⁰ C. A. Brandner et al., *Der Bonifatiusweg: die Wurzeln Europas entdecken* (Fulda, 2004).

Aside from his role as a national and continental symbol and figure of Catholic veneration, Boniface's significance in the history of early medieval Christianity is assured and celebrated among Dutch-, German- and English-speaking academics. It is no coincidence that both Richard Fletcher's hefty and compelling *The Conversion of Europe* and Lutz E. von Padberg's recent *Christianisierung im Mittelalter* feature on their respective covers the Fulda Sacramentary's image of Boniface's martyrdom at Dokkum during his final, ill-fated missionary expedition (see plate 2).¹¹ It is, however, telling that such an image should determine the modern popular view of Boniface, when most historians would now emphasise that Boniface was not principally venerated as a missionary during the early medieval period, but was instead praised after his death as a reformer, monastic founder and exemplary monk.¹²

Among English scholars there have also been important questions raised as to how far the wealth of sources relating to Boniface's mission, not least the hagiographical tradition that arose after his death, has exaggerated his role in the Christianisation of Germania. Ian Wood has been a prominent voice in this respect,¹³ while Timothy Reuter has argued that Boniface expended most of his efforts not among the pagans of Frisia or Germania, but among the corrupt and lax clerics of Francia and Bavaria.¹⁴ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, meanwhile, believed that Boniface saw himself as a failure whose 'rash' foundation of bishoprics east of the Rhine was the one flawed accomplishment of his missionary career.¹⁵ Even Richard Fletcher, who staunchly believed that Boniface's first and deepest calling was to be a missionary among the pagans, stated that after four decades of frustrated church reform, with the Saxon heathens always just beyond reach, Boniface was 'oppressed by a sense of failure' by the end of his life.¹⁶

¹¹ R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371-1386 A.D.* (London, 1997); L. E. von Padberg, *Christianisierung im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2006).

¹² I. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe 400-1050* (Harlow, 2001), p. 92; P. Kehl, 'Entstehung und Verbreitung des Bonifatiuskultes' in *Bonifatius*, ed. Imhof and Stasch, pp. 127-150 (p. 132); idem, *Kult und Nachleben des hl. Bonifatius im Mittelalter (754-1200)*, Quellen und Abhandlung zur Geschichte der Abtei und Diözese Fulda 26 (Fulda, 1993).

¹³ See especially his comments in I. Wood, 'An Absence of Saints? The Evidence for the Christianisation of Saxony' in *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung: Das Epos "Karolus Magnus et Leo papa" und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799*, ed. P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johaneck (Berlin, 2002), pp. 335-352 (pp. 340-345).

¹⁴ T. Reuter, 'Saint Boniface and Europe' in *The Greatest Englishman: Essays on St Boniface and the Church at Crediton*, ed. T. Reuter (Exeter, 1980), pp. 71-94 (pp. 79-81).

¹⁵ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 153-161.

¹⁶ Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, pp. 212-213.

Boniface, then, has a double identity. There is the popular Boniface of the imagination: the preacher and converter, successor to St Paul, scourge of pagans, whose statue today stands triumphant, axe in hand, upon a shattered oak before the Bonifatian church at Fritzlar (plate 1). Then there is the Boniface of modern scholarship: reformer, monk and frustrated missionary, in order of declining importance. These identities are not at all contradictory, and in their variety they merely reflect the extraordinary historical legacy of Boniface's long and active life.

With hindsight it is easy to dismiss Boniface's missionary career as a failure, especially when the latest surviving letter of his authorship, written a year or two before his death in 754, describes in such vivid terms the pathetic state of his missionaries on the pagan borderlands:¹⁷ 'a pathetic swansong for a hero', as Wallace-Hadrill put it.¹⁸ Yet this letter, as we shall see later on, was not all that Boniface to show for thirty years of mission, and it gives us no reason to suppose that he saw himself as a failure. On the contrary, it pertains to a specific part of his territory that he might have abandoned years before, had he chosen to,¹⁹ and, though he was frustrated by the past and fearful of the future, the language of the letter shows Boniface at his most passionate, determined and stubborn. These are hardly the characteristics of a self-professed 'failure'.

My own interests in this thesis lie principally in Boniface's missionary activities among the pagans of Hesse and the Saxon borderlands, and I intend to add depth and colour to this aspect of his life through a close contextual examination of his mission in this region. Only through such a focused study can we appreciate the true scale of his accomplishments as a missionary, which, when we consider the circumstances in which he worked, were considerable; just as important, only this way can we improve our understanding of the missionary techniques that he employed in the field. In order to situate my own work more closely in relation to existing scholarship, I shall now present brief historiographies of the three most important fields of study which underpin mine, and to which I hope to make a useful contribution: Bonifatian scholarship in general; the archaeological study of early medieval northern Hesse; and archaeological approaches to landscape study.

¹⁷ Tangl, ep. 93, p. 212-214.

¹⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 161.

¹⁹ See section 7.2.3 below.

1.2.2 Bonifatian scholarship

Boniface and his career have been the subject of scholarly study since the mid-eighteenth century, and by the celebrations of 1954 this scholarship had already amounted to several hundred books and articles, almost entirely in German. For a useful summary of bibliographies of Bonifatian scholarship prior to 1954 I refer the reader to the article of C. Weber published in the *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter* of that year,²⁰ and to the bibliography of J. Gottschalk which lists no fewer than 80 academic studies devoted to Boniface that were published between 1923 and 1950.²¹ In this brief review I shall restrict myself to the major works published in or after 1954, especially those of more recent years, beginning with the German-language literature.

The most comprehensive study of Boniface in any language remains Theodore Schieffer's 1954 *Wifrid-Bonifatius und die christliche Grundlegung Europas*, in which the author places the career of Boniface within its broad continental context.²² Schieffer's many insights, with his traditionalist emphasis on political and ecclesiastical history, has ensured his book's definitive status for the last sixty years, and continues to do so. Over the decades since 1954, scholarly interest has shifted slightly from the figure of the saint to the missionary community which he helped nurture, two important products of this shift being Lutz E. von Padberg's *Heilige und Familie* and Stefan Schipperges' *Bonifatius ac socii eius*.²³ At 119 pages, von Padberg's recent *Bonifatius: Missionar und Reformator* is an accessible biography of Boniface's life and work aimed at a broader audience.²⁴ M. Glatthaar's scholarly *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg* is a 2003 study devoted to Boniface's understanding and use of the term *sacrilegium*,²⁵ while H. Wagner in his *Bonifatiusstudien* of 2004 examines and analyses the often problematic sources relating to Boniface's mission.²⁶

²⁰ C. Weber, 'Bonifatius-Bibliographie', *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter* 30 (1954), pp. 86-87.

²¹ J. Gottschalk, 'Die Bonifatius Literatur von 1923 bis 1950', *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens und seiner Zweige* 62 (1950), pp. 237-246.

²² T. Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius und die christliche Grundlegung Europas* (Freiburg, 1954).

²³ L. E. von Padberg, *Heilige und Familie: Studien zur Bedeutung familiengebundener Aspekte in Viten des Verwandten- und Schülerkreises um Willibrord, Bonifatius und Liudger*, Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelhheinischen Kirchengeschichte 83, 2nd ed. (Mainz, 1997); S. Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius: eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Wifrid-Bonifatius und seines Umfeldes*, Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelhheinischen Kirchengeschichte 79 (Mainz, 1996).

²⁴ L. E. von Padberg, *Bonifatius: Missionar und Reformator* (Munich, 2003).

²⁵ M. Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg: zur politischen Dimension eines Rechtsbegriffs*, Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 17 (Frankfurt am Main, 2004).

²⁶ H. Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Bistums und Hochstifts Würzburg 60 (Würzburg, 2003).

The bulk of Bonifatian scholarship is in the form of essays. Particularly valuable is the large volume of articles entitled *Sankt Bonifatius: Gedenkgabe zum zwölfhundertsten Todestag*, published in 1954 as part of the 1200th anniversary celebrations in Fulda,²⁷ the thirty-one articles of which cover topics from Boniface's missionary theology to his sacramentary and manuscripts, from his relationship with the Frankish church and rulers to his reformation of the Bavarian church, as well as many aspects of his posthumous cult. These essays are in many cases still indispensable to modern scholars. A similar volume, somewhat smaller in scope and with a strong slant towards Boniface's legacy as a medieval and modern political saint, was published as part of the commemorations of 2004.²⁸ In the same year a Mainz conference on Boniface produced another volume of essays entitled *Bonifatius – Apostel der Deutschen* which took a slightly broader view of processes of medieval Christianisation,²⁹ and the following year's volume of the journal *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* contained seven articles dedicated to Boniface.³⁰ Also in 2005 came a volume dedicated to Boniface's activities and posthumous veneration in Mainz,³¹ and a collection of theological essays.³²

These are only the most important and most recent studies from a vast German-language literature surrounding Boniface, and here I have focused on complete monographs and volumes of essays. Anglophone scholarship can offer no such tradition of Bonifatian study, and the essential works in English are few and venerable. Pre-dating Schieffer's 1954 work is Wilhelm Levison's 1946 *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*, in which Boniface figures prominently.³³ To mark the twelfth centenary of Boniface's martyrdom, G. W. Greenaway collected three short but useful biographical studies of the saint in one slim volume.³⁴ In 1980 the Paternoster Press in Exeter published two companion works, including a volume of scholarly papers edited by Timothy Reuter under the title *The Greatest Englishman*

²⁷ C. Raabe et al., eds., *Sankt Bonifatius: Gedenkgabe zum zwölfhundertsten Todestag* (Fulda, 1954).

²⁸ M. Imhof and G. K. Stasch, eds., *Bonifatius: Vom Angelsächsischen Missionar zum Apostel der Deutschen* (Petersberg, 2004).

²⁹ F. J. Felten, ed., *Bonifatius – Apostel der Deutschen: Mission und Christianisierung vom 8. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, Mainzer Vorträge 9 (Mainz, 2004).

³⁰ *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 57 (2005).

³¹ B. Nichtweiß, ed., *Bonifatius in Mainz* (Mainz, 2005).

³² A. Odenthal et al., eds., *Verspielen wir das Erbe des Heiligen Bonifatius? Theologische Betrachtungen aus Anlass seines 1250. Todestages*, Fuldaer Hochschulschriften 47 (Fulda, 2005).

³³ W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946).

³⁴ G. W. Greenaway, *Saint Boniface: Three Biographical Studies for the Twelfth Centenary Festival* (London, 1955).

and a popular biography by John Cyril Sladden.³⁵ Although few in number, these insular studies have helped maintain active scholarly interest in Boniface's West Saxon origins. This trend, continued by a forthcoming article by Barbara Yorke,³⁶ has provided a complementary perspective to the German tradition, which is overwhelmingly concerned with Boniface's continental career.

Along with a rich tradition of secondary literature, the primary sources directly or indirectly related to Boniface and his mission have been largely published in critical editions and in part translated into German, Dutch or English. Most crucial for our knowledge and understanding of Boniface's career are the letters written by him and others connected to the mission, one hundred and fifty of which survive. In 1916 the MGH published Tangl's now-standard edition of the letters of Boniface and Lul,³⁷ which I have used throughout this thesis, and which is basis for the published German and English translations I have cited.³⁸ For a discussion of the origin, preservation and transmission of the letters arranged by Tangl in his edition, see the opening of chapter five below.

The MGH has also published the various *vitae* of Boniface and his followers,³⁹ while the eighth-century charters of Fulda and Bad Hersfeld, the monasteries founded by Boniface and his disciple Lul respectively, are likewise available in critical editions.⁴⁰ Apart from his letters, the surviving writings of Boniface include a

³⁵ T. Reuter, ed., *The Greatest Englishman: Essays on St. Boniface and the Church at Crediton* (Exeter, 1980); J. C. Sladden, *Boniface of Devon: Apostle of Germany* (Exeter, 1980).

³⁶ B. Yorke, 'The Insular Background to Boniface's Continental Career', presented at the conference 'Bonifatius: Leben und Nachwirken 754-2004' in Mainz, 2-5 June 2004, publication forthcoming.

³⁷ M. Tangl, ed., *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH Epistolae Selectae 1 (Berlin, 1916).

³⁸ R. Rau, ed. and trans., *Die Briefe des Bonifatius, Willibalds Leben des Bonifatius nebst einigen zeitgenössischen Dokumenten*, Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters IVb (Darmstadt, 1968); E. Emerton, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (1940; reprinted with a new introduction by Thomas F. X. Noble, New York, 2000).

³⁹ The collected *vitae* of Boniface have been edited by W. Levison, ed., *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii archiepiscopi Mogutini*, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover, 1905). For individual references to Boniface's *vitae* and to those of his circle, see the opening to chapter five below. Several of the *vitae* have been translated into English by C. H. Talbot, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (London, 1954).

⁴⁰ E. E. Stengel, ed., *Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda, erster Band: Die Zeit der Äbte Sturmi und Baugulf*, Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck X.1 (Marburg, 1958); H. Weirich, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Reichsabtei Hersfeld, erster Band*, Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck XIX.1 (Marburg, 1936).

collection of *enigmata*,⁴¹ a grammar⁴² and fifteen sermons whose attribution to Boniface is disputed.⁴³

There are few aspects of Boniface, his career and his world which have not been extensively studied. One of these, and I believe a crucial one, is how his mission was carried out at the regional level. The surviving historical sources do not make such a study simple; the fragmentary correspondence from the mission offers limited insight into the process of evangelisation in any given geographical area of Boniface's mission, while the hagiographical texts, where they have anything useful to say, must be interpreted with great care. Research into northern Hesse's early ecclesiastical landscape, notably by Wilhelm Classen and Michael Gockel,⁴⁴ has identified a network of church foundations that are almost certainly Bonifatian in date, but the implications of this discovery have yet to be incorporated into mainstream Bonifatian studies: to do so is a fundamental aim of this thesis.

Similarly, although both historians and archaeologists are aware of Boniface's foundation of a bishopric at the major Frankish hillfort of Büraburg in central Hesse, the perspective of the historian tends to be expansive in time and space, regarding Büraburg as a short-lived blip in a much larger episcopal landscape,⁴⁵ while the eyes of the archaeologist remain fixed on the details of the earth, with only an occasional glimpse towards the historical horizon.⁴⁶ Until archaeologists and historians combine

⁴¹ The *enigmata* of Boniface have been edited as part of both the MGH and Corpus Christianorum. Boniface of Mainz, *Bonifatii Carmina*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Poetae 1 (Berlin, 1889), pp. 3-23; idem, *Ænigmata Bonifatii*, ed. F. Glorie, CCSL 133 (Turnhout, 1968), pp. 273-343.

⁴² Boniface of Mainz, *Bonifatii ars grammatica*, ed. G. J. Gebauer and B. Löfstedt, CCSL 133B (Turnhout, 1980). See M. Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinische Literatur des Mittelalters, erster Teil: von Justinian bis zur Mitte des Zehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1911), pp. 149-151.

⁴³ These sermons were first edited by Martène-Durand in 1733 and reprinted by J. P. Migne in 1850, but there is no more recent critical edition. I will address the question of their authenticity in chapter seven below, section 7.4.1; because of the uncertainty of authorship, in my bibliography I have listed them under Anonymous. Anonymous, *Sermones in Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum historicorum, dogmaticorum et moralium amplissima collectio* 9, ed. E. Martène and U. Durand (Paris, 1733), pp. 186-218; idem, *Sermones*, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 89 (Paris: 1850), col. 843-872. They have been translated into German and Dutch: Boniface of Mainz, *Sämtliche Schriften des Heiligen Bonifacius*, ed. and trans. P. H. Külb (Regensburg, 1859); Anonymous, *Het Leven als Leerschool: Preken van Bonifatius*, ed. and trans. A. Jelsma (Laren, 2003).

⁴⁴ W. Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation Althessens im Mittelalter*, Schriften des Instituts für geschichtliche Landeskunde von Hessen und Nassau 8 (Marburg, 1929); M. Gockel, 'Fritzlar und das Reich' in *Fritzlar im Mittelalter: Festschrift zur 1250-Jahrfeier*, ed. Magistrat der Stadt Fritzlar (Fritzlar, 1974).

⁴⁵ Typical are Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius*, pp. 89-90 and Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 80, both of whom acknowledged the status of Büraburg as a major Frankish fortification without discussing its significance for Boniface's Hessian mission.

⁴⁶ Two archaeologists who have discussed the archaeological evidence in relation to the Bonifatian mission, though in a limited fashion, are Norbert Wand and David Parsons: N. Wand, *Die Büraburg bei Fritzlar: Burg, "oppidum", Bischofsitz in karolingischer Zeit*, Kasseler Beiträge zur Vor- und

their expertise to see the bigger picture in all its subtlety and complexity, the precise relationship of Boniface's mission to the developing political and military context of the Hessian-Saxon borderlands will remain elusive. In my thesis I intend to help bridge this interdisciplinary gap by building on the traditions of Bonifatian scholarship and studies of early medieval Hessian archaeology, and to raise both to a new level by using a methodology derived from an Anglophone tradition of archaeological studies of landscape.

1.2.3 The archaeological study of early medieval Hesse

The central German *Land* of Hesse (*Hessen* in German) has a rich tradition of archaeological research, particularly into the early medieval period. A defining feature of the *Land* is a broad division between north and south. The south, centred on the densely populated middle Rhine and lower Main, was part of the Roman Empire between the first and fifth centuries, while northern Hesse lay beyond the *limes* (figure 9). This contrast continued into the Merovingian period, when the old Roman territories fell under direct Frankish control. Only by the late seventh century did the Franks extend their rule into what is now northern Hesse, a process that we shall explore fully in chapter four below.

The first important point to make here is that northern and southern Hesse have very different histories and archaeological records, and even today the highly urbanised south is strongly distinguished in character and dialect from the predominantly rural north. The second point is that the modern *Land* of Hesse dates from the post-war re-organisation of Germany: in the early medieval period, the term *pago Hessorum*, 'region of the Hessians', referred only to the central part of northern Hesse, what is now known as 'Old' Hesse (*Althessen* in German). This region, delineated in figure 10, will be the focus of our attention in this study, and I have used the medieval name of *Hessia* to refer to it. I use *Hesse* only to refer to the modern (much larger) *Land*.

The academic study of Hesse's early medieval archaeology has been led since 1927 by scholars at or connected to the Department of Prehistory and Early History

Frühgeschichte 4 (Marburg, 1974), pp. 34-81; D. Parsons, 'Sites and Monuments of the Anglo-Saxon Mission in Central Germany', *The Archaeological Journal* 140 (1983), pp. 280-321; idem, 'Some Churches of the Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Southern Germany: A Review of the Evidence', *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999), pp. 31-67.

(Fach Vor- und Frühgeschichte) at the Philipps-Universität in Marburg. The two principal historical and archaeological journals of Hesse, *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* and *Fundberichte aus Hessen* began publication in 1951 and 1961 respectively, while the dedicated study of Frankish-period Hesse was initiated by Walter Schlesinger, the head historian of the Hessian regional government,⁴⁷ and its research agenda formulated at an interdisciplinary conference held in Frankfurt from 2-4 December 1965 under the title ‘The Franks in the Region East of the Middle Rhein’.⁴⁸ In the wake of this conference, which was attended by historians, archaeologists, linguists and geographers from Marburg as well as from Mainz, Munich, Cologne, Hannover, Bonn and elsewhere, followed more than a decade of coordinated and well-funded excavations and research projects that revolutionised early medievalists’ understanding of the expansion of Frankish control east of the Middle Rhine from the sixth to the tenth century.⁴⁹ Although the rather haphazard publication of the researchers’ findings lasted into the 80s and 90s and in some cases remains incomplete, the present generation of Hessian archaeologists has at its disposal a huge volume of intensely analysed material that was unavailable thirty years ago.

I will aim to relate the findings from this period of intensive research in chapter four below, and here briefly mention the landmark publications it produced. The first was Schlesinger’s 1975 edited volume *Althessen im Frankenreich*, which contained contributions by the major figures of early medieval studies in Hesse.⁵⁰ The ambitious research project of the *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen*, the objective of which was to produce a series of large-scale, comprehensively annotated maps covering every period and aspect of Hessian history from climatology to prehistoric mound burials and the modern industrial landscape, was conceived before World War

⁴⁷ Schlesinger was head of the Hessisches Landesamt für geschichtliche Landeskunde, the government body charged with the preservation and study of Hesse’s cultural and historical heritage.

⁴⁸ For a full account of this conference and the resolutions of its contributors, see W. Schlesinger, ‘Die Franken im Gebiet Östlich des Rheins: Skizze eines Forschungsprogramms’, *HJL* 15 (1965), pp. 1-22.

⁴⁹ For a recent review of this period of intensive interdisciplinary research and its fruits, see M. Gockel, ‘Die Franken in Althessen: interdisziplinäre Ansätze frühmittelalterlichen Geschichtsforschung’ in *HJL* 50 (2000), pp. 57-76, and the following article by H. W. Böhme, ‘Franken in Althessen – aus archäologische Sicht’, *HJL* 50 (2000), pp. 77-92. Both Gockel and Böhme observe that the achievements of Schlesinger and his fellow researchers, though considerable in hindsight, ultimately fell short of expectations due to various factors, primarily financial and organisational obstacles.

⁵⁰ W. Schlesinger, ed., *Althessen im Frankenreich*, Nationes 2 (Sigmaringen, 1975).

II and finally completed in 1984.⁵¹ It is an invaluable resource for researchers of all periods including early medievalists, and thanks to the foresight of the Hessian regional government is fully available online.⁵² Also in 1984, following a major exhibition in Frankfurt, appeared the lavishly illustrated *Hessen im Mittelalter*, edited by Helmut Roth and Egon Wamers.⁵³ In 1989 Klaus Sippel's study of the early medieval burial evidence of northern Hesse was published,⁵⁴ while the major excavations at the sites of Büraburg,⁵⁵ the Christenberg,⁵⁶ the Höfe bei Dreihausen,⁵⁷ Geismar⁵⁸ and Holzheim⁵⁹ have been published fully or in part.

Very little of the early medieval archaeology of Hesse is known to scholars outside Germany. A 1976 English-language article of Schlesinger helped advertise the results of his excavation projects to an international audience,⁶⁰ but the Anglophone response has been limited to a pair of articles published in 1983 and 1999 by David Parsons in which he related the major Hessian early medieval fortifications and

⁵¹ F. Uhlhorn, F. Schwind and E. E. Stengel, eds., *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen* (Marburg, 1984). For an account of its inception and early development, see F. Uhlhorn, 'Der Geschichtliche Atlas von Hessen: Planung und Gestaltung', *HJL*, 23 (1973), pp. 62-80.

⁵² The *Geschichtlicher Atlas* can be accessed on the LAGIS website at <<http://cgi-host.uni-marburg.de/~hlg/atlas/inhalt.cgi?page=0>> [accessed 20 March 2008].

⁵³ H. Roth and E. Wamers, eds., *Hessen im Mittelalter: Archäologie und Kunst* (Sigmaringen, 1984).

⁵⁴ K. Sippel, *Die frühmittelalterlichen Grabfunde in Nordhessen*, Materialien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte von Hessen 7 (Wiesbaden, 1989).

⁵⁵ Wand, *Die Büraburg bei Fritzlar*; idem, 'Die Büraburg und das Fritzlar-Waberner Becken in der merowingisch-karolingischen Zeit' in *Althessen im Frankenreich*, ed. Schlesinger, pp. 173-210.

⁵⁶ R. Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburger Becken in der Merowinger- und Karolingerzeit' in *Althessen im Frankenreich*, ed. Schlesinger, pp. 121-172; idem, 'Frühmittelalterliche Burgen und Siedlungen in Nordhessen' in *Ausgrabungen in Deutschland, Teil 2: Römische Kaiserzeit im Freien Germanien, Frühmittelalter I*, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum Monographien 1.2 (Mainz, 1975), pp. 313-334; idem, *Der Christenberg bei Münchhausen*, Archäologische Denkmäler in Hessen 77 (Wiesbaden, 1989); idem, 'Ein Keramikkomplex mit dem Schlussdatum 753 von Christenberg, Gde. Münchhausen am Christenberg, Kr. Marburg-Biedenkopf' in *Archäologische Beiträge zur Geschichte Westfalens (Festschrift K. Günther)*, ed. D. Bérenger, Internationale Archäologie, Studia Honoria 2 (Rahden, 1997), pp. 219-228.

⁵⁷ Idem, *Die Höfe bei Dreihausen*, Archäologische Denkmäler in Hessen 121 (Wiesbaden, 1995); E. Treude, 'Die Höfe bei Dreihausen', *FH* 39/40 (1999/2000), pp. 1-72.

⁵⁸ R. Gensen, *Die chattische Großsiedlung von Fritzlar-Geismar, Schwalm-Eder-Kreis*, Archäologische Denkmäler in Hessen 2 (Wiesbaden, 1978); R. Heiner, *Studien an Siedlungskeramik: Ausgewählte Merkmale und Fundkomplexe der Latène- und Römischen Kaiserzeit aus der Siedlung Fritzlar-Geismar, Schwalm-Eder-Kreis*, Materialien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte von Hessen 12,1 (Wiesbaden, 1994); W. Best, *Funde der Völkerwanderungs- und Merowingerzeit aus der frühgeschichtlichen Siedlung Fritzlar-Geismar, Schwalm-Eder-Kreis*, Materialien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte von Hessen 12,2 (Wiesbaden, 1990); A. Thiedmann, *Die Siedlung von Geismar bei Fritzlar: Ausgrabungen und Forschungen in der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Siedlung im Schwalm-Eder-Kreis*, Archäologische Denkmäler in Hessen 2 (Wiesbaden, 2001).

⁵⁹ J. H. Schotten, N. Wand and U. Weiß, 'Ausgrabungen in jüngerkaiserzeitlichen und früh- bis spätmittelalterlichen Siedlungsbereichen der Dorfwüstung Holzheim bei Fritzlar, Schwalm-Eder-Kreis', *FH* 17/18 (1980), pp. 213-260; N. Wand, ed., *Holzheim bei Fritzlar: Archäologie eines mittelalterlichen Dorfes*, Kasseler Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte 6 (Rahden, 2002).

⁶⁰ W. Schlesinger, 'Early Medieval Fortifications in Hesse: A General Historical Report', *World Archaeology* 7.3 (1976), pp. 243-260.

church sites to the Bonifatian mission.⁶¹ In chapter four of this thesis I will propose a new model for understanding the process of Frankish expansion into Hessa between c. 600 and 721 (the year of Boniface's arrival), substantiating my argument with the first concise catalogue, German or English, of all published archaeological data pertaining to this expansion.

I will attempt to advance the current state of knowledge further in two other respects. First, as already mentioned, I shall relate the archaeological evidence of Hessa more closely to the Bonifatian mission than has yet been attempted. Second, there is no tradition of archaeological theorising within the literature of Hessian early medieval studies apart from discussions on the relationship between archaeological and historical lines of enquiry. Migrationist models remain dominant in German-language archaeology as a whole, and material culture tends to be interpreted according to its functional, rather than symbolic, aspects.⁶² The question of continuity from the Roman to the early medieval period in Hessa, for example, has always been discussed almost entirely in terms of mass population movement rather than in terms of the dynamic nature of cultural identity and the settled landscape,⁶³ and the development of the region from the fifth to the ninth centuries is principally understood in terms of its gradual political, ecclesiastical and economic integration into the Frankish realm.⁶⁴ Although Hessian archaeologists are now beginning to adopt more nuanced interpretations of archaeological data, in particular burial evidence,⁶⁵ there is still a lack of explicit theoretical discussion. I therefore intend to

⁶¹ Parsons, 'Sites and Monuments of the Anglo-Saxon Mission'; idem, 'Some Churches of the Anglo-Saxon Missionaries'.

⁶² Migration models have retained a strong hold in German archaeology until relatively recently, and represents the great divide between the German and anglophone archaeological traditions of the last forty years. See H. Härke, 'Archaeologists and Migrations: A Problem of Attitude?', *Current Anthropology* 39.1 (1998), pp. 19-45, esp. pp. 20-21; for a broader discussion, idem, 'All Quiet on the Western Front? Paradigms, Methods and Approaches in West German Archaeology' in *Archaeological Theory in Europe: The Last Three Decades*, ed. I. Hodder (London, 1991), pp. 187-222. Here I use the distinction between functional and symbolic aspects of material culture as discussed by Hodder in *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (1986; 2nd revised edition, Cambridge, 1991), pp. 124-125.

⁶³ For further discussion, see section 4.2.2 below.

⁶⁴ As acknowledged by Gockel, 'Die Franken in Althessen', p. 74, the best general discussion of the 'Frankisation' of northern Hesse remains the 1975 article by F. Schwind, 'Die Franken in Hessen' in *Althessen im Frankenreich*, ed. Schlesinger, pp. 211-280. The fundamental research questions appear not to have changed in the intervening thirty years.

⁶⁵ See especially Böhme's analysis of burial ritual in the borderlands between Hessa and the territory of the *Borthari* (see chapter four below), in which he puts forward a model of cultural influence in preference to older models which viewed burial rituals as direct ethnic signifiers. H. W. Böhme, 'Franken oder Sachsen? Beiträge zur Siedlungs- und Bevölkerungsgeschichte in Westfalen vom 4.-7. Jahrhundert', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 12 (1999), pp. 43-73 (pp. 68-71).

contribute to the existing literature by approaching the archaeological data of Hessia with insights gained from recent theoretical discussion within Anglophone archaeology, in particular with regard to landscape studies.

1.2.4 Archaeological approaches to landscape study

Studies of landscape have long been central to archaeological enquiry in many periods and places and the early Middle Ages are no exception. There are well-established traditions of landscape research in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies which have concentrated on settlement forms and patterns,⁶⁶ on the arrangement of ecclesiastical, political and cultural boundaries,⁶⁷ and on economic exploitation and trade.⁶⁸ This tradition of study bears comparison with research techniques employed by the early medieval archaeologists of Hessia.

Of particular relevance to this study are the anthropological approaches to landscape perception which have invigorated English-language archaeological landscape studies particularly in the last two decades. Here I will confine my remarks to the three works which have most heavily influenced my own approach, and review

⁶⁶ For general studies (not of individual settlements), see C. R. Radford, 'The Saxon House: A Review and some Parallels', *Medieval Archaeology* 1 (1957), pp. 27-38; P. Rahtz, 'Buildings and Rural Settlement' in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. Wilson (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 49-98; S. James, A. Marshall and M. Millett, 'An Early Medieval Building Tradition', *Archaeological Journal* 141 (1984), pp. 182-215; D. Powlesland, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Settlements: Structures, Form and Layout' in *The Anglo-Saxons: From the Migration Period to the Eighth Century*, ed. J. Hines (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 101-124; H. Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements: The Archaeology of Rural Communities in North-Western Europe 400-900* (Oxford, 2002); idem, 'The Archaeology of Early Anglo-Saxon Settlements: Past, Present and Future' in *Landscapes of Change: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. N. Christie (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 301-316.

⁶⁷ The literature in this area in particular is vast. For the major works, see F. M. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England* (Cambridge, 1897); H. M. Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (Cambridge, 1905); F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943; revised 3rd edition, Oxford, 1971), esp. pp. 277-318; E. John, *Land Tenure in Early England* (Leicester, 1960); H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of Wessex* (Leicester, 1964); E. Klingelhöfer, *Manor, Vill and Hundred: The Development of Rural Institutions in Early Medieval Hampshire*, Studies and Texts 112 (Toronto, 1992); D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (Leicester, 1998); idem, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-bounds*, Studies in Anglo-Saxon History II (Woodbridge, 1990); T. Saunders, 'Class, Space and "Feudal" Identities in Early Medieval England' in *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. W. O. Frazer and A. Tyrell (London, 2000), pp. 209-232.

⁶⁸ R. Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement: Archaeology and the Beginnings of English Society* (Ithaca, NY, 1989), esp. pp. 80-112; M. Brisbane, 'Hamwic (Southampton): An 8th Century Port and Production Centre' in *The Rebirth of Towns in the West AD 700-1050*, ed. R. Hodges and B. Hobbley, CBA Research Report 68 (York, 1988), pp. 101-108; M. Anderton, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres: Beyond the Emporia* (Glasgow, 1999); T. Pestell and K. Ulmschneider, eds., *Markets in Early Medieval Europe: Trading and 'Productive Sites', c.650-850* (Macclesfield, 2003); J. Naylor, *An Archaeology of Trade in Middle Saxon England*, BAR British Series 376 (Oxford, 2004); J. Maddicott, 'London and Droitwich, c. 650-750: Trade, Industry and the Rise of Mercia', *Anglo-Saxon England* 34, (2005), pp. 7-58.

the theoretical aspects of the literature fully in the next chapter. First, Karen Altenberg's 2003 *Experiencing Landscapes*, a doctoral study of three economically marginal regions in late-medieval England and Sweden, exemplifies the value of firmly-rooted interdisciplinary landscape research.⁶⁹ The main achievement of her study has been to demonstrate that social relations and cultural perceptions, not merely economic, political or technological concerns, were important factors in determining how medieval landscapes were experienced and used.

Second, Lucia Nixon, in her 2006 study of the sacred landscape of Sphakia, Crete, from 1000 A.D. to the present day, was able to use the rich data gathered by a wide-ranging survey programme to analyse the factors influencing the positioning of rural churches and icon stands.⁷⁰ Using an interdisciplinary approach comparable to Altenberg's, she was able to elucidate the complex interaction of cultural symbolism, spatial arrangement (topography) and material practicality behind the evolution of a sacred landscape over the course of a millenium.

Third, Sam Turner's 2006 study of early medieval southwest England, Boniface's own country, also places the symbolic aspects of the landscape firmly alongside the economic and political aspects according to a dedicated multi-disciplinary methodology.⁷¹ He is thus able to argue that the placing of ecclesiastical sites at the heart of the settled landscape contributed to the generation of a 'Christian landscape' in which the church assumed both physical and spiritual centrality.

Finally, John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* (1992), although it is not primarily an archaeological study, presents an evocative and balanced reconstruction of the social, political and religious landscapes of first-century Judaea using a combination of contemporary (non-Biblical) texts and studies in the social anthropology of the ancient Mediterranean.⁷² There are clear methodological parallels

⁶⁹ K. Altenberg, *Experiencing Landscapes: A Study of Space and Identity in Three Marginal Areas of Medieval Britain and Scandinavia*, Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology 31 (Stockholm, 2003).

⁷⁰ L. Nixon, *Making a Landscape Sacred: Outlying Churches and Icon Stands in Sphakia, Southwestern Crete* (Oxford, 2006).

⁷¹ S. Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape: The Countryside in Early Medieval Cornwall, Devon and Wessex* (Exeter, 2006).

⁷² J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco, 1992). Aspects of Crossan's analysis and interpretation of the earliest New Testament texts have proved controversial among Biblical scholars; see, for example, the following critiques of his position regarding the relative antiquity of the Gospel of Peter: N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, 1996), p. 49; B. Meyer, 'Critical Notice of The Historical Jesus, by John Dominic Crossan', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (1993), p. 575; H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London, 1990), p. 220; G. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO, 1996) p. 128.

in my thesis with regard to both my use of anthropological and sociological theory (see especially chapter two below) and my emphasis on the importance of the wider social and political context in understanding any major historical figure.

*

In this introduction and historiography I have established the basis of my study and shown how I intend to carry forward the existing scholarship. With a sufficiently nuanced understanding of our sources, it becomes all too obvious that Boniface did not dominate the mission field in Germania to the extent that his cult and reputation would suggest.⁷³ This is no reason to ignore or sideline him, however. On the contrary, precisely because of the distracting nature of his posthumous fame, I believe it is important to deepen our contextual understanding of the man and his work via the application of fresh methodologies. I have chosen to do this not through a new biographical study, of which there is already an abundance, or through relating Boniface to the pan-European expansion of Christianity under the Carolingian flag, which has been done regularly and thoroughly. Rather, I have chosen the middle route of a detailed regional study, rescuing Boniface from historical abstraction and returning him to the landscape he knew, among the people with whom he worked. I have chosen Hesse in particular because it was here, not in Thuringia, Bavaria or the Frankish heartlands, that Boniface realised his calling as a missionary; in Hesse he met, challenged and converted pagans who had had but little contact with Frankish Christianity; in Hesse alone he created from scratch an ecclesiastical landscape that survived until the Reformation. As Ian Wood has remarked:

The basic outline of the Christianisation of Europe has been established by generations of scholars. In order to take the history of Christianisation beyond what has been mapped in outline, it is necessary to return to the experiences of individuals and above all to understand the perceptions of the men who evangelised pagan Europe.⁷⁴

⁷³ Wood, 'An Absence of Saints?', p. 343.

⁷⁴ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 20.

Experience and perception: these are the constituent parts of what it is to be human. We have a chart that encompasses the entirety of Europe and the thousand years of the conversion period. It is time to bring ourselves to earth, as it were, to strap on our boots, and to follow Boniface into the intricate gloom of the Hessian woods.

Chapter Two

Theory and Methodology

2.1 Theory

The theoretical underpinnings of a study become especially important when it depends upon fundamentally disparate forms of data from disciplines with distinct traditions of analytical and interpretative methods. The challenge is not just to interpret the surviving historical or topographical sources in a particular way, or to make sense of the fragmentary archaeological record, but to devise a theoretical approach which enables many forms of evidence to be used in conjunction. If I hope to deepen our understanding of the Anglo-Saxon mission in Hesse beyond the level thus far achieved in scholarly works, I will need to devise a suitable theoretical framework within which to do it.

In this thesis I regard theoretical explication as a means of pursuing empirical enquiry. I do not intend to forge a new theoretical tool for a unique historical task, but will assemble a collection from the ample toolboxes of sociologists, anthropologists, historians and archaeologists past and present. In doing so I am following what Pierre Bourdieu described as a pragmatic *Realpolitik* approach to theoretical principles: diverse, adaptable, adapting, but not gratuitously eclectic.¹ The following discussion of my theoretical approach will expose the reasoning implicit in many of my arguments in this thesis.

In this discussion I will concentrate on the three principal pillars of my theoretical approach. First, a discussion of the sociological theory of fields of discourse will help situate the individual within the communities of which any missionary is inevitably a part, and outline a model of the way in which communities generate meaningful action through social discourse. Second, I will outline a theoretical model of landscape perception and meaning. Third, I will make some important observations concerning my understanding of religious conversion in the early medieval period, drawing on both historical studies and sociological theory.

¹ P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. by M. Adamson (Cambridge, 1990), p. 28.

2.1.1 Fields of discourse

Understanding the Hessian mission as part of a long-term process of expansion of Frankish-sponsored Christianity east of the Rhine, as has typically been done in scholarship to date,² is an instructive approach from a broad historical standpoint and forms the foundations upon which this thesis builds. It is not, however, a perspective I intend to develop. I am not seeking to discover what Elias called the ‘*order underlying historical changes, their mechanics and concrete mechanisms*’,³ nor am I attempting to build an abstract model, Marxist, cultural-ecological or otherwise, to explain the functioning components of society. It is true that there were larger forces operating without which the mission could not have proceeded, or would have had very different results. Yet here it is my concern to understand how the individual – more accurately, a select community of similarly-minded individuals – can be fitted into this larger picture, and there is little room for the individual in a society driven by abstract laws of order and process, or submerged by the tide of the *longue durée*.

The sociological theories of Anthony Giddens and Bourdieu have been extremely influential in archaeological studies of past societies over the last three decades, particularly where those studies have focused on individuals or specific social contexts. According to Giddens’ theory of structuration, expounded during the 70s and early 80s, we ought not to focus separately either on ‘objective’ rules of social behaviour or on the world of experience of the free human agent, but should understand the two as fundamentally and perpetually interdependent.⁴ The human agent interprets the world according to a mental structure of loose rules, themselves composed of memories of taught and learned experience, which inform and help rationalise behaviour. The intended and unintended consequences of his or her behaviour are interpreted and incorporated into the mental structure, subtly or drastically altering it in the process. Giddens writes:

Human agents always know what they are doing on the level of discursive consciousness under some description. However, what they do may be quite unfamiliar under other descriptions, and they may know little of the ramified

² See, for example, K. Heinemeyer, ‘Die Missionisierung Hessens’ in *Hessen im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 47-54.

³ N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 1939; trans. E. Jephcott (Oxford, 1994), p. xv, emphasis his.

⁴ A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 2.

consequences of the activities in which they engage [...] Human history is created by intentional activities but it is not an intended project; it persistently eludes efforts to bring it under conscious direction.⁵

Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, though developed independently of Giddens, is based upon essentially the same principle.⁶ Society is never stagnant, and behaviour within and through the world inevitably changes it. Giddens chose the word 'structuration' to describe his theory, for it implies the ever-changing, regenerative 'structure' of human society. Culture, Geertz wrote, is an imperfect blueprint, a work-in-progress: at once a design of something, and a design for something.⁷ This dynamism is manifested in the never-ending negotiation between tradition and innovation, the desire for constancy on the one hand, and the inevitability of change on the other.

Whereas the sociologist and anthropologist can test a behavioural model by live observation, the challenge for the historian or archaeologist is to recognise and account for the human dynamism within any given historical situation. The validity of speaking of the 'individual' in the past has itself been hotly debated by archaeologists in particular. Some have asserted that modern sociological models of the individual are misleadingly applied to past cultures, where networks of interpersonal relationships and responsibilities may have been much more influential in behaviour and conceptions of the self than post-Enlightenment rationalist notions of the bounded, objectified individual.⁸ These cautions are well voiced, for they help us avoid the danger of unwittingly re-imagining people of the past in our own image.

The danger of assuming an unfounded 'empathy' with past individuals is especially acute in periods with no written sources. For this reason, archaeological

⁵ Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, pp. 26-27; also idem, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, Vol. I: Power, Property and the State* (London, 1981), p. 54.

⁶ See in particular P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Stanford, 1990); idem, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1977).

⁷ C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), p. 93.

⁸ For recent contributions to the debate, see B. Morris, *Anthropology of the Self: The Individual in Cultural Perspective* (London, 1994), p. 16; J. Thomas, *Archaeology and Modernity* (London, 2004), pp. 123-125; K. Berggren, 'The Knowledge-able agent? On the Paradoxes of Power' in *Philosophy and Archaeological Practice: Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. C. Holtorf and H. Karlsson (Göteborg, 2000), pp. 38-46; C. Fowler, 'The Individual, the Subject and Archaeological Interpretation: Reading Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler' in *Philosophy and Archaeological Practice*, ed. Holtorf and Karlsson, pp. 107-123; idem, 'Personhood and Social Relations in the British Neolithic', *Journal of Material Culture* 6 (2001), pp. 137-163; J. Gero, 'Troubled Travels in Agency and Feminism' in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. M. A. Dobres and J. Robb (London, 2000), pp. 34-39; J. Brück, 'Monuments, Power and Personhood in the British Neolithic', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute N.S.* 7 (2001), pp. 649-667.

analyses which have been influenced by the theories of Giddens and Bourdieu have tended to discuss more generalised concepts of long-term agency, meaning, memory and power structures, particularly those power structures of the 'élites' whose burials and monuments figure most prominently in the archaeological record. Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been used by some prehistoric archaeologists in attempts to recreate the symbolic structures which are so important in defining, negotiating and justifying social power relations.⁹

Ian Hodder, meanwhile, has expressed reservations about reading too much from isolated archaeological assemblages, and stresses the importance of understanding the physical and conceptual context of the data by trying to see patterns of meaning across as many different forms of data as possible – pottery, settlements, decorative schemes, ritual monuments, and so on. His 'contextual archaeology', which is founded on the analysis of symbolic meanings in their particular historical context, does not, according to him, amount to 'speculative, undisciplined palaeopsychology'; rather, he argues that 'other worlds of meaning, other historical contexts with their unique frameworks of meaning, can be understood through an examination of material culture'.¹⁰

John Barrett, dubious of Hodder's attempts to reconstruct past meanings from seemingly static sets of archaeological data,¹¹ begins by emphasising social discourse as a more useful unit of study. He writes that

if material residues are taken to record or reflect social conditions or meanings then they are immediately isolated from the actual process of social discourse where that material originally resided as the media of communication and social discourse.¹²

⁹ Highly influential in this respect have been the works of M. Shanks and C. Tilley, 'Ideology, Symbolic Power and Ritual Communication: A Reinterpretation of Neolithic Mortuary Practices' in *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, ed. I. Hodder (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 129-154. Shanks and Tilley went on to develop their theories more fully, their two most significant publications being M. Shanks and C. Tilley, *Re-constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice*, 2nd edition (London, 1992) and idem, *Social Theory and Archaeology* (Oxford, 1987).

¹⁰ I. Hodder, 'The contextual analysis of symbolic meanings' in *The Archaeology of Contextual Meaning*, ed. I. Hodder (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 1-10 (p. 10). See also idem, 'Converging Traditions: The Search for Symbolic Meanings in Archaeology and Geography' in *Landscape and Culture: Geographical and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. J. M. Wagstaff (Oxford, 1987), pp. 134-145.

¹¹ J. Barrett, 'Fields of Discourse: Reconstituting a Social Archaeology', *Critique of Anthropology* 7.3 (1984), pp. 5-16 (pp. 7-8).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Barrett, heavily influenced by Geertz, argues that material culture does not merely embody meaning, but generates it; it does not passively reflect society, but actively constitutes it; it is not evidence of discourse, but *is part of the discourse*.

While Geertz's theories are a crucial influence on Barrett's approach, Barrett turns to Bourdieu in order to understand how material residues can be situated 'within specific strategies of social reproduction'.¹³ Bourdieu observed how the physical world, in particular the home, is socially constructed in such a way that it creates and normalises social relationships through a kind of silent discourse.¹⁴ A 'field of discourse', as defined by Barrett, is 'an area in space-time occupied by virtue of the practice of a particular discourse'.¹⁵ A field of discourse could thus be regular sessions of parliament, or evening meals with the family, or a single evening in a public bar, or an elaborate funerary ritual. In each situation one would find distinct codes and patterns of behaviour, different power relationships, uniquely situated discourse – and, most important, the participants subtly or drastically alter the field itself by their actions within it. Using this theory, Barrett has argued that the early second-millennium B.C. monuments of Wessex were constructed and altered through a long-term discourse of power which involved the monopolisation of authority by a ritual élite. This élite gradually narrowed the entrances to the large henge monuments, denying the masses access to what had formerly been places of communal gathering, in doing so securing, mystifying and normalising their own secular power.¹⁶

It is possible to consider the Bonifatian mission in Germania as a field of discourse, bearing in mind that such fields are never isolated and never uniform, but are instead characterised by conflict and change. The field was temporally and spatially extensive, was gradually transformed over a generation and stretched from Hestia to Rome in one direction and as far as Northumbria in the other. Yet it was dominated by social networks of missionaries and clerics who shared similar perceptions and beliefs, who communicated through repeated symbols and rituals, and held to a conviction that they occupied a distinct place in relation to the rest of the world. The concept of the 'field of discourse' is a useful one, for it accounts for the

¹³ J. Barrett, 'The Monumentality of Death: The Character of Early Bronze Age Mortuary Mounds in Southern Britain', *World Archaeology*, 22,2 (1990), pp. 179-189 (p. 187). See further J. Barrett, 'Agency, the Duality of Structure and the Problem of the Archaeological Record' in *Archaeological Theory Today*, ed. by I. Hodder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 140-164.

¹⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 89.

¹⁵ Barrett, 'Fields of Discourse', p. 11.

¹⁶ J. Barrett, *Fragments from Antiquity* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 97-107.

centrality of change and conflict within and between communities, while allowing for the communities' own sense of their enduring cohesion. In plain terms, it provides us with a conceptual framework within which we can understand how the missionary community of Boniface continually re-defined its identity through the representation of experience in literary discourse, and how this self-definition in turn influenced those experiences.

2.1.2 Landscape and locality

Having outlined the way in which the Bonifatian mission can be viewed as a field of discourse, we can now consider how the landscape can be fitted into this theoretical framework. 'Landscape' is a term which has been used with countless meanings, not always well defined, across the social sciences; as mentioned in the previous chapter, its application in archaeology covers areas as diverse as economic studies, settlement morphology, burial distribution and ecclesiastical boundaries.¹⁷ The archaeological term 'phenomenology' refers to a theoretical approach inspired by the philosophical models of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, whose concerns lay with understanding the structures of consciousness revealed through subjective experience.¹⁸ Their models have been adapted to suit the particular concerns of archaeologists with the material world and its role in constituting social and individual identity. In this discussion I shall concentrate on archaeological landscape studies, especially of the medieval period, which contain elements of phenomenology and which are most relevant to this thesis.

I will begin with some remarks on the epistemological status of phenomenological landscape archaeology in general, and argue that the approach can be most fruitful when used in historically documented periods. Brück defines phenomenology in archaeology thus:

¹⁷ For fuller discussions, see M. Johnson, *Ideas of Landscape* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 2-4, and E. Hirsch, 'Landscape: Between Place and Space' in *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, ed. E. Hirsch and M. O'Hanlon (Oxford, 1995), pp. 1-30.

¹⁸ The founding work of modern phenomenology, originally published in 1913, is E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführungen in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. by K. Schuhmann (The Hague, 1977). Heidegger's most influential work was M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Halle, 1927). For introductory discussions of the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, see R. Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge, 2001); D. Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London, 2000); L. Embree, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht, 1997).

Phenomenology aims to describe the character of human experience, specifically the ways in which we apprehend the material world through directed intervention in our surroundings. [...] It is argued that embodied engagement with the material world is constitutive of existence.¹⁹

For the theory-minded prehistorian, the promise of phenomenology is that it may reveal worlds of individual experience and meaning that cannot be recovered from seemingly unpeopled models of economic and social interaction. Landscape, argues Christopher Tilley, should not be treated as a two-dimensional canvas for the mapping of economic resources and nodes or boundaries of power, for such an approach serves to objectify and commodify what should be more accurately seen as an integral part of the social world. People ascribe to places within the landscape meaning and significance that cannot be quantified by traditional archaeological means, and movement and existence within the landscape is a necessarily three-dimensional, sensuous experience for the individual agent. Hence, if archaeologists are to incorporate these concerns into their interpretations of the past, they must learn how to approach the phenomenology of the landscape.²⁰

A central part of Tilley's methodology is the personal observation by the archaeologist of the landscape under study. Lines of sight between monuments and landscape features, physical topography and the sense of opened or confined space constitute the principal elements under analysis, which Tilley then arranges in patterns of significance and meaning. This approach, however, brings with it two fundamental problems, one methodological and the other theoretical. First, given the first-hand nature of both data-gathering and analysis, how should the archaeologist present his or her argument in a self-critical fashion to an audience who have not had the benefit of experiencing the landscape themselves? Second, Tilley's approach suffers from the dangers of circular reasoning and a measure of deductive tyranny: since the

¹⁹ J. Brück, 'Experiencing the Past? The Development of a Phenomenological Archaeology in British Prehistory', *Archaeological Dialogues* 12.1 (2005), pp. 45-72 (p. 46).

²⁰ C. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford, 1994), esp. pp. 7-34; more recently, idem, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford, 2004), esp. pp. 2-19; idem, 'Round Barrows and Dykes as Landscape Metaphors', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 14 (2004), pp. 185-203. A crucial influence on Tilley's approach, and on phenomenological studies of landscape in general, is the work of geographer Denis Cosgrove; see in particular D. E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape* (London, 1984), pp. 13-31.

archaeologist must himself or herself define the standard for a 'significant' landscape element, how are we to determine that the resulting patterns bear any relation to the experiences of prehistoric peoples, and not merely to those of the investigating archaeologist?²¹

I believe that both of these concerns can be largely overcome. First, some prehistorians have attempted to devise non-traditional methods of presenting their data and substantiating their interpretations. These methods have included photographic montages and diagrams which represent the panoramic relationship of particular monuments to other features of the landscape,²² virtual reality modelling (VRM),²³ geographical information systems (GIS)²⁴ and well as video and sound recordings.²⁵ In the coming methodology I will outline my own attempt to overcome this methodological issue.

²¹ A case in point is Tilley's study of prehistoric monuments on Bodmin Moor, Cornwall. One of the 'significant' landscape features he identifies is the relationship of stone cairns to the natural rocky outcrops known as tors. On a map he plots fifteen of these cairns which occur next to or on top of tors, but these represent less than 5% of the more than 350 cairns on Bodmin Moor. Since he does not plot the locations of the remaining 95%, the statistical significance of his observation is open to serious question. C. Tilley, 'The Powers of Rocks: Topography and Monument Construction on Bodmin Moor', *World Archaeology* 28.2 (1996), pp. 161-176 (p. 171, fig. 3). Andrew Fleming has recently given a sharp critique of phenomenological studies of prehistoric landscapes, commenting especially on Tilley's methodology. See A. Fleming, 'Post-Processual Landscape Archaeology: A Critique' in *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 16.3 (2006), pp. 267-280, esp. pp. 273-275.

²² For example, Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*; V. Cummings, 'Landscapes in Motion: Interactive Computer Imagery and the Neolithic Landscapes of the Outer Hebrides' in *U.K. Chapter of Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology. Proceedings of the Fourth Meeting, Cardiff University, 27 and 28 February 1999*, ed. C. Buck and others, BAR International Series 844 (Oxford, 2000), pp. 11-20; V. Cummings, A. Jones and A. Watson, 'Divided Places: Phenomenology and Asymmetry in the Monuments of the Black Mountains, Southeast Wales', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 12 (2002), pp. 57-70.

²³ J. Pollard and M. Gillings, 'Romancing the Stones: Towards a Virtual and Elemental Avebury', *Archaeological Dialogues* 5 (1998), pp. 143-164; M. Edmonds and G. McElearney, 'Inhabitation and Access: Landscapes and the Internet at Gardom's Edge', *Internet Archaeology* 6 (1999) <http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue6/edmonds_index.html> [consulted 21 March 2007]; G. Goodrick and M. Gillings, 'Constructs, Simulations and Hyperreal Worlds: The Role of Virtual Reality (VR) in Archaeological Research' in *On the Theory and Practice of Archaeological Computing*, ed. G. Lock and K. Brown (Oxford, 2000), pp. 41-58.

²⁴ M. Llobera, 'Exploring the Topography of Mind: GIS, Social Space and Archaeology', *Antiquity* 70 (1996), pp. 612-622; D. Wheatley, 'The Use of GIS to Understand Regional Variation in Neolithic Wessex' in *New Methods, Old Problems: Geographical Information Systems in Modern Archaeological Research*, ed. H. D. G. Maschner, Centre for Archaeological Investigations Occasional Paper 23 (Carbondale, IL, 1996), pp. 75-103; idem, 'Making Space for an Archaeology of Place' *Internet Archaeology* 15 (2004) <<http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue15/10/toc.html>> [consulted 21 March 2007]; T. Bell and G. Lock, 'Topographical and Cultural Influences in Walking the Ridgeway in Later Prehistoric Times' in *Beyond the Map: Archaeological and Spatial Technologies*, ed. G. Lock (Amsterdam, 2000), pp. 85-100; C. Roughley, 'The Neolithic Landscape of the Carnac Region, Brittany: New Insights from Digital Approaches', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 70 (2004), pp. 153-172.

²⁵ S. Mills, 'An Approach for Integrating Multisensory Data in Archaeology: The Examples of Sesklo and the Teleorman Valley' in *U.K. Chapter of Computer Applications*, ed. Buck and others, pp. 27-37.

The second problem is more epistemological in nature, and not so easily tackled. It is also the aspect of phenomenological archaeology which has most frequently attracted criticism. Tilley's methodology rests on the assumption that the physical landscape and the human body are constants, and consequently he assumes that his own embodied experience of a particular landscape will not differ substantially from that of, say, an individual in the Neolithic.²⁶ This *a priori* assumption of the constancy of body and landscape is the weakest link in phenomenological studies of prehistoric periods, and has been roundly critiqued by archaeologists who have an understanding of its sociological and anthropological implications.²⁷ Each human individual is a unique result of unpredictable processes of structuration that occur within particular social discourses. When Tilley assumes that he can automatically recreate the 'embodied experience' of a prehistoric individual in a wholly alien (and irretrievably lost) cultural context, he contradicts both his professed rejection of a Cartesian divide between subject and object, and the very basis of phenomenology itself, which asserts the socially embedded interdependence of perception and interpretation.²⁸

The dangers of subjectivism are thus well known to prehistorians, but the extent to which particular hermeneutic approaches can overcome them is highly debatable. The very plasticity of the physical landscape as an arena of human significance and meaning makes it unlikely that past perceptions of it can be

²⁶ Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, pp. 219-225.

²⁷ See J. Brück, 'In the Footsteps of the Ancestors: A Review of Tilley's *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 15 (1998), pp. 23-36; C. Jones, 'Interpreting the Perceptions of Past People', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 15 (1998), pp. 7-22; F. Criado Boado and B. Villoch Vázquez, 'Monumentalising Landscape: From Present Perception to the Past Meaning of Galician Megalithism (North-West Iberian Peninsula)', *European Journal of Archaeology* 3 (2000), pp. 188-216; S. Tarlow, 'Emotion in Archaeology', *Current Anthropology* 41 (2000), pp. 713-746; J. Barrett, comment on Tilley's 'Round Barrows and Dykes', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 14 (2004), p. 199; A. Fleming, 'Phenomenology and the Megaliths of Wales: A Dreaming Too Far?', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 18 (1999), pp. 119-125; idem, 'Post-Processual Landscape Archaeology'; R. Muir, 'Conceptualising Landscape', *Landscapes* 1 (2000), pp. 4-21.

²⁸ Brück, 'Experiencing the Past?', pp. 55-56; Thomas, *Archaeology and Modernity*, pp. 216-217. Consideration of this issue has led some archaeologists to incorporate multiple narratives and highly personal accounts into their studies, reminding their audiences that there is no one 'correct' version of the past. Hodder's excavations at Çatalhöyük in Turkey are the best-known example of this approach. I. Hodder, *Towards Reflexive Method in Archaeology: The Example at Çatalhöyük*, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Monograph 28 (Cambridge, 2000). Barbara Bender, using the example of Stonehenge in recent centuries, has shown how the architecture of a monument may remain static, but the conflicting meanings connected to it do not: B. Bender, *Stonehenge: Making Space* (Oxford, 1998). See also M. Edmonds, *Ancestral Geographies of the Neolithic: Landscape, Monuments and Power* (London, 1999), esp. pp. 111-115; idem, *The Langdales: Landscape and Prehistory in a Lakeland Valley* (Stroud, 2004); Brück, 'Monuments, Power and Personhood', pp. 658-662.

recovered with any great precision, especially where nothing but the landscape and certain types of durable monument remain. Even if 'patterns of significance' within the monumental landscape can be empirically identified,²⁹ there remains the problem of deducing the meanings they once held.

I have made these extended remarks in order to make clear the theoretical and methodological challenges inherent in the use of phenomenology as not merely a philosophical perspective, but a tool of analysis. I do not deny the value of the many insights gained by Tilley and similar scholars through their phenomenological analyses of prehistoric periods, to which my own approach is greatly indebted. Nevertheless, as a historian of anthropological bent, I remain doubtful that phenomenology alone can reveal any but the most general elements of significance, and perhaps nothing at all of meaning, that existed within the landscapes of periods without written sources.³⁰ Even where written sources exist, the insights they offer into matters of landscape perception will likely be sparse, ambiguous and relevant only to a limited number of like-thinking past individuals. As an archaeologist, however, I am confident that these insights, where they can be gathered, can potentially form a valid basis for interpreting the significance and meanings of past landscapes. The main challenge is to perform phenomenological analysis within a sufficiently critical methodological framework.

Some years ago Nick Corcos predicted that the next wave of innovative phenomenological landscape studies would be undertaken by medievalists rather than prehistorians, and he has been proved correct.³¹ Several recent works have successfully incorporated aspects of phenomenology, in particular with relation to Christian symbolism, sacrality and cosmology, into more traditional studies of the medieval landscape. These include the works of Turner,³² Altenberg³³ and Nixon³⁴

²⁹ For one attempt at this, see Criado Boado and Villoch Vázquez, 'Monumentalising Landscape'.

³⁰ Richard Bradley, in his study on the use of natural places as ritual sites in pre-Christian Europe, made an insightful attempt to overcome this problem through the extensive use of pre-modern ethnographic analogies. R. Bradley, *An Archaeology of Natural Places* (London, 2000). See also idem, 'Mental and Material Landscapes in Prehistoric Britain' in *Landscape: The Richest Historical Record*, ed. D. Hooke, SLS Supplementary Series 1 (Amesbury, 2000), pp. 1-11.

³¹ N. Corcos, 'Churches as Pre-Historic Ritual Monuments: A Review and Phenomenological Perspective from Somerset', *Assemblage* 6 (2001) < http://www.assemblage.group.shef.ac.uk/issue6/Corcos_web.html > [consulted 21 March 2007]. As early as 1987, Hodder, in a discussion of meaning and symbolism within the archaeological and geographical traditions, concluded that 'the contextual binding of social action leads to the embrace of history'. Hodder, 'Converging Traditions', p. 144. His own interests, however, remained focused on prehistoric periods.

³² Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape*.

³³ Altenberg, *Experiencing Landscapes*.

which I mentioned in the previous chapter. A unifying feature of these studies is their attempt to view landscape in the broadest and most inclusive sense possible, giving appropriate weight to its functional and symbolic aspects. Identity is also a common concern; this is implicit in the titles chosen by Turner and Nixon, for both of whom a central question is how Christian identity was manifested and defined within the landscape. A particular concern of Altenberg is to show how three economically marginal landscapes of late medieval Britain and Scandinavia were perceived differently by insiders, outsiders, laypeople and religious. She concludes that

the perception of regional identity is expressed on various levels and often determined by the social construction of memory, i.e. the creation of a real or perceived history, specific to a region, community or even a family. The natural world plays an important part in this process, as landmarks and monuments (or perhaps the absence of these features) serve to form the cosmology of societies lacking a linear concept of history.³⁵

According to the phenomenological approach, we achieve an understanding of the world by moving through it, mentally or physically, and by assembling a framework within which we can understand every part in relation to the whole. From quantifiable *space* we create a sense of *place*, and we define each place in any number of ways: by the activities we or others perform in it, or should not perform in it; by ownership; by resources; by symbolism or sacrality; and so on.³⁶ These aspects of place are frequently, though not always, bound to our social identity, and are often contested. Altenberg writes of the medieval church's attempt to 'Christianise' the sparsely inhabited Cornish moors:

From a Christian perspective the moors were marginal and the efforts of the church in these areas were missionary, as it tried to tame the wilderness, a

³⁴ Nixon, *Making a Landscape Sacred*.

³⁵ Altenberg, *Experiencing Landscapes*, p. 268.

³⁶ J. E. Hood, 'Social Relations and the Cultural Landscape' in *Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape*, ed. R. Yamin and K. Bescherer Methany (Knoxville, 1996), pp. 121-146 (p. 122); A. B. Knapp and W. Ashmore, 'Archaeological Landscapes: Constructed, Conceptualised, Ideational' in *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. W. Ashmore and A. B. Knapp (Oxford, 1999), pp. 1-30 (pp. 13-16); S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1995), p. 14; Hirsch, 'Landscape'; Hodder, 'Converging Traditions', pp. 140-141.

mythical inferno from which the community needed protection. Stone crosses and chapels in prominent positions were erected in a mental crusade against the unknown. [...] [This process created] invisible, perceptual boundaries, organising individuals and groups, telling them where to go and where not to go, and more importantly – where they belonged.³⁷

The inferno may have been mythical, but it was real enough to the members of the church who erected crosses on the tors of Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor; a phenomenological approach must account for the role of such perceptions and beliefs in the use and control of the landscape. In accordance with the above discussion of individual identity and social discourse, we must also recognise that the relationship between identity and the experienced landscape is reflexive, and may sometimes be consciously manipulated.³⁸

Developments in landscape archaeology have been paralleled in anthropology over the last fifteen years. There, increasing attention is being paid to landscape as a ‘cultural process’ that plays a reflexive role in everyday experience and identity.³⁹ Especially informative for this study is Arjun Appadurai’s model of locality production, which he developed as part of his studies into the effects of globalisation on local communities around the world. Appadurai uses the term ‘locality’ to describe the ‘structure of feeling’ that binds subjects to a particular locale.⁴⁰ It is a structuring (in the sense of Giddens) complex of identity and knowledge that is ‘primarily relational and contextual rather than [...] scalar or spatial’.⁴¹ Localities, Appadurai writes, encompass all aspects of social life, and could potentially assume equal centrality in anthropological studies:

³⁷ Altenberg, *Experiencing Landscapes*, pp. 110, 112. A comparison of Altenberg’s study of Bodmin Moor with Tilley’s analysis of the same landscape from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age (Tilley, ‘The Powers of Rocks’) puts in sharp relief the greater empirical validity and critical self-awareness that can be achieved by phenomenological studies of historic as opposed to prehistoric landscapes.

³⁸ For such a study focusing on the construction of a single monastic community in nineteenth-century Annapolis, see E. Kryder-Reid, ‘The Construction of Sanctity: Landscape and Ritual in a Religious Community’ in *Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape*, ed. R. Yamin and K. B. Methany (Knoxville, 1996), pp. 228-248.

³⁹ See Hirsch, ‘Landscape’, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁰ A. Appadurai, ‘The Production of Locality’ in *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, ed. R. Fardon (London, 1995), pp. 204-225 (p. 207). Tilley uses ‘locale’ with a similar sense to Appadurai’s ‘locality’. Tilley, ‘The Power of Rocks’, p. 161.

⁴¹ Appadurai, ‘The Production of Locality’, p. 204.

The large literature on techniques for naming places, for protecting fields, animals and other reproductive spaces and resources, for marking seasonal change and agricultural rhythms, for properly situating new houses and wells, for appropriately demarcating boundaries (both domestic and communal), is substantially a literature documenting the socialization of space and time. [...] More precisely, it is a record of the spatio-temporal production of locality.⁴²

Localities are not immutable frameworks of social behaviour and communal perception. They must be continually redefined and reinforced, rituals repeated, memories refreshed, and new generations constantly created and taught 'correct' customs and traditions. When this process of discourse and reproduction is disrupted by external influences, 'problems that are properly historical arise'.⁴³

In eighth-century Hestia, as everywhere else in human history, there was a multiplicity of landscapes comprising countless localities, depending on how we choose to define them. Our sources allow us to study very few of them, but sufficient evidence survives for us to identify several localities of great importance for pre-Christian religious activity. These together formed the sacred pagan landscape of Hestia on the eve of Boniface's mission. As we shall see in chapter seven,⁴⁴ ascertaining something of the nature of these localities is a demanding, though not hopeless, task for the historian and archaeologist. Sites of cult-based pagan worship were centres of social life and identity, focal points of localities, and their reproduction was drastically disrupted by the advent of Boniface's mission. The Anglo-Saxon missionaries, meanwhile, were determined to found their own localities, physically and symbolically centred on church, monastery or oratory, and use them to redefine local identities and the pagan past in fundamentally Christian terms. Appadurai's model is useful for conceptualising the ensuing contestation of sacrality in the landscape:

⁴² Ibid., p. 205. Two recent studies have used Appadurai's model to examine the local religious shrines and cults in Africa: see P. Probst, 'Expansion and Enclosure: Ritual Landscapes and the Politics of Space in Central Malawi', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28.1 (2002), pp. 179-198; U. Luig, 'Constructing Local Worlds: Spirit Possession in the Gwembe Valley' in *Spirit Possession: Modernity and Power in Africa*, ed. H. Behrend and U. Luig (Oxford, 1999), pp. 124-141.

⁴³ Appadurai, 'The Production of Locality', p. 207.

⁴⁴ Sections 7.1.1-2 below.

All locality-building has a moment of colonization, a moment both historical and chronotypic, where there is a formal recognition that the production of a neighbourhood requires deliberate, risky, even violent action in respect to the soil, the forests, animals and other human beings. A good deal of the violence associated with foundational ritual is a recognition of the force that is required to wrest a locality from previously uncontrolled people and places.⁴⁵

Appadurai's remarks could almost be a literal description of Boniface's felling of the Geismar shrine. From Boniface's point of view, there could be no long-term accommodation of pagan sacrality within a landscape that he was determined to claim for Christ, and for the orthodox missionaries it was a case of complete incompatibility. They inhabited the same space as the local pagans but a very different place. Sites of pagan significance had to be identified, activities associated with them disrupted, and all social memory of those activities eradicated or drastically reinterpreted. They were to be *re-placed*, in the literal and phenomenological sense, directly or indirectly, by sites of Christian significance, and in this way their localities were to be utterly transformed.

2.1.3 Christianisation and conversion

One of the overarching narratives of late Antique and early medieval history is that of Christianity's gradual expansion across Europe. This narrative was first perceived and constructed as such in the Ecclesiastical Histories of Eusebius and Bede, both of whom saw the spread of Christianity as the defining feature of the world in their own times, and it has continued to inform the frames of study of modern academics.⁴⁶ Just as historians have seen the Bonifatian mission as being closely connected to the expansion of Frankish imperialism east of the Rhine,⁴⁷ so they have viewed it in the

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 208-209.

⁴⁶ Recent works which take the expansion of Christianity within Europe as their dominant historical theme include Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*; Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*; M. O. H. Carver, 'Introduction: Northern Europeans Negotiate their Future' in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. M. O. H. Carver (York, 2003), pp. 3-13; Padberg, *Christianisierung im Mittelalter*; P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity 200-1000 AD*, (1996; revised 2nd edition Oxford, 2002); idem, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI, 1992).

⁴⁷ See chapter one above, section 1.2.2.

context of Christianity's thousand-year expansion across the face of Europe.⁴⁸ My focus in this thesis will remain firmly at the regional level, concerned with the specific context of the Christianisation of eighth-century Hessa.

Implicit in the theme of 'conversion in the early Middle Ages' are questions regarding the nature of conversion itself. These questions are sociological and anthropological as well as historical, and invariably relate to the broader problem of how social scientists should best categorise and study religion. Space does not permit me to discuss the important works of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Robert Bellah, who pioneered the comparative study of religion based on the broad distinction between its 'world' and 'traditional' forms, but a few preliminary methodological remarks will be necessary.

Weber was an early promoter of the idea that 'world religions' offer a 'rationalised' concept of the world, codified in writing, made firm by means of doctrine, rite and authority until the core of the concept becomes a Truth that is unassailable, unquestionable and sacred in itself: for example, the Jewish Torah, the Muslim Koran or the Christian Bible. This coherence and rationality, argued Weber, is the great strength of world religions, as 'traditional religions', which rarely have a written canon, have no structured body of argument to stand against it.⁴⁹ This model was further developed by Robert Bellah,⁵⁰ and was applied to the early medieval conversion of the Germanic-speaking peoples to Christianity by James Russell.⁵¹ There is also a strong tradition of phenomenological religious studies which claims its roots in the works of Rudolf Otto and found two of its most influential practitioners in Mircea Eliade and Friedrich Heiler.⁵²

The obstacles inherent in applying an overly simplistic model of 'world' versus 'traditional' religions to the early medieval period are made especially clear by Russell's study. In short, Russell argues that the Germanic-speaking peoples of Europe shared a common world-view that incorporated 'traditional' forms of folk religiosity, a 'high level of group solidarity' and a 'rural and homogenous' social

⁴⁸ This is most eloquently done in Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, pp. 234-236.

⁴⁹ M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 1922; trans. E. Fischoff (Boston, 1956), esp. pp. 68-71; see also E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912; trans. C Cosman (Oxford, 2001).

⁵⁰ R. N. Bellah, 'Religious evolution', *American Sociological Review* 29.3 (1964), pp. 358-374.

⁵¹ J. C. Russell, *The Germanisation of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (Oxford, 1994).

⁵² R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1917; trans. J. W. Harvey (1923; revised 2nd edition, Oxford, 1950); M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York, 1959); F. Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* (1949; 2nd revised edition, Stuttgart, 1979).

structure.⁵³ This ‘Germanic world-view’, Russell claims, was fundamentally incompatible with the urban, Mediterranean world-view of early Christianity. The result was that Christianity, in order to become accepted by the Germanic peoples, was forced to become ‘Germanised’.⁵⁴

Reviewers have criticised numerous aspects of Russell’s controversial book,⁵⁵ but here we shall focus on his problematic sociological conception of early medieval Christianity and paganism. There are two serious flaws in his model. First, the scarcity of direct evidence of pre-Christian religious practices in north-west Europe may tempt one to employ such an overarching sociological model of religion, but the danger of over-generalisation, to which Russell succumbs, is great.⁵⁶ The second major weakness of Russell’s study is his assumption that the traditional ‘pagan Germanic’ religion, a hazardous concept itself,⁵⁷ was resistant to change to the extent that the world religion in question, Christianity, was forced to become ‘Germanised’.⁵⁸ No historian would deny that Christianity, however one might choose to define the term, was not affected by its contact with the Germanic-speaking peoples of Europe, but Russell’s failure to acknowledge the complex, heterogeneous nature of both early medieval Christianity and paganism means that he has little worthwhile to say concerning the interaction between them.

The flaws of Russell’s book help illuminate the danger of over-generalising and over-simplifying matters of early medieval religiosity. ‘Christianity’ and ‘paganism’, despite being useful analytical and descriptive labels, must not be regarded as monolithic, mutually antagonistic belief systems in a way that obscures the complexity of their relationship.⁵⁹ Indeed, the difficulties which anthropologists have in seeking a universal, cross-cultural definition of ‘religion’ itself should lead us to question whether a meaningful definition of this kind can even be reached. Heiler’s

⁵³ Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, p. 212.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-214.

⁵⁵ See, for example, A. Angenendt, review of Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 49.1 (1998), pp. 156-157; T. F. X. Noble, review of Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, in *American Historical Review* 100.3 (1995), pp. 888-889; A. M. Perron, review of Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, in *Journal of Religion* 78.4 (1998), pp. 619-621.

⁵⁶ Russell’s thesis depends heavily upon Georges Dumézil’s model of a homogeneous pan-Indo-European world-view (see G. Dumézil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, 1959; ed. and trans. E Haugen (Berkeley, 1973), even though Dumézil himself later abandoned this very model.

⁵⁷ See chapter six below, section 6.3.1

⁵⁸ Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, pp. 213-214 and *passim*.

⁵⁹ L. Milis, ‘Introduction: The Pagan Middle Ages – A Contradiction in Terms?’ in *The Pagan Middle Ages*, ed. L. R. Milis, trans. T. Guest (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 1-12 (pp. 5-10).

use of 'universal' phenomenological categories to dissect and study any religion in supposed objectivity is also of dubious validity, since it rests upon the highly debatable assumption that 'religion' can be defined as a distinct aspect or collection of aspects of non-Western, non-Christian societies.⁶⁰

Given these problems, it is helpful to consider religion as something that is not distinct from (or within) culture in general. The anthropologist Robert Hefner has argued in favour of a broader understanding of identity, politics and morality, in which religion colours and touches many aspects of social life.⁶¹ Geertz, meanwhile, defines religion as a system of 'sacred symbols' which serves 'to synthesize a people's ethos... and their world view'.⁶² Religious belief and ritual, in this sense, become no different in essence from 'non-religious' belief and ritual; boundaries between the two are blurred, and in fact the distinction itself becomes meaningless. This kind of conceptualism allows Albertus Demyttenaere to describe the process of medieval monastic education in completely non-religious terms:

[Monastic education is] cultural propagation, a process by which social and mental structures are developed, changed or enforced, and transmitted in space and time from generation to generation.⁶³

Once religion is absorbed into this broader understanding of culture, however, it need not disappear, for religion is a real and powerful influence in the lives of many individuals. Robert Markus has found it useful for his own purposes to replace the religion-culture dichotomy with a distinction between 'sacred', 'secular' and 'profane' aspects of society. The nature of sacred, secular and profane spheres of life, where they overlapped or excluded one another, where exactly the boundaries lay,

⁶⁰ Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen*. For an attempt to use Heiler's classificatory scheme as a tool of analysis, see P. McKenzie, *Hail Orisha! A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, *Studies in Religion in Africa* 19 (Leiden, 1997). For a commentary and cogent critique of McKenzie, see J. L. Cox, 'Missionaries, the Phenomenology of Religion and "Re-Presenting" Nineteenth-Century African Religion: A Case Study of Peter McKenzie's "Hail Orisha!"', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31.3 (2001), pp. 336-353. A fuller critique of phenomenological approaches to religion in general is G. D. Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London, 1999).

⁶¹ R. W. Hefner, 'Introduction: World Building and the Rationality of Conversion' in *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, ed. R. W. Hefner (Oxford, 1993), pp. 3-44 (p. 4).

⁶² Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 89. For further discussion within a medieval context, see P. Biller, 'Words and the Medieval Notion "Religion"', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985), pp. 351-369.

⁶³ A. Demyttenaere, *The Claustalization of the World* (Utrecht, 1997), p. 2.

was a matter for continual negotiation throughout the development of late Classical and early medieval Christianity, and there was rarely, if ever, complete agreement even among the highest members of the Christian orthodoxy.⁶⁴

This was equally true in the eighth century, when boundaries of ‘proper’ Christian behaviour were of special concern for Boniface and his fellow missionaries. We are fortunate that this concern was shared by churchmen throughout the medieval period, for such clerics were responsible for preserving and copying the many letters between Boniface and his correspondents, in particular the popes, in which matters of Catholic orthodoxy and orthopraxy were frequently discussed and papal judgements given. By examining these surviving letters we can to some extent determine how Boniface and his contacts perceived and defined both their own form of orthodox Christianity and the paganism with which they contrasted it. This process by its very nature involved drawing boundaries between the sacred, profane and ‘what was left in a penumbra of contingent accidentals, indifferent or inessential to the core of their religion’.⁶⁵ As Boniface’s mission progressed into the borderlands, so more and more customs crept into the penumbra of ‘correct’ Christianity. The eating of horse flesh was forbidden, the Pope advised him;⁶⁶ offerings for the dead were permitted, but only if the deceased had been a baptised Christian;⁶⁷ on the use of ‘crystals’ – for what purpose Pope Zacharias does not say – there was no scriptural or patristic tradition.⁶⁸ When we speak of the ‘Christianity’ of Boniface, therefore, we must remember that around the core of his essential belief and practice lay a wide zone of shadow and ambiguity, which he, as papal legate, was charged with narrowing and clarifying in minute detail. And when we come to consider his interaction with members of the Frankish secular and lay élite in chapter seven, we shall see that this zone was already a great deal narrower for Boniface than for most.

An inevitable consequence of our overwhelming dependence on the letters of the missionaries is that we are restricted to their point of view when we consider terms such as ‘pagan’ and ‘paganism’. I will use these terms frequently throughout my thesis, and here make the qualification that they do not represent a value judgment on my part. By ‘pagan’ I mean simply those people and those activities which the

⁶⁴ Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, pp. 9-15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Tangl, ep. 87, p. 196, ll. 24-28.

⁶⁷ Tangl, ep. 28, p. 50, l. 29 to p. 51, l. 4.

⁶⁸ *De christallis autem, ut adseruisti, nullam habemus traditionem.* Tangl, ep. 87, p. 197, ll. 10-11.

missionaries labelled 'pagan' (*paganus* or *gentilis*), regardless of whether others or the 'pagans' themselves would use the same label. Since my main concern is with the perceptions and worlds of meaning of the missionary community, I do not believe that this categorisation is invalid or has no empirical value; such a problem would only arise if I regarded it as an objective category that had a validity external to the missionary community.

Having discussed the definition of religion and my understanding of the terms 'Christianity' and 'paganism', we can now briefly consider the matter of religious conversion. Hefner comes to a sociological definition of conversion as not a complete rupture in the world of cultural meanings and associations, 'but an adjustment in self-identification through the at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful or true [...] It always involves commitment to a new kind of moral authority and a new or reconceptualised social identity.'⁶⁹ In other words, conversion does not necessarily change a person's world, but their place within it and perception of it. Consider Shenoute of Atripe's exasperated rebuke when the man who had come to him for advice turned aside to offer a respectful greeting to a crow, a bird traditionally held to have prophetic abilities:

Even if I take away all your household idols, am I able to cover up the sun? Should I build walls all along the west, so that you do not pray towards the sunset? Shall I stand watch on the banks of the Nile, and in every lagoon, lest you make libations on its waters?⁷⁰

A convert's world is not easily, if ever, transformed wholesale. Such 'superstitions' as divining the future from the cawing of a crow are unthinking and natural to those who inherit them; rooted by generations of practice, they hold together the fabric of all the ideas and things in the world, and even the act of baptism is not enough to dislodge them. Only during the gradual process of Christianisation does the convert's world begin to shift and be remodelled, over years, even generations, into a new form, 'rationalised' according to the precepts of the new religion.⁷¹ The form that this version of Christianity will take is unlikely to be utterly faithful to the form of its most

⁶⁹ Hefner, 'Introduction', p. 17.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 97.

⁷¹ I use 'rationalised' here in the more general sense of Hefner, 'Introduction', p. 14-16, who does not restrict a perceived quality of 'rationality' only to the world religions.

orthodox practitioners (i.e. those wielding highest authority responsible for the missionary activity), but is dependent on the nature of the pre-Christian culture, the aims of the missionaries, and the access the converts have to orthodox, doctrinal Christianity, in the form of preachers or texts.⁷²

Ian Wood usefully defines ‘conversion’ as the ‘spiritual change of an individual’, and uses the term ‘Christianisation’ to refer to the ‘process of evangelisation both before and after baptism’.⁷³ I will use the term ‘conversion’ to refer to the act of baptism alone. One practical reason for doing this is that we cannot possibly know whether each of the 100,000 baptised converts referred to in a given letter experienced a dramatic sense of spiritual rebirth. Boniface and the orthodox milieu of our period regarded baptism as the crucial watershed in the conversion of an individual, without which one was not a member of the Christian family.⁷⁴ Yet while baptism might have made a Christian, it did not necessarily make a *good* Christian, and Boniface’s determination to spread the rite of post-baptismal confirmation demonstrates the importance he placed on the orthodox instruction of new converts under episcopal supervision.⁷⁵ I will broaden the definition of ‘Christianisation’ to mean ‘the attempted restructuring of the personal and social world views that constitute culture in accordance with the orthodox world view of the religious authorities responsible for the process’, in much the same sense as Markus uses it.⁷⁶ The usefulness of such a broader, if cumbersome, definition is that Christianisation need not include only straightforward evangelisation, but the passing of laws to reinforce correct Christian behaviour, the official re-interpretation of certain festivals and customs in Christian terms, and so on.

2.2 Methodology

As already mentioned, one major requirement of a study which will involve such a wide variety of forms of evidence, not to mention a diverse range of theoretical tools, is a sound methodology. I will divide this discussion into two parts. First, I will justify

⁷² Ibid., p. 17. There is an echo here of the ‘levels of culture’ used by Jaques le Goff to explain the process of Christianisation in medieval Europe, discussed in Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, pp. 10-12.

⁷³ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 3; also idem, ‘An Absence of Saints?’, p. 336.

⁷⁴ See chapter seven below, section 7.4.3.

⁷⁵ See chapter seven below, section 7.4.4.

⁷⁶ Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, pp. 3-12.

the broad chronological, geographical and thematic limitations of the study. Next I will clarify the main points of my methodology.

2.2.1 The scope of the study

The chronological focus of this study is the mission of Boniface in Hesse, that is from his arrival in 721 to his death in 754. The bulk of surviving letters connected to Boniface and his circle can be dated to this period, although they survive only in ninth-century copies.⁷⁷ The various *vitae* of Boniface and his followers, though by definition dating from after the events they purport to describe, are largely concerned with events during Boniface's lifetime; they are thus useful sources, but must be used with great caution.⁷⁸ However, the importance of historical context is such that 721 and 754 are not absolute limits. My discussions of both the West Saxon and Hessian contexts prior to the mission will cover a period from the mid-seventh century to Boniface's arrival in Hesse, while certain aspects of my discussion will venture as late as 786. This year saw the death of Lul, Boniface's chosen successor as Archbishop of Mainz, and is a *terminus ante quem* for those letters which post-date Boniface's martyrdom. I will also address some important historical events in Hesse after 754, in particular Charlemagne's destruction of the pagan Saxon shrine near Eresburg in 772, since I believe that they can also inform our understanding of the Bonifatian mission.

As already noted,⁷⁹ wherever in this thesis I use the term 'Hesse', I am referring to the modern German *Land*, and by 'Hesse' I mean a particular region that lies within northern Hesse. The region of Hesse was in the medieval period, and is today, historically and culturally distinct from the surrounding regions. I will describe the geography and topography of Hesse fully in chapter four. There are no early medieval maps of Hesse, and attempting to define its exact political borders would be a fruitless and anachronistic task. By the mid-eighth century it had long been perceived as a distinct region, the territory of the *Hessi*, and it gained formal definition only when Boniface established his ecclesiastical provinces in Germania. Thereafter it appears in the cartulary traditions of Fulda and Hersfeld as the *pagus*

⁷⁷ On the manuscript transmission of the letters of Boniface and Lul, see the opening of chapter five above.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of these sources, see the opening of chapter five below.

⁷⁹ See chapter one above, section 1.2.3.

Hessorum, the ‘territory of the Hessians’, and the area I have delineated as Hestia on figure 10 is determined by the distribution of Fulda’s and Hersfeld’s eighth- and ninth-century properties that lay within this *pagus*.⁸⁰ These boundaries should only be taken as an approximation, for the extent of the *pagus Hessorum*, in as much as it was ever clearly defined at all, may have altered significantly between the mid-eighth century and the end of the ninth century. Its densely-settled core, however, appears to have been preserved within the pre-Reformation borders of the archdiocese of Fritzlar (see figure 40), which, as we shall see in chapter seven, most probably dated from Boniface’s original ecclesiastical organisation of the region.⁸¹ Within Hestia itself, I will pay special attention to the northern areas which adjoined Saxon-controlled territory (*Saxonia* or *pago Saxonum* in contemporary sources). I will use the term ‘borderlands’ to describe the poorly defined and fluctuating Hessian-Saxon frontier.

As mentioned at points in this chapter already, my primary concern is with the missionary community centred on Boniface, not the indigenous Hessians. My focus merely reflects the nature of the historical sources, sources which I believe are invaluable if we are to understand the worlds of meaning and perception of any given group. Had the ‘pagan’ Hessians and Saxons left a wealth of historical material, this thesis could have taken the form of a comparative study and would have been very different. As it happens, the surviving written sources which relate to pre-Christian forms of religion in Hestia and Saxony, though extremely scarce and difficult to interpret, will form a small but important part of my study, and will be used in conjunction with topographical and place-name evidence.⁸² The Hessians are also virtually invisible in the archaeological record: as we shall see in chapter four, datable forms of pottery, furnished burials and major fortifications can all be conclusively related to growing Frankish influence in the area between the mid-sixth and early-seventh century. Although the nature of the evidence has thus determined my focus on Boniface and his missionaries, it must be remembered that the historical and archaeological invisibility of the Hessians are not symptoms of an entirely passive or moribund society. Taken together, the historical, archaeological and toponymic evidence suggests that the mission on the Hessian-Saxon borderlands involved

⁸⁰ For a distribution map of these properties, see Backhaus, ‘Die Gaue vor und nach 900’, Karte 8a.

⁸¹ See chapter seven below, section 7.2.1.

⁸² See chapter seven below, sections 7.1.1-2.

syncretism, conflict and resistance in which the people of Hessa were very active participants.

2.2.2 The methodological framework

Two features are especially important in devising a sound methodology for a regional phenomenological study. First, the wider historical context must be understood as fully as possible. As Probst puts it, ‘the capability of localities to produce local subjects and a meaningful context is always affected by other larger scale formations/localities, such as kingdoms, nation-states, colonial empires, trading companies or mission networks.’⁸³ In historical terms, the particularities of Boniface’s mission in Hessa cannot be understood without an appreciation of his wider mission field, the political landscape of the Frankish Rhineland, the Frankish-Saxons wars, the ambitions of the Papacy north of the Alps, liturgical practices, the West Saxon church of his upbringing and so on. For this reason, I have devoted chapters three and four to elucidating the West Saxon and pre-721 Hessian contexts respectively. Chapter four will open with a full description of the geography, topography and climate of Hessa.

In order to be able to study individual aspects of the mission in detail while retaining an awareness of its long-term progress and development, I have devoted chapter five to constructing a critical chronology of the mission. This chapter will also highlight the various points of historical uncertainty or dispute which will have an impact on my study. In chapter six we shall consider the literary discourse through which Boniface and his correspondents in Rome and Britain represented the mission. This will involve a close textual analysis of the letters of Boniface and Lul, and will reveal a significant contrast between the nature of the discourse between Boniface and Rome on the one hand, and his compatriots on the other. Between Anglo-Saxons the use of recurring motifs and themes led to a consistent and powerful portrayal of the missionary as a suffering exile who was pledged to bring the light of Christ to the darkness of Germania, which they regarded as the homeland of the Anglo-Saxon *gens*. In the papal correspondence, the central theme of exile, *peregrinatio*, is entirely absent.

⁸³ Probst, ‘Expansion and Enclosure’, p. 181. See also Appadurai, ‘The Production of Locality’, pp. 208-212.

In chapter seven I will focus on the experiences of the missionaries in Hessa. After context, the second important feature of sound phenomenological landscape study is critical method. I highlighted above the dangerous logical fallacy of assigning prehistoric significance to sites and monuments based almost entirely on the archaeologist's own view of what such significance involved. My analysis of Christian and pre-Christian sacred significance in the landscape of Hessa in chapter seven will depend on three forms of evidence:

- 1) Toponymics (i.e. place-names which explicitly indicate either pre- or early-Christian religious activity)
- 2) Early church foundations
- 3) Medieval long-distance routes of transit and trade

The methodological challenges of these types of evidence will be dealt with later.⁸⁴ Through the analysis of place-names and early church foundations I will identify individual sites which appear to have held religious significance for either Christian missionaries or pagans. Once these sites have been identified, their spatial relationships to one another and to the major routes of movement through the early medieval landscape can be established. Having identified the significant features of the Christian and pre-Christian landscapes, I will venture to determine some of the meaning attached to pagan sacred sites using the scarce historical accounts of paganism in contemporary Germania, and discuss the nature of the confrontation between the pagan and Christian sacred landscapes.

The remainder of chapter seven will be devoted to an exploration of the challenges and experiences encountered by Boniface and his companions during the Hessian mission. These included negotiations with important figures at all levels of Frankish lay and ecclesiastical society; the establishment and maintenance of a material support base for the missionaries; evangelisation techniques; pre- and post-baptismal instruction; the organisation of the mission field into a coherent system of churches; and the protection of the mission field from infiltration by 'morally corrupt' or unorthodox preachers.

⁸⁴ See chapter four below, section 4.3.6, and chapter seven, sections 7.1.1 and 7.2.1.

Such was the complexity of Boniface's mission in Hestia that we can only deepen our understanding of it by taking such a multi-faceted approach, and in the concluding chapter I will draw together the arguments of the previous chapters. If in chapter six we attain an understanding of the self-perception of the missionaries and their attitudes towards those whom they attempted to convert and Christianise, we are better placed to understand the processes of conversion and evangelisation explored in chapter seven. We shall see that the representation of the mission field in the letters of the missionaries formed a mental arena for a discourse of shared suffering and hope for salvation, through which those involved in the mission and those physically removed from it expressed a common identity and aim. In Hestia itself, the missionaries attempted to transform the cultural identity of the indigenous pagans through the systematic confrontation and eventual supplantation of numerous pagan shrines with their own chapels and churches, a process in which Boniface was almost certainly the main directing force. The strong soteriological aspect of the missionaries' self-identity led them to endure hardships and dangers that severely limited the expansion of the mission. In this way, the poeticised conceptualisation of the mission in the letters was both a reflection of, and a guiding influence on, the manner and direction of its execution.

*

In this chapter we have clarified the theoretical foundations of the thesis, justified its geographical and chronological focus and outlined its structure. I have devised this particular focus and methodology in order to help develop aspects of Bonifatian studies in fresh and enlightening directions. Before we go on to consider the mission itself, we shall spend the next two chapters examining the contexts of Wessex and Hestia before Boniface's arrival in the latter in 721.

Part II

Context

**But oh! what a melancholy portion of the inhabitants of the globe still remain
in the shadow of death!**

**Rev. George Burder of Coventry in an address to broaden
support for the fledgling London Missionary Society, 1795**

Chapter Three

West Saxon Origins

As mentioned in the historiography, the majority of studies of Boniface's insular background have been undertaken by English-speaking scholars. These are for the most part limited in scope, however, and retain a strong bias towards Boniface's continental career. Greenaway, Levison and Frank Barlow present biographical discussions of the saint's early life, and also something of the context of contemporary Wessex.¹ Recently Barbara Yorke has paid extensive attention to the West Saxon context of Boniface's youth. She focused on four main areas: Boniface's family connections; the importance of kin in a 'pioneer' society, especially regarding the prominence of female family members; the conflict between the Anglo-Saxon and British churches; and what she terms the 'missionary impuse', i.e. the legacy of missions from Rome, Ireland and Northumbria that created an atmosphere wherein self-imposed exile *pro amore Christi* was seen as one of the highest of religious callings.²

Since there is no shortage of English-language biographies of Boniface,³ here I shall give only a very brief summary of his pre-continental life before going on to consider the wider West Saxon context. According to Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii* (written 754x768), Boniface was born as Wynfreth to West Saxon parents and was sent as a child oblate to Exeter in Devon.⁴ The date of his birth is uncertain, but probably lay between 672 and 675, with scholarly consensus leaning towards the latter year;⁵ a popular tradition linking his birth to Crediton, a village six miles north-west of Exeter, dates only from the fourteenth century.⁶ Upon reaching adulthood (c.

¹ Greenaway, *Saint Boniface*; Levison, *England and the Continent*, pp. 70-93; F. Barlow, 'The English Background' in *The Greatest Englishman*, ed. Reuter, pp. 11-29. See also H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (1972; revised 3rd edition, London, 1991), pp. 262-270.

² Yorke, 'The Insular Background'.

³ See also Andy Orchard's entry on Boniface in M. Lapidge, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 69-70.

⁴ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 1, p. 6, l. 20 to p. 7, l. 2.

⁵ For discussion, see Barlow, 'The English Background', pp. 26-27, who follows the date of 'about 675' suggested by Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 70. Schieffer, *Winfred-Bonifatius*, p. 103, gives a date 'auf 672/3, spätestens 675'; Andy Orchard, *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, p. 69, 'c. 675'; Greenaway, *Saint Boniface*, p. 8, 'as early as 672 or as late as 680'; Padberg, *Bonifatius*, p. 13, '672/675'.

⁶ Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 70, n. 2.

695x700), Boniface decided that the library at Exeter was insufficient for his needs, and was permitted to transfer to the monastery of *Nhutscele* (Nursling, now a suburb of Southampton in Hampshire), whose abbot was Wynbert.⁷

The young monk established a good reputation as a monastic teacher until a rebellion against Ine, king of Wessex from 688 to 725, led to his election as ecclesiastical envoy to the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁸ Following this, Boniface began moving among the highest echelons of the West Saxon church, frequently attending church councils.⁹ In 716, seized by a desire to become a missionary, he journeyed to Frisia, where the Northumbrian Willibrord had already been active as a missionary for twenty-five years.¹⁰ A rebellion by the Frisian king Radbod forced Boniface to abandon his plans and return to Wessex,¹¹ where he remained for two years, declining the offer of the abbacy of Nursling after Wynbert's death.¹² In 718 he left once again for the continent, this time permanently. All of this account is derived from Willibald, but one corroborating piece of evidence is a reference by Boniface to 'Winbert, my former abbot and teacher' in a letter of 742x746.¹³

In light of Barbara Yorke's forthcoming article, in this chapter I will concentrate on those aspects of the West Saxon context which are most directly relevant to the execution of Boniface's mission in Hessa. First we shall consider how the political and ecclesiastical history of Wessex in the late seventh century may have influenced Boniface's attitude towards dealing with secular élites. Second, we shall examine King Ine's (reigned 688-726) support of the West Saxon church, paying particular attention to its institutional organisation in the landscape and its relationship to systems of royal administration. Similar factors had to be considered by Boniface when he set about structuring a new church in Germania under Frankish protection,

⁷ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 2, p. 9, ll. 3-11. Patrick Hase has suggested that Willibald's *Nhutscele* was actually located at Romsey, three miles to the north of Nursling. Romsey was the site of a famous nunnery and probable minster from at least 907 (the earliest documentary reference), while Nursling was an insignificant manorial church at the time of Domesday, with no hint that it had once been the site of a prominent monastic school. P. H. Hase, 'The Mother Churches of Hampshire' in *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition 950-1200*, ed. J. Blair (Oxford, 1988), pp. 45-66 (p. 46). Since archaeological investigations have not uncovered evidence that the ecclesiastical site of Romsey was in use before the ninth century, the simplest explanation is that the minster and monastery were transferred there from Nursling some time before 907. See B. Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1995), pp. 184-185; J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 300.

⁸ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 4, p. 13, l. 20 to p. 15, l. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, c. 4, p. 15, ll. 2-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 4, p. 15, ll. 8 to p. 16, l. 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, c. 4, p. 16, l. 12 to p. 18, l. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, c. 5, p. 18, l. 4 to p. 20, l. 9.

¹³ *Uuinbertus abbas et magister quondam meus*. Tangl, ep. 63, p. 131, l. 7.

and by understanding the West Saxon context we may better discern the extent to which Boniface later followed models from his homeland, used pre-existing Hessian arrangements or innovated in his own right. Third, I will examine the system of pastoral care in place in the Solent region, including the extent to which it was under episcopal direction.

3.1 Lessons from West Saxon history

3.1.1 Christianity and kingship in Wessex until Cædwalla, 685-688

Around the time of Boniface's birth c. 675, neither Wessex as a political entity nor the West Saxons as self-defined group of people existed. Each of these was a product of the ambitions of the dynasty known as the Gewissae, particularly the kings Cædwalla and his successor Ine (reigned 688-726), to whom we shall return shortly.¹⁴ The principal historical sources for the seventh-century southern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms are Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,¹⁵ completed in 731, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,¹⁶ the common stock of which was originally compiled in the late ninth century. The references are brief, at points conflicting, and difficult to interpret with confidence, and so here I will restrict myself to a brief historical overview.¹⁷

Taken together, the surviving sources give the impression that, for the territory which would later become known as Wessex, the mid-seventh century was a time of considerable turbulence and instability. This was due to both internal dynastic conflict

¹⁴ Bede twice states that the West Saxons (*Occidentales Saxones*) were formerly known as the Gewissae: *HE* III.7, pp. 232-233; IV,15, pp. 380-381. Centwine (r. 676-685/6) and Cædwalla occasionally styled themselves in charters as *rex Saxonum* (S 237 and S 235 respectively for the earliest reliable charters; no genuine charters of earlier kings survive). Aldhelm describes Centwine, Cædwalla and Ine as rulers of the *imperium Saxonum*: *Carmina Ecclesiastica*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, p. 14, l. 3; p. 16, l. 37. The term *rex Westsaxonum* first appears in a reliable charter of Ine dated 688x690 (S 252). The only example of a West Saxon king styling himself *rex Gewisorum* in a charter is S 256, a grant of Cuthred (r. 740-756) to Malmesbury dating from 745. For further discussion of the name-change of the Gewissae to the West Saxons, see H. Kleinschmidt, 'The Geuissae and Bede: On the Innovativeness of Bede's Concept of the *gens*' in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Hill and M. Swan (Brepols, 1998), pp. 77-102; Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 57-59.

¹⁵ Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).

¹⁶ J. Bately, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, Vol. 3, MS A (Cambridge, 1986).

¹⁷ For a full discussion of the interpretative difficulties of the seventh-century sources, see D. P. Kirby, 'Problems of Early West Saxon History', *English Historical Review* 80 (1965), pp. 10-29 (pp. 11-12); also Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 171-172.

and external pressure. For Bede, the ecclesiastical history of Wessex began with the foundation of the bishopric of Dorchester in 635 by Cynegils, king of the powerful dynasty of the Gewissae (see figure 2).¹⁸ The first bishop of Dorchester was the Italian Birinus, who also baptised King Cynegils. After the death of Cynegils, his son Cenwalh assumed power only to be driven into exile in East Anglia by the Mercian king Penda, a misfortune that Bede puts down to Cenwalh's rejection of Christianity. Three years later Cenwalh was 'restored to his kingdom' as a newly baptised Christian,¹⁹ but for the remainder of his reign, until 672, he was 'tormented by the many grave disasters inflicted most savagely on his kingdom by the enemy'.²⁰

For the ten years following Cenwalh's death, according to Bede, the territory of Wessex was ruled by a number of sub-kings, although he does not give their names or identities.²¹ The *Chronicle*, however, states that Cenwalh was succeeded for one year (672-673) by his widow Seaxburg, who was followed by a distant cousin named Æscwine (674-676), who was in turn succeeded by Cenwalh's brother Centwine (676-685/6).²² Of these figures, Centwine is independently recorded by Aldhelm (c. 639-709) as a king who 'ruled the realm of the Saxons by right', a description which appears to conflict with Bede's testimony (derived from Bishop Daniel of Winchester) of a divided kingdom.²³ This apparent conflict between sources may itself be a symptom of the unsettled political situation in Wessex, which, with its various tribal groupings, *regiones*, sub-kings and underlings, had never truly experienced a one-king-one-kingdom system.²⁴ Centwine's nine-year reign, if Aldhelm's reference to him proves that he was dominant in the west country, need not rule out the existence of equal or near-equal rulers in other parts of Wessex.²⁵

¹⁸ *HE*, III.7, pp. 232-233.

¹⁹ *restitutus esset in regnum*. *HE*, III.7, pp. 234-235.

²⁰ *grauissimis regni sui damnis saepissime ab hostibus adflictus*. *HE*, III.7, pp. 236-237.

²¹ *HE*, IV.12, pp. 368-369.

²² *ASC*, p. 31.

²³ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 68. For recent studies on Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne, see in particular K. Barker and N. Brooks, eds., *Aldhelm and Sherborne* (Oxford, 2007); M. Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), pp. 15-69. Aldhelm's reference to Centwine is from his poem celebrating the construction of a church by Bugga, Centwine's daughter, c. 690:

Hoc templum Bugge pulchro molimine structum
Nobilis erexit Centvini filia regis,
Qui prius imperium Saxonum rite regebat

Aldhelm, *Carmina Ecclesiastica*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. R. Ehwald, MGH SS Auct. ant. 15 (Berlin, 1913), pp. 11-32 (p. 14, ll. 1-3).

²⁴ Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 64-66; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 66-67.

²⁵ See Kirby, 'Problems', pp. 15-19.

3.1.2 Cædwalla and the conquest of the Isle of Wight

Especially significant for our interests is Cædwalla's conquest of the Isle of Wight in 685/86, and what its remembrance suggests about secular-ecclesiastical relations in Wessex during the early eighth century. Bede, who received his information from Bishop Daniel of Winchester (bishop from c. 705 to 744), gave a short account of Cædwalla's reign in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.²⁶ He related that in 685 an exiled prince of the Gewissae named Cædwalla invaded Sussex and killed King Æthelwalh, and shortly afterwards overcame his rivals to become the dominant king of Wessex.²⁷ We do not know why Cædwalla was exiled, or by whom; we cannot even be sure precisely how he managed to come to power, or why he forsook it three years later. He may have had connections to western Wessex, as suggested by the derivation of his name from British *Cadwallon* and perhaps also the praise accorded him by Aldhelm.²⁸ Both Bede and the *Chronicle* describe Cædwalla's reign as being one of continual (and largely successful) conquest, during which he subjugated Essex, Sussex, the Isle of Wight and Kent.²⁹ After receiving a mortal wound on the Isle of Wight – so reports Bede – Cædwalla resolved to realise his ambition of baptism in Rome, which he did during Lent 689 before dying there a few days later.³⁰ Following his abdication, power was assumed by Ine, his kinsman, who remained king of Wessex until 726.³¹

Here we shall focus on Bede's account of the conquest of the Isle of Wight by Cædwalla:

²⁶ Bede states that Daniel was his source for the history of the Isle of Wight in his *Praefatio*, *HE*, pp. 4-5. See D. P. Kirby, 'Bede's Native Sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1966), pp. 341-371 (p. 364).

²⁷ *HE*, IV.15, pp. 380-381.

²⁸ In his poem on Bugga's church, Aldhelm portrays Cædwalla as Centwine's successor, praising his martial ability above all:

Post hunc successit bello famosus et armis
Rex Caedvalla, potens regni possessor et heres

Aldhelm, *Carmina Ecclesiastica*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, p. 15, ll. 17-18.

²⁹ *HE*, IV.15-16 pp. 380-385.

³⁰ *HE*, V.7, pp. 468-473. For further discussions of Cædwalla, see Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 69-70; B. Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight and the Origins of Wessex' in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. Bassett (Leicester, 1989), pp. 84-96 (pp. 89-90); idem, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), pp. 137-139; R. Sharpe, 'King Ceadwalla's Roman Epitaph' in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, Vol. 1, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keefe and A. Orchard, Toronto Old English Studies 14 (Toronto, 2005), pp. 171-193.

³¹ *HE*, V.7, pp. 472-473.

Postquam ergo Caedwalla regno potitus est Geuissorum, cepit et insulam Uectam, quae eatenus erat tota idolatriae dedita, ac stragica caede omnes indigenas exterminare, ac suae prouinciae homines pro his substituere contendit, uoto se obligans, quamuis necdum regeneratus, ut ferunt, in Christo, quia, si cepisset insulam, quartam partem eius simul et praedae Domino daret.³²

Cædwalla donated the promised portion of the island to the Northumbrian Bishop Wilfrid, who was evangelising Sussex at this time and appears to have become closely involved with Cædwalla in his rise to power. It is unclear whether Bede's *omnes indigenas* refers to the population of Wight as a whole, or only those members of prominent families who posed a potential risk to Cædwalla's newly established rule. It appears that Cædwalla was at least determined to exterminate Wight's Jutish dynasty, for Bede relates a story about two Jutish princes who escaped from the island to the mainland only to be betrayed, captured and brought before Cædwalla. A local abbot named Cynibert begged Cædwalla to allow him to baptise the boys before they were put to death, and Cædwalla consented.³³

We can leave the historicity of Bede's account to one side, and consider its significance as a story that was known in ecclesiastical circles in the Solent region in the early eighth century. The surviving version of the story is firmly rooted in the Solent landscape: *Ad Lapidem*, where the princes fled, is almost certainly the hamlet of Stone on the Hampshire coast,³⁴ while Cynibert was the abbot of a monastery at *Hreutford*, modern Redbridge/Eling (see figure 1). These places are close to Winchester, but closer yet to Nursling, where Boniface studied and taught between c. 695x700 and 718. Given that Daniel of Winchester was Boniface's teacher and close friend during these years, we can be all but certain that Boniface knew the story well, no doubt in far more detail than the surviving version.

³² 'After Cædwalla acquired the kingdom of the Gewissae, he also captured the Isle of Wight, which had until that time been entirely devoted to idolatry, and sought to exterminate all of the indigenous people with savage slaughter and to replace them with men from his own province. It is said that he swore an oath to donate a quarter of the island and his booty to Christ if he captured it, even though he was unbaptised.' *HE*, IV.16, pp. 382-383.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire', p. 90 and Hase, 'The Mother Churches', p. 45, *contra* the older tradition which identified *Ad Lapidem* with Stoneham, twelve kilometres south of Winchester. Geographically speaking, the identification with Stone is far more logical. In the tenth century, and hence possibly during the eighth, Stone was also in the *parochia* of Eling, site of the monastery ruled by the abbot who attempted to have the princes baptised.

What lessons, then, might Boniface and his brethren have taken from Cædwalla's conquest of Wight? Both Aldhelm and Eddius Stephanus in his *Vita Sancti Wilfridi* (written in the second decade of the eighth century)³⁵ depicted Cædwalla as a noble warrior king who was sympathetic to Christianity and ultimately embraced it. Bede, and by implication Daniel of Winchester, presented a fuller and more balanced picture, and, unlike Stephanus, did not shrink from relating the brutality of Cædwalla's conquests of Sussex and Wight. Even Bede, however, did not condemn the king, but rather used the violent years of his reign as a subtle contrast to his eventual burial in Rome wearing the white robes of baptism. The contrast is made clear in these lines from the epitaph raised above his tomb,³⁶ which Bede quoted in full, and which included the lines:

Percipiensque alacer rediuiuæ præmia uitæ,
 Barbaricam rabiem, nomen et inde suum
 Conuersus conuertit ouans;
 Petrumque uocari Sergius antistes iussit, ut ipse pater
 Fonte renascentis, quem Christi gratia purgans
 Protinus albatum uexit in arce poli.³⁷

Bede used Cædwalla, therefore, as an example of a king whose savagery was redeemed by abandonment of worldly glory in favour of Christ, and the fact that Cædwalla was baptised in Rome and died soon thereafter helped intensify the dramatic symbolism of his 'conversion'.³⁸ A lesson that West Saxon ecclesiastics

³⁵ Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927), c. XLII, pp. 84-85, 176-177 for his account of Cædwalla. For Aldhelm's description, see his *Carmina Ecclesiastica*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, p. 15, ll. 17-18.

³⁶ For a discussion of this epitaph in its wider context of epigraphical transmission, see Sharpe, 'King Cædwalla's Roman Epitaph'.

³⁷ 'Perceiving with eagerness the prize of life renewed,
 Converted, he converted his barbaric ferocity,
 And then, rejoicing, his name;
 Pope Sergius ordered that he be called Peter,
 So that the same father, at the font of rebirth, by the cleansing grace of Christ
 Might speedily bring him, clothed in white, to the gates of Heaven.'

HE, V.7, pp. 470-473.

³⁸ The topos of the king who relinquishes his rule in order to become a monk or pilgrim appears six times in Bede. See also his account of King Sigebert of East Anglia (*HE*, III.18, pp. 266-269), Scbbi of Essex (*HE*, IV.11, pp. 364-369), Ine of Wessex (*HE*, V.7, pp. 472-473), Coenred of Mercia (*HE*, V.19, pp. 516-517) and Offa of Essex (*ibid.*). Bede presents these instances of conversion from royal authority to the religious life as voluntary and motivated by personal piety, but there may well have been political motives behind many of them, and some may not have been entirely voluntary. See C.

might have drawn from the story is that members of the church had to be prepared to make compromises and exercise patience when dealing with the secular élite on whose support they depended. There is no evidence from the narratives of Bede or Eddius Stephanus that Wilfrid had any moral objections to accepting land and property from a king known for his merciless nature. Furthermore, the fact that Abbot Cynibert had managed to baptise the two Jutish princes, but had either failed or not even attempted to save them from execution, demonstrated starkly the limited influence churchmen could have when confronted by a determined king with a political agenda of his own.³⁹

At the start of the eighth century, then, the history of a close alliance between West Saxon church and king was scarcely a history at all, but a relatively recent development. Ine (reigned 688-726) was the first West Saxon king to come to the throne as, and remain, an enthusiastic Christian. As we have seen, Cynegils adopted Christianity when already king and Cenwalh refused to convert until he was forced into exile, while Centwine and Cædwalla received baptism only late in life.⁴⁰ For clerics such as Daniel of Winchester and Boniface, who had close dealings with the powerful secular élite of Wessex, the recent history of the Solent demonstrated that a degree of pragmatism was sometimes necessary for the survival of the church.

3.2 King Ine and the organisation of the West Saxon church, 688-726

3.2.1 Ine's law code

As we shall see in the later chapters of this thesis, Boniface saw the close cooperation between church and secular ruler as essential for the effective Christianisation of the

Stancliffe, 'The Kings Who Opted Out' in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 154-176. David Pratt argues that monastic exile was not as effective a tool of political neutralisation in Anglo-Saxon society as it was in the Frankish kingdoms: D. Pratt, 'The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great', *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), pp. 39-90 (p. 53). On Frankish political uses of 'monastic exile', see M. de Jong, 'Monastic Prisoners or Opting Out? Political Coercion and Honour in the Frankish Kingdoms' in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. de Jong, F. Theuvs and C. van Rhijn (Leiden, 2001) pp. 291-328.

³⁹ This is assuming, of course, that Cynibert, Daniel or any other contemporary ecclesiastic would have necessarily disapproved of the slaughter of the Isle of Wight pagans. The fact that Eddius Stephanus whitewashes Cædwalla's reign of such violence, however, may indicate that he was wary of associating Wilfrid with a ruler who had so much blood on his hands. See Sharpe, 'King Ceadwalla's Roman Epitaph', p. 171; Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire', p. 89.

⁴⁰ Aldhelm, *Carmina Ecclesiastica*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, p. 14, l. 1 to p. 15, l. 32.

wider population. Perhaps the most important living model for this idealised relationship was King Ine of Wessex, who came to power in 688 as Boniface was entering his teenage years at Exeter. Ine appears to have been the first West Saxon king who made a particular effort to promote the interests of church and ruling dynasty in tandem; like his predecessors he made numerous donations to the churches and monasteries of his realm,⁴¹ but unlike them he also issued a law code, compiled around 694, which bound church and king in a mutually beneficial partnership.⁴² In the preamble to the laws, Ine acknowledges the assistance of his father, who was evidently still alive at the time, along with two bishops, Hædde of Winchester and Eorcenwald of London.⁴³

The close cooperation of church and king is clear in Ine's laws, especially if we compare them with the Kentish law codes that were among the models adopted by Ine and his bishops. The Kentish kings granted their own bishops only limited influence in drawing up vernacular law. As Bede remarked with some pride, Æthelberht's first law, written before 616, outlined the compensation due for theft of church property;⁴⁴ but the church is otherwise not mentioned in Æthelberht's law code, while the later Kentish laws of Hlothere and Eadric do not mention the church at all.⁴⁵ In contrast, Ine's first five laws are concerned not only with protecting the interests of the church, but with regularising its members and promoting the wider Christianisation of the common people. He commanded that all monks follow their 'proper Rule', *ryhtregol*.⁴⁶ All newly born infants were to be baptised within 30

⁴¹ There are fourteen such charters, S 238 to S 252, of varying authenticity, which cover the entire span of Ine's reign.

⁴² Ine's laws survive only as an addition to Alfred's late ninth-century Law Code in the manuscript of the Parker Chronicle, Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 173, fol. 38-57 (the facsimile edition is R. Flower and H. Smith, eds., *The Parker Chronicle and Laws (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS. 173): A Facsimile* (London, 1941). The standard critical edition is F. Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, Vol. 1 (Halle, 1903), pp. 88-123. An English translation is in D. Whitelock, ed. and trans., *English Historical Documents I, c. 500-1042* (1955; revised 2nd edition London, 1979), pp. 398-407. See F. L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 36-61, for an edition of the Old English laws with facing English translation. On dating, see also Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 72-73; L. M. Alexander, 'The Legal Status of the Native Britons in Late Seventh-Century Wessex as Reflected by the Law Code of Ine', *Haskins Society Journal* 7 (1995), pp. 31-38 (p. 31); P. Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), pp. 165-178.

⁴³ Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze*, pp. 88-89.

⁴⁴ *HE*, II,5, pp. 150-151; for the standard edition of Aethelberht's law code, see Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, pp. 3-8.

⁴⁵ Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, pp. 9-11.

⁴⁶ Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, c. 1, pp. 88-89.

days.⁴⁷ Nobody, not even a slave, was to work on Sunday.⁴⁸ Church dues were to be paid annually.⁴⁹ Churches were to act as places of legal sanctuary.⁵⁰

The extent to which these specific laws were enforced is, of course, a matter for debate.⁵¹ According to the critical testimony of a mid eighth-century monk who had a miraculous vision of the afterlife, it appears that Bishop Daniel of Winchester (d. 745) for some reason failed to ensure the baptism of numerous infants in his diocese.⁵² Yet even if the laws were to some degree symbolic and could not be enforced to their full extent, they and the surviving charters of Ine's reign suggest the closeness of the relationship which he and the West Saxon church nurtured. Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii* describes Ine convening and directly addressing a council of prominent churchmen on the occasion of a political crisis, which further illustrates the importance he placed on their support and counsel.⁵³

3.2.2 Ine's foundation of Hamwic

Boniface reached adulthood and arrived in Nursling probably within the first twelve years of Ine's reign (i.e. 688-700). Judging from the conspicuous silence of our (admittedly few) historical sources, it appears that Ine enjoyed relatively uncontested, peaceful control of his kingdom until about 710.⁵⁴ A degree of stability would certainly have been necessary for Ine's most ambitious undertaking, the 45-hectare planned trading settlement of Hamwic on the Hampshire coast (see figure 3), about an hour by foot from Nursling. This project was an unprecedented undertaking for an Anglo-Saxon king during this period, and can be compared only to King Alfred's

⁴⁷ Ibid., c. 2, pp. 90-91.

⁴⁸ Ibid., c. 3-3.1, pp. 90-91.

⁴⁹ Ibid., c. 4, pp. 90-91.

⁵⁰ Ibid., c. 5-5.1, pp. 90-91.

⁵¹ Wormald argued that the laws were written according to practical need, not as a mere symbol of royal rule, although this does not prove that they were successfully enforced. Wormald, *Legal Culture*, pp. 192-194. See also M. P. Richards, 'The Manuscript Context of the Old English Laws: Tradition and Innovation' in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose: Sixteen Original Contributions*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, 1986), pp. 171-192 (p. 174).

⁵² An account of the unnamed monk's vision of Hell, which dates from between 757 and 786, survives in the correspondence of Lul: *infantium numerosam multitudinem sub Danielo episcopo maxime sine baptismo morientium tristem et merentem aspexit*. Tangl, ep. 115, p. 249, ll. 7-8. See section 3.3.2 below on the provision of pastoral care in the West Saxon heartlands.

⁵³ *Regnante Ine Westsaxonum rege, subitanea quaedam incuberat, nova quadam seditione exorta, necessitas; et statim synodale a primatibus aecclesiarum cum consilio predict regis servorum Dei factum est concilium. Vita Bonifatii*, c. 4, p. 13, ll. 23-27.

⁵⁴ See below, section 3.2.4.

burga of the ninth century.⁵⁵ Numerous excavations at Hamwic have revealed extensive craft activity, including smithing, bone and antler working, leatherwork, weaving, glass-making, gilding, leadworking and pottery manufacture. There is also pottery evidence for direct trading contacts with the Frankish ports of Quentovic and Rouen, though not with Dorestad in Frisia.⁵⁶ No documents record Hamwic's foundation, but the wealth of archaeological material has established its origins in the first decades of the eighth century, with the earliest occupation beginning on what was apparently virgin territory *c.* 700, firmly in the first half of Ine's reign.⁵⁷

That Hamwic was an impressive and major undertaking is undoubted. Not only the scale of the original layout, but the regular resurfacing of the street grid, indicates long-term and committed investment by a centralised authority, and the foundation of Hamwic close to the *uilla regalis* of Hamtun strongly suggests that this authority must have been King Ine himself. The rapid and strictly controlled expansion of the town (evidenced by numerous short-lived cemeteries across its area), along with the longevity of internal property boundaries, has led Morton to describe Hamwic as 'in many ways an artificial creation [...] It is manifest that the place was directly ruled by the king or by his deputy.'⁵⁸ The position of the minster of St Mary at the centre of a plot that was integral to the overall street plan (see figure 3) further suggests that the West Saxon church also played some role in the establishment of the settlement.

The relevance of Hamwic for our concerns is what it can tell us about the social and political atmosphere of the Solent during Boniface's formative years. It is very possible, though not demonstrable, that Boniface was familiar with the young

⁵⁵ Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement*, pp. 80-112, offers a useful extended discussion of Hamwic in its wider context. See also Brisbane, 'Hamwic', pp. 101-108.

⁵⁶ Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement*, p. 84; A. D. Morton, *Excavations at Hamwic: Volume 1*, CBA Research Report 84 (York, 1992), pp. 59-61. There were trading links between Hamwic and Rouen by 721 at the latest, when, according to Hygeburg's *Hodoeporicon* (written 767x768), Saint Willibald, later bishop of Eichstätt, took ship between the two ports: Hygeburg of Heidenheim, *Vita Willibaldi Episcopi Eichstetensis*, MGH SS 15.1, ed. O. Holder-Egger (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 86-106 (c. 3, p. 91, l. 5). At this time, Anglo-Saxon trade with Frisia appears to have been centred on London. Bede refers to a Frisian slave-trader in London in 679 in *HE*, IV.22, pp. 404-405. That Boniface himself embarked on a trading vessel for Dorestad from London, not Hamwic, also suggests that London had much better established trading links with Frisia. *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 4, p. 16, ll. 6-9. For a survey of early medieval Frisian trade, see D. Jellema, 'Frisian trade in the Dark Ages', *Speculum* 30.1 (1955), pp. 15-36.

⁵⁷ P. Andrews, ed., *Excavations at Hamwic: Volume 2*, CBA Research Report 109 (York, 1997), pp. 20-21.

⁵⁸ Morton, *Excavations at Hamwic*, pp. 69-70. Yorke expresses the same view in *Kings and Kingdoms*, p. 140.

settlement, and had walked down its long, bustling streets to reach the church of St Mary. Its regular street grid, entirely unique among Anglo-Saxon settlements founded at this time, resembles that of a Roman town, and this resemblance may have been intentional. The Solent region is especially rich in monumental Roman remains, very few of which remain visible today; in the Anglo-Saxon period the surrounding countryside would have been littered with the ruins of Roman signal stations, forts, villas and walled towns, while the Roman road system was still largely in use (see figure 1 and plate 3). At least five early medieval minsters are known from historical sources to have been founded in former Roman forts in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, while there are many more archaeologically or topographically evidenced examples in both Roman forts and towns.⁵⁹ Rigold writes of the Saxon shore forts:

The starkest of Roman monuments, even more sharply than today they must have proclaimed in the wilderness the Roman discipline that had become identified with the straight paths of the Lord.⁶⁰

The aura of the Roman past which Anglo-Saxons accorded to such ancient remains was a strong influence in their choice of minster locations, but it was not an overpowering one. 'If Roman ruins survived,' writes John Blair, 'so much the better, but if not, Rome could be rebuilt from scratch.'⁶¹ Ine was the first Anglo-Saxon king to build not only a church, but an entire town on a Roman model, and Wormald has detected the same desire to emulate Roman models in Ine's approach to lawmaking.⁶²

It would be going beyond the limited evidence to suggest that Ine was styling himself as a Roman ruler, although the fact that he ended his years as a pilgrim in Rome clearly indicates his admiration for the city's status as the centre of the Catholic church. It is most important to note here that Boniface arrived in central Wessex at a time of unprecedented collaboration between ruler and church who shared a powerful

⁵⁹ Blair, *The Church*, pp. 188-189. See also idem, 'Anglo-Saxon Minsters: A Topographical Review' in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 235-246; T. W. Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Anglo-Saxon England*, unpublished PhD thesis (Oxford, 2001); K. R. Dark, *Discovery by Design: The Identification of Secular Élite Settlements in Western Britain A.D. 400-700*, BAR British Series 237 (Oxford, 1994), pp. 93-99; T. Bell, 'Churches on Roman Buildings: Christian Associations and Roman Masonry in Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Archaeology* 42 (1998), pp. 1-18.

⁶⁰ Rigold, 'Litus Romanum', p. 71.

⁶¹ Blair, *The Church*, p. 190. See also idem, 'Minster Churches in the Landscape' in *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, ed. D. Hooke (Oxford, 1988), pp. 35-58 (pp. 44-46).

⁶² Wormald, *Legal Culture*, pp. 192-196.

loyalty to Rome. The assumption of the metropolitan see of Canterbury by Theodore of Tarsus in 669 had already led to widespread reforms of the Anglo-Saxon church in the fields of education, canon law, episcopal governance and penitential discipline.⁶³ During the decade or so following Theodore's death in 690, Ine brought the reinvigorated West Saxon church into a close and mutually beneficial partnership with his 'new concept of kingship';⁶⁴ when Boniface arrived at Nursling c. 700, this ambitious partnership was achieving its most striking physical manifestation in the newly-founded trading town of Hamwic. The benefits of stable Christian rule allied to strong episcopal governance were quite clearly displayed to the clerics of the Solent.

3.2.3 The Christian landscape of Wessex

Indirect evidence for Ine's sponsorship of the West Saxon church can also be seen in the consolidation and expansion of ecclesiastical foundations from the beginning of the eighth century, and their organisation into a coherent system that was closely related to a system of royal estates. Both the close relationship between secular and ecclesiastical control and the organisation of the West Saxon church itself are important here. In Hessa, as we shall see, Boniface pursued close cooperation with local potentates from the very beginning of his mission, while the arrangement and distribution of his missionary foundations demonstrates his concern with achieving efficient pastoral coverage of the wider population. To this end, he established a network of churches, closely related to pre-existing settlement patterns, that may have been modelled in part on the prevailing system in Wessex.

The West Saxon system of administrative shires, which survives to some extent today, was either established by Ine or was built upon his foundations.⁶⁵ Although information concerning the administration of early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is limited, Patrick Hase has outlined a general model for central Wessex whereby the territory

⁶³ M. Lapidge, 'The Career of Archbishop Theodore' in *Theodore of Tarsus*, ed. M. Lapidge, CSASE 11 (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1-29.

⁶⁴ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 73.

⁶⁵ The earliest reference to Hampshire is in the *Chronicle's* entry for 755: *ASC*, pp. 36. Yorke suggests that the shire system in the west owed a great deal to earlier British administrative units (noting the Brittonic etymology of the shire names Dorset, Devon and Cornwall), while in the east there was very little continuity from pre-Saxon land arrangements. Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 84-87. David Hinton is also strongly sceptical of pre-Saxon influence particularly in Hampshire: 'Hampshire's Anglo-Saxon Origins' in *The Archaeology of Hampshire from the Palaeolithic to the Industrial Revolution*, ed. by S. J. Shennan and R. T. Schadla Hall (Aldershot: Hampshire Field Club, 1981), pp. 56-65 (pp. 57-59).

was divided into *regiones*, each centred on a *burh* around a royal vill, where the king's reeve lived. From surviving charters, Hase deduces that there was one *villa regalis* every nine to twelve kilometres.⁶⁶ The West Saxon *regiones* were an important stage in this development, with a royal vill and estate acting as administrative centre for the surrounding territory. Each estate was a working farm of slaves and dependents dedicated to maintaining a surplus for the king's use, while the reeve was responsible for representing the king's interests, enforcing dues and duties, keeping the law and supplying fighting men when necessary.⁶⁷

An important feature of this system was its closeness to ecclesiastical administrative structures. Sam Turner has observed that of the 42 known pre-Conquest royal villas in western Wessex (Devon, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire), 70% were within one kilometre of a likely early minster, and none was more than nine kilometres removed. Vill and minster, it seems, were founded side-by-side in the centre of the *regio*'s cultivated landscape, generally on lower valley slopes where the best land was to be found, clearly bounded from surrounding settlements.⁶⁸ The seventh-eighth century site of Cowage Farm in Wiltshire, two and a half kilometres south-west of Malmesbury, illustrates how close this relationship could be, with a high-status site mere metres away from a large separate enclosure containing a probable church (figure 4).⁶⁹ Reeve and churchman stood side-by-side in an enduring and mutually beneficial relationship. As Hase portrays it,

a reeve who had a church would be able to force the free men of that *regio* to come to the gates of his *burh* for their marriages, for the christening of their children and the burying of their dead. In the church the free men would hear the priest preach the importance of obedience and loyalty, under the

⁶⁶ P. H. Hase, 'The Church in the Wessex Heartlands' in *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex*, ed. by M. Aston and C. Lewis (Oxford: Oxbow, 1995), pp. 47-81 (pp. 52-3). The later medieval administrative division of shires into hundreds appears to have had elements of its origins in the system described by Hase, although the relationship between hundreds and *regiones* is far from clear. For discussion, see Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 299-301; P. H. Sawyer, 'Medieval English Settlements: New Interpretations' in *English Medieval Settlement*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (London, 1979), pp. 1-8 (p. 6); see also Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape*, pp. 107-109. For a historiographical discussion, see Klingelhöfer, *Manor, Vill and Hundred*, pp. 3-10.

⁶⁷ Hase, 'The church', pp. 52-53; Klingelhöfer, *Manor, Vill and Hundred*, pp. 113-115

⁶⁸ Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape*, pp. 66-7.

⁶⁹ J. Hinchliffe, 'An Early Medieval Settlement at Cowage Farm, Foxley near Malmesbury', *Archaeological Journal* 143 (1986), pp. 240-259 (figure 1). Blair proposes that the church at Cowage Farm was dependent on Malmesbury as a 'semi-monastic cell with strongly agrarian functions.' Blair, *The Church*, p. 214.

immediate eye of the reeve. Christianity brought new obligations binding on all men: these new duties would have been enforced by the reeve, thus increasing his public profile and power. The priest would support the reeve at the local court, not least by providing religious awe to the ordeals presided over by the reeve. The reeve alone of the laymen of the *regio* would have had access to written documents if needed. The priest's spiritual powers assisted the reeve, while the reeve's authority supported the priest.⁷⁰

Although there was certainly much local variation, a system such as this formed the backbone of Ine's kingdom. If it was present anywhere, it would have been present in the Wessex heartland of the Solent region, where Hase has identified several early minsters which were associated with ancient royal estates (see figure 1).⁷¹ As both Turner and Hase emphasise, this system was not merely a convenient way of organising the economic base of Wessex: its impact on concepts of authority and kingship, on the nature of society and its temporal structure, was just as great. Turner writes of the landscape:

The changes in the landscape of the conversion period were fundamental. They included the re-focusing of the settled area, the development of new kinds of estates and the drawing of more formal boundaries around territorial units. [...] Churches were at the *ideological* centre of hundreds: they were central to ideas about how the landscape ought to be organised and administered.⁷²

Church and vill lay at the heart of the landscape, just as they were at the heart of heavenly and worldly authority. Turner argues here for the power of ideology in determining human interaction with the environment. This phenomenon was not an economically determined accident, for the spatial coincidence observed between sites of secular and religious authority in Wessex did not occur in the Cornish peninsula at

⁷⁰ Hase, 'The Church', p. 53.

⁷¹ Hase, 'The Mother Churches', pp. 46-47. The uncertain case is Romsey, which Hase suspects was an early collegiate minster due to the presence of prebendaries there in 907, apparently independent of the nunnery, who were responsible for local ministry. It is further possible that any minster here had been transferred from Nursling, which had lost its eighth-century status as an important monastic school by the time of Domesday. See Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 184-185; Blair, *The Church*, p. 300.

⁷² Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape*, pp. 181, 113.

this time, where king and church appear to have been less administratively conjoined.⁷³ Rather, it was the result of a deliberate policy by the secular and religious élites of Wessex.

According to Turner's model, churches were founded in association with royal villas to form the focal points of a 'Christian landscape'. The size and permanence of the buildings contrasted with the shifting, organic transience of contemporary hamlets and enclosed farmsteads, although these too were being increasingly delineated, both physically and legally, into fixed entities.⁷⁴ The surrounding territory became orientated towards the church at the centre, a miniature representation of the Holy City of Mediterranean tradition, a 'little Rome in the Mind' as Peter Brown has called it.⁷⁵ Surrounding this core was the populated agricultural landscape, with minor 'outposts' of Christianity such as shrines or chapels scattered throughout. Finally, one came to the marginal land of heath and dense, unused forest: a true wilderness, a place beyond the protection of Church and king (see figure 5 and plate 4),⁷⁶ where, according to *capitulum* 20 of Ine's law code, a man could be slain or ransomed for failing to blow a horn:

Gif feorcund mon oððe fremde butan wege geond wudu gonge ond ne hrieme ne horn blawe, for ðeof he bið to profianne, oððe to sleanne oððe to áliesanne.⁷⁷

This, then, was the Christian landscape within which Boniface spent the first half of his life. The close cooperation of church and king was expressed symbolically in a

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 59-61.

⁷⁴ From the sixth century onwards there was an increase in the number of permanent boundaries within settlements across the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, which archaeologists tend to interpret as evidence of increasing social stratification and attempts to control space. See A. Reynolds, 'Boundaries and Settlements in Later Sixth to Eleventh-Century England', *Boundaries in Early Medieval Britain*, Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History 12, ed. D. Griffiths, A. Reynolds and S. Semple (Oxford, 2003), pp. 98-136 (pp. 130-131). Certain legal rights and responsibilities concerning the use and maintenance of agricultural space were codified in Ine's laws, especially *capitula* 40, 42, 49-49.3: Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, pp. 106-111.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 185; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 15. See also R. Gem, 'Church Buildings: Cultural Location and Meaning' in *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future*, CBA Research Report 104, ed. J. Blair and C. Pyrah (York, 1996), pp. 1-6; R. Markus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2.3 (1994), pp. 257-271; Blair, *The Church*, pp. 221-228.

⁷⁶ Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape*, pp. 186-8.

⁷⁷ 'If a man from afar or a stranger travels through the wood without following the path or blowing a horn, he can be assumed to be a thief, and can be either slain or held to ransom.' Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, c. 20, pp. 98-99.

jointly devised law code, socially in the organisation of everyday life according to clearly defined Christian principles and obligations, and physically in the settled landscape itself. Boniface reached maturity during a crucial moment in the development of West Saxon Christianity, between the political, semi-pagan turbulence of the recent past and the enthusiastically Christian future promised by King Ine.

3.2.4 Political conflict and the missionary impulse

We cannot know for sure that Boniface and other church members viewed their world in precisely the way envisioned by Turner; but if they did, they must also have recognised the distinction between the ideal envisioned by Ine's laws, where church and king worked in Christian harmony, and the complex reality of Anglo-Saxon politics. Such close connections between the secular and ecclesiastical élite, particularly where kinship was involved, could easily cause political conflict in one sphere to effect the other. Wessex was no exception, especially during the turbulent final years of Ine's reign (c. 710 to 726), which coincided with the beginning of Boniface's continental career as a missionary (from 716 onwards). Yorke has also recently suggested that one of the factors that encouraged Boniface to become a missionary abroad was a desire for advancement to an episcopal office that was denied him in Wessex.⁷⁸

As mentioned above, the *Chronicle* has little to say concerning the first half of Ine's reign. It records that in 694 he had received a large compensation from the *Cantware*, 'the people of Kent', apparently for their burning of Cædwalla's brother Mul following a West Saxon invasion of the province eight years earlier.⁷⁹ Since Ine was also devising his law code at this time in close communication with Wihtred, the new king of Kent, this compensation may have formed part of a peace arrangement between the two kingdoms.⁸⁰ The *Chronicle* remains silent until 710, when it reports that Ine and his kinsman Nun fought King Geraint of Dumnonia.⁸¹ In 715 it states that

⁷⁸ The two West Saxon bishoprics of Winchester and Sherborne would not become vacant until 744 and 738 respectively. See Yorke, 'The Insular Background'.

⁷⁹ *ASC*, p. 32.

⁸⁰ In Stenton's view, this compensation demonstrates the subjection of Kent to Ine's overlordship, which may also have been the case. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 73.

⁸¹ *ASC*, p. 33.

Ine fought Ceolred of Mercia at *Wodnesbeorg*, probably Adam's Grave in Wiltshire.⁸² In 722, according to the Welsh Annals, Ine was defeated in a battle on the river Hayle in Cornwall.⁸³

Ine's greatest problems appear to have been caused by internal dissent and dynastic squabbling, the inevitable consequences, perhaps, of having no established system of royal succession.⁸⁴ In 721, the *Chronicle* remarks without explanation that Ine killed Cynewulf, whom Stenton suggests was a member of the West Saxon royal house;⁸⁵ in 722 the otherwise unknown Queen Æthelburg destroyed Ine's stronghold at Taunton in Devon, and an exile called Ealdberht fled to Surrey and Sussex.⁸⁶ Ine invaded Sussex, apparently without success, and invaded again in 725, this time killing Ealdberht.⁸⁷ The following year Ine left for Rome.

I mentioned above Willibald's account of a church council called by Ine c.710-716, immediately following or during a rebellion against his rule.⁸⁸ One wonders whether Ine's intention in summoning this council was merely to maintain ecclesiastical stability during civil strife, or whether his primary objective was to ensure the loyalty of the most influential West Saxon churchmen. Æthelburg's destruction of Taunton in 722 shows that he later had rivals in the west, where he had founded the bishopric of Sherborne c. 705 and where his sister Cuthburg had established a double house at Wimbourne in Dorset.⁸⁹ Like many Anglo-Saxon royal families, Ine's was tightly woven into the ecclesiastical fabric of its kingdom, and consequently some members of the church were bound to become involved in dynastic disputes.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ The Welsh Annals are appended to the *Historia Britonnum* of Nennius in a manuscript from the first half of the twelfth century (London, British Library, Harley 3895, fols. 190r-193r), although the composition of the *Historia Britonnum* can be dated to 828/9. The Annal's entry for 722 does not mention Ine by name, though he is the most likely enemy: *Et bellum Hehil apud Cornuenses, Gueith Gartmailauc, Cat Pencon, apud dexterales Brittones, et Brittones uictores fuerunt in istis tribus bellis.* Nennius, *British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. J. Morris, Arthurian Period Sources vol. 8 (London, 1980), p. 87.

⁸⁴ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 72-73.

⁸⁵ *ASC*, p. 34; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 72. His reason is that the first element of Cynewulf's name alliterates with those of a number of West Saxon kings, including Cynegils, Centwine and Cenwalh.

⁸⁶ *ASC*, p. 34.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *nova quadam seditione exorta. Vita Bonifatii*, c. 4, p. 13, l. 24 (written 754x768). The *terminus ante quem* of the rebellion against Ine is 716, the year of Boniface's first Frisian mission. The council marked the beginning of Boniface's brief career as an ecclesiastical envoy, and it took place after he had established his kingdom-wide reputation as a monastic teacher. Bearing these factors in mind, c. 710 appears to be the earliest likely date of the council.

⁸⁹ *ASC*, p. 34 under 718.

We find direct evidence for the effect of secular unrest on a monastic community in a letter of Eangyth and her daughter Heaburg to Boniface, written 719x722, during Boniface's second sojourn in Frisia. Eangyth, the abbess of an unidentified nunnery possibly (though not demonstrably) in Wessex,⁹⁰ complained at length of the difficulties caused for her primarily by the king's hatred of her cousin's *gens* (*rex noster eius gentem multum exosam habet*).⁹¹ Her community was beset by 'domestic troubles and disputes from many kinds of discord',⁹² for the Devil had 'corrupted the rancid hearts of men with malice, most of all monks and fellowships of monks.'⁹³ She further lamented her poverty, caused in part by the hostility of the king, 'because at his court we are accused by those who envy us.'⁹⁴ She went on to inform Boniface that she had lost almost all her relatives, either to death or because they had left as *peregrini* to Rome.⁹⁵

Eangyth herself desired to join her surviving relatives in Rome with her daughter, and appealed to Boniface to support her decision. Although she stated that she had long harboured this desire,⁹⁶ it is apparent from the context of her appeal that a journey to Rome and the abandonment of her community at this particular time would have effectively constituted self-imposed political exile. Significantly, she also

⁹⁰ Tangl, ep. 14, pp. 21-26. There are circumstantial problems with equating Eangyth's daughter Heaburg, also called Bugga in this letter, with the Bugga of Kent who was one of Boniface's most frequent correspondents in later years (Tangl, ep. 15, pp. 26-28; ep. 27, pp. 47-49; ep. 94, pp. 214-215; for such an identification, see Tangl, ep. 14, pp. 21-22, n. 2; also B. Yorke, 'The Bonifacian Mission and Female Religious in Wessex', *Early Medieval Europe* 7.2 (1998), pp. 154-172 (pp. 145-172); Schipperges, *Bonifatii ac socii eius*, pp. 43-44). The latter Bugga was a close friend and blood relation of King Æthelberht II of Kent, as he stated in a letter of 748x754 to Boniface (Tangl, ep. 105, p. 229, ll. 22-23). If Eangyth and her daughter were in Kent 719x722, the king at the time would have been Æthelberht's father Wihtred; since in her letter Eangyth bemoaned the fact that she had lost every relative (*propinqui et consanguini*) apart from a daughter, mother, aunt and male cousin, against whose *gens* the unnamed king (*rex noster*) harboured a great hatred, it seems unlikely that Heaburg is to be identified as a member of the Kentish royal family, let alone that she was later on such friendly terms with a royal dynasty that had all but destroyed her family. Eangyth's letter assumed a familiarity on Boniface's part with the affairs of her family and the current politics of the kingdom in question, which makes an identification with Wessex slightly preferable to Kent; the type of internal political turbulence described by Eangyth also conforms with what we know of the last years of Ine's reign.

⁹¹ Tangl, ep. 14, p. 23, ll. 26-27.

⁹² *domesticæ rei difficultas et disputatio diversarum discordiarum*. Ibid., ll. 7-8.

⁹³ *qui rancida corda virorum inficit malitia [...] maxime per monasticos et monachorum contubernia*. Ibid., ll. 9-11.

⁹⁴ *quia accusamur apud eum ab his, nobis qui invident*. Ibid., ll. 14-15.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 23, l. 20 to p. 24, l. 8. On *peregrinatio* as permanent exile, see chapter 6 below, section 6.1.3. Ursula Schaefer has compared Eangyth's complaints with the Old English poem *The Wife's Lament*: U. Schaefer, 'Two Women in Need of a Friend: A Comparison of *The Wife's Lament* and Eangyth's Letter to Boniface' in *Germanic Dialects: Linguistic and Philological Investigations*, ed. B. Brogyanyi and T. Krömmelbein, *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* 38 (Amsterdam, 1986), pp. 491-524.

⁹⁶ She assures Boniface that her former abbess, Wala, had known about it some years previously. Ibid., p. 25, ll. 10-12.

requested that Boniface receive her persecuted cousin, the monk Denewald, and direct him towards another monk who had been part of the Frisian mission for some time.⁹⁷

Eangyth's letter helps remind us that monks and nuns could choose to join a mission for any number of reasons, among which was the opportunity to escape difficult circumstances at home. I mentioned above Yorke's suggestion that Boniface's decision to become a missionary was in part motivated by his own career ambitions.⁹⁸ Lul, meanwhile, left his homeland c. 738 in the company of two other young men, who he claimed were almost the only friends he had left, in what may have been less than voluntary circumstances.⁹⁹ As far as hagiographers such as Willibald were concerned, Anglo-Saxon missionaries joined Boniface in Germania out of love for Christ, not out of fear for man; but these examples demonstrate that placing oneself among friends and relatives in distant Germania may have been desirable or necessary for reasons quite apart from simple piety.

3.3 Pastoral care in the Solent region

The process of converting pagans to Christianity was, in Boniface's view, not distinguished in principle from the provision of regular pastoral care.¹⁰⁰ To him, a seriously erring Christian was little better than a pagan; the convert who did not receive guidance in matters of correct belief and behaviour was liable to corruption, and thus it was vital that every baptised individual be thoroughly Christianised under the guidance of pallium-wielding bishops. This was Boniface's approach in Hessa and his other territories, and the model for this ideal can be clearly seen in the West Saxon church of the early eighth century. Here we shall first consider the evidence for episcopal influence in the Solent region at this time, and then go on to discuss the nature of pastoral care in Wessex, focusing on the provision of preaching, baptism and post-baptismal confirmation.

⁹⁷ *diu incoluit illam pererinationem*. Ibid., p. 26, ll. 11-19.

⁹⁸ Above, this section. Yorke, 'The Insular Background'.

⁹⁹ See his letter to Abbess Cuniburg in which he remarks that he, Denehard and Burchard left Wessex on account of the deaths of all their parents and relatives (*genitoris et genetricis et aliorum propinquorum nostrorum ob obitum*). Tangl, ep. 49, p. 78, ll. 17-18. Most telling is Lul's fear that his two freedmen, still living in Wessex, will be 'unlawfully' (*sine iustitia*) prevented by unnamed persons from joining him in Germania. Ibid., p. 80, ll. 2-4. He also gives a highly poeticised account of his departure from England in a roughly contemporary letter to an unnamed abbess and nun: Tangl, ep. 98, p. 219, ll. 6-18.

¹⁰⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 153.

3.3.1 Pastoral care and episcopal authority

The nature of pastoral care in the early Anglo-Saxon period is a matter of extended debate among historians. A particularly fraught question is the degree to which bishops were willing or able to exercise control over the minsters that lay within their dioceses, hence the degree to which pastoral care was undertaken under episcopal direction.¹⁰¹ Both Bede and Boniface assumed that the provision of pastoral care was a duty of bishops.¹⁰² They urged their fellow ecclesiastics to reform lay religious houses, many of which failed to meet their high standards of regular life, and incorporate them into diocesan structures.¹⁰³ The reforms demanded by the canons of *Clofesho*, a general church council called by Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury in 747, mirrored many of the reforms that Boniface had advocated in the Frankish councils of the 740s.¹⁰⁴

There is no direct evidence that Boniface undertook pastoral care in Wessex, although his biographer Willibald stated that he did devote himself to extra-monastic charitable activities after he attained the rank of priest (emphasis added):

ad sacerdotalis officii gradum, diuersis donorum ditatus muneribus, accessit, ita ut *elemosinis quidem misericordiaeque operibus*, quantum sub regulari monasterialique praeualuit districtione, *opere penitus ac uoluntate deseruiret.*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Many historians, although they agree on the central role of minsters in providing pastoral care, differ on this issue, with Blair more sceptical of the extent to which bishops were able to direct the operations of minsters they claimed within their jurisdiction than Cubitt and Sims-Williams. Blair, *The Church*, pp. 112-117; C. Cubitt, 'Pastoral Care and Conciliar Canons: The Provisions of the 747 Council of *Clofesho*' in *Pastoral Care*, ed. Blair and Sharpe, pp. 193-211; idem, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850* (Leicester, 1995), pp. 99-113; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800*, CSASE 3 (Cambridge, 1990), esp. pp. 139-140.

¹⁰² See Bede's letter to Archbishop Egbert of York on this matter: Bede, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford, 1896), pp. 405-423, and Boniface's letter to Cuthbert of Canterbury, Tangl, ep. 78, p. 163, l. 19 to p. 164, l. 4.

¹⁰³ Bede, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, pp. 405-423; Tangl, ep. 78, p. 169, l. 26 to p. 170, l. 9.

¹⁰⁴ On the dating of the council of *Clofesho* and its relationship to the contemporary Frankish councils, see Cubitt, 'Pastoral Care', pp. 102-110. See also A. Thacker, 'Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care in Early Anglo-Saxon England' in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 137-170 (pp. 164-165).

¹⁰⁵ 'Attaining the level of priesthood, enriched by diverse gifts and presents, *he devoted himself utterly in deed and desire to almsgiving and works of mercy*, in so far as he was able under the constraints of the Rule and the monastic way of life.' *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 3, p. 12, l. 29 to p. 13, l. 1.

Given that Willibald was primarily interested in Boniface's continental career as reformer and evangelist,¹⁰⁶ his virtual omission of any early pastoral experience Boniface may have had is not surprising. It is hard to imagine that Boniface would have chosen to begin a career as a missionary without having had some experience of preaching to lay audiences and administering to their spiritual needs. Nevertheless, due to the silence of our sources on the matter, I will not assume that Boniface undertook pastoral care in addition to his monastic teaching; but I will take it for granted that, being a rising member of the church who was closely connected to Bishop Daniel, he was at least familiar with the methods of organising and executing pastoral care in Wessex at the time.

From at least the 740s on the continent, Boniface insisted that the heads of all Frankish religious foundations, apart from those with papal privileges such as Fulda,¹⁰⁷ were to be answerable to the bishop of their diocese, who was in turn subservient in all matters to Rome.¹⁰⁸ This was far from standard practice in the Frankish church of the time,¹⁰⁹ and it seems plausible that Boniface's ideal was derived in part from his own close involvement in the episcopal structures of Wessex. Daniel assumed the see of Winchester c. 705, around the time Boniface was ordained priest, and was to become one of Boniface's closest friends and advisors. Aldhelm (d. 709) became bishop of Sherborne around the same time, and, although he died fairly early in Boniface's career as a priest, the overwhelming debt of Boniface's Latin style to Aldhelm reflects the heavy influence of the latter upon the schools of Exeter and Nursling.¹¹⁰ From the beginning of his active years in the church, then, Boniface moved within a staunchly pro-Roman episcopal *milieu*,¹¹¹ and this may have informed his later view that the organisation of pastoral care was the proper responsibility of the bishop.

How far did Bishop Daniel and his predecessor Hædde (bishop 676-705) dominate pastoral care in Wessex as a whole, and the Solent area in particular? If we make the assumption that pastoral care was chiefly organised from the early minsters

¹⁰⁶ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 61-64.

¹⁰⁷ For Fulda's charter of papal exemption, see Tangl, ep. 89, pp. 203-205; *UBF* 15, pp. 25-32.

¹⁰⁸ Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, pp. 210-211.

¹⁰⁹ See chapter seven below, section 7.3.2.

¹¹⁰ A. Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, CSASE 8 (Cambridge, 1994), p. 252.

¹¹¹ On Aldhelm's loyalty to the Roman church in matters of orthodoxy, see M. W. Herren, 'Aldhelm the Theologian' in *Latin Learning*, ed. O'Brien O'Keefe et al., pp. 68-89 (pp. 70-71).

of the area,¹¹² it then becomes a question of the relationship of those minsters to the bishop of Winchester. The ecclesiastical organisation of the region is very difficult to reconstruct at such an early date,¹¹³ and in only a few instances can we surmise a direct relationship. The early church and possible minster at Portchester was in the hands of the bishop of Winchester until 904, an arrangement that probably dates back to the absorption of Wilfrid's missionary areas into the West Saxon bishopric at the time of Cædwalla's conquests.¹¹⁴ The church at Titchfield, founded by Wilfrid, was probably transferred to the West Saxon bishop at the same time.¹¹⁵ Given Ine's close support of episcopal authority evident in his laws, the minster church of St Mary's in the royal settlement of Hamwic would almost certainly have been placed under episcopal control.¹¹⁶ Judging from the close relationship between Boniface and Daniel, the minster at Nursling, later transferred to Romsey, certainly had close links to the bishop of Winchester. There was a monastery at Bishops Waltham c. 705 when Willibald entered it as an oblate; since he was a relative of Boniface,¹¹⁷ a common social network may also have connected that monastery's abbot, Egwald, to Daniel.¹¹⁸

In five cases, then, the principal church foundations of the Solent region can be shown to have some connection to the Bishop of Winchester. Aside from the mention of the existence of a monastery at Redbridge/Eling by Bede,¹¹⁹ nothing more is known of its status as an early minster. The other Anglo-Saxon mother churches of

¹¹² The assumption that Anglo-Saxon minsters in general were founded as centres of pastoral care is disputed. Richard Morris has argued, *contra* Thacker, Cubitt, Blair, Hase and others, that the earliest Anglo-Saxon minsters were not founded principally to minister and evangelise the local population, but to serve the king's reeve and his household; broader pastoral responsibilities may or may not have followed from this. Thacker, 'Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care', pp. 140-147. For another critical discussion of the so-called 'minster hypothesis', see E. Cambridge and D. Rollason, 'The Pastoral Organisation of the Anglo-Saxon Church: A Review of the "Minster Hypothesis"', *Early Medieval Europe* 4 (1995), pp. 87-104.

¹¹³ Hase, 'The Mother Churches', pp. 45-46.

¹¹⁴ S 372; see S. E. Rigold, 'Litus Romanum – the Saxon Shore Forts as Mission Stations' in *The Saxon Shore*, ed. D. E. Johnston, CBA Research Report 18 (York, 1977), pp. 70-75 (p. 73); D. Hinton, 'Hampshire's Anglo-Saxon Origins' in *The Archaeology of Hampshire from the Palaeolithic to the Industrial Revolution*, ed. S. J. Shennan & R. T. Schadla Hall (Aldershot, 1981), pp. 56-65 (pp. 61-62).

¹¹⁵ Rigold, 'Litus Romanum', p. 73. According to Domesday Book, Titchfield was held by King Edward the Confessor prior to the Conquest. J. Munby, ed., *Domesday Book Vol. 4: Hampshire* (Chichester, 1982), 1.45.

¹¹⁶ The manor containing St Mary's was held by the Bishop of Winchester at the time of Domesday. *Ibid.*, 3.16.

¹¹⁷ For Hygeburg's account of Willibald's entry into the monastery see Hygeburg, *Vita Willibaldi*, c. 2, p. 89, ll. 1-15; for her statement of his brother Wynnebald's kinship to Boniface, *qui carnale propinquatis et sanguini copulatione illo fuerat sociatus*, *idem, Vita Wynnebaldi Abbatis Heidenheimensis*, MGH SS 15.1, ed. O. Holder-Egger (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 106-117 (c. 4, p. 109, ll. 8-9).

¹¹⁸ The Bishop of Winchester held Bishops Waltham in 1086. Munby, ed., *Domesday Book*, 2.9.

¹¹⁹ *HE*, IV.16, pp. 382-383.

southern Hampshire, which included Christchurch, Fordingbridge, Breamore, Mottisfont and East Meon, do not appear in documentary sources until Domesday; hence their relationship to the bishopric of Winchester in the eighth century, assuming they existed at this early date, must remain unclear.

It does seem, however, that the bishop of Winchester had direct control of Portchester, Titchfield and Hamwic, and some degree of influence over Nursling and perhaps Bishops Waltham. It is worth pointing out that there is no positive evidence to prove that Eling lay outside his control. In other words, pastoral care around the Solent, if not farther afield, was probably arranged under the strong guiding hand of episcopal authority with dedicated royal support. The region may or may not have been peculiar in this respect; but in either case, here we can see the roots of Boniface's later desire to make just such arrangements universal in both the Frankish provinces and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

3.3.2 What did pastoral care entail?

If we wish to examine the nature of the pastoral care in Ine's kingdom, we are necessarily reduced to generalities. In this section I will focus on the three activities which, from the point of view of Anglo-Saxon churchmen such as Bede and Boniface, comprised the fundamental points of interaction between clerics and the lay population: preaching, baptism, and post-baptismal confirmation. I will also briefly address the issues of burial and the imposition of penance.

None of the chapters of the Synod of Hertford, held in 673, contains anything explicit about the duties and activities of clerics in administering to the lay population.¹²⁰ While one of Ine's laws demands the annual payment of church dues (*ciricsceatte*, or churchscot),¹²¹ there is no provision which commands bishops or abbots to provide regular pastoral care. This was an acute problem in the remoter areas of Northumbria, as Bede complained to Egbert of York:

Audiuimus enim, et fama est, quia multae uillae ac uiculi nostrae gentis in montibus sint inaccessis ac saltibus dumosis positus, ubi nunquam multis transeuntibus annis sit uisus antistes, qui ibidem aliquid ministerii aut gratiae

¹²⁰ *HE*, IV.5, pp. 350-353.

¹²¹ Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, c. 4, pp. 90-91.

caelestis exhibuerunt; quorum tamen ne unus quidem a tributis antistiti reddendis esse possit immunis.¹²²

Bede, of course, was referring to the remotest of Northumbrian homesteads, those isolated and distant places which Saint Cuthbert, in his exceptional piety, was prepared to visit, but where other preachers feared to go.¹²³ The implication is that *ordinary* preachers were in the habit of visiting more accessible locales.¹²⁴ Although the remoter parts of Wessex may have similarly lacked good pastoral coverage, itinerant preachers, such as those whom Willibald claimed to have been active in the Exeter region during Boniface's childhood,¹²⁵ would have helped cover more central regions. Yet if we were to expect a well-established pastoral system anywhere at all in England at the beginning of the eighth century, we should look not to Devon but again to the Solent region, with its dense network of minster churches, its system of Roman roads enabling easy travel and its proximity to the bishop's seat. Excavations have demonstrated that this region was prosperous, its fertile river valleys densely settled and farmed, its economy thriving, and its population relatively healthy and well-fed.¹²⁶ The Solent region, in other words, provided a stable base upon which to organise a coherent system of pastoral care.

A fundamental function of the Church in caring for the lay population was baptism, and the second law of Ine was intended to enforce this.¹²⁷ Interestingly, the law places the responsibility for prompt baptism on the child's guardians, giving them thirty days to accomplish it on pain of a 30 shilling fine; if the child should die unbaptised after this time, all the possessions of the guardians were forfeit. Both the placing of responsibility and the timescale are significant here. The law appears to

¹²² 'For we have heard, and it is well known, that many of the villages and farmsteads of our people are situated in inaccessible mountains and thickly forested valleys, where for years at a time no bishop is seen who provides any ministry or reveals the grace of Heaven; and yet not one of these places is immune from paying tithes to that same bishop', Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, ed. Plummer, pp. 405-423 (p. 410).

¹²³ *HE*, IV.27, pp. 432-435.

¹²⁴ Blair, *The Church*, p. 161,

¹²⁵ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 2, p. 5, ll. 4-7.

¹²⁶ On the Anglo-Saxon settlement patterns of the area, see S. C. Hawkes and G. Grainger, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Worthy Park, Kingsworthy, near Winchester, Hampshire* (Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2003), pp. 1-4; on the buried population of Worthy Park, *ibid.*, pp. 153-171. The large settlement near Chalton, 20 km north-east of Portchester, has been extensively excavated: T. Champion, 'Chalton', *Current Archaeology* 59 (1977), pp. 364-369; P. V. Addyman and D. Leigh, 'The Anglo-Saxon Village at Charlton, Hampshire: Second Interim Report', *Medieval Archaeology* 17 (1973), pp. 1-25.

¹²⁷ Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, c. 2-2.1, pp. 90-91.

assume that the ecclesiastical framework for universal baptism is in place, but that it may take up to thirty days for a guardian to make use of it. Since it would scarcely be practical for parents and godparents to carry every newborn infant to the nearest minster for baptism, a distance of up to several kilometres, this further suggests that itinerant priests such as those evoked by Willibald were responsible for administering the rite within their territories. These priests would have been based at minsters or daughter foundations, and would have been responsible for visiting every settlement at least once a month in order to preach and administer the necessary sacraments.¹²⁸

We have no way of telling how successfully this scheme was implemented. The anonymous eighth-century monk whose account of his vision of Hell, preserved among the letters of Lul, included crowds of children ‘for the most part dying under Bishop Daniel without baptism,’¹²⁹ appears to have been condemning a failure on Daniel’s part to establish baptism on a sufficient scale in Wessex. Again, however, this criticism may relate to the more remote areas of the kingdom, and we must also take into account the fact that the extremely high infant mortality rates of the period would make timely, universal baptism extremely difficult to attain.¹³⁰ Note that it is only infants, not adults, who were dying unbaptised in the monk’s vision, and this itself implies that most of the adult population were baptised Christians by the end of Daniel’s episcopate in 744.

Bede, in his letter to Egbert, implies that itinerant post-baptismal confirmation by the laying-on of hands was one of the fundamental duties of Northumbrian bishops by the 730s.¹³¹ Although the sacrament of confirmation is not referred to in the decrees of the Synod of Hertford (673) or the Council of Clofesho (747), an incidental

¹²⁸ S. Foot, “By Water in the Spirit:” The Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England’ in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. Blair and Sharpe, pp. 171-192 (pp. 181-182); Blair, ‘Minster churches’, pp. 50-2; idem, *The Church*, pp. 161-162.

¹²⁹ *infantium numerosam multitudinem sub Danielo episcopo maxime sine baptismo morientium*. Tangl, ep. 115, p. 249, ll. 7-8.

¹³⁰ In his study of medieval mortality rates in northern Hesse, using skeletal remains, parish records and modern UN health studies of pre-industrial societies, Kunter estimated a child mortality rate throughout the medieval period of 40-50%. Assuming similar pre-modern standards of living, the rate in eighth-century Wessex could have been similar. M. Kunter, ‘Sterbwahrscheinlichkeit und Lebenserwartung in der nordhessischen Gemeinde Kirchberg (St Niedenstein, Schwalm-Eder-Kreis) vom Mittelalter bis heute’ in *Beiträge zur Archäologie mittelalterlicher Kirchen in Hessen, Band 1*, ed. by K. Sippel, Materialien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte von Hessen 7 (Wiesbaden, 1989), pp. 193-201 (p. 194, Abb. 3).

¹³¹ See his comments regarding the failure of bishops to administer the rite in remote settlements: *nec solum talibus locis desit antistes, qui manus impositione baptizatos confirmet*. Bede, *Epistola ad Egbertum* in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, p. 410.

reference to the *biscopsunu*, ‘spiritual son at confirmation’,¹³² in the Law Codes of Ine indicates that the rite of episcopal confirmation was known and incorporated into the social fabric of Ine’s Wessex by the end of the seventh century.¹³³ The episcopal duty of confirming the baptised with chrism is also mentioned in Theodore’s late-seventh century *Penitential*.¹³⁴ The sacrament of post-baptismal confirmation would therefore have been very familiar to Boniface by the time he attained the rank of priest c. 705.

According to his biographer Willibald (writing 754x768), Boniface performed confirmations by the laying-on of hands in Hessa immediately after he was ordained bishop in 723,¹³⁵ and in the years to come he helped introduce the originally Roman rite of confirmation to the Continent north of the Alps, where it had previously been largely unknown.¹³⁶ The decrees of the *Concilium Germanicum* of 742, behind which Boniface was a prime mover,¹³⁷ stated that bishops were to be responsible for performing rounds of post-baptismal confirmation in settlements throughout their dioceses.¹³⁸ This method of administering the rite is strikingly similar to that alluded to by Bede, and suggests an attempt by Boniface to spread throughout Frankish territory a custom prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Boniface’s establishment of bishoprics in his mission field and his promotion of Lul to the rank of assistant bishop (*chorepiscopus*) must therefore be understood in relation to the importance he placed upon the rite of post-baptismal confirmation.¹³⁹

Contemporary Anglo-Saxon historical sources are silent on the matter of burial. The conspicuous lack of early church discussions or regulations concerning burial habits in Anglo-Saxon England is now well recognised, and archaeologists tend

¹³² T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Supplement* (Oxford, 1921), p. 93.

¹³³ Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, c. 76,3, pp. 122-123. The law states that the compensation due to the person who had sponsored the murdered individual at his confirmation is half that due to the godfather.

¹³⁴ Published in A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, eds., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. III* (Oxford, 1873), pp. 173-203 (*Poenitentiae* i, iv.5-9, p. 193).

¹³⁵ *Hessorum iam multi, catholica fide subditi ac septiformis spiritus gratia confirmati, manus inpositionem acciperunt. Vita Bonifatii.*, p. 30, l. 19 to p. 31, l. 1.

¹³⁶ A. Angenendt, *Geschichte der Religiosität im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1997), pp. 471-473; M. Garrison, ‘The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne’ in *Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Y. Hen and M. Innes (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 114-161 (p. 138). The Frankish rite of anointing the hands of priests and bishops at their consecration, the earliest liturgical sources for which are early eighth-century in date, also appears to be Insular in origin. See B. Kleinheyer, *Die Priesterweihe im römischen Ritus: Eine liturgiehistorische Studie*, Trierer theologische Studien 12 (Trier, 1962), pp. 86-87. On the possible influence of post-baptismal anointing on Carolingian royal anointing rituals, see J. Nelson, ‘The Lord’s Anointed and the People’s Choice’ in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremony in Traditional Societies*, ed. D. Cannadine and S. R. F. Price (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 137-180 (pp. 149-153).

¹³⁷ See chapter five below, section 5.4.1

¹³⁸ Tangl, ep. 56, p. 100, ll. 10-13.

¹³⁹ For a discussion of the Hessian context, see chapter seven below, section 7.4.4.

to explain the overall decrease in furnished burial through the seventh century in terms of social change rather than religious conversion.¹⁴⁰ To what extent individual churches claimed burial rights over the inhabitants of their parishes, or if they did at all, are also unanswerable questions. For example, the cemeteries of Worthy Park and Winnall, on the outskirts of Winchester, fell out of use around the mid-seventh century and burial was moved elsewhere (although only Winnall's replacement cemetery has been located). The excavators attributed the end of the older cemeteries to the foundation of the bishopric of Winchester and the conversion of the population to Christianity.¹⁴¹ There is simply too little archaeological or historical evidence, however, to prove that the early West Saxon church was prepared to disrupt existing burial practices to this extent, and certainly not that it did so in any systematic way.

Finally there is the matter of the imposition of penance upon the lay population by the élite of the the Anglo-Saxon church. The purpose of penance was to allow sinners to atone for their wrongdoings and to encourage 'correct' Christian behaviour among the ordinary people.¹⁴² Itinerant preaching and the ministration of the sacraments required only the occasional compliance of the common people, but to encourage them to behave from one day to the next in a truly 'Christian' fashion required a degree of influence and control that the Church did not always have. Adultery, sodomy, theft and murder (the latter two of which also earned secular punishment under Ine's laws)¹⁴³ were serious sins, requiring lengthy periods of such penance as fasting, excommunication and almsgiving.¹⁴⁴ Archbishop Theodore (d. 690) had also imposed penance upon practioners of pagan sacrifice, auguries, incantation and divination, measures which were condemned on numerous occasions by Boniface.¹⁴⁵

We must allow for a certain amount of variation in the success of enforcing such measures, depending on the frequency with which preachers visited a given

¹⁴⁰ H. Geake, 'Burial Practice in Seventh- and Eighth-Century England' in *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. M. O. H. Carver, (Woodbridge, 1994), pp. 83-94 (pp. 89-93).

¹⁴¹ Hawkes and Grainger, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴² A. J. Frantzen, 'The Tradition of Penitentials in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983), pp. 23-56; Thacker, 'Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care', pp. 161-162.

¹⁴³ Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, c. 7-7.1, pp. 92-93.

¹⁴⁴ Thacker, 'Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care', pp. 159-160.

¹⁴⁵ Both are in Haddan and Stubbs, eds., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents: Theodore's Penitential* i, xv,1, 4-5, p. 189-190; Council of *Clofesho*, cap. 3, p. 360. See also T. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*' in *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 11, ed. by M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 141-174. See chapter seven below, section 7.4.4.

community, the degree of support of the local reeve, and so on. Many offences which monks such as Boniface and Bede found repugnant formed an integral part of social life beyond the cloisters, and the rural population may not have much appreciated a band of visiting monks condemning their folk traditions and celebrations by invoking the theological doctrine of Augustine and St Paul.¹⁴⁶ A discerning preacher, unable to impose penance on entire communities, would either have to turn a blind eye or persuade the populace to reinterpret their customs in a Christian framework.

*

When in chapter seven we come to consider in detail the evidence for pastoral care and ecclesiastical arrangements in Hessa, we shall see that the system established by Boniface was deeply informed by his experiences in the West Saxon church. The coherent network of mother parishes which he established in Hessa bears comparison with the minster arrangements of the Solent region, both in terms of a spatial arrangement that implies the regularised provision of pastoral care, and the organisation of parishes under close episcopal supervision. Similarly, Boniface's later recognition of the importance of close cooperation between ecclesiastical and secular authority and his enduring loyalty to Rome had their roots in the history and organisation of the church in the West Saxon heartlands. His experience of pastoral care in the Solent region clearly informed his later attempts to impose universal baptism and confirmation under close episcopal supervision on the continent. Hessa, where the Frankish church had made very little impact by the time of Boniface's arrival, offered him a virtually blank slate upon which to found his ideal church; yet it also brought specific challenges and contexts that demanded a degree of adaptability, innovation and compromise. In the next chapter we shall examine closely the context of Hessa in the years leading up to Boniface's arrival.

¹⁴⁶ Boniface quoted both Augustine and St Paul to Pope Zacharias on the matter of secular celebrations in Rome in 742: Tangl, ep. 50, p. 85, ll. 5-13. See also R. Meens, 'The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance' in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. Biller and A. J. Minnis, York Studies in Medieval Theology 2 (York, 1998), pp. 35-61 (pp. 50-51).

Chapter Four

Hessia on the Eve of the Bonifatian Mission

Just as important as a clear understanding of the context of Boniface's formative years in Wessex is an understanding of Hessia at the time of his arrival. Wessex, in particular the Solent region, had given Boniface experience of a church founded on strong episcopal control with the support of a king who was prepared to work closely with his bishops to ensure the stability of a truly Christian kingdom. The Frankish élite had a long and complex history of interaction with the church that differed in many ways from the relationship between Ine, a petty king in Frankish terms, and his two recently-founded West Saxon bishoprics.¹ At the time of Boniface's arrival, Hessia was a border region on the very edge of Frankish-controlled territory, caught between the expansionist ambitions of Franks and Saxons, yet with a history and character of its own. Local and supra-regional politics entwined in Hessia, creating a context that threw as many challenges as opportunities in the path of the mission.

I will begin this chapter with an examination of the topography, climate, resources and communications of the region I have defined as Hessia. There will follow a brief discussion of the Roman-period inhabitants of Hessia (the *Chatti* of Tacitus's *Germania*) and a consideration of the degree of cultural continuity into the early medieval period. Then I will present a catalogue of the pertinent archaeological and toponymic data for this chapter, helping overcome the limited familiarity of non-German archaeologists with this material; this also constitutes the first complete survey of Hessia's pre-Bonifatian early medieval archaeological record in any language. Finally, I will interpret the evidence and propose a new three-phase model of Frankish expansion into Hessia from the early seventh century to *c.* 721, and consider the extent of Christianity in Hessia before Boniface's arrival.

4.1 The physical landscape of Hessia

As I stated in chapter two, the region I refer to as Hessia is within the northernmost part of the present-day German *Land* of Hesse, which in its modern form extends

¹ For Boniface's relationship with Frankish secular élites, see chapter seven below, sections 7.3.1-2.

south of the Rhine and Main. The borders of Hestia were never clearly delineated in the early medieval period; my definition is based on eighth- and ninth-century charter clauses which state that particular settlements lay within the *pago Hessorum* (see figure 10).²

4.1.1 Topography

Hestia measures approximately 80 kilometres north-south by 70 kilometres east-west and is contained within the Central German Uplands, a region of high ground which forms part of the Central European Uplands, stretching from the Massif Central in France to the Czech Republic and Poland. Its western boundary is formed by the hilly regions of the Siegerland (containing the Westerwald) and Rothaargebirge, with a maximum elevation of 843 metres above sea level (see figure 8). This high ground separates Hestia from the Middle Rhine valley. To the east lies the high ground of the Rhön (maximum elevation 950 metres). The northern limit of Hestia is the river Diemel, and the southern lies approximately on the Weser/Rhine watershed. The other major Hessian peaks are the Vogelsberg (774 metres), the Knüll-Gebirge (636 metres) and the Kellerwald (675 metres). The various river valleys of Hestia rarely rise above an elevation of 350 metres.

The river system to the north-east of the watershed noted on figure 8 drains into the Weser and thence to the low-lying land of Saxony. The three main navigable waterways of this river system are the Fulda, which flows north from the Rhön, the Eder, which flows east from the Rothaargebirge before joining the lower Fulda, and the Werra, which combines with the Fulda to form the Weser. The Edersee, midway along the Eder, is an artificial reservoir created in the early twentieth century. South-west of the watershed, the river systems are dominated by the Rhine and Main valleys. Immediately north of the Main is the Wetterau basin, a fertile, low-lying area between the Taunus ridge and the Vogelsberg. On the opposite side of the Taunus is the Lahn valley, which flows from central Hestia southwest towards the Rhine. The Kinzig and the Saale form important communication corridors from the Middle Rhine towards Thuringia.

² For a distribution map of charter donations within the *pago Hessorum* prior to 900 see F. Backhaus, 'Die Gauen vor und nach 900' in *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen*, ed. by Uhlhorn and others, pp. 41-43, Karte 8a.

4.1.2 Climate and resources

There are very few climatological data surviving from the early medieval period, and so the following discussion of the Hessian climate is based on measurements from the last century. It must be borne in mind throughout that conditions in eighth-century Hesse may have been different; there is some evidence in particular that winters were significantly harsher in western Europe during the early medieval period than they are today.³ The climate of the modern region is temperate, with few extremes of temperature throughout the year.⁴ The average daily temperatures are in January 0-1 degree celsius, in July 16.5-17.5 degrees celsius. Generally speaking, the highest points in the region will have temperatures 3-4 degrees cooler than in the river valleys. Fritzlar, in the centre of Hesse, presently receives an average annual rainfall of 550-600 millimetres, slightly less than the south of England.

Modern Hesse north of the Main is still a heavily forested region, in particular the north and the east. The natural woodland, overwhelmingly beech (OHG *buohha*, whence the ancient regional name *Buc(h)onia*), dominates the higher ground. Beech wood is not especially durable, but it has manifold other uses in tanning, boat-building and fence, roof and tool construction. Its sap can also be fermented into a beer or wine, other parts of the tree can serve various medicinal functions, and its leaves are quite edible. On the lower slopes, beech mixes with oak and other less common species such as alder, birch, ash, sycamore, elm and lime tree. The larch, pine and fir trees found in parts of Hesse today are more recent introductions. Although cattle are raised in places, most especially in the north, the countryside is chiefly arable. Grain, fruit and potatoes are today extensively cultivated in the fertile valley regions, while the Rhine valley in the south of the province, particularly the southern slopes of the Taunus ridge, can produce excellent wine.

³ On the difficulties of determining climatic change in the medieval period, see R. S. Bradley, M. K. Hughes and H. F. Diaz, 'Climate in medieval time', *Science* 302 (2003), pp. 404-405. On the early medieval documentary evidence for notoriously harsh winters, see H. H. Lamb, *Climate History and the Modern World* (London, 1982), p. 157. A letter of Abbot Cuthbert of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow to Lul alludes to the devastating winter of 763/4 that affected both Anglo-Saxon and Frankish regions: Tangl, ep. 116, p. 251, ll. 8-11.

⁴ For most of the information in this and the following paragraph, see A. Rühl, *Das hessische Bergland: Eine forstlich-vegetationsgeographische Übersicht* (Bad Godesberg, 1967), pp. 8-13; also the various maps of Ulhorn and others, *Geschichtliche Atlas von Hessen*.

4.1.3 Settlement and communications

Hessia is a region of gentle, winding valleys, rolling hills and thick forests. From the prehistoric until the late medieval period, as we shall see, the most densely settled and cultivated district was along the lower Eder around Fritzlar, which today, with a population of 15,000, is the second-largest settlement in Hessia. The largest settlement is the city of Kassel (current population about 200,000), 25 kilometres north-west of Fritzlar. The predominant modern settlement pattern is of small, nucleated villages and hamlets. There is some archaeological evidence for nucleated settlement in the prehistoric and early medieval periods, notably at the extensively excavated site of Geismar,⁵ but the high number of deserted medieval villages across Hessia suggests that the medieval settlement pattern was considerably more dispersed than it is today (see figure 37).

A major characteristic of Hessia throughout its history has been its function as a north-south communications corridor through the Central German Uplands, *ein richtiges Durchgangsland und ein Drehscheibe für Handel und Verkehr*, as Hecktor Amman described it.⁶ Since archaeologists and historians have long recognised this characteristic of early medieval Hessia, some effort has been put into identifying the main communication routes through the use of archaeology, historical references and, most of all, the cautious assumption that the major routeways altered little between the early and late medieval periods.⁷ Briefly, two main long-distance trading routes traversed Hessia during the medieval period, and are illustrated on figure 8. The *Strata Regia* (first recorded in 1224) led from Neuwied on the Rhine across the Siegerland towards Hessia.⁸ The *Weinstraße*, beginning at Mainz, was the major Frankish military route north during their eighth-century campaigns against the Saxons, and has been securely identified thanks to a series of fortified sites along its

⁵ See this chapter below, section 4.3.4.

⁶ 'A real transit land and a turntable for trade and traffic.' H. Amman, *Der hessische Raum in der mittelalterlichen Wirtschaft* (Marburg, 1958), pp. 6-7; reprinted from H. Amman, 'Der hessische Raum in der mittelalterlichen Wirtschaft', *HJL* 8 (1958), pp. 37-70.

⁷ The routes shown on figures 8 are based predominantly on Wand's account: *Die Büraburg*, pp. 15-16 and *Beilage* 8.

⁸ The second reference to the route is from 1356, where it is named the *Rychis straze*, 'King's Way'. Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 16, n. 5; H.-P. Lachmann, *Untersuchungen zur Verfassungsgeschichte des Burgwaldes im Mittelalter*, Schriften des hessischen Landesamtes für geschichtliche Landeskunde 31 (Marburg, 1969), p. 15.

length.⁹ Its importance as a former trading route is signified by its name, a dialect word for *Wagenstraße*, ‘wagon road’.¹⁰

The importance of the lower Eder/Fritzlar basin as a natural hub of regional communications is also clear from figure 8, which shows the web of local routes (the late-medieval names of which survive in a variety of documentary sources)¹¹ that converged on the crossing point at Fritzlar. The fact that the Eder/Fritzlar basin was a centre of communications will have profound implications when we come to consider the earliest phases of Boniface’s Hessian mission in chapter six, particularly his choice of Fritzlar as the site of his first monastic foundation.

4.2 Roman and post-Roman background

4.2.1 The Chatti

Hessia was never part of the Roman Empire, but was immediately adjacent to the *limes*. The group-name *Hessi*, although it appears in documentary sources only from the eighth century,¹² is generally accepted by philologists to be derived from the word *Chatti*, the name given by Roman writers to the tribe living immediately north of the Wetterau.¹³ The earliest attestation of the Chatti is in Tacitus’s late first-century *Germania*, in his survey of the tribes who dwelled along the middle Rhine. He wrote that the Chatti lived in the forest of *Hercynium*,¹⁴ a range of wooded hills which ran from the Rhine across much of central Europe and whose name survived into the early medieval period as Buchonia. The area described by Tacitus cannot be precisely

⁹ W. Görich, ‘Rast-Orte an alter Straße? Ein Beitrag zur hessischen Straßen- und Siedlungsgeschichte’ in *Festschrift Edmund E. Stengel zum 70. Geburtstag am 24. Dezember 1949* (Cologne, 1952), pp. 473-494 (pp. 490-491, Abb. 1); F. Schwind, ‘Zur Geschichte des heute hessischen Raumes im Frühmittelalter’ in *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 34-46 (p. 39).

¹⁰ Schlesinger, ‘Early medieval fortifications,’ pp. 252-253.

¹¹ See Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 16.

¹² The earliest appearance of the name *Hessi* is in a letter of Gregory III dating to c. 738. Tangl ep. 43, p. 68, l. 11.

¹³ Although the derivation is undisputed, there is no consensus on the original meaning of the name *Chatti*. See E. Wamers, ‘Zu den Anfängen der Altertumforschung in Hessen’, *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 13-17 (p. 13); D. Baatz, ‘Römische Eroberungen unter den flavischen Kaisern, Bau des Limes’ in *Die Römer in Hessen*, ed. D. Baatz and F.-R. Herrmann (Hamburg, 2002), pp. 66-83 (p. 72); G. Neumann, philological contribution to ‘Chatti’ in *RGA* 4 (Berlin, 1981), pp. 377-378; Schwind, ‘Zur Geschichte des heute hessischen Raumes’, p. 37; A. Bach, ‘Chatti-Hassi. Zur Deutung des Namens der Hessen’, *HJL* 4 (1954), pp. 1-20.

¹⁴ Tacitus, *Cornelii Taciti opera minora*, ed. M. Winterbottom and R. M. Ogilvie (Oxford, 1975), *Germania*, c. 30, pp. 52, ll. 20-24.

demarcated, although H. von Petrikovits considers the hills in question to be the Vogelsberg and Rhön regions north of the Main.¹⁵ The territory of the Chatti would thus stretch northwards, encompassing Hesse at least as far as the Weser, where the hills of the Central German Uplands begin to merge with the low-lying country beyond.

Roman dealings with the Chatti were predominantly military, their main interest being the stability of the land beyond the *limes*. Cassius Dio, writing over a century after Tacitus, describes certain political and military events among the Germanic tribes around 10 B.C. in which the Chatti figure several times.¹⁶ According to Tacitus, the major settlement of the Chatti was a fortified hill called Mattium.¹⁷ This settlement, which lay somewhere not far north of the Eder (*Adrana*), was laid waste in a Roman campaign of 15 A.D.¹⁸

In contrast to the Wetterau, Roman-period Hesse as a whole appears extremely sparsely populated in figure 9, which is in part due to the nature of the archaeological evidence. In the south, both the widespread use of stone building material in the Roman period and the higher level of modern development activity has enabled a far greater proportion of occupation sites to be archaeologically identified. Considering the generally low quantity of Roman-period archaeological evidence across the whole of Hesse, however, it does seem apparent that the main focus of Roman-era settlement in the region was the crook of the lower Eder. This area, a natural communications hub within the Hessian corridor as observed above, has demonstrated by far the greatest density of first-century A.D. to fifth-century archaeological material outside the Wetterau, particularly settlements (identified

¹⁵ H. von Petrikovits, historical contribution to 'Chatten' in *RGA* 4, pp. 379-385 (p. 380).

¹⁶ Cassius Dio, *Dio's Roman History*, vol. 6, ed. and trans. E. Cary (London, 1917), 54.33.2, pp. 366-367; 54.36.3, pp. 374-375; 54.33.4, pp. 368-369; 55.1.2, pp. 380-381.

¹⁷ Tacitus, *The Annals of Tacitus*, 2 vols., ed. F. R. D. Goodyear (Cambridge, 1981), vol. 1, p. 4, ll. 1-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* See Petrikovits, historical contribution to 'Chatten', p. 379; Jungandreas, philological contribution to 'Chatten', p. 378. The precise location of Mattium, despite attempts to identify it archaeologically, remains unknown. See J. Bergmann, *Die Altenburg bei Niedenstein*, Führer zur nordhessischen Ur- und Frühgeschichte 1 (Kassel, 1965), pp. 14-15; G. Mildenerger, 'Das Ende der Altenburg bei Niedenstein' in *Marburger Beiträge zur Archäologie der Kelten: Festschrift für Wolfgang Dehn*, ed. O. H. Frey (Bonn, 1969), pp. 122-134, (pp. 133-134); *idem*, *Römerzeitliche Siedlungen in Nordhessen*, Kasseler Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte 3 (Marburg, 1972), p. 102.

primarily through the presence of imported Roman terra nigra ceramics) and urn cremation burials.¹⁹

4.2.2 Post-Roman population shift and continuity

The Chatti are not to be found listed among the tribes supposed by the historical sources to have moved by migration or invasion in the late- and post-Roman period. Even so, it was for a long time received wisdom amongst archaeologists that the Chatti took their part in the great *Völkerwanderungen*, and had left their homeland of northern Hesse all but deserted.²⁰ The work of Gerhard Mildemberger in the 1970s helped challenge this theory, particularly through his detailed study of terra nigra pottery finds.²¹ This form of wheel-turned pottery, Roman-produced or produced after Roman models, contrasts strongly with the far more numerous local hand-produced wares (which on some sites account for over ninety-nine percent of the total assemblage).²² The latter form of pottery is notoriously difficult to date; its undistinctive forms, which changed little over time from Roman to early medieval times, are all but impossible to arrange in a reliable series. By examining the scarce but more easily datable terra nigra sherds, Mildemberger was able to construct a more accurate picture of settlement patterns from the first to fifth centuries A.D. He concluded that long-term settlement was not the norm in the Chatti heartland during the Roman period. Sites were often abandoned after three or four generations, and only one of the twelve known sites reliably dated to the first century survived until the fifth.²³

Mildemberger's careful study of the pottery evidence produced empirical evidence to refute the theory of large-scale population shift, leading him to the stern

¹⁹ M. Seidel, 'Großbromstedt- und älterkaiserzeitliche Siedlungskeramik aus Netze, Stadt Waldeck, Kreis Waldeck-Frankenberg' in *FH* 32/33 (1992/93), pp. 111-127 (pp. 116-127); Mildemberger, *Römerzeitliche Siedlungen*, esp. pp. 102-110 and Karten 6 and 7.

²⁰ See for example R. von Uslar, *Westgermanische Bodenfunde des 1. bis 3. Jahrhunderts n. Christ aus Mittel- und Westdeutschland*, Germanische Denkmäler der Frühzeit 3 (Berlin, 1938), p. 148; Demandt, *Geschichte des Landes Hessen*, p. 81.

²¹ Mildemberger, 'Terra Nigra aus Nordhessen'. The prominent Marburg archaeologist Otto Uenze, shortly before his death in an accident in 1962, was also beginning to question the dominant theory that the Chatti migrated south after the fall of the *limes*. See Mildemberger's comments following Uenze's posthumously published article: O. Uenze, 'Völkerwanderungszeitliche Gräber aus Nordhessen', *FH* 11 (1971), pp. 80-94 (p. 94).

²² Mildemberger, 'Terra Nigra aus Nordhessen', p. 112.

²³ Mildemberger, *Römerzeitliche Siedlungen*, Tabelle 3.

conclusion: *Von eine Siedlungsleere kann keine Rede sein.*²⁴ Rather, settlements were abandoned one by one over time, perhaps only to be re-founded very close by. In general, too, Mildenerger argued that finds from other parts of Hesse are too few in number to imply even a long-term decline in population: other factors, such as a decline in the custom of furnished burials, a reduction in datable Roman wares, and the increasing likelihood of late- and post-Roman settlements being hidden beneath their medieval successors, all contribute to an apparent lack of 'migration period' finds.²⁵

Some prominent Hessian archaeologists have disagreed with Mildenerger's conclusion that post-Roman migration from north Hesse was negligible, notably Roth and Gensen, both of whom argued that a gradual population shift during and after the third century towards the Main-Rhine region, a fulcrum of post-Roman political power, was very likely.²⁶ More recently, Böhme has argued that there is no evidence for any large-scale change in population between the Roman and early medieval periods, although he does not rule out some degree of population movement.²⁷ We must be cautious of accepting either case based merely on a lack of evidence for the other.²⁸ Whether or not a sizeable part of the population shifted south after the fall of the Rhine frontier, the north was certainly not left deserted, and it is reasonable to assume that many of the eighth-century inhabitants of the region were direct descendants of those of the third. This does not mean, however, that the cultural practices of the Hessians of Boniface's day had remained unchanged for five centuries, or that the Hessians themselves viewed their own history with this kind of temporal depth.

It may be significant, however, that among the Roman-period sites that demonstrate continued settlement into the eighth century is Geismar, which lies two kilometres west of Fritzlar and was excavated between 1973 and 1980.²⁹ Although the

²⁴ 'There can be no talk of [mass] settlement abandonment.' *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; *idem*, 'Nordhessen in der Völkerwanderungszeit', *HJL* 16 (1966), pp. 1-8 (p. 6).

²⁶ H. Roth, 'Frühmittelalterliche Archäologie' in *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 22-33 (pp. 32-33); R. Gensen, 'Die Frühgeschichte des Fritzlarer Raumes' in *Fritzlar im Mittelalter: Festschrift zur 1250-Jahr-Feier*, ed. W. Schlesinger (Fritzlar, 1974), pp. 10-40.

²⁷ Böhme, 'Franken in Althessen', p. 88.

²⁸ Werner Best, who himself keeps an open mind on the issue, discusses it further in *Funde der Völkerwanderungs- und Merowingerzeit*, pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Two other sites in central Hesse whose settlement continued from the Roman period into the eighth century are Holzheim, 2.5 kilometres south of Fritzlar, and Obervorschütz, 6 kilometres north-west of Fritzlar. On Holzheim, see N. Wand, 'Archäologische Untersuchungen des Kirchhofbereiches St. Thomas in der Dorfwüstung Holzheim bei Fritzlar (Schwalm-Eder-Kreis) im Jahre 1980' in *Beiträge*

bulk of the archaeological material was Carolingian in date (for which see 4.3.4 below), the excavation revealed traces of a Roman-period predecessor. It appeared to have been a community of farmers and craftsmen which existed from the second century onwards.³⁰ Most interesting was the evidence for bronzeworking: this was a valuable trade whose practitioners must have been highly esteemed,³¹ and a skilled craftsman in Geismar may have served an élite which controlled Büraburg, a nearby hillfort that was also occupied during the Roman period (see 4.3.3 below for the Frankish occupation).

The fact that eighth-century Geismar had survived for five hundred years as a high-status settlement, especially when we consider the comparative impermanence of the wider settled landscape, strengthens the possibility that Hesse saw some degree of cultural continuity between the Roman and Frankish periods. Although we cannot ascertain the nature of this continuity, it may well be that certain of the elements of pagan religion and cult worship in central Hesse that Boniface encountered, and which were in part centred on Geismar in the eighth century, had extremely ancient roots. It will help us appreciate the complexity of the task Boniface set himself when we consider that aspects of cult worship had been tightly woven into the evolving socio-cultural fabric of the Hessian population through a dozen or more generations.

4.3 Hesse c. 600-721: Catalogue of archaeological and toponymic evidence

In order to make clear to readers the evidence upon which my model of the Frankish expansion into Hesse is based, it will be necessary to present it as fully as possible. I shall arrange the archaeological evidence under five sub-headings, classed according to the nature of the data, followed by the toponymical evidence:

zur Archäologie mittelalterlicher Kirchen in Hessen, Band 1, Materialien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte von Hessen 7, ed. K. Sippel (Wiesbaden, 1989), pp. 47-75 (p. 48); idem, *Holzheim bei Fritzlar*, pp. 58-61; Schotten et al, 'Ausgrabungen in jüngkaiserzeitlichen und früh- bis spätmittelalterlichen Siedlungsbereichen der Dorfwüstung Holzheim', pp. 241-242. On Obervorschütz, see Mildenerger, *Römerzeitliche Siedlungen*, p. 109.

³⁰ Thiedmann, *Die Siedlung von Geismar*, esp. pp. 12-15; Best, *Funde der Völkerwanderungs- und Merowingerzeit*; B. Beckmann, 'Fritzlar-Geismar' in *Die Römer in Hessen*, ed. Baatz and Herrmann, pp. 312-315.

³¹ H. Roth, 'Bronzeherstellung und -verarbeitung während der späten römischen Kaiserzeit in Geismar bei Fritzlar, Schwalm-Eder-Kreis, und Altendorf bei Bamberg (Oberfranken)' in *FH* 19/20 (1979/1980), pp. 795-806, here p. 804.

- 1) Furnished inhumations
- 2) Burial mound cemeteries (including both inhumations and cremations)
- 3) Major fortified sites
- 4) Unfortified settlement sites
- 5) Pottery
- 6) Toponymics

Some sites will appear separately under two or more sub-headings, according to the data they have produced; the Christenberg, for instance, is a major fortified site which also produced valuable pottery evidence and has two mound burial cemeteries outside its walls, while Amöneburg is a fortified site that contained furnished burials. The data under consideration have never been catalogued together in this way, either in German or in English. A great deal of evidence has been recovered and published since the volume *Althessen im Frankenreich* was published in 1975,³² while the illustrated catalogue volume of *Hessen im Mittelalter*, published in 1984,³³ is very selective in its coverage of the burial evidence from northern Hesse, and does not discuss the toponymical evidence at all. A comprehensive review of the data produced by archaeologists in Hesse during the last thirty years is hence overdue.

Most important, the full spectrum of archaeological evidence has yet to be drawn together and interpreted within the wider political context of Frankish interests east of the Rhine. The core of my interpretation below will be formed by the evidence for increasing Frankish control of Hesse from the early-seventh to the early-eighth century. Although 'Frankish influence' has long been understood as the most plausible explanation for the great changes in the archaeological record during this period, the precise nature of this influence has yet to be critically discussed and contextualised with respect to the material evidence itself. My attempt here will thus make clear the scope and nature of the evidence on which my interpretation below is based, while being made possible by the manageable volume of the material.

³² Schlesinger, ed., *Althessen im Frankenreich*.

³³ Roth and Wamers, eds., *Hessen im Mittelalter*.

4.3.1 Furnished inhumations

Southern Reihengräberfelder

Figure 10 shows the distribution of Merovingian-period *Reihengräberfelder* ('row-grave cemeteries') along the middle Rhine, lower Main, Wetterau and Lahn valley. As is immediately apparent, there is a strong contrast between the former Roman territory of the south (with the addition of the lower Lahn), where Frankish-period furnished burial cemeteries are densely concentrated, and the Hessian north, where very few furnished burials have been identified. Because of this contrast, I shall deal with the southern burials *en masse* before going on to describe the northern examples individually.

The term *Reihengräberfelder* is used to describe the custom of furnished inhumations arranged in large cemeteries which began in north-east Gaul in the later fourth century, and which spread up the Rhine into Bavaria and down into southern Gaul until it finally fell from use in the late-seventh and early-eighth century. There is a large literature concerning the interpretation of these burials and their furnishings, in which questions of religious, social and ethnic signification are dominant.³⁴

While there are no burial sites east of the Rhine (or indeed anywhere) which can be compared to the 5,000 excavated graves of Krefeld-Gellep,³⁵ much of the

³⁴ The relevant studies of this continental phenomenon include H. Steuer, 'Zur Bewaffnung und Sozialstruktur der Merowingerzeit', *Nachrichten aus Niedersachsens Urgeschichte* 37 (1968), pp. 18-87; R. Christlein, 'Beisitzabstufungen zur Merowingerzeit im Spiegel reicher Grabfunde aus West- und Süddeutschland', *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums* 20 (1973), pp. 147-180; U. Koch, 'Grabräuber als Zeugen frühen Christentums', *Archäologische Nachrichten aus Baden* 11 (1973), pp. 22-26; L. Pauli, 'Heidnisches und Christliches im frühmittelalterlichen Bayern', *Bayerisches Vorgeschichtsblatt* 43 (1978), pp. 147-157; R. Christlein, *Die Alamannen: Archäologie eines lebendigen Volkes* (Stuttgart, 1978); E. James, 'Cemeteries and the Problem of Frankish Settlement in Gaul' in *Names, Words and Graves: Early Medieval Settlement*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (Leeds, 1979), pp. 55-89; H. Härke, 'Intentionale und funktionale Daten: ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Methode der Gräberarchäologie', *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt* 23 (1993), pp. 141-146; A. Schülke, 'Die "Christianisierung" als Forschungsproblem der Südwestdeutschen Gräberarchäologie', *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters* 27/28 (1999/2000), pp. 85-117; G. Halsall, 'Archaeology and the Late Roman Frontier: The So-Called "Föderatengräber" Reconsidered' in *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 287 (Vienna, 2000), pp. 167-180; B. Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (London, 2003).

³⁵ R. Pirling, *Das römisch-fränkische Gräberfeld von Krefeld-Gellep 1964-1965*, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Ser. B10 (Berlin, 1979); idem, *Das römisch-fränkische Gräberfeld von Krefeld-Gellep 1966-1974*, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Ser. B13 (Stuttgart, 1989); idem, *Das römisch-fränkische Gräberfeld von Krefeld-Gellep 1975-1982*, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Ser. B17 (Stuttgart, 1997); idem, *Das römisch-fränkische Gräberfeld von Krefeld-Gellep 1983-1988*, Germanische Denkmäler der

material found in the furnished inhumations of the middle Rhine is similar to that from the lower Rhine region.³⁶ The difference lies principally in quantity, among the most thoroughly excavated sites east of the Rhine being the 526 graves of Griesheim south of the Main (figure 11),³⁷ the 136 graves of Nieder-Erlenbach, just north of Frankfurt,³⁸ and the 120 graves of Klein-Welzheim, east of Frankfurt.³⁹

Reihengräber burials are, almost without exception, supine, and the rows are typically arranged with the heads lying towards the west. The most common grave goods include: pottery vessels; the large cruciform brooches of the fifth and sixth centuries, gradually superseded by circular disc brooches in the seventh; bead necklaces of stone, glass and bone; belt buckles; bone combs, small knives and other utensils; and weaponry such as swords, lances, spears, shields and axes of various sizes.⁴⁰ Most burial sites, particularly those which have been subject to extensive robbing in the past, produce very few surviving grave goods. A typical example is the cemetery at Karben-Okarben in the southern Wetterau, which was heavily robbed in antiquity: 36 graves were identified at this site, of which 13 were excavated and only three revealed furnishings (including two blades and a cruciform brooch).⁴¹ In Hessia there are very few examples of Rhineland-style *Reihengräber* burials, but their very absence is itself significant, as we shall soon see.

Eschwege-Niederhone

In 1969, human and animal bones were uncovered and rapidly excavated in

Völkerwanderungszeit, Ser. B18 (Stuttgart, 2000); idem, *Das römisch-fränkische Gräberfeld von Krefeld-Gellep 1989-2000*, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Ser. B19 (Stuttgart, 2003).

³⁶ On the *Reihengräber* of the lower Rhine, see F. Siegmund, *Merowingerzeit am Niederrhein: Die frühmittelalterlichen Funde aus dem Regierungsbezirk Düsseldorf und dem Kreis Heinsberg*, Rheinische Ausgrabungen 34 (Cologne, 1998); U. Müssemeier et al., *Chronologie der merowingerzeitlichen Grabfunde vom linken Niederrhein bis zur nördlichen Eifel*, Materialien zur Bodendenkmalpflege im Rheinland 15 (Cologne, 2003).

³⁷ 'Fundchronik für die Jahre 1981 bis 1985', *FH* 26.2 (1986), p. 462.

³⁸ 'Fundchronik für die Jahre 1986 bis 1990', *FH* 31.2 (1991), p. 378.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 384; 'Fundchronik für die Jahre 1981 bis 1985', *FH* 26.2 (1986), p. 472; 'Fundchronik des Landesarchäologen von Hessen für die Jahre 1971 und 1972', *FH* 13 (1972), p. 333; E. Wamers, 'Kat. 50: Wadenbindengarnitur' in *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 130-131.

⁴⁰ See Roth and Wamers, eds., *Hessen im Frühmittelalter*, pp. 95-173 for an illustrated catalogue of early medieval grave objects and assemblages from Hesse.

⁴¹ 'Fundchronik für die Jahre 1981 bis 1985', *FH* 26.2 (1986), pp. 466-467; H.-W. Böhme and others, *Karben-Okarben, Wetteraukreis – Grabfunde des 6.-7. Jahrhunderts: Ausgrabungen in einem fränkischen Friedhof in der südlichen Wetterau*, Archäologische Denkmäler in Hessen 56 (Wiesbaden, 1987).

Niederhone, a suburb of Eschwege some three kilometres west of the Werra. Three human burials were identified, each on the same west-east alignment, one of which contained grave goods. Next to the burials was a large pit which contained some bones belonging to the front legs of a horse, but the rest of the skeleton had been lost to extensive ground erosion.⁴² The owner of the domestic garden immediately adjacent to the excavation site said that it was not uncommon to uncover fragmentary human remains when digging, which suggests that the discovered burials were part of a larger cemetery, the extent and nature of which remains unknown.⁴³

The grave goods from burial 1 are illustrated and described in figure 12. The surviving assemblage, despite the loss of any pottery or other goods which may have lain at the feet of the burial, allows it to be dated fairly securely. Gensen compares find 18, part of a two-grooved long saxe (a type of single-edged sword), to Rhineland examples which appear at the end of the seventh century and continue throughout the eighth. Find 17, a short knife, has a relatively straight upper edge which is also typical of the later Merovingian period. The 6.4 centimetre-long bronze needle (no. 8), the bronze pincers (no. 2) and particularly the finely-decorated bone comb and sheath (no. 1) are firmly characteristic of eighth-century burials. Gensen thus dates the furnished burial to around 700 or the early decades of the eighth century.⁴⁴

Fritzlar

Another burial was discovered in 1972 in Fritzlar, the site of Boniface's first monastic foundation in Hessa. It was on a natural terrace overlooking the Eder, situated 550 metres due east of the later Bonifatian monastery (founded in the early 720s).⁴⁵ The southern half of the 1.50 metre by 2.70 metre grave chamber was destroyed before being recognised, but the northern part, containing the feet of a supine, south-north oriented body and a variety of grave goods, was fully excavated over two days, and as much building spoil as possible sifted for other remains (figure 13).⁴⁶

⁴² R. Gensen, 'Ein Adelsgrab aus Eschwege-Niederhone', *FH* 9/10 (1969/70), pp. 92-100 (pp. 92-93).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴⁵ See chapter five below, section 5.2.1.

⁴⁶ R. Gensen, 'Ein Frauengrab des 7. Jahrhunderts aus Fritzlar', *FH* 12 (1972), pp. 35-45 (pp. 34-36); *idem*, 'Die Frühgeschichte des Fritzlarer Raumes', pp. 29-37; E. Wamers, 'Kat. 23: Frauengrab' in *Hessen im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 108-109.

A 5-10 centimetre-thick layer of dark soil marked the edges of the chamber and indicates an original wooden lining, while similar discolouration at the northern end of the chamber suggests the loss of several small pieces of wooden furniture or other apparatus. The grave goods are listed and illustrated in figures 14-15, and demonstrate that the grave was fairly richly furnished. A great many further objects were recovered from the excavation spoil, although much of the skeleton and presumably a proportion of the grave goods were permanently lost.⁴⁷

As with the example from Eschwege-Niederhone, the variety of finds allows the grave to be fairly securely dated (figures 14 and 15). Gensen compares the decorated disc (no. 1) to a close parallel from Merdingen, dated by Fingerlin to the first half of the seventh century.⁴⁸ The disc brooch (no. 3), although only partially preserved, Gensen places in the seventh century, possibly the second half, by reference to Böhner and Koch.⁴⁹ The bronze dress fittings (nos. 4-16), typical of richly-furnished female graves in the Frankish *Reihengräber* region, he dates to the second half of the seventh century. The three lightly decorated *Knickwand*-style pots (nos. 30-32) are also a common part of middle-Rhine *Reihengräber* assemblages. These goods suffice to give a secure date for the burial of around the middle of the seventh century.⁵⁰

Werkel

A single furnished burial was discovered at Werkel, three kilometres north-east of Fritzlar, during building operations in 1958 (figure 16). The burial was a supine, west-east oriented inhumation, and included a long sword and lance placed on the right-hand side of the body, a bronze ring, two iron knives, a needle, a buckle and other unidentified fragments of metal (no published illustration of the finds survives).⁵¹ In the spoil of the construction work were discovered further grave objects, including a

⁴⁷ Gensen, 'Ein Frauengrab', p. 37.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 42, citing G. Fingerlin, *Die alamannischen Gräberfelder von Güttingen und Merdingen in Südbaden*, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Ser. A12 (Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 257 ff., Taf. 74-75.

⁴⁹ Gensen, 'Ein Frauengrab', pp. 42-3, citing K. Böhner, *Die fränkischen Altertümer des Trierer Landes*, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Ser. B1 (Stuttgart, 1958), pp. 106 ff., and R. Koch, *Bodenfunde der Völkerwanderungszeit aus dem Main-Tauber-Gebiet*, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Ser. A8 (Stuttgart, 1967), pp. 47 ff.

⁵⁰ Gensen, 'Ein Frauengrab', p. 43.

⁵¹ Uenze, 'Völkerwanderungszeitliche Gräber', pp. 86-88.

saxe, a silver and bronze buckle and part of a spear point; the appearance of these extra weapons implies that further graves had been destroyed in the immediate vicinity.⁵² None of the surviving grave goods, however, allowed for close dating, and Uenze's comparison of one of the buckles with late-sixth century examples from Trier was qualified by Mildenerger, who argued that all of the goods from Werkel could be dated to any time between the late-sixth and second half of the seventh century.⁵³

Kirchberg

At Kirchberg, a village six kilometres north of Fritzlar, nine graves were discovered underneath the medieval church in 1980. Six of these graves (nos. 1, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13 in figure 17) underlay the foundations of the oldest stone-built church on the site, which is of uncertain date but certainly early medieval. All but one of the burials were west-east oriented, and two of the west-east inhumations, a man and woman of advanced years, lay together within a large 2.20 meter by 3.60 metre burial chamber (burial 9).⁵⁴ A pair of post-holes within the chamber (Göldner and Sippel do not give the precise locations) indicate that it once had a superstructure which must have predated the construction of the stone church on the site.⁵⁵ The assemblage of the adult burial in grave 9, illustrated in part in figure 18, included a pair of stirrups, belt fittings, shears, a bone comb, knife, a fourth-century Roman coin, a golden finger ring and gold pendants. Grave 12 contained the remains of a five-year-old child, along with a knife, bone comb and a brooch. The adult burial in grave 8 included stirrups, a knife, pendant and belt buckle.⁵⁶ Of the remaining burials on the site, all of which were of adults, graves 16 and 180 contained pottery and large numbers of beads, while graves 1 and 224 contained pieces of metalwork (figure 19). Göldner and Sippel give the date of the burials as 'late Merovingian or early Carolingian', i.e. late seventh to early eighth century.⁵⁷

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 91-92.

⁵⁴ K. Sippel, 'Die Ausgrabungen in der Pfarrkirche, auf dem Kirchhof und dem benachbarten Gutshof von Kirchberg (St. Niedenstein, Schwalm-Eder-Kreis) in den Jahren 1979, 1980 und 1984' in *Beiträge zur Archäologie mittelalterlicher Kirchen*, ed. Sippel, pp. 85-191; H. Göldner and K. Sippel, 'Spätmerowingische Gräber unter der Kirche von Niedenstein-Kirchberg, Schwalm-Eder-Kreis', *Archäologische Korrespondenzblatt* 11 (1981), pp. 65-77.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 68-71.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 72-74.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

Amöneburg

According to Willibald, Amöneburg (see plate 5) was visited by Boniface immediately prior to his entering Hessa in 721, and was the location of his first chapel (*cella*) foundation in 721.⁵⁸ In 1957 three stone-lined inhumations were discovered during building work within the circuit of Amöneburg's medieval town wall (see figure 20). Each burial was supine and west-east oriented, with burial 3 partially overlaying burial 2. The good condition of the skeletons allowed for their detailed analysis by Manfred Kunter.⁵⁹

Burial 1 contained the skeleton of a 50- to 60-year-old man who bore multiple unhealed cuts to his jaw, face and head, seemingly the result of a clumsy attempt to sever his head while he was lying prone. He had serious unhealed wounds to the left arm that were consistent with a gesture of self-defence against an armed aggressor, while his right arm and left leg were also badly damaged. In the opinion of Kunter, 'the victim, incapable of combat and very likely unarmed, was brutally slaughtered and mutilated.'⁶⁰ The grave contained a long saxe placed at the left hip, an iron buckle at the midriff, and a shield boss rested on the lower legs. Uenze compared the form of the bronze shield boss to an example from Württemberg, which is securely dated by a coin to the second half of the seventh century,⁶¹ while Mildenerger suggested that the long saxe should bring the date of burial towards the end of the seventh century,⁶² and Sippel dates the same saxe to 700-750 and the buckles of grave 3 to 710/20-750.⁶³

Burial 2 included no goods, but the skeleton of the 70-year-old man showed similar signs of violent death. It had an old, healed cut on the inner-left forearm, and there were several unhealed wounds on the right arm which, while probably not fatal themselves, must have been followed shortly by the man's death.⁶⁴

Burial 3 contained the skeleton of a man aged 50-55 who had suffered a serious wound to the neck and jaw (figure 46), and had had part of his left arm

⁵⁸ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, l. 4.

⁵⁹ M. Kunter, 'Menschliche Überreste aus frühmittelalterlichen Grabfunden in Nordhessen (6.-9. Jh)' in *Die Frühmittelalterlichen Grabfunde*, ed. Sippel, pp. 235-277 (pp. 256-257).

⁶⁰ *Das kampunfähige, wohl unbewaffnete Opfer wurde... brutal niedergemetzelt und verstümmelt.* Ibid., pp. 256-257.

⁶¹ Uenze, 'Völkerwanderungszeitliche Gräber', pp. 85-86.

⁶² Ibid, pp. 90-91.

⁶³ Sippel, *Die Frühmittelalterlichen Grabfunde*, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁴ Kunter, 'Menschliche Überreste', p. 257.

severed. The similarity of these wounds to those of the other two skeletons, along with the fact that they were buried in close proximity, led Kunter to suggest that all three men had died in the same encounter.⁶⁵ The grave furnishings included two iron buckles at the waist, a spur on the left foot, and two other fragments of iron – one rectangular piece lying on the left hip, and another smaller piece lying 15 centimetres to the side of the lower left leg.⁶⁶

Goddelsheim

House construction at Goddelsheim in 1934 revealed a large cemetery containing cremations from the pre-Roman and early-Roman periods, and inhumations from the Frankish period. Two supine, furnished inhumations could be dated to the sixth and seventh centuries. Each resembled the *Reihengräber* of the middle Rhine with regard to grave goods, but their north-south alignment, typical of contemporary inhumations in Saxony (where cremation was by far the dominant rite), contrasted with the predominantly west-east orientation of Rhineland burials as well as the orientation of the burials at Eschwege-Niederhone, Werkel and Amöneburg. Ceramics from the graves bore a closer resemblance to Saxon pottery than Frankish in their form and decoration, also suggesting links to the north.⁶⁷

4.3.2 Mound burials

There are three, possibly four, early medieval burial mound sites in northern Hesse (see figure 10). Due to the high visibility of these sites, they were the frequent targets of antiquarian curiosity from the nineteenth century onwards, and have consequently suffered from high levels of disturbance, poor recording and limited publication. There are no survey plans published from any of the sites which detail the extent and distribution of the mounds.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Uenze, 'Völkerwanderungszeitliche Gräber', Abb. 2 and 3. No illustrations of these finds, now in the possession of the *Universitätsmuseum* of Marburg, have yet been published.

⁶⁷ H. J. Hundt, 'Neue Funde aus dem fränkischen Reihengräberfeld in Goddelsheim', *Hessenland* 48 (1937), pp. 307-315; Mildenerger, 'Nordhessen', pp. 4-5; Böhme, 'Franken oder Sachsen?', pp. 68-71; K. Sippel, 'Thüringische Grabfunde des frühen Mittelalters in Osthessen: Archäologische Quellen zur Westausdehnung thüringischer Besiedlung in karolingischer Zeit' in *Aspekte thüringisch-hessischer Geschichte*, ed. M. Gockel (Marburg, 1992), pp. 29-48 (p. 33). Some finds from the excavations are displayed in the Heimatmuseum in Korbach.

Gießen

Six mounds in the wooded hills overlooking Gießen were excavated between 1898 and 1909. In 1898 four mounds were excavated, two of which were found to contain La Tène period finds (fifth to first centuries B.C.), and two Merovingian (fifth to seventh centuries A.D.).⁶⁸ In 1907 a further mound, some 20 to 30 metres distant, was excavated, revealing four cremation burials placed within wheel-turned pots normally associated with domestic, rather than funerary, archaeological contexts.⁶⁹ A third campaign in 1909 opened a sixth mound, six to seven metres in diameter, which contained a single supine, west-east oriented burial beneath an elaborate stone packing.⁷⁰ The burial exposed in 1909 was richly furnished, although many of the finds are now lost. They included glass beads, dress fittings and strap-ends, a decorated disc similar to the example from Fritzlar (see no. 1 in figure 14) and a fragmentary ring. These goods, typical of Frankish *Reihengräber*, were complemented by four unusual pottery vessels.⁷¹ The largest of these vessels is illustrated in figure 21. At the upper edge of the cylinder and around its midpoint ran two horizontal strips, each decorated with *Möwenstempeln* ('gull-stamps'), a type of decoration frequently found on seventh-century middle-Rhine ceramic vessels (compare to nos. 31 and 32 in figure 15).

Germershausen

In 1864, three of nine mounds in the woodland near Germershausen were opened,

⁶⁸ G. Gundermann, 'Ausgrabungsbericht', *Mitteilungen des oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins*, NF, 7 (1899), pp. 207-224; O. Kunkel, *Oberhessens vorgeschichtliche Altertümer* (Marburg: Elwert, 1926), p. 211.

⁶⁹ K. Kramer, 'Gießen B: Frühfränkische Gräber auf dem Exerzierplatz', *Römisch-Germanisches Korrespondenzblatt* 1 (1908), pp. 17-19; idem, 'Bericht des Konservators', *Mitteilungen des Oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins, neue Folge* 16 (1908), pp. 93-101; H. Zeiß, 'Hessische Brandbestattungen der jüngeren Merowingerzeit', *Germania* 18 (1934), pp. 279-284; H. Ament, 'Merowingische Grabhügel' in *Althessen im Frankenreich*, ed. Schlesinger, pp. 63-93 (p. 74); K. Sippel, 'Kat. 127: Hügelgrab mit Brandbestattungen' in *Hessen im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, p. 191.

⁷⁰ K. Kramer, 'Bericht des Konservators', *Mitteilungen des Oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins, Neue Folge* 18 (1910), pp. 137-145; idem, 'Gießen: Fränkisches Grab auf dem Exerzierplatz', *Römisch-Germanisches Korrespondenzblatt* 3 (1910), pp. 4-6; idem, 'Fränkische Funde aus dem Oberhessischen Museum und den Gailischen Sammlungen zu Gießen', *Volk und Scholle* 3 (1925), pp. 202-203; K. Sippel, 'Kat. 126: Hügelgrab mit Körperbestattung' in *Hessen im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, p. 190.

⁷¹ K. Sippel, 'Kat. 24. Frauengrab unter einem Hügel' in *Hessen im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, p. 109.

followed in 1877 by two more. The mounds were fairly regular in size, approximately 1.5 metres high and 60 paces in circumference.⁷² The first three mounds contained the remains of cremations, one of which also contained a fragment of a silver brooch; of the two final mounds, both also cremations, one contained a long saxe and arrowheads, the other a small spearhead.⁷³

Amöneburg

The mound cemetery which lies two kilometres east of Amöneburg, site of Boniface's first chapel foundation as mentioned above, was excavated at least four times in the nineteenth century, in 1920 and again in 1968. The mounds varied greatly in size, between 0.3 and 1.3 metres in height, and despite the numerous investigations revealed no dateable grave goods.⁷⁴ This may explain why Ament did not mention them in his survey of Merovingian grave mounds,⁷⁵ and it is difficult to be as confident as Sippel that the very lack of furnishings dates the mounds to the late-seventh or early-eighth century, when grave goods began to disappear from Rhineland burials.⁷⁶ This may indeed be the case, especially considering the location of the site close to Amöneburg and the other early medieval burial mounds of the Lahn valley, but without concrete dating evidence we must remain extremely cautious. Inhumation was also the dominant form of mound burial in the region during the Bronze Age,⁷⁷ and the Amöneburg mounds are therefore as likely to be part of this tradition.

Christenberg

The largest collection of mound burials is at the Christenberg, which lies 17 kilometres north of Marburg and was the site of a major eighth-century Frankish fortification not directly connected in the surviving historical sources to the mission of

⁷² Ament, 'Merovingische Grabhügel', p. 73.

⁷³ Ibid.; E. Pinder, *Bericht über die heidnischen Altertümer der ehemals kurhessischen Provinzen Fulda, Oberhessen*, Zeitschrift des Vereins für hessischen Geschichte und Landeskunde, Supp. 6 (Kassel, 1878).

⁷⁴ Sippel, *Die Frühmittelalterliche Grabfunde*, pp. 18-25.

⁷⁵ Ament, 'Merovingische Grabhügel'.

⁷⁶ Sippel, *Die Frühmittelalterliche Grabfunde*, pp. 18-25.

⁷⁷ See W. Kubach, 'Karte 5b: Hügelgräberbronzezeit' in *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen*, ed. Uhlhorn and others, p. 23.

Boniface, although it did lie within his mission territory.⁷⁸ There are two separate areas of mounds, each along crests of high ground about 350 metres removed from the Frankish fortification. The high ground is marked on figure 22, although there is no published survey plan of the mounds themselves. To the south-east are ten mounds on a rise known as the Lichten Heide, while along the Klutzkopf ridge to the north-west are at least 37. As can be seen on plate 12, the area is now covered in dense woodland.

Between 1964 and 1969 all of the Lichten Heide and seven of the Klutzkopf mounds were excavated.⁷⁹ All of the mounds, where they survived to a sufficient degree, were encircled by a shallow ditch.⁸⁰ Although no skeletal material survived in the sandy natural soil of the Lichten Heide, two of the mounds covered small (1.20 x 0.80 metres) east-west grave cuts, the size of which indicates that they probably contained children. One of these graves also contained a large throwing axe. Of the remaining Lichten Heide mounds, four contained grave assemblages, respectively: a firesteel and iron knife; an iron knife, brooch and two temple rings; an iron brooch and buckle; three buckles.

In the chalky soil of the Klutzkopf the skeletons were preserved to a much higher degree, and were all aligned east-west. Three of the mounds contained single burials, two contained double burials, and another two contained triple burials. One single burial included a complete assemblage of bead necklace, buckle, knife, further iron objects and the remains of a brooch of the second half of the seventh century. Goods from the other graves, though largely robbed in antiquity, included two buckles.⁸¹ Gensen's dating of the two Christenberg mound cemeteries to the late-seventh century rests principally on the three brooches described above, and none of the other recovered grave goods appear to contradict this.

⁷⁸ See chapter five below, section 5.3.1.

⁷⁹ K. Sippel, 'Kat. 129: Hügelgräber mit Körperbestattungen' in *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, p. 193; Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburger Becken', pp. 140-143; R. Gensen, 'Der Christenberg bei Münchhausen und seine Bedeutung', *HJL* 18 (1968), pp. 14-26 (pp. 21-22).

⁸⁰ Sippel, 'Kat. 129', p. 193.

⁸¹ Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburger Becken', pp. 140-143; idem, 'Der Christenberg bei Münchhausen', p. 22.

4.3.3 Major fortified sites

The major fortified sites of Hesse (see figure 26) are the only part of its archaeological record to have been presented to an English-speaking audience, by Walter Schlesinger in 1976 and more recently by David Parsons.⁸² I shall therefore keep the following survey as concise as is necessary for my present aims, that is to present unfamiliar evidence to a new audience and to revise the received picture of the effects of Frankish expansion into Hesse, without repeating what Schlesinger and Parsons have already achieved. The pottery series constructed following the excavations of the Christenberg and Büraburg, since they also pertain to the broader settlement patterns of the region, will be discussed separately below.

Christenberg

The fortification on the Christenberg hill, overlooking the *Weinstraße* on the southwestern edge of Hesse, is known as the Kesterburg (first attested in a document of 1225), where *Kester* is thought to derive from Latin *castrum*, 'fortress'.⁸³ The Christenberg is a rocky mount surrounded by steep slopes to the north, south and west, and a shallower slope to the east (see plate 13 and figures 22 and 23). The first Frankish-period fortification, constructed c. 700, consisted of a wall of stone and mortar about 2 metres thick. Gensen argues that this early fortification would have been vulnerable if attacked from the east, since the eastern wall had no ditch or rampart to protect it.⁸⁴ This wall was demolished fairly early in the life of the fort, probably during the early eighth century, and was replaced by a larger wall further east which followed the line of the pre-existing Celtic ditches and ramparts, expanding the enclosed area to 4 hectares. During the second half of the eighth century, the eastern fortifications, including the north and south gatehouses, were reconstructed at least twice.⁸⁵

Although Gensen's excavations focused on the curtain walls, internal excavations also revealed the remains of stone and wooden post-constructed

⁸² Schlesinger, 'Early Medieval Fortifications in Hesse'; Parsons, 'Sites and Monuments of the Anglo-Saxon Mission'; idem, 'Some Churches of the Anglo-Saxon Missionaries'.

⁸³ Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburger Becken', p. 127; see also Gensen, 'Der Christenberg bei Münchhausen', pp. 14-26.

⁸⁴ R. Gensen, 'Kat. 167: Kesterburg auf dem Christenberg', p. 257.

⁸⁵ Schlesinger, 'Early Medieval Fortifications,' pp. 246-247.

buildings, and small finds including ceramics, iron worktools, harness fittings and weights for spinning and weaving (see figure 24).⁸⁶ These finds suggest dense and long-term occupation by a community with varied crafts and occupations. According to the pottery series constructed by Gensen following his excavations, the Christenberg remained occupied from the end of the seventh century until the early ninth century.⁸⁷

Gensen's chronology has been revised in recent years following a re-examination of metal finds from the site and an improved understanding of the early-medieval ceramics of northern Hesse, and the Christenberg now appears to have remained in use until at least the tenth century, possibly the early eleventh. A piece of wood recovered from a well within the fortress was subjected to dendrochronological (tree-ring dating) analysis and demonstrated that the well was still in use in 753/54, the year of Boniface's death.⁸⁸ The only building which survived the fortification's eventual abandonment was a church dedicated to St Martin at the highest point of the Christenberg. The foundations of the original eighth-century church may underlie the extant eleventh- to sixteenth-century church building, but they have never been excavated.

Büraburg

Büraburg, at the junction of several communication routes on a tongue of the Kellerwald hills overlooking the Fritzlar plain and Eder valley (see plates 14 and 15), is now deserted but for the church of St Brigid, the remnant of Boniface's short-lived bishopric.⁸⁹ Although pottery evidence from Norbert Wand's excavations of 1967-73 suggests that it may have been occupied before the arrival of the Franks, only at the end of the seventh century was it massively refortified: a 1.5 metre thick wall was constructed around an area of eight hectares, strengthened with encircling ditches and three heavily defended gates to the north-west, south and south-east (figure 25).⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 258.

⁸⁷ Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburger Becken,' p. 129.

⁸⁸ A. Thiedmann, 'Neue Forschungen zum Christenberg bei Münchhausen', *Hessen Archäologie* 1 (2001), pp. 126-128 (pp. 127-128); Gensen, 'Ein Keramikkomplex mit dem Schlussdatum 753'.

⁸⁹ See chapter five below, sections 5.4.1-2.

⁹⁰ Wand, *Die Büraburg bei Fritzlar*; idem, 'Die Büraburg und das Fritzlar-Waberner Becken'. The site was also excavated on a smaller scale by Vonderau: J. Vonderau, *Die Ausgrabungen am Büraburg bei Fritzlar 1926/31: Die Freigelegten fränkischen Festungsanlagen sowie die Grundlinien der ältesten*

Büraburg was the largest man-made construction that Hesse had seen for at least seven hundred years, the walls alone requiring an estimated 23,000 tonnes of local stone and mortar,⁹¹ and the degree of organisation and manpower required for such an undertaking cannot be overemphasised. The entire encircling wall was rebuilt during the eighth century, following the same course but set back slightly from its original position (hence the double wall foundations visible on figure 25). In total, the 8% of the settlement investigated revealed traces of 60 stone and timber buildings (not all contemporaneous), which suggests considerable density and scale of occupation.⁹²

Together with a four hectare settlement area revealed by fieldwalking the plateau outside the eastern defences, the permanent population of Büraburg before its desertion c. 850 can be reckoned in the hundreds.⁹³ Like the Christenberg, Büraburg revealed numerous spurs, harness fittings and weapon fragments, very likely the traces of a mounted garrison, along with agricultural and domestic objects.⁹⁴ Again like the Christenberg, only the site's church, situated at the highest point of the hill, escaped abandonment.

Amöneburg

The modern town of Amöneburg stands atop a 150-metre-high hill in the middle of the lower Ohm basin (see plate 5). I have already mentioned its significance as the first place visited by Boniface upon his arrival at the southern edge of Hesse, and it is apparent from Willibald's account that it was the principal settlement site of the regional élite.⁹⁵ As is clear in plate 5, Amöneburg is a naturally defensible site which offers dominating views over the surrounding plain. Its centrality in a densely settled landscape has ensured its continued occupation since the early medieval period. This means, however, that any early medieval fortifications probably underlie the later medieval town walls, and there has been no chance for excavations to ascertain their

Kirchenbauten am ersten hessischen Bischofsitz inmitten des Kastells, Veröffentlichungen der Fuldaer Geschichtsverein 22 (Fulda, 1934).

⁹¹ Wand, 'Die Büraburg und das Fritzlar-Waberner Becken', pp. 184-189.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁹³ The Büraburg has a mid-ninth century date of abandonment according to Wand's pottery series, which may, like Gensen's Christenberg series, require careful revision in light of more recent ceramic research in northern Hesse. See Thiedmann, 'Neue Forschungen', pp. 127-128.

⁹⁴ Wand, 'Die Büraburg und das Fritzlar-Waberner Becken', p. 200.

⁹⁵ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, l. 4. See sections 4.4.3 and 7.3.3 below.

nature and extent. It is highly unlikely, however, that a site of such importance as Amöneburg was not furnished with fortifications similar to those of Büraburg and the Christenberg.⁹⁶

Höfe bei Dreihausen

Ten kilometres south-west of Amöneburg, facing it across the southern Ohm basin, is the fortified hill of Höfe bei Dreihausen (figure 27). The sub-rectangular fort was encircled and divided in two by walls up to 2 metres thick, and was positioned with steep slopes to the north and east, while ditches ran before the walls to the west and south. The site was surveyed in 1972, and investigated via a series of test pits in 1974 (marked on figure 27). No evidence of occupation was found in the lower fort, but the upper fort appears to have been densely occupied. Especially significant are two large stone buildings, one rectangular and one circular; the latter, whose excavation revealed an apse to the north-east, an *in situ* altar block and a fragment of green marble of the type used in the floor of Charlemagne's circular Palatine Chapel at Aachen, was certainly a church of considerable wealth.⁹⁷

Based on the rich ceramic evidence, Gensen placed the occupation of Höfe bei Dreihausen in the eighth and ninth centuries, with a possible beginning in the first half of the eighth,⁹⁸ although Treude has more recently favoured a date of occupation at the end of the eighth century.⁹⁹ There remains a slim possibility that the fort was occupied in the time of Boniface's mission, although the circular church, if it was modelled on the early-ninth century chapel at Aachen, as seems likely,¹⁰⁰ must also date from the ninth century.

Eresburg

Eresburg, modern Marsberg, was a fortified settlement upon a natural promontory in

⁹⁶ R. Gensen, 'Kat. 165: Amöneburg' in *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 252-253; idem, 'Beobachtungen zur Lage und Umgebung des Oppidums Amöneburg, Kr. Marburg', *FH*, Beiheft 1 (Festschrift W. Dehn) (1969), pp. 20-29.

⁹⁷ R. Gensen, 'Kat. 164: Ringwall Höfe bei Dreihausen' in *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 249-252; idem, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburger Becken', pp. 157-162.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁹⁹ Treude, 'Die Höfe bei Dreihausen'.

¹⁰⁰ Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburger Becken', p. 162.

the upper Diemel valley. Its elevation 130 metres above the valley bottom gave the site a commanding view of both the river and the route of the *Weinstraße*, which crossed the Diemel at Eresburg. Like Amöneburg, continued occupation of the hilltop into modern times means that no visible trace of the early medieval settlement remains, and there have never been any excavations undertaken beneath the later medieval fortifications. Historians ascertain its importance from a reference in the *Annales Regni Francorum* to its destruction by Charlemagne in 772, at which time it was a Saxon fort and close to the major Saxon shrine of the *Irmisul* (see chapter five below).¹⁰¹ Eresburg's position at a strategic point of the *Weinstraße* and its political importance in 772 suggest that it may have been occupied for a long time previously, and was possibly a site of some significance at the beginning of Boniface's mission, but without empirical evidence this must remain hypothetical.

Smaller fortified sites

The five sites so far discussed were the major eighth-century fortifications within Hesse or close to its borders, but, as is clear from figure 26, these formed only part of a wider distribution of fortified sites north of the Main. From 1965 the Marburg archaeologist Willi Görich studied these smaller fortifications, and argued that many had been built as defended waypoints along the pre-existing *Weinstraße* during the eighth-century Frankish campaigns against the Saxons.¹⁰² During the time of Charles Martel and his successors, according to Görich, a series of strongholds appeared along this route, each separated by one day's journey of about 25-30 kilometres.

These strongholds, few of which have been excavated, are distinguished by their triangular *Schildförmig* ('shield-form') plan, are set on a hill or natural promontory and enclosed by earthworks and stone walls. Because of the lack of extensive excavation, it is difficult to date many of the smaller sites. Therefore, although their concentration along the *Weinstraße* does suggest that many of them were constructed according to a pre-devised scheme of securing long-distance communications to the north, how long this process took, and whether it was the

¹⁰¹ *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁰² Görich, 'Rast-Orte an alter Straße?', pp. 490-491.

result of one period of consolidation or several, are questions which have not yet been answered.¹⁰³

The Schiffenberg is one fortified site on the *Weinstraße* which has been partially excavated (figure 28). It lies on a west-facing promontory five kilometres south-east of Gießen with an area of about 175 x 125 metres, and has revealed the foundations of fortifications (area B on plan) and internal stone structures (area A on plan) dated by pottery evidence to 680-730.¹⁰⁴ Görich, however, believed that most of the sites along the *Weinstraße* route were later in date – his excavation of the Gronauer Altes Schloß shield-form fortification, some 20 kilometres north up the Lahn from Gießen (figure 29), revealed pottery from the mid-eighth to the early-ninth century (when many fortified hills in Hesse were finally abandoned) and very little earlier. This led him to suppose that it was fortified in the time of Charlemagne's early Saxon wars c. 772-85, perhaps replacing an earlier smaller-scale occupation of about 720.¹⁰⁵ Backhaus similarly argued that the systematic fortification of the *Weinstraße* most likely took place in the second half of the eighth century in order to secure a route for the annual Frankish invasions of Saxon territory, but was built upon foundations which dated back to the early eighth century.¹⁰⁶ More extensive excavations, however, are required before the precise chronology of the *Weinstraße* fortifications can be determined.

Two other Frankish-period fortified sites worth mentioning for their regional significance are Fulda and Grasburg, both of which are on the route of the *Orteswehc*, the principal long-distance route from the middle Rhine to Thuringia. The future site of Boniface's monastery at an important crossing point of the river Fulda was already fortified in the seventh century. Excavations by Vonderau beneath the plaza of the modern cathedral (the dotted lines signified by A on figure 30) revealed a sub-rectangular defensive wall and ditch (B) and a group of three stone-built structures

¹⁰³ Schwind, 'Zur Geschichte des heute hessischen Raumes', pp. 39-40.

¹⁰⁴ M. Blechschmidt and F.-R. Herrmann, 'Vorbericht über die Ausgrabungen auf dem Schiffenberg bei Gießen 1973 bis 1976', *FH* 15 (1975), pp. 79-86 (p. 86); F.-R. Herrmann, 'Kat. 170: Schiffenberg bei Gießen' in *Hessen im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 260-261.

¹⁰⁵ Görich, 'Rast-Orte an alter Straße?', pp. 490-492; idem, 'Das Gronauer "Alte Schloß" über der Salzböde', *HJL* 1 (1951), pp. 25-41 (p. 41); F.-R. Herrmann, 'Kat. 172: Gronauer Altes Schloß' in *Hessen im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, p. 262; W. Bauer, 'Die Keramik des Gronauer "Alten Schloßes" über die Salzböde', *FH* 12 (1972), pp. 1-13 (pp. 12-13).

¹⁰⁶ F. Backhaus, 'Sachsen- und Wendenfeldzüge der frühen Karolinger' in *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen*, ed. Uhlhorn and others, pp. 38-40 (pp. 38-39).

(C) in the south-east corner of the site.¹⁰⁷ In 743, when the site was granted to Boniface by Charles Martel in order to found a monastery, it was called *Eihloha*, and seems to have been at the centre of a royal estate.¹⁰⁸ The structural and ceramic archaeological evidence, however, demonstrates that the earlier stone buildings had been destroyed by fire c. 700, in the opinion of Vonderau and Hahn during an attack by Saxons, and never reoccupied.¹⁰⁹ It therefore appears likely that the site had lain virtually abandoned for forty years before Boniface established his monastery there.

Thirty kilometres north-east of Fulda, overlooking the *Orteswehc* from a distance of three kilometres, is the fortification of Grasburg (figure 31). Grasburg was defended by steep slopes on three sides, falling 100 metres to the plain below, while on the western side a 300 metre-long earth and stone wall enclosed an area of about 2 hectares from the rest of the hill. Excavation of the wall revealed Carolingian-era pottery, dating the occupation of the site to the eighth century, but without further excavation the nature and scale of the occupation remains uncertain.¹¹⁰ Vonderau suggested that it was a Saxon fortification,¹¹¹ but it may equally be a Frankish foundation intended to guard the route from Mainz and Frankfurt to Thuringia.

4.3.4 Unfortified settlements

Geismar

Geismar is on the opposite shore of the Eder to the Büraburg. The village shifted north after the early medieval period, Schlesinger suggests following its destruction by Saxons in 774,¹¹² leaving its original core preserved beneath pastureland. It was

¹⁰⁷ H. Hahn, 'Kat. 211.1: Fulda Domplatz-Bereich' in *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 300-307 (pp. 300-304); idem, *Die Ausgrabungen am Fuldaer Domplatz im Jahre 1953* (Fulda, 1954); J. Vonderau, 'Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen am Dome zu Fulda', *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter* 12 (1913), pp. 129-144; idem, *Die Ausgrabungen am Dome zu Fulda in den Jahren 1908-1913* (Fulda, 1919); idem, *Die Ausgrabungen am Dome zu Fulda in den Jahren 1919-1924* (Fulda, 1924).

¹⁰⁸ Eigil gives an invaluable and lengthy account of the foundation of Fulda in the *Vita Sturmi*, c. 8-13, pp. 369-371. See also H. Beumann, 'Eigils Vita Sturmi und die Anfänge der Klöster Hersfeld und Fulda', *HJL* 2 (1952), pp. 1-15.

¹⁰⁹ Hahn, 'Kat. 211.1: Fulda Domplatz-Bereich', p. 304.

¹¹⁰ K. Sippel, 'Die Grasburg bei Mansbach und benachbarte Hügelgräber. Untersuchungen an zwei im ausgehenden 8. Jahrhundert genannten Plätzen im Kreis Hersfeld-Rotenburg', *FH* 17/18 (1977/78), pp. 266-287.

¹¹¹ J. Vonderau, *Denkmäler aus vor- und frühgeschichtliche Zeit im Fuldaer Lande*, Veröffentlichungen des Fuldaer Geschichtsvereins 21 (Fulda, 1931), p. 66.

¹¹² Schlesinger, 'Early Medieval Fortifications in Hesse', p. 244.

known since at least 1950 that the site contained Roman-period material, but the planned construction of a bypass gave the opportunity to conduct large-scale excavations between 1973 and 1980. Despite the lack of full publication, the results of the excavation have established Geismar as an important archaeological site of Roman-period and early medieval Germany.¹¹³ Fieldwalking revealed a total settlement area of approximately 450 x 200 metres, only the eastern part of which was excavated.

Judging from the excavated ceramics, Geismar appears to have been founded around the fifth century B.C., and it grew through the Roman period, lessening in size somewhat after the fourth century until the seventh.¹¹⁴ The late seventh century, as well as witnessing the appearance of several forms of wheel-turned wares,¹¹⁵ saw a new phase of settlement which shows clear evidence of central planning, with houses arranged in east-west rows adjoining a north-south central street. Thiedmann relates this new phase to the Frankish fortification of the Büraburg, and thus interprets Geismar as an already important settlement which became a key point in the Frankish re-organisation of the local area.¹¹⁶

Holzheim

At the deserted settlement of Holzheim, two kilometres south-east of Büraburg, excavation revealed the sunken floors and postholes of over fifty buildings dating from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries (figure 32), after which time the site appears to have been abandoned.¹¹⁷ The earliest buildings, which ceramic evidence suggests date from the late seventh century, seemed to follow a general north-south orientation. This suggests that, like Geismar, Holzheim was laid out according to a

¹¹³ Best's 1990 publication *Funde der Völkerwanderungs- und Merowingerzeit* was based on his 1984 doctoral dissertation at Cologne, and deals principally with the small finds of the early medieval settlement. Robert Heiner, *Studien an Siedlungskeramik*, was concerned with the pre-Roman and Roman-period ceramics, while Thiedmann's *Die Siedlung von Geismar bei Fritzlar* is an illustrated booklet which gives an overview of the site. A further summary of the excavation (with site location plan, although no plan of the excavated area itself) is R. Gensen, 'Kat. 158: Frühmittelalterliche Siedlung bei Geismar' in *Hessen im Mittelalter*, ed. Roth and Wamers, pp. 240-241.

¹¹⁴ Thiedmann, *Die Siedlung von Geismar bei Fritzlar*, pp. 12-13.

¹¹⁵ Best, *Funde der Völkerwanderungs- und Merowingerzeit*, p. 99 and Abb. 43.

¹¹⁶ Thiedmann, *Die Siedlung von Geismar bei Fritzlar*, pp. 18-19.

¹¹⁷ Schotten et al., 'Ausgrabungen in jünger-kaiserzeitlichen und früh- bis spätmittelalterlichen Siedlungsbereichen', pp. 215-216.

fresh plan c. 700, replacing an earlier, smaller settlement.¹¹⁸ The name Holzheim ('*Holz*' meaning 'wood,' first attested in 1040 as 'Holcheim'), according to Schotten et al., may describe the settlement's original economic relationship with Büraburg.¹¹⁹

Lampertshausen

A small rescue excavation in 1979 allowed part of the deserted medieval settlement of Lampertshausen, six kilometres west of Amöneburg, to be investigated. The area uncovered was far smaller than the excavated areas of Geismar and Holzheim, but revealed numerous pits, one sunken-floor building, and ceramics that appeared to date the foundation of the settlement to the end of the eighth century.¹²⁰ Although the area excavated was far smaller than at the settlements of Geismar and Holzheim, it produced valuable ceramic material which could be used for purposes of comparison with the wider settled landscape.

4.3.5 Pottery

The chronology of the mid-seventh to early-eighth century Frankish expansion into Hesse which will form the backbone of the interpretation below depends almost entirely on the pottery series constructed for northern Hesse, and it is therefore crucial to reach a sound understanding of the available material record. Since early medieval burials, the major source of datable objects for the period in southern Hesse, are so rare in the north, it was not until large-scale professional settlement excavations were undertaken from the mid-1960s onwards that a reliable pottery series for the region could be constructed. This was principally achieved through Gensen's excavation of the Christenberg, which began in 1964. Excavations of the Büraburg by Wand followed, and then of Geismar, also by Gensen, in the late 1970s.¹²¹ This research,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 255-256.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 218. See also Wand, *Holzheim bei Fritzlar*; idem, 'Siedlungsarchäologische Untersuchungen im mittelalterlichen Dorf Holzheim bei Fritzlar', *Zeitschrift geschichtlicher Politik und ihre Didaktik* 14 (1986), pp. 31-51.

¹²⁰ M. L. Leidorf, 'Eine Notgrabung in der frühmittelalterlichen Wüstung Lampertshausen bei Ebsdorfergrund-Wittelsberg, Kr. Marburg-Biedenkopf', *FH* 29/30 (1989/1990), pp. 331-342.

¹²¹ Werner Best performed the post-excavation analysis of the Geismar ceramic material: Best, *Funde der Völkerwanderungs- und Merovingerzeit*. See pp. 123-127 for Best's harsh criticism of Wand's methodology in recording and publishing his Büraburg excavations; despite some methodological differences, however, their chronologies both agreed with that of Gensen.

supported by a host of smaller excavations and surveys, has given archaeologists a reliable pottery series for Hesse from the late seventh century onwards, which Gensen and his successors were able to assign absolute dates by comparison with Rhineland material.¹²²

Pottery is a crucial form of data, although it has its problems. The largest assemblages of pottery come from these intensively excavated settlement sites, but when looking at a wide area the vast majority of individual finds are by private individuals, and are often discarded or given to museums without detailed recording.¹²³ Together with the tendency for certain areas to be investigated more thoroughly than others, which biases distribution maps, these factors can make the task of interpreting broader regional trends a difficult one indeed.¹²⁴

Pottery in Hesse during the early medieval period, as in the Roman period, can be divided into two types: handmade and wheel-turned. The handmade pottery is virtually indistinguishable from its Roman-period counterpart. Wheel-turned wares, on the other hand, examples of which appear as far north as Nieder-Wellmar near Kassel,¹²⁵ have long been regarded by Hessian archaeologists as proof of contact with the Frankish Empire from the sixth century onwards, since they can be likened to wares produced in the Frankish heartlands around the middle Rhine and lower Main.¹²⁶ Although the absolute chronology for pre-eighth century Hessian ware is still uncertain due to the lack of examples of earlier wheel-turned wares, and since it is very rarely possible to assign a window of less than half a century to any identified form of wheel-turned ware, Stephan dates their earliest appearance to the late-sixth or early-seventh century.¹²⁷

Not until the late-seventh century do wheel-turned wares become plentiful in northern Hesse, and the contexts in which they are found easier to date. The large

¹²² There is no comprehensive study of ceramics across the whole of Hesse, but for a recent summary of research to date see C. Meiborg, 'Das Kanonissenstift in Wetter, Kr. Marburg-Biedenkopf: Die Ausgrabungen im ehemaligen Stiftsgelände auf dem Klosterberg', *FH* 39/40 (1999/2000), pp. 71-248 (pp. 148-154).

¹²³ The regular *Fundchronik* of the journal *Fundeberichte aus Hessen*, which recorded accidental or occasional finds and preliminary excavations throughout the province of Hesse, tended to record pottery finds simply as 'Migration Period', 'Merovingian', etc., without detailed description or illustration.

¹²⁴ For Hesse, the two most recent publications to tackle this topic are R. Haarberg, 'Die mittelalterliche Keramik in Niederhessen', *HJL* 23 (1973), pp. 1-61, and H.-G. Stephan, 'Mittelalterliche Töpferei in Niederhessen', *FH* 32/33 (1992/3), pp. 207-279.

¹²⁵ W. Niemeyer, 'Ein Bemerkenswerter merowingischer Fund aus Niedervellmar bei Kassel', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für hessische Geschichte und Landeskunde* 68 (1957), pp. 209-212.

¹²⁶ Stephan, 'Mittelalterliche Töpferei in Niederhessen', pp. 211-212.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

quantities of ceramics recovered from the Christenberg, some 3,000 sherds in all, complemented by material from the Büraburg excavations and fieldwalking across northern Hesse, allowed Gensen to seriate the pottery forms into sixteen types, and the decorative forms into six styles. The diagnostic criteria used in this initial process were side- and rim-profiles and decorative elements, refined through analysis of ceramic material inclusions and firing techniques. His sixteen vessel forms and five of his six decorative styles are illustrated in figures 33 and 34.¹²⁸

Types 1-4 are hand-made vessels, comprising 4.7% of the total Christenberg assemblage. The first two types are identified by their steep sides and straight rims. With type 3 a curl begins to appear in the rim, which takes its final form in type 4 and is found in some form in all later vessel types of the series except type 14.

Types 5-8 are wheel-turned wares, typified by steep shoulders and thick bases, almost always with circular grooves on the inside base.

Types 9 and 10, with shallow, curving profiles, are similar to vessel forms which were produced throughout the early and late medieval periods, and are consequently difficult to place in a relative chronology.

Types 11-13 are identified by their sharply curling rims, which often merge with the body of the vessel during the firing process, and distinctively high shoulders which place their widest point relatively high in the profile. The bases are also much thinner than in types 1-10, with the mid-point of the base often rising slightly from the ground.

Type 14 is a rare (0.6% of the assemblage) and distinctive vessel form, with a flat, thick base, little or no curl in the rim and often simple decoration on its upper half.

Types 15 and 16 are close in form to types 11-13, distinguished principally through their flatter rims, thinner walls and more evenly rounded profiles.

The six decorative styles identified by Gensen appear on the shoulders and sometimes the rims of the vessels, and are illustrated in figure 34; the sixth style consists of red or brown colouring on the inside of the vessel. Style 1 appears only types 11-13, styles 2 and 3 appear on 11-13 and on 15-16, while style 3, horizontal

¹²⁸ Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburg Becken', Abb. 3 and 4.

bands of waves, appears mainly on types 5-8 and 14, but also occasionally on types 11-13 and 15-16. Styles 5 (finger decoration) and 6 are very rare.¹²⁹

Gensen arranged these vessel forms into a relative chronology through their stratigraphic relationships on the Christenberg. The earliest two phases of the fortifications were dominated by the hand-made pottery types 1-4, with 32.5% of the total assemblage made up of types 5-8; types 9a, 10a and 14 also appeared in the early phases. The late phases of the fortification were dominated by types 11-13, although they begin to appear in limited quantities during phase 2. Type 11 is an extremely widespread form of pottery known throughout the Frankish Rhine region and dating to the second half of the eighth century, while 12 and 13 appear to be distinct to Hesse. Types 15 and 16 belong to the final phase of the Christenberg. They appear in the latest layers of the fortifications but are concentrated mainly at the western edge of the Christenberg near the church; in other words, they had their main period of use after the Christenberg ceased to have a military function, and provide firm evidence for the survival of an ecclesiastical community.¹³⁰

Gensen's next step was to establish an absolute chronology for the Hessian pottery series by comparing it to Rhineland pottery series which had already been dated. The total absence of *Knickwand* pottery from the Christenberg made this relatively straightforward. Wheel-thrown *Knickwand* ('kink-sided') vessels, so called because of the distinctive sharp angle in the vessel sides (see figure 15, nos. 30-32), are characteristic of Frankish *Reihengräber* until about the final quarter of the seventh century, after which they disappear from the Rhineland archaeological record. No *Knickwand* vessels appeared on the Christenberg; the earliest wheel-thrown pottery from the site, types 5-8, is easily distinguished from *Knickwand*-ware, while type 11 only appears in the Rhineland around the middle of the eighth century. Gensen thus placed the occupation and fortification of the site around the final decade of the seventh century, c. 700 at the latest.¹³¹

Certain details of Gensen's seriation were queried following its publication based on the refined analysis of the later ceramic types of his chronology,¹³² and pottery forms which he regarded as ending in the ninth century are now thought to

¹²⁹ Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburg Becken', pp. 146-150.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 150-151.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 151-152.

¹³² Schlesinger, 'Early Medieval Fortifications in Hesse', p. 248.

have continued well into the tenth.¹³³ Nevertheless, the earlier phase of his scheme has in general been accepted as providing a firm chronological base for the seventh- and eighth-century pottery forms of northern Hesse. This is confirmed by the dendrochronological (tree-ring) date recovered from the Christenberg well mentioned above, which proves that types 5-8, with which the piece of wood was associated, were still in use in 753/54 (and possibly later, since a dendrochronological date provides the year in which the tree was felled, not the final year of the wood's use).¹³⁴ Gensen's arrangement of the material also agreed with the relative chronologies constructed shortly afterwards by Werner Best for the Büraburg material and by Norbert Wand for Geismar.

The pottery assemblage from Büraburg chiefly comprised wares similar to those from the Christenberg, with 5-10% of the assemblage comprising hand-made ceramics, again dating from the late-seventh century.¹³⁵ Figure 35 shows three reconstructed pots from Wand's excavation of the Büraburg, two of which he labels as *Wölbwand*, 'curve-sided' ware (in contrast to *Knickwand* ware). Vessel 1, with its blunt, protruding rim and profile, can be compared to Gensen's type 7 in figure 33; vessel 2, a broad-shouldered pot with a tightly curling rim, to Gensen's type 11. The hand-made vessel 3, with a narrow, inward-curving rim, resembles most closely Gensen's type 2.

At Geismar, six forms of wheel-turned pottery appear in the assemblage around 700 and continue until the end of the settlement in the late eighth century, succeeding older forms of hand-made ceramics which had almost entirely disappeared by c. 750.¹³⁶ At Holzheim we see a similar pattern again: about 75% of the ceramics from Phase I of the site, c. 600 to c. 680, are handmade, 17% wheel-turned; in Phase II, from c. 700 to c. 1050, handmade wares account for only 7% of the total assemblage.¹³⁷ Figure 36 illustrates some of the eighth-century pottery recovered from the site, including some decorative styles also seen at the Christenberg (compare to Gensen's decorative styles 1 and 2 in figure 34).

¹³³ Thiedmann, 'Neue Forschungen zum Christenberg'.

¹³⁴ Gensen, 'Ein Keramikkomplex'.

¹³⁵ Wand, 'Die Büraburg und das Fritzlar-Waberner Becken', p. 201.

¹³⁶ The 6 pottery forms are D 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 and 17 according to Best's typology: see Best, *Funde der Völkerwanderungs- und Merowingerzeit*, Abbildung 43 and p. 99.

¹³⁷ Stephan, 'Mittelalterliche Töpferei', p. 213. For a further discussion of the Holzheim pottery, see Schotten and others, 'Ausgrabungen in jüngerer und früh- bis spätmittelalterlichen Siedlungsbereichen', pp. 242-250.

4.3.6 Toponymics

Place-names in Germany have not yet received the scholarly attention they have in Britain and Scandinavia.¹³⁸ The single short toponymical study dedicated to Hesse, over seventy years old, is far from comprehensive,¹³⁹ while there also exists an article on the place-names of Hesse from 1911 by Edward Schröder.¹⁴⁰ Historical place-name studies in Hesse, rather than being directed towards building a critically-discussed resource that researchers of diverse interests could employ,¹⁴¹ have tended to be undertaken within closely-defined research agendas. One such agenda has been the study of the Frankish expansion east of the Rhine during the seventh and eighth centuries, and the discussion here will be based on the findings of the researchers involved. The study of toponymics has complemented the archaeological and historical study of early medieval Hessia, for it has proved immensely useful in aiding our understanding of the development of the wider settled landscape. Nonetheless, toponymical data must be used with a sound appreciation of its difficulties and limitations, especially where the research agenda involves questions of dating and ethnicity.¹⁴²

Ascertaining the date at which a place-name was first coined is not always straightforward, for they rarely survive in their original form and there is always a danger of misreading particular elements. Settlements can also be renamed over time, and thus a place-name which appears to be derived from Old High German, spoken in central and southern Germany between the fifth and eleventh centuries, does not necessarily mean that the first settlement on the site did not date from an earlier period. The surest way of detecting a correlation between place-name form and date of settlement foundation is through intensive fieldwalking or excavation, both of

¹³⁸ H. Beck, 'Probleme einer völkerwanderungszeitliche Religionsgeschichte' in *Die Franken und die Alamannen bis zur "Schlacht bei Zülpich" (496/97)*, ed. D. Geuenich (Stuttgart, 1998), pp. 475-488 (p. 483).

¹³⁹ W. Sturmfels, *Die Ortsnamen Hessens* (Gießen, 1936).

¹⁴⁰ E. Schröder, 'Die Ortsnamen Hessens und seine Besiedlung', *Mitteilungen aus Geschichte und Heimatkunde des Kreises Biedenkopf* 5 (1911), pp. 105-125; reprinted in idem, *Deutsche Namenkunde: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kunde deutscher Personen- und Ortsnamen* (Göttingen, 1938), pp. 134-154.

¹⁴¹ This has been the case in England with the county-by-county surveys of the English Place-Name Society, for example, which has no equivalent in Germany.

¹⁴² The principles of place-name studies remain the same in English-speaking and German-speaking regions, although the particularities of history and linguistics are very different. For general works on English place-names, see E. Ekwall, *Studies on English Place-Names* (Stockholm, 1936); idem, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford, 1960); K. Cameron, *English Place-Names* (London, 1969); M. Gelling, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000); idem, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*, 3rd ed. (Chichester, 1997).

which might produce a datable, representative ceramic assemblage; if this can be done for a large number of settlements, a general pattern might begin to emerge within a given region.

Determining the ethnicity of occupants from a single place-name is much more difficult. 'Frankish-type' place-names, however one chooses to define them, need not indicate 'Frankish' settlers. The rare exceptions are those cases where the ethnicity of the occupants is explicitly stated in the place-name; for example, *Sachsenhausen*, 'settlement of the Saxons', which lies on the north-west edge of Hesse (see figure 37), most likely does indicate that the inhabitants were identified as Saxons in a district where the presence of Saxons was rare, hence noteworthy. Similarly, *Frankenberg*, which lies at the southern edge of the Hessian-Saxon borderlands, probably indicates a hill (*berg*) under the control of Franks.

In chapter seven we will come to consider the place-name evidence for sites of Christian and pagan religious significance, but here our concern is with place-names which appear to relate to changing settlement patterns in Hesse during the period of Frankish expansion. Linguistic studies over the last 150 years have shown that pre-Frankish place-names in central Germany tended to refer to the people who inhabited a place, indicated by the *-ing* element (for example, Sigmaringen), or to a natural feature (such as Geismar, where *-mar* derives from early Germanic **mere*, meaning standing water or pool).¹⁴³ In the Frankish period, that is from the fifth century onwards, surviving place-names tended to refer to the settlement itself, typically ending in *-heim*, *-h(a)usen*, *-hoven* and so on, often preceded by a personal name (as in Sigmarsheim).¹⁴⁴

-Heim place-names in particular are concentrated along the Rhine valley from Mainz to Worms and Speyer, in the heartland of Frankish rule and the *Reihengräber* region. Kunter has charted other concentrations of *-heim* place-names around Gießen, Wetzlar and Limburg in the Lahn valley, and argues that this settlement pattern demonstrates that Frankish social and political structures were well-established in the area by the seventh century, the impetus for the expansion coming from the Wetterau,

¹⁴³ J. Udolph, Linguistic contribution to 'Geismar', *RGA* 10 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 584-585.

¹⁴⁴ A. Bach, 'Zur Frankonisierung des deutschen Ortsnamenschatzes' in *Siedlung, Sprache und Bevölkerungsstruktur im Frankenreich*, ed. F. Petri (Darmstadt, 1973), pp.183-208 (p. 184).

where two-fifths of surviving place-names contain the *-heim* element,¹⁴⁵ rather than up the Lahn valley.¹⁴⁶ Beyond the Lahn valley and the northern Wetterau, however, *-heim* place-names are comparatively rare, suggesting that this was at the periphery of Frankish settlement by the mid-seventh century.¹⁴⁷

Toponymics can provide deceptively clear patterns of landscape settlement, and the development was certainly more complex. Kunter notes that there is no direct correlation between supposedly Frankish furnished burials and *-heim* place-names in the Gießen area, for instance, and that Merovingian archaeological finds are as likely to be associated with pre-Frankish place-names as Frankish; conversely, *-heim* place-names are often associated with pre-Frankish archaeological finds.¹⁴⁸ Although this does not disprove that *-heim* place-names generally indicate Frankish settlement, it does remind us that the Wetterau and the middle Lahn valley were already ancient landscapes, and that such landscapes tend to have multi-layered and complex histories.

There is a clear contrast between the place-names of north and south Hesse. Place-names containing the *-heim* element are dominant in the core Frankish areas around Mainz and the Wetterau yet relatively rare in the north, while *-hausen* place-names are extremely common in Hesse (see figure 37 for the Hessian distribution of *-hausen* place-names). As in the south, one must be cautious with the interpretation of the Hessian toponymic landscape, but the ceramic sequences established through the excavation of Büraburg and the Christenberg have made possible the use of toponymics alongside pottery evidence recovered from fieldwalking. Despite the ambiguous relationship between place-names and archaeological data in the south, Gensen argued that settlements which produced pottery of the eighth century accorded well with *-heim* and *-hausen* place names in the region around Christenberg and Amöneburg; examples included Rüdigheim, Radenhausen, Heuchelheim, Bechtmannshausen, Beltershausen and Goddelsheim, all of which, judging from pottery evidence, appear to have been founded after 700.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Wand, 'Die Büraburg und das Fritzlar-Waberner Becken', p. 205.

¹⁴⁶ K. Kunter, 'Baggerfunde aus der Lahnaue bei Heuchelheim/Dutenhofen als Beitrag zur Besiedlungsgeschichte des Gießen-Wetzlarer Raumes', *FH* 22/23 (1982/3), pp. 120-127 (pp. 120-22, Abb. 16); H. Patze, 'Geschichte des Gießener Raumes von der Völkerwanderung bis zum 17. Jahrhundert' in *Gießen und seine Landschaft in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. G. Neumann, (Gießen, 1970), pp. 65-108 (p. 69).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁴⁸ Kunter, 'Baggerfunde aus der Lahnaue', p. 122.

¹⁴⁹ Gensen, 'Christenberg, Burgwald und Amöneburger Becken', pp. 122-125.

Wand's research in the Fritzlar region to the north-east, building on the work of M. Born, detected a similar spread of *-heim* and *-hausen* place-names during the eighth century.¹⁵⁰ Proposing that at least some of these settlements were founded as part of a central reorganisation of the landscape, Wand cites as evidence the east, south and west 'direction' place-names of Ostheim, Sondheim and Westheim, apparently named in relation to the Homberger Burgberg, 15 kilometres south-east of Fritzlar. According to this theory, the Burgberg was the centre of a royal or noble estate, surrounded by its dependent settlements.¹⁵¹ Guttenberg also argued that just such a form of centralised colonisation lay behind the establishment of the Frankish nobility in areas of recent expansion.¹⁵² Westheim is the only one of the Burgberg's satellite settlements to have been excavated, and the earliest pottery it revealed was eighth century in date. The same was true of Westheim, west of Bad Wildungen, and of every other *-heim* settlement investigated by Wand in the Fritzlar region,¹⁵³ while the extensively excavated Holzheim, near the Büraburg, showed an explosion of ceramic use from c. 700.¹⁵⁴ Lampertshausen, as we have already seen, is an example of a *-hausen* place that was founded at this time.¹⁵⁵

Although future excavations may challenge this general model, the pottery evidence thus far recovered supports the argument of Wand and Gensen that the place-names of Hesse represent a gradual process of settlement expansion that had a clear beginning around the start of the eighth century. This process becomes visible in the historical sources, at least in certain parts of Hesse, only after the foundation of Fulda.¹⁵⁶ In the Amöneburg district we have charter evidence for the foundation of two *-hausen* settlements, Radenhausen and *Rutharteshausen*, respectively named

¹⁵⁰ M. Born, 'Grundzüge der Siedlungsentwicklung im Kreis Fritzlar-Homberg', *Hessische Heimat* 7 (1957/8), pp. 14-19; Wand, 'Die Büraburg und das Fritzlar-Waberner Becken', esp. pp. 203-205.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205. A similar theory has been used to explain the dominance of Anglo-Saxon place-names in Shropshire, which supposedly saw re-naming on a massive scale through the Mercian administration of the eighth century. See M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Shropshire, Part 1*, English Place-Names Society vol. 62/63 (Nottingham, 1990), p. xiii.

¹⁵² E. Freiherr von Guttenberg, 'Stammesgrenzen und Volkstum im Gebiet der Rednitz und Altmühl', *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung* 8/9 (1943), pp. 1-109 (p. 30).

¹⁵³ Wand, 'Die Büraburg und das Fritzlar-Waberner Becken', pp. 204-205.

¹⁵⁴ Schotten et al., 'Ausgrabungen in jüngkaiserzeitlichen und früh- bis spätmittelalterlichen Siedlungsbereichen', p. 257. Of the total pottery assemblage, 1.8% was Merovingian in date (sixth and seventh centuries), 11.7% Carolingian (eighth and ninth centuries), suggesting a major increase in the size of the settlement from c. 700. *Ibid.*, p. 242

¹⁵⁵ Leidorf, 'Eine Notgrabung', pp. 340-341; section 4.3.4 above.

¹⁵⁶ Schlesinger, 'Zur politischen Geschichte', p. 51.

after the Rudun and Ruthardus who granted Fulda property between 750 and 779.¹⁵⁷ Although there is a general consensus among toponymical experts that *-hausen* place-names begin to appear from the eighth century, opinions differ greatly as to the longevity of the phenomenon.¹⁵⁸

Figure 37 illustrates the extent of *-hausen* place names in Hessa, allowing us to identify three distinct features of their distribution: concentration, absence and abandonment. Particular areas of concentration are to the west and south of the upper Lahn, around Frankenburg, south of the Schwalm where it joins the Eder, along the lower Fulda and north of the Diemel. Conspicuous areas of absence are the ancient settled cores around Amöneburg, Fritzlar, the lower Diemel and the areas where *-inghausen* place-names, which are common in Saxony, predominate (see section 4.4.4 below). As is immediately obvious, the northern borderlands of Hessa experienced massive abandonment of *-hausen* and *-inghausen* settlements throughout the later medieval period.

This overall distribution supports the theory that *-hausen* place-names represent a secondary colonisation of marginal, wooded land from the turn of the eighth century and throughout the mission of Boniface in Hessa. Although there were isolated examples of coordinated settlement establishment or re-organisation, for example the three *-heim* settlements associated with the Homberger Burgberg, we should see this phase of secondary colonisation as a long-term process that did not have any single cause or impetus. There is no evidence to determine to what degree the new *-heim* and *-hausen* settlements were being founded by Frankish colonists from the south, and to what degree by elements of the native Hessian population who had begun to use Rhineland forms of pottery. At the most basic level, this toponymical phenomenon represents the effect of gradually increasing population pressure, where less desirable land was brought under cultivation, and remained so

¹⁵⁷ Modern Radenhausen is called *Rodohausen* in *UBF* 112, p. 182, ll. 9-10; according to *UBF* 107a/b, p. 179, ll. 26-31, Ruthart/Ruthardus donated to Fulda *Rutharteshausen*, a *villa sui nominis*. See appendix 5 and section 7.3.3 below.

¹⁵⁸ Schuh dates them from the mid-eighth to the tenth century (R. Schuh, *Historisches Ortsnamenbuch von Bayern, Bd. 5: Gunzenhausen* (Munich, 1979), p. 112); Debus to the ninth century (F. Debus, 'Zur Gliederung und Schichtung nordhessischer Ortsnamen', *HJL* 18 (1968), pp. 27-61 (p. 54)); Flechsig to c. 1100 (W. Flechsig, 'Was kann die Namenforschung zur Datierung von Siedlungen der Ausbauezeit beitragen?', *Westfälische Forschungen* 7 (1953/54), pp. 276-280 (p. 277)); Christmann to the fourteenth century (E. Christmann, *Die Siedlungsnamen der Pfalz, Teil 3: Siedlungsgeschichte der Pfalz anhand der Siedlungsnamen*, Veröffentlichungen der Pfälzischen Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften in Speyer 37 (Speyer, 1958), p. 79).

until social, demographic or economic forces led to its eventual reversion to wooded or open pasture.¹⁵⁹

4.4 Hessia c. 600-721: Interpretation of evidence

As Hessian archaeologists have always recognised, the archaeological evidence of early-seventh to early-eighth century Hessia demonstrates *prima facie* that a central theme of any interpretation must be the gradual process of growing Frankish influence in the region.¹⁶⁰ My interpretation will thus be framed around this fundamental process of Frankish expansion, but in my more detailed consideration of the evidence I will attempt to develop and nuance the existing model. For the purposes of explanation I shall divide the chronology into three phases, determined principally by the changing nature of the archaeological data, which I shall briefly summarise here.

The earliest phase, c. 600 – c. 650, is defined by the absence of any known Rhineland-style material in Hessia, despite the fact that the subjugation of the region immediately south of Hessia to Frankish rule is clearly demonstrated by historical, archaeological and toponymic sources. The second phase begins with the appearance of furnished inhumations in central Hessia, that is c. 650, and is based on the assumption that these burials indicate a new phase of more direct Frankish control, either through permanent settlement of small groups from the Rhineland region or through the intensive ‘Frankisation’ of the native Hessian élite.

This phase is succeeded c. 700 by the direct Frankish military domination of the north, which involved the parallel refortification and permanent, large-scale garrisoning of the Christenberg and Büraburg. The enormous scale of these undertakings at precisely the same time leaves no doubt that they were intended as part of a single military scheme to secure the Frankish borderlands with Saxony, and the pattern of settlement expansion across Hessia from c. 700 further suggests that some form of non-military colonisation and land reorganisation was also taking place at the same time or shortly thereafter.

¹⁵⁹ There are numerous factors that can lead to settlement abandonment, including depopulation, soil exhaustion, economic changes and settlement nucleation. The reasons for the abandonment of *-hausen* settlements in Hessia in the late medieval period is beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, W. Schlesinger, ‘Zur politische Geschichte’; K. Weidemann, ‘Archäologische Zeugnisse zur Eingliederung Hessens und Mainfrankens in das Frankenreich vom 7. bis zum 9. Jahrhundert’ in *Althessen im Frankenreich*, ed. Schlesinger, pp. 95-119; Schwind, ‘Zur Geschichte des heute hessischen Raumes’, pp. 34-46.

4.4.1 Phase 1: Frankish consolidation to the south, c.600-c.650

During the sixth and seventh centuries, a scattering of historical references, only three of which concern the regions bordering Hessa, present an incomplete and poorly detailed picture of Frankish expansion east of the middle Rhine. First, Gregory of Tours gave an account of the murder of the nobleman Sigibert by his son when he set out hunting from Cologne to the forest of Buchonia around 500.¹⁶¹ In the mid-eighth century, Buchonia referred to the district of Boniface's foundation at Fulda,¹⁶² which, as we have seen, was the site of a high-status fortification in the Merovingian period; if the extent of sixth-century Buchonia was similar (which is by no means certain), Gregory's account would suggest that the region to the south of Hessa, at least, was sufficiently secure for the Frankish élite to use it for their hunting expeditions. Second, the conquest of Thuringia by Clovis's sons Theoderic and Clothar in 531 also implies that the Franks had a degree of overlordship north of the Main before 600.¹⁶³

Third, when Sigebert III raised an army to crush a rebellion in Thuringia in 639, his army included, according to a contemporary entry in the Chronicle of Fredegar, 'peoples from all the territories of his realm across the Rhine',¹⁶⁴ which may have included Hessa. Fredegar also stated that Sigebert fought a battle before heading to Thuringia via Buchonia.¹⁶⁵ This battle, if it was fought after crossing the Rhine and before reaching Thuringia, must have taken place on the southern fringes of Hessa, perhaps in the Wetterau or Rhön, and suggests that Merovingian control of the region eighty years before Boniface's mission was not entirely secure.¹⁶⁶

Judging from these few references, it seems that the Franks exercised a degree of overlordship in Buchonia and among the peoples immediately north of the Main from the early sixth century at the latest.¹⁶⁷ In the seventh-century *Ravennatis*

¹⁶¹ Gregory of Tours, *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis libri historiarum X*, ed. B. Krusch, SS rer. Merov. 1.1 (Hannover, 1937), 2.40, p. 89, l. 12 to p. 91, l. 8.

¹⁶² See Pope Zacharias's 751 charter of papal exemption for Fulda: Tangl, ep. 89a, p. 204, l. 2.

¹⁶³ Gregory of Tours recounts the invasion: Gregory of Tours, *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis libri historiarum*, 3.7, p. 103, l. 14 to p. 105, l. 20.

¹⁶⁴ *gentes undique de universis regni sui pagis ultra Rhenum*. Anon., *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 2 (Hannover, 1888), pp. 1-193 (p. 164, l. 26).

¹⁶⁵ *deinde Buchoniam cum exercitu transiens, Thoringiam properans*. Ibid., l. 31.

¹⁶⁶ Schwind, 'Zur Geschichte des heute hessischen Raumes', p. 37.

¹⁶⁷ Kunter, 'Baggerfunde aus der Lahnaue', pp. 120-127; Schwind, 'Die Franken in Hessen', p. 220.

Cosmographia, the river Lahn is recorded as part of the *patria Francorum*,¹⁶⁸ and the archaeological and toponymical evidence surveyed above supports the impression that the areas south of Hessa were closely tied to the Rhine-Main region. The *Reihengräber* cemeteries of the Wetterau and the lower Lahn demonstrate that these regions shared a close cultural affinity, at least regarding burial rite, with the Frankish heartlands. The ecclesiastical history of the Lahn also suggests long-standing, pre-Bonifatian ties to the archdiocese of Trier.¹⁶⁹

With regard to Hessa itself, our sources remain silent. It is a guess, if an educated one, to say that the very lack of references to Hessian campaigns means that local rulers in the region generally accepted Frankish overlordship without any resistance that chroniclers deemed worthy of mention.¹⁷⁰ The state of the evidence allows us to surmise only a lack of historically-attested, archaeologically-visible military activity, not a void of any military or political activity whatsoever. In short, we are left very much in the dark with regard to the political situation in Hessa up to the mid-seventh century, except to say that by this time the Franks were well-established on its southern borders, and were about to extend their influence northwards.

The clearest archaeological difference between Hessa and the Frankish south lies in the evidence for burial, and is worth further consideration. The conspicuous absence of any *Rheingräber*-style burials in Hessa before c. 650 is most likely attributable to the widespread use of unfurnished cremation, a rite that leaves almost no archaeological trace, especially when the ashes are not buried. Cremation appears to have been the standard method of disposing of the dead in pre-Christian Saxony,¹⁷¹ and its probable use in Hessa indicates certain cultural links to the north rather than to the Frankish south. Although we should not ignore important regional variations or potential differences in meaning and use of material culture within the *Reihengräber*

¹⁶⁸ J. Schnetz, ed., *Itineraria Romana Vol. 2: Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia et Guidonis geographica* (Stuttgart, 1942), *Cosmographia*, v. IV, 24.

¹⁶⁹ For full discussion, see K. E. Demandt, 'Hessische Frühzeit', *HJL* 3 (1953), pp. 35-56 (pp. 48-49); Kunter, 'Baggerfund aus der Lahnaue', p. 124; F. Backhaus, 'Besitzkarte frühkarolingische Klöster' in *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen*, ed. Ulhorn et al., pp. 44-50 and Karte 9.

¹⁷⁰ For example, Schlesinger, 'Zur politischen Geschichte', p. 61.

¹⁷¹ Tacitus reports on the prevalent custom of cremation in first-century Germania: Tacitus, *Cornelii Taciti opera minora, Germania* c. 27, p. 50, ll. 23-24. Cremation of the dead according to pagan custom was punishable by death according to Charlemagne's Saxon Capitulary (775-790). Anon., *Capitulation de partibus Saxoniae*, ed. E. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1 (Hannover, 1883), pp. 68-70 (c. 7, p. 69, ll. 3-4).

tradition of the middle Rhine,¹⁷² these appear insignificant compared to the near-total absence of the tradition in Hesse (see figure 10).

The furnished inhumations of the Wetterau and the Lahn valley were not a relatively late expansion into the fringes of Frankish territory, for many of the richest examples date from the fifth and early sixth century, and the custom continued until the eighth. In other words, a highly visible divide in burial custom existed between Hesse and the regions to the south for at least two hundred years. Only a profound difference in the nature of mortuary behaviour and its role in social communication can explain this contrast, and only a determination among both Franks and Hessians to maintain it can explain its longevity. Such a contrast may indeed reflect a deep resistance by the peoples of Hesse to adopting 'Frankish' culture in general, a 'refusal to borrow', to use Fernand Braudel's term;¹⁷³ and if this is the case, then the relatively sudden appearance of late Merovingian furnished burials in central Hesse around Fritzlar, not on the long-standing fringe of the *Reihengräber* tradition around Amöneburg or the upper Lahn, is doubly noteworthy.

4.4.2 Phase 2: Frankish overlordship in Hesse, c.650-c.700

Since this phase is defined primarily by the onset of the furnished burials of Werkel, Kirchberg, Fritzlar and Goddelsheim (the Amöneburg and Eschwege-Niederhone burials are probably eighth-century in date, and I will consider the mound burial cemeteries separately below), we would do well to consider the implications of using such a limited set of data to hypothesise a major political or social change. The presence of typical Rhineland mortuary behaviour does support the theory that the precise form of the burials was the result of contact between central Hesse and that region, but we cannot be sure that the meanings and intentions of the behaviour were identical in both areas. It is now commonly acknowledged among Anglophone early medievalists that *Reihengräber* burials have little to do with expressing broad political loyalties or ethnic identities, but were highly ritualised and partially idealised projections of social identity by a particular group towards a pre-defined audience, for

¹⁷² For a discussion of the theoretical considerations, see I. Hodder, 'The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture' in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, (London, 1994), pp. 393-402 (p. 398).

¹⁷³ F. Braudel, *On History*, trans. by S. Matthews (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p. 203.

particular purposes, within a unique cultural context.¹⁷⁴ Studies by Effros,¹⁷⁵ James¹⁷⁶ and Halsall¹⁷⁷ of continental material, and by Härke of early Anglo-Saxon weapon burials,¹⁷⁸ have taught the lesson that we should heed specific local circumstances before interpreting burials according to an overly generalised model of mortuary behaviour.¹⁷⁹

To begin with, three characteristics of the graves which appeared in Hessa from the mid-seventh century are especially notable: their relative wealth in comparison to typical row-graves of the central Rhineland, which they closely resemble; their rarity; and their locations. I shall discuss the significance of each of these characteristics in the following paragraphs.

First, the Fritzlar burial in particular would be notable in any cemetery of the Frankish south, if not exceedingly so, for the volume and variety of its furnishings, while its large timbered chamber would make it highly conspicuous. The Werkel and Kirchberg burials, though not comparable to that of Fritzlar in terms of ostentation, would also rank among the more generously-furnished burials of a typical Rhineland cemetery. The individuals responsible for these burials must have had access to considerable material resources, sufficient for us to refer to them as members of the local élite.

The rarity of furnished burial in Hessa exaggerates this relative wealth. At Werkel the recovered burial appears to have been part of a cemetery of unknown size, while the chamber burial at Fritzlar may also have had neighbours to the immediate north, although no investigation has yet been undertaken there. There may also be

¹⁷⁴ Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ James, 'Cemeteries and the Problem of Frankish Settlement in Gaul'; idem, 'Merovingian Cemetery Studies and some Implications for Anglo-Saxon England' in *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries 1979*, ed. P. Rahtz, T. Dickinson and L. Watts, BAR British Series 82 (Oxford, 1980), pp. 36-41.

¹⁷⁷ Halsall, 'Archaeology and the late Roman frontier'. See also idem, 'The Origins of the *Reihengräberzivilization*: Forty Years On' in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 196-206; J. Werner, 'Zur Entstehung der *Reihengräberzivilization*: ein Beitrag zur Methode der frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie', *Archaeologia Geographica* 1 (1950), pp. 23-32; H.-W. Böhme, *Germanische Grabfunde des 4. bis 5. Jahrhunderts zwischen Elbe und Loire, Bd. 1*, Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte 29 (Munich, 1974), pp. 195-207.

¹⁷⁸ H. Härke, "'Warrior graves?" The Background of the Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite', *Past and Present* 126 (1990), pp. 22-43.

¹⁷⁹ See R. Samson's acerbic critique of attempts by Christlein, Steuer and others to determine the relative social levels of large numbers of temporally and spatially diverse *Reihengräber* burials according to a universal classification of wealth expended in mortuary ritual: R. Samson, 'Social structures from *Reihengräber*: mirror or mirage?', *Scottish Archaeological Review* 4 (1987), pp. 116-126.

further graves within the vicinity of the medieval church at Kirchberg. Even if these burials were not as isolated as their limited excavations make them seem, the lack of further discoveries in the area of the lower Eder and Fulda, which has seen considerable development in the post-war period, suggests that their apparent scarcity when compared to the areas of the Rhine-Main and lower Lahn is a fair representation of the regional material record. That the Fritzlar burial, one of the few seventh-century burials so far discovered in Hesse, was of such a conspicuous nature cannot be ascribed to mere chance. The community practising its mortuary customs at Fritzlar was small but clearly capable of performing ostentatious funerary rituals resembling those of the Frankish south.

The location of numerous Frankish-style burials in the lower Eder basin and at Amöneburg is also highly significant. A glance at figure 8 will remind the reader that the crossing at Fritzlar was a hub of regional communications, while figure 9 illustrates its central place in the settled landscape of Hesse since at least the Roman period. The cemeteries at Werkel and Kirchberg both lie directly beside important long-distance communication routes with the north. Amöneburg was itself the seat of Frankish sub-rulers in 721, when Boniface first arrived and built his first chapel there;¹⁸⁰ the comparable significance of Fritzlar is demonstrated both by its central physical location and by the fact that, along with Amöneburg, it became the site of one of Boniface's first monastic foundations.¹⁸¹ These burials are thus crucial evidence for relatively early Frankish influence at sites which had been, and would remain, of regional importance.

Whether the individuals given furnished burials in central Hesse were themselves from the Rhineland is of course impossible to ascertain; we can only be sure that the people who buried them were familiar with, and chose to use, customs of furnished inhumation which were common in the Frankish south and largely unknown in the Hessian north. In the south these customs were part of a complex social performance intended for an audience who recognised the meanings and messages of the customs, and were in a position to use them themselves. In a northern context, the meanings and symbolism of such a burial are necessarily transformed, for the southern audience is in part removed and replaced by one which is not familiar with the customs of furnished inhumation, and which – as the archaeological record

¹⁸⁰ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, ll. 3-4.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23, ll. 7-17.

testifies – did not seek to adopt them.

Those men and women performing the funeral ceremonies must have recognised that in doing so they were marking themselves out as ‘foreign’ to a great part of the audience. Indeed, this may have been part of their purpose. We cannot know precisely how local people perceived and interpreted the various aspects of the burials, but it is likely that a major theme was the ‘southernness’ of the rituals – the recognition that these were Frankish customs, and that, by practising them, those performing the burial were expressing an élite identity which was also inherently Frankish. These deaths had thus provided a small group of people with an opportunity to make a highly visible political statement. Precisely what this statement was, and how it was received, are matters on which we can only speculate.

The remaining furnished seventh-century burials in Hesse were the burial mounds near the Christenberg. Since they, along with the cemeteries at Germershausen and Gießen, are close to the important transit route of the *Weinstraße*, I shall consider all three sites as related phenomena. Due to the impossibility of dating any of the mound burials near Amöneburg, they will not be included in the present discussion.

Hermann Ament related the cemeteries of the Christenberg, Germershausen and Gießen to other burial mounds of the Merovingian period: more than two dozen broadly contemporary mound cemetery sites are known in the Alamannic region along the upper Rhine, with more along the upper Danube and in north-west Bavaria, three west of the middle Rhine and more in Saxony.¹⁸² The variety of customs in the Hessian mound burials, first of all, means that we cannot regard them as a single established tradition – rather, Ament describes them as a mixture of Alamannic (furnished inhumation), Saxon (cremation) and local (distinct pottery) customs, with great variation in the size and number of mounds at each site, and Christenberg being the only site with ring ditches.¹⁸³

Yet we can interpret the mound burials more deeply than being merely ‘Frankish with Saxon influences’.¹⁸⁴ Their appearance at this time, at these particular locations, must be significant. As noted above, cremation was probably the dominant form of burial in Hesse in the seventh century, and therefore we need not assume that

¹⁸² Ament, ‘Merowingische Grabhügel’, Abb. 1.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

the moment it becomes archaeologically visible it is a result of 'Saxon' influence. As regards Alamannic influence, the furnishings of the Hessian mound burials are essentially a continuation of what had been practised in the Wetterau and the Lahn valley for two centuries.

The chief reason, indeed, to look to either Saxon or Alamannic regions as sources of 'influence' appears to be not the contents of the mounds, but the mounds themselves – and there is no reason to look beyond Hesse for that inspiration. Just between Gießen and Limburg, 50 kilometres to the west, are at least 824 prehistoric mounds in 78 separate sites,¹⁸⁵ while there are also high concentrations in the Wetterau and along the lower Main, especially between the Vogelsberg and the Fulda, and a scattering across Hesse.¹⁸⁶ Although knowledge of Alamannic and Saxon custom may have influenced the decision to adopt mound burial in the Lahn valley, it is equally possible that it arose quite independently. The mid-seventh century inhumation mound at Gießen, the earliest securely dated of the Merovingian-period Hessian mounds, was built within metres of two Bronze Age mounds. It would make sense to turn our immediate attention to these mounds, rather than to Saxon examples 150 kilometres to the north, or Alamannic ones 250 kilometres to the south.

There is no evidence for a gradual development of an early medieval burial mound tradition along the Lahn valley.¹⁸⁷ Instead, the custom appears suddenly around the mid-seventh century and disappears almost as suddenly – probably within two generations, and still within living memory. We can ask the same questions here as Martin Carver did of the early seventh-century mound burials of Sutton Hoo in East Anglia: why did these mounds appear then, and why there?¹⁸⁸ Ament's explanation that burial mounds retained a distinct aura of dignity and monumentality from the Bronze Age through to the early medieval period, despite long periods of disuse, does not take us far.¹⁸⁹ Continuity is no explanation, for features of the landscape do not have continuous meanings over time: meanings shift and transform,

¹⁸⁵ H. Janke, 'Grabhügelfunde aus der Umgebung Wetzlars: Fundbestände verschiedener Zeitstellung aus einer Privatsammlung', *FH 37/38* (1997/98), pp. 39-127.

¹⁸⁶ Karte 5b in Ulhorn et al., eds., *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen*.

¹⁸⁷ In comparison to Alamannic regions, for example: Ament, 'Merowingische Grabhügel', p. 86.

¹⁸⁸ M. O. H. Carver, 'Why That? Why There? Why Then? The Politics of Early Medieval Monumentality' in *Image and Power in early medieval British archaeology: Essays in honour of Rosemary Cramp*, ed. A. Macgregor and H. Hamerow (Oxford, 2001), pp. 1-22 (p. 4).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

are forgotten and re-invented, according to situation and subject.¹⁹⁰ Rather, we should consider the possibility that such a spatially and temporally restricted phenomenon as the Hessian mound burials arose within a particular context, fulfilling an immediate social and political need, and did not survive beyond that context.

The context in question is surely related to the expansion of Frankish influence towards the north. That the mid- to late-seventh century saw significant changes in the social power structures of Hesse is very likely, given that small groups of people around Fritzlar had begun to advertise their association with the Frankish south through public funerary ritual. The mound burials at Gießen, Gemershausen and Christenberg, I would argue, are symptoms of significant social and political upheavals along the upper Lahn valley that accompanied political changes in Hesse. It would be too simple to explain the mound burials as the result of religious confrontation, although religion may well have been one factor among many. Böhme has cogently argued that the early medieval mound burials of the Rhine valley arose in reaction to the gradual advance of Christianity,¹⁹¹ and Carver has suggested that a similar phenomenon influenced the adoption of mound burials in parts of pagan Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁹² Such an explanation falters in the Lahn valley, where the largest mound cemeteries in the area line a pair of ridges beneath the ramparts of the Christenberg (Klutzkopf and Lichten Heide on figure 22). The nearest known early medieval settlement is Münchhausen, three kilometres to the west; this, along with the fact that the inhumations contained diagnostic Rhineland furnishings, suggests that the forty-seven Christenberg burial mounds served the earliest population of the Frankish fort. Since this population appears to have been Christian, the mounds cannot possibly represent a reaction against the advance of Christianity, as mounds elsewhere in Europe seem to.

Elites of all societies, to some extent, invent and re-invent traditions in order to legitimise their position, introducing 'sets of practices' which reinforce the present through the authority of the past, particularly during times of social stress and

¹⁹⁰ C. Evans, 'Tradition and the cultural landscape: an archaeology of place', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 4.1 (1985), pp. 80-94 (pp. 81-82).

¹⁹¹ H.-W. Böhme, 'Adelsgräber im Frankenreich: archäologische Zeugnisse zur Herausbildung einer Herrschaft unter den merowingischen Königen', *Jahrbuch des römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 40 (1993), pp. 397-534.

¹⁹² Carver, 'Why That?'; idem, 'Conversion and Politics on the Eastern Seaboard of Britain: Some Archaeological Indicators' in *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World*, ed. B. E. Crawford (St Andrews, 1998), pp. 11-40.

uncertainty.¹⁹³ Monuments, because of their visibility, are commonly used for this purpose, in the early medieval period as well as in our own day, as recent archaeological studies have argued.¹⁹⁴ People in the early medieval period certainly knew that the prehistoric mounds of Hessia (and beyond) held ancient burials, and certain of these mounds remained important as landmarks,¹⁹⁵ perhaps also as sites of folkloric or superstitious significance.¹⁹⁶ Constructing a burial mound beside two ancient barrows created an association with the monuments as well as with the past they embodied: thus the élites at Gießen were claiming legitimacy and authority by rooting themselves into an ancient landscape, perhaps implying or claiming descent from the occupants of the older mounds. Whether or not those performing the burial were indeed ‘native’ to the region is of little significance;¹⁹⁷ their attitude towards the advancing Frankish powers, on the other hand, would be hugely significant in our interpretation of the mounds at Gießen, could we discern it.

The different forms of mound construction, burial deposition and grave furnishing attested at the three sites show that they cannot be treated as the manifestation of a single, fully-formed tradition. If anything, they demonstrate the uncertain, conflicting early stages of the ‘invention’ of a tradition, perhaps brought about by the imminent threat or realisation of serious rupture within established social power structures. Nothing in the artefacts can help us determine whether these mounds originated in an attempt by local leaders to resist the encroachment of Frankish control farther up the Lahn valley by expressing their own ‘ancestral’ right to rule, or whether they were established by a pro-Frankish élite, determined to impress their legitimacy and authority upon a fractured and resisting society.

The grave mounds do indicate, however, that the élites of the upper Lahn around the latter half of the seventh century were attempting to protect or consolidate

¹⁹³ E. Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’ in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1-14 (pp. 1-5).

¹⁹⁴ See R. Bradley, *Altering the Earth: The Origins of Monuments in Britain and Continental Europe* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 117-119; idem, ‘Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 140 (1987), pp. 1-17 (pp. 14-15); Hood, ‘Social relations and the cultural landscape’, p. 124; Altenberg, *Experiencing Landscapes*, pp. 249-250; B. Effros, ‘Monuments and Memory: Repossessing Ancient Remains in Early Medieval Gaul’ in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. de Jong, F. Theuws and C. van Rhijn, (Leiden, 2001), pp. 93-118 (p. 101).

¹⁹⁵ A late eighth-century boundary charter of Fulda refers to a group of prehistoric burial mounds near Hersfeld as ‘ancient tombs’, *antiqua sepulchra*. Sippel, ‘Die Grasburg bei Mansbach’, pp. 261-262. The charter in question is *UBF* 145b, p. 206, l. 3.

¹⁹⁶ Historical sources of the early medieval period prove that Knowth and Newgrange in the Boyne Valley, Ireland, were both centres of élite activity and subjects of folklore, each role closely related to the other: Bradley, ‘Time regained’, p. 14.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

their positions during a period of conflict and uncertainty. Given the historical context, this may well have been closely related to the increasingly direct Frankish domination of Hesse. At the Christenberg the phenomenon of mound burial would find its final and fullest expression c. 700, with several dozen mounds being erected by the occupants of the newly-rebuilt Frankish fortification. The absence of a similar tradition at Büraburg, which the Franks fortified at about the same time and in the same fashion as the Christenberg, is also significant. It suggests that the mound burials of the Christenberg were the result of a particular social context in the district of the upper Lahn valley during the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries.

4.4.3 Phase 3, c. 700 to 721: Direct Frankish control of Hesse

Since both the Christenberg and Büraburg had lain unoccupied for several centuries before their reoccupation by the Franks, the arrival of new inhabitants in large numbers created a sharp horizon in the archaeological record. The fortification of the sites around the final decade of the seventh century, c. 700 at the latest, places them clearly in a later phase than the early furnished burials of Hesse, and represents the Frankish consolidation of a northern borderland which had until then been controlled through local élites, such as those buried at Fritzlar and Werkel.

The exact circumstances leading up to the direct military domination of the north by the Franks are not clear, but they very probably included increasing tension on the Saxon border. Bede reports that the Saxons had conquered the *Boructuari* around 692,¹⁹⁸ who, if they can be equated with the *Bructeri* of Tacitus¹⁹⁹ and the *Borthari* of Pope Gregory III,²⁰⁰ lived to the north-west of Hesse, along the river Lippe (see figure 38). The apparent destruction and abandonment of the fortified site of *Eichloha* at Fulda around 700 may also have been the result of a Saxon incursion, as Vonderau and Hahn believed.²⁰¹ The *Annales Sancti Amandi* record that in 715 the Saxons pillaged the lands of the *Charuari*, thought to have dwelled on the lower Lippe and Ruhr, both of which flow into the Rhine far to the north-west of Hesse, and this appears to have been the limit of their westward expansion towards Frankish

¹⁹⁸ *HE*, V.11, pp. 484-487.

¹⁹⁹ Tacitus, *Cornelii Taciti opera minora, Germania*, c. 33, p. 54, l. 1.

²⁰⁰ Tangl, ep. 43, p. 68, l. 12.

²⁰¹ Hahn, 'Kat. 211.1', p. 304.

territory.²⁰² In Hestia itself, the two furnished sixth or seventh century inhumations at Goddelsheim indicate a mixture of Frankish and Saxon influences. The location of the burials directly on the *Weinstraße* is significant, as this was the principal axis of communication between Saxony and the Frankish heartlands, and the most likely area for direct cultural contact.

Toponymical evidence supports the impression of the historical and archaeological sources that the Saxons, who appear to have been a loose collection of small units rather than a single coherent people,²⁰³ were expanding aggressively from the late seventh century. The 'border' of Saxon and Frankish controlled-territory at this time was an ill-defined, permeable zone of variable influence rather than a fixed entity, and for this reason I have used the deliberately imprecise term 'Hessian-Saxon borderlands' throughout this thesis. The primary indicator is the spread of *-inghausen* place-names from Saxony along the north-west edge of Hestia on the course of the *Weinstraße* (figure 37). Historians tend to see these as a place-name form distinctive to Saxony and roughly contemporaneous with the earliest *-hausen* place-names of Hestia and the other Frankish regions north of the Main.²⁰⁴ These historians express little doubt that the scatter of examples between the Diemel and the Eder represents the furthest extent of Saxon expansion towards the south from the late-seventh to the late-eighth century, although the nature and course of this expansion is extremely difficult to determine from place-names alone. Along the south-east extent of *-inghausen* settlements appear the place-names Sachsenberg, Sachsenhausen and Sassel, each of which indicates the presence of Saxon settlers in predominantly non-Saxon districts.

The distribution of *-inghausen* place-names strongly suggests that the north-west border of Hestia was one region under considerable pressure from Saxon expansion. It may be that the Saxons were launching raids into Hestia by the end of

²⁰² Anon., *Annales Sancti Amandi*, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hannover, 1826), pp. 6-14 (p. 6); for discussion, see H. Rademacher, 'Die Anfänge der Sachsenmission südlich der Lippe' in *Westfalia Sacra: Quellen und Forschungen zur Kirchengeschichte Westfalens*, vol. 2 (Münster, 1950), p. 140.

²⁰³ I. Wood, 'Beyond Satraps and Ostriches: Political and Social Structures of the Saxons in the Early Carolingian Period' in *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. D. H. Green and F. Siegmund, *Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology* 6 (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 271-297 (pp. 285-286).

²⁰⁴ G. Müller, 'Das Problem der fränkischen Einflüsse auf die westfälische Toponymie', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 4 (1970), pp. 244-270; M. Gockel, 'Siedlungsnamen-Typen I und II' in *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen*, ed. Uhlhorn et al., pp. 185-189 (p. 188).

the seventh century, as they would do in the eighth.²⁰⁵ In this context the strategic importance of the massive fortifications of Büraburg and the Christenberg becomes clear. Büraburg served to secure the strengthening Frankish influence in central Hesse lest it be forced to retreat in the face of Saxon aggression, while Christenberg was an almost impenetrable stronghold on the major transit route of the *Weinstraße*. The Frankish annals record that Charles Martel campaigned against the Saxons in 719,²⁰⁶ 720,²⁰⁷ possibly 722,²⁰⁸ 724²⁰⁹ and 728 or 729,²¹⁰ that is around the early years of Boniface's mission, although whether these campaigns entered Saxony from Hesse, Thuringia or the Rhineland is not recorded. If any took place in western Saxony, there can be little doubt that the Christenberg and Büraburg were fully exploited as military strongpoints and staging posts.

The frustrating lack of pre-Fuldan charters or other historical sources for Hesse makes it extremely difficult to draw anything more than generalisations regarding the political landscape of the region in the years immediately before Boniface's mission. Schlesinger comments on the nature of Frankish authority east of the Rhine (specifically Thuringia):

Ich bin der Meinung, daß die Abhängigkeit der ostrheinischen *gentes* vom Merowingerreich im wesentlichen darauf beruhte, daß die Spitze des gentilen Verbandes diese Abhängigkeit anerkannte, vom merowingischen Königtum autorisiert wurde und im Konfliktfalle beseitigt und ersetzt werden konnte, was aber weniger eine Verfassungs- als eine Machtfrage war.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ See chapter five below, section 5.3.1.

²⁰⁶ According to the *Annales Petaviani*, in *Annales et chronici aevi Carolini*, ed. G. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hannover, 1826), p. 7 (henceforth *Ann. Petav.*), corrected by Böhmer from 718. J. F. Böhmer and E. Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii I: Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern, 751-918* (Innsbruck, 1908), p. 13.

²⁰⁷ *Ann. Petav.*, p. 7, and repeated in several other Early Frankish Annals; see Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 13.

²⁰⁸ The *Annales Laureshamenses*, in *Annales et chronici aevi Carolini*, ed. Pertz, MGH SS 1, p. 24, recorded *bella contra aquiloniam* in 722, although whether this refers to Frisians or Saxons (or both) is unclear. See Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 14.

²⁰⁹ According to the Continuations of Fredegar in *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici*, ed. B. Krusch, SS rer. Merov. 2 (Hannover, 1888), pp. 1-193 (p. 175, ll. 1-3).

²¹⁰ The *Annales Petaviani* have the entry *Karolus voluit pergere in Saxonia* under 729. *Ann. Petav.*, p. 9. The same annals also claim that Charles Martel campaigned in Saxony in 728, but Böhmer argues that this is a mistaken reference to a campaign in Bavaria during that year. Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 16. Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, p. 117, accepts an actual campaign in 728 and a planned campaign in 729.

²¹¹ 'In my opinion, the dependence of the *gentes* east of the Rhine upon the Merovingian Empire was essentially based on the fact that the élite of the tribal group acknowledged this dependence, was

Raw power or *Macht* certainly lay at the heart of Frankish rule in Hessa. Since we have no record of major campaigns, it seems possible that most of the region passed peacefully into the hands of Frankish rulers, and was held without major rebellion. Schlesinger argues that this process of Frankish expansion left the native power structures largely in place, if not intact; local leaders, not having any strong sense of inter-regional unity, readily accepted the protection and support of the greater power. To support this argument, Schlesinger points out that most of the nobles establishing new settlements in the Grabfeld region in the late eighth century charters of Fulda had family roots in the area – in other words, there had been no large-scale supplanting of the indigenous élite.²¹²

The general impression of a largely non-military expansion of Frankish overlordship should not, however, blind us to the kind of local political tensions and conflicts that often arise in historical situations where smaller polities are caught on the fringes of an expanding superpower. The Frankish chroniclers, as already mentioned, give no insight into the nature of Frankish control in Hessa during the early eighth century. Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii*, however, gives us a valuable glimpse into political arrangements at Amöneburg upon Boniface's arrival in 721. Willibald, writing 754x768, did not mention the two brothers ruling at Amöneburg in 721 as a historical curiosity – indeed, they are the only two members of the early eighth-century élites north of the Main whose names have come down to us. Rather, his primary motive in mentioning Dettic and Deorulf was to emphasise Boniface's authority, granted him by both Charles Martel and God, which enabled him to convert the brothers, and then their people, from semi-paganism to the orthodox faith:

[Bonifatius] tunc quippe, Domino patrocinate, alias Germaniae praedicandi causa partes adiit et supradictum locum [Amanburch], cui gemini praeerant germani, Dettic videlicet et Deorulf, Domino auxiliante, obtinuit, eosque a sacrilega idulorum censura, qua sub quodam christianitatis nomine male abusi sunt, euocavit ac plurimam populi turbam, rectae patefacta intellegentiae viae,

supported by the Merovingian king, and could be disposed of and replaced in the event of conflict. Yet this was less a question of political constitution than of raw power.' Schlesinger, 'Zur politischen Geschichte', p. 34.

²¹² Ibid., p. 51. Kunter makes a similar argument concerning the élite of the Lahn valley: 'Baggerfund aus der Lahnaue', p. 124.

errorum deposito horrore, a malivola gentilitatis superstitione retraxit et monasterii, collecta servorum Dei congregatione, cellam construxit. Similiter et iuxta fines Saxonum Hessorum populum paganis adhuc ritibus oberrantem a demoniorum evangelica praedicando mandata captivitate liberavit.²¹³

Despite Willibald's motives and bias, and making allowances for the vagaries of memory and transmission between the events of 721 and the writing of the *Vita Bonifatii* roughly forty years later,²¹⁴ the above passage is invaluable in considering the political landscape on the southern fringes of Hesse a generation or so after the Christenberg and Büraburg fortresses were first founded. From Willibald's account we can be certain that Amöneburg was a centre of political power in the 720s, and that its rulers were subservient to Charles Martel. Boniface worked through the established Frankish élite from the very beginning of his mission, and among his surviving correspondence is a letter of support from Charles Martel, the original of which he may have presented to Dettic and Deorulf on arrival at Amöneburg in 721.²¹⁵

Willibald does not give us the titles of the two brothers at Amöneburg (e.g. *duces* or *comites*), but simply says that they were 'in charge' (*praeerant*), which leaves much uncertainty as to their relationship with the Frankish ruler. If they were indeed twin brothers, however, it could suggest that their position of shared power was a hereditary one; and if so, their inherited rule would have had one of three possible origins: it could have been a Frankish foundation, as was the duchy of Würzburg c. 630;²¹⁶ it could have had purely local origins, the product of a political

²¹³ ' [Boniface] then came, with the protection of God, to other parts of Germania in order to preach, and reached, with God's help, the abovenamed place [Amöneburg], where twin brothers, Dettic and Deorulf, were in charge. He recalled them from the sacrilegious use of idols, with which they were doing great harm under the name of Christianity; he also won back a large crowd of people from the wicked superstition of paganism by revealing the path of proper understanding and putting aside the horror of their mistakes; and, having brought together a congregation of God's servants, he built a chapel. In the same way, by preaching according to the evangelical command as far as the borders of the Saxons, he freed the erring Hessians, until then given to pagan rites, from the captivity of demons.' *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, pp. 26-27, ll. 17-4.

²¹⁴ Ian Wood has commented that Willibald's 'carefully researched work' is in fact rather less biased in certain matters than we could expect it to be, given the context of its creation. Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 64.

²¹⁵ Tangl, ep. 22, pp. 36-38. Tangl plausibly dates this letter to 723, relating it to the letter of late 722 by which Gregory II recommended Boniface to Charles Martel. Even so, Boniface must have met and won the protection of Charles Martel before he came to Amöneburg in 721, whether this support was expressed in the existing letter or an earlier one that was not preserved.

²¹⁶ Schlesinger, 'Zur politischen Geschichte', pp. 36-37.

landscape which evolved independent of Frankish involvement but which the Franks did not seek to remove; or, between the two, there could have been a line of local rulers whom the Franks supplanted with their own élite, as Dagobert I had replaced the Thuringian kings with (supposedly) more dependable Frankish *duces*.²¹⁷

Whatever the relationship of Dettic and Deorulf to their overlords in the middle Rhine, the three men who were savagely hacked to death and buried close together at Amöneburg in the first half of the eighth century are a stark illustration of the potential violence to which members of the local élite at this time could be subjected. It is worth observing that, if these men were killed in or after 721, Boniface very possibly knew them personally, or would at least have been aware of the circumstances of their deaths. These circumstances, including whether they died together as Kunter suggested,²¹⁸ or whether they died at Amöneburg or elsewhere, are not discernible to us given the available evidence. It is apparent, however, that their killer or killers dispatched them with extraordinary and merciless ferocity, even making a clumsy attempt to behead the middle-aged man from burial 1 as he lay dead or dying on the ground. It is also significant that their badly mutilated bodies could be recovered and brought to Amöneburg to be accorded privileged, Frankish-style burials. The one clear lesson we can learn from these burials is that Boniface was entering a context where social and political tensions could potentially result in extreme violence directed at high-ranking individuals.

We cannot be certain how closely the political arrangements in central Hesse resembled those of the district of Amöneburg. Willibald implies that the situation with regard to aberrant Christian/pagan customs among the wider population was similar, but he does not mention any counterparts of Dettic and Deorulf resident at Fritzlar or Büraburg. There must have been local potentates associated with these sites who were subservient to Charles Martel; that Willibald did not mention them may indicate that they were generally supportive of Boniface and practised a sufficiently orthodox form of Christianity to avoid correction by him. This could in turn imply that central Hesse was effectively controlled by members of the Frankish élite originally from the Rhineland, who either worked alongside or had authority over the local leaders. It certainly seems unlikely that Charles Martel would have entrusted command of the large Büraburg garrison to a local leader in preference to one of his own Frankish

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

²¹⁸ Kunter, 'Menschliche Überreste', p. 257.

supporters. Upon his arrival in central Hessa in 721, Boniface may have been faced with two broad sources of political authority: a Frankish military commander based at Büraburg, whose support he won through the patronage of Charles Martel, and the partially-Frankised, partially-Christianised élite of Hessa whose focus of power had been at Fritzlar for generations.

4.4.4 The extent of pre-Bonifatian Christianity in Hessa

Boniface was clearly not the first missionary in Germania, but the degree to which some form of Christianity had spread among the population before Boniface's arrival is difficult to determine.²¹⁹ Christianity had certainly made less of an impact in Hessa than in regions to the south and east, but the surviving sources relating to Boniface's mission, in particular the hagiography written over the century following his death, amplify Boniface's role and diminish or ignore the part played by the Frankish church.²²⁰ Willibald does not deny that there was a pre-existing church structure, if a somewhat neglected one, in Thuringia by the time Boniface began his missionary work there, although he may have overly dramatised the resident duke's hostility to Christianity.²²¹ Bede also records that the Anglo-Saxon bishop Swithberht had led a detachment of monks from the Frisian mission into the territory of the Boructuari, to the north-west of Hessa, but that the mission collapsed following the annexation of the region by the Saxons c. 695.²²² Two other Anglo-Saxon missionaries, Hewald the White and Hewald the Black, were martyred around the same time when their visit to a Saxon village went awry.²²³ Boniface, perhaps learning from these disasters, did not attempt to evangelise the Saxons until he had spent seventeen years working in Hessa.²²⁴

²¹⁹ M. Werner, 'Iren und Angelsachsen in Mitteldeutschland: zur vorbonifatianischen Mission in Hessen und Thüringen' in *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter, Teilband 1*, ed. H. Löwe (Stuttgart, 1982), pp. 239-318 (p. 239).

²²⁰ Wood, 'An Absence of Saints?', pp. 340-345.

²²¹ Willibrord had been active in Thuringia before Boniface, as evidence by two charters, dating from 707 and 714, in which the Thuringian *dux* Heden granted possessions to Willibrord: G. H. Pertz, ed., *Chronica aevi Suevici*, MGH SS 23 (Hannover, 1874), pp. 55-56, 60. Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 64. A letter of Pope Gregory II from 722 was addressed to a group of Thuringian leaders whom he praised for retaining their Christian faith in the face of adversity (Tangl, ep. 19, p. 33), while Willibald portrays Boniface's early attempts to reconstruct the embattled Thuringian church (*Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 32, l. 3 to p. 33, l. 12). See also Wood, 'An Absence of Saints?', p. 342.

²²² *HE*, V.11, pp. 484-487.

²²³ *HE*, V.10, pp. 299-301.

²²⁴ See chapter five below, section 5.1.3.

The lower and middle Lahn valley had been well-integrated into the archbishopric of Trier by the early eighth century,²²⁵ and Bishop Rigibert of Mainz was extending his jurisdiction along the Main and into the Wetterau around the same time.²²⁶ Christianity appears to have spread as far as the upper Lahn perhaps through emulation and adoption among local élites as much as through episcopal direction. In a letter of 724, Pope Gregory II referred to an unnamed Frankish bishop who was claiming part of Boniface's mission field as his own.²²⁷ Although Hauck, Tangl, Schieffer, Wallace-Hadrill, Fletcher and other historians have assumed the bishop in question to have been Gerold of Mainz,²²⁸ it seems more likely, as Classen argued in 1929, that Boniface's activities in the Amöneburg district were clashing with the ambitions of Milo of Trier in the upper Lahn valley.²²⁹

Classen also observed a high concentration of medieval church dedications to St Martin along the upper Lahn (see figure 44). Early dedications to this saint are ubiquitous in the Frankish territories, and in this case they give some idea of the farthest advance of Frankish Christianity towards Hessa by the early eighth century.²³⁰ The dedications include the church (later diaconate) of Christenberg. The name of the Christenberg itself indicates that a community of Frankish Christians was worthy of note in the district at the time of its foundation c. 700, while the fact that it lies at the very fringe of dedications to St Martin suggests that the Franks had not yet undertaken any dedicated missionary activity beyond the Lahn before 721, when Boniface arrived to find a conspicuously syncretic form of Christianity being practised by the rulers of Amöneburg.²³¹

If Christianity had only recently been adopted, and not well understood, by the élite of Amöneburg in 721, it is highly unlikely to have been much more thoroughly established in Hessa, where there is no evidence for organised pre-Bonifatian missions or episcopal foundations.²³² Of all the parts of central Germania where

²²⁵ Demandt, 'Hessische Frühzeit'; Kunter, 'Baggerfund aus der Lahnaue', p. 124; Classen, *Die kirchlichen Organisation*, pp. 3-5.

²²⁶ Ibid.; Heinemeyer, 'Die Missionierung Hessens', p. 48.

²²⁷ Pope Gregory II refers to the claim in a letter to Boniface of 724: Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 25-31.

²²⁸ K. Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1904), p. 471; Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, n. 2; Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius*, p. 149; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 151-152; Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, p. 208.

²²⁹ Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation*, pp. 3-4.

²³⁰ Ibid., pp. 40-43.

²³¹ Werner, 'Iren und Angelsachsen', pp. 242-245. *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, pp. 26-27, ll. 17-4.

²³² F. Schwind, 'Fritzlar zur Zeit des Bonifatius und seiner Schüler' in *Fritzlar im Mittelalter*, ed. Schlesinger, pp. 69-88 (p. 70); Werner, 'Iren und Angelsachsen', p. 277.

Boniface was active, Hestia and the Saxon borderlands were the places where he encountered forms of paganism least influenced by Christianity.²³³ The only two likely pre-Bonifatian churches in central Hestia are St Brigid's at B uraburg and St Martin's at Bergheim. St Brigid's, judging from its dominating position at the highest point of B uraburg, was founded at the refortification of the site c. 700.²³⁴ Its principal purpose, however, was probably to serve the garrison of Christian Franks, and there is no reason to view it as the centre of an organised mission before Boniface's arrival. On the contrary, the survival until 723 of a major pagan shrine near Geismar, less than two kilometres distant, implies that the Christian clerics of B uraburg had had little interest, or at least little success, in evangelising the local area.

The dedication of the church (later mother church) of Bergheim to St Martin may also indicate an early Frankish foundation. Classen was inclined to regard it as a post-Bonifatian dedication,²³⁵ but it overlooks the crossing point of the Eder on the main route between central Hestia and Christenberg. This, along with the early Frankish place-name suffix *-heim*, makes an early foundation by Frankish authorities very plausible. A pre-Bonifatian Frankish origin would also explain why, of all the early Hessian mother churches whose medieval dedications are known, Bergheim alone was not dedicated to St Peter. The mother churches dedicated to St Peter were at Fritzlar, Gensungen, Mardorf-Berge and Sch utzeberg (see figure 44); as we shall see in chapter seven below, all of these churches were most likely established by Boniface, and their common dedication to his chosen patron is one element of a single coherent scheme of mother church foundations.²³⁶ The conspicuous dedication of the mother church of Bergheim to the most prominent Frankish saint may indicate that it was already in existence when Boniface incorporated it into his scheme.

Although there is no evidence for a coordinated Frankish mission in Hestia, this is not to say that three decades of direct Frankish involvement among the local  elite had not had an impact on the religious habits of the Hessian population. Nonetheless, Willibald states that Boniface baptised 'many thousands' of people in Hestia,²³⁷ and confirmed them in 723 after he was granted episcopal authority.²³⁸ We

²³³ Schieffer, *Winfried-Bonifatius*, p. 141.

²³⁴ The dedication of the church to St Brigid is not evidence for its foundation by Irish missionaries. For an extensive discussion of the issue, see Werner, 'Iren und Angelsachsen', pp. 249-274.

²³⁵ Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation*, p. 41.

²³⁶ See chapter seven below, section 7.2.1.

²³⁷ *Multisque milibus hominum... baptizatis, Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, ll. 8-9.

shall consider Boniface's earliest activity in Hessa in the coming chapters, but some remarks are necessary in order to understand the state of Christianity upon his arrival in the region.

Some aspects of Christianity may have been assimilated into local paganism in a form quite incompatible with Boniface's notion of Christian orthodoxy. This would probably have occurred in a fairly organic, undirected fashion via the close economic and political contacts of the Frankish garrisons at Christenberg and Bûraburg with the surrounding populations. Nevertheless, the majority of Hessians had not been baptised, and so, by Boniface's understanding, were not Christian.²³⁹ Given that this was the situation in central Hessa, where the Frankish influence was strongest, the extent to which a form of Christianity recognisable to Boniface was practised on the Saxon borderlands at this time is likely to have been minimal. Hessa was, in short, a region of pagans with perhaps small numbers of baptised Christians in the areas of strongest Frankish influence, and there was almost certainly no widespread church structure established in the region prior to Boniface's arrival.

*

There are major challenges involved in understanding the political and cultural context of Hessa in the early-eighth century. There are no surviving historical references to Hessa or Hessians before Boniface began his mission, and the region only emerges from the shadows of archaeological obscurity when the Franks began to extend their influence northwards from the mid-seventh century. It is puzzling that Hessa should appear to have been ignored by the Franks, or at least by the Frankish chroniclers, when the neighbouring kingdom of Thuringia was already a target of serious Frankish ambitions in the sixth century, and we must be cautious not to equate historical silence with political and cultural inactivity.

By considering the changes in the archaeological record between the mid-seventh century and early-eighth century, we have gained a more nuanced impression of the process of Frankish expansion into Hessa than has been achieved in existing scholarship. The Franks had long considered Hessa vital to the security of their

²³⁸ *Hessorum iam multi, catholica fide subditi ac septiformis spiritus gratia confirmati, manus inpositionem acciperunt*, *ibid.*, p. 30, l. 19 to p. 31, l. 1.

²³⁹ See chapter seven below, section 7.4.3.

southern provinces, and during the second half of the seventh century they gradually established control of the Fritzlar district through local élites who either originated in the Rhineland or who chose to adopt Rhineland burial customs, presumably along with other aspects of Frankish culture. At around the same time, political and social tensions in the upper Lahn valley resulted in the short-lived adoption of mound burial as certain local élites sought to affirm their authority publicly in an unpredictable and rapidly changing context.

By the end of the seventh century, the Franks were in firm control of the two main routes between Saxony and the middle Rhine, and had secured each with an enormous fortification. Büraburg and the Christenberg represented a fundamental shift in policy on the part of the Frankish rulers, perhaps provoked by reasonable fears of Saxon encroachment towards the south, from distant control via local élites to direct military domination. The turn of the eighth century also saw a transformation in the settled landscape of Hesse, as more land was brought under cultivation. There may have been a significant rise in population connected to this process, although whether due to an influx of settlers from the south, to the expansion of indigenous communities, or a combination of the two, cannot be ascertained from the available evidence. It is clear, however, that Hesse was not a stagnant landscape when Boniface arrived in 721. On the contrary, it appears to have been a highly militarised, intensely settled, increasingly cultivated border region where long-distance trade routes and the expansive, confrontational political interests of the Franks and Saxons entwined with complex local concerns.

The Franks apparently had no serious plans to Christianise the region before the arrival of Boniface, despite the fact that Willibrord had been pursuing his Frisian mission under Frankish protection since 690; but it seems that Charles Martel was quick to perceive the potential benefits of a coordinated mission led by Anglo-Saxons with no obvious interest in factional Frankish politics, and offered Boniface his support. We cannot know how thoroughly Boniface was informed of the potentially volatile political situation in Hesse, or how well he managed it when he was there. If we take a long view, however, we can gain an impression of the overall course of his Hessian mission in relation to the long-term development of the Hessian-Saxon borderlands, before we go on to consider the mechanics of the mission in more detail.

Part III

Mission

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But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul – the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled.

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Oxford, 1986), p. 106

Chapter Five

The Chronology and Sources of the Hessian Mission

The purpose of this chapter is to present a concise chronology of the Hessian mission from Boniface's arrival in 721 to his death in 754, and to discuss the difficulties involved in the interpretation of the pertinent sources.¹ By so doing I will also attempt to demonstrate that Boniface had always pursued his mission in Hessa with the intention of expanding it northwards, and that he did not surrender this desire even when his first concerted attempt to evangelise the Saxons was thwarted. This will provide the essential framework for our consideration of the material of the next two chapters.

I have arranged the major events and periods pertaining to the Hessian mission under four headings: Boniface's evangelisation of Hessa between 721 and 738; the foundation of his church at Fritzlar in the early 720s; the later years of the mission from 738 to 754; and the foundation of the bishopric of Büraburg in 741/42 and its abolition in 746. Of these four areas of interest, only the first is richly and relatively unambiguously attested in our sources. The other three will require some discussion in order to clarify points of dispute; with the church of Fritzlar and the bishopric of Büraburg the discussion is mainly over points of chronology, while the very nature of the Saxon mission of 738/39 has been fiercely disputed. I intend to resolve these issues as far as possible in order to establish the overall course and context of the Hessian mission.

The major primary sources for this chapter are the collected letters of Boniface and Lul, the eighth-century Frankish annals,² and the later *vitae* of several Anglo-

¹ For general accounts of Boniface's career, I refer the reader to the appropriate secondary literature. The principal English-language sources: Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, pp. 204-213; Reuter, 'Saint Boniface and Europe'; Levison, *England and the Continent*, pp. 70-93; Thomas Noble's introduction to Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, pp. viii-xxvii; Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 58-60; Greenaway, *Saint Boniface*, esp. pp. 14-59; Lapidge et al., eds., *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 69-70; P. Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel* (Harlow, 2000), pp. 30-37; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 143-161. The most accessible German literature is Padberg, *Bonifatius*, esp. pp. 28-106; idem, *Die Christianisierung Europas*, pp. 80-88; idem, 'Bonifatius – das Leben des Missionars' in *Bonifatius*, ed. Imhof and Stasch, pp. 39-62; Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius*, esp. pp. 120-85; Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, pp. 227-254.

² The most important sources are the *Continuations of Fredegar* (henceforth *Fred. Cont.*), in *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 2 (Hannover, 1888), pp. 1-193; the *Annales Petaviani* (*Ann. Petav.*) in *Annales et chronici aevi Carolini*, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hannover, 1826), pp. 7-18; the *Annales Mettenses priores* (*Ann. Mett.*), ed.

Saxon missionaries. The *vitae* include Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii* (written between 754 and 768),³ Hygeburg's *Vita Willibaldi*⁴ and *Vita Wynnebaldi*⁵ (754x768), Liudger's *Vita Gregorii* (early ninth century),⁶ Eigil's *Vita Sturmi* (794x800),⁷ Lupus of Ferrières' *Vita Wigberti* (836)⁸ and Rudolph of Fulda's *Vita Leobae* (c. 836).⁹

There are three eighth- or ninth-century manuscripts which contain all of the surviving letters of Boniface and Lul:¹⁰

- 1) Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Lat. 8112 (Mainz, s. viii/ix)
- 2) Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Rastatt 22 (Mainz, s. ix^{med})
- 3) Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Lat. 751 (Mainz, s. ix^{med})

The Vienna manuscript includes letters written between Boniface and other correspondents apart from the popes, along with some letters of Aldhelm (brought to the continent by the missionaries) and letters written to and by Lul both before and after Boniface's death in 754.¹¹ The Munich and Karlsruhe manuscripts contain the papal correspondence along with a number of other letters also found in the Vienna manuscript. The late sixteenth-century Magdeburg Centuriators produced their edition of the letters using only the Vienna manuscript;¹² the first scholarly analysis and

B. von Simson, MGH SS rer. Germ. 10 (Hannover, 1905); the *Annales Laureshamenses* (*Ann. Laures.*) in *Annales et chronici*, ed. Pertz, pp. 22-39; the *Annales regni Francorum* (*Ann. reg. Franc.*), ed. F. Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6 (Hannover, 1895); and the *Annales antiqui Fuldenses* (*Ann. Fuld.*) in *Annales et chronici*, ed. Pertz, MGH SS 1, pp. 337-414.

³ Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii auctore Willibaldo*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover, 1905), pp. 1-58; on dating, see Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 61-64; BHL 1400.

⁴ Hygeburg of Heidenheim, *Vita Willibaldi*, ed. O. Holder-Egger MGH SS 15.1 (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 86-106; Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 64; BHL 8931.

⁵ Idem, *Vita Wynnebaldi*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15.1 (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 106-117; Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 64; BHL 8996,

⁶ Liudger, *Vita Gregorii abbatis Traiectensis*, MGH SS 15.1 (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 63-79; Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 111-112; BHL 3680.

⁷ The most recent critical edition is Eigil, *Vita Sturmi*, in *Die Vita Sturmi des Eigils von Fulda: Literarkritisch-historische Untersuchung und Edition*, ed. P. Engelbert, Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck 29 (Marburg, 1968); on dating, Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 69-70; BHL 7924.

⁸ Lupus of Ferrières, *Vita Wigberti abbatis Frideslariensis*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15.1 (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 36-43; Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 66; BHL 8879.

⁹ Rudolph of Fulda, *Vita Leobae abbatissae Bischofesheimensis*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH SS 15.1 (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 118-131; BHL 4845.

¹⁰ On the manuscript transmission of the Bonifatian correspondence after the ninth century, see H. Hahn, 'Die Briefe und Synoden des Bonifaz', *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte* 15 (1875), pp. 97-115; A. Nürnburger, 'Die Bonifatiusliteratur der Magdeburger Centuriatoren', *Neues Archiv* 11 (1886), pp. 9-41; idem, 'Verlorene Handschriften der Briefe des hl. Bonifatius', *Neues Archiv* 7 (1882), pp. 353-381; Tangl, pp. vi-xxxix.

¹¹ W. Diekamp, 'Die Wiener Handschrift der Bonifatius-Briefe', *Neues Archiv* 9 (1884), pp. 9-28.

¹² Nürnburger, 'Die Bonifatiusliteratur', pp. 16-17, 27.

critical edition of the complete corpus of letters was by Jaffé in 1866,¹³ whose work was followed in 1892 by a fresh edition produced for the MGH by Dümmler.¹⁴ A third critical edition was published by Tangl in 1911, also as part of the MGH, and this has become the standard edition of the letters used by scholars since.¹⁵ All citations from the letters of Boniface and Lul in this thesis are from Tangl's edition.

Letters, annals and *vitae* bring their own difficulties of interpretation and analysis. With regard to the letters, chronological precision is often counterbalanced by geographical imprecision: although many of the letters most useful for this chapter can be securely dated to a particular year, in the case of papal communiqués often to a specific day, the remarks made in the letters regarding Boniface's mission tend to lack associated place-names or even the names of provinces (e.g. Hestia or Thuringia). It is therefore uncertain to which part of his mission field many of the letters relate. We must also remember that the letters preserved in the Vienna, Karlsruhe and Munich manuscripts in the ninth century may not be at all representative of the thousands of letters that must have been written by clerics during the thirty-five years of Boniface's mission. Perhaps most important, there is very little 'internal' correspondence, i.e. letters written between missionaries in the field, surviving: the manuscripts overwhelmingly contain letters written between missionaries and Anglo-Saxon or Roman contacts who were far removed from Germania, and most of these letters are to or from Boniface or Lul. Regular progress reports, situation updates, special requests or instructions, notes between friends and family members, not to mention mundane lists of people and supplies and the countless other ephemera produced by any literate, tightly organised missionary community – almost none of this has come down to us.¹⁶

The precise mechanics of preservation of the letters of Boniface and Lul in the decades prior to the creation of the Vienna, Karlsruhe and Munich manuscripts are all but impossible to ascertain. We do not know how far the compilers of the ninth-century manuscripts selected and discarded letters that were available to them in

¹³ P. Jaffé, ed., *Monumenta Moguntina* (Berlin, 1866), pp. 8-315.

¹⁴ E. Dümmler, ed., *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae*, MGH Ep. 3 (Munich, 1892), pp. 215-433.

¹⁵ Tangl, ed., *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*.

¹⁶ Mary Garrison has examined such accidentally preserved ephemera, in particular the tablets of Vindolanda and Novgorod, in order to illuminate the kinds of everyday written sources that tended not to be preserved through medieval manuscript transmission. M. Garrison, "'Send More Socks': On the Mentality and the Preservation Context of Medieval Letters" in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. M. Mostert (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 69-99.

Mainz or elsewhere, and how far they attempted to preserve whatever they had to hand that seemed worth preserving, according to what criteria. Andy Orchard has argued that a number of the ‘private’ epistles of the Vienna manuscript appear to have been preserved as stylistic templates, with the name of sender or recipient (or both) removed,¹⁷ but this pertains only to a fraction of the entire collection. Papal letters seem to have been preserved with special care, no doubt because of the abundant guidance in matters of orthodoxy and orthopraxy that they contained, but these, too, demonstrably represent only part of the correspondence between Boniface and Rome over the course of thirty-five years.¹⁸

Nor do we know how or where Boniface organised and archived his own correspondence, or if he did so in a systematic fashion at all; we might infer his archival practices from broader early medieval practice,¹⁹ but Boniface was highly mobile, frequently moving from one base to another across many hundreds of kilometres, and the careful preservation of every letter he wrote and received for posterity was not among his foremost concerns. We know, for instance, that the Vienna, Karlsruhe and Munich manuscripts were all originally compiled in Mainz, but Boniface did not acquire that city as his episcopal seat until 746. We may well ask where his personal letters were stored before then, and what proportion of them, assuming that they were not lost or deliberately destroyed before 746, actually found their way to Mainz. When using the surviving letters as a historical source, we must therefore be constantly aware that, invaluable as they are, they remain but clusters of flickering candles in a landscape of overwhelming shadow.

We must also be cautious when interpreting the various Frankish annals and the hagiographical texts. The annals offer limited information with regard to Hesse and Saxony during Boniface’s mission, and what they do say tends to reflect the strongly pro-Carolingian bias of their later authors.²⁰ Hagiographical texts were composed for the purpose of the edification of monastic communities or the

¹⁷ A. Orchard, ‘Old Sources, New Resources: Finding the Right Formula for Boniface’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), pp. 15-38 (pp. 17-19).

¹⁸ See this chapter below, section 5.1.1, on the letter of Boniface to Rome in 722, alluded to in the *Vita Bonifatii* of Willibald, which does not survive. Many more letters from the popes to Boniface survive than *vice versa*.

¹⁹ On the preservation and transmission practices of early medieval letters, see M. Garrison, ‘Letters to a King and Biblical Exempla: The Example of Cathulf and Clemens Peregrinus’, *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), pp. 305-328 (pp. 319-320).

²⁰ R. McKitterick, ‘The Illusion of Royal Power in the Carolingian Annals’, *English Historical Review* 115 (2000), pp. 1-20 (pp. 3-4).

promotion of a particular saint's cult, rather than the impartial recording of history.²¹ Their portrayal of historical events and figures must be viewed in light of these purposes and interests, in particular the accounts of those texts which were written more than two generations after Boniface's death, and consequently lack the authority of contemporary witnesses.

5.1 Boniface's evangelisation of Hessa, 721-738

5.1.1 Missionary priest, 716-722

For the chronology of Boniface's early career, in particular his initial work in Hessa, we are almost entirely dependent upon the *Vita Bonifatii* of Willibald, an Anglo-Saxon priest based in Mainz who wrote the work between 754 and 769 under the patronage of Bishops Lul of Mainz and Megingoz of Würzburg.²² This source has the advantage of having been written well within living memory of many of the events it purports to describe (in the case of Boniface's arrival in Hessa, approximately forty years later), and demonstrates a concern for historical accuracy unusual among early medieval hagiographical texts.²³

Since we now have a fuller understanding of the recent political history of Hessa c. 721, we can approach Willibald's text with greater critical awareness. Although Willibald models Boniface's missionary activities in Hessa on those of the early evangelists with little regard for particular historical context, and despite his reticence concerning the direct Frankish support which his hero enjoyed, there is nothing in his account that contradicts or is contradicted by what we know of the historical situation from other sources. On the contrary, Willibald's hagiographical account, contemporary letters and archaeological evidence all complement one

²¹ Kehl, *Kult und Nachleben*, pp. 1-5; Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 18-20.

²² On Willibald's identity as a cleric in Mainz, possibly attached to the church of St Victor, see Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 61; R. Schieffer on Willibald in B. Wachinger, ed., *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, Vol. 10 (Berlin, 1999), col. 1154-1156; Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 41-47; W. Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im Lateinischen Mittelalter 3: Karolingische Biographien 750-920 n. Chr.*, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters, 10 (Stuttgart, 1991), pp. 6-18; K. Hansel, 'Das Stift St. Viktor von Mainz', *Mainzer Zeitschrift* 54 (1959), pp. 1-11. Wagner has recently claimed that the author of the *Vita Bonifatii* is to be identified with Bishop Willibald of Eichstätt: Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, pp. 9-23.

²³ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 62-64. See also W. Wattenbach, W. Levison and H. Löwe, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter, Vorzeit und Karolinger. II Heft: Die Karolinger vom Anfang des 8. Jahrhunderts bis zum Tode Karls des Grossen* (Weimar, 1953), pp. 176-177.

another, offering different perspectives on aspects of Boniface's initial mission in Hessa.

Boniface arrived in Hessa in 721, five years after his original decision to become a missionary. According to Willibald, Boniface's first attempt to join Willibrord's mission in Frisia in 716 was thwarted when Radbod, the Frisian king, led an uprising against the Franks and forced the Anglo-Saxon missionaries to suspend their efforts.²⁴ Boniface returned to Wessex, where he remained for a winter before embarking on a journey to Rome. Pope Gregory II granted him the name Boniface (he had previously been known by his Anglo-Saxon name of Wynfreth)²⁵ and directed him to spread the Gospel among the pagans of Germania. Boniface next visited Bavaria, Thuringia and the middle Rhine, where he heard of the death of Radbod and immediately rejoined Willibrord in Frisia.²⁶

Direct corroborating evidence for Willibald's account up to this point is restricted to the original declaration of support from Gregory to Boniface, dated May 15, 719, which was preserved among Boniface's papal correspondence,²⁷ and a letter of Bugga, written c. 720, in which she refers to Boniface's audience with the pope and the death of Radbod.²⁸

After two years working with Willibrord in Frisia,²⁹ Boniface returned to the middle Rhine and reached Amöneburg in 721. We already considered his encounter with the brothers Dettic and Deorulf, the semi-pagan rulers of Amöneburg, in the previous chapter.³⁰ Willibald records that Boniface travelled next to Hessa, where he proselytised as far as the Saxon borderlands:

²⁴ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 4, p. 15, l. 31 to p. 18, l. 3.

²⁵ Vernacular personal names were often prone to scribal corruption in Latin documents, but the presence of Boniface's Anglo-Saxon name in an acrostic poem of his own authorship suggests that he spelled it *Uynfreth*. See C. Weber, 'Die Namen des heiligen Bonifatius', *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter* 30 (1954), pp. 39-66 (pp. 43-49).

²⁶ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 5, p. 19, l. 12 to p. 23, l. 21.

²⁷ Tangl, ep. 12, pp. 17-18.

²⁸ Tangl, ep. 15, pp. 26-28.

²⁹ There are hints in Willibald's account that Willibrord and Boniface parted under less than amicable circumstances: *Vita Bonifatii*, p. 24, l. 12 to p. 2, l. 9. Both Schieffer and Padberg suspect Willibald of attempting to smooth over a serious clash of personalities or missionary methods between the two saints. See Schieffer, *Winfred-Bonifatius*, pp. 118-119; Padberg, *Bonifatius*, p. 36; also F. Flaskamp, 'Wilbrord-Clemens und Wynfith-Bonifatius' in *Sankt Bonifatius*, ed. Raabe and others, pp. 157-172.

³⁰ See chapter four above, section 4.4.3.

iuxta fines Saxonum Hessorum populum paganis adhuc ritibus oberrantem a demoniorum evangelica praedicando mandata.³¹

In 722, after performing a large number of baptisms, Boniface wrote a letter to Gregory II which does not survive, although Willibald may well have had it to hand when he wrote his *vita*.³² Boniface was immediately summoned to Rome to give a more detailed report and to receive the full weight of papal support, including consecration as missionary bishop.

5.1.2 Missionary bishop and archbishop, 722-738

Ample contemporary documentation survives which can act as supporting evidence for Willibald's description of Boniface's second visit to Rome, including Boniface's oath as a missionary bishop (dated November 30, 722);³³ a letter of support from Charles Martel (undated; see chapter four above, section 4.4.3);³⁴ and letters from Gregory II to all Frankish Christians (December 1, 722),³⁵ to churchmen (December 1, 722),³⁶ to five named Thuringian leaders (undated, though possibly contemporary)³⁷ and to Charles Martel (also undated).³⁸ After petitioning Charles

³¹ 'By preaching the Gospel close to the borders of the Saxons he freed from the captivity of demons the Hessian people, who until that time were dedicated to pagan rites.' *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, ll. 4-7.

³² *...idoneum quippe nuntium ac fidelem suarum litterarum portitorem nomine Bynnan Rome direxit patrique uenerabili apostolici sedis pontifici universa, quae circa illum, Domino donante, facta sunt, muto quidem littero ministrante, per ordinem reuelavit et, ut magna siquidem hominum multitudo, diuino inlustrante spiritu, regenerationis perciperet sacramentum, manifestauit. Sed et de rebus, quae ad cottidianam ecclesiae Dei necessitatem populique prouentum pertinebant, plura ob consilium sedis apostolicae interrogando conscripsit.* '...he sent to Rome an experienced and trustworthy messenger, Bynnan by name, with a letter in which he made known to the Supreme Pontiff, Bishop of the Apostolic See, all the matters which by God's grace had been accomplished, and the number of people who, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, had received the sacrament of Baptism. In addition he asked for guidance on certain questions concerning the day-to-day needs of the Church and the progress of the people, for he wished to have the advice of the Apostolic See.' *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, ll. 9-19; trans. Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, pp. 42-43. The clarity of Willibald's summary, in particular his naming of Bynnan as messenger, suggests that he had read the letter. The apparent structure of this lost letter resembles those of letters which do survive between Boniface and the various popes: see Tangl, ep. 24, 26, 50, 51, 64, 80, 87.

³³ Tangl, ep. 16, pp. 28-29.

³⁴ Tangl, ep. 22, pp. 36-38.

³⁵ Tangl, ep. 17, pp. 29-31.

³⁶ Tangl, ep. 18, pp. 31-33. In his translation, Emerton somewhat misleadingly inserts 'in Thuringia' into the *salutatio* of this letter, whereas the Latin was originally addressed simply to *clero ordini et plebi consistenti dilectissimi filii*. Ibid, p. 31, ll. 19-21. Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 21. There is no solid evidence that Pope Gregory wrote to the Thuringian church before December of 724, shortly before Boniface began his mission there. Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 32-36.

³⁷ Tangl, ep. 19, p. 33. This letter could also easily date to December of 724, when the pope renewed his support for Boniface's imminent mission to Thuringia.

Martel for his protection, Boniface returned to Hessa and continued the mission with renewed vigour.

The initial enthusiasm of Boniface's Hessian converts for their new faith had apparently worn thin during the months of his absence, with many of the recently baptised lapsing into former customs and rejecting the rite of confirmation. Boniface rallied his supporters, who must have included some powerful members of the local élite, and ceremonially desecrated and destroyed the major pagan shrine of *robor Iobis*, 'Jupiter's (Thor's) Oak', near Geismar. Using the wood from the tree he built an oratory dedicated to Saint Peter, the location of which Willibald does not give.³⁹ For this crucial episode we are entirely dependent upon Willibald's testimony,⁴⁰ but his reliability up to this point makes him a credible, if not impartial, witness; furthermore, the location of Geismar within two kilometres of the major Frankish fortress of Büraburg clearly indicates that Boniface was acting well within the protective shadow of his Frankish supporters.

A year later, in 724, Boniface wrote another report to Pope Gregory II, a reply to which survives.⁴¹ In this letter, dated to December 4, 724, Gregory congratulated Boniface on his progress, mentioning neither Geismar nor Hessa by name, and stated that he had written to the Thuringians, enjoining them to 'establish bishoprics and found churches' (*ut construant episcopia et aeclesias condant*).⁴² Boniface had presumably requested that the pope write a letter to the Thuringian church preparatory to his mission there, which Willibald portrays as taking place after the destruction of the Geismar shrine. Willibald's account, however, becomes vague at this point, giving few clues as to how Boniface contributed, if at all, to restoring secular and ecclesiastical order in the troubled Thuringian province, and not detailing any further events in Hessa.⁴³ Willibald goes on to paint a picture of the early missionary work in Thuringia and Hessa with swift, broad strokes:

³⁸ Tangl, ep. 20, pp. 33-34.

³⁹ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 30, l. 19 to p. 32, l. 2. See below, section 5.2.1.

⁴⁰ A letter to Boniface purportedly by Gregory III and incorporated into the thirteenth-century *Vita Waltgeri*, but not preserved in any earlier source, makes a reference to the felling of Thor's Oak, but the difficulty of determining the authenticity of this text means that it cannot be used to corroborate Willibald's account. See below, this chapter, section 5.3.3.

⁴¹ Tangl, ep. 24, pp. 41-43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 42, l. 34.

⁴³ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 32, l. 3 to p. 34, l. 2.

Sicque sanctae rumor praedicationis eius diffamatus est in tantumque inoleuit, ut per maximam iam Europae partem fama eius perstreperet. Et ex Britanniae partibus seruorum Dei plurima ad eum tam lectorum quam etiam scriptorum alariumque artium eruditorum uirorum congregationis conuenerat multitudo. Quorum quippe quam plurimi regulari se eius institutione subdiderunt populumque ab erratica gentilitatis profanatione plurimis in locis euocauere. Et alii quidem in prouincia Hessorum, alii etiam in Thyringea dispersi late per populum, pagos ac uicos uerbum Dei praedicabant. Cumque ingens utriusque populi multitudo fidei sacramenta, multis milibus hominum baptizatis, perciperet.⁴⁴

Two other letters survive which date from the earliest phase of Boniface's mission. The first is a letter from Daniel of Winchester advising Boniface on methods of conversion,⁴⁵ and the second is a reply of Gregory II, dated November 22, 726, to a report of Boniface.⁴⁶ Some of the queries addressed by Gregory in this letter, particularly those concerning corrupt clergy, probably relate to Thuringia rather than Hessa.

We must also remember that Charles Martel had launched campaigns into Saxony in 719 and 720, the two years prior to Boniface's arrival; possibly in 722 and certainly in 724, during the very beginning of the mission; and again in 728 or 729.⁴⁷ We have no way of knowing the full extent to which these campaigns, and the Saxon provocations or retaliations that may have been associated with them but were not recorded, affected the people of Hessa. It is clear, however, that some of Boniface's earliest evangelisation and ministration was performed among a population who had been subjected to several years of continual warfare across the Frankish-Saxon

⁴⁴ 'By these means the report of his preaching reached far-off lands so that within a short space of time his fame resounded through the greater part of Europe. From Britain an exceedingly large number of holy men came to his aid, among them readers, writers and learned men trained in the other arts. Of these a considerable number put themselves under his rule and guidance, and by their help the population in many places was recalled from the errors and profane rights of the heathen gods. Working in widely scattered groups among the people of Hesse and Thuringia, they preached the word of God in the country districts and villages. The number of Hessians and Thuringians who received the sacraments of faith was enormous and many thousands of them were baptised.' *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 34, ll. 3-17; trans. Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ Tangl, ep. 23, pp. 38-41. The letter is undated, but must have been written before Boniface's promotion to archbishop in 732, most likely during the earliest phase of his evangelisation.

⁴⁶ Tangl, ep. 26, pp. 44-47.

⁴⁷ These campaigns are recorded in the Frankish annals; for references and a discussion of the sources involved, see above, chapter four, section 4.4.3.

borderlands, and had suffered the inevitable social and cultural disruption that warfare brings.

The first few years of the Hessian mission, from 721 to 726, are the most closely documented in the surviving letters and Willibald's *vita*. The emphasis of Willibald's narrative quickly shifts towards Boniface's work as a reformer of the Frankish and Bavarian Churches from c. 736 onwards, and there is a six-year lacuna in the correspondence from 726 until 732, in which year Gregory III promoted Boniface to archbishop.⁴⁸ Padberg suggests that Lul deliberately left letters from this period to one side when compiling his master's correspondence because they contained evidence of turbulent relationships between Boniface and the Frankish clergy and secular élite.⁴⁹ The surviving letters, however, are hardly short of evidence of this kind,⁵⁰ and, as we have already seen, there must have been innumerable factors which influenced the eventual form of the surviving Bonifatian correspondence.⁵¹

5.1.3 The extent of Boniface's mission field c. 738

The first directly contemporary source which allows us to delineate Boniface's sphere of activity in any detail is a letter of c. 738 from Gregory III, which was addressed thus:

universis optimatibus et populo provinciarum Germaniae, Thuringis et Hassis, Bortharis et Nistresis, Uedreciis et Lognais, Suduodis et Graffeltis vel omnibus in orientali plaga constitutis.⁵²

The pope wrote the letter during Boniface's 737/38 sojourn in Rome, and Boniface brought it back with him to the mission field. In the letter Gregory exhorted the named tribes to obey Boniface in matters of religion, to accept bishops and priests he might ordain over them, to reject those clerics whom he punished, and to abstain from

⁴⁸ Tangl, ep. 28, pp. 49-52.

⁴⁹ Padberg, *Bonifatius*, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Boniface's long and plaintive letters to Daniel of Winchester (Tangl, ep. 63, pp. 128-132) and Cuthbert of Canterbury (Tangl, ep. 78, pp. 161-170).

⁵¹ See the opening to this chapter.

⁵² 'to all the nobles and people of the provinces of Germania, the Hessians and Thuringians, the *Borthari* and *Nistresi*, the *Wedrecii* and *Lognai*, the *Suduodi* and *Graffelti* and to all those dwelling in the eastern region [i.e. east of the Rhine]'. Tangl, ep. 43, p. 68, ll. 10-14.

all the pagan customs which they had rejected at baptism.⁵³

The letter appears to give a concise list of the tribal groups among whom Boniface had been active from 721, and who were for the most part baptised and regularly ministered by 738. For this reason the identities and locations of the groups have been extensively discussed in the secondary literature, and general consensus has been reached concerning the locations of most of the tribes. We shall briefly consider the tribal names here, since they will give us an idea of the physical extent of Boniface's activities seventeen years into his mission. Since the letter represents the earliest occurrence of most of the tribal names, scholars have generally relied on the evidence of later charters to localise them.⁵⁴ The generally accepted locations of the tribes in the Hessian region are illustrated on figure 38.

The Hessians and Thuringians, first of all, are easily identified as the inhabitants of Hesse and Thuringia: Gregory's letter is, in fact, the earliest documentary appearance of the name *Hessi*. As Wand notes, it is unclear whether the following three pairs of tribal names represent sub-groups of the Hessians and Thuringians, or would have considered themselves to have an entirely separate group identity.⁵⁵ A general consensus has long been reached that the *Borthari* are to be equated with the *Boructuari* of Bede⁵⁶ and with the Brukerer, a group who in early medieval charters inhabited the region of the upper Saale to the north-west of Hesse, beyond the river Diemel.⁵⁷ Similarly, the *Nistresi* are commonly identified with the

⁵³ Ibid, p. 68, l. 15 to p. 69, l. 9.

⁵⁴ In most eighth- and ninth-century charters of Fulda, Lorsch and Hersfeld a location is described as being *in pago N.*, 'in the *pago* of N.', where N. is a collective name in the genitive plural. For further discussion see Backhaus, 'Die Gaue vor und nach 900', p. 41.

⁵⁵ Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 46.

⁵⁶ *HE*, V.11, pp. 484-487.

⁵⁷ Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, p. 499, n. 3, placed the *Borthari* along the Wohra, a river that flows north from near Amöneburg, while Boehmer, 'Zur Geschichte des Bonifatius', p. 173, placed them on the upper Weser. Later opinion swung conclusively in favour of the Brukerer: Tangl, ep. 43, p. 68, n. 1; idem, *Bonifatiusfragen*, Abhandlungen der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2 (Berlin, 1919), p. 5; E. E. Stengel, 'Politische Wellenbewegungen im hessisch-westfälischen Grenzgebiet', *Mitteilungen an die Mitglieder des Vereins für hessische Geschichte* 25/26 (1927), pp. 11-18 (p. 5); Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, pp. 179-180; Schmidt, 'Bonifatius und die Sachsen', pp. 242-243; Rademacher, 'Die Anfänge der Sachsenmission', p. 138; Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 46; W. Niemeyer, 'Zur Klärung hessischer Stammesfragen des frühen Mittelalters. Bemerkung zum Bonifatiusbrief 43', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für hessische Geschichte und Landeskunde* 63 (1952), pp. 13-26 (pp. 18-19). Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, pp. 134-135, proceeding from the flawed assumption that Boniface could not have evangelised the Brukerer because there is no evidence that he evangelised beyond the Diemel, makes an unconvincing attempt to identify the *Borthari* with the *Osthari*, an eastern Thuringian tribe who are not historically attested until the eleventh century.

Niftharsi, whose *pagus* stretched from the middle Eder to the Diemel along the north-western border of the Hessians.⁵⁸

The *Wedrecii* were commonly placed in the Wetterau region north of Frankfurt until Demandt in 1953 proposed a more plausible identification with the district between the middle Lahn and the Eder, in which the Christenberg lies.⁵⁹ The main river in the area is the Wetschaft, while local place-names include Wetter, Wetterstadt, Wettrehen, Wetterfeld, Wetterburg and Wethen. Furthermore, that a local identity existed along the river in the eighth century is suggested by its brief appearance in Eigil's *Vita Sturmi* (written 794x800). Eigil recounts how, during the Saxon invasion of 778, the Saxons camped in *Loganacinse*, in the Lahngau, while they considered an attack on Fulda.⁶⁰ As the monks of Fulda, including Eigil, fled towards Hammelburg with the relics of Saint Boniface, Sturm himself 'hurried to *Wedereiba*'⁶¹ in order to attempt negotiations with the Saxons. Four days after Sturm's departure, word reached Eigil and his companions that the Saxons had been defeated in a battle,⁶² which according to the *Annales regni Francorum* occurred at *Lihesi*.⁶³ Since *Lihesi*, modern-day Laisa, is eight kilometres north-west of the Christenberg and overlooks the Wetschaft, this strongly suggests that Eigil's term *Wedereiba* refers to the Wetschaft, not the Wetterau.

Of the remaining three tribes named in Gregory's letter, the *Lognai* can be securely identified with the inhabitants of the Lahngau, the district of the river Lahn whose *pagus* included the Amöneburg basin, and the *Graffelti* can be assumed to be

⁵⁸ Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, p. 499, n. 3, placed the *Nistresi* on the river Nister, 80 kilometres west of Amöneburg. Those who prefer an identification with the *Niftharsi* include Schieffer, *Winfried-Bonifatius*, p. 180; Wand, *Die Bûrabung*, p. 46; Schmidt, 'Bonifatius und die Sachsen', p. 239; and Rademacher, 'Die Anfänge der Sachsenmission', pp. 162-163. Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, pp. 131-133, emends *Nistresi* to *uistresi* and identifies the tribe with the *pagus uuistregaugio* which in the early ninth century lay 50 kilometres east of Fulda, but there appears to be no good reason to accept his thesis in favour of the widely accepted identification with the *Niftharsi*.

⁵⁹ Demandt, 'Hessische Frühzeit', p. 46. For the older opinion, see Boehmer, 'Zur Geschichte des Bonifatius', p. 171; Tangl, ep. 43, p. 68, n. 3, repeated by Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 47, n. 1. Schieffer, *Winfried-Bonifatius*, p. 179, was inclined to accept Demandt's theory, remarking that the identification of the *Wedrecii* was problematic because Boniface did not appear to have evangelised the region, which had long been incorporated into the Frankish Rhine-Main ecclesiastical landscape. Wand, *Die Bûrabung*, p. 46, also follows Demandt, as does Schlesinger, 'Early Medieval Fortifications', p. 246. Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, pp. 136-137, expresses dissent in favour of the antiquated identification with the Wetterau, arguing on the weakest grounds that Boniface may have been active in the region after the death of Bishop Gerold of Mainz in 737, even though we know that Mainz was held until 745 by Gerold's son Gewilib, who was equally hostile towards Boniface (see below, chapter seven, section 7.3.2).

⁶⁰ *Vita Sturmi*, c. 23, p. 376, l. 29.

⁶¹ *in Wedereiba perrexit*. *Ibid.*, l. 34.

⁶² *Ibid.*, ll. 42-44.

⁶³ *Ann. reg. Franc.*, p. 52.

the residents of the Grabfeld, in which region Fulda lay. The identity of the *Suduodi* is entirely uncertain. If, as is widely accepted, the names of the tribes in Gregory's address were arranged in pairs according to geographical location (beginning with the Thuringians and proceeding in an anti-clockwise direction),⁶⁴ we can place the *Suduodi* no more precisely than somewhere near the *Lognai* and the *Graffelti*.⁶⁵

By c. 738, therefore, it appears that Boniface's mission in Germania encompassed the entirety of Hesse and Thuringia, and stretched perhaps as far south as the middle Main. At this date he seems not to have been active in the districts of the middle Rhine and lower Main, which would remain in the hands of hostile Frankish bishops until 745.⁶⁶ His influence among the *Lognai* may also have been limited to the district of Amöneburg, for the middle Lahn, as we saw in the previous chapter, was already closely tied to the bishopric of Trier by the time of Boniface's arrival.⁶⁷ To the north, Boniface and his followers had thoroughly evangelised the Hessian borderlands and even crossed the Diemel into the territory of the Borthari. Their next step would be to extend the mission into Saxony. Before we go on to consider the Saxon mission of 738/39, however, we should examine the date and circumstances of Boniface's foundation at Fritzlar.

5.2 The foundation of the monastery at Fritzlar

5.2.1 The date of Fritzlar's foundation

One of the most significant events during the early mission was Boniface's first monastic foundation at Fritzlar. We saw in the previous chapter that Fritzlar had long been at the geographical and political hub of Hesse, and was consequently the focus of Frankish influence in the region. It was also probably the most Christianised area in

⁶⁴ Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 46; Demandt, 'Hessische Frühzeit,' p. 46; Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, p. 130; Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, p. 179.

⁶⁵ Hauck, *Kirchenschichte Deutschlands*, p. 499, n. 3, proposes the district of the Saale, a river between the Lahn and the Grabfeld. Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 46, suggests the region to the south of the *Graffelti*, between Fulda and Würzburg, and Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, pp. 137-140, makes a fuller argument for this. Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, p. 179, argues in favour of an identification with the inhabitants of the Sauerland, the hilly region west of the *Nistresi*.

⁶⁶ See chapter seven below, section 7.4.2.

⁶⁷ See chapter four above, section 4.4.4; also Demandt, 'Hessische Frühzeit', pp. 48-51; Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation*, pp. 3-5.

Hessia, home to families with political and familial ties to the Frankish south.⁶⁸ It was therefore the most obvious place for Boniface to establish a monastic community, a feat which would scarcely have been possible without the considerable patronage and gifts of land that, according to Liudger in his *Vita Gregorii*, local notables gave Boniface ‘for the love of God and for the salvation of their souls’.⁶⁹

The earliest contemporary reference to a religious community at Fritzlar is a letter written by Boniface upon the death of Abbot Wigbert in 746/47.⁷⁰ Willibald, however, states in his *vita* that Boniface erected two churches after his promotion to archbishop in 732, one dedicated to St Peter in Fritzlar, and the other dedicated to St Michael the Archangel in Amöneburg.⁷¹ The church which Willibald records was built at Fritzlar in 732 need not have been the first such, for the directly contemporary church of St Michael at Amöneburg clearly replaced or supplemented the original chapel which, according to Willibald’s own testimony, Boniface had built in 721.⁷² The 732 church at Fritzlar also very likely replaced an earlier foundation.⁷³

Although the date of this earlier church’s foundation is not recorded, Beumann’s study of the career of Sturm, whom Boniface sent to Fritzlar as a *puer*, ‘boy’, has helped determine a *terminus ante quem* of 723.⁷⁴ Beumann argued convincingly *contra* Stengel,⁷⁵ Schieffer⁷⁶ and Tangl⁷⁷ that Sturm founded his

⁶⁸ See chapter four above, section 4.4.4.

⁶⁹ *Ibique coeperunt offerentibus propter amorem Dei et salutem animarum suarum modica loca territoriaque suscipere et in eis ecclesias construere, Vita Gregorii*, c. 3, p. 70, ll. 30-31. See Schwind, ‘Fritzlar’, pp. 74-75.

⁷⁰ Tangl, ep. 40, pp. 64-65. Tangl dated this letter to 737/38, following the judgment of Holder-Egger in his edition of the *Vita Wigberti* that Lupus of Ferrières mistakenly placed Wigbert’s death in 746. See Tangl, p. 64, n. 2; Holder-Egger, ed., *Vita Wigberti*, p. 41, n. 1. Beumann, however, showed that there is no good reason to doubt Lupus’s statement that he wrote the *vita* 90 years after Wigbert’s death in 746, as long as we are prepared to accept that the *Stirme* referred to in the *salutatio* of ep. 40 is not (indeed, cannot be) the same Sturm who founded Hersfeld and was first abbot of Fulda. H. Beumann, ‘Hersfelds Gründungsjahr’, *HJL* 6 (1956), pp. 1-24 (esp. pp. 9-12). See also Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 66, 68.

⁷¹ *duas uidelicet ecclesias Domino fabricauit: unam quippe in Fridelsare, quam in honore sancti Petri principis apostolorum consecrauit, et alteram in Hamanaburch; hanc etiam in honore sancti Michaelis archangeli dedicauit.* ‘he built two churches. One was in Frideslare, which he dedicated to St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles. The other was in Amanaburch, which he dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel’, *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 35, ll. 10-14; trans. Talbot, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, p. 48.

⁷² *monasterii, collecta servorum Dei congregatione, cellam construxit, Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, ll. 3-4.

⁷³ Schwind, ‘Fritzlar’, p. 72, following Beumann, ‘Hersfelds Gründungsjahr’. Schieffer, *Winfrid-Bonifatius*, p. 165, and Parsons, ‘Sites and Monuments’, pp. 281-286, assume that the church of 732 represents the first religious community in Fritzlar.

⁷⁴ Beumann, ‘Hersfelds Gründungsjahr’. With this article Beumann was countering the critiques offered by Stengel and others of his earlier article, Beumann, ‘Eigils Vita Sturmi’ in which he had briefly argued (pp. 13-15) for a foundation date for Hersfeld of 736.

⁷⁵ E. E. Stengel, ‘Zur Frühgeschichte der Reichsabtei Fulda’, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 9 (1952), pp. 513-534 (pp. 518-519).

hermitage at Hersfeld in 736 rather than 743. Since Sturm's biographer Eigil (writing 794x800) wrote that Sturm spent 'almost three years' preaching before he became a hermit,⁷⁸ he must have been ordained priest in or around 734. Also according to Eigil, Sturm had been adopted by Boniface in Bavaria and travelled widely with him before being placed in Fritzlar while still a *puer*,⁷⁹ that is between the ages of seven and fourteen.⁸⁰ If Sturm was ordained at the canonical age of 30, this would place his birth in 704 and his *pueritia* between 712 and 718, before Boniface's first visits to Bavaria in 719 and Hessa in 721. However, Boniface himself asked Pope Zacharias in 751 whether it was permissible to ordain priests as young as 25;⁸¹ if, as Beumann suggests, the talented young Sturm had been one such case, he may have been born in 709 and a *puer* between 717 and 723.⁸² This date range includes both Boniface's first trip through Bavaria and his earliest years in Hessa.

Such wrangling of dates is important, for it strongly suggests that Fritzlar was founded at an early stage in the Hessian mission, in part to house the child oblates whom we know Boniface was already selecting by 726.⁸³ It also frees us from relying on the dubious equation of the earliest church at Fritzlar with the oratory dedicated to St Peter that, according to Willibald, Boniface had built from the wood of Thor's Oak at Geismar in 723.⁸⁴ It is often assumed that this wooden oratory was the predecessor

⁷⁶ Schieffer, *Winfriid-Bonifatius*, pp. 202, 302.

⁷⁷ M. Tangl, *Bonifatiusfragen*, p. 34.

⁷⁸ *cumque paene tribus annis sic presbyteratus sui praedicando ac baptizando officium gereret in plebe, caelesti illi inspiratione cogitatio incidit in cor, ut artiori se vita et eremi squalore constringeret, Vita Sturmi*, c. 4, p. 367, ll. 5-6.

⁷⁹ *Tunc etiam puer Sturmi precatu parentum ab eo [Bonifatio] susceptus [...] Cumque pluribus provinciis peragratis, ad Frideslar Hessionum in regionem, sancti viri coenobium, tandem pervenissent, obilem puerum suo cuidam presbytero nomine Wigberto sanctus commendavit episcopus*, *ibid*, c. 2, p. 366, ll. 26-32.

⁸⁰ This was the age of boyhood, *pueritia*, as defined by Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies*: Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum*, ed. W. M. Lindsey (Oxford, 1911), 11.2.2-3.

⁸¹ Tangl, ep. 87, p. 199, ll. 13-19.

⁸² Beumann, 'Hersfelds Gründungsjahr', pp. 15-17.

⁸³ Gregory, who was about the same age as Sturm, also accompanied Boniface during his earliest years in Hessa and may have remained at Fritzlar for extended periods. See Liudger's *Vita Gregorii*, c. 3, p. 70, ll. 27-40. According to a letter of 726, Boniface was accepting infants (*in infantiae annis*, i.e. children up to seven years old) as oblates by this date, and must have had institutions in which to place them. See Tangl, ep. 26, p. 46, ll. 12-17.

⁸⁴ *roborem quendam mirae magnitudinis, qui prisco paganorum vocabulo appellatur robor Iobis, in loco qui dicitur Gaesmere [...] succidere temptavit, Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 31, ll. 11-14.

to the stone church of St Peter in Fritzlar erected in 732,⁸⁵ but this is far from certain.⁸⁶

5.2.2 The nature of the early religious community at Fritzlar

Fritzlar, then, was selected by Boniface from the outset as the organisational centre of his Hessian mission, a place where young recruits such as Sturm could be raised among a religious community and trained as missionary preachers. Yet whereas Boniface seems to have intended his later foundation at Fulda in 744 to be a model monastic community governed under the Rule of St Benedict,⁸⁷ the precise nature of the earliest foundation at Fritzlar is less clear.⁸⁸ Eigil, writing 794x800, called Wigbert, apparently head of the Fritzlar community at the time of Sturm's arrival, a *presbyter* rather than an *abbas*.⁸⁹ In the letter Boniface wrote after Wigbert's death in 746/47, he referred to Wigbert as *pater noster*, although he also said that Tatwin was to be the new *abbas* of the community.⁹⁰ Finally, Lupus, in his *Vita Wigberti* (836), erroneously claimed that Boniface first summoned Wigbert to Fritzlar after he received the see of Mainz (746) and charged him, as *abbas*, with establishing monastic rule over a pre-existing community.⁹¹

Holder-Egger reasonably assumed that Lupus was confusing the date of Boniface's acceptance of the bishopric of Mainz (746) with the date of his promotion to missionary archbishop (732), which event also marked the construction of the new church at Fritzlar.⁹² Lupus is still in error, however, for Eigil, as we have seen, recorded that the young Sturm had been placed under the *presbyter* Wigbert's guidance in Fritzlar as early as 723. It is worth considering the explanation that Lupus

⁸⁵ See, for example, Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, p. 206; Padberg, *Bonifatius*, p. 41; Schieffer, *Winfriid-Bonifatius*, p. 148; Schwind, 'Fritzlar', p. 72.

⁸⁶ For a full discussion of the issues involved and the location of the Geismar shrine, see chapter seven below, section 7.1.1.

⁸⁷ See Boniface's letter of 751 to Pope Zacharias concerning the foundation of Fulda: *monasterium construentes monachos constituimus sub regula sancti patris Benedicti viventes*, Tangl, ep. 86, p. 193, ll. 22-24.

⁸⁸ Schwind, 'Fritzlar', p. 73.

⁸⁹ *nobilem puerum suo cuidam presbytero nomine Wigberto sanctus commendavit episcopus*, *Vita Sturmi*, c. 2, p. 366, ll. 31-32.

⁹⁰ Tangl, ep. 40, p. 65, ll. 6-7, 15.

⁹¹ *Neque multo post ad amplissimum pontificalis gradum dignitatis Mogonciaci divina gratia provectus, Wigbertum sacerdotem secundi ordinis cenobio suo, cui nomen est gentili Germanorum lingua Friteslar, magistrum prefecit, uti monasticae illic religionis normam statumque componeret*, *Vita Wigberti*, c. 5, p. 39, ll. 34-36.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 39, n. 7.

mistook the year of Wigbert's appointment as abbot of Fritzlar (732) for the year of his arrival (prior to 723), and further confused Boniface's reception of the pallium with his reception of the see of Mainz.

Hence Wigbert, immediately subservient to Boniface, may have been the head of a small community of monks and oblates at Fritzlar for roughly a decade before its church was rebuilt in 732, at which time he was given the full status of abbot. The pre-732 community, although it must have been regulated in some fashion, need not have been organised strictly according to the Rule of St Benedict. Historians have long acknowledged that the *Regula Benedictina* in its pure form was not nearly as widespread in its early centuries as was once supposed, either on the continent or in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.⁹³ In Northumbria, by way of illustration, Benedict Biscop had considered his Monkwearmouth and Jarrow foundations Benedictine, but had in fact carefully drawn up his own institutions based on the rules of seventeen different Gaulish monasteries, themselves probably a jigsaw puzzle of various rules, including those of Benedict, Columbanus and the Master.⁹⁴ Adaptability and variation were prominent features of monastic rules across Europe until the late eighth century, and at Fritzlar, an infant missionary foundation on the troubled north-east border of Frankish territory, adaptability may have been essential to its very survival.

5.3 The evangelisation of the Hessian-Saxon borderlands, 738-754

5.3.1 The Saxon mission of 738/39

A matter on which Willibald remained virtually silent in his *vita* is the degree to which Boniface attempted to evangelise the Saxon borderlands. His comment that in 721 Boniface preached 'close to the borders of the Saxons',⁹⁵ does not suggest that Boniface ventured among the Saxons. A contemporary witness, however, the West

⁹³ C. Holdsworth, 'Boniface the monk' in Reuter (ed.), *The Greatest Englishman*, p. 51. Exactly how prominent and widespread the *Regula Benedictina* was in Europe before the *Admonitio generalis* of 789, particularly in comparison to the *Regula Magistri*, is a matter of eternal debate among monastic historians. See M. de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden, 1996), p. 24; M. Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 128-29; M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World A.D. 300-800* (University Park, PA, 2005), pp. 70-71; A. Diem, *Das monastische Experiment: Die Rolle der Keuschheit bei der Entstehung des westlichen Klosterwesens* (Berlin, 2005), esp. pp. 131-145.

⁹⁴ Bede, *Historia Abbatum* in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, ed. Plummer, 1.11, pp. 365-367.

⁹⁵ *iuxta fines Saxonum*, *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, ll. 4-5.

Saxon missionary Wiehtberht, informed the monks of Glastonbury some time between 732 and 754 that he had been preaching *in confinia paganorum Haesonum ac Saxonum*, ‘within the borders of the pagan Hessians and Saxons’.⁹⁶ As we saw in the previous chapter, we should properly think of a permeable border *region* rather than a strict geographical division between Hessians and Saxons.⁹⁷ Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that a missionary party travelling in northernmost Hesse would also pass through districts settled by Saxons, and we saw above that by 738 Boniface’s mission had reached, if tentatively, into the lands beyond the Diemel.⁹⁸

Whether or not Boniface ever attempted a coordinated mission beyond the fringes of Saxon settlement in Hesse is another matter, and has been among the most widely disputed aspects of Boniface’s career.⁹⁹ The biographer Willibald, as stated above, has nothing to say on the issue; if he knew that Boniface had attempted to evangelise Saxony, he chose not to mention it. The material at the centre of the scholarly debate comprises four letters. The first is from Boniface to the entire Anglo-Saxon church, in which he urged his compatriots to pray for the imminent conversion of the Old Saxons.¹⁰⁰ The second is from Gregory III to Boniface, in which he congratulated Boniface for having converted ‘as many as one hundred thousand’ pagans in Germania with the aid of Charles Martel.¹⁰¹ The third letter, also from Gregory III, exhorted the Old Saxons *en masse* to accept Christ.¹⁰² The fourth is a circular letter written by Boniface in Rome to his major subordinates in the mission

⁹⁶ Tangl, ep. 101, p. 224, ll. 12-13.

⁹⁷ See chapter four above, section 4.4.3.

⁹⁸ See above, this chapter, section 5.1.3.

⁹⁹ There is an old German historiographical tradition of studies dedicated to reconstructing Boniface’s missionary activities on the borders of Hesse and Thuringia with Saxony based on the evidence of dedications, ecclesiastical boundaries, tribal territories and later medieval traditions. Only a sample of the pre-1954 literature need be given here: H. Boehmer, ‘Zur Geschichte des Bonifatius’, *Zeitschrift des Vereins für hessische Geschichte* 50 (1917), pp. 171-215; L. Naumann, ‘Die Einführung und Befestigung des Christentums in den Gauen Friesenfeld und Hassegau’, *Manfelder Blätter* 34/35 (1925), pp. 1-83; K. Löffler, *Der Hülfsberg im Eichsfeld eine Bonifatiusstätte?* (Duderstadt, 1925); E. Hennecke, ‘Miscellen zur Kirchengeschichte Altsachsens’, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 54 (1935), pp. 52-86; J. Prinz, ‘Die fränkische Mission in Hameln und die Anfänge des Bonifatiusstiftes’ in *Geschichte der Stadt Hameln*, ed. H. Spanuth (Hameln, 1939/1940), pp. 65-73; H. Büttner, ‘Das Erzstift Mainz und die Sachsenmission’, *Jahrbuch für das Bistum Mainz* 5 (1950), pp. 314-328; Rademacher, ‘Die Anfänge der Sachsenmission’, pp. 133-186.

¹⁰⁰ Tangl, ep. 46, pp. 74-75. One reply to this letter, from Bishop Torthelm of Leicester (bishop 737-764), survives in the Bonifatian correspondence: Tangl, ep. 47, pp. 75-76.

¹⁰¹ *Agnoscentes itaque in sillabis fraternitatis tuae innotuisti tam de Germaniae gentibus, quas sua pietate Deus noster de potestate paganorum liberavit et ad centum milia animas in sinu sanctae matris ecclesiae tuo conamine et Carli principis Francorum aggregare dignatus est*, Tangl, ep. 45, p. 72, ll. 1-5.

¹⁰² Tangl, ep. 21, pp. 35-36.

field.¹⁰³ The second letter, from Gregory III to Boniface, is dated October 29, 739, and Tangl associates the first and third letters with this one.¹⁰⁴ Böhmer, following Tangl, argues that Gregory's comments in the second letter refer to the successful campaign of Charles Martel against the Saxons the previous year.¹⁰⁵ The fourth letter dates from Boniface's final stay in Rome in 737/38.

Boniface's letter to the Anglo-Saxon church clearly illustrates his powerful longing to convert the Old Saxons, but opinions differ as to how far his desires were ever put into action. Levison merely states that the much-desired mission was 'premature' (the Saxons finally converted only in the reign of Charlemagne),¹⁰⁶ while Rademacher and Schieffer consider that Boniface's early success was probably restricted to border peoples whom Charles Martel had freed from Saxon domination, and that he made little lasting progress beyond the borderlands.¹⁰⁷ Greenaway argues that the pope forced Boniface to cancel his planned mission in Saxony before he could attempt it,¹⁰⁸ and Tangl stated that the pope considered that a full-scale mission in Saxony would put too great a strain on Boniface's resources, although he did offer papal support for some limited work among the border Saxons.¹⁰⁹ Flaskamp, meanwhile, vociferously disagreed that Boniface seriously planned any mission in Saxony in 738/39, and argued that the one hundred thousand converts referred to in Gregory's letter represented the sum total of Boniface's baptisms over the previous twenty years, not new converts.¹¹⁰ More recent scholars have not considered the matter in great detail; Reuter aligns himself firmly with Flaskamp's opinion,¹¹¹ Wallace-Hadrill, Wood, Felten and Nonn state that Boniface's Saxon mission was

¹⁰³ Tangl, ep. 41, p. 66.

¹⁰⁴ M. Tangl, 'Studien zur Neuausgabe der Bonifatius-Briefe, Teil I', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 40 (1916), pp. 639-790 (pp. 758-760).

¹⁰⁵ The campaign is recounted in *Fred. Cont.*, c. 19, p. 177, ll. 4-9. Böhme and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 18; Tangl, ep. 45, p. 72, n. 1; idem,

¹⁰⁶ Levison, *England and the Continent*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁰⁷ Rademacher, 'Anfänge der Sachsenmission', pp. 164, 171; idem, 'Die erfolgreiche Sachsenmission des hl. Bonifatius im Jahr 738', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 38 (1954), pp. 100-130; Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, pp. 179-180.

¹⁰⁸ Greenaway, *Saint Boniface*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰⁹ Tangl, 'Studien zur Neuausgabe', pp. 758-759.

¹¹⁰ F. Flaskamp, 'Der Bonifatiusbrief von Herford', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 44 (1962), pp. 315-334 (pp. 326-327); idem, 'Bonifatius und die Sachsenmission', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 6 (1916), pp. 273-290.

¹¹¹ Reuter, 'Boniface and Europe', p. 91, n. 65.

ultimately abortive,¹¹² and Löwe, Padberg and Wagner believe that Boniface enjoyed initial success that he was unable to consolidate.¹¹³

Much of the debate hinges on what Boniface's intentions were in 738. The letter he wrote from Rome to his brethren in Germania during this year implies that he had approached Gregory III with an intended change in the course of his mission, but had been advised against it:

nos cum gaudio apostolicus pontifex suscepit et de legatione nostra lacta responsa reddidit et consilium et preceptum dedit, ut iterum ad vos revertamus et in certo labore persistamus.¹¹⁴

Tangl was confident that Boniface's proposed plan was a full-scale mission among the Saxons in the wake of Charles Martel's campaign, which was underway at the time.¹¹⁵ Flaskamp instead suggested that Boniface did not intend to return to Germania at all, but that his thwarted intention in 738 was to retire permanently in Rome as a *peregrinus*; he did not even know about Charles Martel's campaign and built no great plans on an 'everyday event' like a Frankish-Saxon border conflict. After he obeyed Gregory's injunction to reorganise the Bavarian church in 739, Boniface's new plan, according to Flaskamp, was to oust Bishop Vivilo from the see of Passau and assume it as his own permanent metropolitan seat.¹¹⁶ Gregory, however, would not allow this. As he wrote to Boniface: 'You are not at liberty, brother, to stay in one place once you see that your work there is done.'¹¹⁷

Since the letters do not clearly describe Boniface's intentions in 738 or 739, we must rely on inference and context to make a judgment. Flaskamp's theory that Boniface, frustrated by Charles Martel's lack of enthusiasm for his mission, desired to

¹¹² Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 153-155; Wood, 'An Absence of Saints?', p. 336; F. Felten, 'Zur Einführung in die Vortragsreihe: Bonifatius – Apostel der Deutschen. Mission und Christianisierung vom 8. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert' in *Bonifatius*, ed. Felten, pp. 11-32 (p. 21); U. Nonn, 'Zwangsmision mit Feuer und Schwert? Zur Sachsenmission Karls des Großen' in *Bonifatius*, ed. Felten, pp. 55-74 (p. 55).

¹¹³ H. Löwe, 'Pirmin, Willibrord und Bonifatius. Ihre Bedeutung für die Missionsgeschichte ihrer Zeit' in *Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte 2: Die Kirche des früheren Mittelalters*, ed. K. Schäferdiek (München, 1978), pp. 192-226 (p. 212); Padberg, *Bonifatius*, pp. 58-59; Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, pp. 237-238.

¹¹⁴ 'the apostolic pontiff received us with joy and gave a favourable response concerning our legation, and advised and commanded that we should return to you once again and continue in our established work', Tangl, ep. 41, p. 66, ll. 10-14.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66, n. 7; Tangl, 'Studien zur Neuausgabe', pp. 758-759.

¹¹⁶ Flaskamp, 'Die Bonifatiusbriefe', pp. 326-327.

¹¹⁷ Tangl, ep. 45, p. 73, ll. 16-17.

retire in Rome in 738 has no supporting evidence. Likewise, although Boniface in his lost letter of 739 must have mooted to the pope the possibility of his settling in one district, Gregory's reply does not help us identify where that was. There is certainly no clear evidence to support the notion that Boniface wanted to abandon twenty years of work in Germania in favour of Bavaria. He had visited Bavaria in 719, again in 736/7 on his way to Rome, and finally in 738/9 during his return from Rome to Hesse and Thuringia. In other words, he had spent relatively little time in Bavaria, and few, if any, of his close friends were based there; some years later, indeed, Boniface chose to delegate his episcopal authority in Bavaria in order to re-focus his efforts in Germania.¹¹⁸ Nor was Charles Martel's major campaign of 738 an 'everyday event', as Flaskamp described it: on the contrary, the annals record no Frankish incursions into Saxony during the previous nine years.¹¹⁹ Finally, in a letter of 742-746 to Abbess Eadburg, Boniface asked her to pray on behalf of 'those pagans who have been entrusted to us by the Apostolic see.'¹²⁰ Unless he had recently expanded his mission field in central Germania, it is difficult to see where these *pagani* had been for the previous twenty years, and why he had not already converted them.

If, as seems likely, Boniface was proposing an extension to his mission in 738, the contextual evidence of the letters points towards Saxony. Gregory may have advised against a full-scale mission, but his blanket address to the *universus populus provinciae Altsaxonum* included an unambiguous reference to Saxons who had already been evangelised, if not converted, and to others who were about to be evangelised.¹²¹ The one hundred thousand converts that Boniface claimed to have won in Germania by 739 with the assistance of Charles Martel¹²² may refer to mass baptisms in Saxony, as most scholars have supposed (although they do not tend to take the figure literally),¹²³ or, as Flaskamp believed, may refer to Boniface's accumulated success since 719.¹²⁴ I would lean towards the former theory in order to explain its appearance in Gregory's letter at this particular time. In either case,

¹¹⁸ See this chapter below, section 5.4.2.

¹¹⁹ The last recorded campaign was in 728 according to the *Ann. Petav.*, p. 9, corrected to 729 by Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 16, although accepted by Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, p. 117.

¹²⁰ *pro istis paganis, qui nobis ab apostolica sede commissi sunt*, Tangl, ep. 65, p. 137, ll. 25-26.

¹²¹ *'volens vos scire, qualem solitudinem habeam pro vobis' et pro his, qui verbum exhortationis fidei Iesu Christi domini nostri susceperunt et qui adhuc suscepturi sunt*, Tangl, ep. 21, p. 35, ll. 10-11.

¹²² Tangl, ep. 45, p. 72, ll. 1-5.

¹²³ Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius*, p. 180; cf. Padberg, *Bonifatius*, p. 59; Rademacher, 'Die Anfänge der Sachsenmission', p. 168; Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 41.

¹²⁴ Flaskamp, 'Der Bonifatiusbrief', pp. 326-327.

Gregory's address to the Old Saxons and the testimony of the missionary priest Wiehtberht prove that Boniface did make some attempt between 732 and 754 to evangelise Saxon communities in the borderlands. The evidence only suggests that Boniface's mission among the Saxons was not a lasting success, not that it never took place at all; and if his Saxon mission was a disaster on a much greater scale than that of the two Hewalds *c.* 695,¹²⁵ we can find a potential cause in the violence that engulfed the Frankish-Saxon frontier from the mid 740s onwards.

5.3.2 The turbulent final years of the mission, 745-754

Boniface, then, did make a concerted attempt to evangelise the Saxon borderlands in 738/39, and may have had considerable success among the defeated and demoralised communities who lay in the path of the Frankish army. But whatever ground he gained beyond the northern fringes of Hessa must have been virtually impossible to consolidate during the near-incessant warfare that plagued the Frankish and Saxon borders for the next fifteen years, and his own missionary ambitions in Saxony were to be pushed aside by those of the bishop of Cologne. In 743 the Franks defeated the Saxons at *Hoohseoburg*, probably Seeburg, 80 kilometres north-east of Fritzlar. The following year Carloman extracted tribute from the eastern Saxons and, according to the *Continuations of Fredegar*, forced many to be baptised.¹²⁶ Boniface reported to the pope in 745 that his territory had been invaded by the pagans, and Gregory's comparison of the disaster to former sackings of Rome suggests that serious damage had been done.¹²⁷ In 748 the eastern Saxons were roused to rebellion by Pippin's half-brother Grifo, but were defeated, again with a report of mass baptisms.¹²⁸ A serious Saxon incursion destroyed more than thirty of Boniface's churches in the Hessian

¹²⁵ *HE*, V.10, pp. 299-301.

¹²⁶ *Fred. Cont.*, c. 27, p. 180, ll. 25-8; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 4-5; *Ann. Petav.*, p. 11. H. Hahn, *Jahrbücher des fränkischen Reiches* (Berlin, 1863), p. 174, equated the campaign of 743 with that of 744, but Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesten Imperii*, pp. 23-24, trust that the various minor annals are recording two separate campaigns.

¹²⁷ Only the reply of Zacharias, dated October 31, 745, has survived: *De incursione autem gentium, quae in tuis plebibus facta est, merendum nobis est. Sed haec adversitatis nullatenus tuam fraternitatem conturbet. Quia et Roma civitas ex accidentibus facinoribus sepius est depopulata, et tamen omnipotentia sua Dominus ex supernis eam dignatus est consolare*, Tangl, ep. 60, p. 121, ll. 4-8.

¹²⁸ *Fred. Cont.*, c. 31, p. 181, ll. 14-22; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 7-8; *Ann. Fuld.*, p. 346, ll. 11-15. *Fred. Cont.* and *Ann. reg. Franc.* place the war with Grifo in 747, but Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 30, argue that the claim of *Ann. Fuld.* for 748 is preferable.

borderlands in 752,¹²⁹ and in 753, the year before Boniface's death, Pippin retaliated by invading and subduing Saxony to the immediate north of Hessa.¹³⁰ According to the *Annales Mettenses*, Pippin extracted from the vanquished Saxons an annual tribute of 300 horses and an agreement to receive missionaries and accept baptism.¹³¹ Finally, in 758, Pippin led an invasion force across the Rhine as far as Sythen, 160 kilometres north-west of Fritzlar, and renewed the annual tribute.¹³²

After this there are no more recorded Frankish campaigns in Saxony until Charlemagne's capture of Eresburg, on the northern border of Hessa, in 772. Immediately after capturing Eresburg, Charlemagne went on to destroy the nearby Irminsul, 'the great pillar', a major Saxon shrine.¹³³ This last event is of some importance for our concerns, for it shows that a district that had been thoroughly evangelised by Boniface before 738 contained a large Saxon fortification and pagan shrine in 772, eighteen years after his death. Whether it occurred during or after Boniface's life, a significant region gained by the missionaries must therefore have been lost to the Saxons by this time.

The record of the annals presents an image of considerable turbulence in south-west Saxony during the final fifteen years of Boniface's mission in Hessa, which, at least in 745 and 752, had a highly damaging effect on his work. Reuter has questioned whether the mass baptisms recorded by the annals as taking place in Saxony in 744, 748 and 753 in fact occurred. He considers them to be anachronistic elaborations by later annalists, for the Franks did not employ the policy of mass baptism in contemporary campaigns in Frisia and Bavaria, and there is only solid evidence for its use from the time of Charlemagne.¹³⁴ This objection is not entirely convincing, for it fails to explain why contemporary entries pertaining to Frisia were not similarly elaborated by the annalists.¹³⁵

Yet even if Pippin did force mass baptisms upon defeated Saxons, it is doubtful that Boniface was directly involved. Pippin's campaigns of 753 and 758 in

¹²⁹ Tangl, ep. 108, p. 234, ll. 15-21. Since Pippin's retaliatory campaign was restricted to the north of Hessa, this was most likely the source of the Saxon attack in 752.

¹³⁰ *Fred. Cont.*, c. 31, p. 182, ll. 19-27; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 10-11. On dating to 753, not 752 as some minor annals claim, see Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 35.

¹³¹ *Ann. Mett.*, p. 44, ll. 3-11.

¹³² *Ann. Mett.*, p. 50, ll. 3-9; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 16-17.

¹³³ *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 32-35.

¹³⁴ Reuter, 'Boniface and Europe', p. 92, n. 67.

¹³⁵ See Rademacher, 'Die Anfänge der Sachsenmission', p. 169, who considered the mass baptisms to have been an important religio-political tool of Pippin that Charlemagne adopted and employed on a larger scale.

west Saxony were concentrated on the region of the Ruhr and Lippe, which lay adjacent to the diocese of Cologne. Hildegard, the sword-wielding bishop who had received the see of Cologne instead of Boniface, was killed fighting the Saxons at Iburg in 753, and may therefore have been closely involved in Pippin's policy of mass baptism.¹³⁶ Hildegard was precisely the type of 'warrior bishop' that Boniface despised and refused to associate with,¹³⁷ a natural antipathy that was made worse by a bitter dispute between the two bishops over the control of the see of Utrecht.¹³⁸ Even supposing that Boniface was given the option, it seems extremely unlikely that he would have chosen to cooperate with Hildegard in evangelising Saxony.

5.3.3 The Herford letter of Gregory III concerning the Saxon mission

There remains one piece of evidence to discuss in relation to Boniface's Saxon mission of 738/39, which is a letter purportedly from Gregory III to Boniface, in which the pope praised Boniface's success in Saxony and named four Saxon nobles who had converted to Christianity. It is dated June 30; the year is not given, but, if genuine, it would have to predate Gregory's death in November 741. The letter survives only as an interpolation in the fourteenth-century *Vita Waltgeri*, which was written by Wigand, a monk based at the monastery of Herford in Saxony.¹³⁹ I remain highly sceptical of its authenticity, but have chosen to discuss the issues involved here primarily because Wagner has recently stated that the letter ought to be accepted as genuine.¹⁴⁰

According to his *vita*, Waltger was a ninth-century saint whose grandfather Aldolf, a Saxon noble, had converted to Christianity during the reign of Charlemagne. Wigand inserted the letter from Gregory into his *vita* in order to illustrate the joy of the pope at Boniface's successful conversion of the Saxons, but made little of it; it is, indeed, something of an oddity and a *non sequitur* within the text.¹⁴¹ Since it was not

¹³⁶ *Fred. Cont.*, c. 31, p. 182, ll. 19-27; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 10-11.

¹³⁷ See chapters six and seven below, sections 6.3.2 and 7.3.2.

¹³⁸ Tangl, ep. 109, pp. 234-236.

¹³⁹ The *Vita Waltgeri* is edited by R. Wilmans, *Die Kaiserurkunden der Provinz Westfalen 777-1313*, vol. 1 (Münster, 1867), pp. 275-318.

¹⁴⁰ Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien*, pp. 237-238.

¹⁴¹ K. Honselmann, 'Der Brief Gregors III. an Bonifatius über die Sachsenmission', *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft* 76 (1957), pp. 83-106 (pp. 88-89).

published by Tangl in his edition of Boniface's letters, I present it here in full, with my own translation below.¹⁴²

Gregorius, servus servorum Dei, reverentissimo fratri et coepiscopo Bonifacio apostolicam benedictionem.

Benedictus Deus et pater domini nostri Jhesu Christi, *qui secundum magnam misericordiam suam et per predicationem tuam Saxoniam regeneravit in spem vivam*¹⁴³ et principes eius, Eoban scilicet et Rutwic, Vuldericum, Dceda, eduxit de tenebris ignoranciae in admirabile lumen suum, ita ut nunc sint Deo *populus acquisitionis*,¹⁴⁴ eo quod per fidem, quam a te susceperunt, agnoscant faciem eterni luminis.

Epistolam a tua dilectione transmissam Denehardus¹⁴⁵ presbiter presentavit, per quam pronuntiante archidiacono Stephano de titulo S[ancte] Susanne audivimus:¹⁴⁶ in Saxonia operarios paucos esse verbi Dei, quodque messis multa pullulaverit.¹⁴⁷ Quapropter a latere nostro Dodonem de titulo Pastoris,¹⁴⁸ ut principibus memoratis in verbo Dei presit, destinamus illique curam predicationis in nostra vice committimus.

Ceterum, dilectissime, arbores illas, quas incole colunt, monemus ut succidantur, sicut subvertisti arborem, que Jovis appellabatur, que ab incolis venerabatur.¹⁴⁹

De sequacibus etiam Adelberti et Clementis eliminatos de ecclesia te pronuntiare volumus, quos etiam per nos et a beato Petro anathematizatos in futurum diem eterni iudicis et a congregatione iustorum scias esse seclusos, nisi resipiscant.

¹⁴² The Latin transcription is reproduced from Honselmann, 'Der Brief Gregors III', pp. 318-319.

¹⁴³ 1 Peter 1:3.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Peter 2:9.

¹⁴⁵ Probably the Denehard of Tangl, ep. 49, p. 78, l.12 ; ep. 51, p. 86, ll. 14-15; ep. 59, p. 109, l. 12; and ep. 113, p. 245, l. 10, who, along with Lul, met and joined Boniface in Rome in 737/38 and became Boniface's main Roman envoy.

¹⁴⁶ *de titulo* followed by a genitive was an early medieval formula, common in papal letters, referring to the church at which the named person was based. On the identity of this archdeacon and his church, see Honselmann, 'Der Brief Gregors,' pp. 97-101.

¹⁴⁷ Matthew 9:37, *Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci*.

¹⁴⁸ In the opinion of Honselman, Dodo is to be equated with the Anglo-Saxon Abbot Duddo of Tangl, ep. 34, p. 58, former pupil of Boniface in Wessex, who was resident in Rome in 735. Honselman, 'Der Brief Gregors,' pp. 101-102. Hahn believed that Duddo worked at the papal archives in Rome, although Emerton was sceptical of this. H. Hahn, *Bonifaz und Lul* (Leipzig, 1883), pp. 164-166; Emerton, *The Letters of St Boniface*, p. 41, n.1.

¹⁴⁹ Presumably a reference to Thor's Oak (*robor Iobis* according to Willibald) at Geismar.

Since the letter is unattested in any other source or collection of papal letters, including those preserved in Mainz, it has been readily dismissed as an obvious forgery by most historians and generally ignored by Bonifatian scholars.¹⁵¹ The only detailed analyses the letter has received have been by Honselmann in 1957, who was convinced of the letter's authenticity,¹⁵² and Flaskamp in 1962, who was equally convinced of the opposite.¹⁵³ If Wagner is correct in following Honselmann, the letter stands as unequivocal proof that Boniface met with real (if transitory) success in his attempts to convert the Saxons. The matter is not straightforward, however, since Honselmann and Flaskamp approached their analyses of the letter from very different directions, and their arguments cannot easily be compared.

Through his close textual analysis of the letter, Honselmann, relying on his extensive knowledge of medieval papal epistolary formulas, concluded that there was nothing in its vocabulary, structure or formulas that indicated a date of composition after the eighth century. On the contrary, in the fourteenth century, when the *Vita Walgeri* was composed, it would have been full of archaisms that only the most

¹⁵⁰ 'Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to his most pious brother and fellow bishop Boniface, apostolic greetings.

'Blessed God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy and through your preaching has regenerated Saxony in living hope, has led its princes, that is Eoban, Rutwic, Wuldericus and Dedda, out of the shadows of ignorance and into his marvelous light, so that they now may be a people purchased for God, seeing as through the faith that they received from you they recognise the face of eternal light.

'The priest Denehard conveyed the letter from your sweetness, through which, read by Archdeacon Stephen of St Susanna, we learned that the labourers in the Word of God in Saxony are few, while the harvest that sprouts forth is great. Therefore we have sent from our parts Dodo, of the Church of the Pastor, so that he should come before the renowned princes in the Word of God, and have committed him in our stead to the care of that preaching.

'Furthermore, sweetest one, we advise that you fell those trees that the natives worship, just as you brought down the so-called Tree of Jupiter that was venerated by the natives.

'Concerning the followers of Aldebert and Clemens, we wish you to pronounce them banished from the church, and know that they are anathematised by us and by the blessed Peter in the coming day of eternal judgment and are excluded from the company of the just, lest they rise up again.

'Given on the day before the Kalends of July at the church of St Paul.'

¹⁵¹ P. Jaffé, *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum: ab condita ecclesia ad annum post Christum natum MCXCVIII* (Berlin, 1851), no. 2255, p. 261, lists the letter as spurious; H. Jakobs, *Germania Pontificia*, vol. 4.4 (Göttingen, 1978), p. 18, 'manifestly spurious, though of unknown author'; F. W. Rettberg, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands 2: Die Geschichte der Kirche bei den Alamannen, Bayern, Thüringern, Sachsen, Friesen und Slaven* (Göttingen, 1848), p. 400, 'clearly spurious'; Wilmans, *Die Kaiserurkunden*, p. 314, 'obvious fiction'. Neither Hauck, Tangl, Levison, Schieffer, Löwe nor Padberg considered the letter worthy of consideration in their Bonifatian studies. Rademacher, 'Die Anfänge der Sachsenmission', p. 182, mentioned the letter, and was inclined to regard it as genuine; Reuter, 'Saint Boniface and Europe', p. 92, n. 65, following Flaskamp, dismissed it as 'bogus'.

¹⁵² Honselmann, 'Der Brief Gregors'.

¹⁵³ Flaskamp, 'Der Bonifatiusbrief'.

dedicated forger would have troubled to reconstruct.¹⁵⁴ Honselmann claimed that the names of the Saxon nobles were appropriate to the early medieval period, if somewhat corrupted, as one would expect through centuries of transmission.¹⁵⁵ The letter's brief references to Boniface's felling of Thor's Oak and to the heretics Aldebert and Clemens, condemned in the Roman synod of 745, may appear contrived, but could not be considered anachronistic or inappropriate.¹⁵⁶

The most obvious aberration in the letter is the closing formula, which forgoes both the universal farewell *Deus te incolomem custodiat* of eighth-century papal letters and the normal method of dating by Roman calendar and indiction year. Instead, the letter ends by giving the day and place of its composition: *Data pridie Kal[endas] Jul[ias] ad Sanctum Paulum*. In the opinion of Honselmann, such an obvious deviation from papal literary formulas would not have been committed by a forger who was as familiar with other aspects of eighth-century scribal practice as the writer of this letter. Moreover, he argued that there was a good contextual reason for the deviation: June 30 was the feast of St Paul, the archetypal missionary and one of Boniface's models, and so it was inevitable that the pope would be celebrating mass in his church on this day. Gregory thus decided to write his reply praising Boniface's successful mission in Saxony on a day and at a place whose significance Boniface would have instantly recognised and appreciated.¹⁵⁷

Flaskamp, meanwhile, admitted that there were no stylistic features of the letter that could prove that it was a forgery, although he remarked that the greeting formula *apostolicam benedictionem* was uncommon before the eleventh century.¹⁵⁸ In general, his argument against the authenticity of the letter was contextual, based on the

¹⁵⁴ Honselmann, 'Der Brief Gregors', pp. 91-92.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 94-96.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 102-103; Flaskamp, 'Der Bonifatiusbrief,' pp. 323-324 and 330-331, is highly suspicious of these allusions to Geismar and the heretics, pointing out that no other source indicates the pope's awareness of the Geismar episode, and that Aldebert and Clemens were first alluded to in the *Concilium Germanicum* of 742 (Tangl, ep. 56, p. 99, ll. 20-23) and not brought to the attention of Zacharias until 744 (Tangl, ep. 57, p. 104, l. 13 to p. 105, l. 10). However, the two heretics had clearly been active for some time before 742, and Boniface may have informed Gregory III of their activities before his death. J. B. Russell, 'Saint Boniface and the Eccentrics,' *Church History* 33.3 (1964), pp. 235-247 (p. 245), accepts Gregory's comment in the Herford letter as the earliest authentic reference to Aldebert and Clemens. On Aldebert and Clemens, see also N. Zeddies, 'Bonifatius und zwei nützliche Rebellen: die Häretiker Aldebert und Clemens' in *Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter: Historische und juristische Studien zur Rebellion*, ed. M. T. Fögen, Ius Commune Sonderheft 70 (Frankfurt, 1995), pp. 217-263.

¹⁵⁷ Honselmann, 'Der Brief Gregors', p. 104.

¹⁵⁸ Flaskamp, 'Der Bonifatiusbrief', pp. 321-322.

premise that 'there is not a single reason to suggest a [Saxon mission by Boniface]'.¹⁵⁹ This premise, as we have seen, is highly debatable, and Flaskamp's initial bias caused him to read rather too much into aspects of the letter in order to discredit it. For instance, he claimed that, according to the letter, Saxony had been entirely converted and Boniface was intending to erect one bishopric for each named Saxon noble.¹⁶⁰ Nothing in the letter supports such a reading. Similarly, his claim that the Dodo of the letter had been invested with a degree of papal authority anachronistic for the eighth century cannot be substantiated, since the letter does not describe the nature of Dodo's authority or duties in any detail.¹⁶¹

Both Honselmann and Flaskamp agreed that Wigand, a mediocre Latinist to judge from his *Vita Waltgeri*, was almost certainly not the author of a letter that so convincingly reproduces early medieval papal literary formulas.¹⁶² As for motive, Flaskamp suggested that the purpose of the letter's inclusion in the *Vita Waltgeri* was to link the name of Herford to Boniface via St Waltger's parents,¹⁶³ but this is clearly not so; one of the converted Saxon nobles, Dedda, does share the name of Waltger's father, but since the *vita* claims that Waltger's grandfather was converted to Christianity during the time of Charlemagne, not his father during the time of Boniface, Wigand could not have intended for the two Deddas to be identified. Nor is Herford or any other establishment mentioned in the letter, which appears to have served no more purpose in Wigand's *vita* than that of a mere curiosity.¹⁶⁴ This does not, however, rule out the strong possibility that the letter was forged at a much earlier date for different reasons.

In short, both Honselmann and Flaskamp agreed that there were no firm textual reasons to denounce the letter as an outright forgery. Contextually speaking, Flaskamp was hostile to the very notion of a dedicated Bonifatian mission in Saxony, while Honselmann was not. Sufficient historical understanding enables me to disagree with Flaskamp's contextual argument, but I lack the necessary knowledge and experience of medieval papal epistolary formulas to assess critically Honselmann's analysis of the letter, and no other scholar has so far published any attempt to do so.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 320.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 331-332.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 333; Honselmann, 'Der Brief Gregors', p. 106.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 332-333.

¹⁶⁴ Honselmann, 'Der Brief Gregors,' p. 106.

Wagner, citing Honselmann, is eager to pronounce the letter as genuine and worthy of inclusion in the corpus of Boniface's papal correspondence. More scepticism is advisable, solely because of the letter's uncertain provenance. We may not be able to identify clear motives for its forgery, but nor can we explain how, if genuine, it came to be in the hands of a fourteenth-century hagiographer at Herford when it was not preserved by Lul in Mainz or at the papal archives in Rome. A window of ignorance six centuries wide should encourage a certain degree of caution until further light can be shed on the letter and its history, and in this thesis I will not treat it as genuine.

5.4 The foundation and demotion of the bishopric of Büraburg

5.4.1 The foundation of the bishopric of Büraburg in 741

Apart from Fritzlar, the other major institution founded by Boniface in Hesse was the bishopric of Büraburg. It appears to have been established in 741 in order to consolidate Boniface's existing mission territory and to aid in the expansion of the mission into Saxony.¹⁶⁵ In 746 or early in 747, Büraburg was demoted to the status of chorepiscopate or archdiaconate within the newly-established diocese of Mainz. Since the fate of the short-lived diocese of Büraburg must be related to the condition of Boniface's mission in Hesse and the Saxon borderlands in the 740s, it will be necessary to examine the chronological and historical issues involved, which are by no means clear-cut.

First of all, three directly contemporary letters refer to the foundation of the bishopric of Büraburg. The first is an undated letter from Boniface to Pope Zacharias in which Boniface greeted the new pope (consecrated December 3 or 10, 741) and informed him that he had established three episcopal seats at Büraburg, Würzburg (ninety kilometres south of Fulda) and Erfurt in Thuringia.¹⁶⁶ The second letter is Zacharias's reply, dated April 1, 743.¹⁶⁷ The date of Zacharias's consecration and his reply place the writing of Boniface's letter some time in 742, but whether early or late

¹⁶⁵ Greenaway, *Saint Boniface*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁶⁶ *Unam esse sedem episcopatus decrevimus in castello, quod dicitur Uuirzaburg; et alteram in oppido, quod nominatur Buraburg; tertiam in loco, qui dicitur Erphesfurt, qui fuit iam olim urbs paganorum rusticorum*, Tangl, ep. 50, p. 81, ll. 20-24.

¹⁶⁷ Tangl, ep. 51, pp. 86-92.

we cannot say: either Boniface was slow to greet the new pope, or Zacharias was slow to respond. Finally there is a letter from Zacharias to Witta by which he confirmed the Anglo-Saxon as bishop of Büraburg.¹⁶⁸ Witta also appears among the bishops who attended the *Concilium Germanicum* summoned by Duke Carlomann in 742,¹⁶⁹ and among those from whom Boniface's 746/47 letter to Æthelbald of Mercia was addressed,¹⁷⁰ but he was not listed attending the Frankish church council of 747. He makes a brief appearance in Hygeburg's *Vita Willibaldi* (written 754x768) at the consecration of Willibald of Eichstätt on October 21, 741,¹⁷¹ but vanishes along with his see thereafter.¹⁷²

These few references represent the only contemporary evidence for the existence of the bishop and see of Büraburg. Willibald did not mention either Büraburg or Erfurt in his *Vita Bonifatii*, but implied that Boniface only ever intended to found bishoprics at Würzburg and Eichstätt, and that he did so at the same time.¹⁷³ This clearly contradicts the evidence of the directly contemporary papal letters, which make no mention of Eichstätt.¹⁷⁴ Since Willibald was writing only twenty years or so

¹⁶⁸ Tangl, ep. 52, pp. 92-94.

¹⁶⁹ Tangl, ep. 56, p. 99, l. 6. The dating of the *Concilium Germanicum*, the first of the church councils which were Boniface's major weapons in his attempted reforms of the Frankish church, has been extensively discussed by German scholars. I have followed the general consensus for 742, although 743 has also been mooted by some, notably Schieffer and Jäschke, and was accepted by Wand. See A. Angenendt, 'Concilium Germanicum' in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, ed. W. Kasper, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Freiberg, 1996), pp. 1289-1290; K. Heinemeyer, 'Die Gründung des Klosters Fulda im Rahmen der bonifatianischen Kirchenorganisation', *HJL* 30 (1980), pp. 1-45 (p. 22); J. Jarnut, 'Bonifatius und die fränkischen Reformkonzilien (743-48)', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 109, Kanonistische Abteilung 66 (1979), pp. 1-26; K.-U. Jäschke, 'Die Gründung der mitteldeutschen Bistümer und das Jahr des Concilium Germanicum' in *Festschrift für Walter Schlesinger*, ed. H. Beumann, vol. 2 (Cologne, 1974), pp. 71-136; Schieffer, *Winfried-Bonifatius*, pp. 207-208; Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 52.

¹⁷⁰ Tangl, ep. 72, p. 147, l. 1.

¹⁷¹ *Vita Willibaldi*, c. 5, p. 105, ll. 5-11.

¹⁷² For a discussion of Witta and his fate after 746/47, see Wand, *Die Büraburg bei Fritzlar*, pp. 52-55.

¹⁷³ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 8, p. 44, ll. 6-17.

¹⁷⁴ The date of Eichstätt's foundation as a bishopric is uncertain, for no contemporary reference survives. Although it clearly post-dates Boniface's foundations of Würzburg, Büraburg and Erfurt, it cannot be much later, for Willibald, the first bishop of Eichstätt, was consecrated in 741. It is possible that Willibald was originally consecrated bishop of Erfurt and transferred to Eichstätt by 745 at the latest, but this is disputed. Hauck argued that the first bishop of Erfurt was Adalar (Æthelhere), who was martyred with Boniface at Dokkum and who may be the Dadanus recorded among the bishops attending the *Concilium Germanicum* in 742/43: Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, p. 521, n. 1. Tangl concurred with Hauck's judgment, while Levison and Schieffer considered it a possibility: M. Tangl, 'Das Bistum Erfurt' in *Geschichtliche Studien: Festschrift für Albert Hauck zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. S. Jenks (Leipzig, 1916), pp. 108-120; Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 80; Schieffer, *Winfried-Bonifatius*, pp. 200-201. Flaskamp, meanwhile, argued that Willibald was originally ordained Bishop of Erfurt in 741 (according to Hygeburg's *Vita Willibaldi*, c. 5, p. 105, ll. 5-11, he was consecrated at Sülzenbrücken, 15 kilometres south-west of Erfurt) but that his seat was moved to Eichstätt by 745. Wand and, most recently, Heinemeyer have leaned towards Flaskamp's theory. F. Flaskamp, 'Das Bistum Erfurt: ein Beitrag zur thüringisch-sächsischen Kirchengeschichte', *Zeitschrift*

after the abortive foundation of the bishoprics of Büraburg and Erfurt, it can hardly be the case that the true course of events had been forgotten, or that he for some reason remained ignorant of them. Rather, he (or his patron Lul) portrayed events as though the unintended outcome of Boniface's episcopal organisation of Germania – two bishoprics in Würzburg and Eichstätt, far from the Saxon borderlands – had been the plan all along.¹⁷⁵

There are two chronological matters for consideration here: first, the year in which the bishopric of Büraburg was founded; second, the year in which it was demoted. The issue of the physical extent of the diocese of Büraburg will be discussed in chapter seven below.¹⁷⁶ The first matter for our consideration, upon which much more ink has been spilt, is the question of whether Büraburg, Würzburg and Erfurt were established as bishoprics in 741 or 742. The reply of Zacharias to Boniface's report on April 1, 743 gives a clear *terminus ante quem* of mid- to late-742 for the foundation of the three bishoprics. Hygeburg's *Vita Willibaldi* gives the date of Willibald of Eichstätt's consecration as October 22, 741.¹⁷⁷ Since Witta of Büraburg was one of the presiding bishops (along with Boniface and Burchard of Würzburg) at the event, he himself must have been consecrated before this date, if not long before.

The problem that many scholars have had with this chronology is that Boniface must have established his bishoprics during the lifetime of Charles Martel (d. October 741), whom some historians believe attempted to obstruct Boniface's efforts to reform the Frankish church.¹⁷⁸ Yet if the date of Boniface's episcopal foundations is shifted to autumn of 742 and the rule of Charles's supposedly more supportive son Carlomann, two chronological conflicts are created: first, with the likely date of Willibald of Eichstätt's consecration in 741; second, with the widely accepted date of the *Concilium Germanicum* of April 21, 742, which Witta, Burchard

für vaterländische Geschichte und Altertumskunde Westfalens 83 (1925), pp. 1-26; Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 48; K. Heinemeyer, 'Bonifatius: Mönch und Reformator' in *Bonifatius*, ed. Imhof and Stasch, pp. 73-76. The issues involved are too wide-ranging to expand upon here; for the latest comprehensive discussion, see A. Wendehorst, *Die Bistümer der Kirchenprovinz Mainz. Das Bistum Eichstätt, 1: Die Bischofsreihe bis 1535*, *Germania Sacra, neue Folge*, 45 (Berlin, 2006), esp. pp. 19-31.

¹⁷⁵ W. Fritze, 'Bonifatius und die Einbeziehung von Hessen und Thüringen in die Mainzer Diözese', *HJL* 4 (1954), pp. 37-63 (pp. 56-59).

¹⁷⁶ See chapter seven below, section 7.2.1.

¹⁷⁷ *Vita Willibaldi*, c. 5, p. 105, ll. 5-11.

¹⁷⁸ The debate is closely related to the dating of the *Concilium Germanicum*; see references in footnote 169 above, in particular Schieffer, *Winfried-Bonifatius*, p. 197. See also Beumann, 'Hersfelds Gründungsjahr', p. 23. I am sceptical of the degree to which Charles Martel was an active antagonist of Boniface, especially in the matter of his bishoprics; see chapter seven below, section 7.3.2.

and Willibald attended as bishops. Dating the origin of the bishoprics to late in 742 would also mean that Boniface had waited almost a year to greet the newly installed Pope Gregory, which would have been uncharacteristically neglectful on his part.¹⁷⁹ Reuter has observed that we simply know too little about Charles Martel's relationship with Boniface either to rule out or to promote the idea that Boniface could have founded bishoprics in Germania during his reign,¹⁸⁰ and in light of the chronological issues a date of 741 for the establishment of the bishopric of Büraburg is now generally acknowledged as preferable, if not certain.¹⁸¹

5.4.2 The incorporation of Büraburg into the diocese of Mainz c. 746

The debate over the year in which the bishopric of Büraburg was founded diminishes somewhat in importance against the second matter for our consideration, which is the fact that the latest evidence for its existence is the final appearance of Witta's name in Boniface's letter to King Æthelbald of 746/47.¹⁸² The apparent demotion of Büraburg from episcopal status in 746, only five years after its establishment, suggests that circumstances in Hesse had changed significantly within this time period. It is unlikely that Boniface's foundation of bishoprics at Büraburg and Erfurt had simply been 'too rash', as Wallace-Hadrill supposed, and that his seeking of papal confirmation was a reluctant attempt to secure them.¹⁸³ On the contrary, Gregory III had instructed him to consider anointing bishops as early as 732, yet Boniface had waited almost ten years before doing so,¹⁸⁴ while he had consistently sought papal approval at every stage of his carefully-organised mission. We should instead consider the matter by asking two questions: first, who assumed responsibility for Hesse after its bishopric was demoted; second, what had changed in Hesse between 741 and 746 that might have prompted its demotion in the first place.

¹⁷⁹ For further discussion of the issues, see F. Staab, 'Die Gründung der Bistümer Erfurt, Büraburg und Würzburg durch Bonifatius im Rahmen der fränkischen und päpstlichen Politik', *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 40 (1988), pp. 13-41; H. Michels, 'Das Gründungsjahr der Bistümer Erfurt, Büraburg und Würzburg', *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 39 (1987), pp. 11-42; Jäschke, 'Die Gründung der mitteldeutschen Bistümer'; A. Bigelmair, 'Die Gründung der mitteldeutschen Bistümer' in *Sankt Bonifatius*, ed. Raabe et al., pp. 247-287 (esp. pp. 271-273); Fritze, 'Bonifatius und die Einbeziehung von Hessen und Thüringen'.

¹⁸⁰ Reuter, 'Saint Boniface', p. 92, n. 73.

¹⁸¹ Heinemeyer, 'Bonifatius', p. 72.

¹⁸² Tangl, ep. 73, p. 147, l. 1.

¹⁸³ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 155-156.

¹⁸⁴ Tangl, ep. 28, p. 50, ll. 3-10.

As to the first question, it seems that Boniface apparently took personal responsibility for his northern mission territory in Hessa and Thuringia after the demotion of the bishoprics. In 752, he, not a subordinate, was directing the reconstruction of churches after a devastating Saxon invasion the previous year.¹⁸⁵ In his roughly contemporary letter to Abbot Fulrad of St Denis he also claimed that the missionaries on the Saxon borderlands survived only with his support;¹⁸⁶ moreover, he stated quite clearly in the same letter that the region of direct responsibility that he hoped to transfer from himself to Lul, i.e. the diocese of Mainz, extended as far as the borderlands with the pagans (*marca paganorum*), hence must have included Hessa.¹⁸⁷

The theory that Boniface demoted the bishoprics of Büraburg and Erfurt in order to supervise their respective territories from his episcopal seat in Mainz, which he assumed in 746, gains some support from a problematic passage in Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii*, written 754x768 (the sentence to be discussed is in italics):

Et duos bonae industriae viros ad ordinem episcopatus promovit, Willibaldum et Burchhardum, eisque in intimis orientalium Franchorum partibus et Baguariorum terminis ecclesias sibi commissas inpartiendo distribuit. Et Willibaldo suae gubernationis parrochiam commendavit in loco, cuius vocabulum est Haegsted, Burchhardo vero in loco qui appellatur Wirzaburch dignitatis officium delegavit *et ecclesias in confinibus Franchorum et Saxonum atque Sclavorum suo officio deputavit* et usque ad gloriosum exitus sui diem incessanter arctam regni caelestis viam plebibus patefecit.¹⁸⁸

This is Willibald's account of Boniface's delegation of responsibility to Bishops Willibald of Eichstätt and Burchard of Würzburg in chapter eight of the *Vita Bonifatii*. Levison's punctuation in the MGH edition of the *vita*, as seen here, tends to lead readers towards the interpretation reached by Talbot in his English translation (the same sentence is italicised):

¹⁸⁵ Tangl, ep. 108, p. 234, ll. 15-21.

¹⁸⁶ Tangl, ep. 93, p. 213, ll. 15-20.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., l. 19.

¹⁸⁸ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 8, p. 44, ll. 6-17.

He promoted two men of good repute to the episcopate, Willibald and Burchard, dividing between them the churches which were under his jurisdiction in east France and on the frontiers of Bavaria. To Willibald he entrusted the diocese of Eichstatt, to Burchard that of Wurzburg, *putting under his care all the churches within the borders of the Franks, Saxons and Slavs*. Nevertheless, even to the day of his death he did not fail to instruct the people in the way of life.¹⁸⁹

Fritze disputed this interpretation, arguing on stylistic grounds that the italicised sentence would be better preceded by a full stop in the Latin, and that the personal pronoun in *suo officio deputavit* should be read in the classical sense as being reflexive, i.e. referring to Boniface, not to Burchard.¹⁹⁰ Fritze also disagreed with Tangl's reading of *in confinibus Franchorum et Saxonum atque Sclavorum* to mean 'within the borderlands of the Franks, Saxons and Slavs.'¹⁹¹ Again for stylistic reasons, he proposed an alternative translation of 'within the Frankish territory bordering the Saxons on the one hand, and the Slavs on the other', i.e. within the former dioceses of Büraburg and Erfurt.¹⁹²

Fritze's proposed interpretation would thus read in English: '[Boniface] allotted the churches within the Frankish territory bordering the Saxons and the Slavs to his own authority.' The benefit of this reading is clear when one observes that Talbot was forced to invent an awkward 'nevertheless' in order for the final sentence to make good sense: '...and to the day of his death [Boniface] did not fail to instruct the people in the way of life'. In other words, Boniface assigned Willibald the diocese of Eichstatt, Burchard the diocese of Würzburg, and incorporated the short-lived dioceses of Büraburg and Erfurt into his own see of Mainz. The evidence of the letters supports this interpretation, for if Boniface had assigned the northern mission field to Burchard of Würzburg, we would have difficulty explaining why Boniface, not Burchard, was responsible for it in 752. Willibald's grammar is admittedly ambiguous, but this can hardly have been deliberate on his part; more probably, he

¹⁸⁹ Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, p. 53.

¹⁹⁰ Fritze, 'Bonifatius und die Einbeziehung von Hessen und Thüringen', p. 46-50.

¹⁹¹ *in den Grenzgebieten der Franken, Sachsen und Slawen*. Willibald of Mainz, *Leben des heiligen Bonifazius von Willibald bis Otloh*, ed. and trans. M. Tangl, *Geschichtsschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit* 13 (Berlin, 1920), pp. 1 – 144 (p. 42).

¹⁹² Fritze, 'Bonifatius und die Einbeziehung von Hessen und Thüringen', p. 39-44.

assumed that his audience would already know the true course of fairly recent events, and would not be confused as to the referent of *suo officio deputavit*.

The importance of Fritze's conclusion, which has since won general acceptance among German scholars,¹⁹³ is that it tells us something fundamental about Boniface's attitude towards his mission field in Hessa. Through his institutional arrangements Boniface was able to delegate authority over Frankish and Bavarian regions to his followers, yet he ultimately chose to keep the missionary districts of Hessa and Thuringia under his direct control even at such a very late stage in his life.

The precise status of the former bishopric of Büraburg after its demotion and the fate of Bishop Witta are not entirely clear, as Wand has discussed.¹⁹⁴ Lupus's *Vita Wigberti* (written 836) mentions that a certain Albuinus, *presul* of Büraburg, translated the remains of St Wigbert from Büraburg to Lul's new monastery at Hersfeld after 772, and died in Mainz in 786, the same year as Lul.¹⁹⁵ Lupus's term *presul* implies that Albuinus – probably not, despite the suggestion of Pertz, the Latinised name of Witta¹⁹⁶ – occupied a position of special responsibility at Büraburg, and was possibly an assistant bishop (*chorepiscopus*) to Lul.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Charlemagne's 775 charter of royal patronage for Hersfeld protected the monastery from the interference of any *archidiaconus aut missus episcoporum Mogonciae, Austriae, Toringiae*.¹⁹⁸ Since Mainz and Thuringia are mentioned in this clause, *Austria* here most probably refers to the region of Hessa,¹⁹⁹ and to the archdeacon (in effect an assistant bishop)²⁰⁰ whose seat was moved from Büraburg to Fritzlar some time before the eleventh century.²⁰¹

¹⁹³ For example Schwind, 'Fritzlar zur Zeit des Bonifatius', pp. 81-82; Heinemeyer, 'Bonifatius', p. 78; idem., 'Die Missionierung Hessens', p. 53; Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 54.

¹⁹⁴ Wand, *Die Büraburg*, pp. 55.

¹⁹⁵ Lupus, *Vita Wigberti*, c. 24, p. 42, ll. 45-48.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., n. 5. Wunder disproved the identification: II. Wunder, *Die Wigberttradition in Hersfeld und Fritzlar*, unpublished PhD thesis (Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1969), pp. 89-97.

¹⁹⁷ Wand, *Die Büraburg*, p. 53.

¹⁹⁸ Weirich, *Urkundenbuch der Reichsabtei Hersfeld*, 5-6, p. 12, ll. 13-15.

¹⁹⁹ Wunder, *Die Wigberttradition*, pp. 99-100. The term *regnum Austrasiorum* also appears in a charter of 782, in which Charlemagne granted several churches in central Hessa to Fritzlar. Gockel, 'Fritzlar und das Reich', pp. 98-99, suggests that these two occurrences represent an attempt by Charlemagne to reorganise the administration of the Hessian region in the context of his Saxon wars, but that the term *Austria/Austrasia* ultimately failed to supplant the term *Hessia*.

²⁰⁰ Archdeacons first arose in the fourth century as holders of primarily liturgical responsibilities within particular orders, but by the eighth century the office of an archdeacon was typically to act as the 'bishop's vicar' and support him in an administrative capacity. In Boniface's time, archdeacons were an entirely continental, largely Roman phenomenon; there is no archdeacon recorded in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms until the early ninth century. See A. Amanieu, 'Archidiacre' in *Dictionnaire du Droit Canonique*, ed. R. Naz, vol. 1 (Paris, 1935), col. 948-1004, esp. col. 959-960; Levison, *England*

The post of an archdeacon or assistant bishop at Büraburg/Fritzlar therefore dates at least from Lul's episcopate (754-786). That Boniface designated Lul his *chorepiscopus* is well known,²⁰² and in doing so he was following the custom of Willibrord in Frisia,²⁰³ who had once tried to assign Boniface himself to such a post.²⁰⁴ It is therefore possible that the assistant bishop or archdeacon at Büraburg was originally established by Boniface after 746 in order to assist him in the administration of the Hessian church.

Our second question concerned the cause of the demotion of the bishopric in 746. If, as seems possible, one reason for the foundation of the bishopric of Büraburg in 741 had been the rapid expansion of Boniface's mission field into southern Saxony, one reason for its demotion five years later may have been the dramatic failure of that expansion. In 743, as already discussed, Pippin led a campaign against the Saxons; in 745, a Saxon retaliatory attack devastated an unidentified part of Boniface's mission field.²⁰⁵ Boniface's report to the pope, which does not survive, prompted Zacharias in his reply to compare the Saxon attack to past sackings of Rome.²⁰⁶ Although this may have been a general allusion by Zacharias, it may also indicate that the attack of 745 had been directed not at a large number of isolated churches, as the attacks of 752 would be, but at one or more of the principal ecclesiastical sites in Hesia or Thuringia, including Fritzlar and Büraburg. In 774, according to Lupus's *Vita Wigberti* (written in 836), a Saxon raiding party attempted to burn Fritzlar and besiege Büraburg,²⁰⁷ and it is possible that hostile Saxons had targeted the same district twenty-nine years earlier in much the same way.

Whether or not Büraburg and Fritzlar were directly affected by the Saxon invasion of 745, the damage done to Boniface's mission infrastructure must have been severe. This, together with the impossibility of sustaining any expansion into increasingly hostile pagan districts, was probably a major factor in the sudden

and the Continent, p. 107; R. E. Reynolds, *The Ordinals of Christ from their Origins to the Twelfth Century* (Berlin, 1978), pp. 28-52.

²⁰¹ For a full discussion, see chapter seven below, section 7.2.1.

²⁰² *filiolum meum et corepiscopum Lullum*, Tangl, ep. 93, p. 213, ll. 21-22.

²⁰³ See Boniface writing to Pope Stephen regarding Willibrord's legacy in Utrecht: *Et sibi [Willibrordus] corepiscopum ad ministerium implendum substituit*, Tangl, ep. 109, p. 235, l. 14-15.

²⁰⁴ Greenaway, *Saint Boniface*, pp. 20-21.

²⁰⁵ See this chapter above, section 5.3.2.

²⁰⁶ *De incursione autem gentium, quae in tuis plebibus facta est, merendum nobis est. Sed haec adversitatis nullatenus tuam fraternitatem conturbet. Quia et Roma civitas ex accidentibus facinoribus sepius est depopulata, et tamen omnipotentia sua Dominus ex supernis eam dignatus est consolare*, Tangl, ep. 60, p. 121, ll. 4-8.

²⁰⁷ Lupus, *Vita Wigberti*, c. 13, p. 41, l. 28 to c. 22, p. 42, l. 36.

demotion of Büraburg from the status of bishopric a year or so later. By 746 Boniface had also attained an episcopal see in Mainz, which enabled him to supervise his missionaries on the borderlands from a relatively secure distance as well as to provide them with material support, perhaps in the hope that conditions would improve and the mission could continue.

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In this chapter I have attempted to present a critical chronology of Boniface's Hessian mission between 721 and 754 with greater clarity than has been attempted in previous scholarship, and with a deeper awareness of the precise context in which he worked. Boniface enjoyed early and rapid success in central Hesse, founded a permanent missionary base at Fritzlar, and his intention appears to have been to consolidate the region in order to realise his ultimate ambition of converting the Saxons. Prompted by Charles Martel's invasion of Saxony in 738, Boniface expanded his mission north of the Diemel. Despite initial advances and the optimistic foundation of frontier bishoprics at Büraburg and Erfurt in 741, the extent of Saxon hostility soon became apparent. Pagan raiding parties attacked the missionaries, burned their churches, and by 747 the worsening situation in the borderlands had led Boniface to demote his two northern bishoprics.

Although hindsight might thus permit us to label Boniface's Saxon mission a failure, there is no reason to suppose that he ever considered it such, much less that he lost all hope of ever reinvigorating it. His continuing attempts throughout the 740s to obtain a metropolitan seat at Cologne, vital for the coordination of a full-scale mission in Saxony, must be seen in this context. Wallace-Hadrill expressed puzzlement that Boniface always longed for a permanent seat in Cologne rather than in Mainz, when Mainz was much better situated for pushing forward Boniface's reforms of the Rhineland Frankish church.²⁰⁸ But this puzzlement arose from the assumption that Boniface had effectively abandoned any hope of converting the Saxons in his lifetime, as though he could foresee the many decades of bitter warfare that would pass before Charles Martel's grandson would finally bring them to heel.

²⁰⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 157-158.

On the contrary, in 751 Boniface was still seeking papal support for his claims on Cologne,²⁰⁹ and he had never weakened his support for his small bands of missionaries who lived under constant threat of pagan annexation. When invaders burned more than thirty of his churches in the Hessian-Saxon borderlands in 752, the embers could hardly have been cool before Boniface set about personally directing the reconstruction efforts. This is not to say that the reform of the wider Frankish church was not also a central concern of Boniface; indeed, as we shall see, it was intrinsically related to his desire to evangelise Saxony, for without fundamental reforms of corrupt Frankish clergy there would be no stable Rhineland church from which to project the mission.

One aim of this chapter has been to show that, even during the final years of his life and in the face of opposition that ultimately proved insurmountable, the impetus of Boniface's mission was always north, towards the pagan Saxon frontier. We must bear this in mind when in the next two chapters we consider the symbolic representation of the mission in the letters of Boniface and Lul and the ways in which the missionaries attempted to overcome the challenges and obstacles they encountered.

²⁰⁹ Tangl, ep. 86, p. 193, ll. 14-20.

Chapter Six

Representing the Mission

We have so far investigated the West Saxon context from which Boniface came, the Hessian context into which he arrived, and have constructed, as far as the sources permit, a chronology of the Hessian mission itself. The aim of this chapter is to examine the ways in which Boniface and his correspondents, particularly his Anglo-Saxon contacts, represented the mission in Germania through their literary discourse. This will allow us, first, to understand the contrast between the Anglo-Saxon and papal views of the mission, and to determine the significance of this contrast. Second, it will add a useful dimension to our study in chapter seven of the practical challenges faced by the missionaries in the field itself. As I argued in chapter two, contrasting the experiences of the missionary community with its symbolic representation of those experiences will help us understand both.

Several recent literary studies have refocused attention on the letters of Boniface and Lul as an important resource for understanding the social relationships of the missionary community,¹ the status and learning of female religious connected to Boniface,² the use of formulaic lamentation in Anglo-Saxon correspondence³ and the literary influences and habits of the missionaries.⁴ So far nobody has studied what is one of the defining features of the letters: their representation of mission through a complex interplay of Biblical and patristic themes, motifs and metaphors.

In order to elucidate this feature of the letters I have subjected them to careful textual analysis from a number of perspectives, the results of which are tabulated in appendices 1-3. Since there was no direct equivalent to the modern term 'mission' in

¹ Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius*.

² J. Cünnen, *Fiktionale Nonnenwelten: angelsächsische Frauenbriefe des 8. und 9. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg, 2000); P. Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porete (†1310)* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 30-35; C. E. Fell, 'Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence' in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. H. Damico and A. H. Olsen (Bloomington, IN, 1990), pp. 29-43.

³ Schaefer, 'Two Women in Need of a Friend'; S. Horner, 'En/closed Subjects: *The Wife's Lament* and the Culture of Early Medieval Female Monasticism' in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (London, 2002), pp. 381-391 (pp. 384-385).

⁴ A. Orchard, 'Old Sources, New Resources: Finding the Right Formula for Boniface', *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), pp. 15-38; R. McKitterick, 'The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany: Personal Connections and Local Influences', Eighth Brixworth Lecture, Vaughan Papers 36 (Leicester, 1990), reprinted in idem, *The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1995). See also Tangl, 'Studien zur Neuausgabe', pp. 731-790.

the eighth century, first we shall clarify the words used by the missionaries and their contacts, in Rome and Britain, to refer to the mission in the broad sense. We shall see that the mission was most often characterised as *predicatio* and *ministerium* between all contacts, but that representation of the mission as *peregrinatio* was a motif employed only between Anglo-Saxons.

Next we shall examine the various metaphors and motifs employed by the missionaries in their symbolic representation of the mission, which included the contrast of paganism as captivity/darkness/ignorance with Christianity as freedom/light/wisdom, the metaphor of mission as harvest, and the symbolic language of suffering. The last of these, like *peregrinatio*, was used only in letters between Anglo-Saxons. Finally we shall draw together the three distinctive but interwoven strands of the discourse between the missionaries and their Anglo-Saxon supporters that formed their dominant representation of the mission: exile, suffering and *Germania* as a symbolic land of primeval darkness. This conceptualisation of mission, I shall argue at the end of the thesis, was both an influence on, and the product of, the course and methods of Boniface's mission in Hessa and the Saxon borderlands.

6.1 Terms and expressions relating to mission and missionaries

6.1.1 The terminology of the letters of Boniface and Lul

Early medieval Latin had no direct equivalents for the modern English words 'mission' and 'missionaries', which derive from terms coined by sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit missionaries in Latin America.⁵ Boniface was occasionally described as having been *missus*, 'sent', by Rome to preach to and convert the peoples of Germania,⁶ but the term *missio*, in the specific modern sense of the coordinated Christianisation and conversion of a given population, was never used by contemporaries.

How, then, did Boniface and his correspondents refer to what we persistently and rather anachronistically call his 'mission', and what does this tell us about their

⁵ D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (New York, 1991), p. 1.

⁶ See, for example, the Papacy's description of Boniface's mandate: *fidelis minister... quem misi ad vos* (Tangl, ep. 21, p. 36, ll. 21-22); *ministerium, pro quo missus es* (Tangl, ep. 26, p. 44, ll. 16-17); *in illis partibus missus... praedicare verbum Dei* (Tangl, ep. 42, p. 67, ll. 13-14).

perception of his activities? In appendix 1.1 I have listed the terms and expressions used in the letters of Boniface and Lul which relate to the purpose and method of Boniface's mission and missionary activities, including preaching, converting and general pastoral care of newly converted populations. I have not included terms or expressions which clearly referred only to Boniface's attempts to reform the Frankish church, which is not to say that his evangelisation, pastoral arrangements, monastic organisation and wider institutional reforms were not all occasionally implied in a single term such as *opus*. Nor have I included a handful of instances of the term *baptizare*, which in the letters is always used to refer to specific occasions, not to general missionary methods or aims (in contrast to *convertere*).

As is clear in appendices 1.1 and 1.2, the term most frequently used to describe the activities of missionaries was *predicatio* (along with the related words *predicare* and *predicator*, 36 occurrences in the corpus); followed by *ministerium* (or *minister*, 19 occurrences); *peregrinatio* (or *peregrinus* or *peregrinari*, 19 occurrences); *labor* (16 occurrences) and *opus* (14 occurrences). Less frequently used terms relating to mission were *convertere*, *dicere* (in this context meaning 'to preach'), *dispensatio* (or *dispensator*), *docere*, *exhortatio*, *inluminatio*, *iter*, *legatio*, *mandatum*, *negotium* and *ritus*.

6.1.2 Mission as *predicatio* and *ministerium*

The definitive activity of Boniface's early mission in the eyes of the Papacy was his preaching, *predicatio*. According to Gregory II, Boniface's task was to preach the 'correct faith' (*ad predicandum recta fides*)⁷ and the 'Word of salvation' (*predicando verbum salutis*)⁸ according to the Great Commission given by Christ at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, which has formed the theological basis and justification for all Christian missions until the modern age: *euntes ergo docete omnes gentes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*.⁹ When Gregory II recommended Boniface to Charles Martel, he said that he had been sent *ad predicandum plebibus*

⁷ Tangl, ep. 17, p. 30, ll. 13-14.

⁸ Tangl, ep. 17, p. 30, l. 16.

⁹ 'Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Matt 28:19. Gregory II invokes this passage in Tangl, ep. 25, p. 43, l. 15-17. See also L. E. von Padberg, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontationen: Theorie und Praxis der Missionspredigt im frühen Mittelalter*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 51 (Stuttgart, 2003), p. 425.

Germaniae gentis, ‘to preach to the common people of Germania’.¹⁰ Gregory III reiterated that Boniface’s original mandate had been ‘to preach the Word of God’ (*praedicare verbum Dei*),¹¹ and Zacharias in turn described his activities as ‘preaching the Gospel of Christ’ (*predicatio evangelii Christi*).¹²

The Biblical theme of *predicatio*, chiefly formulated in the Gospel of Matthew, permeates much of the New Testament,¹³ and is more accurately translated into English as ‘missionary preaching’ or ‘evangelising’ than merely ‘preaching’. Whereas in Insular Latin *predicatio* generally referred to any public exposition of Christian precepts and texts whatever the status of the audience,¹⁴ the word was used by Boniface and his correspondents in the context of his mission to refer almost exclusively to the preaching of the Gospel to the erring, unbaptised and unbelieving, as is demonstrated by appendix 1.3. Whenever the audience of Boniface’s *predicatio* is directly stated in the letters, they were not established Christian communities in need of regular pastoral preaching, but ‘unbelieving peoples’,¹⁵ ‘pagans’,¹⁶ and ‘a faithless population’,¹⁷ who were ‘trapped in the error of paganism’.¹⁸

Members of earlier missions, specifically the missions to Frisia and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, were also referred to as *predicatores*. Thus Boniface, when appealing to Pope Stephan during a dispute between himself and the bishop of Cologne over the control of the bishopric of Utrecht, three times described Willibrord

¹⁰ Tangl, ep. 20, p. 34, l. 9.

¹¹ Tangl, ep. 42, p. 67, ll. 13-14.

¹² Tangl, ep. 80, p. 172, ll. 21-22.

¹³ Matthew’s Gospel is fundamentally missionary, and many of the later books of the New Testament, in particular the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of Paul, essentially describe the attempts of the disciples to fulfill the Great Commission with which Matthew ended his narrative. There is a large literature on the nature and development of missionary theology in the New Testament; see in particular M. F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (New York, 2007); J. LaGrand, *The Earliest Christian Mission to the Nations in the Light of Matthew’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1999); D. J. Bosch, ‘Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission’ in *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, ed. J. M. Phillips and R. T. Coote (Grand Rapids, MI, 1993), pp. 175-192; idem, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 15-83; M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1983), esp. pp. 133-156; D. Senior and C. Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (London, 1983), esp. pp. 211-232; S. Brown, ‘The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission’, *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), pp. 193-221; P. T. O’Brien, ‘The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20: A Missionary Mandate or Not?’, *Evangelical Review* 2 (1978), pp. 254-267; N. A. Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis, 1977), esp. pp. 70-94.

¹⁴ See R. E. Latham, ed., *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* (London, 1965), pp. 365-366.

¹⁵ *gentes incredulae*, Tangl, ep. 12, p. 17, ll. 15-16.

¹⁶ *gentiles / pagani*, Tangl, ep. 23, p. 38, ll. 18-21; ep. 105, p. 230, ll. 18-21; ep. 75, p. 157, ll. 15-17.

¹⁷ *populus infidelis*, Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 9-10.

¹⁸ *gentilitatis errore detenti*, Tangl, ep. 20, p. 34, ll. 9-11; *multitudinem gentilium idolatriae vetustissimo errore miserabiliter deceptam*, Tangl, ep. 105, p. 230, ll. 18-21.

as *predicator* and six times used the verb *predicare* to characterise the mission in Frisia (he also used *convertere* twice).¹⁹ Boniface and Pope Zacharias similarly viewed the original missionaries sent by Gregory the Great to Kent as *predicatores*.²⁰

The term *ministerium* was also frequently used in the letters to describe Boniface's mission, but had a somewhat broader connotation. Whereas *predicatio* referred to evangelisation, *ministerium* could encompass both the task of missionary preaching (*ministerium exhortationis sanctae catholice fidei*)²¹ and, in more general terms, the pastoral care of a converted population. In his letter of 752 to Abbot Fulrad, for instance, Boniface wrote that the priests of his missionary territory were 'settled in many places for the ministry of the church and the people'²² and requested of Pippin that Lul be acknowledged as his successor 'in the ministry of the peoples and churches'.²³ His missionaries who lived on the borders of pagan territory, he wrote, needed external support if they were to continue in the 'ministry of the people'.²⁴ The priest Wigberht, when he wrote to Lul between 754 and 786 that he was prepared to return to Germania, requested to be sent 'to the church and ministry to which I was formerly devoted',²⁵ here using *ministerium* to refer to the administration of a single parish. Finally, Boniface remarked to Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury that they shared one and the same ministry: *Nam labor nostri ministrii unius et eiusdem causae esse dinoscitur*.²⁶

6.1.3 Mission as *peregrinatio*

These two major components of Boniface's mission, *predicatio* and *ministerium*, are supplemented by a third in the surviving letters: *peregrinatio*, which has the meaning of 'travelling/residing abroad or away from home' in Classical Latin,²⁷ and which in the letters of Boniface and Lul carried strong connotations of self-imposed exile, as

¹⁹ Tangl, ep. 109, pp. 235-236.

²⁰ For a query of Boniface to Nothelm of Canterbury concerning the Gregorian mission, see Tangl, ep. 33, p. 58, ll. 11-13; for a letter of Zacharias to Boniface, see Tangl, ep. 80, p. 173, ll. 13-19.

²¹ Tangl, ep. 42, p. 67, ll. 25-26. Also *ministerium verbi*, Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 8-9.

²² *per multa loca ad ministerium ecclesiae et populorum constituti*, Tangl, ep. 93, p. 213, ll. 11-12.

²³ *in hoc ministerium populorum et ecclesiarum componere*, Tangl, ep. 93, p. 213, ll. 22-23.

²⁴ *ad ministerium populi*, Tangl, ep. 93, p. 214, l. 1.

²⁵ *ut... ecclesiae et ministerio, cui ante deservivi, me dimittas, dignum rogo et obsecro*, Tangl, ep. 138, p. 278, ll. 3-4.

²⁶ 'For the work of our ministry proceeds from one and the same cause', Tangl, ep. 78, p. 162, ll. 13-14.

²⁷ P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 1335.

we shall see. Especially noteworthy is the distribution of this particular characterisation of mission according to correspondents (see appendix 1.2). *Predicatio* and *ministerium* were used frequently throughout the letters, although significantly more often in letters written to and from the papacy than between Anglo-Saxons, whereas *peregrinatio*, *peregrinus* and *peregrinari* appear only in letters written by Anglo-Saxons, and overwhelmingly when both sender and recipient were Anglo-Saxon (16 of 19 occurrences). This distinction calls for explanation.²⁸

There is no reason to doubt that the popes would have understood the concept of *peregrinatio* in relation to preaching far from one's homeland, for it was rooted firmly in Biblical and patristic tradition.²⁹ The Latin word *peregrinus*, originally denoting a 'foreigner' in both the legal and non-legal sense,³⁰ gained specifically Christian meanings from Jerome's Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments and from the theology of Augustine of Hippo. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that all men were 'estranged from God' while living on earth (*peregrinamur a Domino*)³¹, but this was an involuntary state; like any stranger in a foreign land, the Christian longed to return home.³² For Augustine in the early fifth century, the dominant meaning of *peregrinus* was still 'foreigner', not 'traveller' or 'pilgrim'. Like Paul, he viewed *peregrinatio* as a miserable, hazardous, negative state that was rarely voluntary, and these very characteristics made it a suitable metaphor for human existence away from the spiritual homeland of Heaven.³³

Augustine and the other Church Fathers tended to emphasise this allegorical interpretation of the Christian as *peregrinus* rather than encourage literal *peregrinatio*

²⁸ Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius*, p. 254, has also noted this feature of the letters, but not explored it in any detail.

²⁹ On the Biblical models of *peregrinatio*, see A. Angenendt, *Monachi Peregrini: Studien zu Pirmin und den monastischen Vorstellungen des frühen Mittelalters* (München, 1972), esp. pp. 127-137. On *peregrinatio* as an early medieval hagiographical topos, see Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 93-97.

³⁰ Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 1335. In his *Confessions*, Augustine described his residence in Milan as a *peregrinatio*, although he was a citizen of the Roman Empire and was thus, legally speaking, not a *peregrinus*: [*Ambrosius*] *suscepit me paterne ille homo dei et peregrinationem meam satis episcopaliter dilexit*. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, ed. J. J. O'Donnell, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1992), 5.13.23, p. 56. G. Clark, 'Pilgrims and Foreigners: Augustine on Travelling Home' in *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane*, ed. L. Ellis and F. L. Kidner (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 149-158 (p. 153).

³¹ 2 Corinthians 5:6.

³² *bonam voluntatem habemus magis peregrinari a corpore et praesentes esse ad Deum*. 2 Corinthians 5:8. See also Hebrews 11:13-16.

³³ P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London, 1967), p. 323. A. Souter, ed., *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* (Oxford, 1957), p. 294, defines *peregrinatio* as a 'sojourn on earth (of those whose real home is Heaven)'.

pro amore Christi.³⁴ By the seventh century, as Maribel Dietz and Gillian Clark have recently discussed,³⁵ the word *peregrinatio* had developed among some Christians to mean something akin to ‘pilgrimage’, that is, a deliberate journey to a person or site of special holiness with an intended return home.³⁶ According to the *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, the earliest appearance of the word in this sense is, in fact, from a letter of Gregory the Great.³⁷

It does not seem, however, that Boniface and his correspondents understood *peregrinatio* in the later medieval sense of pilgrimage. The Abbess Eangyth did use the word *peregrinatio* when she asked Boniface for advice on her proposed journey to Rome,³⁸ but it is quite clear that she was not intending to return: for her, *peregrinatio* meant permanent, self-imposed exile in a foreign land, not, as Emerton conventionally translates it, pilgrimage.³⁹ Similarly, Bugga’s intended *peregrinatio* in Rome was to mark her retirement as an abbess and the closing chapter of her life, as it had done for Boniface’s friend Wiethberga.⁴⁰ On the one occasion when Boniface does refer to Anglo-Saxon nuns who make what appear to be return pilgrimages to Rome, in a letter to Cuthbert of Canterbury, he describes the activity as ‘that frequent journey [*iter*] that they make to and from the city of Rome,’⁴¹ not as *peregrinatio*.

The same concept of *peregrinatio* as an ideally permanent religious exile appears throughout Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* and his *Historia Abbatum*.⁴² For Bede, the mission of Augustine and his companions to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms

³⁴ Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, pp. 28-29. Clark asks whether Augustine, when bishop of Carthage, actively opposed literal interpretation of the Christian as a *peregrinus* and the social dislocation which it could cause. Clark, ‘Pilgrims and Foreigners’, p. 155.

³⁵ Clark, ‘Pilgrims and Foreigners’; M. Dietz, ‘Itinerant Spirituality and the Late Antique Origins of Christian Pilgrimage’ in *Travel, Communication and Geography*, ed. Ellis and Kidner, pp. 125-134; idem, *Wandering Monks*, pp. 27-42.

³⁶ This is the chief meaning of the word given in Latham, ed., *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*, p. 342, and J. F. Niermeyer and C. Van de Kieft, eds., *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden, 2002), p. 1026. On early Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land, see P. Maraval, ‘The Earliest Phase of Christian Pilgrimage in the Near East (Before the 7th Century)’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002), pp. 63-74.

³⁷ Ibid.; Gregory the Great, *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistolarum libri VIII-XIV*, ed. D. L. Norberg, CCSL 140A (Turnhout, 1982), VIII.22, p. 542, l. 31.

³⁸ Eangyth asks Boniface whether it would be better for her and her daughter ‘to live on our native soil or to be exiled in *peregrinatio*’ (*sive in patrio solo vivere vel in peregrinatione exulare*), Tangl, ep. 14, p. 26, l. 4.

³⁹ Emerton, trans., *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Tangl, ep. 27, p. 48, ll. 5-25.

⁴¹ *illud iter et frequentiam, quam ad Romanam civitatem veniendo et redeundo faciunt*, Tangl, ep. 78, p. 169, ll. 20-21.

⁴² On the numerous Anglo-Saxon kings who abdicated in order to enter monasteries or journey to Rome, see chapter three above, section 3.1.2.

constituted a *peregrinatio*,⁴³ as did the departure of numerous Anglo-Saxon nuns to Gaulish religious houses⁴⁴ and the exile of the Irishman Fursey in East Anglia.⁴⁵ Egbert's *peregrinatio* in Ireland was determinedly permanent: *adeo peregrinus vivere vellet, ut numquam in insulam, in quo natus est, id est Britanniam, rediret*.⁴⁶ Bede contrasts Egbert, who 'remained a *peregrinus* for the Lord until the end of his life,' with Chad, who accompanied Egbert in Ireland but eventually returned home.⁴⁷ The later abbess Hild, too, spent a year in East Anglia intending to join her relative Hereswith as a permanent *peregrina* in Gaul, but chose to abandon her 'proposed exile', *propositum peregrinandi*, and returned to Northumbria instead.⁴⁸

The distinction between *iter* and *peregrinatio* is most clear in Bede's *Historia Abbatum*. He recounted six visits of Benedict Biscop to Rome, five of which were transient visits (*itinerata*), and one of which, the third, was supposed to be a permanent *peregrinatio* until he was commanded to abandon it (*relicta peregrinatione quam pro Christo suscepit*) and return to England with Theodore of Tarsus.⁴⁹ Finally, Abbot Ceolfrid made one temporary visit (*iter*) to Rome before he resolved to end his days there as an old man dwelling in exile (*peregrinari*).⁵⁰

In short, *peregrinatio* for Boniface and his compatriots described permanent religious exile rather than the more transient state of what would later be called pilgrimages, which Boniface and Bede tended simply to call *itinerata*, 'journeys'. Furthermore, they used *peregrinatio* more often in the literal sense of a sojourn in a foreign country than in Augustine's allegorical sense of corporeal exile from one's heavenly homeland.⁵¹ This does, of course, reflect the reality of their situation, and it

⁴³ *HE*, I.23, pp. 68-69; I.25, pp. 74-75.

⁴⁴ *HE*, III.8, pp. 238-239.

⁴⁵ *HE*, III.19, pp. 268-269.

⁴⁶ *HE*, III.27, pp. 312-313. 'He desired to live thenceforth as an exile, and never return to Britain, the island in which he was born.'

⁴⁷ *Sed illo [Ceadda] postmodum patriam reuerso, ipse [Ecgberctus] peregrinus pro Domino usque ad finem uitae permansit*. *HE*, IV.3, pp. 344-345.

⁴⁸ *HE*, IV.23, 406-407.

⁴⁹ See Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, ed. Plummer, pp. 364-387 (pp. 365-367). Theodore also referred to himself as a *peregrinus* in a poem he wrote to Bishop Hæddi of Winchester: Orchard, *The Poetic Art*, p. 30.

⁵⁰ Bede quotes a letter of Abbot Hwaetbert to Gregory II, in which Hwaetbert recommends his predecessor Ceolfrid, who 'now an old man nearing his death, wishes to return in exile for Christ' (*prope iam moriturus, rursus incipit peregrinari pro Christo*): Bede, *Historia Abbatum* in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, ed. Plummer, p. 384. Ceolfrid did not reach Rome, but died in Langres.

⁵¹ Boniface cites Augustine during a rumination on the plight of the *peregrinus* in one of his letters to Gemmulus, but only with regard to *peregrinatio* as a corporeal, not spiritual, state of existence: *Et, sicut sanctus Augustinus dixit, licet unus sit in oriente et alius in occidente, conglutinata caritate numquam ab invicem separantur*, Tangl, ep. 104, p. 228. 'And, just as Saint Augustine says, even if

also accords with Insular tradition. One of the most distinctive features of early Irish Christianity was a propensity towards self-imposed exile *pro amore Christi* in literal, almost aggressive, obedience to Christ's injunction to abandon home and family for his sake.⁵²

This Irish tradition had an enormous influence upon early Anglo-Saxon Christianity,⁵³ sharply evidenced in the letter to Aldhelm by the late seventh-century Irishman Cellanus, who portrayed his own situation in Francia in terms very similar to those used by Boniface some decades later. First, Cellanus described himself as 'an exile dwelling in the very far corner of the border of the Franks',⁵⁴ and requested that Aldhelm send him some writings if he should desire 'to relieve the sorrowful little heart of an exile'.⁵⁵ Compare Boniface's use of the term *exul* and the expression 'the dark corners of the Germanic peoples', as well as the relief with which he received sacred texts sent by Eadburg (emphasis added):

Carissimam sororem remunerator aeternus iustorum operum in superna laetificet curia angelorum, quae sanctorum librorum munera transmittendo *exulem Germanicum spiritali lumine consolata est... qui tenebrosos angulos Germanicarum gentium lustrare debet...*⁵⁶

Yet the *peregrinationes* of Willibrord and Boniface, with their emphasis on *predicatio* and *ministerium*, differed fundamentally from those of their Irish predecessors, who

one is in the east and the other in the west, they shall never be separated because of the binding love they share.' The more theologically-minded Bede twice included the concept of *peregrinatio* in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* as an allegory in the Augustinian sense, first concerning the end of Ine's life in Rome (*HE*, V.7, pp. 472-473), and second when quoting Abbot Ceolfrid's letter to the Pictish king (*HE*, V.21, pp. 534-535).

⁵² On the much-studied tradition of Irish *peregrinatio*, see especially C. P. Thom, *The Ascetical Theology and Praxis of Sixth to Eighth Century Irish Monasticism as a Radical Response to the Evangelium*, unpublished PhD thesis (Australian Catholic University, 2002), pp. 164-172; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *peregrinatio*', *Celtica* 11 (1976), pp. 43-59; A. Angenendt, 'Die irische Peregrinatio und ihre Auswirkungen auf dem Kontinent vor dem Jahre 800' in *Die Iren und Europa*, ed. Löwe, pp. 52-79; C. Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom' in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 21-46.

⁵³ On the influence of Irish traditions of *peregrinatio* specifically on the West Saxon church of Boniface's time, see Yorke, 'The Insular Background'.

⁵⁴ *in extremo Francorum limitis latens angulo exul*, Aldhelm, *Epistulae*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, pp. 475-503 (ep. 3, p. 498, l. 5).

⁵⁵ *si peregrini triste reficere vis corculum*, *ibid.*, p. 498, l. 12.

⁵⁶ 'May the eternal rewarder of all good deeds praise the dearest sister in the upper choir of angels, for by sending gifts of sacred books she has consoled with spiritual light a Germanic exile... who is bound to enlighten the dark corners of the Germanic peoples', Tangl, ep. 30, p. 54, ll. 9-13.

were more concerned with personal penance and establishing monastic centres than with evangelisation.⁵⁷ *Predicatio* and *ministerium* were concepts which Gregory II and his successors understood and enthusiastically supported, yet *peregrinatio*, at least in its peculiarly Insular form, does not appear to have formed part of the papal conception of Boniface's mission. It was a term used almost exclusively among Anglo-Saxons in the letters; the most immediate explanation for this is that within their discourse it carried certain connotations that it would not have in letters between Boniface and the popes.

Only three times did Boniface use the term *peregrinus* when writing to non-Anglo-Saxons in his surviving correspondence: once in a letter to Fulrad of St Denis, when, concerned for their security after his death, he described his missionaries in literal terms as being *pene omnes peregrini*, 'almost all foreigners',⁵⁸ i.e. non-Franks; and twice in a single letter to Gemmulus of Rome, in which he felt compelled to discuss the condition of the *peregrinus* at length with one who was unfamiliar with its frequent use in Anglo-Saxon religious discourse.⁵⁹

Mission as *peregrinatio*, then, was a uniquely Anglo-Saxon concept that formed a dominant element of discourse between the missionaries themselves and their native support base.⁶⁰ For Boniface and his companions, *peregrinatio* was not merely about seeking a foreign wilderness and suffering the misery of exile according to the Irish model – although, as we shall see, misery and hardship were defining cultural features of exile for the missionaries – but also involved challenging and defeating paganism in accordance with the Great Commission. One's personal salvation thus became intrinsically linked to the grand narrative of Christ's coming triumph: they were, as Freiherr von Campenhausen put it, *Missionsperegrini*.⁶¹ Our next step will be to consider in more detail the poetic and metaphorical representation

⁵⁷ A. Wendehorst, 'Die Iren und die Christianisierung Mainfrankens' in *Die Iren und Europa*, ed. Löwe, pp. 319-341 (pp. 321-322). In the Iro-Frankish tradition, *peregrinatio* came to refer simply to the monastic life itself, without necessarily implying any travel to foreign lands. See F. Prinz, 'Peregrinatio, Mönchtum und Mission' in *Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte*, ed. Schäferdiek, pp. 445-465 (pp. 451-452); Angenendt, *Monachi Peregrini*, p. 153; Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', pp. 38-40.

⁵⁸ Tangl, ep. 93, p. 213, l. 11.

⁵⁹ Tangl, ep. 104, p. 228.

⁶⁰ Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius*, p. 257.

⁶¹ H. Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Die asketische Heimatlosigkeit im altkirchlichen und frühmittelalterlichen Mönchtum*, Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 149 (Tübingen, 1930), pp. 26-28; see also K. Hauck, 'Von einer spätantiken Randkultur zum karolingischen Europa', *Frühmittelalterlichen Studien* 1 (1967), pp. 3-93 (pp. 62-63); Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius*, pp. 206-207.

of aspects of the mission in the surviving letters, and observe how the portrayal of the mission's hardships in particular formulaic terms was, like the concept of *peregrinatio*, restricted to letters between Anglo-Saxons.

6.2 Metaphors and motifs used to represent the mission

6.2.1 Paganism as captivity, darkness and ignorance

In appendix 2.1 I have listed every appearance in the letters of Boniface and Lul of motifs and metaphors representing Germanic paganism. For Boniface and his correspondents, the three metaphors most frequently used to depict pagans and paganism were captivity, darkness and ignorance. It must be remembered that these were rhetorical, not analytical labels. As discussed in chapter four above,⁶² there had been communities of Frankish Christians in Hessa for many years before Boniface's arrival, and even the paganism of the Hessian-Saxon borderlands had probably been influenced to some extent by Christian beliefs and rituals. When in the next chapter we consider the evidence for the development of such syncretic forms of religion in Hessa during Boniface's mission, we shall recall the fact that the literary motifs employed by the missionaries were soteriological rather than descriptive.⁶³

The metaphor of captivity, occasionally used in the letters of St Paul to describe the state of those who succumbed to Satan,⁶⁴ was adopted by Boniface and his contemporaries to describe pagans in Germania. They were 'held back by error';⁶⁵ 'enslaved to idols';⁶⁶ 'shackled';⁶⁷ and 'caught in the snare of Satan the hunter'.⁶⁸

The phrase 'in the shadow of death' (*in umbra mortis*) was used twice by Gregory II and once by Gregory III to describe the condition of pagans across the Rhine.⁶⁹ The motif appears many times in the Book of Job and the Book of Psalms to illustrate a state of abandonment of God, despair, and often captivity. For example, Psalm 106 says of the Israelites:

⁶² Section 4.4.4.

⁶³ See chapter seven below, section 7.4.4.

⁶⁴ For example, 1 Tim. 3:7, 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:26.

⁶⁵ *errore detenti*, Tangl, ep. 12, p. 17, ll. 29-30.

⁶⁶ *idolorum culturae eos servire*, Tangl, ep. 17, p. 30, ll. 7-10.

⁶⁷ *prepediti*, Tangl, ep. 20, p. 34, l. 12.

⁶⁸ *laqueo venantis satanae; a diabuli laqueis, a quibus capti tenentur*, Tangl, ep. 46, p. 75, l. 4.

⁶⁹ Tangl, ep. 17, p. 30, l. 7; ep. 24, p. 42, l. 5; ep. 28, p. 49, l. 15.

habitantes in tenebris et umbra mortis alligatos inopia et ferro quia provocaverunt sermones Dei et consilium Excelsi blasphemaverunt et humiliavit in labore cor eorum ceciderunt et non erat qui adiuuaret et clamaverunt ad Dominum in tribulatione sua et de angustiis eorum salvavit eos et eduxit eos de tenebris et umbra mortis et vincula eorum dirupit⁷⁰

As in this psalm, *umbra* ‘shadow, darkness’ was used as a synonym for *tenebrae* in the letters of Boniface and Lul. The agents of Satan, wrote Gregory III, were the ‘sons of darkness’,⁷¹ while Boniface described himself as dwelling in the ‘dark corners of the Germanic peoples’.⁷² The imagery of pagan darkness, at least to a Roman such as Gregory II, was especially pertinent to the ‘gloomy forest’ of Germania,⁷³ for this had been an important motif of the Roman perception of the lands beyond the Rhine and Danube since at least the first century A.D.⁷⁴

Finally, the characterisation of paganism as ignorance of God, wilful or otherwise, had its Biblical roots in the sermons of Moses to the Israelites warning against their worship of graven images,⁷⁵ and was a theme frequently employed by St Paul in his letters.⁷⁶ In the letters of Boniface and Lul, the term most frequently used to describe pagan ‘ignorance’ was *error*, while other conceptually related terms include *ignorantia*, *indoctus*, *inspiens*, *absurdus* and *vanitas*; Gregory II also likened pagans to ‘brutish animals’, the implication being that they lacked human reason and self-control.⁷⁷ Terms used to describe ignorance were often closely linked to those

⁷⁰ ‘Such as sat in darkness and in the shadow of death: bound in want and in iron. Because they had exasperated the words of God: and provoked the counsel of the most High: And their heart was humbled with labours: they were weakened, and there was none to help them. Then they cried to the Lord in their affliction: and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he brought them out of darkness, and the shadow of death; and broke their bonds in sunder.’ Psalms 106:10-14. Trans. Douay-Rheims, p. 640.

⁷¹ *fili tenebrarum*, Tangl, ep. 21, p. 35, ll. 27-28.

⁷² *tenebrosi anguli Germanicarum gentium*, Tangl, ep. 30, p. 54, l. 12.

⁷³ *opaca silva*, Tangl, ep. 26, p. 47, l. 18.

⁷⁴ See this chapter below, section 6.3.3.

⁷⁵ See especially Deut. 4:15-19 and 30:15-18.

⁷⁶ Eph. 4:22; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:12-13; see also James 5:19-20; 2 Peter 3:17; Jude 1:11.

⁷⁷ *bruta animalia*, Tangl, ep. 17, p. 30, l. 12; see also Tangl, ep. 26, p. 45, ll. 5-10, where Gregory II advised Boniface to permit marriages between first cousins in recently converted populations ‘because moderation is better than strictness of discipline, especially for so barbaric a people’ (*quia temperantia magis et presertim in tam barbaram gentem placet plus quam districtione censure*). On the late Antique *topos* of the archetypal barbarian as a slave to lust and irrationality, see P. Heather, ‘The Barbarian in Late Antiquity: Image, Reality and Transformation’ in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. Miles (London, 1999), pp. 234-258 (p. 237).

describing captivity and darkness: thus pagans were ‘detained by error’, as we have seen, and ‘shackled in the darkness of ignorance’.⁷⁸

6.2.2 Christianity as freedom, light and wisdom

Negative motifs of captivity, darkness and ignorance were not employed in the letters by themselves, but were frequently juxtaposed with the contrasting benefits of Christianity: freedom, light and wisdom. The use of freedom/captivity as a literary motif depended upon the assumption that any prisoner, even one who must first be convinced of his own imprisonment, inevitably desires to be freed. The ultimate ‘salvation’, of course, was only to be found in acceptance of Christ. One of the lines most frequently cited by the popes and missionaries was from Paul’s first letter to Timothy: *[Deus] omnes homines vult salvos fieri et ad agnitionem veritatis venire*.⁷⁹ Boniface portrayed the Old Saxons as unwitting captives who deserved freedom when, again with reference to a letter of Paul to Timothy, he requested prayers that ‘they might escape from the snares of the Devil’.⁸⁰

The most common metaphor for Christianity in the letters was light, in contrast to the darkness of Satan. Boniface did not merely endure the ‘dark corners of the Germanic peoples’, but was pledged to illuminate them: *tenebrosos angulos Germanicarum gentium lustrare debet*.⁸¹ He was sent to Germania by Gregory II ‘for the illumination of the peoples’,⁸² to ‘lead the people from darkness into the light’,⁸³ and through his mouth God was ‘to glitter with the light of truth in the gloomy forests’.⁸⁴ Such imagery was used in the letters from the very beginning of Boniface’s mission, and was recycled constantly over the following thirty-five years, as can be seen in appendix 2.2.

Boniface and his correspondents, in particular the popes, also emphasised the wisdom to be gained from conversion. Gregory II pronounced that the Germanic

⁷⁸ *ignorantiae obscuritatibus prepeditis*, Tangl, ep. 20, p. 34, l. 12.

⁷⁹ ‘[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to a recognition of the truth’. 1 Tim. 2:4. There are five occurrences of the phrase in the surviving correspondence: Tangl, ep. 21, p. 36, ll. 13-14; ep. 38, p. 63, ll. 24-25; ep. 46, p. 74, ll. 1-2; ep. 65, p. 138, ll. 2-3; ep. 101, p. 224, ll. 10-11.

⁸⁰ *resipiscant a diabuli laqueis*, Tangl, ep. 46, p. 75, l. 4; 2 Timothy, 2:26.

⁸¹ Tangl, ep. 30, p. 54, ll. 13-14.

⁸² *ad inlumptionem gentium; ad lucem gentium*, Tangl, ep. 17, p. 31, ll. 2-3; ep. 20, p. 34, l. 18.

⁸³ *a tenebris ad lucem populum illum... reducat*, Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 13-14.

⁸⁴ *in opacem silvam lumine veritatis per os tuum micare*, Tangl, ep. 26, p. 47, ll. 18-19.

tribes' ignorance of God was to be tackled by 'harmonious reason' (*consona ratio*),⁸⁵ while Gregory III urged the Old Saxons to 'come to a recognition of the truth'⁸⁶ and to accept from Christ the 'treasures of wisdom and knowledge'.⁸⁷ Daniel of Winchester invoked reason in his letter to Boniface advising him on methods of conversion:

Unde et devota benivolentia pauca tuae suggerere prudentiae curavi, quo magis advertas, secundem meum sensum qua potissimum ratione obstinationem agrestium convincere promptus queas.⁸⁸

Thus, at least for Daniel, the supposedly superior Christian powers of reasoning were not a rhetorical motif, but a tool to be employed where possible in the process of evangelisation.

6.2.3 Mission as harvest

Perhaps the richest metaphor for mission was that of the 'harvest of souls', which appears in eleven letters (appendix 2.3). Two parables, of the sower and of the cockle of the field, both in the Gospel of Matthew, were the basis for the metaphor. In the first, Christ likened those who received the word of God to ground that received seed at sowing time: some seed fell on stony ground and grew quickly, only to die for want of deep roots, some was choked by thorns, and some fell on rich earth, producing a rich harvest.⁸⁹ The parable of the cockle of the field describes how the enemies of the sower came to his field and planted weeds among his crop. Rather than damaging his healthy wheat by pulling out the weeds prematurely, the sower decided to wait until harvest to separate the good crop from the bad.⁹⁰

The strength of the harvest metaphor was that it could be used to describe both success and adversity in vivid terms. Boniface apparently had a dream during his

⁸⁵ Tangl, ep. 12, p. 18, ll. 3-4.

⁸⁶ *ad agnitionem veritatis venire*, Tangl, ep. 21, p. 36, ll. 13-14.

⁸⁷ *thesauri sapientiae et scientiae*, Tangl, ep. 21, p. 35, ll. 14-15.

⁸⁸ 'Hence, with devoted goodwill, I have taken care to suggest to your Prudence a few small things, by regarding which you might, according to my judgment, more speedily overcome the chief obstinacy of the barbarians with reason', Tangl, ep. 23, p. 39, ll. 5-8.

⁸⁹ Matt. 13:18-23; also Luke 4:5-8.

⁹⁰ Matt. 13:37-40.

second Frisian mission in which he foresaw his future success. He either assumed the persona of a harvest labourer in the dream itself, or else Bugga selected harvest as the most suitable metaphor when she referred to the dream in a letter of 719-721:

Deinde per somnium temet ipso revelavit, quod debuisti manifeste messem Dei metere et congregare sanctarum animarum manipulos in horream regni caelestis.⁹¹

A mission, like sowing and gathering in a harvest, was a long, physically strenuous process that required continual vigilance and care to prevent one's effort going to waste, but which could produce a bountiful reward.⁹² At some point in the mission in Germania (the letter is undated), an unknown monk wrote words of encouragement to a novice missionary, and chose the metaphor of harvest to do so: *tende, ubi messis est Deo adiuvante*.⁹³ The same monk,⁹⁴ along with Gregory II in a letter of 724,⁹⁵ quoted a passage from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke which would have been relevant to an understaffed mission:

tunc dicit discipulis suis messis quidem multa operarii autem pauci rogate ergo dominum messis ut eiciat operarios in messem suam⁹⁶

When Boniface wished to dramatise his conflicts with the Frankish church, which he generally regarded as being morally corrupt and hostile to his mission,⁹⁷ he invoked the parable of the cockle of the field. The seed of the Gospel which he had sown, he complained to Daniel of Winchester between 742 and 746, was either 'smothered by

⁹¹ 'Then he revealed to you in a dream that it was your duty to reap the harvest of God, gathering in sheaves of holy souls into the storehouse of the heavenly kingdom', Tangl, ep. 15, p. 27, ll. 11-14; trans. Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 18.

⁹² For the use of the harvest metaphor to depict success, see in particular Tangl, ep. 23, p. 38, ll. 18-21; ep. 26, p. 44, ll. 18-21.

⁹³ 'Go to where the harvest is, with God's help', Tangl, ep. 148, p. 284, l. 2.

⁹⁴ '*Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci*' et cetera, Tangl, ep. 148, p. 284, l. 3.

⁹⁵ *Obsecrate 'dominum messis, ut eiciat operarios in messem suam'*, Tangl, ep. 24, p. 41, l. 31 to p. 42, l. 1.

⁹⁶ 'Then he saith to his disciples, The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest.' Matt. 9:37-38; Luke 10:2; trans. Douay-Rheims, p. 13.

⁹⁷ See chapter seven below, sections 7.3.2 and 7.4.5.

tares' that had been planted by his enemies or 'turned into a noxious type of weed'.⁹⁸ Daniel, in his reply, paraphrased Boniface and affirmed that 'they have tried to smother the cornfields commissioned to your Reverence by sowing within them barren tares',⁹⁹ but reminded him of the message of the parable: what cannot be remedied must be endured with patience until Judgment Day. The complex metaphor of the harvest, therefore, could be used by missionaries as an active and constructive element of discourse in a way that simpler metaphors of light/darkness and freedom/captivity could not.

6.2.4 Mission as turbulence, danger and suffering

The presentation of the mission as a great physical, emotional and spiritual trial was, like the motif of *peregrinatio*, restricted to Anglo-Saxon correspondents in the surviving letters (appendix 2.4). Although the popes were kept well aware of the practical problems faced by Boniface and his companions, especially regarding attacks by pagans and the machinations of the Frankish nobility and church, they did not receive the formulaic literary lamentations that Boniface and Lul directed towards their compatriots. Again, the cause of this distribution may have lain in the distinct expectations and understanding of the Anglo-Saxon audience, which we shall consider in more detail shortly, as well as in a feeling that such plaintive language was not appropriate when addressing the pope.

Lamentations of suffering, hardship and adversity appear in the earliest surviving letters written by Boniface in Germania to his Anglo-Saxon correspondents (from 735), and recur throughout the corpus. The vocabulary employed was diverse; the most frequently employed terms were *tribulatio*, *tempestates*, the adjective *periculosus* and the verb *quatior*. Other nouns used less frequently by Boniface, Lul and their correspondents to depict suffering included *sollicitudo*, *tristitia*, *turbines*, *procella*, *meror*, *fluctus*, *pugnae*, *timores*, *angor*, *molestia*, *mala*, *angustia* and *difficultates*. Other adjectives and verbs used were *procellosus*, *concussus*, *ferocitas*, *periclitari*, *fatigari*, *deprimi*, *inlidi*, *pati*, *conturbari* and *tundi*. The missionaries

⁹⁸ *cum lolio superseminare et suffocare nituntur vel in herbam pestiferi generis convertere*, Tangl, ep. 63, p. 129, ll. 17-19.

⁹⁹ *segetem vestrae venerabilitati commissam sterile lolium interserendo suffocare conentur*, Tangl, ep. 64, p. 133, ll. 20-21.

occasionally requested prayers and gifts of books or clothes as *solamen*, *solacium* and *consolatio* in their trials.

Suffering was frequently represented in the letters by imagery of violent storms, winds, and unruly oceans, and the physical effect these had on those trapped within them. The metaphor of the church as a ship caught in a turbulent sea of sin, temptation and hostility was widespread among patristic authors, in particular Augustine,¹⁰⁰ and was also employed by Bede¹⁰¹ and later Anglo-Saxon poets.¹⁰² In the letters of Boniface and Lul, verbs that evoked this metaphor frequently appeared in the passive voice, increasing the impression of the missionaries as helpless and disorientated by forces beyond their control. The degree to which the metaphorical depiction of suffering in the letters represented the experience of Boniface and his companions, rather than merely fulfilling the expectations of their Anglo-Saxon audience, is unclear. Most of the letters in question were written between 738 and 754, which we know was indeed a testing period for Boniface's mission.¹⁰³ Letters 30 to 34, meanwhile, are stylistically related in their depiction of difficulties within the mission, and are closely dated by Tangl to 735.¹⁰⁴

Tangl, ep. 30: periculosi maris tempestatibus quator¹⁰⁵

Tangl, ep. 31: periculosi maris tempestatibus undique quatimur¹⁰⁶

Tangl, ep. 32: Germanicum mare periculosum est navigantibus¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ See Augustine's commentary on Matthew 14:24-33, in which he combines the motifs of Christian as *peregrinus*, sea as the turbulence of life, and ship as the safety of the church: *Nemo quippe in hoc saeculo non peregrinus est: quamvis non omnes ad patriam redire desiderent. Ex ipso autem itinere fluctus tempestatesque patimur: sed opus est vel in navi simus. Nam si in navi pericula sunt, sine navi certus interitus... Interea navis portans discipulos, id est, Ecclesia, fluctuat et quatitur tempestatibus tentationum: et non quiescit ventus contrarius, id est, adversans ei diabolus, et impedire nititur ne perveniat ad quietem.* Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo LXXV*, PL 38 (Paris, 1845), col. 475-479 (col. 475). See H. Rahner, 'Antenna Crucis II: Das Meer der Welt', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 66 (1942), pp. 89-118 (pp. 91-96).

¹⁰¹ See his commentary on the Book of Genesis, where he discussed the symbolism of Noah's Ark: *Designet ergo arca Ecclesiam, designet diluvium fontem baptismi quo abluitur, designet fluctus mundi tentantis quibus probatur, designet finem in quo coronatur.* Bede, *Hexameron*, PL 91 (Paris, 1850), col. 9A-190C (col. 87A); also his remark on Christ's calming of the storm in the Sea of Galilee: *Mystice autem mare turbida ac tumentia hujus saeculi volumina significat.* Bede, *Homilia XXI*, PL 94 (Paris, 1850), col. 110B-114D (col. 111A).

¹⁰² F. S. Holton, 'Old English Sea Imagery and the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*', *Yearbook of English Studies* 12 (1982), pp. 208-217.

¹⁰³ See chapter five above, sections 5.3.1-5.4.2.

¹⁰⁴ On the dating of the letters, see Tangl, p. 54, n. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Tangl, ep. 30, p. 54, ll. 16-17.

¹⁰⁶ Tangl, ep. 31, p. 55, ll. 7-8.

¹⁰⁷ Tangl, ep. 32, p. 55, ll. 22-23.

Tangl, ep. 33: [navis] mentis meae variis Germanicarum gentium tempestatum fluctibus quassatam¹⁰⁸

Tangl, ep. 34: senis Germanici maris tempestatibus undique quassantibus fatigati¹⁰⁹

These letters were written a year or two before Boniface began his reforms of the Bavarian church, three or four years before his attempted mission in Saxony and at least five years before the onset of his major conflicts with the Frankish church, at a point in Hessian history concerning which neither Willibald nor the Frankish annals have anything specific to report. Therefore we cannot relate Boniface's complaints in these letters to any specific setback or disruption to his work in Hesia or Thuringia c. 735. Finally, the lack of any letters from Boniface to his Anglo-Saxon contacts during the early, apparently successful years of the Hessian mission means that they cannot be used as a comparison.¹¹⁰

We saw above how, in the surviving corpus, the theme of *peregrinatio* is almost entirely restricted to letters between Anglo-Saxons. I gave the preliminary explanation that *peregrinatio* formed part of the culturally distinct discourse of literate Anglo-Saxon Christians, but was not a motif employed by the popes with respect to Boniface's mission. In this analysis of the metaphors and motifs used to represent aspects of the mission in Germania, a similar distinction has arisen. Whereas poetic depictions of Christianity and paganism in terms of freedom/captivity, light/darkness and wisdom/ignorance, along with the metaphor of the mission as harvest, were commonly used by both Anglo-Saxons and Romans, formulaic lamentations appear only in letters written between Anglo-Saxons. The fact that Boniface and his companions relied on their distant compatriots for emotional support has long been recognised.¹¹¹ This feature of the letters, however, merits further analysis if we are to understand the way in which the missionary community represented its identity and activities to an external Anglo-Saxon audience through literary discourse.

¹⁰⁸ Tangl, ep. 33, p. 57, ll. 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ Tangl, ep. 34, p. 58, l. 29 to p. 59, l. 1.

¹¹⁰ The earliest surviving letters sent by Boniface from Germania to Britain are Tangl, epp. 32-35, pp. 55-60, dating from 735.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius*, pp. 161-162; Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 76; G. W. Greenaway, 'Saint Boniface as a Man of Letters' in *The Greatest Englishman*, ed. Reuter, pp. 33-46; Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, p. 208; Schipperges, *Bonifatii ac socii eius*, p. 257; J. Gerchau, *Die Gedenküberlieferung der Angelsachsen* (Berlin, 1988), p. 39.

The theme of suffering is closely related to the theme of *peregrinatio* in the letters. Between 742 and 746 Boniface wrote to Daniel of Winchester that, were Daniel to send him a particular large-lettered Book of the Prophets, it would be a 'comfort in my *peregrinatio*'.¹¹² In the same period he wrote to Eadburg that he was 'vexed by manifold storms in the course of our *peregrinatio*'.¹¹³ Shortly after Boniface's death, Cuthbert of Canterbury gave his perception of the mission to Lul in these terms:

Non enim aliquando in memoria nostra obliterari possunt diversarum atque indefessarum tribulationum angores, quos ut viscera nostra vos ipsi cum Deo dilecto patre nostro beate memoriae Bonifatio martyre inter persecutores paganos et hereticos atque scismaticos seductores in tam periculosa ac ferocitate plena peregrinatione pro amore aeternae patriae longo tempore sustinebatis.¹¹⁴

During Lul's episcopate in Mainz he received a letter from the priest Wigberht, who asked whether he and his companions should return to the mission field from their homeland; they were wearied by their wanderings, but were prepared to endure them further:

Multum iam vitae nostrae fluctuando et negligendo, quasi extra nos fusi, peregrimus. Tandem aliquando, ut ad nosmet ipsos redeamus, necesse est; scientes scriptum, quod, qui seminat in lacrimis, in gaudio metet. Et ideo vitae nostrae quod restat, cum vestro consilio transcurrere curamus.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *de uno solacio peregrinationis meae* [...] *rogare velim*, Tangl, ep. 63, p. 131, ll. 4-5. See also Lul's letter to Dealwin (*ad consolationem peregrinationis meae*), Tangl, ep. 71, p. 144, ll.19-20; and Boniface's letter to Hwætberht (Huetberht) (*grande solacium peregrinationis nostrae*), Tangl, ep. 76, p. 159, ll. 16-17.

¹¹³ *conversatio peregrinationis nostrae variis tempestatibus inliduntur*, Tangl, ep. 65, p. 137, ll. 12-13.

¹¹⁴ 'For, finally, the anguish of varied and continual tribulations are not to be erased that you yourself, like our innermost heart, endured for so long along with our father of blessed memory, the martyr Boniface, beloved unto God, amidst the persecutions of pagans, heretics and deceiving schismatics, in such a perilous and ferocity-filled exile for the love of the eternal homeland', Tangl, ep. 111, p. 239, ll. 18-25.

¹¹⁵ 'We have already wandered a great deal in the restless shifting and neglect of our lives, as though we had been poured outside ourselves. It is necessary at last to return to ourselves, understanding what is written in Scripture: he who sows in tears, shall reap in joy. Therefore we shall strive to pass through whatever of our lives remains with your advice', Tangl, ep. 137, p. 276, ll. 19-24.

A further important feature of the testing *peregrinatio* of the missionaries was its location. Boniface was not merely an *exul*, but an *exul Germanicus*.¹¹⁶ He was, as we have seen, pledged to illuminate the ‘dark corners of the Germanic peoples’.¹¹⁷ Moreover, he was not buffeted by ordinary storms, but by the ‘storms of the Germanic sea’,¹¹⁸ which was ‘perilous to navigators’.¹¹⁹ The invocation of Germania added another dimension to the state of the suffering exile, one which was carefully constructed to resonate with an audience of literate Anglo-Saxon Christians, as we shall now see.

6.3 Boniface as a suffering *exul Germanicus*

6.3.1 *Germania* and *Germanicum* as geographical signifiers in the letters

Before going further, I will clarify here that I use the term ‘Germanic’ throughout this thesis as a linguistic and geographical, not ethnic or cultural, signifier. In the linguistic sense, I use the term to refer to the Germanic family of languages, which included Old English, Old Saxon (Old Low German), Old High German, Frisian and the Gothic and Scandinavian languages. In the geographical sense, I use ‘Germanic’ to mean ‘of or pertaining to Germania’, the physical definition of which we shall discuss shortly.

This clarification is necessary because of the problematic history of the term ‘Germanic’, which has long played a role in debates over modern national and ethnic identities that have very little to do with ancient or early medieval periods.¹²⁰ As Herwig Wolfram put it, the term has for a long time ‘had to suffice as a yardstick of ethnographic classification’,¹²¹ and has frequently been used to imply a greater degree of ethnic and cultural unity between the various medieval Germanic-speaking peoples

¹¹⁶ Tangl, ep. 30, p. 54, l. 11.

¹¹⁷ *tenebrosi anguli Germanicarum gentium*, Tangl, ep. 30, p. 54, ll. 12-13.

¹¹⁸ *Germanici maris tempestatibus*, Tangl, ep. 34, p. 58, l. 29 to p. 59, l. 1.

¹¹⁹ *Germanicum mare periculosum est navigantibus*, Tangl, ep. 32, p. 55, ll. 22-23.

¹²⁰ For further discussion, see W. Pohl, *Die Germanen*, Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte 57 (Munich, 2004), esp. pp. 1-10; H.-W. Goetz, ‘Introduction’ in *Regna et gentes: The Relationship Between Late Antiquity and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. H.-W. Goetz, J. Jarnut and W. Pohl (Leiden, 2003), pp. 1-11 (p. 7); R. Simek, *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen* (Darmstadt, 2003), pp. 14-18; R. Schmoeckel, *Bevor es Deutschland gab: Expedition in unsere Frühgeschichte von den Römern bis zu den Sachsenkaisern* (Bergisch Gladbach, 2002), pp. 16-17; F. Hubert, ‘Volksturm as Paradigm: Germanic People and Gallo-Romans in Early Medieval Archaeology since the 1930s’ in *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. A. Gillett (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 177-200.

¹²¹ H. Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, trans. T. Dunlap (Berkeley, 1997), p. 3.

than can be securely demonstrated.¹²² Especially in a regional study such as this one, speaking of ‘Germanic’ instead of Hessian, Saxon, Frankish or Anglo-Saxon culture would only confuse, rather than elucidate, the matters under discussion.

Both the place-name *Germania* and the adjective *Germanicum* appear numerous times in the letters of Boniface and Lul, and so it is possible for us to understand something of contemporary terminology. First of all, it is apparent from appendix 3 that the classical collective noun *Germani* ‘Germans’ does not appear in the letters at all. Boniface and his correspondents referred to the *gens/gentes Germaniae* ‘people(s) of Germania’, *populus Germaniae* ‘population of Germania’, *gentes in Germaniae partibus* ‘peoples in regions of Germania’ and *gens/gentes Germanica/ae* ‘Germanic people(s)’, but conspicuously avoided referring to *Germani*, a loose ethnographical term which fell from use among Latin and Greek writers after the sixth century.¹²³

This feature of the letters is significant, for it implies that Boniface and his correspondents understood *Germania* and *Germanicum* to be primarily geographical, not ethnic, in meaning. In an Anglo-Saxon context, the adjective *Germanicum* could admittedly have ethnic connotations, as when Aldhelm claimed to have been

¹²² See for example D. H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge, 1998), esp. pp. 4-12. Green’s book is primarily a philological study and a valuable contribution to the historical debate, but tends towards an assumption of ‘Germanic’ cultural uniformity across the greater part of Europe between 300 B.C. and 900 A.D. that requires strict qualification. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, is flawed in part due to Russell’s outdated model of ‘Germanic’ culture as a uniform, monolithic entity that refused to adapt itself to Christianity. M. Ravn, *Death, Ritual and Germanic Social Structure c. AD 200-600*, BAR i. s. 1164 (Oxford, 2003), is an archaeological study which compares Anglo-Saxon, southern Scandinavian, Gothic and Romanian early medieval material culture in an attempt to construct a picture of ‘Germanic’ social structure, but at no point does Ravn justify the starting assumption that such a pan-European ‘Germanic’ culture ever existed. For a critique of the use of archaeological material to distinguish between ‘Celtic’, ‘Roman’ and ‘German’ ethnic identities, see P. S. Wells, *The Barbarians Speak: How the Conquered Peoples Shaped Roman Europe* (Princeton, 1999), esp. p. 264; for a critique of the historical concept of a pan-Germanic cultural and ethnic identity in late Antiquity, see P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. xv, 327-330; W. Goffart, *Rome’s Fall and After* (London, 1989), pp. 4-5; Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, pp. 3-11.

¹²³ On Roman and post-Roman uses and meanings of the terms *Germania* and *Germani*, see H. J. Hummer, ‘The Fluidity of Barbarian Identity: The Ethnogenesis of the Alemanni and Suebi, AD 200-500’ in *Early Medieval Europe* 7.1 (1998), pp. 1-27; Goffart, *Rome’s Fall and After*, pp. 4-5; Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, p. 6; P. J. Geary, ‘Barbarians and Ethnicity’ in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar (London, 2001), pp. 107-129 (p. 114); idem, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002), pp. 50-104; W. Pohl, ‘Ethnicity, Theory and Tradition: A Response’ in *On Barbarian Identity*, ed. Gillet, pp. 221-239 (pp. 226-227); D. Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London, 2002), esp. pp. 231-232; The introduction of J. B. Rives to Tacitus, *Germania*, ed. and trans. J. B. Rives (Oxford, 1999), pp. 11-68. Neither Niermeyer and Van de Kieft, eds., *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, nor Souter, ed., *A Glossary of Later Latin*, provides an entry on *Germania*, *Germanic-* or *Germani*.

‘nourished in the cradle of a Germanic people’.¹²⁴ By this, however, he appears to have been alluding to the geographical origins of the Saxon *gens* in Germania, rather than using *Germanicum* as a direct ethnic signifier.¹²⁵ Similarly, when Boniface described himself as an *exul Germanicus*,¹²⁶ he was not using it as an ethnic term, which the literal English translation of ‘a Germanic exile’ might imply; rather, he meant ‘an exile in Germania’.¹²⁷ The title of *legatus Germanicus* ‘Germanic [papal] legate’, which Boniface appears to have applied to himself from 738 at the latest,¹²⁸ also referred to his geographical zone of responsibility, not his ethnicity, just as *mare Germanicum* ‘the Germanic sea’ and *tempestates Germanicae* ‘Germanic storms’ were geographical in meaning.

Germania was thus a convenient geographical signifier that covered a wide area of various *gentes*, and it apparently occurred to neither Boniface nor the popes that the *gentes Germaniae* should or could be lumped together as ethnically homogenous *Germani*. Indeed, Boniface and the popes often referred to his mission among the *gens/gentes Germaniae* when writing to one another, but when the popes wrote directly to the peoples in question they always took care to use the appropriate tribal names: *Hessi*, *Thuringi*, *Altsaxones* and so on.¹²⁹

The term *Germani* did not return to general usage until the ninth century, and then it was used chiefly as an alternative to ‘eastern Franks’.¹³⁰ Radbod, revising the *Vita altera Bonifatii* between 899 and 919, also used the term *Germani* to refer to the peoples of Germania among whom Boniface had worked,¹³¹ and styled Boniface

¹²⁴ *Germanicae gentis cunabulis confotum*, Alhelm, *De metris et enigmatibus ac pedum regulis*, in *Alhelmi Opera*, p. 202, l. 5.

¹²⁵ Compare Bede’s comments concerning the origins of the Angles and Saxons among the many *nationes* who inhabited Germania, and the fact that the Britons of his time erroneously called the Anglo-Saxons *Garmani* for this reason: *quarum in Germania plurimas nouerat esse nationes, a quibus Angli uel Saxones, qui nunc Britanniam incolunt, genus et originem duxisse noscuntur; unde hactenus a uicina gente Brettonum corrupte Garmani nuncupantur*, *HE*, V.9, p. 296.

¹²⁶ Tangl, ep. 30, p. 54, l. 11.

¹²⁷ Emerton gives the translation ‘an exile in Germany’ in preference to ‘a German exile’: Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 39.

¹²⁸ The earliest appearance of the title is an letter of 738 from Boniface to the Anglo-Saxon church: Tangl, ep. 46, p. 74, ll. 26-27.

¹²⁹ See Tangl, ep. 19, p. 33, l. 9; ep. 21, p. 35, l. 7; ep. 25, p. 43, l. 11; ep. 43, p. 68, ll. 10-14.

¹³⁰ See for example Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Germ. 25 (Hannover, 1911), c. 18, p. 22, ll. 12-14: *de Fastrada uxore, quae de orientalium Francorum, Germanorum uidelicet, gente erat*.

¹³¹ [*Bonifatius*] *sive inter Fresones barbaros sive inter ferocissimos Germanos capite truncarentur*, ‘he would be beheaded among either the barbaric Frisians or the fierce *Germani*’. Radbod, *Vita altera Bonifatii auctore Radbodo*, ed. W. Levison, MGH, SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover, 1905), pp. 62-78 (p. 71, ll. 12-13). *Audito autem, quod Germanorum plurima multitudo sine Deo esset*, ‘having heard, however, that a great multitude of the *Germani* knew nothing of God’, *ibid.*, p. 67, ll. 28-29.

himself as ‘preacher of the *Germani*’, by analogy with St Paul as ‘teacher of the nations’.¹³² Radbod’s usage, however, was highly anachronistic. Removed from the complexities and concerns of the mid-eighth century, it was a simple matter for him to regard all the evangelised peoples of Hessa, Thuringia and Saxony as *Germani*. Boniface and his correspondents, on the other hand, did not have (or at least did not use in their letters) a generic ethnic term to describe the diverse inhabitants of what they called *Germania*: for them, *Germanicum* referred to a geographical region.

6.3.2 Boniface’s redefinition of Germania as an ecclesiastical province

What, then, was the geographical region that comprised Germania? Nowhere do Boniface or his correspondents provide a clear and consistent geographical definition; on the contrary, in the earliest letters at least, the term *Germania* appears to have functioned as a somewhat vague geographical signifier. Boniface’s original mandate was to preach to the peoples who lived ‘in parts of Germania or the region east of the Rhine’: *in Germaniae partibus vel plaga orientali Rheni fluminis*.¹³³ The Latin word *vel* most often functions as a disjunctive conjunction, offering an alternative which does not exclude or contradict the matter of the original clause,¹³⁴ and here could mean ‘in addition to’ or ‘more precisely’ (contrast the use of *aut* as an excluding conjunction). Since, at least according to Willibald, Boniface appears to have worked initially *only* east of the Rhine, in Hessa and Thuringia,¹³⁵ Gregory’s use of the phrase *vel plaga orientali Rheni fluminis* implies that some territories east of the Rhine may not have been considered part of Germania, while the phrase *in Germaniae partibus* suggests that Boniface’s mission was not necessarily to encompass Germania in its entirety.

Whether or not Thuringia was considered part of Germania by Boniface and the popes is also unclear from the language of the letters. In a letter of 724 Gregory II stated that he had sent Boniface generally ‘for the illumination of the people of Germania’,¹³⁶ but in the same letter made a distinction between the Thuringians

¹³² *Sed Paulus magister, iste discipulus, ille gentium doctor, iste Germanorum predicator*, *ibid.*, pp. 72, l. 28 to p. 73, l. 1.

¹³³ Tangl, ep. 17, p. 30, ll. 7-8.

¹³⁴ Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 2021.

¹³⁵ See chapter five above, sections 5.1.1-2.

¹³⁶ *ad inluminacionem Germaniae gentis*, Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 4-5.

(*Thuringi*) and the ‘people of Germania’ (*Germaniae populus*),¹³⁷ who presumably included the Hessians. Gregory III, meanwhile, addressed a letter of 738 thus:

populo provinciarum Germaniae, Thuringis et Hassis, Bortharis et Nistresis, Uedreciis et Lognais, Suduodis et Graffeltis vel omnibus in orientali plaga constitutis.¹³⁸

Here Germania is composed of numerous ‘provinces’ (*provinciae Germaniae*), which apparently included both Thuringians (*Thuringi*) and Hessians (*Hessi*),¹³⁹ along with several other smaller tribal groupings.¹⁴⁰ Gregory added the final generalisation ‘to all those dwelling in the eastern region [i.e. east of the Rhine]’.¹⁴¹

In summary, Gregory II and Gregory III appear to have used *Germania* in the loose sense to refer to the lands east of the Rhine, but added specific tribal names and clarifications where they felt it necessary. Boniface’s mandate evidently encompassed such a patchwork of peoples and regions that it is scarcely surprising that he and the popes preferred to use the conveniently vague term *Germania* in their correspondence. Yet what was in the 720s and 730s a rather loose geographical term gained a temporary solidity following the establishment of the bishoprics of Büraburg, Erfurt and Würzburg. Boniface informed Zacharias in 742 that he had founded three bishoprics in Germania:

Necesse quoque habemus indicare paternitati vestrae, quia per Dei gratiam Germaniae populis aliquantulum percussis vel correctis tres ordinavimus episcopos et provinciam in tres parrochias discrevimus.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ *Thuringis et Germaniae populo ea, quae ad animae respiciunt utilitatem et salutem, scribere non omisimus*, Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 32-33.

¹³⁸ ‘To the population of the provinces of Germania, to the Thuringians and Hessians, Borthari and Nistresi, Wedrecii and Lognai, Suduodi and Graffelti, and to all those living in the eastern region’, Tangl, ep. 43, p. 68, ll. 10-14.

¹³⁹ There seems to have been no standard Latinised form of the collective noun ‘Hessians’ at this date; in a letter of 732x754, the priest Wichtberht used the third declension *Haesones*, perhaps influenced by the third declension form *Saxones*: [*Deus*] *etiam nostrum iter sua voluntate in has provincias, id est in confinia paganorum Haesonum ac Saxonum... direxit*, Tangl, ep. 101, p. 224, ll. 11-15. Willibald, in his *Vita Bonifatii* (written 754x768) used the form *Hessi*: *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, l. 5.

¹⁴⁰ On these tribes, see chapter five above, section 5.1.3.

¹⁴¹ *omnibus in orientali plaga constitutis*, Tangl, ep. 43, p. 68, ll. 13-14.

¹⁴² ‘We regard it as necessary to report to your Paternity that, through the grace of God, we have ordained three bishops among the peoples of Germania who have been to some extent compelled [to convert] or corrected, and have divided the province into three dioceses’, Tangl, ep. 50, p. 81, ll. 15-18.

These bishoprics divided Germania – now for the first time referred to as a single *provincia* ‘province’ – into three *parrochias* ‘dioceses’.¹⁴³ Boniface’s novel use of the term *Germania* to refer to one province, not to a loose collection of several *partes* or sub-provinces as had hitherto been customary in the letters, reflected his intention that Germania was to become a single archiepiscopal see, incorporating Mainz, Utrecht, Büraburg, Würzburg and Erfurt, under his control as the archbishop of Cologne. In 742 he had neither Cologne nor any other archiepiscopal seat of his own, but he had nonetheless begun the process of dividing his trans-Rhenan territory into dioceses in anticipation of gaining one. Zacharias confirmed Cologne as his metropolitan seat in 745 according to plan,¹⁴⁴ and at the Roman synod of that year Boniface was grandly introduced as ‘archbishop of the province of Germania’ (*archiepiscopus provinciae Germaniae*).¹⁴⁵

This accomplishment was transitory, however. Boniface’s ambitions regarding Cologne were quickly thwarted by the Franks,¹⁴⁶ and his eventual seat in Mainz, which he assumed in 746, was not raised to archiepiscopal status until 780/82, twenty-five years into Lul’s episcopate.¹⁴⁷ The bishoprics of Büraburg and Erfurt were abandoned,¹⁴⁸ and in 752 Boniface struggled to maintain his influence in Utrecht against the challenge of Bishop Hildegard of Cologne.¹⁴⁹ The title *archiepiscopus provinciae Germaniae* does not appear in any letters after 745, perhaps because Boniface’s failure to establish lasting bishoprics at Büraburg and Erfurt, to secure the archbishopric of Cologne or to expand his mission into Saxony – in short, the collapse of his vision of a unified archdiocese east of the Rhine – meant that he could no longer claim to have the authority that the title implied.

¹⁴³ Zacharias acknowledged that Germania was a single *provincia* in his confirmation of the bishoprics: *innotuit... noster Bonifatius nuper decrevisse et ordinasse in Germaniae partibus episcopales sedes, ubi preest vestra dilectio et provinciam in tres dividisset parrochias*, Tangl, ep. 52, p. 93, ll. 6-10; ep. 53, p. 94, ll. 26-30.

¹⁴⁴ *De civitate namque illa, quae nuper Agrippina vocabatur, nunc vero Colonia... tuo metropolim confirmavimus et tuae sanctitati direximus pro futuris temporibus eiusdem metropolitanae aeccliesiae stabilitatem*, Tangl, ep. 60, p. 124, ll. 23-27.

¹⁴⁵ Tangl, ep. 59, p. 109, ll. 13-14. Gemmulus had also addressed Boniface as *archiepiscopus provinciae Germaniae* in a letter of 742/43: Tangl, ep. 54, p. 96, l. 8.

¹⁴⁶ In 748 Zacharias wrote to Boniface acknowledging that the Franks had refused to hand over the bishopric of Cologne: *Alia denique scripta tuae fraternitatis continebant, quod iam olim de Agrippina civitate scripsisti, quod Franci non perseveraverunt in verbo, quod promiserunt; et nunc moratur tua fraternitas in civitate Magontia*, Tangl, ep. 80, p. 179, l. 27 to p. 180, l. 1. See chapter five above, sections 5.4.1-2, and chapter seven below, section 7.3.2.

¹⁴⁷ Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, pp. 282-283.

¹⁴⁸ See chapter five above, section 5.4.2.

¹⁴⁹ Boniface wrote to Pope Stephen II in 753 concerning the dispute: Tangl, ep. 109, pp. 234-236.

6.3.3 The symbolism of Germania in the letters of Boniface and Lul

Instead of inaccurately describing himself as ‘archbishop of the province of Germania’, Boniface retained in his letters after 745 the less presuming title of *legatus Germanicus*,¹⁵⁰ reminding his audience that he was still Rome’s principal representative in Germania. His attempt to establish ‘Germania’ as a single ecclesiastical province had failed, but the invocation of the Latin name for the lands east of the Rhine may still have had an effect on those literate Christians in Rome and England who heard it. In 726, for example, Gregory II had written to Boniface:

[Deus] te illis in regionibus vice nostra ex apostolica auctoritate pergere fecit et in opacem silvam lumine veritatis per os tuum micare praedestinavit.¹⁵¹

Gregory’s depiction of the ‘gloomy forest’ suggests the existence in eighth-century Rome of a view of Germania that had its origins in classical literature. Between the first century B.C. and the second century A.D., Caesar, Seneca, Pliny and Tacitus perpetuated a literary construct of Germania as a ‘perverse wilderness’,¹⁵² a place of impenetrable forests and marshy bogs, where perpetual cold gripped the unproductive soil and whose unfortunate inhabitants dwelled in primitive misery.¹⁵³ Just as the eighth-century popes’ view of the archetypal pagan was informed by the classical construct of the archetypal barbarian,¹⁵⁴ so the classical perception of Germania as a place of cold, gloomy forests made it a suitable setting for the symbolic confrontation of Christian light and pagan darkness that we see in the letters of Boniface and Lul.¹⁵⁵

Daniel of Winchester appears to have had a view of Germania similar to that of the classical authors, perhaps inherited through the influence of Theodore, Hadrian

¹⁵⁰ The title *legatus Germanicus* appears in six letters after 745: Tangl, ep. 73, p. 146, l. 26; ep. 75, p. 157, l. 1; ep. 78, p. 161, l. 28; ep. 86, p. 192, l. 1; ep. 91, p. 206, l. 30 to p. 207, l. 1; ep. 109, p. 234, l. 28.

¹⁵¹ [God] sent you into those regions in our stead with apostolic authority and preordained that, through your mouth, the light of truth should glitter in the gloomy forest.’ Tangl, ep. 26, p. 47, ll. 16-19.

¹⁵² K. Sallman, ‘Reserved for Eternal Punishment: The Elder Pliny’s View of Free Germania (HN. 16.1-6)’, *American Journal of Philology* 108.1 (1987), pp. 108-128 (p. 120).

¹⁵³ Wells, *The Barbarians Speak*, p. 101; Sallman, ‘Reserved for Eternal Punishment’.

¹⁵⁴ Heather, ‘The Barbarian in Late Antiquity’, p. 245; Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, p. 140; Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, p. 236.

¹⁵⁵ On the medieval concept of the forest as a wilderness and place of exile, see M. Bloch, *Feudal Society Vol 1: The growth of Ties of Dependence* (1939; trans. L. A. Manyon, London, 1965), p. 72; J. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (London, 1988), pp. 51-53.

and Aldhelm.¹⁵⁶ He advised Boniface, when debating theological matters with pagans, to use Germania's cold and barren climate as proof of God's disfavour:

Et cum ipsi, id est Christiani, fertiles terras unique et olei feraces ceterisque opibus habundantes possident provincias, ipsis autem, id est paganis, frigore semper rigentes terras cum eorum diis relinquerunt, in quibus iam tamen toto orbe pulsi falso regnare putantur.¹⁵⁷

Daniel, as far as we know, had never been to either Germania or southern Europe, and he evidently failed to notice the logic-endangering hypocrisy of an Anglo-Saxon born on the edge of Dartmoor trying to persuade the inhabitants of central Germania that their climate was the result of God's displeasure. Yet the image had potency to Daniel's mind, or else he would not have employed it; and the fact that he described Germania from the point of view of a southern European accustomed to olive groves and vineyards suggests that his perception had been influenced, if indirectly, by classical tradition.

It is necessary briefly to mention here the preservation of Tacitus's *Germania* at the heart of Boniface's mission field, for it may have been one possible route of transmission of classical perceptions of Germania to the Anglo-Saxon missionary community. The text, having been lost to the wider world for centuries, was rediscovered in 1425 at the monastery of Hersfeld. Written at the end of the first century A.D., the *Germania* was known to Cassiodorus in the 520s and, according to Rives, was also known in sixth-century Constantinople. Rudolph of Fulda quoted from it verbatim in the 860s, and the oldest known codex (now lost) was written by this time, perhaps at Fulda itself.¹⁵⁸ Our knowledge of the dissemination of the text in

¹⁵⁶ According to Gneuss, there is no evidence that Caesar's *De bello Gallico*, Seneca's essay *De Providentia* or Tacitus's *Germania*, three of the four texts which mostly clearly portrayed the classical perception of Germania and *Germani*, were known in eighth-century England. H. Gneuss, *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Tempe, AZ, 2001), pp. 149-184. Ogilvy claims that Aldhelm did, however, know of the fourth text, Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, as well as some other works of Seneca. J. D. A. Ogilvy, *Books Known to the English, 597-1066* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), pp. 222-223, 240.

¹⁵⁷ 'And while the Christians possess fertile lands, rich in wine and oil and abounding with other things, they have left to the pagans lands forever rigid with cold, where their gods, banished from the rest of the world, are wrongly supposed to rule', Tangl, ep. 23, p. 40, ll. 24-29; trans. Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁵⁸ Rives, *Tacitus: Germania*, pp. 67-68; M. Winterbottom, 'Tacitus' in *Texts and Transmissions: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), pp. 406-411 (pp. 410-411); L. D. Reynolds

the late classical and early medieval periods is extremely cloudy, and the date of its arrival in Hessa before c. 860 is unknown. It is conceivable that more than a century earlier Boniface, or one of his contacts, came across the *Germania* in Rome and judged that it might be useful for the mission, but this is hypothetical, for Boniface neither quotes from the text nor alludes to any knowledge of it in his surviving writings, and we have no evidence that it was known in Rome at this time.¹⁵⁹

Whether or not the *Germania* was known to the eighth-century missionaries, both Gregory II and Gregory III described Boniface's mission in poetic terms which seem to have played on the Classical motif of Germania as a land of darkness and shadow, and which Boniface would have recognised. Gregory II's description was in a letter of 724 to Boniface:

In partibus [H]esperiarum ad inlumptionem Germaniae gentis in umbra mortis sedentis dirigere praevidimus.¹⁶⁰

Gregory III's remarks were in a reply of 739 to a report of Boniface:

[Deus] ianuam misericordie et pietatis in illis partibus [He]speriis ad cognoscendam viam salutis ostium misericordiae aperuit¹⁶¹

and L. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* (1968; 3rd revised edition, Oxford, 1991), p. 85.

¹⁵⁹ Boniface's description of the punishment of adulterous women in Old Saxony, included in his letter of admonishment to King Æthelbald of Mercia in 746/47, bears some resemblance to a passage in the *Germania*, but is not close enough to confirm direct influence. Tacitus related that, among the *Germani*, an adulterous woman was shaved by her husband, stripped and then flogged by him through the village. Tacitus, *Germania* in *Cornelii Taciti opera minora*, c. 19, p. 47, ll. 7-11. Boniface stated that any Old Saxon woman, married or unmarried, who had relations outside wedlock was hanged and burned along with her *corruptor*; alternatively, she was stripped and flogged 'from village to village' (*de villa ad villam*) by a troop of women (Tangl, ep. 73, p. 150, ll. 10-22). According to Tacitus, the husband punished his adulterous wife; according to Boniface, both married and unmarried women were punished along with their adulterous partners, and flogging was carried out by the female community, not the husband. It is impossible to state that Boniface's account indicates the influence of Tacitus, as opposed to some degree of cultural continuity in Germania between the first and the eighth centuries. Boniface also praised the respect for marriage among the 'Wends' (*Uinedi*), a generic term used by Germanic-speakers to describe neighbouring Slavs (*ibid.*, p. 150, ll. 22-27); Tacitus mentioned the *Veneti* but had nothing to say concerning their morality (Tacitus, *Germania* in *Cornelii Taciti opera minora*, c. 46, p. 61, ll. 20-26), but Boniface did have direct contact with Slavs who had settled in Thuringia (Tangl, ep. 87, p. 200, ll. 16-21), just as he had first-hand experience of Old Saxon culture. If he did not rely on Tacitus for his comment regarding the Wends, he need not have used Tacitus to comment on the Old Saxons, and the differences in his account suggest that he did not. This does not, of course, prove that he did not know the *Germania*, merely suggests that he did not rely on it in this instance.

¹⁶⁰ 'We foresaw to send you into the regions of the west, to illuminate the people of Germania who are dwelling in the shadow of death', Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 4-6.

These two instances are the only times that *Hesperia* is alluded to in the letters of Boniface and Lul. *Hesperia* was the name given to the ‘Land of the West’ or ‘Land of the Evening Star (*Hesperus*)’ in Classical poetry, specifically in the works of Virgil, who used *Hesperia* as a synonym for Italy numerous times in the *Aeneid*.¹⁶² Virgil also invoked *Hesperus*, the bringer of night and shadow, on one other occasion, in order to achieve cadence at the close of his final *Eclogue*:

Surgamus; solet esse gravis cantantibus umbra;
iuniperi gravis umbra; nocent et frugibus umbrae;
te domum saturae, venit Hesperus, ite capellae.¹⁶³

In the densely-wooded, half-imagined pastoral world of Virgil’s *Eclogues*, shade and shadow were important poetic signifiers of mood.¹⁶⁴ The intentions of popes Gregory II and Gregory III when they described Boniface’s mission as being ‘in the regions of the west’ must have been largely poetic: Germania was, strictly speaking, north of Rome and east, not west, of the Rhine. More important than geographical precision were the deepening shadows and semi-mythical lands that the term *Hesperia* evoked.¹⁶⁵ Boniface was familiar with Virgil’s *Aeneid*, from which he borrowed part of a line in the fifth of his *Enigmata*,¹⁶⁶ and, having been educated in the circle of Aldhelm, he had probably also read the *Eclogues*.¹⁶⁷ Allusions to *Hesperia* would not have been lost on him.

¹⁶¹ ‘[God] has opened a door of mercy in those western regions, a gate of mercy to the realisation of the way of salvation’, Tangl, ep. 45, p. 72, ll. 8-10.

¹⁶² J. D. Reed, *Virgil’s Gaze: Nation and Poetry in the Aeneid* (Princeton, 2007), p. 7.

¹⁶³ ‘Let us rise; the shadow falls heavy on the singers;
Heavy is the shadow of the juniper; the shadows hurt, too, the crops;
Go home well-fed – Hesperus comes! – go, my flocks.’

Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-IV*, ed. H. R. Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA, 1999), *Eclogue* 10, pp. 94-95.

¹⁶⁴ Wendell Clausen’s commentary in Virgil, *Virgil: Eclogues*, ed. and trans. W. Clausen (Oxford, 1995), pp. xxv-xxvi.

¹⁶⁵ See Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, p. 149.

¹⁶⁶ Orchard cites the parallel of Boniface’s line *In qua nec metas aeui nec tempora clausit* with line 278 of book one of the *Aeneid*: *His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono*. Boniface, *Ænigmata Bonifatii*, CCSL 133, p. 291; Fairclough, ed., *Virgil*, p. 100; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, p. 252.

¹⁶⁷ Aldhelm cited the *Eclogues* in his *De metris* and *De pedum regulis*, and borrowed from them in his own verse (See Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, p. 219). It thus seems likely that the *Eclogues* formed part of the corpus of liberal learning in early eighth-century Wessex to which Boniface referred in his 716/17 letter to the monk Nithard, a letter which is itself full of Aldhelmian allusions to classical

The classical view of Germania as a land of darkness was both literal, owing to the dense forests and long winter nights of northern climes, and figurative, as a contrast to the light of Roman civilisation. Pliny's debt to Virgil, archetypal advocate of Rome's self-ordained destiny to rule the known world, is obvious in the preface to book 27 of his *Naturalis Historia*, where he comments that 'the Gods seem to have given the Romans as another light unto human affairs.'¹⁶⁸

Yet here the apparent similarity of the classical and Bonifatian perceptions of Germania reveals itself as superficial, and the contrast can help us better appreciate the importance of Germania as a literary and poetic construct in the letters of the eighth-century missionaries. In both the classical and the eighth-century traditions Germania was a dark and dangerous wilderness, mysterious, brooding and hostile. But whereas in classical times this shadow was cast across the Rhine by the light of Roman civilisation, in the eighth century, as is evident in the letters of Boniface, it was cast by the light of Christ.

A similar difference existed between the attitude of classical authors towards barbarians and the attitude of Boniface and his circle towards pagans. Tacitus, for example, rejoiced in the mutual destruction of barbarian tribes in Germania, for their endemic discord benefitted Roman security.¹⁶⁹ Pliny, after the failure of Rome to subjugate the Chauci of northern Germania, soothed Roman pride by affirming that the Chauci had not so much preserved their own liberty – their humble, scraping existence was too miserable to be called that – as been reserved by Fortune for eternal punishment.¹⁷⁰ They could thus be abandoned to their damnation, and there was no moral obligation on Rome to rescue them.

Boniface and his companions, however, had a very different mandate, as we have seen: God 'willed that all men should be free',¹⁷¹ and the conversion of the peoples of Germania was something that many missionaries strove for despite the

literature. Tangl, ep. 9, p. 5, ll. 28-29. Martin argues for the pervasive influence of classical poetry on formal Latin teaching in Anglo-Saxon monasteries: B. K. Martin, 'Aspects of Winter in Latin and Old English Poetry', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 68 (1969), pp. 375-390 (pp. 389-390).

¹⁶⁸ [dei] Romanos velut alteram lucem dedisse rebus humanis videntur, Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, ed. W. H. S. Jones, vol. 7 (London, 1966), XXVII.i.3, pp. 390-391.

¹⁶⁹ See Tacitus's account of a battle between the Bructeri and their neighbouring tribes: *Super sexaginta milia non armis telisque Romanis, sed, quod magnificentius est, oblectationi oculisque ceciderunt. Maneat, quaeso, duretque gentibus, si non amor nostri, at certe odium sui, quando urgentibus imperii fatis nihil iam praestare fortuna maius potest quam hostium discordiam*, Tacitus, *Germania in Cornelii Taciti opera minora*, c. 33, p. 54, ll. 6-10.

¹⁷⁰ Sallmann, 'Reserved for eternal punishment', pp. 126-127.

¹⁷¹ [Deus] vult omnes homines salvos fieri, 1 Tim. 2:4; Tangl, ep. 21, p. 36, ll. 13-14; ep. 38, p. 63, ll. 24-25; ep. 46, p. 74, ll. 1-2; ep. 65, p. 138, ll. 2-3; ep. 101, p. 224, ll. 10-11.

hardships involved. In the letters, the poetic intensifiers *Germania* and *Germanic* served to heighten the trials and torments of Boniface and his companions, evoking a rich response in an audience attuned to their usage.¹⁷² In much the same way, romanticised invocations of ‘Darkest Africa’, embellished with Biblical metaphors of light and shadow, at once enticed and unsettled Victorian-era missionaries to that continent.¹⁷³

Yet there was more than the Great Commission to motivate the Anglo-Saxon missionary. The difference between the terms *exul* and *exul Germanicus*, at least regarding the impression made on an Anglo-Saxon audience, was the same as the difference between the terms *tempestates* and *tempestates Germanicae*, or *mare* and *mare Germanicum*. The adjectives were not added merely for the sake of geographical specificity, but because they carried powerful connotations that resonated especially with readers who located the primeval origins of their own *gens* in *Germania* itself.¹⁷⁴ The Old Saxons and Anglo-Saxons were, as Boniface reminded his countrymen in a letter of c. 738, ‘of one blood and one bone’.¹⁷⁵ The first appearance of Boniface’s title *legatus Germanicus* is, in fact, in the unusually elaborate *intitulatio* of this letter, where Boniface described himself thus:

omnibus catholicis Deum timentibus de stirpe et prosapia Anglorum procreatis eiusdem generis vernaculus universalis ecclesiae legatus Germanicus et servus sedis apostolice Bonifacius qui et Uuynfrethus sine praerogativa meritorum nominatus archiepiscopus¹⁷⁶

Nowhere else in the surviving letters did Boniface remind his audience of his Anglo-Saxon name, or emphasise to such an extent his own ethnicity. Both Bede and Aldhelm saw *Germania* as the original homeland of the Anglo-Saxon *gens*,¹⁷⁷ and

¹⁷² On the emotional impact of such choice words and expressions in Old English poems which dealt with themes of exile, see S. B. Greenfield, ‘The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of ‘Exile’ in Anglo-Saxon Poetry’, *Speculum* 30.2 (1955), pp. 200-206 (p. 205).

¹⁷³ L. Larosz, ‘Constructing the Dark Continent: Metaphor as Geographic Representation of Africa’, *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 74.2 (1992), pp. 105-115 (pp. 106-107).

¹⁷⁴ *Alhelmi Opera*, p. 202, l. 5; *HE*, V.9, p. 296.

¹⁷⁵ *De uno sanguine et de uno osse*, Tangl, ep. 46, p. 75, l. 6.

¹⁷⁶ ‘to all God-fearing Catholics begot of the stock and race of the Angles, Boniface, also called Wynfreth, born of that same race, Germanic legate of the universal church and servant of the apostolic see, appointed archbishop for no merit of his own’, *ibid.*, p. 74, ll. 24-29.

¹⁷⁷ See Bede’s comments on the origins of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes in *Germania* in *HE*, V.9, p. 296, and Aldhelm’s remark that he had been ‘nourished in cradle of a Germanic people’, *Germanicae*

Boniface would not have attempted to recall his compatriots to their bond of kinship with the Old Saxons if he did not believe that the bond was widely felt, at least among the higher clerical ranks. It is significant in this context that the only preserved reply to Boniface's appeal is the enthusiastic response of Bishop Torthelm of Leicester, who does not appear to have been among Boniface's frequent correspondents.¹⁷⁸ If a copy of Boniface's letter was carried as far north as Leicester, beyond the circle of his regular correspondents,¹⁷⁹ it suggests that Boniface had indeed instructed his messengers to carry (or copy and distribute) the letter as widely as possible throughout the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

Yet, as we have seen, the image of Germania evoked by Boniface and his correspondents was scarcely intended to be positive. On the contrary, it appears to have been derived from a mixture of Classical and Biblical traditions that resulted in the portrayal of Germania as a hostile, forested wilderness inhabited by barbaric pagans who dwelled in a state of ignorance and spiritual captivity. We can witness the interplay of these traditions in the surviving letters of the missionaries, and thereby understand the reception that Boniface's title of *exul Germanicus* might have had by his Anglo-Saxon audience.

6.3.4 Exile, suffering and purpose

Within Germania, the semi-mythical home of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, the missionaries endured their *peregrinatio*. We can now draw together the themes of exile, suffering and Germania and consider their great importance to the literary representation of Boniface's mission in more detail. First of all, exile was an established theme of Anglo-Latin poetic composition long before Boniface arrived in Germania. During the abbacy of Aldhelm at Malmesbury (c. 672 to 706), his pupil Æthilwald sent him a poem 'concerning the exile of a journey across the sea', for

gentis cunabulis confotum. Aldhelm, *De metris et enigmatibus ac pedum regulis* in *Alhelmi Opera*, pp. 59-204 (p. 202, l. 5).

¹⁷⁸ Tangl, ep. 47, pp. 75-76. It is the only surviving letter of Bishop Torthelm to Boniface, and its tone is formal rather than familiar.

¹⁷⁹ At this stage in his career, the only known Anglo-Saxon correspondent of Boniface beyond the southern kingdoms is Bishop Pehthelm of Whithorn, whom he almost certainly knew through West Saxon connections: according to Bede (*HE* V.18), Pehthelm had trained as a monk with Aldhelm, most probably in Wessex. See B. Yorke, 'Aldhelm's Irish and British connections' in *Aldhelm and Sherborne*, ed. K. Barker and N. Brooks publication forthcoming.

correction.¹⁸⁰ Æthilwald's poem, which survives in the Vienna manuscript of the Bonifatian correspondence,¹⁸¹ presents a heroic image of the exile upon which certain young Anglo-Saxon missionaries – not least Lul himself, as we shall soon see – may have modelled themselves:

At vos, famosi viribus
Viri sudantes strennuis
Trucem vicistis tropeo
Hostem belli aethereo
Qui propinquos et patrias
Abspernantes peregrinas
Ignoti ruris cespites
Adistis cursu praepetes!¹⁸²

Although no Old English poems can be proven to have survived from the time of Boniface, vernacular poetry was being composed in a Christian context by figures such as Aldhelm and Caedmon by the late seventh century, and, in the opinion of Orchard, influenced the rhythmic and alliterative form of the contemporary Anglo-Latin poetry that does survive.¹⁸³ Later Old English poets tended to embellish the theme of exile greatly in their adaptations of Biblical texts,¹⁸⁴ and the portrayal of exile is a central feature of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. These two thematically related poems survived in the Exeter Book, a manuscript from the second half of the tenth century,¹⁸⁵ although consensus dates their composition to the eighth or ninth centuries.¹⁸⁶ The language and poetic formulas of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*

¹⁸⁰ *de transmarini... itineris peregrinatione*. Æthilwald refers to the poem in his letter to Aldhelm (*Aldhelmi Opera*, p. 497, ll. 3-5). The poem itself also survives (*ibid.*, pp. 528-533).

¹⁸¹ *Carmina Rhythmica II*, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, lat. 751, fol. 40.

¹⁸² 'But you, forging on with the strenuous vigour of a renowned man, have defeated the fierce enemy with the celestial trophy of battle, you who spurned friends and fatherland to go to the earth of a foreign field.' Æthilwald, *Carmina Rhythmica II*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, pp. 528-533 (p. 530, ll. 42-48).

¹⁸³ Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 45-54.

¹⁸⁴ Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression', pp. 204-205; L. H. Frey, 'Exile and Elegy in Anglo-Saxon Epic Poetry', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 62 (1963), pp. 293-302 (pp. 295-297).

¹⁸⁵ Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501, fols. 8-130.

¹⁸⁶ There is no way to give a more precise date of composition, and the debate continues. Gordon suggested the ninth-century, while Whitelock favoured the eighth-century, specifically the time of Bede and Boniface, for *The Seafarer*. Most recently Orton has stated that the eighth and ninth centuries are possible, and the tenth century is unlikely. I. L. Gordon, ed., *The Seafarer* (London, 1960), pp. 27-32; D. Whitelock, 'The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*' in *Essential Articles for the Study of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. J. B. Bessinger and S. J. Kahrl (Hamden, CT, 1968), pp. 442-457 (p. 444); P. Orton,

are, of course, very different from the Latin prose of Boniface and his correspondents, but they were the product of an entirely Christian milieu that, like the circle of Boniface, was heavily influenced by patristic tradition,¹⁸⁷ and strong thematic echoes appear that can help us better appreciate the resonance that motifs of exile had with a Christian Anglo-Saxon audience.¹⁸⁸

In Anglo-Saxon society, exile was ‘the ultimate in hardships’¹⁸⁹ and ‘the epitome of misfortune’.¹⁹⁰ It entailed the abandonment, voluntary or not, of one’s home and companions, hence of security and emotional support. The exile was an outcast, forced to dwell on the fringes of society, and for Anglo-Saxon poets this invariably meant crossing the sea. As noted above, the use of the sea as a symbol for the turbulence of human life was a long-established patristic tradition,¹⁹¹ and scholars have also discussed the use of the sea by Anglo-Saxon poets as a metaphor for death and as a place of mystical absorption.¹⁹² The sea, or more specifically travel across it, was part of the poetic paraphernalia of exile. Frey comments:

The natural environment the Anglo-Saxon knew – windy headlands, chilly seas, and northern winters – provided the perfect background for human hardship.¹⁹³

‘The Form and Structure of *The Seafarer*’ in *Old English Literature*, ed. Liuzza, pp. 353-380 (pp. 353-354).

¹⁸⁷ See G. V. Smithers, ‘The Meaning of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*’, *Medium Ævum* 26.3 (1957), pp. 137-153 (p. 149); F. N. M. Diekstra, ‘*The Wanderer* 64b-72: The Passions of the Mind and the Cardinal Virtues’, *Neophilologus* 55 (1971), pp. 73-88 (p. 86). The presence in *The Wanderer* of the pre-Christian concept of *wyrd* ‘fate’ does not, as Beaston has recently argued, constitute the poet’s pining for a lost pagan past, for there is no reason to assume that the Anglo-Saxons considered belief in *wyrd* to be incompatible with Christian faith. L. Beaston, ‘The Wanderer’s Courage’, *Neophilologus* 89 (2005), pp. 119-137 (p. 128). On the subordination of *wyrd* to God in Anglo-Saxon texts, see B. J. Timmer, ‘Wyrd in Anglo-Saxon Prose and Poetry’, *Neophilologus* 26 (1941), pp. 24-33; K. Lochrie, ‘Wyrd and the Limits of Human Understanding: A Thematic Sequence in the *Exeter Book*’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85 (1986), pp. 323-331. On the comparable incorporation of the Old Saxon concept of *wurd* into the epic Gospel narrative of the *Heliand*, see G. R. Murphy, *The Saxon Saviour: The Germanic Transformation of the Gospel in the Ninth-Century Heliand* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 33-55.

¹⁸⁸ See J. Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, CSASE 27 (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 19-20; Schaefer, ‘Two Women in Need of a Friend’; Cünnen, *Fictionale Nonnenwelten*, esp. pp. 226-229.

¹⁸⁹ Frey, ‘Exile and Elegy’, p. 294.

¹⁹⁰ M. D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Poetry* (The Hague, 1972), p. 102. See also R. E. Bjork, ‘*Sundor æt Rune*: The Voluntary Exile of *The Wanderer*’ in *Old English Literature*, ed. Liuzza, pp. 315-327 (p. 316).

¹⁹¹ Above, this chapter, section 6.2.4.

¹⁹² G. H. Brown, ‘An Iconographic Explanation of *The Wanderer*, lines 81b-82a’, *Viator* 9 (1978), pp. 31-38; See also B. McGinn, ‘Ocean and Desert as Symbols of Mystical Absorption in the Christian Tradition’, *Journal of Religion* 74.2 (1994), pp. 155-181 (pp. 157-159).

¹⁹³ Frey, ‘Exile and Elegy’, p. 302.

Perhaps the defining stylistic feature of exile in Anglo-Saxon poetry, according to Greenfield, was the description of physical movement from the homeland and the inevitable sense of displacement that followed.¹⁹⁴ We find such a description among the letters of Lul, who, having travelled from Wessex to Rome c. 738, wrote a florid, highly poeticised account of his journey to an abbess and nun in England (italics indicate borrowings from Aldhelm identified by Tangl):¹⁹⁵

*Fateor caritati vestrae, postquam Brittanice telluris inclita scepra divine pietatis ammonitione ut reor salubri tactus fugiens deserui relictaque fecundissima natalis patriae insula, quam glauca spumantis maris cerula infligentia scopolosis marginibus undique vallant, fragilitatis meae conscius et scelerum meorum aliquatenus tunc reminiscens una cum propinquitatis meae propemodum caterva Christo favente ferventis ingruentibus pelagi molibus transvectus huius regionis marginem applicuisse gratulans votorum compos tripudiabam liminibusque beatorum apostolorum orationis causa demendi innumera piaculorum meorum pondera pergendo me satagebam presentare ibique cunctis adfinitatis meae propinquis propemodum longo quietis somno sopitis solus in huius exilii calamitate et orbatus merui.*¹⁹⁶

Lul conjured an image of the choppy waters of the channel dashing against the rocky shoreline of Britain and described his perilous voyage across the ‘crashing mountains of the seething sea’, yet entirely ignored the weeks that he must have spent crossing Gaul and Italy before reaching Rome. According to the Anglo-Saxon concept of exile,

¹⁹⁴ Greenfield, ‘The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of Exile’, p. 203.

¹⁹⁵ Lul’s passage is stylistically modelled on a letter of Aldhelm describing his journey home from Ireland: Aldhelm, *Epistulae*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ep. 5, p. 489, ll. 7-10.

¹⁹⁶ ‘I confess to your charity, that, after I forsook the renowned realm of British soil, touched, as I believe, by the healthy rebuke of divine piety, having abandoned the most bountiful island of my native home, which is fortified on all sides by the dashing blue-green of the foaming sea, aware of my weakness and recalling my wicked deeds, along with one company comprising almost all of the fellowship I had, carried, by the favour of Christ, across the crashing mountains of the seething sea, rejoicing to have reached the edge of this region, praising and offering vows, and by advancing to the borders of the blessed Apostles on account of prayers subtracting the immeasurable weight of my sins, I readied myself to appear there; and I deserved to be alone in the calamity of this exile, deserted by just about all of my kinsmen, in the long dream of peaceful sleepers’, Tangl, ep. 98, p. 219, ll. 6-18.

crossing the sea, not the land, was what mattered, for without doing so one was not a true *peregrinus*.¹⁹⁷

In the above letter Lul appears to have presented himself as the archetypal exile, who had, like the hero of Æthilwald's poem, 'spurned friends and fatherland to go to the earth of a foreign field.'¹⁹⁸ The Anglo-Saxons who assumed the mantle of exile were expected to assume the entire cultural construct, including hardship and suffering, a feature so amply illustrated in the letters of Boniface and Lul. Bjork has observed:

Exile itself, as one constant tradition in the Anglo-Saxon world, can affirm that world and be as dearly clung to as the seemingly more positive aspects of life. Though perhaps the most intense and painful experience one can have within Anglo-Saxon society, exile is nonetheless an accepted (even expected) part of Anglo-Saxon life, a part that both the language and the culture accommodate.¹⁹⁹

As far as the rhetoric of the letters is concerned, suffering was not a consequence of exile that should have discouraged a determined missionary.²⁰⁰ The priest Wiehtberht, when he wrote to the monastic community of Glastonbury about his work on the Hessian-Saxon borderlands, did not seek to hide from them the hardships he faced. On the contrary, he presented them as an integral part of the missionary experience and declared himself undaunted in his task:

Deus enim omnipotens per misericordiam suam ac merita vestra sufficientiam operis nostri bonam perficit, licet valde sit periculosum ac laboriosum pene in omne re, in fame et siti, in algore et incursione paganorum inter se degere.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Angenendt, *Monachi Peregrini*, pp. 152-153.

¹⁹⁸ Qui propinquos et patrias
Abspernantes peregrinas
Ignoti ruris cespites
Adistis cursu praepetes!

Æthilwald, *Carmina Rythmica II*, p. 530, ll. 45-48.

¹⁹⁹ Bjork, 'Sundor æt Rune', p. 316.

²⁰⁰ Whitelock, 'The Interpretation of the Seafarer', p. 444.

²⁰¹ 'For almighty God in his mercy and through your merits has given success to our labors, arduous and perilous though they be in almost every way, hunger and thirst and cold and attacks by the heathen', Tangl, ep. 101, p. 224, ll. 23-26; trans. Emerton (sic), *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 152.

Between 769 and 786,²⁰² the nun Berthgyth wrote at least three letters to her brother Balthard in which she lamented her monastic isolation in terms that have invited direct comparison with the Old English poem *The Wife's Lament*.²⁰³ Berthgyth had arrived in Thuringia with the nun Cynehild, her mother and Lul's aunt,²⁰⁴ and remained there after her mother died. The plaintive rhetoric of the first two letters, as Tangl and Orchard have noted, is heavily indebted to Aldhelm and Scripture,²⁰⁵ whereas the third, the most intense and heartfelt of her pleas for companionship, is conspicuously free of literary allusions.

Quid est, frater mi, quod tam longum tempus intermisisti, quod venire tardasti? Quare non vis cogitare, quo ego sola in hac terra et nullus alius frater visitet me neque propinquorum aliquis ad me veniet? Et si ideo facis, quia adhuc nihil potui, secundum quod mens mea diligenter voluisset, aliquid beneficii inpendere, tamen caritatis atque adfinitatis iura nullo alio suadente aut mens tua mutando debes obliviscere. O frater, o frater mi, cur potes mentem parvitas meae adsiduae merore fletu atque tristitia die noctuque caritatis tuae absentia adfligere? Nonne pro certo scies, quia viventium omnium nullum alium propono tuae caritati? Ecce non possum omnia per litteras tibi indicare. Iam ego certum teneo, quod tibi cura non est de mea parvitate.²⁰⁶

²⁰² Tangl, although he leaves the letters of Berthgyth undated in his edition, is confident that her brother Balthard is to be identified with the first abbot of Hersfeld, installed by Lul c. 769. Tangl, ep. 147, p. 284, n. 2. The *terminus ante quem* of the letter is the compilation of the *collectio communis* before the death of Lul in 786.

²⁰³ Schaefer, 'Two Women in Need'; Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, pp. 30-35.

²⁰⁴ Otloh, *Vitae Bonifatii auctore Otloho libri duo*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover, 1905), pp. 111-217 (c. 25, p. 138, ll. 1-9).

²⁰⁵ See Tangl's notes on ep. 147, pp. 284-285 and ep. 148, pp. 285-287; Orchard, 'Old Sources, New Resources', pp. 36-37.

²⁰⁶ 'Why, my brother, have you been so neglectful, so slow in coming? Why do you refuse to realise that I am all alone in this world, and that no other brother may visit me, nor any other relative? And if for that reason – because I have been hitherto unable to, though my mind has earnestly desired it – you weigh out some act of kindness, nonetheless you must forget the duties of love and kinship by being persuaded otherwise by someone else or changing your mind. Oh brother, oh my brother, how can you punish the mind of my faithful smallness by your absence, while day and night I wail and pine in sorrow? Surely you now know that I place no other living person before you? But aye, I cannot tell you all this in a letter. Now I know for sure that you do not care at all about my smallness', Tangl, ep. 143, p. 282, ll. 20-33.

There were situations, it seems, in which literary formulas, indeed the medium of letter-writing itself, failed to capture the depth of suffering faced by those who felt isolated from friends and family.

We have already seen the varied imagery that the missionaries had to hand when they desired to depict adversity, and how such depictions played on the themes of *peregrinatio*, Germania and the unruly ocean of earthly life. The missionaries were equally ready, however, to offer formulaic consolation and reassurance when it was required, and this served to balance the discourse of suffering.²⁰⁷

Klein, in a linguistic analysis of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, concluded that the essential feature of admirable Anglo-Saxon character was to grasp and maintain a clear purpose rather than to respond to the vagaries of experience, the unknowable vicissitudes of *wyrd*. A strong mind ensured the dominance of volition, and a wise and happy man, at least in the opinion of the author of *The Wanderer*, directed his purpose towards God in all things.²⁰⁸ It is telling that the one fragment of Old English to survive in the correspondence of Boniface and Lul comprises two short verses, written by an unknown monk to a novice missionary, on precisely this theme.

Audio de te, quod iter vis incipere; orton, ut non deficeris. Eia fac, quo incipisti. Memento Saxonicum verbum:

Oft dædlada dôme foreldit,
Sigisîtha gahvêm; suuytit thî âna.

Sed tamen tale quid in te haud scio, non est hic operandum; sed tende, ubi messis est Deo adiuvante.²⁰⁹

This monk who had pledged himself to join the mission in Germania was not to hesitate or deviate from his course, but to place himself unreservedly in the service of

²⁰⁷ For example, Tangl, ep. 63, p. 131, l. 21 to p. 132, l. 6; ep. 64, p. 136, ll. 19-26; ep. 94, pp. 214-215; ep. 111, p. 239, ll. 8-18.

²⁰⁸ W. F. Klein, 'Purpose and the "Poetics" of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*' in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. L. E. Nicholson and D. W. Frese (London, 1975), pp. 208-223 (p. 212).

²⁰⁹ 'I hear about you that you want to start a journey; I urge you not to abandon it. Carry through, I say, what you begin! Remember the Saxon saying: "The lazy man often puts off glory and any kind of victory; that man dies alone". Although I know of no such tendency in you, it must not be done in this case; but direct yourself to where the harvest is with God's assistance', Tangl, ep. 146, p. 283, l. 25 to p. 284, l. 2.

God. He must have had contact with others active in the mission, and perhaps knew of the dramatic literary discourse that pitched light against darkness, Christ against Satan, amidst the stormy sea of the Germanic peoples. If so, it is no small wonder that he hesitated before committing himself to a *peregrinatio* from which, in all likelihood, he would never return. Yet suffering was the very essence of serving Christ in exile, and was thus not something to shrink back from, but to embrace. His advisor did not turn to a Biblical or patristic source for the crucial words of inspiration, but to a *Saxonicum verbum*, a ‘Saxon saying’, which does not appear to have had any explicit Christian connotations, and could equally have been used to encourage a young secular adventurer. This supports the notion that the missionaries conceived of their *peregrinatio* in terms that, in many ways, would have been familiar to a lay Anglo-Saxon who chose (or was forced) to embark on a length sojourn abroad.

*

In this chapter we have seen how the shared cultural understanding of the missionary community led it to represent the mission to outside audiences. We have identified a clear difference in the nature of discourse between Boniface and the papacy on the one hand, and Boniface and his Anglo-Saxon contacts on the other. Each audience shared the symbolic language of Biblical and patristic tradition, but the theme of exile, in particular the suffering it entailed, was one that resonated only between Anglo-Saxons.

In pursuing mission, the missionaries were making manifest the powerful literary and Biblical construct of the *peregrinus* who abandoned home and family for the love of Christ. Yet the innovation of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries was to combine the Irish tradition of *peregrinatio* with the simple command of the Great Commission – *euntes ergo docete omnes gentes* – and the strong sense of affinity they had for the peoples of Germania, especially the Old Saxons, whose conversion forever eluded Boniface. The resulting image of the missionary as an *exul Germanicus* was a potent one. In the next chapter we shall consider, as far as possible, the trials and experiences of those missionaries who embarked on their great *peregrinatio*, and then come to consider the relationship between the pursuit of the mission and its literary conceptualisation.

Chapter Seven

Experiencing the Mission

By this point we have explored several aspects of Boniface's Hessian mission. We have examined the West Saxon environment in which he spent the first forty years of his life, and which taught him the importance of winning the support of secular rulers, and of loyalty to Rome and to the episcopal model of ecclesiastical government. We have seen how Hesia *c.* 721 was an area of long-standing Frankish ambitions, one which the Franks held under their control but which had not been systematically Christianised prior to Boniface's arrival. We have also constructed a critical chronology of the mission between 721 and 754, within which we can consider the more detailed questions that arise. Finally, we examined the representation of the mission in the rich collection of letters written by or to Boniface and his fellow missionaries. These letters demonstrated a particularly strong tendency among the Anglo-Saxon correspondents to present the missionary as a suffering exile in the pagan darkness of Germania.

We now have the opportunity to examine the Hessian mission itself, after which we can relate the literary discourse between the missionaries and their Anglo-Saxon supporters to the real difficulties and challenges that were encountered during the mission. This chapter will proceed in four main stages. First we shall examine the toponymical and topographical evidence for pre-Christian sacrality within the Hessian landscape, and consider this in light of the surviving historical sources in order to gain an impression of the nature of the paganism encountered in the district by Boniface.

In the second section we shall contrast this pagan landscape with the Christian landscape that Boniface established in the course of his mission. Charter and topographical sources give us the opportunity to reconstruct a network of major Bonifatian church foundations in Hesia, which, as we shall see, was reminiscent of the minster system of the Solent. There is also some evidence that Boniface established numerous chapels and churches in direct confrontation with sites of pagan worship.

The third section will concern the material support base that Boniface established to maintain his missionaries and their churches. This involved negotiations at various levels of society, from the highest echelons of the Frankish

élite to the local potentates without whose support Boniface could not have attempted to Christianise the ordinary people. Equally important in this respect were Boniface's dealings and frequent conflicts with powerful members of the Frankish church outside Hessa, who were the cause of many of his greatest anxieties and frustrations.

Finally, having reconstructed these highly varied aspects of the mission, we can consider how Boniface set about his task of converting the population of Hessa. This will include discussing the organisation of missionary parties, the nature of pre- and post-baptismal teaching methods within an episcopal framework, and finally the reasons why Boniface, despite his best efforts, was never able to expand his mission beyond Hessa.

7.1 The sacred pagan landscape of Hessa

7.1.1 Sacred pagan sites in the landscape

I opened this thesis with a dramatisation of the event for which Boniface is best known in the public imagination: the destruction of the Oak of Thor near Geismar. This event, described by the biographer Willibald in his *Vita Bonifatii* up to forty years after the shrine's destruction,¹ is the only site of Hessian pagan worship named in a near-contemporary source. That it was not the only one is clear from Willibald's own account, in which he stated that some of those baptised Hessians who had rejected the rite of confirmation in 723 'even continued to offer sacrifices, secretly or openly, at groves and springs'.² Willibald's vivid account of the Oak of Thor itself demonstrates that he was not merely recycling Christian stereotypes of pagan practice, but had some authentic reports, whether from documents, tradition or recollection, of pre-Christian religious activity in Hessa during the early 720s. Similarly, in 738 Gregory III urged the baptised Hessians and neighbouring peoples³ not to return to 'the sacrifices to the dead or prophecies at groves and fountains... which used to

¹ *roborem quendam mirae magnitudinis, qui prisco paganorum vocabulo appellatur robor Iobis, in loco qui dicitur Gaesmere, servis Dei secum adstantibus, succidere temptavit, Vita Bonifatii, c. 6, p. 31, ll. 11-14.*

² *alii etiam lignis et fontibus clanculo, alii autem aperte sacrificabat, ibid., ll. 3-4.*

³ *universis optimatibus et populo provinciarum Germaniae, Thuringis et Hassis, Bortharis et Nistresis, Wedreciis et Lognais, Suduodis et Graffeltis, Tangl, ep. 43, p. 68, ll. 10-13. For the locations of these tribes, see chapter five above, section 5.1.3.*

happen within your borders,'⁴ a formulaic prohibition, but one which, appearing in such a carefully addressed letter, probably had some basis in reality. Yet no site of pagan worship besides Geismar is identified in our sources, and therefore we must look to toponymics to identify sites of potential pagan significance.

As discussed in chapter four, the only general studies of place-names in Hesse comprise a short book from 1936⁵ and an article originally published in 1911.⁶ The more recent toponymical studies of early medievalists in the region have tended to focus on the development of the settled landscape under Frankish rule.⁷ To date, the only allusion in Bonifatian studies to pagan activity evidenced in the toponymical landscape is a single aside by Schieffer, who noted that the place-name *Gudensberg*, near Fritzlar, probably indicates the site of a cult dedicated to Woden.⁸ The place-names of Hesse form a valuable and largely neglected resource that could greatly enhance our understanding of the Christianisation of the region, and in this chapter I will present the results of my original research in this area.

The challenges involved in a toponymical study of this type differ from those of the sort of study undertaken in chapter four. Rather than examining the large-scale distribution of particular place-name types in order to infer general processes of landscape development, here our concern is with the nature of individual sites. Since place-names rarely survive in their original form, there is always a danger of misreading particular elements. There will also be a degree of uncertainty in inferring function or significance from place-name elements; the appearance of the name of a god, for example, need not imply an active cult as opposed to another form of mythic association. It is therefore vital to take into account the wider topographical and historical context, and to search for patterns in the landscape as a whole.

My study of sites of pagan significance was based on the following methodology.⁹ Using recent 1:50,000-scale topographical maps of the region,¹⁰ I first identified place-names of both settlements and natural features which indicated

⁴ *sacrificia mortuorum seu lucorum vel fontium auguria... quae in vestris finibus fieri solebant*, *ibid.*, p. 69, ll. 13-14.

⁵ Sturmfels, *Die Ortsnamen Hessens*.

⁶ Schröder, 'Die Ortsnamen Hessens und seine Besiedlung'; reprinted in *idem*, *Deutsche Namenkunde*, pp. 134-154

⁷ See chapter four above, section 4.3.6.

⁸ Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, p. 141.

⁹ See chapter two above, section 2.2.2.

¹⁰ The maps used were the M745 series produced by the Hessisches Landesvermessungsamt and Landesvermessungsamt Nordrhein-Westfalen between 2002 and 2006.

possible pagan cult activity. I then plotted them in relation to topography, early medieval settlement patterns and important lines of communication. Having done so, I visited the sites in question in order better to understand their physical relationship to the wider landscape as well as to produce a photographic record.

The sites with place-names indicating possible pagan activity can be seen on figure 39. In central Hessa, they include Fritzlar, Wichdorf, the three hills of Odenberg, Gudensberg and Heidekopf and the spring called Donarquelle. On the route heading due north from Kirchberg are the twin peaks of Groß- and Klein-Gudenberg, at the foot of which is a spring named Teufelsborn. At the north-west end of the Langerwald is Teufelskopf, while along the course of the Diemel are Donnersberg and Desenberg. I have also noted Geismar and Eresburg, both of which were associated with major pagan shrines in eighth-century sources (the Oak of Thor and the Irminsul respectively). Their names, which do not in themselves signify pagan activity, are an important reminder that toponymical evidence, though valuable, is in no way a complete representation of pre-Christian religious significance within the landscape.

I will discuss the location and appearance of each site in turn, beginning with the well-known site of Geismar. Willibald's statement in the *Vita Bonifatii* that the Oak of Thor destroyed by Boniface in 723 stood *in loco qui dicitur Gaesmere*¹¹ does not mean that the shrine was within the excavated eighth-century settlement itself as opposed to being on its outskirts or simply nearby. Willibald reported that Boniface used the wood of Thor's Oak to built an oratory to St Peter,¹² which since the end of the fifteenth century has often been identified with Boniface's earliest foundation at Fritzlar, two kilometres to the west, and still is by many modern historians.¹³ If the oratory was the precursor to the monastic community at Fritzlar, however, it is curious that Willibald did not mention this, instead implying that Fritzlar was only founded when Boniface built a church there in 732.¹⁴ Parsons, arguing that 'it is [...] inherently unlikely that [Boniface] would have dissipated the psychological impact of

¹¹ 'at the place called Geismar', *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 31, l. 13.

¹² *Tunc autem summae sanctitatis antistes, consilio inito cum fratribus, ligneum ex supradictae arboris metallo oratorium construxit eamque in honore sancti Petri apostoli dedicavit*, *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 31, l. 26 to p. 32, l. 2.

¹³ See Wand, *Die Bûrburg*, p. 42, n. 271a. Modern scholars who identify the church at Fritzlar with the Geismar oratory include Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, p. 206; Padberg, *Bonifatius*, pp. 40-41; Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius*, p. 148; Schwind, 'Fritzlar', p. 72; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 152.

¹⁴ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 35, l. 11. See above, chapter five, section 5.2.1.

the symbolic conquest of pagandom by building the chapel on another site', has contended that Fritzlar, not Geismar, was the location of the original pagan shrine.¹⁵

Parsons' observation that Boniface would probably have built his oratory on the site of the pagan shrine is logical and is a valid interpretation of Willibald's account; yet moving both shrine and oratory to Fritzlar hardly tackles the historiographical problem that Willibald associates neither with the site. Jestädt, also assuming that Boniface's oratory directly replaced the shrine, lent credence to a local tradition that Johanneskirchenkopf, 'the peak of St John's church', a densely wooded rise at the south-east end of the Langerwald, was the location of Thor's Oak.¹⁶ The rise overlooks Geismar from a distance of three kilometres and is on the ancient route, now a rarely used forest track, that ran along the crest of the Langerwald towards Eresburg. It was the site of a church that was re-dedicated to St John in the late Middle Ages (the original dedication is unknown), and a now-deserted village that grew up around it.¹⁷ It is plausible that Willibald used the phrase *in loco qui dicitur Gaesmere*¹⁸ to refer to a hill overlooking the settlement, but there is a lack of conclusive evidence for Jestädt's theory, to which Wand subscribes only with the greatest caution.¹⁹

That Boniface dedicated the oratory to St Peter is no reason to try to equate it only with the church at Fritzlar; as we shall see shortly, three of the four Hessian mother churches whose medieval dedications are recorded, and which were probably founded by Boniface, are also dedicated to St Peter.²⁰ There remains the third alternative that the location of the Oak of Thor, which Willibald claims was 'of extraordinary size',²¹ was determined by a quirk of nature rather than by human intent, and was located in a clearing or pasture somewhere near Geismar that was frequented for no other reason. After its destruction, the location of both former shrine and replacement oratory may eventually have been forgotten. This explanation is less

¹⁵ Parsons, 'Sites and Monuments', p. 292.

¹⁶ W. Jestädt, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Fritzlar: Festschrift zum 1200jährigen Bestehen der Stadt Fritzlar 724-1924* (Fritzlar, 1924), pp. 44-46; see also K. Demandt, *Quellen zur Rechtsgeschichte der Stadt Fritzlar im Mittelalter*, Veröffentlichungen des historischen Kommissions für Hessen und Waldeck 13.3 (Marburg, 1939), p. 1, n. 1.

¹⁷ Jestädt, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Fritzlar*, pp. 44-46.

¹⁸ 'at the place called Geismar', *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 31, l. 13.

¹⁹ Wand, *Die Büraburg*, pp. 41-42.

²⁰ The churches are at Schützeberg, Gensungen and Mardorf-Berge. See this chapter, section 7.2.1, and figure 44. The fourth mother church at Bergheim, dedicated to St Martin, may be pre-Bonifatian in date: see chapter four above, section 4.4.4.

²¹ *mirae magnitudinis*. *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 31, l. 11.

unlikely than Fritzlar and no more unlikely that Johanneskirchenkopf, and perhaps the best course is to remain in a state of conscious ignorance as to the precise location of the Geismar shrine.

Schröder suggested that the place-name Fritzlar may indicate some form of sacred significance.²² Toponyms with the *-lar* suffix belong to the earliest strata of place-names in Hesse, and the first documentary appearance of Fritzlar is in the *Vita Bonifatii* of Willibald as *Frideslar*.²³ The first element of the place-name is related to OHG *fridu*, ‘peace, protection, security, contract’,²⁴ the second from *lar*, the etymology of which is unclear, but which appears to carry the general meaning of ‘place’.²⁵ Whether or not the original meaning of *Fritzlar* as ‘Place of Peace/Security’ indicates some degree of pagan religious significance in the eighth century is impossible to determine, but Boniface’s choice of the site for his first monastic foundation, along with its long-standing importance for Frankish interests in the region,²⁶ make the existence of a socially significant pre-Christian pagan cult there conceivable.

Two other place-names of possible pagan significance in the locality of Geismar are Heidekopf, a less prominent rise one and a half kilometres south-east of Johanneskirchenkopf, and Donarquelle, a spring at the eastern foot of Johanneskirchenkopf. The first element of *Heidekopf* could be derived from either OHG *heida* ‘heath’ or *heidan** ‘heathen’ (cf. modern German *Heide*, which means both),²⁷ while the suffix *-kopf*, ‘head’, here refers to the bowl-shaped crest of a hill. *Donarquelle*, potentially derived from OHG *Thunaer-kwelle*, means ‘the spring of Thor’. The antiquity of these minor place-names is questionable, however, for their association with a site which is explicitly connected in local tradition with the Oak of Thor may mean that they appeared as embellishments of tradition, rather than foundations for it.

More reliable are place-names of major physical features which are less likely to be the product of later legends, and which explicitly refer to a pagan deity or to an active cult. Eight kilometres north-east of Fritzlar, flanking the ancient route that heads towards Saxony along the lower Fulda, are the large hills of Gudensberg and

²² Schröder, *Deutsche Namenkunde*, p. 139.

²³ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 35, l. 11.

²⁴ G. Köbler, *Wörterbuch des althochdeutschen Sprachschatzes* (Paderborn, 1993), p. 345.

²⁵ Schröder, *Deutsche Namenkunde*, p. 138.

²⁶ See chapter four above, section 4.4.2.

²⁷ Köbler, *Wörterbuch*, p. 178.

Odenberg. The prefixes *Guden* and *Oden* are both derived from OHG *Wodan*,²⁸ the name of the pre-Christian god generally referred to in modern English by the Scandinavian form Odin, and to whom I shall refer in this thesis as Woden. Any non-local traveller who takes the modern road north from Fritzlar will immediately be struck by the uniqueness of a landscape that two-dimensional maps and photographs can only poorly represent. Plate 6 is a 90-degree panoramic view (north to east) taken two kilometres north of Fritzlar; the white arrows, from left to right, identify Wartberg, Odenberg and Gudensberg. After the thick, claustrophobic forests and valleys of the surrounding regions, the Fritzlar basin feels vast and open, a wide, flat vale encircled by a rim of distant hills. The eye is naturally caught by a handful of peaks that rise within the basin itself, isolated and discordant, as though dropped there from the sky. Odenberg and Gudensberg are the largest and most prominent of these. As one enters central Hesse on the ancient route from the north-east, one passes directly between these two immense masses of basalt, whose names indicate a dual dedication to Woden.

Heading north from Fritzlar via Kirchberg, one arrives at the village of Wichdorf. Schröder observed that the first element of the place-name, first documented in 957 as *Uuihdorp*, is derived from the OHG adjective *wīh*, ‘holy’,²⁹ and he connected it with the ‘old “sacred” district of Gudensberg’.³⁰ Whether the prefix *wīh-* referred to Christian or pagan sacrality, however, is debatable. It may be significant that the medieval dedication of Wichdorf’s church (first attested in the fifteenth century) was to St John the Baptist and St Andrew, and that St John was the main patron.³¹ The name *Wichdorf*, if pre-Bonifatian, might then have referred to a sacred pagan site that was deliberately supplanted by an early baptismal church dedicated to St John, well-situated on a major communication route into north Hesse; if post-Bonifatian, it might have referred to the baptismal church itself, supplanting the older name of the settlement. Either alternative is plausible, but the evidence does not allow a clear decision between them.

If the traveller continues north from Wichdorf along the winding river valleys, he or she soon reaches a branch in the road where one route leads south-west towards Schützeberg, the other north towards the Diemel. Overlooking this junction is another

²⁸ Ibid., p. 284.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 238-239.

³⁰ *die alte ‘heilige’ Gegend von Gudensberg*. Schröder, *Deutsche Namenkunde*, p. 145.

³¹ Classen, *Die Kirchliche Organisation Althessens*, p. 194.

pair of peaks, Groß- and Klein-Gudenberg, whose names, like those of Odenberg and Gudensberg, invoke Woden (see plate 7). At their foot gushes the Teufelsborn, ‘the Devil’s spring’. The significance of the fact that the four Hessian peaks named after Woden appear in two pairs is unclear, although future comparative place-name studies outside Hessa may help determine the uniqueness or otherwise of the phenomenon.

Approaching central Hessa from the north-west, meanwhile, the same traveller, as he or she started along the Langerwald, would pass directly beneath a promontory now called Teufelskopf, ‘Devil’s peak’ (see plate 8; the arrow on the right indicates Teufelskopf). The name suggests an association in folk memory with pagan cult activity, and appears to mirror Heidekopf, ‘heath/heathen peak’, which occupies a similar position at the opposite end of the Langerwald.

Finally, there are at least three sites along the Diemel associated with pre-Christian religion. The first, the Saxon shrine Irminsul, appears to have been in the vicinity of Eresburg when Charlemagne destroyed it in 772, although the Frankish annalists did not give its exact location.³² At Eresburg, the Diemel flows through a deep, steep-sided valley, and the fortified promontory occupies a dominating position at the point where the long-distance *Weinstraße* crosses the river (see plate 9). Heading downstream, one comes to the crossing-point where the Twiste joins the Diemel from the south; overlooking this important confluence is Donnersberg, a low, elongated ridge that is not especially prominent in the landscape, yet whose name may indicate pre-Christian cult activity associated with *Donar*, Thor. The third site, five kilometers to the north-east, is Desenberg, a cone-shaped basalt extrusion that rises 150 metres above the surrounding vale and is by far the most striking natural feature of the middle Diemel (plate 10). The first element of its name is derived from OS *idisi*, literally ‘women’ (compare OE *idesa* and ON *dísir*), but more specifically denoting a class of supernatural females.³³

The places so far discussed constitute the known or likely sites of pagan significance within Hessa according to the historical and toponymical evidence. If we consider their locations from a topographical point of view, a pattern quickly emerges.

³² According to the *Annales Laurissenses: [Carolus] perrexit partibus Saxoniae prima vice, et Eresburgum castrum coepit, ad Ermensul usque pervenit et ipsum fanum destruxit*. The *Annales Einhardi* have little to add: *Rex vero Karlus... Saxoniam bello adgredi statuit eamque sine mora ingressus ferro et igne cuncta depopulatus Eresburgum castrum cepit, idolum, quod Irminsul a Saxonibus vocabatur, evertit*, *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 32-35.

³³ R. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. A. Hall (Cambridge, 1993), p. 171. See below, section 7.1.2.

First, there are clusters of sites in central Hestia, including Odenberg, Gudensberg, Thor's Oak near Geismar and possibly Heidekopf, Wichdorf and Fritzlar, and along the course of the Diemel, including Desenberg, Donnersberg and the Irminsul near Eresburg. Second, all of those sites identified through toponymics coincide strikingly with the major Hessian transit routes.

- Odenberg and Gudensberg stand on either side of the north-east route from Fritzlar to Saxony.
- Wichdorf and the twin peaks of Groß- and Klein-Gudenberg lie along the road from Fritzlar to the lower Diemel.
- Donnersberg rises above the major crossing point of the middle Diemel.
- Eresburg occupies a similar, though far more dramatic, site where the *Weinstraße* crosses the upper Diemel *en route* to Paderborn.
- At either end of the ancient track running along the Langerwald from the north-west to central Hestia we find Teufelskopf and Heidekopf.

There are no place-names suggestive of pagan cult activity which are more than a few hundred metres removed from one of the major thoroughfares of early medieval Hestia. The consistency of this pattern strongly suggests that the place-names identified here are indeed ancient in origin, and form the toponymical remnants of a pre-Christian sacred landscape that was tightly woven around important communication routes and centres of population.

7.1.2 Historical evidence for Hessian paganism

So far I have restricted myself to identifying sites of pagan significance within Hestia, but attempting to discern *meaning* within the pre-Christian landscape is a far more hazardous task.³⁴ We do, of course, have a wealth of information relating to Norse mythology, which appears to have resembled earlier Germanic and Anglo-Saxon paganism in many respects, but we must be very cautious of using uncritically texts that are so far removed in time, place and context from eighth-century Hestia. Many aspects of Norse mythology, moreover, demonstrate the long-standing influence of

³⁴ For a discussion of the theoretical issues, see chapter two above, section 2.1.2.

Christianity.³⁵ Useful comparative material will thus include the essential characteristics of the major Norse gods, but not details of mythology and cosmology, which tend to be more susceptible to change over time.

Fortunately we do have some direct, if fragmentary, historical evidence for the form and nature of early medieval paganism in central Germania. These are the two short pieces of Old High German verse known as the Merseburg Incantations, and the little evidence for pagan behaviour that can be gleaned from contemporary Bonifatian and Frankish condemnations of it. Before continuing, I will declare my assumption that Hessian paganism *c.* 721, aside from the degree to which it was influenced by Frankish Christianity, did not differ in any fundamental respects from Saxon paganism. There doubtless were differences between the regions, for example the seemingly exclusive Saxon worship of the god Saxnôt.³⁶ On the other hand, both Hessians and Saxons worshipped Woden and Thor, and, as we saw in chapter four, both practiced cremation as their dominant burial rite in contrast to the region to the south, where furnished inhumation was the norm.³⁷

The Merseburg Incantations were added in an early or mid tenth-century hand to a single folio of an early ninth-century Fulda homiletic manuscript which also contains a manual explaining the rituals of mass and baptism to a clerical audience.³⁸ Since the two incantations, uniquely among Old High German charms, bear no apparent trace of Christian influence, they are probably considerably older than the tenth century.³⁹ The pre-Christian nature of these charms and their possible origin in

³⁵ Simek, *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen*, pp. 173-174.

³⁶ Saxnôt was one of the three gods renounced in the Old Saxon baptismal vows, along with Thor and Woden. He also appears across the North Sea as Seaxnet, the *Stammvater* of the South Saxon royal dynasty, which indicates the existence of his cult among the pre-conversion élite of that kingdom. Because he does not appear in non-Saxon contexts, and because of the etymological link in the Sax-element of his name, Simek suggests that Saxnôt was a god peculiar to Saxon tribes. Simek, *Die Religion und Mythologie der Germanen*, p. 114; see also Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 98-102. On the Saxon baptismal vows, see this chapter below, section 7.4.3.

³⁷ See chapter four above, section 4.4.1.

³⁸ The incantations are found in Merseburg Domkapitel, Cod. 136 fol. 85r; the clerical manual is fols. 1-21. The most recent printed edition and English translation of the incantations is by P. Giangrosso, 'The Merseburg Charms' in *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. M. Jeep (London, 2001), pp. 112-114, in which she reproduces the edition of E. von Steinmeyer, *Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler* (Berlin, 1916).

³⁹ The charms and the Merseburg manuscript have been extensively discussed. See in particular J. Grimm, 'Über zwei entdeckte Gedichte aus der Zeit der deutschen Heidentums' in *Abhandlungen der königlichen preussischen Akademie, philosophisch-historische Klasse* (Berlin, 1824), pp. 1-14; B. Murdoch, 'But Did They Work? Interpreting the Old High German Merseburg Charms in their Medieval Context', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 89 (1988), pp. 358-369; K. L. Miller, *The Old High German and Old Saxon Charms: Text, Commentary and Critical Bibliography*, unpublished PhD thesis (Washington University, 1963); K. Hauck, 'Völkerwanderungszeitliche Bild Darstellungen des zweiten

the region of Fulda allow us an invaluable, if brief, glimpse into the form of paganism encountered by Boniface in central Germania, which we can consider in light of the toponymical evidence already discussed. In the first Merseburg charm, a group of female supernatural beings called *idisi* are invoked in order to free captives from their bonds and impede an enemy army. The text and literal translation offered here are from Giangrosso's edition.

Eiris sazun idisi, sazun hera duoder.
 suma hapt heptidun, suma heri lezidun,
 suma clubodun umbi cuoniouuidi
 insprinc haptbandun, inuar uigandun! .H.⁴⁰

These appear to be the same *idisi* for whom Desenberg on the middle Diemel was named. Simek notes several cases in Norway of place-names containing *dísir*, the Old Norse name for *idisi*, including Disen, Dystingbo, Dísæys and Disahøyrg. These place-names are noteworthy here because they indicate sites associated with *dísir* that were used for regular public assemblies (*þing*) and cult activity. Dystingbo, Simek notes, means 'settlement at the *dísir-þing*', while Disahøyrg is named for a *hörgr*, an open-air sacrificial altar, that was dedicated to the *dísir*.⁴¹ Desenberg, situated at the heart of the fertile Diemel vale and three kilometres north-east of the later archdiocese at Warburg, may have fulfilled similar functions as a regional gathering place and focal point of religious activity during Boniface's mission in Hessa.

The invocation of the *idisi* in the name of the most prominent natural feature of the middle Diemel is immensely significant, for it proves that they were known and worshipped on the northern borders of Hessa before the Christian period. In Norse mythology, *dísir* was used as a general term for supernatural females, including valkyries and *nornor*, who had a wide variety of functions. They were believed to preside over births and to prophesy the fate of the newborn infant, and acted as

Merseburger Spruchs als Zugang zu Heiligtum und Opfer' in *Vorgeschichtlicher Heiligtümer und Opferplätze in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*, ed. H. Jankuhn (Göttingen, 1970), pp. 297-319; H. Beck and M. Lundgreen, 'Merseburger Zaubersprüche' in *RGA* 19 (Berlin, 2001), pp. 601-605; B. Bischoff, 'Paläographische Fragen deutscher Denkmäler der Karolingerzeit', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 5 (1971), pp. 101-134 (p. 111).

⁴⁰ 'Once sat women, they sat here then there. Some fastened bonds, some impeded an army, some unraveled fetters: escape the bonds, flee the enemy! .H.' Text and trans. Giangrosso, 'The Merseburg Charms', p. 112.

⁴¹ Simek, *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen*, pp. 126-127.

protectors or betrayers in battle, either binding the enemy or leading those who invoked them to their deaths.⁴² In the first Merseburg Incantation, the *idisi* apparently fulfilled the roles of wartime guardians and liberators of captives. When we consider the frequency and brutality of conflict on the Hessian-Saxon borderlands during much of the eighth century, and particularly during the last fifteen years of Boniface's mission,⁴³ the dedication of a major cult site to supernatural beings who were believed to assist warriors during and after battle is understandable.

The second Merseburg Incantation features Woden and a collection of other deities as each attempts in turn to heal a foal's damaged foot.

Phol ende Wuodan uuorun zi holza.
du uuart demo Balderes uuolon sin uuoz birenkit.
thu biguol en Sinthgunt Sunna era suister,
thu biguol en Friia Uuolla era suister,
thu biguol en Wuodan so he uuola conda:
sose benrenki, sose blutrenki, sose lidirenki:
ben zi bena, blut zi bluoda, sose gelimida sin.⁴⁴

Woden, as we have seen, was invoked four times in the Hessian landscape, each time as one of a pair of peaks overlooking a major transit route. In Norse mythology, Woden, like Christ, was a god of the heavens, raised above mortals on high mountains where he sat and regarded the world below. He was the grantor of victory and the god of fury (his name is related to OHG *wuot* 'rage'), the object of a cult of spiritual ecstasy and shamanism.⁴⁵ The second Merseburg Incantation clearly indicates his associations with healing and horses, which are also features of the Icelandic Odin, and the Hessian custom of eating horse flesh that was condemned by Gregory III in a

⁴² H.-P. Naumann, 'Disen' in *RGA* 4 (Berlin, 1984), pp. 494-497; E. Brate, 'Disen', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Wortforschung* 13 (1911/12), pp. 143-152; Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, pp. 62-62; idem, *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen*, pp. 118-124.

⁴³ See chapter five above, section 5.3.2. Only two kilometres south-east of Desenberg is a promontory on the Diemel called *Schlachtberg*, 'battle hill', but the antiquity of the name is unknown.

⁴⁴ 'Phol and Wodan rode to the woods. Then Balder's foal wrenched its foot. Then did Sinthgunt enchant it, Sunna her sister, then did Freya enchant it, Fulla her sister, then did Wodan enchant it, as well he could: if a bone-wrenching, if a blood-wrenching, if a limb-wrenching: bone to bone, blood to blood, limb to limb, as if bonded!' Text and trans. Giangrosso, 'The Merseburg Charms', p. 112-113.

⁴⁵ Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, pp. 242-243.

reply to a report of Boniface in 732 may have originally been connected in some way with Woden worship.⁴⁶

Another aspect of Woden's cult, at least in southern Saxony, may have been human sacrifice. In the same letter of 732, the pope commanded Boniface to punish as murderers those Christians who sold slaves across the borderlands destined for human sacrifice, although he did not state to which particular god such sacrifices were offered.⁴⁷ It is probable that this was an accurate report rather than a formulaic characterisation of pagan behaviour, for the immorality of human sacrifice was not Boniface's primary concern; rather, he desired to clarify the specific punishment for those merchants who had sold Christian slaves knowing that they were to be sacrificed. We should not, however, assume from this particular instance that the custom was widespread and of long-standing in pagan areas. It may be an example of what Carver has termed the 'bow-wave' effect, where certain early medieval pagan customs appear to have been devised or intensified in hostile reaction to the advance of Christianity: at the eleventh-century pagan shrine of Gamla Uppsala, he suggests, 'the sacrificial practices' reported by Adam of Bremen 'were not so much discovered by the Christians as provoked by them'.⁴⁸ One reason to suspect that this was the case in Saxony in the 730s is that, according to Gregory's letter, baptised Christians were apparently being specifically acquired via the slave trade to be offered for sacrifice. The choice of Christian sacrificial victims by the Saxons could have been seen as highly provocative by the Frankish rulers to the south, and thus was inherently confrontational and reactionary.

Of the six other deities named in the second Merseburg Incantation, *Balder*, *Friia* and possibly *Uuolla* also appear in Norse mythology. Balder is almost certainly to be equated with Baldr, the second son of Odin.⁴⁹ Friia's namesake Freyja, meanwhile, was the most powerful of the goddesses in the Norse pantheon.⁵⁰ Uuolla, who is Friia's sister in the Merseburg charm, might have developed into Fulla in Norse mythology, a minor figure who appears as handmaid to the goddess Frigg.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Tangl, ep. 28, p. 50, ll. 24-28.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 51, ll. 18-23. See also Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 243.

⁴⁸ Carver, 'Why That?', p. 7.

⁴⁹ K. Schier, 'Balder', *RGA* 2 (Berlin, 1976), pp. 2-7; Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, pp. 26-30.

⁵⁰ E. C. Polomé, 'Freyr' in *RGA* 9 (Berlin, 1976), pp. 587-594; Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, pp. 89-91.

⁵¹ Simek, *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen*, p. 115.

The first two lines of the incantation suggest that *Phol* may have been a nickname for Balder,⁵² but the identities of *Sinthgunt* and *Sunna* are entirely unknown; Simek suspects an association of the goddess Sunna with the sun.⁵³

The last pagan Hessian deity for our consideration is Thor, who, thanks to Willibald's description of the shrine dedicated to him near Geismar,⁵⁴ is the only one directly associated with Boniface in our sources. From Willibald's account it is apparent that the Hessian worship of Thor focused on sacred groves, and a grove comparable to that near Geismar may have existed on Donnersberg, which is far smaller than the Hessian peaks dedicated to Woden. Neither Willibald nor the Merseburg incantations, however, describe any characteristics of the Thor worshipped by the Hessians, and we can therefore draw only the most cautious inferences from comparative sources.

The etymology of Thor's name from proto-Germanic **Þunraz* 'thunder' suggests an association with thunder and the natural forces of the sky, and it seems possible that these attributes, together with his grove-centred worship, fundamentally signified his connection with strength, the earth and fertility.⁵⁵ Adam of Bremen, writing in the late eleventh century, equated the Thor worshipped at Uppsala with Jupiter and attributed to him power over the weather:

'Thor', inquit, 'presidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat' [...] Thor autem cum sceptro Iovem simulare videtur.⁵⁶

Public veneration of Thor in sacred groves, if he was held to control the weather and influence crops, may thus have been an important feature of the agricultural economy of Hesia. The existence of his cults at Geismar and Donnersberg, at the heart of fertile, densely-settled districts, may be indicative of this.

⁵² Beck and Lundgreen, 'Merseburger Zaubersprüche', p. 602.

⁵³ Simek, *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen*, p. 115.

⁵⁴ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 31, ll. 11-14.

⁵⁵ H. Beck, 'Donar-Porr' in *RGA* 6 (Berlin, 1986), pp. 1-7; Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, pp. 316-325.

⁵⁶ "Thor," they say, "rules in the sky, and governs thunder and lightning, winds and rain showers, fair weather and crops" [...] Thor, however, appears to resemble Jupiter with his sceptre.' Adam of Bremen, *Adams Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. B. Schmeidler, MGH SS rer. Germ. 2 (Hannover, 1917), pp. 1-283 (p. 258, l. 5 to p. 259, l. 1).

It is difficult to say much more concerning Hessian paganism at the beginning of Boniface's mission without straying away from our few reliable sources. Yet our toponymical analysis has presented an entirely new image of the mission territory which Boniface assumed in 721. Geismar, though made famous by Willibald, was not the only pagan shrine in Hessa, and may not even have been the most important one. Boniface and his companions, during their earliest exploration of Hessa, could not have followed the road north-east from Fritzlar without passing between the imposing masses of Odenberg and Gudensberg, upon which Woden may have been actively venerated. If the missionaries desired to head along the Langerwald towards Eresburg, even supposing that the Irminsul shrine was established by the Saxons many years later, they would have had to pass within metres of pagan shrines at Teufelskopf and possibly Heidekopf. Heading north, meanwhile, the route from Kirchberg took them through Wichdorf, possibly an important pagan cult site, and brought them to another pair of peaks dedicated to Woden, at whose foot was a sacred spring. The road from Fritzlar to the middle Diemel terminated at Donnersberg, site of another shrine to Thor. And if the missionaries desired to move among the communities across the river, wherever they went they would not have lost sight of Desenberg. In short, the pre-Christian landscape of Hessa was full of sites of pagan significance.

We can fortunately understand something of the attributes of the gods and supernatural figures with which the identified sites were associated, but almost every detail and most of the sites themselves have undoubtedly been lost. We must also remember that toponymical evidence lacks temporal depth. Although for the sake of illustration I have just presented the sacred pagan sites of Hessa as though they were all contemporary, this need not have been the case. The sites at Geismar, Gudensberg and Odenberg, at least, must have been established before Boniface's arrival, and were probably the first sites where he attempted to put an end to pagan worship. Yet Boniface's mission in Hessa lasted for over thirty years, and in all that time he made no lasting progress beyond the Diemel.⁵⁷ In order to understand the development of the sacred pagan landscape of Hessa between 721 and 754, we should first examine the sacred Christian landscape with which Boniface and his missionaries strove to supplant it.

⁵⁷ See chapter five above, section 5.3.2.

7.2 The early ecclesiastical landscape of Hessa

7.2.1 Early mother churches and the bishopric of Büraburg

The church of St Brigid at Büraburg and possibly the church of St Martin at Bergheim were founded before Boniface's arrival, but apart from the monastery at Fritzlar, founded in the early 720s, and the oratory that replaced Thor's Oak at Geismar in 723 there are no contemporary references to Bonifatian foundations in Hessa. We must therefore turn to the charter evidence and to later patterns of ecclesiastical organisation in the region, the latter of which has been most comprehensively surveyed by Classen.⁵⁸

The only early medieval record of a donation to Fritzlar is a charter of Charlemagne from 782, which survives in a mid twelfth-century Hersfeld cartulary. In this charter Charlemagne granted to Fritzlar, which he appears to have taken under royal patronage in 775 along with Hersfeld,⁵⁹ an unstated number of unnamed churches which he had formerly been granted by Lul, along with 'their ornaments of gold, silver and other material, books' and other appurtenances.⁶⁰ One church formerly held by Lul, the church at Mardorf-Berge, was to return directly to Lul's possession; the fact that the charter was preserved in a Hersfeld cartulary under the title *de Martdorf* implies that Lul then transferred it to Hersfeld.⁶¹ The only clue in the charter as to the precise location of the 'certain properties within the kingdom of the Austrasians... in the administrative district of Raban, Swigar and Agilgaud',⁶² is given

⁵⁸ Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation*.

⁵⁹ Schwind, 'Fritzlar zur Zeit des Bonifatius', pp. 84-85; Wand, *Die Büraburg bei Fritzlar*, p. 117.

⁶⁰ *praefatas res ad ecclesiam, quam ipse archiepiscopus nobis condonavit cuius vocabulum est Frideslar... tradimus perpetualiter ad possidendum cum terris ecclesiis, cum eorum ornamentis auro scilicet et argento vel aliis speciebus codicibus, domibus aedificiis mancipiis accolis vineis silvis campis pratis, aquis aquarumve decursibus et incursibus mobilibus et immobilibus, gregibus cum pastoribus*, E. Mühlbacher, ed., *Die Urkunden der Karolinger*, MGH DD Kar. 1 (Hannover, 1906), c. 142, p. 193, l. 37 to p. 194, l. 8.

⁶¹ *tradimus atque in omnibus indultum esse volumus excepta ecclesia una in villa quae vocatur Martdorf, quam antea habuit, nobis condonavit*, *ibid.*, p. 194, ll. 10-12. See J. Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli: Gestalt und Inhalt', *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 12 (1960), pp. 18-52 (p. 38).

⁶² *res aliquas infra regnum Austrasiorum... in ministerio Rabano et Swigario vel Agilgaudo*, Mühlbacher, ed., *Die Urkunden*, p. 193, ll. 34-35. Compare the apparent use of *Austria* to refer to the area of the former bishopric of Büraburg in Hersfeld's 775 charter of royal protection. *UBH* 5-6, p. 12, l. 15. On these three otherwise unknown royal officials, see H. K. Schulze, *Die Grafchaftsverfassung der Karolingerzeit in den Gebieten östlich des Rheins*, *Schriften zur Verfassungsgeschichte* 19 (Berlin, 1973), pp. 210-211; Hörle proposed that their administrative districts coincided with the archparishes of Mardorf-Berge, Bergheim and Gensungen. Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli', p. 37.

by this mention of Mardorf-Berge, which lies ten kilometres south-east of Fritzlar. The original charter by which Lul had first granted the properties to Charlemagne has not survived.

Both Classen and Michael Gockel have theorised that the *res aliquae* of the 782 grant included a group of churches which later came to head mother parishes within the archdiaconate of Fritzlar.⁶³ In 1085 the archdeacon of Fritzlar held five mother churches: in Bergheim, Gensungen, Urff, Schützeberg and Fritzlar itself (see figure 39). Conspicuous by its absence is the mother church of Mardorf-Berge, the church exempted by Charlemagne, which was still independent of Fritzlar in the eleventh century. The *res aliquas* referred to in the 782 donation included churches of considerable wealth, furnished with gold, silver, various books and additional property, while the mention of Mardorf-Berge, which would later become a mother church, gives some idea of the administrative status involved.⁶⁴

Thus in 782 the only piece of the puzzle we have is Mardorf-Berge, with a vague idea of the overall picture, while in 1085 we see another similar-looking puzzle with a Mardorf-Berge-shaped hole. It is very plausible that the two puzzles are essentially the same, separated by three hundred and three years. The *ecclesiae* which the charter states Lul had granted to Charlemagne before 782 (perhaps at the same time as Fritzlar and Hersfeld were taken under royal protection in 775) must have been in his private possession, and, since he joined the mission at a relatively late date (738), it is likely that he had inherited them directly from Boniface, just as he had inherited Mainz, Hersfeld, Ohrdruf and Sülzenbrücken.⁶⁵ If we can equate Mardorf-Berge and the mother churches of Fritzlar's eleventh-century archparishes with the churches held by Lul, we may therefore have a network of original Bonifatian foundations.

The nature of this network of early churches becomes clearer if we view it in its geographical context. As is clear in figure 39, each church lies on an important communications route leading through central Hesse. Mardorf-Berge, Urff, Bergheim and Gensungen are evenly positioned at 10-15 kilometres distance from Fritzlar, encircling the densely settled district around the crook of the Eder so that no village or farmstead would ever be more than a morning's walk from a church. From a

⁶³ Classen; 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli', p. 37; Gockel, 'Fritzlar und das Reich', pp. 96-102.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 100-101.

geographical perspective, the northern gap in this ring of churches is filled by Kirchberg; the earliest reference to a chapel (*kapella*) here is in the late eleventh-century *Vita Sancti Haimeradi*, but its name and location suggest that it was a foundation of early date and significance.⁶⁶ This is supported by the existence of a late-seventh and early-eighth century *Reihengräber* cemetery beneath the foundations of the earliest church.⁶⁷ If we travel north from Fritzlar on the medieval route towards Donnersberg and the middle Diemel, just over halfway we reach Schützeberg, where a mother church dedicated to St Peter is first mentioned in a document of 1074, by which time it had acquired twelve daughter parishes.⁶⁸

The *Kirch-* element of Kirchditmold and its position on a major Hessian transit route may also indicate an early foundation, and, like the similarly situated Kirchberg, it is mentioned in the *Vita Sancti Haimeradi*. After visiting Kirchberg in the early eleventh century, St Haimerad went to Kirchditmold, where he found a baptismal church and a derelict church, the latter of which he restored to a state fit for worship.⁶⁹ The baptismal church bore a typically Frankish dedication to St Martin, but the dedication of the older church is not recorded, and in the later medieval period was known as the *Heimeradskapelle*. According to local tradition, the position of the now-demolished *Heimeradskapelle* next to a natural spring indicates that the original church supplanted a pagan cult site. Whatever the truth of this – not a shred of historical or archaeological evidence can support it – the existence of an ancient church at Kirchditmold in the eleventh century, along with the later status of St Martin's church as a mother parish, suggests that it belonged to an early stratum of church foundations in northern Hessa.

It therefore seems possible that the central Hessian churches in figure 39 (shown with pre-Reformation ecclesiastical boundaries in figure 40) represent the remnants of Boniface's network of central missionary foundations. The overall coherence of the scheme, a web covering the Hessian heartlands with its focus at Büraburg/Fritzlar, appears to betray a single organising hand dating from some time before Lul's c. 775 grant of Mardorf-Berge and the *aliquas res* to Charlemagne. The

⁶⁶ Ekkebert, *Vita Sancti Haimeradi Presbiteri*, ed. G. Heinrich, MGH SS 10 (Stuttgart, 1852), pp. 598-607 (c. 8, p. 601, ll. 14-18).

⁶⁷ See chapter four above, section 4.3.1.

⁶⁸ Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation*, p. 228.

⁶⁹ *Post haec venit in Diethmelle; ubi cum essent duae ecclesiae, una baptismalis et una vetus neglecta, hanc sibi Haimeradus a presbitero loci istius impetravit ad celebranda ibidem divina mysteria*, Ekkebert, *Vita Sancti Haimeradi*, c. 9, p. 601, ll. 19-21.

network of churches, indeed, is reminiscent of the minster system that Boniface had known on the Solent (see figure 1). Although the pattern in central Hessa, having been established according to a single design, is far more regular than on the Solent, the spacing of mother churches is similar in each case: the average distance between the minsters of Romsey, Eling, Hamwic, Bishops Waltham, Titchfield and Portchester is just over sixteen kilometres; between the churches of Fritzlar, Bergheim, Kirchberg, Gensungen, Mardorf-Berge and Urff just under fourteen kilometres. This suggests that the early minsters of the Solent and the early mother churches of central Hessa administered similarly sized districts. Furthermore, the position of the short-lived bishopric at Büraburg (741 to c. 746) was also an integral part of the scheme, for it occupied the very heart of what one might call Boniface's 'minster network' in central Hessa, and hence recalls the close association of the bishopric of Winchester with the minsters of its diocese.⁷⁰

Finally, the common dedications of Fritzlar, Gensungen, Mardorf-Berge and Schützeberg to St Peter (see figure 44; the medieval dedications of Urff and Kirchberg are unrecorded) and the fact that these churches were privately held by Lul until 775 strongly suggests that he had inherited them from Boniface. The authority of Rome, for Boniface, was embodied in the person of St Peter, on whose tomb he had taken his episcopal vows, and whom he valued as his patron and protector above all other saints.⁷¹ Three further medieval parish churches were dedicated to St Peter in central Hessa, and three more along the course of the Eder (figure 44). The physical relationship of the latter group to the nearby dedications to St Martin is interesting; whereas the churches of St Martin are all found in settlements on the higher ground overlooking the middle Eder valley, the churches of St Peter lie along the river itself. As stated in chapter four, the dedications to St Martin in this district appear to represent the limit of Frankish expansion by the time of Boniface's arrival in 721.⁷² In contrast to the similar dedications of the upper Lahn, they seem to be restricted to areas of secondary settlement, whereas the churches of St Peter occupy the primary

⁷⁰ See chapter three above, section 3.3.1.

⁷¹ See Gregory II's original mandate for Boniface's mission: *per inconcussam auctoritatem beati Petri apostolorum principis* (Tangl, ep. 12, p. 17, ll. 24-25); Boniface's episcopal oath: *Promitto ego Bonifatius gratia Dei episcopus vobis, beato Petro apostolorum principi vicarioque tuo beato papae Gregorio successoribus* (Tangl, ep. 16, p. 28, ll. 16-18); his request of Eadburg that she sent him copies of the epistles of his 'master' St Peter written in gold: *Sic et adhuc deprecor, ut augeas quod cepisti, id est, ut mihi cum auro conscribas epistolas domini mei sancti Petri apostoli... quia dicta eius, qui me in hoc iter direxit, maxime semper in presentia cupiam habere* (Tangl, ep. 35, p. 60, ll. 14-16).

⁷² Chapter four above, section 4.4.4.

settlement area of the lower ground. Since the distribution of central Hessian dedications to St Peter coincides precisely with Boniface's early missionary activity in that largely pagan district,⁷³ the relationship between dedications to St Peter and St Martin along the middle Eder also suggests that Boniface was the first to found churches among the indigenous population (the *Wedreci* and *Nistresi* on figure 38), either before or after the Franks founded churches on the higher ground.

It is apparent from figure 40 that the pre-Reformation ecclesiastical organisation of the upper Eder and Amöneburg district lacked the coherence of the Fritzlar archdiaconate. This could have been due to both later medieval re-organisations and the influence of the archbishopric of Trier in the district before and during Boniface's mission.⁷⁴ The ecclesiastical arrangements north of Fritzlar's medieval archdiaconate date from the foundation of the bishopric of Paderborn at the earliest (799), and, as argued in chapter five, whatever missionary stations Boniface founded north of the Diemel probably did not last long beyond his death.⁷⁵ The permanent extent of his mission may not even have reached the lower Diemel, for the archdiaconate of Hofgeismar was founded only in the eleventh or twelfth century, and was never part of the archdiaconate of Fritzlar.⁷⁶

We can now observe on figure 45 how closely the north-west border of the archdiaconates of Fritzlar and Amöneburg, church dedications to St Peter, the limit of the *pago Hessorum* and the toponymical evidence for eighth-century Saxon settlement coincide. The line thus formed, running north-east from the middle Eder to the lower Diemel, is striking. We know from the reference to the *Nistresi* and *Bructeri* in the letter of Gregory III discussed in chapter five⁷⁷ that Boniface had evangelised beyond this line by 738 at the latest, and had even ventured beyond the Diemel. By 741 he felt ready to establish a stable episcopal system in Germania, which included the bishopric of Büraburg, whose boundaries were approximately preserved in the pre-Reformation archdiaconates of Fritzlar and Amöneburg.⁷⁸ The system of mother

⁷³ There was a cult of St Peter in the Frankish territories prior to Boniface's mission, but it expanded greatly through his influence. See E. Ewig, 'Der Petrus- und Apostelkult im spätromischen und fränkischen Gallien' in idem, *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973)*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1979), pp. 318-354.

⁷⁴ See Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation*, pp. 10-14, 60-154.

⁷⁵ See chapter five above, sections 5.3.1 and 5.4.2.

⁷⁶ Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation*, p. 245.

⁷⁷ Tangl, ep. 43, p. 68, l. 12.

⁷⁸ Classen, *Die kirchliche Organisation*, p. 9.

churches in central Hesse was therefore probably in place by this date, and Boniface may have begun drawing up plans for its eventual expansion into the north.

There may be a trace of the first (and only) stage in this expansion in the surviving mother churches of Hesse. As can be seen in figure 40, the position of Schützeberg relative to its fellow mother parishes and the apparent northern extension of Fritzlar's archparish suggest an attempt by Boniface to push missionary territory from central Hesse towards the Diemel. The new missionary foundation of Schützeberg may have superseded an earlier church at Kirchberg, which was consequently absorbed into Fritzlar's archparish and never became a mother church itself. The apparently ancient church at Kirchditmold may have been founded at about the same time as Schützeberg, and may similarly represent an effort to expand the mission field northwards from the Fritzlar region.

7.2.2 Other early Hessian churches and chapels

Evidence for Bonifatian-period church foundations in Hesse is not restricted to mother churches. Willibald's account of the destruction of the shrine at Geismar demonstrates that Boniface, in at least this one case, deliberately replaced a site of pagan worship with a Christian oratory.⁷⁹ This may have been a general policy that he employed at other shrines, and there is some toponymical evidence to support this. On figure 39, alongside place-names indicating pagan cult activity, I have noted place-names which imply the presence of a former Christian church or chapel. There is, of course, a greater degree of uncertainty in identifying early Christian sites in this way, since chapels were continually established throughout the medieval period and may have influenced the toponymical landscape.

Three features of sites named for vanished churches and chapels can indicate their relative antiquity. First, early churches in Hesse tended to be founded in prominent positions, often on hills or rises overlooking settled districts. Of the purported Hessian mother churches, Bergheim, Kirchberg, Mardorf-Berge, Urff, Kirchditmold, Schützeberg (see plate 11) and Fritzlar occupied visually dominant sites. Second, the two known Bonifatian foundations in Hesse, at Geismar and Fritzlar, were dedicated to St Peter, and, as we have just seen, a number of early

⁷⁹ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 31, l. 26 to p. 32, l. 2.

Hessian mother churches appear to have been similarly dedicated. An elevated site dedicated to St Peter will thus fit the pattern of known and likely Bonifatian foundations. Third, sites which have a clear topographical relationship to a site of probable pagan activity may well be contemporary with that activity, hence datable to the earliest phase of Christianisation in Hessa.

Four sites north of the Eder display at least two of these features. We have already encountered Johanniskirchenkopf, the site put forward by Jestädt as the site of Thor's Oak.⁸⁰ Although this identification remains debatable, that the site may have been chosen for an early church is suggested both by its elevated position on an ancient transit route and by the fact that it directly overlooks Heidekopf, which possibly refers to a heathen cult active during the conversion period. As already noted, Heidekopf is mirrored at the far end of the Langerwald by Teufelskopf, whose name, 'Devil's peak', is suggestive of pagan activity during the conversion period. Johanniskirchenkopf, too, has its mirror-image in the promontory called Simonskopf, presumably the site of a vanished chapel or church dedicated to St Simon, which directly faces Teufelskopf at a distance of just under two kilometres (see plate 8; the left-hand arrow indicates Simonskopf, that on the right Teufelskopf). It may be that the winding trackway along the ridge of the Langerwald, 30 kilometres or a good day's journey long, had a pagan shrine at either end for the use of locals and long-distance travellers, and that early chapels were built on Johanniskirchenkopf and Simonskopf to confront and ultimately supplant them.

The third place-name suggestive of an early Christian foundation is Petersberg, which has all three features outlined above. It is situated five kilometres due south of Donnersberg, at the opposite end of the lower Twiste valley. No church survives on the hill, nor any record of one save the name itself, but its physical relationship to the Donnersberg calls to mind the relationship between the shrine of Thor near Geismar and the oratory to Saint Peter erected by Boniface in its place. If Petersberg was originally the site of a church or chapel associated with the Bonifatian mission, it appears to have been chosen for its physical opposition to an active cult of Thor at the other end of the valley.

Fourth, the name of Priesterberg, 'priest hill', a large rise two and a half kilometres south-west of Eresburg (indicated by the white arrow on plate 9), indicates

⁸⁰ Jestädt, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Fritzlar*, p. 1, n. 1; see this chapter above, section 7.1.1.

the existence of a long-vanished Christian foundation. Somewhere in the vicinity, possibly on Priesterberg itself, stood the Saxon shrine of Irminsul in 772, and its existence may have been the reason for an early Christian foundation on Priesterberg. Since we only hear of the Irminsul and its destruction eighteen years after Boniface's death, any church or chapel on Priesterberg may also post-date the Bonifatian mission in Hessa.

One final site to be considered, already discussed above, is Wichdorf, which lies three kilometres north of Kirchberg. The site does not display any of the features just outlined, but the derivation of the place-name prefix from OHG *wīh* 'holy', its position on the main route north to the Diemel and the dedication of its medieval church to St John the Baptist together suggest that it was a focus of early missionary activity. As already mentioned, whether the element *wīh* refers to pagan or Christian sacrality cannot be determined. If the former, a church or chapel dedicated to St John the Baptist may have replaced an early pagan shrine; if the latter, the site may have been strategically chosen as a place to coordinate and perform mass baptisms such as those of 721/22,⁸¹ and this function led to the adoption of its present name.

Having described the evidence for the earliest ecclesiastical landscape of Hessa, we can now go on to consider the relationship between it and the wider pagan landscape in more detail.

7.2.3 Confronting the pagan landscape

Bergheim, Priesterberg, Simonskopf, Johanniskirchenkopf, Petersberg, Schützeberg, Kirchberg, Kirchditmold, Gensungen – however one entered Hessa from the pagan north, a Christian church was overlooking the road. Of these, all except Priesterberg, Simonskopf, Johanniskirchenkopf and Petersberg survived as important local ecclesiastical centres in the medieval period. In the ninth century, Eresburg and Warburg would become the seats of major churches, later raised to archdiaconates (see figure 40). In contrast to the centrally placed network of mother churches, any chapels or churches that might have been founded on Petersberg, Simonskopf and Priesterberg did not last, and the foundation on Johanniskirchenkopf survived into the

⁸¹ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, ll. 4-19.

late medieval period only because a village developed around it; after the village was abandoned, the church itself fell into ruin.

Each of these suggested sites of early churches and chapels appear to have been topographically associated with pagan shrines: Petersberg with Donnersberg; Simonskopf with Teufelskopf; Johanniskirchenkopf with Heidekopf; and Priesterberg with the Irminsul. The fact that each was abandoned within the medieval period suggests that they were not sited, as were the mother churches, because they were at central points in the settled landscape. Rather, their locations demonstrate the direct and piecemeal confrontation of the pagan sacred landscape with a Christian one. We know for certain that Boniface took such an approach at Geismar, and it is therefore conceivable that he pursued this policy systematically at other locations within Hessa. Clare Stancliffe has shown that Martin of Tours embarked on a very similar campaign of destruction of pagan shrines and temples across fourth-century Gaul.⁸²

It also seems, however, that Boniface had very little success in confronting paganism beyond northern Hessa, which came to form the limit of his jurisdiction as bishop of Mainz. Nor should we assume that Hessian and Saxon paganism were passive systems of beliefs and customs that failed to respond or adapt to the advance of Christianity.⁸³ Indeed, the turbulent final years of Boniface's mission, in which his most vulnerable churches became the targets of catastrophic attacks, suggest that the pagan Saxons reacted in an extremely vibrant and hostile fashion to their attempted evangelisation and subjugation to Frankish rule. The long-term stalling of Boniface's mission at the Saxon borderlands created a Christian/pagan frontier roughly along the line of the Diemel, where we find the Irminsul, Donnersberg and Desenberg. Any or all of these sites may have been established as a consequence of Boniface's success in central Hessa, when those pagan Hessians who resented the advance of Christianity under Frankish protection retreated northwards and drew a new line of defence with their Saxon neighbours, reaffirming and redefining their own 'pagan' identity in the process.⁸⁴

⁸² C. Stancliffe, *St Martin and his Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 328-340.

⁸³ See, for example, the heavily criticised book of Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, in which he treats early medieval 'Germanic' culture as a monolithic entity that refused to adapt itself in any way to Christianity.

⁸⁴ See Carver, 'Why That?'

Boniface's mission field was embattled during the last years of his life, and since Eresburg had become a pagan Saxon stronghold by 772,⁸⁵ any missionary territory north of the Diemel must have been abandoned by that date. In 745, only four years after the foundation of the bishopric of Büraburg, we have the first reference to a serious pagan incursion into Boniface's territory.⁸⁶ Very soon thereafter, c. 746, he seems to have incorporated the bishopric of Büraburg into his own see of Mainz, re-focusing his personal attention on the mission in the Hessian-Saxon borderlands. In 751, apparently fearing an imminent pagan attack, he asked Pope Zacharias whether it would be permissible in such an event for missionaries to flee from their churches.⁸⁷ His fears were realised the following year, when, as he reported to the newly installed Pope Stephen II, more than 30 of his churches in the Hessian-Saxon borderlands were destroyed.⁸⁸

Perhaps Boniface's missionary priests had followed Zacharias's 'healthy advice' and escaped before their churches were burned;⁸⁹ in any case, Boniface immediately set to work directing the repairs, for which reason he was late in greeting Stephen as the new pope in 752.⁹⁰ His roughly contemporary letter to Fulrad of St Denis presents a picture of isolated, vulnerable priests dwelling in remote districts under imminent threat of pagan annexation, who relied on Boniface's personal support to obtain anything more than the basic necessities of life.⁹¹ If we are to localise these priests anywhere, we should place them on the very fringe of Boniface's stable mission territory, in the region of the Diemel. This may also be the district described by the missionary priest Wiehtberht as 'the common border of the pagan Hessians and Saxons' in his 732x754 report to the monks of Glastonbury,⁹² where he claimed to have suffered hunger, thirst, cold and pagan attacks.⁹³

⁸⁵ See chapter five above, section 5.3.2.

⁸⁶ Tangl, ep. 60, p. 121, ll. 4-8.

⁸⁷ For Zacharias's reply, see Tangl, ep. 87, p. 200, ll. 3-8.

⁸⁸ Tangl, ep. 108, p. 234, ll. 15-21. Since Pippin's retaliatory campaign of 753 was restricted to the north of Hesia, this was most likely the source of the Saxon attack in 752. *Fred. Cont.*, c. 31, p. 182, ll. 19-27; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁹ *Et pro hoc, frater, salutare consilium damus. Si fieri potest et locum inveneris, insta ad predicandum illis; si autem supportare non valueris eorum persecutionem, habes preceptum dominicum, ut in aliam ingrediaris civitatem*, Tangl, ep. 87, p. 200, ll. 4-8.

⁹⁰ *Et haec fuit occasio tarditatis litterarum et appellationis paternitatis vestrae, et non aliqua neglegentiae incuria*, Tangl, ep. 108, p. 234, ll. 20-21.

⁹¹ Tangl, ep. 93, p. 213, l. 11 to p. 214, l. 2.

⁹² *in confinia paganorum Haesonum et Saxonum*, Tangl, ep. 101, p. 224, ll. 12-13.

⁹³ *licet valde sit periculosum ac laboriosum pene in omne re, in fame et siti, in algore et incursione paganorum*, *ibid.*, ll. 24-26.

7.3 Supporting the mission

7.3.1 Material support through tithes and precarial land

Through the close examination of toponymics, topography and some charter evidence, we have obtained a more nuanced impression of Boniface's mission in Hesse than has been achieved in scholarship to date. Yet our view so far has been distant, of results and long-term processes, not of the constant negotiations and anxieties that must have occupied a great deal of Boniface's time. The point need not be laboured that the missionaries could not have achieved as much as they did in Hesse without considerable political and material support. Many objects, as has long been recognised, were requested and received by Boniface from his Anglo-Saxon contacts, most particularly books,⁹⁴ but also items of clothing and on at least one occasion cash.⁹⁵

Such far-flung friends, however, could be of little help in the day-to-day support of missionary parishes, cells, and the gradually increasing monastic communities of oblates and scribes. For this, Boniface needed either to establish a system of church estates, or to take over existing estates through attaining control of the Frankish-founded churches which held them. As early as 722 Gregory II wrote to Boniface instructing him on the distribution of church income (*reditus ecclesiae*) in four equal parts: one part Boniface was to keep for himself, another part for the clergy, another for almsgiving and the fourth for the maintenance and adornment of church buildings,⁹⁶ although this does not help us determine the source or extent of Boniface's economic support at this point.⁹⁷ By the 740s, however, the securing of

⁹⁴ H. Schüling, 'Die Handbibliothek des Bonifatius: Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte der ersten Hälfte des 8. Jahrhunderts', *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 4 (1963), pp. 286-347 (pp. 294-327); Greenaway, 'Saint Boniface as a Man of Letters', esp. pp. 40-45; Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, pp. 207-208; Padberg, *Bonifatius*, p. 89; Levison, *England and the Continent*, pp. 139-145.

⁹⁵ Items of clothing were most often sent as gifts between individuals. Boniface thanked Bugga for sending him *vestimenta* (Tangl, ep. 27, p. 48, l. 32); he also thanked Eadburg for the same (Tangl, ep. 35, p. 60, l. 13); he requested a cloak of Abbot Hwætberht of Monkwearmoth-Jarrow in return for his gift of a goat-hair coverlet (Tangl, ep. 76, p. 159, ll. 15-18); and he received two woollen cloaks from King Æthelbert of Kent (Tangl, ep. 105, p. 230, l. 27). During his second sojourn in Frisia in 719-721, Bugga sent Boniface the considerable sum of 50 *solidi* (Tangl, ep. 15, p. 28, l. 2).

⁹⁶ Tangl, ep. 18, p. 32, ll. 11-16.

⁹⁷ On church tithes, see G. Constable, *Monastic Tithes from their Origins to the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1964); J. Semmler, 'Mission und Pfarrorganisation in den rheinischen, mosel- und maasländischen Bistümern (5.-10. Jahrhundert)', *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell'Alto Medioevo. Espansione e resistenze*, *SSCI* 28 (1982), pp. 813-888.

church property and income from interested laymen had become a major concern of Boniface, and this concern centred on church estates that were held *in precarium*.

The *precarium* was a form of legal agreement by means of which the Frankish church had leased out much of its land to secular tenants from the sixth century onwards, and the decrees of the Frankish synod of 742 provide the first evidence we have that Boniface was attempting to reform this state of affairs by having some of the precarial lands returned to the church and by clarifying the legal status of the remainder through a system of uniform rent (*cursus*).⁹⁸ We do not know how long Boniface had been trying to re-establish church control over these semi-alienated estates, but the rapid expansion of his mission beyond the Diemel in 738/39 probably made it a much more urgent matter, particularly since the disruption of the wars had also prevented many of the Frankish élite from making their customary pious donations to the church.⁹⁹ A related problem was that some former priests whom Boniface had stripped of their office and cast out of the church had been using their influence at court to obtain *precaria* and establish themselves as secular landholders; the idea of such men supporting themselves on church property was deeply offensive to Boniface.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ The nature and forms of *precaria* have been subjected to a great deal of debate among historians. Grants of land were often made to churches *in precarium*, meaning that the grantor retained usufruct of the property until death, after which time it would come fully into the possession of the church. The church could then grant the land as a *precarium* to a particular party, often the heir of the deceased grantor; as a means of maintaining the cohesion of hereditary property the *precarium* could potentially fulfill an important social and economic need, and was also a useful way for a church to obtain regular income from lands it could not afford to maintain itself. See Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, pp. 137-145; I. Wood, 'Teutsind, Witlaic and the History of Merovingian *precaria*' in *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. W. Davies & P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 31-52; H. J. Hummer, *Politics and Power in Early Medieval Europe: Alsace and the Frankish Realm, 600-1000* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 78-104; I. Wood, 'Land Tenure and Military Obligations in the Anglo-Saxon Merovingian Kingdoms: The Evidence of Bede and Boniface in Context', *Bulletin of International Medieval Research* 9/10 (2005), pp. 3-22 (pp. 13-21). Among historians, more attention has traditionally been paid to the *precaria verbo regis*, church lands leased out as 'benefices' by the Frankish ruler to his followers, especially concerning this custom's supposed role in the origins of feudalism. See H. Brunner, 'Der Reiterdienst und die Anfänge des Lehnwesens', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanische Abteilung* 8 (1887), pp. 1-38; F.-L. Ganshof, *Feudalism*, trans. P. Grierson (London, 1964), pp. 3-19; Bloch, *Feudal Society*, pp. 164-165; G. Constable, 'Nona et decima: An Aspect of Carolingian Economy', *Speculum* 35.2 (1960), pp. 224-250; idem, *Monastic Tithes*.

⁹⁹ See Zacharias's comments in Tangl, ep. 60, p. 123, ll. 8-10: *...et dum Dominus donauerit quietem, augentur et luminaria sanctorum pro eo, quod nunc tribulatio accidit Saracinorum, Saxonum uel Fresonum, sicut te ipse nobis innotuisti*. '...and when the Lord grants us peace, offerings for the saints will increase in place of those which, as you inform us, the attacks of the Saracens, Saxons and Frisians have reduced.'

¹⁰⁰ Tangl, ep. 60, p. 123, ll. 11-19.

Boniface's attempts at reforming the *precaria* met the resistance of Karloman's circle, ostensibly because the Franks required the income from their precarial estates, many of which may have been held in their families for generations, to continue the border wars against the Saxons, Frisians and Moors.¹⁰¹ The synod of 742 decreed that those lands which could not be returned directly to the church should be held subject to an annual rent of 1 *solidus* per peasant household (*casata servorum*); if the holder of the *precarium* should die, that land would revert to the church, but could be granted *in precarium* anew at the whim of the Frankish ruler; if a church was suffering dire poverty due to *precaria*, it would have its lands returned.¹⁰² Paul Fouracre has argued that the stated annual rent of one *solidus* per household, a considerable amount, may have been meant primarily as a symbolic sum, with the actual rent negotiated in kind on a case-by-case basis.¹⁰³

Boniface viewed the rent of one *solidus* as unsatisfactory,¹⁰⁴ but was barely able to scratch the surface of the problem; in 751 he was still trying to have the *census* increased from the level defined in 742, and had apparently given up trying to have the precarial lands returned outright.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, some of those laymen who did provide Boniface's churches with tithes (*decimae*) were attempting to dictate how they should be distributed, to which Zacharias responded by reiterating that the distribution of income must be divided by the bishop between support for the clergy, almsgiving and church maintenance.¹⁰⁶ By 751 another potential source of income had appeared in the form of Slavs settled on Christian land in Thuringia, and the pope urged Boniface to extract rent from them as well as from their Christian neighbours, although how easily this could be accomplished is quite another matter.¹⁰⁷

By the final years of his life, Boniface was making great efforts to ensure that at least his own foundations did not fall into alien hands. This included not only laymen in general, but also any churchmen not intimately connected to his mission. His request in 742 that he be permitted to appoint an heir and successor (*heres et*

¹⁰¹ Schieffer, *Winfid-Bonifatius*, p. 218.

¹⁰² For this decree of the synod of 743 see Tangl, ep. 56, p. 102, ll. 3-16; alternatively A. Werminghoff, ed., *Concilium Liftinense*, MGH Conc. 2.1 (Hanover, 1902), pp. 6-7, here p. 7, c. 2, ll. 10-19. For the classic discussion of the synod, see E. Lesne, *Histoire de la Propriété Ecclésiastique en France. Tome II: La propriété ecclésiastique et les droits régaliens à l'époque carolingienne*, fascicule 3 (Lille, 1926), pp. 40-47.

¹⁰³ Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, p. 140.

¹⁰⁴ Tangl, ep. 60, p. 123, ll. 4-10.

¹⁰⁵ Tangl, ep. 87, p. 199, ll. 20-23.

¹⁰⁶ Tangl, ep. 83, p. 187, ll. 9-20.

¹⁰⁷ Tangl, ep. 87, p. 200, ll. 16-21.

successor) to his bishopric was granted by Pope Zacharias only with extreme reluctance.¹⁰⁸ After Boniface's death, Lul did retain private control of Mainz, Fritzlar and the Hessian mother churches discussed above, while the squabble between Lul and Sturm over the control of both Fulda and the relics of their master resembles nothing so much as two estranged brothers fighting over a disputed inheritance.¹⁰⁹

7.3.2 Dealings with the Frankish clerical and lay élites

Boniface's frequent interaction with the Frankish élites, both clerical and lay, was one necessary aspect of the mission which he resented, as he often expressed in his letters to his Anglo-Saxon brethren back home.¹¹⁰ In the ninth century Charles Martel had a reputation in certain ecclesiastical circles as a great despoiler of the church, but despite his opportunistic deposition of several Frankish bishops west of the Rhine in favour of his own followers he was an early supporter of Boniface's mission in Hessia.¹¹¹ This may be partly explained by the fact that neither the Frankish church

¹⁰⁸ For Boniface's request, which he claimed had been instigated by Gregory III, see Tangl, ep. 50, p. 83, ll. 12-17. For Zacharias's response, Tangl, ep. 51, p. 89, ll. 6-29. Boniface also asked Pippin to recognise Lul as his successor: Tangl, ep. 93, p. 213, l. 20-25.

¹⁰⁹ H. Nottarp, 'Sachkomplex und Geist des kirchlichen Rechtsdenkens bei Bonifatius' in *Bonifatius*, ed. Raabe et al., pp. 173-196 (p. 193), sees Boniface's desire to appoint an heir and successor as a evidence for his 'Germanic' attitude towards the legal arrangement of inheritance. It may be the case that Boniface regarded Lul in much the same way as a secular Anglo-Saxon lord might regard an adopted heir, one who was not his son but was related by blood.

¹¹⁰ For discussions of Boniface's often troubled relationships with the Frankish clerical and lay élites, see in particular Schieffer, *Winfriid-Bonifatius*, pp. 199-252; E. Ewig, "Milo et eiusmodi similes", *Bonifatius*, ed. Raabe et al., pp. 412-440; Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, pp. 124-126; Padberg, *Bonifatius*, pp. 71-85.

¹¹¹ Charles Martel's later reputation was primarily due to Hincmar, bishop of Rheims between 845 and 882, who was attempting to regain church lands that had fallen into secular hands. In his appeals to Louis the German and Charles the Bald in 858 he blamed Charles Martel for establishing the custom of *precaria verbo regis*, for which he supposedly received eternal damnation. See Hincmar of Rheims, *Epistola Synodali Carisiacensis ad Hludowicem Regem Germaniae Directa*, ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, MGH Capit. 2 (Hannover, 1890), pp. 427-441 (p. 432, ll. 31-34). Timothy Reuter has argued that a sentence from Boniface's letter of admonition to Æthelbald of Mercia which makes a similar statement concerning Charles Martel reflects the degree of antagonism between Boniface and the Frankish ruler: T. Reuter, "Kirchenreform" und "Kirchenpolitik" im Zeitalter Karl Martels: Begriffe und Wirklichkeit' in *Karl Martell in seiner Zeit*, ed. J. Jarnut, U. Nonn and M. Richter (Stuttgart, 2001), pp. 35-59. Fouracre has stated *contra* Reuter that the sentence in question, which appears only in a summarised form of the letter by William of Malmesbury and not in its earliest version, should be considered a much later interpolation. Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, pp. 134-136; also Wood, 'Land Tenure', p. 21. For the version of the letter from the Mainz tradition, see Tangl, ep. 73, pp. 146-55; for the later summary, William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum, The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R. Mynors, R. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1998), c. 80-81, pp. 115-119.

nor the leading Frankish families had yet established deep roots in that region,¹¹² and it was not until the 740s, when Boniface began pushing for general church reform and personal control of the bishoprics of the lower Rhine, that he started treading on influential toes. Perhaps the greatest single disappointment he suffered in this respect was his failure to secure the bishopric of Cologne, which, according to Boniface, Karloman had promised him at the Frankish council of 744.¹¹³

Although Boniface's hopeless struggles against the entrenched interests of the Franks in the matter of the *precaria* may have earned him many lay opponents, his conflicts with certain powerful clerical families were no less serious. The two best known examples are the episcopal dynasties of Milo of Trier and Rheims and Gewilib of Mainz, both of whom had inherited their bishoprics from their fathers and were extremely powerful figures in Frankish Rhineland politics.¹¹⁴ At the roots of their conflict with Boniface were two irreconcilable conceptualisations of the episcopal office: the monastic-centred ideal of Boniface, where bishops wielded limited power and fulfilled a moral function in the secular world while maintaining strict boundaries against worldliness, and the long-established Frankish model where bishoprics could be granted, inherited or appropriated like any other piece on the political chess board, and where bishops, being quite prepared to swap mitre and stole for sword and shield as well as to marry, were scarcely distinguishable from any other Frankish warrior noble.¹¹⁵

¹¹² The early dispute between Boniface and Milo of Trier over the control of missionary territory in Hessa, especially since Boniface emerged victorious, suggests that Milo's authority over the area was more rhetorical than actual. By the late eighth century, the charters of Fulda demonstrate that the concerns of the leading Frankish families were overwhelmingly concentrated in the Rhine-Main region, the Lahn valley, the Wetterau and the Grabfeld, while very few donated holdings in Hessa. See below, this chapter, section 7.3.3.

¹¹³ In 751 Boniface was still petitioning for the see of Cologne, and accused the Franks of postponing any clear decision. Tangl, ep. 60, p. 124, ll. 23-7; ep. 80, p. 179, ll. 27-9; ep. 86, p. 193, ll. 14-20; ep. 87, p. 195, l. 26 to p. 196, l. 2. See chapter five above, section 6.3.2.

¹¹⁴ The essential study on Milo and Gewilib is Ewig, "Milo et eiusmodi similes". See also Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius*, pp. 120-122; Padberg, *Bonifatius*, pp. 71-74; H. H. Anton, 'Liutwin: Bischof von Trier und Gründer von Mettlach. Zugleich ein Beitrag zu dem historischen Wandlungsprozeß im ausgehenden siebenten und im frühen achten Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Saargegend* 38/39 (1990/1991), pp. 21-51.

¹¹⁵ Padberg, *Bonifatius*, pp. 71-2; Fourace, *The Age of Charles Martel*, p. 127; Ewig, "Milo et eiusmodi similes", p. 418. The obvious Anglo-Saxon exception to the Boniface's ideal is Bishop Wilfrid, whose concept of episcopal authority was significantly closer to that of his Frankish counterparts. See D. Pelteret, 'Saint Wilfrid: Tribal Bishop, Civic Bishop or Germanic Lord?' in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Hill and M. Swan (Brepols, 1998), pp. 159-180. Even Wilfrid, however, did not commit the principal acts by which, in Boniface's view, some Frankish bishops violated the sanctity of their office, namely sexual relations and the bearing of arms.

Boniface was unable to make a dent, even a symbolic one, in the accepted Frankish model until the Frankish synod of 747, when he obtained a decree that no cleric should partake of hunting or ‘wear pompous or martial clothing, or bear arms.’¹¹⁶ Yet Hildegard of Cologne was clearly able to disregard this ruling with royal approval when he joined (and fell during) Pippin’s Saxon campaign in 753, and Milo of Trier was killed while hunting wild boar.¹¹⁷ During Boniface’s lifetime his only real success against the ingrained custom of warrior bishops was the expulsion of Gewilib from the see of Mainz in 745, and even this victory may have been due as much to Gewilib making powerful enemies at Karloman’s court as to Boniface’s moral condemnation of his behaviour.¹¹⁸ Little wonder that in a 747 letter to Cuthbert of Canterbury Boniface likened himself to a pitiful guard dog, snapping and snarling but helpless against the thieves who were plundering his master’s house,¹¹⁹ and complained that the Frankish clerics had no sympathy at all for his attempts to spread the Gospel among the pagans.¹²⁰

J. M. Wallace-Hadrill once warned against the assumption, too easily made from the rhetoric of Boniface’s letters alone, that the saint’s attempts at reform were beset on all sides by the hostile and rapacious Frankish clergy, Milo *et eiusmodi*

¹¹⁶ Tangl, ep. 78, p. 163, ll. 23-28 and p. 164, ll. 3-4; see also A. Werminghoff, ed., *Concilia in Francia Habitum A. 747*, MGH Conc. 2.1 (Hannover, 1906), pp. 45-50 (p. 47, ll. 19-20, 26-27).

¹¹⁷ Anon., *Ex miraculis S. Liutwini auct. monacho Mediolacensi*, ed. H. V. Sauerland, MGH SS 15.2 (Stuttgart, 1888), pp. 1261-1268 (p. 1262, ll. 7-9).

¹¹⁸ Boniface’s assertion in his letter to Zacharias that Gewilib, having been condemned at the Frankish synod, was heading to Rome *sine cuiuscumque consultu apud nos* ‘without the sanction of any one of us’ suggests that the ex-bishop had lost whatever supporters he had had among the highest Frankish élite. Tangl, ep. 60, p. 124, ll. 5-8. That other political factors were at play here besides Boniface’s complaints is evident from the general Frankish failure to discipline or expel warrior bishops comparable to Gewilib, while his expulsion may have been otherwise useful for the Frankish ruler in that it allowed Boniface to be offered the bishopric of Mainz as compensation for being denied Cologne. According to an eleventh-century Mainz tradition, Gewilib’s condemnation and expulsion came about after he joined a campaign of Karloman to Saxony in order to avenge the death of his father. He sought out the Saxon who had killed his father, requested parley with him in a boat on the Weser, and slew him in cold blood; upon his return to Mainz he voluntarily surrendered his bishopric at Boniface’s request. Anon., *Vita quarta Bonifatii auctore Moguntino*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover, 1905), pp. 90-106 (pp. 91-93). Ewig remarks that Gewilib’s voluntary surrender of Mainz, which clashes with directly contemporary sources, is an obvious fiction, probably invented by the anonymous eleventh-century hagiographer in order to preserve the reputation of the ancient Mainz bishops. Ewig, ‘“Milo et eiusmodi similes”,’ p. 422, n. 50. We cannot be certain of the reliability or otherwise of the rest of the tradition, but Gewilib’s pursuit of a blood feud under arms would be quite consistent with the martial habits of contemporary bishops such as Milo and Hildegard, and the Weser would indeed have been a suitable place for a Saxon and Frank to meet in truce during the 740s. See F. Staab, ‘Rudi populo rudis adhuc presul: Zu den wehrhaften Bischöfen der Zeit Karl Martells’ in *Karl Martell*, ed. Jarnut et al., pp. 249-275.

¹¹⁹ Tangl, ep. 78, p. 165, ll. 18-22.

¹²⁰ Tangl, ep. 63, p. 130, ll. 2-4.

similes.¹²¹ Milo, with some justification, may have viewed Boniface as an interloper in the upper Lahn and Amöneburg district, which lay on the fringe of the archdiocese of Trier. In the eleventh century a monk of Mettlach wrote a defence of Milo based on the favourable and pious reputation he had left behind in his native diocese, which may serve to remind us of how few alternative voices remain that can challenge Boniface's and Hincmar's conquests of posterity.¹²² There were also many influential Frankish churchmen, such as Abbot Fulrad of St Denis and Chrodegang of Metz, former referendary to Charles Martel, who also saw the necessity of reform and were moving in the same direction as Boniface, if not on precisely the same path,¹²³ while Fouracre has suggested that Boniface's loud complaints derived principally from his own problems in the Mainz region, and should not be taken as evidence for the overall condition of the Frankish church.¹²⁴

7.3.3 Dealings with local élites

Although the conflicts between Boniface and the highest echelons of the Frankish élite are relatively well documented, his negotiations with the principal figures of other social ranks are not. In order to reconstruct patterns of support at the local level we must turn to the charter evidence of the monasteries of Fulda and Hersfeld, but first I shall make some general observations. First, Frankish social and political relationships at all levels were maintained through the continual re-affirmation and negotiation of complex social networks.¹²⁵ Support and loyalty had to be publicly proclaimed, and in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of duties, alliances and personal honour a supporter could easily slip away without being noticed until it was too late. We see direct evidence for this at the highest social level: Boniface won the protection

¹²¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 160.

¹²² *Milonis autem... finis et actus est memoria dignus, quamvis Hincmarus Remorum episcopus perversorem eum episcopatus sui describit*. 'The end and deeds of Milo, however, are worthy of remembrance, even though Bishop Hincmar of Rheims portrayed him as a perverse bishop', Anon., *Ex miraculis S. Liutwini*, MGH SS 15.2, p. 1262, ll. 4-5.

¹²³ R. McKitterick, 'The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany: Reflections on the Manuscript Evidence', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 9 (1989), pp. 291-329 (pp. 317-319), reprinted in idem, *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms, 6th-9th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994).

¹²⁴ Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, pp. 133-134.

¹²⁵ M. Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 93.

of Charles Martel,¹²⁶ and upon the latter's death wasted no time in seeking the support of Karloman, Pippin and the ill-fated Grifo.¹²⁷ During his first visit to Amöneburg, Boniface was probably operating under the protection of Charles Martel when he cast down the idols of Dettic and Deorulf, and he was certainly under it – and in the helpful shadow of a looming Frankish hillfort – when he destroyed the sacred pagan shrine at Geismar.¹²⁸

Letters of protection, however, would have been useful only as far as the sponsor was feared and his authority felt. The local leaders of the northern Hessian and Saxon borderlands must have been in a difficult position until the Saxon rebels were finally pushed beyond the Weser in the 780s, for they were based in territory disputed between Franks and Saxons. At the local level Boniface may have had to deal with an entirely different world of small-scale rivalries and politics, where a leader's decision to promote Christianity would have serious consequences for his community. This would especially have been the case among Saxons, whose religion appears to have been thoroughly entwined into networks of kinship and authority, without the mediation of a priestly caste who could be marginalised, supplanted or won over.¹²⁹ The harbouring of a preacher or – even worse – the building of a church could make the village a potential target in the event of pagan attack. Boniface's missionaries had probably escaped before pagans burned more than thirty of their churches on the Hessian-Saxon borderlands in 752,¹³⁰ but one wonders how the invaders treated the ordinary Christians who were left behind.

The lesser élite of the eighth century, whether Frankish, Hessian, Thuringian or Saxon, were no doubt just as capable as their social and political superiors of devising ways in which they might benefit from either helping or hindering Boniface and his agents. For instance, we know from a letter of 726 that Boniface was

¹²⁶ Tangl, ep. 22, pp. 36-38.

¹²⁷ Boniface wrote letters to the three brothers appealing for support, although only the letter to Grifo survives: Tangl, ep. 48, pp. 76-78; also n. 1 on p. 76. Later letters between Zacharias and Boniface demonstrate his attempts to secure the support of Karloman and Pippin. Tangl, ep. 50, p. 82, ll. 1-4; ep. 51, p. 91, ll. 20-22; ep. 57, p. 103, ll. 17-22.

¹²⁸ Padberg, *Die Christianisierung Europas*, p. 208; idem, *Bonifatius*, p. 40-41. The only surviving letter of support of Charles Martel most likely dates from the time of Boniface's second visit to Rome, made after his arrival at Amöneburg but before the destruction of the Geismar shrine. Tangl, ep. 22, pp. 36-38. It is however difficult to imagine Boniface having any influence over Dettic and Deorulf unless he had already been sanctioned by Charles Martel.

¹²⁹ I. Wood, 'Pagan religions and superstitions east of the Rhine from the fifth to the ninth century', *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians*, ed. G. Ausenda (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 253-279 (pp. 259-263).

¹³⁰ Tangl, ep. 108, p. 234, ll. 15-21. See above, this chapter, section 7.2.3.

accepting child oblates by that date, and it seems that some parents were donating their children on the condition that they be allowed to leave the cloisters when they reached marriageable age.¹³¹ These parents were evidently eager to use Boniface's new monastic foundations to their own benefit, hoping to leave their children in the care of the church until they reached a socially useful age. This could obviously work against Boniface's long-term interests by draining one of his most precious resources, and Gregory II instructed him that oblates were on no account to leave the cloisters in order to marry.¹³²

Although hagiography and the surviving letters of Boniface and Lul allow us virtually no insight into the intricacies of local politics, an examination of later charters may help throw some faint light on the structure of Boniface's local support networks. We have already encountered the single surviving charter which records a donation to Fritzlar in the early medieval period.¹³³ If we look at the wider cartularly traditions of Hesse and its surrounding regions, we can make some further useful observations. The charters in question are those of Fulda, founded by Boniface in 744, and Hersfeld, founded by Lul between 769 and 775.

By the end of the eighth century the monastery of Fulda possessed widespread properties in Hesse, Thuringia, Saxony, along the Lahn, in the Wetterau, the Grabfeld, around Mainz and along the Main.¹³⁴ During the 830s and 840s Abbot Hrabanus Maurus of Fulda gathered all of the monastery's charters into a single collection. He arranged the almost two thousand charters geographically according to fifteen tribal districts, then each district chronologically according to abbot, and assembled them or had them copied into eight volumes.¹³⁵ About a third of Hrabanus's collection survives in later copies, but the fourth volume, which contained the charters of Hesse and Lahngau, is attested only in the *Codex Eberhardi*, a

¹³¹ Boniface was accepting infants (*in infantiae annis*, i.e. children up to seven years old). Tangl, ep. 26, p. 46, ll. 12-17.

¹³² Tangl, ep. 26, p. 46, ll. 12-17.

¹³³ Mühlbacher, ed., *Die Urkunden Pippins*, MGH DD Kar. 1, c. 142, pp. 193-194. See this chapter above, section 7.2.1.

¹³⁴ The primary editions and analyses of the eighth-century charters of Fulda are Stengel, ed., *Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda*, henceforth *UBF*; E. F. J. Dronke, ed., *Traditiones et Antiquitates Fuldenses* (Osnabruck, 1844); idem, *Codex Diplomaticus Fuldensis* (Aalen, 1850); K. Bosl, *Franken um 800: Strukturanalyse einer fränkischen Königsprovinz*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1969); T. Werner-Hasselbach, *Die älteren Güterverzeichnisse der Reichsabtei Fulda* (Marburg, 1942); B. Bischoff, *Die Abtei Lorsch im Spiegel ihrer Handschriften*, 2nd ed. (Lorsch, 1989). Matthew Innes' study of Frankish social relations in the middle Rhine was based heavily on the charters of Fulda and Lorsch: Innes, *State and Society*, esp. pp. 13-43.

¹³⁵ *UBF*, pp. xviii-xix.

stringently summarised copy of Hrabanus's entire collection which dates from the twelfth century.¹³⁶

The monastery at Hersfeld also received numerous donations in Hessa, Thuringia and Saxony during the last quarter of the eighth century, though not on the scale of Fulda.¹³⁷ The survival of charters at Hersfeld is far more haphazard than at Fulda, with almost all charters of private donations having been lost. Royal charters from the late eighth century onwards have for the most part survived as originals or later copies, while the earliest donations to Hersfeld, both royal and private, are recorded in the *Breviarium Sancti Lulli*. This document, preserved in a twelfth-century Hersfeld cartulary,¹³⁸ is a summary, originally compiled shortly after the death of Charlemagne in 814, of the monastery's holdings.¹³⁹

The *Breviarium Sancti Lulli* in its surviving form has a three-part structure, and its highly complex textual history has been analysed by Hörle.¹⁴⁰ The first section lists properties donated to Hersfeld by Charlemagne before he took it under royal protection in 775;¹⁴¹ the second properties acquired by Lul before 775;¹⁴² and the third properties donated by private individuals (*liberi homines*) after this date.¹⁴³ Style and form indicate that the three parts were not contemporary, but were edited and rearranged at least twice before they reached their present form c. 815. Hörle deduced that section 2 was the oldest, followed by section 3 and finally section 1.¹⁴⁴ As in

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. xxviii-xxix. The *Codex Eberhardi*, which Stengel incorporated into his chronological edition of the Fulda charters, has also been edited and published separately: H. Meyer zu Ergmussen, ed., *Der Codex Eberhardi des Klosters Fulda*, 2 vols. (Marburg, 1995/1996).

¹³⁷ The charters of Hersfeld have received far less attention than those of Fulda; the standard critical edition is H. Weirich, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Reichsabtei Hersfeld, erster Band*, Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck XIX.1 (Marburg, 1936), henceforth *UBH*. For a map showing the distribution of properties of Fulda, Hersfeld and Lorsch, see Backhaus, 'Karte 9: Besitzkarte frühkarolingische Klöster'.

¹³⁸ Staatsarchiv Marburg, Bestand K 244, fol. 33v-34r.

¹³⁹ The *Breviarium Sancti Lulli* is published in the first volume of Weirich's critical edition of the charters of Hersfeld: *UBH* 38, pp. 68-74. A facsimile also exists: T. Franke, *Breviarium sancti Lulli. Ein Hersfelder Güterverzeichnis aus dem 9. Jahrhundert. Faksimileausgabe* (Hersfeld, 1986). On the dating and structure of the text, see Weirich's commentary in *ibid.*, pp. 68-70; also Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli' in which he refutes Weirich's belief that the *Breviarium* was added to between its creation c. 815 and the end of the ninth century.

¹⁴⁰ Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli', esp. pp. 19-23.

¹⁴¹ *et dedit idem imperator Karolvs ad reliquias sanctorum apostolorum Symonis et Judae et ad monasterium illud*, Weirich, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Reichsabtei Hersfeld*, 38, p. 71, ll. 15-17. The charter recording Charlemagne's acquisition of Hersfeld is Mühlbacher, ed., *Die Urkunden Pippins*, MGH DD Kar. 1, c. 89, pp. 128-129.

¹⁴² *In isto breve continentur, quicquid beatus Lullvs archiepiscopus acquisivit*, *UBH* 38, p. 72, ll. 19-20.

¹⁴³ *Et istud, quod inferius est, traditum fuit postea a liberis hominibus ad idem monasterium*, *ibid.*, p. 73, ll. 31-32.

¹⁴⁴ Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli', pp. 19-23.

Hrabanus's compilation of the Fulda charters, the sections are subdivided into tribal districts.¹⁴⁵ The *pago Hassorum* appears only in the second section, the list of properties acquired by Lul before 775,¹⁴⁶ and therefore this section is of most interest to us here.

One of the most striking features of Fulda's eighth- and ninth-century holdings in Hesse as a whole is the conspicuous absence of land in the Hessian borderlands, as can be seen in figure 41. Fulda was receiving lands from the bishop of Minden, founded c. 800 deep inside Saxony,¹⁴⁷ well before it received any in the Hessian heartlands, and even these ninth-century Hessian grants formed a tight cluster immediately south of the lower Eder, between Fritzlar and Hersfeld. Of all the regions of Germania where Boniface was active, including the Thuringian frontier with Saxony, Hesse from the Eder northwards is the only district where Fulda had no recorded property.

This conspicuous void could be due to a lacuna in the cartulary tradition assembled and summarised by Eberhard. This is extremely unlikely, however, since the remainder of Hesse is well-evidenced in the *Codex Eberhardi*; we would be forced to assume that an accident of transmission had erased all record of grants to Fulda between the Eder and southern Saxony while leaving the documents pertaining to neighbouring regions intact. Conversely, if this lacuna represents a genuine lack of donations to Fulda in central Hesse, what might this tell us about circumstances in the region? Why, in the generations following Boniface's mission, were the Frankish nobles and local élites who had interests at the heart of the former mission territory not following the custom of their counterparts elsewhere in Hesse and Thuringia by sponsoring Fulda?

We may throw light on this problem from another angle by considering the *Breviarium Sancti Lulli*, which in its surviving form preserves a complex textual stratigraphy. In the second section of the *Breviarium*, those properties acquired by Lul

¹⁴⁵ It is interesting to ask whether the organisation of Hrabanus's cartulary and the sub-sections of the *Breviarium* by region was merely a method employed by the compilers, or reflected the standard archival practice of Hersfeld and Fulda. Without having original charters this question cannot be answered, although, as Peter Erhart has observed, the archivists at St Gall organised the monastery's collection of original charters according to administrative districts from at least 840. P. Erhart, "Carta ista amalfitana est et nescitur legere". The Charters of Cava dei Tirreni and their Evidence for Early Medieval Archival Practice', *Gazette du livre médiéval* 50 (2007), pp. 27-39 (p. 35).

¹⁴⁶ *UBH* 38, p. 73, ll. 15-26.

¹⁴⁷ Erkanbert, the first bishop of Minden (c. 800 to 813), donated numerous properties within his diocese to Fulda. See *UBF* 498-502, pp. 494-495.

and held by Hersfeld before 775, the tribal districts are listed in the following order: *Thuringia*; *in pago Wetreibe*; *in pago Loganense*; *in civitate Mogontia*; *in pago Loganinse*; and *in pago Hessorum*.¹⁴⁸ In his edition of the text, Weirich emended *in pago Loganense* to *in pago Wormaciense*, believing that the double reference to the Lahn valley was due to scribal corruption.¹⁴⁹ Hörle, however, retained the original reading and from the double reference concluded that *in civitate Mogontia* represents the beginning of a second, originally separate, summary of Mainz's properties. The first part, comprising a large number of properties in Thuringia and a handful in the Wetterau and Lahn valley, he suspected pertained to Boniface's monastery at Ohrdruf.¹⁵⁰ This interpretation is supported by the different form in which properties in section 2 before and after Mainz were recorded: before Mainz, the amount of property, measured in *hubae* and *mansus*, is given for each settlement separately, with one exception;¹⁵¹ after Mainz, the total amount of property in settlement groups of varying sizes is given.¹⁵² This suggests that different methods of compilation were used in each case.

Hörle believed that Lul inherited (*acquisivit*) the properties of section 2 upon Boniface's death in 754, and passed them on *en masse* to his new foundation at Hersfeld before 775.¹⁵³ They represent, in other words, the property held by Boniface by the end of his mission. They included plots of land at 33 different locations in Hessa, which I have listed in appendix 4 in the order in which they appear in the *Breviarium* and plotted, as far as they can be identified, in figure 42.

As is immediately apparent, the Hessian properties listed in the *Breviarium* can be divided into five groups, with the end of each group defined by the statement of the total amount of property within it. I have broken down the list of settlements into these groups in appendix 4. The first group comprises 21 properties, from Mardorf to Velmeden, the so-called *Mardorf-Reihe*; the second group is Braach, Breitingen, Bebra and Heinebach; the third is Kirchheim, the unidentified

¹⁴⁸ *UBH* 38, pp. 72-73.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73, l. 8.

¹⁵⁰ Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli', p. 25-27.

¹⁵¹ At the end of the Thuringian sub-section, 11 properties are listed together. *UBH* 38, p. 73, ll. 2-5.

¹⁵² In the vicinity of Mainz, five settlements are listed together; in the Lahn valley, six properties; in Hessa, four groups of twenty-one, four, four and three, followed by the single record for *Niwihusan*. *Ibid.*, p. 73, ll. 9-25.

¹⁵³ Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli', p. 26.

Liutghusen, Ottrau and Gründau; the fourth group consists of Treysa, Grösen, and Wohra; finally comes the unidentified *Niwihusen*, which is listed alone.

If we observe the distribution of these properties in figure 42, we can see that the groups correspond to geographical locales: group 1 in central Hessa (nos. 1-20 in figure 42); group 2 along the middle Fulda (nos. 21-23); group 3 in the far south of Hessa (nos. 24 and 25); group 4 in south-west Hessa between the Schwalm and the Wohra (nos. 26-28). *Niwihusen* cannot be located. Hörle has also noted that group 2 is centred on the later mother church of Braach, group 3 in the archparish of Ottrau.¹⁵⁴

Further layers of geographical arrangement can be identified within group 1. I have designated as group 1a properties 1 to 15 in figure 42, which begin with Mardorf in the south and end with Hebel. They are listed in a clockwise direction, with the minor slip that Verna and Borken were recorded before Sondheim, and they thus form a coherent group in themselves. Properties 16 to 20, along with Velmeden which lies to the east of the illustrated area, are dotted around the fringe of group 1a in no particular order, and I have listed them as group 1b. Finally, group 1a can itself be broken down further according to the mother churches of central Hessa. Properties 1 to 6 and 15 lie within the archparish of Mardorf-Berge; properties 7 to 9 near Bergheim; properties 10 and 11 just south of Schützeberg; and 12 to 14 within or close to the later borders of the archparish of Gensungen.¹⁵⁵

In summary, the Hessian properties which Lul had acquired before 775 show a close relationship to the medieval mother churches of Hessa, which we have already theorised represent the earliest network of missionary churches founded by Boniface. This is most clear in central Hessa, particularly around Mardorf-Berge and Bergheim. Group 1a thus consisted of properties not more than a day's walk from Fritzlar, while group 1b comprised outlying holdings.

The arrangement of the *Breviarium*, although the surviving text dates only from c. 815, has clearly preserved several layers of compilation that we can gradually unpeel. Section 3 could not have been written before 802, the date of the only one of its donations which is attested in an original charter.¹⁵⁶ Between 802 and 815, therefore, section 3 was drawn up and appended to section 2, imitating its form and

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 22; the charter is for Cölleda (*Collide*): UBH 21, pp. 36-38.

arrangement, and a new opening formula was written for the whole.¹⁵⁷ Section 2 must have been compiled in or soon after 775, when Lul had placed Hersfeld under royal protection, for section 3 comprises all donations to Hersfeld after this date.¹⁵⁸ Section 2 was itself derived from two earlier summaries, one associated with Mainz and the other possibly with Ohrdruf, and these summaries may have been drawn up when Lul transferred the properties in question to Hersfeld (after 769) or when he inherited them from Boniface (754). The Mainz summary included holdings in the city and its vicinity, the Lahn valley and Hessa. The Hessian properties were arranged according to geographical location (appendix 4); the largest of these groups was in central Hessa and can be further divided into core holdings (group 1a) and outlying additions (group 1b); finally, group 1a can be broken down into individual archparishes.

We know too little about early medieval scribal and archival practice north of the Alps to draw many conclusions from the multi-levelled complexity of the 'Mainz summary' sub-section of the *Breviarium*.¹⁵⁹ No other part of the *Breviarium* text is composed of so many layers: the 'Ohrdruf summary' part of section 2 is largely coherent in its one-settlement-one-record form, whereas the arrangement of the properties listed after Mainz appears to have included an even earlier summary of properties in central Hessa (the outliers of group 1b appended to the core group 1a). This suggests a considerable antiquity for the donations, and it seems possible, if not demonstrable, that here we have the original land holdings of Boniface in Hessa, exactly where we would expect to find them: at the heart of his mission field. One can also compare the geographical extent of these holdings with the limits of the archdiocese of Fritzlar and note the perfect coincidence. This suggests that the properties of the Hessian sub-section of the *Breviarium* represent those donations of land which, according to Liudger's late eighth-century *Vita Gregorii*, local notables made to Boniface 'for the salvation of their souls'.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli', p. 22.

¹⁵⁸ The opening formula of section 3 runs: *Et istud, quod inferius est, traditum fuit postea a liberis hominibus ad idem monasterium*, UBH 38, p. 73, ll. 31-32. Hörle argued that the central Hessian properties of the *Breviarium* were included in the *res aliquae* which Lul gave to Charlemagne around 775, and which Charlemagne donated to Fritzlar in 782. He found that all of the *Breviarium* properties that lay within the archparishes of Bergheim, Gensungen and northern Mardorf-Berge were in the possession of Fritzlar in 1209, while none were held by Hersfeld. The most likely context for the transmission of these properties from Hersfeld to Fritzlar is provided by Charlemagne's charter of 782. Hörle, 'Breviarium Sancti Lulli', pp. 35-36.

¹⁵⁹ See Erhart, "'Carta ista amalfitana est'", p. 32.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibique coeperunt offerentibus propter amorem Dei et salutem animarum suarum modica loca territoriaque suscipere et in eis ecclesias construere*, Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, c. 3, p. 70, ll. 30-31.

Yet the record of the *Breviarium* offers nothing more than a shadowy glimpse of Boniface's local support network at the original centre of his mission field, for the names and interrelationships of the private donors are unknown. We may add a little detail to this image by turning to the charters of Fulda, specifically to a clutch of lesser notables based around Amöneburg and the upper Lahn who donated various properties to Fulda between c. 750 and 779. The relatively early date of these donations, occurring within a generation after Boniface's death, may indicate that the donors, or their parents and grandparents, had been active supporters of Boniface's mission during his life. Since the semi-pagan district of the Amöneburg basin was an early focus of Boniface's mission, Boniface's long-term relationship with local notables here may have resembled those he nurtured in central Hessa.

As stated above, the fourth volume of Hrabanus Maurus's compilation of Fulda's charters, that pertaining to Hessa and the Lahngau, survives only in the twelfth-century summary of the *Codex Eberhardi*. The charters relating to the Amöneburg district all appear in the first part of Eberhard's summary of volume four, that is among the charters dating from the abbacy of Sturm (c. 750 to 779).¹⁶¹ Eberhard supplied in each case just the name of the donor(s) and the location of the property. The lack of such valuable information as witness lists, familial relationships, terms of donation and details of property severely limits the conclusions that can be drawn from them, but we can make some valuable observations that were not possible from the information available in the *Breviarium Sancti Lulli*.¹⁶²

I have listed all those who donated land to Fulda in the Amöneburg district in appendix 5, and illustrated the donated properties in figure 43. Two features of the donors listed in appendix 5 are worth noting. First, the repetition of the element *Adel-* in the names of Adelbirc, Adelburch (who may be the same person), Adelman, Adelolt and Adeltrud, along with the fact that their properties were almost all concentrated in the middle and upper Lahn, suggests that they represent a kinship

¹⁶¹ For Stengel's discussion of the dating, see *UBF* 105, p. 178; the charters in question are *UBF* 105-121, pp. 178-187.

¹⁶² Due to the limited information recorded by Eberhard in his cartulary, a full prosopographical analysis of the donors in the Amöneburg district is not possible. For examples of such studies based on larger and more richly detailed early medieval charter collections, see W. Störmer, *Früher Adel: Studien zur politischen Führungsschicht im fränkisch-deutschen Reich vom 8. bis 11. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols (Stuttgart, 1973); F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich. Kultur und Gesellschaft in Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung (4. bis 8. Jahrhundert)*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt, 1988); B. H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909-1049* (London, 1989); Hummer, *Politics and Power in Early Medieval Europe*; Innes, *State and Society*, esp. pp. 61-68.

group. The lack of defined familial relationships within the summarised charters, however, means that this cannot be confirmed.

Second, the donors of land in the immediate vicinity of Amöneburg were men and women of local, not regional pretensions. Apart from the *comes* Argoz, none of them held properties on a scale comparable to that of the Rhine-Main Frankish élite. Neither Altrat nor Nenthere and his wife Hadalouch, all of whom granted land to Fulda in Rossdorf, south of Amöneburg, appear as witnesses or donors in the charter of 780-781 by which three counts, an abbess and several of their siblings defined the boundaries of Rossdorf and granted it in its entirety to Fulda.¹⁶³ Another possible indicator of Altrat's modest social status is that Charlemagne was able to assume possession of the Rossdorf property he had granted to Fulda and hold it as a royal estate until 781, when he returned it to Fulda.¹⁶⁴

As is immediately clear in figure 43, both the donated lands and the early medieval settlement pattern were concentrated in the fertile basin around Boniface's early base at Amöneburg. The lands granted to Fulda in the immediate district of Amöneburg were especially concentrated. Of the sixteen properties that can be located, five were along the Rülfbach, a modest stream that joins the Ohm south of Amöneburg, and five of the thirteen recorded donors held land on its banks. The settlement of Rossdorf on the Rülfbach appears in the charters four times, nearby Rauischholzhausen three times, both appearing among the donations of count Argoz and his wife.

Innes has argued that by granting land to monasteries such as Fulda and Lorsch, laymen did not lose the land so much as reconfigure the influence to be derived from it within continually changing networks of power, prestige, exchange and patronage: the church was an important social actor in such dealings, but far from the only one.¹⁶⁵ The fact that Count Argoz's socially inferior neighbours were also very keen to patronise Fulda with lands in the settlements of Rossdorf and Rauischholzhausen might indicate some degree of social aspiration on their part, although the state of the evidence allows no certainty on this point. Nevertheless, we can see that around Amöneburg was a tight cluster of local notables who held

¹⁶³ *UBF* 145a, pp. 204-5; see Stengel's comment on p. 210. Since the charters of Altrat, Nenthere and Hadalouch are not more closely datable than 750-779, it is possible that they had died by 780; the *comes* Argoz, who also held land in Rossdorf, does not appear among the *comites* of *UBF* 145a either.

¹⁶⁴ *UBF* 147, pp. 208-13.

¹⁶⁵ Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 47-50.

neighbouring properties, were doubtless also connected through familial and social networks and who shared a common goal in donating land to Fulda.

If my supposition that both the *Adel*-kin group in the Lahn valley and the landholders of the Amöneburg basin were long-standing supporters of Boniface's mission is correct, observing these particular charters and the distribution of the properties they describe allows us a faint glimpse into the kind of support network that Boniface attempted to establish among prominent local leaders in his mission field. Indeed, the ancestors of the *Adel*-family may have been among those buried beneath the mounds of the Lahn valley. Such supporters were not the equals of the Frankish élite with whom Boniface had to ingratiate himself at court, but their support, whether economic or social, was indispensable for establishing Christianity among the local population. Their donations established or reinforced links between their family and the community of the church, while many of the child oblates and potential future missionaries in Boniface's monasteries may have been donated by such middle-level landholders.¹⁶⁶

Winning the grass-roots support of the most influential local kin-groups, hence ensuring the stability and future security of the mission, must have been one of Boniface's earliest priorities in Hessa. He exploited existing social and kinship relationships in order to strengthen his support base and further the progress of the mission. In 723, according to Willibald, Boniface even set one set of Hessian locals against another at the public desecration and destruction of the Oak of Thor. He enlisted the 'advice and assistance' of those who had accepted the sacrament of confirmation,¹⁶⁷ while those who had rejected it – apparently the weaker faction – looked on helplessly.¹⁶⁸ Clearly, if defying Boniface meant defying both his local sympathisers and his Frankish sponsors, choosing one's allegiance became much more than a matter of religion; yet the very volatility of the Hessian-Saxon borderlands in the early 720s would have meant that the further one was from the Frankish-dominated Fritzlar region, the less clear-cut the choice became.

We have now examined the sacred pagan and Christian landscape of Hessa, observed the fragmentary evidence for a wide-ranging conflict over sites of particular significance, and considered the complexity of Boniface's negotiations with Frankish

¹⁶⁶ Tangl, ep. 26, p. 46, ll. 12-17; see also Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, pp. 142-143.

¹⁶⁷ *Quorum consultu atque consilio, Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 31, ll. 10-11.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30, l. 19 to p. 31, l. 23.

and local élites in establishing the political and material support base for his mission. Undoubtedly, one of his greatest accomplishments was the establishment, within two decades of his arrival in an almost entirely pagan district, of a stable parochial network that has lasted for more than twelve centuries. This in itself indicates his talents as an administrator, negotiator and inspirational leader. Yet, until the very end of his life, he viewed himself first and foremost not as a reformer, but as a missionary who had vowed on the tomb of St Peter to bring the light of the Gospel to the pagan darkness beyond the Rhine.¹⁶⁹ We shall now turn our attention to this most fundamental of his activities in Hessa.

7.4 The conversion of Hessa

7.4.1 Scholarship and sources relating to the missionary techniques of Boniface

Boniface, due to his fame and the wealth of early sources relating to him, frequently appears in general studies of early medieval missionary techniques. The most prominent of these studies are those by Sullivan,¹⁷⁰ Fletcher,¹⁷¹ Brechter,¹⁷² Reu,¹⁷³ Kahl,¹⁷⁴ Old¹⁷⁵ and, most recently and comprehensively, Padberg.¹⁷⁶ There are no detailed contemporary accounts of missionary techniques surviving from the Frankish and Anglo-Saxon territories,¹⁷⁷ and these scholars have relied chiefly on hagiographical texts, historical narratives such as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and

¹⁶⁹ Tangl, ep. 16, p. 28, ll. 16-18.

¹⁷⁰ Despite Sullivan's frequently simplistic conception of the 'typical' pagan mindset, his discussions of a broad range of sources are insightful. See in particular R.E. Sullivan, 'Carolingian Missionary Theories', *Catholic Historical Review* 42.3 (1956), pp. 273-295; idem, 'The Carolingian Missionary', *Speculum* 28.4 (1953), pp. 705-740. Both of these articles are reprinted in idem, *Christian Missionary Activity in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1994).

¹⁷¹ Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, pp. 234-236.

¹⁷² S. Brechter, 'Das Apostolat des heiligen Bonifatius und Gregors des Grossen Missionsinstruktionen für England' in *Sankt Bonifatius*, ed. by Raabe and others, pp. 22-33.

¹⁷³ M. de Reu, 'The Missionaries: The First Contact Between Paganism and Christianity' in *The Pagan Middle Ages*, ed. L. Milis, trans. T. Guest (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 13-37.

¹⁷⁴ H.-D. Kahl, 'Die ersten Jahrhunderte des missionsgeschichtliche Mittelalters' in *Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte 2*, ed. Schäferdiek, pp. 11-76.

¹⁷⁵ H. E. Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church 3: The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1999), pp. 73-142.

¹⁷⁶ L. E. von Padberg, *Die Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1998), pp. 190-197; idem, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontationen*.

¹⁷⁷ In the case of the ninth-century conversion of the Bulgars we have a clutch of letters between Rome, Constantinople and the Bulgarian king Boris which offer valuable insights into the concerns and complexities of converting an entire people to a new faith. See R. E. Sullivan, 'Khan Boris and the Conversion of Bulgaria: A Case Study of the Impact of Christianity on a Barbarian Society', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 3 (1966), pp. 55-139.

catechetical ‘handbooks’. Each of these types of sources, of course, has its own problems of interpretation. Hagiographers of missionary saints, writing with specific agenda of their own, were less interested in accurately portraying missionary techniques than in presenting their subjects as authentic successors to the Apostolic tradition.¹⁷⁸ Historians such as Bede were also far removed in time and place from the reality of evangelisation, while we can never be certain of the extent to which catechetical texts such as Augustine of Hippo’s *De catechizandis rudibus*,¹⁷⁹ Martin of Braga’s *De correctione rusticorum*¹⁸⁰ and Pirmin’s *Scarapsus*,¹⁸¹ all of which saw widespread dissemination in the early medieval period, were followed in practice.

Within those studies devoted specifically to Boniface’s mission, a great deal of attention has been paid to the nature of his missionary community, particularly the female religious who came to Germania in the later stages of the mission (none of whom appear to have been based in Hestia),¹⁸² and the numerous social and kin relationships within the community as a whole and its supporters across the channel.¹⁸³ Padberg has focused especially on the evangelisation techniques employed by Boniface in the mission field.¹⁸⁴

As for primary sources, there is no evidence that Boniface used, or was even aware of, the catechetical handbooks mentioned above, although he did know some of the sermons attributed to Augustine which were of relevance to missionary work.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁸ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 18-20.

¹⁷⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *De catechizandibus rudibus*, ed. J. B. Bauer, CCSL 46 (Turnhout, 1969), pp. 121-178.

¹⁸⁰ Martin of Braga, *Cultura, Relixión e Supersticións na Galicia Sueva: Martiño de Braga ‘De correctione rusticorum’*, ed. J. E. López Pereira, Monografías 39 (Coruña, 1996).

¹⁸¹ Pirmin, *Pirmins Scarapsus: Einleitung und Edition*, ed. E. Hauswald, Diss. Universität Konstanz (Konstanz, 2006), published online at <http://w3.uib.uni-konstanz.de/v13/volltexte/2006/2224/pdf/Diss_Hauswald.pdf> [accessed 29 March 2008].

¹⁸² G. Muschiol, ‘Königshof, Kloster und Mission – die Welt der Lioba und ihrer geistlichen Schwestern’ in *Bonifatius – Apostel der Deutschen*, ed. Felten, pp. 99-114; W. P. Hyland, ‘Missionary Nuns and the Monastic Vocation in Anglo-Saxon England’, *The American Benedictine Review* 47 (1996), pp. 141-174; Yorke, ‘The Bonifacian Mission’; C. Wybourne, ‘Seafarers and Stay-at-Homes: Anglo-Saxon Nuns and Mission’, *Downside Review* 114 (1996), pp. 246-266.

¹⁸³ L. Kilger, ‘Bonifatius und seine Gefährten im Missionsdienst’ in *Sankt Bonifatius*, ed. Raabe, pp. 51-57; also Levison, *England and the Continent*, pp. 76-77; Padberg, *Bonifatius*, p. 50; idem, *Heilige und Familie*; Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius*.

¹⁸⁴ See chapter five of Padberg, *Bonifatius*, pp. 33-52; idem, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontationen*, passim.

¹⁸⁵ In Tangl, ep. 50, p. 85, ll. 8-15, Boniface quotes at length from sermon 278 *De auguriis* concerning the evils of divination, lot-casting and fortune-telling (Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo CCLXXVIII: De auguriis*, PL 39 (Paris, 1846), col. 2268-2271, here col. 2270). In Tangl, ep. 104, p. 228, ll. 22-3, when writing to Gemmulus in Rome, he quotes from sermon 107 concerning the nature of friendship: *licet unus sit in oriente et alius in occidente, conglutinata caritate numquam ab invicem separantur* (Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo CVII: Rursum de verbis Apostoli, I Cor. cap. XIII, 1 etc.*, PL 39 (Paris, 1846), col. 1957-1959, here col. 1957). Daniel of Winchester wrote to Boniface extensively citing

Our sources relating to his techniques of evangelisation are restricted to hagiography, contemporary letters and fifteen short sermons that are commonly attributed to him or his circle. The hagiographical sources include Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii* (written between 754 and 768),¹⁸⁶ Liudger's *Vita Gregorii* (late eighth century),¹⁸⁷ Eigil's *Vita Sturmi* (794x800),¹⁸⁸ and Lupus of Ferrières' *Vita Wigberti* (836).¹⁸⁹ These sources shed varying degrees of light on the organisation of Boniface's mission field, especially the monastic community of Fritzlar, but obviously must be read through a very critical lens. The letters of Boniface and Lul are far more valuable for being directly contemporary, but still have limitations: the most serious of these is the fact that they overwhelmingly comprise communications between the missionary community and the outside world, rather than within the mission community itself.

Important for our consideration here are the fifteen sermons attributed to Boniface which have been much neglected by modern Bonifatian scholars, including Padberg, and are rarely mentioned in studies of the saint. The most recent Latin printing of the sermons is volume 89 of the *Patrologia Latina* from 1850,¹⁹⁰ there is a rare German translation published in 1859,¹⁹¹ and a recent Dutch edition of the sermons by Auke Jelsma;¹⁹² they have been discussed and summarised in English, but not yet fully translated.¹⁹³

The presumed authorship of Boniface was originally based on the fact that the sermons appeared in a tenth-century Mainz manuscript (now lost) alongside his

Augustine's *De fide et operibus* ('on faith and works'), so Boniface may also have been familiar with that text. Tangl, ep. 64, p. 134, l. 35 to p. 135, l. 25; Augustine of Hippo, *De fide et operibus*, PL 40 (Paris, 1845), col. 197-230 (c. 3, col. 200; c. 5, col. 201; c. 27, col. 228).

¹⁸⁶ Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii auctore Willibaldo*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover, 1905), pp. 1-58

¹⁸⁷ Liudger, *Vita Gregorii abbatis Traiectensis*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS 15.1 (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 63-79.

¹⁸⁸ Eigil, *Die Vita Sturmi des Eigils von Fulda: Literarkritisch-historische Untersuchung und Edition*, ed. P. Engelbert, Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck 29 (Marburg, 1968).

¹⁸⁹ Lupus of Ferrières, *Vita Wigberti abbatis Frideslariensis*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS 15.1 (Stuttgart, 1887), pp. 36-43.

¹⁹⁰ Anon., *Sermones*, PL 89 (Paris, 1850), col. 843-872.

¹⁹¹ P. H. Külb, ed. and trans., *Sämtliche Schriften des Heiligen Bonifacius, des Apostels der Deutschen*, vol. 2 (Regensburg, 1859), pp. 107-156. The title is not stocked in any major national or university libraries in Europe, but can be downloaded in PDF format from the Google Books digitisation project at <<http://books.google.com>>.

¹⁹² A. Jelsma, ed. and trans., *Het Leven als Leerschool: Preken van Bonifatius* (Laren, 2003).

¹⁹³ There is a brief English-language discussion of the sermons and a translation of the fifteenth sermon in G. F. Maclear, *A History of Christian Missions during the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1863), pp. 429-431; for a fuller and more recent discussion, see Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, pp. 128-137.

grammar,¹⁹⁴ while the fifteenth sermon appears by itself under the title *Ammonitio sive praedicatio sancti Bonifacii episcopi de abrenuntiatione in baptisate* in a Melk homiletic manuscript from the second quarter of the ninth century¹⁹⁵ and in a mid ninth-century Lorsch manuscript that also contains the penitentials attributed to Bede.¹⁹⁶ A dispute concerning the validity of the attribution arose between Catholic and Protestant scholars in the late nineteenth century.¹⁹⁷ As far as modern scholars are concerned, Padberg describes the attribution as ‘highly uncertain’,¹⁹⁸ while Rau and Aldridge, like Jelsma, are inclined to accept it as valid.¹⁹⁹ Old suggests that, since the ‘barbarous and broken Latin’ of the sermons is very different from the precise and intricate style of Boniface’s letters, they could be the result of a student of Boniface translating a collection of his master’s sermons from the spoken vernacular.²⁰⁰ Although the authorship of the extant sermons is uncertain, they nonetheless appear to be connected to Boniface’s mission both textually, through their continental transmission alongside his *Ars grammatica*, and in tone, in that the sermons are clearly tailored to give simple, prosaic explanations of proper Christian doctrine and behaviour to an audience of recently baptised adults. Since they concern techniques of post-baptismal instruction, we shall return to them in section 7.4.4 below.

7.4.2 The organisation of missionary parties

Only in two cases can we reliably reconstruct part of a group active in Boniface’s mission field: first, the community at Fritzlar in the late 740s; second, the expedition led by Boniface to Frisia in 754. To deal with Fritzlar first, our information is derived from a letter of Boniface to the monks of Fritzlar after the death of Wigbert, their first

¹⁹⁴ The manuscript was lost by the late nineteenth century, but was the basis for the edition of the sermons by Martène and Durand that was reprinted by Migne. Hahn, ‘Die angeblichen Predigten’, p. 625.

¹⁹⁵ Melk, Benediktinerstiftes Melk, Cod. 597, 114r-115r.

¹⁹⁶ Rome, BAV, Cod. Lat. Palat. 485.

¹⁹⁷ R. Cruel, *Geschichte der deutschen Predigt im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1879), p. 28, eagerly attributed the sermons to Boniface, while the evangelical theologian Heinrich Hahn was a prominent critic of this view: H. Hahn, ‘Die angeblichen Predigten des Bonifaz’, *Forschungen zur Deutschen Geschichte* 24 (1884), pp. 583-625. His objections were in turn sharply countered by A. J. Nürnberger, ‘Die angebliche Unechtheit der Predigten des hl. Bonifatius’, *Neues Archiv* 14 (1889), pp. 109-134.

¹⁹⁸ Padberg, *Bonifatius*, p. 46.

¹⁹⁹ Rau, *Briefe des Bonifatius*, pp. 373-374; R. E. Aldridge, ‘The Lost Ending of the Didache’, *Virgiliae Christianae* 53.1 (1999), pp. 1-15 (pp. 8-9, n. 20).

²⁰⁰ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, pp. 128-129. Because of the continuing debate, I have listed the sermons in my bibliography under ‘Anonymous’.

abbot, in 746/47.²⁰¹ Boniface, possibly writing from Mainz,²⁰² divided the chief duties of the monastery among seven named brethren, including two priests and at least one deacon (Megingoz, later bishop of Würzburg). Aside from the abbacy itself, the duties included the expounding of the monastic rule, organising the correct daily offices, teaching the child oblates and other monks, administering the servants (*seruos nostros*), running the kitchen and organising any necessary construction work.²⁰³

There is no indication in this letter of Fritzlar's involvement in the outside world, but it does confirm that the monastery housed oblates, just as, according to Eigil, it had housed the youth Sturm some twenty years earlier.²⁰⁴ Eigil, writing between fifteen and twenty-one years after Sturm's death (779), stated that Sturm spent almost three years preaching among the people of Hessa after his ordination c. 734, and other oblates at Fritzlar may have had a similar career, perhaps joining missionary expeditions to the frontier along with Anglo-Saxon monks such as Wiehtberht.²⁰⁵ Above all, the letter written by Boniface to the Fritzlar community in 746/47 demonstrates the close control he maintained over the central foundation of his Hessian mission field during the last years of his life, and his strong desire that a regular life be maintained there despite the continued turbulence of the Hessian-Saxon borderlands.

Concerning Boniface's final Frisian mission, Willibald carefully named the principal missionary companions of Boniface: the *chorepiscopus* Eoban, four priests, three deacons and four monks, although there was also a support staff of about 40 who may not have been directly involved in evangelising.²⁰⁶ This expedition,

²⁰¹ Tangl, ep. 40, p. 64, n.1, dates the letter to 737/38, but Beumann, 'Hersfelds Gründungsjahr', pp. 9-12, argues convincingly for a date of 746/47. See the discussion in chapter five above, section 5.2.1.

²⁰² By 746 Boniface had assumed the bishopric of Mainz following the expulsion of Gewilib in 745 (Tangl, ep. 60, p. 124, ll. 5-8), and he may have been organising the affairs of his newly acquired see when Wigbert died.

²⁰³ Tangl, ep. 40, p. 65.

²⁰⁴ *Vita Sturmi*, c. 3-4, p. 366, l. 42 to p. 367, l. 6.

²⁰⁵ Tangl, ep. 101, pp. 224-225.

²⁰⁶ *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 8, p. 47, l. 21 to p. 48, l. 6. Following the deaths at Dokkum of Boniface and his missionary party in 754, there appears to have been understandable confusion concerning the precise number of martyrs. The nearest contemporary reference to the massacre is in a letter written shortly after the event by Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury, who mentions the *plurimis domesticis* 'numerous servants' who died with Boniface, but does not give their number. Tangl, ep. 111, p. 239, ll. 25-6. The Fulda Martyrology records that 50 companions died with Boniface at Dokkum, including Eoban and the priest *Adalhard* (called *Æthelheri* by Willibald). Anon., *E Martyrologio Fuldensi*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover, 1905), pp. 59-61 (p. 60, ll. 6-9). According to the *Continuatio Bedae* the number of martyred companions was 53. Plummer, ed., *Venerabilis Bedae opera historica*, p. 362, while the anonymous *Vita Lebuini antiqua*, MGH SS 30.2, ed. A. Hofmeister (Leipzig, 1926), pp. 789-795 (p. 792, ll. 7-10), puts the number of martyred companions at 52. For a

however, was thoroughly untypical in its size, and most missionary parties would have been much smaller. By way of comparison, Richard Sullivan has observed how in both late eighth-century Carinthia (in modern-day southern Austria) and northern Frisia small parties of missionaries, in the case of Carinthia numbering two or three priests with supporting clerics, undertook rotating expeditions into pagan territory, returning at regular intervals to their base of operations (the episcopal seats of Salzburg and Utrecht respectively).²⁰⁷

If Boniface had devised a similar scheme for Hesse, the obvious initial mission bases would have been Büraburg and the monastery of Fritzlar, for these were the most secure and long-established ecclesiastical centres in the region. From central Hesse, small parties of missionaries, comprising both experienced priests and younger, less experienced clerics, could reach the pagan inhabitants of the Diemel valley within a day, spend several more days preaching throughout the district, and return to Büraburg or Fritzlar without requiring a permanent base in the north. As the Christianisation of the borderlands progressed, the maximum reach of the missionaries could be pushed ever farther into the Hessian-Saxon borderlands. Thus the possibly Bonifatian church or chapel of St John the Baptist at Wichdorf would have been well-situated as a baptismal centre for central-north Hesse, while churches at Schützeberg and Kirchditmold would have given missionary parties easy access to Saxon communities on the far side of the Diemel. The account of Wichtberht of Glastonbury, indeed, seems to describe exactly this type of itinerant missionary activity in the borderlands.²⁰⁸

7.4.3 Pre-baptismal instruction

In his letter to the monks of Glastonbury, Wichtberht does not describe the precise nature of his preaching among the pagan Hessians and Saxons, except to request prayers from his distant brethren that '*utterance may be given us in the opening of our mouth, and the fruits of our labour might be permanent.*'²⁰⁹ In its silence concerning

comparative discussion of the portrayals of Boniface's death in the various *vitae Bonifatii*, see M.-A. Aris, 'Erzähltes Sterben: Der Tod des Bonifatius im Spiegel der Bonifatiusviten' in *Bonifatius*, ed. by Imhof and Stasch, pp. 111-126.

²⁰⁷ Sullivan, 'The Carolingian missionary', p. 709.

²⁰⁸ Tangl, ep. 101, pp. 224-225.

²⁰⁹ *orate 'pro nobis, ut detur nobis sermo in aperione oris'* (Eph. 6:19) *et permanentia in opere ac fructus*, *ibid.*, p. 224, ll. 27-28.

the material and techniques of missionary preaching, this letter, despite having been written by someone directly involved in such activity, is typical of our sources. The letter that Daniel of Winchester wrote to Boniface at the beginning of his Hessian mission is less typical, indeed unique.²¹⁰ Daniel not only imagined Boniface engaged in extended theological debate with pagans, but offered plentiful advice on how to win them over. The discourse imagined by Daniel centred on the nature of the pagan and Christian gods (primarily their origin),²¹¹ the material benefits to be won from conversion to Christianity and the general superiority of Christian civilisation.²¹²

Historians have often viewed Daniel's letter as a naive, derivative literary fantasy that was of limited relevance to missionary work, and Padberg supposes that Daniel's abstract theological meanderings, though perhaps of some use to preachers, were 'on an intellectual level [that] would hardly have been suitable for the horizons of simple people.'²¹³ It is true that Daniel was writing from the point of view of older Mediterranean writers, but, as Fletcher points out, the very fact of the letter's preservation implies that it was found to be of some use,²¹⁴ while Boniface's ownership of a copy of Agnellus's *De ratione fidei*, a sixth-century defence of the Catholic faith against Arianism found in the so-called Ragyndrudis Codex,²¹⁵ suggests that he found some use for a text which gave a careful explication of the origin and nature of the Trinity.²¹⁶ We should also be wary of the assumption that pre-literate pagans were necessarily incapable of theological abstraction.

One insight of Daniel's letter that is especially relevant to our reconstruction of the context of Boniface's mission in Hessa is his equation of religious difference with political confrontation. He wrote:

Hoc quoque inferendum: Si omnipotentes sunt dii et benefici et iusti, non solum suos remunerant cultores, verum etiam puniunt contemptores. Et si haec

²¹⁰ Tangl, ep. 23, pp. 38-41.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 39, l. 5 to p. 40, l. 12.

²¹² Ibid., p. 40, ll. 5-12.

²¹³ 'Das klingt nach abstrakter Diskussion auf intellectuellem Niveau und wird dem Horizont einfacher Leute kaum entsprochen haben.' Padberg, *Bonifatius*, p. 45; see also idem, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontationen*, pp. 322-327. For the similar view of Schieffer, see *Winfried-Bonifatius*, p. 147.

²¹⁴ Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, p. 242.

²¹⁵ Fulda, Landesbibliothek, Cod. Bonifatianus 2, fol. 34v-39v.

²¹⁶ See J. Huhn, 'Der Agnellus-Brief *De ratione fidei* nach einer Handschrift im Codex Bonifatianus II' in *Sankt Bonifatius*, ed. by Raabe and others, pp. 102-138.

utraque temporaliter faciunt, cur ergo parcunt christianis totum pene orbem ab eorum cultura avertentibus idolaque evertentibus?²¹⁷

Such observations would have meant something to Hessians living on the militarised fringe of Frankish territory, especially after Boniface's demolition of Thor's Oak at Geismar in 723 dramatically illustrated the temporal superiority of Frankish-sponsored Christianity over Hessian paganism. As we saw above, Boniface and his missionaries appear to have followed a policy of confronting pagan shrines across Hesse, not merely in the Fritzlar region. For those communities who were some distance removed from Geismar, the destruction of their local shrine could have had the same impact as the destruction of Thor's Oak had had on the central Hessians.

Once the leaders of a local community had demonstrated their willingness to accept baptism, the process of pre-baptismal instruction could begin. No source outlines the nature of the catechism devised by Boniface for his mission field, and, as already noted, there is no evidence that he used any of the catechetical handbooks known in the early medieval period. Nor do we know how closely, if at all, he employed the intricate seven-stage catechism that preceded Easter baptism in the Roman rite.²¹⁸ The surviving letters, however, do give us some idea of what he regarded as the essential knowledge and understanding of the baptismal candidate. Where the question of baptism arises in the letters, it is generally in connection to people who had been baptised by morally compromised priests, or by priests who were guilty of sacrificing to pagan gods. In such cases, Boniface's chief concern tended to be whether or not the Trinity had been correctly invoked during the ritual.²¹⁹

Boniface's view of the importance of the trinitarian invocation was no different in principle to that of the Pope and other supporters of Roman orthodoxy, although his need for grammatical accuracy in the baptismal formula was pedantic

²¹⁷ 'This point is also to be made: if the gods are all-powerful, beneficent, and just, they not only reward their worshippers but punish those who reject them. If, then, they do this in temporal matters, how is it that they spare us Christians who are turning almost the whole earth away from their worship and overthrowing their idols?' Tangl, ep. 23, p. 40, ll. 20-24; trans. Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 27.

²¹⁸ On these seven *scrutinia* that preceded baptism, see A. Angenendt, 'Der Taufritus im frühen Mittelalter' in *Segni et riti nella chiesa altomedioevale occidentale*, *SSCI* 33 (Spoleto, 1987), pp. 275-321 (pp. 275-279).

²¹⁹ Tangl, ep. 80, p. 175, ll. 3-12.

even by the standards of his peers.²²⁰ As long as the priest had invoked the Trinity and annointed the catechuminate, the baptised person was a member of the Christian family – *unus Dominus, una fides, unum baptisma*,²²¹ as Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians – and God’s Grace could be neither revoked nor regranted. There was more to the ritual of baptism than the invocation of the Trinity, though, as is shown in a case from 726 where a Hessian or Thuringian priest had baptised individuals without the standard interrogation of faith.²²² These baptisms remained valid, but Pope Gregory urged Boniface to ensure that the new Christians understood what their profession entailed.

Although Boniface customarily invoked the Trinity in Latin when baptising in Germania,²²³ the baptismal oaths themselves must have been given in the vernacular. The closest example of a baptismal formula to the context of Boniface’s mission is the late eighth-century Old Saxon text of the *Abrenuntio diaboli*,²²⁴ which may have been adapted from an Old High German formula used by Boniface and his missionaries in Hessa and Thuringia. The *Abrenuntio* falls into two parts, with the first three questions and responses confirming the rejection of the Devil (the Latin loan-word *diabolae* is used), of devil worship (*diabolgelda*) and of the Devil’s works (*diaboles uuercum*),²²⁵ following which, in an addition to the standard trinitarian formula,

²²⁰ In 739 Pope Gregory III advised Boniface that Bavarian baptisms where the Trinity had been invoked in the vernacular were valid, but that he should confirm the baptised individuals to be sure. Tangl, ep. 45, p. 73, ll. 4-7. One cannot help but wonder whether Boniface nonetheless directed all Bavarian priests to use Latin in their baptismal formulas even where they had no command of the tongue, for seven years later he had to order the re-baptism of all those who had been baptised by an illiterate priest who gave a grammatically faulty Latin invocation of the Trinity. The priests Virgilius and Sedonius appealed to Pope Zachary against Boniface’s command, and the pope supported them. Tangl, ep. 68, pp. 140-141. See also Angenendt, ‘Der Taufritus’, pp. 290-291, 299-300; P. Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200 - c. 1150* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. pp. 185-220; K. Guenther, *Defining and Shaping the Moral Self in the Ninth Century: Evidence from the Baptismal Tracts and the Reception of Augustine’s De Trinitate*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of York, 2006); S. A. Keefe, *Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire, 1: A Study of Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN, 2002), esp. pp. 1-9.

²²¹ Eph. 4:5. Cf. Pope Gregory II to Boniface in Tangl, ep. 26, p. 46, l. 24: *unus Deus, una fides, unum baptisma*.

²²² *Enimvero quosdam baptizatos absque interrogatione simbuli ab adulteris et indignis presbiteris fassus es*, ‘You mention also that some have been baptized by adulterous or unworthy priests without being questioned whether they believe, as is the ritual’, Tangl, ep. 26, p. 46, ll. 18-26; trans. Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 32.

²²³ Not until he began his reform of the Bavarian church c. 736 did Boniface encounter priests invoking the Trinity in the vernacular during baptism, which suggests that he instructed his own priests in Hessa and Thuringia to use Latin. Tangl, ep. 45, p. 73, ll. 4-7.

²²⁴ Anon., *Interrogationes et responsiones baptismales*, ed. A. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1 (Hannover, 1883), p. 222. The manuscript in which the *Abrenuntio diaboli* is preserved is Rome, BAV, Cod. Lat. Palat. 577, fol. 6v; see Bischoff, ‘Paläolgraphische Fragen’, pp. 109-111.

²²⁵ Both Eggers and Green have remarked that Old English made virtually no discernible impact on the continental Germanic languages in the area of Christian terminology. It appears that the Anglo-Saxon

Thunaer, Woden and *Saxnote* are rejected by name. The second part is an affirmation of belief in each member of the Trinity, *fadaer, suno* and *halogan gast*.²²⁶

The baptismal oath was supposed to be a pivot in the life of the convert, the moment where ‘the old man’ was put off and ‘the new Christ’ was put on.²²⁷ The newly baptised were to understand that they were not merely converting, but diverting: the acceptance of Christ necessarily involved the reconceptualisation and rejection of the old ways, and in the case of the Saxons this was reinforced by the naming of their three principal gods. For a full understanding of the baptismal oath, therefore, the Hessian catechumenate had to be taught that the indigenous gods were not gods at all, but malevolent demons – this they had been hearing since the very first addresses of the missionaries – and they also needed to know something about the nature of the Trinity; Boniface’s copy of Agnellus’s *De ratione fidei* would have proved useful here. In other words, they did not need to know very much about Christianity at all.

7.4.4 Post-baptismal instruction and the sacrament of confirmation

There is no doubt that Boniface desired every Christian to be as thoroughly instructed in matters of correct behaviour and belief as possible. Yet there may not always have been time to organise instruction on a sufficient scale when large numbers of people were to be baptised at once, for example in central Hesse in 721/22,²²⁸ and on the

missionaries merely adopted the Christian vocabulary that had already been established in the Frankish, Old High German-speaking areas of the Rhine, which in turn implies that the Franks had been more active in evangelisation than the Bonifatian hagiography suggests. H. Egger, ‘Die Annahme des Christentums im Spiegel der deutschen Sprachgeschichte’ in *Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte*, ed. Schäferdiek, pp. 466-504 (pp. 498-499); D. H. Green, ‘The Influence of the Merovingian Franks on the Christian Vocabulary of German’ in *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. I. N. Wood (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 343-359; idem, *Language and History*, pp. 355-356.

²²⁶ Anon., *Interrogationes et responsiones baptismales*, p. 222.

²²⁷ Cf. Gregory II’s command to the Old Saxons, alluding to Col. 3:9-10: *Expoliare ergo vos veterum hominem et induite Christum novum*, Tangl, ep. 21, p. 36, ll. 4-5.

²²⁸ See Willibald’s claim in his *Vita Bonifatii* that Boniface baptised ‘many thousands’ soon after he arrived in Hesse: *Multisque milibus hominum expurgata paganica vetustate baptizatis, Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, p. 27, ll. 8-9. Willibald’s account is supported by an optimistic letter of 724 from Gregory II to Boniface, in which he congratulated Boniface on his progress: *praedicationis praeconio populum infidelium, ut innotuisti, audivimus converti [...] Hinc enim nobis merces copiosa credimus quod ab omnipotente Domino adscribatur in caelo*, Tangl, ep. 24, p. 42, ll. 9-10.

Saxon borderlands in 738/39.²²⁹ Padberg has defined three fundamental features of Boniface's perception of himself as a missionary preacher: first, his dense familiarity with Biblical sources; second, his unremitting desire to promulgate the decrees of God; third, his recognition of the importance of post-baptismal teaching and ecclesiastical structures free of moral and doctrinal corruption.²³⁰ Nothing illustrates Boniface's emphasis on the importance of thoroughly instructing recent converts better than his promotion and promulgation of the rite of confirmation by the laying-on of hands.

As already discussed in chapter three,²³¹ performing itinerant post-baptismal confirmations was, in the view of Bede, one of the fundamental duties of Anglo-Saxon bishops.²³² Such a custom was an integral part of the Roman baptismal rite by the fifth century, but was largely ignored by the Frankish church until the Anglo-Saxon missionaries, most of all Boniface, introduced it.²³³ According to Willibald, the first thing Boniface did upon returning to Hessa as a newly consecrated bishop in 723 was confirm those whom he had baptised over the previous two years.²³⁴ Confirmation, not baptism, thus defined the crucial dramatic moment in Boniface's early mission; many of those Hessians who had willingly accepted the first sacrament balked at the second,²³⁵ and local society had become split according to religious (and perhaps political) affiliation. Upon witnessing the miraculous destruction of the Oak of Thor by a godly breath of wind, so claimed Willibald, the Hessian apostates at

²²⁹ See Gregory III's acknowledgement that Boniface had freed 'as many as one hundred thousand souls from the power of the pagans': *Deus noster de potestate paganorum liberavit et ad centum milia animas in sinu sanctae matris ecclesiae... aggregare dignatus est*, Tangl, ep. 45, p. 72, ll. 3-5.

²³⁰ Padberg, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontationen*, p. 337. Padberg bases his conclusions on Boniface's letter of 747 to Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury, in which Boniface deliberated at length on the nature his own role as a servant of the church. Tangl, ep. 78, pp. 161-170.

²³¹ See chapter three above, section 3.3.2.

²³² Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, p. 410.

²³³ Angenendt, *Geschichte der Religiosität im Mittelalter*, pp. 471-473; idem, 'Der Taufritus', pp. 309-313; Garrison, 'The Franks as the New Israel?', p. 138. The Frankish rite of anointing the hands of priests and bishops at their consecration, the earliest liturgical sources for which are early eighth-century in date, also appears to be Insular in origin. See Kleinheyer, *Die Priesterweihe im römischen Ritus*, pp. 86-87. On the possible influence of post-baptismal anointing on Carolingian royal anointing rituals, see Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed', pp. 149-153.

²³⁴ *Hessorum iam multi, catholica fide subditi ac septiformis spiritus gratia confirmati, manus inpositionem acciperunt, Vita Bonifatii.*, p. 30, l. 19 to p. 31, l. 1.

²³⁵ *alii quidem, nondum animo confortati, intemeratae fidei documenta integre percipere rennuerunt*, *ibid.*, p. 30, ll. 1-3.

once realised the error of their ways.²³⁶ We may be forgiven for suspecting that the reality was not quite so simple.

Willibald was writing forty or so years after the event, but Gregory III's promotion of Boniface to archbishop in 732, along with the specific instruction that he should ordain more bishops to cover his mission field, may have been prompted by Boniface's intention to apply the sacrament of confirmation across a wider territory than he could manage alone.²³⁷ That Boniface sought to introduce the rite of post-baptismal confirmation as standard practice in the Frankish church is apparent from its appearance ten years later in the decrees of the *Concilium Germanicum*, which could only be due to his influence. The decree in question stated that bishops, according to canon law, were to perform the regular laying-on of hands at settlements throughout their dioceses.²³⁸ This practice was clearly derived from a custom similar to that desired by Bede to be uniformly implemented in Northumbria,²³⁹ but which, judging from its introduction in Francia by Boniface, was known in early eighth-century Wessex as well.

If we wish to know something of the contents of Boniface's post-baptismal teaching, we can turn to the fifteen sermons discussed above, which, if not written by Boniface himself, at least originated in the context of his Germanic mission field. The titles of the sermons are as follows (below I give the English titles used by Old):²⁴⁰

1. *De fide recta*²⁴¹
2. *De origine humanae conditionis*²⁴²
3. *De gemina iustitiae operatione*²⁴³
4. *De octo beatitudinibus evangelicis*²⁴⁴
5. *De fide et operibus dilectionis*²⁴⁵

²³⁶ *Quo viso, prius devotantes pagani etiam versa vice benedictionem Domino, pristina abiecta maledictione, credentes reddiderunt*, *ibid.*, ll. 23-26.

²³⁷ Tangl, ep 28, p. 50, ll. 3-10. See Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, pp. 179-184; Angenendt, 'Der Taufritus', pp. 312-313.

²³⁸ *Et quandocumque iure canonico episcopus circumeat parochiam populos ad confirmandos, presbiter semper paratus sit ad suscipiendum episcopum cum collectione et adiutorio populi, qui ibi confirmari debet*, Tangl, ep. 56, p. 100, ll. 10-13.

²³⁹ Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, p. 410.

²⁴⁰ Old, *The Reading and the Preaching of the Scriptures*, p. 129.

²⁴¹ On the true faith. Anon., *Sermones*, PL 89, col. 843C-845B.

²⁴² On the origin of the human condition. *Ibid.*, col. 845C-847D.

²⁴³ On justice toward God and justice toward our neighbors. *Ibid.*, col. 847D-850B.

²⁴⁴ On the eight Beatitudes. *Ibid.*, col. 850B-852B.

²⁴⁵ On faith and good works. *Ibid.*, col. 852B-855A.

6. *De capitalibus peccatis et praecipuis Dei praeceptis*²⁴⁶
7. *De fide et caritate*²⁴⁷
8. *Qualiter hic vivatur, qualiter in futurum vivendum sit*²⁴⁸
9. *Qui actus sint omni studio evitandi, et qui tot virium instantia sectandi*²⁴⁹
10. *De incarnatione filii Dei et humani generis reparatione*²⁵⁰
11. *De duobus regnis a Deo statutis*²⁵¹
12. *Exhortatio de jejuniis quadragesimae*²⁵²
13. *Quare jejunia quadragesimae magis aliis jejuniis veneranda sit*²⁵³
14. *In die solemnitatis paschalis*²⁵⁴
15. *De abrenuntiatione in baptisate*²⁵⁵

The sermons are repetitive and written in straightforward, unimaginative language. Theological matters are not expanded upon, lengthy Biblical citations are rare, and no allegories are employed. In the opinion of Old, they resemble rough reproductions of sermons delivered over several weeks rather than a coherent series in themselves, while the focus of the final four suggests that the sermons as a whole were delivered around Lent for the edification of recent converts who were being recalled to their baptismal vows.²⁵⁶

The suitability of the sermon's teachings for a lay audience still prone to pre-Christian beliefs and customs is clear, while the author appears to assume that the listeners were baptised as adults, hence were first-generation Christians. Overwhelmingly the emphasis is on behaviour, not belief, although in sermon fifteen, *De abrenuntiatione in baptisate*, the standard list of wicked deeds from the 'Way of Death' of the *Didache*, pride, idolatry, murder, perjury and so on, is supplemented by 'belief in witches and werewolves.'²⁵⁷ The ditches dug around settlements (*sulci circa*

²⁴⁶ On the worst sins and the most important teachings of God. Ibid., col. 855B-856C.

²⁴⁷ On faith and love. Ibid., col. 856D-858A.

²⁴⁸ On the quality of life here below and on the quality of the life to come. Ibid., col. 858A-860A.

²⁴⁹ What must be avoided if we are to please God. Ibid., col. 860A-862A.

²⁵⁰ On the incarnation of the Son of God and the redemption of man. Ibid., col. 862A-863C.

²⁵¹ On the two kingdoms. Ibid., col. 863C-864D.

²⁵² Exhortation to keep the Lenten fast. Ibid., col. 865A-864D.

²⁵³ Why the Lenten fast is so important. Ibid., col. 867A-868B.

²⁵⁴ A sermon for Easter. Ibid., col. 868B-870A.

²⁵⁵ On the baptismal renunciation. Ibid., col. 870A-872A.

²⁵⁶ Old, *The Reading and the Preaching of the Scriptures*, p. 130.

²⁵⁷ *strigas et fictos lupos credere*. Anon., *Sermones*, PL 89, col. 870. Classical Latin *striga* or *strix* refers to a type of supernatural creature, a metamorphic screeching bat that fed on human flesh and blood and is one root of the later medieval superstitions surrounding witches (cf. Romanian *strigă*,

villas) that were condemned in the *Indiculus superstitionum* may have been intended to defend against such supernatural beasts as these,²⁵⁸ and thus we return to behaviour: in some cases, behaviour was very hard to alter unless belief was altered first. In this sermon we also see the same formulaic condemnation of *incantationes et sortilegos* that Pope Gregory III expressed to the peoples of Germania in 738,²⁵⁹ and that appears in both the *Indiculus superstitionum*²⁶⁰ and the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*.²⁶¹ Clearly the audience of the sermons would have had a long way to go to meet Boniface's standards.

In 726, three years after the first confirmations in Hessa took place, Gregory II replied to a query of Boniface that it was not proper to place two or three chalices on the altar when celebrating mass.²⁶² Quite why Boniface was doing this is unclear, but, considering that he appears to have gained a great many converts very rapidly during his early years in Hessa, the reason may have been that the sheer size of his congregations was overwhelming his limited missionary staff. A shortage of competent missionary priests was still a serious problem twenty-five years later, when Boniface wrote a letter to Archbishop Egbert of York concerning a priest who had been punished for having sexual relations, but had been restored to his office and was living 'in an exceedingly large district of believers'.²⁶³ The priest was apparently ministering to recent converts from paganism, for Boniface stated that the population was 'prone to error', and would die pagan (*paganus*) if denied a priest; however, he feared that, should the priest be left in place and his sinful past become known, the people would become disillusioned by the priests's hypocrisy and the mission as a whole would be damaged.²⁶⁴

Albanian *shtriga* and Italian *strega*, 'witch'). See S. G. Oliphant, 'The story of the *strix*: ancient', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Society* 44 (1913), pp. 133-149. In the first Saxon Capitulary the *strix* is described as a cannibal, and male or female persons suspected of being *striges* were, according to Saxon custom, burned to death and themselves eaten. Anon., *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, ed. A. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1 (Hannover, 1883), pp. 68-70 (c. 6, p. 68, l. 33 to p. 69, l. 2). On medieval Christian perceptions of werewolves, see K. Dennis, 'Fictus Lupus: the werewolf in Christian thought', *Classical Folia* 30 (1976), pp. 57-80.

²⁵⁸ This is the opinion of Boretius in his edition of the *Indiculus superstitionum*: Anon., *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, ed. A. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1 (Hannover, 1883), pp. 222-223 (p. 222, n. 16).

²⁵⁹ *Divinos autem vel sortilegos... omnino respuentes*, Tangl, ep. 43, p. 69, ll. 12-16.

²⁶⁰ Anon., *Indiculus superstitionum*, p. 222, ll. 12, 14.

²⁶¹ Anon., *Capitulatio*, c. 23, p. 69, l. 45.

²⁶² *Unde congruum non est duo vel tres calices in altario ponere, cum missarum sollempnia celebrantur*, Tangl, ep. 26, p. 46, ll. 5-6.

²⁶³ *in latissimo pago fidelium*, Tangl, ep. 91, p. 207, l. 30.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92, ll. 9-17.

Even if Boniface had regarded the priest in question as morally sound, the influence of the latter over such a large area must have been limited. Away from the centre of the priest's parish, in the villages, isolated huts and farmsteads where he rarely visited, the daily behaviour of the ordinary people would have been almost impossible to observe and control. Shines on major transit routes could be destroyed easily enough, but the manifestations of paganism were not restricted to such obvious and easy targets.²⁶⁵ Feasts and processions such as those condemned in the *Indiculus superstitionum*²⁶⁶ could be disrupted, for sure, but a cleric would have to think very carefully before intervening in an important social event,²⁶⁷ especially when it involved the consumption of copious amounts of alcohol.²⁶⁸ Superstitions and customs on a smaller scale created problems of their own: how could the priest have asked a community simply to stop believing in witches and werewolves, and to lower its time-accustomed guard against such evils on blind faith? How could the priest prevent the use of idols of bread and cloth,²⁶⁹ or wooden hands and feet,²⁷⁰ when such objects could simply be stuffed under a mattress as soon as he came near?

The degree to which Boniface and his missionaries were able to influence the daily behaviour of recent converts in Hessa cannot be ascertained from the available evidence. We might surmise that they had more success in central Hessa, where there appears to have been a Bonifatian network of mother churches, than on the Saxon borderlands or in the remoter valleys; but this, too, must remain hypothetical. There is some slight evidence that syncretic behaviour had developed in Boniface's mission field before 732, when he asked Gregory III whether or not his flock were allowed to bring offerings to church for their dead pagan kin.²⁷¹ This apparent desire of recent converts to maintain contact with their pagan ancestors even after baptism is reminiscent of the episode in the *Vita Vulframni* (written 796x807) where King Radbod of Frisia, upon being told that baptism would separate him from his forebears

²⁶⁵ Wood, 'Pagan religions and superstitions', p. 264.

²⁶⁶ Boretius, ed., *Capitularia*, MGH Capit. 1, p. 223, l. 24.

²⁶⁷ E. Duckett, *The Wandering Saints* (London: Collins, 1959), pp. 197-199; Wood, 'Pagan religions and superstitions', p. 259.

²⁶⁸ Boniface, when advising Cuthbert of Canterbury to reduce the amount of drunkenness in the churches of his archbishopric, remarked that excessive consumption of alcohol was a notable trait of the *pagani* of Germania. Tangl, ep. 78, p. 171, ll. 16-18.

²⁶⁹ *De simulacro de consparsa farina; De simulacris de pannis factis*. Anon., *Indiculus superstitionum*, p. 223, ll. 26-27.

²⁷⁰ *De ligneis pedibus vel manibus pagano ritus*, *ibid.*, l. 29.

²⁷¹ Only the reply of Gregory survives, in which he stated that such offerings could only be given if the deceased had been Christian. Tangl, ep. 28, p. 50, l. 29 to p. 51, l. 4.

in the afterlife, stepped away from the font.²⁷² Similar evidence for syncretic religious behaviour focusing on Christian sites appears in Karloman's decrees of 742 and in the *Indiculus superstitionum*, where we learn of unspecified *sacrilegia* performed in churches and on graves, and of pagan sacrifices made in the name of the saints.²⁷³

While such behaviour struck certain clerics as wholly un-Christian, for the lay people it was the natural continuation of their old way of life, a mere re-orientation of existing religiosity, and even those who regularly attended mass were bound to traipse in old superstitions and customs on their rustic feet.²⁷⁴ Social ceremonies were, after all, vital to the stability and perpetuation of the community, regardless of whatever explicit or implicit pagan customs they involved. If Boniface and his companions attempted to restrict particular customs because of their perceived pagan overtones, the result might have been that the old patterns of behaviour simply reappeared in unpredictable, superficially Christian forms. It would have taken much more than occasional sermons, dramatic violations of pagan shrines and the proscriptions of a distant ruler to un-pick and re-knit a pagan world view into something resembling the one that the Anglo-Saxon missionaries had learned through years of strict monastic education.

7.4.5 Maintaining control of preachers within the mission field

Despite the evidence for his establishment of a network of mother church in central Hessa, we should question how much control Boniface had over preaching activity in his mission territory as a whole, particularly on the Saxon borderlands and where his territory conjoined that of Milo of Trier in the upper Lahn.²⁷⁵ He was dealing with morally corrupt priests in his mission field from at least 726, when the issue first appears in a letter of Gregory II.²⁷⁶ Since there is no evidence for pre-Bonifatian churches in Hessa beyond Büraburg and Bergheim, this instance more probably relates to the expansion of Boniface's mission into neighbouring Thuringia from 723, where there was already a badly neglected church structure, or to the region of the

²⁷² Pseudo-Iona, *Vita Vulframni episcopi Senonici auctore Pseudo-Iona*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. 5 (Hannover, 1910), pp. 657-673 (c. 9, p. 668, ll. 1-14). See also Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 92; Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, p. 406.

²⁷³ Tangl, ep. 56, p. 100, ll. 21-31; Anon., *Indiculus superstitionum*, p. 222, ll. 2, 5, 9.

²⁷⁴ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 100.

²⁷⁵ See Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 266.

²⁷⁶ Tang, ep. 26, p. 47, ll. 3-14.

upper Lahn, where there were Frankish priests associated with the archbishopric of Trier.²⁷⁷ By 732, Boniface was having to deal with the wholly different problem of non-trinitarian baptisms performed by pagans (*pagani*) and by priests who had sacrificed to Thor and eaten pagan sacrificial foods.²⁷⁸ These cases seem to be examples of syncretic behaviour that had developed on the interface of Christianity and paganism, and may even be evidence that some pagans were devising their own forms of pseudo-Christian ‘baptism’ in response to the spread of Boniface’s mission.

From at least the late 740s, Boniface appears to have had great difficulty in preventing access to certain districts by preachers unconnected to his mission, whom he did not regard as remotely qualified for the task of spreading the Gospel. Late in 747 or early in 748 he complained to Zacharias about these self-professed priests and bishops, who included ‘false vagrants, adulterers, murderers, effeminate, pederasts, blasphemers, hypocrites... and tonsured serfs who have fled from their masters’,²⁷⁹ and who were operating in open defiance of episcopal condemnation. Boniface’s account of their style of preaching, recounted by Zachary in his reply, is worth quoting in full:

... seorsum populum consentaneum congregant et illum erroneum ministerium non in ecclesia catholica, sed per agrestia loca, per cellas rusticorum, ubi eorum imperita stultitia celari episcopis possit, perpetrant nec fidem catholicam paganis predicant nec ipsi fidem rectam habent, sed nec ipsa sollemnia verba, quae unusquisque catuicuminus, si talis aetatis est, ut iam intellectum habeat, sensu cordis sui percipere et intellegere, nec docent nec quaerent ab eis, quos baptizare debent, id est abrenuntiatione satane et cetera, sed neque signacula crucis Christi eos muniunt, quae precedere debent baptismum, sed nec aliquam credulitatem unius deitatis et sanctae trinitatis

²⁷⁷ See chapter four above, section 4.4.4.

²⁷⁸ *Eosdemque, quos a paganis baptizatos esse asseruisti, si ita habetur, ut denuo baptizes in nomine trinitatis, mandamus*, Tangl, ep. 28, p. 50, ll. 22-23. From the same letter: *Nam et eos, qui se dubitant fuisse baptizatos an non vel qui a presbitero Iovi mactanti et immolaticias carnes vescenti, ut baptizentur, precipimus*, *ibid.*, p. 51, ll. 5-7.

²⁷⁹ *falsos gyrobagos, adulteros, homicidas, molles, masculorum concubitores, sacrilegos, ypochritas et multos servos tonsuratos, qui fugerunt dominis suis*, Tangl, ep. 80, p. 175, ll. 17-20; trans. Talbot, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 122. Zacharias’s reply is dated to 1 May 748.

docent, neque ab eis quaerent, ut corde credant ad iustitiam et oris confessio fiat illis in salutem.²⁸⁰

Zacharias did not specify where Boniface claimed to have found these preachers, but they appear to have been active in more than one episcopal diocese, for he stated that they were protected by their followers from ‘the bishops’. Which bishops Boniface was referring to is unclear. A year or so before writing the letter he appears to have incorporated the bishoprics of Büraburg and Erfurt into his newly acquired see of Mainz,²⁸¹ but he could have been referring to them retrospectively. The fact that neither Boniface nor the popes refer to this specific problem in any letters prior to 748 suggests that it had only recently arisen, or had suddenly become much more serious.

If we examine the wider context of central Germania around this time, the major contemporary events recorded in the annals are the Frankish invasions of Saxony in 744 and 748, both of which involved mass baptisms as a term of the Saxon capitulation.²⁸² As discussed in chapter five, the fact that Bishop Hildegard of Cologne was killed fighting in Pippin’s campaign of 753²⁸³ implies that the mass baptisms associated with the Frankish invasions of Saxony during the 740s and 750s did not involve Boniface.²⁸⁴ The reference to *pagani* in Zacharias’s above-quoted account and the implication that the lay following of the pseudo-priests was ignorant of such basic Christian doctrines as the Holy Trinity further indicates that they are probably not to be located in the relatively Christianised Frankish territories.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ ‘They gather about them a like-minded following and carry on their false ministry, not in a catholic church, but in the open country in the huts of farm laborers, where their ignorance and stupid folly can be hidden from the bishops. They neither preach the catholic faith to pagans, nor have they themselves the true faith. They do not even know the sacred words which any catechumen old enough to use his reason can learn and understand, not do they expect them to be uttered by those whom they are to baptise, as, for instance, the renunciation of Satan, and so forth. Neither do they fortify them with the sign of the cross, which should precede baptism, nor do they teach them belief in one God and the Holy Trinity; nor do they require them to believe with the heart for righteousness or to make confession with the lips for salvation.’ Tangl, ep. 80, p. 175, l. 23 to p. 176, l. 5; trans. Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, pp. 122-123.

²⁸¹ See chapter five above, section 5.4.2.

²⁸² For the invasion of 744, see *Fred. Cont.*, c. 27, p. 180, ll. 25-8; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 4-5; *Ann. Petav.*, p. 11. For 748, *Fred. Cont.*, c. 31, p. 181, ll. 14-22; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 7-8; *Ann. Fuld.*, p. 346, ll. 11-15. For a discussion of dating, see chapter five above, section 5.3.2.

²⁸³ *Fred. Cont.*, c. 31, p. 182, ll. 19-27; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 10-11.

²⁸⁴ Chapter five above, section 5.3.2.

²⁸⁵ Boniface himself made a distinction between true, unbaptised pagans and erring Christians, as we see in his letter to Archbishop Egbert of York, where he described how he had been sent *ad predicandum Germaniae erroneis vel paganis gentibus*. Tangl, ep. 75, p. 157, ll. 16-17. Compare his account of the heretic Aldebert’s following in Francia, which was composed of ‘a multitude of country dwellers’ (*multitudo rusticorum*), but not ‘pagans’. Tangl, ep. 59, p. 111, l. 23.

The passage also immediately follows a query in the letter concerning people who had been baptised some years previously by priests, now dead, who had been guilty of performing animal sacrifices to pagan gods.²⁸⁶ The deceased priests referred to may well have been those whom Boniface had accused of doing exactly the same in a letter to Gregory III sixteen years earlier.²⁸⁷ If so, the Thor-worshipping priests had apparently been expelled by Boniface from his territory in 732, only to relocate farther north, where Boniface, after expanding his mission into the borderlands two decades later, re-encountered their handiwork. He informed Zacharias in 747/48 that he had already re-baptised the communities involved,²⁸⁸ precisely the course that Gregory III had instructed him to take in 723.²⁸⁹

It seems possible, therefore, that the various preachers condemned by Boniface in 747/48 were connected to the expansion of his mission into Saxony from 738/39 onwards, and especially to the Frankish campaigns of the 740s. Those eastern Saxons who received baptism in 744 and 748 had only done so following their defeat; the Saxons north of Hessa were similarly obliged to accept Frankish preachers as a term of surrender in 753.²⁹⁰ As Staab has observed, Frankish bishops of this time such as Hildegard of Cologne, unlike Boniface, may have viewed it as their Christian duty personally to take up arms and forcibly convert those pagan Saxons who had attacked their dioceses.²⁹¹ They did not, however, share Boniface's concern for Roman orthodoxy, orthopraxy and the establishment of stable parishes within a coherent episcopal framework. This may have led to a flood of poorly regulated, self-styled preachers into the newly subjugated Saxon borderlands who operated under a degree of Frankish protection, but neither respected the authority of Boniface, who had always intended to Christianise the region himself, nor troubled themselves with organising a stable parochial system.

Boniface's description to the pope of the pseudo-priests, though based on an element of truth, was probably exaggerated somewhat for dramatic effect. The failure of the Frankish rulers to make good their promise of 744 and grant Boniface his

²⁸⁶ Tangl, ep. 80, p. 174, l. 26 to p. 175, l. 12.

²⁸⁷ Tangl, ep. 28, p. 51, ll. 5-7.

²⁸⁸ Tangl, ep. 80, p. 174, l. 26 to p. 175, l. 3.

²⁸⁹ Tangl, ep. 28, p. 51, ll. 5-7.

²⁹⁰ *Fred. Cont.*, c. 31, p. 182, ll. 19-27; *Ann. reg. Franc.*, pp. 10-11. On dating to 753, not 752 as some minor annals claim, see Böhmer and Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii*, p. 35.

²⁹¹ Staab, 'Rudi populo rudis adhuc praesul', pp. 252, 264.

much-desired metropolitan see at Cologne was fresh in his memory in 747/48,²⁹² and he was still petitioning for it unsuccessfully in 751.²⁹³ But he was by this stage an old man, his eyesight failing,²⁹⁴ and his great plans for a unified archdiocese of Germania were foundering on the rocks of Frankish politics. Without Cologne he did not control the crucial territory east of the Rhine between Hessa and Frisia. Even worse, the Frankish ruler had begun to use baptism as a tool of political coercion in Saxony without any concern for the long-term consequences of failing to consolidate newly converted areas with organised missions or church structures.²⁹⁵

In a letter to his old friend and confidante Daniel of Winchester written around this time (between 742 and the death of Daniel in 746), Boniface resorted to the parable of the cockle of the field to represent his plight.

Et semen verbi, quod de sinu catholice et apostolice ecclesie sumptum et nobis commendatum seminare aliquantulum studemus, illi cum lolio superseminare et suffocare nituntur vel in herbam pestiferi generis convertere. Et quod plantamus non inrigant ut crescat, sed evellare student ut marcescat, offerentes populis et docentes novas sectas et diversi generis errores. Quidam ‘abstinentes a cibus, quos Deus ad percipiendum creavit’ (1. Tim. 4:3); quidam melle et lacte proprie pascentes se panem et ceteros abiciunt cibos; quidam autem adfirmant, quod plurimum populo nocet, homicidas vel adulteros in ipsis sceleribus perseverantes fieri tamen posse Dei sacerdotes. Populi autem iuxta dictum apostoli ‘sanam doctrinam non sustinebunt, sed coacervabunt sibi magistros secundum sua desideria’ (2. Tim. 4:3) et reliqua.²⁹⁶

²⁹² In 745 Zacharias confirmed Boniface’s authority over the see of Cologne (Tangl, ep. 60, p. 124, ll. 23-7), although the Frankish rulers failed to transfer the seat to him (Tangl, ep. 80, p. 179, l. 27 to p. 180, l. 1; ep. 87, p. 195, l. 26 to p. 196, l. 2): this failure ultimately led to the dispute in 753 between Boniface and bishop Hildegard of Cologne over the control of Utrecht and the mission territories of Frisia (Tangl, ep. 109, pp. 234-6). See also Boniface’s 747 letter to Cuthbert of Canterbury, in which he lamented the fact that he did not, as archbishops were supposed to by canon law, have full control over his own province. Tangl, ep. 78, p. 164, l. 21 to p. 165, l. 1.

²⁹³ Tangl, ep. 86, p. 193, ll. 14-20.

²⁹⁴ Boniface refers to his failing eyesight in his 742x746 letter to Daniel of Winchester: Tangl, ep. 63, p. 131, ll. 4-16.

²⁹⁵ See chapter five above, section 5.3.2.

²⁹⁶ ‘They strive to cover and choke with weeds or to turn into poisonous grain the seed of the Word which we have received from the bosom of the Catholic and Apostolic Church and have tried to sow. What we plant they do not water that it may increase but try to uproot that it may wither away, offering to the people and teaching them new diversions and errors of diverse sorts. Some *abstain from foods which God has made for our use* (1. Tim. 4:3); some nourish themselves only with milk and honey,

Boniface's reference in this passage to people who believed that 'murderers and adulterers' could hold priestly office was echoed in Zacharias's 748 reply to his report of the pseudo-priests active in his territory, and suggests that the two letters are describing similar or identical situations.²⁹⁷ If these are references to the same group of corrupt Frankish preachers, Boniface's letter to Daniel reinforces the impression that they were active in recently converted territory. In the previous chapter we examined the use of harvest as a metaphor for missionary preaching in the letters of Boniface,²⁹⁸ and here Boniface employed it to describe districts where he had 'attempted to sow the seed of the Word',²⁹⁹ only to have his crop poisoned, suffocated or left to wither by corrupt pseudo-priests. That some of these preachers were closely connected to the highest echelons of the Frankish élite is clear from Boniface's assertion that he could not avoid contact with them when he attended court.³⁰⁰

Neither Zacharias nor Daniel could offer Boniface any real advice. Zacharias instructed Boniface to condemn the false preachers in a synod, strip them of their office and place them under permanent monastic penance. Yet he also seemed aware of the limitations of Boniface's authority, for he reassured him that if those measures failed he could, at least, take comfort from having tried to maintain canon law.³⁰¹ Daniel, meanwhile, could only advise Boniface to endure with patience what he could not change.³⁰² The mission in Hessa may have achieved rapid success in the 720s, but this was clearly not replicated when Boniface attempted to expand his mission north. Despite initial gains in the wake of Charles Martel's campaign of 738, the successful conversion of the Saxons could only take place through a tightly co-ordinated mission east of the Rhine, and for that Boniface needed Cologne. His failure in this regard, as

rejecting all other foods; some declare – and this is most harmful to the people – that murderers or adulterers who persist in their crimes may nevertheless be priests of God. But the people, as the Apostle says, *will not endure sound doctrine but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers*' (2. Tim. 4:3), Tangl, ep. 63, p. 129, ll. 15-28; trans. Talbot, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 93. On the heretics Aldebert and Clemens, see Zeddies, 'Bonifatius und zwei nützliche Rebellen'.

²⁹⁷ From Gregory's reply, it appears that Boniface's chief concern was whether baptisms performed by morally compromised priests who nonetheless used the correct invocation of the Trinity remained valid. Tangl, ep. 80, p. 174, ll. 4-14.

²⁹⁸ See chapter six above, section 6.2.3.

²⁹⁹ *semen verbi... seminare aliquantulum studemus*, Tangl, ep. 63, p. 129, ll. 15-17.

³⁰⁰ *Nos quidem patrocinitus auxilium in palatio Francorum quaerentes a talium corporali communione abstinere et segregare nos iuxta precepta canonum non possumus*, *ibid.*, p. 139, ll. 29-31.

³⁰¹ *si vero non fuerint conversi, tua predicantis non periet iustitia. Habebis enim solaciantem te contra nequitiam malignantium sanctorum apostolorum et ceterorum probabilium patrum canonicam sanctionem*, Tangl, ep. 80, p. 176, ll. 11-15.

³⁰² Tangl, ep. 64, p. 134, l. 11 to p. 135, l. 25.

well as the continued turbulence of the Frankish frontier with the Saxons, meant that he struggled to assert any control over the potential missionary territory north of the Hessian borderlands.

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In this chapter we have considered Boniface's Hessian mission in its full context. It seems that the Fritzlar basin, which had been a focus of settlement since prehistoric times, was the centre of a rich sacred landscape whose shrines were not restricted to the Oak of Thor at Geismar. Through the 720s and 730s Boniface pursued a policy of systematically confronting and supplanting these pagan sites throughout Hesse, and devised a stable network of mother churches surrounding his early churches at Fritzlar and Büraburg. He established a stable base of material support among the local élite at the same time as he negotiated the intricacies of Frankish court politics.

After almost two decades of work in Hesse and Thuringia, Boniface was given the chance of extending his mission beyond the borderlands into Saxony proper, and he seized it. Yet despite his early success in converting large numbers of Saxons under the close protection of Charles Martel and his establishment of bishoprics at Büraburg, Erfurt and Würzburg in 741, the rest of the decade was to bring a series of disappointments and failures. Cologne narrowly escaped his grasp, for reasons that have not been preserved in our sources; his vision of a unified archdiocese of Germania never came to pass; the bishoprics of Büraburg and Erfurt proved untenable; his attempts to reform hostile elements in the Frankish church were consistently opposed; and he was unable to consolidate whatever gains he had made in Saxony.

Nonetheless, the thirty-three years of Boniface's mission in Hesse left an enduring and detectable impression on the toponymical and ecclesiastical landscapes of the region. It was a decisive period in Hessian history and in European history in general. From the moment Boniface entered Hesse in 721, to the moment he left it for the last time in 754, he had dominated its ecclesiastical development and transformed its culture. It was the only region of Boniface's mission, from Bavaria, Thuringia and the middle Rhine to Frisia, that had not already seen a significant degree of Christian influence, and where there were no powerful Frankish interests to obstruct him. Hesse thus gave him the opportunity to prove his immense talents as an

organiser, leader and missionary, and in this chapter we have seen something of what he was able to achieve.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

I opened this thesis with a half-imagined account of the felling of the Oak of Thor at Geismar in 723, and that historical event has remained at the centre of the study. It symbolises the accomplishment for which Boniface is most famed and remembered, and dramatises the conflict of culture and meaning that is inherent in any missionary enterprise. We can, to an extent, recover some of the worlds of meaning of the Anglo-Saxon missionary community, if not of the pagans they sought to convert. When Boniface stepped out of the church of St Brigid and looked across the Eder in 721 (see plate 14), he would not have seen merely an array of hills and forests, but a land ensnared in spiritual darkness. The twin peaks of Odenberg and Gudensberg rose in the Fritzlar basin to the north-east, dominating the view, unavoidable to the eye, a daily reminder of the rites and sacrifices performed in honour of Woden. The ramparts and slopes of Büraburg are smothered in forest now, but in Boniface's time they would have been stripped bare for fuel and fodder, giving a clear view across the Eder to the village of Geismar and the nearby Oak of Thor. The missionaries, standing on the ramparts with their faces cooled by a northerly breeze, may even have been able to hear the distant sounds of whatever rituals were performed in that grove.

And this was only the beginning. Hessa, as it stretched away to the borderlands with the Saxons, bristled with hilltops, groves and springs dedicated to pagan gods and spirits. The people frequented them because they always had done. Their myths and memories were woven into the hills, streams and forests of Hessa; their ancestors had walked the same paths and offered sacrifices to the same gods. Such places defined identity and community through the delineation of space and time. The Franks had arrived, founded their fortresses, built their churches and made themselves the rulers of Hessa. Yet they were few in number, and after a generation the Oak of Thor still stood, undaunted by the Frankish soldiers who tramped by on their way to the Christenberg or to the borderlands. Things had always been this way, and always would be.

Boniface and his companions saw things differently, and through this thesis we have explored the ensuing thirty-three years of the Christian conversion of Hessa. In chapter three it was argued that the West Saxon church, in which Boniface spent

the first half of his life, provided the foundations upon which his later approach to mission was built. The deepest of these foundations were close relations between church and ruling secular power, absolute subservience to Rome and strong episcopal government down to the parochial level. These were to become the guiding principles of Boniface's mission in Hessa.

In chapter four we examined the political context of Hessa prior to Boniface's arrival, and found that Hessa was a region of fundamental strategic importance to the Franks. Not only had Frankish interests been gradually developing there since the mid-seventh century at least, but by *c.* 700 the Frankish rulers had made an immense investment of resources and manpower in securing it against Saxon aggression, manifested most clearly in the two hillforts of Büraburg and the Christenberg. However, this was primarily a political and military, not religious, expansion: the Franks had brought Christianity to Hessa, but had not attempted to promote it in any systematic fashion among the native population. The bishop of Mainz's authority did not stretch beyond the Wetterau, and the archbishop of Trier's faded in the upper Lahn valley. The arrival of Boniface in Hessa in 721 pre-empted whatever interests they may have hoped to develop there, but they were powerless to remove him.

In chapter five we established the chronological framework of the Hessian mission, a task which was essential for a more nuanced interpretation of the sources in general. A central argument of the chapter was that Boniface saw his mission in Hessa as a preliminary stage in a broader strategy which he intended to encompass the conversion of the Saxons. One consequence of his powerful desire to achieve this goal was the development of a complex and largely antagonistic relationship between himself and certain powerful members of the Frankish Rhineland church, and in this sense Boniface's missionary activities and his reforming activities were fundamentally interconnected. Boniface recognised that a successful mission in Saxony required the stabilisation of the Rhineland churches under an episcopacy that was united with its secular protectors by a shared devotion to Rome. His attempted reforms of the Frankish church, though in part successful, were largely thwarted during his lifetime by hostility and indifference among the Frankish élites; they were at any rate insufficient to allow him to reinvigorate his tattered mission among the Saxons, which remained embattled at the time of his death in 754.

The aim of chapters six and seven was to bring us closer to what one might term the 'missionary experience' through an exploration of the self-definition of the

missionary community in its literary discourse and the ways in which Boniface and his followers attempted to achieve their goal of converting the pagans of Germania. We saw that the Anglo-Saxon missionary community perceived and represented its own identity and role in terms that were entirely foreign to the indigenous culture of Hesse, that drew from centuries of Biblical, patristic and even classical tradition. They shared a divine mandate to spread the Word, and embraced the perils of *peregrinatio* both to pursue this mission and to bring themselves closer to Christ. Their zealotry both created and overcame obstacles: Boniface's reluctance to compromise the purity of Roman teachings and rituals, his need for precision and his disdain for the lax standards of the Frankish Rhineland church, inevitably placed limitations on his mission. Had he been more prepared to work with Milo *et eiusmodi similes*, even at the risk of being morally tainted, perhaps the Frankish bishops in turn would have contributed much-needed manpower and resources to the conversion of the borderlands. Yet this was unthinkable to Boniface at the time, and is purely hypothetical now.

Paradoxically, the cohesion of the Anglo-Saxon missionary community under Boniface, while it could lead to conflicts with those who lay outside it, also helped the community endure those conflicts. Over the years, a constant literary discourse projected a representation of the mission towards an Anglo-Saxon audience that was fundamental to the self-identity of the missionaries. Decades passed, but the letters show that Boniface never ceased to portray himself as an exile, and his friends back home never ceased to regard him as such. The symbolic figure of the *exul Germanicus*, he who was pledged to carry the torch of the Gospel into the dark forests of the pagans, to free the captives of Satan and bring them into the knowledge of freedom of Christ, was immensely powerful. A central feature of the persona was suffering. Hardships, obstacles and dangers were an integral part of exile and serving Christ. They could not be avoided; indeed, they were to be dramatised, emphasised, integrated into the daily experience of moving and preaching in the hazardous borderlands of the Diemel, where waves of Frankish and Saxon ambition clashed and receded like competing tides. Boniface chose to send his missionaries into this maelstrom, and many were prepared to go.

The confrontation at Geismar was thus merely the opening movement of a much larger score. Through the eradication of pagan shrines the missionaries were attempting to rip out the paganism of Hesse by its thickest and most obvious roots.

Yet far more intricate fibres of cultural identity than these were threaded through the individual villages and farmsteads of the landscape, customs such as the processions and doll-making that were condemned in the *Indiculus superstitionum*.¹ An understaffed and underresourced mission could not possibly pluck out these fibres one by one to the extent that Boniface desired, even with the foundation of a stable parochial system and the universal application of the rite of episcopal confirmation. The result was a continuation of pre-Christian behaviour and belief within a nominally Christian framework: not quite the version of Christianity promulgated by Boniface and his missionaries, but a version adapted, elaborated and interpreted according to the immediate needs of recently baptised communities who may not have seen preachers, at least not Bonifatian preachers, for weeks at a time.

There are many themes in this thesis which could be developed, particularly concerning the interaction between preacher and local community, but, as discussed earlier,² our sources have their limitations. For instance, it is difficult to ascertain from the surviving letters how the missionaries dealt with the failure of orthodoxy and orthopraxy to permeate every aspect of social life. In the 740s at least, Boniface was quick to blame the failure of his Christianisation of certain areas on the interference of corrupt and non-canonical preachers who operated without episcopal direction and to some extent with Frankish protection.³ Yet in central Hessa, where he enjoyed widespread support among the local élites, Boniface appears to have established a close-knit network of mother churches that may have given him a virtual monopoly of preaching activity in the area. Did he encounter similar obstacles in Christianising the heart of his mission field as he did at its fringes, and, if so, how did he perceive and account for this? Did he blame unworthy preachers, insufficient instruction or the stubborn refusal of the common people to correct their behaviour? How far was he prepared to compromise his own sense of orthodoxy and orthopraxy before he laid his hands on the brow of a candidate for confirmation? A careful retrospective study of the nature and imposition of lay penance during the Carolingian period may help elucidate this aspect of the mission, and would usefully develop some of the findings of this thesis.⁴

¹ Anon., *Indiculus superstitionum*.

² See the opening to chapter five above.

³ See especially Tangl, ep. 63, p. 129; ep. 80, pp. 175-176.

⁴ Rob Meens, following his analysis of early medieval penitential texts, argues that 'penitentials were generally intended to be employed in a pastoral context [and] were composed for parish priests to be

The interdisciplinary approach of this thesis could also be developed by narrowing or expanding its focus. The focus could be narrowed somewhat to an in-depth analysis of church foundations within Hesse. In this thesis I have concentrated on the mother churches of the Fritzlar diocese, but the pre-Reformation ecclesiastical landscape of Hesse was a great deal more complex and intricate than this level of attention might suggest: many of the subordinate daughter churches may also have had ancient roots, and the careful contextual study of their distribution, dedications and interrelationships might produce telling patterns that can further elucidate the earliest parochial organisation of Hesse. Such an enterprise would involve close work with local historians and archaeologists, whose knowledge of the landscape and its history would be of immense benefit to a researcher who is able to combine the detail with the bigger picture.

Conversely, the interdisciplinary and contextual study of Boniface's mission could be expanded to encompass the remainder of his territory. My original thesis proposal in 2004 encompassed both Hesse and Thuringia, but the wealth of material pertaining to Hesse alone led to an unavoidable narrowing of focus. There is no reason why a study such as this one could not be pursued in Thuringia, Bavaria or the Grabfeld. Such projects would offer valuable contrasts and parallels to Boniface's work in Hesse, and perhaps show how he adapted his approach according to the circumstances of each particular region: the depth and nature of Christianity already established, for instance, or the political relationship of local élites to their Frankish overlords.

Boniface remains one of the most intensely studied figures of the early Middle Ages. The abundant historical sources pertaining to his mission continue to inspire innovative and valuable publications which deepen our understanding of the missionary community,⁵ Boniface's theology,⁶ his posthumous cult and veneration,⁷ his insular background,⁸ and much more besides. With this thesis I have tried to demonstrate that a broadly interdisciplinary, landscape-focused regional study can provide a fresh and important perspective on Boniface and his achievements, and I

consulted in the normal course of their pastoral duties'. Meens, 'The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance', pp. 46-47. The manner in which confession and penance may have integrated into the parochial care of a recently converted region deserves further study.

⁵ Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*; Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius*.

⁶ Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*.

⁷ Kehl, *Kult und Nachleben*.

⁸ Yorke, 'The Insular Background to Boniface's Continental Career'.

thereby hope to have contributed not only to Bonifatian studies, but to studies of conversion-period Europe in general.

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