# THE KING AND HIS COUNCIL

by

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# DEDICATION

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord." Colossians 3:23 KJV

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These photographs were taken during a research trip to England in July 2008.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## The Subject and the Medieval Sources

Following the Easter celebrations of AD 664, Oswiu, the Northumbrian Breatwalda, called a mixed body of representatives from the Bernician and Deirian royal households and Roman and Irish Catholic ecclesiastical leaders to convene a church council at Whitby Abbey, on the mouth of the river Esk. His intent was simple: to put to rest a fiery dispute over the day upon which Christ's resurrection was to be observed and bring peace to his household and to Northumbria. He entrusted the defense of his own church, the Irish, to his bishop, Colman of Lindisfarne. Agilbert, bishop of the West Saxons, was to defend the Roman Church, but the task fell, instead, to the Anglo-Saxon priest, Wilfrid.

Oswiu opened the council by declaring that he wanted to end the division between the two churches in his kingdom and professed that it was right for "those who served one God (to) observe one rule of life and not differ in the celebration of the heavenly sacraments."[1] Then he opened the floor to Bishop Colman so that the man could explain and defend the traditions of his church. Colman called upon the great Irish saint, Columba, and the Apostle John to justify his tradition upon their authority. His opponent, Wilfrid, was well educated and skillfully presented three counter-arguments against

[1] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum = The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* III. 25, edited and translated by Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

Colman's defense. In the thick of presenting his argument, the priest called upon the authority of St. Peter by asking,

> Is (Columba) to be preferred to the most blessed chief of the apostles, to whom the Lord said, 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven?'[2]

This qualification of Peter's authority resonated with Oswiu, and he turned to his bishop and asked him if what Wilfrid had said were true. Colman could not deny it. Then Oswiu asked Colman if he could prove any equality between Columba and Peter. Colman could not. Then Oswiu asked both representatives, "Do you both agree, without any dispute, that these words were addressed primarily to Peter and that the Lord gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven?"[3] They confirmed it. Speaking to the assembly then, Oswiu concluded that he would not contradict so powerful a saint. He declared that he intended "to obey his commands in everything to the best of my knowledge and ability." The council concluded with those in assembly assenting to Oswiu's declaration. Colman and his followers relinquished their see in dissent and retired to their homeland.

At first glance, the Council of Whitby is straightforward in its course and conclusion. However, Oswiu's decision becomes anomalous to the predicted outcome after a more in-depth examination of his life and the council's political conditions. The facts had clearly favored the Irish from the outset of the council. First, the setting was an Irish monastery. Second, the number of Irish defenders out-numbered the Roman presenters. Their support ran deeper than physical numbers, for Oswiu had been raised in the Irish church from an early age and had patronized it for the entirety of his reign, up to

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[2] Matthew 16: 18 – 19, as cited in Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[3] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.

the council (643 – 664). And, finally, Oswiu was engaged in a war for the Pictish throne and needed Irish auxiliary troops from the Ui Neill of north Ulster; the Ui Neill kept the Irish Easter. In such conditions, Oswiu cannot have been expected to forsake the Irish teachings. His sudden switch of religious affiliation in this political environment raises many questions, of which the greatest is, simply, why did he switch? Historians have made explanations on either a political or spiritual basis for his motivations, with the majority of modern scholarship favoring political gains.[4] However, the switch is so incongruous to the rest of Oswiu's life that it is necessary to explore the political and spiritual motivations simultaneously. We shall focus on a number of questions in this approach, namely, what manner of man was Oswiu? What could draw him away from the religion of his youth and that of his brother Oswald? What were the political and religious conditions that led to the establishment of two incongruous church institutions in Northumbria? What was Oswiu's relation to either the Italian or Irish missions? What in Oswiu's life had caused him to esteem Peter so highly? Did politics or personal intent lead him to choose Peter's Church?

Oswiu's decision to accept and follow the practices of the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Whitby is merely a singular proof of a life devoted to the patronage and proliferation of the Christian religion. The conclusion of the Council of Whitby remains his primary contribution to European history due to the resulting need for a synthesis of Irish and Roman material culture products, specifically Irish art and

[4] They are roughly based on either a religious axis or a political emphasis, the latter of which is the absence of taking spirituality into consideration due to a bias against the perceived domination of literature from the providential history point of view. Although in recent years an effort has been made to correct this seeming bias on religious interpretation, and Bede's infallibility has been challenged as a result of this heightened awareness, current conclusions about Oswiu's role in the events of seventh century Anglo-Saxon history are still woefully stereotypical of the sort of conclusions drawn prior to this re-approach. See analysis of modern scholarship in Chapter Six.

education and Roman administrative strengths. Under Oswiu's successors, the two systems merged into the Northumbrian Renaissance.[5] Seven medieval writers recorded details of the life of this important king. It is important to study these writings before delving into the religio-political setting of Oswiu's time.

The Medieval material on Oswiu's life and actions is varied in nature and ranges from facts in hagiographies to entries in chronologies and annals to detailed critiques in historical compilations. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum = The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is the most accessible, most referenced, and most notable source. Consequently, Bede's opinions have shaped the common perspective of English history for thirteen hundred years since the volume's completion in A.D. 731. As a monk who lived in a monastery situated at Jarrow, on the Tyne River in Northumbria, Bede's purpose for writing was to provide King Ceolwulf with an example of how godly kings governed their lands. He did this through an examination of the acts of 'good' kings in comparison with those of 'bad' kings. Those who patronized the Church and assisted in its missionary activities, such as Aethelbert, Eadbald, Edwin and Oswald, were models of the 'good.' Those who persecuted the clergy, such as Redwald and Penda, were examples of 'wicked' kings who were not blessed in their mortal or martial endeavors. The scope and complexity of Bede's material and his skillful coordination of chronological compilation have earned him words of praise and great trust from the scholarly community.

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[5] Margaret Pepperdene, "Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*: a New Perspective," *Celtica* 4 (1958): pp. 253 – 262, as cited by Michael Richter in *Ireland and Her Neighbors in the Seventh Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) pp. 93 – 94.

A result of this trust has been a perpetuation of the author's attitudes, assessments, biases and judgments concerning the subjects of his record. Often, this perpetuation is unavoidable, given the abundance of information contained in the *Historia* regarding the Saxon kings in comparison to the paucity of general information in the contemporary hagiographies and annals. His writing style was such that his provisions and omissions hold an equal weight. The right actions of 'good' kings were emphasized to the degree that their wrong actions were kept silent and the malicious deeds of 'bad' kings were emphasized to the degree that their 'good' deeds were kept silent.[6] Bede could not fit Oswiu into either of his categories, however, and, although he was forced to record the 'good' things Oswiu did, he tempered this information through the inclusion of Oswiu's misdeeds.

A comparison of what Bede has written about Oswiu, his brother Oswald, and Oswiu's sons, Ecgfrith and Aldfrith, yields sufficient evidence to illustrate the unfounded nature of the author's bias against Oswiu. Oswiu was sexually involved with three women over the course of his life and had an illegitimate son, Aldfrith, with one of them. Bede thought him guilty of ordering the murder of a co-ruler, Oswine, and Oswiu's treatment of Bishop Wilfrid was significantly less than humbly submissive to a recognized leader in the Church. But, it is significant that the historian first introduces his audience to Oswiu in the *Historia* as the instigator of Oswine's murder, despite the severe damage caused to the chronological order within the *Historia*.[7] He reveals that, although

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[6] Bede may also have been of the opinion that pagan kings had no means by which to do right, since they lacked the God of the Christians, who is the source of all that is good, and therefore any deed done which bore the semblance of good was not truly good, but deceitful.

[7] The incident takes place nearly ten years into Oswiu's reign. Bede has Eanflaed asking her husband to repent of the murder before their marriage is even mentioned. Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 14.

the king had his moral short comings, Oswiu did great things for the Church: besides defeating Penda, the last pagan king of consequence, Oswiu laid the groundwork for unity among the monasteries and churches by settling the Easter dispute; provided land for monasteries; and strove to provide an archbishop for the see of Canterbury by sending a candidate, Wigheard, to Rome for consecration.[8] Oswiu's life obviously presented a challenge to Bede's simple dichotomy of good and evil.

Bede's open favor of Oswald's memory is a striking contrast to the almost grudging attitude with which he presents Oswiu. Oswiu's brother, Oswald, restored the faith to Northumbria after violent attacks by Caedwallan, king of the Britons, and Penda, king of the Mercians, had left Edwin dead and the year-long reigns of two apostate kings, Eanfrith of the Bernicians and Osric of the Deirians, drove Edwin's Bishop Paulinus and the royal family from the north. Oswald asked the Irish at Iona for a bishop, and established the Irish monastery on Lindisfarne for Aidan, the bishop whom the Irish sent. Because Aidan did not speak Saxon, Oswald himself translated for the bishop during services. Oswald was humble, gave to the needy, and had a number of miracles attributed to him after his death which involved healing the sick, the hurt and the possessed, preventing destruction, and heavenly portents.[9] Oswald was martyred on the field of battle against the pagan, Penda, a death which, to Bede, made his saintliness all the more undeniable.

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[8] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 29; *Hist Eccl* IV. 1.

[9] The cross he erected at Heavenfield, and the area in which he erected it held healing attributes, see Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 2; the site of his demise gave healing, *Hist Eccl* III. 9; his right hand and arm, having been blessed by Aidan, did not decay, *Hist Eccl* III. 5; the soil where his blood had spilled protected a house post from fire, *Hist Eccl* III. 10; the discovery of his bones was marked by "a sign from heaven," *Hist Eccl* III. 11; and the soil where the water which had been used to wash his bones was poured out cast out demons from a man, *Hist Eccl* III. 11. This is but to list a select few of the miracles Bede attributed to Oswald.

Ecgfrith and Aldfrith, in turn, are clearer examples of Bede's process of exalting kings whom he believed were good and denigrating, albeit passively at times, kings whom he did not perceive as good. Ecgfrith was a Christian king whose reign was not as successful as that of his father, Oswiu. He did not have his father's ability to direct the bishops, and his first wife, Aethelthryth, refused to consummate their marriage and gained Wilfrid's support to enter a monastery. Ecgfrith's understandable, subsequent disdain for Wilfrid, and his own death in an unjust battle against the Picts are dark clouds over his record, although he did manage to elevate Cuthbert to the bishop's seat on Lindisfarne.[10] Comparatively, the life of his brother, Aldfrith, shines with piety, and his only readily apparent sin seems to be that he was the bastard son of Oswiu. Aldfrith was pious, devout, educated, and wise. In another work, the *Historia Abbatum*, Bede wrote that Aldfrith gave eight hides of land to Benedict Biscop for a manuscript.[11] Michael Richter observes that such a king ought to have been more to Bede's liking and theorizes that the king's education on Iona is the cause of Bede's silence.[12] Yet, Bede did not elevate Aldfrith.

Bede disapproved of the Irish traditions, although he seems willing to excuse certain practitioners of the Irish traditions, such as Oswald and Aidan, who died without converting to the Roman traditions, and unwilling to excuse other practitioners who took the necessary step and converted. Oswiu converted to the Roman system at the Council of Whitby, and Aldfrith, presumably, when he took the throne in Roman Catholic

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[10] Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 27.
[11] Bede, *Historia Abbatum* 15, as cited by Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, p. 97, nt. 41. The word 'hide' refers to a measurement for a parcel of land. The exact area is variable, but it embodies the idea that it could support a household. As the size of households varies, so does the amount of land needed to maintain it. Bertram Colgrave, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) p. 72, nt. 3.
[12] Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, p. 97.

Northumbria. While Oswiu and Aldfrith followed the Irish traditions into their mid-fifties, Oswald died as a faithful practitioner. It is not enough to assume that the source of Bede's bias was the Easter practices of the Irish church as observed by these Christian kings. This inconsistency suggests either that Bede's bias is unfounded, or that its source is not clearly expressed in the *Historia*. It may be that the apparent immorality of Oswiu's youth, his diplomatic techniques and his commandeering of the election of bishops led Bede to view him more as a bad example, while Oswiu's donations to the Church and his decision at the Whitby Council rendered him anomalous to the historian's model.

These internal contradictions of Bede's *Historia* have skewed the historical view away from drawing accurate conclusions in regard to Oswiu's character for a great number of historians. Six other sources have survived from the seventh and eighth centuries in addition to Bede's work, three of which actually predate the completion of the *Historia*. All six present a picture of Oswiu that is, to some degree, independent of Bede and the bias revealed in the inconsistencies within the *Historia*. These are the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti = Life of Cuthbert*, Adomnan's *Vita Columbae = Life of Columba*, Eddius Stephanus' *Vita Wilfridi = Life of Wilfrid*, Nennius' *Historia Brittonum = History of the British*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum = History of the English Kings*.[13] These authors' estimations of Oswiu

[13] Whitby Anonymous, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti = Life of Cuthbert* in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, translated and edited by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940) pp. 60 – 139; Adomnan, *Vita Columbae = Life of Columba*, translated by A.O. and M.O. Anderson (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1961); Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi = Life of Wilfrid* XIV, translated by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927); Nennius, *Historia Brittonum = History of the British*, translated and edited by A.W. Wade-Evans (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1938); *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, translated by G.N. Garmonsway, in *Everyman's Library* series, No. 624, Second Edition (London: Dent, 1967); William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum = History of the English Kings*, edited and translated by R.A.B. Mynors, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). A metrical version of the Anonymous Life of St. Cuthbert has been preserved as the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti, Metrice Scripta* in

range from neutral to fairly positive; the fact that these other texts do not share Bede's specific perspective supports the claim that Oswiu is much more historically complex than has been afforded him.

The *Vita Cuthberti*, *Vita Columbae*, and *Vita Wilfridi*, which were written between 698 and 725, predate Bede's *Historia*.[14] All three are in hagiographic form and reference Oswiu's reign, his policies and their results, or his family members. All three were crafted with the singular agenda of proving an abbot's claim to a monastery; the *Vita Cuthberti* and *Vita Columbae* were meant to prove the legitimacy of the Irish traditions through the legitimacy of the abbot. Because the information is presented as it pertains to the life of the saint about whom the *Vita* has been written, they provide an indirect rather than in a direct look at Oswiu's life. This indirect perspective is valuable because it yields insight into the martial and ecclesiastical life in Northumbria in the late seventh century. But there is a glaring lack of information on Oswiu in the first two *Vitae*. His role in Northumbrian history was too great to ignore, but the omission reveals the agendas and particular biases of the authors who venerated the holiness of the saint over all else in the historical record.

The *Vita Cuthberti* and *Vita Columbae* were written to justify the Irish position in the notable sees of Lindisfarne and Iona during the aftershocks of the Council of Whitby.[15] They share another similarity: their material on Oswiu or his family was influenced by the reputation of Oswiu's son, Aldfrith. The *Vita Cuthberti* was written

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the *Miscellenea Biographica*, Publications of the Surtees Society, Vol. 8 (London: J.B. Nicholes and Son, 1838) pp. 89 – 117.

[14] The Whitby *Vita Cuthberti* (ca. 698 – 705); *Vita Columbae* (ca. 705); *Vita Wilfridi* (720 – 725).

[15] An earlier *Vita Columbae* was begun immediately after the Council of Whitby by Abbot Cummene. Nicholas J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 259. It is not clear whether Adomnan made use of this earlier manuscript when he wrote his.

during Aldfrith's reign, a fact that adds an insightful element to the singular entry regarding Oswiu's life. The *Vita* records that Cuthbert was at his hermitage on the Farne Islands when Aelfflaed, Abbess of Whitby, and Oswiu's daughter, met him and asked who would succeed Ecgfrith on the throne.[16] Cuthbert patiently reminded her of her brother, who was studying on Iona, implying that he would. There is no explanation for how Aldfrith came to be at Iona; the reader may assume that he went there of his own volition as another distinguished, royal member of the Church. Bede, however, provides a note of the talk which circulated after Aldfrith's death concerning his conception. At the time of writing, the anonymous monk did not wish to do harm to the memory of Aldfrith or, through him, to either Oswiu or Oswald.

In a similar manner, the *Vita Columbae* reveals a hesitation in the writer to besmirch either Aldfrith or his father or his uncle. Adomnan was Aldfrith's friend, and made two trips to Northumbria to see him and confer with him over the subject of Easter. It is worth noting that Adomnan seems to have visited for the first time just after "the battle of Ecgfrith," or *Nechtansmere* (685), a year after Aldfrith had come to the throne.[17] It makes for a good friendship for the king's former abbot to visit him at what was likely a tenuous time for Aldfrith. As such, Adomnan did not slight his friend in death by commenting on his origins. He focused, rather, on prophetic revelations, prophetic foreknowledge, and angelic visions, and inserted commentary relevant to his own era in and among his stories on Columba. He states in the first book that Oswald had a vision of Columba the night before he faced Caedwallan and Penda in 634, and Columba assured

[16] Whitby Anonymous, *Vita Cuthberti* III. 6.
[17] Adomnan, *Vita Columbae* II. 46. 103b.

him of his success.[18] Thus, the founder of Iona was presented as Oswald's heavenly benefactor and linked the monastery with the Northumbrian dynasty in a positive rather than negative manner.[19]

Both the *Vita Cuthberti* and the *Vita Columbae* are limited in their material on the Northumbrian royal family by their authors' lack of proximity to its members. On the other hand, Eddius Stephanus' *Vita Wilfridi = Life of Wilfrid* benefits from the proximity its subject had to the Northumbrian royals throughout his life. The *Vita Wilfridi* was written as a response to the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, given the fact that Cuthbert was a founding member of the Irish party which initially organized the monastery at Ripon.[20] The text manifests a classic model of an author's hero-worship of his subject and thus presents an extremely unflattering view of the kings Oswiu, Ecgfrith and Aldfrith due to their merited lack of support for the bishop. Nevertheless, it is extremely valuable for its content on the Council of Whitby as it is the only other account of the council besides Bede. It also records Wilfrid's personal connections to Oswiu and his family; a select few include Oswiu's wife, Eanflaed, who sent Wilfrid to Rome for his education, and Alfrith, who befriended him and gave him both the church at Ripon and land for a church in Hexam.

These three texts therefore present a picture of Oswiu that is sketchy and shadowy at best, but merely unflattering at worst. The thematic layout of the *Vita Cuthberti* and *Vita Columbae* make it difficult to discern when certain events occurred. Therefore, they

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[18] Adomnan, *Vita Columbae* I. 1. 8a – 9b.
[19] It is also interesting to consider how strong the Cult of Oswald had become by this time.
[20] Bertram Colgrave, *The Life of Wilfrid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927) p. x. Eddius is supposed to be the "Aedde surnamed Stephen" mentioned by Bede as having been the first singing master in the Northumbrian church, "invited from Kent" and brought up to Northumbria by Wilfrid himself. See Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 2; Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 14.

can only supplement Bede. Their authors felt no need to contribute any good mention to Oswiu's name, for he had destroyed their way of life, but they were compelled by Aldfrith, who evidently esteemed his father, to not libel Oswiu. Aldfrith's respect for his father is notable; he bore no grudge against the man who had tucked him out of sight in a monastery for fifty years, and he honored Oswiu's legacy in the Roman Church by accepting the Roman Easter before Iona did.[21] Eddius' *Vita Wilfridi* differs significantly from the anonymous work and Adomnan's *Vita Columbae* in its presentation of time and opinion of Aldfrith. Eddius followed a chronological rather than a thematic ordering, and resembles Bede's methodology in this way. Also, Eddius went further than Bede to criticize Aldfrith for not supporting Wilfrid's various claims and grievances, and his open ire toward Oswiu and Aldfrith suggests that the respect which had been showed toward the kings after their deaths had begun to fade by the time Bede wrote the *Historia*.[22]

The other three sources differ from the *Vitae* in that their authors were in a position to use Bede as a source, yet they retain varying degrees of independence from Bede. They take the form of chronicles and histories. Nennius, a Briton, compiled a history of Northern traditions in the ninth century organized on a genealogical basis much like in the Book of Genesis. Little is known of him, but his *Historia Brittonum* is valuable for its distinctive and uniquely British perspective. As such, Nennius' *Historia* offers details of the British connection in Oswiu's life: most notably the name of his first wife, Rienmelth, the daughter of Royth map Rhun, and the defeat of the British kings who

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[21] Aldfrith died eleven years before Iona converted. His success in Northumbria and friendship with Archbishop Theodore suggest he converted upon his coronation. See Chapter Six.

[22] Since Bede and Eddius wrote in the 720s, there is no cause to doubt that Bede used Eddius' account of the Council of Whitby and added either other eye-witness accounts or his own literary flourishes. See Colgrave, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 306 – 307, nt. 2.

were present with Penda at the Battle of the *Winwaed* and had continued with him prior to that as far as the city *Iudeu*, now Stirling.[23] Nennius records a great deal of information pertaining to Oswiu although there is no mention of the Council of Whitby. Nennius considers Osiwu's most distinguished feat to be the defeat of Penda at the *Winwaed*, which Nennius calls the *Field of Gai*.[24]

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a complicated source to use as it is riddled with falsified accounts and layered with anachronisms. However, it does contain some relevant material as well as a few significant accounts. The *Chronicle* as it exists today is made up of nine fragments of varying length. The *Parker Chronicle* and the *Laud Chronicle* are the most relevant, especially the *Laud*, as they are based on an Alfredian chronicle compiled in 891 from even older manuscripts. These two contain the most information on Oswiu, the *Laud* having the most interesting. It reports two events in which Oswiu or Oswiu's daughter, Osthryth, is involved in the dedication of the abbey of Medeshamtede, now Peterborough.[25] These dedicatory accounts suggest that Oswiu was particularly renowned as a king long after his death, since his authority is called upon to lend credence to apparent forgeries.[26] The *Chronicle* is organized on a year-by-year basis, and contains very little analysis, making it difficult to gage the impact of Bede's opinion on the material.

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[23] Nennius, *Hist Brit* 57, 64. D.P. Kirby identifies *Iudeu* as Stirling, where the modern stronghold sits atop a massive basalt up-thrust in close proximity to the Firth of Forth, in *The Earliest English Kings* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991) p. 90.
[24] Nennius, *Hist Brit* 64.
[25] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E 656, E 675.
[26] The *Laud Chronicle* is alternately named the *Peterborough Chronicle*. It is possible that these two accounts are forgeries crafted to give credence to the abbey's claim to possession of the land on which it sits, but it is significant that Oswiu is the king chosen as the authority that donated the land. If the *Chronicle* offers nothing else, this alone speaks to the legacy of that particular king.

The sixth medieval source displays a great degree of independence from Bede. William of Malmesbury wrote the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* in the early 1140s.[27] William was the librarian at the abbey of Malmesbury and, as such, wrote nineteen different works of history and hagiography. His style is classical, although he does not adopt a singular pattern, adjusting his style to the material.[28] His is the most comprehensive, as well as cautious history on the subject of Oswiu since Bede, although not very detailed. In fact, he only refers to the Council of Whitby as Oswiu's effort to teach "Christianity in his kingdom…the true law."[29] However, he approached the subject from the same general perspective as Bede.[30] That is, both historians accepted the religious overtones of the council and recorded them sincerely. William departs from Bede's negativity toward the king and reluctance to award him any spirit of sincerity in his deeds by concluding that the source of Oswiu's virtue was a penitent spirit after the death of Oswine.[31]

These six sources express a summation of Oswiu that is independent of Bede and supports the conclusion that there is a way, other than Bede's, to evaluate Oswiu and to understand his motivations and contribution to history. Not all the sources contain material which directly regards the Council of Whitby, but they provide valuable information for interpreting the conditions which put pressure on Oswiu at the council. Oswiu's decision at the Council of Whitby was moved by the sum of his life. We therefore need to understand the scope of his life in order to appreciate the complexity of the pressures in action upon him at the council, as well as to understand how that

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[27] The biographical information is from J.A. Giles' introduction in William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle*, translated by J.A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847; New York: AMS Press, 1968) pp. vi – xvi.
[28] As J.A. Giles observes in his introduction, p. xiv.
[29] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* I. 50. 3.
[30] He seems to have ignored Nennius' work, for he refers to Alfrith, the son of Rienmelth and Oswiu, as a bastard, and therefore was ignorant of the marriage that took place between the Briton and the Angle.
[31] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* I. 50. 3.

complexity has perpetuated Bede's dichotomy of godly vs. ungodly kings in the majority of modern scholarship.

# CHAPTER TWO

## The Early Medieval Setting

The Council of Whitby resulted directly from natural tensions caused by organizational and methodological differences between the Roman and Irish Church institutions in Northumbria, 634 – 664.[32] Both churches were established decades before their contest in Northumbria, the Roman Church in 597, and the Irish was in 573; had legitimate origins but were incompatible with one another in that the Roman was centralized and hierarchical in nature while the Irish institution was autonomous; and were products of their native cultures. No better analogy exists to illustrate the gaping chasm between Rome and Ireland than that of Rome's military history. Never in the history of Rome did that empire conquer Ireland. Because of this, Ireland's culture missed experiencing the benefits of Rome's social programs and, as a result, Ireland's church was tribal, rural and monastic while the Roman Church was systematic, urban and episcopal.[33] Ireland's independence from Rome also created ideal conditions for the perpetuation of ritual observances long deemed unorthodox by the Roman Church. This chapter examines the political and religious conditions that led to the establishment of

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[32] It is difficult to call the Irish church an institution in the traditional sense since, simply put, Ireland's culture was anti-institutional at best. However, the term is used here in reference to what institutional kernel existed in the organizational nexus of the monastic system established by the controversial, yet well known and historical, Patrick.

[33] See T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

these incongruous church institutions in Northumbria and the friction between them in relation to the context of the Council of Whitby.[34]

Rome's episcopal see cultivated an authority of great magnitude in the last century and a half of the political duration of the Western Roman Empire and successfully pressed its claim to the headship of the earthly Church, thanks, in great part, to a Biblical basis, an apostolic legacy rooted in history and the patronage of the Roman emperor Constantine (306 – 337). Biblically, the words of Christ to Peter were that He would build His Church upon a rock and give the keys of Heaven to Peter; apostolically, both Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome.[35] Convinced by these arguments, Constantine incorporated the Church into a governmental, hierarchical system, centered in Rome, at first, and later in Constantinople.[36] The emperor's personal relationship with the Bishops of Rome and his gifts to them specifically exceeded gifts bestowed to other churches in the empire and strengthened the position of the Biblical and Apostolic evidence.[37]

Later popes, such as Damasus (366 – 384), Siricius I (384 – 399), Innocent I (407 – 417), Boniface I (418 – 422) and Gelasius I (492 – 496) developed the primacy of the Roman Bishop through the creation of specific terminology, canonical decrees, and doctrinal concepts. These popes developed the concept of a ruler who was the head of the

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[34] There is a tendency to consider the manifestation at Whitby as an isolated instance with repercussions which served only the inhabitants of Northumbria. The scope of the Easter controversy is actually continental, due to the spread of Irish practices by Columbanus, and the Council of Whitby is merely the climax and conclusion of the third of four progressive phases occurring from 591 to 716. In each phase, the influence of Irish teachings came up against an opposing practice with equal if not greater influence, conveyed by association with kings and saints and the outpouring of their patronage. See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 408.
[35] Matthew 16: 18 – 19, KJV.
[36] Charles Matson Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2004) pp. 227 – 232.
[37] See Odahl, *Constantine*, pp. 113 – 116, 221 – 231.

Church, both a prince and the representative of Peter, the inheritor of Peter's keys; whose role in regards to his fellow bishops was as a father over sons; whose personal word was equal to the rulings of an entire ecumenical council; who was to receive notification on every major concern and to be the officiator of the highest court of appeals.[38] The pope's power on earth was a symbol of Christ in Heaven.

These developments were quite significant, for they created a figure of authority for the West to turn to amidst the ensuing barbarian invasions which created many isolated pockets of Catholic and Christian faithful across the European continent and the insular regions of Ireland and England. Historically, the Roman emperors had faced stiff opposition from the Celtic and Germanic peoples that lived along Rome's northernmost frontier. The early emperors took advantage of the disorganized and limited size of the barbarian tribes and conquered great holdings in the area now making up North Africa, Spain, France, Switzerland and Yugoslavia.[39] The Roman borders, however, were only as strong as the central government and, as the Roman government weakened and grew more dependent upon Germanic allies, or *foederati*, in the fifth century, large confederations of Germanic tribes assimilated themselves into the Roman lands via colonialism and invasion.[40] While the Eastern Empire primarily suffered more from complications generated by its dependency upon *foederati* troops, Western Europe fell to

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[38] See Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy*, in *History of European Civilization Library* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc, 1968) pp. 13 – 24.
[39] This pertains only to the Western Roman Empire
[40] This socio-political restructuring was a result of Romanization throughout the third and fourth centuries. See Brian Tierney, *Western Europe in the Middle Ages: 300 – 1475*, Sixth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill College, 1999) p. 66.

invasions by the Vandals, Visigoths, Burgundians, Alemanni, Franks, Ostrogoths, Angles and Saxons.[41]

The invaded peoples and lands received their invaders in varying degrees of assimilation. The degree to which the Germanic peoples assimilated into the preexistent Roman culture depended upon the degree of Romanization already imposed on both the Germans and the land. The Germans who were most Romanized and settled in highly Romanized lands preserved more of the Roman culture than Germans who were less-Romanized and settled in the satellite Roman provinces that had enjoyed Romanization for only a shorter period of time. In both of these cases, a greater percentage of Roman culture was preserved than in the third extreme: Germans with minimal Romanization settling in areas where Rome's presence was weak. Therefore, the situation was worst in Britain, where the un-Romanized Angles and Saxons invaded and then settled in a land that had struggled with its own barbarian problem for so long that the north, above Hadrian's Wall, was still unconquered territory and all Roman civilization was found in the south.

Rome had stemmed the advance of the Germans into Britain from the middle of the third century, when a line of hard-point defenses known as the "Saxon Shore Forts" were constructed.[42] These forts were staffed with Roman soldiers and, when Stilicho, the commander of the Roman Empire's western armies, stripped "the legion deployed in far-off Britain, that curbs the savage Irish and reads the marks tattooed upon the bodies of

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[41] Tierney, *Western Europe*, pp. 66 – 71.
[42] See Stephen Johnson, *The Roman Forts of the Saxon Shore* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1976).

dying Picts" from its station, Britain's external defense ended.[43] The British fought the Angles and the Saxons for twenty years under the direction of two skilled Romano-British generals, Ambrosius Aurelianus and Arthur.[44] However, their efforts were confounded by later leaders, such as Vortigern, who invested in a particularly counter-productive policy of inviting Saxons into Britain to fight against the Saxons.[45]

Once in-country, the Saxons felt at home in Britain's river-valley geography and settled along the banks of the major rivers with mouths along the southern and eastern coastlines.[46] They established the kingdoms of Bernicia, Deira and Kent, although Bernicia and Deira were later unified under Aethelric and became Northumbria. His son, Aethelfrith (592 – 616) made the union permanent. In the south, Kent was distinguished by its political affiliation with the Merovingians, an alliance which shaped its political role among its neighbors in the coming centuries.[47] As the coastal settlements spread inland, the Angles and Saxons chased the British and Romano-British inhabitants to the western fringes of the island where the exiled natives preserved the Church and culture of Rome deep within the hills of Cornwall, Wales and Cumberland.[48] The invaders obliterated and ignored all traces of Rome in their territory, and seven pagan kingdoms soon emerged: Kent, East Saxons, West Saxons, South Saxons, East Angles, Mercia and Northumbria.

The general state of the Catholic Church following the fall of Roman imperial administration in the late fifth century was that of a religious institution fallen subject to

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[43] Claudian, *De Bello Getico* 414 ff, as cited by John Morris, *The Age of Arthur, a History of the British Isles from 350 to 650* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973) p. 21.
[44] Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) pp. 358 – 359.
[45] Bede, *Hist Eccl* I. 14.
[46] Tierney, *Western Europe*, p. 70.
[47] Morris, *Age of Arthur*, pp. 318 – 320.
[48] Tierney, *Western Europe*, p. 70.

poor leadership and lack of discipline at the individual level. Doctrinal and liturgical issues which had plagued the Church during its earlier days did not flourish but, rather, incubated within pockets of the faithful in communities scattered amid a pagan majority. Early on, the economic, political and civil upheavals suffered by the empire had inspired some individuals to renounce the world and live a life solely dedicated to God. In Egypt, Sts. Anthony and Pachomius pioneered this lifestyle, and Pachomius' directive that the men who joined him be subject to his authority and live by his *regula* laid the foundations for classic Medieval monasticism.[49] This *regula*, or rule, governed every aspect of a monk's life: food, clothing, work, etc. Basil of Cappadocia improved upon this plan by emphasizing communal living, limiting the number of the brethren to thirty or forty, curbing the abbot's powers, introducing education into monastic life and incorporating charitable acts toward the needy as a tenet of a monk's life.[50] Innovations of this sort helped to spread the model across the empire. Sts. Martin, John Cassian and Honoratus all established thriving monasteries throughout Gaul, whence the practice was eventually carried all the way to the shores of Ireland.

The monasteries established prior to the Germanic invasions were the source of both decline and renewal in the years following the upheaval. In the first instance, the isolated nature of monasteries functioned against them. With poor leadership, attention to the *regula* lagged, discipline flagged and immorality was rumored to be at an all time high among the monks.[51] However, not every individual who became a monk was

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[49] John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism, Origins and Early Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972 reprint) pp. 15 – 19, 27 – 29.
[50] Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, pp. 48 – 50.
[51] As may be inferred by Gildas' comments on the British monks and clergy. See Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, pp. 21 – 29.

complacent toward the tawdry aspects of monastic life. St. Benedict of Monte Cassino (480 – 547) theorized that the decline in discipline was a result of the extremism suffused within many of the monastic foundations; not every man could follow the strict asceticism which Anthony's model, or the Irish model under Columbanus, demanded.[52] Benedict scripted a *regula*, modeled after those of Basil, Augustine and John Cassian, which incorporated community living and regimented specific hours for manual labor as well as for the service of God, and promised a less-extreme lifestyle.[53]

Benedict and his predecessors crafted a satisfactory life for themselves within the monasteries, but the majority of westerners' needs went unmet by the Byzantine emperors in the east. The emperors were at a strategic disadvantage dealing with the theological disputes of the eastern church, as well as fighting off massive barbarian attacks. The role of protector of the west fell to the leader of the Church at Rome, one of the last surviving government positions of the failing western empire that had retained any clout and was to recover much of its former authority in the wake of Lombard attacks in Italy and the spread of Islam through Egypt and Syria.[54] Pope Leo I, the Great (440 – 461), infused an aura of authority, administration and monarchy into the position the Church held in the west, firmly securing the concept of Petrine Primacy which his predecessors had conceived of and developed.[55] Leo's active involvement in averting attacks against Rome by Huns and Vandals shaped a more secular civil role for the bishop than ever held by any of his predecessors and established a permanent position in

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[52] W.C. H. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) p. 882. More is to be written on Columbanus and Irish monasticism. Suffice now to say that the Irish preserved the harsh asceticism pioneered in the Egyptian desert; preserved, embraced, enhanced.
[53] Benedict sculpted his *regula* to appeal to the ordinary human, not the "near-perfect." See Frend, *Rise*, p. 882.
[54] Barraclough, *Medieval Papacy*, p. 30.
[55] Barraclough, *Medieval Papacy*, p. 26.

civil affairs for his successors.[56] However, by nature of its occupant, the protectorate was religious as well as militaristic and diplomatic. The role of spiritual warden was developed by Pope Gregory I, the Great (590 – 604), who sought to redeem the souls of men across the fallen west as well as ransom their bodies from the barbaric hordes. To accomplish this, Gregory planned to send out missions of Benedictine monks to preach the Gospel and convert the barbarians.[57]

Gregory chose the Benedictines because he was himself a Benedictine monk and felt confident both in the capabilities of his brethren to spread the Gospel in a disciplined and dignified manner and in the quality of the *regula* to uphold the Church in foreign lands. Born into an aristocratic family, he established seven monasteries on as many of his family estates after inheriting the land.[58] He was the founder of St. Andrews, an urban monastery atop the Caelian hill in Rome, and was residing there when Pope Pelagius II summoned him and ordained him as a deacon.[59] Gregory immediately journeyed to Constantinople to serve as the pope's ambassador (579 – 586), and then was recalled to serve the pope as a deacon in the Lateran palace. Gregory's skill, personality and experience caused him to be elected pope upon Pelagius' death in 589. Prior to Gregory I, Leo I had contributed the most to the papal argument through his personal nomenclature, legislation and doctrine.[60] Gregory, however, had the insight and inspiration to recognize the need for consolidation of doctrine and practice in the Church, as well as the charisma to inspire his subordinates to embrace his vision.

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[56] Tierney, *Western Europe*, p. 54.
[57] Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980) p. 250.
[58] Richards, *Consul of God*, p. 32.
[59] Richards, *Consul of God*, pp. 32 – 36.
[60] Barraclough, *Medieval Papacy*, pp. 26 – 34.

As pope, Gregory cultivated a number of reform and mission projects throughout the eastern and western worlds. He worked to convert Jews across the former empire, combated Donatism in Africa and strove to eliminate paganism in the Italian peninsula and beyond.[61] His interest in Britain, however, may have begun years before his election to the papacy. Bede records a story in which Gregory, while passing through a market in Rome, saw fair-haired slaves for sale and asked whence they had come. He was told they were from Britain, a land ensnared in heathenism, and that their people were called *Angli*. He replied that they had "the face of angels, and such men should be fellow-heirs of the angels in heaven," then he asked the name of their kingdom.[62] Upon hearing that they were from *Deiri*, he exclaimed "Good! Snatched from the wrath of Christ and called to his mercy."[63] Finally, he asked the name of their king. "Aelle," he was told, and "Alleluia!" he replied, "the praise of God the Creator must be sung in those parts."[64] He then went to ask the pope's permission to lead a mission to that land, but was denied. According to Bede, Gregory's vision of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons suffered a hiatus until, at last, he, himself, sent the Benedictine monk, Augustine, who was then residing in Rome, to England in 597.

Recent scholarship, however, has concluded that Gregory's attention to the situation in England was more of an immediate reaction rather than "a long-cherished ambition."[65] Gregory no doubt knew of the English slaves sold at Roman markets; the Bernician wars against Aelle in Deira produced an influx of captives. Gregory's letters,

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[61] Richards, *Consul of God*, pp. 228 – 238.
[62] "*…angelicam habent faciem, et tales anglorum in caelis decet esse coheredas.*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 1.
[63] "*…de ira eruti et ad misericordiam Christi vocati.*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 1.
[64] "*Alleluiah, laudem Dei Creatoris illis in partibus oportet cantari.*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 1.
[65] Richards, *Consul of God*, p. 240.

alternatively, suggest that the converted Merovingian kings and queens relayed a request from the Saxon Breatwalda, Aethelbert, or his Merovingian wife, Bertha, that men learned in the Scriptures come preach to them.[66] Gregory accepted the inspiration and invitation and charged Augustine with the conversion of the Saxon Breatwalda.[67] The mission of forty monks had far reaching consequences in England, although it took some time for them to reach England. The Saxons had a reputation for committing terrible atrocities, and Augustine's courage flagged at least once on the journey.[68] After receiving encouragement from Gregory, Augustine continued on his mission and landed on the Isle of Thanet off the Kentish coast in 597. Aethelbert kept them under observation on the island for some time, but the monks eventually gained an audience with him after a few days. Aethelbert came to the island and established himself in an open area before summoning Augustine and the other monks to his presence. He was wary of any evil magic that Augustine might practice against him, although he had heard about the Roman Church from his wife. Augustine arrived with the pomp and circumstance befitting a kingly presentation of the Gospel: he and his brothers arrived chanting litanies and praying while they carried a silver cross together with a painted icon of Christ.[69] Aethelbert accepted their preaching, at least in part, and awarded Augustine a dwelling place and the freedom to preach in his kingdom. Aethelbert's eventual full acceptance of Augustine's message and baptism at his hand was crucial for reviving the Church in

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[66] Ian Wood, "The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury," *Speculum* 69, No. 1 (Jan 1994): pp. 1 – 17.
[67] The term, 'Breatwalda,' refers to the superior status of one king over the other six kingdoms. It can be translated as 'overking,' and possessed a variable degree of 'imperium' in the classical Roman sense: military command over all kings. Command over the church was soon to be added to the scope of the Breatwalda's authority.
[68] See Bede, *Hist Eccl* I. 23 – 25.
[69] "*…crucem…ferentes argenteam, et imaginem Domini Salvatoris in tabula depictam, laetaniasque canentes…salute aeterna Domino supplicabant.*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* I. 25.

England, for his new religion became intermixed with the political demands of his position as Breatwalda.

Aethelbert possessed more of a political than spiritual reason for accepting Augustine's preaching. His political relationship with the Merovingians was through his wife. The advent of Augustine and a Church based in far-off Rome and governed by the Pope's authority ensured that Aethelbert would not be linked to the Merovingians as a subordinate in religious matters, should he seek to convert.[70] Also, as Gregory's letters imply, someone of high estate had been seeking spiritual representation. Aethelbert's conversion was strongly based on a concept of sponsorship; had he come to the Christian God through the church in Gaul, his sponsor would likely have been the Merovingian king.[71] But Augustine supplied Aethelbert with his own bishop, as well as a link to Rome, and prevented Aethelbert's subordination to the Gallic kings, allowing him to maintain his autonomy. There is no mention of a sponsor to officiate the king's baptism at Augustine's hand. This personal connection with Aethelbert assured Augustine of the support of the king, a vital element for the monks' protection and sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon law, and patronage and backing for the completion of Gregory's agenda.[72]

As mentioned above, the Roman church's association with the Breatwalda was a significant contribution to its success and advancement throughout the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms by means of direct confrontation between clergymen or royal marriages. Augustine had to deal with the British bishops, over whom he had been given authority

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[70] J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) pp. 29, 45; Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, Third Edition (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991) pp. 63 – 64.
[71] Wood, "Mission," pp. 4 – 5; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 30 – 37.
[72] Margaret Deanesly, *Augustine of Canterbury* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1964) pp. 89 – 95; F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947) pp. 61 – 2; Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 21 – 37.

by Gregory, which he was wont to exercise but that the bishops were loathe to recognize.[73] As he set out to reestablish and revive churches and monasteries, Augustine came into contact with the British church and its effect on the spiritual landscape. The British church, at its most basic level, was the remnant of the Romano-British church established in the third and fourth centuries and abandoned once the Roman government withdrew from British affairs in the mid fifth century. While the Irish church on British soil was still in its fledgling stages, the British church was an established institution which possessed a legacy of participation in Church councils.[74] However, that interaction is recorded as occurring in the middle of the fourth century, prior to the Anglo-Saxon onslaught. It is unlikely that the British church was represented very often at councils, as travel was expensive and it is recorded that British bishops were so poor that their passage back to Britain after the Council of Ariminium was paid for by Emperor Constantius.[75]

The first meeting between the Romans and the British, with bishops arraigned from the British kingdoms with the help of Aethelbert, went poorly. Augustine's officiousness offended the British. After a second, equally offensive, meeting, Augustine predicted the demise of the British bishops at the hand of Aethelfrith of Bernicia. His efforts to strengthen the foundations of the revived Church appear to have been more productive. He sent a list of questions to Gregory, the nature of which were quite basic and dealt with organizational and social issues which were undoubtedly the product of

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[73] "…but we commit to you, my brother, all the bishops of Britain that the unlearned may be instructed, the weak strengthened by your counsel, and the perverse corrected by your authority." Bede, *Hist Eccl* I. 27.
[74] Three English bishops were present at councils in Arles in 314 and Ariminium in 359. Frend, *Rise*, p. 563.
[75] Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicorum* II. 41, ed. C.Halm, CSEL 1 (Vienna, 1866), p. 94. Cited by Frend, *Rise*, p. 563.

the sort of leadership which had filled vacancies following the eviction of the British leadership.[76] The eventual consequence of Augustine's initial effort was a solid establishment in Kent from which later bishops could base missionary efforts via the second means: marriage.

The transmission of the Roman Church into Northumbria occurred through the marriage of Aethelbert's daughter, Aethelburh, to King Edwin of Northumbria, although the marriage was not arranged by Aethelbert. Eadbald, Aethelbert's son and successor, sent Aethelburh north during a time when the church, as well as the kingdom of Kent, was suffering difficulties. Eadbald took the throne after his father's death in 616 and went apostate for a few years, during which time he lost the Breatwaldship to Raedwald, king of the East Angles.[77] Saebert, king of the East Saxons, whom Aethelbert had sponsored in baptism, died also, and his sons chased the bishop of the East Saxons south into Kent. Bede indicates that many of the post-Augustine bishops had abandoned the English lands and fled to Gaul before Laurence came to King Eadbald and told him of a dream in which he'd been whipped for the sake of the king's salvation.[78]

Eadbald's return to the Church and personal dedication to its patronage effected the perpetuation of his father's protection of the monks and their religion. Aethelbert had permitted the construction of a cathedral within the royal city of Canterbury and the church of Sts. Peter and Paul in the monastery outside the city. Following his father's example, Eadbald erected a church to Mary in the same monastery and then returned the bishops to their sees, to the best of his ability. Of the two bishops named, Justus returned

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[76] Such as theft from a church and marriage and female attendance. Bede has preserved these questions and their answers in *Hist Eccl* I. 27.
[77] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 5.
[78] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 6.

to Rochester but Mellitus was not allowed back into London. Bede remarks that Eadbald's royal power was significantly diminished, for he was unable to force the people of London to take Mellitus back.[79] He lacked his father's power and authority, and so his greatest contribution to the spread of the Roman faith was to come much later, after Edwin of Deira had overthrown Aethelfrith of Bernicia and had converted in fulfillment of a vow.

Mention has been made of this Aethelfrith of Bernicia. In addition to solidifying his father's union of Bernicia and Deira, he was also responsible for the demise of the British bishops at Chester.[80] He began to rule Bernicia in 592 and added Deira to his lands in 604. To do this he killed Aelle, king of Deira. Aelle's son, Edwin, escaped to Raedwald's East Anglian court where he grew up in Raedwald's fosterage. In 616, he returned with Raedwald and overthrew Aethelfrith, sending Aethelfrith's sons into exile among the other kingdoms of the north. Edwin's authority was then based upon the support of Raedwald and his own subordinate status until after Raedwald's death. Edwin's political alliances changed upon the death of the Breatwalda, and he looked southward to the once-powerful Kentish kingdom which still possessed its connections to the Merovingians and continental trade.[81] He formed an alliance with this southern kingdom by negotiating a marriage between himself and Eadbald's sister, Aethelburh.

Aethelburh brought a retainer of priests and monks with her to Northumbria, thereby simultaneously renewing the connection between the Roman Church and the Breatwalda and transporting the Roman Church into Northumbria. The queen's bishop,

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[79] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 6.
[80] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 2.
[81] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 77.

Paulinus, actively pursued the conversion of the northern peoples while attending to the spiritual protection of the queen. He convinced Edwin to give up idols after Edwin and Aethelburh's daughter, Eanflaed, was born and the king had won a great victory against the West Saxons. However, Edwin submitted to baptism only after a few years of serious thought and study. There are conflicting accounts of this baptism, as to who performed it and when it took place. Bede says that Paulinus committed the act, while Nennius records that Edwin was baptized along with twelve thousand other persons by Rhun map Urien on Easter, 628, a year after Eanflaed was born and baptized in 627.[82]

The rising significance of sponsorship is the most viable answer to the discrepancies among these accounts.[83] Rhun was the son of Urien, the former King of Rheged, modern Strathclyde. Urien had been a powerful presence in Bernicia during the reign of Aethelric.[84] After Aethelfrith's death, Rhun likely inherited a portion of Urien's power, significant enough for Edwin to seek an alliance with him after the death of Raedwald. Edwin's major connections were with Kent, but he had to have recognized the potential of aligning with kingdoms surrounding his land. Rhun sponsored Edwin as Paulinus baptized him, most likely not with twelve thousand other persons but, perhaps, with a retinue of his thanes in a symbolic act harking back to the apostles.[85]

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[82] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 9; Nennius, *Hist Brit* 63.

[83] James Campbell, "Observations on the Conversion of England," *Ampeleforth Journal* 2, No. 78 (1973): pp. 12 – 26.

[84] But not quite strong enough. Urien died *ca.* 593, undone by treachery at the Siege of Lindisfarne and his lands were subsumed by Aethelfrith, who came to power in that same year. Simply put, Urien was a contemporary of Aethelfrith's father, and his death made the Rheged territories easy pickings for the Bernician Aethelfrith. Morris, *Age of Arthur*, pp. 234 – 235.

[85] He was baptized at York, in the church of St. Peter. This church was made of wood, and construction had begun during Edwin's catechumen days. Alfred P. Smyth states that Rhun was responsible for the baptism of both Eanflaed and Edwin, and cites the *Annales Cambriae* as evidence. Smyth suggests that Bede's "dislike of things Welsh probably led him to suppress this tradition" as propaganda for the direct connection between the House of Northumbria and the House of Kent. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland A.D. 80 – 1000* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) p. 22.

Kirby suggests a date between 627 and 628 for the baptism, given that there were more than four years between his marriage into the Kentish line and his baptism.[86] Edwin's conversion led to a period of extending the Roman Church through the king's patronage and sponsorship. There is an association of kingly domain to episcopal domain in Bede's narrative, and under this assumption Paulinus would have received a greatly extended territory, for Edwin extended his own authority as far west as the islands of Anglesey and Man.[87] Although it is not clear whether Paulinus would have thought of his territorial bounds in terms of a diocese, his authority was assured by his association with a convert king. York became the site of Paulinus' episcopal see, and Edwin further graced it with the foundations of a stone church.[88] Edwin sponsored Eorpwald, son of Raedwald and king of the East Angles, in baptism.[89] However, Edwin was killed in a retaliatory attack by Caedwallan of Gwynedd in 633, before his stone church was complete. Edwin's death did not mean the immediate end of the Church's presence in Northumbria, although it did presage it.

Caedwallan was allied with Penda the Mercian.[90] Bede documented this alliance, although there appear to have been a few more alliances made with "other disaffected Anglian elements" which Bede did not record.[91] Kirby notes that the sudden reappearance of the sons of Aethelfrith, namely Oswald, Oswiu and Ealfrith, together with the Deiran, Osric, suggest that the exiles had a part in this overthrow as well.[92] Osric and Eanfrith reigned immediately after Edwin's death for less than a year, a space of time

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[86] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 79.
[87] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 87; Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 5.
[88] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 14.
[89] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 15.
[90] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 20.
[91] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 85 – 88.
[92] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 87.

in which Caedwallan continued to ravage Bernician and Deiran lands and which is often included as a tenth year in Oswald's own reign.[93] These two men were apostates, but Bede places the exit of Paulinus, along with Aethelburh and Eanflaed, after Caedwallan killed Osric and Eanfrith.[94]

It is at this point, in 634, that the policy of royal patronage as it applied equally to both church institutions sparked the specific confrontation which led to the Council of Whitby. Northumbria was not without episcopal guidance for too extended a period of time, for Oswald, son of Aethelfrith, had converted to the Irish faith while in exile and requested that the elders of the Irish faith supply his kingdom with a bishop. Oswald established a monastic community on the Island of Lindisfarne for Aidan, the bishop whom the elders sent. There must have been enough Roman Catholics left in Northumbria to notice the stark differences between the religious practices of their former bishop Palladius and their new bishop. The general population, perhaps, was not so isolated from their Dalraidan and British neighbors as to be unaware of the peculiarities; specifically the calculation for the Easter celebration and their style of tonsure. Up until Oswald's ascension to the throne, however, these people with their peculiar way of worship had been outsiders, non-Saxons: Britons and Dalraidans. Now the Saxon Northumbrian king espoused this strange faith. Many people must have wondered where such traditions had originated.

As previously mentioned, monasticism, the conscious decision to forsake worldly possessions and live a life devoted to God in isolation from the world, originated in the

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[93] Here we follow Kirby's argument for this lost year and Bede's own comment on the common practice of obliterating the embarrassing year of the apostates. D.P. Kirby, "Bede and Northumbrian Chronology," *The English Historical Review* 78, No. 308 (Jul., 1963): pp. 514 – 527; Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 1.
[94] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 20.

east. It was the primary vehicle by which Christianity was transmitted into Ireland, specifically by way of Sts. Martin, John Cassian and Honoratus in Gaul. It was the particular means by which the religion flourished in the pagan country and the vehicle by which the non-Roman Easter entered Ireland along with texts and art forms. Irish monasticism, in comparison to Benedictine, was more ascetic in nature. Two variations of monastic units sprang from the east and traveled west to Ireland by way of Gaul: eremitic and cenobitic. Both eremitic monasticism, a form developed by Anthony in Egypt which favored isolation, and cenobitic monasticism, developed by Pachomius which incorporated communal living and adherence to a rule, were practiced in Ireland and flavored the Irish church.[95]

The Christian religion had been practiced in Ireland since the early fifth century, carried there by missionaries, the best known of whom are Patrick and Palladius. Patrick was a Briton trained for the service of the church in Gaul while Palladius was sent by Pope Celestine to be Ireland's first bishop. Kathleen Hughes argues that the traditions of these men were not yet dissimilar to the practices of the greater Church, and that such dissimilitude developed later, although "Patrick's mission demonstrates that from the beginning the peculiar conditions of an extra-imperial, heroic society compelled unconventional measures of evangelization."[96] The means by which Patrick and Palladius arrived in Ireland, and also their personal origins, however, serve as fine examples of the

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[95] See Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, pp. 15 – 20, 27 – 38. See also Hughes, *Church*, pp. 10 – 16. In fact, the western continental monastic institutions held no equal to the strictness of Irish monastic practices, and so it is the very nature of this strictness which links Irish monasticism with Egypt and Anthony and Pachomius. Frend, *Rise*, p. 878.
[96] Hughes, *Church*, p. 35.

opportunity for the transmission of eastern tradition and the monasticism which developed there, into Ireland.

Patrick especially espoused the virtues of the monastic life and applied its forms to his life as a missionary in Ireland. His adaptability to the Irish political and cultural conditions aided in the establishment of the church on the island, since he was not dependant upon an urban system for survival. He traveled among the kings, gave and received gifts, and presented the Irish with a religion that could be folded easily into their hierarchical culture and social systems.[97] The monastic system established by Patrick flourished in the non-urban Irish church, whose rural system favored monastic enclosures and familial links between abbots and kings. Although Patrick initiated an episcopal system, bishops eventually did not exercise the same authority as they did among the continental churches.[98] The nature of Irish monasticism was such that abbots held sway over bishops and every monastery followed the rule of its founder, rather than an overarching precept. Because of this diversity, which very much resembled the secular hierarchy in that both operated without a centralized head, an underlying emphasis on right beliefs rather than right ritual cushioned everyday relations between founders and their foundations.

The church which continued to grow after Patrick's death (c. 461) incorporated a number of the strengths and weaknesses of the formerly pagan culture. The Irish bardic tradition absorbed the heroes of the Bible and created new heroes out of many biblical figures along with Irish abbots and monastic founders. Irish monks learned Latin and preserved texts in their monasteries, a process which reveals a reclassification of duties

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[97] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 220 – 221.
[98] Frend, *Rise*, p. 794.

and responsibilities among the learned classes in Irish culture.[99] In addition to these scholarly strengths, the Irish possessed a heightened sense of spiritualism which harkened from their devotion to ascetic practices. In a particular Irish trait, men and women alike submitted to extreme forms of deprivation for the sake of deepening their awareness of the Most High God. Problems began to arise when the Irish left their island and its customs to travel to lands of the former Roman Empire, and brought their customs with them. The cause of these problems was rooted in the weaknesses of the Irish church; specifically the lack of a cohesive system of governance which could compete with the systems of the greater continent, the lack of apostolic figures which would lend credibility and authenticity to their arguments for autonomy, and a controversial calculation for the Resurrection of Christ, Christianity's most important date.

All three of these weaknesses came to be recognized by the sixth century. The need for apostolic legacy and centralized leadership quickly became apparent through contact with the Roman system. Irish monks spread out from Ireland through the practice of *Peregrinatio*, voluntary exile and self-committal to a life totally dependent upon God in a strange country. At its heart, *Peregrinatio* arguably was not primarily an evangelistic mission, since the monks' purpose for leaving was to isolate themselves. This does not mean that the Irish did not preach their faith. The apparent departure by the Irish from what could be taken for a standard monastic model centered on evangelism, such as was practiced by Augustine in Kent, was certainly not a departure but a characteristic of the *Peregrinatio*/exile type of Irish monasticism established on the north-westernmost shores of Pictland. Two such *peregrinationes*, whose activities significantly impacted the

[99] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 185 – 202.

process which led to the Council of Whitby, were Columbanus and Columba. These men are directly connected to two controversies which sprang up in the early sixth and late seventh centuries: the Easter controversy and the Armagh controversy.[100]

Columbanus traveled to the European continent where he founded numerous monastic houses, mostly in Gaul (c. 590), all of which observed the Irish Easter calculation.[101] He angered the leaders of the Merovingian church and suffered persecution at their hands. He wrote to Pope Gregory I for help. Over the course of three letters, his attitude toward the pope changed from a man calling upon an equal and a brother to a petitioner meekly requesting aid.[102] Columbanus serves a twofold purpose here: first, since his Easter calculation was one major issue between him and the Merovingians, the confrontation provides a starting point for the conflict between Rome and Ireland in general; second, the change in his tone points to recognition of papal authority. Kathleen Hughes has argued this point, suggesting that while this recognition was something the Irish possessed in general, it did not mean that the pope was satisfied with the Irish perspective.[103] The underlying problem, then, was the Irish emphasis on right belief rather than on right practice.

Columbanus' ordeal marks stage one of a four-stage controversy which ended with the conversion of Iona in 716.[104] Columba founded the monastery on Iona in 563. It was an important monastery off the western coast of Modern Argyll which served as a starting point for all major missionary activities in north England and Pictland after 575.

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[100] Hughes, *Church*, pp. 103 – 122.
[101] Frend, *Rise*, p. 880.
[102] Kathleen Hughes, "The Celtic Church and the Papacy," in *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, edited by C.H. Lawrence (New York: Fordham University Press, 1965) pp. 3 – 28.
[103] Hughes, "The Celtic Church," pp. 16 – 17.
[104] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 408 – 411.

Columba's rule was followed by the monks of Iona while he lived and persisted after his death. Columba's austerity, daring, piety and godliness rendered him a saint equal to Patrick in the Irish mind, and centered him in the second controversy: Armagh. Basically, key foundations with saintly founders, specifically Armagh, Clonmacnois and Iona pushed claims to be the hub around which the Irish church ought to be centered.[105] This controversy arose as a result of the organizational and apostolic weaknesses within the church. These centers may be seen to be an effort on the part of the Irish to preserve their way of worship in the face of a well-organized, well-documented threat.

The year 633 marks the second stage of the Easter controversy. The churches of southern Ireland accepted the Roman Easter, and with it the Roman emphasis on right ritual, while the monks of Iona, together with north Ireland and all of Pictland, kept the same calculation which they had received from Columba, and observed Easter Sunday between the fourteenth and the twentieth day of the moon.[106] Both the Roman and Irish calculations were based on astronomical data and produced cycles of varying regularity. The date was originally calculated for the Passover, a Jewish feast which commemorated the final plague on the Egyptians at the end of the Jewish captivity.[107] On the fourteenth day of the month of Nissan, God's destroyer passed over all the houses with blood on their doorways, but killed the firstborn in the houses without blood on the doors.[108] Later, Jesus suffered, died and rose again over the course of three days during the Jewish Passover. Consequently, His resurrection was observed by His followers at that time also. Uniform calculations were difficult to arrive at in the loosely organized system which

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[105] See Hughes, *Church*, pp. 111 – 122.
[106] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 3 – 4.
[107] Genesis 13: 1 – 16.
[108] Exodus 11 – 12.

existed prior to the acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Emperor Constantine. Although the original Jewish calculations were based on phases of the moon, the later Roman calendar was based on the sun; another complication came from declaring the specific day on which to celebrate the Resurrection: should it be a Sunday, or the fourteenth day, no matter what day of the week that might be, in order to keep tradition?

Emperor Constantine found the issue to be nearly as divisive to the brotherly accord of the Church as the Eastern Churches' debates on Christ's relationship to God. At the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, he and over three hundred consecrated bishops established the Easter policy of the Roman Catholic Church. Christ's Church was to be separate in her traditions from those of the men who had slain the Savior, and her members would observe Easter according to the Alexandrian calculations; cycles were produced in Asia Minor and Gaul as well.[109] Despite the Emperor's efforts, true uniformity was never achieved. Isolated communities empire-wide perpetuated divergent cycles and as a result celebrated Easter on different calendar days.[110]

It is not clear exactly how or when the 84-year cycle entered Irish and British tradition. It seems that the calculation entered the British church sometime after the Anglo-Saxons pushed the British into modern Wales and South Scotland, possibly being imported by Irish Christians from Dalraida, or by raiders, such as Corotacus who brought Irish slaves into Britain.[111] The movement toward acceptance of the Roman calculation which, after 633, spread northward across Ireland from the southern coast suggests that

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[109] See Odahl, *Constantine*, pp. 189 – 201 for the Council of Nicaea.
[110] Finally, in A.D. 525, Dionysius Exiguus, an Italian monk, proposed an adaptation of the Alexandrian cycle which was readily accepted by the Apostolic See and by Pope Gregory I. See Francis S. Betten, "The So-Called Council of Whitby, 664 A.D.," *The Catholic Historical Review* Vol. 7 (1928): pp. 620 – 629; and Hughes, *Church*, p. 104.
[111] Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, pp. 11, 129, 353.

the infusion of the 84-year cycle followed a similar path, clockwise into Britain, in the mid sixth century. There are references to other Church practices to which the British did not adhere, such as canons against the marriage of priests or bishops, which suggest a pattern of social isolation adaptation in the pre-Gregorian Church in which proximal geographical units influenced one another's adaptations and grew more alike with every generation, even as they distanced themselves from the characteristics of less-proximal units. In the course of this social isolation, the name of the greater species, in this case, "Christian Church," was retained although the individual units bore little direct resemblance to one another in liturgy and tradition.

The monks on Iona must have felt a strong sense of hope for their claims to Irish primacy when, in 634, Oswald contacted them and requested that they send him a bishop. Neither Columba nor his successor abbots on Iona had made direct contact with the Bernician or Deiran kings until that time, although they had received their land from Brude, king of the Picts, and Columba had participated in Irish politics upon occasion. The monks of Iona had educated Oswald and Oswiu at the insistence of Aethelfrith's Dalraidan allies, who had fostered the exiled brothers. Iona, in addition to being the center of all missionary activity in north England, was the religious hub for the Dalraidan kings. The disparity between Irish and Roman Easter dates was noticeable but not acute in Northumbria at this time. Bede explains this by writing that the people's love for Oswald's bishop caused them to overlook Aidan's quirks.[112] The festering tension between the two systems was thus set to erupt but did not do so until after the deaths of both Oswald and Aidan, when Oswiu was ruling and an influx of Roman-trained monks

[112] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.

brought eloquent, passionate defenders of the Roman practices to par against equally eloquent and passionate defenders of the Irish practices. At the time of the Council of Whitby, the several calculations for Easter struck at the hearts of Roman and Irish worshipers because they manifested the underlying difference between the practices: right ritual versus right belief. The Irish church had adapted to the variations in practice among the monasteries founded by different abbots while the identity of Roman believers hinged upon their cohesiveness in Church ritual. It is now time to focus specifically upon the life of Oswiu in order to appreciate how these churches specifically affected the king's decision at the Council of Whitby.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Oswiu before *Winwaed*

It fell to Oswald's younger brother, Oswiu, to settle the problem caused by the patronage of two different churches in Northumbria. The issue could not have been resolved by a more competent, attentive and farsighted individual. It is clear that Oswiu was as aware of the cultural and religious diversity which existed in his kingdom at the time of the Council of Whitby as he was of the spiritual implications contained in the basis of the dispute. He had spent over thirty years utilizing the cultural diversity for his brother's political and martial benefit as well as for his own. He had reason to take the spiritual implications on a more personal level. Oswiu's decision at Whitby was the product of life-long experiences and observations and the natural intellect to apply them to political situations. However, in the case of the Whitby Council, he employed these lessons uncharacteristically in complete disregard for the political ramifications.

Oswiu was born in Northumbria, likely at his familial stronghold, Bamburgh, in 613 to Aethelfrith and Acha.[113] He had two elder brothers, Eanfrith and Oswald, four younger brothers and at least one sister.[114] At the time, Aethelfrith was the Breatwalda

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[113] Acha was not Aethelfrith's first wife. Her name was Bebba, and he gave her the stronghold *Dinguoaroy* and named it after her, *Bebbanburh*, or Bamburgh. Nennius, *Hist Brit* 63.

[114] Oslac, Oswudu, Oslaf and Offa. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E 617; his sister was named Aebbe, who became the abbess of a monastery at Coldingham, subsequently at St. Abb. See Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 39; and Colgrave, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 392, nt. 2. The children did not all share the same mother, although Oswald and Oswiu did.

and ruled over a united core kingdom consisting of the northern Bernicia and southern Deira. Aethelfrith was a pagan and continued his pagan ways until his death at the hand of his brother-in-law, Edwin, in 617. When Edwin invaded, the heirs to the throne fled into exile; the locations in which three of the children hid themselves hint at the complexity of Aethelfrith's diplomatic connections and treaties. Eanfrith accompanied foster-parents to Pictland, where he married and produced a son, Talorcan. Oswald and Oswiu went together with other foster parents to the Scottish kingdom of Dalraida.[115] Their ages, respectively, were twelve and four.[116] Both boys were educated by the Irish monks on Iona, for they were both fluent in the Irish language and had been baptized into the Irish church.

Because of the political stresses between the Irish kingdoms contemporary with Oswald and Oswiu's exile, Oswiu's early connection to both Iona and the Dalraidans was a significant factor which shaped the course of his life. Iona is representative of the complex political situation which dogged Oswiu's later political career. Iona was founded in 573, in Dalraidan territory, by the Ui Neill prince, Columba, also a monk, two years before the Treaty of *Druim Cett*. This treaty called for peace between the Dalraidans and the Ui Neill, a peace that was necessary for Dalraida due to its unique situation. Its holdings spanned across the Irish Sea, with the ancient core located on the northernmost tip of Ui Neill territory in Northern Ireland and autonomous regions among the Outer and Inner Hebrides and the Pictish mainland, which the Dalraidan kings had conquered for themselves sometime around the early 500s. A recurrent power struggle among Irish and Dalraidan leadership in the 560s led to a treaty between the Northern Ui Neill and the

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[115] The term 'Scot' actually meant 'Irishman' at the time Bede wrote his *Historia*.
[116] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* I. 47. 5.

Dalraidans as well as land divisions. Columba attended the meeting of the kings at *Druim Cett* and was fundamental in placing Aedan Mac Gabrain, of *Cenel Gabhrain*, on the throne of Dalraida.[117] Columba enjoyed Aedan's patronage for the remainder of his tenure on Iona.

Iona supplied Oswald and Oswiu with Ui Neill contacts while their foster parents provided them with Dalraidan contacts. While Oswald, eight years the elder, spent time fighting wars for the Dalraidan kings, Oswiu likely joined him in battle, although he is noted more for diplomacy.[118] Following in his father's footsteps from a young age, Oswiu cultivated contacts with powerful allies through marriage. The brothers' agenda was to reclaim their father's throne and they evidently worked as a team in order to fulfill their goals, a tactic impressed on them from an early age which both retained even into their later years.

While Oswald was fighting at *Fid Eoin*, in 628, Oswiu married Rienmelth, the daughter of Royth, the son of Rhun, the son of Urien, former king of Rheged.[119] He married into a royal family which his own father had beaten fifteen years prior at Chester, but which, under Urien (573 – 590), had possessed territory as far north as Galloway and

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[117] *Cenel* is the Irish word for 'kindred,' but can mean 'descent.' There were four *Cenela* in Irish Dalraida which were political establishments in the greater kingdom: the *Cenel Comgaili, Cenel nGabrain, Cenel Loairn* and the *Cenel nOengusa*. Iona is located in the northernmost portion of *Cenel Comgaili*, west of the Island of Mull. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 295 – 8. Ironically, Aedan Mac Gabain fought against Aethelfrith at the Battle of *Deganstan* in 603. See Herman Moisl, "The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Cenury," *Peritia* 2 (1983): pp. 103 – 126. It is likely that Aethelfrith's Dalraidan contacts and fosterages developed after his victory in this battle.

[118] Moisl, "Bernician Royal Dynasty," p. 112. His name is recorded in the *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, in part as a device in Irish legend: an Irish king drawing Englishmen to fight for him. This literary reference lends credence to actual historical truth: Oswald was present in the Battle of *Fid Eoin* in 628. There are enough facts in the legend to establish that it was based on a true event and to conclude that Oswald participated in wars on Irish soil during his early twenties. Moisl, "Bernician Royal Dynasty," p. 110.

[119] Nennius, *Hist Brit* 57. Urien died under siege at Lindisfarne ca. 590. Morris, *Age of Arthur*, p. 235

as far east as Catterick.[120] The selection was excellent for Oswald and Oswiu's purposes; Rienmelth's grandfather, Rhun, oversaw and sponsored the baptism of Edwin the Breatwalda the very year Rienmelth married Oswiu. This marriage connected the brothers to Northumbria's political hierarchy through the Church. Their marriage was blessed early on, either in late 628 or early 629, by their first child, a daughter they named Osthryth.[121]

Between 628 and 633, Oswald and Oswiu continued to build alliances among the British, Irish and English. They shared a common goal with their elder brother, Eanfrith, for in 632 that son of Aethelfrith burst back into history after Caedwallan, king of Gywnedd, allied with Penda, the Mercian king, and attacked Edwin's lands. Caedwallan slew Edwin at *Haethfelth*, now Hatfield Chase, on 12 October.[122] Edwin's sons Eadfrith and Osfrith were removed from their holdings, the former deserting to Penda's forces and the latter dying alongside his father at Hatfield Chase. Eanfrith and Osric, cousins, took control of Bernicia and Deira, respectively.[123] Oswald and Oswiu were also closely allied with Caedwallan in this undertaking, given the celerity with which Oswald took the throne a year later after having slain Caedwallan.[124] The birth of Oswiu's eldest son, Alfrith, sometime in 632 may have assured the British that the union with the Saxon and his brother promised to be a profitable one.[125]

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[120] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 70; Morris, *Age of Arthur*, p. 232.
[121] This date is dependent upon the reasonableness of Oswiu's own age at his marriage and Osthryth's age at her later marriage to Aethelred. Oswiu was fifteen in 628; Osthryth, allowing the pubescent base age of twelve and married late in her uncle's reign, say 640, would have been born at the latest around 628/9.
[122] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 20.
[123] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 1.
[124] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 87.
[125] This date is based on the assumption that Alfrith was at least seventeen years old when he married Penda's daughter, and that he did so in 649. It is by no means a concrete, indisputable date; there is insufficient data for such affirmation. Rather it is an educated estimation, give or take a year or two, based

Bede referred to the year 632/3 as the year of the "mad apostasy of the English kings."[126] Kirby suggests that Edwin's wife, Aethelburh, daughter, Eanflaed, son, Uscfrea and grandson, Yffi, remained in Northumbria along with Bishop Paulinus until after Eanfrith and Osric fell to Caedwallan on the British king's return.[127] Kirby argues that Caedwallan was leery of allowing either Edwin's heirs, namely Eadfrith, who had joined him in the battle, or Aethelfrith's sons, Eanfrith, Oswald or Oswiu, to recover or retain control of their familial holdings, and so attacked. Osric died early in the summer of 633; Eanfrith attempted negotiations a year later and was slain. Caedwallan then met Oswald at Heavenfield and was overthrown by him.[128]

Oswiu's connection to the Rheged kingdom by marriage to their princess no doubt brought a charged element to the situation between Oswald and Caedwallan at Heavenfield since Rheged was a virtual buffer zone between Gwynedd and Deira. The union between the princess and the exiled Bernician *aethling*, or prince, may have been intended to benefit the Rheged tribes against Caedwallan's advance, since Oswiu's eldest son was born the year before Oswald and Oswiu marched out with Caedwallan, and the brothers were in good standing with their allies when Oswald killed Caedwallan. It is clear that, between the battle of Heavenfield in 633 and Oswald's death in 642, Oswiu used his diplomatic skills to his brother's political benefit. It is likely that Oswiu spent the

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on information garnered from events which took place later in Oswiu's life and upon average and estimated ages for adulthood.

[126] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 9.

[127] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 87, 89.

[128] Prior to this battle the location was called *Denisesburn*, now Rowley Water. Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 1. Adomnan wrote that Oswald had a vision of Columba the night before the battle, in which he was told that he would be victorious in *Vita Columbae* I. 8a – 9a. On the day of the battle, Oswald prayed on his knees for divine aid and erected a wooden cross in the field. See Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 2. His forces were so inspired that they met the enemy and crushed them despite being significantly fewer in number. Oswald's reign, being filled with such signs and miracles, shone so brilliantly in the year of the apostates that many people added that vile year onto his nine years as Breatwalda.

majority of his time after the battle of Heavenfield putting his diplomatic skills to work among the diverse allies his brother had depended on. These relations were complex. The brothers' Irish connections were beginning to sour because of changes in Irish politics. The Treaty of *Druim Cett* was then under fire in the early 630s when the Dalraidan king, Domnall Brecc, began to harass the Ui Neill king, Domnall Aed. The tensions between them exerted pressure on their connections to Oswald and Oswiu.

Oswiu worked for his brother in the ensuing political situation, but his own political connections began to emerge in the process. Both brothers must have realized that the treaty-breaking Dalraidan king was not the safest bet in the sensitive environment that arose on the death of Caedwallan and Oswald's assumption of power. However, Oswald's choices bore down on his kingdom while Oswiu invariably faced less empirical consequences. The Irish, either Dalraidan or Ui Neill, had aided Oswald during his contests against Caedwallan. If both parties had sent him aid, he was indebted to both to lend aid in whatever conflict arose between them once the Treaty of *Druim Cett* folded. According to Bede, his troops were quite small in number.[129] He most likely would have found neutrality the best path to self preservation; however, he could not afford to appear to do nothing.[130] The best course of action, then, was to send his brother to Ireland to reason with or support the Ui Neill, the offended party, and to renegotiate the failed treaty.

Oswiu made enough of a signature mark on Irish politics that it was clear he did not share his brother's discretion or neutrality. Evidently, Oswiu was in Ireland ca. 633 –

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[129] "*cum parvo exercitu* = with a small army." Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 1.
[130] Moisl presents an excellent argument for Oswald's choices in Moisl, "Bernician Royal Dynasty," pp. 118 – 19.

634. His presence there is indicated merely by the existence of an illegitimate son, Aldfrith, whom he sired with Fin, the daughter of Colman Rimid, king of the Northern Ui Neill (d. 604).[131] Although his familial connection to the Ui Neill would be beneficial at a later time, it is likely that Oswiu's adultery struck him hard personally.[132] He committed his son to God and entered him into the monastic life on Iona, under the child's Ui Neill relatives. No evidence exists to indicate which of the parents, if not both, rendered Aldfrith unto God. Because the adulterer was not stoned as Mosaic Law required, it is likely that the guilty parties acted under the direction of a church official, giving up the child for a recognized act of atonement. Given Oswiu's own connection with Iona and the fact that he did nothing to prevent Fin from committing the boy, it is likely that the two acted in concert. That the seclusion was meant to atone for political embarrassment and for moral indiscretion is suggested by the fact that Oswiu did not capitalize on cultural convention either by bringing Aldfrith back to Bernicia with him or by allowing him to grow up in the Irish court.[133] This deed suggests that Oswiu possessed a deep awareness of spiritual matters.

Oswiu returned to his wife and children after atoning for his sin. He did not forget the lesson his infidelity taught him. No further mention is made of Rienmelth, and a number of speculations seek to explain her disappearance. She may have separated from

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[131] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 143. Michael Richter argues against Kirby's premise that Fin was Colman Rimid's granddaughter, as it is not backed by any evidence. See Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, p. 96, nt. 30. I wish to add that Kirby's projected date of ca. 650 for the tryst is flawed on the matter that there is no reason for Oswiu to have been in Ireland at that time. There was a good deal of reason for him to be in Ireland in the mid 630s, however.

[132] It is not clear what the law was for adultery. No Northumbrian laws have survived from the seventh century, and the Irish Brehon Laws did not necessarily agree with them.

[133] It is likely that Oswiu rarely spoke of this son, as Aelfflaed's later difficulty in determining the identity of her brother, Ecgfrith's, heir, when she asked Cuthbert who it should be, suggests a cultivated forgetfulness among the younger members of the family. See Whitby Anonymous, *Vita Cuthberti* III. 6.

Oswiu for his adultery, but that would have created bad relations between him and his British in-laws. Alternatively, as British Christians, she and her family may have accepted the proscribed atonement. Noticeably, when Oswiu later invaded British kingdoms and took booty, it was the kingdoms to the south of Rheged which he targeted, Gwyendd and Powys, not Rheged.[134] Most likely, she died in childbirth. Between 633 and 638, Rienmelth bore Oswiu a second daughter, whom they named Alhflaed.[135] The loss of his wife by whatever means left him with three children. There is no evidence to indicate whether he returned to Ireland, remained among the British, traveled north to the Dalraidans or joined his brother in Northumbria. He kept in contact with his brother and was near enough at hand to supply his eldest daughter, Osthryth, for a royal marriage after 638, which suggests that Oswiu remained in his diplomatic position under his brother, possibly as a member of Oswald's entourage of ealdormen and thegns with whom he had been exiled in his youth.

After Oswiu had returned from Ireland in 635, Oswald requested that an Irish bishop be sent from Iona so that he might revive the church in Northumbria.[136] Remnants of the Roman institution had survived the year of the Apostates and Caedwallan's devastation. James the Deacon persisted at York, and many unspecified converts had kept the faith and practices alive while political conditions were uncertain.[137] The Irish responded quickly and provided Bishop Aidan. Oswald provided the bishop with a see on

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[134] *Annales Cambrionensis* s.a. 658, as cited by Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 96.
[135] These dates are arrived at by calculating a probable age of fourteen to nineteen years at her marriage to Peada in 653 and considering that age in conjunction with the birth of her elder brother, Alfrith, around 632 and his likely age at his marriage sometime prior to 653.
[136] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 3.
[137] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 20.

the Isle of Lindisfarne, just off the coast from his royal stronghold at Bamburgh. The bishop held services on the island in Irish, with Oswald acting as his interpreter.

Soon after Aidan's arrival, the bishop officiated over Oswald's marriage to Cyneburh, daughter of Cynegisl, king of the Gewisse, or Thames Valley Saxons.[138] This marriage was part of a calculated effort to revive Edwin's Humbrian confederacy, i.e., Edwin's southern powerbase which had rendered the Mercians dependants to him.[139] Penda, king of the Mercians, was Oswald's foremost threat militarily. Kirby suggests that the marriage of Oswald to the Gewisse princess was a forward step in the process of breaking up the power Penda had accumulated after Edwin's death as well as intended to contain the Mercian kingdom.[140] Oswald went further than Edwin did to procure the kingdom of Lindsey. Due to the lack of references, the dates of Oswald's actions are difficult to ascertain, but it appears that Oswald overthrew the king of Lindsey early in his reign, after allying with the Gewisse and that, when Osthryth came of age in 640, he formally added Lindsey to his holdings through her marriage.[141] Osthryth's marriage highlights Oswald's precarious position. He had married late in his life and lacked children with which to make political alliances among his neighbors. His one child, a son named Oethelwald, was likely born in 639/40, the year after his parents' marriage.[142]

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[138] The name of Oswald's wife is supplied by a twelfth-century *Vita Sancta Oswaldi*, written by Symeon of Durham. As referenced by Colgrave, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 232, nt. 3.
[139] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 88.
[140] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 88 – 89.
[141] Her husband, Aethelred the Mercian, is a historical anomaly and a likely son of Penda. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E 656. That Oswald sought to soften Penda's antipathy toward his expansionism by allying their families in a time-share agreement for the coastal kingdom, is uncertain. What is clear, however, is that Osthryth was the dominating presence in that union. She remained a formidable ruler until her death, in 697, at the hands of the South Mercians. See *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* A 697.
[142] Given that he ruled Deira as Oswiu's sub-king from 651 – 655 and rode against his uncle at the Battle of the *Winwaed*. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 88 – 95

Oswald's preoccupation with reestablishing a southern powerbase might have been a calculated distraction meant to preserve his neutrality in the tumultuous Irish affairs of the day. Domnall Brecc's harassing of Ui Neill lands, combined with the rivalry between Congal Caech and Domnal Mac Aed for the kingship of Tara, Ireland's High Kingship, eventually resulted in the dissolution of the Treaty of *Druim Cett* in all out war at the Battle of *Mag Rath*, ca. 637 – 639.[143] Oswiu's affiliation with the Ui Neill clearly put him on Domnall Mac Aed's side, and possibly that association spilled onto Oswald. The uncertainty of the victor no doubt convinced Oswald that it would be prudent for him to look southward for his strength rather than to expand too far into the morass of clan feuds in the northwest.

After the Ui Neill, under Domnall Mac Aed, won the Battle of *Mag Rath*, Oswald possibly felt secure enough then to maneuver northward, as suggested by records in the Irish Annals of sieges in the territory of the Votadini, modern Edinburghshire.[144] Verifiably, the stronghold of Stirling was in Bernician possession in 655. Either Oswald or Oswiu succeeded in capturing it. It is possible that Oswald started his advances northward after the Irish question settled itself, providing a base for Oswiu's later expansions. Kirby theorizes that these expansions caused Domnall Brecc, having survived *Mag Rath*, to invade Strathclyde in 642.[145] Oswald was clearly distracted by the complications taking place on his northwestern and southern borders in the last years of

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[143] Congal Caech had been removed from the kingship of Tara due to a disfigurement. He argued that the removal was invalid; Domnall Brecc sided with him and began to ravage Mac Aed, who was in line for and fought for the Tara throne. The material on Irish politics in the 630s is derived from Charles-Edward, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 486 – 501. Oswiu's efforts in Ui Neill territory seem to have been effective, for the treaty survived for another three, albeit shaky, years.

[144] *Annals of Ulster* s.a. 637; *Annals of Tigernaugh* p. 184; *CA* p. 144, as cited by Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 90.

[145] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 90.

his life. He died in a battle against Penda at *Maserfelth* on 5 August, 642.[146] His attempts to contain Penda had failed. He was beheaded, with his body hung on stakes on the battle field and his hands severed.[147] Oswiu immediately assumed the throne, which suggests his close proximity, perhaps fighting in the northward advance or at *Maserfelth*. However, he acquired only the Bernician throne. Penda assumed the Breatwaldaship, and the throne of Deira went to Oswine, a son of Osric the apostate.

Oswiu's rise to the kingship was by no means clean and simple. His brother's army was in tatters and scattered in the south and the north; no doubt it was impossible at that time to recover men loyal to Oswald in the south. However, Aethelred and Osthryth remained king and queen of Lindsey, although Penda's presence was no doubt a part of the reason that it took Oswiu a whole year to remove his brother's corpse from *Maserfelth*. Other reasons for the late removal were family based; Oswald's son Oethelwald, a boy of ten years of age, stood in line to inherit Deira. That Oswine snapped up the southern kingdom so quickly indicates that Oethelwald may also have had backers who protested Oswiu's assumption. However, the throne did not pass by inheritance, but to him who held the strongest army. Oswiu was at least secure in his new holdings when he returned to *Maserfelth* with an army and retrieved his brother's remains.

His first act after assuming the throne, the retrieval of Oswald's body, speaks to his intelligence and to his devotion to his brother. Oswiu capitalized on his brother's renowned piety and the love his people held for him by initiating a cult centered on

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[146] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 9. Colgrave identifies this location as Oswestry in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 242, nt. 1.
[147] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 12.

Oswald.[148] His daughter Osthryth was instrumental in the organization of the cult, supporting his agenda to preserve the Bernician and Deiran people's love for Oswald's family. Oswiu sent Oswald's head to Lindisfarne, the hands and arms to Bamburgh, and the body to Osthryth, who placed it at Bardney in Lindsey.[149] There were a number of miracles attributed to Oswald and to his body which centered mainly on the healing properties of the wood of the cross erected at Heaven Field and the water and dust with which and over which, respectively, his bones had been washed.[150] Most notably, the hand which Bishop Aidan blessed did not decay.[151]

While dedicating himself to preserving his brother's memory and throne, Oswiu also recognized that he needed to extend his alliances beyond the Ui Neill, Dalraidans, Mercians and Britons. He sought a wife from Kent, Edwin's daughter, Eanflaed, and sent the priest, Utta, to fetch her.[152] This marriage linked Oswiu directly with Edwin's family, more so than his first marriage had, as well as with the powerful Merovingian kings with whom the Kentish royal family had been allied for over forty years.[153] Oswiu appealed to the popular memory of Edwin by returning the princess to her father's people, and linked himself to a powerful army should he have needed allies.

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[148] Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 224. Higham is very clever to theorize in this manner, although he completely ignores Osthryth's involvement in assisting her father's agenda.
[149] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 11 – 12. The skull was first interred in the cemetery, then, in 875, the monks took the skull with them in St. Cuthbert's coffin when they escaped the Viking onslaught. In 1104, the coffin and skull were re-interred in the newly constructed Norman cathedral in Durham. In 1827, the coffin was reopened and a skull pieces were discovered alongside Cuthbert's body. This second skull bears a massive sword blow across the brow, the fatal blow which ended Oswald's life. Joanna Story, *Lindisfarne Priory* (London: English Heritage Guidebooks, 2005) p. 26.
[150] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 2; *Hist Eccl* III. 11.
[151] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 6.
[152] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 15.
[153] See Bede, *Hist Eccl* I. 25. Aethelbert had married Bertha, the daughter of the Merovingian Charibert. Her father ruled Paris. Colgrave, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 74, nt. 1.

The first thirteen years of Oswiu's reign marked a clean break from his tenure as Oswald's co-operative in northern affairs. That span of time exhibited a trend of familial and religious discord was to plague him the duration of his twenty-eight years as king, fifteen of which he held as Breatwalda. Oswiu, now ruling in his own right, employed the political instincts which had led him to gravitate toward the Ui Neill during the slow demise of the Treaty of *Druim Cett*, albeit bearing in mind the many lessons learned along the way, to skillfully navigate the intrigues of sons, daughters, nephews, bishops and priests, while preserving his spiritual integrity.

His marriage to Eanflaed took place in 643. He was a thirty-year-old widower with three children, two of which, aged thirteen and seven, were still at home or housed with foster parents. She was eighteen and no doubt remembered fleeing with her mother and Bishop Paulinus when Caedwallan returned after killing her father. She brought her own clergy with her to observe the Roman customs. Their first child, Ecgfrith, was born in 645.[154] Their fruitful union spelt danger for Oswine, loved though he was by the Deiran people and by Oswiu's own bishop, Aidan, whom Oswiu had practically inherited from his brother. While Eanflaed was the daughter of Edwin, Oswine was only his grandson. Oswine may have feared that Oswiu would make a bid for the Deiran throne on behalf of his son Ecgfrith. Relations between Oswiu and Oswine were not cordial, for the next major event in Northumbrian history, as recorded by Bede, was the murder of Oswine five years later in 651.

During those five years, however, Oswiu made efforts to pacify his pagan enemy, Penda. He allied himself with Penda via the marriage of his eldest son, Alfrith, to Penda's

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[154] Bede says that "*extinctus anno aetatis suae XLmo* = he was killed at the age of forty" in the Battle of *Nechtansmere*, 685. *Hist Eccl* IV. 26

daughter, Cyneburh, ca. 649.[155] Oswiu has been criticized for not addressing the Mercian threat within the first decade of his reign, but it is important to consider the fact that Oswald's wars had reduced the number of men Oswiu had available to send into battle. His army was tiny, while Penda was the Breatwalda and controlled thousands of men. Thus, Oswiu resorted to the most successful means of late for retarding unnecessary violence until he could strengthen his own forces and deal absolutely with the threat. Oswiu's alliance with Penda benefited Oswiu in that it promised to make Oswiu a little harder for his enemies to get rid of, since Oswiu could call for aid from Kent for his children's sake. But, the alliance also drove a wedge between Oswiu and his bishop, as Oswiu was allying himself with a pagan force.

The loss, or non-existence, of Aidan's friendship was yet another lesson Oswiu took to heart as is evident in Oswiu's changed demeanor toward the religion of his sons- and daughters-in-law. Higham theorizes that Aidan saw the arrival of the Roman clergy, with Eanflaed, as a threat to his sovereignty.[156] Aidan's affiliation was invaluable to either Oswiu or Oswine because he was an authoritative figure in both Bernicia and Deira. But Oswiu did more to alienate him than reintroducing the Roman Church to Northumbria. His illegitimate son had entered Iona the year before Aidan left it, leaving the pious man with a vile taste in his mouth, that the product of adultery should darken God's doorstep. Aidan had further reason to believe that Oswiu had ceased to trust God since the king had allied himself by fleshly means with a pagan family. There is no

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[155] It is commonly assumed that Alfrith married Cyneburh almost a year before his sister, Aelflaed, married Cyneburh's brother, Peada, or that the two royal marriages were somehow linked closely in time. There really is no indication of such proximity. Alfrith probably came of age five years before his sister did, and was therefore part of Oswiu's earliest attempts to control Penda by affiliation.

[156] Nicholas Higham, "Dynasty and Cult: The Utility of Christian Mission to Northumbrian Kings between 642 and 654," in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, edited by Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999) pp. 95 – 104.

mention of an attempt made to have Cyneburh convert before she married Alfrith, although two years after Aidan's death Oswiu would not allow Aelflaed to marry Peada unless the man accepted the teachings of the church.[157]

Oswine capitalized upon the wedge. Bede acknowledged Oswine and Aidan's closeness by recording an early version if a *Vita Oswini*.[158] Tensions between Oswiu and Oswine reached their peak in August of 651, when the kings assembled armies against one another. Oswine apparently realized it was tactically advantageous to await a future engagement and disbanded his army at *Wilfaraesdun*, near Catterick.[159] Then he hid in the home of Hunwold, his *gesith*. Hunwold betrayed him to Oswiu, who "had him foully murdered" by the reeve Aethelwine on 20 August.[160] It is impossible to exonerate entirely Oswiu in this affair, but the account of this death, which eventually earned Oswine a martyrdom, ought to be considered critically. Bede got his information from the abbey at Whitby, which was run by Hilda, a cousin of Oswine. Christopher Scargill has argued convincingly that Hilda operated Whitby as a major Oswine-cult center following the young king's death.[161] It is therefore unreasonable to take Bede's conclusions at face value. Oswine had assembled an army against Oswiu. It is not recorded whether or not Oswiu viewed the disbanding of the Deiran army as a legitimate tactic in a commenced engagement, or if the disbanding was actually a rout and Oswine had abandoned open combat.

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[157] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 21.
[158] In which the scene in which Aidan weeps over a vision of Oswine's death is significant because it shows Aidan dining with Oswine rather than Oswiu, and because it shows the intensity with which he cared for the young man. Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 14.
[159] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 14.
[160] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 14.
[161] Christopher M. Scargill, "A Token of Repentance and Reconciliation: Oswiu and the Murder of King Oswine," in *Retribution, Repentance and Reconciliation*, edited by Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004) pp. 39 – 46.

In any event, Oswiu faced an extreme, negative reaction to his military victory: the Deiran people and his own wife objected to Oswine's death. Oswiu showed sufficient remorse for the outcome. He gave the Deirans the son of their beloved Oswald, Oethelwald, as their king under him. It is possible that Oethelwald seized the throne in his own right, backed by enraged Deirans. That Oswiu did not contest his appointment is inescapable. Rather, Oswiu allowed the Deirans their due, and acquiesced to his wife's request that he build a monastery at the site of the murder to atone for the crime, where Trumhere, Oswine's relative, could offer prayers for both Oswine and Oswiu.[162] Eanflaed was also kin to Oswine, and the granting of her request was as close to a fulfillment of Oswine's blood-price as Oswiu could come.[163] As he had by giving Aldfrith to God, Oswiu made a very public confession of guilt and atonement by constructing the monastery at *Ingentlingum*, modern Gilling West.[164]

Aidan died twelve days after Oswine, on 31 August.[165] His death necessitated his replacement. It is clear that the Irish of Iona heard of and disproved of Oswiu's apparent guilt in the death of Oswine. They sent Finan Mac Rimid to serve as Oswiu's bishop and, in doing so, set in motion a series of events which ultimately led to the defining moment in Oswiu's life. Finan's surname designates him as a likely brother of Fin, Oswiu's Irish

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[162] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 14; *Hist Eccl* III. 24.
[163] Scargill, "A Token of Repentance," pp. 44 – 46.
[164] Nothing remains of the monastery, but there is a quaint little church dedicated to Sts. Agatha and Oswine and a road called 'Oswine Court,' located on the main road through the village.
[165] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 14. Higham suspects that his death was not accidental, given the bishop's love for Oswine and animosity toward Oswiu. See "Dynasty and Cult," p. 100. But Higham's work manifests an unhealthy level of professional cynicism and, therefore, ought to be regarded carefully. His notion is absurd because Oswiu could not have afforded to take such a risk, given the public reaction to Oswine's death. Had the same reaction been produced by both deaths, the documentation would reflect it.

lover.[166] It is highly suspect that Finan did not approve of Oswiu's relations with his sister, and it would not be remiss to believe that Finan was not tactful in his comments on family history. Finan was also a man of a fiery temper, and a staunch defender of the Irish traditions.[167] The Easter dispute, fraughtfully charged by the chafing of opposing views possessed by Irish and Roman Catholics, had lain dormant for the duration of Aidan's reign out of respect and love for the pious, loving and faithful bishop.[168] Upon Aidan's death and the election of Finan, the discord that had gripped Frankland during Columbanus' day and, most recently, the south of Ireland started a thirteen year crescendo to the pinnacle of Northumbrian social discord.

The dispute, championed by a Roman-trained monk, Ronan, against Finan, began at such a quiet level that it escaped the king's notice for many years. Oswiu was preoccupied by the events unfolding in Mercia. In 653, Peada, Penda's son, approached him to request his daughter's hand in marriage. Alfrith had befriended Peada after his own marriage, and had made known to him the benefits of the Christian religion. Oswiu, because of Aidan's animosity toward him for arranging the marriage of Alfrith and Cyneburh, insisted that the Mercian *aethling* convert and be baptized. Peada had done so, willingly, and was baptized at a royal estate called *Ad Murum*, along Hadrian's Wall on the southern border of Bernicia.[169] He then took the priests, Cedd, Adda, Betti and

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[166] See James Campbell, "Debt of the Early English Church to Ireland," in *Irland und die Christenheit, Bibelstudien und Mission: Ireland and Christendom, The Bible and the Missions*, edited by Proinseas Ni Chathain and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987) pp. 332 – 346.

[167] It seems right to award the phrase "*quod esset homo ferocis animi*" to Finan, as Ronan was already described as an "*acerrimus veri paschae defensor*," and to award the distinction of possessor of a fiery temper is redundant. Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.

[168] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25. For Aidan's character, see Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 17.

[169] It is likely that Oswiu separated himself from Bamburgh so as not to tarnish his brother's cult with the affairs of the world. He seems to have favored *Ad Murum*, since he had had both his good friend Sigeberht

Diuma, back with him to his Mercian kingdom.[170] Bede writes that Penda did not forbid the preaching of the Catholic faith in his kingdom, and even despised those who did not practice what they preached.[171]

Penda was troubled most by the implications of Oswiu's sponsorship of his son's baptism as well as that of Sigeberht, the king of the East Saxons. Sigeberht was Oswiu's friend. It was Oswiu who had witnessed to him of his faith and convinced him that conversion and baptism were fitting acts for a king and for his people.[172] Sigeberht, like Peada, was baptized along with his own thegns at *Ad Murum* by Bishop Finan. Penda's suspicions of political implications were well founded. When, upon Sigeberht's request for "teachers to convert his people to the faith of Christ and wash them in the fountain of salvation," Oswiu summoned one of the priests he had sent with Peada, Cedd, and reassigned him to serve as bishop to the East Saxons, Penda's suspicions appeared justified.[173] Higham theorizes that Oswiu intended to take by religion what he could not take by force.[174]

By 653, then, Oswiu became quite a threat to Penda. He was connected by marriage, faith or family to several kingdoms, beside Bernicia. He had religious ties to Penda's land as well as to the East Saxon lands. His nephew, Oethelwald, governed Deira at a much closer familial relation than the degree of cousinship Oswiu had shared with

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and the loyal Peada baptized there. It therefore held a high symbolic value as the convening place of the kings under God.

[170] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 21.
[171] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 21.
[172] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 22.
[173] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 22.
[174] Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 240.

Oswine. His other nephew, Talorcan, the son of Eanfrith, assumed the Pictish throne.[175] However, Penda saw in Oethelwald his hope for suppressing Oswiu. His connection to Oethelwald probably originated when Oswine died and Oethelwald took power, possibly with Penda's backing, as a means to keep Oswiu from inheriting the whole of Northumbria. Oethelwald seemingly attempted to mimic or even counter his uncle's church-based territorial expansions by granting land to Bishop Cedd in Deira on which he could establish a monastery.[176] Oethelwald provided the land after Cedd became bishop, but the suspicion still remains that Oethelwald was trying to diffuse his uncle's authority by drawing the East Saxon bishop into his Deiran kingdom.

Penda began harassing Oswiu sometime in late 653 or early 654, the year that Oswiu's third daughter, Aelfflaed, was born. Despite Penda's paranoia, Oswiu's vast alliances appear to have weakened in the thirteen years since he took the Bernician throne. Bede and Nennius make no mention of Irish or Dalraidan or Pictish assistance that would have lent hope and strength to Oswiu during his period of antagonism by Penda. They may have been deterred by Oswiu's affiliation with Kent, or were distracted by their own wars after the dissolution of the Treaty of *Druim Cett*. Oswiu's son, Ecgfrith, had been taken hostage by Penda at some point in early 655.[177] Oswiu's forces were actually quite weak by November; he did not engage Penda in battle because his son was captive and because his forces were extremely few.[178] Penda, on the other hand, had amassed a large force made up of his own men plus the men of thirty British kings, and

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[175] The Pictish kinglists give him a four year reign, and the Irish annals place his death in 657. As cited by Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 110, nt. 61.
[176] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 23.
[177] Bede clearly states that Ecgfrith was in the Mercian kingdom in November 655. *Hist Eccl* III. 24.
[178] He attacked eventually "*cum paucissimo exercitu* = with the smallest army." Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 24.

Oethelwald with his men.[179] Oswiu withdrew to his northernmost stronghold, Stirling, in the face of all this and resorted to offering Penda "all the riches which were with him in the city."[180] While Bede records that Penda refused the offer, Nennius' account states that he did, in fact, accept, and that he even distributed the goods to his British allies. Nonetheless, Penda then retired with his forces and headed off in the direction of Mercia.

Oswiu, perhaps realizing that the harassment would not end so easily and that he was eventually going to run out of treasure, turned to God. He vowed that he would give Aelfflaed, his infant daughter, to God in perpetual virginity, and promised to bestow twelve *possessiones praediorum* for the constructing of monasteries if he were to be victorious.[181] Then, "trusting in Christ as their leader," Oswiu, his son, Alfrith, and their combined forces rode out against the departing Mercian king, catching him and his army by surprise at the flood-swollen banks of the *Winwaed* River.[182] Penda's forces were trapped against the high waters. Oswiu probably maximized the element of surprise by coming upon the massive army at dusk or after sunset, when confusion would be to his advantage. While the details of Penda's own death are unknown, beyond Nennius' claim that Oswiu killed him, the majority of Penda's forces drowned.[183] The battle ended at the *Winwaed*, but the campaign ended in the district of *Loidis*.[184] This distance implies that Oswiu and Alfrith pursued the stragglers long into the night. Some of these, presumably, were Oethelwald and his men. He had withdrawn from the battle to observe the outcome.

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[179] Nennius actually refers to the kings as being British, while Bede mistakes them for ealdormen. Bede, however, records Oethelwald's treachery. Nennius, *Hist Brit* 64; Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 24.
[180] Nennius, *Hist Brit* 65.
[181] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 24.
[182] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 24. The location of this river has never been satisfactorily identified, although it was once presumed to be the Went River. A.W. Wade-Evans, *Nennius's "History of the Britons"* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1937) p. 82, nt. 5, 7.
[183] Nennius, *Hist Brit* 64.
[184] Presumed to be Leeds. Colgrave, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 293.

When he realized his uncle would be victorious, he fled. He is not mentioned again after 655.

Oswiu's victory made him the Breatwalda. With Penda's death he inherited the entire Mercian kingdom; with Oethelwald's death, Deira; with the deaths of Penda's British allies, the Welsh march and access to Gywnedd and Powys.[185] He celebrated his victory by fulfilling his oath to God. Oswiu realized the implications of the victory he had been given, and was humble, wise and God-fearing enough to keep his word. The Battle of the *Winwaed* opened the door on the next fifteen years of Oswiu's reign, in which he amassed the most expansive land-holding of any English Breatwalda. It also opened the door to a new appreciation of spiritual matters, and bolstered Oswiu's already strong sense of the presence of God in his life.

[185] *Annales Cambrionensis* s.a. 658, as cited by Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 96.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## **Oswiu after *Winwaed***

The Battle of the *Winwaed* marks the beginning of a change in Oswiu's governance, specifically, a new era of dependence on his offspring and their spouses in order to govern his vast holdings. The alliances that had betrayed him returned to their orbits in his hierarchy – a new source of treachery rising within the ranks of his most trusted companions. Oswiu's enemies found political as well as religious means by which to plague his reign. The nine years between the Battle of the *Winwaed* and the Council of Whitby are marked by the growing unrest among the Irish and Roman Church leaders over the observation of Easter. Oswiu's diplomatic ability shines in the midst of these intrigues, even as circumstances inevitably forced him to the decision which satisfactorily put to rest the centuries-old dispute. However, his political savvy by no means precluded his personal devotion to the Christian God.

The sun that rose the morning after the battle shone on a lot of empty thrones which Oswiu quickly filled, principally, Penda's Mercian kingdom and Breatwaldaship, and Oethelwald's Deira. After divvying up the plunder with which he had averted Penda's attack just days prior, Oswiu made his way home to his royal estate at *Ad Murum* where he awarded the thrones of Deira and Southern Mercia to his loyal son, Alfrith, and son-in-law, Peada, respectively. Alfrith had proved himself most worthy in the battle and

finally received what Oswiu had wanted to bestow upon him since Oswald's death. Peada already controlled North Mercia, having received it from his father. The young men then retired to winter in their new lands. The vacancies in the Welsh lands were not to be dealt with then. Oswiu wisely let the native British squabble among themselves over the winter and weaken themselves with factions.

Instead of marching into the cold, wet, Welsh lands, Oswiu made it his priority to honor his oath to God. He called upon his cousin, Hilda, at *Heruteu*, modern Hartlepool, to deliver his daughter to her new home. The monastery is located at the eastern end of Hadrian's Wall. It is not the greatest distance from Oswiu's royal estate, so the king and queen could easily visit their daughter and cousin often. Oswiu then dedicated the monastic estates, as vowed. It is not clear how he did this; he either listed twelve locations in which he wanted monasteries to be built, or he called pious monks and nuns to his estate and offered them their choice of any ten-hide parcel in Northumbria. Most likely, he followed the latter option, probably by calling one individual from both Bernicia and Deira per year and allowing them to select their location. In this manner the building program would have taken a minimum of six years, thus prolonging the memory of both God's favor and Oswiu's faithfulness in fulfilling his vow.

Oswiu's monastic building program extended beyond Northumbria's borders. Peada, having heard that Oswiu had arranged for the construction of at least two monasteries, returned to *Ad Murum* and requested him to build a monastery, to the "glory of Christ and the honor of St. Peter," in the lands newly given to him, South Mercia.[186]

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[186] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E 654.

Oswiu agreed, and they broke ground for the foundations at *Medeshamstede*, now Peterborough, in the spring of 656.[187]

This joint project must have surprised Alfrith, perhaps even discomfiting him enough to take stock of his situation. The Deirans, who had been deprived of the honor of being ruled by a descendant of Oswald, were displeased with the appointment of Alfrith over them. It is uncertain to what degree their displeasure resonated with him, but Oswiu's apparent favoritism of Peada rankled him. Peada had already controlled North Mercia when Oswiu killed Penda. That he then received all of Penda's land as a sort of inheritance did not sit well with Alfrith, who knew that thrones were earned with blood. He was his father's eldest son, and yet had only been given Deira. While it was a wealthy kingdom, given its position on the trade routes from the Wall, it was nothing compared to the 12,000 hides of land Peada had received *in totam* in Oswiu's subdivision of sub-kingships.[188] Alfrith probably did not see his father's wisdom in keeping the Mercians happy by allowing them continuity in their leadership, but, desired more power for himself.[189]

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[187] The paucity of scholarly reference to the material in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* leaves one hesitant to employ it as a source. However, the monastery's history is woven far too complexly into the other material in the *Chronicle* to make it a profitable forgery. That the chronicler felt compelled to include Wulfhere's later dedication to finishing his elder brother's monastery, instead of simply starting it as Wulfhere's personal project, indicates that there is a good deal of fact in the entries. See *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E 654 – E 657.

[188] Bede states that South Mercia was 5,000 hides while North Mercia was 7,000, in *Hist Eccl* III. 24. These two regions were divided by the Trent River.

[189] It is also possible that the hot-tempered Finan inspired Alfrith to rebel against his father. Finan was in the position to make comments about Aldfrith, Oswiu's bastard son, which Alfrith would have overheard. Alfrith would have been reminded that there was an elder son, and would have realized that his own claims were really quite tenuous if Finan worked with Oswiu to put that bastard in the line to inherit or to lay claim. James Campbell suggests that Finan's adamant stand for Irish ways inspired Alfrith to rebel, but, since the nature of Oswiu's relationship with Finan's sister was not the sort to endear Finan to Oswiu, Campbell is wrong to conclude that Finan and Oswiu's close relationship disquieted Alfrith. Campbell, "Debt," pp. 336 – 337.

Devising a cunning plan, Alfrith convinced his younger sister, Alhflaed, to assist him in preserving their stake in their father's holdings by grabbing whatever they could when they could. Higham suggests that Alhflaed and Alfrith acted in concert out of concern for their own futures, since they were not related to Oswiu's present queen.[190] Alfrith probably feared losing his right to the throne in the event of Oswiu's death if Peada were to back Ecgfrith's ascension. Alhflaed apparently loved her brother more than her husband, for she killed Peada by treachery at Eastertide.[191]

There is a chance that all this transpired while Oswiu was away. The Irish annals record that Oswiu invaded the land of the thirty British kings who had fought against him the year before. The traditional warring season in Anglo-Saxon England was late summer, after the crops were in. While it was not agriculturally sound to abandon one's personal crops in favor of pillaging an enemy before they could get their crops in, Oswiu needed to strike before the British could get their affairs sorted out and assemble behind a united front. So, it is highly likely that he attacked in spring, before Easter, and took the British grain stores along with the rest of the booty he collected. Such an unexpected move would have removed him from his kingdom at the very time Alhflaed killed Peada. Oswiu's reaction to their treachery, at least to his daughter's treachery, upon his return, was most definitely swift and righteous. Alhflaed is never again mentioned by any historian or chronicler. Oswiu did not allow a power-vacuum to develop in Mercia; he installed a governor in Peada's place. However, the damage had been done to his authority. Oswiu's control of Mercia was never again as strong as it had been with Peada ruling.

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[190] Higham, *Convert Kings*, pp. 252 – 253.
[191] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 24; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E 654.

After Peada's death, Oswiu busied himself with expanding his empire northward. His nephew, Talorcan, was in a position to be of great assistance to Oswiu, in supplying troops, provisions and lodging between battles with the Dalraidans. In the latter course of his reign, Oswiu took the kingdom of Fortriu, between the Forth and Tay rivers.[192] While it is unlikely that he achieved this all before Talorcan's death in 657, this gave him a foothold in the Pictish lands whence he could expand his holdings at a future time. This conquest indicates that he started at Stirling and began a slow advance northward. Talorcan's death may have been in a battle on his uncle's behalf. His own nephew, Gartnait Mac Donuel, succeeded him. This Gartnait may have been a son of Domnall Brecc, although there is no way either to prove or to disprove the possibility.[193] In either case, the new king was loyal to Oswiu and served as his sub-king in Talorcan's place. His coronation may have revived the connection between Oswiu and the Ui Neill, as it reminded them of their past alliances against Gartnait's alleged father, and renewed their own interests in family connections through Iona.

Oswald's building program continued in Bernicia and Deira while he was away at war in the north. That very year, 657, Hilda, then Abbess of Hartlepool, received ten hides at a place called *Streanaeshealc*, now Whitby, located atop costal cliffs with a good

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[192] More will be written on this subject, but it is sufficient for now to present Kirby's argument for familial inheritance from Oswiu to a future Pictish king. Kirby writes that Oswiu's successes above the Forth are visible in that his nephew, Bridei Mac Bili, king of Strathclyde, is "described specifically in the Irish annals as 'king of Fortriu' at his death in 692." *Annals of Ulster* s.a. 692; *Annals of Tigernach* p. 212, as cited by Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 99.

[193] Marjorie O. Anderson theorizes that Talorcen's sister married Donuel. Gartnait and Drust therefore were loyal to Oswiu. By some linguistic technicalities, "Domnall" and "Donuel" could be one and the same name. Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973) p. 172.

view of the North Sea.[194] There she built a joint monastery to house her followers, both men and women, a characteristic unique to Irish monasteries in the seventh century. The remains of their living quarters have been discovered to the east of the surviving Gothic-style abbey complex. Hilda and her followers observed the Irish Easter, and their abbey became a center of learning in the Irish scholarly discipline.[195] The original complex, with its Church of St. Peter and the chambers where the Council of Whitby was eventually held, are believed to be located under the existing abbey. Oswiu's daughter, Aelfflaed, was three years old when she moved with her aunt to the newly constructed monastery.[196]

Possibly, Oswiu meant Whitby Abbey to eclipse Lindisfarne's episcopal influence as a new *Eigenkirche* controlled exclusively by himself.[197] Hilda's status as the "principle and oldest wise woman of his kin;" the eventual cooperative rise of Aelfflaed and Eanflaed to the Abbessy; Whitby Abbey's success as a center for literature; and Oswiu's own burial on its premises, constitute a conspicuous "concentration of resources" which promised to deprive Lindisfarne of its royal patronage.[198] However, Hilda's Oswine cult was anything but beneficial to the king and, considered together with her later reluctance to give up her Irish observations, implies she was not likely Oswiu's alley in that goal.

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[194] The Irish settlement fell to the Danes around 867 and was destroyed. The site was resurrected in 1066 with the Danish name "Whitby." John Goodall, *Whitby Abbey* (London: English Heritage, 2006) pp. 1 – 4.
[195] Numerous saints' lives were produced here. One previously mentioned was the Life of Oswine which Bede used as a resource. Another notable, and equally anonymous life was that of St. Gregory the Great. It is often referred to as the "Whitby life of Pope Gregory."
[196] Her presence at the abbey is documented by a fragment of her tombstone, discovered in the 1920s. It is unfortunate that better notes were not taken upon this discovery, for she was buried there with both her parents. Oswiu's grave has been lost to time, it seems.
[197] Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 251.
[198] Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 251.

Whitby Abbey's success was more likely a product of Eanflaed's royal attentions to her daughter and cousin than any religio-political conniving done by Oswiu.[199]

It is not probable that the entire structure and housing complex was raised in one year, however, although Hilda was on site to oversee its progress. The new monastic foundation was still under construction when rebellion broke out among the Mercians in 658. Three Mercian ealdormen, Immin, Eafa and Eadberht, took advantage of Oswiu's distractions in the north and overthrew the Northumbrian governor. In his place they installed Wulfhere, Penda's youngest son, whom they had kept in hiding since Peada's death.[200] Their caution was a product of Alhflaed's treachery, indicating how important Peada had been to Oswiu's hopes for a successful governance of Mercia: the Mercians clearly were loyal to Penda's family. Peada would have linked his people to Oswiu more closely than a foreign ealdorman would have. The Mercian sense of betrayal at Oswiu's hands, through his daughter, had chafed for three years until Wulfhere came of age. The rebellion was swift and clean; Wulfhere drove out Oswiu's ealdormen and then readied himself to make his case to Oswiu once the Breatwalda arrived to address the situation.

A little-referenced entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a record of the work for the finishing of *Medeshamstede* and its consecration by Abbot Seaxwulf, suggests how Wulfhere went about presenting himself as a worthy replacement for Peada.[201] Remembering that the entries regarding *Medeshamstede* must be handled with caution, the underlying idea that Oswiu and Peada, or Oswiu and Wulfhere, constructed a

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[199] Which presents a tantalizing complexity, for Eanflaed practiced the Roman Easter. There are many recorded instances that suggest that the chasm between Irish and Roman observances was not nearly as impassible as it is thought to be and that whatever divide did exist was, in certain situations, inconsequential. The friendship and kinship between these women would thus indicate at least one means to circumvent an inconsequential cultural divide.
[200] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 24.
[201] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E 656.

monastery together is not far fetched. Suspicion arises when the land holdings attached to the monastery are found laid out with palpable care and are explicitly described as being held "royally and freely that neither tax nor rent be taken from it except for the monks alone."[202] Then there is the fact that Wulfhere's signature mark was made prior to Oswiu's. One should expect Oswiu, the Breatwalda and founding member of the project, to sign first. Rather, Oswiu's cross of confirmation comes second. Finally, the attached papal bull from Pope Vitalian smacks of forgery as it is addressed only to Wulfhere. Bede has preserved a letter from Pope Vitalian in which the pope is careful to address Oswiu in recognition of his authority despite the fact that Oswiu had consulted with Egbert the king of Kent in the business which the letter addressed.[203] Such a keen statesman as Vitalian would not have made the basic error of ignoring the Breatwalda, if he had actually promulgated that bull.

That the monastery needed repair prior to its consecration suggests that it had lain only partially completed for the two and a half years since Peada's death. Wulfhere expressed his interest in completing it for the love of his brother Peada, for Oswiu, and for Abbot Seaxwulf, whom Oswiu and Peada had first commissioned for the work. Wulfhere admitted to having spoken with his brother Aethelred and sisters Cyneburh and Cyneswith before approaching Oswiu. Recall that this Aethelred was the husband of Osthryth, Oswiu's daughter. He had served both Oswald and Oswiu without treachery, having received Oswald's body to his realm as a rare honor. Oswiu undoubtedly held his opinion in high esteem, as well as Osthryth's, who had not betrayed him as had his other

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[202] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E 656.
[203] See Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 29.

daughter, Alhflaed. He accepted Wulfhere's claim and stood with him at the consecration and dedication of the finished monastery, either later that year or in the one following.[204]

Oswiu's business in Mercia brought him back into Alfrith's territory sometime in 658. That Alfrith was not assisting his father in battle is evident, for he was home when he received news that a young Northumbrian monk, named Wilfrid, whose education in Rome Alfrith's stepmother, Eanflaed, had sponsored some years past, had returned to England after suffering persecution in Gaul.[205] While still a novice monk, Wilfrid had been inspired by the arguments between Finan and Ronan concerning Easter, and he had gone to Rome to study the debate in depth. He returned as a staunch advocate of the Roman practices and preached them unabashedly upon his arrival in England. Alfrith acted upon the advice of Cenwealh, king of the West Saxons, and called for Wilfrid to attend him in Deira.[206] Wilfrid convinced him of the Roman argument, and Alfrith willingly converted to the Italian practice. The king and the monk became friends, and Alfrith extended his royal patronage over Wilfrid, giving him the monastery at Ripon.[207]

Wilfrid came into contact with Oswiu through his court connections with Alfrith and Eanflaed. The presence of yet another Roman monk did not provoke much of Oswiu's attention. The king's attention was focused on the state of the northern and southern borders. With the loss of Mercia, his southern border had receded to the Humber

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[204] While it is true that Oswiu may not have had the man-power to face the Mercian on the battlefield, this possibility is most often referenced in dealing with Oswiu's loss of the territory south of the Humber River. I have decided to emphasize this less-considered explanation.
[205] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 7. Wilfrid had come to Eanflaed soon after her marriage, to serve in her court. She sent him to Lindisfarne as a monk and then to Rome. *Vita Wilfridi* 2.
[206] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 7.
[207] This monastery was already occupied by Irish monks from Lindisfarne whom Alfrith previously had installed there. Alfrith evicted the Irish monks and gave it to Wilfrid to serve as his monastery. Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25. See also Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 8.

River; Wulfhere was not his sub-king by any means. The two kings shared an uneasy peace and were wary of one another. Oswiu's hard earned lands in the north did not fluctuate, but he knew he could not leave them in an unstable governance for long, ere he lose them to the Dalraidans or the Picts. Having learned that serious damage occurred when he took his eyes off his family members, Oswiu would not risk abandoning his main holdings.[208]

Oswiu's absence from the Pictish and Dalraidan frontier constituted a pause in the wars that had consumed his youth and early reign. He busied himself with keeping a watchful eye on the Mercian border, probably taking note of the Easter dispute as it traveled around his kingdom. During this pause, the Easter dispute ripened dramatically. Notable participants, particularly Wilfrid, reportedly agitated the common populace. However, that Oswiu did not give more attention to the rising problem indicates that the dispute boiled primarily among the church leaders. The common people were affected when they witnessed open arguments between Finan and Ronan, but they could not have been driven to worry too much. Their kings since Edwin had all observed the Christian faith; to that affect they were all Christian. The issue of identity through common practice was a detail valued by Church scholars more than the layman.

Oswiu could not help but hear of the cause and nature of the dispute. He verbally acknowledged it on numerous occasions and his preference for the Irish ways was a well known fact among the Church leaders.[209] Oswiu concurred with his church's

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[208] It is possible that this constant action in the north against the Dalraidans is a partial source of Bede's comment that Oswiu made the Dalraidan's tributary to him. *Hist Eccl* III. 5.

[209] "*Osuiu a Scottis edoctus ac baptizatus…nil melius quam quod illi docuissent autumabat* = Oswiu, having been baptized and taught by the Irish…considered nothing better than that which he had learned." Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.

understanding: the Apostle John had observed Christ's resurrection on the fourteenth day of the moon in the month Nissan; the fourteenth day of the moon was determined via a copy of Anatolius' nineteen year cycle; Columba, founder of Iona, had kept John's Easter.[210] As far as Oswiu was concerned, there was nothing invalid about his church's cycle. He was an observant man, but his affairs of state, including keeping an eye on Gartnait's and Wulfhere's actions, likely did not leave him much time to devote to sorting out the details of the dispute. It was the sort of technical problem that required a great deal of study. It had taken Wilfrid a year to master it, and he devoted his time to the topic.[211] Oswiu was never at a loss for people to discuss the topic with, however. His wife kept the Roman Easter during their whole marriage. Oswiu probably engaged her in many conversations on the subject both before and after the dispute arose among the clergy.

The birth of Oswiu's fourth son, Aelfwine, in 661 suggests that the king's relationship with his wife did not suffer for the worse from their opposing traditions even as the Easter dispute persisted. Aelfwine was Oswiu's seventh child, his third with Eanflaed. Their joy soon turned to sorrow, or was a singular bright moment in an otherwise bleak time, for Bishop Finan died the same year.[212] Oswiu welcomed Finan's replacement, Colman, whose appointment intensified the Easter dispute, possibly because the election of another Irish bishop aggravated the Roman faction, as all monasteries and

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[210] An unknown monk or group of monks following in John's footsteps changed the day of observation to the Sunday after the fourteenth day in order to avoid association with the Quartodeciman heresy, whose followers observed Easter literally on the fourteenth day.

[211] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 5. Such a depth of study suggests scholarship, and no mention is ever made of Oswiu being literate.

[212] There are no means by which to determine the order of events. Bede mentions Finan's death in the same breath as the intensification of the Easter dispute which resulted from his successor's election. *Hist Eccl* III. 25 Aelfwine's birth year is calculated from his age at death and the date of his death: eighteen in Ecgfrith's ninth year. Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 21.

churches were under the episcopal authority of Lindisfarne. The Roman clergy and monks were moved to protest the dominance of the misguided Irish because their own Bishop Paulinus had first advanced the Catholic religion in Northumbria.[213] The Irish had done a good job of bringing Christianity back into the land after Caedwallan's attacks, but the Romans believed that it was high time to shed the ignorance and accept the correct practices.

Bede's references to the intensification of the dispute are vague and inspire all sorts of conjecture as to the ecclesiastic and lay conditions in Northumbria after Colman's election. His entry following Colman's arrival at Lindisfarne suggests that the problem erupted once more, encompassing the lay community.[214] If the king's actions meant anything to them, Oswiu sided firmly with Iona, his own brother and Colman, and still did not admit to a problem in his faith. Between Colman's election in 661 and the resurgence of war in 663, Oswiu was in position to discuss the matter in depth with the new bishop. They clearly spent time together, for it is stated that "the king greatly loved Bishop Colman on account of his innate prudence."[215] It is possible that this prudence was in reference to Colman's attitude about Aldfrith, Oswiu's illegitimate son, who was now nearly thirty and quite intelligent, as his actions in Bede's *Historia* and Eddius' *Vita Wilfridi* suggest. Oswiu may have appreciated Colman's discretion, given Alfrith's connection to Peada's death and his rising animosity and intolerance toward his father's

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[213] Bede, *Hist Eccl* II. 14.
[214] Many people "feared that, though they had received the name of Christian, they were running or had run in vain." Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[215] "*Multum namque eundem epsicopum Colmanum rex pro insita illi prudentia diligebat.*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 26.

faith. Bede's entries, at best, reveal that the punctuated incidents of intensification in the Easter dispute corresponded with the elections of Aidan's two Irish successors.

The death of Gartnait in 663 provided Oswiu with the chance to escape the sermons of Wilfrid and the pressures Alfrith placed on him. Oswiu called upon his Ui Neill allies to assist him in seizing the Pictish throne for his great-nephew, Drest, leaving behind a sufficient force to watch the Mercian border.[216] It is certain that at least one Pictish army also rose to the opportunity to reclaim liberty and self-direction.[217] By moving swiftly to preserve his family's northern holdings, Oswiu turned his back on Alfrith. If Oswiu left for the north in the late summer of 663, he gave Alfrith a chance to assemble a rebellion against him.[218] Bede mentions an attack which Oswiu suffered at the hand of his son, Alfrith, although neglecting to provide any indication as to when in Oswiu's reign it took place.[219] Alfrith gathered his ealdormen and thegns that fall and they strategized during winter. He could have done nothing until the next autumn, for he could not have expected to fill his stores with plundered food. He had to wait until his own harvest was gathered. When he was finally able to attack, he would proceed under the guise of a holy war, persecuting Oswiu as one who claimed the name of Christian and yet refused to follow the teachings of the Church.[220]

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[216] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 103.
[217] A member of Oswiu's family, through the line of his brother Eanfrith, had ruled Pictland off and on since around 616. Anderson, *Kings*, p. 172.
[218] There is some dispute as to when this rebellion occurred. If the rebellion took place after the Council of Whitby, it would have had to have been immediately after. At that point Alfrith's cover-challenge was already moot and he would have been attacking out of pure spite against his father rather than in holy war against a heretic or something of the sort. Also, Oswiu's lands were ravaged by bubonic plague immediately after the council. Plague is not a logical condition in which to wage a war, no matter how desperate. It is deadly to morale.
[219] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 14.
[220] Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, pp. 107 – 108. The concept of holy war is not so much an elaborate misnomer for Alfrith's reasoning; it is a concept that gets at the heart of Alfrith's motivations.

Alfrith expected his father to remain in the north. If Oswiu had Ui Neill allies against the Picts, the fighting which took place in 663 had likely been successful. It is unlikely that either side engaged in combat over the winter, although they may have wintered on the lines. Oswiu would have spent this time with his grand-nephew, Drest. In summer they retired to their fields in order to stock up for a renewed confrontation in the fall. Oswiu returned home, wary of having left Alfrith unguarded and careful not to give him any more maneuvering room. He found the situation significantly worsened; a rumor was circulating that he and his queen celebrated Easter's feast and Lent's fast juxtaposed.[221] In addition, Alfrith was preparing a confrontation while Oswiu's troops were occupied on Mercian and Pictish frontiers.[222] Oswiu probably expected Alfrith to unleash his plot sometime after the various Easter celebrations and may even have suspected that the recurrent Easter dispute was a major piece of Alfrith's plan.

Indeed, Oswiu's celebration of Easter was the final piece in Alfrith's plan; it reminded the populace, to whom Alfrith was playing, that there was serious dysfunction within the Northumbrian kingdom. Alfrith hoped to associate that dysfunction with Oswiu to personally avoid the disdain his father had attracted in his various bids for power. If Alfrith could portray Oswiu as an individual who frankly refused to uphold the Church's rulings, he could appeal to a number of bishops, in England, Gaul and Rome

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[221] "Hence it is said that in these days (those prior to 664) it sometimes happened that Easter was celebrated twice in the same year, so that the king had finished the fast and was keeping Easter Sunday, while the Queen and her people were still in Lent and observing Palm Sunday." Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25. However, Donald A. Bullough has compared reconstructed Easter cycles from this period and has concluded that no such conflict of dates occurred in Oswiu's reign as described by Bede. "The Missions to the English and Picts and their Heritage (to c. 800)," in *Die Iren und Europa im Frueheren Mittelalter*, Vol. 1 (Klett-Cotta, 1982): pp. 80 – 98.

[222] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 103.

herself, to sanction Oswiu's removal from power. If Alfrith succeeded in doing this, he would become the ruler of a kingdom united by a common religious practice.

Alfrith's plans to approach his father after Easter with his concerns over the worsening Easter dispute were waylaid by a serious outbreak of bubonic plague, which struck the south of England first and carried off Deusdedit, the bishop of Canterbury, on 14 July, 664.[223] The threat of death likely brought the validity of the Roman argument for right practice, as indicated by Bede's statement that many then feared "they were running or had run in vain," home to the populace, who had listened to Roman and Irish sermons concerning the date of Easter for over thirteen years.[224] This popular expectation of death intensified the delicacy of Oswiu's situation. Having anticipated his son's attack along the lines of the importance of observing Easter correctly, Oswiu surely realized the sympathetic values which Alfrith's argument could monopolize and possibly approached Alfrith first. At the very least, he agreed, at last, to address Alfrith's concerns when his son came around to confronting him later that year.

The timing of the Council of Whitby, late summer or early autumn by Richard Abels's reckoning, the customary time for battle, suggests either that Alfrith delivered an ultimatum to his father or that Oswiu undermined Alfrith and broke the momentum of Alfrith's assembled ealdormen and thegns.[225] Oswiu's need to nip Alfrith's treachery in the bud is one of the more obvious of his motives for this confrontation.[226] A second was to reaffirm his authority. Alfrith's scheming hurt Oswiu's authority as Breatwalda, not to

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[223] Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 2.
[224] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[225] Richard Abels, "The Council of Whitby: A Study in Early Anglo-Saxon Politics," *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Autumn, 1983): pp. 1 – 25.
[226] Eric John, as cited by Abels, "The Council of Whitby," p. 11.

mention that Oswiu's hold on his territory was weakening.[227] His reign had been plagued by intrigue since he had lost Deira to Oswine twenty years prior. Oswiu needed to rout his son's plans without risking the lives of his men or the numbers of his defenses. The predicament made him willing to face some extreme odds in order to put an end to Alfrith's threat. He would have to be quick and diplomatic.

Oswiu and Alfrith agreed to a council at Whitby Abbey, the now seven-year-old abbey maintained by Oswiu's cousin and Alfrith's great-aunt, Hilda. At first glance, the location even seems beneficial to Oswiu, given his close connections to it. This abbey was not the optimal location for Oswiu, since Hilda still bore a strong grudge against Oswiu for having Oswine killed. Its selection may have been a calculated move on Alfrith's part; after all, it would be difficult for Oswiu to refuse the apparently innocent suggestion. However he may have felt about the idea, Oswiu wanted the issue settled quickly and in a manner that would take Alfrith's advantage away from him. Oswiu accepted the suggestion and enforced his authority by indicating that he would preside, to which Alfrith acquiesced.

Oswiu's policy of entrusting his offspring with powerful positions in his government had been a cause of much grief to him over the eight and a half years since Penda's death. He had been at war for more than half of that time, and was in the delicate position of a chess-board king surrounded by pawns without a queen in sight to provide relief. Between his return from war in April and the assembly deadline in autumn, Oswiu had a lot of thinking to do. He had to figure out exactly what it was he hoped to accomplish with the Council of Whitby.

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[227] Abels, "The Council of Whitby," pp. 10 – 13.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## The King and His Council

The Council of Whitby is the undisputed event of Oswiu's career, and yet its significance is generally registered only by the expansion of Roman Church authority throughout England. Truly, this should not be disregarded, but the amazement generated among contemporaries by Oswiu's decision has been obscured by the well-recorded success of ecclesiastical-political events succeeding the council. That the outcome of the Council of Whitby hinged on a personal element, derived from the manner in which the council's subject resonated with Oswiu, is unappreciated. This personal element was a cumulative product of Oswiu's life experiences; guided most by his recent involvement in war and the questions which the Easter dispute had raised in his own mind. It remains to be explained why Oswiu made such an unprecedented about-face and ruled against the church of his youth.

We come upon Oswiu as a man who was conscious of spiritual matters, no doubt made aware of them through his life-long association with Irish churchmen and their fervor for spiritual existence. He knew of the intense faith, the many miracles, and the resilience of the Irish saints. He had been raised by Columba's disciples. He clearly accepted the Irish theory of right beliefs rather than his wife's Church's theory of right ritual, for he had lived in peace with her for many years among the followers of the two

churches mingled within his kingdom. The importance and spiritual potency of Easter itself was variously translated among the separate *coarba*, individual *paruchiae*, and the Roman Church, but the base line centered upon the specific event of Christ's resurrection; the observation of this alone made Easter an important date for the church members in Northumbria and Rome. The Council of Whitby addressed three particular questions: ritual versus faith; saints' authority; and identity. Of all of these, Oswiu identified most with the question of authority, although his decision was by no means based upon an agenda. Until Wilfrid caught Oswiu's attention with a crucial Biblical quotation, all sides expected the king to maintain his support of the Irish church.

Whitby must have strained at the seams with the number of people assembled there in 664. It is impossible to deduce the layout of the Irish monastery for the site has enjoyed numerous periods of construction in the past thirteen hundred years. The notes taken at the initial excavation (1924 – 1925) are woefully inadequate for any sort of seventh-century period reconstruction based on material evidence.[228] Given the average size of the building foundations excavated in the twentieth century, in comparison to the later structure which has survived and appears capable of once holding eighty to a hundred people quite comfortably, quarters during the council were cramped. The little wooden structure in which the council was held most likely was unable to seat the many attendants who accompanied Oswiu and Alfrith. Bede noted that the audience members

[228] The site was further muddled by an equally unkempt excavation in the 1940s. See Philip Rahtz, "The Building Plan of the Anglo-Saxon Monastery of Whitby Abbey," Appendix C, in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by David M. Wilson (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1976) pp. 459 – 62. Since the paradox of archaeological excavation is that in order to preserve the past, the archaeologist must first destroy it, it is impossible to dig in the same location and claim, beyond a doubt, any shred of primary deposition.

were seated as well as standing within the church constructed for Abbess Hilda and her followers.[229]

Neither side lacked for distinguished supporters. Oswiu had called Bishop Colman to attend as defendant for the Irish calculation. Colman brought an indeterminate number of clergymen with him.[230] Abbess Hilda also took her seat on the Irish side; her followers joined her.[231] The third member of this notable clutch was Cedd, Oswiu's bishop to the East Saxons. It is not clear whether Cedd had been paying a visit to the abbey before the council was even called, but his distinguished career and the fact that he was there to act as "a most careful interpreter for both parties at the council" suggest that his presence was a calculated move by Oswiu to impress and cow the opposition.[232]

Alfrith's supporters by no means matched his father's in the sense of possessing equally distinguished careers, though they presented a formidable front. Alfrith had invited Agilbert, Bishop of the West Saxons, to stand with him at Whitby. Agilbert had had a mixed career; he had come to Ireland from Gaul to study and then had been ordained the Bishop of the West Saxons for Cenweahl, their king.[233] He was visiting Wilfrid in Alfrith's kingdom at the time of the council and, apparently, was the only

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[229] "*…adsidentes quique sive adstantes…*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25. The monastery was constructed after the fashion of other Irish monasteries, such as Lindisfarne, which were made of wood and woven reeds. Lindisfarne did not acquire stone foundations until after the coming of Archbishop Theodore.

[230] It would be pure conjecture to guess at how many were possibly there. The Irish were quite conscious of numerology and, being Catholic, were likely to put a lot of faith in the numbers repeated in the Bible: three, seven and twelve. Colman's attendants were undoubtedly far fewer than Hilda's, for her community was in attendance.

[231] "*…cum suis…*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25. Their identities can only be guessed at. Their number consisted of men and women, and it is possible that Aelfflaed was also among them. She was ten years old by this time.

[232] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25. This conclusion does assume that no form of internal ranking system was in effect. Cedd was, after all, senior even to Colman, having been elected under Finan.

[233] This was sometime between 642 – 655. Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 7.

bishop Alfrith could get to back him.[234] Agilbert brought two priests with him: Agatho and Wilfrid. The fourth member of this group, James the Deacon, had the distinction of being the last surviving member of Paulinus' first missionary venture into Edwin's kingdom in the 620s. The fifth member, Romanus, was Eanflaed's own priest, who had traveled with her from Kent in 644. The attendance of James and Romanus indicates Alfrith's subtlety; their combined presence sent a complete message to Oswiu. James represented the first Roman mission, Romanus the second. Both men's careers were tied to Eanflaed and her father and, through them, to Oswiu's own maneuvering for the favor and support of Kent.

Once everyone had taken their seats, or found a place to squeeze in among the rows of standing attendants, Oswiu opened the council with the declaration that,

> It was fitting that those who served one God should observe one rule of life and not differ in the celebration of the heavenly sacraments, seeing that they all hoped for one kingdom in heaven; they ought therefore to inquire as to which was the truer tradition and then all follow it together.[235]

He then proceeded to ask Colman first and then Agilbert to explain what were the customs they each followed and whence and from whom such customs had originated. This initial step was, in reality, basic information gathering. Oswiu had no pressing need to require the information of Colman, but he showed respect to the bishop in directing the question to him first. Colman answered with measured brevity and provided the proofs with which Oswiu was quite familiar; in the process, he referenced the authoritative

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[234] This alone suggests that Alfrith's intentions at the council were less than spiritually motivated if, instead of being embraced as one of the brothers who had brought concord to the Breatwalda's kingdom, Agilbert was surreptitiously replaced without consultation: Agilbert was Cenwealh's bishop until Cenwealh tired of his "barbarous speech" and replaced him with Bishop Wine. Agilbert left England, "deeply offended," and accepted the bishopric of Gaul. *Hist Eccl* III. 7. It is entirely possible that Cenwealh rid himself of Agilbert due to Agilbert's connections to Alfrith.

[235] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.

figures who lent credence to the Irish observation. Colman followed his superiors who, in turn, followed their fathers. He directly cited the authority and precedence of the Apostle John, who had followed it himself "together with all the churches over which he had presided."[236] Colman also inferred the authority of Columba, the Ui Neill founder of Iona, and likened himself and his brothers to John's disciple Polycarp.[237] With the exception of Columba, the men he referenced were distinguished fathers in the Church universal.[238]

When Colman finished, Oswiu requested that Agilbert follow suit. Agilbert politely suggested that, for the sake of his own thick Gallic accent, Wilfrid be permitted to answer in his place. It was an unusual move; priests were not customary presenters at Church councils. But Oswiu permitted it, perhaps out of gratitude that the proceedings could now be sped up without the need for Cedd to repeat everything the bishop said. And Oswiu knew Wilfrid; they had undoubtedly met over the course of Wilfrid's numerous incarnations: *gesith* to Eanflaed, monk at Lindisfarne, deliverer of pro-Roman Easter sermons, Alfrith's priest and Abbot of Ripon. Wilfrid answered eloquently, but not succinctly, that he followed the practice of Rome, city of Sts. Peter and Paul, where it was "universally celebrated." He then repeated the sarcastic argument used thirty years earlier by Cummian that the whole world, except for the men of Ireland and "their accomplices in obstinacy," observed the same calculation and were foolish to do so.[239]

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[236] "*…cum omnibus quibus praeerat ecclesiis celebrasse legitur*." Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[237] "*…et nos, sicut discipuli eius Policarpus at alii, ea fiducia celebramus* = and we, like his disciples Polycarp and others, celebrate it on his authority." Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 10.
[238] Columba held more insular than continental distinction.
[239] Cummian, writing in 632 to Abbot Segene of Iona, famously stated in pure sarcasm: "Rome is mistaken; Jerusalem is mistaken; Antioch is mistaken; the whole world is mistaken: the British and the Irish alone hold the truth." Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali, PL*, LXXXVII. 974, cited by Colgrave, *Bede's History*, p. 199, nt. 3.

Colman immediately asked whether Wilfrid would be so bold as to include, by association, John in that bunch of fools who opposed the world since the Irish followed his example and "all the world acknowledges his great wisdom."[240] Oswiu sat back to watch the exchange which quickly became *ad hominum* vitriol. He did not interrupt the two men, for they were arguing over the question of authority, a language he understood and appreciated. They also relied heavily upon conveying the universality of their beliefs, another theme in which he was interested. Colman's question suggests that the bishop tactically intended to incriminate his opponent by forcing him into a position where he either had to either drop his argument or risk compromising the holiness of the saints.[241] Wilfrid absorbed Colman's attack. He stated that he would not dare call John foolish, for John followed the Mosaic ceremonial law. He further claimed that it had not been wrong of the early saints to follow the Jewish practices; even Paul had fallen back into his Jewish habits when under extreme stress. But Colman and the Irish did not live in such tumultuous times; they lived at a time when the whole world was welcoming the evangelist and his gospel.

Wilfrid then proved that the Irish were mistaken in associating themselves with John. He presented a concise précis on the subtle difference between the practices in question: John's, Peter's and that of the Irish. If the argument was actually presented as clearly as it is in Bede's *Historia*, Oswiu may have finally appreciated the subtlety of the dispute and just how much difference a day or two makes. "John," said Wilfrid,

> In accordance with the custom of the law, began the celebration of Easter Day in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month, regardless of whether it fell

[240] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[241] Colman may have believed that the priest was no match for him, and assumed too much from Wilfrid's subordinate ranking. The incriminating nature of his questions is consistent.

on the Sabbath or any other day.[242]

Therefore, the celebration could run anywhere in the week of the fourteenth through twentieth. By comparison, Peter waited for the first full moon after the fourteenth day and then celebrated Easter Sunday. This practice produced a timetable for Easter of the fifteenth through the twenty-first, and a celebration which began, at the earliest, on the fourteenth. Finally, he proved that the Irish followed "neither the law nor the gospel," because, by only celebrating on Sunday, they sometimes began their celebration on the evening of the thirteenth and completely omitted the twenty-first.[243]

Colman could not argue with this. It was true that his church celebrated Easter only on Sunday, that they often began their celebration on the thirteenth day of the month which was not Scriptural, and that they did not keep the whole law either, since their timetable naturally omitted the twenty-first. He could form no rejoinder to the point concerning the appropriate dates, so he sought his next defense within the issue of how the dates were to be determined: acceptable cycles. However, that Colman resorted to a derivation of the initial argument instead of countering dates for dates does not indicate an adaptation in his strategy. He challenged Wilfrid on a greater basis, asking whether Wilfrid questioned the wisdom of Anatolius, the man who had calculated the earliest Paschal cycle.[244]

This escalation threatened to eclipse Wilfrid's argument and confuse the issue. The dispute, historically, had two parts. One concerned the dates, the other centered on

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[242] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[243] This summation does not do the argument justice. For the complete text, see Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[244] Anatolius was the bishop of Laodicea in the late third century. Eusebius of Caesarea preserved a portion of his *Paschal Canons*, which predicts the timing of the Vernal Equinox on a nineteen year basis. Eusebius, *Church History* VII. 32. 14 – 19, translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert, in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994).

identifying the Vernal Equinox. The second issue was resolved by creating and keeping to cycles generated mathematically. The technical details of creating these cycles regularly introduced friction into the controversy because of the complications of similar terminology and dissimilar calculations. If two entities start at zero and revolve forward through a set of intervals determined by different calculations, they will not reach zero-prime at the same time. The Irish and Roman Churches did not mark the same week as zero, nor did they proceed to calculate the lengths of the months in a similar fashion, nor did they calculate the same number of times zero could be reached in their cycles.[245] They did, however, share an ancestor in the field of Paschal cycle calculations: Anatolius. Colman evoked the name even though he knew that the Irish church followed a cycle of eighty-four years to the Roman's nineteen, vowing that he would never contradict the teachings of his own father, Columba, who kept Anatolius' cycle. Thus, Colman made a brave foray into a complicated topic because he still sought to force Wilfrid to incriminate himself.

Wilfrid answered this challenge by calling Colman's bluff; he agreed that Anatolius was a great and learned father in the Church, but concluded that the tangent was irrelevant and immaterial to Colman's argument because the Irish "do not observe his precepts."[246] This was true; the Irish had received a corrupted version of it some centuries past, but were perhaps ignorant of this.[247] Wilfrid proved his point by referring to the argument on dates which he had just presented; zero did not line up to the same point on an equal scale between the Irish and Anatolius. Then Wilfrid returned to the

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[245] Zero equaling the Vernal Equinox, zero-prime equaling the Vernal Equinox of the next year, etc. See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 391 – 411.
[246] "*…cum nec eius decreta servetis…*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[247] Colgrave, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 218, nt. 2.

question of authority by directly challenging Colman's dedication to Columba. Was this Columba a man worthy of such devotion? Wilfrid pointed out that many would claim to have followed the Lord when they stood before Him in judgment, but He would say that He never knew them.[248] Wilfrid then quickly retracted the statement by denying his ability to judge Columba but, in his benevolence toward Columba, he impinged upon Colman via a comparison. Columba had been ignorant of the true mean, like John; Colman was not.

Then Wilfrid honed his argument and focused the attention of those gathered to listen on the issue of authority among the saints. Was Columba

> to be preferred to the most blessed chief of the apostles, to whom the Lord said, 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven'?[249]

Colman had no opportunity to respond, for Wilfrid's question had caught Oswiu's attention. Oswiu broke into the debate and asked Colman whether or not it was true that the Lord had said this to Peter. There are two ways to interpret Oswiu's intent; he either asked in the spirit of returning Colman's incrimination tactic back on Colman's own head, or he asked in the honest spirit of a man who had just made a significant realization and was turning to a friend and trusted advisor for confirmation. Colman would not deny it. Oswiu then asked his friend if an equal distinction had ever been awarded to Columba. Colman replied that no such equal authority had been given. Then, to make doubly certain that both men were in accord and that he was not incorrect in his hopes, Oswiu

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[248] Wilfrid quoted Matthew 7: 22 – 23.

[249] Matthew 16: 18 – 19. Eddius has the scene run in a different manner. After Wilfrid argues down Colman's implied argument about Anatolius, Oswiu asks the two debaters to answer the authority question without being prompted by the invocation of Peter's primacy, in *Vita Wilfridi* 10. However, Bede's dramatic scenario does more to link together the ideas expressed by the members of the council.

asked both Colman and Wilfrid, "do you both agree, without any dispute, that these words were addressed primarily to Peter and that the Lord gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven?"[250] The two men answered yes.

This simple affirmation was all Oswiu needed. Here, at last, was a clear and direct answer for all questions generated by the differences between the Irish and Roman churches: what would Peter do? Oswiu smiled, perhaps out of relief for never having to hear another convoluted treatise on how planets moved and what, if anything, that had to do with the celebration of Christ's resurrection.[251] Then he spoke:

> Then, I tell you, since he is the doorkeeper I will not contradict him; but I intend to obey his commands in everything to the best of my knowledge and ability, otherwise when I come to the gates of the kingdom of heaven, there may be no one to open them because the one who on your own showing holds the keys has turned his back on me.[252]

Oswiu then asked the other people gathered around the room whether or not they agreed with his ruling. Those who agreed gave their assent. Those who did not removed themselves from office.

The conclusion of the council is clean and precise, much like the material arguments preserved by Bede and Eddius, but comes much too soon. Bede mentions that there were other topics on the agenda; one of which concerned the style in which monks were to wear their tonsure.[253] The Irish grew their hair long down the back and shaved the front half while the Romans wore Christ's Crown, a ring of short cropped hair around

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[250] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[251] "*…subridens interrogavit…*" Eddius gives little evidence of any use in deducing the significance of this smile. *Vita Wilfridi* 10. The fact that Oswiu did smile while delivering his verdict has been used often to prove that Oswiu's choice was premeditated and that the council was, in effect, a sham or smokescreen to mask the fact he was going to jump ship to the Roman side.
[252] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[253] "*…nam et de hoc quaestio non minima erat…*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 26.

a bald pate.[254] The tonsure was a hotly disputed topic for debate prior to the council at Whitby and yet it received a mere comment after the fact in Bede's work and no notice in Eddius'. Edward James believes that Bede purposefully omitted the details of the debate at the council because the tonsure was more of a derisive issue than Easter.[255] As a visible symbol of affiliation, it spoke more of resistance to a united identity than the once a year celebration did.[256] Whether this omission was a conscious decision on Bede's part or a result of the reluctance of his sources and informants to provide him with details, it is likely that Oswiu's startling decision enflamed more than a few tempers of the debaters gathered at Whitby and conditioned the way he was to be remembered by historians.

Any discussion concerning the tonsure was purely a matter of Church business. While Oswiu had the authority to make a personal decision to adopt the Roman Church for himself and his kingdom, he technically had no say in how the Church was to direct its affairs. However, since the king had just proclaimed Peter's way in everything, he had, effectively, castrated any argument against adopting Christ's Crown. The issue at hand no longer concerned the individual details of the two churches' grievances toward one another; it was now whether the Irish clergymen could take the same leap of faith Oswiu had.

Colman could not make this leap, with his honor bruised by his loss to Wilfrid; but Cedd could. These opposing responses reveal that the leap from one cycle to the other, from one date to another was really not that insurmountable, but that the difficulty

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[254] Colgrave, *Bede's History*, p. 139, nt. 3.
[255] Edward James, "Bede and the Tonsure Question," *Peritia*, 3 (1984): pp. 85 – 98.
[256] The concept of identity today is a hotly debated topic in itself. However, James presents a credible argument to the effect that some sort of solidarity was perceived by means of this extreme physical feature. James, "Tonsure," pp. 93 – 95. The tonsure question, if it did not preempt the Easter question, was inextricably linked with it and its omission is therefore quite a problem.

came from injuries sustained by an individual's pride. Colman's identity as an Irishman had been impinged and his intelligence had been ridiculed, but it was the damage inflicted by Wilfrid on Columba's memory that caused Colman to refuse to concede and see the same logic as Cedd. The argument, for Colman, hinged upon the authority of the saints, as it had for Oswiu, and Colman was not going to betray his founding father. At Colman's refusal to accept the new Easter and tonsure, Oswiu was forced to remove him from his episcopal office at Lindisfarne.[257] Then, as it was late, or because Oswiu was affected by what he had just done to his friend, the council adjourned for "an interval."[258]

The edicts of the first session had caught the Irish majority off guard. The king, raised, educated, baptized, befriended by and now allied with the Irish, had struck everyone, not just Alfrith, with a spectacular, diplomatic hip-shot. His choice had definitely caught Alfrith off guard and removed the young man's leverage. The benefits of his new alliance with Rome were obvious to everyone in attendance and have been commented on by numerous scholars.[259] Oswiu gained access to law, institutional hierarchy and authority, and allies in Kent and Gaul by accepting the Roman Church's principles.[260] He stood to capitalize on a great network of bishops who would act as his

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[257] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 26; Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 11.
[258] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 11.
[259] See Higham, *Convert Kings*; Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*; and Abels, "The Council of Whitby."
[260] For the relationship between the Church, its laws and the Anglo-Saxon Breatwaldas, see Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 32 – 43; Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, pp. 50 – 68; and Deanesly, *Augustine*, pp. 89 – 98.

governors in his client kingdoms.[261] He deftly overcame his son's treasonous ploy, too, and stood poised to become the powerful ruler of an England united under the Church.[262]

The obvious possibility of this motivation obscures the fact that Oswiu already had access to all these benefits, excepting the defeat of his son, through the Ui Neill and Iona. The selection of Peter's Church is especially incongruous in light of the military situation. Oswiu's more immediate problem was in the north. He was engaged in a war with the Picts in defense of his nephew's throne and needed the Ui Neill on his side in order to overthrow the Picts. The continued support of the Ui Neill on the war's conclusion would assure his nephew's successful retention of the throne. There are hierarchical implications to consider as well. The bishop of Lindisfarne was the one bishop whom Oswiu did not appoint; he was ordained by Iona.[263] It is likely that the Ui Neill kings shared this or a similar authoritative mindset that made them favorable toward Oswiu as an ally. Therefore, Oswiu stood to lose an ally he really needed in favor of one that would have to fight through Mercia to help him in the north. Neither was he in a position to risk either angering or ignoring Wulfhere of Mercia in order to get the Kentish men to him. Oswiu's decision was not strategically logical just then, and he was an experienced enough warrior to realize that.

In light of this more immediate political situation, Oswiu's defection from Iona and the Ui Neill demands a different explanation than the long-term political benefits on their own. The real motivation had to be personal; Oswiu's life bears evidence for this conclusion. His remorse, shown in dedicating Aldfrith to God and erecting the monastery

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[261] Higham, *Convert Kings*, pp. 231 – 238.
[262] Abels, "The Council of Whitby," p. 13.
[263] All three of the bishops of Lindisfarne, Aidan, Finan and Colman had been elected by the Abbot of Iona and sent to Oswald and Oswiu.

at Gilling West, after the alleged murder of Oswine, was the fruit of a penitent heart that feared and sought to please God. That Oswiu had first called out to God before facing his enemy, Penda, and then had kept his oath to God after the Battle of the *Winwaed*, giving his daughter, Aelfflaed, to the Church and commencing the promised monastic-construction project, reveals the same heart, still intent on obeying the will of God. Oswiu's strong insistence that Peada be baptized before marrying Alflaed indicates a definite reforming reaction to Bishop Aidan's opinion. Once Oswiu appreciated the apostolic authority behind the Roman argument, he chose to follow what had been presented as God's will for His church. The fact that Peter appeared to control access to heaven's splendors struck a final chord in Oswiu, who was due back on the northern frontier when the council concluded. Oswiu had good reason to consider his mortality just then; his father and both his elder brothers had died violently in battle at comparable ages to his own. Oswiu did not wish to have run in vain.

Colman had departed Whitby immediately after the first session closed, in order to put his affairs in order at Lindisfarne as quickly as possible. He needed to reach Iona before the winter storms kept him in Northumbria, where he no longer had a residence. He came to Oswiu before he started on his journey back up the coast in order to ask that Oswiu fill his now-vacant position by electing Eata, abbot of Melrose, as the new abbot of Lindisfarne.[264] It is clear that Colman did not mean for Oswiu to make Eata the next bishop as well as abbot; that was not for him to suggest. Oswiu promised Colman that he would do as Colman requested. Then Colman left with his attendants and returned to Lindisfarne where he spread the word that those monks who would not accept the Roman

[264] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 26.

customs should join him on his journey north. Colman then traveled to Iona, where he shared the news with Abbot Cummene.[265] The news may not have reached the Ui Neill until the spring, given the rough nature of the winter seas. The abbot's response was to write a life of Columba in order to bolster Iona against the ecclesiastical ramifications of losing the Northumbrian king.[266]

While Colman was still making his way back to Lindisfarne, however, the second session of the council began. By now, the political climate at the council had changed: Alfrith could no longer attempt a holy war against Oswiu and Oswiu needed to replace Colman with another bishop for his kingdom. He would not leave the council until he had provided this bishop for his spiritual guidance and that of his people. Oswiu opened the second session by inquiring who ought to fill Colman's see. He directed this to his and Alfrith's ealdormen and thegns, who were now included in the proceedings.[267] These men, impressed by the display of wisdom they had just witnessed, recommended Wilfrid, who had shown great mettle against a bishop and certainly was qualified for the position. Oswiu accepted the suggestion, but not before either Alfrith's ealdormen petitioned that Wilfrid be given a see closer to them so that they might be allowed to retain a share of Wilfrid's wisdom, or before Alfrith made the same request with a different intent: to centralize the new Church institution in his territory.

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[265] Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 259.
[266] Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 259.
[267] "*Reges deinde consilium cum sapientibus suae gentis post spatium inierunt, quem eligerent in sedem vacantem* = after an interval the kings had a consultation with the counselors of the realm as to whom they should elect to the vacant see." Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 11. This phrasing is too convenient to the material on the council to consider that it refers to anything other than a second, more secular session of the same council.

Wilfrid, therefore, was elected to the see of York, and Tuda to Lindisfarne.[268] This constituted a resurrection of Pope Gregory's diocesan plan and the suggestion may have come from James the Deacon. He would have reminded the assembly of the first cathedral built there by Edwin, which Oswald had finished, where Archbishop Paulinus had sat over the northern churches.[269] Oswiu may have suspected Alfrith's intent beneath the nostalgia, but accepted the suggestion on the argument that Pope Gregory had planned it thusly in order to alleviate his dependency upon his son's ingenuity. Colman's replacement seems to have been the final item on the council agenda, and so Oswiu concluded the affair. Oswiu likely wanted Wilfrid to take his seat immediately, but Wilfrid insisted that he had to be consecrated in Gaul, for there were not enough properly consecrated bishops to legitimatize his election.[270] The petition was reasonable, and so Oswiu and Alfrith provided Wilfrid with a ship, a crew and money.[271] Wilfrid left England late in the summer, just before the plague that had ravaged Canterbury and the south struck Northumbria.

Oswiu could not return to the frontier as quickly as he had planned. There was a problem to which he needed to attend, namely, Alfrith. It is significant that the last mention made of Alfrith dates to the close of the council.[272] Bede, in his *Historia*

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[268] Interestingly, the name of the see is not used immediately to distinguish where Wilfrid had been assigned. That it was York and not Lindisfarne seems derived from Wilfrid's reaction when he returns from Gaul to find that his seat has been given to someone else, namely Chad, the new bishop of York. Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 14. Tuda was Irish, but Southern Irish. He died later that year in the plague. Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 26.
[269] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 20.
[270] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 12.
[271] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 12.
[272] In Bede, it regards the petition for Wilfrid to sail to Gaul, *Hist Eccl* III. 28. Eddius includes him with Oswiu in providing for Wilfrid's voyage, *Vita Wilfridi* 12.

*Abbatum* mentions that Alfrith petitioned his father to be allowed to travel to Rome.[273] Then there is Bede's statement that Alfrith rose in rebellion against Oswiu.[274] Finally, there is the plague's arrival in Northumbria in late summer. These four events occurred within a very short period of time, and hinge upon the nature of the rebellion. If Alfrith decided to attack his father anyway, since the seat of the episcopacy had been transferred to his territory and if he felt that would give him sufficient backing, then he may have felt secure enough to strike.

This is not very convincing, however, since he lacked the possibility to earn public approval in the same manner as he had earlier schemed. Public favor in Deira was, for once, with Oswiu, for Oswiu had done the Deirans great honor by electing their favorite priest to the episcopacy. Alfrith may have wanted to escape the condemnation of his people for the failed attempt at rebellion and requested that his father let him go. Oswiu did not want Alfrith out of his sight or from under his authority while he returned to the north, and therefore refused. He left Alfrith in Deira, where the son could do little against the father, and returned to his troops. Alfrith, then, likely died in the plague. Bede said it raged "far and wide with cruel devastation and laying low a vast number of people."[275] The omission of his obituary likely resulted from public knowledge of his attempted revolt. Public opinion was correct at the time to rule that the plague was God's wrath against Alfrith rather than Oswiu.[276]

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[273] As cited by Abels, "The Council of Whitby," p. 18, nt. 81.
[274] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 14.
[275] "*…corripiens atque acerua clade diutius longe lateque desaeviens, magnam hominum multitudinum stravit.*" Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 27.
[276] Such a death would have vilified him to Oswiu's benefit. The inclusion of a public rumor of such a nature may have altered modern interpretations of Oswiu's life as based on Bede's record. Alternatively, Oswiu's reaction to hearing of his son's death may have motivated rumor-mongers to keep Alfrith's name out of the daily fare. It is impossible to know if Oswiu ever regretted not allowing Alfrith to travel to

That year, Oswiu wintered in the north, either with his nephew again or with the Ui Neill. Either scenario would have been uncomfortable, since Colman reached Iona sometime before winter and informed his superiors on Iona and Ireland of the new development in Northumbrian politics. Oswiu thereafter spent the winter explaining his decision. But, his defection from the Irish tradition only strained the relations between the Bernicians and the Ui Neill instead of breaking them, because it resulted in an unexpected benefit to Iona, which may have preserved some amicability across territory boundaries. Iona, as the head of a recognized portion of the Irish church, a *coarb*, had been at odds with the *coarb* of Armagh throughout the seventh century.[277] Armagh's lawyers sought to elevate her position to one of a primacy equal to Rome on the basis of Patrick's authority, effectively rendering Armagh the head of Ireland's churches.[278] Oswiu's affiliation with Iona had extended Iona's prestige and authority, so his decision against her naturally shook their standing against Armagh but, what hurt one Irish *coarb* hurt them all. Since Oswiu had elevated the position of the Roman Church at the expense of the traditions which Armagh kept, he had effectively weakened Armagh's universal claims against Iona.[279]

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Rome, thereby causing him, in Oswiu's world-view, to die in his sins. Wallace-Hadrill presents an excellent study on the role of Rome in the lives of Anglo-Saxon kings, *Germanic Kings*, pp. 87 – 91.

[277] An Irish *coarb* was larger than a *paruchia*, and seems to parallel the Roman diocese except it was based on the measure of land throughout which an abbot's daughter houses were spread. *Coarba* often overlapped.

[278] Hughes, *Church*, pp. 111 – 113.

[279] It is unlikely that Oswiu was aware of the significance which the elevation of Peter's Church would have on the Irish power struggle. He probably knew of Armagh's claims; he had been in Ireland a few times in his younger days and possibly discussed it on one of his diplomatic missions. But he could not count on this sort of success when he made his choice. Oswiu chose Peter's Church for Peter's sake, and went about mopping up his wake afterward.

Oswiu succeeded in enthroning his nephew, Drest, sometime in 665.[280] If he had attacked the Picts in early spring, he could have been back in Northumbria by early summer. Although there is no evidence to substantiate this, it is possible that he wanted to celebrate his first Petrine Easter with his wife. In light of this, he might have returned very close to the time of Alfrith's death, a conclusion borne out in his smooth transition into the Deiran throne, which ensured his sole rule of Bernicia and Deria. He was, therefore, either physically present, in the room, when the question of a successor arose, or so close to the Deiran border with his troops that it was futile to assemble and march against him. Oswiu's proactive attitude toward firmly establishing a unified church, along with his concessions to the Deiran requests at Whitby and his blamelessness in the face of Alfrith's shameful treachery, finally endeared him to his mixed subjects. Having celebrated Easter and secured the kingship, he departed for a final campaign in the late summer. The decisive battle for Drest's throne, whenever that occurred, was Oswiu's final recorded battle; the last five years of his life were devoted to establishing a united English church.

Oswiu began this agenda in the middle of his final efforts to secure the Pictish throne, late in the year 665, when Wilfrid had not yet returned from his consecration in Gaul. Voyages from Gaul to England were usually swift. News from Gaul that Wilfrid's ship had been lost in a storm may have reached Oswiu, making it apparent that Wilfrid's disappearance was equated with his death .[281] Oswiu determined to find another bishop for the see of York. Filling the post had been the topic of the second session of the Council of Whitby, which Oswiu might have considered symbolic of the change affected

[280] Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 99.
[281] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 13.

in his kingdom. Kingdoms had remained without bishops for long periods of time; Canterbury, for instance, lacked one at that very moment. But the nomination of a bishop to York was such a high-profile event that Oswiu was pressured to fill the void out of the need to appear dedicated to unity. He elected Chad, Cedd's brother, bishop of York and sent him to Canterbury for consecration. The move was highly irregular, but understandable, given the leaderless situation which Oswiu perceived England's church to be in.[282]

Chad's journey to Canterbury revealed it to be an empty see; Deusdedit had died the year before in the plague. In 665, Oswiu and Egbert, the king of Kent, met together to strategize concerning Canterbury, as well as the English church. Canterbury was without an archbishop and half of the monks and clergymen in the north had been trained by the Irish.[283] It was a hybrid church at best, but Oswiu wanted it to be better than that. The two kings realized that the election of a new archbishop was the most pressing order of business. After conferring with and receiving the approval of a representative body of churchmen, Oswiu and Egbert selected an Anglo-Saxon priest named Wigheard, formerly a cleric of Deusdedit, for the position and sent him to Pope Vitalian in Rome for confirmation. Oswiu also sent a messenger with a letter and gifts for the pope; in this letter he likely stressed his role as Breatwalda of the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and informed the Pope of the result of the proceedings at Whitby.[284]

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[282] Eddius says that Oswiu was moved "by envy and at the instigation of the ancient foe," and by the council of the misguided and ignorant Irish to elect Wilfrid's replacement, in *Vita Wilfridi* 13.
[283] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 29.
[284] Abels concludes this, although he finds Oswiu to be presumptuous in doing so, in "The Council of Whitby," p. 13.

Wigheard reached Rome in 666, where he presented himself, Oswiu's gifts and letter, and the intentions of the kings to the pope. Then he died of a local outbreak of bubonic plague.[285] Vitalian wrote back to Oswiu, commending him for his conversion and informing him that, at the time of writing, he had not yet found a man suitable to replace Wigheard.[286] Oswiu did not learn of this until the next year, when he received the pope's letter. By that time, a problem of some magnitude had arisen in Northumbria. Wilfrid had returned from Gaul in 666, bearing stories of shipwreck and skirmishes with barbarian hoards on the coast of Gaul.[287] He wanted his see, despite the fact that Chad was already in residency. Oswiu was not convinced that he necessarily had to install Wilfrid there, and so he returned Wilfrid to his position at Ripon.[288] Wilfrid obeyed, and used Ripon as a base from which to venture out on numerous occasions into the kingdom of the Mercians as well as to Kent for the duty of ordaining priests and deacons.[289] He was likely informed about Wigheard's journey to Rome, and no doubt heard news of Vitalian's response when it arrived in 667.

Vitalian had concluded his search soon after sending off the letter. He decided that Hadrian, Abbot of *Hiridanum*, near Naples, was the monk for the job.[290] Hadrian, however, deferred twice and asked for time to find someone more suitable. He recommended a monk in Rome, Theodore of Tarsus. Vitalian agreed to send Theodore on the condition that Hadrian would accompany him as a guide, both for the road and for

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[285] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 29; *Hist Eccl* IV. 1.
[286] This letter is preserved in Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 29.
[287] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 13.
[288] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 14; Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 28.
[289] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 14.
[290] For Hadrian's background and the full story of his selection, see Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 1.

doctrine.[291] By 668, Theodore was ready to embark on his journey to England. He and Hadrian visited a number of bishops along the way, one of whom was Agilbert, who had accompanied Wilfrid in 665. Theodore's journey took an entire year to complete; he arrived in England on 27 May, 669, escorted by Raedfrith, Egbert's reeve, who had met him in the kingdom of the Franks.[292]

It is significant that a representative of the Kentish king assisted Theodore to England. There is no direct evidence to suggest what event kept Oswiu from attending Theodore's arrival; his absence is quite conspicuous and has been translated alternatively as a signal to Theodore that the prestige of the Breatwalda was not as impressive as Oswiu had conveyed in his letter to Theodore, or as an indication that Oswiu did not intend to wait upon the Church; he expected to wield it as his own weapon.[293] However, Oswiu's assertion of power when he instigated the process of regaining an archbishop far exceeded Egbert's, who had known of the vacancy for a year and had done nothing about it. It is highly likely that Oswiu assigned the archbishop's safe arrival to Egbert. Oswiu's interest in laying the foundations of his new church was sincere, given his history of sincerity and devotion to God, and is incongruous with the notion that he sought to wield the church as a political weapon. If anything, he knew from his past experiences with bickering monks and priests and from Alfrith's attempted manipulation that the church, as it sat then, was unwieldy at best and more likely to cause him harm.

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[291] Vitalian was concerned that Theodore would carry the Monophysite heresy into England. Colgrave, *Bede's History*, p. 330, nt. 3.
[292] Hadrian, detained in Gaul by Franks who suspected that he was a spy, did not arrive for another year. Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 1.
[293] Abels, "The Council of Whitby," p. 15. This second interpretation is conveyed in many instances by Higham in *Convert Kings*.

Soon after his arrival, Theodore made a grand tour of England, beginning with the south and moving north. He probably intended to winter in Northumbria with the Breatwalda, and thus would honor Oswiu's position by giving him the most of his own time. Theodore developed a clearer picture of what sort of situation he was up against, organizationally, when, in Mercia, at Wulfhere's request, he was asked to replace Bishop Jaruman, who had died in 667.[294] Wilfrid had served in Jaruman's place, and presumably met Theodore during this visit. Wilfrid thus had ample opportunity to present the curious situation he was in, a bishop refused command of his see; Wilfrid's see was double-booked, would the archbishop please set the affair straight? Theodore kept this petition in mind and, when he reached Northumbria sometime in the late summer of 669, brought "the decrees of the Apostolic See from which he had been sent" to the "king of Deira and Bernicia."[295] Canon law, he explained to Oswiu, did not allow the sort of situations which Oswiu had permitted at York. He then asked Oswiu to allow Chad to accept the bishopric to the Mercians, and moved Wilfrid to York.[296]

Thus, Oswiu lived to see the results of his efforts for unifying the Church. His health declined that winter, and he likely spent a great deal of his time with Theodore, discussing monastic life and Rome. These interactions had a strong affect on Oswiu; when illness struck him, he vowed that he would go to Rome, should he recover.[297] He arranged to have Wilfrid act as his guide and companion on the journey. But Oswiu never

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[294] Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 3.
[295] Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi* 15.
[296] Chad was no longer the bishop of York; the insult to Wilfrid had been compounded likely because Oswiu found him better suited for the double duty in Deira and Mercia. Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 3.
[297] Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 5.

made that pilgrimage; he died on 15 February, 670, and was buried in the Church of St. Peter at Whitby.[298]

[298] He did not lie forgotten, however. When Hilda died ten years later, Aelfflaed became co-abbess with her mother, Eanflaed. It is a final testament to Oswiu that his wife, Eanflaed, stayed by his side at *Streanasehalc* until her own death in 705. She was buried there with him.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Aftermath and Modern Interpretations

Oswiu's successors witnessed the fall of Northumbrian supremacy under Ecgfrith and the success of the English church under Archbishop Theodore. Oswiu's reign epitomized the apex of Anglo-Saxon power, for he held the largest kingdom of any single Breatwalda. Bede calls Ecgfrith Oswiu's heir, implying that he inherited the kingship but, in reality, Ecgfrith had to fight for it.[299] During his fifteen year reign, Ecgfrith lost large sections of the territory; most notably the kingdom of Mercia, which established its independence under Wulfhere and maintained it under Aethelred.[300] Ecgfrith managed to retain the northern territories, but only with help from the northern Ui Neill, who still found their alliance with the Northumbrians to be useful.[301] This usefulness flagged in 684 when Ecgfrith attacked the southern Ui Neill at *Mag Breg*, modern Meath, and evaporated when he attacked Drest at the Battle of *Nechtansmere* in 685.[302] His death caused great concern, seen in the actions of his sister Aelfflaed, now Abbess of Whitby.

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[299] Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 5. Using as evidence the Council of Hatfield in September of 680, Ecgfrith's tenth year, and Bede's method of calculation which tends to label even the first day of king's reign as being in 'the tenth year,' etc., Kirby suggests that Ecgfrith took the throne in September, 670, over seven months after Oswiu's death in *Earliest English Kings*, p. 98.
[300] This Aethelred was his brother-in-law. It is a testament to Ecgfrith's loss that his sister Osthryth would not support him as she had their father. Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 21.
[301] Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, pp. 94 – 96.
[302] Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, p. 98 sites the *Annals of Ulster* 685 for the Battle of *Mag Breg*. See also Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 24. For the Battle of *Nechtansmere*, see Nennius, *Hist Brit* 65.

She visited Cuthburt on Lindisfarne and asked him who was to succeed Ecgfrith.[303] Cuthbert reminded her of her illegitimate brother, Aldfrith, who was living on Iona; hearing this, Aelfflaed returned to her monastery

The immediacy of Aldfrith's appointment to the throne suggests that the northern Ui Neill had a hand in replacing Ecgfrith with one of their own.[304] Aldfrith made a good ruler and strengthened the boundaries of his father's kingdom during his own reign, but he was a scholar at heart.[305] He probably did not feel any compunction to vie for his father's throne, after living fifty-one years as a monk. Aldfrith's mother was an Ui Neill princess, rendering Aldfrith somewhat of an Ui Neill prince. As such, he was put on the throne as much for his Ui Neill sympathies as for his paternity. It is likely, given his own education and experience in Irish scriptoriums, that he worked together with Theodore to bridge the sharp divides which persisted between the artistically talented Irish clergy and the still quite new Roman hierarchy.[306]

Oswiu's legacy found success through the combined careers of Aldfrith and Theodore. Theodore held the archiepiscopacy for twenty-one years (669 – 690), during which he established a new diocesan system upon the existing Irish/Roman hybrid layout, strengthening the authority and discipline of the Church hierarchical system.[307] He also

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[303] Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 27 – 32; Anonymous, *Vita Cuthberti* III. 6. Her fear that Ecgfrith had no other brothers after Aelfwine's death in 678 or sons is problematic, since Nennius claims that Ecgfrith had a son named Oslach who lived long enough to bear a son named Alhun in *Hist Brit* 61. It is likely that Oslach fell hostage to the Ui Neill, not so much to pressure Aldfrith to act as they willed but rather to clear the path for Aldfrith.

[304] Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, pp. 95 – 97.

[305] "*…vir in scripturis doctissimus…qui…destructumque regni statum, quamuis intra fines angustiores, nobiliter recuperavit* = he was a man most learned in the scriptures…who…ably restored the shattered stste of the kingdom although within narrower bounds." Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 26. He once bought a book from Benedict Biscop for eight hides of land. Bede, *Hist Abbatum* 15, as cited by Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, p. 97.

[306] Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, p. 97.

[307] He achieved this at the Council of Hertford in 672. Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 5.

preserved the artistic and literary contributions of the Irish church by drawing the Irish clergy and monks into the new institution as re-consecrated bishops and abbots of monasteries.[308] Clearly, a good part of his strategy relied on the syncretism of the Irish and Romans and Anglo-Saxons from the start, a syncretism regularly threatened by Wilfrid's unrelenting criticisms of the Irish customs and pretentious opinion of his own position in the new diocesan plan.[309] The combined efforts of Theodore and Aldfrith succeeded, despite Wilfrid, and sparked a new age of learning: the Northumbrian Renaissance.[310]

The forced overhaul of many Irish customs, because of the outcome of the Council of Whitby, and the subsequent need to fit the displaced clergy into the new English church resulted in a fusion of Irish, Roman and Anglo-Saxon culture. Since this fusion was the direct result of Oswiu's patronage of the Roman Church at, and following, the Council at Whitby, Oswiu's greatest contribution to Anglo-Saxon, or even European, history, is found in the products of the Northumbrian Renaissance. It is not an exaggeration, then, to claim a portion of the creation of Modern Europe for Oswiu. Derek Wilson argues that Charlemagne created Modern Europe by means of his political policies and enforcement of the Catholic Church and its teachings.[311] Charlemagne himself was educated by monks who were products of the Irish-inspired Northumbrian Renaissance, and therefore owes something of his educational opportunities to the

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[308] Pepperdene, as cited by Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbors*, pp. 93 – 94.
[309] Wilfrid held and lost episcopal sees with a startling regularity, and quite often angered the kings Ecgfrith and Aldfrith and lost Theodore's support with his inflexible outlook against the Irish. See Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi*, beginning at chapter 15 for the development of this theme.
[310] See Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, chap. 12.
[311] Derek Wilson, *Charlemagne* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

decision of an Anglo-Saxon king to embrace the Roman Church almost eighty years before Charlemagne was born.

This facet of Oswiu's legacy has been lost on the majority of modern scholars. There are two current perspectives for appraising and interpreting King Oswiu's contribution to history, specifically in the pivotal event of the Council of Whitby, which have resulted from dynamics within the historical record. Both are bi-products of Bede's personal opinion of Oswiu; Bede intentionally presents his audience with a simplistic, one-sided view of Oswiu as a king who held the advancement of political authority as more sacred than righteousness, all the while de-emphasizing the complexities of Oswiu's every action. The details of modern studies admit a degree of subjectivity to each interpretation, and the manifestation of this subjectivity is clearest in scholars' perceptions and interpretation of Oswiu's motivations and of his reactions to the influences which acted upon him at the council. A simplistic, one-sided interpretive basis has developed in the methodology of evaluating Oswiu's motivations and reactions within the past two centuries, in which scholars apply either a strong religious interpretation or a strong politically-based interpretation. This approach is very much rooted in Bede's methodology.

The development of this one-sided interpretation over nearly two-hundred years, in which Oswiu is 'either/or,' either a simpleton in affairs of a spiritual nature or a sacrilegious diplomat who wielded the church as his own agent without regard to matters of the soul, is visible through a study of eight scholars who have contributed to Anglo-Saxon and Church History with varying degrees of significance. The first seven illustrate the evolution of thought from acceptance of religious motivational explanations to strictly

political motivational explanations. The eighth suggests a return to the acceptance of religious motivations for Oswiu; the author has employed a synthesis of dual motivations in a reconsideration of Oswine's murder. These are J.M. Lappenberg's *A History of England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings*, Francis Betten's article "The So-Called Council of Whitby," F.M. Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England*, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill's *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent*, Henry Mayr-Harting's *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, Nicholas Higham's *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England*, and Christopher M. Scargill's "A Token of Repentance and Reconciliation: Oswiu and the Murder of King Oswine."[312]

J.M. Lappenberg's *A History*, written in 1843, emphasizes the Germanic roots of the Anglo-Saxons and the Germanic origins of many customs of the English. It is a piece of German Nationalist literature, but it offers a sample of how the council and its king were viewed when the authenticity of the council was unquestioned. Lappenberg covers an extensive period of time in the first volume, from the Greek records of the Cassiteride Islands to the Norman Conquest and his material on Oswiu and the Council of Whitby closely follows Bede's perspective. He observes that the Irish and Roman representatives had equal opportunity to convince the king, but shows Oswiu "waving under the weight of so many conflicting arguments," only to go with the authority of Peter.[313] He also opines that, later, Oswiu retracts his decision to support the Roman church and installs

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[312] J.M. Lappenberg, *A History of England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings*, translated by Benjamin Thorpe, Vol. 1 (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971 reissue of 1845 text).
[313] Lappenberg, *A History*, p. 170.

Cedd rather than Wilfrid in York.[314] Lappenberg fails to provide explanation for Oswiu's actions; it is enough for him to merely observe that it happened.

The stimulus for seeking Oswiu's motivations began when the authority of the council came into question and explanations for a purpose, independent of Church objectives, became necessary. In 1928, Francis Betten questioned the ecclesiastical nature of the council and argued that the role the king played was not standard in Church practice. By these means Betten labeled the event "one of the regular national gatherings of the Northumbrians," rather than a Church council.[315] Questioning the nature of the council logically led to the necessity of a new explanation of its conclusion, which was arrived at by considering the other members involved, and resulted in the observation that Oswiu's unusual role distinguished his presence. This turned the focus to him, on why he had called the meeting, why he had involved the Church in it, why he had felt called to settle what clearly amounted to a Church issue, *et cetera*. These questions have since been addressed, albeit with different conclusions due to the evidence employed.

The trend of political interpretation continued in F.M. Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England*, which, because of Stenton's finely tuned attention to chronology, is an extremely important volume in the study of Anglo-Saxon church history. In it, Stenton physically separated England's political and religious histories into the two halves of the book, and referenced Oswiu more in the chapters with political, rather than ecclesiastical, content. Oswiu is presented as a king and a politician, but his role in the council is

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[314] His words are quite damning of Oswiu: "So arbitrary at that time was the spirit in which affairs of the highest moment were conducted, so wavering the mind of Oswiu, of so little worth the royal word, that the king, during Wilfrid's absence, influenced by the Scottish party, had consented to the election of the presbyter Ceadda to the See of York." p. 176.

[315] Betten, "So-Called Council," p. 628.

omitted during the actual discussion of the council's events. Stenton credits ecclesiastics primarily with settling the matter; but Oswiu is mentioned as having made the actual decision after the Council of Whitby section, because Stenton sees the council as a Church event with outcomes of an ecclesiastical nature.

Stenton's work leads to the conclusion that Oswiu benefited from the council primarily via backdoor politics, and, in many ways, Stenton short-changes Oswiu by separating him from the course of the debates. This omission diminishes the significance of the council itself by ignoring the tenuous nature of the Church's position in England at the time as well as her dependency upon the patronage of the Anglo-Saxon kings. Also, the omission of Oswiu's reaction to the notion of Petrine Primacy in Matthew 16 removes what little explanation Bede offered for the council's conclusion. However, Stenton's approach rightly affirms that the council was, indeed, a council and suggests that its outcome worked primarily to the Church's benefit. In his view, Whitby holds historical significance because it ended the stalemate between the Irish and Roman churches resulting from the Easter debate, eased unification of the two church traditions, and "made possible the Northumbrian contribution to the European missionary enterprise of the next generation."[316] Stenton therefore acknowledges the need to separate the ecclesiastic and political, but he assigns Oswiu's motivations to political advantage devoid of any ecclesiastical or spiritual overtones.

Wallace-Hadrill's contribution was to develop the role of Oswiu as a king. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the king was the epitome of political leadership. Wallace-Hadrill traces the evolution of the concept of kingship from its pagan beginnings to a reflection

[316] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 124.

of Church hierarchy in the secular realm. Bede serves as a major source of information on the kings; information written after the kings had reigned as well as after the kingly concept had been institutionalized. Bede's opinion was a product of his time and led to interesting repercussions for Oswiu's record. Through Wallace-Hadrill's eyes, the political details of Oswiu's secular reign are viewed simply as the necessary business features of his role as king. This realization brings to light that the seeming contradictions of Oswiu's life are actually the consequence of the life of a king who fulfilled the norm of kingship for the seventh century but failed Bede's eighth-century ideals. Unfortunately, Wallace-Hadrill illustrates one such repercussion of Bede's kingly concept in his own distinction between warrior-convert kings and monk-kings, and misses Oswiu's complexity because of the basis of the distinction, which rests in a king's success in the service of God.[317]

Different criteria exist for measuring success. Three warrior converts, Edwin, Oswald and Oswine, were ultimately successful in their service to God by being martyred; these men submitted wholly to God, even amidst the expectations of their time. Oswine was the last of this type of king because Oswiu had killed Penda and removed the pagan threat to the Christian lands. Monk-kings submitted to God by leaving their kingships and taking up the cross on pilgrimages or retiring to monasteries.[318] Oswiu is the dividing line between these types of kings, a fact inexplicably ignored by Wallace-Hadrill. Judged by these criteria, Oswiu, who was neither a warrior-convert king nor a monk-king, was, therefore, a king not wholly submitted to serving God, in spite of his actions to the contrary. Wallace-Hadrill does not include Oswiu as a significant member

[317] Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, p. 80.
[318] Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 80 ff.

of either field, even though, as Bede recorded, Oswiu swore on his death-bed that he would go to Rome on a pilgrimage if he were to recover.[319] Instead, Wallace-Hadrill suggests that Oswiu's kingly deeds, including settling the Easter debate and bringing ecclesiastical cooperation to the forefront of kingly policy for the next hundred years, were negated by that death-bed oath.

Although Wallace-Hadrill set the premise by which Oswiu's actions as king could be categorized as political steps taken for the well-being of his people, thus allowing Oswiu kingly virtue, he relegated him to a non-specific third category of transitory kings, to serve as the sole link between convert-warrior and monk. Oswiu had no opportunity for traditional martyrdom at the hands of unbelievers, having himself slain the last pagan of consequence fifteen years before his own death. While Oswiu could have kept his oath and entered history as a monk-king, undeniably submitting to God had he survived his illness, he did not survive and died an enigma. Wallace-Hadrill effectively settled an unspoken question, granting Oswiu the right to take the actions he had at the Council of Whitby. It only remained to answer why the king had felt the need to address the issue.

Henry Mayr-Harting, writing a year after Wallace-Hadrill in 1972, identified a key political motivation for Oswiu to settle the divisive Easter issue: the aspirations of his son, Alfrith, sub-king of Deira. By the time of the council, Alfrith had converted to the Roman calculation of Easter and patronized the monk Wilfrid to the extent that he evicted the monks of Lindisfarne from the monastery at Ripon in order to bestow it on Wilfrid and his monks. Furthermore, Alfrith possibly had schemed against his father, along with

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[319] "By this time he was so greatly attached to the Roman and apostolic customs that he had intended, if he recovered from his illness, to go to Rome and end his life there among the holy places." Bede, *Hist Eccl* IV. 5.

his sister, Alflaed, in the murder of Peada, the sub-king of Mercia under Oswiu, husband to Alflaed and son of Penda. Alfrith's presence at the council thus appears to extend beyond the role of co-ruler, which Bede ascribes to him, and Mayr-Harting even finds him responsible for calling the council.[320]

Mayr-Harting explains the tension which provoked the assembling of the Council of Whitby as a generational divide between parents who converted from paganism, and their children who were born and raised in convert families, pointing out that the elder generation had a high tolerance for the discrepancies between the Easters while their children had a lower tolerance. Alfrith's challenge to his father on the basis of Oswiu's spiritual practices was a symptom of this generational divide. According to Mayr-Harting, Oswiu's non-Roman traditions were just cause for his son, the under-king, to take up arms against a misled believer out of concern for the Church. Mayr-Harting has interpreted Alfrith's motivations as being political in origin and, given his sister's involvement in the murder of his brother-in-law and fellow under-king, there is a high level of credibility in Mayr-Harting's observation that Alfrith was in a position to expect a positive outcome from challenging his father on an issue that did not directly involve going to war.

Mayr-Harting sees the council as a political play by Alfrith against his father and acknowledges Oswiu's decision and that it concluded the council, but he interprets the significance of the council as a mere political tool used by either king. By fixing primary responsibility for gathering the council on Alfrith, Mayr-Harting challenges both Bede's explanation for its calling as well as the commonly accepted assumption, derived from

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[320] Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, p. 107.

Bede's explanation, that Oswiu was primarily responsible.[321] Mayr-Harting's generational model reveals Alfrith as progressive and his father, Oswiu, as regressive. Alfrith saw the light in the Roman argument, embraced Wilfrid as his teacher and had him made priest. According to Mayr-Harting, Oswiu was shrewdly undermining his son when he switched to the Roman Easter. However, Mayr-Harting did not delve into Oswiu's motivations for switching so unpredictably other than to say that it "thwarted" his son's plans to pressure his father through the people and the Church.[322]

Mayr-Harting's generational division scheme is compromised by Oswiu's personal connections to both the Irish and the Roman Easter. His evaluation of the council's events is rendered unduly simplistic by his failure to acknowledge Oswiu's more dynamic role. He does acknowledge his general over-simplifications of the relationship between the Irish and Roman institutions, but does not acknowledge the need to rectify those made in regard to Oswiu.[323] However, his arguments are not without merit in the macroscopic sense and his acknowledgement of Alfrith's insidious rebellion is a significant contribution to the field of study. Mayr-Harting opened the door for scholars, such as Donald A. Bullough, who, through meticulous comparisons of reconstructed Easter dates, has concluded that no such conflict of dates occurred in 664 as described by Bede.[324]

Nicholas Higham's 1997 work, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England*, reveals the extreme to which interpretation

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[321] Bede, *Hist Eccl* III. 25.
[322] Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, p. 108.
[323] Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, p. 3.
[324] Bullough, "Missions," p. 91. Bede's explanation for the assembly at Whitby Abbey as an effort by Oswiu to remedy conflicting festal Easter schedules has long contributed to the common simplistic perspective on Oswiu as it robs the king of spiritual motivation, insinuating rather that he was motivated by base desires such as connubial peace and festal gluttony.

based on political motivations has gone. He approaches the topic of conversion in Anglo-Saxon England as if the phenomenon was a contrivance of political convenience, devoid of spirituality. He justifies this approach by referencing the overworked view of providential historians. Higham's main argument, as regards Oswiu, is that the Church, Irish or Roman, provided access to diplomatic agents and infrastructure which bolstered his weak martial skills. In a stroke of insight, however, he argues that Oswiu promoted his brother's cult of sainthood as a political program to legitimatize his own ascendance to the throne. This suggests an interesting irony that Oswiu created the source of Bede's favoritism and bias, and provided his own historical competition and the negative view of his reign.

Higham makes another good point that the account of the king's life and actions has been too heavily viewed from a providential history viewpoint, but he errs in and through the omission of any consideration of spiritual motivation or elements. He continues from the premise of Wallace-Hadrill, that the convert status of the Anglo-Saxon kings adds an extra dimension to the politics of the period, and he merges it with Mayr-Harting's theory that Alfrith instigated the Council of Whitby. Higham provides the invaluable insight that Alfrith may have been behind Peada's death, and that Alfrith plotted to undermine his father's power by killing Peada.[325]

The omission of spiritually-based motivations makes it difficult for Higham to explain the Council of Whitby, which exposes the necessity of considering all possible types of motivation acting upon Oswiu. Higham presents Oswiu as a king who does not often engage in military activities, and who has built his power on diplomacy and

[325] Higham, *Convert Kings*, pp. 231 – 234.

marriage and the Church infrastructure. According to Higham, Oswiu cultivated connections among the Irish bishops and was dependant on their loyalty in order to maintain authority, because of his own lack of martial prowess. However, Oswiu's decision for the Roman Church at the Council of Whitby would have defeated the intricate web of loyal bishops which Higham alludes to, by forcing their conversions or forcing them from their offices. Higham believes that Oswiu's choice was motivated by his desire to access the more efficient infrastructure of the Roman system. He goes so far as to state that Oswiu hadn't thought his choice through well enough to realize its implications. Higham's arguments cannot be considered conclusive, since he has purposefully ignored spiritual motivation as a possible explanation for Oswiu's actions.

Research today has begun to reassess the extremism of Higham's work. Acknowledgement of possible spiritual sincerity in Oswiu's motivations is reemerging. Christopher Scargill pioneered this return in a short article focusing specifically on the murder of Oswine. Scargill argues that certain of Oswiu's actions, such as the donation of one-hundred twenty hides of land and his daughter's entry into Whitby Abbey as a nun, are linked to the establishment of the monastery at Gilling West "as a token of Oswiu's repentance for the murder of the Deiran king and a desire to honour the Deiran royal house."[326] Open to both the political and spiritual implications of Oswiu's actions in the erection of Gilling, his approach is unique in that his use of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* is both cautious and extensive.

Although the conclusions of modern scholarship possess varying degrees of viability, all are still bi-products of Bede's approach to the enigmatic king's history and

[326] Scargill, "A Token of Repentance," p. 42.

err by presenting a singular source of Oswiu's motivations. Scargill, however, shows that it is possible to circumvent the bias in Bede's otherwise exemplary *Historia* and conclude that a measure of spiritual sincerity took precedence over politics in Oswiu's reactions to adverse political situations. In order to apply Scargill's approach to the most significant event in Oswiu's life, the Council of Whitby, it has been necessary to utilize the independent perspective of the six other medieval sources. Together, these permit full comprehension of the complexity of the spiritual and political influences bearing on Oswiu's decision. Oswiu was a king who understood authority and recognized the Italian argument for Peter's authority. He drew upon a lifetime of devotion to God's will when he made his decision at Whitby, despite the political and strategic disadvantages to his choice. This personal desire to obey God and the vision to see the foundations of the new English church laid out prove that, despite his human errors, Oswiu was a godly king.

# APPENDIX A

## Figures

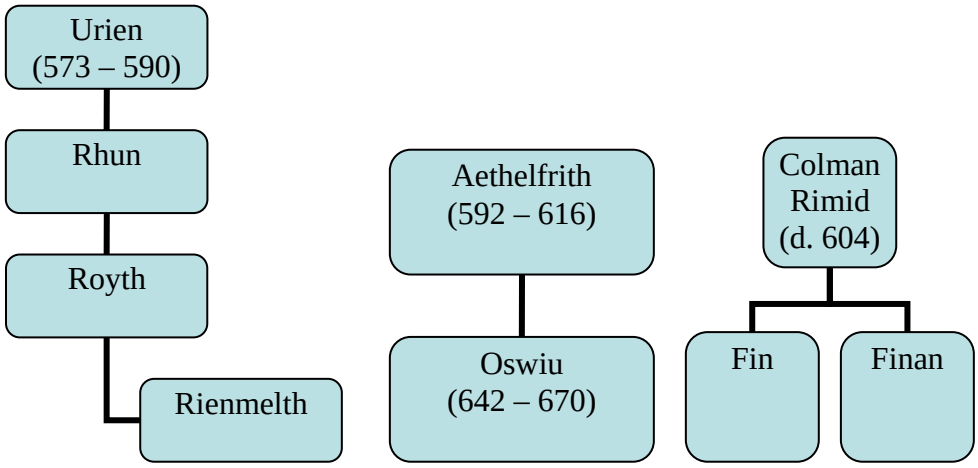


Figure A1. Genealogies of Oswiu, Rienmelth, and Fin.

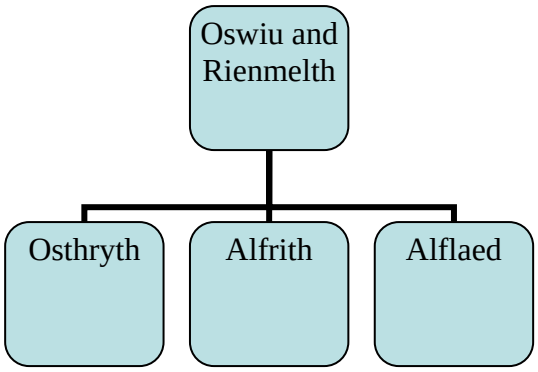


Figure A2. Offspring of Oswiu and Rienmelth.

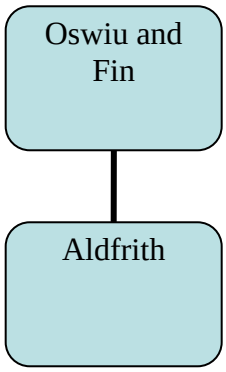


Figure A3. Offspring of Oswiu and Fin.

Adapted from Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, p. 22.

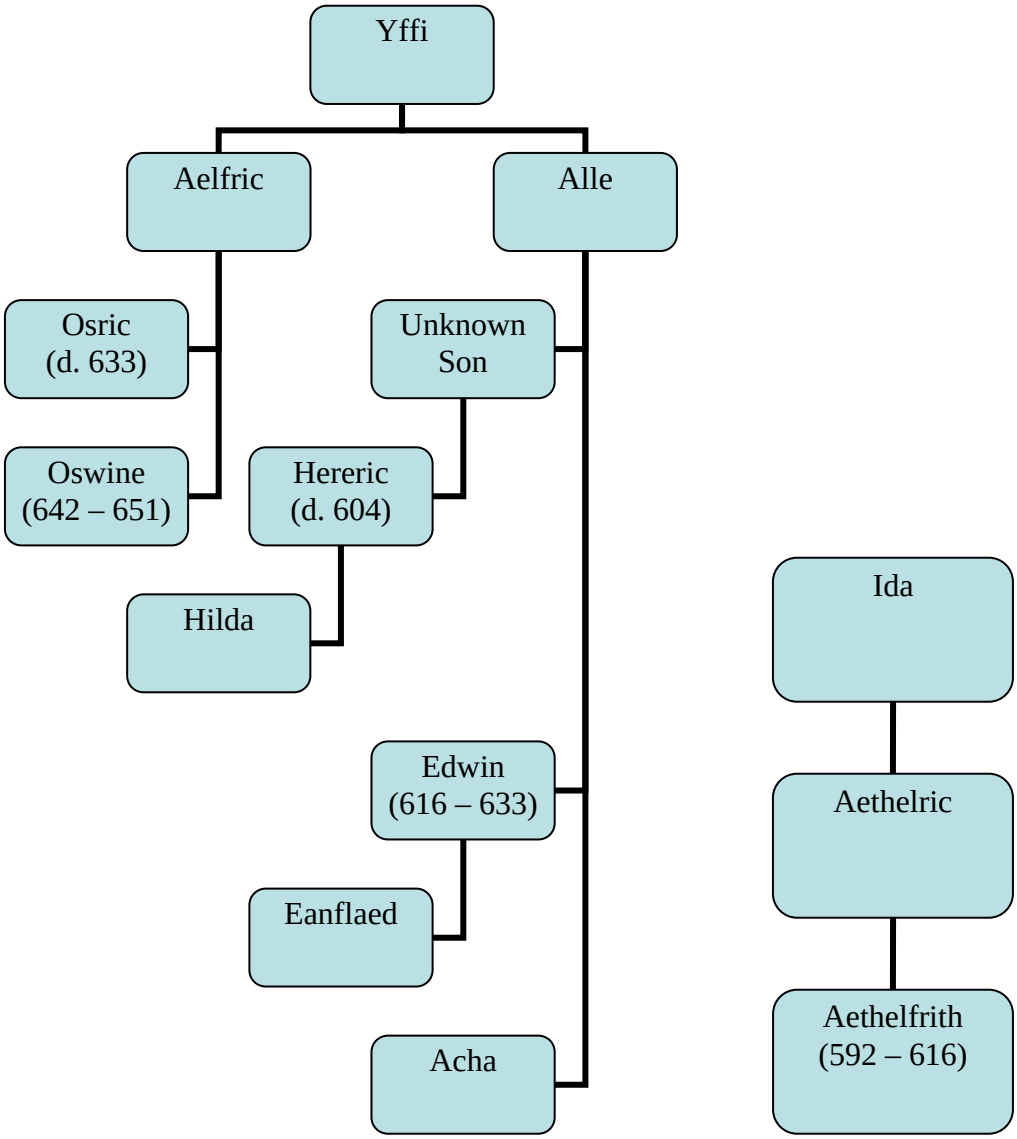


Figure A4. Deiran (on left) and Bernician (on right) Genealogies.

Adapted from "Family Tree of the Northumbrian Kings in the Seventh Century," in Nicholas Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria AD 350 – 1100* (Alan Sutton: United Kingdom, 1993) p. 80.

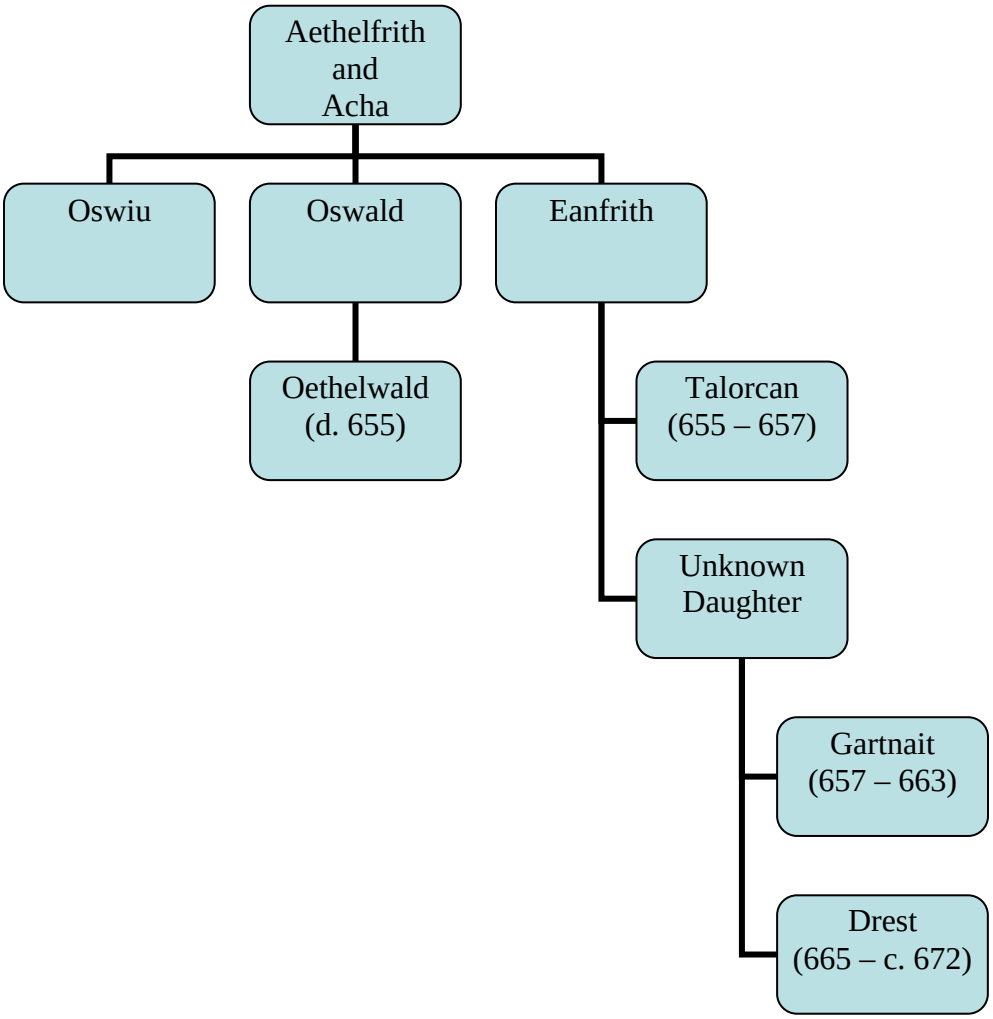


Figure A5. Oswiu's Siblings and Siblings' Offspring.

Adapted from Anderson, *Kings*, p. 172.

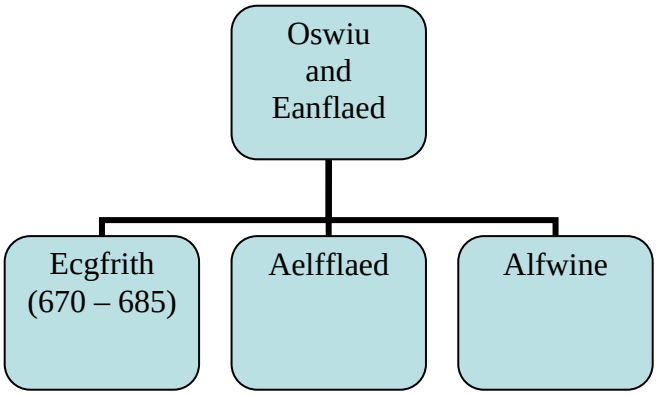


Figure A6. Offspring of Oswiu and Eanflaed.

# APPENDIX B

## Illustrations

Illustration B1. St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, England. Westward View of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Nave. Image Taken from Position in Wulfric's Rotunda.

Illustration B2. Archepiscopal *cathedra*, Canterbury Cathedral.

Image Taken from Position in Back Apse.

Illustration B3. Iona Abbey, Iona, Scotland. Viewed from Island of Mull.

Illustration B4. Iona Abbey with St. Columba's Shrine in the Forefront.

Illustration B5. Site of Pictish Stronghold along Loch Ness, A.D. 580, Urquhart Castle, Loch Ness, Scotland.

Illustration B6. Lindisfarne Priory, Holy Island, England.

Illustration B7. Nave of Lindisfarne Priory, Holy Island, England.

Illustration B8. Bamburgh Castle, off Holy Island, England. Viewed Southward from Lindisfarne Priory.

Illustration B9. Hadrian’s Wall, Housesteads, England. Northeast View.

Illustration B10. Northeast View of Terrain around Stirling, Scotland.

Illustration B11. Westward View of Terrain around Stirling, Scotland.

Illustration B12. Surviving West and South Walls, Whitby Abbey, Whitby, England.

Illustration B13. Hexham Abbey, Hexam, England.

Illustration B14. Anglo-Saxon Graves along East Wall, Whitby Abbey, Whitby, England.

Illustration B15. Fragment of Abbess Aelfflaed's Headstone Located in the English Heritage Museum, Whitby Abbey, Whitby, England.

Illustration B16. St. Paul's Church, Jarrow, England. Original Dedication Stone Ensconced in Wall above Archway.

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