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In the Company of Angels: Expressions of Personal Autonomy, Authority, and Agency in Early Anglo-Saxon Monasticism

William Tanner Smoot
smoot17@live.marshall.edu

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IN THE COMPANY OF ANGELS: EXPRESSIONS OF PERSONAL AUTONOMY, AUTHORITY, AND AGENCY IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON MONASTICISM

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by
William Tanner Smoot
Approved by
Dr. Laura Michele Diener, Committee Chairperson
Dr. William Palmer
Dr. Michael Woods

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APPROVAL OF THESIS

We, the faculty supervising the work of William Tanner Smoot, affirm that the thesis, *In the Company of Angels: Expressions of Personal Autonomy, Authority, and Agency in Early Anglo-Saxon Monasticism*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Master of Arts and the College of Liberal Arts. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

Dr. Laura Michele Diener, Department of History

Committee Chairperson

Date

5/5/2017

Dr. William Palmer, Department of History

Committee Member

Date

5/6/2017

Dr. Michael Woods, Department of History

Committee Member

Date

5/4/17
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the opportunities for individual agency and social and spiritual autonomy in the seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon kingdoms occasioned by the introduction and development of Christian monasticism. The term “autonomy” concerns the degree to which individuals managed to determine the social order and nature, as well as spiritual character, of their ensuing lives through an adherence to monastic practice. Early Anglo-Saxon Christianity assumed a monastic character, and from the outset coenobitic communities acquired and maintained certain rights regarding their internal governance and social development from their ecclesiastic and secular superiors, which conceptually separated religious households from those of the secular nobility. I argue that monastic foundation and participation functioned as an alternative means for social engagement, and spiritually justified and legitimized otherwise culturally unorthodox behaviors such as anchoritic retreat. I consider monasticism’s social and spiritual consequences on individual self-determination. I argue that monastic participation constituted a considerable degree of both collective communal and personal autonomy in regards to an institution’s physical foundation, inner governance through the establishment of a monastic rule, and ability to select subsequent abbots and rulers independent of external influence. I consider the active lives of monastics such as Wilfrid of Ripon, Hild of Whitby, and Ceolfrith of Wearmouth and Jarrow to further suggest the considerable degree of autonomy monastic leaders exercised in their administration of vast monastic properties. I additionally argue that despite the temporal wealth and authority that often accompanied monastic administration, monasticism’s introduction of contemplative eremitism constituted a legitimate alternative to the social obligations inherent in coenobitic practice, and represented an extreme expression of individual autonomy. I finally consider the hagiographic narratives and contemporary social image of
anchoritic saints such as St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne and St. Guthlac of Crowland. I argue that regardless of any power and authority achievable within the physical and temporal world, contemporary religious writers understood complete contemplative withdrawal from society as the ultimate expression of spiritual autonomy, whereby an anchorite positioned their mind towards God alone, and therefore freed themselves from the trivialities and distractions of the world.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The introduction and growth of Christianity in England during the seventh and eighth centuries precipitated an extraordinary period of social redefinition and restructuring within the existing Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, as the new religion conveyed the concepts and practical mechanisms of a parallel continental Christian culture. In addition to theological considerations, the Anglo-Saxons’ assimilation within a broad and shared Christian tradition influenced the future development of numerous aspects of domestic society, from economic transactions and land ownership rights, to political and judicial codification, to literary and poetic expression. The subsequent introduction of pre-established traditions and institutions of continental Christendom, in particular those of coenobitic and anchoritic monasticism, provided a means through which individual monastic adherents expressed a degree of self-determination otherwise unknown within contemporary secular society. The most prominent Anglo-Saxon religious communities of the seventh and eighth centuries drew organizational and spiritual influence from well-developed continental monastic conventions, inaugurating a social alternative within an Anglo-Saxon society complete with its own expected norms and obligations, as they established themselves alongside secular households. From the outset, Anglo-Saxon monastic communities seemingly enjoyed certain institutional rights, which at once solidified their expected role within secular society, while simultaneously exempting monastics from participating in specific secular social duties and obligations. While monastic foundation and governance assumed various forms in the seventh and eighth centuries, the novel career opportunities monastic communities provided for both young and old raises important questions as to the character of contemporary Anglo-Saxon society, and an individual’s role within it as it acclimatized to the development of a parallel
religious social order. What did monastic adherence mean for those individuals who both established and entered coenobitic communities of the seventh and eighth centuries? What was an individual monk’s practical relationship to both their new coenobitic community and the broader secular society they previously inhabited? What opportunities existed within a monastic context for self-determination and individual autonomy in regards to one’s career choice, manner and order of living, material security and aggrandizement, and expression of spiritual desire? How did seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxons understand individual self-determination and autonomy?

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the opportunities for individual monastic expressions of self-determination and autonomy in regards to an individual’s social and spiritual life occasioned by the development of monasticism in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of the seventh and eighth centuries. I examine the relationship individual monks maintained between both their monastic and secular societies, and what their participation within each of these two social systems meant in regards to their ability to condition various aspects of their lives, from the order of their daily existence within a particular religious house, to the character of their spiritual and contemplative behaviors in eremitic solitude. I also consider the differences in practical monastic self-determination, often achieved through coenobitic foundation and administration, and contemporary religious society’s conception as to what constituted true and absolute liberation from all manners of worldly influence, frequently expounded within hagiographic literature through an association with anchoritic behaviors.

What does the term personal “autonomy” here reference? The word itself has its foundations in the Greek *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law); therefore, proving appropriately applicable to those behaviors expressed by early English monastics, whereby their personal
inclinations as to their position within religious and secular society anticipated like results. Contemporary writers convey an understanding of individual religious, and specifically coenobitic and anchoritic monastic, expression as inherently liberating in contrast to secular preoccupation. While charters, law codes, and historical synodical records all reveal an exercised self-governance among monastic communities as entities, the hagiographic works, both prose and poetical, pertaining to the lives of St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne and St. Guthlac of Crowland, the historical writings of the Venerable Bede, contemporary correspondence, and the didactic treatises of Aldhelm of Malmesbury, all suggest an accompanying theoretic liberty innate in religious expression and secular retirement.

What is the nature of the personal liberation discussed and acknowledged within the pages of Aldhelm and Bede? Here, I rely upon Barbara Yorke’s discussion on the continuity of a deep kin-consciousness among female monastic leaders of Anglo-Saxon double houses for partial context. Royal abbesses often struggled amid the conflicting expectations of both their religious superiors and immediate kin-group.¹ Although her work pertains specifically to royal women within the monastic authoritative hierarchy, Yorke nevertheless convincingly illuminates the significance with which Anglo-Saxon monastics remained conscious of the needs of their immediate kin-group, as well as their position within the familial hierarchy. Perhaps excluding the few anchoritic saints whose lives inspired hagiographic praise, monastic self-determination did not occasion an absolute individualization whereby a monk sought to abandon all prior relational, communal, and religious systems of support and identity. Due to the presence of such a relational-consciousness within Anglo-Saxon society, I avoid the term “freedom” whenever possible, if not specifically mentioned by a contemporary author, as to prevent a misconception.

of Anglo-Saxon self-determination through the anachronistic application of a modern political notion. I therefore supply the term “individual autonomy” to explain the expected and exercised rights monastics maintained in the seventh and eighth centuries as they lived and operated within a behavioral dichotomy of what secular and religious societies understood as conventionally acceptable. This study will therefore attempt to address the various ways in which individual monastics proved capable of exerting a self-determination and autonomy in regards to their daily manner of living, material welfare, and inner spiritual condition, all in relation to their external world and the conventional expectations within it.

In investigating the concept of personal monastic autonomy in early English monasticism, it is necessary to distinguish between two distinct conceptual types of autonomy present within seventh-and-eighth-century religious expression. There at once exists a practical autonomy, inferred from contemporary literature, law codes, and charters, which suggests both a monastic self-assertion of rights regarding the ownership of property, and a theoretic social and political acquiescence to communities’ internal control and self-governance. This practical self-determination, which I refer to as “temporal autonomy,” encompasses all aspects pertaining to an individual’s corporal existence and their relationship to their physical surroundings. The second discernable type of monastic self-determination is what I refer to here as “spiritual autonomy,” and concerns those aspects that relate to an individual monk’s apprehended contemplative relationship to God and the divine. It is impossible to thoroughly investigate the concept of autonomy within seventh-and-eighth-century monasticism and yet neglect this aspect, as writers from Aldhelm to Bede explicitly posit contemplative focus upon the divine, and anchoritic worldly detachment, as the ultimate sources for true personal liberation from the distractions and consequences of the physical world. While monastic temporal autonomy presents itself as the
logical consequence of monasticism’s introduction into Anglo-Saxon society, many seventh-and-eighth-century religious writers of history, hagiography, and didactic prose, declare a contemplatively driven spiritual autonomy as their utmost personal desire. Contemporary religious understood contemplative resonance on God as the wellspring from which true liberation from all manner of personal constraint and individual limitation proceeded, as even extensive or exaggerated temporal autonomy necessitated personal concern, and often, as with the experiences of Wilfrid of Ripon, precipitated conflicts with established secular authorities.

While various external and internal developments, such as the ninth-century Viking invasions and tenth-century Benedictine reforms, shaped and influenced the character of English monasticism prior to the Norman Conquest, I have chosen to examine seventh-and-eighth-century monastic practice specifically. The seventh-century represents a time of drastic social and religious reorganization of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, as the pagan states of England received their formal introduction to a continental Christian culture interested in their membership. Prior to the unifying reign of Æthelstan in 924 A.D., what historians refer to as “Anglo-Saxon England” does not denote a cohesive political or social entity, but rather culturally distinguishes the Germanic and pagan courts of what generally constitutes modern England from their Welsh and Irish neighbors to the west and north respectively. The successful Germanic invasions of England following the withdrawal of the Roman military in the fifth-century resulted in the partitioning of Roman Britannia into several distinct kingdoms. While undoubtedly incomplete, the genealogies of eight distinct royal families, each ruling simultaneously, survive in extant manuscripts. On the eve of St. Augustine’s apostolic proselytization mission to the people of Kent in 597 A.D., the most significant and lasting

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kingdoms within England included those of Kent, Wessex, the South Saxons, the East Saxons, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria. Excluding certain minor kingdoms, which either amalgamated into larger and more powerful realms, such as the peoples of the Hwicce, Magonsætan, and Lindsey in regards to Mercia, or combined to form a larger political union, as in the case of Deira and Bernicia’s establishment of Northumbria, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms maintained a more or less independent relationship to one another. The kingdoms south of the River Humber did on occasion coalesce into loose confederacies under the aegis of a single kingdom’s monarch, but the relationship between an overlord and his subject kings always entailed a military element and such confederacies never endured beyond an overlord’s death.3

Considerable debate surrounds the nature of religion within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms prior to the concerted conversion attempts by the Catholic Church in the late sixth-century. While British place names offer interesting insights as to the possibility of a survival of Christian belief in England following the Germanic invasions,4 Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* conveys a late sixth-century landscape wherein the royal and aristocratic ranks of general Anglo-Saxon society maintained an adherence to an ancestral paganism. The first major step towards the establishment of a permanent ecclesiastic presence within, and conversion of, Anglo-Saxon society in general began with the arrival of Augustine of Canterbury on the island of Thanet off the coast of Kent in 597 A.D., at the prompting of Pope Gregory the Great. Augustine’s arrival and success proved pivotal for the subsequent development of Christianity within the southern English kingdoms,5 as his focus upon conversion of the royalty and nobility proved the means


5 Ibid., 73.
through which all of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms gradually adopted the continental faith in their entirety. James Campbell notes that although Augustine’s series of royal conversions proved unquestionably essential for the establishment of the Christian Church within England, Augustine’s activity may nevertheless represent the final stage in the gradual assimilation of Christianity into Anglo-Saxon culture and society. Sources of Christian influence surrounded the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, from the British in Wales, to the Irish of Iona in the north, and the Merovingian Franks across the Channel. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms bordering Christian lands almost certainly maintained some form of diplomatic relationship with their neighbors, regardless if their main point of contact coalesced around military conflict. The Kingdom of Kent at the very least maintained an amiable relationship with the Merovingian Franks prior to Augustine’s arrival, as Bede mentions the Frankish origin and Christian faith of the Kentish queen Bertha. While the Kentish king Æthelbert remained a pagan even after his betrothal to Bertha, an apparent condition of the union centered upon her continued ability to freely practice her religion with the aid of her bishop Liudhard. Bede states that at Augustine’s arrival Æthelbert maintained an at least cursory knowledge of the Christian religion due to the conditions of his marriage, and it is not inconceivable that other Anglo-Saxon monarchs ruling on the edges of Christian realms acquired a similar simple knowledge of the faith prior to the conversion of their kingdom.

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.


9 Ibid.
Augustine’s arrival precipitated an establishment of both a lasting ecclesiastic presence in the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and perhaps the earliest expression of monastic living within an Anglo-Saxon kingdom. According to Bede, Gregory the Great suggests that Augustine live communally with his clergy and follow a monastic rule of living, as Augustine himself had led a monastic life prior to his journey to England. Augustine’s mission by no means secured the dominance of Christianity among the southern English kingdoms, or even in Kent, but his institutionalization of the Christian religion proved lasting and resulted in a continued conversion effort by his episcopal successors which ultimately succeeded in its task. Augustine’s mission and its Christianization results most directly affected the kingdoms of Kent, the East Saxons, and East Anglia. Contemporary marriage politics extended the influence of the novel ecclesiastic presence in Kent and the east, as Archbishop Justus consecrated Paulinus bishop of York in 625 A.D. to accompany the Kentish princess Æthelburh to Northumbria for her marriage to King Edwin. The arrangement strikingly resembled that of Æthelbert and Bertha, and resulted in the conversion of King Edwin and a sizable number of his nobility. The violent death of Edwin and the subsequent ravaging of his kingdom at the hands of kings Penda and Cadwalla in 633 A.D. reversed the initial success of Paulinus and his followers, as the bishop himself fled with Queen Æthelburh to Kent in the wake of the disaster. The withdrawal of Paulinus opened Northumbria to the evangelization efforts of the Irish, and in 635 A.D. the newly established king Oswald requested that the monastic community at Iona send him a bishop to assist in the conversion of his people. The request precipitated the arrival of Aidan, who established a lasting

11 Ibid., 118.
12 Ibid., 131.
13 Ibid., 146.
ecclesiastical structure and presence within Northumbria and founded the monastic community of Lindisfarne with land donated by Oswald. Iona’s primary role in the proselytization of Northumbria influenced the character of Northumbrian Christianity long after the Church’s official split with idiosyncratic Irish religious customs in A.D. 664 at the synod of Whitby, with the Irish propensity for asceticism and eremitic retreat remaining particularly indelible.

The expansion of Christianity into the kingdoms of Mercia, Wessex, and Sussex each followed a similar pattern of top down conversion, whereby the people and aristocracy of a given realm gain sustained access to the novel religion following the formal conversion of their monarch or royal family. The marriage of King Peada of Mercia to the Northumbrian princess Alchlaed appears to have inaugurated formal proselytization efforts within the Kingdom of Mercia, as King Oswiu of Northumbria refused to consent to the arrangement unless Peada received Christian instruction and baptism. Bede states that following his baptism in Northumbria, Peada returned to Mercia in 653 A.D. with the four priests Cedd, Adda, Betti, and Diuma to “instruct and baptize his people.”14 The mission institutionalized the Church’s position and established a lasting episcopal structure within Mercia, with Finan of Lindisfarne consecrating Diuma bishop of the Mercians, Middle Angle, and eventually the people of Lindsey.15 The conversion of the West Saxon royal court came as a consequence of an apostolic mission in 634-635 A.D. similar to that of Augustine’s some thirty-eight years earlier. Pope Honorius I commissioned Birinus to evangelize to the more remote areas of Britain that had yet to come in contact with Christian missionaries.16 Birinus journeyed to the Kingdom of Wessex,

14 Ibid., 177.
15 Ibid., 178, 184.
16 Ibid., 153.
which remained outside any practical sphere of Christian influence occasioned by Augustine’s mission in the east, and in 635 A.D. established a bishopric at Dorchester and baptized the West Saxon king Cynegils.\textsuperscript{17} While Cynegils’ successor Cenwalh initially refused to adopt Christianity upon his ascension to the throne,\textsuperscript{18} he eventually received his baptism at the court of King Anna of the East Angles while in exile,\textsuperscript{19} and subsequently supported the West Saxon bishopric upon his reinstatement as king, though not without controversy. The Kingdom of the South Saxons remained the last major Anglo-Saxon kingdom whose royal kin-group formally adopted Christianity, receiving practical instruction in 681-686 A.D. from Bishop Wilfrid during his exile from Northumbria.\textsuperscript{20} Wilfrid secured the conversion of the South Saxon king Æthilwalh, established a bishopric, and founded a monastic community at Selsey.\textsuperscript{21}

The collective Anglo-Saxon Church assumed a monastic character from the outset of its establishment within the various English kingdoms, in contrast to that of Gaul wherein ecclesiastic authority coalesced in urban bishoprics. John Blair has noted that this is in large part due to the decentralized and rural nature of the Anglo-Saxon polities, where old Roman cities and bishoprics failed to endure as administrative centers as they did in Francia.\textsuperscript{22} Anglo-Saxon kings often appointed a single bishop to administer vast territories of land, and in late 660 A.D. only three bishops operated within the whole of England.\textsuperscript{23} In absence of a strong episcopal

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{bede} Bede, \textit{Ecclesiastical History of the English People}, 153.
\bibitem{ibid} Ibid., 154
\bibitem{ibid2} Ibid., 83-85.
\bibitem{blair} John Blair, \textit{The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 73-75.
\bibitem{ibid3} Ibid., 75.
\end{thebibliography}
structure, the endowment and proliferation of monastic communities after 650 A.D. provided the foundation upon which the early Anglo-Saxon Church established its ecclesial organization, with monastic institutions filling the administrative gaps opened by the absence of episcopal authority.\textsuperscript{24} The acquisition and preservation of landed property proved vital for the survival of a monastic institution.\textsuperscript{25} The earliest monastic communities received their property and material endowments from converted kings, and their nobles in imitation, for reasons both religious and secular.\textsuperscript{26} Sarah Foot suggests that newly converted kings subsequently endowed religious institutions as material indications of their newly embraced faith, while nobles emulated their kings in a practice that allowed for a significant public display of wealth, in addition to assisting in the redemption of their souls.\textsuperscript{27} John Blair additionally notes that by 700 A.D. some members of the Anglo-Saxon nobility appear to convert tracts of their family’s land into monastic properties, installing a family member as abbot over the new community to ensure the property remained within the authority of the kin-group.\textsuperscript{28}

Regardless of the motives that precipitated the initial instances of aristocratic monastic patronage, the mere conception of a religious community appears to have entailed certain economic and social liberties otherwise unavailable to secular households. The historical writings of Bede, seventh-and-eighth-century hagiographic works, secular law codes, and extant charters detailing the conditions of monastic land transactions, each expound upon the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 73-74.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Sarah Foot, \textit{Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England} c. 600-900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87-88.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 78.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 79-80.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Blair, \textit{The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society}, 104.
\end{itemize}
conventional rights and duties attached to Anglo-Saxon monastic institutions. Charters for monastic foundation or endowment frequently alienate tracts of land to a religious institution in perpetuity, while often additionally freeing monastic centers from secular obligations such as labor and food rents due to the king and his ealdorman. Secular patrons acknowledged the institutional right of monastic communities to govern themselves internally, to acquire new properties, and to dictate the future use and succession of their landed and material possessions. Though certainly many aristocratic abbots who acquired patronage and property through the alienation of family lands remained conscious of the needs of and obligations due their immediate kin-group, Anglo-Saxon communities in general retained legitimate rights of self-governance and tax exemption, while some, such as Benedict Biscop’s community at Wearmouth and Jarrow, even managed to remain independent from familial interference and intrusion. In this thesis I argue that in light of the acknowledged social and economic rights of monastic communities as entities, monastic participation constituted a considerable degree of individual practical autonomy in regards to the landed appropriation and foundation of an institution, its inner governance through the establishment of a monastic rule, and ability to determine future abbots and rulers independent of external experiences. I further contend that monastic association supplied individual monks with an alternative means of legitimate social interaction and advancement, while simultaneously providing a spiritual basis for otherwise culturally unconventional behaviors, such as familial renunciation and contemplative withdrawal.

29 Foot, Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600-900, 93.

The general weakness of the early Anglo-Saxon Church’s episcopal structure occasioned a situation wherein abbatial and episcopal authority often coalesced in a single individual, well acquainted with the traditional monastic spiritual preoccupations of divine contemplation while simultaneously occupying an office that required active administrative duties and pastoral engagement with the laity. Almost all seventh and early eighth-century Anglo-Saxon bishops came from a monastic background, and while their episcopal and monastic occupational combination frequently resulted in an attempted harmonization between the active and contemplative elements of each profession, personal inclinations occasionally precluded any balance. Bishop Wilfrid of Ripon engaged in a long and vigorous active career with seemingly little to no interest in contemplative behavior, as he founded and lead a vast international network of monastic properties while exercising episcopal authority at one time or another in the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and Sussex. In contrast, St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne appears to have held contemplative aspirations for most of his life, resigning his own episcopal dignity after only two years in order to return to the hermitage on Farne Island he had inhabited prior to his elevation. Aidan of Lindisfarne perhaps represents the most notable example of a bishop maintaining a more or less equal devotion to monastic contemplation and episcopal activity, with the bishop successfully establishing the ecclesiastic structure of Northumbria, while additionally founding and utilizing a temporary hermitage on the island of Farne for solitary contemplation and prayer.

Some of the greatest Christian minds of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages had wrestled with the question as to what constituted the proper relationship ecclesiastics ought to maintain between their active duties of pastoral care, almsgiving, proselytization, and instruction, and personal aspirations of divine contemplation and worldly detachment, by the time the Anglo-
Saxons began to adopt Christianity. Beyond the shores of Britain, writers from Origen and John Cassian, to Augustine and Gregory the Great considered and commented upon the inherent communal and personal value between active and contemplative manners of religious living. Pope Gregory’s own conceptualization of the ideal religious life as a balanced synthesis of active and contemplative behaviors\textsuperscript{31} came to dominate the popular thought of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics such as Bede, who understood, or at the least imagined, Anglo-Saxon saints such as Cuthbert of Lindisfarne in essentially Gregorian terms.\textsuperscript{32} Gregory’s religious ideal is reminiscent of St. Augustine’s, whereby a life of religious activity and action prepared a given ecclesiastic for a future life of contemplation;\textsuperscript{33} an understanding Gregory expounds in his commentary on Ezekiel where he interprets the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest as representative of active religious participation and succeeding contemplation respectively.\textsuperscript{34} The stagnation of Pope Gregory’s English mission south of the River Humber however, left Northumbria susceptible to the proselytizing efforts of Irish monastics, who depended more upon the eastern traditions of the eremitic desert saints for their conceptions of appropriate contemplative living than any Augustinian or Gregorian discourse.\textsuperscript{35} Irish monasticism’s admiration for anchoritic saintliness deeply influenced the manner in which the newly established Northumbrian Church


\textsuperscript{33} Constable, \textit{Three Studies in Medieval Religious Social Thought}, 19.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 21

conceptualized and understood the contemplative aspects of Christian religious life. As early
Anglo-Saxon monastic communities developed and maintained an element of local pastoral
responsibility, the contemplative branch of Anglo-Saxon religious existence naturally developed
within a medium of ascetic eremitism.\textsuperscript{36} Contemporary literature of the seventh and eighth
centuries captures the overwhelming contemporary social adulation for the individual expression
of anchoritic contemplative desire and its subsequent achievement; a sentiment that I argue,
despite its hagiographic and poetic manifestation, conveys both a serious social and individual
desire for contemplative escape, as well as the association of transcendent spiritual liberation
with ultimate contemplative attainment.

Various scholars have influenced the direction of this work. Their contributions have
greatly influenced the understanding of early Anglo-Saxon monastic culture and spirituality, and
have proven invaluable in helping cultivate the questions of this present study. Patrick
Wormald’s investigation into the cultural relationship of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy and
developing Christian Church within the seventh and eighth centuries in his paper “Bede, Beowulf
and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy,” incited this study’s primary interest in
Christianity’s assimilation into and subsequent development within Anglo-Saxon society and
culture. Wormald’s study as a whole concerns the degree to which the heroic Anglo-Saxon poem
\textit{Beowulf} offers insights into both the primary conversion of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy, and the
nature of an English Christianity that produced a poem so replete with praise for heroic pagan
virtues;\textsuperscript{37} however, it is his VI section which pertains to the English social and cultural context of
secular Germanic literature that has most directly influenced this study. In this and the preceding

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 153.

\textsuperscript{37} Patrick Wormald, \textit{The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian}
sections, Wormald investigates contemporary ecclesiastic opinions concerning the promulgation and recitation of secular Germanic tales in both secular, though particularly religious, environments, famously quoting the Northumbrian monk Alcuin’s remark of “What has Ingeld to do with Christ?”38 He then compares the general disdain with which conventional seventh- and-eighth-century Christian thought viewed secular literature within religious contexts with the contemporary nature of Anglo-Saxon monasticism. Through an examination of the denunciations of Bede, St. Boniface, and the Council of Clovesho (747 A.D.) concerning the rampant instances of worldly standards of living within eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monastic communities, as well as the aristocratic idiom of extant insular poetry and hagiography, Patrick Wormald argues for the aristocratic environment of early English Christianity.39 “When the aristocracies of the barbarian West became Christian, they did not, and they could not, lose their awareness of being aristocracies, and this is as true of churchmen as of laymen.”40 Contrary to traditional Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic scholarship however, Wormald does not envision the aristocratic nature of eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monasticism as evidence for a decline in religious standards, but rather as one of Christianity’s greatest triumphs. The Anglo-Saxon warrior nobility, without the slightest disposition to abandon its secular culture and standards of living, successfully assimilated into a novel religion and proved willing to incorporate its traditions, tastes, and loyalties in its subsequent religious expression.41 Wormald’s work is an important influence upon this study, as I too explore the nature of early Anglo-Saxon monasticism as continental Christian influences amalgamated with a recently converted secular society. I specifically

38 Ibid., 41.
39 Ibid., 57.
40 Ibid., 58.
41 Ibid.
investigate the opportunities for individual self-determination occasioned by such an amalgamation. I argue that the introduction and development of a Christian monastic culture in seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon society, and its subsequent assimilation, occasioned novel opportunities for individual self-determination in regards to a monk’s standard of living, profession, property development, and spirituality, as monastics participated within two divergent, though often cooperative, systems of social thought.

The work of Clare Stancliffe has furthermore significantly influenced the scope of this study. In her article “Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary,” Stancliffe explores the religious pattern and nature of St. Cuthbert’s life and ecclesiastic career in the context of the western Church’s historical debate concerning the appropriate relationship between the active and contemplative religious lives. Through a comparative analysis of the contemporary hagiographic accounts of St. Cuthbert, Stancliffe identifies two main patterns of religious expression in the saint’s career and life. First and foremost, Cuthbert demonstrates “a progression towards the solitary life which begins in his teens with his night vigils and finds ultimate fulfillment on Farne,” and “secondly, and concurrently, a pastoral involvement which runs throughout, whether as guestmaster, prior, soulfriend, or bishop.”42 The differences between the anonymous and Bede’s prose hagiographies reveals a seventh and early eighth-century Northumbrian Church well versed in the continental discourses concerning the balancing of active and contemplative ideals.43 While Bede’s personal proclivity towards the teachings of St. Augustine and Gregory the Great occasioned a recasting of Cuthbert, whereby the monk achieved a deserved contemplative perfection only after a flawless active career, the anonymous

42 Stancliffe, “Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary,” 38.

43 Ibid., 40.
author’s preoccupation with Cuthbert’s eremitic desires prior to Farne, as well as his seemingly antipathetic view of episcopal duty, represent strands of thought more akin to the anchoritic traditions of the Egyptian Desert Fathers, St. Martin of Tours, and general Irish monasticism.\textsuperscript{44} Indeed the structure of the contemporary Irish Church, which had so much influence in the early development of Northumbrian Christianity, never supported a strong episcopal element, but instead fostered an unrestrained ascetic monasticism and eremitism.\textsuperscript{45} Stancliffe argues that beyond the disparities between Cuthbert’s multiple hagiographic images, the saint’s actions possess an essentially Irish character, with Cuthbert exhibiting a pastoral concern amid an ever present desire to withdraw from the world completely.\textsuperscript{46} Clare Stancliffe’s use of hagiographic comparisons to investigate both Cuthbert’s true religious nature and character, as well as the ideological intent of his hagiographers, is particularly pertinent to this study, as I make considerable use of hagiography in an attempt to examine the degree to which hagiographers shaped saintly narratives in accordance with their own, or contemporary society’s religious conventions. I particularly investigate contemporary Anglo-Saxon religious society’s general conception of personal and individual autonomy through the analyzation of anchoritic hagiography. I demonstrate that the degree of liberty from the world and all its constraints and vain distractions, ascribed to eremitic contemplatives in their hagiographic accounts not only far surpasses that available to their active colleagues, but represents a synthesis of an inner spiritual autonomy from distress or anxiety and a material authority over the environmental circumstances of their hermitage.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 39.  
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 41.
Jeffery J. Cohen has additionally contributed to this work’s interest in the meaning and purpose of the saintly images produced within seventh-and-eighth-century hagiographic literature. His chapter on St. Guthlac of Crowland in his *Medieval Identity Machines* has proven particularly influential, as Cohen argues for an intense literary individualization of Guthlac’s being within his prose and poetic hagiographies. Individuals within early medieval cultures of northern Europe preserved a strict hierarchal mode of being and identity through their participation within networks of familial and social relations. Cohen argues that in Guthlac’s eremitic withdrawal, Felix and Guthlac’s anonymous poetic hagiographers envisage the saint as utterly rejecting the relational systems of identity of the secular world. Guthlac’s contemplative anchoritic solitude occasioned an envisaged independence of the saint’s individual meaning and purpose from secular relational hierarchies, as Guthlac’s novel contemplative identity depended only on his proximity to God. Cohen highlights Guthlac’s personal choice in extracting his identity from traditional relational systems, comparing Guthlac’s enthusiasm for the solitary life to the doleful mood with which extant Anglo-Saxon elegies, such as *The Wanderer*, convey the loss of community and kin. Guthlac’s knowledge of his self-identity comes from his trust in and proximity to God, and represents an independence from human methods of identification through a focus upon the inhuman and divine. Jeffery J. Cohen’s interpretation of the St. Guthlac literature has proven influential to this study, as I examine the hagiographic traditions of

48 Ibid., 126.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 128.
51 Ibid., 136.
52 Ibid., 139.
Guthlac and others for evidence of an envisioned independence from all forms of worldly interaction, obligation, and concern. While I ultimately argue for a degree of literary individualization somewhat less than Cohen, I expand the scope of his notion of anchoritic social abstraction and trust in the divine. I suggest that the hagiographic traditions of both St. Cuthbert and St. Guthlac envisage an anchoritic introduction into a novel spiritual relationship and hierarchy with its end in God, and within which God satisfies the saints’ every spiritual and material need.

I have divided this study of monastic autonomy into two parts, with the first two chapters investigating the temporal opportunities for and aspects of personal monastic self-determination, while the succeeding two chapters examine the degree to which individuals’ spiritual preoccupations and contemplative desires legitimized anchoritic behaviors, often at the expense of ecclesiastic administration and pastoral care. I begin this study by examining the foundation and administration of seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monastic communities. In Chapter II, I consider the degree of self-determination individual monastic leaders of the seventh and eighth centuries assumed in their foundation of novel religious communities. I examine extant monastic land charters and secular law codes, in addition to contemporary historical and hagiographic texts, such as the Venerable Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the prose *vitae* of St. Wilfrid of Ripon, St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, and the various abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow, to demonstrate the significant degree of autonomy secular leaders proved willing to grant monastic institutions over their own landed properties. I subsequently investigate the authority of coenobitic founders and their succeeding abbots exercised in their construction and application of monastic rules for regulating and ordering the manner and character of a community’s religious and social existence. I consider the communities of Wearmouth and Jarrow, as well as
those under the hegemony of Wilfrid, to suggest the considerable theoretic authority a ruling abbot possessed in their ability to determine the structure and daily observances of one or more dependent communities and their members. I additionally consider the collective expectations of monastic members in regards to the content and perceived severity of their institution’s rule, and the methods with which they cooperatively resisted the administrative authorities within their own communities when realities failed to meet expectations. I finally examine the internal autonomy monastic communities exercised in their ability to frequently select and endow future abbots and leaders independent of external interference. Though many abbacies and the properties attached to them descended hereditarily within the initial founder’s kin-group, abbots often retained a prerogative to select their successors. While Wilfrid of Ripon certainly shared his monastic properties and the administrative positions within them with his kin, prior to his death he delegated the abbacies and wealth of his vast monastic network to communities and individuals according to his own will, regardless of relationship ties. Additionally, some communities sought to collectively elect their succeeding abbot from among their own monastic ranks. In his absence, Benedict Biscop’s communities at Wearmouth and Jarrow elected Sigfrith as co-abbot of Wearmouth after the death of the former abbot Eosterwine. Ceolfrith and his successor Hwaetberht similarly assume their abbacies of the united community of Wearmouth and Jarrow after the collective consideration of their monastic brethren. I argue that monastic institutions’ general ability, either through abbatial decree or communal election, to select their succeeding leader constituted a legitimate communal autonomy in regards to their ability to determine both the course of their internal affairs and future development.

In the third chapter I consider the degree to which a monastic career precipitated opportunities for both the expression of a personal autonomy in relation to the character of an
individual monk’s social and professional environment, as well as a personal authority within monastic and secular society as monastic leaders achieved and maintained a relatively high social status in contemporary society. I examine the early religious careers of several seventh-century monastics such as Ceolfrith of Wearmouth and Jarrow, Hild of Whitby, and Guthlac of Crowland, to demonstrate the exercisable self-determination of incipient monks as they selected a particular monastic institution to enter. Anglo-Saxon monastic communities of the seventh and eighth centuries differed significantly from one another in regards to their religious observance, educational character, and relationship to secular patrons and authorities. I argue that the social and religious diversity of early Anglo-Saxon monasticism, combined with the relatively weak English episcopal structure that would nominally prevent monastic movement, provided individual monks with a variety of options for monastic ingression. I additionally consider the great personal authority and security of monastic leaders such as Wilfrid of Ripon, Eata of Lindisfarne, Hild of Whitby, and Benedict Biscop of Wearmouth and Jarrow, as they acquired and maintained often-vast monastic properties subject to their own personal hegemony. I argue that monastic networks provided their founding abbot with an extraordinary material and landed wealth, and social influence, while the geographic expansion of dependent religious communities provided a degree of security from the indignation of secular authorities otherwise unavailable to merely secular subjects. I lastly examine the social and political role of seventh-and-eighth-century abbots and abbesses. Almost all early Anglo-Saxon abbots and abbesses belonged to either a branch of a kingdom’s royal house or the aristocracy, and I argue that the addition of a religious element supplemented the traditional conciliative authority of the secular nobility to produce an increased legitimacy to the royal advice given by abbots and abbesses. I investigate the careers of numerous monastics including Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, Ælfthryth of Whitby, and
Guthlac of Crowland, and the perceived prophetic context of their royal counsels to demonstrate monasticism’s influence on the traditional practices of the secular nobility.

While monastic practice precipitated a significant degree of practical individual authority and autonomy within seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon religious and secular society, contemporary religious authors nevertheless convey an understanding of pure autonomy and personal liberation from worldly concern and consequence as a uniquely spiritual condition, achievable only through divine contemplation and anchoritic social withdrawal. The religious of seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England therefore often expressed, through both individual action and literary conceptualization, a desire to retreat from the active and social world of their birth to a more contemplative and spiritual existence. In the fourth chapter, I examine lives of St. Aidan of Lindisfarne, St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, and St. Guthlac of Crowland, as they each progressed through their monastic careers and conditioned their contemplative retreats from ecclesiastic society. I argue that the conventionalization of eremitic behaviors within the Anglo-Saxon religious conscious legitimized individual actions taken in the pursuit of anchoritic solitude, despite the abandonment of administrative or pastoral duty such actions necessitated. I additionally demonstrate that the solitary pursuit of divine contemplation posited a necessary rejection of secular society and the social networks it bound. Contemplative eremitism inherently constituted a degree of individual autonomy, not within the contemporary social structure, but beyond it, as an individual monk sought to free their mental being from the temporal world that surrounded them.

Following the practical pursuits of individual monastics towards a solitary and contemplative religious existence, in Chapter V I examine contemporary Anglo-Saxon religious society’s perception of the physical and spiritual nature of eremitic and contemplative behavior. I
first consider contemporary society’s conceptualization of anchoritic desire in opposition to administrative or pastoral activity. I utilize numerous texts from the seventh and eighth centuries, including the didactic works of Aldhelm of Malmesbury, monastic correspondence, and domestic hagiographies, to demonstrate the great esteem with which contemporary Anglo-Saxon religious society maintained for personal contemplative withdrawal from active society. I then investigate the social perception of the physical and spiritual nature of eremitic behavior and hermitic establishment. I argue that seventh-and-eighth-century prose and metric hagiographic literature presents an individual monk’s obtainment of hermitic solitude as a transition from a dependence on fallible and worldly social relationships to a trust in an infallible and spiritual divine hierarchy. The respective hagiographic traditions of St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne and St. Guthlac of Crowland correspondingly project a saintly image whereby the saints’ trust in God occasions a liberation from all manner of worldly concern, as the saints’ novel position within a divine hierarchy secures the eternal and unfailing satisfaction of the saints’ every material and spiritual need. St. Cuthbert and St. Guthlac exercise a near total authority over their hermitic environments through their envisioned proximity to God and command not only the respect of visiting religious pilgrims, but the forces of inanimate nature itself. I lastly investigate the fundamental nature of seventh-and-eighth-century religious society’s conception of individual autonomy and liberty. I argue that the majority of contemporary religious authors, regardless of literary genre, represent true and lasting individual autonomy as a purely spiritual condition maintained through consistent divine contemplation. Spiritual autonomy therefore represented an inward grace and a transcendent response to the weariness and obstructions of the external and physical world. While certainly coenobitic monastic participation inaugurated a practical individual and communal autonomy within the temporal and secular world, contemporary
religious nevertheless understood contemplative escape, at least within the theoretic bounds of hagiography, as demonstrative of a more complete autonomy both within and above temporality.

Due to this study’s concentration on both the behavior and religious social thought of seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monastics, hagiographic accounts feature prominently as sources throughout this study not only for individuals’ personal conduct, but contemporary religious society’s subsequent interpretation thereof. While communities and individuals commissioned the creation of a given saint’s vita for one of any number of reasons, the documents themselves often relied upon personal knowledge of the subject therein, preceding written hagiographic tradition, and possibly written historic or relative hagiographic records, and therefore constitute invaluable sources in understanding the nature of contemporary monastic life and broader Anglo-Saxon society. Despite the undeniable importance hagiographic texts command regarding the historical study of Anglo-Saxon England, certain noteworthy obstacles arise in their use as sources for historical inquiry. The context and purpose of a given hagiography differs inherently from that of an explicitly historical text, as a given hagiography’s primary purpose centered upon revealing an individual monastic as an exemplar of saintliness. Hagiographies concerned themselves with the personification and promulgation of moral truths, rather than precise facts. In attempting to justify their subject’s holiness, hagiographers referenced, often verbatim, existing hagiographic traditions of conventionally agreed upon saints, while biblical comparisons find similar expression as a rationale for present sanctification. Furthermore, the nature of, and motive behind, the information included within a vita, in addition

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to the socio-political context of broader Anglo-Saxon society during the period of its composition, engender accompanying issues concerning a work’s historicity. In his “Hagiography in Politics in Early Northumbria,” David Rollason suggests that the explosion of hagiographic output in the late seventh and early eighth centuries may in fact represent certain communities’ reaction to the various political situations confronting each institution.55 The hagiographies of St. Wilfrid and St. Guthlac in particular contain material suggestive of a political raison d’être; with Rollason suggesting that Wilfrid’s death in 709 A.D. left Ripon and Hexham sufficiently vulnerable so as to necessitate the creation of a work legitimizing the late bishop’s long and controversial life.56 Felix’s acknowledgment of King Ælfwald’s commissioning of Guthlac’s vita raises similar questions to his own work’s overall compositional purpose, as the comment elucidates a curious instance in which an East Anglian king funded the creation of a royal Mercian’s vita. It appears likely that the East Anglian origin of Guthlac’s vita suggests Ælfwald’s attempt to placate King Æthelbald of Mercia, while simultaneously recognizing Mercia’s political suzerainty over the eastern kingdom.57 Cuthbert’s tradition, comprising two prose and one poetic work, induces a unique circumstance wherein Bede’s later work either directly refutes, or otherwise alters, the prose account of the saint’s original anonymous author. The survival of two contemporary prose hagiographic accounts of Cuthbert allow for a degree of literary comparison absent within other seventh-century saintly traditions; however, Bede’s corrections of and additions to the anonymous text displays the


56 Ibid., 104.

57 Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, 118.
complicated dichotomy between historic truth and moral purpose all hagiographers fundamentally operated within.

Despite the apparent shortcomings of hagiographic accounts as historical sources, their use nevertheless remains vital to the student of Anglo-Saxon England. Thomas D. Hill correctly posits that the immense historic value of contemporary hagiography consists, not only in what they convey about the historic life and times of a given saint, but the overall mentalité of the work’s author and intended audience.58 Hagiographies are often the primary, or only, extant source for the life of an individual or particular historic event, and while their main purpose lay in the promulgation of an ideal in contrast to mere actuality, their biblical and external hagiographic allusions convey important conceptual truths pertaining to contemporary religious thought. Benedicta Ward asserts the great value inherent in the didactic elements of hagiography, which often juxtapose a local saint with extant hagiographic tradition or biblical narrative, as such comparisons illuminate the inner essence and intention of a given work.59 Furthermore, the instances in which a contemporary saint’s vita appears to emulate a preceding saint’s tradition do not inherently signify historical falsifications in every instance, as Christ remained the standard to which all serious religious modeled their actions, the lives of saints provided the subsequent tier of virtuous inspiration.60 The vitae of Cuthbert, Wilfrid, and Guthlac do not constitute mediocre biographies, but rather as Benedicta Ward relays, superb hagiographies.61 The proper use of hagiography in historical investigation therefore consists in understanding the complex


relationship between the historic life and times of a domestic monastic and the broader pre-
established western tradition of sainthood within which a given *vita* developed. The diligent
criticism of the historic claims of hagiographic authors, with respect to a particular work’s
compositional purpose and didactic intent, as well as preexisting local and continental literary
influences, may yet yield indispensable information in regards to contemporary monastic life and
thought.
CHAPTER II

PRACTICAL COMMUNAL AUTONOMY

In this chapter I argue that Anglo-Saxon monastic institutions of the seventh and eighth centuries maintained a collective internal autonomy in regards to their daily affairs and future development that nominally precluded external secular interference. I specifically examine the degree of practical self-determination monastic leaders commanded in establishing novel religious communities. Monastic beneficiaries of secular land endowments received various rights of land proprietorship, in addition to their physical properties, by virtue of their religious purpose which legally secured their institution’s independent development and right of internal self-regulation. I additionally examine the authority various coenobitic abbots commanded in their construction and implementation of monastic rules for the regulating and ordering of their community’s manner of existence. During the seventh and eighth centuries, the vast majority of religious communities in Anglo-Saxon England ordered their day to day operations and religious observances through the use of a distinct composite rule which varied greatly between separate monastic institutions.\(^1\) A community or founder therefore exerted a considerable degree of institutional autonomy and self-determination in composing a set of regulations to which the entire community would subsequently adhere. Finally, I consider the significant authority both retiring abbots and the collective bodies of coenobitic monastics exerted in nominating or electing a succeeding abbot and leader. Anglo-Saxon monastic communities of the seventh and eighth centuries utilized multiple methods of abbatial selection that differed from one community to another, often on the basis of both the personal inclinations of an institution’s current abbot, as well as the dictates of a community’s established organizational rule. While contemporary

monastic succession practices predicated upon hereditary ties of kinship certainly enjoyed wide application, other communities, such as Benedict Biscop’s Wearmouth and Jarrow, communally elected subsequent abbots from among their own monastic ranks regardless of kinship affinities. Both practices nevertheless exhibit the legitimate autonomy monastic communities maintained in regards to their internal organization and subsequent daily governance. Early Anglo-Saxon monastic communities therefore enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy from outside interference in so far as it concerned their internal regulation, institutional development, and religious character, and while communities occasionally suffered from the impositions of irreverent kings, the rights they maintained as social entities nevertheless found general acceptance among the practical conventions of society.

Autonomy in Foundation

The initial religious communities established in England following the arrival of the Augustinian mission in 597 A.D. proved extremely diverse in regards to their foundation pretext, monastic rule, and general order of their collective existence. It is therefore simply impossible to supply one example of a community’s foundation and reliably submit its experiences as normative within a broad Anglo-Saxon monastic context. Nevertheless, despite a certain dependency upon diverse local social and political contexts, a significant degree of almost inherent institutional self-regulation emerges as a common characteristic throughout early English monastic foundations. Though unquestionably diverse internally, monastic communities’ physical and geographic establishment produced an environment through which an institution’s founder and their monastic family expressed a great deal of temporal autonomy over their material condition as well as the order and composition of their shared communal existence.

2 Ibid., 24.
Monastic autonomy as a concept manifests as fluid in so far as a monastic leader remained dependent upon secular royal authorities for initial land bestowal and continued patronage. The degree to which an abbot, and by extension his community, exerted relatively uncontested institutional autonomy often depended upon the condition of a community’s relationship with secular authorities. Kings had extreme power over the temporal wealth of their kingdoms and as subsequently noted, did not shy away from asserting their dominance over religious communities whose apparent self-rule may have depended upon regal patronage. Wilfird’s own conflicts with Northumbrian royal authorities particularly demonstrate the fragile nature of monastic authority when pitted against monarchial wrath. Within the context of a healthy royal relationship however, monastic communities proved capable of expressing a great deal of temporal self-determination, both in their accumulation of landed properties and establishment of dependent daughter communities, and their internal legal organization.

At the outset of monasticism’s development within Anglo-Saxon England, there emerges a consensus relative to the degree to which religious communities ought to stand apart from secular society and the traditional social and fiscal expectations of those therein. That is not to suggest that early English monastic communities sought and obtained any extreme degree of social seclusion, as John Blair demonstrates the undeniably pastoral character of early Anglo-Saxon religious communities, but rather that secular and ecclesiastic authorities recognized, at least in the abstract, that monastic communities possessed a general entitlement to certain degrees of self-regulation and civic exemption. Notions contributive to a concept of acceptable monastic autonomy drew influence from both Anglo-Saxon cultural conventions as well as the incipient inspirations of continental Christendom. It appears likely that seventh-and-eighth-

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century kings commonly bequeathed lifetime grants of land to secular retainers in return for loyal service;\(^4\) nevertheless, the Christian introduction of written charters in land transactions merely strengthened and safeguarded a potential monastic beneficiary’s rights to land usage and ownership by comparison, as Christianity introduced foreign interpretations of land proprietorship alongside literate methods of recording property contracts.\(^5\) Monastic leaders of the seventh and eighth centuries considered the land bequeathed to them for purposes of monastic foundation as their personal property,\(^6\) and therefore subsequently endeavored to exercise a personal authority over a community’s religious and social development. The degree of institutional permanency which resulted from the proliferation of written land grants, or booked land, applied not only to the physical existence of a monastic community, but the entire social entity subsequently established within its borders; an entity that extant charters suggest kings often allowed to develop beyond the sway of secular authority.

Seventh-century secular patrons exhibit, in documented charter land transactions, an at least nominal acquiescence to monastic recipients’ supervisory rights regarding the future development of a henceforth-established community. In a grant consigned to the community at Chertsey between 672-674 A.D., Frithuwold, the sub-king of Surrey, gifted two hundred hides of land to Chertsey and five hides to Thorpe. In supplementing the physical forfeiture of land, the charter grants the recipient abbot and his successors “free licence to do whatever” they wished with the lands thereby endowed to them.\(^7\) Frithuwold’s concession explicitly acknowledges the

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\(^4\) Ibid., 101.

\(^5\) Ibid., 90.


\(^7\) Grant by Frithuwold to Chertsey, charter, 672-674, in *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 479-80.
internal governmental rights of the abbot in question over the properties, which would come to constitute the greater community at Chertsey, and further represents a trend current in contemporary land transactions between secular authorities and monastic leaders. The establishment of what would become known as Barking abbey in 685-694 A.D. additionally exemplifies this trend, whereby Æthelræd, kinsmen of Sebbi, offers land referred to as “Ricingahaam, Budinhaam, Dagenham, Angenlabeshaam, and the field in the wood which is called Widmund’s field”\(^8\) to Abbess Æthelburh for the purpose of increasing the property controlled by the monastic house called Beddanhaam.\(^9\) The ensuing pronouncement that Æthelburh and her successors possessed the “free power” to do whatever they wished with the acquired property\(^10\) augments the significance of the physical land endowments to Beddanham, altogether comprising forty hides. Dorothy Whitelock discerns that the Æthelburh of the Beddanham charter could hardly have been anyone other than Saint Æthelburh of Barking and that the combination of the endowed lands probably resulted in the abbey of Beddanham being hence known as Barking.\(^11\) Additionally, while Bede states Earconwald built the abbey at Barking for his sister Æthelburh before Theodore consecrated him bishop of the East Saxons in 675 A.D.,\(^12\) Whitelock’s estimation of a 686-688 A.D. foundation date is congruent with available evidence, with the document’s witness list including bishops Earconwald and Wilfrid, who had each been called to London in 686-687 A.D. by Archbishop Theodore.\(^13\) A late seventh-

\(^8\) Grant by Æthelræd to Abbess Æthelburh, charter, 686-688, in Whitelock, 487.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid.

\(^11\) Ibid., 486.

\(^12\) Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 216.

\(^13\) Whitelock, English Historical Documents c. 500-1042, 486.
century provenance for the Beddanham charter would situate the document as nearly contemporary with the laws of King Wihtred of Kent in 695 A.D., whereby the king emancipated the Church from taxation, therefore suggesting a general secular acknowledgement, independent of political boundaries, of monastic governmental rights nominally alienated from secular interference.

The secular recognition of monastic autonomy in land appropriation and community management provided the foundation through which religious communities could develop their internal self-determination while remaining an integral aspect of Anglo-Saxon social culture. The legal promises of autonomy however, exemplified within documented land bequeathals, only protected monastic communities so long as any given king felt inclined to uphold the assurances. Monastics and secular rulers often maintained relatively fragile working relationships and kings sporadically broke promises when they felt it politically necessary or personally expedient.

Wilfrid’s forced deposition from the see of York first in 678 A.D.,14 and once again in 691-2 A.D.,15 by kings Ecgfrith and Aldfrith respectively exemplifies the often-dubious nature of royal assurances and the practical reach of regal authority, as does Bonifice’s castigation of King Æthelbald of Mercia in 746-7 A.D. for his supposed raping of nuns in double houses within his kingdom.16 These acts of flagrant disregard for the conventional rights of the Church certainly drew the condemnation of many contemporary ecclesiastics, particularly in the case of Æthelbald. While such actions certainly reveal the pragmatic authority of secular kings as opposed to the theoretical rights of monastics, it is nevertheless vital to recognize the instances in

15 Ibid., 91-93.
16 Boniface and seven other missionary bishops to Æthelbald, *King of Mercia, 746-747*, in Whitelock, 817.
which kings did not interfere with monastic autonomy. Though kings had the political ability to
depose bishops and appropriate monastic lands, it does not follow that they necessarily did so on
a regular basis. Anglo-Saxon kings certainly deposed or exiled bishops within their realm from
time to time, with Tunbert of Hexham,\(^\text{17}\) and Wini of Wintancaestir\(^\text{18}\) each suffering royally
instigated depositions within their respective kingdoms of Northumbria and Wessex;
nevertheless, such impositions and disruptions hardly constitute a regular or conventional
practice among the royalty. What is important in regards to monastic autonomy within and
around an institution’s own community, is the fact that kings initially felt inclined to grant
certain rights to monastic founders and their communities, and ordinarily upheld them.

The founder and or subsequent abbot of a given community deeply influenced both the
monastic and educational character of an institution;\(^\text{19}\) an influence elucidated both in Wilfrid’s
introduction of the Benedictine rule at Ripon,\(^\text{20}\) as well as Benedict Biscop’s educational
preoccupations at Wearmouth and Jarrow.\(^\text{21}\) The degree to which a monastic community relied
upon a founder or abbot for its religious character and social definition is significant. Wilfrid
acquired the community of Ripon only after King Alhfrith had pressured those within the
community beholden to Irish monastic traditions to accept the continental Easter calculation and
subsequently redistributed the lands to Wilfrid.\(^\text{22}\) Despite any lingering affinity to Irish custom,
the community at Ripon quickly realigned doctrinally towards continental orthodoxy and

\(^\text{17}\) Bede, *Ecclesiastical history of the English People*, 259.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 154.

\(^\text{19}\) Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 81.


Benedictine monastic tradition under Wilfrid’s direction, so much so that Cuthbert’s anonymous hagiographer felt sufficiently comfortable to lie about Cuthbert’s initial Irish tonsure by establishing Ripon as the institution where the saint acquired his incipient monastic education.\(^{23}\)

The community at Jarrow similarly matured in the image of Benedict Biscop, whose enthusiasm for spiritual education assisted in instigating a monastic culture capable of producing one of the greatest minds in eighth-century western Christendom in Bede. Furthermore, as personal property, an accumulation of monastic lands may have preceded an individual advancement within secular social spheres; a perception seemingly maintained by Eddius in his contention that in attaining the community of Ripon the “door of this world was being opened” for the young Wilfrid.\(^{24}\) The Anglo-Saxon cultural context that penetrated early institutions such as those at Ripon and Jarrow only strengthened the theoretic power and autonomy of a community’s founder as the monastic ethic of obedience to abbot resonated easily with the secular ethic of loyalty to lord and kin.\(^{25}\)

The social atmosphere of seventh-century England constituted an environment extremely favorable towards the establishment of monasticism,\(^{26}\) with secular social understandings of local and familial loyalty merely reinforcing the bond between monk and abbot as monastics amplified secular concepts of social convention through a novel religious context. Themes of aristocratic loyalty to lord and kin present within extant Anglo-Saxon literature parallel hagiographic

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\(^{23}\) Stancliffe, “Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary,” 23.

\(^{24}\) Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid, 16-19. *Iam autem, sicut ei saeculi huius lata ianua per Dominum aperiebatur et per sanctum Petrum apostolum, ita large crescebat ei porta aperta elemosinarum pro Domino in paupers, pupillos ac viduas omnique languor infirmitatis colligatos, ostendens perspicue, quid animo gerebat in paupertate.*

\(^{25}\) Blair, The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society, 80.

accounts of monastic loyalty to abbot and community. The idealistic duty of secular retainers to share in their lord’s conflicts and the consequences thereof, persists uninterrupted throughout monastic culture in the various expectations of loyalty to abbot both in times of plenty and scarcity. The heroic loyalty ascribed to Byrhtnoth’s retainers Ælfnoth and Wulmær within the late tenth, early eleventh-century, poem *The Battle of Maldon*, resembles Aldhelm of Malmesbury’s moral basis for castigating those monks under Wilfrid’s leadership who refused to follow their abbot into exile. In comparison to Ælfnoth and Wulmær, who stood with their fallen lord in battle only to subsequently share his doomed fate, the *Maldon* poet upbraids the less courageous of Byrhtnoth’s men who fled and abandoned their lord at the sign of inevitable defeat. In abandoning their lord, the fleeing East Anglian warriors blatantly disregarded “the favours which Byrhtnoth had done for their benefit.”

Aldhelm utilizes a similar tone in reprimanding Wilfrid’s fair-weather monastics, equating Wilfrid to a “wet-nurse” who nourished, reared, and educated his companions in the way a father cares for foster children. Despite the disparate contexts of each account, a conventional ethic of lordly obedience, in addition to obligations of shared fate, permeates both religious and secular social propensities. Moral conceptions of owed personal obedience, dependent upon two individuals’ relationship to each other within the contemporary social hierarchy, permeated contemporary Anglo-Saxon society. Seventh-century monastic leaders’ presumed possession of a due obedience from their religious dependents therefore, resembled that of a secular earl among his comrades, providing both a religious justification and secular precedent for their social authority.

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The internal governmental and social autonomy of English monastic communities continued to mature as Anglo-Saxon cultural proclivities amalgamated with the influences of continental Christendom in the mid to late seventh-century. Religious and secular authorities each respectively recognized certain episcopal and social liberties as an intrinsic aspect of monastic foundation and maintenance. The synod held at Hertford in 673 A.D. officially protected the internal governmental and material autonomy of religious communities from the over interference of the Church itself. According to Bede, in the third chapter of the synod at Hertford, Archbishop Theodore pronounced:

That no bishop shall interfere in any way with monasteries dedicated to God, nor take anything from them forcibly.\(^{29}\)

This statement supports various interpretations, and such a proclamation may well simply be the pronouncement of previously extant canons for their official recognition among the bishops and ecclesiastic hierarchy of England. It is equally plausible however, that certain bishops were indeed infringing upon the tacit property and governmental rights of monastic communities, and the issue felt sufficiently serious as to warrant an address from the archbishop. The frequency with which the position of abbot and bishop coalesced in one individual in early Christian England could only further complicate the seemingly delicate matter, as even the isle’s first archbishop and principle missionary Augustine of Canterbury maintained a coenobitic atmosphere among his clergy after his archiepiscopal installation.\(^{30}\) Wilfrid himself proved another such abbot-bishop, simultaneously occupying the bishopric of York while remaining Ripon’s abbot, as well as the nominal head of various monastic communities he had patronized in Mercia. The Anglo-Saxon Church of the late seventh-and-eighth-century developed a

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\(^{30}\) Ibid., 78.
monastic character from the outset and maintained few structures of administrative authority distinct from monastic centers and their networks.  

31 Being a bishop with a direct stake in the development of multiple religious communities, a pronouncement such as that at Hertford would appear to be initially advantageous to Wilfrid; since the command, if enforceable, would preclude external episcopal interference within Wilfrid’s network of communities that transcended his own bishopric of York. Nevertheless, additional pronouncements at Hertford seemingly convey an archiepiscopal frustration over the great difficulty with which abbatial and episcopal rights were differentiated and maintained when extensive monastic and episcopal authority coalesce in one person:

That no bishop shall intrude into the diocese of another, but confine himself to the guidance of the people committed to his charge.  

32 Initially noted by Barbara Yorke, it is entirely likely that Theodore directed the second chapter of his proclamation at Hertford specifically towards Wilfrid.  

33 Nevertheless, religious and authoritative theory as expounded by a synod such as Hertford often failed to translate into practical application within temporal reality. Wilfrid may have welcomed the third chapter pronouncement at Hertford as it seemingly protected the bishop’s foreign holdings in Mercia despite his personal monastic community and bishopric residing within the Kingdom of Northumbria. It additionally appears as if the third chapter of the Hertford proclamations proved a greater advantage to Wilfrid than the second chapter a detriment, as Wilfrid’s mere presence as monastic leader in another bishop’s diocese may not necessarily equate to the episcopal


interference the synod was directly pronouncing against.\textsuperscript{34} Regardless of the second chapter’s intent, Wilfrid may have welcomed such a proclamation as a valuable addition to his monastic armory, as his most frequently used weapon in defending his personal position as bishop, as well as abbot, was a constant appeal to the canons.\textsuperscript{35}

In addition to the attempts within Church hierarchy to protect monastic entitlements, secular authorities similarly sought to define the political and material prerogatives due to clerics and monastics in regards to their relationship with secular society. In 695 A.D., King Wihtred of Kent issued edicts, which, as far as they related to the Church, freed religious institutions from taxation and monastic communities from secular lordship, while additionally stating that religious communities shall only be subject to the consent of the bishops of their diocese.\textsuperscript{36} Indeed, the very first pronouncement of Wihtred’s decrees enunciates the Church’s bestowed immunity from taxation.\textsuperscript{37} Secular pronouncements of such a type remove all doubt as to the abstract benefits and rights that monastic communities possessed over their secular contemporaries, with each community type maintaining differentiated legal expectations. While the secular legal structure of one Southumbrian kingdom is certainly not representative of the whole of Anglo-Saxon England, it is evident that English secular authorities in general increasingly appear to recognize monastic communities as occupying a distinguished place within local society as the seventh-century progressed. Bede’s castigation of the merely nominal


\textsuperscript{36} Stenton, \textit{Anglo-Saxon England}, 142.

monastic communities established by secular aristocrats in his correspondence with Bishop Egbert suggests that at least by 734 A.D., a typical Northumbrian monastic community enjoyed a certain degree of liberty from all secular civic service and commonly possessed titles of hereditary succession.\(^{38}\) It is nevertheless interesting that Wihtred proclaimed religious communities subject only to the consent of their local bishops when the synod of Hertford explicitly banned the interference of bishops in monastic affairs just twenty-two years prior. The seeming contradiction within Wihtred’s pronouncements may simply be an expression of due deference to the Church on matters of ecclesiastic hierarchy, or an acknowledgment of contemporary realities wherein a diocese’s bishop often simultaneously administered a monastic institution. Regardless of Wihtred’s intention, it is nevertheless significant that the executive secular power within a kingdom explicitly, though undoubtedly with ecclesiastic aid, literately acknowledged the internal governmental and property rights of monastic communities, and their theoretical emancipation from secular meddling.

In further regard to the secular legal position of monastic institutions within Wihtred’s Kent, it is necessary to note that though the king released religious communities from certain taxation and secular interference, he did demand from them *honorem et oboedientiam*, which as Barbara Yorke has alluded, could have included monetary payments.\(^{39}\) Indeed, Boniface received complaints from the Kentish abbess Eangyth who lamented over the poverty of her house and the material consequences of the *servitium* owed to the Kentish king and queen.\(^{40}\) In regards to the possibility of such temporal demands upon a religious community, two specific monastic

\(^{38}\) Bede, “Bede’s Letter to Egbert,” in Farmer, 345.

\(^{39}\) Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, 52.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
characteristics are of particular importance. The first being, that given the popularity of aristocratic monastic foundation increased to such a high degree in the eighth-century that Bede felt the need to speak against the careless distribution of royal lands for monastic communities, it is evident that at least in the eyes of the Northumbrian nobility, the benefits attached to the establishment of a religious community outweighed the disadvantages. Either the Northumbrian royal house did not require monetary *honorem et oboedientiam* or the payment required, whatever its form, was less than that required of secular houses.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly in regards to the abbess’s complaint, communities under the jurisdiction of an abbess, that is a nunnery, operated within a different social dynamic than those communities of their male counterparts. Abbesses, those in control of the double houses that included male and female religious, most often ruled their monastic holdings through a broader family nexus whereby their patrons understood the institutions as valuable in promoting the interests of themselves or the broader kin-group.\(^{41}\) The abbess’s situation then, differed from that of the communities founded by male thegns and nobles. Where abbesses generally belonged to a ruling kin-group, kings made claims of lordship over royal nunneries by virtue of their relation.\(^{42}\) In Eangyth’s situation then it must be noted that *honorem et oboedientiam* very well could have assumed an altogether separate definition in another kingdom, as well as the fact that what was asked of male communities and of royal nunneries differed. Nunneries remained in close proximity to royal dynastic politics and maintained a dissimilar social relationship than those monastic communities that solely supported men. That is not to suggest that male only communities did not suffer when they lost the favor of a king or the


\(^{42}\) Ibid., 52.
support of a patron, but that their dependence assumed an altogether different character. Nevertheless, despite specific instances of expected social or economic tribute, usually applicable to royally patronized double houses, it remains that monastic communities of the seventh and early eighth centuries in general, from their foundation, expected and received a consequential degree of civic and ecclesiastic obligatory emancipation, and occupied a distinct position within contemporary Anglo-Saxon society.

**Monastic Rules**

In seventh-century England both religious and secular authorities recognized the founder of a religious community as possessing inherent rights in the subsequent development of their landed monastic possession, rights often pertaining to the future hereditary inheritance of monastic property and the acquisition and organization of monastic lands into novel communal associations. The alienation of hereditary land privileges however, did less to differentiate a monastic community from a secular household than the internal regulatory rule a religious institution adopted upon its foundation, which ultimately defined the identity of an institution and proved the principle aspect that distinguished the religious from the laity. A monastic founder, in acquiring a donation of alienated landed property, therefore possessed the salient responsibility of selecting and or creating the religious rule with which their monastic brothers and sisters would regulate the daily order of their lives and their community, as a whole, would identify itself as an institution. No standard or broadly accepted monastic rule existed in seventh- and eighth-century England, and the rules of most contemporary religious communities were

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conglomerate in nature. The character and rule of a religious community deeply mirrored the subjective influences of its founder and their subsequent administration, which naturally precipitated a comparative variety of monastic forms. The prerogative of monastic founders and subsequent abbots to internally regulate their religious communities serves to evince both the significant authority of monastic heads, as well as the innate internal autonomy in their ability to define a community’s social existence.

The initial land endowment of a prospective community produced the environment through which an abbot proved capable of defining the rules by which the entire community would live their lives. In adopting a religious manner of life, a potential monk inherently acquiesced to live under the specific organizational rule of a given community upon their formal monastic ingression. In this respect, a community’s founding abbot or abbess wielded a considerable power to define the social lives of numerous subsequent brothers and sisters. The scope of an abbot’s legislative power largely depended upon the size of a community’s monastic holdings and the immensity of a primary institution’s abbatial association with other communities, both of which in several instances could be quite expansive. Contemporary literature demonstrates various monastic leaders such as Wilfrid, Hild, Biscop, Eata, and Ceolfrith as directly controlling and administering, or nominally exerting personal influence over, multiple communities at a variety of geographic locations, and thereby extending the practical boundaries of their abbatial authority. The formation of monastic property networks therefore enabled the dissemination of the monastic organizational structure established and

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45 Ibid., 52.

46 Blair, The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society, 81.

47 Foot, Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600-900, 49.
maintained by the various communities’ shared patron, which could consequently determine the customs of individual monastics and collective religious communities over hundreds of miles.\textsuperscript{48} Within such a context, the decision to establish or create a particular rule could accordingly affect hundreds of lives, across hundreds of miles, through several kingdoms.

A great many early Anglo-Saxon monastic institutions sought to incorporate particular aspects of multiple existing monastic traditions into their own composite mixed rule;\textsuperscript{49} the most noteworthy example being the community founded by Benedict Biscop at Wearmouth and Jarrow. Though there is evidence to suggest that the communities at Wearmouth and Jarrow initially developed as distinct and at least partially individual monastic institutions,\textsuperscript{50} it appears likely that Jarrow, upon initial foundation or shortly thereafter, adhered to the same religious rule established by Biscop in his establishment of Wearmouth.\textsuperscript{51} Biscop’s was a composite rule, in which the abbot called upon several other extant continental rules for guidance and inspiration.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, by the time of Wearmouth’s foundation, Biscop had already completed three separate journeys to Rome, and returned each time with new knowledge of the faith, as well as physical treasures such as books and relics.\textsuperscript{53} Upon returning from his first journey to Rome, Bede states

\begin{footnotes}
\item[48] Blair, \textit{The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society}, 83.
\item[51] “The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith,” 217. The anonymous hagiographer makes a noticeable effort to state that Ceolfrith continued to maintain Biscop’s monastic rule upon ascending to the abbacy of Jarrow. The author’s subsequent insistence that Ceolfrith personally corrected young monastics not yet knowledgeable of the community’s rule further suggests, at the very least, that the two communities had come to operate under the same rule by the writer’s own time.
\item[53] Bede, “Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,” 192. Bede states that Benedict departed for his fourth trip to Rome shortly after establishing the monastic rule of Wearmouth.
\end{footnotes}
in his *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* that Biscop “devoted himself wholeheartedly and unceasingly to making known as widely as possible the forms of church life which he had seen in Rome.”\(^{54}\) Biscop’s desire for continental instruction continued, with Bede recording that during his third journey to the holy city the abbot “brought back a large number of books on all branches of sacred knowledge.”\(^{55}\) Thus with three separate journeys to Rome before the initial foundation of the monastic community at Wearmouth, Biscop is presented by Bede as having possessed extensive knowledge of church organization as well as insights into contemporary continental Christian thought and teaching. The anonymous author of the *History of Abbot Ceolfrith* additionally states that Benedict “often used to say that he had learnt the rule which he taught from seventeen ancient monasteries, and whatever he had found most valuable anywhere he had (as it were) hidden in his inmost heart and brought back to Britain and delivered to us to be followed.”\(^{56}\) The decision as to what was most beneficial and advantageous within the extant continental traditions remained the sole prerogative of Biscop, despite his successor Ceolfrith’s possible assistance in establishing the community at Wearmouth.\(^{57}\) Ceolfrith’s anonymous historian appears careful as to not give Ceolfrith too much credit in aiding Biscop with the foundation of Wearmouth; consistently presenting Ceolfrith’s role as supportive to Biscop who, although he obtained a reliable companion, “did not need his [Ceolfrith’s] teaching for his own instruction as, having travelled overseas many times to Gaul, Italy, and the Islands, he had already acquired detailed knowledge of the statutes of long

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 188.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 190.


\(^{57}\) Ibid.
established monasteries.” Ceolfrith “would strengthen monastic observance by equal zeal for doctrine,” but the application of such observances, by which the community would structure their religious lives, remained the overall privilege and responsibility of Benedict Biscop as the institution’s founder.

An abbot’s proprietary authority to establish the religious rule of a given religious community contrasted with the collective protest coenobitic monks exercised in response to a perceived overzealous application of communal regulations. Opposition and hostility on behalf of a community’s seemingly non-administrative population posits the practical limitations of abbatial institutional authority and demonstrates the persistence of a communal awareness of its own collective autonomy in contrast to abbatial sovereignty. In joining a monastic community, individual monks consciously accepted a particular manner of living expressed through the internal regulation of a community’s rule; however, it is clear through the experiences of monastic leaders such as Ceolfrith and Cuthbert, that coenobitic members retained a collective sense of self-determining protest in response to a severe application of monastic regulation. As prior of the community of Wearmouth in the absence of Benedict Biscop, Ceolfrith suffered from “the bitter attacks of certain noblemen who could not endure regular discipline.” Thus, in absence of any authority Biscop’s person may have commanded, dissatisfied nobles found their opportunity to express either their jealousies or their unwillingness to capitulate to stringent discipline. Whether fueled by envy of position or regulatory discontent, the attacks appear to

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 216.
have been sufficiently truculent as to drive Ceolfrith to abandon his monastic position and return to his previous community at Ripon.\textsuperscript{61}

Despite the possibility that at least some degree of communal discontent arose from personal jealousies, the resistance of communal monks to the strict enforcement and implementation of institutional regulations is not exceptional to the community at Wearmouth. During his tenure as prior of Lindisfarne, St. Cuthbert’s attempt to persuade his contemporaries to accept a structured monastic rule, rather than the traditional customs of that particular community, incurred substantial bitterness from his fellow brethren.\textsuperscript{62} Bede’s statement that some monks “preferred to conform to their older usage rather than to the monastic rule”\textsuperscript{63} suggests that those living out of conformity with the community’s rule were doing so explicitly. St. Wilfrid, in addition to Cuthbert, may have instigated conflict at Lindisfarne during his temporary administration of that see, either by his implementation of a strict Benedictine observance or in attempting to circumvent the traditional authority the abbot exercised within Lindisfarne and its community.\textsuperscript{64} The monks at Lindisfarne may indeed have found the organized tradition of the Benedictine rule overbearing, and it is worth noting that Ceolfrith’s initial institution after Gilling was Wilfrid’s own Ripon, where he would have learned the Benedictine rule well. Ceolfrith’s knowledge of the structured Benedictine doctrine may certainly have influenced his understanding of Biscop’s own rule, a development that may have contributed to the arousal of disdain among the noble monks of Wearmouth. Such examples of

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\item\textsuperscript{61} “The Anonymous History of Abbot of Ceolfrith,” 216.
\item\textsuperscript{62} Stancliffe, “Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary,” 33.
\item\textsuperscript{64} Foley, \textit{Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus’ Life of Bishop Wilfrid, an Early English Saints’ Life}, 109-110.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
monastic resistance to regulatory enforcement are fundamentally of a different character than those of the monasteries admonished by Bede in his letter to Egbert, for his attacks center upon monasteries that seemingly hold no rule at all and adhere to no real monastic way of life.\textsuperscript{65} Both Biscop’s community and that of Lindisfarne undoubtedly operated under the direction of a communal rule; however, the monastic brethren of those communities nevertheless proved hesitant in accepting unexpected adaptations to past traditions, or outright resistant to the strict application of prevailing regulations.

Accordingly, while the abbatial authority to regulate the organizational life of a community appears to have been theoretically plenary, the protests of monastic members in response to strict regulation reveal the social limits of internal abbatial authority. It is interesting however, that in almost every case of monastic dissent, the dissatisfied party directs their complaints towards a monastic authority subservient to the community’s abbot, rather than the abbots themselves. The Wearmouth brethren resist Ceolfrith’s attempt to enforce monastic regulation precisely when Biscop is absent abroad. The monastics of Lindisfarne cast insults at Cuthbert, not Eata. Even the resistance to Wilfrid, as acting bishop of Lindisfarne following Cuthbert’s death, most likely resulted from his position as an un-appointed outside authority. In this respect, there appears to be at least some degree of social convention or deference to hierarchy governing the complaints of dissatisfied monastics, with disheartened brethren recognizing the authority of abbots in congruence with the understood responsibilities of priors as enforcers of monastic policy. Contemporary historic and hagiographic accounts depict monastics, at the very least, as having voiced their dissent through certain socially appropriate channels. Their dissent however, whether contributive to successful alleviation or not,

\textsuperscript{65} Bede, “Bede’s Letter to Egbert,” 344.
illuminates their own communal autonomy through their limiting of abbatial regulatory authority. The resistance of monastic brethren to the strict enforcement of a communal rule suggests that individual monastics maintained expectations of how their religious lives should progress, and that when reality significantly delineated from such expectation, internal channels existed for expressions of opposition.

A final point in regards to communal resistance to monastic authority concerns those assaulted for their attempt to implement monastic order and regulation; they are all posthumously remembered as saints. Subsequent writers such as Bede, and the respective anonymous authors of both Cuthbert’s hagiography and Ceolfrith’s History endeavored to reveal the sanctity of their subjects; yet both Bede and Ceolfrith’s anonymous historian chronicle the abuses their subjects suffered for the sake of proper teaching. Thus, while monastic brethren seemingly possessed avenues for self-deterministic opposition against abbatial or delegated monastic authority, the literary context of their resistance suggests a rejection of saintly instruction. Bede supplements the anonymous author’s allusion to Cuthbert’s virtue and authority as legislator of Lindisfarne’s novel rule of monastic life through his recollection of the brethren’s initial hostility to Cuthbert’s administrative modifications. Bede’s addition, if not entirely conducive to the reality of the situation, certainly suggests that the enforcement of monastic rules, as well as the subsequent fraternal persecution, were admittedly saintly endeavors. Nor in Ceolfrith’s History are the discontented brethren given warrant for their ferocious dissent, as Biscop swiftly travels to Ripon in order to convince Ceolfrith to return to his community at Wearmouth. Upon Ceolfrith’s return to Wearmouth, the anonymous historian


states that he and Biscop “sedulously continued all they had begun in the foundation and organization of this monastery.”68 The continuation of the organizational practices of the community unequivocally justifies Ceolfrith’s previous attempts to enforce monastic discipline while simultaneously discrediting the actions of the brethren whose attacks prompted Ceolfrith to depart. While communal dissent may represent an expression of practical autonomy among the brethren of a community, Benedict Biscop’s justification of Ceolfrith’s practices suggests an enhanced theoretical authority for Ceolfrith as his actions acquired abbatial approval. The holy memory that developed around both Ceolfrith and Cuthbert posits a continuity in their monastic authority, an authority that ascribed itself to the priors’ past actions in light of the contemporary knowledge of their sanctity. Monastic brethren may resist the demands of communal regulation, but contemporaries present their actions as illegitimate, with the severity of their priors vindicated through their posthumous sanctification.

Despite the occasional instances of coenobitic dissent, seventh-and-eighth-century abbots nevertheless exercised a considerable degree of influence over their institutions and landed properties. The degree to which Wilfrid proved able to export the Benedictine rule to which he adhered, in contrast to personally manufactured mixed rule, speaks to the wide range of his monastic authority and abbatial autonomy. Wilfrid’s initial application of the Benedictine rule to his own community follows his return to Ripon after a lengthy consecration in Gaul in around 665 A.D.69 Upon his return to Northumbria, and discovering his promised see under the administration of Bishop Chad, Wilfrid applied his energies to the governance of his community at Ripon; where, “by introducing the rule of St. Benedict, he greatly improved the ordinances of

the churches of God.” Wilfrid’s affinity for the rule of St. Benedict is unsurprising given the degree of continental exposure Wilfrid experienced by 665 A.D., as the abbot received both his consecration and tonsure abroad,\(^71\) in addition to having traveled once already to Rome. Wilfrid’s continental experiences fostered a lifetime affection towards apostolic authority and tradition, with the young abbot being sufficiently competent in knowledge of Roman teaching by 664 A.D. for Agilbert to appoint him speaker of the Roman party at the synod of Whitby.\(^72\)

Wilfrid’s adoption of a continental monastic tradition, in lieu of a domestic composite creation, is thus in congruence with the degree of exposure the young abbot had to the authority and fashions of continental Christianity. Frankish and Roman Christianity influenced Wilfrid extensively, as Eddius presents Wilfrid as being particularly uncompromising in his adherence to Roman precedent in comparison to his secular and religious contemporaries. In his travels to Rome and Lyons specifically, Wilfrid witnessed firsthand a continental tradition of episcopal authority that transcended boundaries of secular and religious differentiation.\(^73\) Powerful continental clergy such as Archbishop Annemundus of Lyons would influence Wilfrid’s future self-identification as a bishop, instilling in him the conviction that his episcopal office had been divinely inspired and sanctioned.\(^74\) It is Wilfrid’s episcopal self-identification along continental standards, as well as the strictness with which he sought to enforce Roman canon, that brought the Northumbrian bishop into direct conflict with contemporary secular and religious authorities in England, where bishops in no way possessed the political authority and power equivalent to

\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 13-15. Wilfrid received his tonsure from the Archbishop of Lyons around A.D. 655-58.

\(^{72}\) Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 188.

\(^{73}\) Foley, *Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus’ Life of Bishop Wilfrid, an Early English Saints’ Life*, 75.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 75-76.
that of their continental colleagues. While Northumbrian kings and perhaps Archbishop Theodore remained content to adhere nominally to the canons, Wilfrid would settle for no less than their complete observance, with an ultimate judicial deference to the see of Rome.\footnote{Ibid., 48.}

Wilfrid’s application of the rule of St. Benedict within the monastic communities under his hegemony generated significant repercussions for the broader development of Anglo-Saxon monasticism. While never assuming the role of spiritual guide or confessor as an abbot,\footnote{Ibid., 64.} Wilfrid nonetheless created an association of monastic communities that transcended political boundaries and consequently proselytized the rule of St. Benedict, bringing knowledge and adherence of the continental rule to numerous houses in both Northumbria and Mercia.\footnote{Blair, The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society, 97.} There is no way of knowing how ardently the communities under Wilfrid’s hegemony applied the Benedictine rule in its entirety to their daily orderings, though it is evident that Wilfrid exercised a nominal headship over his abbots, as his monastic subordinates turned to him for both guidance and the management of their worldly affairs.\footnote{Foot, Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600-900, 263.} As Wilfrid refused to tailor church discipline and convention in the secular realm,\footnote{Foley, Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus’ Life of Bishop Wilfrid, an Early English Saints’ Life, 83.} it is difficult to believe he would have tolerated the flagrant disregard of the Benedictine rule in his own monastic realm, had he been aware of such a discrepancy. Throughout his career, Wilfrid often found himself absent from his primary power base at Ripon while preoccupied in struggles with secular authorities. Nevertheless, there is no record of abbots or monastic brethren within Wilfrid’s communal network balking at his rule’s application in a manner similar to Cuthbert’s experience at Lindisfarne or Ceolfrith’s at
Wearmouth. Wilfrid’s strict application of canons created conflict within the secular sphere, but other than his brief authority over Lindisfarne, he appears to have made no waves within his own monastic holdings. It is certainly possible that if such a conflict arose, Eddius explicitly edited the memory out of his hagiographical work. Conflict between monastic authorities and errant brethren may certainly impress a saintly endeavor of correction; an endeavor Eddius may have sought to justify in his attempt to posit the sanctity of his own patron.

**Abbot Election**

The communal election of a new ruling abbot assumed various forms in seventh-and-eighth-century England. The considerable variation of customs governing abbatial appointment largely depended upon the variances between a given community’s patron or founder, avowed purpose, political relationship, and financial state of affairs. Apart from the double houses which operated under the superintendence of a royal abbess, the assorted contemporary methods of abbatial selection, to varying degrees, imply a level of monastic autonomy relative to a community’s relationship to external secular, or even religious, authority. It appears as though many communities at least initially delegated abbatial power hereditarily through the familial relations of an institution’s initial leader, seemingly in accordance with the succession practices of contemporary secular households.80 Patrick Wormald convincingly reveals the degree to which contemporary concepts of nobility dominated the “thought-world” of seventh-and-eighth-century abbots and bishops,81 and the near total overlap of abbatial status and aristocratic ancestry alludes to the fact. Within a context so heavily saturated with concepts of heroic aristocratic behavior, it is easy to conceptualize John Blair’s suggestion that the aristocratic

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81 Wormald, *The Times of Bede*, 53.
monastics understood themselves as occupying the position of thegn-abbot, and expecting all the familial hereditary succession rights such a position naturally entailed. The degree to which non-hereditary succession practices prevailed often depended upon the disposition of a community’s initial founder in accordance with the faithful adherence to a regulatory rule which provisioned alternative succession methods, such as communal election. Despite the multiplicity of monastic methods of abbatial selection, each imply a degree of institutional autonomy whereby the matter of monastic leadership was concluded, at least within male communities, internally. Regardless of whether an abbot consolidated power within their familial kin-group, designated an heir apparent, or sanctioned an internal communal election, the monastic community itself accomplished the final adjudication of abbatial succession.

The actions of various seventh-and-eighth-century abbots who, in preparation of their death or departure, seemingly exercise a degree of authority over the future of their community in such a manner as to parallel that of a noble in selecting an heir to a secular household, attests to the continuity of secular aristocratic identity present within the self-understanding of early English monastics. The case is perhaps best exemplified by Wilfrid of Ripon who, upon falling ill and sensing his end, summoned to Ripon two abbots in addition to six friends for the purpose of discussing his will. Following the intimate discussion, Eddius states that Wilfrid appointed Tatberht, his kinsman, as future abbot of Ripon, operating as co-abbot during Wilfrid’s lifetime and sole abbot after Wilfrid’s death. Eddius thus presents Wilfrid as possessing absolute authority in choosing who should rule his community at Ripon following his death. Aside from

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82 Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 104.

83 Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 137

84 Ibid., 137-139
the familial connection between Wilfrid and Tatberht, Eddius’ account of Wilfrid’s delegation of authority over the abbey of Hexham to Acca parallels Tatberht’s acquisition of Ripon.\textsuperscript{85} This assertion by Eddius is curious as Archbishop Theodore elevated Hexham to a bishopric in 678 A.D. when he successfully split the Northumbrian diocese.\textsuperscript{86} The community at Hexham continued to function as a see up to Wilfrid’s restoration in 706 A.D. Additionally, Bede states that following the synod of Nidd, “it was generally agreed that Wilfrid should be restored to the bishopric of his own church.”\textsuperscript{87} Thus as Hexham continued to function as a bishopric, it would have seemingly been out of Wilfrid’s control as to who should inherit the see after his death.

Wilfrid’s own restoration to the see Hexham and the reinstatement of his Northumbrian monastic possessions depended on the combined agreement of archbishop Bertwald and the Northumbrian king Osred; a consensus revealed as necessary through both Wilfrid’s depositions as well as his episcopal replacements.

Wilfrid’s turbulent career in particular gives credence to the necessity of both royal and archiepiscopal acquiescence in regards to lasting episcopal installation. In contrast to mere secular approval, Archbishop Theodore consecrated all subsequent bishops installed in Northumbria immediately following Wilfrid’s exile in 678 A.D.: Bosa bishop of Deira, Eata bishop of Bernicia, Eadhaed bishop of Lindsey (later Ripon), Tunbert bishop of Hexham, and Trumwine bishop of the Picts under Northumbrian suzerainty.\textsuperscript{88} Archbishop Theodore additionally performed Cuthbert’s consecration to Hexham at York in the presence of the

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 141.

\textsuperscript{86} Bede, \textit{Ecclesiastical History of the English People}, 224.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 306

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 224-225.
Northumbrian King Ecgfrith. Thus, Wilfrid’s role in Acca’s supposed advancement initially appears peculiar. Acca’s acquisition of merely the abbacy of Hexham can be understood as solely Wilfrid’s decision, in a manner similar to the bishop’s bestowal of Ripon to Tatberht, as he himself initially founded the monastic community and had since regained his practical abbatial status following the synod of Nidd. Wilfrid’s promotion of Acca to abbatial authority is not equivalent however, to the latter’s investment with the episcopacy of Hexham. Eddius states that following the death of Wilfrid, Hexham accepted Acca as “the abbot who had been appointed [by Wilfrid].” This statement by Eddius is open to multiple interpretations. The first is that the community, in adherence to Benedictine teaching, felt that they possessed the right to elect their own abbot, and with Wilfrid being their founder and current abbot, accepted his nominee. When comparing Hexham with Wilfrid’s other prized possession at Ripon, it is unlikely that the monastic community at Hexham had any choice in who their next abbot would be, or that they necessarily objected to Wilfrid’s authority in the matter. Just as Wilfrid chose Tatberht as his successor at Ripon, he too presumably chose Acca his successor at Hexham in the same manner. What is far more plausible and ever more likely is that when Eddius states the community accepted Acca as Wilfrid’s appointee, he is in reality referring to Acca’s consecration as bishop of Hexham. In such a circumstance, it would not have been the community at Hexham that obliged to accept Acca’s leadership, but rather Archbishop Bertwald and Northumbrian King Osred. Wilfrid very well may have suggested Acca succeed him as bishop of Hexham, but Wilfrid had no authority in actuality to necessitate such a power transfer. Acca’s ultimate consecration should not be surprising however, as Archbishop Bertwald and

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89 Ibid., 259.

90 Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid, 141
King Osred both presided over Wilfrid’s own reinstatement at Nidd; though apostolic pressure coerced Berhtwald into friendship with Wilfrid, and Osred, being a child upon his coronation, presumably followed the advice of Berhtfrith who spoke on the king’s behalf at the synod.\footnote{Ibid., 131. Berhtfrith spoke directly after Ælfflæd in Eddius’s account of the synod of Nidd. He pronounced the king and earls’ will that the deceased King Aldfrith’s wishes be honored regarding the reinstallation of Wilfrid to the position of bishop, as well as the restoration of his Northumbrian property.} That Acca ultimately succeeded Wilfrid to the bishopric of Hexham plausibly demonstrates Wilfrid’s continuing social influence in Northumbrian monastic politics, as well as suggesting an adequate degree of reconciliation between the aging bishop and secular authorities.

At the time of his death Wilfrid additionally felt compelled to provide for the future of the various monastic communities he helped found in Mercia. In regards to the monastic holdings he nominally possessed in Mercia, Wilfrid stated his desire that the community accept as abbot “whosoever my witnesses... shall come and announce to you.”\footnote{Ibid., 139.} Thus in establishing an abbatial council for the purposes of deciding the leadership of his Mercian community, Wilfrid displays his own personal authority in relation to monastic power delegation against the theoretical communal authority of his institutions to determine abbatial succession. In exerting his own authority as monastic founder and head, Wilfrid reveals his unwillingness to permit those communities under his hegemony to operate within full accordance of Benedictine tradition, a tradition that explicitly allows for communal abbot election.\footnote{D. H. Farmer, “Saint Wilfrid,” in \textit{Saint Wilfrid at Hexham}, ed. D. P. Kirby (Newcastle upon Tyne: Oriel Press, 1974), 57.} Regarding the succession of abbots within a coenobitic community, the Benedictine rule directly states:

\begin{quote}
In the appointment of an abbot, the guiding principle should always be that the person appointed should be the one chosen unanimously by the whole congregation in the fear of
\end{quote}
God, or even by minority, however small, of the community if they will make the more sensible decision. 94

The manner in which Eddius recalls Wilfrid’s delegation is, while appearing consistent to some degree with the Benedictine principle of minority selection, nevertheless rather ambiguous. After a meeting, at which Wilfrid declared Tatberht his successor to Ripon, “a bell was run at the command of our bishop and the whole community at Ripon gathered together.” 95 Following the announcement of his decision to depart for Mercia, Wilfrid states that he has given the present witnesses, the two abbots, Tibba and Ebba, a priest Tatberht, and a certain Hathufrith and a Master Alnhfrith, power to elect a novel abbot. 96 Over what community their elected abbot may rule, Eddius does not say. The context of the council, in addition to Eddius’ comments in his vita of Wilfrid, suggest that the community resides in Mercia, with Eddius recalling Wilfrid’s appointment of Tatberht heir to Ripon in the preceding chapter, while positing Acca’s nomination to the abbacy of Hexham in the succeeding. Whether Wilfrid intended the Mercian appointee to head a single community or expected them to replace himself as nominal head of his Mercian monastic network is unclear. Eddius’ description of Wilfrid’s behavior regarding the future leadership of his monastic communities suggests however, that both Wilfrid, and Eddius himself, understood the Mercian communities established through Wilfrid’s leadership to be his monastic “heirs,” and therefore subject to his personal authority. Thus, while in Mercia Eddius states:

he [Wilfrid] repeated the above-mentioned will at length to certain of them and for each of them in due proportion he either increased the livelihood of their monks by gifts of


95 Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 139.

96 Ibid.
land, or rejoiced their hearts with money, as though, endowed with the spirit of prophecy, he were sharing his inheritance among his heirs before his death.\textsuperscript{97}

Wilfrid apparently maintained a great deal of wealth that he desired to distribute in Mercia. The evidence may be too sparse to speculate as to whether Wilfrid’s witnesses saw to the installation of one abbot or several, but it is explicit that Wilfrid regarded the Mercian houses that he founded as his in that he felt the need to provide for their wellbeing in light of his coming death.

Wilfrid’s example as founder choosing an individual as abbot to succeed himself as head of a given religious community, often along familial hereditary lines, may not have been uncommon in early English monasticism. The adamancy with which Benedict Biscop demanded his community elect future abbots on the basis of their virtue rather than “rank or family influence”\textsuperscript{98} suggests that at least some of his monastic brethren may have understood ancestral affluence as a perfectly legitimate standard through which an abbot should be selected. Prior to his death, Biscop consistently expressed his own abbatial authority through his appointment of temporary co-abbots to share in the monastic responsibility and authority inherent in the maintenance of his communities at Wearmouth and Jarrow. Bede states that Benedict’s frequent travels abroad necessitated a delegation of abbatial power within his communities, as Biscop’s absences prevented him from participating in the daily governance of the institutions.\textsuperscript{99} It is within such a context that Biscop appoints his cousin Eosterwine abbot of Wearmouth and Ceolfrith abbot of Jarrow.\textsuperscript{100} Eosterwine’s co-rule of Wearmouth was brief, with the abbot dying of plague not long after his appointment by Biscop. Sigfrith was chosen to succeed Eosterwine as

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 141

\textsuperscript{98} Bede, “Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,” 198.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 194.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 196.
co-abbot, though the manner of his appointment sharply contrasted to that of both his predecessor and Ceolfrith; with Bede, as well as the anonymous writer of Ceolfrith’s History, stating that due to Biscop’s absence, the community itself elected Sigfrith abbot rather than wait for a more authoritative appointment from Biscop. Thus in the absence of abbatial authority the community at Wearmouth, with the aid of Ceolfrith at Jarrow, asserted its internal autonomy in the election of a novel abbot. It is perhaps the success of Sigfrith’s monastic election, as much as the influence of Benedictine tradition, which inspired in Biscop a confidence in his communities to successfully elect future leaders. While Ceolfrith and Eosterwine owed their positions as abbots solely to Benedict’s authority as founder, the nature of their elevation nevertheless differed in character in comparison to those abbots selected by Wilfrid to inherit his communities. Certainly Eosterwine’s familial connections to Biscop, similar to Wilfrid’s relation to Tatberht, highlights the primacy with which familial associations pervaded the social thought of seventh-century monastics. Wilfrid’s abbatial selection however, related to the bishop’s deteriorating health and therefore represented a desire for the permanent appointment of monastic heirs. Conversely, the appointment of Ceolfrith and Eosterwine by Biscop materialized out of the necessity for daily monastic guidance founded on the reality of Benedict’s frequent travels abroad. Thus, the co-abbots Biscop appointed may best be understood as his monastic lieutenants or co-rulers while he was absent from the community on missions to the king or Rome.

When prompted by illness to consider the future management of his communities at Wearmouth and Jarrow, Benedict Biscop maintains his own abbatial authority while

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simultaneously legitimizing the concerns of his monastic brethren and attempting to provide direction for future abbot election. In Benedict’s final delegation of abbatial power, his recorded statements seem to suggest an expectation that the communities would in the future possess the responsibility and autonomy to select their own abbot. Prior to his death, Benedict selected Ceolfrith as his successor and appointed him abbot of both the communities of Wearmouth and Jarrow; however, both Bede and the anonymous author of Ceolfrith’s History state that Biscop first solidified his delegation of power through consultation with Sigfrith and the other monastics of the communities.103 Biscop’s appointment at least theoretically considered the will of his communal brethren. While Eddius comparatively presents Wilfrid as having met with various monastic companions when considering how best to divide his monastic holdings, such consultation concerned a select few, namely those close to Wilfrid in terms of kinship or those already maintaining a position of authority within his vast network. The manner in which Biscop appointed Ceolfrith seemingly maintains a greater degree of communal acceptance than does Wilfrid’s more oligarchical appointment. Bede presents Biscop as being almost fearful of familial interference in regards to future abbot elections and records him as insisting incessantly:

that in electing an abbot upright life and soundness of doctrine were to be the prime considerations, not rank or family influence.104

Bede additionally records an even further affirmation of future monastic autonomy in quoting Biscop:

According to the rule of the great St Benedict, our founder, and according to the decretals of privileges of this house, you are to meet as a body and take common counsel to discover who has proved himself fittest and most worthy by the probity of his life and the wisdom of his teaching to carry out the duties of this office.105

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105 Ibid.
The adamancy with which Bede specifically records Biscop’s decision to exclude rank and kinship as abbatial qualifications may ultimately pertain to both Biscop’s relationship to his external or secular kin, as well as Bede’s own continuing attempts to secure the monastic autonomy of Jarrow in addition to propagating the community’s prestige.\[106\]

While it is certainly true that several members of Biscop’s communities, such as Eosterwine or Ceolfrith, shared ties of kinship with Benedict, Ceolfrith’s anonymous historian states the abbot additionally possessed a “physical brother who was very close by blood but far distant from him in mind because of the emptiness of his heart.”\[107\] Bede’s reiteration of Biscop’s desire that future abbatial elections be conducted devoid of ancestral consideration may be due to the existence of Benedict’s brother, and the great detail conveyed within Bede’s account may have sought to prevent Biscop’s external kin from positing an inherited claim upon the communities, while simultaneously attempting to inhibit the communal monks from electing a blood relation of Biscop’s that was “far distant from him in mind.” Thus the meritocratic election of an abbot in the wake of Biscop’s death does not appear to have been a forgone conclusion, with Ian Wood suggesting the existence of a faction within Wearmouth itself favoring the ascension of Biscop’s external brother.\[108\] Bede and the anonymous author’s recurrent concern with familial-based abbatial election appears to suggest that those most adamantly challenging the communities’ monastic rights were Biscop’s external kin, and it is certainly possible that Benedict’s brother desired to inherit Biscop’s monastic possessions on the grounds that they

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belonged to the family.\(^{109}\) Thus the development of an internal self-determination expressed through the communities’ ability to elect an abbot from among their monastic brethren may have been the result of Biscop’s successors’ struggle in maintaining internal monastic autonomy from Benedict’s rapacious kin. While the abbacy of Eosterwine may constitute the early dominance of Biscop’s family over the communities of Wearmouth and Jarrow,\(^{110}\) the acquiescence of Biscop or Ceolfrith, following the former’s death, to theoretical communal autonomy in subsequent abbatial election, appears to be at least partially in response to Biscop’s familial opponents and therefore in defense of internal monastic autonomy. Through the communities’ adherence to Benedictine orthodoxy in regards to abbatial election, the communities may have ensured continued independence from Biscop’s external or non-monastic kin. The degree of self-governance expressed during the elections of Ceolfrith, and more thoroughly in the succeeding election of Hwaetberht, promoted the communities’ internal self-determination and further removed the institution from external familial interference. Both Bede and the anonymous author of Ceolfrith’s *History* state that the collective members of Wearmouth and Jarrow elected Ceolfrith’s successor in the absence of Ceolfrith himself, who had already retired his abbacy and departed for Rome.\(^{111}\) Bede states that in deciding to retire to Rome Ceolfrith:

> turned the matter over in his mind a long while and finally decided that it would be better were the brethren to choose, as the decree of their privilege and the Rule of St Benedict [of Nursia] laid down, one from among themselves who was more suitable to be abbot.\(^ {112}\)

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 87.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 88.


\(^{112}\) Bede, “Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,” 204.
Bede reiterates that the communities’ monastic right to elect a subsequent leader from among its existing brethren devoid of any deference to kinship is a legitimate consequence of its adherence to continental monastic tradition. While much of Bede’s rhetoric concerning the immense orthodoxy of Wearmouth and Jarrow arose out of an ideal of monastic competition, in this particular instance, Bede’s expressions of monastic conformity appear to develop out of an attempt to weaken the ownership claims of Biscop’s external kin.

Monastic communities of the seventh and eighth centuries thus possessed various methods through which one monastic leader transferred abbatial power to another. The circumstances surrounding each community’s foundation, as well as the contemporary familial and political environments extant during a community’s abbatial transition, each contributed to the condition and character of a novel monastic leader’s selection and elevation. Wilfrid, despite his lengthy adherence to the continental rule of St. Benedict, ultimately refused to allow those communities within his hegemony to communally elect their subsequent leader. Benedict Biscop’s rule, at least partially conditioned by the existence of familial contentions, provided for a greater degree of autonomy among the monastics of Wearmouth and Jarrow in regards to the selection of their new monastic head. The ability of coenobitic monastics to at least theoretically select a new abbot on the basis of merit rather than ties of kinship contributed to the development of a novel collective autonomy expressed within monastic participation. The extent to which Wilfrid maintained abbatial control over his communities’ futures, as well as the probable heritable pretensions of Biscop’s brother suggest that those communities which adhered to Benedictine notions of abbatial election expressed a degree of internal autonomy unknown or foreign to the contemporary Anglo-Saxon secular nobility. That the members of Biscop’s

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monastic communities selected a man of aristocratic background as their succeeding abbot need not diminish the autonomy inherent in their selection. Most if not all of the intimate members of a given monastic institution would most likely have been of noble birth, and the selection of an aristocratic leader would have been obvious. Nevertheless, the insistence with which Wearmouth and Jarrow’s literary tradition proposes the meritocratic election of future abbots establishes a necessary degree of collective autonomy in the election of both Ceolfrith and Hwaetberht. That merit, in comparison to mere heredity, proved a worthy consideration when discussing the eligibility of a novel abbot, supposes a level of self-determination among at least some members of a religious community. Wilfrid’s familial and oligarchic partitions speak to the bishop’s vast personal authority over the monastic properties within his network. Conversely, those communities that participated in abbatial election, or at the very least acquiesce to abbatial appointment, expressed a collective autonomy as a social and religious unit. Whichever model a community conditionally operated within, early English monasticism necessitated the development of a novel level of internal autonomy, either condensed within the monastic abbot or founder, or expressed collectively within an institution, or communal network.
CHAPTER III

INDIVIDUAL TEMPORAL AUTONOMY AND AUTHORITY

In this chapter I argue that seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monastic participation occasioned an intensified personal autonomy in relation to the character of an individual’s social existence, in addition to expanding the opportunities for individual self-determination within both the context of coenobitic monasticism as well as contemporary secular and political society. I particularly consider the degree to which individual monastics proved capable of determining the nature of their social lives through their ability to choose between disparate monastic institutions. Prior to the Regularis Concordia of the tenth-century,¹ no standard rule of monastic observance found general acceptance among the institutions of the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The variety of religious rules within early Anglo-Saxon monastic communities engendered an opportunity for incipient monastics to select a social environment according to their personal inclinations, with some monastics, such as Ceolfrith of Wearmouth and Jarrow, demonstrating an ability to change dissimilar monastic environments throughout their long career. I additionally examine the personal authority that a monastic leader, such as Wilfrid of Ripon, maintained in their administration of geographically distinct monastic properties, subsequently organized into a social union under the hegemony of a common religious patron. These monastic networks not only allowed for an extraordinary accumulation of wealth in both material properties and, secular and religious, social influence, but afforded an otherwise unavailable degree of security against the wrath of secular powers. Lastly, I consider the elevated authority of monastic leaders in their role as royal advisors, whereby abbots and other ecclesiastics managed to project their personal dispositions upon secular authorities in the

¹ Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 453.
form of advice underpinned with religious consequences. Anglo-Saxon kings traditionally relied upon the secular nobility, often in addition to their queens, to fulfill advisory roles within their courts. Where virtually all monastic leaders of the seventh and eighth centuries originated from the aristocratic class, their synthesis of noble status with religious authority constituted a reevaluation of their advisory responsibility, whereby an ecclesiastic’s pronouncements acquired a divine justification through the medium of stated prophecy. The conventional practices of early Anglo-Saxon monasticism proved highly favorable to the development and application of personal autonomy in regards to contemporary social and political forces. Monastics of the seventh and eighth centuries not only determined the location and nature of their immediate social environment, but possessed the means to extend their acquired religious authority and influence across multiple kingdoms; thereby establishing a social entity united in a single individual powerful enough to resist the indignation of jealous kings.

**Choice of Residence**

While the synodical pronouncements at Hertford and the legal dictation of Wihtred in large part applied only to those either wealthy or influential enough to establish a monastic community, or those already in possession of monastic holdings, the increasing popularity of monastic foundation provided novel opportunities for would-be monks in regards to selecting the particular rule and order of their everyday lives. The conscious decision as to which community a prospective monk may enter supposed a certain degree of individual self-determination, as choosing a religious institution did not simply involve a geographic choice but a decision regarding the structure and order through which a monk’s future life would develop. For while monastic founders and abbots exercised their creative authority to establish the regulations and boundaries of daily life within their communities, a potential monk possessed an alternate agency
in their ability to consciously select properly differentiated institutions. Each early English
monastic community, as far as it participated in a regulated monastic tradition, ordered its
community through the application and adherence of a monastic rule which guided the spiritual
behavior of a community’s monks as well as determined the manner of an institution’s daily
conduct. During the seventh and eighth centuries, no one monastic rule found overwhelming
adherence in England and thus a monastic’s residential decision reflected more than a mere
change in geographic situation but represented a certain individual agency in determining the
new order of their social lives.

The general infrequency of childhood ingression within seventh-century Anglo-Saxon
monasticism amplifies the personal agency of a potential monk, as their selection of a
coenobitic home represented a conscious personal decision. Although uncommon, the practice
does seem to have existed and a few specific instances prove worthy of note. Bede himself states
that after being born on lands owned by Biscop’s community, at the age of seven his family
entrusted his care to the abbot himself. Additionally, Eddius states that in return for Wilfrid
raising a child from the dead he required that the mother enter the boy into the monastic life at
the age of seven. The mother in time refused and Wilfrid sent a reeve to seize the boy forcibly.
The fact that both Bede and the child in Eddius’s Life of Wilfrid happened to be seven years old
may be no coincidence, and it is possible that seven was an agreeable age if one were going to
submit their child to an abbot for indoctrination into the religious life; though Bede does state

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2 Barbara Yorke, The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain c. 600-800,
(Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 183.

3 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 329.

4 Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid, 41.
that King Oswiu dedicated his daughter Ælfflæd to God when she was around one year old.\(^5\) In addition to these specific instances, there is additional evidence for women entering nunneries as children, with the understood expectation that their religious life would bring benefits to their family and kin.\(^6\) Despite some precedence however, the monastic ingression of children does not appear to be overly common within the seventh and early eighth centuries. Individuals often sought out monastic vows as a second career choice,\(^7\) and with the exception of Bede, almost all the major monastic figures of the seventh-century entered the monastic life following their participation in some secular career. While Wilfrid and Ceolfrith were only fourteen,\(^8\) and eighteen,\(^9\) respectively at the time of their monastic integration, their age seems to suggest that their pursuit of the monastic vocation did not result from childhood dedication. Similarly, Cuthbert and Guthlac each maintained secular careers as warrior-thegns prior to their anchoritic pursuits, while Bede states that Hild of Whitby spent thirty-three of her sixty-six years of life “most nobly in secular occupations.”\(^10\) The frequency with which adults, previously engaged in secular activities, sought entrance into monastic communities in the early Anglo-Saxon Church supposes a necessary degree of personal agency as a monastic career required a conscious surrender to coenobitic religious living.

Ceolfrith of Wearmouth and Jarrow perhaps best represents such a personal agency. Before his tenure as abbot of the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, Ceolfrith resided as a


\(^6\) Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, 111.

\(^7\) Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain*, 183


monk first at Gilling, and second at Ripon, before finally ending his monastic life as abbot of both of Biscop’s communities. Ceolfrith’s initial decision to enter the monastery at Gilling undoubtedly resulted from ties of kinship as his brother Cynefrith had been the abbot of Gilling not long before his own induction at the age of 18. Following a short residence at Gilling, Ceolfrith migrated to the community of Ripon at Wilfrid's invitation following the death of his brother. There is also evidence of a plague, which may have effected Ceolfrith’s decision to move, as it appears as though the rest of the brethren abandoned Gilling shortly after Ceolfrith’s departure. While Wilfrid’s invitation certainly illuminates the context of Ceolfrith’s choice of Ripon as his new home, it does not necessarily explain it. The anonymous author of Ceolfrith’s History states that Ceolfrith and his brother were of aristocratic ancestry, which explains not only Cynefrith’s position as abbot at Gilling, but additionally Ceolfrith’s own future monastic advancement. His own departure from Ripon ten years later, suggests that formal invitation need not always be necessary for monastic entrance and induction. The synod of Hertford in 673 A.D. did attempt to curtail the wandering of monks however, as Theodore states in the fourth chapter of the council:

The monks shall not wander from place to place, that is, from monastery to monastery, except with letters dimissory from their own abbot; and that they keep the promise of obedience which they made at the time of their profession.

12 Ibid., 214.
13 Blair, The World of Bede, 162.
15 Blair, The World of Bede, 162-3.
16 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 214.
The decree of a synod once again may reflect either the official pronunciation of canonical norms or the acknowledgement of a common problem among contemporary clergy and monks. Regardless, Ceolfrith’s decision to enter Ripon fits well within this synodical rubric. The *History of Abbot Ceolfrith* states that Ceolfrith’s cousin and current abbot of Gilling, Tunbert, accompanied him to Ripon thus ensuring the possession of “letters dimissory” from his former abbot.17

While permission seems necessary for the entrance into Wilfrid’s community, it is difficult to imagine Tunbert, Ceolfrith, and their monks having a difficult time obtaining entrance into another institution. Geographically and politically, Ripon presented itself as the natural choice for a band of monks looking to reestablish themselves. Wilfrid’s popularity had been growing ever since his defense of the Catholic estimation for Easter at the synod of Whitby in 664 A.D.,18 and as his career demonstrated, numerous monastic communities turned to Wilfrid as their nominal head in regards to their spiritual guidance and temporal management.19 The point remains however, that while Wilfrid’s growing power may have enticed Ceolfrith and Tunbert to seek his protection, mirroring the secular protection awarded to a noble from a king,20 common religious charity to a band of monks displaced in the grips of a plague ensures that Ceolfrith and his monastic brethren probably would have had little difficulty entering another monastery if they had chosen to do so.

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20 Campbell, “Bede I,” 16.
Ceolfrith resided at Ripon for ten years, receiving the priesthood from Wilfrid in that time. After a brief time spent in Kent studying the monastic and priestly disciplines, he returned to Ripon before Benedict Biscop requested Ceolfrith’s assistance in founding his own community at the mouth of the River Wear. Thus, once again Ceolfrith changed residencies, though once more with permission as Ceolfrith’s historian records Wilfrid as consenting to Ceolfrith’s departure. Ceolfrith’s migration proved temporary however, as the writer of the anonymous History states Ceolfrith returned to Ripon shortly after his induction as Benedict’s monastic prior due to discrepancies between his enforcement of the community’s monastic rule and the actions of his fellow monks. Thus, Ceolfrith possessed the ability to return to the community at Ripon, presumably at his own will. Neither the History of Abbot Ceolfrith, nor Bede’s Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow mention Wilfrid’s disposition in regards to Ceolfrith’s return, but it is possible that Wilfrid either did not mind having a prior monk of Ripon return to the community, or otherwise found himself preoccupied with the beginning of his own secular troubles, with Biscop founding Wearmouth in 674 A.D., just four years prior to Wilfrid’s Northumbrian exile in or around 678 A.D. The description of Ceolfrith’s departure from Wearmouth within the anonymous History suggests however, that when Ceolfrith returned to Ripon, he did so without the consent of his new abbot, Benedict Biscop. The History states that Biscop followed Ceolfrith to Ripon and asked him to return with him to the community at

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 215.
24 Ibid
25 Ibid., 216.
26 Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid, 49.
Wearmouth. It is significant that Ceolfrith’s historian describes Biscop as having “asked” for Ceolfrith to return in contrast to simply commanding it; instead referring to Biscop’s appeal as a “request of charity.” Through a strict adherence to the canonical pronouncements at the synod of Hertford, Biscop’s permission was necessary for Ceolfrith’s departure from Wearmouth, and therefore theoretically Biscop could have necessitated his return. It is certainly possible that Biscop did not view himself or his abbatial power in such an authoritarian manner and would not have required a colleague and friend to remain at his institution against his will. It is additionally probable, as earlier stated, that the canon law pronounced at Hertford represented a desire to restrain itinerant monks more than it signified an enforceable law. It is worthy of note that the synod at Hertford commenced in 673 A.D. while Bede places the foundation of Wearmouth around 674 A.D.; thus, the canon pronounced at the council had little time to disseminate by Biscop’s establishment of Wearmouth. Regardless of the canon, or Biscop’s disposition, the instances of Ceolfrith’s unauthorized migrations alongside the concerted synodical effort at Hertford to curb the itinerancy of monks allude to a practical, if not acceptable, personal agency through which a given religious conditioned their monastic home.

Guthlac of Crowland exhibits a conceptually similar personal agency in his incipient monastic behaviors, though ultimately directs such means towards an anchoritic end. A warrior-thegn of Mercia in his youth, Guthlac abandoned his secular retinue at the age of twenty-four in

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

exchange for a novel career as a monastic and hermit, mirroring Cuthbert, Biscop, and Ceolfrith in his grown ingression, and thereby further suggesting the regularity with which early Anglo-Saxon Christians perceived monastic participation as a second career opportunity.

According to Felix, Guthlac received the Petrine tonsure and his initial monastic education at the community of Repton under the guidance of Abbess Ælfthryth. Felix’s observation regarding the abbacy of Ælfthryth reveals Repton’s status as a monastic double house, wherein male and female religious coexisted separately under the authority of an often-royally appointed abbess. The community at Repton therefore appears to constitute a natural monastic home for Guthlac, as the community commanded a geographically central position within the Kingdom of Mercia, in addition to likely maintaining social and relational connections with the Mercian royal dynasty with which Guthlac shared distant kinship ties. Felix maintains that Guthlac’s ancestry “was traced in set order through the most noble names of famous kings, back to Icel in whom it began in days of old,” implicitly providing a familial context for Guthlac’s monastic ingression.

Jeffery J. Cohen highlights the presence of an eighth-century royal crypt at Repton to further suggest the community’s enduring royal association; however, though Repton maintained a Mercian royal crypt from at least the middle of the eighth-century on, it remains uncertain as to whether such an arrangement existed in the time of Guthlac or contributed to his ingression. The earliest evidence of Repton housing the remains of any Mercian king comes from an entry in the


32 Ibid., 85.

33 Yorke, Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses, 9.

34 Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 75.

35 Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, 118.
The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 755 A.D. [757 A.D.] regarding the death of King Æthelbald (d. 757 A.D.). The next surviving reference to a Mercian king’s internment at Repton belongs to Florence of Worcester (d. 1118 A.D.) who states that King Wiglaf’s (d. 840 A.D.) remains rested in the crypt of Repton following his demise. Guthlac himself died in 714 A.D. and Felix probably composed his Life of Saint Guthlac close to sixteen years later in or around 730 A.D. Both Guthlac’s entry into Repton, as well as his death, preceded Æthelbald’s reign. Æthelbald yet ruled Mercia during the composition of Guthlac’s vita and therefore no early eighth-century relationship between the Mercian royal line and the community of Repton may be assumed on the basis that the latter maintained a royal crypt. Barbara Yorke’s extensive work on Anglo-Saxon nunneries strongly suggests however, that double houses of the early Anglo-Saxon Church indeed depended heavily upon royal patronage for their continuity. The fact that Repton eventually came to house the remains of fallen Mercian kings, as well as the community’s organization under an abbess, strongly alludes to the community’s foundation under royal auspices.

Regardless of Repton’s familial characteristics, which may have initially enticed a prospective royal monastic, the ancestral and economic contexts that constituted Guthlac’s aristocratic station allude to the variety of alternatives available for inauguration into the monastic life. In comparison to other contemporary monastic founders, Guthlac appears particularly well endowed to establish his own monastic community if he had so chosen. Felix

36 The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 49.


explicitly mentions the “immense booty”39 Guthlac and his companions accumulated during their youthful skirmishing with their various “persecutors, foes and adversaries.” Additionally, as monastic founders could buy and sell landed property,41 it is therefore plausible that Guthlac possessed adequate means with which to purchase property for the establishment of a monastic community. Furthermore, companions of a royal military household could reasonably anticipate some type of lifetime endowment of land for rendered armed service,42 and though Felix does not state Guthlac’s military career as singularly benefiting the king of Mercia, the duration and rank of Guthlac’s service,43 in combination with the saint’s regal ancestry and continued association with Mercian royalty while pursuing hermitic solitude, indicates the likelihood of Guthlac’s secular interaction with Mercia’s ruling dynasty. It is likely that given Guthlac’s secular social standing, the saint would have had little difficulty obtaining a suitable royal or aristocratic patron interested in investing in a novel monastic community. Guthlac abandoned his secular military retinue at the age of twenty-four,44 just one year prior to Benedict Biscop’s own thegnly retirement;45 at which time, the Northumbrian King Oswiu gave Biscop “possession of the amount of land due to his rank.”46 Guthlac’s lengthy military record may reasonably have warranted a similar transaction between the future saint and his secular lord, and therefore it is


40 Ibid.

41 Blair, The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society, 87.


43 Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 81. Igitur transcursis novem circiter annorum orbibus...

44 Ibid., 83.


46 Ibid.
unwise to assume that Guthlac’s entrance into Repton resulted from lack of alternative monastic prospects. The absence of any perceived desire to found a personal and novel religious community, within an individual so suited towards monastic foundation, seems to suggest that Guthlac was searching for something in particular when the saint journeyed to Repton. Guthlac seemingly possessed the means to travel and the appropriate social connections favorable to monastic establishment; therefore, the saint’s choice of monastic home appears contingent upon personal initiative rather than material or social necessity.

Female religious interested in monastic participation did so within a separate social and political context than that of their male monastic contemporaries; a context that, although differing from male circumstances of monastic foundation, did not inherently reduce the individual agency of monastic choice in so far as it proved available to women. Almost all eminent early English nunneries were established by a member of the royal house of the kingdom in which a given community resided, with royal patronage often determining the individual in command of the institution. The enthusiasm with which royal families invested in female religious communities implies a contemporary understanding of the value such communities possessed in promoting the dynastic interests of the broader royal kin-group. Thus, it appears that almost all of the prominent abbesses of the seventh-century presided over houses in one way or another connected to Anglo-Saxon royal families. In her detailed study of the nature and development of Anglo-Saxon nunneries, Barbara Yorke has concluded that by the late seventh, early eighth-century, twenty-five to thirty nunneries undoubtedly had been founded.

47 Yorke, Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses, 18.

48 Ibid., 9.

49 Ibid.
patronized, and ruled by members of various royal houses. While royal women depended heavily upon the patronage of their immediate kin-group for their abbatial position, such dependence need not necessarily represent a hindrance to personal agency in regards to an individual’s choice of monastic residency, though such familial dependence could alter the initial monastic intentions of a prospective nun. Royal women interested in monastic ingress would hardly have understood institutional selection predicated upon familial or dynastic social networks as limiting. When Northumbrian king Oswiu died, his widow Queen Eanfled retreated from public life and joined the community at Whitby to rule in conjunction with her daughter Ælfflæd. Queen Æthilthryth of Northumbria similarly abandoned public activity for monastic respite, receiving her veil at Coldingham before assuming the abbacy of Ely in her native East Anglia; though Æthilthryth’s monastic transition differs from Eanfled’s in that she abandoned an active queenship for the sake of monastic ingress. Dynastic religious institutions therefore engendered a novel, though legitimate, career opportunity for ruling queens outside the sphere of dynastic politics, while additionally providing financial and social security for widowed queens of an inoperative regime.

While male religious communities maintained a context of patronage separate to that of female houses, Ceolfrith’s example suggests that monastic integration on the basis of familial association was not a consideration mutually exclusive to women. When widows such as Eanfled resigned secular duty and sought entrance into a religious community, they generally did so within the kingdom of their birth rather than the kingdom into which they had married.

50 Ibid., 23.
52 Ibid., 236.
53 Ibid., 31.
Conversely, daughters of such political trans-kingdom marriages of the seventh and eighth centuries operated within a separate context when desirous of monastic retreat, as their position within multiple dynastic kin-groups allowed for expanded choice in both monastic patronage and residency. By Yorke’s estimation of the popularity of royal double houses by the end of the seventh-century, it seems plausible to suggest that royal women desirous of monastic foundation enjoyed a fair degree of financial and familial support.

Among the royal women inclined toward monastic existence, the experiences of Abbess Hild of Whitby offer particularly valuable insight into not only the complicated relationship between a female monastic and her secular kin group, but additionally reveal the aspects of personal residential agency particular to royal women. Bede states that Hild spent the first half of her life in secular occupation, following monastic devotion at the age thirty-three. Her decision to abandon lay existence does appear to be her own, though familial associations determined and conditioned her journey towards monastic retreat. Following her decision to quit the secular life, Hild immediately traveled to East Anglia, whose king Aldwulf was her nephew. Hild ultimately sought, according to Bede, to join her sister Hereswith at the community at Chelles in Gaul, thereby paralleling Ceolfrith who sought out the community of Gilling due to his brother’s abbatial tenure. Despite Hild’s initial desires however, Aidan bishop of Lindisfarne recalled Hild to Northumbria prior to her voyage to Gaul. Upon her return, Hild acquired one hide of land near the River Wear and with it established a small community until her elevation to

54 Ibid., 31-32.
55 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 243.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
abbess of Heruteu [Hartlepool] one year later. Bede gives no further explanation as to why Aidan summoned Hild to Northumbria, though it may be that Aidan concluded it more advantageous for both Hild and her kin if she reigned as an abbess in Northumbria rather than persist as a nun in Gaul. While Bede states that Aidan “recalled” Hild to Northumbria, presumably by nature of his episcopal authority, it is entirely likely that the bishop enticed Hild’s return through promises of land endowment and abbatial rank, as Hild acquired a hide of land immediately upon her homecoming. Nevertheless, Hild’s return proved advantageous beyond all measure, as the abbess would eventually come to found not only the prestigious community at Whitby, but also acquire a sufficient degree of influence as to allow for an extension of her monastic authority in the establishment and persistent rule of sister communities at Hackness and Hartlepool.

Certainly, the future experiences of Hild would not have been common to those other royal nuns whose familial interference upset their initial monastic goals. What is not certain however, is that royal nuns would have viewed familial interference in their monastic desires as limiting, as entrance into a monastic communal social network would not have annihilated their previous understanding of familial and dynastic duty. Both the continuity of royal abbatial patronage in Anglo-Saxon nunneries, as well as Bede’s chastisement of nominal monastics concerned with the hereditary succession of their community, suggests a continuation in kinship identity for many if not most contemporary monastics. Contemporary religious would not have understood such relational identity as a hindrance to the actualization of their monastic goals.

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58 Ibid., 244.

59 Ibid.

60 Bede, “Bede’s Letter to Egbert,” 345.
desires; indeed, kin identity constituted the relationship through which royal abbesses acquired their main source of patronage. Thus, the association and support of an abbess’s kin-group directly attributed to the temporal institutional autonomy she exercised over her community as founder or leader. The degree of personal autonomy necessarily inherent in the management of monastic communities will be examined in the succeeding section; however, as it pertains to the individual agency of female religious in institutional selection, the understood familial duty innate in the establishment of royal double houses constituted a context of personal agency differentiated from that available to male monastics. While nunneries themselves frequently relied upon the continued patronage of an associated royal kin-group, a monastic career nevertheless provided the means for a continuity in social consequence and financial provision for royal women within an atmosphere removed by a degree from secular dynastic politics.

The peripatetic actions of Cuthbert of Lindisfarne conversely exemplify the degree to which certain seventh-century Anglo-Saxon monastics valued personal spiritual development in contrast to monastic administration and pastoral duty; a value judgement that occasioned a sense of personal agency as monks sought out a life of contemplative solitude at the expense of coenobitic participation. Following years of monastic service and participation at the community at Melrose, Cuthbert ostensibly abandoned his administrative position and departed the community in search of solitary contemplative peace. The sources that chronicle Cuthbert’s communal departure are at variance in regards to the motivation behind the prior’s seemingly sudden withdrawal. Cuthbert’s anonymous hagiographer suggests that the saint’s decision to depart Melrose ultimately developed out of personal initiative contingent upon a desire for ascetic contemplative existence. Cuthbert “fled from worldly glory and sailed away privately and
a venture which elicited an immediate response from Bishop Eata whereby Cuthbert was transferred to the community at Lindisfarne for further administrative service, the monk’s individual desires being temporarily halted. Bede’s hagiographic account of Cuthbert’s transition from Melrose to Lindisfarne conversely interprets the transfer as the administrative prerogative of Eata, removing all initiative from Cuthbert individually, and perceiving the move as beneficial for the monastic and spiritual education of the monks at Lindisfarne. Though both Bede’s prose and metrical hagiographic works on Cuthbert utilize the anonymous prose vita as a source, the anonymous author’s account, in this particular instance, is most likely more indicative of historical reality. Bede’s writings are largely pedagogic, and he frequently avoids reporting the behaviors of otherwise exemplary religious personalities that ran contrary to contemporary church convention; within such a context, the irresponsibility of Cuthbert’s administrative abandonment at Melrose proved too controversial for Bede. In comparison, it is unlikely that Cuthbert’s anonymous author, as a member of the community at Lindisfarne, would convey Cuthbert’s secret abandonment of monastic responsibility, in a work explicitly composed for the purpose of illuminating Cuthbert’s saintly behaviors, if it were not the case. Cuthbert’s initial departure from the community at Melrose therefore appears to be of his own volition despite Eata’s near immediate constraining reaction. Furthermore, the fact that an author actively


62 Ibid., 95.


66 Ibid., 32.
arguing for the sanctification of Cuthbert felt at ease to include an anecdote that emphasized Cuthbert’s contemplative nature at the expense of monastic administrative responsibility may allude to the frequency with which monks desirous of contemplative escape abandoned communal monastic living. Though perhaps unwelcomed within the broader ecclesiastic hierarchy, it is conceivable that contemplatively oriented monastics, particularly those within Northumbria under the influence of Irish ascetic tradition, found little issue with exchanging communal monastic existence with an alternative, more solitary, religious existence.

Anglo-Saxon monastics of the seventh and eighth centuries exhibited a conscious individual agency by their ability to personally select a monastic home, conform to a religious rule, and transfer from one monastic community to another; behaviors through which a potential monk proved capable of influencing their religious and geographic environment. A permeating ideal of kin consideration overwhelmingly conditioned the self-deterministic actions of potential monks, influencing the activities of major figures within early English Christianity such as Ceolfrith, Guthlac, and Hild. While familial association remained an important factor in monastic establishment and ingress, its conditioning of incipient monastic activity did not prohibit subsequent individual action outside of concerns for familial affiliation. Ceolfrith’s departure from Wearmouth back to the community at Ripon around 675 A.D. resulted from the intense hostility and persecution of the Wearmouth monks in Benedict Biscop’s absence, despite Ceolfrith’s cousin Tunbert yet plausibly remaining at Ripon. Guthlac’s tenure at the double community of Repton lasted only two years before the saint sought out contemplative solitude at Crowland, a solitude similarly sought by Cuthbert at Melrose independent of any concern for kindred relations. Hild’s initial monastic movements and subsequent abbatial position ultimately depended more upon familial associations and patronage than her male contemporaries due in
large part to the unique royal context of most nunneries’ establishment. Nevertheless, the inclusive and decentralized nature of early Anglo-Saxon monasticism, combined with royal women’s traditional involvement in secular government, ensured that when royal women such as Hild decided to retire from the secular world, they often entered into an environment conducive to their possession and utilization of authority and influence, similar in some cases to that of a male bishop. Both the individual hagiographic accounts of monks such as Ceolfrith and Cuthbert, as well as the prohibitions formally established at the synod of Hertford, exhibits the overall prevalence of unsanctioned monastic travel in seventh-century England. The frequency with which individual monks exchanged monastic environments, often without the acquiescence of an administrative superior, in combination with the motivational diversity of such movements, suggests a pervading consciousness of personal agency relative to a monastic’s residency and religious occupation.

Monastic Networks

The existence of what John Blair and others have termed monastic networks undoubtedly represents one of the most overt and outward expressions of monastic temporal authority and autonomy within seventh-and-eighth-century England. A monastic network constitutes an often vague yet apparent relationship between two or more communities and a common founder or abbot. The proliferation of Christianity throughout the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, along with the physical structure through which individuals expressed occupational adherence, provided a novel avenue through which kings and nobles could visually display their wealth, an action that may have enhanced a donor’s status among both their aristocratic contemporaries and the wider

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population of a locality.\textsuperscript{68} The aristocratic interest in both the endowment and foundation of monastic communities ensured that many monastic leaders would continue to exert social influence and authority through their possession of disconnected properties much like a secular lord.\textsuperscript{69} Regardless of the similarities with secular aristocratic estates, monastic networks yet possessed an attendant attribute of cohesion, with dependent communities sharing cultural and devotional links in addition to a common monastic patron or head.\textsuperscript{70} The most obvious and overt example of such an arrangement is that maintained by Wilfrid of Ripon, who acquired a vast collection of monastic properties throughout his extensive travels, many of which resulted from political exile. While Wilfrid possessed perhaps the largest and most extensive network, there is no evidence to suggest that his expansive actions and their subsequent developments differed in any large extent from other communal founders in possession of monastic associations other than in the degree to which Wilfrid succeeded in enlarging his network.\textsuperscript{71} Monastic networks similar to Wilfrid’s and Benedict Biscop’s provided monastic leaders and founders large amounts of political as well as spiritual authority over multiple communities, occasionally encompassing vast territories within multiple kingdoms. Such extensive authority did not always find itself welcome within the existing power structures of Anglo-Saxon secular society and, as is evident through Wilfrid’s own career, increased ecclesiastic or monastic authority often contributed to conflicts between secular and ecclesiastic leaders.

Wilfrid’s vast monastic association did not exist in isolation, as other monastic leaders sought to expand their monastic authority through the creation and acquisition of novel religious

\textsuperscript{68} Foot, \textit{Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600-900}, 79-80.

\textsuperscript{69} Blair, \textit{The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society}, 117.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 94-5.
communities. Bede and Ceolfrith’s anonymous historian appear to interpret the communities of Wearmouth and Jarrow as an indivisible community governed by a single abbot. Ian Wood suggests that despite Bede and the anonymous historian’s insistence that Biscop maintained abbatial authority over both Wearmouth and Jarrow, the two houses did not initially constitute a single community, and that Jarrow’s need of security and patronage following the death of the Northumbrian King Ecgfrith necessitated the monastic union of the two institutions. That different circumstances and pretexts occasioned the foundation of the communities at Wearmouth and Jarrow seems plausible; however, it is clear that by the death of Benedict Biscop both Wearmouth and Jarrow coalesced into a single community under the abbacy of Ceolfrith. That Hwaetberht assumed the abbacy of both communities following Ceolfrith’s departure further suggests a continuity in the ideal of monastic unity. The unified community of Wearmouth and Jarrow differs from other contemporary monastic networks in that the two physical communities were, at least by the time of Ceolfrith’s abbacy, understood to be a single religious family, rather than two distinct communities under the command of a common abbot. The respective networks established by monastic leaders such as Wilfrid and Hild never claim monastic unity similar to that of Wearmouth and Jarrow, with even Wilfrid’s prized communities at Ripon and Hexham remaining institutionally distinct despite their common leader.

Despite such distinctions, Biscop’s management of Wearmouth and, to perhaps a lesser degree, Jarrow, compares favorably with the actions of other contemporary heads of monastic networks. Similar to several of the communities under Wilfrid, Biscop appointed co-abbots to his institutions out of necessity due to his frequent absences. Biscop appointed Eosterwine as co-

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72 Wood, “The foundation of Bede’s Wearmouth-Jarrow, 94.

73 Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid, 137. Eddius states that prior to his death Wilfrid summoned several abbots and monastic friends to Ripon to discuss his will.
abbot in Wearmouth and, according to Bede’s account, Ceolfrith as co-abbot in Jarrow. If Ceolfrith’s abbacy of Jarrow implied a degree of subservience to Biscop’s at least nominal authority, then Benedict Biscop’s position as *de facto* head of both Wearmouth and Jarrow is easily recognizable within the context of other seventh-century monastic leaders. Again, similar to Wilfrid, Biscop provided for the material endowment of both Wearmouth and Jarrow, with Bede recounting the numerous treasures acquired on the continent, which the abbot subsequently distributed to his communities. The monastic relationship between Wearmouth and Jarrow, established through the care of Benedict Biscop and the abbacy of Ceolfrith, revealed itself as socially and culturally fruitful. The dual community produced one of the greatest minds in early Medieval Europe in Bede, possessed possibly the largest library of all Anglo-Saxon England, and remained quietly passive in the secular-ecclesiastic struggles in which other monastic houses and abbots found themselves entangled. Not only does the dual abbacy of Wearmouth and Jarrow endow upon the community’s leader a vast degree of communal and geographic authority, but the peaceful development produced by the monastic unity of the separate houses ensured the autonomy of Wearmouth and Jarrow in regards to the secular interference facing other contemporary communities.

Abbesses too, in control of their often-substantial double houses, frequently found themselves at the head of a network of monastic communities spanning a significant geographic area. While Bishop Aidan recalled Hild to Northumbria from her journey to Gaul to assume subsequent command of the community of Hartlepool around 648 A.D., the abbess would in

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74Ibid., 35.


76 Gunn, *Bede’s “Historiae,”* 92.
time come to be associated with the communities at Whitby and Hackness as well. Bede states that after Hild ruled the community at Hartlepool for some time, the abbess took it upon herself to establish a new community known as Streanaeshalch [Whitby], before finally establishing Hackness in the same year as her death in 680 A.D. Thus Hild ruled, to some degree, a monastic network of at least three communities; a situation supplemented by Bede through his reference to Hild as the Mother Abbess of Hackness. Hild appears to have delegated authority within her associated communities through prioresses rather than co-abbesses, as Bede records that when Begu of Hackness envisioned the death of Hild, she awoke and reported to the community’s prioress Frigyth. It is possible that Hild found herself in possession of other monastic communities in addition to the three recorded by Bede, as upon initially being recalled to Northumbria she was given one hide of land on the northern bank of the river Wear with which she observed the monastic rule with “a handful of companions.” Bede does not mention this community, if indeed it could be called so, further, but it is possible Hild retained control of the land upon her migration to Hartlepool. Conversely, it is very likely that the religious of the newly established community simply abandoned the house and integrated into the community at Hartlepool.

Monastic networks consisting of roughly two or three separate communities appear to be a relatively common aspect of at least early Northumbrian monasticism. Bishop Eata of

78 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 244.
79 Ibid., 246.
80 Ibid., 246-7.
81 Ibid., 246.
82 Ibid., 244.
Lindisfarne too appears to have been in possession of multiple communities in addition to his bishopric at Lindisfarne. Bede states that Eata originally received his religious instruction as a boy from Aidan before being elevated to the abbacy of the community at Melrose. Following the pronouncements at Whitby and the subsequent departure of bishop Colman of Lindisfarne, King Oswiu appointed Eata as Colman’s successor as abbot of the community. Though Eata succeeded Colman to the abbacy of Lindisfarne, the new abbot does not appear to have ceased being the abbot of Melrose upon acquiring the novel abbacy. Bede suggests that Eata possessed the prerogative to transfer Cuthbert from the community at Melrose to that of Lindisfarne by virtue of his abbatial authority within both communities. That Bede felt at liberty to suggest that Eata occasioned Cuthbert’s departure from Melrose through his decision to transfer the prior to the community at Lindisfarne suggests that contemporaries understood Eata to possess abbatial authority over both communities. In addition to the monastic communities under his direct authority, Eata was elevated in 678 A.D. to the bishopric of Bernicia with its seat at Hexham or Lindisfarne, though three years later Theodore further divided the bishopric with Tunbert assuming the see of Hexham and Eata remaining the bishop of Lindisfarne. While Bede attempts to explain Lindisfarne’s situation as both an episcopal see and monastic community, he states only that Eata possessed the abbacy of Lindisfarne prior to his election as

83 Ibid., 193.

84 Ibid.


86 Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 207. Bede states that Eata transferred Cuthbert to Lindisfarne for the purpose of teaching the brethren of that community both “the rule of monastic perfection by his authority as prior and illustrate it by the example of his virtue,” for Eata “ruled this place also as abbot at that time.”

87 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 224.

88 Ibid., 225.
the community’s bishop. It is therefore entirely possible that Eata retained his abbatial authority over both Melrose and Lindisfarne, as it was hardly uncommon in seventh-and-eighth-century England for an individual religious to occupy both a bishopric and an abbacy. Wilfrid, in comparison, never acquired his numerous episcopal appointments at the expense of abbatial authority. Eata’s maintenance of both the abbacy and bishopric of Lindisfarne, in addition to his abbacy of Melrose, would therefore appear to be entirely within the bounds of contemporary Anglo-Saxon convention. Eata’s network of monastic communities appears to include at least the communities of Melrose and Lindisfarne, in addition to the bishopric of the latter, though Melrose at times seems to exercise some authority over the community at Coldingham as well.

Eata’s monastic associations nevertheless reveal both the fluidity of episcopal and abbatial office in seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England, as well as the individual authority such a relationship could produce. It appears that the early Anglo-Saxon religious did not view the offices of bishop and abbot in mutually exclusive terms, despite evidence that at least some continental authorities understood each office to be preventative of the other. In a letter to Bishop Maximianus of Syracuse, Pope Gregory the Great prohibited those religious serving as clerics in churches from simultaneously maintaining the office of abbot; stating that the responsibilities required of each life necessarily prevented the full expression of the other. A continental ideal such as that which Gregory disseminated to Maximianus found little to no representation in seventh-and-eighth-century England. Certainly even Gregory himself seemed aware of the existing differences in circumstance surrounding Italian and Anglo-Saxon Christian

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89 Ibid., 257; “Bede, The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 207.
expression; as the Pope elevated the missionary Augustine to the bishopric of Canterbury while simultaneously commanding the new bishop to maintain a monastic existence alongside his new clergy. Christian expression as it pertained to abbatial and episcopal authority certainly differed throughout Medieval Christendom, a fact acknowledged by early Church leaders such as Gregory. The fluid nature of the relationship between episcopal and abbatial authority, as it developed in seventh-and-eighth-century England, necessitated an expansion of individual religious authority and autonomy as the two offices coalesced. Eata possessed the abbatial authority to alter the daily operations of Melrose and Lindisfarne, such as the transition of Cuthbert from one community to the other, while simultaneously possessing episcopal pastoral authority over a much larger geographic area inclusive of alternate communities through his maintenance of the episcopal see at Lindisfarne. Episcopal duty and abbatial autonomy consolidated to produce a religious authority that could, if taken to its most expansive expression, challenge secular standards of power and authority. Wilfrid’s own turbulent career exemplifies the various secular complications and conflicts that may arise, to at least a certain degree, from expansive monastic and episcopal authority.

The relatively localized monastic networks of leaders such as Ceolfrith, Hild, and Eata, undoubtedly represent the vast majority of contemporary interdependent monastic associations. The exception to this understanding is Wilfrid of Ripon, who possessed unquestionably the largest and most geographically extensive monastic network of the seventh and early eighth centuries. Wilfrid’s monastic association included communities situated far beyond his native Northumbria, as his monastic hegemony transcended contemporary secular and ecclesiastic boundaries. The immensity of Wilfrid’s network inherently posits an extreme degree of

geographically transcendent abbatial authority, while concurrently indicating Wilfrid’s temporal autonomy in the wake of continued adversity. The temporal wealth and authority acquired by Wilfrid through his vast landholdings proved to be of such a magnitude as to arouse the jealousies and fears of contemporary kings and ecclesiastics. There is nothing to suggest however, that Wilfrid’s monastic association differed from any of those commanded by his contemporaries except in its size and power. Wilfrid acquisitioned land in manners conventionally acceptable, and his dual position as abbot and bishop was a common aspect of seventh-century Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Though unusual in its size and extent, Wilfrid’s network of communities nevertheless perhaps best represents the extremities to which a single individual could extend a monastic relationship network, as well as the authority inherent in its governance.

Wilfrid’s abbatial career began just prior to the synod of Whitby around the year 660 A.D., when the Northumbrian Sub-King Alhfrith bequeathed the community at Ripon to the young Wilfrid. The young community at Ripon had initially been a dependent of the community at Melrose; however, seemingly influenced by the arguments of Wilfrid in favor of Roman orthodoxy, Alhfrith expelled the Celtic Christians inhabiting Ripon and bequeathed the community to Wilfrid. Alhfrith’s expulsion of the monastics already inhabiting the community at Ripon suggests that the community had royal connections at its inception, and that the king possessed the liberty to appoint whomever he wished as abbot. If, however, Alhfrith merely

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96 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 187. Eata was in charge of the community at the time, having been in communion with the Celtic tradition before the Synod of Whitby in 664.
exerted his practical political authority in his appointment of Wilfrid, it is perhaps ironic in the light of Wilfrid’s future political struggles, that the young monastic should have acquired his first abbacy at the expense of monastic autonomy. Nevertheless, Wilfrid’s fame blossomed after his defense of the Catholic position at the synod of Whitby, and Eddius states that both Northumbrian kings, Oswiu and his sub-king and son Alhfrith, resolved to elect Wilfrid bishop of the then vacant see of York. Wilfrid’s authority over and autonomy within both his monastic community and episcopal see compares favorably at this stage to that which Eata would eventually command in his episcopacy and abbacy at Lindisfarne. Wilfrid desired to be consecrated bishop in Gaul however, and in his absence King Oswiu appointed Chad bishop of York, thus necessitating Wilfrid’s return to Ripon following his consecration. While Oswiu’s backhanded appointment of Chad may initially appear to obstruct Wilfrid’s maturation as a monastic leader, the king’s intrusion subsequently initiated Wilfrid’s acquisition of auxiliary monastic landholdings. The circumstance that hindered the development of Wilfrid’s religious influence within Northumbria therefore provided the context through which Wilfrid would attain monastic authority elsewhere.

This context is key to understanding certain developments in Wilfrid’s career that nominally stemmed from his vast monastic power but perhaps additionally resulted from developments within contemporary Northumbrian politics. This applies to the situation that Wilfrid faced as he returned from his continental consecration only to discover Chad occupying his promised episcopal seat. Explanations for the replacement of Wilfrid often concern the

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98 Ibid., 31.
amount of time in which his journey to Gaul consumed. Bede himself seemed to suggest such a narrative when he wrote:

But since Wilfrid remained overseas for a considerable time on account of his consecration, King Oswiu meanwhile, following his son’s example, sent to Canterbury to be consecrated Bishop of York, a holy man…”

The length of Wilfrid’s journey to the continent almost certainly contributed to his episcopal replacement; however, the unfolding political situation within the sub-kingsoms of Northumbria during Wilfrid’s travels may provide an additional context for his replacement. As D. H. Farmer and David Rollason have both noted, Alfrith disappears from the historical record following the Synod of Whitby, and it is entirely likely that this is due to his rebelling against his father Oswiu. If this is in fact true, then Oswiu’s replacement of Wilfrid could have grown out of an anxiety of elevating to the rank of bishop a man who his rebellious son had previously patronized. Thus, Alfrith’s rebellion and Wilfrid’s exclusion appear correlated. Alfrith’s actions toward Wilfrid assume an additional political character if viewed in relation to his forthcoming rebellion. Alfrith seemingly patronized Wilfrid from the beginning of his adult career in Northumbria, leading the way not only in his consecration as priest, but additionally taking the initiative in sending Wilfrid to be consecrated bishop. Furthermore, both the monastery at Ripon and the bishopric of York rested within the Kingdom of Deira, of which Alfrith was king. Thus, if Alfrith had been plotting a rebellion against his father, elevating a priest who owed their aggrandizement to him, and placing him in charge of a bishopric within

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99 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 196.


101 Rollason, “Hagiography in Politics in Early Northumbria,” 100.

102 Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid, 19.

103 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 196.
the boundaries of his own kingdom, could only have strengthened his position at the outset of his uprising. Oswiu’s decision to place a bishop loyal to him in the Deiran bishopric following his son’s defeat may simply represent an expedient political action. Bede states that Oswiu died in 670 A.D. of an unidentified illness, which makes Wilfrid’s re-installment to the bishopric of York in 669 A.D. look less than coincidental.\textsuperscript{104} Although Eddius gives Theodore credit for the removal of Chad and the installation of Wilfrid,\textsuperscript{105} it is unlikely that the archbishop would have been able to make such an important change without the acquiescence of the king. Furthermore, Bede states that in his frail state, Oswiu desired to travel to Rome and that he wished Wilfrid to guide his pilgrimage with the promise of a “considerable gift.”\textsuperscript{106} It is possible that supporting Wilfrid became politically expedient in regards to Oswiu’s succession plans, and that by supporting Wilfrid, the king hoped Wilfrid would support his heir Ecgfrith. It is equally possible that the hostile political climate surrounding Alhfrith’s rebellion had died down and there was no longer any reason to oppose Wilfrid; while a more cynical theory may suggest Oswiu wished Wilfrid out of Northumbria during his son Ecgfrith’s coronation. Regardless of the circumstances that led to Wilfrid’s elevation to bishop of York, it is entirely plausible that his original aggrandizement had political implications. That Alhfrith rebelled seems likely, though such a theory pertaining to Wilfrid’s replacement does depend somewhat on Alhfrith’s premeditated rebellion. Nonetheless, this event reveals the complicated diplomatic and political situation extant in Northumbria during Wilfrid’s career, but also potentially illuminates the way in which political circumstances color the background of ecclesiastical matters. The loyalty and

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 212.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Stephanus, \textit{The Life of Bishop Wilfrid}, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Bede, \textit{Ecclesiastical History of the English People}, 212.
\end{footnotes}
support of the incoming bishop of York appears to have mattered a great deal to Oswiu, thereby suggesting the significant degree of social and political influence the office commanded. Wilfrid’s eventual installation therefore represents a significant advancement in personal religious and social authority, which provided the means for an expansion of wealth and influence when the intentions of king and bishop harmonized, while inevitably inducing conflict when personal aspirations clashed.

Though seemingly relegated to Ripon in the wake of Chad’s appointment, Wilfrid’s official status as a consecrated bishop apparently interested the Mercian king Wulfhere as Eddius states the king frequently invited the unseated bishop to perform episcopal duties within his own vast kingdom. Wilfrid’s incipient ecclesiastic dealings appear to have gone well as Wulfhere gifted several estates in various locations to the bishop, who consequently established religious houses upon them. Through Wulfhere’s donations Wilfrid became the founder and probable abbot of monastic communities within the Kingdom of Mercia, thus developing a network of religious institutions beyond the political borders of Northumbria. Prevented from adequate growth in his native kingdom, Wilfrid’s episcopal success in Mercia directly contributed to his increased authority both as a landowner in multiple kingdoms, and as a monastic patron of multiple communities. This international monastic arrangement may certainly have contributed to Wilfrid’s future political woes; at its genesis however, the ecclesiastic authority gained in his installation to the see of York by Archbishop Theodore, who removed Chad in 669 A.D., supplemented the excursive authority inherent in Wilfrid’s monastic abbacies. Wilfrid’s

108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., 33.
episcopal installment appears to have initiated another series of land acquisitions or purchases for the derelict see as Eddius states the bishop “richly endowed the church with many estates which he had acquired for God, thus removing its poverty by endowing it with lands.” Thus in the three years after his return from his continental consecration in 666 A.D., to his accession to the bishopric of York in 669 A.D., Wilfrid’s monastic network can be traced from his initial holding of Ripon in Northumbria to his foundation of novel communities in Mercia as well as the acquisition of Church lands in and around York.

Wilfrid’s acquisition of the see of York would have drastically expanded the bishop’s practical religious and political autonomy as his ecclesiastic appointment not only diversified the religious spheres through which Wilfrid drew his authority, but additionally positioned Wilfrid as the theoretic head of the Northumbrian Church. Nevertheless, Wilfrid’s position in 669 A.D. as the abbatial leader of a small network of communities, in addition to his status as Northumbrian bishop, does not appear as an overly uncommon phenomenon if not perhaps for the fact that Wilfrid’s monastic possessions extended beyond secular political and religious diocesan boundaries. Wilfrid’s continued reception of land grants from subsequent Northumbrian kings appears to suggest that, at least in 669 A.D., that his trans-political network of monastic properties aroused no major concern among ecclesiastic and political authorities.

Eddius recalls that around 671-678 A.D. Wilfrid received further donations from the Northumbrian King Ecgfrith and his Sub-King Ælfwine during the dedication ceremony of the church at Ripon. Wilfrid, or at least Eddius, used the social gathering as an opportunity to reiterate the legitimacy with which Wilfrid had come to possess his current properties; beyond acknowledging Wilfrid’s lawful monastic hegemony, the gathering appears to occasion the

\[110\] Ibid., 35.
bestowal of additional, newly conquered land upon Wilfrid.\textsuperscript{111} Kings Ecgfrith and Ælfwine capitulated to Wilfrid’s request and bequeathed land “round Ribble and Yeadon and the region of Dent and Catlow and other places” to the bishop.\textsuperscript{112} Though theoretically still within contemporary conventions, Wilfrid’s monastic and ecclesiastical authority expanded with his steady acquisition of religious properties. Eddius does not state whether Wilfrid established or occupied communities on the newly bestowed lands; if Wilfrid had monastic designs however, the communities would owe their continued existence to the Northumbrian bishop.

Despite Wilfrid’s increasing monastic and material authority, it does not necessarily follow that the Northumbrian kings donated lands disdainfully or unwillingly in knowledge of Wilfrid’s growing influences. Wilfrid and his contemporaries operated and existed within a society that revered displays of power and wealth.\textsuperscript{113} The giving of gifts, monastic or otherwise, proved merely one such avenue in which kings could display their material and political power. Additionally, the transfer of lands previously inhabited by British monks to a Northumbrian bishop could certainly have appealed to Ecgfrth as a way in which to bring newly conquered territory securely under Northumbrian suzerainty. Whatever future troubles Wilfrid’s material and landed wealth may have precipitated, both Ecgfrth and Ælfwine almost certainly felt it within their best interest to donate to Wilfrid during Ripon’s church dedication, both for their souls and their reputation.

Wilfrid’s secular and religious authority continued to increase and consolidate following the dedication of the church at Ripon, though often seemingly through political channels outside

\textsuperscript{111} Stephanus, \textit{The Life of Bishop Wilfrid}, 37.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} Campbell, “Bede I,” 17.
of Wilfrid’s control. Between 673-675 A.D., the Mercian king Wulfhere invaded Northumbria and was subsequently defeated by Ecgfrith who not only repelled the invasion, but conquered the Mercian province of Lindsey.114 Through this Northumbrian conquest, Eddius states that Wilfrid’s ecclesiastic jurisdiction increased to such a degree that bishop saw fit to ordain several new priests and deacons out of necessity.115 The new ecclesiastic environment established through the secular conflicts of Northumbria and Mercia resulted in a novel delegation of authority whereby Wilfrid’s increased ecclesiastic duties demanded the enlistment of new religious who owed their position and elevation to Wilfrid. Wilfrid’s own influential elevation was not merely ecclesiastical, but monastic and secular as well. Following the conquest, Eddius goes on to state:

Almost all the abbots and abbesses of the monasteries dedicated their substance to him by vow, either keeping it themselves in his name or intending him to be their heir after their death. Secular chief men too, men of noble birth, gave him their sons to be instructed, so that, if they chose, they might devote themselves to the service of God; or that, if they preferred, he might give them into the king’s charge as warriors when they were grown up.116

Within the context of Anglo-Saxon social culture, the manner through which communities sought protection under Wilfrid compares favorably to the process through which a noble might seek protection under a powerful king.117 Wilfrid now nominally headed a vast monastic network that proclaimed him their spiritual head and deferred to him in the management of their secular affairs.118

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116 Ibid.

117 Campbell, “Bede I”, 16.

Sarah Foot has noted that Wilfrid himself was not the titular abbot of every monastic community within his vast international network,¹¹⁹ and Eddius appears to suggest the same.¹²⁰ Wilfrid would however, have remained the practical abbot of Ripon and plausibly several other communities, possibly establishing a co-abbatial method of rule, similar to Benedict Biscop’s installation of Ceolfrith, Eosterwine, and Sigfrith, in those communities he himself founded. This in fact seems probable given the language used by Eddius to describe the manner in which the aging Wilfrid summoned various abbots and friends to Ripon when attempting to disseminate his will.¹²¹ Regardless of the manner in which Wilfrid directed his network, it is clear that a potentially vast number of communities ultimately chose to become associated with Wilfrid. Commanding a diocese congruent with the political boundaries of Northumbria while simultaneously managing a monastic network that transcended those political boundaries, Wilfrid’s power and position commanded respect within both religious as well as secular spheres. Wilfrid traveled with a retinue, trained the children of aristocrats, and commanded wealth and land on a scale unknown by any contemporary individual excluding kings. If Wilfrid had attempted to meddle in the secular affairs of kings or rival claimants, his support could have altered the balance of power or at the very least made considerable waves that would have rocked the political status quo. It is irrelevant as to whether Wilfrid’s network would have continued to support him in the event of his direct interference with secular politics. Extravagant and overt acts of interference in secular politics by bishops had no precedent in Anglo-Saxon England. Social and cultural conventions would certainly have played a significant role in

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid, 141.

¹²¹ Ibid., 137.
determining the behavior of monks, and almost certainly contributed to Wilfrid’s non-violent reaction to his deposition. What is relevant however is that kings and even bishops came to resent and or fear Wilfrid’s power and expansive land holdings. That they viewed his elevation as an issue is a testament to the power and the temporal autonomy he could potentially express.

Wilfrid’s final landed acquisition prior to his primary political and ecclesiastic exile was that of Hexham; bequeathed by the Northumbrian Queen Æthilthryth and plausibly representing the apex of Wilfrid’s monastic and episcopal authority.\textsuperscript{122} Upon the land at Hexham Wilfrid established a monastic community that would eventually develop into one of the bishop’s most cherished institutions, with Eddius later referring to Ripon and Hexham collectively as Wilfrid’s “two best monasteries.”\textsuperscript{123} Despite the enthusiasm with which Wilfrid developed the community at Hexham, the events directly succeeding the bishop’s monastic establishment constitute one of the most politically turbulent periods of Wilfrid’s life. Shortly after Queen Æthilthryth’s landed gift to the bishop, the relationship between Wilfrid and the Northumbrian court quickly deteriorated. The feud at once appears to be the result of coalescing jealousies, desires, and fears of the Northumbrian political classes at least partly in response to Wilfrid’s expansive landholdings, and the influence and wealth such possessions inherently commanded. Wilfrid’s continued acquisition of land in addition to the vast ecclesiastic authority he maintained as Northumbria’s sole bishop, paradoxically contributed both to his extreme degree of exercisable authority and autonomy within his community network and diocese, while simultaneously producing a rationale through which secular leaders may justify a punitive altercation.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 133.
Wilfrid’s feud and subsequent exile appear superficially to represent the illusory nature of the bishop’s autonomy when confronted with the practical and enforceable authority of secular royalty; however, Wilfrid’s exile paradoxically reveals the degree to which contemporary cultural forces and expansive monastic abbatial authority converged to produce an individual autonomy capable of surviving and outlasting sustained secular assaults. Feud propelled and bound Anglo-Saxon society, and that Wilfrid participated in such a conflict is not astounding given the extensity of Wilfrid’s religious authority and material possessions. Nevertheless, it is Wilfrid’s response to royal encroachment coupled with his ability to not only survive prolonged persecution, but thrive in its wake, that best represents the substantial individual autonomy available to Wilfrid through his monastic associations. The support systems available to Wilfrid on the eve of his exile not only encompassed the geographically vast network of communities and individuals dependent upon Wilfrid for their past foundation or current patronage, but an available appeal to apostolic religious authority.

The methods in which Wilfrid resisted his secular and religious opponents represented a novel expression of abbatial authority within an Anglo-Saxon context that proved unavailable to the contemporary nobility and lesser religious. The methods for forcing political amelioration available to exiled members of a peripheral royal line or fallen aristocratic family were negligible. Political exiles in the early centuries of Anglo-Saxon England often did not live long. War and feuding in Anglo-Saxon England continued too often to the death, and the total annihilation of rival dynasties proved a common goal in contemporary power politics. When


Edwin, exiled from Northumbria through the regal ascension of Æthelfrith, sought sanctuary at the court of the East Anglian king Rædwald, Æthelfrith presented both substantial rewards and threats for Edwin’s capture or murder. Rædwald nearly capitulated, and the overwhelming difficulty with which an exile preserved their life is captured by Edwin’s reaction to Æthelfrith’s demands; for when asked by a retainer if he would seek asylum elsewhere, Edwin replied: “For what refuge remains for me, who have already wandered for so many years in every corner of Britain, trying to escape the machinations of my enemies?” Exiles often traveled great distances in order to escape the influence and might of a rival feuding king, with Ecgfrith’s own half-brother residing and learning at the Irish community of Iona prior to his installation as king following the death of Ecgfrith in Pictland. The major alternative to prolonged exile available to discredited nobles appears to be rebellion, as in the case of the West Saxon Cædwalla who, with the aid of Wilfrid himself, finally wrestled political power from the under-kings then reigning in Wessex.

The dangers Wilfrid encountered during his multiple exiles appear, within an Anglo-Saxon dynastic and political context, to be those hazards common to all political exiles of the seventh and eighth centuries. Wilfrid responded to such perils however, with neither a quiet acquiescence to banishment nor a militaristic uprising, and yet simultaneously prevented his absolute loss of power and influence while providing the necessary conditions for an expansion of his monastic authority. Wilfrid initially appealed to Rome in response to his exile on the grounds that his ecclesiastic deposition was illegal, and after having gained papal support,

126 Ibid.
returned to Northumbria to present Ecgfrith with the bull.\(^{130}\) That Wilfrid felt sufficiently confident to return to not only Northumbria, but the court of King Ecgfrith, suggests the practical authority of both his acquired papal support and episcopal rank. Though Ecgfrith ultimately refused to acknowledge the papal decree and imprisoned the bishop, it is nonetheless somewhat astonishing that Wilfrid avoided serious physical harm or death given the conventions governing typical Anglo-Saxon feuds. Wilfrid’s rank and influence, as much as the developing papal interest, almost certainly influenced the king’s actions within the conflict.\(^{131}\) Despite the failure of his papal appeal, Wilfrid nevertheless continued to thrive within the hostile environment of his exile, utilizing its peripatetic nature to grow his own monastic holdings and religious influence.

Upon his release from Ecgfrith’s imprisonment, Wilfrid journeyed into Mercia and was met by King Æthelred’s nephew Berhtwald who, in apparent sympathy for Wilfrid’s condition, granted to the bishop a small estate on which Wilfrid established a monastic community.\(^{132}\) The new community seemingly contributed to Wilfrid’s communal network already extant within Mercia, and Eddius states that the novel community flourished so as to survive into his own day.\(^{133}\) Wilfrid’s episcopal influence and past monastic presence within Mercia very plausibly contributed to Berhtwald’s enthusiastic invitation and gift, and though small and singular, the endowment represents Wilfrid’s uncommon ability to retain influence and even increase his landed possessions when dispossessed of territory within his native kingdom.

\(^{130}\) Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 71.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 51. Wilfrid’s rank and influence were not so eminent as to prevent serious peril and harm. Eddius states that bishop Winfrid, due merely to the similarity of his and Wilfrid’s name, was attacked, robbed, and left nude. Winfrid survived the encounter, but many of his followers were murdered in the assault. Thus Wilfrid’s safe return to Northumbria could not have been entirely assumed or taken for granted.

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 81.

\(^{133}\) Ibid.
The extensive context of Wilfrid’s exile highlights the significant degree to which his position and reputation provided a variety of opportunities for his continued expression of monastic authority. For what was most likely a combination of familial and political reasons, King Æthelred expelled Wilfrid from Mercia shortly after the bishop received Berhtwald’s gift.\(^\text{134}\) Expelled from Mercia and finding no sanctuary in Wessex, Wilfrid ultimately obtained sanctuary and patronage within the pagan kingdom of Sussex. The South Saxon king Æthilwalh proved a generous benefactor, for in addition to allowing Wilfrid to proselytize, the king endowed him with eighty-seven hides of land and consecrated Wilfrid bishop of Selsey.\(^\text{135}\) Thus under Æthilwalh’s patronage Wilfrid, for at least a time, became the founder and singular authority of all Christian religious activity within the Kingdom of Sussex. Eddius states that Wilfrid founded a monastic community with the land acquired from King Æthilwalh, thus extending the network of communities under Wilfrid’s influence into three separate kingdoms. Wilfrid further extended his southern monastic association when the bishop received a gift of three hundred hides of land on the Isle of Wight from the newly crowned West Saxon king Cædwalla.\(^\text{136}\) Wilfrid appointed his nephew Bernwini abbot over the newly acquired lands while additionally contracting a priest named Hiddila to administer baptism to the surrounding laity.\(^\text{137}\) Wilfrid not only extended the boundaries of his monastic network through the establishment of novel religious communities, but also presided over the appointment of monastic and clerical

\(^{134}\) Ibid. Eddius states that Wilfrid’s Mercian exile was due in part to the familial ties of Ecgfrith’s and Æthelred’s wives. Ecgfrith’s brother Ælfwine had recently been killed in a war between Mercia and Northumbria however, and it is entirely plausible that the withdrawal of support from Wilfrid was either a condition of peace between the two kingdoms, or attached to the compensation due to Ecgfrith for Ælfwine’s death.

\(^{135}\) Ibid., 83.

\(^{136}\) Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 230-231. \(\frac{1}{4}\) of the island.

\(^{137}\) Ibid., 231.
subordinates in two kingdoms. While in political exile from Northumbria and Mercia Wilfrid yet possessed the religious authority and influence to command and appoint numerous monastic adherents, with Bede stating that in addition to Wilfrid, the priests Eappa, Padda, Burghelm, and Oiddi assisted in the conversion of the South Saxons. Despite the loss of northern administrative power, Wilfrid appears to have maintained practical authority over his southern properties and episcopate prior to his return to Northumbria.

The death of Ecgfrith in 685 A.D. precipitated Wilfrid’s reconciliation within both Northumbria and Mercia. Despite the Archbishop Theodore’s segmentation of the see at York shortly after Wilfrid’s initial deposition in 678 A.D., Wilfrid regained the see and had his institutions at Ripon and Hexham returned to him along with numerous communities within the Kingdom of Mercia. It is hardly surprising that it took the death of Wilfrid’s persecutor to reestablish friendly relations between the bishop and Northumbria. Once again, within the context of Anglo-Saxon political culture, feuds often ceased only with the death of one participant; with Ecgfrith’s successor Aldfrith’s political restoration resulting solely from the former’s premature death. Popular opposition to Wilfrid appears to have eroded after the death of Ecgfrith, with Archbishop Theodore, Ælfflæd of Whitby, and Mercian king Æthelred all accepting the apostolic decree recommending Wilfrid’s ecclesiastic restoration. Though the bishop’s peace proved only temporary, the fact that Wilfrid proved able to not only fortify and extend his monastic and religious influence within the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, but

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138 Ibid., 230. King Cædwalla apparently killed Æthilwalh just prior to his ascension to the West Saxon throne, and therefore subsequently subjugated the Kingdom of Sussex to West Saxon rule.

139 Ibid., 226.


141 Ibid., 89.
additionally oversee his ecclesiastic reinstatement and the reimbursement of certainly his most prized monastic possessions, illuminates the great autonomy of Wilfrid’s position. In spite of a concerted royal effort of dislocation, confiscation, and imprisonment, Wilfrid proved able to express an autonomy in contrast to royal authority and power in such a way as to expand his monastic association and influence beyond its pre-exile boarders. Though turbulent, Wilfrid’s exile proved far less constricting and suppressive when compared to contemporary secular examples. Edwin’s response to his retainer upon hearing the news of Æthilfrith’s threats was one of fatigued defeat and mortal acceptance. In contrast, Wilfrid managed to extend both his landed possessions and personal influence, founding communities and appointing within them abbots and brethren alike.

The development and outcome of Wilfrid’s exile proved unique within Anglo-Saxon political culture, a fact further illuminated by Wilfrid’s ability to withstand the political exile of two separate kings and twice force political reconciliation. Though the particular causes remain somewhat obscure, Wilfrid was exiled from Northumbria for a second time by King Aldfrith between 691-692 A.D.¹⁴² It appears plausible that the confrontation arose from the king’s desire to appropriate a portion of Wilfrid’s lands at Ripon and that the bishop’s refusal or resistance precipitated his expulsion.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, the continued inability of Northumbria’s secular powers to altogether diminish and mitigate the monastic and episcopal authority of Wilfrid suggests that the bishop’s survival owed less to circumstance and chance than to the opportunities available by virtue of his own personality and monastic influence. Despite the


¹⁴³ Ibid., Farmer suggests that the most likely explanation revolves around Aldfrith’s endowment of lands originally attached to the community at Ripon to the deposed bishop of Lindsey Æthelwine in A.D. 692.
collective intentions of King Aldfrith and Archbishop Berhtwald at the synod of Austerfield in 702-3 A.D. to strip Wilfrid of every single landed possession in both Northumbria and Mercia,\textsuperscript{144} international support for Wilfrid’s disgrace appears to have faded by the bishop’s second exile. Æthelred of Mercia appears entirely unwilling to participate once more in a Northumbrian feud, and indeed seemingly allows for the growth of Wilfrid’s monastic network within his own kingdom.\textsuperscript{145} It is entirely likely that Wilfrid continued to expand his monastic association during his second deposition in a manner similar to that of his first exile, as D. H. Farmer posits Wilfrid’s probable foundation of six further communities in Mercia: at Peterborough, Oundle, Brixworth, Evesham, Wing, and Withington.\textsuperscript{146} Wilfrid’s domestic exile once again produced an environment through which the bishop could exist and maintain power within his vast connection of monastic communities, while simultaneously fostering that very associations’ development and growth. Wilfrid’s second restoration to a Northumbrian bishopric once again materialized after a combination of royal succession and papal adjudication. Despite possibly losing peripheral Northumbrian lands in the feud, Wilfrid retained possession of his communities at Ripon and Hexham, which according to Eddius constituted his best.\textsuperscript{147} Thus at the time of his death in 709 A.D., four years after his second restoration, Wilfrid presided over a network of monastic communities within which he exercised practical authority over communities in both

\textsuperscript{144} Stephanus, \textit{The Life of Bishop Wilfrid}, 97.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 101.

\textsuperscript{146} Farmer, introduction to \textit{The Age of Bede}, 26.

\textsuperscript{147} Stephanus, \textit{The Life of Bishop Wilfrid}, 133. Eddius recounts that Wilfrid received Ripon and Hexham in addition to the derived revenues produced by each community. Eddius fails to mention the other Northumbrian lands and territories Wilfrid had either acquired or established communities upon prior to his first exile. It is plausible that Wilfrid had lost these communities in the process of his feuding, though the retention of Ripon and Hexham surely represented an enormous victory for the elderly bishop.
Northumbria and Mercia, while at the very least maintaining a foundational association with various communities within Sussex and Wessex.

The authority Wilfrid exercised over his monastic communities, as well as the personal autonomy from external interference such interconnected authority innately produced, represents the coalescing of Anglo-Saxon and Christian cultural understandings of deferred authority and due obligation. Eddius’ recollection of the bishop’s final journey towards Rome suggests that Wilfrid maintained a noticeable degree of authority over at least the communities in Mercia in addition to Ripon and Hexham:

Then our holy bishop went forward with the peace and blessing of all, both the chief men and subjects of Northumbria, and came to the southern lands, where he found all his abbots rejoicing at his coming. There he repeated the above-mentioned will at length to certain of them and for each of them in due proportion he either increased the livelihood of their monks by gifts of land, or rejoiced their hearts with money, as though, endowed with the spirit of prophecy, he were sharing his inheritance among his heirs before his death.\(^{148}\)

Wilfrid’s visitation of and willful provision for the communities in Mercia just prior to his death posits the continuation of a paternal monastic relationship between the bishop and the institutions he previously helped found. Wilfrid’s own death in the Mercian community at Oundle additionally suggests a sufficient degree of familiarity and trust between Wilfrid and his monastic subjects. Eddius refers to those monastic leaders under the hegemony of Wilfrid as “his” abbots, especially during the formulation and promulgation of Wilfrid’s will, an event with which Eddius would have had firsthand experience.\(^{149}\) Though while Wilfrid possessed a paternal authority and influence within his monastic network, such religious and monastic authority necessarily differed from that available to the bishop’s secular peers; as Wilfrid’s

\(^{148}\) Ibid., 141.

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 141. Eddius makes a noticeable transition during Wilfrid's second exile in which he includes himself among Wilfrid’s retainers.
authority not only drew upon those rights applicable to monastic founders and abbots, but Anglo-Saxon cultural conceptions of loyalty and obligation. Christianity did not initiate a comprehensive exchange of value systems upon its initial integration into Anglo-Saxon society.\textsuperscript{150} Aristocratic behaviors revolved around an ethic of obligatory loyalty to one’s lord, especially in times of feud or conflict.\textsuperscript{151} This cultural ethos persisted among the contemporary aristocracy from which the religious elite drew their leadership. Echoes of the contemporary secular heroic ethos permeate throughout Wilfrid’s \textit{vita}, and despite Wilfrid’s multiple exiles, the bishop never experiences total abandonment, nor does he ever travel completely alone. The synthesis of Wilfrid’s extensive monastic territory and the wealth and authority such a network provided, with a contemporary Anglo-Saxon ethic of obligation and loyalty, allowed for Wilfrid to weather the assaults and persecutions of multiple kings in multiple circumstances in a manner wholly unavailable to the bishop’s contemporary secular peers.

Wilfrid operated within the same cultural conventions as both his supporters and advisories; however, Wilfrid’s immense wealth and extensive communal support allowed for the bishop’s novel expression of contemporary concepts of obedience. Aldhelm of Malmesbury, in castigating those abbots who expressed only half-hearted support for their abbatial master, represents a contemporary understanding of required obedience to one’s patron in spite of prolonged harassment.\textsuperscript{152} A contemporary ethical conception of appropriate due obedience, coupled with the geographically expansive nature of Wilfrid’s monastic possessions, provided Wilfrid with autonomy to not only confront secular authorities, but to outlast any punitive

\textsuperscript{150} Wormald, \textit{The Times of Bede}, 67.

\textsuperscript{151} Campbell, “Elements in the Background to the Life of St. Cuthbert and his Early Cult,” 9.

\textsuperscript{152} Aldhelm to The Abbots of Wilfrid, in \textit{Aldhelm: The Prose Works}, 170.
actions they may have seen fit to enforce. While Wilfrid’s severe opposition to anti-canonical pronouncements and behaviors most often corresponded with his own personal tribulations or depositions,\textsuperscript{153} the bishop’s success in his consistent appeal to Rome further illustrates his autonomy from secular judgments. That the various communities under Wilfrid’s care could support and maintain their abbot in exile directly contributes to the autonomy in Wilfrid’s ability to ultimately appeal to papal, rather than secular authority. Ecgfrith neglected to abide by the papal synod that returned Wilfrid’s bishopric; however, the extensity of Wilfrid’s monastic connections provided a safety net that allowed Wilfrid the autonomy to continue defending the apostolic decree in spite of Ecgfrith’s continued hostility. Wilfrid’s abbatial relationship provided the authority and wealth that allowed the bishop to bestow obedience in a continental theoretic authority rather than a local practical power.

The enormity of Wilfrid’s communal associations, combined with the wealth and influence they produced, provided Wilfrid with livable alternatives to stagnate exile or militaristic upheaval. In exile, Wilfrid expanded his monastic landholdings throughout three kingdoms, established a novel bishopric, and initiated the practical evangelization of the South Saxons. The character of Wilfrid’s exile fundamentally differed from that of contemporary secular exiles such as Edwin, Aldfrith, or Cædwalla. The experiences of contemporary religious exiles similarly lack the enduring spirit of Wilfrid’s, with Agilbert of Wessex, Winfrith of Mercia, and Tunberht of Hexham each suffering from ecclesiastic depositions in the seventh-century. Yet none of Wilfrid’s deposed contemporaries possessed the means to resist deposition and force restoration in a manner similar to his own. The autonomy Wilfrid expressed through his vast abbatial relationship and communal network, in the wake of secular hostility and

\textsuperscript{153} Foley, \textit{Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus’ Life of Bishop Wilfrid, an Early English Saints’ Life}, 50.
persecution, allowed the bishop to not only expand his landed possessions and personal associations to new heights, but adequately resist secular authority and acquire novel patrons.

**Secular Relationships and Political Power**

Anglo-Saxon monastic authorities of the seventh and eighth centuries possessed methods through which noble abbots and abbesses proved able to project their influence onto secular political leaders, thereby exerting their own authority into secular society, often through occupying the role of royal counselor. The influential advisory authority of monastic leaders such as Benedict Biscop, Cuthbert, Guthlac, and Wilfrid developed in part due to the amalgamation of Anglo-Saxon aristocratic convention with the strength and popularity of monasticism in seventh-and-eighth-century Britain. As Patrick Wormald and James Campbell have posited, contemporary monastic foundation and integration inherently necessitated the transplantation of a secular aristocratic ethos, along with all its traditional customs and conventions, into the newly established monastic setting. Indeed, the “thought-world” of contemporary medieval society was dominated by notions of nobility, itself a concept which transcended secular and religious distinction. The degree to which various aristocratic customs survived the transition from a secular context to a monastic depends largely upon a community’s founder and abbot, as well as the institution’s internal regulatory tradition. It is evident however, that an aristocratic understanding of monasticism persisted with some popularity well into the eighth-century, as various leaders within the Anglo-Saxon Church voiced their concern in regards to the clerical adoption of worldly behavioral standards. Bede himself castigated those

154 For further study, see Bede’s Letter to Egbert, Patrick Wormald’s *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, and James Campbell’s “Elements in the Background to the Life of St. Cuthbert and His Early Cult.”


156 Ibid., 50.
communities that had been “given the name of monasteries by a very foolish way of speaking, yet have none of the reality of a monastic way of life.”\textsuperscript{157} Despite the potential for the aristocratic abuse of monastic land practices and imagery however, the synthesis of continental monastic tradition with domestic aristocratic social convention created an environment through which the personal autonomy and authority inherent in monastic foundation and abbatial rule was supplemented by a contemporary aristocratic expectation to participation in political discourse. The self-determination monastic leaders expressed by virtue of their communal authority coalesced with traditional concepts of aristocratic political obligation to foster the development of a novel expression of individual autonomy, whereby a monastic leader not only maintained their position of authority over an often legally independent religious community, but additionally continued to occupy the position of royal political advisor and spiritual confidant.

When monastics interacted with the secular courts of their respective kingdoms, they were participating in a long standing social tradition of noble aristocratic political engagement. Secular nobility both north and south of the Humber appear to have participated in the development and administration of their respective kingdoms, and while the royal and dynastic political structures of each kingdom may have differed, trends common to multiple kingdoms are visible. During the discussion concerning Wilfrid’s second restoration at the synod of Nidd, Berhtfrith, “a chief man next in rank to the king,”\textsuperscript{158} presents himself as a leading actor and authority within Northumbria’s political coalition present at the synod. Shortly following abbess Ælfflæd’s declaration of Aldfrith’s last will and testament, Eddius quotes Berhtfrith in stating: “This is the will of the king [Osred] and of his chief men, that we obey the mandates of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157} Bede, “Bede’s Letter to Egbert,” 344.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Stephanus, \textit{The Life of Bishop Wilfrid}, 131.
\end{itemize}
Apostolic See and the commands of King Aldfrith in all things.”

Eddius’ inclusion of Northumbrian earls in the pronouncement may represent the hagiographer’s intent to project the totality of Wilfrid’s reconciliation; nevertheless, the position attributed to Berhtfrith during the synod suggests a political interest and confidence from a member of the secular nobility. The existence of a particularly politically conscious Northumbrian nobility around 706 A.D. is additionally likely, as a rebellion had only recently expelled Osred’s predecessor Eadwulf from the kingdom and placed Aldfrith’s young son upon the throne; the minority of Osred further suggesting the political activism of the Northumbrian nobility.

Despite members of the nobility increasingly associating with and entering into a monastic way of life, religious leaders retained the contemporary political consciousness appropriate to their secular rank. The inclusion of religious counsellors in secular courts presents itself at the very least as an episodic occurrence in early conversion age England, as Bede records several instances in which bishops, for assistance in spiritual development and council, accompanied Christian queens in their marriages to pagan kings. As monastic establishment and development expanded throughout the seventh-century, the presence of abbatial counsellors came to represent a common aspect of contemporary royal courts. It is within the context of an aristocratic political expectation, in addition to the growth and development of English monasticism, that monastics such as Cuthbert and Wilfrid’s associations with contemporary

159 Ibid., 133.

160 Ibid., 129.

161 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 75. The bishop Liudhard is present at King Æthelbert’s court prior to Augustine’s landfall in Kent in A.D. 597. While Æthelbert remained a pagan at the time of his marriage to the Christian Frank Bertha, their political union depended upon the latter’s ability to freely practice her faith with the aid of her bishop Liudhard.
royal courts acquire their proper meaning; a context in which their political inclusion appears as the natural result of class obligation and monastic spiritual rank.

Those monastics of the seventh and eighth centuries who associated with secular kings and sought royal patronage participated in a unique relationship contingent upon the synthesis of their positions within the nobility and the Church, with the spiritual authority attained through religious adherence and ordination consequently aggrandizing their traditional aristocratic claim to counsel. An appeal to the spiritual often preceded the interactions between royals and monastics, as with Ecgfrith’s provision of land at Jarrow “for the redemption of his soul.”

Similarly, contemporary law codes and charters reveal the degree to which Anglo-Saxon kings and nobles valued the spiritual support of those monastics under their patronage. In 704 A.D. King Ine of Wessex freed the monastic communities within the borders of his realm from secular payments and duties with the expressed expectation that those religious houses would pray for the wellbeing of the kingdom. Extant charters of land bequeathal convey a similar preoccupation with the spiritual intercession of the bestowed religious, with Surrey’s Sub-King Frithuwold’s donation to the community at Chertsey binding the institution’s future leaders to spiritually intercede on behalf of the king’s soul. Whether ulterior social or political circumstances constituted an additional motive for monastic land donation, it is clear that spiritual considerations entered into the minds of kings and nobles to some degree as they conducted their secular affairs.

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164 Grant by Frithuwold to Chertsey, charter, 672-674, In Whitelock, 479.
The spiritual assistance, and therefore temporal influence, of monastic advisors found perhaps even higher regard among kings in times of conflict. The Northumbrian kings Oswald and Ecgfrith are both recorded as having consulted with Aidan and Cuthbert respectively prior to engaging in combat, with Ecgfrith subsequently losing his life in his disregard of Cuthbert’s counsel.165 The often-prophetic aspect of religious counsel, such as Cuthbert’s vision of Ecgfrith’s death at the hands of the Picts, effectively differentiated monastic advice from secular guidance. The communication of prophetic visions within secular politics may have had a deliberate ideological importance to Anglo-Saxon dynastic affairs, with visions in Bede often justifying a king’s use of power.166 Bede records that both Cuthbert and the king’s secular advisors condemned Ecgfrith’s expedition into Pictland in 685 A.D.167 Cuthbert’s recorded use of prophecy in his royal consultation however, innately separated the advice of the bishop from that of his lay contemporaries, constructing for Cuthbert a composite authority contingent upon the bishop’s past secular rank and current ecclesiastic stature. Similarly, prophetic visions could serve to either encourage the amendment of royal actions, or call the legitimacy of a sitting king into question.168 In his letter condemning the actions of Æthelbald of Mercia, St. Boniface invokes the images of damned kings Coelred of Mercia and Osred of Deira whose unjust actions in life led to their subsequent punishments in Hell.169 Boniface’s goal in invoking images of

165 Yorke, The Conversion of Britain, 231.


167 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 254.


169 Boniface and seven other missionary bishops to Æthelbald, King of Mercia, 746-747, in Whitelock, 820.
damned kings was to entice Æthelbald to reform his errant behavior and thus to act in accordance with accepted religious convention in addition to rescuing the king’s soul from sharing a similar fate. Secular consultation by contrast inherently lacked such a spiritual, and often-prophetic, dimension which not only provoked royal consideration but conceivably influenced future royal behaviors. Even if the prophetic elements of monastic consultation only materialized within the hagiographic record, the introduction of saintly prognostication into the contemporary historical mindset fostered an environment whereby the counsel of the religious attained a novel significance.

The amalgamation of an Anglo-Saxon cultural ethos with the inclusive and self-determining structure with which early English monasticism progressed, provided royal monastic women with an opportunity to exercise an influence within secular government and religious administration alongside that of their male counterparts. At least within the highest tiers of traditional Germanic social hierarchy, women generally maintained a relatively elevated position; a station, when applied within an Anglo-Saxon context, proved influential socially as well as politically. In recalling the primary expulsion of his abbot, Eddius accuses the Northumbrian queen Iuminburgh of instigating the persecution of Wilfrid by provoking the material jealousies of Ecgfrith. Eddius’ mere production of a narrative centered upon queenly persuasion as an adequate or appropriate explanation for his saint’s ecclesiastic deposition, tacitly suggests the degree of social influence royal women commanded within seventh-century Northumbria. Eddius’ further insistence that Wilfrid’s subsequent expulsions from Mercia and

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171 Ibid.

Wessex resulted primarily from the familial relations of each respective kingdom’s queen to the Northumbrian court suggests, at the very least, that the notion of a king adhering to queenly advice was not a foreign concept in seventh-century England. Royal advisement was an understood function existent within royal and aristocratic women’s conception of their social roles; a conception which survived royal women’s transition from secular to monastic atmospheres.\footnote{Hollis, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church}, 156.}

Abbesses’ continued participation in secular political discourse in concert with the monastic authority inherent in their abbatial office contributed to the development of a novel authority within Anglo-Saxon politics, mirroring the influence enjoyed by male monastics with the addition of bonds of kinship with secular ruling dynasties. Double houses often operated within royal familial associations whereby an abbess of royal descent ruled communities their secular kin considered valuable for the continued maintenance of social and political kin interests.\footnote{Yorke, \textit{Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses}, 9.} Thus royal abbesses’ contiguous familial proximity to secular kings eased their interference in political events.\footnote{Ibid., 145} The traditions surrounding Hild of Whitby in particular imagine an abbess of considerable authority within both secular society and the Church, with Whitby hosting the synod which determined the character of Northumbrian Christianity,\footnote{Bede, \textit{Ecclesiastical History of the English People}, 186.} in addition to providing the initial training for five future bishops.\footnote{Ibid., 244. Bosa, Ætla, Oftfor, John, and Wilfrid[II].} Bede’s statement that both commoner and king sought and respected Hild’s advice suggests the great esteem with which

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173 Hollis, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church}, 156.
175 Ibid., 145
177 Ibid., 244. Bosa, Ætla, Oftfor, John, and Wilfrid[II].
contemporaries held the abbess’ counsel.\textsuperscript{178} Hild controlled what was certainly one of Northumbria’s preeminent monastic institutions in Whitby, and her judgment appears to have carried significant prestige: with the abbess’ initial opposition to Wilfrid’s primary restoration plausibly contributing a certain legitimacy to Wilfrid’s adversaries. Hild’s successor at Whitby appears to have commanded an authority similar to her own, as Eddius refers to Ælfflæd as “always the comforter and best counsellor of the whole province.”\textsuperscript{179} Eddius no doubt conditioned this flattering response upon Ælfflæd’s prominent role in Wilfrid’s final reinstallment at the synod of Nidd; however, additional examples of the abbess’ advisory influence confirm the relatively high esteem with which contemporary secular authorities considered Ælfflæd’s counsel. Ælfflæd’s presence at the deathbed of Aldfrith demonstrates not only the level of shared intimacy between the abbess and Northumbrian court circles, but the significant degree to which Ælfflæd could influence royal succession.\textsuperscript{180} Ælfflæd does not appear to have been the only individual present during Aldfrith’s last testament, as Eddius states that many others confirmed the ailing king’s forgiveness of Wilfrid in addition to the abbess.

Nevertheless, Ælfflæd’s authoritative and defining pronouncement of Aldfrith’s will at the synod of Nidd suggests a contemporary understanding of the abbess as an interpretive and trustworthy authority, at least in so far as dynastic continuity is concerned. Ælfflæd’s contemporary social influence appears sufficient whereby her mere presence at Aldfrith’s deathbed legitimized the rebellion against Eawulf and the subsequent installation of her nephew Osred.\textsuperscript{181} Ælfflæd’s multifaceted involvement with regal will interpretation and succession, in addition to the

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{179} Stephanus, \textit{The Life of Bishop Wilfrid}, 129.

\textsuperscript{180} Hollis, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church}, 182.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
political and social reconciliation of Wilfrid at Nidd, suggest the great influence the abbess exerted over the social and political landscape of early eighth-century Northumbria.

Ælfflæd’s kin-dependent abbatial authority, and familial proximity to the Northumbrian royal court,\textsuperscript{182} explains both the abbess’ political consciousness and her significant ability to influence future societal development. Ælfflæd’s political relationships may have influenced the abbess’ subsequent hagiographic image, with Bede recording an encounter whereby Ælfflæd sought the counsel of Cuthbert regarding the reign of her brother Ecgfrith. Ælfflæd’s interest in Ecgfrith’s fate and successor seems to reinforce the existence of a protracted political consciousness which the abbess expressed at least up to Aldfrith’s death. While David Rollason suggests that the narrative may be representative of an indirect statement of support by the community at Lindisfarne for the reign of King Aldfrith,\textsuperscript{183} the account’s inclusion of Ælfflæd nonetheless reveals the great dynastic and political influence the abbess’ person commanded. Cuthbert and Ælfflæd’s continued association may additionally allude to the abbess’ outstanding contemporary religious status. Cuthbert’s counsel of Ælfflæd may have been an attempt by the community of Lindisfarne to elevate Cuthbert’s saintly wisdom through the suggestion that Cuthbert guided even the wisest of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, to suggest that Cuthbert’s counsel maintained meaningful and prophetic elements is to tacitly suggest the trustworthy and dignified stature of his listener. Ælfflæd participated within an existing social tradition which valued and perhaps facilitated royal women’s involvement in secular politics to a certain degree. Royal consultation appears as a traditional spousal duty of contemporary queens, and while there

\textsuperscript{182} Ecgfrith was Ælfflæd’s brother. Aldfrith and Ælfflæd shared a father in Oswiu, making Osred the abbess’s nephew.

\textsuperscript{183} Rollason, “Hagiography in Politics in Early Northumbria,” 107.
is evidence to suggest that ecclesiastic counsel sought to undermine marital guidance,¹⁸⁴ Hild and Ælfflæd’s composite position as exterior monastic authorities, while yet remaining internal members of a royal kin-group, legitimized their consultation and protected their monastic position from secular reprisal. The composite secular and monastic elements of the position maintained by abbesses such as Hild and Ælfflæd elevated the degree of influence a royal daughter could exert over both secular and ecclesiastic affairs, with their situation providing a legitimate basis for interest in both religious and dynastic development.

¹⁸⁴ Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 166.
CHAPTER IV

AUTONOMY IN CONTEMPLATIVE DESIRE AND RETIREMENT

In this chapter I consider the degrees of individual agency and autonomy from social obligation that anchoritic monastics achieved through their pursuit of an isolated contemplative condition. While continental eremitic traditions certainly influenced the whole of the early Anglo-Saxon Church, the ascetic and anchoritic nature of the Irish Church proved particularly influential in the development of Northumbrian Christianity. The conventionalization of eremitic behaviors within the Anglo-Saxon religious conscious attached a certain legitimacy to the individual actions taken towards the attainment of hermitic solitude, despite the frequency with which such actions occasioned an abandonment of administrative or pastoral duty. Though occasionally opposed by their immediate ecclesiastic superiors, many contemplatively oriented monastics managed nevertheless, to both condition a contemplative existence within their coenobitic environment, and eventually secure their retirement from communal monasticism in favor of an isolated contemplative station. I specifically investigate and compare the ecclesiastic careers of St. Aidan of Lindisfarne, St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, and St. Guthlac of Crowland, in an attempt to illuminate the significant degree to which seventh-century monastics proved capable of expressing a practical self-determination through a spiritual desire for divine contemplation.

Desire for Freedom in God

Despite the sundry pastoral and social activities inherent in seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monastic careers, contemporary religious expressed varying degrees of contemplative desire which most often centered upon an ideal of secular social abandonment in favor of eremitic spiritual solitude. Desire for spiritual isolation not only inaugurated a
monastic’s journey towards contemplative achievement, but sustained their mission and colored the actions which ultimately contributed to their desire’s realization. In the words of the Benedictine historian Jean Leclercq: “Since contemplation in its full meaning means possession in perfect knowledge, it will be attained only in Heaven; it is impossible here on earth. But one can obtain from God the gift of real anticipation which is the desire itself.”¹ In such a desire, monastics expressed a legitimate individual autonomy, not only through the ultimate achievement of contemplative isolation, but in an individual’s particular actions directed towards the attainment of a contemplative end. Contemplatives such as Cuthbert and Guthlac exhibit the extensity of their personal autonomy, not merely through their maintenance of a contemplative mode of existence amid active and or coenobitic duties, but through their practical ability to orchestrate a release from communal life for the sake of achieving solitary respite. Desire for contemplative expression therefore conditioned and even legitimized certain monastics’ individualistic behaviors which contributed to a heightened social isolation.

Though the possession of a contemplative desire proved essential for the pursuit and attainment of spiritual autonomy, the modes of expression through which seventh-century ecclesiastics articulated their spiritual desires varied greatly. It is possible to broadly distinguish contemporary expressive modes between personal movements toward contemplative actualization, and literary social pronouncements of contemplative yearning, often in the context of the present unattainability of spiritual retreat. The active anchoritic pursuits of monastic hermits, who consciously sought spiritual liberation at the expense of worldly attachment and social participation, best exemplify the character of personal contemplative desire extant in seventh-century England. In this regard, the mere actuality of a contemplative’s hermitage, rather

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than the subsequent literary and hagiographic conceptualization of their anchoritic lives, posits the existence of an internal personal desire for divine contemplation. In contrast to individual action towards contemplative attainment, social articulation of the necessity and value of spiritual retreat vary from brief and often seemingly unintentional remarks in the consideration of a prospective hermit, to formalized and almost customary assertions of contemplative longing. The exigency of the active religious life, particularly in England where the weak episcopal structure necessitated the aid of monastic institutions in pastoral care, made it impractical for every monk who harbored contemplative propensities to express their desire in a static, reclusive way. A context of active necessity therefore naturally suggests that many religious expressed a public desire for contemplative escape despite their occupational circumstances directly prohibiting their retreat. From Cuthbert to Aldhelm, monastics consigned, by a superior’s bidding or ecclesiastic duty, to an active occupation consistently exhibited an apparent longing for contemplative escape which ran parallel to an understanding that such a movement was presently unattainable. Cuthbert’s hagiographers record the saint as being profoundly resistant to his episcopal appointment, for it necessitated an interruption of his contemplative retreat on Farne. Aldhelm concurrently complained to King Aldfrith of the weariness which he had acquired through ecclesiastical administration, despite the high value he awarded Scriptural studies. Nevertheless, the early monastic institutions of Anglo-Saxon England often assumed practices which suited their particular religious needs, and adapted to their individual


3 “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 111; The anonymous author conveying hermit’s deep disapproval of the appointment through his statement that Cuthbert was “led away unwillingly and under compulsion, weeping and wailing...”

circumstances. Certainly, not all contemporary religious leaders appear to express a real desire to quit the coenobitic life in favor of solitary contemplation, with Wilfrid exhibiting little, if any, speculative desire at all; nevertheless, a near universal, if merely nominal, respect for the individual value of the contemplative life does appear to have permeated the learned religious circles of England in the seventh and eighth centuries.

**St. Aidan of Lindisfarne**

Despite differences in ecclesiastic position and duty, seventh-and-eighth-century English monastics managed to implement their own anchoritic retirement from social life, thereby conditioning a significant degree of personal autonomy and self-determination through a fervent expression of contemplative desire. Bede describes St. Aidan of Lindisfarne, the Irish bishop sent by Iona at the request of King Oswald to mission to the Northumbrians, as living a relatively active episcopal life of proselytization, yet simultaneously pursuing intermittent periods of contemplative escape. Aidan’s combination of episcopal duty with periods of eremitic recess appears as a synthesis unique to him, very possibly arising from the bishop’s background in Irish monasticism. Nevertheless, Bede leaves no doubt as to the bishop’s active endeavors, describing as Aidan peripatetically missionizing throughout the whole of Northumbria, and often utilizing royal estates as headquarters for local conversion efforts. Aidan seemingly maintained a broad concern for conversion, as the bishop associated not merely with king and ealdorman, but with commoner and pauper alike, never failing to stop and speak with passersby “whether high or

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6 While Bede’s letter to Egbert displays his own virulent disapproval of false monastic communities unorthodoxly enamored with secular behaviors and manners of living suggest the variability of religious standards within early eighth-century English monasticism, the literary works of learned and serious religious communities and their adherents illuminate the existence of shared social and personal contemplative proclivities.

Furthermore, the incipient bishop of Lindisfarne inaugurated a wave of unparalleled Christian religious activity within the northern kingdom’s boarders; as Aidan’s episcopal establishment and success induced a myriad of other Irish monastics to follow suit, which in turn provided the context for the construction of various new churches. Aidan’s evangelical success may be gauged additionally through the Northumbrian Church’s survivability and continuity, as where Paulinus’ conversion attempt failed to establish a lasting Christian presence in Northumbria, Aidan’s produced an enduring ecclesiastic structure and monastic continuance. The developmental success of the Northumbrian Church, in combination with Bede’s narrative, suggest that the Ionian bishop accepted his active and missionizing role very seriously.

Notwithstanding the bishop’s observably successful episcopal establishment and proselytization attempts, the activity of Aidan’s religious career must not overshadow the genuine contemplative character of the Ionian missionary. Bede’s description of Aidan explicates an individual, though accepting of his active duty to the subjects under his charge, nevertheless continually displays a personal affinity for contemplative expressions of religiosity both communally and ascetically. Though surrounded by political authority and material patronage, Aidan incessantly repudiates political engagement while remaining ever concerned with contemplative behaviors and material detachment. When occasionally invited to dine with the Northumbrian king, Aidan never loitered, eating little and leaving “as soon as possible to read or pray” with his fellow clerics. The primacy with which Aidan awarded contemplative reflection is additionally supposed through the bishop’s mandate that all his pupils, both monastic and lay,

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8 Ibid., 150.
9 Ibid., 147.
10 Ibid., 150.
were to meditate “that is, either to read the scriptures or to learn the Psalms.”\textsuperscript{11} In Christian as well as rabbinical tradition, meditation can only be performed upon a text,\textsuperscript{12} with Bede’s reference to scripture and Psalms seemingly initially suggesting such an understanding. Jean Leclercq edifyingly explains the ancient understanding of meditation, which consequently resurfaces in language used by medieval Christians:

\begin{quote}
It implies thinking of a thing with the intent to do it; in other words, to prepare oneself for it, to prefigure it in the mind, to desire it, in a way, to do it in advance - briefly, to practice it... To practice a thing by thinking of it, is to fix it in the memory, to learn it.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Meditation in the context of textural reflection and examination additionally presents itself within the continental Benedictine understanding of the practice, with scriptural meditation aiding in the subsequent completion of good works through its elucidation of God’s Word.\textsuperscript{14} A text based understanding of meditative practice fits well within Aidan’s dual pursuit of active ecclesiastic establishment and intervening contemplative respite, being at once the source of the bishop’s contemplative desires while simultaneously representing the foundation of the bishop’s pastoral activity. Bede’s application of meditor within his Historia Ecclesiastica may suggest a textural understanding prompting subsequent active participation;\textsuperscript{15} however Bede’s use of the word elsewhere appears to posit a more personal contemplative understanding of even scriptural meditation. Prior to his monastic induction at Melrose, Bede states in his Life of St. Cuthbert that

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} Leclercq, The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, 17.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 16.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 17.}
\end{itemize}

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the future saint meditated “entrance into a stricter course of life,”\textsuperscript{16} thus freeing the word from any relationship with textural examination. While Bede’s use of meditari in his Historia Ecclesiastica appears to suggest a necessary association between meditation and scripture, his description of Cuthbert’s monastic ingression indicates the potential for meditation outside of textual examination.

During his tenure as bishop of Lindisfarne, Aidan was the primary authority for Christendom within the Northumbrian kingdom, yet despite such administrative responsibility, the bishop managed to maintain a degree of personal autonomy within the contemporary ecclesiastic structure through his periodic retreats to the desolate island of Farne for contemplative prayer and peace. Bede relates that Aidan established the humble island cell as “his retreat when he wished to pray alone and undisturbed.”\textsuperscript{17} The island of Farne was known to be inhospitable even in Cuthbert’s day,\textsuperscript{18} and it is certainly possible that the provisional nature of Aidan’s ascetic visits owed at least as much to the inherent hardships associated with sustaining an existence upon the dismal island as it did the active requirements of his episcopal rank. Regardless of the intermittent nature of Aidan’s retreats, the bishop’s contemplative commitment during the periods of his spiritual withdrawal proved sufficiently serious as to produce a hermitage which apparently survived until Bede’s own time at least eighty years after Aidan’s death.\textsuperscript{19} That Aidan’s episcopal rank did not preclude the bishop’s contemplative retreat posits


\textsuperscript{17} Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 168.

\textsuperscript{18} “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 97; Of Farne Island the anonymous writer of Aidan’s solitary successor states that “almost no one could remain alone for any length of time on account of the various illusions caused by devils.” Aidan’s hermitage was temporary in that the bishop did not live an entirely solitary life and it may be that the conditions of the island made continual existence difficult.

\textsuperscript{19} Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 168.
not only Aidan’s deep affinity for contemplative religious expression, but a personal autonomy extant within the contemporary episcopal structure to adequately provide the means for such an expression. Certainly, early Anglo-Saxon monastic institutions would have been unfamiliar with the notion that action and contemplation somehow existed mutually exclusive of each other; nevertheless, Aidan’s experience is unique in contrast to future monastic contemplative ideals. Of the two most famous subsequent Anglo-Saxon hermits, neither Guthlac nor Cuthbert occupy an episcopal office when establishing their hermitages at Crowland and Farne respectively. Cuthbert surrenders his contemplative existence on Farne when summoned to occupy the bishopric of Lindisfarne and only reverts to his anchoritic insular existence after retiring from episcopal responsibility. Aidan and Cuthbert may have both participated in active as well as contemplative endeavors, but only Aidan engaged in both simultaneously.

Aidan’s proclivity towards episodic contemplative exiles in congruity with his episcopal activities and duties suggests a somewhat Gregorian mold for the bishop’s religious life. Aidan’s character outside of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* is opaque, and with Bede himself a proponent of the Gregorian ideal of balanced participation in both active and contemplative behaviors, it is possible that Bede’s conviction colored his description and understanding of the Ionian saint. Though while Bede interprets Aidan’s life within a Gregorian paradigm, the continuity of both the Northumbrian Church and Aidan’s hermitic tradition on the island of Farne alludes to the veracity of the bishop’s dual preoccupation. The survivability of the Lindisfarne episcopate as well as the explosion of monastic activity in the decades succeeding Aidan’s death, each evince Aidan’s success in establishing an enduring ecclesiastic and episcopal structure in Northumbria.

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Farne Island, almost certainly due to Aidan’s inaugural hermitage, similarly remained a popular and active hermitage of Lindisfarne for generations, with Cuthbert, Æthilwald, and Felgild each subsequently inhabiting the island’s cell. Aidan’s individual agency and autonomy thus rests in his ability, amid a necessarily active career, to synthesize those active and contemplative aspects of the religious life which his successors found to be largely mutually exclusive, as even Cuthbert felt it necessary to abandon his hermitage upon his episcopal elevation.

**St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne**

Aidan articulated his contemplative longings within a context of necessary religious action and therefore successfully synthesized the dual aspects of contemporary religious expression; though in doing so, he achieved a demonstrably less total and enduring contemplative existence in comparison to his hermitic successor Cuthbert. Despite the obvious occupational similarities between the two, contemporary hagiographic accounts present Cuthbert’s contemplative consciousness as more self-defining than that of Aidan. Cuthbert’s saintly tradition produced three hagiographies, two prose and one metric, within a quarter century of his death in 687 A.D. An anonymous monk from the community at Lindisfarne produced the first account of Cuthbert’s life between 699 and 705 A.D., which subsequently influenced Bede to compose a verse *vita* in 716 A.D., followed by a prose narrative in 721 A.D. Despite various didactic differences between the two prose works, both Bede and the anonymous hagiographer posit a contemplative motive for nearly all of Cuthbert’s major life decisions. Cuthbert’s coenobitic withdrawals and episcopal retirement merely facilitated the saint’s ultimate

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23 Colgrave, introduction to *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, 13.

24 Farmer, introduction to *The Age of Bede*, 16.
contemplative end, an end which legitimized Cuthbert’s agency and abandonment of active responsibility in the eyes of his contemporaries, despite Bede’s later apprehension to Cuthbert’s disregard of duty. Regardless of Bede’s pedagogic pretentions and Gregorian reorganization of Cuthbert however, his prose hagiography yet depicts, much like his anonymous predecessor, a saint deeply influenced and driven, both actively and privately, by contemplative aspirations. Cuthbert’s contemplative determination constituted the foundation upon which his personal agency depended, and both of the saint’s hagiographers swiftly establish the saint’s innate contemplative character within their respective works. The anonymous author conspicuously elucidates the young Cuthbert’s speculative nature in recalling the great periods of fasting the young saint endured for the sake of prayer and Heavenly rewards, while Bede, albeit more reservedly, constructs an image of Cuthbert akin to an acute observer and diligent student; though Bede’s later description of Cuthbert’s desire to study the scripture with the ailing Boisil nevertheless further envisages Cuthbert as a young monastic deeply concerned with personal spiritual expressions of piety.

Cuthbert’s first discernable attempt at achieving contemplative peace followed his tenure as prior of the community at Melrose; an office the young monk abruptly abandoned in an apparent attempt to detach himself from the world and its distractions. Indeed, according to Cuthbert’s anonymous hagiographer, Cuthbert “finally fled from worldly glory and sailed away

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26 “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 75-77.

27 Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 175. After entering the community at Melrose Bede states that Cuthbert: “sought at once to observe the rules of the regular life equally with the other brethren, or even to excel them in zeal for a stricter discipline, being more diligent in fact in reading and working, in watching and praying.”

28 Ibid., 183.

privately and secretly.”  

The anonymous author’s insistence that Cuthbert’s departure was a covert affair suggests that the prior acted without the approval of Eata, his abbot, and therefore proceeded of his own volition to seemingly pursue a contemplative existence at the expense of coenobitic responsibility. In contrast to the anonymous author’s account, Bede removes all motive and agency from Cuthbert himself in his insistence that the monk’s departure from Melrose was legitimately orchestrated by Eata, who personally transferred Cuthbert to the community of Lindisfarne “in order that there also he might both teach the rule of monastic perfection by his authority as prior and illustrate it by the example of his virtue.”

Clare Stancliffe is correct in her assumption that in this particular instance, the anonymous writer is most likely nearer to the truth of the event, as there seems to be little reason for the anonymous hagiographer to describe Cuthbert as abandoning his monastic responsibilities in such a self-concerned manner unless it were actually the case. Bede’s revision of the event lends credence to the original narrative’s verity, and although it is possible his emendation may constitute a correction similar to his treatment of Cuthbert’s monastic ingression, it is more likely, as Stancliffe states, that Bede, ever inclined to omit unflattering aspects of fellow ecclesiastics’ lives, felt it prudent to leave Cuthbert’s administrative abandonment out of his vita. Eata may have indeed transferred Cuthbert to Lindisfarne, though perhaps not in the manner which Bede’s

30 Ibid. postremo tamen secularem gloriam fugiens clam et occulte abscedens enauguit.

31 Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 207. transtulit eum reverentissimus abbas ipsius Eata in monasterium quod in Lindisfarenensium insula situm est, ut ibi quoque regulam monachicae perfectionis et praepositi auctoritate doceret, et exemplo virtutis ostenderet.

32 Stancliffe, “Cuthbert and Polarity between Pastor and Solitary,” 32

33 “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 77. Cuthbert’s anonymous hagiographer erroneously states that Cuthbert received his initial monastic tonsure at Ripon, instead of the correct Melrose.

context seems to imply. Bede’s narrative suggests an idealistic use of abbatial authority to direct the conduct and occupation of a monastic subordinate, with Eata, simultaneous abbot of Lindisfarne and Melrose, seemingly discerning that Cuthbert’s talent would be best utilized at Lindisfarne and therefore relocating the monk from one community under his hegemony to another.

Only in Bede is such a rigid idealism suggested as the anonymous writer records that after slipping away from Melrose, Cuthbert “was invited and constrained by the venerable and holy Bishop Eata and came, by God’s help, to this island of ours which is called Lindisfarne.” The anonymous author’s assertion that Cuthbert was “constrained” (coacte) by Eata proposes, in contrast to Bede, that Cuthbert, at least somewhat against his initial preference, was in some manner coerced into entering into the community at Lindisfarne. Bede’s narrative of Cuthbert’s transfer to Lindisfarne avoids any mention of the prior’s contemplative designs, much in the same way as it avoids any suggestions of the saint’s administrative neglect. While a later Gregorian like Bede may have understood Cuthbert’s administrative withdrawal as an unfortunate blemish in the life of an otherwise saintly monastic, there is little reason however to assume that such anchoritic expressions of contemplative piety seriously troubled all within the community at Lindisfarne during the completion of the anonymous vita. It may be that Eata understood Cuthbert’s administrative abandonment as an unacceptable movement outside of explicit abbatial acquiescence, and therefore preferred Cuthbert to continue his administrative counseling at Lindisfarne. That the anonymous monk nonetheless felt inclined to mention Eata’s coercion of Cuthbert while previously excluding the saint’s initial introduction into Melrose.  

35 “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 94-95. Deinde a uenerabili et sanncto episcopo Eata inuitatus, et coacte ad hanc insulam nostrum que dicitur Lindisfarnae...
suggests that not all within Northumbrian religious society universally deplored Cuthbert’s eremitic behavior.

Cuthbert’s hagiographers persistently interpret the saint’s profound contemplative consciousness as the ultimate theoretic basis for his concrete actions, and even though Cuthbert initially failed in his attempts to achieve contemplative escape from coenobitic responsibility and life, his incipient movement nevertheless establishes a context which explicates his future eremitic behaviors. Cuthbert’s attempt to abscond from communal monasticism years before his primary hermitic retreat to Farne reveals an abiding personal desire for solitary retirement; that he temporarily failed merely likens Cuthbert’s limited agency to that of Aidan. Though Eata’s transfer of Cuthbert to Lindisfarne inherently hindered the saint’s immediate individual agency, Cuthbert nevertheless continued to foster mature contemplative pretentions, as even Bede, despite disregarding eremitic enthusiasm as a motivator for Cuthbert’s withdrawal from Melrose, expounds upon Cuthbert’s contemplative temperament post Lindisfarne. Bede’s description of Cuthbert during the latter’s tenure as prior of Lindisfarne naturally illustrates an individual practical in his managerial tutelage yet contemplative in his religious expression. Bede states that in addition to reproaching various monks for preferring to “conform to their older usage rather than to the monastic rule,” Cuthbert “was so zealous in watchings and prayer that he is believed many times to have spent three or four nights on end in watching.” Bede maintains that Cuthbert often conducted such vigils solitarily while retreating to “some retired spot” within

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36 Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 211.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.
the island’s periphery, thus contextually forecasting Cuthbert’s future isolation and hermitage on Farne.

In contrast to Cuthbert’s persistent contemplative development, both Bede and the anonymous hagiographer mention, in some capacity, the active work Cuthbert completed while prior at Lindisfarne; though the anonymous author’s entire account of Cuthbert’s initial residency at Lindisfarne is brief and reserved. The anonymous writer succinctly states that Cuthbert “dwelt there [Lindisfarne] also according to Holy Scripture, following the contemplative amid the active life, and he arranged our rule of life which we composed then for the first time and we observe even to this day along with the rule of St. Benedict.”39 Despite this reference to Cuthbert’s aid in the construction of a new monastic rule, the overall impression given by the anonymous author’s short account is that Cuthbert’s years at Lindisfarne were relatively quiet until his desire for the solitary life eventually drove him to retreat to Farne. The overall impression supplied by Bede, in consonance with the brevity of the anonymous author’s account of Cuthbert’s active responsibilities, suggests that Cuthbert’s contemplative pretensions continued to influence the character of his daily life while at Lindisfarne, a suggestion fortified in the hindsight of Cuthbert’s future anchoritic exile. Cuthbert’s retained contemplative consciousness and sense of speculative agency amid a somewhat obligatory career nevertheless enabled the saint to supplement his coenobitic role with consistent contemplative expressions of piety, whether devoting himself to “private prayer in some retired spot, or else while he sang his psalms, [and] he worked with his hands.”40


40 Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 211.
Following several years of residency at the community at Lindisfarne, Cuthbert once more sought a contemplative existence outside of coenobitic tradition, eventually realizing his anchoritic desires on the isolated shores of Farne. Though expressive of Cuthbert’s contemplatively driven self-determination, the saint’s anonymous hagiographer devotes no more than one sentence recalling the personal spiritual desire which finally induced Cuthbert to abandon the communal life at Lindisfarne. Conversely, Bede not only imparts the great joy with which Cuthbert accepted his hermitical position, but is resolute in his insistence that both the saint’s abbot and fellow monks at Lindisfarne approved of his relocation to Farne.\(^{41}\) The anonymous writer is silent in respect to abbatial or monastic approval for Cuthbert’s contemplative endeavors, and given Bede’s treatment of Cuthbert’s prior exodus from Melrose, it is certainly plausible that this is another emendation by Bede on the basis of orthodoxy. The geographic proximity of Farne Island to the greater community at Lindisfarne, in addition to the relatively lengthy nature of Cuthbert’s residency upon the island suggest that at the very least Eata and the community finally acquiesced to Cuthbert’s anchoritic desires if not supporting them outright. Furthermore, in selecting Farne as his hermitic location, Cuthbert entered into an eremitic tradition previously established by Aidan some years prior;\(^{42}\) thus providing the community and abbot of Lindisfarne with a precedent for local anchoritic behavior. Though Cuthbert’s withdrawal to Farne may represent the utmost physical expression of his contemplative longings, Cuthbert nevertheless continued to preach from his eremitic cell and eventually returned from the island in order to accept a bishopric, albeit reluctantly.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 215. On Cuthbert’s elevation to the role of hermit Bede states: “Now after he had completed many years in that same monastery, he joyfully entered into the remote solitudes which he had long desires, sought, and prayed for, with the good will of that same abbot and also of the brethren. For he rejoiced because, after a long and blameless active life, he was now held worthy to rise to the repose of divine contemplation.”

Nevertheless, while Cuthbert’s hagiographers consistently recall the diligence with which the monk fulfilled the active duties delegated to him by his ecclesiastic superiors, Cuthbert consistently exhibits a lifelong fondness for anchoritic existence.

Cuthbert’s contemplative affection influenced the manner in which the monk fulfilled his active duties when pressed into active monastic or episcopal administration, maintaining a contemplative consciousness throughout his intervals of active participation. Cuthbert’s contemplative preoccupation subsequently induced an interpretation of monastic responsibility in some manner, though further reaching in its eremitic scope, similar to the synthesis maintained by Aidan, whereby active duty persists alongside a deep contemplative longing, which in turn conditions the character of all succeeding administrative activity. The reluctant brethren of Lindisfarne berated Cuthbert when he attempted to reform Lindisfarne’s monastic rule, yet Cuthbert responded not through reference to his administrative authority, but instead overcame their hostility through “modest virtue and patience, and by daily effort he gradually converted them to a better state of mind.”

In regards to Cuthbert’s overall character throughout his administrative difficulties, Bede states:

For he was a man remarkable for the strength of his patience and unsurpassed inbravely bearing every burden whether of mind or body. At the same time he kept a cheerful countenance though sorrows overtook him, so that it was made clear to all that, by the inward consolation of the Holy Spirit, he was enabled to despise outward vexations.

Despite occupying an initially unwelcomed administrative position and receiving consistent internal opposition, Bede envisages Cuthbert as having sufficiently detached himself from his temporal surroundings as to persevere inwardly through the aid of the divine. Cuthbert does not castigate his fellow monastics in anger, but rather fulfills his supervisory duties through example

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43 Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 211.
44 Ibid.
and patience. Bede understands Cuthbert as free from the bitter consequences of his fellows’ insults; as Cuthbert laments, not over the content of his contemporaries’ slurs, but rather the mere fact of their recalcitrance. Cuthbert weathers the outward hardships and insults of his contemporary brethren much in the same way an anchorite bears the austerity of their physical environment, all with the aid of God despite a deprivation of human support. Cuthbert’s contemplative consciousness therefore provides an individual continuity between the saint’s two modes of existence, with the saint successfully enduring the outward misfortunes of his environment whether it be the monastic compound at Lindisfarne or the austere cell of Farne. Through God’s assistance, Cuthbert maintains command of his spiritual condition despite temporal difficulty, preserving the personal contemplative character necessary for a final anchoritic withdrawal. Cuthbert not only expresses an inward spiritual autonomy prior to his insular retreat, but an outward corporal agency which is exhibited through his ability to ultimately engineer a solitary escape from coenobitic living, thereby attaining the ultimate manifestation of contemplative expression. Regardless as to whether Cuthbert withdrew to Farne confidentially or with the approval of Eata and his community, Cuthbert’s attainment of that which his hagiographers had long imagined him to have sought nevertheless reveals his practical individual agency.

Despite achieving the ultimate physical expression of contemplative solitude on the island of Farne, Cuthbert nevertheless proved incapable of maintaining his hermitic condition in perpetuity, yielding once more to the active dictates of outside ecclesiastic and secular authorities. Following the deposition of Tunbert from the bishopric of Hexham,45 a Northumbrian synod, of which Archbishop Theodore presided and King Ecgfrith attended,

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45 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 259.
elected Cuthbert to the vacant see.⁴⁶ Both Bede and the anonymous hagiographer understood Cuthbert as initially antagonistic to the episcopal dignity and suggest a significant degree of coercion in the hermit’s eventual acceptance; a perception of altogether paramount importance in so far as it demonstrates an external force propelling the anchorite, who relatively recently attained the end expression of his personal spiritual desires, into an environment contrary to his individual preference. The linguistic imagery surrounding Cuthbert’s acquiescence to the synodical decree and his subsequent departure from Farne is personally somber and contextually coercive. According to the anonymous author, Cuthbert, under pressure from Bishop Tumma and King Ecfrith, “was led away unwillingly (inuitus) and under compulsion (coactus), weeping (lacrimans) and wailing (flens), while the council together with Archbishop Theodore still awaited him.”⁴⁷ The language used by the anonymous writer to describe Cuthbert’s departure from Farne directly parallels the earlier description of Cuthbert’s compelled entrance into Lindisfarne following his withdrawal from Melrose. Thus, as Cuthbert was “invited and constrained” (inuitatus et coacte)⁴⁸ by Bishop Eata following his departure from Melrose, so too was Cuthbert led away “unwillingly and under compulsion” (inutus et coactus)⁴⁹ from his hermitage by Ecgfrith and his delegation. MS O₁ of the Anonymous Life of St. Cuthbert, which is the basis for Bertram Colgrave’s own translation of the text,⁵⁰ utilizes the adverbial coacte in

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⁴⁷ “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 110-111. ...inuitus et coactus lacrimans et flens, abstractus est expectante etiam adhuc senatu, cum archiepiscopo Theodoro.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 94. The O₁ manuscript of the Anonymous Life of St. Cuthbert makes use of the adverb coacte in both the description of Cuthbert’s entrance into Lindisfarne and his departure from Farne Island.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 110. Similarly, while Bertram Colgrave utilizes the adjective coactus in describing Cuthbert’s anchoritic departure, MS T additionally uses coactus to describe Cuthbert’s Lindisfarne ingressio despite MS O₁’s use of coacte, thus maintaining congruency.

⁵⁰ Bertram Colgrave, “Manuscripts,” in Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert, 45.
both the description of Cuthbert’s initial arrival at Lindisfarne as well as the hermit’s forced abandonment of contemplative solitude upon the island of Farne. Thus, at least by the time of the manuscript’s composition in the late ninth or early tenth-century, the linguistic context for Cuthbert’s respective contemplative curtailments appears to have been the same. Cuthbert’s anonymous author, and the tradition which developed out of his hagiographic work, understood Cuthbert’s episcopal elevation to be an event not only contrary to the hermit’s personal designs, but one externally forced upon the hermit.

Bede utilizes similar coercive and restricting imagery in his own hagiographic account of Cuthbert’s acquiescence to episcopal elevation, illuminating further the extent to which external authorities pressed upon the anchorite. According to Bede, after both Bishop Trumwine and King Ecgfrith personally plead before Cuthbert on behalf of the synodical pronouncements, the hermit finally acquiesced and was led:

shedding many tears (lacrimas), from his sweet retirement… to the synod. When he had come, in spite of his reluctance (renitens) he was compelled (compellitur) to submit (summittere) his neck to the yoke of the bishopric.53

Bede’s word choice may have less to do with his desire to alter the anonymous author’s context of the narrative so much as Bede merely appears to purposely avoid using words and phrases similar to those in the earlier anonymous hagiography. Nonetheless, Bede’s account sufficiently projects the significant degree to which Cuthbert maintained a contemplative desire in contrast to active duty, yet ultimately consented under external persistence. Bede’s prolonged

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51 Ibid., 17.

52 “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 111. The anonymous author names the bishop who visited Cuthbert on behalf of the synod as Tumma.


54 Colgrave, introduction to Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert, 14.
narrative however, does more firmly adhere to conventional and contemporary church orthodoxy in regards to the appropriate relationship between active and contemplative religious lives. Though he always maintained an affinity for the contemplative life, Gregory the Great acknowledged in his commentary on I Kings that religious activity must take primacy over personal contemplation. Though both hagiographers seemingly convey an understanding that ordained activity cannot be escaped, Bede’s account of Cuthbert’s prophecy to Ælfflæd concerning his future episcopal appointment is much more Gregorian than even the anonymous author’s telling, which yet conveyed a similar understanding. In so far as Cuthbert prophesizes his future acceptance of the Lindisfarne episcopate, Bede quotes Cuthbert in stating: “I know that I am not worthy of such a rank; nevertheless, I cannot escape anywhere from the decree of the Ruler of Heaven.” While both hagiographers posit the futility of fleeing active and episcopal appointment, Bede evokes an image of divine ordination which Cuthbert acknowledges as authoritative and incontrovertible.

Cuthbert’s episcopacy endured a mere two years, after which time the saint arranged for a return to the contemplative solitude of Farne; an apparent return singularly contingent upon Cuthbert’s own contemplative will, and therefore indicative of the practical agency a seasoned and respected monastic such as Cuthbert possessed. Though described as faithfully and diligently fulfilling his expected episcopal duties, Cuthbert seemingly continued to foster contemplative behaviors and predispositions, with the anonymous hagiographer stating that the saint

58 “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 105. The anonymous writer states that Cuthbert knew “that he was not worthy and yet that [at] neither sea nor land could he hide himself from so honorable a rank.”
“maintained the dignity of a bishop without abandoning the ideal of the monk or the virtue of the hermit.” In point of fact, the brevity of Cuthbert’s Lindisfarne episcopate implies the continuity and further development of the bishop’s anchoritic pretentions, with Cuthbert desiring first-hand what he had temporarily achieved previously. In so far as Cuthbert’s final withdrawal explicitly accentuates the monk’s personal agency, the anonymous author is far more forthcoming than Bede, stating that Cuthbert “resigned of his own will the worldly honors of his bishopric.”

Though Cuthbert’s declining health may have contributed to the apparent ease of his administrative retirement, the saint’s later return to Farne should be at least partly understood within the emotional context of his initial departure from the island; whereby in spite of the inclinations of external authorities, Cuthbert ultimately returned “of his own free will,” to his anchoritic hermitage.

If Cuthbert had not already fallen ill prior to his episcopal resignation, then the acknowledgement of Cuthbert’s prophetic talents may, in this specific instance, be interpreted as a preventative hagiographic defense for episcopal abandonment; however, the mere hagiographic inclusion of prophetic instances, in addition to other continental hagiographic tropes, necessarily envelopes Cuthbert’s memory within a continental saintly context which serves only to strengthen local understanding of Cuthbert’s contemplative and spiritual nature. The anonymous hagiographer’s association and comparison of Cuthbert with other contemplatively minded saints, whose hagiographic tradition was thoroughly established and well known in seventh-and-eighth-century Christian Europe, amplifies the anchoritic desire

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59 Ibid., 111.

60 Ibid., 129. *Igitur post duos annos episcopatus sui secularem honorem sponte deserens.*

61 Ibid. “for being filled with the prophetic spirit of God, he foresaw his own death…”
expressed within Cuthbert’s own personal actions and movements. Cuthbert’s anonymous hagiographer borrowed material from Athanasius’ *Life of St. Antony* in addition to Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of St. Martin*, two saints whose traditions express deep and explicit contemplative preferences. Beyond the historical veracity of Cuthbert’s continentally inspired traits, the anonymous author’s use of Christian hagiography as source material in describing a local saint nevertheless illuminates the manner in which Cuthbert’s contemporaries understood and defined his behavior. The borrowed hagiographic material within Cuthbert’s insular *vita* ultimately support the novel individual behaviors and actions attributed to the hermit, in turn creating an image of Cuthbert wherein his contemplative desires are properly understood. Though Bede attempts a conventional and Gregorian recasting of Cuthbert’s hagiographic tradition, Cuthbert continually sought a contemplative condition at the expense of religious activity throughout his monastic career. Cuthbert’s desire for contemplative solitude produced a legitimate personal agency which ultimately resulted in his desire’s fulfillment upon the shores of Farne; a fulfillment which necessarily included a spiritual autonomy from coerced activity.

Cuthbert’s seventh-and-eighth-century hagiographic tradition perhaps best captures the personal agency inherent in anchoritic contemplative desire; nevertheless, additional Anglo-Saxon eremitic traditions, such as that of Guthlac of Crowland, further illuminate the degree of spiritual autonomy available in anchoritic pursuits. Guthlac’s hagiographic tradition, in so far as it conveys the monk’s journey from communal monastic ingestion to eremitic contemplative solitude, at once compares relatively favorably with that of Cuthbert, with both saints pursing a

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62 Colgrave, introduction to *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, 11.

63 Hill, “Imago Dei,” 36. Hagiographic composition and convention reveal, in the words of Hill, the mentalité of a work’s author and audience.

secular career as thegns prior to their commitment to monastic living, and each eventually abandoning communal monasticism in favor of contemplative solitude. Common hagiographic source material further contributes to the contextual similarity of the two insular traditions, as Guthlac’s prose hagiography often borrows heavily from the established traditions of St. Paul, St. Antony, and even Cuthbert himself. Despite the two traditions’ shared hagiographic influence, in addition to apparent similarities in individual monastic experience, Guthlac’s prose tradition nevertheless diverges sharply from Cuthbert’s both in its implicit hagiographic goals, as well as its understanding of personal contemplative expression.

St. Guthlac of Crowland

Guthlac of Crowland’s primary motivation for contemplative pursuit appears to resemble the desire for contemplative peace expressed by Cuthbert; though the methods through which Guthlac practically sought anchoritic solitude differ extensively from Cuthbert’s own experience. Guthlac’s religious life inspired multiple hagiographic works, the earliest being Felix’s prose Life of Saint Guthlac which he composed between 730 and 740 A.D., some fifteen to twenty-five years after the saint’s death in 715 A.D. There is little information concerning the broader identity of Felix other than his probable East Anglian origin and competent familiarity with contemporary insular and continental scholarship. Felix’s recollection of Guthlac’s journey towards the contemplative life is succinct, and it may be that the East Anglian monk felt that the

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65 Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 81. Felix records that prior to his entrance into Repton, Guthlac “devastated the towns and residences of his foes, their villages and fortresses with fire and sword;” Anonymous, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 73. The anonymous writer of Cuthbert’s hagiography records a miracle when Cuthbert was “dwelling in camp with the army, in the face of the enemy.”

66 Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, 119.


68 Ibid., 16-17.
manner in which Guthlac acquired his contemplative retreat was relatively unimpressive in comparison to the spiritual combat Felix understood Guthlac to have engaged in after relocating to Crowland. Consistent with contemporary anchoritic convention north of the River Humber, a theme of the inherent worthiness of actions taken towards the abandonment of the worldly permeates Felix’s narrative of Guthlac’s contemplative journey. According to Felix, following nine years of near constant combat and warfare, Guthlac experienced a spiritual revelation which developed one evening as the saint reflected upon the ephemerality of temporal existence. The following morning Guthlac abandoned his subordinate military companions and, at the age of twenty four, committed himself to the service of God and sought out monastic living. The abandonment of positions of responsibility presents itself as an aspect of at least one other anchorite in Cuthbert, and though Guthlac’s Desertion revolved around his secular family and comrades, and therefore constituted an act worthy of praise for Felix, the linguistic image of Felix’s prose nonetheless conveys the contemporary significance of Guthlac’s decision. In abandoning his comrades Guthlac not only “disregarded the reverence due to his royal blood, but he also spurned his parents, his fatherland, and the comrades of his youth.” The scale of complete secular abandonment described by Felix is remarkable within an Anglo-Saxon context, but perhaps represents a necessary step towards contemplative, and even monastic, living within a hagiographic paradigm. Guthlac’s perceived abandonment of secular social networks directly corresponds to the attainment of a monastic communal social system with his subsequent

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69 Felix, *The Life of Saint Guthlac*, 83. Felix states that Guthlac “contemplated the wretched deaths and the shameful ends of the ancient kings of his race in the course of the past ages, and also the fleeting riches of this world and the contemptible glory of this temporal life, then in imagination the form of his own death revealed itself to him…”

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.
entrance into the double house at Repton;\textsuperscript{72} the maintenance of which however, proved surprisingly temporary as Guthlac’s contemplative proclivities drove him to ultimately renounce monastic attachments after only two years in favor of the wilds of Crowland.\textsuperscript{73}

The initial explanation for Guthlac’s protracted contemplative agency, in achieving anchoritic solitude after only two years of coenobitic practice, within Felix’s hagiographic account may revolve around Guthlac’s own ancestral kinship to Mercian royalty in addition to the possible regal context of Repton’s monastic establishment. Felix conveys Repton’s status as a double house through the assertion that Guthlac received his initial monastic education under the direction of the community’s abbess,\textsuperscript{74} identified as Ælfthryth.\textsuperscript{75} As with almost all Anglo-Saxon double houses, the community at Repton almost certainly maintained close relational and political ties to the Mercian royalty and aristocracy, with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle identifying the community as the final resting place of the Mercian king Æthelbald (d. 755 A.D.).\textsuperscript{76} Guthlac’s own noble ancestry which extended through “the most noble names of famous kings, back to Icel in whom it began in days of old,”\textsuperscript{77} in concert with Repton’s ties to contemporary Mercian royalty, therefore constituted a context through which Guthlac proved capable of expressing an enhanced authority over his own religious being. It may have been perfectly acceptable, given the secular contexts of Repton’s existence and Guthlac’s birth, for Guthlac to abscond from communal life in favor of contemplative solitude after a mere two years of

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{74} Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 161.

\textsuperscript{75} Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 85.

\textsuperscript{76} The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 48.

\textsuperscript{77} Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 75.
personal religious instruction. Similarly, the community of Repton may have even welcomed Guthlac’s spiritual commitment as a method of increasing the religious reputation of his hermitage’s parent community; for within a context of contemporary monastic competition, the production of a royal anchorite would certainly have evoked a sense of spiritual authority surrounding Repton’s contemporary image. The heightened spiritual and geographical self-determination of Guthlac therefore contrasts with any nominal control he may have possessed as a non-royal monk within a less politically active community.

The degree and strength of the personal contemplative agency Felix understood Guthlac to have possessed most strikingly differentiates the Mercian saint from the traditions of other contemporary anchorites. Guthlac sought hermitical solitude after a mere two years of monastic residence and education at the community of Repton, for according to Felix “For when he read about the solitary life of monks of former days, then his heart was enlightened and burned with an eager desire to make his way to the desert.” That a seventh-century monk sought contemplative respite following a cursory monastic education does not appear to be overly uncommon or surprising; it is Guthlac’s actual attainment of such anchoritic and contemplative ends despite his recent monastic induction and lack of active religious participation which strikingly differentiates the experiences of Guthlac from those of hermits such as Cuthbert and Caelin. Cuthbert appears to have withdrawn from his initial monastic residence at Melrose on similar contemplative principles, though Eata quickly restrained the young monk and installed

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78 Gunn, Bede’s “Historiae,” 78. The overall rise of saint’s cults and the subsequent development of their tradition had much to do with the relationship between individual monastic communities and their royal patrons.

79 Ibid., 87. Certainly much of the monastic competition between individual houses revolved around the acquisition of either material and political patronage, or local spiritual authority.

80 Ibid.
Cuthbert as prior at Lindisfarne.\textsuperscript{81} Cuthbert only received explicit abbatial approval for his anchoritic designs after several years of monastic administrative service,\textsuperscript{82} a compromise which is entirely absent from Guthlac’s hagiographic tradition. According to Felix, Guthlac acquired the approval of his monastic superiors to found a hermitage “after some days had passed.”\textsuperscript{83} The personal agency Cuthbert ultimately expressed in engineering his long-sought retreat to Farne Island developed throughout the saint’s entire life within an active setting of monastic and episcopal administration. Guthlac’s ultimate contemplative obtainment, by contrast, is abrupt. Though a monastic may never fully satisfy their desire for God through contemplation,\textsuperscript{84} Guthlac acquired the means to pursue such an end almost immediately. Moreover, Guthlac’s primary contemplative retreat proved enduring from the outset, as the saint never returned to coenobitic living or assumed any administrative responsibility; further differentiating the Mercian saint from such anchorites as Cuthbert and Caelein. Guthlac appears, from the outset of his religious career, to express a personal, contemplatively driven, agency within his novel monastic context at Repton, which directly contributed to the saint’s ability to maintain his anchoritic autonomy seemingly throughout his entire life.

Despite the variety of mediums through which an individual monastic proved capable of expressing personal desires for contemplative attainment in seventh-and-eighth-century England, an individual spiritual agency often developed through the concerted expression of such

\textsuperscript{81} “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 95.
\textsuperscript{82} Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 215.
\textsuperscript{83} Felix, \textit{The Life of Saint Guthlac}, 87.
\textsuperscript{84} Jean Leclercq, \textit{The Love of Learning and the Desire for God}, 31. Leclercq recalls the writings of Gregory the Great on the obscurity by which God is possessed and the brevity with which one is aware of the possession. Such transient awareness naturally leads to regret which fosters the continuing desire to find the possession once more.
contemplative yearnings; whereby a monastic proved able either to foster a contemplative mode of existence amid an otherwise active life, or orchestrate a final anchoritic retreat despite the initial intentions of ecclesiastic authorities. Monastics of early Anglo-Saxon Christian society furthermore understood contemplative attainment as a condition of spiritual autonomy and liberation, especially in comparison to the active life, a verity demonstrated through domestic hagiography’s association of contemplative pursuit with active abandonment. The personal agency precipitated by an expressed contemplative desire permitted a reorientation of individual behaviors towards a contemplative end despite a monastic’s confinement to an active life. When constrained by his ecclesiastic and secular superiors and coerced into episcopal administration, Cuthbert nevertheless demonstrated a personal spiritual self-determination through his maintenance of a characteristically contemplative existence despite his administrative office. The personal agency contemplative desire legitimized provided a conventional means through which pensive monastics could resist the active duties delegated by their ecclesiastic superiors. Guthlac and Cuthbert both, though by different means, proved capable of instigating their release from communal monastic life for the purposes of contemplative achievement, with Cuthbert withdrawing from active responsibility on at least three separate occasions, while Guthlac managed to bypass active participation altogether.
CHAPTER V
SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEMPLATIVE EREMITISM AND SPIRITUAL LIBERATION

In this chapter I examine seventh-and-eighth-century religious society’s perception of the essence of contemplative eremitic retreat, and the nature of personal autonomy from worldly constraint. The stagnation of Pope Gregory’s English mission south of the River Humber left Northumbria particularly susceptible to the proselytizing efforts of Irish monastics, who depended more upon the eastern traditions of the eremitic desert saints for their conceptions of appropriate contemplative living than any Augustinian or Gregorian discourse on the value of the mixed life.¹ Irish monasticism’s admiration for anchoritic saintliness deeply influenced the manner in which the newly established Northumbrian Church conceptualized and understood the contemplative aspects of Christian religious life. While certainly stronger within the borders of Northumbria, contemporary Anglo-Saxon literature of the seventh and eighth-centuries captures the overwhelming contemporary social adulation for the individual expression of anchoritic contemplative desire and its subsequent achievement; a sentiment which, despite its hagiographic, poetic, and didactic manifestation, conveys both a serious social and individual desire for contemplative escape, as well as the association of transcendent spiritual liberation with ultimate contemplative attainment. I consider the works and actions of active monastics, otherwise consigned to ecclesiastic administration or pastoral duties, to demonstrate the general social association within Anglo-Saxon religious society of active religious participation with restriction and diversion, in contrast to the liberating nature of contemplative retreat. I furthermore examine the social perception of the physical and spiritual nature of contemplative

hermitic behaviors. I argue that contemporary hagiographers project an image of individual anchoritic authority whereby hermits exert a near total control over their spiritual and natural environments through their introduction into a novel divine hierarchy. While contemporary hagiographers envision anchorites such as St. Cuthbert and St. Guthlac as abandoning the support structures of their coenobitic monastic communities in their isolated behavior, the saints nevertheless consistently receive a comparatively infallible divine aid in their daily lives. Lastly, I examine the essential nature of seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon religious society’s understanding of personal autonomy and liberty. Through an analysis of seventh-and-eighth-century didactic, hagiographic, and poetic literature, I argue that contemporary Anglo-Saxon religious society conceptualized pure and enduring autonomy from all manners of worldly concern as spiritual inner condition, independent of physical or material circumstance, achieved and maintained through divine contemplation. Contemplation upon God and his kingdom occasioned a personal liberation from all manner of worldly constraints, both material and emotional, thereby liberating the mental being of an individual monk from the very temporal world that surrounded them.

**Contemplative Desire**

The social legitimization of contemplative religious practices produced an alternative occupational path whereby an individual monastic’s anchoritic desires proved capable of providing for ultimate contemplative achievement despite both monastic conventions in addition to the initial intentions of immediate ecclesiastic superiors. Nevertheless, personal declarations of contemplative desire persisted among those religious whose circumstances precluded any comprehensive surrender to contemplative living, as ecclesiastics either personally unwilling or occupationally forbidden to ascetically retire nevertheless expressed an individual desire for at
least periodic contemplative peace. Though an active ecclesiastic in both monastic and episcopal administration, Aldhelm of Malmesbury, in his prose works *De Virginitate* and *Epistola ad Acircium*, consistently conveys an emphatic desire for further contemplative expression amid his burdensome active responsibilities. Aldhelm’s comparative imagery at once illustrates the great personal superiority of contemplative existence, as the bishop consistently analogizes his delegated administrative activity with restricting chains. Though expressed through religious treatises and personal correspondence, Aldhelm’s deference to contemplative expression in spite of his lifelong activity further suggests the general understood merit of contemplative behavior within Anglo-Saxon religious society as a whole. Far from being solely the preserve of individuals willing to or capable of expressing a personal agency towards the final attainment of their contemplative desires, the desire itself nonetheless proved worthy of expression as the ideal of contemplative solitude assumed an overall liberating character. The combination of hagiography’s contemplative explanations, in response to administrative abandonment, with the pronouncements of contemplative superiority expressed by those lacking the will or agency to materialize spoken desires, reveals an early Christian society broadly comfortable with the declaration of personal contemplative designs, as well as conscious of its merit.

Aldhelm’s various ecclesiastic writings and correspondence suggest a broad contemporary social approval for contemplative behavior, or at the very least a conventionality regarding the social projection of personal contemplative yearnings. Regardless of the parameters of established literary convention, Aldhelm’s writings furthermore provide a supplementary non-hagiographic source for the contemporary understanding of contemplative

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respite as a necessarily liberating movement in comparison to active ecclesiastic office. Aldhelm himself maintained monastic as well as episcopal responsibilities throughout his long religious career, ascending to the dignity of abbot of Malmesbury sometime before 673 or 674 A.D. before eventually being elevated as the bishop of Sherborne.\textsuperscript{4} As abbot of Malmesbury Aldhelm appears to have led a relatively exacting and active religious life, producing a large corpus of prose and poetic writings in addition to establishing several churches and monastic communities within the borders of Wessex.\textsuperscript{5} In spite of Aldhelm’s active responsibility and the success with which he carried out his administrative duty, the writings and personal correspondence of Aldhelm nevertheless impart a personal understanding of episcopal experience essentially parallel to that of Gregory the Great. External circumstance and the Will of God condemned Gregory to a life of apostolic activity despite his own preference for the peace and tranquility of monastic communal living.\textsuperscript{6} Aldhelm expresses a similar understanding in regards to his own active position in the concluding remarks of his prose \textit{De Virginitate} and \textit{Epistola ad Acircium}, where the bishop laments the incessant demands of his abbatial responsibilities which restrain his mind and devours his time. In concluding his lengthy treatise on virginity to the Abbess Hildelith and the nuns at the community at Barking, Aldhelm writes:

\begin{quote}
I confess to your kindness, that I have not been able to write this little work, even though it’s very small, and send it to you as quickly as you wished, since I have been weighed down with the burden of pastoral care and overwhelmed with the weight of worldly business, (and) because the demanding responsibilities of ecclesiastical administration
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid. Lapidge and Herren recall that Aldhelm himself states that he rebuilt the church at Malmesbury and that at least three of Aldhelm’s \textit{Carmina Ecclesiastica} most likely refer to churches Aldhelm constructed. Additionally, Aldhelm reveals his involvement in the establishment of the monastic communities on the river Frome and at Bradford-on-Avon respectively.

\textsuperscript{6} Leclercq, \textit{The Love of Learning and the Desire for God}, 28.
did not allow any space for undisturbed peace and a leisured interval for writing, and the noisy bustle of practical matters interrupted it.7

Aldhelm continues:

For leisure of secluded quietude and the remoteness of private solitude abundantly equip authors with copious material for writing; just as, on the contrary, the verbose loquacity of chatters and the troublesome business of worldly affairs, which the apostle of the Church ordered to be dealt with by those of little account, rob one of it by force.8

Aldhelm’s apology to Hildelith for the tardiness of his reply illuminates his own understanding of the necessity of the active life within the Church despite his personal inclinations towards “undisturbed peace.” Active and administrative responsibility, while inherently burdensome and personally constraining, is yet necessary and indeed “ordered to be dealt with by those of little account.” Aldhelm further expounds upon the constraining nature of abbatial and episcopal administration in his Epistola ad Acircium where he writes that he is:

weighed down by the ecclesiastical concerns of pastoral care by which the meticulous and scrupulous mind is constrained as though by the tightest sort of bolts and chains.9

The continued association of abbatial and episcopal activity with imagery of interruption and limitation alludes to an understanding of the nature of contemplative expression, as the opposite of active religious participation, as being spiritually and mentally liberating. Whether Aldhelm lacked the personal will to pursue ultimate contemplative solitude or felt duty bound through his acceptance of abbatial and episcopal positions to persevere through the burdensome activity expected of him, his West Saxon writings suggest a contemporary Anglo-Saxon social understanding, beyond mere hagiographic tropes, of the significant value and autonomy innate with contemplative practice, specifically in contrast to ecclesiastic activity.

8 Ibid., 130.
The writings and correspondence of other active ecclesiastics of the seventh and eighth centuries mirror Aldhelm’s salient praise of contemplative peace in comparison to active and social engagement. The Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface hints upon a similar understanding of activity in his correspondence with the Abbess Buige around 738 A.D., wherein Boniface encourages the nun to take a pilgrimage if she is otherwise unable to attain a silent freedom of the mind due to her worldly responsibility and concern.\(^\text{10}\) Active religious participation within the temporal world is therefore hardly conducive of mental liberation which requires worldly abandonment in favor of a more spiritual exercise, a pilgrimage in Buige’s case. The Northumbrian monk and scholar Alcuin projects a similar attitude in his 796 A.D. letter to Osbald where the latter is encouraged to abandon his secular responsibilities and “free” himself by entering into the service of God.\(^\text{11}\) The perception of constraint as a corollary to worldly, and in Osbald’s case secular, activity is once again on display through Alcuin’s language usage. An individual attains autonomy and spiritual liberation, not through participation in religious activity or even secular administration, but through their abandonment. In congruence with Aldhelm’s own understanding of the necessity of activity amid personal contemplative desire, the images of the active life presented by Boniface and Alcuin also essentially match Gregory the Great’s conception of the Christian life as one ultimately of detachment and desire, for with the abandonment of temporal cares, one’s desire should turn fully towards God Himself.\(^\text{12}\)

The broad acknowledgement by monastics principally engaged in active administration and evangelization, of the religious legitimacy of contemplative desire, in addition to an

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\(^{10}\) Boniface to Abbess Buige, before 738, in Whitelock, 797.

\(^{11}\) Alcuin to Osbald, 796, in Whitelock, 852-853.

understanding of spiritual and mental autonomy as the natural products of such desire’s attainment, suggests an at least nominal religious social approval of contemplative behaviors beyond hagiographic imagery and literary imitation. While certainly literary productions such as Aldhelm’s treatise, as well as the personal correspondence of Boniface and Alcuin, all in themselves adhere to proscribed conventions in regards to the license of their content; common concluding remarks regarding the burdens of active service do not necessarily represent unfelt and or formal customary pronouncements. The broad coalescing of individual conceptions of behavior into social convention simply reveals both the shared norms in regards to the emotions society in general valued and detested as well as the acceptable modes of those norms’ expression.13 Barbara Rosenwein posits the existence of what she terms “emotional communities,” which persist alongside or within a given society and represent a system of feeling, wherein certain modes of emotional expression are conditioned and normalized among members of a particular locality.14 Rosenwein subsequently suggests that such emotional communities need not always be “emotional,” but rather represent important shared norms concerning the value of particular feelings and the manner of their expression.15 Rosenwein’s community based system of feeling may in fact provide a useful framework through which active monastics’ expressions of contemplative desire may be properly understood; as the fact that active monastics felt comfortable disseminating notions which associate abbatial and secular activity with spiritual and mental limitation seemingly exposes the concept as one which they believed and understood as socially valuable and therefore worthy of promulgation. In the


15 Rosenwein, Generations of Feeling, 3.
process of promulgation, conceptions pertaining to the value of contemplative peace may well have developed into expected social expressions of feeling; however, such a development does nothing to diminish the personal worth of the concept for the original author, for conventional attitudes may come to be personally internalized through their repeated expression.\textsuperscript{16} Though certain emotions and feelings may be feigned, Rosenwein suggests that even “performed emotions” are subsequently internalized, and thus felt, through their continued expression.\textsuperscript{17}

A similar understanding may apply to the expression of contemplative desire within the personal correspondence of active ecclesiastics. Though the expression of desire and love for the contemplative life may have been expected within certain religious and social contexts, the expression of expected norms may itself be internalized within a particular religious, thereby developing into a true personal desire for contemplative solitude. The continued expression of expected attitudes and feelings furthermore conveys an author’s belief as to how their contemporaries either do, or ought to feel.\textsuperscript{18} Frequent expression of commonplace monastic and religious feelings may yet represent understandings that prove socially true even if otherwise false individually.\textsuperscript{19} Thus it may not be assumed that expressions of contemplative peace or the subsequent association of contemplative practice with spiritual liberation merely represent literary conventions with no basis in personal belief. Saintly hagiographic accounts may operate in a similar fashion, whereby the similarities between local anchoritic saints and the hermitical Fathers of antiquity have their basis in the influence that previously established hagiographic

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 5-6.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 9.

traditions simultaneously exerted on both the actions of monastics attempting saintly imitation as well as the writing of authors tasked with describing and defining such local saintly behavior. The subsequent combination of hagiographic definitions of contemplative desire as an attribute of the saintly, with the imagery of limitation and restriction utilized by active monastics in describing their ecclesiastic responsibility, articulates an apparent underlying social consensus in regards to the spiritual value and autonomy inherent in contemplative exclusion.

The frequency with which predominately active monastics achieved a contemplatively oriented withdrawal from active administration in their waning years further alludes to the significant worthiness Anglo-Saxon religious society attached to contemplative behaviors, especially when sought as a due reward for life long active participation. Abbot Ceolfrith played a pivotal role in the foundation of the community at Jarrow before ultimately assuming the abbacy of Wearmouth; nevertheless, the abbot’s anonymous historian attributes both of Ceolfrith’s brief administrative interruptions to ever present contemplative yearnings. In response to his ill treatment while prior of Wearmouth, Ceolfrith abandoned his office and returned to Ripon for the “freedom of monastic peace appealed to him more than the care of ruling others.” While Ceolfrith would return to Biscop’s community and indeed a career of monastic activity, the abbot’s hagiographers nevertheless convey a contemplative element of his being which persisted until his death. Though engaged in monastic administration for most of their careers, Ceolfrith, and to a lesser degree Wilfrid, appear at the ends of their lives to abandon their active stations in favor of final contemplative peace. In his elderly condition, Ceolfrith is said to have retired from his community in order to “be a stranger in foreign lands so that he

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might with greater freedom and purity of heart devote himself to contemplation with the legions
of angels in heaven.”  

22 Wilfrid similarly sought the comfort and peace of Rome in response to the advancement of a fatal illness.  

23 Though certain monastics in high administrative positions may not have possessed the unrelenting contemplative desire Cuthbert’s hagiographers suggest, the value with which even active monastics appear to place on contemplative respite ante mortem reveals an agency less dependent upon personal aspirations than the mere advancement of age. While Cuthbert and Guthlac nominally required abbatial permission to commit to hermitic living, there appears to be no question that Ceolfrith and Wilfrid inherently earned the privilege in their elderly years.

Cuthbert’s post episcopal return to the wastes of Farne scarcely precedes his own death; a circumstance which may have intensified the saint’s agency in determining his nature of existence and religious expression similar to that of Wilfrid and Ceolfrith. The anonymous author states that following two years of episcopal service:

being filled with the prophetic spirit of God, he foresaw his death and, being attracted by the love of his former solitary way of life, he returned to the island from which he had formerly been withdrawn by compulsion.  

24 Cuthbert’s “elderly” retirement from active service therefore appears to follow contemporary convention whereby an aging ecclesiastic withdrew from positions of practical authority with little to no objection. The experiences of a certain Caelin of Ripon appear to most strikingly parallel those of Cuthbert, in that after spending a considerable amount of time in monastic administration, the monk desired to “return to his former manner of life, to go back to the desert

22 Ibid., 223.

23 Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid, 137.

places, and to live a life of contemplation, as he once did, serving God alone.”

While the anonymous author explicitly states that Cuthbert withdrew from episcopal activity under his own volition, the author’s inclusion of Cuthbert’s prophetic knowledge of his approaching demise posits the saint’s conformity with contemporary convention. Similar to the case of Wilfrid, the awareness of life threatening illness would undoubtedly have warranted the retirement of active office in favor of temporary contemplation; nevertheless, the anonymous author states Cuthbert’s illness in its actuality only after the saint’s anchoritic return to Farne. The inclusion of prophetic awareness of approaching death may then represent the anonymous writer’s attempt to convey Cuthbert’s contemplative nature and achievement, while simultaneously protecting the saint from any outside criticism by explaining away Cuthbert’s abandonment of his bishopric. The anonymous writer’s hagiographic intent may in this particular instance favorably compare to Bede’s orthodox retelling of Cuthbert’s departure from Melrose, despite the broad conventionality of the situation in question.

**Hermitic Surroundings**

The ultimate personal expression of contemplative desire concerned a process of anchoritic seclusion whereby an individual monastic sought the establishment of an isolated hermitage some distance removed from their original religious community, for the explicit purpose of realizing uninterrupted contemplation. The descriptive imagery utilized by contemporary monastics in their narrations of anchoritic contemplatives conveys an understanding of the great spiritual and physical autonomy hermits appear to have possessed.

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25 Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 139. *…multum in Domino laboravit et nunc ad pristinum statum conversationis atque ad deserta loca revertere et contemplativam vitam, sicut olim, exercere et soli Deo servire concupiscit…*

26 Ibid., 137.
inherently through their detached solitary existence and conquest of local surroundings. Certainly the degree to which a given anchorite, in actuality, maintained a detachment from the founder’s original communal institution varied considerably, with hermits often paradoxically attracting local attention. Many hermitages may have additionally remained socially connected with and dependent upon the support of the broader communities out of which they often grew; thus hermitages themselves may be an important link between contemporary institutionalized monastic culture and a more charismatic religious expression characteristic of popular religion.\(^{27}\)

Of those hermitages which retained an institutional support network, several may have in fact functioned as popular branches of given religious communities which maintained the local retreats for periodic use.\(^{28}\) Certainly the hermits whose lives ultimately inspired the composition of hagiographic narratives, and whose traditions therefore produced the most enduring impressions upon secular and monastic culture, depended upon the support of a coenobitic community to promulgate their cult.\(^{29}\) Nevertheless, despite any support hermitages may have received from nearby monastic communities, seventh-and-eighth-century hagiographers tend to describe the secluded hermitages of a given eremite in a manner which explicitly accentuates the personal autonomy of the inhabiting anchorite over both their spiritual condition and physical surroundings. The hermits described within seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon hagiography, especially those venerated as saints, appear as the understood masters of their environment, thereby at once transcending the limitations of spiritual adversity and temporal destitution.

\(^{27}\) Blair, \textit{The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society}, 145.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 216-217. Blair goes on to state that Lindisfarne specifically appears to have maintained a local hermitage for periodic usage. Indeed, Aidan seems to have established the hermitage which is eventually appropriated by Cuthbert. Following Cuthbert’s death Æthelwald succeeded him as hermit of Farne Island.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 217.
Though not every hermitage appears to have been initially established for purposes of perpetual inhabitation, it is likely that at least some permanent hermitages subsequently developed out of temporary retreats. The hermitic dwelling on Farne Island near the community of Lindisfarne seems to have developed in such a manner, as Aidan first established the hermitage for temporary use until Cuthbert ultimately re-established the retreat as a permanent site capable of sustained inhabitation. The provisional nature of Aidan’s hermitage may have dictated the manner in which the bishop’s monastic contemporaries understood his personal relationship to the island. The hagiographic material pertaining to other contemplative monastics such as Cuthbert and Guthlac, alludes to a certain degree of spiritual authority the anchorites commanded over their immediate surroundings, an implication absent in Bede’s account of Aidan’s intervals on Farne. The nature of Aidan’s anchoritic retreat inherently differed from those established by Guthlac or Cuthbert, and his withdrawal from activity into contemplative solitude proved ultimately less enduring. In regards to Aidan’s retreat Bede succinctly states that the bishop withdrew to the island when he “wished to pray alone and undisturbed.” 30 Though a statement perhaps broadly true of most contemporary hermits, Bede’s narrative merely recalls the isolation of the island retreat while neglecting to elucidate any individual spiritual or physical relationship Aidan may have maintained with his solitary contemplative refuge. Rather than attempting to convey Aidan’s mastery of his spiritual refuge, as he would do with Cuthbert, Bede simply emphasizes the conditions which inaugurated Aidan’s contemplative desires. Aidan’s significant episcopal and evangelical responsibilities appear to have precluded any attempted lengthy withdrawal, and the brevity of Bede’s narrative pertaining to Aidan’s hermitical behaviors gives credence to the notion that the bishop’s retreats were sporadic. The brief nature

of Aidan’s contemplative retreats may in some degree explain Bede’s descriptive reticence; with the bishop’s temporary residency correspondingly prohibiting a total environmental mastery. Certainly, in contrast to Cuthbert’s attempts of indefinite inhabitation, Aidan’s is a less total and self-dependent retreat. Furthermore, the narrative surrounding Aidan’s anchoritic episodes may have materialized in a more traditionally hagiographic manner had the bishop’s life inspired an independent hagiographic work; nevertheless, Bede’s concise account of Aidan’s hermitical establishment within his Historia Ecclesiastica suggests the bishop’s purely provisional claim to contemplative refuge and anchoritic authority.

The hagiographic tradition of Cuthbert of Lindisfarne collectively projects an image of an anchorite exerting an invariable spiritual authority over his ascetic environment despite envisaged social isolation and material depravity. Bede’s description of Cuthbert’s lengthy contemplative withdrawal to Farne at once contrasts with his narrative concerning Aidan’s sporadic use of the island for prayer,- with Bede conferring upon Cuthbert an environmental mastery absent in Aidan’s biography within the Historia Ecclesiastica. The hagiographic descriptions of Cuthbert’s eremitic environment, as well as his individual and authoritative relationship to it, evoke direct comparisons to royal sovereignty in addition to notions of divine ordination.

The hagiographic image of Cuthbert’s transition from communal to eremitic living is essentially unaccompanied and individual, and therefore posits the consolidated nature of Cuthbert’s anchoritic authority. Bede states that prior to his departure Cuthbert first “fought there in solitude for some time with the invisible enemy, by prayer and fasting” before seeking “a place of combat farther and more remote from mankind.”³¹ Thus aside from minor and initial aid

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from monastic brethren, the chronicle of Cuthbert’s journey and eremitic conquest is one of tangible self-dependence aside from perceived divine assistance. Upon Cuthbert’s departure from the community at Lindisfarne, his anonymous hagiographer states that in selecting the island of Farne as his retreat, Cuthbert had chosen a “place where, before this, almost no one could remain alone for any length of time on account of the various illusions caused by devils.”

It may have been the intention of the author that the statement be understood within the context of Aidan’s own experiences on the island, thus projecting a level of spiritual authority onto Cuthbert not even possessed by Lindisfarne’s founder. Bede’s own account runs directly parallel to that of the anonymous writer as he states that “no one had been able to dwell alone undisturbed upon this island before Cuthbert the servant of the Lord,” thereby asserting the preeminence of Cuthbert’s character through the suggestion that his eremitic experience is beyond local comparison.

It is not Cuthbert’s fortitude but his own spiritual power which ultimately differentiates the saint from his predecessors however, as the Lindisfarne monk conquers the island both spiritually and naturally. Upon his arrival on Farne, the anonymous writer states that Cuthbert “fearlessly put them [the devils] to flight and, digging down almost a cubit of a man into the earth, through very hard and stony rock, he made a space to dwell in.” Cuthbert therefore defeated and cast out the spiritual malefactors which had perturbed the island’s former anchorites, presumably even Aidan. In his account, Bede evokes royal imagery to explain

32 Ibid., 219. Bede states that brethren from Lindisfarne assisted Cuthbert in building his island dwellings but that after this initial aid the saint lived entirely alone.


Cuthbert’s condition while inhabiting Farne stating that Cuthbert, “as soon as he had become monarch of the land he had entered and had overcome the army of the usurpers, built a city fitted for his rule, and in it houses equally suited to the city.”  

The distinctions Bede makes seem to suggest that upon conquering the island from the incorporeal “usurpers,” Cuthbert’s practical power conceptually compared to that of a king’s. Cuthbert’s appropriation of the island naturally instilled in him the liberty to create a hermitage “worthy of his power.” Bede envisaged Cuthbert as a “soldier of Christ” *(miles Christi)*, whose conquests expelled the island’s unnatural and usurping previous inhabitants *(tyrannorum)*, and therefore legitimized Cuthbert’s authority and divinely sanctioned rule. Cuthbert is the fullfiller of God’s Will, engaging in battle not with the weapons of man, but with the “helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.” Cuthbert is at once an anchoritic king, and a soldier of Christ, legitimizing his dominion through conquest and divine Will. Furthermore, due to the solitary and individual nature of Cuthbert’s journey and task, the saint’s authority and consequential autonomy remained dependent upon and indivisible from his person, with Cuthbert being the sole recipient of God’s delegated power on Farne.

Parallels persist between Cuthbert’s hagiographic experiences and expressions of saintly authority upon his initial arrival on Farne and the prose and metric traditions relating to Guthlac’s withdrawal to Crowland. Similar to Cuthbert’s Farne, the hagiographic imagery surrounding Crowland suggests an environment equally inhospitable. Tatwine’s observation to

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37 Ibid., 214-15.

38 Ibid., 216-17.

39 Ibid., 215. *armato galea salutis, scuto fidei, et gladio spiritus quod est verbun Dei, omnia tela nequissimi ignea extincta.*
Guthlac that “many had attempted to dwell there [Crowland], but had rejected it on account of
the unknown portents of the desert and its terrors of various shapes,”⁴⁰ so excited the prospective
hermit, that Guthlac, “began by divine aid to dwell alone among the shady groves of this
solitude.”⁴¹ The comparative un-inhabitability of Cuthbert’s and Guthlac’s hermitages suggests a
contemporary understanding of environmental hardship as a necessary component to the utmost
expression of contemplative living. In describing the topography of Crowland, the author of the
poem Guthlac A states:

The dwelling-place of this hill his not more modest nor greater then will suffice for a
man who in his sufferings daily fulfills the Ruler’s will. The servant of the Lord must
not cherish in his heart more of earth’s goods than a sufficiency for himself alone, so
that he has sustenance of his body.⁴²

The environment surrounding an anchorite’s hermitage appears necessarily desolate as to ensure
total and complete detachment from worldly things beyond bare essentials. Thus, in revealing
Crowland as indisputably hostile, Felix and the anonymous poet suggest Guthlac’s individual
tenacity in his continued existence within the fen, characteristics heightened through comparison
with past inhabitants’ failure to endure.

Guthlac’s battles with the “monsters” and “strange terrors” of Crowland consequently
mirrors Cuthbert’s conquest of Farne, though differs in content and scope. Guthlac’s narrative, as
presented by both Felix and the author of Guthlac A, projects the saint against a strikingly heroic
ethos which, as Jeffery J. Cohen notes, is not incomparable to that of Beowulf.⁴³ Despite
collective similarities however, Guthlac’s poetic and hagiographic traditions personify the

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⁴⁰ Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 89.
⁴¹ Ibid.
⁴² “Guthlac A,” in Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 259.
⁴³ Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, 123.
terrors of Crowland to a degree unparalleled in Cuthbert’s corpus. The spirits of Guthlac A covet the very land upon which Guthlac’s hermitage is founded for they had “formerly been allowed at times a lodging-place after their punishments.”\footnote{“Guthlac A,” 255.} Despite Crowland’s inhabitation by vile spirits, the author of the poem is blatant in their claim that the marshy island not only lay outside of “hereditary jurisdiction,”\footnote{Ibid.} but remained free from any claims to ownership the devils solicited for they “are not permitted to enjoy a habitation on the ground.”\footnote{Ibid.} In contrast to his fiendish assailants, Guthlac does not value the holding of Crowland in itself, but rather the responsibility bestowed upon him through God’s landed bequeathal, erecting “a saintly retreat there - not out of greed, because he bothered about the ephemeral benefit of riches, but so that he might justly keep watch over that region for God...”\footnote{Ibid., 253.} Those who envied the possession of Crowland the most lost their prize to a caretaker who merely utilized the area’s natural asceticism for a higher contemplative purpose. The illegitimacy of the evil spirits’ claim to the territory alters the context of Guthlac’s prolonged spiritual battle, a context exemplified within an address by Guthlac to the fiends which illuminates the nature of their mutual conflict:

You are betrayers of trust: accordingly you have long lived in exile, inundated with flame, having been miserably deceived, deprived of heaven, despoiled of happiness, delivered up to death, ensnared by sins, without hope of life, that you would find a cure for blindness.\footnote{Ibid., 264.}

The anonymous poet’s reference to the spirits as having “long lived in exile” proves paramount to understanding the context of Guthlac’s solitary retreat, for despite withdrawing into the
wilderness, the spirits, not Guthlac, are the exiles; therefore, Guthlac’s spiritual struggle represents less a conquest than a defense. Guthlac received his authority to establish a contemplative retreat, and the subsequent autonomy inherent in its continuation, from God and must defend his rightful inheritance from a troop of invading demons. Though the anchoritic banishment of devils persists as a common hagiographic trope, Guthlac’s literary tradition subsequently posits a novel meaning for the spiritual conflict through its placement within a domestic heroic ethos.

Beyond spiritual conquest and hermetical endurance, the perceived authority of anchorites such as Cuthbert and Guthlac allude to a hegemony over both the animal co-inhabitants and natural phenomena of each monk’s respective environment. Both of Cuthbert’s prose hagiographies contain a narrative whereby Cuthbert reprimands the ravens of Farne for harassing his simple dwellings, and consequently forces the birds to express their obedience and acknowledge his intrinsic eremitic authority. Similarly Guthlac, in a story perhaps contingent upon Bede’s vita of Cuthbert, assumes command of the crows of Crowland when the birds grew accustomed to destroying the hermit’s few material possessions. Of the account, Felix states:

For the grace of his excellent charity abounded to all creatures, so that even the birds of the untamed wilderness and the wandering fishes of the muddy marshes would come flying or swimming swiftly to his call as if to a shepherd.

Though a common theme throughout western hagiographic tradition, instances of animal dominion within Anglo-Saxon saintly narratives nevertheless allude to the significant degree of


50 Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 121.

51 Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 223. In describing an earlier instance where the birds of Farne capitulated to Cuthbert’s commands, Bede compares the Northumbrian saint to St. Antony.
The extent of Guthlac’s and Cuthbert’s perceived hermitic authority encompassed inanimate nature itself, with Bede hagiographically describing Cuthbert as the *monarcha terrae*. Bede explicitly categorizes obedience, whether human reverence or natural submission, as an intrinsic prerogative of a saint. Both Bede and the anonymous Lindisfarne author recall an account in which the sea surrounding Farne provides Cuthbert with a necessary supply of wood after a group of visiting monks neglected Cuthbert’s appeal. Upon realizing the ocean’s obedience to Cuthbert, Bede records that the monks:

> marvelled at the holiness of the venerable man for whom even the elements did service; and with fitting shame they blamed their slothful minds, for even the insensible elements taught them what obedience ought to be shown saints.

Bede thus presents the obedience due to Cuthbert as both innate in his capacity as a saint as well as inclusive of both humanity and nature.

Hagiographic saints such as Cuthbert and Guthlac existed and operated within a spiritual, if not temporal, hierarchy of authority. Cuthbert achieved dominion over his earthly residence only in so far as he himself recognized his spiritual superior in God. In the words of Bede:

> For if a man faithfully and wholeheartedly serves the maker of all created things, it is no wonder though all creation should minister to his commands and wishes. But for the most part we lose dominion over the creation which was made subject to us, because we ourselves neglect to serve the Lord and Creator of all things.

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52 Ibid., 216.
53 Ibid., 227.
54 Ibid., 225-227.
55 Ibid., 227.
56 Ibid., 225.
Bede understood the dominion of earth to be a right of humanity; a right accessed only when humanity itself occupied its natural position within the ultimate hierarchy of authority.

Cuthbert’s insular authority expresses a contemporary understanding of man’s authoritative relationship to nature, with the Creator allowing man to reign over the creation in so far as man’s actions are in service to the Creator. If man abandons this service, he loses the right to govern his world. Thus Bede establishes Cuthbert, as a beneficiary of an elevated environmental autonomy, ultimately achieved through the saint’s participation within the authoritative hierarchy, as ruler of nature yet servant to God. Nor is such an understanding lost upon Felix who describes Guthlac’s own authority within the same context as Cuthbert’s and with language essentially identical to that of Bede.57

Anglo-Saxon hagiographic accounts present anchorites as living beyond the boundaries of human support networks, and therefore invariably dependent upon the divine for their continued ascetic existence; a dependency which liberates eremites from reliance on fallible and unreliable human assistance. The hagiographic contradistinction between divine and human assistance is particularly prevalent throughout Cuthbert’s tradition, as each of the saint’s hagiographers chronicle instances of repeated human negligence in contrast to heavenly aegis. Cuthbert’s anonymous hagiographer recounts a specific instance in which four visiting brethren fail to transport a large stone to the center of Farne, despite promising Cuthbert otherwise. After abandoning the arduous task, the four monastics return to Lindisfarne, only to discover upon their subsequent visit that the stone, previously too heavy for four grown men to successfully

57 Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 121. The language used by Felix in this passage is so similar to Bede’s that it suggests Bede as Felix’s original source. Pertaining to Guthlac’s authority over nature Felix states, “For if a man faithfully and wholeheartedly serves the Maker of all created things, it is no wonder though all creation should minister to his commands and wishes. But for the most part we lose dominion over the creation which was made subject to us, because we ourselves neglect to serve the Lord and Creator of all things.”
transport, rested within Cuthbert’s novel edifice.\textsuperscript{58} The narrative serves to establish God’s reliability in contrast to human failure, as the visiting brethren accordingly “praised and glorified God who works great marvels in his servants”\textsuperscript{59} at the sight of the stone. Once more, when visiting pilgrims neglect Cuthbert’s request for a measured plank of wood, the sea itself, “uplifting its waves in honour of the servant of God, landed a floating timber exactly twelve feet in length, just at the opening by the rock where it was to be placed for the building.”\textsuperscript{60} The contemplative autonomy ascribed to Cuthbert while residing on Farne, in addition to its totality, transcends common and temporal associations and dependencies. Thus, the nature of Cuthbert’s anchoritic and spiritual autonomy, as understood within a shared eighth-century textural hagiographic context, necessarily differs from the perceived self-determination of a less contemplatively oriented saint such as Wilfrid. Though Wilfrid managed to survive various political assaults and material deprivations, his continued perseverance and material well-being largely depended upon his vast previously established monastic network, itself a system of support within and contingent upon a relational social hierarchy. Wilfrid received material and social support not only through his heading of an international system of landed properties, but close proximity to St. Peter’s. In contrast, Cuthbert receives spiritual as well as material assistance from God, and thereby occupying a position beyond the consequences of human support, and within a hierarchy based in the divine. Despite a shared hagiographic context, the essential character of Cuthbert’s and Wilfrid’s individual autonomy in weathering hardship differs in principle, in some part due to Wilfrid’s seeming lack of contemplative concern.

\textsuperscript{58} “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 97.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 101.
Though participating within a spiritual hierarchy of authority, Cuthbert’s supportive hagiographic reliance on God represents not merely an exchange in systems of support, but an elucidation of the *supernaturalis* origin of the saint’s contemplative authority and subsequent liberation from temporal means of provision. Bede explicitly describes Cuthbert’s initial contemplative condition through the use of biblical comparatives; a juxtaposition which, according to Benedicta Ward, reveals the inner meaning of a hagiographic text. Bede’s interpretation of Cuthbert’s contemplative nature through external reference to known biblical metaphor establishes a shared literary context through which contemporary society perceived Cuthbert’s position within a broader spiritual hierarchy as well as his subsequent divinely bestowed autonomy. Regarding Cuthbert’s primary withdrawal to Farne, Bede states:

> He [Cuthbert] rejoiced to attain the lot of those concerning whom the Psalmist sings: ‘The saints shall go from strength to strength; the God of Gods shall be seen in Zion.’

Bede’s general use of comparative scripture attempts to associate Cuthbert with an established biblical tradition of sanctity. The eighty-fourth Psalm in itself is thoroughly saturated with notions of heavenly desire as well as expressions of confidence in the divine, and serves to further establish the transcendent nature of Cuthbert’s personal autonomy from temporal destitution. The Psalm’s preceding five verses expound upon the context of the juxtaposition:

> 2. How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! 3. My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God, 4. for the sparrow hath found herself a house and the turtle a nest for herself where she may lay her young ones, thy alters, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God. 5. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord; they shall praise thee forever and ever. 6. Blessed is the man

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whose help is from thee; in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps 7. in the vale of tears, in the place which he hath set,64

The Psalmist highlights notions of Heavenly desire, confidence, and support; all of which conspicuously apply to the hagiographic image of Cuthbert while residing on Farne. Cuthbert withdrew from coenobitic monasticism at Lindisfarne in order to pursue unrestrained divine contemplation,65 in the process abandoning the quarters of men for the absent shores of Farne where he may contemplate on the courts of the Lord. Cuthbert discovers an environment better suited for divine contemplation in Farne, which freed the saint from active distraction and consequently positioned Cuthbert spiritually nearer to the divine; an image analogous to the Psalmist’s sparrow and turtle who each find homes near the altars of God. The Psalmist’s recognition of the blessedness inherent in the acceptance of Heavenly aid illustrates perhaps the most pertinent parallel between scripture and Cuthbert’s hagiographical exile. A theme of trust and reliance on the divine for even material assistance pervades Cuthbert’s hagiographic tradition, with the saint’s faith at times precluding want of monastic aid; Cuthbert understanding the possibility of un-cultivatable soil on Farne as a sign of God’s Will to return to coenobitic living.66 Nevertheless, Cuthbert successfully maintained an existence on the desolate shores of Farne, ever contemplatively minded so as to ascend, as the Psalmist proclaims, “the vale of tears, in the place which he hath set.”67

Despite the conceptualized environmental authority contemplatives such as Cuthbert and Guthlac expressed within the pages of hagiography, anchorites nevertheless typically proved

64 Psalms 83:1-7 (Vulgate).
66 Ibid., 221.
67 Psalm 83:7. ascensiones in corde suo dispositus in valle lacrimarum, in loco quem posuit.
incapable of governing the inclinations of their religious contemporaries. Jeffery J. Cohen alludes to the anomaly in his assertion that, in attempting to isolate their physical and spiritual being, anchorites inherently distinguished themselves socially; a paradox which seemingly contradicted their expressed spiritual and corporal designs. The contemplatively isolated condition of Cuthbert and Guthlac attracted a variety of visitors and pilgrims, from hermits and royal abbesses to exiled princes, whose visitation is often attributed to a desire for wise counsel or prophetic guidance. Bede postulates the broad audiences to which Cuthbert’s discerned miraculous authority appealed, stating:

Now many came to the man of God, not only from the neighbourhood of Lindisfarne but also from the remoter parts of Britain, having been attracted by the report of his miracles.

Though itself a concept well represented within western hagiography, Bede’s elucidation of Cuthbert’s miraculous behaviors not only suggests the significant popularity of the spirit, but attempts to interpret local fervor through a hagiographic lens. The imposition of inquisitive visitors appears to counter the envisaged control an anchorite exerted over their immediate environment through the introduction of an outside agent whose actions, while predictable, lie outside the scope of an eremite’s contemplative jurisdiction. The recorded actions of Guthlac, and especially Cuthbert, nevertheless suggest that seventh-and-eighth-century religious understood pilgrimatic attraction as a natural, yet secondary, corollary of anchoritic contemplative isolation. Cuthbert endeavored to both accommodate and regulate the influx of monastic visitors and pilgrims from the outset of his exile on Farne, preparing for future guests

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through the construction of a small guest house near the sea access of his island.\textsuperscript{70} The anonymous author’s account of Cuthbert’s customary preaching to guests further suggests that the hermit, at the very least, acquiesced to continued, albeit limited, engagement in somewhat consistent social behaviors.\textsuperscript{71} The pilgrimatic drive of outside agents proved beyond Cuthbert’s apprehended insular jurisdiction despite his spiritual authority itself being a prime motivator for the pilgrims’ expedition.

Though extended and seemingly frequent pilgrimatic visitation appears ultimately unavoidable, Cuthbert’s hagiographers present the hermit as taking active regulatory measures to limit his interaction with incoming visitors; therefore, reasserting a degree of control and authority amid otherwise contemplatively disruptive agents. Cuthbert’s sense of pastoral responsibility and spiritual charity seemingly diminished the longer the saint maintained his residency on Farne, as Bede states:

Then, when his zeal for perfection grew, he shut himself up in his hermitage, and, remote from the gaze of men, he learned to live a solitary life of fasting, prayers and vigils, rarely having conversation from within his cell with visitors and that only through the window. At first he opened this and rejoiced to see and be seen by the brethren with whom he spoke; but, as time went on, he shut even that, and opened it only for the sake of giving his blessing or for some other definite necessity.\textsuperscript{72}

Evocative of Cuthbert’s contemplative behavior while prior of Lindisfarne,\textsuperscript{73} the saint’s drastic cellular retreat on Farne represents a reaffirmation of his contemplative nature amid somewhat consistent social contact. While incapable of completely preventing solicitation, Cuthbert yet maintained the capacity to refuse engagement with his guests; a gesture illustrative of, if not a re-

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 217.
\textsuperscript{71} “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 99.
\textsuperscript{72} Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 219.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 211. Bede recalls Cuthbert’s contemplative nature despite his active monastic role, as the prior often participated in lengthy vigils at night, in addition to frequently excusing himself to pray in solitude.
conquest, then a restructuring of Cuthbert’s immediate personal environment along his own contemplative pretensions. Bede interprets Cuthbert’s contemplative restructuring on Farne as a legitimate prerogative of the saint, an interpretation in stark contrast to Bede’s glossing over of Cuthbert’s attempted contemplative departure from Melrose. In so far as Bede is concerned, the value and legitimacy of Cuthbert’s contemplative agency and or spiritual autonomy are themselves largely dependent upon the social circumstances in which they are attained, in addition to the prior commitments forfeited in their expression. Cuthbert’s dedication to anchoritic living therefore subsequently conditioned the validity of his increased isolation. As Mary Clayton notes, Bede often diminishes the more contemplative aspects of Cuthbert’s life, especially those expressed at the expense of necessary active responsibilities. That Bede himself records the narrative concerning Cuthbert’s redoubled retreat within Farne at once suggests both Cuthbert’s individual ability to further adapt his environment to suit his contemplative ends, as well as the degree to which contemporary monastic society sanctioned his isolationist behaviors.

Aside from Bede’s narrative concerning Cuthbert’s eventual interior withdrawal while residing on Farne, neither Cuthbert’s nor Guthlac’s hagiographers overtly suggest their representative anchorites seriously objected, on contemplative grounds, to the presence of visiting religious pilgrims; nor is it evident that seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monastics perceived regular visitation as antithetical to the concept of personal contemplative solitude, or contradictory to local eremitic authority. The degree to which anchorites such as Cuthbert and Guthlac socially isolated themselves, even when accounting for the few regular and

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74 Clayton, “Hermits and the Contemplative Life in Anglo-Saxon England,” 155. Bede certainly praises the contemplative life, but does not appear to have overly admired total eremitic isolation; believing the contemporary English Church in dire need of active instruction.
prolonged relationships each maintained, appears extreme and overbearing when interpreted through an Anglo-Saxon cultural context. Early medieval cultures of Northern Europe in general derived their mode of being and self-definition from networks of familial and social relations; a mode which, according to Jeffery J. Cohen, anchorites such as Cuthbert and Guthlac rejected in their individual seclusion. Felix elucidates the corresponding significance of Guthlac’s decision to pursue anchoritic isolation in regards to the development of his subsequent being, recalling the saint’s renunciation of his ancestry, parents, country, and childhood comrades just prior to his initial monastic ingression at Repton. Cuthbert and Guthlac maintained a solitary and contemplative image within their respective hagiographies despite abandoning those modes of self-definition active within conventional society, regardless of their continued interaction with monastic visitors and secular exiles. Upon discovering the finitude and ephemerality of temporal existence, Cuthbert and Guthlac renounced the transitory relational systems of society and kin. Guthlac considered “the fleeting riches of this world and the contemptible glory of this temporal life,” and consequently sought out a relational system of support less fleeting, entering into a transcendent support order based in the eternal, whereby the saint had recourse to infallible aid, personified in the Apostle Bartholomew, when temporal means fail. Due to the transcendent nature of an anchorite’s divine support network, their hagiographic transition from temporal means of reliance and aid to Heavenly modes of sustenance appears to external onlookers as an extreme expression of individual isolation. Itself being transcendent of temporal nature, the divine hierarchy to which hagiographers envisage contemplatives existing within inevitably

75 Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, 126.
76 Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 83.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 97.
fosters an impression of extensive individual sovereignty in so far as an eremite persistently thrives in physical isolation and material deprivation. Despite the abandonment of temporal insurances however, the hagiographic image, itself conducive to contemporary religious thought, of anchoritic saints such as Cuthbert and Guthlac yet presents individuals well provided. Liberated from reliance upon worldly support structures, the saints operated within a spiritual system of divine supervision, within which they received the full bounty of God’s largesse.

Spiritual Autonomy

Throughout Anglo-Saxon literature of the seventh and eighth centuries there persists a concept of what may be termed spiritual autonomy, representative of an acknowledged contemplative inner condition which often accompanied, though hardly depended upon, anchoritic expressions of material and social independence; yet as a concept transcended the necessity for ascetic living, itself a condition achievable within communal monasticism. Authors of both works of prose and meter, throughout multiple genres, describe the maintenance of a contemplative inner condition with language suggestive of liberation in regards to all forms of worldly constraint and consternation. Achievable through divine contemplation, spiritual autonomy represents a grace within, a transcendent response to the weariness of the external world. The liberating quality of such a contemplative condition frequently applies to internal sentiments, whereby a contemplative monastic maintains a patient and jovial demeanor amongst an otherwise emotionally distressful environment. The condition’s mental predominance imparts a more total and engrossing liberation from worldly distress and distraction; though the ultimate expression of autonomy nevertheless consists in the synthesis of both mental and physical contemplative behaviors. The extent of liberating potential within such a contemplative condition consistently contrasts with the constraint innate in active life, whether secular or religious. The
perceived full expression of spiritual autonomy, itself a synthesis between a contemplatively
driven mind and body, therefore liberates a practicing monastic not only from corporal
degradation but also mental affliction, a divinely focused release from worldly, and ultimately
ephemeral, concern.

In his seventh-century De Virginitate, Aldhelm of Malmesbury didactically accentuates the importance of harmonizing physical asceticism and virtue with divine contemplation in achieving an exemplary spiritual condition capable of withstanding worldly preoccupation. According to Aldhelm, corporal virtue, though noble in its own right, is altogether less consequential than spiritual righteousness. In his dedication to Abbess Hildelith and the community at Barking, Aldhelm states:

To the most reverend virgins of Christ, (who are) to be venerated with every affection of devoted brotherhood, and to be celebrated not only for the distinction of (their) corporal chastity, which is (the achievement) of many, but also to be glorified on account of (their) spiritual purity, which is (the achievement) of few...80

While superficially a corporal virtue, Aldhelm presupposes virginity to entail an inherent, altogether elusive, spiritual element. Though conscious of the necessary balance between active and contemplative religious expression, Aldhelm patently believed spiritual pursuits as superior; an opinion shared by almost all of Aldhelm’s contemporaries, including Bede.81 Aldhelm is less cautious than Bede in his praise and overt desire for contemplative respite; however, both writers essentially agree in recognizing amalgamated active and contemplative expressions as


indispensable to sanctity.\textsuperscript{82} Corporal abstinence is positively worthy of distinction, but is as a virtue naturally subsidiary to the dignity awarded to the simultaneous preservation of spiritual purity alongside carnal chastity, an altogether more difficult condition to achieve. Aldhelm presents corporal virtue in itself as incapable of producing the elevated degree of spiritual autonomy and worldly detachment achievable through a combination of carnal integrity and divine preoccupation. In point of fact, an overemphasis of and concern for corporal refinement frequently conditions the development of sentiments such as pride and self-righteousness, which obstruct spiritual purity through preventing honest repentance.\textsuperscript{83} Aldhelm states on the hindering nature of pride:

\begin{quote}
The former lot [those who rejoice solely in the integrity of the flesh], seeking the condition of the holy life with the life-rafts of their soul all sound, and the ship of their uncontaminated body unbreached, without any risk of rocks, are so much the less eager to devote themselves to moans of lamentation or to seek to wash their faces with floods of tears, inasmuch as they trust themselves to be deformed by no blemishes and stains, and fouled by no blackness of secular slag.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Pride is “the devourer of the other virtues,”\textsuperscript{85} and as a vice “like a fierce queen she is known to usurp for herself the authority of tyrannical power and the sway of government more so than the others.”\textsuperscript{86} The development of pride innately interrupts the mind’s heavenly preoccupations and illegitimately seizes a monastic’s thoughts to refocus them upon their own self.

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\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{83} Aldhelm, “De Virginitate,” 67.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Aldhelm’s understanding of pride insinuates an intensification of worldly reflection, which deprives a monastic from the contemplation of heavenly bodies and their divine companionship and support:

Now if angelic loftiness of heavenly citizens, swelling so greatly with the arrogance of pride, was deprived of the blessed companionship of the other angels and its share in contemplating the godhead, how much the more will the frail weakness of mortals be unhappily defrauded of the wedding-feast of the celestial bride-groom, if it has swelled up like an inflated bladder with the merit of its own attainments.\footnote{Ibid., 67-8.}

A monastic must ascetically refocus their spirit towards God through divine contemplation and fearful repentance in order to prevent the subsequent development of pride and similar notions of lofty self-righteousness,\footnote{Ibid., 68-9. “Let the cruel serpent of gluttony... be driven away by the restraint of frugality; and, last of all, on the other hand, let the ferocious adder of pride... be banished from the hidden recesses of our soul and the secret corners of our hearts (and) be driven far away by the fear of God.”} a re-emphasis which, in continuity with carnal abstinence, engenders a far worthier rule of life than would that of corporal temperance alone.\footnote{Ibid., 71.} Aldhelm’s comprehension of the role of repentance in the contemplative process seemingly conforms to that of Gregory the Great, whereby compunction is the means through which the soul develops an intensified longing for God; therefore, as pride thwarts compunction, the prideful necessarily inhibit the growth of their own divine capacity.\footnote{Leclercq, \textit{The Love of Learning and the Desire for God}, 30.} Bede draws similar associations between contemplative desire and sorrowful penitence, recalling Cuthbert’s “penitence” in conjunction with “heavenly yearnings,” which ultimately drove the saint to offer “himself to God in contrition of heart.”\footnote{Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 213.} Bede overtly posits Cuthbert’s astounding humility, at once working
Gregorian influences into Cuthbert’s character,92 while similarly demonstrating the saint’s mature inner condition in resisting spiritually restricting self-adulation. Bede presents Cuthbert’s extreme subsequent amalgamation of both carnal purity and contemplative preoccupation on Farne as extensively liberating, extricating the hermit from most temporal concerns, be they considerations of corporal well-being, narrow-minded self-righteousness, or emotional consternations. Recalling the spiritual manner of Cuthbert’s life on Farne, the anonymous author correspondingly asserts that:

in all conditions he [Cuthbert] bore himself with unshaken balance, for he kept throughout the same countenance, the same spirit. At all hours he was happy and joyful, neither wearing a sad expression at the remembrance of a sin nor being elated by the loud praises of those who marvelled at his manner of life.93

Cuthbert’s detachment from the worldly extends far beyond mere social dependence and corporal interest, with Cuthbert maintaining his spiritual exuberance “in all conditions,” at once abandoning all mental perturbations through the static preservation of a contemplative spirit. Despite differences in genre and expressed purpose, the contemplative condition ascribed to Cuthbert by his hagiographers principally affirms Aldhelm’s own conviction regarding the liberating nature of pure contemplative existence, with literary comparison illuminating shared themes of contemporary orthodox thought.

Since the pontificate of Gregory the Great, Church leaders commonly understood the active and contemplative religious lives as naturally linked, each manner of existence being interactive and successive to the other.94 Aldhelm’s perception parallels that of Gregory, with the

92 Thacker, “Bede’s Ideal of Reform,” 141. Cuthbert’s expression of humility is itself attached to a statement of approval for the coenobitic life, thereby justifying both the active and contemplative lives.

93 “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 105-107; equali quoque ad cuncta ferebatur examine. Nam eodem uultu, eodem animo perseuerabat.

contemplative aspects inherent within corporal religious activity providing monastics with a bulwark capable of preserving the “unbreached barriers of their modesty without disparagement of their purity.”⁹⁵ In order to achieve a condition of spiritual autonomy, detached from significant introspective concern and sin, a pervasive contemplative awareness must guide a monastic’s subsequent active behaviors. Liberation from corporal sin did not in itself result in a corresponding deliverance from the development of spiritual obstacles, with Aldhelm warning that inflated affection for personal humility may “weave the net of pride or the snare of self-exaltation.”⁹⁶ Cuthbert’s hagiographic tradition similarly appears to confirm the significance of a spiritually driven interconnection of active and contemplative behaviors. The contemplative spiritual fixation of Cuthbert conditions virtually every major decision within the saint’s hagiographic narratives, with Cuthbert never pursuing ascetic physical conditions absent of underlying longings. Cuthbert’s secret departure from Melrose was occasioned by a desire to flee worldly glory (secularem gloriam);⁹⁷ while the saint’s ultimate ascetic physical withdrawal to Farne had its genesis in a deserved aspiration for divine contemplation (diuinae speculationis).⁹⁸ Even when coerced into episcopal activity, the anonymous hagiographer yet envisages Cuthbert as harboring a pervading contemplative demeanor, maintaining “the dignity of a bishop without abandoning the ideal of the monk or the virtue of the hermit.”⁹⁹ The cultivation of a contemplative nature delivers a monastic beyond the reach of the internal corporal danger and temporal concern, as contemplatively aware religious are “so goaded by the spur of divine love

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⁹⁶ Ibid., 70.
⁹⁷ “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 94.
and inflamed by the blazing torch of heavenly ardour, that every day they eagerly long to depart from the prison of the body, transported from the adversity of this world.”

Though ascetic expressions of religiosity suggest a degree of self-determination within an active monastic environment, seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon religious literature appears to conform in the implication that true autonomy detached from worldly adversity, that is tribulation inclusive of both material hardship and interior mental and emotional anxiety, is impossible absent a contemplative element underlying all ascetic religious behavior. In conjunction with Aldhelm’s statement concerning pride as the primary cause of the devil’s fall and subsequent loss of angelic companionship, Guthlac additionally declares “for he who is often visited by men cannot be often visited by angels;” pronouncements themselves representative of a perceived prohibitive dichotomy, in which a certain degree of worldly involvement obstructed divine intimacy.

Further expounding upon the degree to which contemplative virtue conditions and grounds corporal expressions of sanctity, Aldhelm in particular accentuates the necessity of the former in perpetually revitalizing the ethos through which a monastic may resist temporal distraction. Regardless of the degree to which physical asceticism and or chastity may have evoked notions of worldly liberation, corporal purity in itself could not produce a sustained freedom from finite concern and worldly distraction absent a corresponding personal desire for contemplative virtue. Aldhelm understood a presumptuous trust in corporal ascetics as contributing to the development of a self-exulting liberty from common and contemporary

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100 Aldhelm, “De Virginitate,” 71.
101 Ibid., 67.
102 Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 123.
temporal behaviors, a liberty proud in its achievement, whose self-satisfaction outgrew the significance of its virtue:

Whence the same writer [St. Paul] says, ‘I chastise my body and bring it into subjection’, which is to say, so that the flesh does not contumaciously grow insolent with tyrannical power against the spirit and, swelling with the impudent arrogance of liberty, scorn to subject its neck to the yoke of legitimate servitude.  

The initial liberty from perceived impurity and secular convention a monastic attained through corporal integrity, if devoid of an equivalent, contemplative guidance, occasioned a relapse into a condition of impoverished servitude to complacent hubris. Proper and sagacious religious behavior, virginity in Aldhelm’s context, represents not only a corporal expression but a mental exercise which requires a free mind receptive to divine guidance, itself acquired through frequent contemplation:

For every privilege of pure virginity is preserved only in the fortress of the free mind rather than being contained in the restricted confines of the flesh; and it is beneficially safeguarded by the inflexible judgment of the free will, rather than being diminished out of existence by the enforced servitude of the body.

An expression of virginity consigned merely to the corporal body virtually annihilates the privileges of “pure virginity.”

Cuthbert’s hagiographic tradition additionally highlights the governing influence of a contemplative mentality in regards to the expression of pure religious virtue. Though Cuthbert’s coerced episcopal appointment seemingly ended the saint’s synthesis of mental and physical

103 Aldhelm, “De Virginitate,” 73.

104 Ibid. “Therefore the pure steadfastness of uncontaminated virginity is made a servant of God through the tireless constancy of contemplation; and, on the other hand, the freedom of restrained conjugalism is made into a servile poverty of complacent spotlessness.”

105 Ibid., 129. This statement of Aldhelm’s from his De Virginitate is directly followed by a quotation of St. Augustine of Hippo's The City of God, wherein the African bishop asserts the contingency of bodily sanctity upon the condition of the soul. No carnal sagacity can defend against spiritual degradation, while conversely spiritual virtue may reinforce corporal purity.
contemplative expression, both of his hagiographers nevertheless perceive the new bishop as maintaining a contemplative attitude,\textsuperscript{106} with Bede claiming that he “practiced his wonted frugality and, amid the thronging crowds, rejoiced to preserve the rigours of monastic life.”\textsuperscript{107} Cuthbert’s hagiographic image is thus the reverse of Aldhelm’s warning, the saint perpetuating a contemplative frame of mind despite occupying an active role within Church administration.

Cuthbert’s anonymous hagiographer, more frequently than Bede, comments upon the contemplative character of the saint during his tenure as bishop of Lindisfarne, stating not only Cuthbert’s continued monkish demeanor, but applies St Paul’s list of proper episcopal qualities to Cuthbert, patently suggesting Cuthbert’s episcopal justice, holiness, temperance, and general lack of self-will.\textsuperscript{108} Bede is characteristically more restrained when mentioning contemplative qualities that may detract from necessary pastoral duties, yet nevertheless suggests Cuthbert’s outward miracles revealed the inward virtues of the saint’s mind.\textsuperscript{109} Despite a dissimilarity in genre and, though both didactic to some degree, compositional purpose, many of the contemplative themes present within Aldhelm’s \textit{De Virginitate} find expression within contemporary hagiography, particularly that pertaining to Cuthbert. If Aldhelm’s understanding of necessary contemplative conditioning applies to the hagiographic depictions of Cuthbert, then it appears as though Cuthbert’s perceived contemplative mentality continued to direct the saint’s episcopal attitude by allowing a recurrent blossoming of inner virtue amid active involvement.

\footnotesize{106} Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 243; “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 111-113. The anonymous author states that “before everything it was his [Cuthbert’s] special care to take part in fastings, prayers, vigils and reading of the Scriptures.”


\footnotesize{108} “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 111.

episcopal elevation, and although Cuthbert lost the means through which he physically detached himself from his surrounding social world, he yet maintains his acquired contemplative virtues despite transitioning into an environment much more dependent upon outward display. Although contemporary monastic society understood non-contemplative saints such as Wilfrid as yet worthy of veneration, it nevertheless remains plausible that Cuthbert’s contemplative mindset contributed to his perceived mental freedom while Lindisfarne’s bishop.

Anglo-Saxon poetry, particularly the poems so termed Guthlac A and Guthlac B, contains allusions to the finite and ultimately transitory nature of temporal reality in contrast to a spiritually liberating contemplative condition attained through repositioning a monastic’s focus and mind on the divine and eternal. Altogether more pertinent to the present study than its sister work, the significance of Guthlac A extends beyond its inclusion of theological themes common to various genres of Anglo-Saxon literature, as the poem illuminates the mentality through which contemporary society envisioned the actions and goals of contemplative anchorites within a broader poetic, and even heroic context, very possibly appealing to an audience not entirely or even primarily religious. The use of the poem, in so far as it pertains to eighth-century literary expressions of contemplative eremitism, largely depends upon the accuracy of the traditional composition date ascribed to the two Guthlac poems of the Exeter Book, the verity of which is not universally agreed upon.\footnote{For a more in depth introduction into the ongoing debate regarding the dating of the two Guthlac poems, see the first chapter of Catherine A. M. Clarke’s book \textit{Writing Power in Anglo-Saxon England: Texts, Hierarchies, Economies}.} Traditional estimations consign the poems to the latter eighth-century, positing their composition shortly after both Guthlac’s own death in 714 A.D. and the completion of Felix’s prose \textit{vita} between 730-749 A.D.\footnote{Bradley, ed. and trans., \textit{Anglo-Saxon Poetry}, 248-9.} English scholars such as Catherine A.
M. Clarke have more recently suggested a tenth-century provenance however, thereby proposing the English Benedictine reformation as the poems’ proper compositional context.\textsuperscript{112} In support of a tenth-century composition date for the Guthlac poems, Clarke highlights Guthlac’s poetic position within a broader spiritual hierarchy,\textsuperscript{113} in addition to the saint’s continued engagement within coenobitic monastic relationship networks by maintaining a role as spiritual counselor to local secular and religious pilgrims.\textsuperscript{114} Far from abandoning earthly social interaction in its entirety, Guthlac develops an ascetic seasoned authority with which the saint spiritually intercedes and patronizes those within a broader monastic community,\textsuperscript{115} behaviors, which Clarke believes, harmonize with the politics and ideology of the tenth-century English Benedictine reforms.\textsuperscript{116} Though detailed and intriguing however, Clarke’s arguments in favor of a later tenth-century provenance prove ultimately unconvincing in their entirety and appear to neglect the influence of both continental Latin hagiography and Gregorian tradition on eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monastic culture. While Guthlac A appears less dependent upon Felix’s \textit{vita} than Guthlac B,\textsuperscript{117} allusions which posit, be it overtly or implicitly, a saint’s inclusion within a spiritual hierarchy, in addition to examples of continued coenobitic social interaction, are tropes well represented within both eighth-century Anglo-Saxon prose hagiography and continental Latin hagiographic tradition in general. It has been shown above how both of

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{113}] Ibid., 26.
\item [\textsuperscript{114}] Ibid., 24.
\item [\textsuperscript{115}] Ibid.
\item [\textsuperscript{116}] Ibid., 24-25.
\item [\textsuperscript{117}] Bradley, ed. and trans., \textit{Anglo-Saxon Poetry}, 249.
\end{itemize}
Cuthbert’s hagiographies, each early eighth-century compositions, present the anchorite as existing within a divinely ordered spiritual system, dependent upon Heaven, through which Cuthbert exercises both natural environmental and inner spiritual authority. Similarly, the paradox in which an anchorite’s contemplative social withdrawal occasioned a novel, somewhat pilgrimatic, social engagement, is itself a recurrent trope throughout Latin western hagiography. A continued, though diminished, social presence need not contradict an anchorite’s desires for contemplative solitude, with Cuthbert seemingly expecting visitors while on Farne, as the monk initially constructed a shoreline guesthouse. Clarke herself admits that the paradox in which an ascetic contemplative yet maintained a social presence and continued spiritual interest in their surrounding religious community may indeed be intentional.

Certainly, the representation of such a paradox throughout the western hagiographic tradition fails to prevent authors, from Athanasius to Aldhelm, from presenting the contemplative life, so often exemplified through eremitic hermits, as sufficiently distinct from coenobitic monasticism, and yet subsequently spiritually liberating in contrast to the ephemeral constraints of the world.

Furthermore, Gregorian concepts advocating the superiority of a mixed life of social religious activity with periods of contemplative repose heavily influenced eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monasticism, particularly in the writings of Bede. Bede is cautious in his hagiography

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118 Athanasius, “Life of Antony,” in *Early Christian Lives*, ed. and trans. Carolinne White (London: Penguin Book Ltd., 1998), 18-19. The earliest hagiographic texts present anchorites as spiritual confidants to their local populations and religious pilgrims. Athanasius recalls that during Antony’s twenty years in solitude “many came to him in their desire to imitate his commitment to that way of life, together with a large number of those who knew him, and there gathered there a great crowd of people who were suffering.” Nor did Antony’s visitors depart dissatisfied as Athanasius states “then the grace of God, through Antony, freed many people from unclean spirits and from various illnesses.” Cuthbert’s, and indeed Guthlac’s spiritual guidance conceptually parallels that of Antony.


121 Stancliffe, “Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary,” 40.
of Cuthbert not to diminish the worthiness of coenobitic monastic living through an overemphasis on contemplative eremitism. Bede in fact appears to guard against any contrary assumptions of ascetic preeminence, relating that:

He [Cuthbert] was also accustomed very frequently to bid the brethren not to wonder at his way of life, as though it were specially exalted, because he despised worldly things and preferred to live alone. ‘But’, said he, ‘the life of monks ought rightly to be admired…’

Bede almost certainly believed the contemplative life as superior in independent contrast with continuous activity, though he does not appear to have overtly approved of total retirement from the temporal world in so far as it prevented certain religious exemplars from assisting in the development of the Church through active instruction. While contemporary concepts of contemplative asceticism yet pervade Bede’s prose hagiography of Cuthbert, his Gregorian reworking nevertheless conveys an eighth-century endorsement of traditional coenobitic monasticism parallel the veneration of a contemplatively oriented monastic. In contrast, Jeffery J. Cohen’s investigation into the Guthlac literature exhibits at least the possibility of interpreting the poems conversely as evidence for an intense perceived individualization of Guthlac, whereby the saint’s identity is abstracted from any support system dependent upon familial and social relationships. Cohen’s interpretation of the Guthlac literature interestingly accentuates the individualistic themes present throughout the saintly inspired poetry, though perhaps overstates their degree. Catherine A. M. Clarke rightfully critiques Cohen for failing to recognize the continued social and spiritual relationships maintained by Guthlac while living in supposed

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122 Thacker, “Bede’s Ideal of Reform,” 141.
125 Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, 139.
solitude at Crowland. Nevertheless, while Clarke attributes the poetic allusions of continued coenobitic interaction and spiritually organized hierarchy to tenth-century Benedictine influences, it is hardly obvious that such conceptions inherently suggest a tenth-century provenance for the Guthlac poems, as relative themes permeate throughout the corpus of seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monastic literature and continental hagiography.

Though modeled particularly on Evagrius’ vita of St. Anthony, the Old English Guthlac poems of the Exeter Book convey an interpretation of contemplative eremitism approximately comparable to that of Aldhelm and precursory Church leaders such as John Cassian and Gregory the Great. Aldhelm’s conception of mere carnal expressions of virtue as representative of an incomplete personal purity, in so far as such behaviors lack an inner contemplative focus which resists finite self-interest through concentration upon the divine and eternal, find theoretic representation within Guthlac A, though within an expanded context and scope. In contrast to Aldhelm’s declaration of the servile nature of independent corporal sagacity, the anonymous poet of Guthlac A explicitly expounds upon the restricting nature of the physical world in its entirety, as the character of the temporal world itself constitutes a finite limitation upon a monastic’s desire for eternal life. The temporal world exists within a context of perpetual decay, and its ephemerality demonstrates its finitude, which guarantees the futility of seeking ultimate human contentment within its limits. The temporal world innately disappoints those whose highest hopes rest within the confines of physical treasures; however, a contemplative may exchange their involvement in the finite world and all its inadequacies for a

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127 Bradley, ed. and trans., Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 249.
128 “Guthlac A,” 251.
share in the eternal, through constant heavenly contemplation in synchronization with earthly deeds directed towards an infinite end. In the words of the anonymous poet:

and therefore they [those concerned more with earthly life than eternal] now deride the courage of those saints who make steadfast their thought upon heaven, who know that the homeland will last eternally for all the multitude who serve the Lord throughout the world and by their works aspire to that precious home. So these worldly treasures will be exchanged for those glorious benefits when those over whose heads impends the fear of God yearn for it.¹²⁹

The poet characterizes the pious actions of a monastic within an underlying contemplative context wherein earnest thought upon the divine guides and directs temporal participation towards the personal attainment of the eternal. Divine reflection results in temporal expressions of material charity, spiritual generosity, and love of the unfortunate, through which religious “purchase heavenly glory” by serving and pleasing God.¹³⁰ The poet’s interconnection of individual heavenly contemplation and appropriate active religious behaviors significantly resembles Aldhelm’s postulation regarding the ultimate necessity of a harmonic virtue between the body and the soul; while the notion that an exemplary and virtuous religious life ought to entail a certain degree of engagement in both contemplative and active practices pervades throughout the works of continental theologians from John Cassian, to Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Great.¹³¹ The Guthlac A poet recognizes Guthlac’s actions within the physical world as directly associated with the hermit’s contemplative journey towards the attainment of eternal peace, much in the same way as Pope Gregory the Great envisaged active religious participation as the necessary antecedent to contemplative withdrawal.¹³² A contemplative inner condition

¹²⁹ Ibid., 251-252.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 252.


¹³² Ibid., 20.
therefore precedes and influences all subsequent physical action, for a true contemplative, desirous of a more total virtue in proximity to the divine, must not place ultimate hope in the temporary world, but must act through that very world in order to prepare themselves for the eternal life that awaits those who serve the Lord; they “make use of this life and wish for and look forward to the better one hereafter.”

The anonymous poet of Guthlac A ultimately visualizes the ascetic Guthlac within a context of contemplatively conditioned static spiritual liberation that contrasts with the mutable and finite nature of the surrounding temporal world. The abandonment of the ephemeral proved a natural prerequisite for the attainment of the eternal, a process through which Guthlac gained autonomy from the transient conditions of the physical world. Following Guthlac’s withdrawal into the fens of Crowland, the poet confers an angelic justification and therefore heavenly foundation for the exigency of Guthlac’s contemplative retreat from the temporal world. Perplexed by a dualism of angelic and devilish influences, Guthlac’s angelic guardian:

> told him [Guthlac] this whole earth beneath the sky was ephemeral and praised those lasting benefits in the heavens where souls of saints possess the joys of the Lord in triumphant glory; gladly he [God] yields them reward for their deeds, those who are willing gratefully to receive his grace and more utterly to let this world escape them than the life everlasting. \(^{134}\)

Guthlac’s angelic companion leaves the reward structure relating to worldly deeds and corresponding eternal recompense intact; however, the poet explicitly asserts the value of relinquishing position within the physical world for the sake of attaining an eternal condition. When consequently assailed by spiritual devils that threaten the ascetic with debilitating physical

\(^{133}\) “Guthlac A,” 252.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., 253.
infirmity in the form of starvation, thirst, lack of shelter, and loneliness,\textsuperscript{135} the saint nevertheless stands beyond the scope of such deprivations. Guthlac’s response to the devils is one of cavalier reproach, stating:

Cravings therefore affect me little, and anxieties seldom, now that a spiritual guardian looks after me. My hope is with God; I care nothing at all for earthly well-being, nor do I yearn in my heart after much for myself, but every day the Lord provides me with my wants by the hand of man.\textsuperscript{136}

Guthlac unwaveringly rejects all temporal concern in so far as such consideration relates solely to worldly states of being and differentiates from trust in God. The saint’s devilish tormentors initially evoke hazards exclusively limited to the physical world and thus pertain solely to Guthlac’s corporal being; however, Guthlac’s contemplative trust in the divine for both spiritual and temporal support and sustenance transcends the limited influence of such corporally dependent threats. Armed with the knowledge of God’s patronage, Guthlac’s heart was “neither frightened nor faint” in the presence of the devils, who proved consequently unable to influence the saint’s earthly condition favorably or adversely.\textsuperscript{137} Guthlac’s contemplative trust in God inaugurated the saint’s liberation from the temporal world and any corresponding corporal concern, infinite support blunting the edges of finite affliction. Regardless of the degree to which Guthlac secluded himself from monastic social support networks in reality, the poet nevertheless envisions the anchorite’s exile within a sufficiently total context as to imply that men less stalwart in divine faith would lament over such corporal depreciation, an atrophy Guthlac’s divine dependence precluded.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 256-257.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 257.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
In his *Medieval Identity Machines*, Jeffery J. Cohen demonstrates the value of poetic comparison in discerning what elements within the Guthlac poetry represent broader cultural interests of contemporary Anglo-Saxon society. Cohen investigates extant Anglo-Saxon poems such as *The Wanderer*, *The Ruin*, and *The lay of the Last Survivor* alongside the Guthlac poems to specifically highlight common themes pertaining to communal discontinuation. An interpretation of Guthlac’s poetic works through a complimentary Anglo-Saxon poetic context additionally amplifies the significance of the saint’s divinely founded liberty from mutable physical conditions and general temporal concern; with the context itself consistently emphasizing earthly ephemerality, material loss, and the acceptable corresponding emotional responses to each. Poems such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Fortunes of Men*, and *Deor*, each respectively accentuate themes expressed within *Guthlac A*, and though the impossibility of precise dating makes any suggestion of the poems’ contemporaneous provenance somewhat speculative, the independent recurrence of analogous themes suggests their utility in comprehending the significance of Guthlac’s temporal escape. Tropes allusive to the inherent ephemerality of worldly existence, with a relative perception of continuous earthly mutability and the necessity of accepting the unpredictability of fate, find frequent representation within Anglo-Saxon wisdom poetry. In similarity to Guthlac’s angelic guardian, the wandering poet expounds upon the transient nature of physical existence and the overall frailty of life:

I cannot think, therefore, why in this world my heart does not grow dark, when I thoroughly contemplate the life of men – how swiftly they, brave warrior-thanes, have yielded up the hall. Just so this middle-earth each and every day declines and decays.139

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In parallel imagery *The Seafarer* poet concedes that earthly existence innately concludes through one of three conditions, for either “ill-health or old age or the sword’s hostile violence will crush the life from the doomed man in his heedlessness.” The earthly destiny of man is as mutable as it is inescapable; “such things are not man’s to control.” The *Deor* poet’s recognition of the impermanency of both joy and pain invokes a similar personal surrender to heavenly discretion; a mitigation founded upon a contention that “throughout this world the wise Lord frequently causes change: to many a man he shows grace and certain success, to some a share of misfortunes.”

The presence of congruent thematic material within *Guthlac A* is hardly astounding as a considerable degree of Anglo-Saxon poetry reveals a Christian inspiration and compositional purpose. The poems of the Exeter Book therefore share an Anglo-Saxon Christian poetic context, despite divergent dating and the obscurity of the poems’ origins prior to their collection within the codex. Where the non-hagiographic poets lament at the unpredictability and pain of worldly existence however, the *Guthlac A* poet perceives a hero whose spiritual trust in God intrinsically partitions him from all consequence born within the physical world and alleviates his emotional condition from the impositions of mutable fate. Though the *Deor* poet implies that the effects of fate diminish in relation to an individual’s proximity to God, *Guthlac A* in contrast presents Guthlac as manifesting an extraordinary degree of propinquity to the divine. The

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140 “The Seafarer,” in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 333.


144 Ibid., xxii. Indeed, as Bradley suggests, the poems’ collection within the Exeter codex suggests their common utility in serving the specific purposes of the book’s patron.
respective poets of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* similarly acknowledge the necessity of conclusive reliance on the divine, yet nevertheless initially suffer from temporal anxieties and emotional desolation. *The Seafarer* poet thus decries:

> for there is no one on earth so confident of temperament, nor so generous of his gifts, nor so bold in his youth, nor so courageous in his deeds, nor his lord so gracious to him, that he never worries about his seafaring, as to what the Lord will send him.\(^{145}\)

The pervasive metaphorical implication that the journey towards definitive resignation to God’s Will inherently besets temporal concern and anxiety at once appears to escape the poetic character of Guthlac. Guthlac’s self-concern pertains ultimately to his soul, that which is eternal within him. All consequence born of the transitory world is incapable of permanently altering an aspect of being which exists in perpetuity. Guthlac relies on God for the safekeeping of that which is truly valuable for eternity. The saint’s response to the renewed offensive of his fiendish assailants epitomizes his total heavenly relinquishment:

> Though you may make assault upon it [the body] with painful afflictions you will not be allowed to touch my soul; rather you will induce it to a nobler state. I will therefore await what my Lord decrees me. For me there is no anxiety over dying. Though my bones and blood moreover both turn to dust, my immortal part will pass into bliss where it will enjoy a beautiful abode.\(^{146}\)

Guthlac “set his mind on high, on the home in the heavens;”\(^{147}\) a spiritual preoccupation with the divine which not only tempered the consternation aroused by his adversaries, but conversely humiliated the devils, to whom Guthlac’s presence provoked incessant anxieties.\(^{148}\) The poet explicitly contrasts Guthlac’s unblemished spiritual condition with the downcast state of the devils who “lament and wish for extinction and yearn for the Lord to concede, through the

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\(^{145}\) “The Seafarer,” 333.

\(^{146}\) “Guthlac A,” 259.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 252.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., 255.
extinction of death, an end of their miseries.” The loss of influence over an otherwise temporal entity provokes notions of anxiety and humiliation within the devils as the metaphoric personification of worldly mutability, while Guthlac subsequently wrestles possession of Crowland away from the spiritual wretches. Thus, Guthlac’s trust in the divine upended the despondency experienced by supplementary Anglo-Saxon poets through their vulnerability to the forces of change, whereby the devils of mutability are forced to contend with their own incapacity to influence that which the immutable supports.

Guthlac’s characterization as a “blessed warrior” within Guthlac A, “equipping himself with spiritual weapons and vestments,” accentuates the perceived primacy with which an individual’s soul naturally commands over the corporal body. The association of contemplative behaviors with notions of spiritual warfare is a concept widely expressed throughout contemporary Anglo-Saxon literature from Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate* to Bede’s prose hagiography of Cuthbert; expressions themselves based upon the scripture of Ephesians 6:17: *et galeam salutis adsumite et gladium Spiritus quod est verbum Dei.* The anonymous poet’s incorporation of Guthlac within the ranks of what Aldhelm termed a “monastic army,” serves both to maintain a heroic context for Guthlac’s anchoritic endeavors and spiritual skirmishes, as

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid., 254.

151 Ibid.

152 Aldhelm, “De Virginitate,” 68. “Rather, as combatants in the monastic army, boldly offering our foreheads armed with the banner of the Cross among the ranks of our competitors, and carrying tightly the warlike instruments of armament - which the distinguished warrior enumerates, that is to say, the sword of the Holy Word and the impenetrable breast-plate of faith;” Bede, “The Life of St. Cuthbert,” 215. “but when the soldier of Christ [Cuthbert] entered, armed with the ‘helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of spirit which is the word of God, all the fiery darts of the wicked one’ were quenched.”

153 Ephesians 6:17.

154 Aldhelm, “De Virginitate,” 68.
well as highlight Guthlac’s contemplative pensiveness and favorably associate the hermit with existing anchoritic traditions of saintliness, all through the use of well-established literary metaphor. While Guthlac and Cuthbert’s literary conceptualization as spiritual warriors share a similar context of contemplative conquest however, Guthlac’s poetic representation as a “soldier”\(^\text{155}\) is explicitly expatiated within *Guthlac A* and constitutes a principle aspect of the poetic work. Guthlac’s engagement with the malicious forces of Crowland comprises not a single definitive battle, such as with Cuthbert, but a nearly life-long resistance to corporal threats and temporal temptation. Through corporal assaults, the devils sought to tempt Guthlac’s spirit and bring about his withdrawal from the fens of Crowland.\(^\text{156}\) Guthlac responds with a preemptive contemplative defense of his soul; at once contrasting with both the fiends and his own prior thegny responsibility through his refusal to engage with the devils temporally. Guthlac subsequently responding to the devil’s threats:

> I do not intend to carry against you a sword, a weapon of the world, with hand enraged, nor shall this site be colonized for God through the shedding of blood, but I intend to please my Christ with a gift more acceptable.\(^\text{157}\)

Guthlac’s detachment from external temporal influences extends beyond the saint’s immediate spiritual well-being to govern the nature of Guthlac’s recourse; the saint’s contemplative liberation from worldly considerations applying to both the finite world’s bearing upon Guthlac as well as his reciprocal interactions.

Guthlac’s preeminent spiritual concern essentially resembles Aldhelm’s understanding of virginity, whereby true purity is “preserved only in the fortress of the free mind rather than being

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\(^\text{155}\) “Guthlac A,” 254.

\(^\text{156}\) Ibid., 254.

\(^\text{157}\) Ibid., 257.
contained in the restricted confines of the flesh.”\textsuperscript{158} Aldhelm’s quotation of St. Augustine appears dually applicable:

Thus the sanctity of the body is not lost provided the sanctity of the soul remains, even if the body is overcome, just as the sanctity of the body is lost if the purity of the soul is violated, even if the body is intact \textit{[De Civit. I. 18].}\textsuperscript{159}

The anonymous poet of \textit{Guthlac A} expounds accordingly, presenting a hero who acquired a spiritual security that consequently protected the saint’s overall well-being. Though Guthlac’s adversaries launched numerous attacks upon the Mercian anchorite, “they were not permitted to harm Guthlac’s spirit nor with wounding stroke to sever soul from body.”\textsuperscript{160} Guthlac maintained spiritual virtue amidst the corporal onslaught of Crowland fiends, as “God was not willing that the soul within his body should suffer pain by this [assault]; however, he allowed that they might lay hold of him with their hands, and that immunity be safeguarded towards his soul.”\textsuperscript{161} The hero of \textit{Guthlac A} is a warrior beyond temporality, with his focus purely upon the eternal, through which all finite suffering lost potency.

Both Felix and the anonymous poet of \textit{Guthlac A} conceive of a saint whose contemplative trust in the divine, in addition to spiritual protection, occasions a personal angelic companionship that serves to introduce the saint into a novel system of cooperative aid. While Guthlac’s literary transition from a position within secular identity and support networks, into those within a more encompassing spiritual hierarchy, itself hardly suggests a tenth-century Benedictine influence, Catherine A. M. Clarke justifiably accentuates the themes relative to the anchorite’s inauguration into a broader spiritual system of patronage upon his contemplative

\textsuperscript{158} Aldhelm, “De Virginitate,” 129
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} “Guthlac A,” 255.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 260.
retreat. Conceptions of personal identity within Guthlac A in particular, even within a spiritual context, are relational and dependent upon an individual’s status within some form of social hierarchy; a framework which Clarke recognizes as a possibly deliberate or natural consequence of the saint’s temporal social abandonment. Guthlac abandons secular relational bonds, with Felix recalling the saint’s renunciation of “his parents, his fatherland, and the comrades of his youth,” an act which freed Guthlac’s individual identity from reliance upon temporal standards of definition. Guthlac’s loss of temporal social relations fails to perturb sufficiently the saint’s being in any fashion comparable to the expressions of less hagiographic poets. Whereby The Wanderer poet dolefully cries “alas, the majesty of the prince!” Jeffery J Cohen acknowledges Guthlac’s comparatively cheerful abandonment of the social bonds that once comprised his former being. Regardless of his emotional disposition, Guthlac’s exile from secular society accompanied a contemporary perception whereby the saint’s contemplative retreat represented an introduction into a higher, sturdier, spiritual social environment. Felix explicitly contrasts the spiritual support system to which Guthlac entered into with the temporal social environment the hermit had previously abandoned, subsequently positing a somewhat mutually exclusive social dichotomy wherein temporal abandonment necessarily preceded the saint’s introduction into a spiritual social order. In response to contemporary amazement at his ascetic living, Felix perceives Guthlac stating:

Have you not read how if a man is joined to God in purity of spirit, all things are united to him in God? and he who refuses to be acknowledged by men seeks the recognition of

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163 Ibid., 23.

164 Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 83.

165 “The Wanderer,” 324.

166 Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, 136.
wild beasts and the visitations of angels; for he who is often visited by men cannot be often visited by angels.\textsuperscript{167}

Felix perceives Guthlac’s abandonment of secular familial and social relationships as necessary for the saint’s acquisition of heavenly companionship; an association uniquely prepared to assist the contemplative in his impending spiritual trials. Felix recalls the near immediate abuse Guthlac suffers at the hands of “the ancient foe of the human race;”\textsuperscript{168} an occurrence which provoked the saint to despair of his chosen anchoritic station. Felix continuously refers to Guthlac as a “soldier of Christ,” yet the spiritual assaults disturbed Guthlac as he reflected upon his past sins, believing forgiveness to be eternally out of reach.\textsuperscript{169} The novel spiritual context within which Felix situated Guthlac demonstrates the saint’s fundamental need for transcendent spiritual assistance. Only the apostolic intervention of Bartholomew ultimately alleviates Guthlac’s lamentations:\textsuperscript{170}

So when this same man [Guthlac], like a soldier fighting in the serried ranks, had realized the heavenly aid and angelic light had reached him, immediately the clouds of impious thought were dissipated…\textsuperscript{171}

The angelic support awarded to Guthlac was conditional upon the saint’s anchoritic retreat into the wastes of Crowland; however, though Guthlac’s contemplative asceticism necessitated the abandonment of temporal social relations, Guthlac’s spiritual focus and divine trust inaugurated a novel higher social hierarchy unequivocally more able and reliable than those of man. The contrast between the corporal and spiritual aspects of an individual’s being, present within the

\textsuperscript{167} Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlac, 123.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 95.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 97.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
works of Aldhelm and St. Augustine, is suggested through Guthlac’s spiritual conflicts. Though the saint lost temporal aid, representative of the body in temporal existence, the anchorite nevertheless gained the spiritual assistance necessary to alleviate his weathered condition. Temporal support may principally be lost, as the temporal world itself proves ultimately ephemeral and mutable; however, the support accessible through contemplative trust in the divine is by contrast eternal and immutable. Guthlac’s novel social order extended beyond temporality, and constituted a relational support structure itself dependent upon nothing more than the immutable Will of God. The saint of Crowland’s subsequent introduction into a novel spiritual hierarchy hardly lessened his liberation from worldly social orders. Devoid of any spiritual support, Guthlac’s ascetic seclusion would hardly have evoked conceptions of liberation, with the saint abandoning one structure of support in return for helpless individualism. The saint’s hagiographic inclusion into a higher spiritual system of social support and order liberated the saint not only from temporal, and therefore fallible, support systems, but occasioned a circumstance in which infallible assistance never exhausted.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to highlight and expound upon the significant degree to which the introduction of Christian monasticism within the seventh-and-eighth-century Anglo-Saxon kingdoms fostered the development of environments favorable to the expression of self-determination and personal autonomy among contemporary monastic adherents in regards to their material and spiritual condition. Monastics’ participation within two parallel social structures occasioned numerous opportunities for an imposition of personal will concerning an individual’s profession, character of life, and spiritual identity. Operating within two distinct yet cooperative social hierarchies, monastics often applied the conventions of each social system in a personally beneficial manner, legitimizing behaviors one system identified as irregular through an appeal to the established norms of the other. Monastic founders of the seventh and eighth centuries and their heirs therefore exercised an extraordinary authority over the social and religious development of their religious institutions. Furthermore, the diversity of early English religious communities in regards to form and rule presented incipient monastics with a variety of choices concerning the character of the religious life they sought. Outside of coenobitic environments, continental hagiographic tradition and the intellectual currents of western Christendom, in concert with the eremitic influences of Ireland, provided a basis for individual abandonment of social interaction in favor of solitary contemplative retreat. Though solitaries theoretically lost a degree of material security and collective autonomy within contemporary society, concurrent religious authors present, with near unanimity, such reclusive spiritual behavior as the ultimate expression of liberty achievable within this world.
The limited seventh-and-eighth-century scope of this study is in large part due to the significant and lasting political and cultural development of the succeeding two centuries which altered the nature and character of Anglo-Saxon monasticism. The social and episcopal autonomy early Anglo-Saxon monastic communities generally maintained proved ultimately unsustainable. The conventionalization of monasticism within Anglo-Saxon culture gradually tapered the initial enthusiasm of aristocratic patrons, and the disappearance and replacement of monastic founders’ dynasties occasioned an additional emotional disconnect between religious communities and secular regimes.\footnote{1} While the degree to which a monastic institution maintained a characteristically religious manner of living depended, from the outset of monasticism’s Anglo-Saxon introduction, on the proclivities of its founder or reigning abbot, the initial popularity of monastic establishment among the secular nobility nevertheless engendered a noticeable decline in monastic spiritual and intellectual standards by the middle of the eighth-century. Bede’s critical overview of the general state of Northumbrian monasticism in his 734 A.D. letter to Archbishop Egbert suggests the poor spiritual and intellectual standards many aristocratic communities often maintained. In the context of monastic oversaturation and normalization, the wealthy and elite communities of the late seventh and early eighth centuries increasingly felt the need to justify their vast wealth as their own prestige and novelty faded.\footnote{2} Many lesser communities faced serious financial difficulties by the middle of the eighth-century, and often parted with land endowments out of necessity for monetary relief from secular authorities.\footnote{3}

\footnote{1} Blair, \textit{The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society}, 129.
\footnote{2} Ibid., 133-134.
\footnote{3} Ibid., 129.
The practical opportunity, and overall secular respect, for monastic self-government appears to diminish in the latter half of the eighth-century. In a letter to King Eadberht of Northumbria around 757-758 A.D., Pope Paul I admonishes the king for his forceful seizure of three of a certain Abbot Forthred’s communities at Stonegrave, Coxwold, and Donaemuthe respectively.\(^4\) The king redistributed the lands to a “patrician” named Moll, and much of the pope’s concern centers around Eadberht’s wrongful invasion of religious property.\(^5\) Dorothy Whitelock suggests that Eadberht’s seizure of monastic property materialized as a response to Bede’s advice on reconstituting false aristocratic monastic communities;\(^6\) nevertheless, the king’s willingness to intercede into monastic affairs for the purposes of patronizing a secular retainer reveals a certain shift in the thought of secular authorities in regards to what constituted their greatest personal benefit in terms of patronization. King Æthelbald of Mercia received similar censure from St. Boniface for his violation of monastic privilege and sanctity. Boniface accuses the king of collectively stealing church and monastic revenues, raping nuns, and allowing the aristocratic oppression of monks and priests, while suggesting that even pagans understood proper sexual morality.\(^7\) John Blair rightly characterizes monastic communities of the middle to late eighth-century as victims of their own success, for their continuing economic and landed growth tempted secular powers to manipulate communities’ means to their own needs,

\(^4\) Pope Paul I to Eadberht, King of Northumbria, and his brother Egbert, Archbishop of York, 757-758, in Whitelock, 830.

\(^5\) Ibid., 830-831.

\(^6\) Whitelock, *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, 830.

\(^7\) Boniface and seven other missionary bishops to Æthelbald, King of Mercia, 746-747, in Whitelock, 817-820.
the affluence of many institutions additionally proving too substantial to warrant a lapse of secular interest and oversight.\(^8\)

Monastic communities of the mid-seventh-century suffered a concurrent deprivation of autonomy from episcopal supervision,\(^9\) as developing ecclesiastic hierarchy sought to exert tighter regulation over monastic government and property. The council of Clofesho in 747 A.D. prescribed bishops to enter local monastic institutions held by secular authorities in order to regulate the behavior of ruling abbots.\(^10\) The council’s pronouncements effectively overruled the decrees of the synod of Hertford in 672-3 A.D. which liberated monastic communities from episcopal interference.\(^11\) The proliferation of lay abbots, or in Bede’s language “laymen in charge of monks,”\(^12\) in the late eighth-century, appears as the justification for the Church’s attempts to extend episcopal authority and jurisdiction over monastic governments. The legatine councils of 786 A.D. suggest that bishops superintend the appointments of monastic heads on order to suppress the number of secular abbots.\(^13\) References to the financial distress of certain communities additionally appears as a basis for episcopal interference and oversight.\(^14\) The council of Chelsea in 816 A.D. permits the episcopal acquisition of impoverished monastic lands in order to prevent church property from reverting back into secular control.\(^15\) The Church

\(^{8}\) Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 134.


\(^{10}\) Ibid., 130-131.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 131.

\(^{12}\) Bede, “Bede’s Letter to Egbert,” 343.


\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, 51.
sought to prevent penurious monastic institutions from selling land endowments, which once lost
to secular control, proved difficult to recover. The episcopal effort to resist lay interference in
monastic organization and land propriety harbored little to no concern for the autonomy of the
monastic communities it sought to protect, and indeed gradually undermined monastic self-
governance and independence from ecclesiastic control.

In addition to the social and cultural trends of the late seventh and early eighth centuries
which ultimately subverted monastic institutional autonomy, the Viking raids at the beginning of
the ninth-century significantly disrupted monastic establishment and development. While
isolated Viking assaults on monastic centers proved devastating in individual cases, the Viking
conquest of eastern England in the mid-ninth-century effectively extirpated monastic life within
those provinces. The regicide and dethronements inflicted on the royal courts of Northumbria,
Mercia, and East Anglia by the Vikings between 866 A.D. and 873 A.D., proved particularly
devastating for the royal nunneries of those kingdoms, for which royal deaths and dynastic
discontinuity meant the loss of their principle source of patronage. Despite the survival of the
Kingdom of Wessex and the western provinces of Mercia, their monastic communities yet
suffered from the incursions of Viking armies, as West Saxon secular authorities privatized
Church properties in order to provide a better defense against the Danes.

Following the disruptions to English ecclesiastic structure by the Viking invasions,
monastic patronage and practice garnered little enthusiasm until the middle of the tenth-century,

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16 Blair, The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society, 129.
17 Ibid., 123.
19 Yorke, Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses, 59.
20 Ibid., 60.
after both the Anglo-Saxon re-conquest of the Danelaw and political unification. The monk and eventual Archbishop of Canterbury Dunstan established the first organized community of monks in two generations at Glastonbury around 940 A.D.\(^{21}\) His example and influence, alongside the royal support of kings Eadred and Edgar, inaugurated a reformation of monastic practice in tenth-century England. The variety of religious rules within the new or reestablished monastic communities emphasized to King Edgar the need to regulate monastic observances, and between 963 and 975 A.D. the king summoned a council to proclaim a standardized monastic rule.\(^{22}\) The subsequently produced *Regularis Concordia* sought to codify monastic practice and observance for the entire English kingdom,\(^{23}\) thereby precipitating the end of the individual authority and autonomy abbots such as Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid exercised in establishing the character of their monastic communities, and the nature of their religious lives. The organization and communal essence of tenth-century monasticism differed considerably from that of the seventh and early eighth centuries. Monastic communities of the tenth-century operated within a significantly different political, episcopal, and cultural context than their predecessors, a context that often supplanted monastic autonomy for secular interference, episcopal oversight, and universal communal standardization.

The limited scope of this study may nevertheless serve as a premise for future research. While this study has focused on expressions of temporal and spiritual autonomy during the early stages of monasticism’s integration within Anglo-Saxon culture, further research into both the practical exercise, and social conceptualization, of personal monastic autonomy during the tenth-


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 452.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 453.
century reestablishment may prove fruitful. The tenth-century monastic reformation altered the religious and social character of English monasticism, but monasticism as a concept ceased as a cultural novelty. The integration of monastic practice in the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon mind and landscape fostered the development of individual material and spiritual self-determination; however, was there a place for such personal monastic determinations in an Anglo-Saxon society where the ecclesiastic and secular social structures sufficiently acclimatized? To what extent did individual monastics of the tenth-century prove capable of influencing the social nature of their daily lives within a context of increased episcopal supervision and observance standardization? The political unification of England under the West Saxon king Æthelstan in 926 A.D. proposes additional questions concerning the practical opportunities for an exertion of monastic authority. Could an exile such as Wilfrid continue to extend their monastic and social authority in a politically unified state? The unification of the English kingdom, in accordance with the establishment of an effective and strong episcopal structure, marked a significant achievement within Anglo-Saxon culture and society, and its influence on the monastic conceptions and applications of individual agency and autonomy warrants future study.

The development of personal spirituality within a context of post-reformation English monasticism may additionally justify future examinations. Did the contemplative concept of saintly environmental authority and spiritual liberation alter in the wake of both the Viking invasions and the tenth-century Benedictine influenced reforms? The Benedictine reforms inaugurated a revitalization of Anglo-Saxon culture, characterized in one respect by the development of a new outpouring of religious literature. The degree to which seventh-and-

\[24\text{ Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 107.}

\[25\text{ Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 457.}\]
eighth-century hagiographic themes of individual spiritual liberation, wherein a contemplative monk transcends beyond the ephemeral consequences of temporal society and nature through divine trust and support, found representation in tenth-century hagiographic literature, may prove useful in discerning continuities of thought and spirituality in Anglo-Saxon monastic and ecclesiastic culture. Ælfric of Eynsham’s late tenth-century hagiographic works provide an excellent starting point for an investigation of reformed concepts of individual spiritual identity within a more regulated English Church. The endurance and influence of early English hagiographic literature on subsequent literary conceptions of individual temporal autonomy and spiritual liberation, both within and beyond the shores of Britain, may illuminate the significance and prominence of the early Anglo-Saxon Christian Church.

This study may precipitate further examinations into both the physical nature, and social perception, of Anglo-Saxon monastic autonomy, as the Anglo-Saxon Church developed in centuries succeeding the ninth-century Viking invasions and the tenth-century political unification of England. The continued importance of monastic communities and their brethren in tenth-century English culture and society suggests important questions concerning the practical self-determination of monastic institutions as collective social entities. The self-image of individual monks within the context of an externally regulated English monasticism warrants similar study, particularly in regards to the perceived constitution of an individual’s personal liberty as a spiritual being. The social and cultural circumstances surrounding monasticism’s introduction into Anglo-Saxon society permitted early monastic leaders and their communities to exert a considerable degree of self-determination in their economic, social, and spiritual lives, and further research is necessary to reveal the extent to which communities and individuals of
subsequent centuries remained capable of exercising a practical, and spiritual, autonomy in their daily existence.
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APPENDIX A: OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Integrity
April 3, 2017

William Tanner Smoot
2040 Weberwood Drive
South Charleston, WV 25303

Dear Mr. Smoot:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled "In the Company of Angels: Expressions of Personal Autonomy, Authority, and Agency in Early Anglo-Saxon Monasticism." After assessing the abstract it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director

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APPENDIX B: VITA

WILLIAM TANNER SMOOT

Education
M.A., History, Marshall University, 2017
  Thesis: In the Company of Angels: Expressions of Personal Autonomy, Authority, and Agency in Early Anglo-Saxon Monasticism
  Advisor: Dr. Laura Michelle Diener
B.B.A., Marketing, Marshall University, 2013

Conference Presentations
“In the Company of Angels: Perceptions of Personal Authority and Sovereignty in Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography,” Fourteenth Annual Queen City Colloquium, Cincinnati, OH, 7 April 2017.

Honor Societies
Phi Alpha Theta, National History Honor Society, Gamma Chi Chapter, 2015 -
  Office Positions: Treasurer, 2016 –2017
Eta Sigma Phi, Honorary Society for Classical Studies, Beta Upsilon Chapter, 2015 –

Languages
Latin, Marshall University, 9 hours: Translation Competent
Spanish, Universidad Nebrija, Madrid, 6 Hours: Basic Speaking Competence

Academic Honors