

How an Early Medieval Historian Worked:  
Methodology and Sources in Bede's Narrative  
of the Gregorian Mission to Kent

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Medieval Studies  
University of Toronto

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2014

## Abstract

This dissertation examines the methods and sources employed by Bede in the construction of his account of the Gregorian mission, thereby providing an insight into how an early medieval historian worked.

In Chapter 1, I begin by setting out the context for this study, through a discussion of previous compositional analyses of Bede's works and the resulting interpretations of the nature and purpose of his library.

Chapters 2-4 analyze the sources of the narrative of the Gregorian mission in the *Historia ecclesiastica*. Each of Bede's statements is interrogated and its basis established, while the ways in which he used his material to frame the story in the light of his preconceptions and agendas are examined.

Chapter 5 collects all the sources identified in the earlier Chapters and organizes them thematically, providing a clearer view of the material Bede was working from. This

assessment is then extended in Chapter 6, where I reconstruct, where possible, those ‘lost’ sources used by Bede and consider how the information he used reached him.

In this Chapter, I also examine the implications of Bede’s possession of certain ‘archival’ sources for our understanding of early Anglo-Saxon libraries, suggesting more pragmatic purposes for them, beyond those they have usually been credited with. The Chapter ends with an assessment of Bede’s primary sources for the account of the Gregorian mission and an examination of the reasons he possessed so few.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I discuss those passages of Bede’s account of the ‘mission fathers’, whose origins were not able to be established in Chapters 2-4. Bede’s use of a set of proto-homiletic sources of a hagiographic nature, dedicated to the early bishops of Canterbury and the mission, emerges. The basic outlines of this collection are set out and the context for their composition described.

Throughout, the dissertation is intended not only as end in itself, but as the basis for further investigation both of Bede’s methods and sources, and those of others. In particular, the provision of a more comprehensive awareness of Bede’s resources enables future work to dispense with the narrative Bede has superimposed on his evidence. This thus lays the foundations for re-writing, and not merely re-interpreting, the history of early Christian Kent on a firmer evidential basis than previously possible.

## Acknowledgments

It is a great pleasure to be able to thank the many people who have inspired and assisted me on the often circuitous journey to this point. First and foremost among these is Sandy Murray, my supervisor. The wise guidance I have received from Sandy is only matched by his generosity with both his time and his work. He has truly been a mentor.

The advice of the other members of my committee – Nick Everett and Andy Orchard – has been scarcely less helpful. Their rigour and scholarship has continually improved my work and the dissertation which follows owes much to their encouragement.

Sadly, many of those who guided me most at the start of my interests in medieval studies and Anglo-Saxon England have already faced that “enforced journey” Bede spoke of. Patrick Wormald was for me undergraduate tutor, Masters’ supervisor, and friend. The speculation that I may well be the last of his students to gain their doctorate fills me with some pride.

Others who have passed away, but without whom I should never have reached this point, merit equal thanks: Maurice Keen and Rees Davis at Oxford, and Dom Daniel Rees, monk of Downside Abbey, who first directed my interests towards the Middle Ages. I am glad that one, at least, of my early inspirations is able to see her efforts come to some fruition: my gratitude to Henrietta Leyser for all of her generous enthusiasm over the years cannot be overstated. Without her I should never have undertaken graduate studies in the first place.

I am grateful for the assistance provided by both the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, who gave me a Fellowship to support my doctoral studies, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, who awarded me a two-year scholarship. At the former my thanks go especially to Grace Desa, whose knowledge and support have been crucial over my years at Toronto, and to Michael Elliott without whose stimulating and erudite conversation my understanding of canonical issues, especially relating to the *Libellus Responsionum*, would be much poorer.

I should also like to thank Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy, in Barry’s Bay, Ontario, where, in my new role as Chairman of History, I completed work on this thesis and who generously put their resources at my disposal even before I began work

formally. The institution's motto, *Veritas Vos Liberabit*, was the motto of my father's doctorate and a model for my own.

My greatest thanks must go to my family. My debt to my parents, grandmother and great aunt for the support they have provided can never be repaid. In ways well beyond the obvious, I would not be here were it not for them.

Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to my wife, Christine, and my children. It is almost a cliché to say that without them this thesis would have been finished faster; in this case it would be truer to say that without them it would never have been begun. Christine has been a constant source of encouragement and inspiration throughout my work and it is to her that this work is dedicated.

19 September 2013

The Feast of St Theodore of Canterbury

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## Abbreviations

<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
<i>DTR</i>	<i>Bede, De temporum ratione</i> , ed., C. Jones <i>CCSL</i> 123B (Turnhout, 1977); tr. F. Wallis, <i>Bede: The Reckoning of Time</i> (Liverpool, 1999)
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>HA</i>	<i>Historia abbatum auctore Baeda</i> , ed. C. Plummer in <i>Venerabilis Baedae opera historica</i> 2 vols (Oxford, 1896), I, pp. 364-87; tr. D. Farmer in <i>The Age of Bede</i> (London, 1998)
<i>HE</i>	<i>Bede, Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum</i> , ed. and tr., B. Colgrave and R. Mynors (Oxford, 1969) [reprinted with corrections, 1991]
<i>LP</i>	<i>Liber Pontificalis</i> , ed. L. Duchesne, 2 vols, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, Series 2, 3 (1886-92). Translated in R. Davis, tr., <i>The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): the Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715</i> (Liverpool, 1989)
<i>S</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography</i> , ed., P. Sawyer, (London, 1968)
Gregory of Tours, <i>Histories</i>	<i>Gregory of Tours, Historiarum libri X</i> , ed., B. Krusch and W. Levison, <i>MGH SRM</i> 1.1 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn. (Hanover, 1937-51). Translated in: L. Thorpe, tr., <i>Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks</i> (London, 1974); A. Murray, ed. and tr., <i>Gregory of Tours: the Merovingians</i> (Peterborough ON, 2006)
<i>MC</i>	Bede, Major Chronicle ( <i>Chronica Maiora</i> ) from <i>De Temporum Ratione</i> , c. 66
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina</i> , ed., J.-P. Migne



# Chapter 1

## Introduction: How Bede Worked

### 1.1 Bede's method and materials

The aims in this thesis are simple: to show that both the process and the sources for Bede's creation of the *Historia ecclesiastica's* account of the Gregorian mission to Kent can be reconstructed and thus, potentially, that his narrative can be replaced.<sup>1</sup> This exercise in the identification and reconstruction of the lost sources available to Bede is closely akin to the process Michael Lapidge termed 'palaeobibliothecography' – the reassembly of ancient libraries and the works within them – though operating on a narrower canvas than is usually the case.<sup>2</sup> The conclusions will extend beyond the classification of Bede's materials, to provide a better appreciation of the way Bede worked in writing his history. As a result, it will be possible to gain both a more nuanced view of the nature and purpose of the 'library' at his disposal and a firmer basis than heretofore for the future study of early Christian Kent. Such an enterprise thus takes place within the context of a wider field: the question of the contents of Bede's library. This is an area of study that has been examined frequently and well. It is necessary, therefore, to begin by contextualizing this dissertation within it.

There is no doubt that, in Lapidge's words, "Bede had access to a very substantial library at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Lapidge has argued that, given the state of the evidence, Bede's monastery possessed "the largest library ever assembled in Anglo-Saxon England."<sup>4</sup> This conclusion was supported by David Ganz, who claimed that "the

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<sup>1</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* [henceforth, *HE*]; B. Colgrave and R. Mynors, ed. and tr., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969; reprinted with corrections, 1991) [henceforth Colgrave and Mynors].

<sup>2</sup> M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 191.

<sup>4</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 37.

range of texts known to Bede was never replicated in the ninth, tenth or eleventh century” in Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>5</sup> As Love put it, “the breadth of Bede’s reading is undeniably impressive”.<sup>6</sup> Lapidge went on to catalogue the works apparently known to Bede.<sup>7</sup> In preparing this inventory, he was updating the study by Laistner,<sup>8</sup> who in turn had built on a list collected by Plummer.<sup>9</sup> Lapidge’s conclusions, though open to minor refinements,<sup>10</sup> were based on a much more systematic analysis than those of his predecessors, and took advantage of the various modern critical editions available. They were also presented according to a more functional organization than earlier attempts, making it a simple matter to find where Bede used each ‘source’. Overall, Lapidge’s work represents a landmark study of the topic and will be of value for decades to come.

Such efforts are of more than merely antiquarian interest. In sum, these researches are aimed at establishing Bede’s library. Love, for one, has emphasized the “importance of assessing the extent of the library used by the man who was arguably the most productive of all known authors active in Anglo-Saxon England.”<sup>11</sup> By reconstructing the list of works available at Wearmouth-Jarrow, it is possible to gain a framework for situating Bede as an author. These studies allow us to learn not only about Bede, but also about the world in which he lived. This is a world whose cultural achievements have long been admired,<sup>12</sup> but whose educational attainments and intellectual dynamics are perhaps only beginning to be fully realized. In one sense, Laistner may have been right to describe Bede’s library as “for his age unique”,<sup>13</sup> but it was not an isolated oasis. Aldhelm, Bede’s older contemporary, had access to resources scarcely less extensive and in some ways

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<sup>5</sup> D. Ganz, “Anglo-Saxon England”, in E. Leedham-Green and T. Webber, ed., *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland Volume I: to 1640* (Cambridge, 2004), 91-108, at p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> R. Love, “The library of the Venerable Bede”, in R. Gameson, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume I c.400-1100* (Cambridge, 2012), 606-32, at p. 631.

<sup>7</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 193-228.

<sup>8</sup> M. Laistner, “The Library of the Venerable Bede”, in C. Starr, ed., *The Intellectual Heritage of the Early Middle Ages: Selected Essays by M.L.W. Laistner* (New York, 1966), pp. 117-49.

<sup>9</sup> *Beda Opera Historica*, ed. C. Plummer (2 vols; Oxford, 1896), [Henceforth Plummer, with references by volume and page number] volume I, p. l-lii, n. 3.

<sup>10</sup> As, for instance, offered by Love, “Library of the Venerable Bede”.

<sup>11</sup> Love, “Library of the Venerable Bede”, p. 607.

<sup>12</sup> L. Webster and J. Backhouse, ed., *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600-900* (London, 1991), remains a valuable introduction to the various cultural achievements of the period.

<sup>13</sup> Laistner, “Library of the Venerable Bede”, p. 142.

more exotic.<sup>14</sup> Aldhelm was a product of the school of Theodore and Hadrian at Canterbury, which injected new life into learning in England and educated several future senior ecclesiastics, while possessing “an important teaching library”.<sup>15</sup> With Theodore and Hadrian as masters, students were instructed on the basis of literary knowledge of a breadth available nowhere else in western Europe north of the Alps at the time.<sup>16</sup> The period was one of a florescence of learning and literature that went well beyond the surviving products of the authors whose names have come down to us. Overall, Dumville has estimated that thousands of manuscripts must have made their way to England by the end of the seventh-century.<sup>17</sup>

A catalogue of available works, however, while extremely valuable, still only takes us so far. Larger questions concern the purpose of the libraries and the manner in which the works within them were used. As far as the former issue is concerned, Lapidge’s study concludes with the view that Anglo-Saxon libraries were assembled principally for “the interpretation of Scripture and the regulation of the Church.”<sup>18</sup> There is, of course, at one level, a circularity to this case, as Love pointed out.<sup>19</sup> Bede wrote commentaries and unsurprisingly used earlier commentaries as his main sources; when he wrote hagiographies, he used earlier hagiographies; when he wrote grammatical works he used earlier grammars; when he wrote computus, he used earlier computistical works; and when he wrote poetry he used the works of earlier poets. What Bede’s library might have included but Bede did not use, because he did not compose works for which such works would have been useful, will never be known.<sup>20</sup> As Lapidge himself put it “biblical

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<sup>14</sup> A. Orchard, “Aldhelm’s Library”, in Gameson, ed., *Cambridge History of the Book I*, pp. 591-605; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 178-91.

<sup>15</sup> Ganz, “Anglo-Saxon England”, p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> M. Lapidge, “The School of Theodore and Hadrian”, in M. Lapidge, ed., *Anglo-Latin Literature 600-899* (London, 1996), pp. 141-68; M. Lapidge, ed., *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence* (Cambridge, 1995); and *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, ed., B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> D. Dumville, “The importation of Mediterranean manuscripts into Theodore’s England”, in Lapidge, ed., *Archbishop Theodore*, 96-119, at p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 128. This view was taken earlier, and on less evidence, by G. Bonner, “Bede and Medieval Civilisation”, *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973), 71-90, at p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> Love, “Library of the Venerable Bede”, p. 620.

<sup>20</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 128, argued, for instance, that Bede’s library could not have been better for writing his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. As he rightly noted, this shows the collection reflected choice not chance; but it is also a strong argument that works unused by Bede need not have been unavailable to him, since it shows he did not simply need to ‘pressgang’ every single item he possessed into service, but could be more focused.

commentaries are no place to look for evidence of a scholar's response to, and knowledge of, classical Latin poets."<sup>21</sup> It should not be assumed that Bede's writings drew on every single work collected by Benedict Biscop, Ceolfrith and Hwætberht.<sup>22</sup> Nor need a 'functional' collection have meant what we might imagine to Bede's abbots, even if this were all they had aspired to,<sup>23</sup> and even if we make the implausible assumption that the bibliographical priorities of Benedict Biscop, Ceolfrith and Hwætberht were inevitably identical. Bede's own description of the types of works favoured, for instance, by Acca shows that collectors placed definite personal stamps on the make-up of their libraries, not merely engaging in minor variations on a single Scripture study theme.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, if early Anglo-Saxon libraries were collected purely for the purposes of understanding Scripture, there is something slightly inconsistent about the absence of exegetical works from the corpus of any Anglo-Saxon writer besides Bede before the mid-eighth century.<sup>25</sup> Aldhelm did not write any; Boniface did not write any; nor did any other 'minor' authors whose surviving works we possess. The products of Ripon, Lindisfarne, Malmesbury, Nursling and Whitby scarcely justify assuming that their libraries were *designed* for Scriptural studies, although their surviving works certainly demonstrate their authors' knowledge of a variety of works which *could* have been used for biblical exegesis. Broadly speaking, the libraries of Bede and Aldhelm do not seem to have been vastly dissimilar in range and content. The qualitatively different outputs of these two figures cannot therefore be explained simply by access to sources. Thus the 'purposes' of these early Anglo-Saxon monastic libraries should not perhaps be inferred so quickly, and so narrowly, from either the nature of the works they wrote or the sources they demonstrate knowledge of in their writings.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> That the Wearmouth-Jarrow library was merely the product of Benedict and Ceolfrith's efforts is often taken for granted; but, as P. Wormald, "Bede and Benedict Biscop", in G. Bonner, ed., *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Century of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), 140-69, at p. 165, n. 70, rightly noted: "Bede's library will presumably have been supplemented continuously".

<sup>23</sup> I. Wood, *The Most Holy Abbot Ceolfrid* (Jarrow, 1995), p. 15; Love, "Library of the Venerable Bede", p. 620, perceptively suggested "cultural aspirations" as another motive in the abbots' selections.

<sup>24</sup> *HE* 5.20.

<sup>25</sup> This question, and its relation to Bede's early 'career', is considered in my article (in preparation), "From *enfant terrible* to pillar of orthodoxy: the making of 'Bede the exegete'".

<sup>26</sup> The very popularity of the *HE* perhaps points to a broader purpose for eighth-century monastic libraries than merely as reading lists for a scriptural studies curriculum. Even if Eusebius, Orosius, and Josephus

Nonetheless, the sheer weight of patristic entries in the Bedan catalogue has its own force and it is no surprise that even with Love's comments about the circularity of the argument, she should close by accepting Lapidge's conclusions.<sup>27</sup> The conclusions of this present thesis, despite offering some further reservations, will themselves do little to challenge the basic thrust of this particular argument. Bede's library did possess works designed in the main to facilitate study of the Scriptures; but this was not all. By expanding the array of sources available to Bede as well as offering new perspectives on his application of them, the 'palaeobibliothecographical' approach taken in this study should implicitly extend the range of purposes for which the Wearmouth-Jarrow library was designed and used, enriching our view of that collection. As I shall attempt to show, these shifts in function have intriguing implications for our understanding of the culture of Anglo-Saxon monasteries and their relation to the politics and society of the time, especially perhaps in the field of education, even of those not destined for a religious life.

As for the second question – how these libraries and the works within them were used – it is possible, at least for the Canterbury school under Theodore and Hadrian, to edge in the direction of an answer. Once again it is Lapidge who has led the way, showing that comments by Bede, and more importantly by Aldhelm, as well as the survival of glosses apparently descended from the notes of those taught by Theodore and Hadrian, point towards both the shape of the Canterbury curriculum and the manner in which it was taught.<sup>28</sup> The result is a remarkably different, and much more positive, view about the state of learning and education in late seventh-century England than had previously prevailed. Indeed so significant are these findings that their full implications remain to be completely worked through in the scholarship.<sup>29</sup> Even here, however, the precise ways in which Canterbury's library holdings were transformed not only into teaching, but into actual literary works is difficult to assess. Broad claims are now made for the products emanating from the Canterbury school, but the proposed works, in their surviving forms,

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might arguably have been obtained primarily to serve as a preparation for exegesis, monasteries can hardly have acquired copies of Bede's *HE* for that purpose.

<sup>27</sup> Love, "Library of the Venerable Bede", p. 632.

<sup>28</sup> Lapidge, "School of Theodore and Hadrian"; and see the summary in Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>29</sup> My article (in preparation), "The school of Theodore and Hadrian: education and public administration in seventh-century England", is an attempt to take forward work in this direction.

are sufficiently removed from the *obiter dicta* of the two masters that confident conclusions about their precise methods of work continue to be difficult to derive.<sup>30</sup>

With Bede, the connection between library and corpus is much closer. Moreover his extensive canon provides plenty of material for analyzing his methods. This approach has been central to the recent refocusing of scholarship on Bede's works besides the *HE*. Somewhat paradoxically, a fuller appreciation of Bede's bibliographic borrowings has gone hand in hand with a realization of his areas of originality as an author.<sup>31</sup> His own creativity in both the exegetical and 'scientific' fields becomes all the clearer with an awareness of how he used his sources, together with an assessment of where he differs or goes beyond them. Bede did indeed, as he so often claimed, walk in the "footsteps of the Fathers", but he went further yet down the path they had laid.<sup>32</sup>

There is no shortage of studies on Bede 'the scholar', or on various aspects of his scholarship. All rely on an appreciation of his library and the best are integrated into an implicit consideration of it.<sup>33</sup> Indeed studies like Love's of Bede's library are indirectly studies of Bede's scholarship, since almost everything we know about what Bede knew comes from source analysis of his works.<sup>34</sup> This tandem approach has been particularly productive in the modern scholarly attention to Bede's biblical commentaries and 'school' texts. We know more about Bede's library thanks to the new emphasis on his exegesis, and we understand his exegesis better thanks to the improved appreciation for his library.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In addition to the "Leiden Glossary", and the Biblical glosses identified by Bischoff, claims of varying strengths have also been made for the connection of several other works to Theodore and Canterbury: the *Iudicia/Penitential*, the *Laterculus Malalianus*, and the version of the *Passio S. Anastasii* reworked by Bede. Of these, only the *Laterculus*, which in some ways is the text least convincingly connected to Canterbury, has a real claim to be a literary work; all the rest – even the *Passio* – are based on the second-hand records of oral statements by the *magistri*.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, R. Ray, "Who did Bede think he was?", in S. DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, 2006), pp. 11-35.

<sup>32</sup> Ray, "Who did Bede think he was?"; S. DeGregorio, "The New Bede", in DeGregorio, *Innovation and Tradition*, pp. 1-10.

<sup>33</sup> M. Laistner, "Bede as a Classical and a Patristic Scholar", in Starr, ed., *Intellectual Heritage*, pp. 93-116, is a classic example of this.

<sup>34</sup> As pointed out by Ganz, "Anglo-Saxon England", p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> The most informed analyses of Bede's method in individual works are found in the introductions to the various recent translations, especially those in the Liverpool *Translated Texts for Historians* series. All of these have expanded modern knowledge and understanding of Bede's sources – even when already working from good critical editions – as well as helping to explain the ways in which Bede both used and went beyond them.

Surprisingly, considering the overwhelming historical emphasis on the *HE*, such studies of how Bede worked, based in an analysis of his sources, have not been carried out in any systematic way for Bede's *History*. Of course the results of the broader inquiries have been of indirect benefit to study of the *HE*. A solid understanding of the literary works at Bede's disposal has supported the immensely valuable historiographical concentration over the last forty years or so on the ideologies and agendas Bede brought consciously and unconsciously into his writing of the history of the conversion of the English.<sup>36</sup> Such studies have tended to privilege a focus on Bede's canon rather than his library; but analysis of the latter supports their conclusions. With a deeper awareness of Bede's intellectual background, the *HE* appears less the independent and objective work it was once considered.

Other recent work on the *HE* has gone further still, offering not simply descriptions of the conscious and unconscious Bedan attitudes that must be taken into account in interpreting the evidence of the *HE*, but even adducing possible motivations for Bede's writing. Again, however, the relation of the question of Bede's 'library' to these issues has not always been prioritized, although discussion of the topic has been used to support the more persuasive theories. Through these proposed rationales, which tend to be grounded in contemporary ecclesio-politics, whether the "Ghost of Bishop Wilfrid",<sup>37</sup> or ecclesiastical reform,<sup>38</sup> or monastic competition,<sup>39</sup> we should, it is argued, read the entire

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<sup>36</sup> Although sensitive treatments of what might be termed the 'limitations' of Bede's historical method had been written previously (for instance, W. Levison, "Bede as Historian", in A. Thompson, ed., *Bede: His Life, Times and Writings* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 111-51; and C. Jones, "Bede as early medieval historian", *Medievalia et Humanistica* 4 (1946), pp. 26-36), the field shifted qualitatively with two seminal pieces by James Campbell: J. Campbell, "Bede I" and "Bede II", in J. Campbell, ed., *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 1-27; and 29-48.

<sup>37</sup> W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (AD 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988); W. Goffart, "L'Histoire Ecclésiastique et l'engagement politique de Bède", in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *The Venerable Bede: Tradition and Posterity* (Lille, 2002), pp. 149-58; W. Goffart, "Bede's *uera lex historiae* explained", *Anglo-Saxon England* 34 (2005), 111-16; and W. Goffart, "Bede's History in a Harsher Climate", in DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition*, pp. 203-26.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance, S. DeGregorio, "Monasticism and Reform in Book IV of Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People'", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61.4 (Oct., 2010), pp. 673-87; A. Thacker, "Bede's Ideal of Reform", in P. Wormald, ed., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 130-53.

<sup>39</sup> V. Gunn, *Bede's Historiae: Genre, Rhetoric, and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon Church History* (Woodbridge, 2009).

work. Not all of these, or other, competing, explanations,<sup>40</sup> can be correct, but taken together they have enriched our appreciation of the complexity of Bede's character and the nuances within the *HE* itself.

These studies, even if for the most part indirectly, have therefore utilized the results of the broader analysis of Bede's library in order to provide a better understanding of the *HE*. Overall, however, there has been little direct connection between the wider work on Bede's library and the continuing study of the *HE*. More importantly, the sort of comprehensive source analysis which has now been undertaken across much of the rest of Bede's corpus has not been replicated for his most famous work. Thus, although we now have plenty of reasons to tread cautiously in using the *HE* as a source, the *HE* does still remain our source, and indeed our chief one.<sup>41</sup> While we know much more now about the possible reasons for which the *HE* was written, or at least about the ideologies under the influence of which it was drafted, we still know very little about *how* it was written, giving the work a deceptively monolithic appearance.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike studies of Bede's other works, therefore, analysis of the *HE* has not consistently sought answers to the question of the basis for Bede's individual statements. Here scholarship has barely moved beyond the findings of Plummer and he, in the main, only noted those places where he found Bede borrowing from literary works. Beyond the merely stylistic, these were primarily concentrated in the first section of the *HE*, from *HE* 1.1-22. Bede was fairly frank in the Preface about what he was doing in these chapters and specifically about the extent to which the narrative represented mainly a collection of borrowings from the writings of earlier writers (*ex priorum maxime scriptis*). Other, later, sections of the *HE*, as Plummer pointed out, relied on other works, such as Bede's *Life of*

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<sup>40</sup> Such as Higham's claim the *HE* was intended to provide something of a *speculum principis*, with specifically tailored implicit criticisms designed for King Ceolwulf. N. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede: the Ecclesiastical History in Context* (Abingdon, 2006). Or Rollason's intriguing view that the work was intended to provide material for the 'German' mission fields: D. Rollason, *Bede and Germany* (Jarrow, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Levison's comment remains true: "One has only to imagine Bede's work as non-existent to realise how much we depend on him." W. Levison, "Bede as Historian", p. 146.

<sup>42</sup> Although there have been some very stimulating discussions of Bede's rhetoric – a rather different aspect of his process to that which is being considered in this study. See, especially, the contributions of Roger Ray on the subject, for instance: R. Ray, "Bede's *Vera Lex Historiae*", *Speculum* 55.1 (1980), pp. 1-21; R. Ray, "Bede and Cicero", *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987), pp. 1-15; R. Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture* (Jarrow, 1997); and Ray, "Who did Bede think he was?". Gunn, *Bede's Historiae*, is also intended as an intervention on the topic.



*Cuthbert*, or his adaptation of Adomnan's *On the Holy Places*; and discussion continues about the extent or not of Bede's use of the *Whitby Life of Gregory*,<sup>43</sup> and Stephanus' *Life of Wilfrid*.<sup>44</sup>

In the century since Plummer's *magnum opus*, however, scholars have added few sources to those he identified, though there have been individual discussions about certain types of material or about Bede's use of individual authors. Bede's borrowings from Gildas have been analyzed, for instance,<sup>45</sup> as has his use of Orosius,<sup>46</sup> and his handling of certain of the papal letters.<sup>47</sup> A consideration of the way Bede integrated the latter documents into his narrative has also been part of discussions of the context of Bede's composition of the *HE*.<sup>48</sup> Other studies have included considerations of Bede's sources for dates in wider discussions of chronology,<sup>49</sup> and, of course, focused discussions of episodes in the *HE* have sometimes included limited considerations of Bede's sources and attempts to explain them. All of this will be built on in this present study, but the fact remains that surprisingly little systematic work has been performed either on Bede's sources in the *HE* or on how he used them to create his narrative.<sup>50</sup>

Partly, as hinted above, this is a consequence of the focus in analysis of the Wearmouth-Jarrow library on the literary works it contained. As far as these go the

<sup>43</sup> *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1968). The question of the origins of this early Anglo-Latin work remains unsettled. For simplicity's sake, and following continuing scholarly convention, I shall refer to it as the *Whitby Life*.

<sup>44</sup> *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. and tr. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927). Patrick Wormald ("Bede and Benedict Biscop", in S. Baxter, ed., *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian* (Oxford, 2006), 3-29, at p. 29, additional note 8) made a persuasive case that the modern rejection of the "Eddius" named in the work as its author may have been overly precipitous, but in line with current conventions I shall refer to the author simply as Stephanus throughout.

<sup>45</sup> M. Miller, "Bede's use of Gildas", *English Historical Review* 90 (Apr. 1975), pp. 241-61.

<sup>46</sup> D. Scully, "Bede, Orosius and Gildas on the Early History of Britain", in Lebecqz et al, ed., *The Venerable Bede*, pp. 31-42.

<sup>47</sup> R. Markus, "The Chronology of the Gregorian Mission to England: Bede's Narrative and Gregory's Correspondence", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963), pp. 16-30; P. Hunter Blair, "The letters of Pope Boniface V and the mission of Paulinus to Northumbria", in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes, ed., *England Before the Conquest: studies in primary sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 5-13; and J. Story, "Bede, Willibrord and the Letters of Pope Honorius I on the Genesis of the Archbishopric of York", *English Historical Review* 127 (Aug. 2012), pp. 783-818.

<sup>48</sup> The argument in P. Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great* (Jarrow, 1964) is an influential, if rather simplistic, example of this.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, C. Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles* (Ithaca, 1947) – henceforth Jones, *Saints* – and K. Harrison, *The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History to A.D. 900* (Cambridge, 1976).

<sup>50</sup> The salient contributions of Kirby to the subject should not be ignored, however, even if their treatment of the material is not systematic. See, for instance, D. Kirby, "Bede's Native Sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1965-6), pp. 341-71; and D. Kirby, "Northumbria in the time of Wilfrid" in D. Kirby, ed., *St Wilfrid at Hexham* (Newcastle, 1974), pp. 1-34.

reason so little has been added to Plummer's scholarship is that he left so little to add; but Bede had and used many sources beyond the 'classics' in composing his history.<sup>51</sup> Love provides a helpful catalogue of Bede's "historical collection", but as she notes, *contra* Laistner,<sup>52</sup> these works represent texts used, and presumably also collected, for "explication of the Scriptures", rather than in preparation for writing the *HE*.<sup>53</sup> Some were drawn upon in the *HE* as well, but they can hardly be called the basis for that work. These are not, in the main, what is meant when talking of the sources of the *HE*, or, besides Gildas,<sup>54</sup> of any of Bede's stories within it. The reality, as will be seen, is that Bede's 'library', in the sense of the written resources available to him in composing his works, clearly went beyond simply 'literary' works; but if this is the case, then there are implications for our understanding of the purpose and roles of monastic libraries in the period.

Another probable reason for the lack of a systematic treatment of the *HE*'s sources, is that, in contrast to Bede's exegetic or educational works, much of the *HE* tends to be implicitly, or explicitly, explained away as reliant not on 'written sources', but on what might be termed, in a general sense, 'tradition'. Thus, for the basis of Bede's account of the Gregorian mission, historians frequently refer to 'Canterbury tradition'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, for Kirby, the *HE* was, in the main, a "mosaic of personal memories".<sup>56</sup> Higham even argued that Bede was an oral historian.<sup>57</sup> These sort of comments are grounded in a reality: many stories in the *HE* do come from 'oral tradition', which would not be found in a library.<sup>58</sup> Bede is often clear that his source is a named individual who has told him the tale. At other times, though more ambiguously, generic expressions point in the same direction. To say that Bede uses 'traditions', however, is not to say that the majority of the work was written without identifiable 'sources'. Nor does it preclude an analysis of either the

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<sup>51</sup> So focused was Laistner, for instance, on literary works that he misleadingly stated that Plummer had "tracked down the sources" for the *HE*: Laistner, "Library of the Venerable Bede", p. 118.

<sup>52</sup> Laistner, "Bede as a Scholar", p. 100.

<sup>53</sup> Love, "Library of the Venerable Bede", pp. 627-28.

<sup>54</sup> Included by Love among the historical collection, though it is hardly a 'historical' work in reality.

<sup>55</sup> This is particularly prevalent in the otherwise extremely useful N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (London, 1984).

<sup>56</sup> Kirby, "Bede's Native Sources", p. 56.

<sup>57</sup> N. Higham, *Bede as an Oral Historian* (Jarrow, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Though Ray goes too far in claiming the *HE* "was built with self-conscious rhetorical art largely from folk traditions": R. Ray, "What do we know about Bede's Commentaries", *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 49 (1982), 5-20, at p. 5.

basis upon which he made his claims or how he used his materials – oral and written – to compile his narrative.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore such generalizations do not do enough to recognize the often quite stark differences in genre between the materials used across the *HE*. The beginning of the account of the Gregorian mission, for instance, marks a watershed as much in evidence as in narrative.<sup>60</sup>

What is required for the *HE*, therefore, is an exercise whose nature and value were set out in plain terms by Love for the entire Bedan corpus: “a very great deal still remains to be discovered about his reading, by a painstaking process of interrogating every single paragraph he wrote, a lifetime’s task.”<sup>61</sup> This thesis represents a contribution to such a broader undertaking, analyzing the sources of Bede’s account of the Gregorian mission in the *HE*. I shall attempt, through a ‘palaeobibliothecographical’ treatment of the *HE*’s narrative of the early Church in Kent before the arrival of Theodore, to offer a case study in Bede’s resources and method.

It should be recognized, however, that implicit in Love’s comment, is the other main reason that this enterprise has so far been pursued less rigorously in the *HE* than elsewhere in Bede’s corpus: the sheer difficulty of carrying it out successfully. The nature of the *HE* renders this sort of labour even harder than for his other works. Bede’s sources for the *HE* are not only literary, as we have already emphasized: some are administrative, some are oral, many are lost. In fact, probably the majority of Bede’s sources no longer survive.<sup>62</sup> In short, the enterprise Love calls for cannot be achieved with the *HE* simply by searching electronic databases. Instead a more complex assessment of the viable and plausible sources is required, with the conclusions inevitably less evidently certain.

Difficult the task may be, but it is not impossible, and in any case it is necessary. Studying the ‘how’ of the *HE*, as is being essayed in this thesis, is crucial and not simply for the same reasons that such an exercise needs to be completed across Bede’s corpus. The present study will thus do more than merely increase the extent of Lapidge’s catalogue. The analysis has implications for our awareness of the chronology and context

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<sup>59</sup> Higham, *Bede as an Oral Historian*, p. 4, makes broad claims about what Bede used, but based on little more than a cursory examination of the *HE*’s materials.

<sup>60</sup> A distinction Higham, *Bede as an Oral Historian*, p. 6, made no allowance for, treating Book One monolithically.

<sup>61</sup> Love, “Library of the Venerable Bede”, p. 619.

<sup>62</sup> Although parallel, or later, versions often do, as with episcopal lists or genealogies.

of the composition of the *HE* and indeed of Bede's relations with Canterbury. Furthermore, properly used, the conclusions of this study can lay the basis for a better understanding of, and not merely a new perspective on, early Christian Kent. Because of the specifically historical nature of the *HE*, what can be learned from an improved awareness of Bede's sources is different and more directly 'useful', with implications potentially much further reaching.

In some ways, this is almost self-evident. All the work on Bede's library, even focused as it has been on works other than the *HE*, has still been extremely helpful for historians. For the most part, however, the conclusions have been valuable, from a historical perspective, only indirectly. Source analysis of Bede's other works tells us about Bede, his background and milieu. Incidentally, therefore, it is possible to learn about the world and intellectual culture of the late seventh and early eighth century and about the perspective of the author. Source analysis of the *HE* offers all this as well, of course, and given the broader range of sources involved, promises to open up new avenues to explore. But because the *HE* is a history, identifying its sources provides more direct insights into the events and world of early Christian Anglo-Saxon England.

As has long been recognized, in theory at least, Bede is, for the account of the Gregorian mission, "at best merely a secondary source".<sup>63</sup> In the *HE*, Bede has created a narrative using primary sources, secondary sources, oral information, and rhetorical *topoi*, as well as his own deductions and, arguably, inventions. That some of Bede's sources were better than others goes without saying. In the absence of a systematic analysis of the basis for each statement in the *HE*, however, how is one to sift between them?

Bede's very qualities as historian have complicated the task. His ability to weave together his sources and connect them into a convincing story is one of his most impressive characteristics. As Mayr-Harting put it:

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<sup>63</sup> R. Gameson, "Augustine of Canterbury: Context and Achievement", in R. Gameson, *St Augustine of Canterbury and the Conversion of England* (Stroud, 1999), 1-40, at p. 3.

The *Ecclesiastical History* reads so fluently and seems such a finely woven fabric, that we have to remind ourselves how patchy and uneven were the sources on which Bede was forced to rely.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, without the sort of analysis undertaken in this study, it is very difficult to see what was ‘Bede’ and what was his ‘source’; or, for that matter, what was primary and what secondary; or what was inference, or assumption or invention.

Indeed, as will be seen very clearly, and as Mayr-Harting and others have suspected, Bede’s primary sources for the Gregorian mission, beyond the papal letters, were very few indeed.<sup>65</sup> There was good reason for this, as will be shown in Chapter 6: the hiatus in ecclesiastical organization, amounting almost to a total structural breakdown, in the 660s, as a consequence, directly and indirectly, of ‘plague’, resulted in devastating administrative discontinuity. There were extended vacancies in the episcopacies of both Canterbury and Rochester, as well as in the main abbey, Ss. Peter and Paul’s, at a time when one king had died and his successor was a minor, probably with a maternal regency.<sup>66</sup> This congruence of natural and systemic calamity meant that, as I shall argue, Canterbury had almost no original sources from the early mission period to pass on to Bede.

Without a comprehensive analysis of the sources lying behind Bede’s narrative, however, even though it is possible in a general way to recognize Bede’s bias and the limitations in the evidence available to him, the reliability of his account in specific

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<sup>64</sup> H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.: Penn, 1991), p. 45. See also N. Brooks, *Bede and the English* (Jarrow, 1999), p. 3: “Bede wove the complex stories of the conversion of some twelve different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and of their ecclesiastical and political fortunes, into a single narrative.”

<sup>65</sup> “There is, however, reason to believe that Bede knew very little about the Gregorian mission except what he could learn from those of Gregory’s letters with which the priest Nothelm had supplied him.” Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, p. 63. P. Hunter Blair, “The Historical Writings of Bede”, in *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo XVII* (1969), 197-221, at p. 215, put it well: “So far as we can tell no documents relating to the mission survived in Canterbury itself.” The same view is explicit in R. Collins and J. McClure, “Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow: Three Viewpoints on Augustine’s Mission” in S. Barton and P. Linehan, ed., *Cross Crescent and Conversion: Studies on Medieval Spain and Christendom in Memory of Richard Fletcher* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 17-42, at p. 38; P. Chaplais, “Who introduced charters into England? The case for Augustine”, *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3.10 (1969), 526-42, at p. 535; and H. Chadwick, “Gregory the Great and the Mission to the Anglo-Saxons”, in *Gregorio Magno e il suo Tempo* (Rome, 1991), 199-212, at p. 199.

<sup>66</sup> The full scale of the impact of the ‘plague’ in Kent on the Church in the 660s and on Bede’s sources is discussed at the end of Chapter 6, below.

instances cannot properly be assessed.<sup>67</sup> Thus the *HE* reads like a primary source, while the latent trust for Bede's reliability means it is often implicitly treated as one, even when in fact, as is already widely recognized, it is at best a secondary one. Indeed, this is the case even among those scholars who have separately provided perceptive and nuanced treatments of Bede's weaknesses as a source.<sup>68</sup> Until there is a systematic assessment of Bede's sources, there will continue to remain sufficient doubt about Bede's ignorance in each particular situation, that he can be given the benefit of it. But there is no reason that he should. The only reason this doubt remains is that his sources have not been sufficiently discerned.

The treatment of how Bede worked presented in this study will therefore attempt to rectify this – at least for the account of the Gregorian mission. Once Bede's sources have been identified, and, as far as possible, reconstructed, their origins and reliability will then be assessed. As a result, it will no longer be possible to allow unconvincing statements to go unchallenged or to rely on every passing remark of Bede's as if each might potentially represent the vestiges of an original source to which he had access.<sup>69</sup> Nor will it be credible any longer merely to repeat Bede's narrative with the caveat that "Bede says" in an attempt to disassociate the author from the story, while relying on its content to propel the narrative.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Except in those rare cases where sources for comparison have survived, as, for instance, concerning the questions around Augustine's episcopal consecration.

<sup>68</sup> Mayr-Harting's account, for instance, despite his statement concerning Bede's lack of sources, follows Bede's narrative carefully throughout. So too does P. Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (Cambridge, 1970), once the mission party arrive in Kent. The dismissal by N. Brooks, *Early History*, of all attempts to question 'Canterbury tradition', or to caveat this, as "assaults on Bede's veracity" (e.g. p. 11) is a different version of the same problem.

<sup>69</sup> A good example of this type of error is the considerable time Wallace-Hadrill spent (J. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: a Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), [henceforth, Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*] pp. 36-37) trying to explain why Bede's assertion, in *HE* 1.26, that the church of St Martin was built and dedicated to that saint "while the Romans were still in Britain" should be taken seriously. Bede cannot possibly have had a primary source for this; therefore, his narrative should not be treated as if it was itself a source for the claim.

<sup>70</sup> Such rhetorical tactics are popular as they appear to establish credible distance from the story, while maintaining narrative continuity. See for instance, N. Brooks, "Mellitus (d. 624)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/article/18531>, accessed 31 May 2013]. Ironically, the reality is that in so doing, historians are following the *uera lex historiae* Bede mentioned in the *HE* Preface. Repeating Bede's unverified statements with a caveat, but without analysis of the source Bede was working from, or its reliability, is no better historiographical practice than Bede justifying his retelling of the story of Gregory and the *Angli* boys, on the basis of what had reached him from the *traditio maiorum*. If the story is patently not true, such as Mellitus' miraculous

If it is possible to identify Bede's sources and discern between their values, then Bede will no longer be our 'source', Bede's sources will. This means scholars need no longer be constrained by Bede's narrative. Using the various prisms modern historians have been able to identify through which to read the History and to 'aim off' for Bede's 'biases',<sup>71</sup> views of the *HE*, and thus of the period, have grown more nuanced.<sup>72</sup> But these still remain reinterpretations of Bede and the *HE*. This is the most that study of Bede's ideology and agendas can realistically be expected to achieve: to nuance our 'perspective' and help in finding a better balance to offset Bede's own. We are still left 'reading' the history through the *Historia*. Again, the *HE* remains our 'source'. Thus it has long seemed that, even with modern reservations about Bede as an objective historian, and even with an increased ability to correct certain errors of fact, it is not possible to dispense with what Campbell called, a "necessary dependence on Bede".<sup>73</sup>

Here then is the final difference between an analysis of why Bede wrote and one of how. Studying why Bede wrote helps us to understand and interpret the *HE*; studying how Bede wrote helps us to move beyond it. We certainly have sources that Bede did not. If this thesis is successful in adding to those the ones that Bede himself possessed, properly sifted, then the foundations will have been laid for the replacement of Bede's narrative. Given how aware modern historians are of Bede's agendas and ideologies, the potential should be present, following this study, for the construction by scholars of new narratives, more reliable than Bede's and on a firmer evidential basis than has been the case before now. 'Bede' need no longer be our 'source'. Thus, in short, this study indirectly attempts to carry out the groundwork necessary for rewriting, and not merely reinterpreting, seventh-century England.

Studying the 'how' of the *HE* is therefore the goal of this thesis. In the long run, of course, the work needs to be carried out across the whole text. Such a comprehensive

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turning back of a Canterbury fire, which is merely a repetition of a tale from Gregory's *Dialogues*, there is no reason to dignify it by repetition in a modern narrative of events, even with a caveat. It did not happen.

<sup>71</sup> Although 'reading between the lines' with Bede is not as easy an exercise as J-M. Picard, "Bede, Adomnan, and the Writing of History", *Peritia* 3 (1984), 50-70, at p. 57, makes out.

<sup>72</sup> As Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, p. 4 put it: "how we envisage Bede's own agenda as he set about the task of writing should affect how we read the *EH*".

<sup>73</sup> J. Campbell, "The First Century of Christianity in England," in Campbell, *Essays*, 49-67, at p. 49. Or as Stancliffe put it: "Bede's account, which we are in no position to dispense with". C. Stancliffe, "The British Church and the Mission of Augustine", in Gameson, ed., *St Augustine*, 107-51, at p. 107.

examination of Bede's account is a major desideratum for the study of the entire *HE*. Given the scale of the question, however, I shall focus on a single significant and coherent narrative within the *HE*, the account of the Gregorian mission and the life of the church in Kent until the advent of Theodore. This was a period which Bede himself, in the Preface, marked as an essentially discrete element in the composition and sourcing of the work. For the Gregorian mission Bede was writing what we might call 'distant history'. This was not the case for the whole *HE*, or indeed for most other early medieval historians. For this period Bede did not have access to either direct or second-hand oral information for this period: that is, he had information neither from the participants or observers or directly from those who had spoken to them. Yet the events and history of this time were more intimately connected to those of his own than say that of the Anglo-Saxon *aduentus*. How Bede reconciled these challenges is revealing. Here, Bede can be seen engaged in a recognizable process. In some ways, it is in the account of the Gregorian mission that Bede behaves most like a 'historian', at least as modern historians of the Middle Ages understand the term and their own endeavours.

Thus, overall, a study of Bede's sources and how he used them to compile his *HE* tells us not only about him, his time, and his library, but also about the processes of an early medieval scholar and historian at work. How did Bede construct his history? What was he working with? What was his basis for saying the things he did? The answers to these questions lead in interesting directions, potentially fruitful for understanding Bede's reading, methods, audiences, contacts and contexts. Earlier works have sought to give an impression of Bede's library; in this study I shall try to show him at work in it. It will be possible to see Bede at his desk, in the scriptorium, surrounded by his notes and books, and to gain a much better sense of how he obtained his materials and how he used them. In short, I hope to provide an insight into how an early medieval historian worked – albeit an exceptional one. If successful, the methods and conclusions of this thesis should point the way for others to attempt something similar for the other sections of the *HE*,<sup>74</sup> and indeed for other works.

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<sup>74</sup> Extending the analysis to the earlier parts of the *HE* [1.1-22] would be a simple matter, but, as will be seen, moving on to Northumbria and into the later books would be more difficult.



## 1.2 The Structure of this Study

The rest of this study falls naturally into two parts. The first, comprising Chapters 2 to 4, represents the source analysis of the *HE*'s account of the Gregorian mission and the Church in Kent before the arrival of Theodore. Chapter 2 covers *HE*, Book 1, chapters 23-33. Chapter 3 covers *HE*, Book 2, chapters 1-11; and 15-20. Chapter 4 covers *HE*, Book 3, chapters 8, 14, 20 and 29, as well as *HE*, Book 4, chapter 1. Following the methodology set out in the next section, this analysis will systematically assess the basis for each statement Bede makes in the *HE* chapters which are being considered. Through this it will be possible to see not only what Bede possessed, but also how he used it, combining his materials with his own deductions and rhetoric to construct a coherent narrative. By necessity this is the longest part of the dissertation.

In Part Two, I turn to a detailed consideration of the sources themselves. Chapters 5 and 6 collect and organize the sources identified by the preceding study. The materials will be considered by genre. The nature of these sources will then be assessed, addressing the questions surrounding their reliability, date and origins, and how Bede obtained them.

Chapter 7 will analyze those sections of the *HE* which were not able to be sourced in Part One. By considering the segments together I shall argue that they represent a group of their own whose content Bede has integrated skilfully into his narrative. This set represents a linked collection of hagiographic tales from Canterbury concerning the mission fathers, but written significantly after their time. The nature and possible contexts of these 'Canterbury tales' will be discussed. In this Chapter and throughout this thesis, the analysis will be related to Bede's discussion of his sources and authorial process in the Preface.

Finally, the Conclusion will summarize the findings of this study and point to the directions in which the work could profitably be taken forward.

## 1.3 Methodology

Achieving these aims is no simple matter: it requires a specific methodology, which has already been described in general terms. In short, what is needed is the exercise called for

by Love for the entire Bedan canon: “a painstaking process of interrogating every single paragraph he wrote”.<sup>75</sup> Such an analysis, be it of a biblical commentary or of the *HE* cannot be done properly if it is not done systematically, paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence.<sup>76</sup> It is possible to gain a very good idea of what Bede possessed; but the work needs to be done through a process of determined and careful investigation. Organizing such an examination is not an easy matter within the confines of a doctoral dissertation. Anything less than a rigorous, step-by-step, treatment, however, is not convincing. It is not sufficient to make broad assertions supported with a few examples, as Laistner did, or simply to take Bede’s own assertion of sources as evidence as Plummer did. Nor is it feasible to merely state conclusions as agreed and begin work on reconstructing the history of early seventh-century Kent. No one would believe the work had been done, unless they saw the work itself: this study would appear to have provided just options rather than answers. The basis provided by such an approach would be no stronger apparently than those that have gone before.

Only through an intense investigation, as attempted in this thesis, is it possible to see what Bede had, and how he used it; and only then therefore will it be possible to go beyond Bede. The approach in this study thus represents a necessarily different one to the traditional thematic treatment of the *HE*. A thematic treatment, or one dedicated to making specific narrative points, might appear to provide the materials for innovative answers to interesting questions, but without the thoroughness of a more comprehensive examination of Bede’s sources too many gaps would be left to allow the conclusions to advance beyond the merely speculative. We would remain unsure whether Bede did not have alternative sources underpinning elements of his narrative. In other words, without a systematic analysis covering a significant part of the *HE*, such as that undertaken here, too many uncertainties remain. Conclusions on individual points of interpretation would be much less convincing and it would remain possible to give Bede the benefit of the doubt, trusting statements without due consideration, on the basis that Bede *may* have had an unknown source behind his narrative. Thus, rather than being able to replace his narrative, we would be left in the same position as at present, simply offering potential,

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<sup>75</sup> Love, “Library of the Venerable Bede”, p. 619.

<sup>76</sup> This was something also implicitly called for by P. Meyvaert, “Bede the scholar”, in Bonner, *Famulus Christi*, 40-69, at p. 63, n. 19.

speculative alternatives to it. In short, any attempt to reconstruct early seventh-century Anglo-Saxon England using Bede, but without thoroughly analyzing his sources, is doomed to failure.

Moreover there is an academic short-sightedness to such a narrow approach. It would advance knowledge only so far as it served the author's current argument. In contrast a more thorough method will present conclusions which should serve as a basis for all scholars working on Bede and the *HE*. This strategic approach characterized Lapidge's volume with its appendices on the Anglo-Saxon Library. Rather than simply analyzing one single point, or even making a series in a specific argument, Lapidge provided a comprehensive foundation for scholarly work for the next generation. The nature of the work means that conclusions such as Lapidge's will never be the last word. Refinement will continue to come – I hope to offer some myself – but the enduring value of such work far exceeds more narrow treatments. This is the model that, for a more limited field, this thesis seeks to emulate.

The reality is that in order for this study to be as useful as possible, in itself and as a premise for future work on the subject, it needs to be able to demonstrate that almost everything Bede writes in describing the Gregorian mission can be seen to have been either derived from or deduced from identifiable, if not always reconstructable, sources, rather than being based on secret, but allegedly trustworthy primary sources, hidden from view.

The only way to achieve this is to undertake a thorough analysis of the relevant sections of the *HE*, testing every statement made by Bede in these chapters, to isolate and identify the basis on which he is saying it, and, where appropriate, specify the source: be that primary or secondary. Each relevant chapter of the *HE* will therefore be examined, section by section. To facilitate the reader's navigation within the *HE* chapters being considered, each section will begin with a summary of the entire Bedan chapter, usually in the form of the original chapter headings, with additional content where required. The investigation of each section within the *HE* chapter will begin with the Latin and English of the pertinent segment for the reader's easy reference. These will be taken from the Colgrave-Mynors edition and translation, with minor revisions where necessary. The Latin will be in italics and the translation in square brackets. Occasionally sections

included within such quotations need to be marked out for separate treatment, these parts are distinguished in both the Latin and English through the use of angle brackets. At times the sections being considered are too long for it to be helpful to reproduce them in full: in such cases lacunas are marked with ellipsis, with the omitted content sometimes summarized in curly brackets – {} – for the sake of comprehension. The analysis follows the quotations from the text. Usually there is no need to provide internal divisions within the examination of the sources, but where there is, these will be noted by headings in bold font.

#### 1.4 What this study will not do

Before beginning this analysis, it would, perhaps, be useful to clarify what is not being attempted in this exercise. The analysis below will seek to explain the basis upon which Bede made each and every statement in the *HE* concerning the Gregorian mission and the early Church in Kent, noting those few that cannot be sourced. The following pages are not, however, intended to provide a commentary on Bede's work. Several other scholars have already attempted such an exercise with varying degrees of utility. In doing so they often referenced or speculated on the more obvious sources for Bede's statements; but none has yet provided a comprehensive analysis of Bede's sources.<sup>77</sup>

What I shall also not, as a general rule, be doing in this analysis is assessing whether Bede was right or not: the present task is to discover Bede's sources, or more precisely, his reasons for saying the things he did, not to pronounce on his accuracy. Clearly with a better sense of his sources such a process becomes easier and more convincing; but though the judgments set out here inevitably lead to historical conclusions, there is no scope in the present enterprise to pursue them.

Furthermore, just as the analysis will not cover the entire *HE*, so it will not cover all of Anglo-Saxon England. The focus is on Kent as the most fruitful grounds for such a study,

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<sup>77</sup> Plummer carried out some source analysis in his commentary, but apart from, as mentioned above, noting Bede's literary sources, was not thorough, since his working assumption was that Bede knew what he was talking about. Wallace-Hadrill was even less thorough in his personal and impressionistic *Commentary*, perhaps partly because death interrupted his completion of the work. Jones, *Saints*, did look directly at sources, but his approach was not comprehensive since he was only interested in those relating to Bede's statements on chronology.

and so the concentration will be on those chapters relating to Kent or to possibly Kentish sources. Consideration will also be given to those non-Kentish chapters dealing with papal letters, as the wider question of Bede's use of papal letters is an important one in considering his information on Kent specifically. In general, however, the content and chapters relating to 'Northumbria' will not be considered.<sup>78</sup> Growing up and living in Northumbria, the likelihood is higher that Bede had readier access to a more significant body of tradition about his *patria*. The possible permutations for Bede's sources, especially oral traditions, of whatever trustworthiness, for Northumbria, are thus simply too great for it to be feasible to discern between them here. More consideration of them is required, but the levels of certainty practicably achievable fall below the threshold desired for this study. Here the focus will be on Kent and the Gregorian mission.

One final point is important to emphasize before proceeding. 'Bede the historian' has come in for strong and sustained criticism over the last forty or so years. The purpose of this analysis and this thesis is not to heap yet further coals on Bede's head. As part of the process of assessing Bede's sources, it will be necessary at times to underline those areas where others have already identified erroneous statements by Bede: errors based on his misunderstandings of, or faulty deductions from, his sources, or because of the ideological baggage he brought to his presentation of the ecclesiastical history of the English. The world looked very different from Kent in c.600 and Wearmouth-Jarrow in c.730.

Bede's narrative, sources and occasionally his process, will therefore necessarily be criticized in the following pages. But this is not being done for its own sake. Historians should not trust Bede as much as we have tended to; but we should not be bitter towards him because we did for so long. The reality, which will, incidentally, be emphasized in this study, is that Bede did incredibly well with a meagre amount of primary sources. Through an examination of how Bede constructed the *HE*, the analysis below will provide insights into Bede's own view of history. The *HE* was hardly an exercise in the conscious deception of the centuries of historians who followed him. Bede was not trying

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<sup>78</sup> 'Northumbria', as a term, and to an extent as a unified political entity, seems to have been invented during Bede's adulthood; indeed it was an 'invention' which the *HE* appears to have played a role in initiating and disseminating. Nonetheless, I shall usually refer to Northumbria without qualification for simplicity's sake and following academic convention. Where relevant, the term will be placed in inverted commas to emphasize its anachronism.

to trick modern scholars. The reason we should trust his account less than we did is not because he was lying, but, principally, because his sources were so few and so rarely primary and because he needed to make deductions from the limited materials he did have in order to create a credible narrative from them. Those deductions were based on his own ideology and contemporary world-view. His presentation, such as the placing of speeches of his own composition into the mouths of his protagonists, was informed by the classical and late antique historiographical tradition.

Bede was not a ‘modern historian’, but he was a historian. His processes in reconstructing ‘distant history’ are recognizable to historians today. Even while breaking down the basis for his narrative, this analysis will confirm that. The problem for Bede was that his task was to write a history of a period about which he had a basic ignorance and almost no primary sources to enlighten him. How in such circumstances, he yet managed to produce the enduring masterpiece that is the *HE*, will now be examined.

## PART ONE

### Constructing the Narrative of the Gregorian Mission to Kent

## Chapter 2

### Gregory and the Mission: *HE* 1.23-33

As explained in the Introduction, the analysis will begin with *HE* 1.23 and the dispatch of the Gregorian mission; but it is worth briefly contextualizing that chapter within the rest of the work. In many ways, the earlier chapters of the *HE* do little more than build up to this point. Bede has introduced Britain's geography and spoken of the peoples who inhabited the islands in his time. He has given a summary account of 'Roman Britain', before describing events after the legions left. Much of the latter narrative derives from Constantius' *Life of Germanus* and Gildas' *Ruin of Britain*, but there are also what appear to be more 'traditional' tales, for instance, concerning the *aduentus*, and especially the stories of Hengist and Horsa. *HE* 1.22 ends on a conflicted note, with a lament that the British did not convert their conquerors followed by a final assurance that God had "appointed much worthier heralds of the truth to bring this people to the faith".<sup>79</sup> The rest of the passages considered in this study are, in essence, those related to the actions of the men Bede believed to be these "worthier heralds".

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<sup>79</sup> *HE* 1.22: *quin multo digniores genti memoratae praecones ueritatis, per quos crederet, destinauit.*



**1.23 – “How Pope St Gregory sent Augustine and other monks to preach to the English people, and [when they paused for fear of the English] encouraged them in a letter not to cease from their efforts”**

*Siquidem anno ab incarnatione Domini DLXXII Mauricius <ab augusto quinquagesimus quartus – see below> imperium suscipiens [In the year of our Lord 582, Maurice, <the fifty-fourth from Augustus – see below> became emperor]*

In beginning the account of what Levison called the *HE*’s “proper theme”,<sup>80</sup> Bede seeks to contextualize the event in order to present it more impressively. He does the same at other turning points in the *HE*, for instance, in 2.5, when recording the death of Æthelberht.

Bede knew that Maurice was the reigning emperor at both Gregory’s papal accession and the time of the dispatch of the mission to the English, thanks to the Gregorian letter he quotes at the end of this chapter. The date given in that letter also provided him with the basis from which to make the deduction about when Maurice came to the throne. The letter ends with a dating clause which said that it was written in the fourteenth indiction; it even gave the precise, ‘Julian’ calendar date, 23 July. Bede knew how to convert an indictional date into an incarnational one, as he showed in the *De Temporum Ratione* [*DTR*].<sup>81</sup> Bede could therefore calculate that the epistle was sent in 596. Since the dating formula also noted that the letter was sent in the fourteenth year of Maurice’s reign, it was easy for Bede to calculate that the emperor had come to the throne fourteen years earlier than 596, that is, in 582. One important point to note is that neither here, nor anywhere else in the chapters under examination would Bede have found an incarnational date in his source. No sources c.600 were dating in AD.<sup>82</sup> Where Bede has an incarnational date, it is his calculation; the question, as here, is what that was based on.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> W. Levison, “Bede as Historian”, in A. Hamilton Thompson, ed., *Bede: his Life, Times and Writings* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 111-51, at p. 141. He was followed by K. Harrison, *The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History to A.D. 900* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 141.

<sup>81</sup> Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, c. 49.

<sup>82</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 55-61.

<sup>83</sup> In fact, Jones, *Saints*, p. 162, pointing out that Bede gave Maurice’s year of accession correctly, noted that the extant Dionysian tables (which were, of course, written later) placed it in 583.

*ab augusto quinquagesimus quartus* [The fifty-fourth from Augustus]

This statement represents a more complex deduction by Bede, but, again, it is a process which can be reconstructed. The first thing to note is that Bede has probably taken the idea of introducing the emperor with his number from Orosius. This is standard in Orosius' *History* and for Bede therefore including where an emperor came in order, represented historiographical best practice. Bede was aware that in composing the *HE*, he was working in the historical genre. No source provides a particularly close model for the type of work Bede planned with the *HE*. The closest, and the most influential, was the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius/Rufinus.<sup>84</sup> Orosius, however, offered something different, a window into the classical, secular, historical tradition. The *History Against the Pagans* was Bede's model for beginning a history with a geographical survey,<sup>85</sup> and indeed Orosius' work provided a source for much of the information about early imperial interactions with Britain, described in the initial chapters of the *HE*.<sup>86</sup> Orosius was especially influential when Bede turned from talking about the Church to speaking about imperial, and even royal, rule. Orosius clearly felt that giving the ordinal number of the emperor was important, and so too, therefore, did Bede.

This does not, however, explain the totality of Bede's statement. At first sight it is difficult to see where Bede can possibly have obtained such a precise figure: in this case calling Maurice the 54<sup>th</sup> emperor. During the principate so many claims and counter claims were made and so often had 'emperors' overlapped that such a bald statement as if of indisputable fact seems almost shocking. In order to understand whence Bede derived the figure, it is necessary to consider all his uses of the formula together. There are ten of them in total. In 1.3 he calls Claudius the fourth emperor after Augustus; in 1.4, he terms Marcus Antoninus Verus (that is, Marcus Aurelius) the 14th from Augustus; in 1.5 Septimus Severus is the 17th from Augustus; in 1.6, Diocletian is the 33rd from Augustus; in 1.9, Gratian is the 40th from Augustus; in 1.10, Arcadius, son of

<sup>84</sup> R. Markus, *Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Historiography* (Jarrow, 1975), p. 4: though, as Markus noted, Bede was not simply writing a supplement to cover an area neglected in the earlier work.

<sup>85</sup> Markus, *Bede and Ecclesiastical Historiography*, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> D. Scully, "Bede, Orosius and Gildas on the Early History of Britain", in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack, ed., *The Venerable Bede: Tradition and Posterity* (Lille, 2002), 31-42, at pp. 31-32.

Theodosius, is the 43rd from Augustus; in 1.11, Honorius is the 44th from Augustus; in 1.13, Theodosius the Younger is the 45th from Augustus; in 1.15, Marcian, being made emperor with Theodosius, became the 46th emperor from Augustus; and finally, the reference here in 1.23, where Maurice is the 54th from Augustus.<sup>87</sup>

While Bede's practice of numbering the emperors derived from Orosius, the figure for Maurice, ruling a century a half after Orosius' death, could not have been. It is true that most of Bede's imperial numerations for the period covered by Orosius are consistent with the latter's; but even so the two histories are not completely in harmony even for those emperors which they both count. Orosius, for instance, counts Arcadius jointly with Honorius as the 42<sup>nd</sup>, whereas they are given separate numbers by Bede as the 43<sup>rd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup>. In short, while the idea of enumerating the emperors probably derived from Orosius, the actual figures do not seem to have done, at least directly.

There were, however, emperor lists circulating in Bede's time which went further than Orosius. Indeed, there is even evidence that one was composed in Anglo-Saxon England in the late seventh century. The final chapter of the *Laterculus Malalias*, which Stevenson has credited to Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury, is little more than a list of emperors in order, together with figures for the lengths of their reigns.<sup>88</sup> Whether or not Theodore was, in the strict sense of the word, the 'author' of the work, Stevenson's arguments very strongly suggest that the text emerged from the didactic environment of the Canterbury school under the archbishop's direction. Scholars have, however, traditionally seen little indication that Bede had access to the *Laterculus*,<sup>89</sup> although at times, elsewhere in his corpus, he takes issue with one of the major themes within the

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<sup>87</sup> Incidentally, when Bede says, for instance, that Maurice was the 54<sup>th</sup> from Augustus, he is, of course, following standard Latin practice, including Augustus in the count. Orosius counted the same way. This is not what would normally be meant by "from Augustus" today, however, so perhaps the phrase would be better translated into English as the 53<sup>rd</sup> from Augustus. If confirmation is required, it can be found elsewhere in the *HE*. Bede uses exactly the same practice when he numbered Anglo-Saxon bishops. In 2.18, for instance, he describes Honorius' succession at Canterbury after the death of Justus and calls him *quintus ab Augustino*. Even so, to avoid confusion, Bede's numbers will be retained in this study, but described as "including Augustus", rather than "from Augustus".

<sup>88</sup> J. Stevenson, *The 'Laterculus Malalianus' and the School of Archbishop Theodore* (Cambridge, 1995). Her edition and translation of the text are pp. 120-61, and chapter 25, the imperial list, is pp. 156-61.

<sup>89</sup> But see J. Siemens, "Another Book for Jarrow's Library? Coincidences in Exegesis between Bede and the *Laterculus Malalianus*", *Downside Review* 462 (Jan. 2013), pp. 15-34, where more evidence than had heretofore been recognized for Bede's awareness of the work is accumulated.

work.<sup>90</sup> As far as the numbering of the emperors is concerned, Bede definitely did not follow the *Laterculus*.<sup>91</sup> Where Bede calls Maurice the 54<sup>th</sup> including Augustus, the *Laterculus* ends two emperors before with Justin II, but he is already the 72<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>92</sup> Nor do the figures in the two lists for any of the other, earlier, emperors, other than Claudius, tie up.

Bede therefore clearly did not derive his figure from Canterbury or at least not from the *Laterculus*. This is not surprising since there are no signs that Bede derived any of his chronological information from Canterbury, apart from certain items Albinus provided relevant to the writing of the *HE*.<sup>93</sup> Rather, in tracing the origin of Bede's views on the imperial succession the natural place to look is his chronicles: the *Minor Chronicle* [*MinC*], chapters 17 to 22 of his early work the *De Temporibus* [*DeT*], and the *Major Chronicle* [*MC*], chapter 66 of his 725 work *De Temporum Ratione* [*DTR*]. The content of these Chronicles was structured around a framework based on the imperial succession. Thus, even though the Chronicles did not actually number the emperors, one might say that Bede had already implicitly drawn up his own list of them. It is therefore possible to count the emperors Bede includes in the Chronicles and compare the figures with the numbers given in the *HE*. Having done this, what is surprising is that while the figures for the emperors are consistent between the *Major* and *Minor Chronicles*, they do not agree precisely with the *HE*.

The first noteworthy disagreement is that Bede's Chronicles both state that Julius Caesar was the first emperor, whereas the *HE* implies that this honour was Augustus'. More importantly for the purposes of this study, the Chronicles disagree with the *HE* over the figures for the later emperors. In this comparison one is, of course, limited to the emperors mentioned in the *HE*. Counting the emperors starting from Augustus in the Chronicles, unsurprisingly, gives the same figure as *HE* 1.3 for Claudius: that is the fourth, including Augustus. At some point before the next example, however, an extra emperor has apparently been added to the count, because whereas in *HE* 1.4, Marcus

<sup>90</sup> That is the *Laterculus*' strident assertion of the equation of a thousand years for each of the first six ages (c. 24). Bede, of course – equally firmly in his *Letter to Plegwin* – took quite a different view.

<sup>91</sup> The *Laterculus* does not actually number the emperors, but it is easy to count those given in its list.

<sup>92</sup> As Stevenson points out, the *Laterculus* is sloppier than its source in its catalogue of the Caesars: Stevenson, *Laterculus Malalianus*, p. 225.

<sup>93</sup> As shown in detail by C. Jones in the introduction to his edition, *Bedae Opera de Temporibus* (Cambridge Mass., 1943), pp. 105-13.

Aurelius is the 14<sup>th</sup> including Augustus, in the Chronicles he is the 13<sup>th</sup> including Augustus; in 1.5, Septimus Severus is the 17<sup>th</sup> including Augustus, but the 16<sup>th</sup> in the Chronicles. In 1.6, Diocletian is the 33<sup>rd</sup>, but he is 32<sup>nd</sup> in the Chronicles. Finally, here in 1.23 Maurice is the 54<sup>th</sup> including Augustus, but only the 53<sup>rd</sup> in the Chronicles.

It is therefore clear that for most of the *HE* Bede was working from an ‘imperial list’ where each emperor was assigned a number one higher than that he had received in the Chronicles. Since the figures are the same for Claudius but not for Marcus Aurelius the number must have been added between those dates. Within those bounds, the natural place to look is the ‘year of the four emperors’, 69 AD. The Chronicles include only Vespasian from that chaotic year, so there was theoretically plenty of room for adding more. The question then is why Bede felt he should add only one. What was his source? Returning to Orosius provides the probable explanation for this oddity, and also helps to cast light on the construction of the *HE*.

Initially, in Orosius’ description of the events of 69 the impression he gives is that he is including all four emperors; but when he comes to Titus, who followed his father Vespasian, the emperor ultimately victorious in 69, he says: “Titus was the eighth including Augustus, setting aside Otho and Vitellius from the number of the emperors.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, Orosius has included two emperors, Galba and Vespasian, from that year, but skipped the others. Now, intriguingly, Bede does not mention Galba in either of his Chronicles. Therefore, at some stage between composing the Chronicles and making his calculations of the order of emperors for the *HE*, Bede has added an emperor to the count, and he has done so apparently somewhere between Claudius and Marcus Aurelius. The obvious solution is that, in doing this, Bede has consciously followed the example and the argument of Orosius and that therefore the ‘extra’ emperor may be presumed to be Galba. If Bede had simply become better informed about the early principate then one would expect all four to have been included in his list, as, for instance, they were in the *Laterculus*. The fact that only one was added in the *HE* makes it highly likely that Bede’s adjustment was made following a closer reading of Orosius.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*, 7.9.13. “Titus, segregatis a numero principum Othone et Vitellio, ab Augusto octauus”.

<sup>95</sup> That Bede has not simply taken on board the entire numbering system of Orosius has been shown above.

This conclusion raises interesting questions about what works Bede knew when. If Bede was using Orosius in the writing of the *HE*, but not in the composition of the *Chronicles* does that mean he only read Orosius at that stage? It is often implicitly assumed that the Wearmouth-Jarrow library was constant; but it certainly expanded during Bede's lifetime – and not simply with the addition of papal letters, council decrees, and the like, designed to serve as sources for the *HE*. Bede himself provides direct evidence of this, stating that Ceolfrith doubled the volumes the library included.<sup>96</sup> There is no reason to assume that this was not a gradual process or that it ceased with Hwætberht. Does this shift therefore between Bede's numbering of the emperors in the *DTR*, composed in 725, and the *HE*, completed in 731x4, mean that Bede discovered Orosius after he had written the *DTR* and the *MC* and that it was added to the library in the meantime? The simple answer, however, is no. There are many instances in the *MC* where he uses Orosius.<sup>97</sup> Some perhaps might be explained away as only indirect borrowings, actually deriving in reality from another source, such as Jerome's *Chronicle*, which Orosius drew on and which Bede also possessed. On occasion, however, Bede quotes Orosius verbatim and it is difficult to envisage how these instances and, in fact, the sheer scale of apparent borrowings can have occurred other than directly.

In contrast, however, the evidence for Bede's knowledge of Orosius at the time he wrote the *MinC* and the *DeT*, in 703, is much less strong. Jones did not cite Orosius in his edition of the latter, nor did Mommsen in his edition of the former. Kendall and Wallis, in their translation cite two allusions,<sup>98</sup> but both are for information also found in other sources Bede uses, especially Jerome's *Chronicle*. Nor is Bede's use of Orosius particularly clear in his other slightly later, but still early, works. The recent editor of the *Commentary on Apocalypse* found one instance, but the dependence is not very obvious,<sup>99</sup> so too with the *Commentary on Acts*.<sup>100</sup>

Perhaps therefore at the time he wrote the *DeT* and *MinC*, in 703, Bede did not have access to Orosius' *History*. Of course Bede's overwhelming dependence on Isidore for

<sup>96</sup> *Historia Abbatum* [HA], c.15.

<sup>97</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 221, gives more than twenty examples.

<sup>98</sup> Bede, *On the Nature of Things and On Times*, tr. C. Kendall and F. Wallis (Liverpool, 2010), p. 120, n. 105 and p. 127, n. 240. Although for the second example, not all manuscripts contain the reading supposedly derived from Orosius.

<sup>99</sup> *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 4.51 using Orosius, *Historiae*, 7.27.

<sup>100</sup> *Commentary on Acts*, 18, using Orosius, *Historiae*, 7.6.

the content of the *MinC* makes it difficult to be sure that what was not quoted there was necessarily unknown to him. Certainly it is possible to say that Orosius had been added to the Wearmouth-Jarrow library before 725, and perhaps during the period 703x10, if it was used in the *Commentaries on Acts* and the *Apocalypse*. Nonetheless, Bede only seems to have drawn on it systematically in preparing the *MC* in the *DTR*, for which it was crucial.

This still, however, leaves the issue of the different treatments of Orosius in the *MC* and the *HE*. Despite the *MC*'s dependence on Orosius, Bede did not use the latter, as he did in the *HE*, to improve the imperial list which provided the Chronicle with its framework. It is relatively easy to see how this came about. In the *MC*, just as in the *MinC*, Bede used the list of emperors as his framework and structure – rather like numbers by the side of the page, or chapter headings. When he came to expand the content of the *MinC* for the *MC*, Bede did not reinvent the wheel. With his own 703 Chronicle in front of him, Bede simply copied the ‘chapter headings’, that is the list of emperors. Isidore had skipped from Nero to Vespasian and so too, therefore, did Bede in the *MinC*, and so too, therefore, did he in the *MC*. The *MC*'s list of emperors, whose names stand at the head of each entry, has been taken directly from his earlier work without any thought or consideration. As a result, the numbers of the emperors are identical in each. Thus, even though, by 725, Bede possessed sufficient sources to create a more nuanced imperial list than the one he had copied from Isidore in the *MinC*, he does not take the opportunity.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, while the *MC*'s content is much more intelligently designed, researched and arranged than that of the *MinC*,<sup>102</sup> its framework is identical. In a word, Bede can here be seen cutting a corner in his preparation of the *MC*.

Nonetheless, the indications here support the inherent probability, suggested by Levison, that Bede was – at the very least – already gathering his materials for the *HE* as he wrote the *MC* and the *DTR*.<sup>103</sup> The evidence suggests, for instance, that Gregory of

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<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, later copyists seem to have done just that, adding various emperors to Bede's list.

<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, even though the later work is a vast improvement on the *MinC*, which was justly criticized by Levison (Levison, “Bede as Historian”, p. 116), the *MC* is itself often confused and confusing, as Harrison pointed out (Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 76-77). Taken together, the flaws of the Chronicles are a reminder, and one is perhaps needed, that Bede did not emerge fully formed into the perfect scholar – though he was always brilliant and precocious.

<sup>103</sup> Levison, “Bede as Historian”, pp. 119-20.

Tours' *Histories* were only known to Bede later in his career.<sup>104</sup> Equally, other than in the *MC* and the *HE*, Gildas was only used in the *Retractations on Acts* and the *Orthography*,<sup>105</sup> while Eutropius was only used in the *MC* and the *HE*. This then would make sense of Bede's different uses of Orosius between the *MC* and the *HE*. Orosius was drawn on for the *MC*; but it was studied as a model of historical writing for the *HE*. In composing the *HE*, therefore, Bede derived not only information, but also some of his approach from Orosius.<sup>106</sup>

Overall, therefore, this extended treatment of an apparently small point leads to some important conclusions. When in 1.23, or elsewhere, Bede says Maurice was the 54<sup>th</sup> emperor including Augustus, he has not derived this information from a separate source, let alone one contemporary with Maurice. He has deduced it himself by relying – rather too trustingly perhaps – on a framework of an imperial list initially provided by Isidore and repeated by himself, first in the *MinC* in 703 and then in the *MC* in 725, with the only revision the new addition of a small numerical adjustment based on his reading of Orosius, from whom he had anyway taken the idea of giving a number to each emperor, as best practice in the composition of a rhetorical history.

*XX et uno annis tenuit* [ruled 21 years]

From the foregoing discussion it is easy to see where this statement about the years of Maurice's reign, has come from. Again the information was initially derived from Isidore,<sup>107</sup> but Bede is almost certainly not using him directly as his source here, but rather one of his own earlier works, in other words the *MinC* and *MC*. The latter had derived its information from the former, which, as was seen above, slavishly copied Isidore. By such a process, Bede, has not actually given a completely accurate figure,

<sup>104</sup> Levison, "Bede as Historian", p. 132. They are only used in the *Retractations on Acts* and the *Commentary on Genesis* and implicitly in the *HE*.

<sup>105</sup> This used to be considered an early work, but a consensus is emerging that in its final form, at least, it was late: A. Dionisotti, "On Bede, Grammars and Greek", *Revue Benedictine* 92 (1982), pp. 111-41. There remains a case for seeing the text as an early composition that Bede continued to update, but certainly nothing argues against Gildas's work being obtained later in Bede's career.

<sup>106</sup> This picture is consistent with Miller's conclusions on the use of Orosius in the *MC*: M. Miller, "Bede's use of Gildas", *English Historical Review* 355 (1975), pp. 241-62.

<sup>107</sup> Isidore, *Chronica maiora* 406.



since, as Plummer pointed out, although Maurice ruled into his 21<sup>st</sup> year, he actually only ruled for twenty complete years, not twenty-one.<sup>108</sup>

*Cuius anno regni decimo Gregorius, <uir doctrina et actione praecipuus, – see below> pontificatum Romanae et apostolicae sedis sortitus rexit annos XIII menses VI et dies X.* [In the tenth year of his reign, Gregory, <a man eminent in learning and in affairs – see below> was elected pontiff of the apostolic see of Rome; he ruled for thirteen years, six months, and ten days.

Bede makes several statements relating to the dates of Gregory's pontificate. Here, in 1.23, he says both that Gregory became pope in Maurice's tenth year and that he ruled for 13 years, six months and ten days. Later on, at the start of 2.1, his potted biography of the apostle of the English, Bede repeats the figure for the length of Gregory's pontificate and states that he died in 605 AD (*anno dominicae incarnationis DCV*). Then, near the end of the same chapter he states that Gregory's death occurred in the second year of the emperor Phocas' reign, and that he was buried (*sepultus*) on 12 March. For the sake of simplicity, and because much of the information underlying these statements is connected, the sources of all of Bede's claims about Gregory's dates will be dealt with here.

The easiest statement to source is the length of time Gregory was pope. The figure Bede uses is the same as that from the papal *Liber Pontificalis* [henceforth *LP*],<sup>109</sup> which was a significant source for Bede's information about all the popes. The same figure was also included in Gregory's epitaph, in the chronological prose summary which accompanied the verse epitaph Bede quoted near the end of 2.1.<sup>110</sup> As Bede used both

<sup>108</sup> August 582 to November 602: Plummer, 2.36.

<sup>109</sup> "*Gregorius, natione Romanus, ex patre Gordiano, sedit ann. XIII mens. VI dies X.*" *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris, 1886), p. 312.

<sup>110</sup> *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae Septimo Saeculo Antiquiores*, vol. II, ed., I. de Rossi and A. Silvagni (Rome, 1985), p. 26. The full note reads: "*Hic requiescit Gregorius pp. qui sed. an. XIII mens. VI. d. X. Dp. IIII. Id. Mar. post cons. dom. n. focae aug. an. ii.*" Both Sharpe and Lapidge have shown beyond any reasonable doubt that Bede had access to a *sylloge* of such Roman epitaphs, though one which has not survived. R. Sharpe, "King Ceadwalla's Roman epitaph", in A. Orchard and K. O'Brien O'Keefe, ed., *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge* (Toronto, 2005), pp. 171-93; M. Lapidge, "The Career of Aldhelm", *Anglo-Saxon England* (2007), pp. 15-69. They both suggest that the origins of Bede's version lay in Aldhelm's trip to Rome; but it seems as likely, or more so, that Northumbrian visitors to the city had made or copied their own and Bede had direct access to one such in the Wearmouth-Jarrow library.

these sources, either or both of them may be considered to have lain behind this particular statement.<sup>111</sup>

Equally easy to trace is Bede's claim that Gregory died in Phocas' second year. This is not found in the *LP*, so Jones thought it was a product of one of Bede's own calculations;<sup>112</sup> but instead it derives from the chronological note mentioned above which originally followed the pope's poetic epitaph.<sup>113</sup> The latter, of course, Bede quoted in full in 2.1, but the information in the former he simply integrated into his account of the pontiff.

More intriguing are the other claims in 1.23 and 2.1, especially as they contain some surprising errors. As Plummer pointed out, by placing Gregory's death in 605 and his accession in the tenth year of Maurice's reign, which ran from August 591–August 592, Bede's dates for both the start and end of Gregory's pontificate were a year later than the correct ones.<sup>114</sup> Gregory in fact came to the papal throne on 3 September 590 – that is in Maurice's ninth year – and he died on 12 March 604. These errors are particularly unexpected given that, as has just been seen, Bede was correct about the year of Phocas' reign in which Gregory died.

In assessing how Bede came to make these statements and the mistakes in them, the first thing to note is that none of his sources for information about Gregory and his life can have lain directly behind his erroneous claims about the pope's year of accession or death. This is apparent from even a brief consideration of the documents he possessed concerning Gregory. First, and in many ways most importantly, at least as far as Bede's account of the pope's life in 2.1 is concerned, was Gregory's own corpus of writings. These do not, however, allow one to gain a clear idea of when Gregory became pope. Even Gregory's letters would only have been of use if Bede had access to a much fuller selection than he did in fact possess. Nothelm had probably brought Bede more Gregorian and papal letters than is often believed – and certainly more than he quoted in

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<sup>111</sup> The same figure is also found in the set of papal years given in some versions of the *Collectio canonum Quesnelliana* with Anglo-Saxon connections, for instance, Einsiedeln 191. My thanks to Michael Elliot, of the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, for pointing me in the direction of this collection and manuscript.

<sup>112</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 161. Surprisingly, Jones, mistakenly claims that Bede had the year wrong: Jones, *Saints*, p. 162.

<sup>113</sup> *Inscriptiones*, ed., de Rossi, p. 26. "*Dp. IIII. Id. Mar. post cons. dom. n. focae aug. an. ii.*"

<sup>114</sup> Plummer, 2.36.

the *HE*. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that, unlike us, Bede did not have access to anything like the continuous run of Gregory's epistles,<sup>115</sup> from the beginning of his pontificate to its end. These allow historians to use the indictional dates Gregory referenced in dating the letters to be sure that Gregory came to the throne in September 590, not 591, and that he died in 604 not 605. Such a 'complete' collection is required if one wishes to date Gregory's reign from his letters as he did not relate his correspondence to the years of his own pontificate. When Gregory dated his letters, it was only by imperial years and indictions. Nor do any of Gregory's more literary works make any sufficiently precise references from which to derive a date of accession.

Other earlier, though not contemporary, sources at Bede's disposal which mentioned Gregory, included Isidore's two chronicles.<sup>116</sup> These would have been of little help, however; they even gave different figures for the length of Phocas' reign. Bede seems not to have known Isidore's *De viris illustribus*,<sup>117</sup> but even if he had, the section on Gregory would have told him nothing about the dates of Gregory's accession or death beyond the general point that Gregory *floruit* in Maurice's reign and died in Phocas'.<sup>118</sup> Nor did the 'Whitby' Life of Gregory,<sup>119</sup> which Bede arguably knew,<sup>120</sup> have any idea of what date he had become pope.<sup>121</sup>

This therefore leaves the two sources already mentioned which Bede definitely had access to: the epitaph and the *LP*. The epitaph gave the length of reign and the calendar date of death, but no indiction was given for the year, only the fact that it was in the second year of Phocas. The *LP* gave the length of Gregory's reign, but has no direct information on the pope's date of accession.<sup>122</sup> This follows usual practice: direct statements about the date of accession of a pope are not normal either in the *LP* or

<sup>115</sup> Not that ours is a complete version of the original *Register* of course.

<sup>116</sup> Isidore, *Chronica maiora*, 406, and Isidore, *Chronicon* B (from *Etymologies*, 5.38-39), 260.

<sup>117</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 160, thought this work was a source of information for Bede on this question, but Lapidge, *Library*, suggests that there is no evidence Bede ever knew (or at least used) the work.

<sup>118</sup> *De viris illustribus*, c. 27.

<sup>119</sup> *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1968).

<sup>120</sup> Again, the academic jury remains 'out' on this question as on many relating to this 'biography'. Overall, the balance of the evidence and probabilities seem to me to favour Bede's knowledge of – and disrespect for – the work.

<sup>121</sup> *Life of Gregory*, c.11.

<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, some recensions of the *LP* versions give an indictional date for the death of Gregory's predecessor Pelagius II: but this, the fifth indiction, is obviously inaccurate. The correct indiction would have been the seventh. Clearly, Bede did not have this version, or he would have made quite different errors.

elsewhere. The *LP* did have Gregory's day and month of burial, which at that period normally also meant the date of death, but it did not give the year.<sup>123</sup>

The figures for Gregory's accession and death therefore do not come directly from Bede's obvious sources on the pope and his life. This immediately suggests that it may instead be his own calculation. Jones, who considered this question briefly, came to the same conclusion.<sup>124</sup> This calculation, however, was not made specifically for the *HE*. Bede had made it in producing the *MC* where he claimed, under 4565AM, Phocas' reign, that in that emperor's second year and the eighth indiction Gregory died.<sup>125</sup> In the *HE*, therefore he had simply copied his earlier conclusion – and its implications.

Having said that, of course, does not answer the more serious question of whence Bede derived the idea initially, which will be discussed shortly. But first it needs be emphasized that while at first sight this might appear to be the source of only one of the *HE*'s errors, in fact all are intrinsically connected. There are three errors,<sup>126</sup> but only one explanation is required. The others follow inexorably from whichever error Bede started with, thanks to the information Bede had about Gregory's length of pontificate from the *LP* and epitaph. For instance, if Bede had reason to believe that Gregory became pope in Maurice's tenth year (that is 591) then adding 13 years, 6 months and 10 days would give him a death date in 605, which Bede could easily transform into the eighth indiction.<sup>127</sup> The difficulty with this particular explanation, of course, is that there is no extant source

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<sup>123</sup> Although the main traditions of the *LP* did not give the year, it was added in some recensions. In these the year was correctly given as the seventh indiction. Again, clearly Bede's version did not have this, or he would not have made the mistake he did – giving the year of death as the eighth indiction. Of course, it is possible that Bede had a corrupted version where an extra 'i' had crept into his text of the *LP* turning a 'vii' into an 'viii'. This is certainly not impossible, though it is not among the variants which have survived, and a simpler explanation will be seen later, which does not require the invention of a new and unattested source.

<sup>124</sup> Jones, *Saints*, pp. 161-62. Jones' treatment of this question was, however, not of his usual clarity or thoroughness, omitting consideration of important sources, such as the epitaph, and making confusing and sometimes contradictory statements about the relationship between Bede's sources and content. Unfortunately, Harrison, *Framework*, p. 95, seems to have simply accepted Jones' conclusion about the origins of Bede's errors without a reconsideration of the evidence.

<sup>125</sup> As already seen, these statements are not consistent.

<sup>126</sup> The dating of the death to 605 AD; saying Gregory died in the eighth indiction; and placing his accession in the tenth year of Maurice (which works out to 591).

<sup>127</sup> This was the solution posited by Jones, *Saints*, pp. 161-63. Jones, here as elsewhere, was inhibited by an overly dogmatic reliance on his theory that Bede's chronological statements derived, without alteration, from his source. But Bede was not such a simplistic author. Once it is evident that Bede calculated at least the incarnational dates he uses – something Jones did not normally want to recognize – then it is clear that Bede was capable of producing chronological statements in forms different to those in which he found them in his source.

which gives any direct date, with or without a reference to the year, for Gregory's accession, so one has to posit the existence of a source that not only has not survived,<sup>128</sup> but also does not follow anything like usual practice. All the surviving source evidence suggests that it was not normal to record the date of accession directly, making it difficult to envisage what non-existent source would have to be presumed.<sup>129</sup> Equally, it is difficult to believe that if Bede's basis for his other statements was a document giving him the accession date for Gregory that he would not have paraded this knowledge in the *MC*. This was his usual practice,<sup>130</sup> and is evident at this point in the *MC* where he is seemingly taking pride in expanding the basic Isidorean account with his knowledge of the regnal year of Phocas in which the pope died, thanks to his reading of the epitaph.

On the other hand, if Bede thought Gregory died in the eighth indiction, as he states in the *MC*, then for the *HE*, he could calculate that this represented 605 AD in incarnational reckoning, then subtracting 13 years, 6 months and 10 days would give him 3 September 591 for the pope's accession, and thus Maurice's tenth year. Given that the earlier statement – in the *MC* – relates to the eighth indiction, and that much more of the evidence seems to relate to Gregory's date of death, it is *prima facie* more likely that it was this which formed the basis of Bede's calculations. In other words it seems likely that in 725, for the *MC*, the only calculation that Bede had made was that Gregory had died in the eighth indiction.<sup>131</sup> Then, in drawing up the *HE*, he made the further calculations based on that error. This led him into two more: the incarnational date of Gregory's death and the year in Maurice's reign of Gregory's accession.

The key oddity therefore, which seems to lie at the heart of this question in the *HE*, is how, in composing the *MC*, Bede came to equate the second year of Phocas with the eighth indiction. Thanks to the epitaph, Bede had firm authority that Gregory died in Phocas' second year. But how could he know what year that was? The context for Bede's statement in the Chronicle provides the probable solution to the conundrum. A few lines

<sup>128</sup> As Jones, *Saints*, pp. 161-63, recognized.

<sup>129</sup> Jones also admitted that the form *cuius anno regni decimo* was not normal: Jones, *Saints*, p. 162. He thought this might mean the information came from an annal, but it is more likely that the oddity of the form reflects the fact that it was not found in a source, but was instead Bede's calculation.

<sup>130</sup> As noted in another context by P. Bartholomew, "Continental Connections: Angles, Saxons and Others in Bede and in Procopius", in S. Semple, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 13 (2005), 19-30, at p. 20.

<sup>131</sup> The statement about Phocas' second year was, as seen above, not a calculation.

above, as part of his account of the events of Maurice's reign, Bede referenced the Gregorian letter setting out his proposed division of the church in England. Included in this note of the epistle was the fact that it was sent "in the eighteenth year of Maurice and the fourth indiction".<sup>132</sup> This provided Bede with a deceptively simple basis from which to calculate the indictional year of the pope's death, given that he knew Gregory died in Phocas' second year. For the first fifteen years of his reign Maurice's principate was in line with the indictions, so all Bede needed to do was keep counting. Maurice ruled 21 years, as he 'knew' from Isidore (via his own *MinC*), so that took him to the sixth indiction. Then Phocas' first year would be the seventh indiction and his second the eighth; therefore, Gregory died in the eighth indiction. Of course, in reality, Maurice only reigned a little over 20 years and he and Phocas shared the 6<sup>th</sup> indiction. But Bede did not know that. The precise subtleties of when emperors came to the throne, were deposed or died were beyond Bede or his sources of information. Gregory's letter told Bede that Maurice's eighteenth year was the fourth indiction and so it was simply a matter of counting a few extra years from the last reference to arrive at the indiction for Phocas' second year.<sup>133</sup> Confirmation that this process conformed to Bede's normal practice – and led him elsewhere into similar errors – is found in the way he related regnal years to incarnational dates in the *HE*. As Levison put it: "He considered the whole year of the Incarnation, in which a king died, as his last year and reckoned the next year of the Incarnation as the first year of his successor."<sup>134</sup> In other words, Bede mistakenly began counting the regnal years of each king from the incarnational year after that of the death of his predecessor: exactly as he does here with imperial reigns and indictional years.

On this basis, therefore, Bede calculated the mistaken figure for the indictional year of Gregory's death found in the *MC*. In compiling the *HE*, Bede did not return to his sources or re-examine the question. The *MC*'s error simply became the premise on which he then calculated the dates he wanted to include in the *HE*. Producing an incarnational date from

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<sup>132</sup> *XVIII anno Mauricii, indictione IIII.*

<sup>133</sup> Incidentally in making this mistake Bede was falling into the very trap he warned others of at *DTR*, c. 48, where he noted the risk that imperial years shared between emperors might result in problems with the calculations of the chronology.

<sup>134</sup> Levison, *England the Continent*, pp. 271-75; see also the discussion in C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850* (London and New York, 1995), pp. 254-55 and n. 25.

an indiction was quick work for Bede.<sup>135</sup> The result of that calculation was his statement at the beginning of 2.1 that Gregory died in 605. Working back from that date, the 13 years 6 months and 10 days of Gregory's pontificate, as assigned in both the epitaph and the *LP*, would mean an accession on 3 September 591, which from the Gregorian letters he knew was Maurice's tenth year. The result of that calculation therefore is what Bede adds here in 1.23.

Of course if, in composing the *HE*, Bede had only looked forward in his narrative he would have seen that he had the materials at hand to correct his earlier mistake. In 2.4 Bede quotes from the dating formulae of papal documents issued under Phocas: namely the letters of Boniface IV and the decrees of the 610 synod of Rome. Here, in a statement which is evidently based on actual documentary evidence in his possession, Bede states quite clearly that the synod issued its conclusions "in the eighth year of the Emperor Phocas, on 27 February and in the thirteenth indiction".<sup>136</sup> Unsurprisingly, the relationship between imperial year and indiction here is correct. If Bede had therefore taken the time to work back from this primary source – as we can – he would have seen his earlier error.<sup>137</sup> He would have seen that the second year of Phocas would have been the seventh indiction. Thus, Gregory, dying then, would have died on 12 March 604, not 605. Using the pontifical dates it is also possible to calculate that he came to the throne on 3 September 590 not 591. Unfortunately slightly sloppy work in the *MC*, which Harrison has commented on previously, and was noted above, was compounded in the *HE* by reliance on the earlier work and by making calculations derived from the erroneous conclusions within it.<sup>138</sup>

In all this Bede can be seen at work, using his, very limited, evidence to come up with a rhetorically impressive account. Once again, it is clear that Bede had no hidden source which adds veracity to his otherwise confusing statements. He has identifiable sources,

<sup>135</sup> Bede explained a simple way of making this calculation in *DTR*, c.48.

<sup>136</sup> *HE* 2.4: "*anno octauo imperii Focatis principis, indictione XIII, tertio die kalendarum Martiarum*".

<sup>137</sup> Incidentally, this is a further sign that Bede was working from an actual copy of an original document in 2.4. Had he deduced the date himself, using his earlier calculation and claim, then the figures for either Phocas or the indiction would be one different.

<sup>138</sup> For this reason, Bede's failure to adjust the figures should not necessarily be taken as evidence that the collection of papal letters arrived via Nothelm after the composition of the *MC*. Bede does not make the adjustment in the *HE* when he clearly did have the information, so there is no reason to assume he would have done so in 725 for the *MC*. This question will be discussed further in considering 1.29.

ones which we ourselves possess; and he has made deductions from them. Here, those deductions are faulty ones, based on a simple calculation slip, but the sources he used are very clear. Incidentally, it is already possible to see an early sign that, given the same sources as Bede, modern historians are in a position potentially to interpret them better. In the first place because we actually have more sources to add to those; and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, because we have potentially a better understanding of the real context in 600 than Bede did writing in the 720s and 730s.

*[Gregorius] uir doctrina et actione praecipuus* [a man eminent in learning and in affairs]

This is a judgment that Bede or anyone familiar with Gregory the Great's writings could have made themselves without any need for a source. No doubt it was Bede's view. In truth it hardly does Gregory justice. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that while it sounds like a mere rhetorical flourish on Bede's behalf, the quote is actually a compound of borrowings from Gregory the Great himself. In the *Dialogues*, Gregory uses the juxtaposition of the words *uir* and *doctrina* in his description of Servandus, the friend of St Benedict.<sup>139</sup> More telling is the use of *actione praecipuus*, which Bede takes from Gregory's description of the properly prepared pastor, in the *Pastoral Care*, where it is one of the characteristics of the ideal prelate (*praesul*),<sup>140</sup> something Bede certainly considered Gregory the Great to be.

*Qui diuino admonitus instinctu* [prompted by divine inspiration]

This sounds like merely a rhetorical phrase to express the divine workings of Providence behind the mission to the English. It certainly is that; but worth noting also is the frequency with which Bede makes uses of the phrase, or a part of it, in his corpus. The closest analogue is found in his *Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah*, where he spoke of

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<sup>139</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.35: "*Eius quippe monasterium frequentabat, ut, quia isdem quoque uir doctrina gratiae caelestis influebat, dulcia sibi inuicem uitae uerba transfunderent, et suauem cibum caelestis patriae, quia adhuc perfecte gaudendo non poterant, saltem suspirando gustarent.*"

<sup>140</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, 2.1.



Cyrus in precisely the same terms, as being *diuino admonitus instinctu*.<sup>141</sup> Others have pointed out the connections between the *HE* and this commentary, with DeGregorio in particular pointing to shared reforming purposes of the works and arguing persuasively that they were being written at a similar period.<sup>142</sup> Here it is possible to see a further connection between the works. Bede's use of the phrase in both works is very apt: Cyrus is *divino admonitus instinctu* to permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem, following their Babylonian captivity, and there to rebuild the Temple of God. Gregory is *divino admonitus instinctu* to send Christianity back to *Britannia* and there to rebuild the Church of God. The connection is too close to be coincidental. Bede is consciously drawing out the allusions and parallel.

Bede also used a version of the phrase in his third advent homily,<sup>143</sup> and later in the *HE*, where Cuthbert was *diuino admonitus oraculo* that the day of his death was approaching.<sup>144</sup> The phrase was therefore something of a Bedan tag,<sup>145</sup> a rhetorical expression which he enjoyed and repeated; but the apt parallel with the usage in the Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah suggests he was consciously intending to connect the two works and the two passages.

Nonetheless, as far as the present investigation into the basis for the construction of Bede's account is concerned, Bede's comment here is not derived from any source – unless one wished to argue that he derived it from his own commentary – and certainly not from a primary source with genuine information about Gregory the Great's motivations. Clearly Bede's statement on what lay behind the pope's motivation in sending the mission was a mere matter of speculation, informed by Bede's Christian beliefs.

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<sup>141</sup> “*Quomodo enim fieret ut archana caelestia scribere non posset rex diuino admonitus instinctu qui Deum cognouisse et confessus esse uerumque decorem domus eius dilexisse atque instaurare probatur*”. Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, CCSL 119A, pp. 248-49.

<sup>142</sup> S. DeGregorio, “Bede's ‘In Ezram et Neemiam’ and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church”, *Speculum* 79, No. 1 (Jan., 2004), pp. 1-25; S. DeGregorio, “Bede's *In Ezram et Neemiam*: a Document in Church Reform?”, in Lebecq, Perrin and Szerwiniack, *Venerable Bede*, pp. 97-107; and S. DeGregorio, “‘Nostorum socordiam temporum’: the reforming impulse of Bede's later exegesis”, *Early Medieval Europe* 11.2 (2002), pp. 107-22.

<sup>143</sup> Bede, *Homiliae euangelii*, 1.3: “*Hinc est quod idem populus diuino admonitus instinctu cum passurus ille Hierosolimam properaret in eius laudem gaudens decantabat*.” CCSL 122, p. 17.

<sup>144</sup> *HE* 4.29.

<sup>145</sup> The phrase was also a favourite of Alcuin's, thanks to Bede no doubt; and probably thanks to both of them it became a favourite of ninth-century Carolingian authors.

*anno XIII eiusdem principis* [in the fourteenth year of this emperor]

This figure is taken directly from the dating formula of the Gregorian letter, which Bede inserts in full below.

*aduentus uero Anglorum in Britanniam anno circiter CL* [and about 150 years after the coming of the Angles to Britain.]

This is Bede's own calculation from a figure he was not really sure of – the date of the 'English' arrival. Bede had attempted to calculate this more precisely in preparing *HE*, 1.15, but for all his efforts he had been able to give no specific date for the *aduentus*. He placed it in the reign of Marcian and Valentinian, starting, he said, in 449. Bede's comment in 1.23 is not taken from any primary source, however, or based on any information additional to that which lay behind those other comments.<sup>146</sup> All that Bede is doing here is presenting the result of his own deduction, and a rounded-up one at that, as fact, in service of his rhetorical purposes: providing a grand introduction to the liminal moment in Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical history.

*misit seruum Dei Augustinum et alios plures cum eo monachos timentes Dominum* [(Gregory) sent a servant of God named Augustine and several more God-fearing monks with him]

The description of Augustine as a *seruus Dei* is present in the Gregorian letter to Etherius 'bishop of Arles' that Bede quotes in the following chapter (1.24). In the same letter the pope also refers to Augustine's companions as *serui Dei*. As Bede will have known, the term *seruus Dei* meant 'monk' in Gregory's vocabulary. Indeed, Gregory used it, in the plural, in the letter included at the end of this chapter, to describe the addressees: "*Gregorius seruus seruorum Dei seruis Domini nostri*". Despite these connections,

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<sup>146</sup> As Colgrave pointed out in his note on 1.15: "In 1.23 Bede puts the coming of the Angles and Saxons about 445 [by taking 150 away from 596] and so too in V.23 [where Bede says that he is writing in the 285<sup>th</sup> year since the *aduentus*]. In II.14 it is dated about 446 or 447 [by taking away the 180 years Bede says it had been from the *aduentus* at Edwin's Easter 627 baptism]. It is clear therefore that he looks upon the dating as a mere approximation." Colgrave and Mynors, p. 49, n. 3. The clarifications in square brackets are mine.

Bede's use here is not, as Collins and McClure thought a Bedan deduction;<sup>147</sup> rather his source for the phrase here is simpler. He has taken it directly from the *LP*'s account of the mission. This states that "*Gregorius misit servos Dei Mellitum, Augustinum, et Iohannem et alios plures cum eis monachos timentes Deum*". Thus, here in the *HE*, Bede has simply adjusted the *LP*'s wording to focus attention on Augustine, while retaining almost all of the original phrasing.<sup>148</sup>

*praedicare uerbum Dei gentis Anglorum* [To preach the word of God to the English]

As a general rule, Bede does not have sources on motivations for actions. His assertions of the thinking behind decisions and choices are normally merely his speculation, often persuasive enough, presented as simple statements of fact. Too often they have been treated as trustworthy evidence for the real reasons for actions; but to do so is not to take seriously Bede's position as a secondary source. In many cases, as here, there seems to be an element of *post hoc propter hoc* in Bede's claims of motivation. In other words, because something happened as the result of an action then Bede presumes that this was the reason for the action in the first place. Thus, in this instance, for example, because the consequence of sending Augustine and his party was the 'conversion of the English', the natural presumption is that this was the original purpose in sending them.<sup>149</sup>

Such may be the general rule, but this instance may well be an exception. Bede, on this occasion, may well have had a primary source justifying his assertion of motivation. None of the Gregorian letters which Bede quotes from 596 reveals what the pope's intention was in sending Augustine and his companions. Gregory is in fact surprisingly cautious in his letters to his Gallic contacts about why Augustine is travelling across their lands. The only ones which mention the party's purpose are those addressed to Queen

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<sup>147</sup> Collins and McClure, "Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow", p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> The *HE* wording is similar to that in the *MC*, which itself derived from the *LP*: "*Idem missis Britanniam Augustino, Mellito et Iohanne et aliis pluribus cum eis monachis timentibus deum ad Christum Anglos convertit.*" Nonetheless, the *HE* text is closer to the *LP* version and it is clear Bede has returned to that source to borrow from it directly here.

<sup>149</sup> The situation was probably a lot more complicated than this, but there is no space to consider the issue here.

Brunhilde,<sup>150</sup> and to her grandsons, King Theudeberht and King Theuderic.<sup>151</sup> In these essentially identical letters from July 596,<sup>152</sup> Gregory explains that: “it has come to our attention that the people of England earnestly desire to be converted to the Christian faith, with God’s compassion, but that the priests from nearby neglect them... . And so, we have decided for this reason that Augustine, a monk who bears this letter ... should be sent there with other monks.”<sup>153</sup> As he continues in the letter to Brunhilde, “so that through them we might learn the wishes of the people themselves and consider their conversion, as far as is possible, with your support also. We have also warned them that they should take priests with them from nearby to carry out these things.”<sup>154</sup>

Claire Stancliffe has argued persuasively that one or both of these letters was among those that Nothelm brought from Rome and passed on to Bede. She argued that Bede’s view that the British did not help in the initial conversion, which historians have taken on trust from Bede, is actually surprisingly difficult to source and that in fact much of the early evidence suggests that the British were more helpful or at least involved than Bede realized or wanted to credit.<sup>155</sup> In her view, and it is an appealing one, Bede had gained the wrong impression, compounded no doubt by his own reasons for disliking or distrusting the British, thanks to misinterpreting this letter. The reference to the English not receiving help *e uicino* most likely refers to the Franks, as Gregory uses the same phrase moments later to speak of Augustine taking Frankish priests with him.<sup>156</sup>

Possessing one or both of these letters is also the best explanation for Bede’s otherwise confusing statement in 1.25 that Augustine “had acquired interpreters from the Frankish

<sup>150</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 6.57. References are given to the *MGH* edition: Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistolarum*, ed. P. Ewald and L. Hartmann, *MGH Epp.* I, pt II (Berlin, 1887-99). Translations are taken from *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, 3 vols, tr., J. Martyn (Toronto, 2004), henceforth Martyn, followed by book and letter number (here, 6.60), where these differ from the *MGH* edition.

<sup>151</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 6.49. Martyn, 6.51. The letter to the kings was apparently addressed to them jointly.

<sup>152</sup> The letter to the kings is dated 23 July; that to Brunhilde was probably written at the same time, although it is not assigned a specific Julian date.

<sup>153</sup> “*Atque ideo pervenit ad nos Anglorum gentem ad fidem christianam Deo miserante desideranter velle converti, sed sacerdotes e vicino neglegere ... Ob hoc igitur Augustinum servum Dei praesentium portitorem, ... cum aliis servis Dei illuc praevidimus dirigendum.*” This version is taken from the letter to the kings (Gregory, *Letters*, 6.57; Martyn, 6.51); that in the letter to Brunhilde is little more than a paraphrase.

<sup>154</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 6.57; Martyn, 6.60. “*ut per eos ipsorum potuissemus voluntates addiscere et de deorum conversione vobis quoque adnitentibus, in quantum est possibile, cogitare. Quibus etiam iniunximus ut, ad agenda haec e vicino secum debeant presbyteros ducere.*”

<sup>155</sup> Stancliffe, “The British Church”, pp. 108-9.

<sup>156</sup> I. Wood, “Augustine and Gaul”, in Gameson, *St Augustine*, 68-82, at p. 69.

race according to the command of Pope St. Gregory.”<sup>157</sup> This statement seems such a bald repetition of the information in the letters to the Frankish royals that it seems highly likely he did have them and was using them, as Thomas Charles-Edwards argued,<sup>158</sup> and as even Wallace-Hadrill acknowledged.<sup>159</sup> If Nothelm had included these letters in his batch then in describing Augustine’s purpose as preaching the word of God to the English Bede was not simply inventing intention, but deriving it directly, if with pardonable exaggeration, from the Gregorian letters at his disposal.<sup>160</sup> From the perspective of this study, it should already be becoming clear that Bede’s sources of information for Kent in c.600 were minimal at best. Entities should not be multiplied. If what Bede is saying is a reasonable deduction from a source available to us, and which it is easy to envisage being available to him, then we should not presume the existence of another, lost source, which happened to provide exactly the same information.

Certainly, however, Bede has no extra source here beyond the Gregorian letters: probably his view is a combination of a deduction from the Gregorian letters and a sense of what must have seemed to him an obvious case of *post hoc propter hoc*.

*Qui cum iussis pontificalibus obtemperantes memoratum opus adgredi coepissent ... Quibus ille exhortatorias mittens litteras in opus eos Verbi diuino confisos auxilio proficisci suadet.* [In obedience to the pope’s commands, they undertook this task ... {but fearing the barbarian English they paused in Gaul and sent Augustine back to Rome to ask for permission to give up the mission}<sup>161</sup> ... Gregory, however, sent them an encouraging letter in which he persuaded them to persevere with the task of preaching the Word and trust in the help of God.]

<sup>157</sup> “*Acceperant autem, praecipiente beato papa Gregorio, de gente Francorum interpretes.*”

<sup>158</sup> T. Charles-Edwards, “Bede, the Irish and the Britons”, *Celtica*, 15 (1983), 42-52, at p. 44, n.8.

<sup>159</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, pp. 33-34, referencing Charles-Edwards’ article.

<sup>160</sup> It is no argument against Bede possessing the letters that he did not include them in his account, *contra* W. Trent Foley and N. Higham, “Bede on the Britons”, *Early Medieval Europe* 17.2 (2009), 154-85, at p. 167 and Collins and McClure, “Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow”, p. 32. Nor is there any justice in the claim in the latter piece that there is no evidence Bede knew the letters, when we have now seen that at least three otherwise difficult to explain aspects of his account make perfect sense if Nothelm had brought him one or both of the letters.

<sup>161</sup> As noted in the Introduction, the content within curly brackets – {} – represents my summary of information omitted in some of the longer ellipses in the sections under consideration. This is not therefore a quotation from Bede, simply an attempt to help the reader follow Bede’s narrative and thus the analysis which follows.

This famous story of the company's fear of the *barbaram feram incredulamque gentem* has been incredibly enduring.<sup>162</sup> Recently, however it has been realized that Bede's account is no more than his deduction from the letter which he quotes immediately afterwards.<sup>163</sup> It is easy to see why Bede made the mistake he did. He had a Gregorian letter – that quoted at the end of this chapter – which suggested the party were nervous about going on, but which did not give the reasons why. For Bede those reasons must have seemed obvious. It made sense to Bede that the English were dangerously uncivilized before the advent of Augustine and Christianity. That assumption also suited his purposes in presenting the conversion as the great turning point in Anglo-Saxon history. What other reason can there have been for Augustine to return to Rome and for Gregory to send him back with an encouraging message to the party?

What Bede did not, and could not realistically, have known was that the arrival of the group in Gaul had coincided with the death of Childeberht, the most senior figure on the contemporary Frankish political scene. This event led to a significant recasting of the political map of Merovingian Gaul. Childeberht had been succeeded by his young sons, while their grandmother Brunhilde remained a powerful and, at least initially, apparently a unifying figure. Over the border in Neustria, however, to Chlothar and his mother Fredegund, the succession looked like an opportunity. War was coming and may already have begun as the party eventually made its way through Gaul. Paris, for instance, was taken by Chlothar in 596. There was thus every reason in the world for Augustine to return to Rome to take stock with the pope in the summer of 596, not least to request new letters of introduction, now that the main political figure Childeberht with whom they would have been expecting to work was dead.

The narrative of the conflict which followed is beyond the scope of this study, but the true context of Gregory's letter should already be clear. Bede, however, with little, or no, information beyond the Gregorian epistles, could only interpret the one he quotes in

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<sup>162</sup> See, for instance, its continued acceptance in full by R. Gameson, "Augustine of Canterbury: Context and Achievement", in Gameson, *St Augustine*, 1-40, at pp. 9-10.

<sup>163</sup> This was first suggested by N. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1997), p. 76. The same conclusion was reached, without reference to Higham, by Collins and McClure, "Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow", pp. 24-26, as well as M. Dunn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons c.597-c.700: Discourses of Life, Death and Afterlife* (London, 2009), p. 51, and S. Amos, "Frankish Involvement in the Gregorian Mission to Kent", *History in the Making* 1.1 (2012), 16-24, at pp. 17-18.

terms which seemed natural to him looking back from c.730. This deduction was thus the source of the story Bede inserts here. Relying on Bede's authority – and the same ideological assumptions that Bede had about the necessary barbarity of pre-Christian Kent – historians have thereby been misled for centuries both about what happened in 596 and about the kind of place Kent was at the time. Once again it is possible to see Bede at work, using his sources to create a narrative. Once more it is clear that Bede had no secret additional primary source from which he was deriving those parts of the narrative we cannot explain. He was making deductions from his sources. It should be emphasized that he is not lying in an attempt to consciously mislead. He is simply doing his best to carve a credible and coherent narrative out of extremely meagre materials. Sometimes he did incredibly well. At others, like here, he has gone seriously wrong. The simple fact is that we are better placed than he in terms of sources for the events he tries to describe.

*Quarum uidelicet litterarum ista est forma: Gregorius seruus ... indictione XIII*  
 [The letter was in these terms: Gregory, servant ... {The pope encourages the group to continue with the task on which they had set out and informs the party that Augustine has been appointed abbot. The letter ends with an extended dating clause} ... fourteenth indiction]

The rest of the chapter is simply the text of the Gregorian letter from which Bede had attempted to derive the foregoing account. This letter like almost all the other papal correspondence in Bede's possession came to him thanks to Nothelm and his researches in the papal archives. Nothelm brought these sources on the second of the two visits made to Wearmouth-Jarrow described in the *HE* Preface.<sup>164</sup>

### **What Bede had**

As a result of the foregoing analysis it is possible to set out quite clearly what materials Bede had for this chapter:

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<sup>164</sup> That is not to say that the visits described there were Nothelm's first and second visits ever to Wearmouth-Jarrow. For simplicity's sake, however, references here to Nothelm's first or second visits are to those visits he made in the context of the compilation of the *HE*.

- Letter of Gregory the Great to Augustine's companions [Register (MGH): 6.50a. Martyn: 6.53]
- Bede's own *Major Chronicle* [MC] from his *De Temporum Ratione* [DTR]
- Orosius' *History Against the Pagans* – in order to revise, not very thoroughly, the order of emperors
- *Liber Pontificalis* [LP]
- Gregory's Epitaph: poetic and prose. Derived from a *sylloge* of Roman inscriptions
- Gregory's *Pastoral Care*. Used merely for style, not genuine content
- Gregory's *Dialogues*. Used merely for style, not genuine content
- Bede's own *Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah*
- Probably letter of Gregory the Great to Kings Theuderic and Theudeberht and/or to Queen Brunhilde. [R(egister): 6.49, 6.57. M(artyn): 6.51, 6.60]

What is clear from this list and the examination above is that almost all of the narrative part of this chapter,<sup>165</sup> was therefore simply Bede's derivation of a story from the Gregorian letter, which he himself quotes. Needless to say we have all the sources Bede has been seen using, and more besides, which would enable us, potentially, not only to correct Bede, but also to paint a more convincing narrative of the period. It is now possible to move on to consider 1.24.

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<sup>165</sup> As opposed to the quoted source and the simply stylistic points or tangential material added for introductory context, which were again aimed at rhetorical effect.



## 1.24 – “How he [Gregory] wrote to the bishop of Arles about welcoming the party”

*Misit etiam tunc isdem uenerandus pontifex ad Etherium Arelatensem archiepiscopum, ut Augustinum Britanniam pergentem benigne susciperet, litteras,* [The venerable pontiff at the same time also sent a letter to Etherius, archbishop of Arles, asking him to receive Augustine kindly, in travelling to Britain.<sup>166</sup>]

This sentence, which is the only part of 1.24 which is not the text of the letter, derives almost entirely from it. That Gregory sent the letter and the fact that its date is the same as the letter in 1.23, are simply statements of what Bede has found in the text of the letter in front of him. So too, the note about the request to receive Augustine kindly is nothing more than a summary of the epistle’s content.

Only two elements, or rather errors, require explanation: locating Etherius at Arles, when in fact he was bishop of Lyons; and making him archbishop. The second error is the simplest. There is nothing in Bede’s source to support the designation of Etherius as archbishop. As historians have recently emphasized there were no archbishops in the west in c.600.<sup>167</sup> Certainly no Gallic metropolitans would be termed that for some time. By the time Bede was writing, however, and thanks to a great extent to the example of Theodore of Canterbury,<sup>168</sup> all metropolitans were gradually being accorded the rank as a general rule. Bede knew that the bishop of Arles was a metropolitan and so, to Bede, writing in the early eighth century, a metropolitan meant an archbishop. This Bedan slip is therefore a simple anachronism, though revealing for the present purposes in that it again underlines that Bede interpreted his sources not in their own context but in his own.

The other difficulty is that Etherius was not bishop of Arles at all, but of Lyons. This mistake has long been recognized.<sup>169</sup> Bede was therefore in error, but there is no reason

<sup>166</sup> Translation edited slightly: Augustine was not “on his return” to Britain at this stage!

<sup>167</sup> For a detailed discussion see Charles-Edwards, *Early Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 416-21 and A. Thacker, “Gallic or Greek? Archbishops in England from Theodore to Ecgbert”, in P. Fouracre and D. Ganz, ed., *Frankland: the Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages, Essays in Honour of Dame Jinty Nelson* (Manchester, 2008), 44-69, at p. 55.

<sup>168</sup> Thacker, “Gallic or Greek?”, pp. 55-69.

<sup>169</sup> For instance, Plummer, 2.36.

to think he was consciously trying to mislead.<sup>170</sup> he had no reason to make such a ‘fact’ up. The question of how precisely this can have happened is, however, more complicated than it might at first seem.<sup>171</sup>

Bede’s error is usually seen as stemming from a mistake in, or his mistaken reading of, his copy of the Gregorian letter. It is not impossible, for instance, that the version of the letter Bede had in front of him associated Etherius with Arles in the addressee list. There is no textual support for such a reading, however. Moreover, there is a further possibility, which will be discussed in detail under 1.27, and which is actually more likely: that Bede himself added the ascription to Arles, based on a separate deduction. It will be argued there that Bede possessed a Canterbury episcopal list, which seems to have included a record, or claim, of who had consecrated each bishop and where. On this basis Bede thought he knew that Etherius had consecrated Augustine and that he had done so at Arles. If so, it would then have been natural for him to conclude, albeit mistakenly, that Etherius had been the bishop of Arles. Even so, his source for this statement, while going beyond simply the Gregorian letter, was not strictly speaking a primary one, and unlike us, Bede did not have alternative original sources with which he could compare the text and thus avoid such errors.

*quarum iste est textus: Reuerentissimo et sanctissimo fratri Etherio coepiscopo ... indictione XIII.* [This is the text: To his most reverend and holy brother and fellow bishop Etherius ... {Gregory asks Etherius to assist Augustine and his group of monks; the pope also recommends Candidus to the bishop} ... the fourteenth indiction.

The rest of the chapter is simply the text of the Gregorian letter, which Bede had obtained from Nothelm and which had provided the material for the summary in the introductory sentence.

<sup>170</sup> *Contra Martyn, Letters*, vol. 1, p. 55, who claimed Bede had “falsified the record”.

<sup>171</sup> Collins and McClure put the problem concisely: “Lacking any other version of it, we can not be sure whether the mistake in diocesan attribution was made by Bede himself, was the result of an error in copying by Nothelm, or was caused by the original letter being wrongly transcribed by the papal notaries of Gregory’s day when they were entering it into the annual letter book. Whatever the cause, the consequence was that when Bede subsequently included a letter sent by Gregory to bishop Vergilius of Arles in 601, he made the sensible but mistaken assumption that Etherius, whom he believed had been the bishop of Arles in 596, must have died and that this Vergilius was his successor.” Collins and McClure, “Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow”, p. 23.

**What Bede had**

For this chapter, therefore, Bede had at most two sources:

- Letter of Gregory the Great to 'Etherius'
- Canterbury episcopal list, including claims about who had consecrated each bishop and where

**1.25 – “How Augustine came to Britain and first of all preached to the king of Kent on the island of Thanet; then, after obtaining permission, he went to Kent to preach”**

*Roboratus ergo confirmatione beati patris Gregorii, Augustinus cum famulis Christi, qui erant cum eo, rediit in opus Verbi, peruenitque Britanniam.* [So Augustine, strengthened by the encouragement of the blessed father Gregory, in company with the servants of Christ, returned to the work of preaching the word, and came to Britain.]

Having left the narrative in 1.23 with Gregory’s letter to Augustine’s party in Gaul, which Bede interpreted as a sign of fear at their destination, Bede now returns to his story and begins by merely stating the obvious: Augustine made it to England. The idea that the monks were encouraged by Gregory’s letter is simply Bede’s presumption, premised on the idea they needed encouragement. In short there is no source additional to the Gregorian letter from 1.23 here, but only a blending of *post hoc propter hoc* with some understandable teleology.

*Erat eo tempore rex Aedilberct in Cantia* [At that time Æthelberht, king of Kent]

Bede had several ways of knowing that Æthelberht was the king of Kent at this time. Most importantly Nothelm had brought him a letter from Gregory to the king, which he inserted verbatim into 1.32. Moreover Bede also possessed a Kentish king list and genealogy, both of which he drew from in 2.5, and a ‘hegemony list’ – often called a list of ‘bretwaldas’ – which will be discussed shortly. That Æthelberht was the king to whom Augustine had come was also of course ‘common knowledge’, judging by the fact that even the *Whitby Life*, which did not have the papal letters, knew his name.<sup>172</sup> Moreover Bede knew that Æthelberht was buried in Canterbury and it is likely therefore that he had some epigraphic information about him. Theoretically this may simply have been as

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<sup>172</sup> The *Whitby Life*, assuming Bede knew it, would of course have been a further source that Æthelberht was the king of Kent at the time of Augustine’s arrival.

concise as “Here lies Æthelberht, king”, but it may have been more informative. The possibilities suggested by other evidence will be discussed later.<sup>173</sup>

*potentissimus, qui ad confinium usque Humbræ fluminis maximi, quo meridiani et septentrionales Anglorum populi dirimuntur, fines imperii tetenderat.* [was a most powerful monarch. The lands over which he exercised his suzerainty stretched as far as the greatest river, Humber, which divides the northern from the southern Angles]

Bede is really making two statements here. The first is, implicitly, that Æthelberht was one of the list of English ‘overkings’ that he reproduces in 2.5. That list will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of 2.5, but since it was Bede’s source here, it is important to mention some of the key points in this chapter. Much work has been dedicated to what is represented by this list, and especially the potential connection it has with the title, rank, or some would argue office, of *Brytenwalda* (still frequently referred to as *Bretwalda*).<sup>174</sup> It is not necessary to enter into this debate here; all that is required for present purposes is to discover the nature of Bede’s source for his statement and he is here clearly using a list. The list is apparently of overlords of whatever form and on whatever basis, so for simplicity’s sake I shall term it a ‘hegemony list’.

The second statement concerns the extent of this overlordship. Bede is fairly consistent in his presentation of the hegemonic lordship as of the peoples south of the Humber.<sup>175</sup> This was apparently the usage in his own day, as Æthelbald of Mercia’s *dispositio* in the

<sup>173</sup> It should be noted, however, that the existence of an ‘epitaph’ does not make it necessarily a primary source.

<sup>174</sup> For instance, D. Dumville, “The terminology of overkingship in Anglo-Saxon England”, in J. Hines, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration period to the Eighth Century* (Woodbridge 1997), pp. 345-65; S. Keynes, “Rædwald the Bretwalda”, in C. Kendall and P. Wells, ed., *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo* (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 103-23; B. Yorke, “The Vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon Overlordship”, in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 2 (1981), pp. 171-200; S. Fanning, “Bede, Imperium, and the Bretwaldas”, *Speculum* 66.1 (Jan., 1991), pp. 1-26; and P. Wormald, “Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*”, in P. Wormald and S. Baxter, ed., *The Times of Bede: studies in early English Christian society and its historian* (Oxford, 2006), 106-34, especially the additional notes, pp. 131-34. James Campbell has made frequent perceptive comments on this topic; see, for example, J. Campbell, “The United Kingdom of England: the Anglo-Saxon Achievement”, in J. Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), pp. 31-53. Or, recently, J. Campbell, “Secular and political contexts”, in DeGregorio, *Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 25-39, at p. 27.

<sup>175</sup> As he does here, and in 2.5 and 5.23.

Ismere charter, an original diploma of 736, attests.<sup>176</sup> Bede also refers – though not quite consistently<sup>177</sup> – to Northumbrian kings in the seventh century whose *imperium* stretched further yet: namely, Edwin, Oswald, Oswiu and Ecgrith. The basis of those comments is unclear; but there is certainly no reason to believe that Bede had any real, direct evidence about the actual extent of Æthelberht's contemporary hegemony. Given the stories circulating about Æthelfrith it seems difficult to believe that he was under Æthelberht's suzerainty. That alone would argue for a more limited 'overlordship' than that proposed for Oswald, Oswiu or Ecgrith later. Nonetheless, the ambition to create a new mission outpost in York, attested by Gregory's letter, may suggest that the Humber was not, in the early seventh century, as decisive a border as Bede understood it to be, based on the situation during his lifetime.<sup>178</sup> At the same time, the precise extent of what was 'England' south of the Humber is also unknown; it was certainly a great deal less than by Bede's day. All in all it can be seen that while Bede's knowledge that Æthelberht was a *potentissimus* came from a written source, his assertion about the extent of that overlordship was mere extrapolation from the nature or extent of what appeared to be the comparable overlordship of his own day and was not derived directly from a primary source.<sup>179</sup>

*Est autem ad orientalem Cantiae plagam Tanatos insula non modica, id est magnitudinis iuxta consuetudinem aestimationis Anglorum familiarum sexcentarum, [Over against the eastern districts of Kent there is a large island called Thanet, which, in English reckoning, is 600 hides in extent.]*

The fact that Thanet was an island in the east of Kent need have been derived from no more than Bede's general knowledge. Bede certainly did possess some geographically

<sup>176</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography*, ed. P. Sawyer, (London, 1968), S 89. Wormald sets out the other charters with a similar usage (S 94, S 101, S 103, S 287, S 291) in Wormald, "Bede, the *Bretwaldas*", p. 125, n. 32.

<sup>177</sup> In 2.5, Bede says that Edwin ruled over "all who lived in Britain" (*cunctis qui Britanniam incolunt*), but later in that chapter, and in 3.24, he suggests that it was only under Oswiu that the Picts were subjected. Moreover in 2.5 he implies that all the Picts were subject to Oswiu, but in 3.24, only the greater part: "*qui etiam gentem Pictorum maxima ex parte regno Anglorum subiecit*." On this, see H. Moisl, "The Bernician royal dynasty and the Irish in the seventh century", *Peritia* 2 (1983), 103-26, at p. 118.

<sup>178</sup> The shifting position of Lindsey in the seventh century points to the same conclusion. B. Yorke, "The Origins of Overlordship in Anglo-Saxon England", in S. Baxter, C. Karkov, J. Nelson and D. Pelteret, ed., *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, 2009), 81-95, at p. 84 and references in n. 12.

<sup>179</sup> Yorke, "Origins of Overlordship", pp. 83-84, comes to a similar conclusion.

specific information about the island in relation to tides as will be seen in a moment. The statement about the size of the island has as Wallace-Hadrill put it, “been much discussed”.<sup>180</sup> There is no need to enter into that discussion here, except again to say that the figure Bede uses shows that he was working from a source, which at one level at least must have been a written one.

It is possible, however, to edge closer to an understanding of the nature of Bede’s source here. In order to achieve this, all of Bede’s references to ‘hides’ need to be examined.<sup>181</sup> There are seventeen (or potentially eighteen) of these in the *HE*, found in thirteen separate passages.<sup>182</sup> These references fall quite neatly into two distinct kinds of reference, indicating two different types of sources. One follows what one might call the ‘charter type’ in that it sets out the amount of land gifted to an individual or a monastery or obtained as part of a transaction, which would have been recorded in writing. Bede has eight such references in the *HE*.<sup>183</sup>

#### 1 and 2: 3.24. Oswiu’s gifts of twelve estates and later of land to Hild<sup>184</sup>

*donatis insuper XII possessiunculis terrarum, in quibus ablato studio militiae terrestres ad exercendam militiam caelestem supplicandumque pro pace gentis eius aeterna deuotioni sedulae monachorum locus facultasque suppeteret. E quibus uidelicet possessiunculis sex in prouincia Derorum, sex in Berniciorum dedit. Singulae uero possessiones **X erant familiarum**, id est simul omnes CXX. Intrauit autem praefata regis Osuii filia Deo dedicanda monasterium, quod nuncupatur Heruteu, id est Insula Cerui, cui tunc Hild abbatissa praefuit. Quae post biennium comparata possessione **X familiarum** in loco, qui dicitur Streanaeshalch, ibi monasterium construxit; in quo memorata regis filia primo discipula uitae regularis, deinde etiam magistra extitit, donec completo unde LX annorum numero, ad complexum et nuptias sponsi caelestis uirgo beata intraret. In quo monasterio et ipsa, et pater eius Osuii et mater eius Eanfled et pater*

<sup>180</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 33.

<sup>181</sup> These were apparently units of fiscal liability amounting, by about 700 at least, to the land of one family: P. Barnwell, “*Hlafæta, ceorl, hid and scir: Celtic, Roman or Germanic?*”, in D. Griffiths, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 9 (1996), 53-61, at p. 53. There is a characteristically thought-provoking discussion of the social implications of the existence of ‘hides’ in J. Campbell, “Archipelagic thoughts: comparing early medieval polities in Britain and Ireland”, in Baxter, Karkov, Nelson and Pelteret, ed., *Early Medieval Studies*, 47-63, at pp. 54-62.

<sup>182</sup> W. Goffart, “From Roman Taxation to Medieval Seigneurie: Three Notes (part I)”, *Speculum* 47.2 (Apr., 1972), 165-87 at p. 166, n. 5 listed some of these passages, but only seven of them.

<sup>183</sup> For easy reference the key phrases have been placed in bold.

<sup>184</sup> This passage has been quoted at length as it will need to be considered in more detail shortly.

*matris eius Eduini et multi alii nobiles in ecclesia sancti apostoli Petri sepulti sunt. Hoc autem bellum rex Osuii in regione Loidis tertio decimo regni sui anno, septima decima die kalendarum Decembrium, cum magna utriusque populi utilitate confecit. Nam et suam gentem ab hostili paganorum depopulatione liberauit, et ipsam gentem Merciorum finitimarumque prouinciarum, desecto capite perfido, ad fidei Christianae gratiam conuertit.* [He also gave twelve small estates on which, as they were freed from any concern about earthly military service, a site and means might be provided for the monks to wage heavenly warfare and to pray with unceasing devotion that the race might win eternal peace. Six of these estates which he gave were in Deira and six in Bernicia. Each estate consisted of ten hides so that there were a hundred and twenty hides altogether. Oswiu's daughter who had been dedicated to God entered the monastery named Heruteu (Hartlepool), that is, the island of the hart, over which Hild was then abbess. Two years later she gained possession of ten hides in the place known as Streanæshealh (Whitby) and there built a monastery; in it the king's daughter was first a pupil and then she became a teacher, of life under the Rule; then, about the age of sixty, the blessed virgin departed to be united with her heavenly bridegroom. She is buried in this monastery together with her father Oswiu, her mother Eanflæd, her grandfather Edwin, and many other nobles, all in the church of the holy apostle Peter. King Oswiu brought the campaign to a close in the district of Loidis (Leeds) on 15 November in the thirteenth year of his reign, to the great benefit of both peoples; for he freed his own subjects from the hostile devastations of the heathen people and converted the Mercians and the neighbouring kingdoms to a state of grace in the Christian faith, having destroyed their heathen ruler.]

### 3: 3.25. The gift of Ripon to Wilfrid

*Vnde ei etiam donauerat monasterium XL familiarum in loco qui dicitur Inhrypum;* [(Alhfrith) had therefore given him (Wilfrid) a monastery of forty hides in the place called Ripon.]

### 4: 4.3. Gift of land to Chad

*cui etiam rex Uulpheri donauit terram L familiarum ad construendum monasterium in loco qui dicitur Ad Baruae, id est Ad Nemus, in prouincia Lindissi, in quo usque hodie instituta ab ipso regularis uitae uestigia permanent.* [King Wulfhere gave him fifty hides of land to build a monastery, in a place called Adbaruae, that is At the Grove (Barrow), in the province of Lindsey, where up to this day traces of the monastic Rule which he established still survive.]



### 5: 4.13. Wilfrid given Selsey

*Quo tempore rex Aedilualch donauit reuerentissimo antistiti Uilfrido terram **LXXXVII familiarum**, ubi suos homines, qui exules uagabantur, recipere posset, uocabulo Selaeseu quod dicitur Latine Insula uituli marini.* [At this time, King Æthelwealh gave the most reverend bishop Wilfrid eighty-seven hides of land to maintain his exiled followers. The land was called Selsey, that is, the island of the seal.]

### 6: 4.23[21]. Gift of land for Hild's first monastic establishment

*deinde ab Aidano episcopo patriam reuocata, accepit locum **unius familiae** ad septentrionalem plagam Uiuri fluminis, ubi aequae anno uno monachicam cum perpaucis sociis uitam agebat.* [Bishop Aidan called her (Hild) home, and she received a hide of land on the north side of the river Wear, where, for another year, she lived the monastic life with a small band of companions.]<sup>185</sup>

### 7 and 8: 5.19. An alternative description of Alhfrith's gift of Ripon to Wilfrid

*mox donauit terram **X familiarum** in loco qui dicitur Stamford, et non multo post monasterium **XXX familiarum** in loco qui uocatur Inhrypum.* [he (Alhfrith) at once gave him (Wilfrid) ten hides in a place called Stamford, and soon afterwards a monastery with thirty hides in a place called Ripon.]

In addition to these *HE* references, Bede has six more in his *Historia Abbatum* [*HA*].

#### a. *HA*, c.4

Ecgrith gave Benedict Biscop 70 hides (*septuaginta familiarum*), from his own property (*de suo largitus*). This was the basis for the monastery of Wearmouth, which was built 'on the north bank at the mouth of the Wear, in 674 AD, in the second indiction and in the fourth year of the reign of King Ecgrith.'<sup>186</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Given Hilda's royal background and her later importance, politically and religiously, it hard to credit this figure for her initial foundation. I think the probability must be that something has dropped out in Bede's source, or that this single hide was added to the holdings of an existing establishment.

<sup>186</sup> *HA*, c. 4: "ad ostium fluminis Wyri ad leuam anno ab incarnatione Domini sexcentesimo septuagesimo quarto, indictione secunda, anno autem quarto imperii Ecgridi regis."

**b. HA, c.7**

Ecgrith added another 40 hides (*quadraginta ... familiarum*) for the foundation of Jarrow.

**c. HA, c.9**

King Aldfrith, acting with his counsellors (*consiliariis*), bought two cloaks from Benedict Biscop for the price of three hides of land (*terram trium familiarum*) on the south bank of the Wear next to the mouth of river.

**d. HA, c. 15**

Benedict exchanged a cosmographical work for eight hides (*terram octo familiarum*), which was given to Jarrow. The arrangement was drawn up by Benedict Biscop, but he died before it was completed.

**e. HA, c.15**

Ceolfrith exchanged that same piece of land, and some money, for twenty hides (*terram viginti familiarum*) at Sambuce.

**f. HA, c.15**

Joining the monastery, Witmer donated to Wearmouth ten hides (*terram decem familiarum*) that Aldfrith had given him in Dalton.

There are also three references to 'hides' in the Anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith*.

**a. Life of Ceolfrith, c. 7**

A description of King Ecgrith's initial grant of fifty hides (*familiarum quinquaginta*) for the foundation of Wearmouth.

**b. Life of Ceolfrith, c. 11**

A description of Ecgrith's grant of forty hides (*XL familiarum terram*) for the foundation of Jarrow.

### c. *Life of Ceolfrith*, c. 33

The author records the total Wearmouth-Jarrow holdings on Ceolfrith's departure for Rome as being about 150 hides (*familiarum ferme centum quinquaginta*), according to English reckoning (*iuxta supputationem consuetudinis Anglorum*).

Looking first at the references from the *HA*, it must be *prima facie* very likely that at these points in the book Bede has obtained his information from the monastery's own archives, and may in fact in places have been actually quoting from 'charters' the house possessed confirming its ownership of the lands in question. Stephanus' reference to Wilfrid reading out the "list of the lands which the kings, for the good of their souls, had previously, and on that very day as well, presented to him, with the agreement and over the signatures of the bishops and all the chief men",<sup>187</sup> is evidence, if it were needed, that major houses kept charter records of the land they had received.<sup>188</sup>

Such an interpretation seems particularly probable for the three references in *HA*, c. 15 which give the appearance of having been grouped together as a convenient holding place for the public affirmation of these landholding claims. Equally, it seems plausible that the precise words of the charter are being repeated in the first example, from c. 4, where Bede is precise about not only the location, but also the date. This included not only an incarnational date, which may well be his own calculation of course, and an indictional one, a form Bede did not like to use, but also one by Ecgrith's regnal years: "on the north bank at the mouth of the Wear, in 674 AD, in the second indiction and in the fourth year of the reign of King Ecgrith."<sup>189</sup> Bede's inclusion of such detail would seem to indicate that he possessed a direct source for the grant: the most obvious such source would be archival: the original 'charter'. It is not difficult to envisage Wearmouth-Jarrow retaining this. Thus, Bede would have had ready access to its content.

<sup>187</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c. 17: "coram regibus enumerans regiones, quas ante reges pro animabus suis et tunc in illa die cum consensu et subscriptione episcoporum et omnium principum illi dederunt, lucide enuntiavit."

<sup>188</sup> The early eighth-century *Life of Wilfrid* is not particularly trustworthy evidence for Wilfrid having actually read out the list in the 670s at the dedication of Ripon, but it shows that such records were considered in line with normal practice at the time Bede was writing.

<sup>189</sup> *HA*, c. 4: "ad ostium fluminis Wyri ad leuam anno ab incarnatione Domini sexcentesimo septuagesimo quarto, indictione secunda, anno autem quarto imperii Ecgridi regis."

Not all of Bede's 'charter type' references in the *HE*, however, will have come directly from actual diplomas. Bede's description in 5.19 of Alhfrith's gifts to Wilfrid of ten hides at Stamford and soon after of thirty at Ripon is taken from the *Life of Wilfrid*, c. 8.<sup>190</sup> Nonetheless the figures taken from Stephanus, while they may not derive directly from a charter, do still probably ultimately depend on such a document, since Stephanus himself was probably drawing on one for his own account.<sup>191</sup>

Another example, which the evidence implies Bede did not gain directly from a charter and which has not been included in the above catalogue, again concerned Wilfrid. In describing, in 4.16 [14], Cædwalla's donation of a quarter of the Isle of Wight to Wilfrid, Bede first explains that the island measured 1200 hides and then states that therefore [unde] Wilfrid was given 300 hides. The implication or at least the impression one gains is that Bede, based on his knowledge both of the hidation of the island,<sup>192</sup> and that Wilfrid had been given a quarter of it, has simply calculated how much Wilfrid was given.

Nonetheless, other signs subtly suggest that some at least of the *HE* references come from original documents: that is, probably, charters. First, it is worth noting that five of Bede's nine 'charter type' contain what seems to be a stock phrase or formula that one could easily imagine deriving from a charter: [Y] *familiarum* (hides) *in loco qui dicitur* [place X].<sup>193</sup> The fact that no original or genuine Northumbrian charters from this period

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<sup>190</sup> Earlier in the *HE*, Bede had given a slightly different account and figure, saying in 3.25, that the king had given Wilfrid "a monastery of forty hides at a place called Ripon." Jones, *Saints*, pp. 49-50 notes this difference, but it is not necessary to accept his conclusion that the inconsistency showed Bede did not know the *Life of Wilfrid* until a later stage in the *HE*'s composition. It is as well to be clear that there is no *contradiction* between the two accounts. They are easily reconcilable, since each ends up with Wilfrid being given a monastery of forty hides at Ripon, even though the later description is more detailed in setting out the stages in which this happened. In such an interpretation, Bede's first mention of the topic would be a significant, but harmless, generalization based on his second.

<sup>191</sup> Given Bede's close, if probably not consistently positive relations with Acca, there does remain the possibility that Bede had seen the original documents (which Stephanus had himself used, hence explaining the similarity of their accounts) and that Bede's version and possibly his phrasing comes directly from them; Jones, *Saints*, p. 198, argued this for the Selsey reference. The use of the *Life of Wilfrid* remains the simplest explanation, however.

<sup>192</sup> The source of which will be discussed shortly.

<sup>193</sup> 3.24: "*X familiarum in loco, qui dicitur Streanaeshalch*"; 3.25: "*XL familiarum in loco qui dicitur Inhrypum*"; 4.3: "*L familiarum ad construendum monasterium in loco qui dicitur Ad Baruae, id est Ad Nemus*"; 5.19: "*X familiarum in loco qui dicitur Stanford, et non multo post monasterium XXX familiarum in loco qui uocatur Inhrypum*". A similar phrase is found in one of the references in the *HA*, c.15: "*terram uiginti familiarum in loco qui incolarum lingua Ad uillam Sambuce uocatur*".

have survived makes definitive statements difficult;<sup>194</sup> but since this formula does not appear at all in the other type of ‘hide’ reference which will be examined shortly, this is unlikely to be simply a catch-phrase Bede has added on his own initiative. Of course, as one of the examples is, as seen above, an alternative account of the same donation, with different figures, as another which seems to come from the *Life of Wilfrid*, then a charter may not directly lie behind any of these. Nonetheless it is worth considering the idea that even where Bede is not copying from an actual charter he is using wording which from his experience was standard for the description of donations in such land documents.<sup>195</sup>

That Bede in at least some of these cases built his narrative on diplomas he had seen seems particularly probable in the light of the example in 3.24. This section, which was quoted at length above, is not entirely clear in Bede’s account. King Oswiu having apparently promised to dedicate his daughter Ælfflæd in perpetual virginity does so following his defeat of Penda. At the same time, though at least partially as the result of an independent grant, Oswiu also gave twelve “small estates” *possessiunculis terrarum* for monastic foundations – six in Deira, six in Bernicia – each of ten hides giving a total of 120. These estates were, Bede says, to provide for monks, freed from any concern about earthly military service to wage heavenly warfare. The account then inserts what appears to be a digression on Hild and Ælfflæd, before returning to King Oswiu, giving the date and location that he “brought the campaign to a close”: “*Hoc autem bellum rex Osuii in regione Loidis tertio decimo regni sui anno, septima decima die kalendarum Decembrium.*”<sup>196</sup>

This account of Oswiu’s mass grant of 12 estates seems to retain certain elements which point towards the possibility that Bede’s information was based on his possession of a charter or similar record. For instance, some historians have seen in Bede’s use of the diminutive in the term *possessiunculis terrarum*, a criticism of Oswiu’s generosity.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>194</sup> P. Wormald, “Bede and the Conversion of England: The Charter Evidence”, in Wormald and Baxter, ed., *Times of Bede*, 135-66, at p. 135.

<sup>195</sup> This formulaic phrasing is not, for instance, present in the *Life of Wilfrid*, c.8, from which it is most likely Bede took his information in 5.19.

<sup>196</sup> “King Oswiu brought the campaign to a close in the district of Loidis (Leeds) on 15 November in the thirteenth year of his reign.”

<sup>197</sup> H. Mayr-Harting, *The Venerable Bede, the Rule of St Benedict, and Social Class* (Jarrow, 1976), p. 14. He is followed, for instance, by D. Craig, “Oswiu (611/12–670)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.Oxforddnb.com>. myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/article/20930, accessed 18 March 2013].

Such an interpretation mistakes the nature of the term, as Campbell showed conclusively.<sup>198</sup> Wallace-Hadrill in a cursory consideration of the passage, having agreed with Campbell that the term *possessiunculis* “does not imply disparagement” ends with the perceptive comment that: “Bede may be taking the word from his source without having much interest in the distinction.”<sup>199</sup> The question, which he does not go on to consider, is what this source is most likely to have been. Jones believed that the text had “the components of a monumental inscription.”<sup>200</sup> More credibly, Campbell noted that, “it might derive from a polite formula in a charter”.<sup>201</sup> Mayr-Harting himself had said that “such diminutives are common in letters and charters”.<sup>202</sup> His caveat that this was only “of one’s own rather than other people’s donations”,<sup>203</sup> is, of course, irrelevant if Bede’s source was one such charter. The inclusion of a clause relating to the ‘immunities’ these houses would possess is also exactly the sort of element one would expect to find in a charter of donation.

The odd addition of the location, *Loidis*, Leeds, which is not the site of the battle against Penda, may point in the same direction. Hunter Blair noted and followed the assumption of others that Leeds was just being used by Bede as a place in the general environs of the battle of Winwæd.<sup>204</sup> But this would hardly be characteristic of Bede who does not invent the locations he inserts. It is much more likely that he found it in his source. If so, what did the place represent? Perhaps the simplest explanation is the location of a ‘post-war’ council held to divide up the spoils and make the peace. This is supported by the other oddity in the account: the fact that Bede provides a date for the end of the ‘war’. There is no implication that he is dating the battle of Winwæd when he says that Oswiu brought the campaign to an end, *bellum confecit*, on 15 November, in the thirteenth year of his reign. Nor is there any *prima facie* reason to imagine that the

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<sup>198</sup> J. Campbell, “Bede’s Words for Places”, in Campbell, ed., *Essays*, 99-119, at p. 112. Campbell’s argument against the diminutive being pejorative is not dependent on accepting his plausible, though not definitive argument that the term referred to “subordinate settlements”.

<sup>199</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 122.

<sup>200</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 180.

<sup>201</sup> Campbell, “Bede’s Words for Places”, p. 112. He refers to Birch, 229, which uses a diminutive *portiuunculam*: W. de Gray Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum: a collection of charters related to Anglo-Saxon history* (London, 1885), vol. 1, p. 374.

<sup>202</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Bede, the Rule of St Benedict*, p. 27, n. 70.

<sup>203</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Bede, the Rule of St Benedict*, p. 27, n. 70.

<sup>204</sup> P. Hunter Blair, “The Bernicians and their Northern frontier”, in N. Chadwick, ed., *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border* (Cambridge, 1959), 137-72, at pp. 163-64.

precise date of the battle would even have been retained. Somewhat counter-intuitively, those that were remembered seem to have generally related to defeats: no doubt because these led to the liturgical commemoration of the deceased king by a community with ties to him.<sup>205</sup>

Such a specific date as Bede gives here for an event, which was not even apparently the battle, is likely to derive from the dating clause in a written document.<sup>206</sup> Again, the sort of meeting I am proposing – a council at Leeds at the end of the war – would be a natural occasion to produce dated documents: specifically the grants of land for the establishment of a set of religious houses in thanksgiving for victory, which Bede describes here. The dating clause,<sup>207</sup> the location, the terms *possessiunculis terrarum*, the figures for the hidage, as well as the details about the new monasteries’ ‘immunities’ and perhaps also some of the justification of the gifts may therefore have been taken by Bede directly from a charter emanating from the event.<sup>208</sup>

Arguably, therefore, Bede’s account in 3.24 provides the resources for the reconstruction of a fragmentary, but presumably genuine, Northumbrian charter. Bede’s other references may provide less distinctive evidence for the existence of charters underlying his account, but these too, especially the ones in the *HA*, may be built directly or indirectly on originally diplomatic material.<sup>209</sup>

This discussion of the ‘charter’ type of hidage reference has been necessary and useful, but the example in 1.25 does not of course fall under this category. This comes under the second group, which I shall refer to as the ‘tribute’ type.<sup>210</sup> There are nine instances in which Bede uses *hide/familia* in this form.

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<sup>205</sup> For instance, Oswald’s death at Maserfelth on 5 August, *HE* 3.9; or Ecgrith’s at Nechtansmere on 20 May, *HE* 4.26. See also Harrison, *Framework*, p. 89.

<sup>206</sup> *Contra* Harrison, *Framework*, p. 89, who thinks that “two weeks before St Michael’s tide in his 13<sup>th</sup> year” was the way in which it was carried over the decades to Bede by “word of mouth”. This seems very unlikely.

<sup>207</sup> Especially the use of an indiction, which was normal for early southern Anglo-Saxon charters: Wormald, “Bede and the Conversion of England”, p. 139.

<sup>208</sup> Given the context, Bede had perhaps obtained this document from his Whitby contacts.

<sup>209</sup> One potentially indicative point is that none of these ‘charter type’ references relate to the very early period. The example in 3.24, which refers to 655 (following the calculations in Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 81-90), is the earliest.

<sup>210</sup> Such a term is hopefully general enough to cover the range of possibilities from taxation to a more traditionally ‘barbaric’ interpretation. There is neither the space nor the need to enter into the debate about the precise uses of such documents here.

## 1: 1.25. Thanet

*Est autem ad orientalem Cantiae plagam Tanatos insula non modica, id est magnitudinis iuxta consuetudinem aestimationis Anglorum **familiarum sexcentarum**.* [Over against the eastern districts of Kent there is a large island called Thanet, which, in English reckoning, is 600 hides in extent.]

## 2 and 3: 2.9. Anglesey and the Isle of Man

*Prior [sc. insularum] ... **nongentarum sexaginta familiarum** mensuram iuxta aestimationem Anglorum, secunda **trecentarum** et ultra spatium tenet.* [The former of these [Anglesey] ... containing 960 hides according to the English way of reckoning, while the latter [Man] has more than 300.]

## 4: 3.4. Iona

*Neque enim magna est, sed quasi **familiarum quinque** iuxta aestimationem Anglorum.* [It (Iona) is not a large island, being only about five hides in English reckoning.]

## 5 and 6: 3.24. Gift of southern Mercia to Peada.

*regnum Australium Merciorum, qui sunt, ut dicunt, **familiarum quinque milium**, discreti fluuio Treanta ab Aquilonaribus Mercis, quorum terra est **familiarum VII milium**.* [It (the kingdom of the Southern Mercians) was said to consist of 5,000 hides, being divided by the river Trent from Northern Mercia, which is 7,000 hides in extent.]

## 7: 4.13. Wilfrid in Sussex

*siquidem diuertens ad prouinciam Australium Saxonum, quae ... habens terram **familiarum VII milium**.* [So he (Wilfrid) turned to the kingdom of the South Saxons, which ... contains 7,000 hides.]

## 8: 4.16 [14]. Wilfrid given part of the Isle of Wight

*Est autem mensura eiusdem insulae iuxta aestimationem Anglorum **mille ducentarum familiarum**; unde data est episcopo possessio terrae trecentarum*



*familiarum*. [The size of the island is 1200 hides according to the English way of reckoning, so the bishop was given 300 hides.]<sup>211</sup>

#### 9: 4.19[17]. Ely

*Est autem Elge in prouincia Orientalium Anglorum regio familiarum circiter sexcentarum*. [Ely is a district of about 600 hides in the kingdom of the East Angles.]

These therefore are the sum total of Bede's 'tribute' type hidage references. Separated from those of the 'charter' type, it is easier to appreciate the extent to which this group shares characteristics with the much-debated surviving document, often termed the 'Tribal Hidage'.<sup>212</sup> As in that document, so with Bede's references in this group, precise hidations are given for geographical areas.<sup>213</sup> These areas can be as large as well attested kingdoms, but some are much smaller, amounting to tiny subsections of better known *regna*. The Tribal Hidage, whatever its origins and whatever its purpose, provides an example of just the sort of document which would most naturally explain Bede's references.<sup>214</sup>

The question then is what is the nature of this source. In answering that, the first issue to be addressed is whether Bede was using a single source or several.<sup>215</sup> Bede has nine different 'tribute' type hidation references. Did he have nine different sources each with a specific figure? This seems highly unlikely, especially given the geographical spread of

<sup>211</sup> As already discussed, although theoretically there are two hidage references here, the second appears to be only Bede's calculation based on the other information in the paragraph.

<sup>212</sup> D. Dumville, "The Tribal Hidage: an introduction to its texts and their history", in S. Bassett, ed., *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989), 225-230. D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 76-77. C. Hart, "The Tribal Hidage", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5<sup>th</sup> series, 21 (1971), pp. 133-57; W. Davies and H. Vierck, "The contexts of the Tribal Hidage: social aggregates and settlement patterns", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 8 (1974), pp. 223-93; N. Higham, "King Edwin of the Deiri: rhetoric and the reality of power in early England", in H. Geake and J. Kenny, ed., *Early Deira: archaeological studies of the East Riding in the fourth to ninth centuries AD* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 41-49; etc.

<sup>213</sup> It is worth emphasizing this point, as Campbell, "Archipelagic thoughts", p. 55 noted: the references are "at least as much territorial as tribal."

<sup>214</sup> As was already suggested in J. Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1982), p. 61; and by Hart, "Tribal Hidage", pp. 146-47.

<sup>215</sup> Some might wish to argue that Bede himself may have been working from a secondary document or even oral communication rather than an original text, but even so, at one level at least, that text can justly be considered the source of his information. In any case, such an argument unnecessarily overcomplicates the explanation when a simpler and more convincing one is available: Bede had direct access himself to the document.

the places under consideration. Starting in the south-east there is Thanet, in Kent; then in the South, Sussex and the Isle of Wight. In the East, there is Ely; and in the middle, the North and South Mercians. In the far west, Anglesey and the Isle of Man,<sup>216</sup> and finally, in the far north-west, there was Iona. The distribution is simply too random and too widespread for each statement to have had its own separate source. It makes much more sense to see Bede's statements as underpinned by a broader, more comprehensive, single source: again something which reminds one very clearly of the Tribal Hidage.

Comparing Bede's references with the Tribal Hidage reveals some telling similarities and differences. The Tribal Hidage figure for the South Saxons, 7,000 hides, is precisely the same as that given by Bede. Moreover, although the Tribal Hidage has no figure for Ely, to which Bede assigns 600 hides, it does give an identical amount for some of the other smaller areas in the Fens, near to Ely, that it does include, such as the East and West Willa. In contrast, the Wightgara in the Tribal Hidage are only 'assessed' at 600 hides, but Bede accords them twice that – 1200. This shows that they were not the same document, or even probably the same ultimate source. Nonetheless the connections are clear enough to suggest that they are the same *type* of texts. As argued above, Bede is unlikely to have had access to a series of such documents. He seems to have had his own version, his own 'Tribal Hidage', as it were, which, on its own, explains most, if not all of these 'tribute' type hidation references.

More speculatively it might be presumed that the text in question was a 'tribute' list or something akin, from some stage during the period of the Northumbrian hegemony in the seventh century.<sup>217</sup> That would make the most sense of Bede's possession of such a document. In terms of which reign this might have derived from, however, one can do little more than set out the options.

At first sight, the most plausible candidate for such a tribute list in Wearmouth-Jarrow's possession, or at least with Bede able to access, would of course be Ecgrifith,

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<sup>216</sup> These are the instances where it is particularly hard to envisage Bede having independent and separate sources for his information.

<sup>217</sup> Hart, "Tribal Hidage", pp. 146-47, comes to similar, though not quite consistent, conclusions about the document's origins. N. Brooks, "The formation of the Mercian kingdom", in Bassett, *Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, pp. 159-70, argued that the 'Tribal Hidage' itself was a Northumbrian text, not the Mercian one it is often taken for.

who founded and patronized the monastery.<sup>218</sup> However the coincidence of Bede specifically associating the two Mevanian islands – Anglesey and Man – with Edwin and then giving each of their hidages makes it more likely that the text Bede had access to at least claimed to be from closer to Edwin’s reign.<sup>219</sup> The implication may well be that Bede’s source for one of these statements was the same as that for the other.<sup>220</sup> The entry for Iona, however, makes it difficult to imagine the text coming from Edwin’s time itself, implying perhaps a dating in the reign of either Oswald or Oswiu – perhaps as an updated version of one from Edwin’s.

Of course, this all relies on Bede’s own version of the ebbs and flows of Northumbrian power in the seventh century; but there is no reason to believe he was well informed about the details of such shifts in geopolitics as much as a century before he was writing.<sup>221</sup> One would do well to be cautious before building any conclusions on the superficial narrative he has left. Nonetheless there are sources beyond Bede which point to Oswald’s *imperium*. Adomnan’s *Life of Columba* tells the story, in 1.1, of how Oswald, as king, returned to Iona and recounted a vision of Columba that he had had.<sup>222</sup> Interestingly, it is at this point that Adomnan calls Oswald *totius Britanniae imperator*, a more impressive title than even Bede gives him, and one which, if based on reliable evidence or tradition, would certainly imply that he had some degree of political hegemony even over Iona.

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<sup>218</sup> In three connected pieces Ian Wood has made a strong case for the role of Jarrow in particular as a house designed by Ecgrith for his own benefit, including plausibly as a treasury and archive: I. Wood, *The Origins of Jarrow: the Monastery, the Slake and Ecgrith’s Minster* (Jarrow, 2008); I. Wood, “Monasteries and the Geography of Power in the Age of Bede”, *Northern History* 45.1 (Mar., 2008), pp. 1-25; and I. Wood, “The foundation of Bede’s Wearmouth-Jarrow”, in S. DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 84-96.

<sup>219</sup> Although that is no reason not to think that it might have been deposited by Ecgrith as part of his official royal documents.

<sup>220</sup> We have already seen good reason not to place much weight on Bede’s precise phrasing, nonetheless it bears mention that in 2.5 Bede says that Edwin *subiecit imperio* the Mevanian islands (and *imperio subiugavit* in 2.9). Colgrave translates this as “brought under [English] rule” (or “power” in 2.9), but something like “made tributary” would seem at least as probable a meaning.

<sup>221</sup> Plummer, 2.86, set out the contradictions between Bede’s various expressions of the hegemony of Northumbrian kings in the *HE*. See also, Hunter Blair, “Bernicians and their Northern Frontier”, p.161. Such contradictions in Bede’s account probably owe more to his rhetoric than to his sources. Certainly, they should not be relied on for detailed knowledge of the nuances of the shifts of power in the seventh century.

<sup>222</sup> *Life of Columba*, 1.1.

On the other hand, Bede's caution over the figures for the hidage of the South Mercians might be taken as a reflection of its artificiality as a region, and thus point to the reign of Oswiu, who had apparently made the division. Neither they nor the northern Mercians are mentioned in the Tribal Hidage

Beyond such cautious suggestions it is difficult to go; nor is it necessary. The general outlines of the nature of Bede's source are essentially clear. From whoever's reign it came, Bede had a 'tribute' document probably from one of the seventh-century Northumbrian hegemon, perhaps most plausibly Oswald or Oswiu.

The unity of Bede's source is supported by some linguistic evidence: in five of these nine 'tribute' type examples Bede uses the same phrase, or a version of it, to introduce the figure: *iuxta aestimationem Anglorum*. This is present in 2.9,<sup>223</sup> 3.4, 4.16 and in a slightly adapted form here in 1.25.<sup>224</sup> As with the frequent use of standard phrasing seen in the 'charter' type, it seems likely such wording also represents the repetition of a formula. This may then suggest that the formula was included in the text of the original source Bede possessed and that he unconsciously copied it out as he inserted several of the figures recorded in that document into his narrative.<sup>225</sup>

This wider discussion has been necessary to contextualize this apparently tiny reference in 1.25; at the same time it has raised some potentially important conclusions concerning not only the nature of Bede's sources and what he had access to, but also about some of the administrative arrangements and records that were extant and available in seventh and early eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England. Having done so, it is now time to return to the *HE* and the next section of 1.25 to be considered.

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<sup>223</sup> I count this chapter twice as Bede groups two hidage references together here.

<sup>224</sup> Goffart, "From Roman Taxation", p. 166, n. 5, also pointed to the use of this phrase, though not to all its potential implications. It should be noted, however, that a similar phrase is also found in one of the Anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith* 'charter' type references, c. 33: *iuxta supputationem consuetudinis Anglorum*.

<sup>225</sup> One more point is worth noting. As will be seen shortly, when it came to figures – even ones for which Bede had a written source – he often introduced a caveat, such as *fertur*, *ferunt*, etc. He tended to be cautious in his presentation of numbers. The absence of such phrasing in all but one of the hidage examples in the *HE* is a further example that Bede considered himself to be working from a written source in which he could place serious trust.

*quam a continenti terra secernit fluuius Uantsumu, qui est latitudinis circiter trium stadiorum, et duobus tantum in locis est transmeabilis; utrumque enim caput protendit in mare.* [It is divided from the mainland by the river Wantsum, which is about three furlongs wide, can be crossed in two places only, and joins the sea at either end.]

The detail about the water ways around Thanet have been persuasively connected by Stevens to a set of other entries Bede makes concerning locations on the coast of England, and particularly the east coast.<sup>226</sup> This information appears to derive from a network of sources Bede developed between writing the *De Temporibus/De Natura* and composing the *DTR*.<sup>227</sup> Directly, then, the source for this statement will have been Bede's own knowledge; but indirectly, of course, it points to his wide-spread 'scientific' contacts, in this case probably someone in a Kentish monastery – more than likely in Minster-in-Thanet itself.

Interestingly, Bede speaks of the river in different terms later in the *HE*. Here, in 1.25, he talks about Thanet and the Wantsum, *fluuius Uansumu*; but, in 5.8, when speaking about Reculver he describes it as “to the north of the mouth of the river Yant” (*iuxta ostium aquilonale fluminis Genladae*).<sup>228</sup> As Colgrave and Mynors point out in their note, the river Yant is simply “an alternative name for the northern arm of the river Wantsum”.<sup>229</sup> This inconsistency is, however, probably a sign that each statement came from a different source: one told Bede about Thanet (1.25), while the other told him about Reculver (5.8).

*In hac ergo adplicuit seruus Domini Augustinus et socii eius,* [Here Augustine, the servant of the Lord, landed with his companions]

<sup>226</sup> W. Stevens, *Bede's Scientific Achievement* (Jarrow, 1985), especially p. 15 and pp. 27-29, n. 45. A. Thacker, “Bede and the ordering of understanding”, in DeGregorio, ed., *Innovation and Tradition*, 37-63, at p. 42 and Wallis, “Bede and Science”, in DeGregorio, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 113-26, at p. 124, also commented on Bede's widespread sources for tidal information.

<sup>227</sup> Many of Bede's connections, whether scientific or broader, were on or near the North Sea coast: Campbell, “Secular and political contexts”, p. 34, notes that at least 26 of Bede's historical or hagiographical accounts are located in this geographical location. See also, S. Foot, “Church and Monastery in Bede's Northumbria”, in DeGregorio, *Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 54-68, at p. 60. Indeed material finds suggest an east coast trade network: C. Cessford, “Relations between the Britons of Southern Scotland and Anglo-Saxon Northumbria”, in J. Hawkes and S. Mills, ed., *Northumbria's Golden Age* (Stroud, 1999), 150-60, at p. 158.

<sup>228</sup> *HE* 5.8.

<sup>229</sup> Colgrave and Mynors, p. 475, n. 3.

This is the first element of Bede's account considered so far that is neither dependent on an easily identifiable source – whether surviving or natural to assume – nor something that one can imagine Bede simply adding for rhetorical effect.<sup>230</sup> Readers of *1066 and All That*, will know that Thanet was the traditional place from which to launch a conquest of Britain.<sup>231</sup> But Bede is not behind this tradition: he makes no mention of where Julius Caesar landed;<sup>232</sup> nor Hengist and Horsa.<sup>233</sup> Thus one is not entitled to assert that Bede simply inserted Thanet as that was where it was obvious that everyone landed.

As archaeology has shown, Thanet was certainly a key location for communication and commerce with the continent in the late sixth century,<sup>234</sup> but it was not so exclusively so that it would have seemed such a self-evident disembarkation point for Augustine that Bede felt confident in presuming it.<sup>235</sup> Despite all the modern criticism of Bede for his bias and agenda, and the claims of his willingness to manipulate the facts, he was not in the habit of simply making them up. If Bede said they landed in Thanet then he must have had a source for this. Unfortunately it is one that has not survived. Nonetheless, the clue as to its nature lies in the fact that the story of Thanet continues in the second half of the chapter. In other words Bede's comment here is part of the story he goes on to tell at greater length in a moment. They are in short derived from the same, single source. The nature of that source will be discussed in more detail at the end of the analysis of this Bedan chapter.

*uiri ut ferunt ferme XL.* [who are said to have been nearly forty in number].

Once again there is no easily identifiable source for this rather curious statement, which, on reflection, is one of the oddest pieces of information in the whole *HE*. Numbers, of course, could have deep spiritual significance for Bede. He frequently extracts moral

<sup>230</sup> Nor was it apparently available to the Whitby author.

<sup>231</sup> As Julius Caesar, "like all other successful invaders of these islands" knew, but Monmouth, "landing incorrectly in Somerset" did not: W. Sellar and R. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (London, 1930), pp. 9 and 81.

<sup>232</sup> *HE* 1.1.

<sup>233</sup> *HE* 1.15.

<sup>234</sup> S. Chadwick Hawkes, "Anglo-Saxon Kent, c.425-725", in P. Leach, ed., *Archaeology in Kent to AD 1500* (Oxford, 1982); G. Moody, *The Isle of Thanet: from Pre-History to the Norman Conquest* (Stroud, 2008), pp. 158-69.

<sup>235</sup> Especially not judging by Bede's own time.

meaning from the figures in the Bible. The number forty could be particularly meaningful. For instance, in his *Commentary on Genesis*, Bede said: “And since forty is made up of ten multiplied by four, the fulfilment of the divine law, which is accomplished through the grace of Christian doctrine, can rightly be signified in the number of days [before Noah opened the window of the ark and sent forth a raven], forty. For the Law is contained in the ten commandments, and the doctrine of the Gospel is described in four books.”<sup>236</sup>

With Augustine and his party bringing both the Gospels and the Commandments to the pagan English, the number forty for his companions, one might suppose, could not be more fitting. Perhaps therefore some might like to argue that the figure is Bede’s own invention and he is leaving the message implicit confident that his readers familiar with such exegetical tricks will be able to draw their own conclusions. In reality, however, such an interpretation is scarcely credible. For one thing, numbers did not have a fixed and necessary meaning in exegesis – even in Bede’s own.<sup>237</sup> More importantly, the reality is that, despite the many criticisms of his modern detractors, Bede did not make ‘facts’ up.<sup>238</sup> Even if the evidence had suggested that he did, his use of *ut ferunt* here strongly suggests that he had a source. In order to understand what this might be it is necessary to consider Bede’s use of this phrase and other similar caveats throughout the *HE*.

Discussing these phrases, Plummer claimed that: “Where Bede gives a story on merely hearsay evidence he is careful to state the fact.”<sup>239</sup> The situation is, however, more complex than this. Examining them as a group reveals that there are more than 50 instances of the use of such caveating phraseology, a perhaps surprisingly large

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<sup>236</sup> *Commentary On Genesis*, c.8, v.6. “*Quod uero quadraginta per decem quater ducta complentur, potest in numero dierum quadragenario non inmerito diuinae legis impletio, quae per euangelii gratiam perficitur, intimari. Lex enim in decem praeceptis continetur, euangelii doctrina in quattuor libris descripta est.*” The translation is from Kendall, tr., *Bede’s Commentary on Genesis* (Liverpool, 2008), p. 193.

<sup>237</sup> Bede’s interpretation of ‘forty’ was quite different, for example, in his *Commentary On Acts*, I.3. “*Iste enim numerus hanc temporalem terrenam que uitam uel propter quattuor anni tempora uel propter quattuor uentos caeli designat.*” (“Now this number [forty] designates this temporal earthly life, either on account of the four seasons of the year, or on account of the four winds of the heavens.” L. Martin, tr., *The Venerable Bede Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Kalamazoo, 1989), p. 10.)

<sup>238</sup> Levison, “Bede as historian”, p. 124.

<sup>239</sup> Plummer, I.xlv, n.3. This interpretation of Bede’s language has often been followed without further analysis, or cross-reference; see for instance, Higham, *Bede as Oral Historian*, p. 6. Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 8, more perceptively notes simply that such phrases signal “necessary caution”.

number.<sup>240</sup> Of this huge list, many do indeed almost certainly refer to oral traditions which Bede has heard either during his life or as part of his researches. But it is equally certain that not all can be classed as ‘hearsay’. Three at least are clearly referring to written texts, as Bede is drawing on Adomnan’s *De Locis Sanctis*, or rather on his own edited version of that work.<sup>241</sup> Others, such as those relating to the story of the meeting with the British monks, it is difficult to see how Bede can conceivably have accessed except via a written source. Another reference, to the miracles at Cuthbert’s tomb in 4.30, is explicitly based on his own life of the saint. Moreover, if, as remains possible, the *Whitby Life* was the basis of Bede’s account of Gregory the Great’s visit to the Roman marketplace, then the triple caveated content there was also based on a text, not mere oral ‘tradition’. In other words, the “tradition of the fathers” – *traditio maiorum* – as he terms it,<sup>242</sup> need not have been oral tradition: it could have taken concrete form before Bede encountered it.<sup>243</sup> Nor is it unlikely that some of the *miracula* stories where he uses these terms, perhaps especially those of Æthelthryth in 4.19,<sup>244</sup> actually came from locally produced hagiography available to Bede.<sup>245</sup> Even his uses outside the *HE* point to the same conclusion. As Stancliffe pointed out, Bede used *ferunt* in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* to refer to information derived from Pliny’s *Natural History*.<sup>246</sup>

Bede’s decision as to whether or not to ‘caveat’ his statements, was based, therefore, not on the nature of the source specifically – that is oral or written – but on Bede’s

<sup>240</sup> The ambiguity is because one or two examples might be considered debatable. Plummer provided a list of some of the key phrases and their usage (Plummer, 1.xlv, n.3), but it was not complete, containing only 22 examples – not all correct. The full catalogue includes 54 genuine instances: *fertur*: 1.1, 1.25, 2.2x2, 2.5, 2.14, 3.2, 3.6, 3.14, 3.16, 3.24, 3.25, 4.6, 4.23, 5.10; *ferunt*: 1.25, 2.2, 2.12, 3.5, 3.10, 3.12, 3.16, 4.13, 4.16, 4.19x2, 4.23, 4.30, 5.2, 5.21; *feruntur*: 3.4; *perhibent*: 1.1, 2.2, 3.4, 3.5, 4.19; *perhibetur*: 1.26, 2.4, 2.16, 4.5, 5.21; *perhibentur*: 1.15, 4.14; *traditur*: 5.16; *audiuimus*: 3.9; *(sunt etiam qui) dicant*: 4.19; *dicunt*: 2.1, 3.24x2; *dicitur*: 5.16, 5.17; *traditione maiorum*: 2.1, 5.24; *iuxta opinionem, quam ab antiquis accepimus*: 2.1.

<sup>241</sup> The examples are *traditur* in 5.16 and *dicitur* in both 5.16 and 5.17. They come from Bede’s *On the Holy Places*, 7.1 (both the instances are from *HE* 5.16), and 6.2. These are based on Adomnan, *De locis sanctis* 2.2 (CCSL 175: 206, 2-12) and 1.23 (CCSL 175: 201, 67-76). It might just about be argued that Bede uses the caveating phrases not because of the written source Adomnan, but because Adomnan’s own source, Arculf, was explicitly acknowledged to be an oral one: but it would be quite a stretch. Interestingly, Bede’s double use of *dicitur* as a caveat in these passages copied from his early work, *De Locis Sanctis*, is not characteristic of his usage elsewhere in the *HE*, one of the last he completed: this is probably, therefore, an intriguing, if small, shift in Bede’s style during his ‘career’.

<sup>242</sup> In the Preface, 2.1 and again at 5.24, when summarizing his sources.

<sup>243</sup> That did not mean, of course, that he was unable to smell a rat.

<sup>244</sup> Bede uses caveating phrases four times in this chapter.

<sup>245</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 159.

<sup>246</sup> Stancliffe, “The British church”, p. 127, with references at p. 147, n. 119.



perception of its reliability as a witness. In other words he is implicitly giving some insight into his own hierarchy of sources. Events for which Bede could provide a specific nameable witness – who was often referred to – did not require caveating, despite having reached him orally. But in general, he privileged written over generic oral sources,<sup>247</sup> in the sense that, in the main, he did not feel the need to caveat them.<sup>248</sup> Nonetheless, there were also written sources which he might doubt or which he simply sought to distance himself from. The most obvious are the source(s) which apparently originated among the British and which lay behind much of the account in 2.2 of Augustine’s second meeting with the Welsh clerics, and of Æthelfrith’s subsequent victory. The negative attitude towards Augustine was not something he could entirely avoid in retelling the story, but it was hardly something he wished to associate himself with.<sup>249</sup> His caveats when borrowing from apparently written hagiography probably stem from their lack of specifically named witnesses.

There is one final aspect worth noting, which is of relevance to the specific example under consideration here. Examination of Bede’s use of caveating phrases shows that he was particularly cautious where numbers were concerned. Eleven of the times he uses a phrase such as *fertur* it relates to a number in one form or other.<sup>250</sup> Some of course must have derived from oral sources, but not all of them.<sup>251</sup> Overall, this group comprises about a fifth of all his caveated statements – enough to represent a category of their own.<sup>252</sup> They seem to reflect that Bede often did not wish to commit himself wholeheartedly to the numbers that he had been given in stories in which he was not completely confident, whether they reflected generic oral traditions, the communication of a specific witness or the evidence of a written source which he possessed.

<sup>247</sup> Despite the insistence of Higham, *Bede as Oral Historian*, p. 3, that this is only a recent phenomenon.

<sup>248</sup> The one odd exception is the claim that Bisi, bishop of the East Angles, *in praefata synodo fuisse perhibetur*, when his attendance is attested to in the preface to the canons, which Bede had just quoted. This should not have merited a caveat according to Bede’s normal usage: so much so that Colgrave and Mynors, p. 353, translated the phrase as: “is known to have been present”.

<sup>249</sup> This example will be discussed in more detail in considering 2.2.

<sup>250</sup> The full list is: 1.15: *perhibentur* (first leaders; two brothers); 1.25: *ferunt* (forty companions); 2.2: *perhibent* (7 British bishops); 2.2: *ferunt* (1200 men slain); 2.2 *fertur* (300 men); 2.14: *fertur* (36 days); 3.24: *fertur* (30 times as great); 3.24: *dicunt* (5,000 hides); 3.25: *fertur* (twice); 4.13: *ferunt* (40 or 50 men); 4.16: *ferunt* (a quarter); 4.23: *fertur* (first woman).

<sup>251</sup> For instance the figure for the hidage of the South Mercians, as already discussed.

<sup>252</sup> Although there are of course many numerical references in the *HE* not so caveated, either because he felt more confident in his sources, or where he felt he had already provided a caveat for the wider section.

On all these bases therefore the *ferme XL* in this phrase should not be assumed to be a reference to oral traditions simply because Bede added *ut ferunt*. In fact, on reflection, it is difficult to see how it could be. Rather, the figure fits neatly within the account of the arrival of the party and is best taken as part of that narrative which will be discussed shortly.

*Acceperunt autem, praecipiente beato papa Gregorio, de gente Francorum interpretes; [They had acquired interpreters from the Franks, according to the command of Pope St Gregory.]*

As discussed in considering 1.23, this sentence points, as Wallace-Hadrill among others rightly noted, to Bede's possession of either Gregory's letter to Brunhilde, or his letter to her grandsons Theoderic and Theodeberht, or both.<sup>253</sup> In these epistles, the pope requested that Augustine and his party be provided with Frankish priests: "We have also ordered that they should take some priests with them from nearby, through whom they might understand their thoughts, and whose advice might help them to get what they want, whatever God should give them."<sup>254</sup>

There was no reason for Bede, or us for that matter, to think that Gregory's request was not acceded to. For the purposes pursued here, however, it is not a question of whether Bede's claim is true or false. It might be right to conclude, on the basis of Gregory's letters, that Frankish priests travelled to Kent with Augustine, but Bede is not evidence they did. The basis for his conclusion and statement is precisely the same as ours: the Gregorian letters.<sup>255</sup> The *HE* should not be treated as an independent source here, capable of verifying and confirming a modern deduction from the papal epistle. Rather, as pointed out in 1.23, it is important to realize that when Bede's statements are explicable in terms of the existing evidence there is no justification in 'inventing' another source. Doing so imbues the *HE*'s account with a quite undeserved authority.

<sup>253</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, 33-34. Gregory's letters are 6.49 (Martyn, 6.51) and 6.57 (Martyn, 6.60).

<sup>254</sup> This quotation is from the letter to Theoderic and Theodeberht: Gregory, *Letters*, 6.49 (Martyn, 6.51).

*"Quibus etiam iniunximus, ut aliquos secum e vicino debeant presbyteros ducere, cum quibus eorum possint mentes agnoscere et voluntates ammonitione sua, quantum Deus donaverit, adiuuare."*

<sup>255</sup> The alternative, proposed by Trent Foley and Higham, "Bede on the Britons", pp. 166-67, n. 50, that "Bede's awareness of interpreters accompanying Augustine's mission may have otherwise derived from a consciousness of such retained at Canterbury", is not to be taken seriously, given how extremely minimal this study has shown Canterbury's continuously maintained information was about the early mission.

*et mittens ad Aedilberctum mandauit se uenisse de Roma ac nuntium ferre optimum, qui sibi obtemperantibus aeterna in caelis gaudia et regnum sine fine cum Deo uiuo et uero futurum sine ulla dubietate promitteret. Qui haec audiens manere illos in ea quam adierant insula, et eis necessaria ministrari, donec uideret quid eis faceret, iussit.* [Augustine sent to Æthelberht, to say that he had come from Rome bearing the best of news, namely the sure and certain promise of eternal joys in heaven and an endless kingdom with the living and true God to those who received it. On hearing this the king ordered them to remain on the island where they had landed and be provided with all things necessary until he had decided what to do about them]

This short passage is probably connected to the story with which the chapter ends; but much of it might also be simply Bede's description of what he feels sure must have happened next. Certainly the phrasing about the "best of news" which Augustine brought being "the sure and certain promise of eternal joys in heaven and an endless kingdom with the living and true God",<sup>256</sup> is very likely to be merely Bede's rhetoric. For much of this section therefore there is no need to presume a source beyond Bede's ability to fill in the gaps, amplifying on his source for the story which he relates in more depth shortly afterwards.

*Nam et antea fama ad eum Christianae religionis peruenerat, utpote qui et uxorem habebat Christianam de gente Francorum regia, uocabulo Bercta, quam ea condicione a parentibus acceperat, ut ritum fidei ac religionis suae cum episcopo, quem ei adiutorem fidei dederant nomine Liudhardo, inuiolatum seruare licentiam haberet.* [Some knowledge about the Christian religion had already reached him (Æthelberht) because he had a Christian wife of the Frankish royal family whose name was Bertha. He had received her from her parents on condition that she should be allowed to practise her faith and religion unhindered, with a bishop named Liudhard whom they had provided for her to support her faith.]

Bertha and Liudhard are two highly interesting figures, despite the scanty attention Bede pays them in the *HE*. But what basis did he have for even the few statements he does make about them? Since he links them so clearly in this passage, it makes sense to

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<sup>256</sup> *HE* 1.25: "aeterna in caelis gaudia et regnum sine fine cum Deo uiuo et uero futurum sine ulla dubietate".

presume that in his evidence for these ‘Franks’ they were already connected. I will consider all of Bede’s references to the pair, directly or indirectly, here.

In 1.25, Bede notes, concerning Bertha, that: she was Æthelberht’s wife; she was a Christian; she was of the Frankish royal family; she was given in marriage *a parentibus*; on condition she could practise her faith; with her came a bishop, Liudhard. In 1.26, Bede says that she used to pray in St Martin’s church in Canterbury; in 2.5, he states that she was buried (he does not say when) in the chapel of St Martin, in the church of Ss Peter and Paul, Canterbury; and that Eadbald married her after Æthelberht’s death; but that, in 2.6, he gave her up on coming (back?) to Christianity.<sup>257</sup>

Bede does not therefore reveal much directly about either individual; but even so it is not easy to deduce whence he derived the little information he does provide. Most of his statements have been trusted heretofore based primarily on his authority, but how reliable is that? Bede’s description of Bertha as a Frankish royal is one element which is seen as being confirmed by an alternative source: Gregory of Tours.<sup>258</sup> Twice in his *Histories* Gregory mentions that Ingoberga’s daughter with King Charibert had married the son of a certain king of Kent.<sup>259</sup> Gregory of Tours does not, however, mention the name either of the daughter, or of the Kentish king, or of his son. The identification of this figure with Bertha is entirely the assumption of historians working with Bede’s account as a premise. Gregory said that a Frankish princess married a Kentish prince. Bede said that Æthelberht, king of Kent, and son of a king of Kent, was married to a Frankish princess. Therefore, historians assume they were the same person.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Some would prefer to see Eadbald’s marriage as having been to a different wife of Æthelberht, (for instance, J. Nelson, “Bertha (b. c.565, d. in or after 601)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/article/2269>, accessed 18 March 2013]), but there is simply no evidence for that. If the story of the marriage to the step-mother is to be taken seriously, then, despite how difficult it might seem, it needs to be taken ‘warts and all’. There is nothing inherently less probable about this tale than about Æthelbald of Wessex marrying Judith, his father’s widow, a century and a half later. Nor, self-evidently therefore, need there be anything essentially ‘pagan’ in the action, despite the protestations of Bede and modern historians: for instance, H. Richardson and G. Sayles, *Law and Legislation from Æthelberht to Magna Carta* (Edinburgh, 1966), p. 163; D. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (Rev.ed.: London, 2000), p. 29; F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Oxford, 1971) p. 112, n. 3. This incident and its many Frankish parallels are discussed in more detail in my article (in preparation), “Bishop Liudhard, Queen Bertha and ‘Frankish’ Kent”.

<sup>258</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, ed., B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH, SRM 1, 1 [henceforth Gregory, *Histories* with reference by book and chapter number].

<sup>259</sup> *Histories*, 4.26; 9.26.

<sup>260</sup> Although Bede probably did possess Gregory’s *Histories*, he is unlikely to have used them to deduce Bertha’s origins. The knowledge of that work which Bede evinces does not suggest that he had read it

We should pause before leaping to this conclusion, however. Æthelberht is not the only son of a Kentish king that surviving sources suggest married the daughter of a Frankish king. The texts associated with the *Mildrith Legend*, on what basis it is impossible to say, claim that Eadbald married the daughter of an unnamed Frankish king.<sup>261</sup> This is not to argue that the princess Gregory of Tours is speaking about is Ymme,<sup>262</sup> the wife the Legend assigns to Eadbald,<sup>263</sup> simply that Gregory's account is not specific enough to be a source proving that Bede's Bertha was the daughter of Charibert and Ingoberga. Moreover, it should also be clear that the evidential foundations for historians' assumptions about Bertha's origins are much weaker than might have been expected.<sup>264</sup> So what was Bede's basis for believing what he did about Bertha, and for that matter Liudhard?<sup>265</sup>

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thoroughly enough to make this kind of inference. Moreover Bede knew the name Bertha, which Gregory does not give, so it is more likely that the information he 'knew' about her came from a source which also gave her name.

<sup>261</sup> See, for instance, the description in the forged St Augustine's charter (*S* 6; Kelly, *Charters of St Augustine's*, 5) drawing on this tradition: *Emma, Francorum regis filia*.

<sup>262</sup> The various modern myths that, quite without evidence, historians have concocted around her, claiming her first as a daughter of Erchinoald (I. Wood, "Frankish Hegemony in England", in M. Carver, ed., *The Age of Sutton Hoo* (Woodbridge, 1992), 235-41, at 239 and 240), and more recently, though on no better basis, as that (future) mayor of the palace's sister (I. Wood, "Quentovic et le sud-est Britannique (VIe-IXe siècle)", in S. Lebecq, B. Bethouart, and L. Verslype, ed., *Quentovic: environnement, archéologie, histoire* (Lille, 2010), 165-75, at p. 168; and I. Wood, "The Continental Connections of Anglo-Saxon Courts from Æthelberht to Offa", *Settimane di Studio* 58 (2010), 443-80, at pp. 447-48 and 454), are discussed and dismissed in my article (in preparation) "Eadbald and Emma: the evolution of a modern myth".

<sup>263</sup> Although it is not impossible that the Legend's mention of Ymme retains some memory of Bertha. Certainly we should not be distracted by the apparent difference in the names. Ymme is simply a contraction, probably from the prefix of her original name, which would have been something like Irmin-X or Ermin-X (Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, pp. 61-63). Gregory the Great addresses Æthelberht's wife as Berta and Bede uses the form Bercta. But 'Bertha' may well also have been a contraction, only of a suffix not a prefix, with the original name really being X-Berga. Kelly (S. Kelly, "Æthelberht I (d. 616?)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/article/8902>, accessed 18 March 2013]) has already pointed in this direction, though her claim that the queen took the name Æthelburh is made on no good basis. Nonetheless, the underlying point confirms that an Erminberga would be quite plausible as an explanation for both the names – Ymme and Bertha – in the later stories. Perhaps it should again be emphasized that I am not arguing for their identity, simply that this should not be discounted so quickly once it is realized how flimsy is the basis on which historians' view of Æthelberht's queen has previously been built.

<sup>264</sup> There is no sign Bede knew the 'Mildrith Legend', but it is quite likely he had access to analogous texts or traditions.

<sup>265</sup> As with Bertha, it is initially difficult to see how Bede can have known that Liudhard was Frankish, or that he was a bishop, or arrived in Kent with Bertha. In fact, with Liudhard, it is even difficult to see how Bede knew he even existed. Plummer, 2.42, summarized the information from later sources about Liudhard, rightly discounting them all.

The only other surviving source for Bertha is Gregory the Great's letter to her from 22 June 601.<sup>266</sup> Some historians believe that Bede did not possess this letter, simply because he does not quote it. As has already been seen with other examples, and will be seen later with yet more, this is meaningless as evidence. The balance of Bede's work was already at risk of being seriously disturbed by the addition of the papal letters Nothelm had brought. Those he inserted had to fit his story and that to Bertha added nothing to the account.<sup>267</sup> Some information from the letter was, nonetheless, probably used elsewhere in the *HE*, since in 1.27 Bede notes that Laurence and Peter had been the messengers who returned to Rome in 601, bringing back to Kent letters from Gregory. This detail is only present in this letter.<sup>268</sup> Even with the papal letter, however, Bede would have learned little more about Bertha. Gregory's impressive epistle gives no clues about her origins.

This leaves only sources which have not survived. Bede gives a hint that he may have possessed at least one which might help solve many, if not all, of the problems. In 2.5 he states that Æthelberht was buried in the church of Ss Peter and Paul, in the chapel of St Martin, "*ubi et Berctae regina condita est*". There is only one way that Bede can have known that Bertha was buried there, and that was if her tomb had some form of epitaph. This epitaph must have included at least her name, but quite possibly there was more information: a mention of her as Æthelberht's wife and of her origins in the Frankish royal family, would seem quite plausible. In short, the very information Bede replays here.

It seems unlikely that Liudhard would be mentioned in Bertha's epitaph, but he may have had his own one. Bede makes no mention of his tomb in the chapel, but there certainly was one by the eleventh century,<sup>269</sup> and it seems difficult to envisage it being added later than the seventh.<sup>270</sup> Assuming this to be the case, then again there must have

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<sup>266</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 11.35.

<sup>267</sup> There are also perhaps hints, which there is no space to explore here, that Bede did not like Bertha and thus that the omission may have been on more personal grounds.

<sup>268</sup> It is also present in one version of the *Libellus Responsum*, but not the version Bede quoted (though Meyvaert, without strong grounds, believed he may have known it as well: P. Meyvaert, "Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsum* of Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury", in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes, ed., *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 15-33, at pp. 30-31).

<sup>269</sup> A. Thacker, "In Gregory's Shadow? The Pre-Conquest Cult of St Augustine", in Gameson, ed. *Augustine*, 374-90, at pp. 374-77.

<sup>270</sup> Whether he was genuinely buried there of course is quite another question.

been some form of epitaph,<sup>271</sup> which would be likely to have identified him as bishop, and plausibly both connected him with Bertha, and noted that he too came from Gaul.<sup>272</sup>

Even so, the epitaphs are unlikely to have explained Bede's reference in 1.26 to Bertha praying in the church of St Martin's. Unless this is to be viewed simply as rhetorical embellishment by Bede, it remains necessary to consider what type of source, which has not survived, but which makes sense as having existed, could have provided him with this information. One type of source which may very well have existed, although it does not today, is non-funerary ecclesiastical epigraphy: in other words 'foundation stones' or inscriptions with similar purposes. As will be seen later, there are other strong signs pointing to Bede's possession of the texts of certain of these 'foundation stones', including information relating to the early mission. He would, of course, frequently have seen the one at Jarrow which has survived.<sup>273</sup> St Martin's may well have had one too, which will be discussed further in considering the next chapter.

Suffice it to say for now, that such a source may be the most plausible basis for the association of St Martin's with Bertha and, indeed, is probably the most likely source behind Bede's extremely odd and unconvincing statement that the church was built while the Romans were still in Britain.<sup>274</sup>

In the face of the loss of whatever epigraphic material there might have been originally, certainty on this issue is not achievable. It does, however, seem likely that both the epitaphs and a (re)dedication inscription from St Martin's did originally exist. Therefore, it is more than plausible that Bede's information about Bertha and Liudhard here, and later, came from little more than their texts, the content of which Bede has

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<sup>271</sup> Liudhard's epitaph, would not, of course, have been strictly contemporary, since his tomb was apparently in Ss Peter and Paul's church, which was only dedicated by Laurence [1.33].

<sup>272</sup> We have separate evidence for Liudhard that Bede did not: the 'Liudhard medalet'. With its inscription, LEVDARDVS EPS, this confirms that he was a bishop as Bede mentions; but it says nothing about his origins. The workmanship has similarities to contemporary Frankish issues, but also to Visigothic ones: P. Grierson, "The Canterbury (St. Martin's) Hoard of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Coin-Ornaments", *British Numismatic Journal* 27 (1953), 39-51; M. Werner, "The Liudhard medalet" in *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (1994), 27-41; P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage I: the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 122 and 160-61. The coin alone could not prove that Liudhard was Frankish.

<sup>273</sup> E. Okasha, *Hand-list of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 85-86.

<sup>274</sup> Not, of course, that the existence of such a stone – from the late sixth or early seventh century – would make the basis for believing that the church was built by the Romans in the early fifth century any stronger.

creatively weaved into his narrative.<sup>275</sup> In short, Bede is again making the best of a very thin evidential basis: a letter, an epitaph and a church plaque. He does so well, however, that the story has stood the test of time and become very difficult not to treat as a premise. One of the oddities about Bertha is that she gets such limited attention in the *HE*, when it is clear that she must have played a significant role in events. The same is true to a lesser extent of Liudhard, who, rather than Augustine, was the real first bishop of Canterbury. As has been seen throughout this study, this is a product of Bede's lack of helpful sources for the early mission period, meaning that he could discover only the very barest facts, and several myths, about the early days of the Church in Kent. The analysis here has only confirmed this pattern.

*Post dies ergo uenit ad insulam rex, et residens sub diuo iussit Augustinum cum sociis ad suum ibidem aduenire colloquium. Cauerat enim ne in aliquam domum ad se introirent, uetere usus augurio, ne superuentu suo, siquid maleficae artis habuissent, eum superando deciperent. ... Fertur autem, quia adpropinquantes ciuitati more suo cum cruce sancta et imagine magni regis Domini nostri Iesu Christi hanc laetaniam consona uoce modularentur: "Deprecamur te, Domine, in omni misericordia tua, ut auferatur furor tuus et ira tua a ciuitate ista et de domo sancta tua, quoniam peccauimus. Alleluia."* [Some days afterwards the king came to the island and, sitting in the open air, commanded Augustine and his comrades to come thither to talk with him. He took care that they should not meet in any building, for he held the traditional superstition that, if they practised any magical art, they might deceive him and get the better of him as soon as they entered. ... {The mission party approach the king and his counsellors, processing and bearing a silver cross and a picture of Christ. Augustine is said to have preached. Æthelberht's sympathetic, but cautious reply is quoted. Finally, the king gives them a *mansio* in Canterbury and allows them to preach} ... It is related that as they approached the city in accordance with their custom carrying the holy cross and the image of our great King and Lord, Jesus Christ, they sang this litany in unison: "We beseech Thee, O Lord, in Thy great mercy that Thy wrath and anger may be turned away from this city and from Thy holy house, for we have sinned. Alleluia."]

The rest of the chapter is a single, coherent story – the meeting of Æthelberht with Augustine on Thanet, outside, and the discussion there, ending with the party's entry into Canterbury singing litanies. Unfortunately it is a story with no surviving source. Elements

<sup>275</sup> The phrase about the precondition for Bertha's marriage (the continued practice of her faith) need not be read as any more than a pious presumption by Bede – and perhaps an extrapolation from the remarkably similar story of Paulinus' arrival in Northumbria and Edwin's court with Æthelburh in 2.9.



that have already been discussed – especially the arrival on Thanet but also the number of Augustine’s companions – apparently came from the same source. The precise nature and origins of this source will be discussed later, but here some of its key characteristics will be set out. This needs to be done in some detail since other stories will soon emerge which share them.

One thing that should be emphasized about the tale is how anachronistic it is. Æthelberht had a Christian wife and patronized a bishop. He did not fear meeting Christians indoors. The idea is ridiculous.<sup>276</sup> Moreover the Gregorian letters suggest very clearly that Æthelberht had requested the ‘mission’, underlining the implausibility of this claim of initial suspicion on the king’s part. The attitude which gave rise to such a story is quite easy to understand, however: it was one which knew or cared little for England’s pagan past and which automatically assumed the barbarity of the people before the arrival of Christianity. This was of course Bede’s own attitude; but he would not have been the only one to hold it. In fact the longevity of the story is a sign of how consistent the attitude has been and continues to be. It is a testimony to Bede’s enduring influence that his secondary (at best) account, based on no known source, and quite unconfirmed by any other, should be preferred to all the archaeological evidence, the coins, and the evidence of trade, which points to the very detailed awareness of the Frankish world in late sixth-century Kent. The simple fact is that the absence of Christianity did not necessarily imply lack of all culture or awareness of a wider world, as archaeological evidence confirms.<sup>277</sup>

Another anachronistic element is the account of the party entering Canterbury singing the Rogation litanies. As has been pointed out in the past this passage is not from a contemporary source. The claim that Augustine and his party entered Canterbury singing the Rogation litany has been described as “another example of embroidery by Canterbury

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<sup>276</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 33 accepted the event but without giving it any real consideration. In contrast, some would somehow still seek to argue for its historicity: for instance, Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, p. 235, n. 169 – despite criticizing others for taking the story on trust. Gameson, “Augustine”, p. 18, also says the incident should be treated with circumspection, but goes on to accept it.

<sup>277</sup> The evidence of archaeology, pointing as it does to frequent commercial contacts between Kent and Gaul, makes it clear that Christians and Christianity were not some outlandishly foreign proposition to Æthelberht and his people. See for instance, S. Brookes, *Economics and Social Change in Anglo-Saxon Kent AD 400-900: Landscapes, Communities and Exchange* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 102-82. Every year more evidence emerges, and is now helpfully recorded and summarised in the online publication of the *Treasure Annual Reports* (available at [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)).

or Bede to enhance the tale of the first days of the mission of Augustine.”<sup>278</sup> For those who would like to see Bede as the great inventor, this passage would be a tempting one to claim as his own creation. Certainly the insertion or adaptation of a fitting liturgical or Biblical passage was not beyond Bede’s capacity and will.<sup>279</sup> This is just the sort of dramatic moment Bede enjoyed recreating and the idea of beginning the mission with prayers for the sins of the nation to bring about healing, which is precisely what the Rogation liturgies were all about,<sup>280</sup> is so perfectly suited to Bede’s ideological agenda that it is only right to be suspicious. Even so, the insertion of a caveat for this particular part of the story – *fertur* – strongly suggests that Bede had a source and was not simply adding his own fitting flight of rhetoric. Bede’s use of such caveats has already been discussed in detail, showing that they can refer to written sources, but imply that he retained some doubts about their credibility and reliability. They are not used to cover his own creative additions. It is therefore possible to conclude that Bede’s ‘facts’ here were based on a source, possibly written, but one which, for whatever reason, he did not completely trust. In fact this should be considered another characteristic of this story, since in two places Bede caveated his statements – the forty companions and the liturgical singing.<sup>281</sup>

Other characteristics are simpler and yet more obvious. The story concerns Augustine and the early ‘mission’ fathers. It has a hagiographic tone and probably derives from Canterbury and Albinus. As Kirby put it: “In the account of how Augustine first encountered King Æthelberht, Canterbury provided Bede with the sort of material which would fit well into a saint’s *Life*”.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> I. Wood, “The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English,” *Speculum* Vol. 69, No. 1 (1994), 1-17, at p. 4. In Bullough’s words: this “can hardly be regarded as historical, although editors and commentators have treated it as such.” D. Bullough, “Alcuin and the Kingdom of Heaven,” in U. Blumenthal, ed., *Carolingian Essays* (Washington, DC, 1983) 1-69, at p. 6, n. 14.

<sup>279</sup> In *HA*, c.14, Bede quotes from the psalm he says was being sung as Benedict Biscop lay on his deathbed. He emphasizes how fitting the text was for the moment. There is a strong argument, however, that he has actually created that suitability himself by giving the psalm from the wrong day: Wood, *Abbot Ceolfrid*, p. 11. Cuthbert’s *Letter on the Death of Bede* strikes me as probably guilty of many such convenient inventions.

<sup>280</sup> Y. Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul* (London, 2001), pp. 23-24.

<sup>281</sup> Whatever reservations Bede may have had, in the last analysis, this story must have been just too attractive, and frankly, helpful, for someone trying to create a narrative with such limited resources to leave out.

<sup>282</sup> D. Kirby, “Bede’s native sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*”, in D. Pelteret, ed., *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings* (New York and London, 2000), 55-81, at p. 69.

More generally it should be noted that this is an extended narrative, a single coherent story, albeit with a couple of elements dispersed elsewhere in the chapter. Almost certainly the tale came from a single source. One or two small details may plausibly have been integrated from elsewhere: for instance, the reference to the gift of the *mansio* in Canterbury, which is as likely to be Bede's own statement of what must have seemed to him the apparently obvious as derived from any specific source. Overall, however, given the narrative nature of the story it is not realistic to suggest that Bede has built his story up by collecting and compiling different elements from a variety of sources.

That is not to say that the *HE*'s phrasing need be that of the source itself of course. Bede was quite capable of paraphrasing his sources to present the narrative more rhetorically and in doing so he may well have embellished the story beyond his source. It is especially likely that the direct speech here, as indeed, elsewhere in the *HE* represents his own words.<sup>283</sup> In this Bede was merely following classical historiographical tradition, though there is no reason to suppose the content would have been very different in his source.

### **What Bede had**

Following this discussion it is possible to identify certain written sources Bede probably used in the writing of this chapter:

- Letter of Gregory the Great to Augustine's companions quoted in 1.23. [R: 6.50a. M: 6.53]
- Sources providing him with knowledge of Æthelberht's existence as king of Kent at the time of the mission.
  - Letter of Gregory the Great to King Æthelberht quoted in 1.32. [R: 11.37. M. 11.37]
  - Kentish kings' list
  - Kentish royal genealogy

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<sup>283</sup> As argued, for instance, by A. Thacker, "Bede and history", in DeGregorio, *Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 170-89, at pp. 171-72. That Bede did this as a general rule is evident from the way he altered speeches he transposed from the Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* to his own Prose Life of the saint.

- 'Hegemony' list
- Æthelberht's epitaph
- 'Hidage' document, of the 'tribute', rather than the 'charter' type.
- Tidal information from his 'scientific' contacts.
- 'Hegemony' list.
- Letters of Gregory the Great to Kings Theoderic and Theodeberht and/or to Queen Brunhilde. [R: 6.49, 6.57. M: 6.51, 6.60]
- Letter of Gregory the Great to Queen Bertha. [R: 11.35. M: 11.35]
- Bertha's epitaph.
- Liudhard's epitaph.
- Inscription from the '(Re)foundation stone' at St Martin's, Canterbury.

### **What Bede says that has not been possible to source**

In this chapter some information has been identified for which the source cannot be discovered and which is not simply Bede's deduction or rhetoric.

- Augustine arrived in Thanet.
- He had about 40 people with him.
- The king met him on the island – outside – because he was scared of being indoors.
- The group arrived at the meeting bearing a cross and an image of Christ.
- Following their preaching, the king said he was unwilling to convert himself instantly, but granted them leave to preach.
- And gave them a *mansio* in Canterbury.
- The party, taking possession of this dwelling, entered the city singing the Rogation litany.

The nature of this source will be discussed later, but for now it is possible to summarize its characteristics: it is a single coherent story about the early 'mission' fathers, which reads like it comes from a single source, probably hagiographic and almost certainly from Canterbury. Its content is not explainable by documents that have survived, nor is it easy

to envisage what series of sources could have been compiled by Bede to create the narrative he provides. Moreover the content in two places at least is evidently anachronistic, and Bede himself seems to have had his doubts about its reliability. At this stage it is not necessary to address the question of whether it is more probable that the source be written or oral; but later, once this tale has been compared with similar ones in *HE* Books 1 and 2, it will be necessary to return to the issue. At that stage, indeed, it will be quite clear that the evidence makes it difficult to view these tales as from anything other than a written source. At present though, and in conclusion, it is enough to say that in the second half of this chapter Bede builds his story round the reworking of a single narrative source, which has not survived.

**1.26 – “How in Kent he [Augustine] followed the manner of life and the teaching of the primitive church and how he received an episcopal see in the royal city”**

*At ubi datam sibi mansionem intrauerant,* [As soon as they had entered the dwelling-place allotted to them,]

Bede is referring here to his own comment in the previous chapter, 1.25, that Æthelberht gave the party a *mansio* in Canterbury. As seen above, this may well have been part of the same story which told him about the meeting on Thanet and the entry into the city, but equally it may simply have been Bede’s statement of the apparently obvious.

*coeperunt apostolicam primitiuae ecclesiae uitam imitari, orationibus uidelicet assiduis uigiliis ac ieiuniis seruiendo, uerbum uitae quibus poterant praedicando, cuncta huius mundi uelut aliena sprenendo, ea tantum, quae uictui necessaria uidebantur ab eis quos docebant accipiendo, secundum ea quae docebant ipsi per omnia uiuendo, et paratum ad patiendum aduersa quaeque uel etiam moriendum pro ea quam praedicabant ueritate animum habendo. Quid mora? Crediderunt nonnulli et baptizabantur, mirantes simplicitatem innocentis uitae ac dulcedinem doctrinae eorum caelestis.* [they began to imitate the way of life of the apostles and of the primitive church. They were constantly engaged in prayers, in vigils and fasts; they preached the word of life to as many as they could; they despised all worldly things as foreign to them; they accepted only the necessities of life from those whom they taught; in all things they practised what they preached and kept themselves prepared to endure adversities, even to the point of dying for the truths they proclaimed. To put it briefly, some marvelling at their simple and innocent way of life and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine, believed and were baptized.]

This account of how the mission lived in its early days is of course derived ultimately from the account of the early Church in Acts 4.32. For Bede the parallel was very apt. From the small group of disciples, surrounded by enemies, in the post-Ascension period in Jerusalem, the Church grew until, despite centuries of suffering, it had won over the entire known world. So too from the seeds planted by Augustine and his companions, the Church in England was to grow until every kingdom was Christian. At its most basic

level the *HE* is little more than an account of that process, so, such a parallel, continuously present in Bede's mind, was always likely to find its way into the work.<sup>284</sup>

Moreover the section allowed Bede to set out plainly one of the key elements of his agenda that serves as a driving force in the *HE*: the encouragement of ecclesiastical reform and more intensive pastoral care through pious and learned preachers.<sup>285</sup> Through a simple description of the heroic life of these early mission fathers courageously bringing light to a strange and barbaric land, Bede set out an implicit, but directed model of behaviour for those ecclesiastics of his own day whose lassitude he criticized in the *Letter to Ecgberht*, written in 734, probably at about the same time Bede was putting the finishing touches on the *HE*. So attached is he to the double analogy that he finds himself carried away rhetorically by his own passionate feelings, ending by claiming that the figures were "prepared to endure adversities, even to the point of dying for the truths they proclaimed". As Bede himself is to relate in Book 2, however, when adversity really did press, their reaction was in fact quite different.

Thus, Bede's exaggeration here is further evidence that this is a key section and a key chapter for understanding both his programme and the ways he attempts to convey it in the *HE*. As such, this passage and its context might seem on the face of it to be little more than the product of Bede's creative mind and a continuation of his 'career' in exegesis. There is a truth to this, but even though the apostolic picture of the 'mission' party's living arrangements, and the success emanating from them, undoubtedly suited Bede's agenda perfectly, he was not without a source for the basic statement – that they lived like the Christians of the early Church – even if he has certainly embellished and adapted his source to improve the narrative and better serve his 'agenda'.

Bede has deduced the basic fact, from which he feels justified in extrapolating to the account here, from a comment in one of Gregory the Great's letters, specifically the *Libellus Responsionum*. In that document, a version of which Bede includes in full in the following chapter, Gregory tells Augustine that he "ought to institute that manner of life

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<sup>284</sup> There is a discussion of Bede's broader treatment of this passage in the *Commentary on Acts* in G. Olsen, "Bede as Historian: the Evidence from his Observations on the Life of the First Christian Community at Jerusalem", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33.4 (Oct., 1982), pp. 519-30.

<sup>285</sup> A. Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', in P. Wormald, ed., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 130-53; DeGregorio, "Monasticism and Reform".

which our father followed in the earliest beginnings of the Church: none of them said that anything they possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.”<sup>286</sup>

This was Bede’s basis for the extended treatment he gives at the beginning of 1.26. Bede’s deductive logic is simple: Gregory had said it should be done by Augustine, therefore it was done by Augustine.<sup>287</sup> Bede’s historiographical method here was therefore precisely the same as that in 1.25, in his description of the Frankish ‘translators’. There too the basic information found in a papal letter – attesting simply to Gregory’s wishes – formed the basis for Bede’s account, which assumed their fulfilment.<sup>288</sup>

In other words, the reality is somewhere in the *via media* between two extremes. Bede did not create this material *ex nihilo* simply to serve his agenda-driven purposes; nor did he have a specific, separate source which provided direct evidence of Augustine and his party living in the way he described. Bede has deduced the basis of his story from one of his other sources, which we also possess and which he included separately; but he then massaged the account, in a perfectly understandable manner, in order to suit his agenda by telling a story in which the type of monastic and episcopal living he advocated led to triumphant success.<sup>289</sup>

*Erat autem prope ipsam ciuitatem ad orientem ecclesia in honorem sancti Martini*  
[There was nearby, on the east of the city, a church in honour of St Martin]

Bede’s knowledge of the existence and location of this church will have come directly, or indirectly, through Nothelm, from his Canterbury sources, that is, Albinus – unless of course one wished to argue that Bede had himself visited Kent.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> HE 1.27: “*hanc debet conuersionem instituere, quae initio nascentis ecclesiae fuit patribus nostris; in quibus nullus eorum ex his quae possidebant aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant eis omnia communia.*”

<sup>287</sup> Given that the *Libellus* was composed in 601, Bede’s ordering of events is slightly out of synch of course, but this is a small crime on his behalf. Other minor inconsistencies in Bede’s story will be discussed later. Again Bede was constrained in the construction of a cohesive narrative by his lack of sources.

<sup>288</sup> Thus Bede’s statements in both cases do not represent confirmation that Gregory’s intentions were in fact implemented.

<sup>289</sup> Bede makes very similar use of the *Libellus* in 4.27 to describe and praise the arrangements of Aidan as bishop; but there he is more direct, making specific reference to Gregory’s letter and even including the key quotation.

<sup>290</sup> There is no way to disprove such an idea, which is not inherently unlikely, but nor is there any evidence for it. Bede’s reference in 1.2 to the stakes laid in the Thames against Julius Caesar is sometimes taken as a sign that he had seen them himself: “*quarum uestigia sudium ibidem usque hodie uisuntur, et uidetur*



*antiquitus facta, dum adhuc Romani Brittaniam incolerent, in qua regina, quam Christianam fuisse praediximus, orare consuevit. In hac ergo et ipsi primo conuenire psallere orare missas facere praedicare et baptizare coeperunt, [built in ancient times, while the Romans were still in Britain, in which the queen who, as has been said, was a Christian, used to pray. In this church they first began to meet to chant the psalms, to pray, to say mass, to preach, and to baptize,]*

Historians and archaeologists now believe that it is very unlikely that the construction and dedication of St Martin's church can actually have dated to before 410.<sup>291</sup> In that sense, Bede cannot possibly have 'known' what he said – as it was not true. Certainly it shows that he had no 'Roman' source for his claim. As far as the present analysis of Bede's sources is concerned, it can be confidently concluded that he did not have trustworthy or primary evidence on which to base his claim.<sup>292</sup>

Nonetheless, Bede will have had *a* source from which he derived his statement, even though it cannot possibly have been a trustworthy one. What might this have been? The potential answer was already hinted at in the analysis of the previous chapter: a '(re)foundation stone'. Bede implies that St Martin's was restored and specifically states that was the case for the cathedral in 1.33.<sup>293</sup> In contrast, in the same chapter, he says that Ss Peter and Paul's was built *a fundamentis*. Bede clearly thought he had some reason for making these distinctions. Perhaps the most telling clue is in the note that it was

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*inspectantibus quod singular earum ad modum humani femoris grossae et circumfusae plumbo immobiliter erant in profundum fluminis infixae.*" ("The traces of these stakes are visible even today; each of them, on inspection, is seen to be about the thickness of a man's thigh encased in lead and fixed immovably in the river bed.") There is again no good reason to discount the idea Bede had travelled to London, but this 'evidence' is not beyond other, simpler, explanations.

<sup>291</sup> Collins and McClure, "Rome, Canterbury, and Wearmouth-Jarrow", pp. 38-39, go even further, claiming that neither the statement that the church was built before the Romans left, nor the dedication to St Martin "can be true."

<sup>292</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, pp. 36-37 spent considerable time attempting to show that Bede's claim could be correct; but this misses the point. Even if Bede were correct, which is unlikely, it was by chance, not because he possessed a reliable or primary source that provided him with this information. This is a good instance therefore of the practice that the current analysis is aimed at undermining: the treatment of Bede as a source, without considering his sources. C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London, 1981), pp. 170-74, takes this error to yet further extremes, arguing from Bede's statement to the conclusion that another church, St Pancras, was that which dated to Roman times. Such a deduction asserts confusion in the account, but presumes that the basic information is genuine, without making any attempt to address how the information that one Canterbury church dated from Roman times can possibly have been transmitted from the fifth century to the seventh.

<sup>293</sup> *HE* 1.33: *Augustinus ... recuperavit ... ecclesiam.*

Laurence, rather than Augustine, who had consecrated Ss Peter and Paul's.<sup>294</sup> The name of the cleric who had consecrated the church is precisely the sort of information one would expect to find in the text of an inscription on a dedication stone. A similar point might be made for the odd detail in 2.3 that it was Æthelberht who built St Paul's in London, not Sæberht, the king in whose kingdom London apparently lay; or that it was Eadbald who had built the church "dedicated to the holy Mother of God, which was afterwards consecrated by Archbishop Mellitus."<sup>295</sup> Bede's statement about the re-foundation of the church that was to become the cathedral points in the same direction: "Augustine ... restored a church, which, as he was informed, had been built in ancient times by the hands of Roman believers".<sup>296</sup> This implies not simply that Bede thought the church was built in Roman times, but that Bede thought Augustine thought the church had been built then. Again, the most credible and plausible source for all these statements about the various churches used by the early 'mission' fathers, would have been the texts of the inscriptions from their foundation stones.<sup>297</sup>

It is therefore probable that several at least of these early churches were furnished with 'foundation' stones,<sup>298</sup> and that where such details are included in the *HE*, Bede may well be drawing on the information from their inscriptions.<sup>299</sup> He would no doubt have received these from Albinus, via Nothelm. Such an inscription at St Martin's would be likely to include details such as the claim of re-foundation and the names of those who had (re)dedicated it. This would therefore explain both the origins of the idea that the church pre-dated the coming of Augustine – if the inscription referred to rededication –

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<sup>294</sup> *HE* 1.33.

<sup>295</sup> *HE* 2.6.

<sup>296</sup> *HE* 1.33: "*Augustinus ... recuperavit ... ecclesiam quam inibi antiquo Romanorum fidelium opere factam fuisse didicerat*".

<sup>297</sup> Such an inscription, as was the case in the Jarrow inscription, can be presumed to have included the name of the king who had patronized the building work, as well as that of the ecclesiastic who consecrated it. In cases of restoration the inscription may well have referred to that in terms. As will be seen in 2.3, some inscriptions may also have contained dating clauses – as, of course, the Jarrow inscription does.

<sup>298</sup> Although, it is arguable that the inscriptions on them need not have been strictly contemporary.

<sup>299</sup> There is, in fact, the remains of what Okasha calls, "possibly [a] dedication formula", at St Martin's and which may date to the seventh-century. Most of the text has disappeared apart from what appear to be the closing words, *OMNIUM SANCTORUM* ("of all the saints"). Whether or not this text is the remains of an original inscription placed there by Queen Bertha, its survival is strong evidence that such inscriptions both existed and were available to Bede in writing the *HE*. Okasha, *Hand-list*, pp. 60-61.

and Bertha's association with it.<sup>300</sup> This latter point is also supported by the fact that, unlike the other churches Bede mentions, the king is not assigned the credit for giving, building or restoring St Martin's. It is associated solely with Bertha and the early mission. Bede did not go out of his way to emphasize her role in the *HE*; indeed, he seems to have downplayed it. If she were the patroness of the church, then the inscription, while mentioning Augustine, may well have been in her name, thus explaining why she is mentioned here and Æthelberht is not. Since Liudhard is not mentioned in this section of the *HE*, it seems probable that the inscription did not make mention of him either and is more likely therefore to date to Augustine's time.<sup>301</sup>

From these very basic foundations then, Bede adapted such information as the inscriptions provided into a form fit for insertion within a narrative history. Notice of refoundation on an inscription could mean only one thing as far as Bede's image of the history of Kent in the fifth and sixth centuries was concerned: an original construction by the Romans, before their departure, followed by nearly two centuries of neglect or worse under pagan masters, before the arrival of the mission, and to a lesser extent that of Bertha and Liudhard, brought about the opportunity for restoration and reuse. Given his premises, it was not an unreasonable deduction from the bare bones of the inscription, even if modern historians are now able to conclude that he was very likely to have been wrong. It was an easy and understandable step to deduce from a dedication, which noted that a church had been restored, that the original church had been built by the (Christian) Romans. Nor is it in fact unlikely that the party did use old Roman buildings, possibly including churches, for their own churches. But that is not what is at issue here. The point is that Bede's evidence was not good enough for us to treat him as a source for that particular conclusion or to build further deductions upon his statement.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> With Bertha as dedicator, the choice of St Martin would of course make perfect sense: see for instance, I. Wood, "Augustine and Gaul", p. 72. More speculatively, one might wonder whether the lands and possessions pertaining to the church might perhaps have been given to the new queen as a 'morning gift'.

<sup>301</sup> Liudhard's historical association with St Martin's, however, and implicitly therefore Bertha's too, are implied by the discovery of the Liudhard medalet in the environs of the church.

<sup>302</sup> One relatively extreme example of such a deduction is the claim by R. Meens, "Questioning Ritual Purity: the influence of Gregory the Great's answers to Augustine's queries about childbirth, menstruation and sexuality", in Gameson, *St Augustine*, 174-86, at p. 174, that Bede's statement showed that there were people in Canterbury in c.600 who "still remembered that these buildings were, or had been churches."

In the same way Bede's description of the functions carried out by the party in the church – singing psalms, praying, saying Mass, preaching, and baptizing – did not derive from any specific, separate source. They were simply Bede's statement of the obvious, premised on his knowledge of Augustine's use of the church, thanks to the text of the inscription on its (re)foundation stone.

*donec rege ad fidem conuerso maiorem praedicandi per omnia et ecclesias fabricandi uel restaurandi licentiam acciperent.* [until when the king had been converted to the faith, they received greater liberty to preach everywhere and to build or restore churches.]

The question of what lay behind Bede's very vague statements in this chapter relating to Æthelberht's conversion will be discussed shortly, but first it is necessary to consider his claim here about its consequence. At first sight it may seem natural enough: the king, having been converted, permitted the mission fathers to preach and build churches. But on examination it is easy to see how flawed such a statement is, pointing to Bede's lack of good sources, which compelled him to construct his own narrative by connecting the few things he did have sources for using things which seemed only natural and obvious.

First of all, Bede's statement here is in stark contradiction to the very similar one he made in 1.25. It seems to have slipped Bede's mind that, according to his own narrative, at the end of the king's initial meeting with the mission party Æthelberht had already given them permission "to win all you can to your faith and religion by your preaching."<sup>303</sup> Now he is saying that such a licence was only obtained after the king was baptized. What this, and other similar inconsistencies, show is that Bede was not working from any early sources, which could provide him with detailed information about events. Rather he was working instead in a near-void and having to fill this by using platitudes in order to create a layered narrative expounding the success of the mission in as credible terms as possible. The phrasing here is generic enough to pass anything but close inspection and the story seems reasonable: but it is Bede's story. Bede has no extra source for his claim. He is simply saying what he felt was obvious: it made sense for the king to offer more active support only once he had been converted.

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<sup>303</sup> HE 1.25: "*nec prohibemus quin omnes quos potestis fidei uestrae religionis praedicando sociatis.*"

Something very similar might be said about the actual content of what Bede says Æthelberht granted after his conversion: permission to build or rebuild churches. He possessed no original evidence beyond that which was examined in the last section for the rebuilding of churches, so this should not, for instance, be taken as independent evidence for the continuity of a Christian community in Canterbury or Kent.<sup>304</sup> Perhaps more importantly, however, the very idea that Æthelberht needed simply to give the party “permission” (*licentia*), whether to build or to rebuild churches, is ridiculous. The party needed a lot more than simple permission to build churches. The flippancy of the phrase reveals a source greatly distanced from events.

The reality is that the conversion to Christianity required a massive redistribution of resources on the king’s behalf simply to patronize the churches. Bede felt he had evidence that six churches were built or refurbished under Æthelberht. Four were in Canterbury: St Martin’s [1.26], holy Saviour’s, the cathedral [1.33], Ss Peter and Paul [1.33], and the church of the Four Martyrs [2.7].<sup>305</sup> Then there was one in London, St Paul’s [2.4], and one at Rochester, St Andrew’s [2.4]. Six cases is already a sizeable number, yet in every case each newly endowed church had a variety of requirements. They needed empty land or an old building to locate the church; people to staff them, not simply those to train as clerics, but also those to cook and clean and provide for the monks; land as endowment,<sup>306</sup> to provide the community with food, clothing, and other material resources;<sup>307</sup> and building work, which again needed people, money, raw materials and other ancillary resources, such as those required for transportation and construction.<sup>308</sup> Doing this once would have been no small feat – especially for the kind of kingdom historians, following Bede, have generally estimated Kent in c.600 to have been. This apparently has to be envisaged happening, however, not once, but six times,

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<sup>304</sup> For example, Brooks, *Early Church*, pp. 17-20. Not that this is an impossible idea in itself, or one for which there is not separate evidence. It is just that Bede’s statement is not more.

<sup>305</sup> Bede is not clear under whose patronage this last example was built; it might conceivably have been Eadbald’s.

<sup>306</sup> Brooks, *Early Church*, pp. 100-107, has a good discussion of the probable extent of some of these early donations. Bede makes only the most generic statements about Canterbury’s endowment and there is no reason to believe he was aware of any details concerning them.

<sup>307</sup> Gregory the Great, *Letters*, 6.44, to Bona, abbot, from July 596, gives a good example of what Augustine and his companions would have expected even a small religious house to receive as an endowment, necessary for its sustainability.

<sup>308</sup> To some extent at least, the ‘people’ must surely have, as it were, ‘come with the land’.

including probably at least once before Augustine actually arrived. Permission was not enough. Churches could neither be built nor rebuilt without massive royal patronage and Bede's sources evidently gave him no indication at all of the significant shift – economically and indeed visually – that took place in Æthelberht's reign.

In short, Bede's generic statements here and elsewhere on such topics reflect his own assumptions, not his possession of any early sources.<sup>309</sup>

*At ubi ipse etiam inter alios delectatus uita mundissima sanctorum et promissis eorum suauissimis, quae uera esse miraculorum quoque multorum ostensione firmauerant, credens baptizatus est, coepere plures cotidie ad audiendum Verbum confluere, ac relicto gentilitatis ritu unitati se sanctae Christi ecclesiae credendo sociare.* [At last the king, as well as others, believed and was baptized, being attracted by the pure life of the saints and by their most precious promises, whose truth they confirmed by performing many miracles. Every day more and more began to flock to hear the Word, to forsake their heathen worship, and, through faith, to join the unity of Christ's holy Church.]

This eloquent passage is almost pure deduction, or if one prefers, rhetorical creation, on Bede's behalf. He 'knew' that Æthelberht had been baptized at some stage by the 'mission' fathers and that is really all that he is saying here. Of course, whatever the nature of the source from which he had taken the account of the meeting on Thanet in 1.25, it is almost inevitable that this must eventually have mentioned Æthelberht's conversion. It may well be therefore that this source at least influenced Bede's account. If it did, then once again it is clear that the source contained no trustworthy contemporary details given how generic Bede's account is here.

To be perfectly just to Bede, he did have sources which told him that miracles had been worked through Augustine: Bede quoted from Gregory's letter to the bishop urging caution against the temptations of pride after performing miracles [1.31]; he possessed a

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<sup>309</sup> Incidentally, in all this one is struck by how similar Bede's account of the conversion of Kent is, in its main framing, to the account of Edwin and Paulinus. That example is suffused with much more of what might be termed 'folkloric-style' material, but the basic steps are the same, even down to the parallel between the initial roles of Liudhard and Paulinus. Apparently Bede's framework for Northumbria – supported by more plentiful, though not necessarily more trustworthy evidence – has provided the basic premise for how such conversion narratives should proceed. We may rightly criticize this approach, but it is not greatly different from the modern historical use of anthropological analogies to reconstruct the world of early Anglo-Saxon England: for example, Higham, *Convert Kings*, pp. 7-52, or Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, esp. pp. 1-42.

hagiographic story of Augustine's cure of a blind man [2.2]; and he included Augustine's epitaph, which made direct reference to his miracles [2.3].<sup>310</sup> Nonetheless, Bede's statement here about this as the *cause* of Æthelberht's conversion is entirely his own deduction. As is the wider claim Bede makes here about the growth of the Church among the Kentish population.<sup>311</sup>

*Quorum fidei et conuersioni ita congratulatus esse rex perhibetur, ut nullum tamen cogeret ad Christianismum, sed tantummodo credentes artiori dilectione, quasi conciuēs sibi regni caelestis, amplecteretur. Didicerat enim a doctoribus auctoribusque suae salutis seruitium Christi uoluntarium, non coacticiū esse debere.* [It is related that the king, although he rejoiced at their conversion and their faith, compelled no one to accept Christianity; though nonetheless he showed greater affection for believers since they were his fellow citizens in the kingdom of heaven. But he had learned from his teachers and guides in the way of salvation that the service of Christ was voluntary and ought not to be compulsory.]

This passage reads very much as if it were Bede's own view of the next stage informed by Bede's own idea of how conversion should be carried out. Plummer and Wallace-Hadrill both noted the parallel with a comment in Bede's *Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah*.<sup>312</sup> Others have already spoken of several parallels between this commentary and the *HE*, and in considering the last chapter a new one was noted. Taken together these connections, which are as much about a shared approach as shared language, support the arguments for their composition at a similar period.

The view expressed here certainly was Bede's therefore, but the use of the word *perhibetur* probably points towards a specific source, which served as the ultimate basis for Bede's claim. Bede's use of such terms has already been discussed at length above. Given that discussion, and what was said in considering the last section, it seems plausible that the account here is, at some level, a continuation of the hagiographic story

<sup>310</sup> As will be seen in considering 1.29, Bede may well also have possessed Gregory's Letter 11.48 to Queen Brunhilde, from 22 June 601, which refers to "the nature and the greatness of the miracles that our Redeemer has produced in the conversion of the English race."

<sup>311</sup> Once more, it should be emphasized that this does not mean it was not true, simply that Bede's account is not based on primary sources providing contemporary testimony to the events.

<sup>312</sup> *Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah*, 7.13 ed. Hurst (CCSL 119A: 1969), p. 312, ll. 996-1001). Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 37: "the passage sounds more in conformity with Bede's own thinking ... than with what may actually have occurred." See also, Plummer, 2.44, who noted that Bede contradicts this statement later, saying, in 2.5, that some had converted out of fear of the king.

of the missionaries that lay behind the 1.25 account of the meeting on Thanet, the entry into Canterbury and potentially the mention of Æthelberht's conversion earlier in 1.26. The type of generic phrasing used in this section would be consistent with the anachronistic treatment seen in the earlier example. Such a narrative source having noted the king's baptism might well be expected to describe some of its consequences, including potentially the claim that he did not compel others to convert. This can be no more than a plausible hypothesis, of course, not amounting even to probability; nonetheless it is difficult to envisage from what other source the information could have been *perhibetur*. This section, and much of the second half of the chapter, could thus have consisted of Bede's rhetorical development of a very generic mention in an anachronistic source, of Canterbury origins, which he had already drawn from, but about which he clearly retained some reservations.

*Nec distulit quin etiam ipsis doctoribus suis locum sedis eorum gradui congruum in Doruuerni metropoli sua donaret, simul et necessarias in diuersis speciebus possessiones conferret.* [it was not long before he granted his teachers a place to settle in, suitable to their rank, in Canterbury, his chief city, and gave them possessions of various kinds for their needs.]

Here again there is an apparent contradiction with the earlier account in 1.25, recalled at the beginning of this chapter: there Æthelberht had already given the party a *mansio*. The present instance, however, is probably not a contradiction, *per se*, but a separate layer in Bede's vision of how a conversion would be expected to progress. First the party receive necessary support, almost as hospitality, and no obstacles in the way of their work. Then, on the king's conversion, they receive active support and patronage – amounting to a larger endowment in this case. Implicitly and somewhat confusingly, Bede actually seems to be referring in this place to the gift of land for a cathedral – a seat for the bishop. In 1.33, Bede states that he has already mentioned that Augustine received a seat for his bishopric; the recurrence of the word – *sedis* here, and *sedem* in 1.33 – suggests this note is what he is referring back to in the later chapter. This is supported by the use of the descriptive phrase *gradui congruum* – suitable to their rank. What rank could Bede mean? The beginning of the next chapter 1.27 goes on to explain, without actually saying that that is what he is doing. Colgrave's translation is therefore misleading and it should



perhaps be better translated “he granted his teachers a place for their [episcopal] see/seat”.

In terms of the basis on which Bede made the statement, there is no reason to look for or expect a specific written source. Bede ‘knew’ that Augustine had been given land and property for an episcopal seat as Canterbury ‘cathedral’ existed in his own day. This stage, after Bede had related the king’s conversion would have seemed the most plausible for such a grant.

The reference to the gift of “possessions of various kinds for their needs” is mere platitude and does not require a source. He made a similar sort of statement in 1.25, noting that the king promised to “provide what is necessary for your support”,<sup>313</sup> and that he “granted them provisions”.<sup>314</sup> Bede knows that new churches are given possessions, land, dues, exemptions, etc., and of course Canterbury had plenty by Bede’s time. No doubt Canterbury claimed that many of these went back to Augustine and Æthelberht’s time, on whatever grounds,<sup>315</sup> and Albinus may in general terms have been Bede’s source for that. But there is no specificity here. Brooks has made a strong case for the substantial endowment of the Canterbury communities from a very early period, based to an extent on the very absence of charter support for these holdings.<sup>316</sup> His argument is compelling, and, indeed, is implicit confirmation that Bede had no primary source basis for his statement.

As with most of this chapter, therefore, this is a generic account of the apparently obvious, lacking specific details and structured within a teleological narrative framework. There are no grounds for seeing any early, primary evidence lying behind the statements in this section. This does not make it untrue, of course. As presumptions go Bede’s are good ones, but they are not grounded in any sources and so the account cannot itself be treated as a source.

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<sup>313</sup> HE 1.25: “*quae uictui sunt uestro necessaria, ministrare curamus*”.

<sup>314</sup> HE 1.25: *cum administratione uictus*.

<sup>315</sup> Forged diplomas were, of course, already a fact of life by c.700 in England, as the *Life of Wilfrid*, c.53, attests: whatever the accuracy of Stephanus’ specific claims, it is clear from his account that the idea that such existed was not controversial. There is no sign here, however, that Bede is working from any land documents, such as he did on occasion, as was discussed earlier.

<sup>316</sup> Brooks, *Early Church*, pp. 100-107.

## What Bede had

In terms of written sources Bede therefore had:

- *Libellus Responsionum* [*Libellus*], included in 1.27. [R: 11.56a. M: 8.37]
- Bible: Acts of the Apostles
- Inscription from the (Re)foundation stone at St Martin's
- Letter of Gregory the Great to Augustine on miracles, quoted in 1.31. [R: 11.36. M: 11.36]
- Augustine's epitaph, quoted at 2.3

'Orally' he also had basic Canterbury-sourced knowledge about the location of the churches in the city.

## What Bede says that has not been possible to source

The only detail that has not been able to be explained fully is the claim that the king did not compel anyone else to convert, which is caveated with *perhibetur*. As noted above, however, this would make sense as a continuation of the narrative hagiographic material seen in 1.25, which would have been likely to include mention of Æthelberht's conversion and its consequences; the nature of that source remains to be discovered.

**1.27 – “How he [Augustine] was made bishop and how he sent to inform Pope Gregory about what had been done in Britain, at the same time asking questions and receiving replies on important matters”. These questions and answers took the form of the *Libellus Responsionum*, which Bede inserts in this chapter**

*Interea* [Meanwhile]

In assessing Bede’s sources, it is almost always worth pausing at the word *interea*, since it instantly signals Bede’s limited information, especially as regards dating, about what follows, and often about what has gone before. Other phrases have similar import.<sup>317</sup> Here there is even more reason than normal to dwell on the word, since as well as signalling Bede’s ignorance, it is also a tacit admission that his broader narrative is, at this point, not completely consistent. In other words he is about to contradict, or at least confuse, what has just gone before.

In the last two chapters, 1.25 and 1.26, Bede has been telling a story which reads like that of the entire mission: it has a beginning a middle and an ‘end’. Augustine arrived on Thanet; Æthelberht met them, gave them freedom and support, including a place to live in Canterbury, but did not initially convert; then, impressed by their way of life and miracles, he, together with many of his people, was baptized, following which he patronized the Church he had joined and looked favourably on others who converted.

Thus within 1.25 and 1.26, perhaps influenced by a narrative, Canterbury, source discussed above, Bede has ostensibly wrapped up the entire story of the mission and the conversion. Nonetheless, as Bede well knew, there was a problem with this simple, coherent and apparently complete version of events. Something significant was missing: Augustine’s episcopal consecration. As was argued in considering 1.26, Bede claimed there that Æthelberht had given Augustine an ‘episcopal seat’; but there was no room in that neat little narrative for him to have become bishop. It is that necessary, but seemingly unconnected, story, which Bede tells here at the beginning of 1.27.

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<sup>317</sup> For instance, *eo tempore*, which as Jones, *Saints*, p. 163, noted: “is a vague reference, suggesting Bede’s lack of more precise data”.

In essence, the account which follows does not so much contradict that in 1.25-26 as ignore it.<sup>318</sup> They are not easily reconciled. Bede, therefore, has to ‘crowbar’ the episcopal consecration on to the other account he has given. The use of *interea* shows that he was aware of the inconsistency and was making an attempt to side-step the difficulty of combining the stories, avoiding the question of why Æthelberht had given Augustine an episcopal seat before he had been made bishop.

*uir Domini Augustinus uenit Arelas, et ab archiepiscopo eiusdem ciuitatis Aetherio, iuxta quod iussa sancti patris Gregorii acceperant, archiepiscopus genti Anglorum ordinatus est; reuersusque Brittaniam* [Augustine, the man of God, went to Arles and, in accordance with the command of the holy father Gregory, was consecrated archbishop of the English by Etherius, the archbishop of that city. He returned to Britain]

This deceptively straightforward passage raises some very difficult questions about what Bede thought he knew and why. Bede makes several claims here, some of which can be shown to be in error. Among the latter, Bede’s reasons for thinking Etherius’ diocese was Arles and that he, and Augustine, were archbishops,<sup>319</sup> have already been dealt with in considering 1.24. But why did Bede believe that Augustine returned to Gaul for his episcopal consecration – something modern historians consider highly unlikely – and why did he think this occurred at the hands of Etherius, at Arles?<sup>320</sup>

At first sight, the idea that Bede might assume Arles was the place of consecration could appear natural enough. As Wallace-Hadrill put it: “Arles seemed the natural place to go, in view of the letter in the following chapter”.<sup>321</sup> There were lots of additional grounds for which Arles would have had a good claim. Arles had been the major ecclesiastical city in Gaul, with its bishop the papal vicar since the early sixth century. Britain had been part of the Prefecture of the Gauls and Arles was the metropolitan see.

<sup>318</sup> This ‘confusion’ may also be part of the ‘ripple effect’ of Bede’s addition of the Gregorian letters, and his deductions based on them, to his ‘original’ account of the mission in a putative draft version of the *HE*.

<sup>319</sup> The description of the extent of Augustine’s episcopate as over the *gens Anglorum* should also be considered a Bedan assumption. Gregory himself, in both the *Libellus Responsum*, quoted later in 1.27 and in his letter quoted in 1.29, seems to have intended Augustine’s authority to be broader yet, including all the bishops in Britain.

<sup>320</sup> It might also be asked why Bede states with such confidence that Augustine was consecrated bishop with Gregory’s sanction.

<sup>321</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 32.

Bede himself included a Gregorian letter to Virgilius of Arles in 1.28, suggesting that Augustine might visit him, and later in 1.27, in the *Libellus*, ‘Question’ 7, Gregory emphasized the ancient authority of Arles and says that if Augustine went to Gaul he must [*debet*] consult [*agere*] with the bishop of Arles. Colgrave translated that as “consult with”, but perhaps Bede took the phrase to mean “deal with” and thus inferred that any dealings with Gaul should primarily be through Arles. Therefore this might seem to Bede the natural place for Augustine to go for consecration. Bede in fact focuses the connection of Augustine with Gaul on Arles: two letters (in 1.24 and 1.28); a mention in the *Libellus*; and his episcopal consecration. In that context it might be considered telling that here Bede does not start by saying that Augustine was consecrated by Etherius, but that he went to Arles (*uir Domini Augustinus uenit Arelas*).

Nonetheless, if Bede was making an assumption, Arles was not quite as obvious a location as the points in the previous paragraph might alone suggest. Arles may have been the premier Gallic see in the late sixth century, but long before Bede’s time Lyons had usurped that position.<sup>322</sup> Arles remained a metropolitan, but could no longer be presumed to be the natural leader of the Frankish church. Nor is there any reason to believe that Bede had accurate information about the historic situation. Moreover, if Bede’s claim was his own deduction, it was not one based on those instances of recent English episcopal consecration in Gaul of which Bede was aware. It was not at Arles that Bede says either Wilfrid or Berhtwald were consecrated. Berhtwald was consecrated at Lyons,<sup>323</sup> and Wilfrid at Compiègne, by Agilbert of Paris.<sup>324</sup> Moreover, if Bede was going to make any assumption about where Augustine had been consecrated, then, without any other evidence, Rome would surely have been the obvious choice. The *Whitby Life* stated that Gregory consecrated Augustine in Rome before he left as a matter of simple fact.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> See for instance, R. Mathisen, “Syagrius of Autun, Virgilius of Arles, and Gregory of Rome: Factionalism, Forgery, and Local Authority at the end of the Sixth Century”, in C. De Dreuille, ed., *L’Église et la Mission au VIe Siècle: la mission d’Augustin de Cantorbéry et les églises de Gaule sous l’impulsion de Grégoire le Grand* (Paris, 2000), pp. 260-90, at p. 288.

<sup>323</sup> *HE* 5.8. Or he was at least consecrated by the archbishop of Lyons – called by Bede the metropolitan bishop of the Gauls. The *LP*, however, has a different story, claiming he was consecrated by the pope, in Rome.

<sup>324</sup> *HE* 3.28. Bede also had reason to believe that Wine had been consecrated in Gaul (*HE* 3.7), but he does not seem to have known where.

<sup>325</sup> *Whitby Life*, c. 11.

In this context, it can be seen that it was not so obvious to Bede, as some imagine, that Augustine should have been consecrated in Arles, that he could state it as fact, without any supporting source. In reality, this conclusion raises a wider question too infrequently addressed by modern scholarship: why should Bede have made such a bald claim at all, if as historians often suggest, this was merely his deduction, or invention.<sup>326</sup> This cannot be said to be his normal practice, at least as seen so far in this study. Bede does infer motivation and happily adds basic narrative connections or statements of the apparently obvious. But he does not invent wholesale such a careful set of details, especially about places, names and dates, without some evidence as a basis. That is not to say that no deductions have gone into his statement, but rather that the probability must be that, at the most basic level, there was some source behind Bede's assertion of consecration at Arles by Etherius.

The most likely candidate for such a source was hinted at above in considering 1.24: the Canterbury episcopal list. Based on the *HE*, it is possible to see that this catalogue apparently included assertions about the place of consecration of each bishop, and the name of the prelate who had consecrated them. Bede claims that Augustine was consecrated in Arles by Etherius;<sup>327</sup> Laurence, he says, was consecrated by Augustine, and though he did not give a location, Canterbury is implied.<sup>328</sup> There was no information of course about Mellitus and Justus for Canterbury since having already been bishops they did not need separate consecration when they succeeded to the metropolitan see. Honorius, Bede states, was consecrated in Lincoln by Paulinus.<sup>329</sup> In 3.20, Bede mentions that Deusdedit was consecrated by Ithamar of Rochester in Canterbury. The pattern continues after the 660s. In 4.1, Theodore is said to have been consecrated by Pope Vitalian, with Rome clearly assumed; and Berhtwald was consecrated by Godwin, with his see of Lyons the implied location. Even Tatwine's consecration in 10 June 731, by bishops Daniel, Ealdwine and Ealdwulf, is given a specific location: Canterbury.

Some of these cases may not perhaps have come from the Canterbury episcopal list. It

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<sup>326</sup> For instance, Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 31, described this incident as: "an instance of his ability to make deductions from the material available." It is a shame that such conclusions, when Bede can be shown to be in error, have not previously been extrapolated sufficiently widely to cover those statements in the *HE* for which he cannot possibly have had a source, or at least a reliable, primary one.

<sup>327</sup> *HE* 1.27.

<sup>328</sup> *HE* 2.4.

<sup>329</sup> *HE* 2.16 and 2.18.

is very hard to imagine that this was the case for Tatwine for example. Theodore's too could be put down to different sources, though Berhtwald's would be more difficult to account for. Other oddities within the list, however, argue for the information coming from such a central catalogue. The mention of Lincoln as the location for Honorius' consecration, for instance, is so random that it cannot possibly have been a deduction. Equally, there is something strange about Bede feeling the need to note that Ithamar came to Canterbury to consecrate Deusdedit. The fact that Bede's presentation of the location of the consecration of Canterbury bishops, and the name of the consecrator, is so consistent suggests that wherever Bede obtained his knowledge about Honorius, Paulinus and Lincoln, he also gained his information about the other consecrations.<sup>330</sup>

The source which would have provided him with his comprehensive overview of the various bishops would have been the Canterbury episcopal list, provided no doubt by Albinus, via Nothelm. It is easy to envisage such a list including notes about the consecrator and location of consecration. Of course, one might wish to argue that Augustine's consecration was an outlier; but the fact that Bede gives both the name of the consecrator and the location would fit perfectly with the rest of the list, which Bede evidently obtained from Canterbury.

As noted in 1.24, therefore, the Canterbury episcopal list would also have been the reason Bede mistakenly believed Etherius was bishop of Arles. If the list stated that Augustine was consecrated at Arles by Etherius then he would automatically assume that Etherius was the bishop of that see.<sup>331</sup> Such a deduction would indeed have been a natural one and, based on this, Bede stated that the Etherius, named in the letter quoted in 1.24 – which does not mention his see – was bishop of Arles. In reality Etherius was bishop of Lyons, not Arles; but Bede simply did not have good enough information about the world c.600 to be able to avoid the trap in his source.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> It is worth noting that Bede does not provide anywhere near as comprehensive information about the consecrations of bishops to other sees, even Rochester.

<sup>331</sup> Although natural, such an inference is not inevitable. It is plausible that Augustine might have been consecrated in Arles, but by the bishop of Lyons. Wilfrid was apparently consecrated in the diocese of Soissons by the bishop of Paris: *HE* 3.28. Moreover, it hardly needs to be emphasized that the information in an episcopal list available to Bede in the early eighth century need not be considered unassailable evidence for what actually happened at the end of the sixth century.

<sup>332</sup> This also led him to state, in 1.28, that Vergilius, the bishop of Arles, whose letter from Gregory he inserted in 1.28 was the successor to Etherius. This was pure deduction requiring no further evidence.

Having apparently resolved the question of Bede's basis for the claim about the place of Augustine's consecration, and the name of his consecrator, it is still necessary to deal with the issue of why Bede believed Augustine returned from Kent to Gaul to be consecrated. Modern historians tend to assume that Augustine received his consecration on the way to Kent. The main reason for this is that a letter from Gregory to Brunhilde written in September 597 refers to Augustine as "our brother and fellow bishop".<sup>333</sup> If Augustine arrived in 597, as scholars tend to assume,<sup>334</sup> then, so the argument goes, there seems no realistic opportunity – or reason – for him to have returned to Gaul for consecration in time for the pope to have heard about it by September. This hypothesis is supported by the natural, though not the only necessary, interpretation of Gregory's letter to Eulogius of Alexandria from July 598, which appears to place Augustine's consecration chronologically prior to his arrival in England.<sup>335</sup>

Bede did not possess either letter, however, so he made his deduction about Augustine's return for consecration based on the more limited evidence available to him.<sup>336</sup> Indeed, on considering the evidence Bede had access to, it is no surprise he came to this conclusion. Bede had at least one and probably several of the letters Gregory wrote to smooth the mission's journey through Gaul in 596. We have almost certainly more than he did, but they still all refer to Augustine simply as "monk", or "servant of God". None speak of him as bishop; nor do any make the slightest reference to, or request for, his episcopal consecration while going through Gaul. There was thus no basis for Bede to conclude that Gregory had asked for Augustine to be consecrated on the way.

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<sup>333</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 8.4.

<sup>334</sup> The assumption follows the figure given in Bede's *recapitulatio* from 5.24. Logistically speaking, spring 597 is the most likely date, but autumn 596 is not impossible. Moreover, it should be emphasized that even if 597 was the right year, the *recapitulatio* is not evidence for it. The year given there represents no more than Bede's own deduction, based on less evidence than we possess. It is not a reliable, or primary, source for events at the end of the sixth century.

<sup>335</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 8.29.

<sup>336</sup> Bede's claim that Augustine's consecration occurred with Gregory's permission was probably also merely a statement of – to him, at least – the apparently obvious. There is, however, textual support for Bede's view in the Gregorian letter to Eulogius mentioned a moment ago. This says that "with my permission he [Augustine – who is not named in the letter] was elected bishop by the bishops of Germany" ("*Qui data a me licentia a Germaniarum episcopis episcopus factus*"). Gregory, *Letters*, 8.29. There is good reason, however, to believe that Bede did not possess this letter.



The next papal letters that Bede possessed were associated with the sending of the ‘reinforcements’ from Rome in 601.<sup>337</sup> These provided Bede with his next datable event for the mission and therefore a later *terminus ante quem* for Augustine’s consecration than the September 597 Gregorian letter to Brunhilde mentioned above allows historians today.<sup>338</sup> Thus the gaps in Bede’s evidence meant he had no reason not to think Augustine had sufficient time to return to Gaul. This must, therefore, have seemed the only natural conclusion to Bede, given the lack of any reference to Augustine’s consecration in all of the 596 papal correspondence. Even so, as was seen in the last section, such a conclusion was still inconvenient for his broader narrative, and led, incidentally, to the confusion between 1.26 and 1.27 described above.

In summary, it has again been possible to understand how Bede came to his conclusions. It is clear that this short passage is very revealing about both Bede’s sources and his method. This section thus provides an important insight into the way Bede constructed history. Certainly he makes deductions, but, despite some of the modern criticisms of him, Bede does not simply insert his own speculations. Indeed, in some ways proving Bede’s ignorance has further revealed his intelligence. Overall, this passage is one which shows Bede working most naturally as a historian. The process he is going through is no different really from that of modern historians when they conclude, albeit in contrast to Bede, that Augustine was in fact consecrated *en route*. Bede made the best use possible of the meagre sources at his disposal, and his errors were not based on conscious efforts to mislead.<sup>339</sup> Nonetheless the aim of creating a coherent narrative history compelled him to make deductions, something which intellectually came naturally to him anyway. The difficulty for modern historians, as always, is discerning between Bede’s

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<sup>337</sup> Incidentally none of these gave any direct indication of when or where Augustine’s consecration had occurred. From the surviving letters – and, again, we certainly have more than Bede did – it is clear Gregory acceded to Brunhilde’s request to bestow the pallium on one of her favourites, Syagrius of Autun, because of the support and help he had given Augustine and the mission. Some have speculated that this should be taken as a sign that Syagrius played a role in Augustine’s consecration (for instance, L. Pietri, “Gégoire le Grand et la Gaule: le projet pour la réforme de l’Église gauloise”, in *Gregorio Magno e il suo Tempo* (Rome, 1991), 109–28, at pp. 116–17); but what is odd is that the latter event is not mentioned in the letter, or at any other stage. Overall, it should be acknowledged that this complete absence, in Gregory’s letters to Frankish prelates, of any mention of a request to consecrate Augustine, or thanks for doing so, remains a more telling difficulty than those proposing consecration *en route* generally acknowledge.

<sup>338</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 8.4.

<sup>339</sup> Unlike the view of Martyn that here Bede “has falsified the record”: Martyn, *Letters of Gregory*, vol. 1, p. 55.

deductions and the information he derived directly from his sources. In this separation, however, lies the key to gaining a solid evidential basis for an understanding of Kent c.600.

*misit continuo Romam Laurentium presbyterum et Petrum monachum*, [and at once sent to Rome the priest Laurence and the monk Peter]

Bede's knowledge that Peter had accompanied Laurence to Rome probably comes from Gregory's letter to Bertha. The only other source which notes Peter's presence on that journey is one of the textual versions of the *Libellus*, but not the version which Bede uses.<sup>340</sup> The fact that Bede does not include the letter to Bertha in his text is not, of course, evidence that he did not have it. Other signs that the number of epistles brought by Nothelm from Rome was larger than those Bede directly inserts in the *HE* have already been discussed above. Bede was a master of balance,<sup>341</sup> and the papal letters were already taking up a significant proportion of his narrative. Including the letter to Bertha in full would have added nothing materially new to the narrative. Bede had good reason not to slow down the account any more than he already had by including a letter of praise for someone he arguably had his reservations about.

The "at once" (*continuo*) is merely a Bedan addition – perhaps an attempt to redress the narrative complexities he had found himself in.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> P. Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great* (Jarrow, 1964), pp. 24-25, n. 40; P. Meyvaert, "Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsionum* of Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury", in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes, ed., *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 15-33, at p. 30. In the latter piece, Meyvaert, rather surprisingly, suggested that Bede had two copies of the *Libellus*: Meyvaert, "Bede's Text", pp. 30-31 (R. Flechner, "St Boniface as historian: a continental perspective on the organization of the early Anglo-Saxon church", *Anglo-Saxon England* 41 (2012), 41-62, at p. 55, n. 55, makes the same claim). There is, however, no real evidence for this and some against, as Meyvaert himself essentially accepts: all the circumstantial evidence points rather to the letter to Bertha.

<sup>341</sup> As pointed out, for instance, by Levison, "Bede as historian", p. 145, P. Hunter Blair, "The letters of Pope Boniface V and the mission of Paulinus to Northumbria", in Clemoes and Hughes, *England Before the Conquest*, pp. 5-13, at p. 7, and Harrison, *Framework*, p. 141.

<sup>342</sup> Plummer, 2.45, noted that the *continuo* in this section, and the *nec mora* which follows shortly after are not accurate. Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, p. 24, n. 40, makes the same point.

*qui beato pontifici Gregorio gentem Anglorum fidem Christi suscepisse ac se episcopum factum esse referrent*, [to inform the pope Gregory that the English had received the faith of Christ and that he himself had been made their bishop.]

Bede is here merely presuming that this was the occasion on which Gregory learned of the success of the mission and that Augustine had been consecrated. In fact, as we know, but Bede did not, since he evidently did not have the relevant Gregorian letter to Brunhilde, the pope had found out that the party had arrived and that Augustine had been made bishop by September 597 at the latest. As seen above, Gregory wrote to Brunhilde in that month and referred directly to Augustine as “our brother and fellow bishop”.<sup>343</sup>

Given all the evidence, however, it is not in fact impossible, or even unlikely, that the first *direct* contact that Gregory had from the party was the arrival of Peter and Laurence in late summer/early fall 600, or spring 601, which gave rise to the pope’s letters from that summer. The tenor of those epistles suggests that Gregory’s earlier information – from 597 – was as likely to have come from Candidus, his agent in Gaul, rather than from messengers Augustine had sent back to Rome. Even so, for Bede to say that this was when Gregory was informed of the conversions that they had made or Augustine’s episcopal consecration is incorrect: it is simply Bede’s deduction from the limited evidence at his disposal. Bede is using his inference as a link in the narrative, without giving it too much thought. He has no further source to support this mistaken assumption.

*simul et de eis quae necessariae uidebantur quaestionibus eius consulta flagitans. Nec mora, congrua quaesitui responsa recepit, quae etiam huic historiae nostrae commodum duximus indere.* [At the same time he asked his advice about certain questions which seemed urgent. He received fitting answers to his inquiry without delay, and we have thought proper to insert them in our History.]

This ‘filler’ sentence reveals nothing more than that Bede possessed the *Libellus*, which he then goes on to quote in full.<sup>344</sup> As the ‘original’ version did not contain questions,<sup>345</sup>

<sup>343</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 8.4.

<sup>344</sup> That he does give the complete text he possessed – and therefore did not possess the ‘preface’ – is stated in terms in 2.1 (*totum ipsum libellum*), as Meyvaert noted: Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, p. 25, n. 40.

<sup>345</sup> Meyvaert, “Bede’s Text”, pp. 26-29.

this statement is, however further evidence that Bede's only version was the one he included in the *HE* text.<sup>346</sup>

As already noted, Bede's comments about the timings involved are nothing more than rhetorical devices. The sentiment behind them is based on Bede's immense respect for Gregory and his assumption, for which he had no evidential basis, that the pope considered the English mission his highest priority and crowning achievement.

The rest of the chapter is the *Libellus* itself. The nature of this document remains uncertain.<sup>347</sup> Parts are clearly genuinely by Gregory, plausibly the whole is, but the complexities of transmission clouds the picture.<sup>348</sup> Given the difficulties with the text, the *Libellus* will not be discussed in any detail here. What is important from the perspective of this present analysis is that Bede almost certainly did not obtain this from Nothelm as part of the sheaf of papal letters he brought on his second visit.<sup>349</sup> Such a conclusion is possible not because Bede's use of the work in his *Prose Life of Cuthbert*<sup>350</sup> necessarily places his possession of the text prior to Nothelm's second visit,<sup>351</sup> but because the work was not apparently available in the papal archive, as Boniface bears witness.<sup>352</sup> In any case the version that Bede used is so corrupt that even if Rome had still possessed a copy of the original, it was not this which Bede had access to.<sup>353</sup> The *Libellus* did, however, travel in canonical and penitential collections and it is from this tradition – with a text filtered through the continent – that Bede's version almost certainly derived.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Meyvaert, "Bede's Text", p. 23.

<sup>347</sup> My understanding of this difficult text has been greatly enriched by many discussions of its nature with Michael Elliot.

<sup>348</sup> The picture is further complicated by Meyvaert's failure to deliver on his long-promised edition of the work, together with his repeated statement that no analysis might be performed on it until he had finished. This has sadly obstructed scholarship on this crucial text for more than half a century.

<sup>349</sup> As claimed, but without evidence, by Flechner, "St Boniface as historian", p. 55.

<sup>350</sup> Bede, *Prose Life of Cuthbert*, c. 16.

<sup>351</sup> Meyvaert, "Bede's Text", p. 21.

<sup>352</sup> Boniface, *Letters*, ep. 33: *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, *MGH, Epistolae Selectae* I, 56-8.

<sup>353</sup> In the same way, while Plummer, 2.45, suggested that Bede's copy was the one preserved at Canterbury, the corruptions in the text show that even if his version did come from Canterbury, which is again unlikely, it was not the 'original' version, but one that had been obtained later, following a period of continental transmission.

<sup>354</sup> See for instance, Harrison, *Framework*, p. 139, n. 2.

**What Bede had**

In this chapter therefore Bede used:

- Letter of Gregory the Great to 'Etherius', included in 1.24
- Canterbury episcopal list
- Letter of Gregory the Great to Queen Bertha. [R: 11.35. M: 11.35]
- *Libellus*

### 1.28 – “How Pope Gregory sent a letter to the bishop of Arles asking him to give Augustine help in the work of God”

*Hucusque responsiones beati papae Gregorii ad consulta reuerentissimi antistitis Augustini.* [Such were the answers of blessed Pope Gregory to the questions of the most reverend Bishop Augustine]

This is simply a reference to and deduction from the *Libellus*, which Bede had inserted into the previous chapter.

*Epistulam uero, <quam se Arelatensi episcopo fecisse commemorat,> ad Uergilium <Aetherii successorem> dederat;* The letter <which he says he had written to the bishop of Arles> was directed to Vergilius, <the successor of Etherius.>

This letter, which Bede goes on to include in its entirety in the second half of this chapter, was among those brought by Nothelm from the papal archives.

*quam se Arelatensi episcopo fecisse commemorat,* [which he says he had written to the bishop of Arles]

Gregory mentioned sending a letter to the bishop of Arles in the *Libellus*, at ‘Question 7’: that is what Bede is referring to here.

*Aetherii successorem* [the successor of Etherius.]

This is Bede’s deduction and an error. The reasons for Bede’s belief that Etherius had been bishop of Arles have already been discussed at length and need not be repeated here. Given that Bede knows that this 601 letter is addressed to Vergilius as bishop of Arles, this statement about Vergilius’ succession is simply his perfectly understandable deduction: Etherius must have died in the meantime and been replaced by Vergilius.

*cuius haec forma est: Reuerentissimo et sanctissimo fratri Uergilio ... indictione IIII* [This is the substance of it: To the most reverend and holy brother Vergilius ... {Gregory asks Vergilius to receive Augustine if he should visit and listen to what advice he might have} ... and in the fourth indiction.]

As mentioned above, this letter, which Bede quotes in its entirety, was one of those brought to Bede by Nothelm.

### **What Bede had**

- *Libellus*
- Letter of Gregory the Great to 'Etherius', included in 1.24.
- Canterbury episcopal list, from the information in which he had deduced that Etherius has been bishop of Arles.
- Letter of Gregory the Great to Vergilius of Arles. [R: 11.45. M: 11.45]

**1.29 – “How the pope sent Augustine a pallium with a letter [explaining his plan for the organization of the English church], and also sent several more ministers of the Word”**

*Praeterea idem papa Gregorius Augustino episcopo, quia suggesserat ei multam quidem sibi esse messem sed operarios paucos, [Since Bishop Augustine had advised him that the harvest was great and the workers were few,]*

This phrase sounds suspicious like a Bedan deduction from the ‘knowledge’, which tends to be considered implicit in the Gregorian letters he possessed, that more ‘missionaries’ did indeed come in 601. This is probably at least partially the case. Certainly the biblical language is Bede’s addition.<sup>355</sup> Just as in 1.26, he is emphasizing the link with the early Church. The imposition of such a New Testament framework upon his account of the ‘mission’ is hardly surprising, but still needs to be noted as a reminder that in the absence of sufficient sources the narrative was to a large extent his own creation. The form this took was influenced as much by his assumptions as his ideology, but it was not automatically self-evident in his sources.

On this occasion, however, the root of Bede’s statement is probably based in an actual primary source: a letter from Gregory the Great. Among the many letters the pope sent with the 601 party to smooth the way with Frankish magnates they might expect to meet on the journey, were two letters that specifically referred to Augustine’s expressed need for reinforcements. One, dated 22 June 601, was to Menas of Toulon, Serenus of Marseilles and a set of Neustrian bishops,<sup>356</sup> which claimed that: “Augustine asserts that those who are with him are insufficient to carry out this work through the various locations.”<sup>357</sup> Gregory went on: “We have therefore made provision for a few monks to

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<sup>355</sup> Matt 9.37; Luke 10.2.

<sup>356</sup> Where Gregory has a single letter addressed to several recipients, this does not, of course, mean, as Collins and McClure thought, that all the addressees were expected to be in the same place at once to receive together a single letter: Collins and McClure, “Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow”, pp. 30-31. Rather, these letters to several recipients represent epistles, which were originally individually addressed, but otherwise identical in their texts.

<sup>357</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 11.41: “*Augustinus eos qui secum sunt ad hoc opus exequendum per diversa loca asserat non posse sufficere*”.



be sent over to him, together with our most beloved and joint sons, the priest Laurence and the abbot Mellitus.”<sup>358</sup>

The second letter, which was to Brunhilde, was perhaps more likely to have been Bede’s source. In this, Gregory noted that he had sent the new set of monks “due to the fact that he [Augustine] says those with him cannot be sufficient for him.”<sup>359</sup> One or other – or conceivably both – of these letters, brought by Nothelm from Rome, therefore, probably provided the basis for Bede’s statement here. This reinforces the more general sense seen several times already that Bede received more papal letters from Nothelm than he inserts into the *HE*.

*misit cum praefatis legatariis suis plures cooperatores ac Verbi ministros, [Pope Gregory sent more colleagues and ministers of the word together with his messengers.]*

Bede’s statement that Gregory did actually send these reinforcements is again derived from whichever of the letters he had gained his knowledge that the extra monks were needed. It is worth mentioning that contrary to the general assumption,<sup>360</sup> there is actually no reason to think that without such a letter Bede would have been in a position to deduce that other missionaries had in fact come in 601 – apart from Mellitus apparently, to whom one of the other 601 letters is addressed and who is mentioned in others. None of the other 601 papal letters included by Bede in the *HE* makes mention of sending more people – or doing so because Augustine had expressed a need for reinforcements.

Scholars often assume that Bede wrote different accounts between the *MC* in 725 and the *HE* in c.731 thanks to the arrival of the papal letters.<sup>361</sup> It is too infrequently noted, however, that such an assumption presumes Nothelm brought Bede the additional letter(s) discussed in the section above. None of the 601 letters Bede includes in the *HE* mention that there are new people coming – or that they are coming as reinforcements. There is, in short, no basis at all in the sources Bede quotes verbatim for the conclusion

<sup>358</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 11.41: “*aliquantos ad eum monachos cum dilectissimis et communibus filiis Laurentio presbytero et Mellito abbate praevidimus transmittendos.*”

<sup>359</sup> Gregory, *Letters*, 11.48: “*quod illos qui secum sunt sufficere sibi dicit non posse.*”

<sup>360</sup> For instance, Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 31.

<sup>361</sup> Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, has been particularly influential here. This question will be dealt with in a moment, showing that the *MC* actually points towards Bede’s possession of the letters by 725.

that several more, that is more than Mellitus, came in 601, despite such a conclusion being so frequently treated as though it were the natural, inevitable inference from the texts.

*in quibus primi et praecipui erant Mellitus, Iustus, Paulinus, Rufinianus;* [First and foremost among these were Mellitus, Justus, Paulinus, and Rufinianus]

Here Bede is making a more complex set of deductions, and, somewhat surprisingly, does not use all the information at his disposal. He ‘knew’ that Mellitus had only come in 601 thanks to the Gregorian letter addressed to him, which Bede inserts in 1.30. This letter might be taken to imply, though it does not state outright, that Mellitus is not returning to Augustine, but coming to him for the first time. Mellitus was also mentioned in several of the letters addressed to correspondents in Gaul,<sup>362</sup> though again it is not clear from these that Mellitus was one of these reinforcements and that this was his first trip to England. Whatever our own uncertainties might be about whether Mellitus was a member of the original 596 party or the leader of the 601 reinforcements, therefore, we can be certain that Bede felt the latter answer was the right one.<sup>363</sup>

Moreover, Bede knew that this ‘new arrival’ had become the bishop of London, as he describes in 2.3, while in this chapter he is connecting the arrival of the reinforcements with Gregory’s plans for the episcopate of what he calls the “new English church” (*noua Anglorum ecclesia*). This juxtaposition shows that Bede had deduced – almost certainly correctly – that the intention in sending reinforcements was clear: they were to fill the sees of the new bishoprics. Thus, just as Mellitus, the future bishop of London, had come in 601, as Bede ‘knew’, so too must Justus have done. Paulinus fell in the same category, for although events meant that he only went to Northumbria perhaps two decades later, the sending of someone to York was clearly part of Gregory’s original plan.

<sup>362</sup> For instance, Gregory, *Letters*, 11.41, quoted above.

<sup>363</sup> It can only really be inferred that he was genuinely ‘new’ thanks to the letter to Bertha, which mentions just Laurence and Peter as those who had come back to Rome. This is scarcely the strongest piece of evidence, but perhaps Bede, possessing the letter, made the same deduction, which reinforced his assumption based on the letter to Mellitus from 1.30.

Rufinianus of course did not become a bishop. Later Canterbury tradition considered Rufinianus the third abbot of Ss Peter and Paul's, following Peter and then John,<sup>364</sup> who the *LP* noted were part of the mission.<sup>365</sup> This name therefore is likely to have come from Albinus, the contemporary abbot of Ss Peter and Paul's. For some reason, Bede seems to have thought Peter died earlier than he in fact did.<sup>366</sup> One possible solution to this would be to suggest that Bede thought, presumably on Albinus' authority, that Rufinianus was the direct successor to Peter and therefore merited inclusion here. Perhaps the later tradition inserting John into the list as the second abbot was merely an attempt to tie up a loose end: the inclusion of his name in the *LP*'s list of the missionaries.

Overall, therefore, there is no reason to treat Justus, Paulinus or Rufinianus<sup>367</sup> as certainly among those who arrived in 601. Once more Bede's statements can be seen to be based not on primary written sources, but on his own deductions. These deductions may perhaps have been correct; but Bede cannot be treated as a source for the arrival of these figures then. If we want to reconstruct what happened we have to begin in the same place he did – the Gregorian letters – but without assuming as separately evidenced facts the deductions he made from them.

*et per eos generaliter uniuersa, quae ad cultum erant ac ministerium ecclesiae necessaria, uasa uidelicet sacra et uestimenta altarium, ornamenta quoque ecclesiarum et sacerdotalia uel clericilia indumenta, sanctorum etiam apostolorum ac martyrum reliquias, necnon et codices plurimos.* [and he sent with them all such things as were generally necessary for the worship and ministry of the Church, such as sacred vessels, altar cloths and church ornaments, vestments for priests and clerks, relics of the holy apostles and martyrs, and very many manuscripts.]

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<sup>364</sup> *Thomas of Elmham, Historia Monasteria S. Augustini Cantuariensis*, ed. C. Hardwick (London, 1858), pp. 126-27, 147-48. There is, of course, no reason to believe that this source had any good information about the earlier period. As R. Emms, "The Early History of Saint Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury", in Gameson, *Augustine*, 410-27, at p. 410, put it: "the historical tradition embodied in ... [Elmham's] work misleads more often than helps us".

<sup>365</sup> The *LP*'s account was followed essentially verbatim both by Bede in the *MC* in the *DTR*, and by the *Whitby Life*.

<sup>366</sup> Based on the placement of the story of his death in 1.33, Bede seems to have believed Peter died before Augustine, though such ordering is not a certain indication of Bede's view of comparative chronology. Peter's subscription at the Paris Council of 614, however, shows that he must have lived at least until then. This instance will be discussed further in considering 1.33.

<sup>367</sup> Or even perhaps Mellitus.

This list of the various necessities required for a functioning church need be no more than Bede's view of what he knew every ecclesiastical institution required. Indeed, by his own phrasing Bede almost seems to be signalling that the list is his personal assessment of the *generaliter uniuersa ... necessaria*, rather than anything more specific. Bede's view may well have been informed by his rather better knowledge of what Benedict Biscop had brought back from his trips to Rome.<sup>368</sup>

Perhaps, of course, oral information from Albinus might lie in a general way behind the catalogue. Despite the gaps that have already begun to be seen in the Canterbury record, it is not implausible that certain objects did survive. Nor is it unlikely that certain objects were furnished with a more venerable ancestry than they in fact had. Alfred the Great thought Augustine himself had brought a copy of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*.<sup>369</sup> Even today, Cambridge preserves a sixth-century Italian Gospel book, known as the 'Augustine Gospels',<sup>370</sup> a claim that continues to be widely asserted.<sup>371</sup> Other books, however, which, at least later, Canterbury also claimed Augustine brought, can be categorically shown to have arrived later.<sup>372</sup> Overall, this seems the most probable explanation for the 'Augustine Gospels' too. The evidence suggests, fairly clearly, that by at least the eighth century, Canterbury was passing off older or older-looking items as genuine relics of the original Augustinian mission. Bede's statement therefore is evidence for contemporary Canterbury claims, not for the actual items brought by the 'mission fathers'.

Incidentally, one might note that Bede's assumption that everything the early English Church possessed must have come from Rome, displays his ignorance – or avoidance – of the close connections the church in Kent had with its Gallic counterpart. Some items may even have been locally produced, but otherwise Gaul was the more obvious market than Rome. Gaul does not, however, play such a role in the *HE*. For Bede, it is little more

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<sup>368</sup> For instance, *HA*, c.6. Not that Bede's details about the precise journeys on which specific items were brought should necessarily be accepted uncritically.

<sup>369</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 44. Canterbury had therefore begun at least by this stage to assert probably specious claims of antiquity for manuscripts and other items in their possession.

<sup>370</sup> CCCC, MS 286.

<sup>371</sup> Though not usually without caveats: R. Marsden, "The Gospels of Augustine" and R. Gameson, "The Earliest Books of Christian Kent", both in Gameson, *St Augustine*, pp. 285-312; 313-73.

<sup>372</sup> M. Budny, "The *Biblia Gregoriana*", in Gameson, *St Augustine*, 237-84, at pp. 252-54; Gameson, "Earliest Books of Christian Kent", p. 313.

than an inconvenient barrier on the route to Italy. Instead, as is surely self-evident, most of the items Bede believes can only have arrived with the ‘missionaries’, must already have been available in Canterbury, even in the unlikely event that Liudhard and Bertha were the only ones attending church. Bede’s omission of the Gallic dimension may be a conscious one, but it is much more likely to reflect once more his lack of genuine primary source material about the early days of the church in Kent as well as his use of the contemporary situation to frame his understanding of the past.

*Misit etiam litteras, in quibus significat se ei pallium direxisse, simul et insinuat, qualiter episcopos in Brittania constituere debuisset.* [He also sent a letter in which he announced that he had dispatched the pallium to him and at the same time directed how he should organize the bishops in Britain.]

This sentence provides nothing more than a précis of the letter Bede is about to quote.

*Quarum litterarum iste est textus: Reuerentissimo et sanctissimo fratri Augustino ... indictione IIII.* [Here is the text of the letter: To the most reverend and holy brother Augustine ... {Gregory gives Augustine the pallium and sets out his plan for the English church with a bishop of London and one of York, both with twelve suffragens. Augustine is also granted authority over all the bishops of Britain} ... and in the fourth indiction.]

Bede has derived the text of the letter, which he inserts in its entirety, from Nothelm. As mentioned in considering 1.23, Bede knew this letter by the time he composed the *MC*, which was written as part of the *DTR*. Historians have sometimes claimed that there is a radical difference between Bede’s narrative of the mission in the *MC*, from 725, and that in the *HE* c. 731x4.<sup>373</sup> From this they have argued that Nothelm brought Bede the papal letters after 725. Meyvaert even envisaged the letters arriving immediately before the finalization of the *HE*. Such arguments are, however, based on a faulty premise. There is no sign of contradiction between the *MC* and *HE* narratives. Moreover there are several signs in the *MC* itself that Bede had already received the papal letters: the inclusion of a reference to this letter in the *MC* is merely the most obvious example.

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<sup>373</sup> Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, is the obvious example.

It is true that the *MC* account of the mission does not mention that there were two parties who arrived from Rome, but there is no reason why it should have done. The fact that two groups came was hardly such an important fact that it required separate emphasis in the skeleton narrative provided by a chronicle. The *HE*, arguably designed as a history of the conversion of the English, has the best part of two books to tell the story. In contrast, the Gregorian mission is not integral to the *MC*, which by its very nature has to abbreviate events. The *MC* account is a simple and accurate, if compressed, description of what occurred. Furthermore, even if it is compressed, the *MC*'s version is still revised from the one Bede included in the 703 *Minor Chronicle*. There, Bede placed the mission's arrival under the reign of Emperor Phocas. In the *MC*, this has rightly been changed to Maurice. The only reasonable basis for this correction is the information in the papal letters brought by Nothelm. Their dating clauses will have told Bede that it was Maurice who was emperor when the party was sent by Gregory, not Phocas. Thus, Nothelm's 'second' visit must already have occurred by 725.

The very mention in the *MC* of content from the letter cited in 1.29, should have been enough to tell us this anyway. There is no reason to think that this letter alone had been preserved at Canterbury and plenty of reason to think that it cannot have been. There is no sign that Canterbury, or Theodore for instance, had any idea of the detail of the original Gregorian plan as they sought to revive and reform the Church in England in the later seventh century.<sup>374</sup> Furthermore there are other signs in the *MC* that the papal letters had arrived by the time Bede was writing. One telling point is the *MC*'s description of Edwin as *excellentissimus*, a term which is copied from Pope Honorius' letter to the king.<sup>375</sup> Also, as Gunn noticed, Bede has changed the order of the names of the mission fathers from his *LP* source, taking into account the information the papal letters had provided him about Augustine. Overall, we can be quite confident, therefore, that Bede possessed the papal letters by 725 and that Nothelm's second visit had occurred by then.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> The beginnings of the campaign to raise York to an archbishopric in the late 720s and early 730s are perhaps most plausibly explained as a consequence of the arrival of the letter in England and an awareness of the information about Gregory's original plan included within it.

<sup>375</sup> *HE* 2.17.

<sup>376</sup> Bede's *Letter to Albinus* thanks him for the information provided through Nothelm. We should not assume that this need have been written soon after the latter's 'second' visit. The letter was a public

None of this is to argue that the arrival of the papal letters did not impact construction of the *HE*, leading to qualitative changes between a putative ‘first draft’ and the version that survived today. Quite the opposite: the significance of the changes necessitated by the content of the letters was such that a more radical overhaul was required than the rapid revision envisaged by Meyvaert permits. As it stands, Book 1 quotes all or part of eight papal letters.<sup>377</sup> From 1.23 and the beginning of the account of the Gregorian mission to the end of the book in 1.34 with the story of Æthelfrith, eight of the twelve chapters are almost entirely made up of quotations from Gregory’s epistles.<sup>378</sup> Book Two is scarcely less reliant on papal letters: six of the twenty chapters are little more than citations from them.<sup>379</sup>

Nor is the issue simply one of letters quoted. As has already been seen and will continue to be seen, Bede makes references which reveal he possessed papal letters he has not included. Even considering only those letters Bede does copy verbatim, it should be clear that these are not mere additions to an already essentially complete work. They are structural. The work, as it survives, is intrinsically dependent upon them. Too much of the first two books of the *HE* relies on the letters to imagine the work that we have without them. This is not to say that Bede had not prepared a draft prior to the arrival of the letters, it simply means that it is not possible to recreate that draft merely by removing the papal letters from the present text. Books 1 and 2 would be hollow shells. The work that we have, the *HE*, should not be conceived of as existing without those papal letters. Whatever earlier structure Bede had designed in an earlier draft needed to be radically overhauled in order to integrate the letters.<sup>380</sup> The papal letters Nothelm brought represent too significant an element in the content and structure of the currently existing work, not to have been in integral part of its planning.

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document, intended as an alternative preface, as it were, to the *HE*. The expression of gratitude was rhetorical and meant for a wider audience: it gives no indication of the date of arrival of the texts.

<sup>377</sup> Not seven, as Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, p. 130, claimed. He omitted chapter 1.23.

<sup>378</sup> Although one of these chapters, 1.27, is a papal letter, the *Libellus*, that was almost certainly not derived from Rome via Nothelm.

<sup>379</sup> One of these, 2.19, includes a papal letter, of pope-elect John, and reference to another by Pope Honorius, both to the Irish. As will be seen, Bede probably derived his knowledge of these epistles independently of Nothelm.

<sup>380</sup> This process was arguably the reason the *HA* exists as a separate work.

All of this is a reminder that the process of writing the ‘*HE*’ was not a short one. There is no space here to break down the stages of its composition systematically; nor is such an exercise within the current remit. Nonetheless, at times, as here, an examination of how Bede wrote, and especially of how he gained and used his sources, throws light on the wider question of the context for Bede’s authorship of the *HE*.

One further point arising from this letter should be dealt with briefly: the issue of its contemporary relevance. While this thesis is not intended as a direct analysis of the nature of early Christian Kent, here the question concerns Bede’s use of sources and so does fall within the purview of the present study. It is often assumed that Gregory’s plan for the Church in England “had little relation to reality at the time”.<sup>381</sup> Such a statement, however, privileges the Bedan narrative, whence such a view of contemporary geopolitics derives, over the primary source that is Gregory’s letter. In reality, there are no grounds for thinking that the pope’s plan, set out in 601, necessarily differed from Augustine and Æthelberht’s vision when they sent legates to Rome, probably in 600; nor therefore should it be presumed that the strategy was impractical in terms of the politics of the time.<sup>382</sup> We have already seen good reason to believe that Bede’s evidential basis for this period was extremely thin. It would be very unwise therefore to rely on impressions of the early seventh-century political landscape inferred from his narrative – especially when doing so would involve contradicting a genuine, primary source.

### **What Bede had**

In terms of written sources, Bede therefore had:

- Letter of Gregory the Great to Menas of Toulon/Serenus of Marseilles/Lupus of Chalons-sur-Saone/Agiulf of Metz/Simplicius of Paris/Melantius of Rouen/Licinus, or perhaps more probably to Brunhilde, or both [R: 11.41, 11.48]

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<sup>381</sup> H. Chadwick, “Gregory the Great and the Mission to the Anglo-Saxons”, in *Gregorio Magno e il suo Tempo* (Rome, 1991), 199-212, at p. 200.

<sup>382</sup> Although clearly, by 604 things had changed. There seem to me some grounds for associating Edwin’s first reign as king of Deira, which was probably ended by Æthelfrith’s take-over in c.604, with these plans. I shall consider the question in my article (in preparation), “Canterbury, London and York: the Gregorian plan for the ‘English church’ in context”.



- Bible: Gospels
- *LP*
- Rochester episcopal list
- Information about Paulinus – from varied sources, several of which must have been oral, but also including a letter of Pope Honorius to King Edwin, included in 2.17.
- Letter of Gregory the Great to Augustine, about the organization of the church in England. [R: 11.39. M: 11.39]

‘Orally’ he probably also had information from Albinus of uncertain value that Rufinianus had become abbot of Ss Peter and Paul, Canterbury.

**1.30 – “A copy of the letter which Pope Gregory sent to Abbot Mellitus [advising him on creative strategies for converting the English] who was on his way to Britain”**

*Abeuntibus autem praefatis legatariis, misit post eos beatus pater Gregorius litteras memoratu dignas, in quibus aperte, quam studiose erga saluationem nostrae gentis inuigilauerit, [When these messengers had departed, St Gregory sent after them a letter which is worth recording, in which he plainly showed his eager interest in the salvation of our race.]*

This sentence contains two deductions by Bede, both based on the letter which follows. The first is a strictly mechanical calculation. Bede possessed Gregorian letters sent with Mellitus, Laurence and Peter which were clearly dated 22 June 601.<sup>383</sup> This letter, however, dated 18 July, was sent almost a month later and specifically referred to the departure of Mellitus, and his companions.<sup>384</sup> Therefore Bede rightly concluded that the pope had sent the letter to the party after it had departed.

Bede's second deduction was a more subjective one: Bede's claim that the letter showed Gregory's eager interest for the salvation of the English. This is Bede's interpretation of the frankly much more ambiguous evidence of the letter, in the light of his own desire to see the pope as specially connected to the English, of whom Bede considered Gregory the Apostle.

*ostendit ita scribens: Dilectissimo filio Mellito abbati Gregorius seruus seruorum Dei ... indictione IIII. [This is what he wrote: To my most beloved son, Abbot Mellitus, Gregory, servant of the servants of God ... {Gregory gives Mellitus instructions for Augustine on how to 'Christianize' pagan places and practices in order to facilitate the process of conversion} ... and in the fourth indiction.]*

The text of the letter, which Bede quotes in full, came to him via Nothelm.

<sup>383</sup> He included these in 1.28, 1.29, 1.31 (though in abbreviating this letter, Bede has omitted the dating clause) and 1.32. As this shows, the letters in the *HE* do not follow their original order. There is no reason, however, to assume with Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 44, that this was because Bede simply preserved the order Nothelm had copied them in, rather than that the ordering was Bede's conscious rhetorical choice to suit his narrative purposes.

<sup>384</sup> “*Post discessum congregationis nostrae, quae tecum est.*”

**What Bede had**

- Letters of Gregory the Great dated 22 June 601, as quoted elsewhere in the *HE* (1.28, 1.29, 1.31, and 132)
- Letter of Gregory the Great to Mellitus. [R: 11.56. M: 11.56]

### 1.31 – “How he [Gregory] urged Augustine, in a letter, not to glory in the miracles he was performing”

*Quo in tempore misit etiam Augustino epistulam super miraculis, quae per eum facta esse cognouerat, in qua eum, ne per illorum copiam periculum elationis incurreret, his uerbis hortatur:* [At the same time Pope Gregory heard that Augustine had been performing miracles and sent him a letter on the subject, in which he exhorts Augustine not to incur the danger of being elated by their great number.]

This statement is a deduction from the letter which follows, summarizing the argument of the epistle. Strictly speaking the phrase *in tempore* is inaccurate, since this letter was actually written and sent almost a month before that in the previous chapter. As has already been noted, Bede possessed other information which told him that Augustine had worked miracles. Nevertheless, Bede’s statement here need be based on no more than the letter itself.

*Scio, frater carissime, ... pro quorum tibi salute collata sunt.* [I know, most beloved brother ... {Gregory congratulates Augustine for the miracles he has worked, but warns him of the dangers of pride and urges him to maintain rigour in the practice of his faith} ... for whose salvation they have been granted you.]

The text of the letter was, as usual, received by Bede via Nothelm on the latter’s second visit. The letter itself was originally longer. Bede’s choice to edit is a sign of his balance as an author and his desire to make the *HE* rhetorically effective. Gregory’s letter is a characteristically brilliant exposition of the subject, but it is very long and not all of the content was relevant to Bede’s story.<sup>385</sup>

#### What Bede had

- Letter of Gregory the Great to Augustine about miracles [R: 11.36. M: 11.36]

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<sup>385</sup> As Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, pp. 37-38, noted the papal letters in 1.27-32 already look “somewhat out of proportion in a work that observes proportion.”

### 1.32 – “How he [Gregory] sent letters and gifts to King Æthelberht”

*Misit idem beatus papa Gregorius eodem tempore etiam regi Aedilbercto epistulam,* [Pope Gregory, at the same time also sent a letter to King Æthelberht,]

This statement is based on Bede’s possession of the letter which he goes on to quote in full and which makes up the bulk of this chapter. This time, Bede is correct to say *eodem tempore* as this was another of the 22 June 601 letters.

*simul et dona in diuersis speciebus perplura,* [as well as numerous gifts of every kind.]

Here Bede is exaggerating for rhetorical effect in an attempt to emphasize Gregory’s concern for the nascent English church. He is basing his statement on the pope’s own mention in the letter of unspecified gifts which he is sending the king. Bede is merely fleshing out that statement as part of his précis of the letter. In reality, the gifts mentioned by Gregory are not likely to have been numerous, or particularly varied, but probably did include small relic crosses.<sup>386</sup>

*temporalibus quoque honoribus regem glorificare satagens, cui glorie caelestis suo labore et industria notitiam prouenisse gaudebat.* [He was anxious to glorify the king with temporal honours, while at the same time he rejoiced to think that Æthelberht had attained to the knowledge of heavenly glory by Gregory’s own labour and industry.]

This statement is not directly derived from any source, but is Bede’s own view of the pope’s attitude, inspired by the content of the letter he is about to quote. Bede is keen to present Gregory as intensely concerned with the mission and its success, as has already been seen. In reality, taking the sum of Gregory’s surviving letters and works into account, it may seem rather that the English church was only one among a very long list of priorities for Gregory and by no means the most important.

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<sup>386</sup> This seems to have been Gregory’s gift of choice, for instance: 1.29, 7.23, 11.43. See further, Martyn, *Gregory’s Letters*, vol. 1, p. 74.

*Exemplar autem praefatae epistulae hoc est: Domino gloriosissimo atque praecellentissimo filio Aedilbercto regi Anglorum Gregorius episcopus ... indictione IIII.* [This is a copy of the letter: Bishop Gregory to his most worthy son, the glorious lord Æthelberht, king of the English ... {Praising the king, but warning him of the approaching end of the world, Gregory urges Æthelberht to listen to Augustine and do everything in his power to facilitate the conversion of his people, including destroying pagan shrines and prohibiting the worship of idols. The pope also gives Æthelberht some unnamed gifts.} ... and in the fourth indiction]

The rest of the chapter is merely the text of the letter, which as usual Bede had obtained from Nothelm.

### **What Bede had**

- Letter of Gregory the Great to King Æthelberht [R: 11.37. M: 11.37]

### 1.33 – “How Augustine repaired the church of the Saviour and built the monastery of the Apostle St Peter'; and about Peter its first abbot”

*At Augustinus, ubi in regia ciuitate sedem episcopalem, ut praediximus, accepit, recuperauit in ea, regio fultus adminiculo, ecclesiam quam inibi antiquo Romanorum fidelium opere factam fuisse didicerat, et eam in nomine sancti Saluatoris Dei et Domini nostri Iesu Christi sacrauit, atque ibidem sibi habitationem statuit et cunctis successoribus suis. [After Augustine had, as we said before, received his episcopal see in the royal city, he with the help of the king restored a church in it, which as he was informed, had been built in ancient times by the hands of Roman believers. He dedicated it in the name of the holy Saviour, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ; and there he established a dwelling for himself and all his successors.]*

The narrative here appears to follow on almost directly from where Bede left the story at the end of 1.26, with the gift of the “seat”, which, as shown above, was for the bishopric. In between is the series of chapters, 1.27-1.32, dependent on papal letters. Thus, perhaps in the ‘original’ draft of the *HE*, written before Nothelm’s second visit and the arrival of the papal letters, this chapter did indeed follow immediately after ‘1.26’.<sup>387</sup> The sense in which the first part of 1.27 in particular, and to an extent the rest of the material in the papal letter chapters, interrupts the story otherwise being told has already been discussed. Taken together, this all strengthens the possibility, first raised by Meyvaert, though not in detail, that much of the story of Augustine and the Gregorian mission had already been written by the time Nothelm brought the batch of papal letters.<sup>388</sup>

Returning to the passage in question, it is clear that most of this section requires no specific source. Bede knew that the archbishops of Canterbury had a ‘seat’ and he knew that it was in Canterbury, at a church dedicated to the holy Saviour. Nonetheless, as already discussed at length, the mention of Augustine restoring an older church, which “as he was informed, had been built in ancient times”, probably points towards Bede’s possession of the text of the inscription of the church’s ‘(re)foundation stone’. This source was most probably conveyed to Bede from Albinus via Nothelm, presumably on

<sup>387</sup> Not that this chapter number need have been the same of course.

<sup>388</sup> Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*. Though, as seen in considering 1.29, he was wrong to suggest that Nothelm’s second visit occurred between the writing of the *MC* and the completion of the *HE*.

his first visit. It is not unlikely that such a dedication stone mentioned the co-operation of the king, but it need not be assumed that this particular part of Bede's statement was based on anything beyond his own assumption and agenda.

*Fecit autem et monasterium non longe ab ipsa ciuitate ad orientem, in quo eius hortatu Aedilberct ecclesiam beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli a fundamentis construxit ac diuersis donis ditauit, in qua et ipsius Augustini et omnium episcoporum Doruuernensium, simul et regum Cantiae poni corpora possent. Quam tamen ecclesiam non ipse Augustinus sed successor eius Laurentius consecrauit.* [He also founded a monastery not far from the city, to the east in which Æthelberht, encouraged by him, built from its foundations the church of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul and endowed it with various gifts, so that the bodies of Augustine himself and all the bishops of Canterbury and the kings of Kent might be placed in it. The church was consecrated, not by Augustine but by his successor Laurence.]

Again, most of the information about the foundation and purpose of Ss Peter and Paul is a simple case of a form of *post hoc propter hoc* logic on Bede's behalf. He knew the monastery existed; he knew it was dedicated to Ss Peter and Paul; he knew that it was a well-endowed institution; he knew that the kings of Kent and bishops of Canterbury were buried there. This was all present tense. He knew all this to be the case in c.730 and he assumed that everything began in Augustine's day.<sup>389</sup>

Nonetheless, beneath these layers of presumptions and deductions there was almost certainly, as seen above, an earlier, written source: Ss Peter and Paul's foundation stone. This conclusion is hinted at by the specific reference to the church having been built *a fundamentis*, in contrast to those Bede notes as being rebuilt. More telling, is the reference to Laurence as the consecrator of the church, rather than Augustine. This is the sort of information one would expect to find in such an ecclesiastical inscription, but is difficult to envisage appearing in another source.

The note about the geographical location of the church – “not far from the city, to the east” – presumably came from Albinus.

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<sup>389</sup> These deductions could theoretically have been made first by Albinus and then passed on to Bede as fact.



*Primus autem eiusdem monasterii abbas Petrus presbiter fuit*, [The first abbot of this monastery was the priest Peter,]

It is natural to presume that this information came from Albinus the contemporary abbot of the monastery, without the need for any written source. Albinus' own source is less clear. Bede does not seem to have had an abbatial list for Ss Peter and Paul, given how little information he included about its abbots,<sup>390</sup> so presumably Albinus did not either. Conceivably Peter's name was on the church's dedication stone, but perhaps, to some extent at least, the information about Peter and his rank derived from the story which follows and indirectly therefore from its source.<sup>391</sup> We know that Peter was the "abbot of Canterbury" (*abba de Dorouerno*),<sup>392</sup> because he subscribed as such to the canons of the Council of Paris in 614;<sup>393</sup> but Bede did not possess that source.

*qui legatus Galliam missus ... abstulerunt corpus, et in Bononia ciuitate iuxta honorem tanto uiro congruum in ecclesia posuerunt*. [who was sent on a mission to Gaul ... {Peter drowns and is buried unworthily, but a heavenly light guides the locals to his resting place, helping them to identify him as a saint} ... they removed his body and put it in a church in Boulogne with all the honour due to so great a man.]

This story, which takes up the whole second half of this chapter, is not from any surviving source. The characteristics of the account are clear, however. The story is a single, coherent narrative and almost certainly must have come therefore from a single narrative source. There are no signs that the tale is, or could conceivably be, Bede's compilation of elements derived from several sources. The story deals with one of the early 'mission fathers' and is obviously hagiographic, with the miraculous appearance of the light directing locals to Peter's tomb. There is anachronism again also, but here it is explicit, with the final denouement of the story being that Peter's body, dishonourably

<sup>390</sup> After Peter, no one is named as abbot in the *HE* until Hadrian. The *HA* states that Benedict Biscop was Hadrian's immediate predecessor, but this detail was presumably based on Wearmouth-Jarrow traditions, rather than Canterbury information.

<sup>391</sup> The only Gregorian letters to mention Peter – the preface to one textual version of the *Libellus*, which Bede probably did not have, and the letter to Bertha, which he probably did – do not call him abbot. The letter to Bertha describes him as "my monk" (*noster monachos*). If he was the first abbot of Ss Peter and Paul's it had not been founded yet. Intriguingly, Gregory does refer to Mellitus in the 601 letters as abbot.

<sup>392</sup> Not Dover, as Wood thought: I. Wood, *The Merovingian Sea* (Alingsas, 1983), p. 25, n. 105.

<sup>393</sup> *Les Canons de Conciles Merovingiens (VIe-VIIe siècles)*, ed. by C. de Clercq and tr. by J. Gaudemet and B. Basdevant (Paris, 1989), vol. 2, p. 524.

interred, was only discovered to be that of a holy man some time later thanks to the miraculous light. Moreover the lack of any indications of dating within the story supports the general impression that the nature of the source is most naturally interpreted as a generalized hagiographic narrative.

Another element pointing to the anachronistic character of this story is the extent to which the narrative is mere *topos*. Plummer noted two analogues within just the *HE* itself for this type of miracle: Oswald in 3.11; and the Hewalds in 5.10.<sup>394</sup> One might add the account of the miraculous light showing where bodies should rest in 4.7. Such borrowings from hagiographic tradition scarcely suggest any direct or early knowledge of the supposed events in question.<sup>395</sup>

Indeed, as mentioned previously, this story is also misplaced chronologically within the *HE*. By inserting it before the end of Book 1, Bede is implicitly dating Peter's death before 603, the date given for the battle of Degsastan mentioned in 1.34.<sup>396</sup> Thanks to Peter's subscription to the canons of the Council of Paris in 614, mentioned above, however, it is clear that he must have lived at least until that year. Even acknowledging that Bede was perfectly capable of ordering his narrative thematically as well as chronologically, this is probably further confirmation that the source for this story about Peter provided Bede with no more than circumstantial details about his death, burial and rediscovery.

These elements therefore are strongly reminiscent of the same characteristics which were representative of the story Bede told of the meeting on Thanet in 1.25 and suggest, as I shall discuss in more detail later, that the sources for these two 'Canterbury tales' might have been similar or even connected.

## What Bede had

- Inscription from (re)foundation stone at Canterbury 'cathedral'

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<sup>394</sup> Plummer, 2.64

<sup>395</sup> Intriguingly the 'Mildrith Legend' includes a similar story: D. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: a Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester, 1982), p. 70.

<sup>396</sup> And apparently before the events in the earlier parts of Book 2, the death of Gregory, dated by Bede to 605, the foundation of the sees of London and Rochester in 604, and the subsequent death of Augustine, for which Bede did not have a year.

- Inscription from foundation stone at Ss Peter and Paul's

'Orally' Bede also had both basic Canterbury-sourced knowledge about the location of Ss Peter and Paul's in relation to the city and probably information from Albinus that the first abbot of his monastery was named Peter.

### **What Bede says that has not been possible to source**

In this chapter it has not been possible to identify the source for the following details.

- Peter, abbot of Ss Peter and Paul's, was sent on a mission to Gaul.
- He drowned in a bay of the sea known as Amfleaht (Ambleteuse)
- He was given an unworthy burial.
- But a heavenly light appeared every night above his grave.
- At last the people of the neighbourhood noticed it and realized it must have been a saint's body.
- They found out who the saint had been.
- And they reburied his body honourably in a church in Boulogne.

As already mentioned, the nature of this source will be discussed in detail later, but for now the above conclusions about its characteristics should be summarized: it is a single coherent story about one of the early 'mission' fathers, which reads like it comes from a single source, inevitably a narrative one, probably hagiographic and almost certainly from Canterbury. Its content is not explainable by documents that have survived, nor is it easy to envisage what series of sources could have been compiled by Bede to create the narrative he provides. Moreover the content is both explicitly and implicitly anachronistic. Bede does not himself express any doubts about the particular story's reliability, but otherwise the characteristics of the tale and its source are essentially identical to those of the story Bede told in 1.25.

So far therefore we have seen such a type of source for both Augustine's arrival and initial meeting with Æthelberht and now for the death, burial and miraculous discovery of

the body of Peter, as well as possibly for elements of the story underlying Bede's narrative of the conversion of Æthelberht and its consequences in 1.26. As will be seen later, Book 2 contains other similar tales, again sharing these characteristics, and following the same pattern. Through an examination of these, the probable existence of a single overarching hagiographic source from Canterbury will become increasingly clear. This drew together several hagiographic stories about the 'mission' party; but the anachronisms in the tales show they must have been composed some time after the events in question, when direct knowledge of the mission had all but died out. Such a source can only reasonably have come to Bede from Canterbury and Albinus. In such a light, as will be seen, this source fits the description in the *HE*'s Preface of "the written records ... [of] all that the disciples of St Gregory had done in the kingdom of Kent or in the neighbouring kingdoms"<sup>397</sup> very well.

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<sup>397</sup> That Albinus had passed on to Bede via Nothelm, apparently on the first visit. The whole passage is as follows: "*diligenter omnia, quae in ipsa Cantuariorum prouincia uel etiam in contiguis eidem regionibus a discipulis beati papae Gregorii gesta fuere, uel monimentis litterarum uel seniorum traditione cognouerat, et ea mihi de his quae memoria digna uidebantur per religiosum Lundoniensis ecclesiae presbyterum Nothelmum, siue litteris mandata siue ipsius Nothelmi uiua uoce referenda, transmisit.*"

**1.34 – “How Æthelfrith, king of Northumbria, vanquished the Irish race in battle and drove them from English territories”**

1.34 is the story of Æthelfrith with which Bede ends Book One, bringing the story rather abruptly to Northumbria. This will increasingly become the focus of the remaining books of the *HE*. Perhaps then, in this chapter, Bede was signalling to the reader that ultimate shift in direction, hinting at what he considered the most crucial subject matter; alternatively, Bede’s own Northumbrian contacts, and patrons, not least King Ceolwulf, may well have considered the tale of this king one that could not be omitted. Whatever the grounds for Bede’s insertion of this chapter, for the reasons set out in the Introduction, this study will not directly consider the *HE*’s Northumbrian sections. The focus, instead, will be on those parts primarily concerning Kent, and so the analysis must now move on to Book Two, which will be considered in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3

### The Mission Fathers: *HE* 2.1-11; 15-20

**2.1 – “Concerning the death of the blessed Pope Gregory”. This chapter also includes an account of the pope’s life, and ends with the story of his encounter with the *Angli* slaveboys which is credited, ultimately, with inspiring Gregory to send the mission to England.**

*His temporibus, id est anno dominicae incarnationis DCV, beatus papa Gregorius, postquam sedem Romanae et apostolicae ecclesiae XIII annos menses sex et dies decem gloriosissime rexit, defunctus est, atque ad aeternam regni caelestis sedem translatus.* [About this time, in the year of our Lord 605, Pope St Gregory, who had reigned in great glory over the apostolic see for thirteen years, six months, and ten days, died and was taken up to reign forever in the kingdom of heaven.]

The sources of this statement and the various other references Bede makes to the dates of Gregory’s accession, length of pontificate and death were already discussed in 1.23. In summary, Bede’s calculation of the incarnational date for the pope’s death, which has led him into error, is based on information from his own *MC* in the *DTR*. Bede knew the length of Gregory’s pontificate thanks to the information about the pope in the *LP*, as well as from the details at the end of his epitaph.

*De quo nos conuenit, quia nostram, id est Anglorum, gentem de potestate Satanae ad fidem Christi sua industria conuertit, latiore in nostra historia ecclesiastica facere sermonem. ... nam signaculum apostolatus eius nos sumus in Domino.* [Well indeed may we, the English nation converted by his efforts from the power of Satan, give a somewhat fuller account of him in our *History of the Church*. ... “for we are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord.” (1 Cor 9.2)]

This ‘purple’ passage is not based on any source. The section is rather Bede’s justification for interrupting the narrative of the *HE* with an entire chapter in praise of

Gregory. What this is, as Wallace-Hadrill pointed out, is Bede's expression of his own deeply held views about the Providential purposes of the English conversion.<sup>398</sup> As noted previously, Bede takes the opportunity to associate the form of the English mission with the model of the early Church, through the judicious use of biblical quotation, as here from Acts 26.18 and 1 Corinthians 9.2. As such, the content of this passage is Bede's own creation and design, written in a rhetorical manner, intended to paint the 'apostle of the English' in the best possible light.<sup>399</sup>

*Erat autem natione Romanus ... Hisque Dei consul factus laetare triumphis, Nam mercedem operum iam sine fine tenes.* [He was of Roman race ... {Bede traces the life of Gregory as reconstructed from the pope's own writings and the *LP*; he ends by inserting the poetic epitaph in full} ... Take thy reward in triumph and in joy, Who in God's council sits eternally!]

Most of the rest of the chapter is brilliantly woven together from various bit of biographical information drawn from Gregory's works, mingled with information from the *LP* and, as has already been shown, his epitaph, the poetic part of which Bede quotes in full. This assemblage is bound together by Bede's rhetorical expressions infused by his desire to praise the pope. The resulting product is much more than the sum of its parts and is one of the most impressive passages of the entire *HE*, showcasing "Bede's view of the ideal episcopal career" and thus providing a model for ecclesiastics of his own day.<sup>400</sup>

Nonetheless, since the content of this section does not refer directly to the Gregorian mission, or make use of evidence derived from Bede's Kentish sources, there is no reason to provide a detailed breakdown of what lies behind each of Bede's statements in this passage, though such a task would not be complicated. Even so it should be emphasized that this section represents further evidence of the conclusion to which we have been frequently led throughout this analysis: one of the most marked aspects of Bede's genius

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<sup>398</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 49.

<sup>399</sup> As Wallace-Hadrill noted, Gregory is also, with Cuthbert, given the distinction of carrying over between two books: J. Wallace-Hadrill, "Bede and Plummer", in G. Bonner, ed., *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Century of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), 366-85, at p. 381.

<sup>400</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 48.

was his ability to create a convincing story from mere scraps of evidence, setting out a narrative that reads like a source itself.<sup>401</sup>

What is interesting is the complete absence in Bede's account of English traditions about Gregory the Great.<sup>402</sup> Canterbury has been able to pass on nothing from the memories of the 'mission fathers' about their mentor. Knowledge of Gregory's works in Anglo-Saxon England in c.700 far superseded knowledge of Gregory.<sup>403</sup> No recollections of the pope were passed on in England. This is another sign, in line with others seen earlier, that continuous Kentish tradition about Gregory and the mission had disappeared.

*Nec silentio praetereunda opinio, quae de beato Gregorio traditione maiorum ad nos usque perlata est, .... Haec iuxta opinionem, quam ab antiquis accepimus, historiae nostrae ecclesiasticae inserere oportunum duximus.* [We must not fail to relate the story about St Gregory which has come down to us as a tradition of our forefathers. ... {Bede relates how prior to becoming pope, Gregory met some English slaveboys in the Roman market. Following a conversation, involving a series of puns on their place of origin, king, etc, Gregory decides on the conversion of that people, though he is unable to carry out the task himself} ... I have thought it proper to insert this story into the *Church History*, based as it is on the tradition which we have received from our ancestors.]

This is the famous tale of Gregory and the English slaves, who are said to have first inspired the future pope with the idea of a mission to England. After the careful crafting of the rest of the chapter, this odd story, which Bede both begins and ends by caveating,<sup>404</sup> reads like something of a last-minute, half-hearted addition. Meyvaert makes a similar point, describing it as an "appendix";<sup>405</sup> although he then, somewhat surprisingly, suggests that this story represented the original version of Bede's account of the pope, before it was displaced by the Gregorian letters. This is very unpersuasive. As he himself acknowledges,<sup>406</sup> there is actually no sign at all of the influence of the newly-acquired papal letters on the narrative in this chapter. More probably therefore this story

<sup>401</sup> Or, as Thacker, "Bede and History", p. 188, put it: "Bede liked to edit and codify complex and confusing information into an orderly structure."

<sup>402</sup> The story about the slave-boys notwithstanding. As will be discussed in a moment this does not come from continuously maintained English tradition.

<sup>403</sup> The same conclusions could be drawn from the works of Aldhelm, and even the *Whitby Life of Gregory*.

<sup>404</sup> As Hunter Blair, *World of Bede*, p. 78, put it: Bede "had reservations about the historical truth of the whole tradition."

<sup>405</sup> Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, p. 11.

<sup>406</sup> Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, p. 10.



represents precisely what it looks like: an addition to Bede's original material, rather than the earlier content of Bede's 'first draft' of the *HE*.

Bede's use of caveats and what this reveals about the nature of his sources, and how he conceived of their reliability, have already been discussed. Of all those instances, however, this one appears, to me at least, to be the one which made Bede feel the most uncomfortable.<sup>407</sup> As Markus pointed out, Bede's caveats here are far more extreme than his usual phrasing to signal the insertion of something obtrusive into the narrative.<sup>408</sup> Given again how coherent the rest of the chapter is, this passage aside, it seems worth considering the possibility that this section was only added after the rest had been completed.

One other circumstantial piece of evidence supports the late inclusion of this passage: the use of the phrase *traditio maiorum*. This is only used otherwise in the *HE* in the Preface and at the very end of the work, in 5.24. It is reasonable to assume that both of those entries were among the last things in the *HE* that Bede wrote: so this may well be too. Perhaps its inclusion might even be considered one of the revisions insisted upon by King Ceolwulf and his court, wondering where the amusing story, tying the famous pope to 'Northumbria', and which was apparently in circulation in that kingdom, had gone!<sup>409</sup>

Leaving such speculation aside, the primary question, of whence Bede sourced the story, remains. A slightly different version had already appeared in the *Whitby Life of Gregory*, which Bede arguably knew – though he may just have had access to some of the materials on which it was based. If it is derived from the *Whitby Life*'s story, then Bede has certainly tidied up the narrative, though in doing so he needed nothing but his own intelligence and rhetorical instincts, not a separate source. As discussed previously, Bede's use of caveats, such as those employed here, does not mean Bede's source was not a written one. Indeed, this remains likely, even if his direct source was not the *Whitby Life*.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> The tone in which the story is told suggests to me that G. Hardin Brown, *Bede the Venerable* (Boston, 1987), p. 91, was quite wrong to say that this was a tale Bede "could not resist adding".

<sup>408</sup> Markus, *Bede and Ecclesiastical Historiography*, p. 8.

<sup>409</sup> In Hunter Blair's words: Bede included the tale "because the story was widely believed by the faithful in Northumbria, not necessarily because he himself believed the event to have happened." P. Hunter Blair, "The Historical Writings of Bede", *Spoletto*, 17 (1970), 197-221, at p. 202.

<sup>410</sup> As Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 52, pointed out.

Thacker has made a persuasive case for believing that this story about Gregory emanated from Rome, where it was concocted in the mid-late seventh century.<sup>411</sup> From there it was brought to England during the episcopate of Theodore, or perhaps later, reaching ‘Northumbria’ at least by c.700, where it was presumably embroidered to enhance the links to Deira.<sup>412</sup> Theodore, as Thacker showed, seems to have made a significant, and successful, effort to promote Gregory the Great’s cult among the English.<sup>413</sup> This tradition therefore – even if mediated through the *Whitby Life* – formed the basis for Bede’s account.<sup>414</sup> In either case, it is clear that Bede was not drawing on a primary source for his description of events.<sup>415</sup>

### What Bede had

- Bede’s own *MC* from the *DTR*
- *LP*
- Gregory’s full Epitaph
- Bible
- Writings of Gregory the Great – *Moralia on Job*, *Dialogues*, *Pastoral Care*, *Homilies on the Gospels*, *Homilies on Ezechiel*, *Libellus synodicus*, *Libellus Responsionum*.
- *Whitby Life of Gregory* – or stories used by that work

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<sup>411</sup> A. Thacker, “Memorializing Gregory the Great: the origins and transmission of a papal cult in the seventh and early eighth centuries”, *Early Medieval Europe* 7.1 (1998), pp. 59-84.

<sup>412</sup> This information therefore came to Bede via a different route from that of the hagiographic stories about the early mission fathers we have been identifying.

<sup>413</sup> Thacker, “Memorializing Gregory”; and Thacker, “In Gregory’s Shadow?”, pp. 380-81.

<sup>414</sup> As Colgrave argued, the differing versions of the story suggest that it was well-established even before the Whitby author wrote it down: *Whitby Life*, p. 145, n. 43.

<sup>415</sup> Nor for that matter is there any reason to believe the story may be trusted, despite Wallace-Hadrill’s suggestion: Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 51 (following Markus, “Chronology of the Gregorian Mission”, pp. 29-30).

**2.2 – “How Augustine gave warning to the British bishops on the subject of catholic peace and also performed a miracle in their presence; and the vengeance which overtook them because they despised him.” The chapter includes accounts of two meetings between Augustine and the British and ends with a description of Æthelfrith’s victory at the later battle of Chester.**

*Interea* [Meanwhile]

As noted previously, Bede’s use of the word *interea* is always interesting since it consistently displays his lack of a precise date for the story which followed. Furthermore it also suggests that he is not clear even whether the story actually came before or after the events in the surrounding chapters. He is placing the content therefore where he thinks makes most narrative sense, and disguising his ignorance through the rhetorical use of *interea*.<sup>416</sup>

This stage also provides an opportunity to pause before proceeding to the analysis below. In order to help navigate this chapter’s complex narrative, it is worth starting with a summary of its contents. In short, 2.2 comprises three stories, inter-linked in the *HE*. The first two are accounts of meetings between Augustine and British clerics.<sup>417</sup> The shorter, first, story focuses on Augustine and includes his cure of a blind man, ending with the British on the verge of accepting his authority. The longer and more detailed second story focuses on the British; following the advice of a Welsh hermit, the British reject Augustine at a second meeting, after he does not stand up to greet them. Augustine then threatens them with dire consequences for their recalcitrance. This threat links the first two stories in the chapter with the third, which describes, again in surprising detail, a great British military disaster at the hands of King Æthelfrith of ‘Northumbria’. At this battle, many monks from the monastery involved in the earlier meetings with Augustine were killed and so Augustine’s prophecy was apparently fulfilled.

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<sup>416</sup> Plummer, 2.73, implicitly makes a similar point.

<sup>417</sup> For simplicity’s sake, these meetings are often referred to by historians as ‘synods’; this practice will be followed here, even though, strictly speaking, ‘synod’ is not an accurate term for these gatherings.

*Augustinus adiutorio usus Aedilbercti regis conuocauit ad suum colloquium episcopos siue doctores proximae Brettonum prouinciae in loco ubi usque hodie lingua Anglorum Augustinaes Ác, id est Robur Augustini, in confinio Huicciorum et Occidentalium Saxonum appellatur, coepitque eis fraterna admonitione suadere, ut pace catholica secum habita communem euangelizandi gentibus pro Domino laborem susciperent. <Non enim paschae diem dominicum suo tempore sed a quarta decima usque ad uicesimam lunam obseruabant, quae computatio LXXXIII annorum circulo continetur; sed et alia plurima unitati ecclesiasticae contraria faciebant. – see below> ... Nec mora, inluminatur caecus, ac uerus summae lucis praeco ab omnibus praedicatur Augustinus. [Augustine, making use of the help of King Æthelberht, summoned the bishops and teachers of the neighbouring British kingdom to a conference at a place which is still called in English Augustinæs Ac, that is Augustine’s oak, on the borders of the Hwicce and the West Saxons. He proceeded to urge them with brotherly admonitions, that they should preserve catholic peace with him and undertake the joint labour of evangelizing the heathen for the Lord’s sake. <They did not keep Easter Sunday at the proper time, but from the fourteenth to the twentieth day of the lunar month; this reckoning is based on an 84-year cycle. They did other things too which were not in keeping with the unity of the Church. – see below> ... {The British refuse and Augustine suggests the matter be settled by a trial of spiritual strength, as it were. While the British are unable to cure the blind man brought forward, Augustine is successful.} ... At once the blind man’s sight was restored and all acknowledged Augustine to be a true herald of the heavenly light. ]*

This tale of the first meeting with the British, and the miracle Augustine performed there, is, as discussed above, the first of the three stories in this chapter; it has no surviving source. The account is interrupted by a short excursus on the British party’s paschal errors, and contains one or two details which Bede has apparently embedded into the narrative,<sup>418</sup> but otherwise it represents a single, distinct, tale. Although the context is the council, this is a miracle story. There is no sign that Bede knew about the meeting from one source and the miracle at the meeting from another. Bede briefly details the ‘debate’ before moving on to the exhibition of virtue which proves Augustine to be in the right. The perfunctory account of the proceedings of the ‘synod’ is, thus, no more than a preface to the miracle.

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<sup>418</sup> For instance, the translation of *Augustinaes Ác* and probably the statement about its location, as is suggested by the use of the term “West Saxons” [*Occidentalium Saxonum*], which was not used by that ‘people’ themselves until well after 600.

Overall, therefore, this section represents a single, coherent story, focusing in a laudatory way on the early mission fathers and almost certainly deriving from Canterbury. In this it follows the pattern of others examined earlier. The rest of the characteristics of those earlier tales are also seen here. Like them, this is, as the miracle shows, a hagiographic account; and, like the others, the lack of any detail in the story points, if not to strict anachronism, then at least to distance from the events in question.<sup>419</sup>

The nature of the miracle strengthens this sense, since, as in the account of abbot Peter in 1.33, it could hardly be more of a *topos*. Ian Wood noted how similar this work of healing was, in both content and context, to one credited to St Germanus that Bede had inserted earlier in the *HE*.<sup>420</sup> As a result, Wood proposed that Bede himself invented this miracle of Augustine.<sup>421</sup> Certainly there is a strong parallel with the earlier miracle, and there are even clearer ones in other hagiography.<sup>422</sup> But there is no reason to accuse Bede of such uncharacteristic invention. As has been argued previously, Bede does not make up events, though he is willing to manipulate the way a story is told to serve his agenda or suit his narrative. Nonetheless, the parallels and the tale's formulaic nature do suggest that, as for the story of Peter, Bede's source for his account was composed later than the events in question. That "Augustine" is an element in the name given for the meeting's location, of course, points to the same conclusion.

Thus, it is clear that now, for at least the third quite distinct time, Bede is telling a short story which apparently came from a hagiographic narrative source of Canterbury provenance concerning the early 'mission fathers', but which was evidently composed significantly after the events in question. Evidence for a body of such stories is therefore beginning to accumulate: more such tales are to come.

Even though Bede was working from a source for this story, however, he evidently also included his own rhetorical devices in its telling. Thus, since Bede's source has not survived, it is difficult to tell how independent is the phrasing in the *HE*'s account.

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<sup>419</sup> As also argued by Jones, *Saints*, p. 164: "the story suggests that the record from which Bede took his account was written long after the event, possibly not until common tradition had given it its miraculous ending, which has all the marks of the hagiographical incident."

<sup>420</sup> *HE* 1.18.

<sup>421</sup> I. Wood, "Augustine and Aidan: Bureaucrat and Charismatic?", in De Dreuille, *L'Église et la Mission*, 148-79, at pp. 166-68.

<sup>422</sup> Wood, "Augustine and Aidan", p. 162, noted the parallel with a story in Gregory of Tours, *Histoires*, II.3; another is in the same author's *Glory of the Confessors*, c. 13.

Certainly the direct speech seems to be Bede's own composition, following the pattern mentioned previously. Plummer noted that Augustine's speech included a favourite Bedan biblical text from the Psalms.<sup>423</sup>

Incidentally, as Stancliffe noticed, the description of Augustine as "true herald" (*uerus praeco*) picks up on something Bede had said in 1.22. There, in concluding his section on post-Roman Britain, he gave advanced notice that, following the refusal of the British to preach the faith to the English, God had appointed for the latter other, better, "heralds of the truth" (*praecones ueritatis*). Here again therefore there is evidence of Bede's authorial hand at work.

*Non enim paschae diem dominicum suo tempore sed a quarta decima usque ad uicesimam lunam obseruabant, quae computatio LXXXIII annorum circulo continentur; sed et alia plurima unitati ecclesiasticae contraria faciebant.* [They did not keep Easter Sunday at the proper time, but from the fourteenth to the twentieth day of the lunar month; this reckoning is based on an 84-year cycle. They did other things too which were not in keeping with the unity of the Church.]

This parenthetical statement about the precise nature of the British failings is based on Bede's own knowledge, and is quite separate to the rest of the story into which it is inserted. Computus was one of Bede's key specialities and emphasis on the subject is found throughout his corpus. Bede's continuing annoyance at what he saw as British intransigence on this issue, which had continued even into his own day, and would take another half-century to begin to shake, is well known.

Bede does not mention, assuming he knew, that, following contemporary Roman practice, Augustine would not himself have been keeping the 'proper' Easter at that time either. Or, to put it another way, Augustine would not have been keeping Easter according to the precise rules Bede advocated. Rome was still using the Victorian tables in c. 600 and Augustine would have followed that practice.<sup>424</sup> Bede does not mention at this stage what the *alia* issues were, preferring to leave that for Augustine to state later in the chapter.

<sup>423</sup> Ps. 67.7. Plummer, 2.74. Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 53, suggested that the phrase *flectit genua sua*, used slightly later, may well have been added by Bede as "a gloss of his own", since he used a similar expression in 5.1.

<sup>424</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 58-62.

*Tum Brettones confitentur quidem intellexisse se ueram esse uiam iustitiae quam praedicaret Augustinus, sed non se posse absque suorum consensu ac licentia priscis abdicare moribus; unde postulabant ut secundo synodus pluribus aduenientibus fieret.* [Then the Britons confessed that they realized that it was the true way of righteousness which Augustine preached but that they could not disown their former customs without the consent and approval of their own people. They therefore asked that a conference should be held for a second time and that more should attend.]

Conceivably the first part of this statement at least, comes from the same source as the rest of the synod/miracle story. Despite the reality of failure in this case, hagiographers often struggled to separate the actual result of the miracle from what they considered the logical, sensible reaction.<sup>425</sup>

The second part of the statement, however, linking the first meeting of Augustine with the British with the second council, which Bede is about to describe, is all his own addition. He is connecting the two ‘synod’ stories, for which he has different sources. To Bede, it seemed evident that the accounts were linked and should be placed consecutively. The only question was the order. Neither has any indication of dating, but since the one discussed above ended positively for the ‘Roman’ side and the other, as will be seen below, negatively, it made sense for Bede to place the latter story after the ‘Canterbury tale’. The situation in Bede’s own time was enough to show him that whatever negotiations there had been must have ended with the British rejecting the ‘Romans’.

*Quod cum esset statutum, uenerunt, ut perhibent, VII Brettonum episcopi et plures uiri doctissimi, maxime de nobilissimo eorum monasterio quod uocatur lingua Anglorum Bancornaburg, ... Fecunt ut dixerat, factumque est ut uenientibus illis sederet Augustinus in sella. Quod illi uidentes mox in iram conuersi sunt, eumque notantes superbiae cunctis quae dicebat contradicere laborabant.* [When this had been decided upon, it is related that seven British bishops and many learned men came, chiefly from their most famous monastery which the English call Bancornaburg (Bangor Iscoed). ... {Before going to the ‘synod’ the British party met a hermit who advised them to arrive second at the meeting and then, if Augustine rose to greet them, to follow him, but to despise him if he did not} ...

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<sup>425</sup> This can be seen as far back as the account of the consequences of Daniel’s surviving the lions’ den: Daniel 6.25-27.

They did as he [the hermit] had said. Now it happened that Augustine remained seated while they were coming in; when they saw this, they forthwith became enraged and, setting him down as a proud man, strove to contradict everything he said.]

Here then begins the second of the three stories in the chapter: the second ‘synod’ narrative. This story and the next one – about the British defeat at the battle of Chester and the massacre of monks there – while very similar to each other are, however, quite different in terms of both content and tone from the first story, which was considered above.<sup>426</sup> The shift from the generic narrative of the first tale – the account of Augustine’s miracle and apparent success – to the markedly detail-laden character of the second and third stories is particularly noticeable. There is general acceptance that Bede’s source for the second and third stories was the same.<sup>427</sup> As a result, it makes sense to attempt to deal with both tales here, together with the question of what that common source was.<sup>428</sup>

There has been significant debate about the nature of this source, although there is apparent consensus that British materials must be involved at some level at least. Charles-Edwards set out the case best for an early seventh-century Canterbury document relying on British information.<sup>429</sup> Stancliffe’s arguments that the text Bede was using was a British source, written later in the century, are, however, more persuasive, answering

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<sup>426</sup> By assuming all the stories shared a single point of origin, Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 52, was led into providing a very confusing account of the nature of the sources behind this chapter.

<sup>427</sup> Charles-Edwards, in the appendix to Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 218; and Stancliffe, “The British church”, p. 127.

<sup>428</sup> For the sake of convenience, the extract from the third story, of the battle of Chester, is included here, though it is also repeated below: *Siquidem post haec ipse, de quo diximus, rex Anglorum fortissimus Aedilfrid collecto grandi exercitu ad Ciuitatem Legionum, quae a gente Anglorum Legacaestir, a Brettonibus autem rectius Carlegion appellatur, maximam gentis perfidae stragem dedit. ... Brocmail ad primum hostium aduentum cum suis terga uertens, eos quos defendere debuerat inermes ac nudos ferientibus gladiis reliquit.* [For later on, that very powerful king of the English, Æthelfrith, whom we have already spoken of, collected a great army against the city of the legions which is called Legacæstir by the English and more correctly Caerlegion (Chester) by the Britons, and made a great slaughter of that nation of heretics. ... {Æthelfrith first slew about 1200 monks who, from the same monastery as those who had gone to the ‘second’ meeting with Augustine, were on the sidelines praying for the success of the British troops.} ... Brocmail and his men [who were supposed to be guarding the monks] at the first enemy attack turned their backs on those whom they should have defended, leaving them unarmed and helpless before the swords of their foes.]

<sup>429</sup> In the appendix to Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, pp. 218-19.



Charles-Edwards' linguistic objections and developing a comprehensive case, which deals with all the oddities in the narrative.<sup>430</sup>

Such a conclusion is in many ways the obvious one from reading Bede's account. The level of detail concerning specifically British individuals and institutions makes it very difficult to believe that Bede's source can have been anything other than a British one. The underlying negative tone towards Augustine and the English is further evidence. Indeed, the very frequency of the caveats Bede sprinkles into his account points to his discomfort at borrowing material from the schismatic British.<sup>431</sup> As was argued earlier, Bede's use of such caveats, while often referring to material derived from oral sources, did not do so exclusively. If the information did come from a written source – and it is difficult to see how the details in these stories can have come from anything other than a written source – then Bede enters caveats when he has some other reason to question the trustworthiness of that source. Bede's dislike and distrust for the British, in both secular and religious terms, would be a natural basis for these signals to his readers to treat the material derived therefrom with caution.

Bede was, thus, almost certainly using a British written source as the basis for his account. He had so few channels of information about Augustine, he had to include whatever he could.<sup>432</sup> Bede, of course, attempted to tone down and counteract the original pro-British and anti-Augustinian tone. Some terms seem explicitly added to reassure the reader about which side Bede is on.<sup>433</sup> Nonetheless, he has not been able to remove entirely the original perspective of the text he was working from, as it was so integral to the narrative. Thus, as noted above, the underlying antagonism to Augustine has not been completely eliminated. Indeed, the Welsh hermit whose advice apparently led to the British refusal to accept Augustine's authority is still praised, as *sanctus ac prudens*! This is quite revealing about the way Bede worked and what he was and was not capable of as a narrator.

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<sup>430</sup> Stancliffe, "The British church", pp. 125-29. Though her theories about how Bede obtained the source, while implicitly supported by B. Yorke, *Rex Doctissimus: Bede and King Aldfrith of Northumbria* (Jarrow, 2009), p. 12, are more speculative.

<sup>431</sup> The second and third stories together include a total of five such caveats.

<sup>432</sup> See also the similar point made by W. McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede* (Toronto, 1994), p. 211.

<sup>433</sup> For instance, the description of the British as both *perfidi* and, separately, as a *gens perfida*, while calling their army a *nefanda militia*.

For all Bede's genius for combining information from a variety of sources to create a narrative that went well beyond the sum of its parts, he struggled to do more than merely paraphrase when faced with only a single source for an event. Walter Goffart has noted something similar about the nature of Bede's authorship more generally.<sup>434</sup> The same point could be made about his revision of the *Passion of Anastasius*. Bede described the earlier version as "badly translated from the Greek by some ignorant person";<sup>435</sup> but his own 'corrected' version is scarcely pure.<sup>436</sup> Bede was prevented from writing a 'perfect' work by his difficulty in departing from his source.<sup>437</sup>

Faced by a single source, therefore, as in this instance, Bede struggled to digest its content and comprehensively reframe and rephrase its narrative according to his own objectives. Nor should one underestimate the difficulty of the task. How does one take a source, which – as the basis for the story of the second 'synod' – doubtless began as a tale of the wise British ascetics, enlightened and pious, insulted by the arrogance of an ignorant Roman interloper, and make it a tale about British perfidy? Or start with an account which – as the basis for the third story in this chapter, the battle of Chester – presumably included the tragic telling of a disastrous defeat of the pious (British) army, including the massacre of holy monks by a terrifying pagan host, and transform it into a story in which the English are glorified and the British justly punished? Overall, given the circumstances, Bede has shown great skill in recasting the narrative; but it is still not enough to hide entirely his source and its tone.

This leads to a further, connected, conclusion about Bede's way of working that can provide a better understanding of his methodology, as well as its shortcomings. Single sources enabled Bede to craft consistent pictures of individuals in the *HE*. Arguably the same was also true when Bede was faced by an essential absence of sources. When, however, there are apparently conflicted perspectives on a protagonist's character, as

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<sup>434</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 249.

<sup>435</sup> *HE* 5.24: "*male de Greco translatum et peius a quodam inperito emendatum*".

<sup>436</sup> Assuming that Vircillo Franklin is correct in identifying BHL 408(p) with Bede's work: C. Vircillo Franklin, *The Latin Dossier of Anastasius the Persian: Hagiographic Translations and Transformations* (Toronto, 2004), pp. 186-224.

<sup>437</sup> In (re-)writing the *Life of Cuthbert* Bede achieves this goal much more successfully; but here, of course, he was able to include much more new information than in these other examples and thus found himself on more comfortable ground.

with Augustine,<sup>438</sup> then this points to Bede's use of a variety of sources whose conflicting approaches he has not been able to harmonize. What can at first appear a reflection of his opinion, therefore, may often instead be merely an indication of the limitations, or contradictions, of his sources. Taken at face value this can appear confusing,<sup>439</sup> but viewed more creatively, these incidents offer interpretative opportunities. If we can discern between the sources, then it is possible to assess the quality of evidence within them and go on to make independent judgments irrespective of Bede's narrative. This enables the modern historian to add greater clarity and nuance to the characterizations provided by Bede, even at times excising error.

Returning to Bede's text, the description of British activity both before and during the 'synod' is followed by Augustine's response to the Welsh clerics. Bede gives this as direct speech.

*Dicebat autem eis quia "in multis quidem nostrae consuetudini, immo uniuersalis ecclesiae contraria geritis; et tamen si in tribus his mihi obtemperare uultis, ut pascha suo tempore celebretis, ut ministerium baptizandi quo Deo renascimur iuxta morem sanctae Romanae et apostolicae ecclesiae conpleatis, ut genti Anglorum una nobiscum uerbum Domini praedicetis, cetera quae agitis, quamuis moribus nostris contraria, aequanimiter cuncta tolerabimus."* [Then he said to them, "You do many things which are contrary to our customs or rather to the customs of the universal Church; nevertheless, if you are willing to submit to me in three points, we will gladly tolerate all else that you do, even though it is contrary to our customs. The three points are: to keep Easter at the proper time; to perform the sacrament of baptism, whereby we are born again to God, according to the rites of the holy Roman and apostolic Church; and to preach the word of the Lord to the English people in fellowship with us."]

The story of the second 'synod' continues with this speech credited to Augustine. As has been seen before, direct speech in the *HE* is usually best understood as Bede's own composition, even if his source may well have contained its own version. This present speech fits somewhat oddly within its context suggesting that such is also the case here. Moreover there is special reason to believe that Bede is taking the opportunity to provide Augustine with 'the best lines' as the speech interrupts the otherwise essentially negative perspective found in the narrative from his British source. Nonetheless, there are no

<sup>438</sup> Other examples include Edwin and Oswiu, and possibly even Theodore.

<sup>439</sup> And has led some to question Bede's attitude to Augustine.

grounds for thinking the original source could not have included a speech by Augustine at some stage setting out his demands, if not his side of the case. The reference to the rite of baptism as one of the elements of contention is something which occurs in no other source for ‘Roman’-‘Celtic’ ecclesiastic disputes. The inclusion of the issue here may, therefore, be a sign that it was found in the original source – and may, plausibly, also point to a relatively early date for that source.<sup>440</sup>

*At illi nil horum se facturos neque illum pro archiepiscopo habituros esse respondebant, conferentes adinuicem quia “si modo nobis adsurgere noluit, quanto magis, si ei subdi coeperimus, iam nos pro nihilo contemnet.” Quibus uir Domini Augustinus fertur minitans praedixisse quia, si pacem cum fratribus accipere nollent, bellum ab hostibus forent accepturi, et si nationi Anglorum noluissent uiam uitae praedicare, per horum manus ultionem essent mortis passuri. Quod ita per omnia, ut praedixerat, diuino agente iudicio patratum est.* [They answered that they would do none of these things nor would they accept him as their archbishop, saying between themselves that if he was even unwilling to rise at their approach now, he would despise them much more if they were to begin to give way to him. It is said that Augustine, the man of God, warned them with threats that, if they refused to accept peace from their brethren, they would have to accept war from their enemies; and if they would not preach the way of life to the English nation, they would one day suffer the vengeance of death at their hands. This, through the workings of divine judgement, came to pass in every particular as he had foretold.]

As this account of the second ‘synod’ comes to a close and Bede sets the scene for the next tale – the third in the chapter, the account of the battle of Chester – it becomes more difficult to tell what is ‘Bede’ and what is his source. Bede may have been responsible for all the connections drawn between the two passages. In other words, the threat might be considered Bede’s addition based on his knowledge of the story about the massacre of the monks of Bangor that he is about to tell. The inclusion of the caveat, *fertur*, however, points towards Bede’s use of a source at least as a basis for his statement that Augustine threatened his interlocutors. Whether that threat was as specific as Bede suggests is less clear. It certainly seems likely that much of the form the narration takes in this passage is of Bede’s own devising, intended to reinforce rhetorically the narrative points about the

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<sup>440</sup> As suggested by Stancliffe, “The British church”, p. 132.

British he is seeking to emphasize and which he will continue to underline in the next section.

Before moving away from the second ‘synod’ narrative, however, one further point should be noted. Although, as discussed above, this chapter includes accounts of two separate meetings between Augustine and the British, in fact there seems little reason to multiply entities. Bede had two sources each speaking of a meeting between Augustine and the British. He therefore concluded that there were two such meetings; but there is actually no reason to posit more than one. Bede’s sources are not so detailed or trustworthy that it is possible to be certain they really represent accounts of two originally quite separate meetings, rather than simply two diametrically opposed versions of the same meeting.<sup>441</sup> Both stories contain hagiographic elements and neither is a particularly credible narrative; thus the fact that they differ so significantly hardly argues against the theory that there was only one meeting. The continued implicit trust for Bede’s account,<sup>442</sup> despite all the criticisms of him and his *History*, has obstructed scholars’ recognition of this apparently obvious conclusion.

*Siquidem post haec ipse, de quo diximus, rex Anglorum fortissimus Aedilfrid collecto grandi exercitu ad Ciuitatem Legionum, quae a gente Anglorum Legacaestir, a Brettonibus autem rectius Carlegion appellatur, maximam gentis perfidae stragem dedit. ... Brocmail ad primum hostium aduentum cum suis terga uertens, eos quos defendere debuerat inermes ac nudos ferientibus gladiis reliquit.* [For later on, that very powerful king of the English, Æthelfrith, whom we have already spoken of, collected a great army against the city of the legions which is called Legacæstir by the English and more correctly Caerlegion (Chester) by the Britons, and made a great slaughter of that nation of heretics. ... {Æthelfrith first slew about 1200 monks who, from the same monastery as those who had gone to the ‘second’ meeting with Augustine, were on the sidelines praying for the success of the British troops.} ... Brocmail and his men [who were supposed to be guarding the monks] at the first enemy attack turned their backs on those whom they should have defended, leaving them unarmed and helpless before the swords of their foes.]

<sup>441</sup> Especially, when the ‘first’ tale was so generic an account, written, as was argued above, significantly after the supposed events in question.

<sup>442</sup> Which is not, as Nora Chadwick claimed, an “original authority” for these events. N. Chadwick, “The Battle of Chester: a Study of Sources”, in K. Jackson et al, ed., *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border* (Cambridge, 1963), 167-85, at p. 167.

As noted above, historians believe that Bede's source for this, the third, and final, story in the chapter,<sup>443</sup> was the same as that for the second.<sup>444</sup> The shared tone and similar treatment by Bede, especially through the use of caveats, points in the same direction. The source for this passage has therefore already been discussed: it was a written source of British origins. As mentioned above, one element at least of the narratives – the reference to different British baptismal practice – may suggest that Bede's source perhaps drew on near contemporary materials for parts of its account. At the same time, the hagiographic and 'saga' overtones of both these tales should not engender too much confidence about their reliability.

*Sicque completum est praesagium sancti pontificis Augustini, quamuis ipso iam multo ante tempore ad caelestia regna sublato, ut etiam temporalis interitus ultione sentirent perfidi, quod oblata sibi perpetuae salutis consilia spreuerant.* [Thus the prophecy of the holy Bishop Augustine was fulfilled, although he had long been translated to the heavenly kingdom, namely that those heretics would also suffer the vengeance of temporal death because they had despised the offer of everlasting salvation.]

The chapter ends with Bede pointing the moral of the story. Whether Bede's source connected the two stories or whether he was the first to do so, most of this closing statement is Bede's own inference and not derived from any specific or primary evidence.

The exception is Bede's note that the event took place long after Augustine's death (*multo ante tempore*). Although Bede does not provide a date for the battle of Chester,<sup>445</sup> his statement here suggests that he probably did have one. His 'knowledge' probably derived not from his 'saga' source for the events of the battle, however, but from a version of the Irish annals he seems to have had access to.<sup>446</sup> From these, the text of Bede's version of which was apparently somewhat corrupt, Bede also seems to have obtained the information he used in 3.27 about the eclipse and plague.

This still leaves the question of how Bede knew the battle had taken place long after Augustine's death, when, as will be seen later, he did not know the precise year

<sup>443</sup> The account of the battle of Chester.

<sup>444</sup> The 'second synod' narrative.

<sup>445</sup> Indeed, the precise date remains uncertain, but it was probably in c.615.

<sup>446</sup> Chadwick, "Battle of Chester", pp. 173-78, has a good summary of the references to the battle in these annals.

Augustine died. Despite this, as will be argued in 2.4, Bede did possess, thanks to Nothelm, some papal letters dating to 610, including at least one from Boniface IV to ‘archbishop’ Laurence. Thus, Bede could tell Augustine had died before that point, and, therefore, some years before the battle of Chester, even if his ambiguous phrasing, *multo ante tempore*, is a reminder that he did not know precisely how many.

### **What Bede had**

- A version of ‘Irish’ annals (probably somewhat corrupt)
- Letter from Pope Boniface IV to Laurence, dated to 610.

### **What Bede says that has not been possible to source**

No other written material survives directly underlying the material in this chapter. Nonetheless, as has been seen above, one at least of his sources – that used for the second and third stories in the chapter – can be identified, even if only in the most general way.

- A written source of British origins telling the story of the ‘second’ council and of the battle of Chester.

In addition to the material Bede obtained from that British source and the various rhetorical adjustments he made, however, there is also information at the start of this chapter which does not derive from an obvious source, though it shares characteristics with others noted earlier.<sup>447</sup>

- Augustine met British ecclesiastics at Augustine’s Oak
- He urged them to work with him
- They were unwilling to agree
- In order to test the justice of each case, a blind man was brought in

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<sup>447</sup> Those sections where it is not clear whether the content comes from Bede’s source or is merely his deduction/rhetorical invention are placed in square brackets.

- The ministrations of the British bishops failed
- But the man was cured by Augustine
- [The British acknowledged Augustine's righteousness]
- [Augustine prophesied that they would be punished for their unwillingness to help.]



### 2.3 – “How he [Augustine] consecrated Mellitus and Justus bishops; and about his death”

*Anno dominicae incarnationis DCIII Augustinus Britanniarum archiepiscopus ordinavit duos episcopos, Mellitum uidelicet et Iustum:* [In the year of our Lord 604 Augustine, archbishop of Britain, consecrated two bishops, namely Mellitus and Justus.]

Jones suggested that the placing of two events in one year meant that Bede had found this information in a Dionysian Easter table.<sup>448</sup> Harrison demonstrated why this was essentially impossible.<sup>449</sup> Instead, he proposed the initially appealing alternative that Bede had calculated the year from the bishops’ lists for London and Rochester.<sup>450</sup> Although Harrison did not enter into the details of his suggested solution, in order for it to be practical one needs to infer both that Bede’s proposed episcopal lists for these sees included the length of years of each bishop’s reign and that Bede possessed fixed chronological pegs upon which to hang this comparative chronology. Only with these would Bede have had the material necessary to work back to 604 as the date of consecration of Justus and Mellitus.

Once this is recognized, it quickly becomes clear that Harrison’s solution is not sustainable. Bede almost certainly did have access to an episcopal list for Rochester, and possibly for London too, though the evidence for this is much less clear. Moreover his episcopal list for the diocese of the East Angles does seem to have included the lengths of each episcopate, so there was a good precedent.<sup>451</sup> On examination, however, it is clear that Bede’s putative episcopal lists for London and Rochester cannot have included even

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<sup>448</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 165.

<sup>449</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 62-65 and 97. An additional difficulty with Jones’ explanation is that this would be the only element which can be conceivably credited to a Dionysian table in Bede’s account – at least for this period, as Jones himself acknowledged separately: Jones, *Saints*, pp. 162-63. Nonetheless, the fact that Bede does not mention annals in the *HE* Preface should concern us less than Harrison thought. Nor is it *prima facie* unlikely that later parts of the *HE*, not considered in this study, may well have drawn on English annals, but none of these relate to a period before Theodore.

<sup>450</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, p. 97.

<sup>451</sup> Unfortunately Bede never had a specific date on which to ‘hang’ this comparative East Anglian episcopal chronology, so he was not able to offer incarnational dating for any of the bishops.

such comparative dating, or only partially if so: certainly, he never had enough to calculate 604 from them.

This is particularly obvious for London. There was a significant gap between the apparent expulsion of Mellitus from the see<sup>452</sup> and the next bishop, Cedd. Bede is able to give no date for Cedd's accession,<sup>453</sup> and what information he does have about the re-establishment of Christianity in Essex apparently came not from any bishops' list, but from Lastingham.<sup>454</sup> The extended vacancy between Mellitus and Cedd means that even if an episcopal list had included the lengths of episcopates, this could not have provided sufficient information from which to calculate the origins of the see. Furthermore Bede's account of Mellitus reveals he did not have a figure for the length of his episcopate. Given that he was apparently exiled, such a figure would have been difficult to assess exactly anyway: was he technically bishop of London until he became bishop of Canterbury in 619? But Bede did not even have a date for the expulsion. The fact that the story is told in the same chapter as that recounting Æthelberht's death as 616,<sup>455</sup> is no evidence at all for the year of the events in the colourful story about Mellitus. Even assuming Bede had a bishops' list for London therefore, it did not include the lengths of episcopates and could not feasibly have provided sufficient information from which to calculate the date of 604 for Mellitus consecration.

While Bede's possession of an episcopal list for Rochester is more evident from the information he provides in the *HE*, it is equally clear that this did not provide him with any detail about the lengths of each bishop's episcopate. Like London, Rochester had vacancies which interrupted succession to the see. Leaving aside the significant gap in the 660s,<sup>456</sup> there was another one much earlier, between Romanus and Paulinus, which Bede

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<sup>452</sup> *HE* 2.5.

<sup>453</sup> *HE* 3.22.

<sup>454</sup> As Bede specifically states in the Preface.

<sup>455</sup> Which some scholars have interpreted as meaning 618: for instance, N. Brooks, "The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent", in Bassett, *Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, 55-74, at pp. 65-67.

<sup>456</sup> Bede does not seem to have known precisely when Damian died, but he did, however, apparently have reason to believe that there was a vacancy between that bishop's death and the choice and consecration of his successor Putta by Theodore: *HE* 4.2. Overall, it is perhaps most probable that Damian died in or shortly after 664 from the great 'plague'.

was able to provide no details about.<sup>457</sup> Bede did not know when Romanus died and he did not know when Paulinus succeeded.<sup>458</sup> Therefore, his episcopal catalogue for Rochester could not have contained comparative dates for each prelate. As a result, we can conclude that bishops' lists do not in fact lie behind Bede's calculation of the date 604 as the moment of creation of the two dioceses.

Nor can epitaphs have been of much help. Bede states in 2.7 that Mellitus died after ruling over the church (of Canterbury) for five years. As will be seen when considering that chapter, the source of this statement is not obvious, but may derive from his epitaph.<sup>459</sup> Either way, Mellitus' epitaph did not record even a comparative figure for his prior episcopacy over London, since, as seen above, Bede did not know when that ended.

Equally, Justus's epitaph is scarcely likely to have given Bede any information about his rule over Rochester, when it did not apparently provide any about the length of his rule over Canterbury. Bede did not know when Justus died or for how long he had ruled there. Thus, even assuming Bede had texts of the epitaphs for these individuals,<sup>460</sup> they could not have provided the basis from which Bede could have deduced 604.

The present analysis thus undermines claims that Bede could have calculated the year 604 from comparative information for later figures about whom he also possessed positive dating from which to work back. As a result, it is clear that Bede's source must have provided him more directly with the figure necessary to transform into the incarnational date of 604. Having accepted that, then a very plausible source, whose existence has already been proposed above, comes into play.

As discussed earlier, it seems very likely that Bede obtained some of his information about the early churches used by the mission fathers from the inscriptions on their

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<sup>457</sup> The questions raised by Bede's passing remark in 2.20 about Paulinus' appointment to the see vacant since Romanus' death on a mission to Rome are very difficult indeed and there is no space to deal with them in this study.

<sup>458</sup> Although he did 'know' his date of death and the total length of time since his episcopal consecration – but this was for York not Rochester: *HE* 3.14.

<sup>459</sup> It may also be a calculation based on some confusion, as will be seen. Certainly, the information did not come from the Canterbury bishops' list Bede possessed, as that does not seem to have recorded the length of episcopal reigns, until at least that of Deusdedit.

<sup>460</sup> As will be discussed shortly, there is good reason to believe that this is likely: though the epitaphs themselves may well only have been added later, after Theodore's arrival.

(re)dedication stones. None of these survive,<sup>461</sup> but that for Bede's own Jarrow, of course, does. In the Jarrow example there is a dating clause. Even though this is from three-quarters of a century later, it seems quite reasonable to suppose that one at least of the foundation stones inscribed by Augustine and his party included a dating reference.<sup>462</sup> This, therefore, could have provided the material Bede required to come up with 604 as the date of Mellitus and Justus' consecration.

Some of the details Bede gives later in this chapter, point again to his possession of such foundation stone inscriptions, especially for St Paul's, London. Bede referred to both the churches as being built by Æthelberht, which in the case of St Paul's is somewhat surprising. Even if one were to make the justifiable assumption that Bede's desire to present royal support for ecclesiastical foundations in his own day might mean he would be willing to exaggerate accounts of this in the past, this would not explain the claim for Æthelberht's involvement here. As far as Bede was concerned London was not part of Æthelberht's kingdom. If Bede had been inventing the detail of who had built the church, he would have been more likely to credit it to Sæberht than Æthelberht. Bede had no reason to invent the statement that Æthelberht was the king responsible. Thus, his claim was probably based on information in the source he had. The most likely source for such a robust assertion was probably the text of a foundation stone crediting the construction to that king while referencing Mellitus as bishop.

The next question then is what form the dating information in the inscription could have taken.<sup>463</sup> Two options are possible, though there is not sufficient information to decide conclusively between them. Given the Roman background to the mission, an indictional dating would perhaps seem the most likely. With such a reference Bede would have found it a simple matter to calculate the incarnational date. The other alternative is a dating by regnal years, as in the Jarrow stone.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Not including the fragment from St Martin's which might have formed part of the dedication. As Okasha pointed out, given that the normal position for such dedication stones was above the altar or the entrance – both places renovation would be likely to affect – it is no wonder so few have survived: Okasha, *Hand-List*, p. 86.

<sup>462</sup> The fact that there is no sign of dating for those considered above for St Martin's, Ss Peter and Paul's, or the 'cathedral', does not mean that neither Rochester's nor London's did either.

<sup>463</sup> In theory both churches' inscriptions could have included such a date, but given Bede's methods, it seems just as possible that only one did and Bede extrapolated from one to both.

<sup>464</sup> Okasha, *Hand-List*, p. 85.

Bede had a regnal list for Kent, which seems to have provided the lengths of each king's reign. In 2.5, he claims that Æthelberht ruled for 56 years. In 3.8, Eorcenberht is said to have reigned twenty-four years. Eadbald is said to have died in 640,<sup>465</sup> a figure Bede probably arrived at by subtracting the twenty-four years of Eorcenberht's reign from his year of death of 664.<sup>466</sup> Although Eadbald is not assigned a specific length of reign in the *HE*, it seems likely that Bede's date of death for Æthelberht of 616 merely represents a subtraction of a regnal length of twenty-four years for Eadbald from 640, the year Bede had calculated he died. In 4.1, Egbert is given a nine year reign; in 4.5, Hlothre is credited with 11 years 7 months;<sup>467</sup> in 4.26, Eadric's rule is described as of a year and a half; and finally, in 5.23, Wihtred is said to have governed for 34 and a half years.

Some of these figures may, of course, be calculations, but overall, the consistency with which this information is presented in the *HE* strongly suggests that Bede's kings' list for Kent included regnal years as a general rule. Since Bede seems to have possessed a firm date for Eorcenberht's death, the information in the regnal list would have given him the basis to calculate an incarnational date from a regnal year if one were present in the St Paul's, London, foundation stone inscription.

Whether Bede's basis for calculating the year 604 lay in an indictional figure or a regnal year, therefore, Dionysian tables, episcopal lists and epitaphs are all impossible; instead, he is most likely to have found the relevant information in an ecclesiastical inscription, from St Paul's, London, and/or St Andrew's, Rochester.

Finally, Bede's description of Augustine as "archbishop of Britain" – *Brittaniarum archiepiscopus* – should be noted. This is not based on any early source,<sup>468</sup> but rather reflects later Canterbury ambitions, including those which perhaps underlay Albinus' initial commissioning of the writing of the *HE*.

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<sup>465</sup> *HE* 3.8.

<sup>466</sup> *HE* 4.1. This is a figure for which, as will be seen later, Bede does seem to have had direct positive dating evidence.

<sup>467</sup> In 4.26, Bede rounds this up to twelve years.

<sup>468</sup> Notwithstanding Gregory the Great's view, expressed in his letter to Augustine quoted at 1.29, that the latter's authority should include *omnes Brittaniae sacerdotes*. The question of 'archbishop', however, as discussed earlier, is quite separate.

*Mellitum quidem ad praedicandum prouinciae Orientalium Saxonum* [He consecrated Mellitus to preach in the province of the East Saxons,]

The information in the *HE* does not give much reason to believe that Bede possessed an episcopal list for London and the East Saxons. Bede did of course also have a narrative source which will be discussed in 2.5, which told the story of Mellitus' expulsion from London and thus directly associated him with the East Saxons. But Bede may have needed no more than the information in the St Paul's foundation stone proposed above, and which would have mentioned both Æthelberht and Mellitus, as a basis for the statement he makes here. For Bede, the bishop of London was the bishop of the East Saxons.<sup>469</sup> He did not require an additional source to 'know' that.<sup>470</sup>

*qui Tamense fluuio dirimuntur a Cantia, et ipsi orientali mari contigui, quorum metropolis Lundonia ciuitas est, super ripam praefati fluminis posita et ipsa multorum emporium populorum terra marique uenientium;* [which is divided from Kent by the river Thames and borders on the sea to the east. Its chief city is London, which is on the banks of that river and is an emporium for many nations who come to it by land and sea.]

Bede did not require any specific source in order to make these basic geographic statements. In terms of geography, Bede, as discussed in considering 1.25, was especially well-informed about the rivers and the coast on the east of the island. Bede's views of boundaries, control of cities, or commercial success should not therefore be taken as evidence for events or the political or economic situation in c.600, rather than simply at the time of writing, c.730.

*in qua uidelicet gente tunc temporis Sæberct nepos Aedilbercti ex sorore Ricula regnabat,* [At that time Sæberht, nephew of Æthelberht and son of his sister Ricule, ruled over the nation ]

<sup>469</sup> Although, as will be seen, even he later recognized, in the case of Cedd, that being the bishop of the East Saxons did not mean one was bishop of London.

<sup>470</sup> In reality, there is evidence which suggests that the bishop of London was not so consistently 'bishop of the East Saxons' as Bede suggests: for instance, Ine, *Lawcode*, Prologue, or the letter of Bishop Wealdhere of London to Berhtwald, A. Haddan and W. Stubbs, ed., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 1871), vol. 3, pp. 274-75.

Despite Jones' assertion, there is no reason to treat *tunc temporis* as a "definite time reference".<sup>471</sup> Quite the opposite: there is no reason to think Bede had separate dating information here. Nor is there any sign in the *HE* that Bede possessed a kings' list for the East Saxons. He does, however, seem to have possessed not only a regnal list for the kings of Kent, but also a genealogy. Possibly, this lies behind the information in this passage, which relates as much to the Kentish royal family as it does to the East Saxon.<sup>472</sup>

*quamuis sub potestate positus eiusdem Aedilbercti qui omnibus, ut supra dictum est, usque ad terminum Humberae fluminis Anglorum gentibus imperabat.* [although he was under the dominion of Æthelberht who, as already said, held sway over all the English nations as far as the Humber.]

Bede's basis for the claim of Æthelberht's hegemony and his view that this applied to the southern kingdoms has already been mentioned and will be discussed at greater length in considering 2.5. The statements here are merely Bede's deduction from the materials noted in analyzing 1.25 and the situation in his own time.

*Vbi uero et haec prouincia uerbum ueritatis praedicante Mellito accepit,* [After this kingdom had accepted the word of truth through the preaching of Mellitus,]

This optimistic statement in praise of Mellitus is merely Bedan rhetoric and is not based on any direct source. The story Bede tells in 2.5 assumes the conversion of Sæberht, but the idea that the East Saxons as a whole accepted Christianity is Bede's deduction – and is in fact contradicted by the narrative in that later tale.

*fecit rex Aedilberct in ciuitate Lundonia ecclesiam sancti Pauli apostoli,* [King Æthelberht built the church of the apostle St Paul in the city of London,]

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the idea that Æthelberht, rather than Sæberht, is named as the founder of the church of St Paul's in London is a surprising one, given all that Bede has just been saying about London being in the kingdom of the East

<sup>471</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 165.

<sup>472</sup> A suggestion raised also by Jones, *Saints*, p. 165, though he ended with the rather confusing conclusion that it "was more probably an ecclesiastical notation." The nature of what source he had in mind by this is, however, very unclear.

Saxons of which Sæberht was the king. Thus, it requires some explanation. Such a positive affirmation of a fact which is inconsistent with the surrounding narrative suggests that Bede was basing his claim on a specific piece of information. The most probable source, as seen above, would have been the text of the church's foundation stone, which credited Æthelberht directly with the foundation.

*in qua locum sedis episcopalis et ipse et successores eius haberent.* [in which Mellitus and his successors were to have their episcopal seat.]

Even if the foundation stone mentioned Mellitus, this statement is merely an extrapolation by Bede from the practice current in his own times. The claim is not accurate, even by Bede's own later account of the see. When discussing the episcopacy of Cedd in 3.22, it is clear that Cedd was not based in London, but operated out of various other houses including Bradwell-on-Sea and Tilbury.

*Iustum uero in ipsa Cantia Augustinus episcopum ordinavit in ciuitate Dorubreui,* [Augustine consecrated Justus in Kent itself, in the city of Dorubreis ]

Bede had a bishops' list for Rochester, though not one which included the lengths of episcopates, as has already been seen. This list would have told him that Justus was the first bishop of the city. Bede himself would have been able to deduce that Augustine consecrated him, without the need for any new specific source.

*quam gens Anglorum a primario quondam illius, qui dicebatur Hrof, Hrofaescaestrae cognominat;* [which the English call Hrofæscæstræ (Rochester), after one of their former chiefs whose name was Hrof.]

Unsurprisingly Bede's etymology here is completely fanciful.<sup>473</sup> Whether this claim, therefore, was Bede's own best guess, or, more probably, was based on oral information from his Canterbury contacts, no 'primary' source lies behind this.

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<sup>473</sup> See for instance, E. Ekwall, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (4<sup>th</sup> edn. Oxford, 1960), p. 390.



*distat autem a Doruuerni milibus passuum ferme XXIII ad occidentem.* [It is about twenty-four miles west of Canterbury]

Bede does not include mileage figures very often in the *HE*. There are ten instances in total, including twelve specific mileages. Most of these seem to be integrally connected to the stories in which they are found and thus probably derive from Bede's sources for these stories. There are two apparently from Lindisfarne sources;<sup>474</sup> one apparently from Acca;<sup>475</sup> one from Lastingham;<sup>476</sup> one from 'Whitby';<sup>477</sup> and one from whatever his source was for the story of Oswine.<sup>478</sup> The figure for the distance between John of Beverley's oratory and the church of Hexham is likely to be based on no more than Bede's own knowledge.<sup>479</sup> References to the length and breadth of Britain at the very start of the *HE* come from Gildas.<sup>480</sup> Those to the dimensions of the Isle of Wight in the account of Vespasian's conquest of the Isle of Wight, in 1.3, do not, however, occur in Eutropius, Bede's source for the rest of that passage.<sup>481</sup> Here instead, Daniel, bishop of Winchester, was probably Bede's source, since the Preface specifically noted that he had provided information relating to the Isle of Wight. This just leaves then the reference here to the distance from Rochester to Canterbury. As can be seen from this catalogue, there is no sign that Bede possessed a written document such as an *Itinerary* which formed the basis for the mileage references in the *HE*.<sup>482</sup> We must therefore assume that Bede received this detail, odd though it is, orally from his Canterbury sources – that is from Albinus, via Nothelm, presumably on his first visit.<sup>483</sup>

<sup>474</sup> *HE* 3.16 and 4.27.

<sup>475</sup> In the story of the Hewalds' martyrdom: *HE* 5.10. Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 182, argues that Bede's source for the Frisian mission stories was Acca, and through him, indirectly Willibrord and his companions, who Acca visited in 703-4.

<sup>476</sup> In the story of the reconversion of the East Saxons: *HE* 3.22.

<sup>477</sup> *HE* 4.23.

<sup>478</sup> *HE* 3.14. Bede's source may have been Ceolfrith himself, or at least traditions derived from Gilling: Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 107.

<sup>479</sup> *HE* 5.2.

<sup>480</sup> Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, c.3.

<sup>481</sup> Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 7.19, which itself probably derived, as Plummer, 2.14, noted, from Suetonius, *Twelve Caesars: Vespasian*, c.4.

<sup>482</sup> *Contra* R. Morris, *Journeys from Jarrow* (Jarrow, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>483</sup> The fact that the figure 24 miles is similar to the 25 miles of the *Antonine Itinerary* for the same journey is not the result of any borrowing, but rather the consequence of both being measurements of the same distance.

*In qua rex Aedilberct ecclesiam beati Andreae apostoli fecit;* [and in it King Æthelberht built the church of the apostle St Andrew;]

As already discussed, given that Bede refers in 3.14 to this church as being built by Æthelberht, *a fundamentis*, St Andrew's probably had a foundation stone, the text of whose inscription Bede seems to have known. This will no doubt have named the bishop who had consecrated it and the king who was its patron, as well as the saint to whom it was dedicated. Even so Bede's statement here was a much simpler one to infer than those concerning St Paul's and London. Who else but Æthelberht would have built the church in Kent's second 'city'? The dedication of the church Bede knew from his own time and he would have been quite content to make the reasonable assumption that this had been maintained from its foundation.

*qui etiam episcopis utriusque huius ecclesiae dona multa, sicut et Doruuernensis, obtulit, sed et territoria ac possessiones in usum eorum, qui erant cum episcopis, adiecit.* [he later bestowed many gifts on the bishops of each of these churches and that of Canterbury; and he also added both lands and possessions for the maintenance of the bishops' retinues.]

As was seen in 1.26, Bede did not need specific evidence to make rhetorically phrased statements of the obvious such as this, especially when they fitted his own agenda of promoting church-state co-operation in mission, pastoral care and reform so well. That is what kings did and should do. At the same time, it is quite easy to envisage Albinus emphasizing how well endowed these foundations were; but we should not imagine any early source lying behind this claim.<sup>484</sup>

*Defunctus est autem Deo dilectus pater Augustinus, et positum corpus eius foras iuxta ecclesiam beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli, cuius supra meminimus, quia necdum fuerat perfecta nec dedicata.* [On the death of our father Augustine, a man beloved of God, his body was buried outside but close to the church of the apostles St Peter and St Paul mentioned already, for it was not yet either finished or consecrated.]

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<sup>484</sup> Nor need this contradict Brooks' arguments for the significant early endowment of the church at Canterbury, despite its lack or loss of documentation: Brooks, *Early Church*, pp. 100-107.

There is no reason to assume that Bede had a source for this story of the fate of Augustine's body. It seems more likely to have been a deduction on his part. Thanks to Albinus, Bede 'knew' that Augustine was buried in Ss Peter and Paul in his own time. But he also knew, probably thanks, as was seen in analyzing 1.33, to the foundation stone for that church, that it had been consecrated by Laurence and not by Augustine. In other words, Bede could see that Ss Peter and Paul cannot have been ready to receive Augustine's body when he died and so he could not have been buried in the church, at least initially. Bede has therefore neatly sidestepped this problem by stating as certain, what was only likely, that Augustine had been buried nearby until the church was ready. Bede's method, as seen previously, allowed him to state deductions as fact quite confidently.

*Mox uero ut dedicata est, intro inlatum et in porticu illius aquilonali decenter sepultum est; in qua etiam sequentium archiepiscoporum omnium sunt corpora tumulata praeter duorum tantummodo, id est Theodori et Berhtwaldi, quorum in ipsa ecclesia posita sunt, eo quod praedicta porticus plura capere nequiuuit.* [But as soon as it was consecrated, the body was carried inside and honourably buried in the chapel on the north side. In it the bodies of all succeeding archbishops have been buried with the exception of two, Theodore and Berhtwald, whose bodies were placed in the church itself because there was no more room in the chapel.]

These statements were based on the information provided by Albinus, who as abbot of that monastery was of course in a good position to know the location of the tombs. Given that Berhtwald died on 14 January 731,<sup>485</sup> this information at least, came to Bede after that date, possibly significantly later, up to c.734. For at least several of these figures, Bede apparently also possessed epitaphs, provided by Albinus, via Nothelm. These would not, however, have alone told him of the location of the tombs.

Bede's claim about the motivation for burying the later archbishops in the church itself may be grounded in information from Albinus, but it is just as likely to be Bede's own attempt at explaining the shift. In reality, part at least of the reason for the change was the erosion of the older, Roman, sense, apparently maintained by the early 'missionaries' that burials should occur outside churches. By the end of the seventh century, this was no longer an issue, even in Rome. Thus, interring the later prelates away from the crowded

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<sup>485</sup> HE 5.23.

*porticus* would no longer have caused a difficulty. Again, Bede's confident, if misleading, statement of his deductions, or incomplete information, as fact reveals more about his method.

*Habet haec in medio pene sui altare in honore beati papae Gregorii dedicatum, in quo per omne sabbatum a presbytero loci illius agenda eorum sollemniter celebrantur.* [Almost in the middle of the chapel is an altar dedicated in honour of the pope St Gregory, at which a priest of that place celebrates a solemn Mass in their memory every Saturday.]

Again, Albinus is the source for this information about contemporary practice in his monastery. Although Bede implies that the altar to Gregory was present from the early seventh century, in fact, as Thacker noted, this could have been a more recent addition or dedication.<sup>486</sup> The ways in which the *agenda* of the earlier bishops of Canterbury may have been celebrated will be discussed in more detail, in Chapter 7; suffice it to say for now that Colgrave's rendering of the word as Mass may be too narrow.<sup>487</sup>

*Scriptum uero est in tumba eiusdem Augustini epitaphium huiusmodi: "Hic requiescit domnus Augustinus Doruuernensis archiepiscopus primus, qui olim huc a beato Gregorio Romanae urbis pontifice directus, et a Deo operatione miraculorum suffultus, Aedilbertum regem ac gentem illius ab idolorum cultu ad Christi fidem perduxit, et conpletis in pace diebus officii sui defunctus est septima kalendas Iunias eodem rege regnante."* [This is the epitaph inscribed on Augustine's tomb: "Here lies the most reverend Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury, who was formerly sent hither by St Gregory, bishop of Rome; being supported by God in the working of miracles, he led King Æthelberht and his nation from the worship of idols to faith in Christ and ended the days of his office in peace; he died on the twenty-sixth day of May during the reign of the same king."]

Bede here inserts Augustine's epitaph, the text of which must have been sent north with Nothelm by Albinus. Although Bede does not quote any other epitaphs of the Canterbury bishops, apart from Theodore's, there is good reason to believe, as already noted and as will be seen in more detail later, that others existed and that Bede possessed at least some

<sup>486</sup> Thacker, "Memorializing Gregory", p. 75. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, p. 58, n. 39, states Theodore's role in founding the altar as fact, though without evidence or argument.

<sup>487</sup> Colgrave's reading followed Plummer, 2.80-81.

of them. Judging by Augustine's, however, they should not be assumed to be primary documents. In a sense, of course, Augustine's could not have been strictly speaking a primary source, as he was not buried in Ss Peter and Paul's initially. More importantly, the reference to Augustine as "archbishop"<sup>488</sup> shows that the text itself can have been written no earlier than the episcopate of Theodore who, as discussed earlier, was the first to adopt the term to describe his position and authority.<sup>489</sup> Indeed, it might plausibly have been written even later, under Berhtwald (692-731).<sup>490</sup>

As already noted, Bede did not know the year of Augustine's death. Historians have given various versions, which tend to be in or shortly after 604.<sup>491</sup> This view is based on the extremely unreliable premise that Bede mentions Augustine's death in the same chapter that he begins with an event dating to 604. The reality, as historians recognize, is that Bede did not know when Augustine died, so arguing from where he placed the event in the *HE* makes no sense.<sup>492</sup> The question will have to be considered incidentally in the next chapter, where I shall suggest an answer.

### What Bede had

- Inscription from foundation stone for St Paul's London, including a date, either indictional or regnal
- Inscription from foundation stone for Rochester, perhaps also including a dating clause, but this is less necessary
- Kentish kings' list, which included the length in years of each king's reign
- 'Hegemony list'
- Kentish royal genealogy
- Rochester episcopal list

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<sup>488</sup> And especially as the *archiepiscopus primus*.

<sup>489</sup> Thacker, "Gallic or Greek?", pp. 55-69.

<sup>490</sup> The epitaph's strident assertion of Augustine as "first archbishop of Canterbury" would certainly be consistent with the tone of ecclesiastical politics in the late seventh or early eighth century discussed by Brooks, *Early Church*, pp. 76-80.

<sup>491</sup> For instance, Thacker, "In Gregory's shadow?", p. 374, says it was probably 604.

<sup>492</sup> Martyn, *Letters*, p. 71, goes further yet, claiming, again with no evidence or argument, that Augustine resigned!

- Inscription from foundation stone for Ss Peter and Paul, with Laurence not Augustine as the consecrator
- Augustine's epitaph

'Orally', he had information from Albinus about the location of tombs and altars and contemporary liturgical practices in Ss Peter and Paul's, Canterbury. From this source also he seems to have gained the detail about the distance from Rochester to Canterbury and probably about the etymology of Rochester. Other basic geographical information about the boundaries of kingdoms and the location of London were part of Bede's own general knowledge.

## 2.4 – “How Laurence and his fellow bishops warned the Irish about preserving the unity of the holy Church, especially in the matter of keeping Easter; and how Mellitus went to Rome”

*Succesit Augustino in episcopatum Laurentius, quem ipse idcirco adhuc uiuens ordinauerat*, [Augustine was succeeded in the episcopate by Laurence, whom he had consecrated during his lifetime]

Bede, as has been seen several times already, possessed a Canterbury episcopal list. This would have told him that Laurence followed Augustine as bishop of Canterbury. The more surprising statement is that Augustine consecrated Laurence. Bede’s efforts later in the chapter to defend this action by emphasizing the apostolic precedent reveals that he realized how uncanonical such behaviour was. The *Whitby Life of Gregory* had claimed to have a tradition – *dicitur* – that Mellitus had consecrated Laurence, which *prima facie* sounds much more reasonable.<sup>493</sup> For Bede to have made the radical claim he does here therefore means that he must have been basing it on some specific source.<sup>494</sup>

This source was, in fact, probably the Canterbury episcopal list itself, since, as argued above, this list noted both the place where each bishop had been consecrated and the name of the prelate who had consecrated them. Thus Bede would have ‘known’ that Laurence was consecrated by Augustine, presumably at Canterbury.

Bede may have felt the *Libellus Responsionum*, which he had inserted at 1.27, provided some support for this. In his ‘answer’ to ‘Question 6’, Gregory gave Augustine permission to consecrate other bishops alone. Moreover there were several occasions in Bede’s own lifetime where this type of practice had also occurred. His own former diocesan, John of Beverley, had consecrated his successor at York.<sup>495</sup> Soon afterwards, as Colgrave pointed out in his note, Boniface consecrated his successor.<sup>496</sup> Such instances

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<sup>493</sup> *Whitby Life*, c. 11.

<sup>494</sup> Differing again from the *Whitby Life* should not be taken as a sign that Bede did not know the work; he may simply have thought he was better informed.

<sup>495</sup> *HE* 5.6. Other examples are given by Harrison, *Framework*, p. 103.

<sup>496</sup> Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 144-45, n.2. In doing so, it seems likely that Boniface felt he was consciously imitating what he considered to have been the practice for the foundation of the church in England.

would have given Bede confidence that the controversial claim in his source was credible.

*ne se defuncto status ecclesiae tam rudis uel ad horam pastore destitutus uacillare inciperet.* [lest, when he was dead, the church, being in so raw a condition, might begin to falter if deprived of its shepherd even for an hour.]

This statement about Augustine's intentions, as is generally the case when Bede posits motivation as 'fact', is really merely his own inference or assumption of what seemed to him the most plausible thinking behind the action. There is no need to presume that any source lay behind Bede's claim.

*In quo et exemplum sequebatur primi pastoris ecclesiae, hoc est beatissimi apostolorum principis Petri, qui fundata Romae ecclesia Christi Clementem sibi adiutorem euangelizandi, simul et successorem consecrasse perhibetur.* [Herein he followed the example of the first pastor of the Church, St Peter, chief of the apostles, who, when the Church of Christ was founded at Rome, is said to have consecrated Clement to help him in evangelistic work and at the same time to be his successor.]

Plummer argued that this parallel, while deriving ultimately from the Ps-Clementine *Recognitiones*, was taken by Bede from the *LP*.<sup>497</sup> This is quite possible; but there is also separate evidence that Bede seems to have made direct use of the *Recognitiones* in other works,<sup>498</sup> and so he may well have done so here as well.

*Laurentius archiepiscopi gradu* [When Laurence had acquired the rank of archbishop,]

<sup>497</sup> Plummer, 2.82. In the same place, Plummer also noted that Bede made a similar parallel in the *HA*, justifying Benedict Biscop's appointment of Eosterwine and Ceolfrið as abbots, by reference to Peter's consecration of Linus and Cletus: *HA*, c.7.

<sup>498</sup> For instance the *Commentary on Genesis*: Bede's use of Ps-Clement in that Commentary is discussed briefly by D. O Croinin, "A New Seventh-Century Irish Commentary on Genesis", *Sacris Erudiri* 40 (2001), 231-65, at p. 256, where he suggests the *Recognitiones* reached Bede from Irish sources. For a full list of Bede's borrowings from the work, with detailed references, see, Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 228.



Calling Laurence “archbishop” is, as seen previously, an anachronism resting on Bede’s extrapolation from later, Theodorean and post-Theodorean practice back to the early Canterbury church.

*potitus strenuissime fundamenta ecclesiae, quae nobiliter iacta uidit, augmentare atque ad profectum debiti culminis et crebra uoce sanctae exhortationis et continuis piae operationis exemplis prouehere curauit.* [he strove to build up the foundations of the church which had been so magnificently laid and to raise it to its destined height; this he did by frequent words of holy exhortation and by continually setting a pattern of good works.]

This passage is little more than Bede’s rhetorically phrased praise for someone he had next to no information about: no specific source or direct evidence lie behind such a generic statement. Bede is taking the opportunity to promote one of his underlying agendas in the *HE*: the importance of preaching by prelates and the necessity of those preachers living and leading by example. That the famous names of the earlier English church should be presented as exemplary reformist bishops, offering a heroic model to the church of Bede’s own time, is standard practice in the *HE*. Such clichés were not based on written or primary sources and do not offer information on which any reliable narrative can be built.

Incidentally, Levison’s argument that the use of the phrase *ad profectum debiti culminis* in inauthentic Canterbury charters of a much later date is a sign of the forgers’ use of the *HE*,<sup>499</sup> is much more plausible than Wallace-Hadrill’s view that both were “drawing on the same written account at Canterbury.”<sup>500</sup>

*Denique non solum nouae, quae de Anglis erat collecta, ecclesiae curam gerebat, sed et ueterum Britanniae incolarum necnon et Scottorum, <qui Hiberniam insulam Britanniae proximam incolunt,> populis pastorem inpendere sollicitudinem curabat.* [For example, he not only undertook the charge of the new Church which had been gathered from among the English, but he also endeavoured to bestow his pastoral care upon those Irish]

<sup>499</sup> Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 183.

<sup>500</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 55.

This statement is merely Bede's deduction from the letter to the Irish which he possessed and from which he is about to quote. He has no independent reason to believe that Laurence took particular pastoral care for the Irish.

*qui Hiberniam insulam Britanniae proximam incolunt*, [who live in Ireland, which is an island close to Britain.]

Bede's statement about the geographical location of Ireland is based on his own general knowledge.<sup>501</sup> He had already given his readers a description of Ireland's juxtaposition with Britain in *HE* 1.1. Such an emphasis is surprising, pointing perhaps to a sense of an audience for the *HE* which reached beyond the obvious 'Northumbrian' or Canterbury ecclesiastical elites.

*Siquidem ubi Scottorum in praefata ipsorum patria, quomodo et Brettonum in ipsa Brittaniam, uitam ac professionem minus ecclesiasticam in multis esse cognouit, maxime quod paschae sollemnitatem non suo tempore celebrarent sed, ut supra docuimus, a quarta decima luna usque ad uicesimam dominicae resurrectionis diem obseruandum esse putarent, scripsit cum coepiscopis suis exhortatoriam ad eos epistulam, obsecrans eos et contestans unitatem pacis et catholicae obseruationis cum ea, quae toto orbe diffusa est, ecclesia Christi tenere. Cuius uidelicet epistulae principium hoc est:* [He came to realize that in the aforementioned land the life and profession of the Irish, just as in Britain among the British, was not in accordance with church practice in many things. He noticed especially that they did not celebrate the festival of Easter at the proper time but, as we have said before, held that the day of the Lord's resurrection should be observed from the fourteenth to the twentieth day of the paschal moon. So he wrote a letter of exhortation in conjunction with his fellow bishops, beseeching and warning them to keep the unity of peace and of catholic observance with the Church of Christ which is spread over the whole world. This is the beginning of the letter:]

This extended statement is a combination of an extrapolation from the text of the letter to the Irish, which he is introducing, with his own knowledge of the 'Irish' computistical errors. Bede's deduction that Laurence is writing because he has heard about Irish errors in calculating Easter is almost certainly a correct one, but neither that, nor the lengthy description of the motivation, make it any less a deduction.

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<sup>501</sup> There is no reason to think, as Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 55, suggests, that such a statement must have derived from Canterbury sources. Bede knew where Ireland was, without needing Albinus to tell him.

*Dominis carissimis fratribus episcopis uel abbatibus ... Nam Daganus episcopus ad nos ueniens non solum cibum nobiscum sed nec in eodem hospitio, quo uescebamur, sumere uoluit.* [To our most beloved brethren the bishops and abbots throughout the whole realm of Ireland, bishops Laurence, Mellitus, and Justus, servants of the servants of God. ... {The bishops emphasize the esteem in which they had previously held both the British and Irish before becoming aware of their odd customs} ... For when Bishop Dagan came to us he refused to take food, not only with us but even in the very house where we took our meals.]

Bede next inserts part of the letter. There are various possible reasons why he only includes a selection from the text, but it is very unlikely to be because he did not have the whole letter. He is more likely to have limited himself to the start of the epistle, on the grounds that the rest of the text either described the ‘Irish’ position in a way that Bede knew to be inaccurate, or explained the ‘correct’ position in a way which revealed Laurence to be following Victorian tables and calculations rather than the more accurate Dionysian ones promoted by Bede.<sup>502</sup>

The question of how Bede obtained the letter is an interesting one and its answer is revealing about the nature of his sources. This letter would not of course have come from Rome, but nor is it likely to have come from Canterbury.<sup>503</sup> The idea that Canterbury having lost all record of the papal letters sent to it should still somehow preserve a copy of a scarcely essential epistle that they themselves had sent is not credible. Like most of Bede’s computistical materials, this letter, concerning the paschal issue, would have been obtained quite separately to his accumulation of sources for the *HE*. As with the rest of these materials,<sup>504</sup> Bede would have derived this therefore from an ultimately Irish source.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Given Bede’s desire to achieve balance in his work, we should not dismiss the possibility that he has merely included only that content which best suited his narrative; he was quite capable of ignoring the rest of what may well have been a long letter, not because he disagreed with it, but simply because he felt it unnecessary, as he did with Gregory’s letter to Augustine in 1.31.

<sup>503</sup> As R. Flechner, “Dagan, Columbanus and the Gregorian Mission”, *Peritia* 19 (2005), 65-90, at p. 68 claimed.

<sup>504</sup> See for instance, F. Wallis, “*Si Naturam Quaeras*: Reframing Bede’s ‘Science’”, in DeGregorio, *Innovation and Tradition*, 65-99, at p. 88, n. 54, based on C. Jones, “The ‘Lost’ Sirmond Manuscript of Bede’s computus”, *English Historical Review* 51 (1937), pp. 204-19. See also D. O Croinin, “The Irish Provenance of Bede’s Computus”, *Peritia* 2 (1983), pp. 229-47, and “Bede’s Irish computus”, in D. O Croinin, ed., *Early Irish History and Chronology* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 201-12.

<sup>505</sup> Although, it is conceivable, as C. Jones suggested (*Bedae Opera de Temporibus*, p. 131), that Bede himself may not have known this was the point of origin of his materials.

In this instance, there is actually evidence that the letter was indeed preserved in an Irish context, no doubt by monks of the *Romani* party. The *Stowe Missal*, which preserves Irish liturgical traditions of the seventh century, commemorates Laurence, Mellitus and Justus, following the ordering of the letter here. The simplest explanation for their presence together – and importantly Augustine’s name is not included – in a seventh-century Irish commemoration of the dead is that the letter, sent by the three bishops and from which Bede quotes here, was preserved in Ireland.<sup>506</sup> There is also evidence that the letter of pope-elect John, which Bede quotes from in 2.19, was also preserved in an Irish context. An Irish computus collection includes a sentence from the part of the letter omitted by Bede.<sup>507</sup> Bede, as usual, therefore, had probably obtained his computistical materials both in 2.19, and here, from an ultimately Irish source.

There is no evidence that Bede obtained any of his computistical materials from Canterbury; in fact there is very limited evidence of any materials, not directly related to the compilation of the *HE*, reaching Bede from Canterbury.

*Misit idem Laurentius cum coepiscopis suis etiam Brettonum sacerdotibus litteras suo gradui condignas, quibus eos in unitate catholica confirmare satagit.* [This Laurence with his fellow bishops also sent a letter, of a sort befitting his rank, to the British priests, striving to bring them into catholic unity.]

Such statements summarizing letters are usually based on Bede’s possession of the epistle(s) in question. That may well be the case here. If so, like the letter to the Irish, and the rest of his computistical materials, Bede probably obtained it from Irish sources. Given, however, that such a letter would seem to suit so precisely Bede’s anti-British perspective in the *HE*, it seems strange that he does not quote at all from it or at the very least provide a more extended summary, emphasizing the negative criticisms of the British position. Perhaps therefore Bede’s knowledge of the letter to the British was not direct, but rather came from the omitted parts of the letter to the Irish. Even the section of the letter to the Irish which Bede does quote from refers to the British and so the excised parts may very well have mentioned the earlier letter to them.

<sup>506</sup> Plummer, 2.81, noted the presence of the three saints together in the *Stowe Missal*. The discussion in Thacker, “In Gregory’s Shadow?”, pp. 379-80, brings out the implications of their inclusion.

<sup>507</sup> D. O Croinin, “A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cummianus”, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 82, C, 11 (1982), 405-30, at p. 409.

*Sed quantum haec agendo profecerit, adhuc praesentia tempora declarant.* [But the present state of affairs shows how little he succeeded.]

Bede cannot resist adding his own comment and implicit critique of the British and their position which had endured into his own time. No source, of course, is required.

*His temporibus* [About this time ]

Bede's use of this phrase points to his ignorance of a precise date; but here it is the date of the incidents in the first half of the chapter which he does not know. He had in fact a very specific date for the central event in the half of the chapter which follows.

*uenit Mellitus Lundoniae episcopus Romam, de necessariis ecclesiae Anglorum cum apostolico papa Bonifatio tractaturus. Et cum idem papa reuerentissimus cogeret synodum episcoporum Italiae, de uita monachorum et quiete ordinaturus, et ipse Mellitus inter eos adsedit anno octavo imperii Focatis principis, indictione XIII, tertio die kalendarum Martiarum, ut quaeque erant regulariter decreta, sua quoque auctoritate subscribens confirmaret,* [Mellitus, bishop of London, went to Rome to confer with Pope Boniface about the needs of the English Church. The holy father had summoned a synod of the bishops of Italy to draw up regulations concerning monastic life and harmony. Mellitus himself took his place among them in the eighth year of the Emperor Phocas, on 27 February and in the thirteenth indiction in order that he might subscribe to the formal decisions and ratify them by his authority.]

As usual, Bede's statements about motivations are not to be relied upon: they reflect his best assessment, and are usually, unsurprisingly, sensible. Because he presents them as simple matters of fact, however, they have a tendency to mislead us into thinking that he possessed separate information on which to base them, when this is very rarely the case. This example is no exception. Bede has no source behind his extremely generic claim that Mellitus went to "confer about the needs of the English church". Bede has simply tried to make sense of why Mellitus might have gone.<sup>508</sup> The real reason provides an

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<sup>508</sup> At least Bede does not fall into the trap that some modern historians have of thinking Mellitus travelled to Rome *in order* to attend the synod: for instance, N. Brooks, "Mellitus (d. 624)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [[http:// www.oxforddnb.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/article/18531](http://www.oxforddnb.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/article/18531), accessed 18 March 2013].

insight into a question that historians have never been able to answer: when did Augustine die?

The primary source evidence for journeys from early Christian Kent to Rome associates such trips with the request for, and collection of, the pallium for the new bishop of Canterbury. The papal letters that survive refer to this in 601,<sup>509</sup> 625,<sup>510</sup> and 633.<sup>511</sup> There are two other times Bede refers to papal letters to Canterbury bishops, but without including the texts of the letters. One of these is following Laurence's death, at Mellitus' accession:<sup>512</sup> once more this was a time when a pallium certainly would have been sent. The only other time Bede mentions a visit to Rome, and epistles being brought back, is here in 2.4, where, as will be seen in a moment, papal epistles were sent to "archbishop" Laurence. Given that Augustine had self-evidently therefore died in the meantime, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that requesting the pallium was the motivation for the journey on this occasion as well. The papal letter has not survived, but because Bede gave the date of the synod Mellitus attended in Rome, 27 February 610,<sup>513</sup> as well as the Julian date for Augustine's death, 26 May, it is a simple deduction that he died on 26 May 609. Certainty is never achievable in such matters, but we can be relatively confident in accepting this as the natural implication of the evidence, which, on this question at least, represents primary sources.<sup>514</sup>

Thus, it is possible to say, categorically, that Bede's claim of motivation was not correct. His statement that Mellitus visited Rome and attended the synod, however, is on a much firmer basis. The precision of Bede's dating of the synod shows that he had in front of him a copy of the decrees.<sup>515</sup> This is confirmed by the form of the dating Bede gives, which is indictional. As Harrison pointed out: "Throughout the *Historia* we discover the indiction only in official documents with one exception and that in a papal

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<sup>509</sup> *HE* 1.29. For Augustine.

<sup>510</sup> *HE* 2.8. For Justus. The year is not certain. The text of the letter in the *HE* does not include the original dating clause.

<sup>511</sup> *HE* 2.18. For Honorius.

<sup>512</sup> *HE* 2.7. Again the year is not certain, though Bede writes as if Mellitus succeeded in 619; if he was right, then the letter would probably have been sent in the summer of 620.

<sup>513</sup> This incarnational year is a conversion from the indictional one Bede gives.

<sup>514</sup> This case is argued at more length in my article (in preparation), "Rome, the *pallium*, and the dates of the early bishops of Canterbury".

<sup>515</sup> Levison, "Bede as historian", p. 139, n. 4.

context.”<sup>516</sup> This is that one exception. Bede has not chosen to insert an indictional date because he favoured that form of dating; he inserted it because it was present in his source, which was, almost certainly, a copy of the canons of the synod. Mellitus’ presence would have been easy to recognize from that document’s list of subscriptions.

Unfortunately only forged versions of the canons survive.<sup>517</sup> Bede’s statement about the nature of the topics considered in the council is nonetheless in line with what other information suggests were exactly the sort of questions at issue in seventh-century Rome.<sup>518</sup> This, more than mere coincidence, points again to Bede’s possession of copies of the original canons.

Bede therefore almost certainly took the basis of his information in this section from the synod’s canons. Given that the synod is mentioned together with papal letters, which it seems Bede also possessed, though he did not quote from, then presumably he had obtained the synod document, like them, from Rome via Nothelm.

*ac Brittaniam rediens secum Anglorum ecclesiis mandanda atque obseruanda deferret*, [bringing them back with him to Britain for the information of the English Churches and for their observance.]

Bede’s statement that Mellitus brought the canons back with him, and his claim about the reasons for so doing, while uncontroversial enough, are no more than assumptions on his behalf.

*una cum epistulis, quas idem pontifex Deo dilecto archiepiscopo Laurentio et clero uniuerso, similiter et Aedilbercto regi atque genti Anglorum direxit*. [The pope also sent with them letters written to Archbishop Laurence, the beloved of God, and to all the clergy, as well as a letter to King Æthelberht and to the English people.]

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<sup>516</sup> K. Harrison, “The beginning of the year in England, c. 500-900”, *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973), 51-70, at p. 58.

<sup>517</sup> As Plummer, 2.84, noted.

<sup>518</sup> P. Llewellyn, “The Roman Church in the Seventh Century: the Legacy of Gregory I”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 25.4 (Oct., 1974), pp. 363-80; T. Noble, “Rome in the seventh century”, in M. Lapidge, ed., *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 68-87.

As with the decisions of the 610 Rome synod, there is good reason to believe that Bede actually possessed the texts of these epistles, though he does not quote from them. The references to letters sent to the clergy and to the English people might sound at first like mere generality covering ignorance. In reality, however, the Register of Gregory the Great shows that these forms for addressees reflected actual papal practice. Gregory sent several letters to comparable groupings.<sup>519</sup> This is not the sort of phrasing Bede can be expected to have stumbled on fortuitously.<sup>520</sup> The exact number of letters of Pope Boniface IV in question here is not clear, however; unfortunately, as noted above, Bede does not quote from the main text of any of these letters and they have not survived separately.<sup>521</sup> Like most of the rest of his papal letters, Bede will have obtained these from Rome via Nothelm.

*Hic est Bonifatius quartus a beato Gregorio Romanae urbis episcopo, qui inpetrauit a Focate principe donari ecclesiae Christi templum Romae, quod Pantheon uocabatur ab antiquis, quasi simulacrum esset omnium deorum; in quo ipse, eliminata omni spurcitia, fecit ecclesiam sanctae Dei genetricis atque omnium martyrum Christi, ut, exclusa multitudine daemonum, multitudo ibi sanctorum memoriam haberet.* [St Boniface was the fourth bishop of Rome after St Gregory. He obtained for the Church of Christ from the Emperor Phocas the gift of the temple at Rome anciently known as the Pantheon because it represented all the gods. After he had expelled every abomination from it, he made a church dedicated to the holy Mother of God and all the martyrs of Christ, so that, when the multitudes of devils had been driven out, it might serve as a shrine for a multitude of saints.]

This description is taken from the *LP*'s account of the pontificate of Boniface IV, apart from the last line explaining that the pope consecrated the shrine to serve for the

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<sup>519</sup> For instance, Gregory, *Letters*, 1.58, "To the clergy, senate and people, living in Perugia", July 591; 2.5 (Martyn, 2.3), "To the clergy, nobility, senate and people living at Naples", Sept 591; 3.11, "To the clergy, senate and people living at Albano", Oct 592; 4.39, "To the clergy, senate and people living at Ortona", Aug 594; 5.22, "To the clergy, nobles and people of Ravenna", 10 Feb 595; 6.46 (M, 6.48), "To the priests, deacons and clergy, nobles and people living in Zara and the soldiers", July 596; 9.81 (M, 9.82), "To the clergy, nobles and people of Misenum", Dec 598; 10.19, "To the clergy and nobles of the city of Naples", July 600; 11.6, "To the priests, deacons and clergy of Milan", Sept 600; 13.17 (M, 13.15), "To the clergy, senate and people living in Palermo", Nov 602; etc. In total, I count 31 such instances in Gregory's surviving correspondence, but there may well have been more originally.

<sup>520</sup> Indeed, Bede's description of Laurence here as *dilectus* is not unlikely to have been taken from the text of the letter itself.

<sup>521</sup> Plummer, 2.79, mistakenly thinks the presence of the term "archbishop" in this passage means that the pope used it in the letter; but really this was merely Bede's own automatic addition.



multitude of saints, rather than demons. This is not in the papal biography but is rather a Bedan touch, quietly demonstrating that he knows what *Pantheon* means, and indulging in a little word-play to display that knowledge – at least to other initiated readers.

### **What Bede had**

- Canterbury episcopal list, including the names of each consecrator and the places of consecration
- *LP*
- Information from the Ps-Clementine *Recognitiones*, a text Bede may have obtained from ultimately Irish sources
- Letter of Laurence, Mellitus and Justus to the Irish, probably mentioning having sent an earlier letter to the British. Bede is likely to have obtained this from ultimately Irish sources
- Possibly the letter to British, if this was not simply mentioned in the letter to the Irish
- Canons of the 610 Rome synod, from Rome via Nothelm
- Letters of Pope Boniface IV, from Rome via Nothelm

## 2.5 – “How on the deaths of Æthelberht and Sæberht, their successors restored idolatry; for which reason Mellitus and Justus left Britain.”

*Anno ab incarnatione dominica DCXVI, qui est annus uicesimus primus ex quo Augustinus cum sociis ad praedicandum genti Anglorum missus est, ... Aedilberct rex ... subiit* [In the year of our Lord 616, the twenty-first year after Augustine and his companions had been sent to preach to the English nation, ... King Æthelberht ... died]<sup>522</sup>

This chapter, like 1.23, represents something of a ‘waypoint’ in the *HE*’s narrative. As in that earlier chapter, Bede’s attempt here to render his content more impressive through the provision of layers of detail, especially involving figures, leads him into contradictions, making statements that have confused historians ever since. In this specific passage there are two questions: where does Bede’s figure of 616 for Æthelberht’s death come from? And what is his basis for claiming the king died 21 years after the departure of Augustine from Rome? Indeed, there are also a third and fourth, given the other related material Bede includes later in the chapter: why does Bede go on to say, in apparently plain contradiction of his claim here, that Æthelberht died 21 years after accepting the faith? And what made him think that the king’s death was on 24 February?

All these questions will be considered together here. The last mentioned – that Æthelberht died on 24 February – should be considered first, since it seems the simplest. Perhaps, as Jones suggests,<sup>523</sup> Æthelberht was commemorated liturgically at Canterbury; but this should not be assumed.<sup>524</sup> Bede does not, in fact, seem to have derived his dates for early Canterbury figures from records of liturgical commemoration. A more likely source for the date of the king’s death would have been the information on his epitaph.

<sup>522</sup> Given that it will also be dealt with in this section, it is worth including here some text from later in the chapter: *Defunctus uero est rex Aedilberct die XXIII mensis Februarii post XX et unum annos acceptae fidei, atque in porticu sancti Martini intro ecclesiam beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli sepultus, ubi et Berctae regina condita est.* [King Æthelberht died on 24 February, twenty-one years after he had accepted the faith, and was buried in the chapel of St Martin, within the church of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul, where his queen, Bertha, also lies.]

<sup>523</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 166: though his description of such commemoration as being from a “martyrology” is not perhaps the most helpful.

<sup>524</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 60, emphasized that such commemoration of a royal non-martyr as a saint at this stage would have been exceptional.

That an epitaph for Æthelberht existed at Canterbury in the early eighth century is evident, even if it contained no more than his name, because Bede, through Albinus, knew that the king was buried in the chapel of St Martin, in Ss Peter and Paul's, Canterbury. That Bede notes this in the same sentence as he gives the Julian date for Æthelberht's death might be considered circumstantial support for the suggestion that the dating information came from the epitaph. Augustine's own epitaph, which Bede cited in 2.3, included the date of his death, though not the year, so the one proposed for Æthelberht would have paralleled that perfectly.

If the text of the king's epitaph may well therefore have been Bede's source for the date of his death, did it also provide the basis for the year Bede gives? This is certainly not impossible,<sup>525</sup> although that of Augustine's, which is the one most obviously comparable to Æthelberht's, certainly did not.<sup>526</sup> Thus the epitaph should not be considered the most likely source, at least directly, of the incarnational year Bede gives.

To discover where the figure 616 does come from, it is necessary to start by recognizing that, at some level at least, being an incarnational date, it must represent a calculation.<sup>527</sup> The question then is whether it was a direct calculation – that is a simple 'translation' of an indictional or regnal year, as would have been the case, for instance, if either had been included on the epitaph – or whether it was a more indirect calculation, with Bede working out the date from other materials in his possession.

If, however, the king's epitaph is dismissed as a source of direct information for the year of Æthelberht's death, then it is not easy to envisage what other source could have provided the material from which Bede could have made such a straight 'translation'. The question of whether it is a calculation and what form that might have taken, has, however, been confused in modern historians' minds by Bede's ambiguity about what event Æthelberht's death was 21 years since: at first he says, it was 21 years since the mission party left Rome, then he says it was 21 years after Æthelberht's baptism. As a result, Brooks, for example, concluded that historians should consider dating the king's death to

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<sup>525</sup> Evidence of others, which probably did contain reference to a year, will be seen later.

<sup>526</sup> No doubt partially at least because the year was not known at the time the epitaph was composed, which, as has been noted already, cannot have been earlier than the episcopate of Theodore.

<sup>527</sup> Even though it is not, strictly speaking, impossible that Bede derived the year from late seventh or early eighth-century Dionysiac tables that had been 'back-filled', as it were, those too must have stemmed from a calculation somewhere along the line.

618, rather than 616.<sup>528</sup> Such approaches, however, tend to privilege one of Bede's contradictory statements over the other, without considering the source for either.<sup>529</sup>

Leaving aside for now therefore the question of the "21 years since", it is possible to see that Bede possessed enough information to deduce 616 without any need for a direct source. Bede 'knew' that Deusdedit, the bishop of Canterbury, died on 14 July 664.<sup>530</sup> He also 'knew' that King Eorcenberht had died on precisely the same day.<sup>531</sup> Finally, as noted already, Bede possessed a kings' list for Kent, which seems to have included regnal years. Thus Bede could subtract the 24 years that Eorcenberht had reigned and so infer that Eadbald had died in 640, which he notes at 3.8. Then he could subtract 24 years for Eadbald's reign to arrive at a date of 616 for Æthelberht's death. Given the information which we can deduce that Bede possessed, this process seems the simplest interpretation of the calculation Bede made to reach 616.<sup>532</sup>

This therefore leaves only the confusing double references to Æthelberht's death having been "21 years since" two separate events that in Bede's account, and probably reality, were actually in different years: Augustine's departure from Rome and Æthelberht's conversion. Given the suggestion above that Bede reached 616 for the king's date of death through a calculation entirely separate from this "21" figure, it might be argued that the number 21 was simply Bede's own calculation.<sup>533</sup> According to such a hypothesis, Bede would then have included the calculated figure of 21 years for purely rhetorical purposes. Certainly the first reference to Augustine's departure, connecting this chapter again to 1.23, would fit neatly with such an explanation. Nonetheless, this explanation does not explain the second, contradictory reference. Repeating his calculated figure, but giving a different reference point would not be characteristic of

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<sup>528</sup> Brooks, "Creation and early structure", p. 65.

<sup>529</sup> This does not preclude them incidentally reaching the correct answers of course; but the process is flawed.

<sup>530</sup> *HE* 4.1. This information may well have been derived from his epitaph, though it is not impossible that by that stage the Canterbury episcopal lists noted the full date of each bishop's death. Certainly from the notice of Deusdedit's 'reign' onwards, the list seems to have included the length of each episcopate.

<sup>531</sup> The source of this claim is more difficult to envisage. Possibly the coincidence of the king's death having taken place on exactly the same day as the bishop's may have merited a recording of that fact on his epitaph; or it may simply have been mentioned on Deusdedit's.

<sup>532</sup> One should probably not imagine such calculations being made as Bede wrote, but rather as part of a set of calculations of royal succession and the like, which he will have made as part of accumulating the materials for the writing of the *HE*.

<sup>533</sup> Although from what, and why, is less clear.

Bede's usual method. The repetition of the number, therefore, points more probably to its derivation from a source. The contradiction, then, shows Bede attempting to make sense of that figure when it is not consistent with other information he possessed.

This still leaves the question of which of the two statements was in Bede's source. If Bede possessed a source with a reference to Æthelberht dying 21 years since a certain event, which of the two events he gives is it most likely to be? In a sense, the answer should be obvious: it is self-evident that in a notice of the king's death a reference to his conversion is intrinsically much more likely than one to the date of departure of Augustine and his companions from Rome. This common-sense conclusion is apparently confirmed by the context of the second reference. This reference – to Æthelberht dying 21 years after his conversion – comes immediately after the Julian date of the king's death and directly before the detail about where he was buried. It seems most likely therefore that, as with the Julian date, the 21 years (since his conversion), was originally in the text of the king's epitaph. Parts of the beginning of this sentence in the *HE* might even, therefore, have been taken directly from the actual inscription: “*Defunctus uero est rex Aedilberct die XXIII mensis Februarii post XX et unum annos acceptae fidei*”.<sup>534</sup>

Incidentally, it should be noted that from Bede's perspective this reference would not alone have provided sufficient information to deduce an actual year for Æthelberht's death. In fact, having already calculated this year in the manner outlined above, the 21 years reference would have left him with a problem. Twenty-one years from a date of death that Bede had deduced as 616 implied that the king “accepted the faith” in 596.<sup>535</sup> Now Bede had no other direct information other than this about when Æthelberht had been baptized, but he ‘knew’ that it could not have been before Augustine arrived.<sup>536</sup> Thus, we see him adjusting the claim slightly at the start of the chapter, when he uses the same figure, 21 years. There he relates the ‘21 years’ to the departure of the mission from Rome, which, as he knew from the Gregorian letters, had set out in 596. This was 21 years before 616, the date Bede had calculated for Æthelberht's death, and so using the mission's departure as the reference point fitted his wider narrative much better. Such an

<sup>534</sup> “King Æthelberht died on 24 February, twenty-one years after he had accepted the faith”.

<sup>535</sup> Perhaps it goes without saying that while for us 21 years before 616 is 595, by ancient calculation, which included both the first and last figure in the tally, it would be 596.

<sup>536</sup> Although Bede does not provide an incarnational year for Augustine's arrival in the main narrative of the ‘mission’, he assigns it to 597 in the *recapitulatio* in 5.24.

allusion also served his purposes of subtly connecting this chapter in the reader's mind with 1.23. In repeating the figure later in the chapter, in its more correct context, however, Bede returned to the original wording, or at least meaning, and thus has confused historians ever since.

This extended analysis of such apparently small details leads therefore to some important conclusions not only about the nature of Bede's sources for these statements, but also about his methods of working, how he drew his conclusions and how he dealt with apparent contradictions in his sources. Moreover, the conclusions here will hopefully provide a firmer basis for further study of the questions of when Æthelberht did actually die, and Augustine did actually arrive.

*Aedilberct rex Cantuariorum post regnum temporale, quod L et sex annis gloriosissime tenuerat, aeterna caelestis regni gaudia subiit.* [King Æthelberht of Kent, after ruling his temporal kingdom gloriously for fifty-six years, entered upon the eternal joys of the heavenly kingdom.]

As shown in considering 1.25, Bede knew Æthelberht's name, and his rank, from a variety of sources, including a letter from Gregory the Great. The Kentish king list he possessed, however, included regnal years for each monarch, as seen above, and was thus the basis for Bede's statement here about the length of Æthelberht's reign.<sup>537</sup>

*Qui tertius quidem in regibus gentis Anglorum cunctis australibus eorum prouinciis, quae Humbrae fluuio et contiguis ei terminis sequestrantur a borealibus, imperauit; sed primus omnium caeli regna conscendit. Nam primus imperium huiusmodi Aelli rex Australium Saxonum; secundus Caelin rex Occidentalium Saxonum, qui lingua ipsorum Ceaulin uocabatur; tertius, ut diximus, Aedilberct rex Cantuariorum; quartus Reduald rex Orientalium Anglorum, qui etiam uiuente Aedilbercto eidem suae genti ducatum praebebat, obtenuit; quintus Aeduini rex Nordanhymbrorum gentis, id est eius quae ad borealem Humbrae fluminis plagam inhabitat, maiore potentia cunctis qui Brittaniam incolunt, Anglorum pariter et Brettonum, populis praefuit, praeter Cantuariis tantum, necnon et Meuanias Brettonum insulas, quae inter Hiberniam*

<sup>537</sup> The figures in the regnal list need not have been correct, of course. Modern historians would dramatically reduce the length of Æthelberht's reign (for instance, B. Yorke, "Gregory of Tours and Sixth-Century Anglo-Saxon England", in K. Mitchell and I. Wood, ed., *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Boston, 2002), 113-30, at pp. 113-14). There may be a middle ground, given that rule of Kent seems to have often been divided between kings: the 56 years Bede, following the kings' list, gave for Æthelberht's reign may therefore have included time as 'king' of west Kent, before he took over rule of the entire kingdom.

*et Britanniam sitae sunt, Anglorum subiecit imperio; sextus Osuald, et ipse Nordanhymbrorum rex Christianissimus, hisdem finibus regnum tenuit; septimus Osuii frater eius, aequalibus pene terminis regnum nonnullo tempore coercens, Pictorum quoque atque Scottorum gentes, quae septentrionales Britanniae fines tenent, maxima ex parte perdomuit ac tributarias fecit. Sed haec postmodum.* [He was the third English king to rule over all the southern kingdoms, which are divided from the north by the river Humber and the surrounding territory; but he was the first to enter the kingdom of heaven. The first king to hold the like sovereignty was Ælle, king of the South Saxons; the second was Cælin, king of the West Saxons, known in their own language as Ceawlin; the third, as we have said, was Æthelberht, king of Kent; the fourth was Rædwald, king of the East Angles, who even during the lifetime of Æthelberht was gaining the leadership for his own race; the fifth was Edwin, king of the Northumbrians, the nation inhabiting the district north of the Humber. Edwin had still greater power and ruled over all the inhabitants of Britain, English and British alike, except for Kent only. He even brought under English rule the Mevanian Islands (Anglesey and Man) which lie between England and Ireland and belong to the Britons. The sixth to rule within the same bounds was Oswald, the most Christian king of the Northumbrians, while the seventh was his brother Oswiu who for a time held almost the same territory. The latter overwhelmed and made tributary even the tribes of the Picts and Irish who inhabit the northern parts of Britain; but of this more later.]

This ‘hegemony list’, which apparently also lay behind Bede’s statements concerning Æthelberht’s overlordship in 1.25 and 2.3, as well as Edwin’s in 2.9, has inspired a great deal of academic comment over the years. This has focused particularly around the issue of what relation the list has to the ‘title’ *Brytenwalda* found in *ASC* 829.<sup>538</sup> These questions are not directly related to the search, in this study, for Bede’s sources or to the attempt to understand his method. From that perspective, the present task is much simpler, in this situation at least, since Bede’s list must derive from a written catalogue. What form this took is a more difficult question. The names on the list would seem to suggest that a ‘southern’ list had been added to by ‘Northumbrians’, during their apparent hegemony in the mid-seventh century. The first four kings are all of kingdoms south of the Humber: Sussex, ‘Wessex’, Kent and East Anglia. The following three are the ‘Northumbrian’ overlords: Edwin, Oswald and Oswiu.<sup>539</sup> Bede was well aware of

<sup>538</sup> An updated discussion of these issues is found in the additional note to Wormald, “Bede, the *Bretwaldas*”, pp. 131-34.

<sup>539</sup> One minor instance of editing of the list by Bede should be noted: as mentioned in the Introduction, the term ‘Northumbrians’ is not seen before the *HE* – even in Bede’s own writings – so none of these figures were kings of the Northumbrians in the way that Bede, or perhaps Ceolwulf, wanted to imply.

hegemons after Oswiu, including Northumbrian ones like Jarrow's patron Ecgfrith: this is thus a further sign that he is working from a source here, which can scarcely have been oral, rather than inserting one of his own invention.<sup>540</sup>

The question of the form of the 'hegemony list' Bede possessed is tied to the issue of its origins. Although Bede inserts the material here in a discussion of events in Kent, there is no reason to assume, as Wallace-Hadrill did, that he had obtained the document from Canterbury.<sup>541</sup> The Northumbrian additions would rather imply that Bede had obtained the list from more local sources. That natural assumption is strengthened by hints in the glosses to some of the names which Bede includes.

The first such note is about Rædwald gaining independent control over East Anglia before Æthelberht's death. This reveals nothing about the origins of the list, since the claim is probably simply Bede's own inference. Bede had information that while Rædwald had 'converted' under Æthelberht's influence, unlike Sæberht of Essex, he had been autonomous enough only to nod towards this on his return to East Anglia, merely adding another altar to his temple. Bede's 'knowledge' about this incident is not connected to the 'hegemony list', however, as it seems to have derived, ultimately at least, from the East Anglian king Ealdwulf.<sup>542</sup>

The other notes all relate to the Northumbrian kings and are for the most part generic statements about the extent of their overlordship.<sup>543</sup> But Bede does also claim that it was under Edwin that the Isle of Man and Anglesey were *Anglorum subiecit imperio*. As already mentioned in the earlier discussion of Bede's sources for his hidage statements, Bede possessed specific figures for the assessment of both these islands.<sup>544</sup> These figures,

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<sup>540</sup> Given the form of the list, and Bede's usual working methods, such a hypothesis is not tenable anyway, although that has not prevented some scholars from trying: for instance, S. Keynes, "Rædwald the Bretwalda", in C. Kendall and P. Wells, ed., *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo* (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 103-23; and S. Keynes, "Bretwalda or Brytenwalda", in M. Lapidge, with J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2001), p. 74. For others, the fact there are seven names on the list is seen as meaningful: B. Yorke, "The Bretwaldas and the origins of overlordship in Anglo-Saxon England", in Baxter and Nelson, ed., *Early Medieval Studies*, 81-95, at pp. 84-85; H. Mayr-Harting, "Bede's Patristic Thinking as an Historian", in A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter, ed., *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Munich, 1994), 367-74, at pp. 371-72. But such numerological perspectives are not to be taken seriously.

<sup>541</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 58.

<sup>542</sup> *HE* 2.15.

<sup>543</sup> The reference to Kent as being excluded from the hegemony should be dismissed as nothing more than Bede's diplomatic reservation of his Canterbury contacts' blushes.

<sup>544</sup> *HE* 2.9.



as argued in 1.25, are likely to derive from a ‘tribute’ type document from some stage during the Northumbrian hegemony: and more probably from the reign of Oswald or Oswiu. The coincidence that Bede makes reference twice to these islands – once here as part of the discussion of the hegemons and once with reference to their hidages, may well suggest that Bede’s two sources for these statements were connected. In other words that the ‘tribute’ document which included the figures for assessment, also contained the list of ‘hegemons’. If so, then, given that the latter ends with Oswiu, this connection might potentially be a sign that the ‘tribute list’ which Bede possessed should most plausibly be assigned to the reign of that king.

*Defunctus uero est rex Aedilberct die XXIII mensis Februarii post XX et unum annos acceptae fidei, [King Æthelberht died on 24 February, twenty-one years after he had accepted the faith,]*

This passage was considered with that at the start of the chapter and there is no need to repeat the earlier analysis here. Suffice it to say that, as discussed in detail above, Bede has probably obtained these figures from the text of the king’s epitaph: this sentence may even preserve some of the original wording from that inscription.

*atque in porticu sancti Martini intro ecclesiam beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli sepultus, ubi et Berctae regina condita est. [and was buried in the chapel of St Martin, within the church of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul, where his queen, Bertha, also lies.]*

This information derived from Albinus’ own knowledge, conveyed to Bede via Nothelm either in a letter or orally.<sup>545</sup> Albinus’ knowledge of course only extended to the names ‘on’ the tombs, derived from epitaphs; he had no means of independently verifying that these claims were correct. Such a point may seem pedantic, but as well as emphasizing Bede’s lack of primary sources, it is important to remember that Canterbury had its own reasons to make claims, which might not necessarily have been true. These are particularly pertinent as far as the bodies of Liudhard and even Bertha are concerned.

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<sup>545</sup> Unless one wished to speculate that Bede had himself visited Canterbury.

*Qui inter cetera bona quae genti suae consulendo conferebat, etiam decreta illi iudiciorum iuxta exempla Romanorum cum consilio sapientium constituit; quae conscripta Anglorum sermone hactenus habentur et obseruantur ab ea. In quibus primitus posuit, qualiter id emendare deberet, qui aliquid rerum uel ecclesiae uel episcopi uel reliquorum ordinum furto auferret, uolens scilicet tuitionem eis, quos et quorum doctrinam susceperat, praestare.* [Among other benefits which he conferred upon the race under his care, he established with the advice of his counsellors a code of laws after the Roman manner. These are written in English and are still kept and observed by the people. Among these he set down first of all what restitution must be made by anyone who steals anything belonging to the church or the bishop or any other clergy; these laws were designed to give protection to those whose coming and whose teaching he had welcomed.]

There has been a great deal of scholarly discussion about what precise meaning should be ascribed to Bede's use of 'legal' terms, such as *decreta* and *exempla*.<sup>546</sup> Much of this is, however, based on precisely the assumption of semi-sacred status for each word in the *HE*, which the present analysis is undermining. Not every statement of Bede's should be considered to possess some deep meaning, without a thorough examination of his sources. Moreover, as is becoming increasingly clear, there is no reason to believe that Bede has secret sources supporting all his passing remarks.

As far as the present search for Bede's sources is concerned, however, it is fortunate that he chose to summarize the first of the laws. This matches the text of 'Æthelberht's laws' that was preserved in the *Textus Roffensis* and so have survived into modern times. As a result, it is clear that Bede too had seen the actual text of the laws. This does not prove that the laws were actually Æthelberht's of course;<sup>547</sup> but it does mean that Bede was working from a written source and one which it is probably safe to assume looked similar to that which survives today.

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<sup>546</sup> For instance, Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, pp. 60-61; P. Wormald, "'Inter Cetera Bona Genti Suae': Law-Making and Peace-Keeping in the Earliest English Kingdoms", in P. Wormald, ed., *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), 179-99, at pp. 180-82 and 197-98; T. Charles-Edwards, "Law in the Western Kingdoms between the Fifth and the Seventh Century", in A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins and M. Whitby, ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History Volume XIV Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors A.D. 425-600* (Cambridge, 2000), 260-87, at pp. 264-66; etc.

<sup>547</sup> There is good reason to think that not all the information in the early Kentish codes – specifically those of Æthelberht and Eadric and Hlothre – was originally in the places assigned in the *Textus Roffensis*, as I argue in my article (in preparation), "Textual confusion in the earliest Kentish laws?"

One difference worth noting may be that Bede's version perhaps included the lawcode's original preface.<sup>548</sup> Bede describes Æthelberht drawing up the laws *cum consilio sapientium*, which could conceivably be merely his rhetoric, but would also make sense as a direct borrowing from a prologue. Judging by contemporary, or near contemporary, analogues, at least some form of introduction would be expected. The surviving versions of the laws of Wihtred and Ine preserve their prefaces and mention the king taking counsel.<sup>549</sup> The absence of Æthelberht's prologue from the only extant copy of the laws, a twelfth-century manuscript, is no evidence that it was lacking from the original code.<sup>550</sup>

Bede's expression of the purpose of the laws – “designed to give protection to those whose coming and whose teaching he had welcomed” – if not from the preface postulated here, must be his own deduction, or rather assumption.

*Erat autem idem Aedilberct filius Irminrici, cuius pater Octa, cuius pater Oeric cognomento Oisc, a quo reges Cantuariorum solent Oiscingas cognominare, cuius pater Hengist, [Now Æthelberht was the son of Eormenric, the son of Octa, the son of Oeric whose surname was Oisc, whence the kings of Kent were known as oiscingas. Oisc's father was Hengist]*

Bede's inclusion of a Kentish genealogy immediately after the mention of the laws, a mention which, as seen above, was based on having seen their text, has been taken with good reason by some like Wallace-Hadrill as a sign that the manuscript which contained Bede's version of the laws also included a Kentish royal genealogy.<sup>551</sup> Such a juxtaposition is paralleled in continental laws.<sup>552</sup>

<sup>548</sup> As also suggested by F. Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* 3 vols (Halle, 1903, 1906/12, 1916), vol. iii, p. 3.

<sup>549</sup> Contemporary Frankish legislation, such as the *Constitutio* of Chlothar (probably Chlothar II), often began with a preamble, and sometimes mentioned assemblies. *Capitularia regum Francorum*, ed., A. Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia (1898), I, p. 18-19.

<sup>550</sup> And there is thus no value in arguments from such an absence for the supposedly primitive nature of Æthelberht's laws: for instance, P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century: Volume I: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), p. 94.

<sup>551</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 61. He first made the connection in J. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), p. 34, although there he mistakenly described the catalogue not as a genealogy but as a king list, which is similar but not the same thing.

<sup>552</sup> The Prologue to *Rothari's Code* is the most obvious, as Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 61, pointed out. Indeed, if the version of Æthelberht's law available to Bede did have a preface, as proposed here, then it is not impossible that the Kentish genealogy might even have been included within that.

The manuscript containing the genealogy may have even included other Kentish laws beyond Æthelberht's: Bede's description of the decrees of Eorcenberht, in 3.8, suggests that he had seen these too. Equally, the statement that Æthelberht's laws were still in force in Bede's own time, implies a wider knowledge of Kentish law than simply the possession of a single century-old code. Such a manuscript may also have included the Kentish king list Bede possessed.<sup>553</sup> Whether or not they came in a single manuscript, as would seem simplest, or in several, such sources can only reasonably have come from Kent, and thus, one must assume, from Albinus, via Nothelm. These texts would be a natural set for Albinus to send to someone writing a history of the Church in England.<sup>554</sup>

One more point needs emphasis. The genealogy Bede gives here stops with Hengist, but this was not the end in his own source. Bede had already given the first half of the genealogy in 1.15: "They [sc. Hengist and Horsa] were the sons of Wihtgisl, son of Witta, son of Wecta, son of Woden."<sup>555</sup>

*qui cum filio suo Oisc inuitatus a Uurtigerno Brittaniam primus intrauit, ut supra retulimus.* [who (Hengist) with his son Oisc first entered Britain at the invitation of Vortigern, as related above.]

Bede is here referring back to his earlier description of the *aduentus*, in 1.15. His sources for that 'event' are unclear. Even if they were written, they were not primary.

From this point in the chapter Bede's narrative becomes more complicated, and so, as in 2.2, before beginning a detailed analysis of the passages below, it would be helpful to start with a summary of the stories Bede is telling here. On this occasion the situation is even more complex, as Bede not only interweaves the two stories he tells, but also splits the account between this chapter and the next. Since, as will be seen, the source is, in effect, the same for both tales, it is necessary to deal with the elements that appear in both 2.5 and 2.6 together.

<sup>553</sup> The genealogy and the king list were separate documents, as Jones, *Saints*, p. 166, failed to recognize.

<sup>554</sup> More intriguing perhaps is why he possessed them in the first place. Some of the implications will be discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>555</sup> *HE* 1.15: "Erant [sc. Hengist et Horsa] autem filii Uictgisl, cuius pater Uitta, cuius pater Uecta, cuius pater Uoden".

The two stories in question relate to the so-called ‘apostasy’, or ‘pagan reaction’, after the deaths of Æthelberht of Kent and Sæberht of the East Saxons. Bede begins with the tale about the new king of Kent, Eadbald,<sup>556</sup> but having explained that Eadbald married his father’s wife and did not support the Church, Bede then interrupts himself to describe a similar situation in Essex. There the three pagan sons of King Sæberht expelled Mellitus (of London) from their kingdom after he had not permitted them to receive the Eucharist. Together with Justus (of Rochester), Mellitus then goes into exile in Gaul, after consulting with Laurence (of Canterbury). Chapter 2.5 ends with a brief notice of the defeat and death of the three East Saxon kings at the hands of the West Saxons: a fitting punishment, in Bede’s mind, for the difficulties they had caused the mission fathers. In the next chapter, 2.6, Bede returns to complete the original story, about Eadbald and Kent. Following a night in the abbey church, where Laurence is scourged by St Peter, the bishop is able to persuade the king to give up his uncanonical wife and be baptized. Wrapping the stories up, Bede goes on to explain that Mellitus and Justus were recalled to Kent, before he closes the chapter with a general description of the rest of King Eadbald’s reign.

That, in summary, is the narrative which comprises the end of 2.5 and most of 2.6; the sources of those tales will now be examined in more detail.

*At uero post mortem Aedilbercti, cum filius eius Eadbald regni gubernacula suscepisset, magno tenellis ibi adhuc ecclesiae crementis detrimento fuit. Siquidem non solum fidem Christi recipere noluerat, sed et fornicatione pollutus est tali, qualem nec inter gentes auditam apostolus testatur, ita ut uxorem patris haberet. ... Auxit autem procellam huiusce perturbationis etiam mors Sabercti regis Orientalium Saxonum, ... Sed non multo tempore reges, qui praeconem a se ueritatis expulerant, daemonicis cultibus inpune seruiebant. Nam egressi contra gentem Geuissorum in proelium omnes pariter cum sua militia corruerunt; nec, licet auctoribus perditis, excitatum ad scelera uulgus potuit corrigi atque ad simplicitatem fidei et caritatis, quae est in Christo, reuocari.* [But after the death of Æthelberht, when his son Eadbald had taken over the helm of state, there followed a severe setback to the tender growth of the Church. Not only had he refused to receive the faith of Christ but he was polluted with such fornication as the apostle declares to have been not so much as named among the Gentiles, in that he took his father’s wife. ... {This led to a wider apostasy among those who had been frightened into converting by Æthelberht. Eadbald was punished by

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<sup>556</sup> Unsurprisingly, given, as has just been seen, the first half of chapter 2.5 was focused on Æthelberht.

frequent fits of madness} ... On the death of Sæberht, king of the East Saxons, the tempest of troubles became yet more violent, ... {Sæberht was succeeded by his three sons, who were not Christian. They demanded the Eucharist from Mellitus, who refused, unless they were baptized first. This impasse led to the bishop's expulsion from Essex. Following consultation with Laurence and Justus, the latter went with Mellitus into exile in Gaul} ... But not for long did the kings who had driven away the herald of truth worship their devils unpunished. They went out to fight against the Gewisse and they and all their army perished together. But though the instigators perished, the people, once they had been encouraged to do evil, could not be converted and recalled to the simplicity of faith and love which is in Christ.]

As discussed above, the sources for the interconnected stories at the end of 2.5 and the start of 2.6 will be considered together here.<sup>557</sup> In these sections, as was again noted above, Bede is telling what might be termed the narrative of the 'apostasy', or, as it is more frequently described by historians: the 'pagan reaction'.<sup>558</sup> In a very generic way, therefore, the two stories – Eadbald's rejection of Christianity until Laurence's vision of St Peter, and the expulsion of Mellitus from London – are connected by their subject matter. Even so, the narrative of each tale is, essentially, independently coherent. Bede has made it more difficult to see this, by interrupting the account of Eadbald and Canterbury, which begins in 2.5, and only returning to its most important part, the miraculous visitation and scourging of Laurence by the apostle Peter, in 2.6. In between, he has inserted the essentially complete story of Mellitus, and his exile from London, after he refused to give the *panem nitidum* to the new East Saxon kings.<sup>559</sup> The two tales are then briefly wrapped up together in 2.6 with the addition of some other material, which will be considered in its proper place. Thus, although they are entwined in the *HE*,

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<sup>557</sup> For the sake of convenience, the relevant extract from 2.6, where the story of Eadbald and Laurence, begun in 2.5, is completed, runs as follows: *Cum uero et Laurentius Mellitum Iustumque secuturus ac Britanniam esset relicturus, ... Non enim tanta erat ei quanta patri ipsius regni potestas, ut etiam nolentibus ac contradicentibus paganis antistitem suae posset ecclesiae reddere.* [Now when Laurence was about to follow Mellitus and Justus and to leave Britain, ... {Laurence slept the night in the abbey church where St Peter appeared to him and scolded him for his faintheartedness, even scourging him physically. The bishop, showing his wounds to the king, was able to convert him and Eadbald embraced Christianity, gave up his unlawful wife and banned idolatry in the kingdom. He also recalled Justus and Mellitus, but he was not able to restore the latter to the episcopacy of London} ... For King Eadbald had less royal power than his father had and was unable to restore the bishop to his church against the will and consent of the heathen.].

<sup>558</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 58, noted that despite the interesting information in the first half of 2.5, this chapter "is in fact about the pagan reaction following the deaths of Æthelberht and Sæberht."

<sup>559</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 196, makes the important point that the fact that Sæberht's sons are not named indicates that Bede did not possess a regnal list for the East Saxons, something noted already in this study.

these are two fundamentally separate stories, within which the narrative of each is, internally, self-contained.

Nonetheless, despite their basic independence, the tales are entwined in the *HE*, near the end of both 2.5 and 2.6,<sup>560</sup> in ways which make it difficult to be sure whether Bede was working from a single source, or whether such sections of shared narrative represent authorial intervention on his part to connect two different stories from two different sources. Certain parts of the narrative clearly are Bede's, such as the use of biblical allusions to emphasize his meaning, or the description of Mellitus as a *praeco ueritatis*.<sup>561</sup> But the specific claim which connects the stories about Essex and Kent – that Mellitus and Justus went to Gaul – is not the sort of thing Bede is likely to have invented simply to integrate the narratives of two entirely separate sources. Perhaps the most likely conclusion is that the stories had been originally connected in Bede's source, but that he significantly embellished those elements in order to improve the telling of the story.

Such a discussion, however inconclusive, is necessary, in order to try to move towards a better understanding of the nature of Bede's source(s). But whether or not the two stories came from the same source, it seems likely they came from the same place – Canterbury, and presumably Albinus. In fact, these two stories are two further examples of the kind of 'Canterbury tale' that has been identified earlier. Both the stories in 2.5 and 2.6 share the characteristics of the other examples discussed above. Each represents a coherent narrative; it is difficult to imagine either being based on more than one source. Clearly they relate to the mission fathers and both are presumably from Canterbury.

Looking at the two stories in more detail, it can also be seen that, like the other 'Canterbury tales' considered so far, both of the stories here raise difficult chronological questions, which suggest they were written significantly later than the 'events' themselves. The East Saxon story, for instance, is not dated at all. Bede tells it as if it occurs after Æthelberht's death, but he is obviously unaware of how much after. Statements by modern historians that Sæberht died in 616, or even c.616,<sup>562</sup> are not based on any firm evidence. From the *HE* itself, the reader is left with the impression that

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<sup>560</sup> Primarily through the claim that Mellitus and Justus went into exile in Gaul together.

<sup>561</sup> As has already been seen in 2.2, this was one of Bede's favourite terms for the mission fathers.

<sup>562</sup> For instance, Flechner, "Dagan, Columbanus", p. 70.

Bede's decision to insert the story in its present position has more to do with the demands of his narrative than any knowledge of the date of the actual events.

Nor does the content of the story inspire much confidence in the source's credibility. Bede himself adds a caveat, *dicebant*, in the telling. As discussed earlier, that does not rule out a written source, but it does express his caution about the credibility of the evidence on which he is basing his account. Certainly, while there is nothing specifically miraculous in the story of Mellitus, it does have a hagiographic, and even theological, flavour with the saint as the strong, virtuous hero, standing firm against the powerful pagan antagonists.<sup>563</sup>

The chronological difficulty with the Laurence/Canterbury story is more complex since it relates to information from other sources. In 2.8, 2.10 and 2.11, Bede includes three papal letters, one to bishop Justus, one to King Edwin and one to Edwin's wife, Æthelburh. All three letters mentions a king's conversion, and the one to Justus is specific about that bishop's role in bringing it about. The terms used are ambiguous and it is not impossible that the pope is referring to a level of inner conversion beyond simply baptism; but that is not very likely.

Equally the name of the 'converted' king is not precisely Eadbald in any of the letters. In 2.8 (to Justus) it is *Adulwald*, which is quite different linguistically to Eadbald; in 2.10 (to Edwin) and 2.11 (to Æthelburh) it is *Audubald*, which is closer. Was the individual in the letter a different person from Eadbald?<sup>564</sup> The fact that Kent seems frequently to have been divided in half, with two separate kings, one probably senior to the other, might suggest that it could have been. Most historians, however, seem to accept the simpler option, that "Adulwald/Audubald" was in fact Eadbald.<sup>565</sup> If so, however, this undermines the entire basis of Bede's story of Eadbald and Laurence, where it is the latter who is credited with bringing the king to Christianity. Bede's account and the papal letter cannot realistically both be true; nor can the former reasonably be more reliable than the latter.

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<sup>563</sup> Furthermore the crimes of the East Saxon kings are specifically punished, though this may be a fitting conclusion specifically included by Bede. The direct speech, as usual, was probably his own invention or paraphrase of what he found in his source.

<sup>564</sup> It must surely be presumed that *Adulwald* and *Audubald* were the same person.

<sup>565</sup> For instance, Hunter Blair, "Letters of Pope Boniface"; D. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London, 2000), pp. 31-32; etc. There is no consensus, however, about the implications of this for early seventh-century Kent. For instance, Hunter Blair and Kirby, despite their agreement on the association of *Adulwald* with Eadbald, have diametrically opposed views on what this means.



The papal letter is a primary source; in contrast, there is no reason to believe that Bede had access to a primary source for what is anyway a hagiographic tale. If therefore one accepts the most obvious explanation – that *Adulwald* was Eadbald, and that the reference to conversion is to Eadbald's baptism (or potentially his readmission into communion following a period of apostasy/excommunication) – then the conclusion must be that it was Justus, not Laurence, who brought Eadbald (back?) into the Church. Thus, Bede's story is again evidently anachronistic.

Moreover, the story of Laurence and Eadbald as told in detail in 2.6, is even more clearly hagiographic than that of Mellitus: a nightly vision of the saint whose church Laurence was sleeping in, followed by a scourging which left physical marks, finally leading to the stunningly simple 'conversion' of the king. As with other 'Canterbury tales' considered above, the story is a hagiographic *topos*.<sup>566</sup> Such adherence to fixed patterns should probably be taken as a further sign of their anachronism. No internal detail suggests the 'author' possessed primary knowledge of the individuals or events described.<sup>567</sup> Instead, the reader is presented with merely an example to show that the virtues of these Canterbury heroes were worthy of the miracles of the great saints of the past.<sup>568</sup> In short, this is not a tale that can be taken seriously and it is a wonder that some would still prefer the evidence of this "attractive monastic myth", as Brooks termed it,<sup>569</sup> to the papal letter. But such is the enduring sense of Bede's reliability, without due

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<sup>566</sup> Plummer, 2.89, provided references to some analogues; but there are even more, with Gregory of Tours himself suffering a beating in a vision in his *Glory of the Martyrs*, c. 86. There is even one in the *Whitby Life*, c.19. Colgrave's categorization of this as a classic *incubatio* miracle (Colgrave and Mynors, p. 154, n.1), however, seems over general: miraculous scourgings during visions seem to represent a type of their own. For this, the continuity from the pagan period Colgrave refers to seems much less apt.

<sup>567</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 62, misleadingly associates the message of this miracle story with that in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, 2.3, where Benedict is commended for leaving those attempting to poison him. In fact, the Laurence story has precisely the opposite moral. The tale is not attempting to reinforce Gregory's teachings as Wallace-Hadrill suggests. Rather, the dissonance between the story and Gregory's own thinking might well provide a subtler indication of the chronological and ideological distance of the composition of the account from the time of the individuals who made up the Gregorian mission.

<sup>568</sup> One is reminded of the (in)famous comment in the *Whitby Life*, c.30, that "if anything we have written did not concern this man ... we have little doubt on the whole that they were true of him, too." ("*si quid horum quae scripsimus de hoc viro non fuit ... de illo eius etiam esse in magno dubitamus minime*".)

<sup>569</sup> N. Brooks, "Laurence (d. 619)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/article/16166>, accessed 18 March 2013].

consideration of the nature of his sources, that the narrative of this anachronistic, hagiographic story is often repeated, but rarely challenged in modern historiography.<sup>570</sup>

Other smaller pieces of evidence in both tales also suggest Bede's source was written significantly after the 'events' had taken place. Bede is apparently unsure, in 2.5, whether Eadbald, Æthelberht's son and successor, had ever been Christian or had simply abandoned his faith on his father's death. This ambiguity between Bede's description of Eadbald as both unbaptized and an apostate is representative of some of the confusion in the story. Other confusions include the expression of the desire by the three bishops (Laurence, Mellitus and Justus) to leave for their *patriam* in one sentence, while in the next Bede states that two went not to Rome, but to Gaul, and the third only planned to join them later; and the note at the conclusion of the story in 2.6 that Eadbald banned all idolatrous worship,<sup>571</sup> when Bede says in 3.8 that the first English king to do this was not Eadbald, but his son Eorcenberht. As usual, in this analysis of Bede's method and sources, the question is not what the reality might have been which underlies these odd accounts, but rather the basis upon which Bede tells them. Nonetheless, even from this perspective, it is worth noting that these inconsistencies and apparent inaccuracies point to further elements of anachronism in both tales.

The picture that is emerging about the nature of the source, or sources, of these two stories should by now be familiar. These are two more 'Canterbury tales', very similar in form and character to those of the party's arrival [1.25], the miraculous discovery of Peter's body [1.33], and Augustine's healing of the blind man [2.2]. Another one will be seen in 2.7 and they will all be discussed together, as a set, at the end of the analysis of the sources of Bede's statements in these chapters.

There remains a question about whether the conclusion to chapter 2.5 – the story of the defeat of the three pagan East Saxon kings at the hands of the West Saxons – comes from the same source as the earlier narrative about Mellitus. The event provides such a fitting punishment for the recalcitrant kings that it might be considered Bede's own addition. If so, then his source for the event is unknown. Nonetheless, this drawing of a 'moral'

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<sup>570</sup> For instance, Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>571</sup> *HE* 2.6: *anathematizato omni idolatriae cultu*.

probably makes most sense as the original conclusion to the Mellitus story in Bede's source, although no doubt he has increased its rhetorical impact.

### **What Bede had**

- Æthelberht's epitaph
- Bertha's epitaph
- Kentish kings' list, including regnal years
- Information about the date of death of Deusdedit and Eorcenberht, probably from epitaphs
- Letters connected to 596 mission
- 'Hegemony list'
- 'Hidage document' of the tribute type
- Æthelberht's laws
- Kentish royal genealogy
- Bible

### **What Bede says that has not been possible to source**

In this chapter some information has been identified without a surviving source and which is not simply Bede's deduction or rhetoric: although content from 2.6 has also been discussed above, to avoid confusion, it is not included below, but, will be inserted only in the appropriate place.

- Eadbald refused to receive the faith
- He married his father's wife
- He permitted those who had not converted or were lukewarm to reject Christianity
- He was punished by frequent fits of madness
  
- In Essex on Sæberht's death, his three sons, successors, were all still heathen
- They practised open idolatry and permitted it

- They demand the Eucharist from Mellitus, who refused
- He was exiled as a result.
  
- He went to Kent and conferred with Laurence and Justus
- Justus and Mellitus departed for Gaul
- The East Saxon kings were punished for their crimes by their defeat and death in battle against the Gewisse.

Again the discussions above about the characteristics of the sources, which lie behind these two stories, can be summarized. Both are internally coherent, not built up by Bede from a compilation of other sources. Each story may have had its own source or a single source might have connected the two tales. In either case, Bede was working from narrative sources, which have not survived, but which clearly concerned the early ‘mission fathers’ and derived almost certainly from Canterbury. The content of both tales is evidently both hagiographic and anachronistic, drawing on classic *topoi*. Bede himself seems to have had his doubts about the reliability of at least one of the stories. In short, it can be concluded that in the second half of this chapter, and the first half of the next, Bede has built his story around the narratives of either one or two sources, which have not survived, but which share the characteristics of the several other ‘Canterbury tales’ identified earlier.

## 2.6 – “How Laurence was reproved by the apostle Peter and converted King Eadbald to Christ; and how the king recalled Mellitus and Justus”

*Cum uero et Laurentius Mellitum Iustumque secuturus ac Britanniam esset relicturus, ... Non enim tanta erat ei quanta patri ipsius regni potestas, ut etiam nolentibus ac contradicentibus paganis antistitem suae posset ecclesiae reddere.* [Now when Laurence was about to follow Mellitus and Justus and to leave Britain, ... {Laurence slept the night in the abbey church where St Peter appeared to him and scolded him for his faintheartedness, even scourging him physically. The bishop, showing his wounds to the king, was able to convert him and Eadbald embraced Christianity and gave up his unlawful wife. He also recalled Justus and Mellitus, but he was not able to restore the latter to the episcopacy of London} ... For King Eadbald had less royal power than his father had and was unable to restore the bishop to his church against the will and consent of the heathen.]

Most of this chapter is, as just discussed, no more than the completion of the story begun in the last one. Bede's source, which was a single, hagiographic narrative, following established *topoi* and composed apparently long enough after events to make mistakes in the chronology, has already been considered. The story concerns one of the early 'mission fathers' and cannot reasonably have come from anywhere else but Canterbury and Albinus. All these characteristics have been seen in several of the other stories examined above.

Although Bede has derived the core of the story from information in a single source, he has of course added his own touch throughout. The direct speech, for instance, may be presumed to reflect his own rhetorical choices, though the content is likely to be based on that in his source. Furthermore, certain specific comments are probably best interpreted as Bede drawing inferences or pointing out morals. For instance, the conclusion about the diminished reach of Eadbald's power compared to his father's, need not have been stated as such in Bede's source: Bede may simply have deduced that conclusion from the evidence he had, including the 'hegemony list'.

Finally, it should be noted that this passage also includes several biblical quotations. Again, these are probably best understood as Bede's own additions to the tale.

*Verumtamen ipse cum sua gente, ex quo ad Dominum conuersus est, diuinis se*

*studuit mancipare praeceptis. Denique et in monasterio beatissimi apostolorum principis ecclesiam sanctae Dei genetricis fecit, quam consecrauit archiepiscopus Mellitus.* [Nevertheless after he and his race had turned to the Lord, they strove to follow God's commandments and in the monastery of the blessed chief of the apostles he built a church dedicated to the holy Mother of God, which was afterwards consecrated by Archbishop Mellitus.]

The comment about Eadbald and indeed the Kentish people's efforts to follow God's commandments might conceivably have been based on something in the source which Bede used for his story; but it is more likely to represent Bede's own insertion, without support in his sources. The use of such a generic comment to provide a neat conclusion to the tale, in line with what Bede thought should happen, would suit Bede's usual working methods perfectly.

Bede's other information about Eadbald's reign was clearly minimal. Apart from the papal letters which mentioned him, this passage suggests Bede possessed the text of the inscription from the 'foundation stone' for the church of the Mother of God in the Ss Peter and Paul monastic precinct. The information likely to be found in such a 'document' would explain the statements Bede makes here about that church: namely his claim that it was built by King Eadbald and consecrated by Mellitus. This text would no doubt have been sent to Bede by Albinus and delivered by Nothelm, presumably on his 'first' visit.

### **What Bede had**

- Inscription from the 'foundation stone' of Holy Mother of God church, noting the name of the bishop, Mellitus, who consecrated it, and the king under whose patronage it was built, as well as the name of the church's dedication
- Bible

### **What Bede says that has not been possible to source**

In this chapter, certain pieces of information have been identified (in the analysis concerning 2.5) which lack a surviving source and which are not simply Bede's deduction or rhetoric.

- Laurence slept in the church of SS Peter and Paul
- St Peter appeared to him
- He scourged him
- And admonished him to follow his own example of perseverance
- Laurence showed Eadbald his stripes
- Eadbald was shocked
- He banned all idolatrous worship
- Gave up his unlawful wife
- And was baptized
- On his request Justus and Mellitus returned from Gaul.
- Only Justus received his see back, however.

As seen before, whatever source lay behind this tale, it shared characteristics with several others in the account of the Gregorian mission in the *HE*. These tales will be discussed together as a group in Chapter 7.

**2.7 – “How [after the death of Laurence] Bishop Mellitus, when his city was on fire, extinguished the flames by his prayers”. The chapter also mentions papal letters addressed to Mellitus (and to Justus of Rochester) and notes his date of death.**

*Hoc enim regnante rege beatus archiepiscopus Laurentius regnum caeleste conscendit, atque in ecclesia et monasterio sancti apostoli Petri iuxta predecessorem suum Augustinum sepultus est, die quarto nonarum Februariarum.* [During this king's reign, the blessed Archbishop Laurence entered the heavenly kingdom and was buried on 2 February in the church and monastery of St Peter the Apostle near to his predecessor Augustine.]

There are a number of elements in this deceptively simple sentence. The term ‘archbishop’ is Bede’s and an anachronism, as seen several times before. Bede’s knowledge of the precise day of Laurence’s deposition is a sign that his information does not come from liturgical commemoration,<sup>572</sup> not that this was necessarily unavailable to him, but from his epitaph. Roman epitaphs, such as that of Gregory the Great,<sup>573</sup> often noted the day of burial, which was generally the same as the date of death.<sup>574</sup> Evidence of the existence of epitaphs for the seventh-century bishops of Canterbury and for Bede’s possession of the texts has been seen earlier: this is therefore a further example. Bede would have found out about the location of Laurence’s tomb via Nothelm, but from Albinus, in whose monastery Laurence and the others were apparently buried.<sup>575</sup>

Finally, Bede’s comment that Laurence had died in Eadbald’s reign requires no source: this is simply his statement of what seemed obvious. It may well, however, have been mentioned on Laurence’s epitaph.

*Post quem Mellitus, qui erat Lundoniae episcopus, sedem Doruuernensis ecclesiae tertius ab Augustino suscepit;* [Thereupon Mellitus who was bishop of London succeeded to the see of Canterbury, the third after Augustine.]

<sup>572</sup> As Jones, *Saints*, p. 167, suggested.

<sup>573</sup> In the prose summary sentence, not in the poem Bede quotes in 2.1.

<sup>574</sup> Plummer, 2.36.

<sup>575</sup> As mentioned before, the fact that the tombs of those early mission leaders were in the positions they were in c.730 does not necessarily mean that they had not been moved since their deaths; but for Bede, and no doubt Albinus, the present position was taken as the location of their original internment.



Bede's bishops' list for Canterbury would have told him that Mellitus succeeded Laurence. As discussed in 1.23, Bede's description of Mellitus as the *tertius ab Augustino* to mean the third including Augustine follows his normal method when counting kings, emperors, bishops and the like.

*Iustus autem adhuc superstes Hrofensem regebat ecclesiam.* [Justus, who was still living, ruled over the church at Rochester.]

Bede here repeats something he has mentioned before more than once: Justus was bishop of Rochester. He possessed an episcopal list for Rochester, on which this statement is based.

*Qui cum magna ecclesiam Anglorum cura ac labore gubernarent,* [While guiding the English Church with great care and energy]

This statement is merely Bede's rhetorically phrased praise of the two prelates.

*susceperunt scripta exhortatoria a pontifice Romanae et apostolicae sedis Bonifatio,* [they received letters of exhortation from Rome from Pope Boniface,]

The only realistic means through which Bede can have known about the existence of these letters is if he possessed some of them. His failure to insert them is no argument against this conclusion. There is, as seen frequently above, strong evidence that Bede did not use all the papal letters Nothelm brought him. He was not constrained to insert the full text of every papal letter he possessed, as sometimes seems to be assumed. Bede was able to make decisions about the best use of his material: if the content of a papal letter he possessed served his narrative then he would insert the text, but otherwise he was content to include only details from the epistles – as here, where he seems to use little more than the date, as will be seen in a moment.

Incidentally, Hunter Blair was incorrect to say that, “we know nothing of the contents of the letters”.<sup>576</sup> As was the case in all the other instances after the death of the former

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<sup>576</sup> Hunter Blair, “Letters of Boniface”, p. 7.

bishop of Canterbury and the appointment of the new one, we can be quite sure that this papal letter bestowed the *pallium* on Mellitus.

*qui post Deusdedit ecclesiae praefuit*, [who had succeeded Deusdedit]

Bede's knowledge of the details of papal succession came from the *LP*.

*anno incarnationis dominicae DCXVIII*. [in the year of our Lord 619.]

As Plummer pointed out, it is not immediately clear from Bede's Latin whether this date relates to the letters or to the accession of the pope.<sup>577</sup> Calculation of papal years from the *LP*, even with the benefit of information derived from the epitaph collection he possessed, was no easy matter for Bede. As seen in considering 1.23, Bede was not even able to be accurate about his hero Gregory the Great. On balance, the simplest interpretation is that the date Bede gives refers to the date of the sending of the letters, and is therefore further evidence of his possession of them. The incarnational date Bede provides would therefore have been his conversion from the indictional one he would have found at the end of each of the letters.<sup>578</sup>

*Erat autem Mellitus corporis quidem infirmitate, id est podagragrauatus*, [Now Mellitus suffered from a bodily infirmity, the gout,]

The detail about Mellitus' medical problem is an integral part of the story Bede goes on to tell in a few moments. We may therefore safely conclude that this note comes from the same source as that tale.

*sed mentis gressibus sanis alacriter terrena quaeque transiliens atque ad caelestia semper amanda petenda et quaerenda peruolans. Erat carnis origine nobilis, sed culmine mentis nobilior*. [yet in mind he was sound and active enough; indeed he leapt lightly over all earthly affairs and flew towards those heavenly concerns which he had always loved, pursued, and sought after. He was noble by birth but nobler still in loftiness of spirit.]

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<sup>577</sup> Plummer, 2.90.

<sup>578</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 167.

Unless some of this encomium was perhaps found in Bede's source for the story he is about to tell, these words of praise are best taken as his own rhetorical invention, lauding Mellitus in terms highly influenced by hagiographic norms. The "noble by birth, ... nobler still in spirit" *topos* at least, as Plummer noted, is almost certainly Bede's own addition; the play on words being one he used frequently.<sup>579</sup>

*Denique ut unum uirtutis eius, unde cetera intellegi possint, testimonium referam, tempore quodam ciuitas Doruuernensis per culpam incuriae igni correpta crebrescentibus coepit flammis consumi. Quibus cum nullo aquarum iniectu posset aliquis obsistere, iamque ciuitatis esset pars uastata non minima, atque ad episcopium furens se flamma dilataret, confidens episcopus in diuinum, ubi humanum deerat, auxilium iussit se obuam saeuientibus et huc illucque uolantibus ignium globis efferri. Erat autem eo loci, ubi flammarum impetus maxime incumbibat, martyrium beatorum quattuor Coronatorum. Ibi ergo perlatus obsequentum manibus episcopus coepit orando periculum infirmus abigere, quod firma fortium manus multum laborando nequiuera. Nec mora, uentus, qui a meridie flans urbi incendia sparserat, contra meridiem reflexus primo uim sui furoris a lesione locorum, quae contra erant, abstraxit, ac mox funditus quiescendo flammis pariter sopitis atque extinctis conpescuit. Et quia uir Dei igne diuinae caritatis fortiter ardebat, quia tempestates potestatum aeriarum a sua suorumque lesione crebris orationibus uel exhortationibus repellere consuerat, merito uentis flammisque mundialibus praeualere et, ne sibi suisque nocerent, obtinere poterat. [I will relate, for example, one instance of his power from which the rest may be inferred. On a certain occasion the city of Canterbury had been carelessly set on fire and was rapidly being consumed by the growing blaze. It could not be quenched by throwing water on it and no small part of the city had already been destroyed, while the raging fire was spreading towards the bishop's house. Mellitus, trusting in divine help since human aid had failed, ordered them to carry him into the path of the furious flames where tongues of fire were flying about hither and thither. The church of the Four Crowned Martyrs stood just where the fury of the flames was at its height; the bishop was carried to this spot by his followers, and, weak as he was, proceeded to avert by his prayers the peril which had defeated strong men in spite of all their efforts. Immediately the south wind, which had spread the conflagration over the city, veered round to the north and first of all prevented the fury of the flames from destroying those places which were in its path; then it soon ceased entirely and there was a calm, while the flames also sank and died out. So brightly did the man of God burn with the fire of divine love, so often had he repelled the stormy powers of the air from harming him and his people by his prayers and at his exhortations, that it was right for him to be able to prevail over earthly winds and flames and to ensure that they should not injure him or his people.]*

<sup>579</sup> Plummer, 2.90-91. For instance in *HA*, c. 1, to describe Benedict Biscop.

This story about one of the Roman mission's founding fathers is another coherent, yet extended narrative, which only really makes sense if it came from a single source, though one that has not survived. Again this is a clearly hagiographic tale, including a miracle which shows almost no detailed knowledge, but instead is a simple paraphrasing of a *topos*. The motif of the power of the saint turning back flames is found elsewhere even in the *HE*,<sup>580</sup> as well as in Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*.<sup>581</sup> But the story here is actually drawn almost precisely from Gregory's *Dialogues*, even down to the saint suffering gout.<sup>582</sup> In the example from the *Life of Cuthbert* Bede even acknowledges the parallel with the *Dialogues*.<sup>583</sup> This is not because "one of the missionaries must have recalled a very similar miracle performed by Bishop Marcellinus of Ancona."<sup>584</sup> Rather, it is another sign that those composing these tales, presumably in Canterbury, had little or no knowledge of the actual individuals whose sanctity they were attempting to evidence through the telling of miracle stories. This is not a story we can put any faith in: there is no reason to believe Mellitus really did have the gout. The only 'fact' in the story is the existence of the church of the Four Crowned Martyrs, which was surely standing at the time of the composition of the narrative.<sup>585</sup> There is no sign that the storyteller possessed any other details concerning the church and the tale is not evidence for the date of that building.

Finally, it is worth noting that Bede's reference to this miracle as one example of many need not be taken to suggest that Bede's source originally contained several such tales. That is not impossible, of course, but such a passing remark is much more likely to be simply a rhetorical flourish on Bede's behalf. He is making the most of the limited evidence at his disposal to construct a narrative much more comprehensive and coherent than the scraps of evidence he possessed.

*Et hic ergo, postquam annis quinque rexit ecclesiam, Eadbaldo regnante migravit ad caelos, sepultusque est cum patribus suis in saepedicto monasterio et ecclesia beatissimi apostolorum principis, anno ab incarnatione Domini DCXXIII die octauo kalendarum Maiarum.* [He, too, after ruling over the church for five years

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<sup>580</sup> *HE* 3.10.

<sup>581</sup> *Life of Cuthbert*, c. 14, following the *Anonymous Life*, 2.7.

<sup>582</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, 1.6.

<sup>583</sup> *Life of Cuthbert*, c. 14.

<sup>584</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 62.

<sup>585</sup> No church is mentioned in the story from the *Dialogues*.

went to heaven during Eadbald's reign and was buried with his fathers in the monastery and church of the blessed chief of the apostles so often mentioned, on 24th April in the year of our Lord 624.]

Mention of the bishop's Julian date of burial almost certainly means, as seen above, that this detail came from Mellitus' epitaph rather than from Canterbury liturgical commemoration. The question of Bede's basis for the incarnational date of 624 that he gives is more complicated. At one level, of course, it is a calculation: but is it a direct 'translation' of an indictional or regnal one from Mellitus' epitaph, or has Bede deduced it from other information? The mention of Mellitus having served for five years, may point in the latter direction.<sup>586</sup> Given what we have seen of the epitaphs of Augustine and Æthelberht, neither of which seem to have included references to their years of death, there is no reason to assume that Mellitus' did. In contrast, a notice of the length of his episcopate is something that might well be expected on the epitaph. As mentioned earlier, such notes were frequently found as part of papal epitaphs, such as Gregory's.<sup>587</sup> Even so, the difficulty remains of what Bede calculated the five years from. In this context, the coincidence of him using the year 619 earlier in the chapter naturally makes one suspicious. Could it be the case that Bede has mistaken the import of the date he mentioned earlier in the chapter, confusing the accession of Mellitus with that of Pope Boniface, or at least the letters he sent? Certainly the stories are entwined and such confusion is not beyond Bede. But if we are willing to consider that Bede's use of 619 in his calculations might have stemmed from a confusion between Mellitus and Boniface, then we also need to note the further coincidence that the *LP* gives five years for the latter's episcopate, just as Bede gives for the former.

There is not enough information to provide any degree of certainty here. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize how significant are the consequences if either or both of these claims are in error. The firm date of 619 historians give for Laurence's death is merely a modern deduction from Bede's statements here: in other words, 624 subtract five. There is no other evidence for the year of Laurence's death. If either the 624, or the five years,

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<sup>586</sup> As Jones, *Saints*, p. 167, persuasively, if rather uncharacteristically argued. He did not, however, suggest what Bede had added the five years to.

<sup>587</sup> Bede's Canterbury episcopal list did not include figures for the length of each of the early seventh-century episcopates.

or both, were in error therefore, then the year for Laurence's death would also be wrong. Moreover, if Justus did not succeed Mellitus in 624, but plausibly a year or more earlier, then this might provide a key for explicating the otherwise confusing chronology of the Northumbrian mission to Edwin by Paulinus.<sup>588</sup>

Certainty about whence Bede derived 624 for Mellitus' death may therefore not be possible. At some level at least, calculation, and indeed confusion, on Bede's part are probable. Nonetheless, by an overreliance on Bede's word, without examining what his sources might have been, historians may well have constructed a false chronology, with deeply misleading implications. For now, therefore, we should at the very least be more cautious about the years of Laurence and Mellitus' death.<sup>589</sup>

Finally: Bede's statement that Mellitus' death, like Laurence's, occurred during Eadbald's reign was for him mere common sense. Nonetheless, it is not impossible, or even unlikely, that Eadbald was mentioned on Mellitus' epitaph, as Æthelberht was on Augustine's.

### **What Bede had**

For this chapter therefore Bede used the following written sources

- Laurence's epitaph
- Canterbury episcopal list
- Rochester episcopal list
- Letters of Pope Boniface V to Mellitus and Justus
- *LP*
- Mellitus' epitaph

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<sup>588</sup> Perhaps the most difficult element of which is resolving how it was that the letters Pope Boniface V, who died in 625, sent to Justus, Edwin and Æthelburh (2.8, 2.10, 2.11), can be reconciled with the rest of the narrative.

<sup>589</sup> It is not part of the present task to determine what actually happened, nor is there space here; suffice it to say, however, that there is reason to think that further examination would partially redeem Bede's conclusion if not his methods.

‘Orally’, Bede also had basic Canterbury-sourced knowledge about the location of the tombs of Laurence and Mellitus.

### **What Bede says that has not been possible to source**

Bede’s source for the miracle story about Mellitus has not survived. This would account for the following elements of this chapter that have not otherwise been identified above.

- Mellitus suffered from gout
- Canterbury was on fire, which was spreading to the bishop’s residence
- Mellitus had himself carried to the church of the Four Martyrs – in the way of the flames
- His prayers averted the flames and turned the wind backwards, saving the church and the people.

Bede has not compiled this story from a variety of sources, he has taken it from one. That source fits all the criteria of the rest of the ‘Canterbury tales’ spread across Bede’s account of the Gregorian mission, and noted in the analysis earlier.

## 2.8 – “How Pope Boniface sent the pallium and a letter to Justus, the successor of Mellitus”

*Cui statim successit in pontificatum Iustus, qui erat Hrofensis ecclesiae episcopus.* [Justus, bishop of the church of Rochester, immediately succeeded Mellitus in the archbishopric.]

Bede has already stated Justus’ original diocese several times, based on the episcopal list he possessed for Rochester. Bede’s Canterbury episcopal list would have told him that Justus succeeded Mellitus in the metropolitan see. There is no reason to believe that the *statim* is based on any particular source. This is simply Bede’s own view of what should have been the case.

*Illi autem ecclesiae Romanum pro se consecrauit episcopum,* [He consecrated Romanus, bishop of Rochester, in his own place,]

Bede would have found Romanus’ succession to Justus at Rochester in the episcopal list for that diocese. That it was Justus who consecrated him was the only possible conclusion Bede could have come to: there simply was no one else to perform the rite. Bede needed no separate source in order to make such a claim, though he would have seen the papal letter he inserts in this chapter, and which he interpreted as a licence to consecrate, as corroboration.

*data sibi ordinandi episcopos auctoritate a pontifice Bonifatio,* [having been granted licence to consecrate bishops by Pope Boniface]

This conclusion is based on Bede’s reading of the papal letter he is about to quote in full. It also explains why Bede includes this letter, when he has recently omitted others, with only passing references revealing that he possessed them. This one served the purposes of his narrative.<sup>590</sup>

The letter does specifically mention permission to consecrate bishops, but Bede is

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<sup>590</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 64.



mistaken to focus on the purpose of this letter as being as such a “licence”.<sup>591</sup> The main matter is the conferral of the *pallium*; the ability to consecrate others is merely incidental.<sup>592</sup>

*quem successorem fuisse Deusdedit supra meminimus.* [whom we have referred to above as the successor to Deusdedit.]

Bede’s information about papal succession derived primarily from the *LP*.

*Cuius auctoritatis ista est forma: Dilectissimo fratri Iusto Bonifatius. ... Deus te incolumem custodiat, dilectissime frater.* [This is the form of the licence: Boniface to our most beloved brother Justus. ... {Boniface congratulates Justus for his role in converting a king, who is probably best understood as Eadbald, and grants him use of the pallium, as well as permission to consecrate other bishops.} ... May God keep you safe, most beloved brother.]

This is the text of yet another papal letter, which Bede obtained from Nothelm thanks to his researches in the papal archive.<sup>593</sup>

### What Bede had

- Rochester episcopal list
- Canterbury episcopal list
- *LP*
- Letter of Pope Boniface V to Justus

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<sup>591</sup> Just as Hunter Blair, “The letters of Pope Boniface”, p. 7, was incorrect to describe the primary purpose of the letter as exhortation.

<sup>592</sup> This has potential implications for understanding the narrative of events in the 620s with which there is no time to deal here.

<sup>593</sup> Some would suggest that the papal letters in Book 2 did not come to Bede from Rome via Nothelm, though it is not always clear which route they would propose instead: for instance, Hunter Blair, “The letters of Pope Boniface V”, p. 6, suggests they may have come via Hwætberht, while Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 68 implies that some were Paulinus’ copies preserved at Rochester, while others were in the Canterbury archives. In reality there are no grounds for such speculation, which has no support in Bede’s discussion of how he obtained the papal letters in the Preface. The recent discussion of these letters in J. Story, “Bede, Willibrord and the Letters of Pope Honorius I on the Genesis of the Archbishopric of York”, *English Historical Review* 127 (Aug. 2012), pp. 783-818, came to the same conclusion.

**2.9 – “About the reign of Edwin [of Northumbria] and how Paulinus [one of the Gregorian mission] came to preach the gospel to him; how he first administered the sacraments of the Christian faith to Edwin’s daughter as well as to others”. This chapter also includes mention of the marriage of Edwin to Æthelberht’s daughter Æthelburh.**

*Quo tempore etiam gens Nordanhymbrorum, hoc est ea natio Anglorum quae ad aquilonalem Humbrae fluminis plagam habitabat, cum rege suo Eduine uerbum fidei praedicante Paulino, cuius supra meminimus, suscepit. ... Sed et ipse, cum esset uir natura sagacissimus, saepe diu solus residens ore quidem tacito sed in intimis cordis multa secum conloquens, quid sibi esset faciendum, quae religio seruanda, tractabat.* [At this time the Northumbrian race, that is the English race which dwelt north of the river Humber, together with their king Edwin, also accepted the word of faith through the preaching of Paulinus already mentioned. ... {Bede details the extent of Edwin’s power, including reference to his hegemony over the isles of Anglesey and Man. King Æthelberht allowed Edwin to marry his daughter, Æthelburh, provided she was allowed to continue to practise her faith and might have Paulinus as bishop to accompany her. The precise date of Paulinus’ consecration is given, followed by a passage describing his missionary work in laudatory, but generic terms. Bede then tells a specific story – that of Edwin’s survival from a West Saxon assassination attempt and his consequent acceptance that his daughter Eanflæd, born the same night, might be baptized. The king himself, despite a crushing military victory over the West Saxons and careful study with Paulinus, hesitated before conversion.} ... He himself being a man of great natural sagacity would often sit alone for long periods in silence, but in his innermost thoughts he was deliberating with himself as to what he ought to do and which religion he should adhere to.]

This chapter is the beginning of a cycle of stories about Paulinus and the conversion of Edwin and his family. As discussed at the beginning of this analysis, such chapters will not be considered in depth. First, they do not directly concern the main subject of this study, which remains early Christian Kent and the narrative of the Gregorian mission there. Moreover, Bede, growing up in ‘Northumbria’, will have had access to a greater depth and variety of sources, for the events and people of that kingdom. Some of these would have been written, but more would have come to him orally. The evidence of the *Whitby Life* confirms that even more quasi-legendary stories about Edwin and Paulinus were in circulation than Bede provides, and perhaps even different versions of the same

stories as well.<sup>594</sup> Such a comparison points again to a Northumbrian, rather than a Kentish, context for Bede's stories about Edwin and Paulinus.<sup>595</sup> Bede was no doubt aware of some of these whether or not he knew that *Life*. As well as being more numerous therefore, Bede's sources here are more intangible. They will have been connected in complex ways which make them much more difficult to trace convincingly: although this does not of course mean they need necessarily have been more reliable.

There are thus good reasons to omit a detailed source coverage for such chapters. Nonetheless, Kent cannot be completely discounted as a source for stories about Paulinus. Bede specifically includes Northumbria among the kingdoms whose early Christian days he learned about partially through Albinus.<sup>596</sup> In general, however, this seems to refer to little more than the information Bede found on episcopal lists held centrally at Canterbury. Nonetheless, several stories relating to others of the Gregorian 'mission' party, presumably with a Canterbury provenance, have been seen above. Perhaps one of the otherwise apparently Northumbrian legendary stories about Paulinus was originally from the same set as the other 'Canterbury tales' identified earlier. If so, it is well hidden. None of the Paulinus stories has an evidently Canterbury tone. Moreover most of them are more detailed, and less closely adherent to standard hagiographic *topoi*, than any of the Canterbury hagiographic legends considered above.

If any chapter would seem the most likely to be based on Kentish information then we should perhaps expect it to be this one, 2.9, in which Edwin takes a bride and a bishop from Kent. It is, nevertheless, difficult to discern which, if any, elements in this chapter could fall under such a heading. The account of the reason for Paulinus' trip north – that is, the marriage of Æthelburh of Kent to Edwin – may well contain inaccuracies, but is as likely to come from Northumbria as Kent, if not more so. Wallace-Hadrill assumed that all the information about Paulinus must have come from the prelate's own recollections preserved at Rochester, simply because he had been exiled from Northumbria and had

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<sup>594</sup> As Jones, *Saints*, p. 175, put it: "Legend and stories gathered quickly around Paulinus and Edwin."

<sup>595</sup> See for instance, P. Hunter Blair, "Bernicians and their Northern Frontier", p. 144.

<sup>596</sup> *HE* Preface: "Some of my information about the East and West Saxons, as well as East Anglia and Northumbria, was provided by them [Nothelm and Albinus], especially under what bishops and in whose reigns they received the grace of the gospel." ("*Qui etiam prouinciae Orientalium Anglorum atque Nordanybrorum, a quibus praesulibus uel quorum tempore regum gratiam euangelii perceperint, nonnulla mihi ex parte prodiderunt.*")

himself not returned.<sup>597</sup> But this is based on the mistaken premises that everyone else had left and no one else returned. James at least, Paulinus' companion, stayed in Northumbria and lived into Bede's own lifetime;<sup>598</sup> and Hilda, who was baptized at the same time as Edwin, was apparently thirteen then, quite old enough to recall memories of these earlier events later in her career.<sup>599</sup> Moreover, Eanflæd, the daughter of Edwin and Æthelburh went back to Northumbria when she married Oswiu.<sup>600</sup> She will not have returned alone, though no doubt others had been able to make their way back in the meanwhile. There were plenty of channels by which anecdotes about Paulinus were retained – and embellished – in Northumbria. The prevalence of Paulinus stories in the *Whitby Life* should be evidence enough that Northumbria rather than Kent was the primary location for the circulation of such traditions.<sup>601</sup>

Only one substantive element in this passage probably does come, indirectly, from Kentish sources: the date of Paulinus' consecration. This seems unlikely to have appeared on its own in a source: it is not easy to imagine what source would have recorded such a date. More probably, the figure was Bede's own calculation based on two other items: the date he had for Paulinus' death, 10 October 644 which he probably took from the inscription from Paulinus' epitaph at Rochester; and the length of his total episcopate, 19 years, two months and 21 days, which again is likely to have been from the epitaph.<sup>602</sup> By subtracting the second from the first, Bede arrived at 21 July 625 for his consecration. This was a Sunday, which quietly supports Bede's conclusion.<sup>603</sup>

The claim that Paulinus was consecrated by Justus required no source: this is a simple deduction by Bede using his 'knowledge' of when the event had happened, supported by his awareness of the 'licence to consecrate' granted by Pope Boniface V to Justus in the letter Bede had just inserted in 2.8.

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<sup>597</sup> For instance, Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>598</sup> *HE* 2.20.

<sup>599</sup> *HE* 4.23.

<sup>600</sup> *HE* 3.15.

<sup>601</sup> Moreover if Paulinus were such a source of anecdotes in Kent, then why do we hear nothing further about his life during the fifteen years he spent there after his 'exile'?

<sup>602</sup> These will be discussed further in considering 3.14.

<sup>603</sup> That date is also the feast of the prophet Daniel – he of the lions' den – which would seem a particularly pertinent day for the consecration of a prelate going into a foreign kingdom, as advisor to a foreign king, and defender of a foreign religion, among a hostile, pagan people. However apt the association, it needs to be acknowledged that Daniel's feast is not noted in either Willibrord's *Calendar* or Bede's *Martyrology*.

Much of the first half of the chapter is similarly either Bede's deduction or his rhetoric.<sup>604</sup> Some of the compliments paid to Edwin, for instance, are a bit of both. The details about the extent of his power, with which Bede begins, derive, however, as already discussed at length, from Bede's 'hegemony list' and his 'hidage document' of the tribute type; both of these came to Bede with an apparently Northumbrian provenance, and may well have even been connected in the material Bede had in front of him.<sup>605</sup>

The second half of the chapter represents one of the traditional anecdotes, almost certainly of Northumbrian provenance,<sup>606</sup> concerning Paulinus, which dominate several of the next few chapters. This, and those chapters like 2.12-2.14, which are similar, will therefore be passed over here, for the reasons discussed above.

Those chapters where Bede inserts papal letters, such as 2.10 and 2.11, will, however, still be examined. These often cast indirect light on Kent; and Bede of course obtained them through Nothelm and thanks to Albinus. Bede's use of these letters also offers interesting insights into how he deals with sources, something that is crucial to appreciate if we are to understand how he constructed his *History*.

### **What Bede had**

Within the sections relevant to this inquiry, it is therefore possible to conclude that Bede seems to have possessed the following written sources.

- 'Hegemony' list
- 'Hidage document' of the 'tribute' type.
- Letter of Pope Boniface V to Justus
- Paulinus' Rochester epitaph, including his total years as bishop and date of death

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<sup>604</sup> There is also frequent biblical quotation or allusion.

<sup>605</sup> As is suggested by Bede's knowledge of not only the addition of the Mevanian islands to Edwin's *imperium*, but also their hidages.

<sup>606</sup> Hunter Blair, *World of Bede*, p. 92.

## 2.10 – “How Pope Boniface sent a letter urging the king to embrace the faith”

*Quo tempore* [At that time]

Bede has just been recounting quasi-legendary material about Edwin and Paulinus, and the papal letter Bede cites in this chapter does not have a dating clause. His use of this generic phrase, of the type examined previously, reveals his struggle to reconcile the chronology of parallel accounts from quite different sources.<sup>607</sup>

*exhortatorias ad fidem litteras a pontifice sedis apostolicae Bonifatio accepit, quarum ista est forma: Exemplar epistulae beatissimi et apostolici papae urbis Romanae ecclesiae Bonifatii directae uiro glorioso Eduino regi Anglorum. ... Praeterea benedictionem protectoris uestri beati Petri apostolorum principis uobis direximus, id est camisia cum ornatura in auro una et lena Anciriana una: quod petimus ut eo benignitatis animo gloria uestra suscipiat, quo a nobis noscitur destinatum.* [he (Edwin) received a letter from Boniface, bishop of the apostolic see, exhorting him to accept the faith. It ran as follows: Copy of the letter of the most blessed and apostolic pope of the Church of the city of Rome, Boniface, addressed to the most illustrious Edwin, king of the English. To Edwin, the illustrious king of the English, Bishop Boniface, servant of the servants of God. ... {In a lengthy and detailed attack on pagan ideas and practices, Boniface exhorts the king to become Christian, making reference to Eadbald's own recent conversion.} ... We are sending you the blessing of your protector, St Peter, chief of the apostles, in the form of a robe embroidered with gold and a garment from Ancyra, asking your Majesty to accept these gifts in the same spirit of goodwill as that in which they were sent by us.]

Bede's claim that the letter was intended to exhort the king to accept the faith is derived from the text of the long letter which he goes on to insert in full and which takes up the rest of the chapter. Again we can be confident that this letter reached Bede via Nothelm.<sup>608</sup>

<sup>607</sup> Given the contradictions in the material these difficulties remain unresolved, though many have tried: for instance, P. Hunter Blair, “The Letters of Pope Boniface”; D. Kirby, “Bede and Northumbrian Chronology”, *English Historical Review* 78 (1963), pp. 514-27; and S. Wood, “Bede's Northumbrian Dates Again”, *EHR* 98 (1983), pp. 280-96.

<sup>608</sup> This is also accepted, for instance, by Hunter Blair, *World of Bede*, p. 89, and by Story, “Bede, Willibrord and the Letters of Pope Honorius”.

**What Bede had**

- Letter of Pope Boniface V to King Edwin

## 2.11 – “How he [Pope Boniface] sent a letter urging the king to embrace the faith”

*Ad coniugem quoque illius Aedilbergam huiusmodi litteras idem pontifex misit: Exemplar epistulae beatissimi et apostolici Bonifatii papae urbis Romae directae. Aedilbergae reginae Eduini regis. ... Praeterea benedictionem protectoris uestri beati Petri apostolorum principis uobis direximus, id est speculum argenteum et pectine eboreum inauratum, quod petimus ut eo benignitatis animo gloria uestra suscipiat, quo a nobis noscitur destinatum.* [The Pope also sent a letter to King Edwin’s consort Æthelburh to this effect: Copy of the letter of the most blessed and apostolic pope of the church of the city of Rome, Boniface, addressed to Æthelburh, King Edwin’s queen. To his daughter the most illustrious lady, Queen Æthelburh, Bishop Boniface, servant of the servants of God. ... {Boniface rejoices in the conversion of Eadbald, but urges Æthelburh to work harder to bring her husband into the Church.} ... As well as the blessing of St Peter, chief of the apostles and your protector, we send a silver mirror and an ivory comb adorned with gold. We beseech your Majesty to accept it in the same kindly spirit as that in which it is sent.]

The brief sentence which precedes the long papal letter is little more than a repeat of its title, while the rest of the chapter is simply the text of the epistle itself. This would have been brought by Nothelm on his ‘second’ visit.<sup>609</sup>

### What Bede had

- Letter of Pope Boniface V to Queen Æthelburh

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<sup>609</sup> Incidentally, it is quite clear, *contra* Hunter Blair, “The letters of Pope Boniface”, p. 9, that the letters to Edwin and Æthelburh were originally sent together, and indeed at the same time as that to Justus in 2.8.



**2.12-2.14**

For the various reasons already stated the strictly Northumbria focused chapters 2.12-2.14 will not be examined in this present study of Bede's sources and method. These chapters include: Edwin's vision while in exile among the East Angles which Paulinus made use of to persuade the king to convert (2.12); the famous story of the council with the advice given to the king by his nobles, and even the pagan priest, to become Christian (2.13); and finally the baptism of King Edwin and many other 'Northumbrians' (2.14).

## 2.15 – “How the kingdom of the East Angles received the faith of Christ”

*Tantum autem deuotionis Eduini erga cultum ueritatis habuit, ut etiam regi Orientalium Anglorum Eorpualdo filio Redualdi persuaderet relictis idolorum superstitionibus fidem et sacramenta Christi cum sua prouincia suscipere. ... accepitque sedem episcopatus in ciuitate Dommoc, et cum X ac septem annos eidem prouinciae pontificali regimine praeesset, ibidem in pace uitam finiuit.* [So great was Edwin’s devotion to the true worship, that he also persuaded Eorpwald, son of Rædwald and king of the East Angles, to abandon his idolatrous superstitions and, together with his kingdom, to accept the Christian faith and sacraments. ... {Bede tells the story of Rædwald’s conversion in Kent, followed by his syncretic institution of dual altars – to pagan gods and to Christ – in his temple in East Anglia. A basic genealogy for Rædwald is given. Bede then runs briefly through East Anglian royal succession, ending with King Sigebert, who had been converted while in exile in Gaul and whose efforts to convert his own kingdom were supported by the Burgundian bishop Felix} ... He [Felix] received the seat of his bishopric in the city of Dommoc (Dunwich); and when he had ruled over the kingdom as bishop for seventeen years, he ended his life there in peace.]

This chapter, although about East Anglia rather than Northumbria, is nonetheless, for similar reasons, not directly relevant to the primary focus of this study and so Bede’s sources here will not be considered in detail either. Even so, given that Bede suggests in general terms in the *HE*’s Preface that some at least of his information about the early days of the Church in East Anglia had come from Albinus,<sup>610</sup> it is quite possible that some of the material in this chapter derived from Canterbury. If so, however, it quickly becomes clear that this cannot have been much more than the name of Bishop Felix, from the episcopal list, and perhaps parts of the probably unreliable biographical information Bede provides about him.

The other elements in this chapter seem to have reached Bede via quite different channels. The context of the Eorpwald story is Edwin’s efforts to convert him, so this

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<sup>610</sup> *HE* Preface: “Some of my information about the East and West Saxons, as well as East Anglia and Northumbria, was provided by them [Nothelm and Albinus], especially under what bishops and in whose reigns they received the grace of the gospel.” (“*Qui etiam prouinciae Orientalium Anglorum atque Nordanybrorum, a quibus praesulibus uel quorum tempore regum gratiam euangelii perceperint, nonnulla mihi ex parte prodiderunt.*”)

probably came from the Northumbrian cycle of Edwin tales.<sup>611</sup> Bede specifically states that the evidence of King Ealdwulf lay behind the Rædwald story, though this was probably transmitted to Bede via Abbot Esi, who is mentioned in the Preface as Bede's main source for East Anglian events.<sup>612</sup> The details about the family of Rædwald seems to have come from a genealogy or kings' list. The brief accounts of Ricberht, and indeed of Sigeberht, whose biography is continued into 3.18 with strong anecdotal elements, probably also come from Abbot Esi's retention of East Anglian quasi-legendary material. It should not be forgotten, however, that the Anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith* noted Ceolfrith had spent time in an East Anglian monastery; he may, therefore, have passed on some traditions.<sup>613</sup>

This leaves only the mention of Felix, which is clearly embellished by Bede's own use of rhetorically-phrased comments about the prelate, including word-play on his name. For such puns Bede did not require any source. For the basic information underlying his account, Bede probably relied on the East Anglian episcopal list he possessed. This may well not have come from East Anglia itself, however.<sup>614</sup> As will be argued later, the evidence suggests Bede may well have obtained all his episcopal lists from Albinus and Canterbury, via Nothelm, thus explaining his statement in the Preface.

The length of episcopate Bede gives here would also have come from the episcopal list. As mentioned previously, however, because Bede had no positive date upon which to hang this chronology he was never able to give incarnational dates for East Anglian bishops. Other episcopal lists, as will be seen shortly, follow the same practice as the East Anglian in noting the origins of early bishops, as is done for Felix here. On what basis these claims were made and what credibility they have is unclear, especially given that these catalogues are unlikely to have been maintained contemporaneously, at least until Theodore's time. Certainly, there is nothing in this chapter to suggest Canterbury had access in c.730 to primary source information about events in the early seventh century.

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<sup>611</sup> Kirby, "Bede's native sources", p. 71 noted that the framework of Bede's East Anglian narrative often derived from Northumbrian sources. This is something of an exaggeration, but in giving this instance as his primary example, he was surely right.

<sup>612</sup> Although as McCready, *Miracles*, p. 164 noted there are risks in arguing back from the location of a story to its source based purely on the Preface.

<sup>613</sup> Anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith*, c. 4.

<sup>614</sup> Although the addition of the reference to the location of the see seems inherently more likely to have derived from Bede's East Anglian contacts.

Given the lacunas in Bede's knowledge, therefore, it would be unwise to place too much weight on his statements that Felix came to Honorius himself and was sent by him to East Anglia, or the claim in 3.18 that he was "received by" Sigeberht.<sup>615</sup> Some of the narrative seems to be no more than Bede's own deduction. Bede's combination of two apparently separate stories here and in 3.18,<sup>616</sup> gives the distinct appearance of attempting to smooth out the edges and minor inconsistencies in order to produce a coherent picture overall.<sup>617</sup>

### **What Bede had**

In terms of material relevant to this study, it is possible to conclude that Bede's written sources used in this chapter included:

- East Anglian episcopal list, including the length in years of each episcopate, and probably a note of the origins of Felix.

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<sup>615</sup> *HE* 3.18: *acceperat*.

<sup>616</sup> As Kirby, "Bede's native sources", p. 73, also noted.

<sup>617</sup> Thus, the complicated logic which Plummer, 2.106-07, employed to provide dates for events in this chapter, while impressive, is not built on firm foundations. The questions about East Anglian secular and ecclesiastical chronology are in fact much more complicated than there is time to discuss here. At some level, at least, over-simplification in Bede's sources has probably misled him, while over-reliance on Bede's authority continues to mislead modern scholars.

**2.16 – “How Paulinus preached in the kingdom of Lindsey; and about the character of Edwin’s reign”. This chapter also includes mention of the consecration by Paulinus of Honorius as the new bishop of Canterbury.**

In this chapter, Bede returns again to Paulinus, although this time speaking about his mission to Lindsey. He then ends the chapter by discussing the rule of Edwin. Again, therefore, this chapter may be passed over as not directly relevant to present purposes. The only exception is the reference to Paulinus consecrating Honorius at Lincoln:

*... In qua ecclesia Paulinus, transeunte ad Christum Iusto, Honorium pro eo consecrauit episcopum, ut in sequentibus suo loco dicemus. ... [... After Justus had departed to Christ, in his place Paulinus consecrated Honorius bishop in this church, as we shall relate in due course. ...]*

This reference is slightly expanded upon in 2.18. Both probably came from the Canterbury bishops’ list, which Bede possessed. As seen in examining 1.27, the evidence of the *HE* suggests that this list seems to have recorded both the name of the consecrator of each bishop, and the place where the consecration took place. None of the rest of the chapter is relevant to the current inquiry.

**What Bede had**

Of the short section relevant to the current inquiry, Bede’s statements are based on:

- Canterbury episcopal list

## 2.17 – “How Edwin received a letter of encouragement from Pope Honorius, who also sent Paulinus the pallium”

*Quo tempore* [At that time]

Once more Bede’s vague phrasing reveals his ignorance of the precise dating of the events either side. This is no surprise given that the last chapter ended with a general summary of the peaceful conditions under Edwin’s rule and this one contains a letter with no date. But there may also be something conscious about the ambiguity here. In the following chapter Bede inserts a letter which was clearly sent at the same time as that quoted here; unlike this one, however, that in 2.18 ends with a dating clause – one which translates to 11 June 634. In other words these letters were actually written after Edwin was dead.<sup>618</sup> The resulting chronological confusion may have helped prompt Bede to be intentionally as vague as possible in his phrasing here. In reality, the content of these letters became essentially moot and thus have little more than antiquarian value.<sup>619</sup> For Bede, however, they told an attractive story with which he was reluctant to dispense.

*praesulatum sedis apostolicae Honorius Bonifatii successor habebat*, [Honorius, the successor of Boniface, was bishop of the apostolic see.]

The *LP* was Bede’s source for papal succession.

*qui, ubi gentem Nordanhymbrorum cum suo rege ad fidem confessionemque Christi Paulino euangelizante conuersam esse didicit, misit eidem Paulino pallium.* [When he heard that the Northumbrian race and its king had been converted to the faith and the confession of Christ by the preaching of Paulinus, he sent the latter a pallium.]

Both these statements – the pope’s knowledge of the king’s conversion and the sending of the pallium to Paulinus – are derived from the content of the letter, which Bede is

<sup>618</sup> Most scholars accept that Bede is correct in dating this event to 12 October 633 in 2.20.

<sup>619</sup> Although it seems to me quite plausible that it was the discovery in the papal archives of these letters, together with that of Gregory the Great quoted in 1.29 on the organization of the English church, which helped precipitate the campaign to raise York to an archiepiscopal see.

about to insert. Bede also ‘knew’ from his Kentish contacts, as will be seen in 2.20, that Paulinus’ pallium had been preserved at Rochester, to which he had been translated after his ‘exile’ from Northumbria following Edwin’s death. Even so, the letter is a sufficient source in itself for Bede’s claims here.

*Misit et regi Eduino litteras exhortatorias, paterna illum caritate accendens, ut in fide ueritatis quam acceperant persistere semper ac proficere curarent. Quarum uidelicet litterarum iste est ordo: Domino excellentissimo atque prae excellentissimo filio Eduino regi Anglorum Honorius episcopus seruus seruorum Dei salutem ... Incolumem excellentiam uestram gratia superna custodiat.* [He also sent King Edwin letters of exhortation encouraging him and his people with fatherly love, to persevere and increase in the true faith which they had accepted. This is the tenor of the letter: To my most excellent lord and noble son, Edwin, king of the English, Bishop Honorius, servant of the servants of God, sends greeting. ... {Honorius exhorts Edwin to grow in spiritual knowledge through prayer and reading – especially of the works of Gregory the Great. The pope then says he is acceding to the king’s requests for the organization of the church in England, including sending palliums to both Honorius and Paulinus} ... May the grace of heaven preserve your Excellency in safety.]

The introduction to the letter is merely a generic summary of its import, based on Bede’s reading of the text of the letter, which he then goes on to add.

### **What Bede had**

- *LP*
- Letter of Pope Honorius to King Edwin

**2.18 – “How Honorius, who succeeded Justus as bishop of the church at Canterbury, received the pallium, and also a letter from Pope Honorius”**

*Haec inter* [Meanwhile]

Here the “meanwhile” is even more inaccurate than usual. This is not simply a case of ambiguity based on ignorance, but of ordering the inclusion of events to fit the narrative more conveniently. Most of 2.17 was a letter stating that a pallium was being sent to both Paulinus and Honorius, while 2.18 is the letter to the latter conveying the same message. The death of Justus did not happen while these things were going on; it could not have done. It happened before, as Bede knew, though he did not know how much before.

*Iustus archiepiscopus ad caelestia regna sublatus quarto iduum Nouembrium die,*  
[Archbishop Justus was translated to the heavenly kingdom on 10 November]

The description of Justus as archbishop is an understandable anachronism on Bede’s behalf. Bede probably derived the Julian date of the bishop’s death from the text of his epitaph, as he had done for his predecessors.<sup>620</sup> This would have come to Bede from Albinus via Nothelm, presumably on his first visit. It is also clear, as noted above, that Bede did not know the year of Justus’ death, and could therefore only approximately locate it within the general narrative of events occurring during Edwin’s reign.

*et Honorius pro illo est in praesulatum electus;* [and Honorius was elected to the archbishopric in his place.]

Bede’s episcopal list for Canterbury would have told him that Honorius followed Justus.

*qui ordinandus uenit ad Paulinum, et occurrente sibi illo in Lindocolino, quintus ab Augustino Doruuernensis ecclesiae consecratus est antistes.* [He came to Paulinus to be consecrated, meeting him at Lincoln, and there was consecrated bishop of the church at Canterbury, the fifth from Augustine.]

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<sup>620</sup> Although liturgical commemoration at Canterbury may well have been a corroborative source.



Bede could count for himself that, according to his own usage, Honorius was the fifth bishop of Canterbury from Augustine, that is, the fifth including Augustine. As argued in considering 1.27, the Canterbury episcopal list Bede possessed seems to have contained a note in each instance of who had consecrated the bishop and where. Thus Bede ‘knew’ that Honorius had been consecrated in Lincoln by Paulinus. As seen in 2.16, Bede was able to integrate this claim into the account he had derived from separate sources about Paulinus’ work in the north.

*Cui etiam praefatus papa Honorius misit pallium et litteras, in quibus decernit hoc ipsum, quod in epistula ad Eduinum regem missa decreuerat, scilicet ut cum Doruuernensis uel Eburacensis antistes de hac uita transierit, is qui superest consors eiusdem gradus habeat potestatem alterum ordinandi in loco eius qui transierat sacerdotem, ne sit necesse ad Romanam usque ciuitatem per tam prolixa terrarum et maris spatia pro ordinando archiepiscopo semper fatigari.* [Pope Honorius sent a pallium to him also, with a letter in which he prescribes what he had already previously laid down in the letter sent to King Edwin, namely that when the archbishop of Canterbury or York departed this life, the survivor, being his colleague and of the same rank, should have the right to consecrate another bishop in the place of the one who had passed away; so that it should be unnecessary always to make a toilsome journey to Rome, over great distances of land and sea, for the purpose of consecrating an archbishop.]

This passage is simply a lengthy paraphrase of what Bede considered the most important matter from the letter. Bede already knew, of course, thanks to the letter to Edwin in 2.17 that Pope Honorius was sending a pallium to bishop Honorius of Canterbury, but this epistle confirmed it more directly.

*Quarum etiam textum litterarum in nostra hac historia ponere commodum duximus. Dilectissimo fratri Honorio Honorius. ... Data die III id. Iun. imperantibus dominis nostris piisimis Augustis Heraclio anno XXoIIIo, post consulatum eiusdem anno XXoIIIo, atque Constantino filio ipsius anno XXoIIIo et consulatus eius anno IIIo, sed et Heraclio felicissimo Caesare idem filio eius anno III, indictione VII.* [We have thought it proper to insert the text of the letter into our *History*: Honorius to his most beloved brother Honorius. ... {Following an introduction in praise of the work done to promote the Church among the English, the pope notes that, following the requests of the kings, he is sending both bishops a pallium, and granting permission for each to consecrate the successor of the other.} ... Given on 11 June in the 24th year of the reign of our most religious emperor Heraclius and the 23rd year after his consulship, the 23rd

year of his son Constantine and the 3rd year after his consulship; in the 3rd year of the most illustrious Caesar his son Heraclius, in the 7th indiction.]

Bede here inserts the letter of Pope Honorius.<sup>621</sup> Despite Bede's claim in the *HE*, however, this was probably not only addressed to bishop Honorius. The content of the letter makes it almost certain that the original was a joint epistle to both Honorius and Paulinus, or rather that the same letter was sent to both bishops. The most obvious indication of this is when Pope Honorius states that "when God in His divine grace shall summon one of you to His presence, the one who remains may consecrate another bishop in place of the dead man."<sup>622</sup> Given there is no internal reference to Paulinus, this instruction makes little sense unless the letter is actually addressed to both bishops. Moreover, the pope then goes on to say that he has therefore "sent a pallium to each of you".<sup>623</sup> This can only reasonably mean that both bishops were expected not merely to be receiving a pallium, but to be reading the letter.<sup>624</sup> The absence of Paulinus' name from the line of address does not, therefore, represent the original text of the epistle; this was probably the result of choice or error on either Bede's behalf or that of Nothelm.

*(id est, anno dominicae incarnationis DCXXXIII).* [That was in the year of our Lord, 634.]

This is Bede's own calculation based on the indictional dating clause in the papal letter.<sup>625</sup>

## What Bede had

### - Justus' epitaph

<sup>621</sup> As with the majority of the other papal letters Bede included in the *HE* this will have come to Bede from Rome via Nothelm.

<sup>622</sup> "[Q]uando unum ex uobis diuina ad se iusserit gratia euocari, is qui superstes fuerit alterum in loco defuncti debeat episcopum ordinare."

<sup>623</sup> [S]ingula uestrae dilectioni pallia ... direximus.

<sup>624</sup> The use of the second person plural to refer to the addressees throughout the letter, apart from the last line of valediction, probably points in the same direction, although this might be dismissed as merely formal, papal rhetoric.

<sup>625</sup> Colgrave and Mynors, p. 199, print the clause in Latin as if it were part of the letter; but in the corresponding note (p. 199, n. 2) Colgrave was clear that the incarnational dating was added by Bede. Levison, "Bede as Historian", p. 148, n. 3, had already pointed this out.

- Canterbury episcopal list (including names of consecrator and locations of consecration)
- Letter of Pope Honorius to Bishop Honorius of Canterbury (and Paulinus of York)

## 2.19 – “How Pope Honorius and afterwards Pope John sent letters to the Irish about the observance of Easter and about the Pelagian heresy”

*Misit idem papa Honorius litteras etiam genti Scottorum, quos in obseruatione sancti paschae errasse conpererat, iuxta quod supra docuimus, sollerter exhortans ne paucitatem suam in extremis terrae finibus constitutam sapientiozem antiquis siue modernis, quae per orbem erant, Christi ecclesiis aestimarent, neue contra paschales computos et decreta synodaliū totius orbis pontificum aliud pascha celebrarent.* [Pope Honorius also wrote a letter to the Irish race, whom he had found to have erred over the keeping of Easter, as we have explained above, urging them with much shrewdness not to consider themselves, few as they were and placed on the extreme boundaries of the world, wiser than the ancient and modern Churches of Christ scattered throughout the earth; nor should they celebrate a different Easter contrary to the paschal tables and the decrees of the bishops of all the world met in synod.]

Bede does not include the letter of Pope Honorius to the Irish, but he does summarize its contents. Presumably therefore he did possess the text, although it may perhaps have been mentioned in the letter of pope-elect John, which Bede goes on to quote from directly.<sup>626</sup> As Plummer noted, Bede made reference to both letters in the *MC*.<sup>627</sup> Thus, whether he had both epistles or just John’s, it was by 725 at the latest. This helps confirm what would already have been the natural conclusion: if Bede did have the actual letter of Pope Honorius, then like all his computistical material, including the letter of John, this will have come from ultimately Irish sources – not from Rome, via Nothelm.

*Sed et Iohannes, qui successori eiusdem Honorii Seuerino successit,* [John, who succeeded Severinus, successor of Honorius,]

Bede as usual uses the information from the *LP* to construct his papal chronology.

*cum adhuc esset electus in pontificatum, pro eodem errore corrigendo litteras eis magna auctoritate atque eruditione plenas direxit, euidenter astruens quia dominicum paschae diem a quinta decima luna usque ad XXI, quod in Nicena*

<sup>626</sup> As Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, pp. 82-83, suggested. Something similar may well have happened with Bede’s reference to the letter of Laurence, Mellitus and Justus to the British in 2.4.

<sup>627</sup> Plummer, 2.114. The *DTR* reference does not answer the question of whether Bede knew both letters directly.

*synodo probatum est, oporteret inquiri. Necnon et pro Pelagiana heresi, quam apud eos reuiuere didicerat, cauenda ac repellenda, in eadem illos epistula admonere curauit.* [while he was yet pope-elect, (John) sent them a letter of great authority and learning to correct the error; he showed clearly that Easter Sunday ought to be looked for between the fifteenth and twenty-first day of the moon, as was approved in the Synod of Nicaea. He took care to warn them, in the same letter, to guard against the Pelagian heresy and reject it, for he had been informed that there was a revival of it in their midst.]

All the details in this passage were probably derived from the letter which Bede is about to quote from. As he does not provide the whole text, however, it is possible that some of the content represents his own insertions for the sake of clarification or amplification: the reference to the Council of Nicaea might conceivably be an example of this. Certainly the description of the letter as “of great authority and learning” (*magna auctoritate atque eruditione*) represents Bede’s own judgment.

*Cuius epistulae principium est: Dilectissimis et sanctissimis ... Quibus reseratis, ne diu tantae quaestionis caligo indiscussa remaneret, repperimus quosdam prouinciae uestrae contra orthodoxam fidem nouam ex ueteri heresim renouare conantes pascha nostrum, in quo immolatus est Christus, nebulosa caligine refutantes et XIII luna cum Hebreis celebrare nitentes.* [This is the beginning of the letter: “To our most beloved and most holy ... {Following a long list of addressees and senders, the letter mentions earlier epistles sent to Pope Severinus} ... These we re-opened so that no obscurity should remain uncleared in questions of such import and we discovered that certain men of your kingdom were attempting to revive a new heresy out of an old one and, befogged with mental blindness, to reject our Easter in which Christ was sacrificed for us, contending with the Hebrews that it should be celebrated on the fourteenth of the moon.”]

Bede only quotes part of the text of the letter. Historians have speculated on why this might have been, with the most popular hypothesis perhaps being that Bede was attempting to spare papal blushes by omitting claims about the ‘Irish’ calculation which he knew to be false.<sup>628</sup> This sounds perfectly reasonable, although one should not discount Bede’s willingness to make editorial decisions in order to maintain the balance and rhetorical effect of his work.

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<sup>628</sup> For instance, O Croinin, “Irish Provenance of Bede’s computus”, p. 232; and C. Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid and the Irish* (Jarrow, 2003), p. 2.

As argued in examining 2.4, Bede will have obtained this letter, along with the rest of his computistical materials from Irish sources. There is independent evidence that this epistle was preserved in an Irish context: a sentence from the part of the letter omitted by Bede was included in an Irish computus collection.<sup>629</sup>

*Quo epistulae principio manifeste declaratur, et nuperrime temporibus illis hanc apud eos heresim exortam, et non totam eorum gentem sed quosdam in eis hac fuisse implicitos.* [At the beginning of this letter it is clearly asserted that this heresy had sprung up among them very recently and that not all the race but only certain of them were implicated in it.]

What Bede is saying here does not seem very clear or clearly supported by the part of the letter he quoted.<sup>630</sup> It seems he is taking the phrase “new heresy out of an old one” (*nouam ex ueteri heresim*) to mean that the ‘Irish’ had only begun to hold it recently. The more natural interpretation, however, was that the papal knowledge of the ‘Irish’ error was recent enough to mean that it seemed new compared to what had been condemned in 325 at Nicaea.

Bede’s conclusion that the erroneous view was only held by certain Irishmen seems better grounded in the letter, based on the *quosdam*. Bede of course knew this to be true himself on independent grounds, so his interpretation of the letter is scarcely objective. Certainly both statements are deductions from the epistle, but ones in which Bede seems to be making every effort to avoid tarring the Irish as a whole with the same brush.

*Exposita autem ratione paschalis obseruantiae,* [After they (the pope-elect and his colleagues) had explained the method of observing Easter]

Bede omits the part of the letter explaining the Easter calculation, simply noting that it was included.<sup>631</sup>

<sup>629</sup> O Croinin, “A Seventh-Century Irish Computus”, p. 409. K. Harrison, “A Letter from Rome to the Irish Clergy, AD 640”, *Peritia* 3 (1984), 222-29, at p. 228.

<sup>630</sup> In Plummer’s words: “Both these inferences seem to me very hazardous.” Plummer, 2.114.

<sup>631</sup> By this stage, such an omission is unlikely to be because Bede did not fully approve of the method propounded by Rome. Probably the excision has more to do with Bede’s attempt to avoid repetition and maintain balance in the work.

*ita de Pelagianis in eadem epistula subdunt:* [they added this in the same letter about the Pelagians:]

This note reflects the content of the section of the letter he is about to quote.<sup>632</sup>

*Et hoc quoque cognouimus, quod uirus Pelagianae hereseos apud uos denuo reuiuiscit; ... 'Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum, et in peccatis peperit me mater mea.'* ["And this also we have learnt, that the poison of the Pelagian heresy has of late revived amongst you; ... {The pope strongly urges the Irish to avoid Pelagianism, which he energetically condemns, ending with biblical proofs for the reality of original sin} ... 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother bring me forth.'"] (Ps. 50:7)]

The chapter ends with this second quotation from the letter, which as mentioned above, Bede almost certainly obtained from ultimately Irish sources, either directly or indirectly.

### **What Bede had**

Beyond Bede's plentiful background knowledge about the nature of the dispute the content of this chapter is based on the following written sources.

- Perhaps the letter of Pope Honorius to the Irish, if Bede's reference was not simply taken from a section he omitted of the letter of pope-elect John
- *LP*
- Letter of pope-elect John to the Irish

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<sup>632</sup> The precise reasons behind this accusation remain unclear, though O Croinin has offered the most persuasive suggestion: D. O Croinin, "'New Heresy for Old': Pelagianism in Ireland and the Papal Letter of 640", *Speculum* 60.3 (July, 1985), pp. 505-16.

**2.20 – “How, after Edwin was killed, Paulinus returned to Kent and became bishop of the church at Rochester”**

*At uero Eduini cum X et VII annis genti Anglorum simul et Brettonum gloriosissime praeesset, ... ibique ambo in infantia defuncti, et iuxta honorem uel regiis pueris uel innocentibus Christi congruum in ecclesia sepulti sunt.* [Edwin had reigned most gloriously over the English and the British race for seventeen years, ... {Bede gives an account of Edwin’s defeat and death at the battle of Hæthfelth at the hands of Penda of Mercia in alliance with Cædwalla, a British king. Together, despite the latter’s Christian faith, they carried out a great slaughter of the people of Northumbria, greatly setting back the Church’s cause there. The details of the burial of Edwin’s head are given. Paulinus fled with Æthelburh and with Edwin’s children. The daughter, Eanflæd, came to Kent with Paulinus and her mother, but the sons were sent to King Dagobert in Gaul} ... Both children died there in infancy and were buried in the church with the honour due to royal children and Christian innocents.]

The majority of this chapter concerns distinctly Northumbrian issues – the death of Edwin and its consequences; Bede’s knowledge of the events will have derived from sources and traditions from his own kingdom. As usual, these will not be discussed here. Near the end, however, the chapter does deal with Kentish information which requires consideration.

*Attulit quoque secum uasa pretiosa Eduini regis perplura, in quibus et crucem magnam auream et calicem aureum consecratum ad ministerium altaris, quae hactenus in ecclesia Cantiae conseruata monstrantur.* [Paulinus also brought with him much precious treasure belonging to King Edwin, including a great golden cross and a golden chalice, consecrated to the service of the altar. These are still preserved and are to be seen in the church of the Kentish people.]

Bede believed that Paulinus had brought the “treasure” he mentions from Northumbria, because, as he says, Canterbury claimed to possess it in the early eighth century. He has no separate source as evidence for the claim. Canterbury’s views about the origins of the objects in its possession might be true or false, but they were not based on primary sources. They relied on oral tradition, of inevitably doubtful reliability, claiming to



stretch back almost a century, to at least 644, the year of Paulinus' death.<sup>633</sup> One surprising or suspicious element in the tradition is that Bede seems to be suggesting that the objects are apparently preserved not at Rochester where Paulinus was bishop, but at Canterbury.<sup>634</sup>

*Quo in tempore Hrofensis ecclesia pastorem minime habebat, eo quod Romanus praesul illius ad Honorium papam a Iusto archiepiscopo legatarius missus absortus fuerat fluctibus Italici maris; [At that time the Church at Rochester had no pastor because its bishop, Romanus, who had been sent on an embassy to Pope Honorius by Archbishop Justus, had been drowned in the Italian Sea.]*

This is a passage with no obvious source and certainly comes from no surviving one. In order to understand the origins of the story therefore, it is important to appreciate how the parts of the story are connected. There are two or possibly as many as three elements to the account: Romanus died in the Italian Sea; he did so on a mission to the pope (or on his way back); and that mission was from Bishop Justus and to Pope Honorius. The first element is so distinctive that it is very difficult to envisage Bede inventing it. He must have had a source which provided that piece of information at least, however reliable or not its authority for the events in question was. Theoretically, the other elements could have been simply Bede's deductions from that premise: if Romanus died in the Italian Sea then this must have occurred on his way to or from Rome and therefore on a mission to the pope, who in essentially any of this period,<sup>635</sup> would have been Honorius (625-638). For most of the period, Justus was the bishop of Canterbury, so he would have seemed the obvious figure to have commissioned the embassy. Bede's picture could therefore be simple deductions based on a single piece of information. Such a process was well within his talents and is not beyond the type of inferences we have seen him making elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the likelihood that the detail that Romanus died in the Italian Sea came to Bede without any context has to be considered extremely low. This is not the type of information, like the date of a death, which was liable to be recorded on its own. Instead

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<sup>633</sup> *HE* 3.14.

<sup>634</sup> This must be the natural interpretation of Bede's phrase, *ecclesia Cantiae*.

<sup>635</sup> That is between Bede's dating of the accession of Justus at Canterbury to 624 and the death of Edwin, and resulting exile of Paulinus, in 633.

it probably points to a basis in a more anecdotal story. It is reminiscent of the parallel story in 1.33 of the drowning of Abbot Peter on a mission, which Bede says was to Gaul. There are sufficient elements even in this tiny passage about Romanus to suggest that here too Bede may have been drawing on a separate narrative which was either dedicated to Romanus, or which was merely a tangent to a larger one about Paulinus. In either case, this story will presumably have included all the elements – the mission to Pope Honorius, the sending by Justus, and the drowning in the Italian Sea – which Bede compresses into one line here, and will have followed a similar pattern to those of the several other stories of Gregorian mission figures seen previously. This scenario seems more persuasive than a theory which requires an almost complete Bedan deduction from a single fact – Romanus’ drowning in the Italian Sea – that it is difficult to conceive being retained on its own.

*ac per hoc curam illius praefatus Paulinus inuitatione Honorii antistitis et Eadbaldi regis suscepit ac tenuit, usque dum et ipse suo tempore ad caelestia regna cum gloriosi fructu laboris ascendit.* [Paulinus therefore took charge of it at the invitation of Bishop Honorius and King Eadbald and held it until his time came to ascend to the heavenly kingdom, bearing with him the fruits of his glorious labours.]

Other than the basic fact of Paulinus’ accession, which he knew from his Rochester episcopal list, the rest of this passage is simply Bedan rhetoric praising Paulinus and requires no separate source.

*In qua ecclesia moriens pallium quoque, quod a Romano papa acceperat, reliquit.* [When he died he left in the church the pallium which he had received from the pope at Rome.]

Bede’s assertion will have been based on physical evidence, which he will have heard about from his Kentish contacts. Rochester clearly possessed a pallium in Bede’s time, which they claimed, perhaps rightly, to have preserved since Paulinus’. Bede has no separate source for his claim.

*Reliquerat autem in ecclesia sua Eburaci Iacobum diaconum, ... et ipse senex ac*

*plenus dierum, iuxta scripturas, patrum uiam secutus est.* [Now Paulinus had left in the church at York a certain James, a deacon, ... {Bede tells the story of James, who, following Paulinus' departure, continued to preach in Northumbria, often using Catterick as a base, and whose skill in church music was famous} ... and when he was old and full of days, as the Scripture says, he went the way of his fathers.]

The final paragraph of the chapter and Book 2 is concerned with Paulinus' assistant James, who had already been mentioned in 2.16. Thus Bede brings the narrative back again to 'Northumbria', or at least to his Northumbrian sources, in order to close the book. Bede's information about James, a man "who survived right up to our days",<sup>636</sup> and was even apparently present at the synod of Whitby, came from Northumbria and Northumbrian sources.<sup>637</sup>

### **What Bede had**

For the content of the sections of this chapter relevant to this study, Bede possessed only one written source.

- Rochester episcopal list.

'Orally', Bede also had basic Kentish-sourced knowledge about the items associated with Edwin and Paulinus and preserved in Canterbury and Rochester, including both the royal and ecclesiastical treasures and the episcopal pallium.

### **What Bede says that has not been possible to source**

Bede's source for the death of Romanus in the Italian Sea on a mission to Pope Honorius for Bishop Justus has not survived. The detail about the location of Romanus' death is highly unlikely to have been preserved on its own and thus points probably to an anecdotal, rather than archival source for Bede's information here. If so, then this section

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<sup>636</sup> *HE* 2.16.

<sup>637</sup> For instance: *HE* 2.16, 3.25.

may derive from a narrative source, of Canterbury provenance, focused on the early ‘mission fathers’ and following a pattern – hagiographic and anachronistic – we have seen elsewhere, although whether this would have been from one for Romanus himself or Paulinus is unclear.

Having dealt with the relevant chapters of Book 2, it is necessary to move on in the next Chapter to consider those few select parts of Books 3 and 4 relating to Canterbury before Theodore.

## Chapter 4

### Canterbury before Theodore: *HE* 3.8; 3.14; 3.20; 3.29; 4.1

#### Books 3 and 4

With Book 2 ends the consolidated batches of chapters focused on Kent and the Gregorian mission, but there remain a few chapters or parts of chapters in Book 3 and one in Book 4, concerning that kingdom, or with sources which relate to it, before Theodore's arrival, which need to be examined. These are: 3.8, 3.14, 3.20, 3.29 and 4.1.

**3.8 – “How Eorcenberht, king of Kent, ordered idols to be destroyed; and concerning his daughter Eorcengota and his kinswoman Æthelburh, virgins dedicated to God”. The chapter also includes a notice of Eadbald's death.**

*Anno dominicae incarnationis DCXL, Eadbald rex Cantuariorum transiens ex hac uita* [In the year of our Lord 640, Eadbald, king of Kent, departed this life,]

Bede's notice of the incarnational date of Eadbald's death represents a calculation, as noted earlier. In this case Bede's deduction appears to have been based on two elements. First, Bede had a firm date for the death of Eadbald's successor King Eorcenberht of 14 July 664, which was probably noted on his epitaph as it was precisely the same day on which Bishop Deusdedit died.<sup>638</sup> Secondly, Bede possessed a simplified Kentish king list which included regnal years, and allotted 24 to Eorcenberht. By subtracting the second figure from the first, Bede was able to arrive at a year of death for Eadbald.<sup>639</sup> Bede may

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<sup>638</sup> The year given there would not have of course have been in incarnational form. It seems possible that the coincidence of the shared date of death might have been found on Deusdedit's own epitaph, rather than the king's, although this does not affect the main issue here.

<sup>639</sup> He also entered this AD date into the *recapitulatio* in *HE* 5.24. This may be a sign that it represented a calculation on his behalf if Levison is right that Bede drew up this list as part of his preparations for writing the *HE*.

well have drawn up his chronology of events in the first instance using regnal lists with the kings' years of reign, as Harrison argued he did for Northumbria.<sup>640</sup>

A Julian date of 20 January for Eadbald's death is given in later annals, which though Frankish are based on earlier English exemplars.<sup>641</sup> Bede, however, does not seem to have been aware of this detail.<sup>642</sup>

*Earconbercto filio regni gubernacula reliquit; quae ille suscepta XXIII annis et aliquot mensibus nobilissime tenuit.* [and left the government of his kingdom to his son Eorcenberht, who ruled with distinction for twenty-four years and some months.]

Bede knew about Eorcenberht's succession and years of rule from the Kentish kings' list just discussed. He might have simply presumed that Eorcenberht was Eadbald's son or he may have derived this piece of information from the genealogy he possessed for the Kentish royal house.

*Hic primus regum Anglorum in toto regno suo idola relinqui ac destrui, simul et ieiunium quadraginta dierum obseruari principali auctoritate praecepit. Quae ne facile a quopiam posset contemni, in transgressores dignas et competentes punitiones proposuit.* [He was the first English king to order idols to be abandoned and destroyed throughout the whole kingdom. He also ordered the forty days fast of Lent to be observed by royal authority. And so that his commands might not be too lightly neglected, he prescribed suitably heavy punishments for offenders. ]

In an apparently passing remark in 2.6,<sup>643</sup> Bede contradicts the first statement he makes here. The earlier comment, however, reads more like rhetorical hyperbole either of Bede's own or his source's. Here, the juxtaposition of two legal rulings, and a third if one includes the punishments, points to a more specific source. Given that, as argued in 2.5, Bede seems to have had access to a manuscript with included not only Æthelberht's laws, but probably also a Kentish royal genealogy then the natural conclusion is that Bede knew the detail of such specific legal decisions by Eorcenberht because his 'Laws' were

<sup>640</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>641</sup> Plummer, 2.148, with the revisions of Jones, *Saints*, p. 169. As Plummer pointed out the date given is not completely consistent internally.

<sup>642</sup> For instance, Jones, *Saints*, pp. 168-69.

<sup>643</sup> Where he claimed that Eadbald "banned all idolatrous worship".

included in the same manuscript.<sup>644</sup> Bede's references here to Eorcenberht's Laws are as clear in their description of actual legal decrees as were his notices of Æthelberht's in 2.5. The only difference is that Æthelberht's Lawcode survives and so it is possible to verify that Bede was working from an actual text there. We do not possess Eorcenberht's laws, they have not survived; but the conclusion is as clear. Eorcenberht made laws including the ones mentioned by Bede. Bede 'knew' because he had access to their texts. His version of the text was probably in the same manuscript as his copy of Æthelberht's laws, which were presumably sent to Bede by Albinus via Nothelm, most probably on the latter's first visit with materials for the *HE*.

*Cuius filia Earcongotae, ... Cuius uidelicet natalis ibi solet in magna gloria celebrari die Nonarum Iuliarum.* [His daughter Eorcongota, ... Her festival is celebrated there with great honour on 7 July.]

The rest of this long chapter tells the stories of some of early Christian England's most noted female saints. Some of the content incidentally touches on Kent, but the material has all been drawn from hagiographic sources connected to the cults of the saints (or is Bede's own rhetorical expansions on the theme of their sanctity). Some of Bede's material may well have included written sources, but they are not relevant to the present inquiry.

### **What Bede had**

In the passages from this chapter relevant to this study, Bede's narrative was based on the following written sources.

- Kentish kings' list, including regnal years
- Eorcenberht's epitaph, with date of death (or perhaps the mention of the coincident deaths was on Deusdedit's epitaph)
- Kentish royal genealogy
- Decrees ('lawcode'?) of Eorcenberht.

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<sup>644</sup> Certainly Kentish laws travelled together later.

**3.14 – The chapter begins with an account of Oswiu’s succession to his murdered brother Oswald, and then moves on to: “How, when Paulinus died, Ithamar was made bishop of Rochester in his place; and about the marvellous humility of King Oswine who was cruelly murdered by Oswiu”.**

Most of this chapter is not relevant to the present study. It begins with a brief summary of Oswiu’s succession in Northumbria, on his brother Oswald’s death, and a reference to the opposition he faced from Mercia, and indeed from his own close relatives, including a son and a nephew. This is merely the introduction to a chapter focusing on Oswiu and Oswine, and derived from Northumbrian sources. The narrative is only interrupted briefly by the short passage on Kentish affairs that is considered below.

*Cuius anno secundo, hoc est ab incarnatione dominica anno DCXLIII, reuerentissimus pater Paulinus, quondam quidem Eburacensis sed tunc Hrofensis episcopus ciuitatis, transiuit ad Dominum sexto iduum Octobrium die; qui X et VIII annos, menses duos, dies XXI episcopatum tenuit, [In his (Oswiu’s) second year, that is in the year of our Lord 644, the most reverend father Paulinus, once bishop of York and then of Rochester, departed to be with the Lord on 10 October, having held the office of bishop for nineteen years, two months, and twenty-one days.]*

The use of Oswiu’s regnal years to date what was strictly speaking a Kentish event – the death of the bishop of Rochester – is perhaps at first sight surprising. But it should not be assumed that this indicates that Bede had found such a reference in his source for this event. In reality it is highly unlikely that Bede’s source for Paulinus’ date of death would have included mention of Oswiu, so Bede has almost certainly made the calculation himself.<sup>645</sup> He does date events by Northumbrian regnal chronology relatively often, but not consistently enough to see it as a general rule.<sup>646</sup> Here, Bede probably uses this form

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<sup>645</sup> Kirby, “Bede and Northumbrian Chronology”, p. 518, comes to the same conclusion, though his interpretation is not the same as that given here. The question Kirby focuses on of whether Bede has miscalculated Oswiu’s years is not relevant to the present inquiry.

<sup>646</sup> For example, in *HE* 5.7, Cædwalla is said to have gone to Rome in Aldfrith’s third year. As mentioned earlier, there are some signs that Bede may well have drawn up a basic chronology of events, using Northumbrian (and probably Kentish) regnal lists, with their helpful inclusion of the lengths of royal reigns, as a framework, in preparing his materials for composing the *HE*.



for rhetorical purposes. This is the point, chronologically speaking, where he needs to bring the story of Paulinus – such a crucial figure for the Northumbrian church – to a close with his death. The narrative space between the end of the account of Oswald's reign, cult and miracles and the start of Oswiu's rule was a perfect place to insert the information about Paulinus, but Bede simply did not have enough information to create an entirely separate chapter, so he needed to link the story with the start of the Oswiu material.<sup>647</sup> He must therefore provide a transition from the events in Northumbria he has been describing, and to which he is about to return: dating Paulinus' death by the reign of the Northumbrian king was the ideal way to do this. Having created this interruption Bede then takes the opportunity, as will be seen in a moment, to deal with the next stage of the story at Rochester, which again he knew little about and would have had difficulty fitting in elsewhere.

The Oswiu reference is therefore no indication of Bede's source for his information about Paulinus' death. Instead, his information in this passage is all likely to have come from a very simple source: the text of Paulinus' epitaph, provided to Bede by his Canterbury contacts. The mention in the next passage of the location of Paulinus' tomb, shows that he must have had an epitaph and the details in this one could naturally have been included in one.<sup>648</sup> The epitaph therefore will have included not only a year, presumably in indictional form, but also the total length of time he was bishop. This is more information than we have seen in the epitaphs for some of the earlier figures,<sup>649</sup> but those seem to have been written later, by people with limited information about the subjects. The details contained on Paulinus' epitaph are consistent with those apparently present on other contemporary epitaphs, like that of Deusdedit.<sup>650</sup> As shown in 2.20, Bede did not know how long Paulinus had been bishop specifically at Rochester, so that had not been included on the epitaph; but given Paulinus' complicated career, including a figure for his total episcopate would have made more sense to include anyway. It was

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<sup>647</sup> Hence the understatement by Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 107: "This insertion may derive from a source other than that of the main material of the chapter."

<sup>648</sup> The calendar date itself could theoretically have come from liturgical commemoration, but Bede has too much other information for that to be the case here.

<sup>649</sup> Such as Augustine.

<sup>650</sup> Although that still does not necessarily mean these were 'primary' sources, strictly speaking.

from these pieces of information that, as seen in 2.9, Bede calculated the date of his consecration.<sup>651</sup>

*sepultusque est in secretario beati apostoli Andreae*, [He was buried in the sanctuary of the church of the blessed apostle Andrew, ]

Bede's Kentish sources provided him with the information on which this claim is based. As has just been seen, early eighth-century 'knowledge' of the location of Paulinus' tomb, shows that there must have been an epitaph, whether or not it was original.

*quod rex Aedilberct a fundamentis in eadem Hrofi ciuitate construxit*. [which King Æthelberht had built from its foundations at Rochester.]

Here Bede repeats his statement from 2.3, crediting Æthelberht with the construction of the church at Rochester. As argued in considering that chapter, this information, and particularly the detail that the church was built *a fundamentis*, probably points to Bede's possession of a simple inscription from the church's foundation stone.

*In cuius locum Honorius archiepiscopus ordinavit Ithamar*, [In his place Archbishop Honorius consecrated Ithamar,]

Bede possessed a Rochester episcopal list which was the basis for his statements about the order of succession in that see. The claim that Honorius consecrated Ithamar required no source: this was the obvious assumption.

*oriundum quidem de gente Cantuariorum* [a man of Kentish extraction]

Richard Sharpe has pointed out how the choice of name for this bishop suited British ecclesiastical naming patterns much more than English ones, but did not go so far as to suggest that the bishop was actually British.<sup>652</sup> Whether Ithamar really was from Kent or not, it is not immediately clear what kind of source would have preserved this sort of fact.

<sup>651</sup> Kirby, "Bede and Northumbrian Chronology", p. 522, thought the calculation gave a different figure, which Bede had needed to massage, but Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 86-87, using Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 275, n. 2, shows that Bede was correct.

<sup>652</sup> R. Sharpe, "The Naming of Bishop Ithamar", *EHR*, 117.473 (Sept. 2002), pp. 889-94.

It would not be unreasonable to wonder, therefore, whether the detail may not have simply been Bede's assumption: where else would the first native English bishop have come from but Kent? Bede does, however, also record the origins of Ithamar's successor, Damian, who is described as a South Saxon.<sup>653</sup> Bede also notes the origins of the first English bishop of Canterbury, Deusdedit [3.20], and the first three bishops of East Anglia, Felix [2.15], and Thomas and Boniface [3.20]. The information here therefore probably derived from episcopal lists. These details seem to dry up for those consecrated after Theodore's arrival, however.<sup>654</sup> Perhaps, in general, the lists noted the earliest bishops of English origin in each see and included their origins.<sup>655</sup> Either way, the episcopal lists seems the most obvious source for Bede's 'knowledge' of this surprising detail.

*sed uita et eruditione antecessoribus suis aequandum.* [but the equal of his predecessors in learning and in holiness of life.]

This is mere rhetoric on Bede's behalf: there is no sign he had any direct knowledge of Ithamar's life and learning. One can hardly accuse Bede of lying by doing this; this was simply his usual *modus operandi*. He provided generalized statements of praise for figures of the past with the implicit hope that they would also serve as models for his own generation.<sup>656</sup>

The rest of this lengthy chapter marks a return to Northumbrian affairs for which Bede's sources were Northumbrian and so it will be passed over here.

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<sup>653</sup> *HE* 3.20.

<sup>654</sup> No origins are recorded for those Rochester bishops consecrated after Theodore arrived: Damian's successor Putta [4.2], then Cwichelm [4.12] followed by Gefmund [4.12] and Tobias [5.8] and finally Ealdwulf [5.23]. As in many things Theodore might have marked a turning point, though it is less clear why this should be so within the records of episcopal lists.

<sup>655</sup> If so, then the East Anglian list's mention of Felix would constitute an exception.

<sup>656</sup> Other examples include the description of Utta in 3.15 as "a man of great worth and sincerity" (*multae grauitatis ac ueritatis uir*); or of King Sigebert in 3.18 as "a good and religious man" (*homo bonus ac religiosus*); or of Penda's son Peada, who became Christian, in 3.21 as "a most noble youth, worthy both of the name and office of king" (*iuuenis optimus, ac regis nomine ac persona dignissimus*); or of Wigheard in 4.1 as "very learned in Church affairs (*uir in ecclesiasticis disciplinis doctissimus*); etc. None of these statements relied on any source and they should not be trusted as informed comments on the individuals concerned. They are simply Bede's own, rhetorically-motivated value judgments. As Bullough put it for Bede's description of Aidan, another figure described in the *HE* with such epithets, they tell "us more about Bede and his idea of what Aidan ought to have been than about the historical Aidan." D. Bullough, "The mission to the English and Picts and their heritage (to c.800)", in H. Lowe, ed., *Die Eren und Europa im frheren Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1982), vol. I, 80-98, at pp. 85-86, n. 18.

**What Bede had**

In the sections of this chapter of relevance to this study, Bede's statements were therefore based on the following sources.

- Paulinus' epitaph containing his date of death, including year (probably indictional) and length of total period as bishop
- Inscription from Rochester's foundation stone
- Rochester episcopal list, including information about Ithamar's origins

'Orally', he also had basic Kentish-sourced knowledge about the location of Paulinus' tomb.

### 3.20 – “How, when Honorius died, Deusdedit became archbishop; and who were the bishops of the East Angles and of the church at Rochester at the time”

*Interea*, [Meanwhile]

As usual such a term expresses Bede’s ignorance of a precise date for the events either before or afterwards. Here it is both. In 3.19, he has been telling the story of Fursey, which is derived essentially entirely from the anonymous *vita*.<sup>657</sup> This includes almost no information helpful for constructing a chronology. Bede then begins this chapter with information about succession in the East Anglian see. The bishops’ list he possessed for this diocese included the lengths of each episcopate, but unfortunately Bede had no positive date on which he could hang this otherwise apparently useful chronology. Thus Bede gives the years for each of the early East Anglian bishops, but the dates of none.<sup>658</sup>

*defuncto Felice Orientalium Anglorum episcopo post X et VII annos accepti episcopatus, Honorius loco eius ordinavit Thomam diaconum eius de provincia Gyruiorum; et hoc post quinque annos sui episcopatus de hac uita subtracto, Berhtgislum cognomine Bonifatium de provincia Cantuariorum loco eius substituit.* [Felix died seventeen years after becoming bishop of the East Angles, and Honorius consecrated in his place his deacon Thomas who belonged to the nation of the Gyrwe. When he died five years afterwards, Honorius put in his place Berhtgisl, also named Boniface, from the kingdom of Kent.]

As has just been seen, Bede possessed an episcopal list for the bishops of the East Angles, which included the years each early bishop served.<sup>659</sup> Moreover, as noted in considering 3.14, the East Anglian bishops’ list also seems to have mentioned the place of origins of its early bishops.<sup>660</sup> Thus, this list is the source for almost all of the statements Bede makes here. The claim that it was Honorius who consecrated Thomas and Berhtgisl, however, is almost certainly merely Bede’s assumption of what must have seemed obvious to him, and indeed to us – who else can have performed the rite?

<sup>657</sup> *Transitus beati Fursey*, ed. and tr., O. Rackham (Norwich, 2007).

<sup>658</sup> See, for instance, Harrison, *Framework*, p. 96.

<sup>659</sup> *HE* 4.15, gives the ‘reign’ of Berhtgisl/Boniface as seventeen years.

<sup>660</sup> And probably the claim that Thomas was Honorius’ deacon. Such notices do not automatically mean that these lists need have been maintained contemporaneously of course.

*Et ipse quoque Honorius, postquam metas sui cursus inpleuit, ex hac luce migravit anno ab incarnatione Domini DCLIII, pridie kalendarum Octobrium;* [Then Honorius himself, after he had finished his course, departed in the year of our Lord 653, on 30 September.]

Since Bede's description of the timing of Honorius' death extended beyond merely a Julian calendar date, it seems clear that this information cannot have come to Bede simply from a record of the bishop's liturgical commemoration. As seen previously, this sort of record points rather to Bede's possession of the text of the epitaph of the individual in question. The year on that epitaph would not have included an incarnational date of course, but Bede was able to convert easily from the indictional form, which the epitaph is most likely to have had.<sup>661</sup>

*et cessante episcopatu per annum et sex menses,* [After the see had been vacant for eighteen months,]

While it is not, perhaps, impossible to imagine that a date for a vacancy between bishops might feature on an episcopal list, it should be considered highly unlikely. This is especially true here, since the Canterbury episcopal list Bede had did not apparently give figures for the length of each episcopate of the individual bishops, until that of Deusdedit. Thus the "eighteen months" is much more likely to be Bede's deduction. He probably had, as has just been argued, a precise date of death for Honorius from his epitaph. He also had, as will be seen in 4.1, a specific date of death, including the year, for Deusdedit, Honorius' successor, again, most probably from his epitaph. The length of Deusdedit's pontificate, which Bede includes later in this chapter, was probably included in the Canterbury episcopal list – the first such to have been – unless this too was perhaps mentioned on the epitaph. From these pieces of information, Bede had enough material to calculate the date of Deusdedit's consecration. This left him with a gap of about a year

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<sup>661</sup> As will be seen shortly, the Canterbury bishops' list does seem to have included the length of each episcopate starting with Deusdedit, but given that there was apparently an extended vacancy between Honorius and Deusdedit, the figure given here for Honorius' death is unlikely to have been a calculation using the figures for Deusdedit from the episcopal list.

and a half between Honorius' death and Deusdedit's consecration.<sup>662</sup> Bede 'knew' from the Canterbury episcopal list that Deusdedit followed Honorius, so the 18 months had to be seen as a vacancy, something Bede knew was far from impossible in that see: there had been an even longer one in his own lifetime, between Theodore's 690 death and the consecration of Berhtwald in 29 June 693,<sup>663</sup> and one longer still in the 660s.<sup>664</sup>

Given that the figure was Bede's calculation then, the possibility should not, I think, be rejected that either he has made a mistake, or his sources have misled him. This length of vacancy at this stage seems suspicious.<sup>665</sup> However, it may simply emphasize another period of turbulence in Kentish secular and ecclesiastical history. The succession by a West Saxon, if Bede is right in describing Deusdedit as such, might be a further indication in the same direction.

*electus est archiepiscopus cathedrae Doruuernensis sextus Deusdedit de gente Occidentalium Saxonum, quem ordinaturus uenit illuc Ithamar, antistes ecclesiae Hrofensis.* [Deusdedit, a West Saxon by race, was elected sixth archbishop of Canterbury. Ithamar, bishop of Rochester, went thither to consecrate him.]

The order of succession Bede derived from the Canterbury episcopal list he possessed. This also seems to have included, as argued previously, the name of the consecrator and the location of the consecration. Here, the Canterbury list seems, like those for Rochester and East Anglia, to have also included one further detail – the place of origin of the man considered the see's first English bishop. In the *HE* it is clear that Bede believed Honorius came from Rome and that Deusdedit was the first 'native' bishop of Canterbury. We might choose to doubt, however, whether Honorius' identification as a member of the Roman mission, whether of the 596/7 party or that of 601, can be correct, given that Bede states that he died in 653. Since he rose to the highest rank in the English church, if he had made the journey to found or 'resupply' the nascent Church in England in c.600, it is hard to see him having come as anything less than a priest. If so, then he

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<sup>662</sup> Bede made a minor mistake in this calculation, but this was small enough not to affect the basic accuracy of his resulting generalized figure of a year and a half for the vacancy.

<sup>663</sup> *HE* 5.8.

<sup>664</sup> Between Deusdedit and Theodore: *HE* 3.29 and 4.1.

<sup>665</sup> One wonders if the figure is for the correct term: was it really length of episcopate or could it have been time since consecration, or even receipt of the pallium?

must have been at least 30 in 596/7 or 601. That would make him no younger than his 80s when he died. This is not of course an impossibly old age, but it does raise suspicions.<sup>666</sup> Support for Honorius' Italian origins apparently comes later in the *HE*, when Bede calls him a member of the Roman mission in 5.19; but on what basis did he make that statement? It seems difficult to believe that Bede had specific information for making such a claim. It may have been no more than an assumption. The reference here to Deusdedit as a West Saxon, may suggest Bede simply had no further information than he found in the episcopal list and therefore felt able to conclude that Honorius must have been from the mission.

It may be possible to go slightly further, however, for in 2.18, in a letter from Pope Honorius to Bishop Honorius,<sup>667</sup> the former refers to Gregory as Bishop Honorius' "master and head" (*magister et caput*). The reference is no more than an allusion to the pope's role as the 'founder' of the English Church,<sup>668</sup> but the terms in which he writes are similar to those Bede uses in 5.19.<sup>669</sup> Perhaps then Bede's statement is no mere assumption, but is rather a deduction from the papal letter. Certainly, as seen frequently above, Bede was more than capable of making bald statements on such a basis. There is thus no reason to assume that Honorius was necessarily an Italian from the Roman mission: he may have been, but perhaps he was not.<sup>670</sup> In the end, the crux is that we do not really know enough about the basis for Bede's assertion about Honorius to rely on him as a source for the claim.

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<sup>666</sup> M. Deanesly, *Augustine of Canterbury* (London, 1964), p. 112, argued that he was one of the early converts received "for training in the archbishop's *familia*".

<sup>667</sup> And, as argued above, to Paulinus of York, though his name is not included as an addressee in the *HE*'s version of the letter.

<sup>668</sup> As confirmed by the fact that in his letter to Edwin, in 2.17, Pope Honorius also calls Gregory the king's "preacher": *Praedicatoris ... uestri*.

<sup>669</sup> In 5.19 Bede describes the same relationship, but the other way round: that is, he calls Honorius "one of the disciples of the blessed Pope Gregory" (*unus ex discipulis beati papae Gregorii*).

<sup>670</sup> There is, however, one possibility which would make sense both of the late year of his death and the idea that he came from Rome in 596/7 or 601: that he was one of the Anglo-Saxon boys bought as slaves by Candidus and intended as monks by Gregory the Great (Gregory, *Letters*, 6.10). While there is no direct proof that any of these did come on the mission, it stretches credibility to think that they were not – at least by 601, if not 596/7 – a useful, and used, resource. Honorius was a name that could easily have been assumed at some suitable stage, perhaps even at his episcopal consecration, given the identity with the current pope. Perhaps, then, he was one of the *Angli* boys, saved from slavery, educated in Christianity at Gregory's monastery, who returned to Britain in an ecclesiastic role and eventually became bishop of Canterbury. If this is the case, his coming with the party of either 596/7 or 601 as a youth would make more sense and his death would therefore have occurred at a much more reasonable age.



Interestingly, this section also perhaps provides a hint about the timing of the arrival of Bede's material, or at least his close consideration of it. When writing the *HA*, Bede apparently had no knowledge that any Englishman had been consecrated (arch)bishop of Canterbury before Berhtwald. In a story which, as will be seen, was probably based on Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition, resting in turn on the recollections of Benedict Biscop, Bede claims that after Deusdedit's death the king chose Wigheard, because he wanted someone who could talk to him without a translator.<sup>671</sup> Bede could not reasonably have made this statement had he read the episcopal list with its note on Deusdedit's origins. The natural presumption therefore is that at the time of writing the *HA*, Bede had not yet received the Canterbury episcopal list. Or to put it another way, Nothelm had not yet made his first visit to Wearmouth-Jarrow with materials for the *HE* when Bede was completing the *HA*.<sup>672</sup> The issue then is when the *HA* was written. This is an interesting question, which has recently and revealingly been revisited. The older view that the *HA* was written after the *MC* in the *DTR*, and thus after 725 has been disproved by Ian Wood.<sup>673</sup> The *HA* was used in the *MC* and was thus complete before 725; it could have been written any time after 716, the date of the latest event mentioned in the work. Indeed the probability is that it was composed closer to 716 than 725. Thus, Nothelm's first visit bringing resources from Albinus to Bede for the composition of the *HE* probably occurred somewhere between c.716 and c.720.<sup>674</sup>

*Ordinatus est autem die septimo kalendarum Aprilium, et rexit ecclesiam annos VIII, menses III et duos dies;* [He (Deusdedit) was consecrated on 26 March and ruled the church for nine years, four months, and two days.]

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<sup>671</sup> *HA*, c. 3.

<sup>672</sup> This is a good place to re-emphasize that references here to the number of Nothelm's visits relate only to those in the context of the composition of the *HE*, and as described in the *HE* Preface. Nothelm had almost certainly visited Wearmouth-Jarrow separately prior to this point. P. Meyvaert, "'In the Footsteps of the Fathers': The Date of Bede's *Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings* to Nothelm", in W. Klingshirn and M. Vessey, ed., *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus* (Michigan, 1999), pp. 267-86.

<sup>673</sup> I. Wood, "The Foundation of Bede's Wearmouth-Jarrow", in DeGregorio, *Cambridge Companion*, 84-96, at pp. 86-87.

<sup>674</sup> The later barrier is set significantly earlier than 725, given that, as shown earlier, the second visit, with the papal letters, had also occurred before the completion of the *MC* in 725.

As Colgrave pointed out Bede has almost certainly given the wrong date here.<sup>675</sup> The day he gives would have been Maundy Thursday, in Holy Week, an essentially impossible date for a consecration. The error shows that the figure Bede gives is his own calculation and that he has made a mistake. By subtracting the actual figure Bede gives for the length of Deusdedit's episcopate from the date he gives, in 4.1, for Deusdedit's death, we arrive at 12 March 655 for the consecration. Since 12 March is the feast of Gregory the Great, this is much more likely to be correct.

*et ipse, defuncto Ithamar, consecrauit pro eo Damianum, qui de genere Australium Saxonum erat oriundus.* [Deusdedit, on the death of Ithamar, consecrated Damian in his place, a man of the South Saxon race.]

Bede knew the names of the bishops of Rochester thanks to the episcopal list he possessed for that see. As shown above, Bede's episcopal lists while not completely standardized, do seem to have sought to record the origins of the early English holders of each see, such as Damian here. As hinted previously, it probably makes most sense to envisage Bede obtaining the episcopal lists he had from Albinus directly,<sup>676</sup> rather than from sources in each individual kingdom. That is not to say, of course, that each had been originally produced in Canterbury.

Bede's assumption that the consecration was carried out by Honorius did not require a separate source, since no one else can plausibly have done it.

### **What Bede had**

In the relevant sections from this chapter, Bede was working from the following written sources.

- East Anglian episcopal list, including episcopal years and origins for early English holders of see
- Honorius' epitaph including year and day

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<sup>675</sup> Colgrave and Mynors, p. 278, n.1.

<sup>676</sup> This would also be consistent with the mention he makes in the Preface of having learned about the early bishops of several kingdoms through sources provided by Albinus and Nothelm.

- Deusdedit's epitaph including year and day (and possibly length of episcopate)
- Canterbury episcopal list, including location and name of consecrator and origin for earliest English holder of see, as well as the length of episcopate, starting with Deusdedit
- Rochester episcopal list including origins for earliest English bishops

**3.29 – “How the priest Wigheard was sent to Rome from Britain to be made archbishop, and how a letter sent by the pope told of his death”**

*His temporibus reges Anglorum nobilissimi, Osuii prouinciae Nordanhymbrorum et Ecgeberct Cantuariorum, habito inter se consilio quid de statu ecclesiae Anglorum esset agendum (intellexerat enim ueraciter Osuii, quamuis educatus a Scottis, quia Romana esset catholica et apostolica ecclesia), adsumserunt cum electione et consensu sanctae ecclesiae gentis Anglorum uirum bonum et aptum episcopatu, presbyterum nomine Uighardum de clero Deusdedit episcopi, et hunc antistitem ordinandum Romam miserunt, quatinus accepto ipse gradu archiepiscopatus catholicos per omnem Brittaniam ecclesiis Anglorum ordinare posset antistites. Verum Uighard Romam perueniens, priusquam consecrari in episcopatum posset, morte praereptus est; [At this time the most noble English kings, Oswiu of Northumbria and Egbert of Kent, consulted together as to what ought to be done about the state of the English Church; for Oswiu, although educated by the Irish, clearly realized that the Roman Church was both catholic and apostolic; so with the choice and consent of the holy Church of the English people, they took a priest named Wigheard, a good man and well fitted for the office of bishop, one of the clerics of Bishop Deusdedit, and sent him to Rome to be consecrated bishop so that, when he had received the rank of archbishop, he could himself consecrate catholic bishops for the English churches throughout the whole of Britain. Wigheard duly reached Rome, but died before he could be consecrated;]*

This famous story is also told in the *HA*, chapter 3. While the two summaries are essentially consistent, there are important differences between the accounts: the *HE* adds significant details, specifically relating to the role of Oswiu in the process, which he has deduced from the papal letter that he goes on to quote from in the second half of the chapter. The letter itself, as will be discussed, suggests quite a different narrative, which as it is based on a primary source should be taken more seriously.

The *HA*'s version of the story does, however, point directly to the ultimate source of the narrative followed in both the *HA* and *HE* accounts: Benedict Biscop. There is no evidence of any Canterbury source, or even influence, underpinning Bede's story, but there is good reason to believe Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition lay behind at least part of it. In *HA*, c.3, Bede states that Benedict was in Rome at the time of the arrival of the English legation and indeed that it was he whom the pope asked to accompany and guide

Theodore and Hadrian on their way to England.<sup>677</sup> This does not of course mean that he would necessarily have been accurately informed about the events which had led up to his commission, but it does mean that it is inevitable he would have had at least a vague sense of what had happened. This story, no doubt including Wigheard's name, would have become part of the traditions about Benedict's own life which were current at Wearmouth-Jarrow as Bede grew up. Bede drew on these in the *HE*, and especially in the *HA*. Presumably the account in the *HA* was written before Bede acquired the papal letter from Nothelm, since there is no mention of Oswiu.<sup>678</sup> But although the letter gives quite a different story, such was the strength of the 'local' Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition, and of Benedict Biscop's authority as a witness for Bede, that even when he obtained Vitalian's letter, Bede retained the older account in the *HE*. It is important to recognize, as will be emphasized further in a moment, that apart from the insertion of Oswiu's name and role in this introductory passage, none of the narrative of this opening paragraph has been affected by Bede's knowledge of the letter together with its competing narrative.

Not every word of this passage should be considered Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition, of course. Certain minor elements are Bede's own rhetorical additions to the story. The description of Wigheard's qualities is one such example, following as it does Bede's normal practice of describing figures of the past with brief laudatory phrases.<sup>679</sup> So too is the idea that it required an 'archbishop' to consecrate other bishops, something which Bede's own account – for instance in noting that Ithamar consecrated Deusdedit – demonstrates is palpably false.

The notes about Oswiu's own background, training and conversion to Roman Easter and practices relate to earlier statements in the *HE*, which derived from principally Northumbrian sources.

*et huiusmodi litterae regi Osuii Britanniam remissae: Domino excellenti filio Osuio regi Saxonum Uitalianus episcopus seruus seruorum Dei. ... sic doctrina eorum corda hominum cotidie inlustrat credentium.* [and this is the letter which was sent to King Oswiu in Britain: "To the most excellent lord, our son Oswiu, king of the Saxons, Bishop Vitalian, servant of the servants of God. ... {The pope

<sup>677</sup> This account is not in the *HE*.

<sup>678</sup> As already seen, the *HA* was written before the *MC* in the *DTR* and thus pre-725, and probably closer to 716, the last datable event in the work.

<sup>679</sup> As was discussed in considering 3.14.

thanks Oswiu for his letter and rejoices in the evidence it shows of the king's religious faith} ... while their teaching daily illuminates the hearts of believers.”]

This letter, like most of the rest of the papal correspondence included or referred to in the *HE*, derived from Nothelm and his trip to Rome.

*Et post nonnulla, quibus de celebrando per orbem totum uno uero pascha loquitur*, [After some remarks about celebrating the true Easter uniformly throughout the whole world, he goes on:]

Bede interrupts the letter, editing out material, which, as Plummer noted,<sup>680</sup> would surely have simply repeated much of his earlier accounts of the paschal controversy. Bede's statement here is therefore a summary of what was omitted, enabling Bede to concentrate on what he considered the core of the letter, while retaining rhetorical balance in the work as a whole.<sup>681</sup>

*Hominem denique, inquit, docibilem et in omnibus ornatum antistitem, secundum uestrorum scriptorum tenorem, minime ualuimus nunc repperire pro longinquitate itineris. ... Incolumem excellentiam uestram gratia superna custodiat.* [“Finally, in view of the length of the journey, we are not at present able to find a man who is entirely suitable and fitted to be your bishop, as you request in your letter. ... {Vitalian promises that as soon as a suitable individual is found he will be sent. The pope thanks the king for his gifts, regretting that their bearer had died and explaining that he had been buried in Rome. Vitalian sends back gifts in return, relics for both the king and the queen.} ... May the grace of heaven keep your Excellency in safety.”]

The narrative in this part of the papal letter, as already mentioned, is in direct contradiction to the story Bede tells above and in the *HA*. Bede claims Wigheard was the new ‘archbishop’ of Canterbury, who, having been sent to Rome for consecration, died there. In contrast, the papal letter to Oswiu is clear that the king has not asked for consecration for an appointee, but rather a new appointment for the vacant episcopal position. The person who has died is unnamed in Vitalian's letter, but he is not the presumptive ‘archbishop’, he is merely the bearer of the king's letter.

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<sup>680</sup> Plummer, 2.201.

<sup>681</sup> By this stage there is no reason to presume, as does Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 134, that the excised section included methods of calculation of which Bede disapproved.

The way this contradiction has been dealt with by historians, on the rare occasions it has been noted, is revealing about even modern treatments of Bede. Brooks mentioned the discrepancy, but strangely decided not to trust the primary source, that is, the papal letter.<sup>682</sup> Plummer also saw a difficulty between the two and attempted to solve it by suggesting that, although Wigheard had been sent for consecration, “some discretion had been left to the pope in this matter”.<sup>683</sup> But this solution is no better than Brooks’. Privileging Bede’s narrative because it is Bede’s is not to compare the two sources of the accounts on their own merits.<sup>684</sup> Bede works as well as possible with his varied sources, but his conclusions do not merit such blind faith. It is crucial to keep asking what his source was for each statement. Does he have a primary source? Here we know we do: the papal letter. This therefore is what should be trusted, and used as the basis for a reconstruction of events, not Bede’s story. The latter relied on oral tradition, based probably on no more than Bede’s former abbot’s anecdotal information, which there is no reason to believe included all the facts.

The reality is that only one of the stories can be correct. Either Wigheard was sent for consecration and died before he could receive it; or Wigheard was sent to Rome to ask the pope to send a new bishop for Canterbury and he died on reaching the city. On consideration, it is easy to see that the latter solution is not only supported by the best evidence, but also makes the most sense historically. There is absolutely no reason at all to believe that an Englishman chosen as bishop would need to go all the way to Rome for consecration. Consecrations which did not happen in England could take place perfectly well in Gaul, as they did on several occasions: Augustine, Wilfrid, Wine and Berhtwald are the obvious examples. The difference here was that, as will be discussed at the end of Chapter 6, the church in Kent had suffered institutional collapse in the 660s, at a time of political instability, all precipitated almost certainly by ‘plague’, using the term in its most general sense. There were vacancies in both the bishoprics as well as the chief abbey. The English were not sending to Rome asking for consecration of a new bishop; they were asking for a new mission. They needed a new Augustine, and so they needed a

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<sup>682</sup> Brooks, *Early History*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>683</sup> Plummer, 2.201

<sup>684</sup> Some have gone even further, arguing from the contradiction to the inauthenticity of the papal letter: Jones, *Saints*, p. 179.

new Gregory. Sending a request to the pope to breath new life into the church the papacy was credited with creating was the natural thing to do in the circumstances. Vitalian may never have gained the fame that Gregory had with the English, but Theodore certainly became as seminal a figure as Augustine. He seems to have seen himself as a re-founder of the church, or at least behaved as though he wanted to present such an image. His emphasis on the cult of Gregory the Great, which Thacker has described, was an important element in this.<sup>685</sup>

Therefore, it is clear both that the papal letter is the primary source and that the narrative in the papal letter suits the precise historical context perfectly: the papal letter's evidence should be trusted, not the oral traditions brought back by Benedict Biscop, maintained at Wearmouth-Jarrow, and popularized by Bede. In terms of what this example reveals about Bede's methods of working with sources, it should be emphasized that Bede has made no serious attempt to bring the two versions into harmony. Apart from inserting most of the letter, Bede's only real nod to the contents of the epistle in his narrative of events, is to include a role for King Oswiu – the recipient of Vitalian's missive. This is not one of those occasions where Bede's historical preface to the account in a papal letter, although apparently based on a separate source, is simply his deduction from the letter itself.<sup>686</sup> Here, in contrast, Bede does have two sources and they give differing accounts, and so implicitly does he.

*Quis sane pro Uighardo reppertus ac dedicatus sit antistes, libro sequente oportunus dicetur.* [The next book will provide a more suitable place for telling who was selected and consecrated archbishop in place of Wigheard.]

These are of course Bede's own words, preparing his readers for the account of Theodore starting in 4.1.

### What Bede had

- Bede's own *Historia Abbatum* [HA]

<sup>685</sup> See, for instance, Thacker, "Memorializing Gregory".

<sup>686</sup> As was seen to be the case, for instance, in 1.23 with the story of the pause of Augustine's party in Gaul.



- Letter of Pope Vitalian to King Oswiu

‘Orally’, Bede drew on Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition based ultimately on Benedict Biscop’s own understanding and memory of events.

Separately also, Bede possessed information, of essentially Northumbrian provenance, concerning Oswiu’s shifting views on the Easter question.<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Including, of course, the account of the ‘Synod of Whitby’ in 3.25.

**4.1 – “How when Deusdedit died, Wigheard was sent to Rome to be made archbishop; but, on his death there, Theodore was consecrated and sent to Britain with Abbot Hadrian”**

*Anno memorato praefatae eclipsis et mox sequentis pestilentiae, quo et Colman episcopus unanima catholicorum intentione superatus ad suos reuersus est, [In the year of the eclipse already mentioned (664) and of the pestilence which quickly followed, Colman, defeated by the unanimous decision of the catholic party (at the ‘Synod of Whitby’), returned to his own people;]*

Bede’s information about this incident comes from his Northumbrian contacts and sources, and his access to Irish information. The year of the eclipse “already mentioned” is 664, which Bede noted at the start of 3.27.

*Deusdedit sextus ecclesiae Doruuernensis episcopus obiit pridie iduum Iuliarum; [and Deusdedit, the sixth bishop of the church at Canterbury, died on 14 July.]*

Deusdedit’s epitaph will have given Bede this date of death, which must have included sufficient information for him to calculate the incarnational year, which Bede referred to implicitly in the previous quotation.

*sed et Erconberct rex Cantuariorum eodem mense ac die defunctus [Eorcenberht, king of Kent, died on the same day,]*

Bede did not normally have the day and the year for Kentish kings’ deaths. The coincidence of the king’s death with Deusdedit’s probably explains why he did in this case. Either the king’s own epitaph, or plausibly that of Deusdedit himself, probably recorded that the deaths fell on the same day.

*Ecgbercto filio sedem regni reliquit, quam ille susceptam per nouem annos tenuit. [leaving his throne to his son Egbert, who held it for nine years.]*

The king list Bede had for Kent included, as already noted, the regnal years for each monarch and so will have provided him with the information behind these statements. If

the detail about Egbert being Eorcenberht's son is not Bede's presumption, then he could have drawn it from the Kentish royal genealogy he possessed.

*Tunc cessante non pauco tempore episcopatu, missus est Romam ab ipso simul et a rege Nordanhymbrorum Osuio, ut in praecedente libro paucis diximus, Uighard presbyter, uir in ecclesiasticis disciplinis doctissimus de genere Anglorum, petentibus hunc ecclesiae Anglorum archiepiscopum ordinari, missis pariter apostolico papae donariis et aureis atque argenteis uasis non paucis. Qui ubi Romam peruenit, cuius sedi apostolicae tempore illo Uitalianus praeerat, postquam itineris sui causam praefato papae apostolico patefecit, non multo post et ipse et omnes pene qui cum eo aduenerant socii pestilentia superueniente deleti sunt.* [As the see had remained vacant for a considerable time, a priest Wigheard was sent to Rome by Egbert and also by Oswiu, king of the Northumbrians, with the request that he might be consecrated archbishop of the English Church. This was briefly mentioned in the preceding book. He was a man of English race and very learned in Church affairs. At the same time they sent presents to the pope and no small number of gold and silver vessels. When he arrived in Rome, Vitalian was presiding over the apostolic see; but not long after Wigheard had explained the object of his journey, he and almost all the companions who had travelled with him were carried off by a visitation of the plague.]

The basis for this story has already been discussed at length in considering 3.29. In short, Bede is working from Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition deriving ultimately from the memories of Benedict Biscop. He also possessed the letter of Pope Vitalian which he quotes from in 3.29, and which testified to a slightly different narrative. Bede, however, made almost no effort to bring the two versions into line. He chose to privilege the Wearmouth-Jarrow version, which he grew up with, rather than that set out in the primary source, the papal letter, which he acquired much later. Bede's only apparent nods towards the epistle in this passage are the mention of Oswiu, the addressee of Vitalian's missive, and the reference to the sending of gifts by that king – for which the pope gives thanks in his letter. The anachronistic references to “archbishop” are of course Bede's own additions, as is the laudatory description of Wigheard.

### **What Bede had**

- Deusdedit's epitaph
- Perhaps King Eorcenberht's epitaph

- Kentish kings' list, including regnal years
- Kentish royal genealogy
- Letter of Pope Vitalian to King Oswiu

'Orally', Bede drew on Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition based ultimately on Benedict Biscop's own understanding and memory of events.

*At apostolicus papa ... et daret ei locaum, in quo cum suis apte degere potuisset.*  
[The pope ... and to give him a suitable place to live with his followers.]

The rest of the chapter is the account of Theodore's choice by the pope as the new "archbishop" of Canterbury and his journey with Hadrian, who became abbot of Ss Peter and Paul, from Rome through Gaul to Kent. With this, the narrative moves beyond the chronological boundaries being considered in this study. The following Chapters will provide further analysis of the sources identified in the above analysis, looking at their character and reliability, as well as clarifying further how Bede used his materials to create the *HE*'s narrative.

PART TWO  
Bede's Sources for  
Kent before Theodore

## Chapter 5

### Cataloguing Bede's Sources

Having completed the foregoing comprehensive review of the way Bede constructed his narrative and of all that lies behind Bede's statements in the chapters concerning the Gregorian mission to Kent, this Chapter will now summarize our findings. Through a 'palaeobibliothecographical' approach, it has been possible to deduce Bede's sources for all but a few passages. The missing parts and their implications will be considered in detail shortly. These unsourced passages, however, represent only a tiny minority of the sections of the chapters considered. The vast majority of Bede's content has been explained. As a result a complete catalogue of Bede's written sources for these chapters can be compiled.<sup>688</sup> By collecting those noted at the end of each chapter and collating them thematically it is possible to compile the list below. With the exception of those passages which will be considered and explained shortly, this list represents the near totality of what Bede had access to concerning the Gregorian mission and Kent before the arrival of Theodore. The material is organized by genre and type. The references in square brackets refer to the chapters of the *HE* in which Bede's statements and claims were based on the relevant document. In some cases Bede's means of access to the source is given; others will be considered in more detail later.

#### 5.1 Political

##### Kings' list

- Kent: [1.25; 2.3; 2.5; 3.8; 4.1]

##### Royal genealogy

- Kentish: [1.25; 2.3; 2.5; 3.8; 4.1]

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<sup>688</sup> That is for: 1.23-33; 2.1-2.11; 2.15-20; 3.8; 3.14; 3.20; 3.29; and 4.1.

‘Hegemony list’: [1.25; 2.3; 2.5; 2.9]

‘Hidage document’ of the ‘tribute’ type: [1.25; 2.5; 2.9]

Kentish laws:

- Æthelberht [2.5]
- Eorcenberht [3.8]

## 5.2 Ecclesiastical

Episcopal lists:

- Canterbury [1.24; 1.27; 1.28; 2.4; 2.7; 2.8; 2.16; 2.18; 3.20; 4.1]
- Rochester [1.29; 2.3; 2.7; 2.8; 2.20; 3.14; 3.20]
- East Anglia [2.15; 3.20]

Inscriptions from (Re-)Foundation stones:

- St Martin’s, Canterbury [1.25; 1.26]
- Holy Saviour’s, Canterbury – Canterbury ‘cathedral’ [1.33]
- Ss Peter and Paul’s, Canterbury [1.33; 2.3]
- St Paul’s, London [2.3]
- St Andrew’s, Rochester [2.3; 3.14]
- Mary, Mother of God, Canterbury [2.6]

Epitaphs:

- Gregory the Great [1.23; 2.1]
- Bertha [1.25; 2.5]
- Liudhard [1.25]
- Augustine [2.3]
- Æthelberht [1.25; 2.5]
- Laurence [2.7]

- Mellitus [2.7]
- Paulinus [2.9; 3.14]
- Justus [2.18]
- Eorcenberht? [2.5; 3.8; 4.1]
- Deusdedit [2.5?; 3.8?; 3.20; 4.1]
- Honorius [3.20]

Ecclesiastical correspondence:<sup>689</sup>

- Bede quoted
  - From Gregory the Great to Augustine's companions. (R: 6.50a; M: 6.53). [1.23; 1.25] From Rome (papal archives) via Nothelm/Albinus, brought to Bede on the latter's second visit to Wearmouth-Jarrow with materials for the compilation of the *HE*.
  - From Gregory the Great to 'Etherius'. [1.23; 1.24; 1.27; 1.28] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Gregory the Great to Augustine: the *Libellus Responsionum*. (R: 11.56a; M: 8.37). [1.26; 1.27; 1.28] From canonical collections, separate from Albinus/Nothelm.
  - From Gregory the Great to Vergilius (of Arles). (R: 11.45). [1.28] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Gregory the Great to Augustine, concerning the organization of the church. (R: 11.39). [1.29] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Gregory the Great to Mellitus. (R: 11.56). [1.30] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Gregory the Great to Augustine, concerning miracles. (R: 11.36). [1.31] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Gregory the Great to King Æthelberht. (R: 11.37). [1.32] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.

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<sup>689</sup> Where relevant, references to the Gregorian *Registrum* are provided. R = number in *MGH* edition. Where the figure differs, M (= number in J. Martyn, tr., *The Letters of Gregory the Great* (Toronto, 2004), 3 vols) is also provided. The figures in square brackets continue to refer to the passages in the *HE* in which Bede drew on the letter in question.



- From Laurence, Mellitus and Justus to the Irish. [2.4] From ultimately Irish sources.
  - From Pope Boniface V to Justus. [2.8; 2.9] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Pope Boniface V to King Edwin, encouraging him to convert. [2.10] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Pope Boniface V to Queen Æthelburh. [2.11] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Pope Honorius to King Edwin, informing him of the bestowal of the two palliums. [1.29; 2.17] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Pope Honorius to Bishop Honorius (and Paulinus).<sup>690</sup> [2.18] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From John pope-elect to the Irish. [2.19] From ultimately Irish sources, as with Bede's other computistical material.
  - From Pope Vitalian to King Oswiu. [3.29; 4.1] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
- Bede possessed, but did not insert:
- From Gregory the Great to Kings Theoderic and Theudeberht and/or Queen Brunhilde. (R: 6.49, 6.57; M: 6.51, 6.60). [1.23; 1.25] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - From Gregory the Great to Queen Bertha. (R: 11.35). [1.25; 1.27] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
  - Gregorian letter to Gallic correspondent, either to bishops Menas of Toulon/Serenus of Marseilles/Lupus of Chalons-sur-Saone/Agiulf of Metz/Simplicius of Paris/Melantius of Rouen/Licinus, or perhaps more probably to Brunhilde, or both. (R: 11.41, 11.48). [1.29] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.

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<sup>690</sup> Although the letter is only addressed to Honorius in the *HE*, its content, as argued above, shows that the epistle would originally have been sent jointly to both Bishop Honorius and Bishop Paulinus, with separate copies going to each. That the *HE* only includes Honorius' name as the addressee is probably the result of choice or error on either Nothelm's part or Bede's.

- Letters of Pope Boniface IV. [2.2; 2.4] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
- Letters from Pope Boniface V to Mellitus and Justus. [2.7] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.
- Bede either knew from references in other letters he had; or had but did not quote:
  - Letter from Laurence, Mellitus and Justus to the British, possibly mentioned in their letter to the Irish. [2.4] From ultimately Irish sources.
  - Letter from Pope Honorius to the Irish, possibly mentioned in pope-elect John's letter to them. [2.17; 2.19] From ultimately Irish sources, as with his other computistical material.

#### Canonical documents

- Canons of 610 Roman Synod. [2.4] From Rome via Nothelm/Albinus.

#### Liturgical commemoration

- Bede may also have had a document listing the dates of liturgical commemoration of the early saints of Kent. If so, it would have been a copy of one maintained at Canterbury. No independent evidence of Bede's use of such a source was discovered in the above analysis. He may, nonetheless, have had access to one, which would have confirmed some of the Canterbury death dates he already 'knew' from the inscriptions on their epitaphs.

### 5.3 'Literary' sources

*Liber Pontificalis*: [1.23; 1.29; 2.1; 2.4; 2.7; 2.8; 2.17; 2.19]

Gregory the Great's works (separate from his letters):

- *Pastoral Care* [1.23; 2.1]
- *Dialogues* [1.23; 2.1]
- *Moralia in Job, Homilies on the Gospels, Homilies on Ezekiel, Libellus Synodicus* [2.1]

Orosius' *History against the Pagans*: [1.23]. There are some signs that Bede did not know this work very early in his career and only gradually came to make full use of it, perhaps as part of his preparations for writing the *HE*.

*Whitby Life of Gregory the Great* (or its sources): [2.1]

Written source of British origins telling the stories of a 'council' with Augustine and of the battle of Chester: [2.2]. How Bede obtained such a source is not clear.<sup>691</sup>

The *Ps-Clementine Recognitiones*: [2.4]

The Bible is consistently used by Bede, but also:

- specifically [1.26; 1.29; 2.1; 2.5; 2.6]

Bede's own works:

- *Major Chronicle* from the *De Temporum Ratione* (this chronicle is based ultimately on a core of information derived from Isidore). [1.23; 2.1]
- *Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah*. [1.23; 1.26]
- *Historia Abbatum*. [3.29; 4.1]

## 5.4 Other

Tidal information from his 'scientific' sources. Most of this was probably collected between 703 and 725. At some level at least the information must have been in written form.

- 1.25

A version of 'Irish' annals (probably slightly corrupt): [2.2]

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<sup>691</sup> Stancliffe's proposal of Pechtelm is an intriguing one (Stancliffe, "The British church", p. 128); but this situation does not allow for any certainty.

## 5.5 Oral information

The following represents a summary list of those pieces of information which it was noted that Bede obtained orally, in the most general sense of the world.

‘Orally’ Bede had ‘knowledge’ about:

- Location of churches in and around Canterbury [1.26; 1.33]
- The existence of Rufinianus, probably noting that he became abbot of Ss Peter and Paul, though Bede does not mention that [1.29]
- Peter as the first abbot of Ss Peter and Paul’s, Canterbury [1.33]
- Location of tombs and altars in Ss Peter and Paul’s [2.3; 2.7]
- Details of liturgical practices at Ss Peter and Paul’s [2.3]
- Distance between Canterbury and Rochester [2.3]
- The items associated, at least by the early eighth century, with Paulinus and Edwin and preserved in Rochester and Canterbury. These included a pallium and royal and ecclesiastical treasures [2.20]
- Location of tomb of Paulinus in St Andrew’s church, Rochester [3.14]
- The choice of Theodore as bishop by the pope [3.29; 4.1]

Other than the last item, which was based on Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition, the rest of this ‘orally’ acquired information, relating to the Gregorian mission and the church in Kent before Theodore, came to Bede from Albinus via Nothelm. Presumably Nothelm passed on this ‘material’ on his first visit associated with the compilation of the *HE*, as mentioned in the Preface. It should be noted that while this information is described as ‘orally’ conveyed, much may in fact have reached Bede by letter.

In summary, it is possible to say that this is the first time that Bede’s sources have been collected like this. The ‘palaeobibliothecographical’ approach followed in this study has made it feasible to set out Bede’s sources for the creation of the *HE*’s account of the Gregorian mission to Kent. We have seen Bede ‘at work’ and thus, have a far better sense

now of Bede's 'working' library, beyond the merely literary works. The mental and physical activity involved in Bede's researching and writing of the story should now be much clearer. We can envisage Bede's workspace – his desk or the scriptorium – in composing the *HE*, at least in creating his account of the Gregorian mission. This is not the end of the process, however, as some of these sources can actually be reconstructed. This not only provides an insight into Bede's library catalogue for the *HE*, as it were, but even enables historians to use those materials themselves. This reconstruction, together with analysis of the nature of these sources and assessment of their reliability, will be undertaken in the next Chapter.

## Chapter 6

### The Lost Sources Reconstructed

The catalogue set out in the previous Chapter details Bede's sources for the passages analyzed in this study. Although this summary provides something previously unavailable to scholars working on Bede, this is not the end of the process. Many of these documents, such as certain of the letters, survive extant, either separately or directly preserved in the pages of the *HE*. But many are lost. Thanks to the above analysis, however, they can be partially, at least, recovered and reconstructed. Bede was, of course, more than capable of adjusting the wording in his re-presentation of the information from his sources. Moreover there is ambiguity at times even over the original language of Bede's sources.<sup>692</sup> Thus, it is not possible to produce editions, in the traditional sense, with any confidence. Nonetheless, equivalent effects can be achieved in modern English. This will therefore enable us to gain a yet better sense of the content of Bede's sources, and indeed, one might even say to peek into his very *scriptorium*. This Chapter will therefore examine each relevant category and document in turn, and in each case also discuss the question of how Bede had obtained the source in question.

#### 6.1 Political

##### 6.1.1 Kings' lists

In 3.1, Bede makes specific mention of both the existence of regnal lists and his use of them. There his reference was to Northumbrian king lists; but the above analysis showed him drawing also on a comparable list from Kent. From the examination of the *HE* in the preceding Chapters, it is possible to reconstruct what content that Kentish catalogue

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<sup>692</sup> A. Crepin, "Bede and the Vernacular", in Bonner, *Famulus Christi*, 170-92, at p. 173, argued that in several instances an original Old English phrase underlay Bede's Latin.

would have provided Bede with. As seems to have been usual for such texts,<sup>693</sup> this list included the lengths of each king's reign, though this figure only later included months as well as years.<sup>694</sup> Although the above analysis only considered the period until Theodore's arrival the full list that can be recovered from the *HE* is provided below.

*Bede's Kentish kings' list* [1.25; 2.3; 2.5; 3.8; 4.1]<sup>695</sup>

**Æthelberht**, ruled 56 years [2.5].

**Eadbald**, ruled 24 years [2.5].

**Eorcenberht**, ruled 24 years [and some months?] [3.8].

**Ecgbert**, ruled 9 years [4.5; 4.26].

**Hlothere**, ruled 11 years and seven months [4.5]; 12 years [4.26].

**Eadric**, ruled 1 year and a half [4.26].<sup>696</sup>

Historians have used alternative sources, such as charters, to show that the picture of Kentish royal succession in the seventh century was actually a great deal more complex than this.<sup>697</sup> Whatever the real situation, however, this list represented the information Bede had and used. Although other Kentish kings' lists survive, whose content is, unsurprisingly, similar to Bede's list,<sup>698</sup> none is precisely the same as that of the one which Bede possessed.

The present focus is on Kent, but it should be emphasized that he possessed kings' lists for other kingdoms as well. In the 'Northumbrian' cases the information included was

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<sup>693</sup> D. Thornton, "Regnal Lists", in Lapidge et al, *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, 388-89, at p. 388.

<sup>694</sup> In the 'Northumbrian' lists the more detailed information about reign lengths seems to have gone further back.

<sup>695</sup> Although the full list used by Bede is given, these references are just for the uses of the Kentish kings' list in the chapters concerning the Gregorian mission.

<sup>696</sup> Bede also gives the length of reign for Wihtrred – 34 and a half years – in 5.23, but this information is unlikely to have reached him at the same stage as the other dates; it may even have been Bede's own calculation.

<sup>697</sup> For instance, B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), pp. 32-39; or Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 142-46.

<sup>698</sup> See, for instance, D. Dumville, "The Anglian collection of royal genealogies and regnal lists", *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976), 23-50, at pp. 29-37.

apparently more detailed.<sup>699</sup> In preparing the *HE*, Bede probably used documents like this to help draw up an intermediate chronology.<sup>700</sup> Their value as sources will be discussed further in the next section, but even here it is worth emphasizing the intrinsic limitations of such ‘texts’. The form in which these catalogues reached Bede means that, inherently, they were not primary sources. That changes could be – and indeed were – made for ideological purposes is proved by the very example Bede gives in *HE* 3.1. Moreover, as Thornton noted, “by their very form, regnal lists can simplify political relations and ignore changes in kingship over time, implying continuous lineal succession.”<sup>701</sup> As Dumville pointed out, multiple kingships could not be easily integrated into such lists.<sup>702</sup> This therefore, necessarily, limited the accuracy of the information they could provide about Kent. Nor are the numbers in regnal lists always precise: rounding errors occurred and the gaps between monarchs were not easily accounted for.<sup>703</sup> In short, kings’ lists are inevitably flawed as sources.<sup>704</sup> None of this is to say that they include no trustworthy material. It is simply that they do not merit implicit trust, even for the more recent periods they claim to cover.

### 6.1.2 Genealogies

In addition to his possession of a Kentish kings’ list, Bede also made use of a genealogy covering at least the direct descent of the Kentish royal family. Preservation of kingship within a single royal line of direct descent was exceptional in the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, but Kent apparently was that exception. This increased the relevance of the genealogy to Bede, as he composed the *HE*, but the genealogy also seems to have included slightly broader information about relationships within the Kentish royal family. As such, the text below should not necessarily be considered complete. There may have

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<sup>699</sup> P. Hunter Blair, “The *Moore Memoranda* on Northumbrian History”, in C. Fox and B. Dickens, ed., *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe* (Cambridge, 1950), 245-57, p. 249; Harrison, *Framework*, p. 88.

<sup>700</sup> Hunter Blair, “Bernicians and their Northern Frontier”, p. 141. The *recapitulatio* in 5.24 is arguably an example of this. The objections of Higham, (*Re-*)*Reading Bede*, pp. 82-95, to Levison, “Bede as historian”, pp. 136-37, are not convincing.

<sup>701</sup> Thornton, “Regnal Lists”, p. 388.

<sup>702</sup> D. Dumville, “Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists”, in P. Sawyer and I. Wood, ed., *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72-104, at pp. 97-98.

<sup>703</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, p. 129.

<sup>704</sup> Dumville, “Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists”, p. 97.



been additional pieces of minor information which Bede considered irrelevant and chose not to insert. Equally, although the basic organization is likely to be accurate, the precise format in which the more indirect information was included is now irretrievable. As with the Kentish kings' list, for the sake of completeness and for the utility for others, content from the genealogy beyond that used by Bede in the chapters analyzed above has been included.

One thing can be said about the nature of Bede's source, however: it was almost certainly in the vernacular. Genealogies in both Old English and Latin have survived; but there is a difference in how they order the material. As Thornton pointed out, vernacular genealogies are usually 'retrograde' in that "they begin with the chronologically most recent name and trace the line of descent back in time".<sup>705</sup> In contrast, Latin versions of the genealogies tended to follow the biblical form and begin with the progenitor the furthest back in the past.<sup>706</sup>

*Bede's Kentish royal genealogy* [1.25; 2.3; 2.5; 3.8; 4.1]

**Eadric and Wihtred**, were the sons of,  
**Ecgeberht**; [4.26] he and **Hlothere**, were the sons of,  
**Eorcenberht**, [4.1; 4.5] was the son of,  
**Eadbald**, [3.8] was the son of,  
**Æthelberht**, [2.5] (whose sister **Ricule**, married Sæberht king of the East Saxons [2.3])  
 was the son of,  
**Eormenric**, was the son of,  
**Octa**, was the son of,  
**Oeric** (whose surname was Oisc), was the son of,  
**Hengist**, [from Æthelberht to here: 2.5]; he and **Horsa**, were the sons of,  
**Wihtgisl**, was the son of,  
**Witta**, was the son of,  
**Wecta**, was the son of,

<sup>705</sup> D. Thornton, "Genealogies, Royal", in Lapidge et al, *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, 199-200, at p. 199.

<sup>706</sup> Dumville, "Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists", p. 89.

**Woden** [from Hengist (and Horsa) to here: 1.15].

This Kentish genealogical list was a very helpful tool for Bede, providing him with interesting colour to flesh out the story of the conversion. The kings' list did not provide this genealogical information and there is no reason to think Bede's knowledge of contemporary politics would have led him to assume that any new king was the son of his predecessor. Bede's historical and rhetorical abilities enabled him therefore to combine the information from these two Kentish sources to enrich his narrative and provide a more layered account.

### **6.1.3 The context for the preservation and maintenance of Bede's kings' lists and genealogies**

Bede probably possessed more genealogies than simply the Kentish.<sup>707</sup> As far as they can be recreated from the *HE*, therefore, they provide access to different, and earlier versions of Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies than those in the better-known 'Anglian' collection.<sup>708</sup> Being earlier does not, of course, automatically make the catalogues reconstructed above trustworthy. Nonetheless, this is important evidence showing that claims that the beginning of the creation/recording of genealogies only took place in the late eighth century cannot be true.<sup>709</sup>

Bede's source for both these Kentish lists – the kings' list and the genealogy – was presumably Albinus, who would have specifically provided them as background information for the writing of the *HE*, which he had helped inspire. Indeed, given their shared topics of interest, the two texts should probably be envisaged travelling together from Canterbury to Wearmouth-Jarrow in the same manuscript. Moreover, given Bede's juxtaposition in 2.5 of the information from the genealogy with the description of

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<sup>707</sup> He seems to have had 'Northumbrian' ones, for instance, and probably an East Anglian too, as seen in considering 2.15. In 1.15, Bede claimed that the royal houses "of many kingdoms" (*multarum ... regium*) went back to Woden, which suggests he possessed several such catalogues. See also Thornton, "Genealogies, Royal", p. 199.

<sup>708</sup> This was probably composed in Northumbria in the late eighth century. Thornton, "Genealogies, Royal", p. 199.

<sup>709</sup> As argued, for instance, by Thornton, "Genealogies, Royal", p. 200.

Æthelberht's laws,<sup>710</sup> as well as the fact that there are parallels on the continent for associating genealogical material with laws, it might cautiously be suggested that all three texts came to Bede not only from the same source and via the same messenger, but even in the same manuscript.<sup>711</sup>

Certainly the lists would have reached Bede in written form.<sup>712</sup> Given this must have been the case for the Kentish catalogues it is natural to assume this was true also of the 'Northumbrian' ones Bede possessed. Genealogies may at one stage have been purely oral, but this is not evidence that the information in the specific written lists Bede possessed represented credibly transmitted oral tradition. Moisl, for instance, made a strong argument for the existence of genealogical records, orally maintained, in pre-Christian and pre-literate times in Anglo-Saxon England,<sup>713</sup> but this does not address the question of the reliability of the texts that have survived, or of the actual ones Bede possessed. Even if, for example, earlier oral material did survive in the lists available in the early eighth century, there is no evidence, or reason to believe, that this need have included trustworthy accounts of who fathered whom, or, in regnal lists, of who succeeded whom. Such sources were, by their very nature, not primary ones, even if the earlier names on the list had been based on genuine materials.<sup>714</sup>

In sum, while the record of an accurate ordering of family members going back as much as two centuries is perhaps not impossible, it scarcely fills one with confidence. It

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<sup>710</sup> As noted by, for instance, P. Wormald, "*Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis: Legislation and Germanic Kingship, from Euric to Cnut*", in Sawyer and Wood, *Early Medieval Kingship*, 105-38, at p. 134.

Wormald was developing the suggestion of Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 34-45.

<sup>711</sup> Which probably included the 'laws' of Eorcenberht as well [3.8]. Plausibly this manuscript also contained the laws of other Kentish monarchs, perhaps including Hlothere and Eadric or Wihtred, whose codes have survived, though Bede makes no mention of possessing such.

<sup>712</sup> Levison, "Bede as historian", p. 140, n. 5, states that the genealogical material could have reached Bede as "hearsay", but this is not credible. Nonetheless, as Hunter Blair, "*Moore Memoranda*", p. 249, said, there was no reason to think the Northumbrian lists for instance were in a written form by Edwin's death.

<sup>713</sup> H. Moisl, "Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies and Germanic oral tradition", *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), pp. 215-48.

<sup>714</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 121-23, makes a bold case for the sixth-century origin of the Kentish genealogy, which was accepted by Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 61. Hunter Blair, however, argued that, for 'Northumbria' at least, the more likely period for the creation of such documents was the reign of Ecgrifith, or shortly afterwards: P. Hunter Blair, "Bernicians and their Northern frontier", p. 140.

would be unwise to place trust in their reliability.<sup>715</sup> As Dumville, put it: the earlier ranks of pedigrees are “hardly to be taken seriously as biological statement.”<sup>716</sup>

The reality of memory is only one reason, however, that, as Thornton noted: “any attempt to use them [genealogies] for ‘historical’ purposes must be undertaken with extreme caution.”<sup>717</sup> Even more than kings’ lists, genealogies can be a “very sophisticated means of expressing political claims. As such they are prone to a high degree of ideological manipulation and falsification, which can undermine the historical reliability of the genealogical statements made therein.”<sup>718</sup> This may even be too cautious a view. As Dumville argued, such catalogues were by nature ideological documents.<sup>719</sup> Their value as historical sources, for Bede and for us, must therefore be very much in doubt.

What is interesting, however, and worth further separate consideration, is that Bede’s ‘secular’ Kentish sources, with a claim to represent information from the early seventh century, are arguably as well, or better, preserved than the comparable ‘ecclesiastical’ documents.<sup>720</sup> This raises the question of who maintained these catalogues – the kings’ lists and genealogies. Bede refers to such figures as: “all those who compute the dates of kings”.<sup>721</sup> Who were these individuals Bede refers to? As Dumville showed, kings’ lists and genealogies were royal items, but ones whose composition was associated with the Church.<sup>722</sup> Or as Moisl put it: “the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies are in their extant form products of ecclesiastical scholarship.”<sup>723</sup>

Despite this, Bede speaks of the authors in somewhat distant tones. This raises questions about just how strictly ‘ecclesiastical’ these figures were. Certainly it suggests that it is unlikely Wearmouth-Jarrow monks maintained the lists, in the sense of being the ones who updated them. Bede’s access to the ‘Northumbrian’ catalogues, however,

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<sup>715</sup> As Hunter Blair, *World of Bede*, p. 14, put it: composers of genealogies were “fertile in their imaginations”. As already noted, the Kentish kings’ list, at least, represents a significant simplification of the reality of that kingdom’s politics.

<sup>716</sup> Dumville, “Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists”, p. 93.

<sup>717</sup> Thornton, “Genealogies”, p. 200.

<sup>718</sup> Thornton, “Genealogies”, p. 200.

<sup>719</sup> Dumville, “Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists”, p. 73.

<sup>720</sup> There is evidence, beyond Bede, for the original existence of at least one more: some form of diploma, as suggested by the apparently genuine witness list added to a forged charter. S. Kelly, ed., *Charters of St Augustine’s Abbey Canterbury and Minster-in-Thanet* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 7-8.

<sup>721</sup> *HE* 3.1: *cunctis ... regum tempora computantibus*.

<sup>722</sup> Dumville, “Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists”, p. 96.

<sup>723</sup> Moisl, “Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies”, p. 215.

suggests that his monastery did maintain them, at least in the sense of preserving them. So too, presumably, did Ss Peter and Paul's for Kent, though there Albinus and his monks may well also have been responsible for updating them.

The question then is why would a monastery preserve and maintain such lists. The original presence of such texts at Wearmouth-Jarrow probably points towards that monastery's historic role in supporting kings like Ecgrith and assisting in the promotion of their ideological objectives. But these texts were not preserved for merely antiquarian purposes. That they were still at Bede's disposal is also indicative of the nature of their continued use. It is quite clear also that such lists, and indeed genealogical traditions in narrative form, were preserved not only for the king's court, but also in broader royal and aristocratic contexts.<sup>724</sup>

Moisl saw the agents of such preservation and continuity forming a 'secular' cadre of poet propagandists according to the Irish *filidh* model and drawing on the same social tradition.<sup>725</sup> Direct evidence for the existence of a *filidh* office, let alone class, is essentially absent in Anglo-Saxon England; but the indirect evidence for some sort of similar set of individuals is difficult to dismiss, as the existence and maintenance of these documents suggests. The texts reconstructed here did not exist in a vacuum. They were not preserved without purpose.

Moisl's compelling argument for the continued presence of these *filidh*-like figures at Anglo-Saxon courts was, however, somewhat undermined by the tension imposed by his sharp distinction between 'ecclesiastical' and 'secular' in discussing the status of these individuals. This difficulty with his thesis is wholly unnecessary and avoidable. As historians of early Irish law and society are recognizing, by the late seventh century at least, the 'ecclesiastical', defined in broad terms, was undertaking many of the functions, and was responsible for many of the products, traditionally associated with 'secular' functionaries.<sup>726</sup> The precise 'status' of such individuals may never have been clear, any more than their functions and activities could neatly be distinguished between the two spheres.

<sup>724</sup> Felix, *Life of Guthlac*, c. 2. See also Moisl, "Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies".

<sup>725</sup> Moisl, "Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies". Dumville did not go quite as far, but even so argued that the origins of such texts lay with learned groups keeping royal records. Dumville, "Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists", p. 81.

<sup>726</sup> D. O Corrain, L. Breatnach, and A. Breen, "The Laws of the Irish", *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp. 382-438.

The question of whether those who prepared and used these documents were ‘religious’ or ‘secular’ therefore does not greatly advance understanding of the texts themselves or of their context. The works may be classifiable as ‘ecclesiastical’ documents, as Dumville argued, and Moisl accepted; but it was not necessarily only ‘ecclesiastics’ who learned them, any more than the texts were maintained for merely ‘secular’ purposes.<sup>727</sup> The reality is that, ‘religious’ or ‘secular’, the education of these figures was, by the late seventh century, almost certainly taking place in ‘ecclesiastical’ institutions. Furthermore, as the *HE* shows, the texts themselves were being maintained and preserved at the same ‘ecclesiastical’ institutions, although for purposes well beyond the purely ‘religious’.

The sources Bede has been seen using reveal that he had access to more ‘archival’ material than identified in the catalogue of purely literary holdings emphasized by Lapidge. In some situations, no doubt, this was because the monasteries that were his sources acted as official royal ‘archives’.<sup>728</sup> The nature of Bede’s use of these texts, however, suggests that the purposes of their preservation probably went beyond the narrowly politically pragmatic.

The presence of such documents in monastic ‘libraries’ need not, therefore, invalidate Lapidge’s broader point about the primarily pedagogic purpose of the texts an early medieval monastery possessed. It is perfectly clear that not all those educated in monasteries or by bishops were ecclesiastics or destined for a religious career.<sup>729</sup> There is no reason to assume that all such students would have been expected to follow the rigid ‘biblical studies curriculum’ envisaged by Lapidge as the purpose for the monastic libraries.

Rather than contradicting Lapidge’s theory about the role of the Wearmouth-Jarrow library, however, the evidence and analysis above simply point towards an expansion of

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<sup>727</sup> Moisl, “Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies”.

<sup>728</sup> As Winchcombe probably was for one branch of the Mercian royal family: Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, p. 47. Ss Peter and Paul’s, Canterbury, is another likely example.

<sup>729</sup> For instance the *Life of Wilfrid*, c. 2, shows that the saint only decided on the ecclesiastical life after his education at Lindisfarne was complete. Later in the *Life* it is clear that “Wilfrid tutored sons of nobles, so that they might either enter the Church or return to the king as warriors.” C. Kendall, “Bede and Education”, in DeGregorio, *Cambridge Companion*, 99-112, at p. 106. Whether or not one believes that Stephanus had a strong enough evidential basis for telling either of these specific stories about Wilfrid, they are testimony to credible practice in the society of the time.

it. Bede's 'secular' sources support a broader conception of the statuses of the students receiving contemporary monastic education, and of the range of studies offered therein. This is a view that sits naturally with Dumville's description of the preservation of genealogies as expressions of learning.<sup>730</sup> The most natural context for the maintenance and preservation of these texts thus opens up interesting dimensions on the functions of Anglo-Saxon monasteries like Bede's. His access to, and use of, these intriguing sources provides a slightly different perspective on the nature and purpose of monastic education at the time, at least in Kent and Northumbria. It is one with a much greater external dimension than is often assumed. 'Monastic' learning and libraries were, apparently, intimately connected to contemporary governance.<sup>731</sup> This is something which will be underlined further in later sections.

#### 6.1.4 'Hegemony' list

Bede possessed a list of what he, at least, believed to be the 'overlords' over southern England. Traditionally this has been termed the 'Bretwalda' list, but given the controversy over that term, the more generic 'hegemony' list will be used here. Bede ends his quotation from the list at Oswiu. Given that Bede knew of 'overlords', both Northumbrian and Mercian, after Oswiu, it should be concluded that this king was the last mentioned in Bede's source. The catalogue included no 'regnal/imperial' years, but did, at least for the southern overlords, note their kingdoms; the term 'West Saxon' is, however, almost certainly Bede's alteration from 'Gewisse'. Possibly, Bede also changed original references to 'Deira' and 'Bernicia' to the anachronistic 'Northumbria'.

*Bede's 'hegemony' list* [1.25; 2.3; 2.5; 2.9]

**Ælle**, of the South Saxons

**Cælin**, [known in their language as Ceawlin] of the Gewisse.

<sup>730</sup> Dumville, "Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists", p. 97.

<sup>731</sup> Moreover, the *HE* itself provides evidence, *contra* Gunn, *Bede's Historiae*, pp. 31-33, for the maintenance of some form of working 'library', or at least book collection, within the king's court itself. Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 48-59 posited this for Alfred's court; but this is more likely to represent continuity than innovation.

**Æthelberht**, of the Kentish

**Rædwald**, of the East Angles

**Edwin**

**Oswald**

**Oswiu**

The form of the list and the names and kingdoms included suggests that the catalogue began as a southern document, which was then added to in 'Northumbria'. Given this, it should be assumed that the text did not come to Bede from Albinus and Canterbury, despite his insertion of its content into the account of Æthelberht. This document seems to have been instead a more locally-preserved record, as will be discussed in the next section.

#### **6.1.5 'Hidage' document of the 'tribute' type**

There are some indications that Bede's 'hegemony' list was associated with the 'hidage' document of the 'tribute' type that Bede possessed. There is no possibility of a meaningful reconstruction of the text of this document. The content is similar to that of the 'Tribal Hidage'. This might be considered a framework for an attempted recreation of Bede's version. Even in the extant sections, however, the texts are different enough to make the product of such a process so unreliable as to be essentially pointless. For this document, therefore, it is not possible to do much more than repeat the entries Bede includes, treating them as extracts. The order in which the entries are included is that of their occurrence in the *HE*, and obviously need not be indicative of their original position. For the sake of completeness and utility all the extracts used in the *HE* are included, not simply those from the chapters relating to the Gregorian mission and Kent before Theodore.

*Bede's 'hidage' document of the 'tribute' type: extracts [1.25; 2.5; 2.9]*

- Thanet, 600 hides [1.25]



- Anglesey, 960 hides [2.9]
- Isle of Man, more than 300 hides [2.9]
- Iona, 5 hides [3.4]
- Southern Mercians, 5,000 hides [3.24]
- Northern Mercians, 7,000 hides [3.24]
- South Saxons, 7,000 hides [4.13]
- Isle of Wight, 1,200 hides [4.16]
- Ely, 600 hides [4.19]

Clearly these references represent merely a small proportion of the total content of the text in front of Bede. A document rather on the scale of the ‘Tribal Hidage’, or perhaps even larger, should be envisaged, given that, unlike that document, the coverage here seems to have extended beyond the ‘English’ kingdoms.<sup>732</sup> This document was thus a helpful aid for Bede in providing interesting context for his account in the *HE*.

Bede’s connection of the information in the ‘hidage’ document to that in the ‘hegemony’ list in 2.9, and perhaps implicitly in 2.5, may imply that the texts themselves were related, or, at least, that they were present in the same manuscript. The nature of the content of course points to such links. A tribute document inevitably implies some form of hegemony. The most plausible general dating of both documents, as has already been discussed at length, also seems to be consistent with each other. They arguably share a context therefore – one relating to the ‘Northumbrian’ hegemony of the mid-seventh century and the reigns of either Oswald, or perhaps more probably Oswiu.

Whether these two texts represent two manuscripts, or as seems more likely only one, they were, in the form in which Bede used them, ‘Northumbrian’ documents.<sup>733</sup> Bede probably obtained them from local sources therefore. This might have been very local indeed. Wearmouth-Jarrow was closely connected to Ecgfrith, and may have been used as his treasury and archive.<sup>734</sup> Probably then Bede derived these two intriguing, and

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<sup>732</sup> As with the *Tribal Hidage*, the lack of ‘Northumbrian’ entries may be instructive. N. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 74-111.

<sup>733</sup> Even though, as already noted, Bede’s ‘hegemony’ list may well be a ‘Northumbrian’ expansion on a ‘Southumbrian’ original.

<sup>734</sup> Wood, *Origins of Jarrow*; Wood, “Monasteries and Geography”; and Wood, “The foundation of Bede’s Wearmouth-Jarrow”. The use of major monasteries as royal treasuries is attested in the *Life of Brigit* by

probably linked, texts from the records held in his own house, rather than acquiring them specifically for the writing of the *HE*.

Both this document and the ‘hegemony list’ are ones again, like the kings’ list and genealogy, that would make sense preserved and maintained by ‘professionals’, not antiquarians. Again, the retention of this type of material at Wearmouth-Jarrow points towards a broader conception of the role of these monasteries and indeed their libraries/archives. If it is correct to say that Wearmouth-Jarrow, at least by the time Bede was writing, was unlikely to have been responsible for the contemporary upkeep of such lists on the king’s behalf, then their continued presence at the abbey once more opens up possibilities for the use of such documents as texts to be taught and learned.

## 6.2 Ecclesiastical

### 6.2.1 Episcopal lists

Bede possessed several episcopal lists, which provided him with much of his information about the early bishops.<sup>735</sup> As with the regnal lists, although original materials may have lain behind such sources, the texts Bede used were by their very nature secondary ones.

#### Canterbury

Perhaps the Canterbury episcopal list should be termed an archbishop list, even though many of those in this list were not in fact archbishops. To Bede, however, that is what this list would have appeared to be, and indeed this is how it would have been presented to him by his Canterbury contacts. The information provided in Bede’s Canterbury episcopal list was not consistent. The entries for the early bishops did not include the lengths of their episcopates; this apparently began with the notice of Deusdedit, and was maintained from then on.<sup>736</sup> Bede ‘knew’ the origins of the bishops between Augustine

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Cogitosus: D. O Croinin, “Hiberno-Latin Literature to 1169”, in D. O Croinin, ed., *A New History of Ireland, vol. I, Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), 371-404, at p. 385.

<sup>735</sup> For background on Anglo-Saxon episcopal lists, including analysis of some of the few surviving ones see, R. Page, “Anglo-Saxon Episcopal lists”, Parts 1-2 and 3, *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 9 and 10 (1965 and 1966), pp. 71-95 and 2-24.

<sup>736</sup> That is not to say the shift necessarily occurred during Deusdedit’s episcopate.

and Honorius, but he did not derive that information from the list. The origins of Deusdedit, as the first English bishop of the see, were, however, recorded. He seems on both grounds therefore to represent something of a threshold in the list, which might perhaps be an indication of the date of one recension at least of the text. One extra element, which does seem to have been consistently entered, where relevant in the Canterbury list, was a note of where each bishop had been consecrated, and by whom.<sup>737</sup>

Although the above analysis effectively ended with the closure of Deusdedit's episcopate, the list below also includes the notice of Theodore, in order to preserve more accurately the actual content of the list at Bede's disposal.

*Bede's Canterbury episcopal list* [1.24; 1.27; 1.28; 2.4; 2.7; 2.8; 2.16; 2.18; 3.20; 4.1]

**Augustine.** Consecrated by Etherius, at Arles. [1.24; 1.27; 1.28]

**Laurence.** Consecrated by Augustine [2.4], at Canterbury [the location is not specifically mentioned by Bede, but is implied].

**Mellitus.** [No note on consecration as already consecrated bishop, of London, 2.3]

**Justus.** [No note on consecration as already consecrated bishop, of Rochester, 2.3]

**Honorius.** Consecrated by Paulinus at Lincoln. [2.16; 2.18]

**Deusdedit.** He was a West Saxon. [3.20] Consecrated by Ithamar at Canterbury [3.20]. He ruled nine years, four months and two days. [3.20]

**Theodore.** Consecrated by Pope Vitalian, at Rome. [4.1] He ruled 21 years, three months, and 26 days.<sup>738</sup> [4.2]

Bede does also provide information about Berhtwald, but this is unlikely to have come from the Canterbury list. He was the archbishop throughout most of Bede's adult life. His death was recorded in 5.23, with the precise date of 13 January 731 and a note about the length of his episcopate, as 37 years, six months, and fourteen days. Such information is likely to have been conveyed to Bede directly, as he was completing the *HE*, and

<sup>737</sup> We do not know of course whether these details are reliable or not.

<sup>738</sup> In 5.8, Bede gives the rounded number of 22 years for Theodore's episcopate. This was either his own generalization, or perhaps it represents a figure derived from the omitted portion of the archbishop's epitaph.

therefore quite independently of the arrival of the episcopal list, which he possessed presumably since Nothelm's 'first' visit.<sup>739</sup>

It should be clear that in order to record the lengths of episcopates, some notice must have been kept at Canterbury of the date of each bishop's 'election' and/or consecration. This information may even have been included in the list itself from Deusdedit onwards, but that conclusion is not certain enough to enter those details in the above catalogue.<sup>740</sup>

Overall, it is clear that Bede was surprisingly poorly informed about these figures, even though they were, technically, so crucial to the telling of his story. The Canterbury episcopal list, especially for the early incumbents, did not include much useful material, particularly related to dating. Bede had to combine the information from this source with whatever other meagre scraps he possessed in order to deduce the more basic, non-anecdotal, information he set out in the *HE*. The gap in the locally-produced and preserved evidence at Canterbury for the period prior to Theodore's arrival will be discussed in more detail at the end of this Chapter.

## Rochester

Bede's episcopal list for Rochester seems to have included little more than the names of the bishops. The one exception is that for the earliest English bishops the list apparently also inserted claims concerning their origins. No episcopal dates were provided on this list. The list has been separated here into two halves, one ending with the vacancy in the 660s, because it is not clear that the information Bede possessed for the later bishops of Rochester need have derived from this list. If in fact it did, then the detail in the second half of the list may well have been much fuller than that he found in the first. It should be recognized that there is ambiguity here: the list Bede possessed may either have been only the shorter, first half, or the longer, combined, list, which may have included some more anecdotal information not included below.

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<sup>739</sup> Although arguably the information might perhaps have been conveyed in the form of an updated Canterbury episcopal list.

<sup>740</sup> Indeed Bede's error in calculating Deusdedit's date of consecration suggests that it may well not have been the case.

*Bede's Rochester episcopal list* [1.29; 2.3; 2.7; 2.8; 2.20; 3.14; 3.20]

**Justus** [1.29; 2.3; 2.7]

**Romanus** [2.8; 2.20]

**Paulinus** [2.20; 3.14]

**Ithamar** [3.14; 3.20], who was Kentish [3.14]

**Damian** [3.20; 4.2], who was South Saxon [3.20]

**Putta** [4.2; 4.12]

**Cwichelm** [4.12]

**Gefmund** [4.12; 5.8]

**Tobias** [5.8; 5.23]

**Ealdwulf** [5.23]

In a similar way to the early sections of the Canterbury list therefore, that for Rochester provided Bede with very limited information about the holders of the see. Nonetheless, as with the Canterbury list – and the East Anglian one, as will be seen – the Rochester list did record the origins of the early native bishops.

### **East Anglia**

Bede's episcopal list for East Anglia is a more complex, confusing and indeed ultimately unconvincing document. As Harrison noted, this list included the lengths of episcopal reigns, but Bede had no specific dates on which to hang this comparative chronology.<sup>741</sup> In fact, Bede can be seen here employing something of a rhetorical sleight of hand, displaying what he knew – the length of episcopate – while in doing so drawing attention away from what he did not – the actual dates of the bishops' tenure.

Interestingly, the length of episcopate is only given for the first three holders of the see. For those same bishops each prelate's origins were also given. As with Canterbury and Rochester, there seem to be signs of some form of separation in the way the

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<sup>741</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, p. 96.

information for the periods before and after the 660s was recorded in the list. As with those other instances, this is most plausibly taken as an indication of stages of composition, though precisely when these ‘recensions’ date from, or how they took shape, is less clear.

*Bede’s East Anglian episcopal list* [2.15; 3.20]

**Felix**, who was from Burgundy, 17 years. [2.15]

**Thomas**, who was from the province of Gyrwe, 5 years. [3.20].<sup>742</sup>

**Berhtgisl/Boniface**, who was from Kent [3.20], 17 years [4.5]

**Bisi** [4.5]

**Æcci** and **Baduwine** [4.5]

Bede’s information from the East Anglian list seems to dry up with those last two figures between whom the diocese was divided. He did know, as he sets out in 5.23, that in 731 Ealdberht and Hathulac were bishops of the East Angles; but this information did not come from his episcopal list. He provides no indication of whom these two individuals had succeeded. Furthermore, Bede separately knew of at least one bishop of East Anglia, who is not named in the *HE*, since he names Cuthwine as bishop of Dunwich in his *Eight Questions*.<sup>743</sup> This points again to the episcopal list being less detailed than he, or we, would like. Perhaps, therefore, one should presume that Bede’s East Anglian episcopal list ended with Æcci and Baduwine: certainly it is not reasonable to extrapolate further from the information Bede provided.

Concerning the content of the list, it should also be noted that, *en passant* in the *HE*, Bede makes claims about who consecrated certain East Anglian bishops. On these claims Plummer built a complex case for East Anglian chronology with implications even affecting that of Kent.<sup>744</sup> Bede’s statements are, however, more likely to be his own

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<sup>742</sup> Perhaps Bede’s note about Thomas having been Felix’s deacon originally came from the episcopal list as well.

<sup>743</sup> *On Eight Questions*, Q. 2.

<sup>744</sup> Plummer, 2.106.

deductions than to derive from the episcopal list. Bede presents the ecclesiastical and secular chronology of East Anglia in a deceptively simple form, while the information in his source was patchy at best. Taking Bede's various claims seriously leads to serious chronological difficulties, which by privileging Bede's account, historians have not done enough to acknowledge.<sup>745</sup>

## London and the East Saxons

Bede may have had such a list,<sup>746</sup> but he did not apparently use one for the information in the chapters considered in the above analysis, and so it will not be included here. Bede was very badly informed about Essex overall,<sup>747</sup> especially directly.<sup>748</sup>

### 6.2.2 The origins of Bede's episcopal lists

Bede therefore possessed and drew on three episcopal lists for the chapters analyzed.<sup>749</sup> Those for Canterbury and Rochester came no doubt from Albinus, via Nothelm, presumably on his first trip with materials for the *HE*. The possibility that the East Anglian list came from the same source should also be considered. Bede himself seems to be referring to Canterbury as his source for the episcopal lists for each see when he says in the Preface that: "Some of my information about the East and West Saxons, as well as East Anglia and Northumbria, was provided by them [Nothelm and Albinus], especially under what bishops and in whose reigns they received the grace of the gospel."<sup>750</sup> This notice is most naturally taken as a reference to episcopal lists for the kingdoms in

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<sup>745</sup> Stenton's attempt to simplify matters ignored some of the more important, and more complex, issues especially related to Hereswith: F. Stenton, "The East Anglian Kings of the Seventh Century", in D. Stenton, ed., *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England: being the collected papers of Frank Merry Stenton* (Oxford, 1970), 394-402, at p. 398.

<sup>746</sup> Kirby, "Bede's Native Sources", p. 71, states it as fact, and though the evidence seems much less clear in reality, it probably is a fair assumption.

<sup>747</sup> Kirby, "Bede's Native Sources", p. 71.

<sup>748</sup> Nor was Essex, of course, alone in this: Lindsey is another good example, as Kirby, "Bede's Native Sources", p. 77, also pointed out.

<sup>749</sup> Leaving London and the East Saxons out of the equation.

<sup>750</sup> *HE* Preface: "*Qui etiam prouinciae Orientalium Anglorum atque Nordanybrorum, a quibus praesulibus uel quorum tempore regum gratiam euangelii perceperint, nonnulla mihi ex parte prodiderunt.*"

question, though no doubt in some situations Bede's information from Albinus and Nothelm amounted to much more than merely that.<sup>751</sup> Technically, even if Albinus provided these lists, they need not have been recorded at Canterbury originally. Nonetheless, there are subtle grounds for thinking that Canterbury did maintain central lists and that it was from these holdings that Bede's own versions came.

First, it should be noted that the Synod of Hertford, of 672, whose canons Bede records at 4.5, implicitly called, in Article VIII, for the maintenance of episcopal lists by each diocese.<sup>752</sup> Presumably this was already being carried out at Canterbury, at least since Theodore's accession, if the matter was so important to him. A back-filled list would be easy to create at that stage, though one might not consider all its details necessarily trustworthy. Perhaps we should therefore look to this period, the 670s, both for the collection of such lists by Canterbury, and even arguably for their composition there and elsewhere. Furthermore such common Canterbury provenance may also be the best explanation for the coincidence of the consistency across the three lists in recording the origins of the earliest English bishops in each see and in certain other elements of their organization. The lists all seem to fall into two natural 'halves' with the dividing line in the catalogues generally lying in the time of Theodore.<sup>753</sup>

If Bede's lists are of Canterbury provenance, as seems likely therefore, then the early entries might cautiously be envisaged as the records, drawn up at Canterbury, near the start of Theodore's pontificate. The information they included would thus be of uncertain reliability, although it might make sense to presume that, though compiled at Canterbury, they may have been based on records or memories that were more local. The later entries would then have been updated contemporaneously at Canterbury, though not apparently conscientiously.<sup>754</sup> To an extent this might also help to explain the deficiencies in the

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<sup>751</sup> And, of course, he often had other information – particularly for Northumbria – which could be added to the basic account implicit in the episcopal list provided by Canterbury.

<sup>752</sup> Canon VIII: "*Vt nullus episcoporum se praeferat alteri per ambitionem, sed omnes adnoscant tempus et ordinem consecrationis suae.*" ("That no bishop claim precedence over another bishop out of ambition; but all shall take rank according to the time and the order of their consecration.")

<sup>753</sup> Canterbury, understandably, is the exception, with Theodore apparently able to draw the line with his predecessor, Deusdedit, not simply himself.

<sup>754</sup> A similar situation seems to pertain to Bede's knowledge of succession at the West Saxon sees. Clearly, anecdotal information, presumably from Daniel, expanded what material Bede could derive from the episcopal list he possessed, but again there is an apparent shift between the coverage of those prelates appointed before Theodore's arrival and those after. There are also some signs the West Saxon list may,



treatment of dioceses like those of the East Angles. The Canterbury coverage of personnel in the English sees for the later period was not consistent or comprehensive. Thus Bede's was not either. This would make less sense if Bede had obtained the information and the lists directly from the sees in question. In any case, while certainty is not possible, the Canterbury provenance for Bede's episcopal lists, and at least for those three he used in the account of the Gregorian mission, is plausible and perhaps even probable.<sup>755</sup>

Certainly, episcopal lists were vitally important for the detail and for the narrative of Bede's account. As with the regnal lists, episcopal lists helped to provide the basic chronological framework for the *HE*'s narrative. As much of the *HE* is the story of succession at the various English sees,<sup>756</sup> they were in some ways even more important in providing Bede with content. Their limitations as sources, however, needs to be recognized. As Keynes put it: "They can be tendentious and are by no means necessarily authoritative or complete."<sup>757</sup> Taken as a whole they are clearly not continuous, contemporarily maintained records, and the evidence suggests the reconstructions they thus involve rested on information, or memories, that were not always reliable.

One final point should be clear from this discussion: the fact that the surviving Anglo-Saxon episcopal lists seem to derive from late eighth-century versions is not evidence that they only began being maintained in this period.<sup>758</sup> They may have involved historical reconstruction, as Keynes argues, but that occurred earlier, probably by the late seventh century.

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like that for Canterbury, have included notice of the location of the consecration of each of the early bishops – another probable indication of central organization of the material.

<sup>755</sup> Perhaps even for kingdoms not mentioned in the Preface. Kirby, "Bede's native sources", p. 77, claimed that Bede's Lindsey list came from Bishop Cyneberht, but we do not know that. In fact, it is just as likely that this came from the central Canterbury collection.

<sup>756</sup> Levison, "Bede as historian", p. 143. See also, Wallace-Hadrill, "Bede and Plummer", p. 369.

<sup>757</sup> Keynes, "Bretwalda or *Brytenwalda*", p. 173.

<sup>758</sup> As argued by S. Keynes, "Episcopal Lists", in Lapidge et al, *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, pp. 172-74, who saw their origins lying perhaps at Clofesho, 747.

### 6.2.3 Inscriptions from (Re-)Foundation stones

Bede possessed inscriptions from several ecclesiastical ‘foundation stones’, or equivalent, with texts related to the activities of the early ‘mission fathers’ and specifically to their (re)construction of churches.<sup>759</sup> They contained material Bede could not have acquired via other written sources.<sup>760</sup> As part of this list the text of the one such inscription Bede could have seen almost daily – the surviving Jarrow foundation stone – will be included. Many of the earlier texts, despite being for churches built up to three-quarters of a century before the Jarrow example, seem to have followed essentially the same form. To describe the activity at its most generic, standard practice seems to have been to include the name of the king who patronized the building of the church, as well as that of the senior cleric involved, primarily as consecrator. Unlike the Jarrow stone, however, only one of these examples (or possibly two) included a dating formula.

The *HE* does not provide sufficient information about these texts to produce reconstructions, although, given their probably formulaic nature, drawing up tentative, but substantially accurate versions might not be completely impractical. It is, however, possible to describe the material that, based on the *HE*’s account, it is possible to conclude would have been included in each inscription.

*St Martin’s, Canterbury* [1.25; 1.26]

- The church was restored/recovered/rebuilt
- Queen Bertha was patron
- Augustine mentioned in some form

A fragment of the end of an apparently seventh-century inscription at St Martin’s has survived. This may well have been part of a dedication stone.<sup>761</sup> It reads:

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<sup>759</sup> The frequency of inscriptions at early Anglo-Saxon sites as a whole is quite impressive: J. Higgit, “Inscriptions, non-runic”, in Lapidge et al, *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, 252-54, at p. 253.

<sup>760</sup> The alternative source in such situations would otherwise have to be presumed to be unreliable oral tradition.

<sup>761</sup> Okasha, *Hand-list*, pp. 60-61.

... *OMNIUM SANCTORUM*

[... of all the saints].

*Holy Saviour's, Canterbury – Canterbury 'cathedral'* [1.33]

- The church was restored/recovered/rebuilt
- King Æthelberht was patron.
- Consecrated by Augustine.

*Ss Peter and Paul's, Canterbury* [1.33; 2.3]

- The church was built *a fundamentis*
- King Æthelberht was patron
- Consecrated by Laurence

*St Paul's, London* [2.3]

- King Æthelberht was patron
- A dating formula, either based on the indiction or regnal years, from which Bede was able to derive a foundation date of 604 AD
- Probably mention of Mellitus as bishop

*St Andrew's, Rochester* [2.3; 3.14]

- The church was built *a fundamentis*
- King Æthelberht was patron
- Possibly a dating formula, or Bede may have just inferred this from the date from St Paul's.

*Mary, Mother of God, Canterbury* [2.6]

- King Eadbald was patron
- Consecrated by Mellitus

*St Paul's, Jarrow*<sup>762</sup>

[Chi-Rho] DEDICATIO BASILICAE SANCTI PAVLI VIII KALENDAS MAI  
ANNO XV ECFRIDI REGIS CEOLFRIDI ABBATIS EIVSDEM Q QUE  
ECCLESIAE DEO AVCTORE CONDITORIS ANNO III

Translation:

The dedication of the church of St Paul (was) on 23 April in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of King Ecfred and the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Ceolfrid the Abbot and, under God's guidance, founder of this same church.

This text is added merely for the sake of providing a near-contemporary parallel for comparison. The inscription was not quoted or used in the composition of the *HE*. There is no reason to assume that the 'mission' church inscriptions would have used words or formulae identical to this later, 'Northumbrian', inscription. Nonetheless, the Jarrow example does give a sense – from a consciously Romanizing institution – of what might have been included in such a slab and thus supports the suggestion of similar content in terms of structure and diction in these earlier examples.

Transcriptions of all the inscription texts used in constructing the *HE*'s narrative of the Gregorian mission would have come to Bede from Albinus. Nothelm will, presumably have brought them on his first visit. Bede mentions another Canterbury church, the Four Crowned Martyrs, in 2.7, but his knowledge about this structure did not extend beyond its name; Bede clearly had no foundation stone for it.

Certainty is not possible, but it would probably be safe to assume that the inscriptions represent genuinely primary sources for the mission. These are the type of texts the 'mission fathers' can reasonably be expected to have produced. There is nothing

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<sup>762</sup> Text and translation from Okasha, *Hand-list*, p. 85. Expansions of abbreviations have been underlined.

anachronistic in their content; although, if any included specific statements claiming to be reconstructing a church originally built by the Romans, these claims would have had no evidential basis.

#### 6.2.4 Epitaphs

Epitaphs represent Bedan sources rarely considered previously. The information he gained from them certainly enriched the *HE*'s narrative of the Gregorian mission and enabled Bede to provide details he could not have gained from other sources. But they did not all come from the same source. He certainly possessed some Roman epitaphs, probably from a *sylloge* – that is a collection of the texts of epitaphs, *tituli* and other similar inscriptions. There is other surviving evidence for the circulation and use of such *sylloges* elsewhere in seventh and eighth-century England. Aldhelm possessed one,<sup>763</sup> as did Milred of Worcester.<sup>764</sup> Various manuscripts of these *sylloges* survive, including some with Insular connections.<sup>765</sup> The exact version used by Aldhelm is not extant, but Lapidge and Sharpe both argued that his collection, which he may even have compiled himself, was similar if not identical to that used by Bede, and, indeed, might have been the exemplar for the latter.<sup>766</sup> This is possible, but it seems *prima facie* more likely that Bede's came from a 'Northumbrian' source, and indeed, a Wearmouth-Jarrow one; in other words that it was a collection brought back by one of his fellow monks from Rome, rather than being derived from elsewhere in England.

In addition to a *sylloge* of Roman inscriptions, Bede also had access to the texts of epitaphs from Canterbury. It probably makes most sense to conceive of these as collected in a single manuscript, which would have amounted, essentially, to a Canterbury *sylloge*. This would have been provided to Bede by Albinus, via Nothelm, and may even have been drawn up specifically for him.

Bede quotes two of the Canterbury epitaphs directly: Augustine's and Theodore's. From their existence and other hints in the *HE*, it can be inferred that other bishops of

<sup>763</sup> Lapidge, "Career of Aldhelm", pp. 52-62.

<sup>764</sup> P. Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's collection of Latin epigrams and its continental counterparts", *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1981), pp. 21-38.

<sup>765</sup> Sharpe, "King Ceadwalla's Roman epitaph", pp. 172-75.

<sup>766</sup> Sharpe, "King Ceadwalla's Roman epitaph", pp. 185-86; Lapidge, "Career of Aldhelm", pp. 60-61.

Canterbury were also given epitaphs, even though Bede does not specifically mention or quote them. The text of Augustine's epitaph is relatively simple and focused on certain key facts.<sup>767</sup> Theodore's was a much more impressive text, thirty-four lines of heroic verses according to Bede. So long was it that Bede only included the beginning and the end in the *HE*.<sup>768</sup> The information in the other epitaphs summarized below might theoretically fall anywhere within this spectrum: but one might perhaps expect that those for earlier figures would have been shorter, and more similar to that for Augustine.

Bede's knowledge of the location of certain royal tombs points to the existence of epitaphs for these figures as well. These might conceivably have recorded little more than their names, but some of Bede's information about them is most simply explained as deriving from details from the inscriptions on their epitaphs.

As with the inscriptions from the ecclesiastical foundation stones, reconstructing, even tentatively, the original texts of these epitaphs is not, in practical terms, possible. Nonetheless, where Bede's account might conceivably have retained some of the vocabulary or phrasing from his source, the citations from the *HE* are included below. This is not of course to claim that they represent the original phrasings of the inscriptions, but the terms Bede uses may be indicative and could repay further research.

In a similar way, the entries here are arranged by location, rather than by occurrence in the *HE*, in order to give a better sense of the possible shape of the original manuscripts that Bede was working from. This is less revelant for the Roman *sylloge* he possessed. Bede's selections from this will have been only a tiny proportion of the total text of that document. Thus, the extracts from Rome inserted in the *HE* reveal little about the basic makeup of Bede's source. In contrast, it seems likely that the overall structure of the 'Canterbury *sylloge*', that is the document with Canterbury inscriptions sent by Albinus via Nothelm, can be seen in general outline in the summaries below.<sup>769</sup>

Finally, although they are not directly relevant to this study, Cædwalla's epitaph, as well as Wilfrid's,<sup>770</sup> which Bede quotes at 5.7 and 5.19, respectively, are also included,

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<sup>767</sup> *HE* 2.3.

<sup>768</sup> *HE* 5.8.

<sup>769</sup> Nor is it unlikely that this document/manuscript included not only the epitaphs, but also the church inscriptions, sent from Canterbury, which were dealt with in the previous section.

<sup>770</sup> Intriguingly, the epitaph is not included in Stephanus' *Life of Wilfrid*.

for the sake of completeness. The references in square brackets, as usual, provide the chapter numbers of the *HE* for which Bede used the epitaph in question.

## Rome

*Gregory the Great* [1.23; 2.1]

Bede included Gregory's entire poetic epitaph at 2.1. He also used material from the short prose summary, with which the text would originally have ended, both in 1.23 and 2.1.<sup>771</sup>

*Cædwalla* [5.7]

At 5.7, Bede includes the West Saxon king Cædwalla's complete epitaph, in which, following common Roman practice, a short prose summary of key facts is appended to a laudatory poem. While Bede quoted the entire epitaph, he also used the information it provided elsewhere in the chapter to add colour to his account of the king. This also enabled him to calculate an incarnational date for Cædwalla's death. Bede's copy of this epitaph would have been part of his *sylloge* of Roman epitaphs, wherever he had obtained that.<sup>772</sup>

## Ss Peter and Paul's, Canterbury

*Bertha* [1.25; 2.5]

Bede notes that Bertha was buried in Ss Peter and Paul's church in Canterbury, in the *porticus* next to her husband [2.5]. This implies at least some form of epitaph. This is likely to have included her rank – queen – and perhaps her marriage to Æthelberht.<sup>773</sup> Probably the epitaph was also Bede's source of information about her origins.

The material present in the epitaph can therefore be summarized as follows:

<sup>771</sup> The full text with references is edited in *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae: Septimo Saeculo Antiquiores vol. II, Coemeteria in viis Cornelia Aurelia Portuensi et Ostiensi*, ed., I. De Rossi and A. Silvagni (Rome, 1985), no. 4156, p. 26.

<sup>772</sup> The question of why Bede should include this epitaph of a king, who hardly seems his model of royal behaviour, from Wessex, scarcely his 'favourite' kingdom, has never been raised but is worth more consideration.

<sup>773</sup> Although Bede could have deduced the latter fact from Gregory the Great's letter to her.

- Bertha was queen
- She was from Gaul

### *Liudhard* [1.25]

Liudhard seems to have had a tomb in the royal chapel in the south *porticus* of Ss Peter and Paul, alongside Bertha and Æthelberht.<sup>774</sup> It is not possible to be certain that this was the case by the time Bede was compiling material for the *HE*, but this must be the most likely assumption. Liudhard cannot have been buried there originally, however, since, as seen above, the church had not yet been built. We have no evidence therefore about when his ‘epitaph’ would have been written or what sources of material could have lain behind it. However basic the information (or mis-information) this sepulchral inscription included, it does seem to be the most plausible source for Bede’s claims that Liudhard existed, was a bishop, came from ‘Gaul’, and arrived with Bertha – although that last statement may have merely been Bede’s inference from the other claims.

The material present in the epitaph can therefore be summarized as follows:

- Liudhard was bishop
- He was from Gaul
- Possibly that he was associated with Bertha

### *Augustine* [2.3]

*Hic requiescit domnus Augustinus Doruuernensis archiepiscopus primus, qui olim huc a beato Gregorio Romanae urbis pontifice directus, et a Deo operatione miraculorum suffultus, Aedilbertum regem ac gentem illius ab idolorum cultu ad Christi fidem perduxit, et completis in pace diebus officii sui defunctus est septima kalendas Iunias eodem rege regnante.*<sup>775</sup>

<sup>774</sup> Thacker, “In Gregory’s Shadow?”, p. 376. This is not to claim that his remains were actually in the tomb, of course.

<sup>775</sup> *HE* 2.3. “Here lies the most reverend Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury, who was formerly sent hither by St Gregory, bishop of Rome; being supported by God in the working of miracles, he led King



As already noted, Bede inserts the, apparently, entire text of Augustine's epitaph at the end of 2.3. The text is included here for the sake of comparison. Other 'early' examples may well have been produced at the same time and have followed a similar pattern. The content is simple and 'factual'. The use of the term "archbishop", however, confirms the impression of the general tone of this text – that it was written some time after Augustine's death. As discussed above, the title archbishop only began to be used in England with Theodore, and only gradually during his episcopate.<sup>776</sup> Augustine's epitaph cannot therefore have been composed before Theodore's arrival, and could conceivably have been written while Berhtwald was archbishop. Given that Liudhard's certainly cannot have been contemporary, if such is also the case for Augustine's epitaph then the same may well be true for those of all the early, Gregorian mission, bishops of the see.

*Æthelberht* [1.25; 2.5]

Bede states that Æthelberht was buried in Ss Peter and Paul's, Canterbury and thus it is reasonable to conclude that his tomb possessed an epitaph, even if this were no more than the mere mention of the king's name. Given that Bede's description of Æthelberht's place of burial is connected in the *HE* with the notice of his (Julian) date of death, 24 February, this points to the probable presence of this detail on the inscription. Moreover, in the same sentence, Bede also claims that Æthelberht died 21 years after his conversion, and as argued above, it probably makes sense to view this reference also as taken from the epitaph.<sup>777</sup>

The following therefore summarizes the material present in the epitaph:

- Æthelberht king of Kent died on 24 February

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Æthelberht and his nation from the worship of idols to faith in Christ and ended the days of his office in peace; he died on the twenty-sixth day of May during the reign of the same king."

<sup>776</sup> See for instance, Thacker, "Gallic or Greek?"

<sup>777</sup> As seen in 2.5, Bede also used the "21 years" since Æthelberht's death to refer to another, essentially contradictory, event – the departure of the mission party from Rome; but this reference, though it comes earlier in the chapter, is likely to be no more than a rhetorical, and slightly confusing, borrowing from the actual one on the epitaph which probably related to the king's conversion.

- Twenty-one years after his conversion [this is the probable reference point: or, less likely, the departure of the Gregorian mission from Rome]

Since Bede might arguably be repeating some of the actual words of Æthelberht's epitaph, it is worth repeating the key sentence from *HE*, 2.5:

*Defunctus uero est rex Aedilberct die XXIII mensis Februarii post XX et unum annos acceptae fidei*<sup>778</sup>

*Laurence* [2.7]

This is how Bede describes Laurence's death in 2.7:

*Hoc enim regnante rege beatus archiepiscopus Laurentius regnum caeleste conscendit, atque in ecclesia et monasterio sancti apostoli Petri iuxta prodecessorem suum Augustinum sepultus est, die quarto nonarum Februariarum.*<sup>779</sup>

The use of *sepultus est* (was buried) to describe the day of death, along with the mention of the location of the bishop's tomb, indicates that Bede's source for the date was Laurence's epitaph, rather than mere liturgical commemoration. Use of the date of burial for date of death was common on Roman epitaphs of the period.<sup>780</sup>

The epitaph may have included more information, but the only elements Bede used were:

- Laurence was buried on 2 February
- Possible mention of Eadbald as the king reigning at the time of Laurence's death

<sup>778</sup> "King Æthelberht died on 24 February, twenty-one years after he had accepted the faith".

<sup>779</sup> "During this king's reign, the blessed Archbishop Laurence entered the heavenly kingdom and was buried on 2 February in the church and monastery of St Peter the Apostle near to his predecessor Augustine."

<sup>780</sup> As for instance in that of Gregory the Great: *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, ed. De Rossi, p. 26. Burial was usually on the day of death: Plummer, 2.36.

*Mellitus* [2.7]

In 2.7, Bede describes Mellitus' death in the following manner:

*Et hic ergo, postquam annis quinque rexit ecclesiam, Eadbald regnante migravit ad caelos, sepultusque est cum patribus suis in saepedicto monasterio et ecclesia beatissimi apostolorum principis, anno ab incarnatione Domini DCXXIII die octauo kalendarum Maiarum.*<sup>781</sup>

Mention of the Julian date when Mellitus was buried (*sepultus*), almost certainly means, as shown above, that this detail came from the bishop's epitaph rather than from Canterbury liturgical commemoration. Bede makes other claims in this sentence about dates relating to Mellitus' episcopate and incarnational year of death. These have been examined at length, and, as argued above, it seems clear that there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that these figures derived from the epitaph. Thus, again, while the epitaph may have included more information, the only elements we can be relatively confident Bede used were:

- Mellitus was buried on 24 April
- Possible mention of Eadbald as the king reigning at the time of death

*Justus* [2.18]

*Iustus archiepiscopus ad caelestia regna sublatus quarto iduum Nouembrium die*<sup>782</sup>

Bede only notes the Julian date for Justus' death and uses no vocabulary with specific reference to burial. Even the location of Justus' tomb is not recorded. Nonetheless, given all the other instances seen so far, it should be presumed that like his predecessors and

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<sup>781</sup> "He, too, after ruling over the church for five years went to heaven during Eadbald's reign and was buried with his fathers in the monastery and church of the blessed chief of the apostles so often mentioned, on 24th April in the year of our Lord 624."

<sup>782</sup> HE 2.18: "Archbishop Justus was translated to the heavenly kingdom on 10 November."

successors Justus too was provided with an epitaph,<sup>783</sup> and that he was buried in Ss Peter and Paul's, Canterbury. The epitaph would therefore have included the following information used by Bede:

- Justus died 10 November

*Honorius* [3.20]

*Et ipse quoque Honorius, postquam metas sui cursus inpleuit, ex hac luce migravit anno ab incarnatione Domini DCLIII, pridie kalendarum Octobrium;*<sup>784</sup>

Since Bede's description of the timing of Honorius' death extended beyond merely a Julian calendar date, it seems clear that this information cannot have come to Bede simply from a record of the bishop's liturgical commemoration. As seen previously, this sort of record points rather to Bede's possession of the text of the epitaph of the individual in question. The year on that epitaph would not have included an incarnational date of course, but Bede was able to convert easily from one that was probably originally in indictional form.<sup>785</sup> In short, therefore, Honorius' epitaph included the following information, drawn on by Bede for his account in the *HE*:

- Honorius died 30 September
- A year of death – presumably indictional – which Bede converted to 653 AD

*Eorcenberht?* [2.5; 3.8; 4.1]

Bede gives Eorcenberht's precise date of death including year, which is more information than he usually possessed for Kentish kings. Such detail was probably only recorded because of the coincidence that the king's death fell on exactly the same day as Bishop Deusdedit's: 14 July 664. An epitaph would be the natural place to note such information.

<sup>783</sup> Albeit quite probably composed at a later date.

<sup>784</sup> *HE* 3.20: "Then Honorius himself, after he had finished his course, departed in the year of our Lord 653, on 30 September."

<sup>785</sup> Honorius would therefore be the earliest Canterbury figure whose epitaph included a year.

The question is whether this was on that of the king's or the bishop's. Overall, the bishop's epitaph might be considered the more likely option, rather than that Bede had a separate, detailed, epitaph for Eorcenberht. That is not impossible, however, and so it merits inclusion here.<sup>786</sup>

If an epitaph did exist for the king, then it would have contained the following content, used by Bede:

Either:

- Simple mention of the coincidence that King Eorcenberht died the same day as Bishop Deusdedit (with Bede deriving the precise date from the bishop's tomb)

Or:

- King Eorcenberht died 14 July
- A year of death – presumably indictional, which Bede converted to 664 AD

*Deusdedit* [2.5?; 3.8?; 3.20; 4.1]

*Deusdedit sextus ecclesiae Doruuernensis episcopus obiit pridie iduum Iuliarum; sed et Erconberct rex Cantuariorum eodem mense ac die defunctus*<sup>787</sup>

In line with the conclusions of the immediately preceding discussion, Bede's precise information about Deusdedit's day and year of death points towards him possessing the text of this bishop's epitaph, just as he did for the other Canterbury bishops. This epitaph may well also have been Bede's source of knowledge for the date of Eorcenberht's death, as this was apparently exactly the same as Deusdedit's.

Deusdedit's epitaph would therefore have included the following information:

- Deusdedit died 14 July
- A year of death, presumably indictional, which Bede converted to 664 AD
- Perhaps reference to King Eorcenberht dying on the same day

<sup>786</sup> However Bede 'knew' Eorcenberht's date of death, he used that information, combined with the regnal years in the Kentish kings' list, to calculate the year of Eadbald's death, and thence also Æthelberht's.

<sup>787</sup> *HE* 4.1: "and Deusdedit, the sixth bishop of the church at Canterbury, died on 14 July. Eorcenberht, king of Kent, died on the same day". The year is dated as 664 in *HE* 3.27.

*Theodore* [5.8]

Although strictly speaking Theodore lies outside the general area of this inquiry, it should be noted that Bede also possessed his epitaph, which was written in ‘heroic verse’.<sup>788</sup> The opening and closing lines of this were included in 5.8, but Bede clearly had access to the text of all thirty-four verses and drew on their content for other aspects of his description of the archbishop in that chapter. The age, 88 years, Bede gives for Theodore at death will, for example, have derived from the omitted sections of the epitaph.<sup>789</sup> The calendar date of Theodore’s death is included in the section of the epitaph Bede quotes.

**St Andrew’s, Rochester**

*Paulinus* [2.9; 3.14]

*Cuius anno secundo, hoc est ab incarnatione dominica anno DCXLIII, reuerentissimus pater Paulinus, quondam quidem Eburacensis sed tunc Hrofensis episcopus ciuitatis, transiuit ad Dominum sexto iduum Octobrium die; qui X et VIII annos, menses duos, dies XXI episcopatum tenuit*<sup>790</sup>

Bede specifically states the location of Paulinus’ tomb and provides a ‘complete’ date for his death, including both Julian figures and an incarnational year. These probably derived therefore from the epitaph.<sup>791</sup> The same is likely to be the case for the detailed length of total time Paulinus was bishop. From this, Bede was able to calculate the precise date of Paulinus’ episcopal consecration, which he inserted in 2.9. Paulinus’ epitaph therefore included at least the following information:

- Paulinus died on 10 October

<sup>788</sup> Orchard made a persuasive case for Aldhelm’s authorship of this text: A. Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 278-80.

<sup>789</sup> No doubt, if the poem was by Aldhelm, this figure would not have been given in the simple and direct form Bede provides!

<sup>790</sup> *HE* 3.14: “In his second year, that is in the year of our Lord 644, the most reverend father Paulinus, once bishop of York and then of Rochester, departed to be with the Lord on 10 October, having held the office of bishop for nineteen years, two months, and twenty-one days.”

<sup>791</sup> Chronologically, this would therefore have been the first figure whose ‘Kentish’ epitaph included a reference to an actual year.

- A year – probably indictional – which Bede has converted to 644 AD
- He was bishop, in total, for 19 years, 2 months, 21 days.

## Ripon

*Wilfrid* [5.19]

At the end of his account of Wilfrid, Bede closes with the full text of the poetic epitaph inscribed over that prelate's tomb at Ripon. The epitaph does not include a date of death, but does have a figure for Wilfrid's total time as a bishop – *quindecies ternos ... annos* – which is essentially in line with the number Stephanus gives.<sup>792</sup> Bede may well have been to Ripon himself, but if not, then his close connection with Acca meant he had plenty of sources through which he could have obtained this text.<sup>793</sup>

## Bede's Kentish epitaphs

Although the epitaphs of Cædwalla and Wilfrid have been considered for the sake of completeness, the real focus must be on those relating to the members of the Gregorian mission. Bede seems to have had access to the epitaphs of all the bishops of Canterbury. He will have acquired the texts of these inscriptions from Albinus via Nothelm, presumably on the latter's first visit. As Bede does not quote most of them, however, the precise form these took is not recoverable. What we can say though is that the ones for Liudhard and Augustine at least must have been written some time after their death simply because the church in which Bede knew them to be buried had not been built by the time they died. In Augustine's case, Bede gives the text of the inscription and from its

<sup>792</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c. 66: *quadraginta sex annos episcopatus*. On the face of it, this figure differs from Bede's, but as Colgrave said: "Doubtless Eddius [sic] means that he died in the forty-sixth year of his episcopate."

<sup>793</sup> One wonders whether he might even be considered the possible author? Certainly, Bede was credited with writing the texts of epigrams for the Wilfridian church at Hexham which were presumably inscribed there (M. Lapidge, "Some Remnants of Bede's Lost *Liber Epigrammatum*", in M. Lapidge, ed., *Anglo-Latin Literature 600-899* (London, 1996), 357-79, at p. 363); and Acca, of course, commissioned many other works by Bede. Equally, there do seem to be some signs that Bede was seeking to insert within the pages of the *HE* minor 'works' he had written which might not otherwise be widely known: the poem on Æthelthryth in 4.20 is the obvious example, but the letter to Nechtan may be another, if the general view that it was a work of Bede's is correct.

tone and content it can be concluded that the work was in fact composed significantly later – not before Theodore’s episcopate. If that is the case for Augustine’s epitaph, then the presumption must be that it is the case for those of all the bishops before the 660s. This does not necessarily invalidate every piece of information within them, but one should be very cautious before treating them as, by their very nature, primary sources. We might instead be seeing here hints of some of the products of Theodore’s own program of ecclesiastical *renouatio* among the English, taking steps to establish and promote publicly the cults of the earlier ‘mission fathers’, just as he seems to have done for Gregory the Great. In the next Chapter, I shall examine another possible source that points in the same direction.

### 6.2.5 Other Canterbury sources?

Among the many sources used by Bede in the construction of the narrative of the Gregorian mission, several, as the analysis above has shown, had a Canterbury provenance. In Chapter 7, I shall suggest the existence of another such source or group of sources. It should be emphasized, however, that this thesis is not intended as an attempt to provide a complete collection of all the sources Bede obtained from Canterbury and Albinus. Others probably lay behind sections of the *HE* not considered here. One example of such material of probably Canterbury provenance lying outside the scope of this work is that forming the basis of Bede’s stories of the Anglo-Saxon *aduentus*. It seems probable that Bede learned about Hengist and Horsa from his Canterbury contacts,<sup>794</sup> but that case need not be examined here. Other documents, relating to sections of the *HE* later than the focus of this thesis, also most reasonably reached Bede from Albinus. The canons of the councils of Hertford and Hatfield are among the most likely examples.<sup>795</sup> But neither these nor any others fall within the purview of this study.

One potential source, if it existed, that might be considered relevant to this work would be a *Liber Pontificalis* for Canterbury. There are some subtle signs that York maintained one, at least in the mid-eighth century. Alcuin seems to be drawing on a record very

<sup>794</sup> As stated by K. Harrison, “Woden”, in Bonner, *Famulus Christi*, 351-56, at p. 351.

<sup>795</sup> D. Kirby, *Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum: its contemporary setting* (Jarrow, 1992), p. 4, assumed Bede obtained them from Canterbury. This may be likely, but is by no means certain.



similar in form and content to those of the popes' official biographies in his accounts of the gifts of both Bishop Wilfrid II and Archbishop Ælberht to the church of York.<sup>796</sup> If York possessed such a source might not Canterbury have done? It is a tempting prospect, but one which we are compelled to reject. Nothing in the *HE*'s account of the early mission fathers could plausibly be derived from a Canterbury *Liber Pontificalis*. Nor does Bede's description, at least of the bishops up to Theodore, include the elements that would be expected from a work following the Roman *LP*.<sup>797</sup>

### 6.3 Conclusions: the disappearance of 'Canterbury tradition'

The 'palaeobibliothecographical' approach in the above analysis has, I hope, introduced new clarity into the question of Bede's sources and method. We now have a much better idea of the nature of what was available to Bede and especially of what Albinus and Canterbury were able to provide him with concerning the mission. We also have a clearer sense of the reliability of the material at Bede's disposal. We have seen sources that have not received much focus before. Overall, we have gained important hints about the nature of the Anglo-Saxon monastic library and its purpose in education.

From another perspective, however, as Bede's sources have here been catalogued, sifted, organized and reconstructed, it has become increasingly obvious that his 'knowledge' was based on a very small amount of material. Moreover, what Bede did have rarely inspires much confidence as to its reliability. In elucidating Bede's method significant gaps have been revealed, even concerning areas like Canterbury before Theodore that one might previously have assumed Bede knew about. Gameson, for instance, claimed that, "we are relatively well informed about Augustine".<sup>798</sup> Such a view is no longer tenable. The reliability and extent of the 'Canterbury tradition' that survived to reach Bede has been comprehensively dismantled.

Given the impossibility of certainty for many of the identifications made above, it is, of course, quite likely that others might want to take issue with a few of the explanations

<sup>796</sup> *Alcuin: the Bishops, Kings and Saints of York*, ed. and tr. P. Godman (Oxford, 1982), pp. 94-97 and 118-21.

<sup>797</sup> Such as length of pontificate, or gifts to the church or number of consecrations.

<sup>798</sup> Gameson, "Augustine", p. 1.

proposed, or to suggest, in the tiny number of cases where that is remotely possible, that another, lost, primary source lies behind Bede's claim. But this has no meaningful impact on the basic conclusion. Even with such hypothetical objections, it is undeniable that the overall picture built up through systematic and comprehensive analysis is utterly overwhelming: this section of the *HE* at least, was composed without access to hidden original sources supporting Bede's less obvious statements.

Following this examination, therefore, what is perhaps most striking is the sheer scale of the vacuum in evidence at Canterbury for the days of the 'mission'. Canterbury did not maintain useful records dating back to Augustine's time. They did not possess any of the original papal letters sent to Kent. Nor does Bede insert any other document that seems to come from Canterbury's records of the mission days. Bede did possess Canterbury epitaphs, but, as argued above, most of these are unlikely, in the form Bede knew them at least, to be contemporary. The only source which is a possible exception is the letter of Laurence, Mellitus and Justus to the Irish, which Bede includes extracts from in 2.4. Given, however, that the content of the letter concerns the Paschal dispute for which Bede's sources were generally ultimately Irish and that there is good evidence that the letter was preserved among Irish communities interested in the issue, the strong likelihood is that this too came from Irish sources. Bede certainly did not rely on Canterbury for his computus texts; nor was collecting them part of his researches for the composition of the *HE*. In short, there is nothing in the *HE* to suggest that Canterbury had retained any primary documents relating to the mission, other than the texts of the inscriptions on the ecclesiastical (re)foundation stones, perhaps laid in the the time of the mission fathers.

Credible information of a more anecdotal nature was also apparently unavailable to Albinus. Bede's ignorance of even basic facts about the mission and its heroes is clear. Bede did not know Augustine's year of death [2.3].<sup>799</sup> He was apparently confused about when Æthelberht died [2.5], and perhaps about the length of his reign.<sup>800</sup> Bede is able to include almost no information about bishops Honorius and Deusdedit. Most of the – very few – statements about these prelates are simply inferences from the 'knowledge' that

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<sup>799</sup> Although the analysis above has shown when this probably was.

<sup>800</sup> Yorke, "Gregory of Tours", pp. 113-14.

they were bishops of Canterbury at the time that other events happened. The same might be said for the first bishops of Rochester about whom Bede is able to include little more than their names.<sup>801</sup>

Finally, despite, his main source, indeed the *auctor ante omnes atque adiutor*, for the work,<sup>802</sup> being Albinus, abbot of Ss Peter and Paul, Canterbury, Bede shows no clear signs of knowing the name of any other abbot of that house between Peter, the first, and Benedict Biscop, who held the position on Theodore's arrival until he was replaced by Hadrian.<sup>803</sup> The only additional or alternative information about the abbots is found in very late sources, such as the surprisingly frequently trusted, Thomas of Elmham.<sup>804</sup> The very tenuous claim his 'History' has to credibility on these issues is another indication of how complete was the break that took place in Canterbury records between the early seventh century and the time of Theodore and Bede. If Bede had known the abbots of Ss Peter and Paul it is reasonable to assume that he would have included at least their names.<sup>805</sup> It seems that even Albinus, the current abbot, did not know the identities of his predecessors back to the beginning.<sup>806</sup>

It should be emphasized that this is not merely the standard failure of such documents to survive into modern times: here, it is clear that, well before the time of the composition of the *HE*, Canterbury was already bereft of primary documents relating to the mission and the missionaries. These gaps do not simply represent the erosion of evidence with which historians of the early medieval period are familiar. Rats, Vikings and Henry VIII no doubt destroyed many Canterbury records, but the break had occurred long before even the Danes arrived. It had happened even before the chaos in Canterbury in 796, and

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<sup>801</sup> This ignorance of the early church in England stretched beyond Kent: Bede possessed little more than the names and lengths of reign for the bishops of the East Angles.

<sup>802</sup> *HE* Preface.

<sup>803</sup> The detail about Benedict Biscop comes not from the *HE*, but from *HA*, c. 3. Bede's source was Wearmouth-Jarrow tradition, not Albinus and Canterbury.

<sup>804</sup> Thomas of Elmham, *Historia*.

<sup>805</sup> Indeed, this might explain the mention of Rufinianus in 1.29, though without his title.

<sup>806</sup> Nor was Bede the only one who was poorly informed about the early days of the mission. The *Whitby Life of Gregory* was unaware of anything outside legend and beyond the *LP* and the works of Gregory himself. Some, like Colgrave, *Earliest Life*, p. 53, believe that this *uita* was written in a house with Canterbury connections. If so, these connections still seem to have been unable to access reliable traditions about the early missionaries. Again, only the arrival of the papal letters brought any of the genuine events to light.

the apparent destruction of the archives.<sup>807</sup> The comprehensiveness of the loss is surprising, especially when Kent is otherwise among the areas with a better survival of material, at least from the arrival of Theodore and the 670s onwards. The *HE*'s evidence shows that whenever this break occurred it was before the early eighth century. The very frequency with which early documents have, in a more general way, been lost to later times has helped to disguise the otherwise obvious loss which occurred even within the earlier period itself – some time during the seventh century.

On consideration, it is possible to be quite confident about precisely when this occurred. The break is scarcely likely to have occurred while there was a sitting bishop at Canterbury. Of course, devastating destruction could have ruined archives even while a bishop continued to rule. In that case, however, the more human element would not have been lost: that is, the traditions would have been able to survive. With an episcopate uninterrupted, even in the face of material destruction, a greater level of continuity than there is evidence for, would be expected.

Thus the break is likely to have been at a time when there was an 'interregnum' between bishops of Canterbury.<sup>808</sup> There is evidence for three of these in the seventh century. The first was between Honorius and Deusdedit,<sup>809</sup> and the third was between Theodore and Berhtwald.<sup>810</sup> The second, between Deusdedit and Theodore, is, however, where we are most likely to find the cause of the gap in the evidence.<sup>811</sup> This episcopal 'interregnum' followed the death of Deusdedit on 14 July in 664.<sup>812</sup> His successor, Theodore, only arrived in 669.<sup>813</sup> There was therefore a gap of essentially five years with no bishop at Canterbury. This is a significant period of time, much longer than either of the other two seventh-century interregnums. Not only that, but this hiatus required the

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<sup>807</sup> P. Wormald in Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, p. 124.

<sup>808</sup> As will become clear, this is not of course to say that an 'interregnum' necessarily resulted in the loss of sources.

<sup>809</sup> *HE* 3.20.

<sup>810</sup> *HE* 5.8.

<sup>811</sup> If the decisive break had occurred between Honorius and Deusdedit then why was Bede still almost completely uninformed about Deusdedit as well? As for Theodore and Berhtwald, there certainly seem to have been political troubles in Kent in the early 690s (Brooks, *Early Church*, pp. 76-77), but Hadrian provided ecclesiastical continuity in Canterbury, as did Gefmund at Rochester. Moreover, it is clear that Albinus was able to provide Bede with material about Theodore's episcopate.

<sup>812</sup> *HE* 4.1.

<sup>813</sup> Since Bede gives 27 May as both the date of Theodore's departure from Rome in 4.1, and of his arrival in Canterbury in 4.2, it seems more likely than is usually credited that one at least of these is wrong: which is less clear.

sending of someone directly from Rome to fill it. This requirement points as clearly as anything to the genuine disjuncture in the ecclesiastical life of Anglo-Saxon England in the 660s.

At the same time, there was a vacancy at the monastery of Ss Peter and Paul. When Benedict Biscop arrived with Theodore he stepped into the vacuum as abbot until Hadrian was able to cross the Channel, after being delayed in Gaul.<sup>814</sup> Bede did not know who had been Biscop's 'predecessor' in the role, so it must be presumed that Biscop did not either. Such ignorance on Bede's behalf, despite having among his sources two abbots of Canterbury – his own late abbot, Benedict Biscop, and his close contact in writing the *HE*, Albinus – is powerful testimony to the evidential gap for the period.<sup>815</sup> With a qualitative break at the 'cathedral', the abbey of Ss Peter and Paul was therefore in no position to provide continuity in its place. As a result, there was therefore a problem at the same point in time in both the major ecclesiastical institutions in Canterbury. Both apparently lacked the barest institutional functionality, incapable even of the choice of successors.

Canterbury was not the only ecclesiastical institution in Kent bereft of leadership at the time. Rochester too lacked a bishop for at least part of the later 660s. Bede was badly informed about the Rochester episcopate and does not seem to know precisely when Damian died. He did, however, apparently have reason to believe that there was a vacancy between Damian's death and the choice and consecration of his successor Putta by Theodore.<sup>816</sup>

Bede would not therefore have been able to rely on Rochester to have preserved materials lost at Canterbury during this troubled period. Both Kentish bishoprics were empty and the major abbey was not only without a head, it had apparently lost almost all

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<sup>814</sup> Actually Bede, in *HA*, c.4, says that Biscop held the abbacy at Canterbury for two years. The precise timing of the 'hand-over' cannot now be retrieved and is not relevant to the present purposes here.

<sup>815</sup> Even Thomas of Elmham, who there is no reason at all to trust for his account of the order of abbatial succession at Ss Peter and Paul, has to accept a vacancy of two years following the death of "Nathaniel": Thomas of Elmham, *Historia*, Titulus, 8, p. 202.

<sup>816</sup> *HE* 4.2. There is reason to think Bede's information about Putta derived not from Kent, but from the *Life of Wilfrid* and sources connected to Mercia.

record of its earlier existence and leaders.<sup>817</sup> No wonder the genuine information which survived about the Kentish church before 669 was so meagre.

In fact, however, the situation was even worse than this, as there are signs that not only was there ecclesiastical disjuncture in Kent in the 660s, but political problems as well. King Eorcenberht died the same day as Deusdedit.<sup>818</sup> Bede says that Eorcenberht's son Egbert took over and ruled for nine years. The situation, however, seems to have been more complex than this. As seen earlier, Bede's information about the succession of Kentish kings was simplistic to the point of being misleading. The basically single line of Kentish royal succession he asserts in the *HE* is not born out by surviving documentary evidence for the kingdom. Both the charters and the lawcodes speak of frequent joint rule and indeed name kings not even mentioned by Bede. It is true that the charters in particular are not without their own difficulties, some of them significant, and the details within them certainly should not be accepted wholesale.<sup>819</sup> Even so, where diplomatic texts can be seen to represent primary sources, the charters – and the lawcodes – merit greater trust than Bede's later, and geographically distant, account, which is apparently based on no more than the king list and genealogy, provided by Albinus and examined above.<sup>820</sup>

Alternative literary evidence, in particular the texts associated with the 'Mildrith Legend', paints a more complex story than Bede's narrative allows.<sup>821</sup> Indeed there are indications in the 'Mildrith Legend' that there may even have been something of a quasi-

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<sup>817</sup> At some level there must have been a degree of survival of personnel over the period; not every single person associated with the church in Kent can possibly all have died off during the period. Plausibly such individuals might have been able, implicitly, to preserve orally some tradition of what had occurred before Deusdedit's death. They may even have been able to preserve some basic liturgical functions at Canterbury, including the commemoration of the dates of the feast days of the dead; but they did not amount to a sufficiently critical mass to maintain the effective functionality of these institutions.

<sup>818</sup> 14 July 664. *HE* 4.1.

<sup>819</sup> Indeed the lack of any surviving charters from the period before Theodore's arrival is probably another sign of the administrative discontinuity that occurred in the 660s, rather than, for instance, an indication that such documents had only been introduced to England by that prelate.

<sup>820</sup> Most of the evidence that survives for Kent suggests a long history of dual kingship with kings of both the eastern and western halves of the kingdom: the former being the senior 'King of Kent'. See, for instance, Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 32-39; or Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 142-46. That Bede's account gives next to no direct sight of this is no evidence against the existence of the system. Given how limited his information about Kentish royalty was, we cannot presume to prioritize his narrative over that of others here, especially the 'primary' sources.

<sup>821</sup> For a discussion of the Mildrith Legend and the texts containing the stories surrounding it, see D. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: a Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester, 1982).

inter-regnum following Eorcenberht's death – or at the very least a guardianship for the young king Ecgberht. One branch of the tale claims that he was a child at accession and that his mother, Seaxburh, acted as regent.<sup>822</sup> Given that Eorcenberht was unlikely to have married Seaxburh until he became king, that is on Eadbald's death, which Bede believed occurred in 640,<sup>823</sup> the story, though only found in this later source, makes sense. Ecgberht is likely to have been no more than about thirteen years old on his father's death, and may well have been younger. Given what has already been said about the impact of the problems of the 660s on the preservation of material, it is no surprise that there is little more than this that can be said about the politics of the period. What meagre information there is though does seem to support the idea of a level of contemporary political dysfunction in Kent, paralleling that found in the ecclesiastical sphere. Nor should the possibility, or perhaps likelihood, of external interference in such a situation be discounted; such assaults could well have come from the Mercians and conceivably even from the Northumbrians. One way or another there seems to have been confusion in the Kentish political sphere in the period at precisely the same time as there was a breakdown in the leadership of the kingdom's ecclesiastical institutions.

Overall therefore, the hiatus in Kent in the 660s amounted to a period of comprehensive and systematic disaster for ecclesiastical life in the kingdom. There was no bishop at Canterbury to lead the church, leaving a vacancy which lasted almost five years. There was no bishop at Rochester to provide an alternate centre. There was no abbot for the key monastery of Ss Peter and Paul's. Finally, this ecclesiastical breakdown was accompanied by an apparent failure at exactly the same time in effective political rule. There was certainly a change in kings, with the new monarch probably a minor, and with rule, such as it was, perhaps exercised through a regency involving his mother. The very confusion in the accounts of the political life of the period points to the confusion of the period itself.

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<sup>822</sup> She was the daughter of Anna king of the East Angles (3.8). She had sisters connected to Faremoutiers (3.8). Another sister was Æthelthryth, the wife of Ecgrith (4.22). Seaxburh succeeded her at Ely as abbess (4.19). According to texts associated with the 'Mildrith Legend', she founded Milton Regis and Minster-in-Sheppey. Her date of death is unknown though later sources claim she died at an advanced age. D. Rollason, "Seaxburh (b. in or before 655, d. c.700)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/article/25150>, accessed 18 March 2013].

<sup>823</sup> *HE* 3.8.

It should be no surprise that such a disastrous few years for the church in Kent should have had a dramatic effect on the chances of survival of Canterbury's records of the early period of the church in the kingdom. In such a situation, it was only natural that next to nothing should be retained. There was apparently no one to take over responsibility for these institutions and their holdings in such circumstances. Indeed, even if there had been sufficient institutional functionality to produce new leaders there would not have been anyone to consecrate them. While problems with a lack of bishops in the 660s may have been at their worst in Kent, they extended across most of the rest of contemporary Anglo-Saxon England. There were no bishops in Essex, which Bede claims reverted to paganism.<sup>824</sup> In Mercia, Bishop Jaruman had died sometime in the mid-660s.<sup>825</sup> Wine was unsatisfactory on more than one account. He had only become a bishop in the first place because Agilbert had been uncanonically expelled from the West Saxon see. Then, following Wine's own expulsion, he had become bishop of London, but only through simony, paying the king of Mercia for the privilege.<sup>826</sup>

Even Northumbria was in trouble. Colman had left after Whitby in 664. Tuda, his replacement, died of plague. The controversy over who should succeed him – Wilfrid or Chad – formed the basis of the various troubles the former was to undergo throughout the rest of his career. Thus when Theodore arrived in 669, apart from Wilfrid, who was without a see, and Berhtgisl, or Boniface, bishop of East Anglia, the only surviving bishops in place were both illegitimate: Wine and Chad, whose own consecration, at the hands of a simoniac and schismatics, was also uncanonical.

So, even if the Kentish church had retained enough continuity to produce new leaders, there was hardly sufficient ecclesiastical vitality elsewhere to be able to take advantage of it. This was not therefore simply a short gap between the end of one episcopate and the beginning of another; rather, the evidence suggests the essential collapse of ecclesiastical functionality for a significant period in Kent, and to a certain extent at least elsewhere. The church in England was therefore in a terrible situation when Theodore arrived.

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<sup>824</sup> *HE* 3.30.

<sup>825</sup> Colgrave dated this rather precisely to 667 (Colgrave and Mynors, p. 336, n. 2). In any case there certainly was a gap, since as Colgrave pointed out, Stephanus mentions (*Life of Wilfrid*, c. 14) that the exiled bishop Wilfrid was required to fulfill episcopal functions in Mercia during this time.

<sup>826</sup> *HE* 3.7.



Indeed, as argued in discussing 3.29 and 4.1, it was for precisely this reason that the pope had been asked to send a new bishop, and, in essence, a new mission in the first place.

The central cause of the devastation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is not far to seek: primarily, at least, it was surely a consequence of the ‘plague’, using the term in its most general sense.<sup>827</sup> Bede spends some time in 3.27 discussing its arrival in 664, and its impact:

a sudden pestilence first depopulated the southern parts of Britain and afterwards attacked the kingdom of Northumbria, raging far and wide with cruel devastation and laying low a vast number of people. Bishop Tuda was carried off by it ... The plague did equal destruction in Ireland.<sup>828</sup>

Tuda was not the only victim Bede noted: Cedd and his whole following died.<sup>829</sup> Cuthbert was infected, but recovered: his master, Boisil, however, passed away.<sup>830</sup> Bede explained the East Saxon reversion to paganism as a consequence of the plague.<sup>831</sup> Ceolfrith and his earlier house of Gilling were also affected as Maddicott showed.<sup>832</sup> Bede returns to the topic in *HE* 4.1, implicitly connecting the arrival of the plague to the deaths of both Deusdedit and Eorcenberht on the same day,<sup>833</sup> and he repeats the year and the mention of the *pestilentia* in the *recapitulatio* in 5.24.

Bede’s statement about Ireland is borne out by the account of Adomnan of Iona in his *Life of Columba*,<sup>834</sup> and by the near contemporary records of the Irish Annals,<sup>835</sup> a slightly corrupt version of which Bede probably possessed.<sup>836</sup> In these, as Dooley put it,

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<sup>827</sup> The extended discussion in J. Maddicott, “Plague in Seventh-Century England”, *Past and Present* 156 (1997), pp. 7-54, remains useful.

<sup>828</sup> *HE* 3.27: “*etiam anno subita pestilentiae lues depopulatis prius australibus Brittanniae plagis, Nordanhymborum quoque prouinciam corripuens atque acerua clade diutius longe lateque desaeuiens, magnam hominum multitudinem strauit. Qua plaga praefatus Domini sacerdos Tuda raptus est de mundo, ... Haec autem plaga Hiberniam quoque insulam pari clade premebat.*”

<sup>829</sup> *HE* 3.23.

<sup>830</sup> *HE* 3.27.

<sup>831</sup> *HE* 3.30.

<sup>832</sup> Anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith*, c.3. Maddicott, “Plague in Seventh-Century England”, pp. 12-13.

<sup>833</sup> Perhaps Damian of Rochester, and Nathaniel of Ss Peter and Paul’s (if he existed), both dying in this period, were other victims, given that Kent seems to have been disproportionately affected.

<sup>834</sup> Adomnan, *Life of Columba*, II.46.

<sup>835</sup> Under 664 in the, so-called, “Chronicle of Ireland”, T. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland volume 1* (Liverpool, 2006), p. 154.

<sup>836</sup> Sharpe has a characteristically informative note on the scale of the plague in Ireland between 664-68 in his translation of the *uita*, noting the various annal references to its impact: *Adomnan of Iona, Life of Columba*, tr., R. Sharpe (London, 1995), pp. 348-49, n. 346.

the plague's arrival appeared as "an epochal occasion".<sup>837</sup> Bede also knew anecdotally of its impact in Ireland. He had been told of its effect on the Irish monastery of Rathmelsigi by a priest who had heard from Egbert himself. Egbert was one of the few there who had not been "carried off by the plague or scattered about in various places".<sup>838</sup> As in England, Irish elites – secular and ecclesiastical – were particularly badly affected, thereby impacting the hegemonial politics of the island.<sup>839</sup> The roots of the church in Ireland, were of course, much deeper by the 660s than those in England, so there was never a question of the very survival of Christianity; but the same could not be said for England.

Other sources, including both the Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert*,<sup>840</sup> and Stephanus' *Life of Wilfrid*,<sup>841</sup> attest to the destruction the plague wrought in the 660s.<sup>842</sup> Given what has already been seen of the dislocation, even in the highest ranks of society, between the death of Deusdedit in 664 and the arrival of Theodore in 669, it seems that Bede was not exaggerating the impact of this scourge.<sup>843</sup> During the latter half of that decade, the plague had drawn a massive fault line in the history of early Christian Anglo-Saxon England. As Maddicott put it: "the plague's immediate impact was probably countrywide in its range and cataclysmic in its consequences".<sup>844</sup> Incidences of pestilence recurred, but after 669 the worst effects and the maximum impact had already been felt.<sup>845</sup> The Christian tradition had simply not been embedded strongly enough to provide the clerics necessary to ensure continuity in the key sees over this period of social catastrophe. Several nominally Christian kingdoms were without pastoral care, seriously undermining sacramental life, given the bishop's usual role in baptism at the time. Kent seems to have

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<sup>837</sup> A. Dooley, "The Plague and its Consequences in Ireland", in L. Little, ed., *Plague and the End of Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2006), 215-28, at p. 219.

<sup>838</sup> *HE* 3.27: "uel mortalitate de saeculo rapti uel per alia essent loca dispersi".

<sup>839</sup> Dooley, "Plague and its Consequences", pp. 219 and 221-23.

<sup>840</sup> Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert*, c. 6.

<sup>841</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c. 18.

<sup>842</sup> One might perhaps wonder if Wilfrid "lingered" (*demorante* – *HE* 3.28) in Gaul out of fear of returning with the plague in full force. This might even explain some of Benedict Biscop's travels.

<sup>843</sup> Maddicott, "Plague in Seventh-Century England", pp. 30-31, suggests that the plague may even have had a greater impact on elites – especially ecclesiastical – than on the largely scattered rural secular population. He also (p. 16) adds Alhfrith, King Oswiu's son, as another potential victim.

<sup>844</sup> Maddicott, "Plague in Seventh-Century England", p. 54.

<sup>845</sup> There was to be a particularly violent recurrence in the 680s, which of course affected Wearmouth-Jarrow as well. Anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith*, c. 14.

been worst hit of all.<sup>846</sup> Stephanus claims that, in an attempt to deal with these various problems, Wilfrid was summoned by King Ecgberht of Kent, “and there he ordained many priests ... and not a few deacons”;<sup>847</sup> but overall, it is clear that the 660s represented a nadir in ecclesiastical life in Kent, amounting almost to the essential flat-lining of the Church in the kingdom.

The direct impact of the plague should therefore be clear, but its indirect effect on the Kentish church may have been just as negative. Ravagings of the plague are likely to have offered temptations to predatory raids, or worse, from other kingdoms. There is no direct evidence for these, but at other times of instability in the seventh century and later Kent presented a tempting target. The political weakness consequent on the destruction wrought by the plague makes it plausible that something similar could have happened at this point too. If so, then such ‘interventions’ may have been as debilitating for the fragile Christian institutions in Kent as the actual plague itself.

Taken together, these elements help to explain why everything Theodore is seen to do on his arrival, and throughout most of his episcopate, appears to show him building the English church up as if *de nouo*. The account in the *HE* of his activities immediately after arrival suggests a man on a mission: he toured the various kingdoms, settling questions over legitimacy in Northumbria, and appointing bishops to fill the various vacancies.<sup>848</sup> Then, within three years he held a major national council, at Hertford, in 672.<sup>849</sup> Cubitt, in fact, saw Theodore as responsible for the foundation of the Anglo-Saxon conciliar tradition.<sup>850</sup> Certainly his foundation of the famous school at Canterbury where he taught

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<sup>846</sup> We know nothing for instance about monastic life in Kent before Theodore. Maddicott’s argument for the disproportionate effect of the plague on monastic communities may explain why: Maddicott, “Plague in Seventh-Century England”, pp. 25-27.

<sup>847</sup> *Life of Wilfrid*, c.14: “*Ecgerhtus quoque rex Cantuariorum religiosus pontificem nostrum ad se accersivit, et illic presbiteros multos, ... et non paucos diacones ordinavit.*”

<sup>848</sup> *HE* 4.2-4.3.

<sup>849</sup> *HE* 4.5. The date is now definitively settled at 672, though Bede himself mistakenly calculates 673, thanks to his eccentric view of which day the indiction began. See for instance, Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>850</sup> Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, pp. 25 and 76. Although her basis was somewhat circular, resting on the absence of evidence for conciliar practice before Theodore. In reality, the point is not that there would have been no synods/councils before 664. It is simply that whereas with Theodore we see the practice restarting, it appears to be beginning as if *ex nihilo* because almost no evidence at all of any episcopal activity at Canterbury survives prior to his time.

with Hadrian might have been designed as a training ground for future bishops, so many were trained there.<sup>851</sup>

These signs that Theodore needed to restart the church in England on his arrival are of course further evidence of the major impact of the break before he came. Rome was, in effect, initiating a new mission; Theodore's arrival was a 'reset' moment for the Anglo-Saxon church, particularly in Kent. His actions and activities show him attempting to re-found the church in England. His emphasis on the cult of Gregory the Great simply underlined this.

Overall, therefore, it is clear that Bede possessed very few primary sources concerning the Gregorian mission in Kent. Canterbury had not preserved them and so Albinus was unable to provide them. The causes of this essential vacuum in the evidence lie in the troubled period of the 660s where the plague did such damage to the ecclesiastical and the political hierarchies that effective continuity with the church of the mission period was broken.<sup>852</sup> The gap was, in terms of the *longue durée*, short enough, however, that its full ramifications have previously evaded historians. In reality, it seems that Canterbury in the late seventh and early eighth centuries were so lacking in reliable information about the 'mission fathers' that, as I shall argue in the next Chapter, the 'Canterbury tradition' they recorded was little more than rhetorical invention based on hagiographical *topoi*.

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<sup>851</sup> In addition to Aldhelm, who became abbot of Malmesbury and then bishop of Sherborne, there was Tobias who became bishop of Rochester; Othfor, later bishop of Worcester; and John of Beverley who became bishop of Hexham and finally of York. Other scholar ecclesiastics flourishing in the late seventh and early eighth centuries should probably be added to the list: Tatwine, later archbishop of Canterbury and, like Aldhelm, author of both a grammatical work and *enigmata*, is another likely candidate, as is Daniel, bishop of Winchester, whose education is described by Bede in the same terms and at the same time as Aldhelm's.

<sup>852</sup> Interestingly, Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, p. 13, made a similar point about the effect of the plague on Jarrow, where he said it divided recollection of the monastery's history and required the essential refoundation of the abbey. The same, on a larger scale, is true of Canterbury.

## Chapter 7

### Bede's 'Canterbury tales'

#### 7.1 The unexplained sections of the Gregorian mission narrative

At this point it would be helpful to summarize how far we have come. All the relevant chapters of the *HE* have been examined, with an analysis of Bede's sources for each statement. In the vast majority of cases it has been possible to discover and describe them. These sources have then been catalogued comprehensively and thematically. As far as possible, they have also been reconstructed and the contents of others have been identified. Finally, in every case, an explanation has been offered for the form Bede's source took and for the route by which he obtained it.

Despite all this progress, there still remain certain passages in the Bedan chapters considered above that have not been able to be sourced and which are not merely rhetorical expression and embellishment on Bede's part. These sections were noted in each chapter, but it is helpful to set them out now together in consecutive order, chapter-by-chapter, in order to be able to view them clear of their context in the *HE*. Placing these elements side-by-side will make it easier to analyze and hopefully elucidate whence Bede derived these pieces of otherwise unexplained information.

#### 1.25

- Augustine arrived in Thanet.
- He had about 40 people with him.
- The king met him on the island, outside, because he was scared of being indoors.
- The group arrived at the meeting bearing a cross and an image of Christ.
- Following their preaching, the king said he was unwilling to convert himself instantly, but granted them leave to preach.

- And gave them a *mansio* in Canterbury.
- The party, taking possession of this dwelling, entered the city singing the Rogation litany.

### 1.26

- Following his conversion, King Æthelberht did not compel anyone else to convert.

### 1.33

- Peter, abbot of Ss Peter and Paul's, was sent on a mission to Gaul.
- He drowned in a bay of the sea known as Amflea (Ambleteuse).
- He was given an unworthy burial.
- But a heavenly light appeared every night above his grave.
- At last the people of the neighbourhood noticed the light and realized the grave must have held a saint's body.
- They found out who the saint had been.
- And they reburied his body honourably in a church in Boulogne.

### 2.2

- Augustine met British ecclesiastics at Augustine's Oak.
- He urged them to work with him.
- They were unwilling to agree.
- In order to test the justice of each case, a blind man was brought in.
- The ministrations of the British bishops failed.
- But the man was cured by Augustine.
- [The British acknowledged Augustine's righteousness.]
- [Augustine prophesied that they would be punished for their unwillingness to help.]

## 2.5

- Eadbald refused to receive the faith.
- He married his father's wife.
- He permitted those who had not converted or were lukewarm to reject Christianity.
- He was punished by frequent fits of madness.
  
- In Essex, on Sæberht's death, his three sons, successors, were all still heathen.
- They practised open idolatry and permitted it.
- They demanded the Eucharist from Mellitus, who refused.
- He was exiled as a result.
  
- He went to Kent and conferred with Laurence and Justus.
- Justus and Mellitus departed for Gaul.
- The East Saxon kings were punished for their crimes by their defeat and death in battle against the Gewisse.

## 2.6

- Laurence slept in the church of Ss Peter and Paul.
- St Peter appeared to him.
- Peter scourged Laurence.
- And admonished him to follow his own example of perseverance.
- Laurence showed Eadbald his stripes.
- Eadbald was shocked.
- He banned all idolatrous worship.
- Gave up his unlawful wife.
- And was baptized.
- On his request Justus and Mellitus returned from Gaul.
- Only Justus received his see back, however.

## 2.7

- Mellitus suffered from gout.
- Canterbury was on fire, which was spreading to the bishop's residence.
- Mellitus had himself carried to the church of the Four Martyrs, which lay in the path of the flames.
- His prayers averted the fire by turning the wind backwards, saving the church and the people.

*2.9; 2.12-14; 2.16; 2.20*

Although this study has not concentrated on the 'Northumbrian' material, it is not impossible that some of Bede's information concerning Paulinus, as one of the early 'mission fathers', may have been of a similar character to the other stories we have been noting, and whose provenance must surely be Canterbury.

## 2.20

- Romanus drowned in the Italian Sea on a mission to Pope Honorius for Justus, bishop of Canterbury.

This then is the sum total of what was not possible to be sourced in the Bedan chapters considered above. The intriguing connections these stories share have already been commented on in a general way. Now all the pieces have been placed together, that picture becomes even clearer, and it is necessary to consider and discuss those characteristics in more detail in order to understand Bede's sources for these passages.

## 7.2 Characteristics of the 'Canterbury tales'

Perhaps the more important shared characteristic of these passages is that almost all of these otherwise unsourced sections are extended stories, the core, at least, of which, it is difficult to imagine coming from more than a single source. Even those parts which are dispersed among other, sourced, sections of a chapter, such as the landing on Thanet, or



the mention of the nearly forty companions in 1.25, fit naturally as parts of the story that Bede later goes on to tell. Stories, such as the meeting with Æthelberht, or the miraculous discovery of Peter's body, or Laurence's vision of St Peter, are not each compiled by Bede from information he had collected from a variety of sources. They read as single-sourced tales, although Bede may have retold them in his own words. The material within them is not explainable by other sources that have survived. Nor could the stories, or the details within them, plausibly be derived from what one might term more archival-type sources, such as episcopal lists, epitaphs, or even annals. In fact, one cannot easily envisage any type of sources out of which each tale could have been individually compiled. They are not therefore Bede's complex confection from a variety of different ingredients. With allowance made for some narrative crossing over two Bedan chapters, each reads like its own coherent story. Overall, there is no reasonable doubt that the tales must have come from narrative sources, each essentially from its own.

Despite the individuality, or internal cohesion, of each story, however, we should not underestimate the common elements, which unite the tales as a group. The most obvious point, of course, is that every one of these stories relates to members of the Gregorian mission or to the progress of that mission. Bede presumably obtained the sources for all these accounts from Albinus and Canterbury. The apparent emergence therefore of a set of stories about the early 'mission fathers', used by Bede in a work inspired and informed by Canterbury, is already suggestive.

There are, however, yet more thematic connections between these tales. All are hagiographic, at least in tone, and some are direct accounts of miracle working: the miraculous light which drew the locals to Peter's place of burial; Augustine's cure of the blind man; his prophecy of misfortune for the British stubbornness; the punishments Eadbald and the East Saxon kings suffered for their resistance to the faith; Laurence's vision and scourging; and Mellitus turning the Canterbury fire back by his prayers. These narratives sources can then be described as hagiographic in nature. We do not, therefore, simply have a set of stories about Augustine and his party: we have a set of miracle stories about them. This is, in short, a hagiographic collection.

Moreover, there are strong anachronistic elements in many, which go beyond their status as hagiography: Æthelberht's fear of meeting a Christian indoors (1.25); the party

entering Canterbury singing litanies not known in Rome until a century later (1.25); and the confusion over who precisely did ‘convert’ Eadbald, are the most obvious examples (2.6 and 2.8, 2.10 and 2.11). But none of the stories provides any useful positive or comparative dating evidence. Nothing in any of them suggests direct knowledge of events or points to composition near the time the story is said to have taken place. The anachronistic, and indeed often implausible, nature of much of the evidence strongly suggests that this was a collection composed significantly after the events in question. This characteristic should probably also be taken as an indication that Bede found these stories in written sources, rather than simply oral tradition.

Furthermore, many of the tales rely on hagiographic *topoi*, with clear parallels especially in the works of Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*: the heavenly light guiding locals to Peter’s tomb; Augustine healing a blind man to prove the error of spiritually blind heretics/schismatics; Laurence’s physical scourging by a saint in a vision; and Mellitus turning back a fire in the town. The latter tale is so clearly derived from the *Dialogues*, that Mellitus has even been given gout in imitation of the model! These examples do not only underline the hagiographic nature of Bede’s sources for these stories, they also emphasize the lack of genuine information about the ‘mission fathers’ possessed by the ‘author(s)’ of these tales. The need to copy so precisely the accounts of miracles found elsewhere is a sign of how disconnected the writer was from the early seventh century and the Augustinian mission.

Bede himself seems to have had his reservations about the material. This points to yet one more connection shared between the unsourced stories in these chapters: Bede frequently caveats them. Bede’s methods of caveating have already been dealt with at length above. Suffice it to say that Bede uses characteristic phrases – such as *ferunt* – to indicate that he does not have full confidence in his sources, for whatever reason. As shown earlier, such comments do not mean that Bede’s statement was automatically based on ‘hearsay’. On several occasions Bede used such a phrase when his source must have been a written one, as was almost certainly also the case here.

Bede’s caveats cover a cross-section of these stories, the extent of which can be viewed most easily by organizing the instances by chapter.

## 1.25

- The claim that Augustine landed with his companions who are said to have been nearly 40 in number, is caveated with *ferunt*.
- The statement that as the party approached the city they sang the litany Bede cites, is caveated with *fertur*.

## 1.26

- The assertion that Æthelberht compelled no one to accept Christianity is caveated with *perhibetur*.

## 2.2

- The claim that Augustine warned the British with threats is caveated with *fertur*.

## 2.5

- The story of Sæberht's pagan sons' demands of Mellitus is caveated with *ut uulgo fertur*.

The prevalence of such caveats in these stories is striking. About ten percent of all such cautious phrasing in the entire *HE* is found in these tales. Their repetition across the span of this Canterbury hagiographic collection is further support for the conclusion that the tales came from the same overall source: certainly Bede's attitude to their trustworthiness was similar. Perhaps this was because he, like us, could see how *topos*-bound so much of the content was. Perhaps also there is a hint at the nature of the sources Bede had been given: a written source, with a sufficiently 'oral' character to inspire him to caution his readers. This is something that will require further consideration later.

### 7.3 The shape and content of Bede's 'Canterbury tales'

By placing the information Bede took from these sources together, it is clear that the collection of tales consisted, at a minimum, of stories about the following figures: Augustine – two stories (or one about the 'mission party' in general, and one about

Augustine specifically); Laurence; Mellitus – two stories; possibly Paulinus; and plausibly Romanus.

Although Bede might theoretically have been drawing each story from a longer *uita* of each saint, this seems unlikely. That does not appear to be the type of story under discussion here. There are no indications that Bede has substantially more information than he provides or that he is working from larger individual *Lives* of say Mellitus or Augustine. The stories he tells are not extracts from *uitae* written on the scale of others he used, such as those of Cuthbert, Wilfrid, or Germanus. Rather, the episodes imply an originally more abbreviated treatment of each saint, limited to a miraculous event or two. Thus, a better comparison would be to the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, or a work like the *Glory of the Confessors* by Gregory of Tours, or perhaps even more his *Life of the Fathers*. The scale of the total Canterbury collection would have been much less ambitious than any of these examples, and would certainly have contained fewer saints and probably miracles. Nonetheless, the basic model of short, quasi-anecdotal miracle stories, often intended, in Gregory of Tours' works at least, to boost the cult of a specific church, seems to fit the evidence for Bede's 'Canterbury tales'. The connections between these similar tales from the same location suggests that Bede's source is best understood as a collection of little stories within a longer book, in which the *gesta* of these early heroes were brought together. Perhaps, to borrow the model of Gregory of Tours' *Life of the Fathers*, we might conceive of a series of short *libelli* of *miracula* collected together inside a single larger *liber*.<sup>853</sup>

It is even possible to reconstruct the basic outlines of these *libelli*, and thus, implicitly, the *liber*. There might be some ambiguity over one or two of the possible stories – for instance that concerning Romanus – but most are very clear. The division of content was evidently by saint, although one initial chapter/*libellus* about the mission party as a whole would also be quite consistent with the evidence. Each of the 'chapters' would then have included one or more stories about the saint in question. Ideally, these would have included a miraculous sign of their heroic virtue. Normally, however, the tales would be necessarily anachronistic in content, given the author's lack of reliable information about

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<sup>853</sup> Perhaps it bears repeating that this work should not be seen as a Canterbury version of the Roman *Liber Pontificalis* for which there is no evidence.

the ‘mission fathers’. Bede, of course, has not inserted the material into the *HE* in precisely the order he will have found it in his source: he was too skilled a writer, and indeed a historian, to be restricted in such a way. But by dividing up those stories which share the characteristics examined above according to the saint who is the chief protagonist, we can move towards a restoration of the original narrative cohesion. Thus, the basic structure of the original collection of ‘Canterbury tales’ which Bede possessed, starts to emerge.<sup>854</sup>

## Augustine

### *Story One*

- Augustine arrived in Thanet. [1.25]
- He had about 40 people with him. [1.25]
- The king met him on the island – outside – because he was scared of being indoors. [1.25]
- The group arrived at the meeting bearing a cross and an image of Christ. [1.25]
- Following their preaching, the king said he was unwilling to convert himself instantly, but granted them leave to preach. [1.25]
- And gave them a *mansio* in Canterbury. [1.25]
- The party, taking possession of this dwelling, entered the city singing the Rogation litany. [1.25]
- Following his conversion, King Æthelberht did not compel anyone else to convert. [1.26]

Perhaps, up to here, the chapter/*libellus* was actually about the ‘**Mission party**’,<sup>855</sup> rather than Augustine, whose individual tale may have been limited to little more than the next story.

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<sup>854</sup> In most cases the content of each *libellus* was confined to a single chapter of the *HE*, but since there is some cross-over, the *HE* reference for each previously unsourced statement is placed in square brackets. The order in which the *libelli* are placed here is not necessary the same as that in which they were originally organized in the *liber*.

<sup>855</sup> Possibly also including, as was noted at the time, some of the generic material about the party’s virtues and the conversion of the king.

*Story Two*

- Augustine met British ecclesiastics at Augustine's Oak. [2.2]
- He urged them to work with him. [2.2]
- They were unwilling to agree. [2.2]
- In order to test the justice of each case, a blind man was brought in. [2.2]
- The ministrations of the British bishops failed. [2.2]
- But the man was cured by Augustine. [2.2]
- [The British acknowledged Augustine's righteousness]. [2.2]
- [Augustine prophesied that they would be punished for their unwillingness to help]. [2.2]

**Laurence**

- Eadbald refused to receive the faith. [2.5]
- He married his father's wife. [2.5]
- He permitted those who had not converted or were lukewarm to reject Christianity. [2.5]
- He was punished by frequent fits of madness. [2.5]
- Laurence slept in the church of Ss Peter and Paul. [2.6]
- St Peter appeared to him. [2.6]
- Peter scourged Laurence. [2.6]
- And admonished him to follow his own example of perseverance. [2.6]
- Laurence showed Eadbald his stripes. [2.6]
- Eadbald was shocked. [2.6]
- He banned all idolatrous worship. [2.6]
- Gave up his unlawful wife. [2.6]
- And was baptized. [2.6]

**Mellitus***Story One*

- In Essex, on Sæberht's death, his three sons, successors, were all still heathen. [2.5]

- They practised open idolatry and permitted it. [2.5]
- They demanded the Eucharist from Mellitus, who refused. [2.5]
- He was exiled as a result. [2.5]
- He went to Kent and conferred with Laurence and Justus. [2.5]
- Justus and Mellitus departed for Gaul. [2.5]
- The East Saxon kings were punished for their crimes by their defeat and death in battle against the Gewisse. [2.5]
- Mellitus returned with Justus from Gaul at Eadbald's request after his conversion. [2.6]
- But Mellitus did not regain his see of London. [2.6]

### *Story Two*

- Mellitus suffered from gout. [2.7]
- Canterbury was on fire, which was spreading to the bishop's residence. [2.7]
- Mellitus had himself carried to the church of the Four Martyrs, which lay in the path of the flames. [2.7]
- His prayers averted the fire by turning the wind backwards, saving the church and the people. [2.7]

### **Peter**

- Peter, abbot of Ss Peter and Paul's, was sent on a mission to Gaul. [1.33]
- He drowned in a bay of the sea known as Amflea (Ambleteuse). [1.33]
- He was given an unworthy burial. [1.33]
- But a heavenly light appeared every night above his grave. [1.33]
- At last the people of the neighbourhood noticed the light and realized the grave must hold a saint's body. [1.33]
- They found out who the saint had been. [1.33]
- And they reburied his body honourably in a church in Boulogne. [1.33]

**Paulinus?** [2.9; 2.12-14; 2.16; 2.20]

Most of Bede's stories concerning Paulinus appear to have been derived from Northumbrian material. Indeed, in general, their principle protagonist seems to have been the king, Edwin, rather than the bishop. We have seen no specific narrative about Paulinus which could naturally be claimed as one of the 'Canterbury tales', but so much of what Bede 'knew' about him seems to have been anecdotal that the possibility should still not be dismissed out of hand.

**Romanus**

- Romanus drowned in the Italian Sea on a mission to Pope Honorius for Justus, bishop of Canterbury. [2.20]

As noted previously, Bede uses this story merely to preface his mention of Paulinus taking over the see of Rochester. Perhaps, therefore, rather than being taken from a separate *libellus* about Romanus, this is simply a parenthetical detail from one about Paulinus.

This completes the set of chapters/*libelli* from the Canterbury hagiographic collection in which, thanks to the content of the *HE*, one can have some confidence. Given, however, that this group includes stories for several of the mission party, we might speculate that *libelli* were also originally dedicated to both Justus and Honorius.<sup>856</sup> If these were in the initial collection, then no sign of them has survived in Bede's work. Perhaps they never existed; or perhaps by the time the *HE*'s narrative had reached the chronological stage where those tales would have fitted, Bede was already deep into stories based on his Northumbrian material and was unwilling to increase the scale of the work or shift the balance out of proportion by including more from the Canterbury source.

As it stands, this collection, and especially each individual *libellus*, is short even in comparison with say Gregory of Tours' *Vita Patrum*. Thus, while they are unlikely to have been much longer, it is quite reasonable to imagine that each *libellus* included more than the solitary stories Bede needed and used. To an extent it should be expected that

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<sup>856</sup> If Bede is right that the latter was one of the Roman party.



Bede picked from the collection only what he wanted for the construction of his chosen narrative in the *HE*, just as he also did with the Gregorian letters he possessed.

The same reasoning may explain why only a very small amount at best of the *HE* material about Romanus and Paulinus appears to have derived from Bede's 'Canterbury tales'. The only real information Bede provides about Romanus is a surprising story, raising complex chronological problems beyond the scope of this study, describing the manner of his death in what is almost a throwaway line. Nor is there any clarity about Paulinus. The best argument for the dedication of a *libellus* to him is the sheer scale of stories associated with Paulinus in the *HE*. The same, however, can be said for the *Whitby Life*, which clearly had no access to the 'Canterbury tales'.<sup>857</sup> Moreover, none of the Paulinus stories in either work points unambiguously in the direction of Canterbury as a source in the ways that the others do. We should therefore be ready to conclude that despite the range of material on Paulinus, all of the anecdotes surrounding him could quite credibly have come to Bede from Northumbrian tradition.

Nonetheless, even if those chapters/*libelli* are ruled out of the projected hagiographic work, it is still clear that Bede had a significant amount of content to work with and that he used it most effectively. This conclusion raises the question of whether it might be possible to retrieve any of the original source or even provide the groundwork for an edition of some of the stories from the collection. As Campbell noted, in relation to Bede's use of the *Life of Germanus*: "Where we know what his sources were, and they have survived, he can be seen often to have followed them word for word or very nearly so."<sup>858</sup> In considering the question of Bede's treatment of hidages in analyzing 1.25, this study has itself pointed to a place where Bede's surprising vocabulary seems to imply his possession of a 'Northumbrian' charter. Thus, especially in those places where a whole section of a chapter in the *HE* seems to have been dedicated to one of these single-sourced stories, it is reasonable to wonder whether Bede may not simply be copying down verbatim what was in front of him.

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<sup>857</sup> Indeed, the case for the *Life*'s access to any material at all from Canterbury is much weaker than Colgrave believed.

<sup>858</sup> J. Campbell, "Bede II", in Campbell, *Essays*, 29-48, at p. 36. He made a similar point in Campbell, "Bede's *Reges* and *Principes*", in Campbell, *Essays*, 85-98, at p. 13, n. 9. Harrison reached the same conclusion independently: Harrison, *Framework*, p. 134.

In the absence of the original sources, however, this is very difficult to prove, even indicatively. Although Bede did have difficulties in moving away from the narrative of the source in front of him, he was nonetheless an author who was quite capable of rewriting the phrasing to improve the rhetorical effect. Such is obvious even from just the recasting of the Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert*.

At first sight, these ‘Canterbury tales’ seem to be quite Bedan in style; but further vocabulary research on them would certainly be worthwhile in case any of the original was obtainable. To mention just one example: in the story of Mellitus’ miraculous deterrence of the fire in Canterbury,<sup>859</sup> Bede uses the phrase *a lesione* twice, but he does not use that word anywhere else in the *HE*. Might this therefore represent a borrowing from the original?

Certainly, from a merely practical perspective, it is very hard to believe that none of these hagiographic sections and stories retains any of the original text of the source from which they came. Such an analysis would need to be an extended one and there is not the space to undertake it here.<sup>860</sup> Even such a comprehensive vocabulary analysis, however, is unlikely to provide sufficient materials for an edition, in the usual sense, of the collection. The best one could probably hope for is the recovery of certain phrases. Otherwise, it is difficult to go beyond what has already been set out above: namely the basic structure of the *liber*, and the essential content of many of the *libelli* it comprised.

#### 7.4 Nature of the ‘Canterbury tales’

One thing should be clear by now: Bede was not working from orally obtained information. At one level this should be obvious. Given that this is Canterbury information, Nothelm has hardly been told all these stories by Albinus and then merely repeated them, parrot-like, to Bede. At the very least Albinus has written up the stories

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<sup>859</sup> *HE* 2.7.

<sup>860</sup> One question that immediately comes to mind in this context is whether the eleventh-century *Lives* of these Canterbury saints by Goscelin drew on the earlier source material. It has generally been assumed that Goscelin was using only Bede (and his imagination) for his account. This probably remains the most likely position, but now it is perhaps not impossible to wonder whether in addition to Bede, Goscelin was also using a local source that Bede had drawn on himself earlier. A definitive answer to this question is not possible until the publication of Richard Sharpe’s eagerly awaited edition of these hagiographic works.

himself and given them to Nothelm to take north with him. But such a minimalist version of events is hardly convincing given all that has been seen above. There is more behind Bede's stories than a hastily-written epistolary summary of the current stories about the first mission saints which were circulating in Canterbury in the early eighth century.<sup>861</sup>

Armed now with a more informed understanding of the characteristics of these stories and the nature of the source in which they seem to have originally been found, careful consideration of Bede's account in the *HE* Preface of the information he received from Canterbury seems to confirm that a source of precisely this type had reached him from Albinus via Nothelm, on his first visit:

My principal authority and helper in this modest work has been the reverend Abbot Albinus, a man of universal learning who was educated in the Kentish Church by Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian of blessed memory, both venerable and learned men. **There he carefully ascertained, from written records or from the old traditions, all that the disciples of St Gregory had done in the kingdom of Kent or in the neighbouring kingdoms. He passed on to me whatever seemed worth remembering through Nothelm, a godly priest of the Church in London, either in writing or by word of mouth.**<sup>862</sup>

The source being posited here, and which I have worked towards reconstructing, would fit neatly within this description: written sources about the deeds of the disciples of Pope Gregory the Great both in Kent and in the neighbouring regions.

Even so, it might seem surprising that such a source has so completely disappeared that the only evidence for it is buried in Bede's more hagiographic chapters on the members of the Gregorian mission in the *HE*.<sup>863</sup> One more piece of evidence indicating the existence of such a source may also help in explaining this anomaly and point towards a further clue concerning the collection's nature.

In 2.3, while describing the church of Ss Peter and Paul, Canterbury, Bede states that:

<sup>861</sup> As Higham, *Bede as Oral Historian*, p. 7, suggested.

<sup>862</sup> *HE* Preface: "Auctor ante omnes atque adiutor opusculi huius Albinus abba reuerentissimus, uir per omnia doctissimus, extitit; qui in ecclesia Cantuariorum a beatae memoriae Theodoro archiepiscopo et Hadriano abbate, uiris uenerabilibus atque eruditissimis, **institutus diligenter omnia, quae in ipsa Cantuariorum prouincia uel etiam in contigis eidem regionibus a discipulis beati papae Gregorii gesta fuere, uel monimentis litterarum uel seniorum traditione cognouerat, et ea mihi de his quae memoria digna uidebantur per religiosum Lundoniensis ecclesiae presbyterum Nothelmum, siue litteris mandata siue ipsius Nothelmi uiua uoce referenda, transmisit.**" The emphases are, of course, added.

<sup>863</sup> Although one should not underestimate the extent to which the phenomenal popularity of the *HE* and the reliance on its authority led to the loss of much earlier material, including that used by Bede as sources.

*Habet haec in medio pene sui altare in honore beati papae Gregorii dedicatum, in quo per omne sabbatum a presbytero loci illius agenda eorum sollemniter celebrantur.*<sup>864</sup>

Colgrave translates this passage as if Bede is simply saying that Mass was celebrated in the honour of those original missionaries every Saturday. Here he is following the note in Plummer who claimed that in this context *agenda* “means Mass”, taken “from the phrase ‘*agere missas*’”.<sup>865</sup> This may well be Bede’s meaning, but if so, such commemorative Masses for these saints would have required material to preach from. A set of stories such as that sent to Bede would be the ideal resource. Indeed, the use of the term *agenda* might, of course, mean something more specific than ‘Mass’. Bede may well be saying that, each Saturday, the deeds of these mission saints were celebrated.<sup>866</sup> If so, that points yet more directly to the existence of material from which to do this. Either way, we seem to be looking plausibly at a homiletic source.

Interestingly, homily material is often considered to have lain behind much of Gregory of Tours’ hagiography.<sup>867</sup> Gregory himself refers to the reading of stories from a saint’s *uita* on their feast-day as normal practice.<sup>868</sup> In the same way, the short ‘Canterbury tales’, focusing on some fairly formulaic miracles, would have been the ideal material for such commemorative preaching. Crucially, however, unless someone chose to write them up into specific hagiographic *uitae*, as Gregory of Tours did for his, they would be unlikely to survive independently. They represented a much more transitory resource than a standard saint’s life, and one, incidentally, which would have retained its implicitly oral character. Thus, this would also help to explain Bede’s own consistent caveats about the material he had acquired from the collection. A homiletic source, which, while written,

<sup>864</sup> HE 2.3. The Colgrave version is: “Almost in the middle of the chapel is an altar dedicated in honour of the pope St Gregory, at which a priest of that place celebrates a solemn Mass in their memory every Saturday.”

<sup>865</sup> Plummer, 2.81.

<sup>866</sup> This is how Thacker, “In Gregory’s Shadow?”, p. 374, for instance, took it.

<sup>867</sup> See for instance, J. Schlick, “Composition et chronologie des ‘De virtutibus sancti Martini’ de Gregoire de Tours”, in F. Cross, ed., *Studia Patristica* (Berlin, 1966), pp. 278-86; or R. Van Dam in the Introduction to his translation of Gregory’s *Glory of the Martyrs* (*Gregory of Tours, Glory of the Martyrs*, tr. R. Van Dam (Liverpool, 2004), p. xxi).

<sup>868</sup> For instance, *Glory of the Martyrs*, c. 85.

would have been by its very nature quasi-oral, if not ‘hearsay’, would fit Bede’s reservations, as well as the rest of the evidence, perfectly.<sup>869</sup>

This, therefore, is probably how we should conceive of the ‘Canterbury tales’ that Albinus and Nothelm put at Bede’s disposal: a connected series of homiletic ‘lives’ of the Gregorian mission saints which were already in a written form ready to be sent to Bede, but not composed in a sufficiently formal rhetorical format to be treated as a ‘book’ worth preserving and disseminating on its own terms.

## 7.5 Dating the ‘Canterbury tales’

One question remains: when do these ‘Canterbury tales’ date from? The similarities to the hagiography of Gregory of Tours or Gregory the Great should not mislead us into thinking that these Canterbury works were essentially contemporary with the works of those authors. Quite the opposite; all the evidence suggests that these sources were put together significantly later than the events in question. The connections with earlier hagiography amount to evidence of nothing more than the education and intellectual context and contacts maintained in Canterbury at the time these stories were composed. They represent a similarity based on conscious copying of famous sources, rather than one borne of a shared milieu. The stories in this collection were composed much later than the ‘events’ they describe.

Unfortunately, more precise dating of Bede’s ‘Canterbury tales’ is very difficult. The anachronism in the detail and the *topos*-driven approach to the ‘mission’ period strongly suggest that they were written long after the death of any who had lived through those events, or who could convey a genuine sense of the world of the early seventh century. The broad dating range therefore for the origins of the collection lies between the early stages of Theodore’s episcopate and about 720, when Bede obtained them from Albinus via Nothelm.

Within those boundaries, it is possible to posit a general purpose for their creation; this implies at least a thematic context, which might in turn be suggestive chronologically.

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<sup>869</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that Thacker, “In Gregory’s Shadow?”, p. 385, argued that the Canterbury cult of Augustine was primarily liturgical.

Clearly the works are intended to commemorate and celebrate these saints and so it makes sense to associate their composition with attempts to promote, or perhaps inaugurate, the cults of these individuals – especially if it is right to associate the work with the weekly celebration at Ss Peter and Paul’s of the mission fathers’ ‘deeds’. In this context, it should be remembered that the epitaphs of Augustine and Liudhard, and presumably therefore also of the other bishops of Canterbury before the great break of the 660s, were not composed before Theodore’s episcopate at the earliest. Perhaps then, the composition of the episcopal epitaphs and of the hagiographic narratives were both activities associated with the same program to raise the profile of the early mission. The use of hagiographic texts to enshrine or establish ecclesiastical claims is seen frequently throughout the early Middle Ages, and beyond.<sup>870</sup> Picard even argued that, by 700, Irish hagiography had become principally concerned with establishing such claims.<sup>871</sup>

When would such a motivation make most sense at Canterbury? The obvious answer must be the time of Theodore, who on his arrival undertook a self-conscious *renouatio ecclesiae*. Pursuing such an agenda, the production of epitaphs and hagiography related to the ‘founding fathers’ would make perfect sense. Thacker has argued something very similar for the cult of Gregory the Great, which he has shown Theodore successfully developed within the English church.<sup>872</sup> Thacker also argued that Theodore did this at the expense of Augustine.<sup>873</sup> In contrast, we may be seeing signs that this was not actually the case. Thacker’s argument was based on the absence of evidence for a promotion of Augustine’s cult.<sup>874</sup> Perhaps now the evidence has been found.

Such an interpretation would fit well with Hollis’ claim, apropos the cult of Mildrith, that, in the later seventh century, “to have translated her remains without creating a legend of the saint would have been unusual.”<sup>875</sup> Books, though not necessarily

<sup>870</sup> The later ‘Histories’ relating to Glastonbury or Abingdon are good examples of this.

<sup>871</sup> J. Picard, “The Purpose of Adomnan’s *Vita Columbae*”, *Peritia* 1 (1982), 160-77, at p. 170.

<sup>872</sup> Thacker, “Memorializing Gregory”, pp. 75-78.

<sup>873</sup> Thacker, “In Gregory’s Shadow?”, pp. 380-83. He actually went as far as to suggest (p. 383) “a certain indifference to Augustine’s memory in Canterbury itself”.

<sup>874</sup> Although, even Thacker had to acknowledge that Augustine’s date of death was included in Bede’s *Martyrology* and that province-wide celebration of this feast day was mandated by the 747 Council of Clofesho, Canon 17. In an attempt to deal with at least the latter fact, he argued that the real start of the cult of Augustine only began once Canterbury had lost its pretensions to ‘national’ dominance; but this is not convincing. Thacker, “In Gregory’s shadow?”, pp. 382-83.

<sup>875</sup> S. Hollis, “The Minster-in-Thamet foundation story”, *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998), 41-64, at p. 62.

hagiography, were apparently regularly placed on display at ecclesiastical tombs in the period.<sup>876</sup> Chattain suggested that the mid-seventh-century *Life of Fursey* was probably written for his translation.<sup>877</sup> The existence of such hagiography was thus, as a general rule, vital for constructing and sustaining a prospective saint's cult.<sup>878</sup> This, then, may well be what happened with Augustine and the other 'mission fathers' as well.

Nonetheless, even though such consistency of purpose might be considered indicative, it needs to be recognized that the case remains uncertain. Emphasis on the importance of Augustine and the rest of the 'mission fathers' might have been almost as useful for Berhtwald's efforts to expand and solidify Canterbury's authority in the early eighth century as it would have been for Theodore's earlier attempt to revive ecclesiastical life in the country. Indeed, if the epitaphs and hagiography dated to Berhtwald's episcopate, these activities might well be linked to the same process which gave rise to the commissioning of the *HE*.

Overall, perhaps the case for a Theodorean context for the creation of these texts may be stronger;<sup>879</sup> but whether these works dated to the late seventh century or the early eighth, both the epitaphs and the 'Canterbury tales' are evidence for the close working relationship of cathedral and abbey in this period and of their joint efforts towards shared agendas.

## 7.6 Conclusions

We have, therefore, a set of late seventh/early eighth-century stories of the Canterbury saints, memorializing them, but not on any firm historical basis, and in fact with frequent signs of anachronistic understanding of their past. Again, it should be emphasized that this does not mean that every single item is inevitably false; but it should be clear that no

<sup>876</sup> M. Brown, "*In the beginning was the Word*": *Books and Faith in the Age of Bede* (Jarrow, 2000), p. 10. The Lindisfarne Gospels is the obvious example, but it seems plausible that something similar also happened at St Brigit's tomb.

<sup>877</sup> P. Ni Chathain, "Aspects of Irish Treatment of Some Works of Bede", in Lebecq, Perrin and Szerwiniack, *Venerable Bede*, 283-87 at p. 285.

<sup>878</sup> Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, p. 4.

<sup>879</sup> In this context, it may be worth mentioning an anonymous Byzantine source from the 660s, *The Miracles of St Artemios*, ed. and tr., V. Crisafulli and J. Nesbitt (Leiden, 1997), which includes several *incubatio* miracles where the man experiencing the vision is physical punished by the saint, as occurred to Bishop Laurence in 2.6.

weight should be placed on the details within them.<sup>880</sup> Indeed, it is further evidence of the conclusion from Chapter 6: there was a very real gap in the administration and records of Kent during the 660s. The veracity of the elements of the stories cannot therefore be taken for granted. It is not possible simply to remove the miracles from the stories and trust what is left. There are no inherent grounds for believing the information these stories contain about the Gregorian mission. Rather, only a specific reason should make us consider trusting any individual detail within them. This is especially true, given not only how anachronistic the stories were in places, but also how reliant they were on hagiographic *topoi* for their material. Mellitus did not have gout.

Interestingly, there is another set of English saints' lives which follow much the same pattern and also derived from Kent: those relating to the, so-called, 'Mildrith Legend'.<sup>881</sup> The origins of the 'Mildrith Legend' stories, and the nature of their recording, differ in important ways from Bede's 'Canterbury tales'. Nonetheless, the process of composition of the 'Mildrith Legend' points to an intellectual and cultural atmosphere in Kent c.700 in which such compositions could be expected.<sup>882</sup> Moreover the Mildrith material, like that of the 'Canterbury tales' seems to have been linked to stories about the royal house.<sup>883</sup> The 'Canterbury tales' were therefore far from exceptional. Indeed, some of the stories even share *topoi* with those in the 'Mildrith Legend'.<sup>884</sup>

More space could be devoted than is possible here to a comparison of the content and structure of the 'Mildrith Legend' with the 'Canterbury tales'. This might well add to the understanding of both.<sup>885</sup> One important similarity between the two, however, should be emphasized: the content of both is more legendary than historical. This may help guide modern historians' usage of the material from the 'Canterbury tales'. The 'Mildrith Legend' stories are sources that scholars do use, but cautiously – sometimes not

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<sup>880</sup> That they might be right in places, especially concerning relatively obvious points, does not validate the source.

<sup>881</sup> The central treatment of this collection remains Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, although there are useful later studies including: Hollis, "Minster-in-Thamet"; and R. Sharpe, "Goscelin's St Augustine and St Mildrith: Hagiography and Liturgy in Context", *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990), pp. 502-16.

<sup>882</sup> Harrison, *Framework*, pp. 120-41, argues for the composition of other 'historical' materials in c.670.

<sup>883</sup> Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, p. 41.

<sup>884</sup> Guidance from heavenly light, for instance, occurs in both.

<sup>885</sup> Perhaps especially because Canterbury seems to have played a later role in the dissemination of texts associated with the 'Mildrith Legend': for instance, Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, p. 31.



cautiously enough, perhaps.<sup>886</sup> There is no real reason to rely on the traditions within the stories, though it might perhaps be feasible to trust them for some details of the names involved, even if only to the extent that they may represent evidence that such individuals existed.<sup>887</sup> In fact, there is good reason to trust them less. The royal material in the ‘Mildrith Legend’ stories is hardly the most convincing part of the text. As Rollason pointed out, the ‘Mildrith Legend’ stories often give the impression of having been drawn up with, as it were, a genealogy in the author’s other hand.<sup>888</sup> So too, the ‘Canterbury tales’ could perhaps be said to have been drawn up with one eye on an episcopal list. But the actual stories included in the ‘Mildrith Legend’ fill us with no confidence in the credibility of the tales as a source. Something similar might be said about the hagiographic stories concerning the early mission fathers composed in Canterbury identified above.

In conclusion, therefore, it has been possible to identify the sources behind several, indeed almost all, of the *HE* passages that were unable to be sourced previously. Thanks to Albinus and Nothelm, Bede had access to a connected series of stories about the Gregorian mission saints which was probably in the form of homiletic or quasi-homiletic material such as was used at Canterbury in the weekly commemoration of these saints in the church of Ss Peter and Paul. These ‘Canterbury tales’ were composed and compiled long after the events in question and in tone are more reminiscent of the texts connected to the ‘Mildrith Legend’ than to any of the more archival sources Bede also used. We have to be more than cautious if we chose to use material from these stories as evidence for Kent in the early seventh century or for the conversion more generally. No weight can be placed on these hagiographic and deeply anachronistic accounts, especially given their reliance for even minor details on long-standing *topoi*. It has been possible to suggest reconstructions of many of the elements and much of the content – and probably even the organization – of Bede’s original source; but the question of language is a more difficult one. Bede was probably often quoting verbatim, but more research would, however, be

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<sup>886</sup> Sometimes the trust which historians invest in the information found in the ‘Mildrith Legend’ seems to be extremely ill-placed.

<sup>887</sup> The obvious example from the ‘Mildrith Legend’ which has already been briefly mentioned, is Ymme/Emma.

<sup>888</sup> Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, p. 42.

required to demonstrate that particular hypothesis more fully and to see whether something approaching a tentative edition of the basic source text might be possible.

It should be acknowledged in advance, however, that the prospects are not good for anything comprehensive. If one considers, for instance, the relation of Bede's account of Fursey with the *uita* on which he drew, then it is clear that, had the latter not survived, it would not be possible to reconstruct it from Bede's references. The same is true for Gildas;<sup>889</sup> and, sadly, the same is probably true for the 'Canterbury tales'. This is not to say that they are entirely irretrievable. It is simply that Bede's very method, as shown earlier in this study, means the language will almost certainly be mainly his, even though the content and the narratives are not. Bede constantly reworked his sources to maximize their utility and impact.<sup>890</sup> As Markus put it, Bede's method is characterized by an "ease of welding his materials unobtrusively into a more personal and more coherent synthesis."<sup>891</sup> The examples are manifold; but none of the changes made in transforming the Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* or Adomnan's *De locis sanctis* should offer any grounds for confidence that an edition of the original 'Canterbury tales' will be easily derived from the *HE*.<sup>892</sup>

Finally, it is possible to say, in ending this section of the Chapter, that the analysis of what Bede used and how he used it is now complete. His 'historical' method is much clearer; we have been able, as it were, to see him at work in his *scriptorum*. We have unpicked the sources for Bede's content and his methods for turning them into a narrative in the relevant chapters of the *HE*. By adding the 'newly discovered' Canterbury tale texts as a source for the Bedan chapters under consideration to those set out in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, nothing in essence remains unexplained or unsourced in Bede's account of the Gregorian mission and the church in Kent prior to the arrival of Theodore.

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<sup>889</sup> Although, it would be much more feasible with the sections of the *Life of Germanus* Bede used.

<sup>890</sup> B. Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Oxford, 2002), p. 114.

<sup>891</sup> Markus, *Bede and Ecclesiastical Historiography*, p. 6. A similar point is made by T. MacKay, "Bede's Hagiographical Method: his Knowledge and Use of Paulinus of Nola", in Bonner, *Famulus Christi*, 77-92, at p. 80.

<sup>892</sup> One sees the same practice in Bede's poetry. As Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, p. 260, pointed out, Bede has a tendency to mask borrowed poetic phrases by substituting metrically equivalent synonyms for them.

It is time therefore to summarize the conclusions of this study and discuss the ways in which this analysis points the way towards further work.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion: Bede's methods and ours

Through the comprehensive analysis offered in this study, all of Bede's sources for every statement he makes relating to the Gregorian mission and the church in Kent before the advent of Theodore have been identified, catalogued and partially reconstructed. This 'palaeobibliothecographical' process could and should be extended to cover the entire work. Even covering only the period of the Roman mission, however, it is, I hope, evident how far we have been able to come in understanding Bede's methods, the range and limitations of his sources and the manner of the construction of the *HE*.

In doing so, we have gained new insight into how an early medieval historian, albeit an exceptional one, worked. In producing the sort of 'distant history' he writes in the account of the Gregorian mission,<sup>893</sup> Bede was engaged in a recognizable process. The materials he possessed gave him very little to work with. He brought his own perspective to their interpretation and rhetorical norms to their expression. But with all the limitations upon him, what Bede achieved was still remarkable. That Bede's often misleading narrative has lasted for so long is not an indictment of historians; it is a testament to Bede.

By studying Bede at work, this dissertation has given good reason to believe that the *HE* is more than a grand exercise in manipulation for agenda-driven narrative purposes. This is not to deny either that Bede did engage in such rhetorical processes, or that his work was influenced by agendas. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests a more positive view of his method. I have sought to show in some detail how Bede strove to reconstruct the past using the limited resources at his disposal. This part of the *HE*, at least, was much more than a mosaic of oral tradition and personal reminiscences. Bede accumulated and assessed his sources in order to create a convincing narrative. Indeed, present day

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<sup>893</sup> That is covering: 1.23-33; 2.1-2.11; 2.15-20; 3.8; 3.14; 3.20; 3.29; and 4.1.

historians of ‘distant history’ should recognize and understand, *mutatis mutandis*, the method that Bede applied to the reconstruction of the Roman mission.

It has been possible to go further, however. By breaking down his narrative into its sources, and by showing how Bede worked with them in writing the *HE*, we have been able to look, as it were, ‘behind the curtain’. It is easier now to imagine Bede at his desk or in the scriptorium, or library, writing or dictating; we can envisage the spread and scale of the actual ‘books’ around him. The basic logistical possibilities now become easier to imagine. The physical reality is that he can only ever have had a small number of works open in front of him at once. We have identified which these were, and in some places, even given a sense of how they were organized. We can start to see the stages in the process of compilation and construction that Bede went through in creating the *HE*; the sources, and, in places, the intermediate sources; the gaps Bede found he needed to fill; and the decisions he had to make in order to do so. We gain a clearer sense of the competing agendas of his various patrons over the years of writing, and, indeed, of his own attempts to ensure his voice and message were not lost. The complex issues surrounding the questions of the audience for the work and the context of its composition can be traced more easily.

Overall, we are now more aware of the challenges Bede faced in constructing a credible narrative of the conversion of Kent. One element in particular stands out: the paucity of his sources, and especially the primary ones, is striking. In terms of the latter, this study has demonstrated that Bede possessed almost nothing beyond the papal letters. In fact, much that Bede did have, including his ‘Canterbury tales’ should only be treated with extreme caution. They should be used rarely, if at all, in building a modern picture of what happened in Kent in c.600. They provide no useful insight into the world at that point in time.

Bede’s account of the Gregorian mission was clearly composed without access to information deriving from a genuinely unbroken link to that part of Kent’s past. Previously, elements and oddities in Bede’s narrative have sometimes been trusted on the basis that they were said to derive from ‘Canterbury tradition’. In fact, there were no credible Canterbury traditions dating back to Augustine. Some very basic elements of reliable information may have been passed on, perhaps, for instance, including the Julian

dates of death of the early mission fathers. As a whole, however, ‘Canterbury tradition’ should not be treated as trustworthy. What Canterbury ‘traditions’ there were post-dated Theodore’s arrival and the great evidential break of the 660s. The stories Canterbury provided Bede barely even merit the title of ‘oral history’. Even Bede himself seems to have treated them with caution and caveated them for his readers.

There is a natural explanation for this caesura in the evidence, as discussed in Chapter 6. The chaos of the 660s in Kent had left a church gravely debilitated at best. Hierarchical continuity was broken; record-keeping was disrupted. Whether Albinus knew this or not is irrelevant. Apart from perhaps the texts of ecclesiastical foundation stones, Canterbury simply did not possess genuinely original ecclesiastical material dating back before the 660s. Even the epitaphs were apparently written after Theodore arrived. The analysis of Bede’s sources in this dissertation has not only clarified the picture of such a qualitative break, but also provided additional reason for believing that it is the accession of Theodore which represented the essential dividing line.

The resources at Bede’s disposal were, therefore, as a general rule, poorer even than might have been imagined; nonetheless, our appreciation for his library has only grown. Through a better sense of Bede’s resources, and some of the more surprising sources he worked from, it is now possible to expand our assessment of what such an early medieval monastery as Wearmouth-Jarrow might have retained. Where the line between ‘archive’ and ‘library’ ends may be difficult to judge, but it is clear that archival material was not maintained by mere chance or for antiquarian interest. Chapter 6 made some cautious suggestions about the implications of the presence of such material at Wearmouth-Jarrow. With more space, it would be possible to go further. Bede’s use of his materials is more broadly functional than is usually assumed was the case for early medieval scholars. The *HE* shows that ‘libraries’ could be used for purposes transcending the “sublime, but ultimately incomplete ‘recapitulation’ of ... [those] of Late Antiquity”.<sup>894</sup> This dissertation has instead presented a more positive, or perhaps more pragmatic, view of early Anglo-Saxon libraries. They were teaching establishments, but they were also repositories – in a more active, bureaucratic sense than might have been assumed.

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<sup>894</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 3.

The results of the above analysis need not, however, directly challenge the conclusions of those like Lapidge or Love who have seen monastic libraries as resources directed primarily or even purely to teaching. Nonetheless, the vision of both what was taught and who was there to learn necessarily expands. We are drawn towards a more sanguine view of ‘secular’ learning in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, and of the role of the ‘ecclesiastic’ in governance. The ensuing picture even begins, in a general way, to resemble that for contemporary Ireland. Further work on this issue would be valuable and is likely to increase the evidence for such a connection.

One specific way such research might be taken forward would be to examine more extensively than has been possible here the routes through which Bede obtained his information. Given the sections of the *HE* under discussion, it has been only natural that this study has concentrated on Canterbury, even if not exclusively. Extending the area of focus would both increase our understanding of the origins of Bede’s sources and expand our appreciation for the implications of what was available. The Preface is a useful guide in beginning such work, but the content of the *HE*, carefully interpreted, provides enough information to go much further. The conclusions are revealing not only about the construction of the *HE*, but also about the dynamics of intellectual life in contemporary Anglo-Saxon England.

An even more important next step, however, is to complete the basic process begun here. This dissertation has examined in the depth required a coherent narrative within the *HE*: the Gregorian mission and the church in Kent before Theodore. The same now needs to be done for the rest of the *HE*. Completing such a task for the rest of Book 1 would be a simple exercise. As it was extended to the later sections of the work, one would face more apparently traditional ‘sources’, whose origins are difficult to discern. Such difficulty means that certainty would be even less achievable; at times, viable options would be the best that could be provided.

Despite its difficulty, the task remains both vital and possible. Even in many of the more obviously oral situations, the provenance of Bede’s story can usually be recovered. If this analysis is carried out systematically, then judgments can be made about the capacity of those ‘sources’ to serve as evidence for the detail in the stories told. This study has shown, for instance, that the assertion of motivation throughout the *HE* should

always be viewed with suspicion. This is as true of the ‘Northumbrian’ material not examined here, as it is of the Kentish content that has been. Bede’s willingness to state his deductions as fact should also be evident. So too, contradictions in Bede’s characterizations can often be seen to represent competing sources more than an inconsistent agenda.

In short, Bede’s methodology is now sufficiently clear that the challenges involved in extending the analysis to the rest of the *HE* should not prevent it being undertaken. Indeed, although the ‘palaeobibliothecographical’ process carried out in this study is tailored to Bede and his *History*, I hope that the analysis in this dissertation might inspire similar work on different authors. There are many comparable works, Anglo-Saxon and continental, which are relied upon for historical information, but whose own sources have not been systematically examined.

One obvious example is Stephanus’ *Life of Wilfrid*. If the *HE* is, by genre, a history, including a significant amount of hagiographical content, then Stephanus’ *Life of Wilfrid* is its mirror-image – a hagiography, including a significant amount of historical content. Too often the two can be confused. Too infrequently is it asked what Stephanus’ source was for particular statements about his protagonist. Does his authority really justify relying even on the basic narrative and chronology provided for Wilfrid’s life? Until his work is interrogated in the same detail as Bede’s has been in this dissertation, the credibility of even some of the more famous elements of Stephanus’ account must be in doubt. Even following such an examination, often the best that may be able to be said is that details of the stories represent incidents believable within – and to – contemporary society, not that they necessarily happened to Wilfrid. Something similar might be said, looking across the Channel, about, for instance, Jonas’ *Life of Columbanus*. The historicity of this work has been vigorously and justly undermined,<sup>895</sup> but its story of the saint’s life often remains the foundation for treatments of his biography.

For Bede at least, it should now be clear that one cannot undermine his methods and sources while continuing to have faith in his narrative. His statements may not be trusted on his own authority: the reliability of his narrative is no better than that of his sources.

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<sup>895</sup> As was done particularly well by I. Wood, “Jonas, the Merovingians, and Pope Honorius: *Diplomata* and the *Vita Columbani*”, in A. Murray, ed., *After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History, Essays Presented to Walter Goffart* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 99-120.



This has always been true. The difference is that his sources have now been identified and it is thus possible to make more informed judgments about their credibility.

At first this conclusion may appear discouraging. Much that was considered ‘known’, is not. But this ‘loss’ is only theoretical. It brings us closer to the truth, even as we seem to be moving further away. It might seem disappointing that many ‘proof texts’ are no longer useable; but they must be rejected nonetheless. Following this study, it is no longer enough to reassert Bede’s stranger and unsupported statements, simply adding the caveat that “Bede tells us...”. Such rhetorical sleights of hand are no better than his own attempts to shift responsibility with a targeted *fertur*. When, for instance, Bede is discovered ‘improving’ his story with what are clearly his own favourite characteristics, this should not be a surprise; but it also needs to be recognized that these cannot then be used as evidence for the saint’s or king’s real, historic personalities.

Going forward therefore, part of the problem will be a historiographical one: there is so little information about this period that it feels as if the tiny amounts we are told must be clung to, even when, reasonably, they cannot have happened. It is hoped that this study will help to provide sufficient confidence to move beyond such limits. With the ability now to dispose of many falsehoods long considered certain, there is a new opportunity to dispense with the traditional reliance on the *HE*’s unattested account of the early Christian period in Kent.

In reality, it should be clear that, despite the sense of ‘loss’, our knowledge has expanded. It is possible, however, to go further. Through the reconstruction of the process and material Bede used in his account of the Gregorian mission, the groundwork has been laid for the replacement of his narrative. The attempt in this dissertation to separate Bede from his sources, detaching his rhetoric and deductions from the evidence, and distinguishing between the types of material he used, provides historians with the basis for doing something never previously considered possible. In the past, historians have complained of an irreplaceable dependence on the *HE*. Now, having isolated Bede’s sources, it is both possible and necessary to lay aside his narrative.

By breaking down the narrative into its constituent parts, many ‘facts’ may have been lost, but in the absence of such errors a more realistic picture of early seventh-century Kent can be allowed to emerge. Bede was, for instance, ideologically committed to a

view of a pre-Christian past that was necessarily barbaric. This vision underpins his narrative of the Gregorian mission; but it also helps to undermine it. In contrast, the archaeological evidence, at the very least, suggests Bede's to be a deeply misleading perspective.

The construction of Bede's narrative, as this study has tried to show in detail, was informed by his own deductions; but he was simply not in the best place to make them. The stunning shifts in geopolitics and economics during the seventh century meant that the political worldview of Gregory the Great was inconceivable to someone like Bede. Events far from the shores of Britain had repercussions dramatically affecting even Anglo-Saxon England. By the time the *HE* was written, the symbiosis of the Late Antique relationship between Kent and Gaul had long since been transformed. The world looked very different from Wearmouth-Jarrow in c.730. The 'England' of c.600 was irrecoverable for someone like Bede who lacked meaningful information about it.

In contrast, modern historians are, in many ways, in a better position to reconstruct that part of the past than Bede was. This dissertation has attempted to provide a firmer basis than previously available for carrying out that necessary process. If the *HE* is a complex weaving of sources, then I hope to have shown that the strands can be unpicked. This then may allow scholars to make something new with what is left, adding alternative materials. Historians' reconstructions of events can now be based not on Bede, but on his sources, and on those others not available to him.

Indeed, our primary sources for the world in 600 outnumber his. They go well beyond the Gregorian letters. They include coins, laws, and archaeology as well as the diplomatic, literary and material evidence from the contemporary Frankish and Irish worlds. Without being framed by the Bedan narrative, the original sources, naturally interpreted, open up quite a different view of late sixth/early seventh-century Kent, and even of the Gregorian mission. Thus, despite an initial sense of 'loss', it is to be hoped that, in making the basis for Bede's narrative clearer, this study will have strengthened historians' ability to write a more comprehensive account of the period: one which can more easily move beyond Bede and his narrative.

None of this is intended to deny that there have been previous attempts to recreate what happened in the period, or that these have differed from Bede's account, or indeed

that they have included useful arguments and conclusions. Clearly such attempts have been frequent and have often moved forward knowledge of the period meaningfully: but all have, to varying degrees, treated Bede himself as a source and have been bound by his story, even in those places where they reject it.

This thesis has shown that there is now no choice but to prepare narratives using sources that can be relied on, including those derived from Bede. In doing so, however, it is necessary to ignore Bede's version. It is irrelevant. It is time to end the practice of repeatedly returning to Bede and 'checking' reconstructions against his account, thus imbuing it with the pretence of some independent validity. This, as the analysis above has attempted to show methodically, the *HE* simply does not possess. We may at times come to some of the same conclusions as Bede, but, crucially, this will be because such is the natural interpretation of the sources, not because Bede has been treated as a source.

The above analysis has already begun this work, answering some of the questions that the sources raise – such as, for instance, the date of Augustine's death – and providing the basis for addressing many others. Much more remains to be done and I intend to return to the questions in a more comprehensive manner in future work. Without the false confidence underpinned by Bede's authority for his story, it is clear that all future reconstructions will be working with probabilities, plausibilities and possibilities more often than certainties. This should not, however, prevent scholars from undertaking such an endeavour. This study has attempted to clear the ground, as it were; in doing so, it has tried to provide a new, more coherent starting point from which to begin the process of historical reconstruction. I hope the foundation this study has laid can, through a better understanding of Bede's methods and sources, assist others, not only in extending our analysis across the entire *HE*, but also in enabling the production of new narratives, more reliable than Bede's and on a firmer evidential basis. Only in this way will it finally be possible to rewrite, and not merely reinterpret, seventh-century England.

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