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Clever Cleric: Saint Wilfrid of York and the Complexities of Power and Authority in Seventh-Century England

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Power and Authority in Seventh-Century England

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Saint Wilfrid of York was a Northumbrian bishop, abbot, and missionary. He was born in 634 and died in 709/710. His life was characterized by his landholdings that spanned territories and kingdoms, his enduring persistence to remain bishop, his monastic empire, his hostile relationships with kings, his powerful friends and supporters, and his resistance in the face of adversity. Wilfrid's achievements were remarkable for a seventh-century bishop – a bishop deserving of recognition for his lasting impact on England. By closely examining the sources, this thesis analyzes Wilfrid's tumultuous life and career in the form of his landholdings, his trips to the Continent, and his role in the developing secular and ecclesiastical tensions of the day to suggest that the growth and development of Christianity across the landscape of England would not have been so successful without him, despite his controversial nature.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Saint Wilfrid lived a tumultuous life, characterized by his persistent and haughty personality, his intransigence, his eloquence in speaking, and his dedication to the Roman tradition in culture, ecclesiastical structure, and doctrine. In addition, his conflicting relationships and obstinacy led to his several trips to Rome, exile, and imprisonment. Historians know of Wilfrid's long and complicated life from the *Life of Wilfrid* written by Stephen of Ripon, formerly and mistakenly referred to as Eddius Stephanus, between the years 710 and 720. We also receive glimpses of his life from Bede, though both the *Life* and Bede's rendition in Book 5, chapter 19 of his *Ecclesiastical History* are very similar, differing only slightly. Stephen of Ripon was commissioned to write the *Life of Wilfrid* by Wilfrid's heirs and successors, Bishop Acca of Hexham and Abbot Tatberht of Ripon. From the twelfth century, historians are provided with additional versions of his *Life* written by Eadmer and William of Malmesbury. Saint Wilfrid, undeniably a powerful figure of his time, died at the age of seventy-six. Examining his turbulent life, it is remarkable that he survived unscathed, continuing to sow his influence on the ecclesiastical landscape of Anglo-Saxon England, given the political instability and cultural norms of the seventh century.

The figure of Wilfrid stands out not only within Northumbria, the kingdom of his birth and career, but throughout the whole of the isle of Britain as well as various parts of Gaul and Italy. Wilfrid's claim to fame arose through his enduring persistence in remaining bishop but also through his monastic empire. Wilfrid's landholdings spanned across territories and kingdoms. He also had powerful friends and patrons that supported him. He set himself apart through his travels, his powerful friends, his role as an abbot, his ambition

for a single Northumbrian diocese, and his resistance in adversity. Wilfrid's legacy or cult after his death rivaled that of Cuthbert of Lindisfarne. Additionally, one of the most prolific writers of the time, Bede, may have been biased in his *Ecclesiastical History* regarding Wilfrid. Wilfrid was a controversial figure and the political instability of England and the religious climate of both Irish and Roman Christianity provide the backdrop to Wilfrid's life and career, one that may not have been so successful otherwise.

Northumbria: a kingdom of two Christianities

At the time the figure of Wilfrid emerged in the history of the English church, Anglo-Saxon England consisted of seven kingdoms: Kent, Wessex, East Anglia, Mercia, Sussex, Essex, and Northumbria (consisting of the sub-kingdoms Bernicia and Deira united by two dynasties). According to Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the first Christian mission to the Anglo-Saxons arrived off the coast of Kent in the Spring of 597, having been sent from Rome. Conversion took place first in the southern part of the isle and gradually traveled to the north. Northumbria, the northernmost kingdom, underwent two separate and distinct missions of conversion.

In the 620s King Edwin of Northumbria sought alliance with Kent and married Ethelberga, daughter of King Ethelbert. Ethelberga was accompanied by a Roman missionary, Paulinus, from the recently converted Kent. Upon their marriage Edwin agreed that she could continue practicing her Christian beliefs. In the year 626, King Edwin survived an assassination attempt from Wessex. He agreed to baptize his daughter Eanfled and made a pledge that if he was successful militarily against the West Saxons, he would convert to the Christian religion. He was successful in battle and at that point decided not to convert yet, but to meet regularly with Paulinus to further understand the Christian religion before making a

decision. While meeting with Paulinus, the bishop placed his hand on Edwin's head and Edwin recalled a vision that he had while in exile. Before Edwin became king, he was forced into exile by Ethelfrith the Bernician king, who had recently annexed Deira. Ethelfrith wanted to kill the Deiran prince and Edwin sought refuge in the court of Redwald of East Anglia. Ethelfrith offered Redwald a large sum of money to kill him. Edwin then remembered the vision of a man who said he could save him from his troubles and show him a better way of life, for which Edwin agreed that he would be grateful and follow any guidance the man offered. The man placed his hand on his head and told him to remember the conversation. Redwald did not kill him but assisted him in battle, resulting in the death of Ethelfrith. Ethelfrith's sons, Oswy and Oswald, fled to Dal Riada and were baptized in the monastery of Iona. After recalling this vision and realizing the man in the vision was Paulinus, Edwin was baptized on Easter at the diocesan seat of York in 627. Between 627 and 633 Paulinus was successful in converting Northumbria, preaching and baptizing openly in the kingdom.

In the year 633 Edwin was killed in battle by an alliance between Penda of Mercia and Cadwalla of the Northern Welsh, king of Gwynedd. Paulinus fled to Kent with Ethelberga and her daughter Eanfled. Royal support was important for the first mission, as permission to preach within Edwin's kingdom was dependent upon him. After his death, the kingdom again broke into Bernicia and Deira and apostate kings succeeded him until the return of Ethelfrith's sons. In 634 at the battle of Heavenfield, Oswy and Oswald of the royal house of Bernicia defeated Cadwalla and Penda. Oswald became the king of Northumbria (Bernicia and Deira) in 634 and wanted to instill the same Christianity among his subjects that had brought him grace in his exile and victory in battle. Christianity came again in the

form of Irish monks from Columba's Iona. Aidan was the second Irish missionary sent to Northumbria, as the first man who was sent had had no success and attributed it to the inhabitants' refusal to listen to his preaching "because they were an ungovernable people of an obstinate and barbarous temperament."¹ The monks of Iona held a conference on the matter, "Then Aidan, who was present at the conference, said to the priest whose efforts had been unsuccessful: 'Brother, it seems to me that you were too severe on your ignorant hearers. You should have followed the practice of the Apostles, and begun by giving them the milk of simpler teaching, and gradually nourished them with the word of God until they were capable of greater perfection and able to follow the loftier precepts of Christ.'"² Aidan was perceived to be the most suitable to preach to the English, and was then consecrated bishop and sent to England. Oswald granted him the tidal island of Lindisfarne to establish a monastery in 635. As Canterbury had become the base of Christianity in the south, so too did Lindisfarne become the base for Christianity in the north. The Irish proved to be successful in Northumbria and made strides towards the south into Mercia, Sussex, and Essex.³ The second mission represented a revival of Christianity itself and its effectiveness in the whole of Northumbria.

Celtic and Roman forms of Christianity were very similar, with just a few notable differences. Not particularly distinctive to the Irish but nonetheless an identifiable difference was the fondness for isolation and seclusion or remote places, away from civilization/urban areas, as was exemplified by Columba in his pilgrimage of exile and foundation of Iona

¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People with Bede's Letter to Egbert and Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1990), 151.

² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 151.

³ D.P. Kirby, "Northumbria in the Time of Wilfrid," in *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*, ed. D.P. Kirby (Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K.: Oriol Press, 1974), 1-9; Sarah Foot, "Church and Monastery in Bede's Northumbria," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56.

around the year 565. Lindisfarne reflected the influence from Iona in its organization, location, and its Celtic form of asceticism, which placed emphasis on the spirituality of the individual. According to Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Columba implemented the custom of the monastery ruled by an abbot, “to whose authority the whole province, including the bishops, is subject contrary to the usual custom.”⁴ Lindisfarne was distinctive in that it had both a bishop and an abbot, the abbot being more revered. It was also the center of the bishopric, which was not typically a monastery. The monasteries that stemmed out of the Celtic tradition were prominently Lindisfarne, Melrose, Coldingham, and Whitby, among others. Whitby was founded in 657 and held a reputation for learning. Hilda, who had been baptized by Paulinus but later instructed by Aidan and other Irish men of learning, focused her attention on both spiritual and intellectual matters. Hilda and Whitby represented a combination of Roman as well as Celtic influences due to her association with both Paulinus and Aidan. Whitby became a hub for intellectual learning and the training of bishops, which contributed to spiritual life as a whole.

The majority of the monasteries that made up the landscape of Northumbria were Celtic in tradition, flowing out from Lindisfarne and like Whitby focused on intellectual and spiritual growth.⁵ Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid, who both emerged in the mid-seventh century, became enthusiastically interested in the Roman form of Christianity, demonstrating the developing attachment to Rome that would change the political and physical landscape of Northumbria. The figures of Biscop and Wilfrid each contributed a somewhat distinctive form of Roman Christianity to Northumbria, bringing relics, books, vestments, and traditions from numerous trips to the Continent and Rome.

⁴ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 149.

⁵ Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 147-50.

The Celtic church in comparison to the Roman held the same faith, was founded on the same tradition, and was completely orthodox. Initially there was no doctrinal or theological separation. It differed due to its remoteness and irregular contact with continental institutions. The Celtic church clung to earlier traditions, practices, rituals, and organization. It lacked the uniformity that the church at Rome was trying to achieve. The Celtic church did not have a central authority, before the establishment of that of the papacy. The Synod of Whitby was not a doctrinal or theological dispute but rather, according to Bede, emphasized the reckoning of the paschal date. The Celtic church can, then, be best described, not as schismatic or heretical (as Stephen's "Life of Wilfrid" would later suggest), but rather as outdated. While some rituals may have been peculiar, they did not diverge completely. The ordination of a bishop became another point of contention in the second half of the seventh century. A more prominent feature of the Celtic church was its monastic foundations which were quite widespread throughout Scotland as well as Gaul. Due to the pastoral population and absence of towns, the Celtic church did not necessarily need territorial sees. Bishops resided in the monasteries but did not have any authority over them. Another aspect of the Celtic church was missionary activity, through the foundation of monasteries, as exemplified by Saint Columbanus. *Peregrinatio*, or wandering pilgrimage, and penance were also common features that marked asceticism and solitude, especially in remote locations like Lindisfarne and Iona. As noted with Celtic monasteries in Northumbria, Celtic Christianity and monasticism were well known for their discipline and intellectual activity.⁶

Roman missionaries survived in the north, but they were few in number. A companion of Paulinus, James the deacon, remained at York after the chaos of the early 630s.

⁶ Nora Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 61-118.

He continued to preach the church of Rome. Roman influence was visible in the ecclesiastical structure in the north at or near previous Roman settlements, but the progress of Roman missionary activity had declined by the 660s. When Wilfrid came to the church at York in 669, he found its stone buildings in ruins. Oswald, Oswy, and their successors provided stability, largely free of dynastic feuds, for Christianity to again make strides across the landscape after the death of Edwin. Celtic missionaries provided a simpler and ascetic way of life that had a greater appeal to the inhabitants than the highly organized Roman mode.⁷ Until the Synod of Whitby in 664, the Irish missionaries were responsible for evangelization and missionary work. Sarah Foot has identified a fundamental distinction between the Roman and Irish modes of evangelization of Northumbria: “While the Roman-trained missionaries had preferred to work out of royal centres and showed some preference for reusing existing stone structures, Irish methods relied less on fixed institutions and more on travel, sometimes quite distant travel, among the scattered rural population.”⁸ Celtic ideals of asceticism, solitude, traveling, preaching, and ministry did not diminish after the Synod of Whitby, which represented the high point of the clash between the two modes of Christianity. It is important to note, then, that the early organization and shape of the Northumbrian church was determined by “the process of conversion (first by Roman missionaries from Kent, then by Irish monks from Iona); the direct association between missionary activity (and the creation of monasteries) and the ruling Northumbrian royal houses of Deira and Bernicia; and the reorganization of English dioceses under Archbishop Theodore in the 670s.”⁹

⁷ Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede*, 126.

⁸ Foot, “Church and Monastery in Bede’s Northumbria,” 57.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

Upon the death of Oswald in 642, his brother became king and married Eanfled, King Edwin's daughter. Oswy, like his brother, held the title of *bretwalda*, which was the equivalent of a military overlord who held supremacy over all other kings. Eanfled adhered to the traditions of Rome while her husband was attached to the Celtic church. In the year 664, the Synod of Whitby was held to determine the correct way to calculate the date of Easter, as in the coming year, 665, the two methods of calculation would result in different dates for Easter. The two customs, Irish and Roman, proved to be controversial upon this point. Bede goes into great detail regarding the Synod and the debate between the two representatives, Wilfrid and Colman. Wilfrid was chosen to speak due to his eloquence in speaking and recent travel to Rome. Colman spoke first, appealing to the teaching of Columba who believed in the evangelist John. Wilfrid defended the Roman method in the tradition of Peter, which was accepted universally and had been affirmed at the council of Nicea. The Roman triumph at Whitby became a pivotal moment in the ecclesiastical history of Northumbria, sending shockwaves among adherents of Christianity that led to consequential outcomes. Irish clergy who chose not to accept the Roman custom departed to Ireland. Additionally, Lindisfarne was seemingly isolated, as the new order was in favor of Paulinus's initial episcopal seat at York. Prior to the Synod, Irish missionaries and clergy looked to Iona for guidance rather than Roman Canterbury. After the Synod, Northumbria became reunited with Canterbury and in the years to follow was overcome by secular and ecclesiastical attempts to unify and solidify Christianity in England. Wilfrid was chosen, after the unexpected death of Tuda, to become the bishop of Northumbria. The growth of Christianity in Northumbria and the Roman triumph at the Synod of Whitby led to the emergence of several bishoprics to oversee the region and a reorganization of the church at

the request of Theodore, the archbishop of Canterbury. The conflicting issue of the Northumbrian dioceses as well as the antagonistic relationship between ecclesiastical and secular rulers began to unfold by the late seventh century.

In the seventh century the idea of Anglo-Saxon kingship was less than a century old. Wilfrid's own Northumbria was continually vexed by dynastic rivalries and uncertain territorial lines. Christianity, too, was still in its infancy as was exemplified by the conversion processes outlined above. The kingdom of Northumbria had to grapple with two coexisting modes of Christianity and constant upheavals of political instability. Additionally, after the Synod of Whitby, the church, clergy, and its adherents remained divided and tensions prevailed, as will become apparent in greater detail with the person of Wilfrid. This was the secular and ecclesiastical climate into which the figure of Wilfrid emerged. He represented a rigid form of Roman Christianity and walked a fine line between the two Christianities over the course of his lifetime as Northumbria grappled with the changing ecclesiastical climate that would result in a unique Christianity, neither fully Roman nor Irish.

Wilfrid: an overview of his life

Wilfrid was born in the year 634. His first glimpse of the monastic life was as a boy receiving education at Lindisfarne, where Aidan would have still been alive and bishop. After a short time at Lindisfarne, he desired to visit the See of St. Peter. He was encouraged by Queen Eanfled to fulfill this desire and she sent him to her cousin, the king of Kent, to await a proper companion. He remained at Canterbury for a year and then traveled to Rome with Benedict Biscop as his guide. Upon his arrival at Lyons in southern Gaul, he parted with

his travel companion and remained at Lyons for a year where Archbishop Annemund welcomed him. In Rome he met Boniface the archdeacon, who taught him the elements of Latin law and the four gospels, and subsequently met the pope. On his return journey, he again stayed at Lyons for three years, during which time he received the Roman tonsure from the archbishop and continued to learn and absorb the Roman traditions. Alchfrith, the son of Oswy and the sub-king of Deira, began Wilfrid's career in England. In the year 660, Alchfrith gave him the monastery at Ripon and in 663 he was ordained priest by Agilbert. In 664, Wilfrid spoke at the Synod of Whitby, ending the reign of Lindisfarne as the leading monastery, diocese, and form of Christianity in Northumbria. Following the flight of Colman to Ireland, Wilfrid, with the help of Alchfrith, was chosen to be the new bishop of Lindisfarne. He transferred the bishopric to York, in place of Lindisfarne, in order to oversee all of Northumbria. He then left for Gaul to be consecrated bishop. During his time in Gaul, King Oswy appointed Tuda and consecutively Chad as bishop of Lindisfarne. Wilfrid did not return until 666, when he retreated to Ripon.

The years following his election as bishop set off a spiraling series of achievements as well as obstacles in Wilfrid's life. Due to the usurpation of his seat during his time in Gaul, he returned to Ripon and it was then that he presumably implemented the Rule of Saint Benedict. He received an invitation from King Wulfhere of Mercia to take up episcopal duties and founded various monasteries in Mercia. After three years, in the year 669, Theodore, the new archbishop of Canterbury, restored Wilfrid to York as the heart of the Northumbrian diocese. Wilfrid restored Paulinus's old church at York during the years 669-671. It was also during these years that he maintained control over Ripon and Hexham.

Between the years 671 and 678, he adorned Ripon and dedicated it to Saint Peter, whose tomb he had visited in Rome.

By the 670s King Oswy had died and his son Ecgfrith became the reigning king of all Northumbria with the death of another brother, Elfwin. Oswy had four sons, Alchfrith, Ecgfrith, Elfwin, and Aldfrith, each of whom served as sub-king. Ecgfrith was married to Ethelthryth, whom Wilfrid had supported in her desire to remain a virgin, leave her husband, and become a nun, later founding the monastery of Ely. She too, like Alchfrith, had been a previous patron, granting Wilfrid the land for Hexham, which he had adorned like Ripon and York.

At the council of Hertford in 673, Theodore began dividing dioceses in existing kingdoms. By 677/678, Theodore had divided Wilfrid's large diocese into three, displacing his authority. In 679 Wilfrid decided to appeal to the pope in Rome. On his journey to Rome, he was welcomed by King Aldgisl of the Frisians, who allowed Wilfrid to preach and baptize openly in his kingdom. Wilfrid began an unintentional conversion of Frisia. Shortly after, King Dagobert II offered him the see of Strasbourg in return for Wilfrid's help and provision of men, during Dagobert's exile. At Rome Pope Agatho restored his bishopric to him, on the grounds that he had been unjustly supplanted, and also gave him the ability to choose his co-bishops. On his return, King Ecgfrith refused to accept the papal decision and imprisoned Wilfrid for nine months, finally releasing him on the plea of Aebbe (Ecgfrith's aunt) and as result of his timely miracles. According to Stephen's *Life*, the wife of the sheriff who managed Wilfrid's cell became ill and Wilfrid was able to heal her. In addition, the iron

bindings made for him were unable to bind him. Lastly, the queen also became ill and she would recover upon the release of Wilfrid.¹⁰

Several other miracles were associated with Wilfrid in his lifetime in addition to his particularly timely miracles in unfortunate situations. He restored a young child to life while traveling around tending to his pastoral duties in Northumbria and Mercia. On one occasion a woman came to Wilfrid, asking him to baptize her baby. When he realized the child was lifeless, he placed his hand on the baby, baptized it, and restored it to life.¹¹ Another miracle attributed to Wilfrid took place during one of the restorations of his monasteries; a mason fell from a high pinnacle, breaking many of his bones, and becoming unconscious. Wilfrid revived him and the man was able to live despite his severe injuries.¹² After Wilfrid's death several more miracles were recorded by Stephen. An abbot, who had given his cloak for Wilfrid to be laid out on (during his funeral), told his servant to take it to Wilfrid's abbess. A poor nun in the convent saw that the abbess was washing the cloak and asked to plunge her crippled arm in the dirty water filled with the saint's sweat. Immediately she was healed.¹³ On another occasion Wilfrid's monastery at Oundle had caught on fire and burned to the ground, except for the room in which he had died and the hedges near the room on the outside of the building.¹⁴ Stephen ended the *Life* with a rainbow that appeared to stretch and encircle the entire geographic distribution of Wilfrid's monastic houses, signifying, as Stephen implied, a protective wall.¹⁵

¹⁰ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," in *The Age of Bede*, ed. D.H. Farmer (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1983), 145-49.

¹¹ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 126-27.

¹² *Ibid.*, 131.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182-3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

Wilfrid again traveled to Mercia, due to his hostile relationship with King Ecgrith and his wife, whereupon he was received by Berhtwald, nephew of King Aethelred. Aethelred's queen was the sister of Ecgrith and made it impossible for Berhtwald to continue to favor Wilfrid, who left Mercia and decided to travel to Wessex. He was forced to move on yet again as the queen was the sister of Ecgrith's queen, Iurminburh. He then went to Sussex, the last pagan stronghold, and won the favor of King Aethelwath. He converted the people and founded a monastery in Selsey. He then helped Cadwalla, exiled prince of Wessex, regain his kingdom and was granted part of the Isle of Wight and other lands that he presumably built or instructed in ecclesiastical matters. In 686/87, he was restored to the see of York, and regained his monasteries of Ripon and Hexham as Theodore realized his errors and wanted to reconcile Wilfrid and the new king, Aldfrith. In 688 he was replaced by John of Beverley at Hexham, and in 691/92 he went into exile again due to uneasy relations with the king, who confiscated lands from Ripon now lost to Wilfrid. Between the years 692 and 703 he retreated to Mercia and the kingdom of the Middle Angles. In 703, the new archbishop of Canterbury, Berhtwald, called a council at Austerfield to settle Wilfrid's status and position, tricking him into losing control of his status and all his monasteries. Wilfrid gave his famous speech here at Austerfield, underlining his lifetime of contributions to the English Church:

Why are you trying to bring me to so sad a plight as to have me make my own signature an instrument of self-destruction? I have been a bishop now for nearly forty years and although unworthy of that rank I am completely innocent of crime... was I not the first to root out from the church the foul weeds planted from the Scots? Did I not convert the whole Northumbrian nation to celebrating Easter at the proper time as the Holy See demanded, and to having the proper Roman tonsure? ... Did I not teach you to chant according to the practice of the early church, with two choirs singing alternately, but simultaneously? ... Did I not bring the monastic life into line with the Rule of Saint

Benedict never before introduced into these parts? And now, have I got to bring some hurried sentence against myself, unconscious though I am of any crime committed?¹⁶

Wilfrid then appealed to Rome for a second time and asked for the protection of his monasteries according to the privileges granted by Popes Agatho, Sergius, and Benedict. Ripon and Hexham had already been safeguarded by earlier privileges but Wilfrid wished to reaffirm those privileges to protect them from further interference from secular power. In 705, he was restored to the exercise of full episcopal functions in Northumbria, but the extent of his jurisdiction was limited to the diocese of Hexham. Additionally, the monasteries of Ripon and Hexham were fully restored to him. Aldfrith died in 705/6 and his son Osred became king and maintained amiable relations with Wilfrid. Wilfrid ended his life at the age of 76 and was buried at Ripon. The Christianity that evolved from simple teaching and a focus on individual asceticism and spirituality gradually evolved as Aidan faded out of the larger context and figures like Wilfrid emerged to unify the complexities of Celtic and Roman traditions.

The Sources: Bede and Stephen

Bede's version of Wilfrid's life appears somewhat more objective than Stephen's, detailing his larger contributions to the church, as Wilfrid was probably a figure he could not ignore. Bede, unlike Stephen, does not go into great detail regarding Wilfrid's life and appears to skirt over any sort of conflict, whereas conflict is a characteristic of Stephen's *Life*. Bede was writing his *Ecclesiastical History* several decades after the death of Wilfrid, though he probably knew of Wilfrid other than from Stephen of Ripon. Bede himself says very little about the church in his own day, but rather looks back on the Golden Age of

¹⁶ Ibid., 157-58.

Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Scholars have suggested that Bede was somewhat biased against Wilfrid, portraying him in an unfavorable light in the church of the seventh century.

Bede's apparent aversion to Wilfrid can be seen in his portrayals of figures like Aidan and Cuthbert. Aidan and Cuthbert both identified with the Irish tradition. For Bede, Cuthbert embodied the perfection of Aidan after the Synod of Whitby. He admired them for their asceticism, their contemplative nature, their dedication to the faith and pastoral care, but also for their adherence to Irish traditions of missionary work, simplicity, and the rejection of wealth. Wilfrid, though he represented the Roman tradition that Bede so highly valued, did not represent the ideal spiritual figure of virtue and holiness. Wilfrid was exceedingly wealthy, ambitious, intransigent, and was a figure that did not seem to fit well into Bede's history of Christianity. In Bede's lifetime and the time in which he was writing, the Northumbrian church had experienced a whirlwind of change, reconstructing the landscape both physically and politically after the Synod of Whitby. Though Wilfrid was successful in expanding Christianity through his network of monasteries in Northumbria and Mercia as well as his missionary work, he did so in a seemingly unholy manner, through his conflicts with authority, his exiles, and his claim to the possession of lands. Though he only had control of Hexham and Ripon at his death, his followers continued to control his monasteries and churches throughout Northumbria and Mercia.

Below is a brief historiography regarding Bede's and Stephen's portrayal of the seventh century and Wilfrid. The world of the Anglo-Saxons was dangerous, unpredictable, and rife with military lords engaged in constant warfare. Bede, however, portrays a vivid image of a somewhat easy process of conversion and a cordiality between kings and clerics with the onset of Christianity. In comparison, across the English Channel, Merovingian Gaul

was violent, characterized by dynastic feuds and violent men who did anything to get ahead. Stephen's *Life* found more similarities in setting with Gregory of Tours's *History of the Franks* than Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. D.P. Kirby has stated that there were "jagged edges of a harsher reality beneath the surface of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*," of which only glimpses are provided by Bede."¹⁷ Stephen's narrative was unlike any text in England and written by a friend of Wilfrid's who most likely followed alongside him, whereas Bede relied largely on oral tradition from the safety of his monastery at Jarrow. Furthermore, Bede "was not concerned with the fundamental realities of political and ecclesiastical power: it was his desire rather to emphasize Christian virtues and the merits of faith and charity, not only in the past but even in 'the happy peace and serenity of the present'."¹⁸

Catherine Cubitt has stated that the figure of Wilfrid appears as an outlier because Bede made him so: "he did not fit into Bede's didactic agenda which underpins his history."¹⁹ A theme throughout Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and its account of the growth of the English Church is the cooperation between secular and ecclesiastical authority that allowed for the well-being of the kingdom and the salvation of its people, as exemplified by the early alliances during conversions.²⁰ Alan Thacker has taken an alternative approach, though not denying that Bede had an agenda. He states, "Bede's account of the bishop [Wilfrid] is not in itself intended to be hostile, rather indeed to be edifying... Even if he is not explicitly presented as a saint, he is among the great and good whose epitaphs are included... Wilfrid's activities were crucial to Bede's narrative... The *Historia Ecclesiastica*

¹⁷ Kirby, "Northumbria in the Time of Wilfrid," 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹ Catherine Cubitt, "St Wilfrid: A Man for His Times," in *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint: Papers from the 1300th Anniversary Conferences*, ed. N.J. Higham (Stamford, U.K.: Shaun Tyas, 2013), 311.

²⁰ Cubitt, "St Wilfrid: A Man for His Times," 311.

was intended to evoke and illustrate values often in conflict with those of Wilfrid and his biographer.”²¹ Bede’s account was ambivalent and molded to suit Bede’s purposes.

Walter Goffart is probably one of the most prominent proponents suggesting bias and even aversion on Bede’s part. Goffart has published numerous articles and chapters suggesting that Bede did not like Wilfrid but tolerated his figure as he was too important to ignore. Each of Goffart’s writings seems to delve deeper than the one before.²² For Goffart, Bede’s history was an idealistic and edifying history of the English people and also a model meant to provide guidance for the future.²³ Bede drew a veil over his own generation and was known to have a plot. Furthermore, “Bede traced the creation of the Northumbrian church in such a way as to efface the dominant figure in its past and, in this cleansed perspective, to propose a plan of evangelical action for the nascent ecclesiastical metropolis of York.”²⁴ While Goffart makes a strong case for Bede’s aversion to Wilfrid, he does not deny the importance of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* and its well-deserved acclaim. As a narrator of history, “Bede’s discretion cannot have been an inborn gift; it presumably resulted from a sustained and painful effort to say no more or less than had to be said.”²⁵

For Patrick Wormald, Bede decided “that what a relatively unsophisticated audience needed was an example of lives led by holy men; what they did not need was familiarity with bad men, or even with those good men whose careers had dubious features – for that would

²¹ Alan Thacker, “Wilfrid: His Cult and His Biographer,” in Higham, *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, 5.

²² Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); “Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Bede’s Agenda and Ours,” *Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990): 29-45; “Bede’s History in a Harsher Climate,” in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 203-26.

²³ Goffart, “Bede’s History in a Harsher Climate,” 213.

²⁴ Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, 432.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 436.

be to lead the sheep to the precipice.”²⁶ Furthermore, “Wilfrid could be praised for his many achievements, but to describe his career in full might run the risk of setting up a flawed model, and it was better to concentrate on the virtues and miracles of those with a more pristine public image, such as Aidan or Cuthbert.”²⁷ And for D.H. Farmer, Bede had “a kind of academic hatred for the Irish and British computations that warmed his habitual dispassionate attachment. Wilfrid, one might have thought, would have been one of his heroes... Was he not the successful protagonist of the Roman calculation at the Synod of Whitby? ... the pioneer of Roman outlook? ... Wilfrid did not fit into Bede’s theme, so he did not obtain the extended treatment which was his due. Moreover, Wilfrid’s personality, as distinct from the causes he stood for, was antipathetic to Bede.”²⁸ D.H. Farmer’s Bede was “a detached scholar” who was out of touch with the power struggles and secular politics of his day.

Nick Higham, like Alan Thacker, takes some offense at the suggestion of Bede’s bias and aversion, arguing that Bede did not have an aversion to the figure of Wilfrid. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede “was addressing an elite secular audience and interpreting English history in terms of the growth of Christianity among the English via exemplary stories capable of steering his listeners towards God.”²⁹ Higham has suggested that Wilfrid and Bede probably met face to face and knew each other personally in the period between 706 and 710, especially as Bede’s monastery was within the limits of the diocese of Hexham. Bede too could have visited Hexham, and his friendship with Acca of Hexham may even

²⁶ Patrick Wormald, “Bede, *Beowulf*, and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy,” in *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and Its Historian*, ed. Stephen Baxter (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 62.

²⁷ Wormald, “Bede, *Beowulf*, and the Conversion,” 62.

²⁸ D.H. Farmer, “Saint Wilfrid,” in Kirby, *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*, 37.

²⁹ N.J. Higham, “Wilfrid and Bede’s *Historia*,” in Higham, *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, 55.

have begun before Wilfrid's death. Wilfrid was the most experienced bishop and it was likely, given his impressive career, that he did indeed know Bede and probably conversed with him regarding the virginity of Ecgfrith's first wife Ethelthryth, whom Bede highly admired. Higham ultimately suggests that the silence on certain episodes in Bede and his glossing over of conflict, actually portray Wilfrid in a more favorable light. Wilfrid was one of the most frequently mentioned individuals in Bede's *History*, but the only one of the leading individuals who was English. Wilfrid "was presented as the home-grown father of Roman-Englishness, therefore, via whom the English could dispense with foreign missions, becoming instead full members of the Christian world and committed to mission at home and abroad."³⁰ Bede paralleled Wilfrid with the early figures of Gregory and Augustine and their achievements. For Higham, Bede's Wilfrid was "an exemplary English bishop, learned, a committed missionary, and the first great English champion of Rome."³¹ While Stephen was commissioned by his close friends to provide for Wilfrid's memory and illuminate his struggles with secular rulers, Bede wanted to encourage cooperation between secular and religious leadership and kept to a minimum those episodes that did not serve his purpose. Wilfrid's inclusion in the *History* and his portrayal in a positive light, despite aspects of his career skirted over, was not bias, it was Bede improvising to suit his own purpose.

Indeed, in more recent years, scholars have continued to emphasize Bede's respect for Wilfrid in a reexamination of his writing. D.P. Kirby, a former proponent of Bede's bias/aversion (discussed above), has stated: "Wilfrid's life could and can easily appear as a series of vain appeals to the pope against the background of almost permanent discord in England; but Bede minimized the contentious element in Wilfrid's career and concentrated

³⁰ Higham, "Wilfrid and Bede's *Historia*," 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

instead on Wilfrid as the champion of the Roman Easter at the synod of Whitby in 664 and of the authority of Saint Peter throughout his life, on Wilfrid as a missionary or evangelist of Gregorian type and as one who introduced Catholic customs into England.”³²

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Bede thought of Wilfrid as a major figure of the church. Bede also valued the Celtic traditions which Stephen and Wilfrid seemingly did not and admired some of the early Celtic leaders in Northumbria. Bede could not deny the efficacy of the Celtic missions. In referring to leaders such as Aidan, Chad, and Colman, he points out their idealistic lifestyles, but does not fail to mention their incorrect calculation of Easter. Saint Cuthbert, one of the most famous Anglo-Saxon saints, was a contemporary to Wilfrid. Bede’s ideal bishops were Cuthbert and Theodore, who in a sense ushered in the Golden Age of the English Church. Bede and Stephen of Ripon portrayed Wilfrid in different lights to suit their own purposes.

Stephen provides us with a detailed and vivid biography of his master. In the opinion of Henry Mayr-Harting, Stephen portrayed Wilfrid in the likeness of an Old Testament prophet who often faced persecution for his beliefs, rather than as a saint. Stephen “created for England a fusion between two key spheres of intellectual activity – biblical interpretation and hagiography.”³³ Furthermore, “in a certain sense Wilfrid saw himself in the tradition of the desert fathers who modelled themselves on the prophets both in their retreats and in their public actions.”³⁴ Stephen admired Wilfrid and elevated his hero, at times, inaccurately and probably deliberately so. His hagiography is perhaps more like the

³² D.P. Kirby, “Bede, Eddius Stephanus, and the ‘Life of Wilfrid,’” *English Historical Review* 98, no. 386 (1983): 102.

³³ Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, Fabric of British History (New York: Schlocken Books, 1972), 140-41.

³⁴ Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 141.

hagiographies of Gaulish bishops, not aesthetically pleasing, depicting a subject immersed in politics and who was a subject of a controversial nature facing opponents in his church.³⁵

Stephen's *Life* is unlike any other hagiographical work in England and in the words of D.H.

Farmer:

Stephen not only lists Wilfrid's achievements as a bishop and monk, missionary and church builder, he also gives an authentic portrait of the able and attractive young man, fluent and persuasive, winning his ecclesiastical spurs at Whitby, of the lordly bishop with his large retinue, of the munificent patron who obtained from friendly kings and queens lavish endowments for the church; of the courageous fighter who travelled far to obtain justice from the highest authority in the church; of the old man facing his enemies like a stag at bay, recalling his many achievements and later on his deathbed, dividing his treasures among his followers.³⁶

Stephen and Bede complement each other, each providing material and perspective that the other does not. Their combined accounts function to clarify inaccuracies and reconcile discrepancies between the two sources, revealing a much more vivid image of the seventh century. Both Bede and Stephen are valuable sources not only for the growth of Christianity in England, but also for the underlying complicated and dangerous world of the Anglo-Saxons.

In this light, then, the question arises, was Wilfrid a successful bishop, abbot, and missionary in the developing English Church? On the surface, Wilfrid did not embody the characteristics of a holy man, given the evidence and the notions of power that Wilfrid utilized: his appeals to the papacy regarding his loss of status (a bold move, acting against Theodore who was appointed by the pope), his armed retinue (assisting secular rulers in England and in Francia, and presiding and enforcing his role as spiritual leader), his ambition for a single diocese and inability to "share" territory, his hostile relationships with kings, his

³⁵ Paul Fouracre, "Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography," *Past and Present* 127 (1990): 127.

³⁶ Farmer, "Saint Wilfrid," 38.

role in foreign politics, his wealth (demonstrated by his will), and his seemingly sole control over all his monasteries throughout England. Yet, despite this image, another emerges that portrays a bishop who was truly dedicated – intransigently and persistently – in his beliefs and whose efforts for the growth and administration of the church did not go unnoticed. In the chapters that follow, I will examine the remarkable figure of Wilfrid and the facets of his career: his temporal glories leading to the perception of him as a secular or aristocratic lord, his unlikely influences that surely contributed to his own perception as a spiritual leader, and the complicated politics (both secular and ecclesiastical) that reflected the shift in ecclesiastical climate after the Synod of Whitby and the world in which secular and ecclesiastical politics coexisted. Wilfrid, indeed, was a successful spiritual leader dedicated to the growth of Christianity.

Chapter 2

Wilfrid, Wealth, and Land Tenure

In 678, Bishop Wilfrid was deposed by King Ecgrith of Northumbria and the archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore. Wilfrid's exceedingly large diocese was then divided into three: Bernicia, Deira, and Lindsey. His career was characterized by turbulence beginning that same year. According to Wilfrid's biographer, Ecgrith's queen, Iurminburh, was hostile towards the Northumbrian bishop and "She used all her eloquence to describe to Ecgrith all St. Wilfrid's temporal glories, listing his possessions, the number of his monasteries, the vastness of the buildings, his countless followers arrayed and armed like a king's retinue."¹ While her statement may have contributed to Wilfrid's fall from episcopal status, it illuminates valid facets of Wilfrid's life and career that reveal ongoing tensions between the rise of the church and traditional patterns of secular society. In the time of Wilfrid, royal and ecclesiastical authorities were learning to coexist in a society where the king had always demonstrated the most authority. Furthermore, clerics, like Wilfrid, represented or were perhaps ascribed a status much like the secular nobility, as kings wished to see the success of Christianity in England just as much as the church wanted and needed to establish itself (and its own authority) among the Anglo-Saxons. Wilfrid's reputation and accumulation of land were remarkable for a seventh-century bishop. As Iurminburh's statement demonstrates, Wilfrid, as a single representative of the church, was extremely wealthy, and perhaps appeared to the king as someone who focused on his own personal gain to the neglect of his pastoral duties. This chapter will highlight Wilfrid's career with specific

¹ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 132.

reference to his “temporal glories,” placing emphasis on his acquisition of land and alluding to his perception as a towering figure of the age, but also as a lordly bishop who sought to establish a successful church, but in doing so rivaled his king in power and influence.

Wilfrid’s more prominent roles as bishop and abbot quite likely arose from his aristocratic status in Anglo-Saxon society. Patrick Wormald has emphasized that in barbarian/Germanic Christian culture, “the social prominence of bishops can be understood as arising from their background as noblemen, and their sheer political and military importance in a developing feudal society.”² Furthermore, as we will see, “the thought-world of the early medieval clergy was dominated by conceptions of nobility, Church, and service to the king.”³ At a young age, Wilfrid “ministered with humble skill to all his father’s visitors, whether the king’s companions or their slaves.” At the age of fourteen, in 648, he left his father’s estates and “managed to clothe, arm and mount both himself and his servants so that he need not feel ashamed in the royal presence.”⁴ Wilfrid’s childhood took place during the reign of Oswald (d. 642). It is possible that Wilfrid had met Oswald during the latter years of his reign or even had an early encounter with Oswy, who ascended to the throne at the death of his brother. Wilfrid’s father, Stephen indirectly tells us, was probably associated with the royal household or at the very least ranked highly among the king’s subjects. Additionally, his father’s estates were probably a gift from the king. In early Anglo-Saxon England, most land belonged to the king. He granted land to followers who provided military support (against rival kingdoms) and who were then bound in loyalty to the king

² Wormald, “Bede, *Beowulf*, and the Conversion,” 53.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 109.

until their death.⁵ It is clear, given Stephen's description of Wilfrid's childhood and his departure from his father's household, that Wilfrid was well-equipped to navigate upper Anglo-Saxon society, already with those willing to serve and support him.

Wilfrid then went to Eanfled, queen of King Oswy, "to be presented to her on the recommendation of those noblemen whom he had cared for at his father's house."⁶ Wilfrid's familial, aristocratic background provided him with the political connections to begin a life for himself, building a reputation along the way. Wilfrid, by commendation of the queen, served the nobleman, Cudda, who was one of the king's companions suffering from illness. After two years at Lindisfarne serving Cudda and receiving an education, Wilfrid sought to visit the Holy See. On Cudda's advice (vouching for his character), Queen Eanfled sent Wilfrid to her cousin Erconberht, king of Kent. Eanfled "fitted him out handsomely for the journey and sent messages to convey her highest commendations of him to Erconberht."⁷ At Erconberht's court, he waited for a guide and in a year's time, he departed to the Continent with Benedict Biscop. All of this would suggest (and reinforce) that Wilfrid's position as a member of the aristocracy and his connections therein fostered his early career, allowing him to travel abroad and craft the figure he would become: a powerful and highly influential bishop learned in the traditions of Rome and Gaul.

While Wilfrid's social status continued to be a major factor in the development of his career, Wilfrid's accumulation of land for himself and the church distinguishes him from any other ecclesiastical figure of the age. Wilfrid returned to England from Rome and Lyons

⁵ Ian Wood, "Land Tenure and Military Obligations in the Anglo-Saxon and Merovingian Kingdoms: The Evidence of Bede and Boniface in Context," *Bulletin of International Medieval Research* 9-10 (2005 for 2004): 9.

⁶ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 109.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

having been recently tonsured in the early 660s. Alchfrith, the son of Oswy and the sub-king of Deira, became Wilfrid's first patron. He wanted Wilfrid, who was instructed in the discipline of the church of St. Peter, to remain in his court as a religious adviser. It was at this time that Alchfrith gave him ten hides (a single hide would have been enough land to support one family) of land at *Stanforda*, which has been variously identified as Stamford in Lincolnshire, Stamford Bridge near York, or Stainforth.⁸ He then gave him the monastery of Ripon and an additional thirty hides of land. Shortly after, in 663, Wilfrid was ordained priest. He now held forty hides of land given by Alchfrith. In the process of Wilfrid's appointment at Ripon, Alchfrith removed the abbot and current monks who had come to Ripon from Melrose, implying that he did not regard his original foundation of Ripon outside of his personal authority (or owned by the church).⁹ In 664 Wilfrid spoke at the Synod of Whitby, resulting in the Roman triumph. Following the flight to Ireland of Colman, who was bishop of Lindisfarne and spoke against Wilfrid at the Synod, Wilfrid, with the help of Alchfrith, was chosen to be bishop of Lindisfarne. He transferred the bishopric to York, in place of Lindisfarne, in order to oversee all of Northumbria. Wilfrid then left for Gaul to be consecrated bishop. When he returned in 666, King Oswy had appointed Tuda and consecutively Chad as bishop of Lindisfarne in his place.

The years 669-678 were the most significant of Wilfrid's career not only for his contributions to Ripon, Hexham, and York, but also in his accumulation of lands and subsequent religious foundations. Due to the usurpation of his seat during his time in Gaul, he retreated to his monastery at Ripon. He received an invitation from King Wulfhere of Mercia in 666 to take up episcopal duties and founded various monasteries in Mercia. Due to

⁸ Ibid., 115.

⁹ Cubitt, "St Wilfrid: A Man for His Times," 321.

the vacancy of the archbishopric at Canterbury, “King Egbert of Kent summoned Wilfrid to ordain a good number of priests and deacons,” and it can be presumed that as Wulfhere had done, Egbert also gave him land and monasteries.¹⁰ According to Stephen, “Wilfrid carried on honorably, acting as bishop in several areas and winning universal affection and then returning to his own part of the country.”¹¹ In the following chapter Stephen states that Wulfhere had given him Lichfield in Mercia, “a place highly suitable for an episcopal see either for himself or anyone he might choose to give it to.”¹² After three years, in the year 669, Theodore, the new archbishop of Canterbury, restored Wilfrid to his episcopal seat at York. Chad (who was previously appointed in Wilfrid’s place at Lindisfarne and uncanonically ordained) was re-ordained in the Roman tradition by Theodore and given Wilfrid’s Lichfield.

Between the years 669 and 671, Wilfrid restored Paulinus’s old church at York. He added a lead roof, glass windows, whitewashed walls, and furnished the altar with sacred vessels. Wilfrid also acquired “vast tracts of land for the church, thus relieving its poverty and enriching it with valuable endowments.”¹³ He also continued to maintain his monasteries as he remained in communication with Wulfhere.¹⁴ Here, we see Wilfrid acquiring more land and beginning to display wealth, especially in his buildings, per Iurminburh’s statement. It was also during these years that Wilfrid, in addition to York, maintained control over Ripon and Hexham. It is important to note that these were the monasteries that he not only invested the most time in, but also the monasteries that he valued the most in his lifetime. At Ripon

¹⁰ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 122.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 123.

¹³ Ibid., 124.

¹⁴ Damien J. Tyler, “Bishop Wilfrid and the Mercians,” in Higham, *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, 279.

and Hexham, Wilfrid demonstrated Roman form, imitating the structures he had seen on his travels to Rome. Prior to 671 he brought singers, masons, and artisans and implemented the Rule of Saint Benedict.¹⁵ Between the years 671 and 678, at Ripon he built a church of stone with columns and side aisles and adorned the altar with purple and gold in dedication to Saint Peter whose tomb he had visited in Rome.¹⁶ In addition he was the patron of a gospel book, lavishly decorated with gems, purple, and gold, known as the Ripon Gospels. Treasures such as these were kept at Ripon as a memorial to him after his death in 709/710.

When the church at Ripon was ceremoniously dedicated, “Those most devout and Christian kings, Ecgfrith and Aelwine, the kings beneath them, the abbots and sheriffs, and all kinds of dignitaries besides were present.”¹⁷ Wilfrid then read out a list of lands given to him by kings, past and present, for the salvation of their souls. Stephen wrote:

Wilfrid stood in front of the altar, facing the people, and in the kings’ presence read out in a clear voice a list of lands which previous monarchs and now themselves had given him for their soul’s salvation with the consent and signature of the bishops and all the ealdormen. He went on to enumerate holy places in various parts of the country which the British clergy, fleeing from our own sword, had deserted... They gave Wilfrid land around Ribble, Yeadon, Dent, and Catlow, and in other places too.¹⁸

It is significant that Wilfrid publicly declared his lands and used documents to record his land possession and transmission. The use of documents in combination with his public declaration not only served to legitimize his possession of property but also reinforce it with the presence of numerous witnesses to safeguard the validity of the written document. It also asserted Wilfrid as a growing political force in Northumbria and parts of Mercia.¹⁹

¹⁵ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 122.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁹ Scott Thompson Smith, “*Inextricabilis Dissensio*: Property, Dispute, and Sanctity in the *Vita S. Wilfridi*,” *Mediaeval Studies* 74 (2012): 173-75.

In reference to Ribble, Yeadon, Dent, and Catlow mentioned in Wilfrid's dedication at Ripon, G.R.J. Jones suggests that Wilfrid was probably in control of Tidover, referring to chapter eighteen of the *Life*, shortly after the dedication of Ripon, in which Wilfrid restored a child to life and in return the mother was supposed to give her son to the church at the age of seven. When the time came, she fled, but "the bishop's reeve having sought and found the boy, took him away by force to Wilfrid at Ripon."²⁰ Tiddanufri, the location of the miracle, was probably Tidover and would have been fourteen miles from Ripon. While this instance demonstrates Wilfrid's probable possession of land, it also seems to typify the image of Wilfrid as a political force or, as David Pelteret has inferred, a secular lord or king exerting his power over the inhabitants demonstrated through his use of reeves.²¹ It was probably while Wilfrid was at York that lands were donated in the central and eastern parts of Yorkshire as well. Based upon evidence in the ninth and eleventh centuries, Hexham, referred to as a *regio* by Stephen, would have also included surrounding parishes with reeves; G.R.J. Jones estimates that it would have encompassed about sixty square miles in the north central Penines.²² Dent could have been a church settlement in the parish of Sedbergh comprising thirty square miles, or it could have comprised the entire parish of Sedbergh, which would have been eighty-three square miles. Finally, Yeadon would have been about forty-one square miles, "the area of the later parishes of Otley, Weston, and Guisley."²³ It is clear that early on in his career Wilfrid held a significant amount of land that he presided over, not only with his monastic foundations but also through his travel, fulfilling his duties

²⁰ G.R.J. Jones, "Some Donations to Bishop Wilfrid in Northern England," *Northern History* 31 (1995): 24; Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 126-27.

²¹ David Pelteret, "Saint Wilfrid: Tribal Bishop, Civic Bishop or Germanic Lord?," in *The Community, the Family, and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Joyce Hill and Mary Swan, *International Medieval Research* 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 159-80.

²² Jones, "Some Donations," 29.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36.

as bishop, baptizing, confirming, and other modes of pastoral care. His travels can also be interpreted as fulfilling his duties as lord, asserting his control over the land through his presence.

Wilfrid's use of documents himself and the appearance of his name upon official documents of the seventh century demonstrate his clever ability to legitimize his possessions but also distinguish himself in a time when very few documents were used, except by those of high secular rank. Based upon Wilfrid's instruction in Rome and his speech at the Synod of Whitby, it is highly likely that Wilfrid knew *annus Domini* dating well and began to use it. While most charters utilizing AD dating date from after the death of Bede, a handful of charters utilizing this form of dating survive from the seventh century and have been associated with Wilfrid. There are two from the kingdom of the Hwicce (on the border of Mercia and Wessex). One of these is the Bath foundation charter, dated to 6 November 675, preserved in the abbey's twelfth-century cartulary. Wilfrid attests this charter and is the only one of the clerical witnesses to attest "reputable" documents with AD dating other than Bishops Eorcenwald and Haedi, who do so with him.²⁴ It was also probably by chance that Wilfrid happened to be in the south when Aethelred and Osric granted the charter for the foundation of the monastery, but Patrick Sims-Williams has suggested that Wilfrid probably wanted to be present at the consecration of Eorcenwald as bishop of London so that he could have a more active role in the foundation of the monastery. The date of the charter, 675, also happens to fall at a central point in his career, when he adorned his monasteries at Ripon and Hexham, before Theodore had dismantled his large diocese.

²⁴ Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 104.

The other Hwiccan charter, preserved in the eleventh-century Worcester cartulary, concerns Ribble and dates to 680, when Wilfrid was in exile from Egfrith and seeking refuge briefly from Berhtwald (as discussed below). Berhtwald had recently granted land to Aldhelm in Northern Wessex. Wilfrid probably reached Sussex in 680/1. Wilfrid was probably attracted to Sussex at the instigation of Wulfhere, who encouraged the baptism of King Aethelwath whose wife was a Hwiccan princess. Wulfhere probably had overlordship over this area as well.²⁵ The charter stipulates that the land was granted by Oshere, with the consent of Aethelred, to one of Wynfrith's monks, Frithowald. Sims-Williams suggests through a series of conjectures and the name on the charter, Wynfrith, that the charter dating to 680 regards the same Ribble in Worcestershire that Wilfrid mentioned in his dedication at Ripon and it was probably Wilfrid's name on the charter rather than Wynfrith's. The names Wynfrith and Wilfrith (Old English for Wilfrid) were mistaken by a syllable, as Stephen later states in chapter twenty-five of the *Life* regarding an episode when both men were on the Continent. When Aethelred expelled Wilfrid from Mercia in 680, he probably consented to leaving this monastery to Wilfrid's monks.²⁶ The similarities between the Bath foundation charter and the Ribble charter, especially the diocesan dating clause, suggests that although Wilfrid appears to be indirectly related with the latter, he or his followers may have been directly involved in it. These charters further provide evidence of Wilfrid's desire to claim possession or association with certain lands.

More recently, Catherine Cubitt has compiled a list of twelve charters in which Wilfrid's name appears on the witness list. Many of the charters, however, must be understood with caution due to the possibility of forgery and tampering. The charters listed

²⁵ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 104-5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

below (whether Wilfrid did in fact serve as a witness or not) offer insight into Wilfrid's possible activities not mentioned by Stephen nor Bede, as well as his unique relationships with other ecclesiastical and secular leaders.²⁷

S 45: AD 692. Nothelm, king of the South Saxons, grants 33 hides in Sussex to his sister Nothgyth. Nothgyth transfers the land to Bishop Wilfrid [692-709] with later confirmations [Largely reliable]

S 47: Aethelberh, king of the South Saxons, to Wilfrid, bishop, grant of ½ a hide at Chichester, Sussex [A later thirteenth-century forgery]

S 51: AD 676. Osric, king, to Bertana, abbess; grant of land at Bath, Somerset, for a nunnery [A possible fabrication based upon the authentic grant of land in 675/6]

S 52: 680 (for 678x793). Oshere, king, to Frithuwald, monk of Bishop Winfrith; grant of land at Ripple, Worcs. [Debatable; Sims-Williams convincingly argues authentic as noted above]

S 53: AD 693x?699. Oshere, king of the Hwicce, to Cuthswith, abbess; grant of land at *Penitanham* and *Dyllwuuida* (?) for the building of a minster [Probably authentic; Wilfrid appears on the witness list with Archbishop Berhtwald and eight other bishops]

S 72: 680. Privilege of Pope Agatho for Medeshamstede with donations to the same house by King Ethelred [Later forgery]

S 230: 680. Cadwalla, king to Wilfrid, bishop, grant of 70 hides at a number of places in Sussex [Possible forgery]

S 232: 673 for ?683. Cadwalla, king to Wilfrid, bishop, grant of 55 hides in and around Selsey and 32 hides elsewhere in Sussex [Possible forgery]

S 235: AD 688. Cadwalla, king of the West Saxons, to Cedde, Cisi, and Criswa; grant of lands for the foundation of a minster of land at Farnham, Surrey [Authentic]

S 1171: AD 685x693, probably 686x688 (March). Ethelred to Aethelburh, abbess, for her minster called Barking, grant of 40 hides [Authentic]

S 1246: 677 for 687 or 688. Eorchenwald, bishop of the East Saxons, to the nunnery of Barking, grant of privileges and of lands [Trustworthy (probably authentic); shares the same witness list as 1171 (omitting Ethelred)]

²⁷ The numbering of the charters is that of P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968).

S 1248: AD 693. [?Eorcenwald], bishop to [? St Mary's, Barking], grant of 28 hides at Battersea, 20 at *Watsingaham* (Washingham). The land had been granted to him by Cadwalla, king of Wessex, and confirmed by Aethelred, king of Mercia [Genuine, but problematic; two witness lists: 680s and 693, Wilfrid's attestation belongs to the 680s]²⁸

While Wilfrid's name appears on the witness list to all the above charters, several have been proven or argued inauthentic. The inauthenticity (whether the result of forgery or otherwise) of some of the charters should not, however, undermine the possibility that Wilfrid was active in these areas, was granted land there, or had impressive, sometimes unlikely, political connections (secular or ecclesiastical). It should be stated that the existence or nonexistence of charters, especially in the seventh century, did not necessarily determine ownership of land. Only two of the charters have been discussed in detail, above (Sims-Williams), as the focus of this chapter is not to contest charters, but to outline all of Wilfrid's possible landholdings and the reason he may have presented a threat to secular authority.

While seventh-century use of charters was minimal, charters were indeed accepted as valid by secular and ecclesiastical authorities, but with some reluctance. Land tenure in Anglo-Saxon England was simple prior to the onset of Christianity. Most land, as stated above regarding Wilfrid's father, was owned by the king who granted it to followers for military service. At their death, land did not pass to their heirs but reverted to the king, who then distributed it to another military follower. The success of kings and kingdoms relied upon the gift of land to loyal subjects and able fighting men. Success or expansion of territory probably attracted landless warriors to service of the king. The more land available to the king, the more he could provide for his followers, strengthening his military power and

²⁸ Catherine Cubitt, "Appendix 1: Anglo-Saxon Charters Attested by Wilfrid," in Higham, *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, 331-33.

prestige. The arrival of the church became an issue to this system. The church needed land, but unlike a military follower it did not die. Kings wished to please their new God by providing land for the church. Land was also provided, especially in the donation for a monastic house, for the salvation of souls, evident in Wilfrid's dedication at Ripon. Charters allowed the church to be granted land in perpetuity and until the tenth century, most charters were written by local bishops, abbots, or scribes.²⁹ The rights conveyed in charters could cause problems for those in positions of power, especially kings. Within the ecclesiastical history of the period, charters caused two problems. According to James Campbell, "kings were now permanently losing land which they might earlier have withdrawn from one warrior and given to another... Secondly charters offered anyone a permanent form of royal donation, to be added to his kindred's stock of heritable land, provided he founded a monastery, and kept its government in his family's hands."³⁰

Unlike the king's followers who were given land in return for military service, the church did not provide any such service to the kingdom in which the land was granted. The alienation of land to the church may not have been initially recognized, although Wilfrid's career and Bede's letter to Egbert convincingly serve to suggest its recognition (a matter which will be returned to at the end of the chapter). Wilfrid's early use of, or participation in charters tried to prevent the king from revoking any land acquired from him (which Ecgrith and his successor Aldfrith fiercely tried to do). Wilfrid, as a single ecclesiastical figure, was continuing to gain permanent land for the church, managing it under himself as bishop and abbot. He represented land now lost to the kingdom and its protection. Excessive alienation

²⁹ Wood, "Land Tenure," 8-9.

³⁰ James Campbell, Eric John, and Patrick Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 97.

of land called into question the survival of kingdoms. This is probably the main reason that Wilfrid encountered hostility from his king throughout his career. Furthermore, “what the charters had originally called ‘perpetual’ or ‘ecclesiastical’ right came to be known as hereditary right.”³¹ Aristocrats who wished to found a monastery went to the king for land. The aristocrat who understood the rights and terms for church land could continue to live on the land after the monastery was founded and pass it on to his heirs (a complaint made by Bede in his letter to Egbert). This may have been one of the reasons why so many monasteries were founded: they enriched the founding family. Wilfrid founded numerous monasteries throughout his lifetime, transcending the territorial boundaries of rival kingdoms, seemingly reducing the opportunity for military support in his own kingdom. In addition, due to the numerous monasteries sprouting up across the landscape, there was a shortage of land not only to endow more bishoprics (as Bede had complained), but also to provide military warriors to defend the kingdom.

In relation to land granted to the church, it was also in the 670s that Ecgfrith granted land for Wearmouth and Jarrow in Northumbria, monastic houses founded by Wilfrid’s earlier travel companion Benedict Biscop. In comparison to Wilfrid’s landholdings, Wearmouth’s landholdings, established in 674, amounted to seventy hides according to Bede in his *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* and fifty hides according to the *Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrid*.³² Several years later, in 681/682 (during Wilfrid’s exile by Ecgfrith), Ecgfrith provided Benedict the land for Jarrow, allocating another forty

³¹ Campbell, John, and Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 98.

³² Bede, “Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,” in Farmer, *The Age of Bede*, 191; Anonymous, “The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrid,” in Farmer, *The Age of Bede*, 215; Ian Wood. “Entrusting Western Europe to the Church, 400-750,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (2013): 53.

hides.³³ Upon Biscop's return from Rome in 685, he purchased three hides of land from King Aldfrith near the mouth of the River Wear. Wearmouth and Jarrow continued to accumulate land under Biscop's successor, Ceolfrith. Ceolfrith acquired eight hides of land by the River Frescia from Aldfrith in return for a work of cosmography that Benedict had brought from Rome. The land went to the monastery of Jarrow, a matter which Benedict had discussed with Aldfrith, but he died before it could be settled.³⁴ Later, during the reign of Osred in the early 700s, Ceolfrith traded the land with a "fair balance in money" for twenty hides at a place known as Sambuce; this plot of land was closer to the monastery of Jarrow. Ceolfrith then acquired a privilege for Jarrow as Biscop had done earlier for Wearmouth. King Aldfrith and assembled bishops confirmed it with signatures before a synod.³⁵ It was also in Ceolfrith's time that a man named Witmer dedicated himself to the monastery of Wearmouth and gave the monastery ten hides which Aldfrith had previously given him at Dalton.³⁶ In all, by the time Ceolfrith left for Rome in 716, the sister monasteries possessed 151 hides. We do not know much about other monasteries in Northumbria, at least not to the extent of Wearmouth-Jarrow and Wilfrid's own land endowments. We do know that in Mercia, Wulfhere gave fifty hides at Barrow to Chad, who took over Lichfield from Wilfrid in 669/670. Further south, charters have provided some evidence, albeit problematic, due to the reasons discussed above. The monastery of Hanbury may have had fifty hides of land, Farnham sixty, Bradfield 120, and Minster-in-Thanet 124. Ely, in East Anglia, may have held 600 hides. Very little is known about other major foundations such as Peterborough, Malmesbury, and Glastonbury. We also do not know much about the later religious

³³ Bede, "Lives of the Abbots," 193.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 196, 203.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

endowments for the episcopal churches of Wessex, Canterbury, or York.³⁷ Given the evidence that we do have for early Anglo-Saxon England, “the amount of property held by ecclesiastical institutions was extensive enough to present a major political problem in terms of ensuring adequate territorial support ... a significant proportion of Western Europe was entrusted to God and his Saints in the pre-Carolingian era.”³⁸

Papal privileges, not entirely dissimilar to the church’s use of charters, sought to restrict secular and sometimes episcopal interference in the governance of monastic houses. Privileges were also another effort to secure the landed endowments of monasteries, upon which the monastery was founded, but probably also any land later donated to the religious house, which could be near the monastery or far afield, as is demonstrated by the land acquired for Jarrow (as stated above). Papal privileges seemingly also needed royal approval. Unlike Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith, who received royal approval for their privileges of Wearmouth and Jarrow granted by the pope, Wilfrid probably did not.³⁹ Upon his return from Rome, his papal documents had been met with contempt. Additionally, unlike Benedict Biscop, whom Ecgrith had given large endowments, Wilfrid is not known to have been given land by Ecgrith apart from the property given to him in the dedication at Ripon (lands deserted by British priests during Northumbrian conquests).⁴⁰ Perhaps, to kings, Benedict Biscop was more attractive as a recipient of endowments as he had lived in military service to the king until he was twenty-five, had been close to Theodore (escorting him to England), and remained a nobleman throughout his life.

³⁷ Wood, “Entrusting Western Europe,” 56.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁹ Bede, “Lives of the Abbots,” 192, 203; Cubitt, “Wilfrid: A Man for His Times,” 317.

⁴⁰ Nicholas J. Higham, “Bishop Wilfrid in Southern England: A Review of His Political Objectives,” *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 13 (1999): 208.

As bishop, Wilfrid ranked exceedingly high among the clergy, especially as “power of bishops was largely coterminous with that of particular kings: the kingdom rather than the city was the ecclesiastical unit, and power of the bishop could become more, or less, extended as a king gained or lost territory. This was due to the tribal organization of the Anglo-Saxons and to the need of bishops to work in close concert with kings.”⁴¹ At the death of Oswy, Ecgfrith ascended to the throne and was by the 670s the reigning king of all of Northumbria (Bernicia and Deira). He continued to extend his own territory and authority alongside his bishop. In the early part of his reign, he had conquered the Picts in the north.⁴² According to Stephen, “These conquests at one and the same time extended our most pious King Ecgfrith’s territory and enlarged the field of Wilfrid’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction. He was now bishop of the Saxons in the south, and of the British, Scots, and Picts in the north.”⁴³

Besides the landed endowment of a bishop’s diocese, he probably acquired revenue from something similar to the ‘church-scot’ (from the laws of Ine, r. 689-726), a payment due in November from every household after the harvest. He was probably also entitled to a portion of money offerings made at the altar during mass, fees for burials, and voluntary tithes to the church which usually went to monastic or minster churches that served the particular area. There was also a tax that every church paid to the bishop for its chrism, which was the main source of revenue for Gaulish bishops (aside from their estates and sees) and quite likely those in Anglo-Saxon England. Mayr-Harting has suggested that the building of Wilfrid’s churches at Ripon and Hexham was probably funded by endowments but any

⁴¹ Farmer, “Saint Wilfrid,” 44.

⁴² Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 128.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 129.

lavish decoration or repair probably utilized these alternative sources of income. Wilfrid was not only a bishop, but also an abbot of numerous monasteries. Monastic houses and their dependencies also probably paid a “financial contribution of their own resources to the wider collective body, a sum,” as Sarah Foot has suggested, which in Wilfrid’s case “could have funded the bishop’s retinue and mobile lifestyle,” including his several trips to Gaul and Rome.⁴⁴ All of the above situations probably contributed to Wilfrid’s wealth. Stephen tells us in chapter twenty-one at the height of Wilfrid’s career, while discussing the virtues of his bishop, that: “Nearly all the abbots and abbesses made over their possessions to him by vow, either retaining them in his name during their lifetime or naming him heir in their wills. Nobles, men of high position in the world, sent their sons for him to tutor so that they might have the choice either of giving themselves to God or else of returning as grown men with Wilfrid’s recommendation to enter the king’s service as warriors.”⁴⁵

Wilfrid continued to gain more land through patronage wherever he traveled. Ecgfrith was married to Ethelthryth, whom Wilfrid had supported in her desire to remain a virgin, leave her husband, and become a nun at Coldingham under Ecgfrith’s aunt, Aebbe. She too, like Alchfrith, had been a previous patron, granting Wilfrid the land for Hexham, which he adorned as he had Ripon and York. Stephen described the elaborate efforts undertaken by Wilfrid at Hexham: “he built a church to the glory of God and in the honour of Saint Andrew,” adding that the church was characterized by “the great depth of the foundations, the crypts of beautifully dressed stone, the vast structure supported by columns of various styles and with numerous side-aisles, the walls of remarkable height and length, the many winding passages and spiral staircases leading up and down ... we have never heard of its like

⁴⁴ Sarah Foot, “Wilfrid’s Monastic Empire,” in Higham, *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, 33.

⁴⁵ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 129.

this side of the Alps.”⁴⁶ On Wilfrid’s trip to Rome in 679, he had been granted a papal privilege to protect Ripon and Hexham from outside interference, which was reinforced upon his third trip and second appeal to Rome in the early 700s. It is notable that both Ripon and Hexham had been given to Wilfrid by royal patrons who were no longer figures in Ecgfrith’s life. Ripon and Hexham were also two endowments of which Wilfrid personally claimed possession and that he lavishly decorated. Perhaps Ecgfrith, who later revoked Wilfrid’s land holdings, believed that because both of the patrons were no longer present and therefore no longer relevant, their land grants should be considered invalid.

At this point in time within Northumbria, Wilfrid was bishop of York, overseeing the vast Northumbrian diocese, as well as Ripon, Hexham, and lands that accompanied them donated by the inhabitants and his patrons, Alchfrith and Ethelthryth. Additionally, Wilfrid possessed lands and maintained his monasteries in Mercia but also presumably Kent, where he had assisted King Egbert during the vacancy at Canterbury. While Wilfrid’s exceedingly large diocese of Northumbria expanded outward territorially based upon his king’s conquests, his monastic foundations from royal patrons or otherwise placed him in a position of power due to his accumulation of lands. Furthermore, Wilfrid had amassed a following of supporters from his previous life in the secular aristocracy, from his monastic foundations, and probably also from those who were attracted to his reputation (for traveling to Rome and his triumph at the Synod of Whitby). These followers served in his entourage during his travels throughout England and on the Continent, armed or otherwise, and were willing to support their leader, bishop or abbot, in his time of need.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 130.

At the council of Hertford in 673, Theodore began dividing dioceses in existing kingdoms, initiating a reorganization of the church. By 677/78, Theodore had divided Wilfrid's diocese into three, over his head, and displaced his authority. Michael Roper has suggested that logically Wilfrid was probably offered one of the bishoprics (most likely Hexham), but, frustrated that his large diocese, power, and influence had been dismantled, refused.⁴⁷ Details regarding his displacement and politics therein will be further discussed in Chapter Three. In 679, Wilfrid appealed to the pope in Rome on the matter, resulting in the decision to restore his large bishopric, as he had been unjustly supplanted. He was also given the ability to choose his co-bishops. Upon his return, King Egfrith – whom Wilfrid probably made nervous due to his accumulation of land and followers, given the association between land and power (often demonstrating the military might of kings) – refused to accept the papal decision, and imprisoned, and subsequently exiled Wilfrid.

Michael Roper asserts that Wilfrid's career as a landholder can be divided into six phases, each coinciding with stages of his ecclesiastical career.⁴⁸ The first two have already been discussed, his return from Rome (and Lyons) until his confirmation as bishop in 669, and 669 through 678 during his time as bishop of York. The third phase corresponded to the first five years of his exile by Egfrith. Returning briefly to David Pelteret's assertions at this point in the narrative may be pertinent in considering Wilfrid as a growing political force. He suggests that to hold a position of power meant giving away wealth in a lavish display, which is evident in Wilfrid's structures of Ripon, Hexham, and York; in his gift giving, which is represented later in his bequests at his death; and in the bestowal of land and the rights inherent in that land, represented first by Alchfrith and Ethelthryth (regal powers)

⁴⁷ Michael Roper, "Wilfrid's Landholdings in Northumbria," in Kirby, *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*, 74-75.

⁴⁸ Roper, "Wilfrid's Landholdings in Northumbria," 61.

giving to Wilfrid and subsequently Wilfrid giving to his followers who probably assisted him in military campaigns first with Dagobert and his return to Gaul (to be addressed in more detail in the following chapter) and subsequently with Cadwalla.⁴⁹ Additionally, kings and lords held a considerable amount of land, as land equated to power and authority in the early Middle Ages, and Wilfrid continued to gain land, exert his influence over it, and seemingly threaten the power of secular rulers. Though Wilfrid was spreading Christianity across the landscape of Northumbria and Mercia through his religious establishments and missionary work as a religious figure, his movement, actions, wealth, and relationships portrayed him less like a bishop and more like a secular lord or king, who seemed to demonstrate his holiness in the acquisition, control, and transmission of land.⁵⁰

Ecgfrith's exile of Wilfrid, according to Stephen, was partly triggered by Iurminburh's convincing statement, indicated at the outset of this chapter, but it was quite likely due to Ecgfrith's uneasiness regarding his bishop's growing influence, which impinged upon his political control. The more wealth Wilfrid gained, especially through his accumulation of lands, the more influential politically he became in Northumbria and parts of Mercia. Additionally, Alchfrith and Aelwine had been the last sub-kings of Deira, making Ecgfrith the sole ruler. In comparison to his king, Wilfrid probably possessed more land, transcending territorial lines. At the same time, Ecgfrith was also trying to extend his control into Mercia, where Wilfrid had befriended powerful rulers. One would have thought Wilfrid would have been seen as an ally who could support his king, both militarily and religiously. The combination of land accumulation under one ecclesiastical figure (much like a lord) and the loss of land from the king (which was usually given to military followers) resulted in

⁴⁹ Pelteret, "Saint Wilfrid," 161.

⁵⁰ Smith, "Property, Dispute and Sanctity," 196.

Wilfrid's representation as a political adversary. Wilfrid not only continued to increase the power of the church, but he rivaled the king in wealth and perhaps military followers.

In his exile from Ecgfrith (his third phase of landholding), Wilfrid received lands from Berhtwald, nephew of King Aethelred of Mercia, which he used to found monasteries until he was no longer favored due to Berhtwald's familial relations to Ecgfrith. Wilfrid then went on to Wessex, where he gained seventy-one hides of land at Wedmore in Somerset and Clewer, which he later transferred to Glastonbury Abbey.⁵¹ In the same region he is also said to have held Withington. He was forced to move on yet again as the queen in Wessex was related to Iurminburh, queen of Ecgfrith. Wilfrid then went to Sussex (leaving his monks behind at his monastery in Wessex), the last pagan stronghold, and won the favor of Aethelwath, king of the South Saxons. He was given the royal vill of Selsey with ninety hides during his mission of conversion in which he founded a monastery. Cadwalla of Wessex later confirmed this land grant after his conquest of Sussex, in which Wilfrid had supported him militarily (turning against his former patron, Aethelwath). He was additionally given seventy hides at Pagham, ten at Tangmere, and a quarter of the Isle of Wight, amounting to one hundred hides.⁵² It was also in the south that he held Aldingbourne, Westergate, and Northmundham, given to him by Nothgitha, the sister of Nothelm.⁵³ In addition, he may also have been given Seaford. In 686/687 he transferred the lands of Pagham and Tangmere to Archbishop Theodore. He left his remaining lands in the region under the control of his family and followers, which could be interpreted as a form of gift giving usually attributed as a characteristic of a king to his followers.

⁵¹ Roper, "Wilfrid's Landholdings in Northumbria," 62.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Wood, "Entrusting Western Europe," 56; Cubitt, "Appendix 1: Anglo-Saxon Charters Attested by Wilfrid," 331-33; Roper, "Wilfrid's Landholdings in Northumbria," 62.

Upon his return to Northumbria to reconcile with Aldfrith in 686/687 following the death of Ecgrith, his fourth phase as a landholder began. It was also at this time that he reconciled with the archbishop and Aethelred of Mercia, Berhtwald's uncle, and regained his lands from Berhtwald. In Wilfrid's brief return in 686, "he [Aldfrith] granted him the monastery of Hexham with all the possessions belonging to it and after a while, carrying out the command of Pope Agatho and the Synod, he restored to him the see of York and the abbacy of Ripon together with their revenues, having driven out the usurping bishops."⁵⁴ In 688 Wilfrid was replaced by John of Beverley at Hexham and in 691/692 he was exiled by Aldfrith, beginning the fifth phase of his landholding. According to Stephen, "the principal cause for dissension was of long standing, namely the unjust removal of land and possessions from the church of St. Peter."⁵⁵ Twice, Wilfrid had been deprived of his lands and bishopric, first by Ecgrith and subsequently by his brother Aldfrith. Wilfrid then retreated to his Mercian estates and is believed to have founded at least six more monasteries in Mercia, under Aethelred. Wilfrid spent eleven years in exile from 691/692 to 702/703.

Stephen says nothing about his eleven years in exile nor his activities during these years. We hear from Bede in his "Life of Hilda" (*Ecclesiastical History*, IV. 23) that Wilfrid consecrated Offor as bishop of the Hwicce, "acting as bishop of the Middle Angles, since Theodore had died and as yet no bishop had been appointed to succeed him."⁵⁶ It was also at this time that he supposedly attested the charter for King Oshere of the Hwicce, a monastic foundation possibly located at Inkberrow.⁵⁷ Bede later tells us that in 692 Willibrord and his

⁵⁴ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 154.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 245; Morn Capper, "Prelates and Politics: Wilfrid, Oundle and the 'Middle Angles,'" in Higham, *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, 263.

⁵⁷ Capper, "Prelates and Politics," 264; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 104; Cubitt, "Appendix 1: Anglo-Saxon Charters Attested by Wilfrid," 331-33.

fellow brethren in Frisia sent Swidbert to Britain to be consecrated bishop: “He was consecrated by the most reverend Bishop Wilfrid, who happened to be driven out of his own country at the time and was living in exile among the Mercians.”⁵⁸ Theodore’s successor, Berhtwald, had not yet returned from Rome at this time. There is no definite list of monasteries founded by Wilfrid among the Middle Angles, but Peterborough, Oundle, Evesham, Brixworth, and Wing provide connection to Wilfrid through written or archaeological evidence.⁵⁹ Wilfrid may also have been present among the East Angles during this period. Bede provides a Wilfridian connection to Ely. Around 695, Wilfrid acted as witness and assisted in the translation of his old friend Ethelthryth’s relics at the request of her sister Seaxburh.⁶⁰ Wilfrid may have thought her sanctification would reconfirm her gift of Hexham to him. He may also have acted as bishop in that area, providing pastoral care and maintaining connections throughout his lifetime.

Morn Capper asserts that chapter forty-five of Stephen’s *Life* indicates that during Wilfrid’s time of exile in which he was welcomed by his friend Aethelred and stayed in the same diocese that Sexwulf held until his death, he was probably active further east near his landholdings at Oundle, a monastery mentioned at the time of his death.⁶¹ He further suggests that Bede’s label of the “Middle Angles” is somewhat inaccurate as Bede used it to indicate a greater Mercian supremacy when it probably included several regions such as the Hwicce, southern Gyrwe, and East Angles that held connections to Mercia.⁶² Peterborough was brought under Mercian rule when Theodore appointed Sexwulf, a landholder in the

⁵⁸ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 283.

⁵⁹ Farmer, “Saint Wilfrid,” 52.

⁶⁰ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 239

⁶¹ Capper, “Prelates and Politics,” 264.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Gyrwe, as bishop.⁶³ Another monastery close to Oundle was Castor, founded by the daughters of Penda, Cyneburh and Cyneswith. It is possible that Cyneburh was the widow of Wilfrid's first patron, Alchfrith.⁶⁴ This connection would then imply her support of his activities within the area and probably near Oundle.⁶⁵ While Capper suggests that Wilfrid's foundations among the Middle Angles competed with other sponsorship based on local lineages, resulting in probably less regional influence, Wilfrid was still active in this area as an influential religious leader regardless of competing sponsors. While his activity is unrecorded, historians can speculate about his influence and activity in the eleven years of his exile.

In 702/703, the Council of Austerfield was called by Archbishop Berhtwald and presided over by King Aldfrith and numerous bishops. Wilfrid was invited to attend in order to settle his status and position. When Wilfrid realized the direction the council was taking, he acknowledged that he was willing to obey as long as its decrees were according to canon law, as the previous kings and bishops had refused the authority of the pope for twenty-two years. While the council was arranging a reply, one of the king's officers came to Wilfrid. According to Stephen, "Wilfrid had taken him in as a helpless infant, brought him up from the cradle in fact; consequently the man was greatly devoted to him. He came in disguise, mingling with the crowd, and explained that the bishops' decision was a trap."⁶⁶ The man continued: "The upshot of the transaction will be that every single parcel of land you are known to possess in Northumbria, whether belonging to the diocese or the monasteries or coming to you in any other way, will be taken from you. You will be forced to surrender to

⁶³ Ibid., 265.

⁶⁴ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 177; Capper, "Prelates and Politics," 267.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 156.

the archbishop everything you have gained in Mercia from King Aethelred. Berhtwald will then give it to whom he pleases. Finally, you will find that your own signature has condemned you to degradation from the office of bishop.”⁶⁷ It is important to point out several things here: Wilfrid, even in his defamation over the years through conflicting relationships with kings, retained and gathered loyal followers; his accomplishments and land accumulation were seen as threatening not only to the king but also the archbishop; and Stephen placed significant emphasis on Wilfrid’s loss of land and possessions. For the third time in his career, his political opponents were doing everything in their power to restrict the political and ecclesiastical influence of Wilfrid, including numerous attempts to revoke his land.

After some deliberation, the council revealed its true intentions: “They openly declared that it was their wish to strip Wilfrid of all he possessed so that he would not be able to call the smallest cottage his own, either in Northumbria or Mercia.”⁶⁸ This is significant because unlike Merovingian bishops (who will be discussed in the following chapter), Wilfrid was not killed but only accorded a menial punishment. For his enemies, the loss of everything he possessed would greatly restrict any sort of power and influence, but it would also humiliate and destroy Wilfrid’s reputation and status. It was decided that Wilfrid would be allowed to keep the monastery at Ripon with all of its lands and possessions as well as privileges granted to the abbot, as Wilfrid had built and dedicated it. The condition would only be upheld if he agreed to never leave the grounds nor exercise episcopal office, voluntarily laying down his rank. Wilfrid, understandably upset, replied: “Why are you trying to bring me to so sad a plight as to have me make my own signature an instrument of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

self-destruction? I have been a bishop now for forty years and although unworthy of that rank I am completely innocent of crime...”⁶⁹ Wilfrid’s reply, as part of a longer speech (quoted in full in Chapter One), describes his contributions to the church but it also demonstrates the importance that Wilfrid placed upon his reputation and ecclesiastical empire that he built throughout his lifetime. Although Wilfrid had amassed a significant amount of land and followers, his speech elucidates his concerns for the growth of the English Church. Unlike other bishops of his time, he fought relentlessly to maintain his possessions and uphold his reputation – a reputation that was highly impressive and deserving of recognition.

Now an old man, he departed to Rome for the third and final time. While his first appeal to the pope concerned his episcopal status and authority, his second appeal to Rome concerned his reputation and property, specifically his monasteries. Stephen wrote that Wilfrid sought a second appeal, based on “the recent disturbances in Britain caused by that faction which, in contravention of Pope Agatho’s decrees, have robbed me of my bishopric, monasteries, land, and everything I possessed.”⁷⁰ Wilfrid asked for the restoration of his monasteries “with all their lands and possessions.”⁷¹ Ripon and Hexham had already been safeguarded by earlier privileges but he wished to reaffirm these privileges granted by Popes Agatho, Sergius, and Benedict, as they had been disregarded by previous kings.⁷² It can be presumed that as Wilfrid asked for the protection of Ripon and Hexham earlier in his career, so he also had asked for protection for those lands in Mercia as well. The pope declared that the archbishop, kings, and those who found fault with Wilfrid must come to an agreement or return to the Holy See. The document acquitting Wilfrid was met with contempt, as had

⁶⁹ Ibid., 157-8.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 161.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 162.

previously been the case with Ecgrith in the 680s. Aldfrith later changed his mind after he fell gravely ill, as divine vengeance had been promised in the decree to those who rejected it. After the ascension of his son, Osred, the council of Nidd was held to find consensus with the pope's decrees. Wilfrid's final phase in landholding began in 705 with the restoration of his monasteries, Ripon and Hexham, and his appointment as bishop of Hexham that lasted until his death in 709/710. Wilfrid's followers rejoiced after Wilfrid again found success: "Those who, after so long a tenure of Wilfrid's possessions gave them up to make amends before his death, brought down Christ's peace upon themselves; while to us their action brought new hope and restored to us all the joys of our old way of life. We had been scattered abroad as exiles in various parts of the country under strange masters. Now our misery was over and we could again enjoy community life under our beloved superior and live in peace with all who were reconciled to him."⁷³

It should be noted that while the details regarding the appeals to the pope as well as the councils of Austerfield and Nidd are not included in Bede, Stephen utilized petitions to and letters from the pope to authenticate the narrative and highlight the power of the papacy. It is curious but also probably deliberate that Stephen's use of documents in the *Life* reflected Wilfrid's use of legal documents throughout his lifetime. Wilfrid legally and publicly not only legitimized his activities, but also preserved a legacy for himself such as no king or ecclesiastic had done before him. Furthermore, a written document provided "fixed, verifiable, and enduring form to the information it [conveyed]."⁷⁴ Charters were written testimonies that provided the legal protection of transactions. They also served as a written

⁷³ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁴ Sarah Foot, "Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record, or Story?," in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, edited by Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti, Studies in the Early Middle Ages (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 40.

record that protected against fallible memories, or rather that prevented the “wrong memory from triumphing.”⁷⁵ Similar to the use of charters, Stephen’s inclusion of detailed accounts of Wilfrid’s more turbulent episodes not only emphasize the contention between secular and ecclesiastical authority over land, but also preserve the true memory of a man who contributed to the spread of Christianity with his monastic foundations but who was unjustly persecuted, rather than a power-hungry bishop in constant conflict with the king. Part of Wilfrid’s legacy was his acquisition, possession, and transmission of land. He was able to transform land into a sacred space and provide his monasteries what was necessary to survive over time.⁷⁶

Wilfrid fell ill in 708 and the news spread quickly. His followers, “all his abbots and hermits came hastening in from far and wide.”⁷⁷ Over the course of his lifetime, Wilfrid formed many connections both amiable and hostile. His ability to create these connections, dispersed throughout England and the Continent, is one of the more intriguing facets of his career and contributed to his larger image as a towering figure of the age. His biographer’s emphasis on Wilfrid’s followers is threaded throughout the *Life* and has been referred to at various points in this chapter. Shortly after Wilfrid’s death Stephen wrote that “regular monastic life continued to flourish under outstanding abbots in all kingdoms on both sides of the Humber,” indicating Wilfrid’s widespread number of followers and the magnitude of his wealth and power.⁷⁸ While Wilfrid continued to gain land and followers who supported him throughout his lifetime, Sarah Foot has highlighted that his followers and his monastic network probably represented something more important to him, a family. While Wilfrid’s

⁷⁵ Foot, “Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters,” 40, 63.

⁷⁶ Smith, “Property, Dispute, and Sanctity,” 192.

⁷⁷ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 177.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

social status seemingly provided him entry into the world of ecclesiastical and secular politics, he remained there due to his personal connections and assistance from his loyal followers and supporters. Wilfrid indeed entered the monastic life appropriately, just as other spiritual brethren, renouncing his kinship relations and his emotional ties with home and any obligations therein. Monastic life did not deny those who chose that particular lifestyle “emotional comfort and support of family life, for monastic society was organized analogously to secular kinship.”⁷⁹ The communities of Wilfrid’s monastic houses were part of a brotherhood who held their devotion and lifestyle in common. Wilfrid’s monasteries and the monks that inhabited them identified and held a certain devotion or affinity to Wilfrid, their bishop and founder. Wilfrid’s family was similar to secular kinship relations as they served as a form of protection. As kin might do, at his death Wilfrid provided his many monasteries and abbots portions of his wealth and land, affording them the ability to survive.⁸⁰

Wilfrid combined the strength of kinship relations from an earlier tribal society with the changing norms of seventh-century society, transforming it into a somewhat feudal society. Furthermore, although this form of society did not develop fully until the later Anglo-Saxon period, it is relevant to emphasize that “the introduction of lordship brought different layers of kinship groups into mutual association and mutual dependence, and thus made it possible for a society to cover a much greater territorial extent than a tribal society could.”⁸¹ As stated earlier in this chapter, Wilfrid’s followers were drawn from his former aristocratic lifestyle, his monasteries, and those who were attracted by his reputation. His

⁷⁹ Foot, “Wilfrid’s Monastic Empire,” 37.

⁸⁰ Campbell, John, and Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 169.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

followers probably recognized numerous advantages in allying with him: loyalty, collective wealth, protection, and survival, among others. His accumulation of wealth (land) and power as an ecclesiastical figure, serving God and spreading Christianity, quite likely assisted in his appeal. Whatever the case, Wilfrid was able to amass a large following, who remained loyal to him, even after his death. His followers provided Wilfrid military prowess in his career, one that threatened secular powers, given Iurminburh's statement above. This may also have been part of the reason that Wilfrid was able to maintain his land after he was deposed and in and out of exile, given Stephen's use of statements such as "his followers have it to the present day" when Wilfrid founded or left a monastery, before moving on to another kingdom. This may also have been a rhetorical method that Stephen used to further demonstrate Wilfrid's possession of, and association with, land.

Wilfrid lived until 709/710 and was buried at Ripon at the age of 76. In his bequests at his death, his possessions and riches were divided into four parts, the first to be offered to Rome, the second to be given to the poor, the third to the abbots of Ripon and Hexham, and the last to those who supported him throughout his chaotic life. In his bequest to Ripon and Hexham he included the statement, "so that they might have something in hand wherewith to secure the favour of the kings and bishops."⁸² Here, it is important to note his perception of the significance of his power and landholdings. Furthermore, his bequests represented wealth and gift giving, normally a characteristic of a king. His wealth and gift giving of the riches of his career were the opposite of the monastic ideal of poverty, but probably necessary for the economic survival of his monasteries. The bequests represented different stages of his life: his first bequest represented his interest in Rome and its benefit towards the English people,

⁸² Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 178.

the second bequest represented his conscience as a holy and a noble man, the third represented his struggle and pragmatic assistance for his abbeys, to enable their independence from secular and ecclesiastical interference, and his last bequest represented his concern for those who had “suffered through loyalty to himself.”⁸³ The representations of his life through his bequests demonstrated Wilfrid’s power, influence, and wealth in Northumbria as a bishop, holy man, and powerful lordly figure. They also demonstrated the conflicting ecclesiastical, secular, and political climates. Shortly after he had made these bequests, he set off for the south, where he provided for every community according to its needs: “some got grants of land to increase their revenues, the rest were left a legacy.”⁸⁴ Wilfrid and his company made their way to the monastery at Oundle. He had given Tatberht, his kinsman, a full account of his life when they were out riding and “he mentioned all the grants of land he had made to his abbots and which he now left them in his will.”⁸⁵

In concluding this chapter, I will return to Bede’s letter to Egbert. Bede’s completed his letter on 5 November 734 and died not long after, on 26 May 735. In the letter, Bede complained of the large bishoprics, lay abbots, lack of pastoral care, and excessive taxation of the local inhabitants that were characteristic of contemporary ecclesiastical life. Book Five of the *Ecclesiastical History*, which includes Bede’s account of Wilfrid’s life and most of which concerned his own time, demonstrates Bede’s clear uneasiness with the current state of affairs and the tensions within the Northumbrian church. While Bede’s portrayal of Wilfrid has already been addressed elsewhere, it may be necessary to return to it here. Land grants, especially large ones, were not unusual in Anglo-Saxon England as Wearmouth and Jarrow

⁸³ Farmer, “Saint Wilfrid,” 57.

⁸⁴ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 180.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

also received significant tracts of lands by Ecgfrith and Aldfrith, as noted above. It was the manner in which Wilfrid claimed the lands as his personal property and his treatment of them that were so unusual for the time. Additionally, some of Wilfrid's followers in Mercia and parts of Northumbria were connected to him through familial relations. Familial succession to monasteries was something to which Bede was adamantly opposed. Wealth and luxury of the church and church figures were also characteristics to which Bede was opposed, and that Wilfrid so strongly embodied especially in his landholdings and his bequests to Ripon and Hexham at his death. In comparison to Wilfrid, Benedict Biscop, whose monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow had also accumulated large tracts of land in Northumbria, never became bishop, he never passed on his land to his kin, nor did he appoint a successor (in fact he was adamant that under no circumstances should any kin succeed him).

In his letter to Egbert, Bede denounces the Northumbrian church beginning in 705, which coincidentally is the period when Wilfrid came back into power. He had resolved his differences with the royal dynasty at the death of Aldfrith by his possible assistance against the coup that challenged Osred, the young son of Aldfrith.⁸⁶ Wilfrid was also famous in Northumbria for the Synod of Whitby, as Bede was well aware. Bede's complaints were not based on opposition to landholding for the benefit of churches and monasteries; "his complaints were more specific: so much land had been given to monasteries that there was not enough to endow new bishoprics; and too many pseudo-monasteries had been established [probably referring to some Wilfridian foundations], thereby avoiding the secular services due from the land without any corresponding religious benefit."⁸⁷ As a result, these secular services (military services) no longer protected the kingdom. Throughout his *History* Bede

⁸⁶ Goffart, "Bede's History in a Harsher Climate," 214-16.

⁸⁷ Roper, "Wilfrid's Landholdings in Northumbria," 70.

emphasized the cooperation between secular and ecclesiastical authority. The survival and success of a kingdom needed God and his representatives as well as those who militarily protected the kingdom. A scale needed to be balanced for the distribution of land, but during Bede's lifetime it had tipped too far towards the church, resulting in the vulnerability of Northumbria. Land needed to be redistributed. Bede called for a reform that would be taken up beginning in the later eighth century.

In his letter, Bede identified valid issues within the Northumbrian church of his day, not unlike issues that arose in the lifetime of Wilfrid or were perhaps represented by the figure of Wilfrid himself. Wilfrid's accumulation of land distinguishes him from any other ecclesiastical figure in England at the time. Focusing on his career in the form of his "temporal glories" has not only elucidated a man who appeared to conduct himself less like a cleric and more like a secular lord or king, but it has also illuminated the rising tensions between the church and secular authority. In a society where church and secular authority were negotiating their authority and coexistence, Wilfrid, though his outward representation may have appeared like a lordly figure, acted not unlike any other nobleman (secular or ecclesiastical) of his day, not least like his counterparts in Merovingian Gaul. With the growing influence of the church in Anglo-Saxon society, Wilfrid cleverly acted in the best interest of the church. As a figure who was seemingly ascribed high status (by secular and ecclesiastical standards) to ensure the growth and development of the church, though his background already lay in the aristocracy, Wilfrid succeeded in establishing the church's presence and authority upon the landscape through his accumulation, possession, and transmission of land. His use of charters (and accumulation of land), his loyal followers, his restoration of churches, and his bequests at his death portray him as a towering figure of the

age, and one that the church would not have been so successful without. His ability to utilize his background and the secular norms of upper Anglo-Saxon society are evident throughout his lifetime.

Chapter 3

Continental Connections: Wilfrid's Unlikely Influences

In the early history of Anglo-Saxon England, the figure of Wilfrid stands out not only within Northumbria, the kingdom of his birth and career, but also throughout the whole of the isle of Britain as well as various parts of Gaul and Italy. Historians know of Wilfrid's long and complicated life from the *Life of Wilfrid* written by Stephen of Ripon between the years 710 and 720. We also receive glimpses of his life from Bede in book 5, chapter 19 of his *Ecclesiastical History*, though his account and that in the *Life* are very similar, differing only slightly. Stephen of Ripon was commissioned to write the *Life of Wilfrid* by Wilfrid's heirs and successors, Bishop Acca of Hexham and Abbot Tatberht of Ripon. Bede, unlike Stephen, says very little about Wilfrid's continental travels. Additionally, Wilfrid's travels are not mentioned explicitly in continental sources nor known on the Continent until the seventeenth century. St. Wilfrid, undeniably a powerful figure of his time, died at the age of seventy-six. Examining Wilfrid's turbulent life, it is remarkable that he survived unscathed, continuing to sow his influence in the ecclesiastical landscape of Anglo-Saxon England, given the political instability and cultural norms of the seventh century. This chapter will highlight Wilfrid's continental connections, placing emphasis on his travels to Gaul, in order to assert three things. First, Wilfrid was influenced by Merovingian aristocratic episcopal culture and implemented it into his own life as demonstrated by his monastic empire, his ambition for a single Northumbrian diocese, and his relationships with kings, specifically Ecgfrith. Second, Wilfrid's relationships and involvement with his continental contacts often placed him in the middle of dynastic rivalries and dangerous situations, but they also partook in the intricacies of his early career. Lastly, while Wilfrid was the champion of the Roman

tradition, beneath his outward representation, Celtic Christianity undergirded his career in his ecclesiastical structure, specifically his monastic empire, and missionary activity.

Wilfrid's travels abroad greatly impacted his view of ecclesiastical structure in Northumbria. After a short time at Lindisfarne receiving an education, he departed and traveled to the Continent with Benedict Biscop as his guide. Upon his arrival at Lyons in southern France (Neustria/Burgundy), he parted from his travel companion. He remained at Lyons for a year in the hospitality of Archbishop Annemund, mistakenly referred to as Dalfinus by both Bede and Stephen, who was in fact Annemund's brother and secular ruler of Lyons. According to Stephen, Annemund said, "Stay with me and be trustful and I shall give you a good part of Gaul to govern in perpetuity and my own niece to be your wife. I shall adopt you as my son and you shall have me for a father and faithful helper in all things."¹ Stephen may have included this statement to make Wilfrid appear greater than he was. It also elucidates the power and prestige of a Merovingian bishop, specifically his possession of land, although it should be stated that it was highly unlikely that he would offer it to a stranger. Wilfrid declined and continued on to Rome. In Rome he met Boniface the archdeacon, who taught him elements of Latin law, the rule of Easter, and the four gospels. He subsequently met the pope. On his return journey he lingered at Lyons for three years, during which time he received the Roman tonsure from the archbishop who had intended to make him his heir and continued to learn and absorb the Roman tradition.² It was probably here in Lyons where he experienced the lifestyle of a bishop, specifically the high status of a bishop who was involved in secular politics reminiscent of the Roman Empire.

¹ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 111.

² Ibid., 111-12.

According to Stephen, Queen Bathild was persecuting the church and had nine bishops put to death, including Annemund. Furthermore, he asserted that Wilfrid accompanied Annemund to his trial, willing to die alongside him in martyrdom, but was spared when it was discovered that he was a foreigner from England.³ In the *Acta Annemundi* Wilfrid is not mentioned and Annemund was killed on the way to his trial. In Stephen's *Life*, after the death of his friend, Wilfrid returned to England. It can be suggested here that perhaps Wilfrid had intended to stay in Gaul and even succeed Annemund but left as he was caught in the middle of political instability. Whatever the case, in both accounts Annemund and his family were clearly powerful as they held power over the region both secularly and ecclesiastically. The *Acta Annemundi* tells us that he had close connections with the kings of Francia as he was brought up in the royal courts of Dagobert I and Clovis II, was chosen bishop by his predecessor Viventius, and one of his first acts as bishop was baptizing Clothar III.⁴ The *Acta Annemundi* is itself a problematic source and does not mention Wilfrid at all. Paul Fouracre raises the question of Wilfrid's presence at Annemund's martyrdom due to the differences in sources, as other scholars have done, although no consensus has been reached. The accounts of both Stephen and the *Acta* agree that the bishop was indeed powerful, that the decision to kill him originated in the royal court, that he was ordered to appear in court, that he had a holy man with him, that there were dukes in charge of him, and that he was killed.⁵ In the *Acta*, the holy man Waldeburt, abbot of Luxeuil, held a similar role to that in which Stephen portrayed Wilfrid. While the seventh-century Merovingian politics surrounding Annemund were complex (and pieced together from numerous sources by Paul

³ Ibid., 113.

⁴ Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography; 640-720*, Manchester Medieval Sources Series (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 167.

⁵ Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 189.

Fouracre), it will suffice to say that in this period Lyons was an integral part of the Neustro-Burgundian kingdom and that “Annemund’s family had a near monopoly of power in the area. Nevertheless, local rivals to the family [or political factions] and forces at the king’s court were able to join forces in order to destroy that power, killing both Annemund and his brother in the process.”⁶

It is pertinent here to briefly explain the role and lifestyle of bishops in Merovingian Gaul in a general sense, as their roles and connection to secular power differed slightly by region. Christianity and monasticism were already firmly established before the fifth century. In contrast, England was still in its infancy and from Wilfrid’s standpoint was still gaining knowledge of ecclesiastical structure and organization. Bishops in post-Roman Gaul sought to maintain their social and political distinction while still maintaining their pastoral duties (again not unlike the figure of Wilfrid discussed in detail in the second chapter). In Merovingian society, as in other Germanic cultures, wealth was a medium of exchange and symbol of power; so too was land, not unlike Anglo-Saxon England.⁷ Jamie Kreiner has suggested that “as administrators of sizeable endowments dedicated to the needy, and as civic and spiritual leaders, they [Merovingian bishops] were better placed than anyone in the kingdom to survey the subjects of the realm on the king’s behalf and to carry out his responsibility for their welfare.”⁸

Although the episcopal office did recognize personal achievement and the episcopal positions in Gaul were dominated by the aristocracy, advancement in office did not guarantee security and bishops were still vulnerable to competition within and outside the church. They

⁶ Ibid., 167.

⁷ Jamie Kreiner, “About the Bishop: The Episcopal Entourage and the Economy of Government in Post-Roman Gaul,” *Speculum* 86, no. 2 (2011): 321-23.

⁸ Kreiner, “About the Bishop,” 323.

often argued that they were or could function as more effective secular rulers.⁹ It is also important to note that bishops in the seventh century actively worked to defend and justify their personal, civic, and spiritual claims to their office from competitors, secular and ecclesiastical. Additionally, the presence of an entourage projected a bishop's social prominence and strength as well as his leadership, which is evident in Wilfrid's later support of Dagobert. The entourage accompanied the bishop wherever he went and often but not always was fitted with weapons and horses.¹⁰ Ecclesiastical positions could also be hereditary although this was more common prior to the seventh century, creating episcopal dynasties which in turn united powerful families across Gaul. Family rivalries often focused on the office of the bishop as control of the bishoprics was the key to regional power, as bishops were in control of vast amounts of land increasingly given to the church.¹¹ According to Patrick Geary, "High-born, well educated, and experienced, they made the ideal bishops from the perspective of their family, the clergy, and the king."¹² While there remained hereditary bishoprics, it became more common for bishops to be selected by the king, aristocracy, or clergy. In hagiographies of the seventh century, it was common to describe the secular and administrative experience of the bishop prior to his consecration – experience that made him highly successful in the administration of his see.¹³ Wilfrid set himself apart early in his career, prior to his episcopacy, by traveling to the holy city of Rome and speaking at the Synod of Whitby.

⁹ Ibid., 337.

¹⁰ Ibid., 343-52.

¹¹ Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 123-29.

¹² Geary, *Before France and Germany*, 129.

¹³ Ibid., 132.

In ca. 660, Wilfrid returned to England. Alchfrith, the son of Oswy and the sub-king of Deira, began his career in England and gave him the monastery of Ripon. In 664 he spoke at the Synod of Whitby against Bishop Colman of Lindisfarne, resulting in the Roman triumph concerning the date of Easter. Both Bede and Stephen assert that Wilfrid spoke in place of the foreign bishop, Agilbert. Stephen says very little about the person of Agilbert, who may have been a larger character in Wilfrid's life than at first glance. Bede, however, says that Agilbert, a prelate from Gaul, had been studying scriptures in Ireland for many years and came to Wessex as a missionary. He became bishop of Dorchester under King Coenwalh of Wessex and remained so from 650 to 660, until the king grew tired of him for his foreign speech and proceeded to divide the diocese in two.¹⁴ The king then appointed another in his place, Wine, but years later he regretted his decision and sent for him. Agilbert declined and sent his nephew, Leutherius, in his place. Carl Hammer has suggested that Agilbert possibly objected to royal attempts to tie his see to a fixed location at Winchester and use his missionary ministry for political ends in Coenwalh's territorial expansion to the south. Furthermore, the king's desire to establish a territorial diocesan organization led to questions regarding Agilbert's origin, as he was not related or connected to a royal dynasty. Canonical status was also questioned as many bishops in England at the time were uncanonically ordained by British or Irish bishops not adhering to the correct calculation of Easter.¹⁵ After he was expelled from Wessex, he returned to Gaul.¹⁶

Agilbert later returned to Northumbria as he ordained Wilfrid priest in 663 and partook in the Synod of Whitby in 664. According to Bede, Agilbert "was a friend both of

¹⁴ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 154.

¹⁵ Carl I. Hammer, "Holy Entrepreneur: Agilbert, a Merovingian Bishop between Ireland, England and Francia," *Peritia* 22-23 (2011-12): 66.

¹⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 154-55.

King Alchfrid and of Abbot Wilfrid and stayed with them for some time, and at the king's request he made Wilfrid a priest in his monastery."¹⁷ Bede suggests that Wilfrid and Agilbert knew each other but Stephen only suggests that Agilbert was a foreign prelate who visited Alchfrith and Oswy to ordain Wilfrid.¹⁸ Stephen states that King Coenwalh had recommended Wilfrid to his patron Alchfrith as soon as he returned from the Continent in 660.¹⁹ Curiously, Coenwalh was Agilbert's patron while he was bishop in Wessex, which would imply Agilbert had maintained relations with Coenwalh and probably recommended Wilfrid, who had spent time on the Continent, to him.²⁰ This implies either a connection between Wilfrid and Agilbert prior to 660 as Bede would imply, or a connection between Wilfrid and Coenwalh. The former seems more likely due to Agilbert's close connection to Coenwalh, rather than a chance meeting between Wilfrid and Coenwalh.

After the Synod of Whibty Agilbert again returned to Gaul and became bishop of Paris from 668 to 690.²¹ Following the flight to Ireland of Colman, who was the bishop of Lindisfarne and spoke against Wilfrid at the Synod of Whitby, Wilfrid with the help of Alchfrith was chosen to be the new bishop of Lindisfarne and transferred the bishopric to York. Wilfrid chose to be consecrated in Gaul, stating, "The Holy See does not consider men they [the Irish bishops] ordain as being in communion with her – any more than she does those who consort with schismatics. In all humility, therefore, let me beg you to send me to Gaul, where there are many bishops of recognized orthodoxy. There, though unworthy, I can be consecrated without the Holy See raising any objection."²² Here we can see two

¹⁷ Ibid., 187.

¹⁸ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 116.

¹⁹ Ibid., 114.

²⁰ Hammer, "Holy Entrepreneur," 71.

²¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 196.

²² Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 120.

important issues, Wilfrid's staunch support for Roman Christianity specifically through Merovingians but also the assertion that there was no person in England worthy or qualified to consecrate him. This may have been due to a number of things: the vacant see at Canterbury, the thinning of bishops due to the plague elsewhere on the island, and the concern for canonically ordained bishops.²³ D.P. Kirby asserts that while Bede was concerned with the calculation of Easter (at Whitby), contemporaries saw the issue "as the validity of Holy orders in the Celtic church where there were no metropolitans and episcopal consecrations according to the canonical rites of the Roman church, thereby calling into question the validity of the sacraments."²⁴ After his triumph at Whitby, Stephen wrote that Wilfrid viewed the Irish tradition as heretical and that "catholic Christians should have nothing to do with its adherents."²⁵ Bede, on the other hand, though pleased with the outcome for the Roman tradition, still valued the contributions from the Columban mission, specifically the revival of the Northumbrian church which had briefly reverted to paganism upon the death of King Edwin in 633. The Northumbrian church probably continued to remain divided. Both Bede and Stephen mention Wilfrid's consecration in Gaul at Compiègne (in Neustria). According to Stephen, "Once he arrived, a convention was formed of at least twelve Catholic bishops, Agilbert among them. Having received his profession of faith, they consecrated him before all the people with great satisfaction and no less pomp."²⁶ Wilfrid may have partaken in or at least witnessed the outcome of a church council as Chlothar III was also present and it was common to hold annual synods.²⁷ It also may have

²³ Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066*, Studies in the Early History of Britain (Leicester, U.K.: Leicester University Press, 1984), 68.

²⁴ Kirby, "Northumbria in the Time of Wilfrid," 8.

²⁵ Clare Stancliffe, "British and Irish Contexts," in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 75.

²⁶ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 120.

²⁷ Hammer, "Holy Entrepreneur," 69.

been yet another opportunity for Wilfrid to observe, first hand, the lifestyle of a bishop and his administration over his see, as Wilfrid did not return to his monastery at Ripon until ca. 666. Neither Stephen nor Bede discloses Wilfrid's activities during this time.

Due to the usurpation of his seat during his time in Gaul, he returned to Ripon and it was then that he implemented the Rule of Saint Benedict.²⁸ Between the years 669 and 678, as discussed in Chapter Two, Wilfrid elaborately adorned Ripon, Hexham, and York. It was at this time that Wilfrid brought the "singers Aedde and Aeona and masons and artisans in every kind of trade."²⁹ While the focus of this chapter is on the external influences upon Wilfrid's character and larger career, Wilfrid's aesthetic contributions to Northumbria must be noted, however briefly, as they explicitly reflect Gallic influences. According to Stephen, Wilfrid, like his earlier travel companion Benedict Biscop, returned to England with relics and vestments.³⁰ During his travels in the 680s he acquired numerous articles and in the early 700s, "purple cloth and silk vestments to decorate his churches."³¹ It can be inferred, however, that, like Benedict Biscop, he also brought manuscripts, images, and portraits. Additionally, he too probably brought stone masons, glaziers, and other building experts from Gaul.³² Wearmouth and Jarrow, founded by Biscop in Northumbria, had Mediterranean influences and Wilfrid's monasteries could very well have been similar. Stephen's statement regarding Hexham's construction, "we had never heard of its like this side of the Alps," may also imply that Wilfrid's physical structures reflected foreign influence.

²⁸ D.H. Farmer, "Introduction," in *The Age of Bede*, 23-37; Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 122.

²⁹ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 122.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 112, 114.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 169, 142.

³² Bede, "Lives of the Abbots," 190-91; Ian Wood, "Ripon, Francia and the Franks Casket in the Early Middle Ages," *Northern History* 26, no. 1 (1990): 10.

During his time at Ripon, Wilfrid carried out episcopal duties and founded monasteries in parts of Mercia and Kent prior to the arrival of Theodore. At the same time, the social and political context of Mercia and Northumbria became increasingly important in Wilfrid's narrative as the tensions between secular and ecclesiastical power began to unfold. Recalling the territorial expansion of both Ecgfrith and Wilfrid and Wilfrid's land acquisition in Mercia from Chapter Two, Wilfrid was infringing on secular power, representing a political adversary wielding influence across territorial lines. While the secular politics will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four, it should be noted that Ecgfrith and Northumbria since the time of Oswy, sought to extend Northumbrian hegemony over Mercia, which held some connections in Essex, Sussex, and Kent, an aspiration that Wilfrid (with his growing monastic foundations and connections to the secular powers in Mercia and Sussex) seemingly restricted for Ecgfrith. It should also be remembered that at the death of his father and of his brother, Ecgfrith advanced his status as sub-king and became king of all of Northumbria.

When Theodore arrived in England in 669, the English see at Canterbury had been vacant for nearly five years since the death of Deusdedit. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Synod of Whitby, all Christianized parts of England looked to Canterbury for guidance. The kingdoms of Mercia, Wessex, and East Anglia lacked bishops and properly trained clergy, as evidenced by Wilfrid's activity in Mercia and Kent. This may have also been due to the triumph at Whitby and the issue of correct canonical status.³³ Wilfrid was briefly reinstated to his seat at York in 669 by Theodore. At the Council of Hertford in 673, Theodore began dividing dioceses in existing kingdoms. By 677/678, Theodore had divided Wilfrid's large

³³ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 71.

diocese into three. Theodore wanted to combine the virtues of both Roman and Irish organization. According to Henry Mayr-Harting, “he established bishoprics with specific sees, not necessarily in important places which had a history going back to Roman times, for he regarded accessibility to populated areas as more important; but each bishop had a definite seat ... he arranged bishoprics territorially with a scrupulous regard for political or tribal divisions.”³⁴ In Gaul the size of the diocese was not an issue, for it was based on Roman cities which were characterized by their history, buildings, fortifications, and education. In England, however, there was no equivalent to this situation. England was perhaps more like Ireland, lacking many large towns; monasteries functioned as ecclesiastical centers rather than a diocese (or diocesan seat with a bishop at the head), at least in Northumbria.³⁵ For a bishop like Wilfrid, his prestige lay in the entire kingdom.³⁶ Irish influence clearly impacted Wilfrid’s outlook on ecclesiastical authority and evangelization, as we will see below.

Examining Wilfrid’s displacement, Stephen states that Wilfrid was deposed by Theodore who “found three men from somewhere or other, not Wilfrid’s subjects, and in flagrant contempt of law and precedent proceeded to consecrate them bishops over Wilfrid’s own territory.”³⁷ Here scholars reveal what Stephen may have meant. In the Latin source, Stephen uses the word *parrochia*, here translated as “territory.” T.M. Charles-Edwards suggests that Stephen may have meant two different senses of the word, one functioning as diocese, or territory of people attached to that see or monastery. The other was intended to mean Wilfrid’s own properties and his supporters, both clergy and monks. The three men appointed by Theodore, Bosa, Eata, and Eadhead, all had belonged to Wilfrid’s diocese in the

³⁴ Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 131.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁷ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 132.

first sense and were not found “somewhere or other,” but they did not belong to his *parrochia* in the second sense (they were not his supporters or clergy). Additionally, the use of the “plural *parrochiae* said to belong to Wilfrid’s former *ecclesia* (likely York or Hexham), is [also] suggestive of the usage of *parrochia* in Frankish Gaul, where *parrochia* would have been similar to the Anglo-Saxon minster.”³⁸ The minster or “minster parishes,” according to Catherine Cubitt, were “larger units dependent on monastic communities... It was a virtual monopoly of monastic communities, responsible for the cure of souls within large regions.”³⁹ Wilfrid’s perception or rather Stephen’s portrayal of *parrochia* appears to have also had close connections to the Irish sense of the word. The Irish *paruchia* may have been something similar to Iona, a number of houses dependent on the parent house and one abbot. Irish monasteries were also federations concerned with the economic aspect and control of possessions across territorial areas.⁴⁰ The ambiguity of Wilfrid’s perception is certainly puzzling, but in any definition of *parrochia* Wilfrid claimed power territorially over his diocese and through his network of monasteries; it was an “ecclesiastical lordship.”⁴¹ Sarah Foot has characterized Wilfrid’s monastic empire as “a nonterritorial connection of houses bound under the nominal authority of one bishop in an economically-dependent foundation, not dissimilar to the Irish model but not entirely equivalent to that organizational form either.”⁴² Furthermore, Wilfrid’s monasteries were not dependent on any other but they were all linked by devotion to the bishop.⁴³

³⁸ T.M. Charles-Edwards, “Wilfrid and the Celts,” in Higham, *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, 251.

³⁹ Catherine Cubitt, “The Clergy in Early Anglo-Saxon England,” *Historical Research* 78, no. 201 (2005): 273-77.

⁴⁰ Foot, “Wilfrid’s Monastic Empire,” 35.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Monasteries in seventh-century Merovingian Gaul were subject to episcopal control, not unlike the figure of Wilfrid whose monasteries identified with their founder and crossed episcopal boundaries. Bishops in Gaul held possessions far distant from their episcopal seat, including across regions. In the will of Bishop Bertramn of Le Mans dating to 616, a lifetime of land acquisitions is evident. He was probably a powerful figure in Maine. Wallace-Hadrill has asserted that “We can see the development of a place, always difficult for the Merovingians to control, from a *civitas* with antique institutions into a complex of ecclesiastical nuclei under the control of a bishop. The monasteries fit into this pattern.”⁴⁴ Bertramn made many purchases of land both urban and royal which he apportioned to his churches, monasteries, and his relations. It was also not uncommon for monasteries to be granted immunity from secular or clerical power. Another example was Desiderius of Cahors, who left bequests in his will totaling seventy-nine *villae*. At this time, founders had proprietary rights in their foundation through hereditary succession and monastic connection, similar to Wilfrid who chose his successor.⁴⁵ Monasteries like their founders and bishops could hold a vast amount of territory, and probably functioned as parent houses or had rights over another, despite the prohibition by church councils.⁴⁶ St. Wandrille, founded in 650, held land in over twenty-six regions, and Corbie had accumulated over thirty-nine *villae* (equivalent to several English hides) over time. Additionally, Columbanian spirituality penetrated Merovingian Gaul at the beginning of the seventh century, leading to numerous monasteries sprouting up across the landscape. Columbanian influence and “the monkish conception of mission combined with the ascetic life ... led to the idea of missionary work

⁴⁴ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 62.

⁴⁵ Roper, “Wilfrid’s Landholdings in Northumbria,” 65-66.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

allied with political assimilation.”⁴⁷ While Wilfrid was founding monasteries across England throughout his lifetime, it can be inferred that he was also associating missionary work with monasteries in a manner not dissimilar to the Irish. Curiously, Wilfrid appeared to have been influenced by the Irish tradition in his own Northumbria, probably during his time at Lindisfarne, but more so in Gaul where Columbanian spirituality and ideals intermingled with the Roman tradition, a point that will be returned to below in regard to Wilfrid’s Merovingian connections.

Turning to Northumbria in the seventh century, prior to 664, Lindisfarne was not only the diocesan seat but also a monastery of Irish origin. It should be asserted that Lindisfarne’s ideals of evangelism, disregard of worldly gain, and learning sprouted outward across the Northumbrian landscape. Wilfrid’s Ripon had previously been an Irish monastery before Alchfrith gifted it to him. The idea of the Irish *parrochia* appears to have transferred onto Northumbrian soil and very successfully. Irish missionaries came from Iona at the request of Oswald and Oswy. They were given the island of Lindisfarne to establish a monastic outpost for Christianity in hope of evangelizing the inhabitants of Northumbria who had previously, and briefly (due to dynastic feuds), been exposed to Roman missionaries from Canterbury. Lindisfarne was most likely part of Iona’s *parrochia* and over time held sway over the Bernician monasteries of Melrose, Coldingham, Abercorn, Norham, and Tynningham, among others, creating a *parrochia* of its own.⁴⁸ In the aftermath of the Synod of Whitby, Wilfrid probably thought that England, at least in the parts affected by Irish missionaries, needed to be revitalized in the Roman tradition to unify the church. He believed the Irish and their schismatic beliefs needed to be rooted out, as is evidenced by his speech at the council

⁴⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 73.

⁴⁸ Roper, “Wilfrid’s Landholdings in Northumbria,” 66.

of Austerfield: “After the death of those elders whom Pope Gregory sent to us, was I not the first to root out from the Church the foul weeds planted from the Scots?”⁴⁹ T.M. Charles-Edwards has convincingly argued that Wilfrid and Stephen not only viewed the Irish as wrong or schismatic, but associated them with other heretical sects.⁵⁰ Throughout the *Life*, Stephen portrays Wilfrid as the champion of the Roman form and rightly so, yet while he strongly represented this form, his monastic network was rooted in the very Christianity he despised.

At the end of the sixth century, Columbanus – similar in name to the founder of Iona, Columba – left his monastery at Bangor in Ireland and arrived in Gaul. He has often been discussed for his missionary zeal and unique network of monasteries. Columbanian tradition and monasticism endured in Gaul throughout the seventh century and left a lasting impression on Wilfrid, who most likely experienced it in some form or another. Columbanus was not the traditional missionary who set out to convert. In the Irish tradition, the *peregrinatio* was a pilgrimage of exile or endless pilgrimage in search of God in foreign lands. It was a wandering ascetic lifestyle that often led to missionary work.⁵¹ In Gaul, Columbanus found himself in the company of kings and bishops. He, not unlike any other figure of the time in England or Gaul, received lands for his future monastic foundations. In the Vosges mountains, he established the monasteries of Annegray, Fontaine, and Luxeuil, on the edge of Burgundy. Like the Celtic monasteries in England, they became centers of culture and education. He asked Childebert and Theuderic for the protection of his monastery at Luxeuil.⁵² Columbanus was later expelled from Francia in 610 for being

⁴⁹ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 158.

⁵⁰ Charles-Edwards, “Wilfrid and the Celts,” 249.

⁵¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 73.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 63.

insubordinate to the bishop and for criticism of the royal family. At the end of his life, in the territory of the Lombards, he founded Bobbio and died in 615.⁵³

All of the Columbanian foundations were major and were meant to implement change in northwest Francia. Columbanus's emphasis on penitential discipline was associated with the geographic distribution of the monastic movement, far larger than the existing one (for he promoted a monastic concept that he believed was lacking in Gaul). He celebrated a different date of Easter than the Gaulish kings and bishops, using the same method of reckoning that the Synod of Whitby would find incorrect. Columbanus should be understood as a missionary through his attraction of followers who wanted to imitate his ascetic lifestyle and for his desire to revitalize society and monasteries through his way of life. The heart of the Columbanian tradition was located in the diocese of Meaux, and it sprouted outward in Gaul through the work of his successors. Columbanus and his followers were revitalizing monasticism while simultaneously participating in missionary activity. Later generations of followers drew their connections from the Columbanian tradition of the ascetic life, linking the network of monasteries.⁵⁴

Columbanus and his foundations become relevant regarding the figure of Wilfrid not only through the example of Columbanus's monastic network and missionary work, but they also provide a connection to the Benedictine Rule (hereafter cited as RB, abbreviating *Regula Benedicti*). In the seventh century, no monastery could necessarily be described as Benedictine. Monasteries probably followed a mixture of rules based upon holy individuals and teachers, taking portions that they found suitable to serve as models. Writers borrowed

⁵³ Timothy Fry, "Introduction: Historical Orientation," in *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry, Imogene Baker, Timothy Horner, Augusta Raabe, and Mark Sheridan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980), 115-16.

⁵⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 73.

quite frequently from one another. Monastic founders were credited with providing a rule for the community to follow. Pope Gregory the Great discusses Benedict at length in the second book of his *Dialogues* (written in the 590s), providing some insight into his life and possibly the RB itself. Gregory follows Benedict's career, though he largely focuses on his spirituality, morality, and miracles. Within the *Dialogues*, Gregory mentioned that Benedict wrote a rule for monks that reflected his own life and teachings.⁵⁵ Gregory himself had some acquaintance with the Rule, as the *Commentary on 1 Kings*, associated with Gregory, indirectly cites chapter 58 of the RB. It is also the earliest citation of the RB.⁵⁶ Benedict would have probably been aware of the monastic life in the East and West when he wrote his rule, incorporating portions of other rules of the time such as the *Regula Magistri* or works by Pachomius, Basil, Cassian, and Augustine.⁵⁷

The earliest surviving copy of the RB and the only one written in uncial script, has been dated to seventh- or eighth-century England: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Codex Hatton 48. Uncial script was not common in England at the time; insular script was in more common usage. The script set Hatton 48 apart from other manuscripts of the time and the manuscript is largely unscathed, suggesting that it was probably held in high esteem. Augustine did not bring the RB to Canterbury during his mission, though he might have been expected to do so given his connection to Gregory. He was a product of Roman basilican monasticism rather than of the Rule of St. Benedict. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the early monastic life at Canterbury was Benedictine.⁵⁸ The first clear references to the RB in England occur in Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid*, written between 709/710 and 720, and in Bede's *Lives of the*

⁵⁵ Fry, "Introduction: Historical Orientation," 73-76.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵⁷ Patrick Wormald, "Bede and Benedict Biscop," in *The Times of Bede*, 4.

⁵⁸ Fry, "Introduction: Historical Orientation," 22-26.

Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow, written sometime after 716. Both texts were written in the early eighth century and describe two men who were prominent figures in the late seventh century, Benedict Biscop and St. Wilfrid. Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid are both likely candidates to have brought the RB to England or to have patronized the text.

Benedict Biscop (628-689/90), Wilfrid's travel companion in 653, founded the sister monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow in Northumbria with a Roman zeal and he traveled to Rome six times. His second journey took place in 664/665, his third in 667/668 (after he spent two years at Lérins becoming a monk and adopting the name Benedict), his fourth in 671/672, his fifth in 679/680, and his sixth in 685/686. On any of these visits to Rome, Biscop could have encountered the RB through his travels, most prominently at Lérins.

Lérins, founded in 410 by St. Honoratus, was located off the southern coast of Gaul and became the training ground for future bishops in Gaul. It held a reputation as a center for culture, education, discipline, fasting, prayer, and overall the monastic ideal. It maintained a sphere of influence throughout the region into the seventh century. It preserved the teaching of prominent scholars such as Augustine, Cassian, Jerome, Ambrose, and Sulpicius Severus, among others. Lérins also held connections with many of the principal ecclesiastical leaders of the fifth century. It is likely that Lérins, given its reputation for learning and the monastic ideal, had mostly adopted the RB by the seventh century.⁵⁹ The monastery of Altaripa in the diocese of Albi, not far from Lérins, had adopted it by the 620s/630s (based upon a letter that the founder, Venerandus, had written to the bishop of Albi sending along a copy of the RB). It also appears in a rule for nuns at Jussa-Moutier, written by a monk from Luxeuil, Bishop Donatus.⁶⁰ Between 665 and 668, Biscop had spent two years at Lérins in which he could

⁵⁹ Ibid., 51-58.

⁶⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 58-59.

have encountered the Rule or at least heard of it. Adopting the name Benedict while at Lérins further suggests that Biscop greatly admired St. Benedict and that he probably learned the RB during his stay there.

In addition to his travels and patronage of Wearmouth and Jarrow, Biscop's proclivity for books, exemplified by the library to which Bede had access at Wearmouth-Jarrow, makes it likely that he could have brought a copy of the RB to England. A strong link between Biscop and the RB is found in the *Lives of the Abbots* where, approaching death, Benedict tells his monks:

“all I found best in the life of the seventeen monasteries I visited during my long and frequent pilgrimages I stored up in my mind and have handed on to you... Take the greatest care, brothers, never to appoint a man as father over you because of his birth; and always appoint from among yourselves, never from outside the monastery. According to the rule of the great St. Benedict, our founder, and according to the decretals or privileges of this house, you are to meet as a body and take common counsel to discover who has proved himself fittest and most worthy by the probity of his life and the wisdom of his teaching to carry out the duties of this office.”⁶¹

This reference to the seventeen monasteries suggests that Benedict was interested in bringing the best traditions to his monastery. Bede also cites the RB several times and compares Biscop's early life to that of St. Benedict as described by Gregory.⁶² It is easy to see that Biscop could have brought the RB to England or patronized a copy, but Wearmouth and Jarrow were unlikely to produce the specific script and decoration utilized for Hatton 48 (in comparison to other texts produced here, there were more dissimilarities than similarities to Hatton 48) and the production points more to the Midlands rather than Northumbria

⁶¹ Bede, “Lives of the Abbots,” 198.

⁶² Farmer, “Introduction,” 33.

(notwithstanding that there is Northumbrian influence on the form of some capitals and in the use of capitular uncial), at a monastery prominent in manuscript production.⁶³

Wilfrid is perhaps a much stronger candidate for the appearance of the RB in England. Wilfrid, like Biscop, was wealthy, a staunch supporter of the Roman tradition, and had traveled to the Continent numerous times. Throughout his life Wilfrid had established an ecclesiastical empire, with monasteries and churches not only in Northumbria but also in Mercia and Sussex, areas in which scholars have supposed Hatton 48 might have originated. The lavishness of his foundations of Ripon and Hexham serves as further example of his wealth but also of his dedication to the Roman tradition. He is assumed to have been the patron of the purple and gold Ripon Gospels, and it is reasonable to assume by extension that he could also have been the patron of Hatton 48, a product of a wealthy patron given the condition and composition of the manuscript.⁶⁴ Stephen refers to the RB twice in the *Life*: when Wilfrid returned from his consecration in Gaul in ca. 666 and in his statement at the council of Austerfield, “did I not bring the monastic life into line with the Rule of St. Benedict never before introduced in these parts?”⁶⁵ This seems to imply that within Wilfrid’s ecclesiastical empire, the RB was in use and that he did indeed bring the RB to England, or at the very least disseminate and encourage its use throughout the landscape of Northumbria, Mercia, and Sussex, as it could have already been in use at Wearmouth-Jarrow under Biscop.

Wilfrid’s Merovingian connections may indeed be responsible for his encounter with the RB and therefore must be reexamined. To do so, we must first return to the figure of

⁶³ Fry, “Introduction: Historical Orientation,” 118-19; Farmer, “Introduction: Description of the Manuscript,” in *The Rule of St. Benedict: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 48*, ed. D.H. Farmer, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 15 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1968), 23-24.

⁶⁴ Fry, “Introduction: Historical Orientation,” 118-119; Farmer, “Introduction: Description of the Manuscript,” 24-25.

⁶⁵ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 158.

Columbanus. Not unlike any other monastic founder of the time, Columbanus had himself written two monastic rules, the *regula monachorum* and the *regula coenobialis*, characterized by their penitential discipline and moral severity. Columbanus's followers altered his rule over time. In the seventh and eighth centuries his rule appears alongside the RB at the monastery of Luxeuil and at numerous houses under its influence. This rule was referred to as the *regula mixta*, as it formed a combination of Columbanus's rules and the RB. It was then through the Columbanian foundations in northern and eastern Gaul that the RB was circulated.⁶⁶ According to Timothy Fry, "The RB was found suitable especially for two reasons: its moderation provided a welcome counterbalance to Columbanus' austerity, and its liturgical provisions reflected a 'Roman' practice that these monasteries were increasingly accepting."⁶⁷ The *Regula Donati*, written by a follower of Columbanus for the monastery of Jussa-Moutier, contained extracts from Benedict, Columbanus, and Caesarius of Arles, although Benedict was the focus. Columbanus's second successor at Luxeuil, Waldebert, introduced the RB into monastic foundations and probably Luxeuil itself.⁶⁸ Columbanus may have known of the RB, as several sections in his *regula monachorum* seem to reflect the RB. Columbanus was in contact with Pope Gregory while he was at Luxeuil and spent the end of his life in Italy. If he had indeed known about the RB, he could have easily transmitted it through his foundations.⁶⁹

Either Biscop or Wilfrid could have come into contact with the RB in their travels through Gaul and Italy, although during the Lombard period most of the monasteries in Italy were destroyed or struggling to survive and the RB did not reappear there until the end of the

⁶⁶ Fry, "Introduction: Historical Orientation," 116.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

seventh century.⁷⁰ The year Wilfrid is assumed to have brought the RB, according to Stephen, is 666 or sometime thereafter, but probably before Wilfrid was deposed in 678. Wilfrid indeed could have come into contact with the Rule on his first trip to Gaul during his stay at Lyons. His friend Annemund, the archbishop of Lyons, appears to have had contact or some sort of connection with the monastery of Luxeuil. If we recall the *Acta Annemundi*, a holy man from Luxeuil, Waldebert, escorted Annemund to his trial (perhaps the same Waldebert who circulated and introduced the *regula mixta*?). While the parallels and inconsistencies in the sources have already been discussed, the emphasis is on Annemund's possible connection with Luxeuil, Columbanus's most significant foundation and known certainly for the *regula mixta*, which is mentioned in the *Acta*. Wilfrid stayed in Lyons with Annemund for three years and if Annemund had known of the RB, he certainly would have shared his knowledge with Wilfrid, especially as Wilfrid received the monastic tonsure from the archbishop.

The other possibility for an early encounter with the RB is the figure of Agilbert, whose family was concentrated in the diocese of Meaux, the center of Columbanian monasticism. According to Columbanus's biographer, upon Columbanus's return journey through Francia after the king's failure to ship him home, he passed through the diocese of Meaux. His companion, Chagnoald of Luxeuil, took him to stay with Chagnoald's father, Chagneric. During his stay he blessed Chagneric's daughter, Burgundofora. Burgundofora later established the monastery of Faremoutiers on the family estate. Her brother Burgundoforo came to serve under Dagobert and became the bishop of Meaux. Columbanus then visited a second family on the nearby estate of Ussy, the family of Autar. His son Ado,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 113-14.

better known as Audoin, founded a monastery on the family land at Jouarre in the 630s. Audoin later became the bishop of Rouen in 641. The other son, Dado (although it may in fact have been Audoin), established the monastery of Rebais and was indirectly associated with the foundations of St. Wandrille and Jumièges.⁷¹ The crypts at Jouarre contain the impressive sarcophagi of Agilbert and his sister Theudechild, the first abbess. Through a close examination of local genealogies, Carl Hammer has illuminated the family history of Agilbert to connect him to these early family monasteries and his significance at Jouarre.⁷² The monasteries of Jouarre and Faremoutiers were associated directly with Columbanus. Furthermore, they were within Luxeuil's sphere of influence and probably accepted the *regula mixta* earlier rather than later. Agilbert, then, could have easily transmitted the RB to Wilfrid in their early encounters before 678. He ordained Wilfrid priest, was present alongside him at Whitby, and was involved in his consecration as bishop in Compiègne. It would not be unlikely if Agilbert had provided Wilfrid with a monastic rule, for they shared an interest in Roman tradition. Furthermore, Agilbert and Wilfrid were not just acquaintances, they knew each other well. It also would not be unreasonable to suggest that Wilfrid stayed with Agilbert in Paris or in Meaux at one of the family monasteries and experienced the RB, as following his consecration at Compiègne, Wilfrid did not return to England until 666.

There are other possibilities for Wilfrid's encounter with the RB, but none are quite as strong as the connections suggested above. King Eorchenbert of Kent, who housed Wilfrid in his court for a year prior to Wilfrid's departure to Rome for the first time, was the father of Earcongota, the abbess of Faremoutiers. Wilfrid had at least three contacts, Annemund,

⁷¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 68.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 68-69; Hammer, "Holy Entrepreneur," 55-65; Ian Wood, "Ripon and the Franks Casket," 11.

Agilbert, and Eorchenbert, who could have directly associated him with the RB. There is one other possibility for the transmission of the RB to England and it occurred in the winter of 668/669, but should be taken lightly. Theodore, Abbot Hadrian, and Benedict Biscop passed through the diocese of Meaux on their journey to England from Rome. They had earlier been detained in Arles by Ebroin on suspicion of being spies. Biscop and Theodore stayed the winter with Agilbert. Hadrian stayed with Burgundoforo.⁷³ It is possible, as Theodore and Biscop stayed with Agilbert through the winter, that Agilbert had provided Biscop and Theodore with the RB. This is a reasonable possibility but given Agilbert's relationship with Wilfrid and Wilfrid's other connections prior to 668/669, Wilfrid would probably already have taken the RB to England. This does not undermine Biscop's ability to have learned the RB at this time or to have taken it to England, nor does it lessen the chance that Biscop could have encountered it at Lérins several months before; it means that Wilfrid would have introduced the RB first.

It is notable that in his exile ordered by Ecgfrith in the 680s, following his first appeal to the papacy, Wilfrid spent time in Mercia near Worcester, where scholars think Hatton 48 may have been copied.⁷⁴ It would not therefore be unlikely that Wilfrid or one of his followers could have been the patron of the surviving text. Patrick Sims-Williams has pointed out that a foundation charter attested by Wilfrid had connections with Gaul: the Bath charter dating to 675 focused on a location on the Hwicce's West Saxon border. The Hwicce appear to have had no bishop of their own. The West Saxon diocese had in the previous twenty-five years had three bishops with close connections to Gaul: Agilbert, who has already been discussed; Wine, who while not of Frankish origin was consecrated in Gaul;

⁷³ Hammer, "Holy Entrepreneur," 53.

⁷⁴ Fry, "Introduction: Historical Orientation," 119.

and Leutherius, Agilbert's nephew. Additionally, the first abbess of Bath, Berta, was also of Frankish origin. Leutherius, like Agilbert, had a close connection with Jouarre and had attested the charter before Wilfrid.⁷⁵ Hatton 48 was in Worcester in the eleventh century and may well have been written there, perhaps in a monastery of Wilfrid's or associated with him, like Bath. Bath passed into the diocese of Worcester in the early eighth century, and this may be part of the reason Hatton 48 made its way to Worcester.⁷⁶

Wilfrid's experience of Columbanian monasticism clearly left some impression on him as it transferred over into his own monastic foundations. Like Columbanus, Wilfrid created a monastic network or empire across England. Ripon and Hexham functioned, like Columbanus's Luxeuil, as the epicenter of the network. It was at Ripon that Wilfrid first introduced the RB, just as Luxeuil functioned under Columbanus's rule and was later the first known monastery to have utilized the *regula mixta*, circulating it among Luxeuil's connections. Columbanus and Wilfrid both incorporated their monastic rules into their foundations, which allowed for uniformity among them. Ripon and Hexham were also the most important foundations to Wilfrid, as is demonstrated by his elaborate adornment of the two monasteries and the papal privileges he secured for them. Columbanus too acquired a papal privilege for his monastery at Bobbio and had earlier asked the king for protection of Luxeuil.⁷⁷ Additionally, Wilfrid's monks and followers had an affinity to their founder, linking the foundations together, just as Columbanus had with his own foundations. Wilfrid's introduction of the RB in his foundations probably allowed him to control his monasteries in his absence, especially during his exile when he was forced to move on from kingdom to

⁷⁵ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 112-13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 204-5.

⁷⁷ Wood, "Ripon and the Franks Casket," 11.

kingdom, leaving his monks behind at his monastic foundations. He may also have been attracted to the RB's association with Gregory, implementing an explicitly Roman ideal into his foundations and into England overall, which was still adjusting from the decrees after Whitby.

In 679 Wilfrid appealed to the papacy concerning his displacement from his diocese. Dagobert II, King of Austrasia, becomes another key figure in Wilfrid's Merovingian connections. On his journey to Rome, Stephen tells us that Wilfrid's enemies – by implication, Theodore and King Ecgrith – “sent envoys off with bribes to Theodoric, king of the Franks, and the wicked Duke Ebroin” in order to permanently exile him or kill his friends.⁷⁸ Wilfrid was able to evade Theodoric as Bishop Winfrid of Lichfield, who was following the same route, was mistaken for Wilfrid because of the similarity of their names. Many of Winfrid's companions were killed, his possessions taken, and he was left naked. Shortly after, Wilfrid encountered Ebroin, who sent messengers to Aldgisl offering him gold if he would send Wilfrid to him dead or alive, which he then declined. After spending the winter with the Frisians, Wilfrid and his companions were welcomed by Dagobert II due to former favors from Wilfrid. According to Stephen, Dagobert had been exiled in his youth by political rivals. He remained in Ireland until years later, when his friends and relatives learned that he was alive and asked Wilfrid to retrieve Dagobert from Scotland and Ireland and send him over as their king.⁷⁹ Stephen states, “This our holy bishop did; he made him welcome on his arrival from Ireland, provided him with arms and sent him back in great state with a troop of his companions to support him.”⁸⁰ Dagobert was grateful for Wilfrid's

⁷⁸ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 133.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

previous favors and “begged Wilfrid to accept the chief bishopric of the realm, Strasbourg; and when Wilfrid declined, he sent him on his way with his own bishop as a guide, Deodatus.”⁸¹

It is necessary to return again briefly to the figure of Agilbert, as he may have been involved in Dagobert’s return. Agilbert was from Meaux and it would not have been surprising if he chose to visit the source of his spirituality, recalling Bede’s assertion that he had spent time in Ireland prior to his episcopacy in Wessex. Agilbert and Dagobert may even have stayed within the same location in Ireland and encountered one another. It may have been that Agilbert stayed in southern Ireland, where the Roman reckoning for Easter was accepted, before he became bishop in Wessex and perhaps part of the reason why he was present at the Synod of Whitby. Agilbert may even have been consecrated here, given the issue mentioned earlier regarding episcopal consecrations and his removal from episcopal status in Wessex. If he had been consecrated here and he was staying in an area that accepted the Roman reckoning, Coenwalh wrongly and automatically linked the issue of uncanonical consecration directly to the Irish. Hammer has also suggested that due to the instability in Francia at the time and the competing political factions, Agilbert’s time in England may have been spent as an exile in retreat from some faction or another. Additionally, Agilbert may have been the link between Dagobert and Wilfrid. At the time that Dagobert returned, Agilbert may have felt that the regime under the Neustrian mayor of the palace, Ebroin, was harsh in the 670s and so turned against his former patron. Hammer further suggests that “His [Agilbert’s] experience of Ireland and his previous close association with the influential Wilfrid provided him with the knowledge and contacts to facilitate Dagobert’s return from

⁸¹ Ibid.

that distant and unfamiliar place.”⁸² Stephen had asserted that Wilfrid may have claimed some sort of authority in Ireland based upon Ecgrith’s conquest of the Picts in the north.⁸³ “He was now bishop of the Saxons in the south, and of the British, Scots, and Picts in the north.”⁸⁴ This may further suggest a closer connection to Wilfrid on both accounts. Fouracre, on the other hand, suggests that it is also possible that Wilfrid knew of Dagobert’s exile as he stayed with Annemund and was immersed in Merovingian politics at the time he was exiled.⁸⁵

Like Annemund, very little is actually known about Dagobert II. Stephen’s *Life* provides a brief glimpse into his reign. He was exiled by a certain Grimoald, mayor of the palace in Austrasia, who placed his own son on the throne and was later executed for the crime. About twenty years later, Dagobert returned to the throne. In chapter 43 of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* we learn that, “Just as Sigibert died, Grimoald had the king’s young son tonsured and directed Dido, the bishop of the city of Poitiers, to take the boy on a pilgrimage to Ireland. Then Grimoald placed his own son on the throne.”⁸⁶ Grimoald was then put to death by the Neustrians in Paris. The Merovingian line in Austrasia had disappeared and the Neustrian branch of the dynasty began ruling in Austrasia. The first Neustrian king was Childeric II in 662, who was sent to Austrasia after Grimoald was killed but then he himself was assassinated in 675, replaced by his younger brother Theoderic III. Between the rule of the two brothers, Dagobert II rose briefly to the throne in 676-679.⁸⁷

⁸² Hammer, “Holy Entrepreneur,” 75.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 129.

⁸⁵ Paul Fouracre, “Wilfrid and the Continent,” in Higham, *Wilfrid, Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, 197.

⁸⁶ “*Liber Historiae Francorum*,” in Fouracre, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography*, 88.

⁸⁷ Paul Fouracre, “Forgetting and Remembering Dagobert II: The English Connection,” in *Frankland: The Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Dame Jinty Nelson*, ed. Paul Fouracre and David Ganz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 73.

Dagobert's return is not mentioned in the *Liber Historiae Francorum*. Stephen's *Life*, according to Paul Fouracre, connects numerous gaps in Merovingian politics but it also demonstrates that Wilfrid found himself in the middle of them in all three of his trips to or through Gaul.

Wilfrid then continued on his way to Rome and stayed with Perctarit (King of Lombardy, 661-8) in Campania and was in exile when this incident occurred. Perctarit said that he was asked to hinder Wilfrid on his way to Rome in return for a reward. Interestingly enough, again we hear a story of a Christian ruler offering a reward or bribe in return for Wilfrid's death or hindrance, yet both instances regarded pagan rulers who declined the reward to safeguard Wilfrid.⁸⁸ He was then sent off to Rome with more guides. On his return from appealing to the pope, he again passed through Austrasia, discovering that Dagobert had been killed by dukes with the "bishops' consent."⁸⁹ Ebroin's men sought to kill Wilfrid and one of the prelates rode out to greet Wilfrid. According to Stephen, the men accused Wilfrid: "'What made you so bold,' they demanded, 'as to pass through the land of the Franks, seeing that you deserve to be put to death for making Dagobert King? You it was who brought him back from exile.'"⁹⁰ They continue that Dagobert was a horrible king and for many reasons was put to death. Wilfrid responded that he could not have known, and asked, "Most righteous bishop, if an exile of my own country, and one of royal blood, had come to your lordship, where else would your duty have lain?"⁹¹ The prelates let him pass, agreeing that he was a righteous man.

⁸⁸ Fouracre, "Forgetting and Remembering," 75.

⁸⁹ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 142.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Upon Wilfrid's return from the Continent, his king imprisoned him for nine months and subsequently exiled him, disregarding papal authority. Ecgrith at this time had connections in all the larger kingdoms through his marriage to Iurminburh; he also had a strong military, making him the most powerful king in England. Stephen tells us that Wilfrid wandered from kingdom to kingdom, finding favor in the secular elite, founding monasteries, and partaking in missionary work. After being forced to move on from Mercia and Wessex, he went to Sussex, an area outside of Ecgrith's reach and unconquered by any other kingdom. Sussex had yet to be converted to the Christian faith. Wilfrid made a pact of friendship with King Aethelwalh, who vowed to protect him from his enemies. He then received consent from the king and queen to preach the gospel openly in the kingdom. For five years, 681-86, Wilfrid remained in Sussex and evangelized the inhabitants. Aethelwalh had also given him an estate for his episcopal seat, Selsey.⁹²

Unlike Stephen, Bede tells us that Aethelwalh had already been baptized on the suggestion of Wulfhere of Mercia, who took the place of his godfather at his baptism. Bede also tells us that his queen had already received baptism prior to her marriage to Aethelwalh, but that the inhabitants of the kingdom of Sussex had not. It is peculiar that the inhabitants of the kingdom had not converted, given the common occurrence that when the king converts, his subjects follow. There was also an Irish monastery, Bosham, but it had no success in evangelizing the inhabitants. Wilfrid's arrival in Sussex coincided with a time of South Saxon freedom from external pressure (Mercian overlordship) as Wulfhere had died in the early 670s and Aethelred did not seem concerned with Sussex. Perhaps because of this, the South Saxons were more willing to accept Christianity (given that it was not a matter of

⁹² Ibid., 141; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 225-26.

coercion by their overlord), especially based on the persuasion of a man with such an impressive reputation.⁹³ The inconsistencies between Bede and Stephen are peculiar, but the fact remains that Wilfrid's efforts in Sussex resulted in a Christianized Sussex.

Wilfrid probably first developed his missionary outlook at Lindisfarne in his youth, when Aidan was still alive, but during his time in Kent in the 650s he could have also been exposed to the writings of Gregory and Gregory's focus on "missionary monasticism" regarding the English mission.⁹⁴ Wilfrid was born in the same year that the Irish from Iona began missionary work in Northumbria and witnessed it first hand in his youth. *Peregrinatio*, discussed briefly above regarding Columbanus, was a voluntary pilgrimage of exile. Irish monks were in search of God and drawn to ascetic solitude, far from home. In doing so, they established monasteries in remote locations (like Lindisfarne, Iona, and Columbanus's first foundations), and brought God to the inhabitants of the area, not yet exposed to Christianity or engaged with it long enough. The main difference in Lindisfarne was that the Irish monks from Iona were invited to Northumbria by the secular rulers. The crucial point in Northumbria is that evangelization began with the monastery of Lindisfarne. Wilfrid was probably exposed to similar missionary activity during his stay at Lyons in the 650s and during his consecration between 664 and 668. It was at this time in Gaul that the later generations of Columbanus's followers were making missionary strides across Gaul. In the seventh century, Burgundy and southern Austrasia had become areas of Columbanian missionary work and men like Eligius of Noyon, Audomar, and Amand were in the center of it, spreading monasticism and missionary work into Northern Austrasia and Neustria.

⁹³ Henry Mayr-Harting, "St. Wilfrid in Sussex," in *Studies in Sussex Church History*, ed. M.J. Kitch (London: Leopard's Head Press in Association with the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex, 1981), 5-6.

⁹⁴ Mayr-Harting, "St. Wilfrid in Sussex," 3.

Wilfrid himself seemed to have utilized this method of evangelization across England in the foundation of his own monasteries, especially in Sussex which fit the description of a remote location. It can be suggested, then, that tangentially Wilfrid also fit the idea of *peregrinatio*. Most of his monasteries were founded first when he was usurped at York, on forced leave from his episcopal seat; in the years he spent in exile from Ecgrith; and later in the 690s in exile from Ecgrith's brother Aldfrith. Wilfrid, however, unlike the Irish monks in Northumbria or the figure of Columbanus, did not choose exile.

Another missionary feat attributed to Wilfrid was his conversion of Frisia. On his journey to Rome in 678/79, he was welcomed by King Aldgisl and openly preached to his people.⁹⁵ When Wilfrid was in Frisia, Aldgisl was under the influence of Austrasia and Dagobert II. This is significant, as the Austrasians controlled the middle Rhine and the Meuse. The Frisians were established along the mouth of the Rhine. Wilfrid's friendship with Dagobert II may have contributed to his success in Frisia.⁹⁶ There was also a strong connection between Sussex and Frisia. The Frisians were pagans and also traders of great importance in the region. They were located on the opposite bank of the North Sea. In 679, the year after Wilfrid landed in Frisia, a Northumbrian nobleman was sold as a slave to a Frisian merchant in the aftermath of the Battle of the Trent (in which Ecgrith took part).⁹⁷ This instance suggests that England was engaged in trade with Frisia, via Sussex. It is also notable that two areas involved in trade between England and the Continent were pagan, and between 678 and 686 both regions were converted by Wilfrid.

⁹⁵ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 134; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 303.

⁹⁶ Mayr-Harting, "St Wilfrid in Sussex," 9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 241-3.

Nick Higham has shed light on Wilfrid's missionary activity. Bede elevated Wilfrid's status as missionary, devoting more detail to Wilfrid in Sussex than Stephen. According to Higham, Bede assigned Wilfrid as "the prime mover of Catholicisation of those parts of England hitherto influenced by Ionan Christianity ... performing a role which had hitherto been exclusive to foreign missionaries."⁹⁸ It is important to remember that while Irish ideals undergirded his ecclesiastical structure and influenced his missionary work, he remained a staunch supporter of the Roman tradition. According to Higham, Bede implicitly compared Wilfrid to the missionary Augustine – Wilfrid was the English version of Augustine. Like Augustine, he was the student of a continental figure, came to Britain from Rome having absorbed the Roman traditions, had been consecrated in Gaul, and confronted the present church (at Whitby and through his travels across England participating in missionary work, episcopal duties, and pastoral care).⁹⁹ Wilfrid was an effective missionary in England and on the Continent, initiating work that would later come to fruition with figures like Willibrord and Boniface. Wilfrid was revitalizing the English church after the Synod of Whitby, and the shift to Roman order, through his foundation of monasteries, monastic rule, and catholic missionary work.

Wilfrid's continental connections and his numerous trips to Gaul and Italy shaped his perception of the episcopal office and ecclesiastical structure, especially his monasteries. Wilfrid, like his Merovingian counterparts, exemplified by Annemund, clashed with secular authority. Like Annemund, he was persecuted because he appeared to be a political adversary as he continued to wield influence across territories due to his accumulation of land and relationships with other secular authorities. While Wilfrid was not killed, Ecgfrith certainly

⁹⁸ Nicholas J. Higham, "Wilfrid and Bede's *Historia*," 59.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

did everything in his power to eject and restrict the power of his bishop. Ecgrith continued to gain his own territory and felt threatened not only as his bishop gained the same territory, but also because Wilfrid was able to establish monastic houses in areas of Ecgrith's potential rivalries. His monastic houses and gifts of land throughout England before and after his appeal to the pope created a monastic network in which the monasteries and land identified with their founder. Wilfrid's travels through and stay in Gaul allowed him to observe the influence of Columbanian monasticism at its height, as well as the missionary work of Columbanus's successors. His lengthy stays in Gaul increased the chance of Wilfrid not only encountering the Benedictine Rule, but probably also witnessing it, first hand, and introducing it into his monasteries. His method of missionary work was also inspired by Columbanus and his foundations, leading Wilfrid to revitalize and unite the church of England, after Whitby. Through a close examination, it has emerged that Agilbert appeared to be Wilfrid's greatest connection from Gaul and became significant in the very intricacies that defined Wilfrid's ecclesiastical structure. He was heavily involved in Wilfrid's early career and his rise to the episcopacy. Agilbert, a direct descendant from the families of Meaux, also represented a powerful clerical figure, becoming bishop of Paris, and may indeed have been another model for episcopacy. When Wilfrid fell ill at Meaux, near Jouarre on his return journey after his second appeal to the papacy in the early 700s, he probably visited the memorial of the man who remained a personal connection throughout his lifetime. Wilfrid's interactions with Dagobert II of Austrasia shed light on Wilfrid's reputation in Gaul. Wilfrid found himself in the middle of secular politics, often evading death, but he was also offered land and bishoprics by several ecclesiastical leaders. Wilfrid was drawn to Gaul initially for its historical connection with Roman Christianity, but he became enthralled by

the intermingling of traditions. In England, Wilfrid was adept in his ability to combine Ionan, Columbanian, and Roman models of Christianity and he implemented them into the wider landscape.

Chapter 4

Secular Politics, Archbishoprics, and the Reorganization of the English Church

In the early Anglo-Saxon Church, Canterbury, located in the kingdom of Kent, was the archiepiscopal or metropolitan seat for the whole of England. In the late sixth century and early seventh century Pope Gregory the Great had envisaged that the church was to be divided into two autonomous provinces in the metropolitan sees of London and York, with each see consisting of twelve bishops subject to its jurisdiction. This never came to fruition as Augustine established a base for Christianity at Canterbury and Gregory's vision was laid aside to be taken up once more, at least relatively, during the archiepiscopacy of Theodore, beginning in 669. In the early seventh century conversion was rapidly sweeping across Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, beginning in the southern portion and eventually reaching Northumbria. The evolving political climate in seventh-century England, especially within the kingdom of Northumbria, disconnected Canterbury from most of the kingdoms, limiting its reach to Kent, East Anglia, and Essex. Canterbury's close ties with the papacy established a unique relationship between England and Rome, as Canterbury acted as an intermediary between the two. It was not until after the Synod of Whitby and the administration of Theodore that Canterbury would reach its archiepiscopal height of authority over all of England, reconnecting Northumbria and its dependencies to Rome.

This chapter will examine seventh-century episcopal authority largely after the year 664 and the reorganization of the English Church. It will examine the relationships between secular and ecclesiastical authority and the manner in which they affected ecclesiastical administration, election, and consecration. This chapter will place special emphasis on the figure of Bishop Wilfrid, his political connections, and his reputation as it continued to

develop throughout his career. Wilfrid was one of few bishops to stand against his king and higher ecclesiastical authority, despite numerous attempts to depose him. It will be argued that several times throughout and despite his turbulent career, through his complicated and often conflicting relationships, Wilfrid was indeed a likely candidate to become archbishop of Canterbury; however, the churning political climate of the day may have halted his possible ascendancy. Furthermore, while he continued to involve himself in the power-politics of the day, Wilfrid never failed to uphold his belief in canon law, nor to hold his superiors accountable – a trait that made him highly reputable, especially during the drastic changes instigated by Archbishop Theodore.

The political history of Northumbria and Mercia must be first discussed as the politics of kings weighed heavily on the development of Christianity and episcopal administration. Bishops would become exceedingly important for the territorial expansion of kings who would stop at nothing to get ahead. In its early history, the kingdom of Northumbria was originally comprised of two smaller kingdoms: Bernicia extended to the north from Durham to as far as the Firth of Forth (the greatest expansion was achieved by Oswy's son Ecgfrith) and Deira extended to the south, encompassing approximately all Yorkshire, with Lindsey (claimed by both Northumbria and Mercia).¹ The sixth and early seventh centuries were dominated by dynastic rivalries for supremacy between the two kingdoms characterized by violence, assassination, and exile. In the year 633 the Deiran king, Edwin, who had previously united the two kingdoms, was killed in battle against Penda of Mercia in alliance with Cadwalla of the Northern Welsh and Gwynedd. In his rise to power, Edwin had defeated the previous king of Northumbria, Ethelfrith of Bernician descent, who had recently

¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 367.

annexed Deira, and exiled Ethelfrith's sons to Dal Riada. After his death, the kingdom again split into Bernicia and Deira and apostate kings succeeded him until the arrival of Ethelfrith's youngest sons, Oswy and Oswald. Prior to their return, Deira was ruled by Osric, son of Edwin's uncle Elfric, while Bernicia was inherited by Eanfrith, the eldest son of Ethelfrith. Cadwalla of the Northern Welsh proceeded to kill these kings shortly after their ascension, claiming dominion over Northumbria for a year.² In 634 at the battle of Heavenfield, the exiled Bernician princes defeated Cadwalla and Penda, resulting in Oswald's ascension to the throne of the larger Northumbria. Oswald reigned for nearly a decade before he was ultimately killed in battle by Penda in 642. His brother Oswy succeeded him and ascended to the throne. Between 642 and 655, Oswy was unable to control all of Northumbria and shared the throne with Oswine, son of Osric of Deiran descent. Oswy assassinated Oswine in 650/651, after ruling alongside him for seven years, and finally defeated Penda in 655.³ In 655, like his brother before him, he reunited the two kingdoms and emerged as a powerful military ruler.

In the battle against Penda in 655, Alchfrith, probably a son of Oswy by a former marriage, fought alongside his father. Oswy's younger son, Ecgrith, was held hostage by the Mercian court. Oswy's sons and successors would later actively participate in the rise and demise of the figure of Wilfrid. Oswald's son and therefore Oswy's nephew, Ethelwald, allied with Penda, serving as his guide and informant. D.P. Kirby has suggested that Ethelwald must have felt threatened by his young cousin Ecgrith (son of Eanfled and Oswy), but perhaps also by Alchfrith (though he may have been illegitimate). Ethelwald, who joined forces against his uncle, may have been intended by his father, Oswald, to succeed to the

² Ibid., 143-44.

³ Kirby, "Northumbria in the Time of Wilfrid," 7.

throne. After the Mercian defeat in 655, Ethelwald disappeared from the sources and it is uncertain if he survived or had children.⁴ Alchfrith may never have had any children and he too disappeared (much later, between 664 and 666), probably due to similar circumstances, as Bede mentions that during Oswy's reign, Oswy was attacked by his nephew, Ethelwald, and son (who was presumably Alchfrith).⁵ The politics of Northumbria and Mercia and their importance regarding the figure of Wilfrid will be readdressed in greater detail below.

Further complicating the political world in which Wilfrid operated was the fact that dynastic rivalries were certainly not uncommon, nor were marriages or kinship relations between the two royal dynasties of Northumbria. Ethelfrith's father, Aethelric, may have killed Aelle, king of Deira. Oswy and Oswald were in fact Edwin's nephews, as their father Ethelfrith, in his second marriage, had married Acha the daughter of Aelle, Edwin's sister. Oswine, whom Oswy assassinated, was therefore his own kin. Oswald was prepared to kill Edwin's son (therefore his cousin) and Edwin's grandson (son of his elder son Osfrith).⁶ Marriage alliances between the dynasties served to provide a claim to the adjacent subkingdom or a means to ameliorate tension.⁷ Oswy solidified the unification of the two kingdoms through his marriage to Eanfled, daughter of the Deiran king, Edwin. During the time of Wilfrid, Ethelfrith's Bernician descendants dominated royal succession and appeared to suppress the Deiran line in Northumbria, proving much more powerful militarily. Wilfrid had lived through the reigns of the more dominant kings: Oswald, Oswy, Ecgfrith, Aldfrith, and Osred, but also witnessed the hostility and blood feuds that existed between the more dominant kings and sub-kings.

⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 165.

⁶ Ibid., 140; Kirby, "Northumbria in the Time of Wilfrid," 18.

⁷ Ibid.

The marriage of King Edwin of Northumbria to Aethelburh, the sister of Eadbald and daughter of Aethelbert of Kent, introduced Christianity and paved the way for a metropolitan see in the north. In 634, only seven years after Edwin's conversion, Pope Honorius I sent a pallium at the king's request to Bishop Paulinus at York, so that the work of establishing a northern see could begin in accordance with the Gregorian plan. The metropolitan seat was not firmly established as Edwin, as discussed above, was killed in battle in 633. Christianity came again in the form of Irish monks from Iona, at the request of Oswald. The Irish monks owed nothing to Canterbury or Rome. Northumbria then looked to Iona rather than Canterbury for ecclesiastical guidance. During the reigns of Oswald and Oswy, Christianity rapidly spread through Northumbria, which in turn would spread Christianity outward into Mercia, Essex, and Lindsey. The sees and bishops that were established in Mercia, Essex, and in the kingdom of Lindsey looked to Northumbria and the diocesan seat at Lindisfarne for ecclesiastical and spiritual leadership.⁸ Canterbury was therefore disconnected from most of England as Northumbria and Iona were making strides spreading Christianity across the wider landscape.

Archiepiscopacy and its notion of greater ecclesiastical authority were only beginning to form in the seventh century and were limited to Canterbury, although it could be argued that Wilfrid was seeking to establish a metropolitan see or archbishopric in the north as the Northumbrian see extended past its territorial boundaries. The first five archbishops had received letters from Rome and their relationship was symbolized with the grant of the pallium by the pope to each new archbishop. It is especially worth noting that the pallium, which became associated specifically to the duties of archbishops, and the necessity of

⁸ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 63-66.

archbishops to have a pallium to exercise their powers, originated in England through Pope Gregory's gift to Augustine in 601, allowing him the ability to consecrate bishops (a significant point that will be returned to in more detail below). Infrequently and on special occasions in the fifth and sixth centuries, popes honored particular archbishops in Gaul and Italy as papal representatives by sending them a pallium. The grant of the pallium was a way of maintaining contact and standards with the English Church.⁹ After archbishop Honorius died (the last of the missionaries sent by Gregory), an Englishman, Deusdedit, was appointed to the see of Canterbury in 655. The Synod of Whitby took place at the end of his episcopacy in 664.¹⁰ The details of the Synod need not be mentioned again here, but it must be stated that it allowed Northumbria's reconnection to Canterbury (and through Canterbury to Rome) as Northumbria accepted the Church of Rome over the traditions of Iona. It is here that the figure of Wilfrid emerges in ecclesiastical politics and his reputation begins to form. Following the flight of Colman, bishop of Lindisfarne, to Ireland, Wilfrid, with the help of Alchfrith (sub-king of Deira in Northumbria and Wilfrid's patron at Ripon), was chosen to be the new bishop of Lindisfarne. He transferred the bishopric to York, in place of Lindisfarne. His interest in York becoming the new seat was due to "its importance in Roman times [as a previous Roman city], its association with Paulinus [as a church established by him], its size, security and accessibility and the desirability of a change of leadership from Lindisfarne."¹¹ It is possible that Gregory's initial plan for York was discussed at Whitby and that this was perhaps the reason it was chosen over Lindisfarne. It established a see distinctly Roman and separate from the Irish ecclesiastical center. Wilfrid then left for Gaul to be consecrated as

⁹ Ibid., 64-67; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 90, 117, 136.

¹⁰ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 67-71.

¹¹ Farmer, "Saint Wilfrid," 44-45.

bishop. He did not return until 666 when he retreated to his monastery at Ripon, as his long sojourn in Gaul had caused King Oswy to appoint another in his place.

Wilfrid's biographer, however, does not mention that Wilfrid was elevated to the episcopal seat only after and due to the untimely death of Tuda. Tuda was a southern Irishman and a practical choice for bishop, as he was dissociated from the current Northumbrian controversies, observed the Catholic (Roman) custom of Easter, and was also familiar with Irish customs and monasticism.¹² Chad was appointed by Oswy and sent to Canterbury to be consecrated bishop of York at the death of Tuda and in the absence of Wilfrid (who was presumably elected first). The appointment of Chad, the death of the archbishop, and the disappearance/death of Alchfrith marked the beginning of Wilfrid's troubles in Northumbria, intrinsically entwined secularly and ecclesiastically.

Oswy may have assumed Wilfrid forfeited his see by his neglect of it, for he remained in Gaul for nearly two years. It was also possible that Oswy may not have fully accepted the outcome at Whitby, as he deeply favored the Irish, among whom he spent his exile, instructed in their teachings. Chad had been a disciple of Aidan, trained in Ionan traditions, a priest, and an abbot of Lastingham in Bernicia. Yet another possibility and a quite likely one, was that his son rebelled against him for some reason or another and was either killed or exiled. Wilfrid's delay in Gaul may be because he had heard of the skirmish in Northumbria between his former patron and the king. If that was the case, Oswy probably did not want a friend of his disloyal son as his bishop, especially after the violent episodes in the 650s that threatened his supremacy (referred to above). Alchfrith, Wilfrid's patron, had fully supported the Roman reckoning of Easter, due to his friendship with Wilfrid. As sub-king of Deira, it is

¹² Eric John, "The Social and Political Problems of the Early English Church," in *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings*, ed. David Pelteret and Anthony Edgell (New York: Garland, 2000), 25.

not unlikely that he sought to promote Wilfrid for his own gain, replacing his father's Irish bishop with his own and therefore rivaling for control in Northumbria after the Roman triumph at Whitby.¹³ At the death of Alchfrith, his brother Ecgrith succeeded him as the sub-king of Deira. Oswy probably appointed Chad for all the above reasons. By appointing a bishop of his choosing, he could be confident that he would remain in control over his territory and perhaps, by extension, control the ecclesiastical administration after Whitby (maintaining Irish bishops).

Prior to the archiepiscopate of Theodore, kings took the leading role in the appointment of bishops, appointing and deposing them at will. After Theodore's arrival, he took over these functions and kings thereafter had a less dominant role, though their involvement in the process did not completely cease, as is evident with Theodore and Ecgrith.¹⁴ It was essential that a successful bishop establish good relations with his king and with the royal family. Catherine Cubitt has emphasized that "a crucial thread running through Bede's depiction of the growth of the Anglo-Saxon church is the vital importance of harmonious interactions between kings and bishops to the well-being of a kingdom and to the salvation of its people."¹⁵ Bishops were therefore vital for the divine protection and success of a kingdom, especially in the eyes of Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*: Upon the arrival of Theodore, Bede commented, "Never had there been such happy times as these since the English settled in Britain; for the Christian kings were so strong that they daunted all the barbarous tribes."¹⁶ Early examples of royal-episcopal partnerships during the missionary

¹³ Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 107-8.

¹⁴ Catherine Cubitt, "Wilfrid's 'Usurping Bishops': Episcopal Elections in Anglo-Saxon England, c.600-800," *Northern History* 25, no. 1 (1989): 34.

¹⁵ Cubitt, "St. Wilfrid: A Man for His Times," 311.

¹⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 205.

period were Augustine and Ethelbert, Paulinus and Edwin, and Aidan and Oswald. Wilfrid's relationships with his Northumbrian kings were hostile or perhaps more accurately, hostile towards him. Evident in the early power-politics outlined above, bishops and other clerics must have accepted dynastic feuding, as Aidan (the first bishop of Lindisfarne) appeared to comply with his king in his quest for supremacy. Violence, in addition to marriage, was something that factored into the conversion process in Northumbria and Mercia and often preceded it. The secular ruler determined conversion among the people in the cases of Edwin and Oswald, above, i.e. when the king converted, the subjects followed shortly after. Additionally, expansion of territory and/or overlordship provided pressure on the inhabitants to do the same. Bishops must have accepted this method or looked the other way, as it proved successful in the expansion of Christianity. While Wilfrid did not necessarily object to this method, as his own episcopal see expanded (in step with) his king's territorial conquests, his ambitions outside the territory of Northumbria, and his friendship with other secular rulers, were probably understood in terms of insubordination/incompliance to the king.

In addition to kings partaking in the appointment of a bishop, it was acceptable before the death or retirement of a bishop to designate his successor. Another manner of episcopal election was the ability of the cathedral or monastic community to elect a candidate from the see in which it was based.¹⁷ A combination of the two was also possible. It must be restated that at the time Theodore arrived, many of the episcopal sees lacked bishops while other sees, Northumbria in particular, were exceedingly large. Theodore therefore took it upon himself to appoint bishops and divide sees, asserting greater authority than any previous archbishop. While election by community or designation by the bishop may have been intended to

¹⁷ Cubitt, "Wilfrid's 'Usurping Bishops,'" 32.

prohibit royal control or interference, it appears that royal approval may have been vital¹⁸ – a point that is evident throughout the reigns of the Bernician kings and the lifetime of Wilfrid.

Between the years 666 and 669, while at Ripon, Wilfrid extended ecclesiastical authority and guidance into Mercia. It is important to return to the political and ecclesiastical background of Mercia before Wilfrid can be discussed here. The kingdom of Kent from about the 630s was subject to Northumbrian, Mercian, or West Saxon overlordship until the end of the dynasty in 835.¹⁹ As briefly discussed earlier, after Oswy had defeated Penda, king of the Mercians, in 655, Oswy became the most powerful ruler in Britain and has been acknowledged by historians as *bretwalda*, at least for a short period of time.²⁰ Previously in 653, Peada, sub-king of the Middle Angles and son of Penda, had asked for the hand in marriage of Alchfled, a daughter of Oswy. He agreed under the terms of the marriage that he and his people would accept the Christian faith. Oswy's son, Alchfrith, strongly encouraged Peada to accept the faith, as he was Peada's kinsman by his marriage to his sister Cyniburg. Peada was baptized by Finan, Aidan's successor at Lindisfarne, and returned to Mercia with four priests (Cedd, Adda, Betti, and Diuma).²¹ Oswy later annexed the northern part of Mercia and he initially gave the southern kingdom to Peada. He then instilled Christianity into Mercia and other sub-kingdoms. Peada was killed the following spring and Oswy presumably now held all of Northumbria and Mercia, or at least had overlordship over it. Oswy's overlordship and Christianization in Mercia were clearly due to intermarriage between the kingdoms, but also to violence that threaded through nearly every encounter. Bede infers that Peada, who appeared to have cordial relations with Oswy, was killed during

¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 99.

²¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 177.

Easter, “through the treachery, it is said, of his own wife.”²² This would imply that Oswy’s daughter killed Peada, presumably for her father to claim this overlordship both militarily and ecclesiastically. Oswy’s overlordship and ealdormen were driven out, and Wulfhere, another son of Penda, ascended as king of Mercia, supported by the Mercian nobility. Oswy, however, continued to hold overlordship as some of the bishops appointed in Mercia were his relatives or appointed from Northumbria. Mercia was dependent on Northumbria for Christianization and so remained a dependency.²³

The first bishop over Mercia, the Middle Angles, and Lindsey was Diuma. Ceollach succeeded him upon his death and relinquished his see not long after. Both were Irishmen, consecrated by Finan (Aidan’s successor at Lindisfarne), and presided during the period of Northumbrian rule over Mercia (at the death of Penda), prior to the ascendancy of Wulfhere. It was also during this time (in the 650s) that Oswy partook in the conversion of the East Saxons and East Angles, for he recalled Cedd, one of the four priests sent to Mercia after Penda and his son accepted the faith, to assist in evangelization. Cedd became bishop of the East Saxons and was granted the land at Lastingham in Northumbria by Ethelwald to build a monastery (prior to the Mercian defeat in 655), the same monastery at which his brother Chad later spent time. Trumhere became the first bishop of Mercia, consecrated by the Irish, during the reign of Wulfhere, having been previously abbot of Gilling. Gilling was the location where Oswine had been killed and where Eanfled had petitioned Oswy to grant Trumhere land to build a monastery as reparation for his unjust death and to pray there for both kings, himself and Oswine.²⁴ In addition to this connection, Trumhere was a descendant

²² Ibid., 185.

²³ Tyler, “Bishop Wilfrid and the Mercians,” 275-76.

²⁴ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 185.

of the Deiran lineage and therefore Oswy's kin.²⁵ Oswy's desire to spread Christianity was directly linked with his desire for supremacy; his relationships with bishops and authority over clerics allowed him to expand his territory and his reach, instilling Christianity into other territories, which in turn looked to Northumbria for guidance both politically and spiritually.

Wilfrid's biographer tells us that between 666 and 669 Wilfrid enjoyed friendship with Kings Wulfhere of Mercia and Egbert of Kent, undertaking various episcopal duties for them prior to Theodore's arrival in 669. In Mercia he founded several monasteries and in Kent he ordained a number of priests and deacons.²⁶ Damian Tyler suggests that Wulfhere probably wanted to use Wilfrid, who had just gained his reputation at Whitby, against Oswy who seemingly didn't like Wilfrid, to reduce his dependency on Northumbria and turn Mercia more towards Rome. Furthermore, he may have hoped that Wilfrid would abandon his Northumbrian claims and become bishop in Mercia instead.²⁷ With these politics in mind and with the see of Canterbury vacant, Wilfrid could easily have been chosen as archbishop, especially due to the fact that he had amicable relations with Egbert who specifically sought out Wilfrid for guidance, probably due to the reputation he earned at Whitby and his travels to Rome and Gaul.²⁸ Oswy of Northumbria and Egbert of Kent consulted about the necessity for a new archbishop, one that could successfully lead the church in the aftershock of Whitby, which is evident from Bede and from a letter from Pope Vitalian. It is therefore likely that Egbert suggested Wilfrid as a candidate, despite Oswy's weariness of Wilfrid discussed earlier. Oswy may have recognized that while he personally did not want Wilfrid

²⁵ Ibid., 176-82.

²⁶ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 122.

²⁷ Tyler, "Bishop Wilfrid and the Mercians," 279.

²⁸ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 70.

as his bishop in Northumbria, he could still value Wilfrid's episcopal qualifications and repute in the growing Anglo-Saxon Church. Oswy and Egbert selected a new archbishop, one of Deusdedit's clergy, an Englishman, "so that when he received the rank of Archbishop, he could consecrate Catholic bishops for the churches of the English, throughout Britain."²⁹ Upon the death of Oswy and the ascension of his son Ecgrith in 670 (as king of all of Northumbria), Northumbrian hegemony was challenged by Wulfhere. He failed in these efforts and was stripped of the province of Lindsey. Wulfhere died shortly after, in 675, and Ecgrith regained Northumbrian hegemony briefly over Mercia, reannexing Lindsey.³⁰

In the year 668 Theodore was consecrated the new archbishop of Canterbury, four years following the Synod of Whitby. He was also the first bishop of Canterbury to adopt the title and by extension authorities/duties now associated with archbishop and confirmed by the pope.³¹ Wighard, who had been trained by the disciples of Gregory and sent to Rome to be consecrated, died there of the plague. In his place the pope appointed Theodore who was escorted to Kent by Benedict Biscop in 669. The English see at Canterbury had by then been vacant for nearly five years. Additionally, the kingdoms of Mercia, Wessex, East Anglia, and the see of Rochester in Kent lacked bishops and probably properly trained clergy.³² Theodore's task, according to Nicholas Brooks, was "to reconstruct the diocesan organization of the church in various English kingdoms, and to encourage and establish centres of learning capable of instructing English-born clerics, so that the spectre of decay that had greeted his arrival would never recur."³³ Theodore was also aware of the

²⁹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 198.

³⁰ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 69-70.

³¹ Alan T. Thacker, "Gallic or Greek? Archbishops in England from Theodore to Ecgbert," in Fouracre and Ganz, *Frankland: The Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages*, 55.

³² Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 71.

³³ *Ibid.*

ecclesiastical climate in Northumbria and of the monastic empire and exceedingly large diocese under the control of Wilfrid. It was Theodore who asserted greater authority over all of England from Canterbury and whose archiepiscopacy and relationship with Wilfrid would allow a further reconnection with Rome and the papacy in ecclesiastical matters. Most archbishops up to this point had been Romans, sent from Rome in the period of the conversion; Theodore was a Greek-speaking abbot from Tarsus living in Rome. Abbot Hadrian and Theodore made a tour of England to familiarize themselves with the dioceses under the jurisdiction of Canterbury. In 673, Theodore summoned the Synod of Hertford and initiated a series of canon law provisions with the intention to secure standardization of practice throughout England in matters of orthodox belief.³⁴ It was also at this council that more bishoprics were created and sub-divided, thereby dismantling Wilfrid's vast Northumbrian diocese (though this did not occur until 677/678), to which he had previously been reinstated in 669. According to Veronica Ortenberg, Theodore "reinforced the hierarchy of dependence of bishops, archbishop and pope and he established the need for papal approval for major changes in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and geography."³⁵ He also introduced the idea of regular church councils, two of which he called at Hertford in 673 and at Hatfield in 679.³⁶ Under Theodore and his two immediate successors, Berhtwald and Tatwine, the see of Canterbury held greater authority than it was ever to possess again. Wilfrid's quarrels appeared not to be initially with Theodore, but with Ecgfrith, who wished to be rid of his worldly bishop who continued to acquire more lands and patronage across

³⁴ Michael Lapidge, "The Career of Archbishop Theodore," in *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26.

³⁵ Veronica Ortenberg, "The Anglo-Saxon Church and the Papacy," in *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. H. Lawrence (Stroud, U.K.: Sutton, 1999), 41.

³⁶ Ortenberg, "The Anglo-Saxon Church," 41.

territories (especially Mercia), seemingly challenging Ecgfrith's authority over the realm as he could not directly control Wilfrid.

In 669 one of Theodore's first tasks as archbishop was resolving the episcopal dispute in Northumbria. Wilfrid probably did not question Theodore's authority as he was sent by the papacy, but initially welcomed it. Wilfrid was reinstated to York by Theodore and Chad was reassigned to Lichfield. Bede and Stephen differ in the narrative of events that ultimately clouded the procedure for canonical consecration. According to Stephen, Chad "was ordained in complete defiance of canon law."³⁷ Theodore then deposed Chad because he unjustly stole Wilfrid's diocese. Bede, on the other hand, implies that upon Wilfrid's return from Gaul, Chad, who had ruled in Wilfrid's stead for several years, gladly stepped down and retired to Lastingham.³⁸ Theodore had pointed out that Chad had been irregularly consecrated and re-consecrated him in the Catholic custom.³⁹ He did not wish to deprive Chad of his episcopal title for "when he informed Bishop Chad that his consecration was irregular, the latter replied with the greatest humility... Theodore hearing his humble answer said that he should not resign the bishopric, and he himself completed his ordination after the Catholic manner."⁴⁰ Theodore then appointed Chad as bishop of the Mercians and the people of Lindsey, upon permission from Oswy. Bede also tells us that Chad was given land by Wulfhere to establish this see.⁴¹ In contrast, Stephen tells us that Wilfrid had previously (while performing episcopal duties there prior to Chad's appointment) been given Lichfield in Mercia by Wulfhere, "a place highly suitable for an episcopal see either for himself or for

³⁷ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 122.

³⁸ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 303.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁰ John, "The Social and Political Problems," 26; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 206. Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 123.

⁴¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 206-7.

anyone that he might choose to give it to.”⁴² It can be inferred from Stephen that Wilfrid made amends with Chad after he was re-consecrated and gave him Lichfield, while reinstalling himself at York with the help of Theodore. At the same time, Theodore appointed Putta to the vacant see of Rochester, founded during the early missionary period in the time of Augustine.⁴³

The matter of canonical consecration or canonical status became exceedingly important during the reorganization of the English church – a matter that Wilfrid strongly supported, actively participating in episcopal duties and pastoral care (especially in the absence of other clerics and bishops), while simultaneously challenging uncanonical deposition. The procedure for canonical consecration was unclear and not well-established in seventh-century England, although both Stephen and Bede provide us with glimpses. Shortly after Wilfrid was appointed bishop, he asked to be sent to Gaul, stating, “The Holy See does not consider men they [the Irish and British bishops] ordain as being in communion with her – any more than she does those who consort with schismatics. In all humility, therefore, let me beg you to send me to Gaul, where there are many bishops of recognized orthodoxy. There, though unworthy, I can be consecrated without the Holy See raising any objection.”⁴⁴ As discussed briefly in Chapter Two, Stephen suggested that there was no one worthy or qualified to consecrate Wilfrid in England. Furthermore, Stephen and Wilfrid viewed the British and Irish not only as schismatic due to their erroneous practice regarding Easter, but associated them directly with heretical sects.⁴⁵ It can be inferred from the passage quoted

⁴² Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 123.

⁴³ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 206.

⁴⁴ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 120.

⁴⁵ Charles-Edwards, “Wilfrid and the Celts,” 249.

above, that any cleric ordained or consecrated by an Irish or British bishop was reckoned uncanonical and that the efficacy of his pastoral care was therefore questionable.⁴⁶

Conversely, in a letter addressed to Augustine discussing his early duties in the establishment of the English Church, preserved by Bede, Pope Gregory states, “In the Church of the English where as yet you are the only bishop, you cannot do otherwise than consecrate a bishop without other bishops being present ... when in God’s good time bishops are appointed in various places at no great distance from one another, no consecration is to take place except in the presence of three to four bishops.”⁴⁷ While this passage dates much earlier than Stephen’s, it elucidates two important factors that apply to the time of Theodore: In the case where there were few bishops, one bishop might take it upon himself to consecrate others, not unlike Wilfrid’s activities before the arrival of Theodore and after his death (given the circumstances of Canterbury’s vacancy, the thinning of bishops due to the plague, and the contest over recognized orthodoxy) and not unlike Theodore’s own activities as archbishop (in the division of sees, appointment of bishops, and consecration). Secondly, the pope himself outlined the future manner of consecration when the church became more established. While the manner of canonical consecration after Whitby appeared to be determined by orthodoxy (Roman tradition) and a small council of bishops, it was a matter that remained ambiguous, especially in the rise of Theodore and during the years in which Wilfrid was deposed and exiled.

Another matter that should be restated is that the first five archbishops were granted the pallium by the pope and with it the ability to consecrate bishops and create new sees. Pope Gregory had not intended that there would be a single authoritative archbishop or

⁴⁶ Kirby, “Northumbria in the Time of Wilfrid,” 8.

⁴⁷ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 81.

metropolitan see in England, but two autonomous sees at London and York, each to be provided with the pallium. Augustine was to consecrate bishops for London and York, both subject to his authority, but after his death they were to become independent sees presiding over their own bishops. Furthermore, in a separate letter addressed to Augustine, Gregory stated: “Thenceforward, seniority of consecration is to determine whether the bishop of London or York takes precedence; but they are to consult one another and take united action in all matters concerning the faith of Christ, and take and execute all decisions without mutual disharmony.”⁴⁸ After Paulinus was granted the pallium at York, however, Pope Honorius amended Gregory’s scheme by stipulating that when a vacancy occurred at Canterbury or York, the surviving metropolitan should consecrate a successor to the empty see rather than having each metropolitan consecrated by his own council of bishops subject to his jurisdiction.⁴⁹ The first five archbishops never styled themselves as archbishops. Theodore was the first to do so, perhaps to claim primacy over all other bishops and “legitimate his drastic intervention [in the powerful diocese of the north],”⁵⁰ that had been disconnected from Canterbury and Rome for so long. Nicholas Brooks has asserted that Theodore “acted high-handedly and without the authority of other bishops of the province ... Theodore himself took the initiative in choosing the bishops whom he consecrated and if necessary in removing them.”⁵¹ Archbishops, especially Theodore, took the ultimate authority in consecration, even when there were enough bishops to form a synod for consecration, a point that is highly significant and separates him from previous archbishops and Wilfrid (who undertook that authority only when there were few bishops). Theodore, his episcopal

⁴⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁹ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 65.

⁵⁰ Thacker, “Gallic or Greek,” 55-58.

⁵¹ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 73.

authority, and Wilfrid's possible ambition for a diocese in the north will be returned to below.

Reexamining Wilfrid's reappointment to York and Chad's deposition, Theodore must have understood some fault in Chad's consecration as he felt the need to re-consecrate him. Upon arriving in Kent, Chad and his priest found that the archbishop had died and so went on to Bishop Wine of the West Saxons, who consecrated him with the assistance of two British bishops, who "[kept] Easter contrary to the canonical practice." At the time, Wine was the only bishop in Britain who had been canonically consecrated for he was consecrated in Gaul, according to Bede.⁵² Wine was also considered (by Bede) a simoniac and schismatic for trying to purchase the diocese of London after he was expelled from Wessex by King Coenwalh.⁵³ Chad's consecration may have been invalid for several reasons. The British bishops may have been regarded as heretics, given Stephen's assertion quoted above. T.M. Charles-Edwards has asserted that Theodore "necessitated a large scale re-ordination of clergy previously ordained by those now deemed heretical [with the outcome at Whitby, the arrival of Theodore, and the placement of Wilfrid at York in place of Chad], not just in Northumbria, but also in Mercia, Lindsey, among the Middle Angles and in Essex."⁵⁴ In combination with Wine's tarnished reputation and his association with British bishops (whose canonical rites were invalid) Chad's consecration may have been found uncanonical. Another reason may be that he was not in the presence of three to four bishops, given the letter quoted above by Bede. Whatever the case, it seems, per Stephen's assertion, that there were no acceptable bishops worthy or qualified, regardless of tradition (Irish or Roman), to

⁵² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 197.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵⁴ Charles-Edwards, "Wilfrid and the Celts," 249.

perform consecration, and therefore Chad must have been consecrated by those that were unacceptable.

Between 669 and 677/78 Wilfrid ruled as the bishop of the whole of Northumbria and carried out episcopal functions in various parts of England, including Mercia and Wessex, among others. Ecgrith likewise continued to extend his own territory and authority alongside his bishop. In the early part of his reign, he had conquered the Picts in the north.⁵⁵ According to Stephen, “These conquests at one and the same time extended our most pious King Ecgrith’s territory and enlarged the field of Wilfrid’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction. He was now bishop of the Saxons in the south, and of the British, Scots, and Picts in the north.”⁵⁶ In addition, Wilfrid and Wulfhere of Mercia most likely remained in good communication, as Wilfrid seems to have retained his monasteries.⁵⁷ Wulfhere died in 675, and his brother, Aethelred, succeeded to the throne of Mercia. Wilfrid befriended Aethelred too until such time that Ecgrith’s hostility towards Wilfrid had increased so much that he used his political connections to infringe on Wilfrid’s later refuge. Aethelred married King Ecgrith’s sister, Osthyrth. This marriage represented an alliance between Northumbria and Mercia, whose prior political relationship was hostile.⁵⁸ In 676, Aethelred invaded Kent, destroying Rochester and many churches. This raid established his reputation among the Mercians, elevating his status as a powerful leader, as his predecessors had been subject to Northumbria. He was reversing Wulfhere’s tension towards Northumbria. By 677, Ecgrith had established connections with all key English dynasties with his new marriage to Iurminburh (probably of Kentish origin). Iurminburh’s sister was the wife of King Centwine

⁵⁵ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 128.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 129; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 206.

⁵⁷ Tyler, “Bishop Wilfrid and the Mercians,” 279.

⁵⁸ Higham, “Bishop Wilfrid in Southern England,” 208.

of Wessex. Ecgrith was the most powerful ruler in Britain at this point and he had a great military reputation.⁵⁹

In 678 the vast and growing kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex were still administered by single dioceses, which were therefore far too large for any bishop to provide effective pastoral care. New sees required excessive endowments from secular rulers and few bishops agreed to the division of their territory and authority. The establishment of new bishoprics was therefore a test of Theodore's authority, especially in the case of Wilfrid.⁶⁰ The see of East Anglia was one of the first sees to be divided. Two bishops, Aecci and Badwin, were consecrated in place of Bisi (initially consecrated by Theodore) due to his illness. They may have been viewed as coadjutors in a single see.⁶¹ In Wessex, Haeddi succeeded Leutherius (the fourth bishop of the West Saxons after Birinus, Agilbert, and Wine) and was consecrated in London by Theodore. He appears to have remained the only bishop of Winchester until his death in 705, resisting the division of the see in Winchester even at the death of Coenwalh and the division of the kingdom and restoration under Cadwalla.⁶² As stated elsewhere, "the power of bishops was largely coterminous with that of particular kings ... [and the] need of bishops to work in close concert with kings" was exceedingly important.⁶³ This assertion was entirely true and caused conflicts between secular rulers if bishops maintained property/ecclesiastical control in more than one territory, which Wilfrid did as his influence and monastic houses continued to extend outward from Northumbria (see Wilfrid's activities described in Chapter One). This placed him in a

⁵⁹ Ibid., 209.

⁶⁰ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 73.

⁶¹ Thacker, "Gallic or Greek," 57; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 212-15.

⁶² Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 74; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 223-24, 298.

⁶³ Farmer, "Saint Wilfrid," 44.

position of power and influence due to his accumulation of lands. Additionally, it should be stated that Wilfrid did not just come across these properties and make them his own; he was patronized by secular rulers who granted him land in Northumbria, Mercia, and Sussex and probably also Kent, due to his early relationship with Egbert. Though it is not stated by Bede nor Stephen of Ripon that he was granted land there, it can be assumed based upon his monastic establishments and political connections throughout England.

It was at this time, in 677/678, that Wilfrid was deposed and deprived of his see and monasteries, and three new bishops were appointed in his place. Bosa, trained at Whitby, was appointed to Deira with his seat at York; Eata, formerly abbot of Melrose and trained by Aidan, was appointed to Bernicia with his seat at Hexham, although he preferred to rule at Lindisfarne; and Eadhead was appointed for Lindsey, presumably at Lichfield, although Aethelred soon reannexed Lindsey for Mercia in 679. The new appointees had been trained in the Irish-Bernician tradition and were leading churchmen in Northumbria. They were probably chosen to cooperate with Ecgrith.⁶⁴ Theodore was probably concerned to undermine any aspirations that Wilfrid may have had for the archiepiscopal/metropolitan status of York that Pope Gregory had initially envisaged and that was briefly achieved by Paulinus. Wilfrid was absent at the Council of Hertford in 672/673 and sent proxies in his place. Among those present were Bishop Bisi of the East Angles, Bishop Putta of Rochester, Bishop Leutherius of the West Saxons, and Bishop Winfrid of the Mercians.⁶⁵ All present agreed to obey the canons of the ancient fathers, confirmed at the synod. This synod discussed smaller dioceses as well as ruled against any bishop intruding into another's diocese or into monastic property. It also stipulated that seniority of consecration determined

⁶⁴ Cubitt, "Wilfrid's 'Usurping Bishops,'" 37.

⁶⁵ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 213.

precedence over other bishops.⁶⁶ Upon the death of Chad in 672, Winfrid was consecrated by Theodore to preside over the Mercians, Middle Angles, and people of Lindsey. By 675, however, Winfrid was deposed and Theodore appointed Sexwulf in his place.⁶⁷ According to Bede, it was in 675 that Lindsey was made its own province/see, established after Ecgfrith defeated Wulfhere and annexed Lindsey. This suggests that Wilfrid may have briefly held Lindsey, as his diocesan boundary extended with the conquests of the king before 678. Sexwulf remained bishop of the Middle Angles and Mercian see and in 678 Eadhead was appointed to the see of Lindsey.⁶⁸ In 679, however, Lindsey was re-annexed by Aethelred, Eadhead returned to Northumbria, and Theodore appointed him bishop of Ripon, Wilfrid's monastery.⁶⁹

Wilfrid may not have been the only bishop deposed by Theodore nor the only one who protested to him. Bede tells us that Winfrid, deposed in 675, retired to the monastery at At-Barwe and remained there until his death. However, according to Stephen, when Wilfrid was on his way to appeal to the pope regarding his own deposition, "Bishop Winfrid, who had been driven out of Lichfield, happened to be on the selfsame route. He fell into their hands [Duke Ebroin and Theoderic bribed by Wilfrid's enemies to exile him indefinitely or kill his friends and take his possessions] ... they seized him, took all his money, killed many of his friends, and inflicted the extremes of misery on him by leaving him naked."⁷⁰ Wilfrid had probably intended to appeal to the pope against Theodore. Neither Stephen nor Bede tells us the reason for his disposal, only a vague disobedience by Winfrid who had held the see for

⁶⁶ Ibid., 214.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 216.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 224-25.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 225.

⁷⁰ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 133.

only a few years.⁷¹ While Putta of Rochester was not deposed by Theodore, he too lost his see during this time when Aethelred of Mercia ravaged Kent and Rochester in 676. He was given a plot of land and a church by Sexwulf, “making no attempts to reestablish his see.”⁷² Theodore then appointed another in his place, Cwichelm and subsequently Gebmund when Cwichelm quickly resigned.⁷³ Agilbert too, though not deposed by Theodore, was driven out by Coenwalh of Wessex in the 660s and was replaced by Wine, demonstrating the power of kings appointing and deposing at will. Tunberht of Hexham was also deposed, although much later, in 685, perhaps for offending Ecgrith or by association with Wilfrid.⁷⁴

Stephen’s assertion that Theodore and Ecgrith collaborated on Wilfrid’s displacement may not be entirely incorrect based upon the political tensions outlined above. Wilfrid’s acquisition of land was crossing territorial lines. Although it was acceptable to hold land in other regions, Wilfrid as one bishop held more land than his own king. Wilfrid represented a political adversary that was continuing to gain power and influence across territories through the gift of land but also seemingly sharing the king’s increasing territory (which was also his bishopric), competing with the king’s own power. Eric John has suggested that Wilfrid’s ejection occurred at the time when the Northumbrians and Mercians were nearly at a breaking point. Wilfrid’s Mercian connections were problematic to Ecgrith, who “saw his power gradually waning before his southern rival, his bishop’s friend, [Aethelred].”⁷⁵ In the absence of Wilfrid (who was engaged in his appeal to the papacy in 679), Ecgrith’s supremacy was challenged and King Aethelred defeated his brother-in-law,

⁷¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 216.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 224.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Kirby, “Northumbria in the Time of Wilfrid,” 12; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 259.

⁷⁵ John, “The Social and Political Problems,” 32.

Ecgrith, on the banks of the Trent and the subsequent peace was made between them through Theodore, restoring Lindsey to Mercian kingship. These developments also limited Ecgrith's authority in the south.⁷⁶ In addition to the political challenges that he faced with Mercia, Ecgrith must have certainly held a personal grudge towards Wilfrid. Both Ripon and Hexham were gifted to him by figures in Ecgrith's life that had direct ties with Wilfrid. Ecgrith's first wife, Ethelthryth, provided Wilfrid the land for Hexham. He supported her decision to remain virginal and dedicate her life to God; she later became abbess of Ely. Ecgrith's half-brother, Alchfrith, provided Wilfrid with Ripon and lands connected to it. He also promoted Wilfrid as a spiritual teacher, leading up to Wilfrid's role in Whitby and election as bishop, discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Regarding Theodore, Ecgrith may have easily persuaded or perhaps pressured Theodore to expel Wilfrid, given the destruction in Kent in 676. Theodore may have relied on Ecgrith for protection (of Kent) against growing Mercian hegemony.⁷⁷ Of course, Theodore was eager to break up exceedingly large dioceses in England as well. Theodore may also have felt authoritatively threatened by Wilfrid who rivaled his authority in England at the height of his career between the years 669 and 678, administering sees elsewhere in addition to his own prior to Theodore's arrival. After the Synod of Whitby and his election as bishop of York, Wilfrid took it upon himself to revitalize the English church, unifying and reconnecting it to Rome, a task Theodore was also trying to achieve.

In 679 Wilfrid decided to appeal to the pope concerning his diocese and displacement. While Wilfrid's complaints have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Chapter Three), it will suffice to say that he was wrongfully deprived as no offense was alleged

⁷⁶ Higham, "Bishop Wilfrid in Southern England," 210.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

against him and especially as he was a validly and canonically consecrated bishop (consecrated in Gaul by twelve Catholic bishops).⁷⁸ His bishopric was divided without his consent and the new appointees selected without his permission.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Wilfrid argued that these were not canonical decisions determined by a synod of English bishops (for he expressed that if it had been, he would have accepted the decision without question), but the decision of an archbishop who held an informal meeting in Northumbria with the king. In Rome, Pope Agatho restored Wilfrid's large bishopric to him under the condition that he rule with co-bishops, as he had been unjustly and uncanonically supplanted.⁸⁰ He also gave him the ability to choose his co-bishops, seemingly suggesting or perhaps confirming his status as something like archbishop in the north, as he appeared to have authority over the other bishops. Furthermore, he was granted papal privileges over Ripon and Hexham protecting them from outside interference. According to Stephen, letters had been sent from England regarding Wilfrid as well as letters "from Archbishop Theodore, who was himself formerly sent to Britain by the Apostolic See."⁸¹ It is clear in Stephen's *Life* that Wilfrid perceived the papacy to be the ultimate authority on all matters. It seems, however, that he was overconfident in the papacy. Simultaneously with Wilfrid's appeal to the papacy, it was decided by Pope Agatho that there would be one archbishop and twelve bishoprics subject to his authority, which reinforced his authority as archbishop and would perhaps further forestall appeals to Rome. The Gregorian plan was compromised, as there would not be two metropolitans, each with twelve bishops, but one.⁸² Whether Wilfrid intended York to be a

⁷⁸ Thacker, "Gallic or Greek," 58; Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 120.

⁷⁹ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 132.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁸² Thacker, "Gallic or Greek," 58; Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 74.

metropolitan see, we may never know, but it easily could have been, if it wasn't for the secular politics in Northumbria and Mercia or, as D. H. Farmer has suggested in the passage quoted above, the problematic tensions bishoprics caused if they extended into more than one kingdom and across territories.

Upon his return from his appeal to Rome, Wilfrid delivered the document from the pope, stamped and sealed, to the king and summoned the clergy to the location where the synod usually met to read out the decrees. According to Stephen, "some of them ... simply refused to accept [the document and] contumaciously rejected it. Others – and this is far more detestable – imperiled their souls by alleging that those very letters which the Holy See had sent to comfort them had been obtained through bribery."⁸³ King Ecgrith refused to accept the papal decision and imprisoned Wilfrid for nine months as he did not want Wilfrid continuing to wield ecclesiastical authority across territories, especially with his potential enemies. It is important to note here that when Wilfrid appealed both times to the pope, no king or archbishop denied his right to do so, but that "Wilfrid had been in breach of canon law by not obeying an English council [regarding his second appeal in the 690s] when it had deposed him" and furthermore that he had gone against Theodore, who was a papal representative sent from Rome.⁸⁴ It is particularly interesting that upon his return from his first appeal, the papal decrees were not necessarily accepted, which leads one to suspect that the papacy was not yet fully recognized in Northumbria after the Synod of Whitby by secular authority nor by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but that the archbishop took precedence. According to Julia Smith, "Certainly no one doubted that the Pope ranked first among the clergy, but in the early middle ages this high dignity neither conferred general authority nor

⁸³ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 144.

⁸⁴ Ortenberg, "The Anglo-Saxon Church," 42.

commanded obedience. If early medieval bishops, abbots, lay persons and kings chose to seek out papal advice or support on specific matters the popes responded. But it was not in their role to intervene in the wider world unless asked, far less to initiate.”⁸⁵ After his release from imprisonment, he was exiled most likely for competing for political control with both Theodore and Ecgrith. Reconnection to the papacy and reorganization of England was proving more difficult than Theodore imagined, as he had to contend with both ecclesiastical and secular politics that were very much intertwined.

In his exile, Wilfrid received a monastery from Berhtwald of Mercia until such time as he was no longer favored as Berhtwald was the nephew of Aethelred, who if we recall was married to Ecgrith’s sister. Wilfrid then went on to Wessex, where he was given more land until he was forced to move on again as the queen was related to Iurminburh. He had earlier enjoyed the support of King Coenwalh of Wessex, but political turmoil had caused divisions in Wessex, and the new ruler, Centwine, had married Iurminburh’s sister.⁸⁶ He then went to Sussex, the last pagan stronghold, and won the favor of Aethelwalh, king of the South Saxons. The South Saxons had previously been under the overlordship of Wulfhere and probably also Aethelred, which suggests that Aethelred was not as hostile towards his former friend because he could have easily forced the South Saxon king to push him out. Aethelwalh and Wilfrid joined forces. Aethelwalh had been a prominent beneficiary of Mercian pressure on Wessex. According to Nicholas Higham, “Aethelwalh’s virtual isolation from the dominant royal connections of the day gave him every reason to welcome a leading cleric who had been excluded by the very same kings and who had likewise been a close

⁸⁵ Julia Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History 500-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 281.

⁸⁶ Higham, “Bishop Wilfrid in Southern England,” 212.

friend and ally of his own patron, Wulfhere.”⁸⁷ He further suggests that Wilfrid’s reputation as a holy man had been damaged by his imprisonment and exiles. Missionary work offered him elevation, within a short distance of Canterbury and Theodore.⁸⁸ He used Sussex to repair his reputation. The outcome of the battle by the Trent ended Ecgfrith’s overlordship in the south and favored the independence of the East Angles and Kent.⁸⁹ Wilfrid offered Aethelwath a means of counteracting the authority of Theodore in Sussex as well as further secular intervention. He was given land at Selsey. Once he was active bishop in Sussex, he offered security against West Saxon colonialism as Theodore had stated that no bishop could infringe on another and Wessex was no longer dependent on Mercia or Northumbria.⁹⁰

In 685, the South Saxons overthrew Hlothhere of Kent in favor of his nephew, thereby reducing the likelihood that Theodore would interfere in Sussex. In the same year the king of Wessex, Centwine, had retired to a monastery. King Ecgfrith of Northumbria was also killed that same year at the battle of Nechtanesmere against the Picts, elevating his half-brother, Aldfrith, to the throne.⁹¹ Wilfrid deserted the South Saxon king in favor of Cadwalla of Wessex in 686 and supported him militarily. Cadwalla then attacked Kent and placed his brother at Canterbury and an East Saxon ruler in West Kent. By 687 he was the most powerful king in the south. He granted land to Wilfrid consisting of the Isle of Wight. In 686/687 Wilfrid attended a meeting with Theodore at London. London and its diocese were now under Cadwalla’s influence, as was Kent. It is likely, given the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical politics, that Cadwalla then urged, or more likely pressured

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 213.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 214.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 212-14.

⁹¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 255.

Theodore, Aethelred, and Aldfrith to reinstate Wilfrid to York in 686/687. Stephen tells us that Theodore sent letters to each of the kings, explicitly including his letter to Aethelred. It is also likely, however, that at the death of Ecgrith, Aethelred no longer felt the need to acquiesce in his brother-in-law's hostility towards his former friend. It is interesting to note that if Cadwalla had maintained this influence for more than a few years until Theodore's death, he may well have appointed Wilfrid to Canterbury, although Wilfrid's concerns always seemed to be his diocese in the north. Wilfrid's patronage was again lost as Cadwalla retired to Rome in 688.

In the absence of Wilfrid in Northumbria, Theodore was making greater strides in the Northumbrian church. In 681 Trumwine was consecrated for the kingdom of the Picts, and placed at Abercorn, an attempt by Theodore to oversee pastoral care in Ecgrith's ongoing territorial conquest until Ecgrith was killed in 685, when Trumwine retired to Whitby. It was also in 681 that Tunberht was consecrated for Hexham, which had been left vacant as Eata preferred his seat at Lindisfarne. Stephen tells us that Wilfrid may have been offered the see of Hexham during his imprisonment by Ecgrith in return for acquiescing in the king's commands and admitting the fraudulence of the papers from Rome.⁹² Shortly after, a synod was held, attended by Theodore and Ecgrith at a place called the Two Fords. Theodore deposed Tunberht, as stated earlier, and in 684 Cuthbert was elected by Ecgrith to replace him, though he was reluctant to accept. Cuthbert, like Eata, preferred Lindisfarne. Upon Cuthbert's appointment, Eata returned to the see of Hexham.⁹³ Both Eata and Cuthbert had ties to Melrose and Lindisfarne. Connections between monasteries were not uncommon as Wilfrid was connected to Ceolfrith, who became abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow and trained at

⁹² Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 146.

⁹³ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 259; Cubitt, "Wilfrid's 'Usurping Bishops,'" 19.

Ripon under Wilfrid when the plague hit Gilling. Wilfrid had also ordained Ceolfrith as priest in 669. Cuthbert, in fact, was one of the Irish monks forced out of Ripon when it was gifted to Wilfrid, as was its abbot, Eata.⁹⁴ Wilfrid's diocese had now been divided considerably, with two bishoprics established at Wilfrid's Ripon and Hexham, perhaps out of spite by Ecgfrith in collaboration with Theodore.

Ripon was never intended to become an episcopal see. In Wilfrid's later disputes with Aldfrith Stephen stresses that "the principal cause of dissension was of long standing, namely the unjust removal of land and possessions from the Church of Saint Peter [Ripon, dedicated sometime in the 670s before 678]. The second was the making of the same monastery, which had been given to us as our own property, into an episcopal see. This entailed loss of rights that had been granted by Pope Agatho and confirmed by five kings."⁹⁵ Ripon's privilege was granted during Wilfrid's first appeal in 678/679, and quite likely the grant took place just before or during the period when Eadhead was appointed. In his reference to the five kings, Stephen was probably referring to the consecration and dedication of Ripon in which "The most devout and Christian kings, Ecgfrith and Aelwine, and the kings beneath them were present."⁹⁶ Ripon's dedication was not, however, an indication of royal approval, but probably only a reference to the presence of kings. Catherine Cubitt has convincingly argued that unlike Benedict Biscop who received royal approval for his privileges of Wearmouth and Jarrow granted by the pope, Wilfrid probably did not.⁹⁷ Privileges in the seventh century were not uncommon as Agatho issued privileges for Augustine's Canterbury as well. Columbanus, too, was issued a privilege for his monastery of Bobbio. The privileges for

⁹⁴ Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 167.

⁹⁵ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 155.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹⁷ Bede, "Lives of the Abbots," 192, 203; Cubitt, "Wilfrid: A Man for His Times," 317.

Biscop's monasteries excluded episcopal interference while Stephen suggests that Wilfrid's privileges allowed for the protection of property and conversion into an episcopal see. The St. Augustine privilege excluded the jurisdiction of any church except the apostolic church. Wilfrid's confirmation of privileges in his second appeal to the papacy (to Pope Sergius) did the same. The concern for episcopal relations with monasteries must have been widespread.⁹⁸

It may have been Wilfrid's lack of royal approval that led Stephen to emphasize the power and authority of the papacy and the consequences for defying the pope's decrees, evident in his account of both appeals.⁹⁹ In both cases, the pope warned that if anyone attempted to withstand or deny the decrees of the papal synod, then divine punishment would ensue. Upon Wilfrid's return from his first appeal in the 680s and Ecgfrith's refusal to accept the papal decrees, Iurminburh fell ill. Ecgfrith's aunt, Aebbe, pleaded with her nephew to release the bishop as Ecgfrith had scorned the papacy. As soon as he was released, Iurminburh recovered from her deadly illness.¹⁰⁰ For continuing to defy the papacy, as implicitly suggested by Stephen, Ecgfrith was killed in battle in 685 and Wilfrid returned from exile, reinstated. After the council of Austerfield and upon Wilfrid's return from his second appeal, Aldfrith initially did not accept the papal decrees, but reconsidered when he fell gravely ill.¹⁰¹

According to Stephen's *Life*, near the end of Theodore's career, the archbishop reconciled with Wilfrid in 686/687 (as stated above) at London. It is curious that Stephen appears to make Theodore look like a fool, conceding to Wilfrid in the manner that he did, but nonetheless Stephen quotes Theodore as saying "God has revealed to me that this coming

⁹⁸ Cubitt, "Wilfrid: A Man for His Times," 317.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 318-19; Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 148.

¹⁰¹ Ibid; Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 172-73.

year will be my last. I therefore implore you by God and Saint Peter not to go against my wish which is that you should succeed me as archbishop. Here and now I appoint you my heir, for of all your race, you are the wisest and most learned in the canon law of the Holy See.”¹⁰² Wilfrid replied that the question of his candidacy should be discussed at a later council in accordance with canon law. Here again, we see Wilfrid very much concerned with canonical procedure and perhaps displaying distaste for the sole authority of the archbishop, even if his decision was in Wilfrid’s favor. It appears that Stephen was elevating his hero and Bede mentions no meeting of the sort, political or otherwise, but the fact that it is included does suggest that Wilfrid may have had interest in Canterbury or that his reputation outside of the politics of Northumbria made him especially qualified for the job. It is also curious that the meeting took place at London (regardless if it was now under Cadwalla’s influence), in the presence of Wilfrid, formerly bishop of York and the bishop of London, Erconwald. It seems reasonable that Stephen knew of Gregory’s original plan for two metropolitan sees and implicitly suggested that Wilfrid was the perfect candidate to administer the see in either the north or south and that his knowledge of canon law perhaps made him more attractive for it.

Theodore died on 19 September 690, and the archbishopric then remained vacant for nearly two years.¹⁰³ The kingdom of Kent had been in turmoil for some years, with kings in dispute, as briefly outlined above. The political instability may have contributed to the delay at Canterbury, but it may also have been due to rivalries or opposition towards selecting a new archbishop. It seems Wilfrid’s concern was always the recovery of his rights in the north. Stephen’s overall silence on the matter may also have been a means of hiding any opposition to Wilfrid’s possible succession at Canterbury. Furthermore, Wilfrid’s friend (and

¹⁰² Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 152.

¹⁰³ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 76.

protector during his second exile), King Aethelred of Mercia, was exercising an overlordship over Kent at about the time that Theodore died (as Cadwalla's influence ceased upon his retirement to Rome). Stephen tells us that Wilfrid was granted the monastery at Hexham, the see of York, and the abbacy of Ripon. Wilfrid may have been invited back to Northumbria due to the vacancy at Hexham upon Eata's death at the beginning of Aldfrith's reign. At the same time, in 686/687, Cuthbert resigned his see and retired to his hermitage at Farne, dying shortly thereafter. Wilfrid administered the see of Lindisfarne for a year until a successor, Eadberht, was elected in 688. Cuthbert may have been driven out by Wilfrid, although Bede suggests that his retirement was due to a vision of his own death.¹⁰⁴ In 687 John of Beverley was consecrated to the see of Hexham. Either Eadhead of Ripon or Bosa of York must have been forced to leave his see; we do not know if or when Bosa's rule at York was interrupted nor when Eadhead died. Eadhead does not reappear in the sources after his transfer from Lindsey to Ripon.¹⁰⁵ Stephen wrote that bishops were forced out but does not specify which bishops. Catherine Cubitt suggests that perhaps Bosa was moved to Ripon sometime after 688 to accommodate Wilfrid at York.¹⁰⁶

In 687/688 Wilfrid's dispute with Aldfrith was rekindled, the same year John of Beverley replaced him at Hexham. Mercian support for the revival of East Saxon kingship was enabling King Saebbi's son Swaefheard to install himself in Kent under the overlordship of Aethelred.¹⁰⁷ In January 691, Aethelred had invaded Kent, granting a charter to Swaefheard. Historians know very little of his invasion or of the outcome, but Wilfrid's position in Northumbria was again becoming problematic in 691 as he was exiled yet again.

¹⁰⁴ Cubitt, "Wilfrid's 'Usurping Bishops,'" 20; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 261.

¹⁰⁵ Cubitt, "Wilfrid's 'Usurping Bishops,'" 20.

¹⁰⁶ Cubitt, "Wilfrid: A Man for His Times," 315-16.

¹⁰⁷ Morn Capper, "Prelates and Politics," 261.

It is possible that one of the things Aethelred hoped to achieve was the appointment of his friend to the vacant archiepiscopal see as Mercian hegemony began to emerge.¹⁰⁸ It is likely that “with Gregorian plans for York as a second metropolitan see in abeyance, it would also have been obvious to Wilfrid that Canterbury offered an alternative route for primacy over Northumbria,”¹⁰⁹ especially as he continued to be exiled and would never again reach his full authority that he maintained between the years 669 and 678.

The successor to Theodore, Berhtwald, was consecrated in Gaul and received the pallium from the pope in Rome. He returned to England with letters from the pope. The first letter was addressed to Aethelred of Mercia, Aldfrith of Northumbria, and Aldwulf of East Anglia, all powerful Anglo-Saxon kings. The second letter was addressed to all the bishops in England. The kings were told to accept Berhtwald as the new archbishop and warned of the penalties for any disobedience. The kings were told that he had been given the pallium directly by the pope. They were warned with full force that they must obey their new archbishop – probably reflecting the issues years before. These letters only make sense if Berhtwald had reason to fear that he would not be accepted as the new archbishop. They also shed light on the growing relationship with the papacy and its understanding of the politics in England. It is possible that two of the kings addressed in the letters were supporters of Wilfrid, but papal authority overrode his claim, if indeed Canterbury had been his intention. Berhtwald was the first English archbishop that had been trained in Kent. King Wihtred of Kent, who shared the throne with Swaefheard, worked in collaboration with Berhtwald and established the protected status of church and clergy and reinforced the jurisdiction of

¹⁰⁸ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 76-77.

¹⁰⁹ Capper, “Prelates and Politics,” 261.

bishops over clergy and laity.¹¹⁰ The alliance and the recent stability of his bishopric in Kent allowed him to continue Theodore's work and by 705, the bishoprics in the north were York, Hexham, Lindisfarne, and Lindsey.¹¹¹

In his exile between the years 691 and 703, Wilfrid sponsored numerous Mercian foundations and acted as the leader of the Mercian church, continuing to build a relationship with Aethelred and spreading Christianity across the landscape of England. Perhaps in expectation of the archbishopric, Wilfrid used Aethelred's patronage to intervene in episcopal consecrations in England after Theodore's death in 690. At the Synod of Hertford, seniority was confirmed as a determinant of episcopal status, which made Wilfrid's own status exceptionally high compared to any other bishop in England at the time. He most likely took full control of his status, exercising episcopal duties while Berhtwald was away. By the time Berhtwald returned in 693, Wilfrid had established his influence in southern England during his exile.

Wilfrid consecrated several bishops in Mercia and the territory of the Middle Angles at the command of Aethelred. Wilfrid was senior to Tyrhtel of Hereford (consecrated in 688) and may have consecrated Headda, who became the bishop of the larger Mercian see of Lichfield after the death of Seaxwulf in 691. Wilfrid's seniority may also have allowed him a role in the consecration of Eadger of Lindsey.¹¹² Wilfrid utilized his seniority to exercise authority as bishop and consecrated Offfor as bishop of the Hwicce, "acting as bishop of the Middle Angles, since Theodore had died and as yet no bishop had been appointed to succeed him."¹¹³ Bede later tells us in Book Five, chapter eleven of the *Ecclesiastical History* that in

¹¹⁰ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church*, 78.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77-80.

¹¹² Capper, "Prelates and Politics," 262.

¹¹³ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 245; Capper, "Prelates and Politics," 263.

692, Willibrord and his fellow brethren in Frisia sent Swidbert to Britian to be consecrated bishop. According to Bede, “He was consecrated by the most reverend Bishop Wilfrid, who happened to be driven out of his own country at the time and was living in exile among the Mercians.”¹¹⁴

At Austerfield in 702/3, Berhtwald held a council to determine Wilfrid’s status later in his life. Tensions prevailed between Mercia and Northumbria as Wilfrid was required to surrender all his properties, especially those in Mercia, and be confined to his monastery at Ripon, giving up all episcopal duties. In response to the council, Wilfrid stated (as part of a longer speech), “And now, have I got to bring some hurried sentence against myself, unconscious though I am of any crime committed?”¹¹⁵ He only agreed to submit to the decrees of the synod if they were in accordance with earlier papal judgments and according to canon law. It is important to note that Aethelred continued to support his friend and did not think he should be stripped of his status or properties. Throughout the remainder of his life Wilfrid continued to assert influence across the landscape of Northumbria, Mercia, and the territory of the Middle Angles as his monasteries continued to thrive and looked to him for guidance.¹¹⁶ In any case, after his second appeal to the papacy in 705, he was restored to full episcopal functions in Northumbria, but the extent of his jurisdiction was limited to the diocese at Hexham. Tensions between archiepiscopal, secular, and papal authority were still felt upon Wilfrid’s return from his second appeal. The pope claimed ultimate authority and determined Wilfrid innocent on all counts but stipulated that a council in England needed to be held to further resolve the issue.

¹¹⁴ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 283.

¹¹⁵ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 157-58.

¹¹⁶ Capper, “Prelates and Politics,” 270-74.

At the end of his life, Wilfrid continued to partake in political and dynastic disputes in Northumbria. Stephen tells us that Aldfrith was succeeded briefly by Eadwulf, whose young son was with Wilfrid at Ripon. Eadwulf failed to maintain cordiality with Wilfrid. Wilfrid had sent messengers to Eadwulf, supporting him and seeking his friendship. Eadwulf, for unknown reasons, threatened to expel Wilfrid. After two months, Eadwulf was pushed out by those who favored the young Osred, son of Aldfrith, who became Wilfrid's adopted son.¹¹⁷ This episode is entirely left out by Bede. D.P. Kirby has convincingly argued that Eadwulf could have been a descendant of Oswald's son, Ethelwald. Throughout his career, Wilfrid may have supported Oswald's line, as his brother Oswy and his sons demonstrated bitter hatred for Wilfrid. It is a possibility, as Wilfrid initially appeared to support Eadwulf over Aldfrith's son Osred. Kirby has further suggested that this may have been another reason for Ecgfrith and Iurminburh to get rid of their bishop; he was much too involved in politics rather than being subservient to the present king. Curiously, the cult of Oswald arose during Wilfrid's lifetime with strong connections to Hexham, suggesting that Wilfrid himself may have promoted it. He may even have met Oswald in his childhood, as his family had connections to the king.

Wilfrid appears to have quickly switched allegiances after Eadwulf's rejection and it is probable, if we believe Stephen's version of royal succession, that Wilfrid assisted militarily in the coup against Eadwulf and that this was the reason Osred fully accepted Wilfrid. At the Synod of Nidd, with Osred present, he received Ripon and Hexham. Bosa of York died in 706 and John of Beverley was transferred from Hexham to York in order for Wilfrid to rule from Hexham, which he held until his death.¹¹⁸ Aethelred retired to a

¹¹⁷ Stephen of Ripon, "Life of Wilfrid," 173.

¹¹⁸ Cubitt, "Wilfrid's 'Usurping Bishops,'" 21.

monastery in 704 and was succeeded by his nephew, Coenred (Wulfhere's son).¹¹⁹ In 709/710 at the death of Wilfrid, Acca succeeded him at Hexham. Ripon was no longer an episcopal see – perhaps his papal privilege was finally accepted.

Whatever Wilfrid's claims for a metropolitan see in the north or as likely candidate for the archbishopric of Canterbury, he was never given the full opportunity to ascend to either one. As we have seen in the course of this chapter, the politics of kings were extremely unstable and the territories attributed to kingdoms were never firm boundaries, as power and authority were constantly contested for multiple territories. These politics weighed heavily on ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It must be remembered that throughout his career, Wilfrid attained patronage from secular rulers and nobility. Though he had conflicting relationships with kings, he never lacked powerful friends and supporters. While on the surface Wilfrid may have seemed to be continuously defamed, it was through his adversity in appeals to the papacy, exiles, and imprisonment that he gained his reputation. Wilfrid was an asset to the kings that he served as he was a member of the nobility and had military backing, as is evidenced by his dealings with Cadwalla described above. The fact that Wilfrid spent time in nearly all territories, especially those that were enemies of one another, did not allow him continuous support from the same ruler who may have believed that Wilfrid impinged on his authority. Wilfrid also may have been viewed as uncontrollable, as he had assisted Cadwalla of Wessex in a dispute with the South Saxons among whom he previously took refuge. Wilfrid's experiences in his long tumultuous life serve as an example of the complexities of power and authority in the seventh century. While his efforts in upholding canon law in the struggle for his see and monasteries probably did not go unnoticed, he wanted to secure the

¹¹⁹ Higham, "Bishop Wilfrid in Southern England," 212.

ability for his followers to navigate through the complexities of a competing secular and ecclesiastical society. Nearing the end of his life, Wilfrid relayed his will to his followers, one part of which reflected his long career in the clash with his archbishop and king: “the second [portion of this inheritance] is to go to the abbots of Hexham and Ripon so that they might have something in hand wherewith to secure the favour of kings and bishops.”¹²⁰ The figures of Theodore and Wilfrid left a lasting impact on England, which during the seventh century underwent considerable reorganization both secularly and ecclesiastically. In the end all of England was reconnected to Rome, and the metropolitan of Canterbury would continue to hold ultimate authority until the elevation of York to metropolitan status in 735.

¹²⁰ Stephen of Ripon, “Life of Wilfrid,” 178.

Conclusion

After his funeral ceremonies at Oundle, Wilfrid's body was taken to Ripon. Tatberht, his successor there, seems to have established the origins of his commemoration and the development of his cult. At Ripon, a daily mass was celebrated in Wilfrid's honor. Every Thursday, the day of his death, was also kept as a feast day to him. Additionally, on the anniversary of his death, his followers and abbots gathered to celebrate vigils at his tomb.¹ In pre-Conquest England, Wilfrid was commemorated on 24 April and 12 October. Probably immediately after his death, but almost certainly by the mid-to-late eighth century, Wilfrid's commemoration occurred across England. His cult also took root by the end of the eighth century, alongside that of Saint Cuthbert. Yet despite the apparent growing devotion to the saint, Wilfrid was probably not admired by everyone. His cult never reached the same height as that of Saint Cuthbert, probably due to his lifetime of conflicts. Stephen's *Life* was not widely read or disseminated in the early Middle Ages. Although there were several more attempts to memorialize the saint in writing over the course of the Middle Ages, including the efforts of Frithegod and Eadmer at Canterbury, it was the work of William of Malmesbury that assisted in bringing Wilfrid's life and achievements into greater recognition, especially to those outside of Wilfrid's inner circle. The later works, of course, relied heavily on the works of Bede and Stephen, and for this reason they were left out of this thesis, although they do provide some interesting observations on Wilfrid's continued veneration and significance in times of later political and ecclesiastical reforms.

¹ Thacker, "Wilfrid: His Cult and his Biographer," 1-2.

Today, Wilfrid has been recognized by most historians as a pivotal figure of the English church and deserving of sainthood despite his tendency to pursue his ambitions and goals, not necessarily falling within the conventional guidelines of sainthood. While my opinion of Wilfrid, after a careful examination and analysis of my own, is not dissimilar to that of his biographer – that he was an abbot, bishop, and missionary who was personally committed to the English church, overcoming obstacles through his adept ability to utilize any and all resources – aversion to the saint persists to this day. I recently encountered this sense of dislike or perhaps divisiveness regarding Wilfrid while assisting at the University of New Mexico’s annual Medieval Spring Lecture Series. While handing out programs for the evening lectures, one attendee inquired about my research interests. In response, I explained that my Master’s thesis focused on episcopality in seventh-century England through the examination of Wilfrid’s life and career. He commented, “not everyone’s favorite, is he? I myself prefer the history of Celtic Christianity and its beautiful cultural output.” While his interest in Celtic Christianity may be rooted in the surviving materials such as the Lindisfarne Gospels, it may also be that Wilfrid and the Celtic/Roman binary continue to perplex or perhaps invoke contention. Regardless of the continued disdain for this complex figure, I hope my analysis of the bishop can suggest the need for further work focusing on Wilfrid as an innovator, a man who uniquely altered the status quo of the primitive church’s ecclesiastical organization.

The introduction of this thesis raised the question: Was Wilfrid a successful bishop, abbot, and missionary in the developing English church? The question merits additional consideration after the previous four chapters analyzing Wilfrid’s life and career. Despite Bede’s vision, evident in his *Ecclesiastical History*, of what made a good bishop, there was

no one way to achieve success as a bishop or abbot in the seventh century. While the two modes of Christianity existed in England and especially Northumbria, Wilfrid seemingly provided a third mode – not entirely unlike Bede’s description of Cuthbert’s combination of Celtic and Roman characteristics – that seemingly unified or at the very least incorporated aspects from both Roman and Irish traditions after the Synod of Whitby. Wilfrid’s appeals to the papacy regarding his loss of status, against the judgment of his king and archbishop, exemplify not only his dedication to the developing church and his own personal profession, but his insistence on the importance of canon law; without it, the high standards for the church organization and structure imply that Christians and those yet to be brought into the fold could falter in their adherence without the stability of the church itself. Wilfrid’s followers and supporters, who at times served as his armed retinue in England and in Gaul, assisted in his control of his land and monasteries. He amassed these holdings over the course of his lifetime, unlike any other figure of the time, representing the Christian (and probably Catholic) community that he built for himself. Despite the difficulties he faced in the process, Wilfrid appeared, not unlike his Merovingian counterparts, better equipped to run a kingdom. In fact, it was his network of monasteries and relationships with secular rulers, complicated as they may have been, that placed him in such a position of power. This unique situation not only helped him personally, but it also enabled him to establish the church and its authority among the Anglo-Saxons. Wilfrid’s (or rather Stephen’s) portrayal of the church and Wilfrid’s role within it strongly disagrees with Bede’s, who believed that the church and secular rulers needed to cooperate harmoniously. Wilfrid seemingly believed that the church – despite its need of assistance from the king, especially in the form of landed endowments – needed to function, in some regard as its own entity, as exemplified in his hostile

relationships with his king and with his archbishop, with whom the king often collaborated. His possession, acquisition, and transmission of land allow historians to understand the consequential complexities surrounding the rise of the church in a Germanic society.

Perhaps the greatest curiosity of Wilfrid's career was his role in foreign politics and his time spent in Merovingian Gaul. He was drawn to Gaul for its Roman history, especially after the decrees of Whitby. Wilfrid's continental influences contributed to his own perception as a spiritual leader – one that infiltrated every aspect of his complicated career in his ecclesiastical structure and organization, in his status as a lordly bishop, and in his navigation in a world where secular and ecclesiastical politics were negotiating their own existence. His success, although perhaps not perceived as such at the time, ultimately reveals that to be a successful abbot, bishop, or missionary, one did not need to follow specific guidelines. Rather, Wilfrid appeared willing to do whatever was necessary to establish not only himself among the Anglo-Saxon population but also the church, including befriending and betraying secular rulers. Indeed, Wilfrid trod in and out of dynastic and territorial rivalries, often switching allegiances himself. In the process, he fell in and out of favor, subject to exile, imprisonment, and defamation. No matter the complexity of his historical context, Wilfrid managed to improvise and inculcate new forms of ecclesiastical structure, stand for and against kings, at times challenging ecclesiastical authority, and seemingly solidify connections between Gaul and England that began in the time of Pope Gregory. It was precisely those characteristics that set him apart, identifying him as a towering figure of the age, and underlining what was the key to his success: he cleverly and persistently fought for what he was believed was the path to a Christianized England and in the process revitalized it.

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