

**THE CONCEPT OF TERRITORY IN  
THE LATE ANGLO-SAXON AND EARLY MEDIEVAL  
CULT OF SAINTS IN ENGLAND**

by

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A thesis submitted to  
The University of Birmingham  
for the degree of  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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November 2009

## **ABSTRACT**

The Cult of Saints, the practice of venerating holy figures and their relics, and the events that surround such worship, was widespread in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval England. It was a cultural phenomenon that engaged all sections of society, and saints enjoyed high levels of popularity through their cults. Not all instances were the same, and cults differed in size and construction. The distances over which cults could command attention varied, as did the social groupings that they catered for.

This work constitutes a discussion of the socio-geographic coverage of such relic cults in this period. Particular attention is paid to methodology and the value of specific types of evidence, including resting-place lists, hagiographical material and church dedications. Historians' approaches to the subject are analysed, with special regard to previous attempts at describing areas of influence. The concept of 'territory' is introduced and defined, and proposed as a standard terminology which can be applied to all cults. Conclusions are drawn about the worth of the model and how it deals with such aspects such as cult expansion and development.

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## **INTRODUCTION: THE CULT OF SAINTS AND THE CONCEPT OF TERRITORY**

The Cult of Saints stands as one of the most encompassing cultural phenomena of the middle ages. It was persistent, geographically widespread and engaged a large social spectrum, and importantly for the historian, it was extremely well documented. From the hagiographic *vitae* of the saint, to the accounts of his posthumous miracles, it is possible to examine in many cases the entire lifecycle of a cult, including its reciprocal impact on the literature, art, and architecture which accompanied it. Comparison between instances is entirely feasible, both to chart the chronological development of the trend, and to observe similarities of style and function present in the majority of sources. Cults provide a good ground for anthropological and psychological history, being as they are public events with aspects of mass participation and social identity, and they provide significant insight into the nature of medieval perception and record.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the comparable nature of relic cults, and the longevity of the phenomena as a whole, it is incorrect to assume that cults were static entities, or that there was little variation in their form or size. Throughout the medieval era the Cult of Saints underwent a great deal of change, in terms of distribution, popularity and scale.<sup>2</sup> The prominence of certain cults over others, indeed the veritable ‘fame’ which some saints achieved while others did not, is one of the greatest differences between instances. The martyr Thomas Becket provides the classic example from one end of the spectrum, being a well-known, highly visible figure in life and only increasing in status and regard after death, while the other is populated by a host of lesser known

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Wilson, S., *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> For an examination of the ongoing development of the Cult of Saints, see Abou-El-Haj, B., *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations*, (Cambridge, 1994).

saints and venerated figures, recognised only in small areas and by much smaller groups of people.<sup>3</sup> This scale embodies the distinction between ‘universal’ and ‘local’ saints, a set of terms often used to express the size of a cult and the eminence of its saint.<sup>4</sup> While a part of the definition that underlies this nomenclature relates to the recognition of a cult, and the strength of its recorded presence, much of it concerns the socio-geographical distribution of that cult: Exactly how far away from its epicentre, most commonly the resting place of the individual concerned, did it reach, and what number of people were actively aware of it? Furthermore, what social strata of the population were engaged with it? Cults and the miracles they produced had by necessity an audience, and often multiple audiences. Where did these audiences originate, and how do their compositions reflect upon the size and influence of that cult?

The issue of the relative scale and spatial distribution of relic cults has been addressed by historians: Catherine Cubitt attempts to define a ‘universal saint’ as one whose cult “transcended regional boundaries...and was widely celebrated throughout the early medieval West.”<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, Barbara Abou-El-Haj discusses ‘supraregional’ shrines, although with particular regard to those on pilgrimage routes in southern France, and mentions them as being characterized by large churches, purpose-built for the housing of relics, and accompanying mass audiences.<sup>6</sup> These audiences are distinguishable from the local audience, drawn from a smaller and closer area which lies “under the jurisdiction of the shrine.”<sup>7</sup> The idea of a saint and

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<sup>3</sup> Very little is known, for example, about St. Cett, mentioned in the *Secgan* as resting at Oundle on the River Nene.

<sup>4</sup> See Thacker, A. and R. Sharpe, eds., *Local Saints and Local Churches in the early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002) for frequent use of these terms.

<sup>5</sup> Cubitt, C., ‘Universal and Local Saints in Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Local Saints and Local Churches*, 423.

<sup>6</sup> Abou-El-Haj, B., *Formations and Transformations*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

his cult commanding a presence over a certain area is elaborated on by Sarah Salih, who suggests that a medieval traveller would be fully aware of passing through a saint's region, much as a tourist today might visit 'Bronte country'.<sup>8</sup> Underlying these designations is a general idea, that a saint and his cult possessed a territory in which they were not only known, but carried authority as a holy figure, commonly manifest as the power to intercede with God.

Thomas Head employs a slightly different approach, in deliberately limiting his study to a defined locale.<sup>9</sup> He identifies two types of saint venerated and promoted by the church; those truly universal saints of the bible, and those saints local to the area, known as 'fathers' of the diocese. The geographical limits Head places on his examination, although restrictive, illuminate a potential point in that, in his case at least, the preference was for regional saints, and that the territory of such individuals may be limited, through the artificial interference of the clergy, to regional boundaries. Such was this true for Orleans, that saints of antiquity such as Anianus and Evurtius were highly venerated long into the medieval era, seemingly purely for the fact of their local patronage.<sup>10</sup>

The idea of territory is thus very present in a variety of historians' work. However, despite alluding to this idea, these writers and others frequently have difficulty in explicitly stating how territory is defined. Catherine Cubitt, for example, can only separate saints into the categories of universal and local, and can then only define universal saints as those who were broadly recognised, generally by inclusion in common liturgical texts.<sup>11</sup> These are very loose groupings, and provide no

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<sup>8</sup> Salih, S., 'Saints, Cults and *Lives* in Late Medieval England' in Salih, S. ed., *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Head, T., *Hagiography and the Cult of the Saints: The Diocese of Orleans, 800-1200*, (Cambridge, 1990). Head's study is of one religious geographical unit only.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Cubitt, C., 'Universal and Local Saints in Anglo-Saxon England', 423-424.

distinction between the territory of one universal saint and another, or between one local saint and another. Head's examination also classifies saints as universal or local, and places an artificial boundary on the study. Sarah Salih's idea of contemporaries being aware of a saint's presence in a certain area is equally vague. It must be possible to create a more detailed model of a territory which can be applied to any saint: Rather than seeing two distinct labels, there should be a 'sliding scale' of influence, a primary measure of which is territory.

It must be noted at the outset that the concept of territory is manifold, and forms part of a wider discussion on sacred spaces. While this term, and the idea of a 'sacred site' has been variously defined by historians, archaeologists, sociologists and anthropologists, an essential meaning is that a sacred space constitutes some area of time and space in which the secular gives way to the holy, a place on Earth which comes into contact with the divine, however that contact be made.<sup>12</sup> There are many questions surrounding how such space is formed, and how it is distinguished. Marcel Eliade outlines sacred space by contrasting what is sacred, and what is profane.<sup>13</sup> Sacred space is known as the sacred manifests itself, and is unlike the profane and the secular. Such a definition is one of opposition, and can be applied to any place in which the sacred can be said to be demonstrably present. While it is recognised that, in the Christian tradition as in many others, the whole world is the creation of God and therefore sacred in its own right, certain spaces are held as particularly holy, and these can be created in many ways.<sup>14</sup> The most obvious and physical examples of such spaces in the medieval period were churches and their shrines, which stood out from the landscape by their architecture, their decoration and iconography, their

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<sup>12</sup> See Brereton, J.P., 'Sacred Space' in Eliade, M. ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol 12*, (New York, 1987), 525-535 for a general definition of sacred space.

<sup>13</sup> Eliade, M., *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (Orlando, 1959).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

sensory impact of sound, sight and smell, and by their importance to their communities, through practical, cultural and legal statuses.<sup>15</sup> Historians have often focussed on these public, constructed spaces, but sacred space can also be private and personal, such as in the domestic space of the home. Diana Webb uses the increasingly available nature of the printed word in later medieval Europe as evidence for domestic prayer and devotion, and this type private religious practice certainly converted the secular nature of the bedchamber or kitchen into a kind of sacred space, albeit a less grand and formal space than that of the church.<sup>16</sup> She admits that there was “more to the ecclesiastical space than its official character” and that the qualities of the church environment were difficult to replicate.<sup>17</sup>

The boundaries of sacred space are debatable, in general and on a case by case basis. With the idea that the world is one, all-encompassing sacred space, there can perhaps only be varying levels of holiness, ‘hot spots’ as it were, in which the concentration of the divine is increased. This is a contrasting view to the rigid delineations of the sacred and the profane held by Eliade, and one that allows more freedom of classification. Certainly, the borders of sacred space can be seen as diffuse, and one space could at times penetrate another, in both directions. Secular business was often conducted in churches, while in return the sacred often spilled over its formal boundaries in the forms of religious processions, miraculous events and other such activities.

Ideas of sacred space naturally impact on a discussion of relic cults. Does the cult occupy a sacred space, and if it does so, what are the boundaries of the space? It

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<sup>15</sup> For an overview of the impact of churches and shrines on the landscape as sacred spaces, see Hamilton, S. and A. Spicer, ‘Defining the Holy: the Delineation of Sacred Space’, in Hamilton, S. and A. Spicer (eds.), *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and early modern Europe*, (Aldershot, 2005), 7-11.

<sup>16</sup> D. Webb, “Domestic Space and Devotion in the Middle Ages”, in *Defining the Holy*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.



could be said that for certain definitions of the term, the entire extent of the territory occupied by a relic cult is sacred space, as it is within this space that a saint is known and venerated, and this religious knowledge and behaviour is enough to transform a wholly profane landscape into one which is associated with the divine. However, if it is accepted that sacred space is not a binary concept, it is difficult to support the idea that, in places where a saint is known, and perhaps pilgrims emanate from, by that fact alone that place can be classified as sacred space. If, rather, sacred spaces are the focuses of the religious community, the places where the divine is most concentrated, then it cannot be said that the territory of a relic cult in its largest definition wholly be called sacred space. Instead, those areas most pertinent to the cult, the shrine of the saint concerned in particular, are the sacred spaces. The territory of the cult is a secondary element, a thinner layer, which, while it most certainly interacts with the sacred and those spaces designated so, is not of the same order of religious importance. Thus those definitions of territory provided by historians concerning a saint's region, or even the jurisdiction of a shrine, do not impact on concepts of sacred space, but incorporate some elements of those concepts, while dealing with a distinct model, one that overlays the notion of particular places engaging more intensely with the divine with a set of boundaries and limits unique to saints and their cults. The concept of territory, while it is compatible with ideas of sacred space, is a specific idea, and in its application, far less universal than theories of sacred space.

Thus far, territory has been referred to in only a vague sense, and some questions posed as to elements that may make up the territory of a saint and his relic cult. It is worthwhile setting out a working definition of the term, for in order to determine how it may be sought out, and what types of historical evidence contribute to an example, it must be determined what the model consists of. For the purposes of

this work, 'territory' concerns the geography and physically measurable area of a cult, the locations in which the cult was strongest and the regions it covered. More precisely, it is the area around the central locus from which the cult could be said to draw attention, whether it be through activity in that area, or supplicants appearing at the resting place from that area. It is not uniform, but may have varying degrees of strength, most obviously concentrated around the physical remains of the saint concerned, but possible at secondary sites or in other parts as well. It is not static through time, and it may be possible to observe the expansion and collapse of a territory, most obviously in direct relation to the popularity of the saint. Furthermore, as relic cults did not exist in isolation, the dynamic impact of territories upon one another is important. The proximity of resting places to one another, the overlapping nature of spaces and the relative changes coexisting spaces experienced all affect the nature of cults' influence. Secondly, the concept of space encompasses a social dimension. Certain saints clearly occupied a niche market, their clientele drawn from among only one section of the population, be it defined by status, gender or other category. The social 'space' these cults occupied was narrow. Other cults claimed influence over many social groupings, giving them more credibility as a truly 'universal' cult. Despite being more abstract, the idea of social space is just as valid, as it still forms a part of a saint's sphere of influence and can be said to be a complementary aspect. It too can be charted through time, and can be measured in levels of strength. In addition to these main definitions, other spaces are important to consider as part of the territory of a cult. The concept is strongly linked, through the notion of the audience, to space at the place of worship itself, the shrine or resting place, the size of that space and how it was utilised and filled. Pilgrimage is the perfect vehicle to observe these spaces, their relationship and the boundaries between

them: The social background of the pilgrims, their location of origin and journey through the geographical territory of the saint, and their destination itself, the space of the shrine. Taken together, these features constitute the socio-geographic territory of a saint's cult: Only in identifying and mapping such areas is it possible to distinguish the scale of a cult, and thus place it somewhere within the terms 'universal' or 'local', expressions that, as has been shown, are not easy to define.<sup>18</sup>

Ronald Finucane discusses some of these issues in his work *Miracles and Pilgrims*, and although he focuses on post-Conquest cults, many of his analyses can be applied to Anglo-Saxon saints as well. He makes the point that in the medieval period territory was created and grew not by some automatic process of expansion, but by individuals physically passing on information to one another.<sup>19</sup> These individuals' identities and how far they travelled effectively determined the limits of a cult. There could be a kind of chain reaction from one person to the next, a spreading of gossip and news that either actively or passively increased the area in which the saint and his powers were known. This is an organic view of the subject, and it is strengthened by a deal of evidence. For example, a man sought the help of St. Oswald after "the miracle which had transpired for [another] man had become well known."<sup>20</sup> Although the exact method of the transport of this knowledge is not given, it is reasonable to assume that word of mouth was a factor. However, this interpretation is not entirely convincing, and it must not be assumed that this was the only method by which knowledge of a cult was spread: It is inconceivable that the established church did not play an active role through the utilisation of hagiographic material in sermons and teaching.

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<sup>18</sup> Cubitt, C., 'Universal and Local Saints', 452. Cubitt, for instance, admits there are many levels of complexity to the term 'local saint'.

<sup>19</sup> Finucane, R. C., *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977), 156.

<sup>20</sup> Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, ed. and trans. A. J. Turner and B. J. Muir, (Oxford, 2006), 299.

Using the example of miracles carried out at Newington, a place where Becket once carried out a confirmation, Finucane goes on to posit a special ‘village-saint’ relationship, in which certain places have ties to particular saints.<sup>21</sup> This is a measure of the strength of the cult in the area, a secondary focal point in which the influence of the saint in question, Becket, is greater. Finucane also makes associated assertions about the strength of a cult relating to its relative proximity to the shrine, noting that three quarters of the miracles of St. Godric occurred within twenty miles of his tomb; clearly a more localised and concentrated cult.

Finucane extends his examination of the cults of a number of saints, including the aforementioned Becket and Godric, and also William of Norwich. In each he observes the geographical spread of the origins of the recipients of miracles attributed to the respective saint, noting both the distribution of sites and, most prominently in the case of Becket, the density of miracles and supplicants from these sites. This allows an estimation of the relative size of the cult, a first glance at a territory. His assessment also includes charting this distribution chronologically. In the case of William, dated translations of the body allow miracles to be assigned to distinct periods, and a trend of expansion emerges, in which pilgrims came from more and more distant places. Conversely, the number of miracles accorded to citizens of Norwich steadily decreased, suggesting a waning of influence in that area. Such trends provide good evidence for the territory of these saints, and their comparative size. However, Finucane’s analysis only considers recorded miracles and the origins of the pilgrims who experienced them. While undoubtedly this represents one of the strongest forms of influence, possibly the greatest, it is not the only means by which to measure the extent of a cult. It is entirely possible that a saint was respected, even

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 154.

sought out in prayer, in areas that did not provide recorded pilgrims. Potentially this area is wider, as the difficulty of undertaking a long journey may have prevented pilgrimage from remoter locations. Other records of the saint must be used in these places. Dedications, of churches and other sites, and the existence of material concerning a saint at a particular site can also be used as evidence for authority or influence.

In the same work Finucane also deals with the social aspects of cults, and the makeup of audiences from certain segments of the population.<sup>22</sup> Again dealing primarily with miracle records, he discusses both a number of individual cults and the general trends that emerge in shrine attendance. The miracles of Godric, for example, affected women more than men, and most recipients were of lower social status.<sup>23</sup> When this information is combined with the prior knowledge that Godric's audience was mostly local, a fuller picture of his sphere of influence emerges. His territory was small geographically, but also socially, with a narrow class distribution. He was very much a 'local' or 'village' saint. Finucane attributes the social spread of cults' audiences to the nature of the saint while still alive, and the extent to which his veneration was contrived rather than popularly driven. Godric was a holy hermit who dealt mainly with local people: Conversely, Thomas Becket and William of Norwich were both well known figures, not least of all because of their violent deaths, and both were politically significant. Their cults saw a greater proportion of miracles worked for the upper classes and for the clergy, evidence that they figured prominently in the worlds of those with higher status, and had more than a simple religious importance.

Finucane extends his discussion to a more general overview of the social makeup of supplicants, combining data from several shrines. He is ultimately

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 142.

dismissive of comparing shrines on an individual basis due to the limited nature of the evidence available. However, assessing the audience of a cult in this way is helpful in determining the territory of a saint: When viewed in conjunction with those aspects described, such as the saint's activity while alive, his manner of death and subsequent ways in which his cult was publicised, the social background of miracle recipients is a good indicator of the range of the cult in terms of gender and status. Throughout this discussion Finucane uses statistical analysis to draw conclusions, an effective way of handling such a large amount of comparable data, including the use of graphical representation to demonstrate the types of miracles commonly experienced by different social groupings.<sup>24</sup> His conclusions are solid, but as mentioned, he is limited in his use of sources, largely to miracle evidence. While undoubtedly this is the greatest body of material available for this particular type of work, other incidental evidence, such as the frequency of saints' appearances in common liturgical texts, is also useful. As discussed below, hagiographical writing is also subject to a large amount of literary criticism, and this may throw some shadow over the statistical analysis Finucane makes of textual sources.

Others have focussed on the nature of the territory of saints, many in specific relation to a particular cult. Michael Lapidge, for instance, has an excellent discussion of the development of the cult of St. Swithun, in which he draws examples from a wide range of evidence, not simply miracle records.<sup>25</sup> While his attention is largely directed to how the cult grew, nevertheless it includes strong examples of the types of material useful to determining the extent of a saint's influence.

He first looks at evidence of commemoration in the liturgy, reasoning that if Swithun appeared in liturgical documents at a particular church, his influence must

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

<sup>25</sup> Lapidge, M., *The Cult of St. Swithun*, (Oxford, 2003), 25.

have reached that place. Three types of document are identified: the calendar, the martyrology and the litany of saints. Taking each of these in turn, Lapidge examines surviving examples with reference to St. Swithun. The calendar, he states, is the “indispensable guide” to which saints were culted at any church, as individual churches would add saints to their calendars as they chose.<sup>26</sup> Swithun is, unsurprisingly, particularly well represented in calendars from southern England, though his name appears in York and Durham, amongst other places.<sup>27</sup> Clearly knowledge of him had spread, although determining the strength of his influence in these areas is much more difficult. Lapidge’s next evidence is drawn from martyrologies, the listing of the deaths of saints, their dates and places. Again, Swithun is commemorated as far afield as Durham, though the majority of entries are found in the south.<sup>28</sup> The third type of commemoration Lapidge utilises is the litany, and this is possibly the best evidence for the strength of devotion or influence in a particular area, forming as it did a petition to the person in question: In this document, not only was the individual remembered, but called upon as an authority and intercessor. Lapidge notes that, between Swithun’s translation in 971 and 1100, sixty litanies of saints survive, of which twenty name Swithun.<sup>29</sup> This is a high proportion, clearly demonstrating the popularity of Swithun and the strength of his cult. Taken together, the liturgical evidence brings a convincing case for the relatively large and solid cult that Swithun enjoyed, centred around his resting site at Winchester, but extending outwards in a considerable radius.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 28. Lapidge makes use of the compilations of calendars by Robert Stanton and Francis Wormald respectively.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 34.

Further example of the spread and extent of the cult of Swithun is given in a section on his relics.<sup>30</sup> By the fifteenth century, churches such as Reading and Warwick held relics of Swithun, clearly indicating that in these places, not only was he commemorated and sought in prayer, but that he was considered enough of a saintly authority to warrant the keeping of his bones and artefacts. These places can effectively be seen as secondary sites in Swithun's territory, substantial loci themselves that would have drawn attention from their local surroundings, bringing greater awareness to fresh audiences. This aspect takes on increased importance with the fact that churches outside England held relics: Evreux in northern France and Stavanger in Norway demonstrate that Swithun's cult was strong overseas also.

Lapidge also presents a summary of churches dedicated to Swithun.<sup>31</sup> Apart from Winchester Cathedral itself, a great number of dedications existed, with a relatively even spread across most of southern England and the midlands. There is an obvious concentration around Winchester, confirming it as the clear seat of the cult, but the distribution of others suggests that Swithun's influence was widespread and ingrained. Lapidge points out that the geographical distances between churches widen as he became more well-known, an unsurprising fact that generally mirrors evidence from miracle records and pilgrimage. Despite its excellent indication of the geographical extent of territory, church dedication is less useful in determining the social territory of a cult, though it does demonstrate strong ecclesiastical interest.

Lapidge thus employs the kind of alternate sources that a pure study of miracle evidence omits: The saint's name in documentary evidence, in dedication, and the distribution and spread of physical remnants. In the case of St. Swithun, Lapidge

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 42.



concludes from these sources that the saint was widely, but not universally, culted.<sup>32</sup> Primarily in England, but also in Scandinavia, Ireland and France, the name of Swithun is recorded, establishing that his presence, strong or weak, was felt in all of these places.

It is thus clear that historians utilise a wide variety of evidence in their attempts to map the spaces a saint and his cult occupied. Geographically, the origins of pilgrims and miracle recipients, the places miracles occurred, combined with documentary evidence and its origins, church dedications and the placing of relics all indicate how far abroad a cult reached. Accessing the social space of a cult is more difficult, but an assessment of who the saint worked miracles for and their backgrounds can provide an insight into the nature of the audience. In addition, peripheral aspects such as the political prominence of the cult and the publicity surrounding it can hint at its status, and its possible clientele.

This study examines the types of material described above with regard to their relevance and necessity in determining the socio-geographical territory of a saint-cult. Is it preferable to focus on sources springing directly from the cult itself, the miracles records, the *vitae* and the like, or does the incidental use of a saint's name elsewhere in the documentary record demonstrate a deeper level of influence? Taken together, these sources may build the bigger picture. However, it is also possible that they may come into conflict and suggest different patterns of recognition, different sizes of space and territory. Questions are also raised about the validity of the notion at all. While it may be correct to refer to some saints as 'local' and some as 'universal', due to these terms' nature as extremely loose definitions, is it really possible to determine with any degree of accuracy an area in which a saint held a level of influence as a

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 61.

divine authority, and outside which people would rather turn to another? Can conclusions be drawn, from the size and spread of certain cults, about the impact that each had on the other? Is it viable to plot the expansion of one cult against the contraction of another, or how two cults overlapped? Additionally, what methodology is best for determining and interpreting territory?

The extent of this work, by its very nature, must be limited both chronologically and geographically. While it is recognised that the practice of culting saints stretches before and beyond the middle ages, the saints of the late Anglo-Saxon and early medieval period have been selected as they provide a large amount of detailed source material to draw from, while at the same time demonstrate emerging medieval trends of hagiographical commemoration. Some evidence is drawn from the later medieval period, in order to provide a fuller picture and to demonstrate the changing nature of the subject, but the majority of individuals analysed are 10<sup>th</sup> century figures. Geographical boundaries are, in a study on territory, potentially even more pertinent than chronological ones, and the focus here is limited to English saints; that is, saints who largely lived, died and were enshrined in England. Thus continental saints and, for example, saints of the British are excluded. While the purpose of this constraint is largely practical, it does serve to make comparative conclusions fairer, in that the individuals discussed all operated in a similar context. Despite this restriction, saints from a variety of geographical locales are examined, and discussion of their territory expands beyond England where appropriate. In deliberately confining the subjects of the study to a limited period and area, answers to the questions raised above can be given with more certainty, as they are more specific, if more qualified. It is inappropriate to draw widespread conclusions about both the model under examination, and the methodology by which the model is

determined: By focussing on late Anglo-Saxon English saints only, the concept of territory is more supportable and valid. The material examined here has been selected as examples of the types of evidence available that contribute to the representation of territory. Thus Eadmer's *Life* of St. Oda supports a picture of his territory as being based upon his location and position while living; Lantfred's miracles of St. Swithun support his territory through geographical evidence of pilgrim origins; and statistical evidence of church dedication supports conclusions about the extent of saintly popularity. It is worth beginning with an overview of the situation, some idea of the numbers of saints recognised in this period, and their spread. For Anglo-Saxon England, there are no better summaries of this information than the resting-place lists.

## THE SHAPE OF THE LANDSCAPE: RESTING PLACE LISTS AND SHRINE DISTRIBUTION

When dealing with an issue such as the geographical spread of relic cults, it is important first to get an idea of the overall spaces involved; the shape of the landscape, as it were, in relation to the saints themselves. Without some knowledge of the density and distribution of shrines and cult centres, it is hardly possible to comment on any one, let alone draw any comparative conclusion. As has been stated, cults did not exist in isolation, and to assess the impact they had upon one another, their proximity and concentration must undergo some examination.

A most excellent source for the plotting of cult centres in England is undoubtedly the Anglo-Saxon and medieval resting-place list, of which several are extant.<sup>33</sup> Generally speaking, these take the form of a roll of saints and where they were believed buried, referenced by a place name, topographical feature or both. None are by any means conclusive, but their merit lies partially in this fact: the deliberate exclusion of some saints by the lists' authors suggest that these individuals took a back seat to those included.<sup>34</sup> The main draw of these lists is their contemporary geographical placement of cult centres, and what they reveal about how saints were culted. Contemporary uses for them varied, from legitimizing evidence in relic ownership disputes to pilgrimage guides, though often they poor sources for both of these examples.

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<sup>33</sup> Rollason, D. W., 'Lists of saints' resting-places in Anglo-Saxon England'. *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978), 61-93. Rollason discusses the list in the *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, a fourteenth century Anglo-Norman list, a *Cathologus sanctorum in Anglia pausancium*, the 'Kentish Royal Legend' and the Old English Martyrology, in addition to the *Secgan*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

The treatment of resting-place lists by David Rollason in his article on the subject is thorough, particularly in regard to his primary case, that of the *Secgan*.<sup>35</sup> The only surviving Anglo-Saxon resting place list, the *Secgan* names eighty-nine saints, of which all but one lie in England. Entries in the list take a regular format and include the saint, his place of rest and often a relevant feature of the landscape, most commonly a river. Rollason dissects the list into two parts based upon the form of the entries, the dates of the lives and cults of the saints, and a geographical split: The majority of the places in the first half are Northumbrian or Mercian, or closely related to those areas, while the places in the second are focussed around Wessex. This distinction is suggestive of two authors, and as Rollason states, the final form is a typical compilation. Rollason plots the resting-places on a map, and the trends he mentions are easy to observe.<sup>36</sup> Those earlier, more northerly places, such as Durham and Ripon, are those that include a topographical reference, while the locations in the south, such as Canterbury and Winchester, lack these.

Looking directly at the material, what is evident from this list overall is the general spread of sites. There is a relatively even distribution across the areas covered, and, while there are greater densities at certain points, no single concentration is dominant. Due to the presence of strong religious communities, clusters are to be expected and are found at Winchester, Thorney, Ripon and Malmesbury, amongst others, but even these do not preclude the existence of others within relatively short distances. Clearly saints of a certain level of importance, worthy enough of recording in a national list, were to be found in many places. The exclusion of saints from the *Secgan*, in particular at the more prominent sites such as Winchester, is an interesting and related aspect. Rollason attributes the incomplete

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 61. *Secgan be Pam Godes sanctum De on Engla lande ærost reston* is the full title of the document, which is extant in two manuscripts, both dated to the eleventh century.

<sup>36</sup> *Secgan*, in Rollason, D. W., 'Lists of saints' resting-places in Anglo-Saxon England', 88.

nature of the list to conciseness on the part of author, but how the selection has been made is unclear, and this is an unsatisfactory conclusion.<sup>37</sup> It is possible that the author was not aware of certain saints, although some entries describe their subject as resting at a place amongst many others, all unnamed: Canterbury, for instance, follows this trend, naming only St. Dunstan and St. Augustine.<sup>38</sup> Evidently some were not considered worth mentioning by name, though there is no way to tell from the list alone exactly what qualified some for inclusion and others not, no obvious level of import or threshold over which a holy figure deserved record. Nevertheless, it appears to demonstrate some sort of hierarchy: The territory of any unnamed saints did not stretch to the *Secgan* at least.

Later lists follow the same pattern as the *Secgan*, though their form differs, as does the inclusion or exclusion of certain saints. The list appearing in the twelfth century *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, for example, contains similar entries to the *Secgan* for some places: the entries for the Old Minster, Winchester, have six saints in common, while those for Lichfield are identical.<sup>39</sup> However, there are significant differences between them also, not least the increased size of Hugh's list, which includes 129 saints. While this is perhaps to be expected being a later document and thus having the benefit of drawing on those produced before it, it also omits some of those saints that the Anglo-Saxon list includes. Its entry for Glastonbury matches the *Secgan* in its inclusion of St. Patrick, but differs in that it lists St. Ceolfrith, which the *Secgan* does not, but not St. Aidan, who appears in the earlier text. It is thus evident that, if these lists were continual compilations of one another that built upon preceding versions, they made no attempt to be definitive. While they may have

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 91. Rollason tabulates the *Secgan* entries by section number, including modern place names and topographical features where included. Canterbury is section 29.

<sup>39</sup> *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, ed. W. T. Mellows, (Oxford, 1949). Both lists include SS. Swithun, Ethelwold, Hedda, Birnstan, Birinus and Justus for the Old Minster.

formed a rough guide, they cannot have been designed as encyclopaedias of resting places.

Beyond the names omitted or included, Hugh's list differs little from the *Secgan*. The form of the entries is a little different, and it is even less giving in terms of detail: There are no topographical references, for example. It does not follow a geographical pattern, and there appears to be no ranking of the saints listed: Although those at Canterbury, Christchurch, London, Glastonbury and Winchester do appear before those at smaller centres, Ripon, Thorney and Ely are further down in the list. Certainly, there is not an order based on the number of saints per site. As in the *Secgan*, the general spread of sites is evident. While the list appears to augment that text mainly in the north, with new inclusions at Durham, Whitby and Hexham to name a few, it does not emphasise this area above another.

A third list of note is that entitled *John Leland's Resting-place list*, so named because it is preserved in a transcript by Leland, with no further reference to its source.<sup>40</sup> This list is unusual in that, in contrast to both the *Secgan* and that of Candidus, a pattern is observable in the order of saints featured: namely, that saints are grouped geographically. Starting in the south-west, the list focuses heavily on Glastonbury, but includes some smaller cults such as St. Brannoc at Braunton in North-West Devon. From there it moves to the West Midlands, with cults at Much Wenlock, Shrewsbury and Chester. Ely, Ramsey and Thorney are grouped together, as are the Northumbrian cult centres of Lindisfarne, Durham and York. The segmented nature of the list is not entirely perfect, as demonstrated by the last entry, the cult of St. Modwenna at Burton-on-Trent, which is a deal farther south than the cluster of northerly sites that precede it. However, it is possibly the closest such a

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<sup>40</sup> The version of this document examined here appears in Blair, J., 'A Saint for Every Minster? Local Cults in Anglo-Saxon England', in Thacker, A. and R. Sharpe, eds., *Local Saints and Local Churches*, 487.

document comes to some kind of order. The grouping of adjacent sites suggests that geography was an important part in the documentation of relic cults, and that contemporaries were well aware of the proximity of one cult to another. As with other lists, there appears to be no consistency in which particular saints are included, and it is difficult to trace any progression from earlier lists to this one. The form of entries, for instance, varies greatly, suggesting that these were drawn from a variety of sources, and that the author was not concerned with regularity in his compilation.<sup>41</sup>

A comparison of the lists discussed thus throws into doubt any conclusions drawn about the inclusion of a saint based on his importance. Clearly, a place on one list did not guarantee a place on another, although it might hint at waxing and waning levels of popularity. The evidence is, of course, too limited to support this speculation, and it must be satisfactory to note that resting-place lists were fluid in which persons they featured. This may well be due to their nature as compiled documents, constructed from fragments of other, similar lists, or it may reflect the individual knowledge and preferences of the author. However, it can be said that all saints appearing in such texts must have garnered enough recognition to warrant inclusion in any one, although the inclusion of both extremely well-known and documented cults, and the more obscure variety suggests that the level of recognition required was not great, and merely being known of by the author was probably enough in some cases. About the areas in which individual saints and their cults were influential, such documents are largely unhelpful, beyond pointing to their central focus, the epicentre of activity and influence. They do not suggest any hierarchy in saints' popularity, nor do they include any information concerning the size or spread of cults. However, what they do demonstrate is that the number of documented

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<sup>41</sup> *John Leland's Resting-Place List*, in Blair, J., 'A Saint for Every Minster', 488.



saintly resting-places in the period was large, they were well if somewhat unevenly spread throughout southern and northern England, and that even the large centres, hosting relics of many saints, did not preclude both the existence and record of other sites nearby: The great number of saints at Winchester, for instance, did not obscure the record of St. Mylor at Amesbury in the *Secgan*. Creating a definitive list of Anglo-Saxon relic cults is not the purpose of this work, but it is worthwhile noting that such attempts have been made, and have thrown up some interesting points, particularly in the frequency of distribution of cultic centres. Using primarily the resting-place lists described, John Blair maps centres across the country, noting that gaps appear in more lightly settled regions, such as the north-west, and that cults had a better chance of record if placed in proximity to a reformed monastic institution.<sup>42</sup> His analysis aims to determine whether a saint could have existed for every minster, an analysis which is largely inconclusive but serves, by admission that the rate of record of cults in some areas would have to be 30 per cent or less, and by a comparison to western British cults which appear much smaller in scale, to demonstrate that increasingly larger, more defined and well documented cults took preference over a potential host of very minor saints in the later Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>43</sup> Coupled with the selectiveness of the resting-place list and the general trend towards ‘celebrity’ saints, this creates an image of the country as segmented into the territories of saints, grown large on their popularity and documented existence. The territories of many lesser known, more local saints may well have existed alongside these larger figures, underlying that map as an almost separate entity, but the overwhelming picture would have been of those more famous individuals, and the areas from which they could draw interest and exert influence over the population.

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<sup>42</sup> Blair, J., ‘A Saint for Every Minster’, 467

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

The shape of the landscape is thus defined. While the contemporary purposes of the resting-place list are manifold and debatable, for the historian they demonstrate not only the extent of the practice of culting saints, but also the process of documentation and remembrance surrounding them. They are an invaluable guide to the geographical frequency of cult centres, and an initial overview of the spaces between them. To move beyond the general, and begin to build a better picture of saintly territory, it is necessary to focus on material that deals with individual cults, particularly the wide canon of text classed as hagiography.

## **LIVES AND MIRACLES: THE EVIDENCE FROM HAGIOGRAPHY**

Hagiography as a literary genre has in the past had a turbulent relationship with the historian. Previously dismissed as unworthy of scholarly consideration, it has in more recent times been afforded more attention as a source for a wide array of historical theory: almost anything that stands under the banner of cultural and social history can draw with good effect on the Lives of the saints and does. The history of mentalities, gender studies and art history all benefit from hagiography, as does literary history and medieval biography.

The turnaround in attitudes towards the genre has been greatly stimulated by the writing of Peter Brown, whose work on the Holy Man in late antiquity was remarkable in reversing trends of thought about the role of the saint in society, and perceptions on the formation and purpose of the relic cult.<sup>44</sup> Brown's central arguments regarding the engagement of both the spiritual elite and the general lay populace with the Cult of Saints overturn notions that it was an unimportant, popular phenomenon, instead successfully arguing that it was a central part of religious life at all levels of society, and that it had implications for relationships of power. The translation of relics, for example, was a demonstration of power, by association with a saint. Taking an anthropological approach, Brown successfully places the saint, and by extension, his cult, in society, as part of a network of social authority. Within this, the saint performs certain functions, as a political tool, for instance. Brown's model is somewhat limited: he does not attempt to define what constitutes a holy man, nor does he reveal how the role was constructed. Despite this, he provides an almost revolutionary viewpoint on the role of the saint, one that is difficult to deny or ignore.

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<sup>44</sup> See Brown, P., 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) 80-101, amongst other works.

His work has since been followed by others who have responded to and expanded upon these principles; all further moving the saint and his cult into a prominent position in the historical landscape.<sup>45</sup>

The Brownian approach very much impacts on an investigation of socio-geographical territory. Key to the concept is the idea of the saint-cult extending a region of influence, an area in which the saint forms a distinct part of the social identity of inhabitants. If the saint and his cult perform distinct functions in society, then their territory is the area throughout which they function. A clear example of this is the ongoing relationship between the house of Wessex and St. Cuthbert, as described by David Rollason.<sup>46</sup> The function of the saint-cult here is to appeal to Northumbrian sentiment to serve the political needs of the crown, in bringing that area under the influence of Wessex. Cuthbert's perceived territory is thusly shown to cover that area, as would be expected. Cuthbert was very much a Northumbrian saint, being born in the region, living much of his life as a hermit near Lindisfarne, and becoming the bishop of that place. He was buried there and translated to Durham: His links to the region are very strong, thus Northumbria was undeniably his territory.

Additionally, Brown's work has implications for the social territory of relic cults. In demonstrating that the church and nobility were as actively involved in the promotion of saintly devotion as the laity, he opens up the possibility that certain saints engaged in varying degrees with different levels of society, both alive and posthumously. This is a much more dynamic scenario in which all kinds of cults can be imagined, not just those catering to an uneducated and superstitious mass population. More weight can be placed on the social origins of miracle recipients and

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<sup>45</sup> For examples of work that follow and respond to Brown, see Howard-Johnston, J. and P.A. Hayward, eds., *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> Rollason, D. W., 'Relic Cults as an instrument of Royal Policy c.900-1050'. *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986), 91-103.

the conclusions that can be drawn from studying trends of these, and a greater level of comparison between individual cults is possible.

Possibly the most consequential effect for the writing of history of the change in opinion on the cult of saints has been a greater interest in related sources, hagiography being the most obviously significant. Sarah Salih describes such renewed interest as a 'rehabilitation' and it is not difficult to accept the label.<sup>47</sup> It is now impossible to conduct a history of saint cults without a detailed examination of hagiography, and rightly so, for it provides a wealth of information not only for the subjects described above, but also for the tracing of medieval attitudes towards the practice of culting, the worship and remembrance of holy figures, and the process of literary record and tradition. Hagiographical text is a valuable source for the investigation of saintly authority and geographical territory, and can be divided into two aspects: the content of the material itself, the specific details of a saint's life and deeds and how this might reflect upon their perceived level and range of influence; and the production and authorial circumstances surrounding the material, its origin and form, and what this reveals about the saint's posthumous power and reach. At a most basic level, the very existence of a formal hagiographical *life* is a clear indicator that the saint was considered significant enough to warrant the writing of one. In cases where multiple documents exist, this significance is amplified.

However, care must be taken when turning to such material. Any work that utilises hagiography as a source must not merely follow Brown's anthropological analyses blindly, but must take in more recent scholarly opinion. Hence the following commentary is vital in an understanding of all arguments drawn from hagiographical literature, particularly in a case such as this where methodology and a model for the

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<sup>47</sup> Salih, S., 'Introduction: Saints, Cults and *Lives* in Late Medieval England', in Salih, S. ed., *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, 20.

concept of territory are discussed. Much work on hagiography undertaken since the turnaround initiated by Peter Brown has focussed on the nature of the text as a literary construction; indeed, some direct responses to Brown deal in detail with this aspect. Averil Cameron, for instance, in *On Defining the Holy Man*, discusses hagiographical writing as a form that requires an audience in order for it to fulfil its purpose and elevate the subject to the status of an exemplar.<sup>48</sup> As such, the *Lives* of saints are self-consciously written documents, incomparable to say, a modern biography. Cameron both notes and demonstrates that current trends have moved away from Brown's anthropological approach to a focus on discourse, rhetoric and linguistics, attempting to explain hagiography as a text in its context. In this interpretation, the saint is a construction of the writing and thus is subject to questions of author, audience and particularly literary style. A strict post-modernist reading would thus claim that the text has meaning imposed upon it by its audience. The true reality behind the text can never be accessed, and thus it is impossible to 'know' a saint, or discern truths about his life or cult. Brown's discussion of the role of the saint in society, in the cultural web, gives way to a discussion of the evidence only: such conclusions cannot be supported. This post-modern approach benefits the historian in that it accounts for the text itself, not only in reporting history, but also as a part of history itself.

Philip Rousseau also discusses the nature of hagiography in a response to Brown.<sup>49</sup> He suggests that any interpretation of the holy man's function, as defined by Brown, must take into account the function of the text through which he is known, and that a successful analysis depends on evaluating the nature of the text. Rousseau also comments on the problems involved with the author's proximity to his sources,

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<sup>48</sup> Cameron, A., 'On defining the Holy Man' in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 27-43.

<sup>49</sup> Rousseau, P., 'Ascetics as mediators and as teachers' in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 45-59.

and his emphasis or neglect of particular evidence, for whatever reason. Paul Magdalino, in a discussion of saints in the Christian east, is also cautious about the use of hagiography. He states that the text imposes a construction upon the historical reality which can be seen as an impenetrable wall, forever blocking the historian's way to the real holy person. However, Magdalino proposes that instead of a barrier, the construction of the text could be a viable route, if it is viewed as a part of the saint's historical agency, as the beginning of his or her historicity.<sup>50</sup> If this approach is taken, the model projected by the text of the holy man can successfully be studied, even when the reality is obscured: how the saint acts through the text becomes pertinent.

It is clear from such responses to hagiography that it must be treated with caution as a source. The fact is that it is a literary construction, created with a function and for an audience. Rather than a way of accessing the truth of a saint or his cult, it may be a barrier due to its standardization. However, to deny the use of such sources is to deny access to history, and such post-modern methodologies, while they must be taken into account, must not entirely obscure whatever truths exist behind the text.

Turning to the material itself, it must be noted that while it is an excellent source of evidence for the examination of the living saint in society, his function and role, the minutiae of a saint's life as most often portrayed in his *vitae* illuminate little about the cultural influence or spread of his cult. Naturally, the focus on his career cannot include details of shrine supplicants and pilgrims and the like. However, details can frequently be gleaned about an individual's personal influence, and the geographical areas that they occupied. It can be speculated that this in turn bore some

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<sup>50</sup> Magdalino, P., 'What we have heard in the Lives of the saints we have seen with our own eyes: the holy man as literary text in tenth-century Constantinople' in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 83-112.

relevance after death and into the cult, where naturally the places in those areas the saint occupied, both geographical regions and socio-political networks, would be the focus for a newly created cult. For example, Eadmer's *Life of St. Oda* describes his early acceptance by nobles of King Alfred's court, as they "confided in him secrets about their days spent in sin and gladly accepted advice from him about how to mend their ways."<sup>51</sup> Later, Oda's sanctity is "borne with wondrous praise and exaltation" to the new King Athelstan, who immediately elevates him to bishop.<sup>52</sup> Oda goes on to become Archbishop of Canterbury, where he eventually dies. According to Eadmer, he is well celebrated, particularly at Canterbury, where he is referred to as 'the good', an epithet of Dunstan, who himself greatly revered Oda.<sup>53</sup> While this is all fairly standard fare for the *Life* of a high-ranking bishop, it highlights in particular the areas in which Oda moved while he was alive. His bishopric was at Ramsbury, and he spent the second half of his life at Canterbury. He travelled to some extent: Eadmer's *Life* details a pilgrimage to Rome, and he also visited France. However, the locations of his official positions and the fact he was closely involved with the royal court under several kings place him firmly in the south of England, very much attached to Wessex. It is not unreasonable to begin looking for his territory in this area, not only around his resting-place at Canterbury but at Ramsbury and through modern Wiltshire. Additionally, his proximity to the crown demonstrates very much the social circles he moved in during life: known and respected by the nobility, it is easy to include them in a map of his social territory.

The *Life* of St. Kenelm includes similar details that might point to his territory. It describes how his body was translated from an "unworthy hiding-place" under a thorn bush to a rightful shrine in Winchcombe, Gloucestershire, and that all Mercians

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<sup>51</sup> Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



approved of this action.<sup>54</sup> It goes on to state that in the process of translation, there was a great quarrel between the men of Gloucester, and those of Worcester, who claimed the body of the saint themselves.<sup>55</sup> Despite a settlement between the two groups, that whoever awoke first the following day should take the relic, the men of Gloucester, on leaving with the body, were pursued by the others who still wished to claim it for themselves. This account demonstrates not only that Kenelm was culted at his resting-place in Winchcombe, but that Mercian devotion to him was strong; his territory most certainly can be identified as within that area. Even Aelfric's *Life* of St. Swithun, brief and thinly written by its own admission, incorporates the fact that he was Bishop of Winchester, presiding over Hampshire, and that he was buried there; a start in determining the focal point of his territory, and even a possible hint at a defined area of influence.<sup>56</sup>

However, of far more interest than the actual lives and deeds of the saints as they are frequently portrayed are the miracles and events surrounding their remains: that is, the basis of their cult, the stories and evidence on which their popularity was supposedly founded. This is often much more explicit about aspects of geography, from the origins of miracle recipients to details of translation locations and the like. It is from such material that a greater picture of a saint's territory arises, a clearer view of the geographical spread that they and particularly their cult reached. Descriptions of translations and miracles can be frequently found attached to a *Life* itself, but are not limited to the medium.

Returning to Eadmer, the miracle collection to be found appended to the life of St. Oswald is illuminating in this respect. The miracles of Oswald begin,

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<sup>54</sup> *Vita et Miracula S. Kenelmi*, in Love, R. C. ed. and trans., *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saint's Lives*, (Oxford, 1996), 67.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-71.

<sup>56</sup> Aelfric, *Lives of Saints*, ed. Rev. W. W. Skeat, (Oxford, 1881), 443.

appropriately enough, with the curing of a monk at Worcester, the site of Oswald's tomb and his early bishopric. His second miracle is more intriguing: a "man, Saxon by race", came as a beggar to the church at Worcester, having wandered far and wide, "through a great number of places dedicated to the saints and not having obtained any relief", and was released from the iron bonds that had been applied to his body as punishment for some previous crime.<sup>57</sup> The man set out for home, with the intent of preaching "to his own people and others" the efficacy of St. Oswald.<sup>58</sup> Obviously he was successful in this mission, as the next recorded miracle concerns another man, afflicted with the same torture. Eadmer notes that the account of the first miracle of the kind had become well known and drawn the man to the tomb of Oswald in the hope of a repeat occurrence: he was not disappointed, and was freed in swift fashion. The exact geographical origins of these men are not detailed, the first simply being a wanderer from a foreign land, the second a pilgrim from no more than a few days travel away. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some conclusions from these short accounts alone. St. Oswald, in this early phase of miracle-working at least, did not discriminate between natives and foreigners. He does not appear to be a purely 'local' saint, and if the first man found his tomb more by accident than design, news spread fast, raising the name of Oswald in the popular consciousness in potentially all directions, certainly enough to cause the second man's arrival. The growth of the embryonic cult is thus observable, if perhaps not more definitely measurable. Additionally, the note that the first man had passed through a number of places dedicated to saints and received no aid is a possible indication that saintly territories in the region at the time were thin: there was room for Oswald's cult to expand.

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<sup>57</sup> Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, 297.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

More likely, however, is that it is a standard device used by Eadmer to strengthen the impact of Oswald's intervention. It is noteworthy nonetheless.

The next account related by Eadmer concerns Oswald's translation, and includes a great many miracles, wrought largely with the water used to cleanse the saint's bones. Of note is the "countless multitude" of people of all social status, lay and clergy, who assembled to witness the spectacle, brought by rumour as well as invitation.<sup>59</sup> Again, the popular exchange of news is the chief agent of the cult's spread, although from what distance people came is unclear. More telling are the final miracles Eadmer relates. The first of these concerns a monk at Ramsey, cured of his sickness by drinking from a cup of Oswald's. Ramsey, from the description Eadmer gives, appears to have been a second cultic centre for Oswald, perhaps natural for the founder of the institution. The place was much "visited, venerated and valued by those living thereabouts" both prior to and after his death, a devotion that was only increased by the working of this miracle.<sup>60</sup> Clearly Ramsey was the territory of Oswald, and strongly linked to Worcester by the presence of Wulfstan at the miracle. The last miracles that Eadmer relates cement the position of Worcester as the heart of Oswald's cult, as the saint seemingly cures the city itself of both fire and plague, in the second instance with particular care to protect citizens of the town and outlying hamlets, but not the inhabitants of nearby Pershore or its monastery.<sup>61</sup> This exclusion is purportedly due to the fact that the residents of Pershore did not seek Oswald's aid, with the exception of one brother who was spared the sickness, and they suffered for it. The reason for this attitude is not expanded on, but it is suggestive of the possibility that in Pershore, Oswald was not considered an appropriate intercessor.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 319.

From a reading of Eadmer's collection alone, it is thus possible to map out a distinct socio-geographical territory for St. Oswald. His miracles affected both clergy and lay, beggars and reputable citizens, and people not native to the immediate area of his tomb. However, there is a strong sense that Worcester was favoured, and there are no accounts of distant pilgrims making their way to his shrine. While Ramsey appears to have been his domain also, there is no miracle recorded at York, of which he was archbishop for some twenty years. While it is inconceivable that he was not remembered at York, the absence of miracles points either to the fact there were none, or that they were few in number or not significant enough to record alongside those that occurred at Worcester or Ramsey. There were certainly none as noteworthy as the saving of an entire town from disaster. Oswald's territory is thus described by the background and origins of the recipients of his miracles.

It is possible to utilise this methodology for many saints, though the results vary both in quantity and quality. In some cases only vague conclusions may be drawn. Lantfred's miracles of St. Swithun, for instance, are very detailed, and include a good amount of geographical detail. Swithun, buried at Winchester, cured blindness in people from Bedfordshire and the Isle of Wight, paralysis in people from Hampshire, London and Rochester, and disfigurement and sickness in people from Wiltshire, Essex and Somerset. Additionally, he cured the ailments of a woman in France, a woman from "faraway areas to the west", twenty-five people on one day from various unspecified regions of England, and a man from "remoter parts".<sup>62</sup> This quantity of information, and great variety of locations, suggest that Swithun's territory was large, if undefined. The more specific accounts are from the south of England, particularly the south-east, suggesting that the cult was stronger in those areas to the

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<sup>62</sup> Lantfred of Winchester, 'Translatio et Miracula S. Swithuni', in Lapidge, M., *The Cult of St. Swithun*, 252-333.

east of his shrine, although the inclusion of Wiltshire and Somerset indicates that it stretched west also. There is little here beyond the latter, more ambiguous descriptions to suggest that the territory extended north, a notion that is at odds with the fact that relics of Swithun were held at Warwick. These miracles would tend to hint at a clear area of influence for the cult, were it not for those that affected the more remote pilgrims. The cure of a woman from far to the west perhaps hints at Cornwall, Wales or Ireland, and the mention of the French woman demonstrates that the cult had reached the continent. The paucity of precise geographical information in these miracles hinders any attempt to draw a territory for Swithun in these areas. So from Lantfred's evidence alone, Swithun's cult can be said to be large, but beyond the south of England, indistinct. There would appear to be a gradual waning of influence from the centre out, the centre being the shrine location of Winchester, and the greater London region. There are a total of sixteen cures of Londoners, and the combination of this with the Rochester and Essex recipients makes this a very dense area. Contrastingly, the relative lack of miracles from the west and north suggest Swithun's territory was much more thin in these regions. Clearly the heart of Swithun's cult, as with Oswald's, was in typical fashion the vicinity of his remains, but it was non-uniform in its expansion and concentration.

Of course, such pictures are not complete, nor are they watertight descriptions of where a saint was or was not culted. Pertinently, they are also subject to those criticisms and provisos raised by the historians mentioned above, who question the nature of the text itself. If the miracles of St. Oswald by Eadmer, or the miracles of St. Swithun by Lantfred, are consciously written documents, intended for a specific audience and requiring an audience to impose meaning upon them, then perhaps they are not accurate representations of the area in which those cults operated: the

perceived area is a creation of the author. This raises a significant point. It is possible to see a territory, created not by the saint, miracles he performed and the spread of his name and deeds, but by the imagining of an audience for the text. The territory of Oswald or Swithun, as a literary construction, consists of the readers of their *Lives* and miracles. When Sarah Salih discusses 'Bronte Country' in relation to geographical area, it is through being part of a textual audience, or audience created through verbal exchange based upon recorded events, that the traveller would likely know of the saintly region he was riding through. If the historical truth of a saint cannot be accessed due to the limitations of the text through which he is known, then his territory also cannot be known in a conventional sense, as a definable area of the socio-geographic landscape as has been posited here, but it can be observed as a construct in itself. It is received by the historian in the same way as the picture of the saint and his life is received, through the construction of the text.

Another criticism levelled at miracle stories, and one that applies to some degree here, is that in their form and content they are standardised, mere *topoi* which conform to precedented examples from earlier works. These examples follow rhetorical formulae drawn from Scripture and the earliest such writers, such that a miracle of healing, or of justice done, will read in a similar manner from one *Life* to another. The similarities are so great between instances that it is possible to draw up a framework into which specific details need only be slotted. Simon Yarrow identifies a seven step process in the written account of cure miracles: Encountering a problem, identifying a potential source of a cure, solicitation of the chosen saint, ritual engagement with that saint, a healing occurring, record of that miracle being made,

and finally the retelling of the incident to a wider audience.<sup>63</sup> This process is encountered time and again in many miracle collections. That such a mechanical and formulaic process can be ascribed to the vast majority of these types of accounts is a sure demonstration that they were written, if not experienced, in a very specific way. The reasons for such parallels centre around the purpose of the material. Designed as exemplary texts in many cases, such stories needed to be repeatable and easily identifiable by their audience, and the repetitive nature of the form greatly contributed to this.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the existence of a precedent for many miracles afforded them a level of authenticity unobtainable had they greatly differed.<sup>65</sup> The fact that many such events had occurred in the past and been viewed as truthful and genuine afforded new stories legitimacy in the eyes of all.

Of course, the historical criticism stemming from this aspect of miracle narrative as *topos* is that the history of the text is highly suspect. If the form, and perhaps content, have been at best moulded, at worst plagiarised, any attempt to seek either the truth of the recorded event itself, or the voices of the individuals and communities involved in it is futile. As Goodich states, medieval standards required that in order to be credible, a miracle conform to precedent, whereas it is this very aspect that destroys such stories as credible in the eyes of the historian.<sup>66</sup> However, this criticism, while it must be considered, can only be noted for the purpose of this work: In attempting to determine a geographical territory for a saint, by the use of place names and pilgrim origins in hagiography, the content and specific detail of the

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<sup>63</sup> Yarrow, S., *Saints and their Communities: Miracle Stories in 12<sup>th</sup> Century England* (Oxford, 2006), 19.

<sup>64</sup> Goodich, M. E., *Lives and Miracles of the Saints: Studies in Medieval Latin Hagiography* (Burlington, 2004), 308.

<sup>65</sup> Goodich, M. E., *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle 1150-1350*, (Burlington, 2007), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Goodich, M. E., *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle 1150-1350*, (Burlington, 2007), 6.

miracles themselves are not utilised as evidence. It is to a degree irrelevant as to whether a particular record is heavily formatted and semi-fictionalised, as it is not that aspect of the text that is under scrutiny. In any case, such stories are arguably more accurate if more details, such as names, places and dative information are included. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that, along with the possibility that the construction of a miracle collection constitutes an obscuration of the historical reality, so the standardised form of the record limits its usefulness as a source.

In order to fully illuminate the model of territory as projected by texts concerning a saint and his cult, a degree of attention must be paid to specific authorial circumstances surrounding the creation of those texts, and the audiences for which they were intended. Eadmer was a prolific author whose work was not limited to the *Lives* mentioned above but included many other biographies and some historical work. Trained from an early age as a Benedictine monk at Christ Church, Canterbury, he would have had an intimate knowledge of both the workings and nature of relic cults, and the commemorative process of hagiographic writing. His writing was at times rhetorical and complex, but he also undertook efforts to simplify others' work, in his revision, for instance, of Osbern's *Life* of Dunstan.<sup>67</sup> The life of St. Oda cannot be precisely dated, but is held to be one of Eadmer's earlier works.<sup>68</sup> Despite being the earliest known work that focuses on Oda alone, it draws upon several earlier writings in its content, including biographies of Dunstan, and Byrhtferth's *Life* of Oswald. Similarly, Eadmer's *Life* of St. Oswald draws on several sources, including Byrhtferth's text, and his own prior work on Oda. The structure of the text, for example, is similar to Byrhtferth with an introductory account of Oswald's childhood, followed by a digression on Oda, before returning to the main

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<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of Eadmer's writing style, see the Introduction to Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, xxxi-xxxiii.

<sup>68</sup> Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, xxxv.



*Life*. This use of pre-existing material does give weight to criticisms of the text as *topos*, unrealistic and formalised examples of events that are repeated from piece to piece. Interestingly, however, it is held that Eadmer did conduct some primary research into Oswald's miracles, and this is supported by details in the text that are not found in any of his possible sources.<sup>69</sup> These details would likely have come from oral sources, gathered by himself and other monks. The inclusion of such information is a clear demonstration that Eadmer was not a mere plagiarist, but was actively concerned with creating an accurate and full account of his subject. While this lends weight to the reliability of such a source, the extensive use of existing hagiography and historical material means that these documents can never be anything but a construction. As stated, if the document is a construct, then the image of the saint it portrays must also be constructed, and not a historical reality. Any idea of Oda or Oswald's territories built upon this evidence suffers from the same conclusion.

This point is further illuminated by an examination of audience. Part of writing self-consciously is the knowledge of who will receive the writing, and hagiography certainly had definable contemporary audiences. Eadmer wrote largely at Canterbury, primarily for his fellow monks, a limited community that would be highly receptive to the kind of formulaic hagiographical writing that has been described. Richard Southern notes that, with few exceptions, none of Eadmer's works were well circulated within his lifetime, and the fact of this small readership would have been known to him as he wrote.<sup>70</sup> Eadmer's audience is therefore a contributory reason to suspect his writing of being a construction, that followed a tradition, if not

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<sup>69</sup> Turner, A. J. and B. J. Muir, Introduction to Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, cviii.

<sup>70</sup> Southern, R. W., *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought*, (Cambridge, 1963), 229.

long established at Christ Church, one that certainly had its precedents at that institution and beyond.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to illuminating ideas of territory through examination of the context of a particular work, it is possible to chart the spread of a cult and the growth in its popularity through a comparison between works on that cult. St. Dunstan is an interesting choice to illustrate this issue, being as he was one of the most popular saints of the entire medieval period and beyond, and has been consistently judged by historians to have had a most successful cult.<sup>72</sup> He is commemorated in several *Lives* each of which is not only revealing in its content but in its context.<sup>73</sup>

The first of these was written by an unknown author, initialled 'B', a Saxon priest. William Stubbs, in the most complete collection of hagiographic material on Dunstan, speculates on strong evidence that he was not attached to the cathedral community at Christ Church, but was more likely based at St. Augustine's, with two of the three extant MSS being connected with there.<sup>74</sup> Little else is discernable about this early author, but the date of the text, to within ten years of the death of Dunstan, and its creation at Canterbury and dedication to Archbishop Ælfric, suggests that the cult was promoted strongly at its core from the very beginning, even if it was within limited monastic community. The second text of the life, the S. Gall MS, was transmitted from St. Augustine's to Abbo of Fleury in order to have it translated into verse. Charters attached to the MS state that it was the property of the monastery of Squires in Gascony, most likely brought there by Abbo and left due to his death at the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 241-246.

<sup>72</sup> Thacker, A., 'Cults at Canterbury: Relics and Reform under Dunstan and his Successors' in Ramsay, N., M. Sparks and T. Tatton-Brown, eds., *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, (Woodbridge, 1992), 221.

<sup>73</sup> Stubbs, W., *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, (London, 1874).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., xi-xii.

same place.<sup>75</sup> Although it is somewhat misleading to claim the transfer of a written document, as pertinent to Dunstan's cult as it was, as evidence of the spreading of his territory, nonetheless it demonstrates that, amongst the monastic clergy at least, Dunstan's memory was being actively supported and disseminated to learned individuals beyond the immediate vicinity of his shrine at Canterbury. While a popular cult of Dunstan can in no way be said to have accompanied the document to France, there is perhaps some weight to the argument that in certain circles, his posthumous influence was being established at quite a distance, and very soon after his death.

The second *Life* of Dunstan was written by Adelard of Blandinium, likely between 1006 and 1011. In a similar fashion, while it cannot be used as evidence for a popular cult alone, the fact that this work was undertaken by a continental author demonstrates the influence of the saint on the wider clerical community. The text is addressed to Archbishop Elfege, thus is still strongly linked to Canterbury, but is written up as lessons to form part of a monastic service, a form which would have reached more individuals than a textual *vita* alone.

The third and fourth *Lives* were written by Osbern and Eadmer respectively, both based at Christ Church. Osbern's *Life* in particular, while suffering from mistakes that Eadmer corrected, was widely distributed. The fifth *Life* was undertaken by William of Malmesbury. These final two, written supposedly while Dunstan's popular cult was in decline, demonstrate still that he had the power to command time and attention from some very eminent scholars.<sup>76</sup> Charting the authorial circumstances of these five can thus reveal some detail about the spread of Dunstan's memory amongst the literary elite: He was rapidly promoted at

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxiv.

Canterbury, and while the majority of his *Lives* were written there or addressed to those based there, some were undertaken by continental authors, and the version by William of Malmesbury is a clear indication, both in the person of its author, and the fact that it was addressed rather to Glastonbury, that his cult had grown sufficiently large enough for such involvement to be warranted. The growth in Dunstan's cult is supported by the material of the *Lives* themselves: even the Life by Adelard contains a number of events that the first *Life* does not. The legend had clearly grown.

While the information gleaned from the backgrounds of such works' authors is illuminating in determining the dissemination of Dunstan's memory amongst the scholarly clergy, and can certainly highlight the growth in size and popularity of his cult, it is less precise about the sheer geographical spread of his cult. Rather it must be considered a complementary aspect to those elements discussed above, the content of the text that specifies miracle locations and the origins of pilgrims. In Dunstan's case this is not so straightforward as for, say, St. Swithun: the miracles recorded are often devoid of geographical detail. Eadmer's collection, for instance, has little information about the majority of miracle recipients. Some are obviously from Canterbury and its surrounds, but most have no information.<sup>77</sup> This may be in part due to the slow development of the popular side of the cult at Christ Church. Alan Thacker has shown that during Dunstan's time, and immediately afterwards, Canterbury lagged behind the centres of Winchester, Fleury and Ghent in its attitude towards relic-collection and cult promotion.<sup>78</sup> The absence of a high-visibility translation for Dunstan, for instance, must have harmed the growth of his cult amongst the population early on.

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<sup>77</sup> Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, 161.

<sup>78</sup> Thacker, A., 'Cults at Canterbury', 243.

Forming an image of the geographical territory of St. Dunstan is thus a problematic task. It is clear that he became an incredibly successful saint, whose cult was extremely popular. His cultic centres, of Canterbury and notably Glastonbury, whose claim on his relics did not cease until 1508, were major and he was commemorated in a great deal of hagiographical material. However, beyond indicating that his cult was both popular and large, it is hard to place boundaries on the cult. Perhaps, in this case, defining such a territory is futile: more so than any other saint, with the exception of Thomas Becket, Dunstan's cult enjoyed what is frequently described as "national success" and "popular regard".<sup>79</sup> He was a universal saint who appealed to people of all social origins, and whose territory extended the length and breadth of England and beyond.

Hagiography as the Lives of the saints, the records of their miracles and the histories of those documents and the authors that produced them, can be an excellent guide to the socio-geographical territory of saint cults. Not only can physical boundaries be drawn by the limit of the origins of supplicants and miracle recipients, but their social origins can suggest a typical clientele to which the saint catered. The production and distribution of such texts is an indicator of the spread of the cult, but also of its developing popularity and the extent to which the educated clergy were actively involved in its remembrance and promotion. The genre is not without its problems, as has been discussed. The content of saints' *Lives* is subject to both old criticisms, of containing little historical material that can be relied upon, and new objections, of being a textual barrier to reality, preventing access to history. Additionally, evidence can often be fragmentary or conflicting, and solid conclusions about territory are difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, in many cases, an examination

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<sup>79</sup> See Thacker, A., 'Cults at Canterbury', 243, and Stubbs, W., *Memorials of Saint Dunstan*, ix.

of hagiographical material can provide us with a very good picture of exactly where a saint's cult was strongest, how far it reached and what sections of the population were primarily concerned with it. In order to expand upon this picture, it is necessary to turn to alternate sources, that may highlight a cult's area of influence in a different way.

## COMMEMORATION AND DEDICATION: ALTERNATE EVIDENCE FOR TERRITORY

In theory, any source that links a saint's cult to a place can be used as evidence for a territory, for if a saint was celebrated, worshipped or even simply recorded in a place, it can be argued that his influence spread to that location. There are, of course, distinctions to be made: the mere existence of a copy of a Life in a certain place does not imply popular devotion there, as has been indicated. However, there are a number of types of source that strongly suggest that, where they are to be found, the saint that they are connected with was considered a divine authority and held a level of spiritual influence.

Michael Lapidge makes an excellent analysis of key alternate sources in his work on St. Swithun. These have been mentioned above, but are worth reiterating to demonstrate the possibilities such evidence offer, and the results that arise when such evidence is compared to the hagiographical material. Lapidge identifies several sources: documentary evidence from martyrologies, calendars and the litany, and the physical evidence of the spread of relics and the dedication of churches.

Examining the documentary evidence, Lapidge notes that the greater proportion of entries for Swithun appear in documents from the south of England, as is to be expected.<sup>80</sup> There are entries for his deposition, and less frequently his translation, in calendars from the majority of monastic centres, including some distant locations such as York and Durham. These northerly mentions are anomalous in that they do not support the evidence from the Lives and miracles: here it is possible to observe a clear territory, centred on Winchester and eastwards towards London, gradually becoming less defined as it spreads laterally, but never really stretching

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<sup>80</sup> Lapidge, M., *The Cult of St. Swithun*, 23-34.

north is observable, in direct contrast to the memorial of the saint at the houses of York and Durham. The inclusion of Swithun in calendars from Westminster, Reading and Abingdon, amongst others, is however, entirely consistent with the miracle evidence. Similarly, Swithun is commemorated in martyrologies largely found in the south, at places such as Christ Church, Faversham and Windsor, but is also to be found in an early text at Durham, again an anomaly to the evidence from the miracle records.

This comparison, of hagiographical text and liturgical commemoration, is only semi-valid, as it is looking for the same answers from two disparate types of source that are not necessarily compatible. One indicates popular devotion, the kind of influence needed to draw the sick and disabled from their home to request aid at a shrine, the other indicates a desire to remember an individual, largely on the part of the clergy themselves, whether to promote that individual and their cult or for other reasons. Nevertheless, as Lapidge states, the appearance of Swithun in so many documents of this type must count for something, and that mentions of a saint in the litany, of which there are a high proportion for Swithun, demonstrate a good level of popularity.<sup>81</sup> The territory of Swithun could thusly be expanded to include the north, but with a proviso that the evidence for his cult in this region does not extend beyond several non-exclusive documents that, while indicating that he was held in regard along with other blessed persons, do not necessarily suggest that he was petitioned on an individual basis.

Another source that Lapidge draws upon as an index to the popularity of Swithun is church dedications.<sup>82</sup> Dedication to a saint was a very common feature of medieval churches, from parish churches, through the monastic houses to the great

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<sup>82</sup> Lapidge, M., *The Cult of St. Swithun*, 42.



cathedrals. Despite this commonality, it is surprisingly difficult to study and analyse church dedications, and there have been relatively few modern overviews of the subject by historians.

Perhaps the first significant work that attempts to collate dedications throughout England is *Studies in Church Dedications*, by Frances Arnold-Foster.<sup>83</sup> Published as early as 1899, this three volume effort is admirable in its scope but readily highlights the difficulties of compiling a comprehensive list. Although there is some attempt to recognise the history of dedication, by division of the work into chronological periods, there is no clear separation of medieval evidence from later examples. Arnold-Foster does herself recognise that many churches may have changed their dedication over the course of the thousand or more years which the study covers, but this aspect is not explored fully, such that the figures that are presented are questionable in their accuracy.<sup>84</sup> Her work is followed by that of Francis Bond, who suffers from the same problems of being unable to distinguish new dedications from old, although he is aware of this problem, and that many dedications may have been lost which would affect the final count.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, he too presents lists of dedications with firm numbers, which are misleading in their suggestion that they are a definite total. However, the figures proposed by Arnold-Foster, Bond and others are, without an entirely new count, the most complete available. As such a systematic examination of the numbers is far beyond the scope of this work, these numbers must be relied upon, although the problems with them should be borne in mind. More recent work has focussed, not on an overview of the

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<sup>83</sup> Foster, F. A., *Studies in Church Dedications*, (London, 1899).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>85</sup> Bond, F., *Dedications and Patron Saints of English Churches: Ecclesiastical Symbolism, Saints and their Emblems*, (Oxford, 1914), 191-192.

whole country, but rather on specific parishes or dioceses.<sup>86</sup> While this limitation may provide a greater degree of accuracy, its geographical confines prevent such work from being effectively used to determine the scale of dedications to a particular saint at a national level. Such studies are marginally useful in a determine of territory, but only in that they can identify the existence of commemoration within another artificial boundary.

Turning to these studies directly, and the numbers that they present demonstrates the magnitude of the subject. Arnold-Foster estimated the number of dedicated churches in 1900 to be around 600, and in a study of churches in the south-west, Nicholas Orme notes that 95% of parish churches and almost all monastic houses in Cornwall were patronised by the end of the middle ages, with the figure for Devon churches placed at 70%.<sup>87</sup> The rest of the figures in these cases are made up by missing evidence, so it is possible the actual figure was much closer to 100%. The situation was similar throughout the country, with a great many dedications to numerous saints. Francis Bond lists 370 saints to which churches or chapels in England were dedicated.<sup>88</sup> Of these, the vast majority were naturally to no English saint, but the ultimate intercessor in the form of the virgin. The biblical saints received the next highest numbers, as one would expect. The first appearance on Bond's list of a saint native to England is St. Thomas Becket, who claims 80 dedications and is swiftly followed by the first saints relevant to this work, St. Cuthbert with 72 dedications, and St. Oswald with 67. St. Dunstan is surprisingly poorly represented, with only twenty dedications to his name.

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<sup>86</sup> See, for examples, Kirk, K. E., *Church Dedications of the Oxford Diocese*, (Oxford, 1946), and Linnell, C. S. L., *Norfolk Church Dedications*, (York, 1962).

<sup>87</sup> Orme, N., *English Church Dedications, with a Survey of Cornwall and Devon*, (Exeter, 1996), 7.

<sup>88</sup> Bond, F., *Dedications and Patron Saints of English Churches*, 65.

It is, of course, the geographical distribution of church dedications that can lend themselves to a study on territory. Lapidge once again performs an excellent job of plotting those institutions dedicated to Swithun, resulting in a general trend which supports the forgoing evidence.<sup>89</sup> Swithun is shown to have a concentration of churches in the vicinity of Winchester, totalling five in Hampshire, with some more widely spread to the south-west in Devon, and in the midlands at Nottingham and Lincoln. Dedications thin in the north, with a single entry for Wakefield, and the west, with nothing at all in Cornwall.<sup>90</sup> Such a spread is a clear demonstration of the seat of his influence, and that such influence lessened across greater distances.

An even more striking example is the distribution and number of churches dedicated to St. Dunstan. That there are not more of them is surprising considering the fame of the saint and the high regard in which he was generally held.<sup>91</sup> With regards to the spread of these churches, as Frances Arnold-Foster remarks, there is not a single one north of Buckinghamshire.<sup>92</sup> In fact, the only church bearing his name alone in this period that lay outside of the south-east at all was at Balstonborough in Somerset, itself in close proximity to Glastonbury. The confinement of these churches to the south east region, including twin churches in the City of London, is in strong support of the miracle evidence: that Dunstan's popular cult primarily claimed domain over the south of England only. Dunstan does appear attached to several doubly-dedicated churches, for instance in Cornwall, but these are not enough to place him as highly influential in the area, and none are northerly.

St. Oswald demonstrates the ability to create a territorial picture based on dedication, but also one of the difficulties in attempting to do so. He claims a total of

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<sup>89</sup> Lapidge, M., *The Cult of St. Swithun*, 43.

<sup>90</sup> Foster, F. A., *Studies in Church Dedications*, 396.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

67 dedications in Bond's list, of which a number are predictably sited in the diocese of Worcester. Still more are to be found around York, for instance at Fulford, Durham and Sowerby. Other locations include Asbourne in Derbyshire, Oswestry and Grasmere, Cumbria. Some of these churches, particularly those in Worcestershire can reasonably be attributed to Oswald and thus contribute to an impression of his territory, and impression that is fully supported by the documentary miracle evidence. However, a great many churches dedicated to Oswald, including some listed here, do not commemorate the bishop but the 7<sup>th</sup> century King of Northumbria. While this distinction is clear in some cases, in others it is not, and the 67 dedications that Bond cites could be for either individual, as only one Oswald appears in his list. Arnold-Foster recognises this problem, as her count for the bishop is "doubtful".<sup>93</sup> Those churches centred on York are most deceiving, as they are likely to be dedications to Oswald the king due to the locality, but his term as Archbishop of York makes Oswald the bishop a possibility for some of them. Ultimately, this confusion makes it quite impossible, without the kind of large scale survey described, to construct more than a limited model of Oswald's territory based upon dedications alone.

The dedication of a church to a particular saint could occur for many reasons, and Nicholas Orme goes as far as to dismiss any attempt to determine the motivations behind many, although he does suggest a list of options. Dedications may have followed "fashion, the encouragement of kings or bishops, or the availability of relics...topography may have played a part."<sup>94</sup> Francis Bond concurs with the idea of fashion being a factor, suggesting that churchmen perhaps copied continental practice. He also suggests geography itself as a reason, citing dedications to St. Nicholas,

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<sup>93</sup> Foster, F. A., *Studies in Church Dedications*, 392.

<sup>94</sup> Orme, N., *English Church Dedications*, 33.

patron of ships and sailors, being predominant in maritime towns.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, and quite pertinently for the figures examined here, dedication of smaller churches was often linked to local monastic houses, the lone Somerset dedication to Dunstan being a good example of this. While the rationale behind every dedication cannot be determined, the variance in possible explanation for them is not suggestive of a great wave of popular devotion on which a cult rose to prominence. Rather the inverse: that a dedication was stimulated by a proximity to a cult centre, as observed strongly in the case of Swithun, and this in turn promoted the cult.

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<sup>95</sup> Bond, F., *Dedications and Patron Saints of English Churches*, 66.

## **CONCLUSION: THE GROWTH AND COEXISTENCE OF TERRITORY**

It has been demonstrated that, in the case of several prominent Anglo Saxon saints, it is possible to create a picture of the geographical territory of their relic cults from a variety of sources. The use of these sources in combination with one another is often beneficial, but can also cause such a picture to lose some focus, as the range of territory described by one may not be totally congruent with that implied by another. Individual sources suffer too from their own criticisms: the formulaic and stylised character of hagiographic text; the distance and disconnection from popular devotion of liturgical evidence; the incomplete and possibly whimsical nature of church dedication. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some strong conclusions by reference to this material, as demonstrated by the limited analyses above alone.

However, the terminology of territory suggests another facet, that in such an area assigned to a saint, this saint was predominant in commanding the attention and devotion of believers and supplicants, even to the exclusion of other holy figures. As previously stated, cults did not exist in isolation and must have had some impact upon one another. Additionally, territory can grow and shrink, and this feature must be observable in the case of cults. It may be possible to chart the geographical expansion of one cult over a given time period against the contraction of another, although the nature of the evidence available and the abstract nature of the concept itself may potentially prove limiting in a full examination of this aspect. Nevertheless, if fluctuation in geographical territory is noticeable, and not simply the increase or decrease in popularity of a cult, then the reasons behind this should be explored.

The growth in territory of a cult has already been touched upon in earlier analyses of hagiographic works on St. Dunstan, but it is possible to expand this examination. Mechthild Gretsch makes a good analysis of the growth in the cult of

St. Cuthbert, and her work demonstrates some of the primary ways in which cults were spread and enlarged.<sup>96</sup> She begins at the seat of his cult in Northumbria, the first *Life* of Cuthbert being written by a monk of Lindisfarne between 699 and 705. The transference of the cult to the continent follows, largely through English expatriates: Boniface, originally from Wessex, but buried at Fulda; Alcuin, from York, who spent time at the court of Charlemagne; and Willibrord, a Northumbrian who founded the monastery at Echternach.<sup>97</sup> Gretsch also points to the evidence of the Metrical Calendar of York, which states that Cuthbert was both known and venerated in churches throughout Europe. She ascribes the wide knowledge of him to circulation of his *vita*, which is preserved in numerous continental manuscripts.<sup>98</sup> Lastly she brings the cult, in an almost cyclic fashion, to Wessex.<sup>99</sup> While there is some question as to when the cult became established in the south of England, there is no doubt that it expanded significantly, and with some rapidity, after the death of the saint in c. 687. The reasons behind this expansion are self-evident: the promotion of the saint by prominent churchmen and historians, and the involvement of the crown. Gretsch cites Athelstan's "deep personal devotion" as the motivation behind the production of Corpus 183.<sup>100</sup> How much this had to do with political motivation and the newly emerging kingdom of the English is unclear, but it is certainly a strong factor in the visibility of the cult in a non-local setting.<sup>101</sup> The popular nature of the cult is questionable, although the great presence Cuthbert must have occupied in the Mass in a great many places points to a widespread knowledge of him, as do the 135 English

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<sup>96</sup> Gretsch, M., *Aelfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2005). See chapter three.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>99</sup> This is the manuscript containing Bede's two lives of the saint and other relevant material, preserved in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 183, given by king Athelstan to the community at Chester-le-Street. *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>101</sup> Gretsch describes the image of Cuthbert as a pan-English saint as an aid to a 'corporate identity' for the nation. *Ibid.*, 96.

church dedications in his name, which are spread throughout the country, as far south as Somerset and Cornwall.<sup>102</sup> Undoubtedly it can be said that in the late-middle Anglo-Saxon period, Cuthbert possessed a territory that spanned England from North to South, and stretched widely across continental Europe. This territory expanded from its locus in Northumbria via active promotion by the clergy, scholarly elite and eventually the king's involvement.

It cannot be said that Cuthbert's territory diminished over time. His translation in 1104 at Durham is evidence that his cult was alive, and the permanent record of him in both the liturgy and in architecture and nomenclature would have maintained his presence in the minds of the populace. Thus, it is possible to draw some conclusion about the coexistent nature of saints' territories. If Cuthbert's influence is accepted as remaining throughout the tenth century, and being essentially spread across the country, then it would have come into conflict with more emergent cults, such as St. Dunstan's. Prior to St. Thomas Becket, it is not difficult to place these two figures at the forefront of the practice of commemorating holy individuals, in England only behind the Virgin and biblical saints. Both are frequently judged to be universal saints of that nation. While Dunstan may have been more influential alive than dead, his cult was certainly extremely large, as was Cuthbert's. The two existed alongside one another: at such a level, this was entirely possible. The Cult of Saints as a single phenomenon was not exclusive, but cumulative, with the inclusion of newly created saints occurring quite frequently. As is evidenced by the existence of resting-place lists, a saint in one location did not overwrite the knowledge of another. So it was with territory, which could expand or contract dependent on the

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<sup>102</sup> Farmer, D., *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, (Oxford University Press, 1978), 128.



promotional factors behind the cult, but which was not necessarily unique in the area it covered.

The Cult of Saints, as a vehicle for the examination of medieval social, cultural and religious history can be approached in many ways. The terminology used to describe the cult surrounding the remains of a holy individual is most important, as it utilises a shared structure which can be applied to each case. If a saint is to be regarded as ‘universal’ or merely ‘local’, some qualification of these terms is necessary. Historians, as has been shown, have attempted to provide some definition of these terms, but inevitably these vary and are inconsistent in their criteria. Indeed, they are often misleading in their application and provide no real insight into the full extent of a cult. In establishing a common structure for the study of individual cults, it is possible to create a model by which cults can be compared. The notion of territory is such a model, and allows the spread, growth, interaction and extent of saints’ cults to be explored within a consistent framework. It is, of course, not a limitless or flawless concept: while it takes into accounts aspects of space, time and audience, these can often never be fully realised or made to be accurate as would be liked, and the concept is often quite shallow in its focus. However, it is not intended as a methodology for determining the reasons behind the growth or decline of cults. It does not suggest ways of investigating the causes of a saint’s fame, or the minor interest only that some individuals received. What it does do is to prescribe ways of locating and determining the boundaries of that growth and that fame, be they geographical or social. While it does not provide methods for evaluating the popular nature of a cult versus its promotional status as a developed arm of the religious establishment, it does allow for an analysis of the makeup of supplicants and the associated suggestions of which groups of people fell under the influence of a cult.

The methodology for best examining the concept is varied. Certainly, an approach to sources that neglects any particular route will be lacking, as evidence for territory can, as has been shown, be found not only in the hagiographical record, but in material as diverse as liturgical documentation and naming conventions. Clearly an approach that takes into account each of these will provide the most complete picture. However, certain types of source are more useful than others in examining particular elements of territory, largely due to the criticisms that can be levelled at the material. Literary criticism of hagiography, while it cannot be ignored, does not ultimately warrant significant enough concern to dismiss miracle records as providing good evidence as to the origins of recipients, and these as thus are prime material for determining the extent of a saint's territory. Items such as mentions of a saint in relic lists, litanies and even church dedication are marginally less useful, in that strictly they can only be said to provide evidence of territory among the religious classes who created them, although these references undoubtedly impacted on the lay population and are strong evidence for geographical, if not social, territory.

The concept of territory, therefore, is a framework under which certain material is used to provide a picture of the sphere of influence of an individual saint, as manifest by his cult. In examining the attempts of historians to establish such pictures, and by an analyses of available historical material, it postulates a model by which any cult can be measured and compared. It is not a sacred space, in that the whole area of the territory is not given over to religious function, but it does incorporate sacred spaces, at the shrines, and along pilgrimage routes related to a saint. It is rather a layer that rests on top of sacred space, a 'pseudo-sacred space' that is defined by a sacred element, but is not strictly the same as the space of the church, the monastery or the shrine. It must be recognised that while it is a useful formation

through which to view the extent and spread of a saint's posthumous influence, it is of course an artificial construct which does not, essentially, have a foundation in reality and as such must not be taken as a static formation, but as a contributing facet to that saint's cult: a guide to the area in which they were commemorated and worshipped, that is identifiable by the examination of a range of evidence, but that is not a complete description. The final qualification that must be applied to the model is that, due to the nature of sources used to construct it, the extent to which it reflects popular devotion is more questionable than the extent to which it represents monastic and religious commemoration. Hagiographic *Lives*, commemoration in the litany and in calendars, and the dedication of churches were all works or acts undertaken by religious authority, and while it is possible to infer the impact of these acts on the lay population, it cannot be explicitly proven that a saint enjoyed the same regard amongst the people as amongst the religious elite. Nevertheless, it is certainly an indicator of general feeling and popularity, and certainly a more detailed and realised concept than is often used. To discuss a saint as 'local' or 'universal' is extremely limited. Defining a territory allows a far more thorough terminology to be brought to bear.

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