

THE ANTI-MONASTIC REACTION IN THE REIGNS OF EDWARD THE
MARTYR AND ÆTHELRED II, 975-993: A TIME OF OPPORTUNISM

A Master's Thesis

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Bilkent University 2020

To my family



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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

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ABSTRACT

THE ANTI-MONASTIC REACTION IN THE REIGNS OF EDWARD THE MARTYR AND ÆTHELRED II, 975-993: A TIME OF OPPORTUNISM

Aytaç, Doğuş

M.A, Department of History

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August 2020

This thesis aims to provide a new insight into the so-called anti-monastic reaction which took place after King Edgar's death in 975 by analysing all the available evidence from fourteen different monasteries and bishoprics known to be affected during this period. It has been usually thought that the anti-monastic reaction was mainly caused by the politics of the period, but the present study argues that the reaction was an act of opportunism. The actions of small landowners and the great landowners are considered according to their contexts: both acted out of opportunism, but the latter's actions were also related to their personal bonds and interests. In order to provide a broad background to this reaction, the developments in the tenth-century England, mainly administrative and legal, are considered in this thesis as well and the current consensus of the subject have also been addressed. Lastly, a brief comparison between England, France and Germany is included in this thesis to see whether similar reaction took place or not.

Keywords: Æthelred II, Edward the Martyr, Monasteries, Opportunism, Tenth-Century England.

ÖZET

ŞEHİT EDWARD VE II. ÆTHELRED DÖNEMLERİNDE MANASTIR KARŞITI HAREKET, 975-993: BİR OPORTÜNİZM DÖNEMİ

Aytaç, Doğuş

Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi David E. Thornton

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Bu tez, 975 yılında Kral Edgar'ın ölümünden sonra gerçekleşen manastır karşıtı harekete, bu dönemde etkilendiği bilinen on dört farklı manastır ve piskoposluktan mevcut tüm kanıtları analiz ederek yeni bir bakış açısı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Genellikle manastır karşıtı hareketin esas olarak dönemin siyasetinden kaynaklandığı düşünülmektedir, ancak mevcut çalışma, reaksiyonun bir oportünizm eylemi olduğunu savunmaktadır. Küçük toprak sahiplerinin ve büyük toprak sahiplerinin eylemleri bağlamlarına göre değerlendirildi; her ikisi de oportünistlik bir şekilde hareket etti, ancak ikincisinin eylemleri kişisel bağları ve çıkarlarıyla da ilgiliydi. Bu harekete geniş bir arka plan sağlamak için bu tezde, onuncu yüzyıl İngiltere'sindeki özellikle idari ve yasal gelişmeler de ele alındı ve konu üzerindeki mevcut fikir birliğine de değinildi. Son olarak, benzer bir reaksiyonun gerçekleşip gerçekleşmediğini görmek için İngiltere, Fransa ve Almanya arasında kısa bir karşılaştırma da bu teze dahil edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: II. Æthelred, Manastırlar, Onuncu Yüzyıl İngiltere, Oportünizm, Şehit Edward.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASC	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> MS A: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 3: MS A, ed. J. M. Bately (Cambridge, 1986). MS B: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 4: MS B, ed. Simon Taylor (Cambridge, 1983). MS C: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 5: MS C, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge, 2001). MS D: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 6: MS D, ed. G.P. Cubbin (Cambridge, 1996). MS E: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 7: MS E, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004). MS F: <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i>, Vol. 8: MS F, ed. Peter S. Baker (Cambridge, 2000). Cited with letter symbol to indicate manuscript(s) and year, as corrected by Whitelock et al. Translations are based on <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation</i>, trans. D. Whitelock, D.C. Douglas, and S.I. Tucker (London, 1961).
ASE	<i>Anglo Saxon England</i>
ANS	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i>
Chron. Ram.	<i>Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis</i> , ed. W. D. Macray (London, 1886).
DB	<i>Domesday Book</i> . James Morris et al. ed. 35 vols. (Chicester, 1975-1986). Cited by folio number and subsections in the Phillimore edition.

<i>EHD</i>	<i>English Historical Documents I, c. 500-1042</i> , ed. D. Whitelock. 2nd ed. (London, 1979)
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
<i>GRA</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Gesta Regum Anglorum</i> , ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom, (Oxford, 1998).
<i>GPA</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Gesta Pontificum Anglorum</i> , ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom, and Rodney M. Thomson (Oxford, 2007).
<i>HA</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesie Abendonensis: The History of the Church of Abingdon</i> , ed. and trans. John Hudson (Oxford, 2002).
<i>HAE</i>	Thomas of Marlborough, <i>History of the Abbey of Evesham</i> . ed. and trans. Jane Sayers and Leslie Watkiss (Oxford, 2003).
<i>JW</i>	<i>The Chronicle of John of Worcester</i> . ed. Reginald R. Darlington, trans. P. McGurk and Jennifer Bray (Oxford, 1995.)
<i>LE</i>	<i>Liber Eliensis</i> . ed. and trans. Janet Fairweather, (Woodbridge, 2005).
Malmesbury, <i>VSD</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Vita Sancti Dunstani</i> , ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson, (Oxford, 2002).
<i>RC</i>	<i>Regularis Concordia</i> . ed. Thomas Symons (New York, 1953).
<i>S</i>	P. H. Sawyer, <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography</i> (London, 1968); revised S. E. Kelly, The Electronic Sawyer, accessed at http://esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html . Charters are cited by number only.
<i>VSÆ</i>	Wulfstan of Winchester, <i>Life of St Æthelwold</i> , ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, <i>Wulfstan of Winchester. The Life of St Æthelwold</i> (Oxford, 1991).

- VSD B, *Life of St. Dunstan*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan* (Oxford, 2011).
- VSO Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *Life of St Oswald*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge, *Byrhtferth of Ramsey. The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine* (Oxford, 2009).
- WBEASE Michael Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg eds. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Chicester, 2014).



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of early medieval England has been the subject of many studies and historians have approached it from various perspectives since the nineteenth century. Anglo-Saxon England as a broad subject, proved to be fruitful from the political history of its earliest kingdoms to its social and cultural history, and the modern historiography keeps pushing the supposed boundaries of historical study, continuing to contribute to the field. One could feel overwhelmed by the amount of works on Anglo-Saxon England and it could very well seem like all the possible topics have already been covered. Some fields, however, have received little to no attention or historians did not feel the need to study a certain subject further and seemed to be satisfied with what has been suggested. One such topic, the so-called anti-monastic reaction, is the subject of this thesis. The anti-monastic reaction started in 975 after King Edgar's death and is generally considered to have lasted three years, ending in 978 with the death of Edward the Martyr, Edgar's eldest son. The reaction was not

targeted against the Benedictine reform movement on an ideological basis but rather was targeted against the building of landed endowments of monasteries and bishoprics in the form of seizing lands from them. However, there has been only one study that has seemed to be regarded as almost authoritative and historians did not study it any further.¹ Some brief remarks which are somewhat different from what has been initially suggested, have been made by various scholars, but the consensus remains unchanged.² This consensus, on the other hand, is based on what I regard as a limited study. A reassessment of the anti-monastic reaction has been long overdue and with this thesis I hope to provide a detailed study of it by providing a broader background and a more thorough investigation of the evidence. My main argument revolves around the role of opportunism in the anti-monastic reaction as opposed to the role of the succession crisis. As we shall see in detail below, the laity, primarily the small landowners, took advantage of the weak reign of Edward the Martyr to retract their agreements they had made with the monks and seized the lands they previously owned.

In this introductory chapter, firstly I will give a very brief overview of the ecclesiastical life, and the situation of the monasteries in Anglo-Saxon England before the Benedictine revival in the tenth century, followed by a narrative of the tenth-century Benedictine reform movement led by Archbishop Dunstan, Bishop Æthelwold and Bishop Oswald with the support of King Edgar. The Benedictine reform movement led to the foundation and refoundation of many monasteries in England but was not popular among the laity as the process of building the landed endowments of the monasteries hurt them to a certain extent. In order to understand

¹ D.J.V. Fisher, "The Anti Monastic Reaction in the Reign of Edward the Martyr" *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 10, no.3 (1952): 254-270.

² For the literature review, see below 22-26.

the anti-monastic reaction, we will examine the reform movement itself. The extent, the nature, and the ideology behind the reform movement are all important aspects which will be considered in this chapter. A review of current literature on the subject of this thesis, although lacking considerably in terms of depth and necessary details, is also important to show how the present thesis will be filling the gap in the current scholarship. Although only a handful of studies have been made on the anti-monastic reaction itself, studies that focus on the reform movement and the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England in general provide us with various useful perspectives in order to understand the subject. Lastly, we will consider the primary sources that deal with the anti-monastic reaction either directly or indirectly.

1.1. Brief Overview of Ecclesiastical Life Before the Benedictine Reform

In the tenth century, Anglo Saxon England witnessed a revival of Benedictine monasticism. Monastic life in England had been disrupted by Viking raids starting from the late eight century into the mid-ninth century until the reign of King Alfred (871-899) when the Viking attacks were halted, and the political situation became fairly stable. A number of monastic houses were either abandoned or completely destroyed because of the unstable political situation and on-going wars and raids. Reality is blurred, however, as all our information comes from church members who perhaps suffered more than any other due to them being the subjects of the first raids. The *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* gives us detailed accounts of what was happening in the south but this southern focus and more specifically on the deeds of kings of Wessex, leaves other parts of Britain much less documented.³ Information provided by

³ Francis Donald Logan, *The Vikings in History*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 138.

contemporary sources and others produced in the twelfth century, again by church members, has often misled historians about the state of ecclesiastical life in England. The destruction of churches and monasteries by Vikings and disruption to ecclesiastical life were not challenged by most of the traditional works produced by scholars.⁴ Though we cannot ignore the fact that there was indeed a disruption to ecclesiastical life in England from the ninth century onwards, a more careful and detailed approach reveals a different picture instead of a complete disruption. There was a relative survival and we also see how the Scandinavians were integrated into Anglo-Saxon society, eventually even taking part in ecclesiastical life. Nevertheless, the scarcity of evidence renders it difficult to make generalizations about the period and attitudes of Scandinavians towards the Church: information provided to us by clergy were often biased, harsh and exaggerated to certain extent.⁵ However, one cannot ignore the fact that there were some concerns over ecclesiastical life in England. The charters produced from late eighth to the late ninth century show us that that Latin learning was in decline as they were poorly written compared to earlier and later documents.⁶ In the preface to his translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, King Alfred voiced his concerns about the decline of learning in the southern parts of England.⁷ Presumably this decline was much more severe in the North. Nevertheless, in the tenth century Wessex produced some notable ecclesiastical figures who would revive both learning and monasticism. Under King Athelstan (927-939), Archbishop Oda of Canterbury established connections with continental

⁴ For a traditional view, see F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 433-445.

⁵ D. M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture*, Manchester Medieval Studies (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006), 192-196.

⁶ Michael Lapidge, "Latin Learning in Ninth Century England" in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600-899*, vol. 1 (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 409-439 at 434-438.

⁷⁷ Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 124-126.

religious houses and primarily, with Fleury, a reformed monastic house under Odo of Cluny.⁸ Archbishop Oda later sent his nephew Oswald who wanted to become a monk, to Fleury. At Winchester, Bishop Ælfheah ordained two promising priests: Dunstan and Æthelwold who would bring about the revival and reform of monasticism. In the following years, Dunstan became the abbot of Glastonbury and Æthelwold became a monk there. Later on Æthelwold was given Abingdon Abbey and became abbot there. In the following years and with the ascension of King Edgar, many monasteries were either founded or revived and monastic observances were carried out according to the *Rule of St. Benedict*.⁹ However, the reform movement caused a degree of resentment among the laity. Since all of the monasteries required landed endowments to sustain the monks, tenurial arrangements had to be made. These arrangements were usually made through direct purchases and gifts to religious houses. On the other hand, as we shall see below, the process of building landed endowments for the reformed monasteries was not smooth and was eventually opposed by laity who had sold their lands to monasteries under various circumstances, some under duress. As soon as King Edgar died, the movement known as the anti-monastic reaction took place. The tenth century Benedictine reform was heavily reliant on the support of the king and once that support was gone, small landholders took advantage of the situation and began to retract the agreements they had made with monasteries. In addition, powerful landholders such as ealdormen took part in this movement as well. King Edward the Martyr (975-978) had little control over his

⁸ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 447-448.

⁹ For classical accounts of the tenth century reform see David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of Its Development from the Times of St Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 940-1216*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 31-56 and Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 433-469. For a narrative with a focus on politics, see Nicholas Banton, "Monastic Reform and the Unification of Tenth-Century England" in Stuart Mews ed., *Religion and National Identity: Papers Read at the Nineteenth Summer Meeting and the Twentieth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1982), 71-83.

kingdom: he was young, and some sources claimed he was naïve. Moreover, Edward the Martyr's coronation was delayed due to a succession crisis which also might have had a part in the reaction.

In order to understand the anti-monastic reaction, we must now turn to the tenth-century Benedictine reform itself: a brief narrative of the reform and the careers of its three leading figures, namely Æthelwold, Dunstan and Oswald, is essential here to provide a background. It has been studied extensively by modern historians and what I will be presenting here, apart from the basic narrative, is mostly the details regarding the pace of the reform and the ideology behind it.

1.2. The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in Anglo-Saxon England

What had happened to ecclesiastical life and specifically to monasteries during the late ninth and early tenth centuries has been the matter of much debate. While some have argued for a complete destruction, more recent studies have shown a different picture, as mentioned above. Nevertheless, disruptions to ecclesiastical life indeed had taken place to a degree. Julia Barrow has demonstrated that when bishoprics became vacant, some of them were integrated into already existing ones, creating much bigger dioceses. These changes, Barrow has argued, "...were acts of political opportunism by the Wessex kings."¹⁰ This policy enabled the kings of Wessex to gain some control over the Danelaw by having the bishops they appointed acting as their agents.

Furthermore, with the First Viking Age we start to see that the laity began to take control of monastic lands. Robin Fleming has argued that the laity started to take

¹⁰ Julia Barrow, "English Cathedral Communities and Reform in the Late Tenth and the Eleventh Centuries" in D. W. Rollason, Margaret Harvey, and Michael Prestwich, eds., *Anglo-Norman Durham: 1093-1193* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), 25-39 at 26-29.

possession of many monastic estates in the late ninth century; also, she states that the kings of Wessex benefitted greatly from this.¹¹ One example, among many, although it does not come from Wessex but from Northumbria shows us a glimpse of the situation. In the *History of Saint Cuthbert*, a document which records the community of Lindisfarne's troubles and its landed endowment, the anonymous author recorded that kings Osberht and Ælle both "stole" estates from St. Cuthbert's community and, by invoking the wrath of the saint, both were slain by the Danes.¹² There was, also, some concerns over the church at large during the late ninth century. King Alfred, as mentioned above, voiced his concern over learning and ecclesiastical life in southern England. He was not only concerned with literacy but also the inefficiency of episcopates. David Dumville has argued that King Alfred possibly had long term plans aimed at the church at large. His successors, Dumville says, carried out Alfred's plans and finalized them during the reign of King Edgar, when the reform finally took place.¹³ Dumville's arguments are convincing and we can see some glimpses of the reform movement which started to develop; or rather, at the very least, members of the church started to have a more active role in politics by being present in the courts and witnessing charters. King Athelstan's charters from 931 to 934 were witnessed regularly by abbots. In addition, some diplomas from Worcester and Glastonbury had a distinct continental style in this period and earlier and were also witnessed by abbots.¹⁴ The appearance of abbots in the witness lists became regular after 955. Some

¹¹ Robin Fleming, "Monastic Lands and England's Defence in The Viking Age," *The English Historical Review* 100, no.395 (1985): 247-265. Compare with David N. Dumville, "Ecclesiastical Lands and the Defence of Wessex in the First Viking Age" in his *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 29-54. Dumville's article is more of a critique of Fleming's work but he has reached the same conclusion as Fleming.

¹² Ted Johnson South, ed., *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto: A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of His Patrimony* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 50-51.

¹³ David N. Dumville, "King Alfred and the Tenth-Century Reform of the English Church" in his *Wessex and England*, 185-205.

¹⁴ Banton, "Monastic Reform," 72-74.

changes were underway, but the reform needed tremendous support in order to take place. This support was to be provided by royalty, a support that would place reformers into bishoprics and give them sufficient gifts to help them build monasteries. The support was given by King Edgar who first became king of Mercia in 957 and king of all English people in 959; but we also need to look at the careers of the three leading reformers; Æthelwold, Dunstan and Oswald.

Æthelwold's and Dunstan's lives overlapped in the early years of their careers. Our main sources for their careers are two hagiographies produced in the late tenth century: anonymous author known as B., who was possibly part of Dunstan's entourage, wrote the *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, and Wulfstan of Winchester, a pupil of Æthelwold wrote *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*. These works, however, have different styles in presenting their subjects: while B. included extensive information on Dunstan's secular life, Wulfstan omitted it completely from his work, but the two sources do complement each other.¹⁵ Dunstan and Æthelwold entered the court of King Athelstan at a very young age and were ordained as priests at the same time by Bishop Ælfheah. In addition, both had aristocratic backgrounds: some of Dunstan's relatives are well-known to us and he is known to have close connections with the royal family.¹⁶ On the other hand, Æthelwold's background is more obscure but it is implied that he came from a wealthy family in Winchester. Dunstan went to Glastonbury at a very young age and studied there before joining the court of Athelstan.¹⁷ After he had joined the court however, he was banished because of the resentment towards him; in particular, resentment from his own kinsmen (*ipsi consanguineus sui*). Winterbottom and

¹⁵ Also see below 25-26.

¹⁶ Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge, eds., *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), xxxi-xxxiii.

¹⁷ VSD ch.5.

Lapidge have argued that his stay at the court was perhaps very brief as Dunstan never witnessed any charters of Athelstan.¹⁸ He eventually returned and was ordained as a priest by bishop Ælfheah the Bald, his relative (*propinquus*).¹⁹ It is at this same time that Æthelwold was also consecrated by Ælfheah, although the author of *Life of Dunstan* did not mention Æthelwold.²⁰ Æthelwold spent a long time at the court of Athelstan and it has been suggested that his stay at the court might indicate that he pursued a secular career.²¹ After this point however, there are some problems with the chronology. Since most of the hagiographers were not fond of giving precise dates for the events, it is difficult to determine the sequence. According to B., Dunstan was yet again banished from court, this time by King Edmund.²² This banishment might have taken place at the time of a *witan* in 941.²³ After facing death on a hunting trip, Edmund forgave Dunstan and appointed him as abbot of Glastonbury.²⁴ Traditionally it is assumed that this appointment took place in 940 but the charter supporting this date is of doubtful authenticity.²⁵ Winterbottom and Lapidge have suggested the range 941x946 for Dunstan's appointment.²⁶ However, Wulfstan of Winchester claimed that Æthelwold went to Glastonbury to study under Dunstan at the command of King Athelstan.²⁷ We know from B., the earliest author of Dunstan's life, that his appointment took place in King Edmund's reign; meanwhile Wulfstan claimed it happened in Athelstan's time. Thus, we have two near contemporary sources

¹⁸ Winterbottom and Lapidge, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, 21 n.59.

¹⁹ VSD ch.7.

²⁰ VSÆ ch.7.

²¹ Michael Lapidge, and Michael Winterbottom, *The Life of St. Aethelwold*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11 n.7.

²² VSD ch.13.

²³ S511

²⁴ VSD ch.14.

²⁵ S466

²⁶ Winterbottom and Lapidge, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, xix-xx.

²⁷ VSÆ ch.9.

conflicting with each other on a problem of chronology.²⁸ Nevertheless, it is not possible to determine the exact dates for these two particular events.

We can at least be certain that Dunstan was senior to Æthelwold, and they spent a few years in Glastonbury. However, possibly due to their differences in implementing the reform and understanding of monastic life, Æthelwold was dissatisfied at Glastonbury and wished to go to the Continent; perhaps to Fleury but the king's mother Eadgifu stalled him.²⁹ This was not the first interference from the royal family: when Æthelwold wanted to leave, perhaps for Glastonbury, he was delayed by King Athelstan.³⁰ Reasons for these interferences are unfortunately unknown to us. Neither Wulfstan nor Ælfric, who had also written a hagiography of Æthelwold, gave any details regarding the royal family's hand in Æthelwold's early career. In fact, Æthelwold's secular life is completely omitted by his hagiographers. We can still make some deductions in the light of the politics of the first half of the tenth century and Æthelwold's background. King Athelstan had a problematic succession and he was not supported in Winchester in particular. The city was quite an important political centre and played a major role in successions as the successions themselves became more complex and caused dissent among nobles.³¹ Athelstan was not supported in Winchester at all and he did not show any particular favour to them because of it but instead tried to establish a firm control over the city by securing the bishopric. He first appointed Beornstan, a priest from his own household and, after Beornstan's death, Ælfheah, who was also close to Athelstan, took his place.³² When

²⁸ For the problem of chronology, see Lapidge and Winterbottom, *The Life of St. Aethelwold*, 14-15 n.4.

²⁹ *VSÆ* ch.10.

³⁰ *VSÆ* ch.9.

³¹ Barbara Yorke, "Æthelwold and Politics of the Tenth Century", in Barbara Yorke, ed., *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 69-73.

³² Yorke, "Æthelwold and Politics," 73.

we consider Æthelwold's possible noble background in Winchester and his wealth, interferences by royalty in his career might have been part of Athelstan's policy of controlling Winchester.³³ Nevertheless, the silence of Æthelwold's hagiographers on his secular life makes it difficult to reach more definitive conclusions.

Dunstan's appointment to Glastonbury has been usually regarded as the beginning of the tenth-century monastic reform in England.³⁴ We can say that after this point the reform started to pick up some pace. As mentioned above, Æthelwold had spent a few years studying in Glastonbury under Dunstan but was dissatisfied with the monastic life there. After his desire to leave was rejected, he was appointed as abbot of Abingdon by King Edmund.³⁵ Æthelwold took three monks from Glastonbury with him; Osgar, Foldbriht and Frithegar.³⁶ In addition, he brought two more monks; Ordabriht from Winchester and Eadric from London.³⁷ It is from this moment onwards we see that Æthelwold's and Dunstan's understanding of reform and monasticism in general were in fact quite different. One of the main themes of the sources that have come down to us from reformers is how monasteries were previously occupied by secular clerks, or canons, and how they were living with their wives and they were not living according to the *Rule*. Moreover, the most striking moment of the reform movement was the expulsion of secular clerks from Old Minster and New Minster in Winchester.³⁸ In the A version of the *Anglo-Saxon*

³³ Æthelwold's acquisition of lands for his foundations might indicate that he possessed a considerable amount of wealth; see, Alan Thacker, "Æthelwold and Abingdon" in Yorke, *Bishop Æthelwold*, 43-64.

³⁴ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 31-32.

³⁵ *VSÆ* ch.11.

³⁶ Osgar became abbot of Abingdon after Æthelwold (963-984); Foldbriht possibly became abbot of Pershore (970-988); Frithegar possibly became abbot of Evesham. See David Knowles, Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, and Vera C. M London, *The Heads of Religious Houses, England and Wales I: 940-1216*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23 and 58.

³⁷ Ordabriht later became abbot of Chertsey and later appointed as bishop of Selsey. See, Knowles et al., *Heads*, 38.

³⁸ *ASC* AE 964.

Chronicle, secular clerks were expelled from Chertsey and Milton as well. However, we know that during Dunstan's abbacy Glastonbury was a mixed community and there were secular canons. This was perhaps the reason for Æthelwold's desire to leave Glastonbury as he might have felt living with secular canons was not truly monastic for him. Most probably there was some dissent between Dunstan and Æthelwold on monastic life and Æthelwold had been developing an ideology for the reform movement. As we will see below, reformers did not share this ideology and implemented the reform in their own views. Now, however, we will briefly have a look at Oswald's career.

Oswald followed quite a different early career than his "colleagues". He was nephew of Oda, archbishop of Canterbury,³⁹ who had supported Oswald's education and even helped him to "buy" a minster church at Winchester.⁴⁰ In addition, according to the Ramsey Chronicle, Oswald was tutored by a Frankish monk called Fredegaud or Frithegod, possibly a member of Oda's household.⁴¹ An interesting point of Oswald's background is that he had Scandinavian origins: his uncle Oda's father came to England with the so-called Great Heathen Army and had settled in East Anglia.⁴² From Byrhtferth's *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* and from the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* we can identify two more kinsmen of Oswald. One of them was Oscytel, archbishop of York, who was Oswald's relative through earthly kinship (*propinquus terrana consanguinitate*).⁴³ Another known kinsman of Oswald is Thurcytel, who was abbot of Bedford and later became abbot of Crowland.⁴⁴ Oswald, along with his kinsmen,

³⁹ VSO i ch.1. Byrhtferth called Oda as Oswald's *patruus*.

⁴⁰ VSO ii ch.1.

⁴¹ *Chron. Ram.* 21.

⁴² VSO i ch.1.

⁴³ VSO iii ch.3.

⁴⁴ This information comes from *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*. After archbishop Oscytel's death, it was Thurcytel who took his body to Bedford and in the *Chronicle* Thurcytel is referred to as Oscytel's kinsman; hence, Oswald's kinsman as well. ASC BC 971.

was part of the Anglo-Scandinavian nobility.⁴⁵ This family possibly had some exceptional influence since they were able to produce three archbishops and it also shows us that in the middle of tenth century Scandinavians were well-integrated into Anglo-Saxon society, at least in the southern Danelaw. After his education and spending some time at his own minster church, Oswald went to Fleury to observe the *Rule of St. Benedict* and became a monk there.⁴⁶ He returned in 958, after receiving news about Oda's health but unfortunately Oda had died before Oswald was able to return.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, through his relative Oscytel, Oswald met Dunstan and after Dunstan's recommendation to King Edgar, Oswald became bishop of Worcester in 961.⁴⁸ Soon after his appointment, Oswald started to build his own "household": he invited Germanus who was possibly a member of his minster in Winchester and had been also present at Fleury at some point.⁴⁹

It is crucial for us to turn to the politics of the tenth century in order to gain a better understanding of the reform movement. We have seen that royalty played an important role in the careers of Dunstan and Æthelwold; Oswald's involvement occurred much later compared to them. However, royalty also stalled the monastic reform to a degree. When we look at the hagiographies of the reformers and other narrative sources, they are all in agreement that the Benedictine reform faced an "opponent", namely King Eadwig (955-959). Most of the sources, apart from Æthelweard's *Chronicle*, presented Eadwig as a "bad" king. He was apparently known for his lustful nature and almost did not attend his own coronation because he

⁴⁵ Michael Lapidge, ed. and trans. *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 56-57 n.22.

⁴⁶ VSO ii ch.4 For Oda of Canterbury's connections with Fleury, see Lapidge, *The Lives*, 39 n.29.

⁴⁷ VSO iii ch.3.

⁴⁸ VSO iii chs.4-5.

⁴⁹ VSO iii ch.7, Lapidge, *The Lives*, 64-65 n.58.

was in a dalliance with certain women.⁵⁰ Out of the three hagiographies of the leaders of the reform, only Æthelwold's *vita* is silent about Eadwig's reign and his attitudes in general. While his entire *vita* omits the secular side of Æthelwold, it is still striking that neither Wulfstan nor Ælfric felt it was necessary to mention Eadwig. Instead, they jumped to Edgar's reign immediately after Edmund's death. Nevertheless, other sources did include Eadwig and contributed to his poor reputation. Eadwig's affair with women on his coronation day, particularly with Ælfgifu, who was to be his wife later and with her mother, was interrupted by Dunstan and his kinsman (consanguineum) Cynesige, bishop of Lichfield, by the order of Oda.⁵¹ According to B., this invoked the wrath of Ælfgifu, resulting in Dunstan's exile.⁵² Cynesige too possibly suffered as he disappears from the witness lists for a year.⁵³ Another interesting remark by B. is that Dunstan was betrayed by his own disciples as well. Although he does not give us any names, one of them was possibly Æthelwold. One of the main reasons for Eadwig's affair with Ælfgifu was their kinship which made their marriage a problem for members of the church, especially for Oda as he later separated them.⁵⁴ On the other hand, Dunstan's exile might probably have happened due to political factions. Dunstan was closely associated with Eadgifu, mother of Edmund and Eadred, and Eadgifu herself was associated with Oda and Athelstan Half-King, the most powerful ealdorman of this period.⁵⁵ Æthelwold however, most probably was not bothered with the marriage and sided with Eadwig. In a

⁵⁰ VSD ch.21 and VSO i ch.2.

⁵¹ VSD ch.21.

⁵² VSD ch.22; ASC, D 956.

⁵³ Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'The Unready' (978-1016): A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 49. Keynes has pointed out that Cynesige attested three diplomas in 956 (S597, S605, S663) and later disappeared from witness lists and only returned in 957.

⁵⁴ ASC D 958. This date, however, is possibly too late if we consider B.'s account of the events. It might have happened in 956. It is believed that Eadwig and Ælfgifu were cousins.

⁵⁵ Winterbottom and Lapidge, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*. xxxi-xxxiii.

memorandum from Abingdon, Ælfifu was referred to as king's wife (*bæs cyninges wif*).⁵⁶ Moreover, Abingdon Abbey received some gifts from Eadwig as well, despite the silence of Wulfstan's and Ælfric's accounts, and despite the fact that there was an indication that the building of Abingdon was stalled.⁵⁷ Æthelwold himself was the beneficiary of two charters of Eadwig, also Ælfifu was quite generous to him in her will.⁵⁸ As we shall see in the following chapters, Æthelwold and Dunstan were political opponents some 20 years later as well and were part of opposing political factions; this time more clearly than implied.

It has been suggested that Eadwig had built a gap between himself and the lay and ecclesiastical nobles in his reign. The 60 diplomas produced in 956 alone show us that he was favouring other noble families instead of formerly prominent ones such as Athelstan Half-King.⁵⁹ For instance, it was during Eadwig's reign that the family of Ælfhere, a powerful ealdorman started to have a prominent position at court, along with his brothers.⁶⁰ This favouritism by Eadwig, however, caused the division of the kingdom in 957 when his brother Edgar was chosen as king of Mercia.⁶¹ Edgar had been tutored by Æthelwold and he provided the much needed royal support to the reformers.⁶² His first deed was to call Dunstan back from his exile in 957 and he appointed him as bishop of Worcester and then of London.⁶³

⁵⁶ S1292

⁵⁷ The charters in which Abingdon is the beneficiary are S583, S584, S605, S607, S663. *VSÆ*, ch.13.

⁵⁸ S606 and S608. For Ælfifu's will, see Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), no.8

⁵⁹ For a discussion and analysis of diplomas produced in Eadwig's reign, see Keynes, *Diplomas*, 49-68

⁶⁰ Ælfhere was appointed as ealdorman of Mercia by Eadwig, S607. His brother, Ælfheah, ealdorman of Hampshire was also appointed by Eadwig. This family started to gain power and influence starting from the reign of King Edmund and their rise to power quickened in 956. Also see below Chapter 3.

⁶¹ ASC BC 957.

⁶² VSO iii ch.11.

⁶³ VSD ch.25. Also see Winterbottom and Lapidge, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, xxxiv-xxxviii.

With the Edgar's succession to the whole kingdom in 959, the reform movement started to accelerate.⁶⁴ Dunstan became archbishop of Canterbury in 961;⁶⁵ Oswald, as mentioned above, was appointed as bishop of Worcester in 961 and finally Æthelwold was appointed as bishop of Winchester in 963.⁶⁶ Soon after his appointment to Winchester, Æthelwold expelled secular clerks from Old Minster and New Minster.⁶⁷ None of the contemporary sources refer to the expulsion of secular clerks from other monasteries or bishoprics. The only exceptions are Chertsey and Milton and this information is only included in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*. However, post-Conquest historians believed that a widespread expulsion took place and Dunstan was the leader of the reform movement.⁶⁸ Modern historians have argued over the pace of the reform as well; for some there was a sudden change while others, more convincingly, have argued for a gradual change.⁶⁹ It is now firmly established that what Æthelwold did at Winchester was more of an exception when we consider the reform movement at large. Julia Barrow has argued that the resentment towards secular clerks was an “Æthelwoldian” construct since it is from the texts associated with him that the propaganda against the clerks is clearer.⁷⁰ She concluded by stating that the monastic

⁶⁴ ASC ABCDEF 959.

⁶⁵ ASC F 961.

⁶⁶ ASC AE 963.

⁶⁷ ASC AE 964; VSÆ ch.16.

⁶⁸ GRA ii ch.149; JW, 418-419.

⁶⁹ For the sudden change, see D.H. Farmer, “The Progress of the Monastic Revival” in David Parsons, ed., *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia* (London: Phillimore, 1975), 10-19 and Eric John, *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), 154-180. For the gradual change, see P.H. Sawyer, “Charters of the Reform Movement – Worcester Archive” in Parsons, ed. *Tenth-Century Studies*, 84-94 and Julia Barrow, “The Community of Worcester 961-c.1100” in Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt, eds., *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 84-99.

⁷⁰ Julia Barrow, “The Ideology of the Tenth Century English Benedictine ‘Reform’” in Patricia Skinner, ed., *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: The Legacy of Timothy Reuter*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 139-154.

writings were centred on cleansing, exorcising, monasticizing or regularizing;⁷¹ all of which led her to doubt whether the term “reform” is applicable in what happened in tenth-century England. Nevertheless, we certainly see a revival of monasticism in the reign of Edgar.

According to Byrhtferth, in what appears to have been a meeting of the *witan* which Byrhtferth calls an Easter meeting, Edgar ordered 40 monasteries to be built in his kingdom.⁷² Soon after his appointment to Worcester in 961, Oswald founded his first monastery at Westbury on Trym, though that was a temporary location. To there Eadnoth (*senior*, later the first prior of Ramsey) came to him along with twelve others.⁷³ After the aforementioned Easter meeting, at a certain ealdorman’s funeral, Oswald was approached by Æthelwine, ealdorman of East Anglia.⁷⁴ Oswald asked him whether he had a place suitable for the building of a monastery and Æthelwine offered him Ramsey; after visiting the site, Oswald sent Eadnoth, together with a few monks and ordered him to start building the monastery.⁷⁵ We know from Byrhtferth that the monks at Westbury on Trym stayed there for 4 years until at least 965; they moved to Ramsey after the initial building process was completed in 966. However, the foundation charter of Ramsey is dated 974 which means that it took almost 10 years to finish building the abbey.⁷⁶ In addition to Ramsey, Oswald founded at least two other monasteries.⁷⁷ Byrhtferth recorded that seven more monasteries were

⁷¹ The documents Barrow analysed are refoundation charter of New Minster (S745), the Proem to *Regularis Concordia* (RC, 1-9) and the Old English account of *Edgar’s Establishment of Monasteries* (EHD no.238); all of which have those common themes.

⁷² VSO iii chs.9 and 11. This number, however, is exaggerated. See Lapidge, *The Lives*, 76-77 n.120.

⁷³ VSO iii ch.8.

⁷⁴ VSO iii ch.13.

⁷⁵ VSO iii chs.15-16-17.

⁷⁶ S798. For an argument on the foundation charter, see Lapidge, *The Lives*, xviii-xx.

⁷⁷ VSO iv ch.4. One of them is St. Mary’s Church in Worcester, possibly dedicated in 966 and the other one is Winchcombe, built around the same time. Its first abbot was Germanus. See Lapidge, *The Lives*, 100-101 n.31 and 32.

founded by Oswald but which monasteries he had founded is difficult to determine.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, Æthelwold reformed Ely, Peterborough and Thorney between 970 and 972.⁷⁹ On the other hand, Dunstan's earliest hagiographer's silence in his narrative after Dunstan's return from exile, leaves us with many gaps in his career and role in the monastic reform in Edgar's reign. As Archbishop of Canterbury we can assume that he played an important role in urging the king to support monastic foundations, but whether Dunstan himself founded any monasteries is far from clear. Apart from Glastonbury, which he in fact never "reformed" in line with what Æthelwold had done in Winchester, he certainly did not expel clerks from Canterbury; Christ Church became a monastic see possibly in the early eleventh century under Archbishop Ælfric.⁸⁰ However, post-Conquest and modern historians alike have placed Dunstan in a crucial position in the reform, presenting him as a "champion".⁸¹

Finally, we must turn to the document known as *Regularis Concordia*, a customary book produced by Æthelwold during the Council of Winchester, possibly in c.970.

Although the document itself is anonymous, we know from Ælfric that it was authored by Æthelwold. In his letter to the monks of Eynsham, which is in fact an abridged version of the *Regularis Concordia*, Ælfric wrote that a customary book was drawn up by Æthelwold with other bishops and abbots.⁸² In addition, in the Proem of the document, there is reference to Edgar's education by a certain abbot who was of

⁷⁸ In addition to St. Mary's in Worcester and Winchcombe, Pershore, Evesham and Westbury on Trym could be counted as well. Deerhurst and Gloucester too was suggested to be reformed by Oswald, Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 51-52. Also see Lapidge, *The Lives*, 112 n.72.

⁷⁹ *VSÆ* chs.23-24.

⁸⁰ Winterbottom and Lapidge, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*. lxxiv.

⁸¹ Some historians went to great lengths to show how Dunstan "achieved" more than Æthelwold, see in particular D.J. Dales, "The Spirit of the *Regularis Concordia* and the Hand of St Dunstan" in Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks, and T. W. T. Tatton-Brown, eds., *St Dunstan: His Life, Times, and Cult* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 45-56 at 55 and idem, *Dunstan: Saint and Statesman* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1988), 148-149.

⁸² Christopher A. Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 111.

course Æthelwold.⁸³ As mentioned above, we have this information from Byrhtferth. However, in the Proem, reference to the Council of Winchester is problematic; none of the contemporary sources refer to this council. Our sole evidence for it is the *Regularis* itself. Not even Æthelwold's hagiographers made any reference to it, nor did the post-Conquest historians have anything to say. It has been suggested that the Easter meeting that Byrhtferth recorded was actually the Council of Winchester but the absence of the king from the council, mentioned in the Proem, along with Archbishop Dunstan's absence, would suggest otherwise.⁸⁴ The modern editor of *Regularis Concordia*, Thomas Symons, suggested 970 as a possible date for the Council of Winchester.⁸⁵ However, in a later work, after taking into consideration the date of Ramsey's foundation charter, he suggested the date 973, since he deemed it more plausible that after this period the reformers may have felt the need to produce a customary book.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, Symons relied heavily on Ramsey evidence and the time necessary to complete the building process of the abbey. He ignored the rest of Oswald's foundations as he felt they were not "important" religious houses compared to Ramsey. More recently, Julia Barrow has suggested 966 as a possible date for Council of Winchester and the *Regularis Concordia*. Compared to Symons, Barrow did consider the other monastic foundations and has argued that *Regularis Concordia* "may well belong in the big surge of monasticizing activities."⁸⁷

⁸³ RC, 1.

⁸⁴ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 42; RC 2-3. King Edgar was absent from the council but instead sent a letter.

⁸⁵ Thomas Symons, *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), xxiii-xxiv.

⁸⁶ Thomas Symons, "Regularis Concordia: History and Derivation" in Parsons, ed. *Tenth-Century Studies*, 37-59, at 39-42.

⁸⁷ Julia Barrow, "The Chronology of the Benedictine 'Reform'", in D. G. Scragg, ed., *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975: New Interpretations*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 211-223.

There are some peculiar elements to the *Regularis Concordia* which need to be emphasized here. The full name of the document, *Regularis Concordiae Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialumque*, gives us some clues about the contents and nature of the document. The first part, *regularis*, shows that the document was drawn up in accordance with the *Rule of St. Benedict*. The word “*concordiae*” suggests that it was an agreement or a settlement of differences. Thirdly, “*anglicae nationis*” indicates something of a national importance or rather, an element of union along national lines.⁸⁸ Unity among the monasteries is an important theme in the *Regularis Concordia*. King Edgar, in the letter he sent to the council, urged the bishops and abbots to follow a single monastic rule, implying that their use of the *Rule* had varied.⁸⁹ We can assume that Æthelwold, Dunstan and Oswald had their own implementations of the *Rule*. The monastic houses they had founded and revived most probably were all following the customs of their founders rather than following the *Rule* itself. We have seen that there was dissent among the leaders of the reform to a certain extent. Æthelwold left Glastonbury because he was not satisfied with the monastic life there, quite possibly because of the presence of secular clergy. He implemented a stricter monastic observance once he became the abbot of Abingdon and later when he became bishop, he expelled secular canons from Old Minster and New Minster. A traditional view of the three leaders of the Benedictine reform in England is that while Æthelwold was a harsh and strict reformer, Dunstan and Oswald were gentle.⁹⁰ Although this view was strongly opposed by Eric John in a series of works throughout his career, we know that Oswald and Dunstan did have a different

⁸⁸ Symons, *The Monastic Agreement*, xxiii-xxiv.

⁸⁹ *RC*, 2-3.

⁹⁰ J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Oswald and the Church of Worcester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1919).

approach and never expelled secular clerks from their bishoprics.⁹¹ The different implementations of monasticism and some monasteries being founded “independently”, meaning not being associated with the reformers, might have led to further diversity in monastic observance; thus, forming a unity possibly became a necessity.⁹² There is also strong emphasis on the role of royalty in protecting monasteries in the Proem which has been usually regarded as a unique element of the *Regularis Concordia*. The Proem starts with a praise of Edgar and his piety; and he was named as a guardian of monasteries, whereas Queen Ælfthryth is a guardian of nunneries.⁹³ There are other elements in the document that puts importance on royalty: there are a total of six psalms to be said for the king, queen and benefactors; in addition, morning mass was to be said for the king.⁹⁴ This heavy emphasis on royalty is a “unique” element compared to other customary books produced in the early medieval period.⁹⁵ In addition, praising King Edgar is a common theme in the texts produced by Æthelwold and it was with his support that the monasteries were founded, and the monastic communities started to flourish. To quote Stenton: “A movement which could not expand without large endowments, and its expansion was bound to collide with vested interests, needed the support of an enthusiastic king.”⁹⁶ This reliance on royalty can be seen elsewhere in the *Regularis Concordia*. The document forbade monasteries from receiving patronage from the nobility, so that the

⁹¹ John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 154-180.

⁹² Monasteries such as Tavistock and Crowland were also founded during the reform movement but they are not directly associated with the leaders of the reform. Also, see Dales, “The Spirit,” 49.

⁹³ *RC*, 1-2.

⁹⁴ *RC*, 14, 16 and 21-23.

⁹⁵ This idea of “uniqueness” was challenged by Patrick Wormald. He argued that the naming the king as the guardian of monasteries stemmed from Benedict of Aniane’s works in the ninth century. He also emphasised that the power of the royalty was not as strong as it was in England in the tenth century on the continent; thus, monasteries had to rely on support from lay nobility. See Patrick Wormald, “Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast” in Yorke, *Bishop Æthelwold*, 14-42 at 32-33.

⁹⁶ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 449.

only secular power they could rely on was royalty.⁹⁷ However, relying heavily on royalty to protect the new monastic foundations was in fact one of the greatest weaknesses of the reform movement. As we shall see in the following chapters, when King Edgar died suddenly, leaving his kingdom with a succession crisis and a political upheaval, the monasteries became vulnerable.

In summary, the tenth-century reform in England was not a collective movement which shared the same ideology. We have instead different understandings of monasticism from the three leading reformers who had implemented the reform based on their own idea of monasticism. As the *Regularis Concordia* clearly stated, they needed some form of unity because of this problem but Æthelwold's harsh treatment of secular clerks was not followed by Dunstan and Oswald. This problem was mainly caused by Æthelwold's picture of the time of Bede: he was heavily influenced by Bede's writings and Bede's use of the word *monasteria*, which can also mean minster church, led Æthelwold to believe that many churches were originally had been monasteries. This reading by Æthelwold possibly caused him to act against secular clerks and wanted to "cleanse" the monasteries from them.⁹⁸

1.3. Literature Review

Most studies that deal with the tenth-century Benedictine reform movement in Anglo-Saxon England have little to say about the anti-monastic reaction that followed the death of King Edgar. There is however a vast number of works on the tenth-century monastic reform: since the late nineteenth century historians have been working on

⁹⁷ RC, 5.

⁹⁸ Wormald, "Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts," 39-42.

the subject and the literature since then continues to expand.⁹⁹ Moreover, there are separate edited volumes on the three leading figures of the reform movement which cover the lives and careers of Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald in great detail; all of which shed more light on the reform movement.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the events that followed the death of King Edgar are usually ignored. Accounts of the brief reign of Edward the Martyr, recorded without any details in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* and other contemporary narrative sources also do not touch upon the anti-monastic reaction in detail. Modern historians have also omitted the events, if not completely ignored them; compared to the tenth-century reform movement itself, there are only a handful of works dedicated to the anti-monastic reaction. The first article on the subject was by D.J.V Fisher, written in 1952.¹⁰¹ In his article, Fisher mainly focused on the politics of the late tenth century and states that the so-called anti-monastic reaction actually resulted from a disputed succession. Two powerful ealdormen of the period, Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia, and Æthelwine, ealdorman of East Anglia became rivals after the death of Edgar. Ælfhere supported Æthelred II and Æthelwine supported Edward the Martyr in the succession crisis. According to Fisher, in order to attack his political opponents, Ælfhere chose to attack monasteries instead: his power lay in Mercia and the monasteries that suffered from Ælfhere were all in

⁹⁹ Some of the earlier works on the reform movement are; William Stubbs, *Memorials of Saint Dunstan Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1874); J. Armitage Robinson, *The Times of Saint Dunstan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923); David Parsons, ed., *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia* (London: Phillimore, 1975).

¹⁰⁰ Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt, eds., *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); Barbara Yorke, ed., *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997); Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks, and T. W. T. Tatton-Brown, eds., *St Dunstan: His Life, Times, and Cult* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992). There is also a review article on the reform movement that focuses on these three volumes; see Catherine Cubitt, "Review Article: The tenth-century Benedictine Reform in England" *EME* 6 (1997): 77-94. There are other volumes on Dunstan; Douglas Dales, *Dunstan: Saint and Statesman* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1988); Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *Saint Dunstan of Canterbury: A Study of Monastic Reform in the Tenth Century* (Norton, 1955).

¹⁰¹ Fisher, "The Anti Monastic Reaction," 254-270.

Worcestershire. For Fisher, the anti-monastic reaction was a result of politics rather than ideological differences. Fisher's book on Anglo-Saxon England, which was published twenty years later than his article, touches on the anti-monastic reaction very briefly but does not add anything new to his initial arguments.¹⁰² Fisher's arguments have been generally accepted by most of the historians.¹⁰³ An alternative interpretation was presented by Eric John: he argued that the causes of the anti-monastic reaction lay in new tenurial arrangements that had been made in Worcester. The creation of Oswaldslow in Worcestershire caused resentment and the authority of Ælfhere of Mercia was diminished because of the "liberties" that came along with it.¹⁰⁴ John went as far as to call the new arrangements for the reformed monasteries a "tenurial revolution". However, John curiously ignored Fisher's article on the subject and says little about the politics of the period; his concerns only lay in land tenure in Worcester and primarily in the Oswaldslow. He strongly believed that the so-called *Altitonantis* charter,¹⁰⁵ the supposed charter of Edgar that created the Oswaldslow, had some genuine basis.¹⁰⁶ However, John's use of evidence was problematic: he relied heavily on a charter that is clearly a twelfth-century forgery, and on the chronicle of John of Worcester, an early twelfth-century historian whose work is not without reliability problems.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, Edward Miller, in his study of Ely Abbey,

¹⁰² D. J. V. Fisher, *The Anglo-Saxon Age: c.400 - 1042* (London: Routledge, 1973), 298-300.

¹⁰³ Some of which are; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 372-373; John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 354; David C. Cox, *The Church and Vale of Evesham, 700-1215: Lordship, Landscape and Prayer*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 52-53; Patrick Wormald, "Oswaldslow: an immunity?" in Brooks and Cubitt, *St. Oswald of Worcester*, 117-128 at 128; idem, "Lordship and Justice in the Early English Kingdom: Oswaldslow Revisited" in Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre, *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 114-136; Janet, M. Pope, "Monks and Nobles in the Anglo-Saxon Monastic Reform" *ANS* XVII, 1994, 165-180 at 179.

¹⁰⁴ John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 154-180 and 234-248.

¹⁰⁵ S731

¹⁰⁶ John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 237-238. He consistently argued for the authenticity of *Altitonantis* charter throughout his career but was completely ignorant of Fisher's work.

¹⁰⁷ Julia Barrow, "How The Twelfth-Century Monks of Worcester Perceived Their Past" in Paul Magdalino, ed., *The Perception of The Past in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London: Hambledon Press, 1992), 53-74 at 59-60.

touched upon the anti-monastic reaction very briefly and presented an alternative perspective on the debate. He argued that the “attacks” against the monasteries were not directed against the reform but against the validity of some of the transactions which turned monasteries into great landowners.¹⁰⁸ In addition, Miller claimed that changes in landownership possibly provoked a reaction from the disinherited and conveyancing procedures might have been in a transitional state, thus making transactions subject to lawsuits. Miller was followed by Sandra Raban who presented the same arguments.¹⁰⁹ More recently, Shashi Jayakumar has published an article on the anti-monastic reaction.¹¹⁰ He has approached the subject from the same angle as Fisher and John. Nevertheless, Jayakumar also leans more towards John’s ideas on the causes of the anti-monastic reaction and focused more on the situation in Worcester. He has also made a counter argument to Fisher’s ideas on Ælfhere formation of a rebellion in Mercia: Ælfhere, in fact, witnessed all the charters of Edward the Martyr. Ælfhere’s consent can also be seen in Oswald’s leases in the period between 975 and 978. However, it is difficult to argue from Ælfhere’s presence in charters to determine whether he supported Edward since only five charters survived from his reign and some of them are dubious.¹¹¹ Still, Jayakumar has offered some valid points on why the anti-monastic movement was seen in the reign of Edward the Martyr. Blaming the reign of a dead king was safer than blaming of a living king. More importantly, he has suggested the role of opportunism in his article as well. However, opportunism played

¹⁰⁸ Edward Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely: The Social History of an Ecclesiastical Estate from The Tenth Century to The Early Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 18-21.

¹⁰⁹ Sandra Raban, *The Estates of Thorney and Crowland: A Study in Medieval Monastic Land Tenure*, (University of Cambridge Department of Land Economy, 1977), 16-17.

¹¹⁰ Shashi Jayakumar, “Reform and Retribution: The ‘Anti-Monastic Reaction’ in The Reign of Edward the Martyr” in Stephen Baxter, Catherine Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, David Pelteret, eds., *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 337-352.

¹¹¹ S828, S829, S830, S831, S832; Simon Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters c. 670-1066* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, Univ. of Cambridge, 2002), Table LVIII.

only a minor role in the reaction according to Jayakumar and as mentioned above, he focused on Worcester and the creation of Oswaldslow whereas I am putting the opportunism at the centre of my thesis, combining it with what Edward Miller suggested.

These three are, meaning Fisher's, John's and Jayakumar's, unfortunately, the only articles that directly deal with the anti-monastic reaction and they are not very detailed studies. Furthermore, not only monasteries but also cathedral churches faced "attacks" from the laity to a certain extent. In this sense, the term anti-monastic reaction also seems misleading. I have included examples of bishoprics which were not "reformed" but became targets and were subjected to same treatment as newly founded monasteries and will be considered as part of the reaction. Another point that has been overlooked by historians is that the anti-monastic reaction did not suddenly cease when Æthelred II succeeded to the kingdom. In addition, there is at least one piece of evidence that shows that the beginning of anti-monastic reaction could be traced back to the reign of King Edgar as well. As we will see in the following chapters, the anti-monastic reaction was not confined to the reign of Edward the Martyr and certainly was not directed against the monasteries only.

1.4. Sources

There are many extant primary sources that have survived from the tenth century. It is a relatively well-documented period of Anglo-Saxon England as a result of the revival of monasticism and learning. The earliest hagiographies of Æthelwold, Dunstan and Oswald have received new editions and translations recently, making these valuable

sources accessible.¹¹² Byrhtferth's account is especially important as it gives us the first detailed narrative of the anti-monastic reaction. His account, combined with the other hagiographies, gives us much information on the careers of the three leaders of the reform and some information on the politics of the tenth century. However, the anti-monastic reaction was not included in the hagiographies of Æthelwold. As mentioned above, his secular life was completely omitted. Dunstan's earliest hagiography by B., on the other hand, has no information on his life after his election to the archbishopric. Nevertheless, starting from the early eleventh century, Dunstan became the subject of other hagiographies which include information on his later career, possibly by using material which was not available to B.¹¹³ There are other narrative sources, written the twelfth century, that have some brief information on the anti-monastic reaction. Especially William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester provided some information briefly.¹¹⁴ Some other useful sources that included the events that followed the death of King Edgar are cartulary-chronicles of monasteries such as Abingdon, Evesham, Ramsey and Ely; all were affected by the anti-monastic reaction.¹¹⁵ However, most of these sources were composed at reformed monasteries,

¹¹² Wulfstan of Winchester, *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*, in Michael Lapidge, and Michael Winterbottom, *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Byrhtferth, *Vita Sancti Oswaldi*, in Michael Lapidge ed., *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); B, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, in Michael Winterbottom, Michael Lapidge eds., *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012).

¹¹³ Bernard James Muir, and Andrew J. Turner eds., *Eadmer of Canterbury: Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Osbern of Canterbury, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, in Stubbs, *Memorials of Dunstan*, 69-161; William of Malmesbury, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, in Michael Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson, eds., *William of Malmesbury: Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166-303.

¹¹⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, in R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, in Michael Winterbottom, and Rodney M. Thomson eds. *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum: The History of the English Bishops*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Reginald R. Darlington ed., P. McGurk and Jennifer Bray trans., *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

¹¹⁵ William Dunn Macray ed, *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis: A Sæc X. Usque Ad An. Circiter 1200: in Quatuor Partibus* (London, 1886); William Dunn Macray ed., *Chronicon Abbatiae Evesham ad*

all of which present partisan accounts and are not always reliable. While some of their claims can be cross-referenced by other sources, sometimes it is not possible to determine the truth of those claims.

In addition to narrative sources, there are many charters that have survived from the tenth century. Most of the charters have been edited and published since the nineteenth century.¹¹⁶ Through charters it is possible for us to trace the histories of estates that were given to monasteries and indications of those who previously owned those estates. Even though charters are not without reliability problems, they are useful for understanding how the monks perceived their own rights. We can also see the politics of the tenth century to a degree from royal diplomas; positions in the witness lists provide some information on the king's court; continuous presence in the witness lists or disappearances from them might tell us who was more powerful and influential and who was in disfavour. In order to understand the rivalry between Ælfhere and Æthelwine, charters will be extremely useful in this research.

Furthermore, four charters in particular, granted by Æthelred II, provide some background on his early reign and the anti-monastic reaction.¹¹⁷ In these charters, Æthelred II voiced his regret over the offences against the church and regranted the lands which had been previously appropriated.¹¹⁸ The charters in question can also be

Annum 1418 (London, 1863); John Hudson, ed., *Historia Ecclesie Abendonensis: The History of the Church of Abingdon*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Janet Fairweather, ed., *Liber Eliensis: A History of The Isle of Ely From The Seventh to Twelfth Century; Compiled by a Monk of Ely in The Twelfth Century*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005); Jane Sayers, and Leslie Watkiss, eds. *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

¹¹⁶ John Mitchell Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, 6 vols. (1839-1848); Walter de Gray Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, 3 vols. (1885-1893); Agnes Jane Robertson, *Anglo Saxon Charters*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939). Charters that were known at the time were catalogued by P.H. Sawyer, in his *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (Royal Historical Society: London, 1968). Sawyer's catalogue has been digitized and expanded by Susan Kelly; "The Electronic Sawyer", accessed in 13 July 2019, <https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/about/index.html>

¹¹⁷ S876, S885, S891, S893

¹¹⁸ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 176-180.

used to determine the chronology of the anti-monastic reaction as we shall see in more detail below. Nevertheless, not all disputed lands have a charter that was preserved by a monastery and our sources are, in fact, quite limited. The use of charters in lawsuits will also be considered very briefly in this research in order to gain a better understanding of landownership in the late tenth century, and to see the legal basis for the claims. Although law codes did not have any specific information on dispute settlement, lawsuits themselves sometimes provide insight. Law codes, on the other hand, will be useful for examining the role of ealdormen and bishops in the courts and whether the monasteries' claim to immunities had any basis or not.¹¹⁹

Lastly, the document known as the *Libellus quorundam insignium operum beati Æthelwoldi episcopi*, sometimes referred as the *Libellus Æthelwoldi* or simply the *Libellus*, will be a crucial source in my research. It is a twelfth-century document produced in Ely, possibly translated into Latin from a lost tenth-century Old English original.¹²⁰ This is the only document that records the transactions that were made to create landed endowments of a reformed monastery during the century, along with the disputes that followed King Edgar's death. The details of transactions shed more light on the reality of the reform movement; that is, how the landed endowments were purchased and how a bishop and an abbot would take advantage of small landowners' problems. We will see that in some cases people sold their lands in order to solve their problems but later tried to retract their agreements. They were somewhat forced to sell

¹¹⁹ All law codes from Anglo-Saxon England have been edited in Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (Niemeyer: 1903-1916). The citation system in Liebermann, *Gesetze*, vol.1, xi, has been used in this thesis. Translations are based on F.L. Attenborough ed. and trans., *The Laws of The Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922); A.J. Robertson ed. and trans., *The Laws of The Kings of England From Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925).

¹²⁰ The *Libellus* is transmitted in two manuscripts: Cambridge, Trinity College O. 2. 41, pp.1-64, and London, British Library Cotton Vespasian A. xix, 2r-27v. The text was incorporated into the book II of *Liber Eliensis*; thus, all the references to the *Libellus* will be corresponding chapters in the *Liber Eliensis*.

their lands and the transactions were made under duress. Most probably, some lands had to be sold under market value as well, though it is not possible to prove it. Nevertheless, Ely provides many great details on transactions and the anti-monastic reaction. It is unfortunate that we do not have similar surviving sources from other monasteries, but we can assume that possibly there were similar disputes. On the other hand, we have some fragmentary evidence from other religious houses that shows us how the anti-monastic reaction took shape in localities. There are wills and memoranda that shed light on estate histories and, whether or not these sources concerned a single dispute, the basis of this dispute is still similar to others; in other words, there is a recurring theme in all the available sources, which is opportunism. In Chapter 4, we will see this opportunism more closely and investigate each dispute and event that falls within the subject of the anti-monastic reaction.

1.5. Thesis Plan

This thesis consists of five chapters in which I intend to show, contrary to the current consensus, that the anti-monastic reaction stemmed from opportunism due to lack of protection from royalty and powerful lay magnates.

In the first chapter we have seen the condition of ecclesiastical life before the tenth century Benedictine reform and how the reforms were implemented by the clergy. The purpose of this chapter was to provide the background information necessary to understand the anti-monastic reaction that followed the reform and a discussion of the current literature to demonstrate how this present thesis is going to complement the earlier studies on the subject.

In the second chapter we will examine the political developments and administrative changes of the tenth century. The kings of Wessex conquered Eastern Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria in the first half of the tenth century and started to rule a vast kingdom. This process of expansion led to some administrative changes in order to control the kingdom more closely through royal agents. This enabled kings to implement their decrees and the agents enforced the laws, which might have been overbearing for the laity.

The third chapter is designed to present the political situation after King Edgar's death: how the factions were formed around the two æthelings and to determine whether these two factions played a role in the anti-monastic reaction, in accordance with their political stances. Moreover, Fisher's arguments on the anti-monastic reaction, followed by many, will be addressed in the light of the available evidence in order to see whether his arguments can still be upheld.

The fourth chapter is concerned with the various disputes, alienations of lands, and other hardships faced by the monasteries and bishoprics from 975 to 993. All the religious houses that were affected by the anti-monastic reaction are included in this chapter, and each house will be investigated in turn. However, due to the lack of sources, some will be considered very briefly but still included in the chapter. The chapter illuminates the nature of the anti-monastic reaction by showing that the reaction was not confined to politics or always led by powerful lay magnates but instead that small landowners played a major role in seizing lands from the religious houses. Moreover, not all monasteries and bishoprics in the chapter were "reformed" at this period but nevertheless included as the attacks fit into the reaction in general.

The fifth chapter will make concluding remarks on the anti-monastic reaction and include brief summaries of the conclusions of each chapter. Furthermore, the laity's involvement in the reform movement and their awareness of the changes will also be considered. Another relevant point I will examine is how the second generation of reformers perceived the events of the anti-monastic reaction and how they portrayed the offences against the Church at large. In addition, the chapter will look at continental counterparts of the English Benedictine reform movement and see whether a similar reaction had taken place elsewhere or not, and more generally, at similarities between King Edgar's policies with that of Ottonian dynasty in Germany. Furthermore, the development of jurisdictional immunities in early medieval England will also be considered very briefly, which I intend to study in more detail in a future research.

CHAPTER II

UNIFICATION OF ENGLAND AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES IN THE TENTH CENTURY

In this chapter we will examine political and administrative developments in tenth-century England. Alfred's vision of the "kingdom of Anglo-Saxons" was implemented by Edward the Elder and Athelstan respectively through military conquests and administrative changes, all of which reached their peak during the reign of Edgar. The changes implemented by these kings might have caused some disturbances in the localities; changes brought more control in daily lives and more burdens began to be imposed on the laity by royal agents. Although in terms of the anti-monastic reaction, the general developments we will see here did not necessarily lead to the reaction in 975, they might have had an indirect effect on the events. The common people could not express any reaction to the changes, as the kings in the tenth century were relatively powerful and had firm control in their kingdom, but they

might have seen a chance during the turbulent reign of Edward the Martyr.

Nevertheless, I will not be arguing for a collective response from the laity because of the various developments but rather that they probably had a degree of influence on the tension that had been building up. In order to see the developments of the tenth century we shall first look at the politics and the expansion of kingdom through campaigns and then we will see the administrative changes brought by Alfred's successors.

The first half of the tenth century was a period of unification and the formation of the English kingdom.¹²¹ The kings of Wessex, who had started to rule Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria, had to make administrative reforms in order to implement their rule on newly acquired regions. Before the extension of their power, the kings of Wessex had been able easily to travel throughout their kingdom and make their authority felt. Now, however, with so much more to control, they needed to rely on agents to do so.¹²² It was through these agents that the administrative reforms took place in remote regions, especially north of the River Thames. Royal agents such as ealdormen, reeves and thegns had new duties which were specified through law codes; in addition, bishops began to have a more prominent role in governance, especially with the reform movement. Furthermore, despite the ambiguities over the social status of a thegn, we see that their role in society somewhat changed in tenth century and they became more active in the administration at the local levels. However, we should also keep in mind that the tenth century was a period of

¹²¹ Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London ; Edward Arnold, 1989), passim; George Molyneux, *The Formation of The English Kingdom in The Tenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 116-230.

¹²² H. R. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, 500-1087* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 96-97 and 100-101; Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 79-80.

transformation: it would be in the eleventh century that we start to see more precise definitions in law codes and many processes which were ambiguous in tenth century became clearer.¹²³ The historiography of Anglo-Saxon state and governance has usually focused on the eleventh century primarily for this reason whereas the tenth-century roots of legal and political late Anglo-Saxon England have been neglected due to lack of evidence. Nevertheless, the developments of early tenth century will provide a broad background for the events that unfolded after King Edgar's death.

2.1. Politics from 899 to 955

The kings of Wessex faced various challenges in their reigns during the course of tenth century. The process of unification meant they had to deal with external threats, but their rule was challenged by their own household as well. Edward the Elder dealt with the revolt of Æthelwold; Athelstan was not supported in Winchester in the early years of his reign; during the short reign of Eadwig the kingdom was divided. In addition to problems within the kingdom, from 899 to 955, the kings led many campaigns against Danish armies in Northumbria and East Anglia. Even though the initial Scandinavian invasions had ended, the Danes that had settled after the invasions posed a threat to Wessex. As the kings wanted to expand their territories, they faced Danish armies situated in West and East Midlands, East Anglia and Northumbria. The Danes too had their own agenda: they saw Wessex as a threat and either ravaged parts of Mercia and Wessex or led armies to war. As a result, the first

¹²³ Patrick Wormald, "Laws" in *WBEASE*, 284-285. This is mostly related to the eleventh century being a well-documented period and some historians tended to combine the histories of tenth and eleventh centuries. Some examples are Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*; Loyn, *The Governance*. Also see Molyneaux, *Formation*, 1-14.

half of tenth century was marked by conquests and warfare. The peaceful and prosperous reign of King Edgar, often recalled as a Golden Age by reformed monastic houses, was a result of the efforts of his predecessors, at least partially.

In the first years of his reign, from 899 to 903, Edward the Elder's rule was contested by his cousin Æthelwold, son of Æthelred I.¹²⁴ As an ætheling, Æthelwold had a right succeed Alfred. In fact, all æthelings had this right since they were all coming from the royal family and succession was determined by whether a candidate was "worthy" or not.¹²⁵ Æthelwold probably opposed the schemes of Alfred and in 900 he seized Wimborne and Twinham.¹²⁶ In the same year he also went to Northumbria where he was accepted as king by the Danes there. His activities in Northumbria are unfortunately unknown to us but he appeared in Essex in 902 and again received submission.¹²⁷ Only in the next year the revolt had ended when Æthelwold died in battle.¹²⁸ It is interesting to see how Æthelwold was able to gather support from the northern and southern Danelaw and at the start of his revolt, Edward the Elder was reluctant to take action against him perhaps out of fear of Æthelwold's influence in gathering this immense support from the Danes. However, it is important to note that the Danish army was not defeated and possibly the war continued until the peace was made with them in 906 at Tiddington.¹²⁹ Edward the Elder appears to have taken a more aggressive stance after this peace arrangement and possibly spent the next three years in preparation as he ordered his army to ravage parts of Northumbria in 909.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 321-322.

¹²⁵ David N. Dumville, "The Ætheling: A Study in Anglo-Saxon Constitutional History," *ASE* 8 (1979): 1-33; see especially 24-25.

¹²⁶ *ASC* ABCDEF 900.

¹²⁷ *ASC* ABCD 902.

¹²⁸ *ASC* ABCD 903.

¹²⁹ *ASC* E 906.

¹³⁰ *ASC* ABCD 909.

In 910, the Danish army retaliated and was defeated at the Battle of Tettenhall.¹³¹ The campaigns of Edward the Elder against the Danes continued throughout his reign, all of which resulted in the conquest of west and east Midlands and East Anglia. These campaigns were followed with the building of boroughs by Edward and his sister Æthelflæd, lady of Mercians.¹³² Although the main chronicle, the A version, is silent on the deeds of Æthelflæd, the so-called Mercian Register relates how she also built boroughs for defensive purposes against the Danish threat.¹³³

Edward the Elder's conquest of East Midlands and East Anglia seems simple enough: he received submission from people in Essex, and then in Bedford, Northampton, Huntingdon, Colchester and Cambridge. Scandinavian landholders either submitted to Edward or in some cases, such as that of Earl Thurketel, left Britain.¹³⁴ Thus, Edward was able to reward his followers with newly acquired territories with relative ease. On the other hand, his control over Mercia has led to some debate among modern historians. Mercia was ruled by ealdorman Æthelred, lord of Mercia, from 881 until his death in 911. He was married to Æthelflæd, Alfred's daughter and ruled jointly with her. After his death, Edward the Elder assumed control of London which was given to Æthelred by Alfred. However, whether they ruled independently is arguable. There are some charters issued by Æthelred and Æthelflæd which might suggest that they were acting as king and queen since only royalty could grant land by charters, i.e. *bocland* (bookland, title-deed, land given by charter). Nevertheless, Simon Keynes has pointed out that Æthelred, together with his wife Æthelflæd, did not use regnal

¹³¹ ASC ABCD 910.

¹³² Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 326-327.

¹³³ Mercian Register is cited as ASC MR. ASC MR 910, 912, 913, 914, 915.

¹³⁴ ASC ABCD 912, 914; A 915, 917. Thurketel left in 916; ASC A 916. Richard Philip Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 89-91.

styles in their charters but instead are generally referred to as lord and lady of Mercians.¹³⁵ Keynes further argued while we can see a clear bias towards Mercia from the main chronicle, sources such as the Annals of Ulster and the Welsh Annals both described Æthelflæd as *regina*; nevertheless, the language of the second coronation *ordo* and the regnal style used in Edward's charters both suggest he was in fact acting as king of Anglo-Saxons and not simply as king of Wessex.¹³⁶ Though it is tempting to assume Æthelred and Æthelflæd were sovereign rulers in Mercia, it might be that the autonomy they had enjoyed was a political manoeuvre by Edward the Elder: he might have wanted to avoid any offences against Mercians by assuming direct control over Mercia but instead chose to follow a gradual process; at the very least, Edward did not want to disrupt his sister's authority, which seems to have been strong. After Æthelflæd's death, Edward took control of Mercia by removing Æthelflæd's daughter Ælfwyn, an act which might have been considered as a *coup* though we do not have the evidence to see the Mercians response.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, Edward the Elder took control of Mercia with relative ease and the Mercian elite became active in the court in the later period.

Controlling the North, on the other hand, posed a greater challenge. As mentioned above, in the first half of the tenth century, the kings of Wessex rarely travelled the north of Thames and they had to rely heavily on royal agents to carry out their will. Establishing control over Northumbria, on the other hand, was a long and complex

¹³⁵ Æthelflæd carried the title *Myrcna hlædige* (Lady of the Mercians) after her husband's death. Æthelred was usually referred to as *dux* but he was possibly more than a regular ealdorman.

¹³⁶ Simon Keynes, "Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons" in N. J. Higham and David Hill, eds., *Edward the Elder, 899-924* (London; Routledge, 2001), 40-66 at 42-48. Compare with Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 25-26 and 31-32.

¹³⁷ ASC MR 918. For a doubtful evidence, see *GRA* ii 133. William of Malmesbury stated that Edward the Elder was in Mercia to put down a rebellion of the men of Chester and the Welsh. Also see, Charles Insley, "Collapse, Reconfiguration or Renegotiation? The Strange End of the Mercian Kingdom, 850-924," *Reti Medievali Rivista*, 17, no.2 (2016): 231-249.

process and the role of royal agents was even more crucial. Northumbrians seemed to have had strong separatist tendencies as kings continuously waged war against them and whatever authority kings had over them was fragile. Scandinavian settlers naturally would not want English kings to rule over them but the local population too did not wish to accept anyone's authority from the south. On the other hand, the authority of Scandinavian rulers in the north seemed to diminish to an extent: instead of choosing a ruler from their own ranks, the Norwegian invaders based in Ireland took control of York.¹³⁸ Until King Athelstan's reign, the Northumbrians did not fully submit to southern kings except for brief periods. In 918, they submitted to Æthelflæd but she died shortly after.¹³⁹ King Athelstan tried to form an alliance with Northumbrians by giving his sister to King Sihtric in marriage and after Sihtric's death he succeeded to Northumbria in 927.¹⁴⁰ In the same year Athelstan made peace with other kings; Hywel king of the West Welsh, Constantine king of the Scots; Owain king of Gwent, and Aldred son of Eadwulf of Bamburgh. This peace arrangement which took place in Eamont was also included in twelfth-century chronicles with significant differences. John of Worcester recorded that it was only after defeating these kings in battle that the peace was arranged.¹⁴¹ It is not unlikely that Athelstan may have brought an army with him to Northumbria but nevertheless twelfth-century sources are not without reliability problems and the lack of any record of a conflict in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* indicates it was simply a "peace summit", which was perhaps a renewal of the submission to Edward the Elder that had taken

¹³⁸ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 323-324.

¹³⁹ ASC MR 918.

¹⁴⁰ ASC D 926, 927. Dorothy Whitelock, "Dealings of the Kings of England with Northumbria" in her *History, Law, and Literature in 10th-11th Century England*, (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981) III, 70-88 at 70-72.

¹⁴¹ JW 386-387.

place in 920.¹⁴² This peace arrangement lasted for seven years and Athelstan's reign was not taken up with military campaigns to the extent that his father's was. He only led two campaigns in 934 and in 937, the latter being the Battle of *Brunanburh*.¹⁴³ These campaigns, however, were aimed at the Scots and perhaps to assert authority in Northumbria. Moreover, in the Battle of *Brunanburh* we see that Athelstan fought against the combined forces of Scots and Norsemen from Ireland. Campaigns against the Scots might indicate that Athelstan intended to claim an overlordship in Britain together with putting pressure on Welsh rulers in 930 and receiving submission from them.¹⁴⁴

The authority of the kings of Wessex over Northumbria in the first half of the tenth century proved to be weak as the Northumbrians chose Olaf Guthfrithson, who had fled to Ireland after his defeat at Brunanburh, as their king in 940, a year after Athelstan's death.¹⁴⁵ Athelstan's successors, Edmund and Eadred, both led campaigns against Northumbria in their reigns since the Northumbrians continuously broke their oaths. King Edmund's first action was to take the region known as the Five Boroughs to answer the attacks of Olaf. (i.e., Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham, Stamford, Derby).¹⁴⁶ He then proceeded to fight against Olaf himself who took Tamworth, but without any major conflict they seemed to come to an agreement.¹⁴⁷ It was in 944 that King Edmund finally reasserted his authority in Northumbria by expelling the Scandinavian kings, who had succeeded Olaf; namely, Olaf son of Sihtric and

¹⁴² ASC A 920. Also see Foot, *Æthelstan*, 161-162.

¹⁴³ ASC ABCDEF 934; ABCD 937.

¹⁴⁴ This information, however, comes only from William of Malmesbury. *GRA* ii. 134; Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 340-341

¹⁴⁵ ASC, D 940

¹⁴⁶ ASC, ABCD 942

¹⁴⁷ ASC, ABCD 943.

Ragnald.¹⁴⁸ However, after Edmund's death, his brother Eadred "reduced all Northumbria under his rule".¹⁴⁹ In addition, he received oaths from the Scots, possibly a renewal of the alliance Edmund had made with them in 945.¹⁵⁰ The situation with the Northumbria proved to be problematic yet again in Eadred's reign as he faced another threat despite asserting his rule as soon as he had succeeded to the kingdom and receiving oaths from Northumbrians, along with Wulfstan archbishop of York who had been playing a key role in the politics. Here, however, the chronology of the events poses significant problems. The *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* seems to be silent: only D and E versions, known as the *Northern Recession*, included the information on Eadred's reign but they are quite ambiguous. Nevertheless, a precise chronology can be constructed to a degree.¹⁵¹ In 948, Eadred ravaged Northumbria since the Northumbrians had chosen Erik Bloodaxe (son of Harold Fairhair of Norway) as their king a year before.¹⁵² However, the Northumbrians yet again gained independence as they chose Olaf Sihtricsson and then Erik again.¹⁵³ In 954 they decided to expel Erik and submitted to Eadred's rule.¹⁵⁴

954 seems to be a turning point in the politics of the tenth century as no further conflict between the West Saxon kings, or more precisely now the kings of the English, and the Norsemen took place until the 980s. The Northumbrians possibly decided that their best interests lay with the southern kings and accepted their rule indefinitely. Local politics, nevertheless, continued to play a major role in controlling

¹⁴⁸ ASC, ABCDEF 944. For a fuller narrative of King Edmund's dealings with the Northumbria, see Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 356-358

¹⁴⁹ ASC, ABCD 946

¹⁵⁰ ASC, ABCDEF 945

¹⁵¹ What follows is based on Simon Keynes, "England, c.900-1016" in Timothy Reuter, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 456-484 at 472-473.

¹⁵² ASC D 947, 948.

¹⁵³ ASC E 949, 952.

¹⁵⁴ ASC DE, 954.

the north as we shall see in more detail below. We can say, with some confidence, that the kingdom of the English was achieved by 955. Eadred's successors, Eadwig and Edgar, would both rule the kingdom in relative peace: especially King Edgar's reign was remembered as a Golden Age by monastic communities not only for his support for the reform movement but also for his peaceful reign which earned him the nickname *pacificus*.¹⁵⁵

2.2. Administrative Changes in the Tenth Century

The expansion of the kingdom during the first half of the tenth century led to some administrative changes. In the earlier periods, the terms such as hundred, shire and their roles in administration and justice, that were either ambiguous or rarely used began to have more precise definitions and occurred more regularly in legal texts. Royal diplomas show us that there was a significant number of people of Scandinavian origins now attending the court after the conquest of East Anglia and Northumbria which indicates that the kings were cooperating with Scandinavian noblemen in administration and possibly relied on them in recently conquered regions. We also begin to see that the roles of ealdormen and bishops had begun to change in this period: kings were now using these royal agents to a larger extent than previously; hence, there are more references to these agents in the law codes than in earlier ones issued by kings who had ruled smaller kingdoms. In addition, with the development of the Benedictine reform movement, abbots began to witness charters regularly as they became more involved in the politics.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ JW, 424.

¹⁵⁶ See above Chapter 1.

The administrative reforms that took place in the tenth century can be traced from the law codes. Existing functions of hundreds as judicial centres now became increasingly important, along with shires.¹⁵⁷ In earlier law codes, such as that of Ine, definite local courts were non-existent: there is one reference to some form of local court stating that if any man could not receive justice from a shire-man (*scirman*) he was to be paid 30 shillings.¹⁵⁸ In other words, a “hierarchy of courts” cannot be seen whereas in the tenth century we hear about hundred courts and shire courts.¹⁵⁹ These changes in the judicial system most probably took place as a result of expansion of the kingdom: the traditional view that the only kings could hear disputes on *bocland*, for instance, cannot be upheld when we consider the disputes that took place in the late tenth century.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, the hundreds became increasingly significant for kings’ authority during the second half of the tenth century.¹⁶¹ Early references to hundreds before King Edgar’s reign were mostly concerned with their judicial function. Thus, in a decree on pursuit of thieves in King Edmund’s third law code, it is stated that “... and if anyone shall refuse to come forward and lend his assistance, he shall pay 120 shillings to the king and 30 shillings to the hundred (*hundreto*).¹⁶² The anonymous legal text, commonly known as the Hundred Ordinance, which is sometimes attributed to Edgar, again mostly deals with the process of catching thieves and the pursuit along the hundreds. However, in the tenth-century legislation, references to

¹⁵⁷ Origins of hundreds are obscure: they might have been the ancient *provinciae* and *regiones*; see Sean Miller, “Hundreds” in *WBEASE*, 249.

¹⁵⁸ Ine 8.

¹⁵⁹ Patrick Wormald, *Papers Preparatory to the Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, vol. II: *From God's Law to Common Law*, edited by Stephen Baxter and John Hudson (University of London: Early English Laws, 2014), 192-194; accessed in 13 July 2019, <http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/reference/wormald/>.

¹⁶⁰ Alan Kennedy, “Disputes About *Bocland*: The Forum for their Adjudication,” *ASE* 14 (1985): 175-195.

¹⁶¹ Molyneaux, *Formation*, 152-155.

¹⁶² III Em 2. Molyneaux. *Formation*, 141-146.

regular meetings of hundreds indicate some changes were underway. In the second code of Edward the Elder it states:

It is my will that every reeve shall hold a meeting every four weeks; and they shall see to it that every man obtains the benefit of the public law (*folcrist*), and that every suit shall have a day assigned to it on which it shall be heard and decided.¹⁶³

Although hundreds are not mentioned in this decree, it is still significant that regular meetings became important and perhaps in the later period received an emphasis. In the Hundred Ordinance we see that the men of the hundred must assemble every four weeks.¹⁶⁴ The same text also refers to *folcrist* and all cases should be dealt in accordance with *folcrist*, just as in other courts.¹⁶⁵ This part in particular signals that the hundred court was in existence and there were other types of courts as well; in addition, the Hundred Ordinance indicates that the local courts became increasingly regulated in tenth century and given a name.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, we begin to see shires' having a judicial function as well whereas in the earlier period, particularly in the ninth century, they had served mainly for military purposes.¹⁶⁷ Just as hundreds were becoming more regulated, shires also changed in the same manner and their functions expanded, especially in King Edgar's reign. Shire courts (*scirgemot*) were to be held twice a year according to Edgar's third code and ealdorman and bishop to preside over it jointly.¹⁶⁸ There are some instances of shire courts serving as a place for dispute settlement in the second half of the tenth century, in which ealdorman and bishop presided over it and heard the dispute as it was dictated in the law code.

Especially when we look at the disputes after 975, during the anti-monastic reaction,

¹⁶³ II Ew 8.

¹⁶⁴ Hu 1.

¹⁶⁵ Hu 7.

¹⁶⁶ Wormald, *Papers*, 195-196.

¹⁶⁷ Molyneaux, *Formation*, 165-167.

¹⁶⁸ III Eg 5.1, 5.2; John Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England: 871-1216*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 48-56.

many of these disputes were heard in hundred courts and sometimes brought to shire courts.¹⁶⁹

The judicial roles of ealdormen and bishops were clearly increasing during the second half of the tenth century along with their administrative functions. In the case of bishops, they were expected to contribute to the implementation of royal decrees.¹⁷⁰ In the laws of Alfred, Athelstan and Edmund, bishops could prescribe punishments for oath-breakers and homicide.¹⁷¹ They could also oversee reeves and, if they were neglecting their duties extract fines from them.¹⁷² In addition to these duties described in the law codes, bishops are also seen leading armies in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁷³ The notion of an increased secular sphere of bishops is, to an extent, not entirely plausible especially with the ninth-century examples. One of the arguments that has been put forward by modern historians is that Oswald's growing influence and his command of an armed retinue challenged ealdorman Ælfhere's authority; thus, resulting in the anti-monastic reaction.¹⁷⁴ However, bishops had already enjoyed this type of power and it does not necessarily explain Ælfhere's attitude. We can assume to a degree that bishops' duties became more regulated in the tenth century, as various aspects of administration and justice underwent changes which might have caused a clash of interests.¹⁷⁵ Ealdormen, on the other hand, are much less frequently mentioned in the law codes and their duties are somewhat obscure compared to the bishops.¹⁷⁶ They, like bishops, led armies and there are many references to them at the

¹⁶⁹ See below Chapter 4.

¹⁷⁰ Molyneaux, *Formation*, 109-110.

¹⁷¹ Af 1.2; I As 1; II As 26-26.1.

¹⁷² As Alm 2; II As 25-25.1.

¹⁷³ ASC ABCDE 825, 836, 871, CDE 992, 1016, D 1051, CD 1056.

¹⁷⁴ Jayakumar, "Reform and Retribution," 343-344.

¹⁷⁵ See below Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of the relevant documents on Oswald's bishopric.

¹⁷⁶ Molyneaux, *Formation*, 111-112.

head of their armies in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*.¹⁷⁷ Another instance of ealdormen leading armies comes from Lantfred of Winchester, writing in late tenth century, who stated: “a certain most beloved ealdorman of the king, who was very influential in secular affairs, set off quickly with a huge retinue (*cum ingenti comitatu*) – as is the custom among Anglo-Saxons (*sicut mos est Anglosaxonum*).”¹⁷⁸ The secular affairs mentioned by Lantfred can be expanded by some passages from homilist Ælfric, who stated:

... historians who write about kings tell us that ancient kings in former times considered how they might alleviate their burdens, because a single man cannot be everywhere and sustain all things at once, although he might have sole authority. Then the kings appointed ealdormen under them, as support for themselves, and they often sent them to many battles...¹⁷⁹

As mentioned above, ealdormen, along with other royal agents, played an important role in carrying out royal decrees in their shires and implemented the kings’ authority. Their importance certainly increased during Edgar’s reign as we see more references to them in his law codes. We have already noted that they were expected preside over shire courts with bishops and during the anti-monastic reaction we see many instances of ealdormen being present at hundred courts as well.¹⁸⁰ In addition, with the fourth code of Edgar, they were expected to distribute the code within their territories which also indicates the law codes were in practical use.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ ASC ABCDE 802, 840, 845, 851, 853, 860, 871, ACDE 991, CDE 992, 1003, 1015, 1016, DE 1051, E 1052, CD 1054, 1055, DE 1063, CDE 1066.

¹⁷⁸ Lantfred of Winchester, *Translatio S. Swithun*, ch.31 in Michael Lapidge, ed., *The Cult of St. Swithun*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁷⁹ Ælfric, ‘Wyrðwriteras us secga’, in J.C. Pope, ed., *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols, Early English Text Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1967–8), ii, 728 (no. 22); trans. Loyn, *The Governance*, 101.

¹⁸⁰ See below Chapter 4. Ealdorman Æthelwine was present in many disputes concerning Ely and influenced the outcome.

¹⁸¹ IV Eg 15, 15.1. Simon Keynes, “Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England” in Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 226-257.

These royal agents were rewarded with gifts and land in most cases and, in the first half of the tenth century, influential families emerged such as that of Athelstan Half-King and Ealhhelm, whose families stayed in power until the 990s. Athelstan, Edmund and Eadred made a substantial number of grants to laymen in their reigns which greatly outnumbered the grants to religious houses.¹⁸² The kings of the earlier tenth century had relied heavily on ealdormen though their numbers declined considerably during the reign of Edgar. Especially from 970 to 975 there were only four ealdormen present at the court and instead Edgar relied on abbots whom he supported extensively and possibly sheriffs started to have an important role as well.¹⁸³ Disappearances of prominent ealdormen such as Athelstan Rota, Ælfheah and Orgar indicate that new administrative arrangements were being made for the shires of Wessex and the south east.¹⁸⁴ Administrative arrangements and the changes in governance at a local level can also be seen when we consider the growing importance of thegns during the tenth century. Thegns were part of the landed aristocracy, though their status largely depended on whom they served.¹⁸⁵ They are mostly associated with military services along with administrative duties, the latter being less emphasised by earlier scholarship and formed part of Eric John's arguments on anti-monastic reaction.¹⁸⁶ Their various duties made them valuable to tenth-century kings and they received different titles depending on their roles in the royal household. These titles, along with the people whom they served defined a thegn's position in society and in the eleventh century they became associated with

¹⁸² Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 37-40.

¹⁸³ Molyneaux, *Formation*, 181-182. For the numbers of abbots and ealdormen attesting charters regularly in the second half of the tenth century, see Appendix A.

¹⁸⁴ Simon Keynes, "Edgar, *Rex Admirabilis*" in D. G. Scragg, ed., *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975*, 3-59 at 31-32.

¹⁸⁵ Simon Keynes, "Thegn" in *WBEASE*, 459-461; H. R. Loyn, "Gesiths and Thegns in Anglo-Saxon England From the Seventh to the Tenth Century," *The English Historical Review* 70, no.277 (1955): 529-549.

¹⁸⁶ See below Chapter 4.

bocland and had to have at least five hides of land. In the tenth century, the need for permanent reliable servants led to a growth in the importance of thegns, which can be seen in the increased number of grants to *ministri* (thegns).¹⁸⁷

Finally, we now turn to the king's court in the tenth century. King Alfred brought clergy from Mercia, Wales and the continent in order to improve the state of learning in his kingdom.¹⁸⁸ These men might have been influential in politics and not just involved in ecclesiastical reform. In the reign of Edward the Elder, the presence of Mercians such as Plegmund in the court continued and Alfred's vision of a kingdom of Anglo-Saxons seemed to be carried on. Charter evidence from Edward's reign also suggests a picture of him acting as king of the Anglo-Saxons and his court was certainly comprised of West Saxon nobles, together with Mercians.¹⁸⁹ However, when political factions were formed in the case of problematic successions, the River Thames became a political border between opponents to the throne. In the case of Athelstan's succession, it seems that for a very brief period the kingdom was divided as he was first chosen by Mercians as king of Mercia in 924.¹⁹⁰ His brother Ælfweard most probably was to become king in Wessex but he died shortly after his father. Whatever plans Edward had for his sons remains unknown though some scheme might have been in place and Athelstan was not supported in Winchester; in fact, one of his charters from 925 was only witnessed by Mercian bishops.¹⁹¹ As we have seen

¹⁸⁷ There are two documents that defines the status and duties of thegn; the eleventh century tract known as *Rectitudines Singularum Personum*, (EHD ii no.172) and a compilation on status, possibly written by Wulfstan, archbishop of York, (EHD no.51); Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 486-490; Rosamond Faith, *The English Peasantry and The Growth of Lordship* (London; Leicester University Press, 1999), 155-159.

¹⁸⁸ Some of them are Werferth (bishop of Worcester), Plegmund (later appointed as archbishop of Canterbury), Grimbold, John the Old Saxon (abbot of Athelney) and Asser. See Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1983), 26-28.

¹⁸⁹ Keynes, "Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons," 49-54.

¹⁹⁰ ASC MR 924.

¹⁹¹ S395. Foot, *Æthelstan*, 73-74.

in the previous chapter, Athelstan never showed any favour towards Winchester and instead used priests from his household to secure the bishopric.¹⁹² This type of division happened again in 957 when Edgar was chosen as king of Mercia but in 957 it was clearer as the division lasted for two years. It is apparent from the charter evidence that the Edgar was supported by noblemen who had land to the north of the Thames whereas his brother Eadwig was supported by southern noblemen.¹⁹³

Another development we see in court politics is the increased number of Scandinavian noblemen attesting charters after the conquest of the Danelaw. Some of the *jarls* who submitted to Edward the Elder after his conquest of the East Midlands and East Anglia were able to keep their lands and titles.¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, it is not possible to draw a clear picture of the court in Edward's reign due to lack of charters from 910 to 924 but some changes had possibly started to take place.¹⁹⁵ These changes can be seen clearly in Athelstan's reign when people with Old Norse names started to appear more regularly in the charters' witness lists which signals a court with more diversity and, in the king's council, voices from the newly conquered regions could be heard.¹⁹⁶ From 958 to 975, the appearance of Scandinavians in royal diplomas continued and new arrangements were taking place. Especially when we look at ealdorman Oslac (Old Norse Áslákr) of Northumbria's rise in prominence in the witness lists, administrative reforms get clearer as northern regions came to be represented almost solely by him; in addition, Oslac was responsible for the distribution of Edgar's law code in Northumbria as mentioned above.¹⁹⁷ The fourth code of Edgar (the

¹⁹² See above Chapter 1.

¹⁹³ S674, S675, S676, S677, S678, S679, S681; Keynes, *Attestations*, Table LII.

¹⁹⁴ Lesley Abrams, "Edward the Elder's Danelaw" in Higham and Hill, *Edward the Elder, 899-924*, 128-143 at 138-140.

¹⁹⁵ Keynes, "Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons," 55-56.

¹⁹⁶ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 349-353; Foot, *Æthelstan*, 129-131.

¹⁹⁷ Keynes, "England, c.900-1016," 481; idem, Keynes, "Edgar, *Rex Admirabilis*," 32 n.138. For Oslac's possible Southumbrian origins see Molyneaux, *Formation*, 178-179. For an analysis of Old

Wihthorðesstan decrees) is usually seen as a recognition of the Danelaw as a “legal autonomy”.¹⁹⁸ Edgar’s legislation made the distinction between English and Danish customs by stating that; “And it is my will that the rights of the laity be maintained among the Danes in accordance with the best *lagum* which they can determine upon.”¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, the same text brings English and Danes under the same laws: “The following measure, however, shall apply generally to the whole nation – to the English, Danes and Britons in every part of my dominion...”²⁰⁰ Edgar’s legislation could be seen as a way of maintaining the unity of his kingdom by granting this legal autonomy to the Danes as his control over the northern Danelaw was possibly weak, similar to his predecessors. We have seen that kings often led campaigns against Northumbria despite receiving submission from them as the Danish presence was particularly strong there, especially in York. To resolve this problem, kings sought to install an archbishop of their choosing to secure their control in York. In the first half of tenth century, Wulfstan I, archbishop of York, possibly showed the importance of securing the see as Wulfstan mostly acted either in his own interests or in the interests of Northumbrians. He received Amounderness from King Athelstan in 934 but he is recounted among the Northumbrians who were false to their pledges in 947.²⁰¹ Wulfstan was later imprisoned by King Eadred and eventually lost his position to Osgytel.²⁰² After this point, it seems that all the archbishops of York were from the southern Danelaw, familiar with Anglo-Scandinavian customs and

Norse names in Edgar’s charters see Lesley Abrams, “Edgar and the Men of Danelaw” in Scragg, *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975*, 171-191 at 179-187.

¹⁹⁸ Abrams, “Men of Danelaw,” 171; Simon Keynes, “The Vikings in England, 790-1016” in P. H. Sawyer, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 48-82 at 72-73.

¹⁹⁹ IV Eg 2.1. The word *lagum* is translated as “constitution” in A.J. Robertson’s edition; A.J. Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England From Edmund to Henry I*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 33. However, laws or customs suits better.

²⁰⁰ IV Eg 2.2.

²⁰¹ S407; ASC D 947.

²⁰² ASC D 952, 954.

holding a southern see in plurality; possibly, Dorothy Whitelock argued, to prevent them from working for Northumbria's interests by maintaining a large sum of income..²⁰³

2.3. Conclusion

Yet he did one ill-deed too greatly: he loved evil foreign customs and brought too firmly heathen manners within this land, and attracted hither foreigners and enticed harmful people to this county.²⁰⁴

This addition by Archbishop Wulfstan (*Lupus*) of York to the annal of 959 on King Edgar is a particularly striking remark. William of Malmesbury expanded on this by saying crowds of foreigners; namely Saxons, Flemish and Danes, visited the country and had a bad influence on its people.²⁰⁵ Continuous Viking attacks which started from the 980s had an influence on Wulfstan's writings in eleventh century and by "foreigners" he most probably meant Danes but what Edgar had done remains a mystery. It has been suggested that there was a migration in 960s and 970s from Scandinavia to England, but it could very well have been a reference to Edgar's recognition of the Danelaw and giving them a degree of legal autonomy.²⁰⁶ On the other hand, Wulfstan may have had Scandinavian mercenaries and merchants in mind but the evidence on their presence in King Edgar's time is only indirect.²⁰⁷ Nevertheless, despite being remembered for his support of monastic reform, his peaceful reign and law-making, Edgar perhaps had other "ill-deeds" that we could consider. From his law codes, we see that King Edgar's focus was the administration

²⁰³ Whitelock, "Dealings," 71-76.

²⁰⁴ ASC DEF 959.

²⁰⁵ GRA ii.148.

²⁰⁶ Keynes, "Edgar, *Rex Admirabilis*," 56-57; Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 370-371 and 371 n.2.

²⁰⁷ Shashi Jayakumar, "Some Reflections on the 'Foreign Policies' of Edgar 'the Peaceable'" *The Haskins Society Journal* 10 (2001): 17-37 at 24-31.

of his kingdom but what those law codes fail to mention are the details of enforcement which must have been part of the legislation in order to carry out the administrative reforms. Simon Keynes has argued that:

Yet when Edgar insists on the enforcement of those provisions ‘which I and my councillors have added to the decrees of my ancestors, for the benefit of the all nation,’ one begins to suspect that there was rather more to his law-making than meets the eye in the extant codes.²⁰⁸

He has also pointed to Lantfred of Winchester’s remarks on Edgar’s severe laws which made Edgar both feared, as well as loved.²⁰⁹

The enforcement of laws is only briefly mentioned in Edgar’s legislation and what we have are the glimpses of it. Even though we do not have direct evidence, it is plausible to think that royal agents were responsible for the enforcement, along with enforcing burdens on the population. Especially with the monastic reform movement in the tenth century, a large amount of folkland became bookland which meant the imposition of common burdens on those lands. Some royal estates, which came into the hands of kings through gifts or forfeiture that may have not contributed to *feorm* (food rent) were also given to newly founded monasteries to sustain them, which meant more control over the estates. In addition, when we consider the size of the labour force needed for the monasteries that were being built in the second half of the tenth century, enforcement by local magnates might have taken place as the population may have been reluctant to contribute to building efforts.²¹⁰ Overall, we have a picture of a kingdom with more regulations and perhaps stricter enforcements on its population. Hundreds and wapentakes (the Danelaw variant of hundred) began to be used more efficiently by kings in the tenth century to regulate localities through

²⁰⁸ Keynes “England, c.900-1016,” 481; IV Eg 2.1a.

²⁰⁹ Lantfred of Winchester, *Translatio S. Swithun*, ch.26.

²¹⁰ Molyneaux, *Formation*, 98-99.

their agents.²¹¹ The increased number of Scandinavians in the assemblies helped kings to establish their control over territories that posed problems in the first half of tenth century. It seems that the appointments of men from the Danelaw bore fruit as we do not see warfare caused by previously settled Scandinavians after 955.²¹²

The anti-monastic reaction which followed Edgar's death, together with a succession crisis shows us that Edgar was a particularly strong ruler. Stenton claimed: "It is a sign of Edgar's competence as a ruler that his reign is singularly devoid of any recorded incident."²¹³ A similar remark has been made by Keynes who wrote "It is a sign of Edgar 'strength' that when he died, on 8 July 975, the 'peace' of his kingdom was immediately disturbed."²¹⁴ However, the anti-monastic reaction can also be seen as a reaction to Edgar's reign in general. The fact that people's lives were being increasingly regulated at the local level through agents and Edgar's supposedly severe laws indicates something different from the general consensus on the anti-monastic reaction. Byrhtferth of Ramsey writing in the 990s had said: "Now this King Edgar, mighty in arms, exulting in sceptres and diadems and regally protecting the laws of the kingdom with militant authority, had trampled under his feet all the proud necks of his enemies."²¹⁵ This representation of Edgar as a powerful and feared ruler can be seen elsewhere. William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester picked up Byrhtferth's writings and made similar remarks.²¹⁶ In particular, John of Worcester's account on Edgar's circumnavigation of Britain every year with a huge fleet has been a matter of debate.²¹⁷ For some historians, this showed the importance of the fleet for

²¹¹ Molyneux, *Formation*, 86-115. Hundreds were used to regulate trade as well; IV Eg 7, 8, 8.1, 10.

²¹² In IV Eg 12 Edgar thanks Danes for their loyalty.

²¹³ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 368.

²¹⁴ Keynes, "England, c.900-1016," 482.

²¹⁵ VSO iii ch.10.

²¹⁶ GRA ii 148; JW 412-413.

²¹⁷ JW 424-427.

King Edgar and his military capability.²¹⁸ This account, Patrick Wormald argued, cannot be dismissed completely but doubtful is at the same time as John was comparing Edgar to Alexander and Charles the Great, and perhaps exaggerated.²¹⁹ The supposed submission of eight kings to Edgar in 973 is also considered as a “peace summit” and is in fact a later construct by reformers who wished to elevate and praise him.²²⁰ However, his authority over the kingdom is not as doubtful as his foreign affairs and his reign was might have taken its toll on the population. We shall see below that there was certainly a resentment towards the newly established religious houses because of the means they used to acquire landed endowments but at the same time the disturbances might very well have been caused by increased enforcement. Nevertheless, the points which I have discussed in this chapter are indirect at best but also open a new perspective on the subject. The complexities surrounding the circumstances after 975 can be best understood once we look at the general developments of the tenth century and take them into account to explain the reaction of laity.

²¹⁸ Eric John, “War and Society in the Tenth Century: The Maldon Campaign,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (1977): 173-195 at 180-181.

²¹⁹ Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, Vol. 1: *Legislation and Its Limits* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 136.

²²⁰ David E. Thornton, “Edgar and the Eight Kings, AD 973: *Textus et Dramatis Personae*,” *EME* 10 (2001): 49-79; Julia Barrow, “Chester’s Earliest Regatta? Edgar’s Dee-rowing Revisited,” *EME* 10 (2001): 81-93.

CHAPTER III

THE SUCCESSION CRISIS OF 975 AND POLITICS FROM 975 TO 993

In this chapter we will examine King Edgar's marriages and the causes of Edward the Martyr's disputed succession. His problematic legitimacy has been debated by historians over the years and certainly caused many problems for his supporters.²²¹ In addition, the reign of Edward the Martyr is sometimes called a period of "civil war" because of the rivalry between Æthelwine and Ælfhere; two of the most powerful landowners in the tenth century who had opposing political interests.²²² Therefore, it is also necessary to look at this particular rivalry and to place it into the context of the anti-monastic reaction. There was a change in royal policy as well since we see new ealdormen being introduced into court and others were exiled. This is a pattern we see rather frequently in the second half of the tenth century and needs to be considered. We will also consider the murder of Edward the Martyr, an incident which possibly

²²¹ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 372-373; Keynes, *Diplomas*, 163-176; Ann Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1-10.

²²² Fisher, *Anglo-Saxon Age*, 298-300.

shocked his contemporaries and received much attention starting from the eleventh century as his cult was beginning to form. Contemporary sources do not tell much about the murder and did not identify the perpetrator; however, later sources claimed it was orchestrated by Queen Ælfthryth. The compiler of the *Liber Eliensis* also attributed the murder of their first abbot to her: clearly, we can say that Ælfthryth's reputation as a wicked stepmother was well established in the twelfth century as all chroniclers also blamed her. Nevertheless, her role in the tenth century was quite important both in politics and in the reform movement as well and whether she had a hand in the murder of Edward or not remains unknown. Factions were also rather obscure and the scarcity of evidence for this short reign makes reconstructing the events rather difficult but there is much to be discovered in order to understand the circumstances that led to the anti-monastic reaction and the murder of Edward the Martyr. We will also look at the early years of the reign of Æthelred II to see how the anti-monastic reaction was still persisting and somehow changed its form as bishoprics were also targeted.

King Edgar's death in 975 was unexpected:²²³ he died when he was just 32 years old and his death was followed by a succession crisis as he left two sons by different mothers. The consequences of his policies surfaced as soon as he passed away and the achievements of monastic reform seemed to crumble.²²⁴ He was succeeded by Edward the Martyr whose reign was marked by the so called anti-monastic reaction, along with changes in royal policies and an unstable realm. Ælfhere was attacking monasteries in Worcestershire; in East Midlands Ely Abbey was facing attacks from lay landowners who broke their agreements with Bishop Æthelwold or Abbot

²²³ ASC ABCDE 975; Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 372.

²²⁴ Keynes, "Edgar, *Rex Admirabilis*," 55-57.

Byrthnoth and attempted to take their lands back from the abbey. On the other hand, ealdorman Oslac of Northumbria was exiled in 975 and Edward the Martyr introduced new ealdormen into his court. There are some indications of a divided court because of his disputed succession and perhaps Edward himself was disliked due to his nature, which is obscure but needs consideration.²²⁵ Although Edward was elected unanimously, he was not supported by everyone: Dunstan, Oswald and Æthelwine were clearly on his side but Æthelwold, Ælfhere and of course Queen Ælfthryth supported Æthelred, who was only 9 or 10 years old at the time. It is possible that Oslac also supported Æthelred which partly explains his exile but most probably his exile was caused by local politics rather than his stance during the succession crisis. The West Saxon kings' control over Northumbria had always been fragile and after Edgar's death this control might have been partly lost.²²⁶ The stance of the two opposing factions taking shape between the two æthelings during the anti-monastic reaction is also rather complicated: Æthelwine was seen as a protector of monasteries during the reign of Edward the Martyr and John of Worcester called him "*dei amicus*" but the community of Ely Abbey remembered him as an enemy as he tried to take back lands from Ely and broke his promises on resolving disputes.²²⁷ On the other hand, Ælfhere was shunned by the monastic communities because of his attacks on monasteries and expulsion of monks but he was also a benefactor of some major monasteries, primarily Abingdon and Glastonbury.²²⁸ However, it is important to note that none of Oswald's foundations received anything from Ælfhere, instead he took lands from Oswaldian foundations in Worcester. Nevertheless, he was not an outright

²²⁵ Jayakumar, "Reform and Retribution," 349-350.

²²⁶ Whitelock, "*Dealings*," 70-88; Keynes, "England c.900-1016," 482.

²²⁷ JW, 426; *LE* ii ch.55.

²²⁸ Ann Williams, "*Princeps Merciorum Gentis*: The Family, Career and Connections of Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia, 956-83" *ASE* 10 (1982): 143-172 at 166-167; S1216.

enemy of abbeys and Oswald as most of Oswald's leases had Ælfhere's consent. In addition, it was Ælfhere who decided to translate Edward's body in 983 and had him properly buried.²²⁹ Sources have very little to say about Edward the Martyr's reign and the circumstances in which he was ruling are blurred.

3.1. King Edgar's Marriages and a Question of Legitimacy

Edgar had three sons by two wives. Edward, his eldest son, was born from his marriage to Æthelflæd. His marriage to Ælfthryth bore him two more sons: Edmund and Æthelred. Successions were often problematic in Anglo Saxon England as the successors were chosen by deciding which one was more "throne-worthy" and in the tenth century there was no institutional provision for the succession of a designated heir.²³⁰ In the case of choosing the successor of Edgar, there were particular problems since Edgar had somewhat unusual affairs with women in his life. In addition, Edgar was crowned twice, one was in 959 as king of all English people and the other one was his so-called imperial coronation at Bath in 973 which possibly led to some confusion among various authors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries whether his earlier marriages were legitimate or not.²³¹ In the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* there is only one entry on Edgar's marriages, that to Ælfthryth, daughter of ealdorman Ordgar.²³² However, hagiographers from the eleventh and twelfth centuries recorded that Edgar had at least two more marriages before marrying Ælfthryth in 965 as well as his rather defamatory affairs. It is possible that Edgar's affairs and seductions became gossip

²²⁹ VSO iv ch.19.

²³⁰ Dumville, "The Ætheling," 24-25.

²³¹ ASC ABCDEF 959; ABCDE 973; also see Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 368.

²³² ASC DF 965; Ann Williams notes that exclusion of his earlier marriages from the records is not particularly important as Æthelred the Unready's first marriage was also omitted; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, 1-6.

material for his court and later on within monastic communities.²³³ This circulation of rumours created an indecisive approach to Edgar's personal life by authors of most of the primary sources. Nevertheless, they all agree on how Edgar could force women into his bed. Writing in the eleventh century, Osbern of Canterbury in his *Life of Dunstan* tells us that Edward was born of an unnamed nun whom Edgar seduced in Wilton Abbey.²³⁴ On the other hand, Eadmer of Canterbury, writing a generation later, records in his own *Life of Dunstan* that Edgar had an affair with a certain woman who unsuccessfully tried to escape from king's seduction attempts by wearing a veil. However, on Edward's mother, Eadmer describes Edgar's marriage to Æthelflæd, a noblewoman perhaps of Mercian origin.²³⁵ By the time Edgar had seduced this particular woman, he was already married and according to Eadmer that was his major crime. After hearing of the king's sordid actions, Dunstan imposed a seven year penance on him. Eadmer also includes the information that Æthelflæd was daughter of Ordmær, ealdorman of East Anglia; however, at this time there is no record of an ealdorman in East Anglia called Ordmær. The ealdormanry of East Anglia was held by Athelstan Half-King and his family from 932 to 992.²³⁶ Ordmær was perhaps a thegn of little importance but Eadmer decided to change his position. Another hagiographer, Goscelin of St. Bertin, tells us of another marriage of Edgar to Wulfthryth, again a noblewoman who became the mother of Edith. After giving birth, Wulfthryth became a nun at Wilton and raised Edith there, who became a royal

²³³ Barbara Yorke, "The Women in Edgar's Life" in Scragg, ed., *Edgar, King of the English*, 143-157 at 154-156.

²³⁴ Osbern of Canterbury, *Vita S. Dunstani*, ch.35 in Stubbs, *Memorials of Dunstan*, 111-112.

²³⁵ Eadmer, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, ch.56 and 134 n.120-1 in Bernard James Muir and Andrew J. Turner, eds., *Eadmer of Canterbury: Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²³⁶ For Ordmær's identity, see Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, 4.

saint.²³⁷ Goscelin also includes information on Edgar's marriage to Æthelflæd and Ælfthryth; his account is the only one that records all three marriages of Edgar.²³⁸

Another source that needs to be considered is the *Gesta Regum Anglorum*. William of Malmesbury's account on Edgar's personal life is similar to that of Eadmer's and draws on Goscelin but he added other information which cannot be found elsewhere. Moreover, William's account of Edgar's marriages is quite different from the eleventh century sources. He mentions how Edgar raped a nun and Dunstan's imposition of seven year penance, similar to Osbern's and Eadmer's writings.²³⁹ However, he also mentions a nameless servant girl who became Edgar's "bedfellow" until his marriage to Ælfthryth.²⁴⁰ William tells us Edward's mother was Æthelflæd but does not refer to her as his wife, but on the other hand he speaks of Wulfthryth as Edith's mother and she was a wife of Edgar. He also mixed up the nameless woman Eadmer had spoken of, who tried to escape from the king by wearing a veil; William says this woman was Wulfthryth. About Ælfthryth, there is an even more interesting story. According to William, Edgar heard of Ælfthryth's beauty and sent Æthelwold, ealdorman of East Anglia, to confirm it. However, Æthelwold had deceived Edgar and lied about Ælfthryth by telling him she looked ordinary. Eventually Edgar found out about Æthelwold's lie and invited him to a hunting party in which he killed Æthelwold in order to marry Ælfthryth.²⁴¹ It is known that Ælfthryth was Æthelwold's widow but whether Edgar actually killed Æthelwold himself or ordered him to be killed is

²³⁷ Goscelin of St. Bertin, *Vita Sancti Edithe*, in Stephanie Hollis and W. R. Barnes, eds., *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 26-28.

²³⁸ For a discussion on relations between the aforementioned sources; see, Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37-44.

²³⁹ *GRA* ii ch.158.

²⁴⁰ *GRA* ii ch.159.

²⁴¹ *GRA* ii ch.157.

difficult to say. This supposed murder also explains how Æthelwine, brother of Æthelwold who had become ealdorman of East Anglia after his brother's death, took the side of Edward instead of Æthelred in the succession crisis. It is impossible to prove but some historians believed this was one of the reasons for Æthelwine's fall from royal favour.²⁴²

So far, we have looked at three different hagiographies and a chronicle all presenting different stories about Edgar's affairs and marriages. His marriage to Wulfthryth is only mentioned in Goscelin and William's accounts, but Goscelin is the only author to give the names of his three wives. However, Osbern does not mention any early marriages and Eadmer only speaks of Æthelflæd. It is easy to guess that there was gossip surrounding Edgar's seduction attempts and all of these rumours altered the facts deeply, which makes it difficult to determine the earlier marriages of Edgar and poses a chronological problem.²⁴³ Nevertheless, Edward was born of an earlier marriage and Eadmer in particular claimed that the marriage of Edgar and Æthelflæd was not consecrated when Edward was born;²⁴⁴ which leads us to the problem of the legitimacy of Edward as an heir. Although Eadmer was most probably confused over the fact that Edgar was crowned twice, there is also charter evidence that supports the legitimacy problem. In a charter of 966, a grant of privileges to New Minster, Ælfthryth witnessed as "*legitima prefati regis coniuncx*" and her elder son Edmund is referred to as "*clito legitimus prefati regis filius*"; on the other hand, Edward is only "*eodem rege clito*".²⁴⁵ As we can see from this charter, there was a clear distinction between the legitimate wife and son of Edgar and that of illegitimate and the

²⁴² Shashi Jayakumar, "Eadwig and Edgar: Politics, Propaganda, Faction" in Scragg, ed., *Edgar, King of the English*, 84-103.

²⁴³ Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, 1-10; Yorke, "The Women in Edgar's Life," 144-145.

²⁴⁴ Eadmer, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, ch.59.

²⁴⁵ S745

legitimacy was quite important for the succession.²⁴⁶ However, it is also important to note that this charter was drawn up by Bishop Æthelwold who was close to Queen Ælfthryth and supported Æthelred during the succession crisis.²⁴⁷ His political stance was opposed to that of Dunstan after the death of Edgar and also during the reign of Eadwig; Æthelwold was the only supporter of Eadwig's marriage to Ælfgifu and in turn received her favour. There is an Old English memorandum from the Abingdon archives that acknowledges Eadwig's marriage but Dunstan, along with archbishop Oda, opposed this marriage and Dunstan was later on exiled.²⁴⁸ Furthermore, Ælfgifu was related to the family of Ælfhere. In her will, she bequests a headband to her brother's wife Æthelflæd and to Æthelweard an ornamented drinking cup.²⁴⁹ This Æthelweard later became an ealdorman and claimed to descend from Æthelred I in his own chronicle.²⁵⁰ She also bequests an estate at Newnham to the "ætheling"; and to the queen a necklace of 120 mancuses, an armlet of 30 mancuses and a drinking cup. It is quite possible that the queen she refers to is Ælfthryth and the ætheling was perhaps Edmund, which puts the date of this will at 966-967. Æthelwold also received an estate at *Tæafersæat* from Ælfgifu; religious houses associated with him also benefitted from this will as Chesham was given to Abingdon, Risborough and 200 mancuses of gold to Old Minster and Bledlow and 100 mancuses of gold to New Minster. Nevertheless, Ælfgifu's will does not make the distinction between the legitimate wife of Edgar and that of the illegitimate one but does give information on

²⁴⁶ Yorke, "The Women in Edgar's Life," 148-149. For the use of the word *clito* to refer to the æthelings see; Dumville, "The Ætheling", 7-10 and 26-27.

²⁴⁷ For a sceptical approach to this view, see Dominik Waßenhoven, "The Role of Bishops in Anglo-Saxon Succession Struggles, 955x978" in Alexander R. Rumble, ed., *Leaders of the Anglo-Saxon Church: From Bede to Stigand* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 98-107 at 104-107.

²⁴⁸ S1292

²⁴⁹ Whitelock, *Wills*, no.8.

²⁵⁰ Æthelweard called Æthelred I his *atavus*; Patrick Wormald, "Æthelweard [Ethelwerd] (d. 998?)," *Chronicler and Magnate.* in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biographies*, 2004, accessed in 13 July 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8918>.

her kinship to Ælfhere's family and Æthelwold's connection to them, and therefore partly explains Æthelwold's stance in the succession crisis. Æthelwold most probably played a part in establishing more firm grounds for the sons of Queen Ælfthryth and raised the question of legitimacy of Edgar's marriage to Æthelflæd.²⁵¹ In addition, Edward's mother does not attest any charter of Edgar, which is another significant point in debate over her legitimacy.²⁵² This distinction can be seen elsewhere: in the will of Ælfheah, ealdorman of Hampshire and brother of Ælfhere, there are some phrases that strengthens the legitimacy of Ælfthryth's sons as heirs to the throne. He leaves an estate at Shirburn to Ælfthryth and specifies her position as the king's wife. He also left to the "elder ætheling" 30 mancuses of gold and calls him "king's son and hers" (*ðæs cyngæs suna and hiræ*). Another estate at Walkhampstead was left to the "younger ætheling".²⁵³ Since Ælfheah's will contained some specific information on Ælfthryth and her sons, there is no doubt that the "elder ætheling" is Edmund and the younger one is Æthelred. Furthermore, his will is witnessed by Ælfthryth and Bishop Æthelwold. Surely Ælfheah had a political agenda when his will was being drawn up and both Ælfthryth and Æthelwold had a hand in it as well.

3.2. The Succession of Edward the Martyr and Politics between 975-978

In a situation where a strong king had ruled without serious opposition, the succession would often be challenged in the hope that his heir's authority would be less effective and therefore less able to withstand an assault.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ For the connections between Æthelwold and Ælfthryth, see Yorke, "Æthelwold and the Politics," in 81-86. For Æthelwold's connections with Ælfhere's family and Ælfgifu see *ibid*, 80-81.

²⁵² Keynes, *Diplomas*, 164.

²⁵³ Whitelock, *Wills*, no.9.

²⁵⁴ Dumville, "The Ætheling," 29-30.

Despite the implications of the illegitimacy of Edward as an heir, he nevertheless became the king in 975 after Edgar's death.²⁵⁵ The process that led to his coronation, however, was not smooth because of the rumours surrounding his legitimacy, and his strong opponents perhaps had better claims because of the documentary evidence crafted by Æthelwold and Ælfthryth.²⁵⁶ Although succession crises were fairly common in Anglo-Saxon England, this particular crisis was rather more problematic and poorly documented. What we can deduce from the sources is that the death of Edgar was followed by turbulent times for the kingdom. In the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* a dramatic account is presented: "a comet appeared in the sky in the same year Edgar died and the next year a great famine occurs."²⁵⁷ The *Chronicle* also records the anti-monastic reaction led by Ealdorman Ælfhere of Mercia: the D, E and F versions tell us that the monasteries were "destroyed" by Ælfhere.²⁵⁸ On the other hand, Byrhtferth of Ramsey writing in late 990s gives us a little more detail on the events which occurred after the death of Edgar. Byrhtferth tells us of a widespread expulsion of monks in 975, and specifically mentions how Abbot Germanus of Winchcombe was expelled.²⁵⁹ However, neither Byrhtferth nor the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* mentions any specific monasteries; we know from other sources that other monasteries that were affected from anti-monastic reaction were Deerhurst, Evesham and Pershore. Byrhtferth also blamed Ælfhere for the expulsion of monks and abbots but did not mention who else might have been responsible. In addition, Byrhtferth gives us some details of a meeting at London which was held to deal with attacks on some lands of Peterborough Abbey.²⁶⁰ He records how a certain man forcibly took lands from

²⁵⁵ ASC ABCDE 975.

²⁵⁶ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 163-176.

²⁵⁷ ASC ABDCE 975. In MS C the "great famine" is a separate entry for 976; ASC C 976.

²⁵⁸ ASC DEF 975.

²⁵⁹ VSO iv chs.11-12-13-14.

²⁶⁰ VSO iv ch.13.

Peterborough and later on was killed in the process, which we shall be looking at in more detail below. Other hagiographies and chronicles from eleventh and twelfth centuries also speak of the anti-monastic reaction following the death of Edgar. In the *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, Thomas Marlborough again blamed Ælfhere for expelling monks from many monasteries, one of them being Evesham and how Ælfhere installed some canons there.²⁶¹ Ælfhere is also said to have taken Evesham and Offenham from the abbey for himself and gave Ombersley to his brother Ælfweard; in addition, he gave 8 hides of land at Binton (Warwickshire) to some of his thegns and various other lands to his priests.²⁶² In twelfth-century sources, the same story of how Ælfhere attacked monasteries and expelled monks insists with little detail. John of Worcester records in addition to the expulsion of monks, Ælfhere introduced secular clerks with their wives to monasteries.²⁶³ William of Malmesbury tells the same story as well but includes the phrase “...the clerks who some time before had been expelled from the churches revived the old feuds.”²⁶⁴ Unfortunately, none of these clerks are referred to by name and they are impossible to trace. However, when we consider the fact that the reform movement did not have the same pace everywhere, these clerks were possibly from Winchester. In fact, the community at Worcester was mixed until the eleventh century and the clerks perhaps did not have much of a “feud” with monks.²⁶⁵ On the other hand, one of the most important events of the tenth-century Benedictine reform is that Æthelwold, with the help of King

²⁶¹ Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, ch.134 in Jane Sayers and Leslie Watkiss, eds., *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

²⁶² Unfortunately, there is no charter evidence for these transactions and they are only recorded by Thomas of Marlborough.

²⁶³ JW, 425-427.

²⁶⁴ GRA ii ch.161.

²⁶⁵ Sawyer, “Charters of the Reform Movement,” 84-94; Barrow, “The Community of Worcester,” 84-99.

Edgar expelled secular clerks from Old Minster and New Minster.²⁶⁶ So it is highly probable that the clerks were from these two minster churches. William of Malmesbury also makes a remark on how these clerks were supported by some noblemen, claiming their losses were unjust. Nevertheless, their identities are also unknown to us but these noblemen could be lesser thegns whose lands were appropriated.²⁶⁷

Edward the Martyr's reign was marked with the anti-monastic reaction but, as mentioned above, his succession was disputed and perhaps this "reaction" was caused by the unstable circumstances of his reign. Furthermore, the court was divided and the two ealdormen, Æthelwine and Ælfhere supported different candidates for the throne. We have seen that various sources give information on the disputed succession of Edward the Martyr; some authors claimed the cause was the lack of legitimacy, as mentioned above; others, however, blamed Edward himself to some extent. Byrhtferth is the first source to indicate Edward's harsh nature, to the point that perhaps even his own men resented him.²⁶⁸ Eadmer and John of Worcester follows Byrhtferth's account and speak of Edward's severe personality.²⁶⁹ Moreover, John of Worcester tells how Edward was killed "by his own men" (*a suis*) but initially blames Queen Ælfthryth for the murder. Other sources say Edward was young and naïve and that was the reason for his turbulent and short reign.²⁷⁰ Whether he was truly a harsh king is difficult to determine with the sources we have available to us but his reign was certainly troubled. In addition to the attack on monasteries, the kingdom had a divided court. The succession of Edward was not smooth as the two opposing factions were both

²⁶⁶ ASC AE 964; also see above Chapter 1.

²⁶⁷ John, "War and Society," 176-179.

²⁶⁸ VSO iv ch.18.

²⁶⁹ Eadmer, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, ch.59; JW, 428-431.

²⁷⁰ Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, ch.133.

extremely powerful. Edward was initially supported by Dunstan, Oswald and Ealdorman Æthelwine of East Anglia; on the other hand, Æthelred was supported by Queen Ælfhryth, Æthelwold and Ealdorman Ælfhere of Mercia. The generally accepted view of the anti-monastic reaction is that it was mainly political because of this disputed succession and not religious.²⁷¹ Most historians have agreed with the thesis of D.J.V Fisher and have not added anything new.²⁷² Fisher argued that in order to attack his political opponents, Ælfhere decided to “attack” monasteries in Mercia, where his power lay and the anti-monastic reaction was in fact a period of “civil war”. However, there are insufficient sources to support this argument. Byrhtferth wrote how Æthelwine assembled an army in Cambridgeshire when the “madness” was spreading towards East Anglia.²⁷³ Another indication of a huge gathering, rather than the assembling of an army can be seen in *Libellus Æthelwoldi*. In order to resolve a dispute, a court consisting of eight hundreds assembled in Cambridgeshire after the death of Edgar and it has been suggested that Æthelwine showed his power through that assembly.²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, there is no evidence of an open conflict between Æthelwine and Ælfhere. It might be the case that Ælfhere tried to spread his influence into East Anglia but when we consider that Ælfhere and Bishop Æthelwold were on the same side during the succession crisis, this seems highly unlikely.²⁷⁵ Æthelwold’s major foundations lay in East Anglia, primarily the abbeys of Ely, Peterborough and Thorney. Ælfhere might have “attacked” monasteries situated in Worcestershire but foundations in the Fenlands do not record any attacks made on them by Ælfhere.

²⁷¹ Fisher, “The Anti Monastic Reaction,” 254-270.

²⁷² Some of them are, Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 372-373; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 354; Cox, *The Church and Vale of Evesham*, 52-53; Wormald, “Oswaldslow: an immunity?,” 117-128 at 128; Pope, “Monks and Nobles,” 179.

²⁷³ VSO iv ch.13; “Sed sancta mens iusti uiri Æþelwini nequaquam hoc ferre studuit; sed, congregato digno exercitu, factus est ipse dux agminum; quem protexit et confortauit princeps angelorum.”

²⁷⁴ LE ii ch.10; Alan Kennedy, “Law and Litigation in the *Libellus Æthelwoldi Episcopi*” ASE 24 (1995): 131-183 at 137-138; Williams, “*Princeps Merciorum Gentis*,” 164-166.

²⁷⁵ For contrast, see Williams, “*Princeps Merciorum Gentis*,” 160-166.

Surely there was an on-going rivalry between Ælfhere and Æthelwine but the lack of evidence for an actual “civil war” makes Fisher’s arguments rather weak. While politics did play a role in the anti-monastic reaction, the majority of the “reaction” consisted of laity trying to take back their lands from monasteries, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter.

It is now necessary to look at the careers of Ælfhere and Æthelwine in detail in order to understand the politics between 975 and 978 and how this rivalry played a huge role during the reign of Edward the Martyr. Both Ælfhere and Æthelwine have received much attention from historians in the past and there are prosopographical studies on them, which are still valuable and unchallenged.²⁷⁶ First, we will look at Ælfhere and his connections. Ælfhere started witnessing charters as an ealdorman during Eadwig’s reign in 956.²⁷⁷ He regularly witnessed Eadwig’s charters between 956 and 957 and he is also referred to as the king’s kinsman (*propinquo*).²⁷⁸ His family played a prominent role in politics throughout the tenth century. Ælfhere’s brother, Ælfheah was also an ealdorman, of Hampshire. Eadwig’s wife, Ælfgifu was also connected to Ælfhere’s family. However, Ælfhere had to wait a little longer to obtain an influential position at court. In the first half of the tenth century, we see another powerful family that rose up, that of Athelstan Half-King, ealdorman of East Anglia. He became ealdorman in 932 and starting from 946 he witnessed charters in the first position among ealdormen.²⁷⁹ Byrhtferth recorded many details about him and his family since they were all associated with Ramsey Abbey; and his nickname Half-King (*semi rex*) is also coined by Byrhtferth.²⁸⁰ He eventually retired to become a

²⁷⁶ Cyril Hart, “Athelstan ‘Half-King’ and His Family”, *ASE* 2 (1973), 115-144; Williams, “*Princeps Merciorum Gentis*,” 143-172.

²⁷⁷ Ælfhere’s first appearance as *dux* is in S607

²⁷⁸ S555

²⁷⁹ Keynes, *Attestations*, Table XLV.

²⁸⁰ VSO iii ch.14.

monk at Glastonbury in 956 and his family's influence started to diminish considerably. After Ælfhere's appointment to Mercia, his family members also enjoyed royal favour from Eadwig. On the other hand, Athelstan Half-King's successor Æthelwold did not have a long career since he died in 962. Athelstan Half-King's youngest son, Æthelwine succeeded to the ealdormanry of East Anglia in 962 but never reached the same influential position of his father. The first three positions in the witness lists of charters were held by Ælfhere and his family; on the other hand, Æthelwine always witnessed after them. After the introduction of new royal policies by Edgar, we see that the Ælfhere's family started to lose some control over politics as their positions were not occupied by family members but instead Edgar left them vacant, which was possibly a part of his policies in controlling the southern parts of his kingdom.²⁸¹ His reign's final years had only four ealdormen: Ælfhere of Mercia, Æthelwine of East Anglia, Oslac of Northumbria and Byrthnoth of Essex. Nevertheless, Æthelwine continued to witness charters in second position and the first position was being held by Ælfhere; this pattern persisted until Ælfhere's death in 983 and only then did Æthelwine start to witness charters in the first position. There is a strong indication of a rivalry between these two ealdormen during the reign of Edward the Martyr. Æthelwine supported Edward the Martyr along with Dunstan and Oswald; meanwhile Ælfhere supported Æthelred II with Queen Ælfthryth and Bishop Æthelwold. While Ælfhere was presented as an enemy of monasteries by all sources, Æthelwine was described as the protector of monasteries along with his brother Ælfwold against Ælfhere's "atrocities".²⁸² Nevertheless, Æthelwine himself was not particularly a defender of all monasteries as we shall see in the next chapter: he was

²⁸¹ Molyneaux, *Formation*, 181-182; Keynes, "Edgar, *Rex Admirabilis*," 31-32.

²⁸² VSO iv ch.13; JW, 425-427.

one of the biggest benefactors of Ramsey Abbey but his attitude towards Ely was completely different to the point that he was blamed by the Ely community for his crimes against their abbey.²⁸³ The rivalry between Ælfhere and Æthelwine did exist though; by supporting Edward, Æthelwine perhaps hoped to gain more influence and political power, but Ælfhere continued to witness charters of Edward the Martyr even though he supported Æthelred II.²⁸⁴ Perhaps he was so powerful that removing him from his position was simply impossible for Edward despite his stance against him and his attitude towards monasteries in Worcester. Oswald of Worcester's reaction against Ælfhere is also unknown; he continued to lease his lands to various men as he had done previously with Ælfhere's consent, which is a significant point to shed some light on Ælfhere's stance in reform movement and the anti-monastic reaction.²⁸⁵ Historians have tried to explain the reasons for his resentment against Oswald and his foundations by pointing to the creation of Oswaldslow in Worcestershire in 964.²⁸⁶ Details of Oswaldslow and the situation in Worcestershire are also the subject of the next chapter but giving a little bit of information is necessary here. After becoming the bishop of Worcester, Oswald started to lease a lot of lands to various people; and almost all of the leases having Ælfhere's consent. Between 975 and 978, Oswald's leases again had Ælfhere's consent except for two leased lands.²⁸⁷ However, Oswald's monasteries did not receive anything from Ælfhere who was generous to other monastic houses such as Abingdon and Glastonbury. When we try to understand the relations between Ælfhere and Oswald, it becomes difficult to present a clear picture. Since monastic communities in Worcestershire all blame Ælfhere and this tradition is

²⁸³ *Chron Ram*, 26; *LE* ii ch.55.

²⁸⁴ Keynes, *Attestations*, Table LVIII.

²⁸⁵ Some of leases that has Ælfhere's consent are S1299, S1300, S1301, S1302 and so on.

²⁸⁶ Williams, "*Princeps Merciorum Gentis*," 158-159; John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 234-248.

²⁸⁷ S1328 and S1329

followed by rest of the sources, it is all the more complex for us to determine Ælfhere's motivations. My suggestion is that he was being opportunistic; after Edgar's death he had no reason to support the monasteries and instead he took some lands back for himself. The same opportunistic attitude can also be seen with Æthelwine, who also took some lands from Ely but in a relatively subtler way.²⁸⁸ Ælfhere's continued consent was perhaps instigated by Dunstan who was still active in politics and was a friend of Oswald. There is no reason to believe Edward himself had any influence over Ælfhere but Dunstan might have been more influential.²⁸⁹ Moreover, since Worcestershire lay at the heart of Central Mercia, and so in the middle of Ælfhere's jurisdiction, perhaps it was more of a formality though this is a bit unlikely.

Looking at the other powerful ealdormen of the period, Oslac and Byrthnoth, we see that only Byrthnoth continued to hold the position of ealdorman while Oslac was exiled in 975.²⁹⁰ Byrthnoth of Essex is famous for his involvement in the Battle of Maldon in 991 and died in that battle.²⁹¹ He was a supporter of monastic reform and took the side of Edward the Martyr during the succession crisis. He was one of the most powerful patrons of Ely and helped the monks resolve some disputes as well.²⁹² When we look at Oslac of Northumbria, however, we do not have any evidence of the reasons for his banishment. John of Worcester says he was exiled "unjustly" but does not give any details and other sources also skip this development entirely.²⁹³ Although banishments for unknown reasons are not uncommon, when we are dealing with a

²⁸⁸ See below Chapter 4.

²⁸⁹ Dunstan was also instrumental in Edward's succession and most probably would not support him if he thought Edward was illegitimate; see, Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 249-250.

²⁹⁰ ASC ABCDE 975.

²⁹¹ ASC ACDE 991.

²⁹² *LE* ii ch.27; Kennedy, "Law and Litigation," 146-147.

²⁹³ JW, 428-429.

turbulent reign such as that of Edward the Martyr it becomes interesting. Oslac became ealdorman in 966 and was responsible for the distribution of King Edgar's fourth law code; a law code especially designed to cover the Northern Midlands and Northumbria, which means the regions that fall under Danelaw.²⁹⁴ Oslac most probably had Southumbrian origins like other royal agents responsible for securing control in the Danelaw in the tenth century and we can assume he was part of Edgar's policy of expanding his influence further into northern parts of Britain.²⁹⁵ Edgar tried to establish his authority in the southern parts of Northumbria through the appointment of Oslac and possibly some noblemen from Northumbria visited Edgar from time to time.²⁹⁶ We do not have any direct evidence to show King Edgar's dealings in Northumbria: one entry in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* says that Thored, son of Gunnar, ravaged Westmorland.²⁹⁷ Gunnar was an ealdorman who, like many other Scandinavian noblemen, had attested charters irregularly in from 930s to 960s and he possibly had some quarrel with King Edgar which resulted in forfeiture of Newbald from him.²⁹⁸ Another entry from the *Chronicle* regarding the dealings concerning Northumbria is Edgar's order to ravage all of Thanet, which was, according to Roger of Wendover, an act to avenge the ill-treatment of York merchants who were taken prisoner there.²⁹⁹ It is probable that the King Edgar sought to reassure Northumbrians that he was protecting their interests by punishing any wrongdoings against them. We know for a fact that kings of Wessex tried to establish their authority and influence through a gradual process of conquest and consolidation.

²⁹⁴ Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 54-55; also see Chapter 2.

²⁹⁵ Molyneux, *Formation*, 178-179.

²⁹⁶ Abrams, "Edgar and the Men of Danelaw," 179-187. For the appearance of Oslac in the charters between 970-975, see Banton, "Monastic Reform," 78-79.

²⁹⁷ ASC DEF 966.

²⁹⁸ S716. Newbald was bought from King Edgar by Archbishop Osgytel later which indicates the forfeiture and explains Thored's later actions. However, Edgar might have received the land because of Gunnar's death as well.

²⁹⁹ ASC DEF 969; *EHD* no.4.

However, how this authority was established over York and Northumbria is unfortunately obscure because of the lack of documentation. One thing we can assume is that since this authority in the North was split between the members of the house of Bamburgh, often called high reeves, and Scandinavian nobles, the kings of Wessex had more difficulty in controlling the north.³⁰⁰ Separatist tendencies of the Northumbrians might have caused the exile of Oslac in 975; he might have been accused by locals. We should consider a change in royal politics resulting in his exile as well but we cannot be certain of that either. Nevertheless, Oslac was most probably a part of Edgar's attempts at controlling the north more closely. Oslac was replaced by Thored, whose identity is debated, as Oslac had a son named Thored, who was mentioned in the *Liber Eliensis*. The other possible identity of Thored is, as we have seen before, son of Gunnar, and it is highly likely that it was Gunnar's son who eventually succeeded to the ealdormanry, possibly in 979.³⁰¹

Another development we see during the reign of Edward the Martyr is that new ealdormen were appointed. As mentioned above, King Edgar did not fill the vacancies in the last five years of his reign as he probably relied more on abbots and sheriffs; in addition, it might have been a sign of his own competency as a ruler.³⁰² However, in the reign of Edward the Martyr, the vacancies were filled with new ealdormen: the five charters issued by Edward the Martyr were attested by Æthelweard (of Western Provinces), Eadwine (of Sussex), Leofwine, and Æthelmær (of Hampshire).³⁰³ The need to fill vacancies immediately after Edgar's death is another indication of Edgar's

³⁰⁰ Thomas Pickles, *Kingship, Society, and the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 214-222.

³⁰¹ *LE* ii ch.32; Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 192-193; David Rollason, *Northumbria, 500-1100: Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 267; also see below Chapter 4.

³⁰² Molyneux, *Formation*, 181-182; Keynes, "Edgar, *Rex Admirabilis*," 31-32.

³⁰³ S828, S829, S830, S831, S832; Keynes, *Attestations*, Table LVIII; see Appendix A.

own ability to control his kingdom directly, primarily the southern parts and once he was gone, difficulties arose.³⁰⁴ Moreover, most probably as a result of the anti-monastic reaction, there are only two abbots that attested Edward's charters. Nevertheless, there is not much to say based on Edward's charters, though the appointment of Æthelweard is quite significant as he was related to Ælfhere's family, which shows they were still influential, despite the opposing political stances.

3.3. Politics between 978 and 993 in the Reign of Æthelred II

Æthelred II's reign was long and he faced various crises throughout it: there were new raids from Scandinavians, all the leading reformers had passed away by 992 and he had to spend some years in exile.³⁰⁵ It is one of the best recorded periods in the history of Anglo Saxon England but also the most misleading. Beginning his reign after the murder of his half-brother and with the Viking raids starting again from 980 and reaching their peak by 992, he has attracted a terrible reputation from chroniclers and hagiographers alike.³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, we will be only looking at his reign until 993 as we can set this date as the end of the anti-monastic reaction. The movement did not stop with death of Edward the Martyr; Æthelred the II's reign also witnessed offences against the Church. Major monastic foundations such as Abingdon and Glastonbury faced some setbacks. In addition, we also see that the anti-monastic reaction was changing character as minster churches and bishoprics were also threatened. Old Minster and New Minster in Winchester lost lands to Æthelred's thegns and

³⁰⁴ Keynes, "Edgar, *Rex Admirabilis*," 53-54.

³⁰⁵ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 373-390; Keynes, *Diplomas*, 154-231; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, passim.

³⁰⁶ Simon Keynes, "The Declining Reputation of King Æthelred the Unready" in David Anthony Edgell Pelteret, ed., *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 157-190.

Rochester was besieged by Æthelred himself. However, there is a series of charters in which Æthelred voices his regret over the offences made against the church and his own “youthful indiscretions”.³⁰⁷ The earliest of these charters is dated 993, which seems to signal a turning point in Æthelred’s reign when he started to have more control over his kingdom and the influence of his thegns over him began to diminish considerably. Now we will look at the aftermath of Edward the Martyr’s death and early years of the reign of Æthelred II.

Edward the Martyr’s murder at Corfe shocked his contemporaries. We do not know the exact details of how the murder took place: the entry from the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* records only that he was martyred at the gap of Corfe and how his kinsmen did not avenge him, but does not give us any further details. Starting from the eleventh century however, authors blamed Queen Ælfthryth for the murder. In the *Passio Sancti Eadwardi Regis et Martyris*, a work that has been attributed to Goscelin, the murder of Edward was blamed on Ælfthryth.³⁰⁸ The fact that Corfe was her estate strengthens this claim. Others followed this tradition: in the eleventh century, the account of the event in the *Passio* was generally accepted by hagiographers such as Osbern and Eadmer who re-told the story with little alteration.³⁰⁹ By the twelfth century it was well established that the queen was to blame for the murder: chroniclers such as William of Malmesbury, John of Worcester and Henry of Huntingdon all blamed Ælfthryth.³¹⁰ The queen’s role in the murder has caused much debate among historians over the years. The fact that her role had

³⁰⁷ S876 (Abingdon), S885 (Rochester), S893 (Rochester), S891 (Winchester); Keynes, *Diplomas*, 176-186. Also see below Chapter 4.

³⁰⁸ Christine E. Fell, *Edward, King and Martyr* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1971), xiv-xx and 6-7.

³⁰⁹ Eadmer, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, ch.59; Osbern, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, ch.37.

³¹⁰ *GRA* ii ch.162; JW, 429; Henry of Huntingdon, v ch.27 in Diana E. Greenway, ed., *Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon: Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

become part of tradition in the twelfth century and was consistently repeated by several chroniclers led historians to believe that she actually had a role in it. Simon Keynes however has argued against Ælfthryth's hand in the murder and has also questioned her part in anti-monastic reaction.³¹¹ Ælfthryth was named guardian of nunneries in the *Regularis Concordia* and she founded several nunneries herself, two of them during the reign of Æthelred II, namely Amesbury in Wiltshire and Wherwell in Hampshire.³¹² Her role in the Benedictine reform movement was voiced again in the Old English document known as *Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries*.³¹³ However, Keynes curiously ignored her close relations with Bishop Æthelwold who authored both documents. As mentioned above, it was also Æthelwold who drew up the New Minster foundation charter in which Ælfthryth and her son Edmund were presented as legitimate wife and son of Edgar.³¹⁴ It might be true that she was not an outright anti-monastic because of her association with Ælfhere, but it is still significant that she certainly gained much from her son's succession. Nevertheless, we cannot be certain of her involvement in the murder; Ælfthryth's consistent appearance on the documents produced by Æthelwold and her foundations does not necessarily point to her character as a reformer either. To quote Pauline Stafford: "... arguments based on consistency of character are dubious, more so than in this period when character cannot be known."³¹⁵ Furthermore, we have seen that Edward the Martyr was known for his harsh character, as mentioned above, and people around him might have acted on their own as both Byrhtferth of Ramsey and John of

³¹¹ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 171-172.

³¹² *RC*, 2 and 7; M.A. Meyer, "Women and the Tenth Century English Monastic Reform," *Revue Bénédictine* 87 (1977): 34-61 at 51-61.

³¹³ *EHD*, no.238.

³¹⁴ S745

³¹⁵ Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 59.

Worcester pointed out. It could be that the some thegns decided to choose the gentle Æthelred over him.³¹⁶

Æthelred II became king in 978 or 979, as different versions of the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* give different dates for his coronation.³¹⁷ This perhaps indicates that his coronation was not a smooth process and that the opposing political factions had to go through reconciliation after his brother was murdered. His legitimacy was well-established after the huge ceremony for the dedication of the Old Minster in 980, which was possibly his coronation as well, and he might have received ecclesiastical approval at that point.³¹⁸ It has also been suggested that “This ceremony marked the occasion of a general reconciliation between the disputing factions...”³¹⁹ On the other hand, contemporaries described the event as Æthelwold’s victory over the opponents of monastic reform.³²⁰ Wulfstan of Winchester, who was possibly present at the ceremony, gave some details of it in his *Narratio Metrica de S. Swithuno*. He wrote the names of all bishops who were present there and all of them were associated with Old Minster and New Minster.³²¹ However, he did not mention Oswald among the bishops, which is quite striking. If the ceremony was in fact a reconciliation between opposing factions as Fisher suggested, then we would expect to see Oswald there. On the other hand, it is highly likely that Oswald might have been deliberately omitted by Wulfstan who desired to describe the event, as mentioned above, as a victory for Æthelwold. By giving the names of the bishops who were previously monks in

³¹⁶ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 166-167.

³¹⁷ ASC C 978, DE 979.

³¹⁸ Daniel J. Sheerin, “The Dedication of the Old Minster, Winchester, in 980” *Revue Bénédictine* 88 (1978): 261-273 at 270-271; S835.

³¹⁹ Fisher, “The Anti-Monastic Reaction,” 277.

³²⁰ VSÆ ch.40.

³²¹ Wulfstan of Winchester, *Narratio Metrica De S. Swithuno*, in Lapidge, *The Cult of St. Swithun*, lines 77-78. The bishops mentioned by Wulfstan are Ælfstan of Rochester, Ælfstan of Ramsbury, Æthelgar of Selsey, Æscwig of Dorchester, Ælfheah of Lichfield, Æthelsige of Sherborne and Æthelwulf of Hereford.

Winchester, Wulfstan may have tried to show Æthelwold's achievements. Whatever the case might be, the ceremony proved to be a success for a period. From 980 to 984, there are no records of anything regarding the anti-monastic reaction and it is highly probable that Æthelwold had a great influence on Æthelred.³²² However, his death in 984 left his monasteries open to attacks from laity. In the cartulary-chronicle of Abingdon Abbey, *History of the Abbey of Abingdon (Historia Ecclesie Abendonensis)*, there are no records relating to the anti-monastic reaction and the reign of Edward the Martyr is completely omitted, but the community of Abingdon remembered Æthelred II's reign because of the offences committed against their monastery during his reign. In addition, Æthelred's mother Ælfthryth disappeared from witness lists after 984 which indicates that, after Æthelwold's death, her influence over Æthelred might have ended also, perhaps instigated by other noblemen.

Furthermore, Ælfhere, Æthelwine and Byrthnoth continued to be ealdormen in Æthelred's reign until their deaths but Æthelred also appointed new ealdormen in his early years. Æthelmear of Hampshire and Eadwine of Sussex both died in 982.

Hampshire was filled by Ælfric but Sussex was left vacant by Æthelred.³²³ Ælfric of Hampshire might be the thegn to whom Edward granted land at Wylve, Wiltshire in 977.³²⁴ On the other hand, Ælfhere of Mercia died in 982 and his brother-in-law Ælfric Cild became ealdorman of Mercia. However, Ælfric Cild was exiled in 985 for high treason and some other offences, according to a charter of Æthelred.³²⁵

Æthelwine continued to hold office until his death in 992 and his family lost their

³²² Keynes, *Diplomas*, 180-182.

³²³ See Appendix A

³²⁴ S831

³²⁵ S937

power and influence completely, as none of his family members became ealdorman after Æthelwine.³²⁶ Moreover, in 991, Byrthnoth died at the Battle of Maldon fighting against Scandinavians.³²⁷ By 992, none of the leading figures who had been active since the time of Eadwig, both lay and ecclesiastical, remained. It was Ælfric of Hampshire who became the leading ealdorman in Æthelred II's reign until 1016. Despite being part of the anti-monastic reaction and leading unsuccessful attacks against the Scandinavians in 992, Ælfric remained in his office and enjoyed Æthelred's favour for a long time.³²⁸ His son, Ælfgar, was not so fortunate though, as he was ordered to be blinded by Æthelred. Ælfgar was among the five *ministri* who consistently witnessed Æthelred's charters in the 980s. Some of them took some part in the anti-monastic reaction and were granted land which Æthelred had appropriated from churches.³²⁹

Starting from the 990s however, Æthelred reached maturity and the influence of the *ministri* mentioned above diminished to a degree. His mother Ælfthryth returned to court and continued to witness charters. We also see the emergence of ecclesiastics who upheld the ideals of reform and a more supportive laity, all urging Æthelred to restore the losses of monasteries and churches.³³⁰ Some new monasteries were also founded by lay magnates: Æthelmær, son of Ealdorman Æthelweard, founded Cerne Abbey and Eynsham Abbey. He was also recounted among the men who encouraged the king to return the appropriated lands in a charter for Abingdon in 993, the charter which marks the end of the anti-monastic reaction. Others mentioned in the charter are Wulfgeat, a thegn who witnessed Æthelred's charters prominently and Ordwulf,

³²⁶ ASC CDE 992. Oswald of Worcester also died in the same year.

³²⁷ ASC ACDE 991.

³²⁸ ASC CDE 992.

³²⁹ These *ministri* were Ælfweard, Ælfgar, Ælfsige, Æthelsige and Wulfsige; Keynes, *Diplomas*, 182-186.

³³⁰ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 186-202.

³³¹ In addition, Burton Abbey was founded by Wulfric Spot, another thegn who also had a prominent position as Wulfgeat.³³² Æthelred II's charter for Abingdon in 993, which marks the end of the anti-monastic reaction, gives us the names of individuals who encouraged the king to return the appropriated lands.

3.4. Conclusion

The peaceful reign of King Edgar relied heavily on his own ability to rule the kingdom and to control the lay magnates. The fact that the anti-monastic reaction began and the changes in politics occurred after his death, such as the appointment of new ealdormen to the south of the Thames, supports this view. In addition, Edgar's marriages caused a succession crisis, which was thought to be one of the main reasons for the anti-monastic reaction. Fisher's arguments, however, cannot be upheld as we lack the necessary references to an actual civil war after Edgar's death.³³³ The rivalry between Æthelwine and Ælfhere, although it existed, did not lead to an armed conflict. Tensions were high, and they may have been close to war but there is no evidence to support Fisher's suggestions. This particular rivalry most likely resulted from clashing personal interests, rather than the succession crisis: Æthelwine's family was losing influence and certainly lost the prominent position they had held, but Ælfhere's family was gaining considerable power.³³⁴ On the other hand, as we shall see in more detail in the following chapter, the anti-monastic reaction did not simply revolve around Æthelwine and Ælfhere. Both took part in it on the opposite side, but

³³¹ S876

³³² Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, 37-39.

³³³ Simon Keynes has argued that the succession crisis was essentially a personal matter which resulted from Edgar's marriages; see Keynes, "Edgar, *Rex Admirabilis*," 52-53.

³³⁴ Williams, "*Princeps Merciorum Gentis*," 157-159.

most of the actors of the reaction were small landholders who were being opportunistic. Similarly, I consider Æthelwine and Ælfhere as opportunistic as well, rather than acting in their political interests. The nobility's actions towards the monasteries can also be explained by their own personal piety and their association with certain religious houses.³³⁵ Nevertheless, when we consider the political situation in 975, it almost certainly created the necessary atmosphere for the people who wanted to take their lands back from monasteries, for reasons we will discuss below. Moreover, it can be said that the results of King Edgar's own policies surfaced, and Edward the Martyr was perhaps unfortunate in having to deal with the aftermath.³³⁶

It is also possible that the opposing political factions were not really reconciled after Edward's succession and the court might have still been divided. William of Malmesbury wrote that Æthelred and Ælfthryth enjoyed all the privileges except for the royal title.³³⁷ Thus, the succession was most probably secured by reaching a compromise. On other hand, it is also difficult to see whether a reconciliation took place in 980 as the documents describing the dedication of Old Minster were written by Wulfstan of Winchester, a pupil of Æthelwold who had his own agenda of praising him. The anti-monastic reaction seems to have ended in 980 with the succession of Æthelred II and Æthelwold's influence over him might have resulted in a temporary royal protection for monasteries. However, from 984 to 993, we see that the reaction continued, though in a different form. This time it was largely the bishoprics that were under pressure from the nobility, especially from people that were close to Æthelred, which we shall see in more detail in the next chapter. Nevertheless, Fisher's

³³⁵ Pope, "Monks and Nobles," 173; Fisher admitted that the actions of Æthelwine and Ælfhere are inconsistent in this period; Fisher, "The Anti-Monastic Reaction," 266-267.

³³⁶ Dumville, "The Ætheling," 30-31.

³³⁷ *GRA* ii ch.162.

arguments on how Ælfhere's attacks on monasteries stemmed from his political stance in the succession crisis, and how he tried to "hurt" his opponents by these attacks, are not plausible when we consider all the evidence.³³⁸



³³⁸ Fisher, "The Anti-Monastic Reaction," 269-279.

CHAPTER IV

AFFECTED MONASTERIES AND THE VARIATIONS OF THE ANTI-MONASTIC REACTION

In this chapter we will be looking at various forms of the anti-monastic reaction. The reaction was not a collective movement and reformed monasteries, together with bishoprics, did not share the same fate but faced different challenges to their landed endowments. In most cases, small landholders who previously sold their lands to a monastery retracted their agreements and seized them. In other cases, such as that of Abingdon, we see that even a bishop was part of the anti-monastic reaction and in the case Evesham, an ealdorman might be directly involved in alienation of monastic lands as well. The existence of peculiar cases such as these hinders the historian from building a narrative that would cover each and every monastery but instead one must look at the monasteries independently from each other and present the peculiarities while providing the broader background. We have already seen in Chapter 2 that many administrative changes were taking place in the tenth century which might have

resulted in a resentment towards the royal agents who now had a more direct control in the daily lives of the laity. With the tenth-century reform movement, bishops and abbots started to hold a more prominent role in administration as well and their involvement with the laity was even more personal as they were purchasing lands through agreements. However, not all agreements were made under fair circumstances but instead, as we shall see below, bishops and abbots were taking advantage of people and possibly forced them to sell their lands, in return for solving whatever problems they had.

Despite having different troubles after 975, there are several documents which show us that the affected monasteries shared some traits that seem to have been too ambitious and might have caused problems. Even though some documents in question are forgeries or dubious, such as the so-called *Altitonantis* charter of Worcester and other charters which granted great privileges, they might indicate how monks perceived their own power and influence and by forging these documents, tried to prevent future attacks to their houses.³³⁹ Especially with the *Orthodoxorum* charters, monasteries were granted the right to choose their own abbots, which was also a feature of the *Regularis Concordia* and they also claimed jurisdictional rights, primarily Worcester, Ely and Peterborough.³⁴⁰ These jurisdictional rights excluded other royal officials from certain hundreds granted to monasteries; it is clearly defined in the case of Worcester and in other monasteries they had a right to hold court,

³³⁹ For a very brief discussion on the development of jurisdictional immunities, see below Chapter 5.

³⁴⁰ *Orthodoxorum* charters are S658 (Abingdon, dated 959), S673 (Abingdon, dated 958 for 959) S876 (Abingdon, dated 993), S786 (Pershore, dated 972), S788 (Worcester, dated 972), S812 (Romsey, datable 967x975). They considered as a group as they share many similarities in formulation. It is somewhat irrelevant here to go over the debate concerning their authenticity, but it is generally assumed that S876 formed the basis for the rest of the *Orthodoxorum* charters. Also see, Charles Insley, "Where Did All the Charters Go? Anglo-Saxon Charters and the New Politics of the Eleventh Century" in *ANS XXIV* (2002), 109-127 at 116-117. The charters that granted jurisdictional immunities are S731 (Worcester), S779 (Ely), S787 (Peterborough). Also see *RC*, 6.

presided over by abbot. Eric John argued that bishops' jurisdictional rights and growing influences might have been one of the causes of the anti-monastic reaction.³⁴¹ However, all these documents are either forgeries and dubious and the jurisdictional rights did not go beyond receiving judicial profits.³⁴² We shall also see that the reality was far from what the monks had perceived as ealdormen usually presided over courts and affected the outcome of disputes. Nevertheless, I will be addressing the questions over judicial rights in this chapter for each monastery that had a claim and show evidence from tenth century that the changes in the judicial system made by King Edgar's legislation was in practice; that is, usually ealdorman and bishop presided over the court jointly.³⁴³ On the other hand, we will see that the anti-monastic reaction was a period of opportunity for lay people to reclaim their lands from monasteries since the kingdom was politically divided as we have already seen in Chapter 3. Edward the Martyr was incapable of defending the monasteries from the laity though he granted some lands to them with limited capacity. Contrary to what D.J.V. Fisher suggested, the anti-monastic reaction can be best understood as a time for opportunity when we look at the disputes. There is no denying that the politics played a role in the anti-monastic reaction but this role was, in my opinion, minimal, and does not explain the attitudes of small landholders. We will also see that the anti-monastic reaction did not cease after the accession of Æthelred II but instead changed its form slightly. In the early years of his reign the reaction does seem to have stopped but after Bishop Æthelwold's death in 984, nobles decided to seize lands from monasteries and bishoprics. Æthelred II addressed this problem in a group of

³⁴¹ John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 154-180 and 234-248.

³⁴² Wormald, "Lordship and Justice," 114-136 .

³⁴³ III Eg 5.1, 5.2. Also see above Chapter 2.

charters in which he voiced his regret and blamed people around him.³⁴⁴ According to these charters, some nobles around Æthelred II took advantage of his youth, urged him to take some estates from churches and even to buy an abbacy. Therefore, I am extending the chronology of the anti-monastic reaction. As opposed to the current consensus, the anti-monastic reaction continued into 993 when Æthelred II finally started to have a more direct control over his kingdom and made grants to religious houses which had been affected by a series of maltreatments from some nobles.

The following monasteries and bishoprics have been identified as being affected by the anti-monastic reaction: Abingdon, Deerhurst, Ely, Evesham, Glastonbury, Pershore, Peterborough, Rochester, Tavistock, Winchcombe, Winchester and York. In addition to these religious houses, I have added Ramsey and Worcester. The reason why I have added Ramsey is that its foundation and building process is well-recorded and its defence by Ealdorman Æthelwine during the anti-monastic reaction puts the situation of other religious houses into context. Lacking a powerful and influential figure such as Æthelwine to protect them, monasteries were more open to attacks. Ramsey Abbey too faced some troubles after 975 though and will be considered briefly. On the other hand, Worcester is a peculiar case with its unparalleled documents and it has been suggested that the reform movement at Worcester was not unlike that at Winchester, and Bishop Oswald's power rivalled that of Ealdorman Ælfhere, the main antagonist of the anti-monastic reaction. Especially Eric John argued consistently for a sudden change in Worcester and how this caused the anti-monastic reaction. Thus, I have decided to address his arguments here. All the monasteries and bishoprics will be examined in alphabetical order; except Deerhurst,

³⁴⁴ These charters are S876 (Abingdon), S885 (Rochester), S893 (Rochester), S891 (Winchester); Keynes, *Diplomas*, 176-186.

Glastonbury, Pershore, Tavistock and Winchcombe since the evidence for these religious houses is only fragmentary and they are considered together.

4.1. Abingdon

Abingdon was reformed under Æthelwold when he became abbot there and brought with him three monks from Glastonbury, one from Winchester and another one from London.³⁴⁵ We could say that it was in Abingdon that Æthelwold's idea of reform started to take shape which he implemented in the Old Minster at Winchester in 964. Our sources for Abingdon's fortunes during the anti-monastic reaction are scarce, as with many other monasteries. First of all, we will look at a charter of Æthelred II, in which he restored some estates to Abingdon and blamed people around him for the offences.³⁴⁶ Secondly, like many other monasteries in the twelfth century, Abingdon produced its own cartulary-chronicle but the anonymous compiler of the document is silent on the events of the period 975 to 978; this silence can be seen from Æthelwold's other foundations, the only exception being Ely which we shall see in detail below. On the other hand, the Abingdon records have much to say about the reign of Æthelred II since it was in his reign that the misfortunes of the monastery began. The deaths of Æthelwold and Osgar, abbot of Abingdon who was a pupil of Æthelwold, in 984 left the monastery defenceless against the laity.³⁴⁷ According to Abingdon chronicle, "a certain powerful man called Ælfric of the royal household bought Abingdon and made his brother Eadwine abbot there." The author also stated that the monastery's properties were taken away under Eadwine but unfortunately

³⁴⁵ *VSÆ* ch.11; see above Chapter 1.

³⁴⁶ S876

³⁴⁷ *ASC* ACDE 984.

does not state clearly which properties.³⁴⁸ The identity of Ælfric has puzzled historians for quite a while: in this period there were two ealdormen named Ælfric, one of them was ealdorman of Hampshire, the other one was ealdorman of Mercia, also known as Ælfric *Cild*, the brother in law of Ælfhere. It has been argued convincingly by modern historians, however, that this entry concerning Ælfric's behaviour was deliberate: Simon Keynes has suggested that the anonymous author of Abingdon chronicle used Æthelred's charter for Abingdon in which Ælfric's identity was blurred, possibly to avoid blaming Ælfric of Hampshire as he was still in power in 993. On the other hand, Ælfric *Cild* was exiled in 985 and might have been a perfect candidate to put the blame on.³⁴⁹ Another interesting statement from Æthelred's charter is that Bishop Wulfgar of Ramsbury was also one of the parties that urged the king to make this purchase. It is quite possible that Wulfgar was anti-monastic: that is, he might have wanted to place someone of his own choosing in Abingdon in order to diminish the community's influence. His motives are far from clear; nevertheless, as Æthelwold's pupils from Abingdon had a chance of securing a bishopric, Wulfgar might have felt threatened and decided to take action.³⁵⁰ In the instance of Abingdon, we see a bishop acting as an anti-monastic although his means were quite different from that of laity. We cannot say that the case of Wulfgar was necessarily ideological, but at the same time he took some measures against a monastic community which could have produced a candidate to a bishopric as it was decreed in *Regularis Concordia*.³⁵¹ Since this case is the only known example of a bishop being anti-monastic, it does not necessarily mean that it was unique. There were perhaps similar cases from newly established smaller monasteries; however, we

³⁴⁸ Hudson, *History of Abingdon*, 138-139.

³⁴⁹ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 177-178 and 177 n.91; Hudson, *History of Abingdon*, cxxii-cxxiii.

³⁵⁰ For Æthelwold's pupils who became bishops and abbots see above Chapter 1.

³⁵¹ RC, 6.

lack evidence and going beyond mere assumptions is not possible. Even though the monks from reformed monasteries were able to become bishops only after a certain bishop died, Wulfgar and perhaps some other bishops, acted together with powerful lay magnates and tried to secure abbacies in order to hurt the monasteries' influence and power at a local level, possibly out of fear of being replaced.

4.2. Ely

Ely was originally founded in 673 and became one of the major foundations of Bishop Æthelwold in tenth century.³⁵² Along with his other religious houses such as Peterborough and Thorney, Ely was also situated in the fenlands. Earlier landed endowments of Ely were mostly acquired through purchases either from King Edgar or from various small landholders mostly in Cambridgeshire. Thanks to two twelfth-century sources produced in Ely, we can trace the history of its estates and recover information on what transpired after the death of King Edgar. One of these sources is the *Liber Eliensis*, a cartulary chronicle of the abbey and the other one is the *Libellus Æthelwoldi Episcopi*, a work that recorded the early endowments of Ely and how these endowments were defended after 975.³⁵³ The text is thought to have been composed in Old English originally but was translated into Latin in the twelfth century. Nevertheless, it is an important document which provide great details on the nature of the anti-monastic reaction. The *Libellus* shows us that the Benedictine reform movement was not that popular and that not all transactions to acquire land for

³⁵² David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, (London: Longman, 1971), 64.

³⁵³ Fairweather, ed., *Liber Eliensis. Libellus Æthelwoldi* does not have a separate edition yet. Disputes from the *Libellus* was incorporated into book II of *Liber Eliensis* hence all of the references to the *Libellus* will be corresponding chapters in *Liber Eliensis*.

a new monastery were smooth. It is generally accepted that the transactions for landed endowments of religious houses were in a transitional state in the tenth century which caused problems later on.³⁵⁴ Even though direct purchases and exchanges were seemingly more secure than other forms of acquisition, they did not go unchallenged as well. As we shall see, many purchases also caused disputes between monks and the laity. There is no point in going over every single dispute in the *Libellus* as most of them have the same theme whereby litigants annulled their agreements.³⁵⁵ However, some of them enable us to have a better understanding of the anti-monastic reaction and why the laity would try to seize lands from religious houses.

Starting from 975, we see that many people who had agreed to sell their lands to Ely began to retract their agreements. Most of the disputes in the *Libellus* revolve around this type of issue. Because of the nature of these disputes, it has been suggested that the anti-monastic reaction was mainly a time of opportunism: small landholders who had sold their lands to the monasteries retracted their agreements since there was no powerful king such as Edgar to protect the religious houses from the laity.³⁵⁶ Evidence from Ely, in this respect, provides the best examples for understanding the nature of the anti-monastic reaction. In addition, such opportunism was also exhibited by the supposed protectors of monasteries as well. An important dispute concerning the lands at Hatfield brought Æthelwine, ealdorman of East Anglia, and the community of Ely into conflict.³⁵⁷ According to the *Libellus*, Hatfield had been given to Ely by Edgar, who had originally received that land from a certain powerful man called Ordmar and his wife. This Ordmar has been identified as the ealdorman of Devon

³⁵⁴ Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, 18-21; Raban, *Thorney and Crowland*, 16-17.

³⁵⁵ For the disputes which are not included here, see Appendix B.

³⁵⁶ Shashi Jayakumar, "Reform and Retribution," 337-352. Note that Jayakumar has strongly emphasised Oswald's supposed military power and opportunism was a relatively minor aspect of the anti-monastic reaction in his views.

³⁵⁷ *LE* ii ch.7.

and father of Queen Ælfthryth. After Edgar's death, Æthelwine and his brothers wanted to take the land for themselves and claimed that their father Athelstan, ealdorman of East Anglia, had acquired the land but that Edgar had forcibly deprived him of it. After the proceedings which took place at Slaughter, Gloucestershire, they returned 40 hides of land at Hatfield to Ely in exchange for 30 hides at Hemmingford. Here we see that Æthelwine, who was often seen as a protector of monasteries, trying to take lands from Ely along with his brothers. It is also important to mention that Ælfhere and his brother-in-law Ælfric Cild were also present at Slaughter. These proceedings were perhaps a sort of *witan* shortly after the death of Edgar, when there was less of a division among the ealdormen as we see during the succession crisis. Another possibility is the close connections between Bishop Æthelwold and Ælfhere: Æthelwold perhaps brought the suit to this meeting at Slaughter where he could receive support from Ælfhere. Nevertheless, the *Libellus* does not provide many details on this transaction and lacks a date, so it is difficult to determine the circumstances surrounding it.

There are other instances of Æthelwine's peculiar attitude towards Ely. A man called Ingulf seized 5 hides of land at Brandon from Ely after Edgar's death. However, he died shortly after and his family too within a year. Then his brother Siferth gave the land back to Ely "against the will of Aethelwine".³⁵⁸ Unfortunately the reason for Æthelwine's objection is unknown but it would be interesting to know. Why would he object to this transaction and what kind of interest did he have, if any, on that particular land are questions we cannot answer. Another example of Æthelwine's wrongdoing against Ely is the case concerning lands at Hauxton and Newton.³⁵⁹ A

³⁵⁸ *LE* ii ch.35.

³⁵⁹ *LE* ii ch.27.

certain man called Eadric *Longus* of Essex left Hauxton to King Edgar and Æthelwold wanted to purchase 4½ hides at Hauxton, along with three hides at Newton. However, Edgar died before Æthelwold managed to obtain charters for the lands in question. Meanwhile, Ælfwold, brother of Eadric decided to separate some lands from Hauxton and apparently held the charters for these two estates. Æthelwold urged Æthelwine to intervene and obtain the charters in exchange for 3 hides at Wangford. Æthelwine received the lands but failed to obtain charters for Æthelwold. Only after the intervention of ealdorman Byrthnoth of Essex were the charters finally obtained. He also gave some other charters relating to lands at Ramsey and Sproughton in Essex to Ælfwold in exchange. In yet another example, Æthelwine promised to help the monks of Ely to take 2 hides of land at Horningsea which was claimed by the sons of a man called Wulfric.³⁶⁰ In exchange for his help, Æthelwine received Kelling but did not keep his promise to the monastery. Because of his attitude towards the monastery, Æthelwine is blamed and harshly criticised by the community. He tried to take Hatfield, and took Wangford and Kelling in exchange for his help but did not help. From Ely's point of view, Æthelwine was not "*dei amicus*" but instead an enemy of the monastery.³⁶¹

On the other hand, there are many cases in which lay people decided to retract their agreements they had made with Ely. When we look at these particular cases, we see the role of opportunism and how the landed endowments were acquired through various means. In some of these cases we see that Bishop Æthelwold and Abbot Byrthnoth took advantage of the troubles of small landholders. One of these disputes concerns lands at Stretham.³⁶² Æthelwold bought a hide from a man called Ælfwold.

³⁶⁰ *LE* ii ch.49.

³⁶¹ *LE* ii ch.55, this particular chapter summarizes Æthelwine's offences against Ely.

³⁶² *LE* ii ch.10.

After the death of Edgar, Ælfwold wanted to annul this agreement and the suit was brought to a court. In the court, Abbot Byrthnoth said that Ælfwold's wife and sons were "estate-born slaves" and in order to free them, Ælfwold sold the land to Æthelwold. In another transaction, a certain Ælfric son of "earl" (*comes*) Hereric had a tax burden and sold his land in exchange for land and money to Æthelwold who promised to relieve him from his tax problem.³⁶³ Yet another case in which Æthelwold took advantage of a situation is concerning a certain man called Oslac.³⁶⁴ According to the *Libellus*, Oslac had to pay 100 mancuses of gold to the king but did not have the money and borrowed 40 mancuses from Æthelwold in addition to 40 acres of land at Cambridge, a farm and a third part of a wood in Dullingham. Similar to many disputes in the *Libellus*, Oslac annulled this arrangement after Edgar's death. These instances of land transactions in which Bishop Aethelwold took advantage of various kinds of problems small landholders were facing might explain the resentment towards the monasteries. Some people attempted to resolve their problems by selling their lands to bishops and abbots who saw this as an opportunity to turn religious houses into large landowners. In turn, those landholders who had to sell their lands saw the opportunity to retract their agreements in unsettled times.

4.3. Evesham

Evesham was originally a minster church founded by St. Ecgbine sometime around 698-704, when he was appointed bishop by Æthelred of Mercia. The early history of Evesham is blurred: there is no direct evidence to show the presence of monks in

³⁶³ *LE* ii ch.11.

³⁶⁴ *LE* ii ch.19.

Evesham but the church was headed by “abbots”.³⁶⁵ There is a list of these “abbots”, showing us a continuous succession without any interruptions except for the early tenth century. Only during the reign of King Edmund do we see thirty years of vacancy. According to Thomas of Marlborough, writing in the early thirteenth century, King Edmund gave Evesham and its estates wholly to Ealhhelm whom he had appointed as ealdorman of Mercia as a precaution against Viking threat from Dublin.³⁶⁶ Later on some Evesham estates were dispersed to various landholders.³⁶⁷ However, whether these estates had actually been part of the landed endowment of Evesham is doubtful as the charters are both spurious.³⁶⁸ Nevertheless, it is thought that the estates which were supposedly given to Ealhhelm eventually passed to his son Ælfhere who had succeeded him in the ealdormanry.³⁶⁹ Evesham was reformed during the reign of Edgar as a part of the Benedictine reform movement under Oswald. Although Evesham sources do not mention Oswald and attribute the reform to Aethelwold, this omission was caused by Evesham’s interests in the early thirteenth century when the community was trying to cut its ties with the bishopric of Worcester.³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, possibly in 975 Ælfhere expelled the monks from Evesham and installed some canons there. In addition, he took Evesham and Offenham which were part of the original endowment of the church and dispersed some lands. He gave Ombersley to his brother Ælfweard, 8 hides of land at Binton to some of his thegns and various other lands to his priests.³⁷¹ Unfortunately for us, our only source for Ælfhere’s attacks on Evesham is Thomas of Marlborough: for

³⁶⁵ Cox, *The Church and Vale of Evesham*, 3-13.

³⁶⁶ Ealhhelm’s first appearance as ealdorman is in S470. Cox, *The Church and Vale of Evesham*, 44-45.

³⁶⁷ S550; Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, ch.132.

³⁶⁸ S935, S1238

³⁶⁹ Cox, *The Church and Vale of Evesham*, 47.

³⁷⁰ David C. Cox, “St Oswald of Worcester at Evesham Abbey: Cult and Concealment.” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53, no.2 (2002): 269–285.

³⁷¹ Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, ch.133.

instance, we cannot prove whether Ælfhere gave land to his brother which he took from Evesham or whether his thegns or priests received anything from him. There are no charters or other documents describing these transactions. Nevertheless, Evesham faced a setback during Edward the Martyr's reign and the community's misfortunes continued well into the reign of Æthelred II. There are other instances of alienation of church property in the *History of Evesham* which shows us that the anti-monastic reaction did not simply cease after Æthelred's accession to the throne. Æthelred II himself caused further alienation of lands from various religious houses and Evesham was also affected. According to the *History of Evesham*, just before his death Ælfhere restored to the abbey the estates which he had taken. However, during the reign of Æthelred II, Godwine ealdorman of Lindsey supposedly bought the abbey from the king. At the same time a new abbot was appointed to Evesham. Freodegar, who was originally one of the monks who had left Glastonbury with Æthelwold, became the new abbot of Evesham and attempted to restore the abbey's endowments and expel the canons once again but he could not. It was only after the Æthelred II's return from his exile that Evesham was fully restored.³⁷²

In the case of Evesham, we see a completely different situation from that of Ely. It was not the small landholders retracting their agreements made with either the abbot or the bishop; but rather, we see that Evesham faced a direct attack from ealdorman Ælfhere. He took the original landed endowments of Evesham and supposedly granted those lands to various people. It is difficult to determine Ælfhere's motivation: according to Evesham sources Ælfhere's father had received the lands from King Edmund but we do not have charter evidence to prove this grant. If the tradition at Evesham is reliable, then Ælfhere was simply taking back what had

³⁷² Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, ch.144.

originally been granted to his family but had been subsequently lost in the reign of King Edgar. Moreover, Ælfhere restored the estates to Evesham before his death.³⁷³ On the other hand, we must again turn to Fisher's arguments on anti-monastic reaction. Ælfhere's reasons for his attacks on Evesham could very well be on a local level and political. It is often thought that Bishop Oswald's growing power and influence in Worcestershire rivalled that of Ælfhere which in turn motivated the attacks.³⁷⁴ However, we do not see that Evesham possessed some type of liberty. While other reformed religious houses claimed to have liberties and jurisdictional authority over parts of their lands, Evesham did not have a charter that granted these privileges. Thus, it is difficult for us to assume that Ælfhere attacked Evesham in order to hurt his political opponents and primarily to shatter Oswald's growing influence. A safe assumption would be that Ælfhere took those lands out of opportunism: small landholders could not always manage to take back their lands from monasteries but opposing an ealdorman would have been difficult, or even impossible. We see from Ely that ealdormen could affect the outcome of disputes, mostly in their own interests. Ælfhere could perhaps have laid claim to Evesham and Offenham lands in a hundred court just as how Æthelwine and his brothers did for Hatfield lands, but it seems he found it unnecessary. Nevertheless, Evesham faced setbacks during the reigns of Edward the Martyr and Æthelred II and was fully restored in the early eleventh century.³⁷⁵ The process of recovering lands, on the other hand, clashed with the interests of Worcester, as we will see below.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, ch.136.

³⁷⁴ Fisher, "The Anti Monastic Reaction," 252-253.

³⁷⁵ Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, ch.144.

³⁷⁶ For the causes of the rivalry between Evesham and Worcester in the early eleventh century, see Stephen David Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 163-177.

4.4. Peterborough

Peterborough Abbey was established by Æthelwold in 966 on an earlier foundation known as Medeshamstede. It was originally a minster church founded by Seaxwulf and the church was supposedly destroyed by Danes in the first Viking Age.³⁷⁷ There is also evidence to suggest that Medeshamstede was in the hands of a secular lord during the Viking Age. In an eighth-century lease for two lives for a Wulfred, he was to give food rent to the lord of Medeshamstede.³⁷⁸ Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine the early history of the site before the foundation of the abbey. Similar to the other reformed monasteries, most of the transactions to build landed endowment were purchases.³⁷⁹ They were mostly close to the abbey itself and strictly localised. In addition, Peterborough Abbey possessed a grant of freedom by King Edgar, a twelfth-century forgery which excludes the sheriff from Peterborough's hundreds not unlike *Altitonantis* charter.³⁸⁰ However, the Peterborough texts do not speak of anti-monastic reaction even though the abbey was the subject of a major dispute around 975. From the *Liber Eliensis* and the *Life of Oswald* we learn of the alienation attempt by a man called Leofsige. According to the account in *Liber Eliensis*, Leofsige made an agreement with Æthelwold but broke it and seized Peterborough, Oundle and Kettering for himself.³⁸¹ The dispute was brought by Æthelwold to a meeting convened in London, perhaps a *witan*, and the seized lands were restored to

³⁷⁷ Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, 73; S. E. Kelly ed., *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2-8.

³⁷⁸ Kelly, *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*, 21-22; S1412.

³⁷⁹ Edmund King, *Peterborough Abbey 1086-1310*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 6-12.

³⁸⁰ S787. This charter was modelled after S782. It is possible that the monks of Peterborough tried to show that their abbey enjoyed privileges similar to that of Thorney. Thorney acquired control of double hundred of Normancross in twelfth century and it is possible that Peterborough's autonomy might have been challenged with that arrangement. Kelly, *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*, 265-267.

³⁸¹ *LE* ii ch.11.

Peterborough after the case was heard. In addition, Leofsige died shortly after the event and his death is presented by Ely sources as “divine justice”. From the *Life of Oswald* however we have more insight to this particular case. Byrhtferth did not give any details on the agreement between Æthelwold and Leofsige but he recorded that a meeting took place to deal with appropriations by Leofsige.³⁸² According to Byrhtferth, Leofsige was probably killed during or shortly after the meeting in London by Ælfwold who was apparently enraged because of Leofsige. He was a thegn and brother of Æthelwine and was presented as a protector of monasteries by Byrhtferth. Neither in the *Liber Eliensis* nor in *Life of Oswald* is he named as the murderer of Leofsige but Byrhtferth implied that he was indeed the murderer. After the meeting in London, Ælfwold went barefoot to Æthelwold to seek forgiveness which seems to point to Ælfwold as the murderer.

4.5. Ramsey

Ramsey Abbey was founded by Oswald of Worcester around 969.³⁸³ The site was offered to him by Æthelwine who became a patron and protector of the house. Early landed endowments of Ramsey were mostly gifts from Æthelwine who either gave his own lands or the lands he acquired through other means and of course Oswald also purchased some lands from King Edgar. Ramsey was not particularly a target during the anti-monastic reaction; nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the early history of Ramsey and how a new monastic foundation fared in the turbulent times of Edward the Martyr’s reign. By looking at the history of Ramsey Abbey we also see how long it took for a new monastery to be built and the process of acquiring landed

³⁸² VSO iv chs.13-14.

³⁸³ Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, 73.

endowments. Thanks to a contemporary source, the *Life of Oswald* by Byrhtferth we know that it took almost 10 years to build Ramsey; in addition, the acquisition of the necessary lands to sustain the community took even longer.³⁸⁴

The early landed endowments of Ramsey included over 100 hides in Huntingdonshire. 50 hides were gifted by Æthelwine: 10 hides at Toft, 10 hides at Gidding and 30 hides at Hemmingford. In addition to these he also purchased a meadow and a mill at Houghton for the abbey. Oswald too purchased or exchanged lands with King Edgar for his monastery.³⁸⁵ Gaining most of the early landed endowments through purchases and gifts was a common strategy for most of the tenth-century foundations. In this respect Oswald followed a familiar method for Ramsey to secure the consumption needs of the community. All of these foundation and acquisition processes however brought monks into temporal affairs fraught with political and legal insecurities. As with the other monasteries, acquiring land through wills caused some problems for Ramsey but nothing major happened during the anti-monastic reaction.³⁸⁶ There are, however, some disputes recorded in the Ramsey Chronicle. One of them is a dispute concerning land at Burwell, Cambridgeshire dated 969-975, which is significant since this precedes the death of King Edgar.³⁸⁷ The dispute was resolved in a court presided over by Edgar himself, together with Dunstan, Ælfhere and Oslac. Two more disputes, which fall under the anti-monastic reaction, are recorded as well: one is again concerning land at Burwell and the other one is at Wangford, Suffolk.³⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Ramsey Abbey benefited greatly from

³⁸⁴ VSO iii chs. 13, 15-16-17. Also see above Chapter 1.

³⁸⁵ James Ambrose Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey: A Study in Economic Growth and Organization* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1957). 6-9.

³⁸⁶ Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, 12-14.

³⁸⁷ *Chron Ram*, 49-50.

³⁸⁸ *Chron Ram*, 50, 52-55. The dispute concerning land at Wangford is related to the record in *LE* ii ch.30.

the patronage of Æthelwine who protected the monastery from any attempts at alienating its lands and he was remembered by the monks as “*advocatus noster*”.³⁸⁹ In addition, Ramsey managed to acquire some lands during the reign of Edward the Martyr: he granted 2 hides at Broughton to the monastery.³⁹⁰ It was only after Æthelwine’s death that the monastery started losing land to the laity but of course these alienations do not fit into anti-monastic reaction.³⁹¹ Nevertheless, Ramsey Abbey shows us the importance of a powerful patron to offer protection from the laity’s attacks. Another important point is that since most of the early landed endowments were either gifts from Æthelwine or purchases from King Edgar the monastery’s position was much safer compared to other reformed religious houses. They had to deal with the laity more deeply whereas Ramsey had a relatively secure building process. It is also possible that since Ramsey was a completely new foundation, there was not any problems that would be caused by the presence of secular canons.

4.6. Rochester

Rochester was founded in 604 by King Æthelbert of Kent and it was one of the sees that faced some misfortunes during the anti-monastic reaction.³⁹² The attacks directed against this church did not just come from small landowners as in Ely but Æthelred II was also involved in the early years of his reign. There is a series of vernacular documents in the form of wills and memoranda that shed some light on the events surrounding Rochester along with two charters of Æthelred II. In addition, evidence

³⁸⁹ *Chron Ram*, 26.

³⁹⁰ *Chron Ram*, 74. This transaction was only recorded in Ramsey.

³⁹¹ Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, 14-15.

³⁹² Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, 74.

from Rochester indicates that the anti-monastic reaction might not have started in 975 but was possibly in effect during King Edgar's reign, even though it was on a much smaller scale.

The vernacular documents in question are about three estates: Fawkham, Bromley and Snodland. Possibly before 970 Rochester lost possession of these estates and by 975 wanted to recover them.³⁹³ We must first look at the will of Byrhttric and his wife Æscwyn and a memorandum on the histories of the aforementioned estates.³⁹⁴ A man called Ælfhere bequeathed Snodland to Rochester but the estate was held by his widow Æscwyn for a life time before its reversion to the church. However, her son Ælfric continued to hold the estate after her death and left it to his widow Byrhtwaru. In the memorandum, which is concerned with the history of estates in question and possibly prepared as a part of recovering possession of them, Bishop Ælfstan of Rochester brought the widow to a shire court to settle the dispute concerning Snodland. According to this document, the Snodland charters had been stolen from the church by priests from the same church. When we put this theft into context, these priests were probably secular canons who were the subject of reformers' resentment and might have feared facing the same fate with canons at Winchester. Another significant point, which has the potential to change the chronology of the anti-monastic reaction is that this theft and the dispute actually took place in the reign of Edgar and not after his death. Edgar himself presided over the court and gave Snodland back to the bishop and Fawkham and Bromley were at first forfeited by Edgar but were eventually given to the widow with reversion to Rochester. However,

³⁹³ Colin Flight, "Four Vernacular Texts from the Pre-Conquest Archive of Rochester Cathedral" *Archaeologia Cantiana* 115 (1995) 121-153. Simon Keynes, "King Æthelred the Unready and the Church of Rochester" in Bruce R. O'Brien and Barbara Bombi, eds., *Textus Roffensis: Law, Language, and Libraries in Early Medieval England*, (Turnhout, Brepols, 2015), 315-362 at 322-329.

³⁹⁴ Whitelock, *Wills*, no.11 (S1511). Memorandum is S1457.

a kinsman of Byrhtwaru called Byrhttric urged Byrhtwaru to annul this agreement after King Edgar's death and held onto these three estates. This dispute too was brought to a court in Kent which was presided over by Eadwine, ealdorman of Sussex, but this time the bishop had to give up on the estates. Simon Keynes has approached the presence of Eadwine sceptically as his office was in Sussex and would not have presided over the court in Kent but Bishop Ælfstan might have been under pressure nonetheless.³⁹⁵ Eric John on the other hand believed that Eadwine was one of anti-monastic ealdormen who had lost his power and influence as a result of the reform movement but he failed to give any evidence to support his claim.³⁹⁶ Eadwine's presence at this particular court might have been due to a personal interest in the estates in question though. Another estate of Rochester which caused a dispute was Wouldham: a memorandum concerning the history of Wouldham tells us how the estate was bequeathed by a man called Ælfheah but due to complexities surrounding the ownership, the matter was eventually brought to court.³⁹⁷ Ælfheah's brother, Ælfric, had a son named Eadric and since Ælfheah had no heir of his own, leased Wouldham to Eadric. However, Eadric died and instead his widow held Wouldham but a certain man called Leofsunu married Eadric's widow and broke the terms of Ælfheah's will and the matter was resolved in the presence of Archbishop Dunstan who recovered the land from Leofsunu. The event possibly took place between 964 and 988 as Bishop Ælfstan and Dunstan were both involved; a more precise date range would be 975-988, as I believe this was possibly part of the anti-monastic reaction as we see a certain man being opportunistic and trying to seize land from Rochester in this case.

³⁹⁵ Keynes, "King Æthelred the Unready and the Church of Rochester," 330-331.

³⁹⁶ John, "War and Society," 179.

³⁹⁷ S1458; Keynes, "King Æthelred the Unready and the Church of Rochester," 332-334.

In the reign of Æthelred II, Rochester faced yet another crisis. For unknown reasons, Æthelred II laid waste Rochester in 986.³⁹⁸ None of the sources offer any explanation as to why Æthelred II decided to attack, and the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* and other contemporary sources are silent about it. Twelfth-century chronicles such as William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum* and John of Worcester's *Chronicle* only speak of a dispute between Æthelred and Ælfstan, bishop of Rochester for reasons unknown.³⁹⁹ Sulcard of Westminster, writing in the late eleventh century, provides some insight into this event. According to him, Archbishop Dunstan accused Æthelred II of appropriating lands from Rochester and giving them to his *miles*.⁴⁰⁰ This animosity can also be seen in the charters from the years between 984 and 987 in which Ælfstan did not attest as a bishop and only returned in 988.⁴⁰¹ The fact he began to disappear from witness lists in 984 is also significant as it shows that whatever dispute they had, it probably did not suddenly occur in 986. Æthelred II's grant of 10 sulungs at Bromley to his *minister* Æthelsige in 987 is also a significant point in this particular dispute.⁴⁰² As we have seen, Bromley was part of Rochester's landed endowment and possibly Æthelred decided to take a part of it to grant it to his thegn. However, this attempt obviously caused problems with the bishop and Æthelred took action against the diocese. Whatever precise reasons Æthelred II had for attacking Rochester, in the later years of his reign he regretted his actions and restored the appropriated lands to the church with two charters, which belong to the same group of charters mentioned

³⁹⁸ ASC CDE 986.

³⁹⁹ GRA ii ch.165. JW, 434-435.

⁴⁰⁰ Bernard W. Scholz, "Sulcard of Westminster: 'Prologus De Construccione Westmonasterii'" *Traditio* 20 (1964): 59-91 at 74-76 and 89-90.

⁴⁰¹ Keynes, *Atlas*, Table LXa.

⁴⁰² S864

above. In the charter dated 998 he specifically blamed Æthelsige for urging him to attack Rochester and taking advantage of his youth.⁴⁰³

4.7. Winchester

The bishopric of Winchester was founded in the seventh century and when Æthelwold became bishop there in 964, his first action as a bishop was to expel secular canons from Old Minster, and later from New Minster, marking a new phase in tenth-century monastic reform.⁴⁰⁴ As we have seen above, this expulsion was part of Æthelwold's own ideology and understanding of monasticism, rather than being something that he decided together with Dunstan and Oswald since the latter two did not perform the same harsh practice. Therefore, it is natural to expect some sort of reaction from the secular canons who were expelled from Winchester to take advantage of Edward the Martyr's incompetence as a ruler. Unfortunately, we do not have evidence to see whether these secular canons played any direct role in the anti-monastic reaction but they perhaps stirred some troubles in Winchester. On the other hand, there is one case of reconciliation between reformers and secular canons from Winchester. Lantfred of Winchester, writing around the 970s, in his *Translatio et Miracula S. Swithuni*, tells the story of Swithun's appearance to a smith and his instructions on finding his remains: Swithun asked the smith whether he knew "a certain canon expelled from Old Minster named Eadsige." The smith eventually found a tenant of Eadsige who carried out the message and Eadsige played an important role in discovering and

⁴⁰³ S885 and S876. Keynes, *Diplomas*, 176-180, idem, "King Æthelred the Unready and the Church of Rochester," 337-347.

⁴⁰⁴ Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, 80-81; ASC AE 964; also see above Chapter 1.

translating Swithun's relics.⁴⁰⁵ He was among the three canons who later returned to Old Minster and became monks according to Wulfstan of Winchester.⁴⁰⁶

There are, however, at least two known cases to consider in Winchester. A writ of Queen Ælfthryth, regarding the large estate at Taunton is of interest here when we look at the anti-monastic reaction. In the writ, Ælfthryth gives testimony on an estate at Ruishton, which was part of Taunton. According to this writ, all the thegns who had land in Taunton were now expected to obey the will of Æthelwold or leave their lands when King Edgar gave Taunton to Æthelwold.⁴⁰⁷ However, a certain man called Leofric had made a deal with Æthelwold and held his land for one life and later, together with his wife, tried to hold onto the estate and accused Æthelwold and Ælfthryth for forcibly depriving him of that land. Ælfthryth claimed they had not forced him but there is a possibility that might have been the case. From Ely we see that many landholders were making deals with Æthelwold under difficult circumstances and Leofric might have been a victim in this particular case or was perhaps being opportunistic. How many thegns became dispossessed by Edgar's arrangement cannot be determined as we lack further evidence but we can assume that some of them might have disagreed and left. Eric John, on the other hand, argued that this writ was not unique and similar arrangements possibly took place elsewhere, especially in Oswaldslow.⁴⁰⁸ However, lack of evidence of any similar arrangements, let alone any type of reaction from thegns apart from Leofric's case in Winchester being recorded, is absurd, if there was a widespread arrangement. Winchester being the centre of Æthelwold's school and producing many late tenth- and early eleventh-

⁴⁰⁵ Lantfred of Winchester, *Translatio S. Swithun*, ch.1; Lapidge, *The Cult of St. Swithun*, 260 n.43.

⁴⁰⁶ *VSÆ* ch.18.

⁴⁰⁷ S1242; Harmer, *Writs*, no.108; for comments, see *ibid*, 380.

⁴⁰⁸ I have addressed Eric John's arguments on Oswaldslow below.

century writers, would have had something to say about thegns if they had caused problems for the church.

In Æthelred II's reign, we see that the Old Minster lost some of its landed endowments. According to a charter of Æthelred in 997, the king appropriated 100 hides at Downton and Ebbesborne.⁴⁰⁹ With an earlier charter dated 986, 5 hides at Ebbesborne was given to king's faithful *minister* Ælfgar and perhaps similar charters existed where Æthelred rewarded his *ministri*. The appropriation was part of Æthelred's scheme of rewarding people in his court.⁴¹⁰ Similar to charters for Abingdon and Rochester, the king again attributes this to this being young and naïve and how he was led astray by people around him. When we consider that attacks against churches had begun only after Æthelwold's death, it suggests he had a remarkable influence on him and possibly kept others at court from performing any abuses against religious houses.⁴¹¹

4.8. Worcester

Worcester presents us with the most peculiar case out of all religious houses in the tenth century. The foundation of the diocese goes back to the late seventh century when Archbishop Theodore was reorganising the church in Anglo-Saxon England. It was initially planned to serve the old kingdom of the Hwicce and the bishops of the Hwicce later on became bishops of Worcester.⁴¹² In 962, Oswald was appointed as bishop of Worcester. His role as a bishop and how he carried out reforms in his

⁴⁰⁹ S891

⁴¹⁰ S861

⁴¹¹ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 180-182.

⁴¹² Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, 81; Christopher Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: The Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680-1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 7-16.

diocese has become a hot debate topic among historians of early medieval England. The understanding of Oswald's own reform agenda also shapes the understanding of the anti-monastic reaction in Worcestershire. There is not much point in going over the details of the reform movement, but it is now generally assumed that, apart from Old Minster and New Minster where the secular canons were expelled with king's support, reform was more of a gradual process.⁴¹³ Cathedral chapters generally did not become monastic suddenly as happened in Winchester in tenth century but slowly turned monastic: this happened in the early eleventh century at Canterbury, and in the late eleventh century at Worcester and Durham. Among the extensive studies dedicated to tenth century reform movement, there are only D.H. Farmer and Eric John who argued for a sudden change in Worcester.⁴¹⁴ While Farmer was more open to other possibilities in his arguments, John consistently argued for sudden change and never altered his views. John based his arguments on the *Life of Oswald* by Byrhtferth of Ramsey, John of Worcester's chronicle and a forged charter dated 964 but created in the early twelfth century. Although Byrhtferth's work is almost contemporary to the events, written around 1000, John of Worcester wrote in the twelfth century. In addition, both authors were closely associated with Oswald: Byrhtferth was a monk at Ramsey which was Oswald's main monastic foundation, and John was also monk at Worcester. Both John and Byrhtferth's connection to Oswald should urge the historian to approach them very carefully when considering the tenth-century reform movement, and Oswald's role in the reform and the anti-monastic reaction. Finally, the charter in question, the so-called *Altitonantis* charter, is an obvious forgery but Eric John maintained his view that it must have been based on

⁴¹³ Sawyer, "Charters of the Reform Movement 84-93; Barrow, "The Community of Worcester, 961-c.1100," 84-99; also see above Chapter 1.

⁴¹⁴ Farmer, "The Progress of the Monastic Revival," 10-19; John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 154-180 and 234-248.

some earlier authentic document, which is lost.⁴¹⁵ He was not alone in this view; writing much earlier, Frederick Maitland also argued that the *Altitonantis* charter has an authentic basis. However, Maitland was mostly concerned with the issue of private justice whereas John was focusing on the reform movement. The peculiarity of Worcester is also evident from its Domesday Book entry:

St. Mary's Church of Worcester has one hundred, which is called *Oswaldslow*, in which lie 300 hides. By an arrangement of ancient times the bishop of this church has from them all the payments of the jurisdictions, all customary dues there which belong to the supplies of the household, both the king's service and his own, so that no sheriff can have any suit there. The whole county confirms this.⁴¹⁶

There are no parallels in Domesday Book that claims such immunity and the exclusion of the sheriff is particularly striking. We will see below that Pershore too had originally a triple hundred of its own and despite not having direct control over it, they claimed all tithes. On the other hand, Worcester had a jurisdictional immunity, which Maitland and John believed to be existent and the *Altitonantis* charter was a supporting document. For Maitland, the *Altitonantis* charter is "the most celebrated of all land-books."⁴¹⁷ He admitted the charter is a forgery but also argued it must have contained some truth. Maitland also believed that Oswald, who leased many of Worcester's lands to various kinds of people, was forming a feudal tenure on his triple hundred and emphasised the military service expected from Oswald's tenants. Although Oswald's leases do not specify the services expected from tenants, a letter from Oswald to King Edgar, known as the *Indiculum*, did set out the services and Maitland believed this document, formed the basis for Oswald's leases.⁴¹⁸ According to the *Indiculum*, "they (the tenants) shall fulfil the whole law of riding (*equitandi*) as

⁴¹⁵ S731. John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 237-238; idem "War and Society," 192-193.

⁴¹⁶ DB i 172c, *Worcestershire* 2:1.

⁴¹⁷ Frederick William Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in The Early History of England*, (Cambridge, 1897; London: Collins, 1965), 317-319. Citations refer to the 1965 edition.

⁴¹⁸ Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, 357-368; S1368.

riding men should” and all tenants were expected to “be subject to the authority and will of that *archiductor*, who presides over the bishopric, on account of benefice (*beneficium*)”. These arrangements have led some historians to believe new military arrangements were made in Worcester which in turn challenged Ælfhere’s authority as ealdorman.⁴¹⁹ However, this particular letter’s authenticity and its contents are debated. Arguments have mainly revolved around the role of thegns: thegns as a class were mainly a military branch of the society but their duties were not confined to it and they had various forms of obligations to perform.⁴²⁰ Their roles largely depended on whom they served, and it was their lord’s ranking that determined their standing in society. Eric John believed that the creation of Oswaldslow and the reform movement at large led to many thegns being dispossessed. He based his argument on the writ of Queen Ælfthryth and her testimony on Edgar’s arrangement regarding the large estate of Taunton.⁴²¹ We have seen above that King Edgar ordered all thegns who had land in Taunton to obey Æthelwold’s will or leave. However, there is no evidence that shows a similar arrangement had been made for Worcester and possibly the arrangement was unique to Winchester. Æthelwold, being an extremist in his implementation of reforms, might have sought Edgar’s support, who in turn provided him with this peculiar arrangement. Contrary to Maitland and John, Frank Stenton argued that “the law of riding” does not necessarily mean military service but rather escorting a lord from place to place. In addition, since Oswald’s leases had various forms of services, “very incoherent series of obligations”, it is difficult to argue for strictly military arrangements. Stenton admits that some of Oswald’s tenants were thegns and military service was customary for them due to their class, but the leases

⁴¹⁹ John, “War and Society,” 178-179.

⁴²⁰ See above Chapter 2.

⁴²¹ John, “War and Society,” 176-177.

did not involve any military obligations to bishop.⁴²² Vanessa King, who studied Oswald's tenants, identified three distinct groups from the leases: laymen, family of Oswald and cathedral clergy. She also emphasised the lack of specific services expected from the tenants, the only exception being church dues. King has argued that most probably these services were matters of oaths and oral agreements made between the bishop and his tenants.⁴²³ Another point of view was that of Christopher Dyer whose argument was more of a synthesis of John and Stenton's views. Dyer argued that Edgar created Oswaldslow as a jurisdictional immunity and as a "shipful"; that is, a group of three hundreds providing sixty men for a ship in royal fleet, one man for each five hides. He discredited *Altitonantis* but argued that there might have been a new military organisation in Worcester which cannot be disregarded completely.⁴²⁴ The shipful, or ship-scot (*scypgesceot*), has not been yet proven to have been introduced by King Edgar, though some type of military re-organisation was in place possibly in the last quarter of tenth century. In the early eleventh century (1001-1012), Bishop Æthelric of Sherborne complained to Ealdorman Æthelmær of losing 33 hides, which was part of his 300 hides that had provided for the shipful, in the days of his predecessors.⁴²⁵ There are some references to shipful in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as well.⁴²⁶ Whatever the case might be, we can at least say that the tenurial arrangements were in a transitional state during Edgar's time and supporting evidence for the military organisation in Worcester is lacking to prove Oswald's supposedly growing power against Ælfhere. Moreover, we have seen that bishops at

⁴²² F. M. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism 1066-1166: Being The Ford Lectures Delivered in The University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1929* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 122-130.

⁴²³ Vanessa King, "St. Oswald's Tenants" in Brooks and Cubitt, *St. Oswald of Worcester*, 100-116.

⁴²⁴ Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, 39-44. For a strictly military perspective, see Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 121-125. Also note that Abels did not go into details of the authenticity of Worcester material and relied heavily on eleventh-century evidences.

⁴²⁵ Harmer, *Writs*, no.63; for comments see *ibid*, 266-268.

⁴²⁶ ASC CDE 1008.

the head of armies was something not unusual in Anglo Saxon England and it seems to me that Ælfhere did not feel threatened by Oswald in this regard.

Nevertheless, both the *Altitonantis* charter and the *Indiculum* gave the bishop and monks unrivalled authority and power in Worcester, especially in terms of jurisdictional immunity, which seems to be a bit too convenient.⁴²⁷ Patrick Wormald tackled the question of whether this jurisdictional immunity actually existed or not and argued that the entry in the Domesday Book possibly resulted from a known dispute between Worcester and Evesham.⁴²⁸ According to this lawsuit, Bishop Wulfstan claimed against Walter, abbot of Evesham “sake and soke, burial church-scot, and the exactions and all the customs which are due to the church of Worcester in the hundred of Oswaldslow, and the king’s geld and service and military expeditions on land and at sea for the fifteen hides at Hampton and the four hides in Bengeworth.”⁴²⁹ To sum up the case, Wulfstan and Walter reached a compromise: Evesham held Hampton and Bengeworth but recognised Worcester’s authority. Wormald pointed out that the witnesses that supported Wulfstan were all tenants or ex-tenants in Worcestershire and possibly both written and oral evidence had been manipulated.⁴³⁰ The agreement between Wulfstan and Walter was also heard by four Domesday commissioners - namely, Bishop Remigius of Lincoln, Henry de Ferrers, Walter Giffard and Adam, brother of king’s steward Eudo - and resulted in the aforementioned Domesday Book entry: Wulfstan was able to secure Worcester’s prominent position which might have been under pressure from Norman lords and

⁴²⁷ R.R. Darlington ed., *The Cartulary of Worcester Cathedral Priory*, (London: Pipe Roll Society, 1968), xiii-xix.

⁴²⁸ Wormald, “Oswaldslow: an Immunity?” 117-128 and idem, “Lordship and Justice,” 114-136.

⁴²⁹ R.C. Van Ceanegem, ed. *English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I. Volume I: William I to Stephen* (London: Selden Society, 1990), no.15.

⁴³⁰ Wormald, “Lordship and Justice,” 123-125.

Wulfstan was possibly adjusting to changes.⁴³¹ Thus, the *Altitonantis* charter remains a forgery and the Domesday Book entry for Worcester seems carefully planned to claim jurisdictional rights by Wulfstan. The letter known as the *Indiculum*, on the other hand, does not seem like an outright forgery but was possibly not contemporary and might have been produced in the eleventh century. It is probable that the letter was included in Hemming's Cartulary (earliest cartulary of Worcester), in order to reassess Worcester's rights over their tenants. We do not have any records of lands of Worcester being alienated during the anti-monastic reaction but in the eleventh century alienation became a serious problem because of Oswald's leases for three lives. The first part of Hemming's Cartulary, also known as *Liber Wigorniensis*, was possibly compiled under instructions of Wulfstan, archbishop of York around 1002, in order to record leases and subsequent lessees.⁴³² In the second part, Hemming complained about how the lands of the church was "taken away by wicked men" and he blamed English, Danes, Norman nobility and monks of Evesham.⁴³³ From Hemming's Cartulary and other evidence which pressed the bishop's rights over Oswaldslow signal that Oswald's habit of leasing almost certainly caused problems for Worcester in the eleventh century. Despite receiving much attention from Maitland and John, who thought that the creation of Oswaldslow led to the anti-monastic reaction and how Oswald was forming a kind of feudal tenure with his leases, the main problem with the leases is that they tended to become hereditary. Leasing was not new in the tenth century and the practice can be seen in the ninth

⁴³¹ Wormald, "Lordship and Justice," 133-135.

⁴³² N.R. Ker, "Hemming's Cartulary: a description of the two Worcester Cartularies in Cotton Tiberius A xiii" in Richard William Hunt, W. A. Pantin, and R. W. Southern, eds., *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 49-75; Stephen Baxter, "Archbishop Wulfstan and the Administration of God's Property" in Matthew Townend, ed., *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of The Second Alcuin Conference* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 161-205 at 165-176.

⁴³³ Thomas Hearne, *Hemingi Chartularium Ecclesiae Wigorniensis* (1723), i 248-288; Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, 17-18.

century as well though not on the scale of Oswald's.⁴³⁴ However, Oswald's leases for three lives led to permanent alienation of substantial amount of lands in the eleventh century. The reason why we have many records of Oswald's leases is that those lands did not revert to Worcester, and the records could have been used later to claim them.⁴³⁵

It is worth mentioning here that Worcester itself did not face any attacks from Ælfhere: none of the estates of Worcester was alienated from the church during the anti-monastic reaction and instead Oswald continued to lease church lands to various kinds of people. Another important point is that most of the leases had Ælfhere's consent and even during the short period between 975 and 978 when Edward the Martyr was king and the anti-monastic reaction was going on, Ælfhere's consent can still be seen in the leases with only a few exceptions.⁴³⁶ The evidence we have from Oswald's leases shows us that Ælfhere was not an outright enemy of monasteries. At the very least, perhaps in the case of a bishopric it was more difficult to take lands from the church but in the later stages of the anti-monastic reaction we see that even the bishoprics were not safe from the laity (e.g. Rochester and Winchester). Although in the later stages, Æthelred II was directly involved in the attacks whereas Edward the Martyr was of pro-monastic party. Nevertheless, attacking Worcester would not have been a problem for Ælfhere: it was in Worcester that his power lay and a relatively weak king such as Edward would not have caused much problem for him. Yet he did not attack Worcester whereas Oswald's monasteries were not safe from him.

⁴³⁴ Susan Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word" in McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy*, 36-62 at 48-49.

⁴³⁵ Reginald Vivian Lennard, *Rural England, 1086-1135: A Study of Social and Agrarian Conditions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 164-166; Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, 17.

⁴³⁶ Exceptions are S1328 and S1329

4.9. York

Our sources for York are even more troublesome in the context of the anti-monastic reaction. In 975, ealdorman Oslac of Northumbria was exiled, and some historians have suggested that his exile was linked with the anti-monastic reaction; however, there is not any evidence that shows that link.⁴³⁷ The only extant source presenting some information on York's landed endowments in the second half of tenth century is a memorandum of Oswald.⁴³⁸ In this document, Oswald recorded the estates that were either purchased or forfeited by his kinsman and predecessor Oscytel, archbishop of York. However, the church was "robbed" of the estates by a certain man called Thored. His identity is a bit obscure as there are two Thoreds known to us: one was son of Ealdorman Oslac and the other was a son of Gunnar, who raided Westmoreland in 966. A Thored appears in the witness lists in 979 and perhaps from Oslac's exile in 975 until that point the ealdormanry was vacant though it could also mean that Thored did not attend royal assemblies. Richard Fletcher argued convincingly that this Thored was son of Gunnar and not the son of Oslac since it is highly unlikely that he would succeed his father after he was exiled.⁴³⁹ Fletcher has also shown Gunnar and Thored's connection with the estate at Newbald: Gunnar received it from King Edgar in 963 but later gave it Oscytel. It is possible that Newbald changed hands due to Thored's ravaging of Westmorland and that he was punished by Edgar who took his lands. Thored's decision to ravage Westmorland, on the other hand, might have been a reaction to Oslac's rise to power by becoming

⁴³⁷ ASC ABCDE 975. Julian Whybra, *A Lost English County: Winchcombeshire in The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1990), 103-104.

⁴³⁸ S1453

⁴³⁹ R. A Fletcher, *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 70-72.

ealdorman in 966.⁴⁴⁰ Nevertheless, we can be certain to a degree that Oslac's exile was not connected to the anti-monastic reaction as some historians have suggested but instead a part of local politics.⁴⁴¹ It is also difficult to determine whether Thored was anti-monastic or not: he seized some lands from York according to Oswald's memorandum but at the same time he made some grants to the community of St. Cuthbert.⁴⁴² He was, in a sense, acting very much like Æthelwine who had protected Ramsey but tried to take land from Ely. What seems to be clear is that Thored's actions were more personal, as he might have had a grudge after the losing the ealdormanry to Oslac and being deprived of Newbald. Moreover, it has been suggested that Thored's appointment to ealdormanry of Northumbria might not have been a royal appointment but instead that Æthelred II was under pressure.⁴⁴³

4.10. Other Religious Houses

There were relatively smaller monasteries that were affected by the anti-monastic reaction which lack contemporary evidence. We have instead twelfth-century historians writing about them and what they had to say about those religious houses is only superficial. Nevertheless, it is necessary to talk about them briefly. The religious houses in question here are Pershore, Deerhurst, Winchcombe, Glastonbury and Tavistock. Although Glastonbury cannot be regarded as a small monastery, since it was an important place for royalty and received many gifts either from them or from nobility, there is at least one instance of an "attack" on Glastonbury. William of Malmesbury wrote how a certain rich man called Ælfwold was ill and went to

⁴⁴⁰ ASC DEF 966; S716.

⁴⁴¹ Keynes, "England c.900-1016," 482.

⁴⁴² S1660

⁴⁴³ Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 57-58.

Glastonbury to become a monk there and also gave some of his estates to the monastery. However, after he was cured he had a change of heart and took back his estates with support from Æthelred II.⁴⁴⁴ For other monasteries, William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* is an indispensable source but unfortunately, he has little to say about them. According to William, Pershore was a small monastery founded during Edgar's reign but decayed and never recovered.⁴⁴⁵ Similarly, Deerhurst was another small monastery but was "now an empty shadow of its former past."⁴⁴⁶ However, William's account of Pershore seems a bit misleading: the monastery had an *Orthodoxorum* charter, a group of charters granting immunities to monasteries and freedom of electing abbots, as mentioned above. Possibly, the original arrangement that had been made for Pershore was perhaps similar to that of Worcester; that is, Pershore had a triple hundred of its own, which is also stated in the Domesday Book.⁴⁴⁷ From the charter we can see that Pershore had more than 300 hides granted by Edgar though the document is not as ambitious as Worcester's *Altitonantis* charter. However, the total number of hides Pershore held in 1086 was only 58, which indicates the church suffered greatly from alienation which took place during and possibly after the anti-monastic reaction but it is not possible to determine whether Ælfhere was responsible.⁴⁴⁸ The same kind of ambiguity can be seen when we look at Deerhurst. Not much is known of its early history but it might very well have been affected by the anti-monastic reaction and was revived to a degree by Odda

⁴⁴⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Vita S. Dunstani*, ii ch.25.

⁴⁴⁵ *GPA* iv ch.162.

⁴⁴⁶ *GPA* ii ch.76.

⁴⁴⁷ S786; DB i 175c *Worcestershire* 9:7. By 1086 Pershore was entitled to receive all church taxes from 300 hides but did not hold them.

⁴⁴⁸ We should of course consider the effects of Norman Conquest in eleventh century as well though it is highly likely that most of Pershore's lands might have been taken away by Ælfhere and his accomplices or possibly in the early years of Æthelred II's reign.

of Deerhurst in eleventh century.⁴⁴⁹ Winchcombe, on the other hand, has a little more information since Byrhtferth of Ramsey tells us how Abbot Germanus, along with his monks in Winchcombe, was expelled by Ælfhere in 975 and went to Ramsey, together with his monks.⁴⁵⁰

When we look at the case of Tavistock, it remains a peculiar monastery in the context of the tenth-century reform movement. The monastery was not founded by the reformers themselves, but by Ordgar, ealdorman of Devon, who was father-in-law of King Edgar in 961. Ordgar's son Osulf finished the building of the monastery around 980 and its foundation charter was granted by Æthelred II in 981.⁴⁵¹ This charter is yet again another one of Æthelred's charters in which he blames his youthful indiscretions, but it does not fall into the group of charters mentioned earlier since the date is too early but most probably modelled after them. Æthelred stated in the charter how he had been unable to prevent attacks on Tavistock and voices his regret. The charter does not provide information on who was responsible for these attacks, but the document fits in with the anti-monastic reaction and Tavistock might have suffered some losses around 975. The early histories of the monasteries being poorly documented present some difficulties for the historian, but the glimpses of the anti-monastic reaction can still be seen in these records. It would have been interesting to see more examples from other religious houses with perhaps more details.

⁴⁴⁹ Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, 64; Ann Williams, *Land, Power and Politics: The Family and Career of Odda of Deerhurst*, (The Friends of Deerhurst Church, 1996).

⁴⁵⁰ VSO iv.11. Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, 80. It is striking that the annals of Winchcombe did not provide any information on the monastery's misfortunes during the anti-monastic reaction.

⁴⁵¹ Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, 77; S838.

4.11. Conclusion

With the evidence we have from monasteries that are known to have been affected by the anti-monastic reaction, it is clear that this reaction was initially a complex matter and did not simply result from politics, as Fisher suggested but instead we see many instances of opportunism.⁴⁵² The supposed rivalry between Æthelwine and Ælfhere may have played a partial role in the anti-monastic reaction; however, it is not plausible to think that Ælfhere attacked monasteries in order to hurt his political opponents.⁴⁵³ Reasoning behind this suggestion is based on only partial evidence from Byrhtferth and the *Liber Eliensis*. On the other hand, we have many more examples of the laity's involvement in the anti-monastic reaction and how they seized lands from religious houses as soon as King Edgar died. Although the evidence from some monasteries is only fragmentary, they fit into the picture presented more clearly from Ely sources. The "attacks" on monasteries, led by Ælfhere, on the other hand, cannot be seen from contemporary sources but rather the tradition was set at the end of tenth century by Byrhtferth and the twelfth-century historians picked up his narrative and expanded it. Out of all the monasteries that we have looked at, only Evesham seems to have been directly targeted by Ælfhere, who possibly had a personal interest in its lands, if we assume that the thirteenth-century chronicle of Thomas of Marlborough is reliable. On the other hand, Ælfhere's motives for expelling monks from Winchcombe are not so clear. It is probable that the small landholders who had lost their lands to monasteries in Worcestershire may have turned to Ælfhere for support and urged him to act. However, it is highly possible that the disputes we see from Ely might have taken place at other monasteries as well and records, if there were any,

⁴⁵² For a list of all the disputes and "attacks" discussed in this chapter, see Appendix B.

⁴⁵³ Fisher, "The Anti Monastic Reaction," 254-270.

may have been lost.⁴⁵⁴ In addition, monasteries might have taken those lands back and the monks possibly did not feel the need to keep the records. As we have seen from Worcester, one of the main reasons for having many records of Oswald's leases and producing a cartulary in the eleventh century, might have resulted from the need to produce necessary documents to lay claim for those lands.

The information on land transactions in the *Libellus* also provides more insight into the building of landed endowments for monasteries. We have seen in several cases that bishop Æthelwold and abbot Byrhtferth took advantage of landholders' problems and made deals with them in return for solving those issues. The same type of transactions might have taken place for other monasteries as well. Especially when a newly founded monastery lacked a patron to support them, whoever founded that monastery had to rely on his own wealth to purchase land from laity, or appeal to the king. When it came to the purchases, especially those that were made under duress, this might have caused resentment towards the monks. Furthermore, we should also consider the heirs of landholders, who had become disinherited in these processes. From Rochester and Ely, there are some cases that show this type of issue: in some instances when a certain someone bequeathed land to a religious house, the disinherited would want to seize that land and the matter would be resolved in the court. It should also be emphasised that the monasteries were much more vulnerable to "attacks", compared to bishoprics. When a monastery had a powerful and influential patron, it would be safe from alienation attempts, such as in Ramsey's case. On the other hand, bishoprics seemed to be secure from attacks as we lack the necessary evidence to prove that they shared the same fate as the monasteries. We have seen only two instances of attempts at alienation after 975 from Winchester and

⁴⁵⁴ Keynes, "England, c.900-1016," 482-483.

Rochester. However, when we look at the period from 984 to 993, bishoprics were also vulnerable and Æthelred II was directly involved in the maltreatment of churches. He later regretted his actions and blamed people around him in the group of charters mentioned above. These charters show that the nobility took advantage of Æthelred II's youth to alienate land from bishoprics, though at the same time it might have been part of a policy to form a new court by giving gifts. Whatever the actual reasons might have been, Æthelred's charter for Abingdon shows a distinct case of the anti-monastic reaction where a bishop was supposedly involved, together with an ealdorman. Even though we do not have similar instances to make a comparison, it remains a significant case and might indicate that perhaps there were other monasteries being pressured by bishops.

Finally, supposed jurisdictional immunities of monasteries and bishoprics possibly did not exist or were in a transitional state in the tenth-century England and what Eric John argued for cannot be proven since the evidence is highly dubious. While his suggestion that thegns were disinherited has some value, we do not have enough evidence to prove that many of them lost their lands due to the reform movement. Although we have evidence to show that ealdormen were involved in the anti-monastic reaction and their attitudes varied, we cannot simply say that "they were discriminated against."⁴⁵⁵ Monasteries did not suddenly acquire unrivalled influence but rather they had to rely on nobility for support, despite being forbidden to seek it according to the *Regularis Concordia*; moreover, many of the disputes were resolved in the courts presided over by an ealdorman. Their attitudes towards a certain monastery were usually based on social and familial bonds: Ælfhere made many

⁴⁵⁵ Eric John, "The World of Abbot Ælfric" in Patrick Wormald, Donald A. Bullough, and Roger Collins, eds., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983), 300-316 at 302-303.

grants to Glastonbury despite “attacking” Oswald’s monasteries; Æthelwine was indifferent to Ely in some cases and tried to take land from them but protected Ramsey.⁴⁵⁶



⁴⁵⁶ Pope, “Monks and Nobles,” 173.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

... ideals that were clear-cut and uncompromising, but also rather narrow-based, and that were formed by a very few committed protagonists.⁴⁵⁷

This very brief but accurate statement on the Benedictine reform movement by John Blair provides, in fact, an elaborate picture of the reform and its aftermath. The evidence we have seen in the previous chapters has demonstrated how limited the reform was and how it was carried out by a few individuals, finding little support from the laity and instead relying on royalty. When this support from royalty disappeared, the monasteries were left defenceless against the laity who saw the opportunity of the political situation and retracted their agreements. Moreover, there were many complexities with the anti-monastic reaction as bishoprics were also targeted, such as at Rochester and Old Minster. In Patrick Wormald's words: "A huge

⁴⁵⁷ Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 346-347.

upheaval in landed property had taken place.”⁴⁵⁸ We could say that the reaction was directed against the church at large to a certain extent and the basis was opportunism. In Edward the Martyr’s reign it was his own incompetent rule that enabled the laity to seize monastic lands and in Æthelred II’s reign it was the people around him, his thegns, who took advantage of his youth, if we believe Æthelred’s own statements at face value. Detailed analysis of evidence has shown that the anti-monastic reaction took many forms and was a complex phenomenon which did not result from politics only and the laity’s involvement has been neglected by modern historians. This thesis has elucidated the errors of the previous works and tried to shed more light on the anti-monastic reaction. In addition, documents have revealed that the reaction was not confined to the reign of Edward the Martyr but that the early years of Æthelred II’s reign, especially after the death of Bishop Æthelwold in 984, also witnessed it.

In the second chapter we have looked at the conquests of the kings of Wessex in the first half of the tenth century and how these conquests were followed by several administrative changes which implemented royal control in the newly conquered regions. Wessex was a small enough kingdom for a king to travel with ease and to have direct control. However, once the conquest of East Anglia and Northumbria was completed, together with the complete integration of Mercia into Wessex, the kings now had to rely heavily on royal agents in order to assert their rule as they could not possibly travel everywhere. The kings of Wessex, instead, rarely travelled North of the Thames and the ealdormen, bishops and reeves started to be used more frequently to carry out the royal will. With the monastic reform movement, we also see that the abbots too became deeply involved in politics and they started to attest charters

⁴⁵⁸ Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 156.

regularly in increased numbers. Especially in the case of King Edgar we see how the number ealdormen decreased considerably whereas the number of abbots increased, possibly a sign of his reliance on abbots, though it might also indicate that he relied on sheriffs as well. Nevertheless, the lack of references to abbots in the tenth-century law codes might signal that this reliance was Edgar's personal preference. Whatever the case might have been, the increased use of royal agents to assert authority and possible strict enforcement of laws on the local level might have caused some problems for the common population which resulted in a reaction. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that the anti-monastic reaction was a result of the policies of King Edgar but there is a possibility that his reign might have been deemed oppressive by the laity.

In the third chapter, I analysed Edgar's marriages, the succession crisis in 975, and the politics between 975 and 993. In tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England, successions were often problematic and despite the indications of Edward the Martyr being an illegitimate child, he succeeded his father in 975. However, two political factions were formed after Edgar's death and the opposition to Edward supported his half-brother Æthelred II. It has been often argued that the anti-monastic reaction stemmed from the politics of this particular period, meaning that the succession crisis caused this reaction and that opposing political factions "attacked" monasteries in order to damage their opponents. Both in the introduction and in the third chapter I have addressed this notion. It was first suggested by D.J.V. Fisher and then his views shaped the consensus regarding the anti-monastic reaction. Nevertheless, a thorough examination of sources showed that the politics of the succession crisis only played a partial role and the explanations given by Fisher and other historians are quite limited. None of the sources indicate the direct effect of the politics on the anti-monastic

reaction. On the other hand, the succession crisis and the turbulent reign of Edward the Martyr created the necessary atmosphere for the laity to seize lands from monasteries. The opposing political factions too were not clearly pro and anti-monastic but instead they acted on their personal interests rather than serving political goals. Great landowners such as Ælfhere and Æthelwine sometimes protected monasteries but also seized lands from them.

The fourth chapter investigated each monastery individually in order to determine how they were affected by the anti-monastic reaction; in addition, we have seen that the reaction took many forms. The reaction mainly consisted of the laity trying to seize lands from monasteries in an opportunistic way and in some cases the bishoprics were subject to alienation. Especially when we look at the majority of disputes from the Ely sources, it was the small landowners who had previously sold their lands to monasteries who started to retract their agreements. Furthermore, contrary to Fisher's views, these landowners were acting on their own and being opportunistic; they were not agents of ealdormen who had political agendas. On the other hand, involvement of ealdormen in the anti-monastic reaction varied: Æthelwine was remembered as the protector of monasteries and Ramsey Abbey benefitted greatly from his patronage whereas Æthelwine's approach to Ely was completely different. He seized Hatfield from Ely which he eventually returned to the monastery. In addition, Æthelwine promised to resolve some disputes for Ely in exchange for some estates but he apparently did not keep his promises and held onto the estates he received. In the case of Ælfhere, we also have a similar picture: he was a patron of Abingdon and Glastonbury so he was not an outright enemy of monasteries but instead his attitude towards some religious houses was possibly caused by his own personal interests. Moreover, the only direct evidence of Ælfhere being an enemy comes from Evesham

sources and the silence of other sources, whether contemporary or in later writings, indicate that Ælfhere was particularly interested in Evesham's landed endowments because of his supposed connection through his father. However, Ælfhere's involvement in the anti-monastic reaction is given in much broader terms by Byrhtferth of Ramsey and others who followed his narrative. It is quite possible that Ælfhere had some conflict with Bishop Oswald of Worcester, which explains the narrative set by Oswaldian foundations.

The anti-monastic reaction was also related to popular piety in the tenth century. John Blair has argued that the Benedictine reform movement had little effect on popular piety since people continued to bequeath gifts to minster churches, instead of to newly founded monasteries.⁴⁵⁹ Blair based his arguments on evidence from wills and it is true that the extant wills mostly mention minster churches rather than monasteries, with few exceptions. Other wills which were incorporated into cartulary-chronicles to tell the history of a particular estate show us that people bequeathed lands to monasteries as well; however, these wills were only included when there was a dispute concerning an estate. Obviously, the reform movement was still in its early stages by 975 in terms of the laity's awareness. This does not mean that people were completely oblivious to the changes as they provided the labour force necessary for the building processes and there is some evidence of topographical changes in the city of Winchester due to the reform. King Edgar ordered some buildings near the Old Minster to be demolished in order to provide the monks with a degree of seclusion.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁹ John Blair, "Introduction: From Minster to Parish Church," in John Blair ed., *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition, 950-1200* (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1988), 1-19 at 3-6.

⁴⁶⁰ S807; Alexander R. Rumble, ed., *Property and Piety in Early Medieval Winchester: Documents Relating to the Topography of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman City and Its Minsters*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 136; idem "The Laity and the Monastic Reform in the Reign of Edgar" in Scragg, ed. *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975*, 242-251.

In addition, the expulsion of secular canons and changing cathedrals into monastic ones meant that the monks would be providing the pastoral care. Some minster churches were also absorbed by the monasteries. P.H. Hase has argued that the tenth-century reformed movement disrupted the parochial system and the estates belonging to the mother churches were made into independent parish churches.⁴⁶¹ Nevertheless, it seems that the laity felt more connected to the minster churches instead of new foundations, which might have affected their attitude towards monasteries.

We also see that the anti-monastic reaction had some effect on the minds of the second generation of the reformers. Clergymen who upheld the ideals of the reformers, such as Ælfric, Wulfstan Cantor and Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, produced works that had the feeling of nostalgia. Christopher A. Jones, who has analysed Ælfric's writings, suggested that this nostalgia mainly resulted from the anti-monastic reaction and the Scandinavian invasions that started in 980.⁴⁶² Like Ælfric, Wulfstan's most famous work, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, could be read along the same lines.⁴⁶³ Wulfstan made many references to offences against the church in his sermon and Eric John argued that this was not merely rhetoric but instead Wulfstan was talking about the anti-monastic reaction.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, Wulfstan also made reference to the laws in the time of King Edgar and how these laws were crumbling. This second generation of reformers, active from 990s to 1016, looked back at the achievements that had been made in the reign of Edgar and remembered it as a "golden age".

⁴⁶¹ P.H. Hase, "The Mother Churches of Hampshire" in Blair, ed. *Minsters and Parish Churches*, 45-66 at 48-49.

⁴⁶² Christopher A. Jones, "Ælfric and the Limits of the 'Benedictine Reform'" in Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan, eds., *A Companion to Ælfric* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 67-108 at 73-77.

⁴⁶³ *EHD* no.240.

⁴⁶⁴ John, "War and Society," 177-178

5.1. Possible Continental Counterparts

The Benedictine reform movement in Anglo-Saxon England was preceded by the reform movement in France in the ninth century. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that something similar might have had taken place there, and in Germany under Otto I where he founded monasteries in the early tenth century. In the ninth century, France went through a monastic reform movement under Louis the Pious and his chief advisor Benedict of Aniane.⁴⁶⁵ Louis was known for being a great patron of monasteries in Aquitaine before he became the emperor. In 816 and 817, two councils were held at Aachen in order to implement the reform. However, the decrees from these councils were quite moderate, unlike Æthelwold's ideas of the reform. It is probable that the opposing parties were also present in the councils at Aachen, thus radical changes cannot be seen. In addition, Rosamond McKitterick has suggested that the lack of major changes and the compromises in the decrees were attempts to answer various circumstances of monasteries in France.⁴⁶⁶ On the other hand, monastic reform in Anglo-Saxon England remains somewhat unique compared to the reform in France. Expulsion of secular canons in particular was quite distinctive and Æthelwold's understanding of the reform, despite being influenced by Benedict of Aniane, was derived from his historicity.⁴⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the influence of the ninth-century reform can be seen in other forms, such as presenting King Edgar as an abbot,

⁴⁶⁵ Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms Under the Carolingians, 751-987* (London: Longman, 1983), 106-126.

⁴⁶⁶ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, 112-117. McKitterick has also pointed out the existence of variations of monasticism due to foundations of Irish monks and the activities of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries; *ibid*, 109-111.

⁴⁶⁷ Wormald, "Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts," 40-42.

which was also done by the reformers for Louis the Pious in France.⁴⁶⁸ There are some other significant difference to mention though, which are the inclusion of monasteries in the legislation and the so-called lay abbots. Louis the Pious created a legal bond between the government and the monasteries by including monasticism in his legislation whereas King Edgar's law codes do not make any reference to it.⁴⁶⁹ Louis also appointed lay magnates as abbots which was not something the reformers encouraged but was tolerated and the aristocracy was interested in obtaining ecclesiastical offices; some families controlled bishoprics.⁴⁷⁰ This practice too was not seen in Anglo-Saxon England and the reformers were not keen on seeking protection from the nobility as well.⁴⁷¹ Furthermore, a very recent study by Mary Blanchard has shown that the Anglo-Saxon nobility tried to obtain political and social standing through secular offices only and was not interested in a career in the church.⁴⁷² Once we look at the early tenth-century Germany, on the other hand, there are more similarities to be seen.

Under Otto I, Germany underwent considerable changes: the power centre shifted to Saxony, the Saxon dynasty was established, and Otto founded monasteries and cult sites in Quedlinburg and Magdeburg.⁴⁷³ Otto's reign also represents a shift in the kingship style: under the Ottonian and Salian rulers, kings acquired a sacral nature through anointment and were praised in liturgy; this sacral kingship was also adapted

⁴⁶⁸ Robert Deshman, "Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus: Early Medieval Ruler Theology and the Anglo-Saxon Reform" *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988): 204-240.

⁴⁶⁹ Thomas F.X. Noble, "The Monastic Ideal as a Model for Empire: The Case of Louis the Pious" *Revue Bénédictine* 86 (1976): 235-250 at 238-239.

⁴⁷⁰ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, 115 and 122; Timothy Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages, c.800-1056* (London: Longman, 1991), 106-108.

⁴⁷¹ This was also forbidden by *Regularis Concordia*; RC, 7.

⁴⁷² Mary Elizabeth Blanchard, "A New Perspective on Family Strategy in Tenth and Eleventh Century England: Ealdormen Status and the Church" *Historical Research* 92, no.256 (2019): 244-266.

⁴⁷³ John William Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany: c.936-1075* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 9-10.

by King Edgar when he was crowned at Bath in 973.⁴⁷⁴ Otto I's reign also marked a period of unification which, Timothy Reuter argued, resulted in the revolts in the early years of his reign.⁴⁷⁵ This process of unification and centralization of the government was a shared theme in the tenth-century Germany and England, and was carried out by establishing strong ties between the state and the church.⁴⁷⁶ One aspect peculiar to Germany, however, is the so-called "imperial church system" which can be defined as a tight control of the church by kings, in an oversimplified way. Reuter argued that the kings' control and influence on bishoprics and monasteries were, in fact, quite limited and largely depended on where their presences were strongly felt through fiscal lands and rights.⁴⁷⁷ In this respect, the situation in England was not unlike Germany as the kings had limited influence over bishoprics and monasteries. However, the phenomenon known as the royal monasteries (*monasteria regalia*) is something unlike anything we see in the tenth-century England. These royal monasteries were controlled more closely by the Ottonian rulers, and their lands could be alienated with ease and abbots could be disposed. They were given jurisdictional immunities in order to protect them from lay magnates and they had a freedom of election as well.⁴⁷⁸ Especially the jurisdictional immunities became much more important for the clergy as they sought protection from the laity and immunity grants were more favourable contrary to gifts of land in the tenth century.⁴⁷⁹ Similarly, reformers in Anglo-Saxon England relied on the king but were not controlled strictly by the royalty and the immunities probably did not exist, at least in the tenth

⁴⁷⁴ Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 48-50. King Edgar had also been included in the liturgy in the monasteries; see RC 5, 14, 16 and 21-23.

⁴⁷⁵ Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages*, 148-150.

⁴⁷⁶ Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 27-35.

⁴⁷⁷ Timothy Reuter, "The 'Imperial Church System' of the Ottonian and Salian Rulers: a Reconsideration" in Janet L. Nelson, ed., *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 325-354 at 329-330 and 336-337.

⁴⁷⁸ Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 70-75.

⁴⁷⁹ Reuter, "The 'Imperial Church System,'" 337-346.

century.⁴⁸⁰ In terms of the anti-monastic reaction, we do not see similar movements where the small landowners were seizing lands from monasteries in France and Germany but they were vulnerable to attacks from lay magnates. During the civil war between Louis the Pious and his sons, monastic lands were seized and churches were left unprotected.⁴⁸¹ In Germany, in the first half of the tenth century, there is at least one known case of an abbey being subject to attacks from lay magnates. Tegernesse Abbey in Bavaria made many complaints to Otto I and John Bernhardt has stated that these attacks took place when the king was absent; in particular, the regions infrequently visited by the king were more vulnerable.⁴⁸²

Nevertheless, despite some similarities with the continent, the anti-monastic reaction remains a unique movement in terms of the laity's involvement and its various forms. On the other hand, patronage from the king proved to be useful for monasteries on the continent as well, and the king's presence almost certainly played an important role in protecting the landed endowments of the religious houses. In addition, much like the turbulent reign of Edward the Martyr, the period of civil war in ninth-century France too can be seen as a time of opportunity since the lay magnates took advantage of the civil war to seize monastic lands, though their interests were different from those of the Anglo-Saxon ealdormen. The differences between the problems faced by monasteries caused different narratives by the contemporaries; thus, there are difficulties on making comparisons between England and the Continent on this issue. Surely the monasteries on the continent faced attacks but the context was different for them. For instance, monastic lands were being used by the royalty more extensively in the Germany hence the term *servitium regis* developed to define various services

⁴⁸⁰ For contrast, see John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 210-233.

⁴⁸¹ Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 90-91.

⁴⁸² Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 55-56.

expected to be performed by monasteries whereas there is no reference to a similar arrangement in the tenth-century England.⁴⁸³

5.2. Final Comments

The scope of this thesis did not include the development of jurisdictional immunities in depth except for Worcester since it has been part of the debate. There were other monasteries that claimed to have the same rights as Worcester though possibly not as ambitious and the Domesday Book entry for the Church of Worcester remained distinctive. However, these immunities seem to have been developing in the second half of the tenth century and became clearer in the eleventh century. The first example of a grant of jurisdictional right, sake and soke (*sacu* and *socn*), was granted by King Eadwig to Bishop Oscytel in 956.⁴⁸⁴ Another early mention of sake and soke can be seen in a charter of Edgar from 959, granted to a *matrona* named Quen.⁴⁸⁵ According to Stenton, in both of the charters, the estates in question were in a peculiar pattern and possibly the arrangements were made in accordance with the Danelaw's own tenurial structure.⁴⁸⁶ It is true that both charters were concerned with estates in Northern Danelaw and Stenton demonstrated the distinct forms of land tenure in Danelaw in a much earlier work, with reference to Domesday Book since these tenurial structures found its way in greater detail there.⁴⁸⁷ Therefore, earlier grants of private jurisdiction might have been restricted to what constituted Northern Danelaw

⁴⁸³ Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 85-135.

⁴⁸⁴ S659

⁴⁸⁵ S681

⁴⁸⁶ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 492-499.

⁴⁸⁷ Frank Stenton, "Types of Manorial Structure in Northern Danelaw" in Paul Vinogradoff, ed., *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 1-96.

in order to provide some form of legal autonomy to that region. On the other hand, jurisdictional privileges claimed by the monasteries had usually obscure meanings and some of the documents are dubious, if not outright forgeries.⁴⁸⁸ The tendency to produce such documents might have resulted from Edward the Confessor's own preference to give the bishoprics to foreign clerics which affected the status of monks greatly as they lost their influence on the government.⁴⁸⁹ It was also in the reign of Edward the Confessor that private jurisdiction started to become common as he tended to give away jurisdictional rights more freely; though the practice itself seems to be common to the eleventh century in general as Æthelred II and Cnut too gave jurisdictional rights.⁴⁹⁰ Thus, the monasteries might have been in a rivalry to obtain these privileges which led to the production of such documents and explains their dubious nature.⁴⁹¹ Moreover, private jurisdiction may have existed but in a more limited way and the religious houses still worked with lay magnates when there was a dispute and the evidences concerning the anti-monastic reaction also point it clearly.⁴⁹² The fact that these jurisdictional problems were in a transitional state becomes clearer in the post-Conquest period. William I's writ dated 1072-1076 stated that the episcopal jurisdiction (*episcopales leges*) had not been exercised satisfactorily, nor in accordance with the canon laws and the separate episcopal courts were created.⁴⁹³ This arrangement signals that the bishops, and possibly abbots, operated within the hundred courts and shire courts and their own separate courts were not in existence, or the transition to their own private courts had not yet been

⁴⁸⁸ Antonia Gransden, "Traditionalism and Continuity during the Last Century of Anglo-Saxon Monasticism," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40, no. 2 (1989): 159–207 at 189–190.

⁴⁸⁹ Gransden, "Traditionalism and Continuity," 187–188.

⁴⁹⁰ Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, 307–328.

⁴⁹¹ Faith, *Growth of Lordship*, 36–38.

⁴⁹² See above Chapter 4.

⁴⁹³ Lieberman, *Gesetze*, 485.

completed in the eleventh century.⁴⁹⁴ Needless to say that the laws and customs were subject to change over time in order to answer the doubts and disagreements.⁴⁹⁵

In conclusion, this thesis has analysed the anti-monastic reaction and tried to demonstrate the causes behind it. A detailed examination of the sources has shown that the reaction consisted of different forms and was not only directed against the monasteries but also bishoprics were targeted as well. Furthermore, despite the consensus regarding the anti-monastic reaction being solely a political occurrence cannot be upheld in the light of evidence we have seen in this thesis. Instead, the anti-monastic reaction stemmed from opportunism since we have much evidence that shows how it was the small landowners who either seized lands from the monasteries or retracted their agreements. These were also related to land ownership issues to a degree: in some cases, bequeathed lands would cause problems and in other cases a claimant might appear after an agreement had been made to lay claim to an estate.⁴⁹⁶ Most probably, conveyance procedures were in a transitional state in the tenth century which in turn caused difficulties for the monasteries.⁴⁹⁷ On the other hand, powerful lay magnates became involved when they had personal interests in an estate or when they were the patrons of a monastery. There is no evidence to point out that the two most powerful ealdormen of the time, Æthelwine and Ælfhere were in open conflict: the notion that Ælfhere acted out of political reasons cannot be found anywhere either. It could be that Ælfhere's association with Æthelred II and Ælfthryth might have

⁴⁹⁴ Frank Barlow, *The English Church, 1066-1154: A History of The Anglo-Norman Church* (London: Longman, 1979), 145-176; Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, 25-35; Hudson, *Laws of England*, 56-62; Kennedy, "Law and Litigation," 149-152. For a broader context, see Martin Brett, "The English Abbeys, their Tenants and the King (950-1150)" in *Chiesa e Mondo Feudale nei Secoli X-XII: Atti Della Dodicesima Settimana Internazionale di Studio, Mendola, 24-28 Agosto 1992* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1995), 277-300.

⁴⁹⁵ Susan Reynolds, "Bookland, Folkland and Fiefs" *ANS XIV* (1992), 211-227 at 214-217.

⁴⁹⁶ Kennedy, "Law and Litigation," 163-169.

⁴⁹⁷ Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, 18-21 and 21-24.

caused his reputation as an enemy of monasteries. Moreover, the second generation of the reformers were deeply disturbed by the offences against the church that had been made in the early years of Æthelred; they witnessed raids from Scandinavians and how the English were unable to stop them, in particular the ealdormen were blamed for the failures; thus, Ælfhere's own offences, whether minor or major, might have led to a terrible reputation. Similarly, Ælfthryth's reputation too might have suffered because of the same issues. As mentioned above in Chapter 3, she was a benefactor of monasteries, founded some of them herself yet later she was blamed for the murder of Edward the Martyr. In addition, even at her own foundation Wherwell, she was remembered for causing the death of Edward.⁴⁹⁸ It might be that Ælfthryth's attitude towards monasteries was also related to more personal reasons such as that of ealdormen of the period. Nevertheless, in terms of the laity's actions, the tumultuous period which followed the death of Edgar, was a time of opportunity.

⁴⁹⁸ Yorke, "The Women in Edgar's Life," 152-154. There are two very recent studies on Ælfthryth which are published too late to be used in this thesis, see Mary Elizabeth Blanchard, "Beyond Corfe: Ælfthryth's Roles as Queen, Villain, and Former Sister-in-law" *The Haskins Society Journal* 30 (2020): 1-20; Matthew Firth, "The Character of the Treacherous Woman in the Passiones of Early Medieval English Royal Martyrs" *Royal Studies Journal* 7, no.1 (2020): 1-21.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

The table below shows the number of abbots and ealdormen witnessing the charters in the second half of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh century on a regular basis. The numbers show the effects of the reform movement and the anti-monastic reaction: when the monastic reform movement started to gain some pace, the number of abbots regularly attesting to charters increased significantly from four to seven and in 970, increased to thirteen. On the other hand, in the reign of Edward the Martyr, this number reduced to two; however, with only five extant charters from Edward's reign, some of them of dubious nature, this particular reduction might be misleading at the same time. During Æthelred II's reign, abbots were again attested in small numbers until 993 when the anti-monastic reaction finally ended, and the second generation of the reformers started to have a more prominent role in the government. Increased number of abbots followed by a reduced number of ealdormen in the charters, the most striking reduction is seen in the period 970-975 when only four ealdormen regularly attested. Reign of Edward the Martyr saw a drastic increase in the number of ealdormen up to eight and gradually started to reduce after 978 to only three of them regularly attesting between 990-1016. These changes in the

number of abbots and ealdormen were also related to the changes in administering the kingdom as we have seen in Chapter 2. The data in the table is based on Keynes, *Attestations*, Tables XLVIII, L, LV, LVI, LVIII, LXI, LXII.

Kings	Period	No. of Charters	Abbots	Ealdormen
Eadwig	956-959	87	4	7
Edgar	959-963	54	4	6
	964-969	49	7	7
	970-975	47	13	4
Edward the Martyr	975-978	5	2	8
Æthelred II	979-984	21	4	6
	985-989	23	3	5
	990-1016	75	10	3

APPENDIX B

The table below provides all the disputes and other “attacks” that the religious houses faced during the anti-monastic reaction. Next to each religious house is the document that recorded the event and the corresponding number in Patrick Wormald, “A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits” *ASE* 17 (1988): 247-281. Note that not all of them has been identified by Wormald as his list is almost strictly concerned with disputes whereas some of the documents I have discussed in this thesis cannot be identified as disputes. In addition, I omitted Worcester from this table as the bishopric was safe during the anti-monastic reaction and the documents I have examined are largely concerned with the supposed privileges the community of Worcester enjoyed and they have been examined to see whether the anti-monastic reaction was a truly widespread movement. On the other hand, I have added some of the cases from Ely which I did not examined in Chapter 4. Most of the cases more or less revolved around the same theme where the litigant would be retracting an earlier agreement and seizing the lands they had sold and would be repetitive to include all of them in the thesis proper; nevertheless, I have included them in this table.

Monastery & Bishopric	Text	Wormald, "Lawsuits" no.
Abingdon	<i>HA</i> ; S876	
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.7	108
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.8	109
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.10	110
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.11	111
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.11a	114
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.12	115
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.18	116
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.19	119
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.24	120
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.25	121
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.27	122
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.28	123
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.32	125
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.33	126
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.34	130
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.35	
Ely	<i>LE</i> ii ch.49	
Evesham	<i>HAE</i> , ch.133	
Evesham	<i>HAE</i> , ch.144	
Glastonbury	Malmesbury, <i>VSD</i> , ii ch.25	
Peterborough	<i>LE</i> ii ch.11	111
Ramsey	<i>Chron Ram</i> 49-50	136
Ramsey	<i>Chron Ram</i> 50	137
Ramsey	<i>Chron Ram</i> 52-55	139
Rochester	S1457	46
Rochester	S1458	47
Tavistock	S838	
Winchcombe	<i>VSO</i> iv.11	
Winchester	S891	59
Winchester	S1242	66
York	S1453	53