

# KINGS AND LORDS IN CONQUEST ENGLAND

ROBIN FLEMING

*Assistant Professor of History, Boston College*



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## Chapter 1

# LANDHOLDING AND ALLIANCE IN LATE SAXON ENGLAND

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records, in exhausting and imaginative detail, the descent of King Alfred's father through Woden, Noah, Enoch and Adam.<sup>1</sup> The genealogy, stretching back some forty generations, preserves the paternal descent of West Saxon kings from the age of Germanic settlement in England to 855. Like other royal genealogies of the period, however, the list is wanting in a number of ways. Old English kings' descent through Germanic gods, equine brothers and Hebrew patriarchs is hardly credible. The names of these rulers' mortal ancestors in the epoch before the Anglo-Saxon invasions are based on fancy rather than fact, and the inclusion of some of their descendants in the historic period were determined by political ideology and convention rather than blood.<sup>2</sup> And because royal genealogies interest themselves only in that neat succession of one king to the next, they do not preserve the names of maternal kindred nor do they record non-ruling siblings and offspring. As haphazard and as difficult as the material in this and other royal genealogies may be, it provides more information about the West Saxon kings' factual and fictive kin that exists *in toto* for any of the great Anglo-Saxon aristocrats from Hengest and Horsa to Harold Godwinson. Evidence for the complex collateral kindreds of the Saxon Age is extremely fragmentary and must be pieced together from the occasional family relationship noted in the attestation lists of royal charters or mentioned in the bequests and obits of pre-Conquest

<sup>1</sup> ASC, s.a. 855.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 39 (1953), pp. 287-346; David N. Dumville, 'Kingship, genealogies, and regnal lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1979), pp. 72-104; 'The Anglian collection of royal genealogies and regnal lists', *ASE*, 5 (1976), pp. 23-50. These three articles aptly show what Pierre Bourdieu has seen in other cultures, that genealogy can be official rather than historical, and that its twin functions are to order the social world and to legitimize that order. (Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977), p. 34.)

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England. The chronicle-cartularies of a number of England's monastic houses also from time to time preserve information on the families of their house's lay benefactors and despoilers: hence the *Ramsey Chronicle* preserves information on the family of Æthelwine 'Friend of God'; the *Liber Eliensis* on Bryhtnoth, his friends and relations; and Hemming's cartulary on Earl Leofric's descendants. An anonymous monk of Durham, describing the patrimony of Saint Cuthbert, incidentally preserved a rich if somewhat confusing catalogue of Earl Siward's in-laws, including three daughters of Ealdorman Uthtræd who shared the name Ælflæd, a complication which reflects accurately the confounding nature of the period's genealogical material.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the *Vita Eadwardi Regis*, in presentation a royal biography but in fact a piece of special pleading for Queen Edith and her relatives, tells something of Earl Godwine's family. Other than a few genealogical asides in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 'Florence of Worcester', and William of Malmesbury, little else survives to connect one pre-Conquest aristocrat with another. Sparse though the evidence is, it is sufficient to flesh out important connections between many of the dominant lords of the tenth and eleventh centuries and between Old English kings and the aristocrats who were both their allies and their competitors.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the paucity of information on the specific links between the aristocrats whose names are commemorated in the *Chronicle* or preserved in the witnesses lists of surviving diplomas, there is an abundance of legal and literary testimony which sets forth the obligations and duties entailed by these relationships. The clans and vast cousinages that formed the families of Europe's Germanic settlers in Victorian historiography have long been in retreat, and it is now clear that although Englishmen cultivated and kept track of a wide circle of kinsmen, their most intimate kin had a special place in customs revolving around property, salvation, and honour.<sup>5</sup> The *healsfang*, or first instalment of the wergeld, for example, was paid exclusively to the children,

<sup>3</sup> DOD, pp. 215-20.

<sup>4</sup> See below, chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>5</sup> For a history of the theories of Germanic kinship structure see Alexander C. Murray, *Germanic Kinship Structure: Studies in Law and Society in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1983), pp. 11-32. For the characterization of Anglo-Saxon kinship as both cognatic and especially concerned with the closest of relations, see Lorraine Lancaster, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon society', *British Journal of Sociology*, 9 (1957), pp. 230-50, 359-77 and H. R. Loyn, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE*, 3 (1974), pp. 197-209.

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brothers and paternal uncles of the victim,<sup>6</sup> and the property of a man who died intestate was divided only among his wife, children and near-kinsmen (*neahmæg*).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the morning gift of a woman who remarried within the first year of widowhood reverted to her former husband's closest relatives (*nidfreond, neahfreond*).<sup>8</sup> Pious donations made to monasteries for the sake of relatives' souls appear to have been offered primarily for this same small circle of kin. Parents and grandparents, spouses and children benefited from the gifts their relatives bequeathed to religious communities, but the spiritual welfare of nephews, cousins and more distant kinsmen was not generally provided for, nor did the individuals whose wills survive leave gifts especially marked for the salvation of members of the larger and less specific *parentela*.<sup>9</sup> A man's honour could be damaged by the infidelity of his closest kinswomen, and he was allowed to wreak vengeance, without fear of the feud, on any man caught behind closed doors or 'under the same blanket' as his mother, wife, sister or daughter. By the same token, only the behaviour of his close kinswomen could damage his reputation.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, bishops and priests were allowed to receive no women guests except for their mothers, sisters, and maternal or paternal aunts.<sup>11</sup> The threat to pride and good name and the safety of chastity resided not in a great crowd of female relatives, but only in the closest of kinswomen.

Below this most intimate level of kindred there existed a vast

<sup>6</sup> Wer. In the *Leges Henrici Primi* it is the fathers, sons, and brothers who are paid the *healsfang*. (*Leges Henrici Primi*, ed. L. J. Downer (Oxford, 1972), c. 76.) For a discussion of the importance of these two conflicting texts, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Kinship, status, and the origin of the hide', *Past and Present*, 56 (1972), pp. 22–3.

<sup>7</sup> II Cnut 70.1.

<sup>8</sup> II Cnut 73a.

<sup>9</sup> For bequests made to the church for the souls of parents, grand-parents, and ancestors see S 1526, 1483, 1485, 1511, 1494, 1486, 1501, 1536, 1503, 1538, 1489, 1521, 1530, 1519, 1533, 1514, Thorpe, *Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici* (London, 1865), pp. 585–9; for spouses see S 1188, 1483, 1493, 1496, 1485, 1498, 1487, 1486, 1501, 1498, 1537, 1530, 1531, 1535, 1519, 1520, 1525, 1510, 1513, 1533, 1514, Thorpe, *Diplomatarium* pp. 585–9; for children see S 1188, 1483, 1510, 1528, 1535, Thorpe, *Diplomatarium* pp. 585–9; for brothers and sisters see S 1485, 1486, 1536, 1516; for nephews see S 1516. In western France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries donations were most commonly made for this same group of kinsmen, but they were also made for sons-, fathers-, and sisters-in-law, former husbands, and the like. (Stephen D. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to the Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France 1050–1150* (Chapel Hill, 1988), pp. 109–14).

<sup>10</sup> Alfred 42§7.

<sup>11</sup> Ælfric, 'Pastoral Letter for Wulfstige III', *Councils and Synods with other Documents Relating to the English Church*, ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett and C. N. L. Brooke (Oxford, 1981), i, p. 198; Ælfric, 'First Old English Letter for Wulfstan', *ibid.*, p. 278.

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and etymologically undifferentiated group of relations.<sup>12</sup> *Nefa* was used to express nephew, grandson, stepson, or cousin of any degree; *nefene* meant equally niece or granddaughter.<sup>13</sup> *Mæg*, the most common term for kinsman, was used not only for distant collateral relations, but for sons and brothers as well.<sup>14</sup> This absence of a distinctive collateral terminology, which is exemplified by such roundabout phrases as *his modar his broðar dohtar* for maternal grandnephew, makes it unlikely that each degree of kinship had its own specific duties.<sup>15</sup> Distant cousins, like more immediate kinsmen, were nonetheless necessary to guarantee an individual's personal safety, witness his legal transactions, and provide support in difficult times. These assorted and generally undifferentiated kinsmen can be seen acting as compurgators, as collectors or payers of wergeld, and as the protectors of their kinsmen both in and out of court.<sup>16</sup> They supplied relatives with food when they were in prison and lent them aid in their bid for profferment. They defended them when attacked, took care of them in ill health and madness, and avenged their deaths.<sup>17</sup> Kinsmen were also obliged to guarantee the good behaviour of less trustworthy members of their families, to vouch for relatives' good character, to act as sureties in marriage agreements,<sup>18</sup> and to

<sup>12</sup> Lancaster, 'Kinship', pp. 237–8.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. and enl. T. Northcote Toller (Oxford, 1954), *sub verbo*. For words used as 'cousin' see *genefa*. <sup>14</sup> Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary, sub verbo*.

<sup>15</sup> Literally 'A's mother [is] B's brother's daughter'. (S 1200.)

<sup>16</sup> For kinsmen as protectors, see Alfred 1§2, 42§1, 42§6, II Æthelstan 11, II Æthelred 6; II Cnut 56. For kinsmen as the payers of wergeld, see Ine 74§1, II Æthelstan 1§4, 6§1; VI Æthelstan 1§4; VIII Æthelred 23; Cnut 5§2b. For kinsmen as collectors of wergeld, see Ine 23, II Edmund 4, 7, 7§1; I Cnut 2§5, II Cnut 39; *Mircna laga*, 4. For kinsmen as compurgators see Ine 21§1; *Be Wifmannes Bewedding* 1, 6; II Æthelstan 1§3, 6§1, VI Æthelstan 6§1, *Northumbrian Priests' Law*, 51; Robertson, *Charters*, n. 40. In court kinsmen tried to jolly up the judges. For an example of this, see *Firthehogdi Monachi Breuiloquium Vitae Beati Wulfredi et Wulfstani Cantoris Narratio Metrica de Sancto Swithuno*, ed. Alistair Campbell (Zurich, 1950), p. 152.

<sup>17</sup> For the obligation of kinsmen towards their imprisoned relatives, see Alfred 1§2; II Æthelstan 6§1. Kinsmen are also to be notified when a relative is in the custody of his enemies (Alfred 5§3). For kinsmen as the bearers of the feud, see II Æthelred 6, II Edmund 1§3, II Cnut 56, VIII Æthelred 23, *DOD*, pp. 218–220, and (for Welshmen) *DB*, i, 179r. For kinsmen giving aid to mad relatives see *Vita Wulfstani*, pp. 27, 29. For the help they offered to ill relatives, see Ælfric 'Saint Swithun', *Lives of the Saints*, i, pp. 455, 461; *Vita Wulfstani*, p. 7. They also procured leases for relatives (S 1242).

<sup>18</sup> For kinsmen's responsibility for the good behaviour of family members see II Æthelstan 1§3, 1§4, 2, 2§1, 6§1, 8; VI Æthelstan 1; II Edmund 7§1. For kinsmen's obligations in marriage agreements see Ine 31, *Be Wifmannes Bewedding*, 1, 5, 6. For kinsmen's responsibilities as character witnesses see *Vita Wulfstani*, p. 7.

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protect their property rights.<sup>19</sup> They were also entrusted with the welfare of the souls of those kinsmen who died before them, fasting after their deaths,<sup>20</sup> and they were buried alongside one another, so they could wait out the Second Coming together.<sup>21</sup> These ties of mutual dependence in this world and the next created strong personal bonds. Indeed, *freond* could mean 'friend' or 'relative' and *freondleas* 'friendless' or 'orphan',<sup>22</sup> and often a man's kith and kin – his *cognati atque amici* – were one and the same.

Within this amorphous kin-group, Anglo-Saxons emphasized agnatic connections. Paternal kinsmen were favoured when property was bequeathed in wills,<sup>23</sup> and there was a rich paternal vocabulary – *fædera* (father's brother), *faðu* (father's sister), *fæderencyn*, *fæderenmæg* (paternal kinsman) – used to denote the relationship between a man and his paternal kinsmen.<sup>24</sup> Cus-

<sup>19</sup> E.g., in *LE*, ii, c. 25 two nephews claimed some of Ely's land for their uncle, and took the monks to court over it. In a writ of Edward the Confessor to the Abbot of Bury St Edmunds, the king promised to protect the Abbot's land 'as if he were my brother'. (S 1083.)

<sup>20</sup> *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen*, ed. Paul Willeim Finsterwalder (Weimar, 1929), pp. 318, 319. In the will of Æthelgifu various friends and kinsmen were left property, but in return were to give 'swine at Martinmass', food rents or a 'barrel full of ale' to various monasteries for her soul and the soul of her dead kindred. (*The Will of Æthelgifu*, trans., ed. and commentary Dorothy Whitelock, Neil Ker and Lord Rennell, The Roxburghe Club (Oxford, 1968).) King Æthelstan's drowned brother Edwin was buried at St Bertin by Count Adelfolf of Flanders because 'he was his kinsman'. (*Folcwini diaconi gesta abbatum S Bertini Sithensium*, in *MGH Scriptores*, 13 (1881), ed. O. Holder-Egger, c. 107, trans. in *EHD*, i, 26.)

<sup>21</sup> For examples of kinsmen choosing burial places together see below, chapter 2. Monastic brothers, no less kin than worldly brothers, were buried together for just this reason. (Donald Bullough, 'Burial, community and belief in the early medieval West', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. Patrick Wormald with Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 177–8.) If a man had been denied burial in consecrated ground because he had been executed for theft, his kinsmen could undergo the ordeal to clear his name and thereby reclaim the man's right to a proper burial (*Æthelred* 7§1).

<sup>22</sup> Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, *sub verbo*. Other cultures have this same confusion of terms. See, for example, J. K. Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage* (Oxford, 1964), p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., in the will of Ealdorman Alfred (871 × 889), the ealdorman declared that if his daughter had no heir 'then the next of kin descends from her direct paternal ancestry'. (S 1508.) See also S 1482, 1507. Royal genealogies trace descent through the male line, and patronymics were fairly common in pre-Conquest England, while metronymics were rare. Gosta Tengvik, *Old English Bynames* (Uppsala, 1938). For metronymics, see pp. 228–32. For patronymics, see pp. 146–227.

<sup>24</sup> Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, *sub verbo*; Lancaster, 'Kinship', p. 237.

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tomary law, too, stressed the rights and obligations of agnatic relations. An unborn child's wergeld was set by the status of its *fæderencnosl* or paternal kin.<sup>25</sup> Paternal relatives also play a greater role in the collection and payment of their kinsmen's wergeld<sup>26</sup> and were more often used as oath keepers.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the kinship system of pre-Conquest England was not exclusively paternal. There was some vocabulary, like *modrige* (maternal aunt) and *eam* (mother's brother), that specified maternal links.<sup>28</sup> English aristocrats with more illustrious maternal kin, like their Ottonian contemporaries, at times traced their descent through their mothers,<sup>29</sup> and the right of women to inherit and bequeath property encouraged a lively interest in maternal relations. The tract *De Obsessione Dunelmi*, for example, traces a Northumbrian aristocrat's claim to former Durham lands through his mother, grandmother and great-great-grandmother.<sup>30</sup> The legal obligations of maternal kinsmen to aid family members in the payment of wergeld and the vouching of warranty indicate that close affiliations with maternal as well as paternal relations were of fundamental importance.<sup>31</sup> Husbands were known to take on the feuds of their fathers-in-law,<sup>32</sup> a widow's kinsmen fought from time to time for her rights in court,<sup>33</sup> and maternal kinsmen got a portion of their relatives' wergeld.<sup>34</sup> In the tract *Be Wifmannes Beweddunge*, we are told that if a woman, after her marriage, moved to another district, her kinsmen nonetheless continued to act as her compurgators and to contribute to any fines she might incur.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the obligations imposed by kinship, men could legally dissociate themselves from incorrigible relations who were penally

<sup>25</sup> Alfred 9; *Leges Henrici Primi*, 68§3b; 75§7.      <sup>26</sup> Wer.      <sup>27</sup> II Æthelstan 11.

<sup>28</sup> Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, *sub verbo*.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Ælfwine son of Ælfric, who evokes the name of his maternal grandfather Ealhhelm at the Battle of Maldon (*Battle of Maldon*, line 218); Edward the Confessor's staller Robert, who is commonly identified by the metronymic 'fitz Wimarc' (Tengvik, *Old English Bynames, sub nomine*); and Wulfric Spot, who is described as the 'son of Wulfrun' (S 886). Karl Leyser 'Maternal kin in early medieval Germany', *Past and Present*, 49 (1970), pp. 126-7.      <sup>30</sup> *DOD*, pp. 215-20.

<sup>31</sup> A third of the wergeld went to maternal kinsmen, two-thirds to the paternal kinsmen (II Æthelstan 11; *Leges Henrici Primi*, 74§1a, 75§8, 75§9). Similarly, a third of those who stood surety were from the maternal kinsmen, and two-thirds from the paternal (Alfred 30; Wer 3; II Æthelstan 11; II Edmund 7§2; *Leges Henrici Primi*, 76§1a).

<sup>32</sup> Ealdorman Uthtræd promised, as part of the bargaining that went into the formation of one of his marriage agreements, to kill his future father-in-law's enemy (*DOD*, p. 218).      <sup>33</sup> Robertson, *Charters*, n. 59.      <sup>34</sup> Alfred 8§3, and above n. 26.

<sup>35</sup> *Be Wifmannes Beweddunge*, 7.

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enslaved or who had involved themselves in unwelcome feuds.<sup>36</sup> At the same time custom and Christian practice allowed the inclusion of those who shared no ties of blood into the charmed circle of the family. Relationships formed by marriage and other Christian rituals created strong familial bonds between individuals with no common ancestor, and were formed by free will and probably a good deal of forethought. Affinal bonds came with their own set of legal responsibilities. The laws of Hlothhere and Eadric suggest that the relationship between a woman and her husband's family was continued after her spouse's death. While the widow was to maintain custody of her children, one of her deceased husband's kinsmen was to serve as their guardian until they reached the age of ten. This suggests that the widow and her husband's family remained in close contact, possibly for many years after the legislated twelve months of mourning.<sup>37</sup> Old English, moreover, had a rich affinal vocabulary. Special words existed for a husband's brother (*tacor*), sister's husband or son-in-law (*aðum*), daughter-in-law (*snoru*), mother-in-law (*sweger*), and father-in-law (*sweor*).<sup>38</sup> This is hardly surprising, since parents' in-laws would be their children's blood relations, forming the maternal and paternal kindreds of the next generation. As such, families linked by marriage would share many of the same legal responsibilities. The life-long bonds of affection and obligation formed by such ties are attested by the frequent bequests of thegns and ealdormen to sons-, sisters-, and brothers-in-law, and to stepchildren.<sup>39</sup> The Anglo-Saxon dooms indicate that bonds of ritual kinship could also be as strong as consanguineal ties.<sup>40</sup> Godfathers, like other kinsmen, were entitled to a portion of their charges' wergeld and so probably shared in the responsibility of their protection and good behaviour.<sup>41</sup> Certainly godfathers at times acted as compurgators for troubled godchildren and pleaded for them in court.<sup>42</sup> The status of the godfather, like that of the natural father, could affect the wergeld of the child: the godsons of kings

<sup>36</sup> Ine 74§2; II Edward 6; II Edmund 1§1; II Æthelstan 1§4.

<sup>37</sup> Hlothhere and Eadric 6. See also Ine 38; *Be Wifmannes Bewuddunge*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, *sub verbo*. *Sweor* could also be used as another word for cousin.

<sup>39</sup> S 1483, 1484, 1494, 1519, 1521.

<sup>40</sup> For godparenthood in the early Middle Ages, see Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1986).

<sup>41</sup> The godfather received compensation for slain godchildren (Ine 76). See also *ASC*, s.a. 755.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., in the late ninth century the thief Helmstan 'begged [his godfather] to be his advocate because [he] had stood sponsor to him before he committed that crime [*ic his*

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and bishops had higher wergelds than did the godsons of other men.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the relationship between sponsor and child was perceived, by the late Saxon period, as so intimate that marriage between them was forbidden on the grounds of incest.<sup>44</sup> It is not surprising, then, that kings from the Age of Bede through the Viking invasions sat sponsor to defeated warlords and potential allies.<sup>45</sup> Co-sponsors and godchildren were remembered in the wills of their ritual kinsmen,<sup>46</sup> and Old English had a word, *gefæðeran*, to describe the relationship between co-sponsoring god-parents.<sup>47</sup> Another set of pseudo-kin were guild-brethren. The language the guilds adopted when drawing up their statutes was that of kinship.<sup>48</sup> Like born-family, guild members acted as compurgators, collectors and payers of compensation, and as the avengers of slain brethren. They helped their fellows in illness and with burial, and they remembered them in their prayers.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, a bidding prayer, dating from the first half of the eleventh century, underscores the strength of such ritual ties. In its special prayers were offered for sponsors, godfathers, and guild-brothers and sisters.<sup>50</sup>

Thus collateral and lineal ties, along with relationships formed by marriage and ritual, were powerful forces in Anglo-Saxon

*hæfde ær onfongen æt bisceopes honda*]. Then I pleaded and interceded for him with King Alfred' (S 1445).

<sup>43</sup> Ine 76, 76§1, 76§3.

<sup>44</sup> VI Æthelred 12§1; I Cnut 7§1; Northumbrian Priests' Law 61.1. In earlier days, however, such marriages did not trouble English churchmen. See Boniface, *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, MGH, *Epistolae Selectae*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1916), pp. 57-8.

<sup>45</sup> Olaf Tryggvason became godson of King Æthelred. In 920 King Edward the Elder was made the Norseman Ragnald's 'father and lord.' (*ASC*, s.a. 878, 995 (C, D, E).) Earlier alliances were similarly formed. Oswald was the godfather of Cynegisl and then married his daughter (Bede, *Hist. Ecc.*, iii, c. 7). When King Æthelstan became the godfather of the Breton Alan Crooked Beard, having 'lifted him from the holy font, this King had great trust in him because of... the alliance of his baptism' (*EHD*, i, n. 25). <sup>46</sup> S 1485, 1536; *The Will of Æthelgifu*, p. 14. <sup>47</sup> *Wills*, p. 123.

<sup>48</sup> The Exeter statutes, for example, legislate for masses for a dead *fynd* and psalms for a *brothur* (*Councils and Synods*, p. 59).

<sup>49</sup> The texts of the surviving guild regulations are printed in Benjamin Thorpe, *Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici* (London, 1865), pp. 605-17. They are found in translation in *EHD*, i, n. 136-9. For guild brethren as the payers of wergeld and avengers in feud see the Cambridgeshire regulations; for guild brethren's duties to pray for living and dead brethren see the regulations for Exeter, Bedwyn, and Abbotsbury. For their obligation to give aid when disaster hits, see the regulations for Exeter and Bedwyn.

<sup>50</sup> W. H. Stevenson 'Yorkshire surveys and other eleventh-century documents in the York Gospels', *EHR*, 27 (1912), pp. 1-25; Simon Keynes, 'The additions in Old English', in *The York Gospels*, ed. Nicholas Barker, The Roxburghe Club (London, 1986), p. 97.

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society. They worked alongside lordship to help guarantee the safety of individuals and maintain the peace. These relationships, moreover, involved everyone. Even the kinless men of Saxon society – monks and strangers – were drawn into the system of kinship by a legislative fiction that made them kinsmen of the king.<sup>51</sup> Peasants, ceorls, and earls were equally governed by this family structure. It is unwise, therefore, to ignore the fact that the lives of great English aristocrats and the king, like the lives of lesser men, were shaped by these same bonds, obligations and rights; and it is important to remember that the system of kinship current in pre-Conquest society affected their lives as strongly as it did those of lesser men. An understanding of these relationships is vital for an understanding of the period's political organization and action.

As we have seen, although there is little evidence by which to link the aristocrats of tenth- and eleventh-century England, much has survived to indicate the obligations such ties entailed. With respect to landholding, however, the opposite is true. There is a vast amount of evidence on individual holdings, but few contemporary utterances which describe the effects such holdings had on the politics and history of the period. A vast quantity of information on landholding is preserved in Domesday Book, which records the comprehensive inquest of English lands undertaken in 1086 on the orders of William the Conqueror. Its entries, which provide relatively standardized, detailed, and quantified information for nearly every farm and village in eleventh-century England south of the Tees, constitute the most complete body of statistical, tenurial and geographical information on English land in the Middle Ages. The amount of information in Domesday Book, however, is staggering. It provides us with detailed information on some 45,000 landholdings across the kingdom. The document preserves information on peasant population, agricultural productivity, tax assessment, and land values – recording among other things thousands of mills, pastures, woodlands, iron works and slave women. Of equal importance, Domesday Book records names. Generally the document tells us who held the manors and

<sup>51</sup> II Cnut 40. That monks left the obligations of kinship behind when they entered a monastery is made clear in VIII Æthelred 25, where it is stated that they were not obliged to provide compensation nor were they entitled to a portion of their kinsmen's wergeld.

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farmsteads recorded in England both in January 1066 – immediately before the Conquest – and in 1086 – the year of the Domesday inquest. The survey also records the names of the subtenants, retainers and allies of great Saxon and Norman lords. It notes the tenures by which Englishmen and Normans held their land and periodically preserves the legal disputes into which they entered and the land transferences they made. This vast array of tenurial and manorial information is organized geographically, and we are able to identify the great bulk of Domesday places – some 14,000 in all – and thus locate lordships, swine pastures, waste land, or areas of highest land value in eleventh-century England. Finally, Domesday Book bridges the Norman Conquest, describing tenurial conditions as they existed both in 1066 and again in 1086. Hence, it discloses the wealth, power and political structure of two distinct cultures and societies, and illuminates the revolutionary transformation in landholding that the Conquest brought about. Although occasionally ambiguous, inaccurate or incomplete, Domesday Book is singularly reliable by the standards of pre-scientific societies. It has rightly been called 'the most remarkable statistical document in the history of Europe'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, no land survey until the nineteenth century approached it in comprehensiveness or detail.

Existing alongside Domesday Book are a number of satellite surveys, which provide additional information on eleventh-century landholdings for the counties of Cambridgeshire,<sup>53</sup> Somerset, Devonshire, Dorset, Cornwall and Wiltshire,<sup>54</sup> and for the lands of Ely,<sup>55</sup> Christchurch, Evesham,<sup>56</sup> and St Augustine's Canterbury.<sup>57</sup> Monastic histories of Abingdon, Ely, Worcester, Evesham, Peterborough, Ramsey and Durham also preserve

<sup>52</sup> H. C. Darby, 'Domesday England', *A New Historical Geography of England*, ed. H. C. Darby (Cambridge, 1973), p. 39. See also J. McDonald and G. D. Snooks, *Domesday Economy: A New Approach to Anglo-Norman History* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 32–6.

<sup>53</sup> *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis...subjicitur Inquisitio Eliensis*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton (London, 1876). For an excellent overview of these texts, see Elizabeth M. Hallam, *Domesday Book through Nine Centuries* (London, 1986), pp. 17–31.

<sup>54</sup> The Exon Domesday is printed in *DB*, vol 4. Not all the Liber Exoniensis survives. Somerset and Cornwall are complete and Devonshire is shy of only six fiefs, but Dorset and Wiltshire are only poorly represented. (H. C. Harby, *Domesday Geography of South-West England*, pp. 393–428; F. H. Baring, 'The Exeter Domesday', *EHR*, 27 (1912), pp. 309–18; R. Weldon Finn, 'The immediate sources of the Exchequer Domesday', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 41 (1959), pp. 360–87.)

<sup>55</sup> See above, n. 53.

<sup>56</sup> *Dom. Mon.*; BL Cotton MS Vespasian B xxiv.

<sup>57</sup> *An Eleventh-Century Inquisition of St Augustine's Canterbury*, ed. Adolphus Ballard, in *Records of the Social and Economic History of England and Wales*, iv, pt 2 (London, 1920).

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valuable information on the lands given to these foundations by pious benefactors, stolen by greedy aristocrats, or restored through the mysterious powers of God. Toponymics, too, give indications of early landholding patterns. The Kingstons, Coninsboroughs and Aldermastons of England bear silent testimony to their early Saxon lords. Happily, a great deal of work has been done on English place-names and is available through the publications of the English Place-Name Society.<sup>58</sup> This evidence is further supplemented by some 1,700 pre-Conquest charters, writs, wills and memoranda of varying shades of authenticity, which record the transference, maintenance or loss of about 3,500 different pieces of land. There are also approximately two hundred post-Conquest charters and writs dating from William I's reign, along with a handful of memoranda dealing with some of the important pleas held to adjudicate disputes over land in the first years after the Conquest.

The landscape itself is invaluable in interpreting the meaning of landholding patterns. Extensive analyses of England's topography and river morphology are available,<sup>59</sup> along with detailed information on Roman and medieval road systems,<sup>60</sup> Iron and Dark Age earthworks, Scandinavian settlement patterns and the paths taken by conquering Norman armies.<sup>61</sup> Administrative districts, too, can be reconstructed, as can the bounds of a number of estates.<sup>62</sup> Once geographical information is plotted, infor-

<sup>58</sup> English Place-Name Society, general editors A. Mawer and Sir Frank Stenton (vols. 1-19), Bruce Dickins (vols. 20-2), A. H. Smith (vols. 23-43), and K. Cameron (vols. 44- ) (Cambridge, 1924- ).

<sup>59</sup> *British Rivers*, ed. John Lewin (London, 1981); T. S. Willan, *River Navigation in England (1600-1750)* (London, 1964); Francis John Monkhouse, *Landscape from the Air: A Physical Geography in Oblique Air Photographs*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1971).

<sup>60</sup> Ivan D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 3rd edn (London, 1973); Christopher Taylor, *Roads and Tracks of Britain* (London, 1979).

<sup>61</sup> J. Ford-Johnston, *Hillforts of the Iron Age in England and Wales: A Survey of the Surface Evidence* (London, 1976); B. W. Cunliffe, *Iron Age Communities in Britain* (London, 1974); Leslie A. Alcock, 'Hillforts in Wales and the Marches', *Antiquity*, 39 (1965), pp. 184-95; D. W. Harding, *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* (Oxford, 1974); Ian Burrow, *Hillfort and Hill-Top Settlement in Somerset in the First to Eighth Centuries A.D.*, *BAR* (Oxford, 1981); Cyril Fox, *Offa's Dyke* (London, 1955); C. A. R. Radford, 'The later pre-Conquest boroughs and their defences', *Medieval Archaeology*, 14 (1970), pp. 83-103. For a convenient and fairly current bibliography of articles dealing with archaeology of Anglo-Saxon earthworks see *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. David M. Wilson (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 463-511.

<sup>62</sup> O. S. Anderson, *The English Hundred-Names* (Lund, 1934); *The English Hundred-Names: The South-Western Counties* (Lund, 1939); *The English Hundred-Names: The South Eastern Counties* (Lund, 1939).

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mation from the chronicles can be superimposed. Such a political and geographical reconstruction of English history can then be overlain with the tenurial information provided by charters, monastic chronicles and Domesday Book. Thus, evidence which is geographical in nature but arising from a variety of sources can aid in determining the origin, function and effect of landholding configurations preserved in the record sources.

Although evidence on landholding is abundant, it presents a difficult set of problems. The shortcomings of Domesday Book have been chronicled over the course of a century of close scholarship. As detailed and comprehensive as the document initially appears, its information, as its critics have pointed out, is not always exact and must be used cautiously. The geld assessments and values of many estates in Domesday are divisible by five or by four – favourite numbers of account in eleventh-century England – so are doubtless approximations. There are also a number of scribal errors and lacunae. More serious than Domesday's minor inaccuracies is the information which the survey fails to record. Neither London nor Winchester was included in the Survey, nor were the counties of Durham and Northumberland. Anglo-Scandinavian personal names have been conflated by the Domesday commissioners, who were sloppy in their recordings of Alwigs and Æthelwigs, Ælfrics and Alrics, and in several counties the names of the majority of Anglo-Saxon tenants have been omitted.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the Saxon tenures recorded in the survey present a host of problems. Over two hundred phrases are used to describe the tenurial arrangements of pre-Conquest England, but it is difficult to match this confusion of terms with the commendation, bookland, loanland, and folkland known from other sources.

Since the inquest was carried out in different circuits, and since customs changed from region to region, there are also important variations in Domesday's terminology and information. In most of England south of Watling Street land was assessed in hides and organized by hundreds; in the north taxes were levied on the carucate, and shires were divided into wapentakes. Some circuits witness the careful recording of pre-Conquest tenures and overlords, while other circuits rarely bothered; and in some circuits hundreds or wapentakes are conscientiously rubricated,

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Oxfordshire and Leicestershire (DB, i, 154r–162r; 230r–237r).

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but elsewhere in the survey there is little effort made to keep these districts straight. Estates in Domesday were also valued very differently. The value of some were given at twenty pence to the ora. Others rendered pounds by tale, and still others money that had been weighed or blanché. Although most estates were given annual values in pounds, to a number were appended a series of arcane customary renders. Scattered in the survey's folios we find land rendering foodstuff such as cheese,<sup>64</sup> wine,<sup>65</sup> bread,<sup>66</sup> flour,<sup>67</sup> honey,<sup>68</sup> wheat, barley and oats,<sup>69</sup> bacon-pigs<sup>70</sup> and porpoise;<sup>71</sup> livestock such as cows,<sup>72</sup> sheep,<sup>73</sup> hawks and dogs;<sup>74</sup> raw material such as timber,<sup>75</sup> boxwood<sup>76</sup> and iron;<sup>77</sup> manufactured goods such as salt,<sup>78</sup> spurs<sup>79</sup> and ploughshares;<sup>80</sup> and labour services such as riding, sowing, ploughing and harrowing.<sup>81</sup> Clearly, no absolute value can be assigned to estates that rendered these customary dues in addition to money. To further complicate matters, such details are normally suppressed in Domesday, although it is quite clear that nearly every tenant was encumbered with similar kinds of dues, and that all great lords received thousands of hours of grudging labour each year along with a mountain of produce and squealing livestock. But the inclusion of these dues in Domesday Book is too haphazard and idiosyncratic for us to quantify them in any way. Some royal and comital estates are given no value at all, but rendered night's farm, an ancient customary food rent. It is difficult to compare these often enormously valuable but unvalued estates with estates valued in pounds, shillings and pence.<sup>82</sup> None of these problems, however, is insurmountable, and most are the exception rather than the rule. The vast majority of estates have been identified, are assigned TRE and TRW tenants, and are given values and assessments which can, at least roughly, be compared. Domesday evidence enables us to plot the bulk of great men's landholdings and to calculate their relative wealth. As Sally Harvey has aptly noted,

Rightly ... the deficiencies of the Domesday text have been minutely researched by commentators in the last two decades or so; but there is

<sup>64</sup> DB, i, 59v.

<sup>65</sup> DB, i, 43r.

<sup>66</sup> DB, i, 162v.

<sup>67</sup> DB, i, 12r.

<sup>68</sup> DB, i, 173r.

<sup>69</sup> DB, i, 172v; 179v.

<sup>70</sup> DB, i, 97r.

<sup>71</sup> DB, i, 5v.

<sup>72</sup> DB, i, 162v.

<sup>73</sup> DB, i, 179v.

<sup>74</sup> DB, i, 187r.

<sup>75</sup> DB, i, 173r.

<sup>76</sup> DB, i, 252v.

<sup>77</sup> DB, i, 87v.

<sup>78</sup> DB, i, 281v.

<sup>79</sup> DB, i, 276v.

<sup>80</sup> DB, i, 39v.

<sup>81</sup> DB, i, 163r; 174v; 179v.

<sup>82</sup> For a further discussion of night's farm, see FE, p. 114; Paul Vinogradoff, *English Society in the Eleventh Century* (Oxford, 1908), pp. 142, 327; Carl Stephenson, "The 'firma noctis' and the customs of the hundred", *EHR*, 39 (1924), pp. 161-74.