

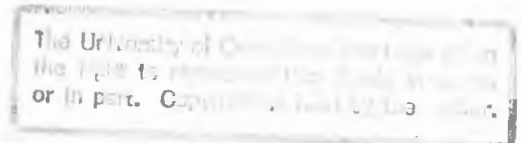
**RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA IN SELECTED ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE**

**Lise Manda Keating**

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**Supervisor: Professor J. E. van der Westhuizen**

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## **Abstract**

This study of selected Old English texts, from the canons of Aelfric and Cynewulf, presents the argument that the primary purpose of the Saints' Lives in question is that of instruments of persuasion. After a description of the rites of Anglo-Saxon paganism, an attempt is made to outline the manner in which the Christian missionaries used certain aspects of pagan belief to promote Christianity. As such, these texts may therefore be viewed as religious propaganda in the Anglo-Saxon Church's attempt to win new converts to Christianity and to strengthen the faith of those already within its fold, firstly by promoting belief in the miraculous and secondly by investing Anglo-Saxon Christianity with the supernatural powers of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Pagan religions.

Although the works of Cynewulf predate those of Aelfric, I have chosen to discuss the prose works of Aelfric first. However, I do not believe that reversing the historical order invalidates the argument.

## Introduction

**Ad cuius pietatis et iustitiae opus pertinet etiam hoc, quod nostram gentem per praedicatores, quos huc direxit, de dentibus antiqui hostis eripiens aeternae libertatis fecit esse participem; cuius fidei et saluti congaudens, quamque digna laude commendans, ipse dicit in expositione beati Iob: ‘Ecce lingua Britanniae, quae nil aliud nouerat quam barbarum frendere, iam dudum in diuinis laudibus Hebreum coepit alleluia resonsare. Ecce quondam tumidus, iam substratus sanctorum pedibus seruit oceanus, eiusque barbaros motus, quos terreni principes edomare ferro nequiuertant, hos pro diuina formidine sacerdotum ora simplicibus uerbis ligant, et qui cateruas pugnantium infidelis nequaquam metueret, iam nunc fidelis humilium linguas timet. Quia enim perceptis caelestibus uerbis, clarescentibus quoque miraculis, uirtus ei diuinae cognitionis infunditur, eiusdem diuinitatis terrore refrenatur ut praue agere metuat, ac totis desiderii ad aeternitatis gratiam uenire concupiscat.’ Quibus uerbis beatus Gregorius hoc quoque declarat, quia sanctus Augustinus et socii eius non sola praedicatione uerborum, sed etiam caelestium ostensione signorum gentem Anglorum ad agnitionem ueritatis perducebant. (Bede. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Lib II, cap I, 78)**

The beginnings of the English people are to be seen in the arrival half way through the fifth century in Britain of three Germanic tribes; the Saxons, Angles and Jutes described by Bede as the “three most formidable German races”. Known collectively as the Anglo-Saxons, these three Germanic tribes of the fifth and sixth centuries were entirely heathen.

Although modern knowledge of Anglo-Saxon heathenism is considered meagre, our best source of information concerning Anglo-Saxon heathenism is Bede’s *De Temporum Ratione* in which he names and describes the months of the Anglo-Saxon year and from which it would appear that the regular practice of the pagan religion of England, like the pagan religions of the Germanic peoples on the continent, involved seasonal festivals. According to Bede the heathen year began on 25 December and certain ceremonies caused the following night to be named *Modra nect*, meaning the night of the mothers. The last month of the Old Year and the first month of the New were both comprised under the name *Giuli*, the modern Yule, a name so old that its meaning is unknown. (It is likely that this Yule festival involved the burning of evergreen, the burning of a Yule log and a feast centred around a boar’s head, since these non-Christian features became associated with the Christmas festival celebrated at that time) (Owen. G. R. *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons*, 48).

The name of the second month, *Solmonath*, is described by Bede, as the month of cakes, which Anglo-Saxons offered to their gods. According to Frank Stenton most modern scholars, however, reject this interpretation since no English word *sol*, meaning cake, is known. The third and fourth months were named after the goddesses *Hretha* and *Eostre*:

the fifth was called *Thrimilci* because during this month cows were milked three times a day. The sixth and seventh months were brought together under the name *Litha*, an ancient word, meaning moon. The eighth month was called *Weodmonath*, the month of weeds and the ninth month was known as *Halegmonath*, or holy month, or as Bede interprets the name, “the month of offerings”(Stenton. F. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 97).

*Wintirfyllith*, or the tenth month, is connected by Bede with the appearance of the first full moon of winter. *Blotmonath*, the name of the eleventh month meaning month of sacrifice, arose, according to Bede, because the Anglo-Saxons devoted to their gods the animals which they were about to kill. Stenton writes “This explanation gives what is by far the earliest reference to the practice of killing off superfluous stock for winter food, and the name shows that the custom, with a naïve economy, was made a sacrificial occasion. For all the obscurity of some of these names and the neutral character of others, it is clear that there was a strong element of heathen festivity at the base of the Old English calendar”(Stenton. F. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 98).

The heathen Anglo-Saxons worshipped several deities the most important being Tiw, Woden and Thunor. According to John Godfrey, the attributes of these deities, after whom three of our weekdays are named, are by no means clear. We should not assume that Woden and Thunor were identical with the Norse Odin and Thor, about whom more is known. It is clear, however, that Tiw was a Germanic war-god, equated by the Romans with Mars. Thunor, the thunder-god, equated with Jupiter, was more widely worshipped and was one of the gods whom the continental Saxons were to be specifically called on to renounce by the Christian missionaries. Woden, regarded by the Romans as equivalent to Mercury, was in the opinion of Tacitus the most worshipped of German gods. He was a war-god who could bring victory, an aristocratic god whom kings claimed as their ancestor(Godfrey. J. *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, 63).

Gale Owen provides a sound account of Anglo-Saxon heathenism, summarised as follows. Anglo-Saxon heathenism had diverged somewhat from Teutonic mythology as known on the continent and had probably weakened in intensity and conviction, yet it remained thoroughly Germanic in character. Although human sacrifice, which was certainly practised in Dark Age Scandinavia, had disappeared, perhaps as Gale Owen suggests because human life was considered too precious to waste in the new and struggling immigrant colonies, the Anglo-Saxons continued the ancient Germanic practice of worshipping in a grove. This practice continued until original animistic beliefs associated with the sacred grove became superseded by more tangible aids to worship such as temples in which were placed images and idols. Two types of temples existed. The first was usually an ordinary building in a farm or home, used on special occasions for religious feasts while the second was situated away from the dwelling in which the idols or sacred features came over time to be protected by a tent or a temporary cover.

Despite the fact that the Anglo-Saxons were skilled metal workers, nothing resembling a metal idol survives, so it seems likely that their idols were constructed of wood. (If any had escaped the destruction by Christians, wooden idols would not have survived in English soil conditions). These idols were probably pieces of wood on which carvers

accentuated a natural resemblance to the essential feature of the god, as in a Danish example from an Iron Age site. In this case a side-branch on a length of oak made an obvious phallic symbol. A little carving and the addition of a stylised face turned the whole into a fertility god.

In Scandinavian paganism animals, particularly oxen, were offered to Fryer and it seems likely that the English also honoured the fertility god in this way. The ritual sacrifice of oxen is a feature of Anglo-Saxon paganism evidenced repeatedly by archaeology and confirmed by historical document. We can only guess the precise reasons behind the ritual gesture of the severed head; perhaps being the least useful part of the animal for food, the head was offered back to the god whose beneficence had provided the feast. Owen suggests that perhaps the offering was to ensure that the food supply would last the winter and that the surviving beasts would breed well in the coming year. Or perhaps the head of the beast, with the brain, which had controlled the powerful shoulders and strong limbs, was to the Anglo-Saxons an awesome object which they believed contained magical properties (Owen. G. *The Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons*, 41- 46).

The fundamental principles binding Anglo-Saxon society were kinship and loyalty to one's lord. There was no clan system as among the Celts, but there existed a strong sense of family interdependence which found expression in the payment of *wergild*, the money compensation due to an injured family. Probably even more important than kinship ties was the comitatus principle, by which a leader relied on the allegiance of a band of followers. "This was a Germanic principle which Tacitus had noticed. He said that the Germans counted it lasting shame to leave a battle alive after their chief had fallen. 'The Chiefs fight for victory, the companions for their chief'. At the same time this allegiance is not given for nothing. An open-handed generosity on the part of their chief is expected by his followers, and to keep the latter adequately supplied in food and gifts, constant resort to war is necessary"(Godfrey. J. *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, 62).

A further feature of the Anglo-Saxon comitatus principle was the erection of gigantic monoliths to commemorate chieftains, probably such as were slain in battle "The value of the tribute lay in the great size of the stone and the consequent difficulty of raising it. At a later period, when writing became known, the rough pillar was inscribed, in *oghrams*, or in debased Latin characters, on a smooth side of the stone (Stevens. W. O. *The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, 39).

We can see then that the Anglo-Saxons in general were closely involved not only in the festivals of their religion, but also in their social and domestic interaction. More significant than these manifestations of organised religion and social intercourse, however, was the widespread belief in the supernatural, in charms and incantations, in the spiritual potency of trees and wells and a whole array of elves, dragons and nightmares. Many of these beliefs and traditions would survive the introduction of Christianity and to a great extent it would be true that the triumph of the Church entailed not an uprooting but a reinterpretation of existing processes of thought, since heathenism was deep rooted by the practice of many generations when it met the Christian challenge.

In the words of Keith Thomas;

The claim to supernatural power was an essential element in the Anglo-Saxon Church's fight against paganism, and missionaries did not fail to stress the superiority of Christian prayers to heathen charms (Thomas. K. *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 27-28).

Although Christianity had first been founded in Britain by the Romans, the first Christian missionaries to reach the Anglo-Saxons were sent at the behest of the medieval Pope, Gregory the Great. According to legend it was upon his return journey from Constantinople, in 585, that he encountered pagan Anglo-Saxons being sold as slaves in Rome;

Dicunt, quia die quadam cum, aduenientibus nuper mercatoribus, multa uenalia in forum fuissent conlata, multi ad emendum confluxissent, et ipsum Gregorium inter alios aduenisse, ac uidisse inter alia pueros uenales positos candidi corporis, ac uenusti uultus, capillorum quoque forma egregia. Quos cum aspiceret, interrogauit, ut aiunt, de qua regione uel terra essent adlati. Dictumque est, quia de Britannia insula, cuius incolae talis essent aspectus. Rursus interrogauit, utrum idem insulani Christiani, an pagani adhuc erroribus essent implicati. Dictum est, quod essent pagani. At ille, intimo ex corde longa trahens suspiria: 'Heu, pro dolor!' inquit, 'quod tam lucidi uultus homines tenebrarum auctor possidet, tantaque gratia frontispicii mentem ab interna gratia uacuum gestat!' Rursus ergo interrogauit, quod esset uocabulum gentis illius. Responsum est, quod Angli uocarentur. At ille: 'Bene,' inquit; 'nam et angelicam habent faciem, et tales angelorum in caelis decet esse coheredes. Quod habet nomen ipsa prouincia, de qua isti sunt adlati?' Responsum est, quod Deiri uocarentur idem prouinciales. At ille: 'Bene,' inquit, 'Deiri; de ira eruti, et ad misericordiam Christi uocati. Rex prouinciae illius quomodo appellatur?' Responsum est, quod Aelli diceretur. At ille adludens ad nomen ait: 'Alleluia, laudem Dei Creatoris illis in partibus oportet cantari.' (Bede. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Lib II, cap, I, 79-80)

It would appear that after this incident, Gregory approached Pope Pelagius II (578-90) and urged him to send missionaries to the English under his leadership. Although the Pope willingly acceded to his wishes the Roman people did not, since they saw in Gregory their future Pope and protector. In 590 Rome was ravaged by Bubonic plague and Pelagius fell victim to the disease. Gregory was elected Pope in that same year and consecrated on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September in St Peter's. According to Frank Stenton we need not doubt that Gregory's attention was first called to Britain by the desire to convert its heathen inhabitants. We should, however, bear in mind that Gregory was in the succession of ancient Roman statesmen and would not have been indifferent to the

political advantages that would surely have followed from the reunion of a lost province to the empire to the church of its capital (Stenton. F. *Anglo-Saxon England*. p. 104).

It was not however, Northumbria, the home of the slave-boys on sale in the Forum, that Gregory chose to spear-head his English conversion, but Kent. In the words of Gale Owen;

Kent had no doubt been carefully chosen. It was a wealthy kingdom, and its ruler at that time, Ethelbert, was Bretwalda and so had influence over other kingdoms. Being the closest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to the continent, Kent had strong ties of culture and kinship with her Frankish neighbours. Ethelbert himself was married to a Frankish woman, Bertha, daughter of Charibert, King of Paris. She was a Christian and the continued observance of her faith had been a condition of her marriage. The Frankish bishop Liudhard had come to Kent as her chaplain, and she worshipped in the old church of St Martin which had been built near Canterbury in Roman times.

(Owen. G. *The Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons*, 129)

Unable to lead the mission personally, Gregory chose as leader of the mission to Britain, Augustine, prior of the monastery on the Caelian. In the fourteenth year of the emperor Maurice, Augustine set out from Rome with several companions, breaking their journey in Provence, where they were welcomed by the provincial governor Arigius, bishop of Aix and by Stephen, abbot of Lerins. It would appear, however, that this obvious reminder of the monastic life which they had left behind caused them to become unnerved and prompted them to send word to Gregory requesting that the mission be abandoned. In a return letter, Gregory refused their request and appointed Augustine as abbot, giving him sole authority.

John Godfrey suggests from evidence found in several of Gregory's letters addressed to lay persons requesting assistance for the mission that the English had in fact expressed a wish for the Christian religion. Furthermore Augustine and his followers met with no opposition and did not suffer any martyrdoms but received rather a cordial welcome, which in itself would suggest not only that heathenism was weakening in Kent but that perhaps the mission had been expected (Godfrey. J. *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, 75).

Bede records that although Ethelbert kept the missionaries supplied with food and provisions, he ordered them to remain on the Isle of Thanet. After some time he arrived on the island and commanded Augustine and his companions to appear before him in the open air since he believed that a man could get the better of an opponent by magical means if he encountered him under a roof. This attests to the fact that belief in magic and the supernatural was general amongst the Anglo-Saxons.

When Ethelbert and his men were ready to receive Augustine's mission, Augustine and his monks moved towards him singing litanies and carrying a silver cross and a picture of the Saviour painted on a board. Bede records that Augustine preached the word of life to which Ethelbert replied that despite his acknowledgement of the beauty of Augustine's words, he must refuse to abandon the practices of his ancestors. Nevertheless he would not prevent Augustine and his men from preaching and granted them the use of St Martin's at Canterbury the Kentish capital, from where they might proceed in their preaching and converting (*H.E. Lib I, cap XXV-XXVI, 44-46*).

The first stage of the mission ended soon after Augustine's arrival with the conversion of Ethelbert, on the feast of Pentecost. Bede attributes this particular and significant conversion to the example of purity set by Augustine and his men and their powers of salvation which are ratified by the performing of miracles; *At ubi ipse etiam inter alios delectatus uita mundissima sanctorum, et promissis eorum suauissimis, quae uera esse miraculorum quoque multorum ostensione firmauerant, credens baptizatus est* (*H.E. Lib I, cap XXVI, 47*). Keith Thomas writes;

Nearly every primitive religion is regarded by its adherents as a medium for obtaining supernatural power. This does not prevent it from functioning as a system of explanation, a source of moral injunctions, a symbol of social order, or a route to immortality; but it does mean that it also offers the prospect of a supernatural means of control over man's earthly environment. The history of early Christianity offers no exception to this rule. Conversions to the new religion, whether in the time of the primitive Church or under the auspices of the missionaries of more recent times, have frequently been assisted by the view of converts that they are acquiring not just a means of other-worldly salvation, but a new and more powerful magic. Just as the Hebrew priests of the Old Testament endeavoured to confound the devotees of Baal by challenging them publicly to perform supernatural acts, so the apostles of the early Church attracted followers by working miracles and performing supernatural cures. Both the New Testament and the literature of the patristic period testify to the importance of these activities in the work of conversion; and the ability to perform miracles soon became an indispensable test of sanctity (Thomas. K. *Religion and the Decline of Magic, 27-8*).

After king Ethelbert's conversion there was a steady flow of converts to the new religion so that by the following Christmas, Augustine was able to baptise ten thousand converts (Godfrey. J. *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England, 77*). Bede also records that while the mission itself compelled none to convert, King Ethelbert showed special favour to those who chose Christianity over heathensim. An example of such a conversion is that of the heathen priest Coifi at the court of King Edwin in Northumbria, as recorded by Bede;

Cui primus pontificum ipsius Coifi continuo respondit : 'Tu uide, rex, quale sit hoc, quod nobis modo praedicatur ; ego autem tibi uerissime, quod certum didici, profiteor, quia nihil omnino uirtutis habet, nihil utilitatis religio illa, quam hucusque

tenuimus. Nullus enim tuorum studiosius quam ego culturae deorum nostrorum se subdidit; et nihilominus multi sunt, qui ampliora a te beneficia quam ego, et maiores accipiunt dignitates, magisque prosperantur in omnibus, quae agenda uel acquirenda disponunt. Si autem dii aliquid ualerent, me potius iuuare uellent, qui illis inpensius seruire curauit. Unde restat, ut si ea, quae nunc nobis noua praedicantur, meliora esse et fortiora, habita examinatione perspexeris, absque ullo cunctamine suscipere illa festinemus.’  
(Bede. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Lib II, cap XIII, 111-12)

According to Stephanie Hollis “Missionary policy, both in England and on the continent, was to gain first the protective favour of kings or overlords, and to secure if possible their immediate conversion, so that by “persuasion and example” their subjects would be brought to follow suit.” (Hollis. S. ‘The Conversionary Dynamic: More Laws for Times Like These’, 16-19).

Augustine’s next initiative was the building of new churches and the restoring of old ones. One such restoration was a Romano-British Church which he rededicated as Saviour Jesus Christ while not far from the city he built and founded a monastery, known in his day as St Peter’s but subsequent to his death became known as St Augustine’s. More importantly Augustine purified and dedicated to St Pancras the heathen temple used by king Ethelbert. The practice of adapting heathen temples as Christian churches was an important characteristic of the Roman mission in England, a practice previously rare in western Christendom. This practice of converting existing heathen temples into Christian churches is generally ascribed to Gregory since in a letter addressed to Abbot Mellitus of the second mission he requests the Abbot to instruct Augustine to do just this;

Cum ergo Deus omnipotens uos ad reuerentissimum uirum fratrem nostrum Augustinum episcopum perduxerit, dicite ei, quid diu mecum de causa Anglorum cogitans tractauit; uidelicet, quia fana idolorum destrui in eadem gente minime debeant; sed ipsa quae in eis sunt, idola destruantur; aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem fanis aspergatur, altaria construuntur, reliquiae ponantur. Quia, si fana eadem bene constructa sunt, necesse est, ut a cultu daemonum in obsequio ueri Dei debeant commutari; ut dum gens ipsa eadem fana sua non uidet destrui, de corde errorem deponat, et Deum uerum cognoscens ac adorans, ad loca, quae consuevit, familiariter concurrat.  
(Bede. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Lib. I, cap XXX, 65)

This would appear, however, to be a complete reversal of Gregory’s initial instructions to Augustine that he should go forth, destroy all pagan idols and spread the faith in the manner of an imperial conqueror like Constantine. (Hollis. S. ‘The Conversionary Dynamic: More Laws for Times Like These’, 17). Perhaps as John Godfrey suggests, Gregory was in fact in this regard following the example set by Augustine in the purification of Ethelbert’s temple and that in this endeavour it is Augustine who showed enterprise and originality (Godfrey. J. *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, 78).

Gregory continues his letter to Mellitus by advocating the adaptation of the pagan custom of sacrificing cattle to Christian use;

Et quia boues solent in sacrificio daemonum multos occidere, debet eis etiam hac de re aliqua sollemnitas immutari ; ut die dedicationis, uel natalicii sanctorum martyrum, quorum illic reliquiae ponuntur, tabernacula sibi circa easdem ecclesias, quae ex fanis commutatae sunt, de ramis arborum faciant, et religiosis conuiuuiis sollemnitatem celebrent; nec diabolo iam animalia immolent, et ad laudem Dei in esu suo animalia occidant, et donatori omnium de satietate sua gratias referant ; ut dum eis aliqua exterius gaudia reseruantur, ad interiora gaudia consentire facilius ualeant. Nam duris mentibus simul omnia abscidere impossibile esse non dubium est. . . . . Haec igitur dilectionem tuam praedicto fratri necesse est dicere, ut ipse in prasenti illic positus perpendat, qualiter omnia debeat dispensare.

(Bede. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Lib I, cap XXX, 65-66)

Perhaps the greatest change in day-to-day living which Christianity brought about was in the calendar. While the pattern of the seasons, with their significance for agriculture continued unchanged, the Church took over the major celebrations and augmented them. The great spring celebration was now associated with the crucifixion and resurrection, and was preceded by the strictly enforced fasting of Lent. With the adoption of the Roman calendar the pagan names of the seasons were dropped and the months with which we are now familiar substituted. So too the Anglo-Saxons' sense of chronology was altered by the introduction of the Roman *anno domini*.

A further example of both missionary enterprise and originality, (although not attributable specifically to either Gregory or Augustine), was the introduction of stone crosses, similar in shape to the pagan stone monoliths erected in honour of fallen heroes. In order to attract attention, and to demarcate places of worship, monumental stone crosses which combined the Roman Christian Cross with pagan architectural elements, such as the interlaced circle binding the centre of the cross and representative of the pagan symbol for eternity, were erected by missionaries at well established places of common resort, such as markets and wells (Stevens. W. O. *The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, 59). In my opinion, these missionary practices would appear to lend weight to Stephanie Hollis' argument that "The conversion was not an imposition of a monolithic ideology upon a cultural void, but an interactive process"(Hollis. S. 'The Conversionary Dynamic: More Laws for Times Like These', 18).

By far the most efficacious method of demonstrating its monopoly of the truth in the fight against paganism was, as we have seen in the conversion of king Ethelbert, the working of miracles. These miracles were performed firstly through its own members as is demonstrated during Augustine's initial meeting with the Celtic Bishops and his demonstration of the superiority of the Roman Church through his miraculous healing of

a blind man(Bede. *H.E.* II. 2)and secondly through the Church's established saints and their relics. In the words of Ronald Finucane;

“Although saints’ relics were being venerated in the second century, if not earlier, the great boom in miracles associated with Christian relics seems to have begun during the fourth century, after Christianity was declared to be a tolerated religion by the Emperor Constantine, in A.D. 313....As posthumous miracles became part and parcel of popular Christianity in the fourth and early fifth centuries, appropriate rituals were established at curative shrines, and candles and incense, once prohibited by the Church as too ‘pagan’, now burned at saints’ altars, while wax or silver offerings...were now brought by grateful pilgrims...Although pagan temples and altars were closed down, converted or destroyed, the old cures, visions and miracles of the healing god AEsculapius or Apollonius, still occurred at Christian shrines under the patronage of a new spiritual hierarchy, the martyred saints....Some Christian leaders reacted adversely to these trends, even St Augustine became more cautious in his old age, suggesting in his *Retractions* of about 427 that though miracles still happened they were not of the same order as those of Christ’s time; Christians he wrote, should not over-emphasize visible wonders and grow contemptuous through familiarity with them...Nevertheless, it was not merely pressure ‘from below’ which brought miraculous relics into the Church.

All through the fourth century latent tensions developed as ‘the Church’ encouraged the principles but condemned the excesses of popular veneration of saints and their relics. The seeds of ambiguity, of paradox within the ‘official Church’ were already taking root, thrusting through the writings of bishops and theologians.”

(Finucane. R. C. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular beliefs in Medieval England*, 18-19)

By the time of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, Miracle was one of the most expedient of all missionary devices, having been used by missionaries since 410. To the pagan congregations who could barely grasp theological principles, a simpler method of convincing them of the truth of Christianity was to perform miracles (usually of healing) or to demolish their temples ensuring that the message could not be misunderstood.

Unfortunately the power to perform miracles would have appeared to have gone to Augustine’s head since in 601 Pope Gregory admonishes him against overreaching pride;

unde necesse est, ut de eodem dono caelesti et timendo gaudeas, et gaudento pertimescas. Gaudeas videlicet, quia Anglorum animae per exteriora miracula ad interiorem gratiam pertahuntur; pertimescas uero, ne inter signa, quae fiunt, infirmus animus in sui praesumptione

se eleuet, et unde foras in honorem tollitur, inde per inanem gloriam intus cadat(Bede. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Lib I, cap XXXI, 66).

Nevertheless, by this admonishment the Pope also acknowledges the utility of miracles in the task of converting men from the worship of pagan gods to that of Christ.

There were, however, other churchmen who were calling attention to the danger of unregulated thaumaturgy. Finucane records Alcuin, an English intellectual at Charlemagne's court who played a leading role in the Carolingian Renaissance, as stating the 'ministry of preaching the Gospel is to be preferred to the working of miracles and the showing of signs' yet simultaneously admitting that country folk were usually more impressed by physical wonders than preaching (Finucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular beliefs in Medieval England*, 22).

A further weapon in the fight against paganism was the Church's appropriation of the use of relics. Many pagan relics were supposed to work wonders and cure diseased suppliants, properties which were appropriated by the bodies of Christian martyrs especially during the fourth century as paganism fell to minority status and then became illegal. Throughout the early Middle Ages the bodies of martyrs and confessors were unearthed and mobilised in defence and exaltation of the faith. A certain Benedict Biscop (d.689) made six trips during his lifetime from Rome to England, bringing books and relics for the enlightenment and comfort of his colleagues. In this manner the Church substituted among the pagans the powers of holy men both living and dead, in place of what it considered to be abstruse doctrine and theological subtleties, creating an atmosphere in primitive Germanic Christianity which could only be described as one of "belief in the miraculous, the hourly expectation of supernatural events"(Finucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 23).

The consequences of employing miracles in the work of conversion are at once apparent; for the novice Christians miracles and saints' relics attained a significance far beyond what the missionaries may have intended. The beliefs promoted by missionaries in the heat of conversion were often an embarrassment to later generations of churchmen in a peaceful Christianised Europe.

By c. 660 all England except Sussex and the Isle of Wight had formally adopted the Faith, an achievement attributable to both the Roman and Celtic missions. There was thus an intricate intermingling of the Irish and Roman strands in the Conversion, and it is likely that the followers of the two traditions were on the whole on good terms with each other. However, it was not until the synod of Whitby in 663, at which the Roman method for the calculation of Easter was finally agreed upon, that the two Churches were brought together. But despite the fact that the Roman Easter was now enforced, other Celtic customs continued and it would still be some time before English Christianity would be organised under one Church.

I agree with Ronald Finucane who believes that by the time of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* the new mythology of Christianity was already a fully developed system of

belief. (Finucane. R. C. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 24). For example, Bede writes of bishops who ward off storms by casting holy water on to the sea (*H. E.* Lib I, cap 17) of the return of a blind girl's sight after being touched by saints' relics (*H.E.* Lib I, cap 18) and of houses which withstand fire, protected by the saint who lies within (*H.E.* Lib I, cap 19). To return once more to Finucane;

“Such were the fruits of missionary zeal, the harvest of Christian folklore. Missionaries won converts by reciting stronger charms, routing braver devils, and performing greater wonders with objects more powerful than rude idols. From Rome to Lindisfarne the powers of holy bones were recognised by the simplest Christians, innocent of theology, and for a thousand years these beliefs, though sometimes challenged, would dominate much of the folk-Christianity of Europe”(Finucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 24).

It is equally certain, however, that despite this missionary zeal and the fact that by 664, Christianity was the dominant religion throughout England, the older beliefs of the English people, though driven underground, were still very much alive;

At the very time of the council (of Whitby) England, like much of western Europe, was being swept by a pestilence, which removed many leaders of the clergy, depopulated whole monasteries, and produced a widespread reversion to heathenism ...the whole organization of the church in England was rapidly disintegrating in these years (Stenton. F. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 128).

As Dom David Knowles states, “all available evidence from the reign of Alfred points to a complete collapse of monasticism by the end of the ninth century(Knowles. D. *The Monastic Order in England*, 33). Knowles firmly believes that the monastic life in any productive sense disappeared from England between the times of the first Scandinavian raids at the close of the eighth century and the inauguration of St Dunstan as Abbot of Glastonbury in the year 940, who was to spear-head the Benedictine Renaissance, in which the new vitality of the reformed Church permeated every aspect of art.

Perhaps the most important of all the changes in Anglo-Saxon culture effected by the Conversion was the setting down of the Anglo-Saxon language in the Roman alphabet. Although Anglo-Saxon poetry of the heathen age was first written down by Christian clerks, most of which only survives in texts which are affected by Christian ideas and imagery later Anglo-Saxon England has left us little extant poetry (Stenton. F. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 192). On the other hand, it produced a substantial amount of vernacular prose, in the form of homilies written by monks and intended probably for the use of the parochial clergy. C. L. Wrenn writes;

There can be no doubt that it is the sermon written with literary art to be read aloud or recited, whether to religious or to lay people,

that is the dominant product in the literature of this age. During the reign of Ethelred the Unready, 978-1016, Aelfric and Wulfstan wrote homilies and didactic religious work of real literary merit, ... which show both liveliness and attractiveness.

(Wrenn. C. L. *A Study of Old English Literature*, 224)

Nevertheless, the historian John Godfrey believes that while the “liveliness and attractiveness” of this homiletic literature has been recognised by both linguists and Anglo-Saxon literary scholars alike, the essence of the work has perhaps been overlooked;

This homiletical literature, a veritable monument of early English prose, has received its due mead of praise from linguists and technical Old English students... Yet in these sermons we have an exposition of Catholic doctrine as it was currently accepted, and a reflection of the Christian way of life.

(Godfrey. J. *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, 331-2).

It is this exposition of Catholic doctrine within one of the dominant literary genres of the Benedictine movement, hagiography or the *Saint's Life*, with which I am concerned. According to P.A. Stafford, the Benedictine movement or English monastic revival of the tenth century should be viewed as part of a wider movement for monastic reform in the tenth century since neither “reform” nor “revival” is an accurate description of the movement. It was not primarily a reform of laxity, nor a simple revival of an earlier form of monasticism which had decayed, though there were elements of both. Rather the tenth century movement was the culmination of the spread of the Benedictine rule, fostered by the Carolingians. This monastic revival was thus political, economic and religious in character and significance;

Many scholars are now revealing the importance of the monasteries in the development of political power, while the economic significance of their estates has long been realized. In the life and organization of the church itself the monasteries not only had an impact on the episcopate, on church reform, and learning, **but they also played a role in winning the mass of the people to the church through their acquisition of relics, their popular Saints' lives and their homilies.**(my emphasis)

(Stafford. P. A. ‘Church and Society in the age of Aelfric’, 12)

In the light of this, it is my contention that the Saints' Lives as a genre are perhaps more than mere exercises in the “rekindling and widening among both the laity and clergy of the teachings of the Catholic Church”(Wrenn. C. L. *A Study of Old English Literature*, 226), as C.L. Wrenn believes them to be or as Gordon Hall Gerould defines them “biographical narrative...calculated to glorify the memory of its subject”(Gerould. G. H. *Saint's Legends*, 5). Thomas Hill writes that “Hagiography... is a curious literary form indeed. On the one hand, every *vita*, no matter how simple or complex, is based upon a

radically historical claim. If the given saint did not live, die, and make his or her powers manifest as the *vita* claims, then the *vita* is not merely in error, it is potentially destructive. It is hardly worthwhile invoking a saint who is not there.”(Hill. T. ‘*Imago Dei*’, 47).

With this in mind, I should like to suggest that the Old English Saints’Lives and in particular the Saints’Lives of *St Edmund* and *St Oswald*, composed by Aelfric, (a tenth century cleric) and that of *Elene* composed by Cynewulf, (a ninth century cleric), may be viewed as examples of religious, literary propaganda, designed to propagate and entrench belief in the miraculous amongst a population innocent of theology, in order to win new converts to the Church, and to strengthen the conviction of those currently within its fold.

## Chapter one: St Edmund and St Oswald

According to David Rollason the relationship between the cult of saints and English society in the 200 years from 650 to 850 shows that the literature associated with the saints was almost exclusively addressed to the ecclesiastical world. The relatively minor involvement of the secular world shows a preponderance of affinity for the noble and royal classes (Rollason, D. *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, 186). During the Benedictine revival however, more effort was devoted to preaching and the teaching of the laity, the organisation of parishes and tithes received and the production of homilies and other material in the vernacular to aid these efforts. Rollason writes that “from the tenth century onwards there was a major expansion in the popularity of the cult of saints amongst the laity. This is further suggested by the composition of collections of miracle stories of this type...such collections must have been in part intended to prove the efficacy of the saint’s miraculous interventions and thus to encourage lay devotion” (Rollason, D. *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, 187). By far the most learned writer of the Benedictine age, as well as being the most artistic, is Aelfric.

Aelfric lived from about A. D. 955 to 1020. He was born of a noble family and educated in the old minster at Winchester under his revered teacher St Aethelwold, who was Bishop of Winchester from 963 until his death in 984. After being ordained priest at the age of thirty, Aelfric was sent through the influence of noble and cultivated patrons to Cerne Abbas, in Dorset, where a Benedictine house was set up in 987. However, he seems to have returned to Winchester after only a few years in this particular monastery. In 1005, he was made the first Abbot of a new Benedictine House at Eynsham in Oxfordshire, where he seems to have spent the remainder of his quiet and apparently uneventful life.

Of the many sermons of Aelfric that survive, most find their place in one or other of the three series which he designed for various purposes and preachers. The first two of these three series are known collectively as his *Catholic Homilies*, while the third series is known as *Lives of Saints*. His next work, which was intended primarily to help the clergy in calculating the dates of Easter and other moveable Church Feasts, was a revision and adaptation into the vernacular of Bede’s treatise *De Temporibus Anni*. Aelfric also composed a Grammar book for small boys. The *Grammar* provided the elements of Latin grammar in the vernacular, so that Latin grammatical terms and classifications could be applied in such a way as to promote the early study of both languages. He was the author of a Latin glossary and the *Colloquy*, a model of a classroom dialogue in Latin.

His final major work was his third collection of homilies, *Lives of the Saints*, treating in particular the sufferings and miracles of those saints who are especially honoured by monks, and who have their own services. This collection was made between the years 993 and 998 at the request of his friends and patrons, Athelm and Aethelweard (Wrenn, C. L. *A Study of Old English Literature*, 226).

It is evident from Aelfric's work that, like King Alfred 100 years before, he had something of an educational plan which should help both laity and clergy since his vernacular books of religious teaching are the first since King Alfred's time;

Remaining within monastic walls, but always fully responsive to all the events happening outside, and directly aiming to forward the revitalising work of the Benedictine leaders and their legacy of teaching, Aelfric might be described in modern literary terms as the unobserved literary propagandist of the Benedictine movement, who produced some of the basic documents for rekindling and widening among both laity and clergy the teaching and the practical guidance of the Church. (Wrenn. C. L. *A Study of Old English Literature* ,226)

We should remember, however, that it was the clergy who formed the sole educated class, and that in their keeping was not only all religious teaching, but also the preservation of literature and the instruction of the young, as is evident from Aelfric's extant work, "in other words, the furnishing of nearly all the mental stimulus which comes to a people through the knowledge of the past, and the use of that knowledge in the preparation of the future"(White. C, *Aelfric: A New Study of his Life and Writings*, 15).

Despite the fact that all Aelfric's vernacular works were seemingly undertaken with one aim in view; "to enable his countrymen to enjoy the spiritual benefits to be derived from a knowledge of the Latin literature of the church, by making available to them in their own language some of the literature itself, and the means of learning for themselves the language in which it was written"(Needham. G. I. ed. *Lives of Three English Saints*, 15) and that Aelfric himself lays no claim to originality as stated in the *Preface* to his *Catholic Homilies*, he does in fact take extensive liberties with his sources and the *Lives of Saint Oswald* and *Saint Edmund* are no exception.

Aelfric's *Life of Saint Oswald* is based upon Bede's account of Saint Oswald in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, a work that is considered primarily as historical. Aelfric therefore chooses to transform an historical account into the conventional form of the saint's life or hagiographical narrative and in so doing conflates and rearranges Bede's nonchronological information into a chronological and ordered narrative divisible into three separate and distinguishable parts; the Saint's life, his passion and death and the miracles and marvels which result. However, political events and the worldly careers of the saints are not what the lives are primarily trying to describe;

The prime concern of the hagiographer is to demonstrate that the life of his subject and the lives of earlier established saints were similar in essence and to show that the Holy Spirit was at work within them. Hagiography is not then primarily concerned with what we should regard as biography but rather with the saint as model of the holy life for others to imitate, and with his or her career as a key to the understanding of the saint's spiritual development.

The aim, in short, was to teach spiritual lessons.  
(Rollason. D. *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, 84)

But even if biography is not its primary aim, hagiography certainly finds its beginnings in biography. H.E. Cardinal Basil Hume, in his foreword to *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, written in 1975 endorses Alban Butler's definition that "The lives of the saints furnish the Christian with a daily spiritual entertainment, which is not less agreeable than affecting and instructive. For in **sacred biography** (my emphasis) the advantages of devotion and piety are joined with the most attractive charms of history"(Burns and Oats. *Butler's Lives of the Saints*. New Full edition, IX).

M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines biography as that which "connotes a relatively full account of the facts of a man's life, involving the attempt to set forth his character, temperament, and milieu, as well as his experiences and activities"(M. H. Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 15). But even if the Saints' Lives do not present what by modern biographical standards would be considered a full account of the facts of their subjects' lives, since they present only select historical facts, they nevertheless present select historical facts to ensure that the audience of such narrative is persuaded that the subject in question was in fact an historical and not a fictitious personage.

David Rollason reminds us that we should note first of all that hagiography was usually written in connection with the promotion and functioning of the cult of the saint or saints who formed its subject and that **devotion to the saint was intensified if people knew of the history of his or her life, relics and miracles**(my emphasis)(Rollason. D. *Saints' and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*,104). In other words devotion to a saint would be intensified if people were convinced that the subject of the hagiographical narrative was an historical and not a fictional personage, since this knowledge would lend veracity to the entire narrative.

Thomas Hill points out that

"Our sense of the highly conventional nature of medieval hagiography and our awareness of the enormous hagiographic corpus that is preserved should not blind us to the fact that the hagiographer who wrote the primary vita was making a very radical claim. Not only is the subject a monk, priest, or lay person (an historical personage) who led an exemplary life, he or she is to be accepted as a saint whose life found such favour with God that He has made that sanctity manifest in miracles"  
(Hill. T. '*Imago Dei*', 36).

Aelfric begins his *Life of Saint Oswald* by situating Oswald immediately in both historical time and place, thereby firmly establishing Oswald's historicity. Aelfric records that this king lived and ruled in the land of Northumbria after the arrival of Augustine in England.(p 27). Moreover Aelfric records Oswald's journey to Scotland by sea, his

subsequent baptism, and the slaying of his uncle Edwin at the hands of the British heathen king Cadwalla.

Although Aelfric takes this historical information from Bede, he chooses to add the reference to Augustine. Ruth Waterhouse believes that by doing this “Aelfric seems to assume that dating Oswald’s life by his own initial added reference to Augustine’s coming to England will function to give his lay (as well as any religious) audience a well-known and easily recognizable date, and may even remind them of Augustine’s mission, which was to introduce Roman Christianity to the heathen Anglo-Saxons of Kent” (Waterhouse. R. ‘Discourse and Hypersignification’, 335-6). This would seem to contradict M. R. Godden’s belief that “What we see in these later lives, beginning with Cuthbert, is not just a concentration on the narrative of events but a particular kind of narrative, one that resists historical and biographical contextualization”(Godden. M. R. ‘Experiments in Genre; The Saint’s lives in Aelfric’s Catholic Homilies’, 281).

Bede’s account of Oswald presupposes the superiority of the Roman Church. Aelfric however, removes this emphasis in reencoding the information for his lay audience, both in his introduction to the life that situates Oswald relative to Augustine and to the Celtic Church, and especially in his parenthetical comment about Ireland being the place where “the faith was then”. For Aelfric, as a second-generation monk intimately involved in the Benedictine revival of the tenth century, monasticism...naturally provides an ideal, but for the lay folk belief in God is far more important than are details of differing religious practice. For Aelfric, Oswald’s saintliness derives from belief, not from any particular practice of it(Waterhouse. R. ‘Discourse and Hypersignification’, 336-7).

Thus, Aelfric ensures from the outset that his audience is certain that Oswald is not only an historical person but also an exceptional man of faith as he is described as a noble king, *Æle cyning*, who believed greatly in God *gelyfed swy 7e on God*. But it is through Oswald’s actions that his exceptional qualities are realised and Aelfric’s audience is led to an understanding of his righteousness. Twice Aelfric portrays Oswald’s ultimate victory over the heathen Cadwalla as being granted by God for Oswald’s Christian faith;

and se ceadwalla sloh and to sceame tudcode, þa Norðhymbran leode  
 æfter heora hlafordes fyllle, ðæt Oswald se eadiga his yfelnysse adwæccte.  
 Oswald him com to and him cenlice wi feaht mid lytlum werode,  
 ac his geleafa hine getrymde and Crist him gefylste to his feonda slege.  
 (p. 28)

and gewunnon þær sige swa swa se Wealdend him uðe  
 for Oswoldes geleafan,  
 (p. 29)

Although realistic characterisation is not a normal feature of hagiographical narrative one of the particular characteristics of Anglo-Saxon hagiographical narratives is the use of direct discourse. Before entering into battle with Cadwalla, Oswald kneels down in

prayer before the cross he has erected and in direct discourse instructs his army to follow him in prayer;

“Uton feallan to ðære rode and þone Aelmihtigan biddan þæt  
 he us ahredde wið þone modigan feond þe us afyllan wile:  
 God sylf wat geare þæt we winnað rihtlice wið þysne reþan  
 cyning to adredenne ure leode.”  
 (p. 28)

This speech is an almost direct translation of the speech that Bede assigns to Oswald yet it nevertheless serves to set Oswald apart from the other characters within the narrative by enforcing his presence as an historical and real person.

Aelfric condenses the miracles that are attributed to the cross that Oswald erects before his victory over Cadwalla. Whereas Bede records that *In cuius loco orationis innumerae uirtutes sanitatum noscuntur esse patratae, ad indicium uidelicet ac memoriam fidei regis. Nam et usque hodie multi de ipso ligno sacrosanctae crucis astulas excidere solent, quas cum in aquas miserint, eisque languentes homines aut pecudes potauerint, sine asperserint, mox sanitati restituuntur* (H. E. Lib III, cap II, 129). Aelfric records that *Seo ylce rod siððan, þe Oswold þær arædde, on wurð mynte þær stod; and wurdon fela gehælde untrumra manna and eac swilce nytena þurh þa ylcan rode, swa swa us rehte Beda* (p. 29). So too he omits Bede’s details concerning the brother of Hexham who breaks his arm and describes him merely as “a certain man”, *Sum man* thus choosing to focus his audience’s attention upon the miracle rather than historical detail.

He nevertheless, enforces the historical reliability and therefore the truthfulness of these miracles by his claim that *swa swa us rehte Beda* and by situating the cross geographically, *Seo stow is gehaten Heofon-feld on Englisc, wið þonne langan weall þe þa Romaniscan worhtan*. These miracles together with Bishop Aidan’s prayer that Oswald’s right hand may never rot in corruption as repayment for his generous donation of food and silver to the poor (p.32), serve to prefigure Oswald’s sainthood before his eventual martyrdom.

Oswald’s strength of faith is further developed by his dedication to the development of religion amongst his people. Bishop Aidan is sent to Oswald in response to his requests that his people may once again be turned to God who joyfully helps bishop Aidan in his conversionary work;

Hwæt þa Oswold on gann embe Godes willan to smeagenne sona  
 swa he rices geweold, and wolde gebigan his leoda to geleafan and  
 to þam lifigendan Gode: sende a to Scotlande, þær se geleafa wæs  
 þa and bæd þa heafodmenn þær hi his benum getiþodon and him sumne  
 lareow sendon þe his leoda mihte to Gode geweman; and him weaþ þæs  
 getiþod. Hi sendon þa sona þam geseligan cyninge sumne arwurðne  
 bisceop, Aidan gehaten, se wæs mæres lifes man on munucliecre

drohtnunga and he ealle woruldcara awearp fram his heortan, nanes  
 þinges wilnigende butan Godes willan.  
 (p. 29-30)

Oswald is responsible for the building of churches and the laying of monastic foundations; *þa wearð se cynincg Oswold swiðe ælmesgeorn and eadmod on þeawum and on eallum þingum cystig; and man ahræde cyrcan on his rice geond eall, and mynsterlice gesetnysse, mid mycelre geornfulnysse* (p. 31). But most importantly, despite a life replete with virtue and discipline, Oswald is not divided from his people but lived and fought as one amongst them. His kingdom is extended to include the Picts, Britons, Scots and Angles, but once again Aelfric views this success as a reward from God for Oswald's faith; *Oswoldes cynerice wearð gerymed þa swiðe, swa þæt feower þeoda hine underfengon to hlaforde, Peohtas and Bryttas, Scottas and Angle, swa swa se ælmihtiga God hi geanlæthe to ðam for Oswoldes gearmunga þe hine æfre wurðode* (p. 32) whereas Bede attributes Oswald's success to the king's diplomacy (H.E. Lib III, cap VII).

Unlike Bede's account of Saint Oswald, by the time of his martyrdom, Oswald is firmly developed by Aelfric in the *imitatio Christi* tradition, for not only does Oswald consider his labours for the heavenly kingdom to be more significant than the transitory dignities of the world, but he reflects Christ in his physical gestures;

He wolde æfter uhtsange oftost hine gebiddan  
 and on cyrcan standan on syndrigum gebedum  
 of sunnan upgange mid swiðlicre onbrydnysse  
 and swa hwæt swa he wæs he wurðode æfre God,  
 up awendum handbredum wiþ heofon[a]s weard.  
 (p. 33)

Yet, having established Oswald firmly as *miles Christi*, Aelfric returns the narrative to historical fact by relating Bede's account of the West Saxon's and the heathen king Cynegil's acceptance of Christianity through the teaching of Birnus and of Oswald and Cyngelis's presentation of the city of Dorchester to Birunus for a bishop's see (p.34). Thus Aelfric chooses to blend the stereotypical portrait of the saint with historical fact which in my opinion serves to re-inforce the narratives claim to veracity.

Aelfric records that king Oswald was thirty eight years old and had held his kingdom for nine years before he was killed by the heathen Penda. But even before he meets his death by beheading, Aelfric describes him as the "holy Oswald" *halgan Oswald*. At the moment of his death Aelfric once again strengthens the reality of Oswald's character by allowing him direct speech as he prays that '*God gemiltsa urum sawlum*' (p.36).

After Oswald's death, Aelfric records, as does Bede, that Oswald's brother who succeeded to the kingdom of Northumbria rode with an army to retrieve Oswald's severed head and right arm and brought them reverently to Lindsfarne Church where the arm was placed in a silver-wrought shrine in Saint Peter's Minster within the town of

Bamborough. Thus we find in this narrative evidence of the involvement of royal families in the promotion of the cult of saints. In the words of David Rollason;

We should not be surprised to find the royal families closely involved in the cult of the saints. Many churches were of royal foundation, many were ruled over by members of royal families or retainers of kings, and many of the saints of pre-850 England were themselves of royal blood. The evidence for active royal participation in the promotion of saints' cults is clear in the case of Oswald, whose brother and successor was responsible for collecting Oswald's head and arms from the battlefield for giving the former to Lindsfarne and for placing one of the latter in a silver shrine in the royal stronghold of Bamburgh. The translation of the saint's headless and armless body from the battlefield to the abbey of Bardney was the work of the Northumbrian princess Osthryth who, with her husband King Æthelred of the Mercians, was patron of Bardney. (Rollason. D. *Saints' and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, 114)

Obviously the royal houses gained great prestige from having one or more saint's in its dynasty, which in turn would serve to enhance royal power by increasing the authority of the royal churches and administrative centres where the saints were buried, and by proclaiming political dominance by a particular royal house over a recently conquered area. David Rollason suggests that when Osthryth, the queen of the Mercians and daughter of Oswiu of Northumbria, translated the body of St Oswald from the battlefield to the abbey of Bardney, the monks refused to admit it; as both Bede and Aelfric inform us. Bede tells us *quia etsi sanctum eum nouerant, tamen, quia de alia prouincia ortus fuerat, et super eos regnum acceperat, ueteranis eum odiis etiam mortuum insequabantur* (*H. E.* Lib III, cap XI, p148).

Nevertheless, Oswald's cult was established at Bardney, for the monks of which abbey it must have been a symbol of Northumbrian dominance. Rollason suggests that although it is not easy to see why King Ethelred should have allowed his wife to establish the cult at Bardney in the kingdom of Lindsey which he had recently conquered from the Northumbrians, (particularly since he was very involved with the abbey and eventually retired there to become its abbot) perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that Oswald was a Bernician whilst Lindsey's affinity was with the southern Northumbrian kingdom of Deira absorbed by the Bernicians in the course of the seventh century.

The affinity between Lindsey and Deira may have created a common interest between the Bernician and Mercian Kings, the former in crushing Deiran independence, the latter in crushing Lindsey's independence. The cult of Oswald at Bardney may have reflected that common interest- the veneration of a Bernician royal saint in Lindsey, promoted by a Mercian king and his Bernician queen. Across the River Humber, the cult of King Edwin at Whitby may have fitted into this pattern. Perhaps the establishment of Oswald's cult at Bardney was a direct challenge to it. (Rollason. D. *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, 120-121).

This obviously accurate historical detail embedded in the narrative therefore serves not only as evidence of Anglo-Saxon royalty's involvement in the promotion of the cult of the saint, but also lends further credibility to the many miracles which precede Oswald's death and those that will follow.

The many miracles that Aelfric records and to which Oswald's sanctity is ultimately attributed, may be classified as either supernatural or curative in nature. The first supernatural miracle is the lack of physical decay exhibited by Oswald's severed right arm and hand, as prefigured in bishop Aidan's prayer and Aelfric's confirmation that this mark of sanctity has indeed come to pass ;

þa wearð gefyllð, swa we her foresædon, þæt his swiðre hand wunað  
 hal mid þam flæscce butan ælcere brosnunge swa se bisceop gecwæð. Se  
 earm wearð geled arwurðlice on scrine of seolfre asmiþod on Sancte  
 Petres mynstre binnan Bebbanbyrig be þære sæstrande and lē þæt swa  
 andsund swa he of aslagen wæs.

(p. 36-7)

For modern readers this event might seem rather curious, if not somewhat impossible. Robert Finucane, however, offers the following explanation;

Sometimes what seems to us to be rather curious circumstances surrounded these translations. It was reported of several saints raised from their tombs in the Middle Ages that as soon as the lid was lifted from their coffins a sweet odour seemed to pervade the air, the 'odour of sanctity'. Whether these odours arose from traces of aromatics used in embalming, or from the imagination of the excited bystanders, cannot now be determined. Sometimes an even more striking discovery was made on these occasions, namely, that the corpse of the individual in question had not completely deteriorated to dust and bones.... This miraculous preservation – a mark of sanctity – could be known in the Middle Ages only by opening the coffin, and generally speaking only the coffins of presumed saints were unsealed, usually for a translation, so the occasional finding of an 'uncorrupted' corpse among purported saints was rather to be expected. Theologians fell back on biblical references to account for the uncorrupted body, but apart from their explanations it is likely that the embalming, which was usually reserved for upper-class clergy and laity crudely done though it was – may have left its mark. It is also probable that in many cases the environment favoured the transformation in damp, hermetic conditions, of body fat into a waxy substance known as adipocere, which resists deterioration. In any case modern ideas of 'preservation' typified by the way our dead are presented as roughed dolls displayed in their best clothes in lined caskets, are very different from those of the Middle Ages. The fact of death was not so easily ignored then; people were far more accustomed to the sight of human bones and corruption than we

are. Even the slightest evidence of resistance to dissolution would have seemed a 'miraculous' confirmation of sanctity.  
(Finucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 22-23)

The second supernatural miracle, that of the beam of light which extends heavenward from the roof of the tent in which the hearse containing the bones or relics of Saint Oswald is housed at Bardney Minster, is perhaps a little more difficult to rationalise;

Hwæt þa God geswutelode þæt he halig sanct wæs,  
swa þæt heofon [lic] leoht ofer þæt geteld astreht  
stod up to heofonum, swilce healic sunnbeam, ofer ealle  
þa niht; and þa leoda beheoldon geond ealle þa scire swiþe  
wundrigende.  
(p. 38)

This miracle nevertheless, serves not only the important function of emphasising the sanctity of Oswald but as an example of the church's use of fear to encourage the veneration of its saints. Fear is the reason that Aelfric attributes to the monks' ultimate acceptance of Oswald's remains;

þa wurdon þa mynstermen micclum afyrhte  
and beadon þas on mergen þæt hi moston ðone sanct  
mid arwurðnisse underfon, ðone ðe hi ær forsocon.  
þa swoh man þa halgan ban and ber into þære cyrcan  
arwurðlice on scrine and gelogodon hi upp.  
(p.38)

In the words of Robert Finucane;

The removal of certain saints to nearly inaccessible, elaborate shrines not only emphasized their elevated sacral status but in a way consolidated their *mana* (supernatural power), and made them even more *tabu*, to use some old-fashioned anthropological terms. Fear, seldom absent from feelings of reverence, was especially evident in attitudes towards certain famous relics. When Gregory the Great refused to send St. Paul's head to Empress Constantina he cautioned her against disturbing such powerful saints and provided horrific examples of their destructive vengeance. In contrast to the small relics which people carried about on their caps or in rings, many of the enshrined saints could only be approached after undergoing rituals that were meant to surround the suppliant in a protective shell. Ordinary pilgrims were expected to be without mortal sin when they drew near the holy dead, and when a saint was to be translated to a more honourable shrine the officials who were to take part usually prepared themselves with a three-day ritual of prayer and fasting before daring to touching the remains....But just as saints punished anyone who

disrespectfully fingered their remains, so they favoured those who treated them with due honour.

(Finucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 27-28)

The third supernatural miracle is that of the bag of dust, removed from the site of Oswald's death, (a secondary relic), which, together with the post upon which it is hung, resists destruction by fire;

þa gemette he gebeoras blið e æt þam huse: he aheng þa þæt dust  
 on æne heahne post and sæt mid þam gebeorum blissigende samod.  
 Man worhte þa micel fyr tomiddes þam gebeorum and þa spearcan  
 wundon wið þæs rofes swyðe, oð þæt þæt hus færllice eall on fyre wearð  
 and þa gebeoras flugon afyrhte aweg. þæt hus wearð  
 forburnon buton þam anum poste þe þæt halige dust on ahangen wæs:  
 se post ana ætstod ansund mid þam duste and hi syyðe wundroden  
 þæs halgan weres gearnunga þæt þæt fyr ne mihte þa moldan forbærnan;  
 (p.40)

Although the outstanding characteristic of Christianity of the early Middle Ages was the belief in relics that worked wonders, the preservation and veneration of relics and secondary relics was not a Christian innovation. Pagan relics were supposed to work wonders and cure diseases, and these properties were appropriated by the Christian martyrs especially during the fourth century as paganism fell to minority status and then became illegal. To return once again to Robert Finucane;

Although it was their curative powers that were most widely acknowledged, relics had many other uses. At one extreme, in twelfth-century Rochester a man claimed that he had driven flames away from a house with a Becket relic fixed to the end of a long pole, at the other relics were used in oath-taking since it was firmly believed that lying would be taken as a personal affront by the saint, sometimes punishable by death....Relics, especially the integral skeletons of widely-known saints, emitted a kind of holy radioactivity which bombarded everything in the area, and as early as the sixth century it was believed that objects placed next to them would absorb some of their power and grow heavier. They affected oil in lamps which burned above them, cloths placed nearby, water or wine which washed them, dust which settled on them, fragments of the tomb which burned above them, gems or rings which touched them, the entire church which surrounded them, and of course the suppliants who approached to kiss, touch, pray before and gaze upon them. (Finucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular beliefs in Medieval England*, 26)

By far the majority of the miracles which Aelfric attributes to Saint Oswald are curative in nature. After the monks have recognised the sanctity of the saint and washed and reverently laid his holy bones in a shrine in the church, Aelfric records several general

examples of the curative miracles attributable to Oswald; that many infirm men were healed of various diseases through his holy merits “*and þær wurdon gehælede þurh his halgan gearnunge/fela mettrume menn fram mislicum cotum.*” (p.38) and that the water which was used to wash the saint’s bones affects the earth onto which it is poured becoming a secondary relic, capable of healing the sick and of curing madness, just as the earth upon which Oswald was slain becomes a healing potion when mixed with water;

þæt wæter þe man þa ban mid a þwoh binnan þære cyrcan wearð agoten  
 swa on anre hyrnan; and seo eorð e sibban þe þæt wæter  
 underfeng, wearð manegum to bote. Mid þam duste wurdon  
 afligde deofla fram mannum þa þe on wodnysseær wæron gedrehte.  
 Eac swilce þær he feol on þam gefeohte ofslagen, men namon  
 þa eorðan to adligum mannum and dydon on wæter wanhalum  
 to flicgenne and hi wurdon gehæde þurh þone halgan wer.  
 (p. 38-9)

Aelfric now moves from the general to the specific by relating in greater detail four more miracles (although it is to be noted that Aelfric’s accounts of these miracles are less detailed than Bede’s), before concluding the saint’s life with an exemplum and sermon. Of these further miracles, three are curative and one is supernatural in nature. But whereas Aelfric has ensured by the time of Oswald’s death that he is firmly established in his audience’s mind as an historical figure, after his martyrdom it would appear that Aelfric’s interest lies in making events rather more symbolic than individual.

The first miracle which is curative, is that of the man whose horse becomes sick while travelling across the field upon which Oswald was killed. The horse rolls about the field in a fit of madness, until it rolls upon the spot where Oswald was slain, whereupon it instantly rises cured of its madness and sound in all its limbs. But whereas Bede describes the traveller as “a man” and “a rider”, Aelfric generalises him by introducing him as “a certain wayfaring man”;

Sum wegfarende man ferde wið þone feld; þa wearð his hors gesticlod  
 and sona þær feol, wealwigende geond ða eorðan wodum gelicost;  
 mid þam þe hit swa wealweode geond þone widgillan feld, þa becom  
 hit embe lang þær se cynincg Oswold on þam gefeohte feoll, swa swa  
 we ær fores dan; and hit sona aras swa hit hrepode þa stowe, hal eallum  
 limum, and se hlaford þæs fægnode.  
 (p.39)

After his horse is cured, this same man proceeds upon his journey, and encounters a young woman who is paralysed. He relates the miraculous cure of his horse to her family. The girl’s family then carry her to the same spot whereupon she falls asleep only to awaken shortly afterward, sound in all her limbs, cured of her affliction and able to walk home (the second and curative miracle). But whereas Bede in Lib III, cap IX, p146 describes the girl as the niece of the landlord of the inn in which he intends to lodge and relates circumstantial detail, such as the members of the household discussing the girl’s

disease, her request for water after her cure, the manner in which she washes her face and adjusts her linen headgear, Aelfric chooses to omit such detail, thus ensuring the universality of the miraculous event;

þa was þær an mæden licgende on paralisyn lange gebrocod.  
 He began þa to recenne hu him on rade getimode, and mann ferode  
 þæt mæden to þære foresædan stowe. Heo wearð þa on slæpe and sona  
 eft awoc, [an]sund eallum limum fram þam egeslican broce: band þa  
 hire heafod and bliðe ham ferde, gangænde on fotum swa heo  
 gefyrn ær ne dyde.  
 (p. 39)

The third miracle which is supernatural in nature, is that of the man, who upon passing this same field removes some of the soil, which he binds in a cloth and subsequently hangs upon a post at a house where he chances to stop. During his merry-making with the other occupants the house catches fire and the entire house, with the exception of the post upon which the bag of dust is hung, is destroyed by the fire. Again Aelfric chooses to omit Bede's circumstantial detail, that of the man's British nationality (Aelfric chooses to define him merely as a certain horseman *sum ærendfæst ridda*), the exceptional greenness of the spot upon which Oswald was killed, the warm welcome that the horseman receives upon his arrival at the house and the description of the roof as being made of wattles thatched with hay, once again ensuring the universality of the miraculous event;

Eft siððan ferde eac sum ærendfæst ridda be ðære ylcan stowe and  
 geband on anuum clafe of þam halgan duste þære deorwurðan stowe  
 and bedde forð mid him þær he fundode to; þa gemette he gebeoras  
 bliðe æt þam huse: he aheng þa þæt dust on ænne heahne post and  
 sæt mid þam gebeorum blissigende samod. Man worhte þa micel  
 fyr tomiddes þam gebeorum and þa spearcan wundon wið þæs rofes  
 swyðe, oð þæt þæt hus ðelice eall on fyre wearð, and þa gebeoras  
 flugon afyhte aweg.  
 (p. 39-40)

Aelfric concludes this section of the narrative which deals with the miracles and marvels resulting from Oswald's death, with what amounts to a direct translation of Bede, by stating emphatically that after these miracles many people sought and obtained cures from the place where Oswald was killed;

and manega menn siððan gesohton þone stede, heora hæle feccende,  
 and heora freonda gehwilcum.  
 (p. 40)

The exemplum of the learned man in Ireland, who upon his deathbed, having lived an ungodly life declares to a certain mass-priest that if a saint might intercede with Christ for him and in so doing secure him a cure he will amend his ways. The man calls upon Saint

Oswald and asks the priest whether he has a relic of the saint to give him. The priest replies that he has a piece of the stake on which Oswald's head stood and pronounces that if the dying man has faith he will be healed. The priest then places shavings of wood from the stake in water, gives it to the man to drink who then makes a full and miraculous recovery and immediately turns to God (p. 40-42).

Although Aelfric omits the historical detail of this exemplum which he takes from Bede (Lib III, cap, XIII), for example Willibrord, Archbishop of the Frisians becomes merely *swa swa sum m ssespreost*, presumably to further ensure the universality of the narrative, he nevertheless retains the direct speech employed which Bede employs for both characters. As with King Oswald's direct speech recorded earlier in the narrative, this serves to enhance the realism of the characters without historicizing them.

The sermon which follows the exemplum promotes the moral that no man should forget the promise he makes to God when he is sick, for fear of divine retribution *For þy ne sceall nan mann awægan þæt he sylfwylles behætt þam ælmihtigan Gode. Þonne he adlig bið, þe læs þe he sylf losige gif he alihð Gode* t (pp.41-42 ) thus serving to re-enforce the element of fear with which the saints should be treated. The sermon also lends authority and credibility to the miracles and in particular the curative miracles of the narrative by quoting Bede not only as the narrative's source but as having stated that the function of Saint Oswald is to heal the sick;

Nu cwæð se halga Beda, þe ƿas boc gedihte,  
 þæt hit nan wundor nys þæt se halga cynincg  
 untrummysse g[e]hæde nu he on heofonum [leo]fað,  
 forðan e he wolde gehelpan, þa þa he her on life wæs,  
 þearfum and wannhalum and him bigwiste syllan.  
 Nu hæfð he þone wuðmynt on þære ecan worulde  
 mid þam ælmihtigan Gode for his godnysse.  
 (p. 42)

Having described the ascent into heaven of bishop Aidan, as witnessed by Cuthbert as a young boy, Aelfric concludes the sermon and the narrative by intimating that Oswald's work of conversion continues after his death, "Aelfric does not spell out that Mercia has become Christian since Penda's death, but he implies it, by hinting that the miracles performed by and through the saintly Oswald are part of the conversion process." (Waterhouse. R. 'Discourse and Hypersignification', 339);

þæs halgan Oswoldes ban wurdon eft gebroht  
 æfter manegum gearum to Myrcena lande  
 into Gleawceastre, and God þær geswutelode  
 oft fela wundra þurh þone halgan wer.  
 Sy þæs wuldor þam ælmihtigan a to worulde.  
 Amen. (p. 42)

Thomas Hill in his work, *Old English Poetry and The Sapiental Tradition*, claims that modern day critics fallaciously assume that the Saints' Lives are realistic in nature and therefore primarily concerned with historical or legendary events. While I would agree that historical and legendary events are not the primary concern of the Saints' Lives and in particular the Saints' Lives in question, having analysed the life of Saint Oswald it would nevertheless appear that both realism and historical and legendary events are important components of these narratives.

However, if modern critics fallaciously assume that these narratives are realistically accurate, one must ask the question whether an Anglo-Saxon audience for whom these narratives were originally intended, would have been better equipped to discern the blending of reality with fiction and thereby distinguish truth from fantasy? Perhaps in order to answer this question we as modern critics need to step back in time to discover the conditions under which Anglo-Saxons lived.

Robert Finucane presents the following picture of these conditions, which he believes ultimately shaped the Anglo-Saxon's perceptions of the miraculous;

The great bulk of medieval Englishmen, then, lived in squalid, unhealthy conditions in which disease and early death were all too common; relatively few individuals, or at least few families, escaped the consequences. With sufficient food and adequate shelter some might pull through with less difficulty, but a great many people were sometimes lacking even these basic necessities. In addition, so little was known about the body and disease that practically nothing - certainly in twentieth-century western 'scientific' terms - could be done for the ill... Sometimes it was found difficult to decide whether a person was dead or alive ... the slightest improvement or partial and even temporary recovery was considered a miraculous cure.. (thus) the medieval concept of 'cure' was very flexible. Since the recovery need not be permanent many recurrent illnesses would apparently be affected by the holy aura of a shrine... the saints also took credit for delayed cures so that a pilgrim who felt no better at a shrine but improved a week later while at home in bed could claim miraculous healing.

(Finucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 73-78)

The Church not only publicised the healing powers of the saints through the production and distribution of Saints' Lives, but it also promoted the healing power of the saints, their relics and shrines over those of medical science, not only by proclaiming disease to be a consequence of sin but by advocating the efficacy of Christian charms as a cure for disease over pagan charms (Finucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 64). Anglo-Saxon churches housing saints' shrines therefore became akin to hospitals. In his article entitled 'The Saintly life in Anglo-Saxon England', Michael Lapidge paints the following picture of the interior of an Anglo-Saxon church;

If a modern English traveller could suddenly be transported back a thousand years into an Anglo-Saxon church, he would be astonished at the differences between that and the churches with which he is familiar today: here, the atmosphere inside most churches is one of calm and beatific silence, there the prevailing atmosphere would be one of tumult and squalor, the church packed day and night with crowds of diseased and penitent persons seeking release from their sufferings through the intercession of the saint whose shrine they were besieging. A memorable picture of such tumult is given by Lantfred, a foreign monk at Winchester in the 970s, who, describing the miracles performed through the agency of St Swithun – then recently discovered and recently translated - shows us the inside of the Old Minster crammed with persons afflicted with appalling physical deformities, festering wounds, blind, paralytic, deaf, dumb, mutilated indescribably by the just process of law or by self-imposed penitential torture, all clustered around the shrine of St Swithun, lying there day and night moaning in pain and praying aloud for deliverance from their suffering. On occasion, Lantfred reports the church's precincts were so plugged with diseased persons that they had periodically to be cleared to make way for the clergy. Whereas today such appalling sights of disease, deformity and suffering are hidden from sight in sanitized hospitals, a thousand years ago they were on full view, every day of the year, in every church which had a saint deemed to be capable of performing a miraculous cure. (Lapidge. M. 'The Saintry life in Anglo-Saxon England', 243)

Thus, the vast majority of people who experienced miracles were neither theologians nor hagiographers;

They were the simple folk who came from the great bulk of medieval England's population **who could neither read nor write. The popular, uncritical acceptance of wonders and miracles stemmed partially from ignorance of the natural world and partially from an overwhelming need, created by the conditions of medieval life, to believe in miracles. The Church was responsible, too; instructed by gullible clerics and sometimes entertained by sermons featuring famous miracles and visions of the other world the laity went away prepared to accept as a miracle the wildest coincidence and most far-fetched tale** (my emphasis). These illiterate masses, when they thought about it all, explained miracles as wonders performed by hallowedghosts who flitted in and out of graves, the tombs and shrines containing magic relics. It was sometimes acknowledged – if only in passing – that God was the ultimate source of miracle. But theological dicta really had no place here. For most people, the important thing was not the theory evolved by the Church to explain miracles and saints, it was what those saints did for them and especially the faith-healing, the curative miracles, that sometimes went on at their shrines. (Finnucane. R. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 55)

From the analysis presented it would seem reasonable to suggest that Aelfric's primary aim in translating and remoulding the Saints' Lives was not to enable his fellow countrymen to derive spiritual benefits from a knowledge of some of the Latin literature of the Church or to teach spiritual lessons, but was in fact, as he expresses in the Latin Preface to the Lives of the Saints, to increase and strengthen his fellow country men in faith;

This volume also I have translated from Latin into the language in ordinary use in England, desiring to benefit others, **by strengthening them in faith** (my emphasis) through reading this narrative, who are willing to take the trouble either to read this work, or to listen to it read. (*LS Preface II. 1-4*)

How then does Aelfric attempt to strengthen the faith of his audience in his *Life of Saint Edmund King and Martyr* translated and adapted from Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*? To begin with the first thing we notice when comparing Abbo's work with Aelfric's is that the English version is only about one-third the length of the Latin. (Clark. C. 'Notes and News: Aelfric and Abbo', 30).

Abbo begins his work by setting it in its historical and geographical context with two opening chapters on the island of Britain in which he singles out Edmund's realm, and its remarkable richness. Although Aelfric condenses Abbo's opening to a prose prologue of only twelve lines, he nevertheless chooses to retain information from his source which situates his version both historically and geographically, thus lending veracity and credibility to the account of the saint's life that is to follow;

Sum swyðe gelered munuc com su þan ofer sæ fram Sancte Benedictes stowe on Ælredes cynincges dæge to Dunstane ærcebisceope þrim gearumær [þam þe] he for ferde, and se munuc hatte Abbo; þa wurdon hi æt spræce of þæt Dunstan rehte be Sancte Eadmunde, swa swa Eadmundes swurdbora hit rehte Ælstone cynincge, þa þa Dunstan iung man wæs and se swurdbora wæs forealdod man. þa gesette se munuc ealle þa gereccednysse on anre bec and eft, þa þa seo boc com to us binnan feawum gearum, a awende we hit on Englisc, swa swa hit heræfter stent. Se munuc þa, Abbo, binnan twam gearum gewende ham to his mynstre and wearð sona to abbode geset on þam ylcan mynstre. (p 43)

This would seem to confirm C. L. Wrenn's opinion that Aelfric's narrative sermon on St Edmund, the martyred King of East Anglia;

Opens with a short prologue in plain prose, in which Aelfric sets out the authority he is translating with vivid and convincing detail. A certain learned monk named Abbo, Aelfric says, came over to England

from his monastery at Fleury, in France, on a visit to St Dunstan at Canterbury three years before the Archbishop died. This therefore places the exact date for Abbo's receipt of the tale as 985. Then St Dunstan related to his visitor the story of Edmund's martyrdom, just as he heard it when a very young man from the lips of a very aged man who had been St Edmund's sword-bearer. We are further told that the slaying of Edmund by the Danes took place when King Alfred was twenty-one years old, thus fixing the date of that event to the year 870. It is further explained that Abbo (the Latin form of his French name Abbon), on returning home wrote down all that he had learned from the Archbishop in Latin, and that it is from this that Aelfric is translating. (C. L. Wrenn. *A Study of Old English Literature*, 235)

Thus having firmly invested his narrative with historical and geographical credibility, Aelfric proceeds to represent Edmund as not only an historical and therefore a non-fictional character but like Oswald, an exceptional man of faith. To this end Aelfric employs epithets such as, *eadiga, snotor, wurful, eadmod, geþungen, swa anræde, þurhwunode* and *mid æþelum þeawum þone*, to ensure that his audience is certain of Edmund's humility and faith as well as his worthiness as a leader and as a candidate for sainthood;

Eadmund se eadiga, Eastengla cynincg, wæs snotor and wurful  
and wurðod symble mid æþelum þeawum ðone ælmyhtigan God.  
He was eadmod and geþungen and swa anræde þurhwunode  
þæt he nolde abugan to bysmorfullum leahtrum, ne on naþre healfe  
he ne ahyrde his þeawas, ac wæs symble gemyndig þære soþan lare,  
'þu eart to heafod-men geset? ne ahefe þu ge, ac beo betwux mannum  
swa swa an man of him'. He was cystig wædlum and wydedum  
swa swa fæder and mid welwillendnyse gewissode his folc  
symle to rihtwisnyse and þam reþum styrde and gesædiglice  
leofode on soþan geleafan.  
(p. 43-44)

The exceptional qualities of Edmund stand in sharp contrast to those of his Danish and heathen enemy, Hingwar and Hubba. As Edmund is infinitely good, they are infinitely evil, as Aelfric describes them as being cruel and predatory;

Hit ge-lamp þaæt nextan þæt þa Deniscan leode ferdon mid sciphere  
hergiende and sleande wide geond land swa swa heora gewuna is.  
On þam flotan wæron þa fyrmestan heafod-men Hingwar and Hubba,  
geantæthe þurh deofol, and hi on Norðhymbra lande gelendon mid æscum  
and aweston þæt land and þa leoda ofslogon. þa gewende Hingwar  
east mid his scipum and Hubba belaf on Norðhymbra lande,  
gewunnum sige mid wælhreownysse. Hingwar þa becom to

Eastenglum rowende, on þam geare þe Aelfred þelincg an and twentig  
 geare wæs, se þe Westsexena cynincg siþþan wearð mære.  
 (p. 45-46)

According to Cecily Clark, here Aelfric excludes much of the detail found in his source;

Abbo emphasises throughout that the Danes are emissaries of the Devil, *ministri diaboli*, and he describes in detail how the Devil, *inimicus humani generis*, in order to test Edmund's capacity for suffering, sent *Inguar, unum ex suis membris*, to tempt him to curse God, *ut desperans Deo in faciem benediceret*, adding that, coming as they do *ab illo terræ vertice, quo sedem suam posuit qui per elationem Altissimo similis esse concupivit*, it is small wonder the Vikings should be so evil – *ab aquilone venit omne malum* (.....*quandoquidem quidam ex eis populi vescuntur humanis carnibus*). Nothing of this is kept by Aelfric except the terse, almost gratuitous reference to Hingwar and Hubba as *geanbehte þurh deofol*.

(Clark. C. 'Notes and News, Aelfric and Abbo', 34)

Perhaps more importantly, in lines 30-35(pp45-46)Aelfric chooses once again to link his narrative with English history as he records that Hingwar raided East Anglia; *on þam geare þe Aelfred ælincg an and twentig geare wæs, se þe Westsexena cynincg siþþan wearð mære* once again conferring on the text the stamp of historical accuracy and therefore veracity.

Like Oswald, Aelfric develops Edmund in the *Miles Christi* tradition. Edmund steadfastly refuses to submit to Hingwar's demands for treasure and allegiance and declares that he will die in defence of his land, people and Christian faith, thus proving himself morally superior not only to his enemies but to his own clergy, who advise him to surrender;

Hwæt þa Eadmund [cynincg] clypode ænne bisceop þe him þa gehendost  
 wæs, and wif hine smeade hu he þam reþan Hingware andwrydan sceolde.  
 þa forhtode se bisceop for þam færlican gelimpe and for þæs cynincges life,  
 and cwæð þæt him ræd þuhte þæt he to þam gebuge þe him bead Hingwar.  
 þa suwode se cynincg and beseah to þære eorþan, and cwæð þæt  
 nextan cynelice him to, 'Eala þu bisceop, to bysmore synd getawode  
 þas earman landleoda, and me nu leofre wære þæt ic on [ge] feohte feolle,  
 wif þam e min folc moste heora eardes brucan'; and se bisceop cwæð  
 'Eala þu leofa cynincg, þin folc lið ofslagen and þu næfst þone fultum  
 þæt þu feohtan muge, and þas flotmen cumað and þe cucenne gebindað,  
 butan þu mid fleame þinum feore gebeorge, oððe þu þe swa gebeorge  
 þæt þu buge to him.' þa cwæð Eadmund cynincg swa swa he ful cene  
 wæs, 'þæs ic gewilnige and gewisce mid mode, þæt ic ana ne belife  
 æfter minum leofum þe egnum, þe on heora bedde wurdon, mid bearnun

and wifum, f̄rllice ofslagene fram þysum flotmannum. Næs me næfre gewunelic þæt ic worhte fleames, ac ic wolde swiðor sweltan gif ic forhte for minum agenum earde; and se ðmichtiga God wat þæt ic nelle abugan fram his biggengum æfre, ne fram his soþan lufe, swelte ic, lybbe ic.’  
(pp. 47-48)

Furthermore, in his reply to Hingwar’s messenger, Edmund refuses to defile his hands with Hingwar’s blood and publicly declares that he wishes to imitate Christ’s example;

After ysum wordum he gewende to þam ærendracan þe Hingwar him to sende, and se ðe him unforht, ‘Witodlice þu wære wyðe sleges nu, ac ic nelle afylan on þinum fulum blode mine cþenan hande, forþan þe ic Criste folgie, þe us swa geysnode; and ic bliðelice wille beon ofslagen þurh eow, gif hit swa God foresceawað. Far nu swi þe hraðe and sege þinum reþan hlaforde, ‘[N]e abih næfre Eadmund Hingware on life, hæþenum heretogan, buton he to Hæðende Criste ærest mid geleafan on þysum lande gebuge.’  
(pp. 48-49)

This sharp reply to Hingwar’s messenger comprises only the opening and closing sentences of a lengthy speech in the Latin original, which according to Cecily Clark is all the more effective for its terseness, since Aelfric’s main purpose was to make an impact on his unlearned audience;

In both compilations (the *First Latin Preface to the Homilies* and the *Latin Preface to the Lives*), he was bearing in mind his unlearned audience and trying to pitch his exposition at the right level for their understanding. Such a principle is, of course, in accord with the teaching of many of the *Artes Praedicandi* concerning the avoidance of vain ornament, of parade of learning and of all that might detract from the usefulness of a sermon; and it accounts for the drastic abbreviation of whatever in the Latin source might be deemed an obstacle to easy understanding.  
(Clark. C. ‘Notes and News: Aelfric and Abbo’, 31-32)

Again, like Oswald, Aelfric establishes Edmund in the *imitatio Christi* tradition so that by the time of his death he has come to reflect Christ in his physical gestures. When confronted by his enemy, Edmund throws away his weapons refusing to fight, in imitation of Christ’s example and instructions to Saint Peter;

Hwæt þa Eadmund cynincg, mid þam þe Hingwar com, stod innan his healle, þæs Hæðendes gemyndig, and awarep his wæpna: wolde geæfenþecan Cristes gebysnungum, þe forbead Petre mid wæpnum to winnenne wif þa wæðhreowan Iudeiscan.  
(p. 49)

The climax of Edmund's imitation of Christ is reached during his passion, firstly as he is bound by his adversaries to "anum earfastum treowe", which conjures images not only of Christ upon the cross at Calvary, but of Christ as depicted in the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*, who is similarly bound to an earth-fast tree and secondly by his steadfast refusal in the face of great physical suffering to deny his faith. Like Oswald, Edmund's sainthood is alluded to before his death;

Hwæt þa arleasan þa Eadmund gebundon and gebysmrodon  
 huxlice and beoton mid saglum, and swa syððan bæddon þone  
 geleaffullan cyning to anum earfastum treowe and tigdon hine  
 þær to mid heardum bendum, and hine eft swungon langlice mid  
 swipum; and he symble clypode betwux þam swinglum mid soðan  
 geleafan to Hælende Criste; and þa hæpenan þa for his geleafan  
 wurdon wodlice yrre, for þan þe he clypode Crist him to fultume.  
 Hi scuton þa mid gafelucum, swilce him to gamenes, to oð þæt he  
 eall wæs beset mid heora scotungum, swilce igles byrsta,  
 swa swa Sebastianus wæs. þa geseah Hingwar, se arlease flotman,  
 þæt se æþela cyning nolde Criste wissacan, ac mid anrædum geleafan  
 hine æfre clypode: het hine þa beheafðian, and þa hæpenan swa dydon.  
 Betwux þam þe he clypode to Criste þagit, þa tugon þa hæpenan þone  
 halgan to stæge and mid anum swencge slogon him of þæt heafod,  
 and his sawl siode gesædig to Criste.  
 (pp. 49-50)

Aelfric immediately re-enforces the veracity of the events of Edmund's passion and death and the miracles which will follow by stating that a certain man whom God had kept hidden and safe from the heathen, had witnessed Edmund's passion and death and had lived to tell the tale afterwards, exactly as it is recorded by Aelfric;

þær wæs sum man gehende gehealden þurh God, behyd þam  
 hæpenum, þe þis gehyrde eall and hit eft sode swa swa we [hit] secgæ her.  
 (p. 50).

However, unlike St Oswald, the majority of miracles that follow Saint Edmund's death are predominately supernatural in nature. Before returning to their ship, the heathen seamen hide the head of Edmund amongst the brambles, to prevent Edmund's followers from burying it. Shortly thereafter, some people gather, deeply saddened by his death and the fact that the head of the corpse is missing. The man who has witnessed Edmund's murder informs them that the heathen seamen have hidden the head in a wood and so they set about searching for the missing head, calling out to it as they search. Eventually guarded by a wolf, which Aelfric states was sent by God's direction to protect the severed head against other animals both night and day, the head answers the searchers' calls;

Hwæt þa se flothere ferde eft to scipe and behyddon þæt  
 heafod þæs halgan Eadmundes on þam þiccum bremelum þæt  
 hit bebyrged ne wurde. þa æfter fyrste syððan hi afarene wæron,

com þæt landfolc to, þe þær to lafe wæs þa, þær heora hlafordes lic  
 læg butan heafde, and wurdon swiðe sarige for his slege on mode,  
 and huru þæt hi næfdon þæt heafod to þam bodige. Þa sæde se sceawere  
 þe hit ær geseah, þæt þa flotmen hæfdon þæt heafod mid him, and was  
 him geuht, swa swa hit wæs ful soð, þæt hi behyddon þæt heafod on  
 þam holte forhwega. Hi eodon þa ealle endemes to þam wuda, secende  
 gehwær, geond þyfelas and bremelas, gif hi ahwær mihton gemeton  
 þæt heafod. Wæs eac micel wundor þæt an wulf wearð asend þurh Godes  
 wissunge to bewerigenne þæt heafod wiþa oþre deor ofer dæg and niht.  
 Hi eoden þa secende and symle clypigende, swa swa hit gewunelic is  
 þam ðe on wuda gæð oft, ‘[H]wær eart þu nu, gefera?’ and him andwyrde  
 þæt heafod, ‘Her! [H]er! [H]er! and swa gelome clypode, andswarigende  
 him eallum, swa oft swa heora ænig clypode, oþ þæt hi ealle becomen  
 þurh ða clypunga him to. (pp. 50-51)

According to Cecily Clark, this is a further example of Aelfric’s simplification of the more complex ideas of his source for his unlearned audience;

For instance in his (Aelfric’s) version the severed head simply calls to the searchers “Her, her, her” and no further comment is offered on the manner of the miracle: Abbo had explained in pseudo-scientific terms how *caput sancti regis, longius remotum a suo corpore, prorupit in vocem absque fibrarum opitulatione, aut arteriarum præcordiali munere . . . . Palpitabat mortu lingu plectrum infra moenia faucium, manifestans in se Verbigen magnalia* However in contrast with passages where Aelfric carries out his stated policy of abbreviating as he translates from Latin into English, there are however, a few showing slight expansion. For instance the messenger returning from Edmund meets *one w threowan Hingwar mid eallre his fyrde, fuse to Eadmunde*, where the Latin says simply *Inguar*. The call of the seekers through the woods “*Ubi es?*” is expanded to “*Hwær eart þu nu, gefera?*”  
 (Clark. C. ‘Notes and News: Aelfric and Abbo’, 34)

Once the grey and hungry wolf has timidly carried the head into the town, much to the people’s astonishment, the head and the body are buried together, and a church is built over the burial place. Aelfric records that once the harrying by the Vikings had ceased and since miracles had occurred frequently at his burial place *for þan ðe gelome wundra wurdon æt his byrgene* (presumably both curative and supernatural) the people determined to build a church worthy of this saint.

Upon his disinterment in preparation for translation, it is discovered that the corpse is indeed whole and uncorrupt, the head is no longer severed from the body and the spear wounds have completely healed. This according to Aelfric is not only a sign of Edmund’s sanctity, but proof that he lived a pure and virginal life;

þa wæs micel wundor þæt he wæs eallswa gehal swylce he cucu wære,

mid clænum lichaman, and his swura wæs gehalod, þeær wæs forslagen,  
 and wæs swylce an seolcen fæd embe his swuran fæd, mannum  
 to swutelunge hu he ofslagen wæs. Eac swilce þa wunda þe þa  
 wæljhreowan hæþenan mid gelomum scotungum on his lice macodon,  
 wæron gehælede þurh þone heofonlican God; and he lið swa ansund  
 of þisne andwerdan dæg, andbidigende æristes and þæs ecan wuldres.  
 His lichama us cys þe lið unformolsnod, þæt he butan forligre  
 her on worulde leofode and mid clænum life to Criste siþode.  
 (pp. 53-54)

A further sign of Edmund's sanctity is confirmed by the supernatural miracle of the continued growth after death of his hair and nails. These, Aelfric relates, are cut by a certain widow, and retained and placed as relics upon the altar under which he rests;

Sum wudewe wunode, Oswyn gehaten, æt þæs halgan byrgene on gebedum  
 and fæstenum manega gear syððan; seo wolde efsian ælce gear  
 þone sanct and his næglas ceorfan syferlice mid lufe and on scryne  
 healdan to haligdome on weofode.  
 (p. 54)

These supernatural miracles are followed by the exemplum of the eight *ungesælige* thieves, who attempt under cover of night to steal the many treasures presented to Saint Edmund. These miracles serve not only to demonstrate the miraculous powers of the saint but are a further example of the Church's use of fear among the laity to encourage the veneration of its saints. Through his supernatural power, Saint Edmund paralyses the robbers as they attempt to break into the church in which his body is housed, thereby ensuring that they are literally caught in the act;

þa wurðode þæt landfolc mid geleafan þone sanct, and þeodred  
 bisceop þearle mid gifum on golde and on seolfre [gegodode þæt mynster]  
 þam sancte to wurðmynte. þa comon on sumne sæl ungesædige þeofas,  
 eahte on anre nighte, to þam arwuðan halgan: woldon stelan þa mæðmas  
 þe men þyder brohton, and cunnodon mid cræfte hu hi in cumon mihton.  
 Sum sloh mid slecge swiðe þa hæpsan, sum heora mid feolan feolode,  
 abutan, sum eac underdealf a duru mid spade, sum heora mid hæddre  
 wolde unlucan þæt ægðyr: [a]c hi swuncon on idel and earmlice ferdon,  
 swa þæt se halga wer hi wundorlice geband, ælcne swa he stod strutigende  
 mid tole, þæt heora nan ne mihte þæt morð gefremman, ne hi þanon astyrian,  
 ac stodon swa ð mergen. Men þa þæs wundrodon hu a weargas hangodon,  
 sum [upp]on hæddre, sum leat to gedelfe, and ælc on his weorce wæs  
 fæste gebunden.  
 (pp. 54-55)

Keith Thomas writes that "The lives of the saints abounded in stories of the miraculous retribution which had overtaken those who tried to raid ecclesiastical treasure-houses or

to penetrate some holy shrine. The thief was unable to get out once he had got in, or the stolen object had stuck to his hands.”(Thomas. K. *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 51). The eight thieves are sentenced to death by Bishop Theodred, who subsequently laments of his harsh sentence, begging God’s pity and forgiveness. Thus, it is not only saints who should be venerated fearfully but God Himself(p. 55).

Despite the fear that this exemplum is intended to instil it is nevertheless both realistic and humorous. In the words of C .L. Wrenn “Aelfric vivifies the scene with a phrase not in the Latin: each as he stood becoming rigid with the tool he was using in his hand’

*lcne swa he stod, struitigende mid tole.* This verb *strutian* is found nowhere else in Old English, and was evidently colloquial, having the sense ‘to stand out rigidly or stiffly’. It is the ancestor of the modern strut, but was used in Elizabethan times of the stiffly outstanding ruffs on robes”(C. L. Wrenn. *A Study of Old English Literature*, 236).

The second example of Saint Edmund’s wrath and the fear with which he should be approached is demonstrated in the second exemplum of the man called Leofstan, who rich in worldly things and ignorant of God, approaches Saint Edmund’s shrine with insolence, and arrogantly demands to view the saint’s uncorrupt body. Upon seeing the corpse of the saint, Leofstan turns mad and accordingly dies a miserable and evil death;

On þam lande wæs sum man, Leofstan gehaten, rice for worulde  
and unwittig for Gode, se rad to þam halgan mid riccetera swiþe  
and het him æteowian orhlice swiþe þone halgan sanct, hwæþer  
he gesund w re; ac swa hra e swa he geseah s sanctes lichaman,  
þa awedde he sona and wæðhrowlice grymete[de] and earmlice  
geendode yfelum deaðe.

(p. 56)

As stated earlier, ordinary pilgrims were expected to be without mortal sin when they drew near the holy dead, and when a saint was to be translated to a more honourable shrine the officials who were to take part usually prepared themselves with a three-day ritual of prayer and fasting before daring to touch the remains. Even after observing all the precautions, certain bodies were approached in fear and trembling. Finucane cites the example of Abbot Samson of Bury St Edmunds who in 1198 picked up the shrouded skull of his patron, Edmund and prayed with many loud groans that the famous martyr would not damn him because “I, a miserable sinner, now touch thee.”(Finucane. *R. Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, 27).

Aelfric ratifies the credibility of the account of Leofstan through the authority of Pope Gregory, who, he states, has recorded in writing a similar incident involving Saint Lawrence whose body lies in Rome. In this instance however, it is God and not the Saint himself who is credited with the punishment of the disrespectful who insist upon looking at his holy remains;

þis is þam gelic þe se geleaffulla papa Gregorius sæde on his gesetnysse  
be þam halgan Laurentie, þe liðon Romebyrig þæt menn woldon sceawian

symle hu he lage, ge gode, ge yfele; ac God hi gestilde, swa þæt þæt swulton  
 on þære sceawunge ane seofon menn ætgedere: þa geswicon þa o þe  
 to sceawigenne one martyr mid menniscum gedwylde.  
 (p. 57)

Choosing not to elaborate further upon miracles attributable to Saint Edmund which according to Aelfric are common knowledge, the moral truth which he confirms in the sermon that concludes this life and which the entire narrative has served to advance, is that St Edmund is proof of God's capability to raise men "uncorruptible" from the dead and that God manifests Himself only to men who have true faith in Him and that this manifestation takes the form of miracles through His Saints;

On þyssum halgan is swutel, and on swilcum oþrum, þæt god ælmihtig  
 mæg þone man æfter eft on domes dæg andsundne of eorþan, se þe  
 hylt Eadmunde halne his lichaman oþ þone micclan dæg, þeah  
 ðe he of moldan come. Wyrðe [wære] seo stow for þam wurfulan halgan  
 þæt hi man wur[ode] and wel gelog[ode] mid cænum Godes þeowum  
 to Cristes þeowdome, for þan þe se halga is mæra þonne men magen asmeagan.  
 (p. 57)

According to Greenfield and Calder, another of Aelfric's didactic aims was to strengthen his people through learning against the horrors and temptations of the chaos produced by the renewed Viking attacks in the late tenth century, attacks that were to lead to the Danish conquest of England in the eleventh (Greenfield. S.B. and Calder. D. G. *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 76). To this end, both the *Life of St Oswald* and the *Life of St Edmund*, depict English Kings refusing to succumb to evil, and also refusing to succumb to Viking invaders. This spirit of nationalism is re-enforced in the *Life of St Edmund* by Aelfric's addition of a paragraph which emphasises the fact that the English nation is not deprived of the Lord's saints, since in England lie such saints as Cuthbert, Æthelthryth of Ely and her sister who remain uncorrupt in body, to name but a few, and all of whom work miracles;

Nis Angelcynn be ðeðed Drihtnes halgena, þonne on Engla landa licgað  
 swilce halgan swylce þas halga cyning, and Cuþberht se eadiga, and  
 Æþeldryð on Elig, and eac hire swustor, ansunde on lichaman, geleafan,  
 to trymninge. Synd eac fela oðre on Angelcynne halgan þe fela  
 wundra wyrcað - swa swa hit wide is cuð - þam Ælmihtigan to lofe,  
 þe hi on gelyfdon.  
 (p. 58)

Aelfric concludes his life of Saint Edmund with the assertion that the entire narrative has served to advance; through his saints, Christ makes clear that it is God Almighty who performs miracles, therefore, since the Jews do not believe in the true faith, no miracles take place at their graves. Miracles then are a sign of the true faith, or in other words, that Christianity is the true religion;

Crist geswutelad mannum furh his meran halgan þat he is A mihtig God  
 þe macad swilce wundra, þeah þe þa earman Iudei hine eallunga wisocen,  
 forþan þe hi synd awyrgeðe, swa swa hi wiscton him sylfum. Ne beoð  
 nane wundra geworhte ðet heora byrgenum, forþan þe hi ne gelyfa on  
 þone lifigendan Crist; ac Crist geswutela mannum hwær se soða geleafa  
 is, þonne he swylce wundra wyrð furh his halgan wide geond þas eorþan.  
 Þæs him sy wuldor a mid his heofonlican Feader and þam Halgan Gaste. Amen.  
 (pp. 58-59)

Having suggested the primary motive behind the composition of these Saints' Lives as that of increasing the Christian faith through promotion of belief in the miraculous, I do not mean to suggest that these hagiographical narratives should be deemed lacking in intrinsic literary merit. In the words of Robert. E. Bjork;

Studying style in the saints' lives is almost a mandatory enterprise. The style's relative simplicity makes the poems extremely accessible and becomes a dominant characteristic, totally appropriate for such a didactic mode... The scholarly, erudite reader can approach Scripture confident that it contains profound mysteries, while the common man can enjoy its treasures because of the simple style. The saint's lives, then, gain power from the low style and operate in its spirit, which the subject-matter implicitly contains: an ordinary individual typically becomes exalted as a saint, and the saint's life typically has its roots in an everyday kind of realism that makes it accessible to all men even while its seeming simplicity approaches a sublime sophistication. (Bjork. R.E. *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, 4)

In my opinion it is Aelfric's literary skill and style which ensure the successful promotion of the miraculous. The direct simplicity of his prose combined with his use of realism, ensures their clarity, accessibility and ease of comprehension for both clergy and laity alike. This is supported by G. I. Needham who writes that;

Most of Aelfric's Lives of Saints and many of his homilies, are written in a kind of rhythmical prose, similar in form to the alliterative verse of, for example, Beowulf, but more freely constructed... The range of patterns of alliteration and of stressed and unstressed syllables, is much more diverse than in the verse, and the number of unstressed syllables is on average larger, particularly the number of those preceding the first stress... Apart however from the rhythm and alliteration, Aelfric's writing in this style shows no trace of the other stylistic features of Old English verse, in particular its characteristic diction and use of variation... Apart in fact from the rhythm and alliteration, Aelfric's writing in this style is hardly to be distinguished from his ordinary prose. Ifric was a didactic writer: his purpose in writing was to instruct and edify. His use of the rhythmical style was perhaps intended to further these ends by increasing the appeal and effectiveness of

his writing, but it was plainly subordinate to the clear and simple exposition of his matter, which remained his chief stylistic concern.  
(Needham. G. I. *Lives of Three English Saints*, 21-22)

This clarity and simplicity of style are reflected in the stark contrasts Aelfric establishes between the saints and their respective enemies. The sharp contrasts of the Christ-like hero opposing the wicked heathens clearly distinguish between the elements of good and evil ensuring that by the time of the kings' passion and death an Anglo-Saxon audience would have been in no doubt as to their moral significance.

Moreover, while both narratives include epic elements, for example the subject matter of both narratives is serious, contains select historical fact and centre on quasi-divine figures, the language, unlike that of traditional epic tales, is neither ceremonial nor distanced from ordinary speech, but is clear, simple and easily accessible.

Cecily Clark illustrates how Aelfric (in his *Life of St Edmund*) in his search for the *simplicem Anglicam* that would speak to the hearts of his audience, regularly reduces the elaborate figures of speech characteristic of his original. When Abbo describes Inguar stealing to and from his ships, *velut lupis vespertinis mos est clanculo ad plana descendere, repetitis quantocius noctis silvarum latibulis* Aelfric cuts this to *swa swa wulf*, keeping the affective force of the simile while eliminating confusing detail. When Abbo says of the martyred Edmund; *Sicque factum est ut spiculorum terebratis aculeis circumfossus palpitans horreret, velut asper hericius, aut spinis hirtus carduus, in passione similis Sebastiano egregio martyri*, Aelfric simplifies the picture; *He eall wæs beset mit heora scotungum, swilce igles byrsta, swa swa Sebastianus wæs*. (Clark. C. 'Notes and News: Aelfric and Abbo', 32-33).

Similarly, Ann Nichols, in her article 'Aelfric and the Brief Style', supports the theory that Aelfric's simple and clear style is a deliberate and conscious attempt to reach the lay Anglo-Saxon ;

Aelfric's primary concern is for the simple, unlearned audience, and it is this pastoral concern that dictates the choice of brevitas and the concomitant choice of simple, clear words. The choice is dictated in turn by a sense of decorum, of fitness. In the Latin preface to his first volume of homilies, Aelfric says that he is concerned with the simple who know no Latin, and for this reason he chooses simple English words that will be understood.

(Nichols. A. E. 'Aelfric and the Brief Style', 2-3)

Both the *Life of St Oswald* and the *Life of St Edmund* share a basic structural pattern, while each is unique in content. Both choose to relate only the moment of greatest emotional and spiritual turmoil of the saints that they depict, rather than their entire historical life. They describe the facts of sainthood through a single moment or event. They are a coalescence of epic, romantic and panegyric traditions, related in a clear and

simple style, in which the reality of biography blends with the surreality of magical miracles and marvels.

The promotion of the belief in the miraculous was, in my view, Aelfric's primary purpose in composing these saints' lives, to ensure his stated aim of increasing the Christian faith among in his audience. He achieves this aim by conjoining historical fact with the supernatural, the magical and the marvellous. This historical fact, combined with his use of simple, direct and realistic language serves to re-enforce the reality, credibility and therefore the veracity of the supernatural and curative miracles which he attributes to the saints in question.

## Chapter two: Elene

In his article ‘*Imago Dei: Genre, Symbolism, and Anglo-Saxon Hagiography*’, Thomas Hill suggests that the most popular of medieval Christian literature, Hagiographic texts are divisible into two distinct stylistic types, the *vita* and the art *vita*, and that this distinction is determined by the *vita*’s function;

Hagiographic texts served two main functions – functions that were not mutually exclusive, but that in practice led to the development of two quite distinct modes of hagiographic literature. On the one hand, such texts could be read as Christian literature – texts to be read in public or in private for pleasure and for instruction – and on the other, certain hagiographic texts served a specific quasi-liturgical function. Both “secular” and “regular” religious services commemorated the saints, and there were various occasions, both in the liturgy of the Mass and the daily order of religious observances of monastic and other comparable groups in which hagiographic texts could appropriately serve as readings, “legends” in the service.... A *vita*, intended for “legendary” use will tend to be relatively brief and straightforward. The constraints of time – the reading is only one portion of the service as a whole – mean that there will be an ongoing tendency to abbreviate the text. And the fact that the reading is a part of a religious service will similarly mean that there will be a tendency to make the *vita* as readily comprehensible as possible. The author has, in a sense, a responsibility to the community as a whole. By contrast the author of a literary *vita* faces no such constraints. One can elaborate the *vita* to one’s heart’s content; it can be as long and as difficult as one wishes. I would call such a *vita* an art *vita*, a term patterned after the model of “art song”. Examples of art *vitae* would be the extended Old English saint’s lives – *Elene*, *Juliana*, and the Guthlac poems of the *Exeter Book*.... Whatever the merits or demerits of these poems, they are clearly ambitious literary works, which treat the life of a given saint with some fullness, and are too long to be read (as a whole at least) in a single church service or for public monastic reading.  
(Hill. T. ‘*Imago Dei*’, 37).

In terms of this definition, Aelfric’s *Lives of Saint Oswald* and *Saint Edmund*, through their brevity and simple prose style may be viewed as *vitae*, while Cynewulf’s *Elene*, which is much longer and written in verse may be viewed as an art *vita*. However, a further feature of the art *vita* which sets it apart from other hagiographic texts, is that characteristically it is a hagiographic text that imitates some secular literary form. In the case of *Elene* this is Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry.

Although scholars are certain that Cynewulf, (author of the poems *Elene*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Christ II* and *Juliana*, which all bear his runic signature), was connected to the Church either as a monk, priest or Bishop, very little is known concerning the rest of his life. In the words of Stanley Greenfield;

But who was Cynewulf? Apart from the signatures and the four poems,

we know nothing... Attempts to identify the poet with Cenwulf, Abbot of Peterborough (d. 1006), Cynewulf, bishop of Lindisfarne (d. about 782), and Cynwulf, a priest of Dunwich (fl 803), have proved inconclusive. Nevertheless, from the subject matter that he chose, from his style, from the dialect rhymes in *Elene* that underlie the Late West Saxon of the manuscripts, and from the two spellings of his runic name, certain deductions can be made. Cynewulf was undoubtedly a literate man who lived in the first half of the ninth century, a cleric, whose native dialect was Anglian (probably West Mercian). Not a great scholar, he nonetheless knew Latin well; he had knowledge of the Bible, the liturgy, and ecclesiastical literature, of doctrine and dogma... and his work reflects a long tradition of Latin Christian poetry fused with the vernacular formulaic verse system. (Greenfield. S. *A Critical History of Old English Literature*, 164-5)

All indications converge on the early ninth century as the most probable era for Cynewulf to have lived, though certainty in these matters is never possible. Derek Pearsall for example, makes Cynewulf active during the fifty-year period on both sides of the century's turn, 775-825 (Pearsall. D. *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, 292).

*Elene* is based on a now lost Latin source, which in turn was based on the Syrian legend of the Invention of the True Cross. According to Stanley Greenfield, literary critics usually consult the *Acta Cyriaci*, printed in the Bollandist *Acta Sanctorum* for May 4, which is believed to be similar to Cynewulf's original source, although Cynewulf's model was undoubtedly a Latin prose recension, the closest parallel being in St. Gall Ms 225 (Greenfield. S. *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 171). Despite the fact that *Elene* is generally considered to be Cynewulf's best poem, few critics are willing to bestow upon it any special literary merit.

While Greenfield describes *Elene*, as "the most epic of Cynewulf's poems in its tone and imagery" (Greenfield. S. *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 172) G. K. Anderson concludes that as literary creations both *Elene* and *Juliana* are not particularly distinguished (Anderson. G. K. *The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, 128). Kenneth Sisam ranks *Elene* as "the most pleasing, though not the most vigorous or original, of the translations from Latin which form the bulk of Old English poetry" (Sisam. K. *Cynewulf and his Poetry*, 308) while Pamela Gradon dismisses Cynewulf's achievement as "poetic circumlocution apart, there is little which is not found in some version of the *Acta Cyriaci*" (Gradon. P. O. E. *Cynewulf's 'Elene'*, 20).

Thomas D. Hill considers the modern critics' antipathy towards the poem to be the result of what would appear to be a forced and simplistic plot;

The main difficulty which modern readers have with *Elene*.... is that the conflict at its centre seems simplistic and forced; the misbelieving Jews are confronted by the saintly empress, and after some judicious torture the wisest of them converts, finds the Cross, and performs a miracle by virtue of the holy wood while the bystanders are suitably impressed. Shortly afterwards he manages

to dig up the nails with which Christ was crucified and Elene goes home satisfied. The poem then concludes with Cynewulf's personal statement that he is sorry for his sins. Given such a view of the poem, it is hardly surprising that most critics have in effect excerpted the more attractive passages and dismissed the poem as a whole as a conventional rendition of a picturesque if rather uncomplicated saint's legend.

(Hill. T. 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*' 159-60)

Yet according to Rosemary Woolf, *Elene* represents the most refined example of the various techniques Cynewulf used in all of his poems for although Cynewulf achieves the stylistic features of balance and control through careful patterning of his work and by his use of analogy and contrast throughout his poetic canon, in *Elene* he explores and intensifies each idea through a series of well-chosen and controlled variations. "This combined with changes of scene, varieties of action and modulation of tone produce a greater brightness and solidity of narrative than is found in the Latin source and is evident from the outset of the poem." (Woolf. R. 'Saints' Lives', 48).

But as George Anderson points out "Essentially it matters very little whom we elect as the real Cynewulf. Certain qualities in his poems are their own excuse for being...there could be no possible doubt that he (Cynewulf) was a cleric, **and all his poetic purpose is the poetic purpose of a churchman who is fired with a zeal to propagate the faith.** (my emphasis)(Anderson. G. K. *The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, 125). To this end we should remember that although writing before the Benedictine revival, Cynewulf was writing not long after one of the most stirring evangelical chapters in the history of the Anglo-Saxon Church, for as Catherine Regan writes;

in this period England's tremendous missionary zeal carried the Christian faith far beyond its own shores. The accomplishments of individuals such as Willibrord and Boniface are well known, but equally significant was the absorption of the entire nation in this evangelical effort. Cynewulf was writing in the shadow of this great missionary spirit. He also found two of his major characters – Constantine and Elene- portrayed as extraordinarily ardent missionaries by medieval historians such as Eusebius of Caesarea, Socrates, Soromen, and Theodoret.

(Regan. C. 'Cynewulf's *Elene*', 30)

In the light of this missionary zeal, I should like to suggest that despite his obvious stylistic achievement, Cynewulf's primary intention in composing this art *vita*, is to increase and strengthen the Christian faith among his readers through what I believe to be deliberate promotion of belief in the miraculous. Even though Cynewulf takes these miraculous manifestations from his source I believe that he consciously uses his particular literary style, narrative patterning, elements of realism, suspense and excitement and the conventions of Anglo-Saxon/ Germanic heroic poetry, conventions with which the majority of his Anglo-Saxon audience would have been familiar and in

which they would have taken great pleasure, to grasp and sustain their attention, thereby promoting belief in the miraculous within an Anglo-Saxon context. In so doing Cynewulf promotes vigorously the Christian faith over the Jewish faith to the point of what might appear to be extreme anti-Semitism.

That Cynewulf manipulates his source for his own ends is suggested by Gardner when he writes that;

If we assume a lost source containing all relevant elements of the Latin texts which have been identified as close to *Elene*... we may reasonably suppose that Cynewulf's embellishment of the traditional plot is little more than dutiful *amplificatio* of the sort already accepted by the Church as a means of drawing simple men to redemption.... however his fondness for establishing structural parallels, ironic juxtapositions of scenes, and verbal repetition all indicate more than a translator's interest in form... Thus Cynewulf's transfer of classical Old English devices to a new context is functional as well as ornamental, supporting the poet's central concern with a Germanic motif which the Anglo-Saxon audience would readily grasp and appreciate (Gardner. J 'Elene: Sources and Structure', 65-66).

Cynewulf deliberately employs classical Old English literary devices in the poem *Elene*, on both a stylistic and functional level, in order that he might capture and sustain the attention of his Anglo-Saxon audience. T. A. Shippey is of the opinion that while Cynewulf's style is that of " a man trained to read and write Latin, and to admire the orderly progress of a Latin sentence" his deliberate intelligence is nevertheless transparent, however great the background of Latin literature upon him might be. Shippey writes;

it is clear that he put its (Latin literature's) lessons to work within the native tradition of rhetoric, relying hardly at all on the style of his originals... it is this deep and multi-leveled influence of style which enables Cynewulf to vary his material. Like the *Andreas*-poet, he makes something of what might easily have been depressingly poor stories, the saints' lives of *Elene* and *Juliana*, his longest works. Both these poems are translations... yet the popularity of such stories (saint's lives) can seem inexplicable. Too many of them show a totally uncritical attitude to the miraculous, and are debased by a respect for spiritual success alone which transforms central characters into superhuman heroes, whose indifference to pain deprives them of visible courage and whose contempt for their opponents leaves them without any sign of charity... Yet though Cynewulf translates these stories at times with remarkable fidelity, he also bends them away from their dangerous naivete... His technique, essentially, is to build up the forces of evil from the inadequacy of the Latin originals to a state in which, though finally overcome by miracles, they have a reasonable being and a certain strength.  
(Shippey. T. A. *Old English Verse*, 167-8)

Cynewulf, however, displays more than an uncritical attitude towards the miraculous. Notwithstanding his unique style and intelligence, to my mind Cynewulf's technique is far more persuasive than that of his sources. Although he might well bend his sources away from naivete, he invests his poems with a plausibility far greater than that of his sources through his use of realism (although I do not mean to suggest that the poem *Elene* is historically realistic or accurate, merely that it contains elements of realism), and the Germanic/Anglo-Saxon heroic style, which in turn ensures among his Anglo-Saxon audience, greater acceptance of and belief in the miracles that will ultimately convert the forces of evil.

But how does Cynewulf employ his literary style to achieve this end? The poem *Elene*, may be divided into three balanced sections: the battle between Constantine and the Goths, the encounter between Elene, the Jews and Judas, and finally the epilogue. Thomas Hill writes; "*Elene* is clearly a segmented poem, even more so than most Anglo-Saxon narrative poems. If *Beowulf* resembles a diptych, *Elene* might be said to resemble a series of panels on a church wall" (Hill. T. 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*' 162).

The first section of the poem takes the form of historical narrative and is written in the formulaic diction of Old English Epic poetry. In typical heroic style, Cynewulf employs several kennings for both Christ, *wealdend God* and *Soð fæstra leoht* and Constantine *wæs se leodhwata lindgeborga / eorlum arfest, Ægelinges weox rice under roderum. He wæs riht cyning, / gūðweard gumena* (all quotes from *The Vercelli Book*). Thus, from the beginning Cynewulf establishes contrast and analogy between Christ and the Roman emperor Constantine and creates balance within the narrative through specific ordering of his material.

In the first ten lines of the poem he separates time passed since the birth of Christ from the duration of Constantine's reign and in the proceeding seven, matches the attributes of Christ with Constantine's virtues and strengths, thereby creating an analogy between the two. Despite the fact that Constantine is a pagan king, it would appear that Cynewulf is eager to establish that God is on Constantine's side;

ƿa wæs agangen gera hwyrftum  
 tu hund on ƿreo geteled rimes,  
 swylce XXX eac, ƿinggemearces  
 wintra for worulde, ƿæs ƿe wealdend god  
 acenned wearð, cyninga wuldor,  
 in middangeard ƿurh mennisc heo,  
 soð fæstra leoht. ƿa wæs syxte gear  
 Constantines caserdomes,  
 ƿæt he Romwara in rice wearð  
 ahæfen, hildfruma, to hereteman.  
 Wæs se leodwata lindgeborga  
 eorlum arfest. Ægelinges weox  
 rice under roderum. He wæs riht cyning,

gūweard gumena. Hine god trymede  
 mærum ond mihtum, þæt he manegum wearð  
 geond middangeard mannum to hrofer,  
 werfeodum to wraece, syððan wæpen ahof  
 wæhetendum. Him wæs hild boden,  
 (lines 1-19)

The balance and symmetry that Cynewulf establishes during his introduction of Constantine as both an historical (realistic) character and a Christ-like figure, is interrupted during the battle scenes that follow. Cynewulf uses direct, staccato sentences, which are themselves suggestive of the clamour and clash of war, in which the actual noise of military instruments and the sounding of the trumpets of victory can be heard;

þonne Huna cining;  
 ridon ym rofne, þonne rand dynede,  
 campwudu clynede, cyning treate for,  
 herge to hilde. Hrefen uppe gol,  
 wan ond wælfel. Werod wæs on tyhte.  
 Hleoþon hornboran, hreopan friccan,  
 mearh moldan træd. Mægen samnode,  
 cafe to cease.

(lines 49-56)

Yet, despite the chaos which this piling up of clauses suggests, Cynewulf continues his use of careful patterning. According to Daniel Calder;

Constantine's battle with the Goths is an oft-anthologized piece, usually admired for its capturing of the Germanic warrior ethic. Indeed, the full description, quite original with Cynewulf, does fall completely within the Germanic oral tradition... He divides the battle into five sections and assigns to each a specific purpose: the assembling of the Romans parallel the drawing up of the Goths; the raising of the Cross on earth parallels the vision of the Cross in the sky; and, with the final section, all four preceding panels merge in Constantine's victory through the power of the Cross. (Calder. D. *Cynewulf*, 106).

Moreover, within these mirror sections Cynewulf employs repetition of half lines to effect further contrast and analogy, for example *For folca gedryht* in line 27 and *For fyrda mæst*, in line 35.

The spirit of the Germanic warrior ethic is represented in the battle scenes through the presence of the Germanic beasts of war. Donald K. Fry in his article 'Themes and Type-scenes in *Elene*' suggests that Cynewulf consciously makes use of several, separate stock-type-themes in his description of the battle between the Huns and the Goths in order to increase the elements of realism, suspense and excitement which are original to his poem and not found in his source. Fry outlines three approach-to-battle type scenes which occur in the first 113 lines of the poem.

Cynewulf employs these type scenes to set up expectations in the reader or listener. For example, the reader or listener would wonder what had happened to the missing Raven when the beasts of battle are first mentioned. When the raven, eagle and the wolf appear later on the side of the Romans, the audience would be assured of a favourable result for the battle. "In summary, the traditional formulaic poet using type-scene construction gains certain advantages from his medium. By manipulating recognized patterns already rich in association, he affords himself possibilities for unity, symmetry, suspense, foreshadowing, and larger connotations from imagery." (Fry, D. K. 'Themes and Type-Scenes in *Elene*', 40-41).

Fry's argument that Cynewulf manipulates stock literary patterns and themes is supported by David Rollason who suggests that the poem *Elene* fits into a tradition of Christian poetry in the vernacular, written down by churchmen, which uses the imagery of a warrior society and in particular the heroic style of epic literature i.e. heightened representation of exciting and crucial situations (hence the concentration on battles and journeys) coupled with expressive use of metaphor. He suggests that this type of literature was probably, though not exclusively, aimed at a lay audience (Rollason, D. *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, 89).

Cynewulf's style may therefore be viewed as a tool which he deliberately employs to capture the attention and imagination of his lay audience, thereby ensuring their appreciation and acceptance of the realism and excitement of familiar heroic literature and by association I believe the realism and plausibility of the miracles that will follow. An example of this is Cynewulf's elaboration of the messenger's exhortation of Constantine. While the source also employs direct speech to relay the messenger's message, "Constantine, do not be frightened, but look up to heaven and see" (Calder D. G and Allen M. J. B. *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry*, 60). Cynewulf significantly expands and elaborates the message with kennings, typical of Germanic heroic poetry;

"Constantinus, heht ðe cyning engla,  
wryda wealdend, wære beoðan,  
dugu a dryhten. Ne ondr d u e,  
eah ðe el eodige egesan hwopan,  
heardre hilde. u to heofenum beseoh  
on wulfres weard, r u wra e findest,  
sigores tacen."

(lines 79-85)

Furthermore, the short, staccato sentences of the battle preparations are interrupted by the description of Constantine's vision, which returns the narrative to a more continuous line. According to Daniel Calder this gift of the vision, becomes the most significant means by which Constantine acquires "a touch of the heavenly aura before he has in fact earned it." Although in both the source and the poem, the angel appears as "radiant" *splendidissimus, hwit ond hiwbeorht*, Cynewulf expands this portion considerably, and emphasises twice the revelatory nature of this event;

a wear on sl·pe sylfum ·tywed  
 am casere, · r he on cor·re sw·f,  
 sigerofum gesegen swefnes woma.

(lines 69-71)

The darkness of battle and night is pushed aside by the bright light *fr·twum beorht* of the Cross and the shadows of night break *nigthehelm toglad*. The entire vision sequence is infused with light and introduces Cynewulf's original metaphor of light as representational of knowledge and truth, and darkness as representational of ignorance and spiritual blindness. Initially Cynewulf applies images of light and song to the Romans and images of darkness and turbulent motion to the enemy, the Goths. Eventually Cynewulf will extend this metaphor to represent the knowledge and truth of the Christian Church and the ignorance and spiritual blindness of the Jews. Thomas Hill writes that;

“this contrast between the light of Christianity and the darkness of misbelief is reiterated throughout the poem. But this pattern of imagery is more than simply a reflection of Cynewulf's preoccupation with the struggle between good and evil. For, from the Pauline epistles on, the imperception of the Jews, was described as blindness.. As Margaret Schlauch remarks, “Blindness was... the most consistent and conspicuous trait of the allegorical figure of the Synagogue throughout medieval art and literature. And this pattern of imagery is thus traditionally associated with the confrontation of Jew and Christian.”

(Hill. T. ‘Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*’, 168-169)

The opening of the poem therefore, as J. Gardner suggests, sets up, both dramatically and imagistically the theme and pattern of the whole (Gardner. J. ‘Cynewulf's *Elene*: Sources and Structure, p. 68).

Once the vision is complete, Cynewulf returns the narrative to the short, staccato sentences of the battle. However, during the vision sequence the messenger returns to the hosts of the pure, *on c̄·nra gemang* (line 96) and through Cynewulf's repetition of this phrase in *on feonda gemang* (line 108) and *on gramra gemang* (line 118) in the final confrontation between the Goths and the Romans, the Cross of the vision is linked to Constantine's earthly cross.

The final battle scene is again replete with the realistic sounds and horror of battle “the cracking of shields, cruel sword-chopping, the fierce and bloody antagonists” and culminates in Constantine's victory. The Goths flee in panic and terror, while the fear which Constantine had felt before the vision of the Cross is now replaced with happiness *Cyning w·s ŷ·y bli·ra ond ·e sorgleasra* (lines 96-97). The tone of this last section of the battle is fittingly victorious and triumphant as Constantine jubilantly makes his way back to his cities;

Gewat ̄a heriga helm ham eft ̄anon,  
 hu e hremig, (hild w ̄s gesceaden),  
 wigge geweor ̄od. Com ̄a wigena hleo  
 ̄egna ̄reate ̄ry bold secan,  
 beadurof cyning ̄burga neosan.

(lines 148-153)

But Constantine is still a pagan king and upon his return home (as in the sources) he gathers together the wisest of his kingdom, whose purpose it is to reveal to him the meaning of the emblem of the Cross. This gathering of the wisest of Constantine's subjects finds a parallel in the subsequent meetings which Elene will hold initially with the wisest of the Jews and then with Judas. "The major difference between this first council and the numerous Jewish assemblies is patent: without hesitation the 'wisest' of the wise among the Romans identify the tree as Christ's Cross, and those Christians then living in Rome materialise with 'light hearts and rejoicing in soul' to corroborate this identification" (Calder. D. *Cynewulf*, 109).

Through the study of the scripture, Constantine learns, as in his source, of the murder of Christ. However, Cynewulf alone and not his source, treats Satan's seduction of the Jews as a trick played by a usurper king on a tumultuous crowd (lines 208-211). Once Constantine is in possession of the knowledge of the Crucifixion and of the Holy Trinity, he converts immediately, "making his conversion effortless, sudden and rational" (Calder. D. *Cynewulf*, 109).

According to Calder, further examples of Cynewulf's expansions of his source can be seen in his treatment of the Cross. Unlike his source, Cynewulf's poetic elaborations constitute a vision of the ultimate reality the Cross embodies; here the Cross is not just a holy relic with special powers to protect the emperor against the invading Huns. Cynewulf's first presentation of the Rood does not simply serve a military function, but symbolises the whole universal Christian order. Constantine, Judas and Cynewulf must become servants of the Cross through their conversions; however, in *Elene* this vision of the Cross shows what it is they must devote themselves to *before*, in fact, that Cross is found and transformed into the radiant Rood that appears to Constantine (Calder D. *Cynewulf*, 109).

Thus, Cynewulf establishes in the first section of the poem a pattern of strife, revelation and conversion, which will be continued and extended in the subsequent two sections. Through his original use of patterning, repetition, elements of realism and suspense he captures his audience's attentions and through Constantine's conversion begins to persuade his audience of the superiority of Christianity.

In response to his new-found Christianity, Constantine sends his mother Elene to Jerusalem to discover the whereabouts of the True Cross. The sea journey which Elene undertakes is original to Cynewulf. He uses this journey as a continuity device, to bridge the physical distance between Rome and Israel as well as to facilitate the transition of the

battle theme from an earthly struggle to a spiritual one in which the ultimate enemy is Satan.

In contrast with Constantine's earlier fear, Elene is eager to begin her journey. J Gardner points out that the lines devoted to the journey of Elene and her army serve a number of functions. First verbal echoes and imagistic parallels recall the earlier passage on the movement of the enemies of Rome toward the Danube: like Rome's enemies, the queen's army hurries to the rim of a surging waterway and there, (Cynewulf mentions this detail twice), the queen's army pauses, as did the enemy of Rome on reaching the Danube. The structural echo calls attention to the change in the Romans' situation: fighting for God, they are now on the winning side, the position Rome's enemies seemed to be in, in the earlier passage. Second, and to my mind more important, by inserting the passage on Elene's journey, Cynewulf is able to emphasise the loyalty of Elene and her forces in contrast to the disloyalty of the Jewish clan (Gardner. J. '*Elene: Sources and Structure*', 68-69). Constantine tells his mother to seek eagerly *georone secan* and the eagerness with which she and her band obey their lord is the focus of the whole Cynewulfian insertion;

Elene ne wolde  
 þæs siðfates sære weorðan,  
 ne ðæs wilgifan word gehyrwan,  
 hiere sylfre suna, ac wæs sona gearu,  
 wif on willsið, swa hire weoruda helm,  
 byrnwiggendra, beboden hæfde.

(lines 219-224)

It is generally agreed among critics that Cynewulf's direct source for Elene's sea journey is *Beowulf*, lines 207-218 (Klaeber's Text). I agree with Gardner who feels that Cynewulf's imitation is more realistic than the *Beowulf* source since there is greater noise and more violent motion in the Cynewulf version. For example Cynewulf describes the sounds of the waves buffeting the sides of the ship and details the speed of the ship scudding over the sea with its sails swelling in the wind;

Ongan þa ofstlice eorla mengu  
 to flote fýsan. Fearð hengestas  
 ymb geofenes stæð gearwe stodon,  
 sælde sæmearas, sunde getenge.  
 Ða wæs orcnæwe idese sið þa,  
 siðan wæges helm werode gesohte.  
 þær wlanc manig æt Wendels  
 on stæðe stodon. Stundum wæcon  
 ofer mearcþa u, mægen æfter ðrum,  
 ond þa gehlodon hildesercum,  
 bordum ond ordum, byrnwigendum,  
 werum ond wifum, wæghengestas.  
 Leton þa ofer fifelwæg famige scriðan

bronte brim isan. Bord oft onfeng  
 ofer earhgeblond y a swengas;  
 s̄ swinsade. Ne hyrde ic sī ne ʳ  
 on egstreame idese ladan,  
 on merestreate, m̄gen f̄ gerre.  
 ʳ meahte gesion, se ʳone sī beheold,  
 brecan ofer b̄ weg, brimwudu snyrgan  
 under swellingum, s̄ mearh plegean,  
 wadan w̄ gflotan.

(lines 225-246)

As Cynewulf invests his text with elements of realism, so too does he invest the character of Elene with realistic qualities. According to Daniel Calder some scholars identify Elene as a figure of *Ecclesia*, the Church Militant, that spiritual body which Constantine married to the secular imperium of Rome. Since she accepts her mission without hesitation or equivocation, she is the Church Militant setting out to erase spiritual darkness and establish the true faith; “The diction may be that of the Germanic heroic poem, but Elene, the ‘war-queen’ (*gūcwen*) combines the Christian saint, the figure of Mary and the Church striving against the very evil that has kept the Cross hidden and the Jews in dark ignorance (Calder. *D. Cynewulf*, 110). According to Thomas Hill this raises the question whether Elene herself is not presented typologically as a figure of the Church confronting the Synagogue (Hill. T. ‘Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*’, 166).

Catherine Regan states that although Elene’s function is clearly if superficially explained by her actions, there is added support outside the poem for the appropriateness of seeing her as a figure of the Church since Cynewulf was writing (as has been stated earlier) in the shadow of the great missionary spirit of the seventh and eighth centuries. “Elene dramatizes the function of the Church Militant – to lead men to eternal life – through her relationship with the Jews and Judas. In her missionary role, Elene preaches the Gospel to the Jews and Judas, who after considerable struggle, come to accept the Christian message by acknowledging the meaning of the Cross” (Regan. C. ‘Cynewulf’s *Elene*’, 30).

However, Alexandra Hennessey Olsen points out that critics such as Calder fail to note that in Germanic tradition, women normally use speech rather than action to achieve their purposes, but that they resort to action when speech fails. Unlike the Latin Helena of the source, who knows Old Testament and classical history and can discuss both the prophets and the Fall of Troy, Cynewulf places a special emphasis on Elene’s ability to remember past events and remind her audience of them.

According to Olsen, Elene’s qualities, severity of mind, tenacity of purpose, and courage link her to those “half-mortal, half-supernatural beings called *idis* in Old High German, *ides* in Old English, and *dis* in Old Norse.” Olsen further points out that the *ides* in heroic poetry is characterised by acuity and wisdom which is buttressed by sagacity of speech and she suggests that Elene manifests this aspect when she repeatedly commands

and goads the Jewish elders and warriors to reveal the whereabouts of the true cross. She suggests that in particular, Cynewulf makes Elene resemble the women of Germanic tradition who admonish their male kinsmen to act in accordance with the heroic code, or what Michael Murphy defines as the “strong-willed and forceful women of the sagas” who, as Carol J. Clover emphasises, use both speech and actions in scenes of “*hvat* or incitement” to action. (Olsen. A. H. ‘Cynewulf’s Autonomous Women’, 225).

Olsen cites the example of *Laxdæla Saga*, in which Thorgerthr Egilsdottir incites her sons to avenge their murdered brother and finally accompanies them on their journey because they need *bryning* “something to egg them on”. Olsen concludes that while women in old Norse texts are not passive, they are usually ‘taunters’ who do not themselves participate personally in the feuds;

Elene uses the various tactics found among Old Norse heroic women at various times in her quest for the True Cross. ...*Elene* is characterized by speech acts and by the poet’s concern with the ethical use of speech, and Cynewulf uses formulaic language like *ma elode*, “spoke formally”, *wi ingode* “addressed”, and *wordum (ge)negan* “approach like words” to emphasize the importance of speech in his poem. At this point I would like to observe that his use of such verbs- in contrast to the use of *dixit* “said” throughout the *Inventio* – suggests that Cynewulf expected his audience to compare Elene to Germanic secular heroic women. ...Elene sometimes resembles women like Thorgerthr, using speech to incite men to action as she does when she orders Cyriacus to find the Nails. Sometimes, however, she acts when other courses fail, especially in the case which has caused critics to heap opprobrium upon her, ordering Judas incarcerated without food or water.

(Olsen. A. H. ‘Cynewulf’s Autonomous Women’, 225-226)

It is my opinion that by failing to respond to Elene as primarily a Germanic heroic woman and choosing to view her solely as an allegorical counter in a typological narrative, the modern reader deprives Elene of her realism, a realism which would have been glaringly evident to Cynewulf’s Anglo-Saxon audience and which I believe Cynewulf obviously intended, since this realism with which the character of Elene is invested in turn lends realism and plausibility to the miracles which occur later in the narrative. I view the character of Elene as a deliberate combination of both the allegorical and the realistic. Similarly the character of Judas may be interpreted as possessing both typological significance and elements of realism, which I will illustrate later.

Upon her arrival in Jerusalem Elene immediately calls a council of the wisest Jewish men. By repeating the pattern of narrative of Constantine’s gathering of the wise Christian men in the gathering of the Jews, Cynewulf draws the attention of his audience to the differences between the two situations which at first appear similar. As the wisest of the Romans immediately reveal the truth, the wisest of the Jews refuse to reveal the truth;

Heo wæron gearwe, geomormode  
 leodgebyrgean, þa hie laȝod wæron  
 þurh heard gebann; to hofe eodon,  
 cyðdon cræftes miht. þa sio cwen ongan  
 weras Ebresce wordum negan,  
 fricggan fyrhðwerige ymb fyrngewritu,  
 hu on worulde ær witgan sungon,  
 gasthalige guman, be godes bearne,  
 hwær se þeoden getowade,  
 soð sunu meotudes, for sawla lufan.  
 Heo wæron stearce, stane heardran,  
 noldon þæt geryne rihte cyðan,  
 ne hire andsware ænige secgan,  
 torngenið lan, þæs hio him to sohte,  
 ac hio worda gehwæs wiðersæc fremedon,  
 fæste on fyrhðe, þæt heo frignan ongan,  
 cwædon þæt hio on aldre owiht swylces  
 ne ær ne sið æfre hyrdon.  
 (lines 555-572)

In the Latin source Elene asks the Jews immediately to disclose to her the exact place where the Cross is hidden. Cynewulf does not, however, follow his sources in this regard, choosing instead to construct a series of ritual and purgative meetings between Elene and the Jews during which she lectures to them about their spiritual darkness and ignorance. These meetings take the form of dramatic dialogue.

In the first confrontation between Elene and a congregation of three thousand Jews she castigates the Jews for the murder of Christ. However, upon learning that they do not know what she means, she explains more fully in the second encounter. Here she reminds them of their former virtue, and recalls to them the words of their prophets. She rebukes them for having followed error and charges them to find wisemen who can give information. When she confronts the five hundred on the third occasion, she again appeals to the Jews' loyalty to their own tradition and tribe, a detail inserted here by Cynewulf;

"Oft ge dyslice dæd gefremedon,  
 werge wræcmæggas, ond gewritu herwdon,  
 fædera lare, næfre furður þonne nu,  
 ȝa ge blindnesse bote forsegon,  
 ond ge wiðsocon soðe ond rihte,  
 þæt in Bethleme bearn wealdendes,  
 cyning anboren, ðenned wære,  
 æðelinga ord. Þeah ge þa cuðon,  
 witgena word, ge ne woldon þa,  
 synwrcende, soð oncnawan."  
 (lines 386-396)

Cynewulf breaks with the abruptness of the epic style to allow Elene a higher style, through his use of complex and elaborate sentence structures which are better suited to Elene's position both as taunter and as Church representative. Her speech is enveloped with a sense of balance and control through Cynewulf's rhythmic patterning of syntax. According to Robert E. Bjork "Elene's discourse...shows the control that creates the obtrusive stasis or uniformity that characterizes her" (Bjork, R. E. *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, 65). Bjork cites as an example Elene's first speech during which she addresses three thousand of the Hebrew wisemen;

Ic þæt gearolice on giten hæbbe  
 þurh witgena wordgeryno  
 on godes bocum þæt ge geardagum  
 wyrðe wæron wuldorcyninge,  
 dryhtne dyre ond dædhwæte.  
 Hwæt, ge ealle synttro unwislice,  
 wraðe wiðweorpon, þa ge wergdon þane  
 þe eow of wergðe þurh his wuldres miht,  
 fram ligcwale, lisan tohte,  
 of hæftneðe. Ge mid horu speowdon  
 on þas ondwilitan þe eow eagna leoht,  
 fram blindnesse bote gefremede  
 edniowunga þurh þæt æðele spald,  
 ond fram unclannum oft generede  
 deofla gastum. Ge to deaðe ðone  
 deman ongunnon, se ðe of deaðe sylf  
 woruld awehte on wera corþre  
 in þæt ære lif eowres cynnes.  
 Swa ge modblinde mengan ongunnon  
 lige wið soðe, leoht wið þystrum,  
 æfst wið are, inwitancum  
 wroht webbedan. Eow seo wegðu forðan  
 sceððeð scyldfullum. Ge þa sciran miht  
 deman ongunnon, ond gedweolan lifdon,  
 eostrum geancum, oððysne dæg.  
 Ganga nu snude, synttro ge encas  
 weras wisfæste, wordes cræftige,  
 þa ðe eowre æðelum cræftige  
 on fehwesefan fyrrest hæbben,  
 þa me soðlice secgan cunnon,  
 onsware cyððan for eowic forð  
 tacna gehwylces þe ic him to sece."

(lines 288-319)

Bjork presents a penetrating analysis of this speech in which he suggests that Cynewulf manipulates her discourse in order to represent Elene's active search for the truth. Bjork shows convincingly that Elene's dialogue depends on a basic triadic kind of structure that integrates and subordinates the various elements of discourse so that each speech is

unified and moves unmistakably forward or outward. Elene seeks the truth, and the syntax, rhythm, grammatical mood, and rhetorical structure, the economy of her dialogue, reflect her search (Bjork. R. E. *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, 66-68).

In sharp contrast to the rhythmic and elaborate patterning of Elene's speech stands the speech of both the Jews and Judas which is conversational in tone, short and direct. The Jews who know nothing of the long-hidden crime answer in the only way that they can, with panic and confusion which is reflected through their repetition of words and of previous concerns as they give up Judas to Elene;

(þam wæs Iudas nama  
 cenned for cneomagum), þone hie þære cwene agefon,  
 sægdon hine sundorwisne, 'He ðe mæg soð gecyðan,  
 onwreon wyrda geryno, swa ðu hine wordum frignest,  
 ærht from orde oðende forð  
 He is for eofðan æles cynnes,  
 wordcraeftes wis ond witgan sunu,  
 bald on meðle; him gebyrde is  
 þæt he gencwidas gleawe hæbbe,  
 cræft in breostum. He gecyðeð ðe  
 for wera mengo wisdomes gife  
 þurh þa myclan miht, swa þan mod lufa' (lines 586-97)

In Judas's dialogue, however, we find many of the features employed in Elene's speech. But Cynewulf initially juxtaposes these features with elements of a personal, and thus antithetical, style. As an example Bjork cites Judas's first speech, in which he responds to the Jew's bewilderment over Elene's zeal;

"Ic wat geare  
 þæt hio wile secan be ðam sigebeame  
 on ðam þrowode þe eoda waldend,  
 eallra gnyrna leas, godes agen bearn,  
 þone orscyldne eofota gehwylces  
 þurh hete hengon on heanne beam  
 in fyrndagum fæderas usse.  
 þæt wæs realic geðoht! Nu is þearf mycel  
 þæt we fæstlice ferh stædelien,  
 þæt we ðes moðres meldan ne weorðen  
 hwær þæt halige trio beheled wurde  
 æfter wigþrace, þy ðes toworpen sien  
 frod fyrngewritu ond þa fæderlican  
 lare forleten. (Lines 419-432)

Bjork states that, firstly, an obvious tonal change occurs from the Latin in the Old English version. Cynewulf alters the material lines 419b-25 by infusing the straightforward Latin (*ego scio, quia quaestionem vult facere ligni, in quod Christum*

*suspenderunt patres nostri*) with Christian diction and a litany of truths central to Christian doctrine. The unadorned *ligni* becomes the compound *sigebeame* (tree of victory) and the *heanne beam* (high tree); the simple naming of Christ turns into a tendentious delineation of his might and sinless state; and the Jewish fathers, given no motive for their actions in the Latin, are moved by hate in the Old English.

A further feature lacking in Judas' pre-conversion speech, but present in Elene's is what Bjork describes as 'plurilinear alliteration'. Alliterating sounds rather than confining themselves to single lines, extend through two or three lines. The plurilinear progression from sound to sound adds to the speech's sense of movement, its sense of openness, urging the reader forward and highlighting a tempo that forcefully punctuates Elene's message (Bjork. R. E. *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, 68).

However, after his entombment in the well (a parallel of Christ's three days in the grave, before rising from the dead), Judas emerges able to recognise the light of spiritual truth. Like Constantine, whose initial fear is replaced by spiritual courage, Judas, too, overcomes his fear and becomes spiritually brave. But with this spiritual conversion comes a different type of speech pattern.

In his invocation to God, Judas's previous short conversational sentences are replaced by a fluid, more complex continuous line, lending a sense of movement and openness to the speech. The structure is linear, chronologically relating the events of salvation history from Creation to Doomsday (lines 725-801). Bjork writes;

The logical development of the speech therefore augments the sense of openness it creates, and both the imperative mood and the alliterative stress, which here tends to fall on substantives or finite verbs, intensify that sense. Furthermore, in lines 735b (up), 738b (inre), 766b (inum), 796b (in), and 776b (in) alliteration reinforces a rhetorical point: no longer inward directed Judas emphasizes forces outside of himself and ceases to focus on the individual *I*. In his seventy-six line invocation Judas uses the pronoun "ic" only twice (788a, 795b), a significant change over his earlier practice. ... In his invocation Judas demonstrates that his new-found faith causes him to assimilate not merely articulate, the principal truths of Christianity. He has been purged, and his dialogue and spiritual state become Elene's. Here-after, his new, unified voice appears in his remaining speeches in a consistent and effective use of iconographic features. Each speech, for example, is characterized by the imperative mood. And each returns to stressing substantives and finite verbs, except when disruption of the pattern would be rhetorically meaningful, as in line 816, where 'minra' takes alliterative stress to emphasize Judas's individual culpability.

(Bjork. R. E. *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, 83-85)

From the above stylistic analysis it becomes obvious that Cynewulf does more than simply translate his Latin source. He carefully expands it with heroic kennings and manipulates the discourse of his characters to reflect not only their spiritual status, but to

convey realism, thus achieving a narrative that his readers will find moving and persuasive.

Catherine Regan believes that Cynewulf's primary intention in the poem is the spiritual meaning of the Invention of the Cross legend, in the light of which *Elene* becomes a poem about the Church and its mission to lead men to salvation through the acceptance of the Cross, the poem may therefore be described as a metaphor for conversion.

While I would agree with Catherine Regan that acceptance of the faith which the Cross symbolises is Cynewulf's primary aim and it is to this faith in the Cross that Constantine, Judas and the entire Jewish Nation are converted, it is important to note that these conversions are achieved only once the converts have received physical proof of God's miraculous power i.e Constantine's triumph in battle, the vapour of smoke that appears in response to Judas' request, the raising of the boy from the dead which prompts the Jews to convert en masse. The importance of these miraculous events will be discussed later.

The Cross may also be viewed as the barrier standing between the Synagogue and the Church, and *Elene's* four councils with the Jews as a dramatisation of representations of the Synagogue versus the Church. Through acceptance of the Cross by the Jews, the Cross becomes the bond uniting Synagogue and Church and the two testaments become one.(Regan. C. 'Evangelicalism as the Informing Principle in Cynewulf's *Elene*,' 29).

As *Elene* is simultaneously realistic and typological as representative of the Church, so is Judas both realistic (in terms of his discourse) and typological as representative of the Jewish Synagogue. Thomas Hill suggests that;

“simply on literary grounds the fact that of all the Jews only Judas speaks as an individual suggests that his role is in some sense representative. . . . . I would argue that the confrontation of *Elene* on the one hand and the Jews and their figure Judas on the other, is patterned typologically; and that this conflict, which is after all central to the poem, is not simply a conflict between individuals but rather the confrontation of two kinds of wisdom—the wisdom of the word and law of the Jews, and the Christian wisdom of *Elene*.(Hill. T. 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*', 164-5)

Cynewulf's representations of both Judas and the Jewish nation are further examples of his manipulation of his source material, manipulations that could be interpreted as anti-Semitic in intention.

Through Cynewulf's choice of adjectives or epithets to describe the Jews, the audience is continuously reminded of Judas' and the Jewish nation's guilt to a far greater extent than in the Latin source. For example, in the source the Jewish nation is referred to merely as “wicked” and “stupid”. Cynewulf however, chooses to describe them not only as stupid and unblessed *swa disige* but as wretched outcasts *werge wr cm cggas* and

sinner *synwyrcente*. He also emphasises that their crime of killing Christ is one of aggression and violence *wig ra ce*, motivated by hatred *urh hete*. In addition, the Jewish wise men are presented by Cynewulf as liars when they refuse to admit to Elene any knowledge of the Cross which she seeks, even though they have recently listened to Judas's confession of knowledge of Christianity;

Heo wæron stearce, stane heardran,  
 noldon þæt geryne rihte cyðan,  
 ne hire andsware ænige secgan,  
 torngeniðlan, þæs hio him to sohte,  
 ac hio worda gehwæs wærsæc fremedon,  
 fæste on fyhðe, þæt heo frignan ongan,  
 cwædon þæt hio on aldre owiht swylces  
 ne ær ne sið æfre hyrdon.

(lines 565-572)

Cynewulf firmly establishes Judas in the *miles Christi* tradition since he is instructed by Elene, is bound and suffers physical hardship in a pit for seven days. Although he does not die physically, as did Christ, he undergoes a spiritual death which in essence may be viewed as a spiritual crucifixion and burial, and following his model, he rises and emerges as a new man.

Before Judas submits and makes his final conversion, he asks God to perform a supernatural miracle i.e. a vapour of smoke which should rise from the spot where the Cross is buried. As mentioned earlier the conversions are achieved only once the convert has received physical proof of God's miraculous power. This miracle will confirm Judas' decision to convert, for as he states in his prayer, confirmation of Christ's identity as the Son of God resides in the miracles that he worked while on earth;

“Forþæt nu, lifes fruma,  
 of ðam wangstede wynsumne up  
 under radores ryne rec astigan  
 lyftlacende. Ic gelyfe þe sel  
 ond þy fæstlicor ferh staðelige,  
 hyt untweondne, on þone ahangian Crist,  
 þæt he sie soðlice sawla nergend,  
 ece ælmihtig, Israhela cining,  
 walde widan ferh wuldres on heofenum,  
 a butan ende egra gestealda.”

(lines 792-801)

Cynewulf does not describe this miracle of the smoke in any great detail, choosing rather to describe Judas' reaction to it, his immediate joy and sudden conversion;

Nu ic þurh soð hafu seolf gecnawen  
 on heardum hige þæt þu hælend eart  
 middangeardes. Sie ðe, mærgena god,  
 þrymstittendum þanc butan ende,

þas þu me swa me þum ond swa manweorcum  
 þurh þin wulfdor inwrige wyrda geryno.  
 Nu ic þe, bearn godes, biddan wille,  
 weoroda willgifa, nu ic wat þæt þu eart  
 gecyðed ond acenned allra cyninga þrym,  
 þæt þu ma ne sie minra gylta,  
 þara þe ic gefremede nalles feam sþum,  
 metud, gemyndig. Læt mec, mihta god,  
 on rimtale rices þines  
 mid haligra hlyte wunigan  
 in þære beorhtan byrig, þær is broðor min  
 geweorðod in wuldre, þæs he wære wið þec,  
 Stephanus, heold, þeah he stangreopum  
 worpod wære. He hafa wigges lean,  
 blæd butan blinne. Sint in bocum his  
 wundor þa he worhte on gewritum cyðed.”

(lines 807-826)

This would seem to prove that Cynewulf's primary concern lies with the poem's ability to act as a metaphor for conversion, or rather as an instrument of persuasion for such conversion. Moreover Cynewulf's choosing not to describe the miracle of the smoke in any great detail, but merely reporting its occurrence would also seem to suggest that the elements of realism with which Cynewulf has previously invested his characters and narrative, now serve to lend credibility to the efficacy of the miracle. By the time the miracle of the smoke which rises from the ground to mark the spot where the Cross is hidden occurs, it seems as realistic and plausible as any other ordinary event within the narrative. The miracle of the smoke therefore strengthens Judas's faith in the crucified Christ as the Saviour of souls, and the eternal, almighty King of Israel and allows Cynewulf to add the adjective *eadig* to Judas's name and the epithet "clear in thought" thereby confirming his complete transformation from sinner to saint while perhaps transmitting the message that the only good Jew is a converted Jew;

Ða of ðære stowe steam up aras  
 swylce rec under radorum. þær æbered wearð  
 beornes breostsefa. He mid bæm handum,  
 eadig ond ægleaw, upward plegade.  
 Iudas ma þelode, gleaw in geþance:  
 (lines 802-806)

Judas converts because of a miracle, a physical and palpable sign, and not as a direct result of the Christian instruction received from Elene. Judas' conversion is not an intellectual conversion. Thus Cynewulf stresses the thaumaturgic or wonder-working power of Christianity as opposed to Christianity as a code of morality. Cynewulf, however, adapts this message to an Anglo-Saxon context, ensuring through stylistic means its acceptability to an Anglo-Saxon audience.

This thaumaturgic power is further emphasised in the following section of the poem, which continues Cynewulf's careful patterning of contrasted analogies and deals with the finding of the True Cross. This section may be divided into two parts; the finding of the three crosses and the identification of the True Cross. Both begin with the same narrative pattern, *ongan þa wilfægen æfter þam wuldres treo/elnes anhydig, eorðan delfan* (lines 827-828) and *Asetton þa on gesyhðe sigebeamas III /eorlas anhydige fore Elenan cneo* (lines 846-847), and each section concludes with what Daniel Calder terms a "rising". (Calder. D. *Cynewulf*, 127) First the three crosses are raised out of their dark grave, and then the True Cross is identified by means of a miracle of healing (as in the source) as it is raised up over the dead boy's body;

ahafen halig. þa sio þridde wæs  
 oððæt him uppan æðelinges wæs  
 rod aræred, rodocyninges beam,  
 sigebeacen soð. He sona aras  
 gaste gegearwod, geador bu samod  
 lic ond sawl. þær wæs lof hafen  
 fæger mid þy folce. Eder weorðodon,  
 ond þone soðan sunu wealdendes  
 wordum heredon. Sie him wuldor ond þanc  
 a butan ende eallra gesceafta!

(lines 883-893)

Once more, it is not the detail of the miracle itself which concerns Cynewulf but the effect that the miracle has upon the Jewish nation; the implication of a future mass conversion;

þa wæs þam folce on fertð sefan,  
 ingemynde, swa him scyle,  
 wundor þa þe worhte weoroda dryhten  
 to feorhnere fira cynne,  
 lifes lattiow. þa þær ligesynnig  
 on lyft astah lacende feond.

(lines 894-899)

Judas' new faith is now tested by the appearance of the Devil, who complains about Christ's power to avail Himself of the Devil's possessions while increasing his own at the Devil's expense. Again I find Bjork's analysis of the devil's speech (lines 902-935) illuminating in that he suggests that the role of the devil is simpler in *Elene* than in a poem such as *Juliana*, since he exists primarily to validate Judas' new voice by offering a contrast to it much like the contrast provided by Judas' now-discarded personal style;

"The devil's single speech contains material stylistically antithetical to the poem's iconography, and Judas's resistance to the devil's rhetoric implies a permanent attachment to the holy life. An excessive use of first-person pronouns makes clear that the devil views himself as victim, but it also shows that the focus of the speech is inward....

The devil's discourse closely resembles Judas's personal style and thus becomes emblematic of the capacity for evil that Judas had within him before his conversion, before his giving himself over to his innate capacity for good (Bjork. R. E. *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, 86-88).

More importantly, I believe that through this stylistic association of Judas with the devil, Cynewulf is able to emphasise that before the Jewish Nation converts, it too is a force of evil, thereby further promoting anti-Semitic sentiment.

Nevertheless, Judas emerges the victor of this encounter, his conversion complete and his new faith steadfast. Once more Cynewulf repeats the pattern of struggle, revelation and conversion.

At this point in the poem, Cynewulf chooses to depart from his Latin source and alter the course of events. After Judas has converted, Elene sends word to Constantine of the finding of the True Cross and in return Constantine commands her to erect a church upon Calvary. In the source, Elene takes this instruction with her, but through this rearrangement, Cynewulf is able to symbolise the complete victory of Roman Christianity over Judaism, for the Church has now completely defeated the Synagogue;

Heht hire þa aras eac gebeodan  
 Constantinus þæt hio cirican þær  
 on þam beorhhlifge begra rædum  
 getimbrede, tempel dryhtnes  
 on Caluarie Criste to willan,  
 hælum to helpe, þær sio halige rod  
 gemeted wæs, mærost beama  
 þara þe gefrugnen foldbuende  
 on eorðwege. Hio geefnde swa,  
 siððan winemagas westan brohton  
 ofer lagufæsten leofspell manig.

(lines 1006-1016)

Only once the Church has been physically established does Cynewulf allow Judas to be baptised and to assume his new name, Cyriacus.

In keeping with the pattern of miracle and conversion that Cynewulf has previously established, another miracle must take place before the Jewish Nation can convert as a whole (a liberty Cynewulf takes with both his sources and history). Like the Cross, the nails which Elene desires Cyriacus to reveal, are concealed in the dark ground, *in foldan gen/deope bedolfen* (lines 1079-1080). They, like the Cross, are transformed from hidden darkness to revealed light, firstly through the miracle of fire which arises to mark the spot at which they are hidden and secondly by their own radiant light *leohte lixton* which shines forth from the ground;

Leort þa tacen forð, þær hie to sægon,  
 fæder, frofre gast, þurh fyres bleo

up eigean þær þa ælestan  
 hæleða geradum hydde wæron  
 þurh nearusearwe, næglas on eorþan.  
 Ða cwom semninga sunnan beorhtra  
 lacende lig. Leode gesawon  
 hira willgifan wundor cyðan,  
 þa þær of heolstre, swylce heofonsteorran  
 oðre goldrimmas, grunde getenge,  
 næglas of nearwe neorþan scinende  
 leohte lixton.

(lines 1104-1115)

Again it is the reaction which the miracle elicits rather than the realistic details of the miracle itself upon which Cynewulf places emphasis, for after this final miracle the Jews convert with one voice, no longer blind since they have received what Cynewulf describes as the light of truth and the wisdom of Christianity;

“Nu we seolfe geseoð sigores tacen  
 soðwundor godes, þeah we wissocum ær  
 mid leasingum. Nu is in leoht cymen,  
 onwripen, wyrda bigang. Wuldor þæs age  
 on heannesse heofonrices god!”

(lines 1120-1124)

In the words of J Gardner;

The crime of the Jewish tribe has been established by Cynewulf as the murder of a king, and in terms of the heroic ethic, payment for that is what Judas wrongly predicted it would be if ever the cross were found: death for the betrayers. But the King of Heaven does not demand blood payment: he prefers correction of old error, renunciation of the false king who has misled the people, Satan. God's (and I would like to suggest Cynewulf's) object is Kingdom Come the supremacy of Christendom not only in heaven but also here on earth  
 (Gardner. J. 'Cynewulf's *Elene*: Sources and Structure', 71).

According to Daniel Calder, the conversion of the entire Jewish Nation signified for medieval Christians the imminent approach of the Last Day of Judgement (Calder. D. *Cynewulf*, 132). Perhaps this may be viewed as a further persuasive device to prompt conversion among any of the Anglo-Saxon audience, as yet unconvinced by the miracles. Thus having detailed the Jewish conversion, Cynewulf is able to proceed logically to the eschatological themes of his original epilogue.

But first he chooses to include from his source Elene's decision to fashion a bridle from the revealed nails for Constantine's horse (this bridle will bring victory in battle and general peace, thereby continuing the symbolic but perpetual fight of good against evil), (lines 1155-1200) and confirms Cyriacus's sanctity through a far greater detailing than his source of the many miracles of healing attributable to Cyriacus. These occur after his

spiritual death and rebirth but before his physical death (unlike Edmund and Oswald) thereby demonstrating emphatically the invincibility and the thaumaturgic power of the Christian faith;

Wæs se bissceophad  
 fægere befæsted. Oft him feorran to  
 laman, limseoce, lefe cwomon,  
 healte, heorudreorige, hreofe ond blinde,  
 heane, hygegeomre, symle hælo þær  
 æt þam bisceope, bote fundon  
 ece to aldre.

(lines 1212-1217)

In the epilogue, Cynewulf repeats within his soul the pattern of conversion that he has established previously in the poem. The epilogue, which has no counterpart in the Latin source, is however, representative of Cynewulf's patterned style in that it reflects the total structure of the poem as it is divided into three parts, within which tone, style and subject matter are entirely different. The first part of the epilogue is written in rhymed verse, spoken in the first person and demonstrates a confessional tone;

þus ic frod and fus, þurh þæt fæcne hus,  
 wordcræftum wæf ond wundrum bes,  
 þragum þreodude ond gefanc reodode,  
 nihtes neawre. Nysse ic gearwe,  
 be þære rode riht ær me rumran gefeaht,  
 þurh a mæran miht, on modes feaht,  
 wisdom onwreah. Ic wæs weorcum fah,  
 synnum aseled, sorgum gewæled,  
 bitrum gebunden, bisgum beþrunge,  
 ær me lare onlag þurh leohtne had,  
 gamelum to geoce, gife unscynde  
 mægencyning amæt ond on gemynd begeat,  
 torht ontynde, tidum gerymde,  
 bancofan onband, breostlocan onwand,  
 leoðucraeft onleac. þæs ic lustum breac,  
 willum in worlde.  
 (lines 1236-1251)

Cynewulf's battle in this first section of the epilogue is thus an interior one, unlike that of Constantine and Judas, and is written in the past tense, signifying that it is a battle which he has won.

Cynewulf tells his reader that he has been bound with sins and oppressed with sorrows; he like Judas, has suffered in preparation for conversion. Initially he was ignorant as he did not know the truth of the Cross, but in his old age God has given him the gift of song in the form of poetry, and it is through this gift and through the writing of this poem, that he has come to understand the true meaning of the Cross. He has witnessed a revelation

(which perhaps could be looked upon as akin to a miracle) and subsequently gained wisdom and truth, as have Constantine, Judas and the Jewish Nation, in the narrative proper. This would seem to confirm Daniel Calder's belief that Cynewulf has transformed the poem in the direction of this inner struggle from the very outset (Calder. D. *Cynewulf*, 135).

The second section of the epilogue (lines 1252-1276) is spoken in the third person and contains the runic signature. It deals with the themes of mutability and the transience of worldly things. The inclusion of Cynewulf's signature creates a more profound statement of the poet's deliverance from his past sins and coupled with the use of the third person, signifies Cynewulf's new-found ability to divorce himself from the transience of the mortal world and proceed to the light of the next.

The final section of the epilogue (lines 1277-1321) which takes the form of a prayer and assumes an eschatological theme, is also a confirmation of Cynewulf's conversion. The focus on the apocalyptic resolution of earthly struggle takes the poem as far as Cynewulf possibly can into the spiritual realm and finally includes all of mankind in the pattern which has run throughout the poem, that of struggle, revelation and eventual conversion. The tone of this final section is one of reverence and peace and, as described by Kenneth Sisam, is "the quiet close" in which the poet and reader find resolution (Sisam. K. *Cynewulf and his Poetry*, 308).

In the light of this discussion it would seem reasonable to assume that *Elene* is in essence a poem which promotes conversion, since all of the four conversions which the reader witnesses, those of Constantine, Judas, the Jewish Nation and finally that of the poet, Cynewulf, are prompted by the efficacy of miracles. Therefore as the characters of the poem have been persuaded to accept the superiority of the Christian faith, through its miracle working power, so too should the reader. It is my opinion that in the hands of Cynewulf, the poem *Elene* becomes a powerful instrument of persuasion, which the poet uses to achieve his aim of strengthening the Christian faith, by wining non-believers to the Church whilst edifying the faithful already within the fold.

Although Cynewulf takes belief in the miraculous from his sources, it is my opinion that through his particular literary style, Anglo-Saxon contextualisation and the promotion of anti-Semitism, he ensures the success of his version of the poem *Elene* as religious propaganda thereby serving the 9<sup>th</sup> Century Anglo-Saxon Church's missionary spirit in its quest for converts.

## Conclusion

Kenneth Woodward points out in his book *Making Saints*, that the medieval preoccupation with relics confirms;

the triumph of the saint as a source of miraculous power over the saint as an example of the imitation of Christ. Though venerated for their holiness, saints were invoked for their powers. Indeed, when it came to recognising new saints, reports of miraculous healings and other thaumaturgic powers were of greater weight in Christianity's first millennium than accounts of heroic virtue. (Woodward. K. L. *Making Saints*, p.64)

With this in mind, I should like to suggest that the Saints' Lives in question, *St Edmund*, *St Oswald* and *Elene* may be viewed in the same light as relics, for despite the authors' attempts to present examples of the *miles Christi* within these lives, it would appear from this discussion that greater emphasis is placed upon the thaumaturgic or wonder working abilities of the saints of these works and by association the Christian faith which they represent as a whole.

Although different approaches and methods are employed by Aelfric and Cynewulf i.e. Aelfric uses the simple and realistic diction of the *vita*, Cynewulf the elaborate diction and motifs of the *art vita*, both attempt to invest their texts with realism, through the use of select historical fact, historical rather than fictional characters and realistic discourse thus lending realism and plausibility to the miracles within these texts and thereby propagating and entrenching belief in the miraculous.

Like medieval relics, these Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives would appear to assume a magical quality of their own. Blending fact with fiction, reality with the marvellous and fantastical they become powerful tools in the fight against paganism whilst ensuring the continued faith of those already converted. Moreover these Saints' Lives may be seen as investing Anglo-Saxon Christianity with the supernatural powers of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic pagan religions, offering its followers a sense of familiarity together with hope of solutions to the harshness of everyday life. For as Bede states in Lib I, cap XXI, 40-41 of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, it is the miracle which ensures the amazement of the people and the firm implantation of the Catholic faith within their hearts;

**Cum subito Elafius pedibus aduoluitur sacerdotum, offerens filium, cuius necessitatem ipsa debilitas etiam sine precibus adlegabat; fit communis omnium dolor, praecipue sacerdotum, qui conceptam misericordiam and diuinam clementiam contulerunt; statimque adulescentem beatus Germanus sedere compulit, adtrectat poplitem debilitate curuatum, et per tota infirmitatis spatia medicabilis dextera percurrit, salubremque tactum sanitas festina subsequitur.**

**Ariditas succum, nerui officia receperunt, in conspectu omnium filio  
incolumitas, patri filius restituitur. Implentur populi stupore miraculi  
et in pectoribus omnium fides catholica inculcata firmatur.**  
*(Lib I. Cap XXI, 40-41)*

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