

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This volume covers the pre-1974 counties of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Bristol north of the Avon was included in the *South-West* volume (Cramp 2006, 145–6), but has also been included here in order to provide a complete coverage of the medieval diocese of Worcester.

The core of the study area consists of two adjacent Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the kingdom of the Hwicce and the kingdom of the Magonsæte. The approximate extent of these kingdoms is known, as the bishoprics of Worcester and Hereford were established to serve them. The kingdom of the Hwicce, as represented by the medieval diocese of Worcester, comprised Worcestershire, south and west Warwickshire and Gloucestershire east of the rivers Severn and Leadon. The kingdom of the Magonsæte, as represented by the medieval diocese of Hereford, consisted of most of Herefordshire, the southern half of Shropshire and part of west Gloucestershire. The study area also includes two sizeable parts of the very large Anglo-Saxon diocese of Lichfield, namely the northern half of Shropshire and north and east Warwickshire. The Welsh kingdom of Ergyng (partially preserved in the area of Archenfield) included a substantial area of southern Herefordshire and part of western Gloucestershire; the process by which it passed into English control is not well documented. The district of Ewyas (in the lee of the Black Mountains) was only attached to Herefordshire in the second half of the eleventh century.

For the medieval diocese of Worcester, the historian has the benefit of the survival of a great deal of material from the Anglo-Saxon period. Above all a substantial quantity of documentation survives from the bishops' own archives at Worcester (Sims-Williams 1990; Tinti 2010); there are also materials from the archives of the Benedictine monasteries of Evesham, Gloucester,

Pershore and Winchcombe. By contrast there is only a meagre supply of historical sources relevant to the pre-Conquest period for the diocese of Hereford and for those parts of the diocese of Lichfield within the study area.

THE ROMAN PERIOD (C.H.)

In the Roman period the region covered by this volume coincided approximately to the territory of the Cornovii in the north and the Dobunni to their south. The eastern margin of this region runs close to (sometimes on) the Fosse Way, the early Roman road (probably military in origin) that runs diagonally across the country from Exeter to Lincoln. This impinges on a third territory, that of the Corieltauvi. The western margin lies at the edge of the uplands of Wales. Between the two are large tracts of arable land and woodland in the Severn, Avon and Wye valleys and their tributaries; at the centre was the brine-manufacturing industry at Droitwich (*Salinae*). This was valuable territory and the rivers, especially the River Severn, were important routeways. Good communications with London and the south-east were available via the Thames valley and Ermine Street in the south and Watling Street in the north. By the mid first century Roman forts and fortresses had been built throughout the region (Webster, G. 1991, 32). Important military bases had been established at Gloucester (*Glevum*) and Wroxeter (*Viriconium*). By the second century there were Roman towns at Wroxeter, the regional centre of the Cornovii, and Cirencester, the centre for the Dobunni (McWhirr 1981, 21); a colony for army veterans had been founded by the 80s AD at Gloucester (Holbrook 2006, 100). All three were defended urban centres with public buildings using local sources of stone: at Gloucester and Cirencester, oolitic limestone from the Cotswolds, at Wroxeter, Hoar Edge Grit,

Keele Beds or the Big Flint Rock sandstones. Smaller towns were established such as *Magnis* (Kenchester), Alcester, and Bourton on the Water, and there were significant industrial centres, not only Droitwich but also *Ariconium* (Weston-under-Penyard) and Worcester, both probably important for iron-working.

In the fourth century Britain was divided into four provinces instead of the previous two; most of the study region was the eastern part of *Britannia Prima* whose capital was probably Cirencester (Frere 1978, 240–1; Salway 1981, 585–6; White 2007, 38–42).

The territory of the Dobunni in particular was highly Romanised — perhaps because Cirencester as capital of *Britannia Prima* was a focus for the wealthy aristocracy. The elite occupied elaborate villas, including the ‘palace’ of Woodchester, near Stroud. These villas, and the towns also, were provided with mosaics and stone sculpture as well as stone buildings; there were craftsmen centred on Cirencester whose influence was felt throughout the region and beyond (McWhirr 1981, 94–5; Henig 1993; Holbrook 2006, 108; White 2007, 126–8; Cosh and Neal 2010, 17). The Cotswold villas, in contrast with neighbouring areas, maintained or even enhanced their lifestyle through the third–fourth century making this one of the richest parts of late Roman Britain; the extravagance seems to have depended on a network of patronage which did not survive the withdrawal of Roman power (Fulford 2003, 22). The Cornovii were less able to patronise fine arts but a mosaic workshop is now suspected at Wroxeter and there are a small but significant number of elaborate late villas in the territory (Cosh and Neal 2010, 310–13).

THE POST-ROMAN PERIOD

The western Midlands present the archaeologist and the historian with many problems in studying the centuries from the end of the Roman period through to the establishment of kingdoms, culturally and linguistically Anglo-Saxon, by the late seventh century. For the historian, only a few sources of limited value exist, while the collapse of the Romano-British urban economy produced a change in the character of the archaeological evidence. The villas and towns were largely abandoned, although the survival of the Roman town of Wroxeter into the fifth and sixth centuries (White and Barker 1998, 118–36) provides evidence that some life in towns did continue. In Wales and Dumnonia, and perhaps in the territory of the Dobunni as well, a new economy developed, or

perhaps re-emerged, based on west-coast rather than south-eastern sea trade routes; the aristocracy may have made use of hillforts as elite centres (White 2007, 170–5).

A detailed discussion of the evolution of the western Midlands, to which the following brief account owes much, has recently been provided by Steven Bassett (2000). Bassett takes as his starting point the continuity of landscape occupation that can be demonstrated over large parts of the study area and shows that this must entail the survival of a substantial British population. This population is likely to have been Christian in these centuries just as the population of the neighbouring territory to the west (which subsequently became known as Wales) was Christian (Sims-Williams 1990, 54–86; Bassett 2000; Sharpe 2002: for some reservations as to when and how fully the British may have been Christianized, see Blair 2005, 26–7). Gildas, in his *De excidio Britanniae* written probably in the first half of the sixth century, attests to the existence of Christian kingdoms of Dyfed, Gwent, Gwynedd and Powys (Winterbottom 1978; Davies 1982, 90–1). It is likely, as Bassett has suggested, that some of these kingdoms extended well into the western Midlands in the sixth and into the seventh centuries; most notably Powys would seem to have included the area around Wroxeter (Bassett 2000, 111–13; Davies 1982, 99–101). It is presumably in this context that the inscription commemorating Cunorix (Wroxeter Roman Town 1, Shropshire), dating perhaps to the first half of the sixth century, should be seen. Similar contexts should also be envisaged for the lost slab of sixth-century date at Llanveynoe (Llanveynoe Olchon House 1, Herefordshire) in an area which long retained Welsh affiliations, and perhaps also for the curious stone from St Briavels in the Forest of Dean (St Briavels 1, Gloucestershire) — a reused Roman altar with what looks like an early medieval inscription on all four faces. One word can be read as *fecit*, but most of the other letters make little coherent sense (see Okasha in the St Briavels catalogue entry, p. 241). In the south of the region it is possible that minor British kingdoms were centred on Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath. Bede records that in 603 Augustine met the British bishops ‘of the nearest kingdoms of the Britons’ at a site which in Bede’s day was on the boundary between the West Saxons and the Hwicce (Bede 1969, 134–5, II.2); this seems likely to imply that the southern part of the western Midlands was under British and Christian control at this date (Bassett 2000, 111–12).

Bassett (1992a; 2000, 113) has also argued that in

at least some areas, the administrative structures of the British church may have been perpetuated in the structures of the later Anglo-Saxon church; he has argued specifically that large parishes around former Roman towns at Gloucester, Worcester and Wroxeter began as the territories of British churches which may have housed bishops. As John Blair (2005, 31) has noted, it is difficult 'for this kind of topographical argument to move from hypothesis to proof'. The church of St Mary de Lode in Gloucester (suggested by Bassett to have a British origin) has been excavated with intriguing but ultimately inconclusive results. It was established that the church was built on and aligned with a Roman building (possibly the baths). The site was a burial chapel or mausoleum (by no means certainly of Christian character) probably of fifth- or sixth-century date, but possibly as late as the seventh century. By the tenth century at the latest, there was a church on the site (Bryant and Heighway 2003; Blair 2005, 31 n. 90). A scatter of place-names with the element 'Eccles-' may also indicate the existence of churches of British origin (Blair 2005, 27, fig. 2). More tangible evidence of British churches in the area has not yet been discovered, though the structures of post-Roman date which succeeded the temple of Mercury at Uley (Gloucestershire) have been interpreted as Christian in character; the presence of glass similar to that found at some Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical sites is striking (Woodward and Leach 1993).

In the eastern part of the study area furnished burial of Anglo-Saxon character occurs from the late fifth century (conveniently mapped in Bassett 2000, fig. 1). Furnished burial is found extensively in and around the Avon valley in Warwickshire and south-east Worcestershire; recent discoveries extend the distribution to the Severn vale around Bishop's Cleeve and Tewkesbury (Holbrook 2000; Hart and McSloy 2008). A further grouping occurs in the upper Thames valley with a thin spread into the Gloucestershire Cotswolds. Furnished burial would not seem to continue in the area beyond the end of the sixth century. The conclusions to be drawn from the introduction and from the subsequent abandonment of furnished burial remain contentious (Bassett 2000, 112–15). The introduction of such burial is likely to represent at least some incoming Anglo-Saxons, but there may also have been a substantial measure of acculturation on the part of the existing population of these areas. The abandonment of furnished burial before the end of the sixth century is argued by Bassett to represent a return to British methods of burying the dead.

In Herefordshire large areas (particularly in the south and south-west of the county) seem to have remained Welsh-speaking throughout the early medieval period and beyond (Gelling 1992, 69–70; Coates and Breeze 2000, 314, 379–80). In the rest of the area recent study has indicated a somewhat larger number of British place-names than previously realised (Coates and Breeze 2000), but the overall picture remains unchanged: the place-name evidence suggests the extensive use of English at an early date. As Bassett (2000, 116) has observed, the place-names recorded in charters from c. 670 onwards suggest that a substantial number of Old English speakers had been living in the area for a long time by the late seventh century.

THE EMERGENCE OF ANGLO-SAXON KINGDOMS

The problematic tribute list known as the Tribal Hidage, perhaps of late seventh-century origin, reveals a complex situation in the western Midlands. The core of Mercia is assessed at 30,000 hides, while three further entries assign 7,000 hides each to the W(re)ocensæte, the Westerna and the Hwinca. The Wreocensæte take their name from the Wrekin and presumably occupied the north Shropshire plain, the Westerna are probably (but not certainly) to be identified with the Magonsæte, while the Hwinca are doubtless one and the same as the Hwicce. In addition a smaller unit of 600 hides known as the Arosæte perhaps represents the area round the valley of the River Arrow in Warwickshire. The Wreocensæte and the Arosæte do not appear as separate kingdoms or sub-kingdoms at a later date (Brooks 1989, 160–2; Sims-Williams 1990, 16–18; Gelling 1992, 79–85).

Mercia was the dominant kingdom in the western Midlands from the seventh century until the late ninth century. Its historic heartland, in the area around Lichfield and Tamworth (both Staffordshire) and Repton (Derbyshire), is outside the area studied in this volume, though northern Shropshire and north-east Warwickshire were within the Mercian kingdom. Mercia first begins to emerge from the sources as a major power during the reign of the pagan king Penda, who seems to have ruled (perhaps intermittently) from the 620s until his death at the battle of the River *Winwæd* in 655 (Brooks 1989, 164–70). According to Bede's account, the kingdom of Mercia was converted to Christianity after Penda's death, though it seems likely that many of the population had long been Christian

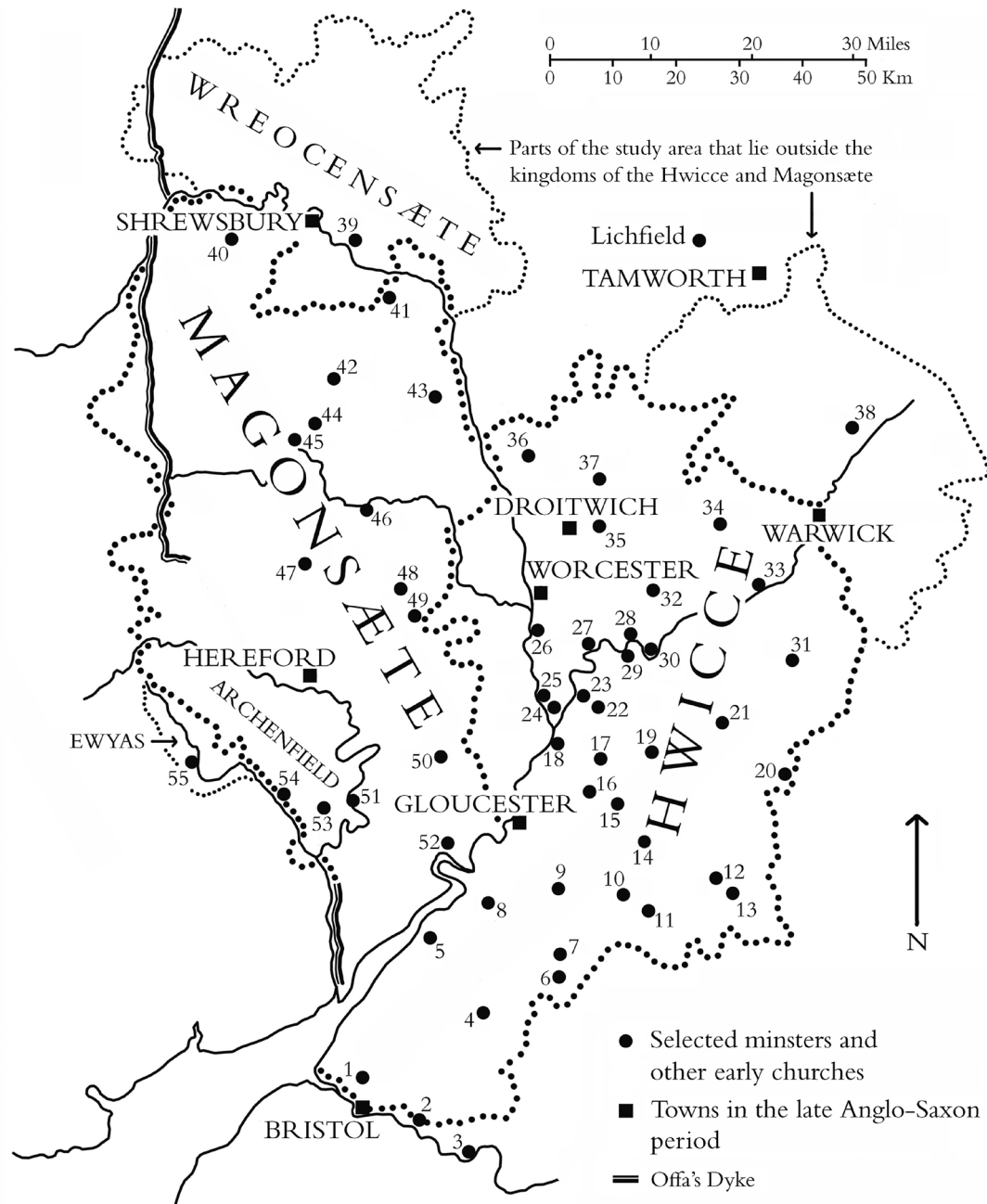


FIGURE 3

Map showing the approximate extent of the kingdoms of the Hwicce and the Magonsæte (based upon the late medieval dioceses of Worcester and Hereford).

Key: 1 Westbury-on-Trym; 2 Bitton; 3 Bath; 4 Hawkesbury; 5 Berkeley; 6 Tetbury; 7 Avening; 8 Frocester; 9 Bisley; 10 Daglingworth; 11 Cirencester; 12 Bibury; 13 Coln St Aldwyns; 14 Withington; 15 Dowdeswell; 16 Cheltenham; 17 Bishops Cleeve; 18 Deerhurst; 19 Winchcombe; 20 Daylesford; 21 Blockley; 22 Beckford; 23 Bredon; 24 Twyning; 25 Ripple; 26 Kempsey; 27 Pershore; 28 Fladbury; 29 Cropthorne; 30 Evesham; 31 Tredington; 32 Inkberrow; 33 Stratford-on-Avon; 34 Wootton Waven; 35 Hanbury; 36 Stour in Ismere (Kidderminster); 37 Bromsgrove; 38 Coventry; 39 Wroxeter; 40 Westbury; 41 Much Wenlock; 42 Diddlebury; 43 Stottesdon; 44 Stanton Lacy; 45 Bromfield; 46 Tenbury Wells; 47 Leominster; 48 Bromyard; 49 Acton Beauchamp; 50 Newent; 51 Ross-on-Wye; 52 Westbury-on-Severn; 53 Llangarron; 54 Garway; 55 Clodock. There were also minster churches (in several cases more than one) in Bristol, Droitwich, Gloucester, Hereford, Shrewsbury, Warwick and Worcester.

(Bede 1969, 292–5, III.24; 564–5, V.24; Bassett 2000, 116). The establishment of Anglo-Saxon Christianity in Mercia was consolidated during the reign of Penda's sons, kings Wulfhere (658–674×5) and Æthelred (674×5–704). The see of Lichfield was established in 669 with Chad (d. 672) as the first bishop (Bede 1969, 336–47, IV.3).

By contrast Bede says nothing of the conversion of the Hwicce and of the Magonsæte. It is uncertain how far this may be due on the one hand to a lack of information on his part (he names no informants for the area) or on the other hand to the fact that such knowledge as Bede had did not suit his agenda with its anti-British bias. Bede does mention that around 680 Eafe, the wife of King Æthelwealh of Sussex, had been baptized in her own province of the Hwicce; he adds that her father and uncle, together with their people, were Christian (Bede 1969, 370–3, IV.13). This would seem to imply that the Hwicce (including the royal dynasty) were Christian before 670 and quite possibly a generation earlier. The establishment of the see of Worcester took place between *c.* 675 and 680 (Sims-Williams 1990, 87–8).

From the late seventh century through until *c.* 780, a succession of sub-kings of the Hwicce is attested by the charter evidence; these sub-kings were subject to the overlordship of Mercia (Sims-Williams 1990, 33–9). It was suggested by Stenton (1971, 45) that the kingdom of the Hwicce was established by Penda of Mercia as a buffer-state in the aftermath of his victory over the West Saxons at Cirencester in 628. However, Bassett has argued strongly for an independent origin (Bassett 1989b; *id.* 2000, 116); he sees the core territory of the Hwicce as lying in the area around Winchcombe.

The lack of charter evidence means that the kingdom of the Magonsæte is an altogether more shadowy entity than the kingdom of the Hwicce (Pretty 1989; Sims-Williams 1990, 39–51). A bishopric was founded for this area at around the same time as the see of Worcester (between *c.* 675 and 680), and by analogy with other areas, it would seem likely that the bishopric corresponded to a kingdom. It is uncertain where the episcopal see was initially located, but it was certainly at Hereford by 801; presumably the diocese did not extend at this stage to include areas under Welsh control in southern Herefordshire and west Gloucestershire. The royal dynasty of the Magonsæte is known mainly from hagiographical and narrative materials of much later date, and these materials do not present a straightforward picture (Sims-Williams 1990, 47–51). The first king would seem to have been

Merewalh, who was reportedly a son of Penda of Mercia and who seems to have ruled in the 660s and 670s; Merewalh was apparently succeeded by Merchelm and his brother Milfrith. An epitaph composed by Bishop Cuthbert (736–40) demonstrates that Milfrith was dead by this date, quite possibly for many years (Sims-Williams 1990, 40, 50–1). The historic core of the kingdom of the Magonsæte may have lain in the Lugg valley in northern Herefordshire, either in the vicinity of Leominster or Maund (Pretty 1989, 177; Sims-Williams 1990, 40; Freeman 2008). It seems likely that the kings of Mercia exercised overlordship in the kingdom of the Magonsæte from the late seventh century just as they did in the kingdom of the Hwicce.

In the century or so following 670, large numbers of minster churches were established in all parts of England. The written sources for early minsters in the medieval dioceses of Hereford and of Worcester have been the subject of a detailed study by Patrick Sims-Williams (1990, 87–176); he has analysed the wide range of influences on the early churches in the area and the varieties of monasticism found. The bias in the survival of written sources means that minster churches are much better attested in the medieval diocese of Worcester than elsewhere in the area studied in the present volume; a list of nearly thirty minsters known from historical evidence by the ninth century can be drawn up (see map in Sims-Williams 1990, xiv–xv). Most of the minsters are already in existence when first documented, and foundation dates are not recorded except in a few cases; the best example is Stour in Ismere (in or near Kidderminster), for the foundation of which a charter of 736 survives as a single-sheet original (Sawyer 1968, no. 89). Significant minsters documented in the course of the late seventh, eighth and ninth centuries include Berkeley, Bishop's Cleeve, Cheltenham, Deerhurst and Winchcombe (Gloucestershire), Beckford, Bredon, Evesham, Hanbury and Pershore (Worcestershire), and Stratford-on-Avon and Wootton Wawen (Warwickshire) (Sims-Williams 1990, 87–176; and this volume Fig. 3, p. 8). A notable feature is the number of recorded double minsters headed by abbesses connected with the Hwiccian royal house (Yorke 2003, 18); these include Gloucester, Twynning and Withington (Gloucestershire), Fladbury and Inkberrow (Worcestershire) and also Bath (Somerset), outside the study area but within the diocese of Worcester at this period. The minsters best known are those which came under the control of the bishops or came into contact with the see in other ways (for

instance Berkeley is known because there was a long-running dispute between Berkeley and Worcester in the ninth century). Even in the diocese of Worcester it is clear that there were many more minsters than appear in the surviving records; thus the major church, probably of ninth-century date, excavated at Cirencester is not mentioned in any pre-Conquest source (Wilkinson and McWhirr 1998).

By contrast only a small number of minsters are recorded from the diocese of Hereford. Those known include Acton Beauchamp, Bromyard, Leominster and Much Wenlock (Sims-Williams 1990, 87–176). Much Wenlock was an important double minster, of which Mildburg, a daughter of King Merewalh of the Magonsæte, was abbess in the late seventh century (Yorke 2003, 27). There are no documented minsters from those parts of the diocese of Lichfield which lay in Shropshire and in Warwickshire, but both in the diocese of Hereford and of Lichfield there must have been large numbers of unrecorded minsters. Steven Bassett (1991; 1992b; 2001) has argued for the existence of important Middle Saxon minsters at Shrewsbury and Wroxeter (Shropshire) and at Coventry (Warwickshire). Minster churches with surviving sculpture are discussed more fully in Chapter III, pp. 19–22.

In areas under Welsh control in the seventh and eighth centuries, a substantial number of early churches are attested by the *Book of Llandaf*. To name only sites with sculpture discussed in this volume, there seem to have been early churches at Clodock, Garway and Llangarron (all Herefordshire) (Davies 1978, 170–1, 176).

THE MERCIAN SUPREMACY

In 731 the Venerable Bede, writing in Jarrow, observed towards the end of his *Ecclesiastical History* that ‘All these kingdoms and the other southern kingdoms which reach right up to the River Humber, together with their various kings, are subject to Æthelbald, king of the Mercians’ (Bede 1969, 558–9, V.23). The supremacy exercised by Æthelbald (716–57) and by Offa (757–96) has attracted much attention on the part of scholars and has recently been the subject of a major reassessment by Simon Keynes (2005). Keynes has downplayed some of the more grandiose notions of rule advanced by Stenton for Offa (in particular rejecting the view that a conception of a kingdom of all England had arrived). This has in turn enabled Keynes to portray Coenwulf (796–821) as a worthy

successor to his eighth-century predecessors. This portrayal of Coenwulf as a king in the same mould as Æthelbald and Offa is important in the context of the present volume, for a substantial quantity of sculpture is assigned to the late eighth century and to the first half of the ninth century; there is also much else of this period elsewhere in Mercia.

No chronicler of Mercian origin recorded the deeds of these kings. In the words of Simon Keynes (2005, 19) we are thus dependent on ‘the unsympathetic and uncomprehending testimony provided by their rivals, their victims and their critics’. Charter material does not survive for the Mercian heartland, but does exist from a variety of other sources, most notably the Worcester archive and the various Kentish archives. Many of the charters issued by Offa and Coenwulf emanate from the remarkable series of annual synods held for the best part of half a century after 781 (Keynes 1994a; Cubitt 1995, 205–40).

Mercian power was exercised in differing ways in different parts of southern England. In the western Midlands, the direct power of the Mercian kings must have been ever more apparent. In the case of the Magonsæte, the sub-kings disappear from the record before the middle of the eighth century. After *c.* 780 no more is heard of the sub-kings of the Hwicce, and the territory was henceforth governed by an ealdorman; the first known ealdorman, Æthelmund (d. 802) was probably the father of Æthelric who was a major patron of Deerhurst (Hare forthcoming a); it seems likely that Æthelmund was himself buried at Deerhurst. It is also evident that the Mercian kings had personal interests in the kingdom of the Hwicce. Thus Eanwulf, who was a cousin of King Æthelbald and the grandfather of King Offa, established a minster at Bredon (Worcestershire), which Offa clearly considered to be a family monastery (Sims-Williams 1990, 152–4, 163). Coenwulf evidently had a particular interest in Winchcombe, for his family archives were kept there and a document of 897 cites a stipulation by him concerning his ‘hereditary land belonging to Winchcombe’ (Bassett 1989b, 8, 239 n. 29; Yorke 2003, 53–4).

The nature of Mercia’s military power has recently been analysed by Steven Bassett (Bassett 2007; *id.* 2011). A major element was certainly the existence of a network of fortified places. Fortifications of Middle Saxon date have been demonstrated archaeologically within the study area at Hereford (Herefordshire) and Winchcombe (Gloucestershire) and outside it at Tamworth (Staffordshire); Bassett argues that this network is likely to have been more extensive

originally. Mercian military might is also demonstrated by the construction of the two great dykes along the Welsh frontier, Wat's Dyke (Hayes and Malim 2008) and Offa's Dyke (Hill and Worthington 2003; but for a reaffirmation that Offa's Dyke exists in Gloucestershire, see Hare 2004). There is no contemporary sculpture from the vicinity of the dykes, but a later fragment (Oswestry River Morda 1, Shropshire) comes from the area between Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke, here less than 5 km apart.

The power of the Mercian kings had a strong economic foundation with control of London a key factor. The high-quality salt produced in large quantity from the brine springs at Droitwich was also of major importance (Maddicott 2005); it is striking that charters granting salt-rights were issued by the Mercian kings alone without reference to the sub-kings of the Hwicce. The Cotswold wool trade is likely to have been important from an early date, and lead (a rare resource important not least for use in lead boiling pans at Droitwich) was mined near Westbury-on-Trym (Gloucestershire) (Hooke 1985, 126). The bishops of Worcester had a substantial stake in the salt-industry, and they also received property and trading-privileges in London from the kings of Mercia (Kelly 1992, 5, 12–13; Maddicott 2005, 44–5). Nevertheless the major centres of economic activity continued to be based in the east and south-east of England; numismatic study has demonstrated that the western and central Midlands long remained significantly less monetized than eastern England (Metcalf 1998).

We are fairly well-informed about the contacts between the kings of Mercia and their Frankish counterparts and the papacy. Much of the evidence is provided by the letter collections of Anglo-Saxon clerics on the Continent such as Boniface, Lull and Alcuin. Useful recent analyses have been provided by Janet Nelson (2001) and Jo Story (2003, 169–211). The trading interests in London of the bishops of Worcester must have meant that they were well-placed to keep in touch with continental developments. Bishop Milred of Worcester visited Boniface and Lull in central Germany in 753, as we know from the letter of condolence which Milred sent to Lull following Boniface's martyrdom in 754 (Sims-Williams 1990, 229–37). The gifts exchanged on such occasions were important means of transmission of cultural ideas. Pilgrimages to Rome must have had a similar impact; the journey to Rome *c.* 804 by the important layman, Æthelric, may lie behind the presence at Deerhurst of a panel of the Virgin and Child with a distinctive iconography in use at the time in Rome, as Richard

Gem has shown (Gem 2008; see below, Deerhurst St Mary 5, pp. 170–2).

It has been demonstrated that Bishop Milred of Worcester (743×5–774×5) played a significant role in the transmission of Latin poetry in eighth-century England (Sims-Williams 1990, 328–59). Milred's collection of verses does not survive intact, but is known from a surviving bifolium and from extracts made by Leland; like other early medieval *sylogae*, the collection 'was probably intended to provide models for inscriptional verses' (Sims-Williams 1990, 348). Some of the surviving verses may derive from inscriptions in the diocese of Worcester, including an epitaph for Cuth and Sigeberht who were possibly clerics at Worcester (Sims-Williams 1990, 355–9). Milred's collection also includes an epitaph composed by Bishop Cuthbert of Hereford (736–40), commemorating three of his predecessors (Bishops Tyrhtil, Torthere and Walhstod), together with Milfrith of the Magonsete, Milfrith's wife Cwenburg and an unidentified Osfrith son of Oshelm (Sims-Williams 1990, 61, 341–2). Sadly there are no surviving inscriptions which can be associated with the activities of Milred and Cuthbert.

The influence of the Carolingian church on England is visible in the attempts made by bishops in the late eighth century and in the opening decades of the ninth century to limit lay lordship over minsters and in turn to exercise greater influence over and in many cases direct control of the minster churches of their diocese; this brought bishops into conflict with kings, powerful aristocrats and other churchmen. The struggles of the archbishops of Canterbury to exercise control over the Kentish minsters provide the best-known example (Brooks 1984, 175–203), but the bishops of Worcester were equally active; Patrick Wormald (1986, 152–7) has provided an illuminating discussion of the complex and long-running dispute over the minster at Westbury-on-Trym (Gloucestershire). For the bishops of Hereford, we have little equivalent in the way of source material, but they may have been equally active; the chance survival of a document concerning the minster at Bromyard (Herefordshire) shows that it was in episcopal control *c.* 850 (Sims-Williams 1990, 169).

THE LAST CENTURY OF MERCIAN RULE

The Mercian supremacy did not long outlast the death of Coenwulf in 821. His death was evidently followed by severe internal quarrels, and in 825 Beornwulf of Mercia (823–5) was defeated in battle by Ecgberht

of Wessex (802–39) at *Ellendun* (near Wroughton, Wiltshire). Four years later Ecgberht ‘conquered the kingdom’ of Mercia and ruled it as king for a year before relinquishing the kingdom. In these years Ecgberht was also able to establish his rule over Kent and other south-eastern kingdoms previously in the Mercian orbit (Keynes 1993, 111–23). King Wiglaf (827–9 & 830–40) regained his throne in 830, but the balance of power had shifted decisively towards Wessex. From the 830s onwards the threat posed to all English kingdoms by the Vikings became more evident, and the middle decades of the ninth century were marked by co-operation between the West Saxon and Mercian kingdoms; this is visible in joint action against the Welsh in 853, in marriage alliances and in collaboration in the minting of coins (Keynes 1998, 2–11).

Viking coastal raids had begun in 789, but matters took a much more serious turn in the middle of the ninth century. In 851 Berhtwulf of Mercia (840–52) was defeated in battle, probably near London, by a Viking army which had spent the winter on the Isle of Thanet. A Worcester charter of 855 (Sawyer 1968, no. 206) mentions that pagans were present at the time in the province of the *Wreocensæte* (a reminder that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not provide comprehensive coverage of all Viking incursions). In 865 the Danish ‘great army’ arrived and in the course of the following years conquered the kingdoms of East Anglia, Northumbria and Mercia. Burgred of Mercia (852–74) was deposed and driven into exile in 874; he was succeeded by Ceolwulf II (874–c. 879), apparently a Viking appointee and described retrospectively by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as a ‘foolish king’s thegn’, but nevertheless recognised as a king by the Mercians themselves and by the West Saxons. In 877 the Mercian kingdom was formally dismembered. The Danish army shared out northern and eastern Mercia, leaving western and southern areas under English control (including in all likelihood the whole of the area studied in the present volume). The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not provide evidence for much military activity on the part of the ‘great army’ in the western Midlands, but a section of the army spent the first half of the winter of 877–8 at Gloucester and then a year at Cirencester in 878–9. King Alfred’s victory over the Danish army at the battle of Edington in 878 achieved respite for the beleaguered West Saxon kingdom, but left the situation in Mercia unchanged (Stenton 1971, 243–57; Keynes 1998, 2–19).

Ceolwulf disappeared from the scene in unknown circumstances c. 879, and by the early 880s a new order had emerged. What remained of Mercia was

governed by an ealdorman, Æthelred, who recognised the overlordship of King Alfred of Wessex (871–99), but who nevertheless enjoyed quasi-royal status. In the mid-880s Æthelred married Alfred’s daughter, Æthelflæd; they became known respectively as ‘Lord of the Mercians’ and ‘Lady of the Mercians’. Æthelred governed until his death in 911, though to all appearances with an increasing involvement on the part of Æthelflæd; she in turn ruled in her own right until she died in 918. For the early part of their rule, we are dependent on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (a West Saxon production), together with the evidence of charters and of coins. But for the period from 903 to 924 there is for the first time a short narrative account with a Mercian perspective, the so-called Mercian Register, a set of annals later embedded in some manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; the annalist shows much interest in the military activities undertaken by the Mercian court (Keynes 1998, 19–34; id. 2001).

From the 880s until the end of the first decade of the tenth century, Æthelred and Æthelflæd seem to have concentrated on consolidating their power in western Mercia. But from 909 offensive operations, involving both Mercians and West Saxons, were begun against the Danish-held territories in Mercia and in East Anglia; Æthelflæd seems to have acted in co-operation with her brother, King Edward the Elder (899–924). By the time that Æthelflæd died at Tamworth in 918, the task of subduing the Danes in Mercia was nearing completion. After his sister’s death Edward moved quickly to extend his overlordship of Mercia into direct rule.

The military policy of Æthelred and Æthelflæd built upon the network of fortified places from the age of the Mercian supremacy (Bassett 2011). The refurbishment of defences at Hereford, Tamworth and Winchcombe at this time has been established archaeologically, while defences excavated at Worcester perhaps constitute an extension to an earlier layout (Bassett 2008a). The establishment of Worcester as a *burh* is mentioned in a charter issued in or before 899 (Sawyer 1968, no. 223), and it is likely that the defences provided by the Roman walls at Gloucester were upgraded at a similar date. The benefits can be seen in 914 when a Viking naval force came up the Severn estuary and ravaged through Wales towards Archenfield; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us that, ‘Then the men from Hereford and Gloucester and all the nearest *burhs* met them and fought against them and put them to flight...’. In 901 Æthelred and Æthelflæd issued a charter at Shrewsbury (Sawyer 1968, no. 221), and it seems probable that

similar steps had been taken there. A *burh* was not established at Warwick until 914. The places listed so far in this paragraph all developed into towns in the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the fostering of trade is clearly evident in the charter issued in respect of Worcester. Other lesser *burhs*, for instance Chirbury (Shropshire) which was established in 915, must have been on a smaller scale with a more limited range of functions (Rahtz 1977, 108, 114); some *burhs* may have been purely military in character (Bassett 2011, 18–19).

Hand in hand with the revival of urban life and the provision of fortresses went the renewal of religious life. At Worcester the link is made explicit in the charter mentioned above; Æthelred and Æthelflæd ‘ordered the borough to be built at Worcester for the protection of all the people, and also to exalt the praise of God therein’. The principal religious foundation of Æthelred and Æthelflæd seems to have been the new minster of St Oswald’s in Gloucester, the church in which they were both buried (Heighway and Bryant 1999). Part of the church established perhaps a little before 900 still stands as a ruin; the site was excavated in the 1970s and has produced a substantial amount of early sculpture (see pp. 207–21). It also seems likely that Æthelflæd refounded a minster in Chester in honour of St Werburgh (Thacker 1982, 203–6), and she is also reputed to have established the minster of St Alkmund in Shrewsbury (Bassett 1991, 9–11). Translations of important relics (including the body of St Oswald brought from Bardney to Gloucester in 909) were an integral part of this policy (Thacker 1982, 209–11).

In the Preface to his translation of Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Care*, King Alfred lamented the state of learning in southern England at the time of his accession in 871 (Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 124–7). This is epitomised by the pitiful standard of both script and Latinity in the scriptorium of Christ Church, Canterbury in the second half of the ninth century (Brooks 1984, 164–74). The exiguous remains from the second half of the ninth century leave no doubt that high-quality and high-volume manuscript production ceased throughout England. Asser recounts that Alfred recruited scholars from outside his kingdom, including four Mercians, Bishop Wærferth of Worcester, Plegmund (who became archbishop of Canterbury) and two further priests (Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 92–3). It might therefore be expected that better standards prevailed in western Mercia; recent scholarship has done much to illuminate the situation, though further work is needed (Lapidge 1996, 409–54; Dumville 2007, 183–204).

In the first half of the ninth century, western Mercia was still capable of producing high-quality manuscripts such as the Book of Cerne, most probably written in the 820s (Brown 1996; see this volume, Ills. 773–4), and a charter of 840 preserved in a cartulary copy at Worcester shows, if authentic, impressive literary ambitions (Sawyer 1968, no. 193; Kelly 2009, 365–8). Nevertheless declining standards of Latin can already be seen in two Mercian charters preserved in original copies, one from 836 in the Worcester archive, the other dated 840×852 and associated with Hereford (Sawyer 1968, nos. 190, 1270; Lapidge 1996, 446, 449). It is also noteworthy that, although Asser praises Bishop Wærferth’s scholarship, Wærferth seems to have had difficulties in construing Latin grammar and syntax (Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 92; Godden 1997). A recent survey from a palaeographical point of view reaches the conclusion that at best it may be suggested that in comparison with other areas ‘there was a much less severe decline in educational and scriptorial standards in western Mercia’ (Dumville 2007, 200–3). At Worcester and Hereford, there was at least continuity in the occupation of the sees. At Lichfield there may also have been continuity in the succession of bishops, though the evidence is far from clear (O’Donovan 1973, 91–5). The location of Lichfield, close to the area under Danish control, makes it very likely that there was considerable disruption in the administration of the see; parts of the diocese, for instance around Repton and Derby to the north of Lichfield, were certainly in Danish hands.

THE UNITED KINGDOM OF ENGLAND

The concept of a ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ was developed at the court of King Alfred during the last two decades of the ninth century (Keynes 1998, 34–45) and maintained during the reign of Edward the Elder (Keynes 2001, 57–62). Edward’s successor, Æthelstan (924–39), had been fostered at the court of Æthelred and Æthelflæd, and Æthelstan seems initially to have won more ready acceptance in Mercia than in Wessex (Keynes 1999a, 466–8); in 925–6 Æthelstan issued a charter granting privileges to the new minster of St Oswald’s in Gloucester which had been founded by his foster-parents (Hare 1999, 36–7, 43). In 927 Æthelstan was able to incorporate Northumbria in his kingdom and his subsequent charters describe him as ‘king of the English’ with claims over the whole of Britain (Keynes 1999a, 468–70). The vicissitudes in the subjugation of the north over the next generation

need not detain us here (Keynes 1999a, 471–6), but mention should be made of the brief split of the English kingdom in 957–9 between Wessex on the one hand and Mercia and Northumbria on the other hand (Keynes 1999a, 474–9); while an element of Mercian separatism could have played a role in these events, the dominant factors seem to have been faction-fighting at court and family dispute (Stafford 1989, 47–50).

During the long reign of Æthelred II (978–1016), renewed Viking attacks began in the 980s. Again the inland shires of western Mercia seem to have escaped much of the fighting, at least until the full-scale invasions at the end of Æthelred's reign. In 1016 the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that Warwickshire was ravaged by Cnut and Shropshire by Edmund Ironside; Worcestershire may also have been affected (Williams 1997b, 383–4). Peace was finally agreed in the autumn when Cnut and Edmund Ironside met on an island in the River Severn at Deerhurst (Gloucestershire) and agreed to a division of the kingdom. When Edmund Ironside died shortly afterwards, Cnut (1016–35) succeeded to the whole English kingdom.

The very high levels of geld raised during the later years of Æthelred II and the early years of Cnut probably had a much greater impact on local society than the military ravagings of 1016. A vivid impression of the upheaval in landholding which resulted is provided by the account written in the late eleventh century by Hemming of the spoliation of the lands belonging to the monks of Worcester (Williams 1997b). Among the beneficiaries of the upheaval were a number of Danish military retainers who acquired lands in the western Midlands after 1016 (Williams 1986); they may have included Balki the Dane, who held land near Bibury (Gloucestershire) in 1066 (see below, p. 22).

The final years of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom under Edward the Confessor (1042–66) see a considerable increase in the quantity of narrative sources. The 'D' text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is especially valuable for the western Midlands at this period; it seems to have been closely associated with Bishop Ealdred of Worcester (1041–62) (Wormald 1993, 9–17). One constant theme during the reign of Edward the Confessor is warfare along the Welsh frontier, much of it associated with the rise to power of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. Sporadic conflicts are recorded throughout the whole of the Anglo-Saxon period (Davies 1990, 61–79) and must always have had a substantial impact in the western Midlands, especially in Herefordshire and Shropshire. The conflicts are, however, much more fully recorded in the mid-eleventh century (Barlow 1970, 203–12). A sign of things to come was

the construction of castles in Herefordshire in the early 1050s by Earl Ralph, Edward the Confessor's French nephew (Barlow 1970, 93–4).

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES AND THE GROWTH OF TOWNS IN THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

The landed wealth of the late Saxon kings of England remained concentrated first and foremost in the heartland of Wessex (Hill 1981, map 179). From the 940s to the 1040s, the itineraries of the kings show that they spent most of their time in Wessex and seem only to have ventured north into the heart of Mercia for special reasons such as a military expedition (Hill 1981, maps 157–63, 168–9). When councils involving Mercian matters were held, they often took place just across the Thames frontier at places like Cirencester (Gloucestershire) and Oxford. The point is underlined by the remark in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that at Christmas 1006, King Æthelred went to Shropshire and 'received there his food-rents in the Christmas season'; the remark is ironic, for Æthelred was staying well out of the way of a Danish army at large in Wessex. Unlike his predecessors, Edward the Confessor visited Gloucester regularly, though he is not found elsewhere in the western Midlands (Hill 1981, map 169); the custom of ceremonial crown-wearing at the great festivals may have begun during his reign and the old minster at Gloucester may have been remodelled for this purpose (Hare 1997).

In the local sources it is not the kings but the ealdormen and earls who are the dominant figures (the nomenclature in use changed from ealdorman to earl around the time of the accession of Cnut). The principal ealdormen/earls of Mercia, such as Ælfric (956–83), Eadric Streona (1007–17) and Leofric (c. 1030–57) were enormously influential on the national stage and may be seen to have wielded great power locally (Williams 1982; Baxter 2007; Keynes forthcoming). There were frequently lesser earls with responsibility for one or more shires in the south-west Midlands. For instance shortly after his accession in 1016, Cnut seems to have appointed Ranig to Herefordshire, Hakon to Worcestershire and Eilaf to Gloucestershire (Williams 1986, 6–7; Keynes 1994b, 58–62); many of the Danish landholders mentioned above are likely to have been members of their retinues. Under Edward the Confessor, Odda was appointed to an earldom probably encompassing Gloucestershire and Worcestershire (Williams 1997a). His patronage

can be seen in the inscriptions from the chapel built by him and dedicated in 1056 (Deerhurst Odda's Chapel 1, 2, pp. 190, 195); a few other possible examples of comital patronage are discussed in Chapter III (p. 22).

Exactly when the shires of western Mercia were formed has been a contentious issue in modern scholarship. The fortified places first constructed at the time of the Mercian supremacy and refortified under Æthelred and Æthelflæd must always have had a rural hinterland, dependent territories from which manpower could be drawn (Bassett 1996, 151–7). The west Mercian shires are not mentioned by name until the early eleventh century, but it is evident that the shires must have built on and modified earlier arrangements; it is also clear that continuing modifications were made. Hemming wrote of Eadric Streona that 'he joined townships to townships and shires to shires at his will' and credits Eadric specifically with the abolition of the short-lived Winchcombeshire (Hearne 1723, 1, 280). Most of Winchcombeshire was incorporated into Gloucestershire; however, many (though not all) lands belonging to religious houses were assigned to the county in which the religious house itself was situated, with the result that the geography of the shires was more fragmented here than anywhere else in England prior to modern rationalisation (Hill 1981, map 178). Another major shift was the transfer of the Forest of Dean from Herefordshire to Gloucestershire; this must have taken place in or after the reign of Cnut (Finberg 1972, 225–7). Some light on the evolving situation in southern Herefordshire is shed by the *Ordinance concerning the Dunsæte*, seemingly a tenth-century code governing relationships between English and Welsh in this area (Gelling 1992, 113–18; Fordham 2007).

It is during the tenth and eleventh centuries that many of the fortified places or *burhs* show clear signs of developing into boroughs with an urban character; this is most clearly the case with the five shire towns, as emerges from the Domesday Book entries (Darby and Terrett 1971, 43–5, 102–4, 153–4, 262–5, 305–6). The early development of Worcester and Gloucester has recently been the subject of a detailed study (Baker and Holt 2004). Both towns show a number of episodes of planned growth during the tenth and eleventh centuries, though the details of the chronology remain obscure. The growth took rather different forms in the two towns, the result of differing patterns of lordship established long before the foundation of the *burhs*. In Worcester it was successive bishops who shaped the pre-Conquest town; in Gloucester, the two minsters

played an important role, but it is evident that an active civil administration also had a major impact on pre-Conquest development. In Gloucester a survey of c. 1100 indicates that there were by then ten churches in the town (Baker and Holt 2004, 97). One of them is likely to have been All Saints, a small urban church located close to the central crossroads; an interesting piece of architectural sculpture, probably of tenth-century date, comes from the site (Gloucester Tolley 1, p. 227).

Such detailed studies have not yet been carried out at Hereford, Shrewsbury and Warwick. The name Hereford ('army ford') suggests a military origin for the town, to which the bishopric was later attached. In addition to the cathedral, there was a second important minster at Hereford, dedicated to St Guthlac. Urban growth was slower here than elsewhere with the major phases of expansion taking place after the Norman Conquest (Thomas and Boucher 2002, 5–11, 183–96). Shrewsbury is situated at an easily-defended highpoint located within a bend of the River Severn of horseshoe shape. It is remarkable for the existence of four major churches of minster character (Bassett 1991); Steven Bassett (1991, 17) fairly draws the conclusion that Shrewsbury must have had a much greater importance in the Anglo-Saxon period both in the secular and ecclesiastical spheres than emerges from its meagre recorded history. Little work has to date been done on Warwick. There seems to have been an important minster of Middle Saxon origin (Slater 1983; Bassett 2009). The foundation in 914 of a *burh* by Æthelflæd is recorded, and the likely circuit of the defences has been tentatively identified but not yet archaeologically established (Bassett 2009, 134–40, 150–2).

A number of other places were towns by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, not all of which can be discussed here. Winchcombe (Gloucestershire) was briefly a shire town and is listed as a borough at the head of the Gloucestershire folios in Domesday Book (Darby and Terrett 1971, 45–7). It is unique among the towns of western Mercia in retaining an upstanding length of its pre-Conquest defensive rampart (Bassett 2008a, 213–26). It never developed into a major town, and ecclesiastical provision was limited to the abbey and nearby parish church, together with a chapel of St Pancras which probably originated as a royal mausoleum of Middle Saxon origin (Bassett 1985b). The brine springs at Droitwich (Worcestershire) have already been mentioned, and they retained their importance through the whole of the Anglo-Saxon period and long after; Droitwich itself had

developed into a borough by the eleventh century (Bassett 2008b). John Blair has drawn attention to the fact that small market-settlements frequently grew up adjacent to Anglo-Saxon minster churches (Blair 2005, 330–41), and Berkeley is a good example of this development; there was a mint in the reign of Edward the Confessor and a market is recorded in Domesday Book (Leech 1981, 4–7). A market is also recorded at Cirencester, which had been a large Roman town of some grandeur, perhaps the capital of *Britannia Prima*; the medieval town was by contrast of purely local importance (Leech 1981, 17–25). However, a major Anglo-Saxon church, probably of ninth-century date, has been excavated (Wilkinson and McWhirr 1998). No Anglo-Saxon sculpture has yet been discovered at Cirencester, though there is much in the surrounding district. The extensive Roman remains are likely to have been plundered for building-stone; some of the stone used for sculptures discussed in this volume may well have been taken from Cirencester's Roman buildings. The origins of Bristol remain obscure, as there is little in the way of historical evidence, and Anglo-Saxon Bristol has proved elusive archaeologically. However, the numismatic evidence from Ireland suggests that Bristol was beginning to replace Chester in the late tenth century as the most significant English port in the trade with Dublin (Edwards 1990, 178), though a mint did not exist at Bristol itself until the later part of the reign of Æthelred II (978–1016). It is evident that Bristol was well on the way to becoming a town of major importance by the time of the Norman Conquest (Leech 1997).

THE CHURCH IN THE WESTERN MIDLANDS DURING THE LATE ANGLO- SAXON PERIOD

As in the period before 900, we are much better informed about the church in the diocese of Worcester than in other parts of the study area. A number of notable bishops occupied the see; only a brief account of the most important can be given (for a fuller survey, see Tinti 2010, 8–67). Coenwald (928/9–958) accompanied King Æthelstan's half-sister, Edith, to her marriage with the future emperor, Otto I; at the same time he visited the monastery of St Gallen. He also seems to have been responsible for the production of the 'alliterative' series of charters issued by English kings between 940 and 956 (Keynes 1999b). Oswald (961–92), who was trained in the 950s at the continental monastery of Fleury, was one

of the principal figures in the tenth-century reform movement (discussed further below); from 971 he held Worcester in plurality with the archbishopric of York, a custom which was continued by his two successors until 1016. After his death a cult rapidly developed, and a *Life* was composed *c.* 1000 by Byrhtferth of Ramsey (Brooks and Cubitt 1996; Lapidge 2009). Wulfstan I (1002–16) played a central role in church and state. He was the author of a considerable number of homilies, of which the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* is the best known; his distinctive style has also been detected in law-codes and other texts. In addition it was under his auspices that the first known English cartulary, the *Liber Wigorniensis*, was compiled at Worcester (Baxter 2004; Tinti 2010, 85–125). Brihteah (1033–8) accompanied Cnut's daughter, Gunnhild, to her marriage with the future emperor, Henry III (Barlow 1979, 16). Ealdred (1046–62) made four continental journeys, travelling twice to Rome in 1050 and 1061 and to Jerusalem in 1058–9; he spent nearly a year in Cologne in 1054–5 seeking to negotiate the return of exiled Anglo-Saxon princes from Hungary. As archbishop of York (1061–9), he crowned William the Conqueror at Christmas 1066 (Barlow 1979, 86–90; King 1996). Wulfstan II (1062–95) was a monk of the Worcester community. He was by some margin the last English bishop to remain in office after the Norman Conquest; he was renowned for his holiness and also encouraged the monks of Worcester to keep alive the tradition of writing in Old English (Barrow and Brooks 2005). William of Malmesbury's surviving Latin *Life*, perhaps written in the late 1120s, was an adaptation of an earlier, now lost, *Life* in Old English (Winterbottom and Thomson 2002).

The continental journeys undertaken by the bishops of Worcester are striking, and no fewer than four of them (Milred, Coenwald, Brihteah and Ealdred) visited Germany; this interesting pattern may not be wholly unconnected with the fact that the bishops had trading interests in London (see above, p. 11). At least some of these visits had significant cultural consequences. Thus it has been suggested that Coenwald may have gathered some knowledge of the monastic reform movement gathering pace on the Continent and that he passed this knowledge on to other influential figures (Keynes 1999b), while Oswald's monastic training at Fleury was of seminal importance. Ealdred is thought to have introduced the Romano-German Pontifical to England (Lapidge 1993, 453–67).

By contrast with Worcester, very little is known of the late Saxon bishops of Hereford and Lichfield (Barlow

1979, 217–19). An exception should, however, be made for the long-lived Bishop Æthelstan of Hereford (1013×16–1056). Æthelstan built the ‘glorious minster’ at Hereford, which was subsequently burnt and sacked by Welsh invaders in 1055. Æthelstan had been blind and infirm for many years and had a Welsh assistant bishop during his infirmity; he left behind a reputation for sanctity (Barlow 1979, 66–8, 217–18, 232–3). It was in all likelihood the Welsh sack of 1055 which led to the loss of Hereford’s archives with the result that the historian has so much less information for this diocese than for Worcester.

Under the auspices of Bishop Oswald, Benedictine monks were introduced at Worcester Cathedral in the 960s. At Winchester Oswald’s fellow reformer, Bishop Æthelwold, expelled the secular clerks when he introduced monks, but it has been shown that at Worcester, Oswald adopted a different approach. Between 966 and 983 Oswald built a separate church of St Mary for the new monks. The secular clerks were left to worship in the existing cathedral church of St Peter; the two groups formed a single episcopal *familia*. The secular clerks apparently remained in occupation of St Peter’s for many years until, at some unknown date in the eleventh century, Worcester became a fully monastic cathedral (Barrow 1996; Tinti 2010, 25–38).

Benedictine monks were also introduced at a number of other religious houses at around this time. Oswald briefly established a community at Westbury-on-Trym in the 960s, but the site was apparently not suitable for a permanent monastery, and the Westbury community was soon moved to Ramsey (Huntingdonshire) (Lapidge 2009, xvii–xviii). Communities of Benedictine monks were also introduced in the 960s or early 970s at Evesham, Pershore and Winchcombe. The Benedictine reform was enthusiastically promoted by King Edgar (957–75), but his death was followed by the so-called ‘anti-monastic reaction’ in Mercia led by Ealdorman Ælfhere. The monastic communities at Evesham, Pershore and Winchcombe were seemingly disbanded and the monks expelled for some length of time; monastic life was reinstated at these houses in the first half of the eleventh century, though the precise chronology is unclear (Barrow 2004, 147–55). The motives of Ælfhere and his followers were more concerned with the large amounts of land and power being concentrated in monastic hands than with opposition to monastic life as such (Williams 1982, 166–70). All three houses survived in the longer term as important Benedictine monasteries.

The old minster at Gloucester also became Bened-

ictine; the date when this happened is uncertain but probably before 1022 (Hare 1993, 14–17). There may also have been short-lived Benedictine communities at Deerhurst (Wormald 1993; Lapidge 2009, 113 n. 77) and at St Oswald’s, Gloucester (Hare 1999, 37–8). The nunneries at Berkeley and Leominster should also be noted; these houses had abbesses in the late Anglo-Saxon period. Berkeley was apparently dissolved towards the middle of the eleventh century; at Leominster the abbess was carried off by Earl Swein in 1046, but there were still an abbess and nuns at Leominster at the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086. It is uncertain what way of life was followed by the nuns of these two houses; the nuns may have lived in a manner similar to continental canonesses, while at the same time maintaining Benedictine affiliations (Foot 2000, II, 39–42, 103–7; Yorke 2003, 85–9). With the possible exception of the nunnery at Leominster, there seem to have been no Benedictine houses in the diocese of Hereford before 1066. In the part of the diocese of Lichfield within the study area, a Benedictine monastery was founded in northern Warwickshire at Coventry *c.* 1043 by Earl Leofric and his wife Godgifu (Godiva) (Baxter 2007, 153–63); this has been argued convincingly to have been established on the site of an older minster (Bassett 2001). Indeed all of the Benedictine monasteries in the area seem to have been founded on the sites of older minsters.

The constellation of Benedictine monasteries in the lower Severn and Avon valleys — Worcester, Evesham, Gloucester, Pershore and Winchcombe — radically changed the religious complexion of the diocese of Worcester, and these communities remained dominant for centuries to come. The Benedictines took steps to appropriate the historical and spiritual heritage of the English Church to themselves by means such as the writing of history and hagiography and the transfer of relics; it was their houses which became perceived as ancient and venerable (Blair 2005, 353). It is a measure of their success that it is in very large measure the archives of the Benedictine monasteries which have preserved such historical information — documentary, narrative and hagiographical — as we have for the western Midlands in the Anglo-Saxon period.

There seems to have been little attempt at a response on the part of the secular clerics. The fate of minster churches depended on the policies adopted by their patrons; a good number were now in episcopal control, while others in royal hands (such as Cirencester) were used as endowments for royal chaplains (Barrow 2004, 155–9). In most cases minsters seem to have been served

by small congregations of secular clergy, and some were evidently vigorous enough to undertake alterations to existing structures or new buildings. Deerhurst and St Oswald's, Gloucester have already been mentioned, and both underwent phases of remodelling in the tenth and/or eleventh centuries. There are also architectural remains of minster churches of tenth- and eleventh-century date at Bibury and Bitton (Gloucestershire), at Tredington and Wootton Wawen (Warwickshire), and at Stanton Lacy and Wroxeter (Shropshire) (Taylor and Taylor 1965). The church at Wroxeter is built of reused stone from the Roman town.¹

The tenth and eleventh centuries saw the growth of local churches, and this development also had a considerable impact on the minsters (Blair 2005, 291–504). In the western Midlands the foundation of local churches seems in general to be a comparatively late phenomenon. John Blair (Blair 2005, 421) has commented that 'local churches would surely have figured in the rich Worcester archive, for instance, if they had been anywhere near as important in that region as they were in Norfolk'. Julia Barrow (2004, 143–7) has calculated that at the time of Domesday Book in 1086, there was a minimum of 160 churches in the diocese of Worcester (and probably more); she

shows that this represents a lower level of provision than in eastern counties of England and agrees with Blair that in the western Midlands, local churches only began to be built in some numbers around the middle of the eleventh century. Architecture provides a little supplementary evidence. In their corpus of Anglo-Saxon churches, the Taylors listed a number of minor churches in Gloucestershire, most of them in the Cotswolds around Cirencester (Taylor and Taylor 1965); nearly all of these are considered by Blair (2005, 420 n. 217) to belong to the period *c.*1050–1120. Odda's Chapel at Deerhurst, a private chapel with a commemorative function, is a rare example precisely dated by an inscription (Deerhurst Odda's Chapel 1, p. 190). Many of the Taylors' Gloucestershire churches are indubitably of 'overlap' date, but it is not improbable that buildings such as Coln Rogers, Duntisbourne Abbots (not listed by the Taylors), Duntisbourne Rouse and Leonard Stanley are pre-Conquest in date, though they may well be no earlier than *c.* 1050 as Blair suggests. Elsewhere in the region, there is little in the way of surviving local churches of pre-1066 date, but Atcham and Barrow (Shropshire) are possible cases, Atcham being built of reused Roman stone from nearby Wroxeter. There has to date been little in the way of archaeological excavation in the study area to shed light on the origins of local churches. The contribution of sculpture to this debate is discussed in Chapter III.

1. If the architectural fragment (Wroxeter St Andrew 4, p. 318) built into the chancel-arch belongs to the same phase of work as the present building, then the standing fabric would be rather earlier and belong to the eighth or ninth century