

# Allegories of Sight: Blinding and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England



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*Abstract: The practical necessity of sight to effective participation in Anglo-Saxon life is reflected in the multifaceted depictions of punitive blinding in late Anglo-Saxon literature. As a motif of empowerment or disempowerment, acts of blinding permeate the histories and hagiographies of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and each narrative mode illuminates different societal attitudes to the practice. These narratives reflect a social discomfort and lack of evidence for a prevalent culture of punitive blinding, alongside a growing acceptance in late Anglo-Saxon England of the measure as a practical penalty. As a codified legal punishment, blinding was reserved for recidivist criminals: mutilation punished while preserving the soul for the redemption of repentance. An eleventh-century legal innovation, the histories and chronicles relating events of this period similarly display a growing acceptance of blinding as a practical expedient deprivation of personal political agency. In contrast, the trope of blinding in hagiographical narrative frequently displays a social commentary that opposes these political and legal powers. Blindings, attempted blindings and healings are motifs used to correct the wrongs of temporal agents and bestow God's favour upon a saint. The conflicting narratives demonstrate the conflicted attitude to blinding inherent in a culture that considered sight as a vehicle for power.*

We looked for light, and behold darkness:  
brightness, and we have walked in the  
dark. We have groped for the wall, and  
like the blind we have groped as if we had  
no eyes: we have stumbled at noonday as  
in darkness, we are in dark places as dead men. (Isaiah 59. 9-10.)

The seventh-century law code of King Æthelberht of Kent ascribes a *wergild* of fifty shillings for the gouging out of an eye.<sup>1</sup> This penalty is the highest the law code mandates for any instance of mutilation, and is the same as that imposed for the killing of a free man.<sup>2</sup> That a man's sight and a man's life are given commensurate value within this early Anglo-Saxon law code demonstrates a cultural association between sight and personal agency in Anglo-Saxon societies. In its genesis, this connection illustrates the practical necessity of sight to effective participation in Anglo-Saxon life. The class-based nature of Anglo-Saxon society and its orientation toward self-sufficient agricultural communities meant that each person's usefulness was defined by their ability to contribute to their community. From these pragmatic origins, the resulting preoccupation with sight as a vehicle for power, and the deprivation of sight as the loss of power, evolved to permeate many spheres of Anglo-Saxon society into the eleventh century. As such, the hagiographical and historical literature of late Anglo-Saxon Christian England reflects an association of sight and agency beyond any purely practical consideration. The spiritual and political domains of authority rested on differing conceptualisations of the basis for power and, as a tool to empower or disempower either victim or instigator, literary accounts of blinding are necessarily defined by the contextual demands of narrative. Within tenth- and eleventh-century hagiographic narratives relating the lives of Anglo-Saxon saints, blinding becomes a trope. Miracles in which the holy person vitiates an attempt on their eyes, blinds a blasphemer, or heals the blind are not only evidence of the spiritual power of the saint, but actually bestow that power. In contrast, the histories of this period seem to evince a new, practical political brutality. Accounts of political blinding as a practice to

remove the agency of rivals for temporal authority become common-place around the reign of Æthelred II (r. 978 –1013, 1014–1016). Though hagiographical and historical literature illuminate different aspects of the late Anglo-Saxon attitude to sight and the practice of blinding, they are nonetheless both facets concerning a cultural perspective of the power of the eyes.

In his extensive survey of blinding as a disability in medieval Europe, Edward Wheatley declares of the accounts of punitive blinding in Anglo-Saxon England that 'the real significance of these incidents lies in their paucity'.<sup>3</sup> Wheatley is not mistaken in asserting that, in the context of the early medieval west, political blinding was comparatively rare in Anglo-Saxon England. Indeed, the punishment cultures of Anglo-Saxon England do not even warrant attention in Geneviève Bührer-Thierry's study of early medieval blinding.<sup>4</sup> Wheatley's brief assessment of blinding as a punishment focuses exclusively on the political accounts of blinding contained within the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. While this survey does identify key events and notes the marked increase in cases of blinding from the reign of Æthelred, Wheatley's brevity ignores chronicles, saints' lives and law codes that contribute to a richer understanding of these incidents and Anglo-Saxon attitudes toward the practice.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, this analysis will consider late Anglo-Saxon perspectives of blinding through the twin lenses of hagiographical and political narrative, located within the entwined religious and legal philosophical milieu in which they were written. As such, it is critical to situate such narratives within a contextual framework of early medieval European law and its treatment of the body.

The treatment of the body in early medieval law has been the focus of much recent study. This discussion will only touch upon law when it illuminates underlying social perceptions of blinding within anecdotes of spiritual or temporal power. Nonetheless, the law codes of both Anglo-Saxon England and wider Western Christendom are important to contextualise attitudes to the mutilated body. Laws that deal with the treatment of the body fall into two broad categories: those that codify

compensations for transgressions against the body, and those that mete out punitive mutilation as a juridical sentence. Into the former fall the law codes of Æthelberht of Kent: the *wergild* representing an inheritance of Germanic legal tradition that the early Anglo-Saxons brought to England. Though this period of legal evolution predates that under examination here, it is in this early medieval period that we see the genesis of Anglo-Saxon attitudes to punitive mutilation. Early medieval law codes enumerating such protections have been discussed extensively by both Lisi Oliver and Mary Richards, with Oliver painting a broader picture of what she terms the ‘barbarian laws’ of early medieval Europe, and Richards focusing more tightly on Anglo-Saxon laws.<sup>6</sup> Oliver does not make specific mention of blinding, yet we know that penalties for blinding were codified by Æthelberht and Oliver does integrate that code within the wider legal traditions of the ‘barbarian laws’.<sup>7</sup> In applying the specific provisions of Æthelberht’s code to various cross-cultural case studies, Oliver demonstrates that, though unusually comprehensive, the attitudes to extra-judicial mutilation evidenced by the code are not uniquely Anglo-Saxon.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Richards is able to draw some nuances from the Anglo-Saxon codes that do evidence societal preoccupations that are carried into the later law codes. Richards notes that while Æthelberht’s code is indeed typical of ‘barbarian codes’, it treats tariffs for mutilation as a separate matter from violent crimes of deadly force and that the compensation demanded for a visible mutilation is higher than for a hidden injury.<sup>9</sup> The preoccupation with recompense for mutilation was a natural development of a labour-oriented communal society. When a person’s ability to contribute profitably to community life was compromised and became instead an encumbrance, that community as a whole suffered. It was a cultural attitude to mutilation that meant that it could be adopted as an effective punishment in later laws.

For, while death was a finite event with a person’s worth set by the *wergild*, mutilation could burden a community with a non-functioning member and a visible wound would provide a lifelong mark of personal dishonour. In her article exploring

mutilation in tenth- and eleventh-century England, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe argues that corporal punishment is not a simple reactionary punitive measure, but a visible declaration of the individual's transgression and a didactic exemplar to the wider community.<sup>10</sup> She posits that 'their mutilated bodies became texts of their behaviour and its lawful consequences'.<sup>11</sup> However, the prevalence of punitive mutilation in late Anglo-Saxon England should not be overstated. In his analysis of juridical blinding and castration in post-Conquest England, Klaus van Eickels argues that in Anglo-Saxon law fining and death had been preferred to mutilation and that 'evidence for [...] blinding as an accepted judicial means of eliminating political enemies remains at best tenuous'.<sup>12</sup> Susanne Kries similarly notes the Anglo-Saxon disinclination toward deliberate mutilation, though she does go on to assert that 'mutilation is increasingly regarded as a replacement for the death sentence from the tenth century onward'.<sup>13</sup> In his turn, Eickels declares that it is through the laws of William the Conqueror that blinding becomes a commonplace punishment.<sup>14</sup> These positions are not in conflict, for what is demonstrated is an increasing acceptance of blinding as a punishment leading into the Anglo-Norman period. Bühner-Thierry notes the pervasive presence of punitive blinding in Roman law and political practice in Byzantium and its increasing adoption amongst the western Germanic tribes in the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>15</sup> Viewed chronologically as a legal transmission from the Roman east via the Carolingian Empire, both cultures that may reasonably be expected to impact on Anglo-Saxon cultural attitudes, it is understandable that juridical mutilation would only become a feature in later of Anglo-Saxon law. While in their early evolution, Anglo-Saxon legal codes demonstrate a cultural reluctance to use blinding as a punishment, by the eleventh century the practice had entered established legal discourse.

Blinding does not become a codified punishment until 1020, with England under the sway of the Danish King Cnut (r. 1016–1035).<sup>16</sup> Wheatley seems to assert that this law code, *Cnut II*, reflects the introduction of another culture's juridical

procedure, yet in doing so ignores the trend toward practical political brutality evidenced by the blindings enacted in the reign of Cnut's predecessor, Æthelred.<sup>17</sup> Both Dorothy Whitelock and O'Brien O'Keefe note that the vaguely worded encouragement of alternative punishments to death in the 1008 law code, *V Æthelred*, is a tacit provision for punitive mutilation, though it does not specifically condone blinding.<sup>18</sup> *Cnut II* may enumerate these alternative punishments, however when considered alongside *V Æthelred*, this must be seen as the expression of the continued evolution of Anglo-Saxon policies on juridical mutilation. Both codes display the guiding hand of the native archbishop, Wulfstan, and with the Church guiding legislative development, blinding is one of a number of punishments specified in *Cnut II* intended to facilitate punishment while preserving the criminal's soul that it may still receive salvation.<sup>19</sup> In this work, Wulfstan drew upon biblical endorsement for punitive blinding. Exhortations to God to punish the unfaithful with blinding permeate both the Old and New Testaments; in the Judges, Samson's disobedience to God resulted in his blinding, while the preservation of his life enabled him to once more enter God's favour before death.<sup>20</sup> Yet *Cnut II* still preserves the Anglo-Saxon reluctance to use blinding as a punishment, being reserved as one of numerous punishments for a recidivist criminal upon a third offence and, as Kries has posited, 'recognis[ing] the ultimate value of eyesight'.<sup>21</sup>

The provision for punitive mutilation as a penitential punishment likely predates the reigns of either Æthelred or Cnut. Whitelock has convincingly argued that these originate in the reign of King Edgar (r. 959–975), under the influence of Wulfstan's teacher, Æthelwold.<sup>22</sup> Anecdotal accounts of the laws of Edgar, such as contained in *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*, certainly seem to evidence an earlier tradition of juridical mutilation and specify blinding as an appropriate punishment.<sup>23</sup> This is at the heart of Simon Keyne's argument that, despite increased chronicle accounts of blinding in Æthelred's reign, these need not imply a specific brutality associated with Æthelred.<sup>24</sup> While the numerous historical accounts of blinding in

Æthelred's reign provide detail to an often obscure practice, this increase reflects the actions of a king who was reacting to the extreme political turmoil of his reign within an established legal framework. From Edgar's reign, through Æthelred's laws and into the specificity of *Cnut II*, the provisions for mutilation in later Anglo-Saxon legal codes exhibit a shift in punitive ideologies reflecting a changing cultural perspective of blinding and power. It is within this context that the accounts of blinding in late Anglo-Saxon histories and hagiographies must be examined.

While the evolution of Anglo-Saxon law codes provides valuable background to social attitudes, blindings within hagiography and political polemic rarely fall within a judicial framework. Anglo-Saxon hagiographies must be read as literary sources: a genre with associated literary tropes and conventions.<sup>25</sup> As products of both the lives of the saints they recount and the cults that subsequently arise after their deaths, accounts of torture or deliverance from torture are designed to demonstrate the saint's faith and God's power. The greater the torture and the further it transgresses social norms and juridical limitations, the greater the power the brutality bestows.<sup>26</sup> Whether the saint is blinded, avoids being blinded, affects a miraculous blinding, or heals the blinded, the anathematising of sightlessness in Anglo-Saxon culture ensures that these allegories become potent demonstrations of the saint's godliness.

In medieval hagiography allegory played an important role in revealing the didactic motifs that were supposed to be understood by their audience, and some consideration must be given to defining the nature of blinding as allegory in hagiographical narrative. Robin Waugh offers an insightful case study that, while intended to examine the relationship between prologue and text, also makes explicit the allegorical nature of blinding to an Anglo-Saxon audience.<sup>27</sup> Waugh focuses on the versions of the *Life of Saint Guthlac* and an exhortation in the prologue that readers believe the narrative, the 'blindness curse', as it converses with blinding narratives within the text of the saint's life.<sup>28</sup> While the hagiographer recognises a blinding curse

to be the most efficacious to discourage scepticism within his audience, he also engages with the reversal of blinding as a demonstration of spiritual agency, narrating a miraculous healing at Guthlac's shrine. For if, as Waugh suggests, 'the blindness curse [...] introduces sightlessness as a metaphor for ignorance', so too can the restoration of sight be seen as a metaphor for faithfulness.<sup>29</sup> The idea of the sceptic or sinner being blinded and the faithful or repentant being healed has deep roots in biblical tradition. The deployment of the blinding motif recalls Saul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus in which Jesus temporarily deprived the sceptic of his sight.<sup>30</sup> In turn, the deployment of the healing motif recalls the restoration of his sight upon his repentance and declaration of belief.<sup>31</sup> However, the motif of blinding is not solely about the person blinded, and Saul's redemption narrative contrasts with the famous passage in which Jesus heals a man born blind. Jesus specifically refutes that the man's blindness is as a result of sin, but rather that he was blind so that Jesus may demonstrate his power through the act of healing.<sup>32</sup> Within the Bible, blinding is a tool of spiritual agency that can be used to punish, redeem or validate and the hagiographers' adoption of the motif reflects these varied usages. Scriptural allusion is a standard technique employed by the hagiographer to both establish the saint's godliness and worthiness of veneration and to bring forth didactic hagiographical motifs familiar to an Anglo-Saxon audience.

It was necessary for biblical allusion to be present and recognisable in saints' lives and, in the hands of the hagiographer, blinding becomes an allegory for scepticism and faithfulness, of empowerment and disempowerment. This point raises the question of how to read accounts of blinding in saints' lives: as narrative trope, religious allegory or historical actuality? For while hagiographic narratives necessarily engages with biblical tropes, they also reflect local narrative traditions and any one or combination of these motives for these tales of adversity can shed light on the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the interrelation of sight and power. Demonstrating this blurred line between history and hagiography, the same dynamics

play out within chronicles and histories recounting political blindings where the act of mutilation often takes on a hagiographic element. Two versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* break with standard prose annals entries for the 1036 entry on the blinding and death of Alfred Ætheling, recounting the event in verse:

Sona swa he lende	As soon as he arrived
on scype man hine blende	they blinded him on the boat
7 hine swa blindne	and once blinded
brohte to ðam munecon. <sup>33</sup>	brought him to the monks.

In contrast to the suffering of a mutilated saint, the victim of a political blinding is deprived of power, yet in the fate of Alfred the mutilation takes on the exaggerated literary style of hagiography. However, other entries in the *Chronicle*, such as Æthelred II's 1006 blinding of Wulfeah and Ufegeat, are pragmatic and minimalist in style and evidence an attitude to the practice as accepted political expedient.<sup>34</sup> The deprivation of sight, whether exalted in the lives of saints, treated with horror in political polemic, or recorded with dispassionate practicality by chroniclers, is inexorably entwined with the potency of the victim and the efficacy of their religious or political power. Sight was a powerful and cherished faculty in late Anglo-Saxon England.

As can be seen, the concept of 'power' as represented by the complex and multi-faceted motif of blinding can be ethereal. In this discussion the interrelation of blinding and power takes on a fundamental duality: empowerment and disempowerment. For the saint an escape from blinding, the blinding of a blasphemer, or the healing of the blind represents empowerment. Displaying spiritual power granted by God, the saint is a repository of spiritual authority evidenced through miraculous action. For the victim of a political or juridical mutilation, blinding represents disempowerment. Deprived of their own political power, the blinded person surrenders their agency with their sight. Naturally, the equation is reversed for the perpetrator of the act: hagiographical narrative is unlikely to empower one

who mutilates God's anointed, while political narrative will empower one who seizes control at the expense of his rivals for power. Such categorisations are necessarily theoretical and the varied narratives that build on the *Chronicle* description of the mutilation of Alfred, quoted above, manifest the complexities of authorial representations of power. As a pseudo-hagiographical protagonist, he is characterised in the *Chronicle* as a victim and innocent brutalised through the treachery of man and taken under God's protection upon his death.<sup>35</sup> The record of the twelfth-century historian John of Worcester seems to bear out God's favour. In 1040 a new king ascended the throne, prosecuting Alfred's likely murderer, Godwine, and disinterring the body of the preceding king, having it flung into the Thames.<sup>36</sup> Yet as a political figure Alfred is characterised as a naïve pawn in high politics. He is clearly and immediately deprived of any personal power through his blinding and death and, despite the prosecution, Godwine subsequently advanced his own political power to become a dominant figure in late Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>37</sup> It must be recognised that the power that is being deprived or augmented can only be understood within the authorial and social context of the source under examination.

Thus, though blinding in tenth- and eleventh-century England is being explored through both political and hagiographical lenses, the *Chronicle's* treatment of Alfred's blinding and death demonstrates that the line between the two is not always easily discerned. Culturally, this reflects the inseparable nature of church and state within Western Christendom at the turn of the millennium. Abbots and bishops played an integral role in political administration, often filling high political office. For example, Saint Dunstan, to whose life this discussion will return, filled the roles of abbot, bishop and archbishop throughout a long and colourful public career that also saw him become an influential royal advisor.<sup>38</sup> The *Vita S. Dunstani*, written c. 998, alleged that it was Dunstan's secular power that prompted jealous courtiers to have him exiled from court, that incited a threatened king to exile him from England, and that motivated an attempted blinding.<sup>39</sup> More specific to the religious and cultural

milieu of tenth- and eleventh-century England, however, was the proliferation of royal saints. In conceptual opposition to the secular power of Anglo-Saxon religious leaders in life was the spiritual power of Anglo-Saxon political leaders in death. While it is important to note that, just as not all high-ranking clergy achieved sainthood, royalty was not an automatic path to canonisation, it remains that royal saints were a key feature of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. In considering the use of blinding in hagiographic narratives it is useful to first identify royal cults in which such tales are played out.

King Edward the Martyr (r. 975–978) was murdered in 978, clearing the way for Æthelred II to ascend the throne. His sobriquet implies a death in defence of his faith: a martyr's death that preserved his soul through his refusal to denounce his Christianity. In fact, his death was purely a matter of internal Anglo-Saxon politics. The most contemporary accounts place the guilt of his murder on the magnates of the realm. Nearly all the versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are characteristically brief – all declare it to be a killing and most a martyrdom, but provide little detail; manuscript E does fall into hagiographic hyperbole, declaring that:

Ne wearð Angelcynne nan wærsa	The English race has not done a
dæd gedon, þonne þeos wæs	worse deed than this
syððon hi ærest Brytonland gesohton. <sup>40</sup>	since they first sought the land of Britain.

The *Vita S. Oswaldi*, which dates to c. 1008, embellishes the *Chronicle* account. The somewhat conflicted narrative first paints Edward as a harsh ruler yet goes on to describe him as an 'innocent youth', predestined for a martyrdom brought to fruition by thegns who saw in the young *ætheling*, Æthelred, a more compliant king than Edward.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Edward's hagiography *Passio sancti Eadwardi regis et martyris*, a late eleventh-century document, plays out a narrative trope of the evil step-mother, laying blame for his death with his step-mother Ælfthryth who sought the throne for her own son Æthelred.<sup>42</sup> This version of events becomes the dominant narrative in

later chronicles, with Henry of Huntingdon in the twelfth century going so far as to place the knife in Ælfthryth's hand.<sup>43</sup> Where detail is provided to the manner of Edward's death, all agree that the king was ambushed and stabbed and his body disposed of without royal or religious honours. He was not blinded. Yet a vision of blinding foretold his death the night before the crime, and after his death the royal saint's piety and power would be displayed in the vengeful blinding of one of the conspirators.

Edward's half-sister, Edith, was a nun at Wilton Abbey. According to her biographer, Goscelin, Edith was dedicated to the Abbey as a child and spent her entire short life there.<sup>44</sup> After her death, Edith joined her brother in the pantheon of Anglo-Saxon royal saints. Goscelin's *Vita Edithe* records her life and deeds, and, as a hagiographic biography, includes a number of anecdotes designed to demonstrate Edith's piety. The unlikely story of Edith being offered the crown after her brother's death demonstrates the saint's rejection of temporal power, while her vision foretelling Edward's martyrdom demonstrates her spiritual power.<sup>45</sup> Both events are entirely unique to the *Vita*. It is in Edith's prophetic vision that the power assigned to blinding and the loss of an eye within Anglo-Saxon literature is demonstrated:

Meanwhile Edith, in contemplation, dreamed that her right eye fell out. When she remembered this and immediately interpreted it to some of her sisters, she said, 'It seems to me that this vision foretells some disaster to my brother Edward.' She spoke, and the outcome of the event proved that this interpretation was a true prophecy.<sup>46</sup>

Goscelin goes on to condemn Ælfthryth for arranging the assassination, and implicates Æthelred in the plan, prompting the offer of the throne to Edith. These motifs place the *Vita* within the later narrative tradition of the *Passio sancti Eadwardi*, with authorship dated to c. 1080.<sup>47</sup>

While it should be noted that the *Vita* was written after the Norman Conquest, and authored by a Fleming, these factors can be overstated. The Norman Conquest did not put an immediate end to Anglo-Saxon social concerns and, by the time Wilton

Abbey commissioned Goscelin to write Edith's biography, he had been immersed in Anglo-Saxon culture for two decades. In recounting Edith's vision, Goscelin is calling upon hagiographical motifs familiar to an Anglo-Saxon audience to extol Edith's sanctity and display the spiritual power that set her apart. In fulfilling St. Paul's exhortation to prophesy Edith makes tacit display of the spiritual gifts expected of a saint in action.<sup>48</sup> More important, however, is Edith's ability to interpret her dream. Christian tradition into the late Anglo-Saxon period placed pre-eminence of vision interpretation over the receipt of visions, a subject that had variously been addressed by Augustine of Hippo, Pope Gregory the Great and the Anglo-Saxon Alcuin of York. While any Christian could receive a vision, Pope Gregory had specifically declared interpretation to be the purview of saints.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore a narrative necessity that Edith interpret her own dream of losing an eye, and further, that this interpretation be proved to be correct by the subsequent news of her brother's murder. Through the medium of correct interpretation Edith's inherent saintliness is being accentuated. In content, for this trope to function, Edith's vision had to represent Edward's death through imagery that had cultural equivalencies with death. Here the Anglo-Saxon attitude to the power of the eyes is evident. Reserved as a punishment of last resort, and valued in law as equal to a life, the image of the loss of an eye would have been understood by an Anglo-Saxon audience to emphasise Edward's martyrdom and validate his saintliness. By using the perceived loss of an eye as a prophetic vision of an event that was considered to be 'the worst deed ever done by the English', Goscelin evidences an astute observation of Anglo-Saxon societal concerns, using the idea to build on the cults of the royal siblings.<sup>50</sup>

The motif of the loss of an eye is not unusual in hagiographical literature, though its comparatively rare use in Anglo-Saxon saints lives sees it reserved to demonstrate only the most morally abhorrent events.<sup>51</sup> Edith's prophecy fits within the narrative of a saint's life as a demonstration of the saint's power, and the specific image of an eye falling out illustrates a brutal crime. Yet it is an unusual story. The

allegorical usage of blinding in Anglo-Saxon hagiography normally sees the saint avoid being blinded, or enact a blinding on a sinner. The image of a saint actually losing their eye, even though only within a prophetic vision, is rare.

Stith Thomson notes the falling out of an eye within the hagiographical context in his *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* as: 'eyes fall out of the head of a blasphemer'.<sup>52</sup> Edith's vision does not neatly fit within this motif. However, the retributive action of her brother against one of his murderers does. The following passage appears within the much earlier *Vita S. Oswaldi*:

One of [King Edward's murderers] endured a semblance of punishment so that he lost both his eyes and suffered an inexpressible deprivation of both his visions — I mean the loss of sight in this life as well as in the next! For he lost his vision in this life, since he was unable to see the light of the sun and the day [...] he lost that of the next life since he did not have our saviour's mercy.<sup>53</sup>

That Edward's death affects the gift of vision and prophecy to his sister, and deprives vision and eternal life from one of his assailants demonstrates the significance of the event, the power of the saint and the power ascribed to sight within Anglo-Saxon hagiography. This far more common motif of the loss of sight as a retributive miracle, posthumously performed by the saint against a reprobate, is similarly played out in the cult of another royal saint, Kenelm of Mercia.<sup>54</sup>

Kenelm was the son of the Mercian King Cenwulf (r. 796–821). Though the *ætheling* was an early ninth-century figure, his life is recorded in a mid eleventh-century manuscript that is contemporaneous with the *Vita S. Oswaldi*.<sup>55</sup> As such, the *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi* is a product of late Anglo-Saxon hagiography and reflects the cultural concerns of eleventh-century England prior to the Conquest. Catherine Cubitt posits that the late date for *Vita et miracula* actually stems from a frenzy of hagiographical biography inspired by Edward's murder.<sup>56</sup> The parallels between the central plot of the *Passio sancti Eadwardi* and the *Vita et miracula* are immediately obvious. According to his biography, Kenelm is assassinated by a close female family member lusting for power, in this case his sister, shortly after he had ascended the

throne as a young and innocent *ætheling*.<sup>57</sup> In detail, the *Vita et miracula* holds little historical accuracy, with the real details of Kenelm's life likely already obscured by the passage of time by the time of its writing. Alan Thacker has demonstrated that there is no evidence that Kenelm ascended the throne of Mercia, no evidence of his sister's supposed repudiation as a consequence of her brother's murder and no evidence of a cult of St Kenelm prior to 970.<sup>58</sup> Yet the historical accuracy of Kenelm's hagiography is secondary to its illumination of the cultural context in which it was written, and late Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the practice of blinding.

The first account of a blinding in *Vita et miracula* is that of Kenelm's treacherous sister, Cwoenthryth. The author paints a miraculous scene in which the crime of Cwoenthryth and her accomplices is made known through divine intervention to Pope Leo III, who sends an expedition to recover Kenelm's body.<sup>59</sup> Upon seeing the joy and adulation of the people translating her brother's body from his ignominious grave to a resting place at Winchcombe Abbey, Cwoenthryth set about cursing her brother's memory by chanting Psalm 108 backwards; in a graphic description the author describes the curse recoiling on Cwoenthryth:

[...] straightway, both her eyes, rooted out from their sockets, dropped upon the very page she was reading. That same psalter, adorned with silver, still shows the proof of this chastisement, stained on the same sentence with the blood of the fallen eye-balls.<sup>60</sup>

In a similarly striking act of retributive blinding, a commercially minded civic leader who instructs her village to ignore St Kenelm's feast so as not lose a day's trade, found upon this announcement that her 'eyes shot out onto the table'.<sup>61</sup> These two accounts fixate on the physical detail of the loss of the eyes, while making clear the crimes for which divine justice was meted out. This contrasts with the focus upon spiritual blindness as a partner to physical blindness in *Vita S. Oswaldi*. However, in all three cases blinding is the vehicle for the deprivation of power and social normalcy. Cwoenthryth dies in disgrace having lost the crown she had snatched, the merchant-

woman loses her wealth and social influence as a result of her blinding, and Edward's murderer lives out his days powerless, tended to by his unseen servants.<sup>62</sup> All three accounts clearly fall into the same trope of hagiographic retributive blinding.

The transgressions of the blinded sinners vary and have little basis in any legal tradition of eleventh-century England. The provisions in *Cnut II* for blinding apply to a thief upon their third offence, and in this likely follow the earlier judicial innovations of Edgar and Æthelred.<sup>63</sup> There is certainly no juridical tradition of blinding associated with regicide, witchcraft or blasphemy in Anglo-Saxon England. These are crimes that were far more frequently associated with capital punishment, though it should be noted that prior to these late Anglo-Saxon law codes death was the standard punishment where the crime fell outside the *wergild* structure.<sup>64</sup> In discussing the shift in punitive ideology from early to late Anglo-Saxon law codes, O'Brien O'Keeffe highlights a change in punishment cultures from a community oriented to an individually oriented approach. Whereas early codes reflected a simplistic system of acquittal, fine or death as a means to enforce social order and compensate loss, the late Anglo-Saxon codes' focus on personal redemption and allowance for personal mutilation 'forever after forces the body to confess to its guilt as part of the process of salvation'.<sup>65</sup> It is not a leap to apply the same logic to the hagiographer's treatment of these three blinded criminals.

While it is clear within the narrative of *Vita et miracula* that Cwoenthryth died as a result of her miraculous blinding, the author's use of that blinding motif is intended to attest her guilt in the eyes of God. Her mutilated body may not survive to confess her guilt, however the permanent mark of the sinner is provided in the detail that her psalter 'still shows the proof of this chastisement, stained [...] with the blood of the fallen eye-balls'.<sup>66</sup> The relic of the stained psalter is in fact an attestation to her crimes that has greater permanency than a visibly mutilated and blinded, yet ephemeral, body. This is certainly the retribution that the author deemed the treacherous sister, regicide and witch he was describing deserved and the kind of

miracle that his audience expected of a saint. Here we see the hand of the author, a presence that must not be forgotten in these narratives. It is a factor that Rosalind Love draws attention to in her translation of *Vita et miracula*, declaring the narrative to be 'very largely fictitious'.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, the hagiographers were writing in a tradition intended to be understood by an Anglo-Saxon audience and, where ocular tropes exist, the hagiographies remain a valuable gauge of cultural attitudes to the interrelation of blinding and power.

The idea that Anglo-Saxon culture positioned blinding as an extreme punishment reluctantly used only for the worst crimes and most incorrigible criminals is belied by the second account of blinding in the *Vita et miracula*. The divine punishment of Cwoenthryth as regicide and reprobate closely parallels the blinding of the unnamed conspirator in Edward's murder, and the deprivation of sight as analogous with the irremediable nature of their crimes is explicit. This point is less clear in the blinding of the civic leader who set herself and her town against the observance of St Kenelm's feast.<sup>68</sup> From *V Æthelred* in 1008 through to the 1020 ecclesiastical code of Cnut, *Cnut I*, the legal injunction to observe feast days is transmitted with little change.<sup>69</sup> It is of note that *V Æthelred* contains a clause that specifies observance of the feast of Æthelred's martyred brother, only to be dropped in *VI Æthelred*.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, St Kenelm's feast is never a named festival within the codes, rather falling within the oft repeated general exhortation that all 'festivals and fast are to be kept diligently'.<sup>71</sup> Yet the clauses relating to feasts do not in themselves contain measures for punishment, and the homiletic nature of those concluding clauses that do provide a legal basis for punishing transgressors does not allow for specificity in application as retributive justice for individual crimes.<sup>72</sup> What these closing clauses do reveal is that within these ecclesiastical codes, punishment was to take the form of *wergild*, property confiscation or death; there is no mention of punitive mutilation and certainly not of blinding.

The impious merchant-woman's action in rejecting the native traditions of her township upon the feast of St Kenelm and encouraging work on a feast day clearly transgresses more than one law on the observance of festivals.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the ejection of her eyeballs is clearly a fabrication of the author outside any punitive framework. The hagiographer ensures that the event is referenced back to the earlier fate of Cwoenthryth and, with this in mind, the author is undoubtedly correlating the act of attempting to curse the saint with irreverence of rejecting a saint's feast.<sup>74</sup> These two acts are remarkably similar, though the differing motives obscure the fact. Both Cwoenthryth and the merchant are attempting to suppress the saint's cult and memory by halting celebrations of his life; in so doing both are subjected to the same divine punishment. These two blindings imbue the saint and his cult with power, and there is an aspect of social commentary within the author's approach to the matter of the observance of saints' festivals. While the laws of men may have instructed the observance of festivals, their ability to enforce such behaviour was suspect. Yet such a serious transgression against the beloved of God would not go unpunished, and divine intervention would result in the worst of punishments: the deprivation of sight and thereby social agency, and power and influence within their community. In considering tales of blinding as presented in English hagiography, it is clear that hagiography and political polemic do not have a clear delineation in late Anglo-Saxon society.

Stories of martyred kings, visionary *æthelings* and vengeful royal saints are necessarily political, not simply within the context of their genesis, but in their later authorship where they provide commentary on the contemporary political milieu. Within the hagiographies of tenth- and eleventh-century England, explicit political commentary is perhaps most evident in the *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*. Written c. 974 by Lantfred, a monk of Winchester, the *Translatio* gives explicit expression to the conflicted nature of the late Anglo-Saxon conception of blinding as a punishment. As Anglo-Saxon politics began to adopt continental attitudes to penal philosophy,

blinding became a practical and legal method of exercising juridical power, however the inherited social unease with the deprivation of sight was not easily relinquished.

The *Translatio* exemplifies a far more common trope of blinding within Anglo-Saxon hagiography than those we have been considering: the healing of the blind. With a firm basis in the New Testament, the healing of the blind is part of a saint's stock in trade. Among the saints' lives produced in England in the eleventh century, accounts of curing blindness are prevalent: St Birani, St Æthelwold and St Dunstan, amongst others, all affect miraculous healings.<sup>75</sup> Each account has its own emphasis and nuance, yet in the *Translatio* there is unrivalled quantity. In five separate miracles, St Swithun is said to have healed at least twenty-one people of their blindness.<sup>76</sup> As a clear allusion to biblical miracles, the motif of healing blindness within hagiographical writings is not limited by time or location, with such miracles attested at various times in English history and across the wider medieval west.<sup>77</sup> With this in mind, an in-depth analysis of this prevalent biblical trope will not provide specific evidence of Anglo-Saxon concepts of the relationship between the deprivation of sight and power. However, the *Translatio* contains a unique account of a wrongly convicted and blinded man having his legally, if erroneously, mutilated eyes restored by St Swithun. Here Lantfred is exploring the ambiguities between the laws of God and man and the cultural tensions in using blinding as a punishment.

The *Translatio* provides some of the clearest evidence for a late Anglo-Saxon legal code advocating the dispensation of juridical mutilation prior to the reigns of Æthelred and Cnut. It also displays the apparent cultural discomfort with the concept of blinding as a punishment. In reporting the laws of Edgar, the *Translatio* states:

A law of great severity was promulgated throughout England [...] if any thief or robber were to be found anywhere in the country, he would be tortured at length by having his eyes put out, his hands cut off, his ears torn off, his nostrils carved open and his feet removed.<sup>78</sup>

This section of prose is paralleled in the poetic rendition of St Swithun's life composed in the 990s by Wulfstan Cantor, in which Lantfred's pragmatic recounting of the legislation is rendered with hyperbolic superfluities. It is this rendition of Edgar's purported law on mutilation that Dorothy Whitelock uses to argue for a gap in the extant laws from Edgar's reign and that mutilation entered Anglo-Saxon legislation prior to its codification in *Cnut II*. Whitelock suggests that late in Edgar's reign he 'came under the influence of that school of ecclesiastical thought which wished to substitute [execution for] mutilation'.<sup>79</sup> It is worth noting that Whitelock does not address the account of the *Passio* and, as Keynes has highlighted, as the earlier source, the less sensationalist passage in the *Passio* should be given precedence.<sup>80</sup> Yet a close examination of both texts shows little variation in the core narrative and Whitelock's argument is convincing and has achieved general scholarly consensus.<sup>81</sup> Edgar's reign marks the genesis of juridical mutilation as a systematic part of the punitive ideology of Anglo-Saxon England.

That the punishment of blinding was enacted on an innocent man already represents a commentary on the dangers juridical physical punishment in the hands of unjust judges. By coupling the loss of independence and the burden his incapacity placed on his family with the vicious wounds the blameless man sustained, Lantfred is demonstrating the social impact, the personal impact and the potential for injustice inherent within such irreversible brutality. While the man receives a full gamut of mutilations, the *Translatio* focuses on his blinding as both a vehicle for injustice and for redemption, providing a vivid description of the state of his eyes:

One of his eyes had been entirely torn out, but the other one hung down on his face; a certain woman took it and replaced it in its socket, it remained that way from Epiphany until Litanía Maior.<sup>82</sup>

The victim lived for three months in this state, and Lantfred informs us that, when the man decided to plead at the shrine of St Swithun, it was only in the hope of regaining his hearing, believing there could be no healing of his mutilated eyes. Yet

miraculously both sight and hearing are restored to him as a result of his supplication before the saint's tomb.<sup>83</sup> Though Lantfred declares that the man suffered numerous punishments that will have included almost all of the enumerate mutilations, the narrative concentrates upon the eyes. The wounded eyes as an Anglo-Saxon motif already represented an unprecedented juridical punishment, and Lantfred is able to use this to enhance the image of the brutal injustice of the savage wounds and highlight his subject's abject helplessness and inability to contribute to his community. All of this is to heighten the perception of the miracle as a demonstration of the saint's power when St Swithun is able to provide sight to one so unjustly treated and so hopelessly wounded.

While there is little doubt that this anecdote from the *Translatio* contains social commentary on the judicial use of mutilation, the core narrative structure, a simple formula of good versus bad, must not be lost. O'Brien O'Keeffe makes much of the fact that while the innocent man in the *Translatio* has his eyes and ears restored, the mutilations to his hands and nose are not noted to have been resolved by the saint. This is allegedly a portrayal that allows power to both saint and king: while the saint can act against the actions of the king, the king's power is not entirely neutralised.<sup>84</sup> In fact, the *Translatio* likely represents a far more straight forward hagiographic trope here. The punishment is said to be 'dreadful', the executioners 'wicked' and the victim 'innocent'.<sup>85</sup> By juxtaposing the innocent man with his own mutilation, which is represented as an injustice enacted by the local agents of the crown, the author enables the saint to show his power to discern truth and intercede with God on behalf of a supplicant. That Lantfred does not mention healing of the other wounds is not necessarily a commentary on the agency of the king, as suggested by O'Brien O'Keeffe, but simply representative of the value of the eyes and ears to an Anglo-Saxon audience. These were the wounds that meant isolation and death within Anglo-Saxon society.

Yet if applied to the story as told by Wulfstan Cantor, O'Brien O'Keefe's argument can be seen to be quite perspicacious. Wulfstan Cantor, despite his violent rhetoric in describing the potential punishments, paints the laws as just and beneficial for the nation. At its core the passage is deeply concerned with the efficacy and the image of the king as law maker:

Thus stands the aforesaid law and pronouncement of the pious king, which he in his benignity had ordained for the common good, that everyone might with carefree heart enjoy in full peace his own goods without complaint of loss.<sup>86</sup>

It is certainly in the interest of this author to ensure that the king's power is not seen to be nullified through the power of the saint, as both men ultimately derive their power from God through their piety. Yet, written c. 997, twenty-five years after the *Translatio*, and twenty years into the reign of Æthelred, Wulfstan Cantor may represent a new political narrative in which practical political brutality is becoming a cultural norm. Certainly it is within the late tenth and early eleventh centuries that the majority of known Anglo-Saxon political blindings and attempted blindings occur.

In considering accounts of political blindings, it is worth emphasising once more that the line between politics and hagiography is not always easily discerned. The account of Edith's vision and those of Kenelm and Swithun's posthumous miracles can quite clearly be seen through a political lens within the context of their writing, however those narrative flourishes do not represent a historical reality. In turning to the political practice of blinding to negate power, it is pragmatic to consider events that have a plausible historicity.

St Dunstan was a critical figure in late Anglo-Saxon religious and political history. Born c. 909 and rising from humble origins, Dunstan would be advisor to seven kings, become the Abbot of Glastonbury and end his long life as Archbishop of Canterbury. Best known for his system-wide reforms of monastic houses in England, it is unsurprising that, after his death in 988, Dunstan was rapidly canonised and that the extant accounts of his life are hagiographical biographies.<sup>87</sup> Of particular interest

is the *Vita S. Dunstani*, written within ten years of Dunstan's death by the anonymous author 'B'. B quite clearly knew Dunstan and seeks to extoll his virtues in life and his sanctity in death in true hagiographical style, though the personal connection adds a dimension of personal testimony from an eyewitness to events.<sup>88</sup> While there are numerous accounts of Dunstan's life and many individual events are independently corroborated by chroniclers, the *Vita* is frequently the source of these alternative accounts. The early dating of the *Vita* and the association of its author as a companion of Dunstan's lend authority to the narrative that is unusual in hagiography.

There is near universal acceptance that Dunstan was exiled by the young King Eadwig in 956.<sup>89</sup> The alleged attempt to blind Dunstan that accompanies this exile only appears in three sources, the *Vita* and two later biographies that are heavily dependent on the *Vita*.<sup>90</sup> Eadwig was not the first king that Dunstan was said to have fallen out with, having previously been exiled by Æthelstan and his successor Edmund.<sup>91</sup> The trope of the holy man being afflicted by the hardships of the world permeates the *Vita*, and Dunstan's conflict with the kings serves to enhance his reputation as a pious man setting himself against worldly authority. This is well demonstrated in B's masterful, if historically dubious, passage describing the event that prompted his exile by Eadwig. On the night of Eadwig's coronation, the young *ætheling* is said to have gone missing from his place of honour amongst his magnates. At the request of the thegns, Dunstan sought out the king, finding him in his bedchamber, crown cast aside and 'disporting himself disgracefully in between two women as if they were wallowing in some revolting pigsty'.<sup>92</sup> That the women were mother and daughter only add to the debauchery, as does the refusal of Eadwig to rejoin his great men. Dunstan resorts to physically marching him from the chamber.<sup>93</sup> It seems of little surprise that Dunstan soon found himself exiled, however B places the influence of the older of Eadwig's two consorts, Æthelgifu, at the centre of the plot to oust Dunstan, rather than the young king. As she began to move against Dunstan's titles and property, Dunstan fled the country just in time, for as he sailed away 'there arrived messengers from the

wicked pirate-woman (so the story goes) who would have torn out his eyes if he had been found on these shores'.<sup>94</sup>

This passage does not fit within the hagiographical trope of blinding, it is a purely political narrative. Dunstan does not avoid blinding through a vision or a miracle, but rather by simple common-sense. An experienced politician, Dunstan saw the way the political wind was blowing and left England before he could be caught and subjected to worse punishments than exile. In this instance, blinding is intended to deprive the agency of a rival for royal power. While Dunstan may not have had designs on the throne, his tenure, authority and patronage overshadowed that of the young king and his new advisors, threatening their political control.<sup>95</sup> While this account of an attempted political blinding is an early example in Anglo-Saxon political history, it occurs right on the cusp of the change in cultural attitude to blinding evidenced by the laws of Edgar and Æthelred. Dunstan would recover from his exile and go on to serve both these kings and, by the time B wrote the *Vita* in c. 998, blinding had a legal basis as a punishment and was beginning to gain acceptance as a political expedient.

The use of blinding to negate the power of a rival is perhaps more evident in chronicle accounts of blinding. William of Malmesbury recounts a plot c. 925 by political rivals in Winchester to blind King Æthelstan (r. 924–939) upon his accession to a united Wessex and Mercian throne.<sup>96</sup> Roger of Wendover in turn chronicles the 946 campaign to the north by Æthelstan's successor, Edmund I (r. 939–946), in which he had the king of Strathclyde's two sons blinded after deposing their father.<sup>97</sup> These early accounts of Anglo-Saxon political blinding are in fact written around two centuries after the events they narrate by Anglo-Norman authors and, though both authors claim to have drawn on earlier documents, any support for their suppositions in any extant literature is purely hypothetical.<sup>98</sup> Yet both accounts contain a plausible verisimilitude. Both recount struggles for political power in which blinding was a

practical expedient to remove the agency of a rival on the grounds of physical disability, while stopping short of breaking God's commandment against murder.

As can be seen, both the evolving legal culture of late Anglo-Saxon and social attitudes implicit in the tenth- and eleventh-century hagiographies, evidence a growing, if reluctant, acceptance to blinding as an appropriate punishment. It is in this context that the blindings enacted on behalf of Æthelred II in 993 and 1006 must be read; a point Simon Keynes highlights in refuting the assertion that these mutilations evidence Æthelred as a violent reactionary.<sup>99</sup> The two instances of mutilation must be viewed within a context of political intrigue detrimental to the king's power and governance. In 993 it was Ælfgar who was blinded. His father already stood in a state of disgrace due to cowardly conduct on campaign in 992 and, while the *Chronicle* seems to imply that the punishment for the sins of the father was visited on the son, Keynes has argued that Ælfgar was not innocent of wrongdoing.<sup>100</sup> In 1006 Wulfeah and Ufegeat were blinded. Once again the sons are punished for the father's crimes. Wulfeah and Ufegeat's father fell out of favour with Æthelred due to his 'arrogant deeds' and was stripped of 'his possessions and every dignity'.<sup>101</sup> By blinding the sons, Æthelred was negating the power of the family by depriving them of any chance to regain those dignities in the future or maintain their line. Adding to these political justifications, with blinding and mutilation entering juridical discourse under Edgar's reign in the 970s, Æthelred's actions fell within the Anglo-Saxon legal framework. It may be that depriving these men of their sight reflects the jealousy for power of a weak ruler; however, it is evident that blinding was becoming an acceptable alternative to execution in late Anglo-Saxon England.

By tracing the transmission of the Wulfeah and Ufegeat narrative into the Anglo-Norman period, this normalisation of political blinding becomes evident. While Eickels notes an Anglo-Norman mandate for punitive blinding and its prevalent use, in this case there is no distinct change in tone between Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman and Welsh accounts of the mutilation of the two young nobles.<sup>102</sup> The

terse *Chronicle* entries of 993 and 1006 seem to display a tacit acceptance of blinding as a punishment; the blindings are stated as matter of fact with no allusion to cultural reaction or societal transgression to the act. Writing in the twelfth century, the English chronicler John of Worcester provides political context for the blindings while treating the event itself with extreme brevity.<sup>103</sup> In their turn, according to Elizabeth Boyle, late medieval Welsh chronicles preserve a vernacular tradition of these mutilations that is equally pragmatic.<sup>104</sup> The tone of the narrative record shows no marked concessions to altered political or social attitudes between Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman rule. While the very event demonstrates that blinding as a political expedient predated the Conquest, the tone of the textual accounts indicate a pre-Norman societal acquiescence to the practice.

Yet acquiescence to punitive and political blinding was not ubiquitous, and the *Chronicle* accounts of Wulfeah and Ufegeat's mutilation contrasts sharply with the *Chronicle's* hyperbolic entry of 1036 recounting the blinding and death of Alfred Ætheling, both the most famous and best attested instance of blinding in Anglo-Saxon history.<sup>105</sup> In returning to Alfred's blinding and death we return to the cultural conflict that resided in attitudes to blinding. Alfred is certainly a victim of circumstance in a volatile and inherently complex political situation. However, Alfred is also eulogised and many accounts of his death carry the tropes of hagiography. As an Anglo-Saxon claimant to the English throne being held by the half-Dane Harold, Alfred may have expected a warm reception from the Anglo-Saxon nobility upon his return from exile. Instead he was caught, his men were ritually decimated and he himself was blinded and subsequently died from the injuries.<sup>106</sup> In her biography, Alfred's mother Emma lays the blame for the act at the feet of Harold himself, though Emma's own role in events remains murky, while most chronicles, including the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, vilify the powerful thegn Godwine.<sup>107</sup> No matter who was to blame, Alfred was a political threat to many people and it is evident that blinding was viewed as an appropriate method of annulling his power. As part of her analysis of the *Chronicle*

account of Alfred's mutilation, Kries argues that regardless of the brutality of the event, it falls 'within the bounds of Anglo-Saxon law'.<sup>108</sup> This implies that the situation parallels the political blindings in Æthelred's reign. Yet here there was no pretence of juridical punitive mutilation directed by the king — it was a simple equation of negation of power without the legitimising treason narrative of Æthelred's blindings and as such, unlike Æthelred's blindings, there was a cultural reaction to Alfred's mutilation. 'Martyred in his innocence', states the contemporary *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, and it was this innocence that gave rapid spontaneous rise to a cult in honour of the *ætheling*.<sup>109</sup> Late Anglo-Saxon cultural sensibilities could only make sense of the blinding of an innocent through the lens of hagiography.

There may be a paucity of accounts of blinding in Anglo-Saxon England, but those there are contain much information about late Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the practice. Tenth- and eleventh-century law codes, hagiographies and histories all build an understanding of reluctance to use blinding as punitive measure, reflecting that practical necessity of sight to effective participation in Anglo-Saxon life which made a sentence of blinding commensurate with death. Yet within the criminal jurisdiction, a sentence of blinding would also preserve the soul from eternal death, while within the political sphere blinding was an expedient method by which to deprive power under the veneer of law. For, within a society in which each person's usefulness was defined by their ability to contribute to their community, the deprivation of sight was not only disempowering to the individual, but a punitive burden and visible exemplar to that community. The application of this logic to the practice would evolve a new attitude of practical political brutality. Yet the preoccupation with sight as a vehicle for power, and the deprivation of sight as the deprivation of power, continued to permeate Anglo-Saxon society. The hagiographical narratives of the period contrast with political narratives and they show unjust blindings can be rectified and the image of a blinded man makes evident the power of God. Though hagiographical and historical literature illuminate different aspects of the late Anglo-Saxon attitude to

sight and the practice of blinding, they are nonetheless both facets concerning a cultural perspective of the power of the eyes. Sight was a powerful and cherished faculty in late Anglo-Saxon England and as such, though juridical and political discourse evolved to embrace the deprivation of sight, blinding was never a punishment that sat comfortably within Anglo-Saxon culture.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Lisi Oliver, ed., *Æthelbert's Code*, 42, in *Early English Laws*, University of London <<http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/laws/texts/abt/>> [accessed 16 August 2016].
- <sup>2</sup> *Æthelbert's Code*, 11–12.
- <sup>3</sup> Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 33.
- <sup>4</sup> Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "'Just Anger' or 'Vengeful Anger'? The Punishment of Blinding in the Early Medieval West', in *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 75–91.
- <sup>5</sup> Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, pp. 32–33.
- <sup>6</sup> Lisi Oliver, 'Protecting the Body in Early Medieval Law', in *Peace and Protection in the Middle Ages*, ed. by T.B. Lambert and David W. Rollason (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), pp. 60–77 (p. 71); Mary P. Richards, 'The Body as Text in Early Anglo-Saxon Law', in *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathon Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), pp. 97–115.
- <sup>7</sup> Oliver, 'Protecting the Body', pp. 61–62, 70–72.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70–76.
- <sup>9</sup> Richards, 'Body as Text', pp. 105–6, 108.
- <sup>10</sup> Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 'Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon England (ASE)*, vol. 27, ed. by Michael Lapidge, Malcolm Godden and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 209–32.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217. See also Ryan Lavelle, 'The Use and Abuse of Hostages in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe* 14 (2006), 269–96 (p. 294), who argues that the mutilated body of a hostage stood as a living admonition for other would be transgressors.
- <sup>12</sup> Klaus van Eickels, 'Gendered Violence: Castration and Blinding as Punishment for Treason in Normandy and Anglo-Norman England', *Gender and History* 16 (2004), 588–602 (p. 593).
- <sup>13</sup> Susan Kries, 'English-Danish Rivalry and the Mutilation of Alfred in the Eleventh-Century Chronicle Poem The Death of Alfred', *Journal of English and German Philology* 104 (2005), 31–53 (p. 40).
- <sup>14</sup> Eickels, 'Gendered Violence', p. 589.
- <sup>15</sup> Bührer-Thierry, 'Just Anger', pp. 79–81.
- <sup>16</sup> *Cnut II* 30.5, in *English Historical Documents (EHD)*, c. 500–1042, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. by Dorothy Whitelock (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), p. 459.
- <sup>17</sup> Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, pp. 31–32.
- <sup>18</sup> *V Ethelred* 3.1, in Whitelock, *EHD*, p. 443; O'Brien O'Keefe, 'Body and Law', pp. 215–16.
- <sup>19</sup> *Cnut II* 30.3–5; Pauline Stafford, 'The Laws of Cnut and the History of Anglo-Saxon Royal Promises', in *ASE*, vol. 10, ed. by Michael Lapidge *et al* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 173–90 (pp. 173–75); Dorothy Whitelock, 'Wulfstan's Authorship of Cnut's Laws', *English Historical Review* 70 (1955), pp. 72–85; Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Legislation and Its Limits* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), pp. 330–35, 349–52.

- <sup>20</sup> For pleas that God blind the sinner see for example Deuteronomy 28. 28, Psalm 69. 23, Romans 11. 10; for Samson's blinding and redemption see Judges 16. 21–30.
- <sup>21</sup> *Cnut II* 30.3–5; Kries, 'English-Danish Rivalry', p. 41.
- <sup>22</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, 'Wulfstan Cantor and Anglo-Saxon Law', in *Nordica Et Anglica: Studies in Honor of Stefan Einarsson*, ed. by Alan H. Orrick (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 83–92 (pp. 85–87).
- <sup>23</sup> Lantfred, *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*, 26, in *The Cult of St Swithun*, ed. and trans. by Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 310–13; O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Body and Law', pp. 217–18, 225–28.
- <sup>24</sup> Simon Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36 (1986), 195–217 (pp. 211–13).
- <sup>25</sup> Catherine Cubitt, 'Sites and Sanctity: Revisiting the Cult of Murdered and Martyred Anglo-Saxon Royal Saints', *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000), 53–83 (pp. 77–78).
- <sup>26</sup> Larissa Tracy, *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature: Negotiations of National Identity* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), pp. 31–35.
- <sup>27</sup> Robin Waugh, 'The Blindness Curse and Nonmiracles in the Old English Prose *Life of Saint Guthlac*', *Modern Philology* 106 (2009), pp. 399–426.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 399–401.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 404–406, 421.
- <sup>30</sup> Acts 9. 6–9.
- <sup>31</sup> Acts 9. 16–21.
- <sup>32</sup> John 9. 1–7.
- <sup>33</sup> Charles Plummer, ed., *Two of the Saxons Chronicles Parallel*, 1036 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 160.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1006, p. 136. *Wulfeah 7 Ufegæat wæron ablende*: Wulfeah and Ufegæat were blinded.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1036, p. 160.
- <sup>36</sup> R.R. Darlington and P. McGurk, eds., *The Chronicle of John of Worcester: The Annals from 450–1066*, 1040, trans. by Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 429–31.
- <sup>37</sup> See for example Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, vi.2, ed. and trans. by Diana E. Greenaway. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 370–73.
- <sup>38</sup> B, *Vita S. Dunstani*, in *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. and trans. by Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), pp. 1–109.
- <sup>39</sup> B, *Vita S. Dunstani*, 6.1–6.9, 21.2–23.3.
- <sup>40</sup> Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, 979, p. 123.
- <sup>41</sup> Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *Vita S. Oswaldi*, iv. 18, in *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine*, ed. and trans. by Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), pp. 137–41.
- <sup>42</sup> *Passio sancti Eadwardi regis et martyris*, in *Edward, King and Martyr*, ed. by Christine Fell (Leeds: University of Leeds, School of English, 1971), pp. 3–6.
- <sup>43</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, v.27, p. 325; see also for example *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 978, pp. 429–31; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii. 162, ed. and trans. by R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 265–

67. For an overview of the varied accounts of Edward's death and their provenance, see Fell, *Edward, King and Martyr*, xvi–xvii.
- <sup>44</sup> Michael and Kathleen Loncar Wright, trans., 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith (Vita Edithe)', 4–5, 23–24, in *Writing the Wilton Women*, ed. by Stephanie Hollis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 26–27, 56–59.
- <sup>45</sup> *Vita Edithe*, 18–19; Susan Janet Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 41, 84.
- <sup>46</sup> *Vita Edithe*, 18.
- <sup>47</sup> Stephanie Hollis, 'Introduction', in *Wilton Women*, pp. 4–5.
- <sup>48</sup> Romans 12. 6; 1 Corinthians 12. 10; 1 Corinthians 14. 1–5.
- <sup>49</sup> Jesse Keskiaho, 'The Handling and Interpretation of Dreams and Visions in Late Sixth to Eighth Century Gallic and Anglo-Latin Hagiography and Histories', *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (2005), 227–48 (pp. 228, 244–45).
- <sup>50</sup> Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, 979, p. 123.
- <sup>51</sup> Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, vol. 5 (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1966), Q451.7.0.2, Q551.6.5.2.
- <sup>52</sup> Thompson, *Motif-Index*, Q551.6.5.2.
- <sup>53</sup> *Vita S. Oswaldi*, iv. 20.
- <sup>54</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, in *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives*, ed. and trans. by Rosalind C. Love (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 50–89.
- <sup>55</sup> Love, *Three Saints' Lives*, pp. xc–xci.
- <sup>56</sup> Cubitt, 'Sites and Sanctity', p. 67. It is worth noting Rosalind Love's hypothesis that in *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi* we are reading another work of Goscelin, author of *Vita Edithe*, Love, *Three Saints' Lives*, pp. xcvi–ci.
- <sup>57</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, 1–6.
- <sup>58</sup> Alan Thacker, 'Kings, Saints, and Monasteries in Pre-Viking Mercia', *Midlands History* 10 (1985), 1–25 (pp. 8, 22). The nature of the evidence for the cult of St Kenelm, a record in the Winchcombe sacramentary invoking his name in the Mass, implies the existence of an established cult prior to written evidence.
- <sup>59</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, 10–12; J.A. Giles, ed. and trans., *Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History*, 821, vol. 1 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1849), pp. 173–74; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum anglorum*, ii.95.3, 211. William's accounts of these events are almost certainly derivative of the *Vita et miracula*, while Roger's account depends in turn on *Gesta regum anglorum*.
- <sup>60</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, 16.
- <sup>61</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, 20.
- <sup>62</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, 16, 20; *Vita S. Oswaldi*, iv. 20.
- <sup>63</sup> *Cnut II*, 30.1–5; Keynes, 'Tale of Two Kings', p. 211; O'Keefe, 'Body and Law', p. 217.
- <sup>64</sup> Eickels, 'Gendered Violence', p. 593; Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 126–27.
- <sup>65</sup> O'Keefe, 'Body and Law', p. 217.
- <sup>66</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, 16.

- <sup>67</sup> Love, *Three Saints' Lives*, p. xc–xciii.
- <sup>68</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, 20.
- <sup>69</sup> *V Ethelred*, 12.3–20; *Cnut I*, in Whitelock, *EHD*, pp. 454–55, especially (n.1); Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 352–55.
- <sup>70</sup> *V Ethelred*, 16 (n.8).
- <sup>71</sup> *V Ethelred*, 12.3, 15, 19.
- <sup>72</sup> *V Ethelred*, 28–33; Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 354.
- <sup>73</sup> *V Ethelred*, 13.1, 15, 19–20.
- <sup>74</sup> *Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi*, 16, 20.
- <sup>75</sup> Osbern, *Miracula S. Dunstani*, 15, in *Memorials of St Dunstan*, ed. by William Stubbs (London: Longman & Co., 1874), pp. 140–42; *Vita S. Birini*, in *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives*, ed. and trans. by Rosalind C. Love (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 31; Wulfstan of Winchester, *The Life of Saint Æthelwold*, 42, ed. and trans. by Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 57–58.
- <sup>76</sup> Matthew 9. 27–30; Mark 10. 49–52; Luke 18. 41–43; *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*, 12, 18, 21, 22, 26, 36.
- <sup>77</sup> Anne E. Bailey, 'Lamentation Motifs in Medieval Hagiography', *Gender & History* 25, (2013), 529–44 (pp. 529–30, 533–34).
- <sup>78</sup> *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*, 26.
- <sup>79</sup> Whitelock, 'Wulfstan Cantor and Anglo-Saxon Law', pp. 83–87.
- <sup>80</sup> Keynes, 'Tale of Two Kings', p.212 (n.65).
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13; O'Brien O'Keefe, 'Body and Law', pp. 225–26; Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 125–28.
- <sup>82</sup> *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*, 26.
- <sup>83</sup> *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*, 26.
- <sup>84</sup> O'Keefe, 'Body and Law', p. 227.
- <sup>85</sup> *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*, 26.
- <sup>86</sup> Wulfstan Cantor, *Narratio Metrica de Sancto Swithuno*, extract in Whitelock, 'Wulfstan Cantor and Anglo-Saxon Law', pp. 83–84.
- <sup>87</sup> Nicholas Brooks, 'The Career of St Dunstan', in *St Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. by Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 1–23 (pp. 1–3).
- <sup>88</sup> 'Introduction', in *Early Lives of Saint Dunstan*, Winterbottom and Lapidge, pp. lxiv–lxv.
- <sup>89</sup> B, *Vita Dunstani*, 23; *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 956, pp. 404–7; Eadmer of Canterbury, *Vita S. Dunstani*, 30, in *The Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, eds. and trans. by Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J Muir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 98–101; Osbern, *Miracula S. Dunstani*, 27; Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, 956, pp. 112–13; Roger of Wendover's *Flowers of History*, 956, pp. 257–58; William of Malmesbury, *Gestum regum anglorum*, ii.147.2–3.
- <sup>90</sup> B, *Vita Dunstani*, 23.1; Eadmer, *Vita S. Dunstani*, 30; Osbern, *Miracula S. Dunstani*, 27.
- <sup>91</sup> B, *Vita Dunstani*, 6.5–9, 7.6–7.
- <sup>92</sup> B, *Vita Dunstani*, 21.

- <sup>93</sup> B, *Vita Dunstani*, 21.4.
- <sup>94</sup> B, *Vita Dunstani*, 22–23.1.
- <sup>95</sup> Brooks, 'The Career of St Dunstan', pp. 14–16.
- <sup>96</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gestum regum anglorum*, ii.137.1.
- <sup>97</sup> Roger of Wendover's *Flowers of History*, 946, pp. 252–53.
- <sup>98</sup> Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 40–41; Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England: C. 500 to C. 1307* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 317.
- <sup>99</sup> Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, 993, 1006, pp. 126–27, 136–37; Keynes, 'Tale of Two Kings', pp. 211–13.
- <sup>100</sup> Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, 992–993, pp. 126–27; Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready', 978–1016* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 183–84.; Keynes, 'Tale of Two Kings', p. 212.
- <sup>101</sup> This version in *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1006, pp. 456–59; Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, 1006, pp. 136–37 does not contain the details of Wulfeah and Ufegeat's father's demise.
- <sup>102</sup> Eickels, 'Gendered Violence', pp. 588–90.
- <sup>103</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1006, pp. 456–59.
- <sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Boyle, 'A Welsh Record of an Anglo-Saxon Political Mutilation', *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006), pp. 247–49.
- <sup>105</sup> Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, 1036, pp. 126–27
- <sup>106</sup> Alistair Campbell, ed. and trans., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, iii.5–6, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 42–47.
- <sup>107</sup> *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, iii.4–6; Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, 1036, pp. 126–27
- <sup>108</sup> Kries, 'English-Danish Rivalry', p. 53.
- <sup>109</sup> *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, iii.6; Cubitt, 'Sites and Sanctity', p. 78.

