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POPE GREGORY AND THE BRITISH: MISSION AS A CANONICAL PROBLEM[*]

by Roy Flechner

The Gregorian mission to Kent continues to be regarded as the crowning event in the history of the conversion of Anglo-Saxon England and as a spur for the subsequent formation of Anglo-Saxon Christian kingdoms.[1] It also marks an important turning point in the history of Christainity in Europe because it was the first large-scale recorded mission aimed at non-Christians to have been dispatched from Rome.[2] From a historiographical perspective the Gregorian mission offers a unique focus owing to the extent to which it was documented in both contemporary and near-contemporary sources, from pope Gregory's letters to Bede's Ecclesiastical History.[3] Nevertheless, the existing accounts leave much to be desired, especially in regard to the state of the British church on the eve of the arrival of the **[48]** missionaries.[4] Thus, whereas Gildas and Bede might give us some idea of the British church after 410 in the territory covered by present-day Wales, its reach beyond that territory is barely documented and consequently received relatively little attention from scholarship. Nor is it clear whether the British had a church that exhibited a coherent organisational structure with territorial dioceses governed by bishops and perhaps provinces governed by metropolitans.[5] While these are important issues in and of themselves, they are also crucial for the writing of the history of the conversion of Britain and in particular the impact of the Gregorian mission. After all, the missionary achievement would be judged differently if the mission was sent to a land already possessed of a church or a land devoid of one.

Aside from the factual question of whether or not the British church ever extended east of the Severn, one would like to know whether Pope Gregory was at all aware of a British church anywhere in Britain before he dispatched his mission. The importance of asking about Gregory's familiarity with the British and their church is

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[1] E.g. H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1972; rev. 1991); B. Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain, c.600–800* (Harlow, 2006); M. Lambert, *Christians and Pagans: Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede* (New Haven, 2010).

[2] By contrast, Palladius's mission to Ireland in the fifth century was directed towards a Christian community. See Prosper of Aquitaine, Chronicle, s.a. 431, ed. T. Mommsen, *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, MGH Auctores Antiquissimi 9.1 (Berlin, 1892), 341–485, at 472.

[3] The edition of Gregory's letters used here is *Sancti Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistularum Libri I–XIV*, ed. D. Norberg, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 140–140A (Turnhout, 1982). For a translation of the letters see John Martyn, *The Letters of Gregory the Great* (Toronto, 2004). The edition and translation of the Ecclesiastical History used here is *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).

[4] The latest on the British in Wales is T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013). Studies concerning the presence of British Christianity elsewhere will be discussed later and will be referenced in their proper context.

[5] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 400, believes that the British church had a territorial organisation in the fourth century, but concedes that its survival into the fifth century and later is a matter for speculation.

that it helps us to focus attention on the degree to which the pope acknowledged the ethnic and religious diversity of the island of Britain and was willing to tolerate it. It is indeed possible to confirm that Gregory knew of the British church and even to gauge his attitude towards it, but only from 601, when Gregory gave Augustine control over it.[6] By that time Augustine had been bishop for approximately three years and settled in Kent for four years. What, then, if anything, did the pope know about the British before 601?

In the present paper I aim to revisit this question and its wider implications for the relationship between Rome and the Britons insofar as this relationship can be gauged through that singular and fateful event, namely the Gregorian mission. The present investigation will draw, to a large extent, on the usual range of evidence—from material finds to much-trodden narrative sources—but it will also introduce a new category of evidence: canon law. Canon law, it will be argued, holds an important heuristic for the study of the Gregorian mission as well as missions more generally, because it posed a challenge to missionaries who were sent to places that might already have had churches of one **[49]** kind or another. For had Gregory knowingly installed a new bishop in the jurisdiction or jurisdictions of existing bishops, he would—strictly speaking—have been in breach of canon law. How grave an offence that would have been we shall see in due course. For the moment, however, let us begin by asking what the British church was like on the eve of the mission.

<center>WHERE WERE THE BRITISH BISHOPS?</center>

Assessments of the evidence for the existence of British bishops east of the Severn have been hampered by a combination of inconclusive archaeological finds and ambiguous textual references.[7] But the question of the existence of such bishops cannot be separated from the bigger question concerning the existence of *any* kind of clergy in Britain before the mission was dispatched in 596, for example Irish or Frankish clergy whose presence might have conflicted with the mission's objectives. Let me, therefore, begin with two documentary references to bishops of Irish and Frankish extraction in Britain in the late sixth and early seventh century. These are, in fact, the only references to bishops in Britain at this time whose names are known: Liudhard and Dagán. According to Bede, Liudhard served as Queen Bertha's personal chaplain with responsibility for attending to her spiritual needs. He is not known to have had a see, but his being a bishop has nevertheless been taken to imply 'that he was envisaged as having more than private responsibilities'.[8] Liudhard worshipped with his queen in a church dedicated to St Martin, a saint with strong Frankish associations.[9] That he was not a mere literary creation is reinforced by the 'Liudhard medalet', a sixth-century gold Anglo-Saxon coin that bears the inscription 'LEVARDUS EPS'.[10] Liudhard's career is depicted in the Ecclesiastical History as

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[6] *Libellus Responsionum* §7, quoted in *HE* 1.27 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 88).

[7] Most recently Lambert, *Christians and Pagans*, 79–133, esp. 79–103, restated the traditional thesis for the demise of Christian practice in the south and east and its continuation in Wales. However, Lambert also made a case for the survival of Christianity in present day Cornwall and Devon, though he admits that the material and placename evidence attesting this survival is impossible to date with precision.

[8] Gameson, 'Augustine of Canterbury', 16.

[9] *HE* 1.26, 33 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 76, 114).

[10] P. Grierson, 'The Canterbury (St. Martin's) hoard of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon coin-ornaments', *British Numismatic Journal* 27 (1953), 39–51: 41: 'That it was minted in England, and presumably at

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analogous to Paulinus's, a bishop who flourished **[50]** a generation later. Roman by origin, Paulinus accompanied Æthelburh, Bertha's daughter, to the Northumbrian court of her husband Edwin. Like Liudhard, he arrived at the court without having a fixed see and served the queen as her personal chaplain. But here the similarity between the two ends, for Paulinus is said to have immediately applied himself to missionary work, and eventually ascended to the see of York.[11] It has been suggested that Liudhard was himself a missionary, albeit not a successful one. Arnold Angenendt saw him as inaugurating the *imperiale Missionsmodell*, whereby missionary bishops were sent to evangelise communities, initially without having a fixed see.[12] This pattern of episcopal appointment, however, is only attested later, with Willibrord and Boniface being two obvious examples. To see the *imperiale Missionsmodell* reflected in Liudhard is, therefore, a teleology. Both Angenendt and Lutz von Padberg believed that Liudhard was effectively an *Emissär des Merowingerkönigs*, whose preaching Æthelberht resisted, fearing that by receiving baptism at his hands he would open the door to Merovingian domination.[13] Their argument is of a piece with Henry Mayr-Harting's assertion that, like the Bulgars, the English preferred to be converted by a distant rather than adjacent power.[14] However, this **[51]** hypothesis is called into question by Ian Wood's convincing thesis that the Merovingian involvement in the mission was more extensive than had previously been thought.[15] Nicholas Higham and Barbara Yorke suggested on separate occasions that it was Liudhard's death (the date of which is unknown) which might have created a vacuum in the ecclesiastical leadership of south-east Britain which the Franks and Gregory sought to fill.[16] Attractive though this hypothesis is, it does not explain why it was necessary to send a mission from Rome rather than a replacement bishop.

The second bishop who is known by name, the Irish Dagán, is said to have personally met the missionaries.[17] He is likely to have hailed from Leinster, for his early medieval cult, which is well attested in hagiographical and annalistic texts, is centred around that province.[18] We also have two contemporary sources that mention him: a letter sent by Lawrence, Augustine's successor, to the senior clergy of Ireland and

Canterbury, seems scarcely open to doubt. . . That the "coin" was intended to be used as money is very doubtful'; S. C. Hawkes, J. M. Merrick and D. Metcalf, 'X-Ray fluorescent analysis of some dark age coins and jewellery', *Archeometry* 9 (1966), 98–138: 104–6, 120, 134; M. Werner, 'The Liudhard Medalet', *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (1992), 27–41.

[11] *HE* 2.9 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 162).

[12] A. Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe: Kaiser, Könige und Päpste als geistliche Patrone in der abendländischen Missionsgeschichte*, Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung 15 (Berlin, 1984), 194–6. *Idem*, 'The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons considered against the background of the early medieval mission', *Angli e sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare*. Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 32 (Spoleto, 1986), 747–81, 783–92.

[13] L. E. von Padberg, *Mission und Christianisierung: Formen und Folgen bei Angelsachsen und Franken im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1995), 56–8. The idea that Æthelberht preferred to accept Christianity from Rome in order to avoid subjection to the Merovingians has a long pedigree: J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), 29, 31, 45; Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, 63; B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), 28–9.

[14] H. Mayr-Harting, *Two Conversions to Christianity: The Bulgarians and the Anglo-Saxons*, The Stenton Lecture 1993 (Reading, 1994).

[15] I. N. Wood, 'The mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum* 69 (1994), 1–17.

[16] Higham, *Convert Kings*, 74–5; Yorke, *Conversion*, 125.

[17] On Dagán, see R. Flechner, 'Dagán, Columbanus and the Gregorian mission', *Peritia* 19 (2005), 65–90.

[18] *Ibid.*

Columbanus's letter to Gregory, where Dagán is referred to obliquely.[19] The former depicts Dagán as an obstinate bishop who insulted the missionaries by refusing to take food with them, a refusal that amounts to excommunication.[20] This behaviour can also be interpreted as a form of protest against what Bede believed was the missionaries' wish to extend their authority over the Irish church. Whatever the reason, Dagán's defiance suggests that the missionaries could not have relied solely on the status conferred on them by Rome for being treated with reverence by insular clerics.

It is here that we finally come to the British clergy. Two sources depict them as being just as obstinate as Dagán: one is Lawrence's letter and the other is Bede's famous account of the two successive meetings between Augustine and the *episcopi siue doctores proximae Brettonum prouinciae* 'bishops and teachers of the nearby British province' at Augustine's Oak. The second of these meetings is said to have been attended by no fewer than seven British bishops.[21] It took place, according to Bede, on the border between the Hwicce and the West Saxons, but it does not follow, of course, that the British bishops resided in that area. This meeting is pivotal for the retrospective justification that Bede gave for the mission to the Anglo-Saxons. According to the Ecclesiastical History, the British bishops refused to yield to the Roman missionaries on three central issues, one of which was preaching to the Anglo-Saxons. However, not all historians accept Bede's portrayal of the event, with some arguing that, in reality, the British made a contribution to the conversion of the *Angli* before the arrival of the missionaries.[22] It has also been argued **[52]** that the entire story of the meeting is fictional, being no more than a reworking of a tale that originated locally as an etiology of the name of Aust on the Severn crossing, spelled *æt Austin* in the late seventh century.[23] The story's factual core has been largely obscured, but despite its fanciful elements Bede's version may nevertheless preserve vestiges of a British episcopal resistance to the missionaries, a resistance that Bede depicted as irrational in line with his own narrative agenda.

From the site of Aust on the Severn, we continue our search eastwards and ask where else British bishops are attested. Our search will take us counter-clockwise from Northumbria, through the West Midlands, and finally to Kent. We begin with

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[19] *HE* 2.4 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 146); Columbanus, Letter 1 (ed. Walker, 6). Flechner, 'Dagán, Columbanus', 86–9.

[20] Flechner, 'Dagán, Columbanus', 74–7.

[21] *HE* 2.2 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 134–40).

[22] On Bede's depiction of the British and Irish see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Bede, the Irish and the Britons', *Celtica* 15 (1983), 42–52. A. T. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', in Beda Venerabilis*: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian,* ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. Mac Donald (Groningen, 1996), 31–59. On the possible British contribution to the conversion of certain communities of *Angli*, see R. Meens, 'A Background to Augustine's mission to Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), 5–17; I. N. Wood, 'Some historical re-identifications and the Christianization of Kent', in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. G. Armstrong and I. N. Wood (Brepols, 2000), 27–35; R. Meens, 'Questioning ritual purity: the influence of Gregory the Great's answers to Augustine's queries about childbirth, menstruation and sexuality', in *Saint Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. R. Gameson (Stroud, 1999), 174–86.

[23] P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, 600–800 (Cambridge, 1990), 78. According to Sims-Williams, the original etiological tale was elaborated upon by Welsh and English redactors, who exploited it for their contemporary rhetorical needs: 'the *Sitz im Leben* in which this story was told was no doubt the mutual excommunication about which we learn from Theodore's *Penitential* and from a letter written by Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury, as well as from Bede, and this background will have coloured it; nevertheless, the story would have strained credulity had the Welsh bishops been known to have preached to their neighbours across the Severn in a concerted manner'.

Northumbria, with a later but nevertheless credible attestation of two British bishops at the consecration of Chad as bishop of York between 664 and 666.[24] Their involvement in the consecration as well as the involvement of a simoniac bishop, Wine of Winchester, were grounds for Archbishop Theodore to demand in 669 that Chad step down and return the see of York to Wilfrid. That only British bishops could be found at such a relatively late date, suggests something about their prevalence. As we continue our search for British bishops we come to the West Midlands, in which two scholars in particular, Patrick Sims-Williams and Steven Bassett, have argued passionately for the presence of British Christians in that region on the eve of the missionaries' arrival.[25] The case has been made on two categories of evidence: changing burial practices in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries over a relatively short period (between the mid and late sixth century) and observations based on landscape archaeology. I shall take them in turn. Conversion to Christianity has been cited as a probable **[53]** cause for the transition from furnished to unfurnished graves in the West Midlands from the late sixth century.[26] Sims-Williams argued that 'the most attractive possibility is that the Hwicce and Magonsætan were converted in an unobtrusive and ultimately unmemorable way by the Britons among them'.[27] But for this hypothesis to hold, one must assume that the cessation of furnished burials cannot be attributed to other, not necessarily religious factors, which are known from other sites in both Britain and the continent.[28]

As for landscape archaeology, it has been argued that major British churches were set up in the West Midlands at some of the region's former Roman towns. In his analysis of the topographical evidence, Basset suggested that Worcester is the site most likely to have had a British see before 680, the year in which the Hwicce received their first Anglo-Saxon bishop. The bishop's seat, Basset claims, would have been the site of the church that later became known as St Helen's.[29] Yet he conceded that the

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[24] *HE* 3.28 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 316).

[25] Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 77–84. S. Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control', in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), 13–40.

[26] On the Anglo-Saxon presence in these areas see A. Meany, *A Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (1964). On the transition from furnished to unfurnished graves see Bassett, 'Church and Diocese', 16.

[27] Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 78–9. See the critique of this view in Yorke, *Conversion*, 120: 'the hypothesis is a difficult one to substantiate as it depends on negative evidence; on the one hand the lack of burial with gravegoods among the Anglo-Saxon settles at a time when this practice was continuing in eastern England, and, on the other, a failure by Bede to mention any major missionary campaign, though he may have felt the matter was covered by discussion of the kingdom of Mercia to which these western areas seem to have been politically subordinate'.

[28] For the latest assessment of this issue see A. Bayliss, J. Hines, K. H. Nielsen, G. McCormac and C. Scull, *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework* (London, 2013), 548–54, esp. 553. But see also the important contributions to the debate by H. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c.600–c.850*, BAR British Series, 261 (Oxford, 1997); G. Halsall, *Early Medieval Cemeteries: An Introduction to Burial Archaeology in the Post-Roman West* (Skelmorlie, 1995); *Idem*, 'Examining the Christianization of the region of Metz from archaeological sources (5th–7th centuries): problems, possibilities and implications for Anglo-Saxon England, in his *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul* (Leiden, 2010), 261–84; Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 59. Note also that Christian burial with grave-goods is known, for instance, from St Cuthbert's Shrine, the Prittlewell princely burial, and the female grave near Trumpington.

[29] Bassett, 'Church and Diocese', 20–6. St Helen's had at least a dozen churches subject to it, but the earliest date at which its control of these churches can be confirmed with certainty is the early twelfth century. However, if St Helen's would have controlled churches before the foundation of the Anglo-

existence of bishops cannot be securely proven for any of the churches covered by his study. The case for ecclesiastical **[54]** continuity from 'Celtic' to Anglo-Saxon times has also been made for sites in Wessex, like Sherborne and Glastonbury. However, the British phase of ecclesiastical activity can only be conjectured from later medieval hagiography devoted to asserting territorial claims.[30]

Finally, as our tour brings us eastwards into Kent, we find strong evidence for British Christianity around 596, but there are no definite attestations of bishoprics *per se*. The *Libellus responsionum*, a text that is essentially a reworking of correspondence between Pope Gregory and his emissary Augustine,[31] has often been cited as evidence for the continuity of British saints' cults in Kent, because it mentions the cult of a local saint, Sixtus.[32] The omission of Sixtus and his cult from Bede's text of the *Libellus* may be an attempt to suppress the memory of Christian worship in Kent before the missionaries' arrival.[33] The *Libellus* also refers to the observance of various rules of ritual purity which might have issued from the customs of the British church rather than the heathen Anglo-Saxons.[34] The cult of Sixtus, together with the rules of ritual purity and the unique pagan shrines attested in Gregory's letter to Mellitus, have been the focus of an important debate between Ian Wood and Rob Meens about the extent to which British Christianity might have influenced Anglo-Saxon pagan cults and even contributed to the conversion of some *Angli* before Augustine's arrival.[35] Meens believed that the customs depicted in the *Libellus* may not be pagan but local Christian customs that lingered in a morphed way from Roman times. However, Wood qualified this assertion, arguing that the customs in question were in fact pagan but 'Anglo-Saxon paganism was already modelled in part on Christianity, **[55]** even before Augustine arrived'.[36]

Archaeological and placename evidence for Christian observance in Kent has been summed up by Clare Stancliffe and Nicholas Brooks in two separate publications.[37]

Saxon cathedral, as Basset believes, then it is likely to have been run by a senior clergyman, thus increasing the likelihood of the presence of a British bishop there. The topographical analysis leading to this conclusion is too intricate to be rehearsed here in detail. Suffice it to say that although a good case can be argued for St Helen's having been controlled by a British bishop, it is by no means conclusive. Basset's topographical studies of other churches, like St Mary-De-Lodge at Gloucester and St Michael's at Lichfield, yielded ambiguous results.

[30] See R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (Leicester, 1997), 18–25, and references therein.

[31] The text is best known from a version that Bede incorporated into *HE* 1.27 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 78–102), but was also transmitted independently.

[32] I. N. Wood, 'Augustine's journey', *Canterbury Cathedral Chronicle* 92 (1998) 28–44: 34. On the identity of the martyr whose remains were venerated and the site of the cult see discussion in R. Sharpe, 'Martyrs and local saints in late antique Britain', in *Local saints and local churches in the early medieval West*, ed. R. Sharpe and A. Thacker (Oxford, 2002), 75–154: 124–7. Wood, 'Augustine and Aidan', 170, citing a personal comment by Nicholas Brooks, suggests that the placename Chich in Essex might derive from Sixtus and therefore attests the cult centre.

[33] As suggested by Wood, 'Augustine and Aidan', 170.

[34] On ritual purity in the *Libellus* see Meens, 'Questioning ritual purity: the influence of Gregory the Great's answers to Augustine's queries about childbirth, menstruation and sexuality', in *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. R. Gameson (Stroud, 1999), 174–86.

[35] See n 22 above.

[36] Wood, 'Some historical re-identifications', 30.

[37] C. Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', in *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. Gameson (Stroud, 1999), 107–151: 118. N. Brooks, *The early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (London, 1984), 17–20. The most recent monograph on

First there is the placename *eccles* (which derives from British *eclēs*) in the parish of Aylesford, on the site of a Roman villa where seventh-century Christian graves have also been found. Wood argues that it evidences that 'at least one Celtic ecclesiastical community survived in the Kentish kingdom'.[38] In East Kent a baptistery and Christian portable objects were found in the Roman shore fort at Richborough.[39] As for Canterbury itself, Brooks believed that there was continuity of Christian worship there from the fourth century until the arrival of the missionaries.[40] He drew attention to the early-medieval re-use of Roman Christian sites that respect the alignment of the Roman rather than the medieval street pattern of Canterbury, for example St Peter's which was built on the site of a Roman church. There also appears to be a coincidence of medieval extra-mural parish churches (like St Dunstan's, St Sepulchre, and perhaps St Paul's) with Roman cemeteries. Brooks's cautious assessment was that 'we should not therefore be surprised to find a hint that a small population of British and Christian origin may have survived in Canterbury at the beginning of the seventh century'.[41] When one considers the sum total of the evidence just mentioned, the case for continuity of British Christianity in Kent into the late sixth century is compelling, but it is impossible to assess what proportion of the British population there practiced Christianity.

By 601 Gregory was undoubtedly aware of the existence of British bishop somewhere in Britain. In the *Libellus responsionum*, the underlying correspondence of which dates to that year, Gregory gave Augustine authority over the bishops of the British, to instruct those who needed **[56]** instructing and to correct those who needed correcting.[42] Augustine's queries to Gregory were delivered by monks returning from Kent, who also gave a detailed report of the progress of the mission.[43] He would therefore have been well informed about the goings-on in Britain.

MISSION AS A QUESTION FOR CANON LAW

The possibility of an encounter with British bishops would have brought about the risk of violating canon law because the missionaries, four of whom were eventually consecrated bishops, could potentially have encroached on the jurisdictions of other bishops, thereby committing a grave canonical offence.[44] It may be significant that

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early Christianity in East Anglia, R. Hoggett, *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion* (Woodbridge, 2010), does not deal with the question of the survival of British Christianity in the region, though a passing comment on p. 13 suggests that the author believes it had been eradicated by the time of Augustine's arrival.

[38] Wood, 'Augustine's journey', 34.

[39] P. D. C. Brown, 'The Church at Richborough', *Britannia* 2 (1971), 225–31. C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London, 1981), 89, 125, 226, 129, 131–2.

[40] The case was first argued in 'The ecclesiastical topography of early medieval Canterbury', in *European Towns: their Archaeology and Early History*, ed. M. W. Barley (London, 1978), 487–98, and developed in his *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, 17–21.

[41] Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, 19–20.

[42] *Libellus Responsionum* §7, quoted in *HE* 1.27 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 88): *Brittaniarum uero omnes episcopos tuae fraternitati committimus, ut indocti doceantur, infirmi persuasione roborentur, peruersi auctoritate corrigantur.*

[43] According to Letter 11.48 to Queen Brunhild dated 22 June 601.

[44] See, for example: Apostolic Canons §§14, 35, Council of Nicaea (AD 325) §15, Council of Antioch (AD 341) §22, Council of Constantinople (AD 381) §2, Celestine I, Letter 4.5. For modern editions see, respectively, A. Strewe, ed., *Die Canonessammlung des Dionysius Exiguus in der ersten Redaktion* (Berlin, 1931), 1–10, 24–31, 44–52, 60–61; Celestine I, Letter 4, *Ad episcopos per Viennensem et*

Gregory preferred to appoint a monk rather than bishop as the head of the missionary expedition because, strictly speaking, as a monk Augustine would not have been in breach of canon law. Formerly prior of St Andrew's monastery in Rome, he was consecrated bishop only around 598 by *Germaniarum episcopi*.[45] An analogous case can be found in Gregory's choice to send Syriacus, an abbot, to engage in missionary work in Sardinia after it had apostatised.[46]

That Gregory would have been likely to take precautions against the violation of other bishops' territories is suggested by the extreme care that the papacy in his time took to prevent breaches of episcopal jurisdictions and consistently enforce canon law on this matter to the letter. For instance, the deposition of an infirm bishop was denied *quia uiuente episcopo, quem ab administratione officii sui non culpa sed aegritudo subducit, alium loco ipsius sacri nullomodo permittunt canones ordinari* 'for while the bishop is alive, and it is not his sin but his illness that removes him from the administration of his office, the sacred canons in no way allow another to be consecrated in his place'.[47] Breaches of canon law in such cases were not a mere formality, for gaining control over a diocese had far reaching practical implications, such as obtaining access to royal or aristocratic patronage, securing a source of income through **[57]** the provision of pastoral care and, above all, it meant that the bishop controlled land with its revenues. Gregory was acutely aware of these implications, which is why he ruled that, should illness compel a bishop to abdicate from his see and another be consecrated in his place, the sick bishop should continue to receive what was owed to him from the church until his death.[48] This ruling could act as a deterrent to potential usurpers.

From the perspective of canon law, the existence of British bishops would not, on its own, have posed an obstacle to the missionary enterprise unless the bishops controlled territorial jurisdictions on which the missionaries planned to found churches. There is every reason to believe that this was, in fact, the case in Britain, despite attempts by earlier generations of modern historians to argue that the British had no concept of territorial bishoprics. The once-prevalent belief that the concept of territorial bishoprics was alien to Celtic peoples, like the British and Irish, has now largely been refuted, along with other notions of Celtic Otherness, like a sublime 'Celtic spirituality' or an idiosyncratic 'Celtic Church'.[49] It has been countered by a

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Narbonensem prouincias, ed. P. Coustant, *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum. . . ab anno Christi 67 ad annum 440* (Paris, 1721), 1065–72.

[45] Letters 9.222, 8.29.

[46] Letters 4.23, 4.25, 4. 26, 4.27.

[47] Gregory I, Letter 13.5. Tr. Martyn, *Letters of Gregory*, 826–7.

[48] Letter 13.6 (Norberg, 1001).

[49] The concept of a 'Celtic Church' in the narrow sense has gradually gone out of use. Already in 1981 Kathleen Hughes questioned its validity in her 'The Celtic Church: is this a valid concept?', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 1 (1981), 1–20. A year later Wendy Davies remarked that, 'it is quite impossible to consider or compare it [i.e. the Welsh church] with the Irish church in any real sense, as is the common temptation. Romantic views of a Celtic church, spanning Celtic areas, with its own institutional structure and special brand of spirituality, have often been expressed, but have little to support them, especially with reference to Wales'. See her *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), 141. For a recent nuanced definition of 'Celtic Church' focused primarily on cultural, intellectual and doctrinal rather than organisational aspects see M. W. Herren and S. A. Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity: Britain and Ireland from the Fifth to the Tenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2002), 3–9, 104–6. Though lacking in centralised governing mechanisms or central authorities, Herren and Brown believe that British and Irish churches showed a similar respect to monastic figures, they shared

convinging case in favour of territorial dioceses in the early medieval Irish and British **[58]** churches.[50] In the island of Britain, with which this essay is concerned, we find both British and Irish bishops. Both kinds of bishops have been argued to have overseen territorial dioceses. Wendy Davies showed that the Llandaff charters describe early medieval Welsh bishops (the term 'Welsh' is applied here with caution to refer to the British living within the territory of present-day Wales) established in their episcopal sees (*ciuitates* in the charters) and governing territorial dioceses (*parrochiae*).[51] She was able to identify two places that may have been active episcopal sees as early as the sixth century—Bicknor, in present day Herefordshire, and Llandeilo Fawr is South Wales.[52] More recently Thomas Charles-Edwards has drawn attention to references to archbishops in Wales in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, one with jurisdiction over Dyfed and the other with jurisdiction over Gwynedd.[53] Although late for the period under discussion in the present essay, this may nevertheless furnish further evidence for the existence of a concept of territorial jurisdiction among the Britons in Wales, a concept that might have gone back to earlier times. Charles-Edwards has also restated the case for at least one Irish bishop, Colmán, controlling a territorial diocese in Northumbria.[54] He believes that the metropolitan status ascribed to Colmán in Stephen's Life of Wilfrid should be given

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a common literary culture, they were equally suspicious of outsiders (especially Romans) they were theologically indebted to Pelagian teachings, and they practiced certain common rites that distinguished them from Christians elsewhere, such as reckoning Easter according to their own calendars and practicing their own monastic tonsure. For an important caveat in detecting Pelagianism in Britain see Yorke, *Conversion*, 116: 'What have been seen as peculiarly 'Celtic' characteristics of asceticism, compatible with Pelagianism, can in fact be viewed as part of the wider monastic movement in western Europe in which western Britain and Ireland shared in the sixth century when many of their religious leaders moved between the two islands'. On the absence of any evidence for an independent or otherwise idiosyncratic Irish liturgy, see Y. Hen, 'The nature and character of the early Irish liturgy', in *L'Irlanda e gli irlandesi nell'alto medioevo*, Settimane di studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 57 (Spoleto, 2010), 353–77.

[50] The scholar most associated with the idea of the absence of territorial dioceses among the Irish is Kathleen Hughes, in her *The Church in Early Irish Society* (New York, 1966). The argument in favour of diocesan bishoprics in Ireland is impossible to summarize without digressing too much, so I shall offer instead two citations from C. Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland AD 600 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999), 168, 237, which conveniently epitomise his conclusions: '*paruchia* connotes a sphere of jurisdiction, in principle episcopal and territorially cohesive', and 'the significance of episcopal jurisdiction is underlined by the substantial annalistic data, which highlights in particular the existence of territorial spheres of authority'. Etchingham's study built on previous work by Sharpe, including 'Some problems concerning the organization of the church in early medieval Ireland', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 58–72, and 'Churches and communities in early medieval Ireland: towards a pastoral model' in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), 81–109.

[51] W. Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm: Studies in the Llandaff Charters* (London, 1978), esp. 146. Recently, David Petts went as far as to draw a map of 'probable fifth- to seventh-century dioceses in Wales', though he admits that the evidence for their existence at an early date is patchy. To my mind his contention that '*sacerdos*', which is attested in Welsh inscriptions, and *episcopus*, which is not, are interchangeable, leads him to overstate the evidence. D. Petts, *The Early Medieval Church in Wales* (Stroud, 2009), 161, 4.

[52] Davies, *Microcosm*, 158. The evidence is largely based on extrapolations from later material or on early grants of land in territories where sees are attested with certainty only later, sometimes only the ninth or tenth centuries, like mid sixth-century grants to the kingdom of Ergyng, within which Bicknor is located. See Davies, *Microcosm*, 152.

[53] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 401, 593. The evidence relates to Asser's kinsman Nobis and to Elfoddw, described in his obit in Annales Cambriae AD 809 as 'archbishop of the land of Gwynedd'.

[54] T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), 430–1.

credence because it **[59]** is consistent with the way in which Irish bishops are portrayed in the Irish collection of canon law, the *Hibernensis*.[55]

Having considered the likelihood for an encounter with bishops governing territorial dioceses, let us now turn to a text from Gregory's correspondence which may reveal something about his attitude towards the possibility of such an encounter, or at the very least an encounter with rival churches in Britain. This is a text that received a good deal of scholarly attention because it mentions a motive for sending the mission. For present purposes it will be used as evidence for Gregory's engagement with canon law as a means for legitimising the mission. The text occurs in two of Gregory's letters from July 596: one (letter 6.51, dated 23 July) to Theoderic II and Theodebert II, kings of Burgundy and Austrasia, respectively, and the other (letter 6.60, dated 23 July 596) to their grandmother, Brunhild, who was at that time acting regent on their behalf. Both letters were sent as part of Gregory's preparation for the mission. The text, cited here from the first letter, reads as follows:

> [6.51] Atque ideo peruenit ad nos Anglorum gentem ad fidem christianam deo miserante desideranter uelle conuerti sed sacerdotes e uicino neglegere et desideria eorum cessare sua adhortatione succendere. Ob hoc igitur Augustinum seruum dei praesentium portitorem, cuius zelum et studium bene nobis est cognitum, cum aliis seruis dei illic praeuidimus dirigendum. Quibus etiam iniunximus ut aliquos se cum e uicino debeant presbyteros ducere, cum quibus eorum possint mentes agnoscere et uoluntates admonitione sua, quantum Deus donauerit, adiuuare. In qua re ut efficaces ualeant atque idonei apparere, excellentiam uestram salutantes paterna caritate, quaesumus ut hi quos direximus fauoris uestri inuenire gratiam mereantur.

> 'And thus it has come to our attention that the *gens* of the English earnestly desire to be converted to the Christian faith, with god's compassion, but that the priests *e uicino* neglect them, and cease to inflame their demand with their encouragement. And so, we have decided for this reason that Augustine, a monk who bears this letter, and whose zeal and earnestness is well known to us, should be sent there with other monks. We have also ordered that they should take some priests with them *e uicino*, through whom they might understand their thoughts, and whose advice might help them to get what they want, whatever God should give them. In this matter, so that they can appear efficient and suitable, we greet your excellencies with a father's love, and request that those whom we have sent might deserve to discover the grace of your favour'.[56]

How should this text be interpreted? It can, of course, be understood at face value. But it is nevertheless possible that certain expressions in **[60]** the letter were meant to invoke associations from beyond the letter itself. What is especially of interest is the possibility that the text—like other letters from the Register—employs legalistic speak, and even terminology drawn from canon law.[57] However, it must also be borne

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[55] *Vita Wilfridi* § 10. For an analysis of the Irish normative sources concerning bishops see Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 47–238; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 258–65.
[56] Tr. Martyn.
[57] For present purposes Dag Norberg's classification of the Register's letters into three separate categories is upheld: the first and largest of his categories consists of letters dealing with routine

in mind that, with the exception of the bible, the Register rarely cites any source verbatim, so instead of verbatim citations from canon law, we ought rather to expect allusions.[58]

There are two aspects in particular from the text above that invite attention. The first is the invitation by the English and the second is the expression *e vicino*. I shall take them in turn. The invitation gives a clear and simple reason for the mission to Kent: the pope was responding to a call from the *gens Anglorum* (though no specific representative thereof is mentioned) who asked to be converted. But one may read deeper into this. It is possible, for example, that by stressing that the mission was sent by invitation, Gregory meant to echo a letter by an earlier pope, Celestine, who was the first to dispatch a mission from Rome, albeit to a Christian community.[59] This was the mission of Palladius to Ireland in 431. In his fourth letter, Celestine laid down the rule that no bishop should be sent to a community unwilling to receive him.[60] In issuing this ruling the pope might have been following the second Canon of the Council of Constantinople (381), which forbade a bishop from ministering in another diocese unless he was invited.[61] Celestine's letter further stipulated that the *plebs* 'people' are the ones who should ask for the bishop. There are, therefore, certain parallels with Gregory's letter, but direct dependence is impossible to prove. However, one may speculate that by echoing a precedent set by Celestine, Gregory could **[61]** portray the mission to Britain as consistent with papal policy of old and therefore also with canon law, because Celestine's letter carried unequivocal canonical authority.

The second aspect to be considered, the expression *e uicino*, is more challenging. Gregory uses this expression—literally meaning 'from the neighbourhood'—to refer both to priests who failed to convert the English and priests whom Augustine was instructed to take with him from Frankish Gaul. In an influential study of the mission Ian Wood suggested that the priests who failed the English need not necessarily have been British, as previous historians supposed, but could have been Frankish.[62] For one could argue that the Merovingian kingdoms, especially western Austrasia, could be considered to neighbour Kent even more closely, geographically speaking, than Wales neighbours Kent. However, just because the same expression is used twice, it does not follow that the priests who failed the English and the priests whom Gregory asked Augustine to take with him, must be one and the same. An alternative interpretation,

administrative business, which were written by the papal *notarii*, the second comprises administrative letters dealing with exceptional matters that needed the pope's approval, and the third and smallest class of letters is made up of Gregory's personal correspondence. Letters belonging to the first category, like 6.51 and 6.60, may exhibit recurrent chancery formulae, some of legal flavour. See D. Norberg, 'Qui a composé les lettres de saint Grégoire le Grand?' *Studi Medievali* 21 (1980), 1–17 ; *Idem*, 'Style personnel et style administratif dans le *registrum epistularum* de saint Grégoire le grand', in *Grégoire le grand*, ed. J. Fontaine, R. Gillet, and S. Pellistrandi (Paris, 1986), 489–97. Norberg's argument is based partly on content and partly on morphological criteria, namely an analysis of *clausulae* patterns. On the latter see also K. Brazzeli, *The Clausulae in the Works of Gregory the Great* (Washington, 1939).

[58] Norberg, *Gregorii Magni Registrum*, 1121.

[59] On the significance of this letter to laying down a rule for dispatching bishops to foreign communities, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), 205.

[60] Letter 4.5: *Nullus invitis detur episcopus. Cleri, plebis et ordinis, consensus ac desiderium requiratur.*

[61] Ed. Strewe, *Die Canonessammlung des Dionysius*, 60–61.

[62] Wood, 'The mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', 8.

which is preferred here, is that it was the British *sacerdotes e uicino* who, according to Gregory, had failed the English and, as a consequence, he advised Augustine that he ought to take other priests *e uicino* with him, meaning specifically priests from Francia.

But why would Gregory choose to be so ambiguous and imprecise? Why did he not spell out clearly who he meant by the vague expression 'priests *e vicino*'? The explanation proposed here is that the term '*uicinus*' was used in a technical canonical sense in order to convey a legal concept that was more important than the actual identity of the priests. The noun *uicinitas* (and variants thereof) occurs frequently in late antique synodal acta. It is often used to designate a sphere of vicinity within which clerics from one diocese are permitted—in special circumstances—to interfere in the affairs of another, adjacent diocese. One of the earliest attestations of this usage is found in the council of Serdica of 343, where the noun can be found several times.[63] There are a number of ways in which canon law allows clerics *e uicino* to intervene in neighbouring dioceses. By way of illustration, I shall give four examples. Canon 8 of the Council of Carthage of 390 stipulated that a priest who had been excommunicated was entitled to appeal to *uicini episcopi* who **[62]** had the power to reinstate him.[64] The fifth canon of the Council of Riez of 439 decreed that only a bishop of a *uicina* church was allowed to act as temporary replacement for a see that lost its bishop.[65] Bishops who are *uicini* could even be involved in selling property belonging to neighbouring dioceses, according to canon 7 of the Council of Agde of 506.[66] And an early African canon from the council in Mila (in present day Algeria) held in 402, has this to say:[67]

> Placuit, ut quicunque neglegunt loca ad suam cathedram pertinentia in catholicam unitatem lucrari, conueniantur a diligentibus uicinis episcopis, ut id agere non morentur; quod si intra sex menses a die conuentionis non effecerint, qui potuerit eas lucrari ad ipsum pertineant.

> 'It behooves that the ones neglecting to win over to catholic unity the churches pertaining to their see, should be summoned by their *uicini episcopi*, in order that they do not delay doing so; for if they will not have accomplished this within six months from the day of being summoned, the [churches] will belong to him, who will be able to win them over'.

Thus, according to this canon, *uicini episcopi* have the right, or even the obligation to call neighbouring clerics to order if the latter neglect their duty of converting churches from heresy (in this case Pelagianism) to orthodoxy. If the neglect persists, those

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[63] The Latin and Greek versions of the canons (there is a dispute as to which of the surviving versions preceded the other) were edited and translated by H. Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica* (Oxford, 2002), 212–55. For a discussion of some of the occurrences of the term *uicinitas* see pp. 10, 147, 151–3, 162, 182, 194, 196, 199.

[64] *Concilium Carthaginense*, ed. C. Munier, *Conciliae Africae 345–525*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 149 (Turnhout, 1974), 16.

[65] *Concilium Regense*, ed. C. Munier, *Conciliae Galliae 314–506*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 148 (Turnhout, 1963), 69.

[66] *Concilium Agathense*, ed. C. Munier, *Conciliae Galliae 314–506*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 148 (Turnhout, 1963), 195.

[67] *Concilium Africanum in Mileuitana urbe habitum* §24, ed. C. Munier, *Conciliae Africae 345–525*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 149 (Turnhout, 1974), 368.

bishops who are *uicini* may take over the churches (*loca*) that remained heretical. In other words, according to Mila and the other councils mentioned, in certain circumstances bishops who are *uicini* are allowed to intrude on the jurisdiction of other bishops. This was no small matter, for a bishop's encroachment on the diocese of another was—under ordinary circumstances—considered to be a serious canonical offence.[68]

The canon from the Council of Mila is of special interest for its concern with conversion (albeit from heresy), which would have made it a convenient precedent for legitimising a mission. It is likely to have been known to Gregory because it is cited in the second redaction of the *Dionysiana*,[69] which was made in Rome in the sixth century. This version was incorporated into the *Hispana* and *Cresconius*'s *Concordia Canonum*, and so clearly circulated widely not only in Rome but throughout Italy, **[63]** Spain, and elsewhere in Europe where these influential collections were transmitted.[70] Gregory's choice of the term *uicinus* in the letters to Brunhild and her grandsons may well have been meant to invoke its use in the canon from Mila (as well as other councils) because by suggesting that certain clerics were not performing their duty of preaching and converting (although not from heresy as in the original context of the Mila canon, but from paganism) the pope could have cleared the path for neighbouring clerics to legitimately intervene.

There are indeed further examples from Gregory's Register which exhibit the use of *uicinus* in what appears to be a canonical sense. The best example is letter 2.35 to Felix, bishop of Agropoli near Salerno, dated July 592. The letter concerns the churches of Velia, Buxentum and Blanda, which should have been served by their own bishop, but were not. The letter recognises that, nominally at least, the churches were not within Felix's diocese but in *dioceseos earum* 'their dioceses'. Nevertheless, Felix is reminded that these churches *tibi in uicino sunt constitutae* 'are situated in your neighbourhood' and is therefore urged to see to it that their inmates live canonically and deacons are ordained. Finally, the bishop is admonished that he will be held personally responsible for any transgressions on the part of these churches. Another example, also from July 592, concerns the churches of Cumae and Misenum, which exercised *uicinitas* in relation to one another.[71] A papal letter gave Benenatus, bishop of Misenum near Naples, control over Cumae upon the death of its bishop. Yet a third letter from the same month gives bishop John of Velletri in Lazio control over dioceses that were ravaged by the Lombards and lost their bishops. Consequently, so the letter goes, *hoc nostro sedit cordi consilium ut uicinis eas mandaremus pontificibus gubernandas* 'we are resolved in our heart to entrust their government to neighbouring bishops'.[72] The foregoing were but three examples taken from a single month in 592. In all three examples other words could have been used to express spatial proximity, like the adverbs *iuxta* or *proxime*, but *uicinitas* (or variants) was preferred because—I would argue—it conveyed the desired technical canonical sense.

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[68] See note 44 above.

[69] *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844–64), vol. 67 col. 220C.

[70] On transmission see C. Munier, ed., *Conciliae Africae 345–525*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 149 (Turnhout, 1974), 360; L. Fowler-Magerl, *Clavis Canonum: Selected Canon Law Collections Before 1140* (Hannover, 2005), pp. 29–33, 39–42..

[71] Letter 2.37: *et temporis qualitas et uicinitas nos locorum inuitat ut Cumanam atque Misenatium uninre debeamus ecclesias.*

[72] Letter 2.42. Tr. Martyn, *Letters of Gregory*, 221.

Clerics from Frankish Gaul, like Wood suggested, could easily have qualified as *uicini* with respect to Kent because of its relative proximity to western Austrasia (and indeed Augustine was eventually consecrated **[64]** bishop in Gaul, probably in Arles, and by so doing acquired a Frankish association himself).[73] The distance from Buxentum to Agropoli is approximately 70 km, a little longer even than the distance from Calais to Canterbury, which is approximately 65 km. Since, as we have seen, the first pair was related by *uicinitas*, then the latter pair could also have been. The use of *uicinus*/*uicinitas* in the letters to Brunhild and her grandsons concerning the mission may suggest that Rome was conscious that the missionaries were heading for a land already possessed of a church, albeit one that could be presented as not fulfilling its duty of converting as diligently as expected.

<p style="text-align:center">UNWELCOME NEIGHBOURS OR UNWELCOMING NEIGHBOURS?</p>

By way of conclusion it may be said that despite good evidence for the practice of Christianity in Kent in the late sixth century, no compelling case can be made for the presence of British bishops governing territorial dioceses east of the Severn. This is not to say that there were none or that Gregory did not believe that there were any, but merely that the material evidence is inconclusive and the documentary record is silent. In certain cases the silence may be deliberate, as suggested by Bede's omission of the reference to the cult of Sixtus from his Ecclesiastical History's version of the *Libellus Responsionum*. In reality the British may have been more active than our sources let on. As Wood writes: 'The British church was, it seems, rather more in evidence in the east of England in Augustine's day than Bede admits. . . further west and further north the evidence for the British church surviving, and even aiding in the christianisation of the English, is yet stronger'.[74]

It is clear that the more widespread the mission was about to become and the larger the number of dioceses that the missionaries were expected to establish (twenty-four in total according to the idealised plan set out in Gregory's letter 11.39), the greater the risk that the missionaries would encroach on the jurisdictions of others. Given the papacy's concern with safeguarding the integrity of episcopal jurisdictions, Gregory might have preferred to take all necessary precautions to ensure—formally at least— that canon law would be observed. I have already discussed above the possibility that the papacy attempted to legitimise the mission by invoking canons that allowed bishops from one diocese to interfere in the affairs of another *uicina* diocese and the significance of Augustine's being a monk rather than **[65]** bishop at the time of his appointment. But, of course, none of these precautionary measures (if this is indeed what they were) would have convinced British clerics that the Roman missionaries were entitled—legally or otherwise—to set up churches on their lands. Indeed, neither contemporary nor later medieval accounts presume to depict insular bishops warmly welcoming the the missionaries, but quite the contrary: both the resistance by British bishops at Augustine's Oak (the legend-like vestiges of which are preserved by Bede) and Dagán's outright excommunication of the missionaries (recorded in Lawrence's

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[73] Wood, 'The mission', 8. Obviously Arles is nowhere near Kent, but Augustine's possible consecration there reinforces the Frankish link all the same.

[74] I. N. Wood, 'Augustine and Aidan: bureaucrat and charismatic?', in *L'Église et la Mission au VIe siècle: La mission d'Augustin de Cantorbéry et les Églises de Gaule sous l'impulsion de Grégoire le Grand*, ed. C. De Dreuille (Paris, 2000), 148–80, at 170.

letter to the Irish senior clergy), seem to offer a more probable scenario for what an encounter between the missionaries and locally-established bishops must have looked like. Bede's portrayal of the British clergy as schismatic and quasi-heretical glosses over the almost inevitable sense of threat that the British would have felt as a consequence of the missionaries' arrival and the risk that the foreign presence would eventually lead to the dispossession of the locally-established clergy, be it British or (later) Irish, as indeed happened under Wilfrid at the latest. When viewed from this perspective, the story of the mission to Kent is far from a story about the preaching of Christian orthodoxy to the uninitiated, the establishment of an Anglo-Saxon church *e nihilo* or the prefigured triumph of the Roman Easter, but about forceful dispossession legitimised by canon law and dressed up in righteous rhetoric whose purpose it was to silence potential contemporary critics and pull the wool over the eyes of future commentators.

[Page numbers from the published script are given in square brackets]