

2000

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Recommended Citation

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THE BAPTISM OF EDWIN, KING OF NORTHUMBRIA: A NEW ANALYSIS OF THE BRITISH TRADITION

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SINCE THE NINTH CENTURY, at the latest, two versions of Edwin's baptism have existed. The more familiar one, found in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the Anonymous *Vita Gregorii*, claims that Edwin was baptized by Paulinus, a member of the papal mission.¹ The British sources, however, give a different version of events. The *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* record that it was Rhun, son of Urien, who was the baptizer.² An attempt to assess the validity of the British claim is critical because it has important ramifications in the relationship between Northumbria and the Kingdom of Rheged in the early seventh century. If it can be argued that there is any truth to the British tradition, no matter how skewed this has become, then it would be possible to demonstrate political ties between the two kingdoms in this early period.

* I am grateful to Ian Wood and Joseph Lynch for their comments on earlier drafts of the article.

¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History [HE]*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), II, 14; *V(ita) G(regorii)*, in *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Lawrence, Kansas, 1968), pp. 14–15.

² 'Eadguin vero in sequenti pasca baptismum suscepit et duodecim milia hominum baptizati sunt cum eo. Si quis scire voluerit quis oes baptizavit Rum map Urbgen baptizavit eos...' (Edwin was baptized at the Easter following, and twelve thousand men were baptized with him. If anyone wants to know who baptized them Rhun son of Urien baptized them). *H(istoria) B(rittonum)* in *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. John Morris (1980), pp. 9–43, 60–84 (pp. 38, 79); *A(nnales) C(ambriae)* in *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. John Morris (1980), pp. 45–59, 85–91 (pp. 46, 86). For information on the *Historia Brittonum* see Nora Chadwick, 'The Conversion of Northumbria: A Comparison of Sources', in *Celt and Saxon*, ed. Nora Chadwick (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 138–66; David Dumville, 'The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Arthurian Literature*, VI (1986), 1–26; idem, 'On the North British Section of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Welsh Historical Review [WHR]*, VIII (1976–77), 345–54; idem, 'Some Aspects of the Chronology of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, XXV (1972–74), 439–45; Kenneth Jackson, 'On the Northern British Section in Nennius', in Chadwick, *Celt and Saxon*, pp. 20–62. For the *Annales Cambriae* see Nora Chadwick, 'Early Culture and Learning in North Wales', in *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 29–120, at pp. 46–65; David Dumville, 'The Welsh Latin Annals', *Studia Celtica*, XII–XIII (1977–78), 461–67; Kathleen Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin Chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and Related Texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LIX (1973), 238–58; Kathleen Hughes, 'The A-Text of the *Annales Cambriae*', in *Celtic Britain in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Dumville (Woodbridge, 1980), pp. 86–100.

Assessment of the British information is complicated by the fact that those documents in their present form are later than the Anglo-Saxon sources.³ Analysis of the *Annales Cambriae* and the *Historia Brittonum* has shown that neither is dependent upon the other, though each used similar source material.⁴ This means that the Rhun–Edwin narrative must have been recorded in material produced sometime before 829–30 when the *Historia Brittonum* was compiled. Dumville and Hughes have argued for the possible existence of northern British annals of the seventh or early eighth century which were later incorporated into the *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae*.⁵ Therefore, it is possible that from the late seventh or early eighth century there was a British tradition that Rhun was somehow involved in the conversion of Edwin.

Instead of determining when and why the Rhun–Edwin link might have been created, the first step in analysing the contradictory traditions is to see whether it can be logically argued that Rhun might have participated in Edwin's baptism. Obviously, if it can be proved that it is highly unlikely that Rhun was present, the British tradition must have been created sometime after the event and the contemporary dating can be ruled out.

At present there are two major theories which acknowledge that the British documents may be based upon early material and attempt to solve the discrepancy between the contradictory traditions. Nora Chadwick argued for two separate baptismal ceremonies; the first performed by Rhun while Edwin was in exile, the second by Paulinus after Edwin's assumption of power in Northumbria.⁶ She claimed that owing to the conflict between the British and Roman Churches over the Celtic baptismal ceremony, Paulinus might have insisted that Edwin be rebaptized.⁷

Chadwick's theory, however, suffers from two major problems. First, the letters from Pope Boniface to Edwin and his queen, written after Edwin's assumption of power, clearly indicate that Edwin was not a Christian at that time.⁸ As there were papal missionaries in residence at the court, the papacy had access to accurate information about Edwin and the conversion of his kingdom. Boniface specifically mentions that he had been in communication with messengers who had come to report the conversion of Eadbald of Kent, Edwin's brother-in-law, and that he had inquired about the situation in Northumbria.⁹ Certainly, if the issue was not that

³ The *Historia Brittonum* can be internally dated to c. 829–30 (Dumville, *Arthurian Literature*, vi, 4–5). The *Annales Cambriae* is from the tenth century (Hughes, *PBA*, lix, 233–34). The *Vita Gregorii* was finished early in the eighth century and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* in the 730s (Colgrave, *Life of Gregory the Great*, pp. 45–49; Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 263–67).

⁴ Dumville, *Arthurian Literature*, vi, 14–15; Hughes, *PBA*, lix, 238–40.

⁵ While both agree on the existence of possible early material which was incorporated into later sources, they differ on the actual transmission of this information. Dumville, *Arthurian Literature*, vi, 14–15, 19; Hughes, *PBA*, lix, 237–40.

⁶ Chadwick, *Celt and Saxon*, pp. 164–65. See also Alfred Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80–1000* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 22–23. Higham, although agreeing that evidence for two baptisms is slim, does argue that it would have been logical for Edwin to accept Christianity while in exile. N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 149–52.

⁷ Chadwick, *Celt and Saxon*, p. 164. See also Michael Richter, 'Practical Aspects of the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons', in *Irland und die Christenheit*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 365–66.

⁸ Bede, *HE*, ii, 10–11. For discussion of these letters see Peter Hunter Blair, 'The Letters of Pope Boniface V and the Mission of Paulinus to Northumbria', in *England Before the Conquest*, ed. P. Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 8–13 and D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (repr., 1992), pp. 38–41.

⁹ Bede, *HE*, ii, 11.

Edwin was pagan, but that he was following perceived heretical practices of the British Church, this would have been made clear in the papal letters. Those letters also give no indication that Edwin had apostatized and that the Pope was urging him to return to the faith. Even if this had been the case, Edwin would not have needed to be rebaptized.

A second difficulty is the apparent confusion over the orthodoxy of rebaptism.¹⁰ Officially rebaptism had been declared heretical.¹¹ The *Penitential of Theodore* lists penances for those who intentionally have been baptized twice.¹² While there are four canons in the *Penitential* requiring rebaptism for those who have been baptized by a heretic or by a pagan, in two cases the compiler of the *Penitential* has added qualifying statements that rebaptism in these cases is not in agreement with synodical decrees or papal rulings.¹³

On the other hand, there are a few recorded instances of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics rebaptizing. Bede reports that John of Beverley rebaptized Herebald because his original baptism had been performed by a man who did not know the ceremony.¹⁴ A letter from Pope Zacharias to Boniface in 746 contains the information that Boniface rebaptized Christians who had been baptized by a priest who garbled the ceremony.¹⁵ The Pope instructs Boniface not to do this, if a mistake was made in the baptismal ceremony owing to ignorance, or if it was performed by a heretic. The fact that Boniface believed rebaptism was acceptable suggests that at least portions of the Anglo-Saxon Church also agreed with this idea.

However, even with the confusion over the orthodoxy of rebaptism in the Anglo-Saxon Church, it must be remembered that Paulinus had been trained in Rome and would have been well aware of the synodical decrees on this issue. It seems likely that Paulinus would not have demanded that Edwin be rebaptized. Therefore, the unorthodox status of rebaptism combined with the solid evidence of the papal letters means that there appears to be no support for Chadwick's claim that Edwin, while in exile, had accepted Christianity and had been baptized by Rhun.

Another major theory, supported by Jackson, is that while Edwin was only baptized once, both Rhun and Paulinus officiated at the ceremony.¹⁶ In this line of argument, the absence of Rhun from Bede's *History* and the Whitby *Vita Gregorii* can be explained by the focus of these works. The Whitby monk and Bede were interested in the papal mission, not missionary efforts by the British. Therefore, while the British sources have focused on Rhun, the Anglo-Saxon sources recorded Paulinus' work. This explains why the sources present apparently contradictory traditions.

¹⁰ Sarah Foot, "'By Water in the Spirit': The Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England", in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 189–90.

¹¹ Constantinople (381), 7; Arles (314), 8.

¹² Theodore, *Penitential*, in *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Ueberlieferungsformen*, ed. P. W. Finsterwalder (Weimar, 1929), pp. 285–334, I, 10.1–2; translation available in *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, ed. J. T. McNeill and Helen Gamer (repr. New York, 1990), pp. 179–215.

¹³ Theodore, *Penitential*, I, 5.6 and II, 9.3 (heretic); I, 9.12 and II, 2.13 (pagan). Compiler's comments on I, 5.6 (heretic); I, 9.12 (pagan).

¹⁴ Bede, *HE*, v, 6.

¹⁵ Boniface, *Epistolae*, in *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangel, *MGH, Epistolae Selectae*, I (Berlin, 1916), *eps.* 68.

¹⁶ Jackson, in Chadwick, *Celt and Saxon*, p. 33.

There are also difficulties with this theory. The first is whether Rhun and Paulinus would have agreed to be co-baptizers. It must be remembered that there were areas of disagreement between the Roman and British baptism ceremonies.¹⁷ Because of the lack of evidence regarding the British liturgy, it is difficult to determine what the Roman clerics disagreed with. McKillop has attempted to piece together a possible Romano-British baptismal liturgy based upon known liturgies of the fourth and fifth centuries and writings with a British association.¹⁸ From this analysis she points out that the British liturgy may not have included the exorcism of the candidate before baptism nor the laying on of hands by the bishop after the ceremony.¹⁹ Both of these could have been considered serious omissions by the Roman clerics. However, the scarcity of material precludes a definitive reconstruction of the British baptismal liturgy. Therefore, while it is possible that Rhun and Paulinus were co-baptizers at Edwin's baptism, the problem of the different liturgies should not be overlooked.

A more serious issue is whether or not Rhun was a cleric. If Rhun was ruling Rheged in any capacity, it is not reasonable to assume that he was a cleric. By this time in Ireland there was a developed tradition of kings retiring and becoming monks.²⁰ Whilst Gildas does include the information that Maelgwn of Gwynedd abdicated his throne to enter a monastery, there is not sufficient evidence to demonstrate whether this was a popular practice in the British kingdoms.²¹ However, even if Rhun had decided to give up his throne and assume monastic vows, this does not mean that he would have been involved in the conversion of Northumbria. Usually kings retired to monasteries or went on pilgrimages. They did not participate in active pastoral care. Therefore, although it is possible that Rhun ruled Rheged and then retired to become a cleric, it does not seem very probable that had this been the case he would have participated as co-baptizer in Edwin's baptism.

If Rhun was only connected to the ruling family of Rheged, he certainly could have been a cleric. Rhun did have children, but with the continuing practice of clerical marriage in the early medieval period, that would not exclude him from the priesthood. If this was the case, he could technically have participated in the ceremony. However, the serious problem of co-baptizers from different traditions must be kept in mind.

¹⁷ For information on baptismal liturgies and baptism see Henry Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology and Drama* (1985), pp. 201–53; M.W. Pepperdine, 'Baptism in the Early British and Irish Churches', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 22 (1955), 110–23; Stevenson, 'Introduction', in F.W. Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church*, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. liii–liv; Charles Thomas, 'Baptismal Places: 600–800', in *People and Places in Northern Europe*, ed. Ian Wood and Niels Lund (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 15–24; F.W. Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church*, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 64–67.

¹⁸ Sybil McKillop, 'A Romano-British Baptismal Liturgy?', in *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland*, ed. Susan Pearce (Oxford, 1982), pp. 35–48.

¹⁹ McKillop, in Pearce, *The Early Church*, pp. 40–44. Stevenson, in Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual*, pp. liii–liv points out the possibility that the episcopal confirmation of the baptismal candidate may not have been included in the ceremony, but is silent on the exorcism issue.

²⁰ Clare Stancliffe, 'Kings Who Opted Out', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. Patrick Wormald and others (Oxford, 1983), pp. 154–76.

²¹ Stancliffe, in Wormald, *Ideal and Reality*, p. 161.

A possibility which most historians have not examined in any depth is that Rhun was not baptizer, but Edwin's sponsor/godfather.²² By the seventh century a sponsor in the baptism ceremony was the norm.²³ The choice of sponsor was important because, as in a marriage alliance, the godfather and godson, along with their families, were joined in a type of kinship.²⁴ Although there was also a parent-child relationship established between the baptizer and the baptized, stronger social ties and expectations were involved in the spiritual kinship surrounding godparentage.²⁵ Both from the viewpoint of Northumbria and Rheged, the spiritual kinship involved in sponsorship may have been viewed as a positive political move binding the royal families in a closer relationship than if Rhun had acted as co-baptizer, if he was a cleric. In addition, it is much easier to picture Rhun acting as godfather than trying to resolve how two clerics from two different traditions were able to perform one ceremony of baptism.

Evidence from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms demonstrates that kings were often instrumental, or at least involved, in the conversion of other kings.²⁶ Acting as sponsor at the baptism of a king had political implications since the tie created between the godfather and godson would hopefully extend into the political sphere.²⁷ It could also demonstrate the superior power of a king as overlord, though this would not have been the case between Rhun and Edwin.²⁸ Aethelberht of Kent was involved in the conversions of the East Anglian King Raedwald and Saeberht of Essex.²⁹ Oswiu is reported as influencing Peadar of Mercia and Sigiberht of Essex to accept Christianity.³⁰ Oswald, Wulfhere of Mercia and Aethelwald of East Anglia are specifically mentioned as sponsors of Cynegils of Wessex, Aethelwald of Sussex, and Swidhelm of Essex, respectively.³¹

Not only did Edwin have the example of Aethelberht of Kent before him, but it should be noted that soon after Edwin's conversion, Bede reports that he was instrumental in the conversion of the East Anglian King Eorpwald, though he is not specifically identified as sponsor.³² This would suggest that he was well aware of the possible

²² Smyth, while supporting the possibility of Edwin undergoing two baptisms, suggested in passing that Rhun's presence in the British sources could indicate only that Edwin was baptized at the Rheged court with Rhun possibly acting as sponsor. However, he offers no support for this claim. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, pp. 22–23.

²³ Joseph Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 242–44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 169–92; Joseph Lynch, 'Spiritale Vinculum: The Vocabulary of Spiritual Kinship in Early Medieval Europe', in *Religion, Culture and Society in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Noble and John Contreni (Kalamazoo, 1987), pp. 181–83.

²⁵ Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, pp. 165–69; Lynch, in Noble and Contreni, *Religion, Culture and Society*, pp. 189–94.

²⁶ Arnold Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufer: Kaiser, Könige und Päpste als Geistliche Patrone in der Abendländischen Missionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1984), pp. 181–86; William Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1970), pp. 157–73.

²⁷ Arnold Angenendt, 'The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons Considered Against the Background of the Early Medieval Mission', in *Angli e Sassoni al di qua e al di là del Mare*, II (Spoleto, 1986), 756–61, 765–66; James Campbell, 'Observations on the Conversion of England', in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, ed. James Campbell (1986), pp. 69–84; Chaney, *Cult of Kingship*, pp. 168–74.

²⁸ Angenendt, *Angli e Sassoni*, II, 756–61.

²⁹ Bede, *HE*, II, 3, 15.

³⁰ Bede, *HE*, III, 21–22.

³¹ Oswald (Bede, *HE*, III, 7; *ASC*, 635), Wulfhere of Mercia (Bede, *HE*, IV, 13; *ASC*, 661); Aethelwald of East Anglia (Bede, *HE*, III, 22).

³² Bede, *HE*, II, 15.

political implications of his own baptism. It is not unreasonable to assume that he would have wanted to use the occasion to form or cement political ties through his choice of godfather.

Edwin had few options available for a sponsor. As Bede describes Edwin's conversion, there appear to have been few if any of his own nobles who were Christian at this time.³³ There is also the issue of whether Edwin would have wanted to choose one of his own men to act as sponsor owing to the political implications of this event.

Edwin might have chosen Paulinus to be both his baptizer and sponsor. There was a tradition of bishops playing both roles in Merovingian Gaul, but this does not seem to have been as strong in Anglo-Saxon England.³⁴ One of the only occasions in the seventh century that a bishop is reported as sponsor is when Bishop Birinus baptized and sponsored Cuthred of Wessex.³⁵ However, a few years earlier, when Birinus baptized King Cynegil of Wessex, Oswald acted as godfather.³⁶ The fact that sponsors are often not mentioned in the source material makes it complicated to ascertain what percentage of sponsors were bishops. Therefore, while the sources for Anglo-Saxon England more often mention that a king was sponsor, it is impossible to rule out definitively that Paulinus played both roles at Edwin's baptism.³⁷

One other aspect which might weigh against Paulinus acting as sponsor is the political implications of this act. Paulinus clearly baptized Edwin. That, in itself, would have created a tie between the King and his bishop. There was little reason to reinforce this by choosing Paulinus as sponsor if Edwin could identify another person with whom it would be politically advantageous to create a spiritual kinship link. By having Paulinus as baptizer and someone else as godfather, Edwin could maximize the political advantages of his baptism.

If Edwin looked outside Northumbria for a godfather, the choices were few. Kent was the only Anglo-Saxon kingdom which had a Christian king in the mid 620s.³⁸ However, the fact that Edwin was married to Aethelburg, sister of the Kentish King, might have made him wary of establishing another tie by having Eadbald as sponsor.³⁹ Another factor to take into consideration is Kent's political dominance only a decade or so earlier and its continued standing. Although Northumbria was certainly increasing its power through the mid to late 620s the marriage alliance between Northumbria and Kent

³³ Ibid., II, 13–14.

³⁴ For Merovingian Gaul see Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, pp. 168–69; Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum* in *MGH:SRM*, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelmus Levison, I (Hannover, 1951), v, 18; vii, 22; viii, 37, ix, 4, 8, 10; x, 1; for Anglo-Saxon England see above fn. 27.

³⁵ *ASC*, 639.

³⁶ Bede, *HE*, III, 7.

³⁷ See fn. 31. It should also be mentioned that in Merovingian Gaul, while bishops appear to have more often acted as sponsor, kings were godparents as well. See Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, II, 23; vi, 17; viii, 1, 9; ix, 9; x, 28.

³⁸ The East Anglian King Eorpwald (c. 625–c. 630) was not baptized until after Edwin converted to Christianity (Bede, *HE*, II, 15). Cynegils (611–43), King of the West Saxons, was baptized while Oswald (634–42) was ruling Northumbria (Bede, *HE*, III, 7). Mercia was ruled by the pagan Penda (626–55). The East Saxon King Saeberht had been baptized sometime before c. 616, but the kingdom reverted to paganism and did not return to Christianity until c. 653 (Bede, *HE*, III, 22). Sussex remained pagan until late in the seventh century (Bede, *HE*, IV, 13).

³⁹ Bede, *HE*, II, 9.

supports the theory that Kent was still powerful in its own right.⁴⁰ If acting as sponsor to a king could be interpreted as a sign of political superiority, it can be assumed that this would have only reinforced Edwin's misgivings about having Eadbald participate in the ceremony. In addition these considerations would have extended to any nobles and churchmen who had accompanied Aethelburg to the Northumbrian court.

As with Northumbria's Anglo-Saxon neighbours, the nearby Celtic kingdoms also did not provide much of a choice of sponsor. Pictland was already associated with the rival Bernician branch of the Northumbrian royal house through Eanfrith's marriage to a Pictish princess.⁴¹ Eanfrith's brother Oswald may have been establishing ties with Dál Riata.⁴² Elmet, a British kingdom near modern Leeds, was conquered by Edwin soon after he came to power. Evidence seems to suggest that Powys would not have supported Edwin and might have assisted in campaigns against him.⁴³ The British kingdom of Gwynedd appears an unlikely option. Edwin's campaigns against Anglesey and the Isle of Man would not have been a positive influence on Northumbrian-Gwynedd relations.⁴⁴ Within approximately five years of Edwin's baptism, Cadwallon, King of Gwynedd, allied with Penda of Mercia, invaded Northumbria and killed Edwin.⁴⁵ Moreover, if the use of a sponsor was an attempt to form a political alliance, Gwynedd's distance from Northumbria proper may have made Cadwallon an unlikely candidate, even without the tense relationship between the two kingdoms.

In looking at Rheged as a possible choice for a baptismal sponsor, the only initial problem is that the *Historia Brittonum* mentions that Rhieinfellt, grand-daughter of Rhun, married Oswiu, a member of the Bernician branch of the Northumbrian royal family.⁴⁶ That would imply that like Dál Riata and the Picts, Rheged was already associated with one of Aethelfrith's sons. However, it seems unlikely that his marriage would have occurred before Edwin's baptism in 627, when Oswiu would have been in his early teens and may have been in exile in Dál Riata or Ireland.⁴⁷ With the

⁴⁰ Owing to the fact that Kent dictated the terms of the marriage alliance, Higham has postulated that Edwin may have been the junior partner when the alliance was first formed between Kent and Northumbria. N.J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 81–82. See also Higham, *The Convert Kings*, pp. 156–64.

⁴¹ Molly Miller, 'Eanfrith's Pictish Son', *Northern History*, xiv (1978), 47–66; Smyth, *Warlords and Holymen*, pp. 61–63.

⁴² Hermann Moisl, 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Century', *Peritia*, ii (1983), 105–12.

⁴³ Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 86–87; Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 99–102.

⁴⁴ Bede, *HE*, ii, 5. There is a twelfth-century tradition that Edwin spent time during his exile in Gwynedd, but there appears little early support for this. However, even if it is true, evidence shows that relations had soured between Northumbria and Gwynedd by the later 620s. See Chadwick, *Celt and Saxon*, pp. 148–55 for an analysis of the textual support for early ties between Cadwallon and Edwin.

⁴⁵ Bede, *HE*, ii, 20; N.J. Higham, 'Medieval Overkingship in Wales: the Earliest Evidence', *WHR*, xvi (1992), 147–55.

⁴⁶ *HB*, 57.

⁴⁷ Bede mentions that Oswiu was fifty-eight years old when he died in 670. If he is correct, then Oswiu was about fifteen years old at the time of Edwin's baptism. Although it is possible for Oswiu to have married at fourteen or fifteen, moving the date forward to the early 630s seems more probable (Bede, *HE*, iv, 5; Miller, *NH*, xiv, 51–57). Whilst in exile in Dál Riata or Ireland, Oswiu may also have had a relationship with Fin, daughter of Coman Rimid of the northern Uí Néill as Aldfrith is usually identified as her son (Moisl, *Peritia*, ii, 105–06, 120–24). If this is the case, then he could not have been married to Rhun's grand-daughter before this and again the tie to Rheged would need to be moved to the 630s. However, Kirby proposes altering the chronology so that Aldfrith was born c. 650. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 143.

continuing expansion of Edwin's power in the late 620s, the logical choice for Rheged would have been to establish ties with Edwin rather than the exiled sons of Aethelfrith.

However, a marriage alliance with Oswiu is more probable in the early 630s when the political situation was changing. Edwin may have lost power in East Anglia when Eorpwald died, and the country reverted to paganism for three years.⁴⁸ Cadwallon of Gwynedd and Penda of Mercia would ally and invade Northumbria in 633. In addition, the fact that Eanbald and then Oswald were able to take power in Bernicia upon Edwin's death may show that they had the military backing of the Picts and Dál Riata, much as Edwin was only able to return from exile with the assistance of Raedwald of East Anglia.⁴⁹ Edwin was facing mounting opposition on a number of fronts.

In the midst of this it is not difficult to imagine an alliance between Rheged and the Bernician royal family either just before or just after Edwin's death. From the point of view of the Bernician royal family, having the assistance of its western neighbour before they took power could have only been welcomed. If the marriage alliance occurred after Eanfrith came to power in 633, that was a very unsettled time in Northumbria with Eanfrith and initially Oswald having to fight Cadwallon and attempting to regain Deira. Bernicia certainly would have wanted to gain Rheged's assistance or at least its neutrality in the midst of such chaos.

In addition, it is understandable that Rheged would have wanted to establish friendly relations with the Bernician royal family in order to insure some measure of protection should Eanfrith and his brothers carry on Edwin's expansion campaign. The fact that they had already been baptized meant it was impossible to establish a godparentage relationship with the new Northumbrian royal family. This did not, however, preclude a marriage link between the two royal families instead.

Consequently, it appears that in the mid 620s, Rheged was the nearest Christian kingdom which was not in alliance with Edwin's enemies and which would have been of strategic political and military use if Rhun were to act as Edwin's sponsor, thus forming a spiritual kinship link between the two countries. If Edwin wanted to use the occasion of his baptism to establish the greatest number of political ties, the choice of Paulinus as baptizer and Rhun as sponsor would have linked Northumbria with the papacy and a strategically important neighbour. Because of Eanfrith's and Oswald's ties with the Picts and Dál Riata, it may have appeared advantageous to attempt to insure that Northumbria had the support of one of the northern kingdoms. From the viewpoint of Rheged, the continuing expansion of Northumbria may have made an alliance or at least an association with Edwin seem a wise political move.

Although it is possible to support a theory that Rhun was Edwin's sponsor, not baptizer, this does not explain the existence of the contradictory British tradition that Rhun baptized Edwin. The answer appears to lie in the language used about the

⁴⁸ Kirby suggests dating the death of Eorpwald as late as 630–31 and argues that the situation in East Anglia implies that Edwin had lost influence in this area. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 80–81.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of a possible alliance between the Picts, Dál Riata and Cadwallon see Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 86–87. For information on the relationship between Dál Riata and Oswald see Moisl, *Peritia*, II, 105–16. For analysis of Raedwald and Edwin see Higham, *An English Empire*, pp. 197–200.

baptizer and godfather. Lynch, in his analysis of the terminology of spiritual kinship, has determined that the language for the baptizer as spiritual father and the sponsor as godfather was quite ambiguous until the late seventh or early eighth century.⁵⁰ For instance, *pater spiritualis* could be used to identify either a godfather or baptizer, among others.⁵¹ In addition, until the ninth century, the terms for godson and god-daughter, *filiolus* and *filiola*, were vague unless used in a clear context. Lynch has provided a perfect example of the type of confusion which could occur.⁵² In the late seventh century, the anonymous *Vita Balthildis* mentions Balthild's '*filiola*', a term which at the time could refer to a child or godchild. In a later *vita* and an account of the translation of Balthild's relics, one identifies the girl as a godchild, the other as her seven-year-old daughter. Even the Whitby *Vita Gregorii's* description of the relationship between Edwin and Paulinus is ambiguous when it states that 'Eduini pater in baptismo venerandus fuit Paulinus antistes'.⁵³

Added to the possible confusion of the language used in the documents are the goals of the surviving source material. Both the Whitby *Vita Gregorii* and Bede's *History* were purposely attempting to highlight the success of the Augustinian mission, and thus there was no reason to include references to the British participation in the conversion of Northumbria, had these even been known. References to the British would have undermined the accomplishments of Pope Gregory's missionaries. For the *Annales Cambriae* and *Historia Brittonum*, it can be conjectured that their common sources were written for a British audience and thus would have highlighted Rhun's, not Paulinus', role in Edwin's conversion.

There are any number of possibilities for dating the confusion which had arisen with regard to Rhun as baptizer or sponsor. Owing to Northumbria's power during the seventh century and continual attempts at expansion, it can readily be understood why Rhun's participation in Edwin's baptism would be remembered.⁵⁴ If the foregoing interpretation of events is correct, a spiritual kinship tie was established between Rheged and Northumbria in the late 620s. This was reinforced by the marriage alliance between Oswiu and Rhun's grand-daughter sometime in the early 630s. During the 650s and 660s, Rheged could emphasize ties with Northumbria through Oswiu and Rhieinfell's son Alfrith, who was sub-king of Deira for a time, and through Oswiu's wife Eanflaed, Edwin's daughter.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Lynch, in Noble and Contreni, *Religion, Culture and Society*, pp. 186–90; Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, pp. 160–72.

⁵¹ Lynch, in Noble and Contreni, *Religion, Culture and Society*, pp. 188–90.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 188–89.

⁵³ Colgrave translates this phrase as 'Edwin's godfather at his baptism was the reverend Bishop Paulinus' (*VG*, p. 96). However, there is little in this phrase to distinguish the baptizer or sponsor as spiritual father. This phrase could mean that Paulinus baptized Edwin. Certainly Bede, in his version of this event, makes no mention that Paulinus acted both as baptizer and sponsor to Edwin (Bede, *HE*, II, 14). In addition, Lynch's discussion of this passage indicates that it is not necessary to interpret this as meaning Paulinus was sponsor as well as baptizer. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, pp. 167–68.

⁵⁴ For information on political events during Oswiu's reign see Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 92–107 and Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (1990), pp. 78–85.

⁵⁵ Miller mentioned in passing that the 'hagiographic ideology' of Rhun's involvement in Edwin's baptism could have been promoted to associate Eanflaed and Rhun. However, she appears to regard Rhun's participation in the baptism as purely a creation of the 660s aimed at Northumbria. Miller, *NH*, xiv, 43 fn.3.

Evidence supports the view that Northumbria slowly took over Rheged from as early as the 670s into the 730s.⁵⁶ It is possible that propaganda against Northumbria could have been produced for a British audience at this time which highlighted the fact that Rheged helped in the conversion of a country which was attempting to conquer it.⁵⁷ By mistake or by design Rhun could have been depicted as baptizer rather than sponsor to magnify Rheged's participation in the Christianisation of Northumbria and consequently portray Northumbria's actions in a much more negative light. That might explain the existence of the grandiose claims found in the *Historia Brittonum*, though not in the *Annales Cambriae*, that Rhun baptized not only Edwin, but twelve thousand of his men and then 'per quadraginta dies non cessavit baptizare omne genus ambronum...'.⁵⁸

Another possibility is that during this period, when Rheged was slowly losing ground and with the exile and death of a number of the Rheged aristocracy, oral or written tradition broke down to the point where the true story about Rhun's participation in Edwin's baptism was no longer known. Northern British traditions and possible documents were in Welsh hands by the time that the compiler of the *Historia Brittonum* was working in Gwynedd in 829–30. Historians have argued for the existence of eighth-century annals from northern Britain, which possibly contained information from the seventh century, and which were incorporated into the *Historia Brittonum*, *Annales Cambriae* and Irish annals.⁵⁹ This is important because the terse language of annalistic entries with little surrounding context easily opens the way to confusion. A near-contemporary entry in an annal could have listed Rhun as sponsor with such ambiguous language that when these records were incorporated into later annals and sources misunderstanding arose.

Lack of source material makes it impossible to form a definitive opinion about the differing information from the Northumbrian and British Churches. However, it is

⁵⁶ The *Vita Wilfridi* indicates that British ecclesiastical foundations were being abandoned in the 670s in the face of Northumbrian expansion (Stephanus, *VW*, 17). Smyth has argued the existence of British mercenaries, possibly from Rheged, fighting in Ireland from 672 to 706. He has also emphasized the possibly tenuous hold of Northumbria over Galloway and Carrick in the eighth century (Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, pp. 25–29). Bede reports that the bishopric of Whithorn had only recently been established at the time he was finishing the *History* (Bede, *HE*, v, 23). For an analysis of place-name evidence for Northumbrian expansion from the mid seventh to tenth century see Daphne Brooke, 'The Northumbrian Settlements in Galloway and Carrick: An Historical Assessment', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, CXXI (1991), 295–327.

⁵⁷ Owing to Northumbria's strong oral and, from the late seventh century, written tradition that Paulinus baptized Edwin, along with the fact that Edwin's grand-daughter was abbess of Whitby until 714, it is doubtful whether any claim that Rhun was Edwin's baptizer would have been aimed at a Northumbrian audience. If the confusion in language or deliberate change of role for Rhun from sponsor to baptizer occurred in the late seventh to early eighth century, this would only be effective for a British audience.

⁵⁸ *HB*, 63. This tradition could also have developed later in an attempt to synchronize Northumbrian and British accounts. Dumville argues that the *Historia Brittonum* is an early attempt to synchronize Anglo-Saxon and British sources (Dumville, *Arthurian Literature*, vi, 5–26). This claim for Rhun sounds very much like Bede's description of Paulinus' work in Northumbria (Bede, *HE*, ii, 14). In fact, in a later gloss to the *Historia Brittonum*, an attempt is made to equate Paulinus and Rhun as the same person. 'Si quis scire voluerit quis eos baptizavit Rum map Urbgen [id est Paulinus Eboracensis archiepiscopus] baptizavit eos' *HB*, 63 (brackets indicate gloss).

⁵⁹ Dumville, *Arthurian Literature*, vi, 15–19; Hughes, *PBA*, LIX, 234–40; Chadwick, *Celt and Saxon*, pp. 160–63. Although all three historians argue for the existence of northern British annals, Dumville argues for a much simpler transmission of this information to the source documents of the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae*.

possible to argue that given the political situation in Northumbria in the 620s, Rhun may have acted as Edwin's godfather. That would eliminate the need to explain the existence of two baptisms or two baptizers and yet still allow for both Paulinus and Rhun to have actively participated in the ceremony. The confusion over the language of baptizer and sponsor, the divergent focus of the source material, and the conquest of Rheged, may well explain the development of the contradictory traditions of the British and Anglo-Saxon sources.