of the poem. In a twenty-two verse macaronic gloria, Latin and English are triumphantly fused, and the passage ends in a word neither Latin nor English; the interlaced tongues lead to the ecstatic apostrophe, *Alleluia*.

Hafað us alyfed lucis auctor
þæt we motun her merueri,
goddædum begietan gaudia in celo,
þær we motum maxima regna
secan ond gesittan sedibus altis
lifgan in lisse lucis et pacis,
agan eardinga alma letitie,
brucan blæddaga, blandem et mittem
geseon sigora Frean sine fine
ond Him lof singan laude perenne
eadge mid englum. Alleluia.[8]

8 'Has granted to us the author of Light
that we may here obtain,
earn by merit joy in the heavens;
where we may in the mightiest kingdom
repair and repose; by the high throne
live in bliss in light and in peace;
possess the abode of merciful joy,
enjoy a time of glory, gracious and mild
behold the Lord of Victories without end,
and sing to him praise, everlasting glory,
blessed among angels. Alleluia.'

9

Slavery in Anglo-Saxon England

David A. E. Pelteret

Slavery was an important institution in most of the Ancient Civilizations of the Near East and Mediterranean area.[1] Rome, in particular, seems to have been heavily dependent on slaves, especially during the late Republican and Imperial periods. In the Ger-

1 As an introduction to slavery in Asia, see Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East* (New York, 1949); for slavery in the world of Greece and Rome, see the collection of papers edited by Moses I. Finley, *Slavery in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1960; rptd. 1968). The *status quaestionis* on slavery in Ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt is analyzed by Jean Gaudemet, who also provides a select bibliography, in "Esclavage et dépendence dans l'antiquité: bilan et perspectives," *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 50 (1982), 119-56. An approach that is stimulating and could have wider application is that of Ignace J. Gelb, "From Freedom to Slavery," in Dietz O. Edzard (ed.), *Gesellschaftsklassen im Alten Zweistromland und in den angrenzenden Gebieten*, XVIII[e] Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-historische Klasse, Abhandlungen, Neue Folge, Heft 75 (Munich, 1972), 81-92. His promised monograph on Mesopotamian slavery has yet to appear. Slavery as an institution in world history has been recently examined by Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982). Moses I. Finley has written a critical assessment of the historiography of slavery in the Ancient world in his *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York, 1980). Some qualifications to his arguments are made by Ernest Badian in a review, "The Bitter History of Slave History," *New York Review of Books* 18, No. 16 (October 22, 1981), 49-53.

manic world, on the other hand, slavery does not seem originally to have been a significant social feature. Once the Germanic peoples had come in contact with the Roman Empire, however, the attractions of the finished goods of the technologically more advanced civilization soon made their mark on the underdeveloped Germanic realms, and the tribes beyond the Roman frontier were more than ready to barter primary products, including slave manpower, in return for the wine, cloth, and luxury goods of the Romans. By the time that the administration of the Empire was crumbling in the fifth century, slavery had become a familiar institution among the Germanic peoples.[2]

It was in this century that Germanic colonists from Denmark and the coasts of Germany and Holland were appearing in sizeable numbers in England.[3] Our sources show that slavery existed in Anglo-Saxon England from this early period, as it had done in Roman Britain.[4] Slaves were to remain part of English society right into the twelfth century, at least two centuries longer than in neighbouring France.[5] England was, however, in advance of Spain, where slavery survived the Middle Ages, to be transported to the Americas as an unfortunate relic of Ancient Times in the midst of the New World.[6]

To discuss within the compass of a brief paper the history of slavery in England during the seven centuries of the Anglo-Saxon era would not be a useful exercise. Instead, I shall seek to answer three of the most obvious questions one would raise when examining this topic. The first of these questions is a composite one: Who were the slaves in Anglo-Saxon society, and how did they acquire this status? The second is: What was it like to be a slave in England? And finally: How did slavery come to disappear?

To begin with, the identity of the slaves in Anglo-Saxon society is difficult to determine with great precision, at least for the earliest part of the Anglo-Saxon period. The paucity of sources covering the centuries between A.D. 400 and 600, when Roman rule in Britain disintegrated, and the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were established, has led many historians to call it the "Dark Age" period of English history.[7] There is some evidence of cultural, and probably also agricultural, continuity between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon eras in England.[8] There is thus the possibility that some who were slaves under Roman or Romano-British masters found that their owners had become Anglo-Saxons. Nothing more definite than this can be asserted. We can be sure, however, that the invasions did lead to the enslavement through conquest of some of the indigenous inhabitants. Our best evidence for this is the tract *De excidio Britanniae* ('The Ruin of Britain') composed perhaps about 547 by a British monk called Gildas. He paints a gloomy picture of the fate of those British attacked by the invaders. "So a number of the wretched survivors," he writes, "were caught in the mountains and butchered wholesale. Others, their spirit broken by hunger, went to surrender to the enemy; they were fated to be slaves for ever."[9] We must be careful how we interpret this. Gildas was, after all, primarily a preacher, not an historian.[10] It would be out of place, therefore, to expect him to be too precise about the specifics of time and place referred to in his account. In some cases, the full horror of what Gildas portrays indeed may have struck a community. His description of events in Britain is, however, too simplistic. Archaeological evidence suggests that the settlement must have at times involved infiltration rather than conquest;[11] and some of the earliest

2 On Germanic slavery, see Edward A. Thompson, "Slavery in Early Germany," in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity*, 191-203.

3 On the history of Britain in this period, see Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367-634* (Harmondsworth, 1973), and John N. L. Myres, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England* (Oxford, 1969). In reading these, one should bear in mind the cautionary comments on the hazards of writing a history of this period made by David Dumville in "Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend," *History* 62 (1977), 173-92.

4 For evidence of slavery in Roman Britain, see Robin G. Collingwood and Richard P. Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain* I (Oxford, 1965), Nos. 21, 445, 712, (?)760, 902, and 1436.

5 See Marc Bloch, "How and Why Ancient Slavery Came to an End," in Marc Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages*, trans. by William R. Beer (Berkeley, 1975), 1-31.

6 See Charles Verlinden, *L'Esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale I: Péninsule Ibérique-France*, Universiteit te Gent, Werken uitgaven door de Faculteit van de Letteren en Wijsbegeerte 119 (Bruges, 1955), 41-46.

7 See, for example, John Morris, "Dark Age Dates," in Michael G. Jarrett and Brian Dobson (eds.), *Britain and Rome: Essays presented to Eric Birley on his Sixtieth Birthday* (Kendal, 1966), 145-85.

8 The problem is a complex one since it is now realized that the term "continuity" itself needs to be more closely defined, as is stressed by Walter Janssen, "Some Major Aspects of Frankish and Medieval Settlement in the Rhineland," in Peter H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change* (London, 1976), 41. For a discussion of a possible example of agrarian continuity, see Herbert P. R. Finberg, "Roman and Saxon Withington," in Herbert P. R. Finberg, *Lucerna* (London, 1964), 21-65, and for cultural continuity, see P. A. Wilson, "The Cult of St. Martin in the British Isles, with Particular Reference to Canterbury and Candida Casa," *Innes Review* 19 (1968), 129-43. For recent findings, see Trevor Rowley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlement and the Landscape: Papers presented to a Symposium, Oxford 1973*, BAR 6 (Oxford, 1974).

9 Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. by Michael Winterbottom, Arthurian Period Sources 7 (London, 1978), Ch. 25, p. 27 (translation); p. 98 (text).

10 He is, nevertheless, our major source for the history of Britain in the fifth and first part of the sixth century; see Dumville, "Sub-Roman Britain" and Molly Miller, "Bede's Use of Gildas," *EHR* 90 (1975), 241-61. The authenticity and unity of the work is defended and a somewhat earlier date of composition (A.D. 515x520) argued by Thomas D. O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 7 (Leiden, 1978).

11 For the likely contemporaneity of late Roman and early Anglo-Saxon occupation of Abingdon, see Martin Biddle, H. T. Lambrick, and John N. L. Myres, "The Early

Anglo-Saxon documents, the West Saxon laws from the late seventh century, show that not all the indigenous inhabitants were reduced to slavery: on the contrary, the Celtic aristocracy retained their noble status in the laws, though their wergeld was lower than that of the Anglo-Saxon nobility.[12]

Where conquest occurred, it was not always the native British that suffered. As the various Anglo-Saxon tribes expanded their control over the country, it was inevitable that they would clash with one another, and I suspect that a substantial number of slaves from the early centuries of the settlement were those captured in inter-tribal warfare. Some of these captives were traded out of the country and ended up in such slave markets as the one in Marseilles in the south of France.[13] It was this trade in slaves of Anglo-Saxon origin that led to the charming, if apocryphal, story of what prompted Pope Gregory the Great to send Augustine to Kent in 597 to convert the English. The story goes that on being told that some slave boys whom he had seen in a Roman market were *Angli*, or Anglians, the pontiff allegedly punned, "They have the face of angels, and such men should be fellow-heirs of the angels of heaven." He then made a further play on the name of their tribe and of their king. (In defence of Pope Gregory, it is not inapposite to note that this story appears in Anglo-Saxon sources and not in Gregory's own correspondence.[14] It is evident that the Englishman's penchant for puns has a long ancestry.)

An illustration of how the Anglian boys could have been enslaved appears in the *Ecclesiastical History* written by the Venerable Bede in the 730's. He recounts how, after a skirmish between Northumbrians and Mercians in 697, a Mercian thegn, Imma, was found on the battlefield by a Northumbrian who had had relatives killed in the battle. Imma initially claimed that he was only a peasant who had brought supplies for the warriors. He did, however, subsequently admit his true status and though his captor wanted to kill him, he was for some reason spared. A Frisian in London bought him and later permitted him to buy back his own freedom. The story implies that there was a warrior class, who, if captured, might be killed, but there was also a peasant class who would simply be enslaved if their tribe was defeated.[15]

Warfare and conquests, then, were major sources of slaves in the first three centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period, and those who were

History of Abingdon, Berkshire, and its Abbey," *Medieval Archaeology* 12 (1968), 26-69.

12 See the Laws of Ine in EHD I, 398-407, No. 32.

13 On Marseilles, see Verlinden, *L'Esclavage* I, 670.

14 Bede, *HE* II.1, 132-35. The story is also told by the anonymous biographer of Gregory, who does not, however, describe them as slaves. See Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1968), 90-91.

15 Bede, *HE* IV.22 (= 20), 400-05.

enslaved included both the indigenous Celts and the invading Anglo-Saxons. Slavery through capture did not cease in the eighth century, however. At the end of that century, the first Vikings made their appearance in England. Slaves were a major item of interest to these marauders, who were not simply plunderers but traders as well.[16] They retained their interest in this marketable commodity, and when in the late tenth century the intensity of their attacks again increased, they once more took slaves. Our most graphic evidence for this comes from another jeremiad not uninfluenced by Gildas's diatribe, the Sermon of Archbishop Wulfstan of York to the English, written in ca. 1014:

> Often two seamen, or maybe three, drive the droves of Christian men from sea to sea, out through this people, huddled together, as a public shame to us all, if we could seriously and rightly feel any shame. But all the insult which we often suffer we repay with honouring those who insult us; we pay them continually and they humiliate us daily; they ravage and they burn, plunder and rob and carry on board; and lo, what else is there in all these events except God's anger clear and visible over this people?[17]

We might feel that most of these captives were destined for sale abroad, as was the case with many of those taken in the sixth and seventh centuries. This was certainly true, but the tenth-century *Life of Saint Swithun* shows that there was also a market for slaves within the country. The *Life* mentions that a slave-woman stolen from her owner in the north of England was later sold in Winchester, the West Saxon capital.[18]

This last account does not suggest that the parties to the transaction were other than Anglo-Saxons, and there is interesting linguistic evidence to show that the Anglo-Saxons continued to capture and enslave people right into the tenth century. From that century on, in southern dialects of Old English, the word *wealh* appears as a designation for a slave. The word is related to the Modern English "Welsh." Originally *wealh* seems to have meant 'foreigner' and then 'Celt.'[19] That 'Celt' became synonymous with 'slave' points to an ominous fate for many of those Celts from the south-west of England, especially present-day Cornwall, an area that was only fully integrated into the West Saxon Kingdom in the second quarter of the tenth century during

16 See especially Peter Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd ed. (London, 1971).

17 EHD I, 932, No. 240.

18 *Miracula Sancti Swithuni* II. 23-28 in *AASS*, 2 July, 297. There are several versions of this *Vita*; for the relationship between them, see Cyril Hart, "The Early Section of the *Worcester Chronicle*," *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983), 251-315, at p. 294. (I am grateful to Dr. Hart for an early offprint of his article.)

19 Margaret L. Faull, "The Semantic Development of Old English *Wealh*," *Leeds Studies in English* N.S. 8 (1975), 20-44; Kenneth Cameron, "The Meaning and Significance of Old English *walh* in English Place-Names," *English Place-Name Society Journal* 12 (1979-80), 1-46; Appendices 1 and 2 by Malcolm Todd, "The Archaeological Significance of Place-Names in *walh*," and John Insley, "The Continental Evidence: OHG *wal(a)h*, OSax *walh*," ibid., 47-53.

the reign of Athelstan.[20] The word thus displays exactly the same semantic shift as the English *slave* and French *esclave* and for the same reason. The latter two words are derived from the tribal designation "Slav," which started to be used in the legal sense of 'slave' from the tenth century on as a result of the conquests by the Germans on the eastern borders of their territory.[21]

Conquest was not, however, the only way in which people could become slaves. The laws show that persons could be enslaved for a number of criminal offences and for debt.[22] Furthermore, people could voluntarily enslave themselves and/or their children.[23] This might seem inconceivable—until we remember the uncertainties of life in the Middle Ages. An unusually dry winter could ruin the grain crop, as could an unexpected hail storm or the appearance of rust. The successive waves of pestilence that occurred throughout the Middle Ages could destroy the family as an economic unit and leave the survivors starving. Cattle disease, warfare, even physical and mental incapacity on the part of the breadwinners: all could reduce a family to destitution. As I shall show below, the servile state offered attractions to such unfortunates.

The consequences of these centuries of enslavement appear in Domesday Book, compiled in 1086 at the behest of William the Conqueror.[24] This great survey shows that in his reign slaves formed on average about ten per cent of the recorded population of England. The percentage varies from county to county, as might be expected. In Essex, highly developed agriculturally, but a victim of Viking incursions, slaves form some eleven per cent of the total recorded population. In Middlesex, the percentage drops to 5.2. In Cornwall, on the other hand, finally brought fully under Anglo-Saxon control only a century and a half before, no less than twenty-one per cent of the county's population were slaves.[25] With the exception of Cornwall, it may be assumed that by this time slaves were fully integrated into the Anglo-Saxon population, whatever their ethnic origin.

20 See William G. Hoskins, *The Westward Expansion of Wessex*, Leicester University, Department of English Local History, Occasional Papers 13 (Leicester, 1970), esp. 20-21.

21 Charles Verlinden, "L'Origine de *Sclavus* = Esclave," *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 17 (1942), 97-128.

22 Ine 3.2, 7.1 (crime); Ine 62 (debt) in EHD I, 399-400, 406, No. 32. For other references, see David A. E. Pelteret, "Slavery in Late Anglo-Saxon England: an Interdisciplinary Approach to the Various Forms of Evidence" (Ph.D dissertation, University of Toronto, 1976), 494, s.v. *witeþeow*.

23 Robert Spindler (ed.), *Confessionale Pseudo-Egberti* 261-63, in *Das altenglische Bussbuch* (Leipzig, 1934), 176-94; cf. *Poenitentiale Theodori* II.13.1, in Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils* III, 173-204.

24 Abraham Farley (ed.), *Domesday Book*, Record Commission, 2 vols. (London, 1783).

25 See Pelteret, "Slavery," 301, Table 6.

What was it like for this not inconsiderable proportion of the population to be slaves? Because our slaves could not, in general, read and write (that was largely the preserve of the clergy)[26] and because they were an element in the society with little or no real power, we are dependent on scattered insights, and these from persons far removed from the needs and aspirations of the slaves mentioned by them. A touching exception is the picture of the ploughman that appears in a textbook called the *Colloquy*, compiled in ca. A.D. 1000 by the monk Ælfric for those learning Latin. Its purpose was primarily to expand a pupil's Latin vocabulary, but in the process provides a very sympathetic portrait of what it must have been like to be a slave:

> "What do you say, ploughman? How do you undertake your work?"
> "Oh my lord, I work excessively. I go out at day-break, badgering the oxen towards the field, and I join them to the plough: there is not a winter so harsh that I dare lurk at home for fear of my master. But after yoking the oxen and securing the ploughshare and coulter to the plough, the whole day I must plough a full acre or more."
> "Have you a companion?"
> "I have a boy spurring the oxen on with a whip, who even now is hoarse with the cold and with the shouting."
> "Do you do anything else during the day?"
> "Certainly I do more. I must fill the stall of the oxen with hay, and supply them with water, and carry their dung outside. Oh! Oh! it is a lot of work. Indeed, it is a lot of work because I am not free."[27]

In portraying the slave as an agrarian worker, and specifically a ploughman, the *Colloquy* was drawing on reality. Domesday Book, for instance, regularly associates the slave with the plough.[28] Another source, the tenth-century will of Æthelgifu, reveals that slaves were also shepherds and swineherds.[29] Women slaves, too, were employed in agricultural tasks, though some may also have been domestics. In the earliest Kentish laws, we read of female grinding-slaves: women whose function it was to grind corn, before medieval agrarian technology led to their being replaced by the much more efficient watermill;[30] and several sources mention slaves who were dairymaids.[31]

26 For a possible example of three slave-women who appear to have received some degree of education, see *The Will of Æthelgifu: A Tenth Century Anglo-Saxon Manuscript*, trans. and examined by Dorothy Whitelock, Roxburghe Club (Oxford, 1968), 13, lines 51-52, discussed on pp. 33-34.

27 See George N. Garmonsway (ed.), *Ælfric's Colloquy*, 2nd ed. (London, 1947), 20-21.

28 Pelteret, "Slavery," Ch. 7.II.2, pp. 305-17.

29 See Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 9, lines 25-26 and p. 15, line 56; cf. also pp. 35-36.

30 On mills, see Jean Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1976), 1-28, and Philip Rahtz and Donald Bullough, "The Parts of an Anglo-Saxon Mill," *ASE* 6 (1977), 15-37; the latter study draws on evidence from an eighth-century mill excavated at Tamworth in Staffordshire.

31 On *daia* 'dairymaid,' see Pelteret, "Slavery," 172-73.

The harshness of the life of the ploughman-slave in the *Colloquy* is not, in itself, remarkable. Arable farming tends to impose a harsher regimen on its practitioners than a pastoral life does. The hard work and long hours that the ploughman had to suffer were probably not strikingly different from those that a poor free peasant was subject to; but it was not so much in the harshness of the labour that the ploughman made his lament. "It is a lot of work *because I am not free*." It was in this lack of *freedom* that our author saw the harshness of the slave's position. As will be seen below, this was not a static concept in the Anglo-Saxon period any more than it is today; the way in which it changed is integral to an understanding of why slavery disappeared—but this is our third question, whose answer must be deferred to later. At this point it is useful to continue to follow our author by examining two elements that constituted an *absence* of freedom.

The first involved a set of very real legal disabilities. A freeman who had a wrong done against him had the support of the tribe's law. If he suffered an injury, he could claim a monetary compensation. If he was killed, his relatives were entitled to his wergeld, an assessment based on his social status and indicative of his economic value to the kin group.[32] A slave, however, was someone else's possession. Only his master, therefore, could claim for injuries done him. The slave himself had no recourse, nor did his kin. From a psychological point of view, this must have been a severe disability, since kinship was the strongest bond in Anglo-Saxon society.[33]

The slave also suffered another legal disability. If a freeman committed a wrong, he was, in general, allowed to compensate for that wrong by means of the monetary payments just mentioned. A slave, on the other hand, did not have any possessions in law—even if in practice this was not the case. Consequently, he could pay only with his hide. Thus, the characteristic punishment for a slave who committed a wrong was a lashing, and this marked him off from a freeman.

To this set of legal disabilities must be added a second element: the psychological dimension of the concept of freedom, which had an impact on both masters and slaves. A slave was a man with the lowest status in society, and a reflection of this is evident in the words given the ploughman. The text shows what an educated and privileged member of the ecclesiastical élite thought of slaves, and a few instances of legal actions initiated by some accused of not being "free" show that those at the lower end of the social spectrum shared these views.[34] It

32 On wergelds, see Hector M. Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (Cambridge, 1905), 76-160.

33 On the nature of Anglo-Saxon kinship, see Lorraine Lancaster, "Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society," *British Journal of Sociology* 9 (1958), 230-50, 359-77.

34 See Pelteret, "Slavery," 257-58. It has to be admitted that these records are late, and it may well be that these are actions initiated by those accused of being serfs. However, see also the attempt of one Putrael to avoid enslavement discussed in ibid., 257.

would be too much to expect of human nature for us to believe that those in a position of power did not exploit and abuse persons suffering from such disabilities. For instance, the slave woman mentioned in the *Life of Saint Swithun* fled to the sanctuary of the saint's tomb because her new owner was a "very bad mistress" (*pessima domina*).[35] On the other hand, the slave's life does not seem to have differed from the rest of the peasantry's in some important areas of existence. The tenth-century manumission-documents, which record the freeing of slaves, mention wives and children, so family life was not proscribed—indeed, a couple of references in legal sources show that even unions between slave and free were sanctioned.[36] The slaves seem to have lived, like other poor peasants, in tofts, which consisted of a primitive dwelling, probably of thatch, wattle, and daub, and a small plot of land surrounding it in which produce could be grown and perhaps a few animals and chickens kept. Thus an early eleventh-century will declares: "And all my men are to be free, and each is to have his toft and his cow and his corn for food."[37] This implies that the slaves here were already occupying tofts even if they did not have legal ownership of them. They were not, therefore, herded together in compounds and so were in certain respects in a better state than some so-called "free" persons of today, such as the black goldminers in contemporary Johannesburg. Nor is there evidence of the harsh impersonality of the gangs of labourers found in the nineteenth-century plantations in the American south. In consequence, it was possible for personal relationships to form between owner and slave. This is implied in Æthelgifu's will, for instance, where a number of her slaves are mentioned by name as being entitled to freedom on her death and, in some instances, to receive property as well.[38]

The *Life of Saint Swithun* provides us with an instructive illustration of the contradictory realities of the slave's position in society. A slave belonging to a wealthy trader called Flodoald had been arrested and condemned by a reeve to the ordeal of hot iron. This was over the objections of his master, who not merely offered the reeve his slave instead, but also offered a pound of silver, in itself the purchase price of a man. The reeve rejected Flodoald's overtures, yet through the intervention of the saint was unable to see the slave's burns when, after the statutory period of time, the bandages were removed.[39] All who have

35 *AASS*, 2 July, 297, II. 23-28.

36 For a discussion of this, see Pelteret, "Slavery," 374-76.

37 Dorothy Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930), 68, lines 3-4 (text); p. 69 (translation).

38 See, for example, Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 7, 9, lines 6, 8, 15-16.

39 *AASS*, 2 July, 298, II. 35-37.

lived in societies which exhibit wide social and legal disparities will feel that the essence of this story rings true. Here is the close personal bond between master and servant, where the master will seek to protect his underling even at cost to himself. But this personal bond is undercut by the slave's legal position; however genuinely felt by master and slave, it is essentially a paternalistic relationship since the slave does not possess any legal protection, as the actions of the reeve show.

In spite of its disadvantages, slavery could have some very real attractions. One must not prejudice the examination of slavery in early societies by the distaste felt today for American slavery and the modern relics of an institution that the Anti-Slavery Society of London reminds us still exists in various parts of the world. The uncertainty of life in the early Middle Ages has already been mentioned. Starvation was an ever-present possibility and not infrequently a reality. To the hungry man, slavery must have seemed an enviable state. Several Anglo-Saxon sources explain why. The prose *Solomon and Saturn* declares that "in twelve months you shall give your slaves seven hundred and twenty loaves, besides morning meals and noon meals."[40] Also, an eleventh-century custumal called the *Rectitudines singularum personarum* ('The Customary Obligations of Various Statuses') lays down that "all slaves belonging to the estate ought to have food at Christmas and Easter, a strip of land for ploughing and a harvest-handful besides their dues."[41] That some took advantage of this protection is evident from a tenth-century manumission-document from Durham in the north of England: "(Geatflæd) gave freedom for the love of God and for the need of her soul, namely, to Eckehard the smith and Ælfstan and his wife and all their progeny, born and unborn, and Arnkell and Cola and Ecgfrith, Æthelhun's daughter, and all those persons whose heads she took in exchange for their food in those evil days."[42] (The taking of heads obviously refers to an act of commendation, but unfortunately the document does not specify what the evil was that provoked this voluntary act of servitude.)

Finally, we arrive at the third question. How did slavery come to an end? It is the most complex of the questions to answer. Like all great historical changes, the factors that had a bearing on it were manifold—and like many other such changes it was not perceived by contemporaries, which does not make our task any easier. It will be necessary to start with a number of different themes and weave them together before we shall be able to discern a pattern emerging.

40 John M. Kemble (ed. and trans.), *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus*, Ælfric Society (London, 1848), 192-93.

41 *Rectitudines* 9.1 in Liebermann, *Gesetze* I, 450 (text); EHD II, 877, No. 172 (translation).

42 Benjamin Thorpe (ed. and trans.), *Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici* (London, 1865), 621.

Let us start with the structure of early Anglo-Saxon society. Some of what I shall have to say about this will not gain the assent of all historians working in this area, but I believe that the sources support my viewpoint.[43] Early Anglo-Saxon society was, first and foremost, tribal in nature.[44] Tribes differ in kind; some are loosely organized, others have a strong central authority under the leadership of a powerful chief. The latter have a tendency to absorb the former through peaceful amalgamation or through conquest. This happened in Anglo-Saxon England, where, however, the leaders were called "kings" rather than "chiefs."[45]

Under the kings, I discern two main levels of tribesmen, who were all by definition "freemen," unlike the slaves, who were not members of the tribe and so fell outside the protection of the tribal law. The lower level of freemen occupied land sufficient for the kin group, in return for which they were expected to provide produce, and possibly services, for the king or his supporters. The latter were warriors whose primary function was to defend and enlarge the tribe's territory. Their

43 My debt to Eric John and Marc Bloch should be acknowledged, though much of the synthesis that follows is my own. See Eric John, "English Feudalism and the Structure of Anglo-Saxon Society," *Orbis Britanniae*, Studies in Early English History 4 (Leicester, 1966), 128-53; and Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages*, 1-31. The portrayal of Anglo-Saxon society that follows is naturally a very simplified generalization of what must have been a very complicated set of developments.

44 In describing Anglo-Saxon society here, I have used "tribe" rather than "chiefdom" so as to avoid getting into a discussion of terminology. I recognize that "tribe" is a rather imprecise term, as has been pointed out by Aidan W. Southall in "The Illusion of Tribe," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5 (1970), 28-50; without committing myself to an evolutionary point of view, I feel that "chiefdom," as used by Elman R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1971), is more appropriate in the context of Anglo-Saxon society. For a discussion of one of the primary sources that needs to be taken into account by anyone wishing to describe early Anglo-Saxon society, see Wendy Davies and Hayo Vierck, "The Contexts of Tribal Hidage: Social Aggregates and Settlement Patterns," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 8 (1974), 223-93.

45 This is a considerable—some might call it a gross—simplification of a complex institution. I have described kingship in these terms in order to emphasize the need to employ anthropological perspectives in examining this topic. Recent treatments of Anglo-Saxon kingship include William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970); John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971); and Hannah Vollrath-Reichelt, *Königsgedanke und Königtum bei den Angelsachsen bis zur Mitte des 9. Jahrhunderts*, Kölner Historische Abhandlungen 19 (Cologne and Vienna, 1971). Archaeological evidence now supplements the documentary material. Rupert L. S. Bruce-Mitford (ed.), *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, 3 vols. in 4 (London, 1975-83), and Brian Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: An Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria*, Department of the Environment, Archaeological Report 7 (London, 1977), provide material from but two of a number of English royal sites; Continental evidence may also prove relevant—see, for example, Karl H. Krüger, *Königsgrabkirchen der Franken, Angelsachsen und Langobarden bis zur Mitte des 8. Jahrhunderts: ein historischer Katalog*, Münstersche Mittelalterschriften 4 (Munich, 1971).

reward, apart from war booty distributed by the king, was lordship over lands worked by the lower rank of tribesmen, lordship which entitled them to a proportion of the fruits of the land. Such lordship was at first only temporary; it was dependent on service and support for the king, and did not constitute ownership of the land.

We must now examine the role of the Church in this society. The ecclesiastical organization set up by Augustine and his successors for the propagation of the faith was based primarily on the monastery. To enable the monks to spend much of their day saying the Divine offices, to keep them clothed, to supply such necessities as skins for vellum onto which the scriptures could be copied, the monasteries needed land which could produce a surplus. Since, short of Divine intervention, their corporate existence would last longer than man's allotted three score years and ten, the traditional form of land grant was clearly unsatisfactory. And so, some time in the seventh century—possibly even with Augustine's arrival, if we are to accept Pierre Chaplais's suggestion[46]—the Roman land charter was introduced. This document attested the permanent alienation of land out of the power of the king and the tribe. The warrior class was, of course, quick to see the advantages of such a legal device. Already at the beginning of the eighth century, Bede was complaining about how they were establishing "monasteries" to further the interests of their own families.[47] His complaint, however, had no impact. By the reign of Offa, late in the eighth century, land was regularly being alienated from the tribe and made over into the hands of what had become an aristocracy.

This process was interrupted in the ninth century by the Viking incursions. By the beginning of the tenth century, power had shifted into the hands of the West Saxon tribe, whose kings steadily during that century established their control over the whole country. From this time on, the land charters grew in number. In this process, both the secular aristocracy and church institutions benefited.

I thus see the tenth century as being a key period when two decisive changes that had gradually been taking place in Anglo-Saxon society made themselves fully evident. The first was the accumulation of land into larger agrarian units, which could be inherited (in the case of secular overlords) or were inalienable (in the case of ecclesiastical institutions). The second was the unification of the country, with a concomitant diminution in the significance of the tribes and their laws.

Before we can understand the relevance of all this to the institution of slavery, it is necessary to introduce another theme into our picture:

46 Pierre Chaplais, "Who Introduced Charters into England? The Case for Augustine," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3 (1965-69), 526-42.

47 On Bede's Epistle to Egbert, see Eric John, *Land Tenure in Early England*, Studies in Early English History 1 (Leicester, 1960), 44-45.

the position of the ordinary freeman. From early in the settlement of the country, he will have been used to the idea of producing for an overlord outside the kin group. As land started to come under more stable control, it was inevitable that certain of his practices would harden into custom, such as how much and when he should hand over produce to his lord, or when and how long he should help the overlord on his own land, the demesne. In day-to-day terms, custom was likely to loom larger in such a man's mind than the provisions of the tribe's law, and from a lord's point of view, those occupying the land under his control would tend to become "his" men. He would have some justification for thinking this, since there were inevitably those who, for one reason or another, did not possess any family land or have the necessary means to work it. These he would have provided with land already sown with seed, together with implements and livestock—goods he would feel entitled to claim back on the death of the recipient. Others would have commended themselves and their property to his control and protection because of threats arising out of invasion or because of rapacious neighbours. A couple of sources show that ties over those defined in tribal law as "freemen" already existed in the time of Alfred (who died in 899).[48] From the middle of the tenth century, there are a few documents extant that show that some of the peasants called "boors" were having to make a payment in order to leave their land and go where they wanted. In many respects, these are just like the manumission-documents recording the release of slaves. For instance, one from Great Bedwyn in Wiltshire, dating from ca. 955, states: "Here is made known that Eadwine granted Wynsige and Æthelnoth, his man, that they may free for ever Beorhtgyth from the boorland for ten mancuses, free to travel to any place" (*færfreoh*).[49] Note here the right that is given: to be *færfreoh*. Whatever status Beorhtgyth may have possessed in tribal law, she did not have the freedom to extricate herself from the obligations of custom imposed on her through the land that she occupied. In other words, persons such as Beorhtgyth were what we today would term "serfs."[50] Their status was derived from the land rather than from their tribal ties. It is significant that in the tenth century we read more and more often in the charters and wills that when property is alienated or bequeathed by a lord it is to be handed over *mid mete and mid mannum*, 'with provisions and with persons.'[51] There is no specification as to what the status of these persons was. From the point of view of the lord who was alienating the property,

48 For the texts and a discussion of them, see David A. E. Pelteret, "The *Coliberti* of Domesday Book," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 12 (1978), 43-54.

49 Ed. by Herbert Meritt, "Old English Entries in a Manuscript at Bern," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 33 (1934), 346; cf. 350-51.

50 An account of the use of the word "serf" in historiography remains to be written.

51 See Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, Index rerum, s.v. *Mete 7 mid mannum, mid.*

their precise rights and obligations were unimportant; what mattered was that possession of the property carried with it certain rights in the labour of those occupying it.

Now perhaps the relevance of the preceding discussion can be seen. The concept of freedom was, by the tenth century, starting to change. In origin a term referring to a person's status *vis à vis* the tribe, by the tenth century it was shifting towards defining his status in terms of the land.

Throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, however, freedom in the old sense still survived as a relevant concept. In fact, from the tenth century on, this older sense is particularly common in certain sources. In this century manumission-documents start appearing, and from the latter part of the same century more and more wills free some or all of the persons belonging to the testator.[52] This growth in manumission continues well into the eleventh century, as is clearly evident in a number of counties in Domesday Book, where the population in 1066 (the year of Edward the Confessor's death) and 1086 is given. In Essex, for instance, there was a twenty-five per cent decline in the number of slaves between 1066 and 1086.[53]

How are we to account for this? If we were naïve, we would say that it was a change motivated by piety, since the extant records frequently mention that a person is being freed for the good of the former owner's soul. Now piety must not be discounted—but why was manumission felt to be a particularly suitable form of piety in England only from the tenth century on? After all, the Church had been encouraging the freeing of slaves by laymen since the days of Constantine, when a special form of manumission—*manumissio in ecclesia*, i.e., church manumission—had been introduced into Roman law.[54] The Roman Church had been in Britain since 597, and *manumissio in ecclesia* had existed in Anglo-Saxon law since at least 695.[55] Pious generosity thus does not seem to be an adequate explanation. Furthermore, the average person does not generally engage in acts involving great generosity unless his deeds have some social sanction, a sanction that frequently has an economic basis. To seek an answer to the problem, let us try to imagine the world as seen through the eyes of a layman who was lord over lands on which there were many slaves.[56] In all probability he possessed a body of men who had constantly to be supervised. Even if

52 See Pelteret, "Slavery," 197, Table 4.

53 Ibid., 321-26, Table 10, and p. 327.

54 C. G. Mor, "La 'Manumissio in Ecclesia'," *Rivista di storia del diritto italiano* 1 (1928), 80-150; Fabrizio Fabbrini, *La Manumissio in Ecclesia*, Pubblicazioni dell'istituto di diritto romano e dei diritti dell'oriente mediterraneo 40 (Milan, 1964).

55 Wihtred 8 in EHD I, 397, No. 31.

56 This is, of course, an imagined reconstruction based on Anglo-Saxon sources and other societies having analogous social institutions.

there was a crop failure, he was still obliged to feed them. Without a direct interest in the land, they probably lacked spirit and showed little initiative. Meanwhile, he would have acquired more efficient ploughs than his forefathers possessed and perhaps even a couple of watermills to grind corn and perform other useful tasks.[57] From an economic perspective, it made more sense to release these men. Some would be surplus to his needs and could be released at the crossroads to take the four roads to freedom and go where they would.[58] To others, he could grant the status of freeman and give them some land of their own to work. The new status would hold little significance for him, but if he was canny and well-informed, he would appreciate how it was valued by the peasants in their village.[59] *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. By "freeing" his slaves, the lord did not lose ultimate control of his land nor most of his former slaves; but no longer did he have the tedious obligation to supply them with their daily food and supervise their activities. As a bonus he also received the acclaim of the Church and the promise of spiritual rewards in the world to come.

You will note that I described the lord as a layman. Though the Church encouraged the freeing of slaves by laymen as a pious act, discouraged the harsh treatment of slaves as the *Life of Saint Swithun* shows, and strongly opposed the sale of men out of the country to heathens,[60] it could not actively free its own slaves since canon law prohibited the alienation of Church property. This explains why, for instance, in 1086 the four abbeys with major estates in Worcestershire—Pershore, Evesham, Westminster and Worcester—owned forty per cent of the slaves recorded in this county.[61] At no time in the Middle Ages did the Church condemn the institution of slavery.[62] We should not be surprised at this; it never occurred to men of the Middle Ages that slavery posed a problem—any more than the presence today of lands where millions go to bed hungry poses a problem to many who live in wealthier, more economically-developed countries.

57 See Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine*, 13-14 (the various functions of watermills), 40-43 (the plough).

58 On manumission at the crossroads, see Pelteret, "Slavery," 220-23.

59 Cf. n. 34 above.

60 On ecclesiastical opposition to the sale of slaves abroad, see, for instance, William of Malmesbury, *Vita Wulfstani* II.20, ed. by Reginald R. Darlington, Camden Society, 3rd Series, 40 (London, 1928), 43 (text); James H. F. Peile (trans.), *Life of St. Wulstan, Bishop of Worcester* (Oxford, 1934), 64-65 (translation). For other references and a discussion of them, see Pelteret, "Slavery," 104-105, 124-26.

61 See Pelteret, "Slavery," 337-45, esp. 340, and Tables 15 and 16.

62 David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York, 1966), 83-106. A. W. Rupprecht takes issue with some of Davis's interpretations in "Attitudes on Slavery among the Church Fathers," in Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (eds.), *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974), 261-77. See also Rayford W. Logan, "The Attitude of the Church toward Slavery prior to 1500," *Journal of Negro History* 17 (1932), 466-80.

By 1066, slavery had evidently started to decline considerably. It does not necessarily follow, however, that it would have disappeared completely, even if the Anglo-Saxons had remained in control of England. As long as the old tribal laws remained with the separate status they accorded to slaves, it is possible that the conservatism of what was a settled society would have preserved the institution. There were, after all, still ten per cent of the population who were slaves in 1086, a small but significant proportion. Yet within a hundred years of the Conquest, slaves vanish from the records. So completely did the institution disappear from English history that the standard Old English word for a slave, *theow*, ceased to remain in the language in any form.[63] The explanation for this that best accords with the evidence has been put forward by Professor J. A. Raftis: he has suggested that a terminological change took place after the Norman Conquest.[64] In order to understand this, let us once more take the perspective of a manorial overlord, this time a Norman who had been granted a fief by the Conqueror. In trying to learn who the peasants were that occupied his lands, he would have been met with a multiplicity of vernacular words. Some would be described in terms of their economic status, such as the *cotsettas* or cottagers.[65] Others would be referred to by their occupational functions, such as the *radmen* or riding men, who travelled about on manorial duties.[66] Yet others would be called *ceorlas* 'churls' and *theowas*, terminology indicative of their status in Anglo-Saxon law. We should not be surprised if our Norman lord found it all rather perplexing. He might grant some had more possessions or some spent more time working for him than others—yet all were, in a sense, "his men." When he was presented with the wide range of questions that the Domesday Commissioners posed on behalf of the king,[67] he was forced to draw on estate documents left behind by the former Anglo-Saxon overlord or had to get local inhabitants to supply the information, especially when it came to social matters.[68] Both the specific questions asked by the Commissioners as to how many slaves there had been at three different times and the means used

63 The word was revived in the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *theow*.

64 James A. Raftis, "The Trends towards Serfdom in Medieval England," *Report of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association* 22 (1955), 15-25.

65 See the *Rectitudines* for some of the terminology employed (Liebermann, *Gesetze* I, 444-53 [text]; EHD II, 875-79, No. 172 [translation]).

66 On the *radmen* and the related *radchenistri*, see Henry Ellis, *A General Introduction to Domesday Book*, Record Commission (London, 1833), I, 72-74.

67 On the terms of reference of the Domesday Commissioners, see Vivian H. Galbraith, *The Making of Domesday Book* (Oxford, 1961), 59-66.

68 On the use of documentary, as well as oral, sources in the compiling of Domesday Book, see Sally Harvey, "Domesday Book and its Predecessors," *EHR* 86 (1971), 753-73.

to answer the questions explain why slaves are so widely recorded in Domesday Book.[69] However, to a Norman overlord, the status of slave must have seemed an anomalous one. So far as he was concerned he had rights in all the persons resident on his lands. None could betake themselves off without his permission. How they were viewed and what they were called within their own community was irrelevant to him—and in any case, the numbers of slaves on any one estate was in most instances too low for them to stand out as a group. Usually, he would refer to them all as his "men," or else would describe them in terms of their function on the estate such as *bubulcus* 'ploughman' or *molendarius* 'miller.' Thus, by the end of the first quarter of the twelfth century, the word "slave" has just about disappeared from our sources. Significantly, one of the last works to use the term is the Black Book of Peterborough, compiled about that time.[70] It was the product of a well-endowed ecclesiastical institution whose stable control from the Anglo-Saxon period encouraged the preservation of old ways and old terminology.

From our perspective, the disappearance of slavery as an institution from large areas of Europe in the Middle Ages marks a momentous change in Western man's perception of himself and society. In England the change took place unremarked—even unnoticed.

69 Slaves are recorded in all Domesday Book counties except Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire, Rutlandshire, and Yorkshire.

70 *Liber Niger Monasterii Sancti Petri de Burgo*, in Thomas Stapleton (ed.), *Chronicon Petroburgense*, Camden Society, Publications 47 (London, 1849), 157-83. Another late example is the earliest survey of the English estates of the Abbey of Holy Trinity, Caen (Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 5650), which dates from 1106x1131 (possibly before 1113). This has a few references to *ancillae* and *servi*: see Marjorie Chibnall (ed.), *Charters and Custumals of the Abbey of Holy Trinity Caen*, British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History, N.S. 5 (London, 1982), 33, 35, and 36.