

## JOINT KINGSHIP IN KENT c. 560 TO 785

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Like most of the southern kingdoms of England during the early Saxon period, the kingship system of Kent was characterized by joint rule, two or more kings ruling at the same time, rather than the simpler pattern of individual reigns with which we are familiar from later Anglo-Saxon and medieval history.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, many of the southern kingdoms are poorly recorded for the Anglo-Saxon period and the details of their kingship systems remain shadowy. Although there are gaps in the Kentish evidence and questions that must go unanswered, enough remains to reconstruct the main sequence of reigns and to understand something of the principles which lay behind the Kentish pattern of kingship.

Traditions of joint reigns apparently stretch back to the time of the formation of the kingdom of Kent. Bede records that the first Saxons who came to Britain were under the leadership of two brothers, Hengest and Horsa,<sup>2</sup> and that the later kings of Kent claimed descent from the former.<sup>3</sup> The details of how they acquired control of Kent are revealed more fully by the early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*<sup>4</sup> and in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which records the elevation to the kingship of Hengest and his son, Aesc, after the death of Horsa in 455. These sources have been discussed so often that the details need not be repeated here.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, frequent

<sup>1</sup> The West Saxons, South Saxons and East Saxons all practised variations of joint rule.

<sup>2</sup> *EH*, i, 15.

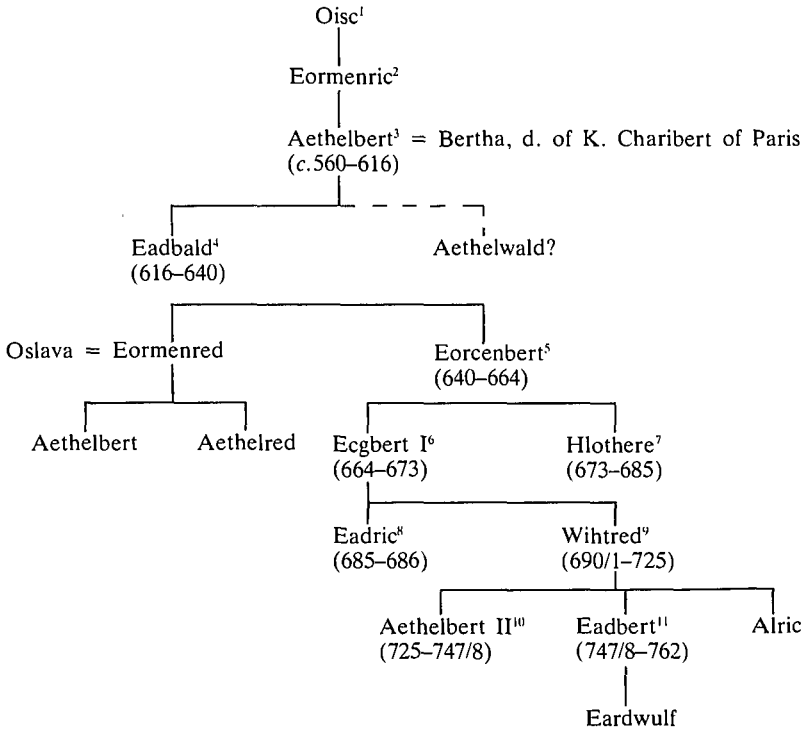
<sup>3</sup> *EH*, ii, 5. In this chapter, Bede refers to the joint arrival of Hengest and Oisc at the invitation of Vortigern. There is no mention of Oisc in I, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Nennius, British History, and the Welsh Annals*, (Ed.) J. Morris, *Arthurian Period Sources*, vol. 8 (1980), ch. 31, 36–8 and 43–6. This edition will be superseded by that being prepared by D.N. Dumville.

<sup>5</sup> For views at different ends of the spectrum of opinion about the early sources see D.N. Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain – History and Legend', *History*, 62 (1977), 173–92, and J. Morris, *The Age of Arthur, a History of the British Isles from 350–650* (1973).

TABLE

*Genealogy of Kentish Kings*



1. Only individuals referred to in the text are included.
2. Senior kings have been numbered in the order in which they ruled (omitting Oswine and foreign rulers).
3. Eardwulf is the last of the Oiscingas for whom we have genealogical information.

repetition does not make these accounts any more reliable and there are fundamental problems in using sources of the eighth and ninth centuries to illuminate events of the pre-literate fifth century. Although there may well be some reliable oral traditions behind the stories of Hengest and Horsa, it is impossible to isolate these. The accounts of the foundation of Kent that survive are undoubtedly influenced by the only near-contemporary source which describes events in fifth-century Britain, the *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* of Gildas. The Kentish leaders are identified with the federate bands

which Gildas says were settled *in orientali parte insulae*, but with no indication that Kent was meant.<sup>6</sup> Other aspects of their story draw on common story-telling *motifs*,<sup>7</sup> while the concept of two brothers establishing a new kingdom recalls the foundation myths of other Indo-European peoples, the mythic element being reinforced by the unlikely pairing of their names ('gelding' and 'horse').<sup>8</sup>

Further problems exist in linking Hengest and Horsa with the later Kentish kings. We know that Oisc (the Aesc of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) was of the greatest significance to the Kentish royal house. Bede tells us that the Kentish kings called themselves *Oiscingas*, presumably with the implication that Oisc was the founder king from whom descent had to be traced to claim royal status, a position analogous to that of Cerdic in the West Saxon dynasty.<sup>9</sup> However, Bede also says that Oisc was only the *cognomen* of Oeric, the son of Hengest. According to Bede, Oisc/Oeric's own son was Octa and he was the grandfather of the first Christian king, Aethelbert I.<sup>10</sup> A different version of the Kentish genealogy was also circulating in Northumbria in the eighth century as the Kentish genealogy in the Anglian collection of regnal lists and genealogies calls Hengest's son Occa (presumably cognate with Octa) and Aethelbert's grandfather is called Oese.<sup>11</sup> The deeds of Octa and his cousin Ebissa in Northumbria are revealed in the *Historia Brittonum*,<sup>12</sup> while an Oessa is credited elsewhere with the foundation of the kingdom of Bernicia.<sup>13</sup> Two separate dynasties seem to be claiming descent from the same ancestors. Clearly, there can be no certainty about Aethelbert's progenitors and the link between Oeric/Oisc, whose historical

<sup>6</sup> Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, (Ed.) M. Winterbottom (1978), ch. 23. Sites like Mucking on the Thames may represent the first settlements of federates, but Gildas' words do not necessarily refer to anywhere in southern England; see E.A. Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', *Britannia*, x (1979), 203–26.

<sup>7</sup> For example, 'the night of the long knives' (*Historia Brittonum*, ch. 45–6) in which the English killed three hundred of Vortigern's followers. Variations of this ruse are to be found in Greek, Roman and Scandinavian literature.

<sup>8</sup> J.E. Turville-Petre, 'Hengest and Horsa', *Saga Book of the Viking Club* 14, part 4 (1956–7), 273–90, connects traditions about them with Anglo-Saxon horse-cults.

<sup>9</sup> *EH*, ii, 5, where it is linked with the claim that Hengest and Oisc were the first Anglo-Saxons to come to Britain.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> D.N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *Anglo-Saxon England*, (Ed.) P. Clemoes, 5 (1976), 31 and 33. The genealogy is for Aethelbert II.

<sup>12</sup> *Historia Brittonum*, ch. 38.

<sup>13</sup> D.N. Dumville, 'A new Chronicle Fragment of early British History', *English Historical Review*, 88 (1973), 312–14. The tenth-century translator of the *Chronicle*, Aethelweard, perhaps in desperation at the variant forms, equates Ochta with Ese (Oisc): *Chronicon Aethelwardi*, (Ed.) A. Campbell (1962), II, 2.

existence is probable,<sup>14</sup> and Hengest, who seems to belong to the world of Germanic heroic poetry,<sup>15</sup> is crudely made and lacks credibility.

It would also be unwise to use the references to the reigns of Hengest and Horsa and Hengest and Oisc to argue for the existence of joint kingship in the fifth century. They do, however, show us that in the eighth century, when the foundation legends were definitely in circulation, it was natural for kingship in Kent to be perceived in terms of joint rule. A common function of foundation traditions is not so much to illuminate the past, but to explain or justify the present by projecting its conditions back into an earlier period.<sup>16</sup> Hengest and Horsa may have more to tell us about the eighth than the fifth century. Kent in the sixth century is as badly recorded as in the fifth and we only know of the reign of Aethelbert I's father, Eormenric, through Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*.<sup>17</sup> Contemporary records probably only began to be kept after the conversion of King Aethelbert,<sup>18</sup> though they are never sufficiently extensive to answer all the questions we might wish to ask. The study of Kent's kingship system is made much easier after the appearance of charters in the reign of Hlothere,<sup>19</sup> though we are largely depen-

<sup>14</sup> The fact that the Kentish royal family called themselves 'Oiscingas' after Oisc suggests that he was the first of the house to rule, like Cerdic from whom all subsequent West Saxon kings traced descent. However, Turville-Petre would see Oisc as another divine ancestor ('Hengest and Horsa', 284-6).

<sup>15</sup> Hengest appears as a Danish or Jutish leader in the poems *Beowulf* and the *Finnsburg Fragment*. His appearance in the poems is against his historical existence in Britain rather than evidence for it as a number of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms seem to have artificially boosted their royal genealogies by incorporating heroes from the past within them; see K. Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxxix (1953), 306-7.

<sup>16</sup> R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung* (1961) and H. Moisl, 'Anglo-Saxon royal Genealogies and Germanic oral Tradition', *Journal of Medieval History*, vii (1981), 215-48. It has been suggested that Bede's stress on Kent as the first province to be settled by Germanic invaders can be linked with the concern of archbishops of Canterbury in the early eighth century to preserve their primacy over the Anglo-Saxon church; see J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bede and Plummer', *Early Medieval History* (1975), 90.

<sup>17</sup> Eormenric appears in the Kentish genealogies, but the only reference to him ruling comes from Gregory's record of the marriage of Bertha, daughter of King Charibert, to Aethelbert who is described as 'the son of a certain king of Kent' (i.e. Eormenric); Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, (Ed.) O.M. Dalton, 2 vols (1927), ix. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Though literacy did come to Kent with the marriage of Aethelbert and Bertha, see K. Harrison, *The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History to A.D. 900* (1976), 121-30.

<sup>19</sup> The first authentic charters date from Hlothere's reign, but P. Chaplais, 'Who Introduced Charters into England? The Case for Augustine', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, iii (1965-9), 315-36, argues for their introduction in the reign of Aethelbert.

dent on the archives of just four religious houses.<sup>20</sup>

Bede represents Aethelbert I (560–616) as sole ruler in Kent with Canterbury as his chief city.<sup>21</sup> Although Bede's account of the work of the Augustinian mission in Kent provides few insights into the nature of kingship in the province, he does imply a major administrative division within the kingdom. For Kent was provided with its two bishoprics of Canterbury and Rochester from the early years of the conversion,<sup>22</sup> whereas the normal pattern elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon England was for the kingdom to be treated initially as one bishopric, with subdivision a secondary development. Kent's uniqueness in this respect suggests that the subdivision into east and west Kent, as revealed by the bounds of the two dioceses, was a significant administrative division within the kingdom before the arrival of Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

Charters surviving in Aethelbert's name present a rather different perspective of his reign from that of Bede's narrative. The charters are referred to with some hesitancy as, with possibly one exception, they are without doubt spurious in their present form,<sup>24</sup> though Aethelbert undoubtedly did grant lands to his foundations at Canterbury and Rochester.<sup>25</sup> They are of interest because the system of kingship they present for Aethelbert's reign resembles that which we can trace in subsequent reigns in Kent. Two of Aethelbert's supposed grants to Canterbury are witnessed by his son, Eadbald,<sup>26</sup> in one of them with the title of king,<sup>27</sup> and Eadbald is made to consent with Aethelbert to an equally spurious grant of privileges from Augustine to Canterbury.<sup>28</sup> Aethelbert's grant to Rochester is actually addressed to Eadbald as well as to St. Andrew, Rochester's patron saint.<sup>29</sup> Levison was inclined to look more favourably on this charter than on those for Canterbury<sup>30</sup> and it lacks obviously anachronistic features, though it is not without problems and is, of course, earlier than the accepted date for the introduction of the charter to England.<sup>31</sup> It is

<sup>20</sup> SS. Peter and Paul (subsequently known as St. Augustine's), Canterbury; Rochester; Reculver and Minster-in-Thanel.

<sup>21</sup> *EH*, i, 25.

<sup>22</sup> *EH*, ii, 3. Rochester was created a see in 604.

<sup>23</sup> *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, (Ed.) C. Plummer (1896), II, 79.

<sup>24</sup> W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the eighth Century* (1946), appendix I, 174–233.

<sup>25</sup> *EH*, ii, 3.

<sup>26</sup> B 5, Sawyer 3 and B 6, Sawyer 4.

<sup>27</sup> B 6, Sawyer 4.

<sup>28</sup> B 7, Sawyer 1244.

<sup>29</sup> B 3, Sawyer 1.

<sup>30</sup> Levison, *England and the Continent*, 223–5.

<sup>31</sup> See n. 19.

curious that all these charters imply that Eadbald shared in the government of the kingdom during Aethelbert's reign even though none of the known sources which were available to later forgers contain any such information. Did Canterbury and Rochester possess some record of their foundation grants which implied ruling status for Eadbald while his father was alive?

Eadbald (616–640) is represented by Bede as sole ruler of Kent after his father's death,<sup>32</sup> though a letter from Pope Boniface V to Bishop Justus, included in the *Ecclesiastical History* implies that he had a co-ruler.<sup>33</sup> Pope Boniface refers to letters which he has received from a king *Adulwald* about his conversion by Justus. As P. Hunter Blair has shown,<sup>34</sup> the form appears to represent the Anglo-Saxon name 'Aethelwald' rather than the name 'Eadbald' which appears as *Audubald* in a letter from Pope Boniface to Edwin of Northumbria.<sup>35</sup> As Justus was Bishop of Rochester when Aethelwald's conversion took place, it is reasonable to associate the latter with the western province as well. We do not, of course, know Aethelwald's relationship to Eadbald, but brother would be likely from analogy with later Kentish reigns.

Bede has little to say about any of Eadbald's children except Earconbert who succeeded his father in the chief kingship of Kent (640–664).<sup>36</sup> Further details of his family are to be found in the so-called *Kentish Legend*, perhaps best described as a genealogical narrative about the Kentish royal house and its relations by marriage, with particular emphasis on those who were deemed to be saints. A version of the *Legend* was in existence in the eighth century, but none of the surviving texts represent this version in its entirety and all contain later accretions and hagiographical elaborations.<sup>37</sup> There are therefore problems in establishing the original historical core of the *Legend*. All versions, however, are agreed that Earconbert had a brother called Eormenred and his two sons, the martyrs Aethelbert and Aethelred, are leading members of the saintly contingent. Although there is some disagreement over details, most of the texts agree that Eormenred was the elder of the two brothers, but was passed over by Eadbald in favour of Earconbert when he nominated

<sup>32</sup> *EH*, ii, 5.

<sup>33</sup> *EH*, ii, 8.

<sup>34</sup> P. Hunter Blair, 'The Letters of Pope Boniface V and the Mission of Paulinus to Northumbria', *England Before the Conquest: Studies in primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, (Eds.) P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (1971), 5–15.

<sup>35</sup> *EH*, ii, 10.

<sup>36</sup> *EH*, iii, 8.

<sup>37</sup> D. Rollason, *The Mildfrith Legend: A Study in early medieval Hagiography* (1983), *passim*.

his successor.<sup>38</sup> According to the compiler of the *Historia Regum*, who used the earliest known version of the *Legend*, Eormenred lived on powerless, while his brother ruled. But perhaps he was relatively powerless rather than completely without royal authority, as several other versions believed he obtained the status of king or *regulus*. That he did achieve some form of ruling status is suggested by the main story of the *Legend*, the murder of Eormenred's sons by their cousin, Ecgbert, son of Earconbert, (see Table), because he felt they were a threat to his tenure of the throne. As we shall see, only those who were sons of kings tended to become kings themselves in Kent and Ecgbert's action is more readily understood if Eormenred had ruled as one of the kings of Kent. We can therefore tentatively identify Eormenred as junior king of Kent during his brother Earconbert's reign.<sup>39</sup>

Ecgbert (664–673) is not known to have shared the throne with anyone, though his brother, Hlothere, who succeeded him, (673–685), is an obvious candidate for the junior position.<sup>40</sup> Hlothere undoubtedly did share power with his nephew, Eadric, the son of Ecgbert, who issued laws jointly with his uncle<sup>41</sup> and in 679 gave his consent to a grant from Hlothere to Reculver which survives in a contemporary manuscript.<sup>42</sup> The partnership ended when Eadric raised the South Saxons against Hlothere and wounded his uncle fatally in battle.<sup>43</sup> Eadric (685–686) reigned only a year and a half before his reign was ended by foreign conquest. The assault of Caedwalla of Wessex and his brother, Mul, is recorded in the *Chronicle sa* 686 and Mul became king of Kent for long enough to confirm previous royal gifts to Minster-in-Thanel.<sup>44</sup> However, in a grant of land in Kent Caedwalla refers to the East Saxon conquest of the province by King Sighere who witnesses the charter.<sup>45</sup> It would seem that the twofold division of Kent was preserved in a time of foreign invasion.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> There are other possibilities: Eormenred could have ruled with his father after the death of Aethelwold which cannot, of course, be dated.

<sup>40</sup> *EH*, iii, 8 and iv, 5. There are problems with Hlothere's dates which have not been satisfactorily resolved. Bede's information puts his accession in 673, but two of his charters imply he succeeded in 674 (B 36 and 44).

<sup>41</sup> F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (1903–16), I, 9–11.

<sup>42</sup> B 45, Sawyer 8. Two other charters of Hlothere (B 36 and 44) do not refer to Eadric.

<sup>43</sup> *EH*, iv, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas of Elmham, *Historia Monasterii S. Augustini Cantuariensis*, (Ed.) C. Hardwick, Rolls ser. 8 (1858), 232–8.

<sup>45</sup> B 89, Sawyer 233.

In 689, two different rulers shared authority in Kent, both of whom acknowledged the overlordship of Aethelred of Mercia.<sup>46</sup> The East Saxon interest was continued by Swaefheard, under the supervision of his father Saebbe who had been co-ruler of the East Saxons with Sighere.<sup>47</sup> Ruling with Swaefheard in Kent was Oswine who claimed membership of the Kentish royal house and kinship with Abbess Aebbe of Minster-in-Thanel,<sup>48</sup> but like Mul and Swaefheard was not acknowledged as a legitimate king in any of the surviving regnal lists and was summed up by Bede in the adjective *dubius*.<sup>49</sup> Although one might have expected the two rulers to divide the kingdom between them, they evidently regarded themselves as joint rulers and approved and witnessed each other's charters.<sup>50</sup> Oswine is not heard of after 690 and Bede records that Swaefheard was ruling with Wihtried, son of Ecgbert, 'the rightful king' in 692<sup>51</sup> and they are linked together in B 89. Wihtried seems to have ousted Swaefheard in 694.<sup>52</sup>

Wihtried (691–725) appears as sole ruler of Kent after Swaefheard's departure – his laws and early charters are made in his name alone,<sup>53</sup> but by the end of his reign there are signs that one, or possibly two, of

<sup>46</sup> There have been problems with the dates of Swaefheard and Oswine, but these have been satisfactorily resolved by D. Whitelock in Harrison, *Framework of Anglo-Saxon History*, appendix 1, 142–6. Grants of Oswine (B 73) and Swaefheard (B 42) were made with the consent of Aethelred of Mercia.

<sup>47</sup> As revealed by B 42, Sawyer 10 and *EH*, iii, 11. It is possible that a second East Saxon king ruled in Kent for a short while. B 41, Sawyer 11, is a grant from *Suabertus rex Cantuariorum*. The name is more typically East Saxon than Kentish, but is distinct from that of Swaefheard; possibly it should be reconstructed as 'Swaefbert'. The charter is undated, but the only witnesses given also witness a charter of Swaefheard, dated 690 (B 42). It may be that Swaefbert originally took over Sighere's interests in Kent, but was soon replaced by Swaefheard. The two could have been brothers.

<sup>48</sup> B 73, Sawyer 12 and B 35, Sawyer 13.

<sup>49</sup> Bede (*EH*, iv, 26) describes how *reges dubii uel externi* ruled Kent after Eadric's death. The *externi* are presumably Mul, Sighere, Swaefbert and Swaefheard. G. Ward, 'King Oswin – A forgotten Ruler of Kent', *Arch. Cant.*, 1 (1938), 60–5, suggested Oswine might be descended from Eormenred whose wife was called Oslave, but we have no definite evidence to support this.

<sup>50</sup> B 35, 40 and 42; neither Oswine nor Swaefheard used their regnal titles when witnessing the other's grants. B 73, Sawyer 12, is a grant of 689 from Oswine which is not witnessed by Swaefheard. A 'Sabertus' is included among the witnesses, but this is probably not 'Suabertus' as the name does not head the witnesses as we would expect that of a co-ruler to do.

<sup>51</sup> *EH*, v, 8 and iv, 26.

<sup>52</sup> His accession is recorded in the *Chronicle* under this year. As we know from Bede and the regnal years of his charters that he was already king by this time, the entry is likely to record the date he commenced ruling without Swaefheard; *Baedae Opera Historica*, (Ed.) Plummer, II, 284.

<sup>53</sup> Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, pp. 12–14 and B 86 and 90.



his sons was sharing power with him. The Council of Bapchild, which cannot be closely dated, was witnessed by Wihtréd's son, Aethelbert, on behalf of himself and his brother, Eadbert.<sup>54</sup> Aethelbert made a grant in his own right in 724, but with the consent of his father and the charter was witnessed by Eadbert at Aethelbert's request.<sup>55</sup> Neither son is given a title, but Aethelbert's ability to grant land suggests that he may have been of ruling status, while Eadbert also appears to have had some share in royal authority, though subordinate to his brother.

The situation after Wihtréd's death requires some discussion as there are contradictory versions of events. Bede states that Wihtréd left three sons as heirs – Aethelbert, Eadbert and Alric – a statement which led at least two post-Conquest writers to assume that they ruled successively.<sup>56</sup> In fact, Alric is not heard of again and Bede's statement need not necessarily mean that it was intended he should have a share in the kingdom.<sup>57</sup> Certainly there is no evidence that he ever ruled. Bede names Aethelbert as the eldest son, or, at least, the son who ranked first, and this is consistent with the evidence already reviewed from Wihtréd's reign. That Aethelbert was the senior king is also implied by B 159 in which Bishop Ealdwulf of Rochester apologetically seeks Aethelbert's confirmation to a grant made by Eadbert as he had not realised that he needed it. Eadbert's consent to Aethelbert's grants was apparently not required.<sup>58</sup>

The *Chronicle*, however, has a different picture of the relative position of the two brothers. It records the death of King Eadbert in 748 (747 C) and that of King Aethelbert in 762. The implication is that Eadbert ruled first and was succeeded by Aethelbert on his death, and this was how the Kentish succession was interpreted by some of the post-Conquest chroniclers who used the *Chronicle*.<sup>59</sup> Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 173 has a Kentish regnal list with this sequence.<sup>60</sup> The charters, on the other hand, appear to show

<sup>54</sup> B 91, Sawyer 22.

<sup>55</sup> B 141, Sawyer 1180.

<sup>56</sup> *EH*, v, 23. This was the assumption of Thomas Elmham (see n. 44) and William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, (Ed.) W. Stubbs, Rolls ser. 90 (1887), 17–8.

<sup>57</sup> Alric could have been given a grant of land or movables. His only other appearance is at the council of Bapchild (B 91) where his mother Werburga witnessed on his behalf, presumably because he was under age. He was probably only half-brother to Aethelbert and Eadbert.

<sup>58</sup> B 148 and 160 are grants by Aethelbert which do not refer to Eadbert.

<sup>59</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 17–8 and *Chronicon ex Chronicis* (attributed to Florence of Worcester), (Ed.) B. Thorpe (1848), 50.

<sup>60</sup> The manuscript also contains the 'A' version of the *Chronicle* (Parker manuscript). The regnal list is printed in M.R. James, *A descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge* (1912), I, 399 (folio 55 v.). The list ends with the reign of Aethelbert II and was added to the manuscript in a twelfth-century hand.

Aethelbert in the senior position between 732 and 748 and Eadbert and Aethelbert both alive in 762.

One solution might be to conclude that Aethelbert and Eadbert ruled together from 725 to 762 and that the *Chronicle* record is entirely mistaken. However, there is another explanation which requires only a slight emendation of the *Chronicle*. Matthew Paris in his *Flores Historiarum* has a regnal list which differs from any other surviving.<sup>61</sup> It has the reading 'Wihtred. Aethelbert. Eadbert. Aethelbert.', and thus implies that there were two kings called Aethelbert in the period 725 to 762. This fits very well with the available evidence. In the charter record Aethelbert appears as the dominant king until 747 or 748, when Eadbert seems to inherit the position. There is not another charter in the name of Aethelbert until 762, and it is reasonable to assume that the Aethelbert of 762 is a different individual to that of 725 to 747/8. The only emendation required is that the *Chronicle* should read under 748 *accession*, rather than death of Eadbert, while the entry for 762, as we shall see, can be allowed to stand.

A third king appears to have been ruling in Kent before Aethelbert's death. In B 175 an Eardwulf *rex Cantuariorum* granted land to St. Andrew's, Rochester. The charter is witnessed by King Aethelbert and Eardwulf is presumably to be identified with King Eadbert's son of that name.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, like the majority of the Kentish charters, this grant is only preserved in a post-Conquest copy. It has the date 762, indiction fifteen, but the *anno domini* date would seem to be incorrect. Not only is 762 not the equivalent of indiction fifteen, but it is also too late for Archbishop Cuthbert who attested the grant and who died in 760. The date generally proposed for this charter is 747 which does have the indiction number fifteen, and it is assumed that the date of 762 was added by a later copyist.<sup>63</sup> This would mean that the first evidence for Eardwulf as king occurs just before Aethelbert's death. The end of the latter's reign is implied by the

<sup>61</sup> Matthew Paris, *Flores Historiarum*, (Ed.) H.R. Luard, Rolls ser. 95 (1890), 464. It is the only regnal list that includes the names of the kings of Kent who are not mentioned by Bede. Matthew had access to a number of primary sources for the Anglo-Saxon period at St. Albans, some reliable, others not. He knew, for instance, some of the Rochester charters from the *Textus Roffensis*. His Northumbrian regnal list is also of considerable interest as it includes late kings not recorded elsewhere (see W. Davies, 'Annals and the Origin of Mercia', *Mercian Studies*, (Ed.) A. Dornier (1977), 27, n. 12).

<sup>62</sup> As revealed in B 176, Sawyer 31. The charter is in a contemporary manuscript, but undated.

<sup>63</sup> *Charters of Rochester*, (Ed.), A. Campbell, Anglo-Saxon Charters I (1973), no. 4 and xxii.

*Chronicle* to have been in 748, but there is a record of Eadbert granting toll to Reculver in 747<sup>64</sup> and, as one might expect the granting of toll to have been the prerogative of the senior king, it is possible that Aethelbert ceased to rule before the end of 747.

After Aethelbert II's disappearance from the records, Eadbert took over his senior position and ruled for an unspecified length of time with his son, Eardwulf.<sup>65</sup> Sometime after 754 Eardwulf joined with Bishop Ealdwulf of Rochester in writing to Boniface,<sup>66</sup> but when he ceased to rule is unknown. However, in 762 Eadbert is found ruling with a King Sigered who granted land to Rochester in that year.<sup>67</sup> Sigered's name is reminiscent of the East Saxon royal house, but as the abbess of the royal nunnery of Minster-in-Thanet in 761 was called Sigeburga,<sup>68</sup> it would seem likely that the element *Sige-* was being used at this time by members of the Kentish royal house.

From 762 until 764 the political situation in Kent is complex. We may assume that Eadbert died in 762 as his witness to Sigered's grant is his last appearance. It would seem that he was briefly succeeded by Aethelbert III who appears in Matthew Paris' list as his successor and exchanged land with SS. Peter and Paul, Canterbury, in 762 before disappearing from view.<sup>69</sup> As the *Chronicle* records the death of Aethelbert, King of Kent, in 762 it would appear that he died in the same year in which he succeeded to the throne. Sigered meanwhile seems to have remained associated with the Rochester diocese. Unfortunately, his second charter to Rochester in which he describes himself as *rex dimidiae partis provinciae Cantuariorum* is undated, although it was made by 764 as Archbishop Bregowine who died in that year is a witness.<sup>70</sup> The charter is confirmed by an otherwise unrecorded King Eanmund, possibly he was Aethelbert III's successor in the eastern province.

<sup>64</sup> B 173, Sawyer 1612. It is odd that Eadbert is not referred to in Eardwulf's grant for Rochester. It is conceivable that there was conflict between Aethelbert and Eadbert which led, say, to the temporary banishment of Eadbert in 747 and perhaps civil war between them which resulted ultimately in Aethelbert's death.

<sup>65</sup> Though in fact we lack records for Eadbert between 748 (B 177) and 761 (B 190). B 190, Sawyer 28, states that Eadbert is making the grant *pro aeterna redemptione animarum nostrarum meae uidelicet atque clementissimi regis Aethelberti*. It may be a reference to his (presumably) dead brother or could be an indication that he was by this time ruling with Aethelbert III, in which case the appearance of Sigered (see below) makes the situation more complex.

<sup>66</sup> *Die Briefe der Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, (Ed.) M. Tangl, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Selectae 1 (1916), no. 122.

<sup>67</sup> B 193, Sawyer 32; the grant is witnessed by Eadbert.

<sup>68</sup> She was granted a remission of toll by Eadbert in B 189, Sawyer 29.

<sup>69</sup> B 191, Sawyer 25.

<sup>70</sup> B 194, Sawyer 33.

The reigns of Sigereð and Eanmund may well have been ended by Offa of Mercia who first appears in Kent in 764 when he re-granted the land Sigereð had given to Rochester in B 194.<sup>71</sup> Associated with him in the grant was a King Heaberht who appears elsewhere with the title 'King of Kent' and may have been the man of that name who witnessed B 194. The name is relatively common in Mercia, but Heaberht's origins are unknown. Heaberht is subsequently found associated with Ecgbert II who may more confidently, from the form of his name, be identified as an Oiscingas and is acknowledged as king in Matthew's list.<sup>72</sup> Ecgbert made a grant to Rochester in 765 which was witnessed by Heaberht and Offa<sup>73</sup> and another undated grant to Rochester was witnessed by Heaberht<sup>74</sup> who then disappears from view and is only otherwise recorded on his extremely rare coinage.<sup>75</sup> However, we do not know exactly when Heaberht ceased to rule as there are no more Kentish charters until 774 when Offa granted lands to Canterbury without reference to any local king,<sup>76</sup> though Ecgbert had witnessed a grant of Offa's in Sussex in 772.<sup>77</sup> There was a major battle between the Mercians and the men of Kent at Otford in 776 which may have resulted in reduced Mercian control in Kent.<sup>78</sup> In 778 and 779 Ecgbert granted lands to Rochester without reference to Offa or any other king.<sup>79</sup> It seems that he also granted land to Canterbury at this time, but that these grants were revoked subsequently by Offa 'as though it were not lawful for Ecgbert to grant lands in perpetuity by a written instrument'.<sup>80</sup> It is possible that Offa was prepared to countenance Ecgbert as king in west Kent as the Rochester charters were apparently allowed to stand. Offa presumably regarded himself as ruler of the eastern province, but in fact seems to have had little authority in Kent between 776 and 785. Towards the end of that period, in 784, a King Ealhmund of Kent granted land to Reculver.<sup>81</sup> It is the only appearance of a king of that

<sup>71</sup> B 195, Sawyer 105.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew included the name 'Ecgferthus' between that of Aethelbert III and Ecgbert II. The significance of the name is not clear.

<sup>73</sup> B 196, Sawyer 34.

<sup>74</sup> B 260, Sawyer 37.

<sup>75</sup> C.E. Blunt, 'The Anglo-Saxon Coinage and the Historian', *Med. Arch.*, iv (1960), 1-15. Rather more coins survive in Ecgbert's name.

<sup>76</sup> B 123, Sawyer 110 and B 214, Sawyer 111.

<sup>77</sup> B 208, Sawyer 108.

<sup>78</sup> The battle is recorded in the *Chronicle*, but the outcome is not given.

<sup>79</sup> B 227, Sawyer 35 and B 228, Sawyer 36.

<sup>80</sup> B 293, Sawyer 155, cited by F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3rd ed., 1971), 36, n. 1. B 293, Sawyer 155 and B 319, Sawyer 1259 also refer to grants by Ecgbert subsequently revoked by Offa.

<sup>81</sup> B 243, Sawyer 38.

name who may have been partner or successor to Ecgbert II. Later tradition identified Ealhmund of Kent with the father of Ecgbert of Wessex of the same name,<sup>82</sup> but the identification seems doubtful and there is no evidence that Wessex had authority in Kent at this time.

From 785 Offa seems to have reasserted his authority in Kent and ruled there as king without reference to any local rulers.<sup>83</sup> Eadbert Praen, who may well have been a member of the Kentish royal house,<sup>84</sup> temporarily won back Kent from Mercian control between 796 and 798, as did Baldred between c. 823 and 825, though his defeat saw Kent pass permanently into West Saxon hands. But it was Offa who finally destroyed the joint kingship of Kent, though the division into two provinces persisted throughout the ninth century when east and west Kent each had its own ealdorman.<sup>85</sup>

Joint reigns were evidently a very significant feature of the Kentish kingship system before the province's annexation by Mercia. Of the nine Oiscingas reigns between Aethelbert I and Aethelbert II, recorded in the king-lists as single reigns,<sup>86</sup> all but two of the reigns can be shown to have been shared, though the evidence for the early seventh century is not entirely satisfactory. Of the two exceptions, Eadric's reign lasted only one and a half years and so is not well-documented, while for Ecgbert's we have scarcely any evidence outside Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The pattern continues after Aethelbert II's death, when most of the regnal lists cease, with Eadbert ruling with Eardwulf and then Sigered; followed by Aethelbert III and Sigered; Eanmund and Sigered; Ecgbert II and Heaberht. What is particularly striking is that the pattern of joint

<sup>82</sup> The claim is made in the twelfth-century 'F' version of the *Chronicle*, written at Canterbury. It may have been no more than the coincidence of names and Ecgbert of Wessex's later connection with Kent which suggested it. There is no other sign of West Saxon involvement in Kent during the reign of Offa.

<sup>83</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 206.

<sup>84</sup> Eadbert Praen was in holy orders which made his accession illegal in the eyes of the church (B 288, letter from Pope Leo III to King Coenwulf of Mercia). The placing of royal rivals in the church was common in the Anglo-Saxon period for this very reason. There is an interesting possible parallel to Eadbert in contemporary Northumbria where Osbald broke his monastic vow in 796 to become king.

<sup>85</sup> H.M. Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (1905), 192-3, 271.

<sup>86</sup> It excludes Oswine who is not acknowledged as king by Bede nor in the *Chronicle* whose compiler took much of his Kentish information from Bede, but may also have used a Kentish king-list for the reigns of Wihtrud's sons. Apart from CCC 173 no separate king-lists exist, though post-Conquest chronicles including the *Gesta Regum* of William of Malmesbury (n. 56), Matthew Paris' *Flores* (n. 61), *Chronicon ex Chronicis* (n. 59) and the *Historia Anglorum* of Henry of Huntingdon, (Ed.) T. Arnold, Rolls ser. 74 (1879), 64 and 134, list the names of Kentish kings. Of these, only Matthew's list shows signs of independence of Bede and the *Chronicle*.

reigns continues at times of foreign conquest. Sighere and Mul seem to have ruled Kent after Eadric's deposition, to be replaced by Swaefheard and Oswine, under the supervision of Aethelred of Mercia. Even Offa, not renowned as a respecter of local custom, may have permitted the kingdom to be divided between himself and Ecgbert II. At the beginning of the eighth century there are some signs of a third joint ruler, though the evidence is not entirely clear. The exact status of Eadbert in the latter part of Wihtred's reign is not certain and he definitely did not use the title of 'king' until after his father's death. In 747, Aethelbert II, Eadbert and Eardwulf do seem to have been ruling at the same time, but Aethelbert died later that year or in the following year and we do not know how long the arrangement had been in existence or whether it came into being to meet a particular situation in 747. Although it would be unwise to be too categorical in view of the limitations of the sources, particularly for the first three quarters of the seventh century, it does appear that dual reigns were the norm in Kent and that no more than three kings can be found ruling together in Kent at any one time.<sup>87</sup>

To a certain extent, at least, the dual kingship can be connected with the division of the kingdom into the two dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester. In a number of instances the junior partner can be associated with the diocese of Rochester. Aethelwald, for instance, was converted by Bishop Justus of Rochester, while the senior ruler, Eadbald, was the prize of Archbishop Lawrence. Eardwulf who ruled with his father, Eadbert, not only granted land to Rochester, but sent a letter jointly with its bishop to the Anglo-Saxon missionary, Boniface. Sigered who styled himself 'King of half Kent' appears only in Rochester charters, while Offa seems to have been prepared to allow Ecgbert II to grant land within the Rochester diocese, but not elsewhere in Kent. The senior kings, on the other hand, granted lands more often in eastern Kent and tended to issue charters from places within the eastern province.<sup>88</sup> As far as we can tell, the two kings did tend to have different territorial bases and B 159 was witnessed separately by Eadbert and Aethelbert II, each with his own entourage. If the two provinces were organised so that each could

<sup>87</sup> One can contrast the position in Wessex where charters, regnal tables and the *Chronicle* indicate a rather more diverse system of multiple kingship; B.A.E. Yorke, 'The Kingship Systems of the early West Saxon Kings' (forthcoming).

<sup>88</sup> The places of issue of charters (where given) are as follows:

- Hlothere – Canterbury (B 36), Reculver (B 45)
- Aethelbert II – Canterbury (B 148 and 159), Lyminge (B 160)
- Eadbert (as chief king) – Canterbury (B 190)
- Aethelbert III – Canterbury (B 191)
- Ecgbert II – Canterbury (B 227)

support its own royal court, it would help to explain the persistence of the two ealdormanries in Kent after the removal of the native dynasty.

The provision of the two dioceses is more likely to have accommodated an existing subdivision within the kingdom than to have been the cause of it. The origin of the division into east and west Kent would thus belong to the pre-Christian period and so be lost to written tradition. Archaeology may throw more light on events of the fifth and sixth centuries in Kent. Work already done reveals that the main concentration of Jutish settlement lay in eastern Kent and that settlement of the Rochester area was secondary and on a lesser scale.<sup>89</sup> Up until the seventh century, the Medway appears to have been a boundary between the Jutes and the Saxons who settled between it and the Thames.<sup>90</sup> The need to keep this important frontier under permanent supervision may provide an explanation of the origins of the junior kingship based in western Kent, though it does not explain the persistence of dual kingship up to the third quarter of the eighth century.

Although the two kings seem to have had different territorial bases, it does not mean that they necessarily ruled independently of each other or were of equal status. When the two kings were both from the same branch of the royal family the premier king, whose name appears in the regnal lists, seems to have possessed far greater authority than his junior partner: Eadbert had to have his charters approved by Aethelbert II, but the reverse does not seem to have been true. Frequently, the senior king seems to have all but eclipsed the junior – Wihtred did not allow his eldest son to use the title ‘king’, though Aethelbert seems to have been allowed some share in royal government. The junior position was not necessarily permanently filled, for although we can show that the majority of Oiscingas shared part of their reign with another ruler, we cannot usually demonstrate that the whole of the reign was shared. Wihtred began ruling with Swaefheard and ended (probably) ruling with his son, Aethelbert, but did not necessarily have a partner in the intervening period, the evidence is not sufficient to be sure one way or the other. However, we need not assume that relationships between the rulers were always the same. They might vary depending on the exact kinship of the two kings, not to mention differences in personality and ability and other such factors which are impossible to measure. The fact that Aethel-

<sup>89</sup> S. Chadwick Hawkes, ‘Anglo-Saxon Kent, c. 425–725’, *Archaeology in Kent to AD 1500*, (Ed.) P. Leach, CBA Research Report no. 48 (1982), 64–78.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

bert I and Wihtrred issued laws in their own names alone, but Hlothere issued his jointly with his nephew, Eadric, may point to differences in their partnerships. A man might be less willing to accept subordination to a brother, than to a father. Bishop Ealdwulf's embarrassed explanation that he had not realised that he needed the confirmation of Aethelbert II to a grant by Eadbert may indicate a difference of opinion between the two brothers about their spheres of influence, and when Eadbert succeeded his brother he calculated his regnal years from the end of his father's reign, not his brother's, as one would normally have expected.<sup>91</sup>

When two closely related members of the Kentish royal family ruled together, they do not appear to have done so as equals, but when the two rulers were not closely related they were more likely to claim equal status. Oswine and Swaefheard both witnessed and consented to each other's grants of land<sup>92</sup> and although one might have expected Swaefheard to have been most interested in the western Kentish province which was closest to the East Saxon kingdom, both kings granted land in eastern Kent. Swaefheard also seems to have claimed equal status with Oswine's successor, Wihtrred. Bede records that Berhtwald was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury while Swaefheard and Wihtrred were ruling.<sup>93</sup> It is the only joint reign he refers to in Kent and this may be an indication of its rather different quality. Sigere with his title 'King of half Kent' seems to be claiming equal status with his partners. Even if Sigere could claim descent from Oisc, the form of his name suggests he was not a member of the main line. The equality claimed by foreign intruders and distant cousins underlines the fact that, although the division into east and west Kent was obviously of great significance, the kingdom of Kent was also viewed as a whole. When the two kings were close relatives power was not equally divided between them and the senior king had control of the whole kingdom with only aspects of the royal authority delegated to his junior partner. But when the two kings were not part of the same family unit, there was equality between the partners as both wished to have the authority and advantages enjoyed by the chief king.

When one compares Kent with other early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms

<sup>91</sup> In B 189, Sawyer 29, dated 761, Eadbert is said to be in the thirty-sixth year of his reign, that is he is dating the charter from the time of his father's death. Eadbert seems to have been very conscious of his dignity as king. In B 190, Sawyer 28, he is described as *Eadbertus dei dispensatione ab uniuersa prouincia Cantuariorum constitutus rex et princeps*.

<sup>92</sup> See n. 50.

<sup>93</sup> *EH*, v, 8.



one is struck by the persistence of joint reigns and the long survival of one branch of the royal house. Scarcely any of the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were ruled in 750 by a direct descendant in the male line of the king who had ruled in 600.<sup>94</sup> The success of the descendants of Aethelbert I in keeping the kingship in their branch of the royal house may well be connected with the continued existence of joint reigns as, in effect, they enabled the chief king to nominate his successor during his lifetime and for the nominee to build up a following and a reputation while in the junior position. The junior king can be seen succeeding to the senior position in a number of instances and the examples could probably be multiplied if we had better evidence for the first three quarters of the seventh century. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Oisc is represented as succeeding in this way on the death of his reputed father, Hengest, though his succession may be symbolic rather than factual. In the Christian period, Eadbert who succeeded Aethelbert I had probably ruled under him in the junior position. Hlothere was certainly succeeded by his junior partner, Eadric, and, following the same pattern, Wihtred by Aethelbert II, Aethelbert II by Eadbert. The shadowy third kingship adds a further refinement. Eadbert was third in the pecking order when his father, Wihtred, was on the throne. He moved to the second position, the Rochester-based kingship, when his brother Aethelbert II became senior king and his position in third place passed, eventually, to his son Eardwulf who makes an appearance as king shortly before Aethelbert II's disappearance. When Eadbert became senior king Eardwulf took the subsidiary position. The system of dual kingship thus avoided the dangerous period of the interregnum, though it could not guard against the possibility of the junior king rebelling against the senior, as Eadric did against Hlothere, or the son like Eardwulf who predeceased his father.

The succession system created by manipulation of the two kingships meant in effect that only those whose fathers had been kings became kings themselves. Although there was a tendency for sons to succeed fathers, this was not an inevitable pattern and the experienced brother of a king was generally preferred to an inexperienced son. If the *Kentish Legend* is correct, the elder son was not automatically given precedence over his junior brothers, as Eor-

<sup>94</sup> It was certainly not the case in Mercia, Northumbria or Wessex where other branches of the royal house had successfully produced claimants. In 750 East Anglia was ruled by Beonna whose relationship to the royal house is unknown, but his successor Aethelred, the father of St. Aethelbert, is described as descended from Raedwald, see M.R. James, 'Two Lives of St. Aethelbert, King and Martyr', *English Historical Review*, xxxii (1917), 236-44.

menred the Elder was reputedly passed over for the senior position in favour of his younger brother, Earconbert. The descendants of princes who did not become kings were apparently excluded from the throne, but we know next to nothing about the status of other Oiscingas and their rôle within the administration. Evidently not all of them were prepared to accept their fate and Oswine, whose exact relationship to the main line is not known, became king with East Saxon and Mercian assistance, though he was evidently not regarded as a legitimate king by those who kept the records. Some of the kings who appear in the later eighth century may have been members of branch lines. Ecgbert II and Eadbert Praen both have names that link them with the main line and the names of Eanmund and Ealhmund recall those of earlier rulers, though the name-elements cannot be paralleled exactly. Sigered, Heaberht and Baldred, on the other hand, have names which are quite different and this could indicate that they were members of cadet branches. The junior lines were much less successful than in most other kingdoms in winning the throne and those that did so seem to have needed outside assistance. The secondary kingship was probably an important element in ensuring the domination of the main line, though it was presumably buttressed by substantial wealth.<sup>95</sup>

The dual kingship may owe its survival at least in part to the interests of the descendants of Aethelbert and those who allied themselves with them. But such an explanation may not provide the whole story. We know little about the rôle of the aristocracy, among whom we can count those of royal descent not in direct line for the throne, but comparable situations elsewhere in medieval Europe show that they may have had an important part to play in the survival of territorial divisions. In Merovingian Gaul, for instance, although the subdivision into several kingdoms was originally to suit the needs of the royal house,<sup>96</sup> it was the nobility who became established in each province with the royal courts as their focus who ensured the continuation of the provinces as political entities. The long survival of the two provinces in Kent and the careful preservation of the joint kingship even under foreign rule imply that it was more than the dynastic ambitions of the main line of the Oiscingas which kept the two kingships in existence.

<sup>95</sup> Archaeological evidence demonstrates the wealth of Kent and there are signs that the profitable and prestigious foreign trade was controlled by the kings, see Chadwick Hawkes, 'Anglo-Saxon Kent', 70-76. One has only to read the poem *Beowulf* to understand the equation between wealth and success in the Anglo-Saxon world.

<sup>96</sup> I. Wood, 'Kings, Kingdoms and Consent', *Early Medieval Kingship*, (Eds.) P. Sawyer and I. Wood (1977), 6-29.

## JOINT KINGSHIP IN KENT

The subdivision of the kingdom of Kent into the two provinces of east and west Kent dominated the early history of the province and survived the downfall of the native dynasty. From the time adequate written records begin we can see that it was normal practice among the Oiscingas for there to be two kings based in the two provinces which corresponded with the dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester. However, this is not to say that there were two kingdoms within Kent, for when two members of the main line ruled, one was dominant and acted as ruler of the whole province, his name appearing in regnal lists and standing for the achievements of Kent in narrative accounts, while the other was subsidiary, though able to grant land and presumably with other royal rights harder for us to trace. It is likely that the precise relationship varied. When foreigners reigned the province was still kept as a whole, but there was dual control. Unfortunately, there is much we do not know about Kentish kingship or cannot fully understand, but we can see within Kent something of a system of rulership which differed from later medieval practice in England and finds no exact parallel in the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

### ABBREVIATIONS

- B: W. de Gray Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, 3 vols. (1885–99).  
*Chronicle: Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, (Ed.) J. Earle and C. Plummer, 2 vols. (1892).  
EH: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, (Ed.) B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (1969).  
Sawyer: P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks no. 8 (1968).