

Session: ‘Memories of the Anglo-Saxon Mission’ (IMC Leeds, 2-5 July 2018)
Organiser: Thijs Porck (Leiden University)



“Boniface arrives in Dorestad A.D. 716” – Memorial plaque in the wall of the Grote Kerk, Wijk bij Duurstede

J. R. R. Tolkien once described the Anglo-Saxon mission as “one of the chief glories of ancient England, and one of our chief services to Europe even regarding all our history.” In the 7th and 8th centuries, the Anglo-Saxons Wilfrid, Willibrord and Boniface spread Christianity to the continent and brought many men and women in their wake, including Ewald, Swithbert, Leoba and Berhtgyð. Over time, the memory of the Anglo-Saxon mission was constructed in varying ways: medieval chroniclers on the continent ‘invented’ their own Anglo-Saxon missionaries, while, in England, the Anglo-Saxon missionaries are hardly remembered for their missionary activities.

This session focuses on the memorialisation of the Anglo-Saxon mission of the 7th and 8th centuries. Paper-a considers the development of medieval and modern legends surrounding Willibrord’s companions, such as Adelbertus, Engelmundus and Swithbertus. Paper-b compares *vitae* of Boniface and demonstrates how various hagiographers and communities shaped and reshaped Boniface’s saintly image for their own ends and contributed to the historical development of a *Bonifatiusbild*. Paper-c examines the supposed kinship between the Anglo-Saxon missionaries and the people they tried to convert in contemporaneous texts and how later remembrances of the mission altered interpretation of these narratives over time.

Paper a: Willibrord’s companions: Remembering and inventing Anglo-Saxon missionaries on the continent

Dr. Thijs Porck (Leiden University)

On his mission to Frisia, the Anglo-Saxon missionary Willibrord was accompanied by a number of companions. Bede indicates that there were twelve, but he only provides the names of three of them: Swithbert and the two Ewalds. In later sources, the names of more and more companions are included, with some (like St Engelmundus) being added to the legend only as late as the fifteenth century. This paper traces the development of the legend of some of the

companions of Willibrord on the continent, focusing primarily on Adelbertus, Engelmundus and Swithbert.

Paper b: Apostle, preacher, mentor, martyr: Remembering Boniface in medieval *vitae*

Dr. Shannon Godlove (Columbus State University, Georgia)

“Ein endgültiges Bonifatiusbild gibt es nicht; jede Zeit schreibt es neu für sich.”
~ Walter Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil*

How did the Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface wish to be remembered? How was he memorialized in the many Continental saints' lives written about him, and what do the differences between *vitae* suggest about how communities at Fulda, Utrecht, and Mainz remembered him? In life, Boniface modelled himself upon the saints: first, upon Bonifatius of Tarsus when he took his name, and later, and to a much greater degree, upon the Apostle Paul in word and in deed. By adopting Pauline rhetoric in his letters, Boniface established himself as an authoritative, apostolic figure and influenced the way he would be remembered for centuries to come. In death, Boniface's self-conscious embodiment and enactment of the apostolic life was brought to its fullest possible conclusion: his martyrdom was the seal that guaranteed that he would be remembered by medieval Christians not merely as a holy man, but rather, as a saint.

Just what kind of saint, however, would depend upon the time, place, medium, and circumstances in which he was being remembered and venerated. In several sources, the mimetic and discursive Pauline identity developed by Boniface in his letters continued to reverberate. Boniface's first hagiographer, Willibald of Mainz, weaves the words of Paul into the text of Boniface's life at regular intervals, creating a pattern that is at once formal and typological. These intertextual comparisons become ever more tightly intertwined in the works of Liudger, Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, the author of the *Vita altera Bonifatii*, and later, Otloh of St. Emmeram. Yet other medieval *vitae*, such as Hygeburg's *Vitae Willibaldi et Wynnebaldi*, Eigil's *Vita Sturmii*, the *Vita tertia*, and *Vita quarta*, depart from this apostolic image, portraying Boniface above all as a bishop, a mentor, a martyr, and/or a monastic founder. A comparative study of some of these *vitae* will enable us to see how various hagiographers and communities shaped and reshaped Boniface's saintly image for their own ends and contributed to the historical development of a *Bonifatiusbild*.

Paper c: The Anglo-Saxon Mission: Memory, kinship, and the motivations of history

Dr. Harold C. Zimmerman (Indiana University Southeast)

According to Bede in the *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, the Anglo-Saxon mission was initiated to “bring blessing to many peoples by undertaking the apostolic task of carrying the word of God, through the preaching of the gospel, to some of those nations who had not yet heard it” (Colgrave and Mynors, 1969.) This description of task and motivation is fairly typical for the contemporaneous texts written about the mission and missionaries. While Boniface does state in one of his many extant letters that those in England are “are of one blood and one bone” with the continental Saxons awaiting conversion, for the most part the Germanic peoples the mission intended to convert are treated far more as alien pagans than close relatives. More contemporary texts, however, have been far more assertive in their positioning of historical memory and ethnic responsibility in the mission. For example, the mission was “undertaken by those who were well aware that they were returning to lands from which their own ancestors had once come to invade Britain” (Hunter Blair, 1963), as the

“descendants of [Anglo-Saxon] invaders never forgot [the] ancient cultural ties linking them to their ancestors, and the cultivation of this memory led to decisive action.” (Hermann, 1995). Indeed, “the conversion of the continental Saxons, whom the English regarded as their next of kin, was the ultimate aim of all Anglo-Saxon missionary work in the seventh and eighth centuries” (Godfrey, 1962). This paper will examine the ways in which memories of connection and kinship affected and are reflected in the contemporaneous texts of the Anglo-Saxon Mission and how later remembrances of the mission altered interpretation of these narratives over time.