

Bede conversion of king edwin and the

[Government](#), [Military](#)



Bede was trying to create a common identity and the notion of the 'same race' so you could argue that this extract is presenting the 'common identity' as Christianity. It is important to understand that the knowledge of this period is one which has been presented through clerics and monks like St Bede. When examining the extract presented by Bede it is vital to understand the key issues that arise from the document itself. The presentation of 'religion' throughout this extract affects our understanding as King Edwin was said to have been a pagan and 'he remained a devout one for a great portion of his life'.

This holds significance as the spread of Christianity throughout Britain led many to believe that Christianity would answer questions that were 'unknown'. The source itself examines King Edwin's conversion to Christianity. However, it can be argued that even though Bede's extract signifies the spread of Christianity it is questionable as to the extent at which people 'remained' Christian as it was said that many reverted back to 'paganism'. Bede's document allows us to understand the importance of 'religion' in particular the spread of Christianity, as well as surfacing key problems like 'kingship'. The conversion shows links to the 'top-down' model and how the ruler used types of power to bring the conversion onto people. This is reflected through King Edwin in the Bede extract as he used his 'power' to ultimately lead the conversion of the kingdom of Northumbria. The extract allows you to recognize the stages that had led to the conversion of King Edwin and the kingdom of Northumbria towards Christianity.

The focal point of Bede's extract begins with the narrative on the meeting with the council. In which King Edwin had previously witnessed a vision

whereby the figure shadowed and could be argued to have been Paulinus from this they had decided for a 'new doctrine' and 'new worship'. A counterargument from another source has argued that within the extract Paulinus of York (missionary) had a lot of input in the conversion of King Edwin. Collins (1991) states 'Paulinus had accompanied the queen to Northumbria and began the conversion of the king's followers'³, however, this contrasts with the extract as Bede presents Edwin to have brought about the conversion. It can therefore be argued that Paulinus's input ultimately led to the spread and conversion of the Northumbrians as well as the King. Bede has portrayed this an extract which unveils the spread of as well as getting rid of previous pagan beliefs. The common questions that are raised from this extract is that even though there was a spread of Christianity much of the religious beliefs was resistance from pagans and many of which had reverted back to paganism after the conversion of King Edwin. Many historians including Barrow (2011) argued that, 'Ray Page has attacked Bede's reliability as a source for Anglo-Saxon paganism'⁴ and Jennings (2008) makes the point that Bede was a 'Christian monk with a political viewpoint, especially as regarding the lineage and legitimacy of his current royal dynasty and culture'.

⁵Bede's extract has a number of reoccurring themes some of which include the importance of religion and kingship during the Middle Ages.

Rollason (2012) states that 'the clear implication is that their power, or at least their military success was a grant of God'. The source portrays Bede's views on Edwin's Kingship as one which had been given by God as well as one which included his authoritative role as 'King'. The importance of religion

is highlighted throughout as 'Bede's conscious use of biblical parallels and religious symbolism in the conversion accounts' which signify the deeper meanings within the source. Bede's ending of the extract reinforces the theme of 'religion' with the reference of 'Casting into it aspear'. The (Longinus) Roman soldier was said to have 'pierced Jesus in his side with a lance' this was significant as Coifi was echoing the action of the Roman soldier and the way in which Coifi had pierced the shrine it was a way of allowing people into the Christian faith and he had ultimately done the same for the Northumbrians.

The focus on historical debate amongst historians focused on the extent at which Bede's source of the Ecclesiastical History of the English people highlighted the spread of Christianity. Stafford 2012 claims that 'Bede knew Christianity was displaced paganism as the official religion throughout these kingdoms' the extract reflects this belief as previous pagan 'idols', 'altars' and 'temples' all which represent a religious purpose are said to have been destroyed with Christianity replacing previous practices. The development of identity for the English was formed by Bede as he created a common identity which can be argued as 'Christianity'. When understanding the spread of Christianity during the middle ages it is evidently clear by Collins (1991) who states that 'Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and all their inhabitants were pagan until the arrival of the mission to Kent' suggesting that previously paganism had been dominant, however this soon changed. Barrow (2011) argues that they tended to concentrate on Bede's Christian message' and the extract allows us to understand Bede's portrayal of the spread of Christianity amongst the Northumbrian and King Edwin as well as enhancing

the impact through his use to language as he ends the source with 'rejoicing in the knowledge of the worship of the true God' suggesting the recognition of Christianity as well as signifying the importance of King Edwin's conversion and the impact amongst the kingdom. The extract of Bede allows us to summarise the extract as well as understand the spread of Christianity amongst the kingdom within England.

Bede's extract enables us to understand the important figures who played a significant role within the conversion of King Edwin and the Northumbrians. The questions which are raised by this extract are the extent at which the conversion to Christianity was regarded as a 'powerful conversion' as after the death of King Edwin many of the people were said to have reverted back to paganism. This further questions whether the conversion could be considered as a 'forced conversion'. Lastly, the understanding in which we gain from monks like Bede are questionable in understanding the 'truth' of this event as of these monks write from a Christian perspective which could be argued to affect the overall source. 1 Mayr-Harting, Henry. *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*. New York: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991. 2 Rollason, D. (2012). *Early Medieval Europe 300-1050*. Retrieved from <https://www-dawsonera-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/readonline/9781408251232> pg. 232 3 Collins, R. (1991). *Early medieval Europe 300-1000*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education. pg. 1704 Barrow, J. (2011). *A Re-Examination of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II, Chapter 13.

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