

Law and order in Anglo-Saxon England

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Deskripsi Lengkap: <https://lib.ui.ac.id/detail?id=20469659&lokasi=lokal>

Abstrak

Law and Order in Anglo Saxon England explores English legal culture and practice across the Anglo Saxon period, from the pre-Christian laws enshrined in writing by King Aethelberht of Kent in c.600 to the Norman Conquest of 1066. The book is focus is the maintenance of order. What constituted good order. What forms of wrongdoing were threatening to it. What role kings, lords, communities, and individuals were expected to play in maintaining it, and how that worked in practice. Its core argument is that the Anglo Saxons had a coherent, stable, and enduring legal order that lacks modern analogies. It was neither state like nor stateless and needs to be understood on its own terms rather than as a variant or hybrid of these models. The book elucidates a distinctively early medieval understanding of the tension between the interests of individuals and communities, and a vision of how that tension ought to be managed that, strikingly, treats strongly libertarian and communitarian features as complementary. Potentially violent, honour-focused feuding was an integral aspect of legitimate legal practice throughout the period but so too was fearsome punishment for forms of wrongdoing judged socially threatening. The book charts the development of kings involvement in law, in terms both of their authority to legislate and their ability to influence local practice, thereby presenting a picture of increasingly ambitious and effective royal legal innovation that relied more on the cooperation of local communal assemblies than kings sparse and patchy network of administrative officials.