This dissertation examines the existence and political relevance of feud in Anglo-Saxon England from the fifth century migration to the opening of the Viking Age in 793. The central argument is that feud was a method that Anglo-Saxons used to understand and settle conflict, and that it was a tool kings used to enhance their power. The first part of this study examines the use of *fæhð* in Old English documents, including laws and *Beowulf*, to demonstrate that *fæhð* referred to feuds between parties marked by reciprocal acts of retaliation. This assertion is in opposition to Guy Halsall's argument that words such as *fæhð* referred to ritual vengeance, in which a single act of revenge terminated a dispute, and not to an ongoing relationship between parties. Written evidence further demonstrates that the Anglo-Saxons conceived of multiple types of conflict as feud, providing an
intellectual framework for thinking about conflict generally.

Case studies of feuds in the remaining chapters also reveal the changing nature of power in early Anglo-Saxon England. These case studies make use of a wide variety of sources, including written and material evidence as well as anthropological theories. Rulers before 597 lacked lasting authority and acquired power primarily through violent action. They did not control social relationships nor did they have the authority to enforce their wills without the threat of violence. With the arrival of Christian missionaries from Rome, kings beginning with Æthelberht (d.603) asserted control over dispute resolution in order to build authority. Conversion to Christianity brought Roman methods of rule, which Anglo-Saxon kings deployed to varying degrees of success over two centuries. Those rulers who separated themselves from prevailing social bonds came to dominate social relationships, allowing them to gain more followers and control over dispute resolution. Rather than being a chief of a single kinship group, they brought multiple kinship groups together into an ethnic group and created kingship. Not driven by ideals, kings and other leaders adopted whatever tools might provide them with greater power.

Violence remained a key strategy of power throughout the period under consideration. Some kings were unable to rein in feud and direct dispute resolution to their courts, but also engaged in feuds that were destructive to their power. Royal feuds in Northumbria prevented any single ruling family from establishing lasting rule as they were constantly under threat of usurpation. Only those kings of Mercia, such as Æthelbald and Offa, who were able to command the political power afforded by new landholding systems, and thus to command a large number of followers, were able to avoid these dynastic feuds. Whether gaining control over feud to build authority or using feud as a political strategy against opponents, feud was a central concept in the construction of power in Early Anglo-Saxon England.