Our main narrative of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons is that provided in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Bede's view was essentially that of top-down conversion, that is, missions to Anglo-Saxon royal courts whose rulers then enabled the establishment of formal church structures and the mass baptism of their subjects. No doubt matters were in fact more complex and it has been suggested that Christianity also spread more organically, especially in western provinces like those of the Hwicce and Magonsaetan, through contact of non-Christian Anglo-Saxons with British Christians (see Section 1: The Church in Britain). It is nevertheless the case that a fully functional Christian church required a complex infrastructure, which could not have been provided without royal support. There is little sign of any such structures surviving in the eastern and south-eastern areas of England where Anglo-Saxons were in control c.600.

Bede gives the fullest information about the missions sent from Rome and Iona, and these missions have therefore tended to be dominant in subsequent secondary literature as well. However, it is also apparent from Bede's narrative that missionaries came from other Irish areas besides Iona, and that in southern England Frankish contacts were of particular significance. Indeed, the first known mission to an Anglo-Saxon court may have been that of the Frankish bishop Liudhard who accompanied Bertha, the daughter of King Charibert of the Franks, to Kent at the time of her marriage to Æthelbert in c.580 (see The Role of the Franks in the Conversion).