

among the Saxon kingdoms; often one king became so powerful that he gained control over all the others. He was then called Bretwalda, (wielder or ruler of the Britons). The less powerful kings were always striving for this dignity. The number of kingdoms was gradually lessened, until, in 827, Egbert, king of Wessex, subdued the remaining kingdoms, and became the first ruler of United England.

Prior to the formation of the Saxon Heptarchy we perceive the basic principle of the present system of government. The Hundred-Moot (moot means meeting) was a meeting of the representatives from the different Hundreds or communities of the kingdom. Communities were formed into Hundreds, and it was a combination of Hundreds doubtless that constituted the little kingdoms of the first periods of Saxon dominion,—some of which became the "shires" and "counties" of later times when all England was united under one rule. The representatives to the Hundred-Moot were the priest, the reeve and four men from each township within its limits. The villages also had their "moots" or meetings. The Hundred-Moot was a judicial rather than an administrative body. Above this body was the Folk-Moot, a general assembly of freemen; in short, it was a national council with administrative functions.

After the English kingdoms had been united under Egbert, we reach another stage in the progress of British government. The Mycel-Gemot (council of the people) was a national assembly with legislative powers. Whenever the king wished to convene a National Council, he would sometimes summon the "moots" of all the "shires" to meet him in a grand "Mysel-Gemot," at some central point in his kingdom, and declare assent to his laws. The Witenagemot (assembly of the wise) or upper house, was a general assembly with judicial and executive powers. Woodrow Wilson remarks in "The State": "We have no certain knowledge of the exact character of this famous national body; but we are probably warranted in concluding that it was formed more or less closely upon the model of the assemblies which it supplanted ("Folk Moots"). The national councils of the smaller kingdoms of the earlier time, which had now shrank into mere "shire" courts, handed on their functions of a general council, and in theory also, it may be, their organization to the "Witenagemot."

It may have been the right of every freeman to attend and vote in this great meeting of the nation; but, it seems its membership was limited, apparently from the first, to the chief men