

1. Alfred the Great and the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons

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Although Alfred the Great has long enjoyed a high reputation, he remains at the centre of intense debate among historians and literary scholars alike. Much depends, for example, on the detailed understanding of Alfred's political accomplishments, and aspirations; much also depends on understanding of Alfred's programme for the revival of religion and learning. It would be impossible to achieve a consensus in such matters; but it is important to emphasize that Alfred's promotion of learning is inseparable from the political developments in the 880s and early 890s, and that in combination these aspects of Alfred's reign represent the essence of his response to the Viking invasions.

From his accession in 871 to his death in 899 Alfred was known to himself, and perhaps also to most of his own people, as king "of the West Saxons." It is a sign of his aspirations and accomplishments, however, that in the 880s he came to be known, in certain quarters, as king "of the Anglo-Saxons," and it is a reflection of the esteem in which he had come to be held, by the early 890s, that he was described by a Welsh admirer, in 893, as ruler "of all the Christians of the island of Britain." The drift from one of these titles to another is of great significance, but of course it could not be regarded as a formal progression. In 871, at a time when the English people were under severe threat from hostile forces, Alfred became king of the extended kingdom of the West Saxons (reaching from Cornwall in the south-west to Sussex and Kent in the south-east). For the first ten years of his reign, from 871 until *c.* 880, he struggled hard against the invaders, known to the English of his day as "the heathens," "the Danes," or "the Vikings." In the aftermath of Alfred's victory over the Vikings at the battle of Edington (878), and the demise of Ceolwulf, king of the Mercians (*c.* 879), circumstances began to change. It was probably *c.* 880 that Alfred assumed or was accorded a new political identity, as a king whose authority now extended across the river Thames, northwards and westwards over what had come to be regarded as the "English" part of the recently divided kingdom of the Mercians; and it was as king of the Anglo-Saxons, so-called, that Alfred presided over a period of reform, reconstruction and regeneration. During the same period, his authority came to be recognized by some if not all of the rulers of the Welsh, at least in the common struggle against a heathen enemy. In 892 the "great [Danish] army (*here*)" which had been active on the continent in the 880s crossed over to eastern Kent, and was soon joined by another. For more than three years Alfred's extended kingdom was put to the test; but eventually, in the summer of 896, the Vikings dispersed. Relatively little is known of the last three years of Alfred's reign, though he would appear to have been based by this stage at Winchester. He died on 28 October 899, described by a West Saxon chronicler as king "over the whole English people, except for that part which was under Danish rule."¹

Alfred was already in his own lifetime to some extent a literary construction, whether in the annals of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in the pages of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, or indeed in any of the other writings which emanated from his circle;

¹ For the royal titles mentioned in this paragraph, and others, see Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's "Life of King Alfred" and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth: 1983), cited hereafter as K&L, *Alfred*, 67, 120, 164, 175, 179, 181, 182, 188 and 191.

and his reputation continued to flourish thereafter, reaching the next of several peaks during the period of renewed Viking invasions in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. It is only to be expected that those who told and retold his story exaggerated or manipulated the details for purposes of their own. First hailed as “the Great” at St Albans in the mid-thirteenth century, Alfred was given a leading role, in the seventeenth century, as the personification of all that a monarch should be, gaining further renown when embraced as the founder of the University of Oxford. He became a significant player in the politics of the eighteenth century, and was adopted latterly as a role model by George III. He achieved his apotheosis in the celebrations symbolized by the statues erected at Wantage in 1849 and at Winchester in 1901, commemorating, respectively, the 1000th anniversary of his birth and the supposed 1000th anniversary of his death.² Alfred “the Great” was dislodged long ago from the pedestal on which he once stood, in the sense that he is now far better understood than before; if he still seems to wobble, it is not least because the ground on which he stands has a tendency to move beneath his feet.

The re-assessment of Alfred has been prompted in part by closer and more critical reading of the major literary and documentary sources, and in part by advances in the knowledge gained from other forms of evidence.³ The annals in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provide a chronological framework which extends from Christ’s birth to the late ninth century, culminating with the series of West Saxon kings from Ecgberht (802–39), and his son Æthelwulf (839–58), to Æthelwulf’s sons Æthelbald (855–60), Æthelberht (860–5), Æthelred (865–71) and Alfred (871–99).⁴ The original compilation seems to have extended to the year 892, supplemented by a “continuation” which covers the years 893–6 and by annals forming part of a second continuation. The *Life of King Alfred* was addressed to the king by Asser, “lowest of all the servants of God.”⁵ Its authenticity has been challenged in the past, but the consensus remains that the work was written in the year 893 by Asser, a priest who had come to Alfred’s court, in the mid-880s, from the church of St David in south-west Wales.⁶ A text central to our understanding of Alfred’s reign is the preface, cast in the form of a letter addressed by the king to each of his bishops, placed at the beginning of the Alfredian translation of Pope Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*.⁷ The composition of a fondly imagined or more securely established “canon” of vernacular

² Simon Keynes, “The Cult of King Alfred the Great,” *ASE* 28 (1999): 225–356, effectively summarized in one paragraph by Patrick Wormald, “Living with Alfred,” *Haskins Society Journal* 15 (2006): 1–39, at 1–2; Barbara Yorke, “Alfredism: The Use and Abuse of King Alfred’s Reputation in Later Centuries,” in *Alfred the Great*, ed. Reuter (Aldershot: 2003), 361–80; David Horspool, *Why Alfred Burned the Cakes: A King and his Eleven-Hundred-Year Afterlife* (London: 2006); Joanne Parker, “England’s Darling”: *The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great* (London: 2007).

³ K&L, *Alfred*; Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great* (London: 1998); the papers given at anniversary conferences in 1999, in *Alfred the Great*, ed. Timothy Reuter; P. Wormald, “Alfred,” *ODNB*, i, 716–26; and David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: 2007).

⁴ The annals in the *Chronicle* are cited below from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, 3: *MS A*, ed. Janet M. Bately (Cambridge: 1986), using the translation in *EHD*, 145–261 (no. 1).

⁵ Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* is cited below from *Asser’s Life of King Alfred*, ed. William Henry Stevenson (Oxford: 1904), new impression, with contribution by Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford: 1959), using the translation in K&L, *Alfred*.

⁶ Most recently by Alfred P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford: 1995). For a response to Smyth’s case, see Simon Keynes, “On the Authenticity of Asser’s *Life of King Alfred*,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47 (1996): 529–51.

⁷ K&L, *Alfred*, 124–6 and 293–6; see also Simon Keynes, “The Power of the Written Word: Alfredian England 871–899,” in *Alfred*, ed. Reuter, 175–97, at 193–6; and Irvine, Chap. 6, below.

translations, considered at one time or another to be “Alfredian,” in one sense or another, remains the subject of debate; so much so that the “Alfredian project” as a whole might seem to be crumbling.⁸ Other aspects of Alfred’s rule are represented by his law-code, by the small surviving corpus of royal diplomas, in Latin, and by an even smaller number of vernacular charters, among them (and naturally of the utmost importance) the king’s own will.⁹ The coinage of King Alfred, studied in its own right and also in relation to the coinage of the Mercians, bears on the nature of royal involvement in commerce, on the scale and control of commercial activity in London and elsewhere, and on wider political developments.¹⁰ Archaeology has contributed extensively to our understanding of the impact of the Viking invasions in the 870s, and of the measures taken to strengthen defenses in the 880s (in combination with the text known as the “Burghal Hidage”), not least at London.¹¹ A picture has also emerged of a very significant group of objects representing the work of craftsmen active in the second half of the ninth century, including a ring associated with King Æthelwulf, a ring associated with Queen Æthelswith, the Abingdon Sword, the Fuller Brooch, and a remarkable array of “unidentified socketed objects,” most notably the Alfred Jewel.¹² The body of material available for the study of Alfred the Great is remarkable; and, appropriately enough, it has given rise to perceptions of the king himself of a kind which could not be contemplated for any other English ruler of the period.¹³

The southern kingdoms in the 840s, 850s and 860s

In the opening decades of the ninth century, the authority of the rulers of the Mercians had extended in one form or another not only over the western and eastern midlands, between the river Thames and the river Humber, but also, and crucially, into the kingdom of the East Angles and south-eastwards into London, Essex, Surrey, Sussex, and Kent. The so-called “Mercian supremacy” disintegrated in the 820s, and henceforth the dominant figure south of the Humber was Ecgberht, king of the West Saxons (802–39). Ecgberht extended his power in the south-east, and his contribution to the making of the English kingdoms culminated in 838 with the important accord

⁸ Malcolm Godden, “Did King Alfred Write Anything?” *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007): 1–23; Malcolm Godden, “The Alfredian Project and its Aftermath: Rethinking the Literary History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162 (2009): 93–122; and Malcolm Godden, “Stories from the Court of King Alfred,” *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture in honour of Hugh Magennis*, ed. Stuart McWilliams (Cambridge: 2012), 123–40.

⁹ For the Laws, see Richards, Chap. 11, below; for diplomas, Simon Keynes, “The West Saxon Charters of King Æthelwulf and his Sons,” *English Historical Review* 109 (1994): 1109–49, at 1134–41, and *Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas 871–975*, Anglo-Saxon Charters Supplementary Series 2 (Oxford: forthcoming); for Alfred’s Will, S 1507, with K&L, *Alfred*, pp. 173–8, and map.

¹⁰ R. H. M. Dolley and C. E. Blunt, “The Chronology of the Coins of Ælfred the Great 871–99,” *Anglo-Saxon Coins*, ed. R. H. M. Dolley (London: 1961), 77–95; *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, ed. Mark A. S. Blackburn and David N. Dumville (Woodbridge: 1998); and Mark Blackburn, “Alfred’s Coinage Reforms,” in *Alfred the Great*, ed. Reuter, 199–217.

¹¹ For further guidance, see *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. Helena Hamerow, et al. (Oxford: 2011).

¹² Leslie Webster, “*Edificia nova*: Treasures of Alfred’s Reign,” in *Alfred*, ed. Reuter, 79–103, and below, Chap. 3.

¹³ Janet Nelson, “The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex,” *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne Duggan (London: 1993), 125–58; David Pratt, “The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great,” *ASE* 30 (2001), 39–90; Wormald, “Living with Alfred,” 14–21; and esp. Pratt, *Political Thought*.

reached with Ceolnoth, archbishop of Canterbury (833–70), on the West Saxon royal estate at Kingston-upon-Thames.¹⁴

Ecgberht's son Æthelwulf (839–58) presided over a bipartite kingdom comprising a western core and its eastern extension (not, it seems, including London), seemingly without any thought of merging the two parts into one.¹⁵ Perhaps there were differences between the western and eastern parts which would have made this difficult; more likely there was not yet the will. It is arguable at the same time that the West Saxon polity itself differed in certain ways from the Mercian polity, and that the differences might help to account for the respective fortunes of the West Saxons and the Mercians as the kingdoms of the southern English came under increasingly sustained attack from the Vikings.¹⁶ Whatever the case, there could be little doubt that Æthelwulf became the key player among the English in the troublous times of the mid-ninth century.¹⁷ He seems to have had little to fear from the Mercians, and makes a distinctive impression overall. The annals bearing on the Viking invasions (as seen from a later perspective) convey an impression of spirited resistance. In 853 Burgred, king of the Mercians (c. 852–74), sought help from Æthelwulf and the West Saxons in putting down an uprising among the Welsh; later that year he married Æthelwulf's daughter, Æthelswith, on the royal estate at Chippenham in Wiltshire.¹⁸ In 854 Æthelwulf conveyed by charter a tenth part of his land throughout his kingdom "to the praise of God and his own eternal salvation."¹⁹ In 855 he went to Rome, staying on the way home with Charles the Bald, king of the West Franks. Soon after his return, in 856, Æthelwulf ordered to be set down in writing a statement of his wishes for the future of his composite kingdom.²⁰

An important aspect of Æthelwulf's legacy arose from his promotion of the West Saxon "alliance" with Mercia. Wessex was seemingly the more effective or adventurous of the two kingdoms in military terms, but its rulers had come to understand that in economic terms they should work together. An early stage in the process had been symbolized by the coinage minted for Ecgberht at London, c. 830, when he seems briefly to have taken control of the city, before it passed back to the Mercians.²¹ In the early 840s coinage of strikingly similar appearance had been issued by Æthelwulf of Wessex (from mints in Kent) and by Berhtwulf of Mercia (from London and perhaps elsewhere).²² In the 850s and early 860s moneyers in Kent struck distinctive coins in the name of Æthelwulf and then Æthelberht; but there was

¹⁴ S 1438, edited with discussion in *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury*, ed. N. P. Brooks and S. E. Kelly, 2 vols. (Oxford: 2013), 650–61 (no. 69).

¹⁵ Simon Keynes, "The Control of Kent in the Ninth Century," *EME* 2 (1993): 111–31, at 124–28.

¹⁶ Simon Keynes, "Mercia and Wessex in the Ninth Century," *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr (London: 2001), 310–28.

¹⁷ J. L. Nelson, "Æthelwulf," *ODNB*, i, 438–41.

¹⁸ ASC, s.a. 853; Asser, chaps. 7–9.

¹⁹ K&L, *Alfred*, 232–33, with Keynes, "West Saxon Charters," 1119–23, and *Charters of Malmesbury Abbey*, ed. S. E. Kelly (Oxford: 2005), 66–80 and 87–91.

²⁰ For Æthelwulf's provisions, see Asser, chap. 16, and Alfred's will (S 1507), with K&L, *Alfred*, 15–16, 236–7 and 314–16.

²¹ *MEC*, 292, with Rory Naismith, *The Coinage of Southern England 796–865*, 2 vols. (London: 2011), II, 19 (L30–31).

²² *MEC*, 289–91 (Kent) and 292–93 (London). For a corpus of surviving coins, see Naismith, *Coinage 796–865*, II, 20–36 (London coinage of Berhtwulf) and 179–92 (Canterbury coinage of Æthelwulf); a unique specimen combining an obverse of Berhtwulf with an obverse of Æthelwulf (II, 20, L32a) seems in some way symbolic of this interaction. A note of caution is sounded by Rory Naismith, *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: The Southern English Kingdoms, 757–865* (Cambridge: 2012), 141–42.

relatively little activity during the 850s at London for Burgred, until the inception of his substantial *Lunette* coinage, c. 860.²³ The clearest manifestation of the alliance in numismatic terms did not begin, therefore, until the mid-860s, when coins of the *Lunette* type (Plate 1, nos. 1–3) were minted not only for Burgred, at London, but also for Æthelred, in Kent; moreover, it seems that in addition to their output for Burgred, the moneyers in London minted a small number of coins of the same *Lunette* type for Æthelred (in the later 860s) and Alfred (in the early 870s).²⁴ In 868 Burgred sought help from King Æthelred and his brother Alfred, in his own struggle against the Vikings; and in the same year Alfred married a Mercian wife.²⁵

In the years which followed Æthelwulf's death in 858, his four surviving sons were much exercised by their respective rights and expectations. The discussion became only more complex as the protagonists died (in 860, 865 and 871), and as children needed to be taken into account. At first Æthelwulf's bipartite kingdom had been divided between his sons Æthelbald, in the west, and Æthelberht, in the east; but on Æthelbald's death, in 860, the arrangements were modified in such a way that Æthelberht succeeded to a bipartite kingdom now made whole. After Æthelberht's death, in 865, there were further modifications: Æthelred became king of the whole kingdom, but Alfred (it seems) was acknowledged as his prospective successor. Alfred's "Mercian" marriage in 868 must therefore have had significant dimensions of its own, even if it could not have been known where they might lead. Æthelred died in 871, prompting further adjustments and assurances which seem in perilous times to have strengthened Alfred's position, securing the prospects of his own children.²⁶

The first Viking invasion of Wessex (871), and its aftermath

In the closing months of 870, or early in 871, the Viking invaders turned their attention towards the kingdom of the West Saxons. The received account of the engagements which followed, given in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 871, was probably constructed some twenty years later, and is presented unsurprisingly from an Alfredian perspective. In the opening three months of the year, Æthelred and Alfred fought at least four battles against the Vikings. Then a "great summer army" arrived, and combined with those already in the field. In April King Æthelred died, whereupon the royal office passed not to one or other of his sons, but in accordance with earlier arrangements to his surviving brother. So it was Alfred, with a "small force," who fought against the "whole army," at Wilton, leaving the Danes in control of the battlefield; "and the West Saxons made peace with the army that year."²⁷

Æthelred and Alfred survived in 871 by dogged resistance, though ultimately by "making peace," no doubt involving a payment of money.²⁸ The consequence of the successful West Saxon strategy was of course to put the pressure back on the Mercians. After their withdrawal from Wessex, the Vikings wintered first in London (871–2), then at Torksey (872–3), and finally at Repton (873–4); metal-detection

²³ *MEC*, 310–11, with Naismith, *Coinage 796–865*, II, 198–205 (Dorb/Cant), 208–18 (Inscribed Cross, Æthelwulf) and 226–54 (Inscribed Cross, Æthelberht), and Naismith, *Money and Power*, 190 and 192.

²⁴ *MEC*, 311–12; Blackburn, "London Mint," 109, and "Alfred's Coinage Reforms," 204–5; and Rory Naismith, "London and its Mint, c. 880–1066," *British Numismatic Journal*, forthcoming. For evidence that the bishop of London attended not Mercian but West Saxon royal assemblies in the 860s, see Keynes, "Control of Kent," 128–30, citing S 327, dated 860, and S 337, dated 867.

²⁵ *ASC*, s.a. 868; Asser, chaps. 29–30.

²⁶ Alfred's will (S 1507), in K&L, *Alfred*, 173–8 and 314–16, with Asser, chap. 29.

²⁷ For the chronicler's account of the events of 871, see *EHD*, 000; for Asser's representation of the same events, based on the *Chronicle*, see K&L, *Alfred*, 78–81.

²⁸ Simon Keynes, "A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser. 36 (1986), 195–217, at 198–201.

across open ground at Torksey, and controlled excavations in the vicarage garden at Repton, have revealed much about the realities behind these movements.²⁹ In 874 the Vikings “conquered all that land,” and Burgred himself was driven across the sea; a remarkable entry in the *Liber Vitae* of Brescia provides evidence of his passage through northern Italy, with Queen Æthelwith and others, evidently on their way to Rome.³⁰ According to the (West Saxon) chronicler, the Vikings gave the kingdom of the Mercians to Ceolwulf, “a foolish king’s thegn,” who would hold it for them and at their service; whereupon one part of the army went north into Northumbria, and the other back eastwards to Cambridge. Ceolwulf seems to have been left at this stage (in 874) as the nominal ruler of the whole of the kingdom of the Mercians, extending across most of the land between the Humber and the Thames; but of course we may doubt that he held all in his sway. He convened royal assemblies, at which royal diplomas were issued, and which to judge from the appended witness-lists were attended by bishops of Worcester, Lichfield and Hereford.³¹ However, in 877 a Viking army returned via Wessex into Mercia, choosing to settle in part of the kingdom which they had “conquered” three years before. It was presumably at this stage that the Vikings settled in the east midlands (including the territory of Five Boroughs), leaving Ceolwulf in control of the more westerly and south-westerly parts of the Mercian kingdom, and also (it seems) in control of London.

The evidence of coinage provides a valuable insight, again, into the political and economic dynamics which lie behind the superficial and probably distorted record found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. In the early 870s coins of the *Lunette* type were minted in the names of Burgred of Mercia (at the London mint) and Alfred of Wessex (at Canterbury). Following the “conquest” of Mercia and Burgred’s departure, in 874, London seems to have remained under “English” control. During the years from c. 875 to c. 880 its moneymen produced not only coins in the name of Ceolwulf but also coins in the name of Alfred. The *Geometric-Quatrefoil* type, known from a single specimen minted for Alfred, stands out from the norm for its design, quality of production, and weight, and is thought to have been produced c. 875 (Plate 1, no. 4).³² The *Two Emperors* type, known from a single specimen for each king, is also regarded as an “experimental” type; its reverse design seems singularly appropriate to the conditions, but it was based on a common Roman coin-type and its intended significance is thus uncertain (Plate 1, nos. 6–7).³³ *Two Emperors* was soon replaced by *Cross-and-Lozenge* (Plate 1, nos. 8–9).³⁴ In this case the portrait on the obverse was derived from a Roman model, and the reverse design was in the “Mercian” tradition. In London, coins of this type were struck in the names of both kings, perhaps for one after the other, perhaps for both simultaneously; the most prolific

²⁹ Mark Blackburn, “The Viking Winter Camp at Torksey, 872–3,” in his *Viking Coinage and Currency in the British Isles* (London: 2011), 221–64; Martin Biddle, “Repton,” in *WB-EnASE*, 401–3.

³⁰ Simon Keynes, “Anglo-Saxon Entries in the “*Liber Vitae*” of Brescia,” in *Alfred the Wise*, ed. Roberts and Nelson (Cambridge: 1997), 99–119; Dieter Geuenich and Uwe Ludwig, *Der Memorial- und Liturgiecodex von San Salvatore / Santa Giulia in Brescia* (Hannover: 2000), 92–93, 167 and 171.

³¹ S 215 and S 216, both from Worcester and dated 875; S. Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters, c. 670–1066* (Cambridge, 2002), Table XIV.

³² Mark Blackburn and Simon Keynes, “A Corpus of the *Cross-and-Lozenge* and Related Coinages of Alfred, Ceolwulf II and Archbishop Æthelred,” in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, ed. Blackburn and Dumville, 125–50, at 129–30.

³³ Blackburn and Keynes, “Corpus of *Cross-and-Lozenge*,” 131–2.

³⁴ The specimens described in Blackburn and Keynes, “Corpus of *Cross-and-Lozenge*,” 134–46, are now supplemented by four further specimens, on which see Blackburn, “Alfred’s Coinage Reforms,” 212–14 and 216–17.

moneyer, Liawald, worked for both kings. At Canterbury, coins of the *Cross-and-Lozenge* type were minted for Alfred and for Archbishop Æthelred; and it would appear that they were minted also (for Alfred) at a mint elsewhere in Wessex, and (for Ceolwulf) at a mint elsewhere in Mercia. Complications and uncertainties remain; but the strong impression created by this evidence is of a form of monetary union between Wessex and Mercia, established between Alfred and Ceolwulf in the mid- to later 870s – in direct development of practices attested already in the later 860s and early 870s.

The evidence of charters and coins makes it difficult, therefore, to accept the chronicler's disparaging reference to Ceolwulf as indicative of an attitude which prevailed in the mid-870s. The remark probably represents an opinion adopted in the early 890s by someone ready to make a mockery of the more distant past in defence or explanation of the political situation which by his day had come to prevail.

The second Viking invasion of Wessex (878), and its aftermath

The Alfredian chronicler was able in retrospect to distinguish between the year in which the Danes “conquered” a kingdom and the year in which they “shared out” the land.³⁵ Between 869 and 875 they “conquered” first the kingdom of the East Angles (869), then the kingdom of the Mercians (874), and finally the kingdom of the Northumbrians (875), leaving only the extended kingdom of the West Saxons still holding firm against their onslaught. In 876 a group “settled” in Northumbria, and in 877 another group “settled” in Mercia (probably in the east midlands). A further group, under Guthrum, remained intent upon subduing Wessex, and in January 878 took the West Saxons by surprise. Alfred retreated into the Somerset marshes, and by Easter (23 March) had taken refuge at Athelney. Many of the familiar stories about Alfred arise from this period, starting with those told in the *Chronicle*; but the West Saxons emerged victorious, whereupon the Danes withdrew into Ceolwulf's kingdom. After passing the winter of 878–9 in Cirencester, Guthrum and his army returned eastwards into East Anglia, where they settled “and shared out the land.”

Alfred's victory at Edington in 878 must have enhanced his standing among the English people in general (*Angelcynn*),³⁶ and seems soon to have led, directly or indirectly, to the extension of his rule over a significant part of the former kingdom of the Mercians. In a regnal list preserved at the church of Worcester, Ceolwulf was assigned a reign of five years, which if calculated from 874 would take us to 879 as a likely date for his death, deposition, or departure. Alfred may have seized his opportunity, representing himself as the natural heir to Mercian political interests (after the earlier “alliances”); or perhaps some among those holding power and exerting influence among the Mercians saw an advantage in their submission to Alfred's rule (albeit a view which might not have been shared by all). A key issue at this stage would have been the position of London in the aftermath of Ceolwulf's disappearance from the scene. The statement in the *Chronicle* to the effect that in 886 Alfred occupied London, and made it habitable again, was once taken to imply that the city had fallen under Danish control in the later 870s, remaining so until 886. A turning-point in understanding of the period came in the mid-1980s, when archaeologists first suggested that the mid-Saxon emporium of London would appear

³⁵ K&L, *Alfred*, 212 n. 13.

³⁶ The notion of an “English” people (*gens Anglorum*, or *Angelcynn*) had been familiar for over 150 years, in the pages of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, and became a commonplace in the ninth century, when it was used as a term applied to the “English”-speaking peoples of Britain, in their common opposition or subjection to the Danes. For wider discussion, see Sharon M. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's “Historia ecclesiastica”* (Woodbridge: 2011), with references.

to have been located immediately *outside* and to the west of the city walls, and that Alfred's contribution in 886 had been to strengthen the city's defences, moving its people back *inside* the old Roman walls for their own protection.³⁷ The suggestion prompted a review of the numismatic evidence, and at the same time of the literary and documentary evidence. The moneyers in London who in the later 870s had struck coins for Alfred as well as for Ceolwulf continued in the early 880s to strike coins for Alfred.³⁸ It seemed likely on the basis of this evidence that London, having come into Ceolwulf's hands in 874, remained under English control after his demise, *c.* 879. The text known as the "Treaty between Alfred and Guthrum," which leaves London on the "English" side of the boundary with the Danes, might then be re-dated *c.* 880 (brought back from *c.* 886), after the settlement of the Danes in the eastern midlands (877) and East Anglia (880), after the death (or whatever) of King Ceolwulf (*c.* 879), and perhaps soon after Alfred had taken upon himself the rule of the English people living elsewhere in the former kingdom of the Mercians.³⁹ It would follow that Guthrum, though represented in the treaty as ruler of the people in East Anglia, was at that stage regarded as one who could also speak for the Danes settled in the east midlands. Moreover, an addition to the annal for 883 in the *Chronicle*, thought to belong to the annal for 886, could be left where it was, indicating that a Viking army had occupied London, briefly, in 883; it was then following the threat to Rochester, in 885, that Alfred took decisive measures, in 886, to secure the defences of London.

Nothing is known of the precise circumstances in which Alfred extended his rule over the Mercians, *c.* 880. A certain Æthelred emerges into view in the early 880s. His origins are obscure, but his associations may have lain in the south-western part of Mercia, perhaps in or around Gloucester. He had acknowledged Alfred's rule by 883; was entrusted by Alfred with the control of London in 886; had married Alfred's daughter Æthelflæd seemingly by 887 and certainly by 893; and on his death in 911 was buried in Gloucester.⁴⁰ The event which took place at London in 886 was evidently a grand assembly held in the presence of the king, attended by persons of standing drawn from all parts of the kingdom, who were able in some sense to represent others. The Alfredian chronicler, writing *c.* 890, described how "all the English people that were not under subjection to the Danes" submitted to Alfred; which Asser, writing in 893, took to mean all of the "Angles and Saxons" who had formerly been scattered everywhere and were not in captivity with the heathen.⁴¹ Those *in captivity* would have been the English of East Anglia, eastern Mercia, and Northumbria, whose kingdoms had already been conquered and settled. Those *not in captivity* would have been the English of western and southern Mercia, *i.e.* to the west and south of the boundary with Guthrum, and north of the Thames, perhaps including people who had decided not to remain wherever they had lived before. The likelihood is, however, that the submission in 886 represented not so much the establishment of a new polity as the formal recognition or symbolic validation of a polity which had been established *c.* 880, after Ceolwulf's demise. Æthelred had already played a

³⁷ For references, see Simon Keynes, "King Alfred and the Mercians," in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, ed. Blackburn and Dumville, 1–45, at 23 n. 106; see also Derek Keene, "Alfred and London," in *Alfred*, ed. Reuter, 235–49.

³⁸ Blackburn and Keynes, "Corpus of *Cross-and-Lozenge*;" Blackburn, "London Mint;" Blackburn, "Alfred's Coinage Reforms."

³⁹ For the treaty, see K&L, *Alfred*, 171–72 and 311–13, with Keynes, "Alfred and the Mercians," esp. 21–6, superseding K&L, *Alfred*, 37–38 and 266. Alfred is styled "king," but the "councillors of all the English race" were seemingly conceived for this purpose as a distinct body.

⁴⁰ Keynes, "Alfred and the Mercians," 19–34.

⁴¹ K&L, *Alfred*, 98 and 200.

significant part in whatever process had been involved; and in 886 the king seems in a further ceremony to have entrusted him with control of the place which was central to the interests of those living both north and south of the river Thames.⁴²

The new Alfredian polity was significantly different from the kingdom of the West Saxons (with its extensions in the south-east), for the simple reason that it incorporated that part of the former kingdom of the Mercians which remained under English control. Given the distinctive styles accorded to Alfred in his Latin diplomas of the 880s and 890s, and the style applied to him by Asser (writing in 893), it seems appropriate that this polity should be called the “kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons.”⁴³ If Alfred’s treaty with Guthrum represented an early stage in the formation of the new political order, Alfred’s code of laws might be regarded as its declaration of existence. The text is subsumed with a sense of its own grandeur, leading in a prologue and 120 chapters from the Ten Commandments, and the Golden Rule, via an expression of the king’s debt to earlier Kentish, West Saxon, and Mercian legislation, into a substantive body of laws running in Alfred’s own name, followed by the appended laws of his renowned predecessor King Ine (688–726), representing his West Saxons origins.⁴⁴ It is nothing if not aspirational, raising the English peoples to an exalted level; though we need not doubt that it was intended, as such, to serve a practical purpose. It is the king’s coinage, however, which demonstrates the reality of Alfred’s position as king “of the Anglo-Saxons.” The *Cross-and-Lozenge* type was probably discontinued soon after Ceolwulf’s demise in 879. From the early 880s we encounter some relatively short-lived local or “experimental” types, before a more widespread type, which seems to have been introduced at about the same time, came to prevail. Best known, because relatively plentiful, are the coins (from London) of the *London Monogram* type, which combine a “portrait” of the king (based on a Roman model) with a monogram forming the word “Londonia” on the reverse (Plate 1, no. 12). No less significant are two other mint-signed types issued in Alfred’s name: a portrait type minted at Gloucester (Plate 1, no. 10), and a non-portrait type minted at Oxford (Plate 1, no. 11). These three types might appear at first glance to have little in common, yet they were minted in Alfred’s name at three important centres of the (former) Mercian kingdom, and seem as a group to proclaim that a new and overtly “Alfredian” polity had come into being. On another mint-signed type, known from specimens issued at Winchester and at Exeter in the heart of Wessex, the king is styled “rex Saxonum” (Plate 1, nos. 16–17), suggesting that “local” identities endured.⁴⁵ It is, however, Alfred’s far more common (if somewhat less than attractive) *Two-Line* type, current from the early 880s until the end of his reign (Plate 1, no. 13–14), which should claim

⁴² For Queenhithe (formerly “Æthelred’s hithe”), just upriver of the north end of Southwark Bridge, see Robin Wroe-Brown, “The Saxon Origins of Queenhithe,” *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 50 (1999), 12–16, with references.

⁴³ K&L, *Alfred*, 38–39 and 227–8; Nelson, “Political Ideas of Alfred,” 134–35; Keynes, “West Saxon Charters,” 1147–48, “Alfred and the Mercians,” 34–39, and “Power of the Written Word,” 185–88; Pratt, *Political Thought*, 105–7. Alfred’s power did not extend over *all* of the English, and it may be that the style was devised, for use in the king’s charters, to express a combination of peoples which fell short of a union of peoples. The more exalted position was, however, by this time a credible aspiration, brought significantly closer in 927. See also Wormald, “Living with Alfred,” 20.

⁴⁴ For the law-code, see Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, I: *Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford: 1999), 265–85; Pratt, *Political Thought*, 214–41; and Todd Preston, *King Alfred’s Book of Laws: A Study of the “Domboc” and its Influence on English Identity* (Jefferson, NC: 2012). Wormald regarded the code as a product of the mid-890s (after Asser’s *Life*); it is more likely in my view to have been a product of the late 880s (or *c.* 890). For further discussion, see Richards, Chap. 11, below.

⁴⁵ Alfred styles himself king “of the West Saxons” in his law-code and in his will.

our attention as the coin-type symbolic of the Alfredian kingdom “of the Anglo-Saxons.” The king is “AELFRED REX;” moneys are named, but not the mint; and while modern analysis suggests that most of the coins were struck probably in London, Canterbury and Winchester, a unified monetary system was now extending deeper into the heartlands of the former kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia.⁴⁶

One can only guess what impact the experience of the 870s might have had on those who became responsible in the 880s for protecting the country, in its new political configuration, against any threat of further invasion. Our attention is bound to focus on Alfred himself, as if he were solely in charge, but many others must have been involved. At one level, guidance for a king was available in the Old Testament, notably in the accounts of David and Solomon; and there were also examples in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.⁴⁷ At another level, contact of some kind was maintained in the 880s with secular and ecclesiastical powers in Francia, and beyond the Alps with the authorities in Rome. Most important, of course, was the collective experience of those among the English who had lived through the events of the past thirty years, and who knew most about the current state of the country’s defences, and its resources.⁴⁸ Some of them might even have asked themselves what the English had done to deserve God’s punishment on such a scale, and been moved by the changing circumstances to dwell on the available means of securing peace and prosperity in the longer term.

Alfred’s program for the revival of religion, learning and literacy

Alfred’s undertakings in the 880s were the product of a combination of changed circumstances. In 878 a Viking army had arrived in the Thames; but on making contact with the force upriver, recently defeated at Edington, it passed the winter of 878–9 at Fulham, and then left the country. The English must have known that the threat had not passed, and that the Vikings might return at any time (as they did, briefly, in 885). On the other hand, by 880 the last of the Viking armies which had been active in the 870s had “settled” (in East Anglia), and the Alfredian polity was being extended and re-formulated as the kingdom “of the Anglo-Saxons.” The continued threat meant that there was no room for complacency, while the changed circumstances, and with them the access to fresh manpower and greater resources, created new opportunities for innovation as well as for reform.

To judge from Asser’s account, Alfred had been of bookish disposition from a very young age. As a boy, in the mid-850s, he had won a book of English poetry from his mother, in competition with his elder brothers; though it was not until he was 12 (c. 860) that he began to learn how to read English for himself, and not until some time later on, represented as St Martin’s Day 887, that he learnt how to read Latin and to understand it (simultaneously) in English.⁴⁹ As a four-year-old, in 853, Alfred had traveled to Rome, perhaps accompanying his elder brother Æthelred as part of a

⁴⁶ MEC, 313–16; Blackburn, “Alfred’s Coinage Reforms,” 205–8 and 214.

⁴⁷ Keynes, “Tale of Two Kings,” 208–10.

⁴⁸ *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. David Hill and Alexander R. Rumble (Manchester: 1996); and Nicholas Brooks, “Alfredian Government: The West Saxon Inheritance,” in *Alfred the Great*, ed. Reuter, 154–73.

⁴⁹ Asser, chaps. 22–3, 76–7, 81 and 87–9. For this understanding of Asser’s account, see K&L, *Alfred*, p. 239 n. 46, and Pratt, *Political Thought*, 89; for a more elaborate exposition (substituting 40 for 12, and postponing Alfred’s attainment of literacy, in English as well as in Latin, until 887, coinciding with the end of the Carolingian empire), see Wormald, “Living with Alfred,” 24–39; for another interpretation, see Godden, “Stories,” 127–9.

delegation representing their father.⁵⁰ Two years later, in 855, Alfred went to Rome for a second time, with his father, staying for several months on the way home at the court of Charles the Bald, during which period Æthelwulf received Charles's daughter Judith as his second wife.⁵¹ The impact of these adventures on a young and impressionable boy should not be underestimated. Even if he could not have understood all that he saw, he could not fail to have been impressed by the grandeur of the ancient city of Rome, and by the magnificence of the church of St Peter, and would have been made aware of the pope's standing in the ecclesiastical order.⁵² He would also have seen for himself the trappings of the Carolingian court.⁵³ Alfred returned knowing more of the world than many, and seems to have been predisposed thereafter to look outside for what he could not find within. Little is known of Alfred's intellectual development in the 860s and 870s, beyond Asser's remarks about his thirst for knowledge and the lack of teachers.⁵⁴ We do hear, however, that Alfred kept constantly with him a "little book" (*libellus*), into which were copied some offices, psalms and prayers learnt in his youth – perhaps comprising a mixture of texts in Latin, with or without English glosses, and in English.⁵⁵

The contemporary perception seems to have been that the English had neglected to maintain the standards proper to a Christian people, and that the Viking invasions were a form of divine punishment for their sins.⁵⁶ Standards of literacy had been maintained in the vernacular, not least for "pragmatic" (or practical) purposes, but difficulties arose from a decline in standards of Latin learning and literacy, and concomitantly from a dearth of vernacular versions of requisite texts. A strangely incompetent charter of Archbishop Æthelred, dated 873, has become symbolic of the decline, at Canterbury, of competence in Latin; and although a distinctive tradition appears to have been maintained in Wessex, into the late 860s, it left much to be desired.⁵⁷ In the 880s, Alfred was in a position to summon learned men from Mercia into his own presence, building in this respect on the bonds which had developed, since the 850s, between two kingdoms which in political terms had been moving (so it would seem) in opposite directions.⁵⁸ The four Mercians who came to Alfred were evidently the first to enter his service in this way.⁵⁹ Wærferth, as bishop of Worcester,

⁵⁰ Keynes, "Anglo-Saxon Entries," 112–13; and Nelson, "Æthelwulf."

⁵¹ *Annals of Saint-Bertin*, in *EHD*, 000.

⁵² For the wider context, see the essays assembled in *England and Rome in the Early Middle Ages: Pilgrimage, Art and Politics*, ed. F. Tinti (Turnhout: 2014), with further references.

⁵³ For Alfred in this wider continental context, see Janet Nelson, "Alfred's Continental Contemporaries," in *Alfred the Great*, ed. Reuter, 293–310; and Paul Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power, and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford: 2011), with further references.

⁵⁴ Asser, chaps. 24–25 and 76.

⁵⁵ Asser, chaps. 24 and 88. For the wider context, see Pratt, "Illnesses," 45–49, and *Political Thought*, 89, 120; see also Godden, "Stories," 131. Cf. the prayer book prepared by Alcuin for the use of laymen (below, n. 000).

⁵⁶ K&L, *Alfred*, 25–26, citing Archbishop Fulco's letter to Alfred (reporting Alfred's remarks to him), King Alfred's preface to the *Pastoral Care*, and Asser, chap. 93.

⁵⁷ S 344, edited with discussion in *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury*, ed. Brooks and Kelly, 793–99 (no. 93). Keynes, "West Saxon Charters," and "Power of the Written Word," 184.

⁵⁸ For a different view of the "Mercian" dimension, see Godden, "Stories," 134–35. If Asser implies in chaps. 76–77 that the Mercians were from "outside" Alfred's own kingdom, he may not mean anything more than that the helpers came from outside Wessex; the position in the mid-880s is well established by the evidence of charters and coins. Nor is there any necessary "denial" of Mercian scholarship in the preface to the *Pastoral Care*; and while Bishop Wærferth received a copy, it does not follow that he was among the bishops said (in the verse preface) to have known little Latin, or that he was then at Worcester (and not also at Alfred's court).

⁵⁹ Asser, chap. 77.

must have become a figure of particular significance at Alfred's court, and may indeed have taken an important early initiative in providing the king with a translation of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*.⁶⁰ Plegmund, Æthelstan, and Wærwulf might also have come from Worcester, or from any of the other episcopal sees (Lichfield, Hereford, Dorchester, London), or from one or other of several religious houses (e.g. Winchcombe), or indeed from a residual body of clergy who had served the previous regime. Plegmund was installed at Canterbury from 890, as successor to Archbishop Æthelred, remaining in office there for over thirty years; Æthelstan and Wærwulf continued to serve as priests in the royal household into the reign of Edward the Elder.⁶¹ Alfred's head-hunting also extended further afield. At least two men came to him from across the channel: Grimbald, a priest and monk from the monastery of St Bertin, in Flanders, and John, a priest and monk probably from eastern Francia.⁶² Grimbald came to be closely associated with Winchester, and John (the Old Saxon) was appointed abbot of Athelney in Somerset.⁶³ As Asser put it: "Through their teaching the king's outlook was very considerably broadened." Asser himself had come to Alfred from the church of St David's, in south-west Wales, and was in time appointed bishop of Sherborne.⁶⁴ In his *Life of Alfred*, Asser tells of an occasion on St Martin's day (11 November) 887, which he remembered (or represented) as an epiphanic moment for the king. Alfred and Asser had been discussing a certain passage in a book, evidently in Latin. The king liked it so much that he asked Asser to copy it into the "little book" which he always kept with him; but this little book was full, so Asser prepared a new quire or gathering (*quarternio*), into which he copied first the passage in question, and then three other passages. As soon as the first of these passages had been copied into the new quire, Alfred determined or endeavoured (*studuit*) to read the Latin text, to understand it in English, and from it (*inde*), perhaps in that way, to instruct or to enlighten a great many people (*per plures instituire*).⁶⁵ In the preface to his translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Alfred names Asser, with Archbishop Plegmund and the mass-priests Grimbald and John, as among those who had helped him to understand the Latin text. Asser might well have "improved"

⁶⁰ For the *Dialogues*, see Malcolm Godden, "Wærferth and King Alfred: The Fate of the Old English Dialogues," in *Alfred the Wise*, ed. Roberts, *et al.*, 35–51, and "Alfredian Project," 95–100; see also Irvine (ch. 6) and Johnson (ch. 14).

⁶¹ K&L, *Alfred*, 259, and "Plegmund," in *WB-EnASE*, 378–9.

⁶² Asser, chap. 78. For Grimbald, see also Archbishop Fulco's letter to Alfred (K&L, *Alfred*, 182–86 and 331–33), discussed further by Janet L. Nelson, "... *sicut olim gens Francorum ... nunc gens Anglorum*: Fulk's Letter to Alfred Revisited," in *Alfred the Wise*, ed. Roberts, *et al.*, 135–44; and Godden, "Stories," 135–37. For Grimbald and John, see Alfred's preface to the *Pastoral Care* (K&L, *Alfred*, 126).

⁶³ For Grimbald at Winchester, see *The "Liber Vitae" of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester*, ed. Simon Keynes (Copenhagen: 1996), 16–18. John may have demitted office as abbot, as he is found latterly as a royal priest (K&L, *Alfred*, 260).

⁶⁴ Asser, chaps. 79–81, with Keynes, "Asser," in *WB-EnASE*, 51–2.

⁶⁵ Asser, chaps. 87–89, with K&L, *Alfred*, 28 and 268 n. 208. There is no necessary implication that the new quire prepared by Asser for the Latin excerpts, which became what he also describes as a "little book" (*libellus*), which grew almost to the size of a psalter, and which Alfred himself called his *enchiridion*, or "hand-book," was prefixed or appended to the "little book" (*libellus*) which Alfred had shown him. Alfred might have had two "little books" (one his old prayer book, the other a collection of excerpts) which he kept by himself continually, and which complemented each other (see Pratt, "Illnesses," 45–47, with *Political Thought*, 119–20). A book which survived at Worcester in the twelfth century, known as the *dicta* of Alfred, "king of the Anglo-Saxons," and a book identified by William of Malmesbury as the king's "handbook," were probably one and the same; if so, the reference is more likely to have been to the second than to the first of the two "little books," extending our sense of its contents (Pratt, *Political Thought*, 81, 91, 127, 141–42).

what was probably an aspect of the same story, for purposes of his own, perhaps as a way of stressing the closeness of his relationship with the king, and the king's enthusiasm for learning, for the benefit of whatever audience he had in mind. It was a way of showing how by divine inspiration the king had acquired a particular skill, or gift, and resolved to put it to good use.⁶⁶

It is appropriate that the work chosen to introduce the program of translations was Pope Gregory's *Cura pastoralis*. Its significance had been advertised by Bede, writing in 731; and an expurgated version was included among a set of texts gathered together and circulated c. 750, apparently by Cuthbert, archbishop of Canterbury, acting in association with Æthelbald, king of the Mercians, in response to Archbishop Boniface's complaints about the English.⁶⁷ In the preface to his translation of the *Pastoral Care*, Alfred expressed his confidence that translations of books deemed "most necessary for all men to know" could be produced, "provided we have the quiet [or peace, or freedom from other distraction]" ("gif we þa stilnesse habbað," *PC* 7.8–9). The remark is understood most naturally as a wishful thought that all would be well as long as the current "quiet" lasted, expressed during a period of peace and prompted by apprehension that the Vikings might soon return. It seems less likely that this form of words would have been chosen if written during the years 892–6, when a Viking army was at large in the kingdom.⁶⁸ As bishop of Sherborne, Asser would have been among the recipients of Alfred's letter; but by the time *he* was writing, in 893, the Vikings had returned, and were posing a serious threat in the heart of Wessex. Under these circumstances, it might have been difficult to maintain the momentum of any such project, at least until peace returned; and while Asser was closely involved, he chose for whatever reason to say no more than he did. Peace or "stillness" returned in 896, so perhaps the work, if it had been suspended, was soon resumed. If any work remained unfinished (or not yet started) at the time of Alfred's death, in 899, it is to be expected that some of those involved, including Asser (d. 911), Wærferth (d. c. 915) and Plegmund (d. 923), might have continued to take matters forward, after the king's death yet still in the king's good name.

Alfred's purpose in encouraging the production of English versions of works otherwise available only in Latin can be understood on various levels. Much is to be learnt, of course, from the analysis of the translations themselves, in their own right as products of their age; much depends at the same time on the "Alfredian" credentials of those translations which have been accepted or have come to be regarded as his work and thus representative of his own thought.⁶⁹ Alfred's preface to the *Pastoral Care* retains its authority, and contains an unambiguous statement of his larger purpose: the provision of English versions of certain key texts, so that "all the free-born youth now found among the English ("ðe nu is on Angelcynne," 7.10) ... may be set to learning ... until the time that they can read English writings properly" – with further instruction in Latin for those advancing to holy orders. Asser has more to say about the "school" itself, revealing that it formed part of the royal household, and that the training extended to writing as well as reading.⁷⁰ He alludes more than once to the

⁶⁶ A significantly different understanding of Asser, chaps. 87–89, is advanced by Godden, "Stories," 129–32. In his view (131), Asser is saying that as soon as he had copied the first passage into the new booklet, the king "endeavoured to read [it] and interpret [it] in the Saxon language and then to set down (*instituere*) many more [passages] (*perplures*)," undoing any wider implications.

⁶⁷ Simon Keynes, "The Reconstruction of a Burnt Cottonian Manuscript: the Case of Cotton MS. Otho A. I.," *British Library Journal* 22 (1996), 113–60, at 141; Pratt, *Political Thought*, 141.

⁶⁸ Keynes, "Power," 193, and Pratt, *Political Thought*, 154; cf. Godden, "Stories," 123–26 and 134.

⁶⁹ Pratt, *Political Thought*, and Bately, Chap. 5, below.

⁷⁰ Asser, chaps. 75 (reading and writing), 76, 102, 106, with K&L, *Alfred*, 35–36 and 257 n. 148.

problems which Alfred had to overcome in achieving his purpose, not least the slow-witted holders of administrative office, the self-interest shown by laymen, and the lack of interest among them in adopting the religious life.⁷¹ Yet he implies at the same time that Alfred was determined to ensure that literacy in English extended beyond those in holy orders and reached down through secular society from his ealdormen to his reeves and thegns: so that they could read the translations and learn more of the books most necessary for all men to know, and (one imagines) so that they could also read the vernacular documents on which government of the enlarged kingdom would depend, including law-codes,⁷² and even produce documentation of their own. The vernacular had been used for “pragmatic” purposes since the early seventh century, increasingly so from the early ninth century onwards. Alfred was building on these foundations but aspired to take matters further.⁷³

The picture which emerges in this way from the combined evidence of Alfred’s preface to the *Pastoral Care*, and Asser’s *Life of Alfred*, can be substantiated in certain respects. The king is said to have earmarked one half of his annual income “for God in full devotion”: an eighth as almsgiving for “the poor of every race who came to him”; an eighth for the support of the two houses he had founded in Wessex; an eighth for the school “which he had assiduously assembled from many nobles of his own race and also from boys not of noble birth”; and an eighth for the support of other houses in Wessex, in Mercia, and elsewhere.⁷⁴ The ultimate religious house was St Peter’s, in Rome, which Alfred had visited in 853 and 855. Thirty years later he was in contact with Pope Marinus (882–4), from whom he received a piece of the Cross; and it was perhaps at about this time that he became familiar with Pope Gregory’s remarks, in the *Cura pastoralis*, on the distribution of alms (*diuidendae elemosynae*).⁷⁵ The gift from Pope Marinus was registered in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, prompting a series of references to expeditions to Rome for the giving of alms, which were maintained in one form or another for several years (883, 887–90).⁷⁶ Alfred’s conspicuous almsgiving, so well represented in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and in Asser’s *Life*, is given more tangible form by the remarkable “offering pieces,” each so much larger and heavier than his silver pennies, inscribed “Alfred rex Saxonum” on the obverse and “ELIMO-” on the reverse (Plate 1, no. 18).⁷⁷

Alfred is said to have promoted building on various scales and of all kinds, in stone and in wood, and to have commissioned works in gold and silver.⁷⁸ Again, one need not look far for the reality.⁷⁹ There are bound to be degrees of uncertainty about

⁷¹ Asser, chaps. 91 and 105–6.

⁷² Richards (ch. 11).

⁷³ He may have been building consciously on Charlemagne’s capitulary *De litteris colendis* (c. 784), on which see Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne* (Cambridge: 2008), 316. For literacy in Latin and English, see M. R. Godden, “Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, I: c. 400–1100, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge: 2012), 580–90. For “pragmatic” literacy, see also M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1217*, 3rd ed. (London: 2012). Earlier editions of this important work, published in 1979 and 1993, take little account of the pre-Conquest evidence; the third edition incorporates significant modifications, and the author admits (337–38) that it might have been better to begin the survey in 900.

⁷⁴ Asser, chaps. 92–98 (Athelney and Shaftesbury) and 102 (division of income).

⁷⁵ Asser, chap. 102; see also Pratt, “Illnesses,” 71–2.

⁷⁶ Keynes, “Alfred and the Mercians,” 22–23 (cf. K&L, *Alfred*, 254 n. 137, 266 n. 198, and 268 n. 206), and Pratt, “Illnesses,” 69–70.

⁷⁷ Dolley and Blunt, “Chronology,” 77–78; *MEC*, 314.

⁷⁸ Asser, chap. 91.

⁷⁹ R. A. Hall, “Burhs and Boroughs,” in *Handbook*, ed. Hamerow, *et al*, 600–21.

the origin, dating, and interpretation of any small object, but the evidence for a distinctive body of “Alfredian” metalwork in the late ninth century is compelling.⁸⁰ The gold rings associated with King Æthelwulf and Queen Æthelswith remind us that the craftsmanship and the thoughtful iconography were deep-rooted. The Alfred Jewel retains its place at the top end of an ever-extending range of “unidentified socketed objects.” If it is correctly identified as a decorative terminal from an *æstel*, or pointer, used for indicating one’s place when reading across a line or down the page, and if it carries the other such objects with it, the implications for the spread of literacy (or for instruction in literacy) are startling.⁸¹ It might be better to wait, however, until yet another such object is found in a context which makes its purpose clear, and then to reassess their significance as a group (if indeed they still form a group). The extraordinary iconography of the Fuller Brooch is now better understood, and more effectively contextualized, than ever before.⁸² No less remarkable, however, is the appearance, in two quite different contexts, of a design which shows a man cutting grapes from a vine; for its use on the Codford St Peter stone cross, and on the Cranborne strap-end, suggests that a visual metaphor for a man gathering fruit or wine (whatever its intended meaning may have been) had become commonplace among craftsmen of this period.⁸³

King Alfred’s program for the revival of religion, learning and literacy was just one aspect of the measures undertaken by him, and those around him, in the continuing struggle against the Danes. It was a product of and cannot be separated from the emergence during the 880s of the Alfredian “kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons,” so well attested by the evidence of law-codes, charters and coins. It was complemented by reorganization of administrative arrangements, and by all the hard work which must have gone into the repair and improvement of the kingdom’s defences. When the Danes returned, they met with a very different situation, represented on the ground by more effective resistance and at another level by a more rarified form of response.

Constructing Alfred

In 892 the Viking army which had wintered at Fulham in 878–9, and which had left thereafter for the continent, came back to Alfred’s kingdom, where it was soon joined by another force. The combined threat must have represented a moment of crisis for Alfred and his “Anglo-Saxon” people. If so, it was a crisis which seems to have prompted publication of what has come to be known as the “common stock” of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It is arguable, moreover, that the appearance of the *Chronicle*, in English, prompted Asser to make use of it as the basis for his *Life of King Alfred*, written in 893, in Latin, probably for a quite different audience.

At some date perhaps in the late 880s, persons unknown but probably among those in regular and close proximity to the king, began work on the compilation of the sequence of annals which would become the first stage of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁸⁴ A copy of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* lay not far behind their work,

⁸⁰ Webster, “Treasures,” and below, Chap. 3.

⁸¹ K&L, *Alfred*, 203–6 (discussing two such objects), and Pratt, *Political Thought*, 189–92 (discussing four); to which should now be added three more, found in Warwickshire, Yorkshire, and the Lofoten Islands. For multiple *æstels*, see Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, 154–55.

⁸² Pratt, “Fuller Brooch,” in *WB-EnASE*, 201–3, and *Political Thought*, 187–88; Webster, Chap. 3.

⁸³ Webster, “Treasures,” 88–89, and *Anglo-Saxon Art*, 156 and 159.

⁸⁴ For the original extent of the *Chronicle* (to 892), see K&L, *Alfred*, 41–42 and 275–81, with Simon Keynes, “Manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,” in *Book in Britain*, ed. Gameson, 537–52, and Irvine (ch. 13).

supplemented by some other materials, including a collection of royal genealogies and episcopal lists of a kind likely to have been maintained at or distributed from the church of Canterbury.⁸⁵ When visiting the court of Charles the Bald in the mid-850s, King Æthelwulf and those with him might have become aware of the *Annales regni Francorum*, and other sets of Frankish annals; it is otherwise to be expected that Grimbold and John the Old Saxon would have been able to provide information (perhaps even examples).⁸⁶ Little is known of the circumstances in which material was collected, or of the way in which written records were combined with information not previously set down in writing. The challenges which faced the compilers are apparent from the difficulty they had in achieving much sense of continuity or flow; yet they brought together and co-ordinated material drawn from various sources, and by merging the information in a single sequence of annals did their best to create a common past for the English people, adding a historical and even a political dimension to the sense of identity which depended otherwise on their common language and their common opposition to the Danes. The account of events in the 850s, 860s and 870s would thus have been written up some years after the events, representing a view of the past constructed c. 890 for the intended benefit of an audience which had already moved beyond its separate “West Saxon” or “Mercian” origins. It is the only account that we have of the warfare, but should of course be approached with all due circumspection. The chronicler represents Alfred as “making peace” with the enemy, when one can be fairly sure that he meant buying them off; unsurprisingly, he was also keen to convey as positive an impression as he could.⁸⁷ The air of retrospection accounts also for the patterning with which the chronicler describes first the “conquest” of the kingdoms of East Angles (870), the Mercians (874), and the Northumbrians (875), and then the “sharing out” of the land of the Northumbrians (876), the Mercians (877) and East Angles (880). The annals for the 880s track the movements of a Viking army on the continent, in the knowledge that it would return to Alfred’s kingdom in 892.⁸⁸

The completion and publication of the “common stock” of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in 892, led directly to the production of Asser’s *Life of Alfred* in 893.⁸⁹ It is a deeply interesting and even artfully constructed work, which with all its peculiarities and limitations exudes a sense of its special value as compelling portrait of the king, written by one who knew him well.⁹⁰ As one might expect, Asser was influenced by portrayals of kingship in the Old Testament, and by conventions familiar from hagiography; it is also abundantly clear that he had perused Einhard’s *Life of Charlemagne* and in certain respects used it as a model. No less interesting is the use

⁸⁵ Simon Keynes, “Between Bede and the *Chronicle*: BL Cotton Vespasian B. vi, fols. 104–9,” *Latin Learning and English Lore*, ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe and Andy Orchard, 2 vols. (Toronto: 2005), I, 47–67.

⁸⁶ For the *Annales regni Francorum*, see McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 31–43.

⁸⁷ Keynes, “Tale of Two Kings,” 196–201.

⁸⁸ The viewpoint of a chronicler, c. 890, would account naturally for other indications of redaction some time or long after the event: the three ships of “Northmen” which arrived in 789 are described in the same annal as “the first ships of Danish men which came to the land of the English”; in 851 Æthelwulf and the West Saxons “inflicted the greatest slaughter on a heathen army that we ever heard of until this present day.”

⁸⁹ Keynes, “Alfred and the Mercians,” 40–41. The question is whether copies of the *Chronicle* were circulated in the same way as copies of the *Pastoral Care*; for the latter, see Keynes, “Power of the Written Word,” 193–96, and Pratt, *Political Thought*, 180–85, with references.

⁹⁰ The study of Asser’s *Life of Alfred* is set on a new footing by T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford: 2013), 452–66, with further references.

that he would appear to have made of the *Life of Alcuin*, produced by a monk of Ferrières in the 820s; he might also have learnt about Alcuin from Grimbold and John, or indeed from a collection of Alcuin's letters.⁹¹ It remains the case, however, that Asser portrays the king in a way which suited his own purposes, which were to convey information of a certain kind about the king himself, and about the author's standing with the king, presumably to his own advantage, and that of the king, and for the instruction of whatever readership or audience(s) he had in mind.

A chronological framework was constructed by Asser with a series of Latin annals based on the *Chronicle* for the years from 849 to 887, arranged in five blocks (chs. 3–11, 17–21, 26–8, 30–72, 82–6), with certain errors, alterations, additions and connections (all of interest in themselves). Into this framework Asser inserted six blocks of material of a more personal or discursive nature: one at the beginning (chs. 1–2, on Alfred's parentage); four at appropriate points in the sequence of annals (chs. 12–16, tales of Æthelbald and Æthelwulf; chs. 22–5, Alfred's infancy and boyhood; ch. 29, his marriage; chs. 73–81, Alfred's *res gestae*); and one at the end (chs. 87–106, Alfred's reading, and governance).⁹² Although the work begins with a salutation addressed to the king, it seems unlikely that the intended readership was the king himself and those at his court; rather, the work would appear to have been composed, in the first instance, for the author's friends and associates in Wales.⁹³ Asser refers to Alfred's predecessors, accurately enough, as kings "of the (West) Saxons," yet in those annals where Asser accords Alfred a royal style, he is consistently king "of the Anglo-Saxons," starting with the annal for 882.⁹⁴ Another striking feature is the provision of a dual chronology, in which events are dated by their year in the Christian era (the *Annus Domini*), followed by the corresponding number in an "Alfredian" era (i.e. Alfred's age).⁹⁵ No less significant is the fact that throughout his work Asser represents the opposing parties as "pagans" and "Christians," thus elevating the struggle to one with which the Welsh themselves could identify.⁹⁶ It must be admitted, however, that his statements (especially if taken literally) do not always make sense, or accord with other evidence. He does not mention the work of those who compiled the *Chronicle*, and one wishes he had said more about Grimbold. He writes of the king's concern for the administration of justice but does not mention the law-code. He mentions Wærferth's translation of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*, but

⁹¹ K&L, *Alfred*, 265 n. 195. For the *Vita Alcuini*, see *Clavis des auteurs latins du moyen âge: Territoire Français 735–987*, II: *Alcuin*, ed. M.-H. Hélène Jullien and F. Perelman (Turnhout: 1999), 7–8, and Donald A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden: 2004), 17–34. Nor should one forget the overtures made by Lupus of Ferrières to King Æthelwulf, through Felix, formerly the king's secretary. For Alcuin's letters, see *Alcuin*, ed. Jullien and Ferelman, 171–355, with references; Bullough, *Alcuin*, 35–120; and Stephen Allott, *Alcuin of York* (York: 1974).

⁹² The references here are to the chapters of Stevenson's edition. There are many discrepancies, however, between these divisions and the distinctions suggested by aspects of layout and script in the Parkerian transcript (c. 1570) of the lost Cottonian manuscript (itself a copy, c. 1000); so the standard edition (and translations derived from it) may not accurately reflect, at this level, the author's own conception of his work. For images of the transcript, see "Parker Library on the Web" (Stanford).

⁹³ K&L, *Alfred*, 56, and Keynes, "Alfred and the Mercians," 41–44, with reference to other views. For evidence that Asser's *Life of Alfred* was used by Gerald of Wales, see Keynes, "Power of the Written Word," 181 n. 31.

⁹⁴ K&L, *Alfred*, 38–41 and 227–28, with Keynes, "Alfred and the Mercians," 43 n. 199. Alfred is also called "king of the Anglo-Saxons," and "ruler of all the Christians of the island of Britain," in the salutation, and "king of the Anglo-Saxons" in chaps. 13 and 21, with reference in each case to the king in Asser's own day.

⁹⁵ K&L, *Alfred*, 230 n. 11.

⁹⁶ K&L, *Alfred*, 42 and 230–31; Keynes, "Alfred and the Mercians," 44.

not the translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, or indeed the program of translations of books "most necessary for all men to know." Asser was well placed to know far more than he was concerned to transmit to his readers; but his approach is idiosyncratic, rather than systematic, objective, or evenly balanced, and it would be dangerous to infer much from his silence about one thing or another.⁹⁷

Asser's account of King Alfred's *res gestae* (chs. 73–81), inserted between his translation of the chronicler's annals for 885 and 886, brings us to what is arguably the heart of his work. The wording in ch. 73 ("de uita et moribus et aequa conuersatione, atque, ex parte non modica, res gestae domini mei Ælfredi, Anglusaxonum regis") is adapted directly from the opening words of Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, suggesting strongly that an implicit analogy with the Frankish emperor was now in Asser's mind.⁹⁸ The only explicit comparison is, significantly, between Alfred and Solomon (ch. 76). Asser also gives here an account of Alfred's recruitment of learned men from Mercia and from Gaul (chs. 77–8), leading into an account of how he was himself summoned from the "westernmost and furthest parts of Britain (*de occiduis et ultimis Britanniae finibus*)" (chs. 79–81). In certain respects Asser's account of his own arrival at Alfred's court echoes the story of Charlemagne's recruitment of Alcuin, as told in the anonymous *Life of Alcuin* (ch. 9); and if Asser saw his relationship with the king in such a way, that is in itself a matter of some historical importance.⁹⁹ Einhard's own account of Charlemagne's interest in the promotion of learning is judged to be misleading in significant respects, but the question, in the immediate late ninth-century Anglo-Saxon context, is how knowledge of Charlemagne's various accomplishments might have reached England, in whatever form, at any time from the 850s onwards.¹⁰⁰ Charlemagne is said to have invited lovers of wisdom from different parts of the world to help him, and it is hard to believe that stories to this effect were not known at Alfred's court in the 880s, and that Alfred would not have been eager, of his own accord, to follow Charlemagne's example.¹⁰¹ The learned men from Mercia, from Gaul and from Wales who joined Alfred at his "Anglo-Saxon" court may pale into insignificance beside the renowned scholars who assembled for the Carolingian Renaissance, yet enough is known of them for us to be sure that they were more than a figment of Asser's imagination, and

⁹⁷ Alfred's law-code and the OE *Pastoral Care* have been dated after 893 because they are not mentioned by Asser; see Wormald, *Making of Law*, 286, and Godden, "Stories," 126.

⁹⁸ K&L, *Alfred*, 88 and 254 n. 139. The heading given to the text in the Parkerian transcript ("Ælfredi Res gestæ authore Asser"), which reaches back to the *Res gestae divi Augusti*, and is duly echoed by Stevenson (*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*), seems unlikely to have been the title given to the work by Asser himself, though might have been suggested by Asser's usage in chap. 73.

⁹⁹ Above, 000 n. 88. Godden, "Stories," 138, observes that Asser's use in chap. 79 of the phrase "de occiduis et ultimis Britanniae finibus" echoes Alcuin, Epistula 229 (*Alcuin*, ed. Jullien and Perelman, 307; Allott, *Alcuin*, 83–85), written in 801, in which he recalls how he came to Charlemagne "from the furthest parts of Britain (*de ultimis Britanniae finibus*)."

¹⁰⁰ Einhard writes of Charlemagne's interest in Latin and Greek, names Peter of Pisa and Alcuin ("the most learned man in the entire world") among his teachers, and tells of his belated attempt to learn how to write; see *Life of Charlemagne*, chap. 25, in Paul Edward Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier* (Peterborough: 1998), 32. His account echoes Suetonius's account of the Emperor Augustus (chap. 89), but it also simplifies a more complex reality. For further discussion, see McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 15–16, and esp. 347–50.

¹⁰¹ Alcuin says as much, explicitly, in Epistula 229, cited above (n. 99), written in 801; see also Walahfrid Strabo's prologue to Einhard, in Denton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, 7–8.

indeed that their presence at Alfred's court is as well founded as it is significant for our understanding of all that was to follow.¹⁰²

After the annals for 886–7 (chs. 82–6), Asser provides a second discursive section on Alfred's governance (chs. 87–106), taking him to the end of his work. The section begins, most interestingly, with Asser's account of what he claims to have been his own role in helping the king to read Latin, and to translate from Latin into English.¹⁰³ Perhaps he was aware of the help given by Alcuin to Charlemagne in connection with the compilation of a prayer book suitable for use by the king, and told his own story of the help he gave to Alfred in connection with the king's "handbook."¹⁰⁴ There follows a perceptive explanation of the considerable difficulties which the king had to endure or to confront in pursuit of his objectives (ch. 91), leading to further coverage of his accomplishments and governance (chs. 92–106). At this point, the work comes to an abrupt though seemingly deliberate end, leaving untouched the annals in the *Chronicle* for 888–92 (assuming they were in Asser's copy). One can understand why Asser had broken into the sequence of annals after ch. 86, and why, having written chs. 91–106 at a time (in 893) when the Vikings were perhaps already threatening the south-west, he should have stopped at this point – quitting, as it were, while Alfred was ahead. The narrative was left some distance behind a final section of discursive content, which was itself crucial to Asser's larger purpose; and perhaps the question is not whether the work is incomplete, but what message might Asser have intended to convey *here* to his audience in Wales. His portrait of Alfred is complex, and contradictory, but it is also compelling and even convincing. The genuine Asser brings us closer than we might think to the genuine Alfred.

Alfred's closing years

The account of the campaign against the Danes in 893–6 forms the first continuation to the "common stock" of the *Chronicle*.¹⁰⁵ The narrative is fuller than for the 870s, and far better informed, reflecting the difference between a set of annals put together some years after the events (870s), and a record of a shorter period composed immediately afterwards by someone who had been close to the centre of events (893–6). It is clear from the outset that the kingdom's defenses were more effective than before, and that the English were working well with each other, and with the Welsh; the annals also afford solid evidence of Alfred's own resourcefulness and leadership in time of war. The Danes dispersed in the summer of 896. According to the chronicler, "the enemy (*here*) had not – by God's grace! – afflicted the English people to a very great extent." Alfred and those around him might well have been minded and might even have been able, therefore, to press forward with other plans while the Danes were still at large in the kingdom. He seems latterly to have been based at Winchester, where his outlook might have been broadened further in the company of Grimbold, in particular, and perhaps also of the priests Æthelstan, Wærwulf and John. He died on 26 October 899, and was buried in the Old Minster, Winchester, pending

¹⁰² For a different interpretation of Asser's account of Alfred's "recruitment" of scholars, see Godden, "Stories," 132–39.

¹⁰³ Asser, chaps. 87–90, discussed above, 000.

¹⁰⁴ For Alcuin's work on the prayer book, see *Vita Alcuini*, chap. 15, with Alcuin, Epistula 304 (*Alcuin*, ed. Jullien and Perelman, 344; Allott, *Alcuin*, 99), addressed to Charlemagne (or Charles the Younger); see also McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 330–31.

¹⁰⁵ K&L, *Alfred*, 42–43, 114–19 and 279–80; Nicholas Brooks, "Why Is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?" *ASE* 39 (2011), 43–70, at 49.

the completion of the New Minster close by.¹⁰⁶ As the chronicler had put it: “He was king over the whole English people, except for that part which was under Danish rule.”¹⁰⁷

The Alfredian legacy

In the Old English version of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, “Mind” avers that he had not been attracted by worldly power, as if merely for its own sake. He explains what kind of people were necessary for exercising the power which had been entrusted to him (men who pray, men who fight, and men who work), and what resources were required for their maintenance; and he concludes by stating that his wish had been to live honourably, and to leave to those who came after “the remembrance of me in good works” (*min gemynd on godum weorcum*).¹⁰⁸ “Reason” responds with a lengthy disquisition on the futility of fame, especially of one man in relation to all others, or across the whole of time. The words assigned to “Mind” seem nonetheless to represent an Alfredian articulation of a view of kingship which might well have arisen within the context of a contemporary reality.

What, then, of Alfred’s legacy? The Alfredian kingdom “of the Anglo-Saxons,” in itself a significant development from the ancient kingdom of the West Saxons, with its mid-ninth-century south-eastern extension, survived Alfred’s death. Indeed, it persisted (with further extension) throughout the reign of his son Edward the Elder (899–924), into the opening years of the reign of his grandson Æthelstan, and was not superseded until Æthelstan established his kingdom “of the English” in 927.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the kingdom endured in one form or another for 40 years, until itself overtaken by events. It had provided the context, perhaps, for the introduction of a general oath of loyalty to the king, for the production and first use of the so-called “Second Anglo-Saxon coronation *ordo*, and for Archbishop Plegmund’s re-organisation of the West Saxon bishoprics.¹¹⁰ It had established a secure basis for the successful defence of the kingdom in the 890s, and served well thereafter for the campaign against the Danes who had settled in eastern England, in which Æthelred, ealdorman of the Mercians, and his wife Æthelflæd (Alfred’s daughter), would play such an important part.¹¹¹ It would be dangerous, of course, to imagine that many problems did not lie ahead. The “Parker Chronicle” represents a view from Winchester, towards the middle of the tenth century; and what might one give for a

¹⁰⁶ *Liber Vitae*, ed. Keynes, 17–18. For his bones, see Keynes, “Cult of Alfred,” 00–0.

¹⁰⁷ K&L, *Alfred*, 120.

¹⁰⁸ K&L, *Alfred*, 132–3, with 298; *Boethius*, ed. Godden and Irvine, I, 277–8, with II, 316–19; Pratt, *Political Thought*, 264–307, esp. 293–5.

¹⁰⁹ Simon Keynes, “Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons,” *Edward the Elder 899–924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London: 2001), 40–66; see also *WB-EnASE*, 00–0 (Appendix I).

¹¹⁰ For the oath, see K&L, *Alfred*, 266 n. 200 and 306 n. 6, and Pratt, *Political Thought*, 239. For the view that the “Second Ordo” was first used for Edward, in 900, see Keynes, “King Alfred and the Mercians,” 36–37, and “Edward,” 48–49. For the revival of an older view that it was first used for Æthelstan, in 925, see Wormald, *Making of Law*, 447 n. 114; Janet Nelson, “The First Use of the Second Anglo-Saxon *Ordo*,” *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters*, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (Aldershot: 2008), 117–26; and Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: the First King of England* (London, 2011), 74–77. See also Pratt, *Political Thought*, 75–78. For Plegmund’s reorganization, see Keynes, “Edward,” 50, and *Atlas of Attestations*, Table XXXIII.

¹¹¹ The campaign of 910–20 marked an early stage in the so-called “reconquest” of the Danelaw – a misnomer not because it was in fact a “conquest” by the “West Saxons” (Wormald, “*Engla Lond*,” 365), but because the “Danelaw” did not come into existence until after the land had been reconquered by the *English*. New administrative arrangements for the lands between the Thames and the Humber might have been introduced as part or in the aftermath of the same process; see S. Keynes, “Shire,” in *WB-EnASE*, 434–35.

view from Mercia, from East Anglia, or indeed from Northumbria?¹¹² The years from 939 to 959 were especially difficult, as suggested by the combined evidence of law-codes, charters and coins.¹¹³ Yet the principle proved to be a good one: just as London had been at the heart of the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons from its earliest days in the 880s, so too it would come by the end of the tenth century to be at the heart of the kingdom of the English.

Alfred's program for the revival of religion, learning and literacy was itself a product of the establishment of the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons, and its longer-term consequences were themselves inseparable from the "political" aspects of his legacy. It is hard enough to detect, let alone to follow, any threads of evidence running through the first quarter of the tenth century; but both the secular and the ecclesiastical orders are likely to have felt the effects of Alfredian initiatives. It is in part a story of raised awareness of past accomplishments, and of continued contact with persons and places outside the kingdom; it is also a story of the import, production, dissemination and use of books. The challenge is to identify the key players in the early tenth century; to establish a case for the significance of one religious house or another; and to assess what new administrative practices lay behind the campaigns of the 910s. Winchester flourished under royal patronage; yet in the event, the literate culture which emerged in the later 920s and 930s, during the reign of King Æthelstan, seems to have had more diverse origins. Two Mercian ealdormen who flourished in the late ninth and early tenth centuries deserve their own places in the unfolding story of pragmatic literacy; another place belongs to Ordlaaf, ealdorman of Wiltshire.¹¹⁴ It is as if we begin to glimpse elements of an emerging order. The royal diploma, in Latin, was reinvented in the late 920s for the greater glory of King Æthelstan, and after some modification went on in the central decades of the tenth century to enjoy its finest hour. Yet while diplomas were the most durable products of royal assemblies, they should not deflect our attention from everything else which took place on such occasions, involving ritual, networking and the spoken word, or from the extent to which in the tenth century business was conducted and carried forward with the help of an increasingly wide and more formalized range of vernacular documentation. It is from an Alfredian context that we have a well-known if tantalizing reference to the use of a letter in association with a seal.¹¹⁵ The seal-matrices issued to or obtained by certain laymen, and some religious women, in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries belong to the same world; and the question

¹¹² Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173, known as "the Parker Chronicle and Laws" (see Irvine, below, Chap. 13); see also Keynes, "Manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*," 541–42.

¹¹³ For the coins, see C. E. Blunt, B. H. I. H. Stewart, and C. C. S. Lyon, *Coinage in Tenth-Century England from Edward the Elder to Edgar's Reform* (London: 1989), with S. Keynes, "Edgar," *Edgar, King of the English 959–975: New Interpretations*, ed. Donald Scragg (Woodbridge: 2008), 3–58, at 23–24.

¹¹⁴ For the ealdormen, see Simon Keynes, "Church Councils, Royal Assemblies and the Use of the Written Word in Anglo-Saxon England," *Kingship and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. G. Owen-Crocker and B. Schneider (Woodbridge: 2013), 17–182, citing S 1442, from Worcester, and S 367, edited in *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury*, ed. Brooks and Kelly, pp. 837–45 (no. 101). For Ordlaaf, see the "Fonthill Letter" (S 1445), edited with discussion in *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury*, ed. Brooks and Kelly, pp. 852–62 (no. 104); see also Simon Keynes, "The Fonthill Letter," *Words, Texts and Manuscripts*, ed. Michael Korhammer (Cambridge: 1992), 53–97, Scott Thompson Smith, "Of Kings and Cattle Thieves: The Rhetorical Work of the Fonthill Letter," *JEGP* 106 (2007), 447–67, and Mechthild Gretsch, "Literacy and the Uses of the Vernacular," *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: 2013), 273–94, at 283–4.

¹¹⁵ K&L, *Alfred*, 141 and 300.

arises whether we have here another product of an “Alfredian” example or initiative.¹¹⁶

Alfred’s legacy extended also to the example of himself (albeit to some extent a literary construction) as one who against the odds had become a man of learning, who had endured various forms of adversity, and who had emerged victorious from an extended struggle against the Danes. Writing perhaps *before* the intensification of the Viking raids in the 990s, Æthelweard, ealdorman of the western shires, remembered Alfred as the “unshakeable pillar (*immobilis postis*)” of the western people, “a man full of justice, active in war, learned in speech, steeped in sacred literature above all things,” who turned “unknown numbers of books” from Latin into his own language.¹¹⁷ Writing some years later, Ælfric, monk of Cerne, wrote of Alfred that “he often fought against the Danes, until he won the victory and protected his people.”¹¹⁸ It is not clear whether Æthelweard and Ælfric were familiar with Asser’s portrayal of the king, or whether they represent an independent view. Asser’s work was, however, readily accessible at the time; indeed, the copy on which we depend (albeit now indirectly) was itself made *c.* 1000, when the Danes were doing again what they had done before. Byrhtferth, monk of Ramsey, made extensive use of Asser’s text in compiling his ‘Historical Miscellany’, and was nothing if not effusive in his own praise of the king.¹¹⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, he draws no contrast between Alfred, in the late ninth century, and Æthelred, in the early eleventh, and seems more concerned to set up Alfred <as one mmmmm>.¹²⁰ None the less, the voices of Æthelweard, Ælfric and Byrhtferth were singing in harmony from the same sheet, and leave one in no doubt that Alfred’s example was seen already as a good one for others to follow.

¹¹⁶ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 138–40, and “Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England,” in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: 1990), 226–57, at 244–47.

¹¹⁷ *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London, 1962), 51, with Mechthild Gretsch, “Historiography and Literary Patronage in Late Anglo-Saxon England: the Evidence of Æthelweard’s *Chronicon*,” *ASE* 41 (2013 [for 2012]), 205–48.

¹¹⁸ *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric’s Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. S. J. Crawford (London: 1922), 416.

¹¹⁹ Keynes, “Authenticity of Asser,” 537–8, and “Cult of Alfred,” 228. <Check Smyth??>

¹²⁰ *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia, II: Historia Regum*, ed. Thomas Arnold (London: 1885), 74 (with invective against the secular clergy), 81 and 89–91.