

WRITING LATIN IN THE AGE OF ALFRED

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When one thinks of Alfredian literature, one normally thinks about Old English prose. At the same time, it is well understood that literary production in the age of Alfred thrived because of the multilingual context in which it existed, and that Latin was a vital aspect of this activity, not least because many of the vernacular texts produced in Alfred's realm were translations of Latin texts.¹ The surviving corpus of contemporary Latin compositions itself is not sizeable and it has received relatively little scholarly attention.² Nevertheless, it has the potential to offer new perspectives on late ninth-century literary activity. Considered alongside contemporary Old English literature, it allows for a more holistic appreciation of Alfredian engagement with the written word. In the present chapter I wish to focus on the very writing — that is, both the composition and copying out — of Latin texts in Alfred's reign. To do this, I seek to answer three questions: what was written in Latin? How were these texts written? And who was writing them?

What?

¹ For the multilingual nature of Alfred's court, see Discenza, 'Writing the Mother Tongue'.

² Asser's *Life of King Alfred* understandably dominates existing scholarship on Latin literary production in Alfred's reign, but for a more general discussion, see Lapidge, 'Schools, Learning and Literature'. See also Gallagher, 'Latin Literary Culture'.

The best place to begin is with what has survived — though this is not quite as straightforward as it sounds, since few Latin texts with possible Alfredian origins survive in late ninth-century forms. The most famous Latin text associated with Alfred is undoubtedly Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, a biography inspired in part by Einhard's account of the life of Charlemagne. Questions have been raised on numerous occasions about the authenticity of the *Life*, not least because it is preserved only thanks to later copying, yet one can identify an abundance of external evidence that overwhelmingly supports the view that it is a product of the late ninth century.³ In fact, not only was Asser writing this text while Alfred was alive, but internal evidence implies that he was writing specifically during the year 893.⁴

The largest body of Latin material otherwise comes in the form of charters, that is, documents that relate in some capacity to land ownership. In terms of preservation, what we see from Alfred's reign is typical of the broader corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters, namely that the majority only survive as later copies, and that the largest surviving portion is formed by royal diplomas, i.e. charters issued in the names of kings that record donations of land or associated privileges. These two points are very much interconnected for the reason that royal diplomas are more likely to have been copied and preserved by later generations than other types of charters, thanks to the legal authority they carried for claiming ownership of land. That said, compared with the number of diplomas extant in the names of some of Alfred's tenth-century successors, we are nevertheless dealing with a small number of documents: as few as seven diplomas issued in the name of Alfred survive that are likely to have authentic bases. The earliest of these dates to 878, but most record donations of land that Alfred issued

³ For a recent summary of the authenticity debate, as well as new evidence for viewing Asser's *Life* as a product of the ninth century, see Gallagher, 'Asser and the Writing of West Saxon Charters'.

⁴ This reference is found in Asser, *Life*, ch. 91. For an explanation, see *Alfred the Great*, trans. by Keynes and Lapidge, p. 269 n. 218.

to various lay nobles in his later years.⁵ All of Alfred's diplomas are for the most part in Latin, as one might expect given the tradition in which they were operating. Of these, only one survives in a late ninth-century form, a rather small, unimposing object produced by a single scribe, who wrote with a very legible though somewhat awkward looking hand.⁶ In addition, we have a small number of diplomas issued during Alfred's reign in the names of the Mercian leaders King Ceolwulf II and Ealdorman Æthelred, variously recording tenurial donations to religious communities and lay individuals.⁷ None is extant in a contemporary form.⁸ The two diplomas purportedly issued in Ceolwulf's name (one of which is probably a forgery) look very much like earlier Anglo-Saxon diplomas in terms of their language and structure, not least because they are for the most part in Latin. The charters issued in the name of Ealdorman Æthelred are a more unusual mixture. Most similarly adhere to the traditional form and language of earlier royal diplomatic, though two make more use of Old English.⁹

Old English had been employed increasingly in charter production from the early years of the ninth century onwards.¹⁰ Despite this, the use of Latin in such documentary activity was not limited to royal diplomas, even in Alfred's reign. Indeed, from the later ninth century we have a small number of Latin charters produced in the names of individuals other than the king. One specimen from Canterbury records a sale of land between two men whose

⁵ S 343, 345, 352, 347, 348, 350, and 355. To this list, we might add S 356, though its authenticity in its current form is uncertain; see *Charters of Malmesbury Abbey*, ed. by Kelly, pp. 198–99. In addition, S 346 was issued alongside Ealdorman Æthelred of Mercia. Here and throughout, I cite Anglo-Saxon charters by their 'Sawyer' number (indicated by 'S'), as they are found in the catalogue compiled by P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*. This catalogue has been revised and updated by S. E. Kelly, R. Rushforth *et al.* as *The Electronic Sawyer*, available at <https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk>.

⁶ S 350, the single sheet of which is Canterbury, D&C, ChAnt F. 150.

⁷ S 215, 216 (spurious), 217, 218, 219, and 220. See also S 222 and 223, which were possibly issued after 899.

⁸ Note, however, that one diploma issued on behalf of Æthelred and Æthelflæd shortly after Alfred's death does survive in a contemporary form, S 221. The single sheet is BL, MS Cotton Charters VIII.27.

⁹ For discussion of the linguistic makeup of these documents, see Gallagher and Tinti, 'Latin, Old English and Documentary Practice', pp. 292–98.

¹⁰ For an overview of the increased uses of Old English in charters in the first half of the ninth century, see Gallagher, 'The Vernacular in Anglo-Saxon Charters'.

social statuses are unknown. Dating to 875, a list of witnesses confirming the sale was added during the archiepiscopate of Plegmund (890–923), who heads the witness-list. Surviving in single-sheet form, it is the work of a single scribe, seemingly working at the time of Plegmund.¹¹ The Latin text may, therefore, have been updated or amended when this copy was produced, but the phenomenon of producing Latin charters to record private sales of land is one that is attested on numerous occasions in earlier decades of the ninth century at Canterbury too.¹² Elsewhere, we have one Latin record of an episcopal donation of land made by Tunbeorht, bishop of Winchester in 877,¹³ while we have four predominantly Latin episcopal leases issued on behalf of Wærferth, bishop of Worcester, the earliest of which dates to 872, while the remainder date to the period after 889.¹⁴ All of these charters only survive thanks to their later copying.¹⁵ At both Winchester and Worcester, these Latin specimens survive alongside a small number of episcopal charters in Old English that were produced during Alfred's reign. From both locations, we are dealing with a handful of texts, but it is possible that we can detect an increasing preference over time for Old English specifically for episcopal leases. Other types of charters from these episcopal centres suggest, however, that the function of the document was not always the decisive factor when it came to language choice. The specific context in which the charter was drawn up and used could also be highly influential in this regard.¹⁶

As well as charters, we also have Latin letters, though none that were composed within Alfred's kingdom. The most famous letter associated with Alfred is undoubtedly the

¹¹ S 1203. The single sheet is BL, MS Cotton Augustus II.89.

¹² For a summary of this material, see *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury*, ed. by Brooks and Kelly, II, p. 766.

¹³ S 1277.

¹⁴ For discussion of these Worcester leases, see Gallagher and Tinti, 'Latin, Old English and Documentary Practice', pp. 279–86.

¹⁵ Note though that a lease issued by Bishop Wærferth in 904 does survive in its original form: BL, MS Additional Charter 19791.

¹⁶ A point stressed by Gallagher and Tinti, 'Latin, Old English and Documentary Practice'.

Fonthill Letter, though this is in Old English and it dates to the reign of Edward the Elder.¹⁷ From Alfred's reign itself, we have three Latin letters sent by Pope John VIII in the 870s; three by Archbishop Fulk of Rheims in the 880s and early 890s; and a letter by Pope Formosus sent in the 890s.¹⁸ These letters survive in varying complete forms, and only because they were either summarised or embedded in later texts and manuscripts. The issue of survival is particularly pertinent for letters, since these are texts that often speak to very immediate issues but do not necessarily offer later generations much value; this is a point that applies to medieval letter-writing in general, though it does not of course apply to all medieval letters.¹⁹ Given their importance for international communication, we can assume that other Latin letters were produced that were sent to Britain during Alfred's reign and, furthermore, that some Latin letters were produced within Alfred's kingdom. Traces of, and references to, now-lost letters can be identified in several places. The common stock of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, for example, states for the year 889 that Alfred had sent two couriers with letters to Rome,²⁰ while Pope John's letter of 877 or 878 to Archbishop Æthelred alludes to an earlier letter sent by Æthelred and to a letter sent by John to King Alfred.²¹ In this light, considering the interest in literary patronage so apparent in the later years of Alfred's reign, it is worth noting that as far as we are aware, no one created a letter collection for Alfred,

¹⁷ S 1445. This letter survives in its original form as Canterbury, D&C, ChAnt C. 1282. A further Old English text with epistolary character that could be mentioned here is the Prose Preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, though there is no evidence to suggest that this ever existed as a single-sheet letter.

¹⁸ The surviving versions of each of these letters have been translated and included in *English Historical Documents*, ed. by Whitelock (hereafter *EHD*), nos 220–25 and 227. Of these documents, perhaps the most discussion regarding authenticity has been regarding the letter sent by Archbishop Fulk to Alfred in the mid 880s (*EHD*, no. 223); for a defence of its authenticity, see Nelson, "... sicut olim gens Francorum ... nunc gens Anglorum".

¹⁹ For an overview, see Garrison, "Send More Socks".

²⁰ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, III: MS A*, ed. by Bately, p. 54. The text also occurs, with orthographic variation, in MSS BCDE.

²¹ *EHD*, no. 222.

Plegmund, Asser or any of their contemporaries in a manner comparable with the letter-collection of, say, Alcuin or the *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*.²²

As one might expect, Latin appears to have remained at the heart of liturgical activity, even if it was not exclusively the language of the liturgy. The earliest sections of two well-known liturgical manuscripts, the Durham Collectar and the Leofric Missal, were produced for use in southern England in the late ninth or early tenth centuries.²³ Both exhibit Frankish influence, not least in the palaeography of the Leofric Missal, the earliest scribe of which wrote in a Caroline minuscule; despite this, Nicholas Orchard has argued compellingly that this book was created at Canterbury.²⁴ The Durham Collectar, on the other hand, was produced in an Insular minuscule; this, alongside its dialectal features, suggests that its scribe was West Saxon.²⁵ The earliest contents of the Leofric Missal, which constitute a sacramentary for a bishop, are entirely in Latin.²⁶ The Durham Collectar, which contains prayers (collects) for use in the daily offices, similarly is dominated by Latin texts. Strikingly, however, it also contains nine rubrics and an oath in Old English, the latter of which speaks from the perspective of an accused individual as part of an ordeal by hot iron, the other two sections of which are in Latin.²⁷ On a very basic level, this vernacular oath is a reminder that we should not take it for granted that any of the ordeal – or indeed, any of this manuscript — is in Latin. In this regard, it is pertinent to note that several of the charters produced at

²² For the phenomenon of early medieval letter collections and further bibliography, see Garrison, ‘Letter Collections’. See also Garrison, “‘Send More Socks’”.

²³ The surviving original text of the Durham Collectar is found in Durham, Cathedral Library, A. IV. 19, fols 1–61; for an edition and analysis, see *The Durham Collectar*, ed. by Corrêa. The oldest section of the Leofric Missal (‘Leofric A’) is Oxford, Bodl. Lib., MS Bodley 579, fols 9–16, 60–154, 158–253, 262–63, 266–73 and 278–336; for an edition and analysis, see *The Leofric Missal*, ed. by Orchard.

²⁴ *The Leofric Missal*, I, p. 131, where Orchard further states his belief that this book was a sacramentary produced specifically for Archbishop Plegmund.

²⁵ *The Durham Collectar*, pp. 80–81. Note that the dialectal evidence comes from those passages in the manuscript in Old English. Corrêa later points towards connections between the earliest material of the manuscript and Winchester: see pp. 120–21.

²⁶ Sarah Hamilton neatly describes the original contents of the Leofric Missal as a ‘sacramentary-cum-pontifical’: ‘The Early Pontificals’, p. 414.

²⁷ For details, see *The Durham Collectar*, p. 81. My thanks to Helen Gittos for sharing her work on this material, which will feature in her *English and the Liturgy*.

Worcester during Wærferth's episcopate contain divine invocations in Old English.²⁸

Elsewhere, near-contemporary writing in Latin of liturgical material can be found added to two early ninth-century prayerbooks, namely the Book of Cerne and the Book of Nunnaminster. A Latin prayer was added to the former,²⁹ while a two-part confession dialogue (*Confiteor* and *Misereatur*) and a prayer were added to the latter, quite possibly by a member of the community at Nunnaminster.³⁰ However, the most significant liturgical composition associated with Alfred's reign is undoubtedly the second royal *ordo*, a revised rite for the consecration of the new 'king of the Anglo-Saxons'. This *ordo* is entirely in Latin. There has been considerable uncertainty about exactly when this *ordo* was composed, but recent work by David Pratt provides the firmest evidence yet that we should indeed understand it as a work of the later years of Alfred's reign.³¹

As to poetry, the composition of only one set of Latin verses can confidently be dated to Alfred's reign. This is a set of hexameters that praise Alfred and spell out his name twice in both the acrostic and telestich. They are preserved thanks to their copying into a ninth-century gospelbook of Cornish or Welsh origin by a late ninth-century or early tenth-century scribe who was similarly of Cornish or Welsh origin.³² Later documentary additions to the gospelbook suggest that it had made its way to the royal estate at Bedwyn in Wiltshire by some point in the tenth century. The verses, are, however, corrupt, which suggests that they had once existed in an earlier written form. Nevertheless, given the context in which they

²⁸ Gallagher and Tinti, 'Latin, Old English and Documentary Practice', p. 285.

²⁹ The Book of Cerne is Cambridge, University Library, Ll. 1. 10. The addition is on fol. 40^r. Its late ninth-century provenance is uncertain; see Brown, *The Book of Cerne*, p. 180.

³⁰ The Book of Nunnaminster is BL, MS Harley 2965. The Latin additions are on fol. 41^r.

³¹ Pratt, 'The Making of the Second English Coronation *Ordo*'.

³² Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 671, fol. 74^v. For a recent overview of the manuscript and sources for these verses, see Gallagher, 'King Alfred and the Sibyl'.

survive, and given the thematic influences and ideas expressed in the verses, it seems beyond doubt that the Alfred of these verses is indeed King Alfred. The verses read as follows:³³

Admiranda *mihi* mens *est* transcurrere gest A
 Ex^a arce^b astrifera cito *sed* redis^c arbiter ind E
 Lex etiam ut docuit typice portendere fraede^d L [=Aelfred]
 Flagrantique^e simul moles mundi arserit igne F
 Rex formasti his *sed* melius gnarum optime flammis R
 Eripis atque chaos uincens Christe ipse necasti E
 Diuino *super* astra frui *per* saecula uultu D
 En *tibi* discendant e celo Gratiae tot Æ
 Letus eris semper Ælfred *per* competa ate L [=leta]
 Flectas^f iam mentem sacris satiare sirela F [=faleris]
 Recte doces *properans* falsa dulcidine mure R [=rerum]
 Ecce aptas clara semper lucrare taltan E [=talenta]
 Docte *peregrine* transcurrere^g rura sophie D³⁴

³³ Note that the verses evidently fall into two parts, divided by the end of the seventh verse. The edition provided here is taken from Gallagher, 'Latin Acrostic Poetry', where I discuss the emendations that I have made, as well as the relationship between the two uneven halves of the text.

³⁴ 'My mind is to run through marvellous deeds: | From the starry citadel you [will] return readily, | Just as the law taught figuratively, to foretell Alfred, | At the same time the world's mass will burn in a blazing fire. | O King, you created, but from these flames more agreeably and most rightly the wise one | You rescue – and so triumphing, Christ, you yourself destroyed the chaos – | To enjoy the divine visage above the stars through the ages. | Behold, may all the graces descend from heaven for you! | You will always be joyful, Alfred, through the happy crossroads [of life]. | May you now turn your mind and be satisfied with sacred adornments. | Rightly you teach, hastening away from the deceptive charm of worldly affairs. | See, you apply yourself always to gain bright talents, | To run wisely through the fields of foreign learning'. Translation taken from Gallagher, 'Latin Acrostic Poetry'.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Es</i> MS b. <i>erce</i> MS c. <i>reddes</i> MS d. <i>faede</i> MS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. <i>Flagrantice</i> MS f. <i>Fletas</i> MS g. <i>transcurre</i> MS |
|---|--|

Other evidence for Latin verse composition is less conclusive. It is possible, for instance, that the writing of the ‘Metrical Calendar of Hampson’ began while Alfred was still alive, even though the version from which all surviving witnesses ultimately derive is evidently a product of the early tenth century.³⁵ Elsewhere, a late ninth-century scribe wrote out some computistical verses — presumably designed as a mnemonic — which sit alongside West and East Saxon royal genealogies and a partial witness to the *Old English Martyrology*; we cannot be sure, however, when or where these verses were composed, or in fact when or where they were copied out by their scribe.³⁶

Beyond this material, surviving examples of Latin writing from late ninth-century England are less substantial or of less certain origins. In terms of the former, we have the Latin title *rex* bestowed upon Alfred on his coinage throughout the duration of his reign, as it had been for his predecessors,³⁷ while occasional Latin vocabulary and phrasing can be found embedded in several Old English texts of the period. See, for example, the Latin invocation that opens a predominantly vernacular lease issued by Ealhferth, bishop of Winchester,³⁸ or the West Saxon royal genealogy included in the *Chronicle* common stock entry for 855, which closes with the words ‘Adam primus homo et pater noster est Christus amen’.³⁹ Some extant manuscripts may also represent the copying and glossing of earlier Latin texts during Alfred’s reign. The dating and location of such activity is often hard to pin down to the exact

³⁵ For an edition of this text, see McGurk, ‘The Metrical Calendar of Hampson’. For discussion of its authorship, see Gallagher, ‘An Irish Scholar and England’; Gallagher, ‘The Authorship of the “Metrical Calendar of Hampson”’.

³⁶ BL, MS Additional 23211, fol. 1^v. For discussion of computistical verse as mnemonics, see *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, ed. and trans. by Lapidge, p. 514.

³⁷ For an overview of Alfred’s coinage, see Naismith, *Medieval Europe Coinage*, ch. 8.

³⁸ S 1275. Note that this charter also has a Latin witness-list, while the main text includes the Latin term *dux*.

³⁹ My thanks to Francis Leneghan for drawing my attention to this. For the relationship between Latin and Alfredian vernacular literature, see Discenza, ‘Writing the Mother Tongue’.

timeframe of Alfred (d. 899) and his kingdom. In many cases, the evidence is exclusively palaeographic, meaning that dating and localisation can only be approximate — and with a good number of specimens, we may be dealing with evidence of the early tenth rather than the late ninth century. Take, for instance, the striking collection of hagiographic prose produced at an unknown location in either the late ninth or early tenth century by a scribe whose hand has been associated with Mercian influence;⁴⁰ or the copy of Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate* that several scholars have posited as a Worcester production, which could similarly be a late ninth- or early tenth-century creation.⁴¹ As to annotations to earlier manuscripts, again, the number of definitive examples is extremely meagre. One notable exception here is the continuation of a list of popes, seemingly updated very early on in Alfred's reign, in a collection possibly held at the time at Canterbury.⁴² Overall, the number of extant manuscripts containing Latin with secure Alfredian provenances is very small indeed — perhaps fewer than ten.⁴³

While the above summary accounts for the surviving corpus of Latin writings, undoubtedly other Latin material was produced during Alfred's reign that has not survived. As noted above, Latin letters were evidently composed that are now lost. There is no evidence to suggest, meanwhile, that computistical education and calculations had ceased to be carried out within a Latin framework; see, for example, the aforementioned Latin computistical verses. It is also beyond doubt that Latin remained at the heart of liturgical activity. More specific examples add to this sense of loss; for instance, if real, Alfred's famed *enchiridion* — that is, the king's personal collection of scriptural writings — has not survived

⁴⁰ BnF, MS lat. 5574, fols 1–39.

⁴¹ BL, MS Royal 5. F III.

⁴² This collection now comprises three bifolia (BL, MS Cotton Vespasian B VI, fols 104–09). See Keynes, 'Between Bede and the *Chronicle*', p. 55.

⁴³ For a full catalogue of manuscripts with early medieval English provenances, see Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*. I offer a more detailed discussion of the manuscript evidence for engagement with Latin during the reigns of Alfred and Edward in my monograph, provisionally titled *Writing the Realm: The Written Word and the Rise of Wessex*.

to the present day.⁴⁴ But perhaps the most stark reminder of loss comes from the range of sources that informed and influenced the production of extant Alfredian literature, particularly Asser's *Life* and the Old English prose translations. For example, no extant copy of Gregory's *Cura pastoralis* has a late ninth-century English provenance, despite the survival of two late ninth-century witnesses to the Old English *Pastoral Care*.⁴⁵ In that case, we can be confident that the translator had access to something approaching a full copy of Gregory's text. It is not necessarily the case, however, that other sources were known to ninth-century authors in their entirety. And indeed, this brings us to my second question: how authors went about writing in Latin.

How?

Writing is an activity that requires both resources and training. More specifically, when writing on parchment, one needs parchment itself, a pen and ink, and often such work in early medieval Europe was assisted by drafting on wax tablets. Training at the very least required the learning of an alphabet and a script system. These fundamentals should not be taken for granted; each necessitated a social structure that allowed individuals access to these requisite resources.

When it came to writing specifically in Latin, most individuals in the early medieval Insular world were met with the additional challenges of working with a language that was philologically far removed from their primary vernacular. The grammar, syntax and vocabulary of Latin all needed to be learnt, and this was done with a varying assortment of resources and techniques. Much like in other areas of western Europe, the learning of prayers

⁴⁴ Asser, *Life*, ch. 89.

⁴⁵ These two late ninth-century witnesses are Oxford, Bodl. Lib., MS Hatton 20 and BL, MS Cotton Tiberius B XI + Kassel, Gesamthochschulbibliothek 4° MS theol. 131. For a summary of the relationship between the manuscript witnesses to the text, see Schreiber, 'Searoðonca Hord', pp. 176–78.

and the psalms is likely to have been central to the elementary Latin education of students in Britain, while information about grammar, rhetoric, metre and semantics could be accessed from the writings of several late antique authors, most prominently Donatus.⁴⁶ Further guidance could be found in encyclopediac works by Isidore of Seville and Martianus Capella.⁴⁷ Yet such late antique works lacked essential information on conjugations, declensions and inflections that non-Romance speakers would have required, and thus the Insular world bore its own grammarians in the seventh and eighth centuries.⁴⁸ The learning of Latin vocabulary and semantics was also assisted by bilingual and Latin-on-Latin glossing and glossaries,⁴⁹ while the Latin riddles (*enigmata*) of Aldhelm were evidently produced, at least in part, in order to help students with Latin metrical composition.⁵⁰ The desire to converse in Latin, meanwhile, inspired several surviving colloquies that were produced in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, the set pieces of which suggest that some teachers in early medieval Britain appreciated the pedagogical potential of role-play and playfulness for learning Latin.⁵¹

The means by which people learnt Latin in early medieval England has been a topic of considerable scholarly interest, though much of the overt evidence dates either to the period of Hadrian, Aldhelm, and Bede, to the lifetime of Alcuin, or to the second half of the tenth century and later.⁵² While some of the challenges remained the same during Alfred's reign as they had done for other generations, we should be wary of making assumptions about

⁴⁶ As stressed by Lapidge, 'The Anglo-Latin Background', p. 2; Lendinara, 'The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning', p. 303. For more on the reception of the psalms, see Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, and the chapters by Toswell and Emily Butler in the present volume.

⁴⁷ Gneuss, 'The Study of Language in Anglo-Saxon England'.

⁴⁸ Lendinara, 'The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning', p. 309; for the Insular grammarians, see Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians*.

⁴⁹ For overviews of this material, see Lendinara, 'Glossaries'; Gretsche, 'Glosses'.

⁵⁰ Lendinara, 'The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning', p. 308. For further discussion of the pedagogical functions of *enigmata*, see Salvador-Bello, *Isidorean Perceptions of Order*, esp. pp. 76–87.

⁵¹ For an emphasis on the playfulness of colloquies, see Porter, 'The Latin Syllabus in Anglo-Saxon Monastic Schools', pp. 478–80.

⁵² In addition to those already cited, see, for example, Bullough, 'The Educational Tradition'; Hill, 'Learning Latin'; Brown, 'The Dynamics of Literacy'; Stanton, *The Culture of Translation*.

the exact circumstances and processes that enabled Latin writing in the late ninth century. So what evidence do we have for how people wrote in Latin? Three main bodies of material can be identified. First and most famously, there is the narrative provided by Asser; second, we have extant manuscripts with late ninth-century English provenances; third and finally, we have the surviving Latin texts that were composed during Alfred's reign (which of course includes Asser's *Life*). Let us look at these in turn.

First, we have Asser, who provides unique descriptions of literary activity in and around Alfred's household. Asser says relatively little about how individuals went about writing in Latin. The most detail in this regard is provided when Asser recalls reading aloud a Latin passage to Alfred while they were sat together in the royal chamber.⁵³ Asser does not tell us what this passage was, but he says that Alfred asked him to copy it into a little book that the king carried around his person. Although Asser does not state it explicitly, he seems to imply through repeated phrasing that this is the same book that Alfred had owned in his youth, to which he had had the daily hours and some psalms and prayers added (by individuals that Asser does not name).⁵⁴ Asser goes on to explain that the book was in fact already so full of texts that he prepared a new quire in order to copy out the passage (and three further passages). This became the foundation of Alfred's *enchiridion*, a book Alfred kept by his side 'die noctuque' ('day and night') that grew to be close to the size of a psalter.⁵⁵ Here we see a highly personalised, intimate example of the copying of a Latin text, the result of a conversation between the king and one of his scholars within the royal chamber. In this scene, as with elsewhere in the *Life*, we are told of Alfred's personal

⁵³ Asser, *Life*, chs 88–89. The language of the Latin passage that Asser read aloud is confirmed at the beginning of ch. 89: 'Now as soon as that first passage had been copied, he was eager to read it at once and to translate it into English'. See further the chapter by Daniel Anlezark in this volume.

⁵⁴ Compare '**cursum diurnum**, id est celebrationes horarum, ac deinde **psalmos quosdam** et **orationes** multas <didicit>; quos in uno libro congregatos **in sinu suo** die noctu –que' (*Life*, ch. 24) with 'libellum, quem **in sinum suum** sedulo portabat, in quo **diurnus cursus** et **psalmi quidam** atque **orationes** quaedam, quas ille in iuuentute sua legerat, scripti habebantur' (*Life*, ch. 88). This is a point that I explore in more depth in my *Writing the Realm*.

⁵⁵ Asser, *Life*, ch. 89.

ownership of, and seemingly very tactile relationship with, books, while it is clear that reading aloud and memorisation were key to how Alfred engaged with Latin.⁵⁶ What we do not see in the *Life* is the king himself writing in this language.

Asser's account also provides insights into the possible institutional contexts to the learning of Latin. The royal household itself is prominent. Asser states explicitly that Alfred grew up within the royal household,⁵⁷ and the descriptions of both his education and engagement with writing evidently took place in this setting. Asser also notes that two of Alfred's children, Edward and Ælfthryth, were similarly educated within the royal household, where they learnt books in English, as well as the psalms; Asser's phrasing seems to imply that the latter were in Latin.⁵⁸ More generally, Asser stresses on several occasions that the study of the liberal arts was not possible in Wessex during Alfred's youth.⁵⁹ While not explicitly linked to this statement, we are also told that several religious communities had continued to exist throughout Alfred's reign, yet they did not maintain a monastic life 'ordinabiliter' ('in any consistent way') — a state of affairs that, according to Asser, led to the international make-up of the newly founded monastery at Athelney, the first abbot of which was the Frankish scholar John the Old Saxon.⁶⁰ Asser informs us that Alfred also established a new foundation for women religious at Shaftesbury, the first abbess of which was Alfred's daughter Æthelgifu; Asser does not, however, give any details about the composition of the community there beyond the fact that it included 'multae nobiles

⁵⁶ For the importance of listening, speaking aloud and meditation for the learning of Latin in both Asser's account and the Old English *Pastoral Care*, see Atherton, 'King Alfred's Approach'.

⁵⁷ Asser, *Life*, ch. 22.

⁵⁸ Asser, *Life*, ch. 75: 'they have attentively learned the Psalms, and books in English, and especially English poems, and they very frequently make use of books'. It is worth noting here that Asser makes no mention of the Old English prose version of the first fifty Psalms, which may have been one of the later translation projects of Alfred's reign. See *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, ed. by Patrick P. O'Neill, p. 95; Bately, 'Alfred as Author and Translator', p. 141. On the influence of Einhard's account of Charlemagne's education on Asser, see Anlezark's chapter in this volume, pp. 000–000.

⁵⁹ Asser, *Life*, chs 24, 76, and 106.

⁶⁰ Asser, *Life*, chs 93 and 94.

moniales' ('many noble nuns').⁶¹ Moreover, we are not given many details as to the range of activities or resources available at these new religious sites, though he notes that some children were sent to be educated at Athelney and, furthermore, that a quarter of the revenue from the king's annual taxes was to be shared out between Athelney and Shaftesbury. A further quarter of tax revenues was distributed between other (unnamed) *monasteria* in 'Saxonia et Mercia'.⁶² The final institutional context that Asser describes is, famously, the *schola* that Alfred founded, which also received a quarter of the annual tax revenues gathered for the king.⁶³ The location of this *schola* is not stated nor do we know who the teachers were. What we are told is that Alfred's youngest son, Æthelweard, studied there alongside other children of noble and lesser social standing, and that in this *schola* both Old English and Latin were read. Asser adds that the students 'scriptioni quoque vacabant' ('also devoted themselves to writing'), but he does not say in which language they wrote.⁶⁴

We need to be wary of taking Asser's anecdotes at face value. It is clear that he wanted to stress his own personal relationship with Alfred, and there are elements of these stories that were no doubt influenced by Asser's ideological framing of the king. The comparison of Alfred's *enchiridion* to a psalter, for example, may well have been driven by a desire to emphasize the extent of the king's learning and wisdom, or even to draw a parallel between Alfred and David.⁶⁵ Commentators have also identified narrative parallels that reveal the influence of earlier textual sources. We see this, for example, in the similarities between the *Life* and the *Vita Alcuini* in describing the arrivals of Asser and Alcuin at the courts of their respective royal patrons.⁶⁶ That said, it seems beyond doubt that some (if not all) of the

⁶¹ Asser, *Life*, ch. 98.

⁶² Asser, *Life*, ch. 102.

⁶³ Asser, *Life*, ch. 102.

⁶⁴ Asser, *Life*, ch. 75.

⁶⁵ Asser, *Life*, ch. 89. Several scholars have discussed Davidic aspects to Asser's *Life* as well as several other Alfredian texts, particularly the Old English *Prose Psalms*. See, for example, Kershaw, 'Illness, Power and Prayer', pp. 217–18; Pratt, 'The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great', pp. 83–88; Pratt, *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great*, ch. 12; Orton, 'Royal Piety and Davidic Imitation'; Toswell, *Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, pp. 64–72.

⁶⁶ As discussed in detail by Rebecca Thomas in her 'The *Vita Alcuini*'.

institutional settings that Asser describes would have been sites of Latin writing, even if very few surviving late ninth-century Latin texts can be attributed with confidence to any one of these places. What is more, Asser's general depiction of engagement with Latin does indeed resonate with that other famed contemporary account of Alfredian literary culture, the Prose Preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*.⁶⁷ Both are at pains to stress the dire state of Latin literacy, while the emphasis on both is first and foremost on reading. The primary focus in both cases is, in other words, on access to Latin texts and on the wisdom that they may contain, not on the composition of new Latin works.

What, then, can extant manuscripts with late ninth-century English provenances tell us? As I have stated already, there are very few manuscripts that contain strong evidence for their production or use during Alfred's reign. Concerning the material that we do have, two points can nevertheless be stated. First, that almost all extant manuscripts with Alfredian provenances have a clearly dominant language within them; in other words, almost none contain something approaching equal amounts of Old English and Latin.⁶⁸ Second, that, as noted above, we lack copies of some of the key texts that are likely to have been considered essential for the learning and use of Latin. For instance, no extant psalter can be localised with certainty within Alfred's realm, nor do any of the extant codices with possible Alfredian provenances contain a glossary. Clearly, much of the textual footprint for how people learnt to read and write in Latin has been lost. There are, however, glimpses of Latin learning in action if we extend our view to include material with very early tenth-century English provenances. Some of these items contain Latin texts that have accrued ink and scratched Old English glosses — though the dating of such additions is often difficult to ascertain. Beyond glossing, perhaps the most tantalising evidence is found within those codices that

⁶⁷ For the Prose Preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, see *The Old English Pastoral Care*, ed. and trans. by R. D. Fulk, pp. 4–11.

⁶⁸ An exception in this regard is the aforementioned BL, MS Additional 23211, in which Latin computistical verses sit alongside entries from the *Old English Martyrology* and East and West Saxon royal genealogies.

palaeographically can be associated with varying levels of confidence to Winchester. This includes a new copy of books v to ix of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*,⁶⁹ as well as a remarkable fragment of a commentary on Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* by Remigius of Auxerre, who died in 908 and may therefore have been alive when his work was being copied out in Britain.⁷⁰

Another striking specimen that could perhaps have been at Winchester is a ninth-century, possibly Welsh copy of Priscian's *Institutio de nomine et pronomine et uerbo*.⁷¹ This provides us with one of our clearest snapshots of more informal scribal activity. Within this book, immediately below the closing words of Priscian's text, we find several additions that appear to be the work of multiple contemporary scribes writing with varying levels of confidence and fluency. These additions are: two Latin antiphons (the second incomplete) from a Night Office for SS. Dionysius and companions; four apparent attempts to copy out an Old English maxim; the first eight letters of the Roman alphabet; and a rather garbled extract from Vulgate Psalm 71. 8.⁷² Later scribes added more still.⁷³ This scribal activity may well capture some of the most salient and commonplace qualities of Latin writing in southern England at the beginning of the tenth century: international influence is plain to see, in this case both in the textual sources and the likely physical origins of the manuscript;⁷⁴ drafting

⁶⁹ Cambridge, Trinity College, B 15. 33.

⁷⁰ Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys Library, 2981 (5).

⁷¹ St Petersburg, Russian National Library, O. v. XVI. 1, fols 1–16. This manuscript has often been described as produced in England; for its Welsh credentials, see Christine Voth, 'An Analysis', pp. 81–82.

⁷² These additions are on fol. 15'. For a discussion and images of the additions, see Kilpiö and Tsvinaria, 'The Old English Scribble'. Note that Kilpiö and Tsvinaria identified the Latin antiphons as a fragment of the *Passio* SS. *MM. Dionysii Rustici et Eleutherii*, though they note the discrepancies between the extract and the *Passio*. These discrepancies can, however, be accounted for by the antiphons, which are more likely to be the direct source for the scribe. For an edition of these antiphons, see *Hilduin of Saint-Denis: The Passio S. Dionysii in Prose and Verse*, ed. and trans. by Lapidge, p. 822, antiphons [4] and [7]. For a translation of the Old English maxim, see Bredehoft, *Authors, Audiences, and Old English Verse*, p. 104. Kilpiö and Tsvinaria were unable to identify the extract from Psalm 71. 8; this identification is my own.

⁷³ An unidentified passage concerning Gregory the Great, possibly drawing directly or indirectly on Paul the Deacon's *Sancti Gregorii Magni vita*, was added to the last eleven lines of fol. 15'. A hymn, prayers and sequences were later added to fols 15v–16v. See Kilpiö and Tsvinaria.

⁷⁴ In terms of sources, the antiphons are particularly notable: the 'post-Hilduin' office for Dionysius from which they derive was compiled in Francia (sometime between 840 and c. 875) before their copying into this manuscript. For discussion of this office's dating, see Lapidge, *Hilduin*, pp. 124 and 821.

and practice were fundamentally important; levels of Latin comprehension were not necessarily high; and this Latin writing was evidently taking place in close proximity to vernacular literary activity.

Our final body of evidence to consider here are those Latin texts that were composed anew during Alfred's reign. This material undoubtedly provides the richest evidence for how people went about writing in Latin, despite the fact that most specimens only survive thanks to their later copying. As the most substantial piece of Latin from the period, it is perhaps unsurprising that in this regard, Asser's *Life* has received the most attention. Several scholars have commented on Asser's writing style, which betrays a liking for long sentences and frequent use of adverbs, alliteration and polysyllabic words,⁷⁵ while considerable work has been done on identifying Asser's possible textual sources, particularly as suggested by phrasing employed in the *Life* and in earlier literature.⁷⁶ These discussions in turn raise important questions about the contexts in which Asser learnt, engaged with and wrote Latin: how unusual were his stylistic preferences among his contemporaries? How did they develop? And how did he come across those phrasal echoes of earlier literature? Asser himself states that he was educated, tonsured, and ordained at St Davids,⁷⁷ though no doubt his time at Alfred's court also helped shape the form and content of his narrative. The challenge in understanding Asser's Latinity in context is that we lack substantial amounts of other late ninth-century Insular Latin literature with which to compare the *Life*, its prose style and vocabulary, although one diploma issued in Alfred's name in 889 does exhibit some comparable stylistic qualities.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Alfred the Great*, trans. by Keynes and Lapidge, p. 54; Howlett, *The Celtic Latin Tradition*, pp. 273–333; Howlett, *British Books*, pp. 365–445; Howlett, *Cambro-Latin Compositions*, pp. 84–94; Gallagher, 'Asser and the Writing of West Saxon Charters', pp. 779–81.

⁷⁶ First and foremost, see Lapidge, 'Asser's Reading'. See also his *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 115–20. Other notable studies include Scharer, 'The Writing of History'; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, especially ch. 14; Thomas, 'The Vita Alcuini'.

⁷⁷ Asser, *Life*, ch. 79.

⁷⁸ S 346. For discussion of this charter's Latinity, see Snook, 'When Aldhelm Met the Vikings', pp. 125–37; Gallagher and Tinti, 'Latin, Old English and Documentary Practice', pp. 294–95.

As to Asser's sources, one of the most interesting aspects is the possible influence of Old English literature, specifically the common stock of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It is widely recognised that Asser drew on a version of the *Chronicle*, though none of the extant *Chronicle* manuscripts contain the exact version that Asser had consulted.⁷⁹ Strikingly, the *Chronicle* provided Asser not only with large amounts of information that he included in the *Life*, but it also appears on occasion to have influenced his choice of expression. See, for instance, *loco funeris dominati sunt*, an idiom that Asser used on seven occasions to denote a military victory.⁸⁰ As several scholars have pointed out, Asser here appears to have been inspired directly by the phrase *ahton wælstowe gewæld* ('they took power over the battlefield'), which is found in both the *Chronicle* and in the Old English *Orosius*.⁸¹ Thus, we see a perhaps somewhat unexpected outcome of the Latin-Old English interface at Alfred's court (particularly given the fact that Old English was not, as far as we can tell, Asser's primary vernacular).

Comparison here with contemporary Old English literary production is pertinent in two regards. First, there is the suggestion by Janet Bately that the production of more 'Latinate' prose styles within certain ninth-century translations — particularly the Old English *Bede* — was driven by a desire for these texts to help individuals wishing to learn and engage with Latin prose.⁸² By the time that Asser was working for Alfred, his own Latin learning was unlikely to have been so rudimentary as to have benefitted significantly from the use of translations in languages other than his own primary vernacular, but Bately's point is a reminder that vernacular texts could provide guidance for reading and writing Latin as much

⁷⁹ See Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Texts and Textual Relationships*, pp. 53–55 and 62; Stafford, *After Alfred*, pp. 43–44.

⁸⁰ Asser, *Life*, chs 5, 18, 33, 35, 36, 40, and 42. Keynes and Lapidge consistently translate this idiom as 'they were masters of the battlefield'.

⁸¹ *Asser's Life*, ed. by Stevenson, pp. lxxxiv and 178–79. For further comment on the related Old English phrase, which also occurs in the Old English *Orosius*, see Timofeeva, 'Battlefield Victory', pp. 114, 121–23 and *passim*. For more on Asser's treatment of the *Chronicle* and its Old English, see Thomson, 'British Latin and English History', pp. 49–52; Gallagher, 'Asser and the Writing of West Saxon Charters', p. 782.

⁸² Bately, 'Old English Prose', p. 138. On the Old English *Bede*, see the chapter by Greg Waite in this volume.

as Latin sources informed the work of the Old English translators. More generally, Asser and several of the Old English texts attributed to Alfred's reign are comparable in the wealth of possible (mostly Latin) sources that enabled their productions. Phrases contained in the *Life* suggest that Asser may have been familiar with works by Aldhelm, Bede, Caelius Sedulius, Cassiodorus, Einhard, Evagrius, Gregory the Great, Orosius, and Paul the Deacon, among others.⁸³ In comparison, the translator of the Old English *Soliloquies*, for example, may have drawn content from texts including Julian of Toledo's *Prognosticon*, Bede's *De natura rerum* and *De temporum ratione*, Boethius' *De consolazione*, and Augustine's *De videndo Deo* and *De civitate Dei*, as well of course as his *Soliloquia*.⁸⁴ However, in all cases we must be wary of automatically equating such possible influence with knowledge of a full text. Indeed, in few cases is the evidence substantial enough to assert such a conclusion with confidence. Influence could instead have been transmitted as an extract or via an intermediary source, be it textual or oral. Leslie Lockett has stressed, for instance, that there is very limited evidence that full copies of Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* were available in pre-conquest England, despite its footprints being visible in the works of several authors from the seventh century onwards.⁸⁵ With this in mind, it is also worth remembering Asser's own account, which includes, as we have seen, descriptions of oral performance and the copying out of extracts.

Such uncertainties about the nature of influence also surround the production of Latin charters. Contemporary Latin charters are often cited as the strongest external evidence to substantiate the claims of Asser and the Prose Preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care* regarding the state of learning in later ninth-century England.⁸⁶ Several surviving specimens are littered with orthographic peculiarities and grammatical errors, while scribal hands often

⁸³ See Lapidge, 'Asser's Reading'.

⁸⁴ See Jayatilaka, 'King Alfred and his Circle', pp. 672–73. On the influence of the Boethian glossing tradition on the Old English *Soliloquies*, see now the chapter by Leslie Lockett in the present volume.

⁸⁵ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, pp. 216–17. See also Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 284.

⁸⁶ The classic study of these charters is found in Lapidge, 'Latin Learning in Ninth-Century England'.

wrote in decidedly uncaligraphic manners. The impression is that the individuals producing these documents were not trained to a particularly high standard. It is not clear, however, how charter draftsmen and scribes received their training nor, on most occasions, what resources they would have had to hand when drawing up a new charter. These uncertainties take us to the heart of the much-discussed issue of who produced Latin charters, particularly when they were issued in the name of a king (i.e. royal diplomas). This is a point to which we will return, but here it suffices to say that the Latin charters of Alfred's reign (as with those of other reigns and decades) tend to be highly formulaic in their structure and phrasing. Within these documents it is possible to identify specific forms and formulae that are regionally distinctive, though the exact processes through which these characteristics and phrasing developed and were transmitted are uncertain. No formularies — that is, collections of diplomatic textual templates — are known to have been produced or used in early medieval England, comparable with surviving examples from other areas of early medieval western Europe. While it is possible that such resources were available to some authors of Latin charters in England, it is also evident on some occasions that draftsmen were instead using specific older charters as models. The occurrence of repeated formulae within the corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters also makes it clear that some authors used certain phrasing as building blocks in the construction of their prose, and here one should not discount the importance of memorisation for the production of Latin charters.⁸⁷

One could extrapolate further: in principle these questions regarding access to, and the nature of, sources apply to any and all Latin literature produced in early medieval England. At the same time, we need to be alert to the specific circumstances and aims of a given author. Within the context of Alfred's reign, we need to recognize the extent to which our

⁸⁷ I have explored several of these issues in more depth in my 'Asser and the Writing of West Saxon Charters', pp. 782–84. See also Snook, *The Anglo-Saxon Chancery*, esp. ch. 1. An illuminating case study for the use of models and formulae by charter draftsmen is the production of episcopal leases at Worcester in the second half of the tenth century. For discussion, see Tinti, 'Writing Latin and Old English'.

understanding of the processes that enabled Latin writing is uncertain. Not only is the nature of sources often unclear, but we also cannot be sure of the exact institutional and social contexts in which they existed. For instance, how many of these sources were part of substantial libraries at certain recently patronised institutions, such as Athelney? And to what extent did personal book ownership play crucial roles in Latin literary production? It is also important to acknowledge the fact that how people went about writing in Latin no doubt differed depending not only on the resources and training available, but also the intended function(s) of the text. The writing process for a royal biography, for instance, was undoubtedly more complex and ambitious than the production of a charter. Different authorial aims, in other words, demanded varying processes. And it is with this in mind that we might turn to the identities of these authors.

Who?

A striking feature of the Alfredian corpus of Latin literature is the extent to which it is anonymous. The only individual contemporaneously named as the author of an extant Latin text is Asser, as the author of the *Life*. This level of anonymity across the corpus — which extends to the work of scribes as well — should not be taken for granted. It raises an important question about how and whence these texts derived their value as they were transmitted and copied out; and it casts into even stronger relief the extraordinary emphasis elsewhere placed on the king's personal involvement in translation work. Despite this persistent anonymity, we can nevertheless identify several candidates, and outline the probable social profiles of others, who are likely to have been involved in Latin writing. This can be done by examining the distinctive features of the surviving texts themselves, and by

considering the social and institutional contexts in which Latin texts were being composed and copied out.

Beyond the *Life*, the most substantial body of evidence for Latin authorship comes from the extant charters. It is reasonable to assume that those charters issued in the names of bishops were normally drawn up by members of their own communities — though the exact identities and rank of these individuals are unclear. This inference is supported by the fact that several episcopal charters were drawn up with the use of earlier documents held by those same institutions, and it is also often supported by the palaeographic evidence of single-sheet charters, when such material is available.⁸⁸ In contrast, the mode of production of royal charters before the tenth century has been a contentious topic.⁸⁹ There is no evidence that the earliest English kings who issued charters (in the seventh century) did so routinely with the use of scribes who travelled with the royal household (i.e. a royal centralised writing office of sorts); rather, the evidence points to the production of charter texts at the behest of the institutions and individuals who were the recipients of the grants. By the time of the reign of Æthelstan (r. 924–939), the situation was clearly different: diplomas issued in his name, extant via different medieval archives, share enough physical and textual features to conclude definitively that they were being produced by a centralised, royally sponsored agency — and for the period 928 to 935, this was evidently a single anonymous individual, dubbed ‘Æthelstan A’ by modern commentators.⁹⁰ Scholars have disagreed about when this new mode of production began to develop, but Simon Keynes has pointed towards shared phrasing and formal features within ninth-century West Saxon diplomas from the time of

⁸⁸ The most substantial body of ninth-century single-sheet charters comes from Christ Church, Canterbury. This material has allowed for the identification of several ‘in house’ scribes who helped produced multiple charters there. See Brooks, *The Early History*, pp. 168–72; *Charters of Christ Church*, ed. by Brooks and Kelly, pp. 115–18.

⁸⁹ This is the so-called ‘chancery debate’. For recent contributions to this debate, see Insley, ‘Charters and Episcopal Scriptoria’; *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, ed. by Kelly, I, pp. lxxix–lxxxiv and cxxvii–cxxix; Keynes, ‘Church Councils’; Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, pp. 78–89; Snook, *Anglo-Saxon Chancery*, esp. pp. 127–28.

⁹⁰ For recent discussion of this royal draftsman, see Smith, *Land and Book*, pp. 37–46; Woodman, “‘Æthelstan A’”; Snook, *Anglo-Saxon Chancery*, ch. 3.

King Æthelwulf onwards that suggest that the majority of these were produced by individuals working centrally.⁹¹ Furthermore, Keynes drew attention to the presence within the witness-lists to these diplomas of priests who appeared to be travelling as part of the royal household; it is these individuals, Keynes suggests, who may have been responsible for the writing of the diplomas. The fact that most ninth-century Mercian charters are extant from a single medieval archive, Worcester, makes it difficult to ascertain how contemporary Mercian practice compares. The dearth of diplomas from Alfred's early reign meanwhile makes the question of continuity of practice in Wessex difficult to answer. West Saxon diplomas of the 890s do, however, point towards a set-up comparable with the reigns of Alfred's immediate predecessors.⁹²

So who were the individuals writing diplomas for Alfred? One of the most distinctive aspects of West Saxon diplomas of the 890s is the appearance of formulaic features that are earlier found within Mercian, not West Saxon, diplomas.⁹³ It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that priests by the names of Æthelstan and Wærwulf variously appear in the witness-lists of three of these charters.⁹⁴ It is highly likely that these individuals are the two Mercian priests and chaplains named by Asser who arrived at Alfred's court in the 880s.⁹⁵ Evidence of Mercian influence on Latin charter composition is also seen in the diplomas of Edward's early reign, some of which similarly include individuals named Æthelstan and Wærwulf in their witness-lists; several also contain formulaic features otherwise found in earlier Mercian

⁹¹ Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters'.

⁹² Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters', pp. 1134–41.

⁹³ This evidence was first identified by Dorothy Whitelock, 'Some Charters', pp. 88–90; see also Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters', pp. 1134–41. The clearest evidence of Mercian influence is in S 348.

⁹⁴ An individual named Æthelstan is listed as a *sacerdos* in S 350. An individual called Wærwulf can be found in the witness-lists of S 348 and 356, the former as a *presbyter* and the latter without a title. See *Alfred the Great*, trans. by Keynes and Lapidge, p. 259 n. 166 and the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* database, , available at <https://www.pase.ac.uk>, for further information. It should be noted that not all of Alfred's diplomas of the 890s survive with complete witness-lists (e.g. S 347).

⁹⁵ Asser, *Life*, ch. 77.

diplomatic.⁹⁶ We may well suspect, therefore, that those Mercian priests summoned to Alfred's court, as named by Asser, found themselves drawing up diplomas for the West Saxon king (though not necessarily when they were acting as witnesses to the documents). Such duties may also have fallen on occasion to other scholars brought to Alfred's court from beyond Wessex. An extant diploma issued for Edward in 904, for instance, may well have been drawn up by Asser.⁹⁷ It is certainly notable, however, that Asser did not consider such activity significant enough to mention in his *Life*. Furthermore, we should be wary of assuming that these scholars had exclusive responsibility for and, indeed, control of such textual production. The process is likely to have been more flexible than what we see by the time of 'Æthelstan A'.

More generally, it is beyond doubt that there was an international contribution to Latin textual production. As is well known, Frankish influence pervades many of the texts and manuscripts produced in late ninth-century England. The presence of individuals from East and West Francia in Alfred's kingdom is also made clear by Asser: not only does he name two scholars at Alfred's court of Frankish origin, Grimbald and John the Old Saxon, but he also draws attention to the international make-up of the new monastic community at Athelney, which included several Franks (not least John the Old Saxon).⁹⁸ David Pratt has recently put forward a forceful argument for associating Grimbald with the compilation of the second royal *ordo*,⁹⁹ while Michael Lapidge has previously suggested that the acrostics in praise of Alfred are the work of John.¹⁰⁰ The evidence for the latter is not particularly strong — and in fact no extant Latin text from Alfred's realm can conclusively be attributed to a

⁹⁶ Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters', pp. 1142–47. On Mercian literary production in this period, see the chapter by Christine Rauer in the present volume.

⁹⁷ This diploma is S 373. See Gallagher, 'Asser and the Writing of West Saxon Charters'.

⁹⁸ Asser, *Life*, chs 78 and 92–94.

⁹⁹ Pratt, 'The Making of the Second English Coronation *Ordo*'.

¹⁰⁰ Lapidge, 'Some Latin Poems'. For two recent challenges to this authorial attribution, see Wieland, 'A New Look'; Gallagher, 'Latin Acrostic Poetry'.

Frankish scholar. Nevertheless, it is certainly credible that both Grimbald and John, and perhaps unnamed others from the Frankish world, played significant roles in the production of Latin literature within Alfred's realm, whether the texts of letters, liturgical rites, chants, praise poetry, charters or other.¹⁰¹ Asser did, after all, describe both Grimbald and John individually as *eruditissimus*, the only two individuals in the *Life* bestowed with this superlative.¹⁰² We should not, furthermore, overlook the possibility of Latin authors from elsewhere in Europe, particularly the Celtic-speaking world. We of course have Asser from Dyfed. Arguments have been made for Irish influence on the composition of the Old English *Prose Psalms* and Alfred's law codes,¹⁰³ while the content and orthography of the aforementioned 'Metrical Calendar of Hampson' suggest that its author had links to Ireland.¹⁰⁴ More general hints of an Irish intellectual presence in Alfred's kingdom can be found in the *Chronicle*, which records the arrival in 891 of three individuals from Ireland, one of whom is singled out as 'se betsta lareow þe on Scottum wæs' ('the best scholar among the Scots').¹⁰⁵

All of the candidates named so far were men. What, then, of female Latin authorship? Women were clearly involved in literary activity in some capacity. Although Asser does not name any women among the scholars invited to Alfred's court, he does famously tell us that Alfred's mother encouraged her sons to learn a book of vernacular verse.¹⁰⁶ Asser also

¹⁰¹ Here it is noteworthy that one of Alfred's diplomas, S 348, includes a witness called John, who may well be John the Old Saxon. It should be stressed, though, that I am unaware of any overt evidence of Frankish influence on the diplomatic of Alfred's surviving charters, though this topic may benefit from further investigation.

¹⁰² More fully, in ch. 78 of the *Life*, Asser describes Grimbald as 'a priest and monk and a very venerable man, an excellent chanter, extremely learned [*eruditissimus*] in every kind of ecclesiastical doctrine and in the Holy scriptures, as well as being distinguished by his virtuous behaviour'. In the same chapter, Asser describes John as 'a priest and monk, a man of most acute intelligence, immensely learned [*eruditissimus*] in all fields of literary endeavour, and extremely ingenious in many other skills.' For discussion particularly in relation to Grimbald, see Pratt, 'The Making of the Second English Coronation *Ordo*', pp. 206–10.

¹⁰³ See Pratt, *Political Thought*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁴ The Irish content of this metrical calendar was first identified by Stokes, 'On the Kalendar'. For a more recent discussion, see Gallagher, 'An Irish Scholar and England'.

¹⁰⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, III: MS A*, ed. by Bately, p. 54. The translation is taken from *EHD*, no. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Asser, *Life*, ch. 23.

fleeting remarks upon the education of two of Alfred's daughters, Æthelgifu and Ælfhryth, the former of whom entered the monastic life while the latter learnt the psalms and *Saxonici libri* ('vernacular books') at court.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere, evidence of women participating in literary processes is abundant in the ninth-century documentary record, particularly in the rich body of material extant from Kent, which records several agreements in which women were operating independently of male kin. It must be stressed that this charter evidence is almost exclusively in Old English, not Latin, and there are no instances for which we can be certain that the documents themselves were composed by women.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, as was customary, women are almost entirely absent from Alfred's royal diplomas, which comprise the vast majority of Latin charters. All of this may not sound particularly encouraging for identifying female Latin authors, though given the anonymity of the corpus, the challenge is not in practice much greater than it is for confirming male authorship. Tantalising evidence for female Latin textual production does at least begin to emerge by the early tenth century in reference to one particular female religious community, namely Winchester's Nunnaminster, thought to have been founded by Alfred's wife Ealhswith.¹⁰⁹ The evidence here primarily comes from the Book of Nunnaminster, an early ninth-century prayerbook ostensibly in the possession of the community at Nunnaminster by the early tenth century, at about which time it received two sets of additions, namely a boundary clause in Old English, and the aforementioned confessional dialogue and prayer in Latin.¹¹⁰ Palaeographic similarities suggest that the scribes of these additions may have been training and working within the same environment that produced an extant partial copy of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*,

¹⁰⁷ Asser, *Life*, ch. 75.

¹⁰⁸ For discussion in relation to charters from ninth-century Canterbury, see Brooks, 'Latin and Old English'. I do not entirely agree with Brooks' conclusions, which draw a direct correlation between gender and language choice; I believe that closer attention needs to be given to the context of issue. This is a matter that I discuss in *Writing the Realm*.

¹⁰⁹ For a summary of the evidence for the history of Nunnaminster, see Foot, *Veiled Women II*, pp. 243–52.

¹¹⁰ BL, MS Harley 2965. The additions can be found on fols 40^v and 41^r. For an edition, translation and discussion of the boundary clause, see Rumble, *Property and Piety*, no. I. For discussion of the Latin additions, see Bugyis, 'The Practice of Penance', pp. 49–53; Falardeau, 'Gender, Space and Communal History'.

and the *Chronicle*.¹¹¹ The identities of the scribes involved in this activity are unknown, but it is certainly very possible that some (if not all) were female.

Finally, let us turn to the issue of social standing. Who within society is likely to have written in Latin? There is frustratingly scant evidence to answer this question, but it does at least encourage us to challenge two preconceptions that we might hold. First, we need to distinguish between writing and comprehension. One could produce a Latin text without necessarily understanding what the words mean — a point that applies as much, for instance, to moneyers as it does to scribes. Second, we need to be wary of necessarily associating Latin with the clergy. In searching for Latin authors during Alfred's reign, all of the most likely named candidates are admittedly ecclesiasts. This does not mean, however, that all members of the church were proficient or required to write in Latin. We may wish here to distinguish between clerical and monastic orders, the latter of whom seem to be more closely associated with Latin literacy later in the tenth century than the former.¹¹² At the same time, this need not preclude the possibility of members of the laity learning to write in Latin. While an education in Latin is likely to have been far out of reach of most people in Alfred's kingdom, Asser, in describing the *schola*, does nevertheless paint a picture in which social standing was not entirely a barrier to an education in Latin.¹¹³ All of this has been powerfully argued by Malcolm Godden, who drew particular attention to the famous statement in the Prose Preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care* that Latin should be taught to those whom instructors wish to teach further and to bring 'to hieran hade' ('to higher order').¹¹⁴ As Godden stressed, the

¹¹¹ The copy of Isidore's *Etymologiae* is the aforementioned Cambridge, Trinity College, B 15. 33. The *Chronicle* manuscript in question is the 'Parker Chronicle' (now part of Cambridge, Corpus, Christi College 173); the palaeographic connections specifically relate to the scribe active on fols 1–16^r. For discussion, see Parkes, 'A Fragment'; Voth, 'The Book of Nunnaminster and the Royal Prayer Book'; cf. Dumville, *Wessex and England*, pp. 55–139.

¹¹² For discussion, see Stephenson, *Politics of Language*.

¹¹³ As Asser states, 'nobly born children of virtually the entire area, and a good many of lesser birth as well' attended the *schola* (*Life* ch. 75; see also ch. 102).

¹¹⁴ Godden, 'King Alfred's Preface'. The instructors in this context appear to be the recipients of copies of the Old English *Pastoral Care*.

phrasing here is vague; it could equally be applied to those training for higher office in secular administrative and political spheres as it could to those within the church.¹¹⁵ For the present discussion, perhaps the most immediate point is that Latin literacy is evidently presented here as a skill that surpassed Alfredian educational expectations for most individuals, both laity and ecclesiastics; it is a skill for leaders — role models, even — within the kingdom. We cannot discount the possibility, therefore, that some ambitious members of lay society, if within reach of the necessary training and resources, acquired some ability to write in Latin. For any such individuals, this activity, in the right contexts, would have brought with it considerable symbolic capital.

Conclusion

An overview such as this can only scratch the surface of much of its material and, indeed, there is much more that could be said. Here I would like to single out one avenue in particular that is ripe for further enquiry, namely the relationship between authors and scribes. For the most part I have not distinguished between these two groups in my discussion, in order to resist viewing this literary culture only in terms of its new compositions. What is more, it is frequently unclear if the authors and scribes of Latin texts are the same or different individuals. It can be said at least that authors are likely to have written out their own words at some point in their creation; perhaps the most productive question to ask, then, is the extent to which there were scribes of Latin texts who never attempted to compose any Latin sentences of their own. We might also wonder what proportion of scribes in Alfred's realm customarily wrote in both Latin and Old English. Certainly, more work could be done in

¹¹⁵ However, in his contribution to this volume, Anlezark argues that the letter refers specifically to the education of clergy (pp. 000–000).

these regards. One can say, however, that both authors and scribes are largely anonymous to us, and many of the extant pieces of Latin — be it new compositions or copies of earlier texts — do not suggest that the standards of training were particularly high.

More generally, it will be apparent now how piecemeal much of the evidence for Latin writing from Alfred's kingdom is and how many unknowns there are. We are confronted by authorial and scribal anonymity; questions over the dating of material; the perennial issue of textual transmission and survival rates; and uncertainty regarding social, institutional, and geographic contexts, and the nature of resources and sources. Furthermore, in search of anecdotal evidence, we often find ourselves leaning almost singularly on Asser's account. It may be tempting to despair, yet such uncertainties can powerfully challenge our preconceptions of what an early medieval Latin literary culture could look like. Within this space of unknowing, we should be open to the possibility that a significant proportion of late ninth-century engagement with Latin took part in different contexts and ways to what we see, for example, in the later tenth century, at a time when Benedictine monasticism dominated many of the resources and institutional structures that enabled literary production. In other words, we need to take this material on its own terms. Moreover, while what we have pales in comparison to the amount of material from ninth-century Francia and, indeed, later tenth-century England, the sheer fact that any Latin writing was taking place should not be taken for granted: this language clearly offered individuals in Alfred's realm value, and it had a fundamental part to play in informing and expressing their outlook on the world. This should not be forgotten.

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