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# Anglo-Saxon England

Spring 2025



The kingdom seized by William the Conqueror in A.D. 1066 had been centuries in the making. Founded by pagan warlords following the retreat of the Roman legions, the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons were already old when missionaries arrived from Rome in A.D. 597, bearing icons and Gospel books. What happened when their kings converted to Christianity? How did their language, law, politics, culture, society, and economy change? What roles did monks, warriors, women, merchants, and poets have in crafting a kingdom so richly endowed that William coveted it as his prize? This course charts the making of Anglo-Saxon England through close readings of primary sources, including histories, epic poems, liturgies, and laws, alongside archeological surveys and works of art. Special attention will be given to the links that the Anglo-Saxons cultivated both with Rome and cultures even further south and east.

## **Books to buy at the University of Chicago Bookstore**

Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

*Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984)

Sarah Foot, *Aethelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011)  
Marc Morris, *The Anglo-Saxons: A History of the Beginnings of England* (New York: Pegasus, 2021)

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Reading and participation in class (10%)
2. Two primary source analyses (10% each)—3 pages each, presented in class, revised after discussion, due Friday of the week we discuss your text; questions will be given in class for what to look for in the texts; one analysis for weeks 2-4, one analysis for weeks 5-8
3. Scholarship review (15%)—3-4 pages, in preparation for your final paper, due May 16
4. Final paper (55%)—10-12 pages, double-spaced, due May 30

## READING AND DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENTS

### **March 25 “A Wave of Egg-Kings”**

Michael Wood, “When Was England England?,” in *In Search of England: Journeys into the English Past* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), 91-106

Sarah Foot, “The Making of *Anglecynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest,” *TRHS* 6th ser. vi (1996): 25-49

T.A. Shippey, “The Undeveloped Image: Anglo-Saxon in Popular Consciousness from Turner to Tolkien,” in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. Scragg and C. Weinberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 215-36

Morris, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 1-42

### **April 1 Bede and the Angelic Angli**

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Preface, Book I, chapters 1, 12-26, 34; Book II, chapters 1-3, 9-15; Book III, chapters 1-9, 24-30; Book IV, chapters 1-2, 13, 21-22; Book V, chapters 7-11, 15-17, 23-24, trans. McClure and Collins, pp. 3-5, 9-12, 22-41, 61-62, 65-75, 84-99, 110-25, 149-67, 170-73, 192-94, 210-18, 244-52, 262-66, 288-95

Bede, “Letter to Egbert,” trans. McClure and Collins, pp. 343-57

Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), chapter 4: “Bede and the Ghost of Bishop Wilfrid,” pp. 235-328

Heinrich Härke, “Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis,” *Medieval Archaeology* 55 (2011): 1-28

Morris, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 45-130

### **April 8 Alfred, King of Wessex**

Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 66-110

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Annals A.D. 888-892, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 113-19

Miscellaneous sources, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 163-94 (passim):

- the treaty between Alfred and Gunthrum
- the will of King Alfred
- King Alfred's charter for Ealdorman Aethelhelm
- Letter of Archbishop Fulco of Rheims to Alfred
- Aethelweard's account of the closing years of Alfred's reign
- the *Burghal Hidage*

Nicholas Brooks, "The Development of Military Obligations in Eighth- and Ninth-Century England," in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 69-84

J.R. Maddicott, "Trade, Industry, and the Wealth of King Alfred," *Past & Present* 123 (1989): 3-51

Morris, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 133-245

### **April 15 Aethelstan, King of England**

William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England: from the earliest period to the reign of King Stephen*, trans. J.A. Giles (London: Bell & Daldy, 1866), book II, chapter 6: Of Aethelstan, the son of Edward, pp. 128-41

*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Michael Swanton (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), Annals A.D. 924-941, pp. 104-111

Foot, *Aethelstan*: Prologue, chapters 1 and 8, Epilogue, Appendix I (pp. 1-28, 212-58), plus at least one other chapter, paying close attention to the sources and scholarship on a particular theme (2 Family, 3 Court, 4 Church, 5 Kingdom, 6 War, or 7 Death)

Michael Wood, "The Story of a Book," in *In Search of England*, 169-85

Morris, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 247-74

### **April 22 Laws of the English Kings**

*The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, trans. F. L. Attenborough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922) (Old English and English):

- Laws of King Aethelberht, pp. 2-17
- Laws of King Ine and of Alfred, pp. 34-93
- Laws of King Aethelstan, pp. 122-169

*Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, trans. Benjamin Thorpe (London: Record Commission, 1840), vol. 1: Secular Laws (Old English and English)

- Laws of King Aethelberht, pp. 2-25
- Laws of King Alfred, pp. 44-101
- Laws of King Aethelstan, pp. 194-243

*Textus Roffensis*, by Christopher Monk

<<https://www.rochester cathedral.org/research/textus/index>>

Sir Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2 vols., 2nd. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), vol. 1, chapter 2: Anglo-Saxon Law, pp. 25-63

### **April 29 Prayers and Lessons of the English Church**

Alfred, Prose translation of the Psalter, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 153-60

Metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter, trans. Craig Williamson, *The Complete Old English Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), pp. 709-846 (passim)

*Regularis Concordia*, trans. D.T. Symons, as *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* (London: Nelson, 1953), pp. 1-69 (Latin and English) [archive.org]

Michelle P. Brown, “The Cross and the Book: The Cross-Carpet Pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels as Sacred Figurae,” in *Cross and Cruciform in the Anglo-Saxon World: Studies to Honor the Memory of Timothy Reuter*, ed. Sarah Larratt Keefer, Karen Louise Jolly, and Catherine E. Karkov (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2010), 17-52

Peter Darby, “Bede, Iconoclasm, and the Temple of Solomon,” *Early Medieval Europe* 21.4 (2013): 390-421

Simon MacLean, “Monastic Reform and Royal Ideology in the late Tenth Century: Aelfthryth and Edgar in Continental Perspective,” in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in Honour of Wilhelm Levison (1876-1947)*, ed. David Rollason, Conrad Leyser, and Hannah Williams, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages* 37 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 255-74.

George Brown, “The Psalms as the Foundation of Anglo-Saxon Learning,” in *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*, ed. Nancy Van Deusen (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), pp. 1-24

Morris, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 277-310

### **May 6 Riddles, Charms, and Biblical Epics**

“Exodus,” Junius Manuscript, trans. Williamson, *Complete Old English Poems*, pp. 116-135

“The Seafarer,” Exeter Book, trans. Williamson, pp. 467-71

“The Order of the World,” Exeter Book, trans. Williamson, pp. 496-500

“Riddles 1-57,” Exeter Book, trans. Williamson, pp. 525-50

“The Metrical Charms,” trans. Williamson, pp. 1067-86

Martha Bayless, "Merriment, Entertainment, and Community in Anglo-Saxon Culture," in *The Daily Lives of the Anglo-Saxons*, ed. Carole Biggam, Carole Hough, and Daria Izdebska (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, 2017), pp. 239-56

Martha Bayless, "Alcuin's *Disputatio Pippini* and the Early Medieval Riddle Tradition, in *Humour, History, and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Guy Halsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 157-78

Martha Bayless, "Humour and the Comic in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Medieval English Comedy*, ed. Sandra M. Hordis and Paul Hardwick (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 13-30

### May 13 Ladies of the English

Abbess Hilda of Whitby: Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, book III, chapter 25; book IV, chapter 23, trans. McClure and Collins, pp. 152-59, 210-18.

Queen Emma of Normandy: *Encomium Emmae reginae*, trans. Alistair Campbell, Camden 3rd ser. 72 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1949), pp. 4-53 (Latin and English) [archive.org]

Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chapter 3: "The cult of the Virgin in the liturgy," pp. 52-89

S. Lucy et al., "The Burial of a Princess? The Late Seventh-Century Cemetery at Westfield Farm, Ely," *The Antiquaries Journal* 89 (2009): 80-140, at 85-91

F.T. Wainwright, "Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians," *Scandinavian England*, ed. H.P.R. Finberg (Chichester: 1975), pp. 305-24

### May 20 Monsters and Treasure

Wulfstan of York, "Sermon of the Wolf to the English" (1014), trans. Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, 2nd ed. (London: Eyre Methuen; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 928-34

\_\_\_\_\_, "On False Gods," trans. Roy Liuzza, *Beowulf*, 2nd ed. (Peterborough: Broadview, 2013), pp. 281-83

*Beowulf*, trans. Williamson, *Complete Old English Poems*, pp. 602-90 [esp. pp. 607-12, 625-29, 646-50, 664-68, 676-79]

"The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle: A translation of the Old English text," in Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-manuscript* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 224-53 (Old English and English)

J.R.R. Tolkien, "Sigelwara Land," *Medium Aevum* 1.3 (December 1932): 183-96; *Medium Aevum* 3.2 (June 1934): 95-111

Morris, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 313-408

FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 30