Chapter 1 : Project MUSE - The cult of Anglo-Saxon and the literary canon

Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature is the first book-length study to consider the construction of an early English cultural mythology of writing. Lerer's philological and historical explication of the texts provides new approaches for assessing representations of reading and writing in pre-Conquest literature.

By the end of the 7th century invasion ended. They also brought oral poetic tradition. This was not written literature. It consisted of songs, myths etc. A freeman changed to a serf. The ideal member of society was a warrior. The value of human life was nothing, the warrior wanted to die in a famous fight. A feudal system started to emerge gradually. Christianity became very important and the church became the promoter of learning and literacy. The latin alphabet was used. Christianity has different set of values based on life after death, people reach it if they live after Christian morals. The old ideal of the wariar was replaced by a new ideal, the saint. Anglo â€" Saxons had runic script, but this was used only for special occasions. It was only after Christian missionaries brought the Latin alphabet that Old English works began to be written. The oldest Anglo-Saxon literature grew out of the confluence of two traditions: Old English had many inflections, large consonant clusters, borrowings from Latin and Scandinavian. The earliest written English words are from the 7th century. Much of Old English poetry was probably intended to be chanted, with harp accompaniment, by the Anglo-Saxon scop, of bard. This poetry is often bold and strong, but also mournful and elegiac in spirit, this poetry emphasizes the sorrow and ultimate futility of life and the helplessness of humans before the power of fate. Almost all this poetry is composed without rhyme, in a characteristic line, or verse, of four stressed syllables alternating with an indeterminate number of unstressed ones. This line strikes strangely on ears habituated to the usual modern pattern, in which the rhythmic unit or foot, theoretically consists of a constant cumber of unaccented syllables that always precede or follow any stressed syllable. Another unfamiliar and equally striking feature in the formal character of Old English poetry is structural alliteration, or the use of syllables beginning with similar sounds in two or three of the stresses in each line. Metaphysical and Christian questions as well as the more concrete issues commonly associated with Anglo-Saxon culture. The monks put some new elements into works, we now have several versions of songs. Very little literature survives from the Anglo-Saxon period. The literature of this time is generally religious based and often consisted of biblical stories.

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Functions[edit] The scop, like the similar gleeman , was a reciter of poetry. The scop, however, was typically attached to a court on a relatively permanent basis. There, he most likely received rich gifts for his performances. The performances often featured the recitation of recognisable texts such as the "old pagan legends of the Germanic tribes. While some scops moved from court to court, they were generally speaking less nomadic than the gleemen and had positions of greater security. Scop, scopf, and relationship to scold[edit] While skop became English scoff , the Old Norse skald lives on in a Modern English word of a similarly deprecating meaning, scold. The association with jesting or mocking was, however, strong in Old High German. There was a skopfari glossing both poeta and comicus and a skopfliod glossing canticum rusticum et ineptum and psalmus plebeius. Skopfsang, on the other hand, is of a higher register, glossing poema, poesis, tragoedia. The question cannot be decided formally since the Proto-Germanic forms coincided in zero grade , and by the time of the surviving sources from the late 8th century , the association with both roots may have influenced the word for several centuries. Much of the poetry that survives does have an oral quality to it, but some scholars argue that it is a trait carried over from an earlier Germanic period. If, as some critics believe, the idea of the Anglo-Saxon oral poet is based on the Old Norse Skald , it can be seen as a link to the heroic past of the Germanic peoples. There is no proof that the "scop" existed, and it could be a literary device allowing poetry to give an impression of orality and performance. This poet figure recurs throughout the literature of the period, whether real or not. Examples are the poems Widsith and Deor , in the Exeter Book , which draw on the idea of the mead-hall poet of the heroic age and, along with the anonymous heroic poem, Beowulf express some of the strongest poetic connections to oral culture in the literature of the period. Further reading[edit] Frank, Roberta. Bulletin of the John Rylands University of Manchester, Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse. Cambridge University Press, Print Pasternack, Carol Braun. The Textuality of Old English Poetry. Bahn, Eugene, and Margaret L.

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The dreamer resolves to trust in the cross, and the dream ends with a vision of heaven. There are a number of religious debate poems. The longest is Christ and Satan in the Junius manuscript, it deals with the conflict between Christ and Satan during the forty days in the desert. Another debate poem is Solomon and Saturn , surviving in a number of textual fragments, Saturn is portrayed as a magician debating with the wise king Solomon. The longest is called Nine Herbs Charm and is probably of pagan origin. This is a particular feature of Anglo-Saxon verse style, and is a consequence both of its structure and of the rapidity with which images are deployed, to be unable to effectively support the expanded simile. As an example of this, Beowulf contains at best five similes, and these are of the short variety. This can be contrasted sharply with the strong and extensive dependence that Anglo-Saxon poetry has upon metaphor , particularly that afforded by the use of kennings. The most prominent example of this in The Wanderer is the reference to battle as a "storm of spears". For instance, in the first line of Beowulf , "Hwaet! We Gar-Dena in gear-dagum", [55] meaning "Lo! Variation[edit] The Old English poet was particularly fond of describing the same person or object with varied phrases, often appositives that indicated different qualities of that person or object. Such variation, which the modern reader who likes verbal precision is not used to, is frequently a difficulty in producing a readable translation. In addition to setting pace for the line, the caesura also grouped each line into two couplets. Prose[edit] The amount of surviving Old English prose is much greater than the amount of poetry. Old English prose first appears in the 9th century, and continues to be recorded through the 12th century as the last generation of scribes, trained as boys in the standardised West Saxon before the Conquest, died as old men. Alfred, wanting to restore English culture , lamented the poor state of Latin education: So general was [educational] decay in England there were very few on this side of the Humber who could Historiae adversum paganos by Orosius , a companion piece for St. His sermons were highly stylistic. His best known work is Sermo Lupi ad Anglos in which he blames the sins of the English for the Viking invasions. He wrote a number of clerical legal texts Institutes of Polity and Canons of Edgar. It has survived in six fragments. It is believed to date from the 9th century by an anonymous Mercian author. There are four additional lives in the earliest manuscript of the Lives of Saints, the Julius manuscript: He also produced a work entitled Computus, which outlined the practical application of arithmetic to the calculation of calendar days and movable feasts , as well as tide tables. He also wrote a grammar and glossary in Old English called Latin , later used by students interested in learning Old French because it had been glossed in Old French. Because this is the same manuscript that contains Beowulf, some scholars speculate it may have been a collection of materials on exotic places and creatures. A third collection, known as the Lacnunga , includes many charms and incantations. By the 12th century they had been arranged into two large collections see Textus Roffensis. They include laws of the kings, beginning with those of Aethelbert of Kent and ending with those of Cnut , and texts dealing with specific cases and places in the country. An interesting example is Gerefa which outlines the duties of a reeve on a large manor estate. There is also a large volume of legal documents related to religious houses. These include many kinds of texts: All of these texts provide valuable insights into the social history of Anglo-Saxon times, but are also of literary value. For example, some of the court case narratives are interesting for their use of rhetoric. Many sermons and works continued to be read and used in part or whole up through the 14th century, and were further catalogued and organised. During the Reformation , when monastic libraries were dispersed , the manuscripts were collected by antiquarians and scholars. In the 17th century there began a tradition of Old English literature dictionaries and references.

Chapter 5 : Scop - Wikipedia

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The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th ed. See also English literature. Poetry There are two types of Old English poetry: Although nearly all Old English poetry is preserved in only four manuscriptsâ€"indicating that what has survived is not necessarily the best or most representativeâ€"much of it is of high literary quality. Moreover, Old English heroic poetry is the earliest extant in all of Germanic literature. It is thus the nearest we can come to the oral pagan literature of Germanic culture, and is also of inestimable value as a source of knowledge about many aspects of Germanic society. The 7th-century work known as Widsith is one of the earliest Old English poems, and thus is of particular historic and linguistic interest. Beowulf , a complete epic, is the oldest surviving Germanic epic as well as the longest and most important poem in Old English. It originated as a pagan saga transmitted orally from one generation to the next; court poets known as scops were the bearers of tribal history and tradition. The version of Beowulf that is extant was composed by a Christian poet, probably early in the 8th cent. However, intermittent Christian themes found in the epic, although affecting in themselves, are not integrated into the essentially pagan tale. In these works, a happy past is contrasted with a precarious and desolate present. The Finnsburgh fragment, The Battle of Maldon, and The Battle of Brunanburh see Maldon and Brunanburh , which are all based on historical episodes, mainly celebrate great heroism in the face of overwhelming odds. In this heroic poetry, all of which is anonymous, greatness is measured less by victory than by perfect loyalty and courage in extremity. Much of the Old English Christian poetry is marked by the simple belief of a relatively unsophisticated Christianity; the names of two authors are known. Cynewulf , a later poet, signed the poems Elene, Juliana, and The Fates of the Apostles; no more is known of him. The finest poem of the school of Cynewulf is The Dream of the Rood, the first known example of the dream vision, a genre later popular in Middle English literature. The verse form for Old English poetry is an alliterative line of four stressed syllables and an unfixed number of unstressed syllables broken by a caesura and arranged in one of several patterns. Lines are conventionally end-stopped and unrhymed. The form lends itself to narrative; there is no lyric poetry in Old English. A stylistic feature in this heroic poetry is the kenning, a figurative phrase, often a metaphorical compound, used as a synonym for a simple noun, e. Prose Old English literary prose dates from the latter part of the Anglo-Saxon period. Prose was written in Latin before the reign of King Alfred reigned â€"99 , who worked to revitalize English culture after the devastating Danish invasions ended. As hardly anyone could read Latin, Alfred translated or had translated the most important Latin texts. He also encouraged writing in the vernacular. Their sermons written in the late 10th or early 11th cent. A great deal of Latin prose and poetry was written during the Anglo-Saxon period. Of historic as well as literary interest, it provides an excellent record of the founding and early development of the church in England and reflects the introduction and early influence there of Latin-European culture. Anderson, The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons , repr. Niles, Old English Literature in Context Cite this article Pick a style below, and copy the text for your bibliography.

Chapter 6 : Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature

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Then we might think of the beauty of illuminated manuscripts such as the Book of Durrow or the Lindisfarne Gospels. Professor Swain recommends learning Old English in order to be able to read works in Old English, of course, but equally intriguing, to allow us to better express ourselves in modern English. Professor Swain, what do you find so compelling about the Anglo-Saxons and their literature? Have you always held an interest in their literature, or did your appreciation grow out of another discipline? That is a difficult question to answer. For me, interest was piqued through the language. By that point, I had already had modern German in high school, and Latin, classical Greek, and Biblical Hebrew in college. So I found the sounds and grammar of the Old English language fascinating. At roughly the same time, I discovered J. Auden and other authors more or less baptized my imagination, and their use of the English language continues to influence my own. The more I learned of Old English, the more I wanted to learn about the people, history, and the literature. And since I was taught the Historical Critical Method in Biblical Studies, it was very easy to use skills developed there in linguistics, textual criticism, source criticism, and historical context in this new medieval field that had so drawn me all of a sudden. I have been studying the Anglo-Saxons and their culture ever since. Sometimes I think I will take up something else or return to Biblical Studies, and then I just read Beowulf in the original and I am right back into Anglo-Saxon studies. Widely regarded as the first and oldest masterpiece in English literature, Beowulf is read and studied in school and universities worldwide. What is it that makes Beowulf the quintessential piece of Anglo-Saxon literature? Is it because the poem is full of rich sounds â€" alliterations and kennings? That, too, is a difficult question. Certainly the sounds of Old English, and a good modern English translation, are hauntingly beautiful. Haunting is a really very good word for this, methinks. Beowulf does indeed haunt the reader. The source for this haunting goes beyond language and the mechanics of oral poetry. The poem has mythic power. Not just a world lost, but the loss of friends and companions, and ultimately the loss of the hero himself, is also a theme in the poem that resonates with readers. Getting back to language, you mention the kennings, and certainly the kennings are an attractive and fun feature of the poem. My own favorites are the kennings for the sea: I could go on at some length, but suffice it to say that the poem creates images that for many readers carry a mythic power conveyed in a language that is beautiful and both known and unfamiliar. Aside from the acceptance of Christianity in the seventh century CE, which factors facilitated the effervescence of Anglo-Saxon literature and culture during the rule of the Mercian bretwaldas in the eighth century CE? The majority of Anglo-Saxon poetry in existence dates from this era, as do important prose works like The Ecclesiastical History of the English People by St. It should be noted that this period produced exceptional works of art like the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Durrow, too. The eighth century is a period of shift from Northumbrian hegemony to Mercian. The cultural effervescence that you refer to really begins in Northumbria in the seventh century CE. In practical terms, the Northumbrians were experiencing a number of successes in battle against the Picts to the North. This meant an influx of money and other goods into the kingdom. One thing a cultural explosion needs is money. At the same time, there is an amazing confluence of cultural forces mixing in the kingdom. Christianity is the obvious one that you mention. Christianity brings with it a good dose of Near Eastern culture embedded in the Christian Old Testament. So the Old Testament tales became a way that Christianity could be taught to the Germanic peoples. Also with Christianity come an alphabet and literacy in Latin. These, too, were read, devoured, and imitated. Scripture, he remarks, must always be the more important text. In addition to the native Anglo-Saxon culture, the Christian culture, and the Roman, the latter two conveyed through text, that is, through books, a good dose of Celtic culture and thought is added to the mix. In part, this comes from the people that the Anglo-Saxons ruled. While the conquered quickly adapted to the culture and language of the rulers, wholesale

abandonment of their previous culture could not happen. But again, more particularly, the Anglo-Saxon ruling house had close ties to parts of Ireland. Iona sends Bishop Aidan to Northumbria, and in his wake follow many more Irish monks from Iona and from Ireland itself. The depth of Irish influence on Northumbrian Christianity may be easily seen in the lives of two saints of the period: These men are in many ways opposites. Brigid, and imitates those lives in relating the story of Wilfrid. Cuthbert is probably one of the most important saints of the Anglo-Saxon period. Three lives of this saint are written in the thirty years after his death, two of them by the Venerable Bede! Carpet page from the Book of Durrow, CE, Trinity College, Dublin All this cultural fusion and mixing is occurring at a time that there is some wealth to spread around. This creates a cultural explosion in Northumbria. Cuthbert, Latin grammars and metrical instruction, and of course Bibles. We see the results in deluxe manuscripts such as the Codex Amiatinus , Lindisfarne Gospels , the Book of Durrow , among a number of other early and important illuminated manuscripts. We see the results in stone crosses such as Bewcastle Cross and the Ruthwell Cross. Nor should we ignore the Staffordshire Hoard of which we have spoken before as an example of both the wealth and the artistry of this period in Northumbria. Last, but not least, there is the vernacular literature. A version of the poem Dream of the Rood is carved in runes on the sides of the Ruthwell Cross also from the seventh century CE. Slightly later in the mid-eighth century CE, we think that Beowulf was composed in more or less the form it will later be written in, along with the poems known as Genesis A, Exodus, Deor, Widsith and some other Old English charters. So far, I have talked mostly about Northumbria. But the territory south of the Humber River had a cultural explosion as well, though smaller in scope. Here we have many of the same cultural forces as in the north coming together. In contrast with the north, the south had an extra ingredient: Theodore hailed from Tarsus, St. Theodore spent the next 25 years or so in the Roman capital studying. In the early s CE, he went to Rome and there lived with a group of Eastern monks, becoming just as learned in the Latin language and literature as he was in Greek. In CE, the see of Canterbury became vacant when the new archbishop, who was in Rome to receive the papal blessing and the accoutrements of his new office, suddenly died. The pope then selected Theodore as his replacement on the advice a counselor, Hadrian. In fact, the pope had offered the job twice already to Hadrian who had declined it. Little is known of his early life, but he was abbot of a monastery near Naples in CE and had a reputation as a scholar. He also obviously had strong connections in Rome and was both friend and counselor of the pope but also knew Theodore. There continued to be Irish influences, though one of the students of this Canterbury school, Aldhelm, wrote a letter to his contemporaries pleading with them not to send their students to Ireland any longer but instead to Canterbury. Out of this school, which Bede mentions very favorably, a number of important early scholars came, including Aldhelm. In addition to the Latin literature that was being produced in the south at this time, there were Biblical studies and documents on how to operate the church. Independent of this movement and earlier in Southumbria, we should mention two likely related archaeological finds that demonstrate the wealth and artwork of this region during the sixth and seventh centuries in spite of Northumbrian hegemony. I will not dwell on these finds, as we could have whole articles about them, but suffice it to say that they are important to fill out our picture of this early period. So to answer the question, there were a number of forces that came together at a propitious moment in time that produced a vibrant culture, one of the results of which was the production of literature in Latin and in the vernacular English. Given the proximity of the Anglo-Saxons to their Celtic neighbors in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, I am curious to know if any Celtic influences can be detected within the corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature. I addressed that a little in my answer above. But before enlarging, it actually is not the Irish who can claim the oldest vernacular literature in Western Europe. Irish as such is represented in Ogham inscriptions consisting of personal names and not much else. The earliest of these date to the late fourth century CE, but are on the island of Britain, not Ireland, and so are not properly Irish. English literature, whether written in runes or in the Latin alphabet, is contemporaneous with anything in Irish. The earliest example of English we have, though preserved in a twelfth century CE manuscript, are the Laws of Aethelberht , the king who received Augustine of Canterbury in CE. About the same time, the poem Amra Choluim Chille , an elegy on

Columba, is composed, thought to have been written very shortly after his death. The attribution of this poem to the poet Dallan Forgail who died in CE cannot be verified. But all agree that it was composed somewhere around CE, making it a contemporary of Laws. In addition, we have two certain literary texts written in runes that date to the seventh century CE: Let me be clear: Examples of English literature are contemporary with examples of Irish literature, however, but there is more English literature of the seventh century than Irish, at least in the vernaculars. A third issue is this: English authors writing in Latin. Here, the Irish predate the English with important authors such as Columba, Columbanus, Sedulius, and possibly Pelagius, are all Irish writers writing in Latin. The earliest English writer in Latin is second half of the seventh century CE, so the Irish win that one. There is a great deal of national and ethnic pride involved in assessing these claims about which language is attested first, which language has the first literature etc and that pride is further fueled by the long political issues that have existed between Ireland and England since the Normans came in. If we ask the question what is the earliest vernacular written in Northwestern Europe, hands down it is vernacular or vulgar Latin in Gaul. Certainly the sermons of Cesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours, Clovis, and other samples of non-literary Latin in the late fifth and the sixth centuries illustrate that there is a non-literary language being written, a vernacular of the time before it became French.

Chapter 7 : Exploring the Depth and Beauty of Anglo-Saxon Literature

Anglo-Saxon runes are runes used by the early Anglo-Saxons as an alphabet in their www.nxgvision.com characters are known collectively as the futhorc (or fuþorc), from the Old English sound values of the first six www.nxgvision.com futhorc was a development.

Also, the use of Anglo-Saxon disguises the extent to which people identified as Anglo-Scandinavian after the Viking age, or as Anglo-Norman after the Norman conquest in Procopius states that Britain was settled by three races: The Christian church seems to have used the word Angli; for example in the story of Pope Gregory I and his remark, "Non Angli sed angeli" not English but angels. At other times he uses the term rex Anglorum king of the English , which presumably meant both Anglo-Saxons and Danes. Alfred the Great used Anglosaxonum Rex. King Cnut in was the first to refer to the land and not the people with this term: This was a period of intensified human migration in Europe from about to Around , Britain slipped beyond direct imperial control into a phase which has generally been termed "sub-Roman". It is now widely accepted that the Anglo-Saxons were not just transplanted Germanic invaders and settlers from the Continent, but the outcome of insular interactions and changes. The most contemporaneous textual evidence is the Chronica Gallica of which records for the year It has been argued that Bede misinterpreted his scanty sources, and that the chronological references in the Historia Britonnum yield a plausible date of around The Saxons go back to "their eastern home". Gildas calls the peace a "grievous divorce with the barbarians". The price of peace, Nick Higham argues, [30] is a better treaty for the Saxons, giving them the ability to receive tribute from people across the lowlands of Britain. The archaeological evidence agrees with this earlier timescale. The most developed vision of a continuation in sub-Roman Britain, with control over its own political and military destiny for well over a century, is that of Kenneth Dark, [32] who suggests that the sub-Roman elite survived in culture, politics and military power up to c. However, Nick Higham seems to agree with Bede , who identified three phases of settlement: But, archaeologists such as Christine Hills [35] and Richard Hodges [36] suggest the number is nearer 20, By around the Anglo-Saxon migrants were established in southern and eastern Britain. But based on a fairly high Anglo-Saxon figure , and a low Brythonic one , , Brythonic people are likely to have outnumbered Anglo-Saxons by at least four to one. The interpretation of such figures is that while "culturally, the later Anglo-Saxons and English did emerge as remarkably un-British,. One is similar to culture changes observed in Russia, North Africa and parts of the Islamic world, where a powerful minority culture becomes, over a rather short period, adopted by a settled majority. Nick Higham summarized in this way: As Bede later implied, language was a key indicator of ethnicity in early England. In circumstances where freedom at law, acceptance with the kindred, access to patronage, and the use and possession of weapons were all exclusive to those who could claim Germanic descent, then speaking Old English without Latin or Brittonic inflection had considerable value. As they adopted this language and culture, the barriers began to dissolve between peoples, who had earlier lived parallel lives. There is evidence for a fusion of culture in this early period. The Wessex royal line was traditionally founded by a man named Cerdic , an undoubtedly Celtic name ultimately derived from Caratacus. This may indicate that Cerdic was a native Briton, and that his dynasty became anglicised over time. The Anglo-Saxon farms of this period are often falsely supposed to be "peasant farms". However, a ceorl , who was the lowest ranking freeman in early Anglo-Saxon society, was not a peasant but an arms-owning male with the support of a kindred, access to law and the wergild ; situated at the apex of an extended household working at least one hide of land. Several of these kingdoms may have had as their initial focus a territory based on a former Roman civitas. The Bretwalda concept is taken as evidence of a number of early Anglo-Saxon elite families. Ostensibly "Anglo-Saxon" dynasties variously replaced one another in this role in a discontinuous but influential and potent roll call of warrior elites. As Helen Peake jokingly points out, "they all just happened to be related back to Woden". There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes, A wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes. This terror

of the hall-troops had come far. A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on As his powers waxed and his worth was proved. In the end each clan on the outlying coasts Beyond the whale-road had to yield to him And begin to pay tribute. That was one good king. Finnian , reached Iona as a self-imposed exile. The influence of the monastery of Iona would grow into what Peter Brown has described as an "unusually extensive spiritual empire," which "stretched from western Scotland deep to the southwest into the heart of Ireland and, to the southeast, it reached down throughout northern Britain, through the influence of its sister monastery Lindisfarne. He had been the prior of a monastery in Rome when Pope Gregory the Great chose him in to lead the Gregorian mission to Britain to Christianise the Kingdom of Kent from their native Anglo-Saxon paganism. For the first time following the Anglo-Saxon invasion, coins began circulating in Kent during his reign. He had been at the monastery in Iona when Oswald asked to be sent a mission to Christianise the Kingdom of Northumbria from their native Anglo-Saxon paganism. Oswald had probably chosen Iona because after his father had been killed he had fled into south-west Scotland and had encountered Christianity, and had returned determined to make Northumbria Christian. An anonymous life of Cuthbert written at Lindisfarne is the oldest extant piece of English historical writing. The decorated leather bookbinding is the oldest intact European binding. Middle Anglo-Saxon history â€” By the political map of Lowland Britain had developed with smaller territories coalescing into kingdoms, from this time larger kingdoms started dominating the smaller kingdoms. The development of kingdoms, with a particular king being recognised as an overlord, developed out of an early loose structure that, Higham believes, is linked back to the original feodus. Many areas flourished and their influence was felt across the continent, however in between the Humber and Thames, one political entity grew in influence and power and to the East these developments in Britain attracted attention. Mercian Supremacy A political map of Britain c the names are in modern English Middle-lowland Britain was known as the place of the Mierce, the border or frontier folk, in Latin Mercia. Mercia was a diverse area of tribal groups, as shown by the Tribal Hidage ; the peoples were a mixture of Brythonic speaking peoples and "Anglo-Saxon" pioneers and their early leaders had Brythonic names, such as Penda. Although there are many gaps in the evidence, it is clear that the seventh-century Mercian kings were formidable rulers who were able to exercise a wide-ranging overlordship from their Midland base. Mercian military success was the basis of their power; it succeeded against not only kings and kingdoms by winning set-piece battles, [66] but by ruthlessly ravaging any area foolish enough to withhold tribute. Penda is found ravaging Northumbria as far north as Bamburgh and only a miraculous intervention from Aidan prevents the complete destruction of the settlement. By the middle of the 8th century, other kingdoms of southern Britain were also affected by Mercian expansionism. The growth and popularity of monasticism was not an entirely internal development, with influence from the continent shaping Anglo-Saxon monastic life. He was joined the following year by his colleague Hadrian, a Latin-speaking African by origin and former abbot of a monastery in Campania near Naples. Bede does not mention Aldhelm in this connection; but we know from a letter addressed by Aldhelm to Hadrian that he too must be numbered among their students. Michael Drout states "Aldhelm wrote Latin hexameters better than anyone before in England and possibly better than anyone since, or at least up until Milton. His work showed that scholars in England, at the very edge of Europe, could be as learned and sophisticated as any writers in Europe. These double monasteries were presided over by abbesses, some of the most powerful and influential women in Europe. Double monasteries which were built on strategic sites near rivers and coasts, accumulated immense wealth and power over multiple generations their inheritances were not divided and became centers of art and learning. The 9th century saw the rise of Wessex , from the foundations laid by King Egbert in the first quarter of the century to the achievements of King Alfred the Great in its closing decades. The outlines of the story are told in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle , though the annals represent a West Saxon point of view. Embedded with a sceat dating to AD and minted in Kent. It is edged in dotted triangle pattern. Origin is the Danelaw region and dates late 8th to 9th century. The wealth of the monasteries and the success of Anglo-Saxon society attracted the attention of people from continental Europe, mostly Danes and Norwegians. A year later Jarrow, the

monastery where Bede wrote, was attacked; in Iona; and in the nunnery at Lyminge Kent was granted refuge inside the walls of Canterbury. Sometime around , a Reeve from Portland in Wessex was killed when he mistook some raiders for ordinary traders. Viking raids continued until in , then the Chronicle says: The fleet does not appear to have stayed long in England, but it started a trend which others subsequently followed. In particular, the army which arrived in remained over many winters, and part of it later settled what became known as the Danelaw. The rest of the army meanwhile continued to harry and plunder on both sides of the Channel, with new recruits evidently arriving to swell its ranks, for it clearly continued to be a formidable fighting force. However, after a decisive victory at Edington in , Alfred offered vigorous opposition. He established a chain of fortresses across the south of England, reorganised the army, "so that always half its men were at home, and half out on service, except for those men who were to garrison the burhs" A. When the Vikings returned from the Continent in , they found they could no longer roam the country at will, for wherever they went they were opposed by a local army. After four years, the Scandinavians therefore split up, some to settle in Northumbria and East Anglia, the remainder to try their luck again on the Continent. Thinking about how learning and culture had fallen since the last century, he wrote: So completely had wisdom fallen off in England that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their rituals in English, or indeed could translate a letter from Latin into English; and I believe that there were not many beyond the Humber. There were so few of them that I indeed cannot think of a single one south of the Thames when I became king. Alfred saw kingship as a priestly office, a shepherd for his people. Alfred took this book as his own guide on how to be a good king to his people; hence, a good king to Alfred increases literacy. Alfred translated this book himself and explains in the preface: When I had learned it I translated it into English, just as I had understood it, and as I could most meaningfully render it. It is unknown how long there may be such learned bishops as, thanks to God, are nearly everywhere. Alfred provided functional patronage, linked to a social programme of vernacular literacy in England, which was unprecedented. Alfred thus laid the foundation for the great accomplishments of the tenth century and did much to make the vernacular was more important than Latin in Anglo-Saxon culture. I desired to live worthily as long as I lived, and to leave after my life, to the men who should come after me, the memory of me in good works. However charters, law-codes and coins supply detailed information on various aspects of royal government, and the surviving works of Anglo-Latin and vernacular literature, as well as the numerous manuscripts written in the 10th century, testify in their different ways to the vitality of ecclesiastical culture. Yet as Simon Keynes suggests "it does not follow that the 10th century is better understood than more sparsely documented periods". During the course of the 10th century, the West Saxon kings extended their power first over Mercia , then into the southern Danelaw , and finally over Northumbria , thereby imposing a semblance of political unity on peoples, who nonetheless would remain conscious of their respective customs and their separate pasts. The prestige, and indeed the pretensions, of the monarchy increased, the institutions of government strengthened, and kings and their agents sought in various ways to establish social order. David Dumville suggests that Edward may have extended this policy by rewarding his supporters with grants of land in territories newly conquered from the Danes, and that any charters issued in respect of such grants have not survived. From that point on there was no contest for the throne, so the house of Wessex became the ruling house of England. He was uncompromising in his insistence on respect for the law. However this legislation also reveals the persistent difficulties which confronted the king and his councillors in bringing a troublesome people under some form of control.

Chapter 8 : Irina Dumitrescu, â€œThe Experience of Education in Anglo-Saxon Literatureâ€• (Cambridge

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