

Exam: Study Resources

- ▶ Key concepts (NB **flashcard website**)
- ▶ Key questions
- ▶ Lectures and slides
- ▶ Readings
- ▶ Tutorial

Exam: Format

- ▶ Count 30 minutes *for the lecture questions*
- ▶ No aids beyond a pen and scrap paper

“

Please answer **any FOUR** out of the following twelve questions in one to two short paragraphs each. Please note that there must be no significant overlap in content between any of your lecture and seminar answers, so choose only those questions which you are not already answering in the seminar part of the exam. Always clearly indicate which question you are answering.

”

Please avoid these mistakes!

- ▶ Answering fewer than four questions
- ▶ Answering more than four questions
- ▶ Misunderstanding the question
- ▶ Providing correct information that does not answer the question

12: Alfred



Figure: Alfred of Wessex statue, Winchester (CC-BY-SA WMC user)

Key Questions

- ▶ Under what family and political circumstances did Alfred come to power?
- ▶ What role did he play in the Anglo-Norse wars?
- ▶ What military innovations did he implement?
- ▶ What was Alfred's strategy for national prosperity?
- ▶ What works were translated by Alfred's circle?
- ▶ What was his own role in the process of translation?
- ▶ How did Alfred envision his own role as king?
- ▶ What models for kingship did Alfred set for himself?
- ▶ What is the nature of Asser's *Life of Alfred*, and what its chief model?

Part I: Commander in Chief

Part II: The Alfredian Renaissance

Part III: Models and Self-Presentation

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle [A] s.a. 851

“

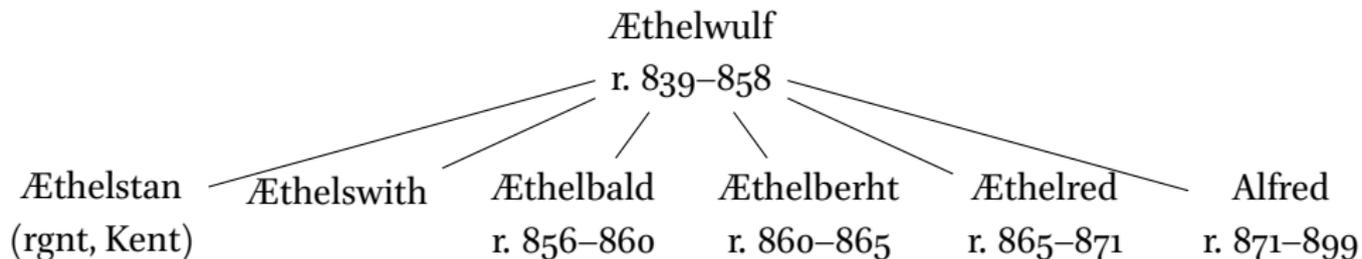
Here ealdorman Ceorl with the men of Devonshire fought the heathens at *Wicganbeorg*, and they caused great carnage and won the victory.

In that same year, King Æthelstan and ealdorman Ealchere defeated a large fleet off Sandwich in Kent; they seized nine ships and put the others to flight. **For the first time, heathens stayed the winter.**

In the same year, **350 ships came** up the mouth of the Thames and laid waste Canterbury and London, and they put King Beorhtwulf of the Mercians to flight with his army. Then they went south across the Thames to Surrey. King Æthelwulf and his son Æthelbald fought them with the West Saxon levy at *Acleah*, and they caused the greatest carnage in a heathen army of which we have heard tell until this present day, and they won the victory there.

”

The House of Wessex, Second Half of the Ninth Century



858: King Æthelwulf dies; his eldest surviving son Æthelbald continues to govern Wessex; his next eldest son Æthelberht becomes King of Kent, Essex, and the associated regions.

860: Æthelbald dies; his younger brother Æthelberht succeeds to the throne of all Wessex

865: Æthelberht dies; his younger brother Æthelred I succeeds, and his youngest brother Alfred is appointed successor

871: Æthelred dies; Alfred becomes king of all Wessex

899: Alfred dies; his son Edward (“the Elder”) succeeds

Viking Chronology, Second Half of the Ninth Century (2)

865 The Vikings conclude a treaty with Kent but break it, overrun Kent

“
865: In this year, the heathen army stayed on Thanet and they made peace with the people of Kent — and the people of Kent promised them money in return for that peace — and during that peace and under those promises of money the army snuck up in the night and overran all of eastern Kent. (ChronA) ”

“
Meanwhile, however, the Vikings, like crafty foxes, secretly burst out of their camp by night, broke the treaty and, spurning the promise of money (for they knew they could get more money from stolen booty than from peace), laid waste the entire eastern district of Kent.

(Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, §20) ”

Viking Chronology, Second Half of the Ninth Century (3)

865 A “large [heathen] army” comes to East Anglia, is paid off in horses

866 The East Anglia Vikings take York

867 The York Vikings come to Mercia, make peace

869 The York Vikings (Ívarr and Ubba) take East Anglia, kill its king Edmund, spend the winter there

871 ▶ York Vikings come to Wessex, fight the first five of nine battles plus many smaller conflicts:

1. Defeated by Ealdorman Æthelwulf
2. Defeat King Æthelred and Alfred at Reading
3. Defeated by Æthelred and Alfred at Ashdown
4. Defeat Æthelred and Alfred at Basing
5. Defeat Æthelred and Alfred at Merton

▶ A large “summer army” arrives

Viking Chronology, Second Half of the Ninth Century (4)

875 Alfred defeats 7 Viking ships on sea

877 ▶ Alfred makes peace with the Vikings; they swear to leave Wessex

▶ Hálfdan and his men settle down in Northumbria

▶ Others break their oath and take Exeter

▶ 120 Viking ships are lost in a storm

878 ▶ Vikings conquer Wessex; Alfred retreats to the marshes

▶ Alfred gathers an army and defeats the Vikings

▶ Alfred negotiates good terms, including Guthrum's baptism

884 ▶ Guthrum attacks Wessex but is defeated

▶ A treaty is drawn up establishing the Danelaw

890 Guthrum dies

892ff. New Vikings attack Kent; Danelaw Norse frequently join in

Defending Wessex: The *burhs*

“ Those who were severely afflicted [...] loudly applauded the king's foresight and promise to make every effort to do what they had previously refused — that is, with respect to constructing fortresses and to the other things of general advantage to the whole kingdom. (Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, §91) ”

- ▶ Fortified place of temporary shelter for the population
- ▶ Also used for trade and permanent inhabitation
- ▶ Roman towns; Iron Age forts; natural fortifications; and new forts
- ▶ 30 *burhs* in Wessex proper
- ▶ *Burgal Hidage* lists these forts and how many *hides* (i.e. amount of land supporting one household) each represents; an appendix states that each hide should supply one man, adding up to a military force of 27,000

Defending Wessex: Military Service

“ Then King Alfred gathered his levy and went so that he camped between the two armies as near to them as still offered the protection of the forest and the water, so that he could reach either if he wanted to make for the plain.

Then they went in forest troops and on horseback on wherever the margin was undefended at the time, and they also tried with other troops on most days, or at night, whether from the levy or from the forts. **The king had divided his levy in two, so that half was always at home and half “out”, not counting those who were to defend the forts.**

(*ChronA* s.a. 894 for 893) ”

Defending Wessex: The Fleet

“ This same year the hosts in East Anglia and Northumbria greatly harassed Wessex along the south coast with predatory bands, most of all with the warships they had built many years before. Then king Alfred ordered warships to be built to meet the Danish ships: they were almost twice as long as the others, some had sixty oars, some more; they were both swifter, steadier, and with more freeboard than the others; they were built neither after the Frisian design nor after the Danish, but as it seemed to himself that they could be most serviceable.

(Trans. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s.a. 897)

”

Part I: Commander in Chief

Part II: The Alfredian Renaissance

Part III: Models and Self-Presentation

Alfred's Love for Books

“ One day, therefore, when his mother was showing him and his brothers a book of English poetry which she held in her hand, she said: ‘I shall give this book to whichever one of you can learn it the fastest.’ Spurred on by these words, or rather by divine inspiration, and attracted by the beauty of the initial letter in the book, Alfred spoke as follows in reply to his mother, forestalling his brothers (ahead in years, though not in ability): ‘Will you readily give this book to the one of us who can understand it the soonest and recite it to you?’ Whereupon, smiling with pleasure she reassured him, saying: ‘Yes, I will.’ He immediately took the book from her hand, went to his teacher and learnt it. When it was learnt, he took it back to his mother and recited it. (Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, §23) ”

Alfred's Love for Books

“ After this he learnt the ‘daily round’, that is, the services of the hours, and then certain psalms and many prayers; these he collected in a single book, which he kept by him day and night, as I have seen for myself; amid all the affairs of the present life he took it around with him everywhere for the sake of prayer, and was inseparable from it. But alas, he could not satisfy his craving for what he desired the most, namely the liberal arts; for, as he used to say, there were no good scholars in the entire kingdom of the West Saxons at that time.

(Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, §24) ”

Alfred's Love for Books

“ It was also in this year that Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, first began through divine inspiration to read and to translate at the same time, all on one and the same day.

(Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, §87) ”

“ It happened that I was reading aloud some passage to him from a certain book. [... H]e suddenly showed me a little book which he constantly carried upon his person [... and] told me to copy the passage in question into the little book. [...] Now as soon as that first passage had been copied, he was eager to read it at once and to translate it into English, and thereupon to instruct many others.

(Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, §88) ”

From Alfred's Preface to the *Pastoral Care*

“

I order that it be made known to you that it has often crossed my mind what scholars existed among the English of old, of both religious and secular orders, and what blessed times then existed throughout the English nation; and how the kings who were then in power obeyed God and his messengers; and they observed well both their peace and their customs and their power domestically, and also extended their territory outwards; and how they prospered both in battle and in wisdom; and also concerning the religious orders, how eager they were both for teaching and for learning, as well as all the services they owed to God; and how people abroad sought wisdom and teaching here, and how we now have to obtain it abroad if we are to have any. So completely had it disappeared from the English nation that there were very few who could understand their office in English, or indeed translate a letter from Latin into English, on this side of the Humber; and I suspect there weren't many beyond the Humber who could. Thanks be to God Almighty that we now have any teachers in place at all!

”

From Alfred's Preface to the *Pastoral Care*

“

When I considered all this, I also considered how, before everything was raided and burned, the churches in England all stood filled with treasures and books, and also with a great multitude of God's servants, and they knew very little about the books, because they couldn't understand any of them and that was because they were not in their own language. They also said, 'our predecessors, who occupied this place before us, they loved wisdom and by it they obtained prosperity and left it for us. You can still see their track here, but we cannot pursue it, and consequently we have now lost both the prosperity and the wisdom, because we did not want to bend down to the track with our minds.'

”

From Alfred's Preface to the *Pastoral Care*

“ When I considered all this, I marvelled greatly at the great scholars that once existed throughout the English nation, and who had fully learned all the books, that they did not want to translate them into their own language. But then I immediately answered myself and said, ‘They did not expect that people would ever become so heedless and the teaching be so lost; they neglected [to translate] it for this reason, that they wanted for there to be the greater wisdom by the fact of us knowing more languages.’ Then I considered how the law was first found in Hebrew, and then, when the Greeks learned it, they translated it into their own language, and all the other books as well. And then it was the same for the Latin speakers: after they learned it, they translated it into their own language through interpreters. And all the other Christian peoples likewise translated some part of them into their own languages. ”

From Alfred's Preface to the *Pastoral Care*

“ That's why it seems better to me, if you agree, that we translate some books, which are the most necessary for all people to know, that we translate them into the language that we all understand, and do that which we very easily can with God's help, provided we have the peace, that all the freeborn youth that now live among the English, those who have the means to apply themselves, be committed to learning for as long as they have no other use, until such a time when they can read English well. Then let those whom we want to train further and entrust to orders be further taught in Latin. ”

Translations of Alfred's Circle

- ▶ Augustine of Hippo: *Soliloquies*
- ▶ Bede: *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*
- ▶ Boethius: *The Consolation of Philosophy*
- ▶ Gregory the Great: *Pastoral Care*
- ▶ Gregory the Great: *Dialogues*
- ▶ Orosius: *History Against the Pagans*
- ▶ Psalms 1–50 (prose)
- ▶ ? Bald's *Leechbook*
- ▶ ? *Martyrology*

From Alfred's Preface to the *Pastoral Care*

“
Đa ic ða gemunde hu sio lar Lædengedīodes ær ðissum afeallen
wæs giond Angelcynn, 7 ðeah monige cuðon Englisc gewrit
arædan, ða ongan ic ongemang oðrum mislicum 7
manigfealdum bisgum ðisses kynerices ða boc wendan on
Englisc ðe is genemned on Læden Pastoralis, 7 on Englisc
Hierdeboc, hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete,
swæ swæ ic hie geliornode æt Plegmunde minum ærcebiscepe
7 æt Assere minum biscepe 7 æt Grimbolde minum
mæsseprioste 7 æt Iohanne minum mæssepreoste.”

“
Then when I considered how the Latin language had previously
been lost among the English, and nevertheless many were able
to read English, then among the various and manifold other
occupations of this kingdom I undertook to translate the book
called *Pastoralis* in Latin, or *Shepherd's Book* in English, into
English, sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense,
as I had learned it from my archbishop Plegmund and my
bishop Asser and my priest Grimbold and my priest John.”

William of Malmesbury

“ Asser expounded with greater lucidity the meaning of Boethius’ books *On Consolation*, which the king himself translated into English. (Trans. Mynors, Thomson, and Winterbottom, *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum Anglorum*, II.122.4) ”

From Alfred's Preface to the *Pastoral Care*

“ Da ic ða gemunde hu sio lar Lædengedïodes ær ðissum afeallen wæs giond Angelcynn, 7 ðeah monige cuðon Englisc gewrit arædan, ða ongan ic ongemang oðrum mislicum 7 manigfealdum bisgum ðisses kynerices ða boc wendan on Englisc ðe is genemned on Læden Pastoralis, 7 on Englisc Hierdeboc, hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete, swæ swæ ic hie geliornode æt Plegmunde minum ærcebiscepe 7 æt Assere minum biscepe 7 æt Grimbolde minum mæsseprioste 7 æt Iohanne minum mæssepreoste. ”

“ Then when I considered how the Latin language had previously been lost among the English, and nevertheless many were able to read English, then among the various and manifold other occupations of this kingdom I undertook to translate the book called *Pastoralis* in Latin, or *Shepherd's Book* in English, into English, sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense, as I had learned it from my archbishop Plegmund and my bishop Asser and my priest Grimbold and my priest John. ”

Translations of Alfred's Circle

“Alfred”

- ▶ Augustine of Hippo: *Soliloquies*
- ▶ Boethius: *The Consolation of Philosophy*
- ▶ Gregory the Great: *Pastoral Care*
- ▶ Psalms 1–50 (prose)

Not Alfred

- ▶ Gregory the Great: *Dialogues* (Werferth)
- ▶ *Martyrology* (unknown)
- ▶ Orosius: *History Against the Pagans* (unknown)
- ▶ ? Bede: *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (unknown)
- ▶ ? Bald's *Leechbook* (unknown)

Part I: Commander in Chief

Part II: The Alfredian Renaissance

Part III: Models and Self-Presentation

Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons



Figure: Coin, 880 (public domain / WMC)



Figure: Silver penny (public domain / WMC)

From the Prologue to Alfred's Law Code

“

The Lord spoke these words to Moses and said thus: 'I am the Lord your God. I led you out of Egypt and out of its slavery. Do not love other, foreign gods before me. [...]'

These are the laws which the almighty God himself spoke to Moses and commanded him to observe. And when the only-begotten son of the Lord our God, namely Christ the saviour, came into the world, he said that he had not come to break these commandments nor to forbid them, but to supplement them with all good things; and he taught compassion and humility. Then after his passion [...] the apostles [...] sent a letter to Antioch and Syria [...]:

That which you do not want others to do to you, do not do it to others. To judge anyone justly, one need only consider this one law; they will have no need for any other books of law. [interpolation into Acts 15:29 from Mt 7:12 / Lc 6:31]

”

From the Prologue to Alfred's Law Code

“ After it happened that many nations received Christianity, many synods of holy bishops and also other excellent scholars were called throughout the world, and also among the English, after they received Christianity. In view of the compassion which Christ taught, they then established for most crimes that secular lords could with their permission and without sin collect the fine for a first offence, which they then determined. [...] They then determined the fines for many human crimes over many synods, and they wrote them down in many synodbooks, one law here and another there. ”

From the Prologue to Alfred's Law Code

“ Then I, King Alfred, gathered these together and ordered to be written down many of those which our ancestors held and pleased me; and many of those which did not please me I discarded after consulting my counsellors, and ordered them to be kept differently. I dared not presume to write down many additions of my own, because I did not know how that would please those who come after. Then I, Alfred, King of the West Saxons, showed them to all my counsellors, and they then said that it would please them to observe them all. ”

From Alfred's *Boethius*

“

When Wisdom had sung this song he was silent, and the Mind answered and said as follows: ‘Reason, truly you know that avarice and the desire for this earthly power never attracted me very much, nor did I greatly yearn for this earthly authority, except that I sought tools and material for the work that I was commanded to carry out; that was so that I could safely and fittingly steer and direct the power that was entrusted to me.

‘Truly you know that no one can show any skill, or exercise or control any power, without tools and material. The material for any skill is that without which one cannot exercise that skill. Then the material for a king and his tools for ruling are that he has his land fully manned. He must have prayer men and army men and workmen. You know that without these tools no king can show his skill. His material is also that he must have sustenance for these tools, for the three communities.

”

From Alfred's *Boethius*

“

‘This then is their sustenance: land to inhabit, and gifts, and weapons, and food, and ale, and clothes, and everything that the three communities need. He cannot keep these tools without these things, nor without these tools can he perform any of the things that he is commanded to perform.

‘I desired material in order to exercise power, so that my skills and authority should not be forgotten and hidden, since every skill and power will be immediately overtaken by age and silenced if it is without wisdom; no one can bring forth any art without wisdom, since whatever is done through folly can never be accounted a skill. To put it very briefly now, I desired to live with honor as long as I lived, and after my life to leave to those people who were after me my memorial in good deeds.’

(Trans. Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, prose 9) ”

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