INTRODUCTION

Suuithuni translationem, *Lib.I.*
De miraculis eiusdem, *Lib.I.*
Vitam Etheluuoplhi regis, *Lib.I.*
Vitam Etheluuoldi episcopi, *Lib.I.*
De tonorum harmonia, *Lib.I.*
Et alia plura.

In 1557, the English churchman John Bale, residing in Basel, published the first volume of his *Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytannię, quam nunc Angliam & Scotiam uocant: Catalogus*, a monumental inventory of Britain's authors and literature from antiquity to his time. Composed when England's monastic libraries were still within living memory, it features several familiar early medieval authors, including Gildas, Aldhelm, Bede and Asser. It also includes the late tenth-century author Wulfstan of Winchester, otherwise known as Wulfstan Cantor. Bale attributed five named works to Wulfstan, as we can see above.[1] Only one of these titles cannot be equated with a known text.[2] This is the *Vita Etheluuoplhi regis*, which, if all is as it seems, appears to be a biography of Æthelwulf, the

[1] I. Baleus, *Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytannię, quam nunc Angliam & Scotiam uocant: Catalogus* (Basel, 1557), p. 150. My attention was drawn to this reference by S. Keynes and R. Naismith, 'The *Agnus Dei* pennies of King Æthelred the Unready', *ASE*, 40 (2011), 175–223, at 183, n. 23.

[2] The first two titles collectively appear to be Wulfstan's *Narratio metrica de S. Swithuno* (*BHL* 7947; ed. and trans. M. Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 372–551), which is divided into two books. The *Vita Æthelwoldi* is *BHL* 2647 (ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, *Wulfstan of Winchester: The Life of St Æthelwold* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 2–69). *De tonorum harmonia*, although no longer extant, is another of Wulfstan's known works; for discussion, see Lapidge and Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *Wulfstan of Winchester*, pp. xvi–xvii. Bale appears to have taken the information regarding these texts from John Leland's *De uiris illustribus*, ch. 126 (ed. and trans. J. P. Carley with C. Brett, *John Leland: De uiris illustribus* (*On Famous Men*) (Toronto, 2010), pp. 268–71). Within this chapter, Leland similarly refers to 'duos libros de translatione et miraculis Diui Suuithuni', the first of which he directly quotes, confirming that he is indeed referring to Wulfstan's *Narratio*.

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ninth-century king of Wessex, a man perhaps best known as the father of his more famous son, Alfred the Great. We may hope that such a text is recovered one day; at present we can only speculate as to what it may have been. Was it a biography of this king? Was it really written by Wulfstan? Why was it composed? What were its contents? What form did it take? And what ninth-century sources, if any, did its author draw upon? Bale's catalogue entry invites comparison with William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century *Gesta regum Anglorum*, in which William alludes to a *uolumen uetustum* ('ancient volume') that had assisted him in recounting the life of Æthelwulf's great-grandson, King Æthelstan.[3] This source appears to have provided William with a great deal of information that is otherwise unattested, yet similarly, no such book or text has survived. In the case of William's mystery source, much ink has been spilt over exactly what this may have been – and again, we are unlikely to ever know for certain, unless it is rediscovered.[4]

These possible losses feel even more acute when compared with what survives from the reign of Æthelwulf's son and Æthelstan's grandfather, Alfred, which includes a contemporary Latin biography of the king, and an extraordinary body of vernacular prose, much of which is intimately associated with the king himself. This wealth of material has made Alfred and his reign a central focus for many interested in early medieval England, particularly regarding the history of English literature and the formation of 'England' as a political entity. Certainly Alfred's military and cultural triumphs were remarkable. We should, however, be mindful of overlooking other decades and contexts in our attempts to understand the historical developments of the ninth and early tenth centuries. Indeed, our views could alter considerably if either of Wulfstan's or William's sources is ever found.

The present study is focussed on one particular issue: the uses of the written word in England from the 830s to the 920s. As such, it offers a chronological arc in which the Alfredian era is not the start, but rather the centrepiece in a wider series of cultural and political developments. This framing is not simply a reaction to the received norms of how we periodise the ninth and tenth centuries of English history; rather, the chronological bounds of this study have been chosen first and foremost because of the distribution of a body of textual – primarily documentary – evidence that is often only mentioned in passing in accounts of the

[3] William of Malmesbury, *GR* ii.132 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, pp. 210–11).

[4] For an overview of the debate surrounding William's source, see S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, CT, 2011), pp. 251–58.

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period, normally as evidence for declining literacy levels. These materials do, however, have a powerful story to tell, a story of heightened interest in written testimony, textual communication and 'linguistic awareness' that begins in decades of the ninth century for which we sorely lack contemporary narrative sources. At the same time, there remain textual artefacts from the Alfredian era itself, particularly several composed in Latin, that are little studied. Considered together, we can identify continuities across these decades, whereby the written word remained a vital technology, as well as a highly valued commodity, regardless of one's personal literacy levels. These consistencies are often overlooked; yet, I argue, they played an important role in creating the conditions for the cultural achievements of Alfred's reign.

The present study has been much inspired by scholarship that has emerged in recent decades on early medieval literacies.[5] This work cumulatively has developed a nuanced understanding of activity surrounding the written word, going beyond assessments based simply on the size and grammatical qualities of textual corpora, and crude distinctions between oral and literary cultures. Gone is the characterisation of two entirely separate spheres of communication and commemoration, one oral and predominantly lay, and one literate and almost exclusively ecclesiastical. What has emerged instead is a more varied picture, thanks to a greater awareness of preservation patterns; the need to understand literary artefacts in the social, legal and institutional contexts in which they were created and used; and the principle that literacy (and even linguistic comprehension) need not form a barrier to an individual's desire or ability to engage in literary activity. It is now clear, furthermore, that multiple variables informed the nature, extent, language, literary registers, textual forms and surviving footprints of literary activity in any given setting.

The work of Rosamond McKitterick has been particularly inspiring, not least her *The Carolingians and the Written Word*.[6] She has drawn

[5] See, for example, R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990); M. Innes, 'Memory, orality and literacy in an early medieval society', *Past & Present*, 158 (1998), 3–36; M. Mostert (ed.), *New Approaches to Medieval Communication* (Turnhout, 1999); N. Everett, *Literacy in Lombard Italy, c. 568–774* (Cambridge, 2003); A. Rio, *Legal Practice and the Written Word in the Early Middle Ages: Frankish Formulae, c. 500–1000* (Cambridge, 2009); É. Anheim and P. Chastang (eds.), 'Pratiques de l'écrit', special issue of *Médiévales*, 56 (2009); E. Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge, 2013); W. Brown, M. Costambeys, M. Innes and A. Kosto (eds.), *Documentary Culture and the Laity in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013). For further reading, see M. Mostert, *A Bibliography of Works on Medieval Communication* (Turnhout, 2012); see n. 8 below too.

[6] R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989). For a recent reflection by McKitterick on her own contribution to understanding of early medieval literacies, see her

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attention to the significant role of members of the ninth-century Frankish laity in contemporary literary activity and the motivations that drove such involvement. In doing so, she has demonstrated the myriad social and cultural associations that a written artefact could carry through its content, literary form and physicality. McKitterick's work has been hugely influential on Medieval Studies; there have, however, been relatively few attempts to apply similar questions and approaches to material from early medieval England. This is undoubtedly because of the relatively small amount of evidence that is perceived to speak overtly to engagement with the written word beyond ecclesiastical centres. Arguably the most prominent study remains Susan Kelly's chapter of 1991, which provides a survey of lay literacy throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.[7] Stimulating articles and chapters by numerous scholars have since added to Kelly's work, demonstrating that earlier assessments of lay engagement with literary culture were too pessimistic, particularly regarding documentary activity and inscribing practices.[8] This work should, in turn, be placed alongside the rich seams of scholarship on reading practices and the performativity of texts that have made clear that textual artefacts were visible in a myriad of communal settings and that there were therefore multiple opportunities for participation in literary activity, regardless of one's literacy levels.[9] At present, these bodies of scholarship are rarely brought together, and yet thinking holistically and

'Charters, languages, and communication: Recent work on early medieval literacy', in *LEMC*, pp. 22–67, at 32–37.

[7] S. Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word', in McKitterick (ed.), *Uses of Literacy*, pp. 36–62.

[8] See, for example, S. Keynes, 'Royal government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England', in McKitterick (ed.), *Uses of Literacy*, pp. 226–57; T. A. Bredehoft, 'First-person inscriptions and literacy in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 9 (1996), 103–10; E. Okasha, 'Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England: The evidence from inscriptions', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 8 (1995), 69–74; K. A. Lowe, 'Lay literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and the development of the chirograph', in P. Pulsiano and E. M. Treharne (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts and Their Heritage* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 161–204; C. Cubitt, '"As the lawbook teaches": Reeves, lawbooks and urban life in the anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers', *EHR*, 124 (2009), 1021–49. For a more general overview, also see M. R. Godden, 'Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England', in *CHBB*, pp. 580–90. Much of this work, implicitly and explicitly, was responding to M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 3rd ed. (Chichester, 2013), which remains seminal for understanding literacy and documentary culture in medieval England.

[9] For reading practices, see, for instance, N. Howe, 'The cultural construction of reading in Anglo-Saxon England', in J. Boyarin (ed.), *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), pp. 58–79; D. H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature 800–1300* (Cambridge, 1994); A. Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture*, ed. and trans. C. M. Radding (New Haven, CT, 1995); *Scrivere e leggere nell'alto medioevo*, *Settimane di studio della Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo*, 59 (Spoleto, 2012). For further scholarship, see below, Chapter 1, n. 78.

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expansively about writing in its manifold forms, and about the varied ways of engaging with it, has the potential to enrich our understanding of literary culture significantly, not least for the ninth century.

I am also interested in understanding literary activity within political and institutional frameworks, potentially as both a result of and an active agent within contemporary political developments within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Here it must be stressed that the geographic and chronological distribution of textual artefacts from the ninth and early tenth centuries is extremely uneven, with the vast majority of surviving examples emanating from southern and western localities. Literary artefacts from East Anglia before the second half of the tenth century are almost exclusively inscribed objects, while Northumbria is served very poorly too – remarkably so when compared with the riches of the seventh and eighth centuries. The focus of the present study – and the story that it tells – is therefore one of the Southumbrian kingdoms of Kent, Mercia and Wessex. Within such a political context, Alfred's reign is the overwhelmingly dominant focus of existing scholarship. He continues to be framed as a leader who was exceptional – perhaps even unique in early medieval England – in appreciating the power of the written word as a means of enhancing his royal authority and fostering a sense of loyalty among his subjects.[10] By promoting textual culture, furthermore, he has been seen by some as laying the legal, administrative and educational foundations for the sophisticated operation of royal government that made the kingdom of his successors such a success.[11] There are two distinct dimensions, therefore, to this relationship between political achievement and writing: the uses of the written word as a vehicle for political discourse, and its practical use within the everyday administrative and legal reach of royal power – though in actuality, of course, single textual artefacts could function in both ways. This distinction, in turn, reminds us that textual artefacts could invite engagement in diverse ways, reflecting the potentially varied motivations that their patrons and creators had for investing in the written word.

The extent of Alfredian textual production has been recently brought into question, yet it remains undeniable that fervent literary activity took place in the later years of Alfred's reign, including the translation of (at

[10] For an overview of this scholarship, see below, Chapter 4.

[11] Keynes, 'Royal government'; S. Keynes, 'Alfred the Great and the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons', in N. G. Discenza and P. E. Szarmach (eds.), *A Companion to Alfred the Great* (Leiden, 2015), pp. 13–46, at 40–43; Cubitt, '"As the lawbook teaches"'. For further comment on the importance of literacy to the kingdom in the tenth and eleventh centuries, see J. Campbell, 'Observations on English government from the tenth to the twelfth century' (1975), repr. in and cited from his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 155–70, at 158.

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least some) earlier Latin texts into Old English; the development of a new script, English Square Minuscule; the sparking of a vernacular chronicle tradition; and the renewed production of royal law-codes.[12] Assessing just how overtly political the driving force was for any one of these activities requires careful scrutiny of each on its own terms. Some of these artefacts have inspired much scholarship. The focus of the present study, however, seeks to go beyond the most heavily studied and celebrated Alfredian material, to provide new perspectives and broader geographic and chronological horizons. Thus, I ask: Within ninth and early tenth-century England, just how unusual was Alfredian appreciation of the written word? How radical would it have seemed to contemporaries both within Wessex and further afield?

In considering these questions, I look to Alfred's reign itself, but also to those decades marked by the reigns of his immediate predecessors and successors. In terms of the latter, I venture into the first two decades of the tenth century, which politically were dominated by Alfred's son and daughter, Edward and Æthelflæd. Including these years in our line of sight encourages us to consider the possibility of an Alfredian legacy. Practically speaking, this also allows us to consider a broader range of pertinent evidence. The documentary corpus of the first decade of the tenth century on the whole offers more opportunities for exploring contemporary engagement with the written word than that of the last decade of the ninth century, while the evidence for use of manuscripts cannot often be dated more specifically than to two decades or so, and thus it is impossible to state whether we are dealing with a late ninth or early tenth-century context.

Equally pressing for the present study is what came before Alfred. This is an area of research that has received even less attention. Ninth-century literary activity before Alfred is often characterised simply in terms of decline; particularly influential in this regard is Michael Lapidge's assessment of contemporary Latin literacy.[13] Yet exceptions do exist. For instance, Jennifer Morrish, to whom Lapidge was in part responding, has taken a more positive approach, pointing towards evidence for continued literary production in certain forms and regions;[14] Michelle Brown and Mildred Budny have shone light on book production in the

[12] For a summary of these debates, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 194–96.

[13] M. Lapidge, 'Latin learning in ninth-century England', in *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 409–54.

[14] J. Morrish, 'King Alfred's letter as a source on learning in England', in P. E. Szarmach (ed.), *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose: Sixteen Original Contributions* (New York, 1986), pp. 87–107.

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first half of the ninth century, particularly in Canterbury and Mercia;[15] Janet Bailey and Christine Rauer have drawn attention to the corpus of Old English literature composed before the time of Alfred.[16] In terms of literary activity with overt political connections, meanwhile, Nicholas Brooks, Simon Keynes, J. L. Nelson and Ben Snook have provided important insights into mid-ninth-century charter production in Kent, Wessex and Mercia respectively.[17] These individual studies, however, are rarely brought into dialogue, and much of the evidence that underpins them is ripe for reassessment. The present study seeks to do both.

Given the intense interest in King Alfred's patronage of literary culture, it is unsurprising that one of the most important settings that scholars have invoked for ninth-century West Saxon cultural developments is that of the royal household, or the royal court. The scholarship of David Pratt is especially important here, principally his monograph of 2007, in which he sought to understand the corpus of vernacular literature potentially composed by King Alfred as a product of a single mind, and as a product of the specific political and cultural conditions of Alfred's reign.[18] It is Pratt's work in the latter regard that is most pertinent to the present study, since he pointed to both sources of influence and the political infrastructures that informed textual production. Pratt emphasised the newness of Alfredian literary activity, including the personal dominance of the king within it and, in turn, the centrality of textual production to West Saxon expressions of royal authority and ideals.[19] He also stressed that the intimate relationship between Alfred and literary culture was made possible thanks to an inherited West Saxon political structure in which power was highly concentrated with the king, to whom ealdormen, representing shires, reported regularly and directly.[20] The present study builds on Pratt's work, though

[15] M. P. Brown, *The Book of Cerne: Prayer, Patronage and Power in Ninth-Century England* (London, 1996); M. O. Budny, 'British Library manuscript Royal 1 E. VI: The anatomy of an Anglo-Saxon Bible fragment', PhD thesis, University of London (1984).

[16] J. M. Bately, 'Old English prose before and during the reign of Alfred', *ASE*, 17 (1988), 93–138; C. Rauer, 'The earliest English prose', *JMH*, 47 (2021), 485–96.

[17] *EHCC*; S. Keynes, 'The West Saxon charters of King Æthelwulf and his sons', *EHR*, 109 (1994), 1109–49; S. Keynes, 'The power of the written word: Alfredian England 871–899', in T. Reuter (ed.), *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Century Conferences* (London, 2003), pp. 175–97, at 185–88; J. L. Nelson, 'England and the continent in the ninth century: III: Rights and rituals', *TRHS*, ser. 6, 14 (2004), 1–24; B. Snook, 'When Aldhelm met the vikings: Advanced Latinity in ninth-century Mercian charters', *Mediaevistik*, 26 (2013), 111–48; B. Snook, *The Anglo-Saxon Chancery: The History, Language and Production of Anglo-Saxon Charters from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 2015), pp. 31–36.

[18] D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007).

[19] Ibid., p. 179.

[20] Ibid., pp. 28–43 and 338. For an overview of the West Saxon shiring system, see S. Keynes, 'Shire', in *WBEASE*, pp. 434–35; see also G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 165–72.

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my approach differs, since my primary focus is less on the intellectual ideas of Alfredian texts and more on the commodity of the written word itself. This difference allows for more diverse perspectives, taking us to different locales, with a greater emphasis on the physicality of the written word in social settings. Importantly, this shift also allows us more readily to appreciate continuities with earlier decades of the ninth century; this should, as a result, nuance our view of Alfredian novelty.

It remains the case that the environs of West Saxon kings are crucial for the present study – as a context in itself, as a point of comparison with other institutions and settings, and as a node within a wider network of contacts and influences. It is important to clarify, then: What exactly do we mean by the royal household? On a most basic level, any one king would have been surrounded by a group of individuals who were integral to his day-to-day life; these will have included members of his family and individuals involved in the organisation of accommodation, food supplies and the overall planning of his work and domestic arrangements.[21] It is also likely that rulers would have been accompanied by members of the Church, who could provide spiritual guidance and liturgical services. While these basic points are likely to have applied to most, if not all, early medieval Christian rulers, there was no doubt variation in the size and organisation of such set-ups.

Direct evidence for the reigns of many kings in these regards is minimal. For instance, beyond churches, the physical buildings occupied by Anglo-Saxon royalty are mostly lost to us.[22] We are unable, therefore, to gauge the size of physical spaces and how such spaces were laid out, what levels of access and segregation took place within them, and how much the same spaces were used for a range of activities.[23] As to literary depictions, one exceptional piece of evidence is Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, in which Asser tells us of his close personal interactions with Alfred, as well as the organisation of the royal household. We will return to this account frequently, but for almost all other Anglo-Saxon kings, we have

[21] For the individuals involved in such organisation, see A. Gautier, 'Butlers and dish-bearers in Anglo-Saxon courts: Household officers at the royal table', *Historical Research*, 90 (2017), 269–95. For further comment on the organisation of the king's itinerancy, see L. Roach, 'Hosting the king: Hospitality and the royal *iter* in tenth-century England', *JMH*, 37 (2011), 34–46, at 40–41. For courts more generally, also see J. Campbell, 'Anglo-Saxon courts', in C. Cubitt (ed.), *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference* (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 155–69; Foot, *Æthelstan*, ch. 3.

[22] A tenth-century exception is the royal residence at Cheddar, Somerset. For a succinct summary of the evidence for the ninth and tenth centuries, see J. Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton, NJ, 2018), pp. 108–11, 285–88 and 362–72.

[23] For exploration of these themes in relation to manor sites, see K. Weikert, *Authority, Gender and Space in the Anglo-Norman World, 900–1200* (Woodbridge, 2020).

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no such insights. Literary depictions of royal sociability and social spaces, furthermore, often need to be read with caution, as it is clear that these themes – particularly the concept of the great hall – were evocative, fruitful subjects for metaphor.[24]

The clearest evidence for the social worlds of most rulers instead comes from charters, both in the clauses that tell us about the geographic locations of meetings and in the lists of individuals who acted as witnesses to the agreements encoded by the documents. What is most evident from such texts is that ninth-century kings – in Kent, Mercia and Wessex (i.e., the kingdoms for which we have charters) – had itinerant schedules. These charter witness-lists also make clear how varyingly important the assembling of churchmen and male nobility was to the operation of royal authority, most of whom are unlikely to have travelled with the king's entourage on a permanent basis. Rather, they would have gathered on multiple occasions throughout the year for meetings customarily referred to in modern scholarship as royal assemblies. It is at these meetings that the royal household is likely to have been most prominent as a locus for cultural developments and the exchange of ideas; and indeed, it is likely that these gatherings would have been when and where the royal environs most conspicuously captured any sense of what we might call a 'court culture'.[25] Recent work has outlined the overriding qualities of such meetings: that they often took place at liturgically significant points in the year, and that they would have been held over a number of days, during which a range of activities – both formal and informal – would have taken place; laws were issued, land conveyed, officials appointed, feasts enjoyed, and only some of these activities would have yielded documentation.[26] Much of the strongest evidence is from tenth-century Wessex, yet in these fundamental ways we can expect a degree of continuity with the ninth-century practices of Mercian and West Saxon rulers. In all cases, royal social environments – and indeed, the royal household – need to be understood as dynamic, itinerant venues,

[24] For the use of the 'mead-hall' as a literary construct, see S. Pollington, 'The Mead-Hall Community', *JMH*, 37 (2011), 19–33.

[25] For the notion of 'court culture' in relation to Alfred's reign, see Pratt, *Political Thought*, pp. 9–14; D. Pratt, 'Kings and books in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE*, 43 (2014), 297–377, at 306–7; also see R. Gallagher, 'Latin acrostic poetry in Anglo-Saxon England: Reassessing the contribution of John the Old Saxon', *Medium Ævum*, 86 (2017), 249–74, at 264.

[26] L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013); S. Keynes, 'Church councils, royal assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas', in G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider (eds.), *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 17–182, at 35.

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and as much a network of encounters and relationships as a fixed cohort of individuals.[27]

A further dimension to this literary activity to acknowledge is its multilingual nature, both in the languages in which texts were written and in the communications and exchanges that enabled their creation. Multilingualism and language choice have been subjects of rich and highly productive discussions in Classics and Medieval Studies in recent years, often in conjunction with the topics of literacy and uses of the written word.[28] Many have successfully demonstrated the potential sociolinguistic significances of language choice, that languages can be used as signifiers of identity and status, and that they can form both barriers and bridges in access to knowledge and power. More specifically, several studies have problematised the relationship between Latin and vernacular languages, demonstrating that no single, 'diglossic' relationship should be assumed. In the early medieval West, the relationship between Latin and vernaculars is arguably at its most complex in Romance-speaking regions, for which scholars grapple with issues of definition and differentiation between the localised, seemingly digressive vernaculars and Latin, the cosmopolitan, normative language out of which the former had developed.[29] The development of the Carolingian Empire adds political immediacy to this context, as a realm that encompassed both Romance- and Germanic-speaking groups and in which a standardised Latin was sought for writing (in part at least) to transcend such linguistic divisions.[30]

[27] For a list of the recorded sites of royal assemblies (dubbed 'meetings of the *witan*'), see Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, appendix; see also Keynes, 'Church councils', appendix I.

[28] See, for example, D. A. Trotter (ed.), *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2000); E. M. Tyler (ed.), *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in Medieval England, c. 800–c. 1250* (Turnhout, 2011); C. Kleinhenz and K. Busby (eds.), *Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and Its Neighbours* (Turnhout, 2011); A. Mullen and P. James (eds.), *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, 2012); *LEMC*; L. Brady, *Multilingualism in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2023). For the relationship between Latin and vernacular languages, see especially M. Richter, *Studies in Medieval Language and Culture* (Dublin, 1995); J. N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge, 2003); M. Garrison, A. P. Orbán and M. Mostert (eds.), with the assistance of W. S. van Egmond, *Spoken and Written Language: Relations between Latin and the Vernacular Languages in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnout, 2013).

[29] M. Banniard, *Viva voce: communication écrite et communication orale du IVe au IXe siècle en Occident latin* (Paris, 1992); R. Wright, *A Sociophilological Study of Late Latin* (Turnhout, 2002).

[30] See, for example, McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*, pp. 7–22; R. McKitterick, 'Latin and Romance: An historian's perspective', in R. Wright (ed.), *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1991), pp. 130–45; M. de Jong, 'Some reflections on Mandarin language', in E. Chrysos and I. Wood (eds.), *East and West: Modes of Communication: Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 61–69; F. Tinti, 'Latin and Germanic vernaculars in early medieval documentary cultures: Towards a multidisciplinary comparative approach', in *LEMC*, pp. 1–21, at 7–9.

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The linguistic situation in early medieval England is seemingly more straightforward. The vast majority of inhabitants spoke varying dialects of the same Germanic vernacular, Old English, while Celtic languages appear to have had little impact on the vocabulary or structure of the Anglo-Saxon vernacular (especially when compared with the considerable amounts of Old Norse vocabulary that would eventually be absorbed into English). For the period under consideration here, the issue of language choice in textual production is relatively unambiguous. It is a matter of two very distinct languages: on the one hand, a Germanic vernacular, and on the other, Latin, a language that for most people had to be learnt and was primarily, as far as we can tell, a language of the written word.[31] What makes this situation remarkable, however, is the extent to which Old English–speakers used their own language for writing not only in runes,[32] but also from the early seventh century, and with increasing ambition in the ninth century, through the adoption of the Roman alphabet. As such, the linguistic dynamics of Anglo-Saxon literary culture have been the subject of considerable interest, much of which has focussed on the mechanics of language acquisition, the relationship with orality, and the respective cultural and political values of Latin and Old English.[33] Within the present study, I am less concerned with how, beyond the institutional implications, an individual obtained the ability to read or write Latin as I am with this last issue, namely, the meanings with which contemporaries in the ninth and early tenth

[31] This does not exclude either the oral performance of written Latin, which I consider on several occasions. For comment on the use of Latin as a lingua franca, see below, Chapter 1, pp. 51 and 54–55.

[32] For a summary, see M. Findell and L. Kopár, 'Runes and commemoration in Anglo-Saxon England', *Fragments: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Ancient and Medieval Pasts*, 6 (2017), 110–37, at 112–14.

[33] See, for instance, S. Gwara, 'Second language acquisition and Anglo-Saxon bilingualism: Negative transfer and avoidance in Ælfric Bata's Latin *Colloquia*, ca. A.D. 1000', *Viator*, 29 (1998), 1–24; H. Gneuss, 'The study of language in Anglo-Saxon England', in D. Scragg (ed.), *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Thomas Northcote Toller and the Toller Memorial Lectures* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 75–105; J. Hill, 'Learning Latin in Anglo-Saxon England: Traditions, texts and techniques', in S. R. Jones (ed.), *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad* (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 7–29; A. Orchard, 'Latin and the vernacular languages: The creation of a bilingual textual culture', in T. Charles-Edwards (ed.), *After Rome* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 191–219; O. Timofeeva, 'Anglo-Latin bilingualism before 1066: Prospects and limitations', in A. Hall, O. Timofeeva, Á. Kiricsi and B. Fox (eds.), *Interfaces between Language and Culture in Medieval England: A Festschrift for Matti Kilpiö* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 1–36; E. M. Treharne, 'The authority of English, 900–1150', in *CHEMEL*, pp. 554–78; R. Stephenson, *The Politics of Language: Byrhtferth, Ælfric, and the Multilingual Identity of the Benedictine Reform* (Toronto, 2015); E. Butler, *Language and Community in Early England: Imaging Distance in Medieval Literature* (London, 2017); E. M. Tyler, *England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c. 1000–c. 1150* (Toronto, 2017); R. Gallagher and F. Tinti, 'Latin, Old English and documentary practice at Worcester from Wærferth to Oswald', *ASE*, 46 (2019 for 2017), 271–325.

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centuries instilled the two languages.[34] This is a topic of particular urgency in relation to the late ninth century, since numerous scholars have interpreted the use of the vernacular in Alfredian contexts in political and ideological terms.[35] Yet as we shall see, there is a broader bilingual context that needs to be acknowledged.

A final point to note is that in seeking to understand language choice, as well as literary culture more generally, I invoke the notion of 'capital' on numerous occasions throughout this study. This is a term that derives from economic modelling, yet social theorists, most notably Pierre Bourdieu, have demonstrated its value as a means of understanding non-monetary systems of exchange. My interpretative approach is to a large extent based on a view of society as a network of individuals with individual relationships and interactions, which are fuelled by transactions of various kinds. Within this framework, the concept of 'capital' is particularly pertinent for understanding the societal values and motivations for engagement with the written word, not least because it reminds us of the investment that literary activity demanded in terms of raw materials, infrastructure and training. It is a concept, furthermore, that ninth-century people may well have appreciated, given the numerous analogies and comparisons in Alfredian literature to wealth generated from both earthly riches and wisdom.[36]

I am by no means the first scholar to bring this theoretical discourse to ninth-century cultural developments. Pratt has argued that intensified contacts between West Saxon and Frankish royalty in the mid-ninth century generated 'cultural capital' for King Æthelwulf, thanks to the access that he had to Carolingian artefacts and practices.[37] Pratt also speaks of a distinctive 'Alfredian capital', which was consciously cosmopolitan, learned, textual and invested in the pursuit of knowledge.[38] The fullest exploration of Alfredian literature within a Bourdieu-inspired framework, however, has been undertaken by Nicole Guenther Discenza, who has demonstrated its applicability for understanding the

[34] For how individuals may have learnt Latin in Alfred's realm, see M. Atherton, 'King Alfred's approach to the study of Latin', in D. Cram, A. Linn and E. Nowak (eds.), *History of Linguistics 1996: Selected Papers from the Seventh International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (ICHOLS VII), Oxford, 12–17 September. Volume 2: From Classical to Contemporary Linguistics* (Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 15–22. For writing, see R. Gallagher, 'Writing Latin in the age of Alfred', in A. Faulkner and F. Leneghan (eds.), *The Age of Alfred: Rethinking English Literary Culture c. 850–950* (Turnhout, 2024), pp. 73–102.

[35] See below, Chapter 4, pp. 202–3.

[36] N. G. Discenza, 'Wealth and wisdom: Symbolic capital and the ruler in the translational program of Alfred the Great', *Exemplaria*, 13 (2001), 433–67; A. Faulkner, *Wealth and the Material World in the Old English Alfredian Corpus* (Woodbridge, 2023).

[37] Pratt, *Political Thought*, pp. 40–41. [38] Ibid., pp. 41 and 63.

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significance of the aforementioned connection between wealth and wisdom.[39] As to Bourdieu himself, he has labelled non-economic capital in general as 'symbolic capital', an umbrella under which subtypes with particular characteristics include cultural, linguistic, scientific and social capital. For Bourdieu 'symbolic capital' is not merely a synonym for 'social status', but a part of more complex modelling of socialisation and exchange. 'Cultural capital' is not simply the value derived for an individual from association with what might be considered a cultural activity or artefact; rather, it is a currency that one acquires over time through cumulative application of oneself to a skill, canon, practice or tradition above the level held by most individuals.[40] In what follows, I most often speak of 'capital' without specifying a single non-economic subtype of currency, since it is often the case that a given object or action can carry multiple forms of 'symbolic capital' at once: the production of a royal diploma, for example, can generate cultural capital for its maker, while the textual artefact itself also bears overt political capital for its donor and recipient. There were, in other words, diverse riches to be exploited through both access to and application of textual resources, all of which, above all, reflects the fundamental sociability of literary activity.

Ultimately what will arise from the present study is a more varied picture than is often presented of ninth-century English cultural developments and the social worlds in which they took place. I will emphasise that literary activity was often dependent, though not always directly so, on international networks of exchange; the Frankish influence at Alfred's court is an example of a broader phenomenon. I also explore how much we do not know, how much has been lost, and the uncertainty that surrounds the social and physical contexts in which the written word was encountered by individuals. I do not emphasise such uncertainties to be nihilistic; rather, I wish to encourage us to be open-minded about possibilities. And, perhaps most crucially, I do not seek to upturn the impression that Latin literacy levels in many mid- and late ninth-century English contexts were low – the charter evidence makes it clear that this was the case. Instead, I wish to emphasise that written communication nonetheless remained vital, and that the mid-ninth century was a period of innovation and experimentation in textual culture, particularly in the sphere of documentary activity. The written word was highly prized as a

[39] Discenza, 'Wealth'; N. G. Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English* Boethius (Albany, NY, 2005).

[40] For Bourdieu's notion of 'capital', see R. Moore, 'Capital', in M. Grenfell (ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Durham, NC, 2008), pp. 101–17.

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commodity by members of both lay and ecclesiastical communities, especially in its potential to reaffirm and elevate one's social standing. Indeed, much of its value for individuals, particularly when in Latin, lay in public, performative encounters – a value that only increased as access to the resources necessary for textual production decreased. The effect of such a mentality was a heightened objectification of the written word. Importantly, I argue that this mentality persisted into the late ninth and early tenth centuries, and it played a significant role in informing the attitudes towards literary culture, and the modes in which people engaged with the written word.

This will all be done in a two-part structure. Part I comprises three chapters in which I examine the evidence for engagement with the written word in the decades marked for the kingdom of Wessex by the succession of King Æthelwulf (r. 839–58) to that of his son Alfred (r. 871–99). The majority of this evidence comes in the form of charters, and this is reflected in the division of the three chapters: Chapter 2 examines royal charters; Chapter 3 explores non-royal charters; while Chapter 1 provides a survey of the non-charter evidence. In Part II, I move to Alfred's reign and the immediate post-Alfredian period, marked by the reigns of Edward (r. 899–924), Æthelred (r. c. 880–911) and Æthelflæd (r. 911–18). The second part is similarly formed of three chapters, though the division of material differs, reflecting a shift in focus towards lesser-studied artefacts within a context that has already attracted significant amounts of scholarly attention. Chapter 4 sets the scene by providing an overview of textual activity during the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Chapter 5 considers the evidence of extant manuscripts for the nature of contemporary book culture; while Chapter 6 returns to charters, which are considered alongside Latin verse as a means of thinking particularly about the performance of Latin texts.

Before turning to Part I, a final acknowledgement that I wish to make is that the holistic approach to textual culture within the present study is only possible thanks to the scholarly endeavours of others who have gone before me. Within this introduction I have drawn attention to scholarship that has been particularly important to the intellectual development of this study, while other influences are plain to see within citations. Here, however, I wish to acknowledge three resources in particular that have transformed how we can approach the textual corpus of early medieval England. First, the analysis of Anglo-Saxon charters has been revolutionised by the catalogue compiled by Peter Sawyer.[41] Second,

[41] P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), rev. as *The Electronic Sawyer*, by S. Kelly, R. Rushforth et al., https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk.

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there is the ongoing British Academy publication series of Anglo-Saxon charters, which provides new critical editions and commentary on each document. The majority of the British Academy editions are the work of Susan Kelly, to whom scholars of early medieval England owe a mighty debt. Of the British Academy editions, the most significant for ninth-century history is that of Christ Church, Canterbury, published in 2013, which Kelly co-edited with Nicholas Brooks;[42] this drew on the magisterial work that Brooks had undertaken over some forty years on the early medieval ecclesiastical history of Canterbury.[43] Third and finally, there is the catalogue of manuscripts with early medieval English provenances, compiled by Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge and published in 2014.[44] Each of these has significantly enhanced my understanding of the material examined within this study. Their impact on my work is a testament to the fact that intellectual endeavour today is as much a collaboration as literary culture was in the ninth and tenth centuries.

[42] *CantCC.* [43] *EHCC.* [44] *Handlist.*

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