

# *The Priests of the King's Reliquary in Anglo-Saxon England*

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*That the priests of the Anglo-Saxon royal household functioned as a primitive chancery is a popular and reasonable hypothesis, corroborated both by contemporary continental practice and by the overlap between chancery and chapel evident from the twelfth century to the fourteenth. Evidence for an Anglo-Saxon chancellorship as such, however, remains frustratingly elusive. This paper argues for the existence of a special tier of priests entrusted with the king's reliquary and archive. It examines their role in the royal household, resolving conflicts in the evidence, to argue that the later office of chancellor evolved from their office.*

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The office of Lord High Chancellor is one of the oldest and most august in British government and may be the oldest office of cabinet rank anywhere in the world. Precisely how old it is, however, is a question which, though often asked, has never been satisfactorily answered.<sup>1</sup> It certainly existed shortly after the Norman Conquest, with Herfast usually being given as the earliest recorded holder of the

CCSL = Corpus Christianorum series latina; *EETS* = *Early English Text Society*; MGH = *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*; SS = *Schriften*; *PL* = *Migne, Patrologia Latina*

<sup>1</sup> Attempts include W. H. Stevenson, 'An Old-English charter of William the Conqueror in favour of St Martin's-le-Grand, London, A. D. 1068', *EHR* xi (1896), 731–44, esp. pp. 731–5; *Regesta regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066–1154*, i, ed. H. W. C. Davis and R. J. Whitwell, 1st edn, Oxford 1913, pp. xi–xv; T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the administrative history of England*, Manchester 1920–33, i. 121–39, esp. pp. 127–31; N. Underhill, *The lord chancellor*, Lavenham 1978, 1–7; H. R. Loyn, *The governance of Anglo-Saxon England, 500–1087*, London 1984, 106–18; S. D. Keynes, 'Regenbald the chancellor (*sic*)', *Anglo-Norman Studies* x (1987), 185–222; and *Regesta regum Anglo-Normannorum: the acta of William I (1066–1087)*, ed. D. Bates, Oxford 1998, 96–8, 107–9. The whole of S. D. Keynes, *The diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978–1016*, Cambridge 1980, is a vindication of the Anglo-Saxon chancery, with a glance at an Anglo-Saxon chancellor at pp. 149–51.

office,<sup>2</sup> but at this point historians of the chancery hit a problem. So suddenly and so completely does the chancellorship appear that it is hard to believe that it had had no prior existence. It is unlikely that William the Conqueror simply imported the office. Norman charters were always written by monastic scribes hired by the beneficiary<sup>3</sup> and there had been before the Conquest only a brief, fleeting experiment with a Norman chancery.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that William was inspired by the French chancery tradition but after 1066 Norman diplomatic practice actually imitated the English,<sup>5</sup> making it likelier that the roots of the English chancellor lie in England.

The Anglo-Saxon heritage of the chancellorship initially seems promising. The Anglo-Saxon kings had a seal and a richly developed and complex system of writs and charters,<sup>6</sup> which the Anglo-Norman kings inherited without (initially) changing it.<sup>7</sup> The point was made most pithily by W. H. Stevenson, who said of the Anglo-Saxon chancery that ‘if

<sup>2</sup> E. B. Fryde, D. E. Greenway, S. Porter and I. Roy (eds), *Handbook of British chronology*, 3rd edn, London 1986, 83.

<sup>3</sup> D. Bates, *Normandy before 1066*, London 1982, 154. This does not necessarily preclude a Norman chancery, since a chancellor’s function might simply be to authenticate a document, rather than to organise its production himself, but there is no evidence for this procedure in Normandy either: H. W. Klewitz, ‘*Cancellaria*: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des geistlichen Hofdienstes’, *Deutsches Archiv* i (1937), 42–79 at p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> V. H. Galbraith, *Studies in the public records*, London 1948, 38; C. H. Haskins, *Norman institutions*, Cambridge, MA 1918, 52–4. In Duke Richard II’s reign (996–1026), there are several references to a chancellor and four charters of 1025, each for a different beneficiary, have a common style and form: *Recueil des actes des ducs de Normandie de 911 à 1066*, ed. M. Fauroux, Caen 1961, nos 7, 13, 18, 34. This, however, proved to be a false start: Bates, *Normandy before 1066*, 155.

<sup>5</sup> Bates, *Normandy before 1066*, 248.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Sharpe distinguishes between writs (that is, ordinary letters) and ‘writ-charters’, that is ‘a writ addressed by the king to the officers and suitors of the shire court ... granting or confirming tenure of land or of rights’: ‘The use of writs in the eleventh century’, *Anglo-Saxon England* xxxii (2003), 247–91 at p. 250. Most historians do not make this distinction but simply use the word ‘writ’ for both kinds: R. Sharpe, ‘Address and delivery in Anglo-Norman royal charters’, in M. T. Flanagan and J. A. Green (eds), *Charters and charter scholarship in Britain and Ireland*, Basingstoke 2005, 32–52 at p. 32. That kings had long been using sealed writs to convey announcements or instructions is hinted by a comment in King Alfred’s version of Augustine’s *Soliloquies*, where Reason asks Augustine whether, having received his lord’s ‘ærendgewrit and his insygel’ (business-letter and seal), he could not perceive his will therein: *King Alfred’s version of St Augustine’s ‘Soliloquies’*, ed. T. A. Carnicelli, Cambridge, MA 1969, 62. See also Keynes, *Diplomas*, 136.

<sup>7</sup> The seal was altered only slightly. Edward the Confessor’s seal had depicted the king enthroned on both sides. William replaced one side with the equestrian image which would become the customary reverse: *Anglo-Saxon writs*, ed. F. E. Harmer, Manchester 1952, 94, 100. The language of writs continued to be English until around 1070: Bates, *Regesta regum*, 50.

they had not the name, they must have had the thing. It is only by the supposition of the existence of a trained and organised body of royal clerks corresponding to the chancery of the continent that we can account for the highly technical way in which an Old-English royal charter is drawn up.<sup>8</sup>

None the less, historians hesitate to attribute a 'chancery' to the Anglo-Saxons and, even more so, a 'chancellor', as (the writs and charters themselves aside) there simply is not enough material to reconstruct such a department. No undisputed Anglo-Saxon charter names a chancellor, or even alludes to one. There is billowing smoke but the fire itself is frustratingly elusive.

### *The chancellor and the chapel*

Part of the problem is that it is easy to be distracted by what the chancellor became. The chancellor has been reinvented many times through the millennium of his existence. He has played by turns at being a judge, a speaker, a viceroy and, most recently, a minister of justice and this shifting kaleidoscope of functions has made it difficult to fix on how he originally started. Even when one sheds all thoughts of breeches and wigs and concentrates solely on the Anglo-Norman chancellor, it is still easy to be misled by his sole surviving function from that time (custody of the seal) into thinking that that was the only function that he performed. That is quite untrue. In contrast to its later judicial and modern ministerial characterisation, the earliest form of the chancellorship was as an overwhelmingly ecclesiastical office, to which responsibility for the chancery and its attendant duties, for all their later importance, were merely accretions. It was not until 1340 that a layman was appointed chancellor.<sup>9</sup> The tendency to make anachronistic assumptions about what sort of office an Anglo-Saxon chancellorship would have been must be unconditionally and immediately abandoned if the search for one is to have any success. So, what sort of office would it have been?

In ancient Rome, a *cancellarius* was originally 'the beadle at the bar [*cancelli*] which separates the court from the public'<sup>10</sup> but, by the time that the term appeared in Merovingian France, *Ripuarria* and *Alemannia*, it had come to mean a scribe.<sup>11</sup> In the reign of Louis the Pious (814–40) the title 'summus cancellarius' appeared for an official who oversaw the

<sup>8</sup> Stevenson, 'Old-English charter', 731.

<sup>9</sup> A succession of lay chancellors between 1340 and 1345 broke the clerical monopoly on the office: B. Wilkinson, *The chancery under Edward III*, Manchester 1929, 113–17.

<sup>10</sup> *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus*, ed. J. F. Niermeyer and C. van de Kieft, Leiden 2002, i. 165.

<sup>11</sup> Klewitz, 'Cancellaria', 51.

scribes' work and approved the final copy of each document.<sup>12</sup> He worked with an *archicapellanus*,<sup>13</sup> who appears to have had disciplinary authority over the scribes, who, as clerics of the royal household, would naturally have been under his charge, though precisely how the overlapping jurisdictions of the archchaplain and archchancellor were managed is unclear.<sup>14</sup>

When the empire split in 843, the chancery split too.<sup>15</sup> In France, the title 'archicapellanus' fell out of favour in the late ninth century and the title 'cancellarius' (rarely 'archicancellarius') became attached to the bishop who was appointed head of the household clergy, in whose name documents were written.<sup>16</sup> In Italy too an archchancellor approved documents, while his scribes were referred to as *notarii*, *cancellarii* or *capellani* interchangeably.<sup>17</sup> In Sicily the chancellorship was also combined with the headship of the chapel royal<sup>18</sup> and in Spain the terms 'capellania' and 'cancellaria' were being used synonymously even into the twelfth century.<sup>19</sup>

In Germany, the archchaplain assumed the functions of the archchancellor<sup>20</sup> and 'capella' is used in contexts where one might have expected 'cancellaria'.<sup>21</sup> Only in Otto I's reign (936–73) did 'cancellarius' re-emerge as the title for the leading scribe, who verified documents on the archchaplain's behalf.<sup>22</sup> Even then, the chancellor was still indifferently referred to as a 'capellanus'<sup>23</sup> and even into the twelfth century it was still the emperor's itinerant chapel that produced the scribes.<sup>24</sup>

The continental analogue must not be pushed too far. If English kings ever dallied with an archchancellor or archchaplain, they left no record of it and, whereas such senior ecclesiastics as abbots or bishops had held honorary positions of superintendence in the French and German chapels royal (and *ipso facto* chanceries) since the ninth century,<sup>25</sup> this appears not to have been the practice in England until well into the chancellorship's established history<sup>26</sup> and these bishop-chancellors' authority

<sup>12</sup> On this office and its functions see *Hincmarus de ordine palatii*, ch. 16, in *Legum sectio II: capitularia regum Francorum*, ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, MGH, Hanover 1883–97, ii. 518–30 at p. 523; and comments in Klewitz, 'Cancellaria', 53.

<sup>13</sup> Klewitz, 'Cancellaria', 54.

<sup>14</sup> R. McKitterick, *The Frankish kingdoms under the Carolingians, 751–987*, London 1983, 84. <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 80. <sup>16</sup> Klewitz, 'Cancellaria', 66. <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 68. <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 73. <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 54–5. <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 57–8. <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 58. <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 59.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 64–5.

<sup>25</sup> By the eleventh century, the archbishop of Mainz was *ex officio* archchancellor of Germany and the equivalent position in France was held (inconsistently) by the archbishop of Rheims: *ibid.* 67. The archchancellor in Italy too was, from the tenth century, always a bishop, though the office was not attached to a particular see: *ibid.* 67–8.

<sup>26</sup> Regenbald, allegedly chancellor to Edward the Confessor and Harold II, around whom a certain amount of consensus has gathered, was granted the status in law of a diocesan bishop but remained in priest's orders: Keynes, 'Regenbald'; P. H. Sawyer,

over the chancery was not titular. William Longchamp and Hubert Walter, successive bishop-chancellors, were responsible for real innovations in the chancery's administration.<sup>27</sup>

The continental evidence none the less demonstrates the fallacy of looking for a chancery first and a chancellor second. On the contrary, it was the chancery that was named after the chancellor. Thomas Becket's biographer William fitz Stephen used the term 'cancellaria' not for the office of chancery but for the office of chancellor.<sup>28</sup> Even in continental Europe the chancery as a distinct department crystallised long after its functions had become a certain official's routine duty. The *cancellaria* as a concept distinct from the *cancellarius* is a development of the second half of the twelfth century,<sup>29</sup> coinciding with the appointment in England of bishop-chancellors to run it. The official came first and his department subsequently assumed a name of its own derived from his title. The word, to adapt Tout's phrase, most definitely followed the thing.

Instead, the department with which the earliest generation of continental chancellors were associated was the chapel. This is unsurprising, since the body of priests attendant on the king would have been the natural group to whom he would turn for scribal purposes. As government became increasingly literate, the priests' secretarial function would have developed from occasional moonlighting into a regular duty. From such *a priori* reasoning, as well as from the continental analogues, those historians who believe in an Anglo-Saxon chancellor have long hypothesised that his department grew from the chapel royal.<sup>30</sup> There is clearly nothing necessarily anachronistic about an Anglo-Saxon chancellor.

*Anglo-Saxon charters: an annotated list and bibliography*, London 1968, no. 1097; *Anglo-Saxon writs*, 211–12. The earliest (confirmed) chancellors to be appointed to bishoprics thereupon resigned the seal. T. F. Tout considered it an 'ancient tradition' for the chancellor to resign the seal on being promoted to a bishopric, though one which was rapidly disintegrating by the end of the twelfth century: *Charters*, i. 184. For more on the humble status of the early chancellors see H. R. Loyn, *The making of the English nation from the Anglo-Saxons to Edward I*, London 1991, 103. Loyn, however, does have the office assume magnate status under Roger of Salisbury, which is too early.

<sup>27</sup> Loyn, *Making of the English nation*, 127.

<sup>28</sup> For example, 'cancellaria emenda non est' ('the *cancellaria* cannot be bought'): *Vita Sancti Thomæ Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martyris*, in *Materials for the history of Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. J. C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard (Rolls Series lxxviii, 1875–85), iii. 18; my translation. This statement is made at the end of a list of the chancellor's functions, which makes no other reference to the *cancellaria*. See also Klewitz, 'Cancellaria', 72.

<sup>29</sup> Klewitz, 'Cancellaria', 74.

<sup>30</sup> See *Anglo-Saxon writs*, 58; Galbraith, *Studies*, 36–7; S. D. Keynes, 'Royal government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The uses of literacy in early mediaeval Europe*, Cambridge 1990, 226–57 at p. 257.

What would be anachronistic would be to expect a chancellor who was strictly divorced from the king's household clergy.

This reasoning is apparently corroborated by the strong link between the chapel and the Anglo-Norman chancery shown by the *Constitutio domus regis*, a survey of the royal household written on the accession of King Stephen in 1136, which preserves several provisions which must have ceased to obtain before his reign.<sup>31</sup> As a reminder of the contemporary indistinguishability of the royal household and the government, it makes no distinction between ministers and servants in their respective modern senses, placing the stewards, dispensers, naperers, bakers, waferer, larder-dispensers, cooks, butlers, cup-bearers and fruiterers in between the chancellor and his associates at the beginning and the chamberlains, constables, marshals and huntsmen at the end. Its concern is not with the ministers' functions but with their food and maintenance allowances.

The chancellor is certainly the best fed (and paid). Associated with him are the *magister scriptorii* and then the officers of the chapel: 'The chaplain [who is] keeper of the chapel and of the relics has double rations, and four chapel servants each have double rations.'<sup>32</sup> That the master of the writing-office was associated with the chancellor should elicit no surprise but why was the chaplain-keeper of the relics in a similar position? The nature of this section implies that he was also an officer of the chancellor, suggesting that the chapel royal was as much the chancellor's department as the *scriptorium*. This overlap between chancery and chapel is confirmed by William fitz Stephen, who, in his biography of Thomas Becket (1189), gives a brief description of the chancellor's duties, including 'that the king's chapel be in his disposition and charge'.<sup>33</sup> Such cross-fertilisation of the chapel and the chancery makes England no different from France, Germany, Italy, Sicily and Spain, where similar arrangements still prevailed after hundreds of years.<sup>34</sup>

The separation of the two departments was a prolonged process. The *clerici de cancellaria* were separated from the *clerici de capella* after 1232<sup>35</sup> and in 1312 the Dean of the Chapels Royal (a newly-created post) was described as 'capitalis capellanus', yet only the following year the chancellor was still 'chef de la chapele nostre seigneur le Roi'. In 1318 the dean is again 'chief chapellin'.<sup>36</sup> By 1449 Dean William Say could write affirmatively that

<sup>31</sup> *Constitutio domus regis*, ed. S. D. Church, Oxford 2007, pp. xxxviii–xliv.

<sup>32</sup> 'Capellanus custos capelle et reliquiarum corridium duorum hominum et quatuor seruientes capelle unusquisque duplicem cibum': *ibid.* 196–7.

<sup>33</sup> 'ut capella regis in ipsius sit dispositione et cura': *Materials*, 18; my translation.

<sup>34</sup> See pp. 267–8 above.

<sup>35</sup> Klewitz, 'Cancellaria', 75.

<sup>36</sup> D. Baldwin, *The Chapel Royal ancient and modern*, London 1990, 16.

The dean ... is principal and head over all, holding from the king power to rule and govern the chapel ... neither the steward of the household nor the treasurer, nor any other officer or servant of the household whatever, may ... correct or punish in any matter concerning the chapel.<sup>37</sup>

The dean's was 'a post evidently created to receive this authority'<sup>38</sup> from the chancellor, who had held it thitherto. Even thereafter, the chancellor would remain the official through whom the monarch exercised visitatorial functions over his chapels and peculiars, which would eventually evolve into the Lord Chancellor's general visitatorial jurisdiction over all eleemosynary corporations of the crown's foundation.

When the chancellor emerges clearly into history and his functions are described, the production of state documentation takes up only half of his portfolio. His other department was the chapel royal. Therefore, to search for an Anglo-Saxon chancellor as such is to make a fatally anachronistic assumption. Rather, if the Anglo-Norman chancery evolved from the Anglo-Saxon chapel, the Anglo-Norman chancellor must have evolved from the Anglo-Saxon head chaplain and so it is such a head chaplain who must be identified.

### *The reliquary and the archive*

Too little is known of the structure of the Anglo-Saxon chapel to be sure that there was an identifiable position of 'head chaplain'. Indeed, 'chapel' itself is a term best avoided. It would perhaps be better to speak of 'household clergy', for 'chapel', like 'chancery', carries anachronistically corporate connotations.

Royal households had long included priests. The Merovingian court educated clerics, who maintained worship in the palace oratory, advised the king and occasionally were rewarded with bishoprics.<sup>39</sup> By the Carolingian period, a decline in lay education had added secretarial work (originally undertaken by laymen) to their duties.<sup>40</sup> Not all royal priests served in the itinerant household. Some were stationed at particular royal residences. When Charlemagne built a church dedicated to St Mary in his palace at Aachen,<sup>41</sup> he founded a college to serve it and deposited his

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 225.

<sup>39</sup> J. Fleckenstein, *Die Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige, I: Grundlegung: die karolingische Hofkapelle*, MGH, SS xvi/1, Stuttgart 1959, 6–8. For the education of Carolingian scribes at court see Klewitz, 'Cancellaria', 57.

<sup>40</sup> Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, 8–10. For the laity of late Roman and early Frankish scribes see P. Classen, *Kaiserreskript und Königswurkunde: diplomatische Studien zum Problem der Kontinuität zwischen Altertum und Mittelalter*, Thessalonika 1977, 188.

<sup>41</sup> On Aachen's importance to Charlemagne see L. Falkenstein, 'Charlemagne et Aix-la-Chapelle', *Byzantion* lxi (1991), 230–89 at pp. 235–6.



most important relics in their altar.<sup>42</sup> From 972, one of the German king's chaplains was made provost (or abbot) of the college of Aachen,<sup>43</sup> though he was an absentee, continuing to serve in the itinerant court chapel,<sup>44</sup> which was under no diocese and had no fixed endowments and (except the archchaplain) little fixed structure.<sup>45</sup>

As with the chancellorship, so information on the organisation of royal household clergy is relatively abundant for continental courts but frustratingly lacking for the Anglo-Saxon. None the less, there are faint indications of a hierarchy among the Anglo-Saxon household clergy and these implications tie in beautifully with one aspect of the chancellor's role as described in the *Consitutio*. The office of chaplain-keeper of the relics appears to be anticipated by a pre-Conquest class of chaplain which was responsible for the king's reliquary. King Alfred's biographer Asser reports that the king devised a candle-clock to illuminate the holy relics 'which the king always had with him everywhere'.<sup>46</sup> It was his *capellani* who had to make these candles.<sup>47</sup> Asser's choice of the word 'capellanus', rather than 'presbyter' or 'sacerdos', is significant. The word had developed in mid eighth-century France, where St Martin's *cappa*, the most prized of the royal relics, gave the name 'capella' to the entire collection. The court priests designated to care for the relics became known as 'capellani', so 'capella' passed from the reliquary itself to the body of priests who tended it and thence to any church in which the reliquary was temporarily stored on the royal progresses.<sup>48</sup>

That Asser was aware of the special meaning of 'capellanus' is confirmed by his description of Alfred's priests Æthelstan and Werwulf as 'sacerdotes et capellanos',<sup>49</sup> which would have been tautological if 'capellanus' did not

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 237–9, 253, 259. The inhabitants of Aachen, including the royal family, worshipped in the upper part of the church and the college worshipped in the lower part: ibid. 257, 259.

<sup>43</sup> R. Schieffer, 'Hofkapelle und Aachener Marienstift bis in staufische Zeit', *Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter* li (1987), 1–21 at pp. 1–2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 7–13; Falkenstein, 'Charlemagne et Aix-la-Chapelle', 266.

<sup>45</sup> Schieffer, 'Hofkapelle und Aachener Marienstift', 3–4.

<sup>46</sup> 'quae semper eum ubique comitabantur': Asser, *Vita Ælfredi regis*, ch. 104: Asser's *life of Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson, Oxford 1904, 90, trans. in S. D. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Asser's life of Alfred and other contemporary sources*, Harmondsworth 1986, 108.

<sup>47</sup> There seems to be an echo of this in the *Constitutio*, in which the chaplain-keeper of the relics had to light 'every night one wax candle to stand before the relics' ('unaquaque nocte .i. cereum coram reliquiis'): *Constitutio*, 196–7.

<sup>48</sup> Schieffer, 'Hofkapelle und Aachener Marienstift', 4–5; Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, 11–13, 23–4, 27–8; cf. Asser's *life of Alfred* (Stevenson edn, 305). 'Capella' could also be used for the eucharistic vessels and sometimes books: Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, 15. As a term for a building, it was initially restricted to the royal *oratoria* but was extended to private proprietary churches in general in the ninth century: Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, 19–21.

<sup>49</sup> Asser, *Vita Ælfredi regis*, ch. 77: Asser's *life of Alfred* (Stevenson edn, 62–3), trans. in Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's life of Alfred*, 93.



imply something more than a private *sacerdos*. Æthelstan and Werwulf were not only Alfred's chaplains in the modern sense but also his *capellani*, the keepers of the royal reliquary. Asser also calls the priests who made the candle-clock 'capellani', indicating that this particular duty was not a deviation from these priests' regular rota of functions but was an accretion to a routine responsibility for the king's reliquary that was a defining part of their role at court. King Alfred not only had a collection of relics but he had also a special group of priests entrusted with its custody.

This deduction is explicitly corroborated by the will of King Eadred (946–55), by which he bequeathed 'to each of my mass-priests whom I have put in charge of my relics 50 mancuses of gold and five pounds in pence; and to each of the other priests five pounds'.<sup>50</sup> 'Preost' was the Old English word for clergyman (hence the specification 'messepreost' for priests in the proper sense), so it is unclear whether the priests of the household here denoted were all relic-keepers (with the generic *operran preosta* being only the minor clergy), or only some of the priests were relic-keepers (in which case the phrase 'þæra operran preosta' would include the rest of the mass-priests). Since the king spoke of custody of the relics as a special appointment within his gift, one suspects that the latter reading is the correct one but either way the fact remains that the only distinction which Eadred made between his household clerics is between those who kept the relics and those who did not. The relic-keepers were obviously of a higher status than the other clerics (apparently they had to be in priests' orders, automatically putting them in the higher tier), so, if there were an identifiable head chaplain, he would have been one of them. The Anglo-Norman chancellor's association with a chaplain-keeper of the relics suggests that, if there was an Anglo-Saxon proto-chancellor, it is among these relic-keepers, if anywhere, that he is to be found.

Relics were not the only things that this reliquary contained. It is highly likely that, once land-grants had become regular, kings maintained an archive or register of such grants, in order to know what land was still bookland.<sup>51</sup> The earliest explicit evidence for such an archive is in an agreement between King Egbert and Archbishop Ceolnoth.<sup>52</sup> Two copies were made

<sup>50</sup> 'ælcā minra messepreosta, þe ic gesette hæbbe in to minum reliquium, fiftyg mancusa goldes, and fif pund penenga. And ælcā þæra operran preosta fif pund.': *The charters of the New Minster, Winchester*, ed. S. Miller, Oxford 2001, no. 17 at p. 77, trans. in *English Historical Documents, I: c. 500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn, London 1979, 555–6. F. E. Harmer suggested that 'pund' may be an error for 'hund', thus reducing the disparity between the gifts: *Select English historical documents of the ninth and tenth centuries*, Cambridge 1914, 122.

<sup>51</sup> Loyn, *Governance of Anglo-Saxon England*, 112–13.

<sup>52</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 1438 (838).

of the agreement, one kept ‘with the charters of Christ Church’<sup>53</sup> and the other ‘with the documents of their [Egbert’s and Æthelwulf’s] heritage’.<sup>54</sup> This proves that the West Saxon kings had an archive by 838 and had had for some generations.

Although this evidence does not locate the archive, it seems reasonable to assume that it had always been a department of the royal reliquary.<sup>55</sup> It was a long-established custom of the Anglo-Saxons to associate documents with sacred things, as a way of consecrating them. Charters were often kept in or even transcribed into gospel-books.<sup>56</sup> If the king’s priests themselves served as scribes, they would have been the obvious custodians to whom to entrust the relics of written government.

Archive and reliquary are first explicitly associated in the late tenth century, in a cyrograph confirming the will of one Æthelric of Bocking.<sup>57</sup> A note at the end of the cyrograph announces that three copies of it existed: one kept at Christ Church, Canterbury, one by Æthelric’s widow and ‘oðer æt þæs cinges haligdome’.<sup>58</sup> There are three other similar examples (four, if the spurious no. 981 in Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, is included).<sup>59</sup> One is a will, one of the three copies of which ‘is mid þise kinges halidome’.<sup>60</sup> Another is an agreement between Bishop Wulfwig and Earl Leofric over a Lincolnshire monastery: ‘an is mid ðæs kinges haligdome’.<sup>61</sup> The *Liber benefactorum* of Ramsey Abbey<sup>62</sup> provides another example. Between 1050 and 1056 Ralph, earl of Hereford, granted a cyrograph to the abbey, which was approved by a royal assembly and made in

<sup>53</sup> ‘cum telligraphis ecclesie Christi’: *Cartularium Saxonicum: a collection of charters relating to Anglo-Saxon history*, ed. W. G. Birch, London 1885–93, no. 421; my translation.

<sup>54</sup> ‘cum hereditatis eorum scripturis’.

<sup>55</sup> Charlemagne had stored documents ‘in sacri palatii capella’ (Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, 17) and Egbert had served Charlemagne as a mercenary before becoming king of Wessex. This congruence of facts may simply be coincidental but it does raise the possibility that it was Egbert himself who inaugurated the Anglo-Saxon royal archive and housed it in the reliquary, in imitation of his erstwhile patron.

<sup>56</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *From memory to written record: England, 1066–1307*, 2nd edn, Oxford 1993, 155.

<sup>57</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 939 (c. 995 x 999).

<sup>58</sup> ‘the second at the king’s sanctuary’: *Anglo-Saxon wills*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, London 1930, no. xvi(ii).

<sup>59</sup> Purportedly of 1032, one of its three copies was kept ‘inne mid ðæs kynges halidome’: *Codex diplomaticus aevi Saxonici*, ed. J. M. Kemble, London, 1839–48, no. 1327.

<sup>60</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 1521 (c. 1035 x 1044); *Anglo-Saxon wills*, no. xxix.

<sup>61</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 1478 (c. 1053 x 1055); *Anglo-Saxon charters*, ed. A. J. Robertson, 2nd edn, London 1956, no. cxv.

<sup>62</sup> This was written in about 1170 from earlier material: Macray, *Chronicon*, p. xxii; L. N. Roach, ‘Meetings of the *witan* in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978’, unpubl. PhD diss. Cambridge 2011, 129.

three parts: 'One part of the writing remained, by the king's command, in his chapel with his relics of the saints.'<sup>63</sup>

Special attention must be paid to a glossary, based on the glossaries of Ælfric of Eynsham (c. 950–c. 1020), written in the margins of a manuscript of the *Excerptiones de Prisciano* in the early eleventh century. This source bears the unique distinction of being the only Anglo-Saxon text to refer explicitly to the office of chancellor. It contains the passage:

*Cancellarius id est Scriniarius. burþen  
Scrinium vel Cancellaria, idem sunt.  
hordfæt. Primiscrinus. yldest burþen  
Et sacriscriniarius. cyrcweard*<sup>64</sup>

*Scrinium* was the term used in the Roman Empire for the secretarial departments<sup>65</sup> and the glossarist neatly falls into line with this by equating *scrinium* with *cancellaria*. He also, however, seems aware of the two literal meanings of *scrinium* as either 'chest of books' or 'reliquary' and conveniently comprehends both by the coining of *hordfæt* (treasure-chest). His arrangement of the material thus implies that the functions of a chancellor (this, rather than a department of charter-production, being the contemporary meaning of 'cancellaria'), included the custody of relics and books, which beautifully complements the picture that has built up of royal clergy who doubled as secretaries and who stored an archive of their productions with their reliquary, under the care of the most senior of their number. It is somewhat frustrating, therefore, to find the glossarist eschewing the opportunity to give the Old English title for this official by translating 'cancellarius'. Instead, he glosses its synonym (or so he believes it to be), 'scriniarius', with the seemingly inappropriate translation 'burþen'.

*Bur* can mean a whole household but in this context the preferable interpretation seems to be a private chamber. St Pelagia rejects the Devil's blandishments by declaring herself to be 'in Cristes brydbure'.<sup>66</sup> Hrothgar spent the night in a *brydbure*.<sup>67</sup> King Cynewulf visited his mistress

<sup>63</sup> 'una pars scripti, jubente rege, in ejus capella cum reliquiis quas habebat sanctorum remansit': *Liber benefactorum ecclesie Ramesiensis*, in *Chronicon abbacie Ramesiensis, a sec. x. usque ad an. circiter 1200: in quatuor partibus*, iii. 105, ed. W. D. Macray (Rolls Series lxxxiii, 1886), 72; my translation.

<sup>64</sup> BL, MS Add. 32246, fo. 21v. This is discussed N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon*, Oxford 1957, repr. with supplement 1990, 1–3.

<sup>65</sup> The *Notitia dignitatum* mentions the *scrinium memoriae*, the *scrinium epistularum* and the *scrinium libellorum et cognitionum*. There was also a *scrinium dispositionum*. Each *scrinium* was headed by a *magister*. Classen, *Kaiserreskript und Königsurkunde*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. G. Kozor, Munich 1981, i. 235.

<sup>67</sup> *Klaeber's Beowulf and the fight and Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles, 4th edn, Toronto 2008, 33, line 921a.

in *gebærum*.<sup>68</sup> Ælfric had St Bartholomew meet King Polymius in *pæs cinges bure*,<sup>69</sup> a translation of the original *Passio's cubiculum*.<sup>70</sup> The tenth-century Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*<sup>71</sup> translates the *cubiculum* in which Antiochus's daughter sleeps as 'bur'.<sup>72</sup> Arcestrates's daughter is also to be found in a *bur* (an expansion on the original).<sup>73</sup>

By the end of the tenth century, a senior tier of household priests had charge of the king's reliquary, with which was stored an archive. The junior household priests are believed to have been responsible for writing the documents in the first place. The Abingdon glossarist could equate the *cancellarius* with the *scriniarius* because the keeper (or keepers) of relics and archives (the *scriniarius*) was also in a position of seniority (perhaps even of official control) over the clerics who wrote state documentation. In other words, the *scriniarius* was the *cancellarius*. However, if this was so, why did the Abingdon glossarist gloss *cancellarius* or *scriniarius* not as *cinges messepreost* but as *burþen*?

### *The burþen as chamberlain*

Apart from this one ambiguous glossary, all evidence that mentions *burþenas* makes them chamberlains (and apparently laymen), a more literal interpretation of the word and a more natural meaning than chancellor or chaplain. One of the earlier glosses of the Abingdon manuscript glosses *burþen* as 'cubicularius' and *bedþen* as 'camerarius',<sup>74</sup> while another glossary<sup>75</sup> puts them *vice-versa*.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s. a. 755 (= 786): The Anglo-Saxon chronicle: a collaborative edition*, III: MS A, ed. J. Bately, Cambridge 1983, 36; *The Anglo-Saxon chronicle: a collaborative edition*, VI: MS D, ed. G. P. Cubbin, Cambridge 1983, 13; *The Anglo-Saxon chronicle: a collaborative edition*, VII: MS E, ed. S. Irvine, Cambridge 2004, 38. Alternatively, MSS B and C locate the mistress in the 'burh' (fortified residence): *The Anglo-Saxon chronicle: a collaborative edition*, IV: MS B, ed. S. Taylor, Cambridge 1983, 26, and *The Anglo-Saxon chronicle: a collaborative edition*, V: MS C, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, Cambridge 2001, 47.

<sup>69</sup> Ælfric's *Catholic homilies: the first series: text*, ed. P. Clemoes (EETS s.s. xviii, 1997), 44<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic homilies: introduction, commentary and glossary* (EETS s.s. xviii, 2000), 260. On the *cubiculum* as that part of the *palatium* reserved for the king's accommodation see Falkenstein, 'Charlemagne et Aix-la-Chapelle', 244.

<sup>71</sup> On the date of the manuscript, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 201, pp. 131–45, see P. Goolden, *The Old English 'Apollonius of Tyre'*, Oxford 1958, pp. xxxii–xxxiv.

<sup>72</sup> Goolden, *The Old English 'Apollonius of Tyre'*, 2–3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

<sup>74</sup> *Anglo-Saxon vocabularies and Old-English vocabularies*, ed. T. Wright and R. P. Wülcker, 2nd edn, London 1884, 124.17–18.

<sup>75</sup> BL, MS Harleian 3376 (s. x/xi).

<sup>76</sup> *Anglo-Saxon vocabularies*, 198.6; 216.21.

Titstan and Winstan, *cubicularii* of King Edgar, are described in the endorsements of certain charters that he granted to them as *burþen*.<sup>77</sup> Winstan was also granted another charter as *camerarius*,<sup>78</sup> and the same year another charter was granted to the *camerarius* Æthelsige,<sup>79</sup> who may be the Ælfsige *burþen* who appears tucked away in a corner of a charter surviving in its original form.<sup>80</sup> There is no implication that any of these men was a priest. In *The Battle of Maldon*, Eadweard is described as Ealdorman Byrhtnoth's *burþen*.<sup>81</sup> Clearly, Eadweard was not a priest, so he cannot have been custodian of Byrhtnoth's reliquary. Ælfwold, bishop of Crediton, willed his bed-clothes to his *burþenon*,<sup>82</sup> clearly implying that they were servants of his bedchamber, not of his reliquary.

The Abingdon glossarist, by equating *burþen* with *scriniarius* and *scriniarius* with *cancellarius*, seems to be saying that this secular chamberlain was custodian of the reliquary and archive, in contradiction of all other evidence, which clearly linked the reliquary with the king's priests, but to explain this away peremptorily as simply a mistake would be precipitate, for he is not completely alone in this understanding of arrangements. Two documents do state that they were kept not in the royal reliquary but in the treasury. A will transcribed in the *Liber Eliensis*<sup>83</sup> reports that 'These things are recorded in a document written out in triplicate. There is one at Ely, another is in the king's treasury [*thesauris*] and Leofflæd [the testatrix] possesses the third.'<sup>84</sup>

The Ramsey *Liber benefactorum* records a dispute over the will of Ailwin the Black, a benefactor of the abbey, which was settled by royal arbitration in 1049, when 'the king decreed that everything should be declared for the remembrance of those to come in English letters ... and that half of the same writing [i.e. a cyrograph] should be kept diligently in the treasury [*gazophylacio*] ... by Hugelin his chamberlain'.<sup>85</sup> Hugelin was definitely not a chancellor or chaplain. He appears (as Hugo) in the Domesday

<sup>77</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, nos 706 (*Cartularium Saxonicum*, no. 1083 [962]), 789 (*Cartularium Saxonicum*, no. 1286 [972]).

<sup>78</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 719 (963).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* no. 713.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* no. 1215 (968).

<sup>81</sup> *The battle of Maldon*, ed. D. G. Scragg, Manchester, 1981, 61, line 121a.

<sup>82</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 1492 (1008 x 1012): *The Crawford collection of early charters and documents now in the Bodleian Library*, ed. A. S. Napier and W. H. Stevenson, Oxford 1895, no. x, trans. in *English historical documents*, i. 581.

<sup>83</sup> This was compiled c. 1131 x 1174: *Liber Eliensis*, ed. E. O. Blake (Camden 3rd ser. xcii, 1962), pp. xlviii–xlix.

<sup>84</sup> 'Hec scripto tripliciter consignantur. Unum est apud Ely, aliud in thesauris regis, tertium Leofleda habet': Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 1520: *Liber Eliensis* ii. 88, pp. 157–8, trans. in J. Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: a history of the Isle of Ely*, Woodbridge 2005, 187.

<sup>85</sup> 'decrevit rex omnia, ordine quo gesta sunt vel relata, literis Anglicis ... declarari, ejusdemque scripti medietatem in gazophilacio, ab Hugelino cubiculario diligenter conservari': *Liber benefactorum ecclesie Ramesiensis*, iii.103, pp. 170–1; my translation.

Book as ‘camerarius regis Edwardi’<sup>86</sup> and in one of Edward’s charters<sup>87</sup> as ‘regis camerarius’, simultaneously with Regenbald *regis sigillarius*. Yet he was a *burþen*. A forged writ in favour of Ramsey Abbey, purportedly of 1053, claims the attestation of Hugelin *cubicularius*, rendered in the purported Old English original *burðeines*.<sup>88</sup> This apparently contradicts all previous evidence (including that of the *Liber* itself), which put archival material in the reliquary.

### *The treasury and the archive*

Was the royal archive kept in the reliquary by the king’s priests, or in the treasury by the *burþen*? There are six genuine sources which say where their copies were kept. Of these, four state that they were kept in the reliquary: two wills,<sup>89</sup> an agreement between a bishop and an earl<sup>90</sup> and a grant to Ramsey Abbey,<sup>91</sup> the first three being contemporary and vernacular (‘cinges haligdome’) and the last post-Conquest and Latin (‘in ejus capella cum reliquiis’. By contrast, the only two sources to state that documents were kept in the treasury are neither contemporary nor vernacular.<sup>92</sup> Again, it would be tempting to assume that these sources, being as it were outvoted, are simply inaccurate but that would be lazy and would still leave unexplained how this alternative tradition had arisen in the collective memory. Another, more complex explanation must be found.

One possibility is simply that the two arrangements are not diametrically opposed alternatives but that both obtained simultaneously. The nature of any central archive would have been affected by practical considerations. The itinerancy of the royal household would have imposed a limit on the number of treasures (documents, relics or anything else) that could be transported from one royal estate to another. Hence, some historians have rejected the image of an archive that spent most of its time dangling

<sup>86</sup> Domesday, *Berkshire*, §56.1, ed. P. Morgan and A. Hawkins, Chichester 1979 (Exchequer Domesday, fo. 63a); *Oxfordshire*, §15.3, ed. J. Morris and C. Caldwell, Chichester 1978 (Exchequer Domesday, fo. 157b); *Huntingdonshire*, §D.1, ed. J. Morris and S. Harvey, Chichester 1975 (Exchequer Domesday, fo. 208a); *Warwickshire*, §13.1, ed. J. Morris and J. Plaister, Chichester 1976 (Exchequer Domesday, fo. 239b).

<sup>87</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 1033 (*Codex diplomaticus aevi Saxonici*, no. 810 [1061]). This is of dubious authenticity.

<sup>88</sup> *Liber benefactorum ecclesiae Ramesiensis*, iii.102, p. 169 (Latin); *Anglo-Saxon writs*, no. lxii (Old English). Although the writs (which involve a serious dating discrepancy) are spurious, the terminology may still be genuine: *Anglo-Saxon writs*, 252–6.

<sup>89</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, nos 939, 1521.

<sup>91</sup> *Liber benefactorum ecclesiae Ramesiensis*, iii.105.

<sup>92</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 1520, and *Liber benefactorum ecclesiae Ramesiensis*, iii.103.



in sacks from horseback over moor and heath in favour of a stationary collection, on which the king would have called when necessary.<sup>93</sup> There is apparent support for this view in the oldest *Vita Dunstani*, written around 1001, which records that King Eadred entrusted 'his most valuable possessions: many land charters, the old treasure of earlier kings, and various riches of his own acquiring'<sup>94</sup> to various 'regalium gazarum custodes',<sup>95</sup> including Abbot Dunstan, who kept his share at Glastonbury. The king recalled them on his deathbed. It is therefore in principle possible that there were in fact several reliquaries and therefore, possibly, several archives and several custodians. Part of the reliquary (and archive) might have been entrusted to the king's priests, while another part was entrusted to the chamberlain.

This elegant solution, however, is unnecessary, for the evidence that lay chamberlains had a share in the *haligdom*, however theoretically acceptable an idea, is illusory. Leofflæd's will is the easiest to explain. This text does not introduce the chamberlain but merely says that a copy of the will was kept in the *thesauris*. The writer, one must remember, was translating a will which would have been written in Old English. Such is the resemblance of the tripartite phrase that the will uses to the phrases in the vernacular documents which are studied above that it is very easy to believe that *thesauris* is a translation of 'haligdome'. As *thesaurus* literally means anything stored, this would not be an inappropriate usage. In fact, it is an established alternative usage. For example, Adomnán states that a stone with curative properties used by St Columba is now kept 'in thesauris regis'.<sup>96</sup> Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims, describes the office of *thesaurarius* as one who 'bears oversight of the windows and all other things which belong to the integrity, utility and preservation of the church and to its service',<sup>97</sup> which would have included the reliquary.

<sup>93</sup> Cyril Hart, developing the arguments of H. P. R. Finberg, recommended the Old Minster, Winchester, as the repository of West Saxon kings' records, possibly from as early as 854: 'The *Codex Wintoniensis* and the king's *haligdom*', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *Land, Church and people: essays presented to Professor H. P. R. Finberg*, Reading 1970, 7–38, esp. pp. 7–19; cf. the use of proprietary churches as archives by wealthy families: A. Williams, 'An introduction to the Gloucestershire domesday', in *The Gloucestershire Domesday*, ed. A. Williams and F. Thorn, London 1989, 1–39 at pp. 11–12.

<sup>94</sup> 'optima quaeque suorum suppellectilium, quam plures scilicet rurales cartulas, etiam ueteres precedentium regum thesaurus, necnon et diuersas propriae adeptionis suae gazas': B., *Vita S. Dunstani* 19.2, ed. and trans. in *The early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. M. Winterbottom and M. Lapidge, Oxford 2012, 60–1.

<sup>95</sup> B., *Vita S. Dunstani* 20.4 at p. 64.

<sup>96</sup> *Vita Columbae*, ii.33, in *Adomnán's life of Columba*, ed. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson, Oxford 1991, 142.

<sup>97</sup> 'de luminaribus et de aliis omnibus quæ ad ecclesiae honestatem, utilitatem, atque salvationem et ad suum ministerium pertinent, providentiam gerat': *PL* cxxv. 533A; my translation.



Alternatively, the twelfth-century translator<sup>98</sup> may have been influenced by contemporary terminology, for *thesaurus* was the term used for the royal archive from the late eleventh to the thirteenth century.<sup>99</sup> Evidence from elsewhere in the *Liber Eliensis*, however, confirms that ‘reliquary’ is indeed what the writer meant, for he records the fabulous tradition that Æthelred II ‘laid down and granted that the church of Ely ... would fulfil the office of chancellor in the royal court ... performing service with the reliquaries and other ornaments of the altar’.<sup>100</sup> The fact that this tradition is almost certainly fiction<sup>101</sup> is irrelevant. The writer had reason to believe that the office of chancellor involved service with the reliquary. Admittedly, he might simply have extrapolated this from his own time (when the chancellor was associated with the chaplain-keeper of the relics) but the fact that he does not mention the seal or the secretarial functions which characterised the office by then suggests that he must have picked up a genuine recollection of what it meant to be chancellor in Anglo-Saxon times.<sup>102</sup>

The last piece of evidence to consider in this matter is a forged charter of Cnut,<sup>103</sup> of which three copies were made, one for Christ Church, Canterbury, one for St Augustine’s and ‘ðe þridde is inne mid ðæs kynges haligdome’. The Latin version of this document renders this as ‘thesauro regis cum reliquiis sanctorum’. This evidence finally and explicitly confirms that *thesauris* was an acceptable translation of *haligdome* and there can be no doubt that the translation of Leofflæd’s will intends it in that sense.

Like the compiler of the *Liber Eliensis*, the Ramsey Chronicler apparently understood that documents were kept with the relics in the chapel, for he would say so quite explicitly only two chapters on from his putting the cyrograph in the *gazophylacio*, presumably a word lifted or translated from the cyrograph’s endorsement. Significantly, though *gazophylacium* is used abundantly in the Vulgate Bible, it is never used for the king’s treasury. Ezekiel

<sup>98</sup> The will is not in the *Libellus Æthelwoldi* but would have been among the monastery’s records: Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 187 n. 403. Unless the compiler of the *Liber Eliensis* used an earlier translation, the present text must date from the time of his own project, so 1131 x 1174.

<sup>99</sup> Clanchy, *From memory to written record*, 162–4.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Statuit ... atque concessit quatenus ecclesia de Ely ... in regis curia cancellarii ageret dignitatem ... cum sanctuariis et ceteris ornatibus altaris ministrando’: *Liber Eliensis* ii.78, pp. 146–7, trans. in Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 174.

<sup>101</sup> This tradition is recorded at neither St Augustine’s nor Glastonbury, with whom Ely was supposed to share the rotating office: *Liber Eliensis*, 146 n. 1.

<sup>102</sup> This is admitted even by that trenchant enemy of the Anglo-Saxon chancellor Pierre Chaplais in ‘Review of *The diplomas of King Æthelred ‘the Unready’ 978–1016*’, this JOURNAL xxxv (1984), 262–5 at p. 263.

<sup>103</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 981 (*Codex diplomaticus aevi Saxonici*, no. 1327 [1032]).

xliv.19 says that the priests of the Jerusalem Temple left their vestments in the 'gazophylacio sanctuarii' and this is the place where the prophet is met by the priests in xlv.19. In 2 Kings xii.10, a *gazophylacium* was placed beside the altar to receive money, which was counted by the 'scriba regis'. Finally, in Jeremiah xxxvi.12, the eponymous prophet 'Descendit in domum regis, ad gazophylacium scribae.'<sup>104</sup> In all these cases, *gazophylacium* is used to translate the Hebrew *lishkah*, which generally denotes rooms used for religious purposes, not a treasury.<sup>105</sup> The closest it comes to that meaning is when referring to the temple's own treasury. One cannot help but notice that on the only occasion when the word is used in a royal context it refers to the office of the royal scribe.

The most explicit and detailed description of the function of the *gazophylacium* is from Nehemiah xiii.4, 5, when Elishiab, 'qui fuerat positus in gazophylacio domus Dei',<sup>106</sup> made a 'gazofilacium grande', in which were stored meat offerings, frankincense, tithes, wine, oil and the sacred vessels. In his commentary on Nehemiah, Bede summarises the *gazophylacium* thus: 'gazofilacium is that in which would be placed those things which ... were necessary for the use of the ministers'.<sup>107</sup> *Gazophylacium* clearly means a vestry and sacristy, not a treasury.

While it is unlikely that King Edward's clerks would have known the Hebrew, they might still have realised (as Bede did) the sense in which *gazophylacium* was used in the Bible and its use as the working-room of the king's scribe would have made it even more appropriate for their purposes. In the later Middle Ages, however, it was used in the sense of a treasury.<sup>108</sup> If the clerks had used *gazophylacium* in their 1049 cyrograph, they must have meant *haligdome* by it but the Ramsey Chronicler would misconstrue it as referring to the treasury. Knowing that the treasury would have been under Hugelin's care, he interpolated that detail himself.

Thus, all sources, both contemporary and late, English and Latin, are in fact unanimous: the royal archive was kept in the royal reliquary, so under the custody of the king's priests, whose job it was to write these documents in the first place. There still, however, lurks unresolved a potential complication raised by the possibility of several reliquaries stationed at different

<sup>104</sup> 'Then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber' (all biblical translations are taken from the Authorised Version).

<sup>105</sup> Definitions and usages in the Old Testament are listed in F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs (eds), *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon*, Oxford 1906, 545.

<sup>106</sup> 'having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God'.

<sup>107</sup> 'gazofilacium in quo reponerentur ea quae ... in usus ministrantium necessaria erant': Bede, *De tabernaculo; De templo; In Ezram et Neemiam*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL cxixA, Turnhout 1969, 388, lines 1947–9 (*In Ezram et Neemiam* iii); my translation.

<sup>108</sup> R. E. Latham and D. R. Howlett (eds), *Dictionary of medieval Latin from British sources*, I: A–L, Oxford 1975–97, 1056, *sub gazophylacium* 2.

locations. To leave these separate reliquaries mewed up in their separate minsters avoids, rather than answers, the question of whether or not there was a central archive and, if so, in whose care it was.

An aversion to the notion of an itinerant reliquary is unfounded. It is in fact already established that *capellae* (i.e. reliquaries) were transported on horseback, at least by the pope and by the German king, on their progresses in the later Middle Ages.<sup>109</sup> Walter Reynolds, archbishop of Canterbury (1313–28), transported the contents of his chapel in nine chests, amongst which were distributed vestments, books (on both religious and secular subject-matter) and charters of the archbishopric.<sup>110</sup> Abbot Dunstan is described as transporting King Eadred's charters on horseback.<sup>111</sup>

That Anglo-Saxon kings observed a similar practice is made quite apparent by Asser, who expressly states that King Alfred always had relics with him (though these may have been just a selection, not necessarily his entire set).<sup>112</sup> One of the reasons why he devised the horn screen for his candle-clocks was because the exposed candles were constantly being fanned by the wind that blew 'through the doors of the churches or through the numerous cracks in the windows, walls, wall-panels and partitions, and likewise through the thin material of the tents'.<sup>113</sup> Since Asser is talking about the king's relics, these descriptions of their locations must be heeded. The churches to which he alludes are churches on royal estates, where the relics would have been stationed during the household's period of residence.<sup>114</sup> The king would have taken some of them with him to his *bur*, which Asser seems to describe next. Most importantly for the present inquiry, however, some were displayed in tents, i.e. in a temporary chapel (Asser describes King Æthelred I hearing divine service in just such a facility<sup>115</sup>) while the household was in transit.

No matter into how many different sets the total collection of relics might have been divided and no matter how far they might have been

<sup>109</sup> Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, 18.

<sup>110</sup> E. Carpenter, *Cantuar: the archbishops in their office*, 2nd edn, Oxford 1988, 79.

<sup>111</sup> B., *Vita S. Dunstani* 20.4, p. 64.

<sup>112</sup> See p. 272 above.

<sup>113</sup> 'per ecclesiarum ostia et fenestrarum, maceriarum quoque atque tabularum, vel frequentes parietum rumulas, nec non et tentoriorum tenuitates': Asser, *Vita Ælfredi regis*, ch. 104; Asser's *life of Alfred*, 90, trans. in Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's life of Alfred*, 108.

<sup>114</sup> Such was certainly the practice in contemporary Germany: Schieffer, 'Hofkapelle und Aachener Marienstift', 15–16.

<sup>115</sup> *Vita Ælfredi regis*, ch. 37; Asser's *life of Alfred*, 29. On the occasion in question, the king was on campaign against the Danes. The situation is paralleled by eighth-century Frankish practice, which allowed the *capellani* to go to war (something proscribed to most clergy) in order to maintain worship in the camp and keep the relics which were taken on campaign, including St Martin's *cappa* (a military cloak, so a fitting mascot on such occasions): Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, 11, 13.

dispersed, a nucleus at least remained on the move with the king all the time and this itinerant reliquary must have been in someone's care. The question is, was it in the care of the priests, or in the care of the chamberlain? Most sources that consider this question assign the reliquary (and, by implication, the archive) to the king's priests. The exception of the Ramsey *Liber benefactorum's* attribution of the duty to Hugelin is, for the reasons already expounded, of dubious authority but the Abingdon glossary, the only Anglo-Saxon source to discuss the *cancellarius* as such, commands special attention and it equates the *cancellarius* not with a *cynges messepreost* but with the *burþen*, which meant 'chamberlain'. Can this remaining inconsistency be explained?

### *The Abingdon conundrum resolved*

Ælfric of Eynsham himself was certainly familiar with the term *burþen*. Despite the interpretation of his imitator, his own glosses used it to mean *cubicularius*. However, another of his works does suggest a slightly different interpretation. In his homily on the Book of Esther, Ælfric calls Ahasuerus' seven servants his 'burþegnes' and he later uses 'burcnihtas' and 'cnihtas' interchangeably for them.<sup>116</sup> These are mistranslations of the Vulgate's 'septem eunuchis, qui in conspectu ejus ministrabant'.<sup>117</sup> He similarly refers to the eunuchs from the Book of Judith as 'burþenas'.<sup>118</sup> This implies that *burþen* could mean any close and intimate servant, rather than literally a chamber-servant.

This paper's initial assumption was that the Abingdon glossarist was saying 'chancellor, or treasurer, means *burþen*'. An alternative reading could be that what he was really writing was that 'chancellor, or treasurer, is a *burþen*'. In other words, there were several officials who could be described as *burþenas*. The suggestion now is that, rather than choosing between 'chamberlain' and 'chancellor', one should instead interpret *burþen* as meaning more vaguely 'minister of the crown' or 'household servant'. Indeed, the glossarist's translation of *primiscriniius* as *yldest burþen* implies the existence of juniors. An alternative reading would therefore be that the *cancellarius* or *scriniarius* was one of several *burþenas*. The only other kind of *scriniarius* (and therefore, perhaps, another kind of *burþen*) mentioned by the glossarist is the *sacriscriniarius*, the *cyrcweard*.

<sup>116</sup> *Be Hester*, ed. B. Assmann, in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, Kassel 1889, 92–101 at pp. 93 (line 35), 100 (lines 275, 278).

<sup>117</sup> Esther, i.10. Coincidentally, the Authorised Version also translates them as chamberlains.

<sup>118</sup> Homily on Judith, in Assmann, *Angelsächsische Homilien*, 102–16 at p. 111, lines 284, 298.

The word ‘cyrceward’ appears in only a few Old English sources but they are enough to give a clear view of what the term meant. A line from the *Regularis concordie Anglicaie nationis monachorum*<sup>119</sup> reads ‘Now, while the children are entering the church, let the *edituus* sound the first gong.’<sup>120</sup> A contemporary gloss supplies *cyrceward* for *edituus*,<sup>121</sup> a word which in classical Latin meant the keeper of a temple. In Bishop Wærferth’s translation of Gregory’s *Dialogorum libri quatuor*, Constantius, who ‘served acting in the office of resident’<sup>122</sup> in St Stephen’s Church near Ancona, is described as ‘se breac þær and þeowode cyrcweardas þenunge’.<sup>123</sup> His duty, of lighting the candles in the church, is reminiscent of that of Alfred’s priests in making his candle-clock.

Relics were also the responsibility of a *cyrceward*. The *Liber vitae* of the New Minster, Winchester, lists the *halidom* (i.e. relics) kept in the *scrin* made by the *circeward* Ælwold.<sup>124</sup> Ælfric of Eynsham describes the *cyrceward* of St Mercurius’ church in Caesarea as custodian of the saint’s weapons, producing them for inspection on demand.<sup>125</sup> From these examples it is abundantly clear that *cyrceward* was the appropriate term for a keeper of relics.

It is possible that Anglo-Saxon kings had a *cyrceward* at court. The lack of reference to one is not strong evidence to the contrary. Scattered references affirm that kings had *hræglþegnas*, *discþegnas*, *byrlan*, *horderan* and (of course) *burþenas*, yet these titles are seldom used in charters, their holders usually being identified by their rank as ealdormen or thegns.<sup>126</sup> If there were a *cyrceward* in the royal household, then it must have been he who kept the reliquary and archive and so approximated to the *cancellarius*. It may seem perplexing that the glossarist does not therefore simply equate *cancellarius* and *cyrceward* directly but it must be remembered that he was not really glossing *cancellarius* at all but *scriniarius*, an office which he believed was synonymous with that of *cancellarius*. He had come

<sup>119</sup> A major document of the Benedictine reform, it was compiled 970 x 973 by Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester: *Wulfstan of Winchester: the life of St Æthelwold*, ed. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, Oxford 1991, pp. lviii–lx.

<sup>120</sup> ‘Infantibus autem aecclesiam intransibus, edituus primum sonet signum’: *De consuetudine monachorum*, ed. W. S. Logeman, *Anglia* xiii (1891), 365–454 at p. 384; my translation. <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> ‘mansionarii functus officio deserviebat’: *PL* lxx.177C; my translation.

<sup>123</sup> ‘who there enjoyed and served the church-ward’s service’: *Bischofs Wærferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des grossen*, ed. H. Hecht, Leipzig 1900, 43–4; my translation.

<sup>124</sup> BL, MS Stowe 944 (New Minster, Winchester), fo. 58v. The *Liber* was compiled in 1031 from earlier material: *The liber vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey Winchester*, ed. S. D. Keynes, Copenhagen 1996, 38.

<sup>125</sup> *The ‘sermones Catholicae’, or homilies of Ælfric*, ed. B. Thorpe, London 1844–6, i. 452. Mercurius was a third-century Scythian soldier, martyred in the Diocletian Persecution.

<sup>126</sup> See Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, 158–62.

to this conclusion because of the synonymy (or so he believed) of *scrinium* and *cancellaria*.

There is a certain amount to be said for this identification. *Scrinium* is clearly related to Old English *scrin*, a connection which is unlikely to have slipped past the glossarist, for an earlier glossary in the manuscript glosses *Arca, uel scrinium* as *scrin*.<sup>127</sup> *Scrin* is almost always used in religious contexts, including as a reliquary. Ælfric called the Ark of the Covenant, the greatest of all reliquaries, 'Ðæt halige scrin'<sup>128</sup> and devoted a section of his sermon *De falsis diis*<sup>129</sup> to its adventures among the Philistines.<sup>130</sup> He introduces it as '*arcam Domini ... þæt is Drihtnes scrin*'<sup>131</sup> and refers to it as a 'scrin' throughout. He even describes its contents as 'heofonlican haligdome'.<sup>132</sup>

This is one of several instances suggesting synonymy between *haligdom* and *scrin* (which is particularly important in the light of the Abingdon glossarist's identification of a *scriniarius* with a *cancellarius* and of the association of senior royal chaplains with the king's *haligdom*). Ælfgyfu wills to Winchester Old Minster 'hire scrin mid hiræ haligdomæ'.<sup>133</sup> The *Liber vitae* of the New Minster uses 'halidom' for relics and 'scrin' for their containers.<sup>134</sup> If the king's *cyrcward* of the early eleventh century kept the king's *scrin* and was also head of the king's priests, then he would approximate quite neatly to the contemporary Frankish and German *cancellarii*.

However, this still does not explain why the glossarist did not gloss *cyrcward* and *cancellarius* directly. He came close, by glossing *cyrcward* as *sacriscriniarius* and then connecting that word, through *scriniarius*, to *cancellarius* but he still forwent the opportunity to equate them directly. Why?

The reason appears to be that, like the Ramsey Chronicler, who mistakenly assigned the *gazophylacium* to Hugelin's care, the Abingdon glossarist attributed to the Anglo-Saxon king's *scrinium* a wider meaning than was appropriate to the context. Despite the word's premier religious meaning, he glossed it as *hordfæt*, an ambiguous coinage which (like *gazophylacium*) can cover both secular and religious treasures. The earlier gloss, which equated *scrinium* with *arca*, may have been responsible for this confusion, as *arca* too can be used in both secular and religious contexts.

The Abingdon glossarist understood (probably correctly) that the *haligdom* in which the king's senior priests kept his reliquary and archive was called in Latin *scrinium*. He also understood that an alternative Latin

<sup>127</sup> *Anglo-Saxon vocabularies*, 126.22.      <sup>128</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric*, ii (Thorpe edn), 214.

<sup>129</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: a supplementary collection*, ed. J. C. Pope (EETS s.s. cclix–cclx, 1967–8), ii. 675–712.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 688–92, based on 1 Samuel iv–vii.

<sup>131</sup> 'the arc of the Lord ... that is, the Lord's *scrin*': *ibid.* 688; my translation.

<sup>132</sup> 'heavenly relics': *ibid.* 689.

<sup>133</sup> 'her shrine with her relics': Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters*, no. 1484 (c. 966 x 975), ed. and trans. in *Anglo-Saxon wills*, no. viii.

<sup>134</sup> MS Stowe 944, fo. 58r–v.



term for *scrinium* was *arca*, which had a double meaning. Knowing that and feeling adventurous, he coined *hordfæt*, which has the same two-fold meaning as *arca*, for *scrinium*; but this was a crucial error, for, although it comprehends the religious meaning of *scrinium* (and therefore can, with some generosity of interpretation, cover *cancellaria*), it also has secular connotations inappropriate to either word. It appears to have been this factor which prevented a direct equation of *cancellarius* with *cycrweard*. A *cycrweard* could keep the treasures of a religious *hordfæt* but not those of a secular *hordfæt*. So, the glossarist translated *cancellarius* and *scriniarius* with the safely generic *burþen*, reserving *cycrweard* for a gloss which specifically restricts itself to religious uses.

By trying to gloss too many things at once, the glossarist obfuscated the meanings of all of them. He was correct in what he wanted to say but tried to say too much at once, making more connections than the analogy allowed and so he rendered needlessly complicated something that should have been simple. This is a common vice among scholars.

The Lord Chancellor's office is, in origin, ecclesiastical. By the mid-tenth century and probably long before, the priests who served Anglo-Saxon kings doubled as a chancery. The senior priests had special responsibility for the royal reliquary, which doubled as an archive. If there was a specific title for these men, then it was *cycrweard*.<sup>135</sup> At some point, these senior priests were consolidated into a single official, sooner or later known by the continental title *cancellarius*.<sup>136</sup> This office was inherited by the Norman kings, who ensured that the new Latin title stuck. The office becomes clearly visible in 1136, by which time the chancellor's functions had ballooned to such an extent that his department had been divided in two. One part remained the chapel proper, where the reliquary was kept. The chancery was now semi-detached from the chapel and would grow into a separate department. As a hangover from his early development, the chancellor remained responsible for both until the fourteenth

<sup>135</sup> The Northamptonshire Geld Roll of c. 1075 calls Osmund, the contemporary chancellor, 'þes kynges writere': *Anglo-Saxon charters* (Robertson edn), app. 1, no. iii. However, this appears to be a direct translation of 'regis cancellarius', the use of which title before the Norman Conquest is uncertain. This evidence therefore does not prove that the office's Anglo-Saxon incarnation bore the title 'writere'. On the contrary, since, as this paper has shown, the Anglo-Saxon proto-chancellor's functions were heavily ecclesiastical in nature, a title that emphasised his scribal role would have been inappropriate.

<sup>136</sup> This process deserves an extensive discussion but to hold one here would upset the thematic balance of this paper. As a brief, provisional answer, Keynes's arguments in 'Regenbald' recommend the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042–66) as the likeliest period.



century, when the Dean of the Chapels Royal finally divorced him from his original department.

The office of chancellor would change a great deal from that day to this. Traditionalists may be reluctant to acknowledge the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP as Lord Chancellor on the grounds that he does not sit upon a woolsack but neither, of course, did his very earliest predecessors. Instead, one can take comfort from the Public Records Act of 1958, under which the Lord Chancellor (in an unwitting reversion to Anglo-Saxon practice) was, after centuries of separation, once again made responsible for the National Archives. The Abingdon glossarist, one suspects, would have approved.