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# THE MAKING OF CHRONICLES AND THE MAKING OF ENGLAND: THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLES AFTER ALFRED

*Prothero Lecture*

By Pauline Stafford

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ABSTRACT. Between *c.* 900 and the mid-twelfth century, a series of Old English vernacular chronicles were produced, growing out of the text produced at the court of King Alfred. These chronicles are collectively known as 'the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. They have long been accorded fundamental status in the English national story. No others have shaped our view of the origins of England between the fifth and eleventh centuries to the same extent. They provide between them the only continuous narrative of this period. They are the story that has made England. This paper deals with the relationship between that story, these texts and England: how they have been read and edited – made – in the context of the English national story since the sixteenth century; but also their relationship to, the part they may have played in, the original making of the English kingdom. The focus is on developments during the tenth and eleventh centuries, when a political unit more or less equivalent to the England we now know emerged. It is argued that these texts were the ideological possession and expression of the southern English elite, especially of bishops and archbishops, at this critical period of kingdom-making. Special attention is given to their possible role in the incorporation of Northumbria into that kingdom. These chronicles were made by scribes a millennium ago, and to some extent have been reworked by modern editors from the sixteenth century on. They are daunting in their complexity. The differences between them are as important as the common ground they share. Understanding the making of these foundational texts has its own light to shed on the making of England.

In the early 1950s, the *English Historical Documents* series was launched. Its aim was to 'make generally accessible . . . fundamental sources of English history'. The first two volumes opened with the same text – ***The*** Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In the eyes of the editors, this text merited 'pride of place'. In their view, 'English narrative history is so dominated by this compilation that other writers . . . are mainly of interest as providing a commentary on it.'[1] It was 'the most important source for the political

[1] *English Historical Documents*, I, ed. D. Whitelock (1955), and II, ed. D. C. Douglas and G. Greenaway (1953), quotations from II, iii and 97.



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history of the period'.[2] This text – or rather the series of chronicles which somewhat misleadingly go under this heading – provide between them the only continuous narrative of the Anglo-Saxon period; though continuous is an overstatement given their fragmentary coverage. They have long been accorded fundamental status in the English national story; no other texts have shaped our view of the origins of England between the fifth and eleventh centuries to the same extent. They are in that sense the story that has made England.

The subject of this paper is the relationship between these texts, and that making: how they have been seen and edited – made – in an English context since the sixteenth century; but also their relationship to, the part they may have played in, the original making of the English kingdom. Its focus is on the tenth and eleventh centuries, centuries during which these chronicles first grew and developed, centuries when a political unit more or less equivalent to the England we now know emerged. The making of these foundational texts has its own light to shed on the making of that kingdom.

What are the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles? Seven survive, though there were once more. They all originate in a chronicle produced at the court of Alfred, king of the West Saxons, towards the end of the ninth century.[3] From that text, a series of chronicles grew in the course of the tenth, eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Like Alfred's, they are anonymous – no one ever claims authorship; they are annalistic – material is entered under years not grouped into thematic books or chapters; and like Alfred's chronicle, they are in the vernacular – unusually for this date they are written in Old English not the more normal Latin. They all grew in some way out of Alfred's chronicle, continuing and developing it.

Combining them, we can piece together a story of English history from the arrival of Julius Caesar – but especially from the arrival of people we now call Anglo-Saxons – through to the early twelfth century, and especially to the conquest of England by the Normans in 1066. But that story is decidedly patchy. None of them, including Alfred's, tells anything like a complete or continuous tale. There are remarkable gaps in their coverage: social – all of them, and not merely Alfred's, are king-centred; and chronological – runs of years are blank, including for the tenth century, a century so important in the making of England as we now know it. All of them share some common material with others. But for

[2] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, ed. D. Whitelock, D. C. Douglas and S. Tucker (1961), xi. This volume brought together the English Historical Document translations.

[3] Anton Scharer, 'The Writing of History at King Alfred's Court', *Early Medieval Europe*, 5 (1996), 177–89.

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the tenth and eleventh centuries, no two surviving chronicles tell exactly the same tale.

People have turned to these chronicles from the twelfth century onwards in pursuit of the story of the English kingdom, often in contexts of national definition. Interest in them has usually been part of a much wider interest in things Anglo-Saxon, where Anglo-Saxon times, the period which preceded the (French) Norman Conquest, have a special originary status: the first, the original, if not the true English. Interest in them tracks periods of national sentiment, of concern for the national past, from reactions to the traumas of 1066 onwards. It has often had official backing.

The Norman Conquest of 1066 produced a flowering of English history writing, in Latin.[4] Authors in search of the English past, of the story of the English, of English kings, turned to the eighth-century *Ecclesiastical History* by Bede, but also to these vernacular chronicles. They were their major sources.

Study of them revived in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the sixteenth century, the preservation of manuscripts of texts like these was explicitly and officially sanctioned. Elizabeth's privy council recorded the queen's 'care and zeale . . . for the conservation of such auncient recordes and monuments' seen as relevant to 'both . . . the state of ecclesiastical and civile government'.[5] Elizabeth's archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, was to be allowed to peruse such manuscripts, with a promise to restore them safely to their owners. The size of the Parker collection in Cambridge suggests that, like many borrowers of books, the archbishop was not always assiduous at returning them. The names often given to two of these texts, the 'Laud' and 'Parker' chronicles, are witness to this interest, and its politics.[6] Queen Elizabeth's chief minister, Robert Cecil, owned the chronicle which passed later to Archbishop Laud. The circle surrounding Archbishop Parker was especially active in their collection, transcription and study. The hand

[4] Richard Southern, 'Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 4. The Sense of the Past', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (*TRHS*), fifth series, 23 (1973), 243–63; James Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 209–28; A. Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 1995), especially 155–86.

[5] C. E. Wright, 'The Dispersal of the Monastic Libraries and the Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon Studies', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 1 (1949–53), 208–37, at 212–13; *Correspondence of Matthew Parker D.D., Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. John Bruce and Thomas Thomason Perowne (Cambridge, 1853), 327–8; see also R. I. Page, *Matthew Parker and his Books* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1993), 2.

[6] Indispensable guide is Angelika Lutz, 'The Study of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the Seventeenth Century and the Establishment of Old English Studies in the Universities', in *The Recovery of Old English. Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Timothy Graham (Kalamazoo, MI, 2000), 1–82.

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of Parker's secretary, Joscelyn, can – literally – be seen in several of these chronicles.[7] Early modern readers blithely made annotations and additions, treating the manuscripts in ways which would give their modern keepers nightmares.

These vernacular chronicles were not, of course, the only, or even the main, manuscripts targeted by Elizabeth's privy council. And interest in them, in the sixteenth century or later, was far from purely political.[8] It would be wrong to exclude disinterested scholarship, or the role of the English antiquarian. By the end of the seventeenth century, their study was located within the English universities, where the first printed editions were produced.

But disinterested scholarship, like antiquarian enthusiasm, has its own contexts. The seventeenth-century shift to a more scholarly locus of study was in part politically motivated and driven.[9] The library of Sir Robert Cotton contained most of these chronicles by the early decades of that century. Cotton's library, situated opposite the houses of parliament, was identified by the Stuart kings as a generator of seditious argument. It was closed from from 1629 to 1631. The first university posts in Anglo-Saxon studies were founded at least in part in reaction to such royalist absolutism. One of the first published products of those posts was an edition of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the Gens Anglorum*, of the English people, to which was added one of the vernacular chronicles.

The nineteenth century saw a flourishing of national feeling and medievalism. Translation now made these chronicles available to a wider public, though they were never as popular as tales of King Arthur. The sense of a 'national' chronicle became explicit in some nineteenth-century editions, like that of Charles Plummer at the end of the century.[10] Already for James Ingram in 1823, the Saxon Chronicle was an all-important source of *facts* on England: on '*our* commerce, *our* naval and military glory, *our* liberty and *our* religion'. It contrasted with the 'puerile' 'legendary tales' 'magical delusions' and 'miraculous exploits', which characterised

[7] On Joscelyn's work, Page, *Matthew Parker and his Books*; and T. Graham, 'The Beginnings of Old English Studies: Evidence from the Manuscripts of Matthew Parker', in *Back to the Manuscripts: Papers from the Symposium 'The Integrated Approach to Manuscript Studies: A New Horizon' Held at the Eighth Meeting of the Japan Society for Medieval English Studies, Tokyo, December, 1992*, ed. Shuji Sato (Tokyo, 1997), 29–50.

[8] T. Graham, 'Anglo-Saxon Studies: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne (Oxford, 2001), 415–33, at 422.

[9] As argued by Lutz, 'The Study'.

[10] *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel, with Supplementary Extracts from the Others. A Revised Text, Edited, with Introduction, Notes, Appendices and Glossary* by C. Plummer, on the basis of an edition by J. Earle (Oxford, 1889) (the edition normally used is that of 1892/9), at e.g. II, civ – at n. 3 specifically contrasting it with the Latin *Gesta Northanhymbrorum*.

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the native British or Norman French chronicles. The Saxon Chronicle was especially fitted to the 'sober sense of Englishmen'.[11]

The judgement that this was somehow a 'national chronicle' attracted official backing and funding. The *British Historical Monuments*, edited in 1848 by the Keeper of the Records of the Tower of London, Henry Petrie, was one such national project.[12] It was a hugely costly and ultimately abortive attempt to answer the great German historical enterprise, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Monuments of German History). The first and only volume included the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[13] It was also among the first commissioned volumes of Britain's more successful response to the German Monumenta, the Rolls Series. That was launched in 1857 under the auspices of the recently created Public Record Office and with parliamentary backing. It was 'an important national object . . . calculated to fill up the chasms existing in the printed material of English [*sic*] history'.[14] The Rolls Series was to fill that gap – using treasury money. As Charles Plummer later ruefully put it 'Mr Thorpe [who edited these chronicles for the series] had behind him the resources of the English government.'[15]

The context of national feeling and pride is less immediately obvious by the twentieth century. It may simply be coincidence that both excellent modern translations – by Garmonsway and Whitelock – appeared in the early 1950s, in the decade following the Second World War, though it is a coincidence worthy of remark. Since the twelfth century, when writers of history turned to them in the aftermath of 1066, there has been a broadly national, and a loosely political context for the reception of these chronicles.

The Old English vernacular in which they were written has always been one of the special qualifications of these chronicles as 'English stories'. The twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury saw them as 'barbaric writings': a broken tale in the language of the fatherland. He would 'season [them] with Roman salt', in other words write a Latin history.[16]

[11] *The Saxon Chronicle with an English Translation and Notes, Critical and Explanatory. To Which Are Added Chronological, Topographical, and Glossarial Indices, a Short Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Language, etc*. by J. Ingram (1823), ii–v. His gendered vocabulary would repay analysis.

[12] On nineteenth-century government-backed editions, see D. M. Knowles, 'Great Historical Enterprises, IV. The Rolls Series', *TRHS*, fifth series, 11 (1961), 137–59.

[13] *Monumenta historica Britannica, or, Materials for the History of Britain from the Earliest Period*, ed. H. Petrie and J. Sharpe (London, published by command of Her Majesty, 1848).

[14] General Preface to Rolls Series, cf. Knowles, 'The Rolls Series', 141–2.

[15] Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, II, cxxxvi, commenting on B. Thorpe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, According to the Several Original Authorities*, published by the authority of the lords commissioners of Her Majesty's treasury, under the direction of the Master of the Rolls (2 vols., 1861).

[16] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, I (Oxford, 1998), 14.

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But for most later seekers of England's past, and even perhaps for William himself,[17] that 'barbaric' tongue has always been part of their attraction. In the sixteenth century, the context for their study was ecclesiastical and political debate about an 'English' church: its beliefs, and its practices, including its use of the vernacular. The vernacular texts of pre-1066 England had special legitimising status. For Ingram in 1823, they were 'a faithful depository of our national idiom'.[18]

But already by the sixteenth century, Old English was a barrier to access. It was the language of the fatherland to some twelfth-century authors, but it was incomprehensible to sixteenth- or seventeenth-century readers. The first editions in the seventeenth century translated these chronicles into Latin, the language of scholars and gentleman-antiquarians.[19] When interest in them revived in the nineteenth century, the first translations into modern English were made. The most influential was that of Ingram. But the first English translation was made by a woman, Anna Gurney, published in 1819, for private circulation.[20] It comes as no surprise to find a woman aware that Latin, as much as Old English, excluded most potential readers.

Many scholarly editions still provided no translation, including what was for long the best – that produced by Charles Plummer at the end of the century. The last thirty years have seen the most important of all the editions, with each single surviving chronicle published in full and separately, again without translation.[21] Consequently, most modern readers, even most non-specialist scholars, still use the two translated versions from the 1950s: that of G. N. Garmonsway, translating

[17] R. Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury's Diatribe against the Normans', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. M. Brett and D. A. Woodman (Farnham, 2015), 113–21, for tensions in Malmesbury.

[18] *The Saxon Chronicle with an English Translation*, iii.

[19] First edition was Abraham Whelock, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae gentis Anglorum Libri V* (Cambridge 1643), to which the *Chronologia Saxonica* – essentially an edition of Chronicle G – was appended. The second appeared in 1692 in Oxford, *Chronicon Saxonicum, seu Annales rerum in Anglia præcipue gestarum, a Christo nato ad annum usque 1154 deducti, ac jam demum Latinitate donate . . . accedunt regulæ ad investigandas nominum locorum origines; et nominum locorum ac virorum in chronico memoratorum explicatio. Opera et studio E. Gibson.*

[20] *A Literal Translation of the Saxon Chronicle*, by Miss Anna Gurney, for private circulation (Norwich, 1819). See G. C. Boase, 'Gurney, Anna (1795–1857)', rev. John D. Haigh, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/11759, accessed 1 July 2016).

[21] Under the general editorship of David Dumville and Simon Keynes, published as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A Collaborative Edition* (Cambridge, 1983–). *MS A*, ed. Janet Bately (1986); *MS B*, ed. Simon Taylor (1983); *MS C*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (2001); *MS D*, ed. George Cubbin (1996); *MS E*, ed. Susan Irvine (2004); *MS F*, ed. Peter Baker (2000). Chronicle G edited separately, Angelika Lutz, *Die Version G der angelsächsischen Chronik* (Munich, 1981).

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Plummer,[22] and the influential *English Historical Documents* translation, by Dorothy Whitelock. The language barrier has had long-lasting scholarly repercussions. Departments of English not Departments of History have been the home to most specialist study of these chronicles. The vernacular Old English enhanced the legitimising 'Englishness' of these chronicles; but it has excluded as well as included.

The title of this paper, and its introduction, stressed chronicles in the plural. Yet this tale of study, edition and reception has often slipped into ***The*** Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in the singular. This is no oversight. That slippage is in the titles of the editions themselves. It indicates a common way of referring to these plural chronicles as if they were in some ways one, and the tendency to treat and *publish* them as if they were one, or at least ways of treating and publishing which emphasise their common ground. In the sixteenth century, Joscelyn happily supplied bits missing from one chronicle with excerpts from another. Thorpe's Rolls Series edition published six side by side, but titled his book ***The*** *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and prioritised the common material in his translation.[23] Dorothy Whitelock's *English Historical Documents* translation, justifiably the most influential modern edition, forefronts the commonalities in its page layout, and its title is 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. There is a long and venerable history of discussing, and publishing, ***The*** Saxon, or Anglo-Saxon, Chronicle.

The habits of editors may seem the arcane concern of the modern Casaubon, ivory-tower navel gazing. It is what these chronicles tell us, surely, which matters, the facts they contain which are of interest. Almost all editors have been fully aware of the differences between individual chronicles.[24] They are constrained by the harsh facts of publishing economics. Plummer recognised four major chronicles, but was able to print only two in full – hence his rueful comment on the luxury of Thorpe's government funding.[25]

But editors make assumptions, overtly or not, about the text they are presenting. Many editors have adopted approaches or titles which enshrine a view of a single historical project, a view consistent with, if not encouraged by, the idea of an English 'national chronicle'. The tendency now is to call them all by letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, a practice followed here, to avoid confusion. Names are, however, rarely neutral. Such letters

[22] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, translated G. N. Garmonsway (1953).

[23] Joscelyn e.g. replaced a lost section of D, *MS D*, ed. Cubbin, x, added bits to B from A, *MS B*, ed. Taylor, xiii, and to C from D, *MS C*, ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, xvii–xviii. Thorpe's translation is, as he puts it 'formed from those of the original which, coinciding in matter, are susceptible to collation; all deviations [an interesting choice of word] from which are placed beneath the line', Thorpe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, I, xv.

[24] Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, II, xxiii.

[25] *Ibid.*, cxxxvi

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follow the practice which denotes manuscripts of a single text. They encourage the notion that we are dealing with precisely that. There is much that is common between these chronicles. It is easy to see why they have so often been treated as one. That common ground is part of their own story. But that common ground, including their shared vernacular language, have to be questions not givens; things we seek to explain, not unexamined assumptions.

Editors also make decisions about what readers want and need. Dorothy Whitelock's express intention was to make available a text of use to historians.[26] 'Textual variants' were not germane to this; a layout in columns would have 'obscured what a lot is common to all or most versions'. But the sort of text 'useful to historians' involves its own assumptions. Like many in the Humanities, early medievalists are increasingly concerned with the readers and reception of texts, at the time they were produced and later. Increasingly, it is the 'versions' and 'variants' that interest us, because it is there that authors, scribes, readers, patrons, contexts, reveal themselves.[27] Attention to editions also reminds us that what we are reading is not always what original authors wrote or audiences read. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, and later, these chronicles were produced – continued – and read – as separate texts. It is difficult to read those separate texts in most editions.

Attention to editions is thus not a marginal question.[28] From the sixteenth century onwards, editions and transcripts have played a major part in the way we conceive of these chronicles, and the way we read them. Their editors and transcribers have in important ways *made* these chronicles – or remade them. Most modern readers never read them as their tenth- and eleventh-century producers made them, or as their tenth- and eleventh-century audiences received them.

Late twentieth-century scholars have redirected attention to those contemporary audiences and meanings, and to the function of these chronicles in tenth- and eleventh-century Englishness.[29] For Janet

[26] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Whitelock, Douglas and Tucker, xi; *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, I, 135.

[27] See e.g. Walter Pohl, 'Memory, Identity and Power in Lombard Italy', in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge, 2000), 9–28, especially 11–12; M. De Jong, R. McKitterick, W. Pohl and I. Wood, 'Introduction', in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. R. Corradini, R. Meens and C. Pössel (Vienna, 2006); on problems of editions, R. Corradini, 'Die Annales Fuldenses – Identitätskonstruktionen im ostfrankischen Raum am Ende der Karolingerzeit', in *ibid.*, 121–36.

[28] On the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Corradini, 'Die Annales Fuldenses'; David Townsend, 'Alcuin's Willibrord, Wilhelm Levison and the MGH', in *The Politics of Editing Medieval Texts*, ed. Roberta Frank (New York, 1993), 107–30; Alan Frantzen, 'The Living and the Dead: Responses to Papers on the Politics of Editing Medieval Texts', in *ibid.*, 159–81.

[29] Janet Thormann, 'The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Poems and the making of the English Nation', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and

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Thormann, the Anglo-Saxon chronicle (still singular) was where the 'English nation was imagined'.[30] They are seen to reveal, construct and enshrine English identity.[31] In these chronicles, as Sarah Foot puts it, 'a collective history was available for those who could read it'.[32] These new approaches signal important new thinking, though they also sharpen the questions. What was available, when and for whom? In whose minds, where and when, was England being imagined?

These chronicles were made, grew and evolved, in a period now seen as critical in the making of the kingdom of England. That making meant the disappearance of old, independent kingdoms in Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and Wessex. It centred on the expansion of the West Saxon dynasty's control. That coincidence prompts a new question. How – if at all – was the making and evolution of these chronicles related to these developments and their politics, even implicated in them?

Answering these questions is fraught with difficulty. These chronicles are anonymous, annalistic, vernacular and discontinuous. There is no explicit information about who wrote them, or when or where. Thanks to the busy collecting of people like Robert Cotton, thanks even more to that great library wrecker, Henry VIII, we are often unsure where some of them were at the *end* of the Middle Ages, let alone where they had been made. They survive largely in fair copies made towards the end of their long evolution; only occasionally can hand-writing be used to date or place the stages of their evolution. Behind the surviving undatable, anonymous, unplaceable texts lie earlier stages, collations, continuations; the smooth fair copies hide these, too. The problems of these chronicles – and I have merely scratched the surface – help explain why they have been so little studied as separate texts, perhaps why so many people have quietly taken refuge in ***The*** Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Yet understanding the nature of these chronicles is essential to understanding their contemporary makers and readers.

First, chronicles like this are more sophisticated than we sometimes allow.[33] Annalistic chronicles, recording events under years, are often

J. D. Niles (Gainesville, FA, 1997), 60–85; T. Bredehoft, *Textual Histories: Readings in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2001).

[30] Thormann, 'The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Poems', 62–3.

[31] Sarah Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS*, sixth series, 6 (1996), 25–49; *eadem*, 'The Historiography of the Anglo-Saxon "Nation-State"', in *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. L. Scales and O. Zimmer (Cambridge, 2005), 125–42.

[32] Foot, 'The Historiography', 132.

[33] Literary scholars have been at the forefront of exposing their apparent naivety as 'artful', thus Jacqueline Stodnick, 'Second-Rate Stories? Changing Approaches to the *Anglo-Saxon* Chronicle', *Literary Compass*, 3/6 (2006), 1254–65, at 1254–5; Alice Jorgensen, 'Introduction: Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Language, Literature, History*, ed. A. Jorgensen (Turnhout, 2010), 1–28, at 27.

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judged as primitive in comparison with full-blown thematic histories.[34] But annalistic chronicles have advantages. They are open-ended, they can be added to; these are stories that can grow. As they grow, they can change; the ending of any story affects how the rest is read. Their stories can grow by continuation, annotation and through collation. Chronicles like these could be merged together to tell augmented – and different – tales. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, all these things happened. These chronicles combined newer annals – contemporary history – and older ones, in constantly evolving stories.

Second, they are anonymous, but that does not mean they had no authors and creators. They look merely mechanical, resulting from the combining of existing material. They appear to be added to year by year, naïve, unvarnished – mines of unmediated information produced by myopic scribes without perspective or interpretation – people for whom a marvellous eruption of adders in Sussex was on a par with the deaths of kings.[35] Ironically, this can encourage us to read them as just the simple truth, not 'authored' in the sense we would now accept.

But year-by-year arrangement need not mean year-by-year writing; these chronicles are full of indications of re-writing, of additions, of the shaping of hindsight. Even when material is copied, small changes can reveal the scribes and their views. The merging of two sources may not generate any new 'facts' over and above what was in each. But the merging is a fact in itself, and the story which results is new – another 'fact', raising new questions: who wanted it, why and why at that moment?

In sum, these chronicles are complicated: complicated in the sense of difficult – hard to study, unforgiving; complicated in the sense of complex, their own histories more intricate than appears at first glance. They and their histories are facts in themselves, and facts that may have relevance to the English story. The problem is identifying where, when and in connection with whom they were made, continued and merged. The current state of scholarship allows for some answers, with more or less certainty.

Alfred's original chronicle was produced at court, in the circle of those surrounding the king. In the early tenth century, two chronicles continued where Alfred's had left off: one from the perspective of the court of his son and successor in Wessex, Edward the Elder, what we now call Chronicle A; the other very likely from that of the court of Alfred's daughter, Æthelflæd, who became ruler of Mercia, perhaps especially from the perspective of

[34] Paul Hayward, *The Winchcombe and Coventry Chronicles: Hitherto Unnoticed Witnesses to the Work of John of Worcester* (Tempe, AZ, 2010), Intro., especially 18–28.

[35] E.g. Cecily Clark, 'The Narrative Mode of "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle"', in *England before the Conquest. Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), 215–35, at 220–1.

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that Mercian court in the aftermath of her death.[36] At some point in the tenth century, these two were merged into a new, now lost, chronicle, BC the ancestor of Chronicles B and C.[37]

During the tenth century, bishops and archbishops come into the frame. Chronicle A was in the hands of the bishop of Winchester by its end. He probably took it with him when he was appointed to Canterbury in 1006, but not before a copy of it had been made, which was then kept at Winchester, the surviving G.[38] About this same time, another archbishop, Wulfstan II of York, was annotating a different vernacular chronicle – the one which lies behind our Chronicle D.[39]

There were one or more lost chronicles in the West Country, perhaps at Worcester, a see which was often attached to the archbishopric of York from the 970s onwards.[40] And York or Worcester are likely homes for the so-called 'Northern Recension', arguably the most important lost chronicle of them all, the *only* vernacular chronicle which made radical changes to Alfred's original. This was a text with a huge progeny, including the vernacular chronicles D and E and some of the great twelfth-century Latin histories of England. It has been connected to an archbishop of

[36] P. Stafford, '"The Annals of Æthelflæd": Annals, History and Politics in Early Tenth-Century England', in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters. Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (Aldershot, 2008), 101–16.

[37] This is the lost BC, identified by Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, II, lxxxviii–lxxxix, discussed in *MS C*, ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, lvii–lxii. The last common annal in B and C is for 977; for an updating *c.* 977 see P. Conner, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 10: The Abingdon Chronicle AD 956–1066* (Woodbridge, 1996), xxxix and n. 80, lxx. One of the last entries in BC was a long, and thus unusual, obit on Archbishop Oscytel – bishop of Dorchester, archbishop of York, and relative of Archbishops Oda and Oswald.

[38] On A's development *c.* 1000 AD: David Dumville, *Wessex and England, from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), especially 56–62; *MS A*, ed. Bately, xxxvii–viii; Patrick Wormald, *Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, I: *Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), 172–81. Chronicle A was at Canterbury by the end of the eleventh century, but the evidence of the state of its episcopal lists and their relationship to those of Chronicle G suggests no further work on it at Winchester after *c.* 1001; the G lists were updated 1001x1012/13, those in A were not.

[39] On Wulfstan and the evolving D: K. Jost, 'Wulfstan und die Angelsächsische Chronik', *Anglia*, 47 (1923), 105–23; Stephanie Hollis, 'The Protection of God and the King: Wulfstan's Legislation on Widows', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York*, ed. Matthew Townend (Turnhout, 2004), 443–60, especially at 450; Sara M. Pons-Sanz, 'A Paw in Every Pie: Wulfstan and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Again', *Leeds Studies in English*, new series, 38 (2007), 31–52. Wulfstan tended to annotate MSS in his possession, sometimes arguably to signal ownership: N. Ker, 'The Handwriting of Archbishop Wulfstan', in *England before the Conquest*, ed. Clemoes and Hughes, 315–31; T. Heslop, 'Art and the Man: Archbishop Wulfstan and the York Gospel Book', in *Wulfstan*, ed. Townend, 279–308, at 282–4 and 308.

[40] M. Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth and Oswald', in *St Oswald of Worcester. Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (1996), 64–83, at 73–8; C. Hart, 'The Early Section of the *Worcester Chronicle*', *Journal of Medieval History*, 9 (1983), 251–315.

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York/Worcester, before 1023, probably in the second half of the tenth century.[41]

The archiepiscopal context continues. Chronicling activity linked Canterbury and Abingdon in the 1040s, when an abbot of Abingdon was made assistant archbishop, then moved back to Abingdon to die.[42] In the mid-century, a new chronicle was collated, and the York archbishop is again in the picture: Chronicle D was evolving.[43] After 1066, Canterbury was a hive of vernacular chronicling – as David Dumville long ago showed.[44] Almost every vernacular chronicle we now have passed through, or was somehow connected to, Canterbury in the later eleventh century. Chronicle E was developing, in dialogue with Chronicle D; Chronicle A was being augmented; Chronicle B was having additions made to its ending and beginning. The first bilingual Latin and Old English Chronicle – F – was made there around the year 1100.

Bishops and archbishops are prominent in this story. But there are laymen too. Ealdorman Æthelweard, a great noble and local ruler, the uncle of a king, had a chronicle *c.* 1000 AD.[45] So too, perhaps, did Earl Leofric, another great noble and local ruler of Mercia, *c.* 1050.[46]

Two vernacular chronicles were still being added to as late as the mid-twelfth century. Chronicle E, as we now have it, was at Peterborough, probably arriving there when a Canterbury prior was appointed abbot.[47] The final form of D was somewhere in north Britain; it should be remembered that the York archdiocese extended as far as southern

[41] D. Whitelock, *The Peterborough Chronicle. The Bodleian Manuscript Laud Misc. 636*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, vol. 4 (Copenhagen, 1954), Introduction; D. Dumville, 'Textual Archaeology and Northumbrian History Subsequent to Bede', in *Coinage in Ninth-Century Northumbria*, ed. D. M. Metcalf, BAR, vol. 180 (Oxford, 1987), 43–55, at 48–9.

[42] *MS C*, ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, xc–xci; D. Dumville, 'Some Aspects of Annalistic Writing at Canterbury in the Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries', *Peritia*, 2 (1983), 23–57, especially 28–9.

[43] P. Wormald, *How Do We Know So Much About Anglo-Saxon Deerhurst?*, Deerhurst lecture 1991 (Friends of Deerhurst Church, 1993); P. Stafford, 'Archbishop Ealdred and the D Chronicle', in *Normandy and its Neighbours, 900–1250. Essays for David Bates*, ed. D. Crouch and K. Thompson (Turnhout, 2011), 135–56.

[44] Dumville, 'Some Aspects of Annalistic Writing'.

[45] *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (Edinburgh and London, 1962); S. Ashley, 'The Lay Intellectual in Anglo-Saxon England: Ealdorman Æthelweard, and the Politics of History', in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. P. Wormald and J. L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2007), 218–45; M. Gretsch, 'Historiography and Literary Patronage in Late Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of Æthelweard's *Chronicon*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 41 (2013), 205–48.

[46] S. Baxter, 'MS C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Politics of Mid-Eleventh-Century England', *English Historical Review*, 122 (2007), 1189–227.

[47] Whitelock, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, Introduction; *MS E*, ed. Irvine, xiii, xc–ci; *eadem*, 'The Production of the Peterborough Chronicle', in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Jorgensen, 49–66; Malasree Home, *The Peterborough Version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Rewriting Post-Conquest History* (Woodbridge, 2015), 1–5.

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Scotland. D's last entry is an annal which has been claimed as our earliest example of lowland Scots.[48]

There is thus not one Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, but many. These snapshots of them and their development are often debatable, more or less clear, more or less identifiable, like faded pictures in an old family album. But they are a family without doubt. Resemblances are marked: all in Old English; each beginning with Alfred's chronicle; each continuing his annalistic genre, none of which should be taken for granted. They are a family too in the sense that at various points different ones were in contact, copied from each other, answering each other, in dialogue with each other.

To that extent, editors have been justified in seeing a common historical project. The snapshots suggest that the owners of that project were the court elite, or rather the southern court elite, at least until their destruction in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest. Bishops, archbishops and great nobles were all members of that elite. Two people, or two series of people, stand out: the archbishops, of Canterbury and of York, or, as the latter often were at this date, of York/Worcester. The vernacular chronicles in the tenth and eleventh centuries appear as in some sense the possession, if not expression, of that southern court elite, particularly of its episcopal, but especially archiepiscopal, members. But their shared historiographical project was not a continuous, centrally planned one. It produced different chronicles, made and continued at different times, read by different people; there are significant chronological gaps. To that extent, the editions can mislead and mask. We need to recognise both the common ground and the difference.

A '*southern*' elite which included archbishops of York is surely oxymoronic. What definition of 'southern' includes England north of the Humber? Closer scrutiny of archbishops of York and their chronicles will resolve that oxymoron. It will also give insight into the role of vernacular chronicling in the making of England.

The York archbishopric was prestigious. Its earlier holders had played a prominent role in the politics of the independent Northumbrian kingdom. Prior to the tenth century, archbishops of York had apparently been Northumbrian by origin. During the tenth century, southern kings conquered Northumbria, and began to appoint the northern archbishops. From the 950s onwards, York archbishops hailed consistently from south of the Trent, and appear to have been deliberately chosen for that reason.[49]

[48] Stafford, 'Archbishop Ealdred and the D Chronicle'. On the possibly lowland Scots annal, *MS D*, ed. Cubbin, cli.

[49] D. Whitelock, 'Dealings of the Kings of England with Northumbria in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', in *The Anglo-Saxons. Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture*

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The York archbishopric was prestigious, but by the tenth century probably impoverished. From the 950s, it was usually held alongside a rich southern see; first Dorchester-on-Thames, but increasingly the wealthy Worcester. This was an answer to York's poverty, but also to the problem – from a southern king's point of view – of its potential independence. Archbishops now had a substantial stake south of the Humber and Trent. The new situation of the York archbishops is flagged by a new pattern. They begin to appear regularly at the southern king's court. Before the 950s, their appearance there was infrequent, and worthy of remark. From then on, it becomes commonplace.[50] From the 950s, archbishops of York were, in most respects and in almost all cases, members of the southern elite. The changes here are an index of the attempts of southern kings to control the north, attempts of which the archbishops were agents.

Archbishops of York were owners, or patrons, of vernacular chronicles. There is every reason to link that significant new chronicle which made changes to Alfred's original to the York archbishops. It is usually known as the 'Northern Recension'; it might be more accurate to name it 'the chronicle of the Archbishops of York'. Its shape and content repay detailed attention.

The so-called 'Northern Recension' was the only pre-Norman Conquest vernacular chronicle to make significant additions within the original Alfredian chronicle, and the only one to change it substantially.[51] This was done by the typical annalistic practice of collating Alfred's chronicle with other material. The makers of the 'Northern Recension' added almost all the datable information in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, together with material from northern sources – the so-called 'York Annals', Northumbrian king lists and Northumbrian bishops' lists. Alfred's chronicle became more northern as a result. Most of the additions came from Northumbrian sources. Bede could be classified as such; writing from his Tyneside monastery, with a geographical bias north of the Humber.

It would, however, be just as true to say that Alfred's chronicle became more broadly 'English' as a result.[52] Bede was a historian of the *gens Anglorum*, of the 'Angles' more broadly conceived than the Northumbrian peoples. Northern material was added into Alfred's story, but more 'Southumbrian' material was added in, too. The narrative was widened;

*Presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. P. Clemoes (1959), 70–88; D. Rollason, *Northumbria 500–1100. Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003), 202–8, 228–30.

[50] See witness lists of southern royal charters in S. Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters c. 670–1066*, www.kemble.asnc.cam.ac.uk/node/31.

[51] Both E and F have additional material, largely in Latin, added into Alfred's chronicle almost certainly post-1066, mostly derived from a Norman set of annals, see *MS E*, ed. Irvine, lxxxviii–xc, and *MS F*, ed. Baker, l–liv.

[52] 'Nationalization', thus Bredehoft, *Textual Histories*, 67–71.

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and a theme already present in Alfred's chronicle was underlined – of a people wider than any of the seventh- or eighth-century Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – a people united by their Christian faith.

Alfred's story also became more episcopal, or rather archiepiscopal.[53] Bede's material increased this coverage, as did the 'York Annals', which were probably archiepiscopal in origin.[54]

There was thus much addition to Alfred's tale, until this new chronicle reached the ninth century. Here, it followed Alfred's.[55] This may indicate failure of other sources, though the faithfulness to Alfred's chronicle is noteworthy. The result, however, is the same. The story which this new chronicle told still led to Alfred's dynasty. The additions were to the years before 800; the ninth century remained Alfred's, as in his own chronicle. The expanded, more geographically inclusive, more archiepiscopal tale still culminated in the military successes of Alfred's dynasty, as they had been told at his court. In that crucial sense, this expanded story still legitimised that dynasty, Alfred in particular, and, of course, his successors.

This lost 'Northern Recension' contains few new facts. Almost every entry, every piece of information in it could be found from the sources its makers used. It is now lost, and can only be recovered through painstaking comparison of the progeny it spawned, of the surviving chronicles which used it and grew out of it. But it repays that effort.[56] This was without doubt the most important and far-reaching development within the vernacular chronicling tradition after Alfred; and it is somehow linked to the archbishops of York. We can place chronicles of this type in the hands of southern-appointed archbishops. We can see at least one of them reading it, and annotating it: Wulfstan II *c.* 1020, adding comment, for example, on one of his pet subjects, the protection of widows. It is linked therefore to key players in the politics of tenth- and eleventh-century England; the archbishops of York, members of the southern elite who had been entrusted with the task of bringing Northumbria more firmly under southern control. It was linked to them in the century which saw

[53] E.g. Chronicle E s.a. 625 and 721 extending coverage of Archbishop John – using both Bede and, probably, northern episcopal lists for e.g. precise lengths and dates of his episcopate.

[54] J. Story, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia c. 750–870* (Aldershot, 2003), ch. 4, especially 116–33; *eadem*, 'After Bede: Continuing the *Ecclesiastical History*', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. S. Baxter, C. Karkov, J. L. Nelson and D. Pelteret (Farnham, 2009), 165–84; Peter Hunter Blair, 'Some Observations on the *Historia Regum* Attributed to Symeon of Durham', in *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1963), 63–118, remains important.

[55] It was at this point that the 'York Annals' apparently petered out, though there were at least fragmentary Northumbrian annals for the ninth century.

[56] On the importance and defensibility of seeking out such lost texts, David Dumville, 'Editing Old English Texts for Historians and Other Trouble Makers', in *The Editing of Old English*, ed. D. Scragg and P. Szarmach (Woodbridge, 1994), 45–52, at 48.

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the military advance of southern rule over Northumbria, and the last independent kings in the north ousted. These archbishops were involved in the making of England. Was the making of this chronicle somehow implicated in that?

The 'Northern Recension' incorporated Northumbria into a wider English story. It could be characterised as the historiographical equivalent of the southern kings' conquest of the north. We could see its making as a brutal act, a parallel or even aid to military conquest: made to be sent north with these archbishops; arriving in their baggage train; southern vernacular history thrust down Northumbrian throats, history as control. This is too crude a reading, which begs questions about both audience and makers.

A milder version of this reading might have it created to keep the archbishops loyal, to control *them*: made for them to take north, as salutary bedtime reading in the cold northern fastnesses; a reminder of the Christian past which linked the kingdom either side of the Humber; a reminder of the triumphs of the southern dynasty the archbishops represented. These were certainly among the messages the story carried. But evidence suggests that it was most likely made *for* the archbishops, at their own behest. It certainly continued to be connected to the archbishops, throughout the early and mid-eleventh century. Its makers, the lost scribes who compiled it, reveal themselves as Northumbrian, the sort of men who would have been in the archbishop's entourage.

Its audience is elusive. Was it aimed at Northumbrian elites, Northumbrian clerics? Perhaps, though there is little evidence that it circulated widely in the north, and a Latin historical compilation – available by the end of the tenth century – was more influential north of the Humber.[57] One audience we know it reached was the archbishops themselves. Should we see this chronicle, and its successors, as reactions of the archbishops to their own new situation, taking this vernacular history with them? Was its function to tell their own – southern elite – story to themselves, fulfilling a major role of history, consolatory and reinforcing? These southern archbishops chose to have a vernacular chronicle, to continue it, and to have northern Latin sources translated into its annalistic and Old English vernacular format. Genre, language, the very making of this chronicle, and the additions to it; none of these should be taken for granted. Was a chronicle in the vernacular

[57] Probably known at Durham, A. J. Piper, 'The Historical Interests of the Monks of Durham', in *Symeon of Durham, Historian of Durham and the North*, ed. D. Rollason (Stamford, 1998), 301–32, at 312, 321 and n 107. On the Latin compilation, M. Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth of Ramsey and the Early Sections of the *Historia Regum* Attributed to Symeon of Durham', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 10 (1981), 97–122; Hunter Blair, 'Some Observations on the *Historia Regum*. For its twelfth-century significance, John Taylor, *Medieval Historical Writing in Yorkshire* (York, 1961), 4–6.

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as much a political statement as an indication of intended audience? Were this chronicle and its continuations expressions of the archbishops' self-inclusion within the ideology of southern rule, centred on Alfred's dynasty?

One other audience is clear, the makers of the original 'Northern Recension' themselves. It was not necessarily produced at York, or even in the north; tenth-century archbishops had links with Dorchester, Ramsey and Worcester, any of which is a possible site. But the making of this chronicle was certainly in the hands of Northumbrians. They revealed themselves unconsciously as they copied and translated; especially when they contrasted 'us' with the 'Southumbrians'.[58] The tone of these vernacular chronicles is usually impersonal; their makers rarely show themselves. But these scribes did. Northern voices are difficult to hear in tenth- and eleventh-century England. These are precious testimonies.[59]

The scribes' self-revelation is a first reaction to the history they were creating and reading, a first reception. And it is far from simply separatist. They reveal themselves as English, or rather Christian English, at the important point of origin when Christianity first arrived, the belief and peace sent to 'us' by Pope Gregory.[60] Here, the scribes were receiving the message of a Christian people, with which they identified. But they also reveal themselves as Northumbrian, significantly, at another point of origin, when they expanded on the arrival of the English people, of *Angelcyn*. They acknowledged that 'our' royal kin were from the same origin as 'that of the Southumbrians'.[61]

These were the makers of this chronicle, the collators of its sources. It was their decisions, conscious, or half-conscious, which nudged what was a wider English story into a more Northumbrian direction; occasionally into a direction which celebrated Northumbrian triumph over Wessex;[62] everywhere into a story which assembled as much as they could of Northumbrian detail.[63] Making a story which made a wider England may,

[58] Whitelock, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, 28; Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, II, lxx–lxxi.

[59] The manuscripts from which the 'Northern Recension' can be reconstructed are all later. Without the scribes' autograph, we cannot see what dialect of Old English they were using. Chronicle D was the result of collation with other chronicles, whose language could have affected it. In the later manuscripts, there are some few signs of northern English usage: *MS D*, ed. Cubbin, at e.g. lxxxix; S. M. Pons-Sanz, 'Norse-Derived Vocabulary in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Jorgensen, 275–304. In general, the language of D is Late West Saxon, *MS D*, ed. Cubbin, lxxxiv–cli.

[60] Chronicle D and Chronicle E s.a. 785.

[61] Chronicle E s.a. 449. The sense of 'us-ness' which recognition of a common past could fuel and feed is discussed by W. Eggert and B. Pätzold, *Wir-Gefühl und regnum Saxonum bei frühmittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibern* (Berlin, 1984).

[62] E.g. Chronicle E s.a 626, Edwin leading an expedition against the West Saxons and killing five kings.

[63] E.g. Chronicle E s.a. 603, adding extra detail on the Battle of *Degsastane*.

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paradoxically, have prompted a sharper awareness of Northumbrian-ness among its actual creators. The reception of history is not straightforward. On one level, this text constructed south-facing loyalty; at another, it may have been capable of enhancing Northumbrian identity.

The chronicle created for a York archbishop carried many messages, including unity and dynastic legitimacy. It expanded the notion of a kingdom united by Christianity. It also had a lot about archbishops. It increased coverage of their role in Christianisation, and of the significance of York archbishops in Northumbria. Archbishops were members of the southern elite, and bishops in the growing English kingdom; *that* is the historical narrative we now prioritise. But they were also bishops, episcopal, with a strong sense of the duties of their position; and, at York and through this chronicle, a strong sense of the long history and prestige of their see. Later tenth- and eleventh-century archbishops of York were among the most confident and visible members of the episcopate. The chronicle created and extended for them reflects that. Did reading and re-reading it contribute to that self-confidence?

By the eleventh century if not before, the vernacular chronicles often stand at a clear if not critical distance from the actions of kings. The complex identities of the patrons for whom they were produced, of the scribes who worked in their entourages, help explain this.

The chronicle made for the southern-appointed York archbishops responded to the making of an England built on southern hegemony, and to the role of York archbishops in that. Other chronicles and continuations responded to other political conjunctures, developed other messages.

In the early tenth century, continuations of Alfred's chronicle were produced in Wessex and Mercia. Their context was the pressing succession question: who could claim Alfred's inheritance, the new kingdom of *Angelcyn*: his son, ruler of Wessex, or daughter, queen in Mercia? The resulting Mercian chronicle contained the most sustained, and unusual, treatment of a woman in the vernacular chronicling tradition. It is a reminder not to ignore Mercia in the making of the English kingdom.

The constantly evolving narratives and messages merit further exploration. The beginning of the eleventh century saw defeat by Danish conquerors, a defeat which included the murder of a Canterbury archbishop. Several chronicles included a very critical account of this. The military triumphs of Alfred and his children were now read alongside that same dynasty's defeat, its exile and return. It was such a chronicle that Archbishop Ealdred of York had, the man who crowned William the Conqueror in 1066.

These chronicles should be read for the contemporary arguments they enshrine and express. An impassioned tone of debate and division sharpens in the eleventh-century chronicles. The dialogue between them,

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already there in the early tenth century, is now more overt.[64] Some begin to express, even invoke, a sense of Englishness and an England separate from its kings.[65] They are our best guide to elite political argument in the last decades before the Norman Conquest.

Chronicles and chronicling activity after 1066 reacted to Conquest. At Canterbury, the maker of Chronicle F made a Latin translation and attempted to incorporate the Normans into the story. Somewhere in the north, Chronicle D was increasingly engaged with Scottish affairs. Scotland was home to many Anglo-Saxon noble exiles. The continuators of D, by turns bitter and fatalistic, reactivated the dynastic messages of the vernacular tradition, especially à propos the Scottish Queen Margaret, the woman whose daughter would marry a new Norman king, but above all, the woman who carried Alfred's bloodline beyond 1066.[66] D's last solitary annal from the 1130s may, or may not, be in lowland Scots. But its subject was a remote, yet direct, descendant of King Alfred.[67]

The Saxon, or Anglo-Saxon, chronicles have long been seen as the story of England, as 'our national chronicle'. Their unusual vernacular language, their place in a pre-1066, pre-Norman, originary England, marked them out for this role. Editors have often prioritised the common ground, the unity among them. It is necessary also to embrace their diversity, to stress the range of texts produced and available in the course of these centuries and to bring back their scribes, readers and patrons. There were many chronicles, and as many stories, to be read in the tenth and eleventh centuries. These chronicles are sources of fact on the early English past, but their making, their overall shape and content, their continuations are also facts in themselves.

Many were loosely speaking 'court' chronicles. Not 'official', transmitting a centrally crafted royal line;[68] not 'propaganda' in the modern sense, it is unclear how far they spoke and circulated beyond a narrow elite; not 'court' or 'official' in the sense that continuations

[64] On Earl Godwine and his actions, differing lines in different chronicles have long been recognised, e.g. F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (1970), xxii.

[65] P. Stafford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, Identity and the Making of England', *Haskins Society Journal*, 19 (2008 for 2007), 28–50, at 32–6.

[66] P. Stafford, 'Noting Relations and Tracking Relationships in English Vernacular Chronicles, Late Ninth to Early Twelfth Century', in *The Medieval Chronicle X*, ed. I. Afanasyev, J. Dresvina and E. Kooper (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2015), 23–48.

[67] Williams , *The English*, 95. Further discussed in my forthcoming 'Fathers and Daughters: The Case of Æthelred II', in *Writing, Kingship, and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Rory Naismith and David A. Woodman (Cambridge, 2017).

[68] N. Brooks, 'Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 39 (2010), 43–70; and *idem*, '"Anglo-Saxon Chronicle(s)" or "Old English Royal Annals"?', in *Gender and Historiography. Studies in the Earlier Middle Ages in Honour of Pauline Stafford*, ed. J. L. Nelson, S. Reynolds and S. M. Johns (2012), 35–48, takes a different line.

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of the Royal Frankish annals were. The gaps in their coverage point to an attitude to history writing which was more spasmodic and reactive. Understanding these chronicles will mean minding all the gaps, chronological, geographical and social, returning constantly to the questions of who wanted history in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and precisely where and when. Yet many if not all were 'court' in the sense that the court was a frame, and a framer of minds.

They are connected to men prominent and active at the southern court, particularly to its episcopal and archiepiscopal members. It is *their* need for history, recent and remote; *their* use of history; *their* reading and reception of it we are largely seeing in these chronicles – albeit a need, use, reading and reception filtered through the scribe/authors who made these texts. These chronicles were – to a greater or lesser extent – the possession of a political elite, and thus expressions of its ideological viewpoint, but also of its tensions, concerns and internal arguments. This should make us wary of using them as simple context for understanding other evidence, the bare, unadorned, unconstructed 'truth'. They should be read alongside other evidence, as deeply engaged witnesses to contemporary politics.

Chronicles connected to bishops were not apolitical. In European perspective, early England stands out for the control of kings over episcopal appointments, for the rarity of familial links between great aristocrats and bishops.[69] English bishops were king's men to a remarkable degree. But they were also bishops, admonishers of kings, guardians of notions of just rule, heirs to their own traditions. How far did history reading and writing in tenth- and eleventh-century England reflect that? There are many questions here. How much of these chronicles' complex development might be explained by taking account of changes and movements of bishops, of pluralism and of the diverse personnel of episcopal households? Was chronicle writing sometimes prompted by royal consecrations, episcopally managed; the making of a new king a moment of reflection, counsel and critique, with history as its vehicle? It was certainly affected by the long-standing Christian views of history, as the story of God's dealings with men, of the punishment of sin and of the role of foreign conquest in that – all strongly reflected in eleventh-century annals. We should read with an awareness that their patrons and audiences had complex identities, which affected both their making and their reception.

These chronicles carried messages of unity and dynastic legitimacy – but also of a Christian people, its history *and its episcopal leaders*. Tim Reuter

[69] Julia Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World. Secular Clerics, their Families and Careers in North-Western Europe, c. 800–c. 1200* (Cambridge, 2015), at 139–46.

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characterised eleventh-century Europe as a Europe of bishops.[70] These bishops and archbishops – and these chronicles – would place England firmly within that.

'***The*** Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' – monolithic monument of English national history – needs to be reconceived as multiple and fluid. But only to some extent. What also emerges is the strength of a tradition, and the continuing importance and meanings of a core narrative which that tradition enshrined. Alfred's story remained central. No vernacular chronicle rewrote its crucial ninth-century section, which led directly to Alfred and his successors. To the end, these chronicles retained the potential Alfred's chronicle wrote into them: to be both dynastic and the story of a people united by their Christianity, to legitimise, but also critique, the one through the other.

All history writing has context. The intellectual context of my re-reading of the vernacular chronicles is a Europe-wide re-reading of early medieval history and its sources, acutely sensitive to contemporary agendas and reception, alert to the way editions have remade texts. That is, itself, part of wider scholarly attention to authorship and to narrative and its workings.

These chronicles have always been read politically. They have often been edited in that context. We read them politically whether we recognise that fact or not. ***The*** Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, vernacular, factual, sober, covering the centuries before Norman Conquest, was an ideal text of English national identity. Are plural chronicles texts for an age of devolution? Not if we are searching for separatist tales, or local stories. These chronicles are neither, though reading one of them provoked an expression of northern pride if not resistance in Northumbrian scribes. We might fruitfully read these chronicles for the 'us' they occasionally reveal, and construct. These are, however, still the stories that made England, directly implicated in and revealing of that process. Their making and remaking is a reminder of the forces that were driving the political developments that made the English kingdom; most notably the southern elite's investment in that project, the strong pressures towards unity which were deeply rooted in that elite's ideology, especially that of its clerical members.

Plural chronicles may, however, be texts for an age of national self-examination: revealing an England not made easily, and far from inevitable; reminding us of the continuing significance of Mercia, the recalcitrance of Northumbria, of political divisions and tensions smoothed over in an annalistic genre with its surface tale of simple facts. It was as a

[70] T. Reuter, 'Ein Europa der Bischöfe. Das Zeitalter Burchards von Worms', in *Bischof Burchard von Worms 1000–1025*, ed. W. Hartmann, Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelrheinischen Kirchengeschichte, 100 (Mainz, 2000), 1–28.

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historian of women that I became acutely aware of the constructedness and partiality of these 'national' chronicles: so few women mentioned, their occasional presence all the more remarkable and demanding attention. Paradoxically, plural, elite chronicles may be texts for a democratic age, increasingly alert to how limited the voices we hear from the past usually are.

The quest for these chronicles is a hazardous one, doomed to only partial fulfilment. We will never be able to answer all the questions they pose. Even asking them demands painstaking, detailed work and the help of many other disciplines – palaeography, manuscript study, language scholarship. The final message of these chronicles should be respect for our craft: skilled, self-aware, increasingly inter-disciplinary. Research does not come cheap; our modern political masters could learn from their nineteenth-century predecessors. These chronicles are worth the investment.

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