

Ælfric the Grammarian

(c. 955–1010) was a southerner, living chiefly in Winchester and in Dorset and later in Eynsham in the Midlands. He was the most, or one of the most, prolific writers of the OE period, writing homilies, saints' lives, Bible commentaries, and a grammar, a glossary, and a colloquy for students of Latin.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (see Chapter 2)

Battle of Brunanburh, The

was an attempt to reverse the conquest of Northumbria by Æthelstan, the grandson of *King Alfred the Great*. In it a combined Scottish-Viking army was defeated in 937. "The Battle of Brunanburh" is an OE poem that celebrates this victory.

Battle of Maldon, The

was fought on August 10, 991 near Maldon in Essex. The battle took place between Viking invaders, possibly under Olaf Tryggvason, and English forces under the English earl Byrhtnoth. The battle ended in the defeat of the Saxons with the consequence that the English under King Athelred the Unready (meaning "poorly advised") had to pay tribute (*Danegeld*) to the victors. Whatever the background to the actual battle and the motivation for Byrhtnoth's allowing the Danish to land, which led to the subsequent defeat of the Saxon forces, the battle bears witness to the superior forces of the Vikings. The OE poem "The Battle of Maldon," probably composed after the Norman Invasion, may well have been written to celebrate Saxon heroism in the time of yet another Saxon defeat.

Bede (see Chapter 1)

Caedmon (see Chapter 2)

Cnut (Canute) (see *Wessex and Danish dynasties*)

Cura Pastoralis (see *King Alfred*)

Cynwulf (see Chapter 2, *Old English literature*)

Danelaw (see Chapter 2, *Vikings, Viking incursions, and their consequences*)

Early Christian England (see Chapter 2)

Exeter Book, aka Codex Exoniensis (see Chapter 2, *Old English literature*)

Historia Ecclesiastica (see Chapter 2, *Old English literature*)

King Alfred, “the Great”

(848/849–899) king of Wessex from 871 to 899, is important for two very different reasons. For one, for defending the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex against the Vikings, who had control over Danelaw to the north and east. The decisive victory came in the Battle of Ethandun in which the West Saxons prevailed and were able to dictate the terms of surrender including the conversion of the Danish leader Guthrum and his men to Christianity. The Danes also promised to leave Wessex, supposedly in the Treaty of Wedmore, which divided England right through the kingdom of Mercia, but with Wessex control over Mercian London and its mints. The second important accomplishment of Alfred was the consolidation of his kingdom. For one thing Alfred produced a *domboc* (cf. the later *Domesday Book*) or code of laws much in the tradition of Æthelbert of Kent (Text 2.1), Offa, and others. Though unsystematic, these laws offered at least a legal basis for the kingdom. Alfred also undertook a revival of learning, perhaps following the example of Charlemagne a century before. He established a court school and stimulated the production of manuscripts, which had decreased due to the Viking invasions, but recovered by the end of his reign. One key component in his program was his proposal that primary education be taught in English, Latin coming only later as advanced studies. Perhaps this was because Alfred realized that Latin learning was in too bad a state to depend on literacy in it alone. The other important undertaking was ordering the translation of ...

Cura Pastoralis, ...

written by Gregory the Great, but also translations of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*, and many of the psalms. *Cura Pastoralis* was sent to all the dioceses in his kingdom, thus supplying them with a finely crafted gift and an important unifying text. In aligning himself with Charlemagne's renaissance Alfred conceived of himself as a Christian monarch fulfilling his role and responsibility in God's world. He was a king whose authority came from God and to whom obedience was due in the Christian world order in which a well-trained, literate priesthood carried out its ministry in well established in monasteries and churches.

Monasteries (see Chapter 2, *Early Christian England*)

Old English literature (see Chapter 2)

Strong verbs (see Chapter 2, *verb classes of OE*)

Vikings (see Chapter 2, *Vikings, Viking incursions, and their consequences*)

Wessex and Danish dynasties

are of interest after the reign of Alfred the Great, who died in 899, but who had unified Wessex, Sussex, Kent, western Mercia, and exercised control over Cornwall and of parts of Wales. His dynasty was continued by his son Edward the Elder, who together with Æthelred of Mercia began further expanding West Saxon primacy as they pushed back the Danes finally reaching north to the Humber River by 918 and fully

integrating Mercia into Wessex. By 927 Edward's son Æthelstan conquered Northumbria thus becoming the king of all of England. Northumbria remained hotly contested under him as well as his successors, Edmund and Eadred. By the reign of Edgar unification was a fact.

Cnut (Canute)

Renewed Danish attacks such as the Battle of Maldon (991) occurred during the reign of Æthelred, who at the end of his life lost the kingdom to Sweyn of Denmark and then regained it after Sweyn died. After the short reign of the Wessex king Edmund II, Sweyn's son Cnut took the English throne and held it until his death, soon after which Edward the Confessor, again a Saxon won the crown. His death in 1066 left a power vacuum since he did not have a son to succeed him. Among the three major claimants, Harold Godwinson, Harald Hardrada (of Norway), and William of Normandy, Harald was quickly defeated by Harold, who himself was killed while fighting the Norman forces at Hastings in 1066. When William took the English crown, the decades of rivalry between the Wessex and the Danish dynasties came to an end (Text 4.1).