



The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great

David Pratt

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THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF KING ALFRED THE GREAT

This book is a comprehensive study of political thought at the court of King Alfred the Great (871–99). It explains the extraordinary burst of royal learned activity focused on inventive translations from Latin into Old English attributed to Alfred's own authorship. A full exploration of context establishes these texts as part of a single discourse which placed Alfred himself at the heart of all rightful power and authority. A major theme is the relevance of Frankish and other European experiences, as sources of expertise and shared concerns, and for important contrasts with Alfredian thought and behaviour. Part I assesses Alfred's rule against West Saxon structures, showing the centrality of the royal household in the operation of power. Part II offers an intimate analysis of the royal texts, developing far-reaching implications for Alfredian kingship, communication and court culture. Comparative in approach, the book places Alfred's reign at the forefront of wider European trends in aristocratic life.

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DAVID PRATT



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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AB</i>	<i>Annales de Saint-Bertin</i> , ed. F. Grat, <i>et al.</i> (Paris, 1964)
<i>AC</i>	<i>Annales Cambriae</i> , ed. J. Williams, ab Ithel (London, 1860)
<i>Af</i>	Laws of Alfred, ed. F. Liebermann, <i>Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen</i> , 3 vols. (Halle, 1903–16) I, 16–88
<i>AGu</i>	Alfred-Guthrum treaty, ed. Liebermann, <i>Gesetze</i> I, 126–9
<i>ASC</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> (manuscript A unless otherwise stated), cited from the edition of C. Plummer, <i>Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel</i> , 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892–9), but according to the corrected chronology in <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation</i> , trans. D. Whitelock, with D. C. Douglas and S. I. Tucker (London, 1961)
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
<i>ASPR</i>	The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. van K. Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York, 1931–42)
<i>ASSAH</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History</i>
<i>BAR</i>	British Archaeological Reports
<i>BCS</i> (with number of document)	W. de G. Birch, <i>Cartularium Saxonicum</i> , 3 vols. (London, 1885–93)
<i>Bo</i>	<i>King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius: De Consolatione Philosophiae</i> , ed. W. J. Sedgefield (Oxford, 1900)
<i>C&S</i>	<i>Councils and Synods with other Documents relating to the English Church I</i> , ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett and C. N. L. Brooke, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1981)
<i>CCCM</i>	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
<i>CCSL</i>	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
<i>Cons. phil.</i>	<i>Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae Consolatio</i> , ed. L. Bieler, CCSL 94, 2nd edn (Turnhout, 1984)

List of abbreviations

CP	<i>King Alfred's West Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care</i> , EETS, os 45 and 50 (London, 1871), cited from manuscripts Ci and Cii, where text is available
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DIL	Jonas of Orléans, <i>De institutione laicali</i> , PL 106: 121–278
DIR	<i>Jonas d'Orléans: Le Métier de Roi (De institutione regia)</i> , ed. A. Dubreucq, SC 407 (Paris, 1995)
EcHR	<i>Economic History Review</i>
EEMF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS	Early English Text Society
–, os	–, original series
–, ss	–, supplementary series
EHD	<i>English Historical Documents, c. 500–1042</i> , ed. D. Whitelock, English Historical Documents I, 2nd edn (London, 1979)
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EME	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
GD	<i>Bischof Wærferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen</i> , ed. H. Hecht, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1900–7)
Gneuss, Handlist	H. Gneuss, <i>Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100</i> (Tempe, AZ, 2001)
Golden Age	<i>The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966–1066</i> , ed. J. Backhouse, D. H. Turner and L. Webster (London, 1984)
GR	William of Malmesbury, <i>Gesta Regum Anglorum</i> , ed. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998–9)
HE	Bede, <i>Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum</i> , ed. C. Plummer, <i>Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica</i> , 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896)
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
K&L, Alfred	S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, <i>Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources</i> (Harmondsworth, 1983)
Ker, Catalogue	N. R. Ker, <i>Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon</i> , Reissue with Supplement (Oxford, 1990)
Lapidge, ALL I	M. Lapidge, <i>Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899</i> (London, 1996)

List of abbreviations

Lapidge, ALL II	M. Lapidge, <i>Anglo-Latin Literature 900–1066</i> (London, 1993)
Liebermann, Gesetze	F. Liebermann, <i>Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen</i> , 3 vols. (Halle, 1903–16)
Making of England	<i>The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600–900</i> , ed. L. Webster and J. Backhouse (London, 1991)
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
–, Capit.	<i>Capitularia. Legum Sectio II, Capitularia Regum Francorum</i> , ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, 2 vols. (Hanover, 1883–97)
–, Conc.	<i>Concilia. Legum Sectio III, Concilia II.i–ii</i> , ed. A. Werminghoff (Hanover, 1906–8), III–IV, ed. W. Hartmann (Hanover, 1984–98)
–, Epist.	<i>Epistolae III–VIII (= Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi I–VI)</i> (Hanover, 1892–1939)
–, Leges nat. germ.	<i>Leges Nationum Germanicarum</i> , ed. K. Zeumer, K. A. Eckhardt, <i>et al.</i> , 6 vols. (Hanover, 1892–1969)
–, Poet.	<i>Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini</i> , ed. E. Dümmler, L. Traube, P. von Winterfeld and K. Strecker, 4 vols. (Hanover, 1881–99)
–, SS	<i>Scriptores in folio</i> , 38 vols. (Hanover, 1871–)
NCMH II	R. McKitterick (ed.), <i>The New Cambridge Medieval History II c.700–c.900</i> (Cambridge, 1995)
NCMH III	T. Reuter (ed.), <i>The New Cambridge Medieval History III c.900–c.1024</i> (Cambridge, 1999)
OE Bede	<i>The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. T. Miller, EETS, os 95–6 and 110–11 (London, 1890–8)
Or	<i>The Old English Orosius</i> , ed. J. M. Bately, EETS, ss 6 (London, New York and Toronto, 1980)
P&P	<i>Past and Present</i>
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PL	<i>Patriologiae Cursus Completus. Series (Latina) Prima</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64)
Ps.	<i>Le Psautier romain et les autres anciens psautiers latins</i> , ed. R. Weber, <i>Collectanea Biblica Latina</i> 10 (Vatican, 1953), for the Roman text; <i>Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem</i> , ed. R. Weber, <i>et al.</i> , 4th edn (Stuttgart, 1994), for variants from the Gallican Psalter
Ps(P)	<i>King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms</i> , ed. P. P. O'Neill (Cambridge, MA, 2001)

List of abbreviations

RC	Sedulius Scottus, <i>Liber de rectoribus christianis</i> , ed. S. Hellmann, <i>Sedulius Scottus</i> , Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 1(1) (Munich, 1906)
Reg. past.	Grégoire le Grand: <i>Règle Pastorale</i> , ed. F. Rommel, with B. Judic and C. Morel, SC 381–2 (Paris, 1992)
S (with number of document)	P. H. Sawyer, <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography</i> (London, 1968), cited according to the revised version by S. Kelly, available in electronic form
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SEHD	<i>Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries</i> , ed. F. E. Harmer (Cambridge, 1914)
Settimane	<i>Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo</i> (Spoleto)
Solil	<i>King Alfred's Version of St Augustine's Soliloquies</i> , ed. T. A. Carnicelli (Cambridge, MA, 1969)
Soliloquia	Augustine, <i>Soliloquiorum libri duo</i> , ed. W. Hörmann, CSEL 89 (Vienna, 1986), 3–98
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
VA	<i>Asser's Life of King Alfred, together with the Annals of St Neots, erroneously ascribed to Asser</i> , ed. W. H. Stevenson, new imp. (Oxford, 1959), with corrections noted by K&L, <i>Alfred</i>
Wormald, MEL I	P. Wormald, <i>The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. I: Legislation and its Limits</i> (Oxford, 1999)

NOTE ON CITATIONS

References to Anglo-Saxon law-codes follow the edition and numbering system of Liebermann, *Gesetze* I; apart from Alfred's laws, they are identified by the ruler's name in full. The Vulgate is cited from *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. R. Weber *et al.*, 4th edn (Stuttgart, 1994), with the exception of the Psalms, where I follow the text and numbering system of the Roman Psalter. In supplying modern English translations, I have prioritized sensitivity to original vocabulary and syntax. Most translations are my own: for Alfredian sources, I have borrowed where possible, and with adjustment, from K&L, *Alfred*, while renderings of the Vulgate are modelled on the Douai-Rheims version. In the dating of manuscripts, I have followed the convention of supplying two superscript numbers where appropriate, to enable flexible specification by either quarter- or half-century.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Is there anything left to say about King Alfred? In part, the question is misconstrued: every age has reinterpreted his ninth-century memory. In his own lifetime Alfred's rule was celebrated in vernacular history and Latin biography; selectively revered in the later Anglo-Saxon period, his reign was partly eclipsed by the reputations of Æthelstan and Edgar.¹ Only in the later middle ages was Alfred singled out as a possible founder of 'English' political and administrative unity. The momentous account of Alfred's viking warfare, and successful extension of West Saxon rule, combined with a natural tendency to schematize jurisdictional uniformity. It was on this basis that Alfred was first styled 'the Great': for Matthew Paris his reign had been pivotal in replacing a former 'Hep-tarchy' of seven kingdoms with rule over the whole of England. Only in the sixteenth century did this vision accord with political needs for a formative Alfredian past. In the learned recovery of several Alfredian texts, Elizabethan antiquaries found deeper origins for a united English church. Under Stuart and Hanoverian rule, those origins extended to English 'liberties', conveniently undermining the alternative schema of a 'Norman Yoke'. By the early eighteenth century, such interpretations reached their climax in Alfred's status as acknowledged 'founder of the English constitution'. The 'Whig' view in turn laid the basis for Victorian rituals of popular commemoration, enshrining Alfred as a symbol of ancient freedom and nationhood.²

Modern reassessment has frequently wrestled with the baggage of retrospection. Beyond later myth lies the reality of an abundant collection of contemporary sources, many variously associated with Alfred

¹ S. Keynes, 'The Cult of King Alfred the Great', *ASE* 28 (1999), 225–356; B. Yorke, 'Alfredism: the Use and Abuse of Alfred's Reputation in Later Centuries', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. T. Reuter (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 361–80.

² P. Readman, 'The Place of the Past in English Culture, c.1890–1914', *PEP* 186 (February 2005), 147–99.

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and his patronage. These include the principal narrative accounts in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the Latin *Life of King Alfred* by the king's Welsh assistant Asser; and, above all, a corpus of five vernacular texts attributed to Alfred's own authorship. As translations, often of considerable freedom, the latter rendered a distinctive selection of learned Latin sources: the *Regula pastoralis* of Pope Gregory the Great; the *Consolatio philosophiae* of the early sixth-century Roman aristocrat, Boethius; the *Soliloquia* of St Augustine; the first fifty Psalms; and Mosaic law in the introduction to Alfred's law-book. 'We hold that Alfred was a great and glorious king in part because he tells us he was', wrote Michael Wallace-Hadrill in his seminal paper of 1949.³ What explained these interests were Alfred's debts to the legacy of Charlemagne, which he now suspected 'in almost every direction: military, liturgical, educational, literary, artistic'. Faced by viking invasion, Alfred had 'turned for help to the experts on kingship, Charlemagne's descendants': that assistance had shaped his success.

Similar thinking reached its full potential in 1971 in the challenge of R. H. C. Davis, 'Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth'.⁴ Observing that 'almost all the sources [for Alfred's reign] may have originated with either Alfred himself or his immediate entourage', Davis argued that 'we must somehow liberate ourselves from the Alfredian sources to see Alfred as he really was'. Actually then depending on these sources, Davis proceeded to isolate logistical difficulties faced by Alfred in defending his kingdom from attack. What mattered to Alfred had been the exceptional burdens placed on his subjects in the course of his military reforms, especially the building of fortifications. This had relied on the wider nobility, but the king 'could not be sure of their strict obedience . . . unless he could indoctrinate them with loyalty to himself and enthusiasm for his cause'.⁵ This was why in Davis' view the sources were so problematic, as 'propaganda' designed for this immediate purpose. For him the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* had been the prime literary instrument, but by implication, the same applied to all Alfredian image-making.

In the event, Davis had a mixed reception, his case partly circular in equating learned self-record with concerted deception.⁶ In the *Chronicle*, where Davis saw exaggeration of Alfred's difficulties in the 870s, there

³ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Franks and the English in the Ninth Century: Some Common Historical Interests', *History* 35 (1950), 202–18, at 216–17, cf. 215 and 218; amended to 'rightly implies this' in his *Early Medieval History* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 201–16, at 213.

⁴ *History* 56 (1971), 169–82, at 169 and 177–82. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁶ D. Whitelock, 'The Importance of the Battle of Edington', in her *From Bede to Alfred: Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Literature and History* (London, 1980), no. 13; S. Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *TRHS* 5th series 36 (1986), 195–217, at 196–201.

were stronger signs that even the severity of his predicament may have been partly obscured.⁷ Yet in other ways his argument laid the basis for all modern enquiry; together with that of Wallace-Hadrill, his piece posed questions central to the understanding of Alfred's kingship. Their respective answers, too, have returned in new guises, the Carolingian dimension weighing as strongly on many aspects of Alfredian activity, while the *Chronicle* has re-emerged as a statement of unity. But what was the role of royal learning? How much can the king's own texts reveal about the character of his rule? As Janet Nelson observes, these translations were no mere exercise but displayed political thinking, consistent utterances on the source, distribution and uses of legitimate power.⁸ As such they are unusual in any early medieval context, and especially so in their attribution to a king; more typical were consciously ecclesiastical acts of rhetoric. Several factors explain the limits that remain in historical engagement.

A first is the striking fragmentation of Alfredian scholarship, necessarily involving many disciplines. The texts have largely remained the province of philology and literary criticism, clarifying the extent of Alfred's œuvre and the nature of Latin source-material.⁹ There is growing awareness of their sophistication as instances of translation; individual texts have been closely studied for signs of philosophical or translatory consistency.¹⁰ In the meantime, political historians have concentrated on the 'real' business of government, represented by charters, coins and law-code.¹¹ In combination, the record has yielded some control to the reading of Alfredian history. The impression is of occasional distortion, more often surpassed by merely selective or wishful disclosure, combined in Asser's case with no shortage of symbolic depiction.¹² It is the latter source

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 198–200.

⁸ J. L. Nelson, 'The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex', in her *Rulers and Ruling Families in Early Medieval Europe: Alfred, Charles the Bald and Others* (Aldershot, 1999), no. 4.

⁹ See esp. work cited below on authorship and the Boethius, pp. 116–17 and 271–2.

¹⁰ Esp. K. Otten, *König Alfreds Boethius*, Studien zur englischen Philologie n.f. 3 (Tübingen, 1964); M. McC. Gatch, 'King Alfred's Version of Augustine's Soliloquia: Some Suggestions on its Rationale and Unity', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1986), pp. 17–46; J. C. Frakes, *The Fate of Fortune in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, New York, Copenhagen and Cologne, 1988); M. Godden, *The Translations of Alfred and his Circle, and the Misappropriation of the Past*, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lecture 14 (Cambridge, 2004); N. G. Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany, NY, 2005).

¹¹ E.g. M. Blackburn and D. N. Dumville (eds.), *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century* (Woodbridge, 1998); D. Hill and A. R. Rumble (eds.), *The Defence of Wessex: the Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications* (Manchester, 1996).

¹² S. Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, ed. Blackburn and Dumville, pp. 1–45, at 12–19 and 40–5; S. Foot, 'Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age', *TRHS* 6th series 9 (1999), 185–200; A. Scharer, 'The Writing of History at King Alfred's Court', *EME* 5 (1996), 177–206;

which has dominated debates over royal presentation; where Alfred's texts are considered directly, historians have struggled to describe the role they might usefully have performed. Failing to appear 'practical', Alfred's law-book was judged 'ideological' by Patrick Wormald; Nelson has hesitantly reinvoked 'propaganda'.¹³ In Richard Abels' biography, Alfred's writings are treated separately, preceding the 'practice of kingship'.¹⁴ Yet it is precisely this relationship which is at issue in the interrogation of Alfred's learned kingship. These texts have much to reveal about royal practice: this much was agreed by all participants in a lively debate over Alfredian 'economic planning'.¹⁵

A second factor is the framework of 'Carolingian reception'. Historians have long been alive to the significance of sustained contact between the West Saxon and Carolingian dynasties, exploring points of similarity between their respective means of rule.¹⁶ The modern trend has been to maximize claims for positive Carolingian influence, taking a lead from the modelling of Asser's *Life* on Einhard's of Charlemagne; in law-making such contact has been plausibly documented.¹⁷ The question is how far Alfredian kingship can be understood as straightforwardly implementing a Frankish programme. Carolingian rule was not monolithic: modern reassessment has highlighted regional variations, most marked between East and West Francia, in methods, shared culture and aristocratic structures.¹⁸ Alfred's career has frequently been illumined by Carolingian

A. Scharer, *Herrschaft und Repräsentation: Studien zur Hofkultur König Alfreds des Großen* (Vienna, 2000); A. Sheppard, *Families of the King: Writing Identity in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto, 2004), pp. 3–70.

¹³ P. Wormald, 'Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis: Legislation and Germanic Kingship from Euric to Cnut', in his *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), pp. 1–43, at 11, 13, 15 and 25; J. L. Nelson, 'Power and Authority at the Court of Alfred', in *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in memory of Lynne Grundy*, ed. J. Roberts and J. Nelson (London, 2000), pp. 311–37, at 332–3.

¹⁴ R. P. Abels, *Alfred the Great* (Harlow, 1998), pp. 219–57, cf. 258–84.

¹⁵ R. Balzaretti, J. L. Nelson and J. Maddicott, 'Debate: Trade, Industry and the Wealth of King Alfred', *P&P* 135 (1992), 142–88; responding to Maddicott's 'Trade, Industry and the Wealth of King Alfred', *P&P* 123 (1989), 3–51.

¹⁶ W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, 3 vols., 5th edn (Oxford, 1891–8) I, 223–7, cf. 104–6, 112–16, 165–6 and 197–202; H. M. Cam, *Local Government in Francia and England* (London, 1912).

¹⁷ J. Campbell, 'Observations on English Government from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century', in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 155–70, esp. 162; P. Wormald, 'Engla Lond: the Making of an Allegiance', in his *Legal Culture*, pp. 333–55, at 366–7.

¹⁸ T. Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *TRHS* 5th series 35 (1985), 75–94, at 92–4; T. Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages c. 800–1056* (London, 1991); cf. J. L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (Harlow, 1992); J. L. Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World', in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 1994), ed. R. McKitterick, pp. 52–87, at 73–80; E. J. Goldberg, '"More Devoted to the Equipment of Battle than the Splendor of Banquets": Frontier Kingship, Martial Ritual, and Early Knighthood at the Court of Louis the German', *Viator* 30 (1999), 41–78.

comparison: often revealing are suggestive differences in West Saxon experience.¹⁹ Where Wallace-Hadrill saw in Alfred's writings how far 'the Church had influenced the western concept of kingship', Nelson observes the unusual secularity of royal imagery and thought.²⁰ Every statement must be judged in this context: the detection of 'influence' can be but the first step to an understanding of Alfredian theorizing and rhetoric. Often overlooked is the backdrop of existing West Saxon practices and assumptions.²¹ Their recovery is vital, as the context for royal thought and action; with Alfred and his scholarly helpers, they hold the key to his rule.

Third, and most problematic, are the challenges of understanding Anglo-Saxon political structures and royal power. Behind Alfred's kingship lay a complex nexus of relationships, expectations and obligations creating effective parameters of action. Successfully negotiated, they offered considerable means of logistical and administrative control. The power involved has been well observed by its most enthusiastic proponent, James Campbell, rescuing the order and sophistication of Anglo-Saxon structures.²² Royal resources extended to systems of taxation and military assessment, organized by territorial subdivision; the latter established a strong relationship between centre and locality. Upon these basic instruments, Campbell detects extensive innovation in the later Anglo-Saxon period, perhaps beginning under Alfred; the case has been taken further by Wormald.²³ Though their perspective is at times extreme, the general argument has considerable weight in identifying an important contrast with the fragmentation of rule in tenth-century West Francia.²⁴ The question is how such divergence might be explained: the answers of both relate uncomfortably to the construct of an 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'English state'. The usefulness of the latter term has long been debated by medievalists, with differing implications: as Rees Davies pertinently suggested, its application carries several problematic assumptions.²⁵ Notions of legitimate force have limits for structures

¹⁹ J. L. Nelson, "'A King Across the Sea'": Alfred in Continental Perspective', in her *Ruling Families*, no. 1, pp. 49–52 and 62–7; Nelson, 'Political Ideas', pp. 126–7, 131, 144 and 147; D. Pratt, 'The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great', *ASE* 30 (2001), 39–90, esp. 40–55.

²⁰ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), p. 141, cf. 141–51; Nelson, 'Political Ideas', pp. 147–8.

²¹ Cf. esp. Keynes, 'Mercians', pp. 2–6.

²² Esp. J. Campbell, 'The Late Anglo-Saxon State: a Maximum View', in his *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), pp. 1–30.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17; Wormald, 'Engla Lond', pp. 366–7 and 376–7.

²⁴ Further contextualized also by T. Reuter, 'The Making of England and Germany 850–1050: Points of Comparison and Difference', in *Medieval Europeans*, ed. A. P. Smyth (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 53–70.

²⁵ S. Reynolds, 'The Historiography of the Medieval State', in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. M. Bentley (London and New York, 1997), pp. 117–38; R. Davies, 'The Medieval State: the

actively harnessing lordship and communal self-help.²⁶ Nor can one straightforwardly prioritize the 'public': as formalized behaviour its early medieval forms cannot safely be detached from the social and institutional forces that underpinned it.²⁷ Complex political and social relationships are effectively reified, relegating certain regions to 'statelessness'. Yet it was precisely through such relationships that power was mediated and deployed.

There are real dangers of an almost circular process of conceptual recovery. A cultural dimension is acknowledged, but primarily detected in 'state-like' features of subjecthood and 'national' identity.²⁸ Wormald's account assumes the essential replication of Carolingian structures, yet his vision is restricted to the phenomenon of oath-taking, here finding evidence for 'allegiance'.²⁹ It is only on this basis that he can then claim a decisive role for 'English' ethnic identity, as if the only remaining variable.³⁰ In wider elite communication many practices of power are effectively sidestepped, neglecting questions of its distribution against an environmentally and socially determined resource-base. The point is important because Wormald's position has gained wider currency as an 'explanation' of English political and cultural distinctiveness, seen to reside in a unique sense of 'Englishness' promoted in antiquity by King Alfred.³¹ This has in turn informed non-specialist exploration of 'state-building', influentially exporting the construct to pre- and post-colonial Africa.³² One might only wish for some engagement with the extensive trans-European historiography of ethnic identity, which has done much to problematize the phenomenon as a feature of the post-Roman world, raising questions of its force and evidential recovery.³³

Tyranny of a Concept?', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16 (2003), 280–300; cf. the very qualified use of M. Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: the Middle Rhine Valley, 400–1000* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 12, note 12, cf. pp. 6, 141–2 and 251–63.

²⁶ Cf. below, pp. 232–41.

²⁷ Innes, *State and Society*, esp. pp. 253–4, 255–9 and 261–2; S. MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 13–17.

²⁸ See esp. J. Campbell, 'Stubbs and the English State', in his *Anglo-Saxon State*, pp. 247–68, 255–6 and 261–7, effectively inviting this questioning. Cf. the more restricted critique of S. Foot, 'The Historiography of the Anglo-Saxon "Nation-State"', in *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. L. Scales and O. Zimmer (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 125–42.

²⁹ Wormald, 'Engla Lond', pp. 362–71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 371–8.

³¹ E.g. H. M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 20–31; P. Wormald, 'Sir Geoffrey Elton's *English: a View from the Early Middle Ages*', *TRHS* 6th series 7 (1997), 318–25.

³² A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 39–43, cf. 148–66.

³³ The literature is vast: see esp. W. Pohl, 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies', in *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. L. K. Little and B. H. Rosenwein (Oxford, 1998), pp. 15–25; G. Halsall, 'Review Article: Movers and Shakers: the Barbarians and the Fall of

Both are pressing for widely stratified societies primarily revealed in written sources of elite consumption and record.³⁴ Yet the observation is otiose against the selective teleology of statehood, the more so for accounts so insistently represented as a form of modern self-knowledge.³⁵ Anglo-Saxon history has often been studied for insight into later periods. As these examples demonstrate, it is here essential to abandon any quest for origins, whether of post-Conquest England or indeed our own. The only alternative is to approach Anglo-Saxon political structures on entirely their own terms, informed among other evidence by the ways in which power was understood by contemporaries.

It is towards such an understanding that this book is directed, through the evidence of Alfred's writings. Its overall aim is to reintegrate Alfred's learned kingship as a part of royal practice. This has necessitated a reconsideration and close analysis of the relationship between royal behaviour and the operation of political power. If the 'public' is to be integrated, one may proceed with the assumption that any activity might potentially be relevant to its practice. On this basis, the study seeks to recover the force and status of Alfred's texts in relation to contemporary structures of kingship and political authority. In so doing, it aims to place these textual utterances in the broader context of ninth-century thought and behaviour, with particular reference to the role of Alfred's Frankish and other scholarly helpers. Informed by this positioning both of texts and kingship, the book further seeks to assess the impact of royal writings in relation to other forces acting on contemporaries. In this complex interface one may hope to recover some of the effects of Alfred's learning as a tool of kingship; this in turn informs assessment of its longer-term legacy.

Learned kingship, royal authorship, inventive translation: each poses challenges of interpretation. Central to my approach is the minimum observation of an historical connectedness which must be embraced in any explanation. One might well focus on any one of these phenomena, yet to do so risks the neglect of this fundamental interrelationship. This is especially the case with translation, open to many forms of critical enquiry.³⁶ More pertinent is what irreducibly linked all three: the action

Rome', *EME* 8 (1999), 131–45; P. J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: the Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 2002); J. Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: an Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge, 1997).

³⁴ Cf. esp. A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1986), often neglected here.

³⁵ Wormald, 'Engla Lond', pp. 361–2 and 380–1; Campbell, 'Anglo-Saxon State', pp. 26–7; Campbell, 'Stubbs', pp. 258–62 and 267–8.

³⁶ Cf. J. Beer (ed.), *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1997); K. Davis, 'The Performance of Translation Theory in King Alfred's National Literary Program', in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays in honour of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. R. Boenig and

of language. The pairing has been a central object of modern philosophical concern, in the understanding that speech is a form of action, whose meaning is necessarily public in any successful act of communication.³⁷ One effect has been the general shift towards discourse, yet another has been to heighten understanding of the properties of texts, as speech-acts minimally constituted by their particular relationship to discourse. It is this which Quentin Skinner has usefully termed 'illocutionary force': a text's action in, for example, attacking or ridiculing a particular line of argument.³⁸ Both realizations have proved profitable in intellectual history: they immediately assist in prioritizing the recovery of discursive context, while clarifying the status of translation as a very particular type of text.³⁹ Yet it should be observed that there can be no end to this convenient hermeneutic. What did it mean to attack or to ridicule? Without addressing this problem, Skinner has upheld the recoverability of 'social meaning' in non-linguistic actions, through illocutionary redescription.⁴⁰ Sooner or later, there can be no escape from more totalizing engagement with the semantics of social behaviour, of the sort so influentially advocated by Clifford Geertz.⁴¹ Skinner's thinking lends support to a broader project of social and cultural recovery.⁴²

In pursuing its implications for King Alfred, I have drawn on further conceptual resources.⁴³ Speech-acts can be more or less mighty: one must confront their very complex interaction with power. Again, the question is fundamentally social: a text's action will relate most

K. Davis (Lewisburg, PA, 2000), pp. 149–70; R. Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2002); Discenza, *King's English*.

³⁷ Q. Skinner, 'Motives, Intentions and Interpretation', pp. 97–8, and 'Interpretation and the Understanding of Speech Acts', p. 120, both in his *Visions of Politics*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 2002) I, 90–102 and 103–27.

³⁸ *Ibid.* ('intentions' are here detached from 'the author', as conventionally understood); J. G. A. Pocock, 'Introduction: the State of the Art', in his *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 1–34; K. Thomas, 'Politics: Looking for Liberty', *New York Review of Books* (26 May 2005), pp. 47–53.

³⁹ Below, pp. 169–70.

⁴⁰ Q. Skinner, '"Social Meaning" and the Explanation of Social Action', in his *Visions of Politics* I, 128–44.

⁴¹ C. Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in his *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London, 1973), pp. 3–30, esp. 12–13 and 27–30.

⁴² L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1989); cf. R. E. Sullivan, 'Introduction: Factors Shaping Carolingian Studies', in *'The Gentle Voices of Teachers': Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age*, ed. R. E. Sullivan (Columbus, OH, 1995), pp. 1–50, with material cited at p. 46, note 24; T. Reuter, 'Nobles and Others: the Social and Cultural Expression of Power Relations in the Middle Ages', in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. J. Duggan (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 85–98.

⁴³ Here I am most grateful to Nicholas Brooks and Janet Nelson for their comments on my original thesis.

consequentially to the contexts in which it is received. In considering such force, my approach is complemented by the insights of Michel Foucault into the power of language, its capacity to order and reinforce the organizing structures of social groups, through institutionalized speech and modes of thought.⁴⁴ In his attention to the cognitive dimensions of language, Foucault rightly pursued inwards the impossibility of truly 'private' meaning, the relationality of all mental acts to available discourses. One need not accept Foucault's own view of the middle ages, nor the uncritical application of his methodological apparatus.⁴⁵ Yet in probing the social basis of intellectual interaction he raised very pertinent historical questions about the political uses of knowledge, its relationship to wider social organization and collective psychology.⁴⁶ Foucault's notion of discourse is here necessary to explore the potential power of privileged language. Yet speech itself cannot be isolated from wider aspects of social practice. Here I have found useful Pierre Bourdieu's attention to the communicational basis of social distinction, its necessary reliance on shared practices and norms.⁴⁷ Primarily concerned with modern capitalist societies, Bourdieu himself has sought to isolate the 'cultural' as a field of inverted economic priorities; one should not be surprised to find different structures in the early middle ages.⁴⁸ In treating 'culture' more broadly, as the shared structures of communication and behaviour, my approach seeks to integrate the economic and political into questions of production and control.

To these general methods I have added an institutional focus, in the social and spatial operation of King Alfred's court.⁴⁹ Early medieval

⁴⁴ M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970); G. Danaher, T. Schirato and J. Webb, *Understanding Foucault* (St Leonards, 2000); L. H. Martin, H. Gutman and P. H. Hutton (ed.), *Technologies of the Self* (Amherst, MA, 1998).

⁴⁵ Cf. esp. J. Weeks, 'Foucault for Historians', *History Workshop Journal* 14 (1982), 106–19; M. Philp, 'Michel Foucault', in *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, ed. Q. Skinner (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 67–81.

⁴⁶ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (London, 1991), pp. 135–292; M. Foucault, 'The Right of Death and Power over Life', and 'The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 258–72 and 273–89.

⁴⁷ P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. R. Johnson (Cambridge, 1993); W. Pohl, with H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction: the Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998); C. Pössel, 'Symbolic Communication and the Negotiation of Power at Carolingian Regnal Assemblies, 814–840' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, 2003), pp. 33–49 (publication forthcoming).

⁴⁸ Cf. the different, though in part complementary, use of Bourdieu by N. G. Discenza, 'Symbolic Capital and the Ruler in the Translation Program of Alfred the Great', *Exemplaria* 23 (2001), 433–67; Discenza, *King's English*.

⁴⁹ Cf. D. Pratt, 'Persuasion and Invention at the Court of King Alfred the Great', in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: the Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, ed. C. Cubitt (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 189–221.

The political thought of King Alfred the Great

courts and court culture have become an increasing focus for scholarly enquiry: here one may learn much from the overarching insights of Norbert Elias, also on the rise in this literature.⁵⁰ Elias's own writings sought ultimately to explain modernity, locating its origins in a transformation of behaviour cultivated 'from above' by medieval and early modern courts.⁵¹ As such, he was also concerned with 'state-building', yet in a way which resolved 'state-like' functions into their constituent social processes. His theory was far more than a modelling of court-based cultural patronage; it extended critically to the power at stake in centralized interaction.⁵² This was fundamentally material, in the control and distribution of local political authority, administering nascent monopolies over violence and taxation.⁵³ In the right conditions, such power had a tendency to accumulate over a larger territory, monopolizing the functions of neighbouring agencies.⁵⁴ One precondition was economic, in the binding effects of towns and use of money; another was a net shortage of redistributable land.⁵⁵ The greater the monopoly, the greater the interdependence of administering interests; the effects were strongest when participating groups were finely balanced, heightening dependence on the coordinating power.⁵⁶ These delicate interests explained the centrality of court behaviour, its tendency to develop elaborate forms of interaction centred on the ruler.⁵⁷ As the latter held advantages of coordinating agency, socialized contact became ever more potent, controlling entirely rational competition among nobles for status and power. In behavioural rules were common features of self-control and symbolic gesture, potentially transmissible to

⁵⁰ C. S. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939–1210* (Philadelphia, PA, 1985), cf. E. J. Goldberg, 'Creating a Medieval Kingdom: Carolingian Kingship, Court Culture, and Aristocratic Society under Louis of East Francia (840–76)' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 1998), now published in revised form as *Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817–76* (Ithaca, NY, 2006); S. Airle, 'The Palace of Memory: the Carolingian Court as Political Centre', in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, ed. S. R. Jones, R. Marks and A. J. Minnis (York, 2000), pp. 1–20; M. de Jong and F. Theuvs (eds.), *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2001); Cubitt (ed.), *Court Culture*.

⁵¹ N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. E. Jephcott, rev. edn (Oxford, 1994 [1939]); N. Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. E. Jephcott (Oxford, 1983 [1969]); cf. P. Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, CT, 1992).

⁵² My assessment is more positive than that of C. Cubitt, 'Introduction', and M. Innes, "'A Place of Discipline'": Carolingian Courts and Aristocratic Youth', p. 76, both in *Court Culture*, ed. Cubitt, pp. 1–15 and 59–76; cf. J. L. Nelson, 'Was Charlemagne's Court a Courtly Society?', pp. 39–57 in the same volume.

⁵³ Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 257–362; S. Mennell, *Norbert Elias: an Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1992), pp. 61–93.

⁵⁴ Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 268–77. ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 206–14 and 220–30.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 312–44, esp. 317–23. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 340–4; Elias, *Court Society*, pp. 78–145.

other social contexts; these mechanisms were the underpinning of a wider 'court society'.⁵⁸

For Elias, these processes did not intensify until the early modern period, though he recognized the much longer history of courtly interaction. In many ways his handling of the middle ages reflected the limits of his material, downplaying Carolingian structures, while too firmly generalizing from Capetian success. Frankish power can no longer be seen as essentially centrifugal, only offset by depleting the royal fisc.⁵⁹ Yet it would be quite wrong to dismiss his model on grounds of chronology. His case for the entirely modern character of depersonalized power deserves respect from medievalists, throwing earlier structures into relief.⁶⁰ More directly, his modelling of court power has many pertinent correspondences. Similarly dissatisfied with modern assumptions, Matthew Innes has located Carolingian political power in critical points of contact between centre and locality, socially negotiated through the manipulation of personal relationships.⁶¹ Though in themselves relatively limited, enough power and resources were at stake to sustain kingship as more than a zero-sum game.⁶² Elias's thinking suggests ways of tracking this game in all its complexity, heightening awareness of variables, while integrating the difficult area of collective perception. His general picture relates particularly well to the later Carolingian kingdoms of East and West Francia, aiding the juxtaposition of their respective courts.⁶³ If used sensitively, his model is open-ended, leaving room for any number of non-courtly arenas, with varying powers and limits of monopoly, and any configuration of aristocratic interests.⁶⁴ Rather than impressive 'states' and puny 'statelessness', the approach invites a quasi-Aristotelian vista of early medieval royal households, widely varying in their degree of social power and relationship to local authority.⁶⁵

That vista is structural, not the 'proving' of Elias nor the tracing of 'civilization'. Violence in particular may be better viewed as an available

⁵⁸ Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 363–447; Elias, *Court Society*, pp. 40–77 and 146–213.

⁵⁹ Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 195–202. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 276, cf. 272–4 and 312–13.

⁶¹ Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 261–2, cf. 253–4.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 259; cf. also MacLean, *Charles the Fat*, pp. 19–22, 75–80 and 120–2.

⁶³ J. L. Nelson, 'Charles le Chauve et les utilisations du savoir', in her *Ruling Families*, no. 7 (cf. below, pp. 133–4 and 150); Goldberg, 'Frontier Kingship'; Goldberg, *Empire*, esp. pp. 165–230.

⁶⁴ Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 261–7, for regional variation; cf. J. L. Nelson, 'Kingship and Royal Government', in *NCMH* II, 383–430, esp. 408–22.

⁶⁵ Esp. evident further west: W. Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm: Studies in the Llandaff Charters* (London, 1978); W. Davies, 'Celtic Kingships in the Early Middle Ages', in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. J. Duggan (London, 1993), pp. 101–24; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000).

form of power, subject to varying sources of regulation and control.⁶⁶ What this thinking highlights is the relative role of court-based contact, the degree to which this was underpinned by quantifiable aristocratic interests. The question necessarily combines prosopographical enquiry with holistic attention to the effects of centrally experienced language and gesture. It makes no sense to separate these latter components: as much is demonstrated by the general character of ninth-century political discourse, frequently drawing force from aspects of interpersonal relationship.⁶⁷ Though 'public' in function, this language was commonly 'royal', combining earthly lordship with divinely imagined notions of worldly service.⁶⁸ Both had room for an idealized royal household, not always relating precisely to contemporary practice.⁶⁹ Such discourse had its own complexity, in relation to both God and the world, shaping the meaning of speech and witnessed action.⁷⁰ Texts took their place within these deeper structures, deployed by actors necessarily defined by their relationship to royal rule. Only here can one hope to recover the force of contemporary rhetoric, and its varying uses at the hands of ecclesiastics, learned laity or wise kings. To employ writing was itself a gesture, never far from these socialized relationships, while capable of complex deployment through self-description.

Texts in turn had the capacity to frame action; gestures related in often complex ways to linguistic norms. The relationship could be directly textual, richly exploited in inauguration rituals and other royal liturgy.⁷¹ Beyond these regularized or status-changing procedures, early medievalists have increasingly acknowledged a wider role for ritualized or symbolic acts in elite communication.⁷² This has been taken furthest

⁶⁶ G. Halsall (ed.), *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (Woodbridge, 1998); P. Wormald, 'Giving God and King their Due: Conflict and its Regulation in the Early English State', in his *Legal Culture*, pp. 333–57, at 335–42 (with above qualifications); Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 129–36.

⁶⁷ J. Fried, 'Der karolingische Herrschaftsverband im 9 Jhdt. zwischen "Kirche" und "Königshaus"', *Historische Zeitschrift* 235 (1982), 1–43; Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire', pp. 64–9; Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 262–3.

⁶⁸ See further below, pp. 58–78 and 130–78.

⁶⁹ Airlie, 'Palace of Memory', esp. pp. 4–8; J. L. Nelson, 'Aachen as a Place of Power', in *Topographies*, ed. de Jong and Theuvs, pp. 217–41, at 226–32, for Hincmar's *De ordine palatii*, discussed further below, pp. 42–3.

⁷⁰ For the social power of religious practice, cf. E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, ed. and trans. K. Fields (New York, 1995 [1912]); C. Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in his *Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 87–125.

⁷¹ J. L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986); E. H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1958).

⁷² K. Leyser, 'Ritual, Ceremony and Gesture: Ottonian Germany', in his *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: the Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, ed. T. Reuter (London, 1994), pp. 189–213; J.-C. Schmitt, 'The Rationale of Gestures in the West: Third to Thirteenth Centuries', in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 59–70; G. Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favour: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY,

for Ottonian and Salian Germany, informing an entire approach focused on representational behaviour: meaningful acts seemingly effective in regulating contact between ruler and nobility.⁷³ Within gestures of 'friendship' and pious humility are discerned unwritten 'rules' of kingship, sufficient in themselves to uphold the 'game'. The resulting work has often been illuminating, though it can leave the impression of largely stage-managed public encounters, uncertainly related to material interests.⁷⁴ There are a few parallels with Geertz's 'theatre state' of Bali: neglecting power, his account found ritual as self-driven spectacle.⁷⁵ Here one may learn from Erving Goffman's profound picture of sociality, observing the necessary theatre of all human behaviour, merely transferred in any context of familiarity or privacy.⁷⁶ The effect is to uphold the centrality of language in all arenas, including those 'behind-the-scenes'; in Alfred's case, the latter is at least partially recoverable from its evidential imprint. Rather than ritualized social action, one must envisage interactive performance by elite actors, delicately played out against the backdrop of discourse, gestural conventions and material power.

These elements were common to all regions: most commentators have seen the use of gesture as an effective substitute for institutional means of rule.⁷⁷ 'Ritualized' Germany is contrasted with 'governed' West Francia, differentiated by the use of writing and deeper administrative machinery.⁷⁸ The direct opposition is becoming unsustainable in the general reassessment of Carolingian rule. Rather than instructional instruments, capitularies are better viewed as exhortatory acts of rhetoric; familiarity and gesture have emerged as important tools of communication, both at court and in the politics of assemblies.⁷⁹ Across Europe, one is dealing with different configurations of political discourse and social interaction, with the uses of literacy highly pertinent to

1992); F. Theuvs and J. L. Nelson (eds.), *Rituals of Power from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2000).

⁷³ G. Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers*, trans. C. Carroll (Cambridge, 2004); G. Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1997); G. Althoff, *Otto III*, trans. P. G. Jestic (Pennsylvania, PA, 2003).

⁷⁴ Useful discussion by T. Reuter, 'Pre-Gregorian Mentalities', *JEH* 45 (1994), 465–74; S. Hamilton, 'Review Article: Early Medieval Rulers and their Modern Biographers', *EME* 9 (2000), 247–60; Pössel, 'Symbolic Communication', pp. 16–33.

⁷⁵ C. Geertz, *Negara: the Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, NJ, 1980); cf. M. Bloch, *Ritual, History and Power* (London, 1989), pp. 208–10.

⁷⁶ E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh, 1956).

⁷⁷ Leyser, 'Ritual, Ceremony', pp. 192–6; Althoff, *Otto III*, pp. 16–26.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, cf. J. L. Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed and the People's Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual', in her *The Frankish World, 750–900* (London, 1996), pp. 99–131, at 128–31.

⁷⁹ Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 253–4; Nelson, 'Aachen', pp. 232–7; Nelson, 'Courtly Society?'; Pössel, 'Symbolic Communication', pp. 56–248.

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the character of aristocratic performance. All were necessarily reliant on encoded elite behaviour: Elias again assists by questioning the extent of its relationship to activity at the political centre. In many ways, Alfred's court offers a richly documented case-study, casting light on the alternative configurations of neighbouring kingdoms.

My study is divided into two parts. In the first I consider the operation of West Saxon royal power, viewing Alfred's reign against the deeper backdrop of ninth-century West Saxon rule. My survey works upwards, beginning with the economic resource-base of the West Saxon political order, before turning to the role of its principal aristocratic participants, first secular, then ecclesiastical. In each case, local activities are assessed in relation to power in the royal household; this provides the context for an exploration of court communication before King Alfred's reign, relating political discourse to the wider scope of available cultural forms. Part I ends by assessing the impact of viking activity on this political community, situating Alfredian developments against earlier aspects of West Saxon military and logistical response. To this context Part II adds the force of Alfredian political discourse, recovered within broader features of communicational innovation. Royal writings are assessed against the more general uses of vernacular prose translation, isolating their participation in a single discourse of power. Alfredian innovation is explored in relation to its material dimensions; each of Alfred's texts is then analysed in turn, tracing the impact of this discourse on royal translation, taking full account of the status of Latin source-texts, the possible role of interpretative material and likely character of Alfred's available expertise. In each case, the analysis is preliminary to reintegrating the text with its immediate context, as part of the practice of Alfredian kingship. In conclusion, I identify the uniting features of Alfred's distinctive practice, the central contribution of royal learning and the implications of both for the understanding of ninth- and tenth-century political, cultural and economic change.

PART I

The West Saxon Political Order

Chapter 2

RESOURCES AND EXTRACTION

The rise of Wessex in the first half of the ninth century was accompanied by grassroots economic change. Political expansion had been the achievement of Alfred's grandfather, Ecgberht (802–39), and father, Æthelwulf (839–58), tightening the hold of dynastic kingship; this order had itself contributed to a more intensive exploitation of expanding resources, commercial as well as agrarian. Both areas were sources of royal income: in the previous century, land and warfare had been increasingly supplemented by new forms of regularized payment, through the taxation of markets and exchange. In fiscal and monetary regulation, these structures presuppose aspects of central control; Balzaretto's reluctance to attribute any form of economic management to early medieval rulers seems inordinately destructive.¹ For Wessex, his case can be countered by many of the effects of expansion, tapping the wealth of south-eastern trade; these extended to systems of military assessment, exercised more broadly in urban defence.

WEST SAXON RESOURCES AND ROYAL POWER

Though sometimes overstated, a strong case remains for royal promotion of markets from the earliest phases of Anglo-Saxon urban development.² Merchants received legal protection: the control of trade enabled substantial extraction, both in bullion and in kind, through payment of tolls and issuing of coinage. The latter involved a potentially

¹ 'Debate: Trade, Industry', pp. 142–50.

² P. H. Sawyer, 'Kings and Merchants', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 139–58; R. Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement* (London, 1989), still useful despite criticisms, pushed furthest in M. Anderton (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres: Beyond the Emporia* (Glasgow, 1999); cf. J. R. Maddicott, 'Prosperity and Power in the Age of Bede and Beowulf', *PBA* 117 (2002), 49–72; C. Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: the People of Britain 850–1520* (London, 2002), pp. 43–70.

lucrative partnership between kings and moneyers, who were mercantile third parties rather than royal officials. The estimation of coinage-volume is fraught with difficulty, but from the second quarter of the eighth century coins circulating in southern England should be measured at least in millions, and possibly tens of millions in later phases.³ By placing charges on minting, and latterly by insisting on the reminting of all foreign coins, kings derived a considerable profit from the circulation of currency, even after moneyers had taken their cut. This strengthened royal interests in coastal trading-centres or 'wics', where minting and commerce were mainly located. In Wessex, this potential seems first to have been exploited under King Ine (688–726), whose suggested role in the laying-out of *Hamwic* (Southampton) would expand his pivotal position in early West Saxon kingship.

Minting nevertheless remained almost exclusively confined to the south-east, where a concentration of 'wics' was sustained by Continental trade. The unparalleled wealth of this region was the main cause of its political significance, initially subject to Mercian ambitions. Under Offa (757–96) and Cenwulf (796–821) Mercian authority was established over the principal mints of Canterbury, Rochester and Ipswich, in addition to the existing Mercian emporium of *Lundenwic*. Another target was the network of Kentish royal monasteries, also participant in trade, exacerbating tensions with the see of Canterbury which were never satisfactorily resolved.⁴ Kentish hostility, coupled with Mercian dynastic conflict, enabled Ecgbert to launch an extraordinarily successful West Saxon offensive, achieving a decisive shift in the balance of power.⁵ In 825 Ecgbert received the submission of Kent, Surrey, the South Saxons and the East Saxons; while in 829, according to the *Chronicle*, 'King Ecgbert conquered the kingdom of the Mercians, and everything south of the Humber; and he was the eighth king who was *brytenwalda*'.⁶ Probably meaning 'wide-ruler', the term bears little relation to his long-term legacy. With Mercian independence restored in the following year, horizons were restricted to the newly acquired south-east.

West Saxon policy proved characteristically more subtle.⁷ An agreement was soon reached with the see of Canterbury at Kingston in 838; local Kentish nobles were rewarded for their support with land and

³ D. M. Metcalf, 'The Prosperity of North-Western Europe in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries', cf. P. Grierson, 'The Volume of Anglo-Saxon Coinage', both in *EcHR* 2nd series 20 (1967), 344–57 and 153–60.

⁴ N. P. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 129–54 and 175–206.

⁵ S. Keynes, 'The Control of Kent in the Ninth Century', *EME* 2 (1993), 111–31; S. Keynes, 'England, 700–900', in *NCMH* II, 18–42.

⁶ See below, pp. 110–11. ⁷ Keynes, 'Kent', esp. pp. 120–31.

offices. The south-eastern regions continued to be treated as a separate kingdom, commonly forming an appanage for successive royal sons and younger brothers, with varying degrees of autonomy. Ecgberht and his successors remained simply 'king of the West Saxons and of Kent' in charters drafted by Kentish scribes. Such rule maximized the potential of their new-found prize. By the Kingston agreement the West Saxon dynasty acquired temporal lordship of the Kentish royal monasteries, gaining access to commercial interests on a scale denied to Mercian rulers.⁸ Royal resources were further boosted by flows of income from the mints of Canterbury and Rochester, now striking West Saxon regnal coinage for the first time.⁹ This was a dynasty fully aware of their new sources of wealth, actively exploiting large-scale currency management.

How far were such concerns shared by the wider nobility? The fundamental basis of aristocratic power remained land. It was through gifts of land that resources were effectively shared between the king and his nobles; collective demand fuelled expansionist warfare, for any new grants had to come from existing royal possessions. Ninth-century royal landholding cannot be calculated with any precision, but from the spread of estates in Alfred's will it is clear that his dynasty could draw upon extensive landed resources, stretching from the West Saxon heartlands to territory more recently acquired to the east and west.¹⁰ The voluminous body of surviving charters in the name of West Saxon kings for the period c. 830–c. 870 reveals a steady flow of land grants up to Alfred's accession, if perhaps no further. An instructive contrast has been drawn with the comparative parsimony of Mercian kings, whose charters include an unusual preponderance of grants obtained for payment, often conferring only a lease or immunities, as if land itself were in short supply.¹¹ Perhaps in response, the second half of the ninth century witnessed a renewal of Mercian attacks westwards against the Welsh, but opportunities were now curtailed by the growing power of Gwynedd.¹² Whereas Mercian ambitions ended in failure, gradual West Saxon absorption of the kingdom of Cornwall may have contributed significantly to royal landholding, easing pressures elsewhere.

Of necessity, land-management remained dominant among aristocratic priorities. Everyday logistics varied significantly according to the

⁸ Brooks, *Canterbury*, pp. 197–203.

⁹ P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage I. The Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 303–16.

¹⁰ S 1507 (*SEHD*, no. 11; trans. in K&L, *Alfred*, pp. 173–8).

¹¹ P. Wormald, 'The Ninth Century', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. J. Campbell (Oxford, 1982), pp. 132–57, at 138–9.

¹² See below, pp. 107–11.

tenure enjoyed by the landholder. Most prized was bookland, conveyed by royal charter; first introduced in the seventh century for ecclesiastical purposes, this tenure contrasted with land conveyed orally, known as folkland. Bookland was soon exploited by the secular nobility, initially via 'bogus' monasteries, and then from the late eighth century through charters in the name of lay beneficiaries. Bookland's defining advantage was the conferral of ownership in perpetuity, with freedom of alienation, sometimes expressed as lordship over land (*dominium* or *hlaforðscipe*).¹³ This flexibility was a major attraction, enabling estates to be leased, gifted or sold; another was the tendency for estates to acquire exemptions from certain royal dues, otherwise incumbent on all folkland. Most commonly specified were a range of legal rights and fines, together with the obligation to provide occasional hospitality to the king and his officials, sometimes expressed as a food-rent or tax (*feorm*). All were effectively transferred to the landholder, drawing inhabitants under greater control. The extension of bookland to secular nobles laid the basis for seigneurial lordship.¹⁴ Progressive fragmentation of holdings forced landlords to exploit their estates more intensively; one outcome was the emergence of seigneurial units which would be known after 1066 as 'manors'. Peasant obligations included labour-services on lordly demesne, typically focused on a central residence; open-field systems also may have accompanied nucleation.

The ninth century was formative in this long-term process, a role especially evident in its social effects. In the law-books of Wihtred and Ine, the standard adjective of nobility was *gesiðcund*, with origins in the notion of personal service, especially royal. By the Mercian translation of Bede, in the later ninth century, *gesið* had become a mark of status, chiefly connoting land-ownership and power over dependants.¹⁵ Lower in the social scale, the defining characteristic of the *ceorl* or 'commoner' remained his personal freedom, denied to the substantial class of slaves beneath him. Yet this legal status mattered less, as many *ceorlas* became tied to estate-centres by obligations of labour.¹⁶ Men and their families are explicitly transferred with land in two Worcester charters of the 880s.¹⁷

¹³ A. Williams in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge et al. (Oxford, 1999), pp. 277–8, with references.

¹⁴ R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (Leicester, 1997), pp. 153–77; D. A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 4–37 and 241–59; B. Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1995), pp. 240–90; Dyer, *Making a Living*, pp. 13–42.

¹⁵ H. R. Loyn, 'Gesiths and Thegns in Anglo-Saxon England from the Seventh to Tenth Century', *EHR* 70 (1955), 529–49, esp. 535–40.

¹⁶ Wormald, 'Ninth Century', p. 142.

¹⁷ S 217 (BCS 547) and S 1415 (BCS 599), cf. S 1285 (BCS 599; *SEHD*, no. 17); Pelteret, *Slavery*, pp. 167–70; Faith, *Lordship*, pp. 171–3.

A remarkable passage in the translation of Orosius assumes that *ceorlas* were somehow unfree through subservience to 'lords'.¹⁸ Social relationships were no longer so clearly personal, but increasingly dependent on relationships to land. The position of *ceorlas* may well have been most constrained in the heartlands of Alfred's kingdom. The extent of manorialism was regionalized; by Domesday at least, levels of peasant freedom seem to have been lower in Wessex than elsewhere.

Even in estate-management landlords were in no way isolated from monetary transactions, or urban exchange.¹⁹ Specialized goods were needed for aristocratic consumption, while urban populations needed food and raw materials, sustaining a growing market for rural produce. Rich charter evidence for ninth-century Canterbury reveals a buoyant market for urban property, with local nobles willing to pay up to ten times the rural price for burgage-plots linked to fields located outside the town.²⁰ The flexibility of income in cash and bullion is here substantiated. Any exemption from royal tolls was treasured as a valuable gift; the best evidence pertains to ecclesiastical interests. The substantial corpus of eighth-century toll-charters nevertheless reveals the wider importance of *Lundenwic* as a place of aristocratic exchange; high-status goods were acquired by the sale of specialist regional produce, transported by ship.²¹ One such exemption was confirmed in the mid-ninth century, while in 857 the bishop of Worcester secured the right to use weights and measures 'freely' on an estate in London, without the normal payment for Mercian royal authorization.²² The collection of royal dues was farmed out as a further commercial privilege. The office of king's reeve could relate either to a 'wic' or royal vill; in either case king's thegns found ample opportunities for profit. The will of the Kentish reeve Abba is laden with payments in bullion and coin.²³ Certain moneyers can be identified in written sources; they too could hold the rank of king's thegn.²⁴

At the rural end of the supply chain, much depended on the geographical distribution of estates, and on the size of each aristocratic

¹⁸ Or IV.3, p. 87. See Pelteret, *Slavery*, pp. 54–6.

¹⁹ C. Dyer, 'Recent Developments in Early Medieval Urban History and Archaeology in England', in *Urban Historical Geography: Recent Progress in Britain and Germany*, ed. D. Denecke and S. Shaw (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 69–80; S. R. H. Jones, 'Transaction Costs, Institutional Change, and the Emergence of a Market Economy in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *EcHR* 2nd series 46 (1993), 658–78; C. Scull, 'Urban Centres in Pre-Viking England?', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. Hines, pp. 269–310.

²⁰ Brooks, *Canterbury*, pp. 26–30.

²¹ S. Kelly, 'Trading Privileges from Eighth-Century England', *EME* 1 (1992), 3–28, esp. 13–16.

²² S 88 (BCS 152; *Rochester*, ed. Campbell, no. 2); S 208 (BCS 492).

²³ S 1482 (*SEHD*, no. 2).

²⁴ Lord Stewartby, 'Moneyers in the Written Records', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, ed. Blackburn and Dumville, pp. 151–3.

household.²⁵ Even for royal vill and ecclesiastical houses, food-renders might prove insufficiently flexible to be consumed directly. The commutation of renders into customary payments offered an alternative source of income, doubtless attractive to the reeves of far-flung royal and ecclesiastical holdings, but also perhaps to smaller households on tighter budgets. Farming memoranda from the tenth century onwards reveal peasants owing rent (*gafol*) or other dues partly in pennies, partly in kind.²⁶ One, famously relating to Hurstbourne in Hampshire, occurs in a charter dated 900: though the context commands respect, such details might well have been vulnerable to later updating and improvement.²⁷ In the absence of comparable earlier sources, assessment rests on the indirect evidence of coin distribution. The map of single-finds from the ninth century shows concentrations at *Hamwic*, Ipswich and *Lundenwic*, in a pattern radiating from the south-east with decreasing intensity.²⁸ Levels of monetization would have varied greatly according to regional and local circumstances; coinage remained virtually unknown in Wales, much of the west midlands and the south-west beyond Exeter. Yet the overall pattern shows a plentiful scatter of single-finds across the open countryside of southern and eastern England, including Wessex. Certain unexpectedly ‘productive’ sites point strongly to the activity of rural fairs.²⁹ This is highly suggestive of peasant demand for coin, at least under certain favourable conditions, and thus of aristocratic demand, through the extraction of monetary payments. Even as labour-services increased, some landlords might well have drawn a significant cash income from their estates, creating new opportunities for those peasants concerned, as well as obligations.

MILITARY SERVICE AND THE COMMON BURDENS

West Saxon expansion had been achieved militarily, but such warfare was probably not straightforwardly profitable. The south-east was

²⁵ Faith, *Lordship*, pp. 153–77; cf. Carolingian parallels in Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, pp. 22–8.

²⁶ Faith, *Lordship*, pp. 56–88 and 105–6, with references.

²⁷ S 359 (BCS 594; *Charters*, ed. Robertson, no. 110), a cartulary copy of s. xii, recording the large figure of forty pence per hide; cf. H. P. R. Finberg’s case for authenticity (‘The Churls of Hurstbourne’, in his *Lucerna* (London, 1964), pp. 131–43).

²⁸ D. M. Metcalf, ‘The Monetary Economy of Ninth-Century England South of the Humber: a Topographical Analysis’, in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, ed. Blackburn and Dumville, pp. 167–97, esp. 167–74.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169 and 180; M. Blackburn, ‘“Productive” Sites and the Pattern of Coin Loss in England, 600–1180’, in *Markets in Early Medieval Europe: Trading and ‘Productive’ Sites, 650–850*, ed. T. Pestell and K. Ulmschneider (Macclesfield, 2003), pp. 20–36; K. Ulmschneider, ‘Settlement, Economy and the “Productive” Site: Middle Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire A.D. 650–780’, *Medieval Archaeology* 44 (2000), 53–72, at 62, note 20, for sites within Wessex.

absorbed as a going concern, while income from coinage will have taken time to realize. Military service was a cost in labour and equipment; even in conquest, Ecgberht faced heightened needs of viking defence. All costs were borne by the economy at large, transmitted by mechanisms of strong logistical effect. Beyond army-service lay the related obligations of bridge-building and fortress-work, as burdens collectively falling on the 'entire people', known from their reservation in certain Anglo-Saxon charters. Though many aspects of the system were long established, fulfilment could not be taken for granted. Requiring co-operation both from lords and their men, these structures related to many other forces acting on local agrarian communities.

From an early stage in Anglo-Saxon England, military service was an obligation assigned to land.³⁰ Assessed by the hide, its role complemented many other dues of tribute and food-render, from which bookland was frequently exempted. Yet unlike these other services, the common burdens described 'necessary' duties, explicitly reserved in statements of immunity, and expected from all types of land, whether bookland or folkland. As such, they are unlikely to have represented an entirely new imposition, from which bookland had hitherto been exempt.³¹ There is no reason to suppose that military service had not always been due from ecclesiastical landholding. Explicit reservation in charters was encouraged by the fuller recording of immunities, not included in the earliest diplomatic. Yet the record seems also to reflect pressures of regular performance. Bridge-building and military service are first reserved in a Mercian context, at the council of Gumley in 749, supplemented by fortress-work from the 790s: the references correlate with the construction of Offa's dyke and other known fortifications.³²

Bridges and border duty corresponded to the Roman public services (*munera sordida*) of the Theodosian Code; in fortress-work the common burdens expanded such collective duty.³³ The same pattern would emerge for Wessex in the context of viking defence. Only in the reign of Æthelbald (855–60) did charters regularly add fortress-work to the other two burdens, reserved from the 840s.³⁴ The timing coincides with other signs of urban renewal. A poem of uncertain date commemorates the construction of a new bridge at Winchester by bishop Swifthun,

³⁰ N.P. Brooks, 'The Development of Military Obligations in Eighth- and Ninth-Century England', in his *Communities and Warfare 700–1400* (London, 2000), pp. 32–47.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–9; cf. R. P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1988), pp. 43–57.

³² Brooks, 'Military Obligations', pp. 33 and 39–43.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 41, notes 45 and 46; Nelson, 'Political Ideas', pp. 128–9.

³⁴ Brooks, 'Military Obligations', p. 44.

completed in 859; its location, outside the east gate, suggests burgeoning use of this civic entrance.³⁵ Similar processes are suggested for London: as early as 857, the estate acquired by the bishop of Worcester lay close to the city's west gate, implying commerce proximate to the Roman walls.³⁶ The estate's former owner, Ceolmund, was probably Æthelwulf's Kentish reeve of the same name. London's political status became increasingly ambiguous in the 850s: development might well have involved West Saxon as well as Mercian interests.³⁷ Collectively, the evidence points to a mid-century 'take-off' in West Saxon burh-work, perhaps focused on defensive repair; uncertain in scale, such efforts laid the basis for Alfred's wider burghal network.

These were very significant costs on labour and capital. The composition of early armies has been much debated, but clearly combined noble with *ceorlisc* personnel.³⁸ Contrary to some accounts, all land was publicly liable: there is no reason to suppose any regular exemption for lordly demesne.³⁹ In practice, military service, beyond that of the king's thegnly supporters, probably fell on a disparate range of commended men. Asser mentions *bellatores* in Alfred's pay and personal service; aristocratic households probably included similar 'fighting-men', available for land or other advancement.⁴⁰ Later evidence suggests the importance of rent-paying and other types of 'free' peasantry, capable of accepting their lord's defence.⁴¹ Though their labour services would be less onerous, they too were frequently tied to a central lordly estate.⁴² Demand was compounded by bridge-building and fortress-work, assessed more intensively, but with fewer specialist requirements. Pressures would already have been great on freer tenants: pressed for labour, many landholders might well have turned to their own dependent *ceorlas*.

Securely extracted, these were formidable mechanisms of collective action, directed at shire level by royal office-holders. As such, the common burdens were distinctive, and seen to be so, on a European stage. Unusually, they attracted direct West Frankish comment: English burh-work supplied an acknowledged precedent for West Frankish fortifications of the later 860s. By the Edict of Pîtres of 864, Charles the Bald required all unable to perform military service to supply labour *inter alia*

³⁵ M. Biddle, 'The Study of Winchester: Archaeology and History in a British Town, 1961–1983', *PBA* 69 (1983), 93–135, at 120–2.

³⁶ D. Keene, 'Alfred and London', in *Alfred*, ed. Reuter, pp. 235–49, at 239–41; cf. *ASC* s.a. 851, referring to *Lundenburh*.

³⁷ Keynes, 'Mercians', pp. 8–9. ³⁸ *Ine* 51.

³⁹ Cf. Faith, *Lordship*, pp. 48–55 and 268–9, over-reliant on restricted Domesday and geld-based evidence.

⁴⁰ *V/A* 100, lines 1–6. ⁴¹ Abels, *Lordship*, pp. 143–54; Faith, *Lordship*, pp. 94–9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 107–14.

for the construction of *civitates*, 'according to the custom of antiquity and of other peoples'.⁴³ The formula implied a distinction between Theodosian bridges and watch-duty, already supported by Frankish legislation, and the building of 'new cities', only customary overseas.⁴⁴ The Edict may well be the work of Charles's key supporter, Hincmar of Rheims; in 858 or 859, the archbishop had drawn a further contrast relating to military service from church lands.⁴⁵ According to Hincmar, English bishoprics and monasteries were less extensively endowed than their Frankish counterparts; this explained an arrangement by which military service was not rendered from bishoprics, but its costs (*stipendia militiae*) supplied 'from public resources' (*ex roga publica*). This Hincmar contrasted with wealthier Frankish bishoprics, supporting service directly from their income. To a conventional fourfold division of episcopal expenditure, between bishop, clergy, poor and church-buildings, Frankish custom had effectively added a fifth, for 'fighting-men'. Hincmar's point was the special defensive role of Frankish ecclesiastical landholding.⁴⁶

The comparison was not merely rhetorical: though ostensibly prompted by a passage in Pope Gregory's *Libellus responsionum*, Hincmar's claims reflected genuine differences in contemporary military assessment.⁴⁷ Frankish church land had long been exploited for lay purposes, the most common involving forms of precarial grant, compensated by rent.⁴⁸ The practice intensified under Carolingian ecclesiastical reform, where such grants were formally accepted as an expedient measure, only justified by military necessity.⁴⁹ At stake was rather the extent and nature of the church's contribution, repeatedly clarified in Carolingian legislation, and a subject of intense episcopal concern.⁵⁰ Typical arrangements

⁴³ MGH Capit. II, no. 273, c. 27, pp. 321–2.

⁴⁴ J. L. Nelson, 'The Franks and the English in the Ninth Century Reconsidered', in her *Ruling Families*, no. 6, pp. 146–9.

⁴⁵ Hincmar, *De ecclesiis et capellis*, ed. Stratmann, pp. 119–20; J. L. Nelson, 'The Church's Military Service in the Ninth Century: a Contemporary Comparative View?', in her *Ritual*, pp. 117–32.

⁴⁶ Cf. synod of Ver (844): MGH Conc. III, no. 7, c. 12, pp. 42–3; the same division recurs in RC 19, pp. 84–7, cf. N. Staubach, *Rex Christinaus: Hofkultur und Herrschaftspropaganda im Reich Karls des Kahlen – Teil II: Grundlegung der 'religion royale'*, Pictura et Poesis II/2 (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1993), 266–8.

⁴⁷ Pace Nelson, 'Church's Military Service', pp. 118–21 and 127–8; cf. her later questioning of this position in '“King Across the Sea”', pp. 66–7, note 105. The same Gregorian text was similarly used by Hincmar's successor, Fulk (cf. below, pp. 51–2 and 223–8).

⁴⁸ G. Constable, 'Nona et decima: an Aspect of Carolingian Economy', *Speculum* 35 (1960), 224–50; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 134–42 and 265–71; J. L. Nelson, 'Charles the Bald and the Church in Town and Countryside', in her *Ritual*, pp. 75–90; S. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 75–105.

⁴⁹ MGH Capit. I, no. 11, p. 28; Constable, 'Nona et decima', pp. 224–31; Nelson, 'Church in Town and Countryside', pp. 77–9.

⁵⁰ E. Ewig in *The Church in the Age of Feudalism*, Handbook of Church History 3, ed. H. Judin and J. Dolan, trans. A. Briggs (New York and London, 1969), 97–125.

involved the recognition of lands held in benefice by royal or ecclesiastical vassals; some may have been quite minor tenants, additionally supported by payment.⁵¹ As Hincmar was implying, all consumed the church's resources; in practice, land was more central, through the variety of threats posed to ecclesiastical title. Appropriation featured prominently among ninth-century complaints of abuse; at the margins, rulers responded with acts of selective restitution.⁵² Yet, as Hincmar also recognized, the contribution was a reality of Frankish ecclesiastical wealth. The church itself had been the principal beneficiary of Carolingian military expansion; according to Herlihy's estimate, between 751 and 825 its landholding had grown from about ten to about thirty per cent of all territory in cultivation.⁵³ Exploited most intensively in the west, these measures supplied an important component in Frankish royal armies; they go a long way to explaining the political power of Carolingian bishops.

Both theory and practice upheld the distinctiveness of Frankish church land. Its service involved forms of 'gift' unique to such property.⁵⁴ There was indeed a contrast with English burdens, required from all land by fiscal mechanisms. Bookland retained these 'common' services: even at Gumley, churches owed what was due from all. The landholding in question was in any case more modest. Canterbury's archiepiscopal endowment has been estimated at approximately 700 hides at the end of the eighth century, placing it on a par with that of St Germain-des-Prés, at best a monastery of upper middle rank.⁵⁵ Bookland had nothing which could be lost through 'secularization'; the more appropriate comparison may be with land held on lease. Seemingly used for a variety of purposes, Anglo-Saxon leasing remained an ad hoc strategy, lacking formalized framework or explicit military concession.⁵⁶ In the ninth century, bookland was no longer restricted to ecclesiastical endowment, its ambiguity accentuated by many other aspects of Southumbrian change.⁵⁷ Central was the role of bishops, seemingly more

⁵¹ Nelson, 'Church's Military Service', pp. 123–7; *casati* ('housed ones') may well have had 'houses' (Reynolds, *Fiefs*, p. 100, cf. MGH Capit. I, no. 20, c. 13).

⁵² Nelson, 'Church's Military Service', pp. 77–8; C.J. Carroll, 'The Archbishops and Church Provinces of Mainz and Cologne during the Carolingian Period, 751–911' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, 1998), pp. 244–67, for East Frankish comparison.

⁵³ D. Herlihy, 'Church Property on the European Continent, 701–1200', *Speculum* 36 (1961), pp. 81–105; cf. Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 41–50.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hincmar, *Quatemiones* (first part of *Pro ecclesiae libertatum defensione*) PL 125: 1050–1, contrasting the church's more recent 'beneficia' and 'annua dona' with support once rendered 'de publico'.

⁵⁵ Brooks, *Canterbury*, p. 107; Wallace-Hadrill, *Frankish Church*, p. 353. ⁵⁶ Below, pp. 99–102.

⁵⁷ Below, pp. 44–62.