

Rory Naismith, David A. Woodman (ed.), Writing, Kingship and Power in Anglo-Saxon England, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 2018, XXX–336 p., 12 fig., ISBN 978-1-107-16097-2, EUR 90,00.

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Simon Keynes has been shaping the study of Anglo-Saxon England for a generation. Over some forty years, he has inspired many more scholars than can be drawn into one *Festschrift*, but the contributors to this welcome volume reflect the diversity of his interests and his formative influence in multiple fields of study. There is, moreover, a warmth to their contributions. No contributor strains to impress; each is comfortable in their specialism, knowing from experience that they have the honorand's attention.

The essays may be divided into three camps. First are those that synthesize and consolidate. Second are the stimulating essays, which »get us thinking«, as one contributor puts it. Third are the revisionist essays, which dismantle and rebuild. There has always been room in Anglo-Saxon studies for a range of scholarship and research.

David Woodman's chapter revisits the »hagiographic feud« between the first »Life of St Cuthbert« and the »Life of Wilfrid«, connecting writing and assertions of power in northern hagiography and charters. Rory Naismith's essay amplifies his criticism of Dolley's model of sexennial recoinage and leans (with David Pratt's piece) towards the maximum view of the late Anglo-Saxon state. Levi Roach too develops ideas fashioned in his previous publications. Here he uses charter evidence to argue that the years 993 and 1005 were turning points in Æthelred's reign. To his prior analysis of S 876 of 993 (which he reads as sounding a return to the policies of Edgar and Æthelwold), he appends a discussion of S 911 of 1005 which also, unusually, refers to contemporary events and which Roach reads as almost heralding the »palace purge« of 1006.

Sarah Foot's stimulating chapter asks whether Bede promoted a distinct ideal of kingship. Considering his kings in relation to their kin, their ministry, and the ways in which they died in Bede's narrative, she concludes that Bede regarded kingship as service and, if necessary, sacrifice. The paternalistic model of kingship she finds in the »Ecclesiastical History« is not out of step with biblical ideals of kingship, but Foot tries out the idea that Bede may have invested exemplary kings with idealized fatherly attributes because he yearned for a father. Foot thus invites us to consider the psychological legacy of his putatively disrupted childhood. Jinty Nelson too invites us to peer through a new lens, not at Bede but at a rumoured plot to oust Pope Hadrian I. She interprets the rumour as a device to unsettle the pope during a phase of tense relations between Hadrian and Charlemagne. Foot and Nelson are trying out ideas for their forthcoming biographies of Bede and Charlemagne respectively.



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Pauline Stafford gets us thinking about Æthelred's daughters. We see their outlines appear rather like the sand people of Sutton Hoo. There is the danger that further trowelling would destroy the evidence. Helen Foxhall-Forbes challenges orthodoxy in a different way, not by calling for the proper restoration of women to male histories, but by questioning Robert Bartlett's claim that it is possible to reconstruct the judicial ordeal. By arguing that contemporaries were less sure of the process than Bartlett thought they were, she reopens a debate. Julia Crick follows the complicating approach by reconsidering the gendering of prayer formulae. Both she and Francesca Tinti challenge the prevalence of functionalist hypotheses, the former in explaining the presence of prayer formulae for men and women, the latter in accounting for bilingualism in charters from the Worcester archive. Tinti identifies a campaign, during Oswald's pre-York Worcester years, to record the leasing of episcopal estates. This effort could have accompanied the increase in the use of three-lifetime leases, for leases spanning three generations would extend beyond living memory and required documentation to ensure reversion to the lessor.

David Pratt asks important questions about geld (the land tax). Was it one of the burdens from which bookland was exempt? Pratt argues no, observing that from Æthelred's reign the writ, and the shire court, enabled the king and royal agencies to grant geld exemption, beneficial hidation, and sake and soke, none of which were included among rights conferred by diplomas. This is a valuable contribution to explaining the increased prevalence of the writ and decline in diploma use over the eleventh century. Katy Cubitt's contribution reassesses the worldview of Archbishop Wulfstan. By distinguishing between two mental projections of the endtimes, namely »psychological imminence« (having the endtimes ever in one's thoughts) and »predictive imminence« (turning one's thoughts to them in moments of anticipation), Cubitt demonstrates the dominance of the former in Wulfstan's thinking. She is able thus to reinterpret his apocalypticism, not as the passing phase observed by Dorothy Bethurum, but as a deep trait of his religious awareness which affected his worldview throughout his preaching career. In so doing, Cubitt refines the chronology of Wulfstan's sermons.

The contribution students will most enjoy is David Dumville's panoramic reassessment of the origins of the English kingdom – a tour-de-force that delights in difficult terrain. After contending that the Britons suffered literal and cultural genocide, he advocates a bottom-up approach by urging us to envisage a land of multiple peoples and their rulers (sometimes kings), comprising blocs that came together to form larger, more transient territorial alliances under over-kings. We need to think of a land full of petty kings, misleadingly reduced to sub-royal status by later centralising histories. Opposing the teleological »game« of identifying »antecedents« to union, while pushing back against the »marked trend [...] to argue for ever bigger, more intrusive government at ever earlier dates« (p. 102), Dumville nevertheless concedes that for Alfred the »unification of the English was an essential aspect of policy« (p. 115). Alfred's legacy, to that extent,



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survives the rampage, though Dumville breathes mischievous life into Smyth's thesis that Asser's Life is a forgery (p. 112); and he dates the creation of England to 12 July 927.

Just as it is difficult to encapsulate the interests of the honorand, it is no easy task to capture the spirit of Anglo-Saxon England. A recent exhibition at the British Library had the title »Art, Word, War«; and the editors of this volume have identified common themes in their title, »Writing, Kingship and Power«. They define power in the Weberian sense as capacity to exert one's will over others. Sarah Foot reminds us, however, that to rule was to serve and protect – and it is well to remember that writing subverted power of the worldly kind modelled by Weber, as in the hagiography of saints who renounce worldly influence to gain power with God. To kingship one might add queenship, which invested its bearers with powers kings lacked, as Pauline Stafford has shown elsewhere. My point in all of this is that the volume might have done a little more to challenge conservative ways of thinking, which are at once a safe passage, for Anglo-Saxonists, and a headwind.

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Seite | page 3



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