

# THE MAKING OF *ANGELCYNN*: ENGLISH IDENTITY BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST'

By Sarah Foot

READ 20 JANUARY 1995

THERE are grounds for seeing an increasing sophistication in the development of a self-conscious perception of 'English' cultural uniqueness and individuality towards the end of the ninth century, at least in some quarters, and for crediting King Alfred's court circle with its expression. King Alfred was not, as Orderic Vitalis described him, 'the first king to hold sway over the whole of England', which tribute might rather be paid to his grandson Æthelstan.<sup>2</sup> He was, however, as his obituary in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle described him, 'king over the whole English people except for that part which was under Danish rule'.<sup>3</sup> Through his promotion of the term *Angelcynn* to reflect the common identity of his people in a variety of texts dating from the latter part of his reign, and his efforts in cultivating the shared memory of his West Mercian and West Saxon subjects, King Alfred might be credited with the invention of the English as a political community.

This paper will consider why it was that Alfred, and after him the tenth-century West Saxon kings who created an English realm, chose to invent an *Angelcynn* and not the Saxonkind that might seem more obvious considering their own ethnic origins.<sup>4</sup> In exploring the pro-

<sup>1</sup> I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Michael Bentley, Julia Crick, David Dumville, Simon Loseby and Janet Nelson all of whom read the text of this paper in draft and made numerous suggestions for its improvement.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. M. Chibnall (6 vols., Oxford, 1968–80), II.241; quoted by S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), 46. For King Æthelstan (whose extended realm was a temporary creation, not surviving his death) see D.N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), ch. 4. It was a foreign conqueror, the Danish king, Cnut, who described himself as *ealles Engla landes cyning*: I Cnut, prologue, ed. F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (3 vols., Halle, 1903–16), I.278–307, at 278; transl. *English Historical Documents, I, c.500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock (2nd edn, London, 1979) [hereafter *EHD*], no. 49, 454. See P. Wormald, 'Engla lond: The Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, VII (1994), 1–24, at 10.

<sup>3</sup> Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, s.a. 900: *MS A*, ed. J. Batley (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. D. Dumville and S. Keynes, III (Cambridge, 1986)) [hereafter *ASC*], 61; *EHD*, no. 1, 207.

<sup>4</sup> On the adoption of collective names see A.D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1986), 22–4. See also P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *gens Anglorum*', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. P. Wormald et al. (Oxford, 1983), 99–129, at 103–4.

motion of this collective name for the politically united Anglo-Saxon peoples, I start from the premise that language is more than an important reflection of the thought of an age; it is essentially constitutive of that thought. Such ideas are only open to a people as they have the language available to express them; in other words, ideas are conditioned by the language in which they can be thought.<sup>5</sup>

For the year 886 the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reported that King Alfred had occupied London and that ‘all the English people (*all Angelcyn*) who were not under subjection to the Danes, submitted to him’.<sup>6</sup> It now seems probable that London had in fact been recovered from the Danes a few years earlier, perhaps in 883 when the Chronicle reports Alfred laying siege to the city, and that what occurred in 886 was either a retaking of the city or a ceremonial statement of the significance of London’s restoration to ‘English’ rule.<sup>7</sup> Earlier in the ninth century Mercia had forcibly been brought under West Saxon rule by King Egberht, and in mid-century there is evidence for some co-operation between the two kingdoms.<sup>8</sup> But while the events of 886 may represent only a formalisation of this pre-existing alliance, the rhetoric by which they are described serves to construe this as a formative moment in the creation of a united West Saxon/Mercian realm. The ceremony is coupled with the submission of the Mercian

<sup>5</sup> For discussion in an Anglo-Saxon context of the relationship between a culture’s ideas and the language in which they are expressed see M. Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind’, in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), 271–98, at 286. A helpful introduction to the wider issue of the role of language in the making of history is N. Partner, ‘The New Cornificius: Medieval History and the Artifice of Words’, in *Classical Rhetoric and Medieval Historiography*, ed. E. Breisach (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1985), 5–59, especially 25–40; also N. Partner, ‘Making up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History’, *Speculum*, LXI (1986), 90–117, at 94–8.

<sup>6</sup> ASC, *s.a.* 886, ed. Bately, 53: ‘By ilcan geara gesette ælfred cuning Lundenburg, 7 him all Angelcyn to cirde, þæt buton Deniscra monna hæftniede was, 7 hie þa befæste þa burge æþerede aldormen to haldonne’. Transl. *EHD*, 199.

<sup>7</sup> That London was recovered before 886 is suggested by the numismatic evidence, which has been interpreted to mean that Alfred was minting his London-monogram pennies earlier in the 880s than 886: M.A.S. Blackburn, ‘The London Mint in the Reign of Alfred’, in *Kings, Currency and Alliances: The History and Coinage of Southern England, AD 840–900*, ed. M.A.S. Blackburn and D.N. Dumville (Woodbridge, forthcoming). For the significance of the ceremonies of 886 see J. Nelson, ‘The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex’, in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Duggan (London, 1993), 125–58, at 154–5.

<sup>8</sup> The Chronicle reported for 825 that Egberht had defeated the Mercians at Wroughton, and for 829 that he conquered the kingdom of the Mercians and everything south of the Humber: ASC, *s.a.* 823, ed. Bately, 41; *s.a.* 827, ed. Bately, 42; transl. *EHD*, 185–6. Evidence for increased understanding between the two kingdoms is apparent in the reign of Æthelwulf (who married his daughter to the Mercian king, Burgred, and assisted him in an expedition against the Welsh in 853) and during the 840s when the West Saxon and Mercian coinages were closely related: Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 12.

ruler Æthelred (to whom charge of the city was entrusted) and his acceptance of an ealdordom, and may also have coincided with his marriage to Alfred's daughter Æthelflæd.<sup>9</sup> According to Asser the joining of Wessex and Mercia was a new union, voluntarily entered into: 'all the Anglo-Saxons—those who had formerly been scattered everywhere and were not in captivity with the Danes—turned willingly to King Alfred and submitted themselves to his lordship'.<sup>10</sup>

The adoption of a new political terminology to reflect the new hegemony of Wessex over the western Mercians is, as Janet Nelson has recently argued, particularly apposite.<sup>11</sup> It was from this time that Alfred was styled in charters *rex Angul-Saxonum*, rather than the more usual West Saxon title of *rex Saxonum*, and from this point in his narrative that Asser adopted the same style to describe the king.<sup>12</sup> Alfred clearly now considered himself licensed to act on behalf of more than his West Saxon subjects; in making an agreement with the Viking ruler of East Anglia, Guthrum, he spoke of himself as acting on behalf of all the counsellors of the English: *ealles Angelcynnnes witan*.<sup>13</sup> The discourse here is not, however, simply such as that used by any ruler consolidating a new political realm. Certainly Alfred's record of military success demonstrated the wisdom of Mercian acceptance of his rule, but he could have continued to ensure the physical safety of his subject peoples without compromising their separateness. What the Alfredian rhetoric does is to advance the notion

<sup>9</sup> Keynes and Lapidge (*Alfred the Great*, 228 n. 1) have argued that Æthelred accepted Alfred as his lord as early as 883, on the evidence of a Worcester charter S 218 [S = P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968)], but this could now be fitted into the new chronology for the taking of London in that year.

<sup>10</sup> Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, c. 83, ed. W.H. Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford, 1904; new impression, 1959), 69; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Nelson, 'The Political Ideas', 134–5.

<sup>12</sup> As Nelson has pointed out, although Asser described Alfred as 'ruler of all the Christians of the island of Britain, king of the Anglo-Saxons' in the preface to his *Life of the king*, he did not use that style again until describing events after the formal submission of 886: Nelson, 'The Political Ideas', 155. For the adoption of the royal-title *rex Angul-Saxonum* in Alfred's charters see Stevenson, *Asser*, 149–52; Whitelock, 'Some Charters in the Name of King Alfred', in *Saints, Scholars and Heroes*, ed. M.H. King and W.M. Stevens (2 vols., Collegeville, Minn., 1979), I, 77–98; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 227–8 n. 1; Nelson, 'The Political Ideas', 134 n. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred–Guthrum treaty; ed. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, I, 126–9; transl. in Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 171–2. Alfred might alternatively have here been asserting his right to act on behalf of the Angles (namely the Mercians), not just the West Saxons for whom he already spoke as king, which message could have had a similar propaganda value. But the text of the treaty goes on to distinguish Danishmen (*Deniscne*) from Englishmen (*Engliscne*), and I understand the *Angelcynn* mentioned here to incorporate all those in Kent and Wessex as well as the Mercian Angles. The treaty is customarily dated to 886 (capture of London) x 890 (death of Guthrum): Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 171. Dumville has, however, challenged this view and argued that the treaty should rather be dated to 878: *Wessex*, ch. 1.

that all the Germanic subjects of the West Saxon king were essentially one 'Englishkind'. The common identity of the West Saxons, Mercians and the men of Kent as the *Angelcynn* was defined by the West Saxon court machine specifically with reference to their otherness from those subject to Danish rule (and from the Welsh from whom Alfred had also received submission),<sup>14</sup> and their common cause under one leader in opposition to the Danes, but also more generally in the sense of one people with a common heritage, one faith, and a shared history.<sup>15</sup>

The role of King Alfred in the development of a sense of English individuality will be examined by exploring the ways in which the Germanic inhabitants of pre-Conquest Britain described themselves and were described by outsiders.<sup>16</sup> The separate and individual identity of the different kingdoms of pre-Conquest Britain was clearly important to their rulers, and it is important to recognise that the apparent use of a consistent vocabulary for the English people does not prefigure any sense of political unity among the Anglo-Saxons before the late ninth century.<sup>17</sup> However, examination of contemporary linguistic usage can be a valuable key to concepts of the past, particularly in the sphere of naming. Not only are the words chosen by one culture to express its ideas one sign of its own distinctive and individual thought, but the collective names adopted by communities play a significant part in the process of the formation of their identity.<sup>18</sup>

Robert Bartlett has argued that medieval ethnicity was a social construct rather than a biological datum, being determined primarily by cultural distinctions which have the potential to evolve differently in changing circumstances.<sup>19</sup> He cites the example of Regino of Prüm who, writing *c.* 900, offered four categories for classifying ethnic variation: 'the various nations differ in descent, customs, language and law'.<sup>20</sup> Although Regino placed *genus* not *lingua* as the first of his

<sup>14</sup> Asser, *Life of Alfred*, ch. 80, ed. Stevenson, 66; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 38–41.

<sup>16</sup> Important in shaping my ideas has been S. Reynolds, 'What do we Mean by Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Saxons?', *Journal of British Studies*, XXIV (1985), 395–414.

<sup>17</sup> The development before the Conquest of the notion of an English (as opposed to a Saxon, or Anglo-Saxon identity) has been examined by Patrick Wormald in various articles: 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas*'; 'The Venerable Bede and the "Church of the English"', in *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, ed. G. Rowell (1992), 13–32; 'Engla Lond: The Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, VII (1994), 1–24; 'The Making of England', *History Today* (February 1995), 26–32.

<sup>18</sup> Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', 286; Smith, *Ethnic Origins*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe* (London, 1993), 197. See also P. Geary, 'Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, CXIII (1983), 15–26, at 18–20.

<sup>20</sup> Regino, letter to Archbishop Hatto of Mainz (ed. F. Kurze, *Reginonis Prumiensis Chronicon*, MGH, SRG (Hanover, 1890), xix–xx): 'sicut diuersae nationes populorum inter

categories, racial differences were generally considered less relevant in the formation of concepts of nationhood in the middle ages than cultural qualities such as customs, language and law. The importance of linguistic bonds in forging collective identity was recognised by many medieval writers.<sup>21</sup> In an insular context, Bede distinguished the peoples of Britain (Britons, Picts, Irish and English) by the languages which they spoke.<sup>22</sup> Following Bede in part, Alcuin drew attention to the role of language together with lineage: 'famed Britain holds within her bounds peoples divided by language and separated by race according to their ancestors' names'.<sup>23</sup> In accentuating the potential of the written language—*Englisc*—to bind together his subjects as the *Angelcynn*, Alfred showed how the promotion of the common tongue they shared might be useful in overriding the inheritance of political and ancestral separateness in the creation of a new identity.<sup>24</sup>

The word *Angelcynn* is first found in one Mercian charter of the 850s from Worcester, where it was used to distinguish those of English origin from foreigners and was apparently synonymous with the Latin *Angli*.<sup>25</sup>

---

se discrepant genere, moribus, lingua, legibus'. W. Kienast (*Die fränkische Vasallität* (Frankfurt, 1990), 270–1 n. 900) has noted that Regino's definition of national characteristics is similar to the famous opening sentence of Caesar's Gallic War: 'Gallia est omnis diuisa in partes tres . . . Hi omnes lingua, institutis, legibus inter se differunt' (Gaul is a whole divided into three parts . . . All these differ from one another in language, institutions and laws): Caesar, *The Gallic War*, I.1 (ed. and transl. H.J. Edwards (London, 1917)). I am grateful to Professor J.L. Nelson for drawing this reference to my attention.

<sup>21</sup> Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 198–204.

<sup>22</sup> *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and transl. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969) [hereafter *HE*], I.1, at 16–17. John Hines has commented on the significance of Bede's recognition of the existence of a single English language: 'The Becoming of the English: Identity, Material Culture and Language in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, VII (1994), 49–59, at 51. The extent to which Bede's language was at variance from that of other writers of his time is explored further below; see also Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas*', 120–3.

<sup>23</sup> *Alcuin: The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York*, ed. and transl. P. Godman (Oxford, 1982), lines 501–2: 'in se quod retinet famosa Britannia gentes / diuisas linguis, populis per nomina patrum'. Alcuin's statement owes something to *HE*, III.6 (ed. and transl. Colgrave and Mynors, 230–1): 'omnes nationes et prouincias Britanniae, quae in quattuor linguas, id est Bretonum Pictorum Scottorum et Anglorum diuisae sunt'.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred preface to the Old English *Regula pastoralis*, ed. D. Whitelock, *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse* (rev. edn, Oxford, 1967), 4–7, at 5; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 124–6, at 125: 'So completely had learning decayed among the *Angelcynn*, that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could comprehend their services in *Englisc*.'

<sup>25</sup> S 207, a charter of Burgred of Mercia dated 855 by which he granted the minster at Blockley to the church of Worcester, freeing it from various obligations including that of lodging all mounted men of the English race (& *ealra angelcynnes monna*) and foreigners, whether of noble or humble birth, which freedom was to be given for ever, as long as the Christian faith might last among the English (*apud Anglos*). That the term *Angelcynn* had been coined before Alfred's time (possibly long before its first recorded written usage) does not detract from my central argument that Alfred harnessed the word to his own particular ends.

But it becomes common only in the last two decades of the ninth century when it appears in a variety of texts associated with the Alfredian court, notably in works which were part of the king's programme of educational reform and revival. This implies that it was not chosen unwittingly but, together with the subject matter of the texts themselves, it was part of an attempt to promote a nascent conception of one people. It was as the *Anglecynn* that Alfred described his subjects in the letter which he circulated to his bishops with his translation of Pope Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*. Recalling how formerly 'there were happy times then throughout the *Anglecynn*', Alfred appealed to the collective memory of his people, reminding them of their shared past and of the consequences of their failure to abstract themselves from worldly affairs to apply the wisdom given by God: 'Remember what punishments befell us in this world when we ourselves did not cherish learning or transmit it to other men.'<sup>26</sup> His solution was to urge his bishops to assist him in teaching 'all the free-born young men now among the *Anglecynn*' to read English, for which project he was translating, or arranging to have translated 'into the language that all can understand, certain books which are the most necessary for all men to know'.<sup>27</sup> These texts, as has long been recognised, were not chosen randomly, but together constituted a programme of study which if mastered would serve to restore Christianity among the English aristocracy, which in the king's opinion had declined so far, notably through their loss of understanding of Latin, that God had sent the Danes as divine punishment.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Alfred, prose preface, ed. Whitelock, 5; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 125. Compare also Alfred's preface to his translation of Psalm xiii, ed. J.W. Bright and R.L. Ramsay, *Liber Psalmorum: The West Saxon Psalms* (Boston and London, 1907), 24; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 158: 'When David sang this thirteenth psalm, he lamented to the Lord in the psalm that in his time there should be so little faith, and so little wisdom should be found in the world. And so does every just man who sings it now: he laments the same thing in his own time.' See also T.A. Shippey, 'Wealth and Wisdom in King Alfred's Preface to the Old English Pastoral Care', *EHR*, XCIV (1979), 346–55; for the interest taken in Alfred's prefatory letter by Anglican reformers and other scholars in the second half of the sixteenth century see R.I. Page, 'The Sixteenth-Century Reception of Alfred the Great's Letter to his Bishops', *Anglia*, CX (1992), 36–64, at 37–41.

<sup>27</sup> Alfred, prose preface, ed. Whitelock, 6; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 126.

<sup>28</sup> Compare Alfred's translation of Psalm ii:12, ed. Bright and Ramsay, 3, transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 154: 'Embrace learning lest you incur God's anger and lest you stray from the right path.' Although in his Life of the king Asser depicted Alfred's thirst for learning as driven primarily by personal aspiration (for example Life of Alfred, chs. 76–8, ed. Stevenson, *Asser*, 59–63; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 91–3), the final chapter of Asser's Life makes explicit the broader application Alfred envisaged: ch. 106, ed. Stevenson, *Asser*, 92–5, transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 109–110. S. Keynes, 'Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England',

In this prefatory letter to the *Regula pastoralis* the king showed his sensitivity to the power of language and its potential for conveying wisdom, as well as an awareness of the benefits which earlier societies had drawn from the use of their own vernaculars: 'then I recalled how the Law was first composed in the Hebrew language, and thereafter, when the Greeks learned it, they translated it into their own language and other books as well'.<sup>29</sup> Language offers understanding, and understanding gives knowledge of the Law, and hence knowledge of God. The text above all others which gave Alfred's officials knowledge of the kind of wisdom they needed to fulfil their duties was, as Simon Keynes has noted, the king's law-code.<sup>30</sup> Here Alfred portrayed himself as a law-giver firmly rooted within an historical tradition;<sup>31</sup> quoting the law of Moses and earlier laws from each of the kingdoms over whom he now had lordship, he claimed not to be making new law, but to be restoring to his newly united peoples the law that they had lost. This is made explicit in the historical introduction which the king appended to his own law-book, where he begins with a collection of passages of Mosaic law, mostly taken from Exodus and beginning with the Ten Commandments, before moving on to consider how Old Testament law for the Jews was modified for Christian nations, and then the earlier medieval history of law-giving.<sup>32</sup>

Afterwards when it came about that many peoples had received the faith of Christ, many synods of holy bishops and also of other distinguished counsellors were assembled throughout all the earth, and also throughout all the *Angelcynn* (after they had received the faith of Christ) . . . Then in many synods they fixed the compensations for many human misdeeds, and they wrote them in many synod-books, here one law, there another. Then I, King Alfred, collected these together and ordered to be written many of them which our forefathers observed, those which I liked; and those which I did not like I rejected with the advice of my counsellors and ordered them

---

in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), 228–57, at 230–1.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred, prose preface, ed. Whitelock, 6; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Keynes, 'Royal Government', 231–2.

<sup>31</sup> Wallace-Hadrill ('The Franks and the English: Some Common Historical Interests', in his *Early Medieval History* (Oxford, 1975), 201–16, at 216) noted the relevance to Alfred of Bede's statement (*HE*, II.5) that Æthelberht of Kent had established with the advice of his counsellors a code of laws after the Roman manner, which had been written down in English to be preserved, and drew attention also to the example of ninth-century Frankish law collections.

<sup>32</sup> Alfred, Laws, introduction §49.7–9; ed. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, I.44–6; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 163–4.

to be differently observed. For I dared not presume to set in writing at all many of my own, because it was unknown to me what would please those who should come after us. But those which I found, which seemed to me most just, either in the time of my kinsman King Ine, or of Offa, king of the Mercians, or of Æthelberht (who first among the *Angelcynn* received baptism), I collected herein and omitted the others.

Alfred was appropriating his subject peoples' separate—Christian—pasts to his own ends. The law he now gave to the *Angelcynn* was not one of his own creation but an amalgam of the collected laws of previous kings of Kent, Mercia and Wessex. Alfred was legislating here overtly in the tradition of a Christian king, against an historical background of Old Testament law-giving (and in the light of a contemporary Frankish commitment to written laws and to the collection of law-codes).<sup>33</sup> He was showing the Anglo-Saxons how similar their laws were to those of Ancient Israel and also inviting them to remodel themselves as a new Chosen People.<sup>34</sup> Bede had conceived of the *gens Anglorum* as the new Israel, but Alfred went further: he purported to restore a state that had formerly existed, equivalent to the state of Israel restored after the Babylonian captivity, not to create a new unitary structure of diverse peoples brought together under one Christian law.<sup>35</sup> Previous Anglo-Saxon kings had extended their realms by military force in order to encompass people from different *gentes*, but had not thereby either made themselves into 'emperors' or indeed defined their own kingship other than by reference to their own *gens*: although he had taken control of the previously independent kingdoms of the Hwicce, the South Saxons and of Kent, removing or demoting their own kings, and he had some authority in Surrey, Essex and East Anglia, Offa was never described in contemporary documents as other than *rex Mer-*

<sup>33</sup>J.L. Nelson, 'Literacy in Carolingian Government', in *The Uses of Literacy*, ed. McKitterick, 258–96, at 263.

<sup>34</sup>Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede', 25. For the Franks' perception of themselves as a chosen people, a new Israel, see J.L. Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World', in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1994), 52–87, at 55–6; for ninth-century Frankish use of the exemplary world of the Old Testament see J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'History in the Mind of Archbishop Hincmar', in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford, 1981), 43–70, at 49–51.

<sup>35</sup>For Bede's conception see Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede', 23–4. Alcuin had drawn a parallel between the sack of Lindisfarne in 793 and the sack of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple by the Chaldeans, which led to the Israelites' Babylonian captivity: *Epistola* 20, ed. Dümmler, *MGH, Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, II.57 transl. *EHD*, no. 194. I am grateful to Dr Judith Maltby for suggesting the parallel with the Babylonian captivity to me.

*ciorum*.<sup>36</sup> Where Alfred was innovative was in his attempt to make his West Saxon and Mercian peoples into one *gens* (the *gens Anglorum* or *Angelcynn*) using his programme of educational revival and reform to encourage among his subjects an idea of their single past history. Appealing to their memory of shared experience and common law he sought to persuade them that he was restoring the English, whereas, albeit following a model provided by Bede, he was inventing them.<sup>37</sup>

The creation of a newly named people subject to one lord, loyalty to whom was forcibly imposed by oath,<sup>38</sup> might be understood in the narrow sense of the imposition of a politically defined nationhood by a cultural elite, in this case the royal court, over a wider population, an identity which could never have been exclusive nor taken priority over pre-existing, more local, allegiances. One might therefore dismiss Alfred's notion of Englishness as representative only of a restricted kind of political identity with no broader relevance beyond the rarefied circles of Alfred's immediate entourage. It might, nevertheless, at least within that confined group surrounding the king, resemble a primitive attempt at creating a single *gens*. Alfred's primitive 'nation', created out of political necessity, would to some extent conform to Gellner's definition of nationalism (articulated exclusively in relation to modern states) as 'primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent'.<sup>39</sup> But the Alfredian 'nation' was also defined in terms of its difference from the other (here clearly

<sup>36</sup>S. Keynes, 'Changing Faces: Offa, King of Mercia', *History Today*, XL (November 1990), 14–19. A small group of Worcester charters does give more grandiose titles to Æthelbald of Mercia: S 94, 101, 103, and S 89 (transl. *EHD*, no. 67) in which Æthelbald is called *rex sutangli* and in the witness list, *rex Britannia*. Although this charter might be compared with the statement Bede made about the extent of Æthelbald's power south of the Humber (*HE*, V.23), these titles are not adopted by other scriptoria of the period and may reveal more of the aspirations of Worcester draftsmen than the Mercian king's own perceptions of his rule.

<sup>37</sup>This point was noted by Gaimar, who in his *Estoire des Engleis* (written c.1140) attributed to King Alfred the responsibility for making the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as a history of the English: *L'estoire des Engleis by Geffrei Gaimar* (Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1960), vv. 3443–50. I am grateful to John Gillingham for drawing this point to my attention and for allowing me to see his forthcoming paper 'Gaimar, the Prose *Brut* and the Making of English History'.

<sup>38</sup>Alfred, *Laws*, §1.2, ed. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, I.46. Carolingian parallels are particularly apt here, for example Charlemagne's imposition of a general fidelity oath in 789 after the revolt of Hardrad (*Duplex legationis edictum*, c. 18, *MGH, Capitularia*, I, no. 23, 63) and his insistence in 802 that all over the age of twelve should promise to him as emperor the fidelity which they had previously promised to him as king: *MGH, Capitularia*, I, no. 33, ch. 2, 92. See now M. Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft: Untersuchungen zum Herrscherethos Karls der Großen* (Sigmaringen, 1993), especially chs. ii and iv.

<sup>39</sup>E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983), at 1, and 53–62. More sympathetic to the idea that national sentiment might exist in pre-modern nations is A.D. Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth, 1991).

understood to be both the Christian Welsh and, more significantly, the pagan Danes) in which context Peter Sahlin's comments, although again made in a modern context, seem pertinent: 'national identity like ethnic or communal identity is contingent and relational: it is defined by the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other'.<sup>40</sup> However, while there are clearly some echoes, in placing loyalty to the primitive state too high up the agenda and apparently minimising the importance of other possible communities or identities any modern nationalist model is too exclusive for ninth-century circumstances. The creation of one political unit at this period was hindered by the fissiparous nature of the early Anglo-Saxon state, and the vigour of regional separatism—the distinctiveness of Mercia and, later, in the tenth century, of Northumbria continued to be articulated far beyond the establishment of unified rule from Wessex. There was, as Wormald has shown, no Alfredian England.<sup>41</sup> But, in agreeing that there was no potential for uniting the polities, must we also accept that there was no putative conception of Englishness?

Alfred's educational programme could be interpreted as a conscious effort to shape an English imagination by disseminating beyond the court his ideas about the nature of 'Englishness' and his fictive interpretation of history through the works he determined the English should read. Drawing attention to Asser's account of the king's learning of 'Saxon songs' (*carmina Saxonica*) in his childhood and his urging their memorisation on his entourage, Janet Nelson has stressed the distinctively Saxon vernacular and aristocratic cultural inheritance which Alfred wished to emphasise.<sup>42</sup> While this might suggest a specifically (West) Saxon focus to Alfred's endeavours, other aspects of his programme demonstrate the wider transmission of his ideas to his Kentish and Anglian (Mercian) subjects as well, through the use of the vernacular, which breadth is encompassed by Keynes and Lapidge's translation of Asser's *libri Saxonici* as English books.<sup>43</sup> Alfred was not

<sup>40</sup> P. Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), 271. Compare also E. Hobsbawm (*Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, 1990), 91): 'there is no more effective way of bonding together the disparate sections of restless peoples than to unite them against outsiders'. And L. Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies*, XXXI (1992), 309–29.

<sup>41</sup> Wormald, 'The Making of England'.

<sup>42</sup> Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ch. 76 (ed. Stevenson, 59); J.L. Nelson, 'Wealth and Wisdom: The Politics of Alfred the Great', in *Kings and Kingship*, ed. J. Rosenthal, *Acta XI* 1984 (Binghampton, N.Y., 1986), 31–52, at 44.

<sup>43</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 91. Compare Asser, *Life of Alfred*, ch. 75 (ed. Stevenson, *Asser*, 58, transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 90) which refers to the school established by the king where books were carefully read in both languages, in Latin and English: *utriusque linguae libri, Latinae scilicet et Saxonicae*. Nelson was also referring

only reminding all of his aristocracy that they shared a cultural tradition (in which they might more actively participate if they reacquired the wisdom they had lost)<sup>44</sup> but asserting that their common cultural ethic arose from their common origins and a shared history.<sup>45</sup>

The historical element of the curriculum Alfred devised is striking: not only were Orosius's *Histories* against the Pagans and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* translated into Old English at this time, but it must be in the context of this wider programme that the compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was commissioned.<sup>46</sup> The Chronicle and the Old English Bede could both be seen as instruction for the English, the *Angelcynn*, in their shared inheritance of a common history. One of the themes of Bede's *History*, as I shall suggest further below, was the promotion of a sense of unity and common cause among the Germanic Christian peoples of Britain; where Bede wrote of a Christian *gens Anglorum*, his Mercian translator spoke of *Ongelcynn* or *Ongelþeode*.<sup>47</sup> Together this historical literature gave the English a myth—a story with a veiled meaning—of their common origins; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in particular is a history with an inner hermeneutic. It is not propaganda for one dynasty;<sup>48</sup> the Chronicle does

---

to the relevance to Kentishmen and Mercians of the wisdom which Alfred sought to foster: 'Wealth', 45.

<sup>44</sup> Nelson, 'Wealth', 45.

<sup>45</sup> One is reminded here of Anthony Smith's definition of ethnic communities as 'named populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with specific territory and a sense of solidarity': *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1986), 32. Also Colley, 'Britishness', p. 317.

<sup>46</sup> That the translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* into Old English, although not made by the king himself, might be datable to Alfred's reign was argued by D. Whitelock, 'The Old English Bede', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XLVIII (1962), 57–90; reprinted in her collected papers *From Bede to Alfred* (Aldershot, 1980), no. viii. Her opinion is shared by Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 33. While I would argue that the compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was part of King Alfred's wider scheme for the invention of a sense of shared identity among his subjects, others have sought to separate the compilation of annals from the late ninth-century West Saxon royal court both chronologically: A. Thorogood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the Reign of Egberht', *EHR*, XLVIII (1933), 353–63, and geographically: F. Stenton, 'The South-Western Element in the Old English Chronicle', *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. M. Stenton (Oxford, 1970), 106–15; J. Bately, 'The Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 60 BC to AD 890: Vocabulary as Evidence', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LXIV (1978), 93–129.

<sup>47</sup> *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, at, for example, Lxiii, IV.ii, V.xxiii (ed. T. Miller, 4 vols., Early English Text Society, original series XCV–XCVI and CX–CXI (London, 1890–8), part i, 54, 258, 478–80). The word *Angelcynn* occurs in a number of annals in the A manuscript of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle before 886, used in relation to the English people as a whole (*s.a.* 443, 597, 787 and 836, ed. Bately, 17, 25, 39, 43) and of the English school in Rome (*s.a.* 874, ed. Bately, 49).

<sup>48</sup> *Contra* R.H.C. Davis, 'Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth', *History*, LVI (1971), 169–82; and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, who saw the Chronicle as 'a reflection of urgent political need not of a people, but a dynasty': 'The Franks and the English in the Ninth Century: Some Common Historical Interests', in *Early Medieval History* (Oxford, 1975), 201–16, at 210–11.

not present, in the way that Bede did, the history of one people in a linear progression with a beginning, a middle and an end: there are indeed too many beginnings in the Chronicle. But, despite its annalistic form, it is a continuing and developing narrative.<sup>49</sup> The separate beginnings of Alfred's subject peoples are brought to one end: that of unitary rule from Wessex. It hard not to see the chronicler's statement about the general submission of 886 as the climactic moment of the achievement of this end to which the whole was directed, although the story continues thereafter: the *Angelcynn* have had multiple early histories, but will have one future, together. The inclusion of the different origin-myths for the separate early kingdoms illustrates the distinctiveness of each people; their ethnic diversity and the particular circumstances in which each group arrived in Britain gives each people its own traditions and culture; the genealogies for each royal line provide a record of each separate ruling dynasty.<sup>50</sup> Yet despite the differences in each kingdom's past history, they all share certain common features and ultimately theirs is a collective history.

In anthropological terms this might be called an instrumental ethnicity, a group identity based on the political circumstances of the moment, a subjective process for defining a collective group.<sup>51</sup> In this case one useful model, despite its failure to consider pre-modern societies, is that of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.<sup>52</sup> Alfred was indeed trying to shape the English imagination; by collating and presenting a coherent historical whole he invented an English community, implanting into the minds of his people a personal and cultural feeling of belonging to the *Angelcynn*, the English kind. Alfred presented his subjects with an idea partly shaped by Bede, partly of his own devising, and he adopted a self-conscious way of promoting it through the educational reform-programme. Despite the differences in scale, this is similar to Anderson's argument about the importance of the mass production of print as a formative process in the creation of

<sup>49</sup> I differ here from H. White in his analysis of early medieval annals: *The Content and the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, Md., and London, 1987), ch. 1. On medieval writers' use of linear narrative see also Partner, 'The New Cornificius', 42–3. I am grateful to Michael Bentley for discussing these ideas with me at length; I intend to pursue some of these thoughts about the Chronicle in a forthcoming paper.

<sup>50</sup> For consideration of the use of genealogy in the assertion of political unity in the early middle ages see D.N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), 72–104 (reprinted in Dumville's collected papers: *Histories and Pseudo-Histories of the Insular Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1990), no. xv).

<sup>51</sup> P. Amory, 'Ethnographic Culture and the Construction of Community in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1994), 8–11; Geary, 'Ethnic Identity', 24–6.

<sup>52</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd edn, London, 1991), especially chs. 2–3.

imagined nations. It is significant that Alfred used the vernacular in order that his ideas might be most accessible.<sup>53</sup> While the texts he thought ‘most necessary for all men to know’ would not have been accessible to as wide an audience as that theoretically possible in a print culture, Alfred was aiming at a socially and geographically wide readership—‘all free-born young men now among the English’—who were to be reached through the participation of all of the king’s bishops in his extended realm. The notion of a common English identity was certainly dreamt up in the rarefied, scholarly atmosphere of Alfred’s court, but it was from the outset intended for a wider audience. One might wish to question the likelihood of the notion penetrating to the wider mass of the semi-free peasantry, but the obligation of general oath-taking suggested by the first chapter of Alfred’s law-code might indicate that it was to the broader group of those subjects who swore the oath that the rhetoric of Englishness was directed.

Alfred was thus manipulating the history of the Anglo-Saxon peoples to create among his own subjects a sense of cultural and spiritual identity, by invoking a concept of Englishness particularly dependent on the Christian faith. It was the loss of faith (notably through the loss of that knowledge which had given previous generations access to the wisdom of Christian writings) which had led the English to the brink of collapse and brought so many of their ethnic as well as spiritual compatriots into captivity under a foreign, and pagan, people. For all the obvious (and patently far from coincidental) advantages for the new regime, this was more than simply a rationale for the political domination of Wessex over Mercia. How original was it?

That divine vengeance might be anticipated if sin were not corrected was scarcely a novel idea; divine displeasure was indeed the most frequently adduced explanation for any disaster.<sup>54</sup> Nor was Alfred the only writer to make direct association between Viking raids and divine displeasure:<sup>55</sup> in 839 his father Æthelwulf had written to the Frankish

<sup>53</sup>In an East Frankish context one might compare here the promotion of the German vernacular by Louis the German: J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983), 333–4.

<sup>54</sup>Gildas had laboured this point in portraying the pagan attacks of Germanic peoples on Britain as a reflection of God’s anger with the Christian British: *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and transl. M. Winterbottom (London and Chichester, 1978). See R.W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain* (London, 1966), chs. 2–3. For consideration of the same themes in the Second Viking Age see M. Godden, ‘Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley* (Oxford, 1994), 130–62.

<sup>55</sup>For example the letters written by Alcuin following the first Viking raid on Lindisfarne in June 793: *Epistolae*, 16–21, ed. E. Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*, MGH, *Epistolae*, IV (Berlin, 1895); and see D.A. Bullough, ‘What Has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne’,

emperor, Louis the Pious, warning that if men did not quickly repent and return to Christian observance pagan men would lay waste their land with fire and sword.<sup>56</sup> While other writers of this period looked to spiritual renewal, and improvement in individual religious observance,<sup>57</sup> Alfred's perception that the root of the evil lay in his subjects' ignorance, rather than in their lack of faith, led to his adoption of the innovative remedy of vernacular education.

In apparently including Bede's Ecclesiastical History among those Latin works translated as part of his vernacular programme, Alfred acknowledged the debt which he owed to Bede for the invention of a concept of the English.<sup>58</sup> For Bede, the Anglo-Saxon peoples, though separated by the diversity of their political arrangements, were united by their shared Christian faith into one *gens Anglorum* in the sight of God: it was as English Christians that the faithful should identify themselves to St Peter. As Patrick Wormald has argued, it was Bede who gave the idea of Englishness its particular power; Bede demonstrated that the Church not only created but named this new communal identity and made the *gens Anglorum* a people with a covenant, like Israel.<sup>59</sup>

For Bede, the semblance of unity was created by the existence of one language distinguishing the Germanic settlers of Anglo-Saxon

---

*Anglo-Saxon England*, XXII (1993), 93–125, especially 95–101. Among ninth-century texts see the Synod of Meaux and Paris, 845–6 (ed. W. Hartmann, *MGH, Concilia*, III (Hanover, 1984), 60–132 at 82); quoted by S. Coupland, 'The Rod of God's Wrath or the People of God's Wrath? The Carolingian Theology of the Viking Invasions', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XLII (1991), 535–54, at 537 n. 6; and the *Translatio et miracula S. Germani*, chs. 2–4 (ed. G. Waitz, *MGH, SS*, xv.1 (Hanover, 1887), at 10–11). I owe this last reference to Janet Nelson.

<sup>56</sup> *Les Annales de Saint-Bertin*, s.a. 839, ed. F. Grat *et al.* (Paris, 1964), 29; transl. Nelson, 43. The danger which Viking attacks presented to the continuance of the Christian faith in England was noted by various outsiders in the ninth century; see my 'Violence against Christians? The Vikings and the Church in Ninth-Century England', *Medieval History*, I.3 (1991), 3–16, especially 9–10.

<sup>57</sup> The capitulary of Pitres, 862 (ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, *MGH Capitularia* II, no. 272), for example describes how 'tumults have arisen, wretchedly stirred up both by pagans and by those calling themselves Christians, and . . . terrible calamities have spread through this land'. Attention is drawn to the individual sins of the Franks for which reason 'we have been exiled from the land of the living'. The remedy proposed is clear: 'in the destruction around us God has revealed to us what we should understand about the devastation within us, so that, having understood, we should return to him and believe'. I am grateful to Dr Simon Coupland for allowing me to quote from his translation of this capitulary.

<sup>58</sup> For the attribution of the Old English Bede to Alfred's reign see above n. 46 and D. Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E.G. Stanley (London, 1966), 67–103, at 77–9 (reprinted in her collected papers *From Bede to Alfred*, no. vi).

<sup>59</sup> Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede', 21, 24. Compare also N. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven and London, 1989), 49–71.

England from their British, Irish and Pictish neighbours. His sensitivity to the role of language in defining ethnic groups was stressed at the beginning of his history, where he also introduced the idea that the Latin of the Bible had the potential to unite these differences.<sup>60</sup>

At the present time there are five languages in Britain, just as the divine law is written in five books, all devoted to seeking out and setting forth one and the same kind of wisdom, namely the knowledge of sublime truth and of true sublimity. These are the English, British, Irish, Pictish as well as the Latin languages; through the study of the scriptures, Latin is in general use among them all.

One of Bede's intentions in writing his History was to demonstrate that, despite their separate ethnic and political origins, the Anglo-Saxons had been brought together into one *gens* by the unifying power of the Christian faith, transmitted to them by Rome. His summary of the state of Britain at the time when he was writing reinforces this view that religion could act as a binding force: it is as one united, Christian people that the relationship of the English with their non-Germanic neighbours (Picts, Irish and Britons) is defined.<sup>61</sup>

Part of what Bede had aimed to illustrate was the process by which a 'national' Church was created; as he traced the establishment of separate sees in each individual kingdom—the framework around which the History was structured—he stressed not a series of distinct institutions for each individual people but the making of a single Church, subject to Rome. The high point of his narrative was the primacy of Archbishop Theodore, 'the first of the archbishops whom the whole English Church consented to obey'.<sup>62</sup> Not only was this the first time when the separate churches of the individual kingdoms were united under one authority, but Theodore was the first person to whom all of the English offered any sort of authority. Although Bede's was an argument about spiritual authority not about political power, there was a potential political dimension to his historical vision, as is demonstrable from his list of kings who held *imperium*, or wide-ranging power.<sup>63</sup>

In the year 616 Æthelberht of Kent entered upon the eternal joys of the heavenly kingdom. He was the third English king to rule over all the southern kingdoms which are divided from the north by the

<sup>60</sup> Bede, *HE*, I.1, 16–17. For the significance of dialectal variants within Old English as markers for the separate identities of different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms see Hines, 'Identity', 55–7.

<sup>61</sup> Bede, *HE*, V.23, 558–61.

<sup>62</sup> Bede, *HE*, IV.2, 332–3. The making of a single *ecclesia Anglorum* had clearly been Pope Gregory's original intention; see for example his advice to Augustine about the consecration of new bishops: *HE*, I.27, 86.

<sup>63</sup> Bede, *HE*, II.5, 148–51.

river Humber and the surrounding territory; but he was the first to enter the kingdom of heaven. The first king to hold the like sovereignty—*imperium*—was Ælle, king of the South Saxons; the second was Ceawlin, king of the West Saxons; the third, as we have said, was Æthelberht, king of Kent; the fourth was Rædwald, king of the East Angles, who while Æthelberht was still alive acted as military leader of his own people. The fifth was Edwin, king of the Northumbrians, the nation inhabiting the district north of the Humber. Edwin had still greater power and ruled over all the inhabitants of Britain, English and Britons alike, except for Kent only. He even brought under English rule the isles of Angelsey and Man which lie between England and Ireland and belong to the Britons. The sixth to rule within the same bounds was Oswald, the most Christian king of the Northumbrians, while the seventh was his brother Oswiu, who for a time held almost the same territory.

The context of this celebrated passage is Bede's obituary for Æthelberht of Kent, and the chapter includes material from a variety of sources, much of it probably deriving from Canterbury. It is not, however, necessary to presume that the list itself derives from Canterbury,<sup>64</sup> and there may be a case for attributing its construction to Bede himself, bearing in mind the importance to him of the unity of the *gens Anglorum*. This is not to argue either that there was, or that Bede was claiming that there was, one quasi-imperial office, ranking above the kingship of an individual kingdom, held by certain figures between the late fifth and seventh century, which passed from one king to another depending on their relative superiority.<sup>65</sup> Bede seems merely to have been hinting

<sup>64</sup> That Bede obtained this list second-hand has been argued by, among others, B. Yorke, 'The Vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon Overlordship', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, II (British Archaeological Reports, British series XCII, Oxford, 1981), 171–200, at 195–6, and S. Fanning, 'Bede, Imperium and the Bretwaldas', *Speculum*, LXVI (1991), 1–26, at 25. For other arguments that Bede himself compiled this list see S. Keynes, 'Rædwald the bretwalda', in *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1992), 103–23, at 109–10 (and for a fuller survey of other secondary opinion *ibid.* nn. 44–7, pp. 119–20), and N. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), 49.

<sup>65</sup> Bede's intent here has been somewhat obscured by the use of the word *bretwalda* in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle *s.a.* 827 (recte 829) in relation to the power held by the West Saxon king, Egberht, following his conquest of the kingdom of the Mercians and everything south of the Humber. Egberht was said by the chronicler to have been the eighth king who was *brytenwalda* (*bretwalda* uniquely in the A manuscript of the Chronicle), the previous seven being those named by Bede in *HE* II.5. But where Bede had envisaged a wide-ranging kind of power, the chronicler appears to have conceived of an office, or wide rulership. The form *bretwalda* (meaning ruler of Britain, from *bret-* 'Briton' and *-walda* 'ruler' or 'king') is attested only in the A manuscript of the Chronicle and is unlikely to represent the original spelling. Other manuscripts have different forms: *brytenwalda* or *brytenwealda* (BDE), *bretenanwealda* (C). Here *bryten* might be a noun meaning

that, just as one faith and one language *can* unify disparate groups, so, bearing in mind the demonstrable unity provided by the centralising authority of the Church, *could* a single political authority serve as one means of binding otherwise distinct political groups into a common cause: the promotion of the true faith and the making of a people with a single, Christian identity. That such an argument might be translated further in the ninth century by a dynasty which found itself in possession of a power exceeding that of any of its West Saxon predecessors, and that it might (having itself only newly come to power) look to Bede's account for an historical justification or parallel for its own pretensions, seems entirely natural. What Alfred can be seen to have recognised is the potential for his own purpose of the model invented by Pope Gregory and promoted by Bede: one Church, one people and one faith could prefigure a political unity, an ideal which might be made real by a king with sufficient power and ideological energy to promote it.

In making the one nation he created English (and not Saxon) Alfred perpetuated the name for that people coined by Bede. Bede did not invent the term, nor was he unique among Anglo-Saxon writers in using it to define the Germanic people of Britain collectively, but he did use it more consistently than his contemporaries.<sup>66</sup> The author of the Whitby Life of Pope Gregory wrote of the pope's role in ensuring the salvation of the *gens Anglorum* and once made reference to the *sudrangli*, meaning apparently the the people south of the Humber.<sup>67</sup> Boniface's letters frequently alluded to the characteristics of the English race, although he also noted their kinship with the continental Saxons; similarly Bishop Torhthelm of Leicester wrote to Boniface on hearing of the success of his continental Saxon mission, to rejoice at the conversion of *gens nostra*.<sup>68</sup> The anonymous Lindisfarne Life of Cuthbert referred to the bishops of the Saxons, while Stephen, hagiographer of Wilfrid, wrote of both *Angli* and *Saxones*.<sup>69</sup> To outsiders, the Germanic

---

'Britain', but it might alternatively be an adjective *bryten* from the verb *brettan* 'to break', or 'disperse'; so *brytenvalda* might mean simply 'wide ruler'. See Whitelock in *EHD*, 186 n. 2; Keynes, 'Rædwald the Bretwalda', 111.

<sup>66</sup> Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas*', 122–3; for a semantic discussion of Bede's use of the word 'Angle' see Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede', 21–3.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, *Liber beatae Gregorii papae*, chs. 6, 12, 18, ed. and transl. B. Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1985), 82–3, 94–5, 102–3.

<sup>68</sup> Boniface, *Epistola* 46, ed. M. Tangl, *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH, *Epistolae selectae*, 1 (Berlin, 1916), p. 74; and compare *Epistolae* 33, 73, 74, 78, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 57–8, 150–2, 156, 169 and 171. Torhthelm's letter is preserved with Boniface's correspondence: *Epistola* 47, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 76.

<sup>69</sup> Anon., *Vita S. Cuthberti*, IV.1, ed. and transl. B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert* (Cambridge, 1940), 110–11. References to the English or *gens Anglorum* are found in *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, chs. 6, 11, 41, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 14–15, 22–3, 82–3; to the *Saxones*: chs. 19, 21, pp. 41, 43. Stephen also quoted a letter of Wilfrid's in which he described his country of origin as *Saxonia*: ch. 30, p. 60. A letter

inhabitants of the former Roman Britain did interestingly seem to have a single identity, but it was a Saxon one, they were *Saxones*. The Celtic peoples of Britain consistently called their Germanic neighbours Saxons (a usage which persisted into the modern period).<sup>70</sup> The term Saxon was similarly used by most of the non-insular authors who described affairs in Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries such as the Gallic Chronicler of 452 and Constantius, author of the Life of St Germanus,<sup>71</sup> and this terminology continued to be used in the seventh century.<sup>72</sup>

At variance with all these early external authorities is the sixth-century Byzantine historian Procopius, who in describing the island of *Brittia* spoke of the three populous nations to inhabit the place, each with a king set over it, these nations being the *Brittones* (named from the island), the *Frisiones*, and the *Angiloi* (*Ἀγγιλοὶ*).<sup>73</sup> Procopius's information about Britain was presumably obtained from the group of *Angiloi* whose presence he recorded among a legation sent from the Frankish king to Constantinople c. 550, making a claim for Frankish hegemony over the island.<sup>74</sup> One might question how accurately Procopius recorded (and translated) the language used by these foreign enemies, were it not that Pope Gregory adopted the same term, *Angulī*, to describe the Germanic inhabitants of Britain. It is not impossible that Gregory's nomenclature was influenced either by Procopius or by

---

of abbot Hwætberht's to Pope Gregory II quoted by Bede in his *Historia abbatum* similarly described England as *Saxonia: Historia abbatum*, ch. 19, ed. C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* (2 vols., Oxford, 1896), I.383, and note II.368. M. Richter, 'Bede's *Angli*: Angles or English?', *Peritia*, III (1984), 99–114, at 105. In a letter to Pope Zacharias Boniface described himself as born and raised in *transmarina Saxonia: Epistola* 50, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Richter, 'Bede's *Angli*', 105–7; Wormald, 'Bede, the *bretwaldas*'; 122; L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (2nd edn, London, 1994), 13.

<sup>71</sup> Gallic Chronicle of 452, ed. T. Mommsen, *MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi*, IX (Berlin, 1892), 660; Constantius, Life of St Germanus, chs. 17–18, ed. W. Levison, *MGH, SRM*, VII (Hanover, 1919–20), 263, 265.

<sup>72</sup> Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas*', 122. Much of this ground was explored by E.A. Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest* (3rd edn, 2 vols., Oxford, 1877), I.533–48, who argued that the Germanic inhabitants of pre-Conquest England ought to be described as the English, not as the Anglo-Saxons.

<sup>73</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ed. and transl. H.B. Dewing (5 vols., London, 1914–28), VIII.xx.4–8

<sup>74</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, VIII.xx.8–10. R. Collins ('Theodebert I, "Rex Magnus Francorum"', in *Ideal and Reality*, ed. Wormald, 11–12) ascribed this legation to the time of Theodebert, who died in 548, but Ian Wood (*The Merovingian North Sea*, 12 and 23 n. 77) has argued rather that it should be dated to c. 553. For the likelihood that the Franks did have some hegemony over southern England see further I. Wood, 'Frankish Hegemony in England', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. M. Carver (Woodbridge, 1992), 235–41, at 235, and I. Wood, *The Merovingian North Sea* (Alingsås, 1983), 12–14. Robert Markus has suggested that Pope Gregory's mission to the English might have been conceived on the presumption of continued Frankish domination of southern England as part of a plan for the revitalisation of the Frankish church: 'Gregory the Great's Europe', *TRHS*, 5 ser., XXXI (1981), 21–36, at 26–7.

the general currency of the term at the Imperial court in Constantinople, where Gregory is known to have been papal apocrisarius c. 578–585.

All of Pope Gregory's letters about the mission to Kent referred to the people as the Angles, including those written after he had received some direct information about affairs in Britain and so might have known that this was not the most appropriate term, certainly not for the people whom Æthelberht ruled.<sup>75</sup> The texts associated with Gregory are not, however, consistent in the retention of the third syllable added by Procopius; the brief biography of Gregory in the *Liber pontificalis* referred to the pope's sending of missionaries *ad gentem Angulorum*, but his verse epitaph stated that he had converted the *Anglos* to Christ.<sup>76</sup> The extra syllable makes more plausible the 'not Angles but angels' pun (and in reporting the famous story of the boys in the Roman slave-market the anonymous Whitby hagiographer of Gregory indeed described them as *Anguli* although Bede termed them *Angli* in his own account).<sup>77</sup> In the letter which he wrote in July 598 to Eulogius, bishop of Alexandria, where he described the success of the Augustine's mission, however, Gregory provided an alternative explanation for the name English, referring to the missionaries whom he had sent to the *gens Anglorum in mundo angulo posita*.<sup>78</sup>

Gregory's adoption of the *Angli/Anguli* label, wherever he had obtained it, would have had little influence had it not been taken up by Bede and via his writings gradually acquired a wider currency. A shift is noticeable in the language used by continental writers to describe the Germanic peoples of Britain from the eighth century, perhaps as Bede's Ecclesiastical History began to circulate on the continent through the influence of English missionaries, but there is little consistency of

<sup>75</sup>H. Chadwick, 'Gregory the Great and the Mission to the Anglo-Saxons', *Gregorio Magno e il suo tempo*, Studia Ephemeridis 'Augustinianum' XXXIII (Rome, 1991), 199–212, at 199–200.

<sup>76</sup>*Liber pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne (2 vols., Paris 1886–92), I,312: '... misit eos in praedicationem ad gentem Angulorum ut eos conuerteret ad dominum Iesum Christum'. Gregory's epitaph is preserved by Bede, *HE*, II.1, 132, and John the Deacon in his Life of Gregory, IV.68 (*Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, LXXXV, col. 221 C).

<sup>77</sup>*Liber beatae Gregorii papae*, ch. 9, p. 90: 'Cunque responderent, "Anguli dicuntur, illi de quibus sumus," illed dixit, "Angeli Dei".' Compare also ch. 13, p. 94, where the insertion of the additional syllable looks like an error in the transmitted text: 'Thus the name of the Angli, with the addition of the single letter *e* means angels: *ergo nomen Angulorum, si una e littera addetur, angelorum sonat*; had the name originally been given as *Anguli*, the letter *e* would need to be substituted, not added. Bede's account of the same story is found in his *HE*, II.1, 134–5.

<sup>78</sup>*S. Gregorii Magni, Registrum Epistularum*, VIII.29 (ed. D. Norberg, *Corpus Christianorum, series Latina CXL–CXLA* (Turnhout, 1982)), CXLA.551. The same pun is made by Widukind: *Res Gestae Saxonicae*, I.8 (ed. G. Waitz, MGH, *Scriptores III* (Hanover, 1839), 419–20): 'Et quia illa insula in angulo quodam maris sita est, Anglisaxones usque hodie uocitantur.'

practice, the two names, Saxon and English, being used synonymously.<sup>79</sup> For example Alfred's father Æthelwulf was variously described in the Annals of St-Bertin as king of the English, of the Anglo-Saxons, of the west English as well as king of the West Saxons.<sup>80</sup> The author of the miracles of St Wandrille appears to have viewed Britain as inhabited by only one people (the *gens Anglorum*) although having multiple kings; he reports how at some time between 858 and 866 the *praefectus* of Quentovic, Grippo, was sent by Charles the Bald on a mission *in insula Britannica ad reges gentis Anglorum*.<sup>81</sup> That there was an association between the Germanic inhabitants of Britain and the continental Saxons was by no means forgotten; Boniface could write to all the *Angli* in the eighth century urging them to pray for the conversion of the Saxons, 'because they are of one blood and one bone with us',<sup>82</sup> and in the tenth century the marriage of Edith, sister of King Æthelstan, to the Saxon king Otto was seen as a reassertion of familial ties between the two peoples, as well as providing the Saxon dynasty with an opportunity to benefit from a more ancient kingship.<sup>83</sup>

It thus appears that before the eighth century the seaborne attackers of Roman Britain and the peoples who settled the south-eastern part of the island in the sub-Roman period were seen generically by outsiders as *Saxones*. Bede also talked of the *aduentus Saxonum*, even though he

<sup>79</sup> Richter, 'Bede's *Angli*', 113. See for example *Annales Regni Francorum*, s.a. 786 and 808 (ed. F. Kurze, MGH SRG (Hanover, 1895), at 73 and 127); Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 25 (ed. G. Waitz, MGH, SRG ius 25 (Hanover, 1911), 30).

<sup>80</sup> Annals of St-Bertin, s.a. 839, 855, 856, 858 (ed. Grat *et al.*, 28, 70, 73, 76): *rex Anglorum, rex Anglorum Saxonum, rex occidentalium Anglorum* and *rex occidentalium Saxonum*. The same text, s.a. 862 termed Æthelwulf's son, Æthelbald *rex Anglorum*, ed. Grat *et al.* 87. In a ninth-century confraternity book from the northern Italian monastery of Brescia Æthelwulf appears among a list of pilgrims with the appellation *rex Anglorum*, having presumably visited the house during his visit to Rome in 855/6: Brescia, Biblioteca Queriniana, MS G.VI.7, fo. 27v: H. Becher, 'Das königlich Frauenkloster San Salvatore/Santa Giulia in Brescia im Spiegel seiner Memorialüberlieferung', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, XVII (1983), 299–392, at 377. I owe this reference to Janet Nelson.

<sup>81</sup> *Ex miraculis S Wandregisili*, ed. O. Hodder-Egger, MGH Scriptores XV (Hanover, 1887), 408–9; quoted by P. Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England', in *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, ed. M. Gibson and J.L. Nelson (2nd edn, Aldershot, 1990), 139–53, at 142.

<sup>82</sup> Boniface, *Epistola* 46, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 74.

<sup>83</sup> K. Leyser, 'The Ottonians and Wessex', in his *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, ed. T. Reuter (London, 1994), 73–104, at 74–5. See also E. Van Houts, 'Women and the Writing of History in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of Abbess Matilda of Essen and Aethelweard', *Early Medieval Europe*, I (1992), 53–68, at 57 and 63–4. The so-called *Leges Eadwardi confessoris*, dating from the mid-twelfth century, also preserve a remnant of a sense of common descent and interests between English and Saxons, directing that Saxon visitors should be received as if brothers, for they are born 'from the blood of the *Angli*, that is to say from *Engern*, a place and region in Saxony, and the English from their blood; they are made one people, one kind': ch. 32 C, ed. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, I.627–72, at 658; transl. Leyser, 'The Ottonians', 74.

sought to describe the salvation of the *gens Anglorum*. The fact that there was one term in general usage before Bede's time suggests that the Germanic inhabitants of Britain were perceived from the outside as one community with a recognisable identity and distinction from their neighbours. The created notion that this community should be named the *Angli* came gradually to be recognised on the continent from the eighth century, but the consistency of usage found in the earlier period does not persist, except in the Celtic-speaking areas, where the Germanic peoples of Britain remained Saxons.

King Alfred's vision of one people united through a shared history, common faith and opposition to the Danes under a single rulership might have found outward celebration in the ceremonies to mark the general submission of 886, but can scarcely have met without opposition. Those reluctant to accept the concept of the newly created identity or unwilling to accept West Saxon overlordship had, however, few independent means of articulating their alternative perceptions or preferences (or, at least, few are recorded). The Alfredian programme was indeed in part an exercise in controlling knowledge, encompassing as it did 'those books most necessary for all men to know'. Those attracted to Alfred's court were not exclusively English. According to Asser 'foreigners of all races came from places near and far', some in search of money, others looking for a lord of proven ability: 'many Franks, Frisians, Gauls, pagans (*viz* Danes), Welshmen, Irishmen and Bretons subjected themselves willingly to his lordship, nobles and commoners alike'.<sup>84</sup> There were others of 'English' birth who failed to perceive the benefits to be gained from obedience to King Alfred. A charter of Alfred's son, Edward the Elder, dated 901, provides the history of an estate in Wiltshire, recording that it had previously been forfeited by an ealdorman, Wulfhere, 'when he deserted without permission both his lord King Alfred and his country (*patria*) in spite of the oath which he had sworn to the king and all his leading men. Then also, by the judgment of all the councillors of the *Ge-wise* and of the Mercians he lost the control and inheritance of his lands.'<sup>85</sup>

Such acquiescence as there was in the unified rule created by Alfred did not extend beyond his death to the automatic acceptance of his heirs. Within Wessex Alfred's son, Edward the Elder, faced a challenge

<sup>84</sup> Asser, *Life of Alfred*, chs. 101, 76, ed. Stevenson, *Asser*, 87, 60; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 107 and 91.

<sup>85</sup> S 362, transl. *EHD*, 100. Discussed together with other instances of disloyalty to Alfred by J.L. Nelson, '"A King Across the Sea": Alfred in Continental Perspective', *TRHS*, 5th series, XXXVI (1986), 45–68, at 53; and by S. Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *ibid.* 195–217, at 206. For further evidence of reluctance to promote Alfred's plans see Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, chs. 91 and 106, ed. Stevenson, *Asser*, 77, 93–4; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 101, 110.

from his cousin, Æthelwold.<sup>86</sup> The predominantly West Saxon sources imply that the arrangements for the control of the parts of Mercia not under Danish control remained as they were (direct control of the kingdom rested in the hands of Ealdorman Æthelred and his wife Æthelflæd, but under King Edward's overall authority)<sup>87</sup> and Edward continued in his charters to use the royal style his father had adopted: 'king of the Anglo-Saxons'.<sup>88</sup> There is no record in the surviving sources of any objection to these arrangements beyond 903 (although the Mercian Register hints at disquiet when Edward assumed rulership of Mercia on his sister's death in 918),<sup>89</sup> but acceptance of the necessity for Mercian and West Saxon collaboration against a common threat is not sufficient ground for arguing for widespread noble acquiescence in the fusion of the two kingdoms, or the loss of the separate identities of their peoples.

The notion of one English nation continued to have a currency throughout the tenth century and might seem to have had a wider applicability following the unification of England under West Saxon rule first by King Æthelstan and particularly in the time of King Edgar. Ælfric showed signs of national pride in writing *c.* 1000 that 'the English nation (*angelcynn*) is not deprived of God's saints when in England lie buried such holy people as this sainted king [Edmund], and the blessed Cuthbert and St Æthelthryth in Ely ... There are also many other saints among the English nation (*on angelcynne*).'<sup>90</sup> Did Ælfric attribute

<sup>86</sup>The Chronicler reported not only that Essex submitted to Æthelwold, and that he was later joined by the East Anglian Vikings and a Mercian prince, but that Edward had some difficulty in holding his own army together, having to send seven messengers to the men of Kent who persisted in lingering behind against his command: Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 903. Æthelwold's revolt has been discussed by Dumville, *Wessex*, 10.

<sup>87</sup>This has been argued by Simon Keynes on the basis of a group of charters issued in 903 and by references in S 396 (*EHD*, 103) and S 397 issued in 926 to 'the order of King Edward and also of Ealdorman Æthelred along with the other ealdormen and thegns': 'A Charter of Edward the Elder for Islington', *Historical Research*, LXVI (1993), 303–16. In other charters, however, Æthelred and Æthelflæd made grants without reference to Edward: S 221, 224–5; see P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989), 25–6.

<sup>88</sup>S. Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters of King Æthelwulf and his Sons', *English Historical Review*, CIX (1994), 1109–49, at 1148–9. The West Saxon chronicle described Æthelred as an ealdorman, but the tenth-century writer of a Latin chronicle based on a lost version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle termed him *rex* (*Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (Edinburgh, 1962), 49–50), and Asser described Æthelred's power in terms similar to those he used of the Welsh kings who submitted to Alfred: Asser, *Life of Alfred*, ch. 80, ed. Stevenson, *Asser*, 66–7; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 96. See Stafford, *Unification*, 26.

<sup>89</sup>The Mercian Register for 919 reported that Æthelred's daughter was deprived of all authority in Mercia and taken into Wessex: *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. C. Plummer (2 vols., Oxford, 1892–9), I, 105; transl. Whitelock, *EHD*, 217.

<sup>90</sup> Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Eadmundi Regis et Martyris*, quoted by C. Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð: A

to Alfred a responsibility for making this a single people greater than that inherent in his defeat of their enemy, the Danes?<sup>91</sup> He certainly knew of 'the books which King Alfred wisely translated from Latin into English', specifying of these only a *Historia Anglorum*, presumably the translation of Bede's History not now thought to have been translated by Alfred personally.<sup>92</sup> To an outsider in the eleventh century, the English did look to be one people; Cnut wrote to his subjects as 'the whole race of the English' (*totius gentis Anglorum*), and in the preface to the version of his laws which he brought before an assembly at Oxford in 1018, Cnut sought to 'establish peace and friendship between the Danes and the English and put an end to their former strife'.<sup>93</sup> The referent of the term has, however, shifted since Alfred's day. Alfred's English were the Christian people of Kent, Wessex and western Mercia;<sup>94</sup> the English whom Cnut conquered included not only the East Anglians and Northumbrians but men of Danish parentage, born or settled in England. The Normans also saw the people they had conquered as one English *gens*.<sup>95</sup>

Although some continued to perceive the Anglo-Saxon peoples as one nation, and to use the term English to describe them into the eleventh century, this does not demonstrate a linear development of an Alfredian notion of English nationhood through the tenth century, nor the perpetuation of the shared memory that Alfred had sought to cultivate. The potential to unite all the Englishkind under one rule

---

Historical-Hagiographical Dichotomy Revisited', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, XXXVII (1994), 18–34, at 18.

<sup>91</sup> *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch: Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. S.J. Crawford (London, 1922), 416–17; transl. Dumville, *Wessex*, 141: 'In England too kings were often victorious because of God, as we have heard tell—just as King Alfred was, who fought frequently against the Danes until he gained victory and thus protected his people; similarly Æthelstan, who fought against Anlaf and slaughtered his army and put him to flight—and afterwards with his people he [Æthelstan] dwelt in peace.'

<sup>92</sup> Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', 69.

<sup>93</sup> Cnut's letter to the English of 1027, ed. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, I.276–7 at 276, transl. Whitelock, *EHD*, no. 53. I Cnut prologue, ed. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, I.278–307 at 278; transl. *EHD*, no. 47.

<sup>94</sup> Interesting in this context is the Chronicle's (alliterative verse) annal for 942, which, describing King Edmund as lord of the English and protector of men, recounts how he 'overran Mercia and thereby redeemed the Danes, previously subjected by force under the Norsemen, for a long time in bonds of captivity to the heathens': ASC 942, ed. Bately, 73; transl. Whitelock, *EHD*, no. 1, 221.

<sup>95</sup> G. Garnett, "'Franci et Angli'": The Legal Distinctions between Peoples after the Conquest', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, VIII (1986), 109–37; R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), 135–8. See also J. Gillingham, 'The Beginnings of English Imperialism', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, V (1992), 393–409. In some senses, however, Northumbria was virtually a separate state c. 1100: W.E. Kappelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North: The Region and its Transformation, 1000–1135* (London, 1979), 11–13.

became a reality temporarily only in the reign of King Æthelstan, and permanently only from the time of Edgar. The tenth-century West Saxon kings frequently saw themselves as kings of the English (*rex Anglorum*) but not uniquely or exclusively so; their authority ranged more widely, encompassed peoples of greater ethnic diversity and might extend to governorship of Britain.<sup>96</sup> A grant of King Eadred's of 946 reported that king's consecration to 'sovereignty of the quadripartite rule' on the death of his brother, Edmund, who had 'royally guided the government of kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons and Northumbrians, of the pagans and the Britons'.<sup>97</sup> It may be that regional separatism was too sensitive an issue to be ignored by southern kings often seen as unwelcome foreigners in Mercia, let alone Northumbria; the problems of imposing unitary rule from the south were considerable, and the loyalty of these regions to Wessex was never certain.<sup>98</sup>

Where there was any notion of the existence of Englishness among the nobility even in Wessex, let alone Mercia or Northumbria, it is likely to have been perceived as only one of a number of possible communities of identity. Those who might at times have defined themselves as English would simultaneously recognise other loyalties: to their king, to their lord, to a village, to a region. Distance from the West Saxon court (or from Canterbury) might alter conceptions of Englishness substantially. Alliance with Scandinavian 'enemies' looked attractive at various times to archbishops of York, and the members of

<sup>96</sup> Numerous tenth-century royal charters style kings as 'king of the English and of the people round about', and the witness lists to these grants reveal the presence at the West Saxon court of Northumbrian and often Welsh princes. For the articulation of imperial pretensions in the charters of Æthelstan and his successors see Dumville, *Wessex*, 149, 153-4, and N. Banton, 'Monastic Reform and the Unification of Tenth-Century England', in *Religion and National Identity*, ed. S. Mews (Oxford, 1982), 71-85, at 72-3 and 80-1.

<sup>97</sup> S 520, transl. *EHD*, no. 105; for discussion of this group of alliterative charters see Whitelock, *EHD*, 372-3. Similarly the early tenth-century coronation *ordo* granted West Saxon kings government of two or three nations: C.E. Hohler, 'Some Service Books of the Later Saxon Church', in *Tenth-Century Studies*, ed. D. Parsons (London and Chichester, 1975), 60-83, at 67-9. For Edgar's imperial coronation at Bath in 973 see Banton, 'Monastic Reform', 82. The pledge made to Edgar at Chester by six British kings in the same year was reported only in the northern recensions of the Chronicle: ASC 973 DE, ed. Plummer, I.119; transl. Whitelock, *EHD*, 228. In the more elaborate account of this ceremony given by John of Worcester, Edgar is reported to have declared afterwards to his nobles 'that each of his successors would be able to boast that he was king of the English, and would enjoy the pomp of such honour with so many kings at his command': *The Chronicle of John of Worcester II: The Annals from 450-1066, s.a. 973*, ed. and transl. R. Darlington *et al.* (Oxford, 1995), 424-5.

<sup>98</sup> D. Whitelock, 'The Dealings of the Kings of England with Northumbria in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. P. Clemoes (Cambridge, 1959), 70-88; N. Lund, 'King Edgar and the Danelaw', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, IX (1976), 181-95; Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings', 206-8.

the northern Mercian and Northumbrian nobility.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, it does appear that one collective identity of Englishness had an enduring currency through the pre-Conquest period, transcending the significant separation brought about by the existence of a multiplicity of different political organisations and ethnic groups among the Anglo-Saxons. Alfred's promotion of the *Angelcynn* as a people with a shared past united under West Saxon rule fostered an awareness that English self-consciousness lay in more than their acknowledgement of a common Christianity centred on Canterbury. Patrick Wormald has already shown how useful the notion of Englishness was to be in the evolution of the early English state; it is worth exploring whether the notion has any potential for the examination of other spheres of pre-Conquest history.<sup>100</sup>

The force of this sense of a common identity is striking, notably its prevalence in sources at least from Bede's time onwards, coupled with the fact that it was clearly recognisable to outsiders. That 'a strong sense of a common unity as a people is not incompatible with a highly particularised local identity' has been demonstrated by the current President of the Society in relation to eleventh- and twelfth-century Wales. Professor Davies has shown that the Welsh defined their common unity in terms of a common descent, the invention of a common mythology to create their identity, a common language and literary tradition, and much that was common in law, together with the coining of names to given themselves a consciously constructed identity as compatriots.<sup>101</sup> This argument—that one can have cultural, legal and linguistic unity without political unity—is equally valid for the pre-Norman English. Alfred's achievement lay in his realisation that by harnessing and focusing these three forms of identity through an appeal to a common memory, and by imposing a cultural hegemony he was able to provide a retrospective and self-consciously historical explanation for the creation of a fourth, national, consciousness. In that sense, while Bede invented the English as a people in the sight of God,<sup>102</sup> they were made one nation by 'Alfred of the English, the greatest treasure-giver of all the kings [Bishop Wulfsgie] has ever heard tell of, in recent times, or long ago, or of any earthly king he had previously learned of.'<sup>103</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Lund, 'King Edgar', 189–92; W.M. Aird, 'St Cuthbert, The Scots and the Normans', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, XVI (1993), 1–20, especially 3–4 and 6–9.

<sup>100</sup> I hope to pursue this further in a thematic consideration of the history of the English before the Norman Conquest.

<sup>101</sup> R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1987), 15–20.

<sup>102</sup> Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede', 24.

<sup>103</sup> Wulfsgie, bishop of Sherborne, preface to his translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*; transl. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 188.