

5 A New Beginning (Alfred's preface to his translation of Gregory's *Cura pastoralis*)

As part of his efforts to revive education in England (see p. 2), King Alfred (871–99) distributed copies of a translation of Gregory the Great's *Cura pastoralis*, a handbook for priests, to churches throughout his kingdom (which now extended beyond Wessex to include Mercia). The letter which he wrote to accompany these manuscripts has become a keystone in our study of the intellectual history of England in the late ninth century. It acts as a preface, presenting first the king's stark – some would say overstated and ideologically driven – view of the dire state of ecclesiastical (i.e. Latin) learning at this time. He notes that in days gone by learning and piety went hand in hand and books were even exported abroad (a clear reference to the time of Bede in Northumbria during the first decades of the eighth century). Now, however, few people can read English, let alone Latin. Alfred implicitly links this decline to a neglect of Christian duty by the English and consequent divine punishment in the form of devastation by Viking attacks. Before the knowledge of Latin had declined, no one had thought of making vernacular translations, but now Alfred has embarked on a remedial programme of translation which will make available to the people of England a selection of texts essential for a Christian education. He has assembled a team of learned men from other parts of Britain and the Continent to help with the task. Now it is up to local bishops to organise the learning process using the materials provided. In justifying his ground-breaking experiment – promoting Christian learning by means of vernacular texts – Alfred analyses the history of translation from the sacred languages and shows it to have been a logical and justifiable process. For him, pedagogy is a sacred duty; wisdom is equated with piety, and piety with spiritual wealth.

Four copies of Alfred's letter are preserved. The text below is based on that in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 20, the version sent with a copy of the *Cura pastoralis* to Wærferth, bishop of Worcester (873–915), one of the team of helpers whom Alfred gathered round him and who, at Alfred's request, translated into English another work by Gregory, the *Dialogi* ('Dialogues'). The manuscript remained in Worcester until the mid-seventeenth century.

Alfred's letter is not consistently easy to read. He wrote at a period when the clear and confident native prose style we associate above all with Ælfric one

hundred years later was not yet fully developed, and his style is still heavily influenced by Latin syntax. This often results in cumbersome sentences, consisting of a succession of dependent clauses whose connections are tricky to unravel. Help with these is given in the notes below. Alfred's language, as we would expect, shows many early WS forms. Most notable is the use of *io* to represent both the short vowel *i* and the diphthong *eo*; thus *htora* (7, etc), *hiene* (21, etc) and *wiotan* (4), and *īow* (48), *sīo* (40, etc), *giond* (5, etc), *liornunga* (10, 53) and *gehtoldon* (8). Before *n*, the characteristic vowel is *o*, rather than *a*, as in *monige* (16 and 58), *monnum* (23 and 49) and *mon* (32, 55, etc). The stem-vowel of *hwelce* (4) and *swelce* (31) has not yet given way to *i* or *y*; *swē* is still used, rather than *swā* (13, 45, etc), and *meahie* (65) rather than *mihite*. The adjectival ending *-e* is used rather than *-e* (as in *gefylde*, 28, *oðra*, 47, etc), and *ðette* (a contraction of *ðæt ðe*) is used more often than not for the relative pronoun *ðæt* (16, 18, etc). Use of *k* for non-palatalised ('hard') *c* is also characteristic (*kyning(as)*, 2 and 6, and *kynerīces*, 59).

Further reading

- N. R. Ker, ed., *The Pastoral Care*, EEMF 6 (Copenhagen, 1956)
 H. Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 2 vols., EETS 45 and 50 (London, 1871)
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 S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, eds. and trans., *Alfred the Great* (Harmondsworth, 1983)
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 N. G. Discenza, 'Wealth and Wisdom: Symbolic Capital and the Ruler in the Translation Program of Alfred the Great', *Exemplaria* 13 (2001), 433–67

✚ DĒOS BŌC SCEAL TŌ WIOGORACEASTRE.

Ælfred kyning ʿhateð grētan Wærferð bisecep his wordum 1 luffice° ond

friēndlice° ond ʿdē cyðan hāte ʿdæt mē° cōm° swiðe° oft on gemynd°

hwelce° wiotan iu° wæron giōnd° Angelcynn°, ʿæġðer ge godcundra hāda ge

woruldundra°, ond hū gesēliglica° tīda° dā wæron giōnd Angelcynn ond hū

dā kyngas ðe done onwald° hæfdon ðæs folces Gode ond his ærendwrecum°

hiersumedon°, ond hīe æġðer ge hiora sibbe° ge hiora stodo° ge hiora onweald

innanbordes° wel gehioldon° ond eac iu° hiora eðel° gerymdon°, ond hū ʿhim

dā spēow ʿæġðer ge mid wiġe° ge mid wiśdome; ond eac dā godcundan hādas

hū giorne° hīe wæron æġðer ge ymb° lāre° ge ymb liormunga ge ymb ealle dā

ðrowdōmas° ðe hīe Gode dōm° scoldon; ond hū man ʿutanbordes ʿwiśdōm ond

lāre hieder° on lond° sōhtie° ond hū wē ʿhīe ʿnū scoldon° iute begietam° gif wē

hīe habban sceoldon. Swæ° clāne° ʿhīo ʿwæs oðfeallenu° on Angelcynne ðæt

swiðe fēawa° wæron behioan° Humbre° ðe hiora ðēninga° cūden° understonðan

on Englisc oððe furðum° an ærendgewrit° of Lædene° on Englisc āreccan°, ond

ic wēne° ðætte nōht° begrondan Humbre ʿnāren°. Swæ fēawa hiora

2 warmly 3 affectionately to me has come very mind 4 what wise men formerly

throughout English nation 5 happy times 6 rule (over +g) ministers 7 obeyed +d

peace morality 8 at home maintained abroad territory as extended 9 warfare

10 zealotry in (or as regards) teaching 11 services perform (for +d) 12 here (this) land

came seeking would have to sbj obtain 13 So [swā] completely fallen away 14 few

on this side of +d the (river) Humber services could 15 moreover letter Latin

translate 16 imagine not many were not sbj

1 **DĒOS...** **WIOGORACEASTRE** ‘This book is meant (to go) to Worcester’, with om. of the vb. of motion [§G2d]. The direction was written in large capitals at the top of the page in Hatton 20 after the volume of Gregory had been put together. The diocese of Worcester, in Mercia, had been founded by 680. Remote from the main areas of Danish depredation, it seems to have retained a good level of learning until Alfred’s time.

2 **hateð grētan...** **wordum** The infin. after *hāteð* may be trans. with a passive saying ‘sends greetings to bishop Wærferth’. The infin. after *hāteð* may be trans. with a passive saying ‘sends greetings to bishop Wærferth’.

3 **dē cyðan hāte** After the formal greeting, Alfred switches to the 1st pers.: ‘(I) command you to be informed’.

4–5 **æġðer ge...** **woruldundra** gen. of respect: ‘both in sacred orders and in secular (ones)’.

8–9 **him dā spēow** impers. vb. with dat.: ‘it prospered for them’, i.e. ‘they prospered’.

11 **utanbordes** ‘from abroad’. In the age of Bede, Northumbria had been a leading centre of Christian learning and many manuscripts were copied at Wearmouth–Jarrow to meet demand from the Continent.

12 **hīe** acc. sg. fem.; the antec. is *lār*.

13 **hīo** for *hīe*, nom. sg. fem.

16 **begrondan Humbre** i.e. in Northumbria; even here, learning had decayed.

wæron ðæt ic furðum ānne ānlēpne° ne mæg geðencean° ʿbe stiðan Temese, dā

dā ʿic tō riçe fēng°. Gode ælmihtegum siē° ðonc° ðætte wē nū ænigne onstal°

habbað lārēowa°. ʿOnd forðon° ic ðē bebiode° ðæt dū dū dō swæ ic gelīefe° ðæt

dū wille°, ðæt dū ðē ðissa woruldþinga tō ðām geēmētege, swæ dū oftofst°

mæge, ðæt dū ðone wiśdōm ðe ðē God sealde°, ðær ðær dū hīene befæstan°

mæge, befæste°. Gedene° hwelc wītu° ius° dā becōmon° for° ðisse worulde, dā

dā wē ʿhit ʿnōhwæðer° ne selfe° ne lufodon ne eac oðrum monnum ne lēfdon°:

ʿðone naman ænne wē lufodon ðætte wē Cristine wæren° ond ʿswiðe fēawe dā

25 dēawas°.

Ðā ic dā ðis eall gemunde°, dā gemunde ic eac hū ic geseah°, ʿær ðām ðe

hit eall forhergod° wære ond forbarned°, hū dā ciricean° giōnd eall Angelcynn

stōdon māðma° ond bōca geflydæ° ond eac ʿmicel mengeo° Godes ðrowa°, ond

dā ʿswiðe lýtle forme° dāra bōca wiston°, ʿfor ðām ðe ʿhīe hiora° nānwuht°

30 ongiotan° ne meahlton, for ðām ðe hīe næron on hiora āgen° geðiofe° āwritene.

17 single think of 18 succeeded be thanks (to +d) supply 19 teachers *gp* therefore

command believe 20 wish most often 21 gave apply 22 Think punishments upon

us came because of (or in respect to) +d 23 neither (ourselves) allowed (to +d)

26 remembered saw 27 plundered burnt churches 28 treasures filled (with +g)

multitude servants 29 they benefit *as* knew of them nothing 30 understand own

language

17–18 **be stiðan Temese** ‘to the south of the Thames’: **dā ðā** double conj.: ‘when’ (lit. ‘then when’); also 22–3.

19–22 **Ond forðon...** **befæste** A cumbersome sentence. The main statement is: *ic ðē bebiode... ðæt dū ðē ðissa woruldþinga tō ðām getēmētege... ðæt dū ðone wiśdōm... befæste*. In the long rel. clause, *tō ðām* (‘to that extent’ or ‘end’) and *ðæt* may be taken as

correl. and be trans. together: ‘that you should empty yourself of (or detach yourself from) the affairs of this world, to the end that you may acquire wisdom’; alternatively, *tō ðām*

may be interpreted absolutely: ‘... for these (things), namely that you...’. The clause *ðær ðær... mæge* then follows: ‘there where (or wherever) you may acquire it (*hīne*)’.

23 **hit** The antec. is *wiśdōm*, though this is a masc. noun, and so the masc. pron. *hē* might be expected; an example of the use of ‘natural’ gender [§B/overview].

24 **ðone naman...** **wæren** ‘we loved only the name that we were Christians’, i.e. ‘we loved only to be called Christians’. It has been argued, on the basis of a well-known

passage from St Augustine, that Alfred did not here write *lufodon* but *hæfdon*, ‘had’, and this is indeed the reading in two of the manuscripts. A copyist may have repeated *lufodon*

inadvertently from the previous line.

24–5 **swiðe fēawe dā dēawas** /*fēawe* may be an adj. describing *dēawas* (acc. pl. masc.): ‘(we loved) very few (of the) practices’; or a noun/pron. (nom. pl. masc.): ‘very few [i.e. of us] (loved) the practices’: In 14 and 16 the indecl. form /*fēawa*, made on the analogy of

fēla, ‘many’, has been used in this latter sense.

26 **ær ðām ðe** compound conj.: ‘before’.

28 **ond eac** ‘and (how there was) also’.

29 **for ðām ðe** conj. phr.: ‘because’.

Swelce° hīe cwæden°: ‘Ure ieldran°, dæ° de ðās stōwa° ær hīoldon°, hīe lufodon wīsdōm ond ðurh ðone° hīe begēaton° welan° ond ūs læfdon°. Hēr mon mæg gīef° gešton° hiora swað°’ ac wē hīm ne cunnon° æfter° spyrigean°. Ond for ðæm wē habbað nū ægðer forlæten° ge ðone welan ge ðone wīsdōm, for ðæm de wē noldon° tō ðæm spore° mid ūre mōde° onlūtan°.

Ðā ic ðā ðis eall gemunde, ðā wundrade° ic swīðe swīðe ðāra gōdena wiotona° ðe giū° wæron giond Angelcynn ond ðā bēc° eallæ be fullan° geliormod° hæfdon, ðæt hīe hiora ðā nænne dæl° noldon on hiora āgen geðīode wendan°. Ac ic ðā sōna° eft° mē selfum andwyrde° ond cwæð: ‘Hīe ne wēndon° ðætte æfre menn sceolden swæ recceleāse° weorðan° ond sīo lār swæ oðfeallan°. For ðære wilnunga° hīe hit forlētton° ond woldon° ðæt hēr ðy māra wīsdōm on londe wære ðy wē mā° geðōda° cūdon°.’

Ðā gemunde ic hū sīo æ° wæs ærest on Ebreiscgeðīode° funden° ond eft, ðā hīe Crēacas° geliornodon, ðā wendon hīe hīe on° hiora āgen geðīode ealle°

31 (It was) as though said *sbj* forefathers those places occupied **32** it acquired wealth left (it) **33** still see track cannot follow **34** lost **35** would not track mind bend **36** marvelled (about +g) **37** long ago books **38** studied **39** translate immediately after answered +d **40** imagined careless become **41** left wanted (i.e. hoped) **42** languages knew **43** the Hebrew language found **44** the Greeks in

33 swað Along with *spyrigean* (33) and *spore* (35), this constitutes a hunting metaphor: **him** ... **æfter** ‘after them’.

33–4 for ðæm adv. phr. correl. with conj. *for ðæm* later in the sentence: ‘therefore ... (because ...)’.

36–7 swīðe swīðe ‘very much’. **ðāra gōdena wiotona** ‘about [lit. “of”] those good wise men’.

37 eallæ pron. (for *ealle*) in apposition with *ðā bēc*: ‘all the books’. **be fullan** ‘fully’.

38 hiora ... nænne dæl ‘not any part of them [i.e. the books]’.

40–1 swæ oðfeallan A notional *scealde* may be supplied before this phr.: ‘should so decay’. Alternatively, *oðfeallan* could be taken as a past part. (for *oðfeallen*), parallel with the adj. *recceleāse*: ‘(become) so decayed’.

41 For ðære wilnunga Apparently, ‘by desire’, i.e. ‘deliberately’.

41–2 ðy māra ... ðy wē mā ... ‘the more ... the more we ...’; *māra* is an adj. describing *cūdon*. Learning would increase as an inevitable consequence of the study of languages, and translation would be unnecessary.

43 sīo æ ‘the Law’ here means the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT, the so-called ‘books of Moses’. Alfred shows a sound understanding of the history of Bible translation. Originally composed mostly in Hebrew, the books of the OT were later put into Greek for the Jews of north Africa, then into Latin for the Christians of the Roman Empire. Alfred uses this to justify his own programme of vernacular translation of Christian works. He himself put fifty psalms into English (see Text 15).

44 hīe ... ealle acc. sg. fem. pron., with antec. *æ*: ‘it all’.

ond eac° ealle ðore bēc°. Ond eft Lædenware° swæ same°, siððan° hīe hīe ge- liornodon, hīe hīe wendon ealla ðurh wīse° weallstodas° on hiora āgen geðīode. Ond eac ealla ðōrre Crīstnæ ðīoda° sumne dæl hiora° on hiora āgen geðīode wendon. Forðy° mē ðyncð° betre, gif iow swæ ðyncð°, ðæt wē eac sumæ° bēc, ðā ðe nīðbedearfosta° sīen° eallum monnum° tō wiotonne°, ðæt wē ðā on ðæt geðīode wenden ðe wē ealle gecnāwan° mægen, ond gedðon° swæ wē swīðe eade° magon mid Godes fultume°, gif wē ðā stīfnesse° habbað, ðætte eall sīo gioguð° ðe nū is on Angelcynne° frīora monna°, ðāra ðe ðā spēða° hæbben ðæt hīe ðæm befēolan° mægen, sīen tō liornunga oðfæste°, ðā hwīle ðe hīe tō nānre oðerre note ne mægen°, oð ðone first° ðe hīe wel cunnen° Englisc gewrit° āræðan°. Lære° mon siððan furdūn on Lædengedīode ðā° ðe mon furdūr lēran wille ond tō hīeran hāde° dōn° wille.

Ðā ic ðā gemunde hū sīo lār Lædengedīodes ær ðissum āfeallen° wæs giond Angelcynn, ond ðeah° monige cūdon Englisc gewrit āræðan, ðā ongan° ic ongemang° oðrum mislicum° ond manigfealdum° bisgum° ðisses kynrīces°

60 ðā bēc wendan on Englisc ðe is genemmed on Læden *Pastoralis*, ond on

45 the Romans when **46** learned interpreters **47** peoples **48** Therefore (it) seems certain **49** most necessary are *sbj* know **50** understand do **51** easily support peace **52** youth means **53** apply (themselves) set **54** time can writing **55** read Teach *sbj* those **56** promote **57** decayed **58** yet began **59** amidst various numerous cares kingdom

45 ealle ðore bēc i.e. the other books of the OT. **swæ same** ‘in the same way’.

47 sumne dæl hiora ‘some part of them [i.e. the biblical books]’.

48 Forðy ... Another complex sentence begins (ending at *āræðan*, 55). It is best tackled by first extracting the essential thought expressed: *mē ðyncð betre ... ðæt wē eac sumæ bēc ... on ðer geðīode wenden ðe wē ealle gecnāwan mægen, ond gedðon ... ðætte eall sīo gioguð ... on Angelcynne ... sīen tō liornunga oðfæste*. All the qualifying clauses may now be added, one by one.

48 gif iow swæ ðyncð, ‘if it seems so to you’ (*iow* for *ēow*). Alfred now addresses all the bishops who are to receive copies of the translation of *Cura pastoralis*, not just Wæferth.

49 eallum monnum ‘for all people’. **ðæt wē** This simply repeats the words in the previous line, taking up the thread again. **ðā** Probably the acc. pl. pron., ‘them’, referring to *sumæ bēc*, but possibly the adv. ‘then’.

52 frīora monna gen. of definition: ‘(who are) free men’.

53–4 ðā hwīle ðe ... ne mægen ‘as long as they are not competent (or able) for any other employment’.

56 tō hīeran hāde ‘to higher office’; i.e. to a position in the church.

60 Pastoralis The usual medieval title of Gregory’s book was *Liber pastoralis*, ‘the pastoral book’.

Englisc 'Hieðebōc', 'hwīlum word be° worde hwīlum andgīt° of° andgiete, swā swā° ic hīe geliomode æt° Plegmunde mīnum ærcebiscepe ond æt Assere mīnum biscepe ond æt Grimbolde mīnum mæsseprōste ond æt Iōhannē° mīnum mæsseprōste. Siððan ic hīe ðā geliomod hæfde, swā swā ic hīe forstōd° ond swā ic hīe andgītfullfost° ārecean° mealte, ic hīe on Englisc āwende: ond tō ælcum biscepstōle° on mīnum rīce wille āne onsendan ond on ælcere bið ān 'æstel' se° bið° on fiftægum mancessa°. Ond ic bebiode on Godes naman ðæt nān mon ðone æstel from ðære bēc ne dō°, ne ðā bōc from ðæm mynstre. Uncūð° hū longe ðær swā° gelærede° biscepas sīen° swā swā nū, Gode ðonc, welhwār° siendon. Forðy ic wolde ðette hīe° ealneg° æt ðære stōwe° wæren, būton° se biscep hīe mid him habban wille oððe hīo hwār° tō° lāne° sīe oððe 'hwā oðre bī write'.

61 for sense for **62** from **64** understood **65** most intelligibly render **66** bishopric
 67 which **68** take (It is) unknown **69** such learned may be almost everywhere
 70 always unless **71** somewhere on loan

61–2 **hwīlum word ... of andgiete** Alfred highlights the two basic methods of translating; literally, word for word, or more freely according to sense. The choice of method for sacred texts was much debated in the medieval period; cf. Ælfric's comments in 16/85–93. **swā swā** conj. phr.: 'just as'.

62–3 **Plegmunde ... Assere ... Grimbolde ... Iohanne** The men from outside Wessex whom Alfred seconded for his programme of translation and teaching. Plegmund (Archbishop of Canterbury, 890–914) was Mercian; Asser (who became bishop of Sherborne and wrote a biography of the king) was Welsh; Grimbold (a priest) was a Frank from Flanders; and John (whom Alfred made abbot of a new monastery at Athelney, Dorset) was a continental Saxon. On the 'mass-priest', see 16/12n.

67 **æstel** A rare word thought to denote an elaborate marker or pointer for use by the reader of a book, made of precious metals and perhaps having a jewelled handle. **on fiftægum mancessa** 'at fifty mancuses' (with noun in the partitive gen.); either made with, or simply worth, that amount of gold. The mancus was a gold coin equivalent to the weight of thirty silver pence.

70 **hīe** i.e. book and æstel. **ðære stōwe** 'that place' is the church.

71–2 **hwā oðre bi write** 'someone should be copying another', i.e. is making another copy. This interpretation takes *oðre* as the acc. sg. fem. pron. and *bīwritan* (with *bi* a form of the prep. *be* and *write* here pres. sbj.) as an idiom meaning 'to copy'.