Saxon Bishop and Celtic King
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Notes and Bibliography

Notes

1. Bede's principle work for the history of early Medieval Britain is of course the Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, completed in 731. All references to the Historia Ecclesiastica (hence, HE) will be cited by book and chapter number from the edition by Sherley-Price & Farmer (1990).

2. There exist two Lives of Aldhelm: by the Italian born Faricius (written c.1080-1100), and by William of Malmesbury, as Book V of his Gesta Pontificum Anglorum (written c.1125) (see Lapidge & Herren 1979: 5-6). William stated that Aldhelm was "not less than a septuagenarian when he died" (709), hence the c.640 date for his birth (Hamilton 1870: 332). However, there is no independent basis for this date, and William himself implies that it is conjectural (Hamilton 1870: 385). Indeed, both of these Lives are written a considerable time after Aldhelm's floruit and therefore need to be used with caution.

3. William of Malmesbury believed Aldhelm was trained by Maeldub, who apparently gave his name to Malmesbury (Hamilton 1870: 333-4). See also Pearce 1978: 111. In a letter from an anonymous student, Aldhelm is said to have been "nourished by a certain holy man of our race" (Letter VI in Lapidge & Herren 1979: 146-7, 164). If the student was Irish, as is often taken to be the case, this would also support William’s claim. Lapidge & Herren (1979: 7) state that Aldhelm had probably read the work of the Irishman Virgilius Maro Grammaticus; had made use of the Liber Numerorum, a work that had at the least been transmitted from Ireland, and he may have known the Irish Liber de Ordine Creaturarum.

4. There survives a letter to Aldhelm from Cellanus (Letter IX in Lapidge & Herren 1979: 149, 167), and a letter from Aldhelm to Cellanus (Letter X in Lapidge & Herren 1979: 149, 167).


6. Dumnonia was the Celtic kingdom of the south-west that roughly covered the modern counties of Cornwall and Devon, and possibly parts of Dorset and Somerset prior to the eighth century. As Wessex expanded westwards, the amount of territory under Dumnonian control would have diminished.

7. It is interesting to note that ASC 710 entry is often used to assert that Ine and Nunna defeated or even killed Geraint (e.g. Lapidge & Herren 1979: 1979: 142; Pearce 1978: 113), even though the entry only actually states that Ine and Nunna fought against Geraint.

8. There is what appears to be a king-list for south-western Britain surviving in a fourteenth-century manuscript: Jesus College, Oxford, MS 20, now in the Bodleian library (Pearce 1978: 139-40). In this list there is a Geraint map Erbin, grandson of Custennyn, a figure who has been tentatively identified as Gildas's Constantine of Dumnonia (Pearce 1978: 140-1; Thomas1986: 67; Thomson & Winterbottom 1999: 405). This would place Geraint map Erbin's floruit in the late
sixth century.

9. Letter IV in Lapidge & Herren 1979: 140-3, 155-60. The letter survives only in the eighth-century MS Codex Vindobonensis 751. Bede referred to the letter (HE V.18, Sherley-Price & Farmer 1990:298-299), though appears to have misunderstood its provenance and nature: he assumed it was a book; seemed to think it was the result of a local synod, and did not mention that it was addressed specifically to Geraint. Thus, Bede probably had not actually seen the letter (see note 10).

10. This statement stands against Bede's claim (HE V.18, Sherley-Price & Farmer 1990: 298-299; see note 9) that Aldhelm had attended a local council.

11. Aldhelm talks of there being bishops in Dumnonia, but provides no indication of how many.

12. I would argue here that Aldhelm's veiled accusation of heresy against British Celtic Christian practice is not merely a topos. If there was an author of such a topos it would surely have been Bede, and Aldhelm's letter was written too early to have been influenced by Bede's work. And even if Aldhelm was employing a topos, the complexity of his argument militates against such a device being used by him in an ill-considered manner. Rather, it seems more likely that Aldhelm was genuinely aroused against British Christianity.

13. Perhaps the potential for rebellion on the basis of religious difference informed Ine's decision to include Britons in his law code, promulgated c.688-94 (Attenborough 1922: 34-5; Whitelock 1955: 364-72).


15. Lapidge & Rosier (1985: 173, 177) translate "Domnonia" as Devon. I have chosen to leave it in the original as it is less misleading, and more informative to do so.

16. According to Stephen of Ripon, Chad had been consecrated by "Quartodecimans" (Vita Wilfridi, ch.15, Webb & Farmer 1998: 123), those who celebrated Easter on the fourteenth of the Paschal month (Davies 1992: 16). It is noteworthy that in his account of the consecration, Bede implies that Wine was obliged to seek assistance from those outside the Catholic fold as he was at the time "the only bishop in all Britain who had been canonically consecrated" (HE III.28, Sherley-Price & Farmer 1990:196-197). Thus, Bede appears to be rationalising Wine's behaviour and suggesting that he sought help from the British only because he had no alternative. Whether or not this was actually the case is difficult to determine; even if Wine was the only Catholic bishop in the region, it does not necessarily follow that he must have viewed the British as a last resort. This rationale may only be a manifestation of Bede's anti-British attitude. Nevertheless, it is an interesting possibility that Wine may have encountered some difficulties in the administration of his role that could only be solved with British aid. Certainly, he had gained his bishopric (c.660) in controversial circumstances (HE III.7, Sherley-Price & Farmer 1990:153-155). King Cenwalh desired a bishop who could speak the West Saxon tongue, so he created a new diocese based at Winchester for Wine, thereby offending the incumbent Frankish Bishop Agilbert, who subsequently departed for the Continent. A few years later, Wine himself was expelled to Mercia by Cenwalh, and the kingdom of the West Saxons was without a bishop until the arrival of Leutherius in 670 (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 670, Swanton 2000: 34-5). Thus, Wine could well have been isolated within Wessex and therefore in a position of weakness, perhaps necessitating a course of action that he might not otherwise have considered. So, Bede may not have been far off the mark in his rationale for British involvement in Wine's consecration of Chad.

17. It is possible that the Dumnonians were "some of the Britons in Britain" who conformed to Roman practice following the lead of the "majority of the Irish in Ireland", c.703 (HE V.15, Sherley-Price & Farmer 1990:293-295), though the Britons of Strathclyde and Cumbria are probably better candidates here.
18 See Edwards 1988: 243-9 and Finberg 1953: 16 for the full record and a discussion of this list. It will thenceforth be referred to as the 'Cottonian list'.

19. Geraint's grant is recorded "Gerontius rex dedit Macuir de v hidis iuxta Thamar" (Edwards 1988: 245).

20. To qualify this point: it may not have been known that "Gerontius" was a British king, so the argument that his name would not have been used by a forger does not necessarily hold. William of Malmesbury, for example, did not appear to know that Dumnonia was a British kingdom, but rather was an older name for English Devonshire. See his Gesta Pontificum Anglorum II.94: "Crediton is a small villa of Dumnonia, which is commonly called Devonshire" (Hamilton 1870: 200-202), and his Gesta Regum Anglorum I.100: "... in Dumnonia, now called Devonshire (Deuenescire)" (Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom 1998: 146-7). Thus, it may follow that Geraint's identity was forgotten by the eleventh century.

21. Egbert's grant is recorded "Egbertus rex dedit ... et Kelk xij hidas et Ros et Macor de xviij hidis" (Edwards 1988: 245).

Finberg (1964b: 106) explains how Kelk (Kilkhampton) and Ros (Roseland) were also estates in Cornwall, thus Maker is not out of place in this list of grants. Archbishop Dunstan's letter to King Aethelred (c.980-88), also mentions Cornish estates given by Egbert to Sherborne (see Whitelock 1955: 822-3).

22. There is, of course, no guarantee that everything of import was actually written down in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle - there may have been more warfare between Wessex and Dumnonia than is recorded. For instance, prior to the entry for 710, the last actual engagement with Britons referred to in the Chronicle is the non-specific entry for 682, in which Centwine is said to have 'put the Britons to flight as far as the sea' (Swanton 2000: 38-9). This is the only battle recorded for Centwine in the Chronicle. Yet, Aldhelm writes in his Carmina Ecclesiastica that Centwine waged war in three battles (Lapidge & Rosier 1985: 48). Given that Aldhelm was abbot of Malmesbury at the time, he is arguably a better witness for Centwine than the authors of the Chronicle. Thus, the suggestion of Aldhelm's peace-keeping role between Wessex and Dumnonia is made tentatively here.

References


Finberg, H.P.R. (1953) The Early Charters of Devon and Cornwall Leicester: University College of Leicester.


