Anglo-Saxon(ist) Pasts, postSaxon Futures

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Published by Punctum Books

Ellard, Donna-Beth.  
Anglo-Saxon(ist) Pasts, postSaxon Futures.  
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Second Movement

Interlude—
A Time for Mourning
On Being an Anglo-Saxonist: Asser’s Life of King Alfred, Benjamin Thorpe, and the Sovereign Corpus of a Profession

Several years ago, Howard Williams noted a relationship between Sharon Turner’s *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, James Douglas’s *Nenia Britannica*, and ‘an influential generation’ of mid-nineteenth-century scholars:

The mid-nineteenth century in England witnessed a rapid growth of interest in the material remains of Europe’s early medieval barbarians. An influential generation of antiquaries, historians, and archaeologists quarried a new vein of Dark Age discoveries. This work augmented an existing historical and philological focus on the Germanic roots of England’s people, language and customs, typified by Sharon Turner’s *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, and built upon James Douglas’ *Nenia Britannica* in which burial mounds and fur-
nished graves were attributed to the Anglo-Saxons for the first time.¹

Chapters 2 and 3 of this book expand upon the implications of Williams’s passing statement. These chapters argue that Turner and Douglas, as well as John Mitchell Kemble, are not figures whose work was ‘augmented’ by academics of a later period. Rather, they are the encrypted, graveyard ‘fathers’ of Anglo-Saxon Studies. When considered together, Turner’s historical writings, Douglas’s archaeological report, and Kemble’s archaeological pursuits place the scholarly minds and bodies of this interdisciplinary field in Anglo-Saxon crypts and graves.

This chapter takes Williams’s ‘influential generation’ and his metaphor of quarrying a step further with a special focus on the philologist Benjamin Thorpe, a key figure among the generation that succeeded Turner and Douglas, especially. While Thorpe labors in the funerary mine opened by these men, he does not claim descent from them. Rather, Thorpe, one of the first named ‘Anglo-Saxonists,’ ‘quarries a new vein of Dark Age discoveries’ that belongs to another ‘father’: Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex, or, ‘Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons.’²

This chapter addresses Thorpe’s relationship to King Alfred, the sovereign ‘father’ of our profession’s entangled signifiers, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Anglo-Saxonist.’ It tracks the terminological appearance of Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex — first, in the early

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English charters, then in Asser’s *Life of King Alfred*—as an expression of kingship that translates the vernacular, performative bodies of Alfred and his ‘Anglo-Saxon’ subjects into the Latin, textual domain of Christ’s sovereignty. In Asser’s *Life*, this translation is facilitated by an imaginary account of the crucifixion. Christ’s crucified corpse, which marks the conversion of material flesh into sovereign Word, enables Alfred to be translated from a corporeal body of chronic illness and pain into a Latinized, textual *corpus*. Through this fictional act, Asser’s biography pronounces Alfred an Anglo-Saxon sovereign; however, it suggests that in real life this work remains incomplete. Asser suggests that a sovereign future awaits Alfred after death, when, like Christ, his material body can be translated from a corpse into a *corpus* of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ texts.

This chapter attends to these prognostications of Asser. It discusses the loss of Alfred’s material corpse amid the turmoil of the English Civil Wars, which enables him to return as a corpse-like ghost of sovereignty. With no physical body to locate Alfred or keep him in the ground, Alfred’s ghost proliferates. His haunting presence appears in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century portraits and paintings, becoming associated with the enfleshed bodies of English kings, then taking on the shape of ‘Englishmen.’ As Alfred’s sovereign, undead figure takes up residence in the images of living bodies, ‘Angulsaxon’ becomes a course of study at Oxford, and Alfred’s sovereign, corpse-like body begins to inhabit a *corpus* of Anglo-Saxon texts.

Alfred’s ghostly movements ready the ground for the nineteenth-century scholarship and pedagogy of Benjamin Thorpe, who (alongside John Mitchell Kemble) is the profession’s first named ‘Anglo-Saxonist.’ Thorpe activates Alfred’s ghostly figure from within his numerous editions of Anglo-Saxon law codes, poetry, and homiletic literature. Further, his language-learning texts recast this association between Alfred’s corpse and textual *corpus* as ‘the Anglo-Saxon,’ a raciolinguistic figure that, on account of its sovereignty, is pure, unmiscegenated, and, consequently, undead. By studying Thorpe’s works, one transitions from studying ‘Anglo-Saxon’ language to *becoming* an ‘Anglo-
Saxonist,’ a professional and embodied ‘being’ that is haunted by the sovereign and racialized ghosts of the colonized past.

**Early English Charters, an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Kingdom, and its ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Subjects**

To begin, one does not simply jettison a word-concept. A signifier is a powerful rhetorical tool, especially when it generates group formation and maintains an individual’s belonging to the group. If, as an Anglo-Saxonist, I harbor a scholarly devotion towards the term ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ then I might do well to consult Susan Reynolds’s 1985 essay ‘What Do We Mean by ‘Anglo-Sax—

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3 In modern English, ‘-ist’ designates a wide range of professional and business affiliations, see ‘-ist,’ suffix, *Oxford English Dictionary*, def. 4. However, the *oed* also explains that these secular applications derive from a Latin, religious context. As a suffix, ‘-ist’ is used initially by ‘Christian writers, in the latinizing of scriptural and ecclesiastical terms.’ Later, it ‘denotes the observers of a particular rite, the holders of special religious or philosophical tenets, or the adherents of particular teachers or heresiarchs.’ Consequently, ‘-ist’ generates descriptive terms that ‘designat[e] a person who ‘practices…studies…or devotes himself to some science, art, or branch of knowledge,’ and later references denote an ‘adherent or professor of some creed, doctrine, system, or art’ (see *oed*, def. 2 and 3). A suffix of spiritual and secular devotion, these two senses of ‘-ist’ are followed by its final and most contemporary one: ‘denoting one whose profession or business it is to have to do with the thing or subject in question…. Also from names of languages, as *Americanist, Anglist, Germanist, Hebraist, Hellenist, Latinist, Orientalist*’ (see *oed*, def. 4). ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ is thus a term that is defined in relation to the shifting semantics of ‘-ist.’ As a word that derives from the professional study of the Anglo-Saxon language, the *oed*’s first definition uses ‘-ist’ to denote one’s academic ‘profession or business,’ while its second definition uses the suffix in order to mark one who ‘practices…studies…or devotes himself’ to a ‘creed’ of ‘Anglo-Saxonism.’ While the multiple semantic registers of ‘-ist’ differentiate secular professionalism from secular ideology, hovering just behind the occupational term ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ is also the study of Latin and of the early medieval Church, both of which are critical to the production of Old English texts. This Latinate, Christian context routes the academic Anglo-Saxonist towards the religious origins of ‘-ist,’ a suffix that renders her, by way of professional study, a ‘follower,’ ‘devotee,’ or ‘practiser’ of this body of scholarship and marks her academic profession as one of faith and fidelity to ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and its ecclesiastical partner language, Latin.
on’ and ‘Anglo-Saxons’?” in which she discusses the various early medieval attestations of the terms ‘Angles,’ ‘Saxons,’ and ‘English.’ Reynolds’s etymological research leads her to early medieval articulations of ‘Anglo-Saxon.’ The compound, she explains, is used first by continental sources to reference, collectively, the Germanic peoples of Britain. It then appears ‘occasionally…in surviving native sources only from the late ninth century on, when West Saxon kings and their successors sometimes referred to themselves as kings of the Angli Saxones, Angolsaxones, Anglosaxones, or Angulsaxones.’

Reynolds’s historical assessment hinges on the political language of King Alfred, who, in charters from the late 880s and early 890s, rescripted the royal style of his Wessex predecessors Æthelbald, Æthelberht, and Æthelred, from ‘king of the Saxons’ [‘rex Saxonum’] to ‘king of the Angles and Saxons’ [‘rex Anglorum et Saxonum, Anglorum Saxonum rex’], and, soon after, ‘king of the Anglo-Saxons’ [‘angol saxonum rex, Anglo Saxonum rex’].

Janet Nelson, Simon Keynes, David Pratt, and Sarah Foot attribute this change in the royal style of Alfred’s charters to the political relationship between Wessex and Mercia during

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7 See the 891 and 892 Anglo-Saxon charters S 348 and S 349 (Electronic Sawyer). In the charters, the compound remains in use after Alfred’s death from his son, Edward the Elder (899–924), until Æthelstan created the “Kingdom of the English” in 927 (Simon Keynes, ‘King Alfred and the Mercians,’ in *Kings, Currency, and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, eds. Mark A.S. Blackburn and David N. Dumville [Rochester: Boydell Press, 1998], 25).
the 870s and 880s. In the late 870s, Viking victories in Mercia and the death of its king, Ceolwulf, pave the road for a Wessex ascendancy, and, in the mid-880s, a coordinated monetary system, royal marriage alliances, and, moreover, Alfred's protective actions in London against the Vikings, indicate tightening bonds between Wessex and Mercia. The precise political relationship between these two kingdoms is articulated in an 889 charter between ‘Alfred, king of Angles and Saxons and Æthelred, petty king and nobleman of the Mercians’ ['Ælfred rex Anglorum et Saxonum et Æðelred subregulus et patricius Merciorum']. The terms that designate Alfred's relationship to Æthelred not only express the overlordship of a Wessex king ['rex'] to a Mercian underking ['subregulus'] but also articulate this political hegemony by way of a new royal style: ‘Alfred, king of Angles and Saxons’ ['Ælfred rex Anglorum et Saxonum']. As David Pratt writes, ‘Æthelred’s submission was understood to have created a new political order in southern Britain’ in which Alfred operates as overlord to both kingdoms, which are now stylized, according to Simon Keynes, as ‘namely the “Anglian” kingdom of Mercia (less the part already settled by the Danes)


9 Alfred’s ‘restoration’ or ‘gesette’ of London, a city governed by Mercia during this period, not only puts a Mercian town under Alfred’s protection and makes it defensible against Viking attack but, moreover, prompts the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to express that, in 886, ‘all English people, except those who were held captive by the Danes, turned to him’ ['him all Angelcyn to cirde þæt buton deniscra monna hæfniede was'] (The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, Vol. 3, MS. A, ed. Janet M. Batley [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986], 53). All Old English translations are my own.

10 S 346, Electronic Sawyer. All charter translations are my own.

11 Pratt, The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great, 106.
and the “Saxon” kingdom of Wessex and its eastern extensions.\textsuperscript{12} For Pratt and Keynes, the use of ‘Angles and Saxons’ and, shortly after, ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ in this and several other charters, signals, on the one hand, a ‘wholly new and distinctive polity’ between Wessex and Mercia\textsuperscript{13} and, on the other, a defensive ‘unity’ or political ‘amalgam[ation]’ between its peoples.\textsuperscript{14}

While politics are key to the development of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ in the court of Alfred the compound exceeds political terminology and likewise functions as an ethnic term. In other words, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ identifies points of shared belonging between Alfred’s people. As Nicholas Brooks writes, the multicultural court of Wessex ‘must have had an immediate problem in determining the ethnic terminology that was appropriate for King Alfred’s people, which now included both Saxons and Mercians.’\textsuperscript{15} Brooks explains that while Alfred and Asser ‘are likely’ to have considered ‘the king’s subjects and their language as “Saxon,”’ his continental and perhaps Mercian advisers will have thought of them as “English”’.\textsuperscript{16} ‘An initial compromise,’ Brooks argues, ‘seems to have been reached among the king’s charter-writers’ in the compound ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ an ethnic term that Brooks aligns with ‘the king’s subjects and their language.’\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{13} Keynes, ‘Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons,’ 44.

\textsuperscript{14} Pratt, \textit{The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great}, 107.

\textsuperscript{15} Nicholas Brooks, ‘English Identity from Bede to the Millenium,’ \textit{The Haskins Society Journal} 14 (2003): 46–47.

\textsuperscript{16} Brooks, ‘English Identity from Bede to the Millenium,’ 47.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. While at this point the precise definition of early medieval ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnic’ are beyond the scope of this chapter, see Robert Bartlett, \textit{The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350} (London: Penguin Press, 1993), 197; Stephen Harris, ‘Race and Ethnicity,’ in
Stephen Harris makes a similar, yet more developed, argument for understanding ‘Anglo-Saxon’ in relation to ethnicity, writing that the ‘ethno-religious order of identity shaped by Charlemagne and imported into Anglo-Saxon England during the reign of Alfred’ configures an ‘Anglo-Saxon ethnogenesis…within the context of Christendom.’

Elsewhere, Harris concludes that when ‘Alfred and his successors recorded genealogies that reached back through Germanic deities like Woden to a Christian past, [they] unit[ed] a gens Anglosaxonum with a gens Christianorum in the descent of a Christian English king.’

Brooks and Harris both assess ‘Anglo-Saxon’ as an ethnic term that denotes a shared language and religion. Thus figured,
it draws under its sign not only those subjects who recognize Alfred’s political overlordship but, moreover, all in Britain who hold common linguistic and religious affiliations. ‘Anglo-Saxon’ exceeds the borders of Alfred’s political dominion and touches upon any place where English-speaking Christians live.

Rethinking Anglo-Saxon: Translation, Sovereignty, Corpus

The compound ‘Anglo-Saxon’ classifies Alfred’s political lands and his subjects; however, it is not a free-standing signifier. As noted above, it exists as part of Alfred’s royal style, *Angulsaxon-num rex*, and appears for the first time (and almost exclusively) in early English charters, legal documents in which a king grants land to a subject. While charters are secular demonstrations of royal power, Kathrin McCann explains that, in Britain, they have religious origins. Monks who had recently arrived on the island did not trust the ‘oral tradition’ that kings used to transfer land to their subjects, so they drafted Latin documents to guarantee gifts of land to the Church.  

Although unmentioned by McCann, the principle of translation—a process that entails the creative selection, substitution, recoding, etc. of materials from one domain to another—underwrites her discussion of the history of early English charters. Kingly power, which had traditionally been located in ritual performances and vernacular statements, is now translated into new, written modes of Latin documentation. Likewise, when land owned by a king was gifted to the Church, the Latin formulae and religious rhetoric used to describe this transaction translated a terrestrial kingship and kingdom into the spiritual architecture of God’s rule and heavenly regions. The linguistic and conceptual re-codings that take place within early English charters impacted the ‘self-image of the ruler’ and ‘had implications…for the perception of kingship as an office, separate from an actual person.”

21 Ibid., 47, 49.
charters, the king could exercise his power to rule without being physically present; and through the charters, the king’s rulings were ‘anchored in eternity.’ Consequently, charters translate the figure of the king from a physically present, embodied entity of vernacular performance to an absent form of Latinate textuality. Likewise, they position kingship within the context of God’s everlasting kingdom, making ‘charters…the place where the secular and religious realms meet and merge.’

In order to exercise this secular-spiritual power, the physically absent king must occupy textual space in the charter writings. Consequently, as McCann notes, ‘it is…the titles that bear the greatest political significance’ because ‘royal titles’ (or styles) enable the ‘sovereignty and authority of the monarch’ to exist in writing ‘through kingdoms and even eras,’ according to a ruler’s ‘territorial politics as well as his territorial ambitions.’ As part of a royal style, the signifier rex articulates the king’s textual, Latin form. However, a ruler such as Alfred may exercise his sovereignty in absentia only through participation ‘of the Anglo-Saxons’ [‘Angulsaxonum’]. As a Latin compound that is

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22 Ibid., 49.
23 Ibid., 47.
24 Ibid., 47, 49, 50.
25 ‘Sovereignty’ is a word that is largely absent from discussions about Alfred and kingship in Anglo-Saxon studies (McKann’s Anglo-Saxon Kingship and Political Power is a notable exception). While the term begins to circulate in thirteenth-century England, the concept of sovereignty is not anachronistic to the early English period. As a global concept, it can be traced, first, to Assyrian rulers, and witnessed in the exercise of power by ‘Islamic, Atlantic, Chinese, even nomadic and exilic’ communities and their leaders, many of which pre-date the ninth-century moment of Alfred. See Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr, ‘Editors’ Introduction,’ in The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept, eds. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 6. While Susan Reynolds cautions that ‘no medieval ruler…was sovereign in the way that later theorists of the sovereign nation-state would require’ (‘The Historiography of the Medieval State,’ in Companion to Historiography, ed. Michael Bentley [London: Routledge, 1997], 111), Francesco Maiolo has taken painstaking efforts to define and understand medieval sovereignty in terms that are fundamentally different from modern sovereignty (as
likewise concerned with bodies, language, and Christian faith (to recall the arguments of Brooks and Harris), Angulsaxonum brings into presence Alfred’s kingdom by translating the physical bodies and vernacular expressions of his subjects into a Latinized, ethnopolitical formula. Angulsaxonum rex is therefore an expression of secular-religious sovereignty that is enacted by translating the bodies of a king and his subjects. It abstracts Alfred’s physical presence and, in its place, identifies those who (and therefore where) he rules — over the people of a temporal kingdom that is nested within God’s eternal, heavenly realm.

While the sovereign ambitions of Alfred’s royal style are articulated in the charters, they are not realized in these documents. As Ben Snook notes, ‘for the diplomatic critic, Alfred’s presence is rather less pervasive…. [T]he corpus of late ninth-century West Saxon charters is comparatively small, full of forgeries and, shared, rather than absolute, power within a territory) and exercised across the kingdoms of medieval Europe (Medieval Sovereignty: Marsilius of Padua and Bartolus of Saxoferrato [Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2007]). While one critic believes the definition of modern sovereignty and its body of legal thought ‘hampers’ Maiolo’s arguments (Thomas Izbicki, ‘08.09.22, Maiolo, Medieval Sovereignty, The Medieval Review, https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/16669), Peggy McCracken’s recent book, In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), not only surveys the many medieval inroads towards sovereignty but also exits the limiting world of medieval jurists in order to consider sovereignty as a concept that operates in literary worlds, which, for McCracken, concern stories about animality. Given this body of evidence that advocates for the relevance to sovereignty in an early English context, one might argue that the absence of the term (and passive resistance to it within Anglo-Saxon studies) reveals not only the masked power of the sovereign but also the extent of Alfred’s sovereignty over Anglo-Saxon studies itself. For sophisticated theoretical treatements of sovereignty in the medieval and early medieval periods that attend to the refusal among contemporary theorists to read the archives of medieval Christendom’s sovereignty in a manner that would reveal the ways in which sovereignty (and in contemporary parlance, biopolitics) always constituted itself by naming various enemies, most notably Muslims and Jews, and how this scholarship has also foreclosed even mention of such entanglements, see Kathleen Biddick, Make and Let Die: Untimely Sovereignties (Earth: punctum books, 2016).
from a literary perspective at least, not particularly interesting.\textsuperscript{26} Rather, as Snook continues, ‘thanks largely to the work of his biographers Alfred has become an immovable monolith, towering over…the whole Anglo-Saxon era.’\textsuperscript{27} Why does Snook pass over the charters and look to biography as the place from which Alfred’s sovereign, monolithic power emerges? Because, as Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr explain, ‘sovereignty is established and maintained as much by aesthetic, artistic, theatrical, and symbolic structures as by political claims over everyday life, war and peace, and life and death.’\textsuperscript{28} In other words, sovereignty comes from creative and, often, theological appropriations of modes of understanding power, while also being solidified in political documentations of power.

First among Alfred’s biographers is Asser, a shadowy figure who in 893 writes the \textit{Life of King Alfred} just as charters from the late 880s and early 890s record the change in Alfred’s royal style to \textit{Angulsaxonum rex}. Asser employs Alfred’s newly asserted royal style throughout his biography, and he narrates the process by which Alfred becomes a sovereign \textit{Angulsaxonum rex} by unpacking an understanding of sovereignty that builds upon the charters’ emphasis on linguistic and conceptual modes of translation. In the \textit{Life}, Asser translates Old English annal materials into Latin while he translates Alfred’s body (along with those of his subjects) from vernacular, physically embodied forms into Latinized, textual ones.

Importantly, while Asser is guided by the language and spirit of Alfred’s recent charters, his \textit{Life} is not limited by them. Asser engages with multiple texts, literary traditions, and genres of writing, composing a biography that many scholars have argued is a bit of a failed project. As Richard Abels summarizes, ‘The \textit{Life}’s loose organisation, repetitions, inconsistent use of verb tenses, and lack of conclusion, moreover, suggest a work


\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{28} Benite, Geroulanos, and Jerr, ‘Editors’ Introduction,’ 3.
in progress rather than a polished text. What we call the *Life of King Alfred* may be no more than an imperfect copy of an incomplete draft.’

In terms of aesthetics, Abels’s statements are true, but they arise from a tradition of source study and criticism that continues to understand the *Life* from within the parameters of Gregorian, Carolingian, and Davidian models of good governance. As we shall see, Pope Gregory’s *Regula Pastoralis*, Einhard’s *Life of Charlemagne*, and King David’s psalms are of critical value to Asser’s biography. However, the scholarship of Abels and other historians does not account for the role of Alfred’s charters, which provide a rhetorical and conceptual framework within which these governmental models operate. Asser’s network of sources is entangled, and his narrative is messy, to be sure. Yet, these elements work together in order to translate and transform Alfred into *Angulsaxonum rex* — an ‘immovable [sovereign] monolith’ of the ‘Anglo-Saxon era.’

While the *Life of King Alfred* is written around the time of the charters, its story begins several decades earlier, in 849, when ‘Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, was born’ *‘natus est Ælfred,*

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30 While this chapter will focus on Asser’s Gregorian and Carolingian sources, it is important to note that *The Life of Alfred* yokes together a much wider range of Latin materials, including phrases from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate*, Augustine’s *Enchiridion*, and the *Vetus Latina* translation of the Bible.

31 It is remarkable and telling that Alfred and his biography are not discussed in relation to the history and theory of sovereignty, given the statements that are made by some of Anglo-Saxon studies’ most well-known historians of Alfred. For example, Simon Keynes notes that, ‘Alfred was already in his own lifetime to some extent a literary construction’ (*Alfred the Great and the Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons,* 13), and David Pratt has positioned ‘Alfredian discourse’ within the context of the king’s bodily performance, arguing that ‘Alfred’s body itself acquired an all-encompassing significance, as a microcosmic representation of his kingdom’ (*The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great,* 178).
Angul-Saxonum rex’). By using the royal style of Alfred’s charters to introduce Alfred, Asser announces the Life as a political accounting of how Alfred grows up to become sovereign ruler of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Asser quickly departs from a discussion of Alfred and turns to annal records (now known, collectively, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle), translating these materials from Old English into Latin. The annals recount Viking raids on southern Britain, conflicts between and within British kingdoms, and wicked deeds and customs. According to Asser’s annal translations, the world into which Alfred is born is full of civil strife and foreign invasions. It is a political landscape in which no British king or kingdom is sovereign. Yet, when Asser invokes the king’s royal style a second time, it acts as a bulwark against these disruptions, which are now explained and consigned to the past, in historical retrospect, by ‘my lord, the truthful Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons’ ['domino meo Ælfredo, Angul-saxonum rege veredico’].

Despite the sovereign assurances of Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex, Asser continues to translate from the annals, which record the yearly, and therefore recurring, onslaught of Viking attacks. When the character of these incursions changes from intermittent raids in Kent to a full-scale land invasion of East Anglia in 866, Asser’s rhetoric and his narrative are forcibly impacted. As if disoriented by the seafaring Vikings, Asser is compelled to speak ‘in nautical terms’ ['more navigantium'], explaining that as a consequence of the many wars and yearly reckonings, ‘the ship’ ['navis'] of Alfred’s biography has been left to ‘to waves and sails’ ['undis et velamentis'] and has ‘sailed quite far away from

33 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 71; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 12.
the land’ ['a terra longius enavigantes']. Asser will put it back on course by narrating an account ‘of the infancy and boyhood of my venerable lord Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons’ ['de infantilibus et puerilibus domini mei venerabilis Ælfredi, Angulsaxonum regis']. In other words, Asser promises to return Alfred’s biography to sovereign shores by recounting, in Latin, personal information that falls outside the political activities recorded in the Old English annals.

After an extended discussion of stories and scenes from Alfred’s youth, Asser’s Life returns to annal materials, which remain preoccupied with Viking activities in Britain and abroad. Viking attacks continue unabated despite defensive efforts led by British kings, including Alfred, who succeeds to the Wessex throne in 871. Throughout these years, Asser calls Alfred rex, translating his title according to the Old English annals, which refer to him simply as ‘king’ ['cyning']. In 882 and 885, however, Alfred’s war with the Vikings, which has mostly been fought on land, moves onto the water, where Alfred commands a seafaring fleet that attacks the Vikings and succeeds in gaining some short-lived victories. As Alfred puts his ships on an offensive course against the Vikings, Asser departs from his Old English exemplar three times, substituting cyning with the charter formula, Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex.

The tide appears to have turned in favor of Alfred’s political situation, but it does not last. The Vikings return to East Anglia, breaking the fragile peace that he had negotiated with them and prompting Asser to return to his nautical metaphors:

Accordingly, in order that I may return to that point from which I digressed — and so that I shall not be compelled to sail past the haven of my desired rest as a result of my protracted voyage — I shall, as I promised, undertake, with

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34 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 74; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 19.
35 Ibid.
36 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 86, 87, 88; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 49, 51, 53.
God’s guidance, to say something about the life, behaviour, equitable character and, without exaggeration, the accomplishments of my lord Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, after the time when he married his excellent wife from the stock of the Mercians...

[Igitur, ut ad id, unde digressus sum, redeam, ne diuturna enavigatione portum optatae quietis omittere cogar, aliquan-tulum, quantum notitiae meae innotuerit, de vita et moribus et aequa conversatione, atque, ex parte non modica, res gestas domini mei Ælfredi, Angulsaxonum regis, postquam praefatam ac venerabilem de Mercorium nobilium genere coniugem duxerit...]

The annals have, again, lead Alfred’s political situation into troubled waters, despite Asser’s repeated translations of Old English *cyning* into the Latin charter formula, Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex. Again, the *Life of King Alfred* must be steered in the right direction. And, again, Asser deploys Alfred’s royal style as a phrase that holds out the promise of a return to sovereignty by redirecting Alfred’s biography towards a lengthy, Latin discussion of private events from the king’s early adulthood that are not recorded in the Old English annals.

By positioning Alfred’s biography in dialogue with annal records, Asser articulates sovereignty as a concept that is situated in relation to the domain of ‘vernacular’ politics but cannot be located within it. Asser repeatedly engages Old English annal material in order to begin the process, quite literally, of translating Alfred from his vernacular political world into a personal, Latin one. Asser’s recounting of Alfred’s childhood, adolescent, and young adult experiences continue this process. They interrupt the yearly accounting of Old English annal records and, together, create a Latin narrative that extends across Alfred’s life.

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tracking, first, his love of English poetry, then his love of Latin writings.

In order to press Alfred in the direction of this textual world, Asser’s extra-annal narrative first addresses the issue of Alfred’s body. According to Asser, Alfred is chronically ill and has suffered, since youth, from a ‘malady’ ['dolor'] that he specifies as a ‘particular kind of agonizing irritation’ ['genus infestissimi doloris'] called ‘piles’ ['ficum']. Alfred’s piles are gifted to him by God so that he may resist the sexual temptations of his adolescence. Yet, at Alfred’s wedding celebration, a new sickness overtakes him. Alfred ‘was struck…by a sudden severe pain’ ['subito et immenso…correptus est dolore'], which remained with him ‘from his twentieth year up to his fortieth and beyond’ ['a vigesimo aetatis suae anno usque quadragesimum, et eo amplius']. Unlike the piles, which is a term for hemorrhoids, Alfred’s new condition is unknown, and his body is not only ‘struck’ ['correptus'] but also ‘seized,’ ['arripuit'], ‘plagued’ ['fatiguit'], and ‘harassed’ ['perturbatus'] by the unrelenting pains related to this adult sickness. Issues of embodiment take center stage in a Life that is keyed to gaining possession of and solidifying Anglo-Saxon sovereignty (and political hegemony). This lexical constellation, which generates a twenty-plus-year scenario of physical pain that attacks and overwhelms Alfred’s body, draws Alfred back to his situation in Wessex, where, according to the annals, Alfred’s kingdom has been in constant conflict with the Vikings. Asser tightens these connections when he explains that Alfred is burdened ‘with all kinds of illnesses unknown to the physicians of his island…and also by the incursions of the Vikings’ ['omnibus istius insulae medicis incognitis infirmitibus…nec-

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38 Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 89; Stevenson, *Asser’s Life of King Alfred*, 55.
non et paganorum...infestationibus’]. Physical ‘illnesses’ and political ‘incursions’ sit side by side as parallel forces that act upon Alfred’s biological form and his kingdom’s territory. They mark an entangled relationship between Alfred’s physical body and his political body, indicating that the health (or sickness) of one is coterminous with the other.

Alfred is not only a sick body but also a ‘vernacular’ one. As a precocious child, Alfred is divinely inspired to learn ‘English poems’ ['Saxonica poemata'] by heart. Alfred’s love and comprehension of English introduces his desire to learn Latin, and he memorizes the ‘daily round,’ that is, the services of the hours, and then certain psalms and many prayers ['cursum diurnum, id est celebrationes horarum, ac deinde psalmos quosdam et orationes multas']. In his youth, Alfred cultivates the linguistic and religious components of an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ identity; and, as king, these expressions are amplified by his embodied performances. Alfred’s enjoyment of ‘reading aloud from books in English and above all learning English poems by heart’ ['Saxonicos libros recitare, et maxime carmina Saxonica memoriter discere'] introduces a range of Christian practices.

Alfred not only reads from books and memorizes poetry. He also listens to the Mass, participates in psalms and prayers, and gives alms to the needy. All these embodied, ritual activities of Alfred’s childhood and adulthood take place, however, amid ‘Viking attacks and his continual bodily infirmities’ ['paganorum infestationes et cotidianas corporis infirmitates']. Alfred’s vernacular or ‘Saxon’ expressions of a so-called ‘Anglo-Saxon’ ethnicity op-

41 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 76; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 21.
42 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 75; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 21. Asser uses four different verbs associated with educational pedagogy to emphasize Alfred’s total comprehension of ‘Saxon’ poetry: ‘disco’ ['learn'], ‘intelligo’ ['understand'], ‘recito’ ['recite'], and ‘lego’ ['learn'].
43 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 75; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 21.
44 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 91; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 59.
45 Ibid.
erate alongside the physical infirmities and territorial attacks upon his two kingly bodies.

Stories of Alfred’s private life reveal that embodiment and vernacularity are trip hazards on the journey to sovereignty. Consequently, despite Asser’s departure from the annals, Alfred’s childhood and adulthood draw Asser, repeatedly, back towards its world of Viking invasion. As stories that are meant to return Alfred’s biographical ship to the ‘land’ of Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex, however, these personal accounts do not simply evidence Alfred’s unsovereign body but also work to remedy it. Asser manages the problem of Alfred’s physical, vernacular form by bracing his account of Alfred’s illnesses against Pope Gregory’s Regula Pastoralis, a text that characterizes the rector, or ruler, as a figure of pious governance who must not only forego temptations of the body but also welcome physical suffering. Like Gregory’s rector, as a youth, Alfred is sexually tempted, and God gives him piles in order to help him resist his temptations. As an adult, Alfred acts always in accordance with Christian practices in the face of continuous illness and pain. In addition to drawing from Gregory, Asser’s Life is influenced by Eusebius’s Life of Constantine, Einhard’s Life of Charlemagne, and the anonymous Life of Alcuin, biographical models that emphasize ‘royal devotion’ as an aspect of good kingship. These sources instruct


47 As Paul Kershaw summarizes, Asser’s biography ‘belongs to a lineage of Christian royal biography that begins with Eusebius’s Life of Constantine, but has a closer affinity with the more immediate family of Carolingian and sub-Carolingian biographies of pious laymen’ (Illness, Power and Prayer in Asser’s Life of King Alfred, ‘Early Medieval Europe 10, no. 2 [2001]: 201). These biographies are also thought of as ‘mirrors for princes,’ and they emphasize what David Pratt, following Kershaw, explains as a ‘Carolingian tradition of royal devotion [that] provides by far the clearest precedents for Alfred’s own personal piety, described by Asser’ (‘The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great,’ 45).
rulers in the practice of good governance, arguing that the regulation of one’s body is *a priori* to governing the bodies of others and therefore an ‘enhance[ment]’ of the king’s secular position.\(^{48}\)

While Asser’s religious and lay models of embodied rulership do not absent Alfred’s body, they direct its unruly materiality towards enactments of spiritual-secular self-regulation. They prepare Alfred’s physical, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ form for its translation into a Latinized, textual body.

As a child, Alfred’s memorization of psalms and prayers is accompanied by an interest in Latin that, as an adult, blossoms into a desire to learn the language and be educated in its scholarship. Alfred seeks teachers, including Asser, from across northern Europe to live at his court in Wessex and to instruct him in the wisdom of Latin texts. This gathering of Latin-educated men returns the *Life* to annal material. Specifically, Alfred’s burgeoning interest in Latin prompts Asser to return to the charter language of *Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex* and to translate an annal entry that documents the identification and voluntary submission of Angle and Saxon subjects to Alfred’s governance:

In that year [886] Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, restored the city of London splendidly…and made it habitable again…All the Angles and Saxons — those who had formerly been scattered everywhere and were not in captivity with the Vikings — turned willingly to King Alfred and submitted themselves to his lordship.

[Æodem anno Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex…Lundoniam civitatem honoifice restauravit et habitabilem fecit…Ad quem regem omnes Angli et Saxones, qui prius ubique dispersi

\(^{48}\) As Pratt writes, works such as Einhard’s *Life of Charlemagne* reshape kingship as a ‘*ministerium* or office’ in which the king’s ability to govern was ‘dependent upon his prior ability to rule his own body and his household…harness[ing] even more effectively…the needs of royal power’ (‘The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great,’ 44).
fuerant aut cum paganis sub captivitate erant, voluntarie converterunt, et suo dominio se subdiderunt’.49

Asser replaces the Old English reference to Alfred’s ‘Angelcyn’ people with the phrase, ‘omnes Angli et Saxones.’50 This sleight of hand, which substitutes a Latin phrase for a vernacular compound, not only ushers in the appearance of ‘Angles’ and ‘Saxons’ but, moreover and most importantly, it also reveals these to be Latin, not vernacular, terms. Asser’s Latin emendations to the 886 annal pronounce ‘Angles’ and ‘Saxons’ as Latin translations of vernacular ethnicities. Asser’s Latinizing move is followed by a description of these Anglo-Saxons that expands upon material in the Old English. According to Asser, Angles and Saxons form a corporate body that consists of everyone ['omnes'], everywhere ['ubique'], who are living freely in diaspora ['dispersi fuerant'], and count themselves Christian. When these dispersed Christians gather themselves under Alfred’s dominion, their Anglo-Saxon bodies — the Angulsaxones named in the charters as part of Alfred’s royal style — define the limits of his kingdom. Not Saxons and Mercians, but all who can be identified by Latin signifiers and in accordance with Latinate faith, are counted as Angli et Saxones, then rendered into the ethnopolitical subjects of Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex.

Up to this point in the Life of King Alfred, Asser has consistently and repeatedly deployed Alfred’s royal style in order to signal an understanding of sovereignty that comes from within the early English charter tradition. Yet Alfred’s vernacular, Anglo-Saxon body acts as a roadblock to enactments of sovereignty

49 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 97, 98; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 69. Note that Keynes and Lapidge argue that Stevenson’s emendation of ‘sub’ from ‘sine’ contradicts annal statements, and their translation follows the ‘original and intended reading’ (Alfred the Great, 266n199).

50 The 886 annal entry states, ‘In that same year, king Alfred restored the town of London, and all English people, except those who were held captive by the Danes, turned to him’ ['Þy ilcan geare gesette Elfred cyning Lundenburg, 7 him all Angelcyn to cirde þæt buton deniscra monna hæft-niede was'] (The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 53).
by this charter formula. Asser remedies this issue by translating Old English annal material into Latin and by translating, or recoding, Alfred’s vernacular, performative, Anglo-Saxon body into an increasingly Latin-oriented form. Asser’s work pays off: Alfred’s subjects become an expansive body of Latinized Angles and Saxons who declare Alfred their Angulsaxonum rex. Charter language brings to presence a body, a corpus, of Alfred’s subjects, who acknowledge Alfred’s political overlordship to all who are ethnopolitically ‘Anglo-Saxon.’

Once this dispersed group of Latinized Angles and Saxons have subordinated themselves to Alfred, and a political body ‘of Anglo-Saxons’ [‘Angulsaxonum’] has been assembled, Asser no longer translates from the Old English annals. Yet a spirit of corporeal assembly guides Asser’s discussion of Alfred’s embodied relationship to Latin texts: ‘It was also in this year [887] that Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, first began…to read [Latin] and to translate at the same time, all on one and the same day’ [‘Eodem quoque anno seape memoratus Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex…legere et interpretari simul uno eodemque die primitus inchoavit’].

One day, as Alfred was listening intently to some Latin passages that Asser was reading, ‘he suddenly showed me [Asser] a little book which he constantly carried on his person [‘subito ostendens libellum, quem in sinum suum sedulo portabat’].’ As all of Alfred’s cognitive energies are focused on taking in this Latin passage, he stretches out [‘ostendo’] from the ‘hollow; ‘bosom;’ or ‘hiding-place’ [‘sinus’] of his garment a little book [‘libellus’] comprised of ‘the day-time offices and some psalms and certain prayers which he had learned in his youth’ [‘diurnus cursus et psalmi quidam atque orationes quaedam, quas ille in iuventute sua legerat’].

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51 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 99; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 73.
52 Ibid.
54 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 99; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 73. Note that this exchange between Asser and Alfred restages an
royal style, Asser explains that Latin, not ‘Saxon,’ language and Christian, not secular, poetry have inhabited Alfred’s heart since childhood. While Alfred has legerat (a term that means ‘gather,’ ‘collect,’ ‘read,’ and ‘learn’) these Latin fragments for many years, all of these activities have been done in secret. Upon showing Asser his libellus, a book so filled with textual snippets that a new one must be commissioned, Alfred sets to work ‘like the busy bee, wandering far and wide’ as he ‘eagerly and relentlessly assembles many various flowers of Holy Scripture, with which he crams full the cells of his heart’ ['velut apis fertilissimae longe lateque…discurrens, multimodos divinae scripturae flosculos inhianter et incessabiliter congregavit, quis praecordii sui cellulas densatim replevit']. Through this early medieval metaphor, Alfred’s ‘gathering’ and ‘collecting’ ['legerat'] are intensified as ‘assembling’ and ‘unifying’ ['congregavit'] activities. Likewise, this metaphor transfers Alfred’s libellus from his bosom ['sinus'] into the emotional and affective interior of his heart ['praecordium']. As Alfred is cognitively, then emotion-

earlier scene in which Alfred’s mother ‘was showing him [Alfred] and his brothers a book of English poetry which she held in her hand’ ['sibi et fratibus suis quendam Saxonicum poematicae artis librum, quem in manu habebat, ostenderet'] (Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 74; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 20). Asser not only repeats the language of books ['liber, ‘libellus'] that are held ['ostendo'] in hand ['manus'], but he also recycles, in his exchange with Alfred, the verbs used to track Alfred’s full comprehension of ‘Saxon’ poetry: ‘disco’ ['learn'], ‘intelligo’ ['understand’], ‘recito’ ['recite’], and ‘lego’ ['learn'] (Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 75; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 20). In so doing, Asser appropriates the terms and conditions that document Alfred’s precocious, divinely inspired, and in toto process of vernacular learning. By associating Alfred’s Latin-learning process with books that are not just held in his hand but, moreover, positioned within his heart, Asser indicates an intimacy with Latin that trumps Alfred’s love of Saxon poems.

55 Lewis and Short, A Latin Dictionary, s.v. ‘lego, v.’, I, II.B.2.
56 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 100; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 74.
57 Here and elsewhere, Keynes and Lapidge note Asser’s debts to Aldhelm’s use of the bee metaphor in De Virginitate (Alfred the Great, nn161, 213).
58 Lewis and Short, A Latin Dictionary, s.v. ‘congrogo, v.’, II.
ally, ‘Latinized,’ Latin religious texts are gathered into a *corpus*, then assembled, unified, and inserted within his physical body.

At last, annal material and personal biography work together in the service of *Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex*. The physical bodies of Angles and Saxons seem to have been transformed into the textual bodies of religious writings. A political *corpus* has become a textual *corpus*, which is now located within Alfred. When this happens, Alfred not only learns to read and translate Latin but, moreover, desires to instruct others in Latin learning and translation:

Now as soon as that first passage had been copied, he [Alfred] was eager to read it at once and to translate it into English, and thereupon to instruct many others…

[Nam primo illo testimonio scripto, confestim legere et in Saxonica lingua interpretari, atque inde perplures instituere studuit…]59

As Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, subjects Christian and Latin texts to mental scrutiny and emotional assembly, he becomes a figure of religious literacy [‘legere’], translation [‘interpretari’], and, finally, instructive governance [‘instituere’].60 No longer is Alfred the subject of translation. Rather, he becomes its agent in order to exercise more compelling displays of royal power.61 As Robert Stanton writes, ‘Alfre[d] clear[ly] identifi[es] with King David as a besieged, wise, and, above all, teaching king,’ who is traditionally assumed to have written the Psalms — the primary

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59 Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 100; Stevenson, *Asser’s Life of King Alfred*, 75.

60 In addition to ‘teach’ or ‘train,’ *instituo* also means ‘to order, govern, administer, regulate’ the actions of others (Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. ‘instituo, v.,’ II. I, K).

61 I would like to thank Ryan Perry for pointing this out to me and for drawing my attention to Carolingian interest in King David as a literary figure.
contents of Alfred’s *libellus*. Moreover, as Daniel Orton writes, ‘For Asser, the figure of Alfred embodied a Davidic union of ecclesiastical and secular power, with the king’s piety confirming his divinely ordained status.’ Alfred’s alliance with David not only advances his relationship with ‘an important source of influence on the Christian definition of sovereignty’ but also orients his kingdom within Christendom’s sovereign domain. As a translator, Alfred’s ethnopolitical overlordship over Angles and Saxons reaches towards a scholarly—spiritual governance that positions his kingship and kingdom within a Hebraic tradition, from whence Christ and Christian sovereignty emerge.

**Flesh, Text, and Christ’s Sovereign Corpse**

Sovereignty, as this chapter noted earlier, emerges and is sustained not only by exercises of top-down power but also by the ‘aesthetics, representation, and theatricality’ of power, which enable the ‘staging…reproducing, [and] identifying with sovereignty and its experience.’ Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* translates

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64 Francesco Miolo, *Medieval Sovereignty*, 129. Note that here, Miolo names Melchisedech, whom ‘David is said to have looked…[to]…in the attempt to unite royal and sacerdotal powers. Because of the conquest of Jerusalem, David and his house became heirs to Melchisedech’s dynasty of priest-kings’ from which ‘Jesus Christ and his New Order’ unfold (ibid, 129, 130).
65 Benite, Geroulanos, and Jerr, ‘Editors’ Introduction,’ 5. See also Biddick, *Make and Let Die*, Chap. 2, ‘Transmedieval Mattering and the Untimeliness of the Real Presence’ and Chap. 5, ‘Tears of Reign: Big Sovereigns Do Cry,’ for the ways in which medieval and early modern forms of sovereignty absorbed and redeployed Christological symbolism and signifiers, and also depended (and still do) on the textual and visual rhetorics of theatrical performance and representational performativity. Biddick’s entire book is critical for also understanding the ways in which contemporary theories of sovereignty and biopower (such as from Agamben, Foucault, and Derrida) either misread or completely disregard the medieval archives of the formulation and formations (religious, political, legal, and otherwise) of sovereignty to which they are nevertheless tied, and which archives also
vernacular texts and bodies into Latin in order to transform Alfred into a political overlord of Anglo-Saxon subjects. From here, Asser abandons his literal translation of the Old English annals and focuses his energies on the process by which Alfred is translated into a Latinized, textual body of secular-spiritual sovereignty. Key to Alfred’s sovereign recoding are his acts of gathering, collecting, and assembling — of drawing together and assembling within him a *corpus* of physical bodies that seem to have become texts. In the future (and, importantly, this future is not narrated in Asser’s biography), Alfred will translate this textual *corpus*. But for now, Asser draws upon the elasticity of the Latin term *corpus* in order to position Alfred directly within the zone of Christian sovereignty.

In the next clause (but in the same sentence that pronounces Alfred’s new role as a translator), Asser imagines a biblical ‘example’ that not only extends Alfred’s associations with David to those of Christ but also exposes the sovereign mechanisms that translate a suffering physical *corpus* into an inviolate textual *corpus*:

…just as we are admonished by the example of the fortunate thief who recognized the Lord Jesus Christ — his Lord and indeed Lord of all things — hanging next to him on the venerable gallows of the Holy Cross, and petitioned Him with earnest prayers. Turning his fleshly eyes only, (he could not do anything else, since he was completely pinned down with nails), he called out in a reverential voice: ‘Christ, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom’ [Luke 23:42]. This thief first began to learn the rudiments of Christian faith on the gallows; the king likewise (even though in a different way, given his royal station), prompted from heaven, took it upon himself to begin on the rudiments of Holy Scripture on

reveal the always entangled relations between the development of political sovereignty, Christian epistemology, and the often violent relations between the Christian Church and its Others, which means not only have we never been secular, but sovereignty is also not thinkable outside of relations of power that are inherently ethnocentric, racist, and violent.
St Martin’s Day [11 November] and to study these flowers collected here and there from various masters and to assemble them within the body of one little book (even though they were all mixed up) as the occasion demanded. He expanded it so much that it nearly approached the size of a psalter. He wished it to be called his enchiridion (that is to say, ‘handbook’), because he conscientiously kept it to hand by day and night. As he then used to say, he derived no small comfort from it.

[...ac veluti de illo felici latrone cautum est, Dominum Iesum Christum, Dominum suum, immoque omnium, iuxta se in venerabili sanctae Crucis patibulo pendentem cognoscente; quo subnixis precibus, inclinatis solummodo corporalibus oculis, quia aliter non poterat, erat enim totus confixus clavis, submissa voce clamaret: ‘Memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum, Christe,’ qui Christianae fidei rudimenta in gabulo primitus inchoavit discere. Hic aut aliter, quamvis dissimili modo, in regia potestate sanctae rudimenta scripturae, divinitus instinctus, praesumpsit incipere in venerabili Martini solemnitate. Quos flosculos undecunque collectos a quibuslibet magistris discere et in corpore unius libelli, mixtim quamvis, sicut tunc suppetebat, redigere, usque adeo protelavit quousque propemodum ad magnitudinem unius psalterii perverniret. Quem enchiridion suum, id est manualem librum, nominari voluit, eo quod ad manum illum die noctuque solertissime habebat; in quo non mediocre, sicut tunc aiebat, habebat solutium.]

Asser’s interest in the crucifixion expands upon a discussion of the thief, who acts as a proxy for Alfred. While the thief is completely immobilized on the cross, he (and Alfred) can nonetheless turn ‘[inclinatis]’ their ‘fleshy,’ ‘bodily,’ or ‘corporeal’ eyes ‘[corporalibus oculis].’ By restricting all physical movements

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66 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 100; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 75, authors’ emphasis.
save one, Asser is able to anatomically limit an understanding of what counts as ‘bodily’ and how the body can move: towards Christ. While the thief hangs, suspended and unmoving on the cross, he turns his eyes but does not gaze upon Christ, who, according to the gospel of Luke, is one breath away from death and from becoming a corpse. Instead, the thief calls out to him in words from Luke, such that the thief begins to learn [‘inchoavit discere’] the rudiments of Christian faith [‘Christianae fidei rudimenta’]. In a similar fashion, Alfred takes it upon himself to begin [‘praesumpsit incipere’] the rudiments of Holy Scripture [‘sanctae rudimenta scripturae’], assembling them into ‘the corpus’ or ‘body of a little book’ [‘in corpore unius libelli’].

Asser’s crucifixion scene offers a densely articulated meditation on sovereignty via the shifting semantics of corpus, a word that means not only ‘body’ and ‘text’ but also ‘corpse.’ As Deborah Posel and Pamila Gupta write,

the dualistic life of the corpse [positions it] as a material object, on one hand, and a signifier of wider political economic, cultural, ideological and theological endeavours, on the other. The moment of death produces a decaying body, an item of waste that requires disposal — simultaneous with an opportunity, sometimes an imperative — to recuperate the meaning of spent life, symbolically effacing the material extinction that death represents.67

Posel and Gupta understand the corpse as a borderland where putrifying ‘waste’ meets a material ‘signifier.’ In other words, the corpse negotiates the conversion of a dead body into text. As a site of ‘recuperat[ion], it facilitates the ready movement between two different definitions of corpus and, as such, functions as ‘a pre- eminent site for the identification of…sovereign[ty].’68

In *The Royal Remains*, Eric Santner explores further the ‘dualistic life of the corpse,’ explaining, with Lacan, that the body’s ‘palpitating life-substance’ — its ‘flesh’ — is that ‘from which everything exudes.’\(^6^9\) And he continues (again, with Lacan), arguing that ‘the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety.’\(^7^0\) The body’s often-ill, often-suffering, fleshly form invokes, for Santner, a ‘crisis of materiality’ that must be managed, lest the body become, upon point of death, what Posel and Gupta articulate above as the decaying waste of the corpse.\(^7^1\) Santner expands his argument in conversation with Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain*:

[In pain,] the ‘obscenely…alive tissue’ of the human body is enlisted as a source of verification and substantiation of the symbolic authority of institutions and the social facts they sponsor. This bottoming out of symbolic function on what I am calling the flesh becomes urgent, Scarry argues, when there is a crisis of belief or legitimization in a society… ‘allow[ing] extreme attributes of the body to be translated into another language, to be broken away from the body and relocated elsewhere at the very moment that the body itself is disowned.’\(^7^2\)

Scarry’s statements on the body in pain, which Santner recasts as ‘flesh’ (and Asser identifies as ‘corporalis’ and ‘corpus’) locate the suffering, physical body within the field of sovereignty, especially upon point of death. Such a relationship is possible, Santner and Scarry explain, when a community’s faith is in jeopardy.

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71 Santner, *The Royal Remains*, 64.
During ‘a crisis of belief,’ only the body’s ‘sheer material factualness’—its corporeal, suffering, and dying flesh—can lend reality or certainty to political or social ideology that has been challenged or remains unproven. At the moment of death, when the living body becomes a corpse, its flesh can be ‘translated into another language.’ It can be converted from waste into symbolic meaning. The dualistic life of the corpse facilitates the conversion, amid ideological crisis, from a material corpus to a textual corpus.

The thinking of Posel and Gupta, and Santner, Lacan, and Scarry, bear upon Christ’s crucifixion, a punishment that not only displays Christ’s body as tortured flesh but likewise reveals the unshaken, sovereign power of Rome. Further, the crucifixion marks that crisis at which Judaic prophecies must be painfﬁ;ly enfleshed and therefore made real by a Christian messiah, whose death and attendant resurrection ushers in a new faith and political ideology (via supersession).

73 While crucifixion is

73 On the ways in which early medieval Christians fabricated imaginative typologies and temporalities to ‘supersede’ and break off from their Jewish ‘neighbors,’ which is also repeated, traumatically, in contemporary academic scholarship on Christian-Jewish relations that continues to reinscribe this fissure (which also reenacts its violence, both psychically and materially, on real persons), see Kathleen Biddick, The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). On the same state of affairs with regard to Christian and Muslim ‘crusader martyrdom,’ see Kathleen Biddick, ‘Unbinding the Flesh in the Time That Remains: Crusader Martyrdom Then and Now,’ GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 13, nos. 2–3 (2007): 197–225, where she writes that, “[h]istorically, Christianity has constituted and claimed ofﬁ;cial theological time by virtue of its temporal model of supersession,’ especially by way of ‘corporeal’ fantasies tied especially to Jewish circumcision and Christ’s crucifixion, and with the emergence of Islam, ‘Christian supersessionary thinking stubbornly maintained this temporal binary by confusing and conflating Muslim and Jewish flesh’ (197, 198). Ultimately, for Biddick, in ‘posing the question “Who is the enemy?” the theologico-political intertwines itself inextricably with sovereignty. It is therefore ethically urgent to understand the theologico-political vicissitudes of pleasure and pain, flesh and body at stake in the cult of martyrs, then and now’ (198). It is not too much of a stretch, I would argue, to see how this also plays out in Asser’s Life of King Alfred.
carried out by the legal authority of Rome, Christ’s death is permitted by God the Father, whose paternal will renders Christ’s body an ‘obscenely…alive tissue’ and ‘translate[s]’ it, by way of a pain that ends in death, into the new ‘symbolic order’ of Christianity. Under joint penalty of earthly and heavenly sovereigns, Christ’s flesh (bodily corpus) is rendered a corpse (corpus), then translated into Christian Logos (textual corpus). Once ‘the incontestable reality of [Christ’s] physical body…[has] become an attribute of an issue that at that moment has no independent reality of its own,’74 Christ assumes his place as Son of God and sovereign figure of Christian signification.

Asser’s retelling of the Crucifixion leverages the full force of Christ’s sovereign corpse in order to complete the project of making Alfred a king of Christian sovereignty. Asser positions Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, within this scene at the moment when Alfred’s suffering, yet still living, body has been thoroughly textualized and needs only the ideological weight provided by Christianity to substantiate his claim to sovereignty. With the corpus of Christ in his hand — with an enchiriadion or hand-book that marks Alfred’s partial conversion of flesh to text — Alfred is interpolated within its Latin world of Holy Scripture. In the following sentence, Alfred hangs openly (rather than by proxy) on the cross as a figure whose living body in pain is, like Christ’s, now an agent of Christian sovereignty. Alfred’s piles and unknown illnesses are no longer medical manifestations but representative of purposive, spiritual suffering. Alfred’s body is no longer a worrisome material of decay but, as Scarry would say, an ‘attribute’ of Christian doctrine that has no ‘independent reality of its own.’75 As Asser explains, Al-

75 Note that Asser’s crucifixion scene connects to Gregory’s figure of the rector, whose physical suffering eventually transforms his body into a form that is staked out between the poles of living [‘vivendi’] and dying [‘moriens’]. As Gregory writes, ‘He, therefore — indeed, he precisely — must devote himself entirely to setting an ideal of living. He must die to all passions of the flesh and by now lead a spiritual life’ [‘Ille igitur, ille modis
Fred is ‘transfixed by the nails of many tribulations[…]plagued continually with the savage attacks of some unknown disease[…]perturbed[…]by the relentless attacks of foreign peoples’ ['multis tribulationum clavis confossus…gravissima incogniti doloris infestione incessanter fatigatur…assiduis exterarum gentium infestationibus…inquietabatur']. In full possession of his little book of scripture, however, Alfred’s ill and sickly physical form is translated and transformed into the world-making Latin narrative of Christian sovereignty.

On the cross, Alfred suffers like Christ and alongside Christ such that his body’s physical suffering form now aggrandizes Alfred’s territorial limits. Asser immediately catalogues the king’s ‘frequent expeditions and battles against the Vikings and of the unceasing responsibilities of government[…]his daily involvement with the nations which lie from the Mediterranean to the farthest limit of Ireland[…]letters sent to him with gifts from Jerusalem by the patriarch Elias’ ['frequentibus contra paganos expeditionibus et bellis et incessabilibus regne gubernaculis…cotidiana nationum, quae in Tyrenno mari usque ultimum Hiberniae finem habitant…de Hierosolyma ab El[ia] patriarcha epistolas et dona illi directas']. Alfred’s earthly powers stretch from the periphery of Europe towards the center of Christendom, and then return home, where Alfred exercises these powers to rebuild towns, fashion treasures, construct halls and chambers, and move royal residences. While threats to Alfred have not abated, Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex manages them omnibus debet ad exemplum vivendi pertrahi, qui cunctis carnis passionibus morti s iam spiritualiter vivit’. See Part I, Chapter 10 of St. Gregory the Great, Pastoral Care, trans. Henry Davis (Westminster: Newman Press, 1950), 38; Gratégie le Grand, Règle pastorale, I:160–62, ll.1–4.

76 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 101; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 76.

77 ‘The transmitted text (de cotidiana nationum) is evidently corrupt, as Stevenson recognized[…]a word such as sollicitudine has fallen out after cotidiana, and our translation incorporates his suggestion’ (Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 270n219).

78 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 101; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 76–77.
with an indefatigable presence-in-pain that is no longer focused on preventing invasion but on extending its territorial limits. Alfred governs, simultaneously, in close proximity and at a distance from his political territories and subjects. He is physically present yet entirely absent from the exercise of royal power. He remains a living, physical body (corpus) in pain even though he holds Christ’s sovereign corpse/text (corpus) in his hand.

Once Alfred’s ill and suffering flesh — its crisis of materiality — is recoded within the textual-symbolic, typological order of Christianity, Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex ‘is’ in perpetual, organized motion. Alfred expands his personal and political borders in order to make his kingdom a heaven on earth. Once these acts are complete, Asser returns to the nautical language from whence his narrative began, describing the king as an ‘excellent pilot’ [‘gubernator praecipuus’] who now ‘guide[s] his ship laden with much wealth to the desired safe haven of his homeland’ [‘navem suam multis opibus refertam ad desideratum ac tutum patriae suae portum…perducere’].Ælfred’s biographical ship no longer ‘waver[s] or wander[s] from course’ [‘haud aliter titubare ac vacillare’] because Alfred now contains within himself both the Latinized Angli and Saxones and the Latin body of Christ. As helmsman of his own story, Alfred enacts the ontological task of being ‘Anglo-Saxon.’ His royal style is no longer appositive to, but located within, his name. Consequently, after this point in the narrative, Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex no longer appears in Asser’s Life.

Asser’s biography enacts an understanding of sovereignty that is pronounced within the charters, in which Old English oral expressions and embodied rituals are translated into Latin texts that recode the king’s body and earthly kingdom within the eternal reaches of Christ’s sovereign Word and his heavenly domain. Positioning Alfred within Christ’s sovereignty happens by way of creative, theatrical means that Latinize and textualize

79 Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, 101; Stevenson, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, 77.
80 Ibid.
the bodies of the Anglo-Saxons Alfred governs in order to assemble them within Alfred’s own Latin, textual frame. In order to complete this translation, Asser draws upon the crucifixion scene, exposing Christ’s corpus (a body, corpse, and text) as the sovereign whose cosmological weight is necessary to substantiate Alfred’s claim to sovereignty, and pointing out the ‘seriality’ of sovereignty, a concept ‘invented as a secularized successor to divine representation.’

Asser’s Life of King Alfred imagines a narrative conclusion in which Alfred has arrived as a figure of Anglo-Saxon sovereignty. However, his crucifixion fantasy begins at the moment when the translation of Alfred into Latin texts has resulted in Alfred’s desire to become a translator. While Alfred sets out to translate the texts he has copied in his libellus, this is a project that is not realized within Alfred’s biography. In calling forth Alfred as a translator, Asser references a body of texts that are produced at Alfred’s court, beginning with David’s Psalms and including Gregory’s Cura pastoralis and Dialogi, Boethius’s De consolatione philosophiae, Augustine’s Soliloquae, Orosius’s Historia, and Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica. While this textual body — this Alfredian corpus — is located beyond the narrative boundaries of Asser’s Life, Asser nonetheless positions Alfred’s body within striking distance of it. To say it a different way, Asser’s biography not only imagines Alfred’s sovereignty over the Anglo-Saxons according to terms understood in the early English charters. Moreover, it leans heavily on the sovereign corpus of Christ in order to assert secular succession (which is also a violently Christological supersession, as Kathleen Biddick has demonstrated in her important work on the development of sovereignty in the medieval period). Furthermore, Asser’s Life writes a promissory note to Alfred, quietly asserting that he will in the future become a sovereign like Christ, when his physical body is translated into an Alfredian textual corpus.

Sovereignty’s Morbid Ontology: Civil Wars, Alfred’s Corpse, and the Ghosts of Effigial Portraiture

The royal style, Angulsaxonum rex, remained in circulation for several decades after Alfred’s death, in the charter language of Edward and Athelstan. However, the term was under pressure, even during Alfred’s reign, from the alternative and more inclusively styled rex Anglorum. As an expression of limited range—one that claimed sovereignty in fiction but could not sustain it in politics—‘Anglo-Saxon’ fell out of use by the mid-1000s, when later medieval historians ceded Alfred’s role as political unifier to Egbert, first monarch of England’s so-called Saxon heptarchy. In the sixteenth century, however, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ makes a comeback.82 And in the seventeenth, Alfred does,

82 ‘Anglo-Saxon’ returns to print in Sir John Smith’s Dialogue on the Correct and Improved Writing of English [De recta et emendata linguae anglicae scriptione, dialogus] (Paris: Ex officina Roberti Stephani Typographi Regij, 1568), and in William Camden’s Britannia: Or, A Chorographical Description of the Most Flourishing Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the Adjacent Islands, out of the Depth of Antiquity [Britannia siue florentissimorum regnorum, Angliae, Scotiae, Hiberniae, et insularum adiacentium ex intima antiquitate chorographica descriptio] (London: per Radulphum Newbery, 1587). These are the first postmedieval texts to employ ‘Anglosaxones’ (in contrast to the more popular referents, ‘Saxones’ and ‘Angles’). In Smith’s treatise on spelling reform, he emphasizes the value of Anglo-Saxon language and writing [‘Anglosaxonice lingue & scriptionis’], which belong to ‘those Anglosaxons, our ancestors’ [‘illos atavos nostros Anglosaxones’], ‘our esteemed elders’ [‘maiores nostros’], and ‘those first Anglosaxons [who] considered very carefully the nature of letters and wrote more correctly, than we do today’ [‘primos illos Anglosaxones multo curiosius intuitos esse naturam literarum, quam nos hodie facimus, rectiusque scripsisse’] (22, 23, 32–33). Camden uses ‘Anglosaxones’ as a consolidating term for Angles, Saxons, and Jutes that marks them as collectively distinct from the ‘Scoti’ and ‘Picti’ of Britain (55–62). All translations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Latin texts are my own.

As a compound that is tied to issues of language reform and British history, these early modern re-uses of ‘Anglosaxon’ acknowledge its ties to ethnopolitical identity. Yet Philemon Holland’s English translation of Camden’s Britannia repositions the ethnopolitics of the compound within a contemporary framework of English identity. Holland trans-
too. At Oxford University, a passage supposedly copied from a manuscript of Asser’s *Life* in the 1590s demonstrates Alfred’s role as the university’s ninth-century ‘refounder.’ As Simon Keynes writes, this ignited ‘a special enthusiasm for Alfred, in Oxford,’ where engravings, portraits, stained and etched glass, and a bust, all bearing his likeness, were located in various University buildings.

Sir John Spelman’s posthumously published biography, *The Life of Ælfred the Great*, addresses this purported relationship between Alfred and Oxford. Moreover, it yokes Alfred’s kingship to that of Charles I and his son, Prince Charles. Spelman, a royalist, wrote his biography of Alfred at the outset of the English Civil Wars, a nine-year conflict that disputed the absolute sovereignty of Charles I in battles fought, simultaneously,

lates ‘Anglosaxones’ as ‘English-Saxons,’ and prefaces Camden’s discussion of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes with a map of Britain titled ‘Englalond Anglia Anglosaxoum Heptarchia,’ under which is written ‘Terra Armis Animisque Potens’ (image between pages 126 and 127). Image and text coordinate to nuance the compound’s function as a term by which an early modern ‘Englalond’ and a medieval ‘Anglia’ are temporal successors to the ‘Heptarchy of Anglo-Saxons,’ but, together, they figure as ‘a land strong in arms and in spirit.’ Holland’s map not only confirms the *a priori* status of a unified and ‘powerful’ Anglo-Saxon England within Britain, but also inflects the subsequent narrative of English-Saxons, who, unlike the Picts and Scots, are a people within a nation, possessing a single and singular ethnopolitical status.

84 Ibid., 245.
85 Ibid., 261, 262, and image VIIIa.
88 Roberta Frank notes that Spelman’s biography of Alfred was written c. 1642, the year in which the First Civil War began (‘The Search for the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet,’ in *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon*...
in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Spelman’s biography turns to Alfred, and to sovereignty. It braces the contemporary crisis of political faith in Charles I (which fragmented Britain into factionalized territories) against the biography of an early medieval king who gathers the ‘broken Reliques of the Saxon-Heptarchy’ into one corporate body and becomes the ‘sole Sovereign of the whole Island [of Britain]’ and ‘King of the English-Saxons.’

*The Life of Ælfred the Great* is dedicated to Prince Charles, and in order to render Alfred a sovereign in whom the prince (and his father, the king) may have faith, Spelman delinks Alfred’s illness from his political tribulations. Likewise, he says nothing about Alfred’s death. However, Spelman meticulously traces the fate of Alfred’s corpse. After an initial burial at Winchester’s New Minster, ‘his Body was taken up from thence in the Abbey of Hyde, without the Gates of Winchester;’ and, in 1520, his ‘Bones,’ along with ‘several other of our Kings and Noble Persons,’ were collected, put into identified lead chests, and placed on top of a wall built to enclose the Winchester Presbytery. Then, ‘at last, Dec. 14, 1642. the Rebells…most sacrilegiously broke into the Church…and amongst the rest prophan’ed and violated these Sacred Cabinets of the Dead, scattering the Bones all over the Church, and carrying them in Triumph into other Places, some whereof were brought to Oxford, and lodged

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89 Spelman, *The Life of Ælfred the Great*, 92, author’s emphasis. See also Robert Powell, *The Life of Alfred, or Alvred* (Paul’s Church-yard: Printed by Richard Eadger for Thomes Alchorn, 1634), the biographical precursor to Spelman’s work. The subtitle of Powell’s work claims ‘ALVRED’ as ‘The first Institutor of sub-ordinate government in this Kingdome, and Refounder of the Vniversity of OXFORD’ in ‘Parallel’ to ‘our Soveraigne Lord, K. CHARLES’ (title page).

90 While Spelman narrates Alfred’s ‘Pain of the Piles and Emerauds,’ which God converts, at Alfred’s request, into ‘an intestine Pain’ that appears at the time of marriage, this discussion is limited to one section of text and bracketed off from his political activities, which have already rendered him sovereign (*The Life of Ælfred the Great*, 207, 208).

91 Ibid., 217, 217n2, author’s emphasis.
in the Repository adjoyning to the [Bodelian] Publick Library." After death, Alfred's corpse shows no signs of decay. It shifts seamlessly from a 'Body' to 'Bones,' which are translated three times before becoming 'at last' a casualty of the Civil Wars. Yet, the desecrating acts of the rebels have landed Alfred (along with several others) in the book repository of Oxford’s library, where pieces of his unmarked bones are now 'lodged' with a corpus of texts. England’s Civil Wars prove to be the crisis of faith that recuperates Alfred's corpse: translating it — recoding it — repeatedly until there is no more material waste to be found. Alfred's physical body is lost in translation. And this enables Alfred to become, like the body of Christ, sovereign reading material for Charles I and the Prince, whose living flesh is cause for national anxiety and therefore truly at risk.

Spelman's biography is never published in his lifetime, and as the Civil Wars continue, anxieties over the king’s sovereignty and his material flesh reach a crisis point. In 1649, Charles I is beheaded, Prince Charles is exiled, and a short-lived republican Commonwealth is established. It is not until several decades after Charles II's restoration to the throne that a Latin translation of Spelman's biography is finally published at Oxford in 1678. Still dedicated to Prince Charles (even though his brother, James II, has succeeded him on the throne), the Latin Life of Ælfred the Great remains concerned with the body of the king and the

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92 Ibid., 217n2, author’s emphasis. Spelman's history is dubious. In 1538, Hyde Abbey was given over to Henry VIII’s officers. ‘John Leland, Henry VIII’s historian recorded that lead tablets bearing the names Alfred and Edward were found in tombs in front of the great altar at Hyde,’ but there is no record of their disturbance during the Civil Wars (Eric Klingelhofer and Kenneth Qualmann, 'Hyde Abbey,' in Medieval Archaeology: An Encyclopedia, ed. Pam J. Crabtree [New York: Routledge, 2016], 170).

Figure 1. Engraving in Sir John Spelman, *Life of Ælfred the Great, Unvanquished King of the English, Bound in Three Volumes* [Ælfredi Magni, Anglorum regis invictissimi vita tribus libris comprehensa] (Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1678), n.p., Tab ula I. Image courtesy of Smith College.
post-Restoration fate of sovereignty. Consequently, it introduces the *Life* with a series of engravings, the first of which depicts the body of Alfred (see Fig. 1).\(^94\)

Copied from a portrait at Oxford that was painted ‘within a year or so of the Restoration,’ this image depicts the king with a furrowed brow, sagging eyes, and an ungroomed beard.\(^95\) Painted to the tune of royal politics, Alfred looks exhausted by the turmoil of previous decades. Nevertheless, his aged body has weathered England’s crisis of sovereignty, and he remains in possession of his crown and royal robes. Alfred wears the regalia of the king’s funeral effigy.\(^96\) His portrait showcases the immortal *dignitas* of English sovereignty, which is vested in Christ’s corpse, a physical body made into a divine form. Despite the regicide of Charles I, which materialized the king’s flesh as waste and decay, Alfred’s biography is not (the portrait seems to say) a dead letter to royal sovereignty. While the *Life*’s textual narrative — into which the ‘Body’ and ‘Bones’ of Alfred’s sovereign corpse was translated — did not fulfill its promises of reuniting the country’s warring political factions and of keeping Charles on the throne, Alfred’s effigial portrait provides its own ‘embodied’ assurances. It claims that Alfred’s sovereignty, passed down

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94 Simon Keynes, ‘The Cult of King Alfred the Great,’ 261, fig. VIIIa.
95 Ibid., 261. Keyes notes that the portrait was commissioned by Oxford’s University College and hung in the college Master’s lodgings (ibid.).
96 The Oxford portrait calls forth a relationship between the king’s two bodies, as theorized in Ernst Kantorowicz’s magisterial study *The King’s Two Bodies*. Beginning with the late medieval period and continuing well through the seventeenth century, the king, like Christ, is a geminated figure — both human and divine, simultaneously. Consequently, sovereignty rests within the king’s body, yet upon death it survives in his sacred office. As Kantorowicz explains, while the king’s dead body was buried ‘naked or in his winding sheet,’ an effigy of the king, dressed in regalia, was publicly displayed as ‘the true bearer of royal glory and the symbol of a Dignity “which never dies”’ (*The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016], 424). For an important critique, however, of the ways in which modern theories of sovereignty and biopolitics (whether Kantorowicz or Agamben or Foucault) have a severe blind spot with regard to the medieval archive, see again, Biddick, *Make and Let Die*.  

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in an unbroken succession of English monarchs, is immaterial, inviolate, and everlasting.

In the wake of the Civil Wars (when the king really is dead, and Alfred’s sovereign, textualized corpse could not keep him alive), Alfred returns as an effigy that is out of time with the political moment in which Spelman’s Life is published. Consequently, Alfred haunts the present tense, zombie-like, holding out anachronistic faith in an outmoded understanding of sovereignty that belongs to the political theology of an earlier moment. And yet, as Paul Downes explains, Alfred’s untimely effigy shows that ‘sovereignty,’ from the ‘perspective of many contemporary critics, was always a ghost-in-denial—a walking fantasy of full and singular presence that refused to acknowledge its own mortality.’ Sovereignty, Downes notes, has a ‘morbid ontology’ because it belongs to a past that is located in no particular temporal moment.

Alfred’s late-seventeenth-century effigy reinforces this point. As Joseph Roach explains, the effigy is ‘a sacred relic, a medieval holdover that…attempted to preserve and publicize the image of an individual in the absence of his or her person.’ As a verb, ‘effigy,’ Roach continues, ‘evoke[s] an absence, to body something forth, especially something from the distant past…which, among other capacities, communicates personas as well as practices over time and space.’ Notably, Alfred’s seventeenth-century effigy is engraved and published just after the death of Charles II, whose effigial displays mark a shift in how the divine or second body of the king is visually presented. As this ritual of sovereign succession disappeared, Roach explains that

98 Ibid., 24.
100 Ibid.
101 At his funeral, a crown was placed on top of his coffin. A life-sized wax figure stood next to his grave for more than a century.
‘derivative specters’—full-sized portraits, engravings, busts, and statuary monuments—came to take its place. It is as if the ‘corpse-like, piously recumbent effigies on medieval tombs “raised themselves up…and began to look round”’. Roach quotes John Ruskin here, who explains that as these royal effigies became statues, and statues became portraits, all ‘memory of death’ was effaced. As Ruskin himself put it, ‘The statue rose up, and presented itself in front of the tomb…surrounded…by allegorical figures of Fame and Victory…by personifications of humbled kingdoms and adoring nations, and by every circumstance of pomp, and symbol of adulation.’

As if aware of the haunting powers of its own morbid ontology, Alfred’s sovereign ghost begins to circulate. Beginning with Spelman, a succession of biographies are introduced by portraits of the king. In 1709, the English edition of Spelman’s *Life* is published (see Fig. 2).

The Alfred on the frontispiece to the English edition of Spelman’s *Life* is not a tired and aging king who is burdened by the weight of rule. His face is youthful-looking and framed by light curls, and his head is ringed with a laurel wreath. Alfred’s portrait is set on a pedestal that is inscribed with a passage from Isaiah 58.12 that fashions Alfred into a political messiah who one day ‘shalt raise up the Foundations of many Generations’ and ‘shalt be called, the Repairer of the Breach’ and ‘the Restorer of Paths to dwell in.’ Alfred’s youthful portrait is marked by a sovereign destiny, which will one day be fulfilled.

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103 Ibid.
Figure 3. Frontispiece engraving in Francis Wise, *The Annals of the History of Alfred the Great, By the Author Asser of Menevia [Annales rerum gestarum Ælfredi Magni, auctore Asserio Menevensi]* (Oxford, 1722). Image courtesy of British Library.
As Suzanne Hagedorn,105 Simon Keynes,106 and Joanne Parker107 note, Spelman’s English *Life of Ælfred the Great* was highly influential within and beyond Oxford. When Francis Wise’s edition of Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* adapts the visual architecture from Spelman’s Latin and English editions, it communicates a sovereignty that is no longer destined for a future but operates within one that has already arrived. In Wise’s engraving (see Fig. 3), Alfred’s homespun tunic is abandoned for ermine robes; Alfred’s laurel now hovers, nimbus-like, above his head; Isaiah’s prophecies of a future ‘Repairer of the Breach’ and ‘Restorer of Paths’ have been replaced with the appellative ‘Alfredus Magnus’; and his portrait’s blank background is filled in with a cartouche that displays an entire kit of visual symbols that signal a *Life* that is as much myth as it is history.

When Wise’s engraving is adapted by George Vertue for Paul Rapin’s *History of England*, Alfred’s enlivened and expansive physical body is given dimension (see Fig. 4). In this new engraving, the strands of a chain extend from within the folds of Alfred’s garment, across the cartouche, and onto the table, linking Alfred’s bosom and two-dimensional portrait to his three-dimensional political world. Objects that were positioned at the

105 Suzanne D. Hagedorn notes that ‘for close to two centuries,’ Spelman’s *Life* was ‘considered the authoritative biography of the king, and as such it provided a historical basis for the glorification of Alfred and his reign in the popular imagination’ (‘Received Wisdom: The Reception History of Alfred’s Preface to the Pastoral Care’, in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, eds. Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles [Gainesville: Florida University Press, 1997], 94).

106 Keynes makes the case for the influence of Spelman on later scholars, arguing that his *Life of Ælfred* ‘effectively determined the parameters of Alfredian studies which have endured to the present day’ and ‘has a serious claim on our attention, whether judged as a tract for its times, or as a forerunner of modern scholarship’ (‘The Cult of King Alfred the Great,’ 254, 256).

107 Joanne Parker writes that ‘Alfred found a life beyond the scholarly and ecclesiastical world and in the realm of popular culture…became intimately associated with the Hanoverian line…. [A]t the root of almost all this new Alfrediana was Spelman’s *Life*’ (‘England’s Darling’: *The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007], 61).
top of Wise’s cartouche are now placed on the table upon which Alfred’s portrait sits. The tools of Alfred’s scholarship — a stack of books, an open scroll, a compass, and ruler — are arranged, as if in use, while Alfred’s harp, his bows, the Danes’ captured standards, and laurel wreath (the trophies of his recent military actions) are pushed into the corner. These objects have been, quite literally, brought out of their frame, and each represents a moment in the king’s expanding narrative. On a table, these objects give spatial dimension and material depth to Alfred’s sovereign narrative. The tablecloth upon which Alfred’s portrait rests, with its angular lines and corners, provides further dimensionality to it, and the military scenes that appear on each side create a sense of temporal motion that is, however, nonlinear. As Alfred ‘sits,’ surrounded by an array of material symbols and on a field of military scenes, his physical body is rendered omnipresent and mythic, capable of crossing space as well as time.

As Simon Keynes writes, Vertue’s frontispiece, ‘directly or indirectly, exerted a strong influence on the development of Alfredian iconography in the later eighteenth century,’ and, in the wake of its publication, the sovereign, spectral body of Alfred begins to cross corporeal dimensions as it becomes the subject of fine art.\(^{108}\) In both small and large historical scenes, Alfred is portrayed as minstrel, cake-burner, precocious child, and law-giver.\(^{109}\) Completely dead, yet forever living, Alfred’s form stands

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\(^{108}\) Keynes, ‘The Cult of King Alfred the Great,’ 282.

\(^{109}\) Keynes has catalogued a full listing of Alfredian art produced during the nineteenth century. Here are some of the titles, artist names, and themes:
- ‘Alfred the Great in disguise of a peasant, reflecting on the misfortunes of his country’ by Richard Dadd;
- ‘Alfred submitting his code of laws for the approval of the witan’ by John Bridges;
- ‘Alfred in the camp of the Danes’ by Marshall Claxton;
- ‘King Alfred the Great dividing his loaf with the beggar’ by Alexander Blaikley;
- ‘Alfred inciting the English to resist the Danes’ by G.F. Watts;
- ‘Alfred, the Saxon king, disguised as a minstrel, in the tent of Guthrum the Dane’ by Daniel Maclise;
- ‘The boyhood of Alfred’ by John Callcott Horsley;
- ‘Alfred the Great when a youth, encouraged by the Queen, listening to the heroic lay of a minstrel’ by Solomon Alexander Hart;
- ‘King Alfred and his Mother’ by Alfred Stevens;
- ‘Alfred, surrounded by his family, addresses Edward his son and successor’ by W.P. Salter;
- the unfinished ‘Alfred and his First Trial by Jury’ by Benjamin Robert Haydon;
in for a sovereignty that was ‘killed’ at the beheading of Charles I and is realized as ghostly and undead upon the return of Charles II. Yet, on account of its spectral nature, Alfred’s corpse-like effigy circulates, making its way from Oxford books to London galleries, from engraved plates and early modern portraiture to sprawling, multi-bodied, historical scenes of the Victorian period. In these new visual environments, Alfred’s ‘flesh’ diffuses into the flesh of others. (To recall Spelman, his actual body and bones have been long lost in Oxford’s book repository.) Alfred can be a youth, young man, or adult; blonde- or brown-haired; bearded or clean-shaven; in disguise or regally attired; and/or interacting with men, women, and children from different walks of life. Alfred’s constantly circulating and shape-shifting sovereign form exceeds its two- and three-dimensional limits. He (or, maybe, ‘it’?) comes to inhabit anybody’s body. In short, an Alfredian ghost of English sovereignty begins to look like an ‘Englishman.’

‘King Alfred in the Neatherd’s Cottage’ by J. Pain Davis; and ‘King Alfred in the Swineherd’s Cottage’ (‘The Cult of King Alfred the Great,’ 334–41).
Figure 5. BobW66, photograph of the Winchester statue of Alfred. Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0 Unported license. No modifications have been made to this image.
Alfred’s ghostly figure changes its shape permanently on the weekend of September 18–20, 1901 in Winchester, England. Thousands of people gathered in Winchester — home to Alfred’s Wessex capital and to his burial place of Hyde Abbey — to celebrate the one-thousand year anniversary of King Alfred’s death. The central activity of this three-day event was not a visitation to Alfred’s gravesite but the unveiling of a ‘colossal,’ thirteen-foot bronze statue of the living king (see Fig. 5) placed atop a pedestal consisting of two immense blocks of grey Cornish granite. As Joanne Parker explains, the statue ‘faced some initial opposition’ by Leonard Cust, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, ‘who argued that it would be impossible to produce an authentic representation of a man for whom no accurate contemporary portraiture existed, and that a different form of sculpture…would be more appropriate.’ Yet those involved in planning Alfred’s millenary celebration wanted ‘the closest equivalent to a portrait in stone,’ and Parker writes that the chosen sculptor, Hamo Thornycroft, was known as ‘the leading exponent of the naturalistic and anti-classical movement,’ and was also the son of Thomas Thornycroft, ‘whose sculptural group, Alfred the Great Encouraged to the Pursuit of Learning by his Mother, had been criticised on the grounds of its excessive realism.’ This tension between Alfred’s corporeal body and his sovereign, corpse-like effigy structures Lord Rosenbery’s speech at the unveiling of Thornycroft’s statue:

the noble statue which I am about to unveil can only be an effigy of the imagination, and so the real Alfred we reverence may well be an idealised figure. For our real knowledge of him is scanty and vague. We have, however, draped round his form, not without reason, all the highest attributes of man and kingship…. In him, we venerate not so much a striking actor in our history as the ideal Englishman, the perfect sov-

111 Ibid.
ereign, the pioneer of England’s greatness…. He is, in a word, the embodiment of our civilization.\footnote{Alfred Bowker, The King Alfred Millenary: A Record of the Proceedings of the National Commemoration (London: Macmillan and Company, 1902), 109.}

Rosenbery’s comments, which acknowledge Alfred as a ‘scanty and vague…form’ around which are ‘draped’ the portraits of ‘the ideal Englishman, the perfect sovereign, and the pioneer of England’s greatness,’ articulate the king as neither a living, fleshly body nor a decayed corpse, but rather as an ‘idealised’ sovereign form that ‘embodi[es]…our civilization.’ His missing, organic form — a biological material that Asser described as ill and sick, and Spelman acknowledged to have become bones — is no longer a ghostly, corpse-like figure. Finally, Alfred has been re-embodied as a ‘portrait in stone’ and a statue made of bronze. Quarried from stone and ore, Alfred can live forever in death as a capacious signifier that stands in for the sovereignty of ‘our civilization,’ past, present, and future.

While Alfred is now made of granite and alloy, his sovereign endurance and impenetrability relies on the easy interchange between Alfred’s corpse-like ghost and other Anglo-Saxon bodies. The night prior to the statue’s unveiling, the life of Alfred was presented to millenary guests in a series of \textit{tableaux vivants} depicting notable events in the king’s life. As ‘living pictures’ meant to celebrate the death of a king — just as live bodies whose stationary positions and silence mimic those of a dead man — these \textit{tableaux vivants} confuse Alfred’s body with the bodies of his Anglo-Saxon subjects. In the final \textit{tableau} of this series, titled ‘Alfred the Great,’ ‘Alfred’ assumes the position of the Winchester statue, surrounded by men, women, and children dressed in period clothing (see Fig. 6). Having been taught to read, having burnt the cakes, disguised himself as a minstrel, and captured the Raven standard of the Danes, ‘Alfred’ appears for his millenary audience not as a body that ages and changes, but as a statue that stands immovable in and across time.
‘Alfred the Great’ functions as a sovereign effigy that is staged through the coordinated efforts of all manner of English people who are subjects of Alfred’s sovereign rule, yet inhabited by their sovereign, Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex.

As Oxford’s decorative arts generate and amplify Alfred’s undead, sovereign form, a new course of study called ‘Anglo-Saxon’ emerges at the university. During the late seventeenth century, Keynes writes, ‘the image of Alfred as a scholarly king began at this time to exercise an important influence on the promotion of Anglo-Saxon studies in their own right.’

In 1696, Humfrey Wanley moved to Oxford in order to participate in the university’s manuscript cataloguing activities. To facilitate his work, he was given a room in the Master’s Lodgings where Alfred’s effigial portrait hung—a choice in decor that signaled...

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Figure 6. ‘Tableaux–Alfred the Great,’ in Alfred Bowker, The King Alfred Millenary, a Record of the Proceedings of the National Commemoration (London: Macmillan and Co, 1902), 101. Image courtesy of Huntington Library.

113 Ibid., 252, my emphasis.
the king’s role as patriarch of Wanley and others who succeeded
him in this scholarly enterprise. ‘[F]rom this “Alfredian” base,’
Keynes writes, ‘Wanley did so much to advance knowledge and
understanding of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. Alfred, it seems,
was never far from the collective mind.’

Wanley’s editorial
labors at Oxford participated in the university’s robust, late-
seventeenth-century activities in the emerging field of Anglo-
Saxon studies. In 1677, the Bodleian Library acquired Franciscus
Junius’s manuscripts, transcriptions, and printer types, provid-
ing the already Alfredophilic university with a much expanded
collection of resources for language study and the tools for print
publication.

Junius’s collection played no small part in the
appearance of several important books: George Hickes’s Principles of Anglo-Saxon and Moesogothic Grammar [Institutiones Grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae et Moeso-Gothicae]; Christopher
Rawlinson’s Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy, in Five Books,
Translated into Anglo-Saxon by Alfred [Boethii Consolationis
Philosophiae libri v Anglo-Saxonice redditi ab Alfredo]; Thomas
Benson’s Anglo-Saxon Dictionary [Vocabularium Anglo-Saxonicium]; and Edward Thwaites’s Anglo-Saxon Grammar [Gram-
matica Anglo-Saxonica].

Published in Oxford, by Oxford academics, and at Oxford’s new scholarly press, these texts—a
series of language-learning, reference materials, and editions
meant for scholarly use—adopt and re-arrange the compound
‘Angulsaxones,’ thereby beginning the process of supplanting
the commonly used term, ‘Saxon,’ with ‘Anglo-Saxon.’ At Ox-

114 Ibid., 268.
115 As John Niles notes, Junius bequeathed his special font of Old English
script to Oxford in order to help with establishing its press (The Idea of
Anglo-Saxon England 1066–1901: Remembering, Forgetting, Deciphering,
116 George Hickes, Institutiones grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae et Moeso-
Gothicae (Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1689); Christopher Rawlinson,
Boethii Consolationis Philosophiae libri v Anglo-Saxonice redditi ab Alfredo
(Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1698); Thomas Benson, Vocabularium
Anglo-Saxonicum (Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1701); Edward
Thwaites, Grammatica Anglo-Saxonica (Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano,
1709).
ford, visions of Alfred’s sovereign, patriarchal effigy hover over an Anglo-Saxon textual body, and as the two become entangled, the corpse-like figure of a king and its morbid ontology become silently, unconsciously, deposited within a corpus of texts. Asser’s predictions, now almost a millennium old, are coming true. Long after his death, Ælfred is finally becoming Angulsaxonum rex as Oxford’s scholars carry out the work of translation begun long ago by their ‘Anglo-Saxon’ ‘father.’

As Wanley, Junius, and others labor at Oxford, they work in an environment ‘refounded’ by Alfred and marked with artful reminders of his effigial presence. Their linguistic studies, paleography, and editorial works are scholarly activities and filial duties that not only fall within the shadow of Alfred, the scholar–king, but are also placed within the wider field of Anglo-Saxon studies. In Wanley’s catalogues, Junius’s collections, and the writings by Hickes, Rawlinson, Benson, and Thwaites, the corpse-like figure of Alfred — ‘father’ to this emerging field — is positioned within the textual corpus of ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ confusing the relationship between bodies and words and reanimating a corporeal ghost of sovereignty via language.  

**Benjamin Thorpe, Incorporating Alfred, and Anglo-Saxonist Being**

As John Niles notes, the intellectual work of Oxford scholars came to a halt in the 1720s due the deaths of Wanley, Hickes, and Thwaites. While few works of Old English scholarship were published during the latter half of the eighteenth century, interest in the subject remained high ‘not just among the university elites, but also among a broad range of persons, including cler-

ics, antiquarians, local historians, dramatists, poets, and many
others.\textsuperscript{119} This interest was maintained and nurtured, in part, by
the British Society of Antiquaries, a learned society founded by
Wanley and several others in 1707 before his death two decades
later. While the Society of Antiquaries was not expressly de-
voted to Anglo-Saxon topics,\textsuperscript{120} by the late eighteenth and early
nineteenth centuries, it and other learned groups had turned
their attentions to the emerging field of Anglo-Saxon studies.

Among the researchers supported by the Society and other
learned groups is Benjamin Thorpe, who edited the early Eng-
lish law codes, the Old English gospels, the Exeter Book poems,
and Ælfric’s homilies, among other texts. Thorpe’s engagement
with most, if not all, of the Anglo-Saxon corpus is described at
length by Niles:

any one of Thorpe’s editions of major Old English texts…
might have been enough for a person of reasonable stamina
to have presented as the centrepiece of years of labour, after
which point the editor might have rested for a while…it is
quite possible, though there exists no way to quantify such
things, that no human being past or present has ever read
more lines of Old English manuscript text than Benjamin
Thorpe, word by word and letter by letter.

\ldots

Thorpe had very little income other than a small govern-
ment pension and whatever stipends, paid by one learned
society or another, he received for producing a book. Thorpe
could thus be called the first professional Anglo-Saxonist, all
previous scholars in this field having pursued that scholarly
interest among other responsibilities, often of a quite differ-
ent kind.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{120} Rosemary Sweet notes that the Society’s minute book displays three war-
riors, one of whom holds a medallion with the portraits of Charles I and
king Alfred on it (\textit{Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth–

\textsuperscript{121} Niles, \textit{The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England 1066–1901}, 228, 229, 225.
Niles claims Thorpe to be ‘the first professional Anglo-Saxonist,’ a figure whose ‘stamina’ is beyond ‘reason,’ whose work is unpaid, and whose time spent in the archives is ‘[un] quantifiable.’ I want to double down on Niles’s statement, arguing that Thorpe’s extraordinary devotion to the textual *corpus* of Anglo-Saxon (which motivates Niles’s claim that Thorpe is an Anglo-Saxonist) implicates Alfred’s sovereign, fatherly claim upon him. After decades of circulation, in which Alfred’s effigial form exceeds the frame of its portraiture and diffuses its corpse-like ghost into the *corpus* of Anglo-Saxon grammars, dictionaries, translations, and editions, Niles’s comments bear witness to the impact of Alfred’s spectral, textualized, sovereign form upon Thorpe’s body. To say it a different way, Thorpe is capable of extraordinary — of *supernatural* — work and accomplishments because he is haunted, unknowingly, by the corpse-like ghost of a sovereign. He is driven, unconsciously, by a devotion to its morbid ontology. Thorpe, the field’s first Anglo-Saxonist, professionalizes a political theology that was articulated, a millennium ago, in early English charters; imagined by Asser’s deployment of the charter expression, *Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex*; and made manifest, so to speak, during England’s crisis of sovereignty — the Civil Wars.

Thorpe is Alfred’s devoted subject and ‘son.’ Yet Alfred’s ghostly figure has located its sovereign, patriarchal presence within an Anglo-Saxon textual *corpus*. Consequently, Thorpe believes his devotions to be to ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ not to Alfred. This devotional error enables Thorpe to recalibrate sovereignty beyond the restrictive limits of Alfred’s body and position it within a raciolinguistic figure that Thorpe calls ‘the Anglo-Saxon.’

122 Note that the first printed attestation of the term, ‘Anglo-Saxonist,’ appears in reference to Benjamin Thorpe and John Mitchell Kemble (Anonymous, ‘Retrospective Review. Anglo-Saxon Literature,’ *Gentleman’s Magazine* [November 1837]).

123 Niles’s descriptive association of an Anglo-Saxonist dovetails with the semantics of ‘-ist’ as elaborated in note 3 of this chapter.

124 I borrow the term ‘raciolinguistic’ from H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arneatha F. Ball’s recent collection, *Raciolinguistics: How Language*
Thorpe’s translation of Erasmus Rask’s *A Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Tongue* and his language primer, *Analecta Anglo-Saxonica*, outline the sovereign, racialized shape of ‘the Anglo-Saxon’ and describe a program of self study by which the devotees of this Anglo-Saxon may become, like Thorpe, Anglo-Saxonists.

The title of Thorpe’s translation of Rask’s *Grammar* invokes the ‘Anglo-Saxon tongue,’ and its Preface soon truncates this expression to ‘the Anglo-Saxon.’

This shorthand collapses the distance between speech, anatomy, and language; and as the Preface moves from an ‘Anglo-Saxon tongue’ to ‘the Anglo-Saxon,’ language moves into the body:

> It [the Anglo-Saxon] appears then to have been, in its origin, a rude mixture of the dialects of the Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes, but we are not acquainted with it in that state, these dialects having soon coalesced into one language, as the various tribes soon united to form one nation, after they had taken possession of England...Even under Danish kings, all laws and edicts were promulgated in pure Anglo-Saxon.

Thorpe’s linguistic assessment points to popular histories by Spelman and Wise, which figured Alfred’s role as the sovereign unifier of the early English kingdoms into ‘one nation.’ Likewise, Thorpe’s language acknowledges the ethnolinguistic origins of ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ a term that, to recall the beginning of this chapter, was introduced in early English charters to identify Alfred’s politically unified subjects according to their shared language

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126 Ibid., xlvi.
and Christian faith. While Thorpe suggests the arrival of Anglo-Saxon sovereignty as an Alfredian event in which various tribes ‘united’ into ‘one nation’ and various dialects ‘coalesced’ into ‘one language,’ the agent of this process is not Alfred, but ‘the Anglo-Saxon,’ an embodied figure that neither originates with Alfred’s late ninth-century kingship nor is restricted to the use of his charter formula, *Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex*. Rather, the Anglo-Saxon is present ‘as a rude admixture’ when the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes arrive in Britain; it coalesces and unites to become ‘one’ figure ‘possessed’ of English sovereignty; and it remains ‘pure’ despite Danish incursions. Thorpe’s Preface presents a linguistic body (not the king’s body) as the site from whence political sovereignty emerges. As he tracks the emergence of this linguistically sovereign Anglo-Saxon figure, Thorpe explains it to be a racially miscegenated body that becomes homogenous and uncontaminated by way of nation-building processes. For Thorpe, raciolinguistic makeup, rather than ethnolinguistic similarity, is the precondition to English sovereignty.

Yet sovereignty (as Alfred’s effigial portrait indicates) is a morbid ontological state. Consequently, the raciolinguistic purity of this Anglo-Saxon sovereign deadens it:

We have here an ancient, fixed, and regular tongue, which, during a space of five hundred years, preserved itself almost without change…. In the year 1066, William the Bastard conquered England, but the highly cultivated, deep-rooted, ancient, national tongue could not be immediately extirpated, though it was instantly banished from the court…. We may therefore fix the year 1100, as the limit of the Anglo-Saxon tongue, whose structure we shall consider in the following work…but the Anglo-Saxon was preserved nowhere but in ancient writings, and therefore is, and long has been, a dead language, not very accessible to the learned themselves.\(^{127}\)

\(^{127}\) Ibid., xlvii–xlviii.
Again, linguistic statements run cover for a discussion about racial bodies. As an ‘ancient,’ ‘fixed,’ and ‘preserved’ ‘tongue,’ ‘Anglo-Saxon’ occupies an aged and homogenous state. Yet these lexemes, used repeatedly across the passage in relation to other, shifting terms, begin to signal the increasingly decrepit raciolinguistic body of the pure Anglo-Saxon, which can survive only in an unchallenged political state. When William the Bastard conquers England, his unknown, ‘bastard’ origins deracinate the ‘deep roots’ of Anglo-Saxon. Once this ‘highly cultivated’ figure is ‘banished from the court,’ it quickly loses its vitality. Like English sovereignty after the Norman Conquest,128 Anglo-Saxon becomes ‘fix[ed],’ ‘limit[ed],’ and, finally, ‘dead.’ Its morbid ontology is evidenced by the ‘inaccessible’ state of its language and textual corpus.129

128 Here, I use a term of nineteenth-century historicism in order to highlight Thorpe’s nineteenth-century argument.

129 When Thorpe’s Grammar traces the outline of a racially pure, yet dead Anglo-Saxon corpse within a discussion of linguistics and language learning, Thorpe does not announce but rather implicates it as a sovereign, national-imperial presence at the expense of other nations and races. As Catharine Karkov remarks, ‘[n]ationalism was a continuing problem in Thorpe’s scholarship’ (Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 197). Karkov continues, noting that Thorpe’s 1830 Grammar intentionally omitted Rask’s ‘highly nationalistic dedicatory epistle with its reference to a glorious pagan Scandinavian past,’ and its second and third editions, published in 1865 and 1979, further effaced the authorial presence of Rask, a Dane, by eliminating his Preface completely (ibid.). Likewise, as Robert Bjork explains, Thorpe conspired with the London Society of Antiquaries to ‘st[eal] the ambitious ideas of N.F.S. Grundtvig from Gruntvig’s 1803 prospectus for the publication of a large number of central Anglo-Saxon texts’ (‘Nineteenth–century Scandinavia and the Birth of Anglo-Saxon Studies,’ in Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity, eds. Allen Frantzen and John Niles [Gainesville: Florida University Press, 1997], 112). By erasing Rask and Grundtvig from the project of Anglo-Saxon philology and editorial work, Thorpe ‘rendered Anglo-Saxonism distinctly, stubbornly British’ (ibid.). While Thorpe’s editorial maneuvers assert Anglo-Saxon supremacy over other Germanic peoples, past and present, his pedagogy of incorporation and encryption — of positioning the racial purity and ancestral likeness of ‘the Anglo-Saxon’ within ‘the student of Anglo-Saxon’ — allows Aryanism to also enter Thorpe’s nationalism. As
While the death of ‘the Anglo-Saxon’ occurs within Thorpe’s Preface, its sovereign, effigial, corpse-like ghost begins to stir by way of the student’s ‘tongue.’ In Thorpe’s Grammar, a section on morphology reminds the student of her purpose of study: ‘an accurate knowledge of…the gender, inflection, derivation, and primitive signification of words…is, in the dead languages…indispensable to the understanding and translating them correctly.’130 Across the pages of the Grammar, an ‘Anglo-Saxon tongue’ generates ‘the Anglo-Saxon, a sovereign figure of racial and linguistic purity that is never classed as ‘living’ because it has already been made ‘dead.’ This silent, dead, raciolinguistic corpse may be interpolated in Thorpe’s student as she studies his translation of Rask’s Grammar and translates his edited compendium, Anelecta Anglo-Saxonica, a wide selection of Anglo-Saxon prose and poetry followed by an extensive glossary of terms. Thorpe’s language pedagogy, like Sharon Turner’s historicism outlined in Chapter 2, and James Douglas’s archaeology discussed in Chapter 3, facilitates acts of incorporation and encryption. His Grammar and Anelecta plot the process by which the student of Anglo-Saxon magically takes custody of the racialized body of a dead language because its sovereign claims on her are too great to endure their severance.131 This

Tony Ballantyne writes, ‘[b]y the time [Orientalist] Max Müller arrived in England, John Kemble and Benjamin Thorpe had elaborated a strong Anglo-Saxonist tradition, which emphasized the linguistic connection between English and its Germanic and Indo-European ancestors. Within such a context, Aryanism fortified both nationalist and imperialist ideologies’ (Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire [New York: Palgrave, 2002], 6).

130 Rask, A Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Tongue, 97.
131 Note that incorporation along with encryption are major concepts of this book and have been discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3. The concepts were initially developed in psychoanalytic theory by Maria Abraham and Nicholas Torok, in relation to Freud’s work on mourning and melancholia, in The Shell and the Kernel, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994). As Abraham and Torok write, this ‘sealed-off psychic space’ warehouses the ‘exquisite corps[e] of a loved one who we cannot bear to mourn,’ and it is metaphorically evidenced in relation to eating, drinking, and silent ingestion (141, 128–29).
Anglo-Saxon corpus is ‘swallowed whole’ and thereby psychically relocated within the self such that one is inhabited by its sovereign ghost. Through silent self-study, the racially pure and ontologically morbid, yet sovereign, Anglo-Saxon inhabits the student of Anglo-Saxon. And through this ghostly inhabitation, she becomes an ‘Anglo-Saxonist.’

Thorpe's Grammar and Analecta are featured in the November 1837 issue of the Gentleman’s Magazine, in a short article titled ‘Retrospective Review: Anglo-Saxon Literature.’ An Anonymous reviewer explains the process by which the ‘student of Anglo-Saxon’ should systematically go about learning the language. Using ‘Thorpe’s translation of Rask, a good and tangible grammar — a dictionary, it is true…and at the same time, attractive, elementary books in Thorpe’s Analecta and Apollonius…will enable him to ground himself perfectly in the language without the need of a dictionary. When he has well studied the Analecta, he may confidently venture on to [John Mitchell Kemble’s] Beowulf; followed by Benjamin Thorpe’s editions of Caedmon and the Vercelli MS.132 Thorpe’s textbooks and editions (along with Kemble’s Beowulf) are ‘the only ones which ought to be put into the hands of a student.’133 In other words, Thorpe’s pedagogy, his textual corpus, and the sovereign raciolinguistic corpse that Thorpe possesses (and that possesses him) are the tools by which the student of Anglo-Saxon becomes an Anglo-Saxonist.

The Gentleman’s Magazine lays out the ‘correct’ process for transitioning from a student of Anglo-Saxon to an ‘Anglo-Saxonist,’ a professional change that is also, to borrow the arguments of Lesley Scanlon and David Beckett, an ontological one. From the 1830s until around 1960, Scanlon explains that the process of entering a profession was a matter of ‘being,’ a term that ‘denotes the notion of arriving at a static point of expertise.’134 Scan-

133 Ibid.
lon’s statement is expanded upon by Beckett, who writes that ‘traditionally...professional formation was...individualistic.’

‘Theories of professional learning,’ Beckett continues, were ‘constructed through a cognitive process involving the transmission, acquisition, storage and application of a “body of data, facts and practical wisdom” which resided in the head.... Central to this “standard paradigm” view of learning is the assumption that “coming to know and understand something” involves arriving “at a state of mind as evidenced in accounts of what is cognitively the case.” These definitions of being ‘professional’ attend to the description of the Anglo-Saxonist’s educational process in the 1837 issue of the Gentleman’s Magazine. The anonymous reviewer, who addresses ‘the student,’ presumes language learning as an independent course of study. Further, the reviewer’s nod to ‘Thorpe’s Analecta and Appollius [of Tyre]’ as beginning texts that will ‘enable him to ground himself perfectly in the language without the need of a dictionary’ presumes two additional points about language learning: firstly, that it is a program of intensive cognitive study and memorization by rote; and, secondly, that by way of these acts, one comes into ‘perfect’ possession of Anglo-Saxon grammar and its lexicon. Even at the beginning stages, a sense of ‘arrival’ has already been forecasted. As the independent student proceeds, systematically, ‘without the need of a dictionary,’ through Beowulf, the Junius manuscript, and the Vercelli Book, he acquires possession of more of the corpus — he ‘arrive[s]’ at what could be called an Anglo-Saxon(ist) ‘state of mind,’ or ‘a static point of [Anglo-Saxon] expertise.’

Professional being, as Scanlon and Beckett imply, points towards philosophical Being, an ontological category that, from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, is bound up in a Cartesian cogito. For professionals and philosophers alike during this period, thinking is being. Yet, for Nelson Maldonado-Torres, ‘the significance of the Cartesian cogito for modern European identity has to be understood against the backdrop of an unquestioned ideal of self in the notion of the ego conquiro.’

Maldonado-Torres claims that Descartes’s ontological paradigm, which governs the philosophical Being of Hegel in the nineteenth century and Heidegger in the early twentieth, expresses a ‘coloniality’ that presumes that not all have the capacity or equal capacity to think and therefore to ‘be.’ Consequently, for anti-colonial philosophers of the twentieth century, an entirely cognitive formula of being is a colonial position: for Emmanuel Levinas, Being is a philosophy of power and violence; for Enrique Dussel, it is a ‘Totality’ that articulates the history of colonialism; and for Franz Fanon, an encounter with an imperial and racist Other.

The arguments of Scanlon, Beckett, and Maldonado-Torres frame Thorpe’s pedagogy in ontological terms. Being an Anglo-Saxonist means having perfect possession of the Anglo-Saxon corpus. It means occupying a professional state of mind that is capable of acquiring, storing, and transmitting all facts and data contained within a body of Anglo-Saxon knowledge. This emphasis on perfect acquisition, complete understanding, and data-oriented recall generates not merely a professional identity but, moreover, a philosophical ‘self’ that accords with a system

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of colonial knowledge and its racial hierarchies. To be an ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ is to know. Moreover, it is to presume that certain non-European, non-white others do not have the cognitive abilities to know and therefore have less right to be.

From the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century, Anglo-Saxonist being (an ontological state that is generated via the relationship between Alfred the sovereign ‘father,’ his Anglo-Saxon corpus, and Anglo-Saxonist ‘children’) remains productive. Yet, as decolonization gains momentum in the 1950s, and the (post)colonial era approaches in the 1970s, being an Anglo-Saxonist — being inhabited by a dead sovereign — reveals itself to be a truly morbid enterprise. The next chapter tracks the fate of Alfred’s corporeal body in the late twentieth century. It revisits key moments of this chapter in order to discover the limits of ‘being’ an Anglo-Saxonist after the fall of Empire and the means by which we might subvert and exceed them.