

Prepare for A Level History – Mrs Davies’s work

Preparation for Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is the earliest known history of England written in the English language. It was probably first compiled at the request of King Alfred (848/9 to 899), and distributed to monasteries throughout England for copying in around 892, after which each copy was kept up to date by a monk. Note that for some years, there is more than one manuscript for the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Below are the extracts for 1035, for both the Abingdon Manuscript (C) and the Worcester Manuscript (D)

C. 1035 *Here King Cnut passed away on 12 November at Shaftesbury; and he was conveyed from there to Winchester and buried there. And the Lady Aelfgifu Emma* then settled inside there. And Harold, who said that he was the son of Cnut and the other Aelfgifu – although it was not true – he sent and had taken from her all the best treasures which King Cnut had, which she could not withhold; nevertheless, she stayed on inside there as long as she could.*

D. 1035 *Here Cnut passed away at Shaftesbury, and he is buried in Winchester in the Old Minster. And he was king over all England for very nearly 20 years. And soon after his passing, there was a meeting of all the councillors at Oxford, and Earl Leofric and almost all the thegns** north of the Thames, and the men of the fleet in London, chose Harold as regent of England, for himself and his brother Harthacnut who was in Denmark. And Earl Godwine and all the foremost men in Wessex opposed it just as long as they could, but they could not contrive anything against it. And then it was decided that Aelfgifu (Emma), Harthacnut’s mother, should settle in Winchester with the king her son’s housecarls, and hold all Wessex in hand for him; and Earl Godwine was their most loyal man. Some men said of Harold that he was son of King Cnut and Aelfgifu, daughter of Ealdorman Aelfhelm, but to many men it seemed quite unbelievable. Nevertheless, he was full king over all England.*

* The ASC calls Emma ‘Aelfgifu Emma’ or (confusingly!) just ‘Aelfgifu’.

** A ‘thegn’ (pronounced ‘thane’) is a nobleman, holding land from the king. He was part of the fighting class – a sort of knight.



1. Read both versions of the Chronicle. List the characters that appear in either or both extracts. Try to find out who they were and explain.
2. Where is the whiff of scandal? Quote from both extracts.
3. Using both extracts, try to write the story of what happened in 1035, in your own words.
4. Find an example of a piece of art OR a written source OR an artefact which tells you something about government, the Church or society in England between 1000 and 1065. It should be an Anglo-Saxon source. Write a paragraph about your source, explaining what it tells us about 11th-century England. You need to be prepared to share this with the rest of the class at the beginning of term.