

## Chapter One

### The reeve in royal government: an emerging official

It has been established that the reeve in late Anglo-Saxon England is an enigmatic official about whom scholars know very little. However, as a result of a preliminary survey, it is evident that the reeve not only played an important role in the workings of the Anglo-Saxon administration, but that he worked with church officials and was likely a prominent, visible figure in England's local districts. Some of the key areas in which the reeve was engaged were, local judicial matters, tax collection and in protecting and ensuring the rights and privileges of the church and the clergy. These functions were key elements in the operation of the Anglo-Saxon administration, and it will be shown that the reeve was a crucial cog within the machinery that made up the Old English state. Arguably, the reeve was the official who in fact ensured that some aspects of the king's *promissio regis* were carried out – namely, helping to ensure peace and especially justice in local areas for both the church and the Christian people. The *promissio regis* was essentially the king's solemn pledge to the people that he would administer England as a good *Christian* king, striving to follow the model and example of Biblical exemplars. While the text of the *promissio regis* does bear some similarities to aspects of Wulfstan's *Institutes of Polity* and his homilies, it has been suggested that the oath may in fact date from the ninth century, though the earliest surviving manuscript containing it is a tenth-century text.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, while it is possible, even likely that this ideology tied in with Wulfstan's thinking on kingship and a holy society, this coronation oath was arguably in use before Wulfstan's time. By the late Anglo-Saxon period, the reeve was an important force in the kingdom, which aided in the king's realization of this goal. Indeed, it will be shown in Chapter Four that Archbishop Wulfstan of York took this notion even further, refining some aspects of the reeve's role to shape an official who played a significant part in reshaping late Anglo-Saxon England into what the

---

<sup>1</sup> Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 40 – 41.

archbishop envisaged to be “a good Christian nation”, in the face of disaster and the viking onslaught, in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

This chapter seeks to examine the workings of the late Anglo-Saxon administration, through the activity of one of its agents: the reeve. Some of the key questions that will be investigated here are the following: How were judicial proceedings carried out? Which officials were in charge of those judicial activities? Were the Old English law codes exclusively ideological statements, as some scholars have argued, or were they in fact enforced on the ground? How did the king ensure (or, at least, attempt to ensure) that royal power was felt on the ground in the localities? How were the rights and privileges of the church protected and enforced? Did royal power play a role in this, as the law codes suggest? Were royal officials literate, or did they possess at least a modicum of literacy? In order to attain an image of the reeve’s role in judicial proceedings, tax collection, his involvement with the church and his part in the balance of regional power, it is necessary first to examine the duties prescribed for the reeve in the Anglo-Saxon law codes, alongside the diplomatic and the more dynamic evidence deriving from individual case studies. Through an analysis of the prescriptions in the potentially ideological legislative material, alongside evidence of reeves operating in the localities, a picture of the reeve’s active and important role on the political stage will be drawn based on these disparate and varied strands of evidence.

### *Introduction to the reeve and his origins in the laws of Anglo-Saxon England*

Over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period, the reeve’s role evolves and expands as it becomes more defined, both in the laws and from what can be seen in other evidence, such as the charters, dispute settlements, estate memoranda, religious discourse and wills. This first role in which we see reevish activity establishes him as a figure invested with royal authority, something which he will bear for the remainder of the period. It will be shown that the laws establish the

reeve as an official imbued with considerable judicial authority, but that this was a development over time. Arguably, judicial responsibilities and duties surface as the reeve's most prominent role by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. The reeve also emerges as the king's foremost representative in local affairs, as "the man on the ground." The reeve's legacy in Anglo-Saxon England originated in England's early ports and towns, and so that is where his story will begin.

The reeve as a royal official makes his first appearance under the title *wicgerefa* in the Anglo-Saxon laws in the code of Hlothhere and Eadric of Kent, which was promulgated 673 – ca. 685.<sup>2</sup> Hlothhere and Eadric claim to be extending the existing body of legislation with their own code, which is decidedly brief, containing only sixteen clauses. Much of their code appears preoccupied with homicide and theft, and the compensation to be paid in a variety of instances pertaining to these actions. It is unsurprising, therefore, that they have included a clause dealing with legitimate buying and selling. Here the reeve emerges with fairly limited power and jurisdiction - yet he is from the start a *royal* agent and serves as a high standing witness; importantly, it is a role with which the reeve appears to have been associated for the remainder of the period. The law stipulates, "Gif Cantwara ænig in Lundenwic feoh gebycge, hæbbe him þonne twegen oððe ðreo unfacne ceorlas to gewitnesse oþþe cyninges wicgerefan."<sup>3</sup> The term FL Attenborough translates as "property" is the Old English *feoh*, which has generally been taken to denote "cattle, goods, possessions, money and/or wealth." This thus indicates that if the man of Kent wishes to engage in any transactions, not only was he required to travel to a *port* or *wic*, but he was also required to have the witness of "two or three trustworthy (the Old English literally means "without deceit") men," or the reeve. This clause establishes that the reeve was considered to be of sufficient status, literally the value of two or three *ceorls*, to witness transactions. The term *ceorl* generally indicates "a

---

<sup>2</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 11. See also Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 11.

"If a man of Kent buys property in London, he is required to have as witness 2 or 3 trustworthy men, or the reeve of the king's estate." Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 23.

freeman of the lowest class,” or a “countryman.”<sup>4</sup> However, Ann Williams refers to *ceorlas* as belonging to the “upper ranks of the non-nobles,” which may suggest a slightly more elevated status than what is indicated by simply “freeman,” or “countryman.”<sup>5</sup> At this time, the reeve was seen as being equivalent to the status of two or three freemen, or men perhaps just below the ranks of the lesser nobility. It may also be argued that the reeve’s title establishes him as an agent of the king, attached to the town. The term *wicgerefa* is indeed a difficult one. It could arguably be intended to reference either a reeve of the king’s estate, or an administrator attached to a town. The significance here is that already by the seventh century, the reeve emerges as a local official representative of royal authority and power. The following clause states that should these goods or possessions subsequently come under claim by another, the man of Kent must swear on the altar that he purchased them legitimately, with either a witness or “*mid cyninges wicgeretan*.”<sup>6</sup> Clause 16.2 states:

16 §2. Gif he þæt ne mæge, gekyþe ðanne in wiofode mid his gewitena anum oþþe mid cyninges wicgeretan, þæt he þæt feoh undeornunga his cupan ceape in wic gebohte; 7 him man þanne his weorð agefe.<sup>7</sup>

This establishes that by the seventh century, the Kentish law codes prescribe that if questioned about the legitimacy of a purchase, a man must attest to its validity either in the presence of one of his witnesses, or that of the *wicgerefa*. It is clear that by this period *wic* tends to refer to a town or “trading settlement”.<sup>8</sup> Bosworth-Toller renders the term *wic* as representing either a residence, or as a

---

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Bosworth. *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: the digital edition*. “ceorl.” <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/006049>

<sup>5</sup> Ann Williams, “Lost Worlds: Kentish Society in the Eleventh Century,” *Medieval Prosopography* 20 (1999), 66.

<sup>6</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 11. (Hlothhere and Eadric 16. §2)

<sup>7</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 11.

16 §2. “If he cannot do so [produce the man who sold him the goods], he shall declare on the altar, with one of his witnesses or with the reeve of the king’s estate, that he bought the property openly in London, and with goods known to be his, and the value [of the property] shall be returned to him.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1999), 45.

village or town.<sup>9</sup> The suggested Latin counterparts are *castellum*, *vicus* or *portus*. The *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* indicates that the term *wic* occurs 121 times in the extant Old English texts.<sup>10</sup> The primary occurrences are in charters (41 times), ecclesiastical and religious texts (36 times) and in Anglo-Saxon literature and poetry (31 times). The *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* specifies that *wic* only occurs once in the Anglo-Saxon law codes, in the legislation of Hlothhere and Eadric. It appears that the subsequent laws after those of Hlothhere and Eadric have substituted the term *port* to denote a town, and accordingly seem to have preferred the perhaps more specific term *portgerefa* as opposed to the earlier *wicgerefa*. *Port* appears in the extant Old English corpus a total of 114 times, though in a higher proportion in the legislation and in the charters than the earlier *wic*.<sup>11</sup> Thus is it possible that by the late ninth or early tenth century, when “town” is again mentioned in the law codes that *wic* was viewed as not precise enough, and *port* became the preferred term.

Scholars have established that there were a number of *wics*, or trading centers, in Anglo-Saxon England by this period, and the legal clauses dealing with legitimate transactions reflect the desire to have buying and selling firmly under royal control.<sup>12</sup> Whether this control was always the reality is difficult to determine, but the law codes do establish that an official (in theory, at least) answerable only to the king – indeed, the *wicgerefa* has also been mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as being attached to a town – was the individual who

---

<sup>9</sup> Bosworth, *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: the digital edition*. “wic.” <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/>

<sup>10</sup> Search for occurrences of “wic” in *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*. <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus/oec-idx?index=Whole+word&type=simple&q1=wic&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100>

<sup>11</sup> *Port* appears seven times in the extant Anglo-Saxon laws, 41 times in the charters, and it also occurred thirteen times in the Old English *Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, which, as will be discussed below, has been suggested by Cubitt to have a late tenth or early eleventh century date, thus perhaps suggesting that by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, *port* was the preferred term to indicate “town,” as opposed to *wic*.

<sup>12</sup> James Campbell, “Power and authority 600 – 1300,” in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain Volume I: 600 – 1540*, ed. DM Palliser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 51. Neil Middleton, “Early medieval port customs, tolls and controls on foreign trade,” *Early Medieval Europe* 13, No. 4 (2005): 340. Kelly, “Trading privileges from eighth-century England,” 19.

was invested with this authority.<sup>13</sup> This association of the king's *wicgerefa* with not only ports and towns but also the supervision of buying and selling seems like a natural progression from his role on the royal *tuns* or estates. In early Anglo-Saxon England, the royal *tuns* were at the center of life for many communities in the localities. The king's *wicgerefa* was arguably, based on the etymology of the term, the official who administered these estates and would have likely been the face of royal authority in local areas surrounding these estates. When ports and towns began developing and growing, these places too became local centers, albeit on a larger scale. The *wicgerefa* would have been a familiar local official and by the nature of his role managing the king's property, would likely already have been invested with the necessary royal authority in order to supervise the transactions that began to take place in the new trading centers. Arguably, the *wicgerefa's* position of power over transactions in towns was a natural step from his work managing the king's *tun*. Importantly, this early role establishes the reeve – already by the seventh century – as a royal official invested with legal power and the power of arbitration (that is, to determine that a transaction was legitimate). Although the reeve's role will be shown to undergo considerable development over time, he began his association with justice and tax collection early on in the Anglo-Saxon period, in the form of the *port-* or *wicgerefa*. The *wicgerefa's* early appearance in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon legislation, coupled with the continued evidence for the *portgerefa* in documents through late Anglo-Saxon England suggests that there was a network of reeves who were installed in each of the towns or trading centers, whose role it was to supervise transactions that went on in these locales, under the authority of the king. This was a royal network and would have necessitated the delegation of royal power to agents in towns.

---

<sup>13</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 57. 896 in MS A and 897 for MSS C and D.

### *The wicgerefa and the portgerefa*

Since our first encounter with the reeve as an administrative official in the law codes is in his capacity as *wicgerefa* or *portgerefa*, it is instructive to examine the role and nature of the reeve's responsibilities in this position in order to gain a better understanding of the reeve's judicial power and its development across the period.

A more detailed examination of the *wicgerefa* and the *portgerefa* will shed light on these particular types of reeve, and the roles and function they played in Anglo-Saxon administration. Scholars are generally in agreement that the terms *port-* and *wicgerefa* were fairly synonymous and that they represented royal officials whose sphere of influence lay within the town.<sup>14</sup> A closer look at the Old English terms themselves suggests that these officials were also responsible for tax and tithe collection, a role which we will continue to see associated with reeves for the remainder of the period.<sup>15</sup> It is clear that this was a figure of some importance, since he ensured the collection of town toll and tax revenue and because his presence was required for [legitimate] transactions to take place. Catherine Cubitt, in her analysis of the late tenth- and early eleventh-century Old English translation of the *Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, states that the legend deploys the term *portgerefa* in order to denote a leading administrative figure within the town.<sup>16</sup> It is of course important to bear in mind that the Old English legend dates to the late tenth or early eleventh century, and while the port-reeve was probably a relatively important figure by the seventh century, it appears that

---

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns*, 92; Kelly, "Trading privileges from eighth-century England," 19; Catherine Cubitt, "As the Lawbook teaches: Reeves, lawbooks and urban life in the anonymous Old English legend of the Seven Sleepers," *English Historical Review* 2009 Vol. CXXIV, Number 510, (2009): 1034; H. Munro Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 229, 232, 233 and Neil Middleton, "Early medieval port customs, tolls and controls on foreign trade," *Early Medieval Europe* 13, No. 4 (2005): 340.

<sup>15</sup> JR Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Fourth Edition, 1960), 274, 407.

<sup>16</sup> Cubitt, "As the Lawbook teaches: Reeves, lawbooks and urban life in the anonymous Old English legend of the Seven Sleepers," 1039.

by the tenth and eleventh centuries the reeve was one of the leading members of the town.

The *portgerefa* does not appear again in the laws until the reign of Edward. Edward, Æthelstan, Edmund and Æthelred all incorporated clauses in their law codes concerning transactions, tolls, taxes and the *portgerefa*. These clauses are as follows:

I Edward 1. 7 ic wille, ðæt gehwiltc man hæbbe his geteaman; 7 nan man ne ceapige butan porte, ac hæbbe þæs portgerefan gewitnesse oððe oþera ungeligenra manna, ðe man gelyfan mæge.<sup>17</sup>

II Æthelstan 12. Ond we cwæðon, þæt mon nænne ceap ne geceapige buton porte ofter XX penega; ac ceapige ðær binnon on þæs portgerefan gewitnesse oððe on oþres unlygnes monnes, oððe eft on þara gerefena gewitnesse on folcgemote.<sup>18</sup>

III Edmund 5. Et nemo barganniet uel ignotum pecus recipiat, qui non habeat testimonium summi praepositi uel sacerdotis uel hordarii uel portireuae.<sup>19</sup>

IV Æthelred 3: Si portireua uel tungrauio compellet aliquem uel alius prepositus, quod teloneum supertenuerit, et homo respondeat, quod nullum tolneum concelauerit, quod iuste dare debuisset, iuret hoc se VII et sit quietus.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 138.

“And it is my will that every man shall have a warrantor [to his transactions] and that no one shall buy [and sell] except in a market town; but he shall have the witness of the ‘port-reeve’ or of another man of credit, who can be trusted.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 114.

<sup>18</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 156. See also Cubitt, “As the lawbook teaches...”, 1034.

“And we have declared that no one shall buy goods worth more than 20 pence, outside a town; but he shall buy within the town, in the presence of the port-reeve or some other trustworthy man, or again, in the presence of the reeves at a public meeting.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 135.

<sup>19</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 191.

“And no-one shall make a purchase or receive strange cattle unless he has as witness the high-reeve or the priest or the treasurer or the town-reeve.” AJ Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 234.

It is noteworthy that these clauses generally occur in the legal text amongst others dealing with matters such as legitimate transactions, false witness, homicide over theft, homicide of a thief, tolls (particularly in the case of IV Æthelred) and coinage. Clearly there is an overriding concern regarding crime and theft permeating these codes. Attempts to curb these problems included not only appointing an official with royal authority to monitor economic activity, but also to designate a specific arena – the town – in which these functions were to take place. All of this points towards a strong royal desire to regulate and control transactions – and in doing so maintain the public peace as well as to ensure the safety of royal revenue. This also serves to establish a power base other than that associated with royal favor alone, which is an important development.<sup>21</sup> The reeve’s early role as portrayed in the law codes underlines this, though, as we will see, his function evolves and expands over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period.

IV Æthelred 2 deals exclusively with tolls and toll-rates, and IV Æthelred 3 then moves on to discussing collection of toll.<sup>22</sup> This text is difficult to interpret, not only because Neil Middleton has suggested that it might in fact be an early town customal, as opposed to a royally promulgated law code, but also because Felix Liebermann and AJ Robertson believe the code to have been a pronouncement specifically aimed at London, which, if it was indeed a town customal, may have been issued to regulate customs and tolls at this specific port.<sup>23</sup> This is an unsurprising conclusion, since the entirety of IV Æthelred is preoccupied with matters pertaining to towns and trade, such as tolls and coinage. It is also imperative here to consider the transmission of IV Æthelred,

---

“If the town-reeve or the village reeve or any other official accuses anyone of having withheld toll, and the man replies that he has kept back no toll which it was his legal duty to pay, he shall swear to this with 6 others and shall be quit of the charge.” Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 72.

<sup>21</sup> Els Schröder, pers. comm., September 19<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 232 and 234. See also Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 71 – 73 and 72 - 75.

<sup>23</sup> Middleton, “Early medieval port customs, tolls and controls on foreign trade,” 333. See also: Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 232; and Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 48.

since this may have a bearing upon its interpretation. This code is extant only in the early twelfth-century Latin *Quadripartitus*, which is a compilation of vernacular Anglo-Saxon legislation, and survives in several manuscripts.<sup>24</sup> Wormald states that the compiler (whom he refers to as “Q”) edited his work as he came across new evidence; which may potentially add to the complexity of the Latin text, since it is not known whether any particular original vernacular text was more reliable than another.<sup>25</sup>

In IV Æthelred 3, the reeve is responsible for the collection of tolls; if he suspects a man of withholding the toll, he has the authority to charge him for it. The man is then required (as set out in subsequent clauses<sup>26</sup>) to provide the reeve with proof of payment.<sup>27</sup> It is notable here that what Robertson translates as “any other official” is in Latin “*alius praepositus*,” which likely means “another reeve,” as *praepositus* is the Latin term that was most often rendered as *gerefa* in Old English translations of Latin texts in Anglo-Saxon England (particularly in the Old English rendering of Bede’s works). Here the law codes specify that the taking of toll can only be done by an administrative official. This is different from the question of witnessing, where other men may bear the responsibility in the absence of a reeve. It seems that taking tolls was regarded as a delegation of

---

<sup>24</sup> Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 236, 237.

<sup>25</sup> Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 237.

<sup>26</sup> An interesting term is employed in the Latin here: in addition to the authority of the port-reeve, the accused man can also appeal to the *cacepollum*, to vouch for his toll payment. Robertson translates this title as “tax-gatherer,” indicating in a note that it comes from the Old English *cæcepol*, the etymology of which she attributes to Norman French origins (Robertson, 325). Indeed, the Anglo Norman Dictionary (<http://www.anglo-norman.net/cgi-bin/form-s1>) includes the term: *cachepole*, *cachepol*, *cachepolle*, *kachepol*, etc. that is translated as: “sheriff’s officer” or “catchpole”. This is interesting because it can probably offer indications as to the transmission of IV Æthelred, which only survives in Latin as a part of the early twelfth-century *Quadripartitus* (Wormald, *Making of English Law*, 112 – 117). This may perhaps serve as textual evidence of the shared trading customs and regulations between Anglo-Saxon England and its neighbors across the Channel, as Middleton suggests (“Early medieval port customs”, 333). Furthermore, Middleton suggests that IV Æthelred was in fact not a law code but “an early town customal” (333), and much of his discussion revolves around the many similarities in the customs and regulations governing trade in Western Europe, surely a symptom of both its Roman past and also its international nature (Middleton 315). Perhaps the transmission of the Anglo-Norman influences through the Old English and into the Latin may be another piece of evidence of this international communication.

<sup>27</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 234. And Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 73, 75. IV Æthelred 3 §1, §2, §3.

royal authority to specific officials, whereas witnessing could be done by anyone with status. This thus indicates that the town-reeve or any other reeve bore the responsibility to monitor and collect tolls. This clause also demonstrates that his word was taken with the seriousness of the law. It is worth considering the Latin vocabulary here: both Liebermann and Robertson record *tungravio* (taken by Robertson to mean “village reeve”) as the Latin that compiler Q rendered in the *Quadripartitus* from the presently unknown vernacular.<sup>28</sup> This is an interesting term: the *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon minus: a medieval Latin-French/English Dictionary* entry states that the word is a variation of the term *grafio*, which is said to denote a Frankish officer “who at first is in evidence as possessing executory powers...”<sup>29</sup> The *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon minus* also states that the term is linked with “the anglosaxon *gerefa*.”<sup>30</sup> This interpretation is further substantiated by the entry in the *Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British sources*, which also translates *grafio* as being synonymous with Old English *gerefa*, and highlights its occurrence in *Quadripartitus*.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the term *gravis*, rendered “heavy” or “oppressive” by the *Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British sources* has been connected to an early medieval usage in relation to taxes, based on its appearance in *Domesday Book*, which may provide some insight as to why it is associated with the term *gravio/grafio*.<sup>32</sup> Thus it is clear that a reeve of some type was denoted by the *Quadripartitus* compiler; however, interestingly he creates a compound using the Old English word *tun*, or village. Therefore what we seem to be dealing with here is a village reeve, as Robertson originally translated, but it is difficult to know how it was rendered in its original

---

<sup>28</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 234; Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 73.

NB: It is also worth noting that III Edmund is also only extant in *Quadripartitus* and employs the same Latin term *portireva* that appears in IV Æthelred, denoting “town reeve.”

<sup>29</sup> Niermeyer and van de Kieft, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon minus: a medieval Latin-French/English Dictionary*, 472.

<sup>30</sup> Niermeyer and van de Kieft, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon minus: a medieval Latin-French/English Dictionary*, 472.

<sup>31</sup> *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, 1092.

<sup>32</sup> *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, 1104.

vernacular. Though, the use of Old English *tun* as opposed to the Latin *vicus* might be suggestive of the Old English originally having been rendered using *tun*.

In his *English Place-Name Elements*, AH Smith discusses the etymology and uses of the Old English term *tun*.<sup>33</sup> Smith states that the first meaning of *tun* was to indicate a yard or enclosed space, and that this led to the development of numerous compounds, such as: *cafor-tun* (courtyard), *cyric-tun* (churchyard) and *lic-tun* (burial ground).<sup>34</sup> The meaning of the term then developed from “enclosed space” to indicate “an enclosure with a dwelling,” to a farm, and then to mean “village.”<sup>35</sup> Smith states that by the seventh century *tun* could often indicate “a community of people,” and it was deployed in the Old English Bede to such effect.<sup>36</sup> Bosworth-Toller ascribes a variety of interpretations to the Old English term *tun*. *Tun* has been shown to indicate simply an enclosed piece of land, or enclosed land surrounding a dwelling; a manor, vill or an estate with an attached village community; to be indicative of the towns of Roman Britain; or, finally, a village or town.<sup>37</sup> *Tun* occurs in 110 instances in the Old English corpus, in a variety of texts, ranging from poetry to homilies, to charters and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, where it appears in the greatest prevalence.<sup>38</sup> However, *tun* only appears in two instances in the law codes. Furthermore, Bosworth-Toller attributes the meaning “village reeve” to *tungerefa*, which may offer further indication that *tun* was generally taken as “village.” *Tungerefa* only occurs in the Old English corpus in six cases, in Ælfric’s homilies, Bede’s works, a martyrology and in a Latin-Old English glossary.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> AH Smith, *English Place-Name Elements, Part II: The Elements Jafn – Ytri, index and maps* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 188 – 198.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *English Place-Name Elements, Part II: The Elements Jafn – Ytri*, 189.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *English Place-Name Elements, Part II: The Elements Jafn – Ytri*, 189.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *English Place-Name Elements, Part II: The Elements Jafn – Ytri*, 189 – 190.

<sup>37</sup> Bosworth, *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: the digital edition*. “tun.”

<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/>

<sup>38</sup> *Dictionary of Old English, Web Corpus*, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus/oec-idx?index=Whole+word&type=simple&q1=tun&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100>

<sup>39</sup> *Dictionary of Old English, Web Corpus*, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus/oec-idx?index=Whole+word&type=simple&q1=tungerefa&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100>

In IV Æthelred, with its focus upon towns, trade and coinage, another responsibility allocated to the reeve by the reign of Æthelred was that of monitoring for false coinage and the coining of “base money”:

IV Æthelred 8: Et rex suadet et mandat episcopis suis et comitibus et aldremannis et prepositis omnibus, ut curam adhibeant de illis qui tale falsum operantur et portant per patriam, sicut premissum est, utrobique cum Danis et Anglis.<sup>40</sup>

Æthelred appears to be addressing all royal agents in this injunction, suggesting that royal officials, including all reeves, bore the responsibility for monitoring coinage. This clause also suggests that like tolls, monitoring coinage was a duty that required the authority of a royal official. It is evident that coinage in particular is another facet of the reeve’s responsibilities, and one which merits a rather significant amount of focus in IV Æthelred, with five clauses devoted to it and its regulation.<sup>41</sup> The regulation of coinage and its purity was clearly a significant concern – indeed if a trader should bring faulty or defective money into a town, unless he could produce a warrantor, he would be liable to lose his life.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, if the town reeve was found to be guilty of knowingly allowing this activity to go on – or indeed, facilitating it – then he would be subject to the same punishment as the trader or fraudulent coiner.<sup>43</sup> The reeve could only clear himself through a pardon from the king, an oath of nominated jurors, or through

---

The Latin-Old English Glossaries are discussed in: Kindschi, L. “The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS. 32 and British Museum MS. Additional 32246” (Stanford University dissertation).

<sup>40</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 236.

“And the king advises and commands his bishops and earls and ealdormen and all his reeves that, both among the Danes and the English, they be on the watch for those who coin such base money and spread it abroad through the country, as has been stated above.” Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 234 and 236. See also Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 74, 76, 78.

<sup>42</sup> IV Æthelred 7 and 7.1: Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 236 and Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 77.

<sup>43</sup> IV Æthelred 7.3: Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 236 and Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 77.

undertaking the ordeal. The functions and responsibilities of the *portgerefa*, as can be seen here, were bound to matters of justice.

Therefore, we find the *portgerefa* to be a figure associated with towns, and linked with witnessing transactions from an early date. This duty appears to have been primarily affiliated with status, and signals that the *portgerefa* in the laws of Hlothhere and Eadric was equivalent to the status of two or three *ceorls*. By the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, IV Æthelred introduces the treasurer in place of the *ceorl* for witnessing, suggesting that perhaps the *portgerefa's* status had shifted to some degree during the period.<sup>44</sup> The terms *praefectus* and *praepositus* have been established as having been in use for a significant period of time, and associated with administrative duties, though the meaning and application of these terms at times has been unclear. The collection of tolls and monitoring of coinage also emerge as responsibilities assigned to royal officials – particularly reeves – which points toward these duties as having been viewed as delegations of royal power and authority. This is significant, because it may offer firmer indications that the reeve was envisaged as a royal agent, with specific duties that are particular to an official position as opposed to being bound up with status.

### *Judicial Activities*

It has been established that although the reeve's first appearance in the Anglo-Saxon administration was in connection with towns and trade, that role still bore judicial implications. It will be shown that as the period progressed, the reeve evolved into a figure invested with judicial, royal authority, and was actively engaged in state administration on a local level. Arguably his early role in handling tolls, taxes, and later the monitoring of coinage paved the way for him to be locally active on a slightly larger scale. Before embarking upon an analysis

---

<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, this change could simply signal an increased concern surrounding legitimate transactions.

of the reeve's administrative and judicial activity, it is necessary to elucidate what is meant by "localities," a term which occurs with relative frequency. By the late seventh century, there were distinct territories in Anglo-Saxon England, which often bore tribal names and which were employed as centers for "royal resource collection" – the number of hides these territories contained determined the amount of food-render that was expected.<sup>45</sup> Groups of hides were sectioned off from these territories and converted into monastic estates; John Blair cites this very specific movement of lands as evidence for extensive knowledge of and precise control over vast land resources in early Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>46</sup> The administrative units of the "shires" were first recorded in around the sixth to the eighth century (these have been referred to as "micro-kingdoms", the products of struggles during the fifth to the eighth centuries), and these were set territorial units by the eleventh century.<sup>47</sup>

Royal centers begin to emerge more clearly in the evidence after about 830, with "a network of royal vills and hundreds" becoming more apparent by the tenth century.<sup>48</sup> Hundreds are regarded as tenth-century judicial units, with those in the northern, Scandinavian areas known as wapentakes; the relative infrequency of shire court meetings generally meant that the hundred was the primary unit of local administration.<sup>49</sup> The administrative districts of the tenth century likely bore the shape and format of much earlier territories.<sup>50</sup> Arguably, it was primarily during the ninth through the eleventh centuries that territories began to be divided up into smaller estates; the church was a great participator in this development, acquiring and purchasing many of the resulting estates.<sup>51</sup> It is important to bear in mind that our evidence for the history of territories and

---

<sup>45</sup> John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154.

<sup>46</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 154.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and Landscape* (Stroud: Tempus, 1999), 65.

<sup>48</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 325.

<sup>49</sup> Della Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (London and Washington: Leicester University Press, 1998), 68; and David E. Thornton, "Localities", in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c. 500 – c. 1100*, ed. Pauline Stafford (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2009), 449.

<sup>50</sup> Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and Landscape*, 67.

<sup>51</sup> Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England*, 68 – 69.

estates comes primarily from tenth-century and later charters, generally concerning properties owned by the church.<sup>52</sup> Della Hooke also cautions that this evidence covers a fairly limited geographical section of Anglo-Saxon England; it is crucial to be aware of this partiality in the evidence.<sup>53</sup>

There appears to have been a general absence of any permanent royal places between the seventh and early ninth centuries, and Blair suggests that this does not imply that they were not there, but perhaps that during this period the majority of assemblies were conducted outdoors, with temporary timber structures erected and then removed as necessary for the purposes of public meetings.<sup>54</sup> These open outdoor spaces would have had the advantage of providing plenty of room for the great number of people and large retinues that would have attended such assemblies.<sup>55</sup> Hooke, too, argues for these meetings having taken place in the format of a public gathering in open spaces.<sup>56</sup> These meeting places tended to be sited at prominent natural features in the landscape or at old pagan sites of importance.<sup>57</sup> These were usually locations which were easily accessible from within the hundred territory; arguably it was accessibility that was the most important factor in determining the meeting site.<sup>58</sup> Meeting sites did not necessarily need to remain in one location during the Anglo-Saxon period to ensure that administration could be carried out: it has been suggested that centers could be moved within their territories without disrupting administrative processes.<sup>59</sup> Hundred meetings and assemblies appear to have taken place at a range of locations within the landscape: bridges, fords and crossroads are among the man-made sites, while naturally occurring features such as large stones, mounds or hills also tended to be utilized as public meeting-

---

<sup>52</sup> Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England*, 86.

<sup>53</sup> Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England*, 86.

<sup>54</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 279.

<sup>55</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 279.

<sup>56</sup> Della Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 99.

<sup>57</sup> Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, 92.

<sup>58</sup> Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, 99 – 102.

<sup>59</sup> John Blair, *Early Medieval Surrey: Landholding, Church and Settlement before 1300* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing and Surrey Archaeological Society, 1991), 19.

places.<sup>60</sup> However, it is noteworthy that by the time of Domesday, many (most?) hundredal meetings took place at hundredal manors, instead of their old traditional, more “natural” locations.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the importance of public meetings appears to have been recognized early on in this period: Æthelberht’s first clause articulates that a breach of the peace must be compensated doubly when it affects a church or a meeting place.<sup>62</sup>

It seems evident that the boundaries of territories were not yet fixed and finite. Baxter contends that late Anglo-Saxon ealdormen were not associated with specific territories so much as groups of peoples, and that the shires within the earldoms were often subject to change.<sup>63</sup> This prompts the question as to whether the reeve would have been, like the ealdormen, linked with a group of people, or more or less fixed to a shire. Here John Williams’ article on the “palace at Northampton” may offer some insight, particularly if Williams is correct in his determination that the hall structure at Northampton was indeed an eighth-century royal hall; though this conclusion has since been debated by Blair.<sup>64</sup> Williams argues that the stone hall discovered to have stood in Anglo-Saxon Northampton was a royal hall lying at the center of the substantial royal estate he argues was in existence there at the time.<sup>65</sup> He contends that this hall would have been one of a network of centers which was used by “the royal entourage” as a temporary residence as it moved around the country, but employed most of the time as a base for royal agents to administer the surrounding localities.<sup>66</sup> He cites numerous Continental examples and references to royal reeves to support his

---

<sup>60</sup> Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and Landscape*, 78.

<sup>61</sup> Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and Landscape*, 78, 80.

<sup>62</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3. See also Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18.

<sup>63</sup> Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, 62 – 63.

Regarding ealdormen and their titles, Baxter cites here Ealdorman Leofwine who is “styled ‘Wicciarum Provinciarum dux’ (‘ealdorman of the provinces of the peoples of the Hwicce’)” and Ealdorman Leofric, who is referred to as “‘dux Merciorum’ (‘earl of the Mercians’)”. This evidence indicates that the ealdormen tended to be connected with the people they administered, as opposed to finite territories.

<sup>64</sup> John Williams, “From ‘palace’ to ‘town’: Northampton and urban origins.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 13 (1984): 113 – 136, and for the debate see John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 205, 211, 266, 267, 272.

<sup>65</sup> Williams, “From ‘palace’ to ‘town’: Northampton and urban origins,” 123 – 124.

<sup>66</sup> Williams, “From ‘palace’ to ‘town’: Northampton and urban origins,” 123 – 124.

suggestion.<sup>67</sup> Sally Crawford contends that the palace at Cheddar, which has been documented as both a place where the witan met, as well as a royal estate, was a site that was used intermittently.<sup>68</sup> Another significant element of Cheddar's archaeology is that the grave of what appears to be an execution victim – found with his hands bound behind his back – has been found within the bounds of the site.<sup>69</sup> Crawford remarks that this could be indicative of displays of the power of justice at public meetings.<sup>70</sup> Royal centers begin to emerge more clearly in the evidence after about 830, with “a network of royal vills and hundreds” becoming more apparent by the tenth century.<sup>71</sup> There is a general absence in the archaeological record of any permanent royal places between the seventh and early ninth centuries, but this does not necessarily imply that they were non-existent, but perhaps rather that temporary timber structures effectively served similar purposes and could be set up in open spaces within hundreds for assemblies.<sup>72</sup>

Minsters, in their pastoral duties and in the collection of tithes, appear to have aided in the development of discreet units of territory, from which the dues and fines could be extracted in an organized fashion.<sup>73</sup> By the late eighth and ninth centuries, minsters became attractive places to kings and aristocrats; thegns began taking up residence in minsters and churches as early as the ninth century.<sup>74</sup> The landscape of Anglo-Saxon England grew more organized in the eighth and ninth centuries, and during this period, minsters tended to fall into the role of “central places” within their regions.<sup>75</sup> During the tenth century, some minsters and monastic communities were subsumed or converted into royal vills

---

<sup>67</sup> Williams, “From ‘palace’ to ‘town’: Northampton and urban origins,” 124.

<sup>68</sup> Sally Crawford, “Settlement and Social Differentiation”, in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c. 500 – c. 1100*, ed. Pauline Stafford (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 437.

<sup>69</sup> Crawford, “Settlement and Social Differentiation”, 437.

<sup>70</sup> Crawford, “Settlement and Social Differentiation”, 437.

<sup>71</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 325.

<sup>72</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 279.

<sup>73</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 162.

<sup>74</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 285.

<sup>75</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 290.

and estates (examples include Cheddar and Cookham).<sup>76</sup> Finally, there likely existed a “larger category of site – shrine and meeting-place in one...” which would offer a greater degree of functionality and would also have been appealing places for local people to gather for assemblies.<sup>77</sup> It seems likely that minsters’ early role in some areas as “central places” may have been connected with reeves’ later role in late Anglo-Saxon England in aiding in the collection of tithes and also protecting the interests of the church and clergy. By the tenth century, reeves’ roles in terms of working with and alongside the church in the localities seem to have been more defined. Arguably, there was some recognition of the minsters’ ancient role as central places, and the resulting logical step that reeves operating from the secular central places – the counterpart to the minsters in the landscape – would be the ideal agents to enforce church tithes and policy, as well as its rights and privileges.

By the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, the reeve is intimately connected with public meetings (*folces gemote*) in England’s local landscape. This association appears to have made its first appearance in the laws of Alfred the Great.

Alfred 22. Gif mon on folces gemote cyninges  
gerefan geyppe eofot, 7 his eft geswican wille,  
gestæle on ryhtran hand, gif he mæge; gif he ne  
mæge, ðolie his angyldes.<sup>78</sup>

This clause not only demonstrates that accusations made at public meetings were taken very seriously, but it also implies that there was a king’s reeve present at these public meetings. It is established here that if a king’s reeve *were* present then the accusation would have formal consequences. The surrounding clauses here are primarily concerned with various types of theft and violence

---

<sup>76</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 326.

<sup>77</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 475.

<sup>78</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 62.

“If anyone makes an accusation [against another] at a public meeting, in the presence of the king’s reeve, and afterwards wishes to withdraw it, he shall prefer the charge, if he can, against a more likely person. If he cannot, he shall lose the value due to him.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 74.

and the compensation due if a charge is successfully made. This clause serves to establish, in the context of the many types of violence and theft against which an accusation might be brought, that making accusations was a weighty and serious matter, and was accompanied by consequences. All of this indicates that not only were accusations at public meetings treated as legal accusations, but it appears that public meetings provided an official forum for grievances. By introducing the meeting (and the reeve) it moves an accusation into a more “formal” setting. These meetings and the presence of the reeve move a dispute literally into the public sphere out of the private.<sup>79</sup> In looking across the channel at the Carolingian administration, it is clear that public meetings were also important events, and if necessary, the king had the power to summon his counts and royal officials to assemblies.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, it appears that in the Carolingian era too, public meetings and assemblies offered a forum for grievances of some sort: the proceedings of assemblies and court meetings indicate that peasants had recourse to royal courts (though how often they managed to win cases is unknown).<sup>81</sup> Nelson highlights the fact that their willingness alone to attend these courts suggests that they harbored some (however small) hope that they might win their case.<sup>82</sup> Further evidence suggesting that by the ninth century the reeve was one of the officials in attendance at these meetings comes to us from *Asser’s Life of King Alfred*:

106. Studebat <is> quoque in iudiciis etiam propter nobilium et ignobilium suorum utilitatem, qui saepissime in contionibus comitum et praepositorum pertinacissime inter se dissentiebant, ita ut pene nullus eorum, quicquid a comitibus et praepositis iudicatum fuisset, verum esse concederet.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Els Schröder, pers. comm., September 19<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>80</sup> Janet Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London and New York: Longman Group UK Limited, 1992), 63 – 64.

<sup>81</sup> Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 63 – 64.

<sup>82</sup> Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 63 – 64.

<sup>83</sup> Stevenson, *Asser’s Life of King Alfred, together with the Annals of Saint Neots, erroneously ascribed to Asser*, 92.

“King Alfred used also to sit at judicial hearings for the benefit both of his nobles and of the common people, since they frequently disagreed violently among themselves at assemblies of

Morris states that the *præpositus* (reeve) was mentioned by Asser as an official who was present at public assemblies.<sup>84</sup> Asser refers to assemblies as being conducted by ealdormen or reeves, and he also states that the authority of the kingdom was vested in bishops, ealdormen, thegns and reeves.<sup>85</sup> It is evident already by this point that public meetings were important events in the early medieval world: Timothy Reuter argues that on the Continent, these meetings were forums for displays of power and authority, where it was required that any accusations and grievances be brought in front of all members of a community.<sup>86</sup> Therefore the meeting not only would provide the necessary arena and audience for the witnessing of accusations and settlement of disputes, but this assembly (presumably, of the local political community) provided the official in power with an opportunity to showcase and reinforce his authority within his sphere of influence. By the eighth century, it was highly unlikely that the kings traversed the entirety of their kingdoms consistently, or even periodically, necessitating the delegation of royal power to trusted officials in the localities.<sup>87</sup> By the time of Edward the Elder's reign, reeves were required to hold public meetings every four weeks, in which legal disputes could be settled:

II Edward 8. Ic wille, þæt ælc grefa hæbbe gemot á ymbe feower wucan; 7 gedon, ðæt ælc man sy folcrichtes wyrðe, 7 ðæt ælc spræc hæbbe ende 7 andagan, hwænne hit forðcume. Gif hit hwa oferhebbe, bete swa we ær cwædon.<sup>88</sup>

---

ealdormen or reeves, to the point where virtually none of them could agree that any judgement reached by the ealdormen or reeves in question was just." Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, trans. *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 109.

<sup>84</sup> William Alfred Morris, *The Medieval English Sheriff to 1300* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927), 5.

<sup>85</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, trans. *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources*, 101 – 102, 109. See also David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>86</sup> Reuter, *Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities*, 206.

<sup>87</sup> Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066*, 41.

<sup>88</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 144. See also: Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066*, 109.

"It is my will that every reeve shall hold a meeting every four weeks; and they shall see to it that every man obtains the benefit of the public law, and that every suit shall have a day assigned to it

By the reign of Edward the Elder, reeves have not only been established in the legislation as having a presence at public meetings, but they were in fact expected to convene meetings of the hundred courts. As part of this duty, II Edward 8 articulates that the reeve also bore the responsibility of ensuring that all grievances brought to the court were duly addressed. Of course, it must be remembered that this evidence is drawn from the law codes, which were likely ideological and prescriptive texts. The inclusion of this provision in the legislation argues for the lawmakers ideally envisaging hundred meetings taking place on a regular basis, and this may even have been something kings attempted to enforce. However, it is difficult to determine, particularly for more distant and remote localities, how much this ruling was in reality enforced.

An example of a reeve in action as an official with judicial authority can be seen in Lantfred's *Translatio et Miracula S. Swithuni*. This text dates to 971 x 981, though according to Lantfred, the miracles he recounts all took place in the recent past, during the years 971 – 972.<sup>89</sup> References to King Edgar suggest that Lantfred was writing before 975; Michael Lapidge argues for a closer dating of 972 x 974.<sup>90</sup> Our reeve appears in Chapter 25: “De homine qui nuda manu ignitum calibem portavit”.<sup>91</sup> In this account, a slave owned by a wealthy merchant named Flodoald was apprehended by the king's reeve, a man named Eadric of Calne, for an unspecified crime, with the reeve ordering him to be held until he could undergo the ordeal.<sup>92</sup> Flodoald begged the reeve Eadric to release the slave into his custody and to therefore avert the ordeal. Eadric, apparently unsympathetic to his pleas – the text describes him as “not countenancing these promises but exulting overmuch in his secular authority” – ordered that the

---

on which it shall be heard and decided. And if anyone neglects [to do] this he shall pay such compensation as we have already ordained.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 120.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Lapidge, John Crook, Robert Dushman and Susan Rankin, *The Cult of St Swithun: Winchester Studies 4.ii, The Anglo-Saxon Minster of Winchester* (Published for the Winchester Excavations Committee. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2003), 236 – 237.

<sup>90</sup> Lapidge *et al*, *The Cult of St Swithun*, 237.

<sup>91</sup> Lapidge *et al*, *The Cult of St Swithun*, 308 – 311.

<sup>92</sup> Lapidge *et al*, *The Cult of St Swithun*, 308.

ordeal take place.<sup>93</sup> The reeve Eadric remained unmoved, and despite myriad promises of cash and gifts, supervised the slave undergoing the ordeal. The slave carried the hot iron in his bare hand and had it sealed up for three days, during which time Flodoald and his supporters prayed for the intercession of St Swithun. Miraculously, when the slave was delivered for judgment, while the crowd could clearly see the corruption of the wound indicative of guilt, the judges only saw a healthy, unmarked hand, and so pronounced the slave innocent. This episode is interesting because it depicts a reeve operating in the capacity as a law-enforcement official and an arbiter of justice in the localities; Lapidge notes that Calne in Wiltshire was a royal estate.<sup>94</sup> Here we have an example of a reeve not only apprehending a suspected criminal, but also enacting judgment on that suspect as a royal official – the text even specifies that not only did Eadric “exult in his secular authority” but it also describes him as apparently impervious to the bribes and pleas of a wealthy merchant, and as having the power to compel the accused to undergo the ordeal. In this account we have an example of a reeve engaging in a number of the roles ascribed to him by the law codes. Furthermore, it seems likely that Eadric’s title linking him to Calne suggests that in the tenth century, some local courts still held public meetings at royal estates.<sup>95</sup>

It is the reeve who appears in this instance to be responsible for providing access to “public law” (*folcrites*) to “every man”, though the jurisdiction is not specified: we can just see in Edward’s laws that he addresses “all” the reeves and explicitly connects them with the implementation of justice. Another appealing, albeit small, piece of evidence linking the reeve with the courts comes from the word *gerefa* itself. Bosworth-Toller notes that the term *geréfærn*, a compound containing the root of the word *gerefa*, denotes a court

---

<sup>93</sup> Lapidge *et al*, *The Cult of St Swithun*, 308.

<sup>94</sup> Lapidge *et al*, *The Cult of St Swithun*, 308, n. 230.

<sup>95</sup> Lapidge *et al*, *The Cult of St Swithun*, 308, n. 230. Lapidge *et al*. note that a meeting of the *witan* took place at Calne in 978.

house.<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately the Dictionary of Old English Corpus reveals that *geréfærn* occurs only once in Old English, in the *Old English Martyrology*, but its existence alone can perhaps suggest some familiarity with reeves' connection to courts and justice.<sup>97</sup> However, the linkage with hundred meetings in the law codes points towards the existence of a reeve presiding over each hundred district and convening its associated court on a regular basis.<sup>98</sup> The preceding clauses here are focused on theft and breaking of oaths, and the consequences of these actions. It seems natural and makes sense that this section is concluded with a clause stipulating the forum in which these matters could be settled. This may also offer an indication of the types of issues that would be brought before the public meetings. Jurisdiction is specified more clearly in the later *Hundred Ordinance*, thought to date to the reign of Edward's grandson, Edgar (r. 957 – 975). It has been argued that by the eleventh century, the sheriff (*sciresgerefa*) was the agent responsible for obtaining the king's portion of the profits of justice arising from the shire and hundred courts.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, it appears that by the eleventh century, the town courts had acquired a similar function and authority to the courts of the rural hundreds in the localities.<sup>100</sup> Since Reynolds notes a contrast between town and country law: "One eleventh-century text makes a general distinction between town law and country law (*burhriht* and *landriht*)," it may be reasonable to assume that the officials in charge of the town courts were viewed as urban or proto-urban.<sup>101</sup> If there was a differentiation between the law and the courts within the town as opposed to those outside of it, most likely the towns then were not viewed as simply just another district which had at its center the town. Contemporary views certainly saw towns as separate entities, which is substantiated by the use of specialized terms such as

---

<sup>96</sup> Bosworth. "An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online." Ge-réf-ærn. March 21, 2010.  
<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/015668>

<sup>97</sup> *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, "geréfærn",  
<http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/cgi-bin/doecorpus/oec-idx?type=bigger&byte=20502164&q1=gerefArn&q2=&q3>

<sup>98</sup> Thornton, "Localities", 448 – 449.

<sup>99</sup> Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066*, 109.

<sup>100</sup> Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns*, 92-3.

<sup>101</sup> Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns*, 93.

*burhgemot*, and *portmenn*.<sup>102</sup> This suggests that the reeve was very much an “official” presence at public meetings, and later at shire court meetings.<sup>103</sup> This evidence reinforces the notion that town reeves were by this time possessed also of judicial authority beyond that of their early role in monitoring transactions and collecting tolls and taxes. Though an important question is raised here, as to whether the shire reeve and the town reeve were always necessarily two distinct roles.

Charter evidence helps to provide further insight regarding public meetings. S 1473 (1044 x 1048, Canterbury, Christ Church) is a charter concerning the purchase of an estate in Kent, with the transaction taking place between two laypeople.<sup>104</sup> Although this document holds interest because two of the witnesses named in the charter are reeves, the text also bears a reference to a public meeting: “Þis ceap wæs geceapod on Wii ætforan ealra scyre.”<sup>105</sup> Robertson states that Wye was utilized as a location for meetings of the Kentish council in the ninth century, and it has also been referenced as an administrative center.<sup>106</sup> Amongst the witnesses listed in the body of the text are Godric the town reeve (*Godric portgerefa*) whom Robertson suggests was the town reeve of Canterbury, and Wulfsige the king’s reeve (*Wulfsige þæs cynges gerefa*).<sup>107</sup> This charter thus provides further evidence that the prescriptions in the law codes which assert that purchases must be conducted either in a port under the supervision of a port reeve, or in a public meeting, were actually (at least in some instances) observed in the localities. This is interesting as documentary evidence that public meetings did in fact occur in local areas at administrative centers, as prescribed by the law codes. This evidence also indicates that public meetings were held in places that were known and familiar to the local population. The

---

<sup>102</sup> Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns*, 92, 93.

<sup>103</sup> Cubitt, “As the Lawbook teaches: Reeves, lawbooks and urban life in the anonymous Old English legend of the Seven Sleepers,” 1038.

<sup>104</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. CIII, 192-193.

<sup>105</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 192.

“This purchase has been completed at Wye before the whole shire.”

<sup>106</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 439.

<sup>107</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 192.

presence of the town reeve suggests that perhaps in some cases, if shire meetings were close enough to a town's sphere of activity, then the town reeve would attend those meetings in the locality as well – and in this case, Wye is located only about ten miles from Canterbury, and thus easily within walking – or riding – distance.

S 1425 (1049 x 1052, St Albans) is worthy of consideration for its notable witness list, which not only includes two reeves but a sizeable group of prominent laymen.<sup>108</sup> The text survives in vernacular and Latin copies; however the Old English version is longer and more detailed. S 1425 records a life term lease of land from St Albans to a widow, Tova, and her son, Godwine. What is significant here is that not only was Earl Leofric of Mercia present with all of his housecarls, but so also were a number of the earl's named retainers, Godwine port reeve of Oxford, Wulfwine the reeve of the earl, and the townspeople of Oxford: "Godwine portgerefa on Oxnaforda 7 Wulfpine þæs eorles gerefa 7 eall seo burparu".<sup>109</sup> This suggests that the witnessing of the lease took place in some form of public meeting; arguably due to the nature of those present, along with the presence of the townsmen ("eall seo burparu"), that this was probably a shire court meeting.<sup>110</sup> Blair suggests that the port reeve Godwine was likely present in his capacity as administrator of the town on the king's behalf, and Wulfwine was present to ensure that the earl received all that was due to him.<sup>111</sup> The presence at this meeting of Wulfpine þæs eorles gerefa is interesting. Despite the fact that not only was Earl Leofric himself present at this meeting, but so were his housecarls and a number of his retainers, yet the earl still apparently felt it necessary to bring his reeve in order to ensure that he received his perquisites during the court proceedings. Why could the earl not advocate for himself, since he was indeed present? S 1425 presents a picture that perhaps a reeve, with his

---

<sup>108</sup> Crick, ed., *Charters of St Albans*, 215-217.

<sup>109</sup> Crick, ed., *Charters of St Albans*, 215 & 218.

"Godwine port reeve of Oxford, Wulfwine the earl's reeve and all the inhabitants of the burh [Oxford]." *Ibid*, 216.

<sup>110</sup> John Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1994), 154.

<sup>111</sup> Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 155.

judicial power and knowledge and all the implications that came with it, was required at such proceedings. By the late Anglo-Saxon period, the reeve was imbued with much judicial and administrative power, and would have been a recognizable figure of authority in the localities. While undoubtedly the earl's private reeve was not endowed with the same judicial authority as a royal reeve, it certainly seems possible that as an administrator for the earl, his reeve would have had the wherewithal to have an understanding of the laws and judicial procedure, and therefore the ability to advocate for the earl in the public arena. Perhaps in order to "officially" secure and protect his rights and privileges, the earl would have needed to retain a reeve as his advocate for such occasions. This may suggest that there was by this period a class of semi-professional administrators. This function of the private reeve is particularly sensible when considered alongside royal reeves' roles working in the localities on behalf of the king, as well as the reeve's duty to protect the privileges and rights of the church, considered below.

Often agreements of this type ended up eventually causing disputes and therefore it may have been desirable to have many witnesses.<sup>112</sup> It appears that this Godwine, port reeve of Oxford, was the same "Godwine port reeve" who witnessed S 1022 (1050, Abingdon).<sup>113</sup> S 1022 records a grant of four hides from King Edward to Godwine, *dux*.<sup>114</sup> The extensive witness list, as already mentioned, includes two reeves, with Godwine placed at the end: "+Ego Goduine prepositus ciuitatis."<sup>115</sup> The use of the somewhat vague term *ciuitatis*, or "the city", likely indicates that the transaction was local.<sup>116</sup> It seems reasonable to assign the same identity to the Godwine appearing in both S 1022 and S 1425.<sup>117</sup>

Additionally, it is possible that these local meetings provided the opportunity for men to have fines officially discharged. I Æthelred 14 deals with

---

<sup>112</sup> Crick, ed., *Charters of St Albans*, 219.

<sup>113</sup> Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 200, n. 40 and Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, 561.

<sup>114</sup> Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, 559-560.

<sup>115</sup> Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, 561.

"I Godwine port reeve/reeve of the city."

<sup>116</sup> Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, 561-562.

<sup>117</sup> Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 200, n. 40 and Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, 561.

finer, stipulating where those who hold *bocland* are to pay any fines they incur. The preceding clauses deal primarily with surety, and the consequences of failing the oath or the ordeal, particularly those suffered by the lord of the malefactor, who would be responsible for fines. Æthelred's laws specify that "compensation" incurred by those who held *bocland* ("bookland") could only be paid in the presence of the king's reeve:

1 Æthelred 1 §14. 7 beo se cyng ælc þæra wita wyrðe, þe þa men gewyrçen þe bocland habban, 7 ne bete nan man for nanre tyhtlan, buton hit sy þæs cynges gerefan gewitnyſſe.<sup>118</sup>

David Pratt asserts that bookland was transferred by royal charter, whereas folkland changed hands by oral agreement.<sup>119</sup> Tenure of bookland tended to be accompanied by rights, fines and obligations, which may be indicative of why holders of bookland were entitled to deal directly with the king's officials in matters of fines.<sup>120</sup> Here we can see another step in the reeve's evolution as a royal official. Edward the Elder's code established the reeve as a royal agent who was not only present at hundred court meetings but also ran them. By Æthelred's reign the reeve is identified as *the* royal agent who held the authority to discharge fines related to the tenure of bookland. All of this points toward the reeve developing into a key figure in the localities who played a significant role in the mechanisms of local justice and who also bore the power to act of the king's behalf.

Therefore, again, as with the *portgerefa*, we see the reeve engaged in financial and legal duties; additionally, a reeve's presence at public meetings added the weight of royal authority to any accusations made within those

---

<sup>118</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 218.

"And the king shall be entitled to all the fines which are incurred by men who hold land by title deed, and no-one [of these] shall pay the compensation following upon any charge, unless in the presence of the king's reeve." Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 55.

<sup>119</sup> Pratt, *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great*, 20.

<sup>120</sup> Pratt, *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great*, 20.

meetings. It is clear that since the inception of his office, the reeve had been responsible for various financial and legal administrative duties. The reeve's presence is repeatedly linked with justice (at least by Edward the Elder's time, in the late ninth/early tenth century), often regarding disputes over bookland (*bocland*) or folkland (*folcland*), and it appears that "justice" (*riht*) can only be done in the presence of a reeve. It is possible that we also see emerging here in the laws of Edward and Æthelred a connection between not only the reeve and justice, but perhaps also a connection with land. Both I Æthelred 14 and I Edward 2 mention the reeve as specifically linked with both *bocland* and *folcland*, particularly where justice is concerned.

I Edward 2. Eac we cwædon, hwæs se wyrðe wære þe  
oðrum ryhtes wyrnde aðor oððe on boclande oððe on  
folclande; 7 ðæt he him geandágode of þam folclande,  
hwonne he him riht worhte beforan ðam gerefan.<sup>121</sup>

Bookland was land held under charter, was usually gained in a grant to the holder, and was becoming more common in the later Anglo-Saxon period, as smaller grants of land were given out to royal servants and officials.<sup>122</sup> Folkland was hereditary land held without a charter, and an older concept than bookland.<sup>123</sup> There are numerous dispute records surviving associated with bookland, considering that the holder of the charter was often regarded the owner of the land in question.<sup>124</sup> The clause I Edward 2 occurs in a group that primarily concerns the issues of legitimate transactions and rights to property. What is noteworthy here is that this clause, along with I Æthelred 1 §14 and I

---

<sup>121</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 140.

"Further, we have declared what [penalty] he is liable to, who withholds from another his rights either in 'bookland' or 'folkland.' And with regard to the 'folkland' [we have declared] that he [the plaintiff] shall appoint a day when he [the defendant] shall do him justice in the presence of the reeve." Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 116.

<sup>122</sup> Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship*, 157 – 159.

<sup>123</sup> Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship*, 159 – 161.

<sup>124</sup> Alan Kennedy, "Law and Litigation in the *Libellus Æthelwoldi episcopi*." *Anglo-Saxon England* 24 (1995): 131-183.

Adjudication of bookland and folkland was a very complex matter. More work is required on this issue, in order to determine how the reeve fits into the bigger picture. AG Kennedy, "Disputes about *bocland*: the forum for their adjudication," *Anglo-Saxon England* 14 (1985): 175 – 195, will be instructive here.

Edward 2 depict the reeve as being associated in some manner with issues and disputes arising from landownership. This connection of the reeve with both land and justice that emerges in the later Anglo-Saxon period makes sense in light of a number of factors. First, it has been established that the reeve's first appearance in the evidence was as the *wicgerefa*, or the reeve of the king's estate. Essentially here we have an official whose origins are deeply embedded in the land, its management and its connection with the communities around it and dependent upon it. Second, even from his origins as the king's *wicgerefa*, some of the reeve's role encompassed dealing with both local justice as well as royal matters, and this aspect of the reeve's function has only expanded as the Anglo-Saxon period progressed. Therefore, in looking for a royal agent who could officially handle land-related disputes and fines, the reeve emerges as an ideal choice – he had locally based royal power, as well as a position with deep roots in England's landscape.

S 1457 (980 x 987, Rochester), and its associated Latin charter, S 671 (955, Rochester) are concerned with the settlement of a dispute over the estates of Bromley and Fawkham in Kent.<sup>125</sup> Campbell suggests a later date for S 671, to sometime after Æthelred's ascension as king in 979.<sup>126</sup> Considering that Campbell suggests that this Latin charter in connection with the vernacular S 1457 was intended to buttress Rochester's claim to the estates of Bromley and Fawkham, which is detailed in the lawsuit recorded in S 1457, it is highly likely that S 671 was back-dated to provide it with a stronger element of authenticity and authority. Robertson states that the actual purchase took place in 973.<sup>127</sup> According to S 1457, the title deeds for the estates had initially been given to Rochester by a widow named Æscwyn; subsequently some unlawful priests stole the deeds from the bishop and sold them illegally to Æscwyn's son, Ælfric. Upon the realization that this had occurred, the bishop attempted to claim them

---

<sup>125</sup> A. Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester* (London: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1973), no. 29, 34-36 and Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. LIX, 122-125

<sup>126</sup> Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester*, xxiv – xxv.

<sup>127</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 365.

back.<sup>128</sup> The title deeds were then allocated to Rochester and the bishop at a meeting of the king's thegns in London:

Ða geacsode se biscop þ̅ ða becc forstolene wæron · bæd þara boca ða geornlice · under ðam þa gewátt Ælfric · 7 he bæd ða lafe syððan · oð man gerehte on cinges ðeningmanna gemote ðære stowe 7 ðam biscope ða forstolenan bécc Snodiglandes · 7 bote æt ðære ðyfðe · þ̅ wæs on Lundene · þære wæs se cing Eadgar · 7 se arcebiscop Dunstan · 7 Aðelwold biscop · 7 Ælfstan biscop · 7 oðer Ælfstan · 7 Ælfere ealdorman · 7 fela cynges witenas · 7 man agæf ðá íntó ðære stowe ðam biscope ða bécc.<sup>129</sup>

King Edgar was present, along with Archbishop Dunstan and the king's *witan*, and there the title deeds were handed over to the bishop of Rochester. It is likely that this was a public meeting, since the Old English employed here to indicate the meeting itself is *gemote*, and that numerous high-status individuals were present. The property was then forfeited to the king. Following this, the reeve Wulfstan<sup>130</sup> (*Wulfstan se gerefa*) was supposed to take possession of this property on the king's behalf: "ða wolde Wulfstan se gerefa niman þa are to ðæs cinges handa · Bromleah · 7 Fealcnaham..."<sup>131</sup> Thus S 1457 (980 x 987, Rochester) provides evidence that at least by the late Anglo-Saxon period, one of the responsibilities attributed to the reeve was the authority to seize property (presumably as a result of a dispute settlement or criminal action on the part of the land owner) on

---

<sup>128</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 122-123.

<sup>129</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 122.

"When the bishop discovered that the title-deeds had been stolen, he earnestly demanded the deeds. In the meantime Ælfric died, and he demanded them from the widow, until at a meeting of the king's thegns, the stolen deeds of Snodland were assigned to the foundation and to the bishop, and compensation for the theft. This was at London, and there were present King Edgar and Archbishop Dunstan and Bishop Æthelwold and Bishop Ælfstan and the other Ælfstan and Earl Ælfhere and many of the king's councilors, and the deeds were given to the bishop for the foundation." *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>130</sup> Robertson suggests that this was the same individual as Wulfstan of Dalham (*Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 36-37). *PASE* refers to Wulfstan of Dalham as a *minister* and a counselor, active in the mid-tenth century and mentioned in the *Liber Eliensis* and the *Vita Æthelwoldi*.

<sup>131</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 122.

"When the reeve Wulfstan was about to take possession of the property – Bromley and Fawkham – on the king's behalf..." *Ibid*, 123.

the king's behalf, so that it could then be dealt with as the dispute settlement had determined.

What the text does not tell us is what type of reeve Wulfstan was – that is, whether any reeve of the localities possessed the *gravitas* to undertake such a task, or if this was a duty restricted to the authority of a king's reeve. S 671 is a Latin charter connected with the dispute in the vernacular S 1457. Not only is this document interesting for its attempts to solidify Rochester's claim on the properties, but it also contains an appearance of the reeve Wulfstan, likely the same individual active in S 1457. Wulfstan emerges here in the capacity of receiving the money from the bishop on the king's behalf for the property at Bromley:

Et insuper dona meo prefecto Wulfstano donando auxit .  
xxx . mancusas auri . ut fixa et immobilis permaneat  
sempiternaliter nostra donatio.<sup>132</sup>

It is evident here that Wulfstan acted as the king's agent with regard to fiscal duties and tasks in the localities, as well as property seizure.<sup>133</sup> The evidence from these charters paints the compelling picture that royal reeves bore the authority to act on the king's behalf in the localities, collecting and receiving monies as well as to carry out land seizures.

Since Edward the Elder's law code, ideally, the reeve was required to hold monthly meetings in which disputes could be settled.<sup>134</sup> By the late tenth

---

<sup>132</sup> Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester*, 35.

"In addition he augmented these gifts by giving to the reeve Wulfstan 30 mancusas of gold so that our gift should remain perpetually fixed and unalterable." [my translation; with kind assistance from Dr Christine Williamson]

<sup>133</sup> The above interpretation of the Latin in S 671 (955, Rochester) is based upon a close examination of the Latin text. This contradicts Robertson's interpretation, wherein she takes "meo prefecto Wulfstano" as being an ablative absolute, and proposes that the reeve contributed some of his own funds in order to render the grant unalterable (*Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 366). I suggest that "meo prefecto Wulfstano" is rendered in the dative case, and that this indicates that the reeve was receiving the money, as opposed to giving it to the king on the bishop's behalf. This rendering is supported by both the context of the transaction as well as Campbell's descriptive sub-title, which states that Bishop Ælfstan paid the money for the property to King Edgar and his reeve, Wulfstan (*Charters of Rochester*, 34).

<sup>134</sup> Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066*, 109.

century, during Æthelred the Unready's reign, the sheriff (*scirgerefa*) makes an appearance in the records, who was not only associated with shire courts, but who was also apparently directly linked with and responsible to the king.<sup>135</sup> The *scirgerefa* was also likely responsible for mitigating the power and influence of the local ealdorman or earl.<sup>136</sup> Stafford also argues for the Anglo-Saxon kings' use of royal agents in the localities as a method of not only balancing royal power with that of the nobility, but also of maintaining royal influence in territories around the kingdom.<sup>137</sup>

S 883 (995, Abingdon) is a charter of particular interest in the study of the reeve in late Anglo-Saxon England. This charter provides evidence not only of two reeves working together, but also of a clash in the localities between a reeve and an ealdorman. The charter records a grant of five hides in Oxfordshire by Æthelred II to Æthelwig, *miles*, who is also referenced as a king's reeve further on in the text. This charter also deals with the circumstances behind the grant. Three brothers had owned the land, two of these brothers were killed in the defense of one of their men who had stolen a bridle, and the third brother fled. Æthelwig, reeve of Buckingham and Wynsige, reeve of Oxford, provided the dead brothers a Christian burial. Ealdorman Leofsige of Essex expressed his disapproval of this to the king, but Æthelred did not reprimand the reeves and in the end granted Æthelwig the brothers' former estate at Ardley in Oxfordshire. S 883 is noteworthy for a variety of reasons. First, Æthelwig is referred to as a *miles* when he is given the land grant, but later on in the text he is called: "Apeluuig meus prepositus in Bucingaham"<sup>138</sup> – very clearly a king's reeve. Thus

---

<sup>135</sup> Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066*, 109.

<sup>136</sup> Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066*, 109. See also Baxter's *Earls of Mercia* for more information on the relationship between earls and ealdormen and other royal agents.

<sup>137</sup> Pauline Stafford, "King and Kin, Lord and Community: England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *Gender, Family and the Legitimation of Power: England from the Ninth to Early Twelfth Century*, ed. Pauline Stafford (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 8, 11-12, 18. Additionally, it is likely that this is where the reeve's association with (the settlement of disputes/authorization of) bookland would come in extremely handy (Els Schröder, pers. comm., September 19<sup>th</sup> 2013).

<sup>138</sup> Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, no. 125, 483.

it seems clear that in some cases a reeve could also be a thegn. Furthermore, from the description, it is clear that the shire two reeves were working together:

Circummanentibus uero hec eadem audientibus,  
Apeluuig meus prepositus in Bucingaham et Þinsige  
prepositus 'on' Oxonaforda inter Christianos predictos  
sepelierunt fratres.<sup>139</sup>

This thus seems to indicate that king's reeves or shire reeves from different districts would sometimes work together – injunctions calling for this can also be seen in the law codes, wherein reeves were supposed to work together across borders of their districts if in pursuit of a thief. Kelly and Blair suggest that these men were acting in the capacity of shire reeves as opposed to town reeves.<sup>140</sup> The Latin text lends support to this suggestion, since the term “prepositus ciuitatis” is not utilized anywhere in this text.

Finally, perhaps the most significant element here is that when Ealdorman Leofsig of Essex<sup>141</sup> objected personally to the king, of the actions of the two reeves (namely, their Christian burial of two wrongdoers), the king not only defended his reeves as opposed to the ealdorman, but he ultimately granted Æthelwig the land forfeited by the three brothers. This provides an example of the king supporting his officials against one of the secular powers in the localities. Furthermore, the affectionate language in this passage is quite striking, with the king using the language of affection to reflect upon a precarious tie based on pure authority over a relationship based on a negotiation of power and honor.<sup>142</sup> This perhaps might be some indication towards how valuable as royal agents reeves might have become by this period.

Although in this case Æthelred supported his reeves' choice and action in giving the dead brothers a Christian burial, in Anglo-Saxon England there were

---

<sup>139</sup> Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, no. 125, 484.

“But when the people heard of these things, Æthelwig, my reeve in Buckingham, and Wynsige, the reeve in Oxford, gave the aforesaid brothers Christian burial.” Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents, Volume I c. 500-1042*, 525.

<sup>140</sup> Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, 488 and Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 104.

<sup>141</sup> This is the same Ealdorman Leofsig who appears in S 926; discussed in Chapter Two below.

<sup>142</sup> Els Schröder, “Friendship and Favour in Late Anglo-Saxon Élite Culture: A Study of Documentary and Narrative Sources, c. 900-1016” (PhD thesis, University of York, 2012), 113.

established “deviant” burial customs, even in the pre-Christian period, with deviant burial practices evident in the landscape as early as the seventh century.<sup>143</sup> Andrew Reynolds highlights numerous Anglo-Saxon Christian burial sites which appear to exclude social deviants in some manner. Reynolds has identified 27 execution cemeteries, containing 797 burials.<sup>144</sup> These “deviants” are identified as such through the physical placement of the remains (such as tied hands, head removed and missing or displaced body parts in some cases), as well as their separation from “normal” Christian burial areas.<sup>145</sup> The law codes incorporate numerous clauses prohibiting burial in consecrated ground for a variety of offenses.<sup>146</sup> These specialized deviant burial practices offer compelling evidence for the efficacy of law and judicial practices in late Anglo-Saxon England’s localities. This indicates that Ealdorman Leofsige was likely in the right, in his objection to the shire reeves’ Christian burial of the brothers. This perhaps further emphasizes the significance of Æthelred’s support of his reeves as opposed to the ealdorman, who apparently had the law on his side. Finally, the reeves’ actions in this charter suggests that the responsibility of disposing of the bodies of deviants in late Anglo-Saxon England fell to reeves, in their capacity as the judicial officials in the localities.

The final reference to the reeve in the laws of Alfred also concerns public meetings, though in this instance, it places the reeve in more of a judicial role:

Alfred 34. Eac is cypemannum gereht: ða men þe hy up mid heom lædan, gebringe beforan cyninges gerefan on folcgemote, 7 gerecce hu monige ðæra syn; 7 hy nimen ða men up mid him þe hy magon eft to folcgemote to ryhte bringan; 7 þonne him þearf sy ma

---

<sup>143</sup> Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44, 45, 96 – 179 and 201 – 202.

<sup>144</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, 97.

<sup>145</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, 37 – 40.

Of course Reynolds does acknowledge that the evidence can be difficult to interpret, particularly depending upon who buried the individual, citing the difference made through burial by “friend or foe”. For example, it is likely that archaeologists would never identify the burial of the two brothers by the shire reeves of S 883 as “deviants,” since the reeves provided the men a Christian burial.

<sup>146</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, “Appendix 1: A handlist of Anglo-Saxon law-codes prescribing capital punishment, mutilation and burial in unconsecrated ground,” 256, 257, 258 and 260.

manna up mid him to habbanne to heora fore, gecyðe  
simle, swa oft swa him ðearf sy, syn gemotes  
gewitnesse cyninges gerefan.<sup>147</sup>

It is clear that public meetings had numerous functions. Alfred 34 highlights the Anglo-Saxon suspicion of strangers and foreigners. This concern regarding unknown persons is not new and can be noted in a number of early law codes, such as Hlothhere and Eadric 15, Wihtried 4 and Ine 20.<sup>148</sup> Alfred 34 indicates that public meetings seemed to function as a space where foreigners in a particular district could be accounted for, with particular members of the hundred being made accountable for these men. The early clauses pertaining to foreigners highlight a particular concern with the possibility of the association of unknown persons with violence. With the development of public meetings and the role of the reeve as the official convener of the proceedings, a method of dealing with these unfamiliar individuals and their perceived threat is established. Here the Old English term employed to denote “public meeting” is *folcgemote*, which literally means, “meeting of the people of a town or district.” The *folcgemote* was also associated with *folcrist*, literally “the right of the people,” or “common law.” This suggests that these were local meetings, which were held for the benefit of the people in a specific district.<sup>149</sup> However, it is important to bear in mind that *folc* is a complicated term, occurring on over

---

<sup>147</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 68.

“Further, with regard to traders, it is decreed: they shall bring before the king’s reeve, at a public meeting, the men they are taking with them up into the country, and declare how many of them there are; and they shall take with them [only] such men as they can bring to justice again, at a public meeting. And when they need to have more men with them on their journey, a similar declaration shall always be made to the king’s reeve, before the assembled company, as often as need arises.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 78.

<sup>148</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 11, 12 and 98. See also Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 21, 25 and 43.

<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, there is an Old English word, *folcgerefa*, which means “public officer.” This appears to me to explicitly, through the use and inclusion of the term *gerefa*, in the compound, to link the reeve with public meetings, and “the people.” The *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* shows that this term appears in the Latin-Old English Glossaries: Kindshi, 1955 42-105; the Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS 32 and British Museum MS. Additional 32246’.

5300 occasions within the Old English Corpus.<sup>150</sup> *Folc* tends to be rendered as “people,” or “the common people,” but it can also be taken to mean “family,” “tribe” or “nation.”<sup>151</sup> *Folc* also occurs in a number of compounds, such as we see with the terms *folcgemote*, *folcrist* and *folcgerefa*, among others. This suggests that *folc* was not just a simple term used to designate “people,” and that it was laden with layers of meaning, many of them with legal connotations. For example, Pratt suggests that *folcrist* indicates “commonly accepted practices of justice.”<sup>152</sup>

Alfred 34 discusses traders specifically, reinforcing the reeve’s connection with towns, trade and transactions. This clause again is significant in its implication that a king’s reeve was expected to attend public meetings. There is a parallel here, with trade regulations imposed on foreign merchants in English ports, as noted by Middleton.<sup>153</sup> The merchants were required to inform the sheriff (*scirgerefa*) of their lodgings and could only remain in the port for a maximum of forty days.<sup>154</sup> This too seems to echo the earlier Anglo-Saxon suspicion of foreigners. This ruling of Alfred’s laws not only again confirms that public meetings officially should have a reeve present, but also that the reeve was by the late ninth century beginning to bear responsibilities for maintaining justice and peace. These are duties with which the reeve will remain intimately connected for the remainder of the Anglo-Saxon period.

In order to build further upon the picture of the reeve presented in the Old English law codes, it is necessary to consider Edward’s ordinances regarding peoples’ rights. In two clauses, Edward contributes significantly to the development of the role of the reeve in late Anglo-Saxon England; these are functions that the reeve subsequently appears to shoulder for the remainder of the period. Both of these laws, I Edward 2 and II Edward 2, indicate that the

---

<sup>150</sup> *Old English Corpus*: <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus/oec-idx?index=Fragmentary&type=simple&q1=folc&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100>

<sup>151</sup> *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, “Folc.” <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/011073>

<sup>152</sup> Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, 217.

<sup>153</sup> Middleton, “Early medieval port customs, tolls and controls on foreign trade,” 336 – 338.

<sup>154</sup> Middleton, “Early medieval port customs, tolls and controls on foreign trade,” 336.

reeve was now responsible for the protection of men's rights. I Edward 2 has been considered above, and indicates the reeve's connection with property and accordingly, with any dispute settlements that should arise in that connection. Here specifically, it appears that the reeve is formally charged with concern for *folcricht*, that is, the "right of the people" according to common law.

II Edward 2. 7 gif hit se gerefa ne amanige mid rihte on  
ðara manna gewitnesse, ðe him to gewitnesse getealde  
syndon, þonne bete mine oferhyrnesse mid CXX scll'.<sup>155</sup>

The fine that the reeve is required to enforce here is that which is imposed upon those who "withholds from another his rights."<sup>156</sup> What is significant here is perhaps the fact that the reeve is involved in overseeing and ensuring the protection of men's *rights* and is responsible for ensuring the associated pursuit of justice. This clause may also offer further indication that the reeve was answerable to the king and subject to his authority, in a subordinate position. This presents itself as a theme in the subsequent laws relating to the reeve. It is also clear here that due to the large fine, the reeve was expected to take this duty seriously. Additionally, here, the reeve is allocated the task of enforcing and collecting fines, though these too are concerned with preservation of rights and justice. II Edward 2 above references compensation due in the event that a man withholds from another his rights (1 §2, §3), though the violated 'rights' in particular are not specified.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, it is now possible to envision a picture emerging of the reeve as a figure who not only bore fiscal responsibilities (particularly when installed within a town), but also whose duty it was to ensure that the rights of the people were observed and maintained. This recalls us to the previously discussed coronation promise of the Anglo-Saxon kings, as well as the

---

<sup>155</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 142.

"And if the reeve does not exact it [the fine] in accordance with the law, and in the presence of men who have been assigned to him as witnesses, he shall pay 120 shillings compensation for insubordination to me." Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 119.

<sup>156</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 142. See also Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 118. II Edward 2.

<sup>157</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 142. Also: Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 119.

ideological nature of the law codes. The kings of Anglo-Saxon England desired to be seen as good Christian rulers: this can be seen not only in Alfred's attempts to instill wisdom and the tradition of just judgment in his officials, but also in Æthelstan's very active devotion to and patronage of the church.<sup>158</sup> Accordingly, part of their coronation oath committed them to ensure the protection of the rights of the people: arguably some of the functions of the reeve we see developing in the laws were instituted in order to fulfill that promise.<sup>159</sup>

Æthelstan appears to have been responsible for this addition to the corpus of laws, and includes a number of clauses addressing the matter. The reeve was the official whose responsibility it was to place questionable men in his district under surety, as well as to nominate suitable witnesses as necessary.<sup>160</sup> Stephen Baxter argues that few historians have deliberated on the problem of how and through what medium the late Anglo-Saxon state would have "mediated its power," though he does allow that scholars have started to consider the possibility and implications of power being arbitrated through appointed individuals acting in the localities.<sup>161</sup> The fact that in some instances this individual might have been the reeve has been shown to some degree in the discussion of the reeve's responsibility for the rights and recourse to justice of those in his district. However, Æthelstan's (and subsequent) clauses pertaining to surety further develop the reeve as an official contracted to maintain peace and justice. Evidence for this being the case can be seen in VI Æthelstan 8 §2.: In the event that the rights of the hundred-groups are infringed upon, the reeve is required to take action on their behalf:

---

<sup>158</sup> Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 94 – 95, 117 – 119 and 126.

<sup>159</sup> Pauline Stafford states that the Anglo-Saxon kings "ruled as their Christian followers expected and in accordance with tradition" (135). She also states that: "In the lengthy preface to his laws, Alfred quoted extensively from the Old Testament. Its picture of the king as judge ordering human society so that it might please an interventionist God was an ideal model for a late ninth-century king" (134).

Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1989).

<sup>160</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 170 and 168. Also: Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 145 and 155. III Æthelstan 7 §1 and V Æthelstan 1 §5.

<sup>161</sup> Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, 10, 11 and 61.

7 gif þonne þæt gebyrige, þæt ænig mægð to þan strang sy and to þam mycel, innon landes oðða uton landes, XII hynde oððe twyhynde, þæt us ures rihtes wyrnen 7 þone þeof foren forstande, þæt we rídan be eallum mannum tó mid þam gerefan þe hit on his mónunge sy.<sup>162</sup>

VI Æthelstan 8 §2 and its surrounding clauses are concerned with the localities and the instances in which nobles become too powerful and protect thieves. VI Æthelstan 8 in particular demonstrates that the officials of the hundred will ride out against these nobles, taking with them the reeve of their district, which suggests, due to the pursuit of the thief and his protector, that reeves bore judicial responsibility for the districts to which they were assigned. Additionally, Æthelstan also required that reeves in neighboring districts were to give each other aid in pursuit of thieves, no matter in which territory the offense initially takes place. This points towards reeves having assigned areas of jurisdiction, over which they were expected to preside. The reeve in this situation appears to have been acting as a representative of royal power, whose presence was perhaps hoped to be sufficient to mitigate the threat to local peace. Furthermore, the above clause represents early evidence of the reeve acting as the king's arm in the localities, representing royal interests and mitigating the power of local noblemen.

Dispute settlements are important examples of the Anglo-Saxon law in action – as well as, occasionally, the activity of the reeve. Despite their importance, these documents have received comparatively little attention within the body of evidence for Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>163</sup> In order to attempt to rectify this and to bring dispute settlements forward as key pieces of evidence, Wormald

---

<sup>162</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 178.

“Again, if it happens that any group of kinsmen – whether nobles or commoners within or beyond the borders of our district – become so strong and powerful as to prevent us from exercising our legal rights, and stand up in defence of a thief, we shall ride out against them in full force with the reeve in whose district the offence takes place.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 163.

<sup>163</sup> Patrick Wormald, “Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 149.

has developed a definitive “handlist” of Anglo-Saxon lawsuits.<sup>164</sup> His criterion for inclusion was that a case needed to display “some degree of formal judicial procedure.”<sup>165</sup> He also cautions that the majority of surviving Anglo-Saxon lawsuits were recorded by and for the successful party, likely producing a biased account of events.<sup>166</sup> It is possible that the lack of attention to this material is partially due to the fact that it is not known what is “typical” for a source of this nature.<sup>167</sup> One difficult element in dealing with these sources is that we cannot be sure whether they represent unusual activity, or indeed “more mundane circumstances”; aristocratic feuding is another element with an unknown role in these documents and the pursuit of justice.<sup>168</sup> It seems that the majority of Anglo-Saxon legal disputes were heard before and settled in shire courts.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, he asserts that these local courts were royal courts, an assessment supported by the prescriptions of the Anglo-Saxon law codes, particularly from the ninth century onwards.<sup>170</sup> These disputes generally revolved around ownership of land; possession of the charter regarding an estate was a more important factor than having the information in the charter altered to reflect current ownership.<sup>171</sup> Charters appear to have been regarded as “symbolic proof” of ownership.<sup>172</sup>

There are a few late Anglo-Saxon charters dealing with dispute settlements, which include the reeve in some capacity. These are: S 1457 (980 x

---

<sup>164</sup> Patrick Wormald, “A handlist of Anglo-Saxon lawsuits,” in *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988), 247-281.

<sup>165</sup> Wormald, “A handlist of Anglo-Saxon lawsuits,” 250.

<sup>166</sup> Wormald, “A handlist of Anglo-Saxon lawsuits,” 277.

<sup>167</sup> Wormald, “Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England,” 152.

<sup>168</sup> Wormald, “Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England,” 152.

<sup>169</sup> Wormald, “Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England,” 162.

<sup>170</sup> It is clear from a number of Anglo-Saxon law codes that local courts were royally regulated to some extent. This is evident in clauses such: Alfred 22 (Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 34 and Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 75) and those of Edward the Elder (Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 144 and Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 121). Wormald, “Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England,” 162.

<sup>171</sup> Kelly, “Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word,” 45.

<sup>172</sup> Kelly, “Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word,” 46.

987, Rochester),<sup>173</sup> S 1454 (990 x 992, Canterbury, Christ Church),<sup>174</sup> S 1456 (995 x 1005, Rochester),<sup>175</sup> S 918 (1008, Abingdon)<sup>176</sup> and S 926 (1012, Rochester).<sup>177</sup> The first three of these documents are in Old English while S 918 and S 926 are in Latin; all of these concern disputes over the ownership of land.

S 1454 (990 x 992, Canterbury, Christ Church) contains the record of a lawsuit between two individuals named Wynflæd and Leofwine.<sup>178</sup> S 1454 also provides an example of a king's reeve taking possession of lands. Whether this was with legitimate permission is up for debate, but it will be shown that Ælfgar, the king's reeve, was acting in this instance with the king's authority. This lawsuit centers upon the dispute over who rightfully possessed the estates at Hagbourne and Bradfield. Wynflæd was able to produce a substantial number of high-ranking witnesses to attest to her rightful ownership of the two estates, which she reportedly was given by Ælfric in return for an estate at Datchet. These witnesses were brought before Æthelred II at Woolmer (*Wulfamere*) in Hampshire. This was the location of royal grants recorded in S 350 (898, Canterbury, Christ Church), S 779 (970, Ely) and S 776 (970, Ely), and in the last two charters *Wulfamere* appears as a royal manor.<sup>179</sup> Thus it is likely that this *Wulfamere* was one of the king's residences by the late tenth century, and one of the locations at which one could assert a claim. In the ninth century, many royal charters were issued at royal estates, where meetings of the king and his councilors took place.<sup>180</sup>

Leofwine was summoned by the king to contest this claim and produce his own witnesses. What is noteworthy about the proceedings of this lawsuit is that

---

<sup>173</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. LIX, 122-125; and Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester*, no. 36, 53-54.

<sup>174</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. LXVI, 136-139.

<sup>175</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. LXIX, 140-143.

<sup>176</sup> Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, no. 135, 526-528.

<sup>177</sup> Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester*, no. 33, 45-47 and FM Stenton, *The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), 79-81.

<sup>178</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. LXVI, 136-139.

<sup>179</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 380.

<sup>180</sup> Keynes, "The West Saxon Charters of King Æthelwulf and his Sons," 1109.

after being summoned, Leofwine requested that the suit be handled in a shire meeting:

þa sende se cyning þær rihte be þam arcebiscope · be þam þe þær mid him to gewitnesse wæron to Leofwine 7 cyþdon him þis · þa nolde he butan hit man scoete to *scirgemote* [my italics].<sup>181</sup>

This meeting was held at Cuckamsley (*Cwicelmeshlæwe*) in Berkshire, a place noted in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 1006 as a stopping-point for the viking army.<sup>182</sup> This provides a practical example of prescriptions in the Anglo-Saxon law codes being observed. Numerous law codes incorporate clauses regulating public meetings in the localities, and it is clear from these clauses that the public meeting in Anglo-Saxon England was an official forum in which grievances could be expressed, and was also an arena in which the witnessing of accusations and settlement of disputes could take place. There are no instances in which it is claimed that specific clauses from the law codes are being observed, but it is clear from dispute records that people were aware of them.<sup>183</sup> S 1454 offers some practical evidence that not only were public meetings utilized in the manner in which the laws prescribed, but also that laymen were aware of their right (*folcrist*) of recourse to this official forum, a place where one could perhaps more reliably obtain justice. It is also noteworthy that the king did not attend this shire meeting (*scirgemote*) – though he did send his seal – and that the first witness listed in the body of the document was Ælfgar, the king’s reeve (*cyninges gerefa*). Wormald argues for the king’s interests as having had representation at judicial proceedings – this was most likely achieved through the presence of the

---

<sup>181</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. LXVI, 136.

“Then the king sent straightaway to Leofwine by the archbishop and those who had acted as witnesses along with him, and informed him of this, but he would not [agree], unless the matter were referred to a *shire-meeting* [my italics].” *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>182</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 88 [C (D, E)]. See also: Swanton, ed., trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 124-57 [C-F].

<sup>183</sup> Wormald, “Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England,” 163.

reeve.<sup>184</sup> It is already clear from the Anglo-Saxon law codes that the reeve bore a significant amount of judicial and fiscal authority, particularly visible in public meetings and through the activities of port reeves in towns. S 1454 (990 x 992, Canterbury, Christ Church), points strongly toward the king's reeve bearing official royal authority as a royal representative in the king's absence. Additionally, if *Wulfamere* was indeed a royal manor, as the charters suggest, then it is possible that as a royal reeve Ælfgar was based there. At the very least, this royal official's witnessing of the dispute settlement would have carried some formal significance.<sup>185</sup>

The next lawsuit involving a reeve in its record also falls during the reign of Æthelred. S 1456 (995 x 1006, Rochester) concerns a lawsuit about the estate of Snodland, in Kent.<sup>186</sup> This document pertains to a dispute between the bishop of Rochester and a layman by the name of Leofwine, over an estate in Kent. The new bishop of Rochester discovered some deeds for estates that were supposed to belong to the foundation. Accordingly, he began making a claim for Rochester's ownership, which resulted in the matter being handled at a meeting in Canterbury among numerous leading men in Kent. When the dispute was settled, "Æþelred portgerefa on byrig" was one of the witnesses named in the body of the document as having been present at the settlement, which was conducted in Canterbury, during a meeting which included not only the archbishop, the bishop and the sheriff, but also all of the leading men of Kent:

þa þ wæs þ se bisceop Godwine com to Cantwarabyrig to  
ðam arcebiscope · þa com ðider se scyresman Leofric · 7

---

<sup>184</sup> Wormald, "Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England," 163.

<sup>185</sup> Additionally, Robertson suggests that one of the witnesses, *Æfic*, *þara æþelinga discþen*, which she renders "the Æthelings' seneschal," was possibly to be identified with Æfic, the king's reeve who was murdered in 1002 (*Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 381). *Discþen* or *discþen*, denotes a minister or servant. Since the manner in which reeves were appointed to office is still uncertain, it is a possibility that a minister (particularly of the administrative type) within the king's household could advance to the position of "king's reeve." Though it is clear in S 926 (1012, Rochester) that Æfic, as king's reeve was a highly ranked and valued official of the king, by 1002 at the latest (to be discussed below).

<sup>186</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. LXIX, 140-143 and Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester*, no. 37, 54-55.

mid him Ælfun abb · 7 þegenas ægþer ge oft East Cent ge  
of West Cent · eal seo duguð ·<sup>187</sup>

It is likely that the reference “portgerefa on byrig” denotes that this Æthelred was the town reeve of Canterbury, due to the fact that Canterbury was the city in which the dispute was settled.<sup>188</sup> It is also worth considering whether the wording here might indicate that the meeting was held within the cathedral precinct, since the text states that Bishop Godwine went to the Archbishop of Canterbury and that the other men went there as well. Furthermore, the presence of Leofric the *scyresman* is worth considering. This individual does not appear elsewhere in the sources.<sup>189</sup> It seems safe to assume, given the presence of the archbishop, the bishop, and the leading men of Kent, that Leofric was the shire reeve of Kent, attending the meeting as its representative. It is difficult to ascertain here whether Leofric held more or less “official” power than Æthelred – both men act as witnesses – but he is certainly given a more prominent position in the proceedings. The fact that the port reeve and the shire reeve were listed as having been witnesses present in an official capacity at the settlement, along with the fact that Leofric was clearly involved in the negotiations of the case, lends support to the implications of the law codes, that the reeve was an important judicial and fiscal official, whose presence would have been an essential element in dispute settlements and financial transactions.<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 140.

“The next stage was that Bishop Godwine came to Canterbury to the Archbishop, and thither came [also] Leofric the sheriff and with him Abbot Ælfhun and the thegns both of East Kent and West Kent – all the leading men – and there they dealt with the suit...” *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>188</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 385.

<sup>189</sup> Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 384. The *Old English Corpus* only records one instance for the appearance of *scyresman/sciresman*, in S 1457 (above). A search for *scirman* reveals appearances in four sources: the *Gerefa* text, *Episcopus*, S 985 (1017 x 1020, Canterbury, Christ Church) and in the *Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS 32* and British Museum MS Additional 32246. Both *scirman* and *scirgerefa* appear to have developed later in the Anglo-Saxon period.

It is clear from the context, as well as other appearances of the word, that *scyresman* most likely denotes a reeve or bailiff associated with a district. However, considering the term’s relative infrequency in the Old English corpus as well as the existence of the more definitive *scirgerefa*, which specifically denotes a reeve attached to a shire, suggests that *scyresman* is probably a variant of *scirgerefa*, and indicates the reeve of the shire.

<sup>190</sup> For two examples of a royal reeve seizing lands (likely the same individual, a royal reeve under Æthelred by the name of Ælfgar), please see S 918 (1008, Abingdon) and S 1454 (990 x 992,

Finally, Wormald raises the interesting and important question as to who actually passed and enforced the judgments in the case of these dispute settlements.<sup>191</sup> He argues that the Anglo-Saxon law codes would not include numerous prescriptions regarding the responsibilities of the reeve, unless this official played a role in the outcome of the settlements.<sup>192</sup> It is clear from a consideration of the instances in which the reeve appears in the Anglo-Saxon dispute settlements, that the reeve was an important royal agent, particularly in terms of his activities in the localities. The lawsuit evidence presents us with a royal official whose sphere of office was firmly associated with the localities in late Anglo-Saxon England. It is clear that these reeves were in the first instance responsible to the king, since they tend to be referred to as *meus prepositus*, and are repeatedly depicted acting in the royal interests. These charters portray the reeve collecting payments for land in the king's name, as can be seen with Wulfstan in S 671; seizing forfeited lands on the king's behalf clear in the actions of Wulfstan in S 1457; acting as the king's official representative in public meetings, as indicated by Ælfgar in S 1454; and finally as a highly valued and prominent official of the king, as illustrated by the descriptions of Æfic offered in S 926. It is clear that the reeve was a royal agent imbued with the force of the king's authority, who operated in a judicial and fiscal capacity in the localities.<sup>193</sup>

Judicial and security matters were arbitrated over in the shire courts, whose meetings were regulated by the tenth century in Edgar's legislation.<sup>194</sup> Æthelstan takes his official requirements for surety further in VI Æthelstan 10,

---

Canterbury, Christ Church); respectively Kelly no. 135 and Robertson no. LXVI. A further example of a royal reeve taking possession of lands on the king's behalf can be found in S 1457 (980 x 987, Rochester); Campbell no. 36 and Robertson no. LIX. However in this case the reeve's action on behalf of the king appears to have been legitimate.

<sup>191</sup> Wormald, "Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England," 163.

<sup>192</sup> Wormald, "Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England," 164.

<sup>193</sup> It is noteworthy that all of the charters discussed under "Dispute Settlements" are dated to the reign of Æthelred II. Is it possible that there was an increase in the reliance upon royal reeves as administrative agents in the face of a weak reign? It would be instructive to examine the activities of other royal officials, perhaps particularly of ealdormen, in comparison with the royal reeves in the period. It is possible that reeves were less expensive to maintain and easier to control, and therefore Æthelred began to rely more heavily upon their administrative activities in the governance of his kingdom.

<sup>194</sup> Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066*, 88.

wherein he instructs that each reeve is responsible for obtaining a pledge to observe public security from all of those within his shire.<sup>195</sup> Considering further the effort in the law codes for the maintenance of peace and public security, Æthelred, in III Æthelred 1 §1 delegates the king's reeve with the power to establish a "peace," the disruption of which carried a large fine.<sup>196</sup> This further demonstrates that the reeve was envisaged as the king's arm in the localities – he was responsible for maintaining the king's peace, which had been established early in the period as being something being almost akin to sacrosanct. Cnut also promulgated laws regarding peace and public security. One of these was II Cnut 33, which dealt with "untrustworthy men," and again depicts the reeve in the light of an official whose duty it was to protect public interests. In the event that an individual aroused suspicion, the king's reeve was authorized to place him under surety in order that the charge could be investigated.<sup>197</sup> Again, it cannot be emphasized enough that the reeve appears to have been essentially the face of royal power in England's local districts – this was arguably key in maintaining royal authority and its balance in late Anglo-Saxon England. Thus it is clear that by the tenth and eleventh centuries, reeves tended to be the officials in charge of carrying out judicial proceedings in the localities. Although there are no extant legal proceedings in which a legal clause is specifically cited, charter and documentary evidence strongly indicates that the prescriptions laid down by the law codes were followed in local judicial proceedings.

---

<sup>195</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 181 – 182. Also: Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 167.

<sup>196</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 228. See also: Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 65.

<sup>197</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 336. Additionally: Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 193.

## *Reeves and the church*

It is evident from the law codes that there was a connection between reeves and the church, at least since the reign of Æthelstan. It is likely that the reeve was envisaged as aiding and supporting the church on behalf of the king and the secular administration in partial fulfillment of the coronation oath. We see in Æthelstan's laws that the reeve – presumably the reeves of the boroughs<sup>198</sup> – was expected to aid the church and ensure that dues and tithes were paid and alms were rendered:

I Æthelstan: Ic Æþelstan cyng, mid geþehte Wulfhelmes arce**bis**copas 7 eac minra oþerra biscopas, cyþe þam gerefan to gehwylcere byrig 7 eow bidde on Godes naman 7 on ealra his haligra 7 eac be minum freondscipe beode, þæt ge ærest of minum agenum góde agyfan þa teoþunga, ægþer ge on cwicum ceape ge on þæs gearas eorðwæstmum, swa man rihtast mæge oððe getellan oððe awegan; 7 þa biscopas þonne þæt ylce don on heora agenum gode, 7 mine ealdormen 7 mine gerefan þæt sylfe.<sup>199</sup>

I Æthelstan 4. 7 ic wille eac, þæt mine gerefan gedon, þæt man agyfe þa cyricsceattas 7 þa sawlsceattas to þam stowum þe hit mid rihte togebyrige 7 sulhælmessan on geara, on þa gerad þæt þa his brucan æt þam haligan stowan, þe heora cyrcan begán willað 7 to Gode 7 to me gearnian willað. Se ðe þonne nelle, þolige þære are oððe eft to rihte gecyrre.<sup>200</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> *Byrig* can either be taken to mean “borough” as Attenborough has rendered it in MnE, or it can also mean “walled town,” thus suggesting that this was perhaps an injunction to *portgerefan*.

<sup>199</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 146.

“Æthelstan's Ordinance. I, King Æthelstan, with the advice of my Archbishop, Wulfhelm, and my other bishops also, inform the reeve in every borough, and pray you in the name of God and of all His saints, and command you also by my friendship, that in the first place ye render tithes of my own property, both in livestock and in the yearly fruits of the earth, measuring, counting and weighing [them] in accordance with the strictest accuracy. And the bishops shall do the same with their own property, and my ealdormen and my reeves likewise.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 123.

<sup>200</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 146.

“And I further desire that my reeves see to it that church dues and payments for the souls of the dead are rendered at the places to which they are legally due, and that ‘plough alms’ [are rendered] yearly – on the understanding that all these payments shall be used at the holy places by those who are willing to attend to their churches, and wish to gain the favour of God and me.

I Æthelstan has an ecclesiastical tone throughout, with its principal concerns revolving around tithes and alms. It is also evident, in both the opening and clause five, that there was a concern regarding rightful and accurate collection from the properties of both the king and his officials. However, the term *sulhælmessan*, or “plough-alms,”<sup>201</sup> occurs in this form on eleven occasions in the Old English Corpus: in the homilies of Wulfstan, Wulfstan’s *Canons of Edgar*, and in the laws of Æthelstan, Edmund and Æthelred.<sup>202</sup> It is possible that all occurrences of this term may be attributed to Wulfstan’s work: Wulfstan himself authored the homilies, the *Canons of Edgar* and the laws of Æthelred. Additionally, Wormald suspects that Wulfstan imposed his own edits upon the laws of both Edmund and Æthelstan, particularly attributing the use of “plough-alms,” which he notes does not occur in *Quadripartitus*, to the archbishop.<sup>203</sup> Dorothy Whitelock also comments upon Wulfstan’s tendency to add to earlier work by others, remarking that he tended to add favored words and “set phrases” into other works.<sup>204</sup> Wulfstan was a powerful and influential ecclesiastic who drafted legislation for two Anglo-Saxon kings and whose work often saw a connection between God and the law.<sup>205</sup>

Although the reeve can be seen in the legislation of Æthelstan to not only be attached to towns, as previously noted, but also enforcing church tithes and alms, the ecclesiastical element was not necessarily a new development during Æthelstan’s reign, since it is likely that the stipulation regarding plough-alms was a later Wulfstan intrusion. The reeve was in some instances a secular arm deployed to enforce the laws and rights of the church, as well as to ensure that

---

He who is not willing [to attend to his church] shall either forfeit his benefice or revert to a proper discharge of his duties.” Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 125.

<sup>201</sup> Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, “sulhælmessan.” <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/029301>

<sup>202</sup> Old English Corpus, “sulhælmessan,” <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus/oec-idx?index=Fragmentary&type=simple&q1=sulhAlmessan&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100>

<sup>203</sup> Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 295, 308.

<sup>204</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (London: Methuen & Co, Ltd., 1939, 1952), 18.

<sup>205</sup> Simon Keynes, “An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 171-2. And Patrick Wormald, “Æthelred the Lawmaker,” in *Æthelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, edited by David Hill (Oxford: BAR British Series, 1978), 57, 58.

alms were properly collected. Edgar has a clause relating to tithes: it is likely that this marks the true beginning of the royal reeve's connection with and support of the church. In II Edgar 3 §1, he states that the bishop's reeve and the king's reeve were responsible for enforcing the payment of tithes.<sup>206</sup> In the event that these payments were not rendered, these reeves possessed the authority to go and take the offender's money without permission to account for the missed payment.<sup>207</sup> This clause demonstrates that not only were the two reeves royally authorized to take the money should it not be rendered on time, but also that they were expected to work together. Instructive here also is the fact that a bishop could have a reeve; though "reeve" in these instances appears to denote an administrative and representative official bearing authority on behalf of his lord. It is clear that bishops had reeves in their service since at least the late seventh century, when we see that St Wilfrid retained the services of a reeve named Hocca.<sup>208</sup> It seems, from clauses such as II Edgar 3.1, VIII Æthelred 8 and I Cnut 8.2<sup>209</sup> that the bishop's reeve (*biscope's gerefa*) was indeed imbued with the power to enforce payments due to the church, alongside the king's reeve:

II Edgar 3.1. 7 gyf hwa þonne ða teoðunge gelæstan nelle, swa we gecweden habbað, fare þæs cynges gerefa tó 7 þæs biscope's 7 þæs mynstres mæssepreost, 7 niman unþances þæne teoðan dæl to þam mynstre, þe hit togebyrige, 7 tæcan him to ðam nigeðan dæle; 7 todæle man þa eahta dælas on twá, 7 fó se landhlaford to ealfan, to ealfan se *biscop*, sy hit cyninges man sy hit þegnes.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>206</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 196. Also: Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 21, 23.

<sup>207</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 196. And: Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 21, 23.

<sup>208</sup> Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500 – 1066*, 51; and Bertram Colgrave, trans. *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), Chapter 18.

<sup>209</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 196, 265 and 292. See also: Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 21, 121 and 165. The laws of Cnut are in general, a restatement of earlier Anglo-Saxon laws.

<sup>210</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 196 and 198.

"If, however, anyone refuses to render tithes in accordance with what we have decreed, the king's reeve, and the bishop's reeve, and the priest of the church shall go to him, and, without his consent, shall take the tenth part for the church to which it is due, and the next tenth shall be allotted to him, and the eight [remaining] parts shall be divided in two, and the lord of the manor

VIII Æthelred 8. Ðæt is: Gif hwa teoþunge rihtlice gelæstan nelle, þonne fare tó þæs cyninges gerefa 7 þæs mynstres mæssepreost – oððe þæs landrican 7 þæs biscofes gerefa – 7 niman unþances ðone teoðan dæl to ðam mynstre, þe hit to gebirige, 7 tæcan him to ðam nigoðan dæle; 7 todæle man ða eahta dælas on twá, 7 fó se landhlaford to healfum, to healfum se biscop, si hit cyninges man, sy hit þegnes.<sup>211</sup>

These clauses from Edgar and Æthelred articulate that by the tenth century, there were designated “groups” of men who bore the authority to collect unpaid tithes on behalf of the church. II Edgar 3.1 specifies that the *cyninges gerefa* (the king’s reeve), the *biscofes gerefa* (the bishop’s reeve) and *mynstres mæssepreost* (the priest of the minster or priest of the church) could exact tithes from those who had not paid their due. VIII Æthelred 8 differs slightly here. It allows for either the *cyninges gerefa* and the *mynstres mæssepreost* or the *landrican gerefa* and the *biscofes gerefa* to collect unpaid tithes. There are a number of significant elements at work here. First, both clauses undeniably assert that not only does the *cyninges gerefa* have the authority to enforce church tithes, but it seems that he was royally expected to do so, effectively helping to ensure the rights and privileges of the church on behalf of the king. Second, the other parties imbued with this same authority were the *biscofes gerefa*, the *landrican gerefa* and the *mynstres mæssepreost*. Returning shortly to the matter of the priest, conceivably this means that both the bishop’s reeve and the local landlord’s reeve were also endowed by royal legislation with this power. The implications of this are that all reeves – even privately retained reeves – were expected to have an awareness of judicial procedure and also to carry out some particular responsibilities in their

---

shall take half and the bishop half, whether the man be under the lordship of the king or of a thegn.” Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 21, 23.

<sup>211</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 265.

“Namely: if anyone refuses to make due rendering of his tithes, the king’s reeve and the priest of the church – or the reeve of the lord of the manor and the bishop’s reeve – shall go to him and, without his consent, shall take the tenth part for the church to which it belongs, and the next part shall be allotted to him, and the eight [remaining] parts shall be divided in two, and the lord of the manor shall take half and the bishop half, whether the man be under the lordship of the king or of a thegn.” Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 121.

local area. Furthermore, the laws stipulate that if an individual refuses to pay the required tithes, these officials were empowered to take them “without consent” (*unþanc*). The Old English term is laden with unpleasant connotations, among which are: displeasure, ill will, anger, unwillingness, compulsion, against one’s will and without one’s consent.<sup>212</sup> This was likely to be an unpleasant task – a compelling reason for the king to have authorized lay officials to accompany the *mæssepreost*. To return now to the *mynstres mæssepreost*, it is possible that the laws indicate here the priest at a minster church as opposed to a country church. *Mynster* can be rendered “monastery” or “minster” as well as “church”.<sup>213</sup> Reading *mynstres mæssepreost* as the priest of a minster as opposed to a church is a compelling argument when one considers the new thegnly churches that began to dot the English landscape in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Edgar issued legislation to try to protect the tithes and privileges of the older, more established minster churches, which had long been a dominant feature of the landscape, from falling into the coffers of the new thegnly foundations.<sup>214</sup> In light of Edgar’s attempts to protect the old minsters from losing their tithes to the thegnly institutions, it makes compelling sense that his laws dispensing authority to collect tithes would ultimately be concerned with the rights of the minsters.

The codes II Edgar and VIII Æthelred are in their entirety concerned with ecclesiastical matters, and particularly with ensuring that various tithes and church dues are paid at various times throughout the year. VIII Æthelred is much more extensive and comprehensive, but this may have been a result of both its promulgation in 1014, just after Æthelred’s return from exile, and its drafting by Archbishop Wulfstan, who surely would have had the church’s interests in mind. Though it is important to bear in mind that VIII Æthelred is extant only in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 201, which has been identified as a Wulfstan

---

<sup>212</sup> Bosworth, "An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online." *Un-þanc*. March 21, 2010.  
<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/033838>

<sup>213</sup> Bosworth. "An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online." *Mynster*. March 21, 2010.  
<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/023322>

<sup>214</sup> Catherine Cubitt, “Pastoral Care and Religious Belief”, in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c. 500 – c. 1100*, ed. Pauline Stafford (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 398. See also II Edgar 1 and II Edgar 2.

manuscript. Historians have debated as to whether VIII Æthelred was once accompanied by a secular equivalent.<sup>215</sup>

The laws of Æthelred also contain clauses requiring the reeve to facilitate a form of social responsibility. Wulfstan appears to have been actively shaping all the royal codes into communicating some form of social responsibility for all. There is also the interesting added clause to IV Edgar (most likely added by Wulfstan) contemplating the spiritual loss that would occur if the reeves were not living up to the king's expectations that they deal with those who fail to render church tithes.<sup>216</sup> This is particularly evident in VII Æthelred, though this code is thought by scholars to have been an emergency measure set into place by Æthelred and his advisors, and as such requires deeper consideration. Keynes discusses the backdrop of the events that precipitated the institution of this code; arguing that England, between 991 and 1005, endured the heaviest and worst viking attacks since the reign of Alfred.<sup>217</sup> These viking raids were seen by contemporaries (especially ecclesiastics) as divine retribution for wrongdoing by the English people and nation.<sup>218</sup> To add to the already heavy burden of strain on the country, a severe famine struck throughout England in 1005.<sup>219</sup> The situation by 1005 would have provided a sharp contrast with the relative peace England experienced during Edgar's reign, which had also been the era of the monastic reform movement, with the foundation and endowment of many monasteries.<sup>220</sup> Many, perhaps most especially ecclesiastics such as Wulfstan, looked back at the reign of Edgar as a "golden age" of sorts for England. VII Æthelred was drafted by Archbishop Wulfstan and was issued at Bath in 1009, in the aftermath of a viking

---

<sup>215</sup> This MS has been dated to the mid- to late eleventh century. Wormald, "Æthelred the Lawmaker," 50 and 59.

<sup>216</sup> Schröder, "Friendship and Favour in Late Anglo-Saxon Élite Culture: A Study of Documentary and Narrative Sources, c. 900-1016", 75. See also: IV Edgar 1 §5 and 1 §5a.

<sup>217</sup> Simon Keynes, "An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12." *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 153.

<sup>218</sup> Keynes, "An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12," 154.

<sup>219</sup> Keynes, "An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12," 155. See also Whitelock, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 87. [entry for 1005]

<sup>220</sup> Keynes, "An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12," 165.

landing at Sandwich that August.<sup>221</sup> This legislation consisted of “emergency measures” for the participation of the entire nation, in a penitential effort to appease God in the hopes that the viking attacks would cease.<sup>222</sup>

The text of VII Æthelred has been transmitted in both Latin and Old English, with the Latin copy originating from an earlier vernacular text and contained in the *Quadripartitus*.<sup>223</sup> The Old English version comes from a Wulfstan manuscript, and the text is shorter than that of the Latin version in the *Quadripartitus*; the discrepancy in length may be because the archbishop saved a draft of his work, since the Latin version appears more polished and complete, and therefore may be the “official” version.<sup>224</sup>

VII Æthelred, as mentioned, was promulgated at Bath in 1009 as an emergency measure in the face of the viking onslaught. As such, VII Æthelred is referred to as the “Penitential Edict,” and as one of the codes drafted by Archbishop Wulfstan, it focuses primarily upon ecclesiastical issues.<sup>225</sup> VII Æthelred 2 §5 states that the reeves of the village are responsible along with the priest and the heads of the tithings, to ensure that the proper fasting and alms-giving are implemented, during the royally decreed “emergency” fast:

VII Æthelred 2 §5: Et sciat omnis presbiter et tungraius et decimales homines, ut hec elemosina et ieunium proueniat, sicut in sanctis iurare poterunt.<sup>226</sup>

This points toward the fact that at least by the tenth century, villages could have a reeve operating within them. It is difficult to know whether these reeves were royal or lordly, particularly because it seems evident that in some cases, lordly

---

<sup>221</sup> Keynes, “An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12,” 179. See also Wormald, “Æthelred the Lawmaker,” 58.

<sup>222</sup> Keynes, “An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12,” 181.

<sup>223</sup> Keynes, “An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12,” 180.

<sup>224</sup> Keynes, “An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12,” 180.

NB: this more complete, “polished” Latin version is the one that Liebermann included in his *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 260 – 263.

<sup>225</sup> Wormald, “Æthelred the Lawmaker,” 58, 60.

<sup>226</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 261.

“And every priest and the reeve of every village and the heads of the tithings shall be witnesses that this alms-giving and fasting is carried out, and shall be able to swear to it on the holy relics.” Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 110.

reeves were subject to royal pronouncements.<sup>227</sup> Importantly, this section is also instructive regarding the social element of a reeve's responsibilities. Not only was this official working in support of the church through ensuring that the prescribed fasting was observed, but he was also ensuring that alms were distributed to the poor. Reeves are shown as not only supporting and aiding the church but they are clearly also an instrument enabling the king to attempt to pull the English from the brink of disaster and in doing so fulfill some elements of the *promissio regis*. It is possible that this aspect of the law codes could be seen as another effort on the part of the king to ensure that he was taking action to fulfill all the obligations of conducting affairs as a good Christian king, which would have been made all the more important during times of national emergency. Thus the king might have used the reeves in his domain to carry out certain duties which would represent the king's careful observance of the tenets of Christian kingship, as well as his concern for his people, as laid out in the *promissio regis*.

VIII Æthelred again, is another "Wulfstan" law code, and as such, is largely preoccupied with ecclesiastical matters. VIII Æthelred 32 stipulates that it was the reeve's responsibility to ensure the preservation of the rights of the abbots, and also to "support their temporal needs."<sup>228</sup> The surrounding clauses primarily revolve around concerns that people "live properly," and according to the estate to which they belong, with the principal focus falling upon those of ecclesiastical orders.<sup>229</sup> The reeve is depicted here, in what essentially seems to be Wulfstan's vision, as not only lending the secular support of the royal government to the

---

<sup>227</sup> See II Edgar 1 & 2 for more on this.

<sup>228</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 267. Also: Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 127.

<sup>229</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 267: VIII Æthelred 31.: Ac we lærað georne 7 luflice biddað, þæt ælces hades men þam life libban þe heom to gebirge.

Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 267: VIII Æthelred 31 § 1.: 7 heonan forð we willað þæt abbodas 7 munecas regollicor libban þonne hi nu ær ðisan on gewunan hæfdon.

"But we earnestly enjoin and, with all good-will, beg men of every estate to live such a life as befits them.

31 § 1. And henceforth we desire abbots and monks to live more according to a rule than they have been accustomed to do until now."

Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 126 – 127.

church, but it appears that he is again acting in the capacity of a royal agent facilitating the commitments and responsibilities of a Christian king, through his task to ensure the protection of the abbots' rights, as well as his compulsory attention to their "temporal needs". It is possible, given the ecclesiastical authorship of the code and the preoccupation of the surrounding clauses that men under holy orders observe the mores of their position, that perhaps the royal reeve was to aid in ensuring this, along with assuring protection of the clergy's rights. Presumably, the majority of the duties of attending to the church would fall to the responsibility of royal reeves, as opposed to private, lordly reeves, because not only were lordly reeves employed by an individual, but they also tended to be estate managers, which suggests that they were unlikely to have any ecclesiastical responsibilities.<sup>230</sup> Finally, there are references in the laws of Cnut instructing that reeves in particular "employ no unjust force towards any man."<sup>231</sup> The desire to ensure that men did not feel abused by the administration's power is also expressed in II Cnut 69; II Cnut 69 §1 takes this concept a little further with the statement that no reeve was to take anything from any man through purveyance, except in any case in which the man was willing to give his goods thus.<sup>232</sup> Cnut's laws appear to generally consist of restatements of earlier laws, though perhaps we can argue that there was special attention paid to the concern that the people of England did not feel oppressed by Cnut's administration. This was likely an important point for Cnut and his advisors, ruling as he was in the aftermath of Æthelred's reign and all of the unrest and troubles that had plagued it.

---

<sup>230</sup> Rosamund Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship*, (London and Washington, Leicester University Press, 1997), 159; and see also: *Bege sceadwisan gerefan* ("Concerning the wise reeve"): Thomas Gobbitt, "Rectitudines Singularum Personarum and Gerefa", in *Early English Laws*, ed. Bruce O'Brien and Jane Winters (2012): [www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk](http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk) and also: "The Discriminating Reeve," in *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, ed. Michael Swanton (London: Dent, 1975), 225 - 227.

However, the laws make it clear that when it came to the collection of local tithes, the reeve of the local lord could enforce these on behalf of the local minster (see II Edgar 1 & 2 for more on this).

<sup>231</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 277 and Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 151. Cnut's Proclamation of 1027, 12.

<sup>232</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 356 and Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 209.

It seems clear in these clauses that the reeve is acting here as the bishop's representative. Due to the aforementioned fact that the bishop's reeve is never mentioned in the law codes in any other capacity, it is possible that when he was not acting as the representative of the bishop, he perhaps occupied a similar role in the bishop's household as that of a nobleman's reeve. VIII Æthelred 8 essentially repeats Edgar's earlier ruling, though with the addition that the "reeve of the lord of the manor" could also undertake this task, in partnership with the bishop's reeve.<sup>233</sup> It is possible that this indicates that there was always a secular reeve charged to aid in managing this duty in order to give the command of the church some administrative backing and reinforcement.<sup>234</sup>

### *Reeves and literacy*

An important consideration in the study of the roles and activities of royal agents is whether or not these individuals might have been literate. Evidence from Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and the laws of Edward the Elder is intriguingly suggestive of some level of literacy amongst reeves as royal officials. However, due to the nature of Asser's *Life* as a biographical work, largely focused on the quality of Alfred's kingship and his exceptional personal characteristics, and the nature of the law codes as prescriptive texts, likely recorded by an ecclesiastical compiler, means that these might not necessarily reflect the situation as it truly was. Thus it is necessary to further investigate the matter, to attempt to gain a clearer indication of the level of pragmatic literacy in late Anglo-Saxon England, and the level of literacy that might have been incorporated into the workings of the administration, and its implications. It is necessary to begin by briefly introducing the extracts from the *Life of King Alfred* and the legislation of Edward

---

<sup>233</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 265 and Robertson, ed., trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, 121.

<sup>234</sup> This may also suggest that the reeves have become more and more prominent in the mechanisms of administration over the last century (pers. comm., Els Schröder, September 19<sup>th</sup> 2013).

the Elder, in order to further discuss lay literacy in late Anglo-Saxon England. In his discussion of Alfred's literacy program, Asser describes the reaction of the ealdormen and reeves who were instructed to apply themselves to the pursuit of wisdom:

Quibus auditis verbis, perterriti <ac> veluti pro maxima vindicta correcti, comites et praepositi ad aequitatis discendae studium totis viribus se vertere nitebantur, ita ut mirum in modum illiterati ab infantia comites pene omnes, praepositi ac ministri literatoriae arti studerent, malentes insuetam disciplinam quam laboriose discere, quam potestatum ministerial dimittere.<sup>235</sup>

This extract indicates that as a result of King Alfred's keen interest in judgment and legal affairs, he envisaged literacy as a necessary skill for the agents of his administration to carry out their duties. However, Wormald has pointed out that the knowledge and wisdom that Alfred viewed as integral to the administration of his kingdom were more along the lines of Biblical and "divine wisdom," as opposed to something judicial and pragmatic.<sup>236</sup> Wormald's stance that literacy in Anglo-Saxon England was not applied pragmatically in the administration of justice tallies with his view that the law codes were primarily intended as ideological statements.<sup>237</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident that Alfred saw literacy as a useful capability for the agents of his royal government. An alternate view is expressed by Keynes, that Alfred certainly appreciated the connection between "divine wisdom and the exercise of secular power," but that he most likely was

---

<sup>235</sup> Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred, together with the Annals of Saint Neots, erroneously ascribed to Asser*, 94.

"Having heard these words, the ealdormen and reeves were terrified and chastened as if by the greatest of punishments, and they strove with every effort to apply themselves to learning what is just. As a result nearly all the ealdormen and reeves and thegns (who were illiterate from childhood) applied themselves in an amazing way to learning how to read, preferring rather to learn this unfamiliar discipline (no matter how laboriously) than to relinquish their offices of power." Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources*, 110.

<sup>236</sup> Keynes, "Royal Government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England," 230; and Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and its Neighbours," 107.

<sup>237</sup> Keynes, "Royal Government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England," 228.

also concerned with the proper exercise of power and judgment by his officials in legal activities.<sup>238</sup>

In the preface to I Edward, Edward the Elder orders that of the royal agents, reeves in particular are to ensure that they are familiar with the written legislation:

Eadwerd cyning byt ðam gerefum eallum, ðæt ge deman swa rihte domas swa ge rihtoste cunnon, 7 hit on ðære dombec stande. Ne wandiað for nanum ðingum folcriht to geregeanne; 7 ðæt gehwilc spræce habbe andagan, hwænne heo gelæst sy, þæt ge ðonne gereccan.<sup>239</sup>

Here, Edward unequivocally links not only the reeve with judicial activity, but he also indicates that the performance of justice was intimately connected with the reeve's ability to interpret (*gereccan*) the *domboc*. This ability to interpret the law book is directly associated with the reeve's understanding of justice and his capability to enact judgment. The term *gereccan* itself is laden with numerous interpretations, many of them with judicial implications, such as: to pronounce [judgment], to declare [the law], to charge [with], to explain, expound, interpret, to prove, and to reprove or reproach.<sup>240</sup> The use of this term, with all of its judicial associations, as opposed to any one of a number of Old English words which convey the meaning "to interpret" – such as *árædan*, *átellan*, *tógescéadan*, *trahtian* and *trahtnian* – arguably underlines in judicial terms, the reeve's ability to interpret the law book. It is also probable in the use of the term *domboc* that Edward was referring back to his father's law code, which may indicate that Edward ascribed similar importance to the value of the written word with regards to the operation of the administration.<sup>241</sup>

---

<sup>238</sup> Keynes, "Royal Government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England," 230 – 231.

<sup>239</sup> Liebermann, ed., trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 138.

"King Edward commands all [his] reeves: that ye pronounce such legal decisions as ye know to be most just and in accordance with the written laws. Ye shall not for any cause fail to interpret the public law; and at the same time it shall be your duty to provide that every case shall have a date fixed for its decision." Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 115.

<sup>240</sup> Bosworth, "An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online." Ge-reccan. March 21, 2010.

<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/049319>

<sup>241</sup> Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 286 – 287.

It is manifest from these extracts from ninth- and tenth-century sources that, whether literacy was ever widespread amongst laymen in Anglo-Saxon England, or used pragmatically in the administration, kings ascribed some special importance to the written word. The genuine level of lay literacy in late Anglo-Saxon England is tough to measure and thus an elusive question. Numerous scholars have entered into this debate, with two arguments emerging. Wormald has ardently disputed the notion that literacy played a significant role in the operation of the administration. Alternatively, numerous other historians contend that pragmatic literacy was indeed an important element in the functioning of the late Anglo-Saxon state.

Wormald argues that royal literacy increased in its importance during the early medieval period, and that this was largely due to pressure from the church, in order to facilitate kings' acquisition of divine wisdom.<sup>242</sup> Accordingly, he maintains that vernacular translations were primarily made in order to permit texts to be read to illiterate laymen; he stresses that this function of the vernacular in Anglo-Saxon England is undervalued by historians.<sup>243</sup> It seems likely that the encouragement of laymen to read English, and because illiterates could have English read to them, were important reasons why the Anglo-Saxon law codes were set down in English instead of Latin.<sup>244</sup> It is of course possible that the Old English law codes were only read out and that the majority of laymen could not read, but the intriguing evidence from Alfred and Edward the Elder means that some level of lay literacy amongst an elite was at least not an impossibility. Furthermore, the reading of Old English texts aloud to illiterate laymen did constitute some level of use and appreciation of the written word. In the preface to his translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Alfred bemoans the

---

<sup>242</sup> Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and Its Neighbours," 99.

<sup>243</sup> Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and Its Neighbours," 96.

<sup>244</sup> Wormald, "*Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis: Legislation and Germanic Kingship, from Euric to Cnut*," 115.

What Wormald says on this is that the codes were probably set out in the vernacular because there were fewer individuals who understood Latin in Anglo-Saxon England, as opposed to the situation on the Continent.

status of learning in ninth-century England, highlighting an ignorance of Latin.<sup>245</sup> This situation, and particularly the lack of knowledge amongst the clergy, appears to have been the springboard for Alfred's literacy program, wherein literacy in the vernacular was advocated first, followed later by Latin for ecclesiastics.<sup>246</sup> Alfred's statements have been the subject of debate amongst historians, and it seems possible that Alfred was dramatizing the situation to some extent.<sup>247</sup> It has been argued that Alfred's conception of the wisdom he hoped men to achieve through being able to read was more of a moral and ecclesiastical wisdom, as opposed to an administrative type.<sup>248</sup> Alternatively, Cubitt contends that while wisdom was indisputably important to Alfred, it seems unlikely that he would exclude the law codes from the texts he wished his officials to know.<sup>249</sup> In support of this Cubitt cites Edward the Elder's injunction to the reeves, instructing them to use the law book in their judicial activity.<sup>250</sup>

Wormald does allow for some level of appreciation of the use of the written word, citing the possibility of an Anglo-Saxon chancery from the middle of the tenth century.<sup>251</sup> However, Wormald draws support for his argument against widespread pragmatic literacy from the undisputed fact that the laws were drafted by clergy and preserved in ecclesiastical archives.<sup>252</sup> Also emphasized is the fact that nowhere in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon dispute

---

<sup>245</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 52.

<sup>246</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 52.

<sup>247</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 53.

<sup>248</sup> Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and Its Neighbours," 107.

<sup>249</sup> Cubitt, "As the Lawbook Teaches': Reeves, Lawbooks, and Urban Life in the Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers," 1042.

This seems especially likely in light of the fact that Alfred himself composed law codes and displayed interest in and reverence for those that had been promulgated in the past, such as the codes of Ine and Offa. It is debatable as to whether Alfred had promulgated his law codes before or after Asser was writing his *Life*, though in light of the stress Asser places upon Alfred's interest in justice, it seems rather doubtful that had the law book been in existence, that Asser would have ignored it entirely.

<sup>250</sup> Cubitt, "As the Lawbook Teaches': Reeves, Lawbooks, and Urban Life in the Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers," 1042.

<sup>251</sup> Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and Its Neighbours," 111.

<sup>252</sup> Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and Its Neighbours," 113.

Furthermore, Wormald (110) and Molyneux ("The Old English Bede: *English Ideology or Christian Instruction?*", 1295) both cite the existence of only one known literate layman - Æthelweard, who was said to have authored a Latin Chronicle in the late tenth century.

settlements is there any legal clause cited in the proceedings.<sup>253</sup> However, this does not definitively prove that the law codes were not known and relied upon to some extent in legal cases and activities. It has been established that the evidence from the dispute settlements indicates that at least some of the population had an awareness of the rulings of the legislation.<sup>254</sup> Instructive here is the dispute detailed in S 1457 (980 x 987, Rochester), wherein the Bishop of Rochester was well aware of the fact that his rights were being denied him. Additionally useful is S 1454 (990 x 992, Canterbury, Christ Church), wherein a layman named Loefwine was summoned by the king to contest a claim on land, and in response, Loefwine insisted that the matter be handled in the first instance in a shire court, which was the precise procedure prescribed in the law codes. Despite the fact that no clauses from the law codes were cited in actual practice, it seems that individuals seem to have been conscious of the manner in which legal proceedings were supposed to be conducted, which suggests some knowledge of the content of the law codes.

Despite the alluring sensibility of Wormald's arguments against the pragmatic uses of literacy in the administration, other historians argue compellingly for its practicality in late Anglo-Saxon England. George Molyneux claims significant lay interest in English texts in late Anglo-Saxon England, contending that vernacular documents were in widespread use by this time.<sup>255</sup> In her analysis of the *Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, Cubitt states that the legend was "known in learned circles in tenth- and eleventh-century England."<sup>256</sup> One of the great interests of this legend is that this Old English version of a late antique legend incorporates a reference to the *domboc*. The text calls for the punishment

---

<sup>253</sup> Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and Its Neighbours," 113.

<sup>254</sup> Cubitt's findings in her study of the Old English legend of the Seven Sleepers also supports this analysis (Cubitt, "As the Lawbook Teaches': Reeves, Lawbooks, and Urban Life in the Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers," 1048).

<sup>255</sup> George Molyneux, "The Old English Bede: *English Ideology or Christian Instruction?*", *English Historical Review*, Vol. CXXIV, No. 511 (2009), 1296.

<sup>256</sup> Cubitt, "As the Lawbook Teaches': Reeves, Lawbooks, and Urban Life in the Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers," 1024.

of the accused criminal according to the *domboc*.<sup>257</sup> Cubitt highlights this element, and its similarity to Edward the Elder's injunction, as a significant indication that reeves' practice may indeed have been informed by the law book in the course of their judicial work.<sup>258</sup> She argues that this conclusion is supported by the evidence from Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, as well as various injunctions in the law codes addressed to reeves.<sup>259</sup> It seems clear that Edward the Elder's injunction to the reeves was issued in written format, and not only was the *domboc* referenced, but it clearly indicates that the king was concerned in various instances with the proper observation of legal procedure, which in turn, points toward the reeves having access to the law book.<sup>260</sup> Insley contends that documents were very much a part of the legal process in late Anglo-Saxon England, and that documents themselves were fairly commonplace.<sup>261</sup> Even members of lay society who were not particularly literate seem to have recognized the value of documents.<sup>262</sup> In fact, Insley argues for lay appreciation and use of texts and documents to such an extent that some laymen appear to have kept archives.<sup>263</sup>

Along these lines, Keynes argues that although there are no extant "working" copies of the law codes, this does not necessarily indicate that officials such as reeves did not read and refer to them.<sup>264</sup> He reasons that the tenth-century laws seemed to assume that not only were copies of the legislation available, but that royal agents' activities were informed by the law codes.<sup>265</sup> This hypothesis is reinforced by Nelson's findings on literacy in the Carolingian government, though it is important to bear in mind that the Carolingian world of

---

<sup>257</sup> Cubitt, "As the Lawbook Teaches': Reeves, Lawbooks, and Urban Life in the Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers," 1028.

<sup>258</sup> Cubitt, "As the Lawbook Teaches': Reeves, Lawbooks, and Urban Life in the Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers," 1031, 1033.

<sup>259</sup> Cubitt, "As the Lawbook Teaches': Reeves, Lawbooks, and Urban Life in the Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers," 1042.

<sup>260</sup> Keynes, "Royal government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England," 233.

<sup>261</sup> Charles Insley, "Archives and lay documentary practice in the Anglo-Saxon world", in *Documentary Culture and the Laity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Warren C. Brown, Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes and Adam J. Kosto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 337.

<sup>262</sup> Insley, "Archives and lay documentary practice in the Anglo-Saxon world", 338.

<sup>263</sup> Insley, "Archives and lay documentary practice in the Anglo-Saxon world", 348 – 349.

<sup>264</sup> Keynes, "Royal government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England," 233.

<sup>265</sup> Keynes, "Royal government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England," 233.

the ninth century was different from tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England, and thus Carolingian evidence can merely be suggestive regarding practices in England. Nelson states that the written word in the form of Latin was extensively utilized in Carolingian administration.<sup>266</sup> Nelson discusses the concept of capitularies as “aids to memory or agendas for discussion,” highlighting the Carolingians’ recognition of the value of the written word and its use in conjunction with the spoken word.<sup>267</sup> It is also evident that the Carolingian administration used letters to communicate with its local royal agents, and that the evidence indicates extensive participation in “governmental literacy.”<sup>268</sup>

I Æthelstan and Æthelstan’s Ordinance on Charities also include injunctions with directives from the king to the reeves, offering another indication that the reeves would have required some access to the written legislation.<sup>269</sup> Keynes suggests that Æthelstan had scribes at his court who drafted the administrative documents, and that this was the era in which the results of Alfred’s literacy program would have been felt.<sup>270</sup> It is clear that by the tenth and eleventh centuries, a great deal of administrative documents were composed in the vernacular – writs, laws, dispute settlements and the boundaries of charters.<sup>271</sup> It is possible that Alfred’s initiative on education was in part responsible for the increase in the usage of vernacular documents. It has been postulated that usage of the vernacular for charters increased in the ninth century, because there was a decline in the number of scribes who could work in Latin at this time; however, there is only one extant royal diploma, the Wotton Underwood charter, which is in the vernacular in its entirety.<sup>272</sup> The existence of charters themselves reveals an appreciation of the value of the written word, even before the vernacular began to be incorporated into these texts, with wills, leases and charter boundary clauses all tending to be primarily in the

---

<sup>266</sup> Nelson, “The uses of literacy in Carolingian government,” 266.

<sup>267</sup> Nelson, “The uses of literacy in Carolingian government,” 266 – 268.

<sup>268</sup> Nelson, “The uses of literacy in Carolingian government,” 292 – 293.

<sup>269</sup> Keynes, “Royal government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England,” 235-236.

<sup>270</sup> Keynes, “Royal government and the written word in late Anglo-Saxon England,” 241.

<sup>271</sup> Kelly, “Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word,” 51, 52.

<sup>272</sup> Kelly, “Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word,” 55, 56.

vernacular.<sup>273</sup> Arguably one of the values of vernacular documents was that not only could they be read by a wider audience than Latin, but Kelly asserts, like Wormald, that they could also be read out to illiterates without being translated.<sup>274</sup> The inclusion of Old English boundary clauses by the ninth century meant that charters were functioning in some manner as written records, since the presence of the vernacular allowed for even illiterate lay participation.<sup>275</sup> Wills as evidence are also indicative of appreciation of the merits of the written word amongst the laity.<sup>276</sup> Finally, Kelly maintains that production of texts such as Old English poetry and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* further highlights lay interest and participation in literacy to some extent.<sup>277</sup> The existence of Old English poetry and literature indicates an audience and esteem for the written word that did not necessarily have to be ecclesiastical.<sup>278</sup>

Alfred's literacy program may have indeed borne fruit by the tenth and eleventh centuries. The increase in the number of vernacular documents and the dispute settlement evidence certainly argue for this view. Recalling *Godwine portgerefa on Oxnaforda* of S 1425 (1049 x 1052, St Albans), a further piece of compelling evidence arises from perhaps an unlikely source. The charter evidence – S 1425 and S 1022 in particular – indicates that there was a port reeve by the name of Godwine operating in Oxford in around the middle of the eleventh century. Significantly, Blair notes that there were coins struck in Oxford by a Godwine and a Wulfwine in the years around the mid-eleventh century.<sup>279</sup> Citing the fact that it may be possible that port Reeves of London may also have been moneyers during this period, Blair allows that it is likely that Godwine might

---

<sup>273</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 56.

<sup>274</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 56, 57.

<sup>275</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 47.

That is, charters by this time were valued *because* they contained information, as opposed to formerly, wherein they were largely utilized as symbolic items in transactions and ownership of land.

<sup>276</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 47 – 49.

<sup>277</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 61.

<sup>278</sup> Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word," 61.

<sup>279</sup> Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 155; see also p200, n. 40 and Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey: Part 2*, 561.

have done so.<sup>280</sup> Bearing in mind that the Old English laws had earlier established that the reeve was supposed to monitor the activities of moneyers in towns, it is certainly plausible that by the late Anglo-Saxon period the port reeve had in some cases assumed this task. One piece of evidence which may be illuminating regarding royal officials' literacy is a seal-matrix bearing the name of "Godwine the *minister*" (+SIGILLUM: GODPINI MINISTRI), which was discovered at Wallingford.<sup>281</sup> Blair argues for the possibility that this seal, which he posits was modeled after late Anglo-Saxon royal coins, might have belonged to Godwine the port reeve of Oxford.<sup>282</sup> This seal, with its implications of its owner's literacy, points strongly toward at least some late Anglo-Saxon royal officials as having been literate. According to Asser's account, King Alfred's program targeted royal officials in particular, with those who held judicial power receiving the most attention. It should perhaps be unsurprising then, that several generations later, by the mid-eleventh century, there is evidence for the individual literacy of a reeve, at a time when the reeve's role bore significant local judicial duties, and when there is compelling evidence for an awareness of the law codes and their prescriptions, as demonstrated by numerous charters and dispute settlements.

It is clear, from a brief survey of not only the primary material, but the compelling arguments of historians, that lay literacy did exist to some extent in late Anglo-Saxon England. Moreover, the written word appears to have played a role in the administration of the late Anglo-Saxon state. Plainly, royal officials, particularly reeves, were expected to have enough of an understanding of the written word to comprehend the law book, and probably, as with the Carolingian model, letters to the localities from the king in the form of sealed writs. The evidence of the seal-matrix of Godwine the port reeve offers a compelling hint at perhaps more than rudimentary literacy amongst royal officials, by the eve of the

---

<sup>280</sup> Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 155.

<sup>281</sup> Janet Backhouse, Leslie Webster and DH Turner, *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art: 966 – 1066* (London: British Museum Press, 1984), no. 112. See also: British Museum "seal/die", Museum no. 1881, 0404.1.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=95268&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=95268&partId=1)

<sup>282</sup> Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 155.

Conquest. Although the paucity of the evidence makes this debate a difficult one, the extant material seems to argue strongly in favor of at least basic literacy in the vernacular for royal agents.

### *Conclusions*

Although the Anglo-Saxon reeve was an enigmatic figure, there is no reason that this should remain the case. The law codes clearly establish the reeve as a royal official invested with a significant amount of royally backed power. That is, a royal official not only based in the localities, but also uniquely placed within the localities (as opposed to the itinerant kings and ealdormen with estates scattered all over the country), who ran local courts, could apprehend suspected criminals, acted as the king's arm and representative when it came to collecting monies rendered or exacting fines and seizing property, advocated for the rights of the church on the king's behalf, and helped to maintain the balance of power in the localities. Of course, an important question here is the issue of the ideologically charged "ideal" of the law codes, in relation to the actual enforcement of these on the ground. Numerous scholars have argued that the law codes existed primarily as ideological statements used to showcase the kings' concern for "a good Christian state", and the preoccupation of these kings that they were viewed as being connected to a long tradition of legislation which stretched back to the Old Testament. In support of this argument, scholars contend that there are no extant "practical" copies of the codes; nor are they ever cited in legal procedure. Questions surrounding the extent of literacy in Anglo-Saxon England are also marshaled in support of this argument. Therefore, some historians maintain that the purpose of the law codes was first and foremost to project an ideological statement, raising the Anglo-Saxon kings up as members of an illustrious tradition of legislation.

An important contribution made by this study of the reeve is that it arguably indicates that the Old English law codes were indeed practical texts, and

accordingly enforced on the ground. This is vividly demonstrated in the actions of various reeves illustrated in the charter, dispute settlement and prose evidence of late Anglo-Saxon England. For example, Lantfred's *Translatio et Miracula S. Swithuni* offers a picture of a reeve working as a judge presiding over a local court, and indeed operating as the prominent judicial official in this episode. In this account, then, we have a reeve acting in a number of the roles assigned to him by the law codes. Of course, much of the late Anglo-Saxon legislation comes to us touched by the influence of Archbishop Wulfstan. However, this need not necessarily be viewed as an issue: this serves to further strengthen the hypothesis that Wulfstan had a vision for England as a holy society, that he addressed this task from numerous angles, and that the reeve was seen as playing an integral part in building it. Arguably, a consideration of the presentation of the reeve in the legislation, alongside other evidence such as that from the charters and prose sources, presents the compelling testimony that the law codes were indeed practical documents, which had an impact on events on the ground. This is further corroborated as a result of considering the potential level of pragmatic literacy in late Anglo-Saxon England. The charters and dispute settlement evidence demonstrate that people in general – and royal officials in particular – appear to have had an awareness of the law and legal procedure, and that while the specific level of literacy in late Anglo-Saxon England will likely remain unknown, Alfred's literacy campaign arguably had borne fruit by the tenth and eleventh centuries, with laymen aware of the value of documents and royal officials very likely possessing at least rudimentary literacy. The evidence of the seal-matrix bearing the name of Godwine the *minister* presents the compelling possibility that royal reeves boasted at least a basic level of literacy.

The evidence examined in this chapter brings together numerous disparate strands of evidence in order to paint a picture of an enigmatic figure. The reeve emerges by the tenth and eleventh centuries as an administrator who played a key role in the functioning of the Anglo-Saxon state. He operated at many levels: from village and shire reeve in the localities, where he generally acted in a judicial capacity, and also protecting the rights and privileges of the

church, to prominent reeves who worked alongside the king, and seemed in some cases to have the royal ear. Indeed, S 883 and S 926 offer evidence for Æthelred's heavy favor of his reeves, which may signal his dependence upon these officials, and therefore a growing amount of power falling into their hands. The work in the forgoing chapters will not only further develop our picture of the royal reeve as a tool of the king who rose to a level of prominence, but also an examination of the reeve as an estate administrator will highlight his pivotal role in the workings of late Old English estate management, and finally a look at the reeve through the lens of the homiletic discourse will reveal the reeve's special place in the innovative work of Archbishop Wulfstan.