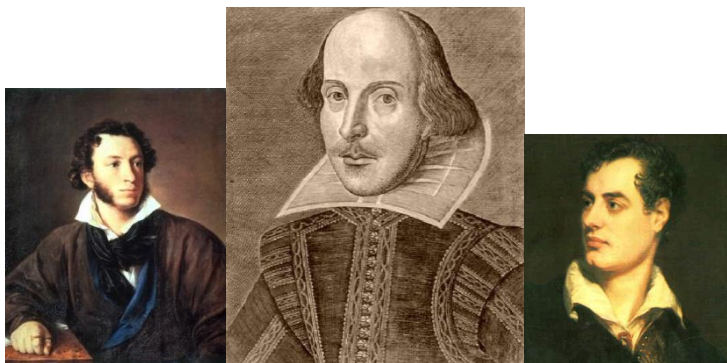


**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY
INSTITUTE OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF LINGUISTICS
MOSCOW INSTITUTE
OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**THE SIXTH
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
'LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY
IN RUSSIAN / ENGLISH STUDIES'**

THE PROCEEDINGS



**SENATE HOUSE, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
27–28 JULY 2015**

LONDON, 2016

THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
'LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY
IN RUSSIAN / ENGLISH STUDIES'

ШЕСТАЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ
«ЯЗЫК, КУЛЬТУРА, ОБЩЕСТВО
(РОССИЙСКО-АНГЛИЙСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ)»
27–28 июля, 2015

THE PROCEEDINGS

SENATE HOUSE, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
27–28 JULY 2015

ISBN 978-5-88966-097-2

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
---------------------------	---

PLENARY

<i>Stanley, Eric</i> . RIDDLING: a serious pursuit through the ages and in many languages	16
---	----

<i>Kalmar, Tomás Mario</i> . Then Alfred took the throne and then what? Parker's error and Plummer's blind spot.	37
---	----

<i>Kitaev, Artem and Leonid Slonimskiy</i> . Malevich's Grave: from figurative to non-figurative and back: A research project on the history of Kazimir Malevich's ashes burial site in the context of the perception of historical avant-garde in Soviet and post-Soviet culture	84
---	----

<i>Eliot, Simon</i> . The History of Communication: A Case Study. The Ministry of Information 1939-46.....	93
--	----

<i>Volodarskaya, Emma</i> . Translation of Shakespeare's works in Russia. Part I. 18 th century	117
--	-----

LITERATURE

<i>Courtney, Julia</i> . Doomed Heroes: Bulgarian patriots in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English translations of Turgenev's <i>On the Eve</i> and I. M. Vazov's <i>Under the Yoke</i>	131
---	-----

<i>Tchougounova-Paulson, Elena</i> . Alexander Blok and the 'seal of Decadence': on the example of his article 'Stagnation' (1906).....	146
---	-----

<i>Foster, Graham</i> . Russian Holiday: Anthony Burgess in Leningrad, 1961.....	155
--	-----

<i>Sepeshvari, Vera</i> . A Musical Pun: Challenges of English-Russian Translation.....	168
---	-----

LANGUAGE STUDIES, LEXICOGRAPHY

<i>Stein, Gabriele</i> . The Author behind the Lexicographer.....	172
---	-----

<i>Ilsou, Robert</i> . Larking about among the Varieties.....	183
---	-----

<i>McGregor, Charles</i> . Reifying vocabulary	190
--	-----

<i>Szymański, Leszek</i> . Selected issues in aspect-modality interaction: English modal auxiliaries and the morphological aspect of the main verb	206
--	-----

MEDIEVAL

<i>Bailey, Janine</i> . The St Petersburg Gospels and the Athelstan Royal Gospels: Palaeographic Purpose.....	228
<i>Konshuh, Courtney</i> . Edward the Elder’s Burghal Policy and Ideology in West Saxon Overlordship of Britain	242
<i>Kotake, Tadashi</i> . ‘Non A-type’ glosses in the Cambridge Psalter (Cambridge, University Library, Ff. 1.23): A case study of double glosses.....	260
<i>Allen, Rosamund</i> . How Does One Pronounce a Mis-Spelling?	277
<i>Mester, Annegret</i> . The Six Swans of the Romance of the <i>Cheuelere</i> <i>Assigne</i> : sources and analogues	290
<i>Matyushina, Inna</i> . Words before blows: flyting in Old English, German, Norse and Russian tradition.....	312

SOCIETY

<i>Benabdi, Farouk</i> . The School Boards and their Abolition in England: 1870-1902	329
<i>Chorfi, Fatima</i> . The Article: The Origins of the Labour Party prior to 1906	340

INTRODUCTION

The Sixth International Conference ‘Language, Culture, and Society in Russian / English Studies’ was held in the University of London on the 27th and 28th July 2015. The collaborating bodies were the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages, the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Academy of Linguistics, and the Institute of English Studies of the University of London’s School of Advanced Study. Central to the conference’s interests is work on the Russian and English languages and on the history of these languages, discussed within the wider context of cultural studies. The 2015 conference heard papers on all the main conference strands: on Theoretical Linguistics and Language Teaching; on Sociolinguistics and Society Studies; on Russian and English Literature; on Medieval Studies; on the History of the Book; and twenty papers have come forward to publication. In Part I of the Proceedings, Six plenary papers are grouped together at the beginning of the 2015 volume, followed by papers arranged under four headings: Literature; and Language Studies, Lexicography; Medieval; and Society.

The opening paper casts its net widely. From the Antique world to nineteenth-century Germany, riddles in verse are entertainingly discussed by Eric Stanley (University of Oxford), in ‘RIDDLING: a serious pursuit through the ages and in many languages’. Behind some of the oldest riddles in English lay Latin riddles composed by Aldhelm late in the seventh or early in the eighth century, like Exeter Book Riddle 38, which draws on Aldhelm’s Riddle 83 to develop three views of a steer: a young calf, sucking at the udder; a full grown bullock ploughing the land; and skin cut into leather strips useful as fetters. Other riddles lack such scholarly origins, and some indeed are delightfully ambiguous, ‘as if in play designed to test monks, not seriously: they are fit to be religious if they guess the innocent solution, but unfit if they are misled by all this sex.’ Stanley shows how riddles continued to have a role in serious literature, for example in the casket scene at the centre of Bassanio’s gaining Portia as wife in *The Merchant of Venice*. A deft understanding of words and their meanings is communicated, but with the sobering final sentence: ‘Verse riddles are a literary genre that celebrates obscurity’.

A conundrum that has long worried Anglo-Saxonists was confronted by Dr Tomás Kalmar, an Independent scholar from Arizona – the seeming oddity that Alfred of Wessex was only four-years old when he visited Rome with his father. In ‘Then Alfred took the throne and then what? Parker’s error and Plummer’s blind spot’, Kalmar skilfully examines the construction of sentences in the Parker Chronicle. Reading sequences of idiomatic structures closely, Kalmar demonstrates how they have come to be misinterpreted. In 855, when the visit to Rome took place, the historical Alfred was, Kalmar argues, more or less the same age as Judith, the thirteen-year-old Carolingian princess old enough to marry his father on their way home from Rome. The paper therefore casts new light on such issues as what Rome meant in later life to the adult Alfred, which Carolingians he could remember meeting as a child, how he imagined the process of learning to understand and recite vernacular writing, and how he arrived at the value, which he placed, on Latin in a bilingual community.

The presentation, almost a graphic paper, if that is not a contradiction in terms, by Artem Kitaev on behalf of himself and his colleague Leonid Slonimskiy required the audience to absorb and add together a fascinating series of images that detail the ‘the tortuous history of Malevich’s grave’. ‘Malevich’s Grave: from figurative to non-figurative and back: A research project on the history of Kazimir Malevich’s ashes burial site in the context of the perception of historical avant-garde in Soviet and post-Soviet culture’ was a rich evocation of successive transformations of the burial site from 1935, the year of Malevich’s death’ to the present day, giving insight into historical and architectural aspects of his commemoration. The first simple memorial, at the heart of the area in which the artist worked, was lost during the Second World War, but the site was rediscovered and a new memorial was put up nearby in 1988. Since then the ploughed field in which the burial lay has become the huge Romashkovo residential complex. Media uproar sparked off the announcement of a competition for the design of a new memorial and the designation of a memorial site within a Romashkovo courtyard, to ‘enhance the appeal of the residential complex and foster ideological and patriotic education’. Kitaev and

Then Alfred took the throne and then what? Parker's error and Plummer's blind spot

*Tomás Mario Kalmar
Arizona, USA*

Тогда Альфред сел на трон, и, что потом? Ошибка Паркера и темные пятна Пламмера.

*Томас Марио Кальмар
Аризона, США*

Abstract. In 1899, a widely shared desire to fix Alfred's birth-date *without consulting Asser* led Plummer to conjure up a mirage: 'It seems to have been overlooked that the date is fixed by the genealogical Preface to MS. A of the Chron., a strictly contemporary authority, which says that he was 'turned' twenty-three at his accession in 871.' Plummer's mirage may be traced back to Archbishop Parker's original interest in his manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which Parker erroneously characterised as written when Alfred was twenty-three years old. The clause recording Alfred's twenty-three-year regnal length in the last sentence of the Alfredian West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List can be reversed to yield a birth date of 848 only by imposing on the text a feebler standard of style and syntax, numeracy and logic, rhythm and coherence than the text deserves, ignoring its arithmetic, semantics, poetics, and genre. Letting go of Alfred's hitherto canonical birthdate is not a trivial matter. What Rome meant to the adult Alfred, which Carolingians he could remember meeting as a child, how he imagined the process of learning to understand and recite vernacular writing, and how he arrived at the value which he placed on Latin in a bilingual community – when we muse on questions like these, much will change if we come to imagine the historical Alfred in 855 as more or less the same age as Judith, the thirteen-year-old Carolingian princess old enough to marry his father on their way back from Rome.

Аннотация. Известно, что в 1899 году в Англии появляется мнение, что историкам следует пересмотреть дату рождения короля Альфреда, не обращаясь к труду Ассера, епископа Шерборна, «Житие короля Альфреда». Эта тенденция привела Чарльза Пламмера к иллюзии о том, что «...исследователи не заметили, что его возраст зафиксирован в генеалогическом Предисловии к рукописи Хроники, по сей день являющейся авторитетным источником, в котором говорится, что ему исполнилось 23 года в 871 г., в год его вступления на престол». Созвучие с мнением Пламмера можно найти у архиепископа Паркера, который ошибочно счел, что Англо-саксонские Хроники были написаны, когда Альфреду было 23 года. Пункт рукописи в части двадцатитрехлетнего правления Альфреда,

записанного в Западносаксонской королевской хронологии Альфреда, может быть отменен с целью признания датой его рождения 848 г. лишь без учета особенностей рукописи: ее стиля, синтаксиса, счетной традиции и логики, не задумываясь при этом о целостности текста – игнорируя арифметику, семантику, поэтику и жанр. Вопрос о пересмотре возраста Альфреда, который до сих пор считался решенным, – не тривиальный вопрос. Когда мы задумываемся над вопросами о том, что означал Рим для уже взрослого Альфреда, кого из Каролингов он запомнил в своем детском путешествии в Рим, как он представлял себе обучение и умение писать на родном языке и письменности, как он пришел к пониманию почетного места латинского языка в своем двуязычном обществе – все эти вопросы помогают по-новому взглянуть на исторического Альфреда 855 г., когда он приблизительно был ровесником каролингской принцессы Юдифь, которая в свои тринадцать лет была достаточной зрелой, чтобы стать женой его отца, короля Этельвульфа, во время их возвращения из Рима домой.

When men had felt the necessity of guarding themselves against mytho-poesy, they found their first guarantee for the security of historical truth in tables of chronology.

–JOHN EARLE¹

If it is possible and even probable that genres in Old English literature not traditionally viewed as poetic use poetic structures to convey meaning, then we should extend poetic scrutiny across the Old English corpus rather than restricting it to the contents of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. Perhaps more texts can sing to us than we thought – if we are prepared to hear them.

–TIFFANY BEECHY²

¹ John Earle, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel. With supplementary extracts from the others* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865), p. v. See also Charles Plummer, *Two of the Saxon chronicles parallel, with supplementary extracts from the others. A revised text on the basis of an edition by John Earle*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892/9), §9, p. xxi. Plummer did not ‘think it possible to state better the difference between Histories and Chronicles’ and therefore preserved Earle’s original Introduction ‘with some abridgement’.

² Tiffany Beechy, *The Poetics of Old English* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 38.

1 The quest for an Anglo-Saxon birth date

In the late Victorian quest for the historical Alfred, led by the Rev. Charles Plummer, the question of how old young Alfred was when he went to Rome played a crucial – now long-forgotten – role in the formation of the Alfredian canon. If, as Asser said, Alfred was born in 849, then he was only four years old when he went to Rome in 853. However, by the 1890s Asser's chronological framework had come under robust critical scrutiny. The 849 birthdate had passed innocuously enough from chronicle to chronicle and then from history to history until the pugnacious antiquary Henry Howorth launched his iconoclastic attack on the cult of Alfred the Great in the pages of the *Athenæum* in 1875. Howorth acutely identified Asser's *Life* as the earliest source for the 849 birthdate, but caustically pointed out that Asser used three other birth dates as well: 842, 848, and 851. According to Howorth, Alfred never went to Rome as an infant to be anointed king by the Pope, for he had never even been born, lived, or died. Like Arthur, he was merely a figment of the romantic imagination. Asser's entire *Life*, not merely his confused chronology, was bogus.³ There was no historical Alfred. There was only the legendary Alfred. There was no birth date.

Simon Keynes has shown in detail how by 1800 the cult of Alfred had 'gathered enough momentum to rise way above the niceties of historical scholarship'.⁴ As the nineteenth century drew to a close and rampant Alfredophilia curdled into perfervid Alfredomania, Plummer sought to do for Alfred what the quest for the historical Jesus had done for the cult of Jesus: separate fact from fiction, the legendary from the historical Alfred. In 1899, Plummer's historical-critical revision of Earle's 1865 philological edition of the Parker Chronicle proved that 'Alfred holds in real history the place which romance assigns to Arthur.'⁵

³ For more on this controversy, see Tomás Kalmar, 'Asser's *imitatio* of Einhard: clichés, echoes, and allusions', *EOLAS* 7 (2014), pp. 65-91, and 'Mythical Millenaries: The Victorian Quest for the Historical Alfred', paper read at the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists Biennial Conference, Notre Dame University, August 10, 1999. <<https://www.academia.edu/8736010/>>.

⁴ Simon Keynes. 'The Cult of King Alfred the Great' *Anglo-Saxon England* 28 (1999): 225–356, at 328.

⁵ First written in the preliminary printing of John Earle and Charles Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel (787-1001 A.D.): With Supplementary Extracts from the*

Pace Howorth, Alfred's historicity did not depend on the authenticity of Asser's *Life*.

Meanwhile, millions of Anglo-Saxons around the globe were being urged to deify Alfred by sheer popular acclaim as the most perfect human being who had ever lived, the archetypal Father of the Race, of the British Empire, of its Laws, its Navy, and its Prose. In 1897, while the Empire was celebrating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the indefatigable old Comtist Frederic Harrison persuaded the Imperialist Sir Walter Besant and the Mayor of Winchester to help him mount a tremendous sequel in 1901 upon the Millenary of Alfred's death. In 1898, Besant addressed a small provincial gathering at the Guildhall in Winchester:⁶

When we were all drunk with the visible glory and the greatness of the Empire – there arose in the minds of many a feeling that we ought to teach the people the meaning of what we saw set forth in that procession – the meaning of our Empire – not only what it is, but how it came – through whose creation – by whose foundation. Now so much is Alfred the Founder that every ship in our Navy might have his name – every school his bust: every Guildhall his statue. He is everywhere. But he is invisible. And the people do not know him. The boys do not learn about him. There is nothing to show him. We want a monument to Alfred, if only to make the people learn and remember the origin of our Empire – if only that his noble example may be kept before us, to stimulate and to inspire and to encourage.

Others: A Revised Text (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), p. xiii. Repeated in Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, 1899, 2:114. He again repeated this declaration in his 1901 sermon on the death of Queen Victoria, repr. as an Appendix to Charles Plummer, *The Life and Times of Alfred the Great* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), pp. 205–13, at 210.

⁶ Walter Besant, *Alfred* (London: H. Cox, 1898); repr. as Introduction to Alfred Bowker, ed., *Alfred the Great* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1899), p. 35. The 1901 Millenary has now been seriously studied from various perspectives: Barbara Yorke, *The King Alfred Millenary in Winchester, 1901*, Hampshire Papers, 17 (1999); Clare A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in 19th-Century British Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 185-91; Stephen Heathorn, "'The Highest Type of Englishman": Gender, War, and the Alfred the Great Millenary Commemoration of 1901', *Canadian Journal of History* 37.3 (2002):459-84.

Seeking a larger audience, he then addressed the general public in a popular book published (after he died) in 1901:⁷

If the subject could interest the folk of Winchester, why should it not interest also the whole of the Anglo-Saxon world? I desire to stand before a larger audience in a wider theatre. I desire to fill that theatre with the people to whom at present Alfred is but a name, if even that. I should like, if it were possible, to see before me, in imagination, tier beyond tier, stretching far away in the distance, circle beyond circle, millions of white faces intent upon the story of the English king.

In 1898, however, W. H. Stevenson had published a learned article in the recently founded *English Historical Review*, dryly proving by strict textual criticism that in the margin of a manuscript a careless scribe had accidentally dislocated the date of Alfred's death from 899 to 901.⁸ Stevenson did not condescend to point out that therefore the proposed Millenary in 1901 would be two years too late. However, celebrating boring old 1899 would be dull indeed. The Millenarians decided to remain faithful to the brand new century for their Millenary, preferring to adore not the historical Alfred but the personage whom Simon Keynes has deftly dubbed Alfred's legendary namesake. The remorseless criticism of scholarship – the Comtean sneer is Frederic Harrison's – was not to prevent the canonization of the Patriot Saint of the Empire. Like Comte, the Millenarians valued stories more than dates, preferring fetishism to history. The Plummers and Stevensons of the world must be content with a marginal role, fussing and bickering over trivial details of mere fact.⁹

⁷ Walter Besant, *The Story of King Alfred* (London: George Newnes Ltd, 1901), p. 12.

⁸ W. H. Stevenson, 'The Date of King Alfred's Death', *English Historical Review* 13 (1898).

⁹ Harrison believed in stories like Alfred and the cakes when he was ten years old. In 1911 when he was eighty years old he wrote 'in a sense I believe in them still': Martha S. Vogeler, *Frederic Harrison: The Vocations of a Positivist*, (Oxford: OUP, 1984), p. 9.

Alfred's sanctity was more interesting than his birth date. However, the two were interlocked. For if he had no birth date, his sanctity was mythical. What was politically and psychologically at stake in this fervour over Alfred's historicity as '*fons et origo* of political stability in England'¹⁰ is illuminated by Hannah Arendt's contrast between the enlarged tribal consciousness characteristic of the Continental pan-movements and the chauvinist mystique of British and French Imperialism:¹¹

Only with the "enlarged tribal consciousness" did that peculiar identification of nationality with one's own soul emerge, that turned-inward pride that is no longer concerned only with public affairs but pervades every phase of private life until, for example, "the private life of each true Pole ... is a public life of Polishness."

In psychological terms, the chief differences between even the most violent chauvinism and this tribal nationalism is that one is extroverted, concerned with visible spiritual and material achievements of the nation, whereas the other, even in its mildest forms (for example, the German youth movement) is introverted, concentrates on the individual's own soul which is considered as the embodiment of general national qualities. Chauvinist mystique still points to something that really existed in the past ... and merely tries to elevate this into a realm beyond human control; tribalism, on the other hand, starts from non-existent pseudo-mystical elements which it proposes to realize fully in the future....

Comtists had their own liturgical cult of Alfred. They worshipped Alfred in private on the first Sunday of the month of Charlemagne (otherwise known as July). The contribution of Comtism to the collective public adoration of Alfred during the 1901 Millenary has been underestimated. For an illuminating study of what made Harrison tick, see Christopher Kent, *Brains and Numbers: Elitism, Comtism, and Democracy in Mid-Victorian England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978). On Comte and Positivist Fetishism, see Peter Melville Logan, *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Keynes, 'Cult of King Alfred', p. 341.

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), pp. 226-27.

And it was in this overheated context that, as his contribution to the celebration of the Empire that had lasted a thousand years, Plummer delivered his 1901 Ford Lectures at Oxford University on the ‘Life and Times of Alfred the Great’. This was the Victorian Cult of Alfred at its soberest and sanest. By following the *sichere Gang einer Wissenschaft*, the line could be drawn calmly separating romance from history, the ‘luxuriance of a riotous imagination’¹² from the proven fact that Alfred was historically Great, and no mere Arthur. Drawing the line on the Alfredian myths, legends, and folktales, Plummer pondered, for example, what to do with the irrefragibly romantic stories about Alfred’s childhood? Were they merely the hagiographic luxuriance of Asser’s Celtic imagination? For example, it was only the legendary Alfred who was anointed king by the Pope, and yet the historical Alfred *did* go to Rome in 853. The Chronicle said so. Was he only four years old then? Or, was he, as Stubbs had suggested, really born in 842? The Chronicle did not say. It did not record a birth date for Alfred — or indeed for any other king.

The attractive 842 date, ‘which would make it at least credible that he was sent to Rome for education at an age at which he would be likely to profit by it’,¹³ depended entirely on a single word, *undecimo*, preserved in transcripts of the burnt Cotton manuscript of Asser’s *Vita Ælfredi*. To defend it would be to vanish into an arcane realm where the value of burnt manuscripts is weighed against that of popular opinion, the value of stories against that of dates, and the value of Asser’s opinion against some criterion yet to be determined.¹⁴ With the 899/901 death date now flapping around at the end of Alfred’s life, Plummer was under increasing pressure to make up his mind and peg Alfred’s birth down to a single year.

Plummer’s strategy for encompassing this challenging situation was to discover in two of the last four clauses of the Parker West Saxon Regnal List conclusive evidence for Alfred’s true birthdate, unscathed by

¹² Plummer, *Life and Times*, p. 10.

¹³ William Stubbs, ed., *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, 2 vols (London, 1887–9), II, xxxix–xli.

¹⁴ For a detailed itinerary through that arcane realm, see ‘Born in the Margin: The Chronological Scaffolding of Asser’s *Vita Ælfredi*’, *Peritia* 27, forthcoming.

Asser. In 1899, in his footnote to Alfred's trip to Rome *s.a.*853 he wrote:¹⁵

There has been much discussion as to the date of Alfred's birth, Stubbs II.xxxix–xli. It seems to have been overlooked that the date is fixed by the genealogical Preface to [the Parker] MS. of the Chron [icle], a strictly contemporary authority, which says that he was 'turned' twenty-three at his accession in 871. This fixes his birth to 848. He was therefore five years old at the time of his first visit to Rome.

Two years later, in his 1901 Millenary lectures, he used this exercise in scissors and paste to institutionalize 848 as the 'true date' of Alfred's birth.¹⁶

Under calmer circumstances, however, one would look askance at the claim that you could track down the exact birth year of an Anglo-Saxon king by consulting a regnal list. A genealogy is a chain of ancestors: a regnal list, a chain of regnal eras. A birth-date or an *aetas* would be as out of place in such a chain as on a coin or a charter. Imagine a witness list that included something like *I Alfred, twenty-three years of age, witness this...*: one would need a lot of persuading to believe that such a charter could be genuine. The rules of the game make it virtually impossible to slip an *aetas* onto a coin, a charter – or a genealogical regnal list. It goes against the grain. It is at bottom a question of genre, a question for philology.¹⁷

In order to understand how Plummer fell under the spell of the odd notion that instead of telling us how long Alfred has been reigning, the

¹⁵ Plummer, *Saxon Chronicles*, II,79. On the reference to Stubbs see further Kalmar, 'Mythical Millenaries' and 'Born in the Margin', forthcoming.

¹⁶ Plummer, *Life and Times*, p. 70.

¹⁷ On the textual strategies that structure traditional alliterating genealogies in general and the West Saxon Regnal List in particular, see the elegant and characteristically incisive analysis by Thomas A. Bredehoff, 'The Common Stock Genealogies', ch. 1 of *Textual Histories: Readings in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. (Toronto, 2001), pp. 14-38. On the West Saxon Regnal List as a whole, see now Susan Irvine, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in Nicole Guenther-Discenza & Paul E. Szarmach, eds, *A Companion to Alfred the Great* (Brill: Leiden, 2015), pp. 353-54.

composer of the Parkerian West Saxon Regnal List would prefer to tell us how old Alfred once was, it will therefore prove helpful to consider first the syntax of *Then A and then B* and the poetics of the text as a whole, and then to revisit the moment when Archbishop Matthew Parker, relying on his Elizabethan grasp of Old English, imagined that the version of the Chronicle preserved in his manuscript was written in the twenty-third year of Alfred's *aetatis*.

2 *Then A and then B.*

In Modern English, it would sound odd to say *she dried the dishes and she had washed them*. It sounds back to front because she dried them after, not before, she washed them. This example comes from the *Grammar of Contemporary English* by Quirk *et al.*, who comment: 'If the second clause is tense-marked [*and she had washed them*] to indicate that its content is prior chronologically, co-ordination of the two clauses is unacceptable in the intended meaning.'¹⁸ In other words, it is unidiomatic. *Then she dried the dishes and then she had washed them* would be even worse. And the philological question is: was this constraint already established in Old English? Can I say in Old English *Then Alfred took the throne and then 23 years had passed* if what I mean is that chronologically the twenty-three years passed *prior* to his taking the throne? That Alfred took the throne when twenty-three years had passed? When, as Plummer phrases it, 'he had turned 23'? Is there no difference between *when* and *and then*? Between *then A and then B*, and *then A when B*?

The last four clauses of the West Saxon Regnal List preserved on the opening page of the Parker Manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle read as follows:

Ʒa feng Ælfræd to rice 7 Ʒa was ágán his ielde 23 wintra ond 396
wintra Ʒæs Ʒe his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geodon.

¹⁸ Randolph Quirk *et al.*, *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (London: Longman, 1972), §9.42.

To begin clarifying the syntax that links these four clauses, consider how *þa* and *ond* interact in the following color-coded display of the full text:

**Parker West Saxon Regnal List
CCCC 173**

*English translation adapted
from Dorothy Whitelock*

Þy geare þe wæs agan fram Cristes
acennesse 494 uuintra,

In the year when 494 years had
passed from Christ's birth,

þa **Cerdic** 7 Cynric his sunu cuom up
æt **Cerdicesoran** mid 5 scipum;

Cerdic and his son Cynric
landed at **Cerdicesora** with five
ships

ond se **Cerdic** was Elesing,
Elesa Esling,
Esla Gewising,
Giwis Wiging,
Wig Freawining,
Freawine Friþugaring,
Friþugar Bronding,
Brond Beldæging,
Beldæg Wodening.

and **Cerdic** was the son of
Elesa,
the son of Esla,
the son of Gewis,
the son of Wig,
the son of Freawine,
the son of Frithugar,
the son of Brond,
the son of Bældæg,
the son of Woden.

Ond **þæs** ymb 6 gear

þæs **þe** hie up cuomon,
geodon Westseaxna rice,

And 6 years

ond **þæt** uuærun **þa** ærestan
cyningas
þe Westseaxna lond on Wealum
geodon;

after they had landed
they conquered the
kingdom of the West Saxons,

ond he hæfde **þæt** rice 16 gear,

ond **þa** he
gefor,

and they were the first
kings
who conquered the land of
the West Saxons from the
Britons.

þa feng his sunu Cynric to þam rice
ond heold
17 winter.

þa he gefor,

þa feng Ceol to þam rice

ond heold 6 gear.

þa he gefor,

þa feng Ceolwulf to, his broþur,

ond he ricsode 17 gear,

ond hiera cynn gæþ to Cerdice.

þa feng Cynegils, Ceolwulfes broþur
sunu, to rice

ond ricsode 31 wintra,

ond he onfeng ærest fulwihte

Wesseaxna cyninga,

ond þa feng Cenwalh to

ond heold 31 wintra,

ond se Cenwalh wæs Cynegilses

sunu;

ond þa heold Seaxburg his cuen an
gear þæt rice æfter him.

þa feng Æscwine to rice,

þæs cyn gæþ to Ceardice,

ond he heold 2 gear.

And he held the kingdom
for 16 years,

and then/when he died,

then his son Cynric succeeded
to the kingdom

and held it for 17 years.

Then/when he died,

then Ceol succeeded to the
kingdom,

and held it for 6 years.

Then/when he died,

then his brother Ceolwulf
succeeded

and he reigned 17 years,

and their descent goes back
to Cerdic.

Then Cynegils, the son of
Ceolwulf's brother, succeeded
to the kingdom

and reigned 31 years,

and he was the first king of
the West Saxons baptised.

And then Cealwealh
succeeded,

and held it for 31 years,

and Cenwealh was

Cynegil's son.

And then his queen Seaburh
held the kingdom for a year
after him.

þa feng Centwine to Wesseaxna rice
Cynegilsing

ond ricsode 7 gear.

þa feng Ceadwalla to þam rice,

Then Æscwine succeeded to the
kingdom,

whose descent goes
back to Cerdic,

þæs cyn gæþ to Cerdice,
ond heold 3 gear.
Ða feng Ine to Seaxna rice,
þæs cyn gæþ to Ceardice,
ond heold 37 wintra.
þa feng Æpelheard to,
þæs cyn gæþ to Ceardice,
ond heold 14 winter.
þa feng Cūþred to,
þæs cyn gæþ to Cerdice,
ond heold 17 gear.
þa feng Sigebryht to,
þæs cyn gæþ to Cerdice,
ond heold an gear.
þa feng Cynewulf to rice,
þæs cyn gæþ to Ceardice,
ond heold 31 wintra.
þa feng Beorhtric to rice,
þæs cyn gæþ to Cerdice,
ond heold 16 gear.
þa feng Egbryht to þam rice
ond heold 37 wintra ond .vii.
monað,
ond þa feng Æpelwulf his sunu to
ond heold 18 1/2 gear.

Se Æpelwulf wæs
Egbryhting,
Egbryht Ealhmunding,
Ealhmund Eafing,
Eafa Eopping,
Eoppa Ingilding,
Ingild Cenreiding,

and held it for 2 years.
Then Centwine, the son of
Cynegils, succeeded to the
kingdom of the West Saxons,
and reigned for 7 years.
Then Ceadwalle succeeded to
the kingdom,
whose descent goes
back to Cerdic,
and held it for 3 years.
Then Ine succeeded to the
kingdom of the Saxons,
whose descent goes
back to Cerdic,
and held it for 37 years.
Then Æthelheard succeeded to
the kingdom,
whose descent goes
back to Cerdic,
and held it for 14 years.
Then Cuthred succeeded,
whose descent goes
back to Cerdic,
and held it for 17 years.
Then Sigebriht succeeded,
whose descent goes
back to Cerdic,
and held it for one year.
Then Cynewulf succeeded,
whose descent goes
back to Cerdic,
and held it for 31 years.

ond Ine Cenreding,
ond Cupburg
 Cenreding,
ond Cuenburg
 Cenreding,
 Cenred Ceolwaling,
 Ceolwald Cupwulfing,
 Cupwulf Cupwining,
 Cupwine Celming,
 Celm Cynricing,
 Cynric **Cerdicing**.

Then Brihtric succeeded,
 whose descent goes back
 to **Cerdic**,
 and held it for 16 years.
Then Egbert succeeded
 and held it for 37 years and
 seven months;
And then his son Æthelwulf
 succeeded
 and held it for 18 and a half
 years.

And þa feng Æpelbald his sunu
 to rice

ond heold 5 gear.

þa feng Æpelbryht his broþur to

ond heold 5 gear.

þa feng Æpered his broþur to rice

ond heold 5 gear

þa feng Ælfréd hiera broþur to
 rice,

ond þa was ágán his ielde 23
 wintra

ond 396
 wintra

þæs þe his cyn ærest
Westseaxna lond on Wealum
geodon.

And then his son Æthelbald
 succeeded to the kingdom

and held it for 5 years.

Then his brother Ethelbert
 succeeded to the kingdom

and held it for 5 years.

Then their brother Ethelred
 succeeded to the kingdom

and held it for 5 years.

Then their brother Alfred
 succeeded

and then had passed 23 years of
 his age

and 396
 years

from when his race first
 conquered the land of the
 West Saxons from the Britons.

Reading this aloud, as if it were poetry, one can feel the counterpoint of the *ands* and the *thens* and the rhythm of the prose. One can sense how it flows in waves from the opening clauses

þy geare þe wæs agan fram Cristes acennesse 494 uuintra
þa Cerdic 7 Cynric his sunu cuom up æt Cerdicesoran mid fif
scipum

to the closing clauses

ond þa was ágán his ielde 23 wintra
ond 396 wintra
þæs þe his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geodon.

Note, first, that three colors suffice to chart the interweaving of all the clauses in the text by just three conjunctions: *þa* in red, *ond* in green and *þæs* in brown. By and large, as one can see from the layout, *þa* introduces the next king, *then so and so took the throne*; *ond* how long he reigned, *and held it for so many years*; and *þæs* harks back to the beginning, to the founding of the kingdom by Cerdic in 500 AD, ‘*þæs cyn gæþ to Cerdice*’.

Secondly, one can see how all three colors have been systematically braided to create some recurrent patterns, such as

þa feng A to,
þæs cyn gæþ to Cerdice,
ond heold B gear.

which cycles through seven regnal lengths to wind up with Alfred’s grandfather Egbert.

Thirdly, note the six clauses linked by *ond þa*, *and then*.

And finally, it is worth pondering why and how the last four clauses are linked together by each of these conjunctions in turn:

þa Alfred, *ond þa* 23 years *ond* 396 years *þæs þe* Cerdic...

No other sentence in the Chronicle links four clauses in exactly this way. I found no other example outside the Chronicle, so in 1987 I consulted Bruce Mitchell, who kindly replied: ‘You raise an interesting and

important question. As far as I can discover, this exact combination of temporal expressions is not found elsewhere in Old English.’¹⁹

Yet there is nothing odd, awkward or unidiomatic about the sentence. It is in the grain of the vernacular. Linking the last four clauses together by each conjunction in turn serves well to tie the threads into a neat bow, to achieve through terminal modification of a systematic repetition what Barbara Herrnstein Smith means by poetic closure – ‘A generating principle that produces a paratactic structure cannot in itself determine a concluding point.’²⁰ Consequently,²¹

one of the most effective ways to indicate the conclusion of a poem generated by an indefinitely extensible principle is simply to modify the principle at the end of the poem. It then becomes a series running *AAA ... x*, where the occurrence of *x* in connection with other (thematic and non-structural) elements suggesting conclusion will be much more effective for closure than one more *A*.

Poetic closure is also reinforced by the way ‘was ágán’ in our clause echoes the verb in the clause that opened the whole text: ‘Þy geare þe wæs agan fram Cristes acennesse’, and clinched by the way the clause that ends the text, ‘þæs þe his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geodon’, echoes the two clauses that launched the list of regnal lengths: ‘ond þæt uuærun þa ærestan cyningas þe Westseaxna lond on Wealum geodon’. ‘In general, whenever a poetic form repeats at its conclusion a formal unit with which it began, closure will be thereby strengthened.’²²

In short, these final four clauses seem designed to establish the integrity of the text by allowing it to end with ‘resolution, finality, punch, pointedness.’²³ They serve as the punch line, as it were, of the whole story.

¹⁹ Bruce Mitchell, private communication, 11 July 1987.

²⁰ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic closure: A study of how poems end* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 101.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 53. For many illuminating examples, see her index, s.v. ‘terminal modification’.

²² *ibid.*, p. 27.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 51.

Then Aethelwulf took the throne and ruled so many years and then
Aethelbald took the throne and ruled so many years then
Aethelbert took the throne and ruled so many years then Ethelred
took the throne and ruled so many years then Alfred took the
throne and then – *what?*

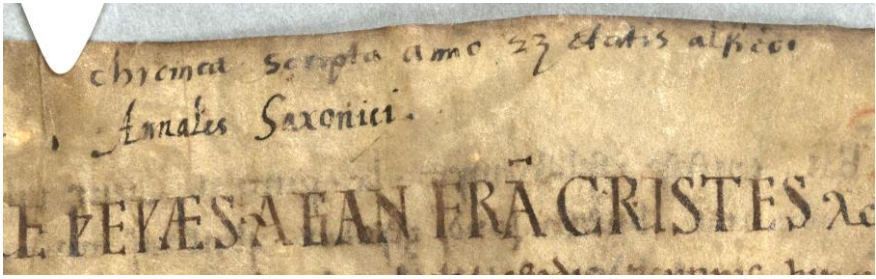
At the climax of the West Saxon Regnal List, we expect *and ruled so many years – ond heold/ricsode 23 wintra*. What we get are these rhetorical, or at least syntactic, gestures, this poetic closure. And the philological question is: were those 23 years chronologically *prior* to his accession? Did they pass *after* Alfred took the throne? Or did they pass *before* Alfred took the throne?

This may well seem, on the face of it, pedantic nit-picking. What makes the question interesting is that seven hundred years after these clauses were written down, Matthew Parker imagined the 23 years of Alfred's *ielde* to have passed before Alfred took the throne – that Alfred took the throne when he was 23 years old, as if *ond þa* can bear the sense of *when*. And what makes the question important is that three centuries later Plummer's understanding of the Life and Times of Alfred the Great was inflected, in ways that are far from obvious, by Parker's interpretation of 'þa feng Ælfred to rice 7 þa was ágán his ielde 23 wintra'.

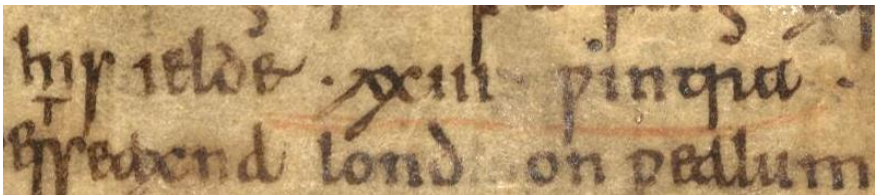
3 Parker's error and Plummer's blind spot

Between 1567 and 1574, in the midst of the pressing problems of his active life as Queen Elizabeth's Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker found it worth his time to write 'chronica scripta anno 23 etatis alfredi' at the top right hand corner of the first page of his manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – the (now famous) Parker Chronicle, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 173, f. 1r.²⁴

²⁴ Reproduced by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.



We know today that Parker erred. Neither the West Saxon Regnal List nor the Chronicle were compiled when Alfred was 23: both were first compiled some time in the 890s. The source of Parker's error is easy to identify. It was his practice to date a manuscript by reading through it until he found a clue to the date of its composition: he would then underline this in his characteristic red crayon and/or add a note at the beginning of the manuscript.²⁵ The Regnal List was nicely laid out on what is now the first page of CCCC 173, ending at the bottom right hand corner. In the final sentence of the Regnal List, in the middle of the second-last line of the page, the phrase '.xxiii. wintra' is underlined in Parker's red crayon.²⁶



What Parker wanted to know was not when Alfred was born but when the Chronicle was written. He underlined the wrong number. I wish that instead of underlining '.xxiii. wintra' he had underlined the *last* number

²⁵ 'For a parallel case of Parker hunting for the date of a manuscript and, having found it, entering a note about it at the beginning of the manuscript, see CCCC 192 fol. 97^v and fol. 1^r.' Timothy Graham, personal communication Aug. 1 1997.

²⁶ We cannot be completely certain, of course, that it was Parker himself, rather than one of his colleagues, who used this crayon to underline '.xxiii. wintra'. The words written at the top of the page, however, are indubitably in Parker's own hand: Graham, personal communication, May 8, 1997.

in this sentence (and hence in the Regnal List), namely ‘ccc. 7 xcvi. wintra’. For this final number, measuring how many years had passed since the Conquest of Wessex, would have allowed Parker to postulate 896 AD for when the text was written. He would have needed to add the first two numbers in the Regnal List, 494 AD plus six years, to arrive at 500 AD as the year Alfred’s ‘cyn ærest Wes’t’seaxna lond on Wealum geodon’ to which the final phrase of the Regnal List refers. Adding the 396 years since then would have given Parker 896 AD. He could thus have written at the top of the page **chronica scripta AD 896*, a date that scholars today agree marks a plateau in the production of Parker’s chronicle.²⁷

For brevity’s sake, I will, in what follows, designate as a ‘regnal’ reading any interpretation of the Parker Regnal List which takes the 23 years of Alfred’s ‘ielde’ as *beginning* with his accession. Suppose that Parker had, as I wish, underlined the 396 years at the end of the Regnal List and had written **chronica scripta AD 896* at the top of the first page of his Chronicle, it is hard to imagine how nineteenth century translators and editors of the Parker Chronicle, seeing such an annotation at the beginning of the manuscript, could then have overlooked the *possibility* of a regnal reading of the Regnal List. And this in turn would have made it impossible for Plummer to claim *tout court* that the Regnal List can, on its own, independent of Asser’s *Life*, unequivocally ‘fix’ Alfred’s birth date to 848 AD by *subtracting* 23 from 871. This received interpretation – call it a Parkerian reading²⁸ – makes nonsense of the final clause, with its 396 years since the Conquest of Wessex. Plummer: ‘The interval the Preface places between the Conquest of Wessex and Alfred’s accession,

²⁷ On the consensus regarding the composition in 896 AD of a version of the Chronicle including the annals up to 896, see, for example, Cecily Clark, ‘The Narrative Mode of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* before the Conquest’, in *England before the Conquest. Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 215-35; Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great. Asser’s Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 279-80; Janet Bately, ‘The Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Once More’, *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1985): 7-26, at 17-19; and Irvine, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’, p. 352. Cf. Alfred P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), pp. 498-608.

²⁸ Parkerian is to ‘regnal’ as *antequam* is to *postquam*.

396 years, is of course too long.²⁹ (Why ‘of course’?) Whitelock: ‘This figure [396] must be wrong. Whether we reckon from the conquest of Wessex, i.e. 500 ... or from the “Coming of the English” in 449, we do not arrive at the year of Alfred’s accession.’³⁰

On this issue, Plummer seems to have suffered from a blind spot, a Freudian slip. It is as if a regnal reading simply could not occur to him. For example, in 1899 he wrote, ‘nothing is said as to the length of [Alfred’s] reign, for the excellent reason that when the preface was written the length of the reign could not be known; and later scribes, with more self-restraint than they sometimes manifest, have refrained from supplying the deficiency’,³¹ even though he knew, better than anyone else, that the later scribe of β [London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A iii, f. 178] updated the 23 to Alfred’s full 28½ year regnal length, so as to supply the deficiency. And, again, in 1902 Plummer added a footnote to his 1901 Ford Lectures on *The Life and Times of Alfred the Great* in which he inadvertently claimed that ‘all these MSS. [including β] read “xxiii”’,³² even though he himself had recorded that β reads ‘7 heold opran healfan geara læs þe .xxx. wintra’.³³

Plummer felt no need to explain why we should favour a Parkerian over a regnal reading, nor why we have to render the climax of the Regnal List meaningless by (of course?) favouring the accuracy of the number 23 over that of the final 396. Perhaps because he was so keen to find an Asser-free birth date, he assumed that his Parkerian reading was the only possible, and hence the only valid, interpretation of the text in front of him. The Chronicle has no annal for 848 AD. To make one up and supply *that* perceived deficiency, Plummer cut out from the beginning of his *ond þa* clause the conjunction *ond*, cut ‘7 ecc. 7 xcvi.

²⁹ Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, II, 3.

³⁰ Dorothy Whitelock, with David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, *The Anglo-Saxon chronicle : A revised translation* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), *s.a.* 626 n.1.

³¹ Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, II.cvi §102 and n.1: ‘I have already shown how a later scribe did continue the genealogy to the exact point to which his own Chronicle extended; see above.’ Cf. also: ‘The genealogy of the West Saxon house (cited by me as β which, apart from scribal variations, resembles that in A, *except that it is continued down to Edward the Martyr*’ (II, lxxxix §88). My italics.

³² Plummer, *Life and Times*, §53, p. 70 n. 3

³³ Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, I, 5 n. 5

wintra' from the end of it, and pasted what was left onto 871 AD, copied from the annal in the Chronicle recording Alfred's accession. Parker had mentally cut 'his ielde xxiii. wintra' and erroneously pasted it onto 'chronica scripta'. I do not say that seeing Parker's 'anno 23 etatis alfredi' at the top of the Regnal List caused Plummer's blind spot. But it certainly did not help. It eased his own exercise in scissors-and-paste.

To seek in the Regnal List internal evidence for its date of composition was not Parker's error. What led him astray was his misunderstanding of the temporal relationship predicated between the 23 years allotted to Alfred's *ield* and the 396 years allotted to the *ield* or era of the Kingdom of Wessex. The elliptical paratactic syntax which connects the four cadential clauses in this Old English sentence predicates these two durations as sharing the same *end point*. Parker, however, mistakenly assumed that *ielde* here means 'aetatis', and was thus lured into assuming that the 23 years of Alfred's *ield* ended, rather than began, with his accession. The Chronicle was not written in 871, the date of Alfred's accession, and the West Saxon Regnal List does not suggest it was.

871 AD, the traditional date for Alfred's accession, had been passed on from chronicle to chronicle and from historian to historian throughout the Middle Ages. Parker underlined 871 in the 871 annal of his Chronicle.³⁴ Subtracting Alfred's 23-year *ield* from 896 AD Parker could have postulated 873 AD as the date for Alfred's accession implicit in the Regnal List's arithmetic. Ignoring (or, better still, explaining) this two-year discrepancy between 871 and 873 would make more sense than ignoring the final 396 years at the end of the Regnal List.³⁵

Was Parker's error due to an inability or unwillingness to do the arithmetic involved? Surely not. Surely, what prevented him from grasping the connection predicated between

³⁴ See the red crayon underlining *s.a.* 871 on f. 14r of CCCC 173.

³⁵ Because of a two-year chronological dislocation, Alfred's reign was recorded as 28½ years *s.a.* 901, also implying an 873 AD accession date. A two-year discrepancy between an accession date explicitly written in the annals of the Chronicle and the corresponding date implicit in the Regnal List is smaller than average. See Plummer's observations on the data displayed in his *Two Chronicles*: II, 3. Æthelwulf's accession, for example, is recorded under the annal for 836 AD in the Chronicle, but if you add up all the regnal lengths before his you only get to 826 AD.

þæs þe his cyn ærest Wes`t`seaxna lond on Wealum geodon

in the last sentence and

þæt uuærun þa ærestan cyningas þe Westseaxena lond on Wealum
geodon

near the beginning of the Regnal List was his loose grip on the idiomatic syntax, poetics, and semantics of this Old English text. Recent and current work on what Rebecca Brackmann adroitly calls the Elizabethan invention of Anglo-Saxon England³⁶ has increased our understanding of the impressive, yet limited, grasp of Old English achieved by Parker and his colleagues in the sixteenth century. In order to entertain a regnal interpretation of the 23 years allotted to Alfred, Parker would have needed to discount certain Early Modern English linguistic habits that had diverged from normal Old English usage.

Specifically, he would have needed to take into account the differences between

- OE *ield* and EModE *age*,
- OE *þa was ágán* and EModE *then was agon*, and
- OE *ond þa* and EModE *and when*.

Each of these is worth considering in detail.

4 Semantics: *ield* versus *age*.

In his Preface to his 1574 edition of Asser's *Life* Parker wrote:³⁷

Iam verò cum Dayus Typographus primus (& omnium certè quod

³⁶ Rebecca Brackmann, *The Elizabethan Invention of Anglo-Saxon England: Lawrence Nowell, William Lambarde, and the Study of Old English* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012). See also Timothy Graham, ed., *The Recovery of Old English: Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000).

³⁷ Quoted by Peter J. Lucas, 'A Testimonye of Very Ancient Time? Some Manuscript Models for the Parkerian Anglo-Saxon Type-Designs', in *Of the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers. Essays presented to M. B. Parkes*, ed. P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot & Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1997), pp. 163-64. My italics.

sciam solus) has formas æri inciderit: faciliè quæ Saxonice literis perscripta sunt, iisdem typis diuulgabuntur. *Quorum sanè lectio & veteris tibi linguæ, ac quondam domesticæ memoriæ renouabit, & haud paruam suppeditabit abstrusæ cognitionis suppellestem. Facile autem erit vocum vim, & verborum varietatem percipere, præsertim cum tanta sit huius nostræ (qua nunc vtimur) linguæ & illius veteris similitudo.*

Lucas translates this thus:³⁸

For in as much as Day the printer [is the] first (and to my knowledge the only one) [to have] indented these shapes (?moulds) in copper those things that are written in Saxon letters will be easily published in these same types. *The reading of which indeed will restore for you the memory of the ancient but once familiar language, and will provide no little household furniture for [previously] concealed knowledge. It will be easy to perceive the meaning of utterances and the diversity of words, especially when the similitude of this our language (which we now use) and of the old language is so great.*

Page quotes a remark attributed to Parker by Strype (in 1711):

It was worth ones Pains ... to compare our Country Language, which we now use, with that *obsolete* and almost extinguished Speech; and while we are comparing them, to observe, how like they are, and almost the same.

Page adds Strype's comment:³⁹

And for that Cause chiefly he took care, that the four Gospels should be printed in that Language, and in the same Form of Character. And that the Reader might the more easily attain the Knowledge and Understanding thereof, the *English* was joined with the *Saxon* in the Margin, and distinguished with such Notes

³⁸ *ibid.* Again, my italics.

³⁹ John Strype, *The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London: John Wyat, 1711), p. 535, quoted by R. I. Page, *Matthew Parker and his Books* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), p. 88.

and Signs, that the Sentences of each Language might very readily be compared one with another.

Parker was a leader of what Cathy Shrank aptly calls the ‘linguistic Reformation’.⁴⁰ By printing Anglo-Saxon texts in special Anglo-Saxon type faces, he and his colleagues hoped to purify English through the *renovatio* of the older, purer Anglo-Saxon tongue. Establishing a one-to-one correspondence between Anglo-Saxon letters and sounds made it possible for his readers to give voice to the old texts by reading aloud what was on the page. Alphabetic literacy, defined as a knowledge of the relation between letters and sounds, is nowadays widely regarded as a relatively trivial variety of literacy.⁴¹ But throughout the sixteenth century, alphabetic literacy in the vernacular was what today some would call a cultural and ideological site of struggle: humanist reformers were vigorously engaged in negotiating and renegotiating the relation between letters and sounds, not only in various dialects and varieties of English, but conjointly in Latin and Greek – not to mention German, Dutch, Italian, French and Spanish. ‘Seldom has so limited a subject had such far-reaching implications.’⁴²

For the nonce I characterize Parker’s relation to Anglo-Saxon alphabetic literacy by drawing on Asser’s vocabulary: it is safe to assume that Parker was able to *legere et recitare* – to scan the Anglo-Saxon script and give it voice – but may, perhaps as often as not, have found it harder to *intelligere et interpretari* – to understand everything he was reading and render it in plain English.⁴³ Nevertheless, Parker himself makes it clear that by listening to what you are reading you will often be able to catch the drift of the words – the *vim vocum* – especially when the tongue we now use closely resembles the old tongue. Reading aloud

⁴⁰ Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England: 1530-1580* (Oxford, 2004), esp. pp. 151-53

⁴¹ Tomás Kalmar, *sv* ‘Literacy’, in Ilan Stavans, ed., *Encyclopedia Latina* (Grolier, 2005).

⁴² Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* (Durham NC: Duke, 1979). p. 320. On the intimate relationship between the philological scholarship of humanism and confessional apologetics see especially his thought-provoking chs 5, pp. 129-70 and 9, pp. 312-45.

⁴³ Tomás Kalmar, ‘Too good to be true: the fable of Alfred’s life’ (forthcoming).

‘ond þa was ágán his ielde .xxiii. wintra’ and listening to it through Elizabethan ears I find it easy to imagine him and his colleagues, unconcerned with nuances of syntax and poetic closure, recognizing each separate word without needing to consult a dictionary or word-list⁴⁴ – *cum tanta sit nostræ linguæ et veteris similitudo*. Each word in the clause has its natural cognate, its echo, in Elizabethan English. Thus the clause might be modernized into pseudo-Elizabethan English as **and his eld was then 23 winters agon*.

When Parker looked at *ielde* and assumed that it meant the same as *age* and *aetas*, he may have been understandably unaware that in the ninth century *ield* was more likely to mean either ‘era’ or ‘old age’, *aevum* or *senectus*. His translation of *ielde* as *etatis* thus offers an elegant case history of what C. S. Lewis meant by the ‘dangerous’ sense of a word.⁴⁵

The dominant sense of any word lies uppermost in our minds. Wherever we meet the word, our natural impulse will be to give it that sense. When this operation results in nonsense, of course, we see our mistake and try over again. But if it makes tolerable sense our tendency is to go merrily on. We are often deceived. In an old author the word may mean something different. I call such senses dangerous senses because they lure us into misreadings When the *dangerous sense* is a sense which did not exist at all in the age

⁴⁴ On sixteenth-century Old English lexicographers, see Timothy Graham, ‘The Earliest Old English Word-List from Tudor England’, *Medieval English Studies Newsletter* 35 (December 1996): 4-7, and ‘John Joscelyn, Pioneer of Old English Lexicography’, in Graham, *The Recovery of Old English*, pp. 83-140. If Parker *had* looked at Talbot’s word-list ‘compiled some time between the late 1530s and Talbot’s death in 1558’ (Graham, p. 87) he would have seen, as the second of the thirty-two items on the list: ‘in senectute – on his ylde’. Talbot took this from Genesis (see n. 56 below). On *senectus* as the dominant sense of ‘his ylde’, see below, n. 58. ‘Parker, of course, may have looked at Talbot’s word-list, although I doubt he paid it significant attention. His main interest in Talbot’s notebook, CCCC MS 379, was in the portion concerning the *Itinerarium*. I believe that Joscelyn’s dictionary as we have it in BL, Cotton MSS Titus A xv and Titus A xvi probably dates from after Parker’s death (see what I say about the date of the watermark in my Joscelyn paper). But Joscelyn was already compiling in the 1560s the word-lists on which the dictionary was based.’: Timothy Graham, private communication, 1998.

⁴⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 13-14.

when our author wrote, it is less dangerous. Moderate, and moderately increasing, scholarship will guard us against it. But often the situation is more delicate. What is now the *dangerous sense* may have existed then but it may not yet have been at all dominant. It may possibly be the sense the old author really intended, but this is not nearly so probable as our own usage leads us to suppose. Our task is not the comparatively simple one of excluding an unqualified candidate; we have to conquer our undue predilection for one of those who are qualified.

Aetas ‘age, time of life, years’ is but the second of the three relevant senses of OE *ield* supported by Bosworth and Toller.⁴⁶ The first is *ævum/sæculum* ‘an age, period of time.’ The third is *senectus/vetustas* ‘mature or old age, eld.’ And the question is which, in the ninth century, was the dominant sense? Which of these three qualified candidates is the sense the old author really intended?

Most of the examples cited by Bosworth and Toller for *ield* in the sense of *aetas* actually belong under *ævum/sæculum* or *senectus/vetustas*. ‘Eadig is heora yld seó ðe ðá gyt ne mihte Crist andettan and móste for Criste þrowian’ [Homl. Th. i. 84, 3]: the *yld* of the children of Bethlehem is not so much their quantitative age in years as their stage of life contrasted with ours. *Fulfremedre ielde* [Past. 49, 5; Swt. 335, 19.] is *vetustas*. To be 600 years *on ylde* is to be *senex*. All told, Bosworth and Toller list only three cases where *ield* quantifies what we today mean by ‘years of age’ reckoned from birth. Although these would seem to be instances that could warrant Parker’s reading of *ield* as *aetas*, all three actually refer to *old* men: ‘op nigon and fiftig wintra minre ylde’ [OE Bede, EETS 95.6 p. 482.7]; Noah ‘wæs ðá sixhund geara on ylde’, Gen. VII.6; ‘þæt hi hundeahtatig ylða gebiden’ [Ps. Th. 89, 11].⁴⁷

Age entered English in the thirteenth century *via* Old French *age*, cognate with Latin *aetas*. Throughout its semantic history the primary

⁴⁶ Joseph Bosworth, ‘An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online’, under *ild[e]*, ed. Thomas Northcote Toller and Others; Comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý. Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 21 Mar. 2010. Web. 25 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.bosworthtoller.com/020465>>.

⁴⁷ *The Paris Psalter & The Meters of Boethius*, ed. G. P. Krapp (NY, 1932), p. 6

sense of *age* has been *aetas*. *OED2*: ‘I. A period of existence. 1. The time that any animal or vegetable has lived; the length of time that anything has existed in its present form or state; length of existence.’ *Aetas* was not, however, the primary sense of *eld*, neither in the ninth century nor in the sixteenth. And it is helpful to realize that in Parker’s day, *eld*, though archaic, was not yet obsolete: Görlach’s evidence, showing the relative frequency of *eldelage* in Chaucer (28:83), Spenser (15:62), and Shakespeare (2:224),⁴⁸ suggests how easily, upon meeting *ielde* in the Regnal List, Parker’s natural impulse might have been to give it the sense of *age* = *aetas* and, as C. S. Lewis put it, go merrily on.

Eld survived in the sixteenth century only in the sense of *vetustas*, ‘old age’. *OED*, for example, cites Ben Jonson (who was in general averse to archaisms) using it in 1637: ‘Who scorns at eld, peels off his own young hairs’ (*Sad Shepherd* II iii), where the primary sense of old age as opposed to youth is obvious. In the nineteenth century, this sense of the word was still available for quaint effect, as in the 1858 specimen cited by *OED* from Kingsley’s *The Weird Lady* 17: ‘[O but] his beard was white with eld’.

But as the first usage documented by Bosworth-Toller makes clear, OE *ield/ylde* was often used in another, more technical sense which did *not* survive the Middle Ages, namely ‘an age of the world, a secular period’: *ævum*, *sæculum*. In the sixteenth century, this sense of *eld* may have survived only in Scots: *OED2* cites an example from Douglas’s Scots translation *Aeneis*.⁴⁹ In England, its last recorded use is in the

⁴⁸ Manfred Görlach, *Introduction to Early Modern English*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [English trans.] 1991), p. 140.

⁴⁹ ‘Ceculus ... all *eildis* ... schawis ws Engenerit was by the God Vulcanus’ (1513 DOUGLAS, *Aeneis* VII. xii.99). In the seventeenth century L’Isle used this Scots translation as part of his programme to teach himself Old English: ‘The due consideration hereof first stirred vp in me an earnest desire to know what learning lay hid in this old English tongue: for which I found out this vneasie way, first to acquaint my selfe a little with the Dutch both high and low; the one by originall, the other by commerce allied: then to reade a while for recreation all the old English I could finde, poetry or prose, of what matter soever. And diuers good bookes of this kinde I got, that were neuer yet published in print; which euer the more ancient they were, I perceived came neerer to Saxon: But the Saxon, (as a bird, flying in the aire farther and farther, seemes lesse and lesse;) the older it was, became harder to bee vnderstood. At length I lighted on *Virgil* Scotified by the Reuerend *Gawin Douglas* Bishop of *Dunkell*, and vncto to the Earle of *Angus*; the best translation of that Poet that euer I read: And though I found that dialect

northern *Cursor Mundi* (c.1300): ‘Blissed be sco þat us has spedd þat we elds four has redd’ (l. 9230.) And, unrecognized by Parker, this sense may well be the one ‘really intended by the old author’ of the Regnal List.

It is a question of the discursive practices appropriate to a specific genre. The organising principle of a Regnal List is not ‘time when’ but ‘time how long’. It lists durations, not dates. A Regnal List is, in the strict sense of the word, an *era*, a system of chronology marking public events from an epoch or starting-point. That starting-point can be the birth of Christ. It can be the date on which a king takes the throne. But it cannot be the date on which a king is born, since who knows whether the newborn child will be king, so how does one know to start counting? Parker’s West Saxon Regnal List constitutes such a system of reckoning. It can be interpreted as diagramming the backbone of the Chronicle, to be fleshed out by attaching dates to the accessions and inserting events into the durations already recorded in the Regnal List.⁵⁰ It subdivides the Age of Wessex into twenty-two subdivisions or ages. When a cosmic cycle of time is divided into periods in this manner, when the history of the world is divided into ages, the lunar cycle into phases, the human life-cycle into stages, the normal OE technical term to designate one such period of time, age, era, epoch, phase, or stage, is *ield/yld*.⁵¹

more hard /[sig. d1ʳ] than any of the former (as neerer the Saxon, because farther from the Norman) yet with helpe of the Latine I made shift to vnderstand it, and read the booke more tan once from the beginning to the end. Wherby I must confesse I got more knowledge of that I sought than by any of the other, for as at the Saxon Inuasion many of the Britans, so at the Norman many of the Saxons fled into Scotland, preserving in that Realme vnconquered, as the line Royall, so also the language, better than the Inhabitants here, vnder conquerors law and custome, were able.’ William L’Isle, *A Saxon Treatise Concerning the Old and New Testament* (London, 1623), sigs. c4^v – d1^r. I thank Timothy Graham for this reference.

⁵⁰ On the West Saxon Regnal List as a prefatory ‘Table of Contents’ see John Earle, ed., *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel* (Oxford, 1865), p. viii (i.e. before Plummer’s revision). And on how ‘the genealogical and regnal list acts as a preface to this version of the Chronicle’, see Irvine, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’, p. 353.

⁵¹ See also S. J. Crawford, *Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, EETS 160 (1922), 24.208, 26.270, 35.471, 39. 535, 54. 892, 70. 1185; Miller, *Old English Bede*, 5/22.484.21 ‘Be ðam syx yldum worulde’. On Byrhtferth’s use of *yldo* to name a phase of the lunar cycle, e.g., S. J. Crawford, *Byrhtferth’s Manual*, EETS, o.s. 177 (1920), 166.14 ‘Syððan þæs monan yldu byd [.xxx.]’. On Bede’s ‘six ages’ see P. Hunter Blair,

In the West Saxon Regnal List, therefore, it would be natural and idiomatic to reckon Alfred's *ield* in this technical sense from the date of his accession to the present: it corresponds to the ModE phrase 'the Elizabethan Age', which begins, of course, not with the birth of Queen Elizabeth, but with her accession to the throne. However, this sense of *ield* thwarts a Parkerian reading, since the 23 years must be reckoned from Alfred's accession, not his birth. Translating *ield* as *Age* – capital A – one could take 'Ond þa was ágán his ielde .xxiii. wintra ond .ccc. 7 .xcvi. wintra þæs þe his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geeodon' as saying, in effect, 'And when the Age of Alfred had lasted 23 years, that of Wessex [had lasted] 396'.

For the sake of completeness, it may now be in order to look at how one would normally say, in Old English, that *A* was *B* years old. Recording a person's exact age in years from his date of birth seems to have been, in the ninth century, not a common practice. The only such *aetas* in the Alfredian part of the Parker Chronicle (*i.e.* before 900 AD) is the dubious case of Penda who, under the annal for 626 AD, is said to have ruled for thirty years and to have been fifty years old when he succeeded to the kingdom:

7 Penda hæfde .xxx. wintra rice. 7 he hæfde .L. wintra þa þa he to rice feng.

These numbers need not be taken literally.⁵² Michael Swanton points out that fifty years is a notional number:⁵³ "“Fifty years” is sometimes used in Old English to mean “a long time”, much as Hebrew historical literature uses “forty years” of the reigns of kings and judges."⁵⁴

Colloquially speaking, Penda ruled for thirty years and when he started, he was already as old as the hills. After the Monastic Revival, the Chronicle does sometimes mention how old a king was at his accession. But it uses the simple formula *A feng to rice ond he wæs þa B wintra*.

The World of Bede (New York: St Martin's Press, 1970) p. 259 ff. Also J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: OUP, 1986).

⁵² Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*, s.a. 626 n. 1.

⁵³ Michael J. Swanton, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), p. 117, commenting on E963.

⁵⁴ Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 24, s.a. A 626 n. 2.

(*s.aa.* A941, B/C 959, E 972). In the *OE Bede* we find an equally simple expression, ‘Hæfde he þritig wintra, þa he to rice feng’.⁵⁵ In the *OE Heptateuch* ‘when Joseph was sixteen’: *þa Iosep wæs syxtine wintra*. ‘A begat B when he was C years old’: *A gestrinde B þa he was C wintre*, ‘and died when he was C years old’: *ond forþferde þa he was C wintra* (or *geara*) *on ylde* – but *on ylde* (= *on ielde*) is used only in the case of an *old* man or woman: Daniel died when he was 110 years *on ylde*, Noah when he was 600 years *on ylde*. I know of no instance where *on ylde* is used for someone less than 28 years old. *His ielde* explicitly refers to old age: Sara conceived a son ‘on hyre ylde’ (‘in her old age’); Israel favored Joseph because he begot him ‘on hys ylde’⁵⁶ (‘in his old age’); David ‘gesette on his ylde his sunu to cininge’.⁵⁷

In short, the normal way for a ninth century author to say that Alfred took the throne ‘when he was 23 years old’ would have been to write something like⁵⁸

- *ond he wæs þa .xxiii. wintra,
- *ond he hæfde þa .xxiii. wintra,
- *þa he .xxiii. wintra wæs, or
- *on þæm geare þe he .xxiii. wintra wæs.

Therefore, we come full circle. The dominant sense of *ield* in the ninth century was not *aetas*: it was that primary sense of *eld* that still survived in the sixteenth century, namely the period *after* a man comes of age, old age as opposed to youth. Ælfric divides the human life cycle into divisions or stages to correspond to the divisions of the day. Morning is our childhood, *cildhad*; the third hour is our youth, *cnihthad*;

⁵⁵ T. Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, EETS, o.s. 95, 96, 119, 111 (1890-98), I, 192.21-2.

⁵⁶ This is/may be the source of Talbot’s second entry in his sixteenth-century word list: ‘in senectute – on his ylde’ : see above, n. 45.

⁵⁷ S. J. Crawford, ed., *Aelfric: On the Old and New Testaments*, EETS 160 (1922). Joseph: Gen. XXX vii.2; ‘begat’ formulas: Gen. V.6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27, 31; Noah: p. 102; Sara: p. 137; Israel, p. 171; Daniel and David: 44.663 and 36. 487.

⁵⁸ Curiously enough, in 1692 Gibson mistranslated an *aetas* as a regnal length: ‘he wæs þa xviii wintra’ > ‘et ei [sc. regno] praefuit xviii annis’; see Plummer, *Two Chronicles*, II cxxix n. 3.

midday is our complete growth, *fulfremede wæstm*; the ninth hour is our *ylde*, our old age; and the eleventh hour is our *forwerode ealdnyss*, our ‘worn-out old age’.⁵⁹ *Ield* is cognate with the adjective *eald*, ModE *old*, and the connotation of ‘old’ as opposed to ‘young’ can be taken for granted unless explicitly modified by the context. For instance, in Paradise there is *geogob buton ylde*,⁶⁰ ‘youth without age.’ But when does old age begin? The simplest division of the life cycle is into youth and *ield*; the next simplest is the common division into *cildhad* (0-14 years), *cnihtad* (14-28 years), and *ield* (28 years and over). (The fancy division is Ælfric’s into six stages.) Thus there would be no cognitive dissonance in referring to the period *after* Alfred’s accession as simply *his ielde* in the sense of his maturity — if Alfred was born before 843. However, to read *ield* in this dominant ninth century sense makes, again, a Parkerian reading of the Regnal List unwarranted since Alfred’s *first* 23 years are the opposite of *his ield*: they are his youth, *his cnihtad*.

The semantic history of *ield* from the ninth to the sixteenth century thus helps explain how Parker may have been lured into misreading *ielde* as *aetatis*: he found it made tolerable sense, and went merrily on, unaware that in the ninth century one would no more speak of the first 23 years of Alfred’s life as ‘his eld’ than one would speak of the last thirty years of Penda’s reign – said to have begun when he was fifty years old – as ‘his youth.’

5 Poetics: *þa was ágán: then was agon*

I turn now to the question of what sense Parker may have made of the formula that frames ‘his ielde .xxiii. wintra’, namely ‘ond þa was ágán ...’ Here too he may have been lured into misreading and gone merrily on, assuming without question that it meant the same as EModE *and then was agon*. Since all the other regnal eras in the Regnal List are introduced by the formula 7 (*he*) *heold/ricsode A wintra*, Parker might perhaps have thought that ‘ond þa was ágán .xxiii. wintra’ means

⁵⁹ Benjamin Thorpe, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle According to the Several Original Authorities*, Rolls Series XXIII (London: Longman *et al.*, 1844-61), II,76.20. Malcolm Godden, ed., *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies Second Series*, EETS, s.s. 5 (1979), II,4.83ff.

⁶⁰ R. Morris, ed., *Blickling Homilies*, EETS, o.s. 58,65, 73 (1874-80), I, 63; cf. 65.17

something different. He is unlikely to have recognized the oral-formulaic use of this particular turn of phrase to record how many years of an Age or *ield* have already passed.

The phrase is used to open the Regnal List, introducing the 494 years since the birth of Christ that had passed when Cerdic and Cynric first arrived:

ÐY GEARE ðE WÆS AGAN FRAM CRISTES ACENnesse .cccc.
wintra 7.xciii. uuintra ða Cerdic 7 Cynric his sunu cuom up ...

This and the final sentence of the Parker Regnal List can be fruitfully compared to the opening of *Elene*. Two passages of time are to be correlated: in the first lines of *Elene*, ‘233 years since the Incarnation’ has the same end-point as ‘six years since the inception of Constantine’s rule’, just as, at the end of the Regnal List, ‘23 years of Alfred’s *ielde*’ has the same end-point as ‘396 years since the Conquest of Wessex.’ *Elene* begins:

ÐA wæs agangen	geara hwyrftum
tu hund 7 þreo	geteled rimes
swylce þritig eac	þinggemearces
wintra for worulde	þæs þe wealdend God
acenned wearð ...	

and correlates this with⁶¹

Constantines caserdomes
þa wæs syxte gear

The formula *þinggemearces*, ‘measurement of time’ – corresponding to *his ielde* in the Parker Regnal List – is also found in *Andreas* 147:⁶²

⁶¹ Pamela Gradon, *Cynewulf’s Elene* (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 25; R. K. Gordon, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (Everyman, 1954), p. 211. ‘WHEN in the course of years two hundred and thirth-three winters had been duly told off in the world since mighty God ... had been bornthen was the sixth year of Constantine’s rule’. On the likelihood that *Elene* and *Andreas* ‘were known to Alfred’s circle and the poets working within it’, see Thomas Bredehoft, *Authors, Audiences, and Old English Verse* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press 2009), p. 99.

⁶² See the note on this passage by K. R. Brooks in his excellent edition of *Andreas*

þa wæs first agan
þingemearces

frumrædenne
butan þrim nihtum ...

The construction is common enough in later OE prose. For example, in the OE Heptateuch we find ‘ða seo wucu agan wæs, þa nam he Rachel to wife’, ‘when the week [i.e. seven years] had passed, he took Rachel to wife.’⁶³ And in the body of the Chronicle itself we find one other occurrence of this variant formula *þa was agan* ... in place of the more usual *ond heold* ... or *ond ricsode* In the annal for 745 AD, the length of Bishop Daniel’s (episcopal) era is expressed not by the usual formula

*ond heold þone biscopdom .xliii. wintra

(as *s.a.* 703, for example) but by the clause

þa was xliii wintra agan siþþan he onfeng to biscopdome.

Also in the Parker Chronicle in the annals for 655 AD, the conversion of Mercia to Christianity upon Penda’s death is followed by a formula reminiscent of the opening of the Regnal List, but used here to record the duration of time that had passed since the creation of the world:

þa was ágan from fruman middan geardes [5000] wintra 7 .dccc. 7
.l. wintra.

Finally, there is the intriguing case of the verse known as ‘The Coronation of Edgar’, which, in the annal for 973 AD in the Parker MS includes the formulae

7 ða agangen wæs
tyn hund wintra geteled rimes⁶⁴

(Oxford, 1961), p. 68, and the note on ‘þingemearces’ by Gradon, *Cynewulf’s Elene*, p. 3.

⁶³ S. J. Crawford, ed., *Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, EETS, o.s. 160 (1922), Gen. XXIX, 28. Compare ‘Ða ða seofan gear agan wæron ... þa lædde Laban hys dohtor to him’: Gen. XXIX 21-23; ‘þa þa vii godan gear agan wæron þa comon þa seofon hungeregear’: Gen. XLI, 53-54; ‘Ða þæs wopes dagas agan wæron, Iosep cwæþ’, Gen. L, 4.

⁶⁴ Compare the fourth half-line in the quotation from *Elene*, above.

fram gebyrd tide
leohta hyrdes
þa agan wæs⁶⁵
þæs ðe gewritu secgað

bremes cyninges
buton ðær to lafe
winter geteles
seofon 7 twentig

Here, a period of 1000 years and a period of 27 years have the same endpoint – but that end-point is 27 years in the future. Today a literal translation requires the pluperfect, ‘And when 1000 years had passed..., (then) 27 years had passed...’, but an idiomatic translation calls for a future perfect, ‘And when 1000 years will have passed [since the birth of Christ], 27 years will have passed [since the Coronation of Edgar]’.

The above observations suggest that the Regnal List’s use of ‘þa was ágán his ielde’ in its cadential sentence echoing the opening formula may have been poetically motivated to resonate with oral-formulaic ways of reckoning the number of years that have passed of an era or *ield*, and especially of synchronising the end-points of two durations. Those older echoes cannot be expected to have reached Parker’s ears.

6 Syntax: *Then A and then B and C since W.*

The choice between a Parkerian and a regnal reading may in the end be settled by a clear account of how the West Saxon Regnal List uses syntax to control its logical and rhetorical effects. However, we would not get far were we to try and identify the syntactical conventions of EmodE which Parker would have had to discount so as to grasp the OE syntax of the Regnal List. For, as Manfred Görlach makes clear,⁶⁶

there is no adequate model available which could be used to describe synchronically the wide range of EmodE syntactic structures on sentence and text levels, and which is capable of taking account of the great number of textual varieties and the social differences between individual authors and intended audiences, and also of dealing diachronically with the drastic changes in syntactic conventions as well as the rapid succession of literary styles in the period between 1500 and 1700.

⁶⁵ MS B and C read ‘þa get’ where (Parker’s) MS A has ‘þa agan wæs’.

⁶⁶ Manfred Görlach, *Introduction to Early Modern English* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), p. 96; and on p. 98 ‘It is not always easy to determine what constitutes a sentence in EmodE and to delimit it, separating it off from the surrounding paragraph.’

On the one hand, Parker's own English prose (for example in his correspondence) is comfortable with what Ian Robinson calls 'the ordinary mid-century wander',⁶⁷ piling clause upon clause, phrase upon phrase, seemingly innocent of the need to write what we today (after Dryden) would regard as sentences. On the other hand, Parker's vernacular liturgical and biblical work furthers the success of Cranmer's grammatically well-formed sentences.⁶⁸

More to the point, my observations above on how Parker may have been lured into misreading his text were rooted in the evidence that he translated 'his ielde xxiii wintra' as 'anno 23 etatis alfredi'. But that is all he actually wrote. It would be futile to speculate on what else in the Regnal List he might have read, misread, or even paid attention to. Seeking to identify a 'dangerous sense' of *and* would be unrewarding: Mary Blockley begins her exhaustive study of clausal *ond* by observing that whereas the *OED* gives four primary significations for *and*, the *Dictionary of Old English* has a 42-page entry "headed by seven main kinds of copulatives, each with subdivisions, and identifying six kinds of subordinates".⁶⁹ The dangerous sense that allows both Parker and Plummer – and us – to unwittingly misread OE syntax and go merrily on is not to be looked for in the semantic history of *ond* and *þa* taken one at a time but rather in the interplay between them severally and jointly, in the patterns that distribute them throughout a well-formed text; above all, in the uneven overlap between *ond þa* and *and when*, between modern and OE use of co-ordination, parataxis and ellipsis.⁷⁰

To keep things simple, by co-ordination and parataxis I mean the way the Regnal List uses *ond* and *þa* as shuttles on a loom to weave the tight

⁶⁷ Ian Robinson, *The Establishment of Modern English Prose in the Reformation and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 82.

⁶⁸ Robinson, *Establishment of Modern English Prose*, pp. 82 ff. and *passim*. See his Preface, pp. xii-xiv: 'Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's work on liturgy created a new English prose, which was much changed in the time of Dryden. I only have to support this thesis and to make some suggestions about why it is worth considering.... Trying to fuse a number of matters, I had some trouble with the title. My first choice, *Cranmer's Sentences*, was overruled ...'

⁶⁹ Mary Blockley *Aspects of Old English Poetic Syntax: Where Clauses Begin* (Urbana: U of Illinois, 2001), p. 79

⁷⁰ I take the succinct phrase 'uneven overlap' from Blockley, *Aspects*, p. 197.

well-integrated text exhibited in the colour-coded layout above. And by ellipsis⁷¹ I mean nothing more than the fact that ‘*ond ccc. 7 xcvi. wintra*’ is a full clause: it has a subject, ‘*ccc. 7 xcvi. wintra*’, and a predicate, ‘*was ágán*’ (or ‘*þa was ágán*’, depending on whether *þa* is an adverb or a conjunction – or something in between.)⁷²

And here what C. S. Lewis meant by ‘dangerous’ may be the attitude which Bruce Mitchell once parodied as ‘parataxis bad, hypotaxis good’: the assumption that our rude stout-hearted ancestors could not be expected to have been as articulate as we are, since we can establish logical and temporal connections between our clauses through hypotaxis, and they couldn’t. In recent years – especially since the publication in 1985 of Bruce Mitchell’s magisterial *Old English Syntax* – we have become more aware than Plummer would have been of how disabling that attitude can be.

The question thus becomes: can the syntax of the Regnal List’s final sentence bear both a Parkerian and a regnal reading? Is it ambiguous? How much room for play does it allow?

Consider the following two sentences:

- (1) She dried the dishes half an hour after she washed them.
- (2) She dried the dishes and half an hour after she washed them.

Any native speaker of English has a grasp of syntax that makes the difference between the two sentences obvious. That is what syntax is for. (To someone who is not a native speaker the depth of syntax operating here, visible only in the absence or presence of the little word *and*, may not be immediately accessible.) I remarked above that what led Parker astray was his ‘misunderstanding of the temporal relationship predicated in the final sentence between the 23 years allotted to Alfred’s *ield* and the 396 years allotted to the *ield* or ‘era’ of the Kingdom of Wessex. The syntax of the sentence predicates these two durations as sharing the same

⁷¹ To be more precise: ‘the idiomatic non-expression of elements supplied from a principal or co-ordinate clause’; see Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), §§3858-72.

⁷² On ambiguous adverb/conjunctions, see Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, §2418, §§2536 ff.

end point.” Grasping how the meaning of these four clauses is carried by their syntax entails grasping the climactic function of the final *ond* before ‘ccc. 7 xcvi. wintra’.

The difference between a Parkerian and a regnal reading is, at bottom, the difference in the interaction of the final *ond* with the absence or presence of the first *ond*, i.e. between the possible alternatives

- (1) *þa A þa B **ond** C þæs þe W
 (2) þa A **ond** þa B **ond** C þæs þe W
 [(1) **then* A ***then*** B ***and*** C *since* W
 [(2) *then* A ***and*** ***then*** B ***and*** C *since* W]

With

Ælfred hiera broþur feng to rice	= A =	their brother Alfred took the throne
his ielde was ágán .xxiii. wintra	= B =	23 years of his age had passed
ccc. 7 xcvi. wintra [was ágán]	= C =	396 years [had passed]
his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geeodon	= W =	[the Conquest of Wessex]

Thorpe, Whitelock, Garmonsway and Swanton attempted to articulate a Parkerian reading in their more or less idiomatic modern English translations of this cadential clause-cluster in Parker’s West Saxon Regnal List. Translating clause by clause, each of them faced technical difficulties due to the ‘uneven overlap’ between OE and ModE use of parataxis and ellipsis.

Consider, for example, how, in 1861, Benjamin Thorpe translated the last sentence – to be more precise, the last four clauses – of Parker’s Regnal List:⁷³

⁷³ Thorpe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, II,4
72

Then Ælfred their brother succeeded to the kingdom; and then were past of his age XXIII. winters; and CCC.XCVI. winters since his kin first conquered the West Saxons' land from the Welsh.

Thorpe's semi-colons could just as well be replaced by full stops. His heavy punctuation conveys a sense of the Old English prose as made out of a series of blocks juxtaposed without the benefit of mortar. 'The heavy use of modern punctuation, especially the division of the Old English paragraph into sentences, destroys the flow of both prose and verse.'⁷⁴ Schematically, his punctuation can be represented as

Then A; and then B; and C since W.

as if the Old English sentence could be punctuated

Þa A; ond þa B; ond C þæs þe W.

It doesn't work in modern English: it sounds odd.

*Then she dried the dishes. And then 23 had been washed. And 396 since...

No doubt, Thorpe was content, for his purposes, to provide a literal word-for-word translation that preserved the OE word order, the parataxis, and the ellipsis, implying, perhaps, that what sounded odd or quaint to nineteenth century ears may not have sounded quite so odd a thousand years before. For example, he translated 'was ágán' not by a pluperfect 'had passed' but by the somewhat ambiguous 'were past' – changing the idiomatic, singular OE *was* to the plural ModE *were*, yet conveying something of the ambiguity of the OE tense system (is *past* an adjective or a participle?) He followed Parker in translating 'his ielde' as

⁷⁴ Bruce Mitchell, *An Invitation to Old English and Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 21. For in OE prose, as in much EmodE prose, 'the unit is not the phrase or the sentence but the paragraph or even larger sections': Janet Bately, *The Literary Prose of King Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation?* (An Inaugural Lecture, 4 March 1980, privately circulated), 19-20, repr. in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul Szarmach, with the assistance of Deborah Oosterhouse (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 3-27, quoted and explored in detail by Mitchell, *OES*, §1881. This is crucial to Ian Robinson's line of inquiry.

‘of his age’, and this in turn forces the *then* in *and then* to look backwards – across the semi-colon – to the preceding clause, giving *then* the adverbial sense of ‘thitherto’ or ‘antequam’, *i.e.* ‘before that point in time – before he succeeded to the kingdom.’ However, in OE paratactic narrative, *þa* can scarcely bear this retrospective sense: it is the word usually used to introduce the *next* turn of events. A happened, then B happened. In *Beowulf*, for example, formulas used to start a new fit begin with *þa*. It is the device that clicks the narrative on from point to point, or rather – since our modern notion of a continuous stream of points in time is misleading – from scene to scene, just as we view the Bayeux Tapestry one tableau at a time, like a comic strip, understanding each tableau to depict the next ‘point’, *i.e.* slab, of time. This paratactic use of *þa* is like the lecturer’s command to the projectionist to change the slide on the screen: ‘Next!’⁷⁵

Ond þa reinforces the parataxis. (See above on **Then she dried the dishes and then she had washed them.*) *Ond þa* is used some three dozen times in the Parker Chronicle before 900. In the Regnal List alone, *ond þa* is used six times, and it is always used to specify succession, to move things forward, to introduce the next king (or queen!), the next interval of time, the next era.⁷⁶ In the annals of the Chronicle *ond þa* is invariably used to introduce the *next* turn of the action, often a pivotal event.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ This comparison dates me – it is now obsolescent in 2016.

⁷⁶ See table above: the death of Cerdic, the accession of Cenwalh, the reign of Seaxburg, the accessions of Æpelwulf and Æpelbald – and (according to a regnal reading) the reign of Alfred.

⁷⁷ *S.a.* 716 *ond þa* is used, as in the Regnal List, to introduce a new reign: ‘Ond þa feng Æpelbald to rice on Mercium ond heold xli wintra’. See also *s.a.* 855. In the *Cynewulf ‘saga’ s.a.* 755 almost every clause is introduced by *ond*. About ten clauses couple *ond* with *þa*. In each such clause *þa* reinforces the parataxis and introduces a new turn of the action. For example: ‘**ond þa** geascode he þone cyning ... **ond þa** ongeat se cyning þæt, ond he on þa duru eode, **ond þa** unhealice hine werede, oþ he þone æþeling locude, **ond þa** utræsde on hine ...’ (The scribe of the B text omits some of these *onds*, converting two paratactic clauses into a subordinate and a main clause: Bredehoft *Textual Histories*, p. 44.) For other examples of this narrative style see *s. aa.* 787, 797, 868, 871, 877 (three instances), 887, 891, 893, and 895. Of these perhaps the most striking is *s.a.* 797 in which the Romans cut out Pope Leo’s tongue and put out his eyes and banished him from his see *ond þa* – and then, immediately *afterwards* – he could, with God’s help, see and speak and was again pope as he had been before.

In the light of these remarks, it is worth seeing how Dorothy Whitelock, a hundred years later, modified Thorpe's translation:⁷⁸

Then their brother Alfred succeeded to the kingdom, and then 23 years of his life were passed, and 396 years from when his race first conquered the land of the West Saxons from the Britons.

Gone are the semi-colons. Her lighter punctuation can be schematically represented as

Then A, and then B, and C from when W.

as if the Old English could be punctuated

þa A, ond þa B, ond C þæs þe W.

Her word order moves closer to ModE idiomatic rhythms:

*Then she dried the dishes, and then 23 had been washed, and 396 from when ...

Ælfred their brother becomes *their brother Alfred*; *were past* becomes *were passed* and is placed after its subject, as if the change from ConjVS to ConjSV does not alter the syntactic relationship between the middle clause and its adjacent clauses; *since his kin* becomes *from when his race*; *the West Saxons' land* becomes *the land of the West Saxons*; and the *Welsh* become the *Britons*. The removal of the preceding semi-colon, however, further weakens the paratactic force of *and then*, and, replacing Thorpe's *his age* by *his life*, further strengthens the Parkerian reading, as if OE *ielde* could bear the sense of a 23-year life-span – a 'dangerous' sense. And, as mentioned above, the ellipsis in *and 396 years* is to be filled by supplying the *then* in the preceding clause, but since that *then* has already been made to refer to the 23 years *before* Alfred's accession, the 396 clause dangles senselessly.

Both Thorpe and Whitelock were addressing a primarily academic, scholarly audience. It is therefore instructive to compare their

⁷⁸ Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*, p. 4.

translations with Garmonsway's Everyman translation, published in 1953, a couple of years before Dorothy Whitelock's:⁷⁹

Then their brother Alfred succeeded to the kingdom when he was twenty-three years old, and it was three hundred and ninety six years since his ancestors had first conquered the land of Wessex from the Welsh.

Addressing a more general audience, Garmonsway writes fully idiomatic English, free of translationese or any odd quaintness. This is a single well-formed sentence with just one comma in the middle:

Then A when B, and C since W
þa A ond þa B, ond C þæs þe W.

But his translation of *ond þa* as *when* gives the game away: what is implicit in Thorpe's and Whitelock's translations is explicit here.

*Then she dried the dishes when 23 had been washed, and it was 396 since ...

Like Plummer,⁸⁰ he translates *ond þa B* as if it were merely *þa B* subordinate to the previous *þa A* clause: that is to say, what he translates is not what was actually written in the Regnal List but rather

***þa** feng Ælfred hiera broþur to rice **þa** his ielde .xxiii. wintra ágán was

And having thus bound the second clause to the preceding clause, he has to supply the ellipsis in the third clause by pulling out of the blue the rather lame phrase *it was*, unsupported by anything in the OE. *What was 396 years?* That is the question this Regnal List was designed to answer. Where the OE *ond þa B ond C* has two subjects with one predicate – ‘was ágán’ – Garmonsway, having, so to speak, used up ‘was ágán’ in his

⁷⁹ G. N. Garmonsway, trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1953), p. 4.

⁸⁰ ‘[Alfred] took to the kingdom when there were gone of his age three and twenty winters.’ Plummer, *Life and Times*, p. 70.

‘was twenty-three years old’, is forced to make up a second and different verb, thus unravelling the tight idiomatic knit of the original Old English construction – and, once again, leaving the end point of the 396 years vaguely dangling.

Garmonsway’s translation was really a crib for Plummer’s edition. Everyman has replaced it with a new one by Swanton:⁸¹

Then their brother Alfred succeeded to the kingdom; and he was then 23 years old; and it was 300 and 96 years since his ancestors had first conquered the West Saxons’ land from the Britons.

We have already seen almost all the elements of this translation. Surprisingly, Swanton reinstalls Thorpe’s heavy semi-colons. He keeps Garmonsway’s ‘he was ... 23 years old’, but he seems to recognize that Garmonsway’s *when* is an invalid translation of *ond þa*, so he uncouples the *and* from the *then*, demoting *then* to an unequivocally adverbial location – while still making it refer back across the semi-colon, though now not with the sense of ‘thitherto’, just ‘at that point in time’. In other words, what he translates is not what is in the Regnal List, but rather the normal expression mentioned above,

*ond he wæs þa .xxiii. wintra.

Swanton then has little choice but to keep Garmonsway’s lame ‘it was’. Schematically:

Then A; and B then; and it was C since W.

þa A; ond B þa; ond C þæs þe W.

*Then she dried the dishes; and there were 23 washed then; and it was 396 since ...

What makes translating this particular sentence tricky is that, as noted above, we know no other sentence in the OE corpus which knots together four clauses in exactly the pattern *þa A ond þa B ond C þæs þe W*. In order to translate it idiomatically we need to appreciate the economy and grace with which it uses ellipsis to wind up the Regnal List

⁸¹ Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 4.

by elegantly leaving unexpressed the verb with which the Regnal List first began: ‘was ágán’. This kind of ‘idiomatic non-expression of an element which can be supplied from a co-ordinate clause’ is rarely practised in Modern English when the element is the main verb, the predicate.⁸² Therefore, we have here a neat example of uneven syntactic overlap: a paratactic resource whose stylistic, rhetorical, and logical effect is no longer idiomatic. We have to conquer our predilection for our habitual usage.

As a contrast, consider, finally, Anne Savage’s translation, in which ‘the language has been modernized sufficiently to make it immediately understandable, but retains the rhythm, power and beauty of the original.’⁸³

then their brother Alfred received the kingdom; twenty-three years of his age passed, three hundred and ninety-six since his ancestors first took Wessex from the Welsh.⁸⁴

þa A; B, C þæs þe W.

[then A; B, C since W.]

*Then she dried the dishes; washed 23, 396 since ...

Paradoxically, by leaving out *ond þa* and *þa* altogether, Savage, unlike the other four translators, allows the 23 years and the 396 years to (finally!) arrive at the same end point and thus make sense of the whole Regnal List. (This is strengthened by her translation of ‘was ágán’ as simply ‘passed’.)

Where the syntactic difficulty lies, what it is that we have lost, may become clearer by looking briefly at how comfortably Thorpe, Whitelock, Garmonsway, Swanton and Savage handled an easier four-

⁸² Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, §§3869-72.

⁸³ Anne Savage, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (NY: St Martin’s/Marek, 1983), Foreword, p. 5; and p. 12 ‘The choice faced by a translator of Old English is a difficult one, that between a completely natural-sounding modern English rendering, and one which is slightly out of the ordinary in sound and rhythm. I have opted for the latter; though it introduces the paradox that the Chronicle language would have sounded completely natural to its writers, and a rendering of some of its basic qualities does not to the modern reader, I hope to convey a sense of the original language.’

⁸⁴ Savage, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 16.

clause string similar to the one in question yet closer to modern English, namely *Ond A ond þa B þa C ond D*.

An example occurs at the beginning of the Regnal List:

7 he hæfde þæt rice .xvi. gear 7 þa he gefor þa feng his sunu
Cynric to þam rice 7 heold .xvii. winter.

with

he hæfde þæt rice .xvi. gear	= A =	he held the kingdom 16 years
he gefor	= B =	he died
his sunu Cynric feng to þam rice	= C =	his son Cynric succeeded to the kingdom
[he] heold .xvii. winter	= D =	[he] held [it] 17 years

And she washed 16 dishes and then she dried them then her son
took over and washed 17

Thorpe:

and he had the kingdom XVI. years, and when he died, then his
son Cynric succeeded to the kingdom, and held it XVII. winters.

and A, and when B, then C, and D.

Whitelock:

And he held the kingdom for 16 years, and when he died,
his son Cynric succeeded to the kingdom, and held it for
17 years.

And A, and when B, C, and D.

Garmonsway:

He held the kingdom sixteen years, and when he died his son
Cynric succeeded to the kingdom and held it seventeen years.

A, and when B C and D.

Swanton:

And he held the kingdom 16 years, and then when he departed his
son Cynric succeeded to the kingdom and held it 17 years.

And A, and then when B C and D.

Savage:

He had that kingdom for sixteen years; when he passed away, his son Cynric received the kingdom and held it for seventeen years.

A; when B, C and D.

No uneven overlap. No heavy semi-colons. No attempt to suggest that Cynric had retroactively held the kingdom for 17 years *before* his father died; no trouble with the idiomatic non-expression of the *subject* in the last clause: the syntax runs smoothly and idiomatically in Modern as in Old English. Of particular interest are the five ways of translating *ond þa B þa C*:

and when B, then C (Thorpe)

and when B, C (Whitelock)

and when B C (Garmonsway)

and then when B C (Swanton)

when B, C (Savage)

Any one of these five ways of using ModE *when* works just as neatly for the *ond þa* in the Regnal List's final sentence:

Then Alfred succeeded and (then) when 23 years had passed,
(then) 396 years had passed since Cerdic

In order to see the parallel between this easy *and A and when B then C* and our tricky *then A and then B and C*, between *ond A ond þa B þa C* and *þa A ond þa B ond C*, construct a 'transform' of the tricky case similar to the easy one. Undo the ellipsis: write in the implicit 'was ágán'. This can be done in two ways:

either

* Ond Ælfred hiera broþur feng to rice **ond þa** was ágán his ielde .xxiii. wintra **þa** ccc. 7 xcvi. wintra ágán was þæs þe his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geodon.

or

80

* Ond Ælfred hiera broþur feng to rice **ond** his ielde .xxiii. wintra ágán was **þa þa** was ágán ccc. 7 xevi. wintra þæs þe his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geodon.

In Modern English, the first sentence becomes:

And their brother Alfred succeeded to the kingdom and when 23 years of his Age had passed [then] 396 years had passed since [the Conquest].

the second:

And their brother Alfred succeeded to the kingdom and 23 years of his Age had passed [then] when 396 years had passed since [the Conquest].

But since *B* and *C* have two different subjects *with the same predicate* ellipsis of the shared predicate economically transforms either of the previous sentences into our target sentence:

þa feng Ælfred hiera broþur to rice **ond þa** was ágán his ielde .xxiii. wintra **ond** ccc. 7 xevi. wintra þæs þe his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geeodon.

We can now answer the question posed at the beginning of this section: when we let the meaning be carried by the syntax, there is no more room for play in the Regnal List's final sentence than there is in the unproblematic sentence about Cynric's reign discussed above. In both sentences the *B* clause is as if 'in protasis' to the *C* clause, although in the easy case, the subordination is established by the *ond þa SV þa VS* pattern, while in the tricky case it is established by ellipsis in the *ond þa V/S1 ond S2* pattern. In both cases, the first *ond* (before the *þa*) hinders the *ond þa* clause from connecting with the preceding clause, and thus renders awkward any Parkerian translation of the Regnal List's final sentence. The ellipsis binds the full *ond þa* clause forward to the elliptical *ond* clause, as if *ond þa B* were 'in protasis' to *ond C* 'in

apodosis.’ This use of *ond* is less familiar than, but just as idiomatic as, the more common use of *þa A þa B*.⁸⁵

In short, what is being predicated at the end of the Regnal List – and quite appropriately so, given its rhetorical and political purposes – is that the 23 years allotted to Alfred’s *ield* are over at the same time as the 396 years allotted to the duration *so far* of the Kingdom of Wessex. The syntax of the sentence predicates these two durations as sharing the same end point and, by implication, if Alfred continues to reign (in spite of the wars) then every year he reigns will increase by one more the number of years that his 396-year-old throne has already held.

Conclusion: a question of genre

I sum up the above investigation of Parker’s error and Plummer’s blind spot by repeating that it is, at bottom, a question of genre. A Regnal List is a cumulative sequence of regnal eras. They add up. The genealogies go steadily backwards, the regnal eras steadily forwards. This determines the genre’s specific use of additive – not subtractive – arithmetic, its technical semantic register, and its preference for certain formulas, and its peculiarly braided syntax. An *aetas* is not a regnal era: it does not belong in a Regnal List. Those of us who, following Parker and Plummer, have continued to see an *aetas* in the final sentence of this text have been victims of a mirage. And the mirage has rendered meaningless the climax of the whole List: the 396 years, which link the end to the beginning. Claiming to understand the West Saxon Regnal List without making sense of this final number is rather like claiming we understand a joke even though we ‘of course’ don’t understand the punch line.⁸⁶ This may not have mattered so much to Parker, but it became a serious problem when Plummer institutionalized Parker’s error by using the Regnal List to fix – i.e. canonise – Alfred’s 848 birth date.

⁸⁵ As, e.g., in the *Old English Bede* or *Blickling Homilies* but not in Ælfric: S. O. Andrew, *Syntax and Style in Old English* (Cambridge: CUP, 1940), p. 6.

⁸⁶ For a brilliant and entertaining use of jokes and punchlines as paradigmatic of genre criticism at its best, see David Cottom, *Text and Culture: The Politics of Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

Bluntly put, a Parkerian reading is possible only to a reader who imposes on the text a feebler standard of style and syntax, numeracy and logic, rhythm and coherence than the text deserves. Therefore, the only honest way we have of finding out how old Alfred was when he went to Rome is to ask Asser, let the chips fall where they may.⁸⁷

If we still insist on squeezing a birth date out of a regnal list by reversing the direction of its final *ield*, we'd better be prepared to explain both why 396 is any less meaningful than 23 and why a regnal list would prefer to tell us how old a king was at a certain point in his life rather than how long he has been reigning. If, on the other hand, we can relax, and let go of the notion that we can discover Alfred's true birthdate, then those of us raised on Plummer and Stevenson may feel a pang of regret, but we will find in the long run that the gains outweigh the loss. Alfred had been to Rome. How, as an adult, did he remember that experience?⁸⁸ What did Rome mean to King Alfred? Which Carolingians could he remember meeting as a child? How did he become *litteratus* in his twelfth year? How did he arrive at the value, which he placed, on written and spoken Latin, and on vernacular literacy, in a biliterate community? When we muse on serious questions like these, much changes if the historical Alfred experiencing Rome in 853 and 855 was not a mere infant, but more or less as mature as Judith, the thirteen-year-old daughter of Charles the Bald, herself old enough to marry Alfred's father on his way back from Rome in 855.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ The systematic but dislocated dating of events since the birth of Alfred in 849 AD deployed in the Cotton manuscript of Asser's *Vita Ælfredi* is unlikely to have been known to Asser himself since it was apparently absent from the source(s) both of 'The Annals of St Neots' and John of Worcester. Stubbs may have been right: Asser may well have written that Alfred went to Rome in his eleventh year and became *litteratus* in his twelfth. The manuscript evidence is complex but the logic of the textual criticism is simple. For detailed analysis, see Kalmar, 'Born in the Margin'.

⁸⁸ On how Alfred's adult memories of his trip to Rome may help us come closer to an understanding of what made King Alfred tick, see Simon Keynes, 'A tale of two kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Ser., 36 (1986), 195-217 at pp. 208-9.

⁸⁹ This work was supported in part by a 1997 Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to participate in a Summer Institute on 'Old English literature in its manuscript context' at the Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, directed by Paul Szarmach and Timothy Graham. I thank Jane Roberts, Janet Bately, and Richard Abels for reading and critiquing drafts of this essay.