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The Eynsham 'letter' and the study of Ælfric

Even at the height of his literary activity, to the question 'What do you do?', Ælfric of Eynsham (*c.* 955–*c.* 1010) is easily imagined responding in words like those of his fictitious monastic novice in the Latin *Colloquy*, or classroom dialogue. Ælfric there has the boy say, when confronted with this question ('Quid habes operis?'): 'Professus sum monachus, et psallam omni die septem sinaxes cum fratribus, et occupatus sum lectionibus et cantu.'[1] Though the *Colloquy* then proceeds to describe the work of numerous other, secular professions, the schoolmaster eventually returns to the novice, this time to pose a different question: which of the occupations is best? The boy again answers in terms of which Ælfric himself doubtless approves: 'mihi uidetur seruitium Dei inter istas artes primatum tenere, sicut legitur in euangelio: "Primum querite regnum Dei et iustitiam eius, et hęc omnia adicientur uobis."'[2] Such assertions of primacy are of course commonplace in monastic literature, and the *Colloquy*, a school exercise, hardly presented its author an occasion to expound a nuanced theory of monkhood. The novice's words nevertheless remind us of an obvious yet often forgotten truth: to Ælfric, the 'greatest

[1] 'I am a professed monk, and every day I shall sing the seven liturgical hours with my brothers, and I keep busy with reading and chanting' (*Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 19, lines 13–15).

[2] 'I think that the service of God holds chief place among these skills, as it says in the gospel: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you" [cf. Matt. VI.33]' (*Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 39, lines 213–16). On the centrality of monasticism in this dialogue, see E. R. Anderson, 'Social Idealism in Ælfric's "Colloquy"', *ASE* 3 (1974), 153–62, at pp. 158–9, and J. Ruffing, 'The Labor Structure of Ælfric's Colloquy', in *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and D. Moffat (Glasgow, 1994), pp. 55–70.

prose writer of the Anglo-Saxon period',[3] the role of author was inevitably subsumed into his vocation as a monk and mass-priest, whose chief occupation was to worship God in the liturgy and carry out other duties laid down by the *Rule* of St Benedict. The passing of centuries and fortunate survival of Ælfric's many Old English homilies have ironically reversed the hierarchy of occupations that he would have considered properly his. Recovery of this largely implicit context of Ælfric's 'authorship' is exceedingly hard, and not only because crucial evidence has been lost to the intervening centuries. The difficulty also inheres in the nature of medieval monasticism, with its bewilderingly complex rituals that both shaped and were shaped by modes of thought and piety often remote from modern understanding.

Though it remains one of the least studied of Ælfric's writings, his so-called *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* preserves the most direct record of the daily and yearly patterns of prayer and work in which Ælfric, not unlike the Venerable Bede before him, spent most of his life. Despite this importance, the content of the 'letter' is quite forbidding, both in the sheer amount of its technical detail and manner of its presentation. Equally discouraging to modern readers, the subject at hand – monastic liturgy – seems to afford few opportunities to glimpse the interesting persona that Ælfric elsewhere conveys so strongly and that has elevated him, like Bede, King Alfred and Archbishop Wulfstan, to the very exclusive ranks of 'known' Anglo-Saxon authors. Yet, on close examination, the *LME* is a vital document, both as a rare witness to the life of a specific Anglo-Saxon monastery and as a significant item in Ælfric's canon, bearing many more hallmarks of his intelligence and characteristic concerns than might at first be apparent. The text has much to reveal about the author's use of sources and methods of composition, and perhaps, more subtly, about a changing sense of mission in the last stage of his career.[4] But the *LME* also shows the familiar Ælfric in a different light, for it reminds us that his 'authorial' occupations of reading, writing and tireless revision were crowded into a busy schedule dominated by the liturgy. Because of its content, the *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* is today

[3] S. B. Greenfield and D. G. Calder, with M. Lapidge, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York, 1986), p. 75. The judgement is typical; cf. R. M. Hogg, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume I: The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. R. M. Hogg (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1–25, at 16.

[4] Adumbrated by Gatch, 'The Office', pp. 348–9 and 352–62.

viewed as a marginal text, when in fact the observances it describes – and the many more it does not – must be understood as an essential context of Ælfric's career. Given the importance, moreover, of monastic scriptoria to Anglo-Saxon literary culture, something like this context probably informs, by extension, the activity of a great many Old English and Anglo-Latin 'authors', and of the scribes who copied their works.

THE TITLE

The *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* survives only in a single eleventh-century copy.[5] The text bears no title in the manuscript and begins directly with the greeting 'Ælfricus abbas Egneshamnensibus fratribus salutem in Christo.'[6] This prominent salutation and the similarly epistolary farewell (at *LME* 80) may explain the tendency, evidenced as early as the twelfth century, to identify the composition as a 'letter'. These framing devices aside, however, the substance of the work is an adaptation of the liturgical institutes known as the *Regularis concordia*, which were compiled in the early 970s by Ælfric's mentor, Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester.[7] Both Æthelwold's text and Ælfric's revision of it belong more properly to a class of documents known as monastic customaries or consuetudinaries – descriptions of specific liturgical and some extra-liturgical customs (*consuetudines*) by which a particular monastery put into practice the teachings of St Benedict's *Rule*.[8] Ælfric virtually defines the genre when, in his preface to the *LME*, he

[5] On the manuscript and its implications, see below, ch. 3.

[6] *LME* 1: 'Abbot Ælfric to the brothers of Eynsham: Greetings in Christ.' All references are to the section numbers of the present edition, which in turn correspond to the editorial divisions of *Aelfrici abbatis epistula*, ed. Nocent.

[7] On this text as a source, see below, pp. 19–58.

[8] Gatch, 'The Office', p. 347. Such detailed descriptions were necessary because the *Rule* covered only the essentials of monasticism and did not reflect the significant changes in the life and liturgy that took place in the centuries after Benedict's death (*c.* 550). On the evolution of the term *consuetudo* (or plural, *consuetudines*) in this technical sense, see the opening chapter of *Initia consuetudinis Benedictinae*, ed. K. Hallinger, CCM 1 (Siegburg, 1963), and E. Palazzo, *Histoire des livres liturgiques: Le Moyen Age: Des origines au xiii^e siècle* (Paris, 1993), pp. 221–7. On extant Anglo-Saxon customaries, see Gneuss, 'Liturgical Books', p. 136. Apart from the *LME* and the *Regularis concordia* (and derivatives thereof), Gneuss's list includes only one other item, the post-Conquest and non-native *Decreta* or 'Monastic Constitutions' of Archbishop Lanfranc.

characterizes its contents as 'certain matters upon which our [Benedictine] *Rule* does not touch'.[9] The English title *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* does not appear to have become standard until after the nineteenth-century *editio princeps* and pioneering articles by Mary Bateson.[10] Fearing that to rename the text now would only perpetuate a long history of confusion over the work, I have thought it best to retain the now-common title, one that is commended, at least, by a degree of familiarity.[11]

AUTHORSHIP

The identification of 'Ælfricus abbas', compiler of the *LME*, with the celebrated homilist of the same name has won wide acceptance, and the present book will, in its course, review numerous similarities among the *LME* and other Ælfrician works that place the attribution beyond serious doubt. The homilist's sermons and pastoral letters not only make occasional use of the same sources as the *LME* but draw on the same portions of these texts and adapt them in similar ways.[12] Slightly more disagreement has surrounded the validity of the *LME*-preface as evidence that Ælfric was abbot of Eynsham. Although he styled himself as 'abbot' in several contexts,[13] he never stated explicitly where he held the office, and at least one modern scholar has inferred that the 'tone' of the *LME* is not that of an abbot addressing his own community.[14] Against that argument, others have pointed out that in the preface Ælfric claims to be 'abiding' with his Eynsham audience ('uobiscum degens'), and that at the

[9] *LME* 1: 'aliqua quae regula nostra non tangit'.

[10] *Excerpta ex institutionibus*, ed. Bateson. Subsequent references to the text occur throughout her 'Rules for Monks' and 'A Worcester Cathedral Book'.

[11] The unfortunate critical history of the *LME* is discussed below, ch. 4. Gatch ('The Office', pp. 348–9) urges a renaming, calling it variously 'Ælfric's Customary for Eynsham' or simply 'the Eynsham Customary'. The latter suggestion, however, would invite confusion with another famous 'Eynsham Customary' of the fourteenth century, which has nothing to do with Ælfric's text; see *The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Eynsham in Oxfordshire*, ed. A. Gransden, CCM 2 (Siegburg, 1963).

[12] See, for example, commentary to *LME* 25–6, 29–30, 32–3 and 44.

[13] For example, in prefaces to the *Vita S. Æthelwoldi* and to the letters to Sigeweard and Sigefyrth, and in the Latin preface to the Old English letters to Archbishop Wulfstan (Briefe II–III). These are all now conveniently assembled in *Ælfric's Prefaces*, ed. Wilcox.

[14] Hohler, 'Some Service-Books', p. 73.

end of the customary he refers to the audience's continued obedience to him on certain matters ('obedienter mihi consensistis in hoc').[15] Given the latter evidence and the risks of any too-literal reading of the conventional epistolary frame, nothing in the *LME* refutes the traditional location of Ælfric's abbacy at Eynsham. Far more complex are the issues of the date of the text and the circumstances behind its composition.

THE FOUNDING OF EYNSHAM ABBEY AND DATE OF THE *LME*

The outlines of Ælfric's career are well known.[16] He must have been born around the middle of the tenth century and, to judge from the dialect of his vernacular writings, in the southwest of England. After an inadequate early education received from a local priest (recounted in the famous preface to his translation of Genesis), he became a monk of the Old Minster, Winchester, during Æthelwold's episcopacy (963–84). His literary career seems to have begun in earnest, however, with his transfer *c.* 987 to the abbey of Cernel (Cerne Abbas, Dorset), where during the next decade and a half he would compose his best-known works, including the two series of *Catholic Homilies*, a set of *Lives of Saints*, the *Grammar*, the *Colloquy*, the partial translation of Genesis and numerous additional Temporale homilies. Around the year 1005 he appears to have left Cernel to become abbot of Eynsham, where he remained until the end of his life, *c.* 1010. His works from this later period include the *Letter to Sigeweard* on the Old and New Testaments, four pastoral letters (two in Latin, two in Old English) to Archbishop Wulfstan, the *Vita S. Æthelwoldi* and further additions to and revisions of his previous series of homilies.

It is generally assumed that the *LME* was written in or near 1005, the supposed date of the foundation of Eynsham and Ælfric's appointment as its head.[17] The major external witness to these events is a charter (S 911)

[15] *LME* 80, noted by Gatch, 'The Office', p. 348, n. 28.

[16] Dietrich, 'Abt Ælfrik'; White, *Ælfric*; Dubois, *Ælfric*; Clemoes, 'Ælfric'; Hurt, *Ælfric*; and now also the introduction to *Ælfric's Prefaces*, ed. Wilcox. Recovering the facts of Ælfric's career has been closely linked to the establishment of his canon, for which see Clemoes, 'Chronology', and the introduction to Pope's *Supplementary Collection* I, 136–45.

[17] E.g., White, *Ælfric*, p. 63; *Hirtenbriefe*, ed. Fehr, p. xlvii; Clemoes, 'Chronology', p. 245; Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 38; and Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, p. 37. The title page of

issued in the name of King Æthelred and dated 1005, confirming endowment of a monastery at Eynsham by Æthelmær.[18] This Æthelmær – known from another source as Æthelmær *se greata* ('the stout') – was the son of Æthelweard the Chronicler, ealdorman of the western shires in the closing decades of the tenth century.[19] Ælfric enjoyed the friendship and patronage of father and son. At their request he took up a number of translation projects and by their agency received his appointments both to Cernel and to Eynsham.[20] Æthelmær, who eventually succeeded his father as ealdorman of the western provinces,[21] founded or (as now seems more likely) refounded both monasteries, and S 911 states that he himself appointed the first abbot of Eynsham, presumably Ælfric (although the charter does not name the appointee).[22] It has been argued that the

Nocent's edition in the CCM gives the date 'post 1004' without explanation (likewise at CCM 7.1, 157: 'verfaßt nach 1004').

[18] The charter is witnessed by Archbishop Ælfric of Canterbury, who died on 16 November 1005. The earliest surviving manuscript is the copy preserved in the twelfth-century portion of the Eynsham cartulary (Oxford, Christ Church, Eynsham Cart.). For other manuscripts and editions of the charter, see *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Sawyer, p. 278 (= S 911), plus addenda and corrigenda to this entry by M. Gelling, *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley*, SEEH 7 (Leicester, 1979), 138–9 (no. 290).

[19] The epithet *se greata* ('the fat' or 'the stout') is given to Æthelmær in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, *s.a.* 1017, and attested in late medieval reflexes such as 'Ailmerus Grossus', 'Almari le Grete' and 'magni Almari' (see *EC* II, 68, 37 and 57). The family of Ealdorman Æthelweard has been much discussed; see the *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. L. Stephen and S. Lee (Oxford, 1908–19), *s.v.* 'Ethelwerd'; *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. Whitelock, pp. 144–5; Flower, 'The Script of the Exeter Book', pp. 87–9; *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Robertson, pp. 386–7; and *Chronicon Æthelweardi*, ed. Campbell, pp. xii–xvi. More recent and reliable are Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 192 and 209–10, and Yorke, 'Æthelmær'.

[20] For the impact of this friendship on Ælfric's works, see Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 48–9.

[21] Æthelweard's last certain attestation of a charter occurs in 998, and he is assumed to have died in that year or shortly thereafter; see Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 192, n. 139. Keynes rejects the basis of an alternate death-date of 1002 accepted by Whitelock (*Anglo-Saxon Wills*, p. 145), Robertson (*Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p. 387) and, with important implications for the chronolgy of Ælfric's career, Clemoes ('Chronology', p. 243). Æthelmær's presumed succession to his father's office is problematic; see Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 197–8, n. 163.

[22] 'abbatem sanctę monachorum congregationi preferre se uiuente instituit'. At the end of the charter (after the bounds and before the witness list), an Old English appendix, seemingly dictated by Æthelmær himself, repeats these terms: 'And <ic> wille þere

monastery at Cernel existed for some time prior to Æthelmær's endowment of 987 and had perhaps been founded by some member of his family before the death of King Edgar in 975.[23] The prehistory of Eynsham and the exact nature of what Æthelmær did there in 1005 may be similarly complex. The relevant portion of the charter S 911 clearly indicates that the king is confirming privileges to a monastery already established:

> Quapropter ego Æthelredus . . . ueracibus litterarum apicibus insinuare curaui, quod Æthelmaro, uiro ualde fidelissimo michi quoque dilectissimo, impetrante, absolutissimum libertatis priuilegium constituo monasterio eius in honore sancti saluatoris, omniumque sanctorum suorum, iure dedicato, in loco celebri iuxta fluuium qui uocatur Tamis constituto, quod ab incolis regionis illius Egnesham nuncupatur uocabulo.[24]

The privilege mentions a monastery already built, staffed and dedicated to the Saviour and All Saints. The king's confirmation of the endowment and conferral of privileges would, by normal procedure, come as the last in a series of events including the dedication of the monastic church. The establishment of a new monastery was a process that might begin years before the official date recorded in document such as

beo ofer hi ealdor þe þær nu is þa hwile þe his lif beo' (*EC* I, 19–28, at pp. 20 and 24). Note the implication that the appointment has already been made. There may also be a discrepancy between the terms of the Latin 'se uiuente' (referring to Æthelmær?) and the Old English, where 'þa hwile þe his lif beo' refers to the abbot. The inference that the unnamed abbot is Ælfric is wholly circumstantial, since the assertion that he witnessed the charter (e.g., White, *Ælfric*, p. 62; Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 37) rests on a misreading of the name *Ælfsige* that occurs twice in the witness list; see *EC* I, 27, n. 2, and Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 260.

[23] Squibb, 'Foundation'. The Cernel charter (S 1217) states that Æthelmær's gift occurred a few years after the foundation of the abbey. Squibb's principal evidence that 'a few' equals twelve years or more lies in the finding of a very late (1440) enquiry that King Edgar donated a manor at Muston (Musterston) to one John, abbot of Cerne ('Foundation', p. 13). Yorke ('Æthelmær', p. 22) accepts this part of Squibb's argument and further suggests that the actual founder may have been some member of the previous generation of Æthelmær's family.

[24] *EC* I, 20: 'Wherefore I, Æthelred . . . have taken care to record in truthful written testimony that, at the petition of Æthelmær, a man most loyal and dear to me, I am establishing an unconditional privilege of freedom for his monastery, duly dedicated to the honour of the holy Saviour and all his saints, located beside the river called Thames in a famous spot named Eynsham by the inhabitants of that region' (trans. mine; see also Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, pp. 10 and 15).

S 911.[25] The Eynsham charter continues, too, with a brief but crucial reference to the history of the property before it came into Æthelmær's possession: 'Quod quidem monasterium Æþelmarus ab Æþelweardo genero suo mutuando accepit, & pro illis triginta mansiunculis dedit triginta sex mansiones, tribus diuisas in locis . . . [here follows a list of the properties given in exchange for Eynsham].'[26] This statement indicates that a *monasterium* already existed at Eynsham while the land was held by Æthelmær's son-in-law. John Blair's study of the early history of the Thames Valley confirms that Eynsham was the site of a minster of considerable wealth and importance by the year 864, and very likely by 821.[27] Recent excavations at Eynsham have, moreover, confirmed Blair's reading of the documentary evidence by proving that Æthelmær built his monastery on the site of a major, much older minster.[28] Sadly, the condition of the site that passed into Æthelmær's hands cannot be known. The Eynsham *monasterium* might have been an abandoned ruin, but it might also have been a minster inhabited by

[25] Squibb, 'Foundation', p. 14.

[26] *EC* I, 20: 'Æthelmær received the monastery from his son-in-law, Æthelweard, through an exchange, and for those thirty *mansiunculae* [i.e., Eynsham and its lands] gave thirty-six *mansiones* divided over three locations . . .' The terms of the exchange that follow are translated and discussed by D. Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds*, SASH 2 (Woodbridge, 1990), 328–9; the Old English bounds are translated by Salter, *EC* I, 24–6, Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, pp. 24–5, and analysed in detail by G. B. Grundy, *Saxon Oxfordshire: Charters and Highways*, Oxfordshire Record Society 15 (Oxford, 1933), 33–6. For other lands that may have been part of the original endowment but are not mentioned in S 911, see *EC* I, viii. On the economic rationale of the original endowment, see Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, pp. 20–5 and 155–6.

[27] *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p. 63: 'The first [documentary evidence] is the agreement of c. 821 by which the archbishop of Canterbury relinquished to King Coenwulf of Mercia . . . a 300-hide estate at *Iogneshomme*, almost certainly Eynsham . . . The second text [S 210], dated 864, is a grant by the Mercian king of five hides at Water Eaton, the grantee to pay 30s. "to Eynsham to that church" after one year, which looks very much like compensation for the dispersal of monastic lands.' On the prehistory of Eynsham, see also Blair's 'The Minsters on the Thames', in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. J. Blair and B. Golding (Oxford, 1996), pp. 5–28.

[28] Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 114–16. Details of the excavations at Eynsham from 1989 to 1991 and of additional minor digs are summarized by D. R. M. Gaimster, S. Margeson, M. Hurley and B. S. Nenk in *Mediaeval Archaeology* 34 (1990), 207; 35 (1991), 180–3; 36 (1992), 257–8; and 38 (1994), 240–1.

secular clerks on whom Æthelmær imposed the reformed monastic life as a condition of their remaining in his new monastery. The presence in Æthelmær's foundation of clerks newly converted to the monastic life has even suggested to some a possible occasion for Ælfric's writing a document such as the *LME*.[29] In any event, it seems that the 'foundation' of Eynsham around 1005 was in effect a refoundation after the general pattern of the tenth-century reformers, who preferred, whenever possible, to revive the regular life in ancient minsters or at other sites, such as Æthelwold's Ely, venerated for their ties to a supposed golden age of Anglo-Saxon Christianity.[30]

The unknown status of the pre-existing *monasterium* or details of the transaction urge that the date of S 911 (1005) be accepted rather as a *terminus ante quem* for the refoundation of the monastery and beginning of Ælfric's abbacy. The chronological relation of the *LME* to these events, however, remains largely a separate issue. The date of the charter will not do as a *terminus post quem* for the drawing up of Ælfric's customary, since he and his community were already in residence before the drafting of the king's confirmation, either as restorers of an abandoned site or reformers of a previously secular minster. How much time passed between Æthelmær's acquisition of the estates and the drawing up of the charter is unknown, as are the ancestry and early fortunes of the younger Æthelweard who held the site previously.[31] It would be helpful to know how the

[29] Thus Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, p. 31, though Ælfric's text does not easily accommodate this hypothesis. Apart from the fact that the *LME* is not an introduction to the monastic life (see below, pp. 11 and 18), Ælfric devotes much attention to the secular liturgy wherever this replaces the monastic form (i.e., the Triduum and in Easter week). Arguably, this emphasis would better serve an audience of monks (relatively unfamiliar with the secular Office) than clerks; see commentary to *LME* 34 (at n. 181), 47 (at nn. 240 and 243–4) and 48 (at nn. 245–6, 248–50 and 254).

[30] Yorke ('Æthelmær', p. 20) implies that Æthelmær's act at Eynsham was a refoundation. On the nostalgia of the tenth-century reformers, see Wormald, 'Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts', pp. 38–41.

[31] On the younger Æthelweard, see Flower, 'The Script', Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 192 and 209–10, and additional remarks by P. W. Conner, 'A Contextual Study of the Old English Exeter Book' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Univ. of Maryland, 1975), pp. 29–37. The most recent biographical summary is by Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', pp. 67–70. It is supposed that Æthelweard II married a daughter of Æthelmær named Æthelflæd (the granddaughter of the senior Ealdorman Æthelweard). Æthelmær's own son (also named Æthelweard) was put to death by Cnut in 1017, so his son-in-law (Æthelweard II) succeeded to the ealdordom of the western provinces, which he held

latter came to possess Eynsham and its *monasterium*, and whether or not he, too, was a fosterer of reformed monasticism, who might have allowed his father-in-law's new community to occupy the site before the transfer of estates was final. The obscurity of so many details cautions against the natural impulse to date the *LME* too narrowly on the basis of S 911. A *terminus ante quem non* for Ælfric's abbacy is at least given by the so-called private letter to Archbishop Wulfstan, who was elevated to the see of York (in plurality with Worcester) in 1002. In this letter Ælfric still styles himself *frater*,[32] so his promotion to the abbacy can be dated as narrowly as 1002 × 1005.

At two points the text of the *LME* itself may bear on the issue of date, though the possible inferences conflict. In the preface Ælfric claims that the 'recent' establishment of the monastery has occasioned his present labour ('quia nuper rogatu Æþelmæri ad monachicum habitum ordinati estis').[33] Standing prominently, as it does, at the head of the work, this remark probably accounts for the widespread association between the *LME* and the date of S 911. As already demonstrated, however, the establishment of a monastery (or whatever specific act is meant by *ad monachicum habitum ordinari*) cannot be simply equated with the issue of that charter. Once the date of S 911 is disallowed as a *terminus post quem*, Ælfric's adverb 'recently' retains value only as a very general indicator. A second internal clue at the end of the *LME* further complicates the matter: commending the Eynsham monks' practice of reading three lessons at the Office of Nocturns during the summer period (instead of the one required by Benedict's *Rule*), Ælfric notes affectionately that they have obeyed him in this matter 'for years now':

> Volo etiam uos scire, fratres karissimi, ualde gratum mihi fore quod obedienter mihi consensistis in hoc, ut tres lectiones cum totidem responsoriis tota aestate ad nocturnas sicut hieme *iam preteritis annis* tenuimus.[34]

until he was outlawed in 1020 for conspiracy against Cnut. Æthelweard II's possession of a large estate in Oxfordshire, Eynsham, prompts Keynes to speculate ('Cnut's Earls', p. 68, n. 142; see also *Diplomas*, p. 212) that he might even be identified with Æthelweard the brother of Eadric Streona and, consequently, a member of a family in rivalry with Æthelmær's.

[32] *Hirtenbriefe*, ed. Fehr, pp. 222–7 (Brief 2a), at 222.

[33] *LME* 1: 'because you have recently been ordained to the monastic habit at Æthelmær's request'.

[34] *LME* 80: 'I also wish you to know, dearest brothers, how very pleased I am that you