THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

Second edition

This *Companion* has been thoroughly revised to take account of recent scholarship and to provide a clear and accessible introduction for those encountering Old English literature for the first time. Including seventeen essays by distinguished scholars, this new edition provides a discussion of the literature of the period 600–1066 in the context of how Anglo-Saxon society functioned. New chapters cover topics including preaching and teaching, *Beowulf*, and literacy, and a further five chapters have been revised and updated, including those on the Old English language, perceptions of eternity and Anglo-Saxon learning. An additional concluding chapter on Old English after 1066 offers an overview of the study and cultural influences of Old English literature to the present day. Finally, the bibliography has been overhauled to incorporate the most up-to-date scholarship in the field and the latest electronic resources for students.

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AND
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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University s mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521193320

First published 1991
Second edition 2013
3rd printing 2014

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
The Cambridge companion to Old English literature / edited by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge. – 2nd ed.
p. cm. – (Cambridge companions to . . .)
First ed.: 1991.
ISBN 978-0-521-19332-0
1. English literature – Old English, ca. 450–1100 – History and criticism – Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Great Britain – History – Anglo-Saxon period, 449–1066 – Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. England – Civilization – To 1066 – Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Godden, Malcolm. II. Lapidge, Michael.
PR173.C36 2013
829′.09–dc23
2012028840

ISBN 978-0-521-19332-0 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-15402-4 Paperback

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PREFACE

On 26 November 1882 Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote to his fellow poet and friend Robert Bridges: 'I am learning Anglo-Saxon and it is a vastly superior thing to what we have now.' W. H. Auden too was inspired by his first experience of Old English literature: 'I was spellbound. This poetry, I knew, was going to be my dish . . . I learned enough to read it, and Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetry have been one of my strongest, most lasting influences.' The list of modern poets who have been influenced by Old English literature (that term is now generally preferred to 'Anglo-Saxon' when referring to the language and vernacular writings of pre-Conquest England) could be extended to include Pound, Graves, Wilbur and many others. One does not have to agree with Hopkins's belief in the superiority of Old English as a medium for poetry to accept the importance of the writings of the Anglo-Saxons for an understanding of the cultural roots of the English-speaking world. The practice of looking back to their writings and their social organization in order to comprehend the present has continued ever since the sixteenth century, when the Elizabethans turned to them in support of their religious and political polemic.

It scarcely needs emphasizing that literature is the record of a particular culture; what Old English literature offers us is not only a mode of poetic expression which startled Hopkins and Auden but a window into a different world of beliefs, myths, anxieties, perspectives. The Anglo-Saxons were at the meeting-point of two major cultural traditions. From their barbarian origins, continually enriched by renewed contact with Scandinavian invaders and continental trade and political relations, they brought a Germanic inheritance of legend, poetic technique, law, pagan beliefs and tribal sympathies. From their contact with the representatives and books of Christianity, they absorbed much of the Latin, and a little of the Greek, tradition of history, religion, science and rhetoric. They were also at a chronological meeting-place. Late Anglo-Saxon England was a sophisticated and advanced country in politics, economic organization and vernacular literature; her peoples

looked back, sometimes critically, often nostalgically, to a past when they were barbarians and Rome was dominant. Looking forward, they saw themselves approaching a time of crisis, the imminent end of the world that they knew, and as that anticipated end drew near, they were increasingly inclined to see the Viking raids as signs of apocalypse. Their writings reflect at times the nostalgic brooding on the past, at times the excitement of newly acquired knowledge or the sophisticated possibilities of writing, and at times the urgency of a period of crisis.

In choosing the subjects to be considered in this book, we have been particularly concerned to show the range of writing in Old English and the ways in which that writing draws on the cultural and social preoccupations of the time. The small group of poems which have come to be recognized as the heart of the literary canon are discussed fairly extensively in the relevant chapters: *The Dream of the Rood* in ch. 13, *The Battle of Maldon* in ch. 6, the so-called elegies including *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* in ch. 10, and *Beowulf* has a chapter to itself (ch. 8). The collection aims to provide orientation and guidance for those approaching the study of Old English literature for the first time. The contributors have thus been asked by the editors to emphasize established understandings rather than new and more speculative ideas; but, perhaps fortunately, not all have followed the editors' request, and some indication of the many areas of uncertainty, the problems still to be resolved or the traditional views that need to be challenged will emerge, we hope, from the book as a whole.

Malcolm Godden
Michael Lapidge
June 1990

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Although the first edition of the *Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* has remained continuously in print during the past twenty or more years, and has become the staple of Old English instruction in many universities throughout the world – not only in British and American universities, but also in Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia and elsewhere – there have inevitably been developments in the field which are not fully represented in the earlier work. A revised, second edition therefore seemed called for. When we were invited by Cambridge University Press to contemplate such a revised edition, we were guided in the first instance by the helpful feedback of a number of university teachers of Old English whom the Press had consulted about the need (or otherwise) of a revised edition, and we hope that we have responded to the criticisms and suggestions of these consultants, and also that the present list of contributors more adequately reflects the worldwide distribution which the first edition has achieved.

In suggesting revisions to existing articles, and in commissioning new ones, we have tried to bear in mind various important developments which have taken place in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies since the publication of the first edition. In particular there has been ever-growing scholarly interest in Anglo-Saxon homilies, fuelled by the publication of monumental editions of the Vercelli Homilies and Ælfric's First Series of *Catholic Homilies* (accompanied by an equally monumental volume of commentary to the First and Second Series, and by many notable monographs on Anglo-Saxon homilies and their sources); by increasing interest in the geographical lore of the Anglo-Saxons (reflected, for example, in new editions of the 'Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn'); by closer studies of Anglo-Saxon literacy, and in particular of the emergence of a standardized written language from the late tenth century onwards; and by awareness that many of the formulaic expressions which are found in Old English verse, and which to previous generations of students were regarded as evidence for the oral composition of that verse, can more appropriately be seen as a reflex of literary composition, inasmuch as the use

of formulae can be shown to be as characteristic of the Latin verse composed by Anglo-Saxons as of their vernacular verse composition, with the further implication that close attention to the recurrence of such literary formulae can often illustrate the dependence of one Anglo-Saxon poet on another (such awareness has important bearing on the study of all Old English verse, and not least on *Beowulf*); and scholarly attention is increasingly being devoted to the afterlife and influence of Old English verse on subsequent English poets, from the Middle English period down to the twenty-first century. No doubt there are other important developments which deserve mention here (we have tried to attend to all such developments in the updated version of 'Further reading', pp. 331–48); but by attending at least to the developments sketched above, we hope to have produced a companion to Old English literature better suited than its predecessor to the needs of twenty-first-century students.

Malcolm Godden
Michael Lapidge
April 2012

NOTE ON THE TEXT

Old English poetry, including *Beowulf* is quoted throughout from ASPR. Prose texts are quoted from the relevant standard editions, and are signalled by editor's name (e.g. *Pastoral Care*, ed. Sweet, p. 10); full bibliographical details of the editions in question are to be found in 'Further reading', pp. 331–48.

ABBREVIATIONS

ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England*
ASPR	The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York, 1931–42)
AST	Anglo-Saxon Texts (Cambridge)
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge)
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHD	*English Historical Documents, I: c. 500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn (London, 1979); cited by page number
HE	Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* or *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969); also trans. L. Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth, 1955)

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

from *c.* 400	Anglo-Saxon peoples settle in Britain
c. 540	Gildas in *De excidio Britanniae* laments the effects of the Anglo-Saxon settlements on the supine Britons
597	St Augustine arrives in Kent to convert the Anglo-Saxons
616	death of Æthelberht, king of Kent
c. 625	ship-burial at Sutton Hoo (mound 1)
633	death of Edwin, king of Northumbria
635	Bishop Aidan established in Lindisfarne
642	death of Oswald, king of Northumbria
664	Synod of Whitby
669–70	Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian arrive in Canterbury
674	monastery of Monkwearmouth founded
682	monastery of Jarrow founded
687	death of St Cuthbert
689	death of Ceadwalla, king of Wessex
690	death of Archbishop Theodore
c. 700	'Lindisfarne Gospels' written and decorated
710	deaths of Bishops Wilfrid and Aldhelm
716–57	Æthelbald king of Mercia

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

731	Bede completes his *Ecclesiastical History*
735	death of Bede
754	death of St Boniface, Anglo-Saxon missionary in Germany
757–96	Offa king of Mercia
781	Alcuin of York meets Charlemagne in Parma and thereafter leaves York for the Continent
793	Vikings attack Lindisfarne
802–39	Ecgberht king of Wessex
804	death of Alcuin
839–56	Æthelwulf king of Wessex
867	the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria falls under Viking control
869	Vikings defeat and kill Edmund, king of East Anglia
871–99	Alfred the Great king of Wessex
878	Alfred defeats the Viking army at the battle of Edington, and the Vikings settle in East Anglia (879–80)
879	end of the independent kingdom of Mercia
899–924	Edward the Elder king of Wessex
924–39	Æthelstan king of Wessex and first king of all England
937	battle of *Brunanburh*: Æthelstan defeats an alliance of Scots and Scandinavians
957–75	Edgar king of England
959–88	Dunstan archbishop at Canterbury
963–84	Æthelwold bishop at Winchester
964	secular (i.e. non-monastic) clergy expelled from the Old Minster, Winchester, and replaced by monks; the event is understood by contemporary witnesses to mark the beginning of the Benedictine revival movement
971–92	Oswald archbishop at York

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

973	King Edgar crowned at Bath
978–1016	Æthelred 'the Unready' king of England
985–7	Abbo of Fleury at Ramsey
991	battle of Maldon: the Vikings defeat an Anglo-Saxon army led by Byrhtnoth of Essex
c. 1010	death of Ælfric, abbot of Eynsham
1011	Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*
1013	the English submit to Swein, king of Denmark
1016–35	Cnut king of England
1023	death of Wulfstan, archbishop of York
1042–66	Edward the Confessor king of England
1066	battle of Hastings: the Anglo-Saxon army led by Harold is defeated by the Norman army led by William the Conqueror

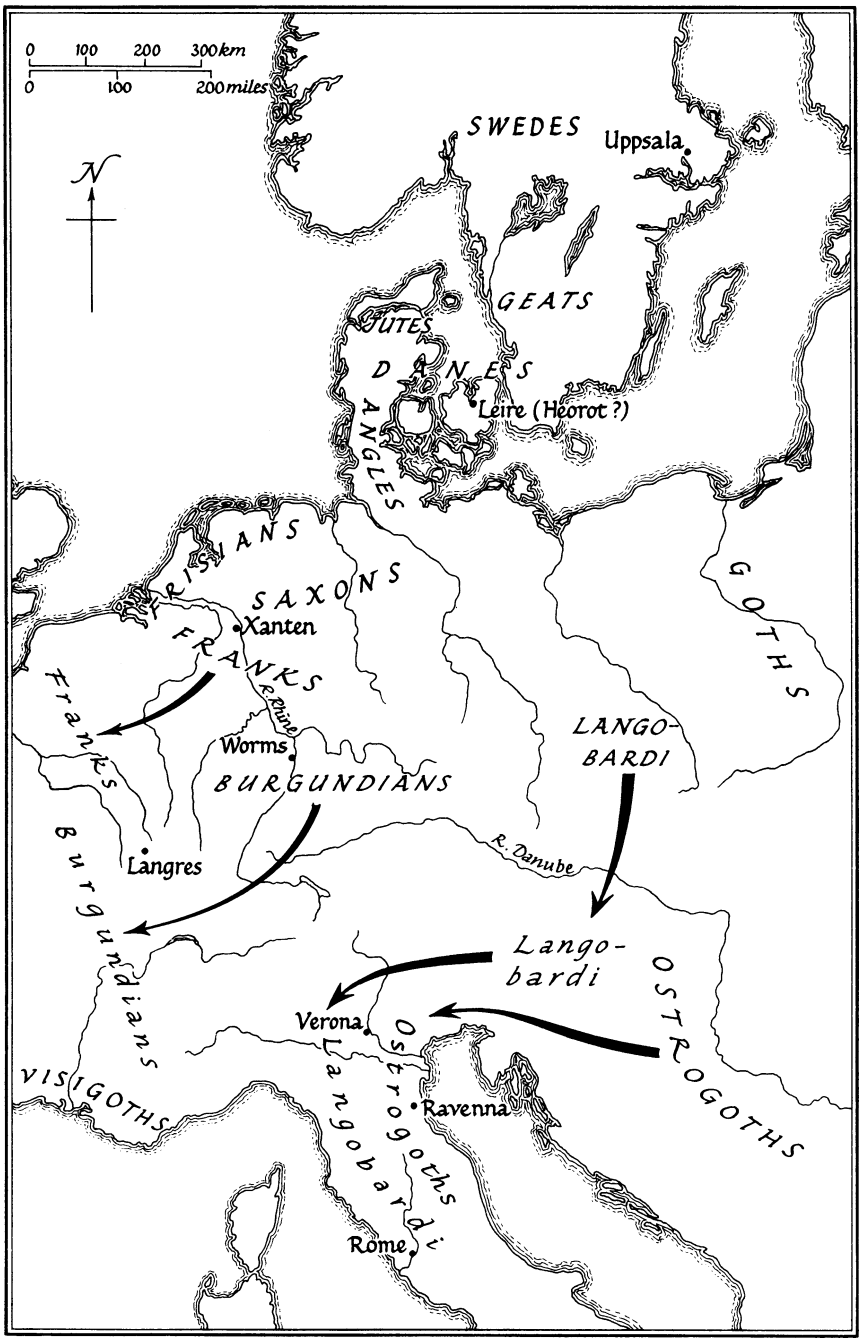

Figure 1 Map of the Germanic peoples of the Migration Age (*c.* 400 to *c.* 600 AD)

Figure 2 Map of Anglo-Saxon England