

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-39819-0 - The World of Bede
Peter Hunter Blair
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THE WORLD OF BEDE

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By the same author

An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England
Roman Britain and Early England: A.D. 43–871

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published by Martin Secker and Warburg Limited 1970
This edition first published by Cambridge University Press 1990

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge
Reprinted 1995, 2001

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

Blair, Peter Hunter, 1912-1982

The world of Bede.

Reissue with corrections.

1. Bede, the Venerable. Saint, 673-735

1. Title II. Lapidge, Michael, 1942-
270.2092

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data applied for

ISBN 0 521 39138 5 hardback

ISBN 0 521 39819 3 paperback

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Foreword

Peter Hunter Blair's *The World of Bede* was first published in 1970. At the time of its publication there had not been a monograph on Bede worthy of the name for over fifty years (the last being *The Venerable Bede: His Life and Writings* by G. F. Browne, published in London by SPCK in 1919), and the standard monograph on Bede was still Karl Werner's (by then outdated) *Beda der ehrwürdige und seine Zeit* (Vienna, 1881). The prospective student of Bede and his Northumbrian context could do no better in 1970 than to consult the collection of essays by various distinguished scholars edited by A. Hamilton Thompson and published by the Clarendon Press in 1935 under the title *Bede, his Life, Times, and Writings*. The appearance of Hunter Blair's book changed this situation immeasurably. It gave us the results of a lifetime's thinking and reading about Bede and Northumbria by an eminent Bedan scholar, distilled into a readable and engaging book, written in a style that is immediately accessible to the non-professional scholar and which carries the weight of its learning lightly and modestly – as in all Hunter Blair's scholarly publications – but which is supplied with ample documentation for those who would pursue its arguments. The most striking feature of *The World of Bede* is that it is based almost entirely on its author's reading in the primary sources, above all Bede's own Latin writings, as well as the manuscript evidence for Northumbrian learning (accessible through E. A. Lowe's *Codices Latini Antiquiores*). For this reason, Hunter Blair's book stands up well to the passage of time: being concerned with Bede himself, and not with the industry of Bedan scholarship, Hunter Blair's arguments are as fresh and relevant as they were twenty years ago. Indeed George Brown, who has recently

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written the only general monograph on Bede which deserves comparison with *The World of Bede*, could describe Hunter Blair's book as 'one of the best books on Bede and his milieu' (*Bede the Venerable* (Boston, 1987), p. 142). The high reputation which Hunter Blair's book still enjoys among Anglo-Saxon scholars encouraged the Cambridge University Press to undertake a photographic reprint; I have taken the opportunity of correcting a number of misprints (for the detection of many of which I am indebted to the generous assistance of David Dumville) and adding some brief *Bibliographical Addenda* (pp. 327–9).

Michael Lapidge
Cambridge
January 1990

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Preface

Writing from his bed of sickness to the Patriarch of Alexandria in the summer of 598 Gregory the Great was able to pass on the joyful news, but lately arrived in Rome, that large numbers of the English had been baptised on Christmas Day 597. He thought it necessary to tell the Patriarch that the English were a people who lived in a remote corner of the world and who had until recently worshipped sticks and stones. Almost exactly a hundred and fifty years later the great English missionary, Boniface, wrote from Germany to the abbot of Wearmouth and Jarrow asking him if he would send him some of the works of the monk Bede whose scriptural scholarship had lately made him eminent among his people as a shining beacon of the church.

I have tried to show in this book how it was that a seed sown in this chill northern soil flourished so greatly that some of those who were nurtured upon its fruits became for a short while, before the age of the Vikings, the spiritual, intellectual and artistic leaders of much of northern and western Europe. I have deliberately confined myself to what has seemed to me the most interesting aspect of Bede's times – the transition from illiterate paganism to the kind of world which enabled him to indulge to the full his delight in learning, teaching and writing. This choice has compelled the omission of much else that is relevant, and in particular I have not thought myself competent to write of his theological and spiritual teaching.

My debt to the work of others will be apparent from the references and from the Select Bibliography, but I cannot forebear to mention the name of Charles Plummer whose volume of notes to his edition of the *Ecclesiastical History* I have

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so often found to contain what I thought I had discovered for myself. It will be evident that much of Part IV of the book could not well have been written without many profitable hours spent with E. A. Lowe's *Codices Latini Antiquiores*. I am deeply indebted also to Professor Dorothy Whitelock who has read the whole of the book in typescript, to its great profit, and to Dr F. H. Stubbings I owe my thanks for his helpful criticisms of my translations of passages in Bede's writings. The final stages of preparing the book for the press have been greatly eased by help given me by my wife. Yet the greatest debt of all is to Bede himself. I hope that I may have succeeded in conveying to my readers at least something of what manner of man he was – the scholar who never spared himself in the search for truth, the monk who loved music and was deeply moved by the beauty of his church all brightly lit for a festal day, the teacher whose last thought was for the pupils of his school, and the endearingly humble man who chose the images of griddle, frying-pan and oven to illustrate stages in the growth of spiritual understanding.

Emmanuel College
Cambridge
24. xi. 1969

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for works cited frequently in the footnotes. Other works cited under abbreviated titles in the footnotes can be easily identified by reference to the *Select Bibliography*.

- AdVC* *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, ed. and tr. A. O. and M. O. Anderson, Edinburgh and London, 1961.
- AVC* *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Anonymo*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, Cambridge, 1940.
- AVCeol* *Vita Ceolfredi Abbatis Auctore Anonymo*, ed. C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, Oxford, 1896, I, pp. 388–404, under the title *Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo*. Tr. D. Whitelock, *EHD*, No. 155, pp. 697–708.
- BR* *Benedicti Regula*, ed. R. Hanslik, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, LXXV, Vindobonae, 1960.
- BdTR* *Bedae Liber De Temporibus Major Sive De Temporum Ratione*, ed. C. W. Jones, *Bedae Opera De Temporibus*, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Publication No. 41, Cambridge, Mass., 1943, pp. 173–291.
- BVC* *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, Cambridge, 1940.
- CCSL* *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, Typographi Brepols, Turnholti – *in progress*.
- CI* *Cassiodori Senatoris Institutiones*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford, 1937. Tr. L. W. Jones, *An Introduction to*

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- Divine and Human Reading by Cassiodorus Senator*, New York, 1946.
- CLA** *Codices Latini Antiquiores, A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts prior to the ninth century*, E. A. Lowe, Oxford, 1934–71.
- EHD** *English Historical Documents*, ed. D. C. Douglas, Vol. I, c. 500–1042, ed. D. Whitelock, London, 1979.
- EHR** *English Historical Review*.
- EVW** *Vita Wilfridi Episcopi Auctore Eddio Stephano*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, Cambridge, 1927.
- GE** *Gregorii I Papae Registrum Epistolarum*, ed. P. Ewald and L. M. Hartmann, *MGH Epist.* 2 vols., Berlin 1891, 1899.
- HAbb** *Historia Abbatum Auctore Beda*, ed. C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, Oxford, 1896, I, pp. 364–87.
- HE** *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum Auctore Beda*, ed. C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, Oxford, 1896, Vol. I, Text, Vol. II, Notes. Tr. D. Whitelock, *EHD*, No. 51, pp. 639–747, with some passages omitted.
- HOM** *Baedae Venerabilis Homeliarum Evangelii Libri II*, ed. D. Hurst, *CCSL CXXII, Pars III, Opera Homiletica*, Turnholti, 1955.
- LEU** E. A. Lowe, *English Uncial*, Oxford, 1960.
- MGH** *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.
- PL** *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols. Paris, 1844–64.
- Rev. Bén.** *Revue Bénédictine*.
- RS** Rolls Series – *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland*, London, 1858–96.
- Settimane** *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di studi Sull'Alto Medioevo*, Spoleto.
- TASA** H. M. and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1965.