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ÆLFRIC'S LETTER TO THE
MONKS OF EYNHAM

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Acknowledgements

The demands of research may sometimes tempt even the most willing student to echo, with new meaning, A. E. Housman's lament, 'The time lost, the tissues wasted, in doing anew the brainwork done before by others . . . are in our brief irreparable life disheartening to think of.' Preparation of this book has often meant recourse to less familiar disciplines wherein, as a virtual beginner, I depended heavily on the work of previous scholars. If today I can claim that such remedial 'brainwork' was not too often 'disheartening', it is because time and again, and oftener by luck than merit, the task has led to acquaintance with some truly delightful, generous people. I am glad for the opportunity here to acknowledge their contribution to this work and to own as mine whatever faults remain in it.

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The most personal acknowledgements usually come last in remarks such as these, perhaps because the formulas of gratitude are, for this group, least equal to the task. As the only expression of thanks even remotely adequate, then, the dedication of this book I offer to my brothers and, most of all, to my mother and father, who alone know how much its completion owes to their selflessness and encouragement, through moments both 'disheartening' and rewarding, down to this very day.

Abbreviations

AEOLO	<i>Amalarii episcopi opera liturgica omnia</i> , ed. Hanssens
AH	<i>Analecta hymnica medii aevi</i> , ed. Dreves <i>et al.</i>
AMS	<i>Antiphonale missarum sextuplex</i> , ed. Hesbert
ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
BaP	Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa
BL	British Library
Brief(e)	Ælfric's pastoral letter(s), numbered as in <i>Hirtenbriefe</i> , ed. Fehr
CAO	<i>Corpus antiphonalium officii</i> , ed. Hesbert
CCCC	Cambridge, Corpus Christi College
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCM	Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CH I	<i>The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church</i> , vol. I, ed. Thorpe
CH II	<i>Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series</i> , ed. Godden
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DEC	<i>De ecclesiastica consuetudine</i>
DMA	<i>Dictionary of the Middle Ages</i> , ed. Strayer
DR	<i>Downside Review</i>
EC	<i>The Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham</i> , ed. Salter
EEMF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
HBS	Henry Bradshaw Society
Hughes	Hughes, <i>Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office</i>
Hymnar	Gneuss, <i>Hymnar und Hymnen im englischen Mittelalter</i>

List of abbreviations

IBA	<i>Institutio beati Amalarii de ecclesiasticis officiis</i>
Lect.discr.long.	<i>Lectiones a textu discrepantes longiores</i> (variants of Amalarius's <i>Liber officialis</i>), in AEOLIO II, 545–65
Lib.off.	Amalarius of Metz, <i>Liber officialis</i> , in AEOLIO II, 13–543
LME	Ælfric's <i>Letter to the Monks of Eynsham</i>
LS	Ælfric's <i>Lives of Saints</i> , ed. Skeat
Milfull	Milfull, <i>The Hymns of the Anglo-Saxon Church</i>
n.s.	new series
ODCC	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> , ed. Cross and Livingstone
OR	<i>Ordo romanus</i> / <i>Ordines romani</i> , ed. Andrieu
o.s.	original series
PL	Patrologia Latina
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
PRG	<i>Le Pontifical romano-germanique</i> , ed. Vogel and Elze
R1	the <i>Retractatio prima</i> of Amalarius's <i>Liber officialis</i>
R1(Sa)	the version of R1 in Salisbury, Cathedral Library, 154
RC	<i>Regularis concordia Anglicae nationis</i> , ed. Symons and Spath
RC (Fa)	<i>Regularis concordia</i> in London, BL, Cotton Faustina B. iii, 159r–198v (+ London, BL, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, 177r–v)
RC (Kornexl)	<i>Die Regularis Concordia und ihre altenglische Interlinearversion</i> , ed. Kornexl
RC (Symons)	<i>Regularis concordia Anglicae nationis monachorum sanctimonialiumque: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation</i> , ed. and trans. Symons
RC (Ti)	<i>Regularis concordia</i> in London, BL, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, 3r–27v
Roper	Roper, <i>Medieval English Benedictine Liturgy</i>
RSB	<i>Benedicti regula</i> , ed. Hanslik
S	<i>Anglo-Saxon Charters</i> , ed. Sawyer
Sacr.Greg.	<i>Le Sacramentaire grégorien</i> , ed. Deshusses
SASH	<i>Studies in Anglo-Saxon History</i>
Schmidt	Schmidt, <i>Hebdomada Sancta</i>
SEEH	<i>Studies in Early English History</i>
s.s.	supplementary series
Tolhurst	Tolhurst, <i>An Introduction to the English Monastic Breviaries</i>
TUEP	Münchener Universitätsschriften, Texte und Untersuchungen zur englischen Philologie

1

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 hæc 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 Âge: 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 EYNHAM 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 Cerne (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 Temporal homilies. Around the year 1005 he appears to have left Cerne 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. xlviii; 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 chronology 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 fluium 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 Æpelmarus ab Æpelweardo 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. Nenck 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 ealdorom 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

The phrase *iam preteritis annis* suggests that Ælfric has been head of the community for some time. Given the indeterminate value of the adverb *nuper* ('recently') in the preface, this latter clue offers the only firm internal evidence for the date of the text relative to the beginning of Ælfric's tenure as abbot.³⁵ Unless the part of the customary containing the phrase *iam preteritis annis* (*LME* 80) was a later addition, Ælfric by his own account composed the document two or more years after his appointment. The shadow of doubt accordingly falls across the assumption that the customary must have been one of the first works Ælfric produced as abbot.³⁶ The *LME* is not an introduction to the monastic life, but an explanation of some of the finer points of the liturgy. The Eynsham monks could perhaps get by for a long time without such a document, especially with Ælfric present to guide by word and example. He may have committed this information to writing early on, as is often assumed, but it is equally possible that years passed between his arrival at Eynsham and the composition of the *LME*. An awareness, for example, that the end of his life was approaching might also have moved him to write down the kind of instructions he had been used to delivering orally and as needed.

Unfortunately, the assembled evidence weakens not one but two chronological mainstays (the date of Ælfric's transfer to Eynsham and the date of the *LME* itself) without providing any more satisfactory alternatives. One should, in any case, resist the assumption that the date of the *LME* necessarily corresponds to that of the charter, or that the writing of the *LME* must have immediately followed Ælfric's promotion. In the face

have obediently agreed with me on this matter: namely, that *for years now* we have retained three lessons and the same number of responsories at Nocturns for the whole summer period just as in winter' (emphasis added). On the grammatical difficulties of this passage, see the commentary to *LME* 80 and cf. the trans. by Gatch, 'The Office', p. 356, n. 49. Bateson also called attention to the key phrase *iam preteritis annis*, but in a different context; see her 'Rules for Monks', p. 702, n. 48.

³⁵ The implications of *LME* 80 have passed unnoticed, even though some scholars have allowed that Ælfric arrived at Eynsham before the often-cited date of 1005: e.g., *Excerpta ex institutionibus*, ed. Bateson, p. 174, White, *Ælfric*, pp. 61 and 63, Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 37 and Dubois, *Ælfric*, p. 63. The assumption may also explain the date 'post 1004' in the CCM edition.

³⁶ E.g., White, *Ælfric*, p. 63. More significantly, the assumption appears to have influenced Fehr, much of whose relative chronology is taken over in the now-standard treatment by Clemoes ('Chronology', pp. 241 and 243); see below, p. 25, n. 26.

of so many uncertainties, the date of 1005, qualified by an cautious *circa*, will have to suffice.

In addition to providing an approximate date for the *LME*, S 911 has also encouraged speculation that the circumstances attending the establishment of Eynsham were unusual. If in some respects Æthelmær's refounding of Eynsham resembled his earlier activity at Cernel, in others the two occasions differed dramatically, for the Eynsham charter declares the ealdorman's intent to retire to his new foundation and spend the rest of his days there, 'acting as a father, living among [the monks] in community'.³⁷ This vow recurs in the Old English statement, apparently dictated by Æthelmær himself, just before the witness list.³⁸ The sort of retirement here proposed would not have been unusual for a wealthy, devout layman and offers the simplest explanation of Æthelmær's motives in establishing the monastery. Other sources hint, however, that the causes of his retirement may not have been so pious. To judge from the evidence of charter witness lists, Æthelmær had enjoyed the steady increase of King Æthelred's favour through the 990s and appears to have succeeded his father as ealdorman at some point after the latter's death *c.* 998.³⁹ But soon after the turn of the millennium, the witness lists indicate dramatic changes among the ranks of Æthelred's retainers. With the charters of 1005–6, the attestations of some of the king's closest associates disappear: Æthelmær, a kinsman and hitherto important advisor, retires suddenly to Eynsham; the *minister* Ordulf, uncle of the king, also retires, perhaps to his own family monastery at Tavistock.⁴⁰ The names of the important *ministri* Wulfgeat and Wulfheah also cease to appear, as does that of the latter's father, Ealdorman Ælfhelm of Northumbria: the grim annal for 1006 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the fates

³⁷ *EC* I, 20: 'ipse patris uice fungens uiuensque communiter inter eos'. Elsewhere (*ibid.* I, vii, n. 4) Salter remarks, 'Perhaps the words [*scil.* 'uiuens communiter inter eos'] only mean "sharing the property with them"'. Salter does not give reasons for questioning the literal sense of the Latin, but only refers to the corresponding Old English (see following note) with its added phrase *þære are mid him notian*.

³⁸ *EC* I, 24: '7 ic me sylf wille mid þære geferrædene gemænelice libban. 7 þære are mid him notian þa hwile þe min lif bið' ('And I myself will live in common with the convent and enjoy the possessions with them during my life' (trans. Salter, *EC* I, 27); cf. Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, p. 28).

³⁹ Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 188, 192–3 and 197–8, n. 163; also Yorke, 'Æthelmær', p. 19.

⁴⁰ Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 209–10.

of these three men.⁴¹ Considering who benefited from this apparent purge, Simon Keynes has argued that the upheavals at court may have been engineered by Eadric Streona, ealdorman of Mercia (1007–17) and son-in-law of the king.⁴²

In such circumstances, it is hard to quell the suspicion that Æthelmær's retirement was somehow related to events at court, and that the founding of Eynsham represents either the shrewd anticipation of troubles ahead or the response to a fall from favour already complete. In either case, Æthelmær's withdrawal from public life may not have been entirely voluntary, and the likelihood that his plans to establish a monastery at Eynsham far anticipated the year 1005 decreases accordingly. Political pressures would also account for the location of the house of his retirement at Eynsham rather than in the territories of his father's ealdormanry. If retirement were his only aim, presumably the family monastery at Cernel would have been a more convenient choice. But Æthelmær's enemies at court would doubtless want to distance him from the seat of his family's power: perhaps the Oxfordshire site was dictated as one condition of withdrawal with life and honour intact.⁴³ If the younger Æthelweard, moreover, also had family connections to powers ascendant in Mercia,⁴⁴ his role in the refounding of Eynsham would hardly be a disinterested one. His offer of the *monasterium* at Eynsham could be seen as a move to facilitate his father-in-law's safe departure from court or, less commendably, as a favour to the king or to Eadric Streona (possibly his brother) as they chose a suitable place of retirement for Æthelmær outside the western shires. Admittedly, such reconstructions of motive remain entirely conjectural; nothing about the tone of the Eynsham charter itself hints of strife between Æthelmær and his son-in-law, much less between Æthelmær and the king. But it may be naive to assume that the protests

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 210–11. See the *Chronicle*, s.a. 1006: 'In the same year Wulfgeat was deprived of all his property, and Wulfheah and Ufegeat were blinded and Ealdorman Ælfhelm killed' (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Whitelock *et al.*, p. 87).

⁴² Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 212–14. According to the *Chronicle* (versions C, D and E), the year 1005 also saw an abatement of the Scandinavian attacks, perhaps related to the great famine reported in that year.

⁴³ Suggested by Yorke, 'Æthelmær', pp. 19–20. A different interpretation is offered by Campbell, who suggests that Eynsham may have been chosen in the hopes – vain, as time would soon prove – that areas so far inland would be safe from Scandinavian assault; see his 'England c. 991', p. 15.

⁴⁴ See above, n. 31.

of affection and pious motive in this highly conventional, public document tell the whole story.⁴⁵ If some controversy did attend Æthelmær's retirement to Eynsham and the job of drafting the charter fell to the royal writing office, the amiable tone of S 911 would suit the interests of a king eager not to appear arbitrary or treacherous in his dealings with a kinsman and once-close advisor.⁴⁶ Conversely, if the charter was drawn up in the Eynsham scriptorium, the monks would be no less eager to put a good face on events that had left them in the awkward position of benefiting from their patron's misfortune while acting as the enforcers of his virtual exile.⁴⁷

Further considerations caution against taking the narrative portions of the charter at face value. Although Æthelmær's absence from the witness lists of charters after 1005 is consistent with a retirement from public life, no source explicitly confirms that he acted on the vow expressed in S 911. If he did, his retirement appears to have been only temporary: the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that an Ealdorman Æthelmær led the thegns of the western provinces to submit to Swein Forkbeard at Bath in 1013.⁴⁸ If this is indeed Æthelmær 'the stout', his re-emergence in these

⁴⁵ The king refers to Æthelmær as 'uīro ualde fidelissimo michi quoque dilectissimo', and Æthelmær to the monarch as 'minon leofan hlaforde Æþelrede cyng' (EC I, 20 and 24).

⁴⁶ Keynes makes a forceful case for a royal scriptorium as the principal agent in charter production in Æthelred's reign; see the third chapter of his *Diplomas* (esp. pp. 134–53). Consensus on the issue, however, does not appear to be forthcoming; Keynes (*ibid.*, pp. 14–28) offers a lucid survey of the history of the debate.

⁴⁷ The assumption of monastic origins for S 911 must underlie the curious speculation that Ælfric himself drafted that charter. I can trace this suggestion back no further than Dietrich ('Abt Ælfrīk', p. 240) and White (*Ælfric*, pp. 60–1), though it has resurfaced as recently as 1991 (Campbell, 'England, c. 991', p. 14). If the assertion rests on a claim that the charter is composed 'in the clear, graceful Latin of Ælfric's other Latin works' (thus Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 37), it has no merit, for S 911 departs little, if at all, from the pretentious style typical of tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charters. Any statement about the authorship of S 911 must also take into account the extensive verbatim parallels in another charter (S 792 = King Edgar to Thorney, dated 973, though probably a forgery), and the relation of both of these, in turn, to the proem of the *Regularis concordia*; see C. R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England*, SEEH 5 (Leicester, 1966), 176, n. 2, and also below, p. 45, n. 111. On a possible echo of S 911 in the *LME*, see the present commentary to *LME* 63 (at n. 298).

⁴⁸ 'Then King Swein turned from there [*scil.* London] to Wallingford, and so went across the Thames to Bath, where he stayed with his army. Then Ealdorman Æthelmær came

circumstances does little to thwart suspicions that his withdrawal in 1005 was not voluntary. The length of his retirement at Eynsham was at most seven to eight years.⁴⁹ If he did spend all eight intervening years at Eynsham, the impact of his presence on the community there can only be guessed. Even in the happiest circumstances, the presence of a powerful lay patron – especially one determined to act ‘as a father’ (*patris uice*) to the monks – could easily disrupt monastic discipline and subvert the abbot’s authority. Conceivably, a retirement imposed from without would exacerbate whatever difficulties already inhered in the arrangement. The *LME* does not betray the existence of such tensions; indeed, it makes no mention of Æthelmær whatsoever, apart from the single reference to his role in the foundation, discussed above. Such reticence certainly accords with the practical nature of the work, since Æthelmær’s presence would have little bearing on the liturgical customs that are the main business of the *LME*. But the fate of Æthelmær will be a context worth recalling when we eventually turn to consider Ælfric’s handling of the *Regularis concordia* and its political implications.⁵⁰

From this attempt to view the composition of the *LME* in its historical setting, more questions than answers have emerged. The combined data of S 911, the witness lists and the *Chronicle* do not tell a straightforward story, and the *LME* offers no explicit comment on contemporary events, however aware of them the monks must have been as they chanted their Offices. But an interpretation of Ælfric’s customary as a deliberate response both to its sources and to the needs of its historical moment requires sensitivity to such backgrounds, however faint. The *LME* is the only complete English monastic customary extant from the period between the *Regularis concordia* and the *Monastic Constitutions* of Lanfranc (c. 1077), and the former, apparently conceived as a type of ‘national customary’, offers little perspective on any specific foundation. In the absence of significant comparanda, Ælfric’s text frames a rare window on the life of a particular

there, and with him the western thegns, and all submitted to Swein, and they gave him hostages’ (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Whitelock *et al.*, p. 92).

⁴⁹ Though he might have re-entered secular life to assume, or resume, the office of ealdorman before 1013, his name does not return to the witness lists until that year; see Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 209–10, nn. 202–3. Our Æthelmær is to be distinguished from another prominent Æthelmær *minister* who attests frequently in the years 1005–9.

⁵⁰ On political concerns at the margins of the *LME*, see below, pp. 43–9.

Anglo-Saxon monastery whose customs, like those of any house, were determined in part by the circumstances of its foundation, the numbers and relative experience of its community and, especially, the plan of its buildings and church, down to the number and location of side altars or chapels.⁵¹ The irony could hardly be greater, then, that so crucial a witness as the *LME* should emanate from a centre about which so little is otherwise known. From the time of the refoundation by Æthelmær c. 1005 until the Norman Conquest, the history of Eynsham Abbey is a virtual blank.⁵² The 'abbot and entire community of Eynsham' turn up in the witness list of a minor St Alban's charter (S 1425), the original of which is datable to 1050 × 1052, and this attestation is the only evidence of the community's continued existence through the mid-eleventh century.⁵³ The early thirteenth-century *Magna uita* of St Hugh of Lincoln reports that the monks still resident at Eynsham in 1066 abandoned the site during the Norman invasion, but that Bishop Remigius of Dorchester, later of Lincoln (1067–93), refounded the monastery, which was thereafter a dependency of the see of Lincoln.⁵⁴ There appears to have

⁵¹ Few will hazard an estimate of the size of a community for which records are so scarce, but see D. H. Farmer's conjectures about Ælfric's previous house, Cernel, in 'The Monastic Reform of the 10th Century and Cerne Abbas', in *The Cerne Abbey Millennium Lectures*, ed. Barker, pp. 1–10, at 6. Some implications of the *LME* for the layout of Eynsham Abbey receive passing notice in Spurrell's 'Architectural Interest', pp. 173–4.

⁵² Salter's introduction to the *Eynsham Cartulary* (I, ix–xxxii) includes a detailed history of the abbey down to the Dissolution; see also his article in *The Victoria History of the County of Oxford*, ed. W. Page (London, 1907) II, 65–7, as well as E. Chambers, *Eynsham Under the Monks*, Oxfordshire Record Society 18 (Oxford, 1936), and Gordon's *Eynsham Abbey*.

⁵³ Edited among the *additamenta* to *Matthæi Parisiensis chronica maiora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 6 vols., Rolls Series 57 (London, 1872–82) VI, 29–30. A recently discovered transcript of the Old English original is discussed by S. Keynes, 'A Lost Cartulary of St Albans Abbey', *ASE* 22 (1993), 253–79, at pp. 266–7, and Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 107 and 138–40; see also Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, pp. 43–4. The Latin edition by J. M. Kemble (*Codex diplomaticus æui Saxonici*, 6 vols. (London 1839–48) IV, no. 950) gives the erroneous reading *Hauuensis* for *Egnesbamiensis*.

⁵⁴ *Magna uita sancti Hugonis: The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, ed. and trans. D. L. Douie and H. Farmer, 2 vols. (London, 1961–2) II, 39: 'Blessed bishop Remigius, who had founded the magnificent cathedral church of Lincoln shortly after the conquest, had refounded the ruined abbey [*scil.* Eynsham], from which the monks had fled out fear of the enemy.'

been no continuity between the Anglo-Saxon and Norman refoundations, although Remigius must have restored Eynsham before 1086, for the Domesday Book records the estates of his refounded monastery. Between 1091 and 1093 the monks were transplanted to another refounded site at Stow in Lincolnshire, but Remigius's successor, Robert Bloet, transferred them back to Eynsham, where the community prospered from 1094 until the formal dissolution of the house on 4 December 1539.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *EC* I, ix–xii and xxxi. It is sometimes asserted that Stow was refounded by Bishop Eadnoth I of Dorchester (1006–16) *from* Eynsham; see J. W. F. Hill, *Medieval Lincoln* (Cambridge, 1948), p. 75, and Knowles, *Monastic Order*, pp. 66 and 721 (Table I). The sole evidence for this claim is the presence of certain pre-Conquest documents pertaining to Stow in the Eynsham Cartulary, but there is no definite link between Eynsham and Stow before Remigius's transplantation of 1091, on which see Gordon, *Eynsham Abbey*, p. 61.