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STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL HISTORY

Edited by

Laura L. Gathagan, William North
and Charles C. Rozier

THE HASKINS SOCIETY JOURNAL
STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL HISTORY

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STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL HISTORY

EDITED BY LAURA L. GATHAGAN, WILLIAM NORTH
AND CHARLES C. ROZIER

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Editor's Note

This volume of the *Haskins Society Journal* includes papers read at the 36th Annual Conference of the Haskins Society at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in November 2017, papers read at earlier Haskins conference sessions, and individual paper submissions. Constance B. Bouchard delivered the C. Warren Hollister Memorial Lecture and Robin S. Reich's essay received the 2017 Bethell Prize, judged by Constance B. Bouchard of the University of Iowa, USA. This is the regular volume for 2018. The Editors would like to offer thanks to the contributors, anonymous reviewers, and to Caroline Palmer and her excellent staff at Boydell & Brewer for their help and patience during the production of this volume.

The *Haskins Society Journal* is an international refereed journal, and its contents are not limited to papers read at the Society's own conference or at the sessions which it sponsors at Leeds, Kalamazoo, or other venues. Papers on topics in the many fields and periods of the medieval past to which Charles Homer Haskins contributed, including but not limited to Anglo-Saxon, Viking, Norman, and Angevin history as well as the history of the neighboring peoples and territories, are welcome from any scholar. Authors intending to submit are asked to consult the Society's website (www.haskinssociety.org) or write to the Editor (Dr. Laura Gathagan, Department of History, SUNY Cortland, P.O. Box 2000 Cortland, NY 13045-0900, USA; email: laura.gathagan@cortland.edu) or Associate Editor (Dr. William North, Department of History, Carleton College, 1 North College Street, Northfield, MN 55057, USA; email: wnorth@carleton.edu).

Laura L. Gathagan, Editor
William North, Associate Editor
Charles C. Rozier, Assistant Editor

Abbreviations

<i>AASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i> (67 vols., Antwerp/Brussels/Paris 1643–1884)
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>ANS</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i> (formerly <i>Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies</i>)
<i>ASC</i>	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; normally cited from <i>Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel</i> , ed. Charles Plummer (2 vols., Oxford, 1892–9), with year and MS
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
Bede, <i>EH</i>	Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, rev. ed. 1991)
<i>Bk. of Fees</i>	<i>Liber feodorum: the Book of Fees, commonly called Testa de Nevill</i> (3 vols., London, 1920–31)
BL	British Library, London
<i>Bracton</i>	<i>Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England</i> , ed. and trans. Samuel E. Thorne (4 vols., Cambridge, MA, 1968–77)
<i>Bracton's Note Book</i>	<i>Bracton's Note Book: a Collection of Cases decided in the King's Courts during the Reign of Henry the Third</i> , ed. F.W. Maitland (3 vols., London, 1887)
<i>Cal. Chart. R.</i>	<i>Calendar of the Charter Rolls, 1226–1516</i> (6 vols., London, 1903–27)
<i>Cal. Docs. France</i> , ed. Round	<i>Calendar of Documents preserved in France illustrative of the History of Great Britain and Ireland, I: A.D. 918–1206</i> , ed. J.H. Round (London, 1899)
<i>Cal. Lib. R.</i>	<i>Calendar of the Liberate Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (6 vols., London, 1916–64)
<i>Cal. Pat.</i>	<i>Calendar of the Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (London, 1891 and in progress)
<i>Camb. Hist. Jnl.</i>	<i>Cambridge Historical Journal</i>
CCCM	<i>Corpus Christianorum, continuatio mediaevalis</i> (Turnhout, 1971–)
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, series latina</i> (Turnhout, 1953–)

<i>CCM</i>	<i>Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale</i>
<i>Close R.</i>	<i>Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (14 vols., London, 1902–38)
<i>Complete Peerage</i>	G.E. C[okayne], <i>The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom, Extant, Extinct, and Dormant</i> , new edn. by V. Gibbs and others (12 vols. in 13, London, 1910–59)
<i>Cur. Reg. R.</i>	<i>Curia Regis Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (17 vols., in progress, London, 1922–)
DB	<i>Domesday Book, seu liber censualis Wilhelmi primi regis Angliae</i> , [ed. Abraham Farley] (2 vols., London, 1783)
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. Leslie Stephen and Stephen Lee
Dudo, <i>History</i>	Eric Christiansen, trans., <i>Dudo of St Quentin: History of the Normans</i> (Woodbridge, 1998)
<i>EcHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>EHD</i>	<i>English Historical Documents, I: c. 500–1042</i> , ed. Dorothy Whitelock (2nd edn., London, 1979); <i>II: 1042–1189</i> , ed. David C. Douglas and George W. Greenaway (2nd edn., London, 1981); <i>III: 1189–1327</i> , ed. Harry Rothwell (London, 1975)
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
<i>EYC</i>	<i>Early Yorkshire Charters</i> , ed. W. Farrer and C.T. Clay (13 vols.: vols. i–iii, Edinburgh, 1914–16; index to vols. I–iii, and vols. iv–xii, Yorkshire Archaeological Soc. Record Ser. Extra Ser. 1–10 [1935–65])
<i>FSI</i>	<i>Fonti per la Storia d'Italia</i>
<i>Gesta Stephani</i>	<i>Gesta Stephani</i> , ed. K.R. Potter and revised R.H.C. Davis (Oxford, 1976)
<i>Glanvill</i>	<i>The Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Realm of England commonly called Glanvill</i> , ed. and trans. G.D.G. Hall with guide to further reading by M.T. Clanchy (Oxford, rev. ed. 1993)
<i>GND</i> , ed. van Houts	<i>The Gesta Normannum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni</i> , ed. and trans. Elisabeth M.C. van Houts (2 vols., Oxford, 1992–5)
Henry of Huntingdon, <i>Historia</i>	Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, <i>Historia Anglorum: the History of the English People</i> , ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford, 1996)
<i>Hist. Res.</i>	<i>Historical Research</i> (formerly <i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>)
<i>HSJ</i>	<i>Haskins Society Journal</i>
<i>JEH</i>	
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>

John of Worcester, <i>Chronicle</i>	<i>The Chronicle of John of Worcester</i> , ed. and trans. R.R. Darlington, P. McGurk, and J. Bray (3 vols., Oxford, 1995–)
LCL	Lincoln Cathedral Library
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
AA	<i>Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
Epp.	<i>Epistolae</i>
LdL	<i>Libelli de Lite</i>
SS	<i>Scriptores in folio</i>
SSRG	<i>Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum, separatim editi</i>
SSRG, n.s.	<i>Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum, nova series</i>
MS./MSS.	manuscript/manuscripts
NA	The National Archives, Kew, London
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> < https://www.oxforddnb.com/ >
OV	<i>The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis</i> , ed. Marjorie Chibnall (6 vols., Oxford, 1969–80)
PASE	<i>The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England</i> < http://www.pase.ac.uk/ >
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
Pipe R.	<i>The Great Roll of the Pipe</i> (Pipe Roll Society), with regnal year
PL	<i>Patrologia latina cursus completus</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne (221 vols., Paris, 1844–64)
PP	<i>Past and Present</i>
Rec. Com.	Record Commissioners
Recueil, ed. Fauroux	<i>Recueil des actes des ducs de Normandie de 911 à 1066</i> , ed. M. Fauroux (Caen, 1961)
Regesta	<i>Regesta regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066–1154</i> , ed. H.W.C. Davis and others (4 vols., Oxford, 1913–69)
RHC	<i>Recueil des Historiens des Croisades</i>
Doc.Arm.	<i>Documents arméniens</i> (2 vols., Paris, 1869–1906)
Gr.	<i>Historiens Grecs</i> (2 vols., Paris, 1875–81)
Lois	<i>Lois</i> (2 vols., Paris, 1841–43)
Occid.	<i>Historiens Occidentaux</i> (5 vols. in 6, 1844–95)
Or.	<i>Historiens Orientaux</i> (5 vols., Paris, 1872–1906)
RIS	<i>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores</i>
Rot. de Lib.	<i>Rotuli de liberate ac de misis et praestitis, regnante Johanne</i> , ed. T.D. Hardy (London, 1844)
Rot. Hund.	<i>Rotuli hundredorum temp. Hen. III & Edw. I</i> , ed. W. Illingworth and J. Caley (2 vols., London, 1812–18)
Rot. Litt. Claus.	<i>Rotuli litterarum clausarum in turri Londinensi asservati, 1204–27</i> , ed. T.D. Hardy (2 vols., London, 1833–44)
Rot. Litt. Pat.	<i>Rotuli litterarum patentium in Turri Londinensi asservati (1201–16)</i> , ed. T. D. Hardy (London, 1835)
RS	Rolls Series

Sawyer, <i>Charters</i>	P.H. Sawyer, <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography</i> (London, 1968), with charter number
s.a.	<i>sub anno/annis</i> [under the year/–s]
ser.	Series
<i>Settimane</i>	<i>Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo</i>
Soc.	Society
Stubbs, <i>Charters</i>	<i>Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First</i> , ed. William Stubbs (9th edn., revised H.W.C. Davis, Oxford, 1913)
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i>
Symeon, <i>Opera</i>	<i>Symeonis monachi opera omnia</i> , ed. Thomas Arnold, RS 75 (2 vols., London, 1882–5)
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
Univ.	University
unpub.	Unpublished
<i>VCH</i>	<i>The Victoria History of the Counties of England</i> (in progress), with name of county
<i>VSO</i>	Byrhtferth of Ramsey, <i>The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine</i> , ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2009)
William of Malmesbury, <i>GP</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Gesta Pontificum Anglorum</i> , ed. and trans. R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (2 vols., Oxford, 2007)
William of Malmesbury, <i>GR</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Gesta regum Anglorum</i> , ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (2 vols., Oxford, 1998–1999)
William of Malmesbury, <i>HN</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Historia novella</i> , ed. K.R. Potter and E. King (Oxford, 1998)
William of Poitiers, <i>Gesta</i>	William of Poitiers, <i>The Gesta Gvillelmi of William of Poitiers</i> , ed. and trans. R.H.C. Davis and M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1998)

Beyond Corfe: Ælfthryth's Roles as Queen, Villain, and Former Sister-in-law*

Mary Elizabeth Blanchard

In March of 978 the teenaged Edward, king of the English, travelled to Corfe in Dorset to visit his stepmother, the dowager Queen Ælfthryth, and younger half-brother, Æthelred. The young king was killed there, probably by his half-brother's retainers, and later honoured as St Edward the Martyr. Ælfthryth received increasing amounts of blame for the death of Edward and during the twelfth century was cast in the familiar, if one-dimensional, role of the evil stepmother. This villainous archetype is the filter through which post-Conquest writers viewed her and most modern scholars have engaged with her life.¹ Yet, this is not the start of her story and the death of her stepson was not the only scandalous tale medieval authors associated with this particular Anglo-Saxon queen. Twelfth-century writers provide a salacious twist to her first marriage in which Edgar, and sometimes Ælfthryth, conspire to kill her previous husband. Although these narratives and the motives behind them are interesting in

* Earlier versions of this paper were presented at 'Medieval Charters and Communities: A Symposium' on the different methods of engaging with charters in historical research, Ave Maria University, 14 November 2016 and the 36th International Conference of the Haskins Society, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 4 November 2017. I would like to thank Constance Brittain Bouchard and Andrew Rabin for reading earlier drafts of this article; any remaining mistakes are completely my own.

¹ Many scholars have discussed aspects of Ælfthryth's life. See Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'The Unready' (978–1016): A Study in their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge, 1980), 168–74; Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: the King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1998), 21–22; Pauline Stafford, 'Queens, Nunneries, and Reforming Churchmen: Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', *Past and Present* 163 (1999), 3–35; Simon MacLean, 'Monastic Reform and Royal Ideology in the Late Tenth Century: Ælfthryth and Edgar in Continental Perspective', in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in Honour of Wilhelm Levison (1876–1947)*, ed. D.W. Rollason, C. Leyser and H. Williams (Turnhout, 2010), 255–74; Andrew Rabin, 'Female Advocacy and Royal Protection in Tenth-Century England: The Legal Career of Queen Ælfthryth', *Speculum* 84 (2009), 261–88; Barbara Yorke, 'The Women in Edgar's Life', in *Edgar, King of the English 959–975: New Interpretations*, ed. D.G. Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), 143–57; Kirsten Fenton, 'The Tale of Queen Ælfthryth in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*', in *Gender and Historiography: Studies in the Earlier Middle Ages in Honour of Pauline Stafford*, ed. J.L. Nelson et al. (London, 2012), 49–60; and Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven, CT, 2017), 45–55.

their own right, the less sensational contemporary royal charters deserve a closer examination. Such documents are not only important for understanding the ecclesiastical and secular figures surrounding the royal family at royal assemblies but also provide a surviving contemporary snapshot of such a gathering unburdened by hindsight. Charter evidence suggests that Ælfthryth was probably already a controversial figure during the reign of her second husband, King Edgar. She became queen during a time when that particular role was expanding beyond the king's bed companion.² There is also a good indication that her remarriage to the king was not well accepted in certain circles. Charters dated to the first years of her tenure as queen indicate that her former brothers-in-law may have taken issue with the king's choice of a new bride. This article explores her complex relationship with the family of her first husband, the powerful kin-group of Ealdorman Æthelstan 'Half-King' of East Anglia. Foundational changes to Anglo-Saxon queenship also occurred during Ælfthryth's life. Her posthumous reputation is best analysed within these contexts.³

Most famous for being the second or third wife of King Edgar⁴ and mother to King Æthelred *Unræd*, Ælfthryth was initially married to Ealdorman Æthelstan's oldest son and immediate successor, Æthelwold. Yet, interactions with her first husband's family have been only cursorily examined.⁵ The charters from King Edgar's reign, moreover, include witness lists in the mid-960s that suggest a strained relationship between the new queen and her former brothers-in-law, indicating a break between her former noble kin-group and Ælfthryth's new royal family.

Ælfthryth, Edgar, and this particular aristocratic kin-group were interconnected in several ways. First, Edgar and Ælfthryth each entered into the familial circle of Æthelstan 'Half-King' at different times and life-stages. This family, in fact, fostered the ætheling Edgar as a child, and, as mentioned above, Ælfthryth married the oldest son, Æthelwold.⁶ Additionally, Æthelwold and his brothers Ælfwold, Æthelsige and Æthelwine were important members of Edgar's courtly and *witan* communities after his elevation to king of the Mercians and later, as he ruled a reunited kingdom.⁷ Thus, this family was very intertwined with and supportive of Edgar's early career. But Ælfthryth's

² See Yorke, 'Women in Edgar's Life', 146; MacClean, 'Monastic Reform', 263–70; and Janet L. Nelson, 'The Second English *Ordo*', in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. J.L. Nelson (London, 1986), 361–74.

³ Although Ælfthryth's interactions seem to generally be with the generation after Æthelstan 'Half-King' I am following convention which denotes this family by its most powerful member – Æthelstan.

⁴ For a clear articulation of the marital situation of Edgar and an argument for Ælfthryth being the third wife see Yorke, 'Women in Edgar's Life', 144–45.

⁵ See C.R. Hart, 'Aethelstan 'Half-King' and his Family', *ASE* 2 (1973), 115–44; Yorke, 'Women in Edgar's Life', 143–57; and Stafford, 'Queens, Nunneries, and Reforming Churchmen', 3–35.

⁶ For a discussion of the fostering of Edgar see Hart, 'Half-King', 124 and Andrew Wareham, *Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 2005), 18.

⁷ For family tree, see Figure 1.

entrance into the courtly community c. 964 seems to have elevated her own natal family and demoted or even pushed members of her first husband's family from the courtly circle. Her marriage to Edgar may well have been against the wishes of her in-laws and some of them seem to have showed this, when possible, by physically avoiding the queen.

Edgar's Reign: A Time of Change

Before addressing Ælfthryth's relationship with her first husband's family some context is needed to understand the political scene and royal court she entered as Edgar's new consort. Edgar's reign over the kingdom of England (959–75) saw developments and changes in several different areas. First was the promotion of a wholesale revolution in monastic observance, generally referred to now as the tenth-century reform.⁸ Senior clergymen such as Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester, Archbishop Oswald of York and Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury fostered the movement, but powerful lay support from the king and queen and many of the king's ealdormen proved crucial to its success. Second, royal authority across the kingdom was strengthened by a number of factors, including a lack of outside threats, the introduction of the shire-reeve⁹ and the promotion of the idea of sacral kingship by the reform leaders. Third, this Christianization of kingship also saw the expansion of the role of the queen in the Anglo-Saxon period as someone with ceremonial responsibilities and rights; although perhaps still her primary duty, queens were no longer only the king's bed companion.¹⁰ Fourth, in the political field, Edgar's reign saw the rise of the family of Ealdorman Ælfhere of Mercia at the expense of Edgar's foster family, the kin-group of Ealdorman Æthelstan 'Half-King'.¹¹ This political change is a somewhat surprising development given that the latter rose to prominence under Edgar's father and uncle. An examination of extant sources

⁸ There have been numerous studies devoted to this reform and its leaders. See *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and the Regularis Concordia*, ed. D. Parsons (Bognor Regis, 1975); *Dunstan: Saint and Statesmen*, ed. D. Dales (Cambridge, 1988); *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988); *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubbitt (London, 1996); Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge, 1999); and David Rollason, *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century* (Turnhout, 2010).

⁹ The Anglo-Saxon reeve has long been neglected but recent scholarship has attempted to amend this. See Judith Green, *English Sheriffs to 1154* (London, 1990); George Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), 106–09; Tom Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2017), 121–25; Chelsea Shields-Más, 'The Reeve in Late Anglo-Saxon England', PhD dissertation (University of York, 2014); and James Lloyd, 'Reeves as Agents of Royal Government in the English Shires, from the Reign of Alfred to Domesday Book', PhD dissertation (University of Cambridge, 2014).

¹⁰ See Stafford, 'Queens, Nunneries, and Reforming Churchmen', 12–22; Rabin, 'Female Advocacy and Royal Protection', 269–70; and Yorke, 'Women in Edgar's Life', 156.

¹¹ See Hart, 'Half-King', and Ann Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum Gentis: The Family, Career and Connections of Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia', *ASE* 10 (1982), 143–72.

reveals political factions and networks that formed around these two families and their ecclesiastical allies.¹²

The Shifting Political Field

The kin-groups of Ælfthryth and her first husband, Æthelwold, probably originated from the same area of western Wessex and theirs was probably a marriage arranged to bolster the power of both noble families. H.P.R. Finberg suggested that the patrimony of her father, Ordgar, in Devon may have lain near to the original familial lands of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’, the father of Æthelwold. The proximity of patrimonies, despite Æthelstan ‘Half-King’s’ appointment to and subsequent transplantation to East Anglia, may explain why the children of these men, Ælfthryth and Æthelwold, married.

Æthelwold’s family, namely his father, Æthelstan ‘Half-King’, and uncles, Æthelwold I and Eadric, had risen to the top of the secular elite under Kings Edmund and Eadred. Indeed, for four years, 942–46, these three brothers administered a significant portion of Edmund’s kingdom, overseeing East Anglia, Kent and central Wessex.¹³ Æthelstan was further favoured with the fostering of the young ætheling Edgar for a time. Although the family lost political clout under Eadwig, they maintained a strong presence in the royal court. As king, Eadwig heavily favoured a different kin-group, that of Ealdorman Ælfhere of Mercia, which began to eclipse the family of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’.¹⁴ Eadwig raised both Ælfhere and his brother, Ælfheah, to ealdordoms in 956 and 959, respectively.¹⁵ Although made an ealdorman by Eadwig, Ælfhere actually joined Edgar’s Mercian court in 957–59. Edgar apparently rewarded this loyalty, as Ælfhere continues to attest in the senior position among ealdormen even after the reunification of the kingdom in 959 – a position that he would maintain until his death in 983.

Æthelwold and Ælfthryth’s marriage probably aligned Ordgar, a powerful western West Saxon thegn with no clear connection to either kin-group, with Æthelstan ‘Half-King’ and his political allies, which generally included Archbishops Dunstan and Oswald and Abbot Sideman of Exeter (tutor to Edward the Martyr and later bishop of Crediton 973–77).¹⁶ Interestingly enough, Bishop

¹² Barbara Yorke, ‘Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century’, in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988), 9–118.

¹³ Hart, ‘Half-King’, 123. See Simon Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters, c.670–1066* (Cambridge, 2002) [hereafter cited as Keynes, *Atlas*], tables XXXVIII, XLII, XLV, XLVIIa, XLVIIb and L for the attestations Æthelstan ‘Half-King’ his brothers, Æthelwold I and Eadric.

¹⁴ See Williams, ‘*Princeps Merciorum*’, 144, and Yorke, ‘Politics of the Tenth Century’, 75–78.

¹⁵ See Keynes, *Atlas*, tables L and LI.

¹⁶ See Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2009) [hereafter cited as *VSO* by page number], 139. He was significant enough that his death was recorded by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in the annal for 977. Ordgar’s family may have had links to the bishopric of Crediton as one of Sideman’s successors, Ælfwold, bequeathed books to Ordgar’s son, Ordulf (see S 1492) or the see passed to an adherent of the other political faction.

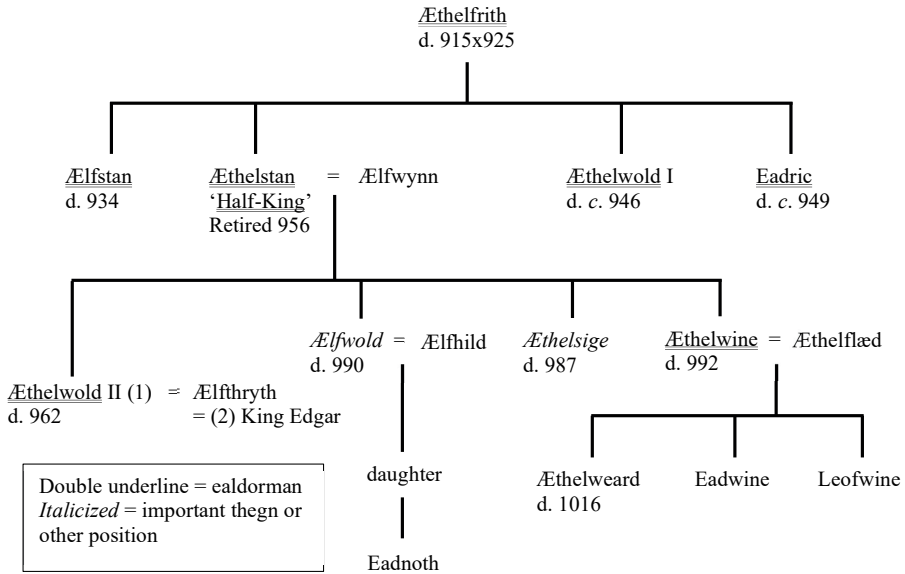


Figure 1. The Family of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’

Æthelwold tended to side with Ealdorman Ælfhere. These political factions would continue into Æthelred’s reign. Perhaps the marriage was a way of wooing the thegn to the East Anglian and away from the Mercian faction. It may have also been, as suggested by C.R. Hart, an attempt to position Æthelwold as an ealdorman in Western Wessex.¹⁷ This last theory is speculative and even if true was not successful.

Despite his apparent dislike of the family, King Eadwig appointed Æthelwold as ealdorman of East Anglia once his father retired to Glastonbury in 956. The family tree lays out the political power that this kin-group held during the tenth century (Figure 1). In some ways they can be compared to the Godwinson family under Edward the Confessor, although their fall from power was never as drastic. Not only were Æthelwold, Ælfwold, Æthelsige and Æthelwine the foster brothers of the young ætheling Edgar, they followed him when the kingdom split between Edgar and Eadwig. All four of the sons of Æthelstan ‘Half-King’ appeared in the charters issued by Edgar as king of the Mercians.¹⁸ Thus, this family appears to have fully supported Edgar from childhood, following him as both king of the Mercians in 957 and as king of the English after the kingdom was reunited in 959.

It is unclear when Ælfhryth and Æthelwold were married. Based on his last attestation and his younger brother Æthelwine’s almost immediate appearance

¹⁷ Hart, ‘Half-King’, 127–8.

¹⁸ See S 579 for the first extant charter from Edgar as king of the Mercians.

among the ealdormen soon afterwards, Æthelwold was definitely dead before the end of 962.¹⁹ Nothing truly is known about their marriage, although they both appear to have been patrons of the refoundation at Ely during this time. Whether this is where Ælfthryth first encountered Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester, her strong adherent both during and after her marriage to Edgar, is unknown.²⁰ As no contemporary commentary exists concerning the death of Ealdorman Æthelwold, it is necessary to turn briefly to William of Malmesbury's soap opera-esque version of Ælfthryth's first marriage. According to William, King Edgar heard about Ælfthryth's beauty and 'commissioned [Ealdorman Æthelwold] to visit ... and to offer her marriage, if her beauty were really equal to report'.²¹ Instead, Æthelwold fell in love and, concealing 'his mission from her parents ... procured the damsel for himself', sending a message to the king that rumours of her loveliness were untrue.²² King Edgar eventually discovered his ealdorman's deception and decided to pay the newlyweds a visit. William of Malmesbury writes that once Æthelwold learned of the king's impending visit he begged his wife to dress in an unappealing manner to save his life. She refused, instead clothing herself to accent her appearance, and the king fell in love with her at first sight.²³ Edgar and Ælfthryth apparently then conspired together, resulting in Æthelwold's death. William ends the story with King Edgar, 'under the pretense of hunting' in the nearby woods, murdering his own ealdorman by running him through with a javelin.²⁴ The death of her first husband is not a well-known incident in Ælfthryth's life, possibly because it is overshadowed by her second marriage, the murder of her stepson and the chaotic reign of her own son Æthelred *Unræd*. Geoffrey Gaimar, who apparently received his information from Wherwell Abbey, also mentions the story, although he treats it more like a romance and places more blame on Edgar and Æthelwold than on Ælfthryth.²⁵ In contrast to other royal nunneries, such as Shaftesbury and Wilton, Wherwell provides both positive and negative facts about Ælfthryth, which may explain the shifting blame.²⁶ Gaimar also avoids using the motif of the 'hunting accident' for Æthelwold's death. It is interesting that the political reasons for the marriage were erased by both writers.

Although the post-Conquest stories make for good romance, no contemporary documents indicate anything suspicious about Æthelwold's death and King Edgar quickly replaced his eldest foster brother as ealdorman of East Anglia with Æthelwold's own youngest sibling, Æthelwine, passing over both

¹⁹ See Keynes, *Atlas*, table LVI.

²⁰ Yorke, 'Women in Edgar's Life', 149.

²¹ William of Malmesbury, *GR*, i, 257.

²² William of Malmesbury, *GR*, i, 257.

²³ William of Malmesbury, *GR*, i, 259.

²⁴ William of Malmesbury, *GR*, i, 259.

²⁵ Geoffrey Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis* ed. A. Bell, *Anglo-Norman Text Society* (Oxford, 1960), 117–23.

²⁶ See Yorke, 'Women in Edgar's Life', 156 and Stafford, 'Queens, Nunneries, and Reforming Churchmen', 27.

middle siblings, Ælfwold and Æthelsige. The latter two men, however, did not necessarily lack political power and over the next year or so everything seemed to continue on in Edgar's court in the same vein. Yet, when the king wed Ælfthryth he married his foster brother's widow; this may have created a rift between Edgar and his three remaining foster brothers. Furthermore, I think this marriage caused a large shift in the courtly community between the sons of Æthelstan 'Half-King' and their rivals, Ealdorman Ælfhere and his kin – a shift that can be seen in a close examination of the charters from the first decade of Edgar's reign.

Before 963 all four brothers witness a large number of Edgar's charters, with Æthelwold attesting alongside the other ealdormen and the three younger brothers appearing among the thegns. Of the three younger brothers, the middle sibling, Æthelsige, attested the most.²⁷ Prior to 963 he often witnessed Edgar's charters and between 960 and 963 he rarely missed attesting. Ælfwold and Æthelwine also attested during these years, but not with the same frequency as their brother.²⁸ Thus, this kin-group appears to have continued in their unwavering support of Edgar even after the death of Ealdorman Æthelwold in 962.

In terms of the middle brothers, Ælfwold and Æthelsige, a charter dated to 963 revealed that Æthelsige had been acting as his foster brother's chamberlain. The document records a land grant from King Edgar to Æthelsige, his *camerarius*.²⁹ Byrhtferth of Ramsey wrote that both of these brothers were influential, with Æthelsige possessing 'the authority of an ealdorman and had ... exceeding importance whenever he came into the king's presence', and Ælfwold disdaining to become an ealdorman.³⁰ Thus, while these two brothers never achieved the highest lay office they do not appear to have lacked political clout. It is uncertain how long Æthelsige served as chamberlain; however, the fact that he attests so often, particularly between 960 and 963, seems to indicate that he spent a great deal of time in Edgar's courtly circle during this period.³¹

Æthelsige may have continued on as Edgar's household official or, as C.R. Hart suggested in his study of this particular noble family, he may well have retired and returned to East Anglia with his brothers in or around 963. Whatever occurred, the frequency with which he attests does markedly decrease after this year, as do his brother Ælfwold's appearances.³² Ealdorman Æthelwine continued to attend the majority of royal gatherings, but he was actually pushed down the list of ealdormen by Queen Ælfthryth's father, Ordgar, despite being the more senior official.³³ Therefore, there were multiple changes to the court

²⁷ See Keynes, *Atlas*, table LVII.

²⁸ See Keynes, *Atlas*, tables LVI and LVII.

²⁹ See S713.

³⁰ *VSO*, 85 and 87.

³¹ This is based on the assumption that Simon Keynes has accurately identified the correct Æthelsige in these charters. See Keynes, *Atlas*, table LVII. There were at least four Æthelsige *ministri* active during Edgar's reign. See S687 where all four attest the same charter.

³² As C.R. Hart suggested in Hart, 'Half-King', 131.

³³ See Keynes, *Atlas*, table LVI.

after Æthelwold's death. Æthelwine became ealdorman in 962, Ælfthryth married Edgar in 963 or 964 and Ordgar appears among the ealdormen in 964. According to the general layout of most Anglo-Saxon witness lists, ealdormen were listed due to a seniority based on length of tenure.³⁴ Thus Ordgar should have appeared below Æthelwine, because the younger man had been an ealdorman longer. Instead, the queen's father is generally listed before Ælfthryth's former brother-in-law and immediately after Ealdorman Ælfhere and his brother, Ealdorman Ælfheah. One has to wonder, given his daughter's remarriage and his own placement above Æthelwine in the witness lists, if Ælfthryth's union with Edgar affiliated Ordgar with the rival faction of Ælfhere and his political allies. This theory of Ordgar and his kin allying themselves with the Mercian ealdorman seems very plausible, especially given the support Ælfhere showed to Ælfthryth's son, Æthelred, in the succession crisis that occurred after Edgar's death in 975.

As will be discussed in more detail below, Ælfthryth was the first Anglo-Saxon queen who regularly, if not frequently, attested in the role of king's wife and thus she was much more visible in the courtly circle as consort than any other before her. While the role of *regina* may have been expanded during her time as consort, Ælfthryth was still by no means a constant presence in the royal court and, in this respect at least, was still overshadowed by her husband's grandmother, Eadgifu, who seems an almost continuous figure in the 940s and 950s.³⁵ While the evolution of the Anglo-Saxon royal consort is fascinating, what no one has truly examined yet is Æthelsige's and Ælfwold's charter appearances subsequent to Edgar and Ælfthryth's wedding. After comparing the brothers' attestations to the queen's early appearances, I would like to suggest that between 964 and early 968 Ælfwold and Æthelsige may have actively avoided or been excluded from gatherings of the royal court when Ælfthryth was present.

The two brothers did not cease to appear in charters, although they witness less frequently once Ælfthryth began attesting as *regina*. Her initial appearance is as a beneficiary in a charter recording a land grant from Edgar dated to 964, possibly soon after their wedding. Ordgar is still listed as *minster* and both Ælfwold and Æthelsige attest among the thegns.³⁶ If the first six authentic charters are examined in which Ælfthryth appears in the witness lists, scattered across the years between 964 and 968, it is noteworthy that only in 968 does one brother (Ælfwold) attest.³⁷ In the same time period Æthelsige attests fifteen charters and Ælfwold witnesses fourteen. Of the first eighteen authentic charters she attested, eleven contain neither brother among the witness lists. One or the other of the brothers attest five of the charters and

³⁴ Keynes, *Diplomas*, 157.

³⁵ Eadgifu appears as a near constant member of the court, particularly during Eadred's reign. See Keynes, *Atlas*, table XXIa.

³⁶ See S 725. There is some debate over its authenticity.

³⁷ See Keynes, *Atlas*, compare tables XXXIc and LVII.

only the two remaining charters list both Æthelsige and Ælfwold.³⁸ Therefore, of the first eighteen charters Ælfhryth attests as *regina*, only two of them are witnessed by both brothers.

These numbers might not seem significant unless one looks at the number of charters these middle brothers witness before 964. Among the sixty-two extant charters between 958 and the end of 963, Æthelsige attests forty and Ælfwold witnessed twenty-four. Between 964 and Edgar's death in 975, seventy-eight authentic charters survive. Æthelsige's attestations, which appear in documents until 987, drop markedly.³⁹ Of these seventy-eight charters he witnesses only twenty-four and Ælfwold attests twenty-one.⁴⁰ There is not, therefore, a complete absence from the charter witness lists, but rather an overall decrease in the number of attestations from the brothers. In some ways, this decrease is harder to explain than a total disappearance from the charters. There seems to have been an obvious break of some sort between Edgar and his foster brothers, but not one so terrible that they were banished for any notable length of time. If the king forced Æthelsige's retirement by his insistence on marrying Ælfhryth he may have tried to maintain a good relationship with his foster brothers by always welcoming them to his court. Another possibility is that this particular kin-group had been so powerful and intertwined in the governance of the kingdom for the middle part of the tenth century that perhaps Edgar sought a way to disentangle himself from their influence. After all, he never appointed more than one of his foster brothers to an ealdorship, even though his own father, Edmund, had appointed their father and uncles to three offices, effectively giving them administration over half his kingdom. Finally, perhaps the king did not misread his foster brothers' feelings about their sister-in-law and the marriage, and Æthelsige's apparent departure from the court and household position may have been at his own insistence. In any case, Æthelsige's appearances decrease sharply after the entrance of Ælfhryth into the courtly circle.

There does appear to be a clear avoidance for several years of the queen by members of this family. Æthelsige and Ælfwold did not cease witnessing, but did not appear as frequently when Ælfhryth was present. Ealdorman Æthelwine, owing to his higher rank, may have been unable to avoid royal councils without giving offence. However, his being pushed further down the witness lists, combined with the more frequent absence of his elder brothers from court, indicates a further loss of power for the family. Their absence was probably filled by the queen's family and their political allies, men who supported Edgar's choice of bride. As Stacy Klein has pointed out, there are multiple indications that Anglo-Saxon kings were 'chosen' by the people. These same kings, however, always picked their own consorts, one of many

³⁸ Compare Keynes, *Atlas*, tables XXXIc and LVII.

³⁹ Compare his attestations in the various charters in Keynes, *Atlas*, tables LVII, LVIII, and LXIII.

⁴⁰ Keynes, *Atlas*, table LVII.

choices that the English people were supposed to trust to their leader.⁴¹ While I hesitate to push this idea too far it is worth pondering. Perhaps Æthelsige's and Ælfwold's actions show not only a dislike for Edgar's choice of a bride in 963 or 964 but also an open distrust of Edgar's choices in general. Æthelwine also made his opinion of Ælfthryth and her son known, although perhaps more subtly than his brothers, when he supported Edward the Martyr in the succession dispute in 975.⁴²

The Development of Anglo-Saxon Queenship in the Tenth Century

Æthelsige and Ælfwold's apparent dislike of Ælfthryth is a new aspect of this particular Anglo-Saxon queen's controversial reputation. It needs now to be placed alongside more established facets of her life, including the office of king's consort. The expanding role of the queen is visible in the surviving charters as well as certain legal cases.⁴³ Much of our understanding of queenship, particularly that of Anglo-Saxon queens, is due to the seminal work done by Pauline Stafford, who has pointed out that Ælfthryth was the turning point among Anglo-Saxon consorts.⁴⁴ Arguably the first recorded native-born Anglo-Saxon consort officially crowned queen (at least in the West Saxon line), Ælfthryth was the first to attest a significant number of charters as *regina*.⁴⁵ She did have two significant predecessors, Alfred's daughter, Æthelflæd, and Ælfthryth's grandmother-in-law, Eadgifu. Æthelflæd was born into the West Saxon line but ruled Mercia, a region with a seemingly stronger tradition of queenship than Wessex. We cannot, however, discount the possibility of Mercian influence, particularly transmitted through Mercian clerics, on West Saxon politics and practices, especially once the two kingdoms were more fully united under Alfred's grandsons. For example, the favour shown to Bishops Cenwald and Ælfwine (Ælle) of Worcester and Lichfield respectively during Æthelstan's reign probably brought Mercian ideologies to the West Saxon court. Cenwald, particularly, was part of a group of prelates who had an impact on the tenth-century reform leaders Dunstan, Oswald and Æthelwold.⁴⁶ Although the influence of Merican traditions in such matters is possible, it did not lead to immediate changes in the role of West Saxon queens. Ælfthryth's grandmother-in-law, Eadgifu, did witness a significantly larger number of charters than

⁴¹ Stacy Klein, 'Corporate Personalities and Sovereign Illusions: Queenship, Royal Masculinities and Cultural Diversity in Asser's *Life of Alfred*', paper presented at the 53rd International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, 9 May 2018.

⁴² Yorke, 'Women in Edgar's Life', 157.

⁴³ See Rabin, 'Female Advocacy and Royal Protection', 262–281.

⁴⁴ Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), 61–3.

⁴⁵ PASE, Ælfthryth 8. The second Anglo-Saxon coronation *ordo* was the first to have a rite for the crowning of a queen. See J.L. Nelson, 'The First Use of the Second Anglo-Saxon *Ordo*', in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters*, ed. A. Wareham and J. Barrow (Farnham, 2008), 117–26 at 121.

⁴⁶ See ODNB, 'Oda', Catherine Cubitt and Marios Costambeys (accessed 18 October 2018).