

George Hardin Brown and Frederick M. Biggs

Bede

Part 2, Fascicles 1-4

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Sources of
Anglo-Saxon
Literary Culture

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Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture

Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture (SASLC) is a longstanding collaborative project by numerous scholars to map the sources that influenced the literary culture of Anglo-Saxon England. Taking inspiration from Ogilvy's *Books Known to the English*, it aims at a comprehensive, descriptive list of all authors and works known in England between c. 500 and c. 1100 CE.

While the focus is Anglo-Saxon England, evidence of knowledge of sources by Anglo-Saxons residing on the Continent is also taken into account. The sources themselves are largely Western European. Most entries concern classical, patristic, and medieval authors, works, or traditions.

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*In memory of Paul Meyvaert, eminent scholar of Bede, distinguished editor,
Executive Director of the Medieval Academy of America, and dear friend*

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Introduction

This second volume completes our survey of the reception of Bede's writings in Anglo-Saxon England. Reading Bede through the works of his immediate followers makes us aware of how useful he was to them, providing the tools they needed to carry on, most prominently, recording history and spreading the faith through preaching. With its entries on the **HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA GENTIS ANGLORUM** and the two chronicles that are part of **DE TEMPORIBUS** and **DE TEMPORUM RATIONE**, volume one focused on the first topic. With those on **HOMILIES** and on the **EXTRACTS** from the **COMMENTARIES** on Mark and Luke, which served the same purpose, volume two is dominated by the latter. There is much else in both, but in these areas, geography, hagiography, metrics, orthography, rhetoric, and science, Bede primarily taught.

Bede's theology is only occasionally a focus of the entries in this volume, in part because he chose not to accentuate doctrinal differences. This is not to say he avoided these issues when they arose. As Faith Wallis (2013) and Peter Darby (2012) have demonstrated, it appears to have been his interest in combatting eschatological speculation around the year 700 that led to both his *De temporibus* and the **COMMENTARIUS IN APOCALYPSIM**. Similarly, his unprecedented commentaries on the tabernacle and the temple demonstrate the degree to which Bede pursued topics that caught his interest. Here the study of Conor O'Brien (2015) breaks new ground in our understanding of Bede's developing thought. Passing over much other scholarship, we would finally note the work of Benedicta Ward (1995) and Sarah Foot (2014) on Bede's understanding of prayer, particularly as it applied to female monastic communities. There is much more to be learned in these areas; and yet, for the moment, it appears that Bede stood out from his contemporaries in having the time and inclination to read deeply in the Fathers and engage with their work in order to produce original commentaries on the Bible.

So we return to Bede the preacher to conclude this introduction. The *Vita Wulfstani*, which survives in William of Malmesbury's translation of Coleman's Old English Life of Wulfstan (see **WULFSTANUS II** in **ACTA SANCTORUM**), describes the new bishop's first official act (ed. Darlington 1928 p 20; trans. Jones 1998 p 85, note 57):

Altera enim ordinationis die beato Bede dedicauit ecclesiam, pulchre illi prime dedicationis prebens principium, qui fuisset literature princeps

de gente Anglorum. Eo enim die tam proflua predicatione populum irroravit, ut non dubitaretur Wlstanum per spiritum sanctum eadem niti facundia, que quondam linguam mouisset in Beda.

(On the day following his ordination he dedicated a church to blessed Bede, appropriately offering the priority of his first dedication to him who had been foremost in learning among the English. For on that day he bedewed the people with such fluent preaching that there could be no doubt but that Wulfstan was, through the Holy Spirit, drawing on that same eloquence that had once inspired the tongue of Bede.)

In her entry on Wulfstan (*ODNB*) Emma Mason writes that he “played an important role in the transmission of Old English cultural and religious values to the Norman world.” Here, however, our labour ends.