An Ecocritical Reading of the Great Storm Presented in Aldhelm's *Carmen rhythmicum* Set Along the Devon/Dorset Coast: An Insight Into the Wider Environmental Damage Affected Across Southern Britain in the Later Seventh Century[*]

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In the closing decades of the seventh century, Aldhelm of Malmesbury, first West Saxon Bishop of Sherborne, composed a lengthy, 200 line poetic work known as the *Carmen rhythmicum* which takes as its focus a dramatic storm. The earliest storms recorded present within a few decades of the invention of the barometer and, as Hubert Lamb notes in his *Historic Storms of the North Sea, British Isles and Northwest Europe*, "circumspection is needed in accepting reports based on those of early observers". Aldhelm's poetic *Carmen* provides a powerful element of "meteorological corroboration" here in its historico-geographical setting along the *Dumnonian*/Devonshire border. A length of Devon/Dorset coastline which today forms part of the Jurassic Coast inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2001; a coastline, notes the website "subject to severe weather conditions at times … violent storms occurred in 1824 and 1974 … these and various lesser storms have battered the cliffs and caused flooding … an eroding landscape". This paper takes as its subject, Aldhelm's vivid description of a severe storm, he experienced along this coastline over 1,300 years ago and which he survived. Presented here is a first-ever reading of the environmental impact alluded to and to its long-term legacy across the southern Britain of the later seventh century. The length of time, Aldhelm declares it had taken him to compose this work, enhances both its bardic, legal connotation and his description of the damage effected by this *tempestas*, this hurricane-force wind, following its "blowing over"; a *tempestas*, we also read here as alluding to an outbreak of plague.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon England, St Aldhelm, Storms, Plague, Counties, Boundaries

The Storm as Divine Judgement: The "Blessing" of West Saxon Rule

The storm is conveyed here by Aldhelm's *Carmen rhythmicum* (Aldhelm, 1919; Lapidge & Rosier, 1985)[1] as an expression of Divine Judgement in effecting his survival following the creation of a Roman-style boundary

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[1] See also "Aldhelm, *Carmen rhythmicum*" followed by translations by Lapidge (1985) and Howlett (1995), also by Brooks & Barker (2010, pp. 271-290). Translations here are by the author.

between Wessex and the British Kingdom of *Domnonia*, Devon; to the making of a *mansio*, a coastal trading estate, at **portus limina*, Lyme, sited along the eastern side of this boundary to serve the newly-instituted, landlocked West Saxon *cathedra*, "bishop's seat", at Sherborne, an estate which was confirmed by charter in AD 774 (see Figure 1). Aldhelm's survival we also read here as relating to an outbreak of plague.
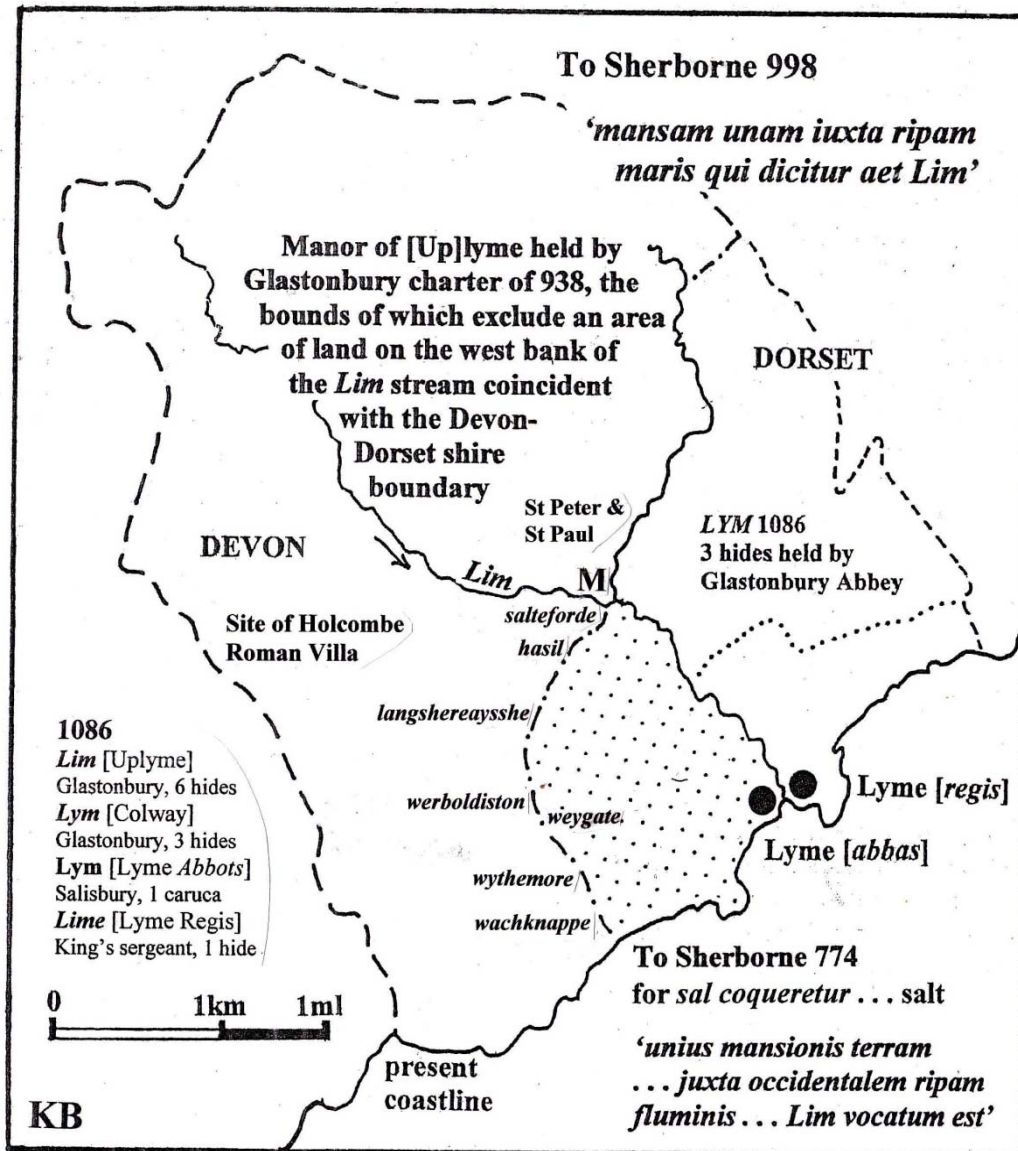

Figure 1. The setting of Aldhelm's bardic *Carmen rhythmicum* along the Devon/Dorset coastline.[2]

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[2] The *mansio*, the episcopal trading estate at Lyme, sited "next/up against the west bank of the river … called the Lim" was confirmed by Roman law, by written charter, in AD 774 and again in the Sherborne Benedictine charter of AD 998. Formerly known as Lyme *Abbas/Abbots*, this area is shown stippled. The Western border of the *mansio* is confirmed by the boundary recital of the Glastonbury Uplyme charter of AD 938/1516 cutting straight across this deep-sided river valley followed by the *Dumnonian*/Wessex, Devon/Dorset, shire/county boundary; selected boundary references are included here. Also shown is the site of both the Holcombe Roman villa and Uplyme parish church dedicated to Sts Peter and Paul; the mill referred to in the text is marked by an "M". In 1086 *salinarii*, "saltworkers", were registered for both *Lym*, Colway, and for *Lime*, Lyme Regis. Following the move of the Bishopric by the Normans to [Old] Sarum/Salisbury, the Sherborne *mansio* was, from 1075, held by the Bishop of Salisbury. Registered in 1086 as an ungelded, untaxed *caruca*, there is thus no reference here to *salinarii*.

An ecocritical analysis here explores the ecological connections presented by this early medieval work in relation to what is already understood as a formative period in early Anglo-Saxon history.[3]

> From a turbulent and shifting political landscape emerged the kingdoms that were, by the later seventh century to dominate … their rulers issuing law codes, granting tracts of land … élites drew themselves increasingly within the ambit of western [Roman] Christendom … in which scholarly connections and long-distance travel encouraged trade and exchange … with Christianity came Latinate literacy … the relationship between man and land … became closer … stability was the key to growth. (McKerracher, 2018, pp. 118-119)

A "stability" presented here not only in the putting in place—the construction of an on-the-ground boundary between two kingdoms, but along a literary borderland between oral and written.[4]

Aldhelm was born into the Western British, Christian Hiberno-Latin world, receiving his early education from the Irish scholar *Maildub* at Malmesbury (Yorke, 2010; Lapidge, 2007). In 664, King Oswiu of Northumbria followed Continental precedent in presiding over the Synod held at Whitbythe outcome of which was that the Roman party "won the day" and conditions were less favourable for alliance with the Western, British Christian kingdoms (Charles-Edwards, 2013). Four years later, Aldhelm's career changed course with the appointment by Pope Vitalian of Theodore of Tarsus as Archbishop of Canterbury who was to effect a major re-organisation of the church putting in place a formal territorial, episcopal order, and (re-)introducing Latin literacy and Roman law (Mayr-Harting, 1972; Lapidge, 1995a). At the Canterbury School, Aldhelm came up to speed with the learning of the old Roman, Byzantine world of Late Antiquity, with *scriptura*, "that committed to writing", noting how much easier it was to teach law, *iuxta exemplum Romanarum*, than the oral, bardic tradition hitherto in place (Aldhelm, 1919, pp. 475-476; Lapidge & Herren, 1979, pp. 137-138, 152-153; Barker, 2010b, pp. 252-254).[5] The Roman Order was, in short, to sanction West Saxon rule, years which coincided with the rule of King Ine and first reference to the shires.[6]

Theodore will have been well acquainted with the episcopal trading syndicates of the Byzantine world, and the growing prosperity of these years is presented by Aldhelm in his reference to purples, silks and to incense from *Saba* (Yemen), which we read in complement of the evidence presented by recent archaeology of the establishment of trading *emporia* on both sides of Channel (Palmer, 2003; Barker, 2014a). And which, we are given to understand, will have included the "storm blessed" *portus* along the Wessex/*Dumnonian* border to serve a newly-created, landlocked bishopric.

The first two West Saxon bishoprics were set up in the old Roman *civitates* of Dorchester-on-Thames and Winchester on the Avon but the third, created on the division of Winchester, was to be sited in neither

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[3] This paper is based on that given at the Symposium held at King's College London in July 2018; "Medieval Weathers: a Symposium on Meteorological Phenomena in Medieval Writing and Culture" held in association with *Medieval Ecocriticisms*. It was at this conference the author was introduced to Ecocriticism; to the "ecocritical reading" of an early literary text, a term first coined by Cheryll Glotfelty in 1989. "Ecocriticism" combines ecology with literary criticism to form a discipline that examines the relationship of texts to literal and figurative environments.

[4] "The Anglo-Saxon charter reflects the desire felt by early churchmen to have some written guarantee for their property … churchmen seem to have achieved their aim … [to bring] about the integration of the written word into land ownership". The storage of a charter … on the altar or bound in a gospel book "visibly associated the charter with the divine" (Kelly, 1990, pp. 43-45). Aldhelm's bardic declaration of the making of this estate was not to be "registered" by Roman law, by written charter, for over a century, see below.

[5] "Thus, as with politics, so with literacy the early medieval *regna* [ruling order] developed their own features in the field of cultural transmission … highlighted by the co-existence of two types of learning, one associated with literacy the other characterised by oral culture" (Richter, 1994, pp. 47-48).

[6] Attenborough (2000, cap 8, p. 39). "Shires" became "counties" under Norman administration.

Ilchesternor Dorchester but in Sherborne which presents the distinctive settlement plan of a high-status British Christian foundation (Barker, 1980; 1984) and where Aldhelm was to be appointed first West Saxon bishop. As it were "astride" two worlds, the Hiberno-Latin and Classical Latin, the British and West Saxon, it is his diplomatic skills in the "promotion" of the newly (re-)introduced Roman Christian order into the Western British Christian world which sets the scene for the Storm he describes in his *Carmen*.

The Storm in Its Historico-Geographical Setting: The Early Medieval Christian World in Its Natural Environment

The earliest storms recorded present within a few decades of the invention of the barometer and "circumspection is needed in accepting reports based on those of early observers" (Lamb, 1991, p. 4). Aldhelm's *Carmen* provides a powerful element of "meteorological corroboration" here in its setting. The distinctive "helmet-*cum*-mitre geography" presented by the Lim valley we read into in the cryptic dedication of his *Carmen* to his *Casses catholice, Obses anthletice*, "Universal helmet, Prize-fighting hostage", to his OE *helm gils* "Helmet hostage", first West Saxon Abbot of Glastonbury, to "stand hostage", "stand surety" along the newly-instituted border with *Dumnonia* (Barker, 2017, pp. 15-35; 2010c, pp. 55-109).[7] Aldhelm's *Carmen* may indeed be read as "an autobiographical narrative" (Lapidge & Rosier, 1985, p. 171)[8] (see Figure 2). The subscription to the *Carmen* reads *Finitur carmen Aldhelmi* "Aldhelm's *Carmen* ends here" is to be trusted; there are no doubts as to its authorship (Orchard, 1994, p. 28). We have good grounds for "presuming the truth of what is told".[9] And the length of time he declares it had taken him to compose this work enhances both its bardic "legal" connotation and his description of the damage effected by this *tempestas* following its "blowing over", *tempestas* we read here as connoting not only "storm" but "plague".

Aldhelm himself alerts us to the "four levels of meaning" presented in his literary style namely *historia*, the historico/geographical, *allegoria*, allegory, *tropologia*, the moral, and *anagoge*, the spiritual (Aldhelm, 1919, p. 232, Lapidge & Herren, 1979, p. 62; Barker, 2010c, pp. 18-19).[10] To which a contemporary readership may now add another, the eco-critical. "'Ecocriticism' combines ecology with literary criticism to form a discipline that examines the relationship of texts to literal and figurative environments" (Douglass, 1998, pp. 10, 136-163, as cited in Rudd, 2007, p. 4) and which adds a thought-provoking insight into this composition. Thus, prompted here is a re-reading of this *Carmen* as to think about the interactions between the early medieval, Christian world and its natural environment (Hoffman, 2008; Wall, 1994).

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[7] The instance of early Glastonbury-held estates along the Dorset and Hampshire/Wiltshire borders suggests that Aldhelm's cryptic reference to Helmgils "standing surety" along the newly-created shire boundary with *Dumnonia*/Devon may relate to the area of the newly-instituted bishopric nowhere else recorded. Aldhelm described as bishop "to the west of [Sel]wood" along the Wiltshire border goes far to suggest that the bishopric was "coincident" with the two *saete*-named territories of Dorset and Somerset, Sherborne located along the border between the two.

[8] In the Glastonbury archive Helmgils presents as *Haemgils*. "Haemgils can be accepted as a genuine and important early abbot … likely to have been appointed in the later 670s" (Kelly, 2012, pp. 162-163). OE *haeman* "to marry" "to lie with" draws attention here to the "intrusion" of the Sherborne *mansio* into the "coastal base" of the Glastonbury-held Lim valley estates. "Aldhelm was not to be consecrated bishop until the year of *Haemgils'* death. But whether the Glastonbury abbot be presented as *Helmgils*, *Hemgils* or *Haemgils*, the geography of this pair of estates will accommodate all three" (Barker, 2017, pp. 23-24).

[9] "Every epic tradition is concerned on the one hand with a movement across a territory and on the other hand with the presumed truth of what is told … essentially the story of the engagement between two peoples" (Benozzo, 2004, pp. 146-147). "In a primary oral culture … poets served as repositories of learning … of the knowledge necessary for the culture's practices and mores are passed along to successive generations" (Amodio, 2004, p. 4).

[10] "In patristic commentaries the first level of meaning is normally designated by the term *historia* denoting a factual history whose truth is never denied" (Robertson, 2011, p. 40).
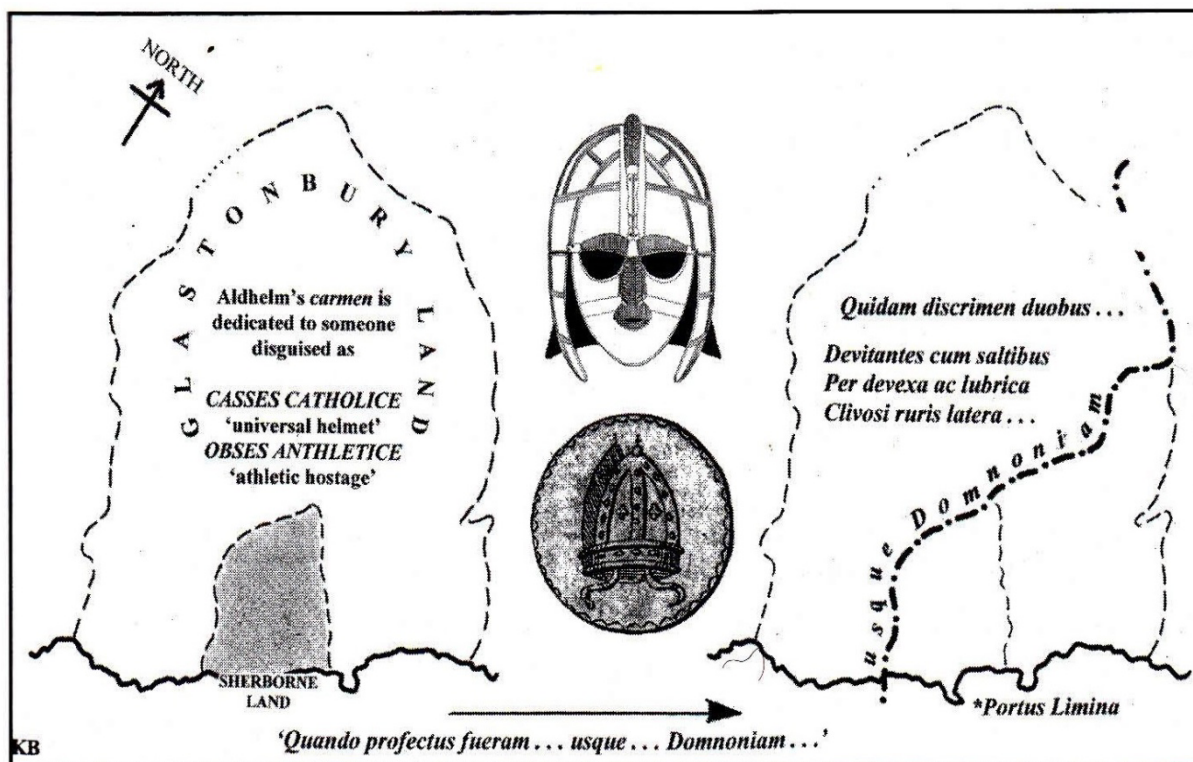
Figure 2. The dedication of Aldhelm's *Carmen rhythmicum* set against a reading of this skilfully composed poetic work presents a persuasive case for the making of this episcopal coastal trading estate, *mansio*, as dating to the final decades of the seventh century.

Aldhelm declares it was *de ingentibus Altithroni operibus*, "through the prodigious works of the Almighty God", he survived a "Day of Judgement-style" Storm on return from a mission to *Cornubia* and *Domnonia* Cornwall and Devon. More usually *Dumnonia*,[11] Aldhelm's rendering here presenting an element of OE *dom*, "law" "judgement". A 21st century reading is one to focus attention rather less on the spiritual and more on what we read here as an eye-witness account of the damage affected by both a storm-force gale and torrential rain experienced at first hand and, by implication, to the hitherto unnoticed, unacknowledged, environmental impact of this Storm in relation to the formative changes of the later seventh century.

Aldhelm's composition declares the role the storm played in affecting the survival of the first West Saxon Bishop of Sherborne in the Westward expansion of the Roman Order in the creation of the trading estate at *portus limina*. His *Carmen* presents us with a skilfully composed bardic declaration of its creation pre-dating the legal charter by almost a century. One thus not (yet) "registered" by written Roman law, by *scriptura*, but by Divine blessing in his surviving the *Dirae*, "Furies" of the *Domnonians*; the storm which broke out as he crossed the newly-instituted border. A mission we may read in complement of his lengthy *epistola* addressed to *Geruntio Regi*, King Gerent of *Dumnonia*, his *sacerdotes*, "bishops" and *clerici*, "priests" seeking their "coming into line" with the Roman Order (Colgrave & Mynors, 1969, p. 514; Aldhelm, 1919, pp. 480-488; Probert, 20120, pp. 110-128).[12]

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[11] "There can be no doubt that the correct form of this name is *Dumnonii* … also in the case of *Dumnonia* (the region)" (Rivet & Smith, 1979, pp. 342-343).

[12] An *epistola* which inaugurated a period of diplomatic relations with the British Christians of *Dumnonia*.

The bardic *Carmen* was a well-established poetic literary form composed in a strict octosyllabic metre, designed for recitation—for performance;[13] a style of composition imposing major constraint on the use of words (Orchard, 1994).[14]

> Bards were as much poets as scholars trained in poetical composition; in a pre-literate age the bard, employed by those in positions of power, was heir to a highly-developed oral tradition, the bard was guardian of history … law … their knowledge of genealogies was relied on to establish or maintain territorial rights. [15]

And it is the establishment of "territorial rights" we read into Aldhelm's composition. His words complement earlier work on this coastal estate; a literary 'illumination' of the Anglo-Saxon charter boundary and scale map.

> This recognition is particularly liberating for eco-criticisms as it allows it to explore texts that are not overtly "about" nature, to focus on those "other details" and give them credit for doing something more than merely adding to an effect of verisimilitude. (Rudd, 2007, pp. 7, 11)

Those "other details" here relating to the damage affected by this storm; to flooding, coastal erosion, loss of salt pans, destruction of crops, trees and buildings and, by implication, to its longer-term environmental impact, migration and re-settlement.

It is rare to find studies of the past in an ecological context and the making of this border, the Devon/Dorset, Uplyme/Lyme Regis county/parish boundary of today, draws attention to the distinctive double/boundary bank bordering this former episcopal estate, *mansio*, not only making possible a formal perambulation but an ordered planting; the ecology presented here dating back to the later seventh century could almost be termed 'botanical archaeology,' a theme further explored below.

The Storm Breaks Out: Oak Trees Uprooted and Rivers Overflowing

The storm broke out the moment Aldhelm reached *Usque Diram Domnoniam*, "the edge of dire, "Furious" Devon", *per carentem Cornubiam*, "by way of shorn Cornwall", *florulentis cespitibus et foecundis graminibus*, "stripped of flowering soils and fertile grazing", "the elements, distorted and horribly formless, were tossed violently under the vaulted upper world of heaven … trembled under the monarchic power of the winds". A powerful evocation is presented here of the scale of storm damage across the peninsula to both cultivated and grazing lands. *Cornubia* may have been *ager publicus*, "public land" under Roman rule (Mattingly, 2006, p. 83) and an element of this may be presented in Aldhelm's words. And of note here is that *Cornubia* is "an artificial latinisation" [by Aldhelm] of a tribal name *Kernow/Cornowii*, presenting Latin *cornu* "horn" alluding to the shape of the peninsula (Padel, 1988, pp. 72-73). *Cornubia* was "stripped of its horns".

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[13] "The ritual hymn of the Salian priests in Rome … said be written by Numa, *ut Numa Saliari Carmine* … an oral artefact perhaps only written down to ensure correct performance" (Macrae, 2016, pp. 48-49).

[14] Aldhelm's *Carmen* comprises 200 lines of octosyllabic verse a style beginning with the Irish in the sixth century and continuing with their seventh century imitators, a style based ultimately on the iambic dimeter hymns of Late Antiquity (Lapidge, 1995b, pp. 260-263). Barker (2010b, pp. 233-270). Aldhelm deplores those *scurrae* "scurrilous" persons wont to "meddle" with his words. Aldhelm's *Carmen* has been described by David Howlett as a skilfully-constructed poetic composition in which "every line, rhythm, word, syllable and letter has been counted and artfully composed". And who also notes that a carefully composed bardic work was one to ensure correct performance, and any attempt at "meddling" would be obvious. See Howlett (1995, p. 140; 2010, pp. 181-194).

[15] See Cronin (1996, p. 9, citing McGrath). Aldhelm describes himself as *poeta, hymnista, auctor*, also as *vates*, "prophet" "seer", "bard". Also, see Barker (2010b, pp. 233-270); Habinek (2005, p. 2); Williams (1996, pp. 221-222).

Breaking out in the early hours of the morning, the gale blew in from the west, from the Atlantic, "coming from the point where the burning lanterns of Titan [the Sun] do set" (Smyth, 1996, p. 133).[16] And which will take its place as one of those major storms recorded in the south-west; the Lynmouth flood disaster of August 1952, the Boscastle flood of 2004 and the Great Storm of October 1987 (Delderfield, 1994; Lamb, 1991, pp. 189-191).

"For behold during the night there arose a dark, violently swirling vortex and the emptiness in league with the weakened winds raved in Bacchanal-style in the upper world, rupturing the reins that bind the ages". Then once they have "taken up the reins", "their repetitive blasts straightaway lead into battle array, the winds whose twelve names are found in *volumina*, papyrus/parchment rolls",[17] … "joining forces … sweeping in wildly from the west". Aldhelm's description of the "spinning" vortex of the *machina mundi* "world machine" powerfully evokes the movement of the cosmos, words also used by Aldhelm's contemporary, Adomnan of Iona, in describing a dramatic storm off the Western coast of Scotland which he uses as metaphor for the Last Judgement.[18]

"However they [the winds] blew for victory they were not without glory, [for] the troubled ground trembled", *Atque eruta robora Cadebant cum verticibus Simul ruptis radicibus* "and hard wood [great] oak trees uprooted, fell, twisting with their roots ripped out". Oak was an important building material needed for high-status construction work and such trees were clearly vulnerable to hurricane-force winds. The storm occurring in mid-summer as we learn (see below), the trees will have been in full leaf.[19] Oak trees, *robora*, expressed here in the plural, are suggestive of well-established areas of woodland and wood pasture associated with borderlands.[20]

The dendro-chronological analysis of alignments of oak piles discovered along the Essex coast present felling dates of AD 684-702; structures of similar date present across the Somerset Levels (McKerracher, 2018, pp. 118-119). A context for causeway construction would have been presented by the repairs needed following the environmental damage suffered across these tracts of low-lying marshland.

Reading on we find reference to overflowing rivers. "Neither did the raindrops fall gently, but menacingly", *Mundi rotam rorantibus Umectabant cum imbribus*, "the world wheel saturated, the guttering let it fall", *Cum praepollenti pluvia Essent referta flumina*, "and with the great weight of rain, the rivers full to overflowing" and then "a whirlwind attacked the earth with a finely polished storm of hail stones tightly packed into the black clouds in massed heavenly companies".

The rapid succession of Latin words here evoke torrential rain, the world [?mill-] wheel overflowing, rivers bursting their banks. Aldhelm composed a riddle, *enigmatum*, on *Mola*, "Millstones", *Nos sumus … sorores, Quaedamus ex nostro cunctis alimenta labore*.[21] "We are sisters … who through our labour provide food for

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[16] "Titan" is read here as the Sun.

[17] Aldhelm is here citing Isidore of Seville. Barney, Lewis, Beach and Berghof (2006); "Winds: *De Ventis*" (p. 275).

[18] Clancy and Markus (1993): *Altus Prosator* "High Creator", Stanzas R and S; pp. 50-55. A reading of Aldhelm's storm illustrates his debt to the school on Iona, to the years he spent there under the tutelage of Adomnan. Lapidge (2007, pp. 22-30). William of Malmesbury provides an account of Aldhelm calming a storm at Dover. See Winterbottom (2007, pp. 564-567).

[19] And which draws attention to the Great Storm of October 1987. "It is estimated that about 15 million trees were lost (broken, felled or uprooted) in southern England … about 90,000 trees on the streets of London were lost". "Newspapers … were quick to suggest comparability with the great storm of 1703 since such events are rare in the south and south-east". An eye-witness account of the 1703 storm reads "there blew in an extreme storm with sudden gusts as violent as any time [in the preceding night] … it came in with a great black cloud and some thunder…" words which recall those used by Aldhelm. See Lamb (1991, pp. 59-60, 189-191). The writer remembers the Great Storm of 1987 and fully-grown trees ripped up from their roots.

[20] Marshwood Vale occupies a large area of the Lyme Dorset/Devon hinterland, "the abundance of *hay* names here would seem to point to a comparatively late colonization" (Fägersten, 1933/1978, p. 288).

[21] See *Aldhelmi Opera*, *Enigmatum* LXVI: *Mola*, p. 127, Lapidge & Rosier (1985, p. 84).

everyone else". Archaeology confirms the distribution of horizontal-wheeled mills from the seventh century onwards on sites of royal or ecclesiastical status (Hodges, 2012, p. 59).[22] A mill site presents today along the *mansio* (Devon/Dorset) border just above the *salteforde* of AD 938 (Fox, 1970, pp. 33-47; Sawyer, 1968) (see Figure 1). The overflowing of the Lim would have affected serious damage to a wheeled structure sited along the floor of this steep-sided valley. And the storm taking place in mid-summer the coming harvest would have been badly damaged if not destroyed, with implications of famine.

Aldhelm's words evoke the disastrous Lynmouth flood along the north Devon coast where the Lyn cascades into the sea.[23] An eye-witness account of 15 August 1952 describes how

> the stream a few feet wide had changed into a rushing torrent which had risen by over twenty feet … houses badly damaged, others completely disappeared … tons of boulders, débris and trees built up to a depth of some twenty five feet … round the harbour the Rhenish Tower [lighthouse] had disappeared… (Delderfield, 1963, pp. 66-67)

Towards the end of his *Carmen*, Aldhelm records the collapse of a coastal tower, *turris*—see below.

Coastal Damage: The Wrecking of Saltpans and Collapse of a Cliff Top Tower

Following a dramatic description of the dark, savage night sky Aldhelm presents a powerful evocation of the coastal setting. "[Similarly] the *cerula* "wax crayons" [waves] of the sea crash, rolling together on the shingly beach, *Glomerantur in glarea*[24], rushing in where the winds take violent hold". The waves were "re-drawing" the beach. *Per pelagi itinera Salsa spumabant equora, Cum bulliret brumalibus Undosus vortex fluctibus; Oceanus cum molibus Atque diris dodrantibus Pulsabat promontoria Suffragante victoria: Sic turgescebat trucibus Pontus ventorum flatibus Infligendo flaminibus Scopulosis marginibus.*

> Across the open sea-ways salty waves foamed billowing with swirling eddies of surging, flowing water; the ocean with its huge weight and savage flood tides struck furiously against the headlands laying claim to victory; in such a way the deep sea began to swell, hurled by the gales with wild hissing against the edges of the rocky cliffs. (Barker, 2010d, pp. 283-289)

Aldhelm's words reflect those presented in the *Altus Prosator* in his use here of *dodrans*, which evokes a huge rising high tide (Clancy & Markus, 1993; Smyth, 1996). This length of the Devon/Dorset coastline presents some of the best known landslides in the UK which continue into the present day; cliff retreat here is measured at an average rate of 5-30m a year (Hart, 2009).[25]

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[22] The West Saxon royal mill at Old Windsor dates to the later seventh century; McKerracher (2018, p. 121). Reference to milling draws attention to one of Aldhelm's *enigmata*, "riddles", which takes as its subject a *castor*, "beaver" describing its felling of trees along steep-sided water courses but also to its power to "annul deadly disease and plague". *Aldhelmi Opera*, *Enigmatum* LVI: *Castor*, p. 122; Lapidge & Rosier (1985, p. 81).

[23] The Lyn along the north Devon coast and the Lim along the south Dorset coast both present names relating to flood potential. The Lyn as OE *hlynn*, "torrent", and the Lim, a Celtic river name identical with Welsh *llif*, "flood stream" (Ekwall, 1928/1968, p. 274; Mills, 1998, p. 102). The context presented here by Aldhelm draws attention to both the Latin *limen*, "threshold", "doorway"; and *limes* "boundary", "limit". Place-names may present more than one connotation.

[24] Aldhelm uses the word *glarea*, "gravel" "shingle". Probably writing in the mid sixth century, Gildas' use of the word *glarea* with reference to coastal pebbles draws attention to the suggestion that his *De Excidio Brttanniae* was "probably written in East Devon … given the borders between the *Durotrigian* area and the Anglo-Saxons to one side, *Dumnonia* to the other … might best fulfil all the constituent elements of Gildas' geographical perspective as found in his *De Excidio*" (Dark, 1994, pp. 263-264). This distinctive length of pebbly beach today presents a name in OE *ceosel*, *cisel*, "shingle"; "Chesil Beach" (Fägersten, 1933/1978, p. 189).

[25] Phase 2 of the Lyme Regis Coast Protection Scheme completed in 2007 cost £20 million. A local farmer noted to the writer the distinctive "hissing" sound of storm-force waves crashing against the cliffs can be heard well up valley.

Reference in the AD 774 charter to *sal coqueretur* "salt[water] boiling" "cooking" (Sawyer, 1968, p. 137; O'Donovan, 1988, p. 4) draws attention to Aldhelm's description here of "the salty [sea] waves" foaming along the *itinera*, "seaways" "paths" which we read here as alluding to the banks giving access to saltpans. Remains of Iron Age salt panning has been identified along the Dorset coast at Hamworthy including a Roman bath tub full of burned *briquetage*. Aldhelm describes salt *coqueretur* in his riddle "on salt", *salis*.[26] The stormy waves of a rising high tide will have seriously damaged saltpans.[27] Evaporation rates are low this far north and the fuel needed here will imply local coppice management which we may read into the place-name presented by Colway, the coastal estate occupying the eastern bank of the Lim.[28]

Towards the end of his *Carmen* Aldhelm records the destruction of a *turris*, "tower". "We might have been struck by lightning in the same way as cruelly, *novies binos circita*, "about twice nine [people]" were crushed in the instance made known by the evangelical [words] of the *Trini Tonantis*, "Three-fold Thunderer", [when] *Turris fregisse fragmina Cum immensa maceria*, "the tower [of Siloam] collapsed in ruins in a huge pile of masonry rubble". Latin *maceria*, "rubble" presents in both Cornish *magoer and Welsh *magwyr* drawing attention here to coastal place-names along the south-west peninsula, to "Maker" and "Magor" suggestive of old Roman structures.[29] Aldhelm's reference here to *maceria* suggests the collapse of a tall stone structure of Roman origin, a beacon or lighthouse; a "maker" lost forever to the seas of Lyme Bay. And which poses the question as to whether these other "makers" were also reduced to rubble by extreme coastal weathers. It was on the Rame peninsula at the entrance to Plymouth Sound that King Gerent granted Sherborne a 5-hide estate at *Macuir* (O'Donovan, 1988; Barker, 2013) along the *Cornubian/Dumnonian* border, by inference a trading *portus* and one giving access to a major river.[30]

Aldhelm's Biblical reference here to "about twice nine [people]" we read as a veiled reference to taxation reflecting the nine-fold pattern of assessment to be presented by both Sherborne and Lyme in 1086; for the former that presented by the home estate, the *predium monasterii*, and for the latter with reference to those "thrice nine", 27 *salinarii*, "salt workers".[31] And the major loss of revenues thus implied.

One of Aldhelm's riddles describes a *Farus Editissima*, "Lofty Lighthouse", and its maintenance by a priestly *flammiger* who placed "burning faggots in the high towers" *turribus*.[32] Suggested here is that the Roman church took on responsibility for the coast watch in a time of growing trade in a "re-institution" of the old secular Roman order, and assisted (if not prompted) by this later seventh century storm which will have witnessed both

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[26] *Aldhelmi Opera*, *Enigmatum* XIX: *Salis*, pp. 105-106; Lapidge & Rosier (1985, p. 74). See also Barker (2005b, pp. 43-51); Hathaway (2005, pp. 53-57, Fig. 1).

[27] Salt working was clearly re- instated by the time of the AD 774 charter and *salinarii* "salt workers" were registered here in 1086; Barker (2005b, Fig. 1 and Note 4). It is not known when salt panning finally ceased; the salt marshes of Lyme Bay are long gone. Barker (2005c, pp. 199-204). Storm damage along this length of coastline was the subject of a presentation by Emma Sheehan given at the Dorset Coast Forum Meeting at Poole, November 2019; "The Lyme Bay MPA Case Study: Recovery, Storm Impacts and lessons learnt".

[28] "Colway" is given as OE *caluhaeg*, "bare enclosure" (Mills, 1998, p. 59); the context here may suggest a prefix in OE *col*, "[char] coal".

[29] See Padel (1985, p. 156); *magoer "wall" "probably in the sense of 'ruins,' 'remains'". This name element presents in Magor "an isolated example of a Roman villa in Cornwall located at Illogan near Cranborne", and again at Magor sited not far from Caerwent on an inlet running down to the Severn. And a third, Maker, is sited on the Rame peninsula at the entrance to Plymouth Sound. See also Todd (1987, pp, 221-222).

[30] "A grant which may have been an attempt 'to buy off' the enemy"—the West Saxons (Finberg, 1964, p. 100).

[31] Fourteen *salinarii* were registered for *Lime* [Lyme Regis] and thirteen held by the Glastonbury-held *Lym* [Colway], see Barker (1982, pp. 77-116, Figs. 7.3, 7.6); Barker (2005b, Fig. 1, Note 4). Salt was an essential product and major source of revenue.

[32] *Aldhelmi Opera*, *Enigmatum* XCII: *Farus Editissima*, p. 140; see also Lapidge & Rosier (1985, p. 190); Barker (2004, pp. 150-157).

major shipwreck and loss of life. In the centuries before lifeboat rescue service, the *flammiger* not only maintained the light but in times of disaster offered prayers to the three-fold powers of the trinity; *Trini Tonantis*. The Uplyme Tithe Map of 1839 records a "Trinity Hill" and former beacon site located on the north-western corner of the parish.

Following the Dissolution by Henry VIII the Church could no longer offer such coastal services. In 1514, Trinity House in Deptford on the Thames was incorporated by royal charter; the legacy of Aldhelm's *Trini Tonantes* survives into the present day in the management of lighthouse and lifeboat services.[33]

The Collapse of a Church: Its Roof Ripped off in the Gale-Force Wind

It was at dawn Aldhelm and his company were celebrating the *Matutinam melodiam* when the building in which they were worshipping started to shake and the words which follow declare the fulfillment of their Roman mission. Through the good offices of the *Matris*, "mother", St Mary, dedication of the new Sherborne *cathedra*, they reached the door, *limina ... portum*, and were saved by "dividing in two" … *discrimen duobus, Devitantes cum saltibus Per devexa ac lubrica Clivosi ruris latera*, "escaping with leaps out onto the steep and slippery slopes of the hillside" words presenting concise reference to the literal "shiring" of this estate in the making of the coastal *mansio* at *portus limina* (see Figure 2).

The hillside here is indeed both steep and, in wet weather, very slippery. The church, *basilica*, suffered catastrophic damage in the gale-force wind and we have an eye-witness account of the collapse of this high-status building. Words used here include not only *basilica*, but *aula*, *casa* and *platea*;[34] a slide of *tigilli*, "roof tiles" scattered down the hillside. Blowing about in the gale was roof-lagging, *genestarum aprica*, yellow *frondosarum* "leafy" "sun-loving" *genista*, "broom", "furze". Within living memory bundles of broom were packed into a roof space before thatching; the Uplyme Tithe Map records several broom and furze field names. It is suggested that the building Aldhelm describes is the Holcombe Roman villa occupying a site above the west side of the Lim valley archaeological excavation of which presented the remains of a baptistery.[35] As noted above, in the AD774 charter, the Sherborne episcopal estate at Lyme sited along the *Dumnonian* border is described as a *mansio*. Attracting immediate attention here is that across the Channel, chartered reference to an estate listed as a *mansio*, or *mansa*, is a term "frequently used in close proximity to a [Gallo-] Roman villa" (Bois & Birrell, 1992, p. 37). "In the old Eastern Roman Empire the association between churches and *mansiones* was to serve merchants and traders; *mansiones* located near frontiers became centres of refuge during border conflicts" (Wood, 1994, p. 213; Graham, 2007, p. 117).

Whether (or not) this building be identified with the Holcombe villa we are presented here with a graphic description of the damage which will have been done to other old [Romano-] British buildings, barns, granaries and dwellings across southern England. And in the weeks following the clearing of debris, reconstruction (or not) and increase in criminal activity, looting and pilfering.

Aldhelm continues, *Et nisi natalicia Pauli sancti solemnia Tuerentur trementia Timidorum precordia, Forsan quassato culmine Quateremur et fulmine.*

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[33] Those who provided coastal services by means of private charters was described by Samuel Pepys as "for profit of private men, not for the good of public seamen". Pepys was master of *Trinity* House in Deptford from 1676-1689.
[34] *Basilica* "public building", *ecclesia* "church", *aula* "nave", *casa* "building", *platea* "courtyard" (Brooks, 2010, pp. 290-295).
[35] On the 1839 Tithe Map, the fields here are *Church Ground* and *Church Field*, ruins of the villa remained into the 1850s when the rubble was cleared during agricultural improvements. See Pollard (1973, pp. 60-161); Todd (2005, pp. 307-311).

> And unless the customary [Eucharistic] service for the birth/feast day of Saint Paul had not been supporting the heartfelt prayers of the trembling and the fearful we might perhaps have been injured if the roof gable had been struck by lightning.

Saint Paul's Saints Day is celebrated with that of Saint Peter on 29 June. Occupying a site overlooking the site of the Holcombe villa on the other, eastern side of the Lim valley, is Uplyme church dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul.

Lightning Flashes: An Outbreak of Plague

In Irish poetic, tradition lightning was synonymous with plague; two terrifying forces coming together (Dooley, 2007; Clancy & Markus, 1993; Barker, 2010b). Adomnan of Iona records that Ireland and Britain "were twice ravaged throughout by a terrible *pestilentia*". In the opening lines of his *Noli Pater* is a prayer to the *Pater*; "Father do not allow thunder and lightning lest we be shattered by its fear and its fire", *uridine*. A gloss on *uridine* reads "yellow plague" (Clancy & Markus, 1993, p. 87).[36] In his *Carmen*, Aldhelm refers to *pallentem*, "yellowish" lightning strikes, "yellowish trails hanging down", *pendula.* The pandemic of c. 684-687 will coincide with the date range of Aldhelm's *Carmen*. Maddicott (2007) described ports as "plague transmitters" the salt trade as effecting "adventitious contacts in the spreading of plague" (pp. 171-214; 175-177).[37] The Peter-Paul dedication presented by Uplyme Church is a pairing of saints well-represented by mother churches occupying sites related to trading. In the *Canon of Saints*, Paul is invoked as protector from both lightning and plague.[38]

And which provides an unexpected context for the building by Aldhelm's father King Centwine (Lapidge, 2007), of *plurima basilicis impendens rura novellis*, "many churches" on "new" "newly-granted" "country estates" cited by Aldhelm in the dedication he composed for a church built by Centwine's daughter, *Bugge*.[39] The Roman church, a structured, hierarchical organization, was to bring both secular and spiritual support to a deeply troubled countryside.[40] Rural depopulation and re-settlement will have played a major part in the agricultural "transformation" of the following century.

Aldhelm was thus to survive the Great Storm through the good offices of two saints respected by the Roman Church; St Mary, of the newly-established Sherborne *cathedra*, and St Paul, who ensured his safe return from the newly-established episcopal coastal estate at *portus limina*, the historico-geographical legacy of which remains to the present day.

Maddicott (2007) noted "if our sources can be believed, these were indeed national plagues striking with exceptional virulence". He also observes the coincidence of pandemic disease with the advance of the Roman

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[36] Adomnan observes that St Columba survived the pandemic through the good offices of the *Aeturnus ... Iudex*, "Eternal Judge" (Orr Anderson & Ogilvie Anderson, 1991, pp. 178-181).

[37] An allusion to plague may be found in an *epistola* addressed to Aldhelm composed by Aethhilwald, one of his students. See Aldhelm (1919, p. 495); Lapidge & Rosier (1985, pp. 164-165); Barker (2010e, pp. 19-26).

[38] Peter-Paul dedications are associated with river ports and minster foundations, "and may occur in any period from the seventh century" (Everitt, 1986, pp. 19, 233).

[39] See *Aldhelmi Opera*, *In Ecclesia Mariae a Bugga Constructa*, III, pp. 14-15; Lapidge & Rosier, 1985, pp. 47-49, Barker (2010c, pp. 76-76, 88-89, Fig. 2.7). *Bugge* will thus have been Aldhelm's sister. This is a statement by Aldhelm which suggests that Glastonbury may have been one of these many newly-granted *rura novellis*. "The cumulative evidence is … that Glastonbury had had some reason to attach particular importance to the reign of Centwine and to the years around 680" and to the appointment of Helmgils as first West Saxon abbot (Kelly, 2012, pp. 16-17). "Three charters survive in favour of an Abbot Haemgils which are assignable to the years 680-682 … they appear to be based on originals" (Foot, 1991, p. 91).

[40] "The so-called 'Dark Ages' separates the period of Roman political hegemony from that of its religious hegemony" (McKerracher, 2018, pp. 118-119; Amodio, 2004, p. 16).

church under Theodore was one which Bede had good cause to "play down" (pp. 175-177). But which Aldhelm had good cause to declare further to West Saxon relations with *Domnonia*.

That memory of this survived into the 12th century we may read into the statement presented in the statement made Geoffrey of Monmouth writing in the 1130s (Faletra, 2008) who noted that

> … the Britons were afflicted with a lamentable civil discord and they destroyed the well-being of their country. Then yet another misfortune struck them: a dire and infamous famine afflicted them so badly they were deprived of the support of any food.… A deadly plague followed on the heels of this famine, striking down such a multitude of people in so short a space of time that the living were unable to bury their dead … the wretched survivors gathered together in companies and fled from their homeland seeking lands across the seas.

Faletra (2008) noted that the *Annales Cambriae* place this plague in the year 682.

A Long-Term Legacy of the Storm: The Uplyme/Lyme Regis, Devon/Dorset, Former *Mansio* Boundary in an Eco-Critical Context

The setting of Aldhelm's Great Storm prompts an eco-critical reading of the distinctive double/boundary bank bordering the former episcopal *mansio*, the parish/county boundary of today; the legacy presented here in the "bringing together" of the later seventh-century episcopal, parochial reforms instituted by Theodore with first reference to the shires in the Laws of King Ine. The *mansio* boundary presents the remains of a now unmanaged ditch and double bank once making possible a formal perambulation, a length of which is today followed by a narrow metalled road, Shire Lane, the AD 938/1516 boundary recital of the neighbouring estate of Uplyme (Fox, 1970; Sawyer, 1968)[41] records along the *mansio* boundary a *langshereaysshe*, "landshire ash"; OE *land-scearu*, a "division of land" "boundary" (see Figure 1). And which may be indentified today with a huge veteran ash stool presenting centuries of pollarding and management. There is, as yet, no means of assessing its age.[42] Sacred to the god Woden, its border location here presents a pagan significance.[43] Running up from the *salteforde* over the River Lim, the now degraded, overgrown double/boundary bank presents the remains of linear hazel coppicing. An essential building material, the management of lengths of coppiced hazels by the *Nervii* and the defensive element thus presented was noted by Caesar, clearly not one familiar to the Mediterranean world (Caesar, 1917).[44]

The AD 938 chartered recording (Fox, 1970) of a *weygate*, *waegn gate* "wagon/cart gate" at the *werboldiston* "ware-building *tun*", today's "Ware House" sited on the *mansio* border across the old road up from the harbour, draws attention to other 'gate' names presenting along the shire/county boundary. And which we may relate to the (re-)institution of the old Roman *portoria* on formally agreed boundaries as presented in seventh-century Gaul. Not to omit the fiscal significance presented by the *salteforde* where the road up valley from the *mansio* harbour enters the Glastonbury-held, Devonshire estate; an essential substance, and as noted

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[41] As Della Hooke notes "charters [are] a veritable treasure trove of information—the first time in English history we can get a glimpse of the real countryside through written documents, rather than relying on hit-and-miss archaeology … we are also privileged to be seeing this through the eyes of those alive at the time". And which presents major potential for eco-critical reading (Hooke, 2012, pp. 146-153).

[42] As confirmed by Prof. Oliver Rackham who inspected this ash tree in 2010. See also Barker (2010a, Plates 1a, 1b, 1c, pp. 53-54).

[43] Yggdrasil was the enchanted Ash [tree] sacred to Woden (Odin) God of War, and claimed as ancestor of the West Saxon kings. Graves (1961, pp. 57, 168-169); Rackham (2014, pp. 78-87). Woden's name is presented in Wansdyke, "Woden's Dyke" a series of early medieval defensive linear earthworks extending across Hampshire, Wiltshire and Somerset. See also Smith (1958, p. 272).

[44] The *Nervii* occupied an area of country now part of Belgium.

above, a major source of revenue. Aldhelm himself likened the duty of prayer to payment of the *vectigalia* "road tax" on the path through life.[45]

A formally created boundary will have assisted in both the management of a wider landscape and its administration, provided essential materials for building and fencing whilst both controlling movement and enhancing natural habitats. It was this hitherto unacknowledged, demonstrably historic length of the Dorset county boundary which first prompted both a systematic field survey of its whole length and the establishment of an agreed boundary recording methodology bringing together history, topography, archaeology and botany, the first-exercise of its kind and one with a wide eco-critical application.[46]

From Bardic to Written: The Loss of the Great Storm

Having survived the *Furies* of the Britons, Aldhelm's stress on the written word resulted in the loss of generations' worth of British law and lore neither promoted nor patronised by the incoming Roman Christian order. And thus it was "the bard known in the Celtic medieval west was to disappear without trace from Anglo-Saxon England" (Frank, 2003, p. 38). The *Carmen Rhythmicum* is a rare survival; a bardic work committed to writing, *scriptura*.[47] And without which the Great Storm of the later seventh century would have been lost to history for ever. As indeed would be an environmental, eco-critical reading of its legacy. And whilst Aldhelm fully acknowledges the power of the Divine he reflects on that presented by *Natura*, "Nature". *Crede mihi, res nulla manet sine me moderante* … "Believe me, nothing exists without my controlling force".[48]

It was in 710, the year of Aldhelm's death, King Ine of Wessex joined forces with King Nunna of Sussex "and fought against Gerent, king of the Welsh" (Swanton, 2000, p. 42). Relations with the western British Christian world were to further deteriorate and the *Chronicles* relate how Cynewulf (757-785) "was very frequently in action against the Welsh" (Finberg, 1964, p. 104). And it is with the Cynewulf charter the Sherborne *mansio* was to be legally registered in writing. The charter, of course, makes no reference to the Great Storm nor to the environmental disaster which witnessed its making.

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[45] *Aldhelmi Opera, De virginitate, Prosa*, 250: 6. Barker (2013, pp. 120-121); Barker (2014b, pp. 325-333). Early Glastonbury-held estates presented along this length suggest, as noted above (fn 14) that Helmgils was also to "stand surety" along the eastern border of the newly-instituted Sherborne Bishopric. The Glastonbury-held Damerham estate was assessed, not in hides, but in *mansiones*.

[46] The Up/Lyme Devon/Dorset length formed the "type site" in the establishing of an agreed boundary recording methodology, Barker (2007, pp. 137-139); Barker (2008, pp. 197-209, Fig. 4, Plates 1, 2); Newbould (2008, pp. 209-212). Campbell (2008, pp. 195-197). Newbould (2012, pp. 154-156). Walls (2012, pp. 157-160). "Latter day Meresmen: establishing a contemporary methodology for recording and classifying boundaries; Lyme as a type-site, a synopsis", *Dorset Procs, 136* (2015); "Boundary of Conservation Importance, Criteria and Methodology' *ibid*; "Recording the county boundary: Guidance on Methodology", *ibid*. Metre-by-metre Hercological Record Forms (HRFs) as completed are filed in the Dorset History Centre. Botanical reports are filed with DERC, the Dorset Environmental Records Centre.

[47] Only one manuscript copy of the *Carmen Rhythmicum* survives. This manuscript was "apparently copied from materials assembled by Lul, archbishop of Mainz (754-786) and a former *alumnus* of Malmesbury" where Aldhelm spent his earlier years. (Lapidge & Herren, 1979, p. 171).

[48] See *Aldhelmi Opera*, *Enigmatum* IV *Natura*, p. 100; Lapidge & Rosier (1985, p. 71).

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