

The final version of this paper appeared as:

Thomas N. Hall, Review of Aaron J Kleist, *The Chronology and Canon of Ælfric of Eynsham*, *Anglo-Saxon Studies* 37 (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2019), in *Speculum* 97.1 (January 2022), 206–08.

This publication was produced in the context of *ECHOE – Electronic Corpus of Anonymous Homilies in Old English*. This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant No. 772744).

Aaron J Kleist, *The Chronology and Canon of Ælfric of Eynsham*. (Anglo-Saxon Studies 37.)
Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2019. Pp. xxii, 347; many tables and 1 black-and-white figure.
\$130. ISBN: 978-1-84384-533-1.

It is a well-worn cliché, but true nonetheless, that Ælfric of Eynsham was the most learned, prolific, and influential writer in English before Chaucer, yet the manuscript record of his writings is so vast and complicated and the evidence for his authorship of some texts so indeterminate that a fundamental challenge of Ælfric scholarship has long been to sort out exactly what he wrote and when. This seemingly straightforward question is bedeviled by many factors, among them the fact that Ælfric constantly revised and reissued many of his works over the course of his lifetime, so that the notion of a “date of composition” becomes very slippery. A major step towards defining the canon and chronology of Ælfric’s writings was accomplished by Peter Clemoes in 1959, but subsequent scholarship has added much to our understanding of these issues, and a fresh assessment is due. Kleist’s book brings us as close as we can possibly get to an authoritative and updated account of them.

The book is in three parts. Following a table of sigla of Ælfrician manuscripts and a brief introduction, the first chapter, “Ælfric’s Chronology,” summarizes scholarship on Ælfric’s career and modifies Clemoes’s 1959 chronology by orienting Ælfric’s oeuvre around five key historical milestones, from his initial completion of the First Series of *Catholic Homilies* in 989 to the elevation of Æthelwold II as bishop of Winchester in 1006. Perhaps the most important adjustment to the Clemoes scheme is Kleist’s reinterpretation of the date of

Ælfric's appointment as abbot of Eynsham, traditionally thought to have occurred in 1005, to "later in the period 1002 × 16 November 1005" (20), which has implications for dozens of texts composed during this period. With this revised framework in place, he then undertakes a detailed examination of the development of the *Catholic Homilies*, distinguishing about thirty overlapping phases of copying, revision, and dissemination of the First Series as well as multiple archetypes and recensions of the Second Series, collectively embracing the period from 990 to the end of Ælfric's life. At stake in this chronology are nearly 750 copies and versions of individual *Catholic Homilies* produced over that twenty-year period. The information in this chapter is so complex that Kleist provides a digest of it in Appendix 4, "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works: Compendium," which presents a timetable charting the evolution of Ælfric's literary career.

Chapter 2, "The Ælfrician Canon," builds upon Kleist's essay of twenty years ago on "Ælfric's Corpus: A Conspectus," *Florilegium* 18 (2001): 113–64, now defining a canon of some eighty-six works or collections of works widely if not universally accepted as authentic writings by Ælfric (each of the large homily collections counts as a single "work" here) plus thirty-four additional texts whose authorship is less certain, such as the unedited *De vaniloquio negligentium* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 178. To these Kleist adds another forty-two "new" works not listed by Clemoes in his 1959 survey, including twenty-one epitomes and abridgments, and he assigns names to twelve previously untitled works. Not included is the considerable number of later texts consisting entirely or partly of material authored by Ælfric but compiled by someone else, a category of material that calls out for its own separate inventory. This chapter makes up the largest part of the book and constitutes an exhaustive, encyclopedic, richly detailed guide to writings certainly, probably, or possibly by Ælfric, in Old English and Latin, with summaries of contents and references to manuscripts and editions, all keyed where possible to the dates assigned to each text in Chapter 1 and Appendix 4.

Chapter 3, “Ælfrician Manuscripts,” provides summary descriptions of about 125 manuscripts containing works surveyed in Chapter 2. Most useful here are the concise accounts of manuscript histories, the references to other published descriptions, and the inventories of Ælfrician contents. A bonus is the survey at the end of the chapter of early modern transcriptions of works of Ælfric by antiquarians such as John Joscelyn and Francis Junius.

This book is not an easy read. It assumes an already sophisticated command of Ælfric’s extensive writings and of the manuscripts that preserve them. The table and notes in Appendix 4 are hard on the eyes (the notes are more than sixty lines to a page). Many of the tables throughout the book cannot be read in isolation but have to be cross-referenced to the abbreviations and table of manuscript sigla up front, to discussions in preceding and following chapters, and sometimes to the bibliography at the back, which requires a lot of flipping back and forth. The lists of Ælfrician contents for all the manuscripts in Chapter 3 give no folio or page numbers, so even though they provide a reliable catalogue of a manuscript’s Ælfrician contents, they don’t tell you where to find those contents in the manuscript. (To be fair, those folio and page numbers are all indicated under the entries for individual works in Chapter 2, but again, that means constant flipping back and forth between the two chapters to get that information.) Moreover, even though Kleist emphasizes that a benefit of these lists of contents is that they offer a sense of each text’s manuscript context at a glance, they don’t include *non-Ælfrician* contents where such exist, so in some cases the manuscript context is not fully represented.

There is no question, however, that this book is a monumental achievement, the product of many years of patient, meticulous work, resulting in what for many years to come will be an indispensable reference tool. Kleist is alert to his own limitations, and he warns the reader where doubts and challenges remain. His summary and analysis of scholarship is clear and

thorough. Perhaps most importantly, his identification of many new potential additions to the Ælfric canon should prompt valuable new work.

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