Irvine, Susan, ed. 2023. *Alfredian Prologues and Epilogues.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. xi + 296. ISBN 9780199692101.

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As Susan Irvine herself writes in her 2015 article, prologues and epilogues linked to the works that have traditionally been associated with the reign of King Alfred "are remarkable not only as compositions in their own right but also for the insights they offer into vernacular literary production and reception in Anglo-Saxon England" (2015, 143). These texts are also "highly varied, enigmatic, and not always reliable in the claims they make" (1), as Irvine describes at the beginning of this volume, and are intriguing in many ways. This volume collectively presents the original texts and translations of all "Alfredian" prologues, epilogues and other framing texts for the first time with a commentary, glossary, a general introduction and separate introductions to individual texts. It is a crucial book in order to make a survey of these texts, to explore each of them in detail, and to have an overview of the contexts underlying the production and reception of the Alfredian corpus.

The texts edited and translated in this volume are as follows: the prose and verse prefaces, Gregorian preface, and incipits and explicits of the Old English *Dialogues*; the prose and verse prefaces, Gregorian preface and epilogue, and verse epilogue of the Old English *Pastoral Care*; the prose and verse prefaces, prose and verse *Vitae*, and epilogues of the Old English *Boethius* (prose and prosimetrical versions); the preface, incipits and explicits of the Old English *Soliloquies*; the preface of the *Laws* of Alfred; and the preface and epilogue of the Old English *Bede*. Although the relationship of these frame texts to the main works which they accompany varies from text to text, they are designed for the purpose of framing the main work and are integral to it. On the other hand, texts whose connection with the main work is uncertain or those existing independently elsewhere are excluded from the volume. Thus, prefatory materials in some manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, namely, the "Genealogical Preface" in the A-manuscript, the *Menologium* and *Maxims II* in C, and a "preface" of D, E, and F, which consists of an Old English summary of Book 1, chapter 1 of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, are not included in this volume. Short introductions preceding each psalm in the *Prose Psalms* are not included either, since they are distinct from the prologue tradition in that they just give an explanation of the psalm they introduce.

The general introduction discusses the influence of earlier traditions of frame texts upon Alfredian and other Old English equivalents (3–8), Alfred's reign and the vernacular translation programme (8–12), Alfredian prologues and epilogues and the authorship debate (12–14), the corpus of Alfredian prologues and epilogues (14–17), their language (17–19), and the history of their early medieval reception (20–22).

In the section on the influence of earlier traditions, it is first pointed out that in providing prologues and epilogues, Old English authors are motivated chiefly by Latin works on which theirs are based and also by other Latin works containing such framing

texts. The potential influence from the ninth-century Bible translations in Old Saxon and Old High German is also discussed. The influence of earlier traditions is perceptible in the conventions of structure, form, and rhetoric, and the following cases are mentioned as examples: frame texts in prose and verse in combination (as in the prose and verse prefaces to the *Pastoral Care* and the *Boethius*); prefaces in the form of a letter (as in the prose and Gregorian prefaces to the *Pastoral Care*, and the preface to the *Bede*); epilogues in the form of petitions or prayers (as in the Gregorian and verse epilogues to the *Pastoral Care*, the two prose petitions at the end of the *Bede*, and a metrical prayer at the end of the all-prose version of the *Boethius*); and those with the modest formula (as in the verse preface to the *Dialogues* and the prose preface to the *Pastoral Care*), the commission motif (as in the verse and prose prefaces to the *Dialogues*), a "word-for-word, sense-for-sense" formula (as in the Gregorian preface to the *Dialogues*, the prose prefaces to the *Pastoral Care* and the *Boethius*), or the motif of book as a speaker (as in the verse prefaces to the *Dialogues*, the *Pastoral Care*, and possibly the verse preface to the *Boethius*). The motif of book as a speaker, which Irvine discusses in more detail in her H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lecture (2017), is compared with works in which an inanimate object speaks such as the Exeter Book Riddles, the *Dream of the Rood*, and the Alfred Jewel. The rationale for the Alfredian frame texts' significant debt to earlier, primarily Latin traditions is explained as follows: "[i]n relying so firmly on an extensive body of conventions derived from the Latin tradition, the Alfredian prologues and epilogues strive to invest the English works they frame with the authority and prestige of the Latin originals" (7).

The section on Alfred's reign and the vernacular translation programme provides basic backgrounds of the programme and introduces the works that have traditionally been associated with the king's reign. It is pointed out that the king's firm commitment to the translation programme, as mentioned, for instance, in the prose and verse prefaces to the *Pastoral Care*, helped vernacular texts to gain certain authority when Latin was carrying high prestige. In the prose preface to the *Pastoral Care*, the translation programme is also justified in terms of historical precedents, where vernacular translations are located in the long history of translations, from Hebrew to Greek, from Greek to Latin, and from Latin to vernacular languages; a somewhat similar approach is taken to gain similar effect in the preface to the *Laws* of Alfred, where "the process of law-giving in early medieval England [is put] into a broad historical and scriptural context that extends back as far as the Mosaic law itself" (143; my square brackets). It is noted that earlier translations (such as the *Dialogues* and the *Bede*) are "more literal and Latinate" (11) in their approach, whereas later works (such as the *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*) "show a more interpretive and independent approach" (12), which points to "an increase in confidence in the use of the vernacular as a means of disseminating learning" (12). This may well reflect that the endeavours to lend some authority to writings in the vernacular by associating them with King Alfred, which started in an early date as evinced in the prose preface to the *Dialogues*, actually gained effect in the course of time.

The section on the authorship debate gives an overview of the main points of the debate, and highlights issues with the traditional attribution of several Alfredian works to the king himself. Frame texts of several Alfredian works, such as those of the Old English *Boethius*, *Soliloquies*, *Pastoral Care*, and the *Laws* of Alfred, mention the king's involvement in the composition of these works, and they have traditionally been

regarded as evidence of king's (co-)authorship of those works. Yet exemplifying cases where these claims turn out to be unreliable, while mentioning cases of erroneous attributions, for example, by Æthelweard, Ælfric, and William of Malmesbury, Irvine contends that evidence of the king's authorship of any of these works remains controversial. Thus, this volume, "while acknowledging the significance of the royal imprimatur in any reading of the framing material, does not assume any of these pieces (or the works which they furnish) was composed by Alfred himself" (14).

The section on early medieval reception history exemplifies several cases which evince the interest of later readers in the Alfredian prologues and epilogues, and shows some aspects of their influence upon later literary works. The prose preface to the *Pastoral Care* was annotated by Archbishop Wulfstan in the eleventh century, while it may have exerted an influence upon the prologue to a version of the Old English Benedictine Rule by Æthelwold, and upon the preface to Ælfric's *Grammar*. William of Malmesbury includes its summary in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* in the first half of the twelfth century, while it was annotated by the Worcester Tremulous Hand in the thirteenth century. In the early modern period, it was also annotated by several readers, among whom was John Joscelyn, secretary to Archbishop Matthew Parker. It is also pointed out that the motif of book as a speaker in some Alfredian frame texts may have acted as a model for the prefatory poems *Aldhelm* and *Thureth*, while there is a passage in the late tenth-century Latin *Chronicon* by Æthelweard, in which the author may well have had in mind the introductory *Vitae* of the *Boethius*. Potential influences of the preface to the *Laws* of Alfred upon Æthelwold and Ælfric are also mentioned.

The general introduction is followed by the edition of the original texts of all Alfredian prologues and epilogues with a facing-page modern English translation, and separate introductions to these texts. Each set of frame texts and their translations is preceded by a detailed introduction discussing the main work which they accompany, its contexts, manuscripts, and previous editions, and the frame texts themselves. The relationship between the frame and main texts is different from text to text: some frame texts are original compositions more or less contemporary with the main work and circulated with it from an early date, some are based on frame texts of the original, some are added by a scribe or reader at some point during textual transmission, and others are recorded only in one manuscript. Thus, the information on the relationship between the frame and main texts is essential in examining the nature of the frame texts as well as their places in terms of the composition and reception of the Alfredian works. The introductions also summarise the fundamental information about the Alfredian frame texts themselves such as their dates, linguistic and stylistic features, and sources and analogues. This part of the volume collectively presents these pieces of detailed information regarding each frame text and its relation to the main work that are otherwise not easy to assemble; it is extremely useful in exploring those frame texts together with the main works which they are designed to frame.

The texts and translations are followed by textual notes (185–96), commentary (197–219), and glossary and list of proper names (221–79). Textual notes record different readings in different manuscripts and other details. Commentary includes basic information such as "[t]he Humber is a large tidal estuary in the north-east of England" (201), because the volume is intended for "a broad audience" (2), but it also furnishes detailed literary, cultural, grammatical and lexical explanations on the original texts. The glossary is a complete one, listing not only all the words and their meanings in the

contexts in which they are used, but also all the other details such as where they occur in what form. Bibliography (281–96) lists works cited in the volume. No index is provided.

This volume not only provides readers with fundamental information about the Alfredian prologues and epilogues, but also addresses various issues raised by them and shed new light upon these texts, the production and reception of Alfredian works, and the history of Old English frame texts in general. As the first complete edition of these texts, this volume is very useful in exploring them, and provides a firm basis for future studies.

Two typographical errors I have noticed: "line 60" (7, fn. 24) should be "line 67"; and "about 870" (21, l. 2) should be "about 970."

References

Irvine, Susan. 2015. "The Alfredian Preface and Epilogues." In *A Companion to Alfred the Great,* edited by Nicole G. Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach, 143–70. Leiden: Brill.

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