

CNUT: *BEASE* pp 108–09; *CALMA* 2.557; *DHGE* 11.812–14; *DMA* 3.471–72; *LMA* 5.1238–39; *PASE* “Cnut 3”; *RGA* 17.66–67.

Cnut was king of England from 1016 to 1035. The only surviving texts attributed to him are two letters sent to England during his travels abroad early in his reign. As with royal diplomas and writs, the first-person voice in these letters does not necessarily guarantee authorship by the alleged writer. Although Cnut was most probably responsible for the basic content of the letters, he cannot be regarded with certainty as the one who composed them. The two letters have most often been considered in the context of legislation produced under the Danish king. They occasionally echo the language of earlier or contemporary legal texts, but these parallels may result from a common use of formulaic language rather than constitute cases of direct citation. Both letters are translated by Whitelock, *EHD*, nos. 48 and 49.

### **Letter to the People of England, 1019–20** [CNUT.Ep.1].

ed.: Liebermann 1903–16 1.273–75.

*MSS* York, Minster Library Add. 1, fols 10–161: HG 774.

*Lists – A-S Vers* none.

*Quots/Cits* 1. ? *Ch* 985 (Harm 26; B15.1.58) 2–3.

2. ? *LawIIEg* (B14.16) 198.25–32.

3. ? *LawVIATR* (B14.24) 248.38–39, 250.31–33, 252.17–20, 256.19–20.

4. ? *WHom* 20.3 (B2.4.2.C) 137–38, 161–65.

*Refs* none.

This Old English letter to the English people (*LawCn* 1020; B14.29) was probably written in late 1019 or early 1020 when Cnut was in Denmark to secure his claim there and to contain possible hostilities against the English (Lawson 1993 pp 89–95). Wormald (1999 p 348) has succinctly described the letter as a promise of “good lordship in return for obedience.” Cnut makes a general address to his earls and bishops and specifically orders that Earl Thorkel should administer justice (presumably in his stead). The opening address distinguishes between “twelfhynde 7 twyhynde” men, echoing terminology used in one of Cnut’s writs to Christ Church, Canterbury; the undated writ was entered into a gospel book at Christ Church sometime between 1017 and 1020, perhaps in 1018 (Brooks 1984 pp 288–90). In the letter of 1019–20, Cnut calls upon the English to honor both divine law and royal authority, and he makes an especially pointed charge to his reeves that they should administer “rihte domas” in accord with the judgment of bishops. In Chapter 13, Cnut also significantly calls upon the entire nation to honor Edgar’s law as sworn at an Oxford meeting. The D text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (see **CHRONICLES**) records a similar agreement between the Danes and the English “to Eadgares lage” at an Oxford meeting in 1018, while an undated law-code in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201 (HG 65.5) records a similar accord founded upon Edgar’s law (Kennedy 1983). Whitelock and Kennedy have argued persuasively that this code represents legislation composed by **WULFSTAN II OF YORK** and issued as a result of the Oxford meeting held in 1018 (Whitelock 1948, 1955; Kennedy 1983). Wormald (1999 pp 131–33 and 346–47) endorses Whitelock and Kennedy’s assessment. Lawson (1993 p 88) has suggested that the *Chronicle* drew upon the letter as a source, but this possibility must remain only a reasonable speculation. While the Oxford meeting provides a link between these three texts, its mutual reference does not allow for definite conclusions about sources or transmission.

The letter survives in a single copy entered into a final gathering in the York Gospels (fols 158–61) sometime in 1020. These four leaves also contain three Wulfstan homilies (*HomU* 48, *HomU* 49, *HomU* 50) with corrections made in Wulfstan’s own hand. Wulfstan most likely also made revisions and additions to the letter, particularly in its later passages. The letter’s first thirteen chapters are most likely similar to the original text, while the final chapters (14–20) are probably additions made by Wulfstan (Kennedy 1983 p 63; Keynes 1986 p 96). Whitelock has suggested that the homilies and letter were all

copied when Wulfstan was drafting Cnut's laws since the letter contains various echoes from earlier codes that inform Cnut's laws (Whitelock 1981 p 435). As it survives in the York Gospels, then, the letter appears to be a hybrid text in close relation to the original document.

**Letter of 1027** [CNUT.Ep.2].

ed.: Liebermann 1903–16 1.276–77.

*MSS – A-S Vers* none.

*Quots/Cits* 1. ? *LawIIEg* (B14.16) 196.18–26.

2. ? *LawVAtr* (B14.23) 240.16–19.

3. ? *LawVIAtr* (B14.24) 252.1–7.

4. ? *LawVIIAtr* (B14.26) 265.11–24.

5. ? *LawICn* (B14.30.1) 290.32–33, 292.1–2.

*Refs* none.

Issued during Cnut's return from a visit to Rome, this letter survives only in a Latin version (presumably a translation of an Old English original) preserved in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.183 (Mynors, Thomson, and Winterbottom 1998–99 1.324–30) and in the *Chronicle* of John of Worcester (Darlington and McGurk 1995 2.512–18). The translation is post-Conquest as indicated by its use of the term *vicecomitibus*, presumably for Old English *scirgerefum* or *gerefum* (Liebermann 1903–16 3.191). William and John both date the letter to 1031, but Dorothy Whitelock (1981 p 507) has established that Cnut's journey to Rome actually took place in 1027. In the letter Cnut proclaims the benefits he has secured for his people during his visit and promises good lordship. His diplomacy has ensured that his subjects can now travel to and from Rome unencumbered by unjust tolls, and it has also lessened the fees incumbent upon English archbishops in receiving their *pallia* in Rome. Cnut promises to rule justly and, as in the letter of 1019–20, he calls upon his councilors, sheriffs, and reeves to eschew injustice in their administrative duties. The letter also explains that Cnut will travel to Denmark in order to secure peace there before returning to England. Chapter 16 of the letter contains material dealing with church dues (*cyricsceat*) which appears in several earlier law-codes designating the calendar date for due payment of plough-almes, livestock tithes, and crop tithes (Whitelock 1981 p 512). Cnut closes the letter with the order that all such dues shall be paid prior to his return. John and William both indicate that Lyfing, abbot of Tavistock, delivered the letter, and it has been suggested that Lyfing may have been its author (Lawson 1993 p 64; Wormald 1999 p 348). John prefaces the letter with a summary of its contents to which he adds some supplemental details. William represents the letter as evidence of Cnut's amended life and royal magnanimity and follows it with praise for Cnut's observance of laws promulgated by earlier English kings.

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