

ASSER (died 909), bishop and scholar

Name: Asser
Date of death: 909
Gender: Male
Occupation: bishop and scholar
Area of activity: Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Authors: John Edward Lloyd, David Myrddin Lloyd

He is known almost entirely from what he tells us of himself in his life of king Alfred. He belonged to the clerical community of S. Davids, where he was brought up and educated, being a relative of bishop Nobis, who died in 873. In due course, he succeeded to the see and therewith acquired a reputation for scholarship, which spread beyond the borders of Wales. Thus it came about that in or around 884 Alfred, in his zeal for his own education and that of his people, enlisted him in the royal service. Asser was not easily detached from his episcopal responsibilities, but, after a delay partly due to a long illness at Caerwent on his way home, he agreed to divide his year between the court and S. Davids. Welsh politics provided one reason for his acquiescence. The see was much exposed to the attacks of the local prince, king Hyfaidd of Dyfed (died 892), and it was hoped that the bishop's friendship with Hyfaidd's overlord, the powerful ruler of Wessex, would put an end to this trouble. Alfred found his new tutor indispensable; he heaped favours upon him, which culminated in the episcopal care of Devon and Cornwall, then part of the great diocese of Sherborne. All this is recounted in the life; it can only be added that later he became bishop of Sherborne and died in 909.

The life is a strange mixture of chronicle and personal memoranda, written in the stilted, rhetorical Latin of the period. It was clearly never finished; the last date mentioned is 893, but the annals are not continued beyond 887. Study of it has been made difficult by the burning of the one old MS. in 1731, and the interpolations of editors, among them the notorious passage about academic disputes at Oxford, inserted by Camden to prove the antiquity of that university. All points at issue are discussed and the text established in the definitive edition by W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904).

Authors

Sir John Edward Lloyd, (1861 - 1947)

David Myrddin Lloyd, (1909 - 1981)

Sources

J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*(London 1911), 226-8

F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943, 1947), 269, 433

J. W. Adamson, *The Illiterate Anglo-Saxon* (Cambridge 1946)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Asser](#)

Additional Links

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