



King Alfred the Great

By Alfred P. Smyth

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King Alfred the Great By Alfred P. Smyth

Soldier, statesman, and scholar, Alfred the Great was a fascinating and highly successful king, pushing back the Vikings to command what is now thought of as the heart of England as ruler of Wessex from 871-899. In this, the first major biography of King Alfred since 1902, his life, career and enduring legacy are given a radical new interpretation, putting into question most of our assumptions about this singular monarch.

Alfred P. Smyth's portrait of King Alfred rejects the image of a neurotic and invalid king who supposedly remained a pious illiterate until he was almost 40. Instead, we are shown a man of remarkable energy and intelligence who took necessary steps to defend his people from the Norsemen. We see, too, a king who had been a scholar all his life and who used his great knowledge to bolster the powers of his own kingship. Smyth also provides a detailed examination of the much-disputed medieval biography of King Alfred, attributed to the King's tutor, Asser. Alfred Smyth argues that Asser's *Life* may, in fact, have been a late medieval forgery--a revelation with profound implications for our understanding of the whole of Anglo-Saxon history.

Smyth's *King Alfred* also contains major studies on the writings of this gifted king, on the controversial charters of his reign, and on the origins of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. (Smyth shows this work to have been much more closely connected with the court of King Alfred than previously realized and suggests a new date for the completion of the earliest Alfredian section of the *Chronicle*.) A monumental and intriguing work of historical scholarship, *King Alfred the Great* will dramatically change the way we understand this early period of western civilization.

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