

A personal selection of Wessex, British Isles and world history.

“It is a reckless analyst who risks reopening sixteenth-century disputes between Roman Catholics and the Protestant Reformers.”
Allan Carlson. “Children of the Reformation”

This month J&T 173 looks at how ecclesiastical reading habits changed after the Protestant Reformation. We get a glimpse into a neo-Assyrian feast and get introduced to an Angolan queen and icon of anti-colonial freedom.

THE BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS¹

In Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale University 2005), he starts with the contention ‘that late medieval Catholicism exerted an enormously strong, diverse and vigorous hold over the imaginations and loyalty of the people up to the very moment of the Reformation’. ‘The liturgy’s ritual structures provided a means of ordering and perhaps also of negotiating social relations.’ This was not simply a matter of the priest dictating and the laymen following. The village and townspeople were completely integrated into the church, often taking command, especially where traditional customs and ceremonies were concerned. Pilgrimage was also up to the individual. (Right, pilgrims arriving at Canterbury).



And yet by the end of Elizabeth’s reign: ‘The imaginative world of the *Golden Legend* and the *Festial* was gradually obliterated from wall and window and bracket, from primer and block-print and sermon, and was replaced by that of the Old Testament. Cranmer’s sombrely magnificent prose, read week by week,

entered and possessed their minds, and became the fabric of their prayer, the utterance of their most solemn and their most vulnerable moments. And more astringent and strident words entered their minds and hearts too, the polemic of the *Homilies*, of Jewel’s *Apology*, of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, and of a thousand “no-popery” sermons, a relentless torrent carrying away the landmarks of a thousand years.’

The effect of this change on the British people cannot be overestimated. Part of the reason why the change was effected so quickly was, I believe, the relief when the Tudor dynasty with its constant changing of ‘the rules’ by a tyrant, or bigot, was finally over. We now live in a largely secular society and from my point of view the one really beneficial result of this change, especially where the non-conformists are concerned, is that it taught us to think for ourselves.

Notes:

The Golden Legend is a collection of 153 hagiographies (stories of the saints, right) by Jacobus de Voragine that was widely read in Europe during the Late Middle Ages. More than a thousand manuscripts of the text have survived. It was probably compiled around 1259 to 1266, although the text was added to over the centuries.



John Mirk was an Augustinian Canon Regular, active in the late 14th and early 15th centuries in Shropshire. He is noted as the author of widely copied, and later printed, books intended to aid parish priests and other clergy in their work. The most famous of these, his Book of Festivals or *Festial* was probably the most frequently printed English book before the Reformation.



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Whereas a Catholic *homily* was an exposition that formed an important part of the mass, the Protestants used the word for a short sermon, as for a wedding or funeral.

Bishop Jewel's (of Salisbury Cathedral) 1562 *Apology* of the Church of England, a document more important in its political-historical significance than its theological significance, represents an attempt to provide a statement of faith for the Church of England under Elizabeth I and answer challenges and accusations of the Romanists against the Protestants.

The Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perilous Days, Touching Matters of the Church, popularly known as Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, is a work of Protestant history and martyrology by Protestant English historian John Foxe, first published in 1563 by John Day. It includes a polemical account of the sufferings of Protestants under the Catholic Church, with particular emphasis on England and Scotland. The book was highly influential in those countries and helped shape lasting popular notions of Catholicism

there. The book went through four editions in Foxe's lifetime and a number of later editions and abridgements, including some that specifically reduced the text to a Book of Martyrs. 1570 illustration from the book (left).

THE DARK SIDE OF NOAH²



According to Genesis, Chapter 9, verses 20-23, after the Ark episode, Noah planted a vineyard, made wine and "he became drunk and uncovered himself inside his tent." His son, Ham saw his father in a naked state and mocked him. Whereas his brothers, Shem and Japheth covered their father. As a result Noah cursed Canaan the son of Ham and made him a slave to the 'blessed' brothers.

Going back to the Roman Jewish historian Josephus (37-100AD), it was considered that Shem's descendants (Semites) populated the Middle East and Asia, Ham those of Africa, and Japheth those of Europe. Alcuin of York (735-804AD), a scholar at the court of Charlemagne, simplified this tradition into Europe, Asia and Africa which was illustrated for the first time in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* of 1472 (below right). This influenced thinking well into the 19th century.

Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's *On the History of Mankind* (1795) secularises the position into Caucasian (Japhethic), Mongolian (Shemitic) and Ethiopian (Hamitic). You will notice that Canaan's curse had been shifted to Ham. We now have the concept of racial superiority but worse still - that slavery of the African had been endorsed by the Bible.

In order to explain serfdom, the 11th century Honorius of Autun in his *Imago Mundi*, classified Freeman as coming from Shem, soldiers from Japheth and slaves from Ham. Augustin Calmet's 1728 *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* explained that the effect of the 'curse of Ham' was to turn his descendants' skin black. For Christians, especially in the US, all was now explained and justified.

By the end of the 19th century, scepticism of the historicity of Genesis lead to increasing doubts about the story of Noah, the flood and a world populated by his three sons. However, the white supremacy and racism remained and now looked to pseudo-science for its justification.



I am indebted to Philip C Almond, Emeritus Professor in Religious Thought at the university of Queensland. If you want to delve deeper, his *Noah and the Flood in Western Thought* (Cambridge University Press 2025) is the place to go.



NZINGA ANA DE SOUSA MBANDE³



Nzinga (1583 - 1663) was Queen of Ndongo and Matamba in what is now northern Angola. Her grandfather and father were kings of Ndongo and Nzinga received military (she fought with a battle axe) and political training, acting as ambassador to the Portuguese Empire. Portuguese missionaries taught her to read and write. When her brother succeeded to the throne he killed off all his rivals including Nzinga's son. Nzinga and her sisters were forcibly sterilised. Nzinga fled to Matamba but the king asked her to lead a deputation to negotiate with the Portuguese. She agreed on condition she could be baptised as this would give her more leverage. The Portuguese sat on chairs whilst providing a mat for her. However, one of her attendants knelt down so she could sit on him and be level with the governor.

After the mysterious death of her brother she assumed power at a time of Portuguese expansion and an escalating slave trade (an important part of their economy). Like her brother she removed (killed) all the male claimants including her nephew who was under the protection of an Imbangala war chief named Kasa. Nzinga married Kasa and then murdered her 7 year old nephew immediately after the wedding. A final revenge for her own lost son.

The Portuguese fomented trouble with her chiefs, at one point driving her into depression. She was outfought in 1626 and at one point captured along with her advisors and her sisters and exiled. In exile she married another Imbangala warlord called Kasanje which entailed some fairly awful (and cannibalistic) initiation rites. With this new powerbase she began to rebuild her army on more effective Imbangala lines and successfully attacked the Portuguese in a guerrilla war. She conquered Matamba and used it as a base to try and regain Ndongo, all the while using the slave trade to finance her wars.

The Portuguese were defeated in 1644 but they returned the favour in 1646, capturing her sister Funji whom they drowned for spying. Nzinga continued to fight the Portuguese until a peace treaty was signed in 1656. She was merciful to captured missionaries and one, Father Caliso Zelotes do Reis Mago became a long term resident and her personal secretary.



She was a complex figure and problematic for some, but she is remembered for her intelligence, political and diplomatic wisdom and her military tactics. She became a symbol of the struggle between the Portuguese and native Angolans and is now seen as the Mother of Angola. I wonder how many more amazing women in African history there are still to be discovered by the West?

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION⁴

Ashurbanipal II of Nimrud, near Mosul ruled from 883 to 859 BCE. On a whim in 879 he thought he would throw a 10-day celebration for 69,574 guests. The order for the kitchen supplies is recorded as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1,000 barley fed oxen | 500 geese |
| 1,000 young cattle | 500 fowls |
| 14,000 common sheep | 1,000 Suki birds |
| 1,000 lambs | 10,000 fish |
| 500 deer | 10,000 locusts |
| 500 gazelles | 10,000 earthenware jars of beer |
| 1,000 large birds | 10,000 goatskins of wine |



I wonder if the guest were given doggy-bags or an antacid?

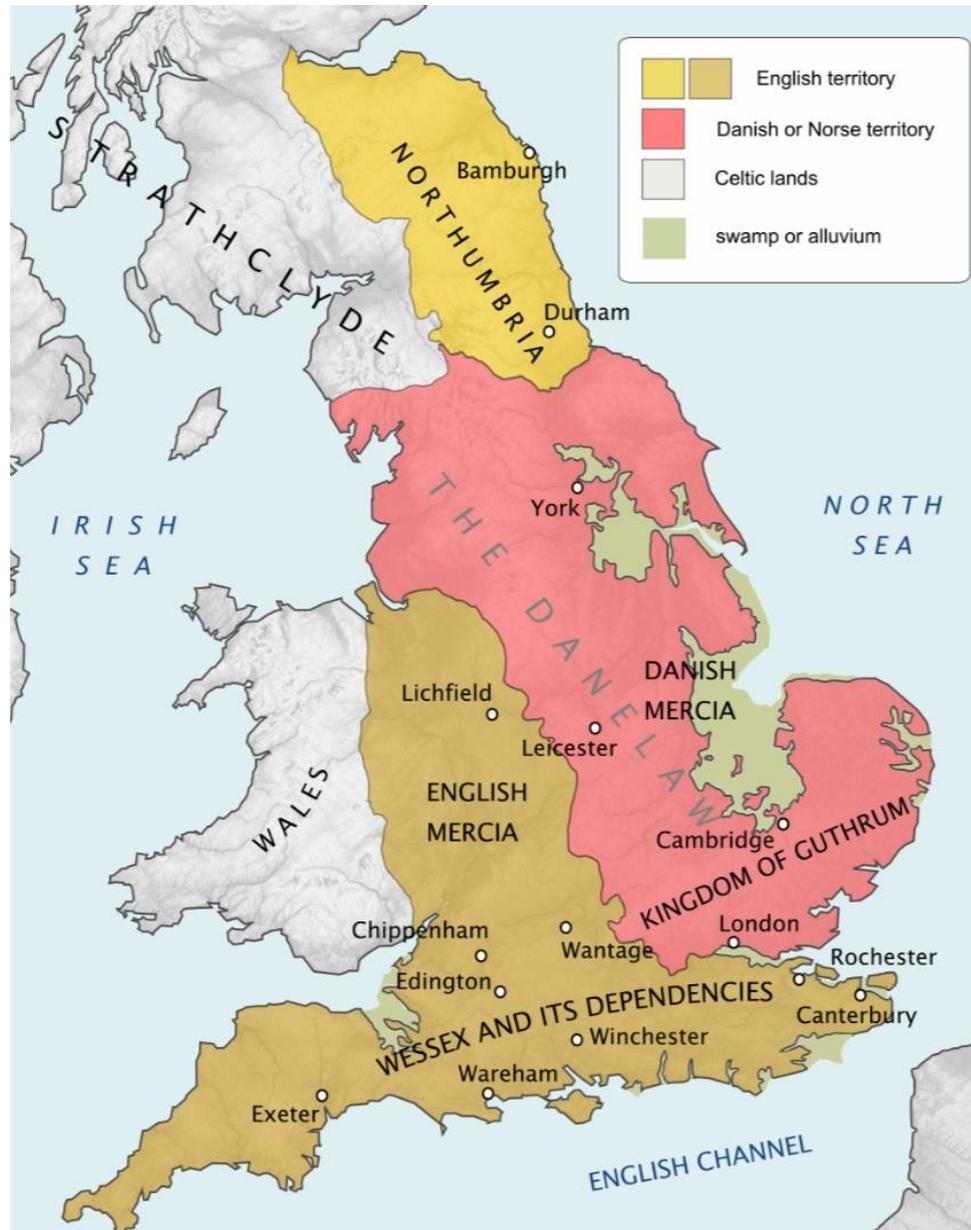


THE ALPHABET⁵

The Anglo-Saxons used an alphabet of runes known as *futhorc* but this was gradually replaced by the Latin alphabet of the Christian missionaries. Even on today's computers, the alphabet is listed as Latin. The Romans of course got their alphabet from the Greeks who in turn inherited (pinched) it from the Phoenicians. By 1110AD most of the capital letters were as we know them, with the exception of 'J' for which 'I' had been used and 'U' for which 'V' was employed. These new letters appeared in the sixteenth century along with 'W' replacing 'UU', and 'Y'.

The many Latin words in English not only came from the Roman invasion (43 - 410AD) but from the Germanic (5th century) and Norman (11th century) invasions who already had their own Roman influences. The Viking invasion (raids) started in 865AD and came to be most influential under Cnut (Canute) when he became king in 1016AD. The lasting influence of the Norse languages is felt mainly in the area covered by the Danelaw, north of a line say from London to Chester. The Church continued to use Latin and my work on the Salisbury Cathedral Chapter Minutes begins with their first use of English in the Eighteenth Century.

Today the Latin alphabet is used by 70% of the world's population and, with the exception of the odd umlaut and grapheme, is uniformly understood. It is even used in countries who employ different scripts as an aid for pronunciation and is the basis for ASCII encoding, ensuring its dominance in the digital age.



1. Pilgrims leaving Canterbury, Wikimedia, in the Public Domain. Llegendà àuria, manuscrit, Florença, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Wikipedia, Creative Commons. Illustration from Foxe's Book of Martyrs, courtesy of British Museum.
2. Noah from History Today, Noah's Ark and the Slave Trade. The mocking of Noah by Ham, Jean Bondol, 1372. KB, National Library of the Netherlands. Public Domain. World map identifying Asia with Shem, Europe with Japheth, and Africa with Ham. From Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, printed in Augsburg, 1472. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Austin, Texas. Public Domain.
3. Angola map courtesy of WVEC. Ann Zingha, Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of National Portrait Gallery.
4. Ashurbanipal II's legendary banquet feast in Kalhu in 879 B.C. Courtesy of Food Republic
5. Taken from *Vox Populi* by Peter Jones (Atlantic Books 2019). Map of England and Wales at the time of the Treaty of Chippenham (AD 878). From the *Atlas of European History*, Earle W Dowse (d. 1946), G Bell and Sons, London, 1910