

ALFRED THE GREAT AND HIS ROLE IN HISTORY OF ENGLAND

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Аннотация:

Данная статья посвящена правлению Альфреда Великого и его роли в истории Англии. В ней представлены исторические факты, подтверждающие важность Альфреда Великого и его реформ.

Ключевые слова: Альфред Великий, история Англии

Abstract:

The subject of this article is reign of Alfred the Great and his role in history of England. There are historical facts that says about importance of Alfred the Great and his reforms.

Keywords: Alfred the Great, history of England

Alfred was known for effectively safeguarding his kingdom against the Vikings, who have attempted on taking over his kingdom, and he became England's ruler by the time of his death. He is the first English king to be given the designation of "the Great". Among the West Saxons, Alfred was also the first English King to proclaim himself as the "King of the Anglo-Saxons".

Alfred, also spelled Ælfred, Byname Alfred the Great was born in 849 in the village of Wannating (now modern day Wantage, Oxford). He was the fifth child of King Aethelwulf and his wife Osburga. Alfred the Great would not become a king if his three elder brothers had not died as young adults during the time of increasing Viking attacks. There is not so much information about his life during the short reigns of his brothers. At the age of four he was sent to Rome, where he was anointed as a king by Pope Leo IV in 853. In early ages Alfred the Great was intreated in English poetry and this interested was supported by his mother. As all boys of noble families, he had military arts education. [1]

In 866 Bishop Alfred was given by Asset the extraordinary title of "secundarius", which may demonstrate a position similar to that of the *Celtic tanist*. Perhaps, that this course of action was authorized by Alfred's father, or by the *Witan*, to prepare for the risk of a conflict between the successors in the event Æthelred is killed in battle. The plan of delegating a successor as the next monarch and military leader is extraordinary even among the other Germanic tribes like the Swedes and the Franks.

Firstly, he appeared on active service in 868 with his brother King Aethelred (Ethelred) I. They went to help Burgred of Mercia (the kingdom between the Thames and the Humber) against a great Danish army that had landed in East Anglia in 865 and taken possession of Northumbria in 867, but the Danes refused to fight and peace was made. In this year Alfred married Ealhswith, descended through her mother from Mercian kings.[3] In 870 the Danes attacked Wessex, the only remaining independent Anglo-Saxon kingdom, whose forces were commanded by King Aethelred and his younger brother Alfred. At the battle of Ashdown in 871, Alfred routed the Viking army in a fiercely fought uphill assault, but this success was not permanent and further defeats followed for Wessex and Alfred's brother died. In April 871, the King Aethelwulf died and at the age of 21 Alfred the Great became a king, although, there are two other elder sons of King Aethelwulf: Æthelhelm and Æthelwold. In early 878, the Danes led by King Guthrum seized Chippenham in Wiltshire in a lightning strike and used it as a secure base from which to devastate Wessex. Local people either surrendered or escaped and the West Saxons were reduced to hit and run attacks seizing provisions when they could. With only his royal bodyguard, a small army of thegns (the king's followers) and Aethelnoth earldorman of Somerset as his ally, Alfred withdrew to the Somerset tidal marshes in which he had probably hunted as a youth. A resourceful fighter, Alfred reassessed his strategy and adopted the Danes' tactics by building a fortified base at Athelney in the Somerset marshes and summoning a mobile army of men from Wiltshire, Somerset and part of Hampshire to pursue guerrilla warfare against the Danes. In May 878, Alfred's army defeated the Danes at the battle of Edington. According to his contemporary biographer Bishop Asser, 'Alfred attacked the whole pagan army fighting ferociously in dense order, and by divine will eventually won the victory, made great slaughter among them, and pursued them to their fortress (Chippenham) After fourteen days the pagans were brought to the extreme depths of despair by hunger, cold and fear, and they sought peace. This unexpected victory proved to be the turning point in Wessex's battle for

survival. Alfred concluded peace with them in the treaty of Wedmore. King Guthrum was converted to Christianity with Alfred as godfather and many of the Danes returned to East Anglia where they settled as farmers. In 886, Alfred negotiated a partition treaty with the Danes, in which a frontier was demarcated along the Roman Watling Street and northern and eastern England came under the jurisdiction of the Danes. Alfred therefore gained control of areas of West Mercia and Kent which had been beyond the boundaries of Wessex. [1]

Alfred's military reforms, of the fyrd (national army of Anglo-Saxons) and the creation of the burghal system (it was an interconnected administrative and military network, with many fortified towns, known as burhs or burghs, designed to work together as a cohesive unit for the defense of the realm), are the most commonly cited reasons for Wessex's victory over the Vikings, followed by the personal characteristics of Alfred himself. Alfred took the education of his noblemen very seriously. Alfred relied upon his ealdormen, reeves, thegns, and bishops for many things, including judicial decisions on their land and providing personal council for the king.

To improve literacy, Alfred arranged, and took part in, the translation (by scholars from Mercia) from Latin into Anglo-Saxon. These books covered history, geography, philosophy and Gregory the Great's 'Pastoral Care. Alfred was patron of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

Like other West Saxon kings, Alfred established a legal code; he assembled the laws of Offa and other predecessors, and of the kingdoms of Mercia and Kent, adding his own administrative regulations to form a definitive body of Anglo-Saxon law.

'I ... collected these together and ordered to be written many of them which our forefathers observed, those which I liked; and many of those which I did not like I rejected with the advice of my councillors ... For I dared not presume to set in writing at all many of my own, because it was unknown to me what would please those who should come after us ... Then I ... showed those to all

my councilors, and they then said that they were all pleased to observe them' (Laws of Alfred, c.885-99). [2]

To conclusion, Alfred the Great did significant work in all spheres. He protected the kingdom from Vikings and built burghal system, developed the law and education systems. The governmental, legal, and economic practices of Alfred the Great also had far-reaching effects. Alfred the Great is an important person in history of England because of his merits.

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