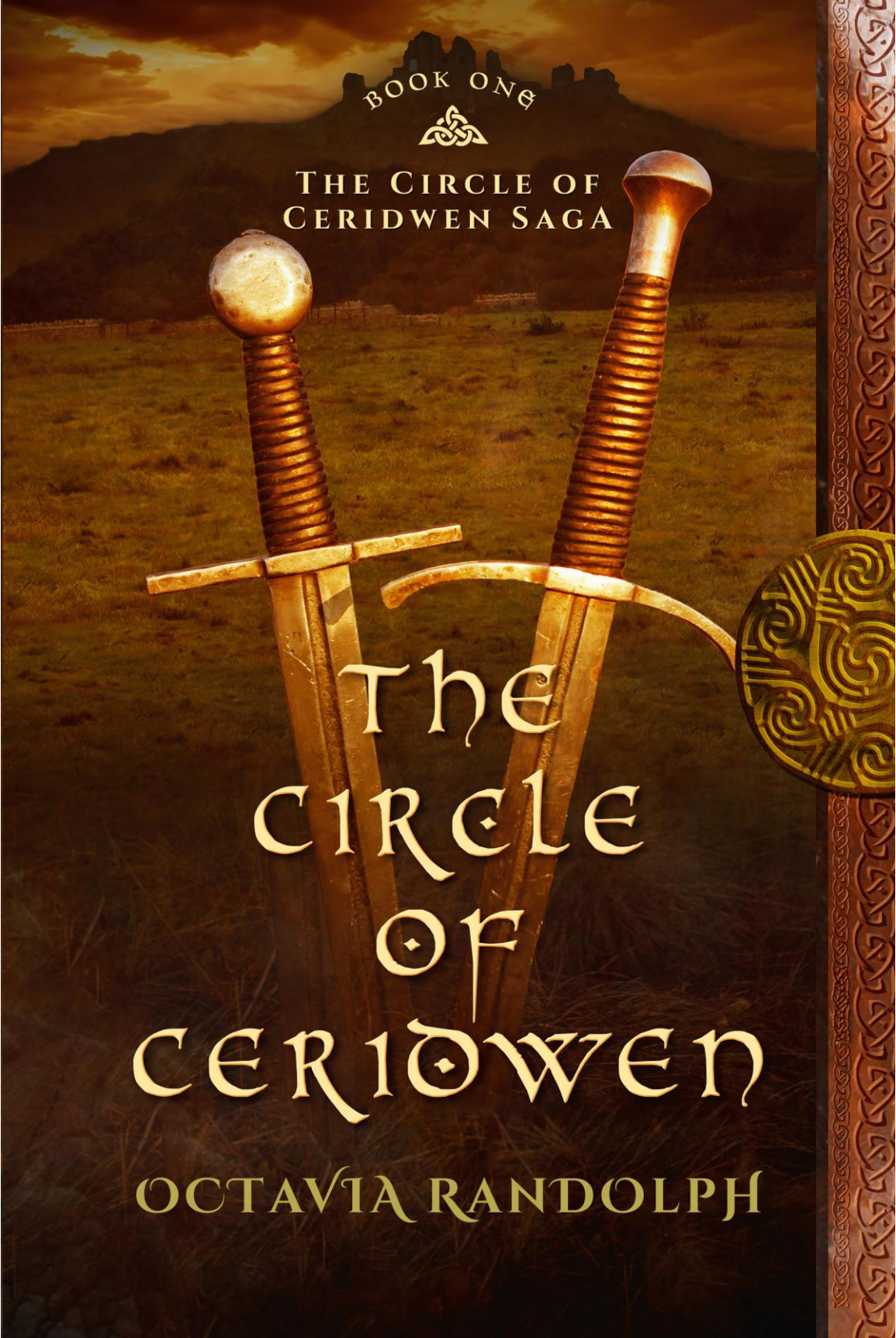


BOOK ONE



THE CIRCLE OF
CERIDWEN SAGA



The
CIRCLE
OF
CERIDWEN

OCTAVIA RANDOLPH

Map of Britain 871 AD



List of Characters

Ceridwen, daughter of a dead warlord of the Kingdom of Mercia, aged fifteen

Ælfwyn, a lady of Wessex residing in Lindisse, now controlled by the Danes

Yrling, a Dane

Toki, a Dane, nephew to Yrling

Sidroc, a Dane, nephew to Yrling

Gyric, son of Godwulf of Kilton in the Kingdom of Wessex

Cadmar, once a warrior of Wessex, now a monk

Godwin, Gyric's older brother

Modwynn, Lady of Kilton, mother to Gyric and Godwin

Godwulf, Lord of Kilton, an ealdorman of Wessex, husband to Modwynn

Edgyth, wife to Godwin

Ælfred, King of Wessex

Calendar of Feast Days mentioned in The Circle of Ceridwen

Candlemas - 2 February

St Gregory - 12 March

High Summer - 24 June

St Peter and Paul - 29 June

Hlafmesse (Lammas)- 1 August

St Mary -15 August

St Matthew - 21 September

All Saints -1 November

Martinmas (St Martin's) -11 November

Yuletide - 25 December to Twelfthnight - 6 January

Anglo-Saxon Place Names, with Modern Equivalents

Æscesdun = Ashdown

Æthelinga = Athelney

Basingas = Basing

Caeginesham = Keynsham

Cippenham = Chippenham

Cirenceaster = Cirencester

Defenas = Devon

Englafeld = Englefield

Ethandun = Edington

Exanceaster = Exeter

Glastunburh = Glastonbury

Hamtunscir = Hampshire

Hreopedun = Repton

Jorvik (Danish name for Eoforwic) = York

Legaceaster = Chester

Lindisse = Lindsey

Lundenwic = London

Meredune = Marton

Scaftesburh = Shaftesbury

Snotingaham = Nottingham

Sumorsaet = Somerset

Swanawic = Swanage

Wedmor = Wedmore

Witanceaster (where the Witan, the King's advisors, met) = Winchester

Glossary of Terms

browis: a cereal-based stew, often made with fowl or pork

ceorl: (“churl”) a freeman ranking directly below a thegn, able to bear arms, own property, and improve his rank

cottar: free agricultural worker, in later eras, a peasant

cresset: stone, bronze, or iron lamp fitted with a wick that burnt oil

ealdorman: a nobleman with jurisdiction over given lands; the rank was generally appointed by the King and not necessarily inherited from generation to generation. The modern derivative *alderman* in no way conveys the esteem and power of the Anglo-Saxon term.

frumenty: cereal-based main dish pudding, boiled with milk. A version flavoured with currents, raisins and spices was ritually served on Martinmas (November 11th) to ploughmen.

seax: the angle-bladed dagger which gave its name to the Saxons; all freemen carried one.

scop: (“shope”) a poet, saga-teller, or bard, responsible not only for entertainment but seen as a collective cultural historian. A talented scop would be greatly valued by his lord and receive land, gold and silver jewellery, costly clothing and other riches as his reward.

thegn: (“thane”) a freeborn warrior-retainer of a lord; thegns were housed, fed and armed in exchange for complete fidelity to their sworn lord. Booty won in battle by a thegn was generally offered to their lord, and in return the lord was expected to bestow handsome gifts of arms, horses, arm-rings, and so on to his best champions.

trev: a settlement of a few huts, smaller than a village

tun: a large cask or barrel used for ale

wergild: Literally, man-gold; the amount of money each man’s life was valued at. The Laws of Æthelbert, a 7th century King of Kent, for example, valued the life of a nobleman at 300 shillings (equivalent to 300 oxen), and a ceorl was valued at 100 shillings. By Ælfred’s time (reigned 871-899) a nobleman was held at 1200 shillings and a ceorl at 200.

Witan: Literally, wise men; a council of ealdorman, other high-ranking lords, and bishops; their responsibilities included choosing the King from amongst their numbers.

withy: a willow or willow wand; withy-man: a figure woven from such wands

Historic Veracity

The fictional characters in this book play upon a stage of actual historical events. I have used as my framework the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a series of histories that King Ælfred (b.849-d.899) commissioned during his lifetime. The Chronicles were written in Old English save for Manuscript F, written in Old English and Latin. Unnamed scribes in various religious foundations assembled the Chronicles^[1]; the dates they cover range from Year One to 1154, the final year covered in the version known as the Laud Chronicle. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* itself makes fascinating reading and is a primary source for what we know of the period.

A few of the more important dates incorporated in *The Circle of Ceridwen* and *Ceridwen of Kilton* include:

871: King Æthelred of Wessex and his young brother Ælfred fight against the Danes at Basingas (modern day Basing); the Danes take the victory. Two months later Æthelred and Ælfred again face the Danes at Meredune (Marton), and after fierce fighting and great losses on both sides the Danes win. Æthelred soon dies (possibly from wounds suffered at Meredune) and his twenty-three year old brother Ælfred is named king.

874: King Burgred of Mercia driven overseas by Danes after ruling twenty-two years.

875: King Ælfred of Wessex launches naval foray in the Channel, fighting against seven Danish ships and capturing one.

877: After a battle and siege at Exanceaster (Exeter) the Danish leader Guthrum makes peace with Ælfred, and Guthrum and his picked men swear oaths of peace upon an huge silver (sometimes recorded as gold) armring, held sacred to them. One hundred and twenty Danish ships lost in bad weather at Swanawic (Swanage).

878: At Twelfthnight, while Ælfred was keeping Yule at his estate at Cippenham (Chippenham), Danes launch a surprise attack, sweeping over Wessex and driving the king into hiding, and many overseas. Seven weeks after

Easter Ælfred rallies enough troops to challenge the invaders. In open battle the Danes are routed and take refuge at Cippenham where after a siege they surrender. Guthrum and his thirty closest men swear to leave Wessex and to accept baptism. The resulting treaty is known as the Peace of Wedmor (Wedmore), where the conclusion of the baptism festivities were held. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records: “Guthrum... was twelve days with the king, who greatly honoured him and his companions with riches.”

[1] There are seven extant versions of the Chronicle, and a few fragments beside. The most important are known today as Manuscript A (The Parker Chronicle) Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS. 173; Manuscripts B and C (The Abingdon Chronicles) British Museum, Cotton MS. Tiberius A vi and Tiberius B i, respectively; Manuscript D (The Worcester Chronicle) British Museum, Cotton MS. Tiberius B iv; Manuscript E (The Laud (Peterborough) Chronicle) Bodleian MS. Laud 636; and Manuscript F (The Bilingual Canterbury Epitome) British Museum, Cotton MS. Domitian A viii.

The Circle of Ceridwen Saga:

[The Circle of Ceridwen: Book One](#)

[Ceridwen of Kilton: Book Two](#)

[The Claiming: Book Three](#)

[The Hall of Tyr: Book Four](#)

[Tindr: Book Five](#)

[Silver Hammer, Golden Cross: Book Six](#)

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About the Author

Octavia Randolph has long been fascinated with the development, dominance, and decline of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. The path of her research has included disciplines as varied as the study of Anglo-Saxon and Norse runes, and learning to spin with a drop spindle. Her interests have led to extensive on-site research in England, Denmark, Sweden, and Gotland. In addition to the Circle Saga, she is the author of the novella *The Tale of Melkorka*, taken from the Icelandic Sagas; the novella *Ride*, a retelling of the story of Lady Godiva, first published in Narrative Magazine; and *Light, Descending*, a biographical novel about the great John Ruskin. She has been awarded Artistic Fellowships at the Ingmar Bergman Estate on Fårö, Sweden; MacDowell Colony; Ledig House International; and Byrdcliffe.

She answers all fan mail and loves to stay in touch with her readers. Join her mailing list and read more on Anglo-Saxon and Viking life at www.octavia.net.