

BOOK TEN



THE CIRCLE OF  
CERIDWEN SAGA

# WATER BORNE



OCTAVIA RANDOLPH



# *List of Characters*

**Ceric**, son of Ceridwen and Gyrice, grandson of Godwulf of Kilton

**Dwynwen**, a noble maid of Ceredigion, in Wales

**Edgyth**, Lady of Kilton, widow of Godwin, mother by adoption to Edwin

**Edwin**, younger brother to Ceric, and Lord of Kilton in Wessex

**Worr**, the horse-thegn of Kilton, pledged man of Ceric

**Tegwedd**, a Welsh slave

**Mindred**, a serving woman of Kilton

**Dunnere**, priest of Kilton

**Alwin** and **Wystan**, captains of Edwin's body-guard

**Elidon**, King of Ceredigion in Wales, uncle to Dwywnwen

**Gwydden**, his priest

**Luned**, a woman of Wales

**Garrulf**, scop of Kilton

**Dagmar**, daughter of the late Guthrum, King of the Danes in Angle-land

**Ingigerd**, a woman of Dane-mark

**Jorild**, a woman of Dane-mark

**Ase**, a brewer in Ribe

**Thorlak** and **Ulfkel**, wine-merchant sons of Ase

**Ælfwyn**, formerly Lady of Four Stones, now wife to Raedwulf of Defenas

**Raedwulf**, Bailiff of Defenas in Wessex

**Burginde**, companion and nurse to Ælfwyn

**Cerd**, grandson to Ælfwyn

**Blida** and **Bettelin**, orphaned siblings of Defenas

**Ealhswith**, daughter of Ælfwyn and Sidroc

**Indract** and **Lioba**, married couple, stewards of Raedwulf's hall

**Hrald**, son of Ælfwyn and Sidroc, Jarl of the keep of Four Stones in South Lindisse

**Pega** of Mercia, wife to Hrald, and Lady of Four Stones

**Ælfgiva**, infant daughter of Pega and Hrald

**Mealla**, companion to Pega, a maid of Éireann

**Yrling**, son of Ceridwen and Sidroc

**Kjeld**, second in command at Four Stones

**Jari**, a warrior of Four Stones, chief body-guard to Hrald

**Bork**, a stable-boy and orphan under Hrald's care

**Ælfred**, King of Wessex

**Asberg**, brother-in-law to Ælfwyn, in command at the fortress of Turcesig

**Wulgan**, a Saxon ship-master and trader

**Fremund**, a Saxon merchant

**Ruddick**, a Frisian ship-master and trader

**Ceridwen**, Mistress of the hall Tyrsborg on the island of Gotland, wife to Sidroc

**Sidroc** the Dane, formerly Jarl of Four Stones in South Lindisse

**Tindr**, a bow hunter

**Rannveig**, a brewster on Gotland, mother of Tindr

**Eirian**, daughter to Ceridwen and Sidroc

**Rodiaud**, youngest daughter of Ceridwen and Sidroc

**Runulv**, a Gotlandic ship-master and trader



## *Water Borne Maps*



# WATER BORNE

THE YEAR 896





# WATER BORNE

THE YEAR 896

GOTLAND

Daviken

Althing-Roma

Hrald the  
Elder's farm

Tyrsborg



# *The Wheel of the Year*

Candlemas - 2 February

St Gregory's Day - 12 March

St Cuthbert's Day - The Spring Equinox, about 21 March

St Walpurga's (Walpurgisnacht) – 30 April

St Elgiva's Day - 18 May

St Helen's Day – 21 May

High Summer or Mid-Summer Day - 24 June

Sts Peter and Paul - 29 June

Hlafmesse (Lammas) - 1 August

St Mary's Day - 15 August

St Matthews' Day - The Fall Equinox, about 21 September

All Saints - 1 November

The month of Blót - November; the time of Offering for followers of the Old Religions; also time of slaughter of animals which could not be kept over the coming Winter

Martinmas (St Martin's) - 11 November

Yuletide - 25 December to Twelfthnight - 6 January

Winter's Nights - the Norse end of year rituals, ruled by women, marked by feasting and ceremony

# *Anglo-Saxon Place Names, with Modern Equivalents*

Æscesdun = Ashdown

Æthelinga = Athelney

Apulder = Appledore

Basingas = Basing

Beamfleot = Benfleet

Beardan = Bardney

Bearruescir = Berkshire

Bryeg = Bridgenorth

Buttingtun = Buttington

Caeginesham = Keynsham

Cippenham = Chippenham

Cirenceaster = Cirencester

Colneceastre = Colchester

Cruland = Croyland

Defenas = Devon

Englafeld = Englefield

Ethandun = Edington

Exanceaster = Exeter

Fearnhamme = Farnham

Fullanham = Fulham

Geornaham = Irnham

Glastunburh = Glastonbury

Gleaweceaster = Gloucester

Hamtunscir = Hampshire

Headleage = Hadleigh

Hreopedun = Repton



Iglea = Leigh upon Mendip

Jorvik (Danish name for Eoforwic) = York

Legaceaster = Chester

Limenemutha = Lymington in Hampshire

Lindisse = Lindsey

Lundenwic = London

Meredune = Marton

Meresig = Mersea

Middeltun = Milton

Readingas = Reading

River Lyge = River Lea

Scaftesburh = Shaftesbury

Scireburne = Sherborne

Snotingham = Nottingham

Sumorsaet = Somerset

Swanawic = Swanage

Turcesig = Torksey

Wedmor = Wedmore

Welingaford = Wallingford

Weogornaceastre = Worcester

Isle of Wiht = Isle of Wight

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

#### Additional Place Names:

Frankland = Much of modern day France and Germany

Haithabu = Hedeby (formerly Denmark; now in modern day Germany)

Aros = Aarhus, Denmark

Laaland = the island of Lolland, Denmark

Land of the Svear = Sweden

Cymru = Wales

Dubh Linn = Dublin

Hunefleth = Honfleur, France

Frisia = modern Netherlands

Dorestad = former trading town on the Rhine in modern Netherlands

# *Glossary of Terms*

**Althing, and Thing:** a regular gathering of citizens to settle disputes, engage in trade, and socialize. Gotland was divided into three administrative districts, each with their own “thing” or meeting, but the great thing, the Althing, was held at Roma, in the geographical centre of the island.

**alvar:** nearly barren stretches of limestone rock, typically supporting only tiny lichens and moss.

**Asgard:** Heavenly realm of the Gods.

**brewster:** the female form of brewer (and, interestingly enough, the female form of baker is baxter...so many common names are rooted in professions and trades...).

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

**chaff:** the husks of grain after being separated from the usable kernel.

**ceorl:** (“churl”) a free man 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.

**cwm:** Welsh name for a mountain hollow, or ravine.

**drekar:** “dragon-ship,” a war-ship of the Danes.

**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.

**ell:** a measure of length corresponding to a man’s forearm and outstretched fingers.

**fey:** possessing magical or supernatural powers; one belonging to the Land of Faery.

**fulltrúi:** the Norse deity patron that one felt called to dedicate oneself to.

**fylgja:** a Norse guardian spirit, always female, unique to each family.

**fyrð:** the massed forces of Wessex, comprising thegns – professional soldiers – and ceorls, trained freeman.

**hack silver:** broken silver jewellery, coils of unworked silver bars, fragments of cast ingots and other silver parcelled out by weight alone during trade.

**hamingja:** the Norse “luck-spirit” which each person is born with.

**leech-book:** compilation of healing recipes and practices for the treatment of human and animal illness and injury. Such books were a compendium of healing herbs and spiritual

and magical practices. The *Leech Book of Bald*, recorded during Ælfred's reign, is a famed, and extant, example.

**lur:** a vertical (or curved) sounding horn fashioned of wood or brass, dating from the Bronze Age, and used in Nordic countries to rally folk from afar.

**morgen-gyfu:** literally, "morning-gift"; a gift given by a husband to his new wife the first morning they awake together.

**nard:** (also, spikenard) a rare and precious oil, highly aromatic, derived from the crushed rhizomes of a honeysuckle-like plant grown in the Himalayas, India, and China. Mary Magdalen was said to have anointed the feet of Christ with nard.

**philtre:** a potion to excite love or lust in another.

**quern:** a small hand-driven mill consisting of two grind stones, the top stone usually being domed and having a hole to insert a wooden handle for turning. The oats, wheat, or other grain is placed between the stones, and the handle turned until the desired fineness is attained.

**rauk:** the striking sea- and wind-formed limestone towers on the coast of Gotland.

**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.

**scrying:** to divine the future by gazing into a looking glass, a crystal, or water.

**shingle beach:** a pebbly, rather than sandy, beach.

**skeggox:** steel battle-axe favoured by the Danes.

**skirrets:** a sweet root vegetable similar to carrots, but cream-coloured, and having several fingers on each plant.

**skogkatt:** "forest cat"; the ancestor of the modern Norwegian Forest Cat, known for its large size, climbing ability, and thick and water-shedding coat.

**Skuld:** the eldest of the three Norse Norns, determiners of men's destinies. Skuld cuts with shears the thread of life. See also Urd and Verdandi.

**strakes:** overlapping wooden planks, running horizontally, making up a ship's hull.

**symbol:** a ceremonial high occasion for the Anglo-Saxons, marked by the giving of gifts, making of oaths, swearing of fidelity, and (of course) drinking ale.

**tæfl or Cyningtæfl** ("King's table"): a "capture the King" strategy board game.

**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.

**treen:** domestic objects fashioned of wood, especially tableware.

**Tyr:** the God of war, law, and justice. He voluntarily forfeited his sword-hand to allow the Gods to deceive, and bind, the gigantic wolf Fenrir.

**Tyr-hand:** in this Saga, any left-handed person, named so in honour of Tyr's sacrifice.

**Urd:** the youngest of the three Norse Norns, determiners of men's destinies. Urd makes decision as to one's calling and station in life. See also Skuld and Verdandi.

**Verdandi:** the middle of the three Norse Norns, determiners of men's destinies. Verdandi draws out the thread of life to appropriate length. See also Skuld and Urd.

**wadmal:** the Norse name for the coarse and durable woven woollen fabric that was a chief export in the Viking age.

**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.

**yealing:** one the same age

# *Notes to Water Borne*

## Chapter the First

Elf-shot, and early English healing and healers. The Old English term *læce* “leech” is the name for a healer, often coupled with the Latin term “*medicus*”, doctor/physician. Wort-cunning is the knowledge of herbs, and all healers, whether a mother dressing a child’s scraped knee, or a nun or monk attempting to stem plague, employed herbs in their efforts. Many recipes for remedies from the period have survived, primarily in three manuscripts: the Leech Book of Bald (Bald being a monk); the Lacnunga Manuscript, and the Old English Herbarium Manuscript. In addition to the use of herbal preparations – a number of which have been proven efficacious by modern science – many treatments include magical elements, such as singing into the wound, performing ritualized actions in the gathering and application of the remedy, and wearing or sleeping on certain charms and amulets. Many healing remedies combine early, heathen wort-cunning with Christian elements. Certain performative treatments include the participation of a priest, such as that known as *Æcerbot* (“Field-Remedy”, also known as For Unfruitful Land), where representative sections of sod were cut from the soil, anointed with yeast, honey, milk, and herbs, carried to a church and laid upon the altar before being returned to the field. The cure for Elf-shot, for which Dwywnwen and Edgyth treat Ceric, makes use of a healer’s knife, a *læceseax*, to repel the power of a curse which renders him for periods in a near-catatonic state. The authoritative source in modern English on Anglo-Saxon medicine is *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plantlore and Healing*, by Stephen Pollington.

## Chapter the Third

Boethius and *The Consolations of Philosophy*. Born into a patrician Roman family about 480, Boethius rose to become a senator and consul as well as respected translator, commentator, and author. After revealing and condemning widespread corruption in the Ostrogothic Court in which he served, Boethius was imprisoned and sentenced to death. It was there, awaiting execution that he wrote his masterwork, *The Consolations of Philosophy*. The manuscript survived his execution at age 44 in 524, and went on to become one of the most popular treatises of the Middle Ages. It is not surprising that a man like Ælfred, plagued by poor health and beset by war over nearly the entire span of his reign, should have found solace and wisdom there. The King rendered the Latin of Boethius into Old English to make it widely available to all who could read, and embellished and enriched the text with glosses and anecdotes germane to his, and his countrymen’s, lives. His translation exists in two manuscripts only, one in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the other in the Cottonian Collection of the British Library (wherein also reside such masterworks as the sole manuscript of *Beowulf*). A modern English version of Ælfred’s translation by Walter John Sedgefield can be found online at the University of Kentucky site.

## Chapter the Tenth

Gerolf, Count of Frisia. Gerolf (died 895 or 896), took part in driving back repeated Viking attacks on Frisia in modern day Netherlands. In 889 by the King of East Francia rewarded him with a substantial land grant, including valuable properties on the banks of the

old Rhine. He is known to have had at least two sons, Dirk and Waldger (possibly nephews he named as sons); but of Gerolf's daughters, if any, we know nothing. The Count's wealth and the date of his death provides the novelist with a likely candidate for a potential match between a daughter of Gerolf and Edwin, Lord of Kilton.

## Chapter the Fifteenth

Rhodri Mawr (in Welsh, "Rhodri the Great"). A renowned war-chief against both the Saxons and Danes, Rhodri Mawr was born Rhodri ap Merfyn about 820, and died either 873 or 877/878. Rhodri became King of much of Wales during his lifetime, and was famed for his defence of Cymru against Viking invaders, killing the Danish leader Gorm in 856. Rhodri was seemingly killed in battle against the invading Mercian army, likely at the Battle of Anglesey in 873. At his death four of his many sons each helmed a different portion of those territories their father had briefly unified.

The Law Code of Ælfred. Certainly one of the crowning achievements of the King's life was the effort he placed in producing a more or less unified code of laws. In his preface, Ælfred explains that he examined many existing law codes, from the Old Testament to those of previous Anglo-Saxon kings in neighbouring kingdoms:

*Then I, King Ælfred, gathered them together and ordered to be written many of the ones that our forefathers observed – those that pleased me; and many of the ones that did not please me I rejected with the advice of my councillors, and commanded them to be observed in a different way. For I dared not presume to set down in writing at all many of my own, since it was unknown to me what would please those who should come after us. But those which I found either in the days of Ine, my kinsman, or of Offa, king of the Mercians, or of Ælthelberht (who first among the English people received baptism), and which seemed to me most just, I collected herein, and omitted the others. (Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources, translated by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge.)*

The Laws outline a wide variety of crimes and appropriate punishments, from cattle-rustling to the rape of a slave girl to cutting off a man's long hair without his consent (short hair was often the sign of a slave, thus to be forcibly shorn would be an insult to one's class). Punishments, whether corporal or exacted by fines, varied according to social class, but all classes were protected, though in the case of enslaved persons the fine exacted for harming them was awarded to the owner.

Women enjoyed legal rights under the Laws of Ælfred, and earlier Anglo-Saxon law, that they were to lose after the Battle of Hastings (1066) and for many hundreds of years afterwards. Amongst them were the right to own land in her own name, and to sell such land or give it away without her father's or husband's consent; the right to defend herself in court; the right to act as compurgator in law suits; that is, to testify to another's truthfulness. She could freely manumit her slaves. And she could not be forced into an unwanted union.

Ælfred compiled his *Laws* in the last decade of his life. I have taken the novelist's liberty of having his faithful Bailiff of Defenas, Raedwulf, aid him in this task.

## Chapter the Sixteenth

The design of Ælfred's ships. Whether Ælfred can rightly be claimed the Father of the English Navy has been discussed amongst military scholars for over a hundred years. The pressing need to meet the onslaught of Danish war-ships with vessels approaching the speed, maneuverability, and flexibility of the famed and feared drekars – dragon-ships – certainly drove him to experiment with new designs. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle notes, for the years 896/897 “...Then King Ælfred ordered warships to be built to meet the Danish ships: they were almost twice as long as the others, some had sixty oars; some more; they were both swifter, steadier, and with more freeboard than the others; they were built neither after the Frisian design, nor after the Danish, but as they seemed to himself that they could be most serviceable...” (Translation G.N. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.)

These seem not always to have proved successful – the Chronicle notes several mishaps with the ships; or nascent naval skills were far from what they would become when Britannia ruled the seas. At any rate Ælfred, ever the innovator, can be credited with greatly spurring efforts to mount a satisfying maritime defence, and several times as a younger man he himself fought at sea.

War-fire, also known as Greek Fire or sea-fire. One of the most fascinating – and deadly – weapons employed by the ancients at sea, this napalm-like substance has never been fully understood, though records of its use are widespread and credible. Its exact composition is still a mystery, but naptha (which could be made from distilling coal tar and peat) was likely mixed with sulphur, tree resins, and other substances, along with quicklime. It was dangerous and volatile to handle, and certain preparations could be smeared by night on the buildings and weapons of the enemy, to self-ignite in the Sun. Other forms used for sea battles, for which we have manuscript illuminations, show the fire being blown out of a metal pipe powered by a bellows, and the hapless enemy ship being met by a wall of fire.

## Chapter the Nineteenth

Fire-starter fungus (*inonotus obliquus*), also known as tinder fungus or Chaga. A parasitical fungus which lives on birch, and sometimes other deciduous trees. Its use as a fire-starter was known in pre-history, and the powdered fungus is used as well in various herbal remedies.



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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; 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](http://www.octavia.net). Follow her on Facebook at Octavia Randolph Author, and for exclusive access and content join the spirited members of The Circle of Ceridwen Saga Discussion and Idea Group on Facebook.