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The Intellectual Life of Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756): Community, Patronage, and Production

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Abstract

Using the central case study of Anglo-Saxon scholar and schoolmistress Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756), this article explores the factors that fostered, as well as those that inhibited, intellectual achievement in the eighteenth century. Over her lifetime, Elstob experienced a series of contrasting circumstances; at such moments of change larger forces become visible. By analysing her letter-writing alongside published works — and through comparison with other intellectuals, their networks, and their experiences of cultural production — the interplay of community, patronage, and production is illuminated.

The intellectual life history of Anglo-Saxon scholar and schoolmistress Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756) encompassed years of frenetic intellectual production and decades of scholarly exclusion. Over her lifespan, Elstob benefitted from scholarly networks, familial ties, cultural patronage, and epistolary friendship. She also experienced the results of economic privation and social exclusion. Elstob's extant body of work, in the form of published works and manuscript letters, reveals her contrasting experiences of scholarly life and her responses to them. This article examines the characteristics of support that Elstob received for her research and writing from very different quarters and the roles that patronage, community, and networks of support played in her intellectual life. While Elstob's early experiences of intellectual activity were exceptional, her example offers insight into important dynamics in eighteenth-century cultural life.

A generation of scholarship has revealed the ways in which women related to and participated in print culture in the eighteenth century.[2] However, the work of published women in this period has often been seen through the prism of literary production and, in particular, the activities of the bluestocking circle.[3] The term "bluestocking" emerged in the seventeenth century and, by the 1750s, it specifically referred to individuals attending Elizabeth Montagu's intellectually-focused London assemblies, most especially the women.[4] Montagu's circle included poets and writers from relatively diverse backgrounds, and her gatherings were designed to promote virtuous sociability through polite conversation. While Elizabeth Elstob is often referred to as an "early bluestocking," her years of intellectual activity predate Montagu's assemblies.[5] Moreover, analysis of Elstob in the context of bluestocking culture can serve to obscure some of the distinct features of antiquarian as opposed to literary production.

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[1] I am grateful to Penelope J. Corfield and Claire Bartram for their helpful comments on early drafts of this piece and to Paul Stortz and the six anonymous readers for their insightful critiques.

[2] See, for example, Temma Berg and Sonia Kane, eds., *Women, Gender, and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Norma Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004); Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999); Emily Hodgson Anderson, *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction: Novels and the Theatre, Haywood to Austen* (London: Routledge, 2009); Vivien Jones, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker, eds., *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678–1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980); Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

More recently, the importance of activities such as letter-writing in the broader project of female literary and intellectual production has been brought into the frame.[6] Arguing that the overwhelming focus on print publication among critics and historians has obscured the importance of other spaces of intellectual exchange, Elizabeth Eger illuminates patronage, conversation, and correspondence as "interrelated practices" that "played an important role in creating a female literary community."[7] Whilst the women of the bluestocking circle cultivated "collective critical practices" through letter-writing and carefully crafted social gatherings, Elstob's intellectual relationships were of a different character.[8]

Elstob's early years of research and writing were undertaken in the context of Anglo-Saxon scholarship. Her nearest collaborators were male antiquarians, such as George Hickes (1642–1715), Edward Gibson (1669–1748), Humfrey Wanley (1672–1726), Christopher Rawlinson (1677–1733), Edward Thwaites (1677–1711), Ralph Thoresby (1658–1725), and Arthur Charette (c. 1655–1722).[9] Through these networks, focused on the universities, Elstob gained levels of access to original manuscripts and transcripts of Anglo-Saxon texts that were unusual for a woman at this time.

Here, Elstob's intellectual life history is explored through both her published works and her surviving letters. A large proportion of the latter is correspondence she wrote to her friend, the stay-maker and antiquary George Ballard (1706–55).[10] The publications include *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St Gregory* (1709), *Some Testimonies of Learned Men in Favour of the Intended Edition of the Saxon Homilies* (1713), and *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (1715).[11] The letters under analysis are those in

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[3] See, for example, Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, eds., *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Elizabeth Eger, ed., *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Emma Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), esp. 74–94; Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[4] See Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1; Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, eds., *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2003), 2–4.

[5] See Ada Wallas, *Before the Bluestockings* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1929).

[6] See, for example, Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

[7] Eger, *Bluestockings*, 118.

[8] Markman Ellis, "Reading Practices in Elizabeth Montagu's Epistolary Network of the 1750s" in Eger, *Bluestockings Displayed*, 228.

[9] Shaun F.D. Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756) and the Limits of Women's Agency in Early-Eighteenth-Century England" in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 5.

[10] See David Vaisey, "Ballard, George (1705/6–1755)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[11] Elizabeth Elstob had published twice prior to this, first with the Old English "Athanasian Creed" printed in William Wotton's *Conspectus breuis*, an abridged version of George Hickes' *Thesaurus* (1703–5), and second with a translation in

Ballard's letter book, which is preserved in the Bodleian Library, alongside two letters written by and about Elstob that now reside in Nottingham University Special Collections.[12] Ballard's letter book contains forty-two letters penned by Elstob between 1735 and 1753 among a wider collection of letters from Ballard's friends and supporters of his project to publish *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been celebrated for their writings or skills in the learned languages, arts and sciences* (1752). The participants in Ballard's epistolary network, as recorded by his letter book, were all women.[13]

Elizabeth Elstob's Life and Work

Elstob was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 29 September 1683 into a relatively affluent merchant family.[14] Her early years were shaped by the education she received at home from her mother which, unusually for the time, included lessons in Latin. As Michèle Cohen has shown, the domestic education offered to girls could be a very full one and was often based on conversation as a pedagogical model.[15] Elstob later reflected: "I found it so easy [to learn Anglo-Saxon], and in it so much of the grounds of our present Language, and of a more particular Agreement with some Words which I had heard when very young in the North."[16] Conversations at home in the Northeast had, it seemed, laid foundations for Elstob's enquiry into northern languages.

By the time Elstob was eight years old, both her parents were dead and she was moved south to join the household of her uncle the Reverend Charles Elstob, prebendary of Canterbury Cathedral, and his wife, Matilda. Elizabeth is often quoted as saying her uncle was "no Friend to Womens Learning," but in his household she became proficient in French and developed her commitment to scholarly life.[17] At this time, Elstob's brother William went to Oxford to study classical languages, theology, and Anglo-Saxon. In 1696 he was elected fellow of University College, Oxford, and in 1702 he left the university for an appointment as rector of the London parishes St Swithin's and St Mary Bothaw's, where Elizabeth joined him.[18] From her brother's premises, she learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, and Old English. Elstob was able to translate Saxon words directly, but her knowledge of Latin made the scholarly literature surrounding Anglo-Saxon accessible and allowed her to participate fully in the research culture of her time.

While living together, the Elstob siblings maintained close links with Oxford's Anglo-Saxon scholars and through these contacts retained access to the manuscripts and transcripts that formed the basis of their research and writing. Women had no formal access to university libraries in this period, but through male

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1708 of Madeleine de Scudéry's *Discours de la Gloire* (the original was published in 1693), which she dedicated to her aunt, Matilda Elstob.

[12] Bodleian Library (Bodl.), Ballard 43; Nottingham University Special Collections (NUSC), Papers of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, PwE8; PwE9.

[13] For a fuller analysis of George Ballard's epistolary network, see Leonie Hannan, "Collaborative Scholarship on the Margins: An Epistolary Network," *Women's Writing* 21, no. 3 (2014): 290–315.

[14] For fuller biographical details see Mechthild Gretsch's excellent entry "Elstob, Elizabeth (1683–1756)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and also her two-part journal article entitled "Elizabeth Elstob: A Scholar's Fight for Anglo-Saxon Studies" published in *Anglia* 117,no. 2, (1999): 164–200 and no. 4 (1999): 481–524; Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756)," 3–24.

[15] M. Cohen, "'To Think, to Compare, to Combine, to Methodise': Notes towards Rethinking Girls' Education in the Eighteenth Century," in Knott and Taylor, *Women*, 224–42; M. Cohen, "Gender and the Public Private Debate on Education in the Long Eighteenth Century," in *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*, ed. R. Aldrich (London: Woburn Press, 2004), 15–35.

[16] See the Preface in Elizabeth Elstob, *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St. Gregory* (London, 1709), vi–vii.

[17] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 59: "Memoir of her life written by herself and sent to George Ballard from Bath 23 November 1738." Her father, Ralph Elstob, died in 1688 and her mother, Jane Elstob (formerly Hall), died three years later in 1691.

[18] The Elstobs lived in Bush Lane in the City of London.

contacts within these institutions could circulate relevant materials.[19] William is documented as having travelled to Canterbury, Cambridge, and Oxford for the purpose of transcribing original materials that could not be borrowed.[20] As Sarah H. Collins reveals, during these productive years the Elstobs spent a great deal of time transcribing manuscripts in preparation for their planned printed editions of Saxon homilies and laws:

> By February 1710 she had borrowed "two very ancient manuscripts from the Cottonian Library" and was transcribing homilies. . . . Elizabeth's practice was, when possible, to transcribe more than one manuscript of a text and to work toward selecting the best readings. Between 1709 and 1714 she spent most of her time transcribing manuscripts for this edition . . .[21]

Well-connected antiquaries might reasonably expect to borrow primary materials from their contacts, and the Elstobs certainly amassed a significant quantity of manuscripts and books at their home.[22]

During the early 1700s, Elizabeth also enjoyed the deep personal support of the distinguished antiquary and non-juring bishop George Hickes (1642–1715) and was in contact with a range of Oxford Saxonists. Whilst this network had originally been fostered by William's post at the university, the Elstobs were in regular contact with these men during their time in London, most likely because of the intense scholarly activity at the Elstobs' home. William Elstob was also a founding member of the organisation that would later become the London Society of Antiquaries, its first informal meeting taking place at the Bear Tavern on the Strand in December 1707.

Aside from these networks of male antiquarians, Elizabeth is known to have participated in the circle of the writer and philosopher Mary Astell (1666–1731). As Hughes has highlighted, the relationship between the women was acknowledged in the periodical press of the day:

> *Tatler* published two attacks on Mary Astell, to whom it referred as "Madonella." The second of these, almost certainly written by Richard Steele, is dated 3 September (no. 63). The opening remarks from White's Chocolate-House . . . begin sympathetically enough with a discussion of how late-Roman glory diminished itself. Subsequently follows a letter . . . mocking "Madonella"'s plans to educate women in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, instead of in "Scissors, Needles, and Samplers," clearly a reference to Mary Astell's Chelsea Charity School, which finally opened in June 1709. Among the professors of the institution "is to be a certain Lady, who is newly publishing two of the choicest *Saxon* Novels, which are said to have been in great Repute with the Ladies of Queen *Emma*'s court." Almost certainly this is a reference to Elizabeth Elstob and the "two *Saxon* novels" are her

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[19] As a former fellow of University College, William may have had continued access to the Bodleian's holdings, but university collections were not open to all as exemplified by the experience of George Ballard, who — as an antiquary with low social origins — was first admitted to read there on 9 December 1747 at over 40 years of age and after decades of active research; see Vaisey, "Ballard, George (1705/6–1755)."

[20] Sarah H. Collins, "The Elstobs and the End of the Saxon Revival," in *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: The First Three Centuries*, ed. C.T. Berkhout and M. McCormick Gatch (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), 110.

[21] Ibid., 111-12.

[22] The accumulation of material is evidenced by Elstob's account of losing these papers when a trusted contact moved abroad to the West Indies, after which Elstob could not locate the manuscripts and books in her care; see below, p. 21.

> two publications: the *Essay upon Glory* from the previous year and the *Homily*, which was in the process of appearing.[23]

Alongside meetings at their home and elsewhere in London and Oxford, the Elstobs would certainly have maintained their networks of support via correspondence — especially where contacts could facilitate access to research materials. Glimpses of Elizabeth's communications in this period survive in the collated correspondence of individuals such as Yorkshire antiquary Ralph Thoresby.[24]

In 1715 William died and Elizabeth's life circumstance changed dramatically.[25] Without her brother's income, she fell on hard times, left London, and set up a school for girls in Evesham in Worcestershire under an assumed name, so that she could earn her own living. While little evidence survives of her life during these years, clearly her whereabouts were known to some because, six years after she had presented her transcript of the Kentish Laws to Robert Harley's library, the Old English scholar and palaeographer Humfrey Wanley sent her five guineas as payment, which she received in Evesham.[26] In the year of her brother's death Elstob had published her *Rudiments of Grammar for the Anglo-Saxon Tongue*, but her larger project — an edition of *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies* — lay incomplete.

Whilst much antiquarian scholarship was derided in eighteenth-century popular print as obscure and irrelevant, scholars of Anglo-Saxon knew the worth of their chosen subject.[27] Elizabeth Elstob's publications contributed to a wider field of Anglo-Saxon studies that was riding high in the early 1700s. The Reformation had provided an impetus for research on this period as it was thought that Old English manuscripts might provide a pedigree for some of the religious reforms of that era, most especially concerning the relationship between Church and Crown.[28] Many publications of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were nakedly polemical, but the works of the Saxonists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries offered unprecedented rigour and scope. Nevertheless, scholars such as the Elstobs were motivated by the question of the modern English state and its origins in the textual records left by Anglo-Saxon kings.

This preoccupation found expression in wider cultural production of the period. For example, in John Arbuthnot's *History of John Bull*, published in 1712, the Church of England was pictured as the protagonist's mother — offering, as Emma Major has argued, "an influential familial literary rendering of the relationship between faith and nationhood."[29] In working on Old English, Elstob and her contemporaries saw an opportunity to:

> demonstrate that the pre-Conquest church was the true progenitor of the reformed Church of England, and that the "popish corruptions" of contemporary Catholicism resulted from deplorable continental developments introduced to England in the centuries following the Norman Conquest.[30]

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[23] Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756)," 7.

[24] See R. Thoresby, *Letters of Eminent Men* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1832).

[25] George Hickes died in the same year, leaving Elstob even more unsupported.

[26] See Gretsch, "Elizabeth Elstob" Part I, 175–6, 180 (fn. 62); Elstob had made her copy from the Textus Roffensis — a twelfth-century manuscript.

[27] See Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004) for a comprehensive discussion of the significance of antiquarianism in this period and also Daniel Woolf, "Images of the Antiquary in Seventeenth-Century England" in *Visions of Antiquity: The Society of Antiquaries, 1707–2007*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 2007), 11–43.

[28] C.T. Berkhout and M. McCormick Gatch, eds,, *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: The First Three Centuries* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), ix; T.H. Leinbaugh, "Ælfric's Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae: Anglican Polemic in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" in Berkhout and McCormick Gatch, *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship*, 51–68.

[29] Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712–1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

[30] Gretsch, "Elizabeth Elstob" Part I, 169.

> In the early eighteenth century, these were powerful reasons to take up a line of enquiry, as Elstob argued in the dedicatory epistle she addressed to Queen Anne: "as the Language, in which Your Earliest Royal, and Pious Progenitors, both laid the Foundation of those Laws, by which You so happily Govern, and in which They received that Orthodox Faith, of which You are the undoubted Defender."[31]

The dedication in *An English-Saxon Homily* traces a line of women who all protected and promoted the faith, and Elstob entrusted the continuation of this work to the reigning Queen.[32] As Major has emphasised, much female writing in this period was tethered to the author's sense of herself as a religious subject.[33] In Elstob's case, women are positioned as playing important but varied roles in defending a particular vision of Anglicanism. Men and women throughout the century drew connections between the moral virtue of women, individually or collectively, and the state of the nation. When Elstob's own confidante George Ballard published on the subject of learned women — he positioned them as "trophies or emblems of an idea of the nation" and the women intellectuals who followed Elstob — Elizabeth Montagu, Catherine Talbot, and Hannah More — would draw heavily on themes of gender and nationhood in their writings.[34] For Elstob as a woman scholar, engaged with a subject pertinent to the legitimacy of the Anglican Church in eighteenth-century British society, writing was bound up with issues of religion and nation.

Despite these political motivations, Elstob's scholarship has stood the test of time, and where she made decisions that twenty-first-century scholars would not, she did so in keeping with her male colleagues. For example, Elstob's translation in *An English-Saxon Homily* is based on a transcript despite her having access to the original manuscript, but this approach was common in the period as it communicated respect for a previous scholar's work.[35] Another feature of Elstob's work was her use of the vernacular rather than Latin in her translations of Saxon texts, and this has been cited as evidence of her particular interest in a female readership.[36] However, by the early 1700s scholars had established a tradition of translating Old English into Modern English, one that "comprised texts of paramount religious importance," confirming Elstob's purpose of emphasising "the importance of Ælfric's homily for understanding the origin and development of the English church."[37] Nevertheless, by making the Saxon words readable by all literate men and women, Elstob certainly opened the door to a readership outside of the universities.

Winning Support for Publication

As Paul J. Korshin, Sarah Prescott, and others have shown, far from being in terminal decline in the eighteenth century, patronage proved an adaptable force that continued to exert considerable power over cultural production.[38] Also, in the early eighteenth century, a growing culture of professional authorship was fuelled by the "the first substantial development of a commercial literary marketplace."[39] These dual trends could be mutually reinforcing as patronage fuelled practices such as subscription publishing and offered authors access to useful literary contacts, networks, and booksellers. Within the bluestocking circle, patronage provided to women of lower social status brought a wider range of literary production into the public arena. Montagu supported the work of women in particular, such as Elizabeth Carter, Hester Chapone, Sarah Fielding, and, famously, the "milkwoman poet" Ann Yearsley. Ultimately, Yearsley would accuse her patrons Montagu and Hannah More of fraudulently profiting from her literary successes.[40] Yearsley's example is often used to show that women writers of this period were able to "go it alone" in the literary marketplace, although she was able to do so only because she retained connections to a network of potential subscribers.[41] This example provides several important lessons about the complex role of patronage in the publication of women's writing in eighteenth-century England. Women could certainly benefit from literary patronage but these relationships could become controlling and exploitative. That said, for a woman without private means, building a network of supporters (or patrons) was essential if work was to make the journey from manuscript to print.

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[31] Elstob, *English-Saxon Homily*, epistle dedicatory.

[32] Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756)," 9.

[33] Major, *Madam Britannia*, 8.

[34] Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750–1810* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 50; Major, *Madam Britannia*, esp. 69–96.

[35] Gretsch, "Elizabeth Elstob" Part II, 494.

[36] Norma Clarke, "Elizabeth Elstob (1674–1752): England's First Professional Woman Historian?," *Gender & History* 17, no.1 (2005): 217; most women lacked a training in classical languages.

[37] Gretsch, "Elizabeth Elstob" Part II, 498; Gretsch acknowledges a parallel tradition, established in the previous century, of translating into Latin and suggests that Elstob paid her respects to this scholarly form by including a Latin translation as an appendix.

[38] Paul J. Korshin, "Types of Eighteenth-Century Patronage," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7, no. 4 (1974): 453–73; Sarah Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690–1740* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Elstob was ambitious in her aims but publishing was expensive, so alongside her scholarly work she also actively sought financial support for her forthcoming works. Publishing Anglo-Saxon texts was particularly costly because new sets of letters would have to be prepared especially.[42] As Elizabeth noted in a letter to George Ballard dated 4 September 1736:

> I will acquaint you where the Saxon Letter was Cast, & . . . I will let you know how it came to be cast. That great Patron and Encourager of Letters, The Late Earle of Macclesfield Lord Chancellor of England, hearing that M^r^ Bowyer Printer in White Fryers London wanted a good Saxon Letter, was pleas'd to be at the expence of the set.[43]

Scholars relied upon some combination of patrons, royal favour, and an extensive network of subscribers to ensure work made it into print, and the Elstobs were no exception. While William's income sustained them, it did not provide the necessary funds for specialised publishing. William had tried in vain to gain the favour of "notable patrons of Anglo-Saxon learning" Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer, and the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Thomas Parker.[44] Elizabeth had tried to raise their profile by drawing up a fair copy of "Textus Roffensis" on vellum and presenting it to the Harley Library, but despite Hickes intervening to remind Harley of the gift — the gesture produced no patronage.[45] Elizabeth also applied for the Queen's bounty twice through Harley and was successful the second time, only for the Queen to die shortly before dispatching her favour.[46]

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[39] Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture*, 2.

[40] See Kerri Andrews, *Ann Yearsley and Hannah More, Patronage and Poetry: The Story of a Literary Relationship* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[41] See details of Yearsley's post-More patronage (including her benefactor Frederick Augustus Hervey, Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry to whom *The Rural Lyre* of 1796 was dedicated) in Frank Felsenstein, "Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage — The Thorp Arch Archive, Part I," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 21, no. 2 (2002): 346–92.

[42] As reported in a letter from Ann Granville to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Elizabeth Elstob's *The Rudiments of Grammar* had been "printed in London at her own expense, and the late Lord Chancellor Parker that great encourager of Learning gave the Printer a new set of Saxon Letters for that purpose"; see NUSC, Papers of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, PwE9.

[43] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 29.

[44] Collins, "The Elstobs," 110.

[45] Ibid., 110, 114.

[46] Ibid., 114.

Without the benefits of a significant patron, Elizabeth Elstob relied more on gathering a large network of subscribers. Cautious printers wished to see money up front before embarking on publishing books of this kind. Wealthier scholars might put up the money themselves, others might seek a patron to provide the bulk of the payment, but many used subscription publishing — relying on many individuals paying in advance for the pleasure of receiving a copy of the forthcoming work.[47] As Betty Schellenberg has emphasised, subscription publishing was essentially a "hybrid form of distributed patronage."[48] When Elizabeth published *An English-Saxon Homily* in 1709 she had amassed an impressive list of 268 subscribers, including 116 women. Her subscription network appears also to have drawn on familial connections, as it included twenty-four individuals from Newcastle, including "the mayor, four city aldermen, and four described as merchants."[49]

Despite her proven ability to secure support for her solo projects, Elstob clearly felt the need to market her scholarship to a broader audience of potential subscribers. In 1713, she published *Some Testimonies of Learned Men in Favour of the Intended Edition of the Saxon Homilies*, a text designed to garner financial support for her next publication — an edition of *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*. The preface was addressed to her uncle "the Reverend Charles Elstob, D.D. Prebendary of Canterbury" who had previously subscribed to *An English-Saxon Homily*.[50] The preface declared: "considering how much the Beauty and Expence of the Edition [it] will need all manner of Assistance, from Learned and Generous Persons."[51] In this piece, Elstob suggested that her uncle was one of several significant supporters of her work, an encouraging mentor who had advised on publishing *Some Testimonies* for the purpose of soliciting:

> Half Subscription as soon as may be: because the Editor not being skilled in the Method of soliciting Subscriptions, and not expecting any great Advantage to her self, wou'd at least desire to be indemnified as to the Charge, if she have no other Advantage from the Edition.[52]

Of course, this address was likely included primarily as a means of invoking her uncle's significant clerical authority. Nevertheless, she took the opportunity to demonstrate that her uncle was in good company in his wish to see the "Saxon Homilies" in print, saying:

> you will share with me in this Satisfaction, that you concur with the two Universities in favour of me. The University of *Cambridge*, which hath indulg'd me with the use of the Manuscript from which I take my Copy, hath been already very liberal in her Subscriptions, and promiseth me the Favour of farther Encouragement. And the University of *Oxford*, besides some Subscriptions, and the like kind Promises, hath done me the Honour to cast a new Letter, to engage me to print the Homilies with them.[53]

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[47] See Reginald Northwood Lock, *The Publication of Books by Subscription: A Contribution to the History of the Eighteenth-Century Book Trade* (London: R. Northwood Lock, 1942); Korshin, "Types of Eighteenth-Century Patronage."

[48] Betty A. Schellenberg, "The Professional Female Writer" in *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in Britain, 1660–1789*, ed. Catherine Ingrassia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38.

[49] Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756)," 3.

[50] Charles Elstob had also subscribed to her third published work, the 1709 edition of *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St Gregory*.

[51] Elizabeth Elstob, *Some Testimonies of Learned Men in Favour of the Intended Edition of the Saxon Homilies* (London, 1713), 4.

[52] Ibid., 23.

[53] Ibid., 4–5.

This text reveals Elstob's deft use of her male contacts — familial and scholarly — and the august institutions with which she worked to reinforce both her authority in her discipline and her right to publish her research.

By the time Elstob sought to print her work, both the university presses had taken an interest in publishing on Saxon language and culture, and Elstob expected to publish her work through this channel. In November 1712, she completed a fair copy of a series of homilies and presented them to the Oxford press with a view to gaining their support.[54] The following years brought strife in the form of persecutions of non-juring bishops — which drove Hickes into hiding — and the failure to garner substantial patronage for William. Nevertheless, in early 1715, some promising new proposals arrived for Elizabeth's edition issued by the Oxford press. With this encouraging sign, Elstob's Catholic homilies looked likely to make it into print, but a few months later she was without income and unable to complete the necessary work; her manuscript trails off mid-sentence.[55] As Gretsch has stated, had she been able to complete this edition, it "would have antedated the first critical and annotated edition of that important text by almost three centuries."[56]

In the early eighteenth century, some scholars had tried to convert antiquarian studies into profitable projects by courting a popular readership. As Rosemary Sweet has argued, claiming to reveal the secrets of antiquities could lend a certain prestige to a publication and this could be effectively marketed to readers, often regardless of the quality of scholarship.[57] Thus, modestly priced studies of local areas or cities aimed partially at a tourist market were often successful sellers, but rigorous scholarly publications remained niche.[58] Conversely, some antiquaries strove to reach a broader audience by publishing abridged editions of scholarly works in affordable formats. Elstob's first publication contributed to one such project, her "Athanasian Creed" appearing in William Wotton's *Conspectus breuis* — an abridged version of George Hickes' monumental and prohibitively expensive *Thesaurus* (1703–5).[59] Despite these efforts, Elstob could not hope to earn her living by the pen like Ann Yearsley and others. Instead, her task was to finance expensive book projects which were unlikely to court a mass readership.[60]

Positioning Her Practice

Despite foregrounding politics and religion as a rationale for the study of Anglo-Saxon, Elizabeth Elstob's published writings also defended her position as a woman scholar. Elstob's mentor, Hickes, had been a passionate advocate for female learning, arguing in favour of educational colleges for women, which could help support Anglicanism in the face of religious dissent.[61] Women writers used dedications and prefaces to their publications to serve a range of purposes. Not simply statements of intent, prefatory remarks offered an opportunity to signal the author's familiarity with particular literary cultures and to position their writing accordingly. As Patricia Pender has emphasised, "Early modern women's modesty rhetoric is best understood . . . as the very mark of literariness."[62]

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[54] Hickes refers to this in a letter he wrote to Charlett (Master of University College) and asked him to support the next steps in getting the work into print, see Collins, "The Elstobs," 113.

[55] Collins, "The Elstobs," 114; Gretsch and Collins have both suggested that Elstob received at this time some financial support from George Smalridge, the Bishop of Bristol and an Oxford scholar but that this help was short-lived and likely to have been unequal to the task of discharging Elstob's existing debts.

[56] Gretsch, "Elstob, Elizabeth (1683–1756)."

[57] Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 310.

[58] Ibid., 312.

[59] Likewise, cheaper serialised versions of William Camden's *Britannia* (1586), a large-scale topographical and historical account of Britain and Ireland, were made available to those of more modest means; see Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 310–11.

[60] See Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756)," 3–24.

[61] See George Hickes, "A Sermon Preached at the Church of St. Bridget on Easter-Tuesday Being the 1st April 1684" in *A Collection of Sermons Formerly Preached by the Reverend George Hickes D.D.*, 2 vols., (London, 1713). For background on Hickes' thoughts and communications on female learning see Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 140–3.

The preface to *The Rudiments of Grammar*, addressed to Hickes, raises the issue of female aspiration, reporting that Elstob had been so impressed by a young woman who promised "that she wou'd learn the Saxon Tongue, and do me the Honour to be my Scholar" that she was prompted to "think of composing an English Grammar of that Language for her use."[63] Furthermore, in her lengthy preface to *An English-Saxon Homily* Elstob set out her case for female education vigorously and tackled this issue on the second page:

> For first, I know it will be said, What has a Woman to do with Learning? This I have known urged by some Men, with an Envy unbecoming that greatness of Soul, which is said to dignify their Sex. For if Women may be said to have Souls, and that their Souls are their better part, and that what is Best deserves our greatest Care for its Improvement; furthermore, if good Learning be one of the Soul's greatest Improvements; we must retort the Question. Where is the Fault in Womens seeking after Learning? why are they not to be valu'd for acquiring to themselves the noblest Ornaments? what hurt can this be to themselves? What Disadvantage to others? But there are two things usually opposed against Womens Learning. That it makes them impertinent, and neglect their houshold Affairs. Where this happens it is a Fault. But it is not the Fault of Learning, which rather polishes and refines our Nature, and teaches us that Method and Regularity, which disposes us to greater Readiness and Dexterity in all kinds of Business.[64]

In this way, Elstob faced the critics of female scholarship square on, aligning education with self-betterment and the vitality of the soul. She raised the objections that were most commonly expressed, acknowledged women's responsibilities within the home, and suggested that learning could improve female skills in several arenas, from the domestic to the cerebral. Denying a simple opposition between domestically situated roles and those of the learned lady, Elstob carved out space for women to have "Dexterity in all kinds of Business."[65] The home, after all, was the site of Elstob's own intellectual work.

Whilst much of Elstob's defence of women's learning was aimed at an imagined audience of male critics, she commented "I am more surpriz'd, and even asham'd to find any of the Ladies even more violent than they [men], in carrying on the same Charge."[66] Elstob railed against the "Darkness" of these women's "Ignorance" "for which they are to be pityed, tho' they are not sensible of it."[67] Having taken on some of the substance of the argument against female education, Elstob concluded with an outright condemnation of the ignorant who deny the value of learning in women: "I think the rash Wit, and thoughtless Expressions of such Persons ought not to pass for any thing else but Folly, with those who have any real taste of good Sense or Christian Prudence."[68]

Only after she had established the worth of female learning does Elstob discuss the way she herself came to her chosen subject: "Having accidentally met with a Specimen of K. Alfred's Version of Orosius into

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[62] Patricia Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

[63] Elstob, *Rudiments*, i.

[64] Elstob, *English-Saxon Homily*, ii–iii.

[65] Ibid., iii.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., iii–iv.

[68] Ibid., iv.

Saxon, design'd to be publish'd by a near Relation and Friend, I was very desirous to understand it."[69] This "kind Encourager of my Studies":

> recommended to me the Saxon Heptateuch, most accurately publish'd by Mr. Thwaites. The Matter of that Book being well known and familiar to me, made the reading of it very easy and agreeable: and led me on to the reading of several other Treatises from such ancient Manuscripts as I could meet with. Among these was one I made of the Athanasian Creed, which the great Instaurator of Northern Literature was pleased to accept from me: and to think not unworthy of being publish'd with the Conspectus, or account in Latin, which the Learned Mr. Wotton has given us of his ample and learned Thesaurus Linguarum Vett. Septentrionalium. This great Patron of the Septentrional Studies, hath ever since persevered to encourage my Proceeding in them, and to urge me: that by publishing somewhat in Saxon, I wou'd invite the Ladies to be acquainted with the Language of their Predecessors, and the Original of their Mother Tongue.[70]

In this statement, Elstob underlines the support and encouragement she had received from learned others, her own aptitude for deciphering texts, and the expertise she had developed in Anglo-Saxon literature, which had been acknowledged and approved by its inclusion in a highly respectable publication. Notably, she added that the work she published might reasonably be read by women who could, in turn, learn the Anglo-Saxon language.

Elstob's direct approach to potential criticism is striking. Within the first line of her preface to *An English-Saxon Homily* she anticipated a negative response: "I am very apprehensive of the Expectations of some, and the Censure of others, who shall take this Treatise into their Hands."[71] As Kathryn Sutherland has highlighted, this work did indeed provoke vigorous criticism.[72] The Oxford antiquary Thomas Hearne concluded that the book must have been written by William Elstob and went on to deride it as "mean and little," criticising the "long, tedious Dedication and Preface" and commenting that the book's "odd flights of fancy . . . expose both brother and sister to the reflections of those who are always ready to run down and despise such vain, affected performances."[73] Elstob expected such criticism but in her preface she dismissed such critics, saying:

> Those who please themselves with an Opinion of their own extraordinary Wit or Learning, usually think themselves obliged to overlook all that they do not know themselves, as useless, and impertinent. So that it is not a difficult Matter to foresee, what kind of reception a Work of this Nature will meet with, from the kind of Persons.[74]

Ultimately, Elstob also knew that she could position herself strongly — drawing on the concrete support she had received from high-profile familial and intellectual contacts.

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[69] Ibid., vi.

[70] Ibid., vii.

[71] Ibid., i.

[72] Kathryn Sutherland, "Editing for a New Century: Elizabeth Elstob's Anglo-Saxon Manifesto and Ælfric's St Gregory Homily" in *The Editing of Old English: Papers from the 1990 Manchester Conference*, ed. Don G. Scragg and Paul E. Szarmach (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 213.

[73] Philip Bliss, ed., *Reliquiæ Hernianæ: The Remains of Thomas Hearne* (Oxford, 1862), 1: 166–7.

[74] Elstob, *English-Saxon Homily*, ii.

Reconnecting with Antiquarian Community

George Ballard has been credited with "rediscovering" Elstob, living out her days in straitened circumstances and obscurity in the West Midlands. As Ann Granville (b. 1707) reported in a letter to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland (1715–85):

> I found her mistress of a little school, which supplies her with no more than the base supports of Life, the Loweness of her spirits and tenderness of her constitution require many indulgencies which her small circumstances will not allow of, she has no servant or any other Person to give her the least assistance of any kind, for which reason when she wants health and spirits to provide better for herself she frequently dines upon a toasted peice of bread.[75]

After such a prolific period and the double loss within a year of her brother and her mentor, one can easily imagine the despair that Elstob must have felt as she exchanged her research for teaching in a local school. As she reported to Ballard on 24 December 1736: "where I am placed, is out of the reach of any Manuscripts."[76] Elstob seems to have kept a fairly low social profile in Evesham, and in her first surviving letter to Ballard in 1735 she referred to "the unhappy Circumstances I have labour'd under for several years, which depriv'd me of Leisure to follow those Studies."[77]

Years later, Granville (née Pendarves and Mary Delany's sister) asked Elstob the reason for her "burying her self alive in a little Illiterate Market Town, where no one Person had y^{e} least apprehension of her distinguishing Quallity's" and elicited the following answer:

> she & a Bro.^{r} had left them by a mother a moderate Fortune, but being both very young their Education with other necessary expences rather lessen'd than encreas'd it: they had both the misfortune of very bad health, but her greatest misfortune was her Brothers being placed in London which not only lessen'd his Fortune but shortned his days; he was [bo]rn a child in deep consumption which must be allow'd a very expensive distemper he was kept aliv for several years by art and care to which M^{rs} Elstob's Fortune greatly contributed. After his Death she was resolved to endeavour to live with^{t} being troublesome to any one, and therefore settled where she thought it was the least likely she should be known[78]

Thinking that relations might have helped Elstob, Granville was informed that: "she had then no relations a live nearer than Cousin Germans, who were rich ignorant and proud, their utter neglect of her was one reason for her giving up the world and desiring to pass unknown to the grave."[79] Whilst Elstob had drawn on familial connections to bolster her scholarly legitimacy, it seems she could not rely on family members to lend material support when she lost her income.

Elstob and Ballard corresponded regularly from 1735 to 1740. Ballard's antiquarian research and publishing project, *Memoirs of Several Ladies*, had attracted the interest of a range of women, most of whom lived in the neighbouring counties of Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, and Warwickshire.[80] Through Ballard, Elstob became friends with other intellectually motivated women who appreciated her status as a female scholar, and who sought to improve her situation. In particular, Sarah Chapone (1699–1764), whose letters feature prominently in the Ballard letter book, campaigned on behalf of Elstob, helping to secure her a more comfortable role within the household of the Duchess of Portland — the granddaughter of Robert Harley, whose patronage she had sought many years earlier.

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 31: Elizabeth Elstob to George Ballard, 24 December 1736.

[77] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 3: same to same, 17 August 1735.

[78] NUSC, Papers of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, PwE9.

[79] Ibid.

Elstob's letters to Ballard of the 1730s-50s represent a much more subdued written form when compared with the ambitious published works of her young adulthood. Nevertheless, this correspondence is littered with references to antiquarian concerns and documents a lively exchange not only of letters but also of transcripts, coins, books, and information. Ballard's eager enquiries and facility for connecting people with an interest in history kept Elstob on her toes, as she responded to his requests. Early in their correspondence, Elstob wrote:

> I will endeavour as soon as possibly I can, to oblige you with what you request in a Short Account of my Brothers Life. But you being sensible I have but little time to think or do any thing else, will I hope excuse me, if it is not done so soon as you or I cou'd wish.[81]

Some months later, Elstob acknowledged the loan of a book, but apologised for "Not having had leisure to read through the Annals of Dunstaple, which you were so kind as to lend me," — taking the time to write her letter on a "little Fair day, and the only Holiday which is allow'd to my [school] Children and self."[82] She assured her friend:

> that the Books shall be return'd with my thanks, as soon as I have read them over, and likewise the Beautiful Specimen of the Ingenious M^r Parry's writing, which I took upon with as much delight, as I have formerly view'd the works of Raphael Urban, or Titian, it being as excellent in its kind.[83]

Similarly, on Christmas Eve 1736 Elstob wrote: "I have just run over Rob: de Avesburys Chronicle for the use of which you have my thanks."[84] Interestingly, Elstob did not even have access to her own published work, asking of Ballard in June 1736: "can you put me in a way how to procure my Saxon Grammar it is for my Honourable Friend M^r Hastings, who is desirous to see one. I have employ'd our Bookseller to get me one but without success."[85] Likewise, over three years later, Elstob thanked Ballard for "the sight of the Catalogue" but complained "it is no small concern to me that I do not find my Transcript of the Homilies in the Worthy Gentlemans Custody."[86] By the 1730s, Elstob had lost contact with all the materials she had worked on as a young woman, and when Ballard asked after the manuscripts that were left by her brother, Elstob could only report that they were unrecoverable:

> it is not in my power to give you any satisfaction concerning my Brothers Collections. . . . at my first going into Worcestershire, I intrusted my Manuscripts

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[80] For more on the geography of Ballard's network, see Hannan, "Collaborative Scholarship," 302–5.

[81] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 9: Elizabeth Elstob to George Ballard, 16 November 1735.

[82] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 23: same to same, 9 May 1736.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 31: Elizabeth Elstob to George Ballard, 24 December 1736.

[85] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 25: same to same, 15 June 1736.

[86] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 65: same to same, 26 November 1739.

> and books with several other things in the hands of a Person, with whom I believ'd they wou'd be safe, but to my great surprise and grief I heard soon after she was gone to the West Indies to a Daughter that was settled there and cou'd never hear of her since . . .[87]

Whilst Ballard was very interested in what Elstob could tell him of her own field of expertise, Elstob also engaged with his interest in collecting antiquarian artefacts. She wrote in November 1735:

> I am using my endeavours to procure you some old Coins, I have sent you two or three. The small ones I can make nothing of, and shou'd be glad of your judgement, who understand them so well. I at first thought them no older than the time of the Great Rebellion, when many had the Liberty of Coining their own Money as I have been told. But observing Crowns on one side I alter'd my opinion, well knowing their aversion to that Regal Ornament, and to the Persons that wore them. The other I believe is a Genuine Roman Coin by the Metal, but not being well acquainted with the Faces of the Caesars I can say nothing of it.[88]

Again, in June 1737, Elstob wrote acknowledging Ballard's thanks for another gift:

> Your thanks for the Bundle of trifles which you are pleas'd to call Curiosities put me to the blush, there being not one thing among them worth your acceptance, the little Mochoa Stone indeed may be call'd a Natural Curiosity, it being pretty piece of Natures Work, for the rest, if you have ever a Drawer for trumpery as I believe most Antiquaries have, pray throw them in there.[89]

These letters reveal an important exchange not only in terms of the conversation between antiquaries that Elstob had so missed but also in relation to the friends' habit of sending books, transcriptions of texts, and objects to one another. These were tokens of friendship as much as they were the substance of scholarship but, nonetheless, the correspondence prompted Elstob for the first time in decades to engage directly with her past achievements, divulge her current knowledge, and share with a friend her lifelong interest in the Anglo-Saxon past.

In researching *Memoirs of Several Ladies*, Ballard often asked Elstob her opinion about a particular "learned lady" and he, likewise, shared his findings: "I do assure you S^{r} that this last Favour of your accurate account of the Learned M^{rs} Margaret Roper will be esteem'd by me as a choice curiosity for which I return you a thousand thanks."[90] Elstob was especially invested in the project as she had herself planned such a publication. A year later, she offered her thoughts on the seventeenth-century poet Katherine Philips: "I was always a great admirer of M^{rs} K. Philips's charming performances, and am intirely of your opinion that the Dialogue between Lucasia, and Rosania comes behind none of the rest."[91] Elstob rifled through her papers to dig out details for Ballard: "Looking over some old Letters from some of my Friends a day or two ago, I found the two Prayers written by the Lady Packington if you have them not, I will transcribe them and send them to you."[92] This offer of help was swiftly followed by a request for information: "I shou'd be glad to know what the Manuscript was which you saw in Queens College Archives by that perhaps I may be able to find out how it came [there] which at present I can't guess."[93] Despite the limited time Elstob had for reading and writing, the circulation of historical source material is a prominent theme in these letters.

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[87] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 72: same to same, 21 July 1748.
[88] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 9: same to same, 16 November 1735.
[89] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 42: same to same, 18 June 1737.
[90] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 25: Elizabeth Elstob to George Ballard, 15 June 1736; Margaret Roper (1505–44) was the daughter of the Renaissance humanist Thomas More and a writer and translator in her own right.
[91] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 38: same to same, 8 April 1737.

Patronage in Later Life

By the time Elstob met Ballard, she had been the mistress of an elementary school for nearly twenty years and, when Ballard's contact, Chapone, began to petition for a more advantageous position for Elstob, teaching opportunities came to the fore. Whilst Elstob was keen to stress that she felt her role a worthy one, it clearly rendered her neither materially nor temporally well off. In discussing the possibilities of teaching at another school, Elstob commented: "there are some things to be taught in such a School, which I cannot pretend to, I mean the two Accomplishments of a good House-wife, Spinning and Knitting."[94] Elstob was quick to add that this was not because she thought herself "to be above doing any commendable Work proper for my sex, for I have continually in my thoughts, the Glorious Character of a Virtuous woman Proverbs 31: 13. She seeketh Wool and Flax and worketh willing with her hands."[95] However, she did "not think my self proficient enough in these Arts, to become a teacher of them."[96] Similarly, when Elstob found herself disappointed in her search for a more comfortable position, she reported with a note of cynicism the criticism she had received:

> He tells me mine is a wrong employment to hope for any encouragement in, if I cou'd teach to make Artificial flowers, a bit of Tapistry and the like, I shou'd get more than I shall by instilling the Principles of Religion and Virtue, or improving the Minds of Young Ladies, for those are things little regarded.[97]

Elstob's old concern with the quality of female education continued to plague her. Toward the end of her life, in January 1752, she commiserated with Ballard when he encountered resistance to the publication of his work on learned women: "I am extremely sorry to hear of the disappointments you have met with . . . but am not at all surpriz'd, this is not an Age to hope for any encouragement to Learning of any kind."[98] She reflected on the hostile environment learned women encountered: "For your part I am sory to tell you the ch[allenge] you have made for the Honour of Females was the wrongest subject you co[uld] pitch upon. For you can come into no company of Ladies or Gentlemen, who you shall not hear an open and Vehement exclamation against Learned Women."[99] Elstob closed this letter with a dismal forecast for the future:

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[92] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 89: Elizabeth Elstob to George Ballard, 16 January 1752; Dorothy, Lady Pakington (1623–79) was a writer of religious works.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Bodl., Ballard 43, f.17: Elizabeth Elstob to George Ballard, 7 March 1736.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Bodl., Ballard 43, f.57: same to same, 23 November 1738. These views were reiterated in her letter of 8 November 1738 addressed to Mary Pendarves (later Delany) meant for the attention of the Duchess of Portland, which stated bitterly: "those who spend their whole time and thoughts on cultivating and improving the minds of those committed to their care, in the most material parts of Education, and the most lasting, shall hardly be allow'd a mean subsistence." NUSC, Papers of Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, PwE8.

[98] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 89: same to same, 16 January 1752.

[99] Ibid.

> The prospect I have of [the] next age is a melancholy one to me who wish Learning might flourish to the end of th[e] world, both in men and women, but I shall not live to see it; yet I cannot help la[ment] for those that will and who love Learning as well as you do and as dos
> S^r
> Your Assured Friend and most
> humble servant Eliz: Elstob.[100]

The tone of Elstob's letters contrast with the assertive arguments posed in the first pages of her books. It seems likely that Elizabeth Elstob held mixed feelings about her own experience and its relation with the broader context of female intellectual achievement. Both her published works and her personal letters show a broader register of tone and a more conflicted understanding of the experience of being a woman of learning in the early eighteenth century.

In 1739 Elizabeth Elstob moved from her school in Evesham to Bulstrode Park in Buckinghamshire to tutor the young children of the Duke and Duchess of Portland. The efforts of women such as Chapone, Granville, and Mary Delany (1700–88) had paid off; Elstob had been taken in by the culturally powerful duchess. The nature of this patronage did not, however, help Elstob return to her studies. We see in Elstob's experience of this kind of aristocratic support parallels with the writer Fanny Burney's experiences in the later eighteenth century. Similarly, Burney's appointment as joint Keeper of the Robes to the Queen in the Royal Household had been brokered by Mary Delany and resulted in a period of frustrating social separation. Although during this period Burney did write many volumes of journals and much correspondence, she found the role destroyed her ability to produce more sustained pieces of writing and demanded long hours at the tea table in company unconducive to creative work.[101] In this court role, Burney even lost social status, finding "that the same aristocrats who had vied to cultivate her acquaintance in London would ignore her at Court."[102] The stifling loss of independence that she documented during her time as Keeper of the Robes might well have been appreciated by Elstob as she lived out her days at Bulstrode Park.

Harriet Guest has argued that Elstob "made neither financial nor social capital of her learning."[103] Granville's correspondence certainly suggests that the women of her class who were willing to support Elstob did not think of her "as an equal, or as a companion with whom they could condescend to be on intimate terms."[104] On the other hand, Elstob met with several sympathetic women through Ballard's network, most especially Chapone, but these women were of a lower social standing than Granville and Delany. Despite her connections with Mary Delany and her circle, Chapone was in financially precarious circumstances, bringing up a large family on a small clerical income, and could therefore form a near acquaintance with the impoverished Saxonist.[105] Guest has contrasted Elstob's inability to break into elite intellectual society in later life with the classicist Elizabeth Carter's experiences. Carter was treated by elite bluestocking women "like a mascot, a sign of the learned inclinations of others," Carter herself commenting "for though I am not Minerva, I may make my fortune very prettily as her owl."[106] Whilst Elstob had occupied a place within male, antiquarian networks and had certainly socialised with Astell and her circle, by the 1730s her circumstances were so diminished and her achievements so far behind her that she could not be integrated into fashionable intellectual society.

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Peter Sabor, ed., *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), I: xvii–xix.

[102] Lorna J. Clark, ed., *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), III: xvi.

[103] Guest, *Small Change*, 132.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Thomas Keymer, "Chapone , Sarah (1699–1764)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed 11 August 2017, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39723.

[106] Guest, *Small Change*, 132; Carter quoted by Guest on p. 133.

Elizabeth Elstob died on 30 May 1756 at the age of seventy-two; her last surviving letter to George Ballard is dated 30 January 1753.[107] Whilst Elstob valued the new intellectual companionship that Ballard's friendship had brought and the social contact with a network of women letter-writers, the results of their advocacy had attended to her material well-being over her intellectual satisfaction.

Conclusion

The eighteenth-century scholars who undertook research, translation, and publication in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies were not participating in an obscure corner of antiquarian study, but were engaged with contemporary, political issues. Elizabeth Elstob was no exception and she added to this potent mix an argument in favour of female education. Ultimately, Elstob's downfall was influenced by the trajectory of her chosen specialism. With a cohort of talented scholars, the field reached a high point in the early years of the eighteenth century but between 1710 and 1750 all its major figures were gone, and no new generation had taken up the mantel. Only in the final years of the century did Anglo-Saxon culture come again into vogue, this time fuelled by literary interests and Romanticism rather than antiquarian concerns with English nationalism and religious controversy. By the time the Duchess of Portland could lend Elstob a hand, Anglo-Saxon's star had faded and with it Elizabeth Elstob's cultural capital.

For women's writing of this period, frameworks of analysis emphasising literary production have dominated the historiography, leaving other kinds of intellectual culture and practice less well understood. Through Elstob's example, we can see alternative patterns of antiquarian associational behaviour, whether through the universities, personal visits, the forming of a society, or the frenetic traffic of manuscripts, transcripts, and ideas through correspondence. Not surprisingly, antiquaries made great use of the letter because they relied heavily on building large networks to support their challenging publication projects by subscription. Elstob's publication of *Some Testimonies* showed that she was not complacent and sought to build her support further, despite the successful publication by subscription of *An English-Saxon Homily*. Elstob's life history reveals the extent to which intellectual activity was dependent upon securing a complex combination of scholarly community, (distributed) patronage, financial support, and the trust of key cultural gatekeepers. The loss of any one of these required swift and effective manoeuvring to sustain a scholarly career; poor luck could end it overnight.

In a letter to the Duchess of Portland, advocating for Elstob, Ann Granville acknowledged Elstob's ambivalence about her experience of patronage:

> I then ask'd her [Elstob] if she had made no Friendships with the learned and deserving, many of whom might befound of Both Sexes, who would patronize Persons of worth in distress: she then told me of some Friends she had in the Learned World, but they were either dead or in no condition to help her, but upon that score she acknowledged herself greatly to blame for having neglected several overtures of acquaintance made to her in her Bro^{s} Life time, particularly Lady Betty Hastings, who sent her an invitation by the late ingenious M^{rs} Astell; she excus'd this mistake by saying that she had been almost always Low spirited and sickly

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[107] George Ballard died a year and a half later, in June 1755.

> and ever had a great deal of the Mauvaise Haute; which had shut her out from an acquaintance with those whose characters she most admir'd and honour'd.[108]

For Elstob, Evesham was exile, but there she came to participate in a local network of individuals who were specifically interested in unearthing the lives of learned women. Fittingly, the last surviving letter that Elstob wrote to Ballard noted: "I think every minute lost that hinders me from the pleasure of reading your book."[109] As Carol Pal has observed for an earlier generation of intellectual women, these individuals were "not a small, heroic cadre of brilliant minds, but rather a much more eclectic, diverse, and conflicted assemblage than we have hitherto believed."[110] Elizabeth Elstob's life presents us with just such a "conflicted assemblage," revealing even in times of desperate struggle the complex social cross-currents of eighteenth-century cultural life.

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[108] NUSC, Papers of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, PwE9 1/2.

[109] Bodl., Ballard 43, f. 98: same to same, 30 January 1753.

[110] Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Re-thinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.