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# Anglo-Saxon Chronicle



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**ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE**

(c. 892)



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**ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE**



*By Delphi Classics, 2023*

# COPYRIGHT

## *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*



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## The Translations



*Wantage, a historic market town in Oxfordshire, England — the birthplace of King Alfred the Great, who commissioned 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'*

## Anglo-Saxon Chronicle — James Ingram Translation (1823)



*Translated by J. Ingram, 1823*

A collection of annals in Old English detailing the history of the Anglo-Saxons, the original manuscript of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was created late in the ninth century, probably in Wessex, during the reign of Alfred the Great (871-899). Its content, which incorporated sources now otherwise lost, dating from as early as the seventh century, is known as the ‘Common Stock’. This was edited between 890 and 892, ahead of Bishop Asser’s use of a version of the Common Stock in his 893 work *Life of King Alfred*. Multiple copies were made of that single original and then distributed to monasteries across England, where they were updated, partly independently. These manuscripts collectively are known as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Almost all of the material is given in the form of annals by year; the earliest is dated at 60 BC (the date for Caesar’s invasions of Britain). In one case, the *Chronicle* was still being actively updated as late as 1154.

Nine manuscripts of the *Chronicle* survive in whole or in part, none of which is the original. Seven are held in the British Library, one in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and the oldest is held in the Parker Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The latter manuscript seems to have been started towards the end of Alfred’s reign, while the most recent was copied at Peterborough Abbey, after a fire at that monastery in 1116. Some later medieval chronicles deriving from lost manuscripts contribute occasional further hints concerning *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* material.

These texts are among the most influential historical sources for England between the end of Roman authority and the decades following the Norman Conquest, as much of the information provided is not recorded elsewhere and also due to the relatively clear chronological framework employed in reporting events. Comparisons, of course, have been drawn with Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* — both being regarded as seminal Anglo-Saxon works of history. The text of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tends to be highly politicised, as the Common Stock was primarily intended to legitimise the dynasty and reign of Alfred the Great. Several comparisons between *Chronicle* manuscripts and with other medieval sources demonstrates that the scribes that copied or added to them omitted events or told one-sided versions of them, while providing useful insights into early medieval English politics.

The *Chronicle* manuscripts are also important sources for the history of the English language; in particular, in annals from 1131 onwards, the later Peterborough text provides key evidence for the transition from the standard Old English literary language to early Middle English, containing some of the earliest known Middle English text.

Of the nine surviving manuscripts, seven are written entirely in Old English. The oldest (Corp. Chris. MS 173) is known as the *Winchester Chronicle* or the *Parker Chronicle* (after Matthew Parker, an Archbishop of Canterbury, who once owned it), and is written in Old English until 1070, then Latin to 1075. The surviving manuscripts are listed below; though manuscript G was burned in a fire in 1731 and only a few leaves remain.

Version	Chronicle name	Location	Manuscript
A	<i>Winchester</i> (or <i>Parker</i> )	Parker Library, Corpus Christi	173

	<i>Chronicle</i>	College	
B	<i>Abingdon Chronicle I</i>	British Library	Cotton Tiberius A. vi
C	<i>Abingdon Chronicle II</i>	British Library	Cotton Tiberius B. i
D	<i>Worcester Chronicle</i>	British Library	Cotton Tiberius B. iv
E	<i>Peterborough (or Laud) Chronicle</i>	Bodleian Library	Laud misc. 636
F	<i>Bilingual Canterbury Epitome</i>	British Library	Cotton Domitian A. viii
G or A or W	A copy of the <i>Winchester Chronicle</i>	British Library	Cotton Otho B. xi + Otho B. x
H	<i>Cottonian Fragment</i>	British Library	Cotton Domitian A. ix
I	<i>An Easter Table Chronicle</i>	British Library	Cotton Caligula A. xv

The *Winchester Chronicle* was begun at Old Minster, Winchester, towards the end of Alfred's reign. The manuscript begins with a genealogy of Alfred. The section containing the *Chronicle* takes up folios 1–32. Unlike the other manuscripts, Manuscript A is of an early enough composition to show entries dating back to the late ninth century in the hands of different scribes as the entries were made. The first scribe's hand is dateable to the late ninth or very early tenth century; his entries cease in late 891, and the following entries were made at intervals throughout the tenth century by several scribes. The eighth scribe wrote the annals for the years 925-955, and was clearly at Winchester when he wrote them since he adds some material related to events there; he also uses *ceaster*, or 'city', to imply Winchester. The manuscript becomes independent of the other recensions after the entry for 975. The book was transferred to Canterbury some time in the early eleventh century, as shown by a recorded list of books that Archbishop Parker gave to Corpus Christi.

Chronicle B provides the next instalment of entries with a dual commentary on Edward the Elder (the elder son of Alfred), as well as the activities of his sister, Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians. Chronicle C, believed to be composed at Abingdon Abbey, makes use of the Mercian Register (a group of annals), giving information about Aethelflaed, while also separately focusing on her brother, Edward the Elder and his exploits during the same period. The subsequent Chronicle D, however, shifts its focus and is believed to have been compiled in the North of England, with an emphasis on events in Worcester and York. The entries discuss events in the period from the 1050's to the 1070's, including details such as the coronation of King William I at Westminster Abbey.

Manuscript E, also referred to as the Peterborough Chronicle, is currently held at Oxford's Bodleian Library and was written after a fire at the monastery in 1116. One of the most interesting details within this narrative is its account of the period known as "The Anarchy" under the reign of King Stephen, who had usurped Empress Matilda to the throne. The later Manuscript F, composed at Christ Church, Canterbury in the late eleventh century, is the first of its kind to provide a translation in Latin after each section of Old English.

Today, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* remains one of the few sources pertaining to this eventful period of English history, capturing the unfolding events in the Old English vernacular. Indeed, it is the oldest history of a European country in its vernacular, offering a treasure trove of knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon period. Along with Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the *Chronicle* provides an insight into the history of the English in the period following the Romans right up until the point of the Norman Conquest. It also preserves a variety of depictions of Anglo-Saxon life, not only reflecting the battles, politics and power of kingship, but

the unique mindset of the Anglo-Saxons, who strove to secure their way of life and settle within their own ideals and cultural norms.





*A silver penny depicting King Alfred the Great, British Museum, c. 890. Alfred (c. 849-899) was King of the West Saxons from 871 to 886, and King of the Anglo-Saxons from 886 until his death in 899. Under Alfred's rule, considerable administrative and military reforms were introduced, prompting lasting change in England.*



*The Alfred Jewel, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, which was commissioned by Alfred, probably as a pointer to aid reading*

Ða wæs on mynrecon mine geƿrahte fide 7 ƿelhræf ƿalder  
 dē lēf. aƿeltes on ƿaldan. ƿelapreand wopreates. gleafna  
 godē deora. f ƿaſ gnomung micel. hāfe on breofuā ƿāſ  
 byrnende lufan. me wotē on mode. ƿaſaſ maſida ƿuma.  
 wofide ƿopſeſe. ƿigora ƿaldero. ƿodeſa ƿaderō ſaman  
 hī ƿihte woprae. 7 ƿaſeand eac aƿraepes deommod haled.  
 of lac of eand. of eſi yda geƿeale. of eſi gano dē beð.  
 gamol ƿeax haled. ƿiſ 7 ƿoſa ƿnotop. of eſi ƿeſeſa ge  
 dſung of eſi hræliſ. edel. hama beſeapod. 7 ƿaſeand  
 de yſes. aƿpe on ƿroderum. ſceopra on ſeadole. ſone  
 ſad ƿerhſe. haled hize gleape. hatad ƿro. cometa be  
 naman. cſaſe gleape miſi. ƿiſe ſodboran. ƿaſ geond  
 ƿeſidode. ƿalderōdē ƿraeu. fide geƿrege hunzop  
 of eſi hſuran. 7 ƿe heopona ƿeapō ge bette bſege  
 engla. gſat eſe blyſſe ge h dſi. eſbu enſona. ƿuſh  
 eoſidan ƿeſem ;

AN dcccc. lxxvi.

AN dcccc. lxxvii

AN dcccc. lxxviii Heſeand eadſeapō cyming of ƿlegen. On ſiſ ylean  
gſaſe ƿaſz adelſe edeling hīſ byodop woprae.

AN dcccc. lxxviiii.

AN dcccc. lxxx.

AN dcccc. lxxxi

AN dcccc. lxxxii

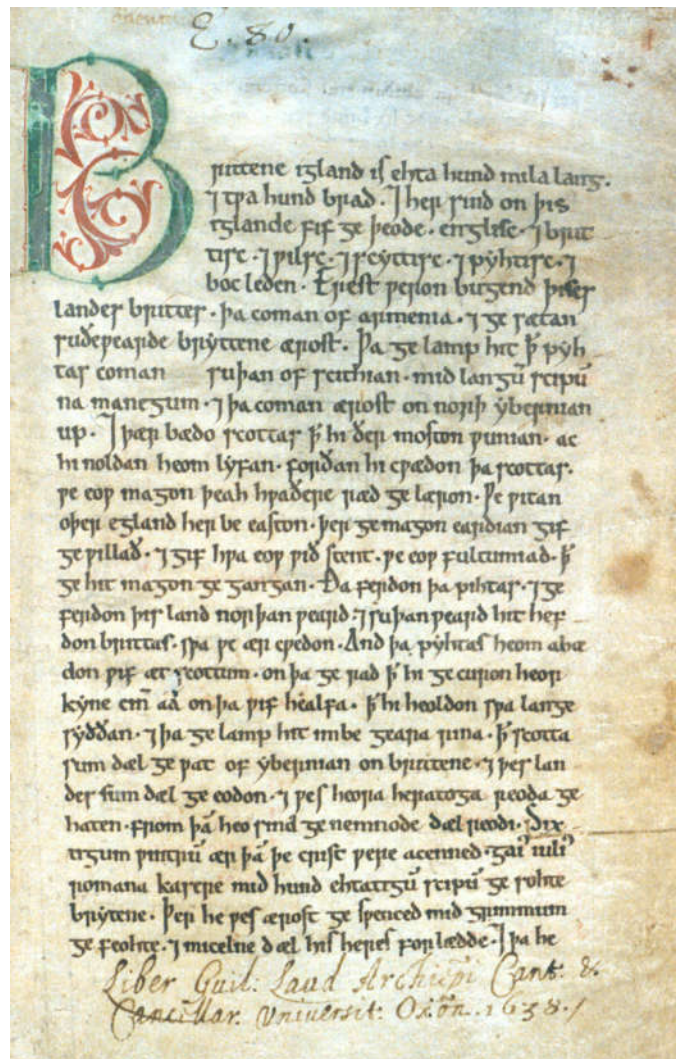
AN dcccc. lxxxiii

AN dcccc. lxxxiiii Heſeand ƿeſe alſeſeſe ƿalderman.

A page from Manuscript A (Winchester) in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge



*Matthew Parker (1504-1575) was the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Church of England from 1559 to his death. He was also an influential theologian and arguably the co-founder (with a previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer and the theologian Richard Hooker) of a distinctive tradition of Anglican theological thought.*



The opening page of Manuscript E in the Bodleian Library, Oxford

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*Eighteenth-century portrait of King Alfred by Samuel Woodforde — Alfred is a key figure of Manuscript A.*



*Æthelflæd (c. 870-918), Lady of the Mercians, depicted in 'The Cartulary and Customs of Abingdon Abbey', c. 1220 — Æthelflæd is an important protagonist of Manuscript B.*





*Thirteenth century depiction of Edward the Elder (c. 874-924), who was King of the Anglo-Saxons from 899 until his death in 924. He is a principle figure of Manuscript C.*

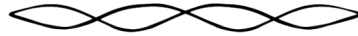


*The coronation of William I (1066), a thirteenth-century illustration from 'Flores Historiarum' by Matthew Paris — the coronation is a key event of Manuscript D*



*King Stephen (1092-1154), as depicted in Matthew Paris' 'Historia Anglorum'. Stephen's reign was marked by the Anarchy, a civil war with his cousin and rival, the Empress Matilda. He is a central figure of Manuscript E.*

## INTRODUCTION



ENGLAND MAY BOAST of two substantial monuments of its early history; to either of which it would not be easy to find a parallel in any nation, ancient or modern. These are, the Record of Doomsday<sup>1</sup> and the “Saxon Chronicle”<sup>2</sup>. The former, which is little more than a statistical survey, but contains the most authentic information relative to the descent of property and the comparative importance of the different parts of the kingdom at a very interesting period, the wisdom and liberality of the British Parliament long since deemed worthy of being printed<sup>3</sup> among the Public Records, by Commissioners appointed for that purpose. The other work, though not treated with absolute neglect, has not received that degree of attention which every person who feels an interest in the events and transactions of former times would naturally expect. In the first place, it has never been printed entire, from a collation of all the MSS. But of the extent of the two former editions, compared with the present, the reader may form some idea, when he is told that Professor Wheloc’s “Chronologia Anglo-Saxonica”, which was the first attempt<sup>4</sup> of the kind, published at Cambridge in 1644, is comprised in less than 62 folio pages, exclusive of the Latin appendix. The improved edition by Edmund Gibson, afterwards Bishop of London, printed at Oxford in 1692, exhibits nearly four times the quantity of the former; but is very far from being the entire<sup>5</sup> chronicle, as the editor considered it. The text of the present edition, it was found, could not be compressed within a shorter compass than 374 pages, though the editor has suppressed many notes and illustrations, which may be thought necessary to the general reader. Some variations in the MSS. may also still remain unnoticed; partly because they were considered of little importance, and partly from an apprehension, lest the commentary, as it sometimes happens, should seem an unwieldy burthen, rather than a necessary appendage, to the text. Indeed, till the editor had made some progress in the work, he could not have imagined that so many original and authentic materials of our history still remained unpublished.

To those who are unacquainted with this monument of our national antiquities, two questions appear requisite to be answered:— “What does it contain?” and, “By whom was it written?” The indulgence of the critical antiquary is solicited, whilst we endeavour to answer, in some degree, each of these questions.

To the first question we answer, that the “Saxon Chronicle” contains the original and authentic testimony of contemporary writers to the most important transactions of our forefathers, both by sea and land, from their first arrival in this country to the year 1154. Were we to descend to particulars, it would require a volume to discuss the great variety of subjects which it embraces. Suffice it to say, that every reader will here find many interesting facts relative to our architecture, our agriculture, our coinage, our commerce, our naval and military glory, our laws, our liberty, and our religion. In this edition, also, will be found numerous specimens of Saxon poetry, never before printed, which might form the ground-work of an introductory volume to Warton’s elaborate annals of English Poetry. Philosophically considered, this ancient record is the second great phenomenon in the history of mankind. For, if we except the sacred annals of the Jews, contained in the several books of the Old Testament, there is no other work extant, ancient or modern, which exhibits at one view a regular and chronological panorama of a PEOPLE, described in rapid succession by different writers, through so many ages, in their own vernacular LANGUAGE. Hence it may

safely be considered, nor only as the *primaeval* source from which all subsequent historians of English affairs have principally derived their materials, and consequently the criterion by which they are to be judged, but also as the faithful depository of our national idiom; affording, at the same time, to the scientific investigator of the human mind a very interesting and extraordinary example of the changes incident to a language, as well as to a nation, in its progress from rudeness to refinement.

But that the reader may more clearly see how much we are indebted to the “Saxon Chronicle”, it will be necessary to examine what is contained in other sources of our history, prior to the accession of Henry II., the period wherein this invaluable record terminates.

The most ancient historian of our own island, whose work has been preserved, is Gildas, who flourished in the latter part of the sixth century. British antiquaries of the present day will doubtless forgive me, if I leave in their original obscurity the prophecies of Merlin, and the exploits of King Arthur, with all the Knights of the Round Table, as scarcely coming within the verge of history. Notwithstanding, also, the authority of Bale, and of the writers whom he follows, I cannot persuade myself to rank Joseph of Arimathea, Arviragus, and Bonduca, or even the Emperor Constantine himself, among the illustrious writers of Great Britain. I begin, therefore, with Gildas; because, though he did not compile a regular history of the island, he has left us, amidst a cumbrous mass of pompous rhapsody and querulous declamation some curious descriptions of the character and manners of the inhabitants; not only the Britons and Saxons, but the Picts and Scots <sup>6</sup>. There are also some parts of his work, almost literally transcribed by Bede, which confirm the brief statements of the “Saxon Chronicle” <sup>7</sup>. But there is, throughout, such a want of precision and simplicity, such a barrenness of facts amidst a multiplicity of words, such a scantiness of names of places and persons, of dates, and other circumstances, that we are obliged to have recourse to the Saxon Annals, or to Venerable Bede, to supply the absence of those two great lights of history — Chronology and Topography.

The next historian worth notice here is Nennius, who is supposed to have flourished in the seventh century: but the work ascribed to him is so full of interpolations and corruptions, introduced by his transcribers, and particularly by a simpleton who is called Samuel, or his master Beulanus, or both, who appear to have lived in the ninth century, that it is difficult to say how much of this motley production is original and authentic. Be that as it may, the writer of the copy printed by Gale bears ample testimony to the “Saxon Chronicle”, and says expressly, that he compiled his history partly from the records of the Scots and Saxons <sup>8</sup>. At the end is a confused but very curious appendix, containing that very genealogy, with some brief notices of Saxon affairs, which the fastidiousness of Beulanus, or of his amanuensis, the aforesaid Samuel, would not allow him to transcribe. This writer, although he professes to be the first historiographer <sup>9</sup> of the Britons, has sometimes repeated the very words of Gildas <sup>10</sup>; whose name is even prefixed to some copies of the work. It is a puerile composition, without judgment, selection, or method <sup>11</sup>; filled with legendary tales of Trojan antiquity, of magical delusion, and of the miraculous exploits of St. Germain and St. Patrick: not to mention those of the valiant Arthur, who is said to have felled to the ground in one day, single-handed, eight hundred and forty Saxons! It is remarkable, that this taste for the marvelous, which does not seem to be adapted to the sober sense of Englishmen, was afterwards revived in all its glory by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the Norman age of credulity and romance.

We come now to a more cheering prospect; and behold a steady light reflected on the “Saxon Chronicle” by the “Ecclesiastical History” of Bede; a writer who, without

the intervention of any legendary tale, truly deserves the title of Venerable <sup>12</sup>. With a store of classical learning not very common in that age, and with a simplicity of language seldom found in monastic Latinity, he has moulded into something like a regular form the scattered fragments of Roman, British, Scottish, and Saxon history. His work, indeed, is professedly ecclesiastical; but, when we consider the prominent station which the Church had at this time assumed in England, we need not be surprised if we find therein the same intermixture of civil, military, and ecclesiastical affairs, which forms so remarkable a feature in the "Saxon Chronicle". Hence Gibson concludes, that many passages of the latter description were derived from the work of Bede <sup>13</sup>. He thinks the same of the description of Britain, the notices of the Roman emperors, and the detail of the first arrival of the Saxons. But, it may be observed, those passages to which he alludes are not to be found in the earlier MSS. The description of Britain, which forms the introduction, and refers us to a period antecedent to the invasion of Julius Caesar; appears only in three copies of the "Chronicle"; two of which are of so late a date as the Norman Conquest, and both derived from the same source. Whatever relates to the succession of the Roman emperors was so universally known, that it must be considered as common property: and so short was the interval between the departure of the Romans and the arrival of the Saxons, that the latter must have preserved amongst them sufficient memorials and traditions to connect their own history with that of their predecessors. Like all rude nations, they were particularly attentive to genealogies; and these, together with the succession of their kings, their battles, and their conquests, must be derived originally from the Saxons themselves, and not from Gildas, or Nennius, or Bede <sup>14</sup>. Gibson himself was so convinced of this, that he afterwards attributes to the "Saxon Chronicle" all the knowledge we have of those early times <sup>15</sup>. Moreover, we might ask, if our whole dependence had been centered in Bede, what would have become of us after his death? <sup>16</sup> Malmsbury indeed asserts, with some degree of vanity, that you will not easily find a Latin historian of English affairs between Bede and himself <sup>17</sup>; and in the fulness of self-complacency professes his determination, "to season with Roman salt the barbarisms of his native tongue!" He affects great contempt for Ethelwerd, whose work will be considered hereafter; and he well knew how unacceptable any praise of the "Saxon Annals" would be to the Normans, with whom he was connected <sup>18</sup>. He thinks it necessary to give his reasons, on one occasion, for inserting from these very "Annals" what he did not find in Bede; though it is obvious, that the best part of his materials, almost to his own times, is derived from the same source.

The object of Bishop Asser, the biographer of Alfred, who comes next in order, was to deliver to posterity a complete memorial of that sovereign, and of the transactions of his reign. To him alone are we indebted for the detail of many interesting circumstances in the life and character of his royal patron <sup>19</sup>; but most of the public transactions will be found in the pages of the "Saxon Chronicle": some passages of which he appears to have translated so literally, that the modern version of Gibson does not more closely represent the original. In the editions of Parker, Camden, and Wise, the last notice of any public event refers to the year 887. The interpolated copy of Gale, called by some Pseudo-Asserius, and by others the Chronicle of St. Neot's, is extended to the year 914 <sup>20</sup>. Much difference of opinion exists respecting this work; into the discussion of which it is not our present purpose to enter. One thing is remarkable: it contains the vision of Drihtelm, copied from Bede, and that of Charles King of the Franks, which Malmsbury thought it worth while to repeat in his "History of the Kings of England". What Gale observes

concerning the “fidelity” with which these annals of Asser are copied by Marianus, is easily explained. They both translated from the “Saxon Chronicle”, as did also Florence of Worcester, who interpolated Marianus; of whom we shall speak hereafter.

But the most faithful and extraordinary follower of the “Saxon Annals” is Ethelwerd; who seems to have disregarded almost all other sources of information. One great error, however, he committed; for which Malmsbury does not spare him. Despairing of the reputation of classical learning, if he had followed the simplicity of the Saxon original, he fell into a sort of measured and inverted prose, peculiar to himself; which, being at first sufficiently obscure, is sometimes rendered almost unintelligible by the incorrect manner in which it has been printed. His authority, nevertheless, in an historical point of view, is very respectable. Being one of the few writers untainted by monastic prejudice<sup>21</sup>, he does not travel out of his way to indulge in legendary tales and romantic visions. Critically considered, his work is the best commentary on the “Saxon Chronicle” to the year 977; at which period one of the MSS. which he seems to have followed, terminates. Brevity and compression seem to have been his aim, because the compilation was intended to be sent abroad for the instruction of a female relative of high rank in Germany<sup>22</sup>, at her request. But there are, nevertheless, some circumstances recorded which are not to be found elsewhere; so that a reference to this epitome of Saxon history will be sometimes useful in illustrating the early part of the “Chronicle”; though Gibson, I know not on what account, has scarcely once quoted it.

During the sanguinary conflicts of the eleventh century, which ended first in the temporary triumph of the Danes, and afterwards in the total subjugation of the country by the Normans, literary pursuits, as might be expected, were so much neglected, that scarcely a Latin writer is to be found: but the “Saxon Chronicle” has preserved a regular and minute detail of occurrences, as they passed along, of which subsequent historians were glad to avail themselves. For nearly a century after the Conquest, the Saxon annalists appear to have been chiefly eye-witnesses of the transactions which they relate<sup>23</sup>. The policy of the Conqueror led him by degrees to employ Saxons as well as Normans: and William II. found them the most faithful of his subjects: but such an influx of foreigners naturally corrupted the ancient language; till at length, after many foreign and domestic wars, tranquillity being restored on the accession of Henry II., literature revived; a taste for composition increased; and the compilation of Latin histories of English and foreign affairs, blended and diversified with the fabled romance and legendary tale, became the ordinary path to distinction. It is remarkable, that when the “Saxon Chronicle” ends, Geoffrey of Monmouth begins. Almost every great monastery about this time had its historian: but some still adhered to the ancient method. Florence of Worcester, an interpolator of Marianus, as we before observed, closely follows Bede, Asser, and the “Saxon Chronicle”<sup>24</sup>. The same may be observed of the annals of Gisburne, of Margan, of Meiros, of Waverley, etc.; some of which are anonymous compilations, whilst others have the name of an author, or rather transcriber; for very few aspired to the character of authors or original historians. Thomas Wikes, a canon of Oseney, who compiled a Latin chronicle of English affairs from the Conquest to the year 1304, tells us expressly, that he did this, not because he could add much to the histories of Bede, William of Newburgh, and Matthew Paris, but “propter minores, quibus non suppetit copia librorum.”<sup>25</sup> Before the invention of printing, it was necessary that numerous copies of historical works should be transcribed, for the instruction of those who had not access to libraries. The transcribers frequently added something of their own, and abridged or omitted what they thought less interesting. Hence the endless variety of interpolators and

deflorators of English history. William of Malmsbury, indeed, deserves to be selected from all his competitors for the superiority of his genius; but he is occasionally inaccurate, and negligent of dates and other minor circumstances; insomuch that his modern translator has corrected some mistakes, and supplied the deficiencies in his chronology, by a reference to the "Saxon Chronicle". Henry of Huntingdon, when he is not transcribing Bede, or translating the "Saxon Annals", may be placed on the same shelf with Geoffrey of Monmouth.

As I have now brought the reader to the period when our "Chronicle" terminates, I shall dismiss without much ceremony the succeeding writers, who have partly borrowed from this source; Simon of Durham, who transcribes Florence of Worcester, the two priors of Hexham, Gervase, Hoveden, Bromton, Stubbes, the two Matthews, of Paris and Westminster, and many others, considering that sufficient has been said to convince those who may not have leisure or opportunity to examine the matter themselves, that however numerous are the Latin historians of English affairs, almost everything original and authentic, and essentially conducive to a correct knowledge of our general history, to the period above mentioned, may be traced to the "Saxon Annals".

It is now time to examine, who were probably the writers of these "Annals". I say probably, because we have very little more than rational conjecture to guide us.

The period antecedent to the times of Bede, except where passages were afterwards inserted, was perhaps little else, originally, than a kind of chronological table of events, with a few genealogies, and notices of the death and succession of kings and other distinguished personages. But it is evident from the preface of Bede and from many passages in his work, that he received considerable assistance from Saxon bishops, abbots, and others; who not only communicated certain traditionary facts "viva voce", but also transmitted to him many written documents. These, therefore, must have been the early chronicles of Wessex, of Kent, and of the other provinces of the Heptarchy; which formed together the ground-work of his history. With greater honesty than most of his followers, he has given us the names of those learned persons who assisted him with this local information. The first is Alcuinus or Albinus, an abbot of Canterbury, at whose instigation he undertook the work; who sent by Nothelm, afterwards archbishop of that province, a full account of all ecclesiastical transactions in Kent, and in the contiguous districts, from the first conversion of the Saxons. From the same source he partly derived his information respecting the provinces of Essex, Wessex, East Anglia, and Northumbria. Bishop Daniel communicated to him by letter many particulars concerning Wessex, Sussex, and the Isle of Wight. He acknowledges assistance more than once "ex scriptis priorum"; and there is every reason to believe that some of these preceding records were the "Anglo-Saxon Annals"; for we have already seen that such records were in existence before the age of Nennius. In proof of this we may observe, that even the phraseology sometimes partakes more of the Saxon idiom than the Latin. If, therefore, it be admitted, as there is every reason to conclude from the foregoing remarks, that certain succinct and chronological arrangements of historical facts had taken place in several provinces of the Heptarchy before the time of Bede, let us inquire by whom they were likely to have been made.

In the province of Kent, the first person on record, who is celebrated for his learning, is Tobias, the ninth bishop of Rochester, who succeeded to that see in 693. He is noticed by Bede as not only furnished with an ample store of Greek and Latin literature, but skilled also in the Saxon language and erudition<sup>26</sup>. It is probable, therefore, that he left some proofs of this attention to his native language and as he



died within a few years of Bede, the latter would naturally avail himself of his labours. It is worthy also of remark, that Bertwald, who succeeded to the illustrious Theodore of Tarsus in 690, was the first English or Saxon archbishop of Canterbury. From this period, consequently, we may date that cultivation of the vernacular tongue which would lead to the composition of brief chronicles<sup>27</sup>, and other vehicles of instruction, necessary for the improvement of a rude and illiterate people. The first chronicles were, perhaps, those of Kent or Wessex; which seem to have been regularly continued, at intervals, by the archbishops of Canterbury, or by their direction<sup>28</sup>, at least as far as the year 1001, or by even 1070; for the Benet MS., which some call the Plegmund MS., ends in the latter year; the rest being in Latin. From internal evidence indeed, of an indirect nature, there is great reason to presume, that Archbishop Plegmund transcribed or superintended this very copy of the "Saxon Annals" to the year 891<sup>29</sup>; the year in which he came to the see; inserting, both before and after this date, to the time of his death in 923, such additional materials as he was well qualified to furnish from his high station and learning, and the confidential intercourse which he enjoyed in the court of King Alfred. The total omission of his own name, except by another hand, affords indirect evidence of some importance in support of this conjecture. Whether King Alfred himself was the author of a distinct and separate chronicle of Wessex<sup>30</sup>, cannot now be determined. That he furnished additional supplies of historical matter to the older chronicles is, I conceive, sufficiently obvious to every reader who will take the trouble of examining the subject. The argument of Dr. Beeke, the present Dean of Bristol, in an obliging letter to the editor on this subject, is not without its force; — that it is extremely improbable, when we consider the number and variety of King Alfred's works, that he should have neglected the history, of his own country. Besides a genealogy of the kings of Wessex from Cerdic to his own time, which seems never to have been incorporated with any MS. of the "Saxon Chronicle", though prefixed or annexed to several, he undoubtedly preserved many traditionary facts; with a full and circumstantial detail of his own operations, as well as those of his father, brother, and other members of his family; which scarcely any other person than himself could have supplied. To doubt this would be as incredulous a thing as to deny that Xenophon wrote his "Anabasis", or Caesar his "Commentaries". From the time of Alfred and Plegmund to a few years after the Norman Conquest, these chronicles seem to have been continued by different hands, under the auspices of such men as Archbishops Dunstan, Aelfric, and others, whose characters have been much misrepresented by ignorance and scepticism on the one hand; as well as by mistaken zeal and devotion on the other. The indirect evidence respecting Dunstan and Aelfric is as curious as that concerning Plegmund; but the discussion of it would lead us into a wide and barren field of investigation; nor is this the place to refute the errors of Hickes, Cave, and Wharton, already noticed by Wanley in his preface. The chronicles of Abingdon, of Worcester, of Peterborough, and others, are continued in the same manner by different hands; partly, though not exclusively, by monks of those monasteries, who very naturally inserted many particulars relating to their own local interests and concerns; which, so far from invalidating the general history, render it more interesting and valuable. It would be a vain and frivolous attempt ascribe these latter compilations to particular persons<sup>31</sup>, where there were evidently so many contributors; but that they were successively furnished by contemporary writers, many of whom were eye-witnesses of the events and transactions which they relate, there is abundance of internal evidence to convince us. Many instances of this the editor had taken some pains to collect, in order to lay them before the reader in the

preface; but they are so numerous that the subject would necessarily become tedious; and therefore every reader must be left to find them for himself. They will amply repay him for his trouble, if he takes any interest in the early history of England, or in the general construction of authentic history of any kind. He will see plagiarisms without end in the Latin histories, and will be in no danger of falling into the errors of Gale and others; not to mention those of our historians who were not professed antiquaries, who mistook that for original and authentic testimony which was only translated. It is remarkable that the “Saxon Chronicle” gradually expires with the Saxon language, almost melted into modern English, in the year 1154. From this period almost to the Reformation, whatever knowledge we have of the affairs of England has been originally derived either from the semi-barbarous Latin of our own countrymen, or from the French chronicles of Froissart and others.

The revival of good taste and of good sense, and of the good old custom adopted by most nations of the civilised world — that of writing their own history in their own language — was happily exemplified at length in the laborious works of our English chroniclers and historians.

Many have since followed in the same track; and the importance of the whole body of English History has attracted and employed the imagination of Milton, the philosophy of Hume, the simplicity of Goldsmith, the industry of Henry, the research of Turner, and the patience of Lingard. The pages of these writers, however, accurate and luminous as they generally are, as well as those of Brady, Tyrrell, Carte, Rapin, and others, not to mention those in black letter, still require correction from the “Saxon Chronicle”; without which no person, however learned, can possess anything beyond a superficial acquaintance with the elements of English History, and of the British Constitution.

Some remarks may here be requisite on the CHRONOLOGY of the “Saxon Chronicle”. In the early part of it <sup>32</sup> the reader will observe a reference to the grand epoch of the creation of the world. So also in Ethelwerd, who closely follows the “Saxon Annals”. It is allowed by all, that considerable difficulty has occurred in fixing the true epoch of Christ’s nativity <sup>33</sup>, because the Christian aera was not used at all till about the year 532 <sup>34</sup>, when it was introduced by Dionysius Exiguus; whose code of canon law, joined afterwards with the decretals of the popes, became as much the standard of authority in ecclesiastical matters as the pandects of Justinian among civilians. But it does not appear that in the Saxon mode of computation this system of chronology was implicitly followed. We mention this circumstance, however, not with a view of settling the point of difference, which would not be easy, but merely to account for those variations observable in different MSS.; which arose, not only from the common mistakes or inadvertencies of transcribers, but from the liberty which the original writers themselves sometimes assumed in this country, of computing the current year according to their own ephemeral or local custom. Some began with the Incarnation or Nativity of Christ; some with the Circumcision, which accords with the solar year of the Romans as now restored; whilst others commenced with the Annunciation; a custom which became very prevalent in honour of the Virgin Mary, and was not formally abolished here till the year 1752; when the Gregorian calendar, commonly called the New Style, was substituted by Act of Parliament for the Dionysian. This diversity of computation would alone occasion some confusion; but in addition to this, the INDICATION, or cycle of fifteen years, which is mentioned in the latter part of the “Saxon Chronicle”, was carried back three years before the vulgar aera, and commenced in different places at four different periods of the year! But it is very remarkable that, whatever was the commencement of the year in the

early part of the “Saxon Chronicle”, in the latter part the year invariably opens with Midwinter-day or the Nativity. Gervase of Canterbury, whose Latin chronicle ends in 1199, the aera of “legal” memory, had formed a design, as he tells us, of regulating his chronology by the Annunciation; but from an honest fear of falsifying dates he abandoned his first intention, and acquiesced in the practice of his predecessors; who for the most part, he says, began the new year with the Nativity<sup>35</sup>.

Having said thus much in illustration of the work itself, we must necessarily be brief in our account of the present edition. It was contemplated many years since, amidst a constant succession of other occupations; but nothing was then projected beyond a reprint of Gibson, substituting an English translation for the Latin. The indulgence of the Saxon scholar is therefore requested, if we have in the early part of the chronicle too faithfully followed the received text. By some readers no apology of this kind will be deemed necessary; but something may be expected in extenuation of the delay which has retarded the publication. The causes of that delay must be chiefly sought in the nature of the work itself. New types were to be cast; compositors to be instructed in a department entirely new to them; manuscripts to be compared, collated, transcribed; the text to be revised throughout; various readings of great intricacy to be carefully presented, with considerable additions from unpublished sources; for, however unimportant some may at first sight appear, the most trivial may be of use. With such and other difficulties before him, the editor has, nevertheless, been blessed with health and leisure sufficient to overcome them; and he may now say with Gervase the monk at the end of his first chronicle,

“Finito libro reddatur gratia Christo.”<sup>36</sup>

Of the translation it is enough to observe, that it is made as literal as possible, with a view of rendering the original easy to those who are at present unacquainted with the Saxon language. By this method also the connection between the ancient and modern language will be more obvious. The same method has been adopted in an unpublished translation of Gibson’s “Chronicle” by the late Mr. Cough, now in the Bodleian Library. But the honour of having printed the first literal version of the “Saxon Annals” was reserved for a learned LADY, the Elstob of her age<sup>37</sup>; whose Work was finished in the year 1819. These translations, however, do not interfere with that in the present edition; because they contain nothing but what is found in the printed texts, and are neither accompanied with the original, nor with any collation of MSS.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Whatever was the origin of this title, by which it is now distinguished, in an appendix to the work itself it is called "Liber de Wintonia," or "The Winchester-Book," from its first place of custody.

<sup>2</sup> This title is retained, in compliance with custom, though it is a collection of chronicles, rather than one uniform work, as the received appellation seems to imply.

<sup>3</sup> In two volumes folio, with the following title: "Domesday- Book, seu Liber Censualis Willelmi Primi Regis Angliae, inter Archlyos Regni in Domo Capitulari Westmonasterii asservatus: jubente rege augustissimo Georgio Tertio praelo mandatus typis MDCCLXXXIII"

<sup>4</sup> Gerard Langbaine had projected such a work, and had made considerable progress in the collation of MSS., when he found himself anticipated by Wheloc.

<sup>5</sup> "Nunc primum integrum edidit" is Gibson's expression in the title-page. He considers Wheloc's MSS. as fragments, rather than entire chronicles: "quod integrum nacti jam discimus." These M

SS., however, were of the first authority, and not less entire, as far as they went, than his own favourite "Laud". But the candid critic will make allowance for the zeal of a young Bachelor of Queen's, who, it must be remembered, had scarcely attained the age of twenty-three when this extraordinary work was produced.

<sup>6</sup> The reader is forcibly reminded of the national dress of the Highlanders in the following singular passage: "furciferos magis vultus pilis, quam corporum pudenda, pudendis proxima, vestibus tegentes."

<sup>7</sup> See particularly capp. xxiii. and xxvi. The work which follows, called the "Epistle of Gildas", is little more than a cento of quotations from the Old and New Testament.

<sup>8</sup> "De historiis Scotorum Saxonumque, licet inimicorum," etc. "Hist. Brit. ap." Gale, XV. Script. p. 93. See also p. 94 of the same work; where the writer notices the absence of all written memorials among the Britons, and attributes it to the frequent recurrence of war and pestilence. A new edition has been prepared from a Vatican MS. with a translation and notes by the Rev. W. Gunn, and published by J. and A. Arch.

<sup>9</sup> "Malo me historiographum quam neminem," etc.

<sup>10</sup> He considered his work, perhaps, as a lamentation of declamation, rather than a history. But Bede dignifies him with the title of "historicus," though he writes "fiebili sermone."

<sup>11</sup> But it is probable that the work is come down to us in a garbled and imperfect state.

<sup>12</sup> There is an absurd story of a monk, who in vain attempting to write his epitaph, fell asleep, leaving it thus: "Hac sunt in fossa Bedae. ossa:" but, when he awoke, to his great surprise and satisfaction he found the long-sought epithet supplied by an angelic hand, the whole line standing thus: "Hac sunt in fossa Bedae venerabilis ossa."

<sup>13</sup> See the preface to his edition of the "Saxon Chronicle".

<sup>14</sup> This will be proved more fully when we come to speak of the writers of the "Saxon Chronicle".

<sup>15</sup> Preface, "ubi supra".

<sup>16</sup> He died A.D. 734, according to our chronicle; but some place his death to the following year.

<sup>17</sup> This circumstance alone proves the value of the "Saxon Chronicle". In the "Edinburgh Chronicle" of St. Cross, printed by H. Wharton, there is a chasm from the death of Bede to the year 1065; a period of 330 years.

<sup>18</sup> The cold and reluctant manner in which he mentions the "Saxon Annals", to which he was so much indebted, can only be ascribed to this cause in him, as well as in the other Latin historians. See his prologue to the first book, "De Gestis Regum," etc.

<sup>19</sup> If there are additional anecdotes in the Chronicle of St. Neot's, which is supposed to have been so called by Leland because he found the MS. there, it must be remembered that this work is considered an interpolated Asser.

<sup>20</sup> The death of Asser himself is recorded in the year 909; but this is no more a proof that the whole work is spurious, than the character and burial of Moses, described in the latter part of the book of "Deuteronomy", would go to prove that the Pentateuch was not written by him. See Bishop Watson's "Apology for the Bible".

<sup>21</sup> Malmsbury calls him "noble and magnificent," with reference to his rank; for he was descended from King Alfred: but he forgets his peculiar praise — that of being the only Latin historian for two centuries; though, like Xenophon, Caesar, and Alfred, he wielded the sword as much as the pen.

<sup>22</sup> This was no less a personage than Matilda, the daughter of Otho the Great, Emperor of Germany, by his first Empress Eadgitha or Editha; who is mentioned in the "Saxon Chronicle", A.D. 925, though not by name, as given to Otho by her brother, King Athelstan. Ethelwerd adds, in his epistle to Matilda, that Athelstan sent two sisters, in order that the emperor might take his choice; and that he preferred the mother of Matilda.

<sup>23</sup> See particularly the character of William I. p. 294, written by one who was in his court. The compiler of the "Waverley Annals" we find literally translating it more than a century afterwards:— "nos dicemus, qui eum vidimus, et in curia ejus aliquando fuimus," etc. — Gale, ii. 134.

<sup>24</sup> His work, which is very faithfully and diligently compiled, ends in the year 1117; but it is continued by another hand to the imprisonment of King Stephen.

<sup>25</sup> "Chron. ap." Gale, ii. 21.

<sup>26</sup> "Virum Latina, Graec, et Saxonica lingua atque eruditione multipliciter instructum." — Bede, "Ecclesiastical History", v. 8. "Chron. S. Crucis Edinb. ap.", Wharton, i. 157.

<sup>27</sup> The materials, however, though not regularly arranged, must be traced to a much higher source.

<sup>28</sup> Josselyn collated two Kentish MSS. of the first authority; one of which he calls the History or Chronicle of St. Augustine's, the other that of Christ Church, Canterbury. The former was perhaps the one marked in our series "C.T."A VI.; the latter the Benet or Plegmund MS.

<sup>29</sup> Wanley observes, that the Benet MS. is written in one and the same hand to this year, and in hands equally ancient to the year 924; after which it is continued in different hands to the end. Vid. "Cat." p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> Florence of Worcester, in ascertaining the succession of the kings of Wessex, refers expressly to the "Dicta Aelfredi". Ethelwerd had before acknowledged that he reported many things— "sicut docuere parentes;" and then he immediately adds, "Scilicet Aelfred rex Athulfi regis filius; ex quo nos originem trahimus." Vid. Prol.

<sup>31</sup> Hickes supposed the Laud or Peterborough Chronicle to have been compiled by Hugo Candidus (Albus, or White), or some other monk of that house.

<sup>32</sup> See A.D. xxxiii., the era of Christ's crucifixion, p. 23, and the notes below.

<sup>33</sup> See Playfair's "System of Chronology", p. 49.

<sup>34</sup> Playfair says 527: but I follow Bede, Florence of Worcester, and others, who affirm that the great paschal cycle of Dionysius commenced from the year of our Lord's incarnation 532 — the year in which the code of Justinian was promulgated. "Vid. Flor. an." 532, 1064, and 1073. See also M. West. "an." 532.

<sup>35</sup> "Vid. Prol. in Chron." Bervas. "ap. X." Script. p. 1338.

<sup>36</sup> Often did the editor, during the progress of the work, sympathise with the printer; who, in answer to his urgent importunities to hasten the work, replied once in the classical language of Manutius: "Precor, ut occupationibus meis ignoscas; premor enim oneribus, et typographiae cura, ut vix sustineam." Who could be angry after this?

<sup>37</sup> Miss Gurney, of Keswick, Norfolk. The work, however, was not published.

DELPHI  CLASSICS

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