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Volume 1: Original Texts

Edited and translated by Benjamin Thorpe

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Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores, or The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages, usually referred to as the 'Rolls Series', was an ambitious project first proposed to the British Treasury in 1857 by Sir John Romilly, the Master of the Rolls, and quickly approved for public funding. Its purpose was to publish historical source material covering the period from the arrival of the Romans to the reign of Henry VIII, 'without mutilation or abridgement', starting with the 'most scarce and valuable' texts. A 'correct text' of each work would be established by collating 'the best manuscripts', and information was to be included in every case about the manuscripts used, the life and times of the author, and the work's 'historical credibility', but there would be no additional annotation. The first books were published in 1858, and by the time it was completed in 1896 the series contained 99 titles and 255 volumes. Although many of the works have since been re-edited by modern scholars, the enterprise as a whole stands as a testament to the Victorian revival of interest in the middle ages.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Benjamin Thorpe (1781/2–1870) was a scholar of Old English and Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Munich. Through his work, he sought to promote the study of the old vernacular, against the trend of scholarly apathy towards Anglo-Saxon literature. One of his greatest contributions was this two-volume edition, published as part of the Rolls Series in 1861, of the oldest and most important chronological accounts of Anglo-Saxon affairs. Covering the period from Julius Caesar's invasion of Britain to around the accession of Henry II in 1154, this volume brings together seven manuscripts in their entirety, arranged in columns to illustrate variation, and given in the original Old English with notes. As none are the original, the authorship is unknown, although Thorpe argues that several elements indicate the influence of King Alfred (848/9–899) upon the chronicle's compilation. The text provides rich insights into Old English language, dialect and history.

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RERUM BRITANNICARUM MEDII ÆVI
SCRIPTORES,

OR

CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND

DURING

THE MIDDLE AGES.

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DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY OF HER MAJESTY'S TREASURY, UNDER THE
DIRECTION OF THE MASTER OF THE ROLLS.

ON the 26th of January 1857, the Master of the Rolls submitted to the Treasury a proposal for the publication of materials for the History of this Country from the Invasion of the Romans to the Reign of Henry VIII.

The Master of the Rolls suggested that these materials should be selected for publication under competent editors without reference to periodical or chronological arrangement, without mutilation or abridgment, preference being given, in the first instance, to such materials as were most scarce and valuable.

He proposed that each chronicle or historical document to be edited should be treated in the same way as if the editor were engaged on an *Editio Princeps*; and for this purpose the most correct text should be formed from an accurate collation of the best MSS.

To render the work more generally useful, the Master of the Rolls suggested that the editor should give an account of the MSS. employed by him, of their age and their peculiarities; that he should add to the work a brief account of the life and times of the author, and any remarks necessary to explain the chronology; but no other note or comment was to be allowed, except what might be necessary to establish the correctness of the text.

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The works to be published in octavo, separately, as they were finished; the whole responsibility of the task resting upon the editors, who were to be chosen by the Master of the Rolls with the sanction of the Treasury.

The Lords of Her Majesty's Treasury, after a careful consideration of the subject, expressed their opinion in a Treasury Minute, dated February 9, 1857, that the plan recommended by the Master of the Rolls "was well calculated for the accomplishment of this important national object, in an effectual and satisfactory manner, within a reasonable time, and provided proper attention be paid to economy, in making the detailed arrangements, without unnecessary expense."

They expressed their approbation of the proposal that each chronicle and historical document should be edited in such a manner as to represent with all possible correctness the text of each writer, derived from a collation of the best MSS., and that no notes should be added, except such as were illustrative of the various readings. They suggested, however, that the preface to each work should contain, in addition to the particulars proposed by the Master of the Rolls, a biographical account of the author, so far as authentic materials existed for that purpose, and an estimate of his historical credibility and value.

Rolls House,
December 1857.

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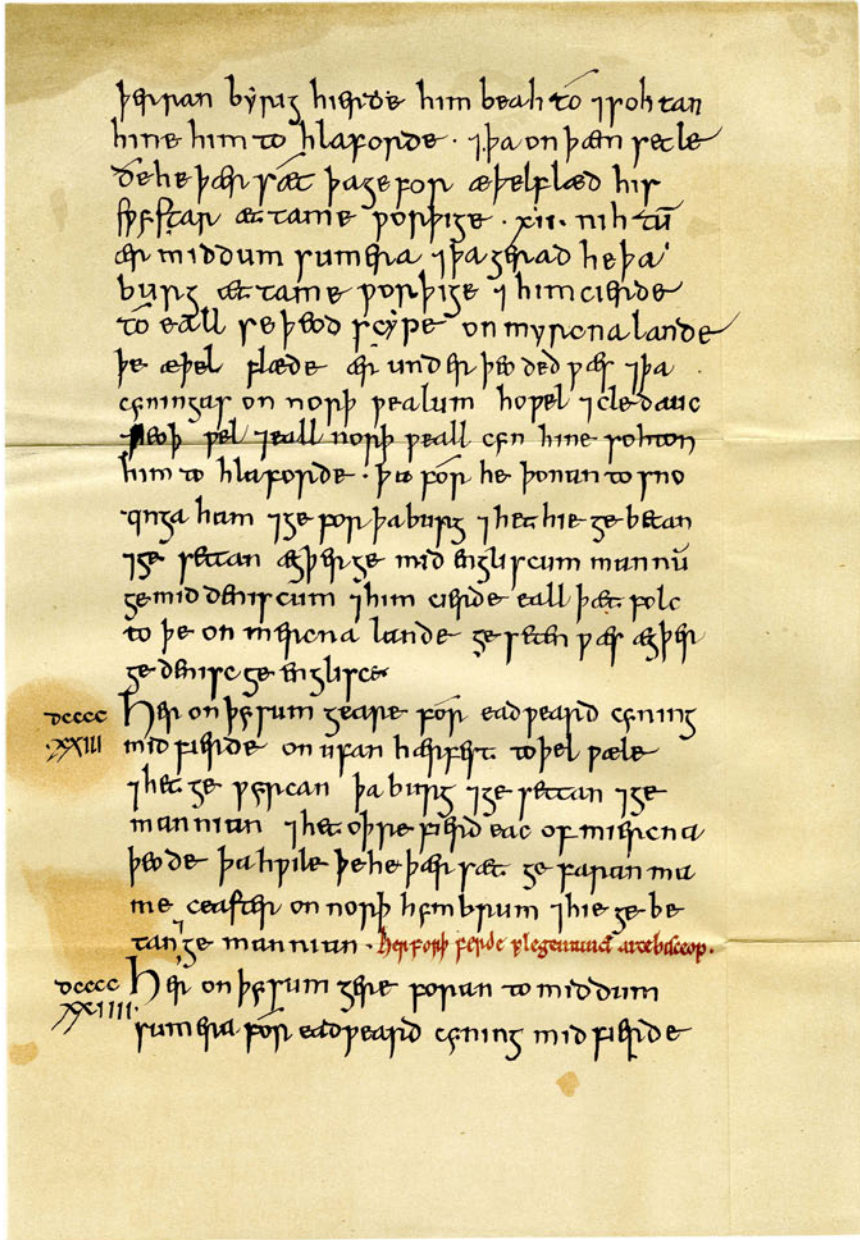
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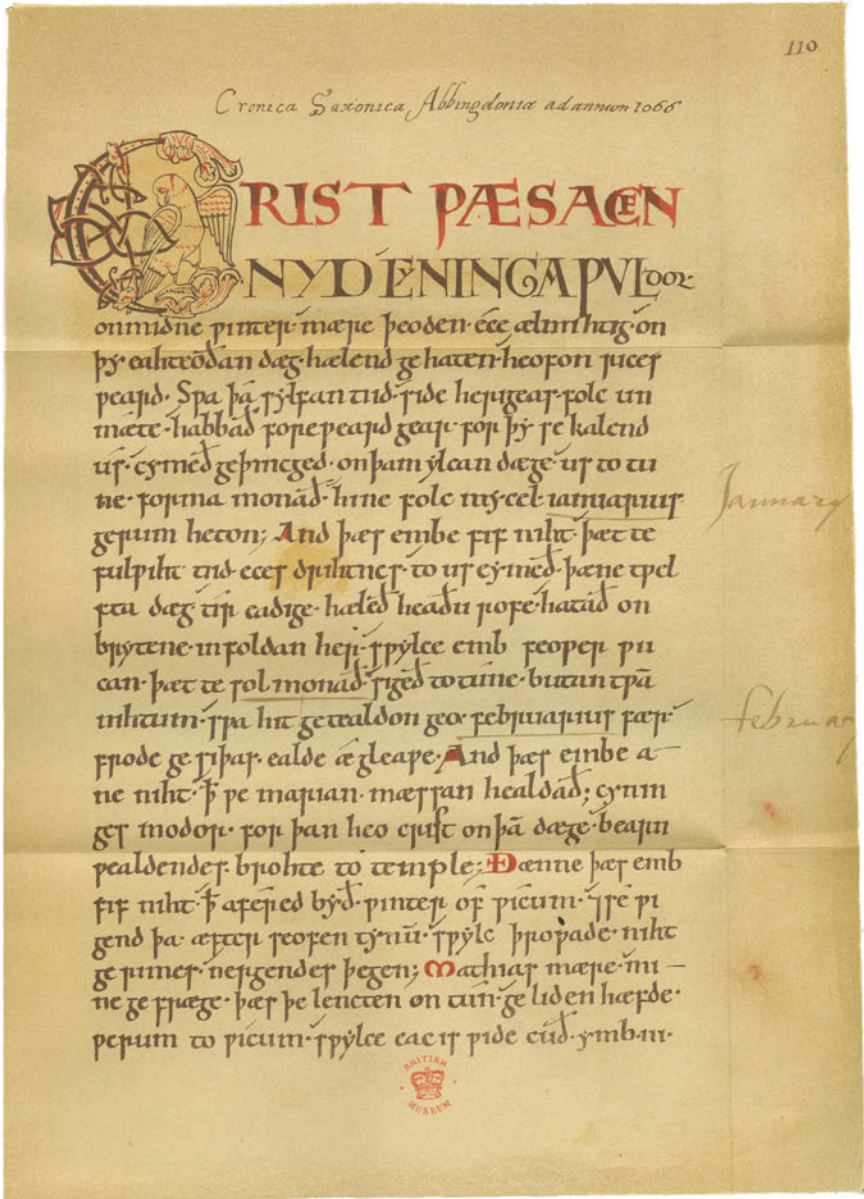
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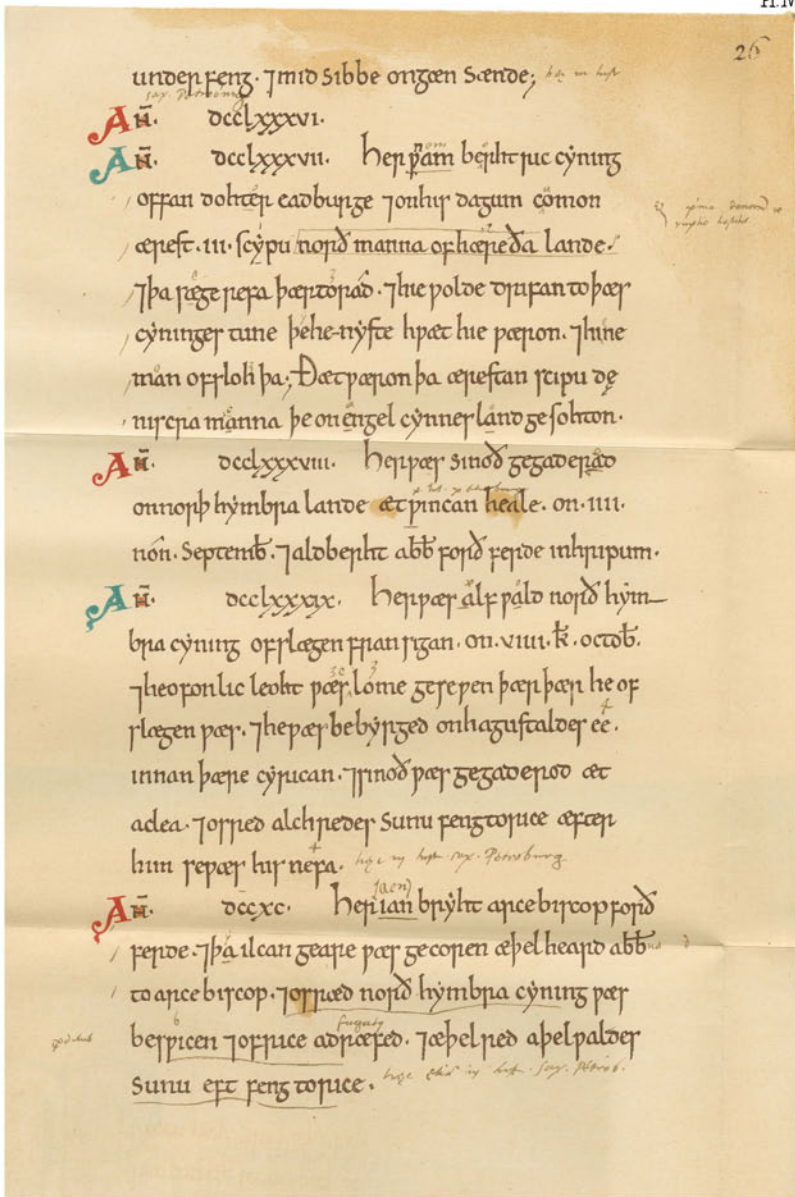
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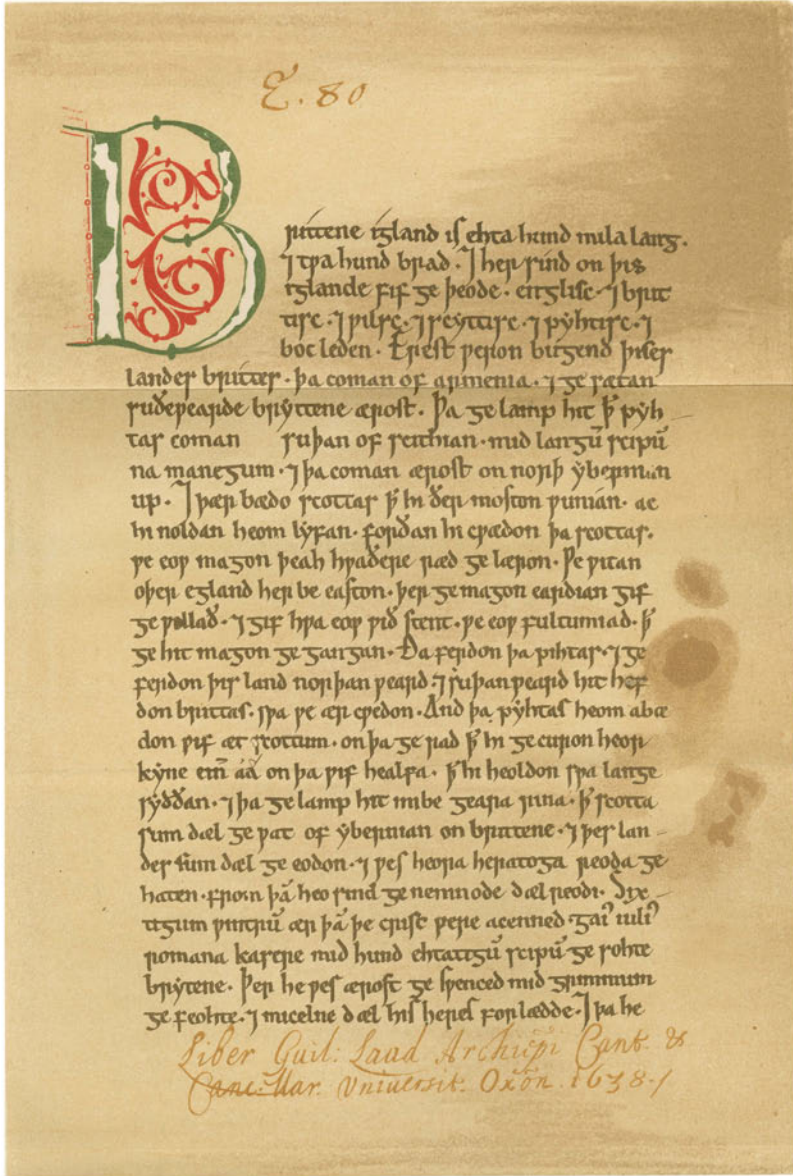
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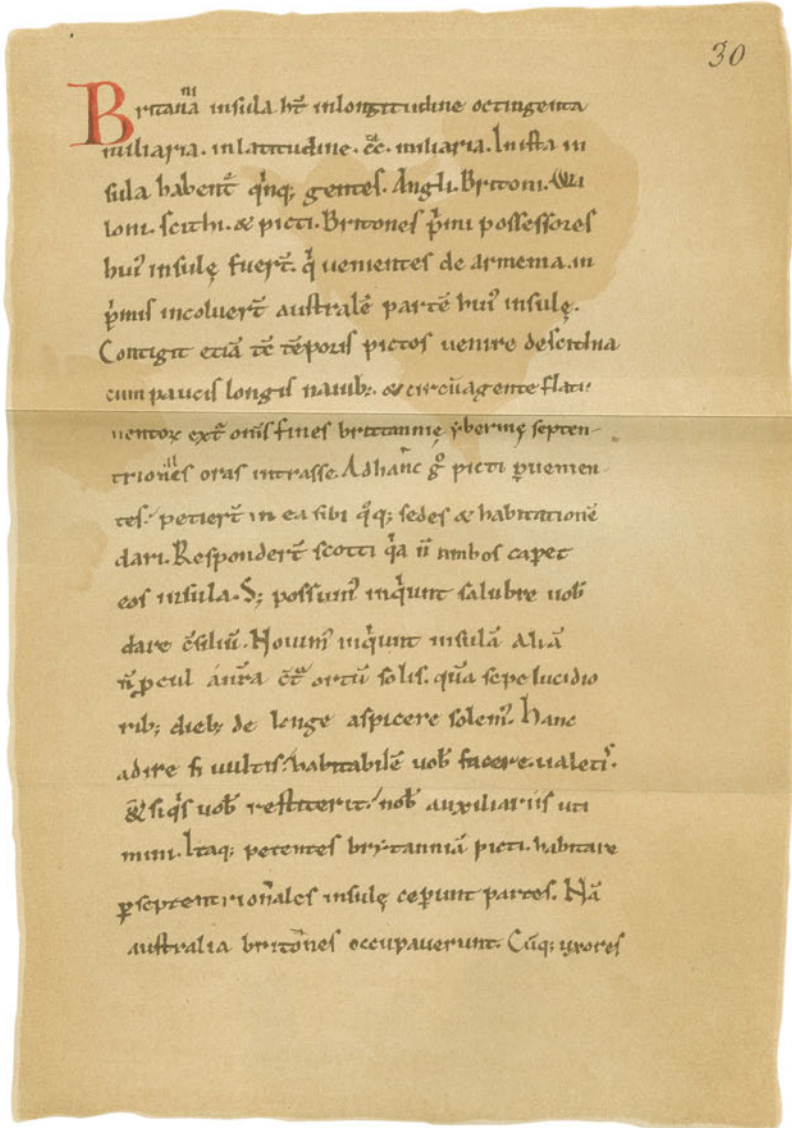
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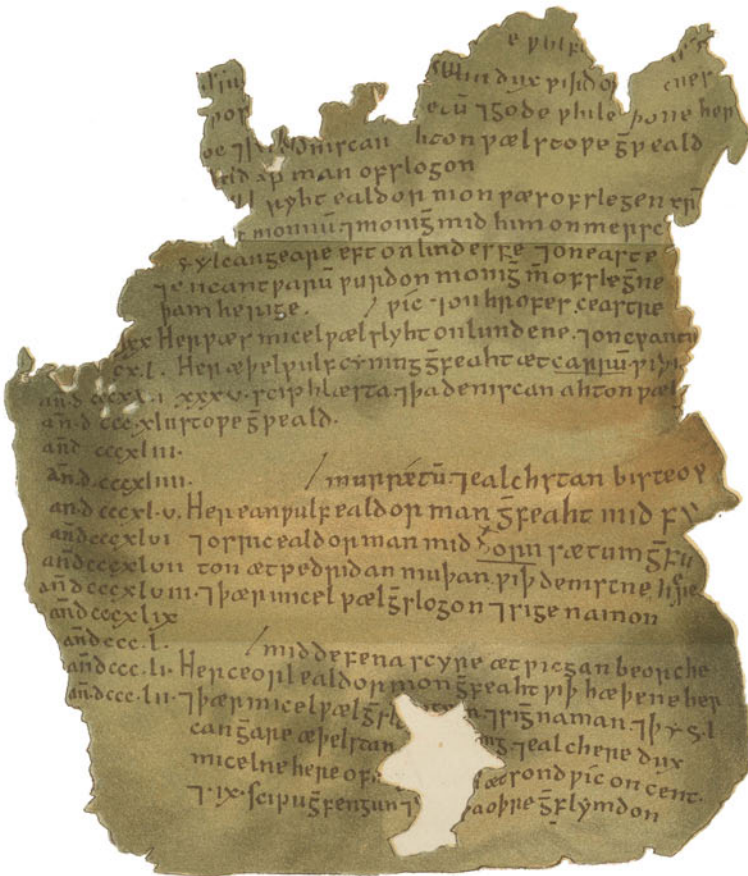
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THE
ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE,

ACCORDING TO THE

SEVERAL ORIGINAL AUTHORITIES.

EDITED, WITH A TRANSLATION,

BY

BENJAMIN THORPE,

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AT MUNICH,
AND OF THE SOCIETY OF NETHERLANDISH LITERATURE AT LEYDEN.

VOL. I.

ORIGINAL TEXTS.

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P R E F A C E.

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P R E F A C E

IT is deeply to be regretted that an historic monument so important, and of such great interest to all students of our early times, not only in Britain, but throughout all Germanic lands, as the ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE, should afford us no information with regard to its several writers,¹ or to the mode in which it gradually grew into the form in which we now possess it. Equally devoid are we of all indirect or collateral evidence, tending to cast a glimmering of light on these points. Conjecture, therefore, and that founded only on probability, is all we can have recourse to, in an attempt to account for the phenomenon. One point, however, seems indisputable, viz., that the several manuscripts, whether West Saxon or Mercian, are derived from a common original; whence the question naturally arises, how and by whom was such original issued to the several monasteries, which, from their rank, or the reputation of one or other of their inmates, for learning or superior penmanship, were deemed qualified for the proposed object of multiplying copies; and where it received such additional matter as, on account of local

¹ Under the year 1087 (p. 354; Transl. p. 188), the writer of that part of the Laudian manuscript (E.) speaks in the first person, both singular and plural, and informs us that he was not only a contemporary of, and personally acquainted with, the Conqueror, but that he had lived in his court; in his own words: þonne wille we be him awritan swa swa we hine ageaton · þe him onlocodan · 7

oðre hwile on his hirede wunedon: *then we will write concerning him as we understood him, who have looked on him and, at another time, sojourned in his court.* From the above, however, we can only form the probable conjecture, that the writer, after his withdrawal from court, joined the brotherhood in the abbey of Peterborough.

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interest or other circumstances, might seem desirable to those whose province it was to supervise the literary department of the brotherhood.

As contributors to the composition of the Saxon Chronicle, the names of king Ælfred and of archbishops Plegemund and Dūnstān have been mentioned. This, too, is pure conjecture; though, with respect at least to Ælfred and Plegemund, a conjecture by no means void of probability; nor shall we perhaps greatly err in assigning to their influence and authority the earlier or original portion of the earliest manuscript,¹ ending with the year 891, and which, from a comparison of the form of its letters with those of other manuscripts of the same period, may be safely assigned to the end of the ninth century, and, with a semblance of probability, as the prototype of the other copies. In favour, too, of Ælfred's participation in the composition of the Chronicle, may be noticed the greater fullness of narrative that prevails, from the year 853, or soon after Ælfred's birth; also that (with the exception of MS. Cott. Domit. A. VIII.), the account of the acts of that prince, is, in all the manuscripts, so strikingly similar; while, in other

¹ The Corpus Christi manuscript. —It is the opinion of Dr. Lappenberg (England under the A.S. Kings, Introd. p. xxxix.), and, after him, of the author of the Preface to the 'Monumenta Historica Britannica' (p. 75), that this manuscript is in the dialect of Mercia; an opinion which, if well founded, would prove that the belief in Ælfred's participation in the work is wholly groundless. But the examples cited by the authority last mentioned, in support of the dialect being Mercian, seem to me more than questionable: as cuom for com, Walas for Wealas, slog for sloh, hiera for heora,

Miercna for Mercna (or rather for hyra, Myrcna); since in Ælfred's Boethius we find hiera and hierē, with numerous other instances of ie for y, as ieldran for yldran, etc.; also ofslog for ofsloh, and genog for genoh; Wealas, too, occurs in this very Corpus manuscript. Cuom for com, may, with every probability, be regarded as an Anglian form; though even that may be only an archaism, *Goth.* cwam. The two dialects have, I believe, been never satisfactorily distinguished; at the same time, we may, I think, without risk of error, pronounce the Corpus manuscript of West Saxon origin.

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cases, they frequently exhibit great deviations from each other.

The testimony also supplied us by the old French chronicle of Geffrei Gaimar, who lived in the middle of the twelfth century, is of some authority, as tending to corroborate the supposition, that to king Ælfred we are indebted for a Saxon Chronicle, and, down to his time, probably in its present form. According to the same chronicler, that prince had a copy of a chronicle at Winchester fastened by a chain, so that all who wished might read; but that it might not be taken from the spot¹; a custom of which traces still exist in England, or at least have existed, within the memory of the present generation. A further corroboration of the existence of the Chronicle in its present form, in the days of king Ælfred, is the circumstance, that his friend, Asser, bishop of Sherborne, translates and incorporates much of its matter, in his Latin life of his royal patron, from the year 849 to 887.

The Saxon Chronicle comprises the period from the invasion of Britain by Julius Cæsar to the accession of Henry II. in A.D. 1154; and is, conjointly with the

¹ Meis n'alout pas la terre issi,
Ke nuls hom pur la guere,
Seust coment alout la terre,
Ne cel tens sul ne saveit
Nuls hom ki chescon rei estait;
Mès moignes e chanoines de abetes,
Ki des reis escristrent les vies,
Si adreseat chescon son per,
Pur la veraie raison mustrer
Des reis; cumbien chescon regnat;
Coment out nun, coment deviat;
Quel fu oscis, et quels transi,
Quels est ent[i]res, et quels purri:
E des eveskes, ensemment,
Firent li clerc adresecement.
Croniz ad nun, un livre grant;
Engleis l'alerent assemblant.
Ore est issi auctorizez,
K'a Wincestre, en l' eveskez,

Là est des reis la dreite estorie;
E les vies e la memorie.
Li reis Ælfred l'out en demaine;
Ferner i fist une chaine.
Ki lire i volt bien i guardast;
Mais de son liu nel' remuast.—
ll. 2316, seqq.

Il [Elucret] fist escrivere un livre
Engleis,
Des aventures, e des leis,
E des batailles de la terre,
E des reis ki firent la guere:
Et maint livre fist il escrivere,
U li bon clerc vont sovent lire.—
ll. 3451, seqq.

In a preceding line Gaimar calls the volume "La dreite estorie de "Wincestre."

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Ecclesiastical History of Beda, the principal source whence our early chroniclers have derived their matter.

What has just been stated, with reference to king Ælfred, may perhaps tend in some degree to account for the distribution of copies of the Chronicle among certain religious houses, during the reign of that prince: but how it was continued in after-times we are without any intimation whereupon to found more than a probable conjecture; although all the extant copies, not excepting that which least resembles the others (Domit. A. VIII.), bear proofs of a common prototype, as must be evident to every reader of the several texts displayed in the present edition. Of this subject, the passage from the Scotichronicon, quoted below, offers a curious and not improbable illustration;¹ though, perhaps, too vague and too recent to be considered as evidence.

While regarding Ælfred as the probable originator of the Saxon Chronicle, it must, at the same time, be evident that in England there already existed written memorials of our early times, whence he, or rather perhaps his coadjutors, derived materials; and to such Beda alludes,² in the words: "A principio voluminis hujus usque ad tempus quo gens Anglorum fidem Christi percepit, ex priorum maxime scriptis, hinc inde collectis, ea quæ promeremus didicimus." He also

¹ " Ideoque statutum est convenienter, in plerisque regionibus, et, ut audivi, in Anglia, quod unumquodque monasterium, a regibus fundatum, haberet de ipso loco suum certum scribam vel scriptorem, qui omnia notabilia, tempore regis, saltem in regno vel e vicinis, contingentia, secundum quod veritas facti se haberet, cum data annotaret, et ad proximum generale concilium, post obitum regis, omnes illi chronographi convenirent, et sua veridicta sive scripta in medium producerent, et,

" electis a concilio sagacioribus et in talibus peritis et expertis, scripta examinarent, et, diligenti habita collatione, de congestis summarium extraherent, et chronicam compingerent; ac in cœnobiticis archivis librariorum pro authenticis chronicis, quibus fides daretur, scripta reponerent, ne temporum labilitate memoriæ gestorum in regno deperirent." Fordun, Scotichronicon, Cont. edit. Hearne, iv. p. 1348.

² H. E. Prolog.

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speaks of “*monimenta literarum* ;” also Malmesbury :
“*Sunt sane quædam vetustatis indicia, chronico more*
“*et patrio sermone, per annos Domini ordinata.*”¹

In thus assuming Ælfred and his coadjutors as the originators of the Saxon Chronicle, the question arises : Is the Chronicle, in succeeding ages, to be regarded as a contemporaneous narrative of events? Generally speaking, I am inclined to answer in the affirmative, although it certainly is not free from interpolations of later date. Such interpolations are, however, chiefly prevalent in manuscript Domitian A. VIII., and the Laudian manuscript. As an instance of such interpolation, may be noticed the entry A.D. 876, in the manuscript first mentioned, where it is said, that Rodla (Rolf, Rollo)² penetrated into Normandy, and reigned

¹ Prol. Gest. Reg.

² As a progenitor of our Norman and Angevin kings, and, through them, of the present reigning house, a few words (after the example afforded by the Chronicle itself, in the case of the Saxon and Anglian kings) concerning Rolf's lineage, may not be deemed irrelevant. According to the idle tale told of this chieftain by the Norman writers, Dudo of St. Quentin, William of Jumièges, Benedict of St. More, and Wace, Rolf was a Dane, whose power appearing too formidable in the land, the king led a force against him and his brother Garin, or Gurim (Gorm ?); but, in an attempt to take his castle, was put to flight, though he afterwards worsted him through an ambush; from which, however, Rolf escaped, though his brother Garin was slain. He afterwards sailed to Scotland, and finally invaded and won the province thenceforward called Normandy.

This story is probably the invention of a chronicler anxious to flatter the pride of his ducal patron. Far more probable is the account given by Snorri (*Heimskringla*, ch. 24), that Rolf was a son of Rögnvald, jarl of Mœri in Norway, and, as we are told, was of so gigantic a stature, that he was compelled to go on foot, whence his appellation of *Hrólfr gavngr*, or Rolf the ganger or walker. For his plunderings (*strandhug*) on the coast of Norway, he was expelled from the country by king Harald *Hårfagri*. William of Malmesbury (and from him, Alberic) says of him : “*De nobili, sed per vetustatem obsoleta, prosapia Noricorum editus.*” Dudo calls him the son of a truly free man, who, for no feudal obligation, would place his hands between those of another. And again : “*Rollo superbo regum ducumque san-*
“*guine natus.*”

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fifty years. The date (876) of Rolf's landing in France is correctly given, at least it accords both with Ordericus Vitalis and Florence of Worcester. The year of his death is variously given; for, according to another interpolated entry, in the same manuscript, the accession of his son, William I., took place in the year 928, and this date accords with that assigned by the Chron. Alberici for the death of Rolf. In fact, all the entries in this manuscript respecting Normandy, previous to the Conquest, as well as some others, may safely be placed to the account of the monastic scribe, and not belonging to the genuine Chronicle.

A remarkable case of what would be pronounced an interpolation, did it not appear in no less than five of the six manuscripts, occurs under the year 755, under which date, an event, the murder of Cynewulf, is recorded, which did not occur until 784, when it is again, and rightly, mentioned. This instance would, if needful, tend to show, that as early as the time of Ælfred there was one model whence the other copies were taken, with the exception of MS. Domitian, A. VIII., which can hardly be dated earlier than the middle of the twelfth century, and may be pronounced a careless composition, by more hands than one, from beginning to end.

From the beginning of the Chronicle to the death of Beda (A.D. 734), we are enabled to form a judgment as to the sources whence much of its matter is derived; but from that date until the time of Ælfred (or about a hundred and fifty years), we know not from what materials the narrative was compiled. Tradition, which in those days must have been in much greater request than it is now, no doubt contributed its share; some marginal notes also in the volumes of monastic libraries, may have afforded information, as, it appears, was the case on the Continent; although I am not aware that any such are extant in this country.

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PREFACE.

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Such a continuous chain of occurrences as that exhibited in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, would, it is reasonable to suppose, display a gradation of changes in the Anglo-Saxon tongue, during the two centuries from the time of Ælfred to the death of Harold: such is not, however, the case, as the language is the same throughout, with regard both to its vocabulary and its inflexions; nor until some time after the Conquest do we observe any material corruptions; they then begin to be but too manifest. Yet, even here we have hardly a just criterion in the Peterborough, or Laudian, manuscript, much of the later parts of which are evidently the work of illiterate, or even foreign, monks, glaringly ignorant of the use of genders and cases. From this period may be dated the break-up of the old "English undefiled." The evil was for some time partial in its influence: its focus was the Norman court; the Saxon, at least its vocabulary, long kept its ground in the country: as an example of this may be compared the courtly jargon of Chaucer with the rugged downright Saxon of Piers Ploughman.

I regret my inability to supply any information relative to the authors of the poetic effusions in the Saxon Chronicle. Are they by the writers of the prose narrative, or are they only insertions? The latter seems to me the more probable opinion. Of these, the first, not only in the order of time, but in excellence, is the ode on the Battle of Brunnanburh (A.D. 937); and a matter it is of regret that the name of its author has irrecoverably perished. Of the other pieces, little can be said in praise; they are rather rhythmical and alliterative prose than poetry; while, on the other hand, the effusion on the assassination of king Eadward, and the account of the murder of the young prince Ælfred, son of the Confessor, may be regarded as unmetrical poetry. In preceding editions of the Chronicle an attempt has been made to reduce them to metrical

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arrangement, but as they are defective both in rhythm and alliteration, I have printed them continuously, as in the manuscripts.

Of the chronology of the Anglo-Saxons, before their conversion to Christianity, or from what data the writers of the Chronicle reduced the time of events, down to the coming of Augustine (A.D. 596), to the era of the Incarnation,¹ we have no knowledge; though that our pagan forefathers had some system of time-reckoning there cannot be a doubt.

In this edition of the Saxon Chronicle, the texts of the several manuscripts are printed entire; a plan which, at first sight, may appear objectionable, on the score of the great mass of repetition it necessarily occasions of matter not only substantially but frequently *verbatim* and even *literatim* identical. But to produce the Chronicle complete, there was no midway between the plan here adopted, and the less satisfactory one hitherto followed, of taking the most esteemed manuscript for a text, and printing beneath all deviations from it, in the shape of various readings, unpleasant and inconvenient to consult, and, it is believed, by only a few readers, ever consulted; and frequently equalling in mass, and sometimes exceeding, the text itself. Nor does this method afford the requisite facility to those desirous of weighing the several narratives of the same event against each other, as the narrative of a West Saxon against that of a Mercian; or of a partisan of earl Godwine and Harold against that of one inimical to their house. And to the investigator of

¹ There are some anomalous appearances with respect to the time of beginning the year in MS. C. (Cott. Tiber. B. 1.), before this period; but henceforward to the year 1053, it can hardly be questioned that the

computation from Easter is followed in that copy. This event, therefore (king Eadward's marriage), according to our mode of reckoning, would belong to the year 1045. R.P. note to An. 1044.