

SWANTON, MICHAEL 1997: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, translated and edited by Michael Swanton (Dent, London); xxxvi + 364 pages; ISBN 0-460-87867-0; £ 12.99 in the United Kingdom only.

THIS paperback edition of Professor Swanton's translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* will be warmly welcomed. It was first issued in hardback in 1996, and immediately became the version of the Chronicle which all students of early English history and literature had to have.

The material of the Chronicle is stirring stuff. It is the first continuous history of any modern European nation in its own language. Compiled over several centuries, it describes the invasion of post-Roman Britain by the English; the development of their society; their conversion to Christianity from the year 597 onwards; the Viking attacks of the ninth and tenth centuries, and the English response to them (sometimes cowardly, sometimes heroic); and the Norman Conquest of 1066. The writing of the Chronicle was continued at Peterborough, in the English Midlands, until the year 1154. The annals for these last years provide an unforgettable picture of the atrocities committed in King Stephen's reign, when people said openly that 'Christ and his saints slept'.

Professor Swanton provides a fitting treatment of this venerable document. His translation, which effectively replaces the one made in 1953 by Norman Garmonsway for the Everyman series, shows differing versions of the Chronicle text on facing pages. He provides full commentary and up-to-date bibliography. His work on the last is especially valuable, since it enables historians and others to update themselves on the enormous amount of research that has been published on the Chronicle in recent decades. His translation also comes complete with maps, genealogical tables, and some excellent photographs. These last range from a picture of the dragon from a real Viking ship, to a gold ring worn on the finger of king Alfred's grandfather. The ring was found in 1780 in a cartrut at Laverstock, just outside Salisbury. (One wonders how it was lost, and who lost it.) It is typical of the unexpected things to be found in this edition that Professor Swanton should tell us this.

In short, Michael Swanton's version of the Chronicle has now become the essential edition of this text. The results of his labours will be with us for many years. His translation should be found in the library of every institution that takes the study of early England and its language seriously.

Andrew Breeze  
University of Navarre

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