

Kings & Dates - CD 1

1 Capture of the Five Boroughs

The re-capture of the Midlands from the Danes celebrated in verse.

2 Alfred on Athelney - ASC 878

The story of the king's rout by the Danes in a surprise midwinter attack, his retreat to the marshes and his triumphant return in the spring of the following year.

3 Cynewulf and Cyneheard - ASC 755

The classic text concerning divided loyalty in a king's warband.

4 The Danes' Harrying - ASC 997

Deniga Hergung (The Danes' Harrying) The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Entry for the Year AD997. King Alfred's wars with the Danes were decisive in stopping the tide of Viking Conquest across western Europe. A century later, however, further waves of Scandinavians ravaged the British Isles. This excerpt tells of attacks against the West Country.

5 Engla Tocyme (The Arrival of the English)

From the Old English version of Bede', Ecclesiastical History of the English People. The story of the invitation by the post-Roman British authorities to the Angles to help protect the province from the Picts, and how their policy went disastrously wrong.

6 Battle of Brunanburh

The Battle of Brunanburh appears in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the year 937, recording a notable English victory over a combined force of Scots and Norse-Irish at 'Bruna's stronghold'. Here we find Old English verse doing one of the jobs it was designed for - making a lasting record of a significant event.

Crime & Punishment

7 Extracts from the Laws of King Ine

Ines Domas Two Extracts from the Laws of King Ine. The first is the preface, in which the king expresses his concern for the correctness of his judgements and the stability of his law-code, while the second concerns the legal penalties for fighting in a variety of places.

8 The Ordeal

(Be ðon ðe ordales weddigap) The reliability of an individual's oath was central to the Anglo-Saxon evidential and legal process; in case of doubt, it was occasionally necessary to back up one's words with an appeal to divine proof.

Health & Wellbeing

9 Leechdoms - medical texts

Apart from traditional English herbal lore and folk wisdom, some Anglo-Saxon medical books were filled with hand-me-down versions of classical medical texts such as the Herbarium Apulei. Here, a remedy for blains and two others for poisons are given.

Anglo-Saxon medicine was a mixture of classical and Christian tradition, folklore and native northern European herbal learning. Sickneses were generally attributed to attack by outside agencies (e.g. a 'dwarf', 'elf' or 'wen') which could be counteracted by a combination of herbal treatments and banishing formulas. This Anglo-Saxon view of invasive elements is remarkable in that it is contrary to everything classical medicine taught (where illnesses were due to an imbalance in the four bodily 'humours' or

liquids) and predates the germ theory of disease by more than a thousand years. Two additional, non-medical charms are given - for luck on a journey, and to make bees swarm.

10 Charm Against a Dwarf

11 Charm Against a Wen

12 Charm Against Waterelf Sickness

13 Nine Herbs Charm

This poem lists the nine most powerful plants used in Anglo-Saxon leechcraft, and some intriguing allusions to folklore (probably - what was common knowledge in those times and so not worth recording has since been lost through remaining unrecorded). It also contains one of the few references in Anglo-Saxon literature to the god Woden, whose central role in pre-Christian healing may be assumed from Scandinavian parallels.

14 Journey Charm

15 Wið Ymbe - for a swarm of bees

Verse

16 Wulf & Eadwacer

From the Exeter Book. A classic tale of female longing, related in short, cryptic lines.

17 Beowulf - The Funeral of Scyld Scefing.

In the opening scenes of Beowulf, the foundation of the Danish kingdom by Scyld Scefing is recounted, his death and splendid funeral.

18 The Wanderer

From the Exeter Book. The peregrinations of a luckless man who happened to survive his warlord, searching for a worthy home, and finding consolation in religion.

19 Deor

From the Exeter Book. This poem is unique in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon verse in having a refrain which may be freely rendered as 'that passed over, so may this'. Through brief allusions to mythical and legendary tales, it demonstrates how good fortune may turn to bad (and back again to good!). The Poet reflects on the limits of man's knowledge of what is to come and finally tells his own story.

20 Beowulf's Greeting

Beowulf's Greeting Having decided to undertake the dangerous task of matching himself against the monster Grendel, Beowulf travels to the Hroðgar's hall where he presents his credentials as a valiant fighter to the ageing Danish king and outlines his intentions.

21 Durham

Poems in praise of cities were a classical tradition, still common in mediaeval Europe. This one, dating from the opening years of the twelfth century, is among the last surviving pieces of Old English verse to be composed.