

THE VENERABLE BEDE'S OBSERVATION OF THE COMET OF 729 A.D. A. A. Mardon & E. G. Mardon, Antarctic Institute of Canada, PO Box 1223, MPO, Edmonton, AB, CANADA. mardon@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca

The Venerable Bede in book five of his Historia Ecclesiastica Genis Anglorum comments on the two separate observations of the comet of 729 AD. The entry is as follow:

“In the year of our Lord 729, two comets appeared around the sun, striking terror into all who saw them. One comet rose early and preceded the sun, while the other followed the setting sun at evening, seeming to portend awful calamity to east and west alike. Or else, since one comet was the precursor of day and the other of night, they indicated that mankind was menaced by evils at both times. They appeared in the month of January, and remained visible for about a fortnight, pointing their fiery torches northward as though to set the welkin aflame. At this time, a swarm of Saracens ravaged Gaul with horrible slaughter; Both the outset and course of Ceolwulf's reign were filled by so many grave disturbances that it is quite impossible to know what to write about them or what the outcome will be.”

These two comet observations were first observed in January and reappearing for three weeks are most likely one comet observation. The appearance of this astronomical event is also found in the other English chronicle the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This is both in the Laud and Parker manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It is also referred to in Matthew of Paris' two manuscripts Flores and Chronica Maior; and Bartholemew of Cotton's Chronicle. This comet event as other events in the middle ages portends disaster.