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WHO IS COMING TO GET YOU? DEATH-SCENE NARRATIVES AND ILLUSTRATIONS FROM EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

This article compares textual narratives of the going-out of souls from the body at death, circulating in early medieval England, with visual representations of similar *post-mortem* scenes featuring in manuscript illustrations. Around twenty images on the topic have emerged from the survey. They appear to be a reflection of their textual counterparts, insomuch as they present the same variety and can be associated to the various traditions circulating in England and on the continent, and which can be ultimately traced back to apocryphal Eastern texts. In literature, two main types of *post-mortem* death scenes can be found: a type presenting a struggle for the soul that can be associated with such texts as the *Visio Pauli*, and a type where the soul is received only by the appropriate band of psychopomps (either angels or devils) on the basis of the moral quality of the dead, as can be seen, for example, in the accounts deriving from the "Macarian legend". The iconography follows both traditions, although the "Macarian" prejudgement appears prevalent.

1. *Introduction*

The fate of the soul after death is a recurring theme in the texts of early medieval England.[1] Some of these also describe in details the going-out of the soul from the body at death. As Gatch affirms, however, "The mind of the early medieval theologian was not plagued as is ours with the *bête noire* of consistency",[2] and given that medieval English people "were heirs to a large number of disparate classical, biblical, patristic and early medieval teachings concerning Doomsday, the afterlife, and the concept of the soul

[1] For a list of Latin and vernacular texts from early medieval England dealing with eschatological themes and *post-mortem* narrations, see Di Sciacca 2018, note 1.

[2] Gatch 1965, 123.

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which are inherently in conflict",[3] the parting of the soul from the body at death is described in diversified ways. This article compares textual narratives circulating in early medieval England with visual representations of *post-mortem* scenes featuring in manuscript illustrations, to provide a taxonomy and to check if the latter are a reflection of textual descriptions – and of which texts in particular – or if they tell a different story.

2. *Eschatological narratives of death in Old English texts*

Early medieval English people were curious not only about the fate of the soul in the Otherworld in general, but also about the immediate events after death, when souls would have to leave their bodies, to be led to their allotted destinations. This can be inferred from the numerous accounts of the coming forth of the soul from the body that are interspersed in early English eschatological texts, both in prose and verse. In these narratives, angels and/or demons are generally present at death, receiving the soul of the dead person. Texts, however, show variation on this model, which derives from the textual traditions on which these accounts are based.

As most medieval narratives of death, English texts ultimately derive from apocryphal Eastern Vision literature, and especially from legends and *post-mortem* beliefs circulating in the Egyptian, Syriac, Greek and even Hebraic culture, in the early centuries of Christianity. Some of these accounts involve, as protagonists, desert fathers such as Macarius of Alexandria (sometimes confused with Macarius of Egypt),[4] or biblical characters, such as St Paul, Abraham, the Virgin Mary, or Joseph. A brief discussion of the basic elements of the main textual traditions circulating in the Eastern Mediterranean is a necessary first step to understand later adaptations of such narratives in the Western medieval world

[3] Hall 2003, 310.

[4] On Macarius, see Di Sciacca 2010, 329-338.

and the diversity of their conceptions.[5] Three main narrative types emerge, and will be analysed separately.

2.1. *Type 1*

In what can be considered the earliest tradition,[6] all souls leaving their bodies, whether righteous or evil, are received by the Angel of Death. He is a servant of God, but terrible and pitiless (such as death necessarily is). He appears, for example, in the Coptic *Death of Joseph*, the *Falling Asleep of Mary*, and in the *Testament of Abraham*. In these accounts, souls appear reluctant to exit their bodies, due to the Angel of Death's fearful aspect, and must be lured, forced or even tricked out.[7] After the separation of the soul from the body, Michael and often also Gabriel come with a host or choir of angels to take the soul and carry it to its new destination, in a divinely woven cloth.[8] In the *Falling Asleep of Mary*, the Virgin's soul first leaps from her body into Christ's bosom, and is later wrapped in linen and entrusted to Michael.[9] This type of account does not seem to have enjoyed much popularity in the Western world, including medieval England, as the Angel of Death is not found in either texts or miniatures circulating there; the detail of the cloth, however, survives in the iconography.[10]

The *Death of Joseph* belongs to a hybrid type, because Death comes with many frightful attendants, including the devil, who

[5] A good starting point to peruse the fate of souls in apocryphal Eastern literature is Batiouchkof's study of the Soul and Body Legend (1891). See also Silverstein 1935, Dudley 1911 and Cataldi 2018.

[6] Dudley 1911, 21-24.

[7] In the *Testament of Abraham*, however, the Angel of Death explains that he appears differently to righteous or wicked souls: "I approach the righteous in beauty, and very quietly, and with gentle guile; but sinners I approach, stinking of corruption, with the greatest possible ferocity and asperity, and an expression that is both savage and without mercy.": Sparks 1984, 417.

[8] For Abraham, see Sparks 1984, 421. On Michael as psychopomp and shepherd of souls, see Di Sciacca 2023 and Lendinara 2023.

[9] Dudley 1911, 24.

[10] See below, sect. 3.

are wrathful and armed with fire, and have smoke and sulphur coming out of their mouths. As Joseph's soul is frightened and refuses to come out, Jesus drives away the dark powers and has Michael, Gabriel and a choir of angels come down from heaven to receive his father's soul. In this legend we can see the presence, at one single person's death, of both dark and light forces. This already constitutes a second type of narration, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.2. *Type 2*

A number of death accounts are characterised by a struggle for the soul at deathbed.[11] One example of this tradition is found in *Canon* LIX of the *Funerary Hymns* (*Necrosima*) attributed to Ephrem Syrus, where we read that:

> Per obitum corpore solutus animus constitit anxius ac admodum tristis in bivio, unde statim binæ erupêre acies contrariæ & discordes, dum ad suas unaquæque partes illum trahere decertat; mali siquidem dæmones instant, ut præcipitem impellant in Gehennam: obstant Angeli, & ad lucidas Beatorum sedes deducere contendunt.[12]

Another example occurs in a homily by Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Going-Out of the Soul, and on the Second Advent*.[13] Here the dying people see all the deeds they have performed in life, so they are firstly judged by their own conscience.[14] Both bands approach each dying person, and fight for the soul, but it is always angels who carry the soul out of this world, passing through the examination of the powers of darkness.[15] If the soul is found guilty, it

[11] Struggles for the soul can also take place later, on the journey to heaven.

[12] Assemani 1743, III, 325-326.

[13] PG, 77, hom. XIV, 1071-1090. See Batiouchkof 1891, 12-15 and Dudley 1911, 52-53.

[14] Batiouchkof notes a connection with the Talmud.

[15] Silverstein calls them 'the witnesses', and Batiouchkof "les Publicains". They are some sort of custom-officers, hovering around earth, and looking for

gets thrown back down on earth, to dwell in a place of torment.

The most popular of these texts is the *Visio Pauli* or *Apocalypse of Paul*.[16] Written originally in Greek (probably by an Egyptian) around the third century, the *Visio* recounts the journey of St Paul to the Otherworld, and grew so widespread that, in the words of Silverstein, "it became one of the chief formative elements in the development of the later legends of Heaven and Hell which culminated in the Divina Commedia of Dante".[17]

It was translated or reworked into "virtually every major language of the Mediterranean and contiguous areas from Armenia to Ireland and from Scandinavia and Russia to North Africa".[18] In Latin, the *Visio* exists in three long versions and eleven shorter redactions, which all differ in matters of selection of material and details.[19] In chs. 11-16 of the long Latin versions, St Paul witnesses the going-out of the body of a good soul (11-14) and a bad one (15-16).

We read that, when someone dies, two bands of angels are sent to receive their soul. Both bands will be present at the deathbed, but each soul will eventually be taken by the relevant band. Wicked souls will be received by angels who are described as having no mercy or pity, with furious faces and teeth showing from their mouths, eyes shining like the morning star in the East, and sparks of fire coming out of their hair and mouths. Pious souls, conversely, will be received by beautiful angels, filled with gentleness and mercy, with faces shining as bright as the sun, wearing golden belts around their hips, holding palm twigs and the sign of God on their hands, and wearing clothes bearing the

wicked "stuff" within the soul (each represents a distinct sin): they only let the souls pass through their realms if nothing bad is found in them. Dudley traces their origin to the Egyptian *genii*.

[16] On the popularity and influence of the *Visio Pauli* see Gatch 1965, Kabir 2001, Di Sciacca 2018, and Cataldi 2018.

[17] Silverstein 1935, 3.

[18] Silverstein, Hilhorst 1997, 11.

[19] For editions and studies on the various texts and redactions of the *Visio*, see: Silverstein 1935; Silverstein, Hilhorst 1997; Jiroušková 2006.

name of the son of God. The deeds that people have performed during their life, and even their desires, will all be visible before them, at the point of death, allowing the two bands to decide to which side the soul belongs.[20]

Paul first witnesses and recounts the death of a righteous man. The evil angels do not find a place "to dwell in him",[21] and so the holy angels claim possession of his soul and lead it out of the body. The soul is met also by the angel who had the task to observe the man's daily deeds on earth, and refer them to God,[22] and by the man's spirit (= *spiritus uiuificationis*):[23] both will help the soul, on its journey to heaven, to sustain the examination by the wicked powers.[24] Once the soul reaches heaven, it is judged by God, on the basis of the angels' reports, and is eventually led by Michael to Paradise. The evil angels claim possession of the soul of the wicked man, after the usual struggle – as the holy angels "can find no place for them in him" – and bring it forth out of the body. The man's guardian angel is present, and, together with the spirit, reproaches the soul for not listening to him, and not doing God's will. It is actually the guardian angel who transfers the soul to heaven, to be judged by God, and resists the attacks of the wicked powers during the journey.[25] After God's judgement, the wicked soul is entrusted to the angel Tartaruchus to be carried to the outer darkness.

The *Visio* contains also another *post-mortem* scene of a wicked man (17-18), but this is not set immediately after death, but seven days after the going-out of the soul from the body.

In the redactions, which are mainly focused on hell and wicked souls, the passages on the going-out of souls are very compressed. The accounts are moved to a later part of the text, when Paul and

[20] For a textual and iconographical analysis of the so-called two judgements, see Angheben 2022.

[21] That is, they find no evil in him.

[22] Later in the text, written reports are mentioned.

[23] Silverstein, Hillhorst 1997, 92.

[24] See above.

[25] He refuses to surrender the wicked soul to them before God's judgement.

his angel guide are in hell and cannot therefore witness the death-bed scenes.[26] So we read that they see the soul of a wicked person escorted by seven[27] devils and the soul of a pious person escorted by an undisclosed number of angels. In some redactions the devils and angels are said to remove the soul from the body, in others we learn that they have extracted the soul from the body "on that same day".[28] We are therefore not certain whether a struggle was thought to have taken place at death or not.

We have evidence that the *Visio* circulated in early medieval England from the seventh century onwards; some redactions are even thought to have originated in insular contexts.[29] A fragmentary Old English translation has been preserved in manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85+86, fols. 3r-11v.[30] The Old English translation recounts the going-out of souls in a similar but more compressed way. Here again we have a description of the two bands of angels who come to receive the soul at the moment of death. The angels of righteousness will eventually receive the good souls ("soðfæstnyssa ænglas, ða beoð gesænde to soðfæstre sawlum, ðonne hige of lichaman ut gangeð", ll. 76-78).[31] As in the Latin version, they are filled with beauty ("fægernesse", l. 76) and gentleness ("manðwearnyssa", l. 74), their faces shine as bright as the sun ("ðara ansyne scinan swa swa sunne", ll. 71-72), they wear golden belts around their hips, and they hold palm

[26] On this, see Batiouchkof 1891, 23: "saint Paul ne pouvais plus demander à voir, des profondeurs de l'enfer, comment a lieu la séparation de l'âme et du corps; aussi se contente-t-il de constater ce qui advient aux âmes d'un pécheur et d'un juste récemment décédés."

[27] The number varies in some manuscripts.

[28] See also Jiroušková 2006. This account shows a partial conflation with the third death-scene of the long *Visio*, where the soul under examination had already left the body – seven days earlier in that case. The number of days has been here transferred to the number of devils.

[29] Wright 1993, 108-109.

[30] Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 642: s. xi med., SE England. On the text, see diPaolo Healey 1978 and 2007. According to diPaolo Healey 2007 the Old English text derives from a lost long Latin version.

[31] Text from diPaolo Healey 1978.

twigs in their hands ("hyra lændene wæran mid gyldenum gyrdelsum begyrded, and palmtwigu on hyran handum hi hæfdon", ll. 72-73). Wicked souls will be received by a different band of spirits ("ða gastas ða ðe beoð gesænde to arleasra manna sawlum on tide hyra forðfore", ll. 69-70), but in the manuscript they have been conflated with the wicked powers that tempt and corrupt hearts.[32] Some traces of the description of the evil angels featuring in the Latin text still survive, though: these spirits have no mercy ("ðas wæron buton ælcere mildheortnesse", ll. 65-66), and have fire sparks coming out of their mouths ("fyrene spearcan of hyran muðan ut gyodan", ll. 66-67).

First Paul sees the soul of a righteous person coming out of its body ("he geseah […] sume soðfæste sawle of lichaman ut gangende", ll. 86-88) and we are told that the soul is met by the good [sic] spirits ("and hire ða ongæn coman ða godan gastas", l. 88). The word 'good' is here out of place:[33] we would expect the 'evil' spirits to be mentioned instead, because we immediately learn that Paul sees them crying and complaining that they cannot take possession of the soul because it has performed God's will while on earth ("he geseah hi wepende, and hige cwædon: 'Eala ðu, sawul, hu ðu us nu beflihst, forðan ðe ðu gewrohtest Godes willan on eorðan'", ll. 89-90).[34] The guardian angel is also present, and scorns the devils, ordering them to withdraw in shame, as they have not succeeded in seducing the soul while in life ("Cyrrað onbæcling scamigende, forðan ðe ge ne mihton ða sawle beswican, ða ða hyo on lichaman wæs!", ll. 92-93).[35] Then Paul hears a voice from above, urging to bring the soul to God, and so the soul is led to heaven.

Subsequently, Paul sees the soul of a wicked man leaving its body ("sumes arleases mannes sawule of lichaman ut gangende",

[32] This passage is full of corrections in the manuscript.

[33] diPaolo Healey 1978,79 considers the possibility of a lacuna in the text.

[34] In the Latin *Visio*, this sentence is uttered by the witnesses.

[35] Again, this sentence belongs to the dialogue between the witnesses and the guardian angel.

ll. 117-118) and we learn that all the soul's sins can be seen lying in front of it ("ic geseah, on ðære tide ðe hire sawul of hire lichaman eode, ealle hire synna and hire yfel beforan hire licgean", ll. 122-124). We also hear that an evil judgement is passed on it ("yfel dom", l. 125). Two bands of angels come together to receive the soul: the holy angels and the good spirits ("and ðær ætsomne coman ða halgan ænglas and ða godan [sic] gastas", ll. 126-127). As in the earlier passage, here too *godan gastas* is probably a corrupt reading for *yfelan gastas*, since, in the following sentence, it is some 'evil spirits' who take the soul, while the holy angels dissociate themselves from it ("ac ða haligan gastas nan geweald on ðara sawle næfdon, ac ða yfelan gastas, hige læddon ða sawle […]", ll. 127-128).[36]

Although the narrative is less detailed and sometimes confused, it is clear that both angels and devils are present at death, but only the appropriate band takes charge of the destiny of the soul.[37] Nothing is said about the aspect of the souls or the way souls are led to heaven.

2.3. *Type 3*

In the third type of Eastern tradition, the righteous soul is received only by beautiful and kind angels, while the evil soul is met by terrible demons. There is no struggle at the deathbed. One example is provided by the homily no. 22 from the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* attributed to Macarius of Egypt, *On the two possible states of those who depart from this life*, where we learn that "If a

[36] The episode of the second wicked soul seen by Paul escorted by devils is also present here. While in the Latin *Visio* we were told that the soul had been dead and around for seven days already, here we have a conflation, as Paul sees it going-out of its body and seized by two devils ("ic geseah oðre sawle of lichaman ut gangende, and twa dyofla hire onfengon", ll. 163-164). The soul complains that it is led, by these two devils, to a place where it has never been before ("ic eam geseald ðisum twam dyoflum, ða me gelædað on ðara stowe ðe ic næfre ær on næs", ll. 166-167).

[37] For a list of texts containing a struggle for the soul (*judicium particulare*) see Robinson 1979, 80-82 and Wright 2014b, 313-317.

person is under the guilt of sin, bands of demons and fallen angels approach along with the power of darkness which capture that soul and drag it as a captive to their place." A different handling is reserved to those who are pious: "When they leave their bodies, the bands of angels receive their souls and carry them to their side into the pure eternity. And so they lead them to the Lord."[38]

Another relevant text belonging to this typology is what we could call the *Legend of the Two Deaths* from the *Adhortationes sanctorum Patrum*.[39] We have here a monk who witnesses the death of a hypocrite and then that of a pious poor man. The soul of the hypocrite is received by a terrible devil who extracts it violently and painfully by means of a fiery trident ("Facta autem exitus ejus hora, vidit frater ille tartaricum inferni descendentem super solitarium illum, habentem tridentem igneum"); the soul of the pious man is received by Michael and Gabriel and coaxed into leaving the body by the music of David's harp and a celestial choir of angels ("Et cum venisset hora dormitionis ejus, conspicit frater ille Michaelem et Gabrielem descendentes propter animam ejus. […] Venit autem ei vox: Ecce mitto David cum cithara, et omnes Deo psallentes in Jerusalem, ut audiens psalmum ad vocem ipsorum egrediatur. Cumque descendissent omnes in circuitu animæ illius cantantes hymnos, sic exiens anima illa sedit in manibus Michael, et assumpta est cum gaudio").[40] Another text in the *Adhortationes*[41] belongs to this tradition, but in this case a wicked soul is received by a band of terrible black devils riding on black horses and holding fiery torches.[42] Both these *exempla*

[38] PG 34, 659-660; trans. Maloney 1992, 155.

[39] PL 73, §13, 1011-1012. See Di Sciacca 2018 and also Marstrander 1911 and Ritari 2014 for an adaptation in the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*. The text has no title in the PL. I call it *Legend of the Two Deaths* in accordance with its partial Irish adaptation, called *The Two Deaths*.

[40] *Ibid.* 164-165.

[41] PL 73, §14, 1012.

[42] Di Sciacca 2018, 167. This is a most unusual imagery in the Body and Soul literature. A partial parallel can be drawn with the "Wild Hunt" that appears in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in relation to the arrival of Henri of

were later translated by Ælfric and form part of Homily 27 in the Supplementary collection.[43]

A hybrid in this tradition is given by Macarius of Alexandria's *Sermon on the exit of the souls of the righteous and the wicked*[44] attributed to Alexander the Ascetic, a pupil of Macarius of Alexandria, the latter being the main character in the text.

Here a host of devils come to receive the soul of a wicked man, but the soul hesitates to leave the body, and one of the devils expresses his fear that Michael might come and claim the soul. He is however reassured by the devil who had the task to observe and influence the man's deeds while he was alive, who confirms that there is no ground for contention.

This passage would seem to confirm Batiouchkof's theory that a struggle for the soul only took place if there were doubts on the soul's status, while only the relevant band would go and receive the soul of a righteous or wicked person when their piousness or wickedness were beyond any doubts.[45] This appears to be true, at least within this text.[46]

The Macarian legend had a wide circulation, and gave origin to a later Latin adaptation which was also partly influenced by the *Visio Pauli* and by the *Legend of the Two Deaths* from the *Adhortationes sanctorum Patrum*.[47] It survives in two Latin texts in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 2846, ff. 135r-139v and 166v-172r,[48] in the so-called Nonantola Homily,[49] and in Sermo LXIX in the collection *Sermones fratres in eremo*.[50] It

Poitou at Peterborough (1127). See also the *Geste de Burch* (ll. 604-615). I am grateful to Patrizia Lendinara for pointing this parallel to me.

[43] Ed. Pope 1967-1968, II, 775-779. See Di Sciacca 2018.

[44] PG 34, 385-395.

[45] Batiouchkof 1891, 41, note 2. See also Wright 2014b. Wright distinguishes between "struggle" and "examination"; I do not do so, in the present essay.

[46] The concept of Purgatory had not been fully developed yet.

[47] See above.

[48] Ed. Leclercq 1946.

[49] Roma, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, Sess. 52 (2096), ff. 193r-194v (s. xi). Ed. Batiouchkof 1891, 576-578.

[50] Dudley 1909, 226-234. PL XL, 1235-1358.

also forms the basis of the Old English Macarian homily, found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201, pp. 222-230[51] and of Napier XXIX (from Oxford, BL, Hatton 113, fols. 66r-73r).[52] In the Latin and Old English adaptations, the dialogue happens between one devil and the soul. I give here the Old English text from the Macarian homily:

> Magon we nu gehyran secgan be suman halgan men, se wæs on gastlice gesyhðe gelæded. He geseah sumes mannes sawle, seo wæs genyded, þæt heo sceolde of hyre lichoman utgangan. Ac seo earme sawl ne dorste utgan, forþam þe heo geseah þa awyrgedan gastas beforan hyre standan. Ða þæt deofol hyre to cweð: "Hwæt is þis, þæt þu dest? To hwan yldst þu, þæt þu ut ne gange? Wen is, þæt Michael se heahengel cume mid engla þreate, and þe genime raðe." Ða sum oðer deofol him andwyrde and cwæð: "Ne þurfe ge eow ondrædan: Ic wat hyre worc, and ic symble mid hyre wæs dæges and nihtes."[53]

2.4. *The* Three Utterances of the Soul exemplum

The passage of the going-out of souls from the *Visio Pauli* probably formed the basis of an *exemplum* on the same topic which had a large circulation in early medieval England. The *exemplum* describes the going-out of souls at death and adds three exclamations of the soul concerning its immediate new environment and experience.[54] It is hence called the *Three Utterances exemplum*[55] and is thought to have reached England through Irish milieux.[56]

[51] Ed. Sauer 1978, 411-416. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 66: s. xi$^{3/4}$, Exeter.

[52] Ed. Napier 1883, 134-143. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 637: s xi^{2}, Worcester. On the relationship between the "Macarian homily" and Napier XXIX, see Wright 2002, p. 213 and note 16.

[53] Sauer 1978, 413-414.

[54] According to Willard 1935, the *exemplum* could also have had an independent origin, and have been later influenced by the *Visio*.

[55] Henceforth *3U*.

[56] On the *3U* see Wright 1993, 264-265, Wack, Wright 1991, Di Sciacca 2002, and Wright 2014a.

The *exemplum* survives in a copious number of Latin texts[57] (and also in Irish)[58] and was also adapted in three different Old English homilies: a Lenten homily in Oxford, BL, Junius 85/86 (SE England, s. xi^{med}), ff. 25r-40r;[59] a homily for Rogationtide in Oxford, BL, Hatton 114 (Worcester, s. xi^{2}), ff. 102v-105v;[60] and a homily for the third or fifth Sunday after Epiphany (*Be heofonwarum 7 be helwarum*) in Cambridge, CCC 302 (SE England, s. xi/xii), pp. 71-73, and London, British Library, Cotton Faustina A.ix (SE England, s. xii^{1}), ff. 21v-23v.[61]

In the Latin versions, two main narratives stand out: one where the soul is met by both angels and devils, contending for the soul, and one in which the soul is met only by either angels or devils, depending on its being wicked or pious.[62]

The Rogationtide homily presents a struggle for the soul in both the wicked and righteous man's death-scenes. The homilist explains that the dead is met by two angels, each accompanied by their comrades: God's angels, who are as white as snow, and the devil's angels, who are as black as a crow or an Ethiopian ("Him cumað togeanes his sawle twegen englas: oðer bið Godes encgel, se bið swa hwit swa snaw; oðer bið deofles encgel, se bið swa sweart swa hræfen oððe Silharewa; and heora byð ægðer myccles geferscypes.", ll. 10-12). They fight to establish who is entitled to the soul ("Hi þonne habbað mycel geflit ymbe ða sawle on hwæðere geferræddene heo beon scule", ll. 12-13). The band who wins the soul rejoices, while the party who loses is sad. In the first

[57] For an up-to-date chronological list of the manuscripts, see Wright 2014a, 128-137.

[58] See Marstrander 1911 and Ritari 2014.

[59] Ed. Luiselli Fadda 1977. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 642.

[60] Ed. Bazire, Cross 1982. Gness, Lapidge 2014, no. 638.

[61] Ed. Teresi 2002. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 86.

[62] Most texts present the former version. See Wack, Wright 1991. The number of devils or angels receiving the soul also varies, as well as the form and the colour of the souls and the otherwordly beings. For example, while some texts describe devils as being as black as coal, other texts confer this feature to the wicked soul. On the interim state of souls, see Kabir 2001 and Wright 2014b.

scene, the devil's angels win, and they enumerate to the dying man all the evil deeds that he has performed in his life, which they have recorded in their books. Finally, the devils order the soul to be extracted harshly from the body and be led to a terrible and frightening place ("'Suscitate animam de corpore grauiter.' Đæt is, 'Aweccað nu grimlice þa sawle of þam lichoman, and syllað hyre miccle fyrhtu and brogan and ongrislan, and gelædað hi to þære egesfullan stowe […]'", ll. 22-24.). After the three exclamations – which are uttered during the journey to the horrible place[63] – the devils separate into two groups, one preceding and one following the soul, and they lead it to hell, while singing Psalm 51 (52): *Quid gloriaris in malitia?*

The soul of the righteous is described as being as bright as the sun ("swa beorht swa sunne", ll. 51-52). The fight takes place at the righteous man's deathbed too ("and hi ða Godes englas and ða awyrgedan gastas swyðe ymbe flitað", ll. 52-53). When the angels win the soul, they enumerate, in a very friendly manner, all the good deeds that the soul has performed, and that are recorded in their books. Later on, Michael leads the soul to Christ.[64]

The Junius version is more compressed. We are only told that the wicked soul will be seven times darker than a raven, and that it will be escorted to hell by devils, while the pious one will be seven times brighter than the sun and will be led to Paradise by angels.

The account in *Be heofonwarum 7 be helwarum* is very confused, because this homily mixes Death and Judgement Day in an inconsistent patchwork, with pieces probably recalled from memory.[65] However, a struggle for the soul, taking place seven times, is mentioned: devils and angels fight before extracting the soul from the body. The extraction of the wicked soul is done fiercely (*grimlice*), whereas the extraction of the gentle soul is not described. The devils are said to be as black as coal, while angels are brighter than the sun ("7 oþer þara weroda bið swa sweart swa

[63] One exclamation refers to an "asperum iter/grimlic siðfæt".
[64] Bazire, Cross 1982, 121-124.
[65] See Teresi 2000.

col, 7 oðer bið beorhtre þonne sunne").

In all these accounts, nothing is said about the form of the souls.

From this survey, we can see how different traditions, mainly rooted in Eastern apocryphal literature, happily coexisted in early medieval England. If this is so with texts, let us see how iconography works.

3. *Visual Narratives of Death in English Medieval Manuscripts*

This section examines the visual narratives of death that have survived in early medieval English manuscripts. The survey was conducted on the Princeton Index of Medieval Art,[66] and on Ohlgren's *Iconographic Catalogue*.[67] Only the scenes that are unambiguously set at death were included in the survey, that is those that show both a dead corpse (or dying person) and a soul exiting the corpse.[68]

The survey has yielded around twenty such scenes, which show variety both in the way the soul is portrayed, that is either

[66] https://theindex.princeton.edu/. Henceforth referred to as IMA. As for the date range of the survey, I have considered manuscripts up to 1200, but have included slightly later manuscripts (dated to the first quarter of the thirteenth century, or – more rarely – the middle of the thirteenth century) when particularly striking or close to earlier manuscripts. The index allows users to customise searches using various filters, including "date range", "work of art type", and "location". I set these filters to "up to 1250", "manuscript" and "England", respectively. The survey was conducted on "manuscripts" from "England", using the keywords "death", "struggle", "soul", "angel" and "devil". Date and place of origin are extracted from the IMA database. For bibliographical references on the various manuscripts and scenes, please see the relevant field in the IMA. In order to view the items by using the IMA System Number (henceforth "SN"), select "Query by System Number" from the "Search" drop-down menu, in the top bar.

[67] Ohlgren 1986.

[68] The only exception to this rule are the scenes where the soul is not visible yet but is being clearly waited for by the receiving angels or devils, as with, for example, London, BL, Harley 603, fol. 19r, showing the martyrdoms of Lawrence, Paul and Peter.

in the form of a bird or *homunculus*/child, and in the way the soul is received, that is either by one single angel/devil, or one single band, or by both bands fighting for the soul. Some scenes show the extraction of the soul from the dead person's mouth, others show the soul already out of the body. Contexts also vary, both in terms of the works that such images accompany, e.g. Psalters, hagiographies, etc., and also in terms of the narrative units within which these illustrations appear, e.g. the death of a saint or a biblical character. I will present the various scenes on the basis of their narrative units.

3.1. *Deaths of Lazarus and Dives, Herod and Abel*

A good item to start the analysis with is the parable of Dives and Lazarus, as it contrasts the death of a wicked person with the death of a righteous one, as in the *Visio*, in the Macarius legend and in the *3U*. The parable of Dives and Lazarus occurs in the Gospel of Luke (16:19-31), and recounts the distinct fates of two souls immediately after death: that of a wicked, rich man (Dives), who used to wear expensive clothes and spend his days feasting, and that of the pious, poor Lazarus, who had his body covered in sores (which were even licked by dogs) and used to beg for food at Dives' door. When they die, Lazarus ends up in Abraham's bosom, while Dives ends up within the torments of hell. The Gospel passage does not mention the details of their respective deaths, and some iconographic narrations are faithful to the Gospel story;[69] however, some illustrations of the parable have expanded on the eschatological theme – perhaps under the influence of the *Visio* and its popularity in early medieval England – by adding two extra scenes showing the going-out of their souls

[69] See, for example, München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 835, f. 70v (1200-1210, Oxford), where Dives and Lazarus are depicted first alive and then only in their *post-mortem* destinations (hell and the bosom of Abraham, respectively). See IMA, SN: 53551. A short version can also be found in Aachen, Aachener Dom, G 25, f. 164v (990-1002, Reichenau): Liuthar Gospels (SN: 44421).

from their bodies.[70] Such expanded narratives are to be found in the prefatory cycles of biblical narratives originally accompanying the Eadwine Psalter[71] and the Huntingfield Psalter.[72]

Fragments of the cycle once belonging to the Eadwine Psalter are now scattered in various manuscripts.[73] The folio featuring the parable of Dives and Lazarus is now f. 1 of New York, PML, M. 521.[74] The scenes appear in the central panel of the lower zone and portray first a flying angel holding the miniature soul[75] of Lazarus within a blue cloth, and, below, a dark-brown, flying devil extracting the soul of Dives from his mouth. Both angel and pious soul have a white complexion, whilst Dives' soul is light brown.[76] The same panel shows Lazarus on Abraham's lap and Dives in hell.[77] As can be seen from the description, here there is no struggle between angels and devils for the soul: only the rele-

[70] According to Batiouchkof (1891, 52-53 and 532-533), the story of Dives and Lazarus might have inspired the apocryphal visionary literature on the subject.

[71] The Eadwine Psalter is found in Cambridge, Trinity College, R.17.1 (1155-60, Canterbury, Christ Church).

[72] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 43 (1210-20, Oxford; SN: 79573).

[73] Other folios from the original cycle are now in New York, PML, M. 724; London, BL, Add. 37472; and London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 661.

[74] SN (= IMA System Number): 97194.

[75] On the soul as a miniature person (or *homunculus*), see Grasso 2020, 57-59.

[76] This is the only instance of a dark-coloured wicked soul I found. In the Huntingfield Psalter, f. 202, however, in a "Massacre of the Innocents" scene, Herod and his soldiers all feature a dark complexion, just as dark as that of the devil perched on Herod's shoulder, presumably as a sign of their wickedness (SN: 79571). On the colour of souls, see Wright 1991, Hall 2003 (with reference to a Last Judgment's scene), and Grasso 2020.

[77] This pictorial narrative has a parallel in the Echternach Gospels (*ca*. 1030; SN: 71271), where we find the same story in roughly similar details. In the Echternach version, however, both souls are white, and there are two angels and two devils receiving the souls. The two devils receiving Dives' soul are black, with red wings. A very close, later copy of this visual narrative is found in Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, Vit. 17, fol. 117v (1045-1046, Echternach) (Codex Aureus Escorialensis; SN: 71510).

vant band is portrayed receiving each soul, showing that somehow a judgement on these two souls had already been passed.

The illustration in the panel on f. 21r of the Huntingfield Psalter shows a flying angel lifting up Lazarus' soul with his hands, and a green, horned devil extracting Dives' soul from his mouth. A blue devil is shown dragging the soul to hell, by means of a rope tied around its neck. Both souls appear as white children. Lazarus' soul is then shown sitting on Abraham's lap whilst Dives' soul is plunged into the fiery mouth of hell by two other devils (one green and the other white). These devils have no wings.

The prefatory cycle of biblical narratives that originally was part of the Eadwine Psalter also shows the suicide of Herod.[78] The king is shown slaying himself with a sword, while a devil grabs his soul, which has just come out of his body, in the shape of a miniature young person.[79]

A nearly exact copy of this scene can be found in the prefatory cycle of biblical illustrations in Paris, BNF, 8846, fol. 4v (the so-called Anglo-Catalan or Canterbury Psalter; see fig. 1).[80] In this cycle we also find a depiction of the death of Abel (fol. 1v; see fig. 2): an angel plunges to receive, in his bare hands, the soul of Abel, coming out of his mouth in the form of a child/miniature person.[81]

Despite not being adjacent or related, these two scenes from the Anglo-Catalan Psalter somehow duplicate the good soul/bad soul opposition in the story of Dives and Lazarus, and confirm the general conception of the artist(s)[82] with reference to the going-

[78] London, BL, Add. 37472, f. 1r (SN: 97186).

[79] See also the historiated initial to Psalm 52 (53) in Cambridge, TC, B.11.4, f. 54v (1220-1230, London), portraying King Saul killing himself, while his soul is received by a black devil (SN: 65717).

[80] *Ca*. 1180-1200, Canterbury.

[81] In these representations, it is not easy to distinguish between a child and a young person or *humunculus*.

[82] I use a single/plural form because although the illustrations in the Anglo-Catalan Psalter, the Eadwine Psalter and the Harley Psalter are all very closely related, they are the work of different artists, who sometimes make individual

out of souls, again with a single angel receiving the soul of Abel (1v), and a single devil receiving the soul of Herod (4v).

3.2. *Death of saints*

Most visual narratives of the going-out of the soul emerging from the present survey are devoted to the death of a saint. In the Bury St Edmund Psalter, ff. 87v and 88r,[83] we find a drawing of the death of St Stephen, within an illustration to Psalm 78 (79). According to the *Acts of the Apostles* (7:59), during his stoning, Stephen declares that he sees God and Christ, and asks them to receive his spirit. In the Bury St Edmund Psalter, the stoning is shown on f. 87v, while on the following folio (88r) the saint's soul, in the form of a bird (presumably a dove),[84] can be seen flying up into the Hand of God, ascending towards God, Christ and the Holy Ghost, who are pictured at the top of the page.[85] Here the soul reaches its destination autonomously, without the help of angels.[86]

A dove-shaped soul is also found in a full-page miniature depicting St Albans' martyrdom featuring in the final part of Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, St. Godehard 1, p. 416 (see fig. 3),[87] a manuscript containing also a Psalter allegedly associated with Christina of Markyate. The miniature shows the moment

choices.

[83] Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 12 (1025-49, Canterbury, Christ Church; prov. Bury St Edmunds, Jouarre sec. xii; SN: 72008 and 72009).

[84] This iconography might be influenced by standard representations of the Holy Ghost/Spirit. The word "spiritus" is explicitly mentioned in the passage from the *Acts of the Apostles* (ch. 7.58) narrating the stoning of St Stephen: "Et lapidabant Stephanum invocantem, et dicentem: Domine Jesu, suscipe *spiritum* meum".

[85] In the same Psalter, however, on f. 72r, an angel is shown taking a soul, in the form of a child, to Abraham (Psalm 65 [66], SN 72001).

[86] A similar, autonomous exit, but with the soul in the shape of a child, seems to appear in Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. XII.17, in an image accompanying Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (see below).

[87] 1125-49, Saint Albans; SN: 170889.

the saint's head is cut off from his body. An angel is portrayed extracting the saint's dove-shaped soul from his mouth,[88] and the soul is shown again at the top of the scene, held by two angels, guiding it towards Christ, who appears between two additional angels. Here we may find an echo of the textual narratives in the *Visio* and *3U*, in which the soul is taken by angels to God/Christ immediately after death.

Dove-shaped souls appear again in a twelfth-century manuscript from Bury St Edmunds, now M. 736 in the Morgan Library,[89] portraying the martyrdom of St Edmund in two distinct death-scenes. The manuscript contains various texts narrating the life and miracles of the saint, preceded by some royal and ecclesiastical documents. A prefatory cycle of 32 full-page miniatures is followed by the *Miracula sancti Eadmundi, regis et martyris*, the *Passio sancti Eadmundi* by Abbo of Fleury, and the *Officium sancti Eadmundi*. One of the two death-scenes occurs in the prefatory cycle of illustrations (f.14v), while the second one is part of a historiated initial within the *Officium* (f. 94v, Vigils, *Lectio*

[88] An interesting image on f. 183v/p. 366 (SN. 170645) shows two souls in two different forms. One is portrayed as a bird peeping out from the mouth of a dead man, whilst a second one appears as a (clothed) miniature man in the psalmist's arms. The image relates to the phrase "Exibit spiritus eius et revertetur in terram suam" from Psalm 146 (145):4, and seems to highlight this double appearance of the soul. Compare with the image of Christ on f. 207r/p. 413 in the same manuscript, who is portrayed with the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove coming out of his mouth (SN. 170748). Matthew Paris' later illustration of the story also presents St Albans' soul in the shape of a dove, this time autonomously ascending to heaven (Dublin, Trinity College IE 177, fol. 38r (1240-1250, St Albans; SN: 71900). See also the images of the death of Heraclius (fol. 46r, SN: 71909) and Amphibalus (fol. 48r, SN: 71913).

[89] *ca*. 1130.

sexta).[90] The full-page illustration[91] shows the moment in which St Edmund's head gets cut off from his torso, and his soul, in the shape of a dove, flies up above, into the Hand of God. No angels or devils are present. The historiated initial[92] presents roughly the same scene, but with a significant difference: here the soul, again in the shape of a dove, is received by a flying angel, and transported within a blue cloth. Again, no devils are present and no struggle for the soul is portrayed.

The dove-shaped soul motif seems to be limited to the "saintly" scenes described so far, and appears particularly popular, as far as the twelfth century is concerned, in the St Albans and Bury St Edmunds areas.

Another saintly death-scene occurs in Roundel 14 illustrating the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, in London, BL, Harley Y.6 (Guthlac Roll), recto (see fig. 4).[93] The scene depicts the death of the saint, showing two angels receiving his soul: one grabs the soul by its arm and leg, while the other waits, holding a cloth, ready to accommodate the soul in it. The soul, in the shape of a miniature, nude young man, has just emerged from the saint's mouth. Once again, no devils are present.

Bede's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* in London, BL, Yates Thompson 26 (Add. 39943), f. 73r,[94] also contains a death-scene with the

[90] The 32 full-page miniatures of the manuscript are not in the same hand as the initials, and might be slightly earlier and originally destined to illustrate a different manuscript. The decoration shows links with some St Albans manuscripts. See Bateman 1978, 23, who concludes that the manuscript was written in Bury St Edmunds but decorated by an illuminator hired from the St Albans atelier: "The artists who produced the Albani Psalter, the Pembroke New Testament cycle of drawings and the Morgan Life and Miracles of St. Edmund belonged to the same workshop, shared a common store of models and were intimately familiar with one another's iconography and style. This workshop existed at St. Albans". See also the curator's description at http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0736a.pdf.

[91] SN: 77562.

[92] SN: 77590.

[93] 1200-1210, Lincolnshire; SN: 66382.

[94] *ca*. 1200, Durham; SN: 214579.

going-out of the soul (see fig. 5). Here St Cuthbert's soul, in the shape of a nude young man in a mandorla, appears up above the saint's body, carried by two angels within a cloth. No devils are present.

Worth mentioning is also an illustration to Psalm 33 (34) in the Harley Psalter, f. 19r,[95] showing, *i.a.*, the martyrdom of SS Lawrence, Paul and Peter. Lawrence is held on a gridiron by two men; Paul is being executed by a man using a sword to cut off his head; and Peter is being crucified upside-down on a cross. Three angels fly or stand near them, each holding a cloth, waiting for their souls to come out of their bodies. Although the souls are not visible in the scene, the cloths on the angels' hands make clear that the souls are expected to come out of the martyrs' bodies soon, to be led to their *post-mortem* destination. The same illustration, with the very same details, can be found in the Harley Psalter's model, that is, Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 32, f. 19r,[96] and in its later copies, that is, Cambridge, TC, R.17.1, fol. 56v;[97] and Paris, BNF, lat. 8846, fol. 56v.[98]

3.3. *Death (or Dormition) of the Virgin Mary, and death of St John*

The illustrations of the death of Mary dating from early medieval England show a variety in their depiction of the scene. Unsurprisingly, none of the scenes presents a struggle for the soul, owing to the total righteousness of Mary, awaiting no judgement. As has been noted before,[99] twelfth-century illustrations show the influence of the Byzantine *koimesis*, based on apocryphal Gospel stories such as the numerous versions of the *Transitus Mariae* or *Dormitio Mariae*, which became very popular in western Europe,

[95] London, BL, Harley 603; 1010-20, Canterbury, Christ Church; SN: 187774. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 422. Ohlgren 1986, item 169.36.

[96] *ca*. 816-840, Hautvillers or Rheims; prov. Canterbury, Christ Church by s. x^{ex} or xi^{in}. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 939.

[97] *ca*. 1155-60, Canterbury, Christ Church.

[98] *ca*. 1180-1200, Canterbury, Christ Church.

[99] See Klein 1998.

probably also due to the Crusades.[100] The scenes based on these narratives "remained almost unchanged over the centuries and always included the figure of Christ lifting the Virgin's soul to be carried to heaven by angels".[101] The presence of the apostles at Mary's deathbed was another standard feature of the Byzantine *koimesis* scenes. All these elements can be found in the death scene on the so-called Byzantine Diptych in the Winchester Psalter,[102] where Christ is portrayed holding Mary's swaddled and nimbed infant-like soul in his arms (see fig. 6).[103] Two angels are also present, each holding a cloth, perhaps ready to receive the soul from Christ, and twelve apostles are gathered around Mary. The Hand of God (a western feature) can be seen at the top, in a blessing gesture.

Earlier illustrations only show angels, apostles and the Hand of God, as in the Benedictional of St. Æthelwold,[104] or only the Hand of God, as in the Benedictional of Robert of Jumiège.[105]

Worth a mention is also the illustration of Mary's death featur-

[100] See Kabir 2001, 31-37.

[101] Klein 1998, 29.

[102] London, BL, Cotton Nero C. IV, f. 29r (1150-60, Winchester; SN: 65138). Klein (1998, 35) considers this image an original conflation, on the part of an English artist, of eastern and western elements.

[103] Perhaps the more pious the soul, the younger its appearance.

[104] London, BL, Add. 49598, f. 102v (971-984, Winchester, prob. OM; SN: 97632). Ohlgren 111.25, 90. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 301. The illustration faces a Benediction for the Assumption of the Virgin, and shows four angels waiting for Mary's soul, three of them holding a cloth; nine apostles are also shown waiting, at the bottom of the page.

[105] Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale 369 Y. 7, f. 54v (975-999, Winchester, NM; SN: 186836). Ohlgren 112.4, p. 91. Klein 1998, p. 41, n. 33, states that "In Anglo-Saxon England the Benedictional of St. Ethelwald […] and the related Benedictional of Archbishop Robert […], both written and illuminated in Winchester about 980, provide the earliest western examples of the subject, inserted to illustrate the Benedictional's text for the Assumption. Neither image shows any evidence of the direct use of a Byzantine model". On the Dormition, the *Transitu* and the two Benedictionals, see Clayton 1990, 154-155 and 161-166. See also Hawkes 1995, 253-255, for the possible interpretation of a scene on the Wirksworth Slab as a Dormition.

ing in the twelfth-century Hunterian Psalter.[106] Here, on f. 18r, we find the scenes of the Dormition and funeral procession. In the Dormition scene proper, Christ and ten apostles are present, but Mary's soul is not depicted, probably as Mary is still alive. Eight angels fly above, bearing no cloth. The funeral-procession scene features two angels, carrying a cloth each.[107] On f. 19v, we have the entombment and then the Assumption scene, where 14 angels are portrayed carrying to heaven the shrouded body of Mary on a big cloth, led by Christ and two further angels, swinging censers.

I would like to mention here also two thirteenth-century scenes that recount the death of John the Evangelist, because one of them appears to be heavily influenced by the Byzantine *koimesis*, while the other follows more closely the standard treatment of the death of a saintly person, as it is represented both in most of the manuscripts we have seen and in some of the textual narratives we have analysed. The *koimesis*-like scene is found in the prefatory cycle of illustrations in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 43, on fol. 25v.[108] Here Christ is shown holding John's soul in his hands, surrounded by eight apostles. John's soul, in the form of a child, appears nude and nimbed.[109] No angels are present. The more standard death scene is found in Paris, BNF, fr. 403,[110] a Salisbury codex containing the *Apocalypse of John*. Here, on f. 44v, John's soul is received and borne to heaven by two angels, in a cloth, The child-like soul is nimbed and appears kneeling within the cloth. Christ and the apostles are not present. The same manuscript

[106] Glasgow, University Library, Hunter 229 (U.3.2) (*ca.* 1170, Northern England; SN: 183552).

[107] Sometimes draped hands were meant to denote respect.

[108] 1210-20, Oxford; SN: 79582. The prefatory cycle of illustrations of biblical events is here placed between a Kalendar and a Psalter. The relevant page shows the deaths of John, Matthew, Simon and Bartholomew. Only John's soul is depicted; Matthew's scene shows the Holy Ghost descending from heaven, while Simon's and Bartholomew's scenes feature a Hand of God up above.

[109] Only the souls of Mary and John appear nimbed.

[110] 1250-60, Salisbury; SN: 67188.

features, on f. 28r, in the context of Rev. 14:13, an image of the death of the "blessed souls".[111] This image is interesting because it portrays a scene with multiple deaths: ten people die and their child-like souls are collectively gathered by a single angel within a single cloth, where many further souls are visible.[112] Of course, the angel portrayed in this scene cannot be a guardian angel.

3.4. *Death scenes with a struggle for the soul*

A death scene featuring in a folio that acts as a frontispiece for a Canterbury copy of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*[113] portrays a struggle for a soul which involves a devil, a few angels and Mary (see fig. 7). This is the only instance of a depiction of devils and angels gathering together at the deathbed of a person – and struggling for his/her soul – that has emerged from this survey.[114] The scene shows the going-out of the soul of a pious man on his deathbed. The soul, in the form of a nude child, is held by Mary, who is sitting on a throne, in a sort of "Virgin-with-child" pose. Two flying angels approach, one holding a cloth and extending his arms to take the soul, grabbing his arms. A third angel descends towards the dead body, swinging a censer. A hairy, beast-like devil without wings extends his claws towards the soul, spitting fire from his mouth. One angel gestures towards Mary and the receiving angel, as if to indicate the side the soul belongs to.[115]

[111] SN: 67152.

[112] The blessed souls transported all together in heaven are probably also the subject of an illustration in Grimbald's Gospels, placed below the portrait of St John (London, BL, Add. 34890, fol. 114v; *ca.* 1020, Canterbury, Christ Church; SN: 187295). Here the souls are transported by two angels, inside a blue cloth.

[113] Oxford, BL, Laud Misc. 469, fol. 7v (1130-40, Canterbury, Christ Church; SN: 186420).

[114] The struggle for the soul will become popular much later, especially in fifteenth-century French manuscripts.

[115] It is not clear if the elements on the left – showing Christ, accompanied by three saints, fighting against two devils – belong to the same scene or to a different one.

Except for the presence of Mary, this scene appears closer to the textual descriptions of the going-out of souls in the *Visio* and in the *3U* Rogationtide account.

An image showing a struggle-for-the-soul scene also occurs in Firenze, BML, Plut. XII.17, f. 1v,[116] again on the frontispiece of another Canterbury copy of the *De civitate Dei*. The page is divided into three registers. The middle one shows two people who have been killed in battle; their souls depart from their dead bodies, and seem to ascend autonomously towards a scene of the weighing of souls, pictured in the upper register, immediately above the death scene. The soul of the man on the left is drawn half in the middle register and half in the upper register, where it is pierced by a devil holding a trident. The soul of the man on the right is drawn entirely on the middle register, but turns its gaze upwards, towards the upper register, which shows three devils and two angels struggling over a soul. The devils have tridents and grapnels; one angel clutches a pair of scales, while another holds a soul within a cloth. Souls are in the form of miniature people. No angels or devils are present in the death scene to receive the souls, which leave their respective bodies autonomously, exiting from the mouth in one case, and from a wound in the head in the second instance.[117]

[116] *ca.* 1120, Canterbury StA; SN: 186437.

[117] I think this image very likely refers to a *post-mortem* struggle, but it is ambiguous. The relationship between the two registers is not totally clear. The spatial transition of the soul on the left presumably refers to a change of state in an immediate *post-mortem* context (a sort of entrance into the invisible world), but it might also depict a temporal succession referring to a distant future, with the weighing scene to be ascribed to a Last Judgment context rather than to a *post-mortem* one. The weighing of the souls often appears in Last Judgment contexts; here, however, the soul in the arms of the angel appears naked and still in miniature size. For a similar scene, see the death of Swicher in München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 13031, fol. 1 (cited in Angheben 2022, 141-142), but with Christ as Judge. Compare, in contrast, the Last Judgment scene in the *Liber Vitae* of the New Minster, Winchester (London, BL, Stowe 944, f. 7r; 1020-31, Westminster, NM; SN: 135270) where the defendant appears much bigger and fully clothed. Moreover, Christ is not present, and neither

4. *Conclusions*

The iconography of the manuscripts of early medieval England shows an interest in the fate of the soul immediately after death, and the separation of the soul from the body, offering a visual counterpart to the textual witnesses of the literary tradition of the time.

Around twenty images can be found, showing a dead person and his/her soul exiting the body or being received by psycopomps, and they show great variation, as in the textual tradition.

The earliest extant scene of death portraying the going-out of a soul from its body dates to the second quarter of the eleventh century – an illustration to *Psalm 78*, showing the stoning of St Stephen –, with most extant death scenes dating to the twelfth century and beyond. They accompany different typologies of texts, mainly Psalters – where they occur especially within Prefatory cycles of illustrations narrating biblical events – and hagiographies, but also Augustine's *De civitate dei* and the *Apocalypse of John*.

The Augustinian manuscripts contain the only two examples of a *post-mortem* struggle for the soul in the entire corpus under analysis, similar to those that can be found in the *Visio* and in most of the *3U* versions. The two death scenarios differ greatly, but both illustrations present devils and angels fighting for a soul: Plut. XII.17 features a weighing-of-the-soul scene, while Laud Misc. 469 shows a more "physical fight", involving also the Virgin Mary, where a fire-spitting devil is kept at bay by the angels.

Apart from the two Augustinian manuscripts, all the other scenes present a narration in which a judgment has already been passed and the soul is received by the corresponding psycopomp(s) (a devil or an angel). This feature moves these representations away from the *Visio*, in which a struggle for the soul was gener-

are the bands of angels and devils and the pious and wicked people who are normally present in Last Judgment scenes. See also Brilli 2015 [2016], 7-10.

ally present, and move them closer, for example, to such versions of the *Three Utterances Exemplum* where the struggle is absent, such as the Old English version in Oxford, BL, Junius 85/86, fols. 25r-40r, or the Latin version in München, BS, Clm. 28135, fol. 13.[118]

In the images, the number of angels or devils receiving the soul generally varies between one and two, but the number increases in the case of the death of Mary, whose depictions are, in many cases, heavily influenced by Byzantine *koimesis* models, possibly mediated through the Crusades or travels to the Holy Land. In these scenes, Christ is also present as the receiver of the soul, which is swaddled and nimbed. We see Christ also in a miniature showing the death of John, with his soul naked and nimbed: again a scene which might be likewise influenced by the *koimesis*. An interesting image from the *Apocalypse of John* (Paris, BNF, fr. 403) shows a single angel collecting all the souls of the blessed. As far as the number of angels and devils present at death is concerned, therefore, iconography and texts do not seem to agree, as texts generally imply more than one angel or devil, and often a host of angels and devils.[119]

Another disagreement concerns the aspect and colour of angels and devils, who in the relevant texts are described as "brighter than the sun" and "darker than an Ethiopian or coal", respectively. This opposition is not generally met in the iconography, except in New York, PML, M. 521 (showing the death of Dives) and in Paris, BNF, 8846 (showing the death of Herod), where devils have dark skin. In the Huntingfield Psalter, devils are even green or blue.

Some souls are depicted reaching God or Christ autonomously (especially dove-like souls, like Stephens' soul in the Bury Psalter and Eadmund's soul in New York, PML, M. 736, but also

[118] See Luiselli Fadda 1977, 1-31, and Wack, Wright 1991.

[119] This also emerges from the use of the imperative plural. For example, the sentence "Aweccað nu grimlice þa sawle of þam lichoman" requires at least three devils, one giving orders and two performing the task.

the child-like souls of Firenze, BML, Plut. XII.17), but most are transported by angels (often in a cloth) or devils (in one case with a rope around the soul's neck). Texts generally do not disclose the details of the actual physical transfer.

The appearance of the soul, which in English textual narratives is not generally dealt with, varies between different manuscripts. Most scenes depict the soul in the form of a swaddled infant (only in the case of the Virgin Mary), or a child, or a miniature young man (*homunculus*), although it is often hard to distinguish between the latter two.[120] Other scenes, in contrast, show the soul in the form of a bird/dove, presumably under the influence of standard representations of the Holy Ghost/Spirit. The earliest extant instance of the soul as a dove can be seen in a second-quarter-of-the-eleventh-century Canterbury Psalter, in an image of the stoning of St Stephen in Roma, BAV, Reg. lat. 12. This codex later found its way to Bury St Edmunds, and it is precisely in that area that, a century later or so (in the second quarter of the twelfth century), we find further representations of the soul as a dove, in two illustrations of the death of St Edmund, in New York, PML, M. 736. We also find the dove-shaped soul in the St Albans Psalter (Hildesheim, D, St. Godehard 1), dated to around the same time, and since research has shown iconographic similarities between these two manuscripts, most probably due to a collaboration between the atelier of St Albans and the monastery of Bury,[121] it is likely that the Bury Psalter influenced the way in which the appearance of the soul was conceived and represented both in the St Albans Psalter and in New York, PML, M. 736.

As with escathological texts, a great variety of conceptions and lines of traditions can be seen, although the majority of representations seem closer to the accounts involving no struggles for the soul. Textual narratives seem however more sophisticated and richer in details. Of the three Eastern types of *post-mortem*

[120] This aspect might have been influenced by Matthew 18:3-4, and subsequently extended to the wicked souls.

[121] Bateman 1978.

accounts,[122] only two seem to circulate in early medieval England: both in the texts and in the iconography we find either scenes where angels and devils fight for the souls, or scenes where the soul is received only by the relevant band, according to its piousness or wickedness. Batiouchkof's impression that a struggle takes place only in case of doubt, when there is uncertainty concerning the piousness or wickedness of a particular soul, seems confirmed by iconography, where scenes depicting the death of saints only feature good angels, and scenes depicting the death of notoriously wicked characters such as Herod or Dives only feature devils. A struggle is shown only in the case of people whose identity is not known, as with the images on the frontispiece of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. It is somehow ironic that the iconographic tradition of the struggle-for-the-soul, drawing on the *Visio Pauli*, serves as an introduction to a text by an author who had so passionately condemned it.[123]

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[122] See above.

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Fig. 1: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 8846, fol. 4v (det.). © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Fig. 2: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 8846, fol. 1v (det.). © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Fig. 3: St Albans Psalter. Dombibliothek Hildesheim, HS St.God. 1 (Property of the Basilica of St. Godehard, Hildesheim), p. 416. © Dombibliothek Hildesheim.

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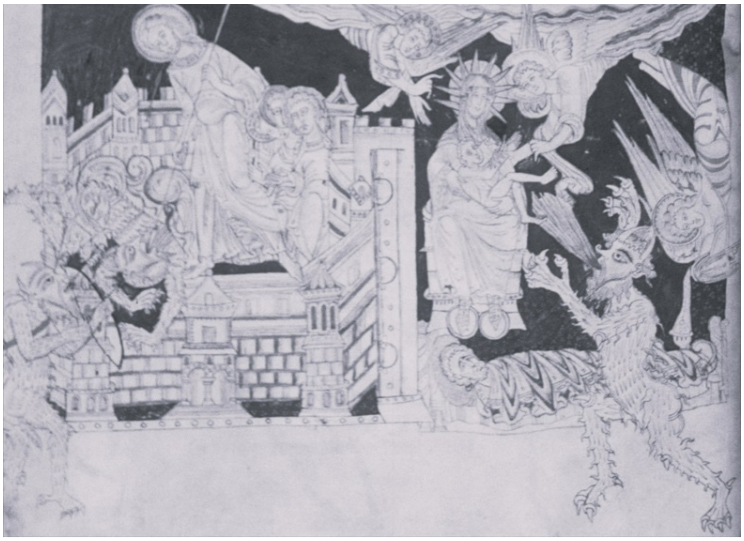

Fig. 7: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 469, fol. 7v (det.).
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