

ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA DI FILOLOGIA GERMANICA

# FILOLOGIA GERMANICA

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## GERMANIC PHILOLOGY

16  
2024

*Testi escatologici  
nelle letterature germaniche medievali  
Eschatological Texts  
in Medieval Germanic Literatures*



FILOLOGIA GERMANICA – GERMANIC PHILOLOGY

Publicazione patrocinata e finanziata dall'Associazione Italiana di Filologia Germanica  
This publication is supported and funded by the Associazione Italiana di Filologia Germanica  
(Italian Society for Germanic Philology)

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ISSN 2036-8992

Registrazione del Tribunale di Trento in data 22 novembre 2009 numero 1398

Per acquisti e abbonamenti : <[riviste@internationalbookseller.com](mailto:riviste@internationalbookseller.com)>

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ADELE CIPOLLA

## FIMBULVETR TRA ECOCRITICA E CRITICA DEL TESTO

Considering the *Vǫluspá*, related eddic and skaldic witnesses, and their adaptation in Snorri's rhetorical treatise (under the pervasive influence of late antique erudition and Christian lore on their written fixation), this contribution aims to assess the convenience of adopting ecocriticism, a discipline of sociological matrix, to the analysis of texts from the Old-Icelandic manuscript tradition and Swedish runology. Advanced techniques of scientific investigation (like volcanology and dendrochronology) and new methodologies and theoretical frameworks (like geosemiotics) appear capable of achieving fascinating results, claimed to be relevant to Old-Icelandic mythography and the reconstruction of underlying beliefs in Scandinavian pre-Christian oral culture. Under the impact of the current climatic emergency, these have been applied with the re-reading of the Rök Stone, where, in the runic inscription, a series of riddles referring to the death of the sun is deemed to be derived from the apocalyptic fears aroused by the memory of a climatic catastrophe, the *fimbulvetr* (Great Winter). The volcanic winter of 536 has been linked to the poetic invention of the *fimbulvetr*, the myth of which is actually documented in Iceland from the half of the 13th c. onwards, with a simple reference in the *Vafþrúðnismál* and a short report in the *Gylfaginning*, where the *fimbulvetr* is the triggering event of the *Ragnarök*. The paper will reassess the development and variability of the Great Winter narrative in the written sources and the soundness of the ecocritical approach to its philological interpretation.

### 1. *Apocalisse interdisciplinare. Introduzione*

Gli studi sulle tradizioni apocalittiche antiche e medievali, considerate nella loro diffusione globale oltre i confini delle filologie d'area, sono oggi tra gli ambiti tematici di maggior successo nel dibattito delle scienze umane – comprensibilmente, viste le crisi valoriali, geopolitiche e climatiche in cui ci dibattiamo – e il tema apocalittico incrocia spesso il frame concettuale dell'ecocritica.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> La lista degli studi sul tema apocalittico e sull'ecocritica è imponente: per i primi si considerino Krümpel 2021, Stepanov 2019 e Wieser *et al.* 2020; per

In un simile contesto, la tradizione letteraria antico-islandese ricopre una posizione rilevante, poiché nel medioevo europeo essa è l'unica a trasmettere un mito originale della catastrofe in più fasi concatenate (con la crescente impotenza e il tracollo delle divinità, la corruzione umana, il prevalere di forze maligne e mostruose, il sovvertimento degli elementi e il collasso del cosmo) immaginando infine la palingenesi e un nuovo mondo purificato per gli dèi e per gli umani: è quanto va sotto la denominazione di *Ragnarök*.<sup>2</sup>

Frammenti di questo mito sembrano affiorare nei monumenti figurativi dell'epoca preletterata (due esempi per tutti, le Pietre di Gotland e la Croce di Gosforth),<sup>3</sup> dove singole immagini – la belva dalle fauci spalancate, la donna con il corno potorio, il destriero a otto zampe – tradizionalmente sono state viste quali testimonianze del racconto precristiano dell'apocalisse e identificate con Fenrir, le valchirie, Odino e gli *einherjar*, che le fonti letterarie islandesi organizzeranno nel racconto complesso del *Ragnarök*. Sottoponendo i nomi e il lessico oscuro della poesia eddica e scaldica e le eziologie e i malintesi di Snorri<sup>4</sup> all'indagine etimologica e alla comparazione interculturale, si è creduto di poter integrare i dati dell'iconografia e dell'epigrafia runica di età vichinga e di poter risalire al mito dell'apocalisse circolante nella tradizione orale, attribuendogli l'articolazione narrativa testimoniata da poche opere letterarie del medioevo islandese.

Nondimeno, queste ultime furono anche esito di contatti con l'apocalittica giudaico-cristiana. Per la strutturazione visionaria e dialogica dei testi islandesi, com'è noto, è stata suggerita una dipendenza dagli oracoli sibillini e dalla Sibilla Tiburtina,<sup>5</sup> ma, come per

i secondi, Fugelso 2017, Garrard 2014, Glotfelty 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Si usa il termine normalizzato quando, come qui, ci si riferisce al complesso mitico dell'apocalisse nordica, mentre le varianti formalmente e semanticamente caratterizzate verranno impiegate per i testi in cui esse compaiono.

<sup>3</sup> Hultgård 2022, 147-222 (*Ragnarök Illustrated*).

<sup>4</sup> Per un orientamento generale sull'*Edda* di Snorri, Battaglia 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Dronke 1997, 93-104. Si vedano anche Wellendorf 2009, Johansson 2013, Pétur Pétursson 2013 e Steinsland 2013. Lo stato dell'arte – sulla ricezione, la matrice precristiana, gli influssi cristiani, la dimensione performativa e la

gli echi evangelici, mancano le prove di filiazioni testuali sicure: in Norvegia e Islanda, come nel resto dell'Europa altomedievale, solo singoli libri della Bibbia vennero precocemente glossati e tradotti e i temi apocalittici di matrice cristiana affiorano, diffratti, nella precoce fissazione scritta dell'omiletica e delle *Biskupa sögur*.<sup>6</sup>

Nei primi due decenni del nuovo millennio, grazie all'applicazione di tecnologie innovative e di nuovi quadri ermeneutici quale quello della geosemiotica, “elaborated to understand public texts as social action in the material world”,<sup>7</sup> archeologia e runologia hanno conseguito risultati interessanti per la definizione dei contesti materiali nei quali il mito si sarebbe formato e diffuso, del loro *Sitz im Leben*. Qui si vuole verificare quanto il loro utilizzo si sia rivelato proficuo per l'interpretazione dei testi letterari islandesi che tematizzano i miti.

## 2. Sviluppo e struttura del mito del Ragnarök

Björtr verðr sól at svartri; | sökkr fold í mar dökkvan; | brestr erfði  
Austra; | allr glymr sjá á fjöllum, | áðr at Eyjum fríðri | (inndróttar)  
Þórfinni | (þeim hjalpi goð geymi) | gæðingr myni fœðask.

(Il sole lucente si farà nero, | il suolo sprofonderà nel mare cupo,  
| si squarcerà la *fatica di Austri* [*kenning*: ‘cielo’], | il mare  
tutto muggierà sui monti, | prima che sulle Isole, migliore | di  
Þórfinnr, un guardiano della schiera | sia messo al mondo: | Dio  
aiuti questo signore!)

Arnórr Þórðarson *jarlaskáld*, *Þórfinnsdrápa* 24.<sup>8</sup>

Nei versi di Arnórr, le immagini della catastrofe cosmica sostanziano l'*adynaton* nell'encomio dello *jarl* Þórfinnr: vi si coglie

documentazione iconografica – nei saggi raccolti in Gunnell, Lassen 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Kirby 1980, 14-16.

<sup>7</sup> Holmberg 2021, 459.

<sup>8</sup> Whaley 2009: <<https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&i=1104>> (ultimo accesso 20 gennaio 2024): le traduzioni in italiano sono dell'autrice di questo contributo.

un'eco dalla strofa R 57 della *Völuspá* (di qui in poi *Vsp*):<sup>9</sup>

Sól tér sortna, | sígr fold í mar, || hverfa af himni | heiðar stjornor;  
|| geisar eimi | við aldrnara, || leikr hár hiti | við himin sjalfan.

(Il sole si fa nero, | il suolo affonda nel mare, || dal cielo precipitano  
| le chiare stelle, || impazza il vapore | contro *quello che nutre la vita*  
[*kenning*: 'fuoco'], || divampa alta la fiamma | contro il cielo stesso).

Dopo una serie di segni premonitori (*Vsp* R 36-44), dopo il sovvertimento di ogni vincolo umano (*Vsp* R 45), dopo che i giganti si sono liberati e hanno sferrato l'attacco (*Vsp* R 50) e dopo che Odino, Freyr e Þórr sono caduti in duello e Odino è stato vendicato da Víðarr con l'uccisione del Lupo (*Vsp* R 53, 55-56),<sup>10</sup> in *Vsp* R 57, i *ragna røk*, 'i destini degli dèi',<sup>11</sup> si compiono in un'apocalisse di tenebre, d'acqua e di fuoco. La *drápa* per Þórfinnr (1065 ca.) è stata indicata come termine utile per la datazione della *Vsp*:<sup>12</sup> tuttavia, per la medesima strofa – come per una serie di analoghi nel corpus degli scaldi – insieme alla *Vsp* e all'eco da Matteo 24:29 “sol obscurabitur, et luna non dabit lumen suum, et stellae cadent de caelo, et virtutes caelorum commovebuntur”<sup>13</sup> è stata suggerita persino una remota influenza oraziana:

<sup>9</sup> R: Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Gks 2365 4to (*Codex Regius*, 1270 ca.). Seguo la numerazione delle strofe di von See *et al.* 2019 I, 19-442 (R) e II, 1479-1566 (H: *Hauksbók*, København, Universitetsbibliotek, AM 544 4to, 1290-1360 ca., che tramanda la *Vsp* in una compilazione di opere storiografiche ed erudite ed è latore di una redazione diversa da R): come in altre edizioni, la numerazione diverge da quella dei manoscritti, seguendo le integrazioni e le dislocazioni congetturali proposte dagli studiosi. La strofa è la 50 nella versione di H.

<sup>10</sup> La str. 55 di R (con la vendetta di Víðarr) è omessa in H.

<sup>11</sup> Sulle varianti *røk* (già nelle compilazioni omiletiche antico-norvegesi e islandesi trasmesse, rispettivamente, in København, Universitetsbibliotek, AM 619 4to e Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, Perg. 15 4to), *røk* (nell'Edda Poetica) e *røkk* (in Snorri), Hultgård 2022, 3-6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 38, nota 63; von See *et al.* 2019 I, 408-409.

<sup>13</sup> Hultgård 2022, 226.

[...] simul imis saxa renarint | vadis levata, ne redire sit nefas, | neu  
conversa domum pigeat dare lintea quando | Padus Matina laverit  
cacumina, | in mare seu celsus procurrerit Appenninus [...].

([...] non appena dai guadi profondi | si saranno levate le pietre,  
tornare non sarà sacrilegio, | né ci vergogneremo di piegare le  
vele verso casa, | non appena il Po avrà lavato le cime del Matino  
| o l'alto Appennino sarà precipitato in mare [...])

*Ep.* 16,25-29.<sup>14</sup>

I versi di Arnórr illustrano quindi il possibile intreccio di apporti disparati (insieme al carne eddico, il testo evangelico e ricordi scolastici eruditi) confluiti nelle opere della letteratura antico-islandese, anche quando esse risalgano a tradizioni orali (che, in Islanda come altrove, coesistono per un tempo imprecisabile con l'emergente scritturalità).

La ricerca di elementi probanti per la ricostruzione del mito ha esposto, tra l'altro, al rischio di sovrainterpretare gli aspetti stilistici dei testi: è quanto è accaduto con la leggenda di Brávellir, della quale si hanno due resoconti paralleli, nel *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* 5-9 e nel libro VIII dei *Gesta Danorum* (di qui in poi *GD*):

Crederes repente terris ingruere caelum, silvas camposque subsidere,  
misceri omnia, antiquum rediisse chaos, divina pariter et humana  
tumultuosa tempestate confundi, cunctaque simul in perniciem trahi.

(Si sarebbe potuto credere che improvvisamente la terra assalisse il cielo, che le selve e i campi coltivati sprofondassero, che ogni cosa si confondesse, che fosse tornato il caos primigenio, che gli dèi e gli umani si mischiassero in uno sciagurato tumulto, che tutte le cose venissero trascinate alla stessa dissoluzione).

*GD* VIII,iv,iv,2.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Per l'influsso oraziano si è pronunciato Bjarni Einarson (1976, in Hultgård 2022, 38, nota 62); si vedano anche Jónas Kristjánsson, *Vesteinn Ólason* 2014 1, 130. Per lo stesso *adynaton* in altre testimonianze scaldiche, Hultgård 2022, 36-38 e <<https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=verse&i=1619>> (ultimo accesso 20 gennaio 2024).

<sup>15</sup> Friis-Jensen, Fisher, I 2015.

Da questo passo, Stig Wikander ha tratto la congettura che la Brávellir dei *GD* fosse la razionalizzazione dello scontro escatologico della mitografia antico-islandese,<sup>16</sup> ma il confronto iperbolico con la catastrofe cosmica anche qui serve ad affermare la straordinarietà della battaglia e connota lo stile di Saxo, senza consentire deduzioni su eventuali influssi di tradizioni precristiane.

Lo studio del teologo e indoeuropeista Anders Hultgård (*The End of the World in Scandinavian Mythology*), tradotto in inglese nel 2022 (ma apparso in svedese nel 2017), elenca e commenta “tutti” i documenti multimodali “indigeni” e gli analoghi “allo-gegni” (latino-giudaico-cristiani, classici, germanici e indoeuropei, principalmente iranici) del mito: le conclusioni non sono del tutto persuasive quando si cerchi di individuare modelli per l’intera struttura del racconto apocalittico nordico; appaiono inoltre le difficoltà metodologiche e il rischio di ragionamenti circolari insiti nella pretesa di cogliere nelle fonti – selezionate tra l’epigrafia runica e l’iconografia di età vichinga, l’erudizione scolastica latino-cristiana e i manoscritti islandesi – la prova dell’ampia circolazione, in Scandinavia e Islanda tra i secc. IX-XIII, di un racconto del *Ragnarök* con il medesimo sviluppo di quello testimoniato – con difformità stilistica e divergenze nell’ordine degli eventi – nella *Vsp* e nella *Gylfaginning* (di qui in poi *Gylf*) 51-53/31.<sup>17</sup> Dalla comparazione interculturale e interlinguistica, infatti, emergono singoli dettagli irrelati del mito, che sono riferibili al *Ragnarök* solo grazie alla loro presenza nella *Vsp* e in Snorri. Quest’ultimo aggiunge alla serie dei duelli escatologici

<sup>16</sup> Wikander 1960, 191-192 e Hultgård 2022, 144-146.

<sup>17</sup> Faulkes 1982/2005, 49-55 (sul *Codex Regius*); Heimir Pálsson-Faulkes 2012, 78-86 (sull’*Upsaliensis*). I capitoli delle due recensioni seguono una diversa numerazione e quella di U si basa sulle rubriche del ms. I testimoni medievali di *Gylf* sono R= Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Gks 2367 4to (prima metà del sec. XIV), T= Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht, Traj 1374<sup>x</sup> (ca. 1595), W= København, Universitetsbibliotek, AM 242 fol. (ca. 1350-70) e U= Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, DG 11 (primo quarto del sec. XIV): T viene considerato nell’elenco in quanto apografo cartaceo di un ms. medievale perduto.

della *Vsp* (tra Odino e il Lupo, Freyr e Surtr e Þórr e il Serpe di Miðgarðr) quello fra Heimdallr e Loki (che chiude la sequenza), e quello fra Týr e Garmr, non ricordato altrove:<sup>18</sup> poiché Garmr, nel *refrain* che scandisce le fasi dell'apocalisse (*Vsp* R 44, 49, 58), appare quale ipostasi di *Fenrisúlfr*, è possibile che Snorri sovrainterpreti una *kenning* di Odino composta con *-týr*, 'dio' (come in *Angantýr*, *Farmatýr*, *Hangatýr*, etc.). Nella *Gylf*, le allusioni al *ragna røkkr* innervano l'intera storia divina, che tende sin dal principio verso la catastrofe e che dopo la palingenesi si concluderà svelando la natura mistificatoria del racconto e dei tre interlocutori di Gylfi/Gangleri:<sup>19</sup> nella conclusione, la recensione breve di Uppsala (cap. 31)<sup>20</sup> omette l'identificazione di *Okubór* con *Ector* e di Loki con *Ulixes*, che in R/T/W (cap. 53) corrisponde all'equazione tra gli *Æsir* e gli eroi troiani del *Formáli* e del II *Eptirmáli* degli *Skáldskaparmál*.<sup>21</sup>

*Vsp* e *Gylf* sono tramandate da sei manoscritti medievali islandesi che non risalgono mai oltre gli ultimi decenni del sec. XIII e che stanno in una qualche non del tutto chiara relazione reciproca: pur ammettendo l'ipotesi della circolazione orale di precedenti forme della *Vsp*, la prima versione affidata alla scrittura nel *Codex Regius* (datato a ca. il 1270) è congruente con la rielaborazione snorriana (che vi integra altri carmi dell'*Edda* Poetica: di qui in poi EP). Nonostante la tradizione numericamente sparuta, dietro ai due testimoni della *Vsp* (R e H) e ai quattro codici medievali della *Gylf* (R, T, W e U), che, oltre a parafrasarla, trasmettono un'ampia citazione dalla sezione apocalittica della *Vsp*,<sup>22</sup> si è ricostruito un numero relativamente alto di sub-archetipi, due per i due testimoni diretti R e H della *Vsp*, almeno altri due per la *Gylf* (l'uno per R/T/W, l'altro per U): la variabilità testuale più cospi-

<sup>18</sup> Faulkes 1982/2005, 50; Heimir Pálsson-Faulkes 2012, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Le premonizioni ai capp. 4, 12-13, 26, 29, 34, 37-38 e 43 della *Gylf* (1982/2005, 9, 14-15, 25-27, 30-32 e 36).

<sup>20</sup> Heimir Pálsson-Faulkes 2012, 86.

<sup>21</sup> Faulkes 1998/2007, 5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Nove strofe in R/T/W, tre in U (tratte forse da un antigrafo diverso da quello degli altri mss.: Quinn 2000, 83-84).

cua riguarda l'inclusione o l'esclusione di sequenze o strofe di particolare rilevanza tematica in rapporto al *Ragnarök*, come per l'uccisione di Baldr e l'imprigionamento di Loki (presenti solo in R 31-33 e 35), la vendetta di Víðarr sul Lupo (R 55) e l'avvento di Colui che “ǫllu ræðr” (H 584, nella penultima semistrofa di questo testimone, non tramandata in R), allusione al Dio cristiano e al Giudizio (“Þá kemr inn ríki | ar regindómi”: H 581-2). Viceversa, sequenze che per il lettore moderno disturbano lo sviluppo della narrazione, come il *dvergatal*, il catalogo dei nani che precede la creazione degli umani nella prima parte del racconto,<sup>23</sup> sono trasmesse da entrambe le redazioni della *Vsp* (R e H 9-16) e parafrasate da Snorri.<sup>24</sup>

Le sillogi eddiche R e A (quest'ultima trasmessa frammentariamente in Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 748 Ia 4to, 1300-1325 ca.) sono state compilate dalla metà del sec. XIII, forse per accompagnare la trattatistica grammaticale alla quale la Snorra Edda si allinea (“the first part of CR [= R] works as a textbook to be used in tandem with *Gylfaginning*, although much additional poetry was also gathered into the collection”)<sup>25</sup> e l'impulso principale alla fissazione scritta dei poemi orali sugli dèi potrebbe provenire dalla *Snorra Edda*.

### 3. *Il Grande Inverno*

Þá mælir Gangleri: “Hver tíðindi eru at segja frá um ragnarøk? Þess hefi ek eigi fyrr heyrt getit”.

*Frá Fimbulvetri ok Ragnarökkrum*  
Hvat segir þú frá fimbulvetri?  
segir Gangleri.

<sup>23</sup> Meli 2008, 24.

<sup>24</sup> von See *et al.* 2019 I, 128-176; 2019 II, 1502-1511; *Gylf*R 14 (Faulkes 1982/2005, 15<sup>33</sup>-17<sup>4</sup>), *Gylf*U 13: (Heimir Pálsson-Faulkes 2012, 24-26).

<sup>25</sup> Males 2020, 166 e, più in generale, per il rapporto tra *Gylf* e EP, 164-175.



Hár segir: “Mikil tíðindi eru þaðan at segja ok mǫrg. Þau in fyrstu at vetr sá kemr er kallaðr er fimbulvetr. Þá drífr snær ór ǫllum áttum. Frost eru þá mikil ok vindar hvassir. Ekki nýtr sólar. Þeir vetr fara þrír saman ok ekki sumar milli. En áðr ganga svá aðrir þrír vetr at þá er um alla verǫld orrostur miklar. Þá dreþask bræðr fyrir ágirni sakar ok engi þyrmir fǫður eða syni í manndrápum eða sífjasliti. Svá segir í *Vǫluspá*:

Bræðr munu beriask [etc.]”.

(Parla Gangleri: “Di quali eventi si deve dire riguardo al *ragnarøkkr*? Sull’argomento, prima, non ho sentito raccontare”. Hár dice: “Al proposito si deve dire di molti e grandi fatti. Per prima cosa che giunge l’inverno chiamato *fimbulvetr*. La neve cade da ogni direzione, grande è il gelo e i venti tagliano: il sole non giova. Vengono insieme tre di questi inverni e nessuna estate in mezzo. Ma, prima che ne arrivino altri tre uguali, per tutto il mondo scoppieranno grandi guerre: i fratelli si colpiranno per avidità e non si avrà misericordia né per il padre né per il figlio, nell’assassinio e nella violazione dei legami coniugali. Così è detto nella *Vǫluspá*:

Si colpiranno i fratelli, etc.”).

*Gylf*R 51.

Hár segir: Drífr þá snjó ór ǫllum áttum. Þá eru frost mikil ok vindar. Ekki nýtr sólar. Þeir vetr fara þrír saman, en ekki sumar í milli. En áðr ganga aðrir þrír vetr þeir er um alla verǫld eru. Orrostur dreifast niðr fyrir ágirni ok engi þyrmir feðr né syni í manndrápum eða sífium. Svá segir:

Bræðr munu beriast [etc.]”.

(Di *fimbulvetr* e del *ragnarøkkr* Cosa hai da dire su *fimbulvetr*? chiede Gangleri. Hár dice: La neve cade da ogni direzione, grande è il gelo e i venti. Il sole non giova. Vengono insieme tre di questi inverni e nessuna estate in mezzo, finché ne arrivano altri tre uguali per tutto il mondo. Le guerre si propagheranno per avidità, non si avrà pietà né del padre né del figlio nell’assassinio, né dei legami coniugali. Così è detto:

Si colpiranno i fratelli, etc.”).

*Gylf*U.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Faulkes 1982/2005, 49<sup>17-26</sup>; Heimir Pálsson-Faulkes 2012, 78: si sono

L'esordio del *Ragnarök* è uno dei luoghi dove la *Gylf* e la *Vsp* divergono significativamente e, mentre la *Vsp* apre il racconto sulla degenerazione umana – R 45 e H 37-38: “Brœðr muno beriaz”, etc. (Si colpiranno i fratelli, etc.) –<sup>27</sup>, la *Gylf* premette alla citazione di quella strofa la descrizione del Grande Inverno riportata qui sopra: nelle tradizioni genealogiche norrene – nella serie dei sovrani danesi dei *GD* e nelle genealogie norvegesi (*Hversu Nóregr byggðisk* e *Fundinn Nóregr*) – si narra di un re leggendario chiamato *Snio/Snær* ‘neve’,<sup>28</sup> apparentemente sostenendo la congettura di un qualche mito del Grande Inverno, che avrebbe lasciato tracce anche nel folclore;<sup>29</sup> esso viene però razionalizzato nella preistoria leggendaria delle nazioni scandinave emergenti e sembra indipendente dal mito della Fine del Mondo: nei *GD* (VIII,xiii,1-2) la carestia che affligge il regno di *Snio*, motivata dalla siccità più che dal gelo, spinge i futuri Longobardi a migrare verso il Sud.<sup>30</sup>

*Fimbulvetr*, nella *Gylf*, è l'evento che conduce alla corruzione sociale e prelude alla catastrofe. La *Vsp* si limita forse ad alludervi – R 41<sup>5-7</sup>/H 25<sup>7-8</sup>: “svört var ða sólskin | of sumur eptir, || veðr ǫll válynd [...]” (Era nera la luce del sole | sulle estati seguenti, || il tempo ovunque infido [...]) –<sup>31</sup> tra altri segni nefasti del *Ragnarök* imminente, ma esso acquisisce rilievo nelle recensioni del trattatello di Snorri: la rubrica di U, che lo nomina insieme al *ragnarrökkr*, ne evidenzia la rilevanza tematica per il redattore del manoscritto. Per *fimbulvetr*, la *Gylf* segue e sviluppa dunque una fonte poetica diversa dalla *Vsp*, ossia i *Vafþrúðnismál* (di qui in poi *Vm*).<sup>32</sup> Tra i carmi eddici, molti dei quali nominano singoli perso-

sottolineate le divergenze tra i testi paralleli e il corsivo distingue la rubrica di U dal paragrafo seguente.

<sup>27</sup> Von See *et al.* 2019 I, 341-348 (da cui si cita); von See *et al.* 2019 II, 1539-1540.

<sup>28</sup> Simek 1984, 366.

<sup>29</sup> Olrik 1922, 20-22.

<sup>30</sup> Hultgård 2022, 275.

<sup>31</sup> von See *et al.* 2019 I, 321; II, 1570 e 1572.

<sup>32</sup> von See *et al.* 2019 II, 969-1179. Il carme, oltre che in R, è trasmesso

naggi ed eventi dell'apocalisse,<sup>33</sup> i *Vm* sono, con i *Grimnismál* e il *Hynðuljóð*, tra le principali fonti di Snorri, il quale, a differenza di quanto fa per la *Vsp* (alla quale assegna il titolo, laddove i manoscritti R e H sono anepigrafi), non ne fa il nome, introducendone le citazioni con la formula *Svá hér sagt* (e simili).<sup>34</sup>

Nei *Vm* singole immagini dell'apocalisse e della palingenesi, avulse dalla consequenzialità delle fasi del *Ragnarök* della *Vsp* e della *Gylf*, figurano negli enigmi dei due antagonisti del certame di sapienza (Gagnráðr/Odino e il gigante Vafþrúðnir), alternandosi con gli eventi della creazione, senza seguire una cronologia lineare.<sup>35</sup> Alcuni elementi del mito impliciti nella *Vsp* sono qui esplicitati e sviluppati. È quanto accade per gli *einherjar* nelle corti di Odino (*Vm* 40-41), i guerrieri scelti che saranno tra gli attori del conflitto finale nella *Gylf* 51: “Æsir hervæða sik ok allir einherjar ok sækja fram á vølluna” (Gli Æsir si armeranno, e tutti gli *einherjar*, e scenderanno in campo):<sup>36</sup> questo motivo rappresenta il sottotesto dei due poemi scaldici del sec. X *Eirismál* e *Hákonarmál* (computati anch'essi tra le possibili fonti del *Ragnarök*),<sup>37</sup> dove l'encomio dei due sovrani defunti viene tematizzato con la solenne accoglienza loro riservata nella Valhøll, per il vantaggio che da loro ci si aspetta nella battaglia escatologica.<sup>38</sup> Sempre dai *Vm* (44-45), la *Gylf* R 53/ U 31 trae i nomi dei due umani sopravvissuti alla distruzione, Líf e L(e)ifþrasir,<sup>39</sup> e dai *Vm* 46-47, citando la seconda di queste due strofe, la *Gylf* 53/31 ricava la notizia della nascita di una ‘figlia di Sól’, *Álfrøðull*, che

acefalo in A: sulla tradizione dei *Vm*, McGillivray 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Hultgård 2022, 103-122.

<sup>34</sup> Il titolo di *Vafþrúðnismál* è registrato invece nel *Codex Regius* dell'EP: von See *et al.* 2019 II, 971.

<sup>35</sup> Sulla struttura dei *Vm*, Ruggerini 1994, 165-181.

<sup>36</sup> Faulkes 1982/2005, 50<sup>26-27</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Hultgård 2022, 123-133.

<sup>38</sup> Eyvindr *skáldaspillir* Finnson, *Hákonarmál*: Fulk 2012, 171 <<https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&i=1187>> (ultimo accesso 20 gennaio 2024); *Eirismál*: Fulk 2012, 1003 <<https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&i=1009>> (ultimo accesso 20 gennaio 2024).

<sup>39</sup> Faulkes 1982/2005, 54<sup>10-11</sup>; Heimir Pálsson-Faulkes 2012, 85.

nel cosmo rigenerato ripeterà il corso della madre sbranata dal Lupo.<sup>40</sup>

È nei versi 44<sup>4-6</sup> dei *Vm* che il tracollo del cosmo, anziché con le tenebre, l'acqua e il fuoco della *Vsp*, viene evocato nell'immagine di un famigerato Grande Inverno (*fimbulvetr*): “hvaf lifir manna, | þá er inn mæra líðr || fimbulvetr með firom?” (Chi vivrà, degli umani, | quando trascorrerà quel famoso || grande inverno tra i viventi?), ma non se ne dice altro. Viceversa, nella *Gylf*, Snorri ne descrive i fenomeni, simili a quelli presentati nella str. 42<sup>3-4</sup> del *Hyndluljóð*: “þaðan koma snjóvar | ok snarir vindar; || þá er í ráði | at regn um þrjóti” (poi sopraggiungono nevi, | ventate repentine: || la condanna delle Potenze | è ora pronunciata).

Nella denominazione del Grande Inverno di *Gylfe Vm*, il primo elemento è un rafforzativo, usato nel *heiti* odinico di *Fimbultýr* (*Vsp*. str. 58) e ricorrente in una serie di composti degli *Hávamál* (di qui in poi *Háv*), *fimbulpulr* ('il possente oratore': str. 80), *fimbulkambi* ('il grande stolto': str. 103), *fimbulkjóð* ('il possente incantesimo': str. 140).<sup>41</sup> Il peso degli *Háv* nell'ideazione della *Gylf*, che ne riporta la sola str. 1 (al cap. 2, all'arrivo di Gylfi/Gangleri al palazzo degli *Æsir*) e ne parafrasa la str. 164 nella conclusione (al cap. 53), per quanto meno apparente di quello dei carmi mitologici estesamente citati, potrebbe essere più sostanziale e aver suggerito la cornice stessa del racconto (della quale Snorri riprenderebbe dagli *Háv* l'apertura e la chiusura), poiché entrambi i testi trasmettono i loro contenuti nella finzione dei 'detti di Hár'.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. *Escatologia nordica ed ecocritica*

Nel 2023 è apparsa una collezione di saggi intitolata a *Ecocri-*

<sup>40</sup> Faulkes 1982/2005, 54<sup>20-27</sup>; Heimir Pálsson-Faulkes 2012, 85. *Álfrǫðull* è una *kenning* per il sole attestata nel corpus scaldico (von See *et al.* 2019 II, 1135-1136).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 697, 764-765 e 891-892, rispettivamente.

<sup>42</sup> Faulkes 1982/2005, 54<sup>30</sup>. Per l'utilizzazione degli *Háv* nella *Gylf*, Males 2020, 165-167.

*ticism and Old Norse Studies*,<sup>43</sup> dove il quadro metodologico dell'ecocritica ("the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment")<sup>44</sup> viene applicato alle opere e alla *legacy* della tradizione nordico-occidentale (saghe di vari sottogeneri, scaldi, EP, raccolte giuridiche islandesi, l'urbanizzazione di Niðaróss e un revival eddico colonialista nel tedesco di Namibia). Nell'introduzione i curatori individuano i primordi dell'ecocritica in un saggio del 1967 dello storico statunitense della tecnologia medievale Lynn White jr. (1907-1987),<sup>45</sup> nel quale le radici della crisi ambientale contemporanea e dell'opposizione tra uomo e natura caratteristica dell'antropocene vennero rintracciate nel medioevo occidentale cristiano: il racconto della Genesi – la signoria dell'uomo sulle creature stabilita *in principio* per decreto divino – avrebbe fornito la premessa ideologico-dottrinale allo sviluppo tecnologico-scientifico (fondato sulla reificazione degli altri esseri viventi) i cui effetti esiziali stiamo oggi scontando.

Nonostante il mito del *Ragnarök* presenti un quadro fenomenologico adatto all'approccio ecocritico, nessuno dei saggi della raccolta del 2023 tocca direttamente l'argomento della catastrofe cosmica e climatica adombrata nell'EP e nella *Gylf*. Tuttavia i curatori, nell'introduzione, discutono uno studio di Cristopher Abram del 2019 (*Ecology and Catastrophe in Old Norse Myth and Literature*):<sup>46</sup> qui, nella metaforica degli scaldi si coglierebbero gli indizi di una visione del mondo "meno antropocentrica" di quanto non si registri altrove nel medioevo occidentale e nell'EP (che sarebbe già allineata alla nefasta ideologia di matrice giudaico-cristiana). Secondo Abram, nel mito del *Ragnarök* l'impotenza degli dèi rifletterebbe quella dell'uomo contemporaneo

<sup>43</sup> Hennig *et al.* 2023 <<https://www.brepolsonline.net/doi/epdf/10.1484/M.NAW-EB.5.132526>>.

<sup>44</sup> La definizione è tratta da Glotfelty 1996 (xviii), un testo fondativo dell'ecocritica (Hennig *et al.* 2023, 11).

<sup>45</sup> White 1967.

<sup>46</sup> Abram 2019 (l'autore è professore di letteratura inglese e *Old Norse* a Notre Dame (IN), attualmente impegnato nella definizione di "post-philological reading strategies" del *Beowulf*).

di fronte alla catastrofe ecologica e rafforzerebbe la consapevolezza della crisi:<sup>47</sup> una simile prevaricante attualizzazione sociologica sembrerebbe rendere l'ecocritica e l'analisi testuale della filologia irrilevanti l'una per l'altra.

Un approccio scienziata e storicista ai temi escatologici della tradizione nordica medievale indirettamente collegato al modello dell'ecocritica è rappresentato dai tentativi di interpretarla alla luce di crisi climatiche delle quali si abbia testimonianza: considerando le caratteristiche morfologiche dell'Islanda, il confronto con la vulcanologia è di vecchia data e già Sigurður Nordal<sup>48</sup> aveva visto nel sole nero di *Vsp* R 57 la possibile memoria delle nubi di polvere che seguono alle eruzioni e la prova dell'origine islandese del carme. Recenti indagini vulcanologiche e dendrocronologiche paiono in grado di spiegare la crisi registrata dalle fonti tardoantiche per il 536-540 (i terribili anni della guerra greco-gotica e della "peste" giustiniana). Il velo di ceneri vulcaniche che, a seguito di un'imponente eruzione, per più stagioni avrebbe oscurato il sole (con una conseguente catastrofe climatica, demografica ed economica) spiegherebbe l'invenzione del mito rappresentato da Snorri con *fimbulvetr* ("Þeir vetr fara þrír saman ok ekki sumar milli"):<sup>49</sup> Cassiodoro (*Variae* XII,xxv) elenca con preoccupazione le manifestazioni celesti (luna, stelle e sole che non splendono), le conseguenze sulla terra (dove i corpi non danno ombra), la mancata alternanza tra le stagioni, i raccolti devastati. In alternativa al sec. VI, si è pensato anche allo sgomento suscitato dall'eruzione dell'Eldgjá del 934-940, che sarebbe stato utilizzato in poesia nella propaganda per la conversione,<sup>50</sup> un'ipotesi accettabile per il mito di *fimbulvetr* in Snorri e nell'EP, ma non per l'iscrizione runica della Pietra di Rök (databile a ca. l'800),<sup>51</sup> nella quale un filone interpretativo recente ha creduto di

<sup>47</sup> Si veda anche Maraschi 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Sigurður Nordal 1952, 114, 179.

<sup>49</sup> Gräslund, Price, 2015 e Nordvig, Riede 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Hennig *et al.* 2023, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Ög 136; *Runor*: <<https://app.raa.se/open/runor/inscription?id=62c17486-13c6-4722-9699-e1d0e2eb7fad>>, ultimo accesso 20 gennaio 2024.

cogliere la memoria di un'analogia catastrofe climatica.

La descrizione del Grande Inverno – il susseguirsi ininterrotto di stagioni di gelo e il vanificarsi della forza del sole – mostra stringenti coincidenze con una particolare situazione registrata nella Scandinavia pre-vichinga e nell'emisfero settentrionale:

Data from ice-core sulphur layers in Greenland and Antarctica, supported by dendrochronological analysis, show that the decline in cultivation, a widespread phenomenon in the middle of the sixth century, was related to a series of volcanic eruptions 536-547 CE probably in North and Central America.<sup>52</sup>

Il racconto di *Gylf* 53/31 preserverebbe quindi la memoria dell'inverno vulcanico di età tardo-antica, che avrebbe attraversato diversi secoli migrando dal Continente fino all'Islanda e, rafforzata da quella dell'eruzione dell'Eldgjá nel sec. X,<sup>53</sup> sarebbe stata alla base dell'ideazione di *Vm* 44, confermando una datazione alta di questo carme eddico al principio del sec. X, in una questione filologica controversa.<sup>54</sup>

### 5. L'iscrizione della Pietra di Rök e l'inverno vulcanico del VI secolo

Un passaggio decisivo in questa ricostruzione sarebbe testimoniato nella Pietra di Rök, dei cui versi runici si propone un'eclatante rilettura, mantenendo invariata rispetto alle precedenti interpretazioni solo la funzione funebre e memoriale (poiché l'unico aspetto universalmente accolto, nonostante le molte concomitanti spiega-

<sup>52</sup> Löwenborg 2012; Holmberg *et al.* 2018-2019, 13.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 16, per una serie di possibili concause in eventi occorsi tra secc. VIII e IX (una tempesta solare e un'estate eccezionalmente rigida per il 775 e un'eclissi solare totale per l'810).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 9 e nota 1: la questione è esaminata da Jónas Kristjánsson, Vesteynn Ólason 2014, 1, 176-177 e da von See *et al.* 2019, II, 999 (dove l'unica conclusione definitiva è che la *Gylf*, ca. 1225, ne rappresenta il *terminus ante quem*).

zioni delle rune, è che si tratti della dedica per un figlio morto).<sup>55</sup> Ora nell'iscrizione si individua un genere poetico orale antenato del carme sapienziale eddico dei *Vm*, dove si dispiegherebbe una sequela di indovinelli, per i quali si è trovato un possibile analogo in un enigma dell'*Exeter Book* (*riddle* D.K. 27/29, trasmesso ai ff. 107v-108r del manoscritto, i cui referenti sono il sole e la luna e una sorta di loro conflitto).<sup>56</sup> Il testo runico consisterebbe dunque di nove enigmi che si riferirebbero alla morte e alla rinascita del sole e i versi sarebbero stati recitati in un culto apotropico (prodotto dalla memoria collettiva dell'inverno vulcanico, e dalla conseguente ansia "ecologica") celebrato all'interno del rito funebre per *Vāmōðr*, a cui il padre *Varinn* dedica il monumento: parte del testo alluderebbe al radioso destino oltremondano del figlio perduto, scelto per unirsi dopo la morte a Odino e agli *einherjar* (come negli *Eiríksmál* e negli *Hákonarmál*).

Sulla Pietra è stata condotta un'analisi multimodale, prendendo in considerazione l'alternanza fra le diverse serie runiche impiegate (rune svedesi a tratto lungo e a tratto corto, *fubark* antico, rune cifrate, alcune *star runes*, che si sostiene alludessero al referente astrologico degli enigmi), la congruità dei versi incisi con i generi del *riddle* e del certame sapienziale (scegliendo i modelli tra gli indovinelli dell'*Exeter Book* e nella silloge eddica di R e A) e il framework geosemiotico ricavabile dalla collocazione del monumento nello spazio, alla cui definizione si è sostenuto concorrerebbero anche la variazione tra i diversi tipi di rune.<sup>57</sup> Si è così creduto di poter ricostruire, coesistente con un ipotetico racconto del *Ragnarök* circolante nell'oralità, un culto precristiano per il sole, una liturgia collettiva celebrata, in una florida area rurale, per la classe signorile emergente in Östergötland al principio dell'età vichinga.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> La storia delle interpretazioni (tra le quali quella di Wessén 1958) in Holmberg *et al.* 2018-19, 7-9.

<sup>56</sup> Holmberg *et al.* 2018-2019; per il *riddle* <<https://theriddleages.com/riddles/tag/riddle%2029/>>, ultimo accesso 20 gennaio 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Ralph 2007, 142-143.

<sup>58</sup> Holmberg *et al.* 2018-19; Holmberg 2021.



La nuova interpretazione si fonda su una diversa decodificazione dei lessemi e sulla proposta di un nuovo ordine di lettura per le stringhe di rune, poste sia verticalmente che orizzontalmente sulle cinque facce della Pietra, e alcuni dati acquisiti, prima fra tutti la menzione di Teoderico e dei suoi accoliti, sono stati considerati insussistenti.<sup>59</sup> Viceversa, si è introdotta la presenza di Odino, il quale, con il *heiti* di Yggr,<sup>60</sup> sarebbe il destinatario degli indovinelli, che alludono tutti alla minaccia del lupo cosmico incombente sul sole e sugli astri e alla nascita di un nuovo sole, la “figlia” che illuminerà il mondo rinnovato, secondo la str. 47 dei *Vm*: “Vafþrúðnir kvað: || ‘Eina dóttur | berr Álfroðull, | áðr hana Fenrir fari; | sú skal ríða, | þá er regin deyja, | móður brautir mæri’”. (Vafþrúðnir disse: | ‘Álfroðull mette al mondo | una figlia, | avanti che Fenrir la annienti; | costei cavalcherà, | quando le Potenze moriranno, | sui sentieri della madre’).<sup>61</sup>

Il ricordo dell’inverno vulcanico del sec. VI troverebbe conferma nell’indicazione cronologica contenuta nella seconda domanda (il cui referente sarebbe la morte del sole): “Þat sagum ánnart, hvá’r fur nīu aldum ān urði fiaru meðr hraiðgutum, auk dōmir ānn umb sakar?” (Poniamo la seconda [domanda]: Chi, nove generazioni addietro, perse la forza vitale presso i Hraiðgutar [a Oriente] e ancora decide la cosa?).<sup>62</sup>

the event is temporally specified to ‘nine generations ago’ (*fur nīu aldum*). Given the current dating of the inscription to around 800 CE and an approximation of each generation to thirty years, the event alluded to would have happened in the early sixth century. Thus, the climate crisis from 536 CE turns out to be an obvious candidate for this “death” of the sun, when it failed to rise in the east.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Il testo completo della nuova lettura dell’iscrizione, in Holmberg *et al.* 2018-2019, 19-32.

<sup>60</sup> Con questo pseudonimo, il dio entra nella casa di Vafþrúðnir alla str. 5 dei *Vm* (von See *et al.* 2019 I, 1013).

<sup>61</sup> Von See *et al.* 2019 II, 1128-1137. Al divoramento e alla rinascita del sole si riferiscono le domande di Odino al gigante alle str. 46-47 dei *Vm*.

<sup>62</sup> La trascrizione in Holmberg *et al.* 2018-19, 21.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

Nondimeno, l'indicazione cronologica funzionava ugualmente bene per l'interpretazione tradizionale e per il riferimento a Teoderico il Grande. Inoltre alcuni dettagli cozzano con l'ipotesi che il referente dell'enigma sia *Sól* (creatura di genere femminile), ossia il pronome interrogativo maschile (*hvār*)<sup>64</sup> e il fatto che nella sequenza immediatamente successiva la stessa creatura venga definita come “il valente campione” che procede a cavallo (*Raið iau, rinkr hinn þurmōði*), nella serie di caratteri, sulla quale molto si gioca dell'interpretazione complessiva del testo runico, dove in passato si leggeva la menzione del dominio di Teoderico (*rēð Þiððrīkr hinn þurmōði*): sulla maggiore plausibilità dell'una o dell'altra decodificazione delle rune, non mi pronuncio, perché la decisione travalica le mie competenze. Gli autori della nuova interpretazione, d'altronde, sono consapevoli della difficoltà semantica e adducono i casi nei quali, nella *Gylf*, a esseri femminili vengano apposti epiteti maschili, spingendosi a congetturare che il “valente campione” che rimpiazza Teoderico sia *Dagr* ‘Giorno’ (che funzionerebbe quindi come ipostasi di *Sól*), concedendo infine che “this is admittedly a weaker link in our chain of reasoning. Perhaps future research will resolve the matter”.<sup>65</sup>

La rilettura del testo implica una differente attribuzione di genere poetico, che farebbe passare i versi trasmessi sulla Pietra di Rök da testimonianza preletterata del genere eroico (congruente con la funzione celebrativa dell'epigrafe funebre) a testimonianza orale di una poesia di contenuto mitologico e impiego culturale nei riti, per noi pressoché perduti, della società vichinga, e come tale sostrato del genere mitologico-sapienziale letterarizzato nell'EP.

## 6. Conclusioni

I risultati compendati nello studio di Holmberg, Gräslund, Sundqvist e Henrik sono stati recensiti severamente da Lars Lönnroth (2017), che si è pronunciato al riguardo anche in un articolo

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 22 e nota 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 23-24 e nota 4.

apparso nello *Svenska Dagbladet* nel 2020 (poiché si tratta di una questione di tale rilevanza nazionale da essere interessante anche per il pubblico generalista della stampa quotidiana), concludendo con un giudizio tranchant sui rischi di interpretazioni troppo ardite: *Att försöka tolka den brukar leda till tillfällig galenskap*. Al di là del sospetto e delle pregiudiziali resistenze con cui è stata accolta, la nuova interpretazione ripropone, con un approccio multimodale e il sostegno di innovative discipline scientifiche ausiliarie, la questione, forse irrisolvibile ma che non può essere elusa, delle “convergenze” e delle “peculiarità” formali e funzionali tra i due “modi” della documentazione del mito nordico e dei relativi generi poetici orali, nell’epigrafia runica scandinava e nella tradizione manoscritta islandese.<sup>66</sup> Per entrambe queste due tipologie testuali, nel dibattito scientifico contemporaneo, si assiste alla valorizzazione della materialità dei documenti, rispetto alla visione idealistica tradizionale del testo quale realtà che trascende la fisicità degli oggetti che ne sono latori (pietra o codice che essi siano).

La nuova interpretazione del testo runico di Rök (che, utilizzando i dati scientifici, propone un’interessante ricostruzione del contesto sociale di produzione e fruizione rituale della pietra), oltre che sulla diversa decodificazione di alcuni dei caratteri runici della quale si è detto, si fonda sulla proposta di un nuovo ordine di lettura delle stringhe scritte, toccando uno degli aspetti più sfuggenti della runologia (complicato nel nostro caso dalla tridimensionalità del monumento con iscrizioni sulle cinque facce):<sup>67</sup> Marco Bianchi sta dedicando le proprie indagini alla definizione dei *pattern* individuabili nelle iscrizioni runiche nell’ordine dei caratteri e al rapporto tra il *layout* dei testi runici e il senso del messaggio verbale (secondo una prospettiva congruente con l’approccio geosemiotico), inaugurando un nuovo, promettente filone di ricerca.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Per lo stato dell’arte, si vedano le “Considerazioni preliminari” in Cucina 2009, 154-158.

<sup>67</sup> Ralph 2007, Gräslund, Price 2015.

<sup>68</sup> Si veda, ad esempio, Bianchi 2015.

Osservo che, per quanto entusiasmanti possano apparire i risultati conseguiti con l'applicazione dei nuovi metodi interdisciplinari, il rischio è che l'interpretazione e la costituzione dei testi venga piegata a un quadro di riferimenti preconcepito (nel nostro caso, la nuova attribuzione delle rune della Pietra di Rök al genere del certame sapienziale orale, con la conseguente datazione alta dei *Vm*, testimonianza letteraria di detto genere poetico). La vita dei testi non si svolge avulsa dal contesto sociale e culturale e il confronto con altri ambiti delle scienze umane – oggi, per le tendenze accademiche dominanti, la sociologia, le scienze della comunicazione, oltre che, secondo tradizione, la linguistica storica, la storia delle religioni e altre filologie d'area – è proficuo e irrinunciabile. Tuttavia, tornando a *fimbulvetr*, il presupposto della tradizione orale soggiacente alle opere letterarie islandesi (fissate per iscritto dalla fine del sec. XII) deve essere trattato con cautela, per evitare il rischio di sussumere meccanicamente i quadri ermeneutici delle nuove discipline “integrative” nelle deduzioni della filologia, ancora una volta sotto l'assillo pressante per la ricerca di “origini” dei testi poste al di fuori dei testi stessi.

In conclusione, in accordo con un quadro teorico più specificamente filologico, che vede nella fissazione scritta delle sillogi dei manoscritti islandesi R e A una prova di come la tradizione eddica venisse recepita e interpretata nel sec. XIII,<sup>69</sup> dalla disamina condotta si è potuto solo dimostrare come Snorri, nella *Gylf*, inserisca all'inizio delle fasi della catastrofe cosmica mutuata dalla *Vsp* il mito del Grande Inverno, sviluppando un'allusione dei *Vm*, una delle sue principali fonti eddiche. Se l'interesse snorriano per *fimbulvetr* risultasse dalla memoria di catastrofi climatiche remote (circolante nei culti vichinghi svedesi dei quali si sarebbe fortunatamente fissato il ricordo nella poesia rituale della Pietra di Rök), e se tra le motivazioni dell'autore ci fosse una precisa “ansia ecologica” (oltre alla familiarità con i rischi e le incertezze della condizione umana nella vulcanica Islanda), resta un'affascinante congettura.

<sup>69</sup> Males 2020, 164.

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GABRIELE COCCO

THE *TRANSITUS* OF THE SOUL AND THE  
INTERCESSION OF THE ANGELS IN OLD  
ENGLISH *RESIGNATION A* 49B-56

*Resignation (A+B)* is still a subject of debate as to its textual unity and classification. Though it is usually partnered to the Old English elegies, *Resignation A* (ll. 1-70) bears more affinities with penitential poetry. The poem also echoes death liturgy. The invocation *geoca mines gæstes* ('save my soul', 46a) anticipates the soul's longing not to be captured by demons (49b-53). The plea for angels to lead her at the *transitus* recurs in antiphons, responsories, and prayers in the *Agenda mortuorum* of pre-Conquest manuscripts such as the Leofric Missal, the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, the Red Book of Darley, and the Winchcombe Sacramentary. The paper aims to confirm that *Resignation A* is a penitent's prayer, whose poet is well learned both in liturgy and theology.

1. *Introduction*

Long printed as a stand-alone poem, *Resignation (A+B)* is penned between gathering XV and XVI of the Exeter Book (s. x<sup>3/4</sup>),<sup>1</sup> between *The Judgment Day I* and *The Descent into Hell* at fols 117v-119r.<sup>2</sup> Since the dawn of pre-Conquest English literary studies, it has been rather hard to classify due to both codicological and genre issues. Early editors considered it a prayer, while in the 20th century it has been partnered with the elegies of the Exeter Book.<sup>3</sup> The suspicion that *Resignation (A+B)* might consist of

<sup>1</sup> Gameson 1996, 179, and "256. Exeter, Cathedral Library, 3500" in Lapidge, Gneuss 1914, 201-203.

<sup>2</sup> Line numbers and quotations from *Resignation A* and *B* are taken from Muir 2000<sup>2</sup>, I, 336-338, 339-340; the title and translation of *Resignation A* follows Jones 2012, 111-115; instead, for *Resignation B*, see Bjork 2014, 109-111. All quotations and titles of other Old English poems are from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* series. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

<sup>3</sup> For the critical history of *Resignation (A+B)*, see Cammarota, Cocco 2020, 120-123.

two originally separate texts arose by reason of some thematic, metrical, and linguistic irregularities.<sup>4</sup> It unfolds the mixture of two predominant traits: on the one hand, a spiritual tone, while, on the other, a mournful mood.

Gathering XV concludes with fol. 118v. Its final word, the preposition *mid* (70a), has no narrative continuation with the poem on fol. 119r, where gathering XVI begins. Bliss and Frantzen questioned the unity of the text. Their thorough lexical, metrical, syntactic, and thematic scrutiny proves that *Resignation* is made of two separate text types: *Resignation A* (1-70) and *Resignation B* (the remaining 49 lines).<sup>5</sup> The former is an unfinished prayer that ends on fol. 118v, the latter is a headless lament starting on fol. 119r.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Bliss and Frantzen implied the loss of a leaf after fol. 118v in the Exeter Book.<sup>7</sup> Such a hiatus in the text suggests that there must have been some missing lines after *mid* (l. 70) at the end of *Resignation A*. Hence, *mid* must be the first word of a new line that had to resume in the likely lost folio.<sup>8</sup> Few critics doubted Bliss and Frantzen's views ever since,<sup>9</sup> the thesis is widely accepted by scholars, who reckon a text comprising two distinct poems: *Resignation A* and *Resignation B*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Schücking was the first to point out a discontinuity on a thematic level; see Schücking 1919, 21-23.

<sup>5</sup> Förster provided the earliest codicological scrutiny. For him, "there is no gap after fol. 118 [...] no possibility of loss", see Förster 1933, 59. Krapp and van Kirk Dobbie printed a single poem, see Krapp, van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 215-218.

<sup>6</sup> Bliss, Frantzen 1976, 389-390.

<sup>7</sup> They concluded that the textual cutoff resulted from the loss of a leaf between fol. 118v and fol. 119r, and fol. 112 would be the remaining half of a bifolium, see Bliss, Frantzen 1976, 385-402.

<sup>8</sup> On a linguistic level, only the first 70 lines contain Anglian words. The syntax of the two poems differs in the use of verbs, of the preposition *mid* (70a), and in their distribution. As to the metrical aspect, the last two words of fol. 118v (*wæron mid*) cannot belong to the same long line, *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Muir followed Bliss and Frantzen's views, see Pickwoad in Muir 2006. He believes Förster's study is incorrect as there must have been missing folios; he could not ascertain whether the lines on fol. 119r belong to the text on fol. 118v, or are the ending of another poem, see Muir 2000<sup>2</sup>, I, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Klinck rejected the loss of a leaf and the metrical irregularity (Klinck

This paper focuses on *Resignation A* as a penitential poem and discusses its echoes of liturgical texts. At lines 49b-56, the soul ceases her confession of guilt and pleads to the angels to lead her. The *Agenda mortuorum* offers liturgical references to the penitent's prayer for a safe *transitus*, away from the perilous grasp of the devil's throng. The Leofric Missal, the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, the Red Book of Darley, and the Winchcombe Sacramentary contain antiphons, responsories, prayers, and rubrics that refer to the angels *in hora mortis* and their role of psychopomps and intercessors. The analysis of analogues will reveal the knowledge of rites the poet has as he made *Resignation A* an Old English poetic *commendatio animae*. The proximity to both the imagery and lexicon of liturgical sources further confirms *Resignation A* among the "poems of worship and prayer".<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Liturgical analogues and sources

Early Medieval England has yielded a significant body of literature on the importance of penance. Through penitentials, homilies, liturgical-pastoral writings and educational literature, both the English and Irish Churches promoted the practice of penance and reconciliation, mainly in the 9th and 10th centuries.<sup>12</sup> *Resignation A* shares indeed diction, topoi and imagery with the wider body of (para)liturgical and devotional texts, and other religious analogues,<sup>13</sup> especially the penitential Psalms (Pss. 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142), and some analogues in Latin prayers of personal devotion.<sup>14</sup> The poem is centred on the confession of the soul's

1987, 423-430); for her, the poet has initially articulated from a penitential viewpoint and then with an elegiac tone (Klinck 1992, 28-29, 55-56). Sobol has recently reclaimed *Resignation A* and *Resignation B* as a single poem. She builds on Förster's scrutiny and Muir's. Yet, by referring to Muir's study of the codex, she omits to mention that Muir assumed some loss between fols 118-119; see Sobol 2015, 73 and Muir 1989, 288.

<sup>11</sup> Jones 2012, 110-115.

<sup>12</sup> Meens 2014, 89-100, 157-162, 249-257.

<sup>13</sup> Sieper 1915, 256-257.

<sup>14</sup> For penance as theme and image in Old English poetry as reworking

sins and her plea for a favourable *transitus*. The theme of penance stands out due to the number of words belonging to the semantic fields of both sin and sorrow.<sup>15</sup> *Resignation A* conveys the cultural spirit of the Benedictine Reform. In that frame of mind, the poet might have imagined the pattern of a confessional prayer, merging the poetic pace to the features of penitential literature.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that (para)liturgical texts in Old English could complement the canonical liturgy in Latin,<sup>17</sup> both for common and private devotion, is shown by confessional and devotional prayers in pre-Conquest codices.<sup>18</sup> *Resignation A* has a few parallels with the interpretation of *nomina sacra* in the Old English *Creed*, *Gloria I*, and *The Lord's Prayer II* and *III*.<sup>19</sup> The poem resembles some other penitential prayers such as *Alma confessio* in the *Book of Cerne* (Cambridge, University Library, Ms Ll.1.10 [s. ix<sup>1</sup>]),<sup>20</sup> *A Prayer of Confession* in London, British Library, Cotton Galba A.xiv (s. xi<sup>1</sup>), and *A Prayer* in London, Lambeth Palace 472 (s. xv).

*Resignation A* 1-2 begins with a plea: “Age mec se ælmihta god // helpe min se halga dryhten” (May almighty God keep me, may the holy Lord help me!). Sobol points out that the lines recall the introductory formula of the Hours (but for Nocturns) of the Divine Office – which corresponds to Ps. 69:2, “Deus, in adiutorium meum intende, Domine, ad adiuvandam me festina” (O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me).<sup>21</sup> Yet, the lexical choice in *Resignation A* 1-2 deviates from the Old English

including also (para)liturgical sources, see Frantzen 1983, 179-183, 193-197.

<sup>15</sup> Ruggerini 2018, 72-76.

<sup>16</sup> Noronha 1971, 30; Bestul 1977, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Pulsiano 2001, 209.

<sup>18</sup> Jones 2012, xix.

<sup>19</sup> For parallels between *Resignation A* and Old English (para)liturgical texts, see Sobol 2015, 80-81.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley 1955, 451. One finds especially some parallels between *Alma confessio* and *Resignation A*, mainly for the enumeration of sins (ll. 19-20a, 25b-26a); for the *Book of Cerne*, see Kuypers 1902, 95-99.

<sup>21</sup> Biblical references are taken from the Latin *Vulgata*, see Fischer, Weber, Gryson, 2007<sup>5</sup>. All English translations of the Vulgate are taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible, see <<http://drbo.org>> (last accessed March 20, 2024).

glossed rendering of Ps. 69:2: “God on fultum mine beheald drihten to gefultumigenne me æfest”.<sup>22</sup> The latter verse occurs almost *litteratim* in the Old English *Regula Benedicti* xviii.1, the *Regula Canoniorum* xvi, and the Durham Ritual. Besides, *Resignation A* 1-2 is not too similar to Old English *Psalm 69.1* – which, instead, proves to be closer to the versicle in the aforesaid *Regulae* and the Durham Ritual.<sup>23</sup>

Besides monastic and (para)liturgical texts,<sup>24</sup> *Resignation A* is a poetic example of a penitential prayer like those in missals and breviaries. The poet is acquainted with Latin sources and has an ability to rewrite religious material, at times in a more direct manner, other times rather veiledly. *Resignation A* has been related to confessional texts penned from 8th-10th insular codices – *i.e.* the prayer *Alma confessio* in the *Book of Cerne*.

There are also *verbatim* parallels in both *Resignation A* and *A Prayer of Confession in Old English begging forgiveness and protection* transcribed in London, BL, Cotton Galba A.xiv<sup>25</sup> – mostly for the similarity of listed items offered to God and the use of similar formulas. For instance, after the initial plea, in *Resignation A* 5b-9, the poet states:

Ic þe, mære god,  
mine sawle bebeode    ond mines sylfes lic,  
ond min word ond min weorc,    witig dryhten,  
ond eal min leoþo,    leohtes hyrde,  
ond þa manigfealdan    mine gepohtas.

<sup>22</sup> Sobol 2015, 79.

<sup>23</sup> The text of *Psalm 69.1* reads, “Wes, drihten god, deore fultum; // beheald, drihten, me, and me hraðe syþþan // gefultuma æt feorhþearfe. // þonne beoð gescende and scame dreogað” (Lord God, be precious help; Lord, look at me and in my extreme need, help me immediately after); see Krapp 1932, 27; O’Neill 2016, 259.

<sup>24</sup> For a survey of Old English (para)liturgical texts and monastic culture, see Keefer 2010, 16-20.

<sup>25</sup> See Noronha 1971, 31-33; Bestul 1977, 21.

(To you I commend, O illustrious God, my soul and my own body, my words and my works; to you, wise Lord, guardian of light, I commend all my limbs and my manifold thoughts).

It is worthy of note that this enumeration is undeniably similar to that in the Cotton Galba *A Prayer of Confession* at fol. 104r:

þam ic e<om and>etta <ecne> ælmihtigne god a wesendne  
and a wuniendne to widan feore þam ic bibiode minre sawle  
gehealdness<e> and mines lichoman min word and weorc and  
mine gēpohtas, mine heortan and minne hyge, min leomu and  
mine lioðu.<sup>26</sup>

(to Him I acknowledge an eternal, God almighty, always existing,  
and always everlasting. To Him I commend the custody of my  
soul and of my body, my words and my deeds, and my thoughts,  
my heart and my mind, my limbs and my joints).

For Muir, *Resignation A* 5b-9 recalls the *Confiteor*'s words: "quia peccavi in cogitatione, in locutione et opere" (for I have sinned by thought, word, and deed) in the *Confiteor*.<sup>27</sup> Yet the recognition of faults occurs later: "meotud, for þinre miltse, þeah þe ic ma fremede // grimra gylta þonne me god lyfde" (O creator, for the sake of your mercy, though I have committed more serious offenses than God would have permitted me, 27-28). This passage echoes Ps. 50:3, "Miserere mei Deus secundum misericordiam tuam iuxta multitudinem miserationum tuarum de iniquitates meas" (Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity). A deep need of God's *milt*s ('mercy') occurs in *Resignation A* 51a and another penitential Psalm (6:5), "Convertere, Domine, et eripe animam meam; salvum me fac propter misericordiam tuam"

<sup>26</sup> See §64 in Muir 1988, 136, ll. 2-6.

<sup>27</sup> Muir 2000<sup>2</sup>, II, 675. See §74 in Muir 1988, 154, ll. 1-2. For a further parallel with the *Confiteor* and the Irish tradition, see Sims-Williams 1978, 94, 101-102, 105-106.



(Turn to me, O Lord, and deliver my soul: O save me for thy mercy's sake). Ps. 6 also shares with the Old English poem the same state of prostration, a heartfelt confession (vv. 5-8), and a plea for celestial aid (vv. 9-11).

*Resignation A* and *A Prayer* in London, Lambeth Palace 472 both deal with penitential themes and the profession of faith. On a linguistic level, there are several imperatives to invoke God's protection.<sup>28</sup> However, what really draws the texts nearer is the soul's final journey and her terror of being harassed by the demons (*A Prayer* 11-13a; *Resignation A* 15b-18). In *A Prayer* 67a, 71-73, 76-77a, one reads the supplication to God:

Ac ic þe halsige nu [...]
   
and gefylste me, fæder ælmihtig,
   
þæt ic þinne willan gewyrcean mæge,
   
ær ic of þysum lænan lyfe gehweorfe. [...]
   
læt me mid englum up siðian,
   
sittan on swegle.

(But I [now] invoke you, [...] and that you, almighty Father, would assist me so that I may accomplish your will before I depart this transitory life. [...] allow me to journey upward with the angels, to take my seat in heaven.)<sup>29</sup>

This imagery also occurs in *Resignation A* 49b-50a, 52b-56a. Yet, unlike the narration in *A Prayer*, the poet solemnly contrasts the power of God and His angels with the pride of Lucifer and of the rebellious spirits who followed him:

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, the parallels between *Resignation A* 1a, 2a, 10a with *A Prayer* 2a, 9a, 22a; as well as the use of *ne* + infinitive to implore God not to abandon the soul in time of need or in the battle with the devil's temptations (*Resignation A* 15b, 52b; *A Prayer* 76a).

<sup>29</sup> van Kirk Dobbie 1942, 95; Jones 2012, 109.



ty before the dispute between angels and devils at her *transitus*. The doctrinal core is the pericope with the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:17-31). Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 156142 (s. xi<sup>1</sup>), fol. 78r depicts the gospel passage: in the middle, angels bring Lazarus's soul to the *sinu Abrahæ* ('Abraham's bosom'),<sup>33</sup> while at the bottom some demons drag down Dives to Hell [see fig. 1].<sup>34</sup> The *visiones* of the afterlife prove that medieval audiences enjoyed them greatly.<sup>35</sup> Given the popularity of this topic, texts and images from some medieval manuscripts will be combined to best reconstruct the destiny of the soul.

The contention between angelic and evil forces has enjoyed wide literary fortune; it draws on several sources, especially in the episode in the *Visio Pauli* 14. This chapter outlines the attention of both heavenly and evil spirits in one's soul at death: "et ante quam exiret de mundo, asteterunt sancti angeli simul et impii" (and before he went out of the world the holy and the impious angels both attended).<sup>36</sup> This account on the contention

<sup>33</sup> The exegetical interpretations of the *sinus Abrahæ* as to its function and location are many and, at times, controversial: (1) Irenaeus of Lyon understands it as a temporary abode before the Last Judgment (*Adversus haereses* ii, 34.1); (2) Tertullian reads it as a *refrigerium interim* (*Adversus Marcionem* iv, 34.14), and (3) Augustine believes it to be populated by patriarchs and prophets (*Tractatus xlv*, Io XI: 11-15); see van der Lof 1995, 109-123. As regards Early Medieval England, in homiletic sources the *sinus Abrahæ* also occurs as *locus refrigerii* or *paradisus*: (1) Wulfstan reads it as a place for the righteous souls till the Day of Judgement (*Homily xlv*, 'Lârspell', ll. 6-7), (2) the *Vercelli Homily xviii* interprets it as a place of rest ('De sancto Martino confessore', l. 294); Ælfric defines it 'Abraham's dwelling' or *neorxnawang* ('paradise') and asserts its *interim* status and the presence of the Apostles (*Catholic Homily V*, 'Dominica in septuaginta', ll. 139-140). For further theological references to the *sinus Abrahæ*, see both Kabir 2004, 37-48, 132-140, and Foxhall Forbes 2010, 680-682.

<sup>34</sup> Nilgel 1998, 271-272.

<sup>35</sup> For an overview of afterlife *visiones* in late Latin literature, see Amat 1985, 377.

<sup>36</sup> The Latin redaction of the text referred to is from the manuscript Paris, Nouv. acq. 1631, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, see Silverstein, Hilhorst

between angels and demons over one's soul highlights the eternal tension between good and evil.<sup>37</sup> Early Christian literature abounds with tales about the afterlife: from Late Antiquity with Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*,<sup>38</sup> to the continental *Visio Baronti*,<sup>39</sup> to the influential corpus of early English visionary literature,<sup>40</sup> both in Latin and the vernacular – such as the Anglo-Latin insular *Vision of Drythelm* in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (V.12-14),<sup>41</sup>

1997, 86; for the translation, see Elliot 1993, 624.

<sup>37</sup> As to the contention between angels and devils, the Old English translator rewrites ch. 15. The Latin text “Et post haec uenerunt simul sancti angeli et maligni, et anima defuncta uidit utrosque” (Then came the holy angels and the evil angels, and the departed soul saw both) is rendered with “and ðær ætsumne coman ða halgan ænglas and ða <yfelan> gastas, ac ða haligan gastas nan geweald on ðara sawle næfdon, ac ða yfela gatas, hige læddon ða sawle” (and there the holy angels and the evil spirits came together, but the holy spirits had no authority over these souls, but the evil spirits led the soul). For the reconstructed Latin text and its rendering, see DiPaolo Healey 1978, 68-69. In the Old English text ða <yfelan> gastas is emended; the manuscript reads ða godan gastas, see n. 127 in DiPaolo Healey 1978, 80.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory the Great's last book of the *Dialogi* has been a forerunner of the *visiones* of the afterlife, thus defying a prosperous literary genre. In IV.32, 37-38, Gregory narrates a soul's journey to the next world, the struggle between angels and devils to possess the soul fought between good and evil, and how it came back to life to tell the journey it had taken, see Keshiaho 2020, 232-240.

<sup>39</sup> Inspired by Gregory's account in *Dialogi* IV.32, 37-38, the *Visio Baronti* circulated all through both Carolingian Europe and Early Medieval England together with the *Vita Fursei*, the *Visio Rotcharii*, and the *Visio Wettini*. The *Visio Baronti* recounts of two demons and the archangel Raphael fighting over the monk, until the angel separates Barontus's soul from his body, see Hen 2020, 33-36.

<sup>40</sup> After reading the Latin *Visio Pauli*, Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, or the *Vita Fursei*, stories began to be told in pre-Conquest England of native Early English men who had experienced visions themselves, see Wieland 2020, 79-84.

<sup>41</sup> *The Vision of Drythelm* is innovative in several aspects. For instance, Bede turns the struggle between angels and devils into a peaceful agreement. His *visio* is an elaboration of the fourfold grouping of the souls at Doomsday Gregory the Great outlines in *Moralia in Iob* XXVI.xxvii.50-51, see Biggs 1989-1990, 36-51 and Foxhall Forbes 2010, 680-682. Following Gregory the Great's idea of purgatory, Bede's view of the afterlife is innovative; he presents

the *Vision of the Monk of Much-Wenlock* in the epistolary of St Boniface,<sup>42</sup> or St Guthlac's strife with the devils in *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* (31-33).<sup>43</sup>

The illustrations of the parable of Dives and Lazarus in Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 156142 (fol. 78r), the accounts in the *Visio Pauli*, as well all the other Christian texts from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, also recur in *Resignation A*. An analogous scenario to that in the eschatological description in *Resignation A* 49b-56a in which the soul is the prey of a battle between angels and devils also occurs in Old High German *Muspilli* 2-5; there, the account is more detailed and expands on the possible outcomes:

uuanta sar so sih diu sela in den sind arheuit,  
enti si den lihhamun likkan lazzit,  
so quimit ein heri fona himilzungalon,  
daz andar fona pehhe: dar pagant siu umpi.<sup>44</sup>

(For at the moment when the soul rises on her journey and leaves the body on the ground, a host comes from the firmament, another from the pitch: there they fight over it.)

*Muspilli* 6-13 further clarifies the terror of the soul in falling prey to the demons and its consequences:

sorgen mac diu sela, unzi diu suona arget,  
za uuederemo herie si gihalot uuerde.  
uuanta ipu sia daz Satanazes kisindi kiuuinnit,  
daz leitit sia sar dar iru leid uuiridit,

a four-tiered otherworld, two interim regions, see Wright 2014, I, 311, 395-396.

<sup>42</sup> Without pretending to emphasise the 'Englishness' of his account, Boniface provides the first *visio* of a native Early English person with the account of the monk of Wenlock, who witnesses himself angels and demons fighting over the soul of a departed soul, see Sims-Williams 2005, 249-258.

<sup>43</sup> Colgrave 1956, 100-109.

<sup>44</sup> Braune 1969, 86.

in fuir enti in finstri: daz ist rehto uirinlih ding.  
 upi sia auar kihalont die die dar fona himile quemant,  
 enti si dero engilo eigan uirdit,  
 die pringent sia sar uf in himilo rihi.<sup>45</sup>

(The soul must worry until the verdict comes as to which of the two armies will take her away. For if Satan's hosts conquer her, they take her forthwith to where her sorrow will originate, into fire and darkness: it is a truly terrible thing. If, on the other hand, those who come from Heaven take her away, and she becomes the property of the angels, they take her straight up into the Kingdom of Heaven).

There is supporting literary and iconographic material from pre-Conquest England that underpins the dramatic eschatological scenario in *Muspilli* 2-13 and the same sentiment of anxiety in *Resignation A* 49b-56a. In one of his epistles, St Boniface shares a vision of the afterlife he was granted: "Et maximum inter se miserrimos spiritus et sanctos angelos de animabus egredientibus de corpore disputationem habuisse" (the miserable spirits and the holy angels had a dispute over the souls leaving the body).<sup>46</sup> The final desire of a Christian is to face death escorted by the angels just as London, BL, Harley Roll Y.6, Roundel 14 (s. xii/xii) portrays St Guthlac's soul being led to Heaven by heavenly messengers [see fig. 2].<sup>47</sup> Similar imagery is found in *Homily xxxvii* 'Sanctus Furseus gesihðe' in London, BL, Cotton Vespasian, D.xiv (s. xii), where St Fursa is brought to God's presence by angels.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Braune 1969, 86. For detailed references on *Muspilli* 2-13, see Di Venosa 2013, 31-33.

<sup>46</sup> See *S. Bonifatii et Lulli Epistolae. 10* in Dümmler 1892, 253.

<sup>47</sup> Though produced chronologically after *Resignation A*, the representation at fol. 85r of Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W. 284 (s. xv) blends the battle between angels and demons for the fate of the departed, and the use of funeral liturgy in cloistered life. There, monks are portrayed while praying at a wake, sitting behind a corpse. The upper part of the illustration depicts the archangel St Michael and a devil fighting over the soul of the late brother for whom the monks recite the *commendatio animae* [see fig. 3].

<sup>48</sup> Warner 1917, 109 (ll. 29-32). See also Ælfric's *Homily XX* 'Item in

Though it is neither the life of a saint nor a vision, the plea for angelic intervention in *Resignation A* follows an analogous architecture to the literary and iconographic examples analysed so far. The turning point in the poem is found at ll. 41-46a:

Nu ic fundige to þe, fæder moncynnes,  
 of þisse worulde, nu ic wat þæt ic sceal,  
 ful unfyr faca; feorma me þonne,  
 wyrda waldend, in þinne wuldordream,  
 ond mec geleoran læt, leofra dryhten,  
 geoca mines gæstes.

(From this world I now hasten to you, Father of humankind, since I know that I must leave it in a very short while; receive me then, ruler of destinies into your glorious happiness, and allow me to depart. O Lord of the beloved, rescuer of my soul.)

This passage conveys a feeling of haste due to impending death, as well as the *leitmotif* of the journey towards the Heavenly Kingdom. The poet clarifies that he will be departing “of þisse worulde” (out of this world, 42a). Similar penitential words occur in Cynewulf’s *commendatio animae* epilogue in *The Fates of the Apostles* 109b-112a:<sup>49</sup> “Ic sceall feor heonan, // an elles forð, eardes neosan, // sið asettan, nat ic sylfa hwær, // of þisse worulde” (I must go far from here, alone on the way forth, seek a dwelling, take a journey from this world, I do not know where).<sup>50</sup>

There are further parallels between *Resignation A* and *The Fates of the Apostles* as to the loneliness of the poet and his need of friends *in hora mortis*. In *Resignation A* 41a, the words “nu ic” (now I) recall Cynewulf’s first-person epilogue: “Nu ic þonne

letania maiore. Feria tertia’, in Godden 1979, 191 (ll. 27-30).

<sup>49</sup> Rice 1977, 108. For the theme of death liturgy in *The Fates of the Apostles*, see Cocco 2019, 57-58.

<sup>50</sup> Krapp 1932, 54; Bjork 2013, 137, 139. For the metaphorical use of the theme of journeying in *The Fates of the Apostles* and in the poems of the Vercelli Book, see McBrine 2009, 298-299.

bidde” (now then I bid, 88a).<sup>51</sup> The theme of friendship has wide currency in the Old English corpus. Elegiac poetry tells of the sorrow of being ‘friendless’: *freondleasne* (*The Wanderer* 28a) or *wineleas* (*The Wanderer* 45b, *The Wife’s Lament* 10a). *Resignation A* 45-46a reminds us of the need for friends before death or in times of need. A similar plea occurs both in *The Fates of the Apostles* 91b-92a and *The Dream of the Rood* 131b-135a. In *Resignation A* 53b the soul is afraid to end up “on laðne sið” (on the hated journey). One cannot but consider another resemblance with Cynewulf. In *Juliana* 699b-700a, the poet declares how the body shall depart from the soul to set off for a journey towards an unknown destination.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4. *Resignation A* and the liturgy of death

*Resignation A* is not merely a prayer with a penitential nature. The supplication *geoca mines gæstes* (‘save my soul’, 46a) and the plea for angelic intercession in the subsequent lines (49b-53) is not random. It is embedded in a specific textual architecture, revealing a series of veiled references to the liturgy of death. Cross first defined *Resignation A* as a *commendatio animae* – i.e. a prayer to be received into the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>53</sup> Much like Cynewulf,<sup>54</sup> the *Resignation A*-poet shows a clear ability to merge poetic craft with biblical sources and Christian rites. Thus, one can derive the profile of someone well-acquainted with missals and breviaries. Such books were part of the liturgical equipment of monastic houses.<sup>55</sup> Since the Synod of Whitby (664), the

<sup>51</sup> Krapp 1932, 54; Bjork 2013, 137. The adverb *nu* (‘now’, 42b, 63b 88a) conveys the penitent’s urgency to depart from this world, trusting in divine mercy; see Nelson 1983, 138.

<sup>52</sup> See Hermann 1984, 263-281. A similar scenario is found in *The Fates of the Apostles* 91b-94.

<sup>53</sup> Cross 1965, 105-106.

<sup>54</sup> See Cocco 2019, 41-52.

<sup>55</sup> For the making of books in the milieu of the Benedictine Reform, see Dumville 1992, 141-146.



pre-Conquest Church embraced the *Ordo qualiter agatur in obsequium defunctorum* (*Ordo xlix*) of the *Ordines Romani*.<sup>56</sup> As the *Regularis Concordia* xii.65-67 proves,<sup>57</sup> the Benedictine Reform restored the *Officium defunctorum*,<sup>58</sup> while the *Agenda mortuorum* had always been part of missals.<sup>59</sup>

The *Agenda mortuorum* that follows draws on the responsories and antiphons copied in complete form in manuscripts which were made or circulated in pre-Conquest England:

The Leofric Missal, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 579, 266<sup>r</sup>-267<sup>v</sup>, (s. ix<sup>2</sup>, with additions in s. x<sup>2</sup>, s. xi<sup>med</sup>)

The Missal of Robert of Jumièges, Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 274 [Y6], fols 207<sup>v</sup>-208<sup>v</sup>, (s. xi<sup>1</sup>)

The Red Book of Darley, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422, pp. 429-490, (s. xi<sup>med</sup>)

The Winchcombe Sacramentary, Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 127 [105], pp. 332-336, (s. x<sup>2</sup>)

The *Agenda mortuorum* highlights the salvific role angels play in the *transitus* of the soul. The rite entails the recitation of the *commendatio animae*, which involves prayers, psalms, and responsories and antiphons such as *Subvenite sancti dei*, *Suscipiat te Christus*,<sup>60</sup> and *Chorus angelorum*.<sup>61</sup> Those antiphons and

<sup>56</sup> See Sicard 1978, 27-33, Andrieu 1956, IV, 529-530. For a complete account of the earliest Old Roman ritual for death and burial, see Paxton 1990, 37-44.

<sup>57</sup> Symons, 1953, pp. 64-66.

<sup>58</sup> For the Benedictine Reform, see Gretsch 1999, 245-249. The *Officium defunctorum* occurs in the Red Book of Darley (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 422, pp. 470-90, and p. 554 in latter hand); Wulstan Portiforium (Cambridge, CCC 391, pp. 705-712); London, BL, Harley 863 (with Nocturns).

<sup>59</sup> For the liturgical books from pre-Conquest England (including those with the *Agenda mortuorum* and the *Officium defunctorum*), see Keefer 1995.

<sup>60</sup> The responsory *Subvenite sancti dei* and the antiphon *Suscipiat te christus* are taken from the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, as the other codices indicate the recitation of *Subvenite sancti dei* and quote *Suscipiat te Christus* entirely; see Wilson 1994, 297-298.

<sup>61</sup> For the *commendatio animae*, see Angenendt 1984, 168-171, and Gougaud 1935, 11-8, 24-27.

responsory seem to be the liturgical counterpart of the cry of the soul in *Resignation A*.

The *commendatio animae* opens with angels called on to save the soul: “Subvenite sancti dei, occurrere angeli domini suscipientes animam eius offerentes eam in conspectu altissimi” (come to aid Saints of God, hasten angels of the Lord: accept his soul and introduce him before the presence of the Highest).<sup>62</sup> The text of the intercession that follows may have minor changes; the Winchcombe Sacramentary reads: “et per manus sanctorum angelorum tuorum inter sanctos et electos tuos, in sinibus abraham, [...] eam collocare digneris” (and by the hands of your holy angels may you find him worthy to place among your Saints and elect, in Abraham’s bosom).<sup>63</sup> After the intercession, Ps. 113 (‘In exitu Israël’) is preceded by the antiphon “Suscipiat te christus qui creavit te et in sinu abraham angeli deducant te” (let Christ who created you receive you and may the angels bring you into Abraham’s bosom).<sup>64</sup>

The invocation that follows Ps. 113 restates the need for angelic intervention: “eumque [...] suscipias et angelos tuos sanctos ei obviam mittas” (receive him and send your holy angels to meet him).<sup>65</sup> The Missal of Robert of Jumièges (fols 214<sup>v</sup>-215<sup>r</sup>) and the Red Book of Darley (p. 432) are the only manuscripts to list the *Chorus angelorum* antiphon in its entirety: “Chorus angelorum te suscipiat et in sinu abrahae ibi te collocet et cum lazaro quoddam pauper aeternam habeas requiem” (may a choir of angels receive you and bring you into Abraham’s bosom so that with Lazarus, once a poor man, you may obtain eternal rest).<sup>66</sup> After the antiphon, the section concludes with Ps. 114 (‘Dilexi quoniam’).

<sup>62</sup> Wilson 1994, 297.

<sup>63</sup> Davril, 1995, 263.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Wilson 1994, 298. The Leofric Missal (fol. 246<sup>v</sup>) reads: “emitte angelos tuos obviam ei [...] aperi ei portas iustitiae et repelle ab ea omnes principes tenebrarum” (send your holy angels before him, disclose to him the doors of justice and ward off all the princes of darkness); see Orchard 2002, II, 367.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 298. For the antiphons *In paradysum* and *Chorus angelorum*, see Capelle 1967, III, 251-267.

The texts of the responsory, antiphons and intercessions from the *Agenda mortuorum* show a liturgical correspondence with the soul's plea in *Resignation A* 49b-56a as to the fundamental intercessory role of the angels in leading the soul of the dead. This aspect goes beyond the common funerary rites and portrays private devotion. In London, BL, Arundel 155 (s. xi<sup>2</sup>), at fol. 185r, the Old English rendering of *Oratio ad XII Apostolos* reads:

ic hreppre mid benum minum earan mildheortnesse geopena gatu  
neorxnawanges æfter forþsiþe minum þæt on gecorenra þinra  
getele gerestan me alyfe toforan englum þinum

I fill the ears your mercy with my prayers; disclose the gates of Paradise after my death that I may be allowed to rest in the number of your elect, in the sight of your angels.<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, the *Oratio de apostolis sanctis* in the Book of Cerne (fol. 83<sup>v</sup>) reads:

Domine deus aperi mihi et portas paradisi post obitum meum, ut  
in electorum tuorum numero mihi requiescere liceat, coram te  
christe et coram angelis tuis

O Lord God, open to me the portals of paradise after my death, so that I might be allowed among the number of your elect, before your presence, O Christ, and the presence of your angels.<sup>68</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

*Resignation A* draws to its conclusion with a rising plea for mercy (60b-63b). As in death liturgy, the penitent makes a *confessio in hora mortis* before receiving the *vitaticum*, and the soul admits

<sup>67</sup> Campbell 1963, 91.

<sup>68</sup> See Kuypers 1902, 166. The same plea occurs *verbatim* in the prayer *Domine Ihesu Christe qui dedisti potestatem* at fols 34v-36r in London, BL, Cotton Galba, MS A.xiv (s. xi<sup>med</sup>).

her faults before passing: “Min is nu þa // sefa synnum fah, ond ic ymb sawle eom // feam siþum forth” (now my mind is stained with sins, and on occasion I am fearful for my soul, 63b-65a). The soul is aware that her life as a sinner is coming to an end and is ready for her final voyage. As in *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Resignation A*, as well as other poems with eschatological content, at their end, (1) evoke the journey of the soul over the *mare mundi*, (2) pray to be received into celestial bliss, (3) praise God’s glory,<sup>69</sup> as do *The Wanderer* 106-115 and *The Seafarer* 117-124.<sup>70</sup>

Symbolically describing a perilous journey across the sea, *Resignation A* is endowed with this eschatological message, which would have carried a deeper spiritual meaning, provided one could read its missing lines. The poet asks God’s protection from the angels of darkness to save his soul from a mighty storm (59-64a):

Forstond þu mec ond gestyr him, þonne storm cyme  
 minum gæste ongegn; geoca þonne,  
 mihtig dryhten, minre sawle;  
 gefreoþa hyre ond gefeorma hy, fæder moncynnes,  
 hædre gehogode, hæl, ece god,  
 meatod meahtum swiþ.

(Defend me from them and keep them at bay whenever that storm comes against my soul; save my soul then, O mighty Lord, protect and receive it, O Father of humankind; heal it, anxiously preoccupied as it is, O eternal God, creator strong in might.)

It is worth noticing the evocation of an allegoric storm the soul must avoid in her *transitus*. As in *The Seafarer* 117-124, the end of *Resignation A* also narrates a *peregrinatio animae* over the *mare mundi*. In Holy Writ, the sea can be deceitful and cause a wreck – e.g. Christ’s calming of the sea (Matt. 8:23-27), or St

<sup>69</sup> Wilson 1974, 65-109, 141-180.

<sup>70</sup> See Smithers 1957, 141-147; Smithers 1959.

Paul's voyage (Acts 27). In *Enarratio in Psalmum CXLVIII.9*, St Augustine says that the sea is the realm of darkness, its abyss is the seat of the devil.<sup>71</sup> The storm in *Resignation A* frightens the poet as much as that in Matt. 8 when the apostles are on a boat tossed by the waves. Just as the disciples cried to Christ to save them, so does the soul in *Resignation A*.

The Fathers of the Church taught that the *peregrinatio animae* should lead the vessel of the soul to the *portus salutis*.<sup>72</sup> In *Christ II* 854-855, Cynewulf vividly portrays the eschatological sailing of a ship on a sea at tempest: “yða ofer mæta þe we her on lacað // geond þas wacan woruld, windge holmas” (the waves without end that we toss on here throughout this mutable world, windy the billows).<sup>73</sup> The poet also tells that because of Christ's mercy the ship may land into the *portus salutis* (858b-859, 864-866):

Ða us help bicwom,  
 þæt us to hælo      hyþe gelædde, [...]  
 Utan us to þære hyðe      hyht stapelian,  
 ða us gerymde      rodera waldend,  
 halge on heahþu,      þa he heofonum astag.

(Then help came to us, that led us to salvation in the harbor [...] Let us fix our hope in that harbor, which for us the Ruler of the skies, holy in the heights, opened when He ascended to heaven.)<sup>74</sup>

The collocation *cuman + storm* in *Resignation A* 59b also occurs in the glossed translation of Ps. 68:3 in the Vespasian Psalter to describe a sea-tempest: “Veni in altitudinem maris, et tempestas demersit me” = “Cym in heanisse saes & storm bisencte mec”.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Dekkers, Fraipont 1956, III, 2171-2172.

<sup>72</sup> In *Divinae institutiones* VI 24.9, Lactantius explains how Christ's mercy has disclosed the *portus salutis* to mankind; see Brandt 1890, 573, ll. 1-4. For the symbolism of the *navicula animae*, see Rahner 1964, 327-329.

<sup>73</sup> Krapp, van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 26-27; Bjork 2013, 31.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Kuhn 1965, 63. The collocation *cuman + storm* also occurs in the glossed

The prayer of the soul not to perish in the storm in *Resignation A* 59b-63 seems to echo Ps. 68:2: “*Salvum me fac, Deus, quoniam intraverunt aquæ usque ad animam meam*” (Save me, O God: for the waters are come in even unto my soul). The imagery of the billowy waters being calmed by God’s power (“*ece god, meatod meahtum swiþ*” [O eternal God, creator strong in might]) in *Resignation A* 64 recalls Ps. 88:10: “*Tu dominaris potestati maris; motum autem fluctuum ejus tu mitigas*” (Thou rulest the power of the sea: and appeasest the motion of the waves thereof). The Old English Paris Psalter *Psalm 88.10* merges the *peregrinatio animae* in *Resignation A* 59-66a, *Christ II* 850-866, and Holy Writ: “*þu wide sæs wealdest mihtum; // þu his yþum might ana gasteoran, // ðonne hi on wæge wind onhrere*” (You control the broad seas with might, only You can restrain the waves, when the wind whips it up into billows).<sup>76</sup>

The plea for angelic intercession at the *transitus* in *Resignation A* 49b-56 recalls the eschatological content in the responsory and antiphons *Subvenite sancti dei*, *Suscipiat te Christus*, and *Chorus angelorum*. Though we do not know the other lines that completed *Resignation A*, in any case, the extant text of *Resignation A* is an independent penitential prayer, with a poetic *commendatio animae* that revises the liturgical extracts from the *Agenda mortuorum* or other *orationes*. Among many, the Old English translation of the *Oratio ad XII Apostolos* in London, BL, Arundel 155 upholds the circulation and use of Old English (para)liturgical texts for personal devotion in a more familiar language.<sup>77</sup>

Along with that practice, on the one hand, the poet proves his knowledge of the dogmatics concerning angelology and of death liturgy, while, on the other, he offers a vivid example of poetic craft to meditate over penance. Through his poetic sensibility, the poet gives voice to the penitent before death and depicts the inmost hope of an anxious soul calling upon God’s promise in Ps.

translation of Ps. 49:3.

<sup>76</sup> Krapp 1932, 57; O’Neill 2016, 343.

<sup>77</sup> Jones 2012, xix.

90:11: “Quoniam angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis” (For he hath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways).

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*Fig. 1. The parable of Dives and Lazarus  
Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 156142, fol. 78r*



*Fig. 2. Angels lead Guthlac's soul to Heaven  
London, British Library, Harley Roll Y.6, Roundel 14*



*Fig. 3. Monks at wake*  
*Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W. 284, fol. 85r*





SEBASTIANO CRESTANI

## IL *LUDUS DE ANTICHRISTO*: ESCATOLOGIA IMPERIALE TRA ORIENTE E OCCIDENTE\*

Composed in Germany in the second half of the 12th century, *Ludus de Antichristo* is configured as a political instrument at the service of the Hohenstaufen court. In the text, in fact, as the eschaton approaches, the Germanic emperor will subdue all the kings of the Earth, and then go to Jerusalem and hand over his kingdom to Christ, laying down his royal insignia on the altar of the *Templum Domini*. This act will be the prelude to the appearance of the Antichrist.

The events narrated in the *Ludus* are based on the legend of the Last Christian Emperor, a recurring topos in medieval eschatological literature. Unlike the other texts in which this figure appears, in the *Ludus* the ruler lays his crown inside the *Templum Domini* in Jerusalem, i.e. in the Dome of the Rock on the Esplanade of the ancient Jewish Temple. This is to be seen in the context of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, which was established in the wake of the first crusades, with the Esplanade regaining importance also in the Christian sphere, after it had been left aside for centuries due to the pre-eminence of the Holy Sepulchre.

This paper considers the political implications of the identification of the Germanic ruler with the Christian Last Emperor, and then focuses on the renewed centrality of the Temple Esplanade in the medieval Christian eschatological discourse, with a hint at a possible reading of the theme of the Last Emperor laying down his royal insignia in the Temple also in a Jewish eschatological text. Apocalyptic-eschatological literature, as well as conveying images of power, can in fact be understood as the privileged medium for interreligious encounters and exchanges.

Il *Ludus de Antichristo*<sup>1</sup> è una rappresentazione teatrale di carattere religioso composta in latino verso la metà del XII secolo. Il testo – un vero e proprio libretto o copione da seguire per la messa

\* Desidero ringraziare i revisori dell'articolo per i preziosi suggerimenti e per le ulteriori indicazioni bibliografiche fornitemi.

<sup>1</sup> Nei testimoni manoscritti il dramma non è provvisto di titolo, che gli fu attribuito dagli studiosi tra XVIII e XIX secolo. Cfr. Thomas, Symes 2023, 12. 24-25.

in scena – è sopravvissuto in forma completa in un unico codice manoscritto<sup>2</sup> (Monaco, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 19411), proveniente dal monastero di Tegernsee, che si compone di 137 fogli ed è databile tra il 1178 e il 1186. Il *Ludus de Antichristo* si trova ai ff. 2v-7r.<sup>3</sup>

Il testo è stato oggetto di numerosi studi,<sup>4</sup> che si sono concentrati soprattutto sugli aspetti politici, storici e ideologici di tale rappresentazione, ma anche su quelli più eminentemente legati al mondo del teatro e alla drammaturgia.<sup>5</sup> In questo mio contributo intendo riproporre alcune di tali questioni, inserendo però più specificamente il *Ludus* all'interno di un filone letterario legato da una parte allo sviluppo di figure escatologiche quali l'Ultimo Imperatore e l'Anticristo e, dall'altra, al contesto delle crociate e dell'occupazione cristiana della Spianata del Tempio di Gerusalemme.

Il *Ludus*, come altre rappresentazioni medievali dello stesso genere,<sup>6</sup> era pensato per essere messo in scena all'interno di chiese. Lo testimonia Gerhoch di Reichersberg, superiore di un'abbazia di canonici regolari dal 1132 al 1169, il quale, nel suo *De investigatione Antichristi*, si scaglia contro i sacerdoti che

<sup>2</sup> Un frammento dello stesso testo è giunto fino a noi anche in un manoscritto del XII secolo proveniente dall'abbazia benedettina di St. Georgenberg di Schwaz, in Tirolo, e ora conservato alla Stiftsbibliothek di Fiecht, ms. 169. Il testo consta dei versetti 1-66 del *Ludus de Antichristo*. Su questo frammento cfr. Riedmann 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Secondo un'altra numerazione presente nel ms., il testo si trova ai ff. 5-15. Cfr. la descrizione del ms. in Plechl 1962, 418-501.

<sup>4</sup> Per un'efficace presentazione della bibliografia ad esso dedicata, cfr. Bisanti 2017, 466, nota 3. Per le edizioni del *Ludus*, cfr. *ibid.*, 468, nota 9. In questo lavoro, per il testo latino e la traduzione italiana, mi sono basato su Piacenti 2009. Ne ho comunque verificato l'accuratezza nel manoscritto, digitalizzato e consultabile a questo link: <<https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00008249/images/index.html?fip=193.174.98.30&seite=1&pdfseitex=>>> (ultimo accesso 18/12/2023). Altra traduzione italiana da segnalare è quella di Franceschini 1960, 267-295; 1976. Per una recente traduzione inglese, cfr. Thomas, Symes 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr., fra tutti, Thomas, Symes 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Su questo tipo di letteratura, cfr. Aichele 1974.

permettevano che tali rappresentazioni si svolgessero all'interno di luoghi sacri.<sup>7</sup> Ferruccio Bertini riteneva che in quest'opera Gerhoch di Reichersberg si riferisse proprio al *Ludus de Antichristo*.<sup>8</sup> Considerando che Gerhoch redasse la seconda versione del *De investigatione* tra il 1160 e il 1161,<sup>9</sup> lo studioso ne dedusse che la composizione del *Ludus* dovrebbe situarsi tra il 1155 (anno di incoronazione di Federico I Barbarossa, al quale, come si vedrà, il testo fa implicito riferimento) e il 1160, individuato come *terminus ante quem*.<sup>10</sup>

Il *Ludus de Antichristo* si può dividere in due parti. Nella prima viene messa in scena la sottomissione dei re di Francia, di Grecia e di Gerusalemme al sovrano dell'Impero romano-germanico, il quale si reca in seguito a Gerusalemme per liberarla dall'assedio del re di Babilonia. Una volta sconfitto il nemico ed essere stato riconosciuto come sovrano anche da quest'ultimo, l'imperatore depone la corona, lo scettro e la dignità imperiale sull'altare del *Templum Domini*, consegnando così il suo regno a Dio. Da questo punto in poi, il sovrano assume il titolo di "re dei tedeschi" (*rex Teotonicorum*). Si apre così la seconda parte della rappresentazione, dedicata all'instaurazione del dominio dell'Anticristo, che termina con la sua sconfitta finale e il trionfo della Chiesa e della Fede. Il testo, tuttavia, non chiarisce in che modo l'Anticristo venga annientato, né chi sia l'artefice della sua caduta: si accenna solamente a un grande "strepito" (*sonitus*)<sup>11</sup> sul suo capo e al suo

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Potestà, Rizzi 2012, 385-419, per un'introduzione al testo, una bibliografia dedicata, il testo latino e la traduzione italiana di alcuni passi significativi. Per la sezione in cui Gerhoch di Reichersberg attacca le rappresentazioni sull'Anticristo, cfr. in particolare p. 417. Cfr. anche Franceschini 1976, 825-826.

<sup>8</sup> Bertini 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Classen 1960, 422.

<sup>10</sup> Bertini 1993, 21-23. Della stessa opinione è Bisanti 2017, 474. Alcuni studiosi, tuttavia, affermano che non vi è certezza sul fatto che l'opera di Gerhoch faccia riferimento proprio al *Ludus* e non ad altre rappresentazioni dello stesso genere. Cfr. Potestà, Rizzi 2012, 618, nota 37 e i riferimenti qui riportati.

<sup>11</sup> Piacenti 2009, 45 (per il testo italiano); 97 (per il testo latino).

sprofondare, mentre anche i suoi seguaci si dileguano. Si intuisce comunque l'intervento di una qualche forza sovrannaturale e divina. Manca inoltre un qualsiasi accenno all'*eschaton* vero e proprio, ossia al ritorno di Cristo nella gloria, al giudizio universale e all'instaurazione del regno eterno di Dio.

I due personaggi principali del *Ludus* sono quindi ovviamente l'Anticristo, il nemico dei tempi finali, e l'imperatore dell'Impero romano-germanico, che qui riveste evidentemente il ruolo di Ultimo Imperatore cristiano.<sup>12</sup>

La tradizione riguardante questo sovrano finale prima della comparsa dell'Anticristo ha radici antiche, trovandosi esplicitata per la prima volta nella *Leggenda siriaca di Alessandro*, composta probabilmente in Mesopotamia tra il 629 e il 630 come strumento di propaganda per l'imperatore bizantino Eraclio, vincitore sui Persiani e conquistatore di Gerusalemme.<sup>13</sup> Stando a quest'opera, Alessandro, il leggendario re macedone, avrebbe ricevuto da Dio l'incarico di fondare l'impero universale romano e cristiano. Alla fine dei tempi, l'ultimo sovrano di tale impero avrebbe consegnato il suo regno nelle mani di Cristo a Gerusalemme, dove avrebbe fatto portare il suo trono e la sua corona.<sup>14</sup> Secondo Ilkka Lindstedt, nell'atto della consegna delle insegne regali, e quindi del regno stesso, nelle mani di Dio, si può intravedere un'eco di I Cor 15,24, in cui si afferma che Cristo, alla fine dei tempi, "consegnerà il regno a Dio Padre, dopo aver ridotto al nulla ogni Principato e ogni Potenza e Forza".<sup>15</sup>

La leggenda venne poi ripresa dal cosiddetto *Vaticino di Costante*, conservatosi nel più ampio testo latino noto come *Sibil-*

<sup>12</sup> Nel paragrafo che segue, per la ricostruzione di questa tradizione mi baso su Potestà 2014. Vi sono, tuttavia, proposte diverse riguardanti la cronologia delle fonti di tale leggenda e i loro rapporti di influenza. Per una breve ma efficace panoramica su queste posizioni, cfr. Tesei 2023, 157. I testi citati di seguito sono stati considerati anche nel classico Bousset 1896.

<sup>13</sup> Per la principale edizione della *Leggenda siriaca di Alessandro*, cfr. Budge 1889. Cfr. anche Tesei 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Potestà 2014, 21-22. Cfr. anche Potestà, Rizzi 2012, XXVIII-XXIX.

<sup>15</sup> Lindstedt 2019, 212.

la *Tiburtina*, compilato in Italia nel X secolo e più volte rimaneggiato.<sup>16</sup> Il *Vaticinio*, tuttavia, è certamente più antico e risale alla metà del VII secolo. Esso fu probabilmente composto come propaganda per Costantino (o Costante) II, nipote di Eraclio, esaltandone la caratura regale e identificandolo con l'Ultimo Imperatore dei romani, il quale si sarebbe dovuto recare a Gerusalemme, e qui avrebbe consegnato il suo diadema e i suoi abiti regali, simbolo del suo regno, nelle mani di Dio Padre e di Gesù Cristo.<sup>17</sup> La più ampia diffusione della leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore si ebbe però grazie all'*Apocalisse dello Pseudo-Methodio*, composta probabilmente in siriano tra il 691 e il 692 in un monastero della Mesopotamia settentrionale, e successivamente tradotta in greco e in latino.<sup>18</sup> La leggenda narra di un imperatore romano cristiano che avrebbe instaurato un regno di pace sulla Terra, convertendo tutti i popoli al cristianesimo. All'apparizione del Figlio della Perdizione,<sup>19</sup> che in una versione aggiornata dello *Pseudo-Methodio* venne esplicitamente identificato con l'Anticristo,<sup>20</sup> il sovrano si sarebbe recato a Gerusalemme, dove avrebbe deposto la sua corona sulla croce del Golgota, consegnando quindi il suo potere nelle mani di Dio. La croce e la corona sarebbero miracolosamente ascese al cielo. Infine, per Adso di Montier-en-Der, autore del *De ortu et tempore Antichristi* (composto tra il 949 e il 954),

<sup>16</sup> Per un'introduzione, il testo latino e una traduzione in italiano, cfr. Potestà, Rizzi 2012, 360-381. Cfr. anche Holdenried 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Potestà 2014, 23-31. Cfr. anche Potestà, Rizzi 2012, XXXIII-XXXIV. Sulla scia di Ernst Sackur, primo editore della redazione latina della *Sibilla Tiburtina* (1898), la maggior parte degli studiosi ritiene che il Costante del *Vaticinio* sia piuttosto il figlio di Costantino il Grande (cfr., fra gli altri, Cohn 2000, 38). Tuttavia, secondo Potestà 2014, 24-25, questa teoria presenta diversi punti di debolezza, ed è più probabile che il Costante in questione fosse, come si è visto, il nipote dell'imperatore bizantino Eraclio.

<sup>18</sup> Reinink 1993, vol. II, XVI. Cfr. anche Potestà, Rizzi 2012, XXVII. Per una traduzione in inglese dell'opera, cfr. Garstad 2012.

<sup>19</sup> 2Ts 2,3, sul quale cfr. *infra*.

<sup>20</sup> Potestà 2014, 69-70. La nuova versione in questione fu probabilmente composta in Aquitania tra il 732 e il 778 circa, in occasione delle incursioni arabe in quella regione. Cfr. *ibid.*, 66-69.

l'Ultimo Imperatore sarebbe stato un sovrano dei franchi, il quale avrebbe deposto il suo scettro e la sua corona sul Monte degli Ulivi, ponendo fine all'impero dei romani e dei cristiani.<sup>21</sup> Una versione dell'opera di Adso, falsamente attribuita ad Alcuino di York (735-804) e databile invece all'XI secolo, afferma, "sicut ex sibyllinis libris habemus", che il re dei romani avrebbe regnato per centododici anni dopo aver sconfitto le ventidue nazioni di Gog e Magog e convertito pagani ed ebrei al cristianesimo.<sup>22</sup> Quindi si sarebbe recato a Gerusalemme, dove avrebbe deposto il suo diadema e consegnato il regno cristiano al Padre e al Figlio.<sup>23</sup>

La leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore, secondo alcuni studiosi, ritornerebbe anche nella prima formazione di un potere cristiano a Gerusalemme in seguito alla conquista crociata del 1099, in particolare nel tratteggiare la figura del primo sovrano cristiano della città, Goffredo di Buglione, sul quale si sarebbero caricate varie aspettative escatologiche.<sup>24</sup>

Alla base della leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore e dell'instaurazione del dominio dell'Anticristo al termine del suo regno vi sarebbe, ad ogni modo, una reinterpretazione di un passo della *Seconda Lettera ai Tessalonicesi* (2Ts 2, 3-6), in cui l'autore<sup>25</sup> mette in guardia il suo uditorio:

Nessuno vi inganni in alcun modo! Infatti, prima verrà l'apostasia e si rivelerà l'uomo dell'iniquità, il figlio della perdizione, l'avversario, colui che s'innalza sopra ogni essere

<sup>21</sup> Per un'introduzione, il testo latino e una traduzione italiana, cfr. Potestà, Rizzi 2012, XXXI.341-342.

<sup>22</sup> Il riferimento, qui, è quasi certamente alla *Sibilla Tiburtina*. Per il passo parallelo in quest'ultimo testo, cfr. Potestà, Rizzi 2012, 378-379.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. il testo in Verhelst 1976, 125. Cfr. anche Potestà 2014, 110, nota 21. Alphandéry e Dupront (1974, 75-76) attribuiscono questo testo all'eremita Albuino, vissuto nel XII secolo.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr., fra gli altri, Ferrier 1997; Andrei 2022, 117-141; Esposito 2023, 141-150.

<sup>25</sup> La tradizionale attribuzione di questa lettera a Paolo di Tarso è stata messa in dubbio dalla critica moderna. Per una breve ma efficace panoramica su questo tema, cfr. McGinn 1994, 41.

chiamato e adorato come Dio, fino a insediarsi nel tempio di Dio, pretendendo di essere Dio. [...] E ora voi sapete che cosa lo trattiene [*katéchon*, *κατέχων*] perché non si manifesti se non nel suo tempo. Il mistero dell'iniquità è già in atto, ma è necessario che sia tolto di mezzo colui che finora lo trattiene. Allora l'empio sarà rivelato e il Signore Gesù lo distruggerà con il soffio della sua bocca e lo annienterà con lo splendore della sua venuta.

Già secondo Ippolito, nel *Commento a Daniele* (IV 21,3), “colui che trattiene”, il *katéchon*, è la quarta bestia di Daniele 7,7.23, la quale rappresentava l'Impero romano. Anche secondo Tertulliano vi sarebbe qui un riferimento all'Impero romano.<sup>26</sup> Tale visione negativa dell'Impero, che di fatto impediva l'inizio dei tempi finali e il ritorno di Cristo nella *parousia*, è testimoniata fino almeno al IX secolo nel *Commento alla seconda lettera ai Tessalonicesi* di Aimone di Auxerre.<sup>27</sup> A partire dall'*Apocalisse dello Pseudo-Methodio*, però, si impose anche un'interpretazione positiva e quasi provvidenziale del *katéchon*, e quindi dell'Impero romano-bizantino, che avrebbe avuto la funzione di trattenere il Figlio della Perdizione.<sup>28</sup>

Tornando al *Ludus de Antichristo*, gli studiosi hanno evidenziato la sua dipendenza dal *De ortu et tempore Antichristi* di Adso da Montier-en-Der,<sup>29</sup> nella misura in cui la messa in scena prevede un sovrano cristiano consegnare le sue insegne regali a Gerusalemme prima della comparsa dell'Anticristo. Se, tuttavia, Adso identificava l'Ultimo Imperatore con un re dei franchi, il *Ludus* indica piuttosto un sovrano germanico come colui al quale tutti i regni della terra si sottometteranno prima dell'arrivo del nemico dei tempi finali. Dietro a tale regnante, la maggior parte degli studiosi ha riconosciuto Federico I Barbarossa. Il testo, infatti, si collo-

<sup>26</sup> Sull'iniziale identificazione del *katéchon* cfr. McGinn 1994, 41-43. Cfr. anche Mariotti 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Per un'introduzione, il testo latino e una traduzione italiana, cfr. Potestà, Rizzi 2012, 280-291.

<sup>28</sup> Potestà, Rizzi 2012, XXVIII-XXIX.

<sup>29</sup> Bisanti 2017, 472-473; Thomas, Symes 2023, 27.

ca cronologicamente e ideologicamente nel contesto dell'Impero romano-germanico della seconda metà del XII secolo.<sup>30</sup> Tuttavia, altri hanno messo in dubbio il carattere filo-imperiale dell'opera.<sup>31</sup> In effetti, dopo la comparsa dell'Anticristo, che si presenterà come il Messia, anche l'Imperatore cadrà nel suo inganno. Paradossalmente, solo gli ebrei, rappresentati dal personaggio chiamato "Sinagoga", riconosceranno le sue falsità, tanto da subire il martirio assieme ai profeti Enoch ed Elia, venuti a smascherare l'impostore.<sup>32</sup> Secondo Klaus Aichele, il *Ludus* non sarebbe quindi da identificare come un prodotto dell'ambiente germanico filo-imperiale, e tanto meno collegabile a Federico I Barbarossa, ma si tratterebbe piuttosto del risultato di una collazione di *topoi* di afferenza romano-cristiana e di difficile datazione.<sup>33</sup>

Non vi sono dubbi sulla natura composita del testo da un punto di vista tematico. Il *Ludus* riprende immagini e stilemi ben più antichi del XII secolo.<sup>34</sup> Ciononostante, l'ideologia filo-imperiale del dramma non può essere disconosciuta: mentre tutti i sovrani della terra (il re dei franchi, il re dei greci ecc.) cadono immediatamente nell'inganno dell'Anticristo, il re dei germani si oppone alle sue astuzie e muove addirittura guerra contro il sedicente Messia. Allorché le armate dell'Anticristo vengono sconfitte, il *rex Teotonicorum* si siede nuovamente sul suo trono e dichiara

<sup>30</sup> Bisanti 2017, 471-472. Cfr. anche Cardini 1988. Thomas, Symes 2023, 31-39 hanno anche evidenziato l'ideologia antipapale che sottostà a questo testo.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. Aichele 1976, 425, e la bibliografia qui riportata.

<sup>32</sup> La tradizione che vede il patriarca Enoch e il profeta Elia (tra i pochi, nella Bibbia, a non aver dovuto sperimentare la morte e a essere stati ammessi ancora in vita al cospetto di Dio) come coloro che tenteranno di opporsi all'Anticristo deriva dall'*Apocalisse* giovannea, in cui si parla di due testimoni vestiti di sacco che agiranno da profeti, compiendo miracoli, ma che verranno uccisi dalla bestia che sale dal mare, per poi risorgere dopo tre giorni e mezzo (Ap 11,3-11). Saranno l'*Apocalisse di Pietro*, nella sua versione etiopica, e Ippolito, nel suo *De Christo et Antichristo*, a identificare i due anonimi profeti con Enoch ed Elia. Cfr. Potestà, Rizzi 2013, 509-510, nota 71.

<sup>33</sup> Aichele 1976.

<sup>34</sup> Per un'introduzione a questa tematica, cfr. Alexander 1971; Potestà 2014.



passata la minaccia. Tuttavia, gli Ipocriti, servi dell'Anticristo, portano al cospetto di quest'ultimo uno zoppo e un lebbroso. Assistendo alla loro guarigione, la fede del sovrano germanico inizia a vacillare, ma è nel momento in cui l'ingannatore fa "risorgere" un soldato che si finge morto che anche il re dei tedeschi deve ammettere la natura divina del suo avversario, arrivando infine a inginocchiarsi davanti a lui.<sup>35</sup>

Sebbene, quindi, questa scena possa portare a pensare che il testo non sposi in pieno l'ideologia filo-imperiale, ritengo che essa risponda più alla necessità di mantenere una continuità della tradizione riguardante i tempi finali piuttosto che sottintendere una non completa adesione al potere imperiale. In altre parole, la leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore cristiano prevede che, dopo l'abdicazione del sovrano, l'Anticristo domini su tutta la Terra e su tutti i regni per un certo periodo di tempo. Il *Ludus* non poteva deviare rispetto a questa tradizione. La strategia del suo anonimo autore consiste nel mostrare il re dei germani come il sovrano dei tempi ultimi e il più fiero oppositore dell'Anticristo ma, in un'ottica di fedeltà alla leggenda, alla fine anche lui dovrà riconoscere il suo dominio. Benché solo accennato in pochi, rapidi e per nulla chiari versi, sarà infatti un intervento extraumano, e non un potere terreno, a distruggere il Nemico e i suoi seguaci. Il dramma, quindi, si può pienamente inscrivere fra gli strumenti di propaganda politica imperiale, rimanendo allo stesso tempo fedele a una tradizione ormai secolare.

Come si è visto, lo spazio in cui si compie l'atto finale dell'Ultimo Imperatore è Gerusalemme, e la scena vede al centro le insegne imperiali. Tuttavia, il luogo preciso in cui il sovrano deporrà le insegne regali varia da testo a testo: si passa dal Golgota (*Apocalisse dello Pseudo-Methodio*) al Monte degli Ulivi (*De ortu et tempore Antichristi*) a un luogo non ben precisato nella città (*Leggenda siriana di Alessandro e Sibilla Tiburtina*). Ad ogni modo, il *Ludus de Antichristo* si discosta in parte dalla messa in scena tradizionale, nella misura in cui la corona, lo scettro e la

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. il testo in Piacenti 2009, 33-37 (testo italiano), 85-89 (testo latino).

dignità imperiale vengono depositate dall'Imperatore sull'altare nel *Templum Domini* di Gerusalemme.

L'espressione *Templum Domini* indica, nel periodo del dominio crociato sulla Città Santa, la Cupola della Roccia sulla Spianata del Tempio, eretta dal califfo Abd al-Malik tra il 690 e il 691 (68-69 dell'Egira). Tale edificio islamico fu identificato dai crociati come il sostituto del Tempio ebraico, distrutto dai romani nel 70.<sup>36</sup> Prima della conquista cristiana di Gerusalemme nel 1099, la Spianata del Tempio non ricopre alcun ruolo nella leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore. Ciò non dovrebbe stupire, se si considera il fatto che il luogo in cui sorgeva il Tempio di Salomone non ebbe inizialmente una grande rilevanza per il cristianesimo, dato che già al tempo di Costantino il Grande e di sua madre Elena il centro religioso della città si era spostato dalla Spianata alla Basilica dell'Anastasis e al Golgota. Come si è visto, alcune versioni della vicenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore lo vedono in effetti depositare la corona sul colle del Calvario e sulla croce di Cristo. La Spianata, dal canto suo, era stata abbandonata ed era diventata forse addirittura una discarica.<sup>37</sup> La Spianata del Tempio, assieme all'intera Gerusalemme, riacquistò quindi importanza nel contesto dell'occupazione cristiana della Città Santa alla fine dell'XI secolo:<sup>38</sup> la moschea di al-Aqsa, ribattezzata *Templum Salomonis*, divenne dapprima il palazzo reale, in cui si insediarono i primi dominatori crociati di Gerusalemme, ossia Goffredo di Buglionne (1099-1100), Baldovino I (1100-1118) e Baldovino II (1118-1131), e, in seguito, passò a sede dell'ordine monastico-militare che dal *Templum* prese il nome: i Templari.<sup>39</sup> Ancora più rilevante

<sup>36</sup> Sulla tradizione popolare che vedeva nella Cupola della Roccia un sostituto del Tempio di Salomone fatto costruire da Elena, madre dell'imperatore Costantino, e poi trasformato in moschea dai musulmani, cfr. Schein 2005, 106-107.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Conterno 2010, 17, nota 24.

<sup>38</sup> Per una discussione sulla riacquistata centralità della Città Santa agli occhi dei cristiani tra XI e XII secolo, nonché sulla dialettica tra Gerusalemme terrestre e Gerusalemme celeste, cfr. Prawer 1980; Musarra 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Schein 1984, 180-183.

è il ruolo centrale che tornò a ricoprire, anche dal punto di vista cristiano, la Cupola della Roccia, la quale venne appunto ribattezzata *Templum Domini*.<sup>40</sup> La Roccia fu ricoperta da una lastra di marmo e divenne un altare.<sup>41</sup> Cosa ancora più importante, l'incoronazione dei re di Gerusalemme avveniva nella chiesa del Santo Sepolcro, ma poi essi si recavano in processione al *Templum Domini*, dove posavano la corona sull'altare.<sup>42</sup> L'azione in sé appare ovviamente spogliata di ogni contenuto escatologico, dato

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 181. Non tutte le fonti, comunque, sono concordi nella lettura positiva che fu data inizialmente alla Cupola della Roccia. Ad esempio, le *Gesta Tancredi in expeditione Hierosolomytana*, scritte da Raul di Caen tra il 1112 e il 1118, raccontano che Tancredi (uno dei comandanti della prima crociata), arrivato sulla Spianata del Tempio in seguito alla conquista di Gerusalemme, trovò nella Cupola della Roccia una statua di Muḥammad, che venne interpretato come il primo Anticristo. Poiché è impossibile che vi fosse realmente una statua simile in quel luogo, a causa soprattutto della tendenza aniconica dei musulmani, Di Cesare (2014) suppone che questo racconto nasconda un preciso significato. La studiosa dimostra come i crociati, in accordo coi testi in loro possesso, si aspettassero che sulla Spianata del Tempio non vi fosse alcun edificio. Sulla base però di alcune profezie escatologiche, come il *De ortu et tempore Antichristi* di Adso da Montier-en-Der, essi ritenevano che il Tempio sarebbe stato ricostruito dall'Anticristo prima della fine dei tempi. Di fronte, quindi, a un edificio come la Cupola della Roccia, fu per loro automatico associare quella costruzione all'opera dell'Anticristo Muḥammad, venuto in passato a fondare una setta cristiana ostile all'ortodossia, ossia l'islam. Il nemico dei cristiani, quindi, sarebbe stato effigiato con una statua prefigurata dal profeta Daniele come l'"abominio della desolazione" (Dn 12,11). Su questo punto cfr. anche Conterno 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Praver 1973, 101; Schein 1984, 184; Blair Moore 2017, 86; Blair Moore 2021, 116-117. Wilkinson (1988, 9) data la copertura della Roccia con l'altare al 1117 circa. La testimonianza più importante in tal senso ci viene dalla *Historia Hierosolymitana* di Fulcherio di Chartres. Cfr. il testo in Fink 1969, 118. Quando i musulmani riconquistarono Gerusalemme nel 1187, Saladino, tra gli altri interventi volti a cancellare l'impronta cristiana sui monumenti islamici, fece rimuovere la lastra in questione. Su questo punto cfr. Boas 2001, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. il *Livre de Jean d'Ibelin*, in RHC Lois, vol. 1, p. 31. In quest'opera, Giovanni di Ibelin (1215-1266) parla esplicitamente dell'offerta della corona sull'altare del *Templum Domini* su cui la tradizione voleva che Gesù bambino fosse stato presentato a Simeone (Lc 2,22-39). Poi la processione proseguiva verso il *Templum Salomonis*. Cfr. anche Schein 1984, 184; Musarra 2024, 79.

che la cerimonia di incoronazione era evidentemente elaborata in modo da confermare e consolidare il potere dei nuovi sovrani, ma vi si può comunque leggere una reminiscenza della leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore, nella misura in cui i sovrani riconoscevano il dominio di Dio sul mondo e ponevano quindi la corona sull'altare del suo Tempio.

La scena rappresentata nel *Ludus*, con il sovrano germanico che posa le sue insegne regali proprio sopra l'altare del *Templum Domini*, rimanda quindi a una cerimonia nata a seguito della conquista cristiana di Gerusalemme, e va perciò iscritta all'interno dell'ambito del dominio crociato sulla Terrasanta. Un altro evidente rimando al contesto delle crociate e del regno latino di Gerusalemme della seconda metà del XII secolo è riconoscibile nella minaccia rappresentata dal re di Babilonia, identificabile con un sovrano dei musulmani, che può facilmente essere collegata alle mire di Saladino su Gerusalemme e sui regni crociati. Al tempo in cui è ambientato il *Ludus*, la Città Santa è ancora evidentemente in mano cristiana, con il re di Gerusalemme ben saldo sul suo trono, ma le forze ostili di Babilonia vengono a cingerla d'assedio. Solo l'intervento dell'Imperatore salverà Gerusalemme, in una battaglia finale che sarà seguita dall'ingresso del sovrano dei tempi ultimi nel *Templum Domini* e dalla deposizione delle insegne regali. Non stupisce, quindi, che il manoscritto nel quale è conservato il *Ludus* sia databile al decennio precedente la conquista islamica di Gerusalemme, in un contesto in cui la minaccia rappresentata da Saladino si faceva sempre più pressante, e già probabilmente si prospettavano missioni cristiane in soccorso dei regni latini d'oriente.<sup>43</sup> Federico Barbarossa, com'è noto, sarà in effetti uno dei primi sovrani europei a partire per la terza crociata,

<sup>43</sup> Su questo punto, cfr. Cardini 1988, 179. Thomas e Symes 2023, 67 identificano piuttosto il re di Babilonia con il califfo abbaside al-Muqtafi, che regnava al tempo della probabile stesura originale del *Ludus*, attorno al 1159. Ritengo tuttavia che, al momento della copiatura del testo tra il 1178 e il 1186, il pubblico al quale era destinato collegasse automaticamente questa figura a Saladino, che rappresentava allora la principale minaccia per il regno di Gerusalemme.

anche se morirà lungo il percorso e non porterà mai a compimento la sua missione prospettata dal *Ludus*.

L'immagine del sovrano cristiano che posa la sua corona sull'altare del *Templum Domini*, ossia della Cupola della Roccia, ritorna curiosamente anche in un testo escatologico ebraico, i *Segni di R. Šim'on b. Yoḥa'i*, databili, pur con qualche difficoltà, alla seconda metà del XII secolo.<sup>44</sup> Prima di considerare brevemente questo testo, è necessaria una premessa riguardante il già menzionato altare del *Templum*.

La Cupola della Roccia fu eretta sopra quella che la tradizione indicava come la *sakhra*, la pietra dalla quale il profeta Muḥammad era asceso al cielo nel *mi'raj*.<sup>45</sup> È verosimile che gli ebrei medievali identificassero quella stessa roccia con la Pietra della Fondazione (*'even šetiyyah*),<sup>46</sup> elemento che compare in età tardoantica nella letteratura rabbinica e che si carica di diversi significati: questa pietra rappresenterebbe l'*omphalos*, il centro del mondo, nonché il luogo da cui Dio avrebbe iniziato la sua creazione all'inizio dei tempi;<sup>47</sup> all'epoca del re Salomone, la pietra sarebbe stata inglobata nel Tempio e sopra di essa sarebbe stata posta l'Arca dell'Alleanza.<sup>48</sup> Come si è visto, anche i cristiani, una volta che la Spianata ebbe riguadagnato la sua centralità al tempo del dominio crociato su Gerusalemme, caricarono la roccia di significati religiosi: essa sarebbe il luogo in cui Giacobbe avrebbe sognato la scala che conduce ai cieli; lì l'arcangelo Gabriele sarebbe apparso a Zaccaria, padre di Giovanni; su quella

<sup>44</sup> I dubbi emergono se si considerano i testimoni piuttosto tardi del testo (si va dal XVI al XVIII secolo), oppure difficilmente databili paleograficamente. Ad ogni modo, come si vedrà, a mio parere è proprio il riferimento alla leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore a far propendere per una redazione del testo al XII secolo. Per un'introduzione e una traduzione inglese dei *Segni*, cfr. Reeves 2006, 111-116. Cfr. anche Crestani 2021, 142, nota 16.

<sup>45</sup> Sulla tradizione islamica riguardante questa roccia, cfr. Koltun-Fromm 2017. Sull'ascensione di Muḥammad, cfr. Colby 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Su questa possibile identificazione, cfr. Blidstein 2007, 575.

<sup>47</sup> Alexander 1999, 115.

<sup>48</sup> Più in generale, sulla nascita e l'evoluzione del *topos* della Pietra della Fondazione, cfr. Koltun-Fromm 2019.

roccia, Gesù sarebbe stato presentato nel giorno di purificazione della madre Maria e Simeone avrebbe riconosciuto in lui il salvatore del mondo; lì, infine, Gesù si sarebbe seduto all'età di dodici anni e avrebbe discusso da pari a pari con i dottori del Tempio.<sup>49</sup> Proprio per questi motivi, come si è detto, al tempo della dominazione crociata sulla Città Santa, la roccia fu coperta di marmo, trasformata in un altare e resa il punto di arrivo di varie cerimonie, tra cui quella dell'incoronazione del re di Gerusalemme.

Ritornando al testo escatologico ebraico, i *Segni di R. Šim'on b. Yoħa'i*, la sezione che qui ci interessa recita:

Il re di Edom tornerà una seconda volta a Gerusalemme, entrerà nel luogo (in cui si trova) la Pietra della Fondazione e si toglierà la corona che è sulla sua testa, la porrà [...] [...] sulla Pietra della Fondazione, e dirà: "Signore di tutto [...] ecc., ho riportato ciò che avevano preso i (miei) padr(i)". E in quei giorni gli israeliti saranno in grande tribolazione.<sup>50</sup>

Edom, nella letteratura ebraica medievale, identifica Roma/Costantinopoli e, per estensione, il mondo cristiano.<sup>51</sup> Così, il passo citato dipinge l'immagine del sovrano dei cristiani che, all'approssimarsi dell'*eschaton*, conquisterà Gerusalemme e poserà la sua corona sulla Pietra della Fondazione. Nonostante le difficoltà di datazione del testo in questione, è possibile, a mio parere, leggere qui un'appropriazione ebraica della leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore, benché poi, com'è ovvio, il prosieguo della narrazione volga a favore del popolo ebraico, con la descrizione di una figura messianica (il Messia ben Yosef)<sup>52</sup> che uccide il re degli edomiti e si cinge il capo con la corona che il suo nemico aveva precedentemente posto sulla Pietra.<sup>53</sup> Al di là

<sup>49</sup> Per tutte queste tradizioni, cfr. Schein 2005, 99-100.

<sup>50</sup> Traduzione mia dall'ebraico dell'edizione di Marmorstein 1906, 182-183.

<sup>51</sup> Sull'equivalenza del popolo biblico degli edomiti, discendenti di Esaù, con Roma/Costantinopoli e la cristianità, cfr. Yuval 2006, 3-20.

<sup>52</sup> Su questa figura, cfr. Mitchell 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Cfr. il testo in traduzione inglese in Reeves 2006, 113-114.

della sua rilettura ebraica, è interessante notare come l'anonimo autore/redattore del testo fosse evidentemente a conoscenza della leggenda dell'Ultimo Imperatore nella versione in cui egli consegna i suoi emblemi regali non sul Monte degli Ulivi o genericamente a Gerusalemme, ma proprio sulla Pietra della Fondazione / *sakhra*, che tanta centralità aveva assunto nel periodo crociato. È anche possibile ipotizzare che questo autore/redattore fosse stato testimone – o, perlomeno, fosse venuto a conoscenza – della cerimonia di incoronazione dei re di Gerusalemme, che si concludeva con la posa della corona sull'altare nel *Templum Domini*. Da un punto di vista ebraico, se si ammette la correlazione altare – *sakhra* – Pietra della Fondazione, si sarebbe trattato di un atto blasfemo, di un'appropriazione indebita di un luogo così fortemente legato alla tradizione ebraica da parte dei nuovi dominatori della città. Un simile gesto avrebbe quindi meritato di assumere una connotazione escatologica e di entrare in una narrazione sulla fine dei tempi, quando il re di Edom sarebbe stato sconfitto da una figura messianica giunta a redimere Israele.

Il *Ludus de Antichristo* si fa quindi in un certo qual modo portavoce della riacquistata importanza della Spianata e del Tempio stesso. È interessante notare come questo spazio, dimenticato dai cristiani nei secoli precedenti la conquista crociata di Gerusalemme, assuma una centralità così evidente per i cristiani stessi nel XII secolo, tanto da essere identificato come il luogo in cui terminerà la vicenda vittoriosa dell'imperatore dei tempi finali. Non stupisce che una tale centralità assuma una valenza escatologica non solo per i cristiani, ma anche per quegli ebrei che vedevano nel dominio crociato un segno dell'approssimarsi dell'era messianica, al culmine (almeno in una visione escatologica della Storia) dello scontro secolare tra ebraismo e cristianesimo.<sup>54</sup> Se, tuttavia, il testo ebraico a cui si è fatto riferimento può essere interpretato, così come altri testi apocalittico-escatologici

<sup>54</sup> Secondo una certa tradizione ebraica, infatti, gli edomiti (ossia, i cristiani) sarebbero entrati in possesso di Gerusalemme poco prima dell'arrivo del Messia. Cfr. Crestani 2023, 142.

ebraici medievali, come uno strumento ermeneutico di resistenza e di consolazione di fronte alle tribolazioni vissute durante le crociate,<sup>55</sup> il *Ludus de Antichristo* può di fatto essere inserito all'interno dell'ambito della cosiddetta "Imperial Eschatology", un tipo di letteratura sulle cose ultime rispondente a un'ideologia di esaltazione del potere regale. Come ha efficacemente riassunto Stephen J. Shoemaker,

In Mediterranean Late antiquity and the European Middle Ages, apocalypticism was [...] regularly joined to ideas of imperial expansion and triumph, which expected the culmination of history to arrive through the universal dominion of a divinely chosen world empire.<sup>56</sup>

Nel *Ludus*, questo dominio universale è chiaramente quello del sovrano germanico, e nello specifico di Federico I Barbarossa, per il quale questa rappresentazione fu scritta, mettendo insieme stilemi di antica origine, come quello dell'Ultimo Imperatore cristiano, ed elementi nuovi, legati alla condizione contingente del regno latino di *outremer*. Il risultato è uno strumento di propaganda che sposa in pieno l'escatologia imperiale, presentando il sovrano come colui che saprà non solo sottomettere tutti i re della terra, ma anche inizialmente opporsi addirittura all'Anticristo, salvo poi soccombere alle sue astuzie, poiché solo Dio potrà sconfiggere il Nemico finale.

<sup>55</sup> Crestani 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Shoemaker 2018, 3.



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### *Sitografia*

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FEDERICA DI GIUSEPPE

ENLISTING THE TRUTH OF DAMNATION:  
THE RHETORIC OF WULFSTAN'S LIFELONG  
ENGAGEMENT WITH ESCHATOLOGY

Around the year 1000, England is in a state of crisis and demoralisation which most likely fosters apocalyptic anxieties. The preoccupation becomes prominent in the writings of contemporary vernacular homilists, and plays a key role in Archbishop Wulfstan's eschatological preaching. By focusing on his use of the list of sinners, this paper illustrates the evolution of Wulfstan's apocalypticism throughout his career, from ideological conviction to rhetorical tool. In particular, I intend to focus on how the alliterating catalogue, which first appears in *De Fide Catholica* (Bethurum sermon no. 7, p. 163 and ll. 128-134), is then reworked not only in the longest version of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (Bethurum sermon no. 20, p. 273 and ll. 161-166) but also in Wulfstan's legal writings and political tracts (in which case the list comes to describe earthly sinners, namely criminals proper). The way the catalogue is rephrased signals a change in Wulfstan's eschatological tone, which is ever-present but still loses its immediacy as the years, his career and the Viking invasions wear on.

1. *Historical background: England between the tenth and the eleventh centuries*

England was in a state of continuous and frequent upheaval between the years 900 and 1200, as the developments which prompted social transformations throughout Europe were here accelerated and complicated by repeated episodes of invasion, migration and changes of regime.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, the Scandinavian<sup>2</sup> occupation of northern, central and

<sup>1</sup> Crick, van Houts 2011; Runciman 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, the term 'Scandinavian' is used to refer to Northern Germanic geographical and linguistic areas (current Norway, Sweden and Denmark), including the communities originating from Scandinavia and settled in Iceland, Great Britain and Ireland. The word 'Viking', on the other hand, does not point to an ethnic reality but rather to those individuals (being them

eastern Britain had been going on for decades since the dramatic sack of the abbey at Lindisfarne in 793. Nonetheless, the ongoing attacks prompted the Alfredian programme of reconquest, which created enabling conditions for a cultural and religious revival, eventually giving rise to the Monastic Reform.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon of the Reform, particularly thriving during king Edgar's reign (959-975), laid the foundations for the long-standing partnership between *rex* and *ecclesia* which would serve as one of the main arguments supporting Archbishop Wulfstan of York's "vision of a holy society".<sup>4</sup>

The succession crisis on Edgar's death contributed to the weakening of the monastic revival and resulted in king Æthelred's somewhat controversial access to the throne.<sup>5</sup> His reign was marked by increasingly traumatic events which worsened the instability of the country. Although he acknowledged his youthful errors as the main cause of divine punishment and national

Scandinavian or not) involved in piracy and pillaging. Consequently, 'Viking raid' is a phrase here denoting attacks whose main goal is the attainment of movable goods, while 'Scandinavian invasion' is preferred when the groups at issue aim at expansion and territorial occupation. Indeed, Old English sources do not employ OE *wicing* ('pirate') to define those Scandinavian entities which had settled down on the island, preferring OE *Dene* ('Danish') instead. Many Scandinavians were indeed Danish, but others (Norwegians and Swedish) were just labelled as such, given that 'Danish' or 'heathen' were amongst the commonest terms in England to describe the invaders (Brink 2008, 5-6). In this paper, 'Danish' features when talking about Cnut's reign because of his origins. Cnut was born and raised in what today is known as Denmark, and which comprised Jutland peninsula, Funen and Sjælland islands and Skåne. More about the terminology mentioned here can be found in Jesch 2015, 1-10.

<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive account of such events can be found, for example, in Higham and Ryan 2013, 232-334 and Stenton [1943] 2004, 239-363. For a focus on the Norse impact on England, see Hadley 2006 and Hadley, Richards 2000. The Monastic Reform has been fully surveyed by Dunn 2003, 59-151 and 191-208. See also Barrow 2009 and Cubitt 1997.

<sup>4</sup> The expression is coined by Patrick Wormald, who first uses it to reference Wulfstan's ideology in Wormald [1999] 2021, 244-245.

<sup>5</sup> Jayakumar 2009; Rabin 2013. Æthelred's reign has been thoroughly investigated by Lavelle 2002; Roach 2016 and Williams 2003.



decadence, Æthelred's programme of repentance failed to restore peace in the kingdom.<sup>6</sup> The Viking raids picked up pace again in the 980s and the English were forced to pay an annual tribute to the Danes beginning in 991. External invasion and heavy taxation fostered political corruption and internal warfare, exhausting the resources of the country. At the turn of the millennium, Æthelred ordered "all the Danish men who were among the English race to be killed" on St Brice's Day<sup>7</sup> and consequently had to face two major raids between 1006-1007 and 1009-12.<sup>8</sup>

Given the situation, the English immediately submitted to Sweyn I of Denmark and his son Cnut when they arrived in England in 1013.<sup>9</sup> Æthelred was forced into exile and, though he succeeded in resuming the throne after Sweyn's sudden death in 1014, neither him nor his son Edmund would be able to prevail over Cnut's forces. Cnut stirred unrest with his initial actions as king, but evidently tried to legitimise his presence in England as a just Christian ruler. He consolidated his control over the Scandinavian territories inherited by his father, creating an Anglo-Scandinavian empire which extended to Denmark, Norway and parts of Sweden, and establishing further connections with Poland, France, Scotland, and Germany. The diplomatic and military demands of such an empire forced him to rely on a number of

<sup>6</sup> Keynes 1980, 176-208; Roach 2014 and 2016, 133-166.

<sup>7</sup> The relevant *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (hereafter *ASC*) entry is in MSS CDEF and it reads *7 on ðam geare se cyng het ofslean ealle ða deniscan men þe on Angelcynne wæron on Bricius messedæg, forþon þam cyng wæs gecyðd þæt hi woldon hine besyrewian æt his life 7 syððan ealle his witan 7 habban syþðan his rice* ("and in that year the king ordered all the Danish men who were among the English race to be killed on Brice's Day, because it was made known to the king that they wanted to ensnare his life – and afterwards all his councillors – and have his kingdom afterwards", cf. s.a. 1002 MS E; ed. Irvine 2004, 64 and trans. Swanton [1996] 2000, 134-135). On the nature of the event itself, see Wilcox 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Keynes 2007; Lavelle 2002, 91-102.

<sup>9</sup> Howard 2003, 107-110. On Cnut's accession, see Bolton 2017 and Lawson [1993] 2011. A companion has been published in 2022, edited by R. North, E. Goeres and A. Finlay.

English political figures and advisors, among whom Archbishop Wulfstan of York (946x966-1023) stood out as a leading figure in both the ecclesiastical and the secular sphere, working as a mediator between the English and their new Danish king.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. *Wulfstan of York's eschatological approach to the English 'tribulations'*

Wulfstan, who had already served as royal advisor under king Æthelred, started his career as bishop of London (996-1002) and was then moved to Worcester (1002-16) while holding York as archbishop as well (1002-23).<sup>11</sup> As the bishop of London was expected to operate both in secular politics and religious administration, Wulfstan's appointment was certainly intended since the beginning to meet specific socio-political needs rather than merely pastoral ones.<sup>12</sup> The subsequent promotion to Worcester and York in a period when both dioceses were encountering problems in territorial administration surely played a key role in the shaping of Wulfstan's dual responsibility as homilist and statesman, raising his awareness on the danger posed by ecclesiastical spoilation and loss of land.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Innes 2000, 76-77.

<sup>11</sup> A comprehensive survey of Wulfstan's life and corpus lies beyond the scope of this paper. The Archbishop began to attract scholarly attention in the sixteenth century, and the analysis of his literary corpus continues to this day. Among the many contributions, see at least Townend 2004. In March 2023 Worcester Cathedral has hosted a two-day conference commemorating the 1000th anniversary of Wulfstan's death, where internationally renowned experts have illustrated the results of their latest research on the Archbishop. A. Rabin has recently published a portion of such research in a very detailed and wide-ranging overview of Wulfstan's scholarship, life and works. Cf. Rabin 2023. Throughout this paper, reference editions are the following: for Wulfstan's homilies, Bethurum 1957 and Napier 1883; for his legal and political compilations, Rabin 2020a. Otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

<sup>12</sup> Rabin 2016, 188-192.

<sup>13</sup> Such an awareness resulted in the compilation of his first legal and political tracts, such as *The Laws of Edward and Guthrum* (ca. 1002), *Episcopus*

This conflation of roles evidently affected Wulfstan's literary production, as a sermonising and religious rhetoric governed his legal writings, while his homilies<sup>14</sup> became more and more 'legal' in tone and content over time. This approach did not imply Wulfstan's refusal or inability to differentiate between the two genres, or even between secular and ecclesiastical justice.<sup>15</sup> What he strived for was the fusion of two separate instruments pursuing the same goal, that is the realisation of a divinely ordered society under the instructions of both the *rex* and the *ecclesia*. As all crimes were ultimately rooted in sin, phrasing moral obligations in a legal form helped Wulfstan to build a kingdom where Christian principles became part of national governance.<sup>16</sup>

Concerned as he was with preserving the proper ordering of social structures, Wulfstan was deeply affected by the events occurring in the first decade of the millennium and he used similar motives and themes across his laws and homilies, one of them being the attention devoted to eschatology.

The contemporary urgency of eschatological concerns in England primarily resulted from the circumstances faced by the nation at the turn of the millennium. The political crisis and the growing threat posed by the Viking raids allegedly fostered apocalyptic anxieties.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the millennium itself played a significant role in Christian understanding of the end of time, as the troubled

(1002x1008), the 'Compilation on Status' (1002x1008) and the *Canons of Edgar* in its initial version (1004x1006). Note that the division between his role as *homilist* and *statesman* has been borrowed from Whitelock 1942.

<sup>14</sup> Although the author is aware of the difference between homilies and sermons, the words will be used interchangeably here to indicate forms of pastoral address. On this problem see, for example, Tristram 1995, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Marafioti 2019, 779 and 801; Orchard 2007, 316-320; Wormald [1999] 2001, 339-345.

<sup>16</sup> Although sin and crime were different categories in Wulfstan's legal philosophy, he did envision a close connection between them. Crime was a symptom of spiritual corruption, whence the need for secular punishments to redeem the offenders' sin. See Gates 2015; Marafioti 2019, 803 and Wilcox 1992, 201.

<sup>17</sup> Cubitt 2015 and 2017, 202-207; Godden 1994 and 2003; Szittyá 1992.

period impacting life and politics in England could well reflect the time of tribulation described in the New Testament, a time which preceded both the coming of the Antichrist and the Last Judgement.<sup>18</sup> Gatch further noted that the pervasiveness of eschatological themes in Old English literature, and specifically in sermons, was the result of the great influence exerted by the Latin Fathers, specifically Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Great, who emphasised the Last Days in their writings.<sup>19</sup>

Although the apocalypse infused much Old English prose and poetry, people in England were not in the grip of millennial anxiety, but rather read the current crisis as a sign of the approaching Endtime regardless of the coming of the year 1000.<sup>20</sup> The urgency to repent before Doomsday and the rejection of speculative predictions concerning the exact timing of the End both resulted in what McGinn defined as ‘non-predictive imminence’.<sup>21</sup> Instead of trying to predict when the world would collapse, the early medieval society rather prepared for the Endtime, prompting moral teachings on how to live a perfect Christian life. This preoccupation resonated with Wulfstan’s eschatological urgency and call for national redemption, especially in the years of social disorder and Viking attacks, whereas it admittedly waned over

<sup>18</sup> The three stages of events at the end of the world are described in Mt 24, Mk 13 and Lk 21. The period of tribulation is followed by the reign of the Antichrist, which will last until Christ’s second coming and the Last Judgement. St Paul’s second letter to bishop Timothy (II Tim 3:1-5) signals the first stage as a time marked by the intensification of wickedness, which according to Gregory the Great grows stronger as the world ages. This idea was complemented by Augustine’s view of biblical history as being divided into six eras and Bede’s belief that each era ended in corruption and descent into sin. The end of the sixth age will bring about the coming of the Antichrist. On eschatology, see Rowland 1982, and on apocalyptic concerns in the Early Middle Ages (especially at the turn of the millennium) see Palmer 2014, 189-226 and the essays in Emmerson, McGinn 1992 and Landes *et al.* 2003. The six ages of the world are reviewed in Darby 2012, 21-24 and 27-29.

<sup>19</sup> Gatch 1977, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Cubitt 2015, 29.

<sup>21</sup> McGinn 1995, 60-63.

time after Cnut's conquest.<sup>22</sup>

The so-called eschatological homilies (numbered I-V in Bethurum's edition) represented the earliest stage in Wulfstan's engagement with the Endtime, dating to a period between his tenure of London and 1002x1008.<sup>23</sup> Bethurum Ia and b (respectively a Latin sermon and its Old English translation, both rubricated *De Anticristo*) are intended as an exhortation for priests to warn their flock against the dangers posed by the Antichrist,<sup>24</sup> while the time of tribulations preceding his coming is detailed in Bethurum II (*Secundam Matheum*), a paraphrasis of Mt 24:1-14, 42. In Bethurum III (*Secundum Lucam*) Wulfstan mentions the Viking invasions for the first time in his homiletic corpus through the Gospel reference to strife between nations.<sup>25</sup> Drawing a parallel between the scriptural time and his own, the Archbishop describes the national decadence as a consequence of the sins of the English. The need for repentance and the theme of deceit are central in Wulfstan's reworking of Adso's short treatise on Antichrist (viz. *De Ortu et Tempore Antichristi*) in Bethurum IV (*De*

<sup>22</sup> Cubitt 2015; Gatch 1977, 105-127; Godden 1994; Lionarons 2010, 43-74.

<sup>23</sup> Bethurum Ia/b, II and III are traditionally dated to Wulfstan's tenure as bishop of London. Bethurum 1957, 101-102 and Wormald 2004, 26 also assign Bethurum IV and V to this period, while Pons-Sanz 2007, 18-25 believes them to have been produced between 1002 and 1008.

<sup>24</sup> Wulfstan ultimately drew on Dan 7:25 for the duration of Antichrist's rule and on Rev 11:2-13 for the need for preachers to instruct people against his persecutions. Amongst his secondary sources were Augustine's third homily on John, Gregory's *Moralia in Job* (esp. book 28 in cap. 38 B. Job and book 32 in cap. 41 B. Job; PL 76, pp. 484 and 713), and possibly Adso's *De Ortu et Tempore Anticristi*. See Bethurum 1957, 282-283; Hall 2004, 95; Lionarons 2010, 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> Bethurum III, 24/20-3: *And ðy us deriað 7 ðearle dyrfað fela ungelimpa 7 ælpeodige men 7 utancumene swyðe us swencað, ealswa Crist on his godspelle swutollice sæde þæt scolde geweorðan. He cwæð: Surget gens contra gentem "And therefore many evil events injure and afflict us harshly, and foreigners and strangers severely oppress us, just as Christ clearly said must happen in his Gospel. He said, Nation will rise up against nation". Translation of Wulfstan's apocalyptic sermons can be found on Lionarons' website: <http://webpages.ursinus.edu/jlionarons/wulfstan/wulfstan.html>.*

*Temporibus Antichristi*), where he also relied on Ælfric's ideas on the importance of a *god lar* ('good doctrine'; cf. Preface to the *Catholic Homilies*, ed. Clemoes 1997, 174) to resist the deceptions of the Antichrist. Bethurum V (*Secundam Marcum*) expands some of the material from Bethurum IV and it is the only homily in Wulfstan's corpus to feature a specific temporal reference as far as millennial expectations are concerned, as the Archbishop commented that *[þ]usend geara 7 eac ma is nu agan syððan Crist wæs mid mannum on menniscan hiwe, 7 nu syndon Satanases bendas swyðe toslōpene, 7 Antecristes tima is wel gehende* ("[a] thousand years and also more have now passed since Christ was among people in human form, and now Satan's bonds are very loose, and Antichrist's time is well at hand"; Bethurum V, 136-137/44-47).

Although Wulfstan never again wrote an entire homily on the figure of the Antichrist and on the Day of Judgement, he obviously invoked eschatological motives elsewhere in his corpus. Between 1002 and 1016, he took on the composition of a series of sermons devoted to lay and clerical instruction in the rudiments of the faith. The first sermon of the series, Bethurum VI, conveys an outline of Christian history from the creation to Judgement Day which serves as a chronicle of humanity's "recurrent cycles of sin and punishment".<sup>26</sup> Describing the Israelites as *swa wið God forworht þæt he let faran hæþenne here 7 forhergian eall þæt land* ("such criminals against God that He let a heathen army destroy all that land"; Bethurum VI, 149-150/116-117), Wulfstan presented the English with an Old Testament antecedent and reminded them of the Danish invasions as divine punishment of their moral corruption. As such, Bethurum VI became a transitional text marking the passage from Wulfstan's eschatological focus at the beginning of his career to the catechetical emphasis of his mature years.

<sup>26</sup> Godden 2004, 374.

Another transitional text which somewhat functioned as a bridge between Wulfstan's homiletic pieces and the legal texts is the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (1014, see below).<sup>27</sup> The *Sermo*, which survives in three versions of different length preserved in five manuscripts, was perfectly integrated in its apocalyptic context. It describes the intensification of evil before the coming of the Antichrist as represented by examples of English depravity. In addition, Wulfstan addresses the violence and suffering inflicted to the English by the Viking attacks, suggesting once again that they were a manifestation of *Godes yrre ofer þas þeode* (God's anger over this people; EI 128, C 126). Nonetheless, the question remains open whether the Danish invasions functioned as premises to the end of the world or as a punishment for local wrongdoings, and whether the English were called to repent in the face of the Last Judgement or to stop the ravaging of the Vikings.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning this salvific amendment, the transformation into a holy society could only happen when the country would be morally reformed through laws aiming for a society ordered according to God's will. As a consequence, it is not rare to find references to the need for repentance in the face of the upcoming Judgement in Wulfstan's political and juridical tracts. The *Institutes of Polity*, drawing on Bethurum VI (150/120-128), features one of Wulfstan's most visually dramatic descriptions of damnation. The Archbishop addresses the unrepentant sinners and describes the *ece wite* ('eternal punishment'; chap. 19, pp. 82-83) awaiting

<sup>27</sup> The *Sermo* is edited in Napier 1883, 156-167, based on MS E (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113); Bethurum 1957, in three separate editions based on different manuscripts, namely MSS BH (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 419 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343), C (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201), EI (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113 and London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.i); and Whitelock [1939] 1976, based on MS I (London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.i), to which I refer. The bibliography on the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* is extensive. Among the most recent contributions, see Cubitt 2017; Keynes 2007, 203-213 and Lionarons 2010, 149-60.

<sup>28</sup> Lionarons, 2010, 147-163; Wilcox 2004, 375-396 or Cowen 2004, 396-411.

them, but also offers a chance of salvation. Even in the seemingly ameliorated conditions of Cnut's reign, Wulfstan voiced his concern with lawlessness, treachery, and corruption by introducing references to the eternal punishment in hell in the laws drafted for the Danish king (I Cn 6.1, 7.3, 18, 25).<sup>29</sup> At the close of his career, in a highly legalistic homily possibly preached before Cnut and the *witan* (i.e. Napier L), Wulfstan combines passages and ideas from his earlier writings to give a warning about the inevitable coming of the Last Days. Although he no longer believed the end to be as imminent as he did during his tenure at London, Wulfstan feared that the English were once again committing those sins which brought about the Danish invasions and the political crisis of 1014. Thus, he used his rhetorical force to convince them to stop and repent before condemning their souls to the flames of hell.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. *The list of sinners*

Amidst the devices signalling Wulfstan's engagement with eschatology, the list of sinners stands out as one of the most recurrent and effective.<sup>31</sup> The present discussion will focus on such enumerations so as to show how they transform from elements perfectly integrated within the apocalyptic narrative content-wise into rhetorical tools aimed at impressing an audience still in need of salvation. Consequently, Wulfstan's use of the list at different stages of his career will be overviewed, from the earliest homilies embedded into the national crisis of 1014 (Bethurum VII and the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*) to the works written during the last years of his career (Napier L and Cnut's legislation).

<sup>29</sup> Wulfstan's socialising eschatology in *Polity* and I-II Cnut has been analysed in Di Giuseppe 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Lionarons 2010, 71-74 and 170-175.

<sup>31</sup> Cubitt 2017, 223-224.



### 3.1. *Lists and list-making: an overview*

There is no univocal and indisputable definition of ‘list’, as we can only ever approximate its structure as an abstraction functioning on the basis of enumeration and accumulation, which can be longer or shorter, consisting of items that comprise one word or a whole set of words, ordered or chaotic.<sup>32</sup>

The versatility of both the form and the function of the list has led scholars to postulate different descriptions of its role, although everyone seems to agree that enumerating serves as one of the most enduring means of processing knowledge and organising data relevant to human functioning in the world.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the list is an extremely archaic pattern, as early a written literary genre as we have, probably useful in circumstances where a more permanent record was preferable to individual or collective memory, from financial transactions to knowledge of one’s own possessions.<sup>34</sup>

When lists are included in literary texts, the everyday device is creatively transformed from a pragmatic instrument fulfilling

<sup>32</sup>For an overview of list-making within different means of communication, see Belknap 2000 and 2004 (esp. pp. 1-35); Eco 2009; Goody 1977, 74-111; and Spufford 1989. Lists, traditionally neglected by narrative study, have recently undergone increased critical scrutiny. The journal *Style* published an issue in 2015 devoted entirely to them. More recently, the projects POLIMA («Le Pouvoir des Listes au Moyen Âge») and «Lists in Literature and Culture: Towards a Listology» have both contributed extensively to the study of the list, analysing the manifold functions of enumeration in literature and art. Among their contributions, see, for example, the comprehensive monographs *Le Pouvoir des Listes au Moyen Âge* (three volumes) and *Forms of List-Making: Epistemic, Literary, and Visual Enumeration*. A vast array of refinements and specifications concerning the definition of the list have been proposed, not least to differentiate catalogues from lists and other forms of enumeration (thus, e.g., Minchin 2001, 74-75 and Mainberger 2003, 4-6). In this paper ‘list’ and ‘catalogue’ are not firmly separated as the terms are conceptually interrelated and both could entail variation in the practice of enumeration.

<sup>33</sup>Barton *et al.* 2022, 5.

<sup>34</sup>The role of the list in Antiquity has been outlined in Belknap 2004, 8-10; Laemmle *et al.* 2021 and Scolnic 1995, 3-7.

a practical role to an aesthetic, narrative, and rhetorical device.<sup>35</sup> As such, the list survives in different literary traditions. It evidently enjoyed wide popularity in the Middle Ages, especially in pre-Conquest England, where it was attested in various forms such as glossaries, royal lists, episcopal lists, martyrologies, lapidaries, laws, genealogies, herbaria, and leechdoms, mostly grouped within the same manuscript context.<sup>36</sup> The pervasiveness of the pattern in Old English literature indicated that the authors acknowledged and accepted the list as structural principle, using it frequently in the attempt to make a given text memorable for the audience as well as for the compiler.<sup>37</sup>

### 3.2. *The rhetorical power of the list*

The list formed part of a set of devices, including alliteration, rhythm and rhyme, which featured noticeably in writings that suggested a traditional, perhaps oral origin within the context of an aural fruition, such as charms, laws, or homiletic literature.<sup>38</sup> The sermons, which were composed by a learned or semi-learned preacher, were intended for oral delivery, and the same devices that would have made legal or ritual practices memorable to a preliterate society would presumably have been useful for making church doctrine memorable to an unlettered populace within a semi-literate society.<sup>39</sup>

The complex relationship between orality and literacy in early England, as well as the very definition of traditional oral style,

<sup>35</sup> Barton *et al.* 2022, 3 and 5-10.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson 1980, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Mainbenger 2003, 6, 164-175; Carruthers 2008, 99-152. The specific English case has been surveyed by Barney 1982; Howe 1985; and Callander 2019, 151-184. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting further useful reference on the subject, that is Hill 1993. The paper offers a comparative overview of Old English preaching styles and sermons used as exhortative material.

<sup>38</sup> The charms were explicitly meant to be sung or recited, while the laws were meant to be read in public, sometimes even from the pulpit.

<sup>39</sup> Chapman 2002, 3-5; Orchard 1992, 244 and 248.

must be considered in light of the interactions of composition, transmission, and performance of a given text.<sup>40</sup> Besides the orality of a preliterate society that would make extensive use of memorised phrases to transmit important knowledge, we may indeed acknowledge the existence of a further type of orality, that of a literate society that still relied on oral performances, even though the material had been written down. As a consequence, the inventiveness of Old English verse and prose was allegedly rooted into native poetic tradition inherited from an oral Germanic past and appealing to auditory imagination, as well as into the new literary Latin culture, mostly Christian and bookish.<sup>41</sup> In addition, individual creativity and the authors' own linguistic awareness surely played a key role in literary compilation.

Among the Old English preachers, Wulfstan stood out as an author who decided to compose in the traditional oral style of vernacular verse, although he evidently inherited an awareness of the use of rhyme, rhythm, and parallel structure from the learned culture entrenched in grammar.<sup>42</sup> In particular, he showed great skill with the combination of such devices and with acoustic figures, which proved particularly effective for orally delivered homilies and sermons.<sup>43</sup>

As one of the many structural devices common to both versification and preaching, the list became perfectly consistent with Wulfstan's repetitive rhetoric as a means of appealing to English congregations. The Archbishop employed his metrical catalogues

<sup>40</sup> See at least O'Brien O'Keeffe 1990; Orchard 1997, 2003 and 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Steen 2008, 3.

<sup>42</sup> While rhetorical instruction in the classical sense cannot be claimed for England, the *grammatici* were involved in teaching the figures and tropes in the tradition of grammatical rhetoric. See for example Knappe 1996 and 1998; and Steen 2008, 7-20.

<sup>43</sup> Knappe 1998, 24. Among the mnemonic techniques used to present religious material, the enumerative style surely stands out as one of the most pervasive ones. Wulfstan himself relied on enumerations in his works (e.g. the eight columns that support the kingdom, the three orders of society). On the subject, see Wright 1989 and 1993, 49-105.

repeatedly in his corpus and, in order to highlight their effects on the audience, he construed them relying on what one might call characteristic formulae, such as the echoic compounds, alliterative doublets or chiming phrases.<sup>44</sup> Wulfstan rephrased the constitutive elements of his enumerative passages, reworking familiar themes to suit different occasions and, in doing that, he addressed one of the time-honoured homiletic preoccupations in Old English religious writing, that is the description of the torments of hell and the joy of heaven.

### 3.3. *Wulfstan's lists of sinners: sources, uses, and echoes*

Wulfstan's familiarity with the structure of the list was the result of his rhetorical artistry as well as of his knowledge of both the biblical and the patristic tradition. In particular, the list of sinners and the list of wrongdoings were common enough in the Scripture, occurring for example in Rev 22:15 or Gal 5:19. Pauline themes from I Cor 6:9-10 and I Tim 1:9-10 have also been detected not only in Wulfstan's fulminations against sinners but also in Old English poetry, namely in the Exeter Book poem *Christ C* (ASPR III, ll. 1609-12) which describes the fate of *þeofas* 'thieves', *þeodsceaþan* 'enemies of the people', *leas* 'liars', *forlegene* 'fornicators' and *mansworan* 'perjurers' at Doomsday.<sup>45</sup>

Elsewhere in his corpus, Wulfstan made use of a different enumerative tradition, that is the Cassianic order of the eight chief sins. Although Cassian's sources are virtually unknown, his eightfold scheme resembles that of Nilus (d. ca. 430) and Evagrius of Pontus (d. ca. 400), who was the first orthodox Christian writer to employ the list of the cardinal sins. A century and a half later than Cassian, Gregory the Great discussed his sevenfold sequence.<sup>46</sup> Early England inherited both the Cassianic and the

<sup>44</sup> Orchard 1992, 257-258.

<sup>45</sup> The parallel between the Wulfstanian catalogue and the *Christ C* one probably stems from common reliance on a pre-existing sermon tradition that employed the same trope. Cf. Morey 2012, 453 and Orchard 2007, 332-334.

<sup>46</sup> The so-called Cassianic order of vices is as follows: gluttony, fornication,

Gregorian catalogue, which remained very present and competed effectively throughout the early Middle Ages until the thirteenth century, when the sevenfold list of Gregory predominated. Many such lists, with numerous minor variants attested in early English texts, can be traced back to either Cassian or Gregory through Alcuin's *Liber de Virtutibus et Vitiis*, which proved very influential, especially on homilists.

Wulfstan himself took inspiration from Alcuin and wrote two short tracts in Old English on the doctrine of the eight principal vices and virtues. As in Alcuin's treatise, Wulfstan described pride as the first sin, immediately followed by *g[ī/ȳ]fernes* ('greediness, gluttony, ed. Wilcox 1991, 9-10). Elsewhere, Wulfstan stuck to the Cassianic order and grouped *gītsung* 'avarice' and *g[ī/ȳ]fernes* in the first position (e.g. Bethurum Xc, 203/63-64), just as Ælfric did in his tract on the eight vices and the twelve abuses (*De Octo Vitiis et de Duodecim Abusiuis Gradus*, ed. Clayton 2013, 144/12-17). Bethurum XI features a further variation, which differs in content and number (nine items) from both the Cassianic and Gregorian order as it includes vices that are often found in penitentials and secular law. Nonetheless, the contrast between *idel renco* 'vainglory' and *ofertruwa* 'arrogance, pride' seems to be Cassianic, as Cassian maintained the Evagrian distinction between vainglory, the seventh struggle, and pride, the eighth and final struggle.

A further example of Wulfstan's engagement with the pattern of the list, somewhat related to the enumeration of sins and evildoers, is the catalogue of calamities, of which the Archbishop made use several times. The ultimate source of this catalogue is Lev 26:3-12, which features a warning against the desperate consequences

avarice, anger, sadness, sloth, vainglory and pride (each of books 5 through 12 of *De Institutis Coenobiorum* deals with one sin). Gregory, on the other hand, lists pride as being the root of all evil, the 'beginning of all sin', from which spring vainglory, envy, anger, sadness, avarice, gluttony and lust (cf. *Moralia in Job*, xxxi.45, PL 76, pp. 620-621). See Bloomfield 1952: 45, 59-61 and 69-75.

of disobedience to the Lord.<sup>47</sup> Wulfstan condensed the narrative to obtain generalised exhortations and consequently recast the catalogue in a highly rhetorical and verse-like passage based on alliteration and rhyme, e.g. in Bethurum V, 140-141/102-108. Variations of this list also appear in the Latin section of *Be godcundre warnung* (Bethurum XIX, 251/8-26). In the Old English section, Wulfstan moved away from *verbatim* reproduction of the Biblical text and translated selectively so that the calamities would remind the English of the problems they were facing at the beginning of the eleventh century, namely the famine and the foreign invasions. The *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* contains a further elaboration of the list of calamities at ll. 55-62, perfectly interposed in a sermon devoted to the failing years of Æthelred's reign.

#### 4. *The evolution of Wulfstan's lists of sinners*

No two of the lists of sinners created by Wulfstan are exactly identical. The variability of such catalogues is evident in the varying length and number of items, but also in their rearrangement and reworking, which may be traced back to the fluidity and variation typical of Old English sermons in general, and of Wulfstanian homilies in particular, where the degree of textual *mouvance* and *variance* surpassed that of most known genres in early England.<sup>48</sup> Such textual fluidity might be the result of Wulfstan's techniques of composition, first among many the reliance on memory. The mnemonic transmission of homiletic motifs drawn from the repertoire of devotional and eschatological commonplaces inhabiting the mind of Old English preachers functioned as a trigger and was possibly responsible for various sorts of contaminations.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, in Wulfstan's case, deviations from both the ulti-

<sup>47</sup> Bethurum 1957, 36 and 48; Lionarons 2010, 149.

<sup>48</sup> For the concepts of textual *mouvance* and *variance*, see respectively Zumthor 1972, 71-72 and *passim* and Cerquiglini 1989. The fluidity of Old English homilies has been acknowledged, among others, by Godden 1975 and Scragg 1977.

<sup>49</sup> Di Sciacca 2008, 135; O'Brien O'Keeffe 1990, 41. See also Teresi 2000.

mate sources and his own recasting of scriptural themes were not only due to the mechanics of mnemonic composition or manuscript transmission, but to the literate technique of intentionally piecing passages together to form a new sermon in order to serve the specific needs of the occasion.<sup>50</sup>

Wulfstan's lists of sinners were built through rhythmically rich variations of alliterative binomials and echoic compounds.<sup>51</sup> These devices made the spoken word easy to memorise, supported Wulfstan's fondness for sound parallelism and repetition and were fundamental in the grouping of sinners in clusters according to the crime they committed. As he recast the lists at different stages of his career and for different purposes, distinctions in tone and number across Wulfstan's enumeration of sinners might also result from the evolution of his own theological and political ideology in response to the events of his time. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on how the alliterating catalogue, which first appears in *De Fide Catholica* (Bethurum sermon no. 7, p. 163 and ll. 128-134), is then reworked not only in the longest version of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (Bethurum sermon no. 20, p. 273 and ll. 161-166) but also in Wulfstan's legal writings and political tracts (in which case the list comes to describe earthly sinners, namely criminals proper).

#### 4.1. *Bethurum VII and the Sermo Lupi ad Anglos: the 'apocalyptic' context of the list*

Bethurum VII formed part of Wulfstan's educational programme and stressed the importance for all Christians to understand their faith by learning the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, whose knowledge (either in Latin or in the vernacular) was decreed by canon law and regarded as fundamental by Bede, Ælfric, and Wulfstan himself.<sup>52</sup> Wulfstan probably translated the two prayers (edited

<sup>50</sup> Tristram 1995, 4.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapman 2002 and 2017; Davis-Secord 2008 and 2016, 140-166.

<sup>52</sup> In his letter to Ecgbert (ed. Plummer 1896, 405-423, esp. 409), Bede instructed that bishops had the duty to teach the Lord's Prayer and the Creed

as Bethurum VIIa/Napier XXVI) in preparation for their interpretation in VII. In particular, the Creed gave him the chance to expand on the description of the Day of Judgement (Bethurum VII, 161-164/93-158), a passage whose popularity is evidenced by the number of times its phrasings and imagery were borrowed and reworked in future compositions. Wulfstan also added innovative elements in this apocalyptic vision and, indeed, Bethurum VII (163/128-134) features the first elaborated version of his alliterating list of sinners. The list follows a passage which agrees verbally with Bethurum III, 126-127/65-80.

As mentioned above, Bethurum III was a highly rhetorical homily where the current calamities of Wulfstan's time were equated with the intensification of wickedness preceding the Day of Judgement. Drawing on Mt 24:10 and 24, the section from III paralleled in VII dealt with the defection of Christians as a consequence of the deception performed by false prophets, and the expressiveness of the passage is heightened by the enumerative catalogue of sinners. Wulfstan possibly reworked the list from his own translation of chapter 45 of Amalarius of Metz's *De Regula Canoniorum* (Bethurum Xa, 192/11-18), where Amalarius relied on a combination of parts of the Decalogue and Mt 7:12 to enumerate evildoers. This translation predated VII, but it already showed Wulfstan's attempt to put the commandments into memorable form through alliteration. The list in VII would result not only from the contamination of further biblical cata-

in Latin or English so that the community knew how to be faithful and defend themselves against evil. Similarly, Ælfric included the prayers among the texts and topics presented as fundamental to the faith (Gatch 2000, 93-99; Upchurch 2009, 226). In line with Bede, Ælfric and Frankish sources, Wulfstan expected his audience to learn the Creed and the Lord's Prayer as a minimum requirement for initiation and participation in communal worship. He addressed the question repeatedly in his corpus (Bethurum VIIIc/142-143, p. 182; Bethurum Xc/170-171, p. 209; *Canons* 17 and 22; Napier 59/20-23, p. 307; I Cn 22), drawing mainly on chapter 22 of Thedulf's *Capitula* (ed. Sauer 1978, 333). For the centrality of the two prayers, see Dumitrescu 2018, 38-42; Foxhall Forbes 2013, 41-43; Gatch 2000, 78-108.



logues (e.g. Gal 5:19 and I Tim 1:9-10), but also from Wulfstan's fondness of sound-repetition, perfectly suited to a homily meant to impress upon the audience the urgency of his message.

The list of sinners in Bethurum VII was then further expanded in the longest version of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. The longest text (202 lines) is attested in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113 and London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.i, where the rubrics provide information concerning the year of composition and respectively read *in dies Æþelredi regis* (with an early modern hand supplying *Anno Christi 1009* in the margin), and *millesimo xiiii* written over an erasure supposedly changing the date from 1009 (the year of the invasion guided by Thorkell the Tall) to 1014, the year following Sweyn and Cnut's invasion.<sup>53</sup> In such a context, Wulfstan's addition of a further eschatological element such as the list of sinners seems consistent with the apocalyptic context of the longest version of the *Sermo*, which dates back to a time when the English needed to repent more than ever before and thus established a link between the Scriptural multiplication of wickedness and Æthelred's misgovernment. Once again, the enumerative passage offered Wulfstan the opportunity to convince the people that national calamities were caused by their sins and would not stop unless they repented.<sup>54</sup> The *Sermo* was explicit in addressing the topic, as the metrical catalogue itself possibly reminded the audience of Wulfstan's own past indictments rooted in eschatological thought at the beginning of his career.

<sup>53</sup> In fact, Wilcox argues for 1014 as date of composition, stating that the version in Hatton 113/Nero A.i is the closest one to the first oral delivery during a meeting of the *witan* in York on 16 February. The council had been summoned to acknowledge and perhaps crown Sweyn as king, although the agenda radically changed after the latter's sudden death. See Wilcox 2004, 381 and 391.

<sup>54</sup> As for the moral and exhortative nature of the *Sermo Lupi*, a valuable contribution is Jurovics 1978.

#### 4.2. *Napier L and Cnut's legislation: the list as a rhetorical tool*

Napier L was possibly intended to be preached in Oxford at the 1018 meeting of king and *witan*.<sup>55</sup> The sermon combined passages and ideas from Wulfstan's earlier writings to give a warning about the inevitable coming of the Last Days.<sup>56</sup> In doing that, Wulfstan addressed the evil times as if they were in the past and far from Cnut's apparently peaceful kingdom (note the repeated use of *ær bysan* 'hitherto' and *ær bysum* 'id.' throughout the homily), but still he hinted at his eschatological expectations and anxieties. Apart from explicit references to the apocalypse (Napier L, 268/10-11; 269/19-20; 270/25-27), Wulfstan mentioned themes that are usually associated with the Last Judgement and with Antichrist, namely the sins of the flesh and those of deception, hypocrisy and violations of chastity. To do that, he used the most-recycled catalogue of sinners, albeit in a different vein. While Bethurum VII and the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* listed inhabitants of hell and unrepentant sinners within the scriptural teaching on the Last Days, Napier L recast the list as a catalogue of earthly criminals instead, interposed in a passage about the duties of a just Christian king, who had to expel evil from his country. Thus, the list did not form part of an apocalyptic narrative, but rather became an instrument of social reformation and a means to understand which members of the society were to be condemned and corrected.

Wulfstan's legal tracts drafted under Cnut featured a similar approach to the lists of sinners, which occurred in Cnut 1018 7-10, Cnut 1020 5 and II Cn 4, 6 and 7. While Cnut 1018 most likely represented the enactments of the meeting held at Oxford

<sup>55</sup> See Lionarons 2010, 34 and 173; Pons-Sanz 2007, 25; Wormald [1999] 2001, 335 and 356-360. Bethurum (1957, 39-40) and DeLeeuw (1972, 41) date the homily ca. 1020 instead.

<sup>56</sup> Even though he rejects Wulfstan's authorship of this homily, Jost 1950, 249-261 identifies its sources: *Polity*, VI Æthelred, I Cnut, Ælfric's Old English letters to Wulfstan, the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* and three eschatological homilies. It is likely that Wulfstan did not interweave consciously these texts but rather quoted himself from memory. Cf. Lionarons 2010, 172.

between the English and the Danes as described in the *ASC* entry for the same year, Cnut 1020 was a letter first composed during Cnut's return to Denmark and subsequently revised by the Archbishop for further circulation, oral delivery or inclusion in the York Gospels.<sup>57</sup> Both texts saw the king promising to rule justly, safeguarding the rights of the Church and just secular law while also acknowledging his subordination to the greatest authority of all, that is God, who could deprive him of power unless he governed wisely.<sup>58</sup> The list of sinners signalled here one of the ways the king could use to attain such goals, that is the expulsion of wrongdoers. When the list appeared in Cnut's secular code (*viz.* II Cnut), the clauses did not prescribe any earthly punishments for the sinners, as the catalogue itself served uniquely as a rhetorical tool in a sermonising passage intended to reach a specific dramatic effect.

From the discussion above, it is evident that Wulfstan's grievances for the pain and sorrow afflicting the world at the end of time underwent a major change in tone and emphasis over the years. Bethurum VII and the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, which drew heavily on Wulfstan's earliest eschatological sermons, included the list of sinners as an element perfectly consistent with the apocalyptic narrative of the tribulations preceding the coming of the Antichrist. Conversely, the list featured in Napier L and in Wulfstan's codes drafted for Cnut evoked a feeling quite different from that produced by his emphasis on the terror and persecutions that would come with the Antichrist and by his thundering condemnation of the sins and crimes of the present day. At this stage of his career, Wulfstan's awareness of the end of the Danish invasions as well as his own advancing age and, maybe, frailty contributed to the shift in his eschatological expectations, which did not lessen but rather transformed into a tool to warn the

<sup>57</sup> Bolton 2009, 83-84; Lawson 1992, 584-585 and [1993] 2011, 63-64; Treharne 2012, 21-27.

<sup>58</sup> Bethurum Loomis 1971, 137-138; Stafford 1971, 188-189; Trilling 2007, 66-78.

people against the dangers of false messiahs. Consequently, the list of sinners became a rhetorical *figura* itself, which reminded the audience of Wulfstan's earliest eschatological condemnations, but was used at this stage to convey his political concerns as well.

#### 4.3. *What's in a list? A survey of Wulfstan's sinners*<sup>59</sup>

The homilists focused their efforts to provide a guide for proper Christian behaviour and on making available to the parish clergy in English the materials which were essential to their pastoral functions. The lists analysed above were clearly indebted to Scriptural material and, while some references to Christian behaviour were common in all medieval homiletic literature (e.g. the deadly sins or the Ten Commandments), others pointed to Wulfstan's current concerns with specific sins and crimes which were considered particularly heinous in England.

The catalogues included references to the so-called *botleas* crimes (cf. II Cn 64), that is theft and robbery, murder and treachery against one's lord. Such crimes were generally unredeemable and thus only punishable by death.<sup>60</sup>

*Gitseras* ('avaricious ones, misers') were grouped with *ryperas* 'robbers, plunderers, spoilers', *reaferas* 'id.' and *woruldstruderas* 'spoilers, plunderers of this world's goods', as the vice of *gitsung* 'avarice', starting in the early Christian era, became one of the leading signs of the imminent end of the world, transmitted

<sup>59</sup> The present paragraph is a summarised overview of the lexical and semantic analysis which will appear in my final PhD thesis, in which I deal with the role of the list within Wulfstan's corpus and in which I specifically focus on the members of his alliterative catalogues so as to explore the ideological and rhetorical reason(s) behind the Archbishop's lexical choices.

<sup>60</sup> Contradictory as it might seem, Wulfstan seemed concerned with the persecution of criminals and the imposition of the death penalty *for alles to litlum* ('for too trivial offences', V Atr 3), so much that mutilation and exile were also an option for some crimes (e.g. mutilation, II Cn 30.4-5; exile of thieves – including priests aiding in the act, VIII Atr 27, I Cn 5.3 and II Cn 30.9).

as such in Patristic thought and in the Middle Ages.<sup>61</sup> Notably, avarice was even described as the cause of thieving and robbery (e.g. Ælfric's *Dominica in Media Quadragesime*, CH II.12.2, 124/507-10). The cluster on theft included the binomial *þeofas 7 ðeodscādan* 'thieves and destroyers', thus insisting on the atrocity of the crime. Theft, frequently addressed from the earliest laws (e.g. Wi 26 and 28), was regarded as a violation of the oath sworn to the king not to engage in criminal activities (e.g. II Cn 21) and as a form of defiance of national peace (e.g. Ine 10).

*Mannslagan* 'manslayers' and *mordþwyrhtan* 'murderers' were both used to denote murderers, although *mord* signalled that the killing happened in secrecy and was thus deemed as particularly heinous.<sup>62</sup> *Mægslagan* 'kin-slayers' was added to the group in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, Napier L and Cnut 1020 5. Kin-slaying seems to have held a great importance in the value system of the different Germanic peoples, who shared tales characterised by fratricide and other forms of breaching of the familial ties. One such tale even resulted in the beginning of the apocalypse in Norse mythology.<sup>63</sup> The English, who lived in a highly segmented society based on the basic bonds to lords and kin, had every interest in restraining violence within the community and thus regarded the killing of relatives as a particularly despicable act.

Given the importance of oath-giving in pre-Conquest England (attested by the presence of the alliterative pair *wēdlogan and*

<sup>61</sup> According to the Bible, avarice was the root of all evil (I Tim 6:10). Moreover, both Gregory and Cassian, whose discussion and lists of sins were most influential in the Old English period (see above), condemned avarice as one of the oldest vices, even revealed in Adam's fall (cf. the threefold temptation of Adam *mid gyfernesne, and mid idelum wuldre and mid gitsunge* in *Dominica Prima in Quadragesima*, CH I.11, 271/155, where Ælfric drew on Gregory's *Homilia XVI in Evangelia* 2-3, PL 76, 1136).

<sup>62</sup> O'Brien 1996; Saltzman 2019, 30-32.

<sup>63</sup> The slaying of a brother at the hands of another found its most renowned expression in the episode of Baldr's death caused by his brother Hǫdr. For further examples of kin-slaying as a form of defiance of the communal bonds, see Lambert 2009, 61-62; Lambert 2017; Mitchell 2012, 7-8 and 14.

*wærlogan*<sup>64</sup> in Napier L), it comes as no surprise that Wulfstan included *hlafordswican* ‘traitors of one’s own lord’, *manswican* ‘traitors’ and *mansworan* ‘perjurers’ in his list, especially because the *ASC* itself recorded several episodes of treason even against the king.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, of the nineteen extant references to perjury in the laws, twelve occur in codes associated with Wulfstan. Among the reasons behind such growing anxiety over oath-swearing, the Reformist and post-Reaction emphasis on false testimony surely played an important role.<sup>66</sup>

Wulfstan dealt extensively with condemnations of paganism which, by virtue of his traditional mode of writing, often stood couched in the most general of terms.<sup>67</sup> In the lists under discussion, the heathen threat was represented by *wiccan* ‘witches’,<sup>68</sup> *wigleras* ‘diviners, sooth-sayers’ and *wælcyrrian*.<sup>69</sup> Sorcery must

<sup>64</sup> The words conveyed the meaning of ‘oath-breaker’. They can both be traced back to the wider homiletic theme of lying and deceit, which was particularly relevant in eleventh-century homilies (cf. the occurrence of *leogeras* ‘liars’ and *lic(c)eteras* ‘hypocrites’ in the catalogues under discussion) and inherent to other sins, such as treason and perjury. Cf. Greenfield 1981, 90-91.

<sup>65</sup> The Æthelredian annals were pervaded with such episodes (e.g. the treason of Ælfric, s.a. 992 and 1003), but also with examples of punishments for traitors (s.a. 1006, where blinding, confiscation of land and death were prescribed) and with army leaders running away from battle (s.a. 993, 998, 999, 1009, 1010; cf also V Atr 28 and 28.1 where death or payment were prescribed as a punishment for deserting).

<sup>66</sup> Ammon 2013; Rabin 2013, 249-251 and 2020b, 36-37.

<sup>67</sup> When Wulfstan used the words *hæþen*, *hæþenscipe*, *hæþendom*, Wulfstan never meant to address uniquely pagans but referred to sins and shortcomings resulting in criminal and anti-social behaviour. See Meaney 2004.

<sup>68</sup> The word survives as a feminine (OE *wicce*) and a masculine (OE *wicca*). Unless its gender is proven by contextual evidence, *wicc[a/e]* cannot simply be regarded as masculine or feminine because it often appeared in the plural, and the weak feminine and weak masculine nouns are distinguished only in the nominative singular. In this case, the meaning ‘witch’ can be assumed as the masculine sense is conveyed by *wigleras*.

<sup>69</sup> Although the word has often been interpreted in relation to its better-known Norse cognate, *wælcyrge* was used in Old English especially in glossaries to point to Graeco-Roman deities (the Furies, Venus and Bellona) or

have been a real threat in early medieval England, as injunctions against it occurred in homilies, penitentials (cf. *Old English Penitential*, respectively Y44.12.01, Y44.14.01 and Y44.16.01)<sup>70</sup> and law codes (e.g. AfEl 30 or II As 6), where both beneficial and injurious magical rituals came to be discredited within the eyes of the Church and the community. *Wiccan* and *wælcyrrian*, in particular, suggested Wulfstan's concern with the feminine as something linked to sexual deviance and perverse magic. Although magic was not exclusively feminine, in the case of *wælcyrge* Wulfstan was rejecting a symbol of both idolatry and female empowerment, the latter implied by a word such as *valkyrie* which clearly had very ancient connections with strong women deciding upon the destiny of men.<sup>71</sup>

Unsanctioned sexual activity featured as *æwbrecan* 'breakers of the (marriage) law, adulterers', *hōrcwenan* 'adulteresses', *horingas* 'adulterers' and *myltestran* 'prostitutes'. OE *hōrcwene* and *hōring*, which are only recorded in Wulfstan's corpus, may well be intended respectively as 'fornicatress, adulteress' and 'fornicator, adulterer' because, in line with Augustine's concern for the detrimental social consequences of the expulsion of harlots (cf. *De Ordine*, ed. Green 1970, 114), Wulfstan would have been less keen on shunning prostitution rather than adultery.<sup>72</sup> Although there is no evidence at all for organised prostitution in England, one of its most deplorable characteristics was not so much the commercial aspect of the act (that prostitutes had sex for money), as that they often practiced infanticide or contraception.<sup>73</sup> Conse-

to the Gorgons (*The Wonders of the East*, cf. 4.2 and 9.1). Wulfstan intended *wælcyrge* to denote a human being rather than a supernatural one, and more specifically he might have wanted to condemn some kind of female diviner or necromancer.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Frantzen's digital edition, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, at <http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/index.php>.

<sup>71</sup> Lacey 2021, 203-209; Meaney 2004, 495-498; and Simek 1993, 349-350.

<sup>72</sup> Coleman 2001; and Pons-Sanz 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Ælfric addressed prostitution in a list of sinners condemned in hell with the devil, in which he qualified the *fracodan myltestran* with *ðe acwellað*

quently, *myltestran* was paired with *bearnmyrðran* ‘infanticides’ in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Although the sin *per se* was not singled out as specifically prevalent or evil in Wulfstan’s lists, it must certainly have been one of the archbishop’s immediate concerns due to the high deathrate in England around the year 1000, and more specifically to the phenomenon of widespread infant mortality.

The addition of *mæsserbanan* ‘slayers of a priest’ and *mynsterhatan* ‘persecutors of a monastery’ to the enumerative passage in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, and of *cyrichatan* ‘church-persecutors’, *sacerdbanan* ‘slayers of a priest’ and *hādbrecan* ‘the ones who injure a person in holy orders’ in Napier L is consistent with the precarious state of church estates from the late ninth century onwards, and especially in the eleventh century when churches were not only victims of Viking depredations but also ended up being controlled by lay patrons or lords who held the land on which they were built and could potentially buy or sell them according to their need and desire.<sup>74</sup> As Wulfstan himself supposedly faced such problems when he was promoted to the dioceses of Worcester and York, he often addressed the topic of Church protection in his homiletic and legal corpus.

Although the catalogues were produced at different stages of Wulfstan’s career, echoes across their items indicated that certain crimes must have continued to threaten the English community, both socially and morally.

### 5. Concluding remarks

Scholars have long addressed the ambiguity of Wulfstan’s personal belief concerning the Endtime, as the evolution of his eschatological thought continued to the end of his life. The references to the Antichrist, to the Day of Judgement and to the passing of

*heora cild* (‘who kill their children’, cf. SH.11, 440/382). Cf. Caie 1998 and Rudolf 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Baxter 2004; Bethurum 1957, 326-327 and Lionarons 2010, 98-100.



the millennium have led to question whether the Archbishop truly thought that the world would collapse in the year 1000. Interestingly, Wulfstan's eschatology undergoes a change in tone throughout his career, which can be detected by the way he employed some of his apocalyptic tropes, such as the list of sinners. As Wulfstan "arranged his sentences for the ear, not for the eyes",<sup>75</sup> the lists were perfectly integrated into his repetitive rhetoric but their role in narrative shifted over time. Bethurum VII and the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, which reflected the time of tribulations preceding the coming of the Antichrist, included the list of sinners in a Biblical description of the English national decadence. Conversely, as the years, his career and the Viking invasions wore on, the list became more of a stylistic device, useful to reform the English society by organising its members, even visually and rhetorically in a text. The continued engagement with eschatological themes in Wulfstan's corpus thus signals that he did not believe the apocalypse to be an imminent event but rather came to see it as a metaphor for the decline of the unrepentant English society.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Bethurum 1966, 230.

<sup>76</sup> Lionarons 2010, 47-49; Rabin 2015, 40-43.

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## APPENDIX

1.1. De Fide Catholica (*Bethurum VII, ll. 128-34/Napier 3, p. 26 ll. 14-8 and p. 27 ll. 1-3*)

**B** Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 419 (s. XI<sup>1</sup>, possibly Christ Church, Canterbury; Ker 68 (along with CCCC 421), Gneuss 108), pp. 161-82; **C** Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201 (s. XI<sup>in</sup> vol. I – s. XI<sup>med</sup> vol. II and III, possibly New Minster, Winchester; Ker 49, Gneuss 65/65.5), pp. 15-19; **E** Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113 (s. XI<sup>3/4</sup>, Worcester; Ker 331a, Gneuss 637), fols. 10<sup>v</sup>-16<sup>r</sup>. Text based on **E**.

*Dyder sculan*

**130** *mannslagan, and ðider sculan manswican; ðider sculan æwbrecan and ða fulan forlegenan; ðider sculan mānsworan and morðwyrhtan; ðider sculan gītseras, ryperas and reaferas and woruldstruder; ðider sculon þeofas and ðeodscāðan; ðyder sculon wiccan and wigleras and, hrædest to secganne, ealle þa manfullan, þe ær yfel worhton and noldan geswican ne wið God þingian.*<sup>1</sup>

**128** ðider **B**; scylan **B** cumeð (from cymð) **C** **129** manslagan **B** mānslagan **C**; þider **BC**; scylan **B** cumað **C**; þider **C**; scylan **B**; æwbrecan **C** (æwbrecan:) adulteri **E** **130** þa **BC**; fūlan **C** fule **E**; forlēgenan **C**; þider **BC**; scylan **B** sculon **C**; (mansworan:) periurii **E** (morðwyrhtan:) uenefici **131** þider **B** ðyder **C**; scylan **B** gītseras and **C**; ryperas **C**; worldstruteras **C** þas woruldstruder; **B** **132** þider **B** þyder **C**; scylan **B**; þeofas **C**; þeodsceaðan **B** þeodscapan **C** (ðeodscāðan:) utlawas **E**; ðider **B**; scylan **B** **133** wigleras **B** wīg-

<sup>1</sup>“There shall go / man-slayers and there shall go traitors; there shall go adulterers / and foul fornicators; there shall go perjurers and murderers; / and foul fornicators; there shall go perjurers and murderers; / there shall go misers, robbers and plunderers and spoilers of this world’s goods; / there shall go thieves and enemies of the people; there shall go witches and / wizards, and, to put it simply, all the wicked who previously worked evil / and did not want to cease nor to pray to God.” Translation is my own.

leras *C*; *rādost C* (*hrædest*;) *cicius*; [*is*] to *E*; *mānfullan C* (*manfullan*;) *iniqui E*; *ðe C*; *ær BC 134* *noldon C*; (*þingjan*;) *bidden E*.

1.2. *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (*long version, MSS EI; Whitelock 1976, pp. 64-5 ll. 167-73*)

*E* Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113 (s. XI<sup>3/4</sup>, Worcester; Ker 331a, Gneuss 637), fols. 84<sup>v</sup>-90<sup>v</sup>; *I* London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.i (s. XI<sup>ex</sup> vol. I – X<sup>in</sup> vol. II, Worcester or York; Ker 163-4, Gneuss 340-1), fols. 110<sup>f</sup>-115<sup>r</sup>. Text based on *I*.

[...] *Her syndan manslagan*  
and *mægslagan* and *mæsserbanan* and *mynsterhatan*, and her  
syndan *mānsworan* and *morþorwyrhtan*, and her syndan  
170 *myltestran* and *bearnmyrðran* and *fule forlegene horingas*  
*manege*, and her syndan *wiccan* and *wælcyrian*, and her syndan  
*ryperas* and *reaferas* and *worolstruderas*, and, *hrædest is to*  
*cweþenne, māna and misdæda ūngerim ealra*.<sup>2</sup>

167 (*mannslagan*;) *homicide E*; *swa we ær sædon* added after her in *E 168* (*mægslagan*;) *parricide E*; *sacerdbanan* instead of *mæsserbanan* in *E*; (*mynsterhatan*;) *hadio E*; *hlafordswican* and *æbere* (: *abroþene*) *apostatan* added after *mynsterhatan* in *E 169* (*morþorwyrhtan*;) *uenefici E*; and her syndan *hādbrecan* and *æwbrecan* (: *adulteri*) and *ðurh siblegeru* and *ðurh mistlice forligeru* (: *libidine*) *forsyngode swyðe* added after *morþorwyrhtan* in *E 170 r* of *myltestran* added above in *I*; (*myltestran*;) *meretrices E 171 e* erased after *c* in *wælcyrian*; *wælcerian E 172* and *þeofas*

<sup>2</sup>“Here there are manslayers / and slayers of their kinsmen, and slayers of priests and persecutors of monasteries, (MS E and traitors and open apostates) and here / there are perjurers and murderers, (MS E and here there are injurers of men in orders and adulterers and people greatly corrupt through incest and various fornications) and here there are / harlots and infanticides and many foul adulterous fornicators, / and here there are wizards and sorceresses, and here there are / plunderers and robbers and spoliators, (MS E and thieves and injurers of the people and breakers of pledges and treaties) and, in short, / a countless number of all crimes and misdeeds.” Trans. by Whitelock 1979, 1001.

and *þeodscādan* and *wedlogan* and *wærlogan* added after *worolstruder* *E*; *woruldstruder* *E*; (*hrædest*:) sonest *E* 173 (*māna*:) scelus *E*; *ungerim* *E*; (*ungerim*:) innumerabile *E*.

### 1.3. Larspell (*Napier 50, p. 266 ll. 24-9 ad p. 267 l. 1*)

*A* Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 421 (s. XI<sup>1</sup>, possibly Christ Church, Canterbury; Ker 68 (along with CCCC 419); Gneuss 109), pp. 209-21.

- 25 *He sceal mǣndæde men þreagean þearle mid  
worldlicre steore, and he sceal **mordwyrhtan, hlaford-  
swican and mānswaran, mannslogan and mægslagan,  
cyrichatan and sacerdbanan, hādbrecan and æwbrecan,  
þeofas and þeodscapan, ryperas and reaferas, leogeras  
and liceteras, wēdlogan and wærlogan** hatjan and hynan*  
1 *and eallum godes feondum styrnlice wīdstandan.*<sup>3</sup>
- 24 *y from i in wyllan*

### 1.4. Cnut's legislation

#### 1.4.1. Cnut 1018 7-10 (*Rabin 2020, 214-5*)

*C* Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201 (s. XI<sup>in</sup> vol. I – s. XI<sup>med</sup> vol. II and III, possibly New Minster, Winchester; Ker 49, Gneuss 65/65.5), pp. 126-30.

7. [...] and gif *wiccan odde wigleras, mordwirhtan odde*

<sup>3</sup>“He must punish evil men severely with / secular discipline, and he must detest and destroy murderers, / traitors and perjurers, homicides and parricides, / enemies of the Church and slayers of priests, those who *injure people in the holy orders* and those who violate their marriage vows / thieves and *enemies of the people*, robbers and plunderers, liars / and hypocrites, those who break their oaths and those who deny their faith, / and he is to harshly repent all of the enemies of God.” Trans. based on Rabin 2015, 146 except for italicised phrases, whose translation is my own.

- 5 *hōrcwēnan*, *ahwar on lande wurdan agitene, fise hi man  
georne ut of þisan eared, oððe on eared forfare hi mid ealle,  
buton hi geswican and þe deoppor gebetan.*  
8. *And witena gerædnes is þæt **widersacan** and **utlagan**  
**Godes** and manna of eared gewitan, buton hi gebugon and  
þe geornor gebetan.*
- 10 8.1. *And **þeofan** and **þeodscadan** to timan forwurdan, bu-  
ton hig geswican.*  
9. ***Manslagan** and **manswaran**, **hadbrican** and **æwbrican**,  
gebugan and gebetan, oððe of cyððe mid synne gewitan.*  
10. ***Liceteras** and **leogeras**, **riperas** and **reaferas**, **Godes**  
graman habban, buton hig geswican.<sup>4</sup>*
- 15 gebeten.
- 6 gebeten.

#### 1.4.2. Cnut 1020 (*Rabin 2020, 230-1*)

*Y* York, Minster Library, Additional 1 (s. XI<sup>2</sup>, Christ Church, Canterbury; Ker 402, Gneuss 774), fols. 160<sup>r-v</sup>.

6. [...] and *ælc unriht ascu-  
nian*, *dæt synd **mægslagan** and **mordslagan** and **manswaran**  
and **wicean** and **wælcyrrian** and **æwbrecan** and **syblegeru**.<sup>5</sup>*

#### 1.4.3. II Cnut 4, 6, 7 (*Rabin 2020, 256-7*)

<sup>4</sup>“7. [...] and if *magicians and wizards*, murderers or / *adulteress* be found anywhere in this land, they are to be / zealously expelled from the realm or be entirely abolished / from the earth, unless they cease and most sincerely repent. / 8. And the council’s decree is that apostates and those in / defiance of the laws of God and the realm are to leave this / land unless they submit and most sincerely repent. / 8.1. And thieves and *enemies of the people* will henceforth be destroyed / unless they cease their crimes. / 9. Murderers and perjurers, *those who injure one in holy orders* and those who violate their marriage vows / shall submit and do penance or leave their native land with their sins. / 10. Hypocrites and liars, *robbers and plunderers* will suffer / God’s wrath unless they cease.” Trans. from Rabin 2020, 214-5 except for italicised phrases, whose translation is my own.

<sup>5</sup>“6. [...] and reject all forms of wrongdoing, / especially those of parricides, murderers and perjurers, / witches, enchantresses, adulterers and the incestuous.” Trans. from Rabin 2020, 230-1.

*A* London, British Library, Harley 55 (s. XII<sup>med</sup>, medieval provenance unknown; Ker 226, Gneuss 412), fols. 7<sup>v</sup>-13<sup>v</sup>; ***B(R)*** Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 383 (s. XI/XII, probably London, St. Paul's; Ker 65, Gneuss 102), fols. 39<sup>v</sup>-52<sup>r</sup>; ***I*** London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.i (s. XI<sup>ex</sup> vol. I – X<sup>in</sup> vol. II, Worcester or York; Ker 163-4, Gneuss 340-1), fols. 16<sup>r</sup>-41<sup>r</sup>.

The lists are identical to those found in Cnut 1018 7-10 (see above).



CONCETTA GILIBERTO

IL MOTIVO DEL *DESCENSUS CHRISTI AD  
INFEROS* NELLA POESIA INGLESE ANTICA

The motif of the Harrowing of Hell (Latin: *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*) refers to the triumphal descent of Jesus into hell between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection to release the Patriarchs and bind Satan. This legend has a large circulation throughout the Middle Ages: references are found in various biblical *loci* as well as in the writings of the Church Fathers. Together with the account of the trial of Jesus, the Harrowing of Hell is the main topic of the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, translated into English around the mid-tenth century. In the early English literary tradition, the journey of Christ into hell occurs at various levels and is expressed in different forms. The theme is treated in a number of Old English poems, in some of them more obliquely (as in the *Panther* or *Guthlac B*), while in others it is integral to the narrative architecture (as in *Christ and Satan*); moreover, the Exeter Book preserves a minor poem entitled *Descent into Hell*. The purpose of the present essay is to survey the poetic passages dealing with the Harrowing of hell and to identify the interpretative keys of their eschatological content, also in connection with the themes of the Second Coming and Doomsday.

1. *Il Descensus Christi ad Inferos e il suo sviluppo nella tradizione anglosassone*

Nella teologia cristiana, con l'espressione *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* s'intende il viaggio di Cristo nel regno dei morti (ovvero nel cosiddetto *Limbus Patrum* o, come denominato nell'Antico Testamento, nello *Sheol*<sup>1</sup>) nell'arco di tempo compreso tra la Crocifissione e la Resurrezione, allo scopo di liberare i profeti e i patriarchi dell'Antico Testamento.<sup>2</sup> Si tratta di una dottrina espli-

<sup>1</sup> Rainwater 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Il tema della discesa di Cristo agli inferi sembra ricalcare miti diffusi fin dall'antichità relativi a viaggi nell'aldilà di figure divine e al loro trionfante ritorno (si pensi all'epopea di Gilgamesh). Sull'origine e le fonti canoniche e apocriefe del motivo della discesa agli inferi, si veda, tra gli altri, Frank 2009 e Charlesworth 2016.

citata in un articolo del *Credo apostolico* (il *Symbolum apostolorum*) e nel *Simbolo atanasiano*, in cui si legge “descendit ad inferos, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis”, sebbene in nessuna delle due preghiere si trovi un perspicuo riferimento alla liberazione delle anime dei giusti vissuti prima della incarnazione di Gesù.<sup>3</sup>

La discesa agli inferi di Cristo è considerata una verità di fede, la cui autenticità non è mai stata confutata, tanto che nella tradizione esegetica essa è assunta come episodio fondamentale della *historia salutis*, che prefigura e annuncia la parusia e il Giudizio Universale. E del resto, il *Descensus ad Inferos* si configura come “typologically related to the Last Judgment in commentaries by Augustine, Gregory, Jerome, and Bede”.<sup>4</sup>

Cenni alla missione salvifica di Gesù agli inferi, dove avrebbe finanche divelto le porte dell’Inferno e incatenato Satana nel fondo dell’abisso fino alla fine dei tempi, si trovano sparsi in numerosi passi biblici e in diversi testi apocrifi.<sup>5</sup> Alcuni brani dell’Antico Testamento sembrano evocare profeticamente la vittoria di Cristo contro lo *Sheol* e i suoi guardiani, come Sal 24 (23):7-8: “adtollite portas principes vestras et elevamini portae aeternales et introibit rex gloriae, quis est iste rex gloriae Dominus fortis et potens Dominus potens in proelio”.<sup>6</sup> In Mt 12:40 “Sicut enim fuit Ionas in ventre ceti tribus diebus et tribus noctibus sic erit Filius hominis in corde terrae tribus diebus et tribus noctibus”, si riscontra una analogia tra Cristo e Giona: entrambi dimorano per tre giorni in un luogo che può essere visto come una metafora degli inferi (il

<sup>3</sup> La Chiesa ha introdotto ufficialmente la formula *descendit ad inferos* nel *Credo Sirmiano* del 359, in seguito al quale si avviò, in seno alla tradizione patristica, un intenso dibattito sulla discesa agli inferi: Norelli 2007, 133-134.

<sup>4</sup> Ruggerini 2011, 207.

<sup>5</sup> Allusioni alla discesa di Gesù nell’aldilà si rintracciano, oltre che in brani del Nuovo Testamento (Mt 12:40, Rm 10:5-7, At 2:24-31, 1 Pt 3:18-21 e 4:6, Ef 4:8-10, Fil 2:9-11, Ap 20:13-15), anche in alcuni scritti apocrifi, quali l’*Ascensione del Profeta Isaia*, risalente al II secolo e le *Odi di Salomone*, una raccolta di inni cristiani redatti intorno al 125 d.C.: cfr. Campbell 1982, 114-133; Norelli 2007, 147-149, Frank 2009, 215-216 e Charlesworth 2016, 379-381.

<sup>6</sup> Le citazioni bibliche sono tratte da Weber 1983.

ventre della balena per Giona e le viscere della terra per Cristo).

Riferimenti che possono essere posti in connessione con l'idea del *Descensus ad Inferos* si trovano anche in 1 Pt 3:18-21:

quia et Christus semel pro peccatis mortuus est iustus pro iniustus ut nos offerret Deo mortificatus carne vivificatus autem spiritu in quo et his qui in carcere erant spiritibus veniens praedicavit qui increduli fuerant aliquando quando expectabat Dei patientia in diebus Noe cum fabricaretur arca in qua pauci id est octo animae salvae factae sunt per aquam quod et vos nunc similis formae salvos facit baptisma non carnis depositio sordium sed conscientiae bonae interrogatio in Deum per resurrectionem Iesu Christi.

(Anche Cristo è morto una volta per sempre per i peccati, giusto per gli ingiusti, per ricondurvi a Dio; messo a morte nella carne, ma reso vivo nello spirito. E in spirito andò ad annunziare la salvezza anche agli spiriti che attendevano in prigione; essi avevano un tempo rifiutato di credere quando la magnanimità di Dio pazientava nei giorni di Noè, mentre si fabbricava l'arca, nella quale poche persone, otto in tutto, furono salvate per mezzo dell'acqua. Figura, questa, del battesimo, che ora salva voi; esso non è rimozione di sporcizia del corpo, ma invocazione di salvezza rivolta a Dio da parte di una buona coscienza, in virtù della risurrezione di Gesù Cristo.)<sup>7</sup>

Il passo – la cui relazione al *Descensus ad Inferos* è considerata controversa da alcuni studiosi<sup>8</sup> – contiene un chiaro riferimento al Diluvio e alla sua connessione con la natura efficace del battesimo, simbolo e mezzo di purificazione delle anime.

L'idea che Gesù abbia sconfitto il demonio, il detentore del potere della morte, e quindi affrancato gli uomini dalla schiavitù

<sup>7</sup> Traduzione dalla versione della CEI 1974, 1214-1215.

<sup>8</sup> Norelli 2007, 138-142.

del male, è espresso in Eb 2:14-15: “Quia ergo pueri communicaverunt sanguini et carni et ipse similiter participavit hisdem ut per mortem destrueret eum qui habebat mortis imperium id est diabolum et liberaret eos qui timore mortis per totam vitam obnoxii erant servituti”; e ancora in Ef 4:8-10 (“propter quod dicit ascendens in altum captivam duxit captivitatem dedit dona hominibus<sup>9</sup> quod autem ascendit quid est nisi quia et descendit primum in inferiores partes terrae qui descendit ipse est et qui ascendit super omnes caelos ut impleret omnia”), si afferma la discesa e ascesa di Cristo in prospettiva soteriologica, nonché la sua “esaltazione cosmica”.<sup>10</sup>

Il motivo della discesa di Cristo agli inferi trova la sua più compiuta manifestazione nel *Vangelo di Nicodemo*,<sup>11</sup> un’opera redatta originariamente in greco tra il II e il VI secolo,<sup>12</sup> che esercitò per tutto il medioevo un grande influsso sulla teologia e sulla letteratura cristiana, e perfino sulle arti figurative.<sup>13</sup> Il testo

<sup>9</sup> Si tratta di una citazione del Sal 68:19: “Ascendisti in altum, captivam duxisti captivitatem; accepisti in donum homines, ut etiam rebelles habitent apud Dominum Deum”.

<sup>10</sup> Norelli 2007, 138.

<sup>11</sup> Geerard 1992, 43-46 ed Elliott 1993, 164-166. Origine, datazione e paternità del *Vangelo di Nicodemo* sono a tutt’oggi oggetto di un ampio dibattito, cfr., tra gli altri: James 1924, 94-95 e 117-118; MacCulloch 1930; Craveri 1969, 299-377; Izydorczyk 1997; Tamburr 2007, 2-3, nota 4 (e indicazioni bibliografiche ivi citate); Baudoin, Izydorczyk 2019, 1-20.

<sup>12</sup> Di Sciacca 2019, 87 e Di Sciacca 2023, 25, nota 15.

<sup>13</sup> Sebbene la dimensione iconografica del *Descensus ad Inferos* esuli dallo scopo del presente lavoro, si ritiene utile offrire qualche accenno in merito. Il motivo del viaggio di Cristo nell’oltretomba ha goduto di ampia fortuna soprattutto nei cicli iconografici dei Salteri dell’Inghilterra anglosassone. La prima illustrazione della discesa di Cristo agli inferi nell’ambito di un ciclo di scene cristologiche inglesi, si trova nel Salterio del ms London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius C.vi, f. 14r (databile al terzo quarto dell’XI secolo e proveniente da Winchester: Gneuss, Lapidge 2104, n. 378 e Ker 1957, n. 199). L’illustrazione, che molto probabilmente risente dell’influsso del *Vangelo di Nicodemo*, raffigura la scena della liberazione dei patriarchi da parte di Cristo e mostra Adamo ed Eva nell’atto di fuoriuscire da una bocca leonina: Openshaw 1989, 19-22; Tamburr 2007, 148; Bradley 2008, 237-238; Di Sciacca 2019,

si articola in due parti, che in origine circolavano separatamente e che sono state unite in una data non precisabile tra il V e il IX secolo:<sup>14</sup> gli *Acta Pilati* o *Gesta Pilati* (V secolo ca.), che narrano il processo di Gesù, la sua condanna e la sua crocifissione (capp. I-XVI),<sup>15</sup> e il *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* (forse databile al II secolo), che riguarda specificatamente la discesa di Gesù nell'Ade per liberare le anime trattenute negli inferi e condurle in Paradiso (capp. XVII-XIX). Il racconto della discesa è affidato ai due figli di Simeone, resuscitati dalla morte dopo la crocifissione. I due fratelli narrano come una luce sfolgorante irrompesse nell'oscurità degli inferi, terrorizzando gli spiriti maligni, e al contempo riempiendo di giubilo le anime dei santi che vi erano imprigionati. Il Principe dell'Inferno, atterrito dall'arrivo del "Re della Gloria", ammonisce Satana per aver istigato l'uccisione del Figlio di Dio. Al grido delle parole del Sal 24:7-8: "Attollite, portae, capita vestra ...", Cristo abbatte le porte dell'Inferno, calpesta i demoni e conduce via Adamo e gli altri santi e patriarchi in alto verso il Paradiso.

La prima versione latina nota del *Vangelo di Nicodemo*, sia pur frammentaria, è tramandata nel ms Vienna, Österreichische

60. Un'altra illustrazione del *Descensus ad Inferos* che può essere stata ispirata dal *Vangelo di Nicodemo* è contenuta nel Salterio di Winchester (ms London, BL, Cotton Nero C.iv, f. 12r, XII-XIII secolo: Watson 1979, n. 539), e ritrae l'ingresso dell'Inferno come una gigantesca bocca zoomorfa di fronte alla quale si staglia la figura di Cristo che prende per mano Adamo, mentre calpesta un demone: Tamburr 2007, 110-111 e Di Sciacca 2019, 63. Una scena simile è riprodotta nel Salterio del ms Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 203 (terzo quarto del XII secolo: Kauffmann 1975, n. 94).

<sup>14</sup> Izydorczyk 1989, 170-176; Izydorczyk 1997, 48; Tamburr 2007, 3; Bullitta 2017, 7-9.

<sup>15</sup> Il testo originale degli *Acta Pilati* fu con ogni probabilità composto in greco tra il II e il IV secolo e successivamente tradotto in arabo, aramaico, armeno, copto, georgiano e siriano: Hennecke 1904, 143-152; Biggs, Morey 2007, 29; Bullitta 2017, 4. Nella sua edizione critica, Tischendorf (1853) identifica due redazioni principali: il cosiddetto *Testo greco A*, trasmesso in quindici manoscritti, e una versione più lunga, il *Testo greco B*, conservato in una trentina di codici; cfr. anche Izydorczyk, Dubois 1997, 28-29.

Nationalbibliothek, Cod. lat. 563 (ff. 122-177), risalente al V secolo.<sup>16</sup> Il testo trádito dal manoscritto viennese conteneva assai verosimilmente solo il testo degli *Acta Pilati*.<sup>17</sup> La tradizione latina che si sviluppa nei secoli successivi è ampia e diversificata e conta un impressionante numero di manoscritti.<sup>18</sup> Il tipo testuale più diffuso è senza dubbio la redazione latina A, che allega una lettera di Pilato all'Imperatore Claudio<sup>19</sup> e, soprattutto, che aggiunge al nucleo narrativo degli *Acta Pilati* il racconto della catabasi espresso dal *Descensus Christi ad inferos*.<sup>20</sup>

Il *Vangelo di Nicodemo* ha goduto di una straordinaria fortuna nell'Inghilterra medievale, come testimoniano le versioni in circolazione in area anglosassone prima della conquista normanna, tutte dipendenti dalla redazione latina A.<sup>21</sup> Si tratta di due versioni latine<sup>22</sup> e tre traduzioni in volgare, denominate – secon-

<sup>16</sup> Philippart 1989; Biggs, Morey 2007, 29; Tamburr 2007, 104.

<sup>17</sup> Vedi Izydorczyk 1997, 46 e Bullitta 2017, 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Tutti i manoscritti conosciuti che trasmettono il *Vangelo di Nicodemo* in latino (436 codici, compreso il Cod. lat. 563 di Vienna) sono stati catalogati da Izydorczyk 1993. Dal censimento effettuato dallo studioso polacco-canadese emerge come il complesso dei codici pervenuti afferisca a quattro diverse recensioni dell'apocrifo latino, distinte sulla base di caratteristiche di lessico, stile e motivi letterari, ed etichettate rispettivamente come Redazione latina A, B, C e T. Per una disamina della tradizione latina del *Vangelo di Nicodemo*, cfr. anche Collura 2016, 42-47 e Bullitta 2017, 5-17.

<sup>19</sup> Biggs, Morey 2007, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Collura 2016, 43 e nota 16 e Bullitta 2017, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Oltre che nel mondo anglosassone, il *Vangelo di Nicodemo* conobbe una vasta diffusione in tutta l'area germanica. Per l'influenza dell'apocrifo nicodemiano in area linguistica tedesca, si veda Hoffmann 1997, 287-336 e Hoffmann 1997, 337-60; per la fortuna dell'opera in Scandinavia, vedi Wolf 1997, 261-286 e Bullitta 2017. Il *Vangelo di Nicodemo* si afferma anche sul fronte celtico: si veda Dooley 1997, 361-401; Klausner 1997, 403-418 e il recente studio di Cárthaigh 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Queste redazioni sono contenute rispettivamente nel ms London, BL, Royal 5.E.xiii (databile alla fine del IX secolo, originario forse della Francia settentrionale o dalla Bretagna: Gneuss, Lapidge 2104, n. 459), e nel ms Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque Municipale, 202 (vergato nella Francia Nord-Orientale nella seconda metà del IX secolo: Gneuss, Lapidge 2104, n. 930.5).

do le abbreviazioni dell'*Old English Corpus* di Toronto – *NicA*,<sup>23</sup> *NicB*,<sup>24</sup> e *NicC*,<sup>25</sup> queste ultime sono tutte riconducibili alla redazione latina A contenuta nel ms Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque Municipale, 202.<sup>26</sup>

Nel periodo dell'inglese medio la tradizione viene poi ripresa e sviluppata in una versione di circa 1300 versi interpolata all'interno del *Cursor Mundi*.<sup>27</sup>

Al di là della circolazione sul suolo inglese del *Vangelo di Nicodemo*, il motivo del viaggio di Gesù nell'oltretomba risulta particolarmente diffuso nella produzione letteraria in volgare anglosassone, assai verosimilmente perché il tema si prestava agevolmente a una integrazione con gli ideali eroici della tradizione guerriera di matrice germanica.<sup>28</sup> Nell'ambito della prosa, Ælfric inserisce riferimenti alla missione di Gesù agli inferi in diverse omelie. Tra queste, l'omelia di apertura della prima serie delle Omelie Cattoliche, intitolata *De initio creaturae* (*Catho-*

<sup>23</sup> *NicA* è contenuto in Cambridge, University Library Ii.2.11 (terzo quarto dell'XI secolo, Exeter: Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, n. 15 e Ker 1957, n. 20, art. 11). *NicA* è il la prima traduzione in inglese antico del *Vangelo di Nicodemo*, nonché una delle più antiche versioni di questo apocrifo in un volgare europeo: vedi Hulme 1898; Hall 1996, 49-50, Di Sciacca 2019, 88, e nota 151 e Di Sciacca 2023, 26 e nota 17.

<sup>24</sup> *NicB* – che aderisce in larga misura a *NicA* – è tramandato in ms London, BL, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, parte I (metà del XII secolo: Ker 1957, n. 215, art. 2): vedi Hulme 1898, Di Sciacca 2019, 88, e nota 152 e Di Sciacca 2023, 26 e nota 18.

<sup>25</sup> *NicC* è attestato in ms London, BL, Cotton Vespasian D.xiv (metà del XII secolo, Canterbury o Rochester: Ker 1957, n. 209, art. 31), vedi Hulme 1904, Di Sciacca 2019, 89, e nota 153 e Di Sciacca 2023, 26, e nota 19.

<sup>26</sup> Cross 1996, 82-104; Bullitta 2017, 9; Di Sciacca 2019, 89; Di Sciacca 2023, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. Tamburr 2007, 111-112 e 148.

<sup>28</sup> Nella letteratura in inglese antico, il *Descensus ad Inferos* è noto come 'harrowing of hell', una formula che rimarca l'aspetto quasi bellico dell'impresa di Cristo agli inferi, espresso dal significato del verbo ags. *hergian* (ingl. mod. *harry*) con valore di 'tormentare, attaccare, assaltare, depredare', corradicale del sostantivo *hergung* 'saccheggio, razzia, irruzione, assalto, incursione', cfr.: Scheper 1992, 332 e Tamburr 2007, 1.

*lic Homilies* 1.1), offre un excursus dell'intera *historia salutis*, procedendo dalla creazione e dalla cacciata di Adamo dal Paradiso alla narrazione del Diluvio, attraverso l'incarnazione, la vita e la passione di Gesù, fino al suo estremo sacrificio, in seguito al quale:

to helle gewende 7 þone deoful gewylde. 7 him of anam adam  
7 euan. 7 heora ofspring. þone dæl þe him ær gecwæmde 7  
gelædde hi to hiora lichaman. 7 aras of deaðe mid þam miclum  
wærede. on þridan dæge his þrowunge.<sup>29</sup>

(andò all'Inferno e vinse il diavolo e prese da lui Adamo ed Eva e la loro discendenza, quella parte che prima gli era stata più gradita, li condusse ai loro corpi e risorse dalla morte con quella grande schiera il terzo giorno, giorno della sua passione).<sup>30</sup>

La discesa agli Inferi compare anche in alcune omelie anonime, in particolare in *Blickling VII*, rubricata come *Dominica Pascha*,<sup>31</sup> nella quale la visione trionfale dell'irruzione di Cristo nel regno di Satana si accompagna a una vivida descrizione della drammatica reazione di Adamo ed Eva, divenendo funzionale allo sviluppo del tema del Giudizio Finale.<sup>32</sup> L'omelista di *Blickling VII* attinge – tra le varie fonti – anche allo pseudo-agostiniano *Sermo 160 'De pascha'*, in particolare per l'elaborazione del discorso pronunciato dai demoni atterriti alla vista di Cristo.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Clemoes 1997, 188.

<sup>30</sup> Le traduzioni sono a cura di chi scrive, se non altrimenti indicato.

<sup>31</sup> Morris 1967, 82-97.

<sup>32</sup> In considerazione di una serie di concordanze linguistiche tra l'omelia *Blickling VII* e la descrizione della discesa di Beowulf nella palude di Grendel, alcuni studiosi hanno ipotizzato che l'autore del *Beowulf* avesse intenzionalmente costruito l'episodio del poema in analogia al *Descensus ad Inferos*, cfr. Scheper 1992, 332.

<sup>33</sup> Ozimic 1979, 19-36; PL 39, coll. 2059-2062. Sull'uso dello pseudo-agostiniano *Sermo 160* in *Blickling VII* (unitamente a una versione del *Descensus* contenuta nel *Book of Cerne* e dell'*Apocalisse di Tommaso*), si veda



Una versione del *Descensus* è inoltre incorporata nel testo di una omelia anonima sulla domenica di Pasqua attestata in due manoscritti: il ms Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41 (prima metà dell'XI secolo),<sup>34</sup> e il ms Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 (XII secolo),<sup>35</sup> ad ulteriore riprova della grande popolarità di cui ebbe a godere questa leggenda nella cultura letteraria e teologica dell'Inghilterra anglosassone.<sup>36</sup>

Oltre che nella prosa, il motivo della discesa agli inferi è assai frequente in poesia, dove è veicolato attraverso immagini caratterizzate da un forte pathos e tragica intensità. Nelle pagine che seguono si intende presentare una rassegna analitica di alcuni passi tra i più significativi della poesia antico inglese che trattano il *Descensus ad Inferos*, allo scopo di individuarne una chiave di lettura in relazione ad altri temi escatologici diffusi nella tradizione letteraria del medioevo inglese, in particolare con la Seconda Venuta e il Giudizio Finale.

## 2. *Il Descensus Christi ad Inferos nella poesia antico inglese*

I temi legati alla fine dei tempi e della storia hanno un posto di rilievo nella letteratura in versi in volgare anglosassone e – tra questi – il *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* si trova declinato in molte forme e in diversi generi poetici. Talvolta esso compare come elemento fugace o velato, in alcune opere invece occupa una posizione preminente, costituendo parte integrante della struttura narrativa.

Campbell 1982, 131-134 e 136-138; Biggs, Morey 2007, 30; Hall 1996, 55-56; Tamburr 2007, 71-74 e Di Sciacca 2019, 86, nota 144.

<sup>34</sup> Ker 1957, n. 32, art. 13; Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, n. 39. Si tratta della cosiddetta versione *NicD*, edita da Hulme 1904, 610-614; cfr. anche Campbell 1982, 141-142; Thomas 2017; Di Sciacca 2019, 90.

<sup>35</sup> Ker 1957, n. 57, art. 17. Questa versione è denominata *NicE*, cfr. Thomas 2017 e Di Sciacca 2019, 91.

<sup>36</sup> Tra gli altri testi omiletici incentrati in modo preponderante sul tema della discesa agli inferi, o che rimandano ad esso anche solo allusivamente, si menzionano un sermone dal titolo *In die resurrectione Domini*, tramandato nel ms Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 121 (Luiselli Fadda 1972), e l'omelia *Vercelli VIII* (Scragg 1992, 139-150); vedi Di Sciacca 2023, 26.

Un chiaro, seppur breve, riferimento al *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* si rintraccia nel capitolo del *Physiologus* antico inglese dedicato alla pantera (vv. 55a-62a) del codice Exeter, Cathedral Library 3501 (ff. 95v-98r):<sup>37</sup>

Swa is dryhten god, dreama rædend,  
 eallum eaðmede oþrum gesceaftum,  
 duguða gehwylcre, butan dracan anum,  
 attres ordfruman. Þæt is se ealda feond,  
 þone he gesælde in susla grund,  
 and gefetrade fyrnum teagum,  
 biþeahte þreanydum, and þy þridan dæge  
 of digle aras, [...] <sup>38</sup>

(Così è il Signore Dio, donatore delle gioie e di ogni dono verso tutte le altre umili creature, tranne che verso il drago, origine di ogni veleno. Questi è il suo antico nemico, che egli incatenò nell'abisso dei tormenti, e avvinse con ceppi infuocati, incarcerò con terribili costrizioni. E al terzo giorno risorse dal sepolcro [...])

Nella sezione del commento allegorico della natura della pantera, interpretata nel *Physiologus* come simbolo del Cristo che risorge dalla morte al terzo giorno per salvare l'umanità, l'anonimo autore inserisce un rapido cenno a uno degli eventi del *Descensus ad Inferos*, ossia la sconfitta di Satana, costretto in ceppi di fuoco e sottoposto a terribili torture da colui che viene definito come il 'dispensatore di vittorie' (*sigora sellend*, v. 64a).

In *Guthlac B* (ai ff. 44v-52v del Codice exoniense), l'autore, nel descrivere la malattia del santo, opera un collegamento tra il tempo della Pasqua e quello della discesa, intesa come momento della redenzione dell'uomo: i vv. 1103-1104 del poema "ealra

<sup>37</sup> Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, n. 257; Ker 1957, n. 116.

<sup>38</sup> Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 170-171.

þrymma þrym, ðreata mæstne / to heofonum ahof, ða he from helle astag”<sup>39</sup> (la gloria di tutte le glorie una folla potente sollevò al cielo, allorquando egli risuscitò dagli inferi) alludono all’evento della liberazione dalla cattività infernale delle anime dei santi, che Gesù conduce in alto nel Regno dei cieli.

Parimenti, nei versi conclusivi del *Sogno della croce* contenuto nel ms Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII (ff. 104v-106r),<sup>40</sup> Cristo porta gioia e speranza a coloro che hanno patito i tormenti della prigione infernale e la sua spedizione vittoriosa culmina nell’ingresso di una schiera di beati nel Paradiso (vv. 148b-156b):

Hiht wæs geniwad  
mid bledum ond mid blisse þam þe þær bryne þolodan.  
Se sunu wæs sigorfæst on þam siðfate,  
mihtig ond spedig, þa he mid manigeo com,  
gasta weorode, on godes rice,  
anwealda ælmihtig, englum to blisse  
ond eallum ðam halgum þam þe on heofonum ær  
wunedon on wuldre, þa heora wealdend cwom,  
ælmihtig god, þær his eðel wæs.<sup>41</sup>

(La speranza fu rinnovata con la gloria e la letizia per coloro che laggiù patirono il fuoco. Il figlio fu trionfante nel viaggio, potente e vittorioso, allorquando egli con una moltitudine giunse, con una folla di anime, nel regno di Dio. Il Re onnipotente, per la gioia degli angeli e di tutti i santi che in cielo già dimoravano nella gloria, là, il loro Signore giunse, Dio onnipotente, là dove era la sua patria.)

Il passo contiene un riferimento implicito al *Descensus ad Inferos*, in cui Cristo è ritratto come il re guerriero che, dopo aver

<sup>39</sup> Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 80.

<sup>40</sup> Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, n. 941; Ker 1957, n. 394, art. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Krapp 1932, 65.

redento l'intera umanità attraverso la crocifissione, trionfa sugli inferi e prende possesso dei cieli. Il poeta accresce l'intensità dell'immagine vittoriosa di Gesù facendo convergere il momento della discesa con quello dell'Ascensione: “[as] in a procession celebrating a military victory, the Son enters heaven at the head of the ‘troop of souls’ he has just saved [...] At the same time, the audience envisions the Last Judgment, just mentioned in the poem and connected typologically to the Resurrection, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Ascension.”<sup>42</sup>

Anche l'*Elena* (Codice di Vercelli, ff. 121-133v) di Cynewulf presenta due passi che si richiamano al tema della discesa agli inferi. Dopo la conversione di Costantino alla fede cristiana, i saggi consiglieri rivelano all'imperatore il significato della santa croce, ossia del simbolo divino che lo ha condotto alla vittoria contro gli Unni. Costantino apprende così come Cristo liberò gli uomini dalle spire del demonio proprio grazie alla stessa croce che è apparsa a lui in cielo durante la battaglia (vv. 181-185a):

Alysde leoda bearn of locan deofla,  
 geomre gastas, ond him gife sealde  
 þurh þa ilcan gesceaft þe him geywed wearð  
 sylfum on gesyhðe, sigores tacen,  
 wið þeoda þræce.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Tamburr 2007, 38. Questo passo, tradizionalmente descritto come “a brief and oblique allusion to the Harrowing of Hell” (Swanton 1970, 78), è stato in passato considerato come una interpolazione, che – per il tono omiletico alieno alla generale ispirazione lirica dell'opera – ne comprometterebbe l'unità (Cook 1905, liv-lv; Ricci 1926, 159; Dickins, Ross 1934, 18; Woolf 1958, 153). A ben vedere, tuttavia, i vv. 148b-156b del *Sogno della croce* – con i riferimenti multipli alla discesa agli inferi (sebbene questi piuttosto sibillini), all'ascensione, e soprattutto al Giudizio Finale – si inseriscono perfettamente nel solco della *historia salutis*, come rappresentata nell'intero poemetto (Brzezinski 1988, 253).

<sup>43</sup> Krapp 1932, 71.

(Egli riscattò i figli degli uomini, gli spiriti afflitti, dalla schiavitù dei demoni, e garantì loro la grazia per mezzo di quello stesso simbolo che gli era apparso in visione, un segno di vittoria contro l'assalto delle nazioni.)

Più avanti nel poema, dopo che il rabbino Giuda Ciriaco, costretto da Elena, rinviene la croce sulla quale era spirato Gesù, Cynewulf introduce un lungo monologo di Satana, nel quale questi lamenta la sua condizione di sconfitto, depauperato delle sue ricchezze e privato dei suoi seguaci, delle anime dei peccatori (vv. 916b-921a):

Is his rice brad  
ofer middangeard. Min is geswiðrod  
ræd under roderum. Ic þa rode ne þearf  
hleahre herigean. Hwæt, se hælend me  
in þam engan ham oft getynde,  
geomrum to sorge!<sup>44</sup>

(Il suo regno è ampio sulla terra. Il mio dominio è diminuito sotto il cielo. Questa croce io non oso schernire con disprezzo. Ecco, il Redentore mi ha rinchiuso ancora una volta in questa angusta dimora, tra atroci pene!)

Nel corso della narrazione, Cynewulf scandisce l'evoluzione del potere della Croce divina, che da segno infallibile di successo terreno (nella battaglia contro le orde barbariche) assurge a simbolo supremo della vittoria soprannaturale di Cristo contro Satana, e infine dell'affrancamento delle anime dei giusti.<sup>45</sup>

Ulteriori riferimenti alla discesa di Cristo agli inferi, anche solo appena accennati (e tuttavia comprensibili per il pubblico), si incontrano con una certa frequenza nella poesia in inglese anti-

<sup>44</sup> Krapp 1932, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. Tamburr 2007, 41.

co,<sup>46</sup> segno che il motivo doveva essere ben radicato nella vita spirituale e nella cultura letteraria dell’Inghilterra anglosassone, anche prima della diffusione delle traduzioni in volgare del *Vangelo di Nicodemo*. Non è semplice risalire alle fonti cui si ispirano i poeti anglosassoni, che del resto trattano la materia del *Descensus* con estrema libertà e disinvoltura: “[t]he variety and originality of the poets, however, is often more visible than the sources, as each poet transforms the Descent theme to fit it into his peculiar piece of poetic architecture”.<sup>47</sup>

Nelle pagine che seguono, l’analisi si focalizzerà su tre poemi anglosassoni in cui la discesa agli inferi trova ampio e articolato sviluppo, svolgendo una funzione strumentale non solo nella costruzione del tessuto narrativo, ma anche contribuendo alla realizzazione del disegno ideologico delle stesse opere.

### 2.1. *Il Descensus Christi ad Inferos nel Cristo II*

Nel *Cristo II*, tramandato nel Codice exoniense ai ff. 14a-20b, il tema del *Descensus ad Inferos* si intreccia con la dottrina dell’Ascensione, la cui celebrazione di gloria è immagine speculare dell’umile incarnazione di Gesù nel ventre di Maria Vergine.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. ad es. *La Fenice*, vv. 417b-423b: “Him wearð selle lif / heolstre bihyded, ond se halga wong / þurh feondes searo fæste bityned / wintra mengu, oppæt wuldorcýning / þurh his hidercýme halgum togeanes, / moncýnnes gefea, meþra frefrend, / ond se anga hyht, eft ontynde.”: Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 105-106 (‘Una vita migliore fu loro celata nell’ombra, e quella santa pianura dalle astuzie del nemico fermamente chiusa per molti inverni, finché il re della gloria, gioia dell’umanità, conforto degli stanchi, e unica speranza, con la sua venuta in questo mondo l’aprì di nuovo ai santi.’) e *Indovinello 55*, vv. 5a-7a: “ond rode tacn, þæs us to roderum up / hlædre rærde, ær he helwara / burg abræce.”: Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 208 (‘e il segno della croce di colui che sollevò per noi una scala fino ai cieli, prima di espugnare la roccaforte degli abitanti dell’Inferno.’). Una associazione simbolica tra la discesa agli inferi e il mistero dell’incarnazione e della natività è inoltre implicitamente sottintesa nelle liriche dell’avvento di cui si compone il *Cristo I*, cfr. Campbell 1982, 147-150 e Tamburr 2007, 48-51.

<sup>47</sup> Campbell 1982, 145.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. Brown 1974.

Cynewulf enfatizza la figura eroica del Cristo, esaltandone i tratti eroici e marziali al momento dell'assalto alle schiere infernali (vv. 558-585):

Hafað nu se halga helle bireafod  
 ealles þæs gafoles þe hi geardagum  
 in þæt orlege unryhte swealg.  
 Nu sind forcumene ond in cwicsusle  
 gehynde ond gehæfte, in helle grund  
 duguþum bidæled, deofla cempan.  
 Ne meahtan wiþerbrogan wige spowan,  
 wæpna wyrpum, siþþan wuldres cyning,  
 heofonrices helm, hilde gefremede  
 wiþ his ealdfeondum anes meahtum,  
 þær he of hæfte ahlod huþa mæste  
 of feonda byrig, folces unrim,  
 þisne ilcan þreat þe ge her on stariað.  
 Wile nu gesecan sawla nergend  
 gæsta giefstol, godes agen bearn,  
 æfter guðplegan. Nu ge geare cunnon  
 hwæt se hlaford is se þisne here lædeð,  
 nu ge fromlice freondum togeanes  
 gongað glædmode. Geatu, ontynað!  
 Wile in to eow ealles waldend,  
 cyning on ceastre, corðre ne lytle,  
 fyrnweorca fruma, folc gelædan  
 in dreama dream, ðe he on deoflum genom  
 þurh his sylfes sygor. Sib sceal gemæne  
 englum ond ældum a forð heonan  
 wesan wideferh. Wær is ætsomme  
 godes ond monna, gæsthalig treow,  
 lufu, lifes hyht, ond ealles leohtes gefea.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 18-19.

(Ora il Santo ha spogliato l’Inferno di tutto il tributo che esso nei giorni passati ingiustamente inghiottì in quel luogo di guerra. Ora i guerrieri dei diavoli sono sopraffatti, e nei sempiterni tormenti umiliati e imprigionati, nell’abisso dell’Inferno privati di ogni benedizione. Non potevano incutere terrore contro i loro avversari nella battaglia, con lanci di armi, dopo che il Re della Gloria, il Protettore del Regno dei Cieli, mosse guerra contro i Suoi antichi nemici con la potenza dell’Uno; lì egli liberò dalla schiavitù la preda più grande, una immensa schiera di persone dalla roccaforte dei demoni, questa stessa folla che qui voi contemplate. Ora il salvatore delle anime desidera cercare il trono di grazia degli spiriti, il figlio stesso di Dio, dopo il gioco della guerra. Adesso sapete bene chi è questo Signore che guida questo esercito, ora andate con coraggio con animo felice incontro agli amici! O porte, spalancatevi! Il Signore onnipotente, il Re, l’autore della creazione, con una non piccola moltitudine condurrà a te, nella città, nella gioia delle gioie, il popolo che ha preso dai demoni con la sua stessa vittoria. D’ora in poi, nei secoli dei secoli, vi sarà pace tra gli angeli e gli uomini. Esiste un’alleanza tra Dio e gli uomini, un legame sacro: l’amore, la gioia della vita e la letizia di ogni luce).

Come in Sal 24 (da cui è ripreso anche il motivo “Attollite, portae!”), Cristo è ritratto come il Messia vittorioso, l’osannato re guerriero che ascende al cielo assieme alla moltitudine di anime che ha appena liberato dalla schiavitù di Satana.

È ormai acclarato che la fonte principale per questo passo è rappresentata dalla sezione finale dell’Omelia 29 di Gregorio Magno sull’ascensione,<sup>50</sup> che tuttavia Cynewulf rielabora in modo personale, conferendo al poema un tono fortemente lirico,

<sup>50</sup> Étaix 1999, 253-254. Sulla circolazione nella Inghilterra prenormanna delle *XL Homiliae in Evangelia* di Gregorio Magno, cfr. Hall 2001 e Castaldi 2013.



pur mantenendo l'intento parenetico-didascalico di un sermone.<sup>51</sup> Oltre che dal testo di Gregorio, Cynewulf attinge a piene mani da un inno di Beda dal titolo *Hymnus canamus gloriae*, in cui i temi della discesa sono interconnessi e integrati con la narrazione dell'Ascensione.<sup>52</sup> Il brano (vv. 558-585) si presenta come un discorso pronunciato dagli angeli che accompagnano Cristo nel suo viaggio verso il paradiso e che Cynewulf lega con il racconto della parusia e del Giudizio Finale.<sup>53</sup>

Nel *Cristo II* Cynewulf introduce inoltre un *topos* dottrinale derivato dalla tradizione teologica e patristica, ossia i cosiddetti "salti di Cristo", le tappe del ministero di Gesù che ha inizio con la sua incarnazione in un corpo umano e che culmina con la sua ascensione al regno dei cieli. Il canone dei "salti" è sviluppato principalmente nella già citata Omelia 29 di Gregorio, a partire da una interpretazione mistica del Cantico dei Cantici (2:8 "Ecce iste venit saliens in montibus, transiliens colles"):

*Ecce iste uenit saliens in montibus.* Veniendo quippe ad redemptionem nostram, quosdam, ut ita dixerim, salus dedit. Vultis, fratres clarissimi, ipsos eius saltus agnoscere? De caelo uenit in uterum, de utero uenit in praesepe, de praesepe uenit in crucem, de cruce uenit in sepulcrum, de sepulcro rediit in caelum.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Campbell 1982, 145 e Letson 1980. È assai verosimile che il *Cristo II* fosse destinato all'edificazione spirituale di un monaco nel privato della sua cella, oppure alla lettura solitaria da parte di un nobile colto, in occasione delle celebrazioni per la festa dell'Ascensione: Letson 1980: 199-201 e 207.

<sup>52</sup> Lapidge 2019, 126-131 e 362-372.

<sup>53</sup> È possibile che il passo in questione costituisca ciò che resta di una più estesa orazione di angeli, la cui prima sezione sarebbe andata perduta per la probabile caduta di un folio del manoscritto, cfr. Jost 1946 e Pope 1969. Ma occorre riportare anche la voce alternativa di Letson 1980, 196, secondo cui: "When one considers the customary manner in which Cynewulf condenses his source, and the thematic arrangement of his poem, it is difficult to respond sympathetically to Pope's reviving of the missing-leaf theory at verse 556".

<sup>54</sup> Étaix 1999, 253-254. La dottrina dei "salti" di Gesù come simboli delle fasi della sua missione terrena e spirituale è presente anche negli scritti di Ippolito

(*Ecco, questi viene saltando sui monti. Venendo per la nostra redenzione, Egli, se è lecito usare questa espressione, compì come dei salti. Li volete conoscere, carissimi fratelli? Dal cielo venne nel grembo della Vergine, poi nel presepio, indi sulla croce ed infine nel sepolcro, dal quale ritornò in cielo.*)<sup>55</sup>

Rispetto all'elenco di Gregorio, Ambrogio aveva in origine inserito anche il "salto" del battesimo nel fiume Giordano. Cynewulf, aderendo al testo di Gregorio, omette il "salto" del battesimo, ma aggiunge un nuovo "salto" rispetto alla tradizione, ossia quello del *Descensus ad Inferos* (vv. 730b-736a):<sup>56</sup>

Wæs se fifta hlyp  
þa he hellwarena heap forbygde  
in cwicsusle, cyning inne gebond,  
feonda foresprecan, fynnum teagum,  
gromhydigne, þær he gen ligeð  
in carcerne clommum gefæstnad,  
synnum gesæled.<sup>57</sup>

(Il quinto salto è quando Egli abbatté la moltitudine degli abitanti dell'Inferno nei tormenti vivi, il re là dentro vi legò il feroce capo dei nemici, con lacci roventi, dove questi ancora giace, in carcere, avvinto in catene, stretto dai peccati.)

di Roma (*Interpretatio Cantici Canticorum*), Ambrogio (*De Isaac et anima* IV.31 e *Expositio in Psalmum 118* VI.6), Alcuino (*Compendium in Canticum Canticorum* II.8), Aimone di Auxerre (*Enarratio in Habacuc prophetam*), cfr. Cook 1900, 115, 143-144, Williams 1974, 256-257 e Haas 1969, 227. Secondo Marchand 2007, il tema dei "salti" di Cristo sarebbe presente anche nel *Sogno della Croce* (vv. 33b-43), sebbene non esplicitamente rappresentato.

<sup>55</sup> Traduzione a cura di Cremascoli 2013, 291.

<sup>56</sup> Cfr. anche Letson 1980, 197: "To Gregory's five leaps Cynewulf has added a sixth, the Harrowing of Hell; it is a popular Anglo-Saxon addition which echoes the poet's earlier use of the Harrowing and [...] which fits well into the structure of the poem".

<sup>57</sup> Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 23.

Cynewulf insiste in questo passo nel rappresentare il “salto” della discesa agli inferi come un’azione bellica e di conquista, che sfocia nella disfatta di Satana e nell’annientamento del suo esercito, come efficacemente puntualizzato da Tamburr: “[...] Cynewulf seems to be using the Descent as a paradigm for the topological struggle against Satan. [...] *Christ II* reassures its audience that that God and his angels will be their shield in this struggle, just as Christ was at the Harrowing of Hell. This is the moral legacy of the Descent”.<sup>58</sup> Sebbene il focus principale del poema sia posto sull’episodio dell’Ascensione, Cynewulf indugia sul *Descensus ad Inferos* raffigurandolo come strumento straordinario e potente per ripristinare la legge divina e il legame tra Dio e l’umanità. I tre momenti dell’Ascensione, Discesa agli inferi e Giudizio Finale sono inscindibilmente concatenati tra loro nella *historia salutis*, per culminare all’apoteosi della intronizzazione di Cristo, la processione dei beati, la gioia degli angeli e la beatitudine della luce eterna.

## 2.2. *Il Descensus ad Inferos nel Cristo e Satana*

Il *Cristo e Satana*, contenuto nel ms Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11 (pp. 213-229),<sup>59</sup> esplora il tema escatologico della lotta fra il bene e il male in una ideale linea temporale che procede dagli albori fino al giorno del Giudizio. Il poema si concentra in particolare sulla figura di Satana all’Inferno, descritto come un’anima in pena che lamenta dolorosamente la sua esclusione dalle gioie del Paradiso. Sul piano strutturale, l’opera si considera tradizionalmente composta da tre sezioni narrative: la prima (vv. 1-364) tratta la caduta di Lucifero e degli angeli ribelli; la seconda (vv. 365-662) è espressamente dedicata al *Descensus ad Inferos*; infine, la terza sezione (vv. 663-729) riguarda le tentazioni che Cristo subì da Satana nel deserto.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Tamburr 2007, 60.

<sup>59</sup> Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, n. 640; Ker 1957, n. 334, art. 2.

<sup>60</sup> La diversità di contenuti e di stile che caratterizza le tre sezioni del *Cristo e Satana*, nonché l’inconsueta collocazione cronologica dell’episodio

Il nucleo narrativo del *Descensus* si apre con un richiamo alla punizione degli angeli ribelli capeggiati da Satana, giocato sull'alternanza tra luce e tenebre, espressa in particolare nell'associazione tra la figura di Lucifero e il suo nome (vv. 365-372a):

Wæs þæt engelcyn      ær genemned,  
 Lucifer haten,      leohtberende,  
 on geardagum      in godes rice.  
 [...]  
 þa Satanus      swearte gepohte  
 þæt he wolde on heofonum      hehseld wyrcan  
 uppe mid þam ecan.<sup>61</sup>

(Quell'essere angelico menzionato prima, chiamato Lucifero, il portatore di luce, era nei tempi antichi nel regno di Dio. [...] Allora Satana pensò oscuramente di edificare un trono alto, nei cieli, insieme a quello dell'Eterno.)

Questo movimento dalla luce all'oscurità prefigura la caduta di Satana dalla gloria celeste al terrore dell'Inferno, anticipando il suo destino di sventura descritto efficacemente nei versi che seguono (vv. 378b-393):

þa him egða becom,  
 dyne for deman, þa he duru in helle  
 bræc and begde. Blis wearð monnum  
 þa hi hælendes heafod gesawon.

delle tentazioni, hanno alimentato in passato un dibattito sulla presunta natura composita dell'opera, da alcuni ritenuta il prodotto della giustapposizione di tre testi originariamente separati. Tuttavia, la gran parte della critica oggi concorda nel considerare il *Cristo e Satana* come un'opera unitaria, in cui prevalgono le implicazioni dottrinali e tematiche piuttosto che la logica della sequenza narrativa: Huppé 1959, 227-231; Finnegan 1977, 12-36; Sleeth 1982, 3-26 e 50-67; Scragg 2014, 108.

<sup>61</sup> Krapp 1931, 147.

þonne wæs þam atolan þe we ær nemdon  
 þa wæron mid egsan ealle afyrhte,  
 wide geond windsele wordum mændon:  
 “þis is stronglic, nu þes storm becom,  
 þegen mid þreate, þeoden engla.  
 Him beforan fereð fægere leoht  
 þonne we æfre ær eagam gesawon,  
 buton þa we mid englum uppe wæron.  
 Wile nu ure witu þurh his wuldres cræft  
 eall toweorpan. Nu ðes egsa com,  
 dyne for drihtne, sceal þes dreorga heap  
 ungeara nu atol þrowian.  
 [...]”<sup>62</sup>

(Allora il terrore piombò su di loro, uno schianto davanti al giudice, allorquando egli le porte dell’Inferno piegò e demolì. Gioirono gli uomini quando videro il volto del Salvatore. Allora coloro che abbiamo nominato prima furono terrorizzati, erano tutti atterriti per lo spavento, per l’ampia estensione della sala ventosa si lamentavano con le parole: “È dura ora che arriva questa tempesta, un principe col suo esercito, il re degli angeli. Porta davanti a sé una luce più bella di quanto non abbiamo mai visto con i nostri occhi, tranne quando eravamo in alto con gli angeli. Ora egli distruggerà tutti i nostri tormenti attraverso la sua gloriosa abilità. Ora arriva questo terrore, uno schianto davanti al Signore, e ora questa folla afflitta deve presto sopportare la sofferenza. [...]).

Il passo che descrive l’impetuoso assalto agli inferi in cui Cristo vi appare circondato da una luce bellissima (*fægere leoht*, v. 387b), è ancora costruito su giochi di contrasti simmetrici che producono l’effetto di amplificare la potenza delle immagini e contrapporre

<sup>62</sup> Krapp 1931, 147-148.

in un dualismo marcato le prospettive della narrazione: ciò che è terrore e sgomento (*egsa*, v. 378b; *dyne*, v. 379a) per i demoni, è – di contro – benedizione e gioia per i patriarchi e profeti salvati da Cristo (*blis*, v. 380b); e la luce magnifica che adesso irrompe possente e terribile nell’Ade (v. 387), della cui vista un tempo gli angeli caduti godevano nell’alto dei cieli, è ora per loro presagio di strazio e tormento.

La liberazione dei patriarchi è introdotta da un lungo e commovente monologo di Eva, con il quale supplica Cristo di volerle concedere il perdono e di riscattarla dalle tenebre dell’Inferno, assieme a tutte le altre anime dei giusti intrappolati nel Limbo. Dopo l’assunzione della responsabilità del peccato originale e l’espressione di un sincero pentimento, l’acme di intensità del discorso di Eva è raggiunta nell’identificazione tra la sua discendenza e la stirpe di Maria Vergine (vv. 437-440):

Hwæt, þu fram minre dohtor, drihten, onwoce  
 in middangeard mannum to helpe.  
 Nu is gesene þæt ðu eart sylfa god  
 and ece ordfruma ealra gesceafta.<sup>63</sup>

(Ascolta, o Signore! Tu sei stato generato da mia figlia su questa terra, per aiutare l’umanità. Ora è manifesto che tu sei Dio stesso e l’eterna origine di tutte le creature.)

Questo passo è straordinariamente denso di significati teologici e spirituali. All’interno della narrazione della discesa di Gesù agli inferi, il poeta evoca il mistero della creazione e vi ricollega il momento dell’incarnazione, entrambi eventi divini che manifestano la benevolenza di Dio per il genere umano. Specificando che Maria è ‘figlia di Eva’ (*þu fram minre dohtor, drihten, onwoce*, v. 437), si sottolinea come la Madre di Dio, che tradizionalmente ha il ruolo di intercedere in favore dei singoli peccatori, diviene così

<sup>63</sup> Krapp 1931, 149.

l'intermediaria per l'intera umanità.<sup>64</sup>

Dopo la processione dei patriarchi in Paradiso, Cristo pronuncia un lungo discorso che racchiude un *summa* della storia sacra, dalla creazione alla sua venuta sulla terra come uomo, alla Crocifissione, Resurrezione, Ascensione, per concludersi con la grande visione del Giudizio Finale. Ancora una volta, il poeta fonda l'impianto strutturale sull'equilibrio tra contrasti, qui affidato all'antitesi tra le ricompense per i beati e le punizioni dei dannati.

### 2.3. *Il poema Discesa agli inferi dell'Exeter Book*

Il poema *Discesa agli inferi* contenuto nell'Exeter Book (ai ff. 119v-121v) si divide in due parti, di cui la prima (vv. 1-23a) tratta della visita delle due Marie al sepolcro, la seconda (vv. 23-137) è ambientata negli inferi, dove Cristo è accolto da Giovanni Battista e dai patriarchi dell'Antico Testamento. Il titolo solitamente attribuito a questo poema nelle edizioni inglesi è *Descent into Hell* (che ha sostituito quello più antico di *The Harrowing of Hell*).<sup>65</sup> Tuttavia, è stato osservato come, in quest'opera, il tema della discesa agli inferi sia lambito solo marginalmente, tanto che – alla luce di analisi testuali più aggiornate – sono state formulate ipotesi di titoli che possano meglio corrispondere alla tematica trattata, come *Christ and John*, suggerito da Trask,<sup>66</sup> e più recentemente, *John the Baptist's Prayer*, proposto da M. R. Rambaran-Olm in uno studio ampio e accurato che presenta anche una nuova edizione e traduzione dell'opera.<sup>67</sup>

Dopo la visita al sepolcro delle due Marie, la cui fonte deve essere verosimilmente il vangelo di Marco (28:1-10),<sup>68</sup> segue un breve accenno alla resurrezione, e quindi la scena si sposta velo-

<sup>64</sup> Cfr. Tamburr 2007, 65.

<sup>65</sup> Krapp, Dobbie 1936, lxi e 219-223; Muir 2000, 341-353; Clayton 2013, 147-157.

<sup>66</sup> Trask 1971, 424.

<sup>67</sup> Rambaran-Olm 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Il Vangelo di Marco è l'unico a menzionare specificatamente la presenza di due donne alla tomba vuota.

cemente negli inferi, dove l'ingresso trionfale di Gesù è descritto con un linguaggio altisonante che risente degli stilemi della poesia eroica (vv. 33-43):

Fysde hine þa to fore frea moncynnes;  
 wolde heofona helm helle weallas  
 forbrecan ond forbygan, þære burge þrym  
 onginnan reafian, reþust ealra cyninga.  
 Ne rohte he to þære hilde helmberendra,  
 ne he byrnwigend to þam burggeatum  
 lædan ne wolde, ac þa locu feollan,  
 clustor of þam ceastrum; cyning in oþrad,  
 ealles folces fruma forð onette,  
 weoruda wuldorgiefa. Wræccan þrungon,  
 hwylc hyra þæt sygebearn geseon moste [...]<sup>69</sup>

(Allora il Signore dell'umanità si affrettò a mettersi in viaggio. Il protettore dei cieli voleva sfondare e demolire le mura dell'Inferno, il più giusto di tutti i re si accinse a impadronirsi della moltitudine della fortezza. Non gli importava [di avere] guerrieri con l'elmo per la battaglia, né avrebbe condotto guerrieri in cotta di maglia alle porte della roccaforte. Eppure subito caddero le serrature, le sbarre di quelle fortificazioni; il re entrò, il principe di tutto il popolo, dono glorioso delle moltitudini, si affrettò a proseguire. Gli esuli si fecero avanti, [affinché] ognuno di loro potesse vedere l'eroe vittorioso [...])

Cristo si avvicina rapidamente all'Inferno e ne distrugge le difese. I cancelli crollano e i patriarchi e i profeti, che a lungo hanno atteso la sua venuta, si accalcano per godere della vista del Signore. Il passo esalta l'impresa epica che Gesù compie senza muovere battaglia, facendo a meno delle armi o dell'appoggio di un esercito. Una

<sup>69</sup> Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 220.



invasione quasi pacifica, che sembra affidare solo alla luce divina l'espressione della sua schiacciante vittoria (vv. 53-55a):

Geseah he helle duru hædre scinan,  
þa þe longe ær bilocen wæron,  
beþeahhte mid þystre [...].<sup>70</sup>

(Egli vide le porte dell'Inferno brillare intensamente, che molto prima erano state chiuse, nascoste nell'oscurità [...])

Ad eccezione di questo passo, tuttavia, il ruolo di Gesù nel resto del poema è del tutto irrilevante: di fatto si mostra come una figura di contorno, relegata in posizione subalterna e di scarso spessore rispetto al personaggio di Giovanni Battista, il vero protagonista dell'opera, che pronuncia le quattro apostrofi liturgiche dirette a Gabriele, a Maria Vergine, alla città di Gerusalemme e al fiume Giordano.<sup>71</sup> Se i discorsi rivolti a Gabriele e Maria servono a introdurre i temi dell'incarnazione e della natività, le orazioni indirizzate a Gerusalemme e al Giordano creano un nesso con il mistero del battesimo,<sup>72</sup> che in questo poema, convergendo con la discesa di Gesù agli inferi, diventa un indispensabile strumento di salvezza e redenzione dell'uomo.

Mancano nel poema quelli che sono considerati elementi tradizionali della dottrina del *Descensus*: la lotta di Cristo contro Satana, il suo imprigionamento nei recessi dell'Inferno e la processione dei giusti in cielo. In passato, per tale ragione, oltre che per la cronologia alterata degli episodi della vita di Gesù, alcuni studiosi ritenevano che il poema fosse frammentario o caotico.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 220.

<sup>71</sup> Per l'articolazione in apostrofi liriche, il *Discesa agli inferi* si può confrontare con il *Cristo I*, anch'esso formato dal susseguirsi di una serie di liriche e inni sul tema della Natività, cfr. *supra*, nota 46.

<sup>72</sup> Per l'associazione di questa sezione del poema con il sacramento del Battesimo, cfr. Hill 1972 e Conner 1980.

<sup>73</sup> Per il dibattito sulla presunta incompletezza del poema, nonché sulla non convenzionale successione cronologica degli eventi della storia sacra in

In realtà, l'interesse del poeta è rivolto allo sviluppo lirico di alcuni dei misteri della vita di Cristo e della *historia salutis*, per i quali il racconto del *Descensus* funge solo da sfondo storico-teologico, come puntualizzato da Rambaran-Olm: "The departure from the apocryphal text is deliberate on the part of the poet who uses the scenario of Christ's Descent as a backdrop in order to present a message focused on the journey towards salvation".<sup>74</sup> Il viaggio di Gesù agli inferi diviene lo scenario dove ambientare una narrazione incentrata sul cammino verso la salvezza, che si esplica nelle parole e nelle azioni di Giovanni Battista, il precursore di Gesù sia in terra che nel mondo ultraterreno.

### 3. *Considerazioni conclusive*

L'analisi fin qui condotta ha permesso di evidenziare come il *Descensus ad Inferos* avesse assunto un ruolo preminente nella tradizione letteraria in inglese antico, e in particolare nelle opere in poesia. Il tema doveva essersi ben assimilato nella cultura dell'Inghilterra altomedievale, probabilmente anche in virtù dell'impronta eroico-bellica che ne costituiva una delle cifre più marcate.

Diversi sono i motivi del *Descensus* che attraversano in varia misura le rappresentazioni del tema attestate nella tradizione poetica anglosassone. Uno dei tratti più significativi della leggenda è rappresentato dalla luce abbagliante che illumina tutto il regno dell'Inferno al momento dell'arrivo di Gesù. Nel *Cristo e Satana*, quando Cristo irrompe potentemente nell'Ade, avanza attorniato da una *fægere leoht* (v. 387b), paragonabile solo alla luce radiosa che pervade il Paradiso. Parimenti, nel poema *Disce-*

*Discesa agli inferi*, si veda Trask 1971, Izydorzyc 1990, Rambaran-Olm 2014 e 2019. Secondo Krapp, Dobbie 1936, lxi: "This apparent incompleteness of the poem has caused many of the commentators to call it a fragment, but there is nothing in the text as it stands in the manuscript which would warrant our considering it other than as a complete poem, though it is perhaps somewhat unusual in idea and structure."

<sup>74</sup> Rambaran-Olm 2014, 57.

sa agli inferi dell'Exeter Book, il bagliore divino è l'unica arma di cui si serve il Figlio di Dio per sottomettere gli abitanti dell'Inferno. Anche nelle arti figurative il motivo della luce è centrale nella descrizione del *Descensus*: nel Salterio di Winchester contenuto nel ms London, BL, Cotton Nero C.iv,<sup>75</sup> l'illustrazione della discesa agli inferi (f. 12r) presenta nell'angolo superiore destro un sole sfavillante che illumina tutta la scena, quasi a voler raffigurare l'ingresso di Cristo come una inondazione di luce.<sup>76</sup>

L'elemento di luminosità risalta ancor di più dal contrasto con l'oscurità opprimente che avvolge l'oltretomba, rappresentato come una fortezza sotterranea buia e profonda, delimitata da alte mura e protetta da imponenti cancelli.<sup>77</sup> Nel *Cristo II*, la *feonda byrig* (v. 569a) è la roccaforte infernale dove dimoravano le schiere di Satana e nel *Cristo e Satana*, le *duru in helle* (v. 379b) sono scardinate violentemente da Cristo per liberare i giusti che erano tenuti in schiavitù negli anfratti più cupi dell'Inferno.

Un tema centrale del *Descensus* è indubbiamente l'annientamento di Satana che finisce per essere imprigionato da Cristo nell'abisso più profondo dell'Inferno, dove è destinato a rimanere incatenato in ceppi infuocati fino alla fine dei tempi. Questa immagine è presente nel capitolo della *Pantera*, dove è operato un parallelismo tra il drago, nemico della pantera, allegoria di Cristo, e l'*ealda feond* avvinto in legacci roventi nel fondo del baratro infernale. Nel *Cristo e Satana*, Lucifero è poi descritto come un'anima dolente che soffre a causa del suo allontanamento dalla felicità del paradiso. La rovina del demonio ad opera di un *Christus Victor* è inoltre ritratta nelle miniature dei manoscritti, come nel ms London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius C.vi, f. 14r,<sup>78</sup> in cui si vede in primo piano la figura massiccia di un

<sup>75</sup> Cfr. *supra*, nota 13.

<sup>76</sup> Tamburr 2007, 111.

<sup>77</sup> Molto probabilmente l'immagine dell'Inferno come prigione-fortezza chiusa da muri e porte robuste deriva originariamente da Mt 16:18: "Et ego dico tibi quia tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et portae inferi non praevalerunt adversus eam".

<sup>78</sup> Cfr. *supra*, nota 13.

Cristo che sovrasta l'intera scena, e con i piedi schiaccia il demone inerte e costretto alla resa.<sup>79</sup>

Ma il senso ultimo e profondo del *Decensus* è condensato nella dimensione salvifica dell'impresa di Cristo, che trova espressione nel mistero soteriologico della croce. Ecco che nell'*Elena* di Cynewulf, il *Decensus* è accostato al potere vittorioso della vera croce, il *sigores tacen* (v. 184b), sommo emblema del trionfo di Cristo contro Satana e del riscatto dei giusti. La salvezza dell'umanità che Cristo realizza con il suo estremo sacrificio sulla croce è compiuta con l'affrancamento dei patriarchi e dei profeti dell'Antico Testamento dalla schiavitù della morte, e che rappresenta un altro dei tratti fondamentali del *Decensus ad Inferos*. Nel passo conclusivo del *Sogno della croce*, Cristo è il re guerriero che, dopo aver soggiogato gli inferi, ascende al cielo guidando una processione di anime beate.

E ancora in *Discesa agli inferi*, l'irruzione di Gesù nell'Inferno fornisce la cornice teologica in cui l'anonimo autore sviluppa, in una sequenza rapsodica di inni e liriche, una narrazione di salvezza. Nella liberazione dei patriarchi dal giogo del demonio si inserisce anche il ruolo di Eva, che – supplicando Gesù di concederle il perdono per aver generato il peccato originale – insiste sulla discendenza di Maria dal suo seme. Il rapporto genealogico tra Eva e Maria ha un ruolo all'interno della dottrina del *Decensus*, come si evince dalla lettura dei vv. 437-440 del *Cristo e Satana*, nei quali si pongono in connessione i due momenti divini della creazione e della incarnazione, attraverso i quali si esplicita l'amore di Dio per l'umanità. Il discorso di Eva nel *Cristo e Satana* riecheggia quello analogo presente in *Blickling VII*, in cui l'omelista enfatizza la parentela tra le due figure femminili anche e soprattutto sul piano fisico, presentando Eva come l'*ancilla* di Dio che implora per ottenere la beatitudine celeste in virtù di questa sacra discendenza.

Il motivo del *Decensus* è inoltre interconnesso con la liturgia pasquale, che celebra la transizione di Cristo dalla morte

<sup>79</sup> Openshaw 1989, 19 e 32.

alla resurrezione e, di conseguenza, il passaggio per i cristiani a una nuova vita libera dal peccato e da ogni male. In tal senso, è evidente l'associazione tra la missione di Cristo agli inferi e il momento rituale della Pasqua nel *Guthlac B*, dove, attraverso la descrizione della malattia del santo, il poeta fa confluire simbolicamente il tempo della discesa e il tempo della Pasqua nel tempo della redenzione dell'umanità. La teologia del *Descensus* si configura come un archetipo per esprimere la salvezza concessa all'anima di Guthlac, il cui destino si assimila a quello delle anime dei giusti liberati da Gesù dopo la sua discesa agli inferi. Analogamente, in *Discesa agli inferi*, l'apostrofe liturgica rivolta da Giovanni Battista all'indirizzo del fiume Giordano rivela una connessione simbolica tra il *Descensus* e il rito del Battesimo, che, operando la rigenerazione dell'uomo nuovo nella fede di Cristo, si configura come un mezzo vitale per garantire la salvezza eterna, alla stessa stregua della missione redentrice di Gesù.<sup>80</sup>

Il racconto della discesa di Gesù nell'Ade si incrocia con la teologia dell'ascensione, come risulta evidente nel *Cristo II*. In quest'opera, Cynewulf, attingendo alla tradizione dei "salti" della missione di Gesù, inserisce un quinto "salto", facendolo coincidere proprio con l'episodio della discesa agli inferi, presentata come un atto bellico il cui apogeo coincide con la rovina delle schiere infernali.

Nella tradizione della poesia anglosassone, il *leitmotiv* che ritorna nelle tante manifestazioni del viaggio di Gesù agli inferi è dunque il tema della redenzione e della infinita misericordia di Dio. In tale contesto narrativo e tematico, il *Descensus ad Inferos* si configura come un evento fuori dal tempo, accaduto solo a beneficio degli uomini, configurandosi pertanto come sommo paradigma della redenzione.

In queste opere, infine, il momento del *Descensus ad Inferos* si connette con gli eventi escatologici della seconda venuta di Cristo e del Giudizio Universale, rappresentando una delle tappe

<sup>80</sup> Per l'associazione del *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* con il sacramento del battesimo e la Pasqua, cfr. Daniélou 1956.

fondamentali della *historia salutis* e soprattutto del destino finale dell'intero genere umano.

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WOLFGANG HAUBRICHS

‘FÜNFZEHN ZEICHEN’ VOR DEM  
WELTUNTERGANG: FRAU AVA KENNT SIE

In the beginning of the 11th century, Frau Ava († 1127), the first known authoress writing in German, composed a cycle of four Middle High German rhyme-poems, beginning with the life of the *praecursor Christi* Johannes Baptista, then dealing with the Life of Jesus, and continuing with the eschatological ‘Vita Antichristi’, the story of the final adversary of Christ, and ending with the events of Doomsday, when Jesus Christ will come back to judge the living and the dead. Since Carolingian times, there exists a legend, telling that before the last judgement fifteen signs will appear to announce the world’s end. In her narration of the last things Ava in principle follows the two oldest versions of the ‘Quindecim Signa’, first the version of Pseudo-Beda (about 820) and second, more intensively, the version contained in the ‘Historia Scholastica’ of Petrus Damiani († 1072). The systematic analysis of the sources shows that Ava runs an astonishingly independent arrangement and interpretation of the tradition, leading sometimes to an anti-aristocratic impetus. However, the main objective is the pastoral creation of a consciousness of all the griefs and sorrows, of all the misery which waits for the humans at the end of the times, especially for the unjusts and sinners. During the process of literarization of the last things the ego of the speaker just as the ‘we’ of the audience will be seized by fear. The function of the literary text is to pass the knowledge of the end and to achieve by that the conversion of all mankind.

*Meinem unvergessenen Lehrer  
Hans Eggerts (1907-1988)  
zugeeignet*

Frau Ava, die erste uns mit Namen bekannte deutschsprachige Dichterin,<sup>1</sup> verfasste am Anfang des 12. Jahrhunderts in frühmittelhochdeutscher Volkssprache (bairischer Färbung) einen Zyklus

<sup>1</sup> Zur Biographie der Autorin: Maurer 1965, II, 371-372; Papp 1978, 560-565; Schulze 1980, 1281-1283; Haug, Vollmann 1991, 1496; Vollmann-Profe 1994, 74-77; Vollmann-Profe 1996, 239-240; Doria 2003, 15-17, 24-26; Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, VII-X.

von vier in Reimpaaren<sup>2</sup> gehaltenen und aufeinander aufbauenden heilsgeschichtlichen Dichtungen.<sup>3</sup> Diese sind:

1. ‘Johannes’: das Leben des Vorläufers Christi (446 Kurzverse);
2. ‘Das Leben Jesu’ (2418 Kurzverse);<sup>4</sup>
3. ‘Der Antichrist’: Bericht über die ungerechte Herrschaft, die Taten und die Vernichtung des endzeitlichen Widersachers Christi (118 Kurzverse);<sup>5</sup>
4. ‘Das Jüngste Gericht’: Bericht von der erneuten Parusie Christi, der Auferstehung der Toten und ihrer Verdammung zu ewigen Höllenstrafen oder Erlösung zu ewigem Leben im Paradies (406 Kurzverse).

Nach eigener Angabe setzt der Zyklus (von insgesamt 3388 Kurzversen) ein mit dem Ende des alten Bundes oder Gesetzes Mose (v. 3f.): *wie die zit aneviench, daz die alte ê zergiench* (wie die Zeit anfang, in der das alte Gesetz zerbrach) und endet mit der Wiederkunft Christi, dem neuen Adventus. Es handelt sich also um die Erzählung der heilsgeschichtlichen Eckpunkte in der Geschichte des neuen, von Christus gegründeten Bundes: Verheißung in Johannes – Erlösung durch Christus – Kampf gegen den letzten Widersacher – Gericht und ewiges Leben der Gerechten.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Die in seiner Edition (s. Anm. 3) von Friedrich Maurer (I, 27-30) begründete These einer strophischen Form der Ava-Dichtungen hat sich in der Forschung nicht durchsetzen können.

<sup>3</sup> Editionen: Maurer 1965, II, 382-513; Schacks 1986; Haug, Vollmann 1991, 728-751 (nur das ‘Jüngste Gericht’); Vollmann-Profe 1996 (nur das ‘Jüngste Gericht’); Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014. Doria 2003 mit dem Titel *Frau Ava. Forschungsbericht, Kommentar und italienische Übersetzung* enthält in Wahrheit nur das ‘Jüngste Gericht’ (nach Schacks 1986). Der “Kommentar” ist ein Glossar.

<sup>4</sup> Das ‘Leben Jesu’ schließt zusätzlich mit einer abgetrennten Auslegung der ‘Sieben Gaben des Heiligen Geistes’.

<sup>5</sup> Die Darstellung steht unter dem Einfluss des wahrscheinlich im dritten Viertel des 11. Jahrhunderts (gewiss aber vor 1122) in Österreich entstandenen Biblepos der ‘Altdeutschen Genesis’ (v. 5668-5741). Vgl. Hennig 1978, 279-284; Vollmann-Profe 1994, 65.

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, XI: “Die Heilsgeschichte als übergeordnetes Deutungsmuster des christlichen Glaubens kann man [...] als die Klammer



Vom Leben der Autorin wissen wir nicht viel. Am Ende ihres Zyklus (‘Jüngstes Gericht’, v. 393-406) sagt sie selbst, dass sie Mutter zweier Söhne (wohl Kleriker) war, die sie exegetisch beraten haben. Von ihnen war der eine bei Vollendung des Werks schon verstorben. Abschließend bittet sie – wie in der Zeit nicht ungewöhnlich – diejenigen, die das „Buch“ (vor)lesen, um Fürbitte für den verstorbenen und den lebenden Sohn und schließlich für die Autorin, die mit dem letzten Wort, in stolzer *humilitas*, ihren Namen nennt:<sup>7</sup>

Dizze buoch dichtete  
 zweier chinde muoter.  
 diu sageten ir disen sin,  
 michel mandunge was under in.  
 der muoter waren diu chint liep,  
 der eine von der werlt sciet.  
 nu bitte ich iuch gemeine,  
 michel und chleine,  
 swer dize buoch lese,  
 daz er siner sele gnaden wunskende wese.  
 umbe den einen, der noch lebet  
 unde er in den arbeiten strebet,  
 dem wunsket gnaden  
 und der muoter, daz ist AVA.

(Dieses Buch dichtete die Mutter zweier Söhne, die berieten sie beim Verständnis des Sinns [der Schriften], in großer Freude wirkten sie zusammen. Die Mutter liebte ihre Kinder, von denen eines aus der Welt schied. Nun bitte ich euch alle, Große und Kleine, dass, wer immer dieses Buch lese oder vorlese, er dessen Seele Gnade wünschen möge. Und auch dem einen, der noch lebt und der sich in Mühen windet, erbittet Gnade, und der Mutter, die heißt Ava.)

begreifen, die den Gedichtzyklus zusammenhält“.

<sup>7</sup> Man beachte auch, wie der Gebetswunsch für den verstorbenen Sohn – sicherlich intentional – mit einem überlangen Vers von 13 Silben bedacht wird.

In den Annalen des niederösterreichischen Klosters Melk an der Donau und in diesem Geschichtswerk verwandten Chroniken dieses Raumes wird zum Jahre 1127 der Tod einer *Ava inclusa*, einer bei einem Kloster in einer Zelle eingeschlossenen Religiösen, oft waren das Witwen, vermerkt.<sup>8</sup> Einen solchen Eintrag (und hier gleich mehrere) erhielten nur Persönlichkeiten, die in ihrer Zeit im österreichischen Kloster- und Kirchenraum von Bedeutung waren – so dass die Gleichsetzung mit der geistlichen Dichterin Ava naheliegt und von der Forschung allgemein als “sehr wahrscheinlich” angesehen wird,<sup>9</sup> wofür auch das im Werk fassbare Bildungsniveau der Autorin sowie auch die Überlieferung in der berühmten, in Österreich geschriebenen Vorauer Sammelhandschrift frühmittelhochdeutscher Texte sprechen. Nur sie hat die autobiographischen Schlussverse bewahrt.

Für Ava ist die Kenntnis volkssprachiger, vor allem in Österreich entstandener Dichtung – wie etwa der ‘Altdeutschen Genesis’ – nachzuweisen. Vor allem aber finden sich bei ihr auch Kenntnisse und Reflexe zeitgenössischer Theologie, Katechese, Liturgie, Predigt, Perikopen, Apokryphen und Endzeitschriften, die freilich auch auf die von ihr selbst angesprochene Deutungsarbeit (*sin*) ihrer Söhne zurückgehen können.<sup>10</sup>

Frau Avas Dichtungen sind in zwei Handschriften überliefert:

1. Vora (A, Steiermark), Stiftsbibliothek cod. 276 (4. Viertel des 12. Jh.s., donauländisch nach sprachlich diversen Vorlagen),

<sup>8</sup> ‘Annales Mellicenses’, MGH SS IX (1851), 502.

<sup>9</sup> Vollmann-Profe 1994, 75; Vollmann-Profe 1996, 240. Zu Recht betonen allerdings Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, VII-VIII, dass letzte Sicherheit für die Identifizierung nicht zu erzielen ist, doch auch, “dass der Erwerb und die weitere Vertiefung der religiösen und literarischen Bildung, die aus Avas Werk spricht, zu ihrer Zeit wohl am wahrscheinlichsten in einem klösterlichen Umfeld erfolgen konnte”. Vgl. auch Arnold 1989, 724.

<sup>10</sup> Vgl. Stein 1976, 24; Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, VII: “Neben einer innigen Vertrautheit mit dem Kirchenjahr und liturgischen Texten sowie biblischen und apokryphen Schriften verraten die Gedichte auch ein gewisses Maß an Lateinkenntnissen und möglicherweise auch die Rezeption verschiedener geistlicher Dichtungen”.

- fol. 114v-123r (ohne den ‘Johannes’);<sup>11</sup>
2. Görlitz (D, Sachsen), Bibliothek der Oberlausitzischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, cod. 10, fol. 1r-24r (14. Jh., bebildert, der Sprache nach bairisch), verschollen (ohne die autobiographischen Schlussverse).<sup>12</sup>

Der letzte Teil ihres heilsgeschichtlichen Zyklus, der um die Erlösung der Menschen, das Ende der Welt, die Scheidung der Menschheit in Gerechte und Verdammte im ‘Jüngsten Gericht’ und die Schaffung einer neuen, ewigen Welt kreist, ist in drei Abschnitten organisiert:

1. ‘Die fünfzehn Zeichen’, die das Weltende und die Wiederkunft des Herrn ankündigen (v. 1-162);
2. Parusie und Gericht Christi (v. 163-326);
3. *Jubileus, daz guote wunnejar* – Paradies und ewiges Leben (v. 327-392).

Da es hier um das Wissen Avas und ihre eigenständige Interpretation der Vorzeichen vor dem Weltende innerhalb des Werkkontextes und schließlich um die intentionale Funktion dieser Interpretation im Bezug zu ihren Adressaten geht, sei als Erstes der Text des ersten Teiles des ‘Jüngsten Gericht’ (mit einer Übersetzung) samt Quellenanalyse vorgestellt.<sup>13</sup> Dabei ist für die Quellen

<sup>11</sup> Vgl. Kienast 1937, 2-27; Menhardt 1956, 429-430; Gärtner 1999; Doria 2003, 20-23; Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, XVIII. Faksimile der Vorauer Hs.: Polheim 1958. Inzwischen auch vollständig digital zugänglich über UB Heidelberg: < [https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/stav\\_ms276](https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/stav_ms276) (letzter Zugriff: 15.07.2024)

<sup>12</sup> Vgl. Helm 1899, 90-92; Kienast 1937, 2-27; Menhardt 1959, 111-115; Gärtner 1999; Doria 2003, 20-23; Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, XIX.

<sup>13</sup> Die Textfassung richtet sich im Wesentlichen (bei Bevorzugung einer nichtstrophischen Form) nach der maßgeblichen Edition von Maurer 1965 unter Berücksichtigung von Schacks 1986, Haug, Vollmann 1991, Vollmann-Profe 1996 und Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014. Für die Übersetzung wurden Haug, Vollmann 1991, Vollmann-Profe 1996 und Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014 mit herangezogen. Die Gliederung erfolgt – in römischer Zählung – aus praktischen Gründen nach den 15 Tagen, in denen sich die Zeichen vollziehen.

der Frau Ava in diesem Abschnitt ihrer Dichtung<sup>14</sup> das nicht ganz einhellige und teilweise undifferenzierte Resultat der bisherigen Forschung<sup>15</sup> zu bestätigen, dass ihre Version den beiden ältesten Fassungen der ‘Quindecim signa’ nahesteht, der aus insularem Milieu stammenden Fassung PB des Pseudo-Beda (nach 820)<sup>16</sup> und – noch intensiver – der Fassung PD aus der ‘Historia scholastica’ des Petrus Damiani († 1072).<sup>17</sup> Doch wird sich erweisen, dass Ava ihr eigenes Arrangement des in den Quellen Vorgefundenen mit bemerkenswerter Selbständigkeit betrieb:<sup>18</sup>

Vorrede (v. 1-14)  
 Nu sol ich rede errechen  
 vil vorhtlichen  
 von dem jungisten tage,

<sup>14</sup> Literatur zu Typen und Versionen der ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ und der Quellenanalyse: Michaelis de Vasconcellos 1870; Nölle 1879; Grau 1908; Sandison 1910; Heist 1952; Schmale-Ott 1954/55; Greinemann 1968; Kursawa 1976; Eggers 1980; Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 59-67; Prica 2008, 83; Wagner 2016, 53-60.

<sup>15</sup> Vgl. Nölle 1879; Grau 1908, 261ff.; Kienast 1940, 102-104; Greinemann 1968, 166-180; Masser 1969, 32-46, 126-143; Papp 1978, 561-562; Eggers 1980, 1017; Schacks 1986, 371; Doria 2003, 20-23. Die Meinung von Haug, Vollmann 1991, 1499, “die Version [...], die Ava bietet, lässt sich an keine dieser Leitformen anschließen” (ähnlich Vollmann-Profe 1996, 240), ist zumindest missverständlich; problematisch ist es auch, wie es Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, 193 tun, die Ähnlichkeit zur Version des späteren Petrus Comestor zu akzentuieren, der selbst eng von Pseudo-Beda abhängt. Doria 2003, 39 glaubt wiederum im Anschluss an Kienast 1937 und Greinemann 1968, dass eine lateinische Mischredaktion benutzt wurde, wovon sich aber anscheinend keine Spur erhalten hat.

<sup>16</sup> Zu Pseudo-Beda (PB), ‘Quindecim signa quindecim dierum ante diem iudicii’ s. Nölle 1879, 424-425; Lapidge 1998, 3-6, 9-11; Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 59-61; Wagner 2016, 53-54, 221-226.

<sup>17</sup> Zu Petrus Damiani (PD) ‘De novissimis et Antichristo’ s. Edition: Reindel 1989, 20-23 Nr. 92. Vgl. Grau 1908, 269-271; Sandison 1910, 73-75; Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 61-63; Wagner 2016, 53, 273; ferner Lohmer 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Vgl. Greinemann 1968, 7, 48-49; Bjørnskau 2000, 215; Doria 2003, 33; Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, XVI; ferner Hintz 2000 mit einer rezeptionsorientierten Interpretation der Erzählung.

als ich vernomen habe,  
 unde von der ewigen corone,  
 die got gibet ze lone  
 swelhe wole gestriten  
 an dem jungisten zite.  
 Finfzehen zeichen gescehent,  
 so die wisten jehent.  
 wir nevernamen nie niht mere  
 von so bitterme sere.  
 so bibenet allez daz der ist,  
 so nahet uns der heilige Crist.

(Nun muss ich in großer Furcht sprechen vom Jüngsten Tage, so wie ich es vernommen habe, und von der ewigen Krone, die Gott denen zum Lohn gibt, die sich in diesem letzten Zeitalter eifrig und gut bemüht haben. Fünfzehn Zeichen werden sich ereignen, wie es die Weisesten [voraus]sagen. Niemals haben wir von größerem, nie von solch bitterem Leide gehört. Dann erbebt alles, was existiert, wenn der heilige Christ uns naht.)

PB: *Quindecim signa quindecim dierum ante diem iudicii, inuenit Hieronymus in annalibus*

*Hebraeorum.*

PD: *Illud tamen, quod de quindecim signis totidem dierum diem iudicii praecedentium beatum Yeronimum referre didicimus, his eisdem verbis inserere non superfluum iudicamus. Quibus profecto verbis sicut nec auctoritatis robur adscribimus, ita nec fidem penitus denegamus. Res ergo sicut ad nos pervenit, huic stilo se simpliciter inserat, ut antiquis etiam Hebraeorum populis, qui divini iudicii terror increverit, ex eorum paginis innotescat.*

Die Berufung auf die Autorität des Hieronymus und die Überlieferung der Hebräer fehlt in A. Doch wird eine durch *sapientes* legitimierte Tradition in v. 10 angedeutet.

Nr. I (v. 15-20)

An dem ersten tage,  
 so hebet sich diu ungehabe,<sup>19</sup>  
 so wirt daz zeichen da ze stunt:  
 diu wazer smiegent sich an den grunt.  
 vierzech clafter iz in get,  
 einen tach iz also gestet.

(Am ersten Tag beginnt das jammervolle Geschehen, das Zeichen zeigt sich sofort: Die Wasser ziehen sich zusammen auf dem [Meeres]Grund. Vierzig Klafter tief sinken sie ein, einen ganzen Tag lang bleiben sie so.)

PB 1: ... *eriget se mare in altum quadraginta cubitis, super altitudines montium, et erit quasi murus, et amnes similiter.*

PD 1: ... *Maria omnia in altitudinem quindecim cubitorum exaltabuntur super montes excelsos, orbem terre non affligent, sed sicut muri equora stabunt.*

A geht in der Maßangabe – entgegen sonstiger Gewohnheit – mit PB (40 *cubiti* = Ellen), während PD nur 15 *cubiti* kennt, übersetzt aber das lateinische Maß mit *clafter*, was auch anderswo bezeugt ist. Da ein Klafter ca. 6 Fuß = 1,7 Meter umfasste (ursprünglich das Maß der ausgespannten Arme eines Menschen), käme man bei 40 Klafter auf ca. 68 Meter *altitudo* der Wasserwand.<sup>20</sup> Übersetzt man *cubitus* – wie sonst üblich – mit ‘Elle’ = ca. 0,5 bis 0,8 Meter, käme man bei 40 *cubiti* auf maximal 32 Meter.<sup>21</sup> Für die

<sup>19</sup> *ungehabe* in G; Schacks 1986 hat mit V *diu chlage*, was ebenfalls einen guten Sinn gibt und von IV,2 gestützt wird.

<sup>20</sup> Einige Glossen des 9. bis 12. Jahrhunderts (Schützeichel 2004, V, 233) übersetzen *cubitus* ‘Elle’ mit *clafdra*, *clafdera* ‘Klafter’; eine Glosse des 9. Jahrhunderts (Codex Sang. 283) bietet *claftera* für *passus* ‘Schritt’, mit dem charakteristischen Zusatz *sicut potest brachia ostendere*. Vgl. Lexer 1872/78, I, 1598; DWB V (1873) 902-904; Kluge, Seebold 2011, 494; EWA V, 2014, 556-558.

<sup>21</sup> *Elinamez* ‘Elle’ findet sich nur im ahd. Abrogans-Wörterbuch als

15 cubiti von PD darf als Vorbild die Sintflut der Genesis (Gen. 7,8) angesehen werden, in der das Wasser bis zu 15 Ellen über die höchsten Berge ging. Die in PB dafür eingesetzte Zahl 40 könnte von den im gleichen biblischen Geschehen bedeutungsvollen “40 Tagen und Nächten”, in denen sich die Flut vollzieht, angeregt sein.

In PB und PD beziehen sich allerdings *altus*, *altitudo* klar auf die Höhe, also auf einen Wasseranstieg, wie der Bezug auf die *montes (excelsos)* und der Vergleich mit einer Mauer, einer Wasserwand deutlich macht. Hier hat A – mit einem möglichen Verständnis von lat. *altus* als ‘tief’ – das Zeichen Nr. 1 kräftig und bewusst uminterpretiert, vermutlich, um in den ersten drei, auf das Wasser bezüglichen *signa* eine logische Reihenfolge zu erreichen: Versinken – Wiederaufrichten – Aufwärtsfließen des Wassers.

II (v. 21-30)

An dem anderen tage,  
 daz sule wir iu sagen,  
 so get iz aver wider uz,  
 vil hohe leinet iz sich wider uf.  
 so biginnet iz bellen  
 mit michelen wellen,  
 daz iz alle die horent,  
 die den sin dare cherent.  
 uber elliu die riche,  
 so stet iz vorhtlichen.

(Am zweiten Tage, das müssen wir euch sagen, dringt es wieder hervor, sehr hoch richtet es sich wieder auf. Es beginnt zu rauschen mit großen Wellen, so dass es alle hören, die ihren Sinn darauf richten. Über alle Lande verbreitet es Furcht.)

Übersetzung von *cubitum*; *elinbogo* für *cubitus* in anderen Glossen; *elinlih* ‘eine Elle lang’ für *cubitalis* ebenfalls als Glosse. Vgl. EWA II, 1998, 1049; Schützeichel 2004, II, 422-424.

PB 2: ... *descendent usque ad ima, ita ut summitas eorum uix conspici possit.*

PD 2: ... *Omnia equora prosternuntur in imum profundi ita, ut vix queant humanis obtutibus conspici.*

A korrespondiert im Kerngeschehen, dem Zurückfließen des Wassers, mit PB und PD, hat aber nicht das Motiv der Quasi-Unsichtbarkeit des Meeresspiegels, das sich ja erst aus dem Rückfluss des zuvor, im ersten Zeichen, versunkenen Wassers ergibt. Dagegen hat A die Reihenfolge der ersten beiden Zeichen gewissermaßen umgekehrt. Avas Text betont auch selbständig den auditiven Eindruck des Geschehens, das Rauschen und Tosen des Wassers, das die universale Furcht der Menschen begründet. Hierzu ist das Christus-Wort Lc. 21,25ff. zu vergleichen: *Et erunt signa in sole et luna et stellis et in terris pressura gentium prae confusione sonitus maris et fluctuum arescentibus hominibus prae timore et expectatione quae superveniunt universo orbi ...* (Und es werden Zeichen geschehen an Sonne und Mond und Sternen; und auf Erden wird den Menschen bange werden vor dem Brausen des Meeres und der Wogen, und die Menschen werden verschmachten vor Furcht und in Erwartung der Dinge, die den ganzen Erdkreis überkommen werden).

III (v. 31-38)

An dem driten tage,  
 also ich vernomen habe,  
 so wider fliuzet ob der erde  
 daz wazer al ze berge.  
 wider get im der stram,  
 daz sihet wip unde man.  
 so truret allez daz der ist,  
 wande daz urteile nahen ist.

(Am dritten Tage fließt, wie ich vernommen habe, alles Wasser



auf der Erde wieder aufwärts. Die Strömung kehrt sich um,<sup>22</sup> das sehen alle Menschen. So fallen alle in Betrübniß, die hier leben, denn das Gericht ist nahe.)

PB 3: ... *erunt in aequalitate, sicut ab exordio.*

PD 3: ... *Maria omnia redigentur in antiquum statum, qualiter ab exordio creata fuerunt.*

A korrespondiert nur im Grundgeschehen mit PB und PD, betont dagegen den visuellen Aspekt, den die ungebärdigen Wasser bieten und der die universale Betrübniß der Menschen begründet. Frau Ava geht über das in PB und PD berichtete Zurückfließen der Gewässer auf ihren Normalstand hinaus, wohl weil das Normale ja eigentlich keine apokalyptische Dimension hat: “Für die doch eigentlich beabsichtigte furchterregende Darstellung der Schreckenisse der Endzeit ist das ... ein völlig unergiebigem Schritt, dramatischer Leerlauf”. Frau Ava deutet zur Steigerung des Schreckens das dritte Zeichen um: Die “Umkehrung des natürlichen Flusslaufes und damit des Kreislaufes des Wassers soll zeigen, dass das Jüngste Gericht mitsamt seinen Vorläufern *contra naturae legem* ist und die Gesetze der Natur aufgehoben sind”.<sup>23</sup>

IV (v. 39-46)

An dem vierden tage  
so hevet sich diu chlage,  
so hevet sich von grunde  
viske unde allez merwunder.  
ob dem mere si vehtent,  
vil lute si brahtent.  
so wirt des luzel rat  
swaz flozen unde grat hat.

<sup>22</sup> Die Umkehrung des Wasserlaufes stammt nach Kursawa 1976, 286-287 aus der Antichrist-Vita.

<sup>23</sup> Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 88-89.

(Am vierten Tag erhebt sich laute Klage, da steigen auf vom Grunde [des Meeres] Fische und alle Meeresungeheuer. Auf dem Meere streiten sie, überlaut brüllen sie. Es gibt keine Rettung für alle die, die Flossen und Gräten besitzen.)

PB 4: ... *piscēs et omnes beluae marinae, et congregabantur super aquas et dabunt uoces et gemitus, quarum significationem nemo scit nisi Deus.*

PD 4: ... *Belue omnes et omnia, quae moventur in aquis marinis, congregantur et levantur supra pelagus more contentionis invicem mugientes et rugientes; nescient homines, quid cantent vel quid cogitent, sed tantum scit Deus, cui omnia vivunt officio regendi.*

A folgt im wesentlichen PD, wovon speziell auch die Wendung *hevet sich von grunde* als Übersetzung von *levantur supra pelagus* Zeugnis ablegt. Die am Ende von PB und PD stehende Aussage, dass nur Gott die Kommunikation der Meereswesen in ihrer Bedeutung verstehen kann (vgl. Nr. IX PD 9), wird von A nicht aufgegriffen.

PD Zwischentext: *Haec quattuor signa pelagi sunt et tria sequentia aeris et etheris sunt.*

V (v. 47-58)

An dem vinfte tage  
 so wirt ein mere chlage.  
 so hevet sich daz gevugele,  
 daz e flouch under himele  
 ufen daz gevilde,  
 iz si zam oder wilde.  
 si wuofent unde weinent  
 mit michelem gescreie.  
 si bizzent unde chrouwent,  
 ein ander si houwent.

des tages harte zergat,  
swaz vettech und chla hat.

(Am fünften Tage erhebt sich noch größere Klage. Es begeben sich die Vögel, die vordem unter dem Himmel flogen, auf die Felder, seien sie nun zahm oder wild. Sie jammern und weinen unter großem Geschrei. Sie beißen und kratzen sich, sie schlagen einander. An diesem Tag geht [alles] ganz zugrunde, was Gefieder und Klauen trägt.)

PB: keine Parallele [PB 5 hat indessen: ... *ardebunt ipsae aquae ab ortu suo usque ad occasum*]

PD 5: ... *Omnia volatilia celi contionabuntur in campis, unumquodque genus in ordine suo; eedem volucres invicem colloquentes erunt et plorantes, non gustantes non bibentes adventum iudicis timentes.*

A ist eindeutig von PD abhängig, doch nimmt A die Formulierung, dass die Vögel weder speisen noch trinken (also fasten), wie in Nr. XII nicht auf, ebenso nicht das Motiv, dass sie miteinander reden,<sup>24</sup> verstärkt aber die Bildlichkeit beim Kampf der Tiere und fügt – analog Nr. IV,7f. – hinzu, dass sie an diesem Tag zugrunde gehen.

VI (v. 59-66)

So chumet vil rehte  
mit sere tach der sehste.  
der himel sich verwandelot,  
er wirt tunchel unde rot.  
an dem manen unde an dem sunnen

<sup>24</sup> In PD reden die Vögel miteinander, weinen und fasten *adventum iudicis timentes*, so dass man daraus schließen muss, dass sie (wie in der Sage vom Vogel Phoenix) um das Ende der Welt und das kommende Weltgericht wissen (vgl. u. Nr. XII), was eben in A völlig zugunsten des ruinösen und tödlichen Kampfes eliminiert wird. Vgl. dazu Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 119.

siht man michel wunder.  
 der tach wirt also vorhtlich,  
 in die erde bergen si sich.

(So kommt alsbald mit Leid der sechste Tag. Der Himmel verwandelt sich, er färbt sich dunkel und rot. An Mond und Sonne sind große Wunder zu sehen. Der Tag wird so schrecklich, dass sie [die Menschen] sich in der Erde verkriechen.)

PB: keine Parallele [PB 6 hat indessen: ... *omnes herbae et arbores sanguineum rorem dabunt*]. Vgl. unten PD 10.

PD 6: *Flumina ignea ab occasu solis surgent contra faciem firmamenti usque ad ortum currentia.*

Die Aussage über die Verwandlung des Himmels in A dürfte von den *flumina ignea* bei PD angeregt sein, die vom Sonnenuntergang [Westen] bis zu Sonnenaufgang [Osten] laufen; A verstärkt diesen Zug noch durch eine Notiz über Wunderzeichen, die sich an Mond und Sonne vollziehen.<sup>25</sup> Der in A präsenste Rückzug unter die Erde dürfte seinen Ursprung aus PB 11 haben, wo die Menschen *exibunt de cauernis suis* (aus ihren Höhlen hervorkommen werden).

VII (v. 67-80)

An dem sibenten tage  
 so wirt der luft al enwage,  
 so vihtet an daz trum<sup>26</sup>  
 die winde an daz firmament.

<sup>25</sup> Hierzu ist zu vgl. Lc. 21,25: *Et erunt signa in sole et luna et stellis ...* In zeitgenössischen Chroniken werden kosmische Zeichen neben den auch in A präsenten Stürmen, Fluten, Donnerschlägen und Blitzen öfter erwähnt, so zum Jahre 1164 *erunt signa in sole et luna*, aber auch Meeresfluten, Stürme und Blitze in den 'Pöhlde Annalen' des 12. Jahrhunderts: 'Annales Palidenses', MGH SS XVI (1859), 92-93. Vgl. Wagner 2016, 233-234.

<sup>26</sup> Kienast 1940, 102 vergleicht für die räumliche Bedeutung von *trum* auch Avas 'Leben Jesu', v. 2241; vgl. ferner Vollmann-Profe 1996, 241.

diu wazer dar widere  
 diezint<sup>27</sup> under dem himele.  
 so horet man diche  
 doner unde bliche.  
 so grimmet sich ze ware  
 der arme suntare,  
 deme sin gewizzede daz saget,  
 daz er gotes hulde niene habet.

(Am siebten Tage setzt sich die Luft in wilde Bewegung, treibt bis ans Ende [der Welt], die Winde bis ans Himmelsfirmament.<sup>28</sup> Die Wasser hingegen toben unter dem Himmel. Oft hört man Donnerschlag und Blitze. Darüber grämt sich zurecht der arme Sünder, dem sein Gewissen sagt, dass er Gottes Huld verspielt hat.)

PB: keine Parallele [PB 7 hat indessen: ... *omnia aedificia destruentur*]

PD 7: ... *Errantia sidera et stationaria omnia spargent ex se igneas comas, qualiter in cometis apparet* ...

PD ist in A stark uminterpretiert und damit für die volkssprachigen Laienrezipienten fasslicher gemacht worden: Das Stürmen der Winde und das Rauschen der Wasser sind neu eingeführt worden; Donner und Blitze dürften ein Reflex der von den Wandel- und Fixsternen ausgehenden kometenartigen feurigen Schweife (*comae*) in PD 7 sein. Blitz und Donner gehören aber auch samt Winden und Stürmen zum Arsenal der apokalypti-

<sup>27</sup> *diezint* ist berechtigte Konjektur von Kienast 1940, 102 (vgl. Maurer 1965, Schacks 1986 und Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014) – gegen V *diu sint* und G *di da sint*, die hier einen gemeinsamen Fehler haben.

<sup>28</sup> Das *firmamentum* bezeichnet nach zeitgenössischer Anschauung den Fixsternhimmel oberhalb der Planetensphäre (Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 133). Kienast 1940, 102 interpretiert: “Der Gedanke ist: Der Himmel kämpft gegen die Winde”. Vollmann-Profe 1996, 241: “Am siebenten Tag droht also gleichsam »der Himmel einzufallen«“.

schen Vorstellungen des Neuen Testaments (Apc. 7,1; 16, 17f.).<sup>29</sup> Petrus Comestor zitiert in seiner Version der 15 Zeichen zusätzlich ein auf die Wiederkunft Christi bezügliches Jesus-Wort (vgl. Mt. 24,27): *Sicut fulgur exit ab oriente et paret usque in occidentem, sic erit adventus filii hominis, subitus scilicet et coruscus* ... (Wie der Blitzstrahl vom Osten ausgeht und bis in den Westen scheint, so wird die Ankunft des Menschensohns sein, plötzlich wie ein Blitz ...).<sup>30</sup>

PD Zwischentext [verstümmelt?]: ... *et signum orbis et eius habitatoribus*. Der Rest dieses Einschubs dürfte eine weitere Klassifikation der folgenden, den Erdkreis und seine Bewohner betreffenden *signa* repräsentieren.

#### VIII (v. 81-88)

An dem ahtoden tage  
so wirt diu erde elliu enwage.  
an der stunde  
si erweget sich von grunde.  
so nemach niwiht des gestan,  
des uf der erde sol gan.  
so truret wip unde man,  
si nemach getrosten nieman.

(Am achten Tage gerät die ganze Erde in Bewegung. Nun schwankt sie von Grund auf. So kann nichts stehenbleiben, was auf der Erde gehen will. Nun verfallen alle Menschen in Betrübnis, niemand kann sie trösten.)

PB 9: ... *erit terraemotus, qualis non fuit ab initio mundi*.

PD 8: ... *Terremotus erit magnus ita, ut nullus homo stare possit aut ullum animal, sed solo sternentur omnia*.

<sup>29</sup> Vgl. Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 129; Wagner 2016, 95-98.

<sup>30</sup> Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 65.

A ist klar von PD abhängig, wo für das Erdbeben des achten Tages betont wird, dass kein Mensch ihm standhalten kann, vielmehr alle auf den Boden hingestreckt werden.<sup>31</sup>

IX (v. 89-96)

An dem niunten tage,  
 also ich vernomen habe,  
 brestent diu steine,  
 daz gescihet vor dem urteile.  
 si chlibent sich envieren,  
 so zeigt iz allez sciere;  
 daz vurhtet wip unde man  
 und swer iht<sup>32</sup> versten chan.

(Am neunten Tage, so habe ich’s vernommen, bersten die Steine, das geschieht vor dem Gericht. Sie spalten sich in vier Teile, rasch geschieht dies alles; das erfüllt mit Furcht alle Menschen, sofern jemand [noch] ein wenig bei Verstand ist.)

PB 8: ... *debellabunt petrae adinuicem, et unaquaeque in tres partes se diuidet, et unaquaeque pars collidet adversus alteram.*

PD 9: ... *Omnes lapides tam magni quam parvi scindentur in quatuor partes, unaquaeque pars collidet alteram partem nescietque ullus homo sonum illum, nisi solus Deus.*

A folgt, besonders mit der Spaltung der Steine in vier Teile, PD (anstatt drei in PB), lässt jedoch das Motiv der Kollision der Steinteile (PB und PD) aus, ebenso die rätselhafte Rede von dem dadurch erzeugten Ton, den nur Gott verstehe (PD; vgl. dazu Nr. IV PD 4).

<sup>31</sup> Vgl. für die Erdbeben in der Apokalypse des Johannes (z.B. Apc. 16,18, von dem PB abhängig ist) Wagner 2016, 59.

<sup>32</sup> G *sich iht* (danach Kienast und Maurer 1965); in V fehlt *sich* (danach wohl zu Recht: Schacks 1986).

X (v. 97-104)

An dem zehenten tage,  
vil luzel sul wir daz chlagen,  
so zevallent die burge,  
die durch ruom geworht wurden.  
berge unde veste  
daz muoz allez zebresten.  
so ist got ze ware  
ein rehter ebenare.

(Am zehnten Tage, das brauchen wir nur wenig zu beklagen, zerfallen die Burgen, die um des Ruhmes willen erbaut wurden.<sup>33</sup> Berge und ihre Festungen, die müssen alle zerbrechen. So ist Gott wahrlich ein rechter Gleichmacher.)

PB 7 (?): ... *omnia aedificia destruentur*.

PD 11 (?): ... *Omnes montes et colles et omnia edificia humana antea constructa in pulverem redigentur*. [PD 10 hat indessen: ... *Omnia ligna silvarum et olera herbarum sanguineum fluent rorem*].

A korrespondiert mit PD 11 in der Zerstörung auch der Berge, setzt aber einen ganz eigenen Akzent, indem statt allgemein *aedificia* speziell Burgen und Festungen zerstört werden, was man nicht beklagen müsse. Triumphierend stellt der Passus schließlich fest, dass sich Gott in diesem Zeichen als wahrer *ebenaere* erweise.<sup>34</sup> A gewinnt damit geradezu einen antiaristokratischen Affekt.

<sup>33</sup> Dass hier mit mhd. *burge* nicht ‘Städte’ gemeint sind, sondern aus Prestigegründen gebaute Bergfestungen gemeint sind, geht aus dem Verweis auf den *ruom* hervor, der topischer Charakterisierung der Adelsburgen als Zeichen der *superbia* entspricht. Vgl. dazu Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 132; ferner Hintz 2000, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Zu Gott (bzw. dem Tod) als *ebenaere* in der volkssprachigen Tradition des Hochmittelalters vgl. Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 132-133.



XI (V. 105-118)

An deme einleften tage,  
 des sul wir unsich wol gehalten,  
 so zergert vil sciere,  
 da diu werlt mit ist gezieret:  
 golt unde silber  
 unde ander manech wunder,  
 nusken unde bouge,  
 daz gesmide der frouwen,  
 goltvaz und silbervaz,  
 chelche unde chirchscaz,  
 so muoz daz allez zergan,  
 daz von listen ist getan.  
 nu wizet, daz iz war ist,  
 iz zergert und wirt ein valewisk.

(Am elften Tage, darüber sollen wir uns freuen,<sup>35</sup> da zerfällt ganz schnell all das, womit die Welt sich schmückt, Gold und Silber, und manch anderes Wunderbare, Spangen und Ringe,<sup>36</sup> das Geschmeide der adligen Damen, Gold- und Silbergefäße, Kelche und Kirchenschatz,<sup>37</sup> es wird alles zerfallen, was mit Kunst erarbeitet wurde. Nun seid dessen eingedenk, dass dies wahr ist: es zerfällt und wird zu Asche.<sup>38</sup>)

PB: keine Parallele [PB 11 hat indessen: ... *homines exhibunt de cauernis suis, et current quasi amentes, nec poterit alter respondere alteri*].

<sup>35</sup> Die von Schacks 1986 gegebene Übersetzung “das ist noch lange nicht das Schlimmste” scheint mir angesichts des Kontextes nicht das Richtige zu treffen.

<sup>36</sup> *nusken unde bouge* scheint mir eine auf den Schmuck der Frauen bezogene Formel zu sein, die z.B. auch im ‘Antichrist’, im ‘König Rother’ und in der ‘Kudrun’ vorkommt. Vgl. Lexer 1872/78, II, 122-123.

<sup>37</sup> Man beachte den Stabreim in *chelche unde chirchscaz*, der auf eine vorgängige Formel deutet.

<sup>38</sup> In *valewisk* ‘Asche, Staub’ scheint die *favilla* der Weltgerichtssequenz ‘Dies irae’ anzuklingen.

PD: keine Parallele [für PD 11 vgl. oben Nr. X].

A hat in PB und PD keine Parallele. Avas Text formuliert hier selbständig und in großartiger Detailliertheit ein Bild der *vanitas*, des vergeblichen Strebens der Menschen, vor allem der reichen und geschmückten Damen, aber auch der Kirche nach Schätzen – so wie in Nr. 10 bereits die Ruhmsucht und *superbia* der Aristokraten getadelt wurde. Die Matthaeus-Worte (6,20) vom Schatz, den man sich im Himmel sammeln soll anstatt auf der Erde, wo ihn Motten und Rost zerfressen, die in zahlreichen Arengen von Schenkungen um des Seelenheils willen standen, sowie die Weltgerichtssequenz vom *Dies irae, dies illa ... solvet saeculum in favilla ...*<sup>39</sup> klingen an. Das Motiv wird von Frau Ava im zentralen Teil des ‘Jüngsten Gerichts (v. 267f.) wieder aufgenommen: Vor diesem Gericht des unbestechlichen Weltenrichters *da nehilfet golt noch scaz – e bedachten wir iz baz* (da hilft weder Gold noch Schatz – ach, hätten wir das doch besser früher bedacht).

XII (v. 119-126)

An dem zwelften tage  
so hilfet uns daz vihe chlagen.  
so diu tier gent uz dem walde,  
daz vihe uf dem velde,<sup>40</sup>  
vil lute si rerent,  
so si zesamene cherent  
mit luteme gescreie  
ingegen dem urteile.

(Am zwölften Tage, da helfen uns auch die Tiere klagen. Da kommen die wilden Tiere aus dem Wald, das Vieh aber geht

<sup>39</sup> Vgl. Strecker 1909; Kunz 1959; Vellekop 1978; Heyse 1986; Raedle 1987.

<sup>40</sup> Maurer 1965 (mit Kienast) ergänzt zu *wider daz vihe*, womit sich das Bild eines Kampfes der Waldtiere gegen die Feldtiere ergäbe, doch findet sich *wider* weder in V noch in G.

auf den Feldern; sehr laut brüllen sie, wenn sie gemeinsam mit großem Geschrei dem Gericht entgegenlaufen.)

PB: keine Parallele [PB 12 hat: ... *cadent stellae et signa de coelo*]

PD 12: ... *Omnia animalia terre de silvis et de montibus venient ad campos rugientia et mugientia non gustantia neque bibentia.*

A geht hier mit PD, übernimmt aber nicht das Motiv des Fastens, der Enthaltensamkeit der Tiere von Essen und Trinken. Dafür verstärkt Avas Text das Klagemotiv, indem neben den Menschen nun auch die Tiere jammern und – wie die Gebeine der Menschen in Nr. XIII,6 – das Gericht erwarten, ja ihm – wilde und zahme Tiere – zusammen entgegenlaufen (vgl. o. bei Nr. V PD 5).

XIII (v. 127-134)

An dem drizehenten tage  
so nemach sich niemen wol gehalten.  
so tuont sich diu greber uf,  
diu gebaine machent sich dar uz  
alle gemeine  
ingegen dem urteile.<sup>41</sup>  
iz ist allen den forhtlich,  
die gewizzen sint der sunden ane sich.

(Am dreizehnten Tage, da kann sich niemand gut fühlen. Da tun sich die Gräber auf, die Gebeine wandern alle zusammen heraus, dem Gericht entgegen. Das wird allen denen fürchterlich, die sich ihrer Sünden bewusst sind.<sup>42</sup>)

PB 13: ... *congregabuntur ossa defunctorum, et exurgent usque ad sepulchrum*. Was mit dieser Formulierung gemeint ist, macht noch deutlicher Petrus Comestor (PC 11): ... *surgent ossa mortuorum et stabunt supra sepulcra*.

<sup>41</sup> Vgl. o. Nr. XII,8.

<sup>42</sup> Kienast 1940, 102 übersetzt: “die sich der Sünden, mit denen sie beladen sind, bewusst sind”.

PD 13: ... *Omnia sepulcra ab ortu solis usque ad occasum patebunt cadaveribus surgentibus usque ad oram sepulcri.*

A entspricht PB und PD, fügt aber das Motiv des dem Gericht Entgegengehens der Gebeine hinzu (vgl. parallel für die Tierwelt Nr. XII); dazu das Motiv des Sündenbewusstseins der Menschen, das zu Furcht und Schrecken führt.

XIV (v. 135-146)

An dem vierzehenten tage  
 so wirt diu bitterste chlage.  
 so gent diu liute alle uz,  
 ir nebestet neheinez in deme hus.  
 si wuofent unde weinent  
 mit luteme gescreige.  
 in dem selben dinge  
 so zergent in die sinne.  
 so nemach nieman gesagen  
 die not, diu ist in den tagen,  
 uber swen got des verhenget,  
 daz sich sin leben dar gelenget.

(Am vierzehnten Tage erhebt sich die bitterste Klage. Alle Leute gehen hinaus, keiner verweilt noch in seinem Haus. Sie jammern und weinen bei lautem Geschrei. Darüber verlieren sie ihren Verstand. So vermag keiner die Not beschreiben, die in diesen Tagen bei denen entsteht, über die Gott es verhängt, dass sie noch länger leben müssen.)

PB: keine Parallele (PB 14 hat: ... *omnes homines morientur, ut simul resurgant cum mortuis*).

PD 14: ... *Omne humanum genus, quod inventum fuerit de habitaculis et de locis, in quibus erunt, velociter descendunt, non intelligentes neque loquentes, sed discurrent ut amentes.*

A entspricht deutlich PD 14, auch im Motiv des Verlustes des Verstands, doch verstärkt Avas Text noch den Jammer und die Trostlosigkeit der Menschen angesichts des kommenden Gerichts.

XV (v. 147-162)

So chumet der vinfzehente tach,  
 so nahet uns der gotes slach.<sup>43</sup>  
 so sculn alle die ersterben,  
 die der ie geborn wurden,  
 alle gemeine  
 vor dem urteile.<sup>44</sup>  
 so hevent sich vier winde  
 in allen den enden.  
 ein fiur sich enbrennet,  
 daz dise werlt verendet.  
 daz liuteret iz allez,  
 so brinnet stein unde holze,  
 wazzter unde huhele,<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *gotes slach* ist ein “fester Terminus für das Jüngste Gericht” (Haug, Vollmann 1991, 1500).

<sup>44</sup> Vgl. zu dieser Wendung Nr. III,8; XII,8; XIII,6.

<sup>45</sup> V hat *buhele* (zu *buhel* ‘Bühl, Hügel’): ihm folgt Schacks 1986 mit der Begründung: “Gesagt wird, dass alles auf Erden brennen wird, und es werden je 2 Wortpaare genannt, zunächst *stain* und *holz*, danach *wazzter* und *buhele*, in denen jeweils das erste Ding schwerer brennbar als das zweite ist” (vgl. auch Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, 200). Er finde im übrigen auch kein frühmhd. *hülwe*, *hülewe*. Dagegen hat G *huhele*, dem Kienast 1940, 102 und Maurer 1965 folgen. Kienast knüpft an *hüel* ‘Sumpf’, *hüelic* ‘sumpfig’ bei Konrad von Megenberg an, und leitet das Wort (mit Hiatus-h geschrieben) von ahd. *huliwa* ‘Sumpf’ ab. Damit wäre es auch die ‘lectio difficilior’. In der Tat findet sich in den ahd. Würzburger Markbeschreibungen *hulia* ‘Sumpf’, in den ahd. Glossen *huliwa* ‘Sumpf, palus’; im Mhd. leben variantenreich *hülwe*, *hulwe*, *hüel* ‘Pfüte, Pfuhl, Sumpflache’ und das Adjektiv *hülwec* ‘sumpfig’; im Nhd. lebt das Wort in Dialekten, darunter bair. *hül* ‘Lache’, schwäb. *hülbe* ‘flacher Dorfteich’. Damit ist die Frage eines sonstigen Vorkommens in der frühmhd. Überlieferung irrelevant: Das Wort ist vorher und nachher belegt. *Wazzter* und *hu(h)ele* sind also einander über das Element ‘Wasser’ zugeordnet, so wie *stein*

die der sint under dem himele.  
 so chumt der jungiste tach  
 also sciere so ein braslach.<sup>46</sup>

(Wenn der fünfzehnte Tag kommt, dann naht uns der Schlag Gottes. Dann müssen alle die sterben, die hier je geboren wurden, alle gemeinsam, noch vor dem Gericht. Es erheben sich die Winde von allen vier Weltenden. Ein Feuer entbrennt, das diese Welt zugrunde richtet. Das läutert alles, denn es brennen Stein und Holz, Wasser und Sümpfe, die hier unter dem Himmel zu finden sind. Dann kommt der Jüngste Tag so schnell wie ein Wimpernschlag.)

PB 14: ... *omnes homines morientur; ut simul resurgant cum mortuis*

PB 15: ... *ardebit terra usque ad inferni nouissima, et post erit dies iudicii*. Vgl. PB 5: ... *ardebunt ipsae aquae ab ortu suo usque ad occasum*.

PD 15: ... *Vivi homines morientur; ut resurgant cum mortuis longe ante defunctis. Finis, id est dies iudicii*.

A hat hier eine Kombination von PB 14 (ähnlich PD 15) mit dem Sterben der noch lebenden Menschen und PB 5/15 mit dem Weltenbrand, der die Erde (von A detaillierter ausgeführt) und die Wasser umfasst, wozu A noch die Erhebung der Winde (Stürme), die von den vier Weltenden kommen, hinzufügt (vgl. o. Nr. VII,4).<sup>47</sup> Der Weltenbrand, das Feuer, ist in diesem

und *holz* über das Element 'feste Materialien'. Vgl. Schützeichel 2006, Ahd. Wöbu, 169; Schützeichel 2004, IV, 430; EWA IV, 1209; Lexer 1872/78, I, 1382. Vgl. Vollmann-Profe 1996, 241.

<sup>46</sup> Ein gängiges Bild für ein rasch eintretendes Ereignis: Vgl. Kienast 1940, 102; Haug, Vollmann 1991, 1500; Vollmann-Profe 1996, 241.

<sup>47</sup> Vgl. Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 129: "... gerade der Wind war ein oft genanntes Vorzeichen des Jüngsten Gerichts". Es könnte auch Einfluss der apokalyptischen Vorstellungen bei Ezechiel 37, 9-14 vorliegen, wo sich die Erweckung der Toten durch *insuflatio* der vier Winde vollzieht (Haug, Vollmann 1991, 1500). Doch gehört die Erhebung der Winde in A eher zu den

letzten Zeichen läuternd und reinigend.<sup>48</sup> PB und PD teilen den abschließenden Hinweis auf den nahenden Tag des Jüngsten Gerichts.

### *Die Quellen und ihre intentionale Umarbeitung*

Es kann kein Zweifel darüber bestehen und ist natürlich längst gesehen worden,<sup>49</sup> dass Frau Ava vorwiegend die Fassung PD der ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ benutzt hat, an zwei Stellen aber auch PB, die Fassung des Pseudo-Beda. Bei fünf Zeichen (V, VIII, X, XII, XIV) ist die Abhängigkeit von PD durchgängig, bei vier Zeichen (IV, VI, VII, IX) verrät sie sich durch eine spezielle Übereinstimmung, wie z.B. beim Erscheinen der Meerestiere und -monster: ... *hevet sich von grunde* (IV,3) aus PD ... *levabuntur supra pelagus*; oder ... *si chlibent sich envieren* (IX,5) aus PD ... *scindentur in quatuor partes* (gegen drei Teile in PB). Neun von fünfzehn Zeichen, d.h. drei Fünftel, sind also direkt von PD abhängig.

Erstaunlicherweise folgen jedoch zwei Zeichen in bestimmten Details der Fassung PB. Es ist dies zunächst Nr. I, in der die Höhe der Wasserwand mit 40 Klafter (PB 40 *cubiti*) angegeben wird, in PD aber nur mit 15 *cubiti*. Zwar spricht A nicht von der Höhe des sich auftürmenden Wassers, sondern von der Tiefe des versickernden Wassers, aber das Maß bleibt doch bestehen. Es mag sein, dass wir es hier mit einer Konsequenz des noch öfter feststellbaren Hangs von A zur Steigerung und Intensivierung des Geschehens zu tun haben. 40 Klafter = ca. 68m Höhe des apokalyptischen *muris aquarum* beeindrucken natürlich mehr als 15 Klafter = ca. 25,5m. Der zweite Fall, in dem zwei PB-Passagen gegen PD übernommen werden, betreffen das letzte, das fünf-

apokalyptischen Ereignissen, die sich mit dem Weltenbrand fortsetzen.

<sup>48</sup> Zur Vorstellung der endzeitlichen Reinigung der Welt durch Feuer vgl. mit Parallelen Gerhardt, Palmer 2002, 151-152.

<sup>49</sup> Vgl. o. Anm. 15.

zehnte Zeichen. Aus einer Kombination von PB 15 und PB 5 wird ein Weltenbrand imaginiert, der nicht nur die Erde und was darauf ist umfasst, sondern auch die Gewässer. Auch hier kann mit der Tendenz von A zur Steigerung des Geschehens gerechnet werden. Auffällig ist, dass die Anleihen aus PB gerade das erste und das letzte der Zeichen betreffen, Anfang und Schluss von Avas Text.

Ob Frau Ava und ihre beratenden Kleriker-Söhne eine gemischte Fassung, von der sich sonst keine Spur findet, vorliegen hatten oder ob sie zwei verschiedene schriftliche Fassungen benutzten, ist nicht zu entscheiden, ist aber auch in dieser Untersuchung, in der es auf Intention und Zweck des Ava-Textes ankommt, nicht primär von Bedeutung.

Walter Haug hat – angeregt von Hans Eggers (1952) – die Ordnung der Zeichen bei Ava wie folgt nach ihrem Betreff gekennzeichnet: Nr. I-III “Bewegung der Gewässer”, Nr. IV-V “Fische und Vögel”, Nr. VI-IX “Kosmos und [...] Erde”, Nr. X-XI “Gebäude und Artefakte”, Nr. XII-XV “Landtiere und [...] Menschen”.<sup>50</sup> Es fragt sich jedoch, ob man für die Gliederung des Ava-Textes nicht besser den Strukturbemerkungen des zeitnahen Petrus Damiani folgen sollte. PD schiebt nämlich nach dem 4. Zeichen ein, dass Nr. I-IV die *signa pelagi*, die Vorzeichen, die sich im Meer und an den Fischen und Meerungeheuern ereigneten, enthalten, was auch für A zutrifft, auch wenn sie selbständig die ersten beiden Zeichen in eine logisch stimmigere Reihenfolge bringt. Unmittelbar anschließend notiert PD, dass Nr. V-VII die (*signa*) *aeris et etheris*, die drei Vorzeichen, die sich in Luft und Himmel vollziehen, enthält. Auch dies lässt sich für A bestätigen: Ende der Vögel, Verwandlung des Himmels, Stürmen der Winde bis ans Himmelsfirmament. Nach Zeichen Nr. VII folgt in PD eine zweite Zwischenbemerkung, die wohl verstümmelt ist: [...] *et signum orbis et eius habitatoribus*. Wenn man den Singular *signum* in den der vorherigen Zwischenbemerkung adäquaten Plural *signa* korrigiert, ließe sich der Einschub als auf die folgenden Vorzeichen bezügliche Klassifikation verstehen: ‘Zeichen,

<sup>50</sup> Haug, Vollmann 1991, 1499.



die den Erdkreis und seine Bewohner betreffen’. Diese Klassifikation trifft auch auf die Version A zu, und es lassen sich ihr die Abteilungen Erdbeben und Zerbrechen der Steine (Nr. VIII-IX), menschliche Bauten und Artefakte (Nr. X-XI), Landtiere (Nr. XII) und schließlich Menschen (Nr. XIII-XV) ohne Zwang eingliedern.

Neben die schriftlichen Quellen PB und PD treten in A aber auch ganz selbständige, für die Erschließung der Intentionen Avas wichtige Züge. Zunächst sind hier Motive zu nennen, die erweitert und verstärkt werden: In Nr. V weinen und klagen die Vögel nicht nur, sondern beißen, kratzen und schlagen, ja kämpfen bis zum Tode; in Nr. VI verfärbt und verdunkelt sich nicht nur der Himmel, sondern es geschehen auch Zeichen an Sonne und Mond; in Nr. XII kommen die wilden Tiere nicht nur aus den Wäldern auf die Felder, sondern vereinigen sich auch mit den zahmen Tieren des Feldes, brüllend laufen sie zusammen dem Gericht entgegen; in Nr. XIII gehen die aus den Gräbern steigenden Gebeine nicht nur (wie in PB und PD) bis zum Rande des Grabes, sondern darüber hinaus und dem kommenden Gericht entgegen; in Nr. XIV schließlich werden auch Jammer und Not der Menschen gesteigert: Zu bedauern sind jene, die noch nicht gestorben sind, sondern nach Verhängnis Gottes noch leben und erleben und leiden müssen.

Die Furcht, welche die Menschen beim Rauschen und Toben des Meeres überfällt, wird in ihrem auditiven Eindruck gesteigert (Nr. II): *daz iz alle die horent, die den sin dare cherent*. Die Betrübnis, welche die Menschen angesichts der auf sie zuströmenden Wasser ergreift, wird durch die universale Ausdehnung des visuellen Eindrucks – *daz sihet wip unde man* – erst richtig akzentuiert (Nr. III). Indem das Geschehen in seiner Wirkung auf die menschliche Psyche gezeigt wird, wird die Empathie der Adressaten Frau Avas aktiviert. Das furchtbare Geschehen wird leichter fasslich für das Publikum. Das gilt auch in Nr. VII für die Uminterpretation der kosmischen *signa* zu irdischen Zeichen: Das Stürmen der Winde, das Rauschen der Wasser, selbst in katastro-

phischem Ausmaß, gehören ja der Lebenswelt des Publikums an.

Unter den selbständigen Motiven von A ragen besonders hervor die kritischen Äußerungen gegen den machtbewussten und ruhm-süchtigen Adel, die Neigung zu Verschwendung und Repräsentation, die Schmucksucht der adligen Damen, aber auch der Kirche. In Nr. X werden die Festungen und Burgen, die um des Ruhms und des Prestiges willen erbaut wurden, zerstört; in Nr. XI zerfallen Gold und Silber, die schmückenden Spangen und Ringe der Damen, die Gold- und Silbergefäße, aber auch der Kirchenschatz, die Sequenz ‘Dies irae, dies illa’ zitierend, zu Staub und Asche. Gott ist der große *ebenaere*, der universale Gleichmacher. Nichts wird vor dem Richter Bestand haben.<sup>51</sup>

Und hier hat es seinen Sinn, dass Ava immer wieder, weitaus deutlicher als ihre Quellen, die Nähe, die quasi schon die in den Tagen der Vorzeichen bewusst werdende Präsenz des göttlichen Gerichts aufruft:

Nr. III, 8 *wande daz urteil nahen ist;*  
 Nr. IX,4 *daz gescihet vor dem urteile;*  
 Nr. XII,8 und XIII,6 *ingegen dem urteile;*  
 Nr. XV,5 *alle gemeine vor dem urteile.*

Der Bewusstmachung des einst, in der Endzeit bevorstehenden Unglücks und Leidens, der Betrübnis, der Furcht, des Jammers und des Elends dienen auch überaus zahlreiche evokative Zusätze des Ava-Textes, die eben dieses Elend wortreich und vielfältig beschwören:

Nr. I,2 *hebet sich diu ungehabe* (beginnt das jammervolle Geschehen bzw. Unglück);  
 II,9f. *uber elliu die riche, so stet iz forhtlichen* (über alle Lande

<sup>51</sup> Zu Gott als *ebenaere* bei Frau Ava vgl. Vollmann-Profe 1996, 241, die auf v. 183-185 verweist, wo noch deutlicher ausgesprochen wird, dass vor dem ‘Jüngsten Gericht’ alle Standesqualitäten ihre Bedeutung verlieren. Vgl. auch oben Anm. 33 und 34.

verbreitet es Furcht);

Nr. VI,7: *der tach wirt also vorhtlich* (der Tag wird so schrecklich);

Nr. IX,7: *daz vurhtet wip unde man* (das erfüllt mit Furcht alle Menschen);

Nr. XIII,7f.: *iz ist allen forhtlich, die gewizzen sint der sunden ane sich* (das wird allen denen fürchterlich, die sich ihrer Sünden bewusst sind);

Nr. III,7: *so truret allez daz der ist* (so werden alle betrübt, die hier leben);

Nr. VIII,7f.: *so truret wip unde man, si nemach getrosten nieman* (nun geraten alle Menschen in Betrübnis, niemand kann sie trösten);

Nr. IV,2: *so hevet sich diu chlage* (so lautet die Klage);

Nr. V,2: *so wirt ein mere clage* (so erhebt sich noch größere Klage);

Nr. XII,2: *so hilfet uns daz vihe chlagen* (da helfen uns die Tiere klagen);

Nr. XIV,2: *so wirt diu biterste chlage* (so erhebt sich die bitterste Klage);

Nr. VI,1f.: *so chumet ... mit sere* (so kommt ... mit Leid).

Besonders stark – in vier Versen – akzentuiert Nr. VII,9-12 den Jammer und die Qual der Sünder: *so grimmet sich ze ware der arme suntare, deme sin gewizzede daz saget, daz er gotes hulde niene habet* (Darüber grämt sich zurecht der arme Sünder, dem sein Gewissen sagt, dass er Gottes Huld verspielt hat). Wie bei Nr. XIII,7f. werden hier Jammer und Klage mit dem Wissen der Menschen um ihre Sündigkeit verknüpft. Das intentionale Thema der Furcht, des Leides, des Jammers wird auch schon in der Vorrede des ‘Jüngsten Gerichts’, die dem Diskurs über die ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ unmittelbar vorausgeht, angeschlagen. Vorrede 1-3: *Nu sol ich rede errechen vil vorhtlichen von dem jungisten tage* (Nun werde ich in großer Furcht sprechen vom Jüngsten Tage); Vorrede 11-14: *wir nevernamen hie niht mere von so bitterem sere. so*

*bibenet allez daz der ist, so nahet uns der heilige Crist* (niemals haben wir mehr von solch bitterem Leide gehört. Dann zittert alles, was existiert, wenn der heilige Krist uns nahe kommt). Hier in der Vorrede handelt es sich nicht um fernes zukünftiges Leid, das Ich der Sprecherin wird im Sprechen existentiell von der Furcht ergriffen, ebenso am Schluss das Wir der Gemeinschaft, an die sich Frau Ava wendet, im Hören des Unerhörten.

Dieses ‘Wir’, dieses Kollektiv des Sagens, Hörens und Klagens wird noch öfter im Text der ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ aufgerufen; so Nr. II,2: *suln wir iu sagen* ‚das müssen wir euch sagen‘; Nr. II,7: *daz iz alle die horent* ‚dass es alle hören‘. Es wird aber auch aufgerufen in den Invektiven gegen die Ruhmsucht der Burgengründer und gegen die Prunksucht der adligen Damen – so in der sarkastischen Bemerkung Nr. X,2: *vil luzel sul wir daz chlagen* (das brauchen wir nur wenig zu beklagen), die Zerstörung der Festungen und Burgen, und parallel dazu Nr. XI,2: *des sul wir unsich wol gehaben* (darüber sollen wir uns freuen), wenn es um die Vernichtung von Gold, Silber und Schmuck, der sozialen Zeichen der Repräsentation, geht. Der pastorale, auf die Gemeinschaft des ‘Wir’ bezogene Zweck wird in der abschließenden Ermahnung Nr. XI,13f.: *nu wizet, daz iz war ist; iz zerget und wirt ein valewisk* (nun seid dessen eingedenk, dass es wahr ist; es zergeht und wird zu Staub und Asche) noch einmal gesteigert ins Gedächtnis der Adressaten gerufen.

Das ‘Wir’ einer Traditionsgemeinschaft, in der das Wissen weiter zu geben ist, ist auch präsent im „Vernehmen“, aus dem das Wissen, das heilsgeschichtliche um die Schrecken der Endzeit ebenso wie das am Ende der Gedichte Frau Avas stehende Wissen um die Freuden des wiedergewonnenen Paradieses und des ewigen Lebens, kommt. Ava beruft sich mehrfach auf dieses „Vernehmen“, die „Vernunft“<sup>52</sup> der Tradition – so in der Vorrede (v. 4) und Nr. IX,2: *alse ich vernomen habe* ‚wie ich’s vernommen habe‘; neigierend in Vorrede, v. 11 *wir nevernamen* ...

<sup>52</sup> Zur Ableitung des Substantiv-Abstractums ‘Vernunft’ von ‘vernehmen’ vgl. Kluge, Seebold 2011, 955.

*nicht mere* ‚wir vernahmen niemals mehr‘. Diese Tradition stammt von den *sapientes*, Vorrede, v. 10: *so die wisten jehen* ‚wie es die Weisesten sagen‘. Das „Vernehmen“ ist dadurch als weises Wissen, als Wahrheit legitimiert.

*Gemeinschaft und Publikum – Die Rede von den Fünfzehn Zeichen im Kontext des Ava-Zyklus*

Frau Ava geht es in allen Teilen ihres heilsgeschichtlichen Zyklus um die Legitimierung ihrer Darstellung, Aussagen und Ermahnungen als unbezweifelbare Wahrheit. Deshalb durchziehen das Werk (am wenigsten im ‘Antichrist’) zahlreiche Quellenberufungen.<sup>53</sup> Diese Quellen sind in erster Linie geschriebene Texte, vor allem die heiligen, biblischen Schriften, auch wenn Ava weitere Quellen (Apokryphen, Legenden, Vita Antichristi, volkssprachige Dichtung usw.) direkt oder indirekt benutzt hat – die ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ legen ja selbst Rechenschaft davon ab. Deshalb bezeichnet sie nicht nur ihr eigenes Werk als ein der literarischen Kultur zugehöriges Buch, das zu lesen oder vorzulesen sei (JG, v. 393, 401),<sup>54</sup> sondern beruft sich mehrfach auf die Bücher als Quellen ihrer Texte: *diu buoch nennent si sus* (J, v. 281), *die buoch sagent uns sus* (LJ, v. 791); anderswo auf das geschriebene Wort: *als iz gescriben ist* (LJ, v. 1974); auf das Wort, das gelesen wurde: *Man liset von Johanne, dem heiligen manne* (J, v. 211f., 221f.); leicht variiert: *Wir lesen von Johanne ...* (J, v. 233f.), *wir lesen von der ascensione* (LJ, v. 2081); ferner Berufungen auf das, was autoritativ gesagt, offenbart und vernommen wurde: *daz sagete uns got hie* (AC, v. 35), *daz ist uns ouch e gesaget* (LJ, v. 78), *alse*

<sup>53</sup> Die vier Teile des Werks werden im Folgenden mit diesen Siglen zitiert: ‘Johannes’ = J; ‘Leben Jesu’ = LJ; ‘Antichrist’ = AC; ‘Jüngstes Gericht’ = JG.

<sup>54</sup> Nach Claußnitzer, Sperl wird mit dieser Rede (*swer dize buoch lese*) “ein lesekundiger und damit für die damalige Zeit schon überdurchschnittlich gebildeter Rezipient” vorausgesetzt. Doch muss man auch damit rechnen, dass hier die Praxis eines gebildeten Vorlesers gemeint sein kann. Vgl. für eine publikumsorientierte Interpretation von Avas ‘Jüngstem Gericht’ auch Hintz 2000, 54-59.

*ich vernomen habe* (LJ, v. 550), *als wir iz vernomen haben* (LJ, v. 644).

Besonders hervorzuheben ist in einem Falle die Berufung auf einen *gramaticus* ‘Schriftkundiger, Lateinkundiger’, der – in der Erzählung von der Berufung der zwölf Apostel durch Christus – die Identität des Bartholomäus verbürgen soll (LJ, v. 559-570):

Do gie unser hailant  
ze Galilee in daz lant.  
da vant er einen guot man,  
Philippus geheizzen;  
der brahte von Betsaida  
einen waren Israhelita.  
nu sprichet ein gramaticus,  
iz waere Bartholomeus.  
alse er zuo got gie,  
vil wol er in enphie.  
er sprach, daz er ane valse waere  
und an guotem gelouben saehe.

Es handelt sich hier in Paraphrase von Joh. 1,44-50 zunächst um die Berufung des Apostels Philippus, der wie Andreas und Petrus aus Betsaida in Galiläa stammte und Nathanael (aus Kana nach Joh. 21,2) zu Jesus bringt, der ihn anredet (Joh. 1, 47): *ecce vere Israhelita in quo dolus non est* – was Ava wörtlich aufnimmt. Im wunderbaren Erstaunen darüber, dass ihn der Unbekannte so genau zu kennen scheint, bekehrt sich Nathanael und tritt in die Gefolgschaft Jesu ein. Nur heißt der *conversus* im biblischen Text Nathanael, und nicht Bartholomäus. Die von Ava wiedergegebene Identifizierung mit dem Apostel verdankt sich dem Umstand, dass Nathanael bereits seit dem 2. Jahrhundert im Orient als Apostel bezeichnet und später (9. Jh.) – im Westen aber erst seit dem 11. Jh. – mit Bartholomäus aus den Apostelkatalogen identifiziert

wurde.<sup>55</sup> Ava beruft sich also mit dem *gramaticus* in feiner Unterscheidung von der biblischen Buchquelle auf einen Exegeten, der die Identifizierung des Nathanael von Kana mit dem Apostel bereits aufgenommen hatte, und beweist damit zugleich, dass sie oder ihre Kleriker-Söhne mit den neuesten Entwicklungen der zeitgenössischen Bibelwissenschaft vertraut waren.

In Avas Version der ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ (wie übrigens auch im ‘Antichrist’) finden wir die legitimierenden Quellenberufungen nicht – außer in der dreimaligen Formel des „Vernehmens“, die auf eine autoritativ verbürgte Quelle, aber nicht unbedingt auf die *buoh* verweisen. Für die Liste der Vorzeichen konnte sich Ava nicht auf Bibel oder Exegese berufen. Es ist bezeichnend, dass sie ihre Vorrede zur Zeichenpassage des ‘Jüngsten Gerichts’ mit einer Redeformel beginnt: *Nu sol ich rede errechen ... als ich vernomen habe* (Nun muss ich sprechen ... wie ich es vernommen habe). Zwar steht auch hinter dieser Rede eine Autorität, die der *sapientes*; das Wissen stammt – wie schon erwähnt – von den *wisten* (JG, v. 10), den ‚Weisesten‘, die *jehen* ‘sagen’, was von den Vorzeichen zu sagen ist. Aber es bleibt doch Gesagtes, also eigentlich Sage. Noch wichtiger aber ist, dass Frau Ava ihre Rede als ein Sollen, Müssen auffasst, wie sie es auch im ersten Doppelvers des Zyklus (J, v. 1f.) tut: *Nu sule wir mit sinnen sagen von den dingen ...* (Nun müssen wir mit Vernunft erzählen von den Dingen ...). Die Rede beruht auf einer moralischen Verpflichtung gegenüber einer Kommunität, der das Wissen der Ava mitzuteilen ist. Diese konkretisiert sich in den zahlreichen Adressierungen eines ‘Wir’ oder ‘uns’ oder ‘Ihr’ im Text, vor allem in den Quellenberufungen und auktorialen Ankündigungen (z.B. J, v. 1f.; J., v. 233f.; LJ, v. 78, 644, 791, 2081; AC, v. 35; JG, v. 24, 98, 106, 117) – mehrfach wieder mit der Formel des Sollens verbunden.

So ordnen sich auch die ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ in Frau Avas Erzählung vom ‘Jüngsten Gericht’ ein als eine mahnende Beschwörung des kommenden Schreckens, der sich zwar nicht vermeiden lässt, aber doch die Menschen dazu aufrufen kann, sich so zu verhal-

<sup>55</sup> Vgl. Kraft 1958; Erharter 1962; Pesch 1994; Pesch 1998.

ten, dass sie im Endgericht bestehen können, was Ava explizit macht.<sup>56</sup> Dieses Gericht ist in der zentralen Partie des Schlussteiles des heilsgeschichtlichen Zyklus ausführlich geschildert (v. 163-326): Christus erscheint mit den vier Evangelisten, welche die Toten zum Leben erwecken. Ehrentvoll werden diejenigen erhöht, *die hie von der werlt cherent* (die sich auf Erden von der Welt abkehren). Der Belohnung der *conversi*, der Bekehrten, die vorweg steht, folgen Ratschläge an diejenigen, die durch ihre guten Werke erlöst werden können: *doch wil ich iu sagen da bi, wie der leben sol getan sin* (doch will ich euch dazu noch sagen, wie deren Leben beschaffen sein soll). Sie sollen *got minnen*, sie sollen *warheit phlegen*. Sie sollen Almosen geben, sich zuchtvoll kleiden, ihre Ehe bewahren, Waisen beschützen, Gefangene auslösen, den Feinden vergeben, Gericht halten ohne Korruption, den Armen zu Hilfe kommen, die Flüchtlinge aufnehmen. Vor allem auch (v. 219f.): *si sullen ze chirchen gerne gen, bihte unde buoze besten* (sie sollen willig zur Kirche gehen, Beichte und Buße leisten).

Diese alle werden gerettet, dürfen im Gericht zur rechten Seite Christi treten; es wird ihnen gesagt werden: *venite benedicti* in des Vaters Reich. Es ist eine soziale christliche Ethik, die sich vielfach an das vierte Kapitel (*Quae sunt instrumenta bonorum operum*) der ‘Regula Benedicti’ anlehnt.<sup>57</sup>

Diejenigen jedoch, die Gottes Gebote nicht erfüllten, die Widerspenstigen werden bestraft. Der Teufel und die Hölle empfangen sie, *da nehilfet golt noch scaz* (v. 267; vgl. oben Zeichen Nr. XI); ausführlich werden die Qualen geschildert, die ihnen zgedacht sind. Erst wenn der Teufel und die Bösen in der Hölle verschwunden sind, zeigt sich Gottes *edele persone* in ihrer

<sup>56</sup> Den paränetischen Zweck von Ava volkssprachigem Projekt betonen zu Recht auch Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, X: “Avas spezifische Leistung kann darin gesehen werden, dass sie in ihren Gedichten [...] sich bemühte, den biblischen Stoff nicht nur nachzuerzählen, sondern für die individuelle Glaubenspraxis zu erschließen und auch diffizile religiöse Gedankengänge zugänglich zu machen”. Vgl. auch Doria 2003, 41.

<sup>57</sup> Steidle 1975, 71-77.



Majestät (v. 319f.): *sich zaiget got mit minnen allen sinen chinden* (zeigt sich Gott versöhnend, liebend allen seinen Kindern). ‚Mühsal‘, *arbeit*, ist vorbei, wir singen Halleluja, den Gesang der Freude (v. 323ff.).

Dieser Gesang leitet über zum letzten Teil des ‘Jüngsten Gerichts’. Dieser Gesang ist der Anfang des ewigen Lebens im wiedergewonnenen Paradies (v. 327-392), es beginnt der *Jubileus*, *daz guote wunnejar* (das Jubeljahr, die reiche Zeit der Freuden). Da beginnen wir anstatt der äußerlichen Sinnlichkeit die inneren, geistigen Sinne zu lieben, *vernunst unde ratio, diu edele meditatio* (Vernunft und Ratio, die edle Meditation, mit der wir Christus erkennen können). Die Gerechten, *die hie mit flize guot sint* (die hier auf Erden sich immer strebend um das Gute bemühen) erhalten unvergängliche Jugend und eine Stärke, vor der Berge zerbrechen wie Glas. Sie leben ohne Krankheit in ewigem Licht, sind die *gotes erben*. In großer Eindringlichkeit und mit einer schon in den Zeichen Nr. X und XI angestoßenen Spitze gegen den falschen Adel der irdischen Zeit verkündet Ava: *So vernemet alle da bi, da sit ir edele unde fri [...] daz ist diu ganze friheit* (So vernehmet denn alle hier, dort seid ihr adlig und frei, ... das ist die wahre, vollkommene Freiheit). Da ist das ewige Leben – unser Geist empfängt von Christus den wahren Adel. Doch – so schließt die *inclusa* in moralischem Impetus – *daz habent allez diu gotes chint, diu hie diemuote sint, die ir scephare lobent und hie ir vianden vergebent* (das alles haben die Gotteskinder, die hier auf Erden demütig sind, die ihren Schöpfer loben, die hier ihren Feinden vergeben). Dann sind sie den Engeln auf ewig gleich.

Im Schluss von Frau Avas heilsgeschichtlichem Zyklus tritt ein Endziel ihrer Schriften in den Vordergrund, das schon im Beschluss des ‘Leben Jesu’, in der Erklärung der ‘Sieben Gaben des Heiligen Geistes’, aufgerufen wurde, in direkter Adresse an das intendierte Publikum (LJ, v. 2269ff.): *nu tuot uf diu inneren oren, diu uzeren sulen iz horen* (Nun öffnet eure inneren Ohren, indem die äußeren es [die Botschaft] hören). Dem entsprechen die inneren Sinne Vernunft, Ratio und Meditation, die erst am

Ende des gesamten Zyklus, in der Zeit der ewigen Freuden als Weg zur Erkenntnis Gottes manifest werden. Ein Zentralbegriff ist dabei die ‘Vernunft’, die etymologisch und dem Sinne nach zu ‘vernehmen’ gehört,<sup>58</sup> zu dem was im ‘Vernehmen’ begriffen und in die Ratio, den Verstand transferiert und in der paradiesischen Meditation praktiziert werden wird. So hat auch der stetige Rekurs in Quellenberufung und pastoralem Aufruf auf das *vernemen* bei Frau Ava seinen guten, auf die Adressaten zielenden Sinn.

Wer sind nun die Adressaten, die in auktorialen Aussagen und pastoralen Aufrufen als ‘Wir’ und ‘Ihr’ immer wieder beschworen werden? Es könnten laikale Gläubige sein, dazu Gruppen des Klerus, die des Lateins nur mangelhaft kundig und deshalb der Unterweisung in der Volkssprache bedürftig waren, doch fehlen konkrete Hinweise auf die Adressaten – mit einer Ausnahme. Im ‘Leben Jesu’ (LJ, v. 297) werden die *lieben mine herren* angesprochen, und zwar in der geistlichen Auslegung jener Passage, in der den heiligen drei Königen von einem Engel ein Heimweg gezeigt wird, der sie den König Herodes, der die weitgereisten Weisen bedroht, vermeiden lässt (v. 297-304):

Lieben mine herren,  
 des scult ir got flegen,  
 daz wir den vermiden,  
 so wir heim ilen.  
 so megen wir mit gesunde  
 chomen heim ze lande  
 hin ze paradyse  
 uzer dirre freise.

(Meine lieben Herren, deswegen sollt ihr Gott ehren, auf dass wir den [bösen Herodes] vermeiden, wenn wir in unsere Heimat eilen. So können wir wohlbehalten in unser Heimatland kommen, in das Paradies, hinaus aus diesem Schrecken.)

<sup>58</sup> Kluge, Seebold 2011, 955; EWA 2007, III, 303.

Hier wird, gegenüber dem Schrecken der Gegenwart, bereits allegorisch auf das Endziel der Gerechten verwiesen, auf die wahre Heimat jener erneut im ‘Wir’ beschworenen Gemeinschaft eines großen Projekts, auf das ewige Leben im Paradies. Und wenn man den Adressatenbegriff *herren* ernst nimmt, dann richtet sich Ava an eine männliche, hervorgehobene Gruppe von Gläubigen, wie es etwa Laienbruderschaften, Kanoniker, Pfarrer sein mochten.

Vor allem Peter K. Stein hat als Adressaten besonders an die seit dem 10./11. Jahrhundert aufkommenden Laienbrüder gedacht, wofür gerade der hohe Anspruch der Dichtung spreche,<sup>59</sup> den auch Maike Claußnitzer und Cassandra Sperl zugeben, indem sie schreiben, “dass sie [Ava] über die liturgischen Texte hinausreichende Bibelkenntnisse und sogar die Inhalte der Bibelkommentare bei ihren Rezipienten voraussetzte. Wer Avas Gedichte lesen oder hören wollte, musste in der Lage sein, sie nicht nur sprachlich, sondern gedanklich nachvollziehen und verstehen zu können”.<sup>60</sup> Man darf auch nicht die Rolle der zahlreichen lateinischen Zitate und theologischen Fachtermini in ihrem Werk vergessen, die freilich gewiss auch die Autorität der Autorin versichern und das Publikum beeindrucken sollten. Nach Claußnitzer und Sperl sprechen gegen klösterlich gebundene Laienbrüder als Adressaten entschieden die von Ava im ‘Jüngsten Gericht’ gegebenen “praktischen Ratschläge für ein gottgefälliges Leben” wie “unbestechlich Gericht zu halten”, wie “Warnung vor Kleiderluxus”, wie “Almosengeben”, die eher auf in der Welt lebende Laien zielen.<sup>61</sup> Doch darf man über diesen berechtigten Einwänden nicht die aus der Benediktsregel entnommenen Lebensregeln vergessen. Nach Claußnitzer und Sperl lässt der Praxisbezug der *consilia* “an einen intendierten Rezipientenkreis in gesicherter und nicht unbedingt niederer gesellschaftlicher Stellung denken”.<sup>62</sup> Aber Laienbrüder, Bruderschaften, Fraterni-

<sup>59</sup> Stein 1976, 38.

<sup>60</sup> Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, XII.

<sup>61</sup> Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, XIII.

<sup>62</sup> Ebd.

tates, Kanoniker, Pfarrer hatten in der Zeit und darüber hinaus durchaus intensiven Kontakt – auch durch ihre verwandtschaftlichen Bindungen – zur Welt der Laien. Man wird also wohl am besten Avas Zyklus als ein plurifunktionales, auf laikale und klösterliche Adressaten zugleich zielendes Werk *sui generis* ansehen können.<sup>63</sup>

Was ist nun der Platz der ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ in Frau Avas Werk, das vom Erlösungswerk Christi bis zu seiner Wiederkunft im Gericht führt und gegenwärtige Schrecken beschwört, die den Menschen zur *conversio* bringen sollen? Die ‘Fünfzehn Zeichen’ Avas beschreiben in bewusster Steigerung die Schrecken der letzten Tage der Menschheit, die die Bereitschaft zur Bekehrung ebenfalls noch weiter steigern sollen. Es ist eine Beschwörung des Leidens als der von Sünde geprägten *conditio humana*. Frau Ava kennt nicht nur die Zeichen, sie kann sie auch selbständig gestalten, deuten und zur Belehrung der Laien auslegen. Ihr Wissen um Schrecken, Ende, Urteil und Zukunft muss sogar weitergegeben werden, denn damit trägt sie zur Rettung der Menschheit bei. Die stetigen Hinweise auf das kommende Urteil, auf das Wissen um Sünde und Gericht, bezeugen, dass die pastorale Unterweisung, die zum Wissen führt, und der daraus folgende Verhaltensmodus der Belehrteten die notwendigen Voraussetzungen dafür sind, dass der Mensch sich am Ende im Felde der Gerechten wiederfindet. Frau Avas Werk ist eine Apotheose des christlichen Wissens um die Zukunft.

<sup>63</sup> Auch Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, XIV zielen schließlich in eine ähnliche Richtung, indem sie formulieren, dass “Ava ihren Gedichtzyklus als erbauliches Werk für in der Welt lebende gebildete Laien konzipierte, was jedoch einer Rezeption in Klöstern keinen Abbruch getan haben muss”.

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LIDIA FRANCESCA OLIVA

SOME REMARKS ON THE LEXICON  
OF *MUSPILLI*

This study considers an aspect of *Muspilli* which, despite the numerous studies on the text, was often overlooked and never extensively analysed: its lexicon. In this article I shall focus on three particularly interesting nouns, OHG *hilfa*, *mord* and *muspilli*, and on their meaning in this Old High German eschatological text. Unlike OHG *muspilli*, the occurrences of OHG *hilfa* and *mord* were never closely examined: as I hope to demonstrate, the interpretation which has generally been given to them is not exactly accurate. As for OHG *muspilli*, on the other hand, many before me have tried to trace back its etymology and have debated its meaning. As I will argue in the article, though, one hypothesis was never given enough attention by the scholarship, leading to what might be an incorrect interpretation of the term which could, indeed, not mean ‘end of the world’.

In his 1971 essay on the language of *Muspilli*, Rolf Bergmann concluded his analysis by stating that “diese Probleme bedürfen gewiß noch einer genaueren Prüfung, wobei insbesondere an eine ausführliche Wortschatzuntersuchung des Textes zu denken ist”.<sup>1</sup> Having conducted the analysis Bergmann had advocated,<sup>2</sup> we can confirm that the scholar was, in fact, right, and that this type of analysis allowed for a better understanding of some passages of the Old High German text. Not unexpectedly, given the complex history of the text, some aspects seem to still remain obscure but, as we shall here demonstrate, a close look at *Muspilli* and at its lexicon proved that some terms, in particular, were often misinterpreted. Unquestionably, while some terms employed by the *Muspilli* author received much attention – e.g. *mûspilli*,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bergmann 1971, 316.

<sup>2</sup> See Oliva 2023.

<sup>3</sup> The literature on the noun is extensive. For an overview of the meanings and etymologies which have been suggested, see Laur 1987, Jeske 2006, Oliva 2023, 377-382.

*uueroltrehtuuîso*<sup>4</sup> – some others have been overlooked because of their seemingly straightforward meaning. This was the case, for example, for two of the words we shall here analyse.

### 1. *Hilfa*

This *nomen actionis* derives from the strong verb *helfan*, which is common to all Germanic languages and goes back to Common Germanic \**χelpe/a-*.<sup>5</sup> While the verb is widely attested in the Old High German corpus, the noun counts fewer occurrences, but can be found in the largest religious works (in the translation of the *Regula Benedicti*, in the *Murbacher Hymnen*, in Otfrid's *Evangelienbuch*, in Williram von Ebersberg's *Hoheliedkommentar*), in Notker and in glosses.<sup>6</sup> In general, the meaning of the noun seems to pose no difficulties, but a closer look at the two lines in which OHG *hilfa* is employed in *Muspilli* (line 17, “hus in himile, / dar quimit imo hilfa kinuok”,<sup>7</sup> and 27, “daz ist rehto paluuic dink, // daz der man haret ze gote / enti imo hilfa niquimit”<sup>8</sup>) highlights the difference between the two occurrences and necessarily calls for a reinterpretation of the term in line 17.

Let us begin with line 27. In the passage the author expresses their pity for those who have sinned during their life and will therefore have to “*prinnan in pehhe*”:<sup>9</sup> these people will call out to God, but His *hilfa* will not come. It is clear that the help these sinners need is firstly help out of the flames, and then the help of God's remission of sins. Of this kind of help we also read in the Gospels, in the passage in which the rich man sees Lazarus

<sup>4</sup> The compound was analysed by Kolb 1962 and, more recently, by Gottzmann 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See Lloyd *et al.* (henceforth referred to as EWA) IV, 2009, 932.

<sup>6</sup> About the noun in glosses, see Schützeichel, IV, 2004, 256-258.

<sup>7</sup> All *Muspilli* lines in this article will be quoted, if not otherwise specified, from Steinmeyer's edition (1916, 66-73); (there he will get enough *hilfa*). All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> (It is a truly terrible thing that he invokes God and no help comes to him).

<sup>9</sup> Line 26a (burn in pitch).

and Abraham from the depths of hell and asks Abraham to have Lazarus come down and give him a drop of water.<sup>10</sup> The help he asks for is, as in *Muspilli*, material: the rich man begs for (momentary) relief from his pain, but cannot be helped. On the other side, Lazarus, in Heaven, is *gifluobrit* (Lat. *consolatur*), because he suffered during his earthly life, and can now enjoy eternal peace. This help is something people in hell may never receive: their punishment is the consequence of their conduct and, as the *Muspilli* author writes, they will have to endure the terrible experience of praying for help without any possibility of getting it.

Different is, on the other hand, the *hilfa* in line 17. The complexity of the interpretation of the noun here is evident in the modern translations of the text:

Ein Haus im Himmel, der hat hohes Genügen;<sup>11</sup>

posto in cielo, sovrabbonda di aiuti;<sup>12</sup>

casa in cielo, gli viene allora aiuto a sufficienza;<sup>13</sup>

dimora in cielo, gli perviene aiuto a sufficienza;<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> An Old High German translation of the passage can be found in *Tatian* 107, 2 (translating Luke 16, 22): “Uuárd thô gitân, thaz arstârp ther betalâri inti uuas gitragan fon éngilon in barm Abrahâmes. Arstarp ouh ther ôtago inti uuard bigraban in helliu. Ûfheuenti sîniu ougûn, mit thîu her uúas in uuîzin, gisah Abrahâman rûmana inti Lazarum in sînemo bârme. Inti her ruofenti quad: fater Abrahâm, milti mîr inti senti Lazarum, thaz her duncô thaz lezzistâ teil sînes fîngares in uuazzar, thaz her gicuole mîna zungûn, uuanta ih quilu in thesemo lóuge”, Sievers 1872, 208 (So it happened that the beggar died and was taken by angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried in hell. Raising his eyes because he was in torment, he saw Abraham from afar, and Lazarus in his bosom. And, wailing, he said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I suffer in this flame).

<sup>11</sup> Vetter 1872, 102.

<sup>12</sup> Leesthal 1943, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Lupi, Schwab 1963, 91.

<sup>14</sup> Manganella 1966, 75.

ein Haus im Himmel, für den wird gut gesorgt;<sup>15</sup>  
 ein Haus im Himmel, dem ist da gänzlich geholfen;<sup>16</sup>  
 ein Haus im Himmel, dann wird ihm genug der Hilfe zuteil;<sup>17</sup>  
 – a home in heaven – then help shall come to him in fullness;<sup>18</sup>  
 ein Haus im Himmel, dort wird ihm genug Hilfe zuteil;<sup>19</sup>  
 una casa in Cielo, là gli giunge sufficiente conforto.<sup>20</sup>

The variety of translation choices highlights the fundamental problem of the line: can “help” in its modern sense render the meaning which the author was trying to convey? Is help what souls in Heaven receive? On one side, we might think that the author could have used the same noun in lines 17 and 27 to underline the difference between the damned, doomed to receive no help, and the good, who shall have *hilfa kinuok*. There might be, however, another reason why they employed the term – which would not necessarily exclude the other: OHG *hilfa* can be used to indicate God’s grace. This meaning of the term is not registered in Old High German dictionaries,<sup>21</sup> but is assigned by Kelle<sup>22</sup> to its occurrence in Otfrid I, 28, 5: “thaz sî uns thiû wîntworfa / in themo úrdeile hêlfa, // iz únsih mit giwélti / ni firwâe unz in énti”.<sup>23</sup> According to the AWB, the noun is here used “in Funktionsverbgefügen (FVG), wobei es vor allem um die Hilfe, den Beistand durch Gott geht”<sup>24</sup>, while Kelle, as already said, more concisely translates it as “Gnade”<sup>25</sup>. Otfrid refers, in the line, to

<sup>15</sup> Haug 1977, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Janota 1999, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Müller 2007, 203.

<sup>18</sup> Hintz 2016, 211.

<sup>19</sup> Kraß 2022, 238.

<sup>20</sup> Di Venosa 2023, 83.

<sup>21</sup> See AWB IV, 905-909 and Schützeichel 2012, 147.

<sup>22</sup> See Kelle 1881, 268.

<sup>23</sup> I, 28, 5-6, Erdmann, Wolff 1973, 53 (may [His] winnowing-fan be merciful to us during the Judgment, and may He never blow us away with His strength).

<sup>24</sup> AWB IV, 905.

<sup>25</sup> See Kelle 1881, 268.

the *ventilabrum* with which, according to Luke 3, 17,<sup>26</sup> God shall separate the wheat from the chaff on Judgment Day: as in many other passages,<sup>27</sup> the author prays that the Judge will be merciful, granting *helfa* to everyone.

The one in the *Evangelienbuch* is not the only case in which God's *helfa* is prayed for in such a context. In a passage from the Old English *Juliana*, for example, Cynewulf asks his audience to pray God for him, so that He may be graceful to the author upon his Judgment:

[...] Bidde ic monna gehwone  
 gumena cynnes, þe þis gied wræce,  
 þæt he mec neodful bi noman minum  
 gemyne modig ond Meotud bidde  
 þæt me heofona helm helpe gefremme,  
 meahta waldend, on þam miclan dæge.<sup>28</sup>

The expression *helpe gefremman* is also used in a similar context in *Christ I*, which reads:

[...] Forþon we, nergend, þe  
 biddað geornlice breostgehygdum  
 þæt þu hrædlice helpe gefremme  
 wergum wreccan.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The passage reads: “cuius ventilabrum in manu eius | et purgabit aream suam | et congregabit triticum in horreum suum”, Beriger *et al.* 2018, V, 294.

<sup>27</sup> See Thelen 1989, 199.

<sup>28</sup> Lines 718b-723, Bjork 2013, 126 (I pray everyone / of the human race, earnest and noble-minded, / who recites this poem will remember / me by name and pray the Lord / that he, the protector of the heavens, / the wielder of powers, will help me in that great day), translation by Bjork 2013, 127.

<sup>29</sup> Lines 261b-264a, Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 10 (therefore, Saviour, we eagerly pray to you in our innermost thoughts, that you may quickly help us, weary exiles).

In both cases the authors pray for God's help on Judgment Day, i.e. for His grace, which shall allow them to enter God's reign. The use of the noun for 'help' to indicate God's grace is also attested in Old Saxon. With this meaning the noun can be found in passages which are similar to the *Muspilli* one, as the following:

[...] endi sân aftar sprac  
 allaro barno *bezt*, quað that man bedon scoldi  
 up te them alomahtigon gode endi *im ênum thionon*  
 suuïðo thiolico thegnos managa,  
 heliðos aftar is huldi: 'thar is thiu helpa gelang  
 manno gehuuilicun'.<sup>30</sup>

Here, as in *Muspilli*, *helpa* is what people shall receive in Heaven. As also noticed by Ohly-Steimer, the noun indicates, in this occurrence, "die wahre göttliche Gnade, die zum Guten führt, im Gegensatz zu den vom Teufel versprochenen verderblichen Gütern [...]. Die durch das aktive *helpa* bezeichnete vorzüglich wirkende Gnade Gottes ist in der *huldi godes* eingeschlossen".<sup>31</sup> Similar is a passage from *Juliana* in which the Saint encourages the sinful to praise the Lord, promising them *frōfor*<sup>32</sup> and stating that in Heaven there will be *help* forever everlastingly:

He is þæs wyrðe, þæt hine wer-þeode  
 ond eal engla cynn up on roderum  
 hergen, heah-mægen, þær is help gelang  
 ece to ealdre, þam þe agan sceal.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Heliand*, lines 1108b-1113a, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 45 (and soon after the best of sons spoke, [and] said that one should pray to the almighty God and very humbly serve Him alone, the many thanes, people hoping for grace: 'there *help* will reach every person').

<sup>31</sup> Ohly-Steimer 1956, 99.

<sup>32</sup> See line 639. The meanings provided by the DOE *s.v.* (last accessed on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024) for the noun are 'consolation, comfort'.

<sup>33</sup> Lines 643-646, Bjork 2013, 120 (he is worthy that the nations of men and / all the race of angels up in the firmament / should praise him, the high



In the brief description of Heaven made by the *Guthlac* poet, too, *help* is something one shall receive in God's reign:

Þær ge gnornende  
 deað sceolon dreogan, ond ic dreama wyn  
 agan mid englum in þam uplican  
 rodera rice, þær is ryht cyning,  
 help ond hælu hæleþa cynne,  
 duguð ond drohtað.<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, in the passage, of which only the final section is here quoted, the poet contrasts the pains of Hell to the joys of Paradise, much as the *Muspilli* author. As noticed by Ohly-Steimer, the alliterative formula *help ond healu* in line 683 is particularly effective to describe what awaits those who deserve a place in Heaven: “noch stärker ist die Bedeutung ‘Gnade’ in der Formel *help and hælu* [...], die zu einer Schilderung der Freuden des Jenseits im Gegensatz zu den Schrecken der Hölle dient”.<sup>35</sup>

There is no doubt that the range of meanings of OS *helpa* and OE *help* is much wider than the one we understand under ‘help’. According to Ohly-Steimer, this is to be ascribed to the *Heliand* poet, too, who “das ebenfalls dem alten poetischen Wortschatz angehörige, aber an keine bestimmte sphäre gebundene *helpa*, angeregt durch ‘auxilium’ u.ä. in der lateinischen Gnadenterminologie, häufig gebraucht und damit seinen Geltungsbereich erweitert”.<sup>36</sup> The scholar’s analysis<sup>37</sup> proved that the noun can be

power, where help is / present for ever and ever for the one who will have it), translation by Bjork 2013, 121.

<sup>34</sup> Lines 679b-684a, Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 68-69 (there you, mourning, shall endure death, and I [shall] have the bliss of joys among the angels up in the kingdom of Heaven, where the true king is, *help* and salvation for mankind, company and community).

<sup>35</sup> Ohly-Steimer 1956, 110, footnote 3. The expression can also be found in *Guthlac*, line 890.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>37</sup> See Steimer 1943 and Ohly-Steimer 1956.

employed with the meaning ‘grace’ in different contexts, often to vary other terms of the *Gnadenterminologie*,<sup>38</sup> although *variatio* is not the only reason for the use of this noun. As seen, in all three of the passages quoted above, *help* indicates the state of grace that awaits the blessed, all that is furthest and most different from the punishments reserved for the damned. This evidence, together with the use of the noun made by Otfrid in I, 28, 5, opens up the possibility for a more accurate interpretation of OHG *hilfa* in *Muspilli* 17, which should, in our opinion, be understood as meaning ‘grace’.

*Hilfa kinuok* and *hilfa ni quimit* express two diametrically opposed concepts: on the one hand sufficiency of *hilfa*, on the other its total absence. In the light of what has been observed above, therefore, one could exclude that this lexical choice was accidental: it might, indeed, be the result of a desire to emphasise once again, by playing on the double meaning of the term, the difference between Heaven and Hell, the two opposite fates, one full of grace, the other without any, which are incumbent on righteous and sinners respectively.

## 2. *Mord*

The Old High German noun *mord* goes back to the Indo-European root *\*mer-*, which is widely attested with the meaning ‘to die’ and can be found, for example, in the Italian verb *morire*.<sup>39</sup> The meaning of the term is, unsurprisingly, mostly unambiguous in Germanic languages, in all of which it indicates a murder. Interestingly, though, *mord* designates a particular kind of homicide: unlike OHG *slahta* and *manslahta*, *mord* is used to refer to a secret, premeditated murder. As Ilkow pointed out, “während unsere Rechtssprache unter “Mord” im Gegensatz zu “Totschlag”

<sup>38</sup> On this lexical field, see Wahmann 1937.

<sup>39</sup> See EWA VI, 2017, 554-556. A previous meaning of the root, ‘disappear’, can be found in Hittite *merta*: “außeranatolisch [hat] eine Bed.verengung von ‚verschwinden‘ über ‚hinschwinden‘ zu ‚sterben‘ stattgefunden, wobei die neue Bed. die alte gänzlich verdrängt hat”, EWA VI, 2017, 556.

jede vorbedachte Mentschentötung versteht, kommt dem altgerm. Rechtsbegriff noch das Merkmal der Heimlichkeit hinzu”.<sup>40</sup> The secrecy implied by this crime is well attested in the *Edictum Rothari*, which article XIV states that *mord* (‘murder’) is to be punished by payment of a fine (*wergeld*):

De morth. Si quis homicidium in absconse penetraverit in barone libero aut servo vel ancilla, et unus fuerit aut duo tantum, qui ipsum homicidium fecerint, noningentos solidos conponat. Si vero plures fuerint, si ingenuus, qualiter in angargathungi, ipsum homicidium conponat; si servus aut libertus, conponat ipsum, ut adpraetiatu fuerit. Et si expolia de ipso mortuo tulerit, id est plodraub, conponat octugenta solidos.<sup>41</sup>

The sentence to be served for committing this offence could also be death, as regulated by the Frisian laws (“morth motma mith morthe kela bi liuda kere”).<sup>42</sup> In Cnut’s laws, too, while *slahta* (‘manslaughter’) could be atoned for, *morð* is considered an unatenable (*botleas*) crime: “husbryce 7 bæret 7 open þyfð 7 æbaére morð 7 hlafordswyce æfter woruldlage is botleas”.<sup>43</sup> The meaning of the noun in law texts is unequivocal and is still preserved in Modern German *Mord* which, unlike *Totschlag*, is characterised by an element of premeditation.

Other than in *Muspilli*, OHG *mord* is attested twice in glosses, as interpretamentum of Lat. *mortaudus* and *strages*,<sup>44</sup> once

<sup>40</sup> Ilkow 1968, 313. See also Brunner II, 1892, 627 (“Mord hiefs die Tötung, die absichtlich als eine heimliche geschah”), Munske 1973, 46-47, DRW online s.v. (last accessed on June 11th, 2024), EWA VI, 2017, 553.

<sup>41</sup> Azzara, Gasparri 2005, 18.

<sup>42</sup> Art. XVI, Righthofen 1840, 26 (murder shall be punished with murder according to the law of the people).

<sup>43</sup> II Cnut, art. 64, Liebermann I, 1903, 352 (burglary and arson and open theft and proven homicide and treason of worldly law are unatenable). See also Grimm J., Grimm W. XII, 1885, 2530: “[mord] bezeichnete die heimliche vorbedachte tötung, im gegensatze zum offenen tots Schlag (ahd. slahta, manslahta), dieses ein sühnbares, jenes ein todeswürdiges verbrechen”.

<sup>44</sup> In Straßburg Universitätsbibliothek, C. V. 6, p. 160, 6 (see Steinmeyer,

in the *Lorscher Beichte* (“ih giu [...] mordes inti manslahta”),<sup>45</sup> and once in the *Evangelienbuch*. Otfrid employs the noun to refer to the massacre of the innocents narrated in Matthew 2, 16 and writes: “iz ni habent lívola / noh iz ni lesent scribara, // thaz júngera wórolti / sulih mórd wurti”.<sup>46</sup> In all of these occurrences, OHG *mord* is undoubtedly employed with the meaning ‘murder’. This meaning is also the one which has generally been assigned to the occurrence of the noun in *Muspilli*:<sup>47</sup> this interpretation, though, does not take into account the context in which the noun is used. The *Muspilli* passage in question reads:

dar scal denne hant sprehan,    houpit sagen,  
allero lido uelihc    unzi in den luzigun uinger,  
uuaz er untar desen mannum    mordes kifrumita.  
dar niist eo so listic man,    der dar iouuiht arliugan megí,  
daz er kitarnan megí    tato dehheina (lines 91-95).<sup>48</sup>

As already pointed out, *mord* in line 93 of the text has almost always been interpreted as meaning ‘murder’. This is easily observable in translations of the line:

Sievers 1882, II, 352,38) and Bern Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 723, fol. 140v, 16, see Schützeichel VI, 2004, 430.

<sup>45</sup> Steinmeyer 1916, 323, 5-8.

<sup>46</sup> I, 20, 23-24, Erdmann, Wolff 1973, 42 (books do not have it, nor do writers read it, that in the young world such a *mord* was committed). In the *Heliand* passage in which the same episode can be found, the term employed to refer to the massacre is OS *menuuerk* (line 753). About the similarities between the two passages, see Kartschoke 1975, 320-325. About the massacre in *Heliand* specifically, see Kartschoke 1975, 210-213, Gantert 1998, 130-132, Albert 2014, 223-226.

<sup>47</sup> See AWB VI, 802 and the translations of the text quoted below.

<sup>48</sup> (Then the hand shall speak, the head say, every body part up to the little finger, what sins he committed among people. No one will be clever enough to manage to lie about anything, to conceal any deed, so that it does not get revealed to God, unless he has not prevented it with almsgiving or has atoned his sins by fasting).

was es unter dieser Menschheit Mordes vollgebracht hat;<sup>49</sup>

quali assassinii egli abbia commesso fra gli uomini;<sup>50</sup>

dirà ciò che di nefando commise tra la gente;<sup>51</sup>

dirà ciò che tra la gente egli commise di male;<sup>52</sup>

was er unter den Menschen hier an Mordtat getan hat;<sup>53</sup>

was er unter den Menschen hier / an Mordtat getan hat;<sup>54</sup>

was er unter den Menschen / an Mordtaten ausgeführt hat;<sup>55</sup>

what deeds of murder one has committed among men;<sup>56</sup>

was er unter den Menschen an Morden verübt hat;<sup>57</sup>

Quale omicidio egli commise tra gli uomini.<sup>58</sup>

If *mord* was, indeed, intended as ‘murder’, though, we would have to assume that every single person presenting themselves before God on Judgment Day had a sin of murder to confess and be punished for. The same applies to Reiffenstein’s interpretation of the term, which he understands as ‘*Blutrache*’:

der Sühnevertrag ist die eine Möglichkeit, die Rechtsordnung wiederherzustellen, die Rache ist die andere. Die Kirche zwar hat die Rache immer abgelehnt; wenn der Rachetotschlag im Heliand und im Muspilli mord genannt wird, schimpfliche Tötung – erheblich verwerflicher als die manslacht, der offene Totschlag –, so bestätigt sich wieder, daß von germanisierender Aufweichung

<sup>49</sup> Vetter 1872, 104.

<sup>50</sup> Leesthal 1943, 28.

<sup>51</sup> Lupi, Schwab 1963, 95.

<sup>52</sup> Manganella 1966, 79.

<sup>53</sup> Haug 1977, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Janota 1999, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Müller 2007, 207.

<sup>56</sup> Hintz 2016, 228.

<sup>57</sup> Kraß 2022, 240.

<sup>58</sup> Di Venosa 2023, 93. The translator’s choice (it. *omicidio*) is based on Hintz’s (2016, 228) interpretation of the passage: “in accord with Germanic judicial custom, the corpse of the murder victim or part of the corpse – the hand or head – could be brought before court as an accusation of murder”.

des Christentums auch in Stabreimgedichten keine Rede sein kann. In unserem Zusammenhang ist vor allem wichtig, daß mit der Warnung vor der Blutrache wieder das adlige Publikum unmittelbar angesprochen ist.<sup>59</sup>

For the occurrence of *mord* in *Muspilli* this interpretation would also pose another problem: as Reiffenstain remarks, “Unfreie hatten weder Anspruch auf Wergeld noch auf Rache”;<sup>60</sup> the use of *mord* in this acception would imply, therefore, that the *Muspilli* author, who always underlines that everyone is equal before God and that everyone will have to attend the Judgment, would here only address an aristocratic audience, which would seem unusual for them. The meaning ‘*Blutrache*’, moreover, is never attested for OHG *mord*, nor for its cognates in other Germanic languages.

In order to make better sense of the *Muspilli* line, it can be useful to look at the occurrences of OS *morth*, in particular at one in *Genesis B* in which the noun is used to refer to what Tiefenbach defines a ‘mortal sin’:

*Sum* heo hire *on* handum bær,    *sum* hire æt heortan læg,  
 æppel unsælga,    þone hire ær forbead  
 drihtna drihten,    deaðbeames ofet  
 and þæt word acwæð    wuldres aldor  
 þæt þæt micle morð    menn ne þorfton.<sup>61</sup>

In relation to this occurrence, J. and W. Grimm had already noticed that *mord* “konnte in den alten sprache [...] in den sinn eines capitalverbrechens überhaupt umschlagen”.<sup>62</sup> And, in fact, the passage

<sup>59</sup> Reiffenstein 1966, 13.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Lines 636-640, Doane 1991, 223 (one she brought in her hands, one lay on her heart, the ill-fated apple which the lord of lords had before forbidden, the fruit of the tree of death, and that commandment the lord of miracles proclaimed so that people would not need the mortal sin).

<sup>62</sup> Grimm, Grimm XII, 1885, 2530. See also col. 2534, “die ältere nhd. sprache kennt bisweilen noch, wie die alte, wie namentlich oft auch das

is about Eve, who just picked the apples from the forbidden tree (*deaðbeam*) which God had told the progenitors not to touch so that humankind would not need the *micle morð*. It appears perfectly clear that the syntagm refers to the original sin – which caused humans to have to leave the Garden of Eden and to have to die –, which was passed down to humankind by Adam and Eve. The expression occurs again a few lines later, in a verse which is almost identical to line 640: “on þæt micle morð / men forweorpan”.<sup>63</sup> In this case the subject is not God, but the devil, who is determined to force humankind into the *micle morð* i.e., the original sin.

The fact that the noun was, on some occasions, used to refer to a misdeed was also noticed by Ilkow, who highlighted that “*mord* kann durch Verallgemeinerung die Bedeutung ‘schweres Verbrechen’ entwickeln”.<sup>64</sup> The example provided is *Heliand* 1495: “*ne iro mǣgskepi sô mikil, / ef he ina an morð spenit, // bêdid baluuuerc*”,<sup>65</sup> an excerpt from a speech made by Christ to his disciples. In the passage Christ warns them of the dangers of following friends, if they drive them towards sin, underlining that their friendship is not that great if one leads the other to *morð*; the noun is then varied, in the following line, by *baluuuerc*, ‘sin, misdeed’,<sup>66</sup> which is employed with the verb *bêdian*, a synonym of *spanan*.

Interestingly, the meaning ‘very evil deed’, ‘mortal wrong’ is also extant for OE *morð*. This is attested in Ælfric’s *Passio Sancti Eadmundi Regis*, which reads:

swa þæt se halga wer hi wundorlice geband .  
 ælcne swa he stod strutigende mid tole .  
 þæt heora nan ne mihte þæt morð gefremman.<sup>67</sup>

mnl., *mord* in der allgemeineren bedeutung eines hauptfrevels, schweren verbrechens”.

<sup>63</sup> Line 691, Doane 1991, 223 ([the devil] forced men into the mortal sin).

<sup>64</sup> Ilkow 1968, 313.

<sup>65</sup> Lines 1495-1496b, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 59 (their friendship is not that great if one induces another to sin, urges him to [commit] misdeeds).

<sup>66</sup> See Tiefenbach 2010, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Lines 207-209, Skeat 1900, II, 328 (so the holy man wondrously bound

The passage leaves no room for doubt about the meaning of the term. The entity of the *morð* is clarified a few lines before the noun is used: Ælfric is telling the story of a group of thieves who tried to steal the treasure of the Saint but were unsuccessful in their ‘evil deed’ (*morð*) because the ‘holy man’ (*halga wer*) bound them.<sup>68</sup> It is therefore evident that, though not particularly frequent, the meaning ‘evil deed’ is attested both for OE *morð* and OS *morth*. It is with this meaning, I argue, that OHG *mord* is employed by the *Muspilli* author.

In order to understand the meaning of OHG *mord* in our line it might be useful to look at the verb with which it is used, *gifrummen*, which is also attested in Old Saxon and Old English. The *Heliand* poet employs the Old Saxon verb *gifrummian* quite a few times. In line 84 the verb occurs with the noun *mên* ‘crime, misdeed, evil deed, sin, perjury’;<sup>69</sup> in line 1716 it is employed with *firinuwerk* ‘sin, evil deed’,<sup>70</sup> while in line 2680 the poet pairs it with *tiono* ‘evil deed, wrong, crime, harm’.<sup>71</sup> The Old English

them, each while they stood stiffly with a tool, so that none of them could perform that evil deed).

<sup>68</sup> Toller 1921, 642 assigns the same meaning, ‘very evil deed’ to the occurrence of OE *morð* in the translation of Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*, III, 5 (Hecht 1900, 186), in which, though, the noun renders Lat. *homicidium* and refers to the (unsuccessful) murder of bishop Sabino at the hands of an ambitious archdeacon who had bribed the bishop’s servant to poison him.

<sup>69</sup> Tiefenbach 2010, 266. The passage reads: “ni uueldun derbeas uuiht // under mancunnie, / mènes gifrummean, // ne \*saca ne sundea”, lines 83b-85a, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 10 (they did not want to perform among people any evil thing, nor crime nor sin).

<sup>70</sup> Tiefenbach 2010, 93. The passage reads: “endi habad im selbo mêt // firinuwerco gefrumid”, lines 1715b-1716a, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 66 (and he himself did more evil). See also the *Saxon Genesis* 256, “sundiga liudi // firinuwerk fremmian”, Doane 1991, 248 ([they heard] sinful people perform sins).

<sup>71</sup> Tiefenbach 2010, 394. The passage reads: “uuisse that imu ni mahtun / menniscoono barn, // bi theru godcundi / Iudeo liudi // êr is tîdiun uuiht / teonon gifrummien, // lêðaro gilêsto”, lines 2678-2681a, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 99 (he [Christ] knew that, because of his godliness, the sons of men could do him no harm before his time, no evil actions).



verb counts more occurrences, approximately 550.<sup>72</sup> Among its meanings, the DOE lists that of ‘committing, perpetrating a sin/crime’<sup>73</sup> when used with nouns such as *firene*, *gylt*, *synne* and ‘to commit a deadly sin’<sup>74</sup> when employed with OE *heafodgylt* and *heafodleahter*. With OE *firene* the verb is used, for example, in *Beowulf*, in an epithet used to describe Grendel: “ða þæt onfunde / sē þe fela æror // mōdes myrðe / manna cynne, // fyrene gefremede / – hē fāg wið God – // þæt him se līchoma / læstan nolde”.<sup>75</sup> The verb is also used with another interesting term, *morþor*<sup>76</sup> ‘murder, mortal sin, great wickedness’;<sup>77</sup> this is the case, for example, in *Judith*, when, soon after the death of Holofernes, the protagonist refers to him as the one who “þe us monna mæst / morðra gefremede”.<sup>78</sup> Both in Old Saxon and in Old English, therefore, the verb can be used with nouns indicating a sin or crime. The same applies to OHG *gifrummen*,<sup>79</sup> which in *Muspilli* occurs in

<sup>72</sup> See DOE s.v. (last accessed on January 10th, 2024).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Lines 809-812, Wrenn 1958, 116 (then he found out, he who had already committed many crimes against the mind of mankind – in enmity with God – that the body would not do him a service).

<sup>76</sup> OE *morþor* derives from Common Germ. \**murpra-* (which had the same meaning as Common Germ. \**murþa-*), but how these two roots came to be is disputed. According to the EWA VI, 2017, 554, there are two possibilities: either \**murpra-* is original and \**murþa-* derives from it, or there are two different underlying constructions.

<sup>77</sup> For these and other meanings of the term, see Bosworth, Toller 1964, 698.

<sup>78</sup> Line 181, Timmer 1966, 26 (the one of all men who brought about for us the most slaughters). The meaning of the verb *gefremman* much depends on the noun it is used with. As seen, it can be paired with nouns indicating something negative, but it is also often used in a positive acceptance. In *Beowulf*, for example, Wiglaf praises the dead hero saying that he “forðām hē manna mæst / mærdra gefremede” (line 2645, Wrenn 1958, 164), (for he, more than anyone, has brought about the most glorious deeds). The similarity between the *Judith* and the *Beowulf* lines, according to Orchard 2020: 45, “is ear-catching indeed, and is one of a number of parallels which suggest that the *Judith*-poet may have borrowed directly (and ironically) from the longer poem with which it now shares a manuscript-context”.

<sup>79</sup> The verb is quite frequent in the Old High German, mostly in glosses, see

lines 70, here with OHG *upil* ‘Sünde, Untat’:<sup>80</sup> (“der [the devil] hapet in ruouu / rahono uueliha, // daz der man er enti sid / upiles kifrumita”),<sup>81</sup> and 93. Another occurrence of the verb with a noun indicating a sin can be found in the *Süddeutscher [Münchener] Beichte*, in which it is used with OHG *sunda*, “so wirdih hiute bihtich [...] aller miner sunden, die ich ie gefrumete”,<sup>82</sup> but also in the *Lorscher Beichte*, in which the verb is employed with the expression *uuidar gotes uuillen*, “thes alles inti anderes manages, thes ih uuidar gotes uuillen gifrumita”.<sup>83</sup> In all of these examples OHG *gifrummen* (as OS *gifrummian* and OE *gefremman*) is paired with a noun – or an expression – for ‘sin’ to convey the meaning ‘to commit a sin’; interestingly, instead, the verb never occurs with a term indicating a murder.<sup>84</sup>

AWB III, 1304ff.

<sup>80</sup> See Schützeichel 2012, 346.

<sup>81</sup> Lines 69-70 (he keeps track of every evil that a person has, sooner or later, done).

<sup>82</sup> Steinmeyer 1916, 347, 46-54 (so I confess today all of the sins I ever committed). See also the *Würzburger Beichte*, “mina suntan, de ih gifrumita” (*ibid.*, 317, 33-34), the *Benediktbeurer Beichte II*, “aller dere sunton, die ih ie gefrumeto” (*ibid.*, 336, 8; see also 336, 10), the *Benediktbeurer Beichte I*, “ich gihe [...] aller miner sunteno, die ich ie gefrumete” (*ibid.*, 339, 22-24; see also 339, 27), the *Sangaller Beichte I*, “hich gio [...] allero minero sündeno, thio hich in uuerelte keteta alde gefrúmeta” (*ibid.*, 340, 1-3), the *Sangaller Beichte II*, “so pigí ih dem allemächtigen got [...] aller miner sunton, der ih ie gedahte oder gefrumete” (*ibid.*, 344, 1-2), the *Benediktbeurer Beichte III*, “aller der sunde, die ich ie gefrumte” (*ibid.*, 358, 50).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 324, 35-36. See also the *Bruchstück einer Beichte*, “des alles enti anderes manages, des ih uuidar gotes uuillun gifrumita [...] so ih es gihukke”, *ibid.*, 326, 18 (so I think of everything that I did against God’s will).

<sup>84</sup> This was possible in Old English, though OE *gefremman* does not occur frequently with OE *morð* ‘murder’ and its synonyms. An example can be found in Ælfric’s first Old English letter to Wulfstan, in which the abbot of Eynsham wrote that clerics should not be implicated in a person’s death, not even if the person had committed manslaughter or murder: “we ne moton beon ymbe mannes deaðe. Ðeah he manslaga beo oþþe morð gefremede oþþe mycel þeofman [...] Ac tæcean þa læwedan men him lif oþþe deað”, Fehr 1914, 140. On this passage, see Marafioti 2008, 44-45. On the history of episcopal involvement in the administration of justice, see Uhalde 2007. The presence

The use of OHG *gifrummen* with a noun for ‘sin’ is, as we have seen, most frequent in confessions and, although *Muspilli* is certainly not a *Beichte*, the passage in which *mord gifrummen* is found is concerned with revealing one’s sins to God. In this respect, it is interesting to look at the other terms employed by the author to refer to what should be revealed:

dar scal denne hant sprehhan,    houpit sagen,  
 allero lido uuelihc    unzi in den luzigun uinger,  
 uuaz er untar desen mannun    **mordes** kifrumita.  
 dar niist eo so listic man,    der dar **iouuiht** arliugan megī,  
 daz er kitarnan megī    **tato** dehheina (lines 91-95).<sup>85</sup>

Other than *mord*, the *Muspilli* author employs the indefinite pronoun *iouuiht* and *tat*, a noun which can refer to any (deplorable, in this case) action. Both terms are broad-ranging and do not indicate a single sin, in accordance with the rest of the text, in which no specific sin is ever mentioned.<sup>86</sup> Considering this and all of the above, OHG *mord* in line 93 of *Muspilli* cannot reasonably be interpreted as ‘murder’. The choice of this term might have been influenced by two factors: on one side, alliteration; on the other, according to Brunner, its intrinsic secrecy:

Die alte Sprache beschränkt übrigens den Ausdruck Mord nicht auf die heimliche Tötung, sondern braucht ihn auch für andere heimliche Verbrechen. So wird die heimliche, die nächtliche Brandstiftung als Mordbrand, Mordnachtbrand bezeichnet. Schlechtweg die heimliche, die verborgene Missethat ist gemeint, wenn eine althochdeutsche Darstellung des jüngsten Gerichtes bei diesem kundbar werden läßt, was Mordes man unter den Menschen vollbracht habe.<sup>87</sup>

and role of bishops in hundred courts was regulated by article 5 of III Eadgar (Liebermann I, 1903, 202).

<sup>85</sup> Emphasis added. See the translation in footnote 47.

<sup>86</sup> The author does mention bribery (*miatun infahan*, line 72), but in a different context.

<sup>87</sup> Brunner 1892, II, 629.

Besides the possible reasons which might have led the author to employ this term, though, what is crucial is that OHG *mord* does not, in this occurrence, mean ‘murder’, but shall be assigned the more general meaning of ‘sin’, ‘sinful action’: one’s body shall reveal to God every sin a person committed in their life.

### 3. *Muspilli*

The noun which gave *Muspilli* its title is undoubtedly one of the most enigmatic terms of the text. Its first editor, Schmeller, had already labelled the noun as a “merkwürdige[r], bisher weder aus der isländischen noch altsächsischen Form genügend erklärbare Ausdruck”<sup>88</sup> and, though many have tried to explain it, both its meaning and its etymology remain unclear: “was *Muspilli* etymologisch bedeutet, weiß ich nicht, und ich habe wenig Hoffnung, daß von der Etymologie her einmal die Erleuchtung kommen wird”.<sup>89</sup> It was because of this inscrutability that OHG *muspilli* was generally assigned a meaning (‘end of the world’ or ‘Judgment Day’)<sup>90</sup> largely based on the occurrences of its Old Saxon cognate. Unfortunately, we cannot account for the occurrences of the noun in other linguistic areas here, but all of these have been thoroughly analysed in the past.<sup>91</sup> We shall, however, highlight two points: the exact meaning of OS *mūdspellī* is not clear from the *Heliand* passages in which it occurs, as Haubrichs also noticed, “auch in Variationsgefüge der ‚Heliand‘-Passagen wird nicht hinreichend klar, ob *mūdspellī* den Gerichtstag, das Weltende oder den Weltenrichter meint”,<sup>92</sup> the Old Norse word

<sup>88</sup> Schmeller 1832, 23.

<sup>89</sup> Mohr 1977, 12.

<sup>90</sup> See AWB VI, 933, ‘Weltende durch Feuer, Jüngstes Gericht’ and Schützeichel 2012, 231 ‘Jüngstes Gericht (?)’.

<sup>91</sup> Among the main contributions, see Braune 1915, 430-431, Ilkow 1968, 318-320 about the meaning of OS *mūdspellī* and Finger 1977, 122-148, Krogmann 1933 and 1953 on the occurrences of ON *múspell*. An overview was recently provided by Di Venosa 2023, 41-49.

<sup>92</sup> Haubrichs 1995, 320.

*Múspell*, instead, indicates either the southern region of fire or, when personified, the ‘*undergangens volder*’.<sup>93</sup> Of course, it would be preposterous to assign any of the two meanings held by the Old Norse noun to OHG *muspilli*. Having cleared these two fundamental points, I would like to offer my contribution to the interpretation of the Old High German term, starting not from its etymology, but from the context in which it occurs. I argue, in fact, that looking at where and how it is used (line 57, “*dar nimac denne mak andremo / helfan uora demo muspille*”),<sup>94</sup> might help to shed light on the meaning of this noun.

In his famous essay on *Muspilli*, Herbert Kolb rejected the meaning which is still often assigned to the noun, ‘end of the world’. This, he argued, would involve the end of every being, making it impossible for a relative to help another:

wäre mit dem Wort *muspille* der Weltuntergang gemeint, so würde die Aussage dieser Zeile eigentlich recht matt, beinahe ohne Sinn sein. Denn der Untergang der Welt bedeutet ja den Untergang auch jedes Einzelnen und schließt die Möglichkeit aus, daß ein Mensch dem anderen und also auch ein Verwandter dem anderen davor helfen könnte.<sup>95</sup>

Besides this consideration, there is another reason why the meaning ‘end of the world’ does not seem possible for the Old High German noun. The line presents us with the motif, common in eschatological literature, which Lendinara called ‘no aid from kin’:<sup>96</sup> creating an antithesis between earthly and heavenly law, authors underline that “at the Judgment Day, no man will receive aid from those – relatives or friends – who, in his lifetime, would

<sup>93</sup> See Jónsson 1931, 415.

<sup>94</sup> Line 57 (there a relative will not be able to help another before the *muspilli*).

<sup>95</sup> Kolb 1964, 4. See also Grau 1908, 241: “[d]aß ein Bruder dem andern vor dem Weltbrand hilft, hat [...] an sich gar keinen Sinn”.

<sup>96</sup> See Lendinara 2002, 67.

have come to his aid in case of need”.<sup>97</sup> In the numerous texts in which the motif is found, the impossibility to help or receive help always applies to the Judgment, not to the end of the world. Considering this evidence, too, the possibility that OHG *muspilli* means ‘end of the world’ may be ruled out.

An interesting input about the possible meaning of the noun was given by Willy Krogmann who, analysing the elements forming the noun and looking at passages from the *Bible*, concluded that OHG *muspilli* is a noun for Christ the Judge. According to the scholar, *mûd* is ‘mouth’,<sup>98</sup> while the second element of the compound derives from *\*-spalliaz*:<sup>99</sup> OHG *muspilli* should therefore mean ‘Mundverderber, Mundtöter’: “er ist derjenige, qui ore occidit. Ae. *spillan* und noch mehr die entsprechenden Bedeutungen des nhd. *spellen*, schweiz. *verspellen* ‘verderben’, ne. *spell* ‘to empty (a sail) of wind’ fordern nachdrücklich diese Bestimmung”.<sup>100</sup> This *Mundtöter* should be Christ, as the scholar clarified later: “als „Mundtöter“ wurde Christus bezeichnet, weil er nach der Darstellung der Bibel die Verlorenen mit der Waffe seines Mundes schlägt”.<sup>101</sup> This interpretation, which was never accepted by the scholarship, is possible on the basis of a careful textual analysis, as we here hope to demonstrate.

The nouns used by the *Muspilli* author to refer to the Judgment are the following: *ding*, *mahal*, *rihtunga*, *stuatago* and *suona*.<sup>102</sup> We shall here only take into account the cases in which the author writes that everyone shall come to the Judgment:

<sup>97</sup> See Lendinara 2002, 67.

<sup>98</sup> This was already maintained by Detter 1896, 108, Skutsch-Dorff 1903, 7, Hagen 1904, 4.

<sup>99</sup> See Krogmann 1934, 154.

<sup>100</sup> See Krogmann 1934, 154.

<sup>101</sup> Krogmann 1957, 104.

<sup>102</sup> About the terms in *Muspilli*, see Oliva 2023. On the nouns for ‘Judgment Day’ in Old High German, see Schnerrer 1963 and Freudenthal 1949, 54-99.

ni allero manno uuelih ze demo mahale sculi [queman, EN] (line 34);<sup>103</sup>

pidiu ist demo manne so guot, denner ze demo mahale quimit (line 63);<sup>104</sup>

denne nidarf er sorgen, denne er ze deru suonu quimit (line 65);<sup>105</sup>

daz er iz allaz kisaget, denne er ze deru suonu quimit (line 71);<sup>106</sup>

dara quimit ze deru rihtungu so uilo dia dar ar resti arstent (line 89);<sup>107</sup>

denner ze deru suonu quimit (line 99a).<sup>108</sup>

It is immediately evident that there is one element which is common to all these lines: the use of the preposition *ze* with the noun indicating the Judgment. This, of course, is partially determined by the use of the verb *queman*, which is also employed in every line quoted above, but the use of *ze* + a noun for ‘Judgment’ or ‘Judgment Day’ is common in Old High German (e.g., “ia der de sinan fillol leran farsumit, za suonutagin redia urgepan scal”).<sup>109</sup> The element of motion towards the Judgment is very present in our text and seems to characterise every mention of the Day of Judgment: there is no case in which the author writes that someone is *at* the Judgment. There are, however, two lines in which they explain what shall happen when a person is undergoing Judgment; the terms used here, though, are not those for ‘Judgment’, but rather words for ‘king’ i.e., nouns to indicate God

<sup>103</sup> (None of the people who have [to go] to the Judgment).

<sup>104</sup> (Thus, it is good for a person, when they come to the Judgment, [that] they judge everything correctly).

<sup>105</sup> (Then they do not need to worry when they come to the Judgment).

<sup>106</sup> (So that they may say everything when they come to the Judgment).

<sup>107</sup> (So many will come to the Judgment who raise from the dead).

<sup>108</sup> Line 99a, Braune, Ebbinghaus 1994<sup>17</sup>, 89 (when they come to the Judgment). Steinmeyer 1916 omits the line. On other editorial choices, see Santoro 2022, 32.

<sup>109</sup> *Exhortatio ad plebem christianam*, Steinmeyer 1916, 50, 38-40 (the one who neglects to teach their godson shall be held accountable [for it] on Judgment Day).

the Judge (OHG *rihhe* and *khuning*). In both cases, the author uses the preposition *fora* to specify the person's position in relation to God:

dar scal er uora demo rihhe az rahhu stantan  
 pi daz er in uuerolti kiuerkot hapeta;<sup>110</sup>  
 dar niist eo so listic man, der dar iouuiht arliugan megi,  
 daz er kitarnan megi tato dehheina,  
 niz al fora demo khuninge kichundit uuerde.<sup>111</sup>

The syntagm *uora demo muspille* is undeniably more similar to these than to the occurrences of the nouns for 'Judgment': the preposition *fora* is, in fact, commonly used with nouns indicating God, or in expressions meaning 'before God's eyes' or 'before God's angels' (e.g. "daz ih fora dinem augom unskamenti si",<sup>112</sup> "giueho ist in himile fora gotes engilun"<sup>113</sup>).

The interpretation of the line is certainly complex both because of the uncertain meaning of OHG *muspilli* and because of *fora*, which can be a local, temporal, or causal preposition. The AWB maintains that the *fora* in our line is a causal preposition which, together with the verb *helfan*, should come to mean 'schützen, behüten, retten, helfen vor'.<sup>114</sup> In most of the other occurrences cited by the AWB under this meaning, the preposition *fora* is used with a noun indicating a danger or something from which one might want to be defended, such as an enemy ("turris fortitudinis a facie inimici. Starch túrre bist dû mir fore demo fiende")<sup>115</sup> or

<sup>110</sup> Lines 35-36 (there, before the Judge, he shall be held accountable for what he did in the world).

<sup>111</sup> Lines 94-96 (there no one will ever be clever enough to be able to lie on anything, to hide any deed: everything will be made manifest to the King).

<sup>112</sup> *Altbayrische Beichte*, Steinmeyer 1916, 309, 8-9 (that before your eyes I am not ashamed). For other examples, see AWB III, 1140.

<sup>113</sup> *Tatian* 96, 6, Sievers 1872, 193 (there is joy in Heaven before God's angels).

<sup>114</sup> See AWB III, 1142.

<sup>115</sup> Notker's translation of *Psalms* 60, 4, Tax 1981, II, 207 (you are, for me, a



fire (“fóre demo fiure skírmdi”).<sup>116</sup> This interpretation of the preposition would, therefore, only be fitting if we were to understand OHG *muspilli* as meaning ‘end of the world’, which, as we have seen, we do not.

In the other two occurrences of the preposition in *Muspilli*, this is used with nouns indicating God (OHG *ríhhi* and *khuning*). Furthermore, Old High German generally uses *in* + a noun for ‘judgment’ to render Lat. *in iudicio*. Considering, moreover, that the *Muspilli* author never writes of somebody being ‘at’ the Judgment, but twice of someone being ‘in front of’ (*fora*) the Judge, it might be possible to reconsider the meaning of the noun. Krogmann<sup>117</sup> and, after him, Haubrichs, have already maintained that OHG *muspilli* shall be understood as a noun for Christ:

das Wort [ist] entweder als nomen actionis „Mundverderben, -zerstörung“ bzw. als nomen agentis „Mundverderber“ aufzufassen [...]. Es wäre damit Kenning für Christus oder das Weltgericht, jedesmal mit Bezug auf 2. Thessalonicher 2, 1ff., wo Christus den Widersacher (Antichrist) mit einem Hauch seines Mundes (nach Rabanus „durch sein Wort“) tötet, und Apokalypse 19, 11ff. (vgl. 1, 16; Epheser 6, 17; Hebräer 4, 12), wo Christus den Pseudopropheten der Endzeit (und damit den Antichrist) und sein Heer durch ein aus seinem Munde hervorgehendes Schwert umbringt.<sup>118</sup>

What has been observed above is, in my opinion, a further argument to support Krogmann’s and Haubrich’s thesis. It does therefore not seem implausible to understand OHG *muspilli* as a noun for Christ: no relative will be able to help another before the Judge.

strong tower in the presence of enemies).

<sup>116</sup> Notker’s translation of Capella’s *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, King 1979, 99-100 (protected from the fire).

<sup>117</sup> See Krogmann 1953, 106.

<sup>118</sup> Haubrichs 1995, 321.

#### 4. *Conclusions*

Those presented here are some of the results of a larger analysis carried out on the entire lexicon of *Muspilli*. The three examples hopefully proved that Bergmann was indeed right in advocating such a work: the close look at the meaning of crucial words showed that a (re)interpretation of some terms is necessary to make better sense of the text, as was the case for OHG *hilfa* and *mord*. With respect to OHG *muspilli*, arguably one of the most complex Old High German words, on the other hand, we were hopefully able to demonstrate that, if on one side searching for its etymology is crucial, looking at how it is employed and in which context is also relevant to its interpretation.

Many of the questions which have long plagued *Muspilli* scholars surely remain unanswered. What we hope to have managed, nonetheless, is to have shed light on some unclear passages of the text.

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*Online resources*

AWB (*Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, digitalisierte Fassung bereitgestellt durch die Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig): <<https://awb.saw-leipzig.de/AWB>>

DOE. 2018. *Dictionary of Old English: A to I online*, edited by Angus Cameron *et al.* Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, <<https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/?E11724>>

DRW (*Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch*): <<https://drw.hadw-bw.de/drw-cgi/zeige>>



VERIO SANTORO

*THEIZ IST ÁBULGES DAG.*

LA RAPPRESENTAZIONE DEL GIORNO  
DEL GIUDIZIO NEL LIBRO V, CAPITOLO 19 DEL  
*LIBER EVANGELIORUM* DI OTFRID DI WEIßENBURG

“Mein Gott! Mein Gott! Warum hast du mich verlassen? Und sollt’ich mich des Ausdruckes schämen, sollte mir es vor dem Augenblicke bange sein, da ihm der nicht entging, der die Himmel zusammenrollt wie ein Tuch?”

J. W. Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*  
(Am 15. November)

The theological reflection on the final destiny of people and creation is widely present in a large number of German texts throughout the medieval period; the theme appears in vernacular translations of the sacred text, but is also a central topic in a large number of poetic texts, from the *Muspilli* of the Carolingian period to the religious poems of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (among others, Frau Avas poems, *Hamburger Jüngstes Gericht*, *Himmel und Hölle*, *Das himmlische Jerusalem*). The eschatological theme is also at the centre of Otfrid of Weißenburg’s reflection. Despite a good number of studies devoted also to the interpretation of specific passages of his work, chapter V, 19 (*De die judicii*) has never been the focus of a particular study. In this essay we shall attempt to highlight the cornerstones of Otfrid’s reflection on the Last Judgement through the examination of the structure of the chapter and the interpretation of its individual parts.

La riflessione teologica sul destino finale delle persone e del creato è ampiamente presente in una grande quantità di testi tedeschi lungo tutto il periodo medievale; non soltanto inevitabilmente si affaccia nelle traduzioni in volgare del testo sacro, ma soprattutto è argomento centrale di una grande quantità di testi poetici, dal componimento escatologico *Muspilli* del periodo carolingio ai componimenti religiosi, di carattere apocalittico o dogmatico, dell’XI e XII secolo (tra gli altri, i componimenti di Frau Ava, *Hamburger Jüngstes Gericht*, *Himmel und Hölle*, *Das himmlische*

*Jerusalem*). La tematica escatologica non poteva non essere al centro della riflessione anche di Otfrid, monaco e maestro di grammatica, copista e bibliotecario presso lo scriptorium di Weißenburg, teologo, tra i principali protagonisti della vita culturale dell'Età carolingia. Nonostante una discreta quantità di studi dedicati anche all'interpretazione di specifici passi della sua opera,<sup>1</sup> il capitolo V, 19 (*De die judicii*) non è però mai stato al centro di uno studio particolare (cfr. *infra*). Nei limiti di spazio consentiti al saggio, cercheremo di evidenziare i cardini della riflessione di Otfrid sul Giudizio finale, attraverso l'esame della struttura del capitolo e l'interpretazione delle sue singole parti. Fondamentale, per una migliore comprensione del capitolo, cominciare dalla sua collocazione all'interno del libro quinto (e dell'intera opera).

Volumen namque istud in quinque libros distinxi, quorum primus nativitatem Christi memorat, finem facit baptismo doctrinaque Johannis. Secundus jam accersitis ejus discipulis refert, quomodo se et quibusdam signis et doctrina sua praeclara mundo innotuit. Tertius signorum claritudinem et doctrinam ad Judaeos aliquantulum narrat. Quartus jam qualiter suae passioni propinquans pro nobis mortem sponte pertulerit dicit. Quintus ejus resurrectionem, cum discipulis suam postea conlocutionem, ascensionem et diem judicii memorat.<sup>2</sup>

Così il maestro di Weißenburg si esprime, nella sua lettera di approvazione all'arcivescovo di Magonza Liutberto (*Ad Liutbertum*), a proposito del contenuto e della suddivisione dei singoli libri dell'opera sua, nota, con il titolo autoriale in latino che lo stesso Otfrid ha tramandato, come *Liber Evangeliorum domini gratia theotisce conscriptus*;<sup>3</sup> opera che non è soltanto il racconto

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Ertzdorff 1964, Haubrichs 1968, Ernst 1972 e più di recente Staiti 2024 sull'episodio della tentazione di Cristo.

<sup>2</sup> Erdmann 1882, 5. Il testo di Otfrid sarà sempre citato dall'edizione di Erdmann 1882.

<sup>3</sup> Per una rapida ed essenziale informazione sull'opera di Otfrid cfr. Schröder

in versi a rima finale della vita del Salvatore, ma fornisce un'interpretazione della *historia salutis*, della storia della salvezza. Se lo scopo ultimo della vita terrena di ogni cristiano è essenzialmente di prepararsi al Giudizio finale in virtù di una vita vissuta secondo gli insegnamenti del Nuovo Testamento, allora primaria funzione del *Liber Evangeliorum* è di non limitarsi alla narrazione della storia della vita di Cristo, ma – e in questo ben diversamente dall'altra versificazione in volgare della vita del Salvatore dello stesso periodo, cui per mille differenti ragioni l'opera di Otfrid è comunemente accostata, lo *Heliand* in sassone antico – di fornire, per mezzo di un ricco impiego di fonti esegetiche,<sup>4</sup> un'interpretazione del testo biblico attraverso l'aggiunta di commenti inseriti nella narrazione e di autonomi capitoli esegetici intitolati *mystice*, *moraliter* e *spiritaliter* a seconda del livello di significato della *historia* di volta in volta richiamato, rispettivamente in merito: alle misteriose immagini del futuro avvento del Regno di Dio, all'esemplarità etica degli avvenimenti e al significato salvifico della narrazione (*allegoria*, *tropologia* e *anagoge*).<sup>5</sup> Narrazione del testo biblico e sua interpretazione costituiscono quindi un'inseparabile e indistinguibile unità il cui fine è, nelle intenzioni del suo autore, di contribuire alla salvezza dell'uomo.

Sotto questo aspetto anche la scelta di esprimersi nella lingua dei Franchi, in aggiunta a tutte le ragioni di ordine storico, politico e sociale – come, ad esempio, il pubblico cui l'opera intendeva rivolgersi e le conseguenti modalità della sua ricezione – che sono state viepiù ribadite nel corso degli studi su Otfrid, risponde a un'esigenza salvifica. Nell'Età carolingia, infatti, l'affermazione

1989 e Hartmann 2005, ix-xliv (*Einführung*); a quest'ultimo si rimanda anche per una più aggiornata bibliografia degli studi (lxii-lxxiv).

<sup>4</sup> La questione delle fonti è dai tempi di Karl Lachmann 1836 “die wichtigste Frage der Otfridforschung” Hellgardt 1981, vii. A Hellgardt 1981, 1-21 (*Methoden und Positionen der Forschung zu den exegetischen Quellen Otfrids von Weißenburg*) si rimanda per una irrinunciabile ricostruzione storica di tutta la questione delle fonti di Otfrid.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Kartschoke 1975, 65, Haubrichs 1995, 307 e in particolare per un tentativo di interpretazione sistematica di questa terminologia Hörner 2005.

dei volgari non è un fatto secolare, fine a se stesso, ma è qualcosa che concerne il destino dell'uomo e la sua stessa salvezza.<sup>6</sup> Scrive Otfrid nell'*Invocatio scriptoris ad deum*:

Al gizungilo, thaz ist – thu drúhtin éin es alles bíst;  
 wéltis thu thes líutes ioh alles wóroltthiotes.  
 Mit thíneru giwélti sie dati al spréchetti,  
 ioh sálida in gilúngun thiu wórt in iro zúngun;  
 Thaz sie thin io gihógetin, in éwon iamer lóbotin,  
 jóh sie thih irknátin inti thíonost thinaz dátin. (I, 2, 33-38)<sup>7</sup>

Dio, Signore di tutte le lingue, ha donato a ogni popolo della terra la capacità di trovare in ogni lingua le parole per lodarLo e per servirLo nell'eternità. Nell'approfondita riflessione linguistica di Otfrid il volgare viene attratto, come il latino, in una dimensione spirituale nuova, che investe la funzione ultima del linguaggio: la lingua del popolo viene inserita in un progetto e in una speranza di salvezza.<sup>8</sup> L'opera di Otfrid dunque, sia dal punto di vista della sua struttura e del contenuto, sia nella scelta di un nuovo medium linguistico (il francone-renano meridionale), concepisce se stessa come opera salvifica, è essa stessa uno strumento di salvezza.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Santoro 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Erdmann 1882, 15 (Tu soltanto sei signore di tutte le lingue che esistono, // tu governi tutte le genti e ogni popolo del mondo. // Con la tua potenza hai donato a tutti loro la capacità di parlare, // e per la loro salvezza è riuscito loro di trovare le parole, // per avverti sempre presente, per lodarti per l'eternità, // per riconoscerti e per servirti).

<sup>8</sup> Vollmann-Profe interpreta *sālida* o come isolata interiezione – seguita da Hartmann “und – oh, Seligkeit! – es gelangen ihnen Worte in ihren Sprachen” (2005, 27) – oppure “als Subjekt im Nomin. Plur. mit *wort* als Apposition: ‘es gelang ihnen Glückhaftes, (nähmlich) die Worte in ihrer Sprache’” (1976, 159). Un'altra possibile interpretazione del v. 36 è stata però avanzata da Erdmann: *sālida* gen. sg. dipendente da *gilungun* (*gilingan*), “Also: und die Worten sind ihnen gelungen zum Heile” (1882, 346); una lettura del verso riproposta da Haug “und zu ihrem Heil ist es ihnen gelungen, in ihren Sprachen Worte zu finden” (1992, 41).

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Müller 2009.

Ben si vorrà allora comprendere la scelta di Otfrid – anche qui discostandosi dallo *Heliand* in sassone antico – di forzare il dettato dei quattro Vangeli e di proseguire la narrazione con la descrizione del Giorno del Giudizio e delle beatitudini del Paradiso (capitolo V, 18-23). Così, per dirla con le parole di Haubrichs,

während das vierte Buch mit der Passion Erwartbares enthält, sprengt das fünfte Buch die Dimension der Evangelien und bietet – in wie im zweiten Buch erneut kühnem Zugriff – auf den Kosmos ausgreifende Heilgeschichte, ja eine Vision der vollendeten Heilgeschichte, einer im *regressus ad Deum* heilsförmig gewordenen Welt.<sup>10</sup>

Il quinto libro si caratterizza, se confrontato con il testo evangelico, per importanti ampliamenti di contenuto ed esegetici: introdotto da tre capitoli sulla croce è infine concluso da cinque capitoli sull'orrore del Giorno del Giudizio e sulle beatitudini della vita eterna, oltre che da una personale preghiera finale e da un capitolo (*Conclusio voluminis totius*), in cui il monaco di Weißenburg torna a riflettere sulle ragioni della sua azzardata operazione poetica. La struttura del quinto libro è stata analizzata da Haubrichs, sia dal punto di vista della sua complessa (e controversa) “Zahlenkomposition”, sia da quello del suo contenuto. Se la strutturazione numerica del quinto libro, come dell'intera opera, proposta da Haubrichs non ha incontrato unanime consenso,<sup>11</sup> condivisibile ne risulta a nostro avviso l'analisi del contenuto, a cominciare dalle ragioni della presenza dei tre capitoli sulla croce che aprono quest'ultimo libro dell'opera. La *laus crucis* avrebbe, infatti, trovato la sua più consona collocazione alla fine del quarto libro, che si chiude con la crocifissione, morte, deposizione e sepoltura di Gesù. Ma per Otfrid, nella sua ben congegnata concezione del quinto libro, che si conclude, almeno dal punto di vista narrativo, con la descrizione delle beatitudini del Paradiso

<sup>10</sup> Haubrichs 2012, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Schröder, 1989, 187.

(capitolo 23, *De aequalitate caelestis regni et inaequalitate terreni*), era importante sottolineare il collegamento tra la Croce e la Resurrezione di Cristo e dell'intera umanità. La Croce, dunque, come presupposto del *regressus ad Deum*:

Der Verbindung von *Kreuz* und '*resurrectio*' korrespondiert noch eine tiefere inhaltliche Bedeutung – ist doch das '*signum salutis*' Repräsentant der Heilskraft, die Christus mit seiner Erlösungstat entband. Vom Kreuz führt der Heilsweg in einer direkten Linie über die Auferstehung des Gottessohnes und seine Himmelfahrt zur Auferstehung aller Menschen.<sup>12</sup>

Se, conformemente agli sviluppi del racconto evangelico, non mancano nel corso di tutta l'opera di Otfrid riferimenti a tematiche escatologiche – p. es. in IV, 7 (*De doctrina domini in monte ad discipulos*) vv. 27-44 sulla base principalmente di Matteo 24 – la sistemazione più compatta e coerente del destino ultimo dell'individuo e dell'umanità si sviluppa a partire già dai versi finali del capitolo 18 del V libro (*Cumque intuerentur in caelum*) per proseguire nei capitoli 19 (*De die iudicii*), 20 (*Quomodo iudicaturus est mundum*), 21 (*Quam districtum sit tunc dei iudicium*) e 22 (*Iusti in vitam aeternam*) e infine culminare nel capitolo 23 (*De aequalitate caelestis regni et inaequalitate terreni*) – il più esteso tra tutti i capitoli dell'intera opera – in una vivida e in larga parte originale raffigurazione contrastiva delle miserie della terra (*civitas terrena*) e delle (inesprimibili) gioie del Cielo (*regnum caeleste*).<sup>13</sup>

Nei primi decenni dello scorso secolo Elisabeth Peters ha dedicato al capitolo V, 23 una sezione della sua monografia sulla rappresentazione del Paradiso nella poesia tedesca del Medioevo, con una particolare attenzione alla questione delle sue possibili

<sup>12</sup> Haubrichs 1969, 255.

<sup>13</sup> Sulle fonti del capitolo 23 cfr. Erdmann 1882, 479 e Peters 1915, 43. Sulle difficoltà di descrizione in letteratura, come nell'iconografia, delle gioie del Paradiso ("quod oculus non vidit nec auris audivit" *Prima lettera ai Corinzi* 2, 9, Beriger 2018, V, 768), cfr. Schumacher 2006.

fonti e della loro riutilizzazione da parte di Otfrid<sup>14</sup>. Negli anni Settanta, invece, prima Herbert Kolb, poi Ulrich Ernst si sono rapidamente soffermati sulla rappresentazione del Giudizio finale nel *Liber Evangeliorum*, in particolare sul capitolo V, 19. Il primo nelle pagine finali di un interessante saggio del 1971 focalizzato sui più significativi elementi di alterità tra il giudizio divino e le consuetudini giuridiche del diritto secolare dei Franchi in Età carolingia;<sup>15</sup> per Kolb nella rappresentazione del Giudizio finale “durchdringen sich himmlisches und irdisches Gericht, jedoch durchweg so, daß Eigenheiten des irdischen Gerichts nur kontrastierend herangezogen werden, damit an ihnen um so schärfer das andersartige Bild des himmlischen Gerichts ins Profil gehoben werden”.<sup>16</sup> Il secondo in un breve excursus, all’interno della sua monografia del 1975, nel quale una particolare attenzione è stata riservata alle possibili fonti, alla struttura compositiva (“das tektonische Kompositionsgefüge”) e al refrain.<sup>17</sup>

Non sarà, dunque, del tutto ingiustificato tornare a distanza di tanti anni sul capitolo V, 19 *De die iudicii*. Si osserverà innanzi tutto che Otfrid ha già dedicato al Giudizio finale il capitolo-preghiera conclusivo del primo libro (I, 28 *Spiritualiter*): “Mit állen unsen kréftin / bíttemes nu drúhtin, // er únsih uns zi léide / fon then gúaten ni giscéide”, vv. 1-2 (Con tutte le nostre forze / preghiamo dunque il Signore, // affinché per nostra sventura non ci separi mai dai doni della salvezza)<sup>18</sup>; capitolo non senza motivazioni aggiunto proprio dopo i capitoli incentrati sugli insegnamenti di Giovanni Battista (23-27), rappresentato come figura centrale della *Historia salutis*. Si tratta, con le parole di Hartmann, di “ein Gebet um Gottes Gnade beim Jüngsten Gericht: Otfrid erfleht die Rettung vor dem Höllenfeuer, in dem dereinst die ‘Spreu’ verbrannt wird, und den Eingang in den himmlischen

<sup>14</sup> Peters 1915.

<sup>15</sup> Kolb 1971, 299-303.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 299.

<sup>17</sup> Ernst 1975, 294-303.

<sup>18</sup> Erdmann 1882, 53.

‘Kornspeicher’, in dem sich die Gerechten und Erlösten wiederfinden werden”.<sup>19</sup>

L’immagine del venturo Messia, che avrebbe, nelle parole di Giovanni Battista (cfr. Matteo 3, 12 e Luca 3, 17), col ventilabro alla mano mondato la sua aia, separando e raccogliendo il grano nel suo granaio e gettando invece la pula nel fuoco, resa da Otfrid nella parte narrativa con

Hábet er in hánton   sina wíntwanton,  
           tház er filu kléino   thaz sin kórn reino;  
 Sin dénni gikérre,   thiu spríu thána werre,  
           thaz thaz kórn scine,   int iz gábissa ni ríne;  
 Thaz ér iz filu gárawo   in sinu gádum sámáno,  
           joh thiu spríu thanne   in fíure firbrénne. (I, 27, 63-68)<sup>20</sup>

è riproposta nel capitolo-preghiera a conclusione del primo libro con

Thaz si uns thiu wíntworfa   in themo úrdeile hélfa,  
           iz únsih mit giwélti   ni firwáe unz in énti;  
 Joh in fíure after thiu   thar brínnen io so spríu,  
           wir mit ginádon sinen   then wéwon bimíden. (I, 28, 5-8  
*Spiritalliter*)<sup>21</sup>

In questo modo l’insegnamento di Giovanni Battista e il suo appello a una vita di preghiera e penitenza per guadagnarsi in eterno le beatitudini del Paradiso venivano richiamati alla coscienza dei

<sup>19</sup> Hartmann 2005, xxvii.

<sup>20</sup> Erdmann 1882, 52 (Terrà in mano il suo ventilabro // per ripulire a fondo il suo grano; // spazzerà l’aia e rimuoverà la pula // così che il grano risplenda e resti libero dalla pula; // e completamente pronto, lo riponga nel suo granaio, // e dopo bruci la pula nel fuoco).

<sup>21</sup> Erdmann 1882, 53 (Che nel Giudizio finale ci soccorra il ventilabro // che con forza non ci soffi via per sempre; // e dopo non bruciamo nel fuoco come la pula // per la sua misericordia sfuggiamo alla rovina).



fruitori (lettori o uditori) del testo, che si faceva così esso stesso, attraverso l'esegesi e la preghiera, strumento di salvezza. Otfrid anticipa qui il significato e il fine più profondi del suo successivo grandioso affresco del Giudizio finale.

Nel prosieguito del saggio cercheremo di evidenziare i temi-cardine della riflessione di Otfrid sul Giudizio finale. Già nei versi conclusivi (11-16) del capitolo V, 18 si delineano due principali temi del teologo di Weißenburg. Il primo: l'impossibilità di sottrarsi al Giudizio finale ("ni múgun wir thaz biwánkon", v. 14b), concetto questo che sarà ribadito ai vv. 13-14 del capitolo V, 24 (cfr. *infra*); di qualsiasi cosa, anche soltanto pensata ("irthénkit wiht io mannes múat", v. 16a), ognuno dovrà rendere conto ("er ím es alles réda duat!", v. 16b); Il secondo: l'impossibilità di nascondere alcunché – azioni ("dati") o intenzioni ("húgu in then githánkon", v. 14a) – allo sguardo di Dio ("nist wiht in érdu ouh, wizist tház, / gisíuni sin firhólanaz", v. 12).<sup>22</sup>

Entrambi questi aspetti peculiari del giudizio divino ricorrono, com'è noto, nel *Muspilli*

so denne der mahtigo khuninc    daz mahal kipannit,  
 dara scal queman    chunno kilihaz.  
 denne nikitar parno nohhein    den pan furisizzan,  
 ni allero manno uuelih    ze demo mahale sculi. (31-34)

so dar manno nohhein    uuiht pimidan nimak,  
 dar scal denne hant sprehhan,    houpit sagen,  
 allero lido uuelihc    unzi in den luzigun uinger,  
 uuaz er untar desen mannun    mordes kifrumita.

<sup>22</sup> Sulla base probabilmente di *Giobbe*, 28, 24 "Ipse enim fines mundi intuetur et omnia quae sub caelo sunt respicit" (Beriger 2018, II, 1424). Cfr. Hartmann 1975, 363.

dar niist eo so listic man, der dar iouuiht arliugan megi,  
daz er kitarnan megi tato dehheina. (90-95)<sup>23</sup>

L'impossibilità di nascondere a Dio le proprie (cattive) azioni doveva essere una condizione ben nota al lettore del *Nuovo Testamento*: “et non est ulla creatura invisibilis in conspectu eius | omnia autem nuda et aperta sunt oculis eius | ad quem nobis sermo”.<sup>24</sup>

Il capitolo V, 19 è strutturato in gruppi di 10, 4, 20, 10 e 4 versi, attraverso la ripetizione di un refrain di quattro, nella forma completa, oppure di soli due versi: I) vv. 1-10 + refrain, II vv. 15-18 + refrain, III vv. 21-40 + refrain, IV vv. 45-54 + refrain, V 56-60 + refrain. Sebbene non risulti semplice riconoscere, dietro questa suddivisione, “das tektonische Kompositionsgefüge des Kapitels”,<sup>25</sup> chiara è però la funzione del refrain, là dove nell'opera esso è utilizzato: “der Refrain dient der meditativen Versenkung in den theologischen Kerngedanken, der andächtigen Rücklenkung und Konzentration des Denkens auf die Bedeutung des erzählten Geschehens”.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> von Steinmeyer 1916, 67 e 71-72 (Quando allora il potente re convocherà il Giudizio, // là dovrà venire ogni persona. // Allora nessun uomo oserà disertare l'appello, // nessuno di coloro che deve [andare] al Giudizio – Là nessuno degli uomini potrà eludere nulla // là la mano dovrà dire, la testa parlare // ogni membro, sino al dito più piccolo // quali peccati commise tra gli uomini. // Là nessuno sarà mai così astuto da riuscire a mentire su qualcosa // da poter nascondere alcuna azione). Per l'area anglosassone, sempre in ambito poetico, cfr. *Cristo III*: “Ne sindon him dæda dyrne, / ac þær bið dryhtne cuð // on þam miclan dæge, / hu monna gehwylc // ær earnode / eces lifes, // ond eall ondweard / þæt hi ær oþþe sið // worhtun in worulde”, vv. 1049-1053a (Krapp, van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 32) (Le azioni non saranno celate a Lui / ma sarà noto al Signore // in quel grande giorno / come ciascun uomo // prima si meritò la vita eterna // e tutto sarà rivelato / quel che prima o dopo / loro hanno compiuto sulla terra).

<sup>24</sup> *Lettera agli Ebrei* 4, 13 (Beriger 2018, V, 1000).

<sup>25</sup> Ernst 1975, 294.

<sup>26</sup> Haubrichs 1995, 302.

Ward wóla in then thíngon thie selbun ménnisgon  
 thie thar thoh bígonoto sint síchor iro dáto;  
 In thie thoh úbil thanne nist wiht zi zéllenne,  
 mit thíu sih thoh biwérien joh étheswio ginérien! (V, 19, 11-14).<sup>27</sup>

Felici nel giorno del Giudizio coloro che sono del tutto sicuri delle loro azioni e che grazie a ciò potranno raggiungere la salvezza, perché nulla di male (*ubil*) potrà essere messo loro in conto.<sup>28</sup> Il refrain ricorre nel nostro capitolo nella forma completa di quattro (A) oppure di due soli versi (B) secondo l'ordine A/B/A/B/A, e con una minima, ma significativa variazione nell'ultima sua occorrenza (cfr. *infra*) a chiusura del capitolo (vv. 63-66). Non sfugga l'impiego del preterito *ward* che, come osserva Johann Kelle, “bei Segnungen wie zur Bezeichnung dessen, was zu jeder Zeit zu geschehen pflegt, [steht]”.<sup>29</sup>

#### 1) V, 19, 1-14

Questo primo gruppo di versi è dominato, dalla prima all'ultima coppia di versi, dal terrore del Giudizio finale (“dagathing” / “thing”),<sup>30</sup> che il Signore ha stabilito per il mondo intero (“wóroltring”): “thíng filu hébigaz”, v. 2a / “theist filu jámarlichaz thíng!”, v. 10b; un orrore persino difficile da raccontare (“zi zellenne ist iz suári!”, v. 7a) e che spaventa l'animo dello stesso poeta (“es irquímit muat mín”, v. 8a); poeta che si mostra da subito partecipe della preoccupazione derivata dal timore del Giudizio (“zi sorganne éigun wir bi thaz”, v. 2b), anche se, già dal verso successivo (“thir zéllu ih híar ubarlút”, v. 3a) riprenderà a rivolgersi con

<sup>27</sup> Erdmann 1882, 247 (Felicissime saranno al Giudizio quelle persone // che sono completamente sicure delle loro azioni // contro le quali là nulla di male potrà essere addotto // e con ciò avranno ancora la possibilità di difendersi e salvarsi).

<sup>28</sup> Sulla corrispondenza di *ata. ubil* con *lat. malum*, cfr. Rupp 1957, 356-357.

<sup>29</sup> Kelle 1856-1881, III, 711-712.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. Ilkow 1968, 83-84.

regolarità a una potenziale seconda persona presente durante la declamazione o la lettura individuale. Concludono questo primo gruppo di versi i due temi centrali del capitolo: l'impossibilità per chiunque di sottrarsi al terribile giudizio ("jámárlíchaz thíngr") e di evitare di rendere conto delle proprie azioni ("nist ther fon wibe quami [...] nub er thár sculi sin; // Ni síe sculin hérton / thar iro dáti renton", vv. 7b-9).

## 2) V, 19, 15-20

Questo secondo più breve gruppo di versi compie un ulteriore avanzamento nella descrizione del Giudizio finale e delle sue conseguenze. L'impossibilità per coloro che coinvolti nel Giudizio ("wérð er thar bifárgan", v. 16b) saranno giudicati colpevoli ("wérð er thar biréðinot", v. 17b) di raggiungere la salvezza ("laba")<sup>31</sup> e di sfuggire ("er wérgin megi ingárgan", v. 16a) al castigo dell'Inferno ("hélliwizes wéwon"); castigo non di durata limitata, ma eterno ("in éwon"),<sup>32</sup> perché, osserva Kolb, "Gott vollzieht seine Gerechtigkeit nicht im Zeitlichen, sondern in der Ewigkeit"<sup>33</sup>. All'"eterno dolore" dei dannati faranno riscontro le eterne gioie del Cielo di cui i giusti, affidati alla protezione del Signore, godranno, come sarà con insistenza ribadito nel secondo refrain (B) del capitolo V, 23:

Thára leiti, druhtin, mit thínes selbes máhtin  
 zi thémo sconen líbe thie holdun scálka thine,  
 Thaz wir thaz mámmunti in thínera munti  
 níazen uns in múate in éwon zi gúate! V, 23, 27-30.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. AWB, s.v.: "Labsal, Erquickung, Stärkung, auch im geistig-seelischen Bereich [...] spez.: in christlicher Vorstellung, auch Rettung, Heil".

<sup>32</sup> Sulla corrispondenza con lat. *in aeternum*, cfr. Burger 1972, 164-175.

<sup>33</sup> Kolb 1971, 293.

<sup>34</sup> Erdmann 1882, 254 (Là, Signore, conduci per la tua potenza // alla vita beata i tuoi fedeli servitori // così che noi nella tua protezione la beatitudine // godiamo nei nostri cuori per la nostra salvezza nell'eternità).

## 3) V, 19, 21-44

Si tratta del gruppo di versi centrale e più ampio dell'intero capitolo. Otfrid lo inizia con un richiamo all'autorità dei profeti ("gotes fórasago") – liberamente rielaborando *Sofonia* (I, 15-16), il profeta del *dies irae* – ("in imo man thar lésan mag / theiz ist ábulges dag", v. 23).<sup>35</sup> Non sfugga la sollecitazione del poeta pochi versi dopo a leggere direttamente nel testo sacro quanto narrato nella profezia ("Lási thu io thia rédina, / wio drúhtin threwit thánana?", v. 31), sollecitazione che, come altri analoghi rimandi presenti nell'opera (p. es. "in búachon thu iz lésan maht", IV, 6, 2), indirizza verso fruitori dell'opera di Otfrid colti, con una buona conoscenza della lingua latina e che, inoltre, dovevano avere facile accesso al testo sacro. La narrazione di *Sofonia* (*redina*)<sup>36</sup> avrebbe ricordato al fruitore dell'opera del monaco di Weißenburg l'agire minaccioso del Signore ("wio drúhtin threwit thánana", v. 31b), affinché non ci si dimenticasse ("zi gihugte") che il Signore nel giorno del Giudizio scuoterà i cieli ("er thanne himil scutte", v. 32b). In questo gruppo di versi, infatti, la rappresentazione dell'orrore del giorno del Giudizio si fa più densa e incalzante ("thaz thar si míhilaz githuíng", v. 22b): "theiz ist ábulges dag, // árabeito, quísti, joh managoro ángusti", vv. 23b-24). Giorno di ira e di fatica, di afflizione e di paura,<sup>37</sup> ma anche il giorno in cui gli angeli, sempre sulla base di *Sofonia*, chiameranno con il suono delle trombe ("Thaz íst ouh dag hórnas", v. 25b) l'umanità alla resurrezione (e al Giudizio).<sup>38</sup>

È infine anche un giorno di tenebre e di tempesta ("Theist dag ouh níbulnisses / joh wíntesbruti, léwes!", v. 27) che spazzeranno via, secondo la lezione accolta dall'edizione di Kelle ("thiu zuei firuuáhent thanne / thie súntigon alle", v. 28), tutti

<sup>35</sup> La descrizione del Giudizio finale di *Sofonia* sarà lungo tutto il periodo tardomedievale "von den Weltgerichtsdichtungen gern übernommen" (Schnerrer 1963, 310).

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. AWB, s.v. *redina*.

<sup>37</sup> Sull'ambito semantico dell'ira in Otfrid cfr. Blum 1960.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. *Muspilli*, v. 73 "So daz himilisca / horn kilutit uuirdit" (von Steinmeyer 1916, 70) (quando il corno celeste sarà suonato).

i peccatori. La lezione *firuuáhent* (*firuuáZent*, forse una grande Z su rasura da correzione di h, ms. V f. 174v;<sup>39</sup> *firuuéent*, ms. P, f. 180v)<sup>40</sup> impone comunque una precisazione. Erdmann sulla base (dubbia) di V proponeva *firwázent*, dunque ata. *firwāzan* (vb. ft.) “maledire”, “condannare”, attestato nella restante tradizione letteraria altotedesca un’unica volta proprio in Otfrid (“firwāzan ir fon góte sit”, V, 20, 99) (cfr. *Matteo* 25, 41). Kelle e successivamente Piper,<sup>41</sup> invece, accoglievano *firwāhen* (vb. db.) ted. mod. *verwehen* “soffiare via”, “disperdere”, *wehen* “soffiare”, attestato raramente anche in Notker – e in un caso in un contesto simile di Giudizio finale<sup>42</sup> – e un’altra unica volta proprio in Otfrid nel capitolo-preghiera sul Giudizio già menzionato (“Thaz si uns thiú wíntworfa / in themo úrdeile hélfa, // iz únsih mit giwélti / ni firwáe unz in énti”, I, 28, vv. 5-6). Sicuramente si è confusa Gisela Vollmann-Profe nella sua edizione di brani con traduzione, che accoglie la lezione *firwázent*, ma traduce “hinweggefegt”, “spazzati via”.<sup>43</sup> Nonostante il guasto della tradizione manoscritta lasci spazio a dubbi e incertezze, ritengo che, anche per ragioni di contesto, si debba preferire la lezione scelta da Kelle e da Piper, ribadita nella tradizione manoscritta del testo otfridiano anche dal testimone monacense *F* (*firúúahent*);<sup>44</sup> si consideri, infatti, che il

<sup>39</sup> “Z steht gross auf Rasur; vielleicht von h”, Piper 1878, 636; “z auf RAS, auffällige Korrektur, z wahrscheinlich auf RAS von h”, Kleiber 2004, 261.

<sup>40</sup> Entrambi rispettivamente consultabili agli indirizzi <[https://digital.onb.ac.at/RepViewer/viewer.faces?doc=DTL\\_3699886&order=1&view=SINGLE](https://digital.onb.ac.at/RepViewer/viewer.faces?doc=DTL_3699886&order=1&view=SINGLE)> e <<https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpl52/0396/image,info>> (ultimo accesso 10/10/2024).

<sup>41</sup> Piper 1878, 636.

<sup>42</sup> “*Sed tamquam pulvis quem proicit uentus a facie terre*. Nube sie zefárent also daz stuppe déro erdo . daz ter uuint feruuâhet. Fóné demo gótes riche uuérdent sie feruuâhet. *Ideo non resurgunt impii in iudicio*. Pediû ne-erstânt árge ze dero urtêildo. Doh sie erstânden . sie ne-bítent dánne urteildo . uuanda ín îu irtêilet ist” (*Salmo* I, 4) (Tax 1979, 10).

<sup>43</sup> Cfr. Vollmann-Profe 1987, 146-147.

<sup>44</sup> Sul manoscritto *F*, commissionato agli inizi del X sec. dall’arcivescovo di Freising Waldo (episcopato 883-906) e consultabile all’indirizzo <<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00094618?page=237>> (ultimo accesso

soggetto dell'azione (*thiu zuei*) sono *nibulnissi* e *wintesbrût*, che appunto “spazzano via”.

Nessuno, prosegue Otrfrid, potrà opporsi a chi fa tremare il cielo (vv. 33-34) e con la Sua potenza lo (ri)piega (“inan fáltonti”) come ogni persona fa con (le pagine di) un libro (“so man sinan lívol duat”, v. 36b).<sup>45</sup> È questa una tra le immagini più efficaci di Otrfrid – probabilmente direttamente basata su *Isaia* 34,4, e non sulla sua riutilizzazione nell'*Apocalisse* di Giovanni, come dimostrerebbe la glossa al margine del f. 175r “*celum plicabitur sicut liber*” – che, se certamente è motivata dalla necessità di adeguare la similitudine alla oramai più diffusa forma del codice, in confronto alla meno comune forma del rotolo, tuttavia, come osserva Kössinger, non è esente da significative ricadute escatologiche:

Aus dem Zusammenrollen des *liber* durch den Engel oder den thronenden Christus, das in seiner Geschwindigkeit reguliert und gegebenenfalls gestoppt werden könnte, wie es aus den Weltgerichtsdarstellungen z. B. im ‘Stuttgarter Psalter’ bekannt ist, wird hier [bei Otrfrid] das Bild des Codex, der ein für alle Mal und in einer (nicht mehr zu stoppenden?) Bewegung zugeklappt bzw. zugeschlagen wird. Das Zuschlagen des Codex wäre in diesem Verständnis im Rahmen der heilsgeschichtlichen Eschatologie um eine Nuance ‘radikaler’ als das Zusammenrollen. Die Konsequenzen indes bleiben gleich.<sup>46</sup>

Il senso degli ultimi quattro versi (37-40) a chiusura della parte centrale, nonostante una certa opacità iniziale, è chiaro: il poeta ribadisce l'unicità del giorno del Giudizio finale, giorno così diverso da ogni altro (“Níst ther dag sumiríh / dagon ánderen gilíh”, v. 37): se qui sulla terra (“hiar”) non ci si preoccupa molto e non si risponde delle azioni nascoste, al Giudizio finale (“thár”) persino i pensieri più piccoli si paleseranno (“Gibórganero dáto /

10/10/2024). Cfr. Pivernetz 2000.

<sup>45</sup> “Auch in Otrfrids ‘Evangelienbuch’ ist mit ‘man’ zunächst ganz allgemein der Mensch gemeint” (Kettler 1977, 155).

<sup>46</sup> Kössinger 2020, 479-480.

ni plígit man hiar nu thráto, // sih ougit thár ana wánk / ther selbo lúzilo githank”, vv. 39-40), con un’opposizione chiarificatrice *hiar* ≠ *thár* che nel corso dei capitoli successivi sarà sempre più marcata.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4) V, 19, 45-56

Otfrid in questo penultimo gruppo di versi passa a precisare gli elementi più significativi dell’alterità tra la giustizia di Dio e la giustizia dell’uomo a cominciare dall’annullamento di ogni differenziazione sociale. Davanti al tribunale di Dio non conterranno “góld noh diuro wáti” (v. 45b), né potranno essere di aiuto “gótowebbi thar / noh thaz sílabar in war” (v. 46). Certo, l’annullamento di ogni distinzione di rango sociale (“sie sint al ébanreiti / in theru selbun árabeiti”, v. 50) poteva far parte di un consolidato, tradizionale patrimonio cristiano<sup>48</sup> – e le parole di Gesù, a cominciare dalla metafora sul cammello e la cruna dell’ago (*Matteo* 19, 24) sino alla parabola di Lazzaro e del ricco epulone vestito di “purpura et bysso” (*Luca* 16, 19-31),<sup>49</sup> erano lì a ricordare la maggiore difficoltà per un ricco di entrare nel regno di Dio – ma con la precisazione che nessun servitore potrà fornire il benché minimo aiuto al suo signore (“Ni mag thar mánahoubit / helfan hérerren wiht” v. 47), Otfrid sapientemente colloca l’insegnamento evangelico su un piano di evidente contrasto con la legislazione carolingia, che non soltanto consentiva “dem Begüterten vielfach [...] sich von Strafen durch Geld- oder Sachwertbußen abzulösen”, ma permetteva anche che “der Leibeigene (*manahoubit*) im

<sup>47</sup> Non convince la traduzione dei versi 39-40 di Vollmann-Profe “Dort kann man nicht mehr schnell heimliche Taten vollbringen: / selbst der kleinste Gedanke wird dort offenbar, das ist ganz sicher” (1987, 147); cfr. invece Kelle 1856-1881, III, 50-51: “So scheint diese nicht klare Stelle mit Bezugnahme auf die folgenden Zeilen: Geheimnisvoller Handlungsart pflegt man nun hier nicht sonderlich, der kleinste Gedanke wird dort offenbar, erklärt werden zu können”.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. Ernst 1975, 297.

<sup>49</sup> Proprio con *ata. got(a)webbi Taziano* (107,1 e 200,4) traduce lat. *purpura*.



gerichtlichen Zweikampf für seinen Herrn eintreten konnte”.<sup>50</sup>

Sottoposti al Giudizio di Dio saranno anche figli e mogli (“also die Rechtsunmündigen nach irdischen Vorstellungen”)<sup>51</sup> che, non soltanto dovranno preoccuparsi della loro stessa salvezza (“kínd noh quéna in ware, / sie sorgent íro thare” v. 48), ma come il servitore (*manahoubit*) non potranno essere di aiuto al proprio signore, in questo caso loro congiunto: *kind* e *quena* sono qui impiegati da Otfrid come sineddoche di “parenti”. Al fruitore del *Liber Evangeliorum* non sarebbe sfuggito, in aggiunta a quanto osservato da Kolb, il riferimento a un altro motivo di alterità tra la giustizia di Dio e la giustizia dell’uomo: l’impossibilità di aiutare in giudizio un proprio parente; possibilità al contrario prevista all’interno dell’istituto giuridico germanico del “Parteieid und Eideshilfe”,<sup>52</sup> ma chiaramente in contrasto con il dovere cristiano del singolo di rispondere, e lui soltanto, dei propri atti davanti a Dio. Con il progredire della cristianizzazione delle popolazioni germaniche, questa rottura etico-religiosa sarà così avvertita da diventare un tema – efficacemente definito da Lendinara “no aid from kin”<sup>53</sup> – ampiamente ribadito in letteratura, soprattutto nella letteratura omiletica anglosassone, in cui

stress is laid on the fact that, at the Judgement Day, no man will receive aid from those – relatives or friends – who, in his lifetime, would have come to his aid in case of need. [...] homilists stress how neither the father nor any other relative will be of help at this point.<sup>54</sup>

Il motivo “no aid from kin” trova riscontro anche nella tradizione poetica nel noto e discusso passo del *Seafarer* (vv. 97-102) in cui è ribadito che il fratello non potrà con tesori e con oro aiutare l’anima intrisa di peccato del fratello davanti al terrore di Dio:

<sup>50</sup> Kolb 1971, 301.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Cfr. Brunner 1887-1892, 337-391 e Weitzel 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Cfr. Lendinara 2002. Cfr. anche Langeslag 2014 e 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Lendinara 2002, 67.

þeah þe græf wille    golde stregan  
 broþor his geborenum,    byrgan be deadum,  
 maþmum mislicum    þæt hine mid wille,  
 ne mæg þære sawle    þe biþ synna ful  
 gold to geoce    for godes egсан,  
 þonne he hit ær hydeð    þenden he her leofað.<sup>55</sup>

E, com'è ben noto, il motivo “no aid from kin” ricorre anche nella poesia altotedesca antica nel celebre verso 57 del *Muspilli*: “dar nimac denne mak andremo / helfan uora demo muspille”.<sup>56</sup>

Annulate dunque le diseguaglianze sociali tra servo e signore e affermata l'impossibilità per chiunque di ricevere aiuto anche dai parenti più stretti, tutti sono infine uguali davanti al Giudizio di Dio: “Skálka joh thie ríche / thie gént thar al gilích” (v. 53). Se al Giudizio c'è una distinzione tra dannati e beati, questa è assicurata, a ragione (“bi noti”), soltanto dalle virtù (“ni si thie thar bi nóti / gifórdoront thio gúati” v. 54), dove con *ata. guotí* (nom. pl.) si fa riferimento alle opere di carità che sole preparano alla salvezza, come Otrifrid preciserà nel successivo capitolo 20, ai vv. 67-94, sulla base di *Matteo 25, 35-40*.<sup>57</sup>

##### 5) V, 19, 57-66

Stabilito che per il raggiungimento della salvezza la sola distinzione valida è percorrere la strada della virtù, Otrifrid a conclusione del capitolo può di nuovo indirizzare la riflessione del

<sup>55</sup> Krapp, van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 146 (Sebbene voglia cospargere d'oro la tomba // il fratello per il suo congiunto, sotterrarlo tra i morti // con vari tesori che egli voglia con sé // non può a quest'anima colma di peccati // essere l'oro d'aiuto, d'innanzi al terrore di Dio // sebbene egli lo avesse prima occultato mentre era ancora in questa vita).

<sup>56</sup> von Steinmeyer 1916, 69 (allora non potrà un congiunto / un parente aiutare l'altro davanti al *muspilli*).

<sup>57</sup> Cfr. AWB, s.v.: “*guotí*. als ideeller Wert im Bereich von Gesetz, Moral u. Religion [...] von einer spezifisch christl. Wertvorstellung: die mit der Nächstenliebe verbundene Gerechtigkeit; [...] hierher wohl auch, als Ergebnis der Nächstenliebe: Wohltun, gutes Werk, Liebesbeweis”.

fruitore dell'opera verso aspetti di più avvertita attualità della società carolingia, con un richiamo alla corruzione di chi amministrava la giustizia. Il contesto di questo ultimo gruppo di versi non lascia dubbi su come debba essere inteso il sost. *mieta* (f. ft. db.), altrimenti connotato da una ricca varietà di significati diversi ("Arbeitslohn", "Entgelt", "Kampfpreis", "Gewinn", "Belohnung", tra gli altri).<sup>58</sup> Vollmann-Profe con la sua traduzione dei vv. 57-58 "Thar nist míotono wiht /ouh wéhsales níawiht, // / thaz íaman thes giwíse, / mit wíhtu sih irlóse" sembra voler ricondurre tutto sul piano già considerato della impossibilità della persona facoltosa di poter lecitamente compensare attraverso un indennizzo i propri misfatti: "Dort gibt es keine Geldbuße und keine Ersatzleistung // so daß jemand versuchen könnte, sich mit irgend etwas loszukaufen".<sup>59</sup> Una possibilità di interpretazione a mio parere non condivisibile e che Kolb riconosce, ma cautamente, al solo sostantivo ata. *wehsal*: "*wehsal* [könnte] auch das gesetzlich auferlegte Bußgeld bezeichnen, für das man sich von erwiesener Schuld- oder Missetat rechtens ablösen konnte".<sup>60</sup> La ricchezza posseduta un tempo sulla terra ("Ni wari thu ío so richi / ubar wóroltrichi", v. 59) è, dice Otfred, definitivamente perduta ("ther scáz ist sines síndes", v. 60b); ma se come tutte le cose terrene la ricchezza sarebbe stata comunque inutilizzabile, l'enfasi è posta dalla preposizione causale *wanta* all'inizio del verso seguente, sulla qualità del Giudice divino, giudice assolutamente giusto nell'emettere la sentenza e che non si fa rappresentare da alcun messo ("Wanta drúhtin ist so gúat, / ther thaz úrdeili duat; // er duat iz sélbo, ih sagen thir éin, / ander bótono nihein", vv. 61-62). Concetto che Otfred ribadirà al capitolo V, 24 ("Thu weltist óuh ana thés / thes selben úrdeiles, // rihtis sélbo thu then dág / then man biwánton ni mag", vv. 13-14).

Ha osservato Kolb che la condanna della corruzione di chi doveva amministrare la giustizia era stigmatizzata in così tanti

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. AWB, s.v.

<sup>59</sup> Vollmann-Profe 1987, 149.

<sup>60</sup> Kolb 1971, 301, nota 46.

testi di età carolingia, da non poter dubitare che la sua denuncia non era un mero topos moraleggiante, ma traeva origine e sua giustificazione da fatti reali. Inoltre, nella sua ricerca degli elementi di contrasto tra il giudizio divino e le consuetudini giuridiche dei Franchi, ha giustamente sottolineato la pregnanza dell'inciso di Otfrid sull'impossibilità che al Giudizio finale, in luogo del Signore, fossero – sulla base anche di precisi riscontri lessicali tra lat. *missus* e ata. *boto* – Suoi messi a intervenire, “so daß wir sicher sein können, daß Otfrid mit seiner abwehrenden Beteuerung *ander botono dehein [duat thaz urdeili]* die karolingische Rechtsinstitution des *missus* als Gerichtsherrn in Stellvertretung des Königs im Sinne hat”.<sup>61</sup> Proprio l'istituzione dei *missi dominici* – funzionari spediti in periferia a rappresentare il sovrano con compiti più vari di governo, di giurisdizione e di controllo – aveva contribuito ad aggravare ulteriormente il livello di corruzione per tutto il periodo carolingio.

Il sost. *mieta* è quindi adoperato da Otfrid nell'accezione di “Bestechungsgeschenk”, che in italiano oggi chiameremo “tangente” o “bustarella”: un dono illecito di denaro che, proprio in un ambito di cattiva amministrazione della giustizia, era ripetutamente condannato nella *Bibbia* a cominciare da *Esodo*, 23, 8 (“nec accipias munera quae excaecant etiam prudentes | et subvertunt verba iustorum”) e *Deuteronomio* 16, 19 (“nec in alteram partem declinent | non accipies personam nec munera | quia munera excaecant oculos sapientium et mutant verba iustorum”).<sup>62</sup>

Otfrid impiega dunque il sostantivo nella medesima accezione in cui compare in due versi del *Muspilli* (“denner mit den miaton / marrit daz rehta”, v. 67 e “niscolta sid manno nohhein / miatun intfahan”, v. 72)<sup>63</sup> e tuttavia in una differente prospettiva:

<sup>61</sup> Kolb 1971, 300.

<sup>62</sup> Beriger 2018, I, 334 e 802.

<sup>63</sup> von Steinmeyer 1916, 70 (quando con la corruzione viola la giustizia – per questo nessuno dovrebbe accettare la corruzione).

The context is clearly different from that of *Muspilli*, in which people are warned of the risks of accepting *miatun*, a wrongdoing which the devil will notice, and which God will take into consideration on Judgment Day. Otfrid, instead, underlines that there will be no possibility of bribing the Judge on the Last Day.<sup>64</sup>

A questo punto Otfrid, qui nelle vesti più di pastore di anime e di predicatore che di raffinato esegeta del testo biblico, introduce, a conclusione del capitolo, con la preposizione causale *bi thiu* e l'indicativo presente *ist*, l'unica variazione significativa del refrain, sostituendo l'infinito “Ward wóla in then thíngon [...]” con il più parenetico “Bi thiu ist wóla in then thíngon [...], a ribadire l'unità tra il momento della riflessione esegetica e la funzione salvifica della sua messa in versi della vita di Cristo.

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<sup>64</sup> Oliva 2023, 167. Ancora nel XII sec. Frau Ava – ricordando il dovere di rendere giustizia senza farsi corrompere tra le virtù che conducono alla salvezza – impiegherà nella stessa accezione il sostantivo atm. *miete*: “gerihtes âne miete phlegen” (Schacks 1986, 265).

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PIA SCHÜLER

*SÔ SPRICHER GOT MIT GRIMME.*  
LEXIKALISCHE SEMANTIK UND NARRATIVE  
DARSTELLUNG DES APOKALYPTISCHEN  
ZORNS IN GEISTLICHER DICHTUNG UND  
WELTGERICHTSSPIEL

This article examines the lexical-semantic constitution and the narrative portrayal of the apocalyptic wrath of God in German-language texts of the 12th, 13th and 16th centuries. The analysis focuses on early religious poetry (Ava's *Jüngstes Gericht*, *Die Hochzeit*), biblical poetry (*Mittelniederdeutsche Apokalypse*, Heinrich von Hesler's *Apokalypse*) and late medieval plays (*Münchner Weltgerichtsspiel*, Tengler's *Weltgerichtsspiel*). The comparative study shows that although the wrath of God appears frequently as a lexeme, the narrative representation is redirected to alternative motifs and plot devices. The abstraction of the eschaton is countered by the frequent reference to the possibility of atonement in the immanent present and in the imagination of specific punishments and legal orders. The theologically founded challenges of the term discussed in the texts also emerge in the lexical analysis, which categorises the wrath of God with regard to its anthropomorphic quality, among other things.

Mit dem christlichen Glauben an das kommende Endgericht ist die Vorstellung vom Zorn Gottes aufs Engste verbunden. So beginnt der vielleicht bekannteste Hymnus des Mittelalters, *Dies irae*, der von 1570 bis 1955 Teil der katholischen Totenliturgie gewesen ist,<sup>1</sup> mit der biblischen Prophezeiung vom ‚Tag des

<sup>1</sup>Entstanden im 13. Jahrhundert und zugeschrieben – wenn auch „umstritten“ (Lang 1993, 1527) – Thomas von Celano, einem um 1190 geborenen und 1260 gestorbenen Heiligen aus Italien, der sich Franz von Assisi anschloss und von diesem 1215 in dessen Orden aufgenommen wurde; vgl. ebd., 1526-1527 sowie Schulte-Herbrüggen 2001, 58. Vgl. auch die Einordnung von Stock 2012, 19-20: „Die Hymnenproduktion des 13. Jahrhunderts wird vorangetrieben von der Inspiration der neuen Orden der Dominikaner und Franziskaner. [...] Im Raum dieser zisterziensisch-franziskanisch geprägten Compassio-Devotion entstanden das *Dies irae* und das *Stabat mater*, die, zuerst als Privatgebete

Zorns‘, wie Stock festhält: „Wörtlich schließt die 1. Strophe der Sequenz an den Vulgatatext von Zeph (Soph) 1, 15 sqq. (cf. 3, 8) an, wo vom Tag des Gerichts die Rede ist, das der Herr über Juda und Jerusalem abhält [...]“. <sup>2</sup> Das Jüngste Gericht wurde durch Warnungen vor göttlichen Strafen bußtheologisch stets präsent gehalten. <sup>3</sup> Dabei bestehe, was die Darstellung des Gerichts selbst angeht, ein Quantitätsgefälle zwischen Text- und Bildzeugnissen, so Dinzelbacher: „Verglichen mit der viel reicheren bildkünstlerischen Überlieferung, verglichen auch mit anderen zentralen religiösen Themen wie der Marien- oder Passionsdichtung, ist es freilich nur ein dünner Strang eschatologischer Texte, der über jenen Tag des Gerichts reflektierte[]“ <sup>4</sup>; so etwa das ‚Muspilli‘ und die Dichtungen der Frau Ava, häufiger dann die spätmittelalterlichen Weltgerichtsspiele. <sup>5</sup> Die nachfolgende Untersuchung zielt darauf ab, anhand ausgewählter Textstellen zu erfassen, welche Rolle der Zorn Gottes in Darstellungen des Jüngsten Gerichts in deutschsprachigen Texten des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters spielt, und dies erstens in semantischer Hinsicht, zweitens in narratologischer Perspektive.

Ausgehend von einem semasiologischen Ansatz soll erhoben werden, wie, in welchem Maße und durch welche Strategien der Gotteszorn überhaupt zur Darstellung kommt. In einem ersten Schritt geht es um eine knappe Erläuterung der häufigsten Zornlexeme und ihrer semantischen Bestimmung, auf der Grund-

gedacht, in den Rang von Maßsequenzen aufgestiegen sind.“

<sup>2</sup> Stock 2002, 284. Vgl. den vollständigen Text mit Übersetzung bei Stock 2012, 285-289; vgl. auch die Anmerkungen ebd., 289-294 (Einordnung); 294-304 (Kommentar). Vgl. ebd., 295: „Die Sequenz setzt mit einem Posaunenstoß ein: *Dies irae, dies illa*. Ein Tag wird ausgerufen, der letzte. Das Ende der Welt wird antizipiert; die sich einstellende Imagination ist die eines Weltenbrandes [...] Im Buch des Propheten [Zef 1, 15, Anm. d. Verf.] ist die Glut dieses Gerichtstages ein Fegfeuer, das die Stadt reinigt von Unrecht, Betrugerei und stolzer Überheblichkeit und sie wieder zu Ruhm und Ehren bringt (Zef 3, 11-20).“

<sup>3</sup> Vgl. Angenendt 2009, 101-104.

<sup>4</sup> Dinzelbacher 2001, 103.

<sup>5</sup> Vgl. ebd.

lage einer Studie der sprachgeschichtlichen Entwicklung vom Althochdeutschen zum Mittelhochdeutschen. Der zweite Schritt führt anhand konkreter Textbeispiele die sprachgeschichtlichen Überlegungen mit narratologischen Fragestellungen zusammen. Hier geht es darum zu erheben, welche Konzeptionen des apokalyptischen Zorns in den Texten entwickelt werden, und inwiefern semantische Zuschreibungen und narrative Gestaltung ineinandergreifen. Dafür ist etwa die Frage relevant, wem das Zornhandeln wie zugeschrieben (oder gerade nicht zugeschrieben) wird und wie die Texte die Spannung zwischen ferner eschatologischer Heilszeit und gegenwärtiger Bedrohung des Seelenheils inszenieren. Diese Fragen werden in diachroner Perspektive erörtert an exemplarisch gewählten geistlichen Dichtungen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts,<sup>6</sup> mit Auszügen aus Frau Avas ‚Jüngstem Gericht‘, der ‚Hochzeit‘ sowie aus ‚Mittelniederdeutscher Apokalypse‘ und Heinrichs von Hesler ‚Apokalypse‘, in denen unterschiedliche Möglichkeiten der Gotteszorn-darstellung vorliegen. Der diachrone Blick wird im letzten Schritt fortgeführt mit den Beispielen des ‚Münchner Weltgerichtsspiels‘ sowie Tengers Bearbeitung des Spiels im Rahmen seines ‚Laienspiegels‘ aus dem frühen 16. Jahrhundert. Im Zentrum aller Lektüren steht die Frage, welche Schwierigkeiten die Vorstellung vom Zorn Gottes einerseits für die literarische Darstellbarkeit mit sich bringt, und welche Möglichkeiten der Diskursivierung andererseits das Medium der Literatur eröffnet, um den Gotteszorn darstellbar zu machen.

### 1. *Lexikalische Semantik des Zorns*

Von der Drohung eines Weltgerichts, das auch diejenigen straft, die sich redlich um ein gottgefälliges Leben bemühen, geht eine besondere Spannung aus, deren Problematik im Mittelalter immer wieder theologisch reflektiert wurde.<sup>7</sup> Diese Diskussion lässt sich

<sup>6</sup> Vorschläge, welche Texte sich für weitere Untersuchungen anbieten könnten, s. u. im Fazit.

<sup>7</sup> Vgl. Dinzelbacher 2001, 107; Grubmüller 2003, 55.

auch semantisch nachvollziehen. Nach Blum sind die häufigsten althochdeutschen Zorn-Lexeme *zorn*, *âbulgî* und *heizmuot*, wobei die ersten beiden die meisten Belege stellten: „Die Sippen *belgan* und *zorn* bilden den Kern der Wörter des Zornes im Althochdeutschen. *zorn* und seine Ableitungen sind auf das Westgermanische beschränkt, die Sippe *belgan* ist auch im Altnordischen belegt.“<sup>8</sup> In *âbulgî* steckt die Verbalwurzel *belgan*, die sich von indogermanisch *\*belgh* (,anschwellen‘) herleitet.<sup>9</sup> Bei Schützeichel finden sich die Übersetzungen: „in Zorn geraten, zornig sein, sich erregen (über, wegen).“<sup>10</sup> Das *Althochdeutsche Wörterbuch* unterscheidet als Hauptbedeutungen des Verbs „1) *belgan* als strafwürdige, sündige Handlung oder Haltung des Menschen gegen seine Mitmenschen oder gegen Gott [...]“, „2) *belgan* als strafende Haltung Gottes der sündigen Menschheit gegenüber [...]“<sup>11</sup>. Zorn ist somit einerseits als Todsünde zu verurteilen, wo er menschlichen Kontrollverlust bedeutet,<sup>12</sup> lässt sich hingegen als gut und gerecht verstehen, wo Gott als Richter betroffen ist.<sup>13</sup> Diese zwei Grundbedeutungen finden sich auch in den Ableitungen von *belgan* wieder, so beispielsweise bei *irbelgan* (,zornig werden“, ,sich erzürnen“).<sup>14</sup> Dem *Etymologischen Wörterbuch des Althochdeutschen* ist zu entnehmen, dass das Lexem im Laufe der Zeit ungebräuchlich wird: „Nhd. ist das Verb untergegangen, aber ein neugebildetes Denominativverb zu *balg* (s. d.), *sich balgen* ‚sich raufen, sich prügeln, streiten‘, ist an seine Stelle getreten; mdartl. ist auch ein nicht-reflexives *balgen* ‚zanken, schelten‘ vorhanden“<sup>15</sup>. Das Verschwinden des

<sup>8</sup> Blum 1960, 161. Hinsichtlich der Ableitungen vgl. auch die zahlreichen Belege in: Glossenwortschatz 1, 291-292.

<sup>9</sup> Vgl. Blum 1960, 161.

<sup>10</sup> Schützeichel 2012, 45.

<sup>11</sup> AWB, s.v. *belgan*.

<sup>12</sup> Vgl. Barton 2005, 371-372.

<sup>13</sup> Zu philosophischen und theologischen Grundlagen vgl. auch Martini 2009, 87-99.

<sup>14</sup> Vgl. AWB, s.v. *irbelgan*, vgl. (1a) und (1b) sowie (2a) und (2b).

<sup>15</sup> EWA, s.v. *belgan*, *pelgan*.

Verbs lässt sich auch in anderen germanischen Sprachen feststellen: „Verwandte st. Verben sind auch in anderen agerm. Dialekten belegt, aber sie scheinen im Absterben begriffen zu sein“<sup>16</sup>. Den Wegfall des Lexems bestätigt auch das *Mittelhochdeutsche Wörterbuch*: Hier findet sich das Lemma zwar, aber es verweist unter *belgen* nur auf frühmittelhochdeutsche Texte („Annolied“ und „Wiener Genesis“), spätere Belege finden sich keine.<sup>17</sup> Der Eintrag zum schwachen Verb *bolgen* („zürnen“) führt wiederum zu nur einem Beleg,<sup>18</sup> nämlich in Bruns von Schönebeck „Hohe- lied“ aus dem 13. Jahrhundert.<sup>19</sup>

Die drei nach Blum<sup>20</sup> häufigsten Lexeme *zorn*, *âbulgî* und *heizmuot* bilden auch den Kernbestand des Wortfeldes nach Prieses Otfrid-Wörterbuch, das für nhd. ‚Zorn‘ bzw. ‚zornig‘ die folgenden Einträge führt: „Zorn *â-bulgi* st. n., *heiz-muati* st. n.; zornig *zorn-lih*.“<sup>21</sup> Zahlreiche Belege des Substantivs *âbulgi* in Otfrids *Liber evangeliorum*<sup>22</sup> versammelt auch Kelles Glossar.<sup>23</sup> Kelle unterscheidet die beiden Bedeutungen „Zorn, Ingrim, Grimm“ und „keine Schranken kennende Aeussereung des Unwillens, Wuth“.<sup>24</sup> Blum weist darauf hin, dass hier, bei Otfrid, zum ersten Mal *zorn* und *âbulgî* gemeinsam auftreten:

In Otfrids Evangelienharmonie treffen *âbulgi* [...] und *zorn* zuerst in einem Denkmal zusammen. *âbulgi* bezeichnet hier mit einer Ausnahme den Zorn Gottes, *zorn* meint dagegen den heftigen Ingrim der Juden, besonders ihrer Hohenpriester und Kriegsknechte, gegen Christus. Daraus läßt sich allerdings kein sicherer Schluß auf einen Unterschied im Gebrauch beider Wörter ziehen. Die Wortwahl kann durch Gesichtspunkte des

<sup>16</sup> Vgl. ebd.

<sup>17</sup> MWB, s.v. *belgen*: „bëlgen stV. (IIIb) ‚sich empören; zürnen“.

<sup>18</sup> Vgl. MWB, s.v. *bolgen*: „swV., zürnen“.

<sup>19</sup> Vgl. Wolff 2012; Malm 2011, 824-825.

<sup>20</sup> Vgl. Blum 1960, 161 und das Zitat oben.

<sup>21</sup> Priese 1907, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Vgl. Schröder, Hartmann 2013; Schröder 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Kelle 1881, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Vgl. ebd.

Reimes und der Metrik bestimmt sein. Die Auswechselbarkeit von *âbulgi* und *zorn*, zu denen noch *heizmuoti* tritt, deutet sich an einer Stelle an, wo ein über Christus erzürnter Hohepriester das versammelte Volk zu gleichem Zorn entflammen will: [...].<sup>25</sup>

Die von Blum erwähnte Stelle bietet ein aufschlussreiches Beispiel für das Nebeneinander der Lexeme. Die entsprechende Stelle verweist auf ein Matthäuswort (Mt. 26,65-66), das in der Vulgataversion keine Zornlexeme enthält.<sup>26</sup> Neben der Ko-Okkurrenz verschiedener Zornlexeme ist hier die Häufung der Belege auffällig:

Ther éwarto zi nóti            inbran in héizmuati,  
           joh sléiz er sin giwáti,        sin muat in kúnd gidati,  
 Thaz ther líut westi thâz    theiz ímo filu zórn was,  
           in *âbulgi* ouh sie wúrtin,    mit *ímo* iz sáman zurtin.<sup>27</sup>  
 (Erdmann, Wolff 1973, IV, 19, 57-60)

Zunächst findet sich das Kompositum *heizmuoti*, das das lateinische *furor* oder *ignis* wiedergibt.<sup>28</sup> *Furor* lässt sich im enge-

<sup>25</sup> Blum 1960, 166. Vgl. ebd., 172: „[...] der älteste Beleg von *zornlih* steht bei Otfrid, wo die Juden den Hohenpriestern *zornlichen worton* das Wunder von der Erweckung des Lazarus erzählen [...].“

<sup>26</sup> Mt. 26,65f.: Jesus vor den Hohepriestern, vgl. Beriger *et al.* 2018, 172: *Tunc princeps sacerdotum scidit vestimenta CCCXI sua dicens blasphemavit Quid adhuc egemus testibus ecce nunc audistis blasphemiam / quid vobis videtuat illi respondentes dixerunt reus est mortis*; vgl. ebd., 171 u. 173 die Übersetzung: „Darauf zerriss der Erste der Priester seine Kleider und sagte: ‚Er hat gelästert! Wozu brauchen wir noch Zeugen? Siehe, jetzt habt ihr die Lästerung gehört. Was scheint euch (richtig)?‘ Diese aber antworteten und sagten: ‚Er ist des Todes schuldig!‘“

<sup>27</sup> Nhd. Übersetzung: ‚Der Priester entbrannte ganz und gar in Wut und zerriss seine Kleidung; er tat ihnen seinen Willen kund, damit die Leute wüssten, dass er ihn zu großem Zorn regte. Zornig wurden auch sie, sie erzürnten sich dessen mit ihm gemeinsam.‘

<sup>28</sup> Vgl. EWA, s.v. *heizmuot*, 925.



ren Sinne als Affekt „Wut“ oder „Raserei“<sup>29</sup> übersetzen; *ignis* hingegen bedeutet an erster Stelle „Feuer“, auch „Flamme“ oder „Brand“<sup>30</sup>, teilt also die Semantik sowohl von ‚Heißmut‘ als auch von ‚entbrennen‘ (hier in IV, 19, 57 als Präteritum: *inbran*).<sup>31</sup> Darauf folgt zunächst das Substantiv *zorn* (IV, 19, 59), im nächsten Vers das zugehörige Verb *zurnin* (IV, 19, 60). In Verbindung mit diesem Verb steht das Lexem *âbulgi* (IV, 19, 60), an dieser Stelle rein substantivisch. Die Verbindung beider Lexeme legt nahe, dass sie hier als semantisch äquivalent verstanden werden.

Ein weiteres zentrales lateinisches Pendant zu *zorn* und *âbulgî* ist lateinisch *ira*.<sup>32</sup> Die Differenzierung von lateinisch *furor* und *ira* reflektiert Barton mit Blick auf Erzähltexte des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts.<sup>33</sup> *Ira* hebe sich konnotativ ab gegen *furor*, welches semantisch als „complete loss of reason and control, inability to allow anger to be sated, bestiality, and illegitimate action“<sup>34</sup> abgegrenzt werde. Der ahd. *zorn* wird zunächst vor allem in dieser Bedeutung verwendet; als Entsprechung der herrschaftlich und göttlich konnotierten *ira* findet er sich erst später, wie Blum argumentiert:

*zorn* lebt auch nach der Zeit Otfrids bis zu Notker hin nur im Bereiche der Glossen. Der Kreis der lat. Lemmata, die es übersetzt, hat sich noch erweitert, aber erst in einer Glossenshs. des 10./11. Jh.s taucht auch lat. *ira* unter ihnen auf. Es ist hier vom strafenden Zorn Gottes die Rede, der die Sünder zum Heil führt [...] Damit tritt *zorn* nicht nur bedeutungsmäßig, sondern auch als *ira*-Übersetzung in Konkurrenz zu *âbulgî*. In Notkers

<sup>29</sup> *Der neue Georges*, 2223-2224, hier 2223: „2. furor, öris, m. [...], die Raserei, die Wut, [I] als physischer Zustand, die Raserei, Tobsucht, der Wutausbruch, die Wut [...]“.

<sup>30</sup> Ebd., 2419-2420, hier 2419.

<sup>31</sup> Vgl. ebd., 2420 als letztgenannte Bedeutung [2.II.c]: „die Zornesglut, Wut“.

<sup>32</sup> Vgl. EWA, s.v. *âbulgi*; zu lat. *ira* vgl. *Der neue Georges*, 2728: „Zorn, Heftigkeit, Erbitterung, Rache [...]“.

<sup>33</sup> Vgl. Barton 2005, 383-384; Barton 1998, 155-156.

<sup>34</sup> Barton 2005, 384.

Psalter stehen *âbulgî* und *zorn* als Übersetzungen von lat. *ira* gleichberechtigt nebeneinander.<sup>35</sup>

Insgesamt setzt sich lexikalisch der *zorn* durch, während die im Althochdeutschen stärker vertretenen Lexeme *âbulgî* bzw. *belgan* und ihre Ableitungen im Mittelhochdeutschen nur noch vereinzelt und später gar nicht mehr vorkommen, wie oben ausgeführt.<sup>36</sup> Die eben angesprochene Unterscheidung von *furor* und *ira* im Lateinischen lässt sich mit Dal Chiele weiter vertiefen: Schon bei Augustinus dominiere *ira* als Bezeichnung für den göttlichen Zorn:

La scelta lessicale riflette il pensiero: la preferenza di Agostino di *ira* in *in psalm*. 87.7 agisce infatti nel segno di un'attenuazione dell'antropomorfismo biblico [...] L'*ira* di Dio è il θυμός (di ascendenza platonica), un'ira filosofica; non un turbamento dell'anima (di qui lo scarto di *iracundia*) o una patologia della stessa (di qui lo scarto di *furor*), ma una collera impassibile e giusta.<sup>37</sup>

Die Vorstellung vom Gotteszorn ist so verstanden zwar ein Anthropomorphismus; durch die lexikalische Differenzierung

<sup>35</sup> Blum 1960, 167.

<sup>36</sup> Vgl. zu dieser Entwicklung außerdem ebd., 178: „Die Verben der Sippe *belgan* können während des ganzen Ahd. ihr Übergewicht über das zunächst alleinstehende *zurnen* erhalten, obwohl bei *belgan* und seinen Ableitungen nicht nur eine relative, sondern auch eine absolute Verminderung des Vorkommens ersichtlich ist. Entsprechend der oben erwähnten verschiedenen Struktur der beiden Sippen siegt *zorn* zunächst im nominalen Bereich über die peripheren Bildungen von *belgan*. Erst im Mhd. erlahmt auch die Kraft des verbalen Kerns dieser Sippe.“ Vgl. auch ebd., 166; zum Substantiv *uuuot* als Entsprechung von lat. *furor* ebd., 193.

<sup>37</sup> Dal Chiele 2018, 342-343 Übersetzung: „Die lexikalische Wahl spiegelt den Gedanken wider: Augustinus' Bevorzugung von *ira* in *in psalm* 87,7 dient in der Tat der Abschwächung des biblischen Anthropomorphismus [...] Die *ira* Gottes ist der θυμός (platonischer Herkunft), ein philosophischer Zorn; nicht eine Störung der Seele (daher der Verzicht auf *iracundia*) oder eine Pathologie derselben (daher der Verzicht auf *furor*), sondern ein gleichmütiger und gerechter Zorn.“

werde bei Augustinus jedoch der göttliche Zorn von den ungemäßigten menschlichen Gemütsregungen unterschieden. Es handle sich vielmehr um eine ‚philosophische‘ Emotion.<sup>38</sup> Von einem anthropomorphen Affektanalogon geht auch Angenendt aus.<sup>39</sup> Die Vorstellung vom göttlichen Zorn diene nicht nur der Veranschaulichung des Eschaton, sondern auch ganz unmittelbar als Erklärungsmodell für auftretende Katastrophen in der Gegenwart: „Stets wurde dieser hervorgerufen durch die Sünden der Menschen, die aufzuzählen kein Ende war. Nicht beim Gotteszorn, sondern bei den verursachenden Fehlthaten mußte angesetzt werden [...]“<sup>40</sup> Durch die anthropomorphisierende Affektmodellierung werden der göttliche Heilsplan und das bevorstehende Jüngste Gericht begreiflich gemacht. Diese Differenzierung zwischen menschlichem Affekt und göttlicher Gerechtigkeit ist auch dort, wo keine eindeutigen lexikalischen Unterscheidungen vorliegen, stets mitzudenken.

## 2. *Wer zürnt? Erzählen diesseits und jenseits des Endgerichts*

Die anthropomorphe Konzeption des Gotteszorns hat wesentliche Folgen für das Erzählen. Gerade, was die Anwendung moderner narratologischer Theoreme betrifft, weisen Eisen und Müllner darauf hin, dass Vorstellungen von Innerlichkeit literarischer Figuren als historisch höchst spezifische Konfigurationen zu denken sind.<sup>41</sup> Dies gilt insbesondere für literarische Repräsentationen Gottes. Eders medienwissenschaftliche Studie zu Gottesfiguren hebt hervor, dass literarisch oftmals indirekte Strategien geltend gemacht werden, um göttliches Handeln darzustellen:

Gottesfiguren stehen in einer Spannung zwischen Anthropomorphismus und Unvorstellbarkeit. Sie sind mit einer Reihe

<sup>38</sup> Zur Verhandlung menschlicher Emotionen im literarischen Kontext als „social discourse“ vgl. Barton 2005, 374.

<sup>39</sup> Vgl. Angenendt 2009, 104.

<sup>40</sup> Ebd.

<sup>41</sup> Vgl. Eisen, Müllner, 14.

von Besonderheiten der Repräsentation und Exegese verbunden [...]. Um der Überschreitung des menschlichen Vorstellungs- und Darstellungsvermögens Ausdruck zu verleihen, werden Gottheiten nicht nur durch (1) explizite und konkrete Gottesfiguren repräsentiert, sondern oft indirekt oder symbolisch durch (2) übermenschliche Figuren, die auf Eigenschaften Gottes verweisen [...], (3) menschliche Figuren, die göttliche Attribute versinnbildlichen [...], sowie (4) Themen und Motive, die in der Geschichte anklingen und eine göttliche Instanz als überpersonale Macht suggerieren [...].<sup>42</sup>

In ähnlicher Weise kommt Kümper im Rahmen einer komparatistischen Untersuchung zu dem Ergebnis, dass die Darstellung des Jüngsten Gerichts in Weltchroniken häufig ausgespart wurde.<sup>43</sup> Deutlich häufiger verfahren die Texte indirekt über die Antichrist-Figur und die Vorzeichen des Jüngsten Gerichts.<sup>44</sup> So, durch indirekte Darstellung, wird der gefürchtete Zorn Gottes oft nicht auf einer aktantiellen Ebene verortet, die an eine Figur im engeren Sinne gekoppelt ist. Der Gotteszorn wird vielmehr als Distanzphänomen inszeniert, das als letzte Motivation und oberste Instanz des universalen Untergangsszenarios fungiert. Gängigstes Motiv ist der Fokus auf die Sünden der Gegenwart, die als Ursache göttlicher Strafen in der immanenten Weltzeit gelten, und die zugleich auf das Jüngste Gericht vorausdeuten: „Ultimately, only the apocalyptic triad – war, diseases, and famine (*bellum, pestilentiae et fames*) – is omnipresent as a trope in both genres.“<sup>45</sup> Auf Basis dieser Verortung des Gotteszorns zwischen Handlungs-

<sup>42</sup> Eder 2016, 30.

<sup>43</sup> Vgl. Kümper, 252: „Overall, some motifs and narrative patterns can be observed in many of the surveyed world chronicles as well as other historiographic texts from the German Middle Ages. The principal motif certainly is the Antichrist. [...] The same holds true for the narrative tradition of the fifteen signs of the apocalypse, which differs in detail but still consists of a rather fixed set of elements from the fifteenth century onwards.“

<sup>44</sup> Kümper, passim, z.B. 236-237, 240, 245, 249 u.ö.

<sup>45</sup> Ebd., 255. Gemeint sind verschiedene Arten historiographischer Literatur, hier konkret Welt- und Stadtchroniken.

tivator und Stellvertreterphänomen soll, wie eingangs benannt, in den folgenden Analysen untersucht werden, wie die Texte das Problem der Darstellbarkeit des göttlichen Zorns und die Spannung zwischen Gegenwart und Endzeit narrativ bewältigen.

Das erste Textbeispiel ist ein kurzer Auszug aus dem ‚Jüngsten Gericht‘ Avas, deren Werke auf die erste Hälfte, vielleicht noch auf das erste Viertel des 12. Jahrhunderts datiert werden.<sup>46</sup> Der erste Teil des Texts schildert die fünfzehn Vorzeichen des Jüngsten Gerichts (Claußnitzer, Sperl, V. 9-152) und greift damit eine der häufigsten Motivtraditionen auf, die mit der Darstellung der Endzeit verbunden sind.<sup>47</sup> Am fünfzehnten Tag erscheint Christus als Richter, der die Guten segnet und die Bösen verdammt (ebd., V. 226-268). Die Handlung wird nicht nur durch die Vorzeichen, sondern noch einmal mit explizitem Bezug auf den Gotteszorn endzeitlich verortet:

Daz gescihet an dem jungisten zorne,  
 dâ sceidet sich diu helewe von dem chorne,  
 diu guoten ze der zesewen,  
 daz sint diu genesen,  
 diu ubelen ze der winsteren,  
 si werdent al gewindet  
 an dem vrône tenne;  
 dar denche, swer sô welle!  
 Sô sprichet got mit grimme  
 ze sînen widerwinnen.  
 er zeiget in sîne wunden  
 an den vuozen unde an den henden.  
 vil harte si bluotent.  
 (Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, V. 233-245)<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Vgl. grundlegend Papp 2012; Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, VII-XXII und 219-223; Hintz 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Vgl. zu dem Motiv auch Giliberto 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Vgl. die Übersetzung von Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, 205: „Das geschieht am Jüngsten Tag, dem Tag des Zorns, / da scheidet sich die Spreu vom Weizen,

Dabei fällt zuerst die Formulierung in V. 233 auf, die das temporale Attribut *jungisten* („Jüngster“) unmittelbar mit dem Zorn koppelt: *Daz gescihet an dem jungisten zorne* [...]. Inszeniert wird der Zorn hier nicht als Auslöser (des Beginns) des Endgerichts, sondern er wird auf syntaktischer Ebene durch die Attribuierung *jungist* metonymisch mit dem Gericht gleichgesetzt. Diese Gleichsetzung verdeutlicht, dass der Gotteszorn eben nicht eigentlich als Affekt zu verstehen ist, sondern als Begriff für die Gerechtigkeit (und ‚Rechtsprechung‘) Gottes steht. Die Komplexität des Gefüges zeigt sich auch beim Versuch, den Vers ins Neuhochdeutsche zu übertragen. Claußnitzers und Sperls Übersetzung trennt das Attribut (*jungisten*) von seinem Bezugswort (*zorne*), baut daraus zwei getrennte Phrasen und fügt jeweils das (heute idiomatisch übliche) Wort ‚Tag‘ ein: „Das geschieht am Jüngsten Tag, dem Tag des Zorns[]“<sup>49</sup>. Das lässt die Bedeutung klarer hervortreten, jedoch geht die metonymische Kontraktion der frühmittelhochdeutschen Formulierung ‚Jüngster Zorn‘ verloren. Grubmüller weist ebenfalls auf die sprachliche Besonderheit des Verses hin: „Ikonisch verdichtet wird das Bild des richtenden, also auch strafenden Gottes im Jüngsten Gericht, [...] bis hin zur völligen Verschmelzung in der Bezeichnung [...]“<sup>50</sup>. Syntaktisch irritiert diese ‚Verschmelzung‘ auch insofern, als das Prädikat *gescihet an* (ebenfalls V. 233) eigentlich eine temporale Bestimmung erwarten lässt. Dass hier stattdessen der Zorn eingesetzt ist, unterläuft diese Erwartung. Der Zorn wäre syntaktisch viel eher mit einer kausalen Bestimmung verbunden: Was geschieht, geschieht ‚wegen‘ des Zorns – nicht, wie hier formuliert, ‚am‘ Zorn. Doch die kausale Bestimmung des Gotteszorns wird hier bewusst vermieden, wodurch die Verschmelzung sowohl das mit dem Eschaton verbundene Ende der immanenten Zeitlichkeit wie

/ die Guten zur Rechten, / das sind die Erretteten, / die Bösen zur Linken, / sie werden alle geworfelt / auf der heiligen Tenne; / daran denke, wer auch immer will! / Dann spricht Gott voller Zorn / zu seinen Widersachern. / Er zeigt ihnen seine Wunden / an den Füßen und an den Händen: / Sie bluten sehr heftig.“

<sup>49</sup> Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, 205.

<sup>50</sup> Grubmüller 2003, 55.

auch das Ende der kausalen Linearität syntaktisch veranschaulicht. Kienast weist auf eine zu V. 233f. ganz ähnliche Stelle in der frühmittelhochdeutschen ‚Summa theologiae‘ hin.<sup>51</sup> Diese ‚Summa theologiae‘ ist ebenfalls eine geistliche Dichtung, die vom Ende des 11. oder Anfang des 12. Jahrhunderts stammt.<sup>52</sup> Dort heißt es in Strophe 30: *ob er sich dan bezzirin niwelli, [/] daz er in vor geriwi zi der helli. / zi jungist in offinimo zorni [/] di heliwin sceidit er von demo chorni* (Maurer, 315, 30, 3-4).<sup>53</sup> Auch hier finden sich die Lexeme *jungist* und *zorni* in einem Satz: *zi jungist in offinimo zorni* (30, 4), jedoch sind sie nicht syntaktisch verschmolzen. Das *jungist* steht als adverbiale Bestimmung der Zeit (*zi jungist*) nicht attributiv, sondern für sich; der offenbarte Zorn beschreibt die Modalität des göttlichen Handelns: *in offinimo zorni* ist als nähere Bestimmung des nachfolgenden Prädikats *sceidit* (30, 4) zu verstehen.

Zurück zu Avas Text. Anschließend, ab. V. 235, wird unterschieden zwischen den guten und den schlechten Menschen, die nach rechts (gut) bzw. nach links (schlecht) eingeteilt werden (V. 235-237). An seine Feinde (V. 242: *widerwinnen*<sup>54</sup>) wendet sich Gott voller Groll: *So sprichet got mit grimme* (V. 241). Das Mittelhochdeutsche Wörterbuch gibt als erste Bedeutung für *grim* (stM) ‚Zorn, Wut, Angriffslust‘ an, erläutert aber vorausgehend: ‚von heftiger Erregung und rohem, ungestümem Verhalten, nicht immer klar zwischen den Bedeutungen zu unterscheiden‘.<sup>55</sup> Mit diesen zwei Begriffen *zorne* (233) und *grimme* (241) wird also unterschieden zwischen dem Zorn als Chiffre für das Jüngste Gericht einerseits, und der wütenden Affizierung des göttlichen Sprechens. Der *jungiste*[] *zorne* (V. 233) betrifft als ‚Tag

<sup>51</sup> Vgl. Kienast 1940, 103; vgl. zur Stelle auch Kettler 1977, 196-197 mit Anm. 1-3.

<sup>52</sup> Vgl. Freytag 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Nhd. Übersetzung: ‚Wenn sich dieser dann nicht bessern will, / bereitet er ihn auf die Hölle vor. / Am Jüngsten Tag, / nach der Offenbarung des Zorns, / trennt er die Spreu vom Korn.‘

<sup>54</sup> Vgl. Lexer, s.v. *wider-winne*.

<sup>55</sup> MWB, s.v. *grim*.

des Zorns‘ alle Menschen, die guten ebenso wie die schlechten.<sup>56</sup> Einem zornigen Affekt ausgesetzt sind jedoch nur die von Gott adressierten schlechten Menschen. Die narrative Gestaltung der Stelle illustriert somit, wie der Wille Gottes einerseits durch das agenslose Eintreten des Jüngsten Gerichts von der Figuren- und Handlungsebene entkoppelt wird. Andererseits tritt dieser Wille wenige Verse später in Erscheinung und wird hier nun, anders als zuvor, an eine sprechende, handelnde Figur gebunden: *Sô spricht got mit grimme / ze sînen widerwinnen. / er zeigt in sîne wunden / an den vuozen unde an den henden* (V. 241-244). Der ‚Gott‘, der hier narrativ eingesetzt wird, ist der Gottessohn, der gekreuzigte Christus. Durch die Figur Christi – nicht nur Gott, sondern auch Mensch – wird die narrative Diskursivierung des Gotteszorns möglich.

Mit dem an dieser Stelle gesetzten Fokus auf die *widerwinnen* geht auch eine implizite Mahnung an die Hörerinnen und Hörer der Erzählung einher, da angesichts der eschatologischen Szene die Gegenwart als Zeit der Bußmöglichkeit hervortritt. So betont auch Hintz: „[...] the unavoidable identification with human shortcomings may well compel Ava’s auditors to envision vividly the despair and ensuing terror as their own.“<sup>57</sup> Die Verschiebung des Handlungsschwerpunkts von der eschatologischen Zukunft zur immanenten Gegenwart der Rezipienten entspricht der mittelalterlichen Auffassung der Zeitlichkeit des Zorns, wie Angenendt zusammenfasst: „Das Mittelalter hat unmittelbar und allezeit mit dem Zorn Gottes gerechnet. Ob nun Katastrophen draußen oder drinnen, der kosmischen Natur oder der menschliche [sic!] Bosheit – letzter Grund war der Zorn Gottes.“<sup>58</sup> Zugleich wird die permanente Drohung umrahmt von der Gnadenfrist, die die Möglichkeit zur Umkehr gewährleistet.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Vgl. Dinzelbacher 2001, 107.

<sup>57</sup> Hintz 2000, 56.

<sup>58</sup> Angenendt 2009, 102.

<sup>59</sup> Vgl. Brandscheidt 2001, 1489-1490: „Die heilsgesch. Auswirkungen zeigen sich in der Langmut Gottes, die den Ausbruch seines Zorns verhindert, das Gericht aufschiebt (Ex 32,13; Jer 18,8; Am 7,3.6) u. so Raum gewährt für



Auch in der sogenannten ‚Hochzeit‘, einer allegorischen Dichtung von um 1160,<sup>60</sup> wird das Ende der Welt in einen paränestischen Kontext eingebettet. Die Erzählperspektive stellt hier keinen direkten Bezug zum göttlichen Handeln her, wie es im vorigen Beispiel der Fall war. Ausgehend von dem Wissen um die biblischen Prophezeiungen wird die Endzeit als Untergang der Welt imaginiert, den nur der reine göttliche Logos überdauert. Die Sünden dieser Welt sind dem Endgericht ausnahmslos unterworfen, so spitzt der Text zu:

An den buochen daz geschriben ⟨st⟩at,  
 wie disiu werlt zergat.  
 die heimuote, die ⟨wi⟩r hie han,  
 die muozzen wir verlan.  
 Ez ⟨wirt⟩ allez verwandelot  
 wan diu heiligen ⟨gotes w⟩ort:  
 [...]

Odin, prodin, loshait, boshait:  
 dem ist daz gotes wort leit,  
 daz muoz allez samt sin  
 in der gotes abulgin.  
 (Haug, Vollmann 1991, V. 65-70, 79-82)<sup>61</sup>

Buße u. Umkehr (Jer 26,3.13; Jon 4, 2; 2 Petr 3, 9), den Frommen z. Läuterung, den Frevlern z. Warnung (Ijob 33; 36,1-14). Allein die verweigerte Umkehr (1 Petr 3,20) macht das Zorngericht Gottes unausweichlich u. weist auf den Tag Jahwes (Jes 13,9-12) bzw. den Tag des Zorns (Am 5,18ff.; Zef 1,15; Klgl 1,2) hin, der die endgültige Abrechnung bringt u. dessen Heimsuchungen das letzte Gericht abbilden (Röm 2,5ff.; Offb 6,17;14).“

<sup>60</sup> Vgl. Ganz 2012; vgl. insgesamt Bowden 2015; Chinca 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Vgl. die Übersetzung bei Haug, Vollmann 1991, 789: „In der Schrift steht geschrieben, / wie diese Welt vergehen wird: / die Wohnstatt, die wir hier haben, / die müssen wir verlassen. / Alles wird vergehen / außer den heiligen Worten Gottes. / [...] / Verheeren, Zerstören, Frechheit, Bosheit: / alldem ist das Gotteswort zuwider; / all das verfällt / dem göttlichen Zorn.“

Wo bei Ava ausführlich von den fünfzehn Vorzeichen des Jüngsten Gerichts erzählt wird,<sup>62</sup> rafft die ‚Hochzeit‘ den Weltuntergang zusammen auf diese wenigen Verse.<sup>63</sup> Beide hier angegebenen Abschnitte sind strukturell auf den je letzten Vers ausgerichtet, der das Programm substantivisch (*wort, zorn*) verdichtet: Am Ende der Welt bleibe nichts erhalten als das Wort Gottes (V. 70: *wan diu heiligen gotes wort*) und alle Sünde muss sich dem Zorn Gottes stellen (V. 82: *in der gotes abulgin*). Der zweite Abschnitt (V. 79-82) beginnt mit der binnengereimten Reihung *Odin, prodin, loshait, boshait*, mit der die menschliche Sündhaftigkeit ins Zentrum gerückt wird.<sup>64</sup> Mit diesem Fokus wird die *agency* den Menschen zugeschrieben, die sich entscheiden müssen, ob sie den göttlichen Gesetzen gehorchen wollen. Der Satzbau bildet die zeitliche Entwicklung ab: Der Satz beginnt bei der Schau der Sünden (V. 79), die als gotteswidriges Verhalten eingeordnet werden (V. 80). Der darauffolgende Vers formuliert, dass dies unvermeidbare Folgen nach sich ziehe (V. 81: *muoz ... sin*). Der Höhepunkt des Erzählens liegt am Satzende (V. 81f.): *daz muoz alles sîn / in der gotes abulgin*. Haug übersetzt: „all das verfällt / dem göttlichen Zorn“,<sup>65</sup> wörtlich hieße es: ‚Das muss alles im Zorn Gottes sein‘. Die Verbindung des Gotteszorns mit der lokalen Präposition ‚in‘ macht implizit deutlich, dass es sich nicht um eine Affektbeschreibung handeln kann, sondern dass hier auf ein abstraktes Konzept verwiesen wird. Diese Abstraktion war auch bei Ava vorhanden (s.o. Claußnitzer, Sperl, V. 233: *Daz gescihet an dem jungisten zorne*). Wo jedoch in Avas Erzählung vom Jüngsten Gericht anschließend der endzeitliche Christus als Figur im Zentrum steht (ab V. 241), richtet sich die kürzere Ausführung der ‚Hochzeit‘ auf das menschliche Handeln in der immanenten Gegenwart.

<sup>62</sup> Vgl. Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, 192-201: V. 9-160.

<sup>63</sup> Vgl. zu V. 69f. den Kommentar bei Haug, Vollmann 1991, 1518: Anlehnung an Mt 24,35; Mc 13,31; Lc 21,33; vgl. auch Kraus 1891, 108.

<sup>64</sup> Vgl. zu möglichen Hintergründen der Aufzählung in V. 79 ebd.: „Aber in dem Ueberlieferten können wir vielleicht die Gegensätze zu den vier Cardinaltugenden sehen, der Prudentia, Fortitudo, Temperantia, Justitia.“

<sup>65</sup> Haug, Vollmann 1991, 789.

Näher am Bibeltext orientiert sich die ‚Mittelniederdeutsche Apokalypse‘. Es handelt sich bei diesem ebenfalls noch im 12. Jahrhundert entstandenen Werk um eine gereimte Bibeldichtung, die die Offenbarung des Johannes in die Volkssprache überträgt.<sup>66</sup> Wo bei Ava auf die Erzählung von dem Anbruch des Jüngsten Tages ein Lobpreis der himmlischen Herrlichkeit folgt,<sup>67</sup> stellt die ‚Apokalypse‘ – zumindest in bestimmten Fassungen –<sup>68</sup> auch jene Gotteszorn-Motive ganz konkret dar, die in der Johannesapokalypse als Teil des Weltgerichts beschrieben werden. So erzählt etwa die Trierer Fassung der ‚Mittelniederdeutschen Apokalypse‘ von den sieben Engeln, die den Zorn Gottes in Form von Krankheiten und Katastrophen aus Schalen über der Erde ausleeren (Apc 15f.):<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Vgl. Langner 2016, 160: „Im Hochmittelalter entstand eine Anzahl von dichterischen, volkssprachlichen Bearbeitungen der Bibel, zu denen auch die mittelniederdeutsche Bearbeitung der Apokalypse gehört. Dieser gereimte Text, der ‚noch während des 12. Jahrhunderts in Westfalen entstand‘, umfasste in einer ersten Verfassung vermutlich ca. 2600 vv. Die handschriftliche Überlieferung ist seit Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts nachweisbar.“

<sup>67</sup> Vgl. Claußnitzer, Sperl 2014, 200-215: V. 161-389.

<sup>68</sup> Vgl. ebd., 163: „Aber nicht nur Textzusätze wurden eliminiert, sondern auch Passagen aus der Offenbarung wurden in der Bearbeitung der beiden untersuchten Handschriften ausgelassen. [...] Viele Gestalten der Apokalypse werden in dieser Bearbeitung ausgelassen, andere Figuren erhalten veränderte Funktionen. [...] Es fehlen im 1. Abschnitt des Jüngsten Gerichtes die 5. bis 7. Posaune. Weggelassen wurden viele der wesentlichen Elemente des Weltgerichts, wie z.B. die sieben Schalen des Zorns (Kap. 16). Aber auch der letzte Gerichtstag (Kap. 20) ist so wenig enthalten, wie das Bild des Himmlischen Jerusalems (Kap. 21f). Insgesamt erscheint der Bericht verknappt und verändert.“

<sup>69</sup> Vgl. z.B. Apc 15, 7-16, 2 in: Beriger *et al.* 2018, 1152: *et unus ex quattuor animalibus dedit septem angelis septem fialas aureas plenas iracundiae Dei viventis in saecula saeculorum / et impletum est templum fumo a maiestate Dei et de virtute eius et nemo poterat introire in templum donec consummarentur septem plagae septem angelorum / et audivi vocem magnam de templo dicentem septem angelis ite et effundite septem fialas irae Dei in terram / et abiit primus et effudit fialam suam in terram et factum est vulnus saevum ac pessimum in homines qui habent characterem bestiae et eos qui adoraverunt imaginem eius; vgl. ebd., 1153 die Übersetzung: „Und eines von den vier*

do sa ich in dem hemele stan  
 Siuen engele al zo hant;  
 er allerlich hatte eine schalen an siner hant.  
 Dar was gotes wrake unde zorn getan,  
 de in den lesten ziten solde vollengan.  
 (Psilander 1901, V. 1665-1669)<sup>70</sup>

Im Vergleich zur biblischen Erzählung ist die Stelle auf die Kernelemente reduziert.<sup>71</sup> Semantisch lässt sich bei dem Substantivpaar ansetzen: Die Schalen seien gefüllt mit *gotes wrake unde zorn* (V. 1668). Dabei kann mnd. *wrake* „Rache“ oder „Strafe“<sup>72</sup> bedeuten, aber auch „Vergeltung“,<sup>73</sup> wenn man die Entsprechungen im Ahd., Mhd., Mnl. und weiteren mehr einbezieht. Die ‚Strafe‘ oder ‚Vergeltung‘ wird hier unmittelbar mit dem Zorn kontextualisiert: Das Jüngste Gericht ist an diesem Punkt keine ferne Drohung, sondern offenbarte Gegenwart, und mit dem offenbarten Zorn ist die Zeit der Abrechnung angebrochen. Jedoch wird auch hier das Zornhandeln nicht an eine Gottesfigur gebunden, sondern – wie in der Bibel – indirekt zweistufig über die Schalen und die Engel vermittelt. Die Koppelung von *wrake* und *zorn* bringt somit

Lebewesen gab den sieben Engeln sieben goldene Schalen, gefüllt mit dem Zorn des in alle Ewigkeit lebenden Gottes, und der Tempel füllte sich mit dem Rauch von der Erhabenheit Gottes und seiner Kraft, und niemand konnte den Tempel betreten, bis die sieben Plagen der sieben Engel vollendet wurden. Und ich hörte eine laute Stimme aus dem Tempel, die den sieben Engeln sagte: ‚Geht und gießt die sieben Schalen des Zornes Gottes auf die Erde!‘ Und der erste ging und goss seine Schale auf die Erde, und eine grausige und ganz schreckliche Wunde wurde den Menschen zugefügt, die das (Brand)mal des Tiers tragen, und denen, die dessen Bildnis angebetet haben.“ Zu Psilanders Edition der Trierer Fassung vgl. Langner 2016, 161 mit Anm. 8.

<sup>70</sup> Nhd. Übersetzung: ‚Da sah ich am Himmel / sogleich sieben Engel stehen, / von denen jeder eine Schale in der Hand hatte. / In diese wurde Gottes Vergeltung und Zorn hineingefüllt, / die sich am Ende der Zeiten vollenden sollten.‘

<sup>71</sup> Vgl. das Zitat in Anm. 78.

<sup>72</sup> Schiller, Lübben 1880, 775-776, hier 775.

<sup>73</sup> EWA, s.v. *râcha*, 146-149, bes. 146-147; MNW, s.v. *wrake*!

in komprimierter Form die eschatologische Vollendung zum Ausdruck. Im Anschluss an die zitierten Verse wird die von den Schalenengeln ausgeführte Strafe weiter ausgeführt. Lehmann sieht das Motiv des Ausleerens des göttlichen Zorns als positive Wendung des zum Teil negativ konnotierten Motivs des vergossenen Weines, das in der Apokalypse unterschiedlich bewertet wird:

Die sieben letzten Plagen erscheinen im Bild der sieben Schalen des Zorns, die Gott über den Menschen ausschüttet. Der Zorn ist im Bild der Zornschalen metaphorisiert als eine Flüssigkeit, die ausgegossen wird. Verknüpft ist dieses Bild der Flüssigkeit zugleich mit dem ‚Wein des Zorns‘, von dem vorher und nachher die Rede ist. [...] So changiert im Bild des Weins, des Rausches und der Hurerei der Zorn zwischen menschlicher Sünde und göttlicher Strafe. [...] Dass der Zorn Gottes so zugleich als die Sünde des Zorns des Menschen erscheint, das findet sich dann auch bei der Darstellung der sieben Plagen. Die Schalen des Zorns erscheinen hier als die gerechten und wahren Urteile Gottes über die ungerechten und zornigen Menschen.<sup>74</sup>

Anders als der Zornwein sind die Zornschalen also durchgängig mit der Gerechtigkeit Gottes assoziiert. Anschließend folgt eine Auslegung der Schalenengel, die die Bedeutung des Bilds erläutert:

Die siuen engele sin de predigere,  
de alle tage *kündiget* vnde leret,  
Daz got sinen zorn zo letten wil wreken  
ouer alle de die sin bot breken.  
(Psilander 1901, V. 1746-1749)<sup>75</sup>

Die Erzählung von der Weltstrafe wird somit in eine exegetische Diskursivierung überführt, die die Drastik des Motivs

<sup>74</sup> Lehmann 2012, 112-113.

<sup>75</sup> Nhd. Übersetzung: ‚Die sieben Engel stehen für die Priester / die alle Tage verkünden und lehren, / dass Gott am Jüngsten Tag seinen Zorn ausführen will / über alle, die seine Gebote missachten.‘

wieder einfängt. Auch hier wird die eschatologische Drohung des Zorns auf die Ebene der Rezeptionsgegenwart geholt und in ein paränetisches Moment transformiert. Offenbar verlangte die apokalyptische Zerstörung der Welt ein Gegengewicht, das in der moralischen Exegese gefunden wurde. Dass die Wiedergabe der Offenbarung durch Allegoresen angereichert wurde, dürfte außerdem als Verweis auf den Gebrauchskontext des Werks als Predigthandbuch verstanden werden.<sup>76</sup>

Ein markantes Gegenbeispiel findet sich in einer weiteren Offenbarungsdichtung, der Apokalypse-Adaption Heinrichs von Hesler, dessen Schaffen um 1300 angesetzt wird.<sup>77</sup> Hier werden die Motive, die zum Kern des Offenbarungsmysteriums gehören, explizit zugunsten einer Antichrist-Allegorese ausgespart:

Swaz min herre sente Johan  
 Hinnen vorder hat getan  
 Anschribene von der genist,  
 [...]  
 Und sprichet da von trachen  
 Und von argen luester tieren,  
 [...]  
 Und ist vil bezzer ungerort  
 Dan zu den oren uch gevort.  
 (Helm 1907, 17803-17805, 17808f., 17815f.)<sup>78</sup>

Wo die ‚Mittelniederdeutsche Apokalypse‘ die (bzw. manche) Bildfelder des Zorns wiedergibt und durch Auslegung kontextua-

<sup>76</sup> Vgl. Langner 2016, 162: „Nach dem Stand der Untersuchungen ist davon auszugehen, dass die Manuskripte der mittelniederdeutschen Apokalypse vornehmlich als Predigttexte aufzufassen oder als Vorlage für Meditationsandachten oder Privatlesungen zu verstehen sind.“

<sup>77</sup> Vgl. Masser 2012, vgl. ebd. die Datierung.

<sup>78</sup> Nhd. Übersetzung: ‚Was auch immer der heilige Herr Johannes / zuvor berichtet / und aufgeschrieben hat von der Erlösung, / [...] / und erzählt von Drachen, / und von bössartigen Tieren, / [...] / Und es ist viel besser, das auszulassen / als davon hören zu lassen.‘

liert, spart Heinrichs Text die als zu riskant empfundene apokalyptische Motivik bewusst aus. Der Bibeltext wird explizit als problematisch beurteilt (17815f.); die geheimnisvollen endzeitlichen Bilder sollten besser gar nicht erst gehört werden: *Und ist vil bezzet ungerort / Dan zu den oren uch gevort* (V. 17815f.). Den auffälligen Sprung beschreibt auch Ehrich:

Für den eigentlichen endzeitlichen Ausblick umgeht er bezeichnenderweise die schwierige, symbolgeladene Auslegung der Apokalypse in den Kapiteln 12, 10-20, 15 und entscheidet sich für die narrative Wiedergabe der Antichristlegende verschränkt mit der Endkaiserweissagung. Offenbar gelten Heinrich die johanneischen Schilderungen der beiden Tiere, der sieben Engel mit den Schalen des Zorns, der Hure Babylon und des endgültigen Siegs über die teuflischen Widersacher Gottes als Äquivalent für Leben, Schreckensherrschaft und Tod des Antichrist, die somit als Inbegriff der eschatologischen Anfechtungen stehen.<sup>79</sup>

Nicht die Zorneshandlung selbst wird hier dargestellt, sondern die konkurrierende Tradition der Antichristlegende, die die Apokalypsebilder explizit substituieren soll: *Des will ichs lazen da bezzemen / Und wil an andern buchen / Die selben rede suchen / [...] / Daz ich beschribe die zit / Umme Anticristen [...]* (Helm, 17824-17826, 17831-17832).<sup>80</sup> Der endzeitliche Zorn und die narrative Ausgestaltung seiner Offenbarung werden hier also nicht abstrahiert, sondern durch die Anspielungen auf die konkreten Inhalte (etwa die *trachen* oder *tiere*[], vgl. 17808f.) problematisiert.

### 3. Zorn im Kontext des spätmittelalterlichen Rechtsdiskurses

Brandtscheidt definiert den Zorn Gottes aus theologischer Sicht als „Widerwille gg. alles Böse“ und als „Reaktion Gottes auf das Fehlverhalten der Menschen u. die Hybris der Selbstverabsolutie-

<sup>79</sup> Ehrich 2015, 102.

<sup>80</sup> Nhd. Übersetzung: „Darum will ich es damit gut sein lassen und will in anderen Büchern dieselbe Erzählung suchen [...] um die Zeit des Antichristen zu beschreiben [...]“.

rung [...]“.<sup>81</sup> Einflussreich für die mittelalterliche Zorntheologie ist nach Martini auch der „aristotelische Grundgedanke vom Zorn als Reaktion auf eine Konfrontation mit einem Übel“.<sup>82</sup> Barton fasst diesen Gedanken zusammen: „For Aristotle, then, anger was a normal and appropriate response when an individual felt that persons or objects important to him or her were threatened.“<sup>83</sup> Daraus werde im Mittelalter eine Zornethik abgeleitet, die die Drohung des apokalyptischen Zorns vereinbar werden lässt mit der Gnadenbotschaft des Neuen Testaments:

Hugh of Saint Victor echoed Hincmar’s distinction. Anger is good, he said, when because of it you refuse to do evil; it is bad, when because of it you refuse to suffer evil. Thomas of Chobham, like Hincmar, carefully distinguished good anger from bad anger. In fact, he used the same dichotomy of *ira per zelum* and *ira per vitium*. Anger through zeal occurred when one grew angry against vices and those who committed vices, and thus this type of anger was virtuous.<sup>84</sup>

Durch diese Differenzierung relativiert sich das Problem des Zorns, das im Rahmen der Gnadentheologie diskutiert wird. Diese beiden, Zorn und Gnade, sind so verstanden nicht als Gegensätze zu denken, argumentiert Schäufele, sondern als sich ergänzende Aspekte von Gottes Heilsplan.<sup>85</sup> Die Frage nach menschlicher Schuld, ihrer Bestrafung und Sühne hat dabei einerseits deutlich an dem Rechtsdiskurs teil, der die Weltgerichtsspiele des Spätmittelalters prägt. Der vom Ende der Zeiten her drohende Zorn Gottes spielte andererseits nicht nur in der mittelalterlichen Predigt, sondern auch in den frühneuzeitlichen Rechtsverordnungen eine ganz handfeste Rolle zur moralischen Maßregelung, wie Frenzel darlegt:

<sup>81</sup> Brandscheidt 2001, 1489.

<sup>82</sup> Martini 2009, 93.

<sup>83</sup> Barton 2005, 376. Zu Aristoteles’ Zorntheorie vgl. auch Freienhofer, 25-30.

<sup>84</sup> Barton 1998, 157.

<sup>85</sup> Vgl. Schäufele 2011, 497-498.



Das Beispiel der Policygesetzgebung hat gezeigt, dass der Verweis auf das Erzürnen Gottes durch die Sünden im Gemeinwesen im Regelungsbereich von Gotteslästerung, Unzucht und Zutrinken in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts kontinuierlich zunahm. [...] Anhand der Verwendung der im lebensweltlichen Erfahrungshorizont überaus realen Strafen Gottes, die seinem Zorn folgten, konnte gezeigt werden, dass sich der Landplagen-Topos parallel zur quantitativen Steigerung der Benennung des göttlichen Zorns verdichtete. Auch dies spricht für eine allmähliche Etablierung und Ausgestaltung von Topos und Argument des göttlichen Zorns im 16. Jahrhundert.<sup>86</sup>

Das Verhältnis von göttlicher und irdischer Rechtsordnung ist somit bestimmt durch den Fluchtpunkt des Endgerichts. Dabei folgt irdisches Recht göttlichen Weisungen, aber auch das Erzählen vom Jüngsten Gericht ist geprägt vom juristischen Diskurs, wie Dinzelbacher darlegt: „Wie in vielen anderen Religionen wird auch im Christentum die oberste Gottheit als Richter gedacht. [...] Das letzte Buch des *Neuen Testaments*, die *Apokalypse*, handelt von nichts anderem als diesem Gerichtstag“.<sup>87</sup> Auch Angenendt weist auf den Zusammenhang von weltlichem und göttlichem Gericht hin: „Gesellschaftsgeschichtlich erlangte der Gedanke des Gotteszornes dadurch eine außerordentliche Bedeutung, daß Recht und Gericht seiner Wirkung unterstanden.“<sup>88</sup> In den Weltgerichtsspielen des Spätmittelalters werden die eschatologischen Gerichtsszenen in den sich spezialisierenden Rechtsdiskurs integriert. Die Spieltexte verhandeln dabei neben juristischen Fragen auch die gnadentheologischen Implikationen des Zorns und des Gerichts, wie Schäufele betont: „Doch zielen die Weltgerichtsspiele nicht allein und in erster Linie auf die traditionelle Moralkatechese, sondern vor allem auf das Problem, wie sich die göttliche Barmherzigkeit und die göttliche Gerechtig-

<sup>86</sup> Frenzel 2013, 70-71.

<sup>87</sup> Dinzelbacher 2001, 95-96.

<sup>88</sup> Angenendt 2009, 103.

keit zueinander verhalten.“<sup>89</sup> Das ‚Münchener Weltgerichtsspiel‘ von 1510 stellt einen der umfangreichsten Vertreter seiner Art da, was für die vorliegende Fragestellung insofern relevant ist, als die Erweiterungen vor allem den gnadentheologischen Diskurs betreffen.<sup>90</sup> Das Motiv der Verdammung der Sünder durch Christus beim Jüngsten Gericht, das etwa auch bei Ava dargestellt ist (s. o.), wird hier in asymmetrischer Wechselrede zwischen den verdammten Seelen und Christus als Richter inszeniert:

**Die seel** [1298a]

Herr, wo sullen wir beleiben?  
 von deinen füessen thuest du unns treiben,  
 So gib unns, herr, den segen dein,  
 damit wir dester seliger sein.

**Cristus** [1302a]

Mein fleisch und pluet habt ir verschworn,  
 darumb ist gros an euch mein zorn,  
 Mein fluech, der sol eur segen sein,  
 auch verfluecht euch der vater mein.

(Schulze, MWG, 1298a-1307)

Die Antwort Christi markiert das Ende der Tage als Zeit des Zorns, der diejenigen trifft, die nicht rechtzeitig das Opfer des Gottessohnes angenommen haben. Der Zorn wird nicht an Gottvater geknüpft, sondern explizit an den leiblichen Tod Christi, dessen *fleisch und pluet* (V. 1303) metonymisch für die Unterordnung der Seelen unter Gottes Gesetze stehen. Auch hier kommt es zu einer (gattungstypischen) Distanzierung Gottes von der dargestellten Handlung, da der Zorn nicht der des Vaters, sondern des Sohnes ist. Der Sohn ist theologisch gesehen wahrer Gott, aber er ist nicht identisch mit dem Gott der Apokalypse, der die Zorneschalen über der Welt entleeren lässt (Apc 15-16.).

<sup>89</sup> Schäufele 2011, 497.

<sup>90</sup> Vgl. Schulze 2014, XIX-XX.

Mit dem ‚Münchner Weltgerichtspiel‘ verwandt ist die Textfassung von Ulrich Tengler, entstanden ebenfalls zu Beginn des 16. Jahrhunderts.<sup>91</sup> Der Spieltext ist Teil von Tenglers ‚Laienspiegel‘ und beschließt den juristischen Text. Dies solle, so Kleinschmidt, den Zusammenhang von Recht und Heilsgeschichte besonders eindrücklich vor Augen stellen.<sup>92</sup> Ein exemplarischer Blick auf Tenglers Adaption zeigt, dass der vermeintliche Gegensatz Zorn – Gnade bei Tengler explizit thematisiert und über die Ebene der Zeitlichkeit aufgehoben wird. In einer aufeinander Bezug nehmenden Abfolge von Szenen bitten die Sünder, die ihre Gnadenchance verpasst haben, zunächst Maria um Hilfe (Schulze, Tengler, V. 436f.: *Wendt ab seinen grausamen tzorn / Und thu uns heut genadt erlangen*[]). Die Gottesmutter gewährt ihnen den Wunsch und bittet Christus um Gnade für die Sünder (V. 425-496).<sup>93</sup> Christus lehnt dies ab mit der Begründung, dass die verschiedenen Zeitstufen unterschiedlichen Rechtsansprüchen unterliegen:

<sup>91</sup> Zur Einordnung des Spiels vgl. Schäufele, 494-495; vgl. ebd., 518 zur verfahrenslolgischen Begründung der endzeitlichen Strafen Gottes. Zur Bearbeitungstendenz Tenglers vgl. Schulze 2011, 487: „Gegenüber seiner Quelle, den Weltgerichtsspielen, konstituiert er einen neuen Texttyp. In narrativen Passagen mit kommentierenden Bemerkungen wird ein Zukunftsbild imaginiert und in diese ‚Erzählung‘ werden Figurenreden eingefügt, die verkürzt, aber auch ergänzend den Rollentexten des ‚Münchner Weltgerichtsspiels‘ entsprechen. [...] Indem der Richter erst am Schluss redend hervortritt und die Trennung in *benedicti* und *maledicti* vollzieht, verleiht Tengler seinem Text eine sachlich und logisch begründete, dramatische Spannung.“

<sup>92</sup> Vgl. Kleinschmidt 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Vgl. Thali, 450: „Bemerkenswert ist, dass Maria und Johannes ihre Fürsprache – anders als es in den traditionellen mittelalterlichen Weltgerichtsspielen die Regel ist – bereits vor dem Urteilsspruch vorbringen [...]“ Vgl. ähnlich Schulze 1994, 271-272: „Entsprechend seiner prozeßanalogen Darstellungsstruktur des Jüngsten Gerichts und abweichend von den anderen Weltgerichtsspielen (von der Berner bis zur Münchner und Churer Fassung) placiert Tengler Marias vergebliches Gnadengesuch vor dem richterlichen Urteil. Auch damit wahrt er die Gepflogenheiten des Gerichtsverfahrens, daß der Übeltäter nach seinem Geständnis oder nach erwiesener Schuld vor der Urteilseröffnung um Gnade nachsuchen kann.“

Dein peet und unmut solt du lon,  
 Hymel und erd müssen vergan,  
 Ee das göttlich wort wurd prochen,  
 Ir sundt müssen werden gerochen.  
 Also ist dein pitt unmöglich,  
 Das ich nit kan geweren dich,  
 Es wer wider meins vatters pott,  
 Unser gotheit ewiger spot.  
 (Schulze 2011, 513-524)

Neben den zeitlich gestuften Rechtskategorien des göttlichen Zorns geht es Tengers Werk um die Zusammengehörigkeit der irdischen und der himmlischen Rechtsordnungen, wie Schulze mit Blick auf die Adaptionleistung Tengers, der das Spiel in den Verbund seines Rechtsbuchs integriert, belegt.<sup>94</sup> Bleumer hat Tengers Adaption ein „juristische[s] Drama“ genannt; er betont stärker die Divergenz der beiden Rechtsordnungen: „[...] das Weltgerichtsspiel handelt vom Endpunkt des Narrativs der Heilsgeschichte, und dieses Ende entstammt nicht der normativen Rationalität des Rechts.“<sup>95</sup> Dass Tenger besonderen Wert auf eine intensive ethisch-rechtliche Diskussion legt, zeigt die auffälligste seiner überarbeitenden Eingriffe, wie Schulze zusammenfasst:

Nur im MüWg und TWg kommen außerdem die auferstandenen Seelen vor dem Erscheinen des Richters zu Worte, und nur in diesen beiden Spielen geht der üblichen Fürbitte Marias und Johannes des Täufers ein Streit zwischen Barmherzigkeit und Gerechtigkeit im Angesicht des Richters voran.<sup>96</sup>

Dieses Streitgespräch zwischen Barmherzigkeit und Gerechtigkeit, das dem Fürbitt-Dialog zwischen Christus und Maria vorausgeht, konzipiert die Zorn-Gnade-Relation als temporale

<sup>94</sup> Vgl. Schulze 1994, 257.

<sup>95</sup> Bleumer 2012, 174.

<sup>96</sup> Schulze 1994, 259.

Strukturierung, also in eine Zeit vor und eine nach dem Eintreten des Eschaton:

Weil sy hetten gnadreiche tzeit,  
 Was in der tag des heils bereit,  
 Sy haben versewmet all genaden,  
 Des leyden sy ewig schaden.  
 Nu ist es ytz warlichen tzeit,  
 Das recht eim yedem menschen geit,  
 was es hat verdint auff erden,  
 Also soll in gelont werden.  
 (Schulze 2011, V. 417-424)

Die Formulierung *tag des heils* (V. 418) hebt im Gegensatz zur Vorstellung des *Dies irae* hervor, dass nicht nur die schlechten Menschen bestraft, sondern die guten Menschen für ihre Werke belohnt werden, wenn der Tag der Abrechnung bevorsteht. Schulze ordnet die temporalen und moralischen Differenzierungen der zitierten Stelle als typisch ein: „Das zentrale Argument für die von der Gerechtigkeit geforderte Entscheidung besteht in der üblichen Zuordnung der beiden Qualitäten zu zeitlichen Geltungsbereichen: Es gab eine ‚gnadriche zeit‘, mit dem Jüngsten Gericht aber beginnt die alleinige Zeit des Rechts.“<sup>97</sup>

Schulze weist auf einen weiteren Eingriff Tenglers hin, der in Abgrenzung zum ‚Münchner Weltgerichtsspiel‘ zu sehen ist und der die filigrane Verwobenheit der Semantik und Theologie des endzeitlichen Zorns ausstellt:

Eine weitere beachtenswerte Differenz zwischen MüWg und Tenglers Text findet sich in der 4. Replik der Barmherzigkeit. An Stelle der problematischen Forderung, ‚Lass ab von deiner gerechtigkeit‘ (MüWg, V. 1227) ist formuliert: ‚O herr las ab von grymmikait / Gedenck an dein barmhertzikait‘ (Bl. 229v, V. 365 f.). Sensibel im Umgang mit zentralen juristischen Begriffen

<sup>97</sup> Ebd., 270.

tastet Tengler zugunsten der Bitte der Barmherzigkeit um einen umfassenden Gnadenakt das Gerechtigkeitsprinzip nicht an [...].<sup>98</sup>

Die Umformulierung führt zurück zur lexikalisch-semanticen Diskussion. Der zürnende und der richtende Gott hängen einerseits eng zusammen, andererseits können die beiden Attribute nicht unterschiedslos miteinander verrechnet werden. Die Forderung, von der ‚Gerechtigkeit‘ bzw. dem ‚Gericht‘ abzulassen, ist für Tenglers juristisch geprägtes Verständnis offensichtlich weit aus weniger plausibel als ein Gnadengesuch nach Ende der Frist.<sup>99</sup> Was die Darstellung apokalyptischer Motive betrifft, werden diese auch in den Weltgerichtsspielen weitgehend ausgelassen:

Dass es den Weltgerichtsspielen gar nicht in erster Linie um das künftige Gericht und das individuelle Jenseitsgeschick der einzelnen Seelen zu tun ist, zeigt sich daran, dass sie darauf verzichten, den durch den neutestamentlichen Referenztext vorgegebenen Rahmen mit damals gängigen weiteren Traditionselementen auszufüllen.<sup>100</sup>

Schäufele begründet diese Tendenz mit einem Interesse, das auch in den frühen Textbeispielen evident ist:

Nicht das künftige Gericht des gerechten göttlichen Richters über die Sünder steht also im Zentrum der Botschaft der Weltgerichtsspiele. Vielmehr lenken sie in den Urteilsbegründungen, den Klagen der Verdammten und den Lobsprüchen der Seligen, der Fürbitte

<sup>98</sup> Ebd., 371.

<sup>99</sup> Vgl. dazu ebd., 274: „Auch das oben erwähnte Plädoyer der Barmherzigkeit für eine nicht ewig dauernde Bestrafung hatte wohl nicht nur textinterne Bedeutung; Tengler greift ein Anliegen auf, das theologisch und juristisch diskutiert wurde: Die Litigatio zwischen den Qualitäten Gottes, iustitia und misericordia, bringt eine Antinomie der christlichen Gottesvorstellung und Soteriologie zur Sprache, die mit dem letztlichem Sieg der Gerechtigkeit nicht zu bewältigen war.“

<sup>100</sup> Schäufele 2011, 505.

Marias und den Antworten Christi immer wieder den Blick auf die Heilswege und Gnadenmöglichkeiten während des irdischen Lebens.<sup>101</sup>

Tenglers Bearbeitung des Spiels greift gnadentheologische Fragen auf, die auch schon in den früheren Zeugnissen relevant gewesen sind, und rekontextualisiert sie im spätmittelalterlichen Rechtsdiskurs. Trotz aller Veränderungen theologischer und juristischer Diskurse bleibt die konkrete und unvermittelte Darstellung des apokalyptischen Zorns entsprechend der biblischen Motive problematisch. Der Blick richtet sich auf die Handlungsspielräume, die das Bußangebot der immanenten Gegenwart bietet. Dadurch wird der Gotteszorn von Gott als handelnde Instanz oder Figur im narratologischen Sinne entkoppelt.

#### 4. *Schluss*

Die Untersuchung hat gezeigt, dass die Texte mit der Drohung der apokalyptischen Gnadenfrist unterschiedlich umgehen. So stellt Ava die Bußfertigkeit ins Zentrum, die späteren Weltgerichtsspiele inszenieren hingegen vor allem die Ausweglosigkeit der Gerichtssituation nach Ablauf der Gnadenfrist. Die Beispiele des ‚Jüngsten Gerichts‘ Avas und der ‚Hochzeit‘ haben außerdem gezeigt, wie sich syntaktische und semantische Sinnzuschreibungen gegenseitig anreichern können. Lexikalisch gesehen verengt sich das Feld immer stärker, Alternativen zum Lexem *zorn* werden zunehmend getilgt. Der Zorn Gottes kommt als Begriff häufig vor, wird aber vor allem als semantischer Bezugspunkt funktionalisiert, nicht als eigentliches und konkretes Handlungselement. Die Mehrdeutigkeit der Rede vom ‚Zorn‘ ist stellvertretend für die verschiedenen Funktionalisierungen, die in dem Lexem zusammenlaufen: Die lineare Perspektive der Heilsgeschichte, die Gnadenbedürftigkeit, aber auch Erlösungshoffnung der Menschen, zugleich die Frist, die durch das bevorstehende

<sup>101</sup> Ebd., 507.

Ende der Welt gesetzt ist, schließlich das Gericht und die Strafen, die bei unterbleibender Buße drohen. Die Ungenauigkeit des Wortes ist eines. Die Kehrseite dessen ist seine semantische Flexibilität, die in einem Begriff die heilstheologische Komplexität beinhaltet und konkretisiert. Der Zorn stellt somit eine Zuschreibungskonstruktion dar, deren theologische Komplexität für die narrative Gestaltung Schwierigkeiten hervorruft, für die die Texte Lösungsstrategien entwickeln müssen.

Insgesamt ist deutlich geworden, dass der endzeitliche Zorn-Diskurs zwei Tendenzen aufweist. Einerseits wird der Zorn als konkrete und tatsächliche Strafinstanz gefürchtet. Andererseits vermeiden es die meisten Texte, die Motive der biblischen Zorn-Offenbarung nachzuerzählen, und leiten die Darstellung auf andere Motive (Vorzeichen, Antichrist), exegetische Exkurse, moraltheologische Appelle oder die Figur Christi als Richter um. Besonders die konkrete Zuschreibung von *agency* hinsichtlich der Vollendung des Eschatons hat sich als narratologische Krux herausgestellt. Die hier vorgelegte Studie wäre unbedingt um weitere Texte und Belegstellen zu ergänzen, in narratologischer Perspektive etwa um das Lehrgespräch im ‚Barlaam und Josaphat‘ Rudolfs von Ems (Pfeiffer, V. 3643-3658, 3778-3797 u. ö.), oder um weitere Weltgerichtsspiele. Methodisch könnte sich darüber hinaus eine Erhebung der Lexemfrequenzen anschließen. Medial läge es nahe, dem eingangs zitierten Hinweis Dinzelbachers zu folgen, der auf die Diskrepanz hinweist, dass es mehr bildliche als literarische Darstellungen des Jüngsten Tages gibt.<sup>102</sup> Die narrative und sprachliche Konstitution der Vorstellung der *ira dei* zwischen konkreter Immanenz und eschatologischer Abstraktion sind Zeugnisse von Aushandlungsprozessen, die im Medium der Literatur besonders differenziert verhandelt werden können.

<sup>102</sup> S. o. und vgl. Dinzelbacher 2001, 103.



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LOREDANA TERESI

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, inasmuch 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” prejudice appears prevalent.

1. *Introduction*

The fate of the soul after death is a recurring theme in the texts of early medieval England.<sup>1</sup> 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”,<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Gatch 1965, 123.

which are inherently in conflict”,<sup>3</sup> 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),<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> Hall 2003, 310.

<sup>4</sup> On Macarius, see Di Sciacca 2010, 329-338.

and the diversity of their conceptions.<sup>5</sup> Three main narrative types emerge, and will be analysed separately.

### 2.1. *Type 1*

In what can be considered the earliest tradition,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Dudley 1911, 21-24.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> For Abraham, see Sparks 1984, 421. On Michael as psychopomp and shepherd of souls, see Di Sciacca 2023 and Lendinara 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Dudley 1911, 24.

<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 erupere acies contrariæ & discordes, dum ad suas unaquæque partes illum trahere decernat; mali siquidem dæmones instant, ut præcipitem impellant in Gehennam: obstant Angeli, & ad lucidas Beatorum sedes deducere contendunt.<sup>12</sup>

Another example occurs in a homily by Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Going-Out of the Soul, and on the Second Advent*.<sup>13</sup> Here the dying people see all the deeds they have performed in life, so they are firstly judged by their own conscience.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> If the soul is found guilty, it

<sup>11</sup> Struggles for the soul can also take place later, on the journey to heaven.

<sup>12</sup> Assemani 1743, III, 325-326.

<sup>13</sup> PG, 77, hom. XIV, 1071-1090. See Batiouchkof 1891, 12-15 and Dudley 1911, 52-53.

<sup>14</sup> Batiouchkof notes a connection with the Talmud.

<sup>15</sup> 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*.<sup>16</sup> 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”.<sup>17</sup>

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”.<sup>18</sup> In Latin, the *Visio* exists in three long versions and eleven shorter redactions, which all differ in matters of selection of material and details.<sup>19</sup> 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 death-bed, 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*.

<sup>16</sup> On the popularity and influence of the *Visio Pauli* see Gatch 1965, Kabir 2001, Di Sciacca 2018, and Cataldi 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Silverstein 1935, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Silverstein, Hilhorst 1997, 11.

<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

Paul first witnesses and recounts the death of a righteous man. The evil angels do not find a place “to dwell in him”,<sup>21</sup> 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,<sup>22</sup> and by the man’s spirit (= *spiritus uiuificationis*):<sup>23</sup> both will help the soul, on its journey to heaven, to sustain the examination by the wicked powers.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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

<sup>20</sup> For a textual and iconographical analysis of the so-called two judgements, see Angheben 2022.

<sup>21</sup> That is, they find no evil in him.

<sup>22</sup> Later in the text, written reports are mentioned.

<sup>23</sup> Silverstein, Hillhorst 1997, 92.

<sup>24</sup> See above.

<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> So we read that they see the soul of a wicked person escorted by seven<sup>27</sup> 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”.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> A fragmentary Old English translation has been preserved in manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85+86, fols. 3r-11v.<sup>30</sup> 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 ganged”, ll. 76-78).<sup>31</sup> 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

<sup>26</sup> 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.”

<sup>27</sup> The number varies in some manuscripts.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> Wright 1993, 108-109.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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:<sup>33</sup> 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).<sup>34</sup> 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).<sup>35</sup> 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”,

<sup>32</sup> This passage is full of corrections in the manuscript.

<sup>33</sup> diPaolo Healey 1978,79 considers the possibility of a lacuna in the text.

<sup>34</sup> In the Latin *Visio*, this sentence is uttered by the witnesses.

<sup>35</sup> 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 ætsumne 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).<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup> 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

<sup>36</sup> 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).

<sup>37</sup> 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.”<sup>38</sup>

Another relevant text belonging to this typology is what we could call the *Legend of the Two Deaths* from the *Adhortationes sanctorum Patrum*.<sup>39</sup> 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 Michaellem 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”).<sup>40</sup> Another text in the *Adhortationes*<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> Both these *exempla*

<sup>38</sup> PG 34, 659-660; trans. Maloney 1992, 155.

<sup>39</sup> 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*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 164-165.

<sup>41</sup> PL 73, §14, 1012.

<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

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*<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> This appears to be true, at least within this text.<sup>46</sup>

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*.<sup>47</sup> It survives in two Latin texts in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 2846, ff. 135r-139v and 166v-172r,<sup>48</sup> in the so-called Nonantola Homily,<sup>49</sup> and in *Sermo LXIX* in the collection *Sermones fratres in eremo*.<sup>50</sup> 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.

<sup>43</sup> Ed. Pope 1967-1968, II, 775-779. See Di Sciaccia 2018.

<sup>44</sup> PG 34, 385-395.

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

<sup>46</sup> The concept of Purgatory had not been fully developed yet.

<sup>47</sup> See above.

<sup>48</sup> Ed. Leclercq 1946.

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

<sup>50</sup> 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<sup>51</sup> and of Napier XXIX (from Oxford, BL, Hatton 113, fols. 66r-73r).<sup>52</sup> 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 dægæs and nihtes.”<sup>53</sup>

#### 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.<sup>54</sup> It is hence called the *Three Utterances exemplum*<sup>55</sup> and is thought to have reached England through Irish milieux.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ed. Sauer 1978, 411-416. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 66: s. xi<sup>3/4</sup>, Exeter.

<sup>52</sup> Ed. Napier 1883, 134-143. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 637: s xi<sup>2</sup>, Worcester. On the relationship between the “Macarian homily” and Napier XXIX, see Wright 2002, p. 213 and note 16.

<sup>53</sup> Sauer 1978, 413-414.

<sup>54</sup> According to Willard 1935, the *exemplum* could also have had an independent origin, and have been later influenced by the *Visio*.

<sup>55</sup> Henceforth *3U*.

<sup>56</sup> 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<sup>57</sup> (and also in Irish)<sup>58</sup> and was also adapted in three different Old English homilies: a Lenten homily in Oxford, BL, Junius 85/86 (SE England, s. xi<sup>med</sup>), ff. 25r-40r;<sup>59</sup> a homily for Rogationtide in Oxford, BL, Hatton 114 (Worcester, s. xi<sup>2</sup>), ff. 102v-105v;<sup>60</sup> 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. xi<sup>1</sup>), ff. 21v-23v.<sup>61</sup>

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.<sup>62</sup>

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

<sup>57</sup> For an up-to-date chronological list of the manuscripts, see Wright 2014a, 128-137.

<sup>58</sup> See Marstrander 1911 and Ritari 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Ed. Luiselli Fadda 1977. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 642.

<sup>60</sup> Ed. Bazire, Cross 1982. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 638.

<sup>61</sup> Ed. Teresi 2002. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 86.

<sup>62</sup> 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 otherworldly 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.’ Ðæt 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<sup>63</sup> – 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.<sup>64</sup>

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.<sup>65</sup> 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 oper þara weroda bið swa sweart swa

<sup>63</sup> One exclamation refers to an “asperum iter/grimlic siðfæt”.

<sup>64</sup> Bazire, Cross 1982, 121-124.

<sup>65</sup> 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,<sup>66</sup> and on Ohlgren’s *Iconographic Catalogue*.<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup>

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

<sup>66</sup> <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.

<sup>67</sup> Ohlgren 1986.

<sup>68</sup> 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;<sup>69</sup> 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

<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> Such expanded narratives are to be found in the prefatory cycles of biblical narratives originally accompanying the Eadwine Psalter<sup>71</sup> and the Huntingfield Psalter.<sup>72</sup>

Fragments of the cycle once belonging to the Eadwine Psalter are now scattered in various manuscripts.<sup>73</sup> The folio featuring the parable of Dives and Lazarus is now f. 1 of New York, PML, M. 521.<sup>74</sup> The scenes appear in the central panel of the lower zone and portray first a flying angel holding the miniature soul<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> The same panel shows Lazarus on Abraham's lap and Dives in hell.<sup>77</sup> As can be seen from the description, here there is no struggle between angels and devils for the soul: only the rele-

<sup>70</sup> 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.

<sup>71</sup> The Eadwine Psalter is found in Cambridge, Trinity College, R.17.1 (1155-60, Canterbury, Christ Church).

<sup>72</sup> New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 43 (1210-20, Oxford; SN: 79573).

<sup>73</sup> 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.

<sup>74</sup> SN (= IMA System Number): 97194.

<sup>75</sup> On the soul as a miniature person (or *homunculus*), see Grasso 2020, 57-59.

<sup>76</sup> 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.

<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup>

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).<sup>80</sup> 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/minature person.<sup>81</sup>

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)<sup>82</sup> with reference to the going-

<sup>78</sup> London, BL, Add. 37472, f. 1r (SN: 97186).

<sup>79</sup> 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).

<sup>80</sup> *Ca.* 1180-1200, Canterbury.

<sup>81</sup> In these representations, it is not easy to distinguish between a child and a young person or *humunculus*.

<sup>82</sup> 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,<sup>83</sup> 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),<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> Here the soul reaches its destination autonomously, without the help of angels.<sup>86</sup>

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),<sup>87</sup> a manuscript containing also a Psalter allegedly associated with Christina of Markyate. The miniature shows the moment

choices.

<sup>83</sup> 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).

<sup>84</sup> 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".

<sup>85</sup> 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).

<sup>86</sup> 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).

<sup>87</sup> 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,<sup>88</sup> 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,<sup>89</sup> 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*

<sup>88</sup> 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).

<sup>89</sup> ca. 1130.

*sexta*).<sup>90</sup> The full-page illustration<sup>91</sup> 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<sup>92</sup> 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).<sup>93</sup> 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,<sup>94</sup> also contains a death-scene with the

<sup>90</sup> 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://coursair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0736a.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> SN: 77562.

<sup>92</sup> SN: 77590.

<sup>93</sup> 1200-1210, Lincolnshire; SN: 66382.

<sup>94</sup> *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,<sup>95</sup> 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,<sup>96</sup> and in its later copies, that is, Cambridge, TC, R.17.1, fol. 56v,<sup>97</sup> and Paris, BNF, lat. 8846, fol. 56v.<sup>98</sup>

### 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,<sup>99</sup> 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,

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

<sup>96</sup> *ca.* 816-840, Hautvillers or Rheims; prov. Canterbury, Christ Church by s. x<sup>ex</sup> or xi<sup>in</sup>. Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 939.

<sup>97</sup> *ca.* 1155-60, Canterbury, Christ Church.

<sup>98</sup> *ca.* 1180-1200, Canterbury, Christ Church.

<sup>99</sup> See Klein 1998.

probably also due to the Crusades.<sup>100</sup> 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”.<sup>101</sup> 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,<sup>102</sup> where Christ is portrayed holding Mary’s swaddled and nimbed infant-like soul in his arms (see fig. 6).<sup>103</sup> 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,<sup>104</sup> or only the Hand of God, as in the Benedictional of Robert of Jumiègue.<sup>105</sup>

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

<sup>100</sup> See Kabir 2001, 31-37.

<sup>101</sup> Klein 1998, 29.

<sup>102</sup> 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.

<sup>103</sup> Perhaps the more pious the soul, the younger its appearance.

<sup>104</sup> 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.

<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup> 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.<sup>107</sup> 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.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> No angels are present. The more standard death scene is found in Paris, BNF, fr. 403,<sup>110</sup> 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

<sup>106</sup> Glasgow, University Library, Hunter 229 (U.3.2) (ca. 1170, Northern England; SN: 183552).

<sup>107</sup> Sometimes draped hands were meant to denote respect.

<sup>108</sup> 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.

<sup>109</sup> Only the souls of Mary and John appear nimbed.

<sup>110</sup> 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”.<sup>111</sup> 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.<sup>112</sup> 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*<sup>113</sup> 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.<sup>114</sup> 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.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup> SN: 67152.

<sup>112</sup> The blessed souls transported all together in heaven are probably also the subject of an illustration in Grimbold’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.

<sup>113</sup> Oxford, BL, Laud Misc. 469, fol. 7v (1130-40, Canterbury, Christ Church; SN: 186420).

<sup>114</sup> The struggle for the soul will become popular much later, especially in fifteenth-century French manuscripts.

<sup>115</sup> 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,<sup>116</sup> 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 grappels; 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.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>116</sup> ca. 1120, Canterbury StA; SN: 186437.

<sup>117</sup> 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 psychopomps, 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 *Psalms* 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 psychopomp(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 Brill 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.<sup>118</sup>

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.<sup>119</sup>

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

<sup>118</sup> See Luiselli Fadda 1977, 1-31, and Wack, Wright 1991.

<sup>119</sup> 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.<sup>120</sup> 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,<sup>121</sup> 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 eschatological 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*

<sup>120</sup> This aspect might have been influenced by Matthew 18:3-4, and subsequently extended to the wicked souls.

<sup>121</sup> Bateman 1978.

accounts,<sup>122</sup> 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.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See above.

<sup>123</sup> I wish to thank Patrizia Lendinara and Claudio Cataldi for their invaluable comments on a draft of this paper and for their most generous help with bibliographical references. I am also very grateful to Charles D. Wright and Claudia Di Sciacca for granting me access to their precious work. My warmest thanks also go to the British Library, the Bodleian Library, the Dombibliothek Hildesheim and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France for allowing me to publish images from manuscripts in their collections free of charge. Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to the editors of this volume for their immeasurable patience and kindness.

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*Fig. 1: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 8846, fol. 4v (det.).  
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*Fig. 2: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 8846, fol. 1v (det.).  
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*Fig. 3: St Albans Psalter: Dombibliothek Hildesheim, HS St.God. 1 (Property of the Basilica of St. Godehard, Hildesheim), p. 416. © Dombibliothek Hildesheim.*



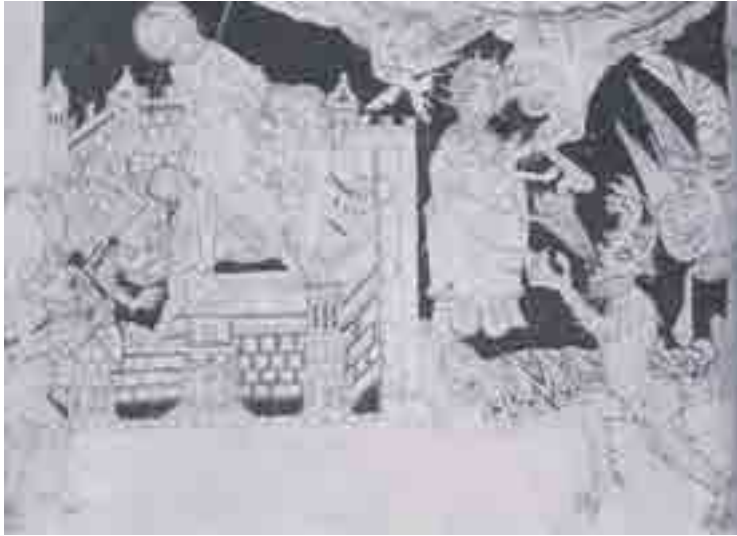
*Fig. 4: London, British Library, Harley Y.6 (Guthlac Roll), recto, Roundel 14.  
© British Library Board.*



*Fig. 5: London, British Library, Yates  
Thompson 26 (Add. 39943), fol. 73r.  
© British Library Board.*



*Fig. 6: London, British Library, Cotton  
Nero C. IV, fol 29r.  
© British Library Board.*



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

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE FIRST  
MIDDLE ENGLISH TRANSLATION  
OF THE REVELATION OF JOHN

The Revelation of John represents one of the most popular texts of medieval Europe. This popularity, undoubtedly fuelled by fears and expectations of the year one thousand, is reflected not only in the presence of millenarian themes in contemporary literature, but also and above all in an extremely rich manuscript tradition in Latin and vernacular languages. Medieval England is no exception, except for the fact that the earliest translations are in Anglo-Norman, and the first copies in Middle English are not available until the middle of the fourteenth century. The most significant work in this regard is certainly the so-called Wycliffe translation, which deviates from the Anglo-Norman model. However, it would not have been possible without being preceded by various attempts, of which we have evidence. This article intends to focus on the first translation that has been handed down to us, trying to highlight the translation practices employed in terms of syntactic, lexical and morphological choices. As a matter of fact, although it is a very adherent translation to the Anglo-Norman version, it shows interesting and strategic attempts to adapt the text to the Middle English language for a successful rendition of the apocalyptic message.

1. *Introduction*

During the Middle English (henceforth ME) period, there was a surge in Christian literature, influenced in part by church policies exemplified by the Constitutions of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1225 and Pecham's Constitutions.<sup>1</sup> This wave was primarily seen in what can be termed as 'paraphrases' of scripture, except for a few versions of the Psalter and some New Testament translations. In these works, both in verse and prose, the basic narrative – including stories such as the Creation and Fall, Old Testament histories, the life of Christ, and others – was supplemented with

<sup>1</sup> Morey 2000.

further explanation and contextualization, often incorporating apocryphal sources.<sup>2</sup> A notable example is *Cursor mundi* (ca. 1300), where Biblical material is organized according to the seven ages of the world and interwoven with legendary episodes, primarily drawn from the *Historia scholastica* (ca. 1178).

Even more significant were homilies, sermons, and psalters, which served as one of the most pervasive means of exposing English speakers to the Bible since Anglo-Saxon times,<sup>3</sup> facilitating teaching through preaching. These text types were accessible to the popular audience as they were all in the vernacular, either translations from Latin to Anglo-Norman, like the *Surtees Psalter* (ca. 1250-1300), or from Latin to ME, such as *Roller's Psalter* (ca. 1340), which included a Latin text alongside an extensive commentary, enabling those who could not read Latin to access the message of Holy Scripture. Noteworthy are Rolle's remarks on his translation strategies: "In the translacioun I follow the lettere als mykyll as I may and thare I fynd na propir Ynglis I follow the wit of the worde",<sup>4</sup> which closely remind Bede's "hic est sensus"<sup>5</sup> and evoke the typical medieval sensitivity towards prioritizing fidelity to the (ideological) content of the translated text, even at the expense of altering the syntactic, morphological, and lexical structure of the original text, when adherence to the latter compromised the comprehension of the message.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of fact, medieval translators felt the important task to communicate the *sententia* (i.e. significance) for the benefit of hearers and readers: "translation est expositio sententie per aliam linguam" according to the most used dictionary of the age, the *Catholicon* (1286) by Joannes Januensis.<sup>7</sup> Sermons and homilies,

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer's comment, I realised that it might be worth pointing out that the use of apocryphal sources is not peculiar to the ME period, but it was also common in Anglo-Saxon times.

<sup>3</sup> Marsden 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Wogan-Browne *et al.* 1998, 246, ll. 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> Lapidge 2010: 278.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion about this topic, see Chiesa 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Minnis 1987, 106-107; Johnson 2019, 66.



probably the second most widely circulated text type, maintained continuity across the Norman Conquest due to the uninterrupted copying of Old English homily collections.<sup>8</sup> This continuity is evidenced by collections like the Bodley, Lambeth, and Kentish homilies, as well as the tradition of Ælfric's or Wulfstan's homilies. It is not coincidental that one of the first ME texts is a homily (*Se godspellere Lucas sægð on þyssen godspelle* in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D. xiv fols 151v/1-158r/12) or that one of the earliest ME poetic works is a homiletic collection, the unique *Ormulum* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Junius 1), consisting of approximately 20,000 lines of thirty-one New Testament readings<sup>9</sup> paraphrased and explained.

The pivotal moment in the Biblical literary tradition is often associated with Wycliffe's Bible,<sup>10</sup> who is credited with breaking away from the practice of reworking Scripture. However, his work was preceded by another example of prose translation, sometimes linked with it:<sup>11</sup> the translation of the *Revelation* or *Apocalypse of John*, considered the first Biblical material to be translated into (Middle) English. Given the prevalence of Anglo-Norman as a vernacular literary language until the fourteenth century, it is unsurprising that the earliest translations of the Apocalypse circulating in England were in Anglo-Norman or continental French. These translations were often accompanied by illustrations, surpassing their Latin counterparts.<sup>12</sup> Like most vernacular texts, they were accompanied by commentaries, derived from or indebted to medieval Latin originals,<sup>13</sup> and optionally included excerpts reflecting the commentator's theological and doctrinal views tailored to the intended readership. Interestingly, the earliest specimens of the French vernacular Bible were of Norman

<sup>8</sup> See Morey 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Before the introduction, 242 New Testament lections were listed, a programme of which we have only a part.

<sup>10</sup> See Dove 2007.

<sup>11</sup> See Hanna 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Morgan 1988, Sandler 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Morgan 2012, 409-415.

origin, and the earliest manuscripts handed down to us were produced in England by Norman scribes.

Similarly, the earliest Anglo-Norman translations of the Apocalypse are believed to have originated from a lost original dating back to the latter half of the twelfth century, possibly crafted in Normandy or England by a Norman scribe. These translations constitute a significant family of exquisitely crafted manuscripts, dating from the early thirteenth century onwards, featuring prologues and commentaries likely derived from an unidentified Latin source.<sup>14</sup> The *Revelation of John* was undeniably a highly popular text. Already Berger<sup>15</sup> identified at least 84 surviving manuscripts that transmit the Apocalypse in both Latin and Anglo-Norman as independent texts. One of the reasons for such popularity has to be found in its eschatological and prophetic character, a feature that acquired particular importance during the Middle Ages for its portrayal of future events leading up to the last day<sup>16</sup> and the signs preceding the coming of the Antichrist. These signs were often interpreted in light of contemporary historical and social events. For instance, Pope Gregory IX famously associated the Antichrist with Frederick II.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, given the popularity and widespread circulation of Latin and Anglo-Norman versions of the Apocalypse, once English re-established itself as a written language, this text became the focal point of the first translation efforts as witnessed by the number of manuscripts handed down to us. The present

<sup>14</sup> See Paues 1902.

<sup>15</sup> See Berger 1884.

<sup>16</sup> See Prigent 2001.

<sup>17</sup> I hereby refer to the Papal Encyclical of 21 June 1239, where the Pope explicitly indicated Frederick as the Antichrist: “Ascendit de mari bestia blasphemie plena nominibus, que pedibus ursi et leonis ore deseuiens ac membris formata ceteris sicut pardus, os suum in blasphemias divini nominis aperit, tabernaculum ejus et sanctos qui in celis habitant, similibus impetere jaculis non omittit [...] caput, medium et finem hujus bestie Frederici dicti imperatoris inspicite diligenter” (*Historia diplomatica*, V, 1, 327). See also McGinn 1979.

paper does not intend to contribute to the medieval theoretical debate on translation nor to contemporary translation studies, but aims to give a concrete example of a translator's attitude towards a religious text. After an overview of the ME manuscript tradition related to the *Revelation of John* and its relationship with the Middle French (henceforth MF) versions, it will focus on the oldest version and its translating choices. Since it is not possible in this context to list all the instances, due to space constraints, the discussion will cover the major types of translation choices within the medieval notion of translation. This will highlight how, even in the earliest attempts at biblical translation, the translator repeatedly faced the dilemma of how to operate between the *sensum* and the *verbum*, anticipating choices that would be revisited in subsequent translations and, more significantly, demonstrating an attitude that would further develop in later translations.

### 1.1. Translatio, Transmutatio or Vernacularization

Before entering the core of the paper, it is necessary to briefly introduce the context and the attitude on translation in Middle Ages. The topic of translation in the Middle Ages is a highly debated issue and held profound cultural, intellectual, and theological significance, particularly when it pertains to religious texts and even more so to sacred texts. Translators were viewed as custodians of *sententia* (the teaching and significance), balancing *verbum* (word-for-word translation) and *sensum* (sense-for-sense translation) to maintain the fidelity to *auctoritas* of the source text (Copeland, 1991; Kelly, 1979)<sup>18</sup>, and therefore translations were viewed as rather close to commentary and exposition, because, as Trevisa put it, preaching and translating was the same thing:

Þanne þe gospel and prophecy and þe ryȝt fey of holy cherche mot be told ham an Englysch, and þat ys noȝt ydo bote by Englysch translacion. Vor such Englysch prechyng ys verrey Englysch translacio, and such Englysch prechyng ys good and needful:

<sup>18</sup> Copeland 1991; Kelly 1979.

panne Englysch translacion ys good and needfol.<sup>19</sup>

(Then the gospel and prophecy and the true faith of holy Church must be told to them in English, and that is not done but by English translation. For such English preaching is veritable English translation, and such English preaching is good and needful; therefore English translation is good and needful.)

Translators were well aware of the educational purposes and the relevance of their work in ensuring doctrinal purity, especially in Biblical translations, and accordingly preventing misinterpretation and heresy. For this very reason, religious translations were characterised by rigorous ecclesiastical oversight.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the emphasis on fidelity, translators demonstrated adaptability by introducing new terms and adapting texts to fit the cultural and linguistic contexts of their audiences, ensuring comprehensibility and relevance.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, translators often appended commentaries and glosses to elucidate difficult passages and provide deeper theological insights, reflecting their role as educators and interpreters.<sup>22</sup> Religious translating was about transferring knowledge and wisdom and about stirring devotion within a broader trans-linguistic culture, and accordingly it must be understood in light of medieval reflection on translation, which, beginning with Jerome's *Epistle 57*, focused on two principles: the precision of rendering, *verbum pro verbo* (word for word), and the preservation of meaning, *ut nihil desit ex sensu, cum aliquid desit ex verbis* (that nothing may be lacking in sense, even if something is lacking in words).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Waldron 1988, 292-293.

<sup>20</sup> Minnis 1988.

<sup>21</sup> Wogan-Browne *et al.* 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Copeland 1991.

<sup>23</sup> "Ego enim non solum fateor, sed libera voce profiteor me in interpretatione Graecorum absque scripturis sanctis, ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est, non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu. Habeoque huius rei magistrum Tullium, qui Protagoram Platonis et Oeconomicum Xenofontis et Aeschini et Demosthenis duas contra se orationes pulcherrimas transtulit.

How this awareness manifested in the translator's choices underlies the different terms used to describe the translation process: "vernacularizations" indicate a deep adherence to the literal text, whereas "transmutation" suggests a freer and more inventive rewriting often linked to the Creation and/or maintenance of rhetorical figures. The work of the H translator is a good example of such effort.

## 2. *Translating the Revelation of John in Middle English*

ME translations appeared approximately a hundred years after those in Anglo-Norman, dating from around 1350-1400, some of which date a few decades before the Wycliffe Bible in which the Apocalypse is inserted as the last chapter. Sixteen manuscripts have survived, a number that attests to both the popularity of the undertaking and aligns with the prevailing ideological stance of the majority of theologians concerning the propriety of translating the Holy Scriptures. Even those who opposed complete translation of the Scriptures, like William Palmer in his treatise *De translatione sacrae scripture in linguam barbaricam* (circa 1380)<sup>24</sup> considered positively the translation of those parts that were necessary or important for salvation. The initial and undisputed attribution to Wycliffe<sup>25</sup> was, for the first time, questioned in Arnold's edition of *Selected English Works of John Wyclif*, where he argued that "[w]ith regard to the Commentary on the Apocalypse, internal evidence is, I think, decisive against its being the work of Wyclif",<sup>26</sup> and subsequently abandoned.

Quanta in illis praetermiserit, quanta addiderit, quanta mutaverit, ut proprietates alterius linguae suis proprietatibus explicaret, non est huius temporis dicere." (Bartelink 1980, 13).

<sup>24</sup> Deanesley 1920, 418-421.

<sup>25</sup> The first to insert it within Wycliffe's works was Bale 1557-59, followed by Tanner 1748 and Forshall, Madden 1850.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold 1869-71, I, vi.

Further insights into the ME *Revelation* tradition were provided by Paues,<sup>27</sup> who identified the dependency on Middle French models and the existence of multiple versions that could be classified into two main recensions, later categorized as “Version a” (henceforth Va) and “Version b” (henceforth Vb):<sup>28</sup> they depended on two different MF prototypes, which are both lost and which should be considered to be responsible for the main differences in expressions and vocabulary (ex (1a.) vs. (1b.), both referring to Ch. 6/1<sup>29</sup> and ex. (2a.) vs. (2b.), both referring to the Commentary 21/1), and they have a different relationship with the Later Version of the Wycliffite Bible (henceforth LV).<sup>30</sup>

- (1) a. (Va) And I seiȝ þat þe lombe opened on of þe claspes & herd þat on of þe foure beestes seide vnto me as it were a voice of þondres come see.

<sup>27</sup> Paues 1902.

<sup>28</sup> Fridner 1961, xvii.

<sup>29</sup> “Et vidi quod aperuisset Agnus unum de septem sigillis, et audiui unum de quatuor animalibus, dicens tamquam vocem tonitruui: Veni, et vide” (Vulgate, 6.1)

<sup>30</sup> The Wycliffite Bible (Lindberg 1959-97), the first complete translation of the Bible into English, was produced by a team of Oxford-based scholars in a very literal form (the Early Version in the 1370s) revised into more fluent prose (the Later Version, in the 1380s). The Early Version is characterized by its literal adherence to the Latin Vulgate, resulting in a text that often mirrors Latin syntax and structure, and was likely intended for a more scholarly audience (maybe the parish clergy) with some familiarity with Latin. In contrast, the Later Version aimed to improve readability and accessibility for English-speaking lay readers by using more idiomatic and clearer English expressions. This revision involved significant refinement of the Early Version, addressing issues of awkward phrasing and difficult syntax to produce a smoother, more comprehensible text (Kelly 2016). It is likely that “the revision was due to a change in translation philosophy from grammatical and literal fidelity to a more elastic conception of meaning” (see Kelly 2019: 51). For the debate on the authorship of the Wycliffe Bible, see Hanna 2003, Dove 2007 and Marsden 2012.

- b. (Vb) And I saw whanne þe lomb hadde opened oon of þe seuene seelis and y herde oon of þe foure beestis as a vois of þundir seie to me come þou and se.
- (2) a. (Va) Þe neweyng of heuen & of erþe bitokneþ þe grete ioye þat þe aungels shullen maken. & þe holy halewen in þe resurreccioun. & in þe glorifieyng of her bodyes.
- b. (Vb) þo neweynge of heuen of erthe is þo gret joye þat aungels & holy soules shal haue at þo resurreccious glorifying of hor bodyes.

Va is preserved in 10 manuscripts containing a translation of the thirteenth-century.

Apocalypse with a prose commentary from the fourteenth or early fifteenth century.

- London, British Museum, MS Harley 874 (H) (*ca.* 1340-70)
- Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2498 (P) (*ca.* 1375-1425)
- Dublin, Trinity College, MS 69 (T) (1375-1400)
- Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 231/117 (C.) (14th century)
- Cambridge, St John's College, MS G.25 (J) (15th century)
- London, British Museum, MS Royal 17. A. xxvi (R) (1400-25)
- Manchester, Rylands Library, MS 92 (Ry) (formerly R. 4988 and Ashburnam 26) (1375-1425)
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 33 (La) (15th century)
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 235 (L) (end 14th-15th century)
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C. 750 (Ra) (14th century)

Within this group, it is necessary to identify a subgroup (H, P, T, C) that can be regarded as “[m]ore or less pure”<sup>31</sup> in the sense that they are all either earlier than the Lollard Bibles<sup>32</sup> or unaffected

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>32</sup> The term Lollard can be regarded as a synonym of Wycliffite (see

by them, directly relying on the Norman French translation. The others – namely J, Ra, L, La, R, Ry – are later than LV and show conformities to the Lollard translations.<sup>33</sup> Moreover the degree of correction is such that they may be regarded as revisions of the original text.

Correspondent to Vb is another, possibly somewhat later, rendering of the same Apocalypse, consisting of the following manuscripts that often agree with LV, that is, they are supposed to have been “corrected” according to the Vulgate:<sup>34</sup>

London, British Museum, MS Harley 1203 (H<sup>2</sup>) (15th century)  
 London, British Museum, MS Harley 171 (H<sup>3</sup>) (first half of the 15th century)  
 Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS 5 (M) (second half to third quarter of the 15th century).

For a quite long time, it has been proposed that next to Va and Vb there must have been a third translation represented by London, British Museum, MS Harley 3913 (Ha) (1375-1425)<sup>35</sup> that contains the same text as that of LV, but agrees with Va as far as prologue and commentary are concerned.

To conclude, we have found that the English Apocalypse appears in at least three different translations, of which the second forms the basis of the third and the first was in all probability not unknown to the translator of the second. Now the third translation as embodied in Harl. 3913 is identical with the rendering of the Apocalypse appearing in the so-called Later Wycliffite Version.<sup>36</sup>

This hypothesis was further confirmed by the existence of late sixteenth century copies, such as:

Hudson 1986 and Dove 2012) when referring to the Biblical translations.

<sup>33</sup> See Forshall, Madden, 1850, I, viii.

<sup>34</sup> See Paues 1912.

<sup>35</sup> Boxal, Tresley 2016, 143.

<sup>36</sup> Paues 1902, xxx.



Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, McClean Collection MS 133  
(formerly Phillipps 7219 and Phillipps 10170)<sup>37</sup> (16th century)

Cambridge, Trinity College 50 (B.2.7.) (16th century)

The proposal of three different translations circulating in the fourteenth century was in perfect alignment with Berger's (1884) grouping of the Anglo-Norman translations,<sup>38</sup> as they exhibit differences among themselves comparable to those observed in the ME tradition. Based on this affinity, Paues posited a hypothesis regarding the relationship between the translation of the Bible and the translations of the Apocalypse, drawing a parallel to the proposed relationship for the translation of the French Bible:

[I]t is highly probable [...] that the translators did not only collect 'manie elde biblis, and other doctouris and commune glosis' in order 'to make oo Latyn Bible sumdel trewe' [*Wycl. Bible*, Prologue, p. 57], but also gathered around them existing versions in the vernacular and with corrections, if required, from the established Latin text, introduced there already well-known renderings into their great compilation. Thus, as the Normal Apocalypse was adopted into the French thirteenth and fourteenth century Bibles, similarly the already popular and well-known text of the English Apocalypse was used as a convenient basis by the English Biblical compilers of the fourteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> According to James (1912, 280), Phillipps 7219 and Phillipps 10170 have been bound together in the nineteenth century and are copies of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 235.

<sup>38</sup> According to Berger (1884) the manuscripts of the Anglo-Norman Revelation are based on the same text, but differ in respect of prologue and commentary to such an extent that he identified a first class including 80 MSS presenting as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century two types – a more complete one with prologue, commentary and text, and a reduced one lacking the prologue –, a second class including only two manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 1036 and MS 13096) with a different prologue, and a third class (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.16.2 and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 1768) with a completely new commentary.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

This perspective remained unchallenged until Forshall and Madden (1984) provided a more convincing explanation for the alignment with LV from an opposing angle. They suggested that Vb and the later Va – i.e. Ha – were corrected on the basis of it. Therefore, there were only two ME translations, an Earlier Rendering and a Later Rendering,<sup>40</sup> from the Norman Apocalypse, whose later copies were “arbitrarily revised by the various scribes who also borrowed from Lollard Bibles”.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike LV and the rendering of the *Revelation of John* heavily influenced or corrected by it, where the translator worked relatively freely from the original text, adapting the message to the ME syntax and vocabulary, the pure subgroup of Va was traditionally recognised for a total adherence to the Norman version, almost as if it were conceived as a functional translation or a utilitarian translation. In other words, at this stage, the translator would have prioritized the *verbum* over the *sensum* in deference to the *auctoritas*. Contrarily, a closer examination of MS H would reveal that the Earlier Rendering experimented, albeit to a lesser degree, with translation strategies that could have easily paved the way for the Later Rendering, and played a significant role in establishing a style for this textual genre.

### 2.1. *The Earlier Rendering of the Apocalypse*

The oldest copy of Va is London, British Library, MS Harley 874 (H), written in a simple and clear hand between 1340 and 1370, but it must have been preceded by other copies, as it presents several mistakes, most of which shared with MS P. MS H and MS P also share the same language, identified as a northern East Midlands dialect because of the northerly forms occurring in the texts, such as the present particle in *–ande* or the pronoun *þai*, or words such as *uche*, *oiber*, *hierþe* etc. According to this hypothesis, the dialect mixture can be explained in accordance with the

<sup>40</sup> The terms “Earlier Rendering” and “Later Rendering” are taken from Paues 1912, quoted in Fridner 1961, xxvii.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx.

idea that the earliest Bible translations were apt to appear in the parts of the country where French first began to lose ground: that is, the scribes of H and P substituted their own East Midlands dialect for the original Northern Midlands dialect, overlooking some northerly forms.<sup>42</sup> It is a thin parchment manuscript, 28 x 16 cm, bound in leather; the parchment itself is of poor quality, here and there damaged even with holes; the pages are uneven, often stained and scribbled in the margins. The text of the Apocalypse begins at f. 2a with the prologue – *SEint Poule þapostle seiþ* – preceded by the invocation *Ad omnea principia tibi salue dico maria*, and ends at f. 31a with the sentence & *duellen with hym withouten ende. Amen*, and a colophon saying *þapocalips on englissh here now makeþ ende unto þe blis of heuen: god grante us grace to wende*.

The text is organized in chapters, each of which is divided into sections of the Biblical *Revelation of John* followed by the corresponding commentary, marked at the head with a paragraph sign in red. The few corrections are attributed to two different hands other than the scribe's. There is no evidence regarding the identity of the translator of the MF Apocalypse, nor the location or timeframe of the translation, aside from deductions drawn from the dates and dialects of the extant copies. Furthermore, since the MF Revelations of John, which served as the basis for the English translations, have not survived, it is uncertain how to assess mistakes and apparent corruptions. These errors could have originated in the MF version itself, rather than solely due to misinterpretation or intervention by the translator or, later, by the scribe.

On a paper leaf inserted between the first two leaves it is written:

<sup>42</sup> See Paues 1912. However, there are serious objections to this theory: the northern forms could be attributed to scribal interventions; moreover, there are also southern forms which could just as well be taken to indicate a southern origin (see Fridner 1961, xxxiii).

This is Wycliffe's Commentary on the Apocalypse. The translation of the text varies considerably from the usual copies both of the earlier and later versions of the New testament. Another copy may be found in Ms. Harley 1203, in which the language has been somewhat altered and revised, and a thirs copy in Ms. Harley 171, which has been still more corrected and brought closer to the later Wyclifite version. A fourth copy, (earlier in point of writing than the Harl. Mss 171, 1203) is in Ms.Reg. 17. A. xxvi f. 67 but certain variations from 874 (the present volume) which must have been written as early as the end of Edw. III. reign. In the Regal Ms. The text begins *Apocalips of Jhū Crist*, whereas in the other copies it commences *I Iohan zoure brother*. F.M. [probably Frederic Madden]<sup>43</sup>.

### 3. *Translation strategies in the Early Rendering: textual fidelity or innovation?*

The close relationship between the MF version and the ME Early Rendering, in particular the version in MS H, is beyond dispute.<sup>44</sup> At the lexical level, a certain conservatism is evident, particularly with respect to obsolete forms, such as the adversative conjunction *ac* for *but* and the conclusive adverb-conjunction *forþi* for *þefore*, as well as words like *wonen* for *dwellen*. This conservatism also accounts for the presence of Germanic-origin terms that are replaced by French loanwords in other manuscripts: *meþfulnessse* (H) vs. *temperaunce* (J), *uprist* (H) vs. *resurexioun* (J), *stede* (H) vs. *place* (J) or *elde* (H) vs. *age* (J). However, the relationship is not always in this direction because there are also cases of French loanwords subsequently replaced with original English words (e.g. *mounten* (H) vs. *stizen* (Ha)), and in general the vocabulary of Romance origin is predictably predominant, compared to loan-words from other languages included Scandinavian ones: even at the pronominal system, only

<sup>43</sup> Fridner 1961, vii-viii.

<sup>44</sup> The edition on which the analysis is based is Fridner 1961.

*bai* is frequent, while the other forms of the third person plural paradigm are usually those of Old English origin. What is striking is that the French words occur in the translation without any change in spelling. Such words as *seint* [seint], *suffre* [sufferer], *persecuciouns* [persecution], *anguisshes*, *failen*, *vertu* [vertu], *tribulacio(u)n* [tribulation/tribulacion], *adversities* [adversitez], *charite* [charité], *pouerte* [poverty], *pacience* [patience], *glorie* [glorie] echo the French source, and at the time they were quite unusual to such an extent that many of them were still entries in the earliest dictionaries. For example, “POVERTE. Paupertas, pauperies. [...] nede. Penuria, egestas (indigencia, inedia, inopia, P.)” and “VERTU. Virtus” are two entries found in the *Promptorium parvulorum sive clericorum* (1440). Cawdrey (1604) listed, as French words, “*tribulation*, trouble, sorrowe, anguish”, or “*anguish*, grieve”. This last word is a significant example of the importance and role that these initial translations played in shaping the English vocabulary, also for later translations. The OED registers its first attestation in the plural form of *anguish* with the same meaning as the Vulgar Latin *angustiae* (pains, sufferings, or distress) occurring in the Early Wycliffe Bible (1382).<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, it had already appeared in the oldest copy of Va (H), and exactly in the plural form. This is no isolated case, and many other Romance loanwords find their first attestation within this very text. Besides those words such as *persecucioun* – meaning ‘an injurious act’ and ‘a particular course or period of systematic violent oppression [of the Antichrist]’ –, whose earliest occurrence is officially ascribed to the Apocalypse of John (H) by the OED, there are numerous loan-words and calque origin for which it is still unknown that they first entered the English vocabulary through this translation: e.g. *þareryng* [*þe areringe* (resurrection)]

<sup>45</sup> *Anguysshes as of the child berere* [Latin parturientis angustias]. (Bible (Wycliffite, early version) (Douce MS. 369(1)) (1850) Jeremiah iv. 31); *Who kepeth his mouth and his tunge, kepeth his soule fro anguysshis* [Latin ab angustiis]. (Bible (Wycliffite, early version) (Douce MS. 369(1)) (1850) Proverbs xxi. 23).

(6/ 5), wrongly attributed to the 1382 Wycliffe Bible in the OED; *yueldoer* (6/1 Cm 4), a perfect calque from MF *maufesanz*, whose first record dates 1398 according to the OED; and *enspiren*, which the OED from Wycliffe onwards, but attested in MS H as 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. pl. present tense (4/4 Cm 9) as a translation of MF *esprennent* from *esprenner* and as past participle, *enspired* (4/1 Cm 8). This latter occurrence represents an innovative Creation, intended to render the French expression *en esperite*, a venture that the translator feels compelled to clarify through a doublet, juxtaposing the literal translation *in gost* ‘in ghost’, as a sort of explanation of the new formation or a reinforcement.

(3) Þat he was enspired in gost bitokneþ þat he þat haþ þe grace of god.

[Ceo qu’il fu en esperite signifie que cil que a la grace Deu.]

### 3.1. *Constructional Fidelity and Betrayal*

If the dependency on the French model at the lexical level can be justified by the necessity of a new terminology apt to the subject, which is partly confirmed by the establishment of these words in the English vocabulary, at the syntactic and pragmatic level the adherence to the French version may produce inappropriate constructions. In some cases, the translator translates literally without understanding the pragmatic function of the words: for instance, if Fr. *salu* lexically corresponds to ME *help(e)*, pragmatically it is a formula of greeting or invocation, a function that is rarely expressed by *help*.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> To be precise, *helpen help(e)* is often in binomials with *grace* referring to God and the expressions *God helpe me* or *through the helpe of* as an asseveration are also used, but to find instances of *help(en)* meaning ‘to give grace to’ referring to God one has to wait for the fifteenth century and authors such as Lydgate, unless one wishes to see in this example the first attestation of such a pragmatic practice.

- (4) & crieden with heize voice. Helpe to our god þat sitter vpon þe throne (7/11)  
 [& crient a grant voiz: Salu a nostre Deu que seez sur la throne]

More often the dependency on the MF model is reflected by the word order of the phrase or of the entire sentence, sometimes having morphological implications. In MF adjectives usually have a post nominal position, whereas in ME they basically precede their nominal head, although they are more flexible than in Present Day English.<sup>47</sup> However, the prenominal position is mandatory in the case of present participle with an adjectival function. Conversely, the expression *Deu vivant* is always translated as *god lyueande*. Even the choice of the genitive construction is just likely to be affected by the MF model, although less patently. In the MF version possessive relationships can be expressed either by means of the preposition *de* or of the so-called “juxtaposition genitive” (see ex. 3):<sup>48</sup> in spite of the fact that by the fourteenth century the *-s* genitive was already established as the inflectional ending for all human possessors irrespectively of their original inflectional class,<sup>49</sup> there is almost no evidence of the morphological genitive inasmuch as independently of the nature of the possessor and of the quality of the possessive relationship, the *of*-genitive seems to be the preferred option. The *of*-genitive indeed adheres to the same word order as either MF genitive expression (ex. 5): *a la fin del munde* vs. *atte ending of þe werelde* and *la grant persecution Antecrist* vs. *þe grete persecucion of Antecrist*. There are only very few exceptions and concern a special kind of possessors, i.e. the members of the Holy family (son, father), God, Christ, the Angels and, much less frequently, the devil/fiend and the Antichrist: *goddess son* or *godes son* for the MF *le filz Deu, goddess*

<sup>47</sup> Two are the contexts allowing post-headed adjectives: with the ‘learned adjectives’ of French origin and with two adjectives, when one or both can follow the head (Fischer 1992, 214).

<sup>48</sup> Arteaga, Herschensohn 2016, 21.

<sup>49</sup> For details, see Rosenbach *et al.* 2000, Vezzosi 2000a, and Rosenbach 2002.

*throne* for MF *throne Deu (Jesus) cristes blood* for MF *le sanc Jesu Crist*, *þe Aungels honde* for MF *la main al angele* and *Antecristes deciples* for MF *li deciple Antecrist*. It is worth noticing that the possessor with *-s* genitive occurs predominantly in the explanatory glosses and interpolations, where there is at least one case of the *his*-genitive form<sup>50</sup> – e.g. *god his eritage* (20/1 Cm 10).

- (5) [...] vntil þat we merken þe tokne of þe lorde in þe foreheuedes of his seruauantz (7/4)  
[tant que aeuem merché le seel nostre Deu en les frunz /de ses/ serfs]

At the sentence level, the replication of the French model can have more invasive side effects, especially when MF allows word sequences inadmissible in ME, and therefore the translator's reliance on his model produces sentences or phrases that repeat the same word order as the French sentence or phrase but collide against ME rules: for instance, sentences with subjects in post-verbal position in declarative sentences (6a.-b.) or without subjects *tout court* although ME is not a rigid pro-drop language.<sup>51</sup>

- (6) a. I seiȝ seuen Aungels stondande bifore þe face of God. & hem | ben ȝouen seuen trumpes. & anoþer Aungel com (8/2-3)  
[ge vi –vij. Angeles estant devant le face Deu, & lur sunt donées . vij. bosines. Et un autre angele vint]
- b. Helle followed hym. & hym was ȝouen miȝth of þe foure parties of þe erþe. Forto slee wiþ | swerd & wiþ hungere & of deth of þe beestes of erþe [...] (6/7)  
[Enfer le suivet; et la poosté lui est donnée sur .iiij. parties de la terre por tuer de espée & de faim & de mourine & /des/ bestes de terre]

<sup>50</sup> This definition refers to the construction in which the relationship between the possessor and the possessum is expressed by the possessive pronoun: the king his reign 'the king's reign'. See Vezzosi 2000b.

<sup>51</sup> Among many others, see Mustanoja 1960 and Fischer 1992.



That said, the Early Rendering cannot possibly be considered to be a literal translation that preserves the original text's words and structure as closely as possible. Although the translator often renders the source text word-for-word, and this sometimes results in awkward or unnatural phrasing in the target language, it is also clear that the translator consciously makes a series of translational attempts aimed at maintaining a certain fidelity to the original text while respecting the target language.

### 3.2. *Constructional infidelity*

The translator's independence from the source model is less apparent and considerably more nuanced. However, this subtlety is particularly intriguing for understanding the translation process that gradually led to the development of a lexicon and formula appropriate for authoritative texts, such as the Holy Scriptures. At a lexical level, unusual expressions or unusual MF words are often translated with synonyms, but more frequently with paraphrases that either specify their meaning or refer to more common concepts, maybe more common and extra-contextually shared. Thus *l'ave del deluge* becomes *Noes flood* (4 Cm18) or *les -ij. Testamenz* corresponds to *þe lawþes of þe olde & of þe newe* (6/5 Cm 11) or *le foi* is *þe riȝth bileue* in the ME translation. Analogously MF *parduarable* and MF *resemblable* are replaced by their definition *þat euere schal laste* (4/1 Cm 7) and *als it were* (4/6) or *treatable*, which only extends its domain from the physical world (workable) to the psychological or mental sphere (amenable, affable, mild) at the end of the fourteenth century, is translated with the locution *lizth to drawen hem to gode* (4/6 Cm 28). Similar treatment is reserved for those Romance words that have not yet entered the lexicon themselves, but are related with already familiar words.

The case in point here concerns verbal forms that by rule become established much later than their corresponding nouns (Durkin 2014, Vezzosi, Baratta forthcoming). In this instance, the translator can employ various strategies, among which a para-

phrase which unpacks its meaning and its semantic and relational components, treating it as if it were a dictionary entry: a good example could be the MF verb *damagen* whose meaning could not possibly be misinterpreted as the noun *damage* has entered the English vocabulary since the beginning of the fourteenth century, and which is not translated through other ME verbs connoting the same event, but through a causative periphrastic construction *don non harme* (6/5 Cm 4) consisting of elements that explicitly and combinatorially convey its meaning. And this happens constantly with predicates the translator does not know or feel unsecure with: *ap(p)areil(l)en* has been attested in ME since the end of the thirteenth century,<sup>52</sup> but in Southern or Souther East Midlands dialects,<sup>53</sup> and accordingly the translator prefers to use the causative paraphrase *maken hem redy* for the MF *se aparilerent*.

The same attitude can be observed in syntactic choices. Regardless of the potential correspondence between the MF construction and its rendering in ME, the translator does not always adhere strictly to the model but may deviate from it for greater clarity, stylistic preference, or rhetorical effect. Even in passages, like the one in (7), where the word order of the MF version seems to be respected, so as to keep split the genitive phrase (i.e. *pe noubre [...] of her breperen* for *le number [...] de lur freres*, the translator effectuates a significant alteration by appending a phrase that serves as an explanatory afterthought regarding the notion of resting, and by transfiguring the concept of the brethren who must be slain akin to him (*cum il*) into the notion that dying like Christ implies being killed virtuously, by adding the qualifying adjective *zut* (good).

<sup>52</sup> See OED *s.v.* *apparel*, MED *s.v.* *apparaillen*.

<sup>53</sup> See CMEPV *s.v.* *a(p)pareil\**.

- (7) [...] vntil þe noumbre be fulfild of her breþeren  
þat ben ʒut to slen & þai weren stille (6/9)

[... Desque le number seit empli de lur freres  
que sunt a ocirre cum il.]

The translator exhibits a distinct preference for explicit subordination over complementation, which is often resolved into a finite clause, for explicit completive sentence over nominalizations (ex. 8a. *An|tecrisť after he is fordon* for *après la destruction Antecrist* -b. *þat / þai eten her tunges* for *La ma(n)ger de lur langues*), and for indirect speech over direct speech (exx. 8c.-d.), a transformation to which they consistently resort and not only in the commentary, where less adherence to the model is to be expected.

- (8) a. [...] þat An|tecrisť after he is fordon shal stoned In holy  
chirche & after þe juggement in heuene (7/ 9 C m 14)  
[... que après la destruction Antecrist, esteront en  
seinte Glise & après le jugement el ciel]
- b. þat / þai eten her tunges bitokneþ þe envie þat þai  
hadden to þe holy for her holynesse (16/ 8 Cm 7)  
[La ma(n)ger de lur langues de dolur signefie l'envie  
qu'il averunt envers les seinz.]
- c. And on of þe grete seide to me what þai weren keuered  
in white stoles & whennes þat þai comen & he seide to  
me it ben þai þat ben from grete tribulatioun & han  
wasshen her stoles | & maden hem white in þe blood  
of þa lombe (7/9)  
[& respond un des maiurs & me dist: Cil que sunt  
couvert de blanches estoles qui sunt il, & dunt  
vindrent? Et li dis: Sire vos le savez. Et il me dist: Ces  
sunt ki vindrent de grant tribulation & lure stoles unt  
lave & les unt blanchies el sanc del aignel.]
- d. þat | he seiþ he begynneþ to cast hem out bitokneþ  
þat oure lorde ʒiueþ hem space to repentem hem (3/14  
Cm 5)  
[Ceo qu'il dit: "Ge commincerai a vomir", signifie ke  
Nostre Sire lur donne espace de repentir]

The translator must have had well in mind the aim of translating, that is to maintain fidelity to the original content as much as possible, allowing readers to grasp the original meaning as accurately as possible. To achieve this, they must at times deviate from the original if the linguistic constructions are not transferable into the target language or if the target language would prefer different constructions to express the same concept. This is what happens when the relative pronoun is modified by a preposition: in this instance, the ME version employs the typical preposition stranding construction.

- (9) a. Þe seuen graces of þe holy gost þat aliztten and enspiren  
 þe hertes þat god resteb | Inne (4/4 Cm 10)  
 [les set graces del Seint Espirit ke enluminent &  
 esprennent les quers en qui Deu se repose]
- b. þe sw|erd þat he sleþ wiþ bitokneþ erpelich mi3th þat  
 þai slen | wiþ þe iuges (4/7 Cm 8)  
 [Le /espée/ dunt il tue signifie le poer terriën dunt il  
 escorchent lour suzgez.]

No other explanation, aside from the necessity to render the message more effective, clearer, and immediate, can justify resorting to topicalization not present in the original text (exx. 8a. and 10a.), or syntactic rearrangements of the sentence structure – e.g. coordination instead of nominal phrase (ex. 10b. *Ouercomynges & temptaciouns* for *victoere de temptations*) and the use of active voice instead of a passive construction (ex. 10b. *bi|tokneþ* for *sunt/est signefié*), or personal construction instead of an impersonal one (ex. 10c. *he wille it to shewen* for *lui plect a demusterer*).

- (10) a. Þe fierþe Aungel þat shad his phiote in þe sonne.  
bitokneþ þe damnacioun of Antecrist | & of alle þat  
þorou3 his prechyng forsaken þe ri3th bileue (16/8 Cm  
1)  
[Ceo que li quart angele expandi sa fiote eu soleil  
signifie la dampnatiun Antecrist & de iceus qui par  
ces tormenz guerpirent la foi]
- b. Ouercomynges & temptaciouns þat bi|tokneþ hundreþ.  
& soþfast penaunce bitokneþ fourty. & þe feiþ of þe  
godspelles foure. (7/8 Cm 12)  
[victoere de temptations, ke sunt signefié par cent, et  
verae penaunce, ke est signefié par .xl., et en la fei  
del euvangile, que est signefié par quatre.]
- c. Þat is whan þe gost aliztteþ þe vnderstondyng of þe  
soules. & dooþ hem seen on nizttes þe spirites | & þe  
priuetes of god als mychel as he wille it to shewen |  
hem. (Prol. 35-37)  
[kant li Seint Espiriz enlumine le entendement del  
alme de home, e le fait veer des oils espiritelz la verité  
des seréz Dampnedeu, tant come lui plect a demus-  
terer]

At times, the translation diverges from the model simply because the translator employs techniques associated with either less formal registers, such as cataphoric deictics, pronominal subject repetition (ex. 11a.), and coordination instead of subordination (ex. 11 b.).

- (11) a. By þe dome hors ben bitokned ypocrites & þe deuel  
þat wo|neþ in hem þat is deþ. (6/8 Cm 1)  
[Par le cheval pale sunt signifié les ypocrites, e le  
diable qui in eus regne est apelé Mort]]
- b. ich herd þat oþere beest | and seide to me come see.  
(6/1 Cm 4)  
[ge oï la secunde beste que me dist: Venz veer]

In (11b.), although grammatically the conjunction *and*<sup>54</sup> cannot coordinate the first clause with the subsequent one due to the lack of a subject in the latter, as they have different subjects, the sentence remains entirely intelligible. The reader or listener has no difficulty in identifying the missing subject with the Beast, as in both clauses it is the most discourse prominent element, which serves as the object in the first clause and functions as the elliptical subject in the second clause. As a matter of fact, in informal and colloquial register, the coordination of clauses sharing the same topic is felicitous regardless of the grammatical relationships that the topic fulfils within the two syntactic units.

### 3.3. *Rhetoric and Style as pivotal factors in the translating choices*

More frequently the diversions are explainable in terms of rhetoric and stylistic needs, such as the predominance of rhythmic alliteration, the use of binomial formulas, and parallelisms. Especially in the Apocalypse proper the translator chooses the words favouring those that can form alliterative phrases, while remaining faithful to the MF copy: in some cases, it is simply a matter of choosing among the various available synonyms those that allow for the Creation of alliterative effects (e.g. in ex. 12a. *girdle* instead of *belt* or *sash* since it alliterates with *gold*); in others, the translator inserts new material (ex. 12b. *hunters* instead of *chil*) to achieve the desired rhetorical figure (alliterative parallelisms); Additionally, the translator sometimes constructs phrasal structures from explicit sentences, as exemplified in (12c.), where the solution is precisely mirrored in the LV – e.g. (c1384) WBible(1)

<sup>54</sup> This is to be distinguished from parahypotaxis, mainly typical of Ancient Italian (that is, combinations of a subordinate clause preceding a main clause that is introduced by *and* or accompanied by *so*, e.g. *Se non volete essere giudicati, e voi non giudicate* ((Riccardo Bacchelli, *Lo sguardo di Gesù*, in *Saggi critici*, Milano, A. Mondadori, 1962, 138) ‘If you do not want to be judged, then do not judge others’) and pseudo-coordination, frequent in English, but also in many other languages (consisting of two inflected verbs that combine to refer to a single complex event e.g. come and go; what he sat and done all day).

(Roy 1.B.6) Apoc.14.2 : [...] *as of harpers harpinge in her harpis.*

- (12) a. Gird under his tittes wiþ a girdle of golde. His heued  
& his here was white as wolle [...] as flaume of fyre  
(1/13,14)  
[ceint as mameles de une ceinture de or. Sun chief &  
ses cheveus furent blanc comme laine blanche [...] comme flambe de feu]
- b. Ac þe houndes shullen ben wiþouten & þe hunters þat  
poy|son oþere þe foule homicides. (22/15)  
[Mès dehors seront lichien & chil qui enpoesunent  
les autres & li ord & li homicide].
- c. I herd a voice of heuene as| it were þe voice þat I herd  
was as of harpurs harpande in her harpes (14/2)  
[et la voiz que ge oï estoet ausi comme de harpeurs  
que harpent en lur harpes]

At times, the translator appears to give clear precedence to the alliterative effect rather than to the fidelity of the text, freely altering the sentence structure by substituting non-alliterative pairs with alliterative ones, even if they have different meanings – e.g. (13a.) where “keys of heaven and hell” should translate *clefs de mort & de enfer* ‘key of death and hell’ –. Frequently, this involves drawing from formulaic expressions already present in the literary tradition, particularly in didactic and religious contexts. For instance, MF *mort* becomes ME *heuene*, echoing a common binomial expression found in *Ayenbite of Inwyt*. However, in the commentary the original binomial is maintained (1/17, Cm 8: *þe keyes of deþ & of helle*). To render the present participle *ardant* (ex. 13b.-c.) – a loan that will enter the English vocabulary only in the very late fourteenth century through Chaucer’s works –, the translator goes beyond simply using the corresponding ME form, i.e. *brennand(e)*, and instead employs a simile consisting of alliterative terms which often occurs in couplet, *brennande as a bronde*, as well as metaphoric images commonly found in theological texts, particularly Psalms, in connection with events

that foreshadow the end of the world.<sup>55</sup> Sometimes the intervention involves profound interventions at the level of syntax and constructions, as shown in (13c.), where the translation is quite free in word order and lexical rendering to such an extent that nouns are interpreted (*estanc* ‘pool’ vs. *þe pyt of fyre*), Prepositional Phrases are transformed into a finite relative clause containing an alliterating expression reinforcing the image of infernal burning fire (*de fue ardant* vs. *þat is brennande wiþ brymston*).

- (13) a. I have keies of heuene & helle (1/17, 19)  
[ge ai les clefs de mort & de enfer]
- b. & a grete sterre fel fro heuene brennande as a bronde (8/10)  
[& une grant esteille chei del ciel ardant comme brandon]
- c. Þise two ben cast in to þe pyt of fyre þat is brennande wiþ brymston (19/20)  
[Et sunt rué cist dui tut vi fen le estanc de fue ardant]
- d. & on þat oþer riȝth | so arisen þe godes of grace & of glorie. (ProL. 24)  
[de autre part nus esleecent les beens de grace e de glorie.]

This particular meticulousness is notably observed in binomial constructions, whether they are inherent to the MF text (13d.) or deliberately crafted by the translator (exx. 14a.-c.), it matters little. In the ME rendition, a distinct inclination towards the utilization of parallelisms and multinomial structures<sup>56</sup> is evident, where

<sup>55</sup> Note that *brymston* can be a theological term for ‘burning sulphur’, associated with hell (a1150 (c1125) Vsp.D.Hom.Elucid. (Vsp D.14) 143/31: *Heo sculen drigen brynstanes stænc on helle*) as well as the rain falling on Sodoma and Gomorra (a1425 (a1382) WBible(1) (Corp-O 4)Gen.19.24: *The Lord reynede vpon Sodom and Gomor brenstoon* [WB(2): *brymston*] and fier) or the end of the world (c1350 MPPsalter (Add 17376) 10.7: *It shal rayne up þe synzers droppes of fur and of brunstone* [Rolle Psalter: *brunstan*]).

<sup>56</sup> Binomials or multinomials are “coordinated pair[s] of linguistic units



constituents predominantly exhibit a synonymous or complementary relationship, albeit occasionally adversative. Some of the word pairs are actually fixed phrases such as *by her wordes & by her werkes* (17/1 Cm24), or *wip word & wip werk* (18/1 Cm3). It is noteworthy that multinomial constructions and parallelisms are rhetorical characteristics typical of the homiletic<sup>57</sup> and didactic<sup>58</sup> genre since the earliest Anglo-Saxon literary evidence, exemplified by the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan, as well as the Blickling homilies.<sup>59</sup>

- (14) a. Mepfulnessse & mesure (4/6 Cm 32)  
[temperance]
- b. Sorou3 of herte & shrift of mouþe (4, 6, Cm 13)  
[contriciuns de quer & confession de bouche]
- c. Clennesse of herte & chastite of flesshe (4, 6, Cm 14)  
[netté de quer & chasteté de char]
- d. Undo þe book & vnbynde þe claspes (5/1, 3)  
[overir le livre & deslier les seaus]
- e. I woot þine werkes & þine dedes | and þi charite (2, 19)  
[Je sai voz eovres & votre foi & vostre charité]

Some of those word pairs must have been perceived so much as a single entity that it was used inappropriately as *werke & dede* in (14d.) where the translator substitutes it for *eovres & foi*, as if the occurrence of *werk* in a binominal construction had automatically

of the same word class which show some semantic relation” (Kopaczyk, Sauer 2017, 3) which are distinguished from non-formular juxtapositions by “syntactic identity, explicit conjunction, semantic similarity, frequent occurrence, and sound repetition” (Chapman 2017, 43).

<sup>57</sup> Richards 1989, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Bethurum 1932, 271.

<sup>59</sup> Chapman (2017, 13) talks of *echoing pairs* for the prose of Wulfstan. Recently, there has been a resurgence of the notion of Ælfric as a poet, with his rhythmic prose being considered akin to verse due to the rhetorical techniques it employs, such as alliterative rhythm and the use of alliterative or assonant word pairs (Updegraff 2018).

triggered the occurrence of the second element of the formula, i.e. *dede*.

Generally, the treatment of the Biblical passage and the commentary is quite similar in the sense that systematic translating choices rarely differ according to whether the passage occurs in the Revelation or in its commentary. Nevertheless, it is in the commentary that explanatory glosses occur, often in the form of an addition, or passages are interpolated. Here, the translator seems to have no hesitation in altering the text and introducing novel elements, when deeming it necessary to augment clarity, or enhance discourse message. For instance, unlike the MF version, in (15a.) the ME translation explicitly specifies that being false Christians means transgressing the law (*þai þat ben out of þe lawe þat | ben Iewes and Sarzines þat ben mys|bileuande Men þorou3 defaut of techyng.* (3, 14, cm8-9) [... que faus crestien est pires ke celui est en mescreantise par defaute de enseignement.]

- (15) a. [...] þat fals christen Men ben wers þan þai þat ben out of þe lawe þat | ben Iewes and Sarzines þat ben mys|bileuande Men þorou3 defaut of techyng. (3, 14, cm8-9)  
[... que faus crestien est pires ke celui est en mescreantise par defaute de enseignement.]
- b. & his glorie þat is þe blis of heuen 3iven to vs [...]  
(22/1, Cm. 17)  
[& la gloere deu ciel nus est rendue]

More significant are the interpolations, that is textual information that has no equivalent in the French source and is added in the ME text. They are often politically connotated, as they show their connection to the controversial writings of the Lollards. Above all, one figure is under attack: that of the prelate (exx. 16a.-b.).

- (16) a. Þat is to seie þat he be comen of grete kynde, oiþer þat he be in grete lordes seruise oiþer þat he come þerto þorouȝ symonye. oiþer þat he goo to þe order forto haue bodilich delices. Alle þise ben Antecristes prophetes & his ypocrites & his Eretikers. (13/11 Cm 27)
- b. Þe pyt þat he cast hym Inne bitokneþ þe pyne þat he had þat he ne miȝth nouȝth disceyen þe folk als he dude afornehonde. Ac after þe þousande ȝer ben gon. Antecristes prophetes shullen regnen. & come more & more & corruppen goddess lawȝe. & tournen it after her libbyng. For þan shal þe fendes power arise more & more in holichirche. Hise prophetes ben coueitouse men of holy chirche. proude Men leccherouse Men. loseiours. Ac þe loseniours ben werst of alle þat maken hem holy. & for drede oiþer for loue. oiþer for ker. Þat þai hopen þai ne shullen noþing haue of hem ȝif þai seiden þe soþe. Þise hane taken vnder honed to speken þe deuels langage forto disceyuen goddess childer & bynymen god his eritage. & swiche ben strengere & wers þan any deuel in helle. forþi vche Man þat wil queme god. kepe hym from swiche be it Man be it woman. oiþer þai shullen gon wiþ hem to her lorde þat is þe fende of helle (20/1 Cm 10)

In many instances, the translational decisions made in H cannot be fully comprehended solely in terms of greater readability or transparency. Rather, they are elucidated in the light of the cultural context in which the translation is situated, as well as the literary works and genres to which the text is connected. In this perspective, one can understand the substitution of well established word such as contemplation (ME *contemplacioun*) with periphrasis such as “thought of God” (*þouȝt of god* 4, 6, Cm 30) that belongs to the formulas of the thirteenth century homilies.<sup>60</sup> For similar reasons, the translator called the pagans *Sarasines*

<sup>60</sup> Morris 1868, 218.

in accordance with the tradition of moral and religious treatises, sermons and homilies, such as *Sermon on the Anniversary of Saint Nicholas*, *Southern Legendary*, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, *Northern Homily Cycle*, *Handling Sin*, and so on, where the term does not mean ‘Turk’, ‘Arab’, or ‘Muslim’, but either who is not Christian or more specifically is a synonym to heathen and pagan: *þe sarsynes þat ben tourned to hym* (6/1, Cm 5) [les pople de paens ke se convertiront a lui]. Similarly, the substitution of *luxure* with *leccherie* in (17) is not dictated by any apparent reason since they are usually used interchangeably as synonyms, except for the presence of this word pair in *Ancrene Wisse* and, what is even more important, gluttony and lechery are always mentioned in this order in the list of the seven capital sins.<sup>61</sup>

- (17)    þe beestes of þe erþe bitokneþ glo|tonye & leccherie  
           (6/7 Cm11)  
           [Les bestes de terre signefie glotunnie & luxure]

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, without denying the undeniable evidence that Va is indeed influenced by the French model, to the extent that the translator sometimes renders the text word for word, especially when not fully understanding it, these initial translations, and particularly the text of H, offer genuine prose, where “there is a certain rude vigour, a homeliness and naïveté of expression which we look for in vain in later renderings”.<sup>62</sup>

What makes this translation effective, original and aligned with the native linguistic and literary tradition is not to be found in the syntactic rendering, as in most cases, the ME version reproduces the sequence of the French version. Rather, it lies in the rhythm of the prose itself, which is determined by lexical and rhetorical choices rather than purely syntactic or morphological

<sup>61</sup> E.g. *þE seuene dedli synnes ben þeose: Pruide, Wraþþe, Envye, Accidie, Couetise, Glotonie, and Lecherie* (Rolle EDormio (Cmb Dd.5.64)64/94).

<sup>62</sup> Paues 1912, ch. 44, quoted in Fridner 1961, xxxvi.

ones. A special emphasis is placed on lexical choice, as the translator, in addition to incorporating new loanwords, endeavours to clarify any unfamiliar or uncommon MF terms by providing explanatory glosses, similes, or multinomial formulations. In this endeavour, he thereby establishes a kind of specialized glossary on these subjects, available to those who would subsequently delve into these topics or embark on further translations. Associated to lexical issues are the two most peculiar characteristics of the Earlier Rendering as present in H, namely the use of alliteration and of (alliterating) multinomials, that is the two features which had been associated with the evolution and establishment of rhythmic prose in the homiletic genre,<sup>63</sup> and which accordingly suggest the context in which the translation was produced and its intended audience: “the need for alliterative prose to preach the church’s word in the vernacular remained as pressing as ever”.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> “[T] rhythm in rhythmical alliteration became so regular, as in passages of great intensity or emotion [...] at other times, when the rhythm becomes less insistent, prose results. The writers in the twelfth century would not have thought of some lines as verse and others as prose; they would have regarded different passages as being in a high or a low style [...] rhythmical alliteration was used particularly in sermons, prayers, and other religious prose.” (Blake 1969, 120). As a matter of fact, “the need for alliterative prose to preach the church’s word in the vernacular remained as pressing as ever” (Blake 1969, 121).

<sup>64</sup> Blake 1969, 121.

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