

Mearca, Mearcland ond hira Mearcstapan: Boundaries and the Bounded World in Old English Poetry

**Submitted by 620036568 to the University of Exeter as a
dissertation towards the degree of Master of Arts in Medieval
Studies**

August 2014

Abstract:

Aside from a brief moment in the mid-nineteenth century when the influence of the polymathic Anglo-Saxonist J. M. Kemble was at its height, the boundary has rarely been at the centre of Anglo-Saxon studies. This study aims to reconsider our understanding of *mearca* ('boundaries'), *mearcland* ('boundary-land') and the identities of the people who tread them (*mearcstapan*), by approaching them not as concrete and singular historical entities, but as abstract and synthetic poetic constructs. More generally, it argues against any direct correlation between the physical and the poetic landscape, with a few notable exceptions. The first section looks at the various discourses relating to boundaries and space that marked out the limits of the Anglo-Saxon poet's cultural horizon. Culturally significant theological, calendric, geometrical, geographical and scientific discourses are explored in Old English and Anglo-Latin poetic works of all kinds, in order to understand how early English poetry actively absorbed, translated, and reconfigured diverse and often contradictory conceptions of 'boundary'. The second part investigates the monumental cross in *Guthlac A*, suggesting that the poem's landscape has been misrepresented as fenland, and instead preferring to read it through a more nuanced understanding of the functions of the marks of monastic land tenure. The third part uses the understanding gained in the previous sections to generate new insights on two of the longer poetic works: firstly, how *Andreas* uses boundary-marks to represent the genealogy of Christ and the calculation of Easter, and secondly, how *Exodus* foregrounds the refashioning of identity by synthesising the 'worldliness' of geographical boundaries with the 'otherworldliness' of formulaic literary boundaries.

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Introduction: Kemble's mark

Off in woods
a field that was tilled
isn't now: tall grass
decades deep, a caesura
birdsplit in the space
wind makes at the middle of continents¹

Just as the physical landscape is indelibly marked by the ploughs, scythes and shovels of men, both modern and ancient, the landscape of historical scholarship is strewn with the pen marks of its practitioners, still living and long-dead. The modern scholarly edifice is built upon ancient clearings; the marginal land of new theory is colonised and built over, until it eventually finds itself at the centre of things, the foundation beneath the brickwork of centuries of erudition. Yet the reverse is far more often the case; the neglected fields of theories which were once central to entire disciplines lie fallow and forgotten, the intellectual fertility of their soil exhausted. Visits to these now-remote lands serve as cautionary tales on the hubris of historians, proclaiming in the manner of Shelley's *Ozymandias* 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'² or in a much earlier but equally memorable poetic turn of phrase 'wraetlic is þes wealstan wyrde gebræcon / burgstede burston brosnað enta geweorc' ('wondrous is this wall-stone, the fates took it apart; the cityscapes have crumbled, the edifice of giants decays.').³ In some cases, the vast spaces which once housed entire historical schools have become academic marchlands, separating 'good' method from 'bad', and set under the ban of their detractors. Herbert Butterfield's great work of modernist historiography, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, contains just such a prohibition.

¹ Ken Smith, 'The Clearing', in *The Poet Reclining: Selected Poems 1962-1980* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1982), 1-6

² Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ozymandis' in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York: Houghton Muffin Co., 1901) 11

³ 'The Ruin' in *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501, Vol. I*, Bernard Muir (ed.) (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 1-2

A great danger lies in the broad spaces over which the mind can range, playing upon the historian's half-truths; and for this reason genuine historical study is bound to be intensive, taking us away from our abridgements, not upwards to vague speculation, but downwards to concrete detail.⁴

Thomas Babington Macaulay, whose conceptualisation of history Butterfield is criticising here, once described ideal historical method as a compound of two elements, the one he compared to a landscape painting, and the other to a map.⁵ The influence of contemporary visual art, and particularly of Romanticism, as a historical model for Macaulay is very much evident in the introductory section on the Middle Ages in his multi-volume *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*. For example, Macaulay's brief assessment of medieval pilgrimage and the Crusades could easily be confused for a description of a great landscape work by Joseph Koch or Caspar Freidrich.

...it was better that the rude inhabitant of the North should visit Italy and the East as a pilgrim, than that he should never see anything but those squalid cabins and uncleared woods amidst which he was born.⁶

The prose style is engaging and poetic, and it is not *malum per se*, but neither is it within the boundaries of what would be defined as acceptable academic history today. In fact, Macaulay's *History* required the assemblage of a considerable body of documentary evidence, but the topography of his historical 'map' was always determined by this ever-present contemporary interpretative element, the 'painting'. Thus, Macaulay's selective bias has been a particular *bête noire* for his critics, even in his lifetime; Karl Marx famously described him as a 'systematic falsifier of history'.⁷ A century later,

⁴ Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), p.99

⁵ Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Review of Hallam's Constitutional History, September 1828' in *Critical and Historical Essays Contributed to the Edinburgh Review* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1883), pp. 51-2

⁶ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second, Vol. I* (New York: Harper, 1856), p. 6

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. I*, trans. Samuel Moore & Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (Moscow: Progress, 1970), XXVII, p. 671 n.

Allen Frantzen showed just how closely Macaulay's defence of the institutions of the medieval church, such as pilgrimage and Christian militarism, were in thrall to the broad brush-strokes of Victorian colonialism and Orientalism.⁸ Macaulay, according to Frantzen, was complicit in painting the 'East' 'not as a geographical entity but as an undifferentiated other'.⁹ The assault on Macaulay's relentlessly teleological frame of reference has thus taken place on at least three fronts, first from the perspective of historical materialism, then from Butterfield's 'scientific' modernism, and more recently from Frantzen's postmodernist assault against 'grand narratives'. Thus, Macaulay's 'landscape painting' has been consigned to the 'uncleared woods' and 'squalid cabins' of the seldom-visited marchlands within the library reserve stack, relevant only in a limited sense, as a work of history rather than as a historical work. As Gertrude Himmelfarb has observed, the answer to the question 'who now reads Macaulay?' is the specialist, who alone prizes their almost elegiac 'remoteness'.¹⁰

It is undeniable that the present marginalisation of Macaulay's historical work is mostly for the best. At the same time, it can occasionally be fruitful to revisit such marginal spaces, clearing away the 'decades deep' foliage, and ask is there anything left that can be of use to a new generation of scholars. The central inspiration for this essay has been just such a revisiting, to a long-discredited theory of Macaulay's brilliant contemporary, John Mitchell Kemble. This revisiting is not as one might revisit Macaulay's *History* for its remoteness, but because it contains certain elements that deserve a reappraisal. For a brief period in the middle of the nineteenth century, the so-called 'mark theory' was at the centre of Anglo-Saxon studies, most notably in the third chapter of the first volume of Kemble's monumental *The Saxons in England*, and the first volume of William Stubbs' *The Constitutional History of England*. Kemble's work in particular was pioneering in so many ways, but his concept of the 'Mark' is almost universally dismissed as an ahistorical cul de sac in Anglo-Saxon studies. Kemble's innovation was to take the 'mark' and 'gau' hypotheses then current in contemporary

⁸ Allen Frantzen, *Desire for Origins* (New Brunswick : Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 30-3

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 30

¹⁰ Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'Who Now Reads Macaulay?' in *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 146

German historical scholarship, which postulated small communal structures of ancient Germanic settlement, and apply them to an Anglo-Saxon context.

According to Kemble, the ‘mark’ (OE: ‘mearc’) was the smallest and most fundamental level of division of common land in Anglo Saxon England.¹¹ This concept, supposedly passed down from continental Germanic antiquity, was the same unit described by Tacitus as ‘agri pro numero cultorum, ab universis per vices occupantur...’,¹² by which Kemble understood land settled by a community of free men,¹³ and which contained a proportion of arable and pasture land.¹⁴ Inseparable from the territory was its politico-legal sense, as the representative institution and protector of a freeman’s privileges and rights.¹⁵ This dual sense of territorial and political institution was supposedly most manifest in a community’s protective borders, and so the Mark designated in especial ‘those forests and wastes by which the arable is enclosed, and which separate the possessions of one tribe from those of another.’¹⁶ As the Mark was inseparable from its own margins, Kemble derived the Mark’s first principle, as an encirclement of heath-land, forest, fen-land and pasture-land, which could not be put to use as arable-land,¹⁷ and which represented the absolute limits of a particular community’s jurisdiction.¹⁸ Should a piece of marginal land (OE *mearcland*) become a private estate, that is become *bocland*, it would cease to become mearcland by definition.¹⁹ As this theory could not take direct supporting evidence from charters by definition, Kemble turned to the Old English poem *Guthlac B* for corroboration, concluding from the description of the Guthlacian mearcland as ‘idel ond æmen’ that such a space was free from property-rights as a condition of its existence.²⁰ The implication, not stated directly by Kemble, was that a poetic landscape directly reflected the reality of the landscape around the poet. This is in fact a direct reversal of

¹¹ Kemble, *The Saxons in England, Vol. I*, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1876), p. 36

¹² Gaius Cornelius Tacitus, *Germania*, in E. B. Williston (ed.) *Five Books of the History of C. Cornelius Tacitus*, (Hartford, O.D. Cooke, 1826), xxvi., p. 254

¹³ Kemble, *The Saxons in England*, pp. 36-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 37

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 42

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 43

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 44

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 43, 49-50

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 44 n.

Macaulay's quasi-romantic 'landscape painting.' To extend the metaphor, Kemble's model had less in common with the Romantic 'lamp' of emotive landscapes, and more with the mimetic 'mirror' of nineteenth century realism. Kemble used other Old English poems in a similar way. From a line in *Juliana*, he argued (correctly) that the Anglo-Saxon *cwealmstow* ('execution site') was typically located in borderland spaces, and, speculatively, that the symbolism of such landmarks helped to guarantee the *mearcland's* indivisibility.²¹ Using the description of the Mermedonian *mearcland* in *Andreas* as 'eall...morthre bewunded' ('entirely wound by murder'),²² alongside a stature of Ine's regarding the slaying of a stranger passing through a wood,²³ he explained that the idea of an ever-present possibility of sudden death in such spaces served as a defensive buffer protecting the arable land the divisive threat of outsiders.²⁴

To Kemble this threat of division and alienation of *mearcland* was a mechanism for inevitable historical change, at least once the influx of Christianity had diminished the sacredness of the Mark²⁵: 'The natural tendency of this state of isolation,' he wrote, 'is to give way.'²⁶ Kemble thus saw the history of the Anglo-Saxon landscape in three distinct phases. At the beginning was the 'Mark', a series of small, nucleated settlements surrounded by uncultivated and protective *mearcland*. As increasingly larger political units were established, first the *scir*, and later the *rice*, the intervening *mearcland* moved from the periphery to the agricultural centre, and itself became *folcland*. Thirdly, the former *mearcland* increasingly became an entirely divisible and alienable feudal appurtenance of *bocland*.²⁷ Kemble's description of this process was tinged with an elegiac sentiment for this primitive liberty which occasionally becomes visible.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Andreas* in George Philip Krapp (ed.), *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles* (New York: Ginn & Co., 1906); Kenneth R. Brooks, *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961)

²³ For the stature, see 'Ine's Code' in Felix Liebermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen, Vol. I* (Halle: M. Neimeyer, 1903), Ine, pp. 98-9, xxi. A very similar statute of a similar date was issued by Whittræd of Kent, cf. 'Wihtræd's Code' in Liebermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze*, p. 14, xxiii.

²⁴ Kemble, *The Saxons*, pp. 46-7

²⁵ Ibid. p. 50

²⁶ Ibid. p. 48

²⁷ Ibid. p. 47-50

And this process will be repeated and continue until the family becomes a tribe, and the tribe a kingdom; when the intervening boundary lands, cleared, drained and divided, will have been clothed with golden harvests, or portioned out in meadows and common pastures, appurtenant to villages; and the only marks remaining will be the barren mountain and moor of the frontiers, the deep unforded rivers, and the great ocean that washes the shores of the continent.²⁸

This nostalgia helps to explain Kemble's attitudes to his sources. The poems and, in particular, the charters that Kemble so diligently listed and edited were both mirrors to a lost earlier time, a body of Anglo-Saxon *incunabula* from which he might derive an English *Markverfassung*. In an 1842 letter to Jakob Grimm, Kemble lamented the paucity of post-Conquest English sources compared to those available for Grimm's *Weisthümer*.

Perhaps a work of some resemblance to yours might be compiled from the rolls for the various manors, though very far inferior to the *Weisthümer* in extent and interest: the whole mark verfassung must have ceased to exist in England at so early a period even before the Norman invasion, as to leave but a dull uniformity over all the country in place of the endless variety which seems to have prevailed so long with you.²⁹

At the same time, diplomatic sources were themselves related to the cause of the effacement of the 'Mark', as the instruments by which *bocland* was granted and acknowledged. Poetic works were similarly dichotomous; on the one hand, a work such as *Beowulf* contained relics of a tradition that was in some cases demonstrably pre-Christian and pagan. At the same time, he recognised that such relics were predominately, and perhaps indivisibly, Christian in theme, as a precondition of their survival. It is this dichotomy which, in the context of Kemble's almost dogmatic insistence on the existence of a lost *Markverfassung*, undoubtedly led to the central

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ J.M. Kemble, 'Letter to Jakob Grimm, September 16th, 1842' in Raymond A. Wiley (ed.) *John Mitchell Kemble and Jakob Grimm: A Correspondence, 1832 – 1852*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 242-3

methodological flaw in the first volume of *The Saxons in England*, and which destroyed the integrity of the entire theory.

The problem was that this dichotomy allowed Kemble's theory to claim veracity from both positive and negative evidence, as well as a lack of either. Positive evidence substantiated the existence of the 'Mark', negative evidence was proof of its effacement. Thus, it could literally find itself, to a certain degree, in anything. For example, Kemble was able to disregard a comparative lack of *mearc* words in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic and legal sources, as opposed to the much later continental texts which his German contemporaries had drawn upon, on the grounds that 'the system founded upon what it represents yielded in England earlier than in Germany to extraneous influences.'³⁰ When he wanted to use a source beyond the age of Bede, and in the absence of written sources for Germanic law and society contemporaneous with the Anglo-Saxon migration, Kemble was forced to rely heavily on short extracts from a single much earlier source, Tacitus' *Germania*. To support his interpretation of these extracts, texts which were written down only in the tenth or eleventh centuries were used as evidence of the most speculative of hypotheses relating to periods predating their manuscripting by centuries. There was simply no room for local variance; these *incunabula* were simply considered mutually analogous legal and political urtexts for 'every state which they [the Germanic peoples] founded upon the ruins of the Roman power.'³¹

'Mark theory' remained current in English scholarship for some thirty years or so, before a series of various new and less 'Teutonic' settlement theories replaced it in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, beginning with Frederic Seebohm's *The English Village Community* in 1883. Even William Stubbs, an enthusiastic adherent of 'mark-theory', added disclaimers in his *Constitutional History* that it could not be said that the 'Mark' system brought to England was 'entire' or was ever the basis of local administration.³² More partisan was the reply of the Romanist historian Fustel de Coulanges, who rubbished the Germanists' suggestions that the oft-cited extracts from

³⁰ Kemble, *The Saxons in England*, p. 36

³¹ Kemble, 'Letter to Jakob Grimm', p. 243

³² William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development, Vol. I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), pp. 83-4

Tacitus and Caesar were in any sense describing communities of free-men who held land in common.³³ By the end of the nineteenth century, the ‘Mark’ had thus become a cautionary tale against excessive historical speculation in the same way that Macaulay’s *History* was against excessive historical anachronism. In Fredrick Maitland essay ‘On the Surnames of English Villages’, reflecting on the apparent correlation between early hundreds and townships as evidence for the agricultural origins of urban settlements, he concluded with a strong refusal to venture into ‘speculations’ of such a kind, despite the fact that it would have actually supported his own hypothesis.³⁴ Thus, by the time Frank Stenton turned his scrupulous eye upon Kemble’s model in 1912, he could comfortably say that ‘the disproof of this theory has long been a commonplace of the examination room’.³⁵

The tendency to speculate and ‘fill in the gaps’ was a trait of Kemble’s work in general, and it was this which often led to such brilliant insights as the deciphering Cuneulf’s runic signature, or his toponymic insights on pagan place-names and the –ingas suffix. The multi-volume *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici* is still held in high esteem today, and there are still a number of charters for which it must still be consulted as the only modern printed edition.³⁶ Despite the more recent contention of Allen Frantzen to the contrary,³⁷ few would disagree with Stenton’s assessment that any work on early English history before *Codex Diplomaticus* should be considered ‘in a very real sense, pre-historic.’³⁸ Frequently he went far beyond the realms of reasonable conjecture, for example in his memorable claim that in the Old English re-workings of Biblical apocrypha in the *Vercelli Book*, ‘the classical original becomes an equally

³³ Fustel de Coulanges, *The Origin of Property in Land*, ed. and trans. by Maragert Ashley (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892), pp. 4-10

³⁴ Frederic William Maitland, ‘On the Surnames of English Villages’ in A. L. Fisher (ed.) *The Collected Papers of Frederic William Maitland, Vol. II*, ed. H. A. L. Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), pp. 94-5

³⁵ Frank M. Stenton, ‘Frederic Seebohm’ in Doris Mary Stenton (ed.), *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England, Being the Collected Papers of Frank Merry Stenton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 17

³⁶ e.g. S 1454, S 1521, S 1524, S 1529, S 1535, S 1539, S 1548, S 1550, S 1553, S 1554, S 1564, S 1565, S 1564, S 1638. All are, however, available online at The Electronic Sawyer (last accessed 14 May 2014) <http://www.esawyer.org.uk>

³⁷ Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, p. 57-8

³⁸ Stenton, ‘Frederic Seebohm’, p. 16

original Germanic poem, in all but the subject.’³⁹ In the case of ‘mark-theory’, it is not so much that many of its principle historical claims are demonstrably untrue, but that they are simply beyond historical verification. When ‘mark theory’ is discussed today, it is generally done so by the same specialists who ‘now read Macaulay’.

In fact, very few modern scholars have revisited mark theory. Eric John’s provocative essay ‘Folcland Reconsidered’ is the only work I know that comes close to doing so from a ‘hard’ historical perspective, and whilst it contributed significantly to the modern negative definition of folcland as not bocland,⁴⁰ his argument that folcland is a form of exclusively non-hereditary *laenland* flounders because it ultimately depends on that great poetic magnet for unwarranted historicism, *The Battle of Maldon*.⁴¹ My contention is that the secondary, literary aspects of Kemble’s ‘mark theory’ should at least be revisited synchronically, outside of the unfeasible historicism that consigned Kemble’s theory to the untilled fields of the academic marches; the problems of dating associated with Old English poetry make it anathema to diachronic approaches.⁴² I wholeheartedly agree with Elaine Treharne’s assertion that ‘to make a mark in this rich semantic field of the border requires greater thought by scholars, and only then will we begin to unravel the border’s complexity and significance in the early medieval world.’⁴³ The use of poetic texts in *The Saxons in England* opens a number of intriguing avenues of inquiry. Firstly, given the modern near-revolution in the understanding of the range of classical, patristic and contemporary learning available thanks to scholars like Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, we now have a rough approximation of the various theological, liturgical, educational, poetic and scientific horizons visible to the erudite Anglo-Saxon poet, a source not available to Kemble; which of these could

³⁹ John Mitchell Kemble, *The Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis* (London: The Ælfric Society, 1843), p. xv.

⁴⁰ See Stephen Baxter & John Blair, ‘Land Tenure and Royal Patronage in the Early English Kingdom: A Model and a Case Study.’ *Anglo-Norman Studies* 28 (2006), 19-46. pp. 22-3

⁴¹ Eric John, ‘Folcland Reconsidered’ in *Orbis Britanniae* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966) pp. 121-2

⁴² For the problems associated with compositional dating of most Old English poetry, even relatively, see the divergent opinions in the wake of the famous 1980 conference in Toronto on the dating of Beowulf, e.g. John C. Pope ‘On the Date of Composition of Beowulf;’ E. G. Stanley ‘The Date of Beowulf: Some Doubts and No Conclusions;’ Nicholas Howe, ‘The Uses of Uncertainty: On the Dating of Beowulf’, all in Colin Chase (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997)

⁴³ Elaine Treharne, ‘Borders’ in Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée R. Trilling (eds.), *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 20

provide usable conceptions of worldly boundaries, and how might they translate into the vernacular? The first three chapters of this essay explore these two questions, within a broad spectrum of Latin and Old English literary genres. Secondly, Kemble was unafraid to ascribe a parity of meaning to legal and poetic texts, confident that they shared in a mutual vocabulary: might we also locate poetic spaces within legalistic, and particularly tenurial and legislative, contexts? This question is considered in the fourth chapter by reference to a crucial point of interpretation in the poem *Guthlac A*, the building of a cross. The third question relates to how the longer and more complex poetic work might synthesize and transform these various concepts of the boundary in order to produce narratives unique to poetic discourse. This question I consider via the close sequential readings of two longer Old English poems. Both make use of the keyword 'mearcland', twice in *Andreas*, in the 'Christ in the Temple' *mise en abyme*, and in the main narrative on St. Andrew's mission to Mermedonia, and once in *Exodus*, in reference to the space between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea.

1. The bounds of belief

þæt is wynsum wongwealdas grene
rume under roderum ne mæg þær ren ne snaw
ne forstes fnæst ne fyres blæst
ne hægles hryre ne hrimes dryre
ne sunnan hætu ne sin caldu
ne wearm weder ne winterscur
wihte gewyrdan ac se wong seomað
eadig ond onsund is þæt æþele lond
blostmum geblowen eorgas þær ne muntas
steape ne stondað ne stanclifu
heah hlifiað swa her mid us
ne dene ne dalu ne dunscafru
hlæwas ne hlincas ne þær hleonað oo
unsmepes wiht⁴⁴

[It is pleasant plain and green forest, expansive under the heavens. Neither rain nor snow, neither blast of frost nor of fire, neither fall of hail nor of ice, neither heat of the sun nor incessant cold, neither summer storm nor winter shower can injure anything there, but the plain remains blessed and whole. That noble land blooms with flowers. Neither steep hills nor mountains stand there, nor do cliffs tower up high, as they do here with us, neither valleys nor dales, nor mountain-caves, neither tumuli nor ridges, and nothing uneven ever lies there...]

The tone of these lines, taken from *The Phoenix*, seem self-consciously antithetical to the strife-ridden climatic and topographical tropes so characteristic of Old English poetry, and yet the poetic lexicon and register remains fundamentally unchanged. The description of the paradise is first structured around two short existential statements, the 'þæt is' and 'is þæt' clauses. These are then followed by a series of apophatic lines that characterize paradise in terms of what it is not, calling the reader's attention to the

⁴⁴ *The Phoenix*, ed. N. Blake (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990), 13-26a.

absence of topographical features by mentioning them. Verses beginning with ‘þæt is’ are fairly common in the poetic corpus,⁴⁵ almost always being used as exclamatory sentences to emphasise exceptionalism of some kind, such as the greatness of God (e.g. ‘þæt is æðele cyning’),⁴⁶ a miracle (e.g. ‘þæt is micel wundor’),⁴⁷ an attribute (e.g. ‘þæt is æpele stenc’),⁴⁸ or a place (e.g. ‘þæt is wynsum stow’).⁴⁹ This last sense, taken from the Alfredian verse translation of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, corresponds most closely to that of *The Phoenix*, describing paradise as ‘a pleasant place’ without storms, a ‘sea-calm dwelling’ (‘meresmylde wic’) to be possessed ‘after these waves’ (‘æfter þyssum yrmðum’).⁵⁰ The translation goes on to describe the insignificance of gold, silver and gemstones in terms of vision and blindness, explaining that they cannot ever illuminate the image of true joys (‘æfre ne onlyhtað... to þære sceawunga / soðra gesælða’), but only serve to ‘blind the mind’s eyes’ (‘modes eagan... ablendað’).⁵¹ If we turn to the Boethian original, then we find a geographical specificity not in the Old English version; the gold becomes the sands of the rivers Tagus and Hermus, and the gems become the shores of the Indus.⁵² The removal of these rivers does not appear to simply be a simple abolition of unfamiliar place-names, for which one might expect their substitution for rivers closer to home, but rather a purposeful ‘de-localising’ and un-focusing of the original context, as if any degree of worldly specificity might intrude upon the blurred otherworldliness of paradise. In *The Phoenix* too, paradise is an essentially anti-geographical landscape. Questions as to whether the ‘pleasant plain’ represents an earthly Eden,⁵³ the interim paradise,⁵⁴ or even the female body⁵⁵ will

⁴⁵ 93 instances in Old English verse, according to the DOE corpus. The Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus. <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca> (last accessed 2 May 2014)

⁴⁶ *Andreas*, 1722b.

⁴⁷ *Genesis B*, ed. A. N. Doane (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 595a

⁴⁸ ‘The Panther’ in Muir (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology*, 72b.

⁴⁹ *The Meters of Boethius* in G. P. Krapp (ed.), *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 290

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Philosophiae Consolatio* (Catania: Centro di Studi Sull’ Antico Cristianesimo, Università di Catania, 1961), III, x, 7-10

⁵³ Daniel G. Calder, ‘The Vision of Paradise: a Symbolic Reading of the Old English Phoenix.’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 1 (1972), 167 – 181; Catherine A. M. Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700-1400* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), p. 44

⁵⁴ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 160-6

always remain unresolved, largely because the poem relies upon the negative designation of ‘not here’ to locate itself, excepting perhaps a single reference to ‘in the eastern regions’ (‘eastdælum on’),⁵⁶ itself a commonplace of medieval vagueness. In the first of the apophatic lists, various antithetical groups of weatherly extremes are reeled off, with the result that the plain, and perhaps by implication the blessed soul, remains ‘eadig ond onsund’ (‘blissful and undivided’).⁵⁷ Following this, a series of topographical relief features which might otherwise threaten to impede vision, and thus contemplation, of this whole, are removed. Unlike in so-called ‘wisdom poetry’ such as ‘The Wanderer’, where the *ne + magan* construction expresses the limits of the mind⁵⁸ and the difficulty of achieving wisdom without the experience of ‘wintra dæl in woruldrice’ (‘a share of winters in the worldly kingdom’),⁵⁹ the same formula is used in *The Phoenix* to illustrate spatial unboundedness and indivisibility in terms of the mind’s ability to grasp the entirety of a space. Thus, the space of negation is paradoxically rendered open and expansive in its invisibility.

The Phoenix’s thematic irregularity in comparison to the greater part of the vernacular corpus can, to a considerable degree, be attributed in part by its felicity to Lactantius’s *De Ave Phoenixe*. Both texts share in the apophysis of the climate and terrain, and in fact the Old English text expands upon these, amplifying the harmonic and cyclical aesthetic of the original in certain respects, by pairing together the polarised weather conditions and regularising the frequency of the phoenix’s song. Catherine Clarke, noting similar pastoral (or quasi-pastoral) features, has used *The Phoenix* as an exemplar of what she argues is an equivalent vernacular tradition to the Latin *locus amoenus*.⁶⁰ At the same time, it seems difficult to argue against the contrary view, as expressed by Jennifer Neville, that the description of the landscape is predicated by an

⁵⁵ Carol Falvo Heffernan, *The Phoenix at the Fountain: Images of Woman and Eterni in Lactantius’s Carmen de Ave Phoenixe and the Old English Phoenix* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), p. 53

⁵⁶ *The Phoenix*, 2a

⁵⁷ *The Phoenix*, 20a

⁵⁸ ‘The Wanderer’ in Muir (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology*, 15-16, 59-60

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 65a.

⁶⁰ Catherine A. M. Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700-1400* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 41-4

absence of typical nature tropes.⁶¹ Nevertheless, what is clear is that Lactantius' work cannot be the source for *The Phoenix's* anti-geographical obscurity, for the Old English work dispenses with Lactantius' references to Arabia, Syria, and the Sabæan kingdoms as completely as it does to the names of pagan gods and goddesses.⁶² Rather than turning to vernacular poetry, however, we might perhaps locate the source of this attitude in a patristic work such as Ambrose's *Hexameron*. *The Phoenix's* intertextual debt to the *Hexameron's* heavily allegorical phoenix is well known,⁶³ but less discussed is the more general influence of the Ambrosian subordination of the visible world to the invisible, particularly in his vitriol against travel for the sake of empirical curiosity: 'Better,' Ambrose wrote, 'is it to know the [spiritual] things of the world than those spaces which are surrounded by the sea, broken up by barbarian regions, overspread with impassable soil and swamps...' ('melius est genera terrarum scire quam spatia, quae circumfuso mari, interiectis Barbarorum regionibus, suffusa atque invia paludibus humo...').⁶⁴ Part Ambrosian fantasy, part negative image, the underlying message in the extract from *The Phoenix* is that only the invisible world, unbounded and undivided, truly deserves our contemplation. This is simultaneously in direct opposition to the process of knowing found in 'wisdom' poetry and the other side of the same coin. Whereas the 'snottor' ('wise man') in 'The Wanderer' sits in silent contemplation of his worldly experiences, with the hard-earned realisation that 'eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorpeð' ('all this earthly creation turns to waste'),⁶⁵ the 'frod guma' ('wise man') of *The Phoenix* comes to understand, via the allegory of the phoenix, the permanence of the spiritual realm, that 'me þæs wen næfre / forbirsteð in breostum' (the hope of this [resurrection and heaven] will never crumble in the breast').⁶⁶

⁶¹ Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 59-62

⁶² Cf. Lactantius, 'Carmen de ave Phoenice' in *The Phoenix*, ed. Blake, pp.92-96

⁶³ Cf. Oliver Farrar Emerson, 'Originality in Old English Poetry.' *The Review of English Studies* 2, 5 (1926), 18-31

⁶⁴ Ambrose, *Hexameron*, in Carol Schenkl (ed.), *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum XXXII, Sancti Ambrosii Opera VI* (Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1896), II, vii, p.208

⁶⁵ 'The Wanderer', 110

⁶⁶ *The Phoenix*, 567b-8a

Despite the popularity of Ambrose's *Hexameron* in the age of reform,⁶⁷ the nature and description of the visible world was, to a great extent, theologically uncontroversial throughout the entire Anglo-Saxon period, even during the efforts to centralise doctrinal authority in Rome from the eleventh century. Belief in a particular conception of the physical world was not central to one's identity as a Christian, and there was never any need to promulgate a credal definition of 'world'. It is for this reason that today's historians speak of 'geographies of heresy', and not heresies of geography. The great schisms and heresies of late Antiquity, from which the Anglo-Saxon church derived their straw-men and heretical 'vocabulary', more often related to scriptural grey-areas such as the nature and divinity of the body of Christ. Early Christian disputations with pagan philosophers, which could also have stimulated theological debate on the concept of 'world', were generally framed in terms of time rather than space, relating to finitude and prime movers, or, as with Porphyry's attack on his patristic adversaries, on the correct dating of the book of Daniel. Even in later times, the backlash against Aristotelianism in the second half of the thirteenth century generally restricted itself to either refutations of an infinite world in time, or a world moved by intelligences, and one would have to travel at least all the way to the fifteenth century to find any truly paradigmatic theological-physical schism in Western Christendom. Nor was there a tradition of exegesis relating to the Biblical meaning of 'world'. The 'world' in a diachronic context was simply the space in which each of the acts described and predicted in the Bible took place, which had been created in the hexameral tradition, tainted by Adam's sin, renewed in the Pauline sense after the Flood, offered salvation following the Resurrection, and which would end at some unknown point in the present Sixth Age. In a synchronic sense, the world was the short-lived sinful condition of this present Age. Instead, the most important and longest-running theological disputes in Anglo-Saxon England related to the calculation of time.

⁶⁷ According to Michael Lapidge's catalogue, of the five extant Anglo-Saxon copies and entries in booklists of the *Hexameron*, four date from the 11thC, one from the 10th or 11thC, and one from the 11th or 12thC. Michael Lapidge, 'Catalogue of Classical and Patristic Authors and Works Composed before AD 700 and Known in Anglo-Saxon England' in *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 279

That even Bede's strictly orthodox work, *De temporibus*, was not immune to allegations of heresy by 'lewd rustics'⁶⁸ evinces the extreme contentiousness of various temporal questions in early eighth-century Northumbria, even aside from the controversies over liturgy and computus. Responding to his accusers in a letter to the abbot Plegwin, Bede listed various errors in interpreting the scriptures, including the ages of the patriarchs, biblical chronology, and eschatological predication.⁶⁹ Despite such variance, by far the most acrimonious dispute of the period was the Easter Controversy, with significant ramifications not only for the direction of the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monasticism, even if this did not diminish the Irish cultural influence in England,⁷⁰ but also for Northumbrian royal politics.⁷¹ Wilfrid, spokesperson for the Romanists at Whitby, saw the Ionian computus as dangerous not only in terms of liturgical discrepancy, but as a source of heretical division for the whole Christian world.

Pasca, quod facimus,' inquit, 'uidimus Romae, ubi beati apostoli Petrus et Paulus uixere, docuere, passi sunt, et sepulti, ab omnibus celebrari; hoc in Italia, hoc in Gallia, quas discendi uel orandi studio pertransiuimus, ab omnibus agi conspeximus; hoc Africam, Asiam, Aegyptum, Greciam, et omnem orbem, quacumque Christi ecclesia diffusa est, per diuersas nationes et linguas, uno ac non diuerso temporis ordine geri conperimus; praeter hos tantum et obstinationis eorum complices, Pictos dico et Brettones, cum quibus de duabus ultimis oceani insulis, et his non totis, contra totum orbem stulto labore pugnant.'⁷²

[He said, 'We saw the Easter which we observe celebrated by all of Rome, where the blessed apostles Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered, and were buried; this we saw being done by everyone in Italy and in Gaul when we passed

⁶⁸ Bede, 'Letter to Plegwin' in Faith Wallis (ed. & trans.) *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), p. 405

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 405-14

⁷⁰ Kathleen Hughes, 'Evidence for Contacts between the Churches of the Irish and English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age' in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 66-7

⁷¹ cf. Richard Abels, 'The Council of Whitby: A Study in Early Anglo-Saxon Politics.' *Journal of British Studies* 23, 1 (1983), 1-25, pp. 1-20.

⁷² Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. Bertram Colgrave & R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), III, xxv, p. 300

through for prayer and pilgrimage; we learnt the same was practiced in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece and the whole world, wherever Christ's church is diffused, by various nations and languages, at one and the same time; except these ones, the Picts, the Britons, and their accomplices of obstinacy, in two of the furthest islands of the ocean, and not the whole of them, foolishly labour against the whole of the world.]

Bede expands on this in an earlier section of the same chapter, stating that the Ionian church was mistaken in their methods of calculation not because Columba and his successors were not devout, but because they were 'longe ultra orbem positus' ('located far at the ends of the earth').⁷³ The gist of Wilfrid's, and by extension Bede's, argument was essentially that liturgical closeness in the reckoning of time can mitigate the effects of geographical remoteness. By membership of a community 'uno ac non diuerso temporis', even the remotest 'orbis' ('island') of Britain can be united, brought into the centre, and thus unite the 'omnis orbis' ('whole globe') of Christendom. Like Ambrose, the Romanists subscribed to a fantasy of an unbounded world, but with liturgical rather than spatial boundaries as the marks to be negated.

Only infrequently, and remarkably so given the significance of the computus disputes, do the traces of such affairs find themselves demonstrably written into the verses of vernacular poetry. The only explicit reference to the paschal controversy that I have been able to find in Old English or Welsh poetry is in the early Welsh poem 'Yspeil Taliessin, Kanu Vryen'.⁷⁴ A greater degree of poetic historicity can be found in a handful of much later works which relate to the increased emphasis on the discipline of fasting in the early eleventh century. For example, the liturgical poem, 'Seasons for Fasting', deals with the uncertainty over the dates of the seasonal Ember Fasts, a liturgical grey-area which originally arose from the divergent Carolingian practise resultant from a 'filling of the gaps' of the *Sacramentarium Hadrianum*, and was only resolved to any real degree by Gregory VII's 'licet nova consuetudo' decree in the last

⁷³ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 224

⁷⁴ Cf. John T. Koch, 'Easter Controversy' in *Celtic Culture: a Historical Encyclopedia. Volume 1* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 664

quarter of the eleventh century.⁷⁵ In ‘Seasons for Fasting’, England is portrayed as the epicentre of doctrinal correctness.

gif þe þonne secgan suþan cymene
brytt (oþþe) franca þæt þu gebann sceole
her on eorþan ænig healdan
þæs þe moyses iu mælde to leodum
na þu þæs andfeng æfre gewyrþe
ac þu þæt sylf heald þæt þe suþan com
from romana rices hyrde
gregoriae gumena papa⁷⁶

[If, when either Breton/British or Frankish should come to you from the south, they say that you must uphold here on earth any edict which Moses once spoke to the people, you (must) never accept it, but instead you (must) uphold that which came from the south from the shepherd of the kingdom of the Romans, Gregory, the Pope of men.]

Unlike *The Phoenix’s* unbounded nowhere, the bounded liturgical exceptionalism of the English is constantly emphasised in ‘Seasons’ as an inheritance carried north by the Augustinian mission, a motif which Patrick Wormald extended to the whole of *Cotton Otho Bxi*.⁷⁷ Rather than the possibility of an unbounded Christian world, it is the integrity of the English kingdom and ecclesiastical independence that is at stake here, threatened the practises of the Frankish church, and in particular, of the Cluniac reformists.

In ‘Seasons’, as before, temporal boundaries are used to fix spatial ones. In an earlier section, it proclaims that ‘we þa mearce sceolan/heoldan higefæste her mid

⁷⁵ H. E. J. Cowdrey, ‘Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) and the Liturgy’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 55, (2004), 55-83, pp. 66-9

⁷⁶ ‘Seasons for Fasting’ in Chadwick Buford Hilton, *An Edition and Study of the Old English Seasons for Fasting*, (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985); Hoyt St. Clair Greeson, *Two Old English Observance Poems: Seasons for Fasting and The Menologium : An Edition*, (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1974), 87-94

⁷⁷ Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 179-80

anglum’ (‘we here, amidst the English, shall mindfully hold the mark’).⁷⁸ ‘Mearc’ is generally read here in a temporal sense, as ‘month’ or ‘schedules, but it can just as reasonably be read in secondary terms as a spatial ‘border’. This dual sense of *mearc* is heightened by the head of the hapax legomenon ‘higefæste’, expressing both mental fortitude and physical fixity, especially when the common poetic trope of mind as an enclosure is considered. A third sense of ‘mearc’ might also be considered, namely the written mark of authority to which the poem is appealing, and which may well be the spurious canon that eventually found its way into Giovanni Mansi’s print edition of the Gregorian acts, giving an identical Ember calendar to ‘Seasons’ (a week after Pentecost, a week before the autumnal equinox, a week before Christmas, and the first week of Lent).⁷⁹ The closing section of the calendrical poem, ‘The Menologium’, which renders the liturgical calendar into alliterative verse, also brings Britain into the centre of the Christian world, tracing doctrinal authority from Augustine to the nascent English state, and thus radiating outwards:

nu ge findan magon
haligra tiida þe man healdan sceal
swa bebugeð gebod geond Brytenricu
sexna kyninges on þa sylfan tiid⁸⁰

[Now you can locate the feasts of the saints which a man must observe, just as the rule of the king of the Saxons encircles the British kingdom at this very moment.]

‘Seasons for Fasting’ is one of the few Old English poems of which a date of composition can be readily assigned without great difficulty, not on grounds linguistic (the preponderance of Late West Saxon forms⁸¹ cannot be evidence in itself), nor palaeographical (the greatest part of *MS Cotton Otho B.xi.* was obliterated in the

⁷⁸ ‘Seasons for Fasting’, 43b-44

⁷⁹ Gregory I, ‘Gregorius Augustinio Episcopo Anglorum’ in Giovanni Mansi (ed.), *Vetus disciplina canonicorum regularium & saecularium, XVII* (Venice: Tomus Secundus, 1742), p. 964.

⁸⁰ ‘The Menologium’ in Greeson, Jr, *Two Old English Observance Poems*, 228b-231

⁸¹ For this evidence, see Greeson Jr, *Two Old English Observance Poems*, pp. 17-18; Hilton, *Seasons for Fasting*, pp. 10-13

Cottonian fire), but contextual alone; the date of manuscript has been shown by Patrick Wormald to lie between 1001 and 1012x1013, based on the final entry in its copy of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the latest possible date for its episcopal lists.⁸² There seems little doubt that we should also understand ‘Seasons’ as near-contemporaneous in composition with the manuscript itself, as a work created in the context of an increasingly attitude to the enforcement of vigils and fasts as expressed by Wulfstan in *VI Æthelred*,⁸³ and reiterated in more hyperbolic fashion in the ‘*Sermo Lupi*’, where ‘*freolsbricas and fæstenbrycas*’ (‘festival-breaking and fast-breaking’)⁸⁴ are rather improbably numbered amongst the sins of murderer, incest and perjury.

Although concerns about the Ember Days were by no means exclusive to England in the eleventh century, continental writers appear to have taken a more sober and universal line than Wulfstan and his English contemporaries. There is no mention of nations or borders in Berno of Richenau’s roughly contemporaneous *Libellus De Quibusdam Rebus Ad Missae Officium Pertinentibus*, which relates the four seasonal fasts to the four elements, and exhorts fasting as a source of mental-spiritual firmity against the flux of the physical world.⁸⁵ Fasting is important, according to Berno, ‘*ut castigentur nostra quatuor elementa, ne subripiantur a delectatione mundi*’ (‘in order that our four elements are castigated, lest they be snatched away by the delights of the world’).⁸⁶ Similarly, there is no mention of national or regional particularism in the rules for fasting laid out in Burchard of Worms’ influential *Decretum*.⁸⁷ In order to find a similar English conception, one must turn to earlier sources, such as the eighth century *Dialogus ecclesiasticae institutionis* of Egbert, which, although it shares the same calendar and appeal to the authority of Gregory the Great as ‘Seasons’, connects the four Ember weeks with the four elements, virtues, gospels, seasons and the worldly

⁸² Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 172-4; Patrick Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West* (London: Hambledon, 1999), pp. 72-4

⁸³ cf. Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp.342-2 For the wider movement from monetary and capital punishment to penitential salvation ‘through the body’, see Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, ‘Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England.’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998) 209 - 232

⁸⁴ Wulfstan of York, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (London : Methuen, 1939), p. 62

⁸⁵ Berno of Richenau, *Libellus De Quibusdam Rebus Ad Missae Officium Pertinentibus* in J. P. Migne (ed.) *S. Brunonis Herbipolensis Episcopi, S. Odilonis Abbatis Cluniacensis, Bernonis Augiensis Abbatis, Opera Omnia* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1853), vii, p. 2326

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Burchard of Worms, *Libri Decretorum* in J. P. Migne (ed.), *Burchardi Vormatiensis Episcopi Opera Omnia* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1853) , XXIII, ii, p.60

regions in a similar manner to Berno.⁸⁸ When asked about uniformity of the practise, Egbert explains that it is done ‘quia igitur mundus quatuor plagis continentur ... et homo quatuor elementis constat... et ex omni parte quadratus numerus perfectus dinoscitur’ (‘for the same reason that the four regions of the world are held together...and man corresponds to the four elements... and a square appears to be perfect in proportion from every part’).⁸⁹

Theological questions relating to time and chronology thus clearly have import to a handful of Old English liturgical poems such as ‘Seasons’, which appears to have been written with a lay audience in mind,⁹⁰ and is in every way an atypical work. Composed amidst the exceptional turmoil of the second half of Æthelred’s reign, ‘Seasons’ espouses a religiously inspired proto-nationalism unique to place and moment, exhibiting a historicity rare in vernacular poetry. Instead, it is less historicised accounts such as that of Egbert, who conflates geographical and geometrical with liturgical harmony, which might promise to offer an account of the physical world against which non-liturgical vernacular poems can be read.

⁸⁸ Egbert of York, ‘The Dialogue of Egbert’ in William Stubbs (ed.), *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. III* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1871), 410-11

⁸⁹ Ibid. 410

⁹⁰ For a contrary view, see Nicholas Howe, *The Old English Catalogue Poems* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1985), p. 73

2. Eorðcræft and riddle

Although writers such as Egbert gave ancillary geographical and geometrical descriptions of the world only within the context of theological and liturgical questions relating to time and chronology, this is not to say that secular accounts of the physical world were not sources of interest in themselves, most notably in the form of the influential scientific works by Isidore of Seville and Bede which both go by the name of *De natura rerum*. Isidore of Seville's *De natura rerum* had reached England by the late seventh century, possibly via Ireland, and quickly enjoyed a sustained period of popularity in the eighth century in England and then Germany, appearing in an early eighth century library catalogue linked by Lapidge to Willibrord's mission in the Low Countries,⁹¹ although citations in Ælfric's *De temporibus*⁹² and Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*⁹³ demonstrate the high regard held for it by the intellectual giants of late Anglo Saxon England. The text begins with the division of time into day and night, working its way up through the week, month, solstice and the year, and only then arriving at the world itself. In *De natura*, Isidore defines the world in two ways. Firstly, he uses an agglomerative definition, explaining that the world is both the sum of everything which stands in the sky and on earth ('mundus est uniuersitas omnis quae constat ex caelo et terra')⁹⁴ and also a space in which scripture can sometimes find its way onto sinners ('per mundum nonnunquam Scriptura peccatores insinuet').⁹⁵ As such, the Isidorean cosmos is itself a hybrid of classical and scriptural authorities, leaping between the physical and the spiritual, as Brehault put it, 'without any feeling of uncertainty or any fear of getting lost'.⁹⁶ Isidore's description of the earth's geography, however, which makes up *De natura*'s final chapter, describes the three continents and their aquiferous boundaries in the classical *orbis terrae* fashion.⁹⁷ The final lines of the

⁹¹ Lapidge, 'Catalogue of Classical and Patristic Authors', p. 310; Michael Lapidge 'Appendix B Eighth-Century Inventories of Latin Books from the Area of the Anglo-Saxon Mission in *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, p.154.

⁹² ed. J. Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville, Traité de la nature* (Bordeaux, 1960), *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk> (last accessed 3 July 2000)

⁹³ Lapidge, 'Catalogue of Classical and Patristic Authors', 310

⁹⁴ Isidore of Seville, *De Natura Rerum*, ed. Gustav Becker (Berlin: Weidmann, 1857) ix, p.21

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ernest Brehaut, *An Encyclopedist of the Dark Ages: Isidore of Seville* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), p.64

⁹⁷ Isidore, *DNR*, xlvi, p.78-9

work cite the Ambrosian *Hexameron*, and involve a radical reconfiguring of Ambrose's approbation at the empirical sciences.

Quid mihi quaerere quae sit eius mensura circuitus, quam geometrae centum octoginta millibus stadiorum aestimaverunt?⁹⁸ -Ambrose, *Hexameron*

[What concern is it to me to inquire of the measurements of the circumference, which the geometers estimate to be one hundred and eighty thousand miles?]

Totius autem terrae mensuram geometrae centum octoginta millium stadiorum aestimaverunt.⁹⁹ - Isidore, *De natura rerum*

[The geometers estimate that the measurement of the whole earth is one hundred and eighty thousand miles.]

Here, Isidore is using the citation from Ambrose to frame geographical questions within the sphere of geometry, and thus properly to distinguish it in the quadrivium syllabus outside of questions relating to space and time together (i.e. in astronomy). However, Isidore has culled it from a section of the *Hexameron* where Ambrose is criticising just such practices for vaingloriously presuming the possibility of a knowledge of the world in geometric terms, because it is the prerogative of the divinity alone.¹⁰⁰ Going on to contrast the 'worthless' and 'usurpatory' mathematical doctrines of the Egyptians to the devout wisdom of Moses, Ambrose remarks that Moses knew only to describe those things 'quae ad virtutis spectarent profectum' ('which might be considered to benefit our salvation').¹⁰¹ In the *Etymologies*, Isidore alludes to a similar inception when he explains that the origins of the discipline of geometry were to be found in Egyptian practices of land-measurement. The Egyptians, according to Isidore, discovered geometry when faced by the problem of delineating land divisions obscured by mud

⁹⁸ Ambrose, *Hexameron*,. VI, ii, vii, p.208

⁹⁹ Isidore, *DNR*, xlvi, p. 79

¹⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Hexameron*,. VI, ii, vii, p.208

¹⁰¹ Ambrose, *Hexameron*, VI, ii, viii, p.209

when the Nile flooded.¹⁰² From the perfection of this art, the geometers moved to the sea, sky and heavens, until ‘sicque intervalla ipsa caeli orbisque ambitum per numerum stadiorum ratione probabili distinxerunt’ (‘thus, through demonstrable calculation, they had divided the space of the heavens and circumference of the globe into the number of stadia’).¹⁰³

The two Old English neologisms for geometry, *eorþgemet* and *eorðcræft* appear only in glosses, and in their utilitarian literalness they are testament to the influence of the Isidorean absorption of geography within geometry in the quadrivium syllabus. For example, in the eleventh century glosses to Aldhelm’s *De laude virginitatis* in Vi MS. Brussels, Royal Library, 1650,¹⁰⁴ we find the subjects of the quadrivium glossed as *eorðcræft* (geometry), *getelcræft* (arithmetic), *sangcræft* (music) and *tungelcræft* (astronomy).¹⁰⁵ Clearly, ‘earth-art’ was not accurate enough for one pedantic reader, who, in a direct translation of the Isidorian etymology, later wrote *eorþgemet* (‘earth-measurement’) alongside it.¹⁰⁶ Given the importance of geometry within the scientific syllabus, it would be unsurprising to find its influence within the riddle tradition, a poetic genre implicitly connected to the schoolroom, even given the paucity of direct evidence for a complete Anglo-Saxon quadrivium.¹⁰⁷ Two recent studies of the *Exeter Book*’s ‘Riddle 22’ by Dieter Bitterli and Patrick Murphy have emphasised the use of technical vocabulary and calculation of celestial movements,¹⁰⁸ leading Murphy to infer that vernacular riddles are ‘indebted to the various forms of specialised knowledge that made up the core curriculum of a tenth-century monastery.’¹⁰⁹ An obvious starting place for evidence of the influence of *eorðcræft* on the riddle genre is the collection of

¹⁰² Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in J. P. Migne (ed.) *Sancti Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Opera Omnia*, (PL 82) (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1850), III, x, p. 161

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Both Goossens and Ker date all four glossing hands to the first half of the eleventh century. Louis Goossens (ed.), *The Old English Glosses of MS. Brussels, Royal Library, 1650* (Brussels: WLSK, 1974), 47-51, 51; Neil Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 6

¹⁰⁵ Goossens, *The Old English Glosses of MS. Brussels*, 3017, p. 345

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600-899* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 4; Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Literature, 900-1066* (London: Hambledon, 1993) pp. 39-41

¹⁰⁸ Patrick J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (Pennsylvania University Press: University Park, 2011), pp. 111-123; Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 67-8

¹⁰⁹ Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, p. 111

mathematical ‘enigmata’, *Propositiones ad Acuendos Juvenes*, attributed to Alcuin. A number of the propositions deal with calculation of the area of various spaces, all of differing shapes and dimensions, such as fields, towns, a basilica and a cellar.¹¹⁰ Perhaps the most intriguing is the ox problem, ‘Propositio de bove’,¹¹¹ one of the handful of trick-questions in the *Propositiones*. It asks, ‘bos qui tota die arat, quot uestigia faciat in ultima riga’ (‘if an ox ploughs for the whole day, how many footprints does he make in the final furrow?’).¹¹² The solution is, of course, none, because the plough that follows the ox inevitably covers over its traces with earth. The ‘trick’ is that, although two units of measurement have been established in the ox’s movements, the *furlang* or *stadium* and the *aker* or *iueum*, these units are rendered indivisible by their measurement. The notion of simultaneously marking and obscuring seems to derive from a device used by Symphonius’ riddle of the stylus, which ‘altera pars revocat, quidquid pars altera fecit’ (‘whatever the one part made, the other removes’),¹¹³ but it also relates to a physical phenomenon, that the foot is always obscured in measuring the acre and furlong because they ultimately rely upon a real-world performance, even in the most regular field-shapes of the ‘Midland’ type.

Given his great interest in both geography and geometry, and his knowledge of Isidore’s works, as well as the riddles of Symphonius,¹¹⁴ we might expect to find similar concerns in Aldhelm’s collection of enigmata contained in *De metris*, yet his landscapes are more often the skies and cosmos, the church, or the natural world, than the field. In a rare agricultural metaphor in Aldhelm, Symphonius’ pen becomes a device exclusively of marking, proclaiming ‘I cross the white fields with a straight track’ (‘pergo per albentes directo tramite campos’).¹¹⁵ Likewise, in Aldhelm’s poem on the bullock, the animal merely ‘terrae glebas cum stirpibus imis...rumpo’ (‘break(s) the fertile clods of

¹¹⁰ Alcuin, *Propositiones ad Acuendos Juvenes* in J. P. Migne (ed.), *B. Flacci Albini seu Alcuini Abbatis et Caroli Magni Imperatoris Magistri Opera Omnia* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1851), xxi-xxxii, p. 1151-4

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* xiv, p. 1148

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Symphonius, *Symphosii Aenigmata* in Elizabeth Hickman du Bois (ed.), *The Hundred Riddles of Symphonius*, ed. (Elm Tree Press, Woodstock, 1912), i, p. 18

¹¹⁴ For the relationship between the riddles of Symphonius and Aldhelm, see Andy Orchard, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Riddle Tradition’ in Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe & Andy Orchard (eds.), *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 155-161

¹¹⁵ *Aenigmata Aldhelmi* (from *de Metris*), in James Hall Pitman (ed.), *Riddles of Aldhelm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), lix, p. 32

earth and deep roots'),¹¹⁶ without any larger geographical, geometrical or agricultural import. Once dead, it unambiguously becomes leather that 'nexibus horrendis homines constringere possum' ('can bind men with horrible bindings').¹¹⁷

Bitterli has drawn attention to the intertextual relationship between Aldhelm's riddle and the bullock of the *Exeter Book's* 'Riddle 36',¹¹⁸ but the closest analogue to the final two lines of the Old English work is undoubtedly Eusebius's enigma, 'De vitulo'.¹¹⁹

seo wiht gif hio gedygeð duna briceð
gif he tobirsteð bindeð cwice¹²⁰

[If it survives, this creature will break the hills;
if it is destroyed, it will bind the living]

Progredientes, et, si vixero, rumpere colles
Incipiam, vivos moriens aut alligo multos¹²¹

[If I live, I will proceed to break the hills,
but, dying, I bind many living creatures.]

Both *rumpere* in the Latin and the essentially analogous *breccan* in Old English have the sense of breaking into or tearing the soil. In Eusebius and 'Riddle 36', the subjects of the 'breaking' are topographical features, 'colles' and 'duna', and thus can refer metaphorically either to the harrowing of uneven and uncultivated earth, as expressed literally in Aldhelm's work, or to the tearing of ridges and furrows by a plough. This second meaning pertains to the dividing of a field-space, marking the physical

¹¹⁶ Ibid. lxxxiii, p. 50

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Bitterli, *Say What I am Called*, pp. 26-34, 26

¹¹⁹ Orchard, *The Anglo-Saxon Riddle Tradition*, p. 298

¹²⁰ 'Riddle 36' in Craig Williamson (ed.), *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill, N.C. : University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 6-7

¹²¹ Eusebius, 'De Vitulo' in Mary Jane McDonald Williams, *The Riddles of Tatwine and Eusebius, a Dissertation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1974), p.183

landscape in the manner that the *ard* and other agricultural tools simply could not do before the introduction of improved plough technology in the eighth and ninth centuries. At the same time, both *rumpere* and *breca*n can hold the sense of breaking into, out from, or through the hillside; in the Old English riddle, this last sense is foregrounded by ‘tobirsteð’ and ‘bindeð’ in the subsequent line. ‘Tobirsteð’ can either be taken as intransitive, in the active-as-passive sense of ‘to be destroyed’, or in apposition to *duna* in the previous half-line, as ‘if it broke from/escaped totally (the hills)’. The impact of the appositional reading is amplified by the dual sense of *gedygan* in the previous line, as both ‘escape’ and ‘survive’. The contrast of the two verbs of breaking against *bindan* in the final half-line express an ambiguity that cannot be expressed with the Latin ‘vivos moriens’. ‘To bindeð cwice’ can, of course, be read as ‘to bind the living’, but if we recognise, as the Anglo-Saxon reader would have, that ‘cwice’ in this context can also mean grass, and in particular, quitch, then the phrase can be rendered ‘to bind or restrain weeds’. A perfectly reasonable, and in many ways, more grammatically acceptable, reading would thus be ‘If it escapes, this creature will break out into the hills; if he escapes (into the hills), then it will restrain (i.e. keep in check) the weeds.’ That this reading has been ignored, despite being perfectly sensible, is perhaps a result of a critical predisposition towards the Aldhelmian focus on the object itself, upon naming the thing in question and not the space in which it inhabits.

We find a similar delineation out of cultivated and uncultivated land, as well as the crossing of physical boundaries, in another of the ‘ox’ poems of the *Exeter Book*. In ‘Riddle 70’ we find the description:

siþade widdor
 mearcpaþas træd moras pæðde
 bunden under beame¹²²

[I travelled wider, trod the ‘mearc-paths’, travelled over the moors, bound under a beam]

¹²² ‘Riddle 70’ in Williamson (ed.), *The Old English Riddles*, 11b-13a

Bitterli claims that this section can only take very remote support from Latin sources such as Eusebius' *De bove* enigma, which has the effect of dividing the work structurally into a reflexive piece that contemplates youth in the manner of Aldhelm and Eusebius, and a morose reflection upon the present in the manner of the vernacular 'elegiac' genre.¹²³ Thus, according to Bitterli, the 'mark-path' serves as a metaphor for the poem's 'oscillation between adopted and autochthonous modes of literary expression.'¹²⁴ I agree that this section has only a tenuous link to Eusebius' 'De bove', but also note that its structure is remarkably similar to the aforementioned sections of both 'De vitulo' and 'Riddle 36'. Again we have the action of travelling through a feature of relief ('moras pæðde'), and then being bound, punning on 'beam' as a feature of uncultivated land ('bound to a tree') and a tool of cultivation ('bound to a yoke'). With this in mind, it seems a step too far to read the mark-path trope as some kind of self-conscious metatextual device. Rather, the *mearcþapas* seem to stand as boundary-spaces between the cultivated and uncultivated, delimiting the absolute extent of the plough in the manner of the bounds of a charter. Indeed, it should not be surprising that we find similar notions expressed in the bounds of a mid-tenth century private grant from Worcestershire, where the border between arable-land and woodland is described as '...swa sulh ond siþe hit gegan mæge...' ('...as far as plough and scythe may go...').¹²⁵ In this way, 'Riddle 36' stands half-way between the abstract *eorðcræft* of Alcuin and more utilitarian standards of land demarcation. Similarly, in the 'Journey of Othere', an original travelogue contained within the loose Alfredian translation of Orosius' *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*, the Norseman Othere's descriptions of the far north are almost always categorised using the binary distinction of cultivated/uncultivated. When speaking of northern and central Scandinavia, the region most familiar to him, he also includes details of the shape and measurement of the cultivated areas. Thus, Norway is described as 'swyþe lang ond swyðe smæl' ('very long and narrow'), with coastal land of between thirty and sixty miles in breadth that 'man aþer oððe ettan erian mæg' ('can either be ploughed or put to pasture').¹²⁶ If, as it appears, Othere is replying

¹²³ Bitterli, *Say What I am Called*, p. 33-34

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 34

¹²⁵ S 1300, *Sawyer Online*. Cf. the boundary-map in Della Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p.245

¹²⁶ Henry Sweet (ed.), *King Alfred's Orosius, Vol. I* (London: EETS, 1883), p. 18

to a series of questions asked by Alfred's court,¹²⁷ then one can start to appreciate just how prevalent hybrid discourses of *eorðcræft* might have been outside of the strict confines of the quadrivium, perhaps as a form of conspicuously deployed cultural capital within the more general wave of translated works in the late ninth and tenth centuries.

¹²⁷ Sally Gilles, 'Territorial Interpolations in the Old English Orosius' in Sylvia Tomasch & Sealy Gilles (eds.), *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 90-1

3. Translating ‘world’

Bede’s *De natura rerum*, which retains much of the structure of Isidore’s work but significantly modifies the contents, primarily by reference to Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia*, should not be thought of as a mere appendix to the better known *De temporibus* and *De temporum ratione*. It was considered to be one of Bede’s signature works throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, and, according to Joshua Westgard’s survey of all surviving manuscripts containing works by Bede, *De natura* was the third most numerous Bedian text produced between the eighth and twelfth centuries, with ninety-three extant manuscript copies.¹²⁸ Rather than beginning with chronological divisions and only then moving to the ‘world’ in the manner of Isidore, Bede begins with two brief sections on creation and the four-fold nature of divine *operatio* in the Alexandrian tradition,¹²⁹ perhaps as a response to Pliny’s insistence on the boundlessness of the cosmos in *Naturalis historia*.¹³⁰ He then proceeds to a much longer discussion on the nature of the universe itself, with little mention of scripture or of divine knowledge. Rather than recycle Isidore’s two-part description of the world when he discusses what is meant by the term ‘mundus’, Bede turns again to Pliny, combining Isidore’s agglomerative definition with the harmonious and immanent structural principles in *Naturalis historia* which ultimately derive from the Pythagorean tradition of an equilibrious *kosmos*. Pliny describes the world as having the shape of a perfect sphere, as does Bede.¹³¹ Both make reference to the parallel adjectival usage of ‘mundus’ as ‘neat’ or ‘elegant’ as evidence of an ordered and uniform structure.¹³² And both then turn to the heavens, before moving to climatic descriptions.¹³³ When Bede turns to the earth itself, he uses the classical description of the *orbis terrarum*: ‘*terrarum orbis universus, Oceano cinctus, in tres dividitur partes: Euporam, Asiam, Africam... hinc intranti dextera Africa, laeva est Europa: inter has Asia magnitudine compar est aliis duabus*’ (‘the whole circle of lands

¹²⁸ Joshua Westgard, ‘Bede in the Carolingian Age and Beyond’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 211

¹²⁹ Bede, *De Natura Rerum* in J. P. Migne (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae, Anglo-Saxonis Presbyteri, Opera Omnia, Vol. I. Opera Didascalica* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1861), i-iii, pp.187-81, 192

¹³⁰ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, ed. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff (Leipzig, Teubner. 1906), II, i, p. 128-9

¹³¹ Bede, *DNR*, pp. 193-4; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, II, lxiv, p.188

¹³² *Ibid.* xlvi, p. 275-6; II, iii, p. 130

¹³³ *Ibid.* v.- xxxvi, p. 197-255; II, vi-lxvi, p. 136-190

enclosed by the Ocean is divided into three parts: Europe, Asia, and Africa...Africa is on the right, and Europe is on the left. Asia is between them, and is of a similar size to the other two together.')¹³⁴

Given the exceptionally widespread diffusion of Bede's work, it is perhaps surprising that, for all the schematic diagrams of the cosmos, Macrobian zonal 'maps', and simplified O-T diagrams that lurk in the margins of various manuscripts, only one true world map from the entire Anglo-Saxon period is extant, the full-leaf *mappa mundi* contained in MS Cotton Tiberius B v.¹³⁵ Likewise, when the influence of Pliny appears in the vernacular, it tends to be in discrete units, as the curiosities of the *Liber Monstrorum* or the *Wonders of the East*, and any suggestion of equilibrious divine will in vernacular poetry is quickly undone by the perennial threat of nature's disorder and rebelliousness.¹³⁶ At the same time, there exist the two complex encyclopaedic miscellanies of the kind which Nicholas Howe called 'books of elsewhere',¹³⁷ Cotton Tiberius B v and Vitellius A xv, which gather together apparently unrelated textual genres, ranging from works of *physica* to heroic epic, without any immediately graspable principles of arrangement. Alongside the *mappa mundi*, Tiberius B v bundles geographical texts such as Priscian's translation of the *Periegesis*, Old English and Latin versions of *Wonders of the East*, and a list of Archbishop Sigeric's stopping points on his return from Rome, alongside royal genealogies, Ælfric's Bedian scientific work, *De temporibus anni*, and various computistical and astronomical works. The equally eclectic Vitellius A xv contains, amongst other works, *Beowulf*.

A point of synthesis between Latin scientific work and Old English poetic epic, a median point of negotiation between the 'here' and the 'elsewhere', can perhaps be found in Ælfric's *De temporibus anni*, an ambitious attempt to translate the central tenets of the *De natura rerum* and *De temporibus* works into Old English. Ælfric's work

¹³⁴ Bede, *DNR*, li, p. 276

¹³⁵ Cf. P. McGurk, 'The Mappa Mundi' in P. McGurk, D.N. Dumville, M.R. Godden, Ann Knock (eds.), *An Eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon illustrated miscellany: British Library Cotton Tiberius B.V. Part I, together with leaves from British Library Cotton Nero D.II* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 79-86

¹³⁶ Jeniffer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 139-177

¹³⁷ Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 151-179

generally follows in the tracks of Bede's works, and to a lesser extent, Isidore's, but is by no means a direct rendering, as a comparison between their various definitions of 'world' demonstrates.

Mundus est unuersitas omnis quae constat ex caelo et terra.¹³⁸

-Isidore, *De natura rerum*

[The world is everything which is contained in the sky and on earth]

...quid est universitas omnis, quae constat ex caelo et terra, quattor elementis in speciem orbis absoluti globate.¹³⁹

-Bede, *De natura rerum*

[The world is everything which is contained in the sky and on earth, rounded from the four elements into the shape of a perfect globe]

...middengeard is gehaten eal þæt binnon þam firmamentum is...seo heofen ond sæ ond eorðe sind gehatene middengeard.¹⁴⁰

-Ælfric, *De temporibus anni*

['Middengeard' means all that is within the firmament...the heaven, earth and sea are (together) called the 'middengeard']

The first difference is that Ælfric finds it necessary to add the sea to the list of worldly components. This cannot be a paraphrasing of Bede's sentence on the four elements, since 'fire' is missing. Rather, it is because, unlike 'terra', which can mean both 'planet' and terra firma, *eorð* is a concept which is fundamentally in opposition to the sea.¹⁴¹ The second is that before the agglomerative definition, Ælfric adds a spatial one,

¹³⁸ Isidore, *DNR*, ix, p.21

¹³⁹ Bede, *DNR*, iii, p. 192

¹⁴⁰ Ælfric, *De Temporibus Anni* ed. Martin Blake (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), p. 84

¹⁴¹ Cf. Joseph Bosworth, 'Eorþ' in Joseph Bosworth & Thomas Northcote Toller (ed.), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), p. 255

suggesting that the reader would find this the more comprehensible and fundamental description of ‘middengeard’. When he then moves to rivers, seas, and oceans, Ælfric explains that water lies on the earth ‘swa swa æddran licgað on þæs mannes lichaman’ (‘just as kidneys lie in a man’s body’).¹⁴² The idea expressed here clearly has something in common with the microcosmic relationship between world and body as expressed by Berno and Egbert, or in the ‘physical and physiological fours’ found in Byrhtferth’s *Enchiridion*,¹⁴³ but the metaphor works not through the four elements, but through a binary of land and sea. The translation between languages cannot itself be the cause of this change, which does not occur in a more ‘highbrow’ translated work, the Alfredian *Boethius*, in which we find the explanation that ‘ðeah ðu [i.e. the Creator] ealle gesceafta ane naman genemde, ealle ðu nemdest togædere and hete woruld, and þeáh ðone ane noman ðu todældest on feower gesceafta; an ðæra is eorþe, oþer wæter, þridde lyft, feowrþe fyr’ (‘although you call all of creation by one name, with everything named together being called the world, despite the one name, you divide it into four parts: the first of those is earth, the second is water, the third is air, and the fourth is fire’).¹⁴⁴ It would instead appear that Ælfric is here adapting a model used in scientific literature to a reader more familiar with this twofold division of the landscape.

Similar notions can be found in other translated works, for example in the *OE Orosius*. In the Latin version, Orosius describes the *orbis terrarum* by explaining that ‘maiores nostri orbem totius terrae, Oceani limbo circumseptum, triquadrum statuere’ (‘our ancestors divided the orb of the whole earth into three, enclosed by the border of the ocean’).¹⁴⁵ The Alfredian text translates this as ‘ure ieldran ealne þisne ymbhwyrft þises middangeardes, cwæþ Orosius, swa swa Oceanus utan ymbligeþ, þone gardecg hateð, on þreo todældon’ (‘Our ancestors divided all the inside space of this world such as is surrounded by the ocean which is called the Garsecg’, said Orosius, ‘into three’’).¹⁴⁶ Apart from the transition into reported speech, there are two striking differences. Firstly, the expansive description ‘orbem totius terrae’, which describes a

¹⁴² Ælfric, *De Temporibus Anni*, p. 86

¹⁴³ Martin Blake, ‘Commentary’ in Ælfric, *De Temporibus Anni*, p. 115-6

¹⁴⁴ Walter John Sedgefield (ed.), *King Alfred’s Old English version of Boethius’ De consolatione philosophiae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899) II, xxxiii, p. 79

¹⁴⁵ Paulus Orosius, *Adversus Paganos Historiarum Libri Septem*, ed. Sigebert Haverkamp (Torun: Ernest Lambec, 1857), I, ii, p. 5

¹⁴⁶ *OE Orosius*, I, i, p. 8

world complete in itself, is replaced with ‘ealne þisne ymbhwyrft þises middangeardes’. The question that we might ask is why did the translator feel that ‘þisne ymbhwyrft’ (‘the interior’) was an appropriate substitute for ‘orbem’ (‘orb’, ‘world’)? The only solution must be that the *orbis terrarum* of late Antiquity was translatable as a concept grounded in a binary of interior/exterior. This is not a case of hard linguistic determinism. Another word was also available to the translator: the rare technical word *þoþer*, meaning ‘sphere’,¹⁴⁷ and would have been the most direct translation of *orbis*. For example, in the *Old English Soliloquies*, an Alfredian translation of the work by Augustine, Reason asks the philosopher:

Wost þu þæt þu leorneodest þone cræft þe we hatað ‘geometrica’? On þam cræft þu leornodest on anum þoðere oðþe on æpple oððe on æge atefred, þat þu meahtest be þære tefrunge ongytan þises rodores ymbehwyrft and þara tungla færeld.¹⁴⁸

[Would you like to learn the craft that we call ‘geometry’? That craft you will learn in a sphere or in an apple or a painted egg, so that you might be able to understand the orbit of the stars and the movement of the stars.]

In this case, the translator uses ‘þoþer’ to retain the original’s microcosmic parity between apple and earth within an ordered cosmos. On the contrary, when *middangeard* is chosen to translate *orbis*, it inevitably locates man’s axiomatic position in the world as, before all else, a geographically intermediate one, upon a land always under threat by the all-encircling *Garsecg*.

When we find the word *middengeard* in *Beowulf*, it inevitably refers to the entire habitable land-space, used in certain formulaic construction, normally on the B half-line, to express the exceptionalism of Heorot’s construction, Unferth’s vanity, Grendel’s

¹⁴⁷ Cf. ‘þoþer’ in Bosworth & Toller, *Dictionary*, p. 1064

¹⁴⁸ Henry Lee Hargrove (ed.), *The Old English version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies* (New York: Henry, Holt & Co., 1902) p.20

strength, or Hrothgar's kingship.¹⁴⁹ A similar purpose is served by 'be sǣm tweonum' ('between the two seas') phrases, signifying everything surrounded by the *Garsecg*, so that when Beowulf's superlative glory is described, the habitable world appears very similar to Ælfric's translation of the *orbis terrarum*: 'þætte suð ne norð be sǣm tweonum/ ofer eormengrund oþer nænig / swegles begong selra nære / rondhæbbendra ('that there was not a better shield-bearer either south or north, between the two seas, across the entire earth, under the course of heaven').¹⁵⁰ Any suggestion that the phrase refers primarily to the North and Baltic Seas, an argument first made by Heinrich Leo in 1839,¹⁵¹ is liable to falsification not only by the 'ofer eormengrund' phrase, but also by the fact that this would purposely exclude the Frisians, Franks, and Vandals, all mentioned in the poem. Alfred Hiatt has recently argued that there is no such thing as a geography of Beowulf but rather a regionalised chorography.¹⁵² I would agree with Hiatt that *Beowulf* cannot be directly mapped to a modern cartography, but would instead stress the fundamental abstraction of *middengeard* that unifies *Beowulf's* multifarious places, times and inhabitants in such formulaic phrases, a conceptual schema of sea/earth and inside/outside through which statements of greater specificity can then be expressed. As Tolkien remarked, in *Beowulf* 'the particular is on the outer edge, the essential in the centre.'¹⁵³

As one would expect, the interaction between land and sea is most pronounced at the points at which they meet. The qualities of these mixed spaces, or 'mutable boundaries', as Kelley Wickham-Crowley has called them, frequently owe more to 'cultural perception' than descriptive felicity,¹⁵⁴ typically making use of an assortment of topographic and climatic tropes that express an excess of indeterminacy in place and material. Most indefinite and undetermined of all these mixed spaces is the 'storm at

¹⁴⁹ *Beowulf* in R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Klaeber's *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, Fourth Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 75b, 504b, 751b, 1771b, but 2996a

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 358-61a

¹⁵¹ Heinrich Leo, 'Beowulf' in Andreas Haarder & T. A. Shippey (eds. and trans.), *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 221-2

¹⁵² Alfred Hiatt, 'Beowulf off the Map.' *Anglo-Saxon England*, 38, (2009), 11-40, pp. 16-18

¹⁵³ J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Monsters and the Critics' in *The Monsters and the Critics: And Other Essays* (London: George Allen and Unwin: 1983), p. 18

¹⁵⁴ Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley, 'Living on the Ecg: The Mutable Boundaries of Land and Water in Anglo-Saxon Contexts' in Clare A. Lees & Gillian R. Overing (eds.), *A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes* (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 85

sea' topos. For example, in the first riddle contained in the *Exeter Book*, four different 'powers' of wind are described in turn: the submarine, subterranean, the sea-storm, and the thunder-storm.¹⁵⁵ The relationship of these descriptions to 'scientific' literature remains obscure. These four powers do not seem to correlate to the most obvious source, the four Cardinal Winds. There is no sense of the geographical orientation associated with them, or the properties given to them in the *physica* works of Isidore¹⁵⁶ or Bede.¹⁵⁷ Nor is there a place-name or allusion to a specific location which might refer to Bede's statement that 'sunt etiam alii quidam peculiare quibusque gentibus venti, non ultra certum procedentes terminium' ('each wind is unique to a particular nation, and does not advance beyond a certain boundary').¹⁵⁸

hwilum ic sceal ufan yþa wregan
 streamas styrgan ond to staþe þwran
 flintgrægne flod famig winneð
 wæg wið wealle wonn ariseð
 dun ofer dype hyre deorc on last
 eare geblonden oþer fereð
 þæt hy gemittað mearclonde neah ·
 heah hincas þær bið hlud wudu
 brimgiesta breahm bidað stille
 stealc stanhleoþu streamgewinnes
 hopgehnastes þonne heah geþring
 on cleofu crydeþ¹⁵⁹

['At times I must rouse the waves upwards, mix the currents, and press up against the shore the flint-grey water; the foamy swell battles against the cliff, the dark hill rises above the deep, the darkness behind it mixed with the sea; another travels so that they meet near the mearcland, the high

¹⁵⁵ The poem has not always been considered a single work, but has frequently been separated into two or three separate works. For the rationale for a unified work, see Williamson, *Riddles*, pp. 127-9

¹⁵⁶ Isidore, *DNR*, xxxvii, 62-3

¹⁵⁷ Bede, *DNR*, xxvii, 247-9

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 247

¹⁵⁹ 'Riddle 1,' 47-58b

cliffs/ridges/banks; there is the loud ship, the noise of the sea-guest, quietly it awaits the steep stone-cliffs of the water-violence, of the turbulent sand-bar, when it swells up high and presses onto the cliffs’]

At first glance, one might confuse this description with the similar topos found in numerous classical works, such as the tempest in Book V of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, a work cited by various Anglo-Saxon authors across the period, from Aldhelm to Wulfstan of York.¹⁶⁰ Yet Lucan’s work does not share the defamiliarising sense of spatial indeterminacy found in ‘Riddle 1’, where the location of the storm is both ‘nowhere’ and ‘anywhere.’ Instead, Lucan’s work always explicates a singularity of location at any point in time, naming the sea in general (Atlas’ sea), the particular demon responsible (Corus), the winds and their place of origin (Scythian Aquilo, Boreas, Eurus, Notus), and the seas in particular (Tyrrhenian, Aegean, Ionian, Adriatic),¹⁶¹ all of which affect a particular person, Caesar. Caesar’s ship is at centre of a maelstrom caused by the confluence of various forces which originate from various regions, yet there is always an equilibrious and discernable boundary between sea and land, and so Lucan can say of the offshore winds: ‘cunctos solita de parte ruentis / defendisse suas uiolento turbine terras, / sic pelagus mansisse loco’ (‘The winds defended all the land with violence from each region of their hurrying; thus the ocean remained in its bounds.’).¹⁶² In ‘Riddle 1’, on the contrary, the place of the storm is an anonymous ‘mearcland’, where water and earth are blended into ‘flintgrægne flod’ (‘flint-grey water’). The direction of the winds is onshore, rousing the swells to press against the steep cliffs, threatening the *mearc* that divides sea and land as well as the anonymous ‘sea-guest’. Darkness covers both land and sea, further confusing their bounds. The curious ‘hopgehnast’ compound in ‘Riddle 1’ is generally taken to mean something like ‘a coming together of waves in a bay’, taking support from the Old Norse hop (‘bay’, ‘inlet’) and the Scots hope/houp (‘haven’, ‘small bay’).¹⁶³ The second part, *-gehnast* usually signifies ‘conflict’, ‘battle’

¹⁶⁰ Lapidge, ‘Catalogue of Classical and Patristic Authors,’ p. 319

¹⁶¹ Marcus Annaeus Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, ed. Hugo Groti & Richard Bentley (Glasgow: Andreas & Jacob Duncan, 1816), V, 598-614

¹⁶² Ibid. 610-12

¹⁶³ ‘Hopgehnast’ in Bosworth & Toller, *Dictionary*, p. 551

or ‘coming together’.¹⁶⁴ However, a more likely reading of *hop-* would be the Old English word for ‘dry land in the midst of a fen’¹⁶⁵, frequently found as an appellative in place names such as Hopwas (hop + OE *wæsse* (‘marsh’))¹⁶⁶ and Hopecarr (hop + ON *kjarr* (‘marsh’)).¹⁶⁷ Such a reading would be in the spirit of the confusion and mixing of place and material, and would thus give ‘turbulent sandbar’. The sandbar interpretation also makes the succeeding lines clearer; the waves ‘heah geþring’ (‘swell up high’) at this place because of the amplifying effect of water-shoaling on the sandbar, marking out the confused mearcland that is always simultaneously and indivisibly land and sea.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. ‘Gehnæstan’ in Thomas Northcote Toller, *Supplement to An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 345; ‘Gehnæst’, ‘Hnitan’ in Bosworth & Toller, *Dictionary*, pp. 402, 547

¹⁶⁵ Cf. ‘Hop-’, Bosworth & Toller, *Dictionary*; Eilet Ekwall, *The Concise Dictionary of English Place Names, Volume II*, 4th Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 237; G.J. Copley, *English Place-Names and Their Origins* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1968), p. 83-4

¹⁶⁶ Eilet Ekwall, *The Concise Dictionary of English Place Names*, p. 238

¹⁶⁷ Gillian Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the North-West* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1985), p. 233

4. *Guthlac A* and the mearc of the cross

The modern traveller to Crowland, approaching the Abbey from the west just as St. Guthlac supposedly arrived from Repton, is greeted by the peculiar sight of the late fourteenth century Holy Trinity Bridge. This aberrant three-way structure stands without any trace of water running underneath its limestone spans, a consequence of the final Anglo-Dutch wave of great drainage projects that so transformed the landscape of the Fens in the late medieval and early modern periods. The bridge without water provides interesting comparison with a poem without water, *Guthlac A*.

god wæs guðlac he in gæste bær
heofoncundne hyht hælu geræhte
ecan lifes him wæs engel neah
fæle freoðuweard þam þe feara sum
mearcclond gesæt þær he mongum wearð
bysen on brytene siþþan biorg gestah
eadig oretta ondwiges heard
gyrede hine georne mid gæstlicum
wæpnum wong bletsade [MS wæpnum > ond wædum]
him to ætstælle ærest arærde
cristes rode þær se cempa oferwon
frecnessa fela¹⁶⁸

[Guthlac was good! He carried in the soul heavenly hope, he obtained salvation of eternal life. The angel was near to him, gracious peace-ward, (close) to that man who inhabited the mearc-land, one of few, where he became an example to the multitude in Britain, after he climbed that hill, the blessed warrior, brave of resistance, he readily prepared himself with spiritual weapons... he blessed the plain, but he first raised up Christ's Cross as the pivotal space where the champion overcame many dangers.]

¹⁶⁸ *Guthlac A* in Jane Roberts (ed.), *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) and Muir (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology*. 170-181a

If a person familiar with the marshy East Anglian and Mercian marchlands in the seventh or eighth century read this passage for the first time, which contains the single reference to ‘mearcland’ in *Guthlac A*, they could be forgiven for assuming it to be referring to the marshy Fens which Felix’s *Vita Guthlaci* painted so vividly as ‘...nunc flactris, interdum nigris fusi vaporis lactibus, necnon et crebris insularum nemorumque intervenientibus flexuosis rivigarum anfractibus, ab austro in mare tenus longissimo tractu prodenditur’ (‘...now with swamps, now with peat-bogs, sometimes with black wetlands and milky vapours, and also with islands and thick woods, interspersed by sinuous and winding rivers, in the longest stretch extending from the south as far as the sea.’).¹⁶⁹ In a similar manner, the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* describes the island home of Guthlac’s Northumbrian predecessor, Cuthbert, as ‘undique in medio mari fluctibus circumcinctam...’ (‘in the middle of the sea, bound on all sides by water’),¹⁷⁰ and Bede’s version adds the miraculous appearance of a freshwater spring.¹⁷¹ Perhaps this even misled the scribe of the *Exeter Book*, who seems to have erroneously substituted ‘wæpnum’ (‘weapons’) for ‘wædum’ (‘garments’), the unstressed form of which means either ‘water-crossing’ or ‘sea’. Yet, remarkably, there is not a single reference to sea or wetlands in the entirety of *Guthlac A*, with the exception of a lone conventional ‘bi sæm tweonum’ phrase.¹⁷² There are hills and uplands, plains and cities, but no swamps, bogs, or fenlands, or indeed holy islands, misty lakes, or meandering rivers. Although it is generally assumed that the author of *Guthlac A* had some degree of familiarity with the *Vita Guthlaci*, the relationship between the two works remains somewhat vague, and attempts to flesh out particular instances of intertextuality have generally failed to do so.¹⁷³ Nor can we assume that the *Guthlac A* poet was in any way familiar with the Guthlacian landscape of The Fens. The dearth of any aquatic features completely undermines Frederick Tupper Jr.’s preposterous claim that *Guthlac A* was ‘probably

¹⁶⁹ Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* in Bertram Colgrave (ed.), *Felix’s Life of Guthlac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xxiv, p. 86

¹⁷⁰ *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Anonymo* in Bertram Colgrave (ed.), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life* (New York: Greenwood, 1968), III, i, p. 96

¹⁷¹ Bede, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda* in Colgrave (ed.), *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert*, xviii, pp.216-8

¹⁷² *Guthlac A*, 266b

¹⁷³ For a summary of scholarship on the sources of *Guthlac A*, see Jane Roberts, ‘Introduction’ in Roberts (ed.), *The Guthlac Poems*, pp. 19-29

written by a Mercian, who knew Crowland well,'¹⁷⁴ and renders any attempt to link the demons of *Guthlac A* to isolated groups of Britons possibly residing in the Fens as highly speculative at best.¹⁷⁵ Instead, it seems that rather than sharing Felix's concern for landscape verisimilitude, as promised in his incipit 'principium in principio, finem in fine conpono' ('I will arrange the beginning at the beginning, the end at the end'),¹⁷⁶ the author/s of *Guthlac A* operated according to a very different aesthetic. This absence of marshlands may be an intentional omission to avoid certain unwanted connotations, given that the lone dweller of the fens is a gnomic truism for the monstrous both in *Beowulf* and the gnomic *Maxims II*, the latter of which states with aphoristic certainty that 'þyrs/sceal on fenne gewunian/ana innan lande' ('the monster must dwell in the fen, alone within the territory').¹⁷⁷ Yet this does not explain why *Guthlac A* does not either attempt to work within the Antonian hagiographical tradition to adopt the sea as a surrogate Anglo-Saxon desert,¹⁷⁸ or to borrow from a binarized sea/land image such as Bede's well-known description of the tidal causeway that links Cuthbert's islet of Farne with Lindisfarne.¹⁷⁹

Felix's account of the hermit's shabby barrow shows no portent of Crowland's future grandeur.

Erat itaque in praedicta insula tumulus agrestibus glaebis coacervatus, quem olim avari solitudinis frequentatores lucri ergo illic acquirendi defodientes scindebant, in cuius latere velut cisterna inesse videbatur; in qua vir beatae memoriae Guthlac desuper inposito tugurio habitare coepit.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ Frederick Tupper, Jr. 'The Philological Legend of Cynewulf'. *PMLA* 26, 2 (1911), 235-279, p. 262

¹⁷⁵ E.g. Alfred K. Siewers, 'Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac's Mound and Grendel's Mere As Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building.' *Modern Philology* 58, 1 (1960), 1-10, pp. 13-14; Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 138-46; Lindy Brady, 'Echoes of Britons on a Fenland Frontier in the Old English *Andreas*.' *Review of English Studies* 61 (2010), 669-689.

¹⁷⁶ Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci*, p. 64

¹⁷⁷ *Maxims II*, in Muir (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology*, 42-3a

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Howe, *Writing the Map*, p. 72

¹⁷⁹ Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti*, xvii, p. 214

¹⁸⁰ Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci*, xxvii, pp. 93-5

[Thus there was a tumulus on the aforementioned island built from rude clods, which once the greedy visitors to the solitude carved out in order that the excavators (could) acquire profits there, in which it seemed as if a cistern was hidden inside; in which the man of sacred memory, Guthlac, had begun to live, after establishing a hovel.]

In contrast, in the corresponding illustrations in the twelfth-century *Guthlac Roll*, Felix's humble shack has been transformed into a grand ecclesiastical edifice, complete with crane, towers and decorative masonry.¹⁸¹ Another roundel in the *Roll* series shows thirteen of Crowland's alleged benefactors, led by Æthelbald of Mercia, each presenting charters to the altar within Guthlac's chapel, upon which are written an abbreviated superscription, the details of the donated land, and the conditions of tenure.¹⁸² *Guthlac A* stands between these two visions, uneasily at times, with one foot in the clod-built hermitage, and the other in the towering abbey with its vast estates and spurious cartularies. Its saint is twice lauded as a 'bytla' ('builder'),¹⁸³ the limits of whose landholdings are measured upon two very different scales, at once modest and expansive in size. On one hand, Guthlac links the modesty of his needs with the size of his home.

nis þisses beorges setl
meodumre ne mara þonne hit men duge
se þe in þrowingum þeodnes willan
dæghwam dreogeð ne sceal se dryhtnes þeow
in his modsefan mare gelufian
eorþan æhtwelan þonne his anes gemet¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ *British Library, MS Harley Roll Y6*, British Library Digitalised Manuscripts http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_Roll_Y_6 (last accessed 29 August 2014), f5r.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* f.18r.

¹⁸³ *Guthlac A*, 148b, 733a

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 383b-388

[The space of this mound is neither smaller nor greater than befits a man who daily endures in (his) suffering. The servant of the Lord must not the Lord's will love in his mind earthly riches more than his portion alone.]

This would not be out of keeping with the character of Felix's saint, who shares his bread and home with birds¹⁸⁵ and refuses to either feast nor fast excessively,¹⁸⁶ or with *Guthlac B*'s death-bound hermit, besieged by the evils of a fleeting age where 'feond rixade / geond middangeard' ('the devil ruled across the middangeard').¹⁸⁷ In this guise, he is a figure of exemplary anchoritic devotion, 'þe feara sum' ('one of few') who builds a modest home in the wilderness. This eremitic discourse is most evident in the framing devices at 1a-92b and 754b-818b, where his humble earthly foundations become an example for others to achieve access to the permanent heavenly Jerusalem.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, the mearcland from which he is evicting the demons is vast, and crammed with homes of innumerable demons. Guthlac proclaims, without irony, that 'wid is þes westen wræcsetla fela / eardas onhæle earmra gæsta' ('wide is this wasteland of many exile-places, the homes of miserable spirits').¹⁸⁹ Whilst Guthlac acknowledges that this land was previously a home to many, his strategy of acquisition involves constructing the fiction of a previously uninhabited space, by employing the technical vocabulary of legal documents, in what Scott Thompson Smith has called 'a fantasy of perfect settlement and uncontested possession.'¹⁹⁰

stod seo dygle stow dryhtne in gemyndum
idel ond æmen eþelriehte feor
bad bisæce betran hyrdes

[The secret place stood to the lord in the memory, empty and desolate, far from ancestral land-rights, it remained under dispute of a better keeper.]

¹⁸⁵ Felix, *Vita S. Guth*, xl, p. 122

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* xxx, pp. 109-21

¹⁸⁷ *Guthlac B* in Roberts (ed.), *The Guthlac Poems*, 865b-6a

¹⁸⁸ *Guthlac A*, 1a-92b, 754b-818b

¹⁸⁹ *Guthlac A*, 296-7

¹⁹⁰ Scott Thompson Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 191

As Thompson Smith convincingly argues, this idea of a land devoid of legitimate ownership makes use of the kind of tenorial discourse found in law-codes, charters and miscellaneous legal works such as the ‘Gerefa’.¹⁹¹ I would, however, suggest that Guthlac’s epithet of *bytla* cannot refer to his role as interim steward,¹⁹² but rather refers to the image of a charismatic monastic founder-figure who binds these individual land tracts together, an agglomerative act achieved through the physical and textual mark of ‘cristes rode.’

Stone and parchment had long provided the Guthlacian foundations from which Crowland Abbey fabricated the bounds of the monastic estate. Another of the extant features of Crowland’s fourteenth century architectural heritage are the weathered boundary crosses that mark out the extent of Crowland Abbey’s holdings. Camden, who visited Crowland when it was still ‘so enclos’d and encompass’d with deep bogs and pools, that there is no access to it but on the north and east-side’, found a pyramid-shaped piece of stonework two miles outside of the town with the inscription ‘aio hanc petram guthlacus habet sibi metam’ (‘I say that Guthlac considers this stone (as) his boundary’).¹⁹³ These boundary-crosses are mentioned in a 948 charter of Eadred,¹⁹⁴ a dubious document with improbable witness list that seems to be ten or fifteen years too early,¹⁹⁵ and a curious consistency in the extended catalogue of landholdings with other ‘earlier’ charter forgeries and the record in Domesday. This begs the question as to whether the cross of *Guthlac A* is being used to mark out the boundaries of Guthlac’s divine endowment in the same manner. It seems doubtful that it physically marking the extent of the bounds, given that Guthlac’s cross is singular, and does not occur within a sequence of other such possible boundary features. Another possibility is that it marks boundaries metaphorically. Karen Jolly has shown that monumental crosses can operate analogically as an edge-boundary, by adopting the vehicle of *orbis terrarum* to

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 195-201

¹⁹² Ibid. 195

¹⁹³ William Camden, *Camden's Britannia abridg'd with improvements and continuations to this present Time, Vol. II*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Joseph Wild, 1701) p. 501

¹⁹⁴ S 538, *The Electronic Sawyer*

¹⁹⁵ E.g. Athelwold, who had just began his career, does not attest another charter until 955. The only similarities to the ecclesiastical attestations of S 538 and the other Eadred witness lists are Oda and Dunstan. Cf. Simon Keynes, ‘Attestations of thegns during the reign of King Eadred.’ *Kemble Online*, <http://www.kemble.asnc.cam.ac.uk> (last accessed 1 August 2014).

agricultural reality¹⁹⁶ in the manner of the *eorðcræft* riddles. In this way, the cross might mark out enclosure-bounds through the right-angles of its shape, bringing out the polysemy of the phrase ‘cristes rod’, where ‘rod’ can be understood as both ‘cross’ and the unit of land measurement.¹⁹⁷ A third sense of ‘rod’ might also be alluded to, that of ‘cleared land’,¹⁹⁸ relating the process of bringing land under cultivation with the blessing of the ‘wong’. Certainly, Felix’s work makes much of the metaphorical relationship between agricultural and spiritual colonisation, brought together in narratives such as the ‘thorn episode’, where a retainer of the Mercian exile, Aethelbald, is injured by a thorn ‘sub incultae telluris herbis latentem’ (‘lurking under the grass of the uncultivated land’), which Guthlac then removes by covering him with a prayer rug.¹⁹⁹ Yet the contrasts that divide the spaces of *Guthlac A* never seem to revolve around the possibility of agriculture; it is impossible to ever bring these waterless wastes under human cultivation, leading the demons to ask Guthlac ‘bi hwon scealt þu lifgan þeah þu lond age?’ (‘By what shall you live, even though you own land?’).²⁰⁰ Rather, the divisions of the world of *Guthlac A* are distinguished along quasi-legalistic lines. Two distinct levels of legal authority are recognised when St Bartholomew, ‘se dema’ (‘the judge’),²⁰¹ intervenes, ruling firstly that ‘he (Guthlac) sceal þy wonge wealdan’ (‘he shall control the plain’),²⁰² and secondly that the demons be evermore obedient ‘on his sylfes (God’s) dom’ (‘under his law’).²⁰³ Thompson Smith has explained this as the resolution of competing claims ‘through a final settlement which erases the trace of competing claims.’²⁰⁴ Yet the text of *Guthlac A* gives considerable space to the demon’s arguments, and so cannot be said to be a true effacement, which would require their ex post facto obliteration. In fact, the domain of divine and human authority is marked by a signature that memorialises the struggle for possession of the mearcland, thus satisfying the gnomic statement at the poem’s opening, that ‘is þes

¹⁹⁶ Karen L. Jolly, ‘Tapping the Power of the Cross’ in Catherine E. Karkov, Satrah Larratt Keefer & Karen Louise Jolly (eds.), *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), pp. 66-7

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Alexander P. Rumble, ‘The Cross in English Place-Names: Vocabulary and Usage’ in Karkov, Keefer & Jolly (eds.), *The Place of the Cross*, p. 29

¹⁹⁸ ‘Rod’, Bosworth & Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 801

¹⁹⁹ Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci*, xlv, p. 140-2

²⁰⁰ *Guthlac A*, 273

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* 703a

²⁰² *Ibid.* 702a

²⁰³ *Ibid.* 706a

²⁰⁴ Thompson Smith, *Land and Book*, p. 209

middangeard / dalum gedæled dryhten sceawað / hwær þa eardien þe his æ healden'
(‘this middle-earth is divided into parts; the lord shows where those who maintain his
law dwell’).²⁰⁵

In the Pseudo-Ingulf portion of the *Historia Croylandensis*, in a digression from the long section on the Herewardian insurrection, the author contrasts the Norman wax seal with the Anglo-Saxon method of marking subscriptions ‘cum crucibus aureis aliisque sacris signaculis’ (‘with golden crosses and other sacred signs’).²⁰⁶ This means of stamping authority upon a document was adopted by the monastic forgers who produced the Crowland ‘Golden Charter’, a pastiche work incorporating a series of elaborate subscription marks above three enormous golden crosses.²⁰⁷ Whilst I am obviously not suggesting that *Guthlac A* is a late medieval forgery, the idea of a ‘manu propria’ signature and authorizing seal can offer an insight into the function of Guthlac’s cross. In the first of his speeches directed towards the wasteland’s demonic inhabitants, Guthlac vows that ‘ic me anum her eaðe getimbre / hus ond hleonað me on heofonum sind / lare gelonge’ (‘I will easily build myself in one year a house and shelter; to me the precepts are dependent on heaven’).²⁰⁸ Later, immediately before he accuses the devil of being a ‘wærloga’ (‘oath-breaker’),²⁰⁹ he describes how the felicity of such precepts requires both act and speech.

ic þone deman in dagum minum
wille weorþian wordum ond dædum
lufian in life swa is lar ond ar
to spowendre spræce gelæded
þam þe in his weorcum willan ræfnað²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ *Guthlac A*, 53a-55

²⁰⁶ Pseudo-Ingulf et alii, *Historia Croylandensis* in William Fulman, (ed.) *Rerum Anglicarum Scriptorum Veterum* (Oxford, E. Thatro Sheldonian, 1684), *EEBO*, n.pag.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Alfred Hiatt, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries: False Documents in Fifteenth-Century England* (London:British Library, 2004), pp. 44-8

²⁰⁸ *Guthlac A*, 250-2a

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 623a

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* 618-22

[In my days I will worship the Judge with words and deeds, to love him in life,
just as learning and mercy took speech to succeed, for he who performs his will
in deed.]

Within this context, the cross could be said to record the illocutionary force of Guthlac's claim. This last aspect works in a similar way to the 'I say that...' clause of Camden's boundary-stone invokes the presence of the addresser who speaks the indirect statement '...Guthlac considers this stone (as) his boundary', an act that is then physically marked by the location of the stone itself. J.L. Austin, the father of speech act theory, called this 'I' the 'utterance-origin,' a formula which makes the circumstances of an act explicit when paired with 'special explicit performative verbs like "promise", "pronounce", "find", etc.' ²¹¹ In Guthlac's case, the 'I...' utterance-origin is described retrospectively in the third person, 'ærest arærde / cristes', and then linked through apposition to the performative verb-phrase, 'wong bletsade'. The analogue in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic would be the conventional superscription, which distinguishes between the 'I' that enacts and the God by whose will it is enacted, and also the pictorial invocations and subscription-marks that decorate the more illustrative single sheet charters and cartularies. A similar situation occurs in *Andreas*, again using the verb *aræran*, when, by building a temple upon what was once mearcland, Andrew 'æ godes / riht aræred ræd on lande' ('rightly established the rule and law of God in the land'). ²¹²

There have been various explanations given for the 'ætstælle' at which Guthlac plants the cross, an obscure word also found in the 'Waldere' fragments ²¹³ and in the bounds of an eleventh century charter. ²¹⁴ Its use in the bounds of a Dorset land-grant from Cnut to his 'minister and well-known friend', Orc, ²¹⁵ has been most convincingly explained by Rune Forsberg, who suggests that we read 'ætstealles beorh' as 'æt stealles beorh' ('at the hill within the stead'), where the genitive expresses the containing boundary, and identifies it with a Neolithic barrow which was located within

²¹¹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 61

²¹² *Andreas*, 1644b-1645

²¹³ *Waldere*, ed. F. Norman (London: Methuen & Co, 1933), 21a

²¹⁴ S 961, Electronic Sawyer

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

an agricultural enclosure.²¹⁶ Such a solution could give us a much better picture of just what a ‘beorg on bearwe’ is,²¹⁷ if the back to back prepositions that would arise did not render a similar reading improbable (unless we assume that the passage is defective). Although Joseph Bosworth gave the most literal ‘at his station’,²¹⁸ and Robert Gordon gave the figurative ‘as his help’,²¹⁹ most editors since have ended up translating it into Modern English as a purpose clause; Gollancz, Roberts and Muir all give ‘to mark his station’.²²⁰ I would prefer something like Shook’s ‘to mark his standard’,²²¹ or better ‘at the crux’ or ‘at what was once mearcland.’ The best evidence for this sense of *ætstealle* is found in *Waldere*, where it occurs within the context of an unknown speaker, perhaps Hildegyth, exhorting the eponymous warrior to greater battles. The speaker first divides the poetic space into regions of battle and of safety, saying that she will never have to reprimand him for fleeing behind the wall to defend himself.²²² Instead, she says, he has ‘symle furðor feohtan sohtest/mael ofer mearc’ (‘always sought to fight a battle upon the border’).²²³ The sense of crossing boundaries is heightened by the puns on ‘mael’, which more frequently refers to a measure or mark, and in particular a mark of the cross, and perhaps also the preposition *ofer*, which as a noun can mean an edge or margin. In this light, the battle which is fought at the border is itself a kind of *mearc*, a critical point which itself confirms or redraws the boundary dependant on the battle’s outcome. The use of *ætsteall* should be understood in this context when the speaker gives voice to her fear ‘þæt ðu to fyrenlice feohtan sohtest/æt ðam ætstealle oðres monnes/wigraedenne’ (‘...that you sought to fight too fiercely at the ‘ætsteall’, by the battle-plan of another man’).²²⁴ The first editor of ‘Waldere’, George Stephens, noting that military vocabulary was a point in common between ‘Waldere’ and *Guthlac A*,

²¹⁶ Rune Forsberg, ‘Ætstealles Beorh: A Place-Name Crux Reconsidered.’ *Studia Neophilologica* 45, 1 (1973), 3-19, p. 16

²¹⁷ *Guthlac A*, 147a. Cf. Laurence K. Shook ‘The Burial Mound in “Guthlac A.”’ *Modern Philology* 58, 1 (1960), 1-10, pp. 4-5

²¹⁸ ‘Ætstælle’ in Bosworth & Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p.24

²¹⁹ Robert K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, (London: Everyman’s Library, 1976), p. 259

²²⁰ *Guthlac A* in Victor Gollancz (ed.), *The Caedmon Manuscript of Anglo-Saxon Biblical Poetry* (London: Gollancz, 1927) p. 115, Roberts (ed.), *The Guthlac Poems* p. 134 n.; Bernard Muir (ed.) *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501, Vol. II*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 432.

²²¹ Shook, ‘The Prologue of the Old-English Guthlac A.’ *Medieval Studies* 23 (1961), 294-304, p.301

²²² *Waldere*, 15b-16a

²²³ *Ibid.* 18-19a

²²⁴ *Ibid.* 20-2a

suggested that *ætsteall* referred to a military post or camp.²²⁵ Yet, as the preceding passages make clear, the battle is taking place along the edges, in the region outside of the fortifying wall. A later editor, F. Norman, gave ‘at the place where the other man has taken up position,’²²⁶ and the preceding reference to the wall does not discount this, for the protection to be found beyond the wall could potentially be an ‘outside’. Such an interpretation might take a further degree of plausibility when read alongside the account of Waldere’s escape, which echoes Weland’s flight from Nithhad in the second fragment.²²⁷ However, as Roberts has pointed out, the ‘oðres monnes’ clause equally refers to ‘wigrædenne’, and so ‘cannot be accepted as proving so restricted a sense in this context.’²²⁸ Furthermore, if ‘ætstealle’ is implicitly referenced only against the position of another, then to have a b-verse which adds absolutely no descriptive content seems excessive, even given the reiterative disposition of Old English poets. Far more likely is that it refers to a liminal no-mans-land between adversaries, where a decisive battle is to be fought most fiercely just as the speaker fears, and it is with this import that we should read its occurrence in *Guthlac A*.

The cross, then, marks out a political and ecclesiastical centre that was once a marginal battle-ground, and that is now a ‘sigewong’ (‘victory-plain’), by invoking the authority of Guthlac as the ‘utterance origin’. The legitimacy of the rule that has displaced the demons does not therefore derive from collective immemorial tradition, given that the space was initially ‘eþelriehte feor’ (‘far from ancestral land-rights’). Nor can we think of it as an authority grounded in the demons’ trust or consent, except through coercion and threat. Rather, it is in the memory of Guthlac’s role as an exemplar of anchoritic living as ‘þe feara sum / mearclond gesæt þær he mongum wearð / bysen on brytene’ (‘one of few who inhabited the mearcland, where he became an example to the multitude in Britain’).²²⁹ Whilst there might be a temptation to adopt Kemble’s folcland to bocland model, this would appear to have more in common Max Weber’s description of how the individual charisma of the exemplary founder is

²²⁵ John Russell Stephens (ed.), *Two Leaves of King Waldere’s Lay* (Cheapighaven & London: Michaelsen & Tillge, 1860), pp. 82-3

²²⁶ *Waldere*, 38

²²⁷ *Ibid.* 9-10

²²⁸ Roberts (ed.), *The Guthlac Poems* p.135n

²²⁹ *Guthlac*, 173b-5a

transformed into tradition by a religious community which seeks to 'monopolize its privilege of grace and charge for its preservation.'²³⁰ That a similar level of asceticism is not demanded of his followers is made clear by his acceptance of the 'rume regulas ond reþe mod' ('lax rules and the savage mind')²³¹ of young monks. The process by which this occurs Weber called 'routinization',²³² and involves making the source of such authority repeatable, a model used by Michael Chanchy in *Memory and Written Record* to explain three centuries of progressive depersonalisation of authority between Alfredian personal rule and the 'spigurel' ('seal-press') of the Angevin Chancery.²³³ In a similar way, Guthlac's cross does not represent a border or a point of transition in authority, but rather it marks a moment within a larger narrative of etiological commemoration, a progressive institutionalization of the individual saint's struggle at what was once the *mearc*. In his introduction to *Guthlac B*, S. A. J. Bradley has claimed that the work was created 'to lend charisma to the cult of Guthlac at Crowland.'²³⁴ My suspicion is that the waterless *mearc*land of *Guthlac A* was also created with just such a purpose in mind.

²³⁰ Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (London: Methuen, 1965) , p. 60-1

²³¹ *Ibid.* 489

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: 1066-1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 68-9

²³⁴ S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London : Dent, 1982), p. 269

5. The many marks of *Andreas*

The ‘Christ in the Temple’ digression in *Andreas* makes up ten percent of the poem’s total length (174/1722 lines). It occupies the space between two segments of approximately equal length, the first documenting the imprisonment of St Mathew by the Mermedonian anthropophagi and St Andrew’s journey to their rescue, and the second giving an account of Andrew’s torture in and conversion of Mermedonia. Comparable *mise en abymes* occurs in both the Latin and Greek apocrypha with which the poem shares a common narrative framework, although the differences between the three are significant in many respects.²³⁵ However, in all the versions, the digression is entirely spoken by Andrew in direct speech, given whilst travelling across the sea to Mermedonia. Andrew’s monologue is initiated by Christ, disguised as a ship’s pilot, who asks the credulous saint to tell of the miracles of the New Testament. The pilot expresses a particular interest in the Jewish rejection of Andrew’s ‘wealdend’ (‘ruler’)²³⁶ by a rabbinical body redolent of a royal *witangemot* ‘þær bisceopas ond boceras/ond ealdormenn æht besæton / mæðelhægende’ (‘where bishops, scribes, and ealdormen sat around in council, deliberating’).²³⁷ Still unaware of the divine helmsman’s identity, Andrew promises that ‘nu ic on þe sylfum soð oncnawe’ (‘now I will unveil the truth to you yourself’)²³⁸ and ‘nu ic þe sylfum secgan wille / oor ond ende.’ (‘now I will tell the beginning and end to you yourself’).²³⁹ These lines can perhaps be read simply as Andrew’s rhetorical insistence on narrative perspicuity. Yet there is no equivalent in the Latin or Greek equivalents.²⁴⁰ Interestingly, we find ‘oor on ende’ in *Riddle 84* of the Exeter book, where it is used to metaphorically equate the geographical origins of water in terms of the genealogy of kin.

²³⁵ Cf. Robert Boenig, ‘Introduction’ in *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals: Translations from the Greek, Latin and Old English*, ed. & trans. Robert Boenig (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. xxvi-xxxii.

²³⁶ *Andreas*, 604a

²³⁷ *Ibid.* 607-609a

²³⁸ *Ibid.* 644

²³⁹ *Ibid.* 649a.

²⁴⁰ *Praxeis*, pp. 7-8 in Boenig (ed. and trans.), *The Acts of Andrew*; *Casanatensis* in Boenig (ed. and trans.), *The Acts of Andrew*, pp. 36-7

nænig oþrum mæg
wlite ond wisan wordum gecyþan
hu mislic biþ mægen þara cynna
fyrn forðgesceaft fæder ealle bewat
or ond ende²⁴¹

[‘No man may describe its form or countenance with words to another, how various is the mass of kin; the Father entirely knows ancient creation/future state, beginning and end’]

These lines capture explicitly what Andrew’s promise to tell ‘beginning and end’ only hint at: that his narrative will involve the disclosure of both genealogical and physical knowledge.

Andrew’s tale begins by describing the people who flock to hear Christ’s words as a ‘folc unmæte’ (‘boundless or unmeasurable people’). *Unmæte* generally signifies immensurability of number or unboundedness of size, although in *Exodus* it is used to refer to immemorial kinship.²⁴² The phrase ‘folc unmæte’ itself is only found in the *Menologium*, where it refers to anyone beginning the calendar of liturgical observance.²⁴³ Such a polysemic expression, divorced from any qualifying context, sets the stage into which Christ arrives as an unbounded one, in a state of *potentia*, with a population who are an unruly and undifferentiated mass, indistinguishable by geography, kinship, or liturgical practices. Once they have gathered at to the meeting-place (‘meðelstede’), the multitudes (‘herigeas’) listen to Jesus’ teachings, but after he has departed, only the twelve apostles remain.

swa gesælde iu þæt se sigedema
ferde frea mihtig næs þær folces ma
on siðfate sinra leoda
nemne ellefne orettmæcgas

²⁴¹ ‘Riddle 80’ in Williamson (ed.), *The Old English Riddles*, 6b-10a

²⁴² *Exodus*, 372-3, 436b

²⁴³ ‘*Menologium*’, 6a

geteled tireadige he wæs twelfta sylf²⁴⁴

[‘So it befell that the powerful judge went, the mighty ruler, and there were no more people on the journey of his nation, except eleven heroes numbered glorious. He was the twelfth.’]

It seems likely that the ‘journey of his nation’ (‘siðfate sinra leoda’) is a continuation of the Old Testament *populum itineris* and so, by extension, the twelve ‘geteled’ apostles are to be distinguished from the now departed ‘unmæte’ Jewish multitudes by their participation in a new covenant. Accordingly, the logic of a new ‘siðfate sinra leoda’ would thus seem to require that the path of its bygone predecessor is retraced.

The legitimacy of the new covenant is tested when the disciples accompany Christ to an unnamed Jewish temple. Presumably this is the Temple of Herod in Jerusalem, given that the city is described using the same word elsewhere, as a ‘cynestol’ (‘royal seat’); in his homily on St James, Ælfric describes it as ‘Iudea cynestol’ (‘capital of Judea’),²⁴⁵ and in the complex vision of Jerusalem found at the beginning of *Christ I*, we find the phrase ‘cynestola cyst’ (‘the best of royal seats’) in apposition to ‘cristes burglond’ (‘Christ’s hometown’) and ‘engla ethelstol’ (‘hometown of angels’).²⁴⁶ Inside the temple, the apostles are accused by the high-priest of being foreign vagrants who ‘wadað widlastas weorn geferað / earfoðsiða ellþeodiges nu / butan leodrihte larum hyrað’ (‘walk the wide-paths, travel many difficult journeys, and now listen to the teachings of a foreigner without ‘leodriht’’).²⁴⁷ The poetic meaning or meanings of *leodriht*, along with its near synonyms, have long been considered an interpretive crux, and various scholarly battles have been fought over it, normally by recourse to homonyms in law-code and charter. Klaeber gave ‘legal share of the ‘common estate’ for the apparently analogous ‘folcriht’ in *Beowulf*.²⁴⁸ However, unlike *Guthlac A*, where tenurial discourse predominates and so it seems clear that the

²⁴⁴ *Andreas*, 661-665

²⁴⁵ Ælfric, ‘De Sancto Iacobo Apostolo’ in Benjamin Thorpe (ed.), *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church, Vol II*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 300

²⁴⁶ *Christ I*, 51a. in Muir (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology*, 50-2a.

²⁴⁷ *Andreas*, 677-9

²⁴⁸ Fulk, Bjork & Niles (eds.), *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, p. 252

customary rights of *landriht* can be read in a diplomatic context as distinct from the proprietary rights of *bocland*,²⁴⁹ the dispute in the *Andreas* digression is never primarily, but only tangentially, about landholdings. Fulk, Bjork and Niles have accused Klaeber's interpretation of being tainted by the flaws of mark theory, symptomatic of 'Kemble's politically charged reconstruction of early German land tenure.'²⁵⁰ Instead, they fall back upon a broader legislative 'legitimate power over people' for *landriht* and 'legal authority' for *leodriht*.²⁵¹ The slur against Kemble is a little unfair on the man himself, who glossed 'folcricht' in *Beowulf* as 'jus commune'²⁵² and translated 'butan leodrihte' in *Andreas* as 'against the law of the land'.²⁵³ Likewise, Grimm glossed of the latter as 'gegen sitte und brauch' ('against practise and custom'), and regarded *folcricht* and *londriht* as analogues,²⁵⁴ as did Krapp, who gave 'contrary to the accepted custom of the people.'²⁵⁵

The problem with comparing the use of *leodriht* and its analogues in Anglo-Saxon legal and poetic texts is that legal texts generally frame its use within a particular legalistic context outside of the text from which one can extrapolate the sense, rather than through the polysemous nexus of poetry. For example, we might seek precision in the use of 'folcricht' in the *Textus Roffensis* recension of the 'Northleoda Laga', an eleventh-century Wulfstanian redraft of a much earlier document originally pertaining to *wergild* in northern England.²⁵⁶ In the 'Laga', a section on royal *wergild* has been rearranged to extend originally Northumbrian provisions to all of England: 'Cynges wergild is inne mid Englum on folcricht XXX þusend þrymsa' ('The wergild of a king is within England in folcricht, three thousand thrymas').²⁵⁷ Regardless of whether Wulfstan's use of 'folcricht' refers to another text or to oral tradition (as there is no surviving Northumbrian precursor), the referent is made clear by the context: the fixed

²⁴⁹Thompson Smith, *Land and Book*, p. 227

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² John Mitchell Kemble (ed. & trans.), *A Translation of the Anglo-Saxon Poem of Beowulf* (London: W. Pickering, 1837) n. pag.

²⁵³ John Mitchell Kemble (ed. & trans.), *The Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis, with an English Translation* (London: Richard & John E. Taylor, 1843), p. 40

²⁵⁴ Jacob Grimm (ed. & trans.), *Andreas und Elene*, (Theodor Fisher: Cassel, 1840), p. 114

²⁵⁵ Krapp, *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, 115

²⁵⁶ cf. Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 391-4

²⁵⁷ 'Northleoda Laga' in Leibermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze*, p. 458

scale of reparations *in which* a wergild can be found. Similarly, in a provision in the ‘II Æthelstan’ code ‘be landleasum mannum’ (‘regarding landless men’), it is stipulated that the family of an itinerant criminal must ‘to folcryhte (hine) læde’ (‘lead him into justice’).²⁵⁸ Here, the extra-textual referent is the judicial authority *to whom* the prisoner is led. These uses in legislation are so aberrant and textually specific that none can be applied with any real confidence to *Andreas*. Subtle distinctions between legal terminology of the kind found in Langland or Chaucer are often not possible, because, whilst legalisms have a very limited shelf-life and narrow intentionality, the aesthetic of Old English ‘epic’ is, for the most part, consciously in opposition to any sense of historicity or fixity in signification. Nor is it enough to cross-reference the Old English occurrences against their twelfth and thirteenth Latin translations in the *Quadripartitus*, which can only result in tautology. For example, in the five Latin *Quadripartitus* copies of ‘Northleoda Laga’, four use ‘in iure publico’²⁵⁹ and one uses ‘in publico recto’.²⁶⁰ Likewise, the translations of the ‘II Æthelstan’ clause are again subject to exactly the same ‘ius’/‘rectum’ manuscript split,²⁶¹ and their reworking in the *Leges Henrici Primi* gives ‘ad publicum rectum ducat.’²⁶² In all of these cases, the translation of the phrases is so directly analytical that it adds no descriptive content.

Instead of fumbling between the various legal definitions of *leodriht*, the answer to this problem lies in an understanding of the aesthetic values that were prized by the Anglo-Saxon poet and his audience. The *Andreas* poet, whilst likely literate in the technicalities of legal vocabulary and willing to play upon their various senses, was not striving for meanings that were immediately intelligible by reference to juridical or diplomatic contexts. Metrical, narrative and verbal complexity, often to the point of obscurantism, are among the hallmarks of the genre, and, as Emily Thornbury has recently argued, technical difficulty may have actually represented ‘a sign of respect for

²⁵⁸ ‘II Æthelstan’ in Leibermann, *Die Gesetze*, 8, p. 154

²⁵⁹ British Library, London, *MS Additional 49366*, f.60v; John Rylands University Library, Manchester, *England, MS Lat. 420*, f.53r; British Library, London, *MS Royal 11 B.II*, f.143r; British Library, London, *MS Cotton Titus A.XXVII* f.125r. All facsimilies at *Early English Laws* [web] <http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk> (last accessed 16 July 2014)

²⁶⁰ *MS Lat. 155* f.26r

²⁶¹ *MS Additional 49366* f.56v-57r; *MS Lat. 155*, f.22v

²⁶² ‘Leges Henrici Primi’ in Leibermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze*, 8, 4, p. 554

one's audience.'²⁶³ With this in mind, it may be that *leodriht* was chosen over the other legal analogues precisely because they are not poetically analogous.²⁶⁴ Rather, its selection was made because it renders the pseudo-etymological form *leo/drihte* ('lion-people'), foreshadowing the forthcoming quarrel over the genealogy of Christ by referring to the Lion of Judah, the symbol of the Israelite tribe whom Jesus was a member of. With this in mind, the priest's 'a foreigner outside of the Iudah' would be rendered ironic by the onomastic association with Christ himself in accord with to the New Testament tradition referred to in Revelation 5:5. A listener familiar with the first of the 'three natures' of the lion in the *Physiologus* tradition (either directly or through Isidore's *Etymologies*) might recognise the allusion to the lion who covers its own tracks with its tail in the manner of Alcuin's ox, an allegorical presentation of Christ's denial of his divinity to those question it,²⁶⁵ which corresponds to the pilot's earlier interest in those miracles performed 'on digle' ('in secret').²⁶⁶ The lion motif is also referenced in *Exodus*, when the tribe of Iudah, the 'feorðe cyn' ('fourth kin') stand at the head of the army of the Israelites, within the otherwise indistinguishable 'wigan on heape' ('army in a mass').²⁶⁷

hæfdon him to segne þa hie on sund stigon
ofer bordhreoðan beacen aræred
in þam garheape gyldenne leon
drihtfolca mæst deora cenost²⁶⁸

²⁶³ Emily V. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 238

²⁶⁴ For examples of the 'onomastic strain' in Old English poetry, see Fred C. Robinson, 'Anglo-Saxon Onomastics in the Old English *Andreas*' & 'Some Uses of Name-Meanings in Old English Poetry' in *The Tomb of Beowulf and Other Essays on Old English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993)

²⁶⁵ For the *Physiologus*, see the transcriptions of Bodleian Library, Oxford, *MS Laud Misc. 129* and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, *MS 448* in Andrea Rossi-Reder (ed.), *The "Physiologus" and Beast Lore in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Ann Arbor : UMI, 1995), pp.208-229, as well as the Old English fragment in *The Exeter Book* (which does not contain the lion section). Isidore includes the literal, but not the allegorical, description of the lion in *Etymologiae*, XII, ii, 5, p. 434

²⁶⁶ *Andreas*, 626b

²⁶⁷ *Exodus* in Peter J. Lucas (ed.), *Exodus* (Cambridge: Methuen, 1977); Edward Burroughs Irving (ed.), *The Old English Exodus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953); J. R. R. Tolkien (ed. & trans.), Joan Turville-Petre (ed.), *The Old English Exodus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 310-11

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 319-322

[‘They had a standard before them, when they traversed the earth, a standard arose above the shields in that battle-troop, a golden lion, greatest of the nations, bravest of beasts.’]

The notion of the primacy of the tribe of Judah in the battle-order had some biblical precedent, firstly in the transfer of birth-right to the descendants of Joseph following the incest of Reuben, and later revisited in the arrangement of the Tribal Camp described in ‘Numbers’, where the camp of Judah gathered under the lion-standard are the most numerous of the tribes.²⁶⁹ Around this, a notion developed in Jewish exegetical tradition that assigned particular standards to each tribe,²⁷⁰ eventually being included in the *Numbers Rabbaat* at some point in the twelfth century, which explained that ‘the world was a desert before Israel came out of Egypt’²⁷¹ and that the source of human political institutions could be found in these standards.²⁷² The absorption of the Mishradic lion motif into *Exodus* and the *Bury Psalter* has already been demonstrated by Charles Wright,²⁷³ and given the evidence below, it seems likely that the author/s of *Andreas* incorporated it too, through subtle poetic word-play that fuses together genealogical, legal and political-territorial discourses.

In the second part of the priest’s speech, the priest contends that the lineage of Jesus is well-known.

þæt is duguðum cuð
hwanon þam ordfuman æðelu onwocon
he wæs afeded on þysse folcsceare
cildgeong acenned mid his cneomagum
þus syndon haten hamsittende
fæder ond modur þæs we gefrægen habbað

²⁶⁹ Cf. Charles D. Wright, ‘The Lion Standard in Exodus: Jewish Legend, Germanic Tradition, and Christian Typology’ in *The Poems of MS Junius 11*, ed. R.M. Liuzza (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 188-9

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Numbers (Bemidbar)* in H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (eds. & trans.), *Midrash Rabbah, Vol. V* (London : Soncino Press, 1961), II, 6, p.27

²⁷² *Ibid.* 7, pp. 28-9

²⁷³ Wright, ‘The Lion Standard in Exodus,’ pp. 188-197

þurh modgemynd maria ond ioseph
syndon him on æðelum oðere twegen
beornas geborene broðorsybbum
suna iosephes simon ond iacob²⁷⁴

[‘It is known to men from whence that (your) leader’s nobility [i.e. lineage] arose; he was reared in this country, born child-young, with his kinsmen. Thus (his) father and mother are called dwellers of this place, of that we have heard through remembering; Maria and Joseph, there are to them/him another two children in lineage born in the brotherhood of the sons of Joseph, (namely) Simon and Jacob.’]

There are three ways of reading the final line, all involving a degree of deliberate confusion, and the implications of which seem to have been overlooked by past scholars. The most likely reading would be that it refers to the twelve sons of Jacob, and thus the twelve tribes. If this is so, then Simon and Joseph should be the sons of Jacob, and not Simon and Jacob as the sons of Joseph. Likewise, this cannot relate to the ancestry of Jesus in the gospels of either Matthew or Luke,²⁷⁵ neither of which contain a Simon. And if Joseph is the husband of Mary, then this description of the desposyni adds Jacob and excludes James, Joseph (the son of Joseph) and Judas, against the Gospel tradition.²⁷⁶ Both the Latin and Greek apocrypha give the correct James and Simon as the sons of Mary.²⁷⁷ This might perhaps be discounted as a scribal error involving either the swapping of the positions and cases of ‘ioseph’ and ‘iacobes’, or the substitution of ‘james’ with ‘iacobes’. However, if this mistake is deliberate, then the implication is not even that the Jewish priest is genuinely confused, but that he is intentionally attempting to conceal both Jesus’ earthly and divine origins. It is made clear that he and his fellows are ‘dugoð domgeorne’ (‘zealous men’) who ‘dyrnan þohton / meotudes mihte’ (‘thought to conceal the Maker’s might’),²⁷⁸ and so terrestrial

²⁷⁴ *Andreas*, 682b-691

²⁷⁵ Matthew 1:16-2; Luk 3:23-38 in Carol Vercellone (ed.) *Biblica Sacra, Vulgatae Editionis* (Rome: 1861)

²⁷⁶ Matt, 13:55-56; Mark, 6:3

²⁷⁷ *Praxeis*, p. 9; *Casanatensis*, p. 37

²⁷⁸ *Andreas*, 693b-4a

and divine *leodriht* is challenged by this genealogical confusion. The implication is that, in a confluence of dynastic and electoral authority, the ‘witan-esque’ council is rejecting Christ’s kingship by denying his earthly blood-right.²⁷⁹

Leaving the rebukes behind, Jesus travels into the wilderness, and ‘þurh wundra feala’ (‘by means of many miracles’), it is revealed ‘þæt he wæs cyning on riht / ofer middangeard’ (‘that he was king in right across the middle-earth’).²⁸⁰ The proclamation is made in a space described as ‘the waste’ (‘þam westenne’)²⁸¹ rather than within the Jerusalem witan, thus locating the origins of Christian rule within the desert. In this context, the headword *leod-* in *leodriht* points less to a ‘nation’ or ‘people’, but more to ‘prince’ or ‘ruler’, before reverting back to the genealogical sense in the next episode, when Christ animates the image of the two angels on the wall, Cheruphim and Seraphim.

nu ic bebeode beacen ætywan
wundor geweorðan on wera gemange
ðæt þeos onlicnes eorðan sece
wlitig of wage ond word sprece
secge soðcwidum þy sceolon gelyfan
eorlas on cyððe hwæt min æðelo sien²⁸²

[‘Now I command a beacon to appear, a miracle to happen, in the company of men, so that this image might visit the earth, beautiful from the wall, and speak words, talk with true speech, by this men in (this) country must believe what my lineage might be.’]

The stone then rebukes the priests for either intentionally or unintentionally questioning the divinity of Christ.²⁸³ First it gives a catalogue of the spaces that God created.

²⁷⁹ For an overview of the significance or otherwise of the witan’s role in royal election, cf. Levi Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.150-2

²⁸⁰ *Andreas*, 700b-701a

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* 609b

²⁸² *Andreas*, 729-734

²⁸³ *Ibid.* 745-7a.

Whereas the Latin text merely says ‘heaven and earth’, and the Greek text makes no mention of the created world,²⁸⁴ the Old English gives ‘þe grund ond sund / heofon ond eorðan ond hreo wægas / salte sæstreamas ond swegl uppe’ (‘the ground and sand, heaven and earth, and the rough waves, the salty sea-currents, and the sky above’).²⁸⁵ The stone explains that this is the same God ‘that knew (your) fathers in ancient days’ (‘ðone on fyrndagum fæderas cuðon’), listing Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as past beneficiaries of divine gifts.²⁸⁶ In such a way, the space of God’s rule is first delimited, describing the created world using the threefold land/sea/earth model just as Ælfric in *De temporibus anni*. Then by cataloguing the patriarchs immediately preceding the tribal split, the stone gives the correct descent of both Christ and the whole nation of Israel, correcting the priest in the previous episode.

The Jewish elders’ rejection of this miracle is attributed to their doubting minds being ‘morðre bewunden’ (‘wound with murder’),²⁸⁷ exactly the same description used for Mermedoina, as ‘eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden’ (‘that mearcland was entirely wound by murder’).²⁸⁸ Two ideas are expressed here, firstly that Jerusalem and Mermedonia are in some way analogous, and secondly that the Jerusalem has itself changed from ‘cynestol’ to mearcland. This rejection prompts the final and most extreme miracle.

ða se þeoden bebead þryðweorc faran
 stan [on] stræte of stedewange
 ond forð gan foldweg tredan
 grene grundas godes ærendu
 larum lædan on þa leodmearce
 to channaneum cyninges worde
 beodan habrahame mid his eaforum twæm
 of eorðscræfe ærest fremman
 lætan landreste leoðo gadrigean

²⁸⁴ *Casanatensis*, p. 38; *Praxeis*, p. 8-9

²⁸⁵ *Andreas*, 747b-49

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 752-4

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 772b

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 19

frode fyrnweotan folce gecyðan
hwylcne hie god mihtum ongiten hæfdon²⁸⁹

[‘Then the lord commanded the mighty work to go, the stone on the road of the open plains, and go forth to tread the earth-path, the green plains, the message and teachings of God to take onto the nation-border, to Canaan as per the king’s word, to command Abraham with his two sons to first arise from the grave, to cease land-rest, to gather limbs, to seize the soul, and to youthfulness once again to come forth to the wise patriarch, to declare to the people (as to) which (of) them had understood God in (his) authority’]

The obvious connection would be with the harrowing of hell topos. Yet we find no devil, no Hell, and no liminal gateway to hell, no ellmouth. The Greek apocrypha includes a corresponding section, but makes it clear that it is only the bodies of the patriarchs that are to be reanimated, as their souls are in paradise.²⁹⁰ The Latin version dispenses with this entirely.²⁹¹ In *Andreas*, however, the stone gathers both body and soul from the grave. This is not necessarily an irreconcilable point of difference between *Andreas* and Anglo-Saxon literary and visual depictions of the harrowing, which frequently wandered quite drastically from the Gospel of Nicodemus. Indeed, the most eclectic Anglo-Saxon ‘harrowing’, the Old English poem ‘The Descent into Hell’, is not generally known as a ‘harrowing’ at all,²⁹² and even the ‘descent’ element of the name has recently been challenged.²⁹³ Just as in *Andreas*, ‘The Descent into Hell’ makes use of both bodily resurrection and the seizing of souls, combining the ‘visit to the Sepulchre’ and ‘descendus’ tropes into a theological oddity so that the physical body of a resurrected Christ travels to Hell in order to free the souls of the patriarchs.²⁹⁴ Yet

²⁸⁹ Ibid. 775-785

²⁹⁰ *Praxeis*, p. 10

²⁹¹ *Casanatensis*, p. 39

²⁹² Until the publication of Krapp and Dobbie’s edition of the *Exeter Book* in 1936, the poem was generally known as “The Harrowing of Hell.”

²⁹³ A recent paper and book by Mary Rambaran-Olm has attempted to instigate a renaming it to the more accurate but perhaps overly prosaic and potentially confusing ‘John’s Prayer’. Cf. M.R. Rambaran-Olm, “Is the Title of the Old English Poem ‘The Descent into Hell’ Suitable?” *Selim*, 13 (2005-6), 71-84; *John the Baptist’s Prayer or The Descent into Hell* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 1-9

²⁹⁴ Jessica Brantley, ‘The iconography of the Utrecht Psalter and the Old English Descent into Hell’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 28 (1999), 43-63; pp. 49-54, 60-8

neither trope seems entirely appropriate here: none of the bodies resurrected are Christ's, and events do not take place either in Hell or the Sepulchre, but at Mamre in Canaan.

Raising the bodies of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac allows them to correct the priest's false genealogy through their direct testament. At the same time, the account of the journey to and from Mamre is structured around movement along paths and across borders. The stone treads across the 'foldweg'²⁹⁵ and into the 'leodmearc'.²⁹⁶ The composite form 'mearcpaðu'²⁹⁷ is also used, and on the return journey, they 'modige mearcland tredan' ('bravely tread the mearcland').²⁹⁸ One possible source for this bounded space is the biblical description of the field of Machpelah as it is first purchased by Abraham (a near homophone to 'mearcpaðu'), where the trees that surround the cave and field make up the boundary ('omnes arbores eius in cunctis terminis eius per circuitum').²⁹⁹ Patrick Geary has argued that in early medieval Europe, 'property was the symbolic language through which people discussed, negotiated, affirmed, and delimited the boundaries of family.'³⁰⁰ According to Geary, 'memory of the family as a family began with the memory of the acquisition of the family's land, and this primordial acquisition could become the subject of family legend and myth.'³⁰¹ In this way, the spoken and physical testament of the patriarchs is reinforced by a retracing of the bounds which make up the ancestral plot. The borders of Machpelah are outlined in terms imply expansive distances ('fold-') and the borders of tribes or nations ('leod-'), rather than simply those of a field, and perhaps allude to 'Genesis' 13:17-18, where God's promise of Canaan to the extent which Abraham can walk the length and breadth of is which is followed by Abraham's construction of an altar at Mamre.³⁰²

In the Greek text, it is two Sphinxes which journey from the 'desert of the

²⁹⁵ *Andreas*, 777b

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 775b

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 788a.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 802a

²⁹⁹ 'Genesis', 23:17

³⁰⁰ Patrick J. Geary, 'Land, Language and Memory in Europe 700-1100' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Sixth Series* 9 (1999), 169-184, p. 171

³⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 172

³⁰² 'Genesis', 13:17-18

Gentiles' in Egypt back into Israel, first to Jerusalem again, and then to Mamre.³⁰³ In *Andreas*, Mamre and the desert are apparently placed side by side, if we are to take the reference to 'mearcland' as referring to the desert when the reanimate patriarchs 'modige mearcland tredan / forlætan moldern wunigean / open eorðscræfu') ('forsake dwelling (in) the tomb, the open earth-caves, and bravely tread the border-lands').³⁰⁴ If this is so, then the description is entirely apt, replaying and reproducing both the Abrahamic and Mosaic experiences of Canaan in terms of the new covenant, by combining the lineage and land of the Judah with the Jewish exegetical tradition of the pre-tribal world as a deserted political vacuum. However, the account in *Andreas* breaks off before the mearcland can be properly described or a specific location established, as Andrew's monologue ends and he is overcome with sleep. Carried across the waters to Mermedonia by angels and eagles, he is left at the urban periphery, 'be herestræte' ('near the main road')³⁰⁵ and 'burhwealle neh' (near the city walls'),³⁰⁶ an abrupt transition that does not occur in *Praxeis* or *Casanatensis*.³⁰⁷ That the pagan city is in some way equivalent to the undescribed mearcland which follows on from Mamre in the interlude is thus implied by their narrative proximity.

The most well-known Anglo-Saxon conception of Mamre was transmitted through Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*, both in its original form and in Bede's heavily abridged revision. After describing the Cave of Machpelah, Adomnán explains that the walls of Hebron are only one *stade* away, and then, borrowing from Josephus,³⁰⁸ he says that:

Quae utique Chebron, ut fertur, ante omnes non solum Palaestinae ciuitates condita fuerat, sed etiam uniuersas Aegyptiacas urbes in sua praecessit conditione: quae nunc misere monstratur destructa.³⁰⁹

³⁰³ *Praxeis*, p. 8-10

³⁰⁴ *Andreas*, 802-4a

³⁰⁵ *Andreas*, 831b

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 833b

³⁰⁷ *Praxeis*, p. 12-13; *Casanatensis*, p. 42-3

³⁰⁸ Thomas O'Loughlin, *Adomnan and the Holy Places: The Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p.92

³⁰⁹ Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis*, p. 80

[This is certainly the Hebron, as it is said, which has its origin before all the cities, not only of Palestine, but also of the whole of Egypt; and which now has been wretchedly destroyed.]

To Bede too, the Biblical Hebron represented a particularly important city, even in its ruins; in *Historia Ecclesiastica* he saves the word ‘metropolis’ only for Hebron, London and Canterbury.³¹⁰ Isidore claimed that the city was the first work of two built by giants,³¹¹ following a tradition found in Josephus’ *Antiquitates Iudaicae*.³¹² Whilst Mermedonia is not Hebron itself, the two do seem to be of a similar type. For example, Mermedonia is ‘enta ærgeweorc’ (‘the ancient work of giants’),³¹³ a formulaic phrase which nevertheless, in its use here, has more in common with Isidore’s etymology than the sword found in the mere of Grendel’s mother.³¹⁴ Babylonian-era Jerusalem also may have offered a model for ‘breogostol breme’ (lit: ‘famous ruler-seat’)³¹⁵ of Mermedonia, now inhabited only by wretches. Ezekiel’s prognostic account of a fallen Jerusalem where its inhabitants will first run out of bread and water³¹⁶ and then the parents will eat their own progeny³¹⁷ is congruous with the description of a Mermedonia where ‘næs þær hlafes wist... ne wæteres drync’³¹⁸ (‘there was no bread-eating nor water-drinking’), as well as the episode of the Mermedonian ‘ealdgesiða’ (‘veteran’) who gives his up own son to be eaten.³¹⁹ However, the most compelling connection between Jerusalem and Mermedonia can be found in the account by Andreas’s comrades of the procession which carried him unconscious to the gates of Mermedonia.

we ðær heahfæderas halige oncneowon
ond martyra mægen unlytel

³¹⁰ N. J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 69

³¹¹ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XV,i, pp.529, 531

³¹² Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* in William Whiston (ed. & trans.), William Borradaile (ed.), *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus Vol. II* (New York: William Borradaile, 1824), II, iii, p. 143

³¹³ *Andreas*, 1235a

³¹⁴ *Ibid.* 209a

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* 208a

³¹⁶ ‘Ezekiel’ 4:17

³¹⁷ *Ibid.* 5:10

³¹⁸ *Andreas*, 21b, 22b

³¹⁹ *Ibid.* 1099-1111a

sunгон sigedryhtne soðfæstlic lof
dugoð domgeorne þær wæs dauid mid
eadig oretta essages sunu
for Crist cumen cining israhela³²⁰

[There we recognised the holy patriarchs and martyrs, no small might. The faithful host sang truth-fast love to the mighty lord. David was there with the sons of Jesse, a happy champion, the King of Israel came before Christ.]

The closest equivalent to these lines, which replace the apostles and angels of the Greek and Latin apocrypha³²¹ with David and the patriarchs, is the exegesis in Ælfric's 'Homily for Palm Sunday' that those who walked before Christ during the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem represented 'ða heahfæderas and þa witegan, ða wæron ær Cristes flæsclicysse' ('the patriarchs and the prophets who existed before Christ's incarnation').³²² A similar idea is expressed in its *Blickling* equivalent, which then goes on to discuss the famine and destruction caused by Titus' siege of Jerusalem in AD70 as divine punishment for Jewish intransigence.³²³ In this sense, the peripheral walls and gates of Mermedonia are central to the understanding of the city's fate, marking out a place, Jerusalem, and a time, Holy Week, in the same way that place and lineage was marked out in the digression.

Recently, Hilary Fox has argued that 'the use of rimcræft to indicate the Mermedonians' practice of food-oriented time-reckoning, paired with repeated references to their collective famine and starvation, suggests that the poem may be read as an Easter poem, or, more precisely, a poem dramatizing the relationship between the Easter sacraments, conversion, and the necessity for orthodox liturgical practice.'³²⁴ With this in mind, the most obvious implication of a Palm Sunday procession at the gates is that the events of Andrew's subsequent torture by the Mermedonians occurs

³²⁰ Ibid. 875-83

³²¹ *Praxeis*, p. 11; *Casanatensis*, p. 40

³²² Ælfric, 'In Dominica Palmarum' in Benjamin Thorpe (ed.), *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church, Vol. I*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 214

³²³ 'Homily VI: Dominica Sexta in Quadragesima' in R. Morris (ed.) *The Blickling Homilies, Vol. I* (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1880), p. 81

³²⁴ Hilary Fox, 'The Mermedonian Computus.' *Philological Quarterly* 89, 2-3 (2010), 141-157, p.147

throughout Holy Week, from Psalm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Throughout the work, Andrew is aware of the ‘guðgeðingu’ (‘impending battle-time’)³²⁵ that awaits him, prompting his attempt to escape his fate in the first section of the poem. Apparently unnoticed by previous scholars, the duration of his torture can be calculated from the Palm Sunday episode to his release as exactly six days, measured using the temporal markers for nightfall or dawn.

Day One (Palm Sunday)

swa wæs ealne dæg oððæt æfen com
sigeltorht swungen sar eft gewod
ymb þæs beornes breost oðþæt beorht gewat
sunne swegeltorht to sete glidan³²⁶

[So was it all day, until evening came and beat the sun-bright(ness) away. The wound travelled back around the breast of the man, until the bright(ness) departed, the sky-shining glided to (sun)set.]

Day Two

oþðæt sunne gewat to sete glidan
under niflan næs niht helmade
brunwann oferbræd beorgas steape³²⁷

[...until the sun went to glide to sunset under the lowering headland. Night covered up, the dusky (sun) spread over the steep hills...]

Day Three

com þa on uhtan mid ærdæge...
... ond ic nu þry dagas þolian sceolde³²⁸

[Then dawn came in with the early day... and I now must endure three days]

³²⁵ *Andreas*, 1022b

³²⁶ *Ibid.* 1245-8

³²⁷ *Ibid.* 1304-6

³²⁸ *Ibid.* 1389, 1345

Day Four (Maundy Thursday)

swa se dædfruma dryhten herede
halgan stefne oððæt hador sægl
wuldortorht gewat under wa(d)u scriðan
þa þa folctogan feorðan siðe
egle ondsacan æðeling læddon³²⁹

[So the deed-doer praised the lord with holy voice until the bright sun departed, wonder-bright, to glide under the waters. Then the chieftains a fourth time, terrible adversaries, led the prince...]

Day Five and Six (Good Friday & Holy Saturday (abridged))

ofer min gemet mycel is to secganne
langsum leornung þæt he in life adreag
eall æfter orde þæt scell æglæwra
mann on moldan þonne ic me tælige
findan on ferðe þæt fram fruman cunne
eall þa earfeðo þe he mid elne adreah
grimra guða hwæðre git sceolon
lytlum sticcum leoðworda dæl
furður reccan³³⁰

[The greatness is above my capacity to tell, everything that he suffered in life from the beginning, an enduring study; a more law-learned man on the earth than I can consider myself must find that in the mind, who knows from the beginning all the suffering which he endured with the courage of cruel battles. Yet (we) should further relate, with little pieces, a part of the poetry.]

Day Seven (Easter Sunday)

stream ut aweoll

³²⁹ Ibid. 1455-9

³³⁰ Ibid. 1481-9a

fleow ofer foldan famige walcan
mid ærdæge eorðan þehton³³¹

[A stream welled up out, it flowed over the earth; with the early morning the foamy swell engulfed the earth]

The fifth and sixth days (i.e. Good Friday and Holy Saturday) are abridged, with an apology for not telling everything ‘eall æfter orde’ (‘in its entirety from the beginning’), for the obvious reason that the literal death and resurrection of Andrew would not be doctrinally acceptable, but Andrew’s predictive remarks made on day three allow us to calculate the duration. The Mermedonians also attempt to calculate the death hour of Andreas ‘on rimcræfte’, which they use to calculate the date on which they can break their fast.

hæfdon hie on rune ond on rimcræfte
awriten, wælgrædige wera endestæf
hwæn(n)e hie to mose meteþearfendum
on þære werþeode weorðan sceoldon³³²

[They had in council and in computation written, slaughter-greedy, the death-hour of men, when they might become meat-hungry for food in that nation]

That they have calculated incorrectly, because Andreas survives, reflects the insufficiency of their computus. Beginning with Boenig’s interpretation as a ‘theological parody’ involving an inversion of the Eucharist,³³³ and more recently revisited in a number of articles on the subject, the cannibalism of the Mermedonians has generally been read as a custom or religious practice by which the difference between inside and outside is asserted. Alexandra Bolinteanu has argued for a cultural otherworldliness that emphasises ‘geographical remoteness and isolation from the rest

³³¹ Ibid. 1543b-5

³³² Ibid. 134-7

³³³ Robert Boenig, *Saint and Hero: Andreas and Medieval Doctrine* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991), pp.71-73

of the world.’³³⁴ The depiction of both Mermedonia and Palestine as mearcland only heightens this, by associating Jewish error with calendrical error, and the Paschal lamb with the bloody torture of Andrew, and then mapping all four against the margins of the world.

As well as calendrical *rimcraeft*, the torture narrative also incorporates an element of *eorðcraeft*. It is no coincidence that the events of the second part of *Andreas* seldom take place within the city, and never in a central marketplace or square, but, excepting the prison scenes, always outside the city walls. Not only is this the place where Andrew is left by the angels, but also where he returns to await potential martyrdom after he has freed the missionaries, an episode described in a similar manner to the earlier wanderings of the stone.

oððæt he gemette be mearcpaðe
standan stræte neah stapul ærenne
gesæt him þa be healfe hæfde hluttre lufan...
...þanon basnode under burhlocan
hwæt him guðweorca gifeðe wurde³³⁵

[...until he found around the boundary-path a brass pillar standing near the road...thence he awaited any war-work that would be ordained to him, at the foot of the city wall.]

In both Latin and Greek versions, Andrew enters the city and wanders the streets, actually being locked within the walls in the latter,³³⁶ whereas in *Andreas* he always remains on the margins of the metropolis. As a result of Andrew’s boundary-bashing, when the Devil himself arrives on the second night of the saint’s imprisonment, he accuses him of having completely claimed ‘land ond leode’ (‘land and nation’), just as Christ had when ‘cyneprym ahof... / ...ofer middangeard’ (‘royal power arose...across

³³⁴ Alexandra Bolinteanu, ‘The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*’, *Neophilologus* 93, 1 (2009), 149-164, p. 150

³³⁵ *Andreas*, 1061-3, 1065-6

³³⁶ *Praxeis*, p. 17; *Casanatensis*, 45

the middengeard’).³³⁷ Satan then puts across his rival claim, grounded in the assertion that ‘þone herodes ealdre besnyðede / forcom æt campe cyning iudea / rices berædde ond hine rode befealg’ (‘when Herod deprived him from life, he overcame the King of Judea at battle, he deprived (him) of the kingdom, and consigned him to the cross’).³³⁸ By employing the verb *beræddan* (‘to take away’), his argument is implicitly unlawful; we find *beræddan* used in the Anglo Saxon Chronicle to indicate the illegal nature of Arnulf’s deposition of Charles the Fat,³³⁹ and in Ælfric’s ‘De Abdon et Sennes’ sermon to equate Jewish denial of Christ with the portrayal of Decius in the previous section as ‘wælhreowan casere þe ða ana geweold ealles middan eardes’ (‘a cruel emperor who ruled alone over the entire world’).³⁴⁰ He also seems to pun on the near homophones *berad* (‘he rode around’) and *berædde* (‘he took away’), convoluting the act of riding a boundary with that of dispossession. This prompts the Mermedonians to confirm their claim by a journey that is both grotesque stational liturgy and boundary walk, dragging Andrew across the landscape and through various landmarks.

heton þa lædan ofer landsceare
 ðragmælum teon torngeniðlan
 swa hie hit frecnost findan meahton
 drogon deormode æfter dunscreafum
 ymb stanhleoðo stærcedferþþe
 efne swa wide swa wegas tolagon
 enta ærgeweorc innan burgum
 stræte stanfage³⁴¹

[Then they ordered that he be led along the land-boundaries, to drag the bitter enemy time after time, as terrible as they could devise it. The bestial ones dragged the stout-hearted one about the mountain-caves, around the rock-cliffs, as wide as the ways ran about, the ancient work of giants inside the burhs, the

³³⁷ *Andreas*, 1322a, 1323a

³³⁸ *Ibid.* 1324-6

³³⁹ Susan Irvine (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Vol. 7, MS. E* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 887

³⁴⁰ Ælfric, ‘De Abdon et Sennes’ in Walter Skeat (ed.), *Ælfric's Lives of Saints. Vol. II* (London: EETS, 1881), p. 54

³⁴¹ *Andreas*, 1229-1236a

stone-paved streets.]

The use of ‘landscearu’ (‘land-boundary’), a term which appears almost exclusively in charter bounds from the South West,³⁴² alongside the sequential presentation of landscape features commonly named in such bounds, would indicate that they are proceeding along the periphery of the territory. Rather than recording their satanic grant in writing, the Mermedonians mark it directly upon the land using Andreas’ own blood, compelling him to acknowledge their claim by forcing him to see ‘seolfes swæð / swa þin swat aget / þurh bangebrec blodige stige’ (‘your own tracks where your blood poured out through bone-breaking with a bloody path’).³⁴³ This diabolical method of land-surveying employs flesh, gore and the body in the same way that the Mermedonian’s cannibalistic ‘eucharist’ does, as a dehumanizing practice that ‘is a demonstration of their simultaneous recognition of and inability to accept people external to them.’³⁴⁴ Showing Andrew his body turned inside out, as it were, allows for a confusion of body and blood in a similar way to the land/sea mixing of the costal mearcland. Throughout the week’s tortures, Andrew’s blood is described in terms normally restricted to seascapes: ‘swate bestemed’ (‘drenched with blood’),³⁴⁵ ‘blod yðum weoll’ (‘blood welled in waves’)³⁴⁶, ‘swat yðum weoll’ (‘blood welled in waves’),³⁴⁷ ‘blod lifrum swealg’ (‘blood swelled in thick waves’),³⁴⁸ and ‘faran flode blod’ (‘blood to travel like a flood’).³⁴⁹ The boundary mark of Mermedonia, along with its tropes, is thus devolved into Andrew’s body itself, in the manner of the Kristevan abject, as a still-living body which sees itself as other and asks ‘How can I be without border?’³⁵⁰ This transference of self to the landscape, and landscape to self, evokes a

³⁴² First noted in John Mitchel Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici, Vol 3* (London: English Historical Society, 1845), p. xii. The *Langscape* database lists 10 Devon, 8 Cornwall, 7 Dorset, 6 Wiltshire, 1 Somerset, 1 Berkshire, 1 Northamptonshire. Langscape, <http://www.langscape.org.uk> (Last accessed 22 August 2014).

³⁴³ *Andreas*, 1441-2

³⁴⁴ N. Godlove, ‘Bodies as Borders: Cannibalism and Conversion in the Old English *Andreas*.’ *Studies in Philology* 106, (2009), 137-160, p. 146

³⁴⁵ *Andreas*, 1239b

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 1240b

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 1275b

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 1276b

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 954a

³⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror, An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4

transformative vision of paradise, where ‘geseh he geblowene bearwas standan / blædum gehrodene swa he ær his blod aget’ (‘he saw blossoming groves standing adorned with blood where he previously spilt his blood’).³⁵¹ The purging flood, baptism of the Mermedonians, establishment of a bishopric, and triumphant proclamation of ‘ræd on lande’ (‘rule within the land’),³⁵² all of these follow as a natural consequence of this glorific dissolution of the boundaries through martyrdom, as the mearcland of Mermedonia is brought within the fold of an exclusively Christian ‘woruld worulda’ (‘world without end’).³⁵³

³⁵¹ Ibid. 1448-9

³⁵² Ibid. 1649b-51, 1645b

³⁵³ *Andreas*, 1686a

6. Identity and geography in the Old English *Exodus*

So far, all of the *mearca* and *mearcþeas* encountered in this study have lurked on the periphery of things. Boundaries and marginal spaces have either been memorialised, circumnavigated or traversed in order to mark out political, legal or religious azimuths, but they have never been confused for the centre itself. Once these edges are enfolded, they have simply become undifferentiated parts of the same. Likewise, the identities of the protagonists, whilst occasionally mimetic, remain relatively stable relative to each other, and there is never any real danger of confusing one opponents with another. When identities are reconfigured, they do so unambiguously within the context of conversion and colonisation, processes intimately linked with circumferential territorial demarcation and lateral intersection of boundaries. My argument here is twofold, firstly that the flight from Egypt in *Exodus* involves the fashioning of a distinctive identity, and secondly that the flight to Canaan makes use of the counter-intuitive notion that by tracing the route of a *mearc*, one can arrive at the centre of the world. The two are the departure point and destination of the same journey, as the identity fashioned in the movement outwards *is* the unifying idea of a centrally located homeland expressed in the second. Fabienne Michelet has suggested that ‘it is territorial hope on the Promised Land, and not their common ancestry from Abraham or their migration from Egypt, which secures their existence as a group.’³⁵⁴ This is correct as far as ends alone are concerned, but it also attributes a discreteness to these three units that belies their collective indivisibility, failing to realise that their territorial aspirations are themselves an inheritance from Abraham, or that the journey from Egypt is itself a kind of ‘deterritorializing’.

The poem begins in a moment of apparent semantic stability, where the characteristics and titles which reflect the identities of the players are clear. Moses is defined by his sacred relationship with God, his earthly authority, and his intelligence, whereas Pharaoh and the Egyptians are defined in a purely infernal and oppositional form as the enemies of God.

³⁵⁴ Fabienne L. Michelet, *Creation, Migration and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 207

he wæs leof gode leoda aldor
 horsc and hreðrgleaw herges wisa
 freom folctoga faraones cyn
 godes andsacan gyrdwite band
 þær him gesealde sigora waldend
 modgum magoræs wum his maga feorh
 onwist eðles abrahames sunum³⁵⁵

[He was dear to God, the Lord of men, alert and wise, the army's general, valiant nation-leader, and he bound Pharaoh's kin, enemies of God, with the rod-punishment, where the ruler of victories gave him, the mindful leader of many, a dwelling of the people to his sons forever, the sons of Abraham.]

The phrases 'godes andsaca' and 'godes andsacan' are used elsewhere in vernacular poetry to refer to the devil³⁵⁶ and fallen angels³⁵⁷, and so many commentators have taken this as an explicit allegorical link between the Egyptians and the devil,³⁵⁸ an association recurrent in patristic exegesis. Isidore, for example, explained in his *Etymologiae* that 'pharao figuram habuit diaboli.' ('Pharaoh had the form of the devil'),³⁵⁹ and also derived the etymologies of both Pharaoh and the Egyptians from their role as afflictors of the Israelites.³⁶⁰ At this stage, the differences between Egyptians and Israelites, the 'faraones cyn' and 'abrahames sunum',³⁶¹ are distinct, between the favoured and the fated, vanquisher and vanquished, punisher and punished, risen and fallen. It would not be inappropriate to call this a schema of self and other. The outcome of their struggle is already known and decided, and so the poetic 'now' against which these descriptions are given is the same 'now' as the audience inhabits,

³⁵⁵ *Exodus*, 13-19

³⁵⁶ *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition*, ed. Robert Emmett Finnegan (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), 190; *Genesis B*, 442

³⁵⁷ eg. *Christ and Satan*, 268, 279, 339

³⁵⁸ Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 76n; Irving (ed.), *The Old English Exodus*, p. 67n; Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 21.

³⁵⁹ Isidore, *Etymologicae*, VII, vi, p.277-8

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* VII.vi 4; IX.ii, p. 333

³⁶¹ *Exodus*, 15b, 18b

using the verb *gefrigan* in the conventional poetic way to describe a world which has already heard of the Mosaic covenant ('gefrigen habað ofer middangeard Moyses domas').³⁶² The Egyptians have already been annihilated by means of 'gyrdwite' ('rod-punishment'),³⁶³ and 'onwist eðles' ('a nation's dwelling')³⁶⁴ has been granted. The opening section is also notable in that there is no direct mention of the massacre of Hebrew children, of slave-labour and straw-bricks, or of Egyptians striking Hebrews.

When the poem moves from this synoptic framing device to actual events, and the *syuzhet* begins to find an alignment with the *fabula*, the self/other binary between the nations of God and the Devil grow increasingly problematic. The first sign of this is in the description of the Egyptians' experience of the Plagues of Egypt, which are described in terms which appear designed to elicit at least some degree of sympathy. Talk of the passing away of hall-joys ('seledreamas') and the loss of ('sinc')³⁶⁵ are redolent of the 'ubi sunt'/'hwær cwom' motif employed so effectively in 'The Wanderer',³⁶⁶ and the 'ealdum witum' ('old punishments') by which 'deaðe gedrecced drihtfolca mæst' ('the greatest of nations were afflicted with death')³⁶⁷ are almost elegiac in tone and strangely incongruous with the diabolic Egyptians of the prologue. The contradictions become more jarring in the syntactically jumbled description of the Passover.

hæfde mansceaðan æt middere niht
 frecne gefylled frumbearna fela,
 abrocene burhweardas bana wide scrað,
 lað leodhata³⁶⁸

[He had, at the middle of the night, severely struck down the multitude of the first-born, the afflictors, destroyed the city-guards. The slayer went far and wide, a hated people-enemy.]

³⁶² Ibid. 1b-2

³⁶³ Ibid. 16b

³⁶⁴ Ibid. 18a

³⁶⁵ Ibid. 36

³⁶⁶ Cf. 'The Wanderer,' 92-6

³⁶⁷ Exodus, 33b

³⁶⁸ Ibid. 37-40a

The term ‘mansceaðan’ (‘evil foe’, ‘sinner’) is used in *Beowulf* to describe the Grendel-kin and the dragon,³⁶⁹ and in *Guthlac A* to describe the demons.³⁷⁰ In this passage, the general consensus is that ‘mansceaðan’ is the object of ‘habban’, in apposition to ‘frumbearna fela’, with God carried over from seven lines previous as the subject of *habban*.³⁷¹ If this is the case, then the most obvious referent is the Egyptian first-born themselves.³⁷² The alternative, that it refers to the Angel of Death as subject of *habban*, and which involves an emendation of the manuscript ‘mansceaðan’ to ‘mansceaða’,³⁷³ can be discounted by Ockham’s razor on account of an equally intelligible ‘clear-text’ reading. Yet, as J.R. Hall noticed, on a purely literal level, the identification of only the firstborn as ‘mansceaðan’ appears to be too limited³⁷⁴ as well as being an insufficiently monstrous group. Hall’s solution has been to include all Egyptians as ‘mansceaðan’, taking it as a synonym for Isidore’s onomastic definition of ‘afflictors’ referred to above, and then reading ‘frumbearn’ as a shorthand for ‘demons’, in the same way that the Devil in *Guthlac A* is ‘facnes frumbearn’ (‘first-born of evil’).³⁷⁵ In *Andreas* too, we find the Devil described in identical terms.

ne læt nu bysmrian banan manncynnes
 facnes frumbearn þurh feondes cræft
 leahtrum beleggan þa þin lof berað³⁷⁶

[do not let now the slayer of mankind mock, first-born of evil, through the fiend's craft, and to afflict with malice those (who) bear your love.]”

³⁶⁹ *Beowulf*, 712, 737, 1339, 2514

³⁷⁰ *Guthlac A*, 650b

³⁷¹ Irving Jr., Edward B. ‘New Notes on the Old English Exodus.’ *Anglia* 90 (1972), 289–324, p. 293n; J.R. Hall, ‘Mansceathan: Old English Exodus 37.’ *Neophilologus* 66 (1982), 145–48, pp. 146–7.

³⁷² First proposed by Fred Robinson in ‘Some Uses of Name-Meanings in Old English Poetry,’ p. 232, and followed in Lucas (ed.), *Exodus* pp. 79n, 179

³⁷³ For this argument, see Tolkien (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 38n; Irving (ed.), *Exodus*, p.69n

³⁷⁴ Hall, ‘Mansceathan: Old English Exodus 37,’ p. 146

³⁷⁵ *Guthlac A*, 1071a. Hall asserts that ‘frumbearn’ is used to describe the demons themselves (Hall, ‘Mansceathan: Old English Exodus 37,’ 146–7), but in fact the modal verb is singular (‘mæg’), and so I have taken it to mean either ‘devil’ or ‘the Devil’ rather than ‘demons’.

³⁷⁶ *Andreas*, 1292–5

Here the Devil is also a *bana* ('slayer', 'bane'), a word usually reserved for unjust killers. In *Exodus*, the same word describes the Angel of Death, with the implication that his actions are in some sense unjust or in opposition to law. Of course, we could read 'bana' in the sense of a weapon or instrument of death, as is found twice in *Beowulf*.³⁷⁷ However, the angel is also described as a 'lað leodhata' ('hated nation-enemy').³⁷⁸ This word appears elsewhere in the sense of tyrant, and the second element of which is used to form other compounds that express both opposition and opprobrium. Wulfstan, for example, uses both *-bana* and *-hata* to express the emotive antitheses that pervade the *Sermo Lupi*, employing the memorable descriptions 'mæsserbanan and mynsterhatan' ('priest-killers and mass and monastery-haters')³⁷⁹ and 'cyrichatan hetole and leodhatan grimme' ('hostile church-haters and cruel tyrants').³⁸⁰ If these lines of *Exodus* were written from an entirely partisan Wulfstanian perspective of 'self', we would therefore expect them to refer definitively to either Pharaoh or the Egyptians. But instead it is written from the perspective of the Egyptians, for who else would describe the angel as 'lað'?

The space that divides the Egyptians as 'evil foes' and the Angel of Death as 'hated people-enemy' is small, a single clause of only one half-line, itself consisting of two words: 'abrocene burhweardas' ('destroyed the city-guards').³⁸¹ When the verb *abrecan* occurs in proximity to *burh*, it normally gives the sense 'storm' or 'sack', without any implicit sense of rightness or wrongness. J. R. Hall has claimed that this moment 'evidently alludes to Christ's breaking down the gates of hell at the Harrowing',³⁸² but in fact the point is that its meaning is purposely obscure. We could perhaps cite the lines 'ær he helwara / burg abræce' ('after he can storm the city of Hell')³⁸³ from 'Riddle 13' as evidence to support Hall's contention, but equally we could take similar evidence to the contrary, for example in the both prose and verse prefaces to the Old English verse and prose translations of *Boethius*, which use

³⁷⁷ *Beowulf*, 2203b, 2506b

³⁷⁸ *Exodus*, 40a

³⁷⁹ Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, p. 64

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 62

³⁸¹ *Exodus*, 39a

³⁸² Hall, 'Mansceathan: Old English Exodus 37,' p. 147

³⁸³ 'Riddle 13' in Williamson, *Riddles*, 6b-7a

‘abrecen’ to describe the Goth’s sack of Rome with regret.³⁸⁴ Clearly, however, this moment is liminal in that it involves a penetration of city defences, but also that it involves a reconfiguration of identity, a penetrating into the subjectivity of the besieged Egyptians. A similar perspective confusion occurs in the section that follows on, a description of the Israelites’ flight.

alyfed laðsið leode gretan
 folc ferend <feond> wæs bereafod [MS freond > feond]
 hergas on helle heofun þider becom,
 druron deofolgyld dæg wæs mære
 ofer middangeard þa seo mengeo for
 swa þæs fæsten dreah fela missera³⁸⁵

[It was allowed for the people to lament the hate-journey, the nation travelled, the friend/foe was bereft. The armies/shrines in hell- heaven came there and devilish idols fell. The day was famous across the middle-earth when the multitude travelled. So the long-accursed Egyptian nation endured confinement of many half-years, because they had intended, had the Maker had allowed it, to keep forever the beloved and long-desired journey from the kinsmen of Moses.]

The first two lines are particularly obscure. The first clause, beginning with ‘alyfed’, yields at least two possibilities. The most syntactically simple way is to read the past-participle as a periphrastic component in the passive voice,³⁸⁶ as most editors have recommended,³⁸⁷ although if this is the case then we must supply an auxiliary verb, perhaps from the next line. In lieu of an obvious subject, Lucas’s ‘the people, the travelling host, were allowed to undertake the hated journey’,³⁸⁸ and Irving’s ‘a hateful

³⁸⁴ ‘Romane burig abraecon’ Krapp (ed.), *The Meters of Boethius* I, 18, p. 153; ‘abrocen burga cyst’ Sedgefield (ed.), *King Alfred’s Old English version of Boethius*, p. 7

³⁸⁵ *Exodus*, 44-9

³⁸⁶ When the OE passive was formed using the past participle, it required either *beon-wesan* (‘to be’) or *weorðan* (‘to become’, ‘to happen’) as an auxiliary. It was not always necessary to decline the participle. Cf. Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English Grammar*, 8th Edition (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), §202

³⁸⁷ Irving (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 69n; Tolkien (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 38n; Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 80-1n

³⁸⁸ Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 39n

journey was permitted to greet the people, the journeying folk'³⁸⁹ are both equally valid. In fact, it is not even necessary to give *alyfan* a subject, and so an impersonal construction might be preferred, as in Tolkien's 'it was allowed...'³⁹⁰ Another equally plausible alternative would be to add *þa* before *alyfed* to create an adjective clause, but this leaves subject and object unresolved. Even when a syntagmatic decision has been made as to how to understand the passage, one is greeted by a semantic undecidedness that eclipses any syntactic problems. The 'laðsið' might refer to the death of the first-born, a 'going hence' that is hated to the Egyptians. It might refer to the departure of the Egyptians' slave labour force along with plunder,³⁹¹ which is also hated to the Egyptians. Or we might read the 'journey from hatred', referring again to either death or literal departure, but governed by the Israelite hatred of their Egyptian masters, divine hatred of the enemies of God, or perhaps a more general distain shared by the audience. A similar confusion surrounds 'leode' and 'folc', both of which can represent either nation. The half-line 'feond wæs bereafod' is even more elusive still. The clear-text 'freond' is almost always amended to 'feond', on the assumptions of scribal confusion between friend and foe, and that it must refer to the diabolic and adversarial nature of Pharaoh, and, by extension, the Egyptian nation. Certainly, similar lines crop up in reference to devils in both poetry and prose works, in the context of virtue ('deoful deaðreow duguðum bereafod'),³⁹² strength ('eallum his mihtum hine bereafode'),³⁹³ souls ('helle bereafode')³⁹⁴ and the world, ('ða wæs se ealda feond þyses middaneardes bereafod').³⁹⁵ The last two in particular, both from homiletic discourses on the harrowing of hell, seem appropriate, given the next half-line 'hergas on helle'. The implication, regardless of whether we read 'hergas' as 'shrines' or as the plural of *here* ('army'),³⁹⁶ is that Egypt is Hell, and that Pharaoh has been robbed of slaves just as the devil is robbed of souls. Yet if this is so, then the 'laðsið' must be reinterpreted as the arrival of heaven into hell, rather than the departure out of hell and into heaven, given

³⁸⁹ Irving (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 69n

³⁹⁰ Tolkien (ed.), p. 21

³⁹¹ cf. 'Exodus', 12:36

³⁹² *Andreas*, 314

³⁹³ 'Homily 1' in D. G. Scragg (ed.) *The Vercelli Homilies* (London: EETS, 1992), 293

³⁹⁴ 'Homily VI,' *Blickling*, p. 67

³⁹⁵ Anna Maria Luiselli Fadda (ed.) 'De Descensu Christe ad Inferos.' *Studi Medievali* 13.2 (1972) 989-1011, 21

³⁹⁶ cf. Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 81n

the next half-line, ‘heofun þider becom’.³⁹⁷ The solution to this might be to amend ‘heofun’ to ‘heofung’ (‘weeping’), which perhaps has some similarity with the account of Egyptian weeping at the departure of the Hebrews in Josephus’ *Antiquitates Judaicae*,³⁹⁸ but this can be supported neither by editorial parsimony nor meter. Furthermore, we cannot even be sure that the ‘feond’ is not actually Moses, who is described fifteen lines earlier as ‘faraones feond on forðwegas’ (‘the enemy of Pharaoh on the onward journey’).³⁹⁹ These two difficulties can be summarised thus. Firstly, if the journey is ‘hated’ by the Egyptians, then from the same perspective, it is the enemy who is an exile, bereft of a home in the wilderness, and who have plundered Egypt, whereas if the journey is ‘hated’ by the Israelites, then it is the enemy who is bereft of their labour. The problem is that there is no obvious dative or genitive of thing to be lost, nor is there any object, even in the reflexive. Secondly, if we prefer the manuscript ‘freond’, then again we cannot be sure whether it refers to the Israelites, the Egyptians, or perhaps both Moses and Pharaoh in accordance with their previous adoptee relationship. That the two nations are later described as ‘friends...with hating eyes’ (‘freond/... laðum eagan’)⁴⁰⁰ only confuses the matter even more. If we chose ‘feond’ then we are also committing to a particular sense of ‘laðsið’ which problematizes interpretation even further.

This jumbled blur of perspectives, and of friend and foe, departs from the poem just at the moment that the Israelites pass across the boundaries of Egypt, and the poetic lens finds its focus again upon entry to the wilderness.

oferfor he mid þy folce fæstena worn
land and leodgeard laðra manna
enge anpaðas uncuð gelad
oðþæt hie on guðmyrce gearwe bæron
wæron land heora lyfthelme beþeagt
mearchofu mor heald moyses ofer þa

³⁹⁷ *Exodus*, 46b

³⁹⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, II, ix, p.31

³⁹⁹ *Exodus*, 32

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 178-9a

fela meoringa fyrde gelædde⁴⁰¹

[He journeyed through a great number of confinements/strongholds with the nation, land and territories of hateful men, the narrow single-track, an unknown way, until they carried weapons against the warlike marchers, their lands were covered by mist, the wilderness held mark-dwellings. Moses led the fyrd across many fixed boundaries.]

Once again it becomes clear who the ‘folc’ are. The adjective ‘enge’ that modifies ‘anpaðas’ refers to the sense of anxiety and oppression as it does elsewhere in the poetic corpus, but it also delineates the visible space around the road, the narrow horizon of the Israelites’ border-path domain. The poet now writes from a perspective within the mearc-land, looking to either side of the path, surrounded by a space around them that appears hostile, incoherent and jumbled. Unlike the most obvious source of comparison in literary theory, Mikhail Bakhtin’s ‘chronotope of the road,’⁴⁰² or its Old English equivalent, the sea-weary exile of ‘The Seafarer’, the Israelites do not look in with voyeuristic clarity at everyday life from the margins, but through a distorting lens that displays each station that they pass through as the ‘land and leodgeard laðra manna’ (‘land and nation-space of hostile men’).⁴⁰³ The wilderness, which in the jumbled logic of the *mearc* is described as a ‘mor’ (‘moor’), contains ‘mearchofu’ (‘mearc-dwellings’), but these are ‘lyfthelme beþeaht’ (‘concealed in mist’), and as such there is no distinguishing between them, no progression, no time-frame, and no sequential catalogue of place-names. The stations are simply ‘worn’ (‘many’) and ‘fela’ (‘many’). Unlike Bakhtin’s paradigm, which understands marks encountered in sequence on the road as indicators of the traveller’s fate,⁴⁰⁴ there is no progressive development, either of number or of identity; the Israelite’s fate and identity, which are the same thing, have been forged by the syntactic and semantic chaos as they left Egypt. This makes an interesting comparison to Bede’s exegesis of the Stations in his first letter to Acca,

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. 56-62

⁴⁰² Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel’ in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), pp. 119-23

⁴⁰³ *Exodus*, 57

⁴⁰⁴ Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,’ p. 120

bishop of Hexham. Bede, after matching the order of the stations described in Numbers 33 against a biblical chronology of the wandering determined by reference to other extracts in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, goes on to explain that the wandering ‘is by no means without purpose, but ought to be understood as having been done and written down in such a way for the sake of a great mystery.’⁴⁰⁵ Following the example found in Jerome’s second letter to St. Fabiola,⁴⁰⁶ Bede explains that the Israelites progression from slavery to the Promised Land is an allegory for the soul’s journey from sin to heaven, with each station an expression of ‘the ascent of spiritual virtues seeking the sublime’.⁴⁰⁷ This progressive, liminal aspect is nowhere to be found in the description of the stations in *Exodus*. Unlike Bede’s stations, they are not gateways, except in that they are gateways to the same.

This processional synchronicity is interrupted by the resumption of the use of temporal and spatial markers upon arrival at Etham.

heht þa ymb twa niht tīrfæste hæleð
 siððan hie feondum oðfaren hæfdon
 ymbwicigean werodes bearhtme
 mid ælfere æthanes byrig
 mægnes mæste mearclandum on⁴⁰⁸

[Then the glorious warrior ordered them, about two nights after they had travelled away from the fiend, by the troop’s sound, to camp around Ethan’s town [i.e. Etham] with the whole band, the strongest of forces, in the mearcland.]

The ‘many’ stations referred to in the preceding passage cannot only describe the two stations, nor can it reasonably take place within two days, despite it being clearly stated

⁴⁰⁵ Bede, ‘On the Resting Places (De mansionibus filiorum Israel)’ in W. Trent Foley & Arthur G. Holder (ed. & trans.) *Bede: a Biblical Miscellany* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 33

⁴⁰⁶ Jerome, Epist. 78

⁴⁰⁷ Bede, ‘On the Resting Places,’ p.33

⁴⁰⁸ *Exodus*, p. 63-7

regarding Etham that ‘þa wæs þridda wic’ (‘that was the third station’).⁴⁰⁹ Rather, the arrival at Etham is a coming to the edge of the *mearc*, the journey to which has been extended in a kind of exaggerated hyperbola or ellipsis. Now that an intersection has been reached, an element of both biblical and geographical specificity can be resumed. ‘Mearclandum on’ is almost certainly a paraphrasing of the depiction of Etham in Exodus 14 and Numbers 33 as ‘in extremis finibus solitudinis’ (‘on the edge of the wilderness’).⁴¹⁰ The next lines reveal that the Israelites are navigating by territorial boundaries, explaining that ‘wiston him be suðan sigelwara land’ (‘knew the land of Ethiopia was to their south’).⁴¹¹ The inclusion of this curious extra-biblical narrative has aroused a good deal of scholarly attention. The patristic sources for the metonymic unification of the Ethiopians and their country as ‘forbærned burhhleoðu brune leode’ (‘burnt-down hillside, brown people’)⁴¹² are well-known,⁴¹³ but the poetic purpose of the inclusion are less clear. Lucas has understood this entirely extra-Biblical addition as ‘largely a matter of literary convenience’ in that it provides a suitably hot and exotic location for the description of the cloud pillar.⁴¹⁴ A more fanciful explanation was given by Moore, who found a potential analogue in Josephus’ account of Moses’ campaign with the Egyptian army against the Ethiopians.⁴¹⁵ Perhaps the truth is somewhere in between. As the edge of the *mearcland* has been reached, an appropriate territory needs to be named, and sources such as Josephus provided this, by explaining that the Ethiopians ‘are next neighbours to the Egyptians’.⁴¹⁶ In this case, the metonymic relationship between man and hillside suggests that the Ethiopians’ most fundamental role is geographical, as a ethnographical landmark who signify extremity of climate and place, rather than as a symbol for sin, the devil, or other any such allegorical function.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. 87b

⁴¹⁰ ‘Exodus,’ 13:20; ‘Numbers,’ 33: 6

⁴¹¹ *Exodus*, 69

⁴¹² Ibid. 70

⁴¹³ cf. Lucas (ed.), *Exodus* p. 87n; Irving, *Exodus*, p. 73n

⁴¹⁴ Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 87n

⁴¹⁵ Samuel Moore, ‘On the Sources of the Old-English "Exodus".’ *Modern Philology* 9, 1 (1911), 83-108, p. 105. Cf. Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* in William Whiston (ed. & trans.) & William Borradaile (ed.), *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus Vol. I.* (New York: William Borradaile, 1824), II, x, pp. 106-8

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. p.106

The next section of *Exodus* has the Israelites travelling north between Etham and Pi-hahiroth, which is named only as the ‘feorðe wic’ (‘fourth station’),⁴¹⁷ explaining that ‘nearwe genyddon on norðwegas’ (‘they pressed on the north-path with difficulty’).⁴¹⁸ At this point, the pillars of cloud and of fire mentioned in ‘Exodus’ 13:21-22 and ‘Numbers’ 14:14 make their appearance, notably described using nautical allusions, giving the impression of a desert-sea. The cloud-pillar has ‘mæstrapas’ (‘halyards’) and a ‘seglrode’ (‘mast-cross’), and it is described as a ‘segle’,⁴¹⁹ which has a similar sense of both sail and veil as found in the modern French *voile*. This dual sense allows for interpretations literal (the cloud-pillar) and typological (as both veil of the Tabernacle and sail of the Ship of the Church). The metaphor is then extended to the landscape and the Israelites themselves, the latter as sailors who are propelled along a waterway by the cloud-pillar: ‘swegl siðe weold sæmen æfter / foron flodwege’ (‘the sail steered the path, the seamen travelled after on the sea-path’).⁴²⁰ Almost every critical interpretation of the extended nautical metaphor emphasises the allegorical reading. According to Lucas, ‘this mode of presentation is a clear indication that the Israelite exodus is to be understood allegorically as the journey of all *eorðbuende* over the sea of life towards the heavenly port.’⁴²¹ Undoubtedly, the various exegetical commonplaces that grounded early medieval interpretation of the exodus were a key interpretative aid for both poet and educated audience. Yet to entirely subsume this section of *Exodus* by the sine qua non of allegory, understanding the work merely as an eclectic gathering of various symbols by a poet whose mind is ‘crowded with allegorical equations’,⁴²² is to lose sight of both the aesthetic of the *mearc* that is a structural precondition of the allegorical mode, and also a rare moment in Old English poetry where descriptive geographical reality actually intrudes upon the thematic realm. An unstable division between land and sea is, as we saw, a commonplace boundary trope, but in order for the Israelites to sail across it, their journey must be one that traces the outline of the *mearc*, rather than intersecting it, much as a ship hugs the coastline. They cannot be following the east-

⁴¹⁷ *Exodus*, 133b

⁴¹⁸ Note that *nearwe* can be taken as adverb or noun here. *Exodus*, 68

⁴¹⁹ ‘segle’, ‘halige seglas’ Ibid. 81a, 89b

⁴²⁰ Ibid. 105-106a

⁴²¹ Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*, p. 89n

⁴²² J.E. Cross & Susie Tucker, ‘Allegorical Tradition and the OE Exodus.’ *Neophilologus* 44 (1960): 122-7, p. 153

west axis of the Ethiopian border, as it has been explained that they are proceeding northwards. The *OE Orosius* gives a simple geographical account of North Africa.

Affrica ond Asia hiera landgemircu onginnað of Alexandria, Egypta burge, ond ligeð þæt londgemære suþ þonan ofer nilus þa ea, 7 swa ofer Ethiopica westenne oþ þone Suþgarsecg.⁴²³

[The boundaries of Africa and Asia begin at Alexandria, a city of Egypt, and the boundary lies south from there across the river Nile, and so across the desert of Ethiopia until the southern Gar-secg.]

The Red Sea is dispensed with, for the reasons discussed below. Instead, the Nile serves as the *landmearc* that marks out the limits of region and continent, Egypt and Africa. Based on this topographical schema, a northerly journey would run parallel with this border, perhaps involving a literal journey up the Nile in the direction of both Canaan and the centre of the world. Thus, phrases such as ‘swegl siðe weold sæmen æfter / foron flodwege’ (‘the sail steered the path, the seamen travelled behind on the sea-path.’) could refer to the Nile. In this way, the division between literal and allegorical border-spaces, and between earth and sea, collapses entirely.

niwe nihtweard nyde sceolde
wician ofer weredum þy læs him westengryre
har hæðbroga holmegum wederum
<on ferclamme> ferhð getwæfde⁴²⁴

[The new night-ward had need to dwell over the troop, lest the waste-terror, the grey heath-terror, with sea-storms ended their lives in a sudden grip.]

The solution proposed by Cross and Tucker is that the allegorical space has triumphed here, and that ‘clearly the geographical situation has been dismissed from the poet’s

⁴²³ *OE Orosius*, I, p. 8

⁴²⁴ MS: ofer clamme. *Exodus*, 116-9

mind'.⁴²⁵ But, as I have already argued, a key feature of the poetic sea-boundary is the turbulent confusion of earth and sea. With this in mind, it is entirely congruous with poetic representations of the *mearc* that the river boundary between Africa and Asia should be populated by both 'heath-terrors' and 'sea-storms'.

Eventually, the Israelites find themselves pursued 'oðþæt sæfæsten / landes æt ende' ('up to the sea-barrier at the end of the land'),⁴²⁶ with the Egyptian army chasing forth 'inlende' ('from inland') and 'of suðwegum' ('from the south').⁴²⁷ Although the sea that the Israelites are pressed up against is named as the Red Sea,⁴²⁸ if they have been travelling south, then the sea would be the Mediterranean. The confusion is perhaps explained by reference to a similar confusion in the *OE Orosius*. The Latin version of *Adversus Paganos* explains that Egypt is bordered by Syria and Palestine to its east, Libya to its west, and the Mediterranean to its north.⁴²⁹ Orosius then goes on to disclose that the origins of the Nile are said to be either on the shore at the beginning of the Red Sea ('qui de litore incipientis maris Rubri videtur emergere') i.e. the Horn of Africa, or via a subterranean course from the Atlas Mountains east into Ethiopia and then north into Egypt.⁴³⁰ The *OE Orosius*, however, confuses both elements:

Seo ægyptus þe us near is, be norþan hire is þæt land Palestine, 7 be eastan hiere Sarracene þæt land, 7 be westan hire Libia þæt land... Nilus seo ea hire æwielme is neh þæm clife þære Readan Sæs; þeah sume men secgen þæt hire æwielme sie on westende Affrica neh þam beorge Athlans ...from eastdæle þurh æthipoica westenne...7 þonne eft norþ þonan up aspryngð neh þæm clife wið þone Readan Sæ...⁴³¹

[The part of Egypt which is near us, about its north is the land of Palestine, and about its east is the land of the Saracens, and about its west is the land of

⁴²⁵Cross and Tucker, 'Allegorical Tradition and the OE Exodus,' p. 125

⁴²⁶*Exodus*, 125-128a

⁴²⁷*Ibid.* 136a, 155b

⁴²⁸*Ibid.* 134b

⁴²⁹*OE Orosius*, I, p. 27

⁴³⁰The sources for which are discussed in detail in A. H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 81-5. *Ibid.*

⁴³¹*OE Orosius*, I, p.18

Libya...the source of the Nile is about the cliff along the Red Sea; although some men say that the source is in Western Africa near the Atlas Mountains...from the eastern part through the Ethiopian desert...and after that North until it spills out near the cliff along the Red Sea.]

The first difference is that Palestine is moved to the north of Egypt, and the Mare Nostra is removed entirely. The second is that the Nile is seen to run north from Ethiopia up to the Red Sea. The confusion here is doubtless because the classical *Maris Rubri* included all of the known elements of the Indian Ocean.⁴³² Because Orosius described the Indus as running into the Red Sea,⁴³³ the *OE Orosius* gives the Red Sea as the entire southern boundary of India, and the all-encompassing *Garsecg* as the eastern.⁴³⁴ If India was to be bound on the south by the Red Sea, the logic of the *orbis terrarium* schema required that the Egyptian coastline border it to the north. Whilst the *OE Orosius* may not be a direct source for *Exodus*, its confusion of its Latin source text is indicative of a similar geographical confusion in the poem. Thus, the northerly bearing of the Israelites' flight can be understood as a movement directly towards Jerusalem and the centre of the world, which would involve a crossing of the Red Sea. Certainly, the references in *Exodus* to the 'Garsecg'⁴³⁵ hint at a larger body of water than that which surrounds the Sinai Peninsula. A similar confusion can be found in the maps that accompanied Beatus of Liébana's *Commentaria in Apocalypsin*, which employs a distinctly Orosian geography, including the account of the Nile's origins.⁴³⁶ On these maps, the Red Sea either sits between Ethiopia and the antipodes in the extreme south, as found in the *Silos Beatus*,⁴³⁷ or occasionally it replaces the Mediterranean, dividing Africa and Europe, as in the *Paris II Beatus*.⁴³⁸ Whilst Beatus' *Commentaria* was apparently unknown in

⁴³² Cf. the description in Bede, *DNR*, xlii, p. 262

⁴³³ *OE Orosius*, I, p. 7

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 10

⁴³⁵ *Exodus*, 281b, 345b, 431a, 490b

⁴³⁶ John Williams, 'Isidore, Orosius and the Beatus Map.' *Imago Mundi* 49, (1997), 7-32, p. 17

⁴³⁷ British Library, London, *MS Add MS 11695*, 39v-40r. British Library Illustrated Manuscripts Online, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_11695 (last accessed 14 July 2014)

⁴³⁸ Paris II Beatus, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS n.a. Lat. 1366, ff.24v-25 in John Williams (ed.), *Illustrated Beatus: A Corpus of Illustrations of the Commentary on the Apocalypse, Vol.V* (London: Harvey Miller, 1994)

England until the vogue for Apocalypses in the mid-thirteenth century,⁴³⁹ it does show just how Orosius' ambiguous sketches of the Nile and Red Sea could be subject to multifarious interpretations whilst remaining within the confines of the *orbis terrarium* model.

The Israelites, 'mægen oððe merestream nahton maran hwyrft' ('an army up to the sea-current, no other way out'),⁴⁴⁰ find themselves momentarily trapped at the northern coast of Egypt. In the prelude to the crossing, the opposing forces are arrayed as if they are to battle, alongside a fantastic image of hypothetical battle-death using the 'beasts of battle' motif.⁴⁴¹ Much is made of the marginality of the place, particularly by convoluting the act of beating the boundary with the identification of the *mearc* as a battle-line, creating a degree of semantic confusion again between both the two senses of *mearc* and the two forces. When Pharaoh's army surround their adversaries, it is never clear if the 'þeod mearc tredan' ('nation (who) tread the mearc')⁴⁴² are the Israelites who are pressed against the Red Sea, or the Egyptian ranks which line up against them. The Hebrew 'mearcweardas' ('advance guards') and 'mearcþreat' ('mearc-troop')⁴⁴³ take their names from their position in the battle-lines, but these evocative terms also play upon their literal closeness to the boundary of land and sea. A third sense of *mearc* as measurement is also alluded to when the Israelite cavalry 'mæton milpaðas' ('mark out the mile-path').⁴⁴⁴ The two armies are finally distinguished irreparably when the Red Sea is parted and closed, using the same *mearc* tropes conventionally employed in the conventional description of the storm at sea as a mixed space. It is the polysemy of the poetic boundary-space that allows the Israelites to escape and the Egyptians to drown, a kind of literary determinism equally fatalistic and salvatory. The drowning of the Egyptians, in particular, makes heavy use of the 'storm at sea' trope.

wæron beorhhliðu blode bestemed

⁴³⁹ David McKitterick (ed.) *The Trinity Apocalypse: Trinity College Cambridge, MS R.16.2* (London : British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 28-30

⁴⁴⁰ *Exodus*, 210

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.* 162-7

⁴⁴² *Ibid.* 160b

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.* 168a, 173b

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 171a

holm heolfre spaw hream wæs on yðum
 wæter wæpna ful wælmist astah
 wæron egypte eft oncyrde
 flugon forhtigende fær ongeton,
 woldon herebleaðe hamas findan
 gylp wearð gnornra him ongen genap
 atol yða gewealc ne ðær ænig becwom
 herges to hame ac behindan beleac
 wyrd mid wæge þær ær wegas lagon
 mere modgode mægen wæs adrenced⁴⁴⁵

[The mountainsides were dampened with blood, the sea spewed gore, tumult was upon the waves, the water full of weapons/weeping, a death-mist rose up. The Egyptians were turned away, terrified they fled, they received a disaster, the cowards wished to seek out homes, (their) boasting became sadder. Against them the rolling terror of waves grew dark, and none of the army came home, but fate locked behind with the wave. Where the paths had lain before, now the seas raged; the force was drowned.]

Confusion of water and earth, towering walls of waves and cliffs, loud noise, wind as the motive force, and the mixture of blood and water are all employed in a similar way to ‘Riddle 1’. Unlike the chosen people of God, for whom an unobstructed passage affirms their unboundedness as a nation, the Egyptians find the boundary impassable because of their inherent pagan separateness. In *Exodus*, unlike in other poetic sea-storms, there is no corresponding denial of geographical specificity. In fact, the biblical geography is purposely amended by changing the easterly direction of the wind which parts the Red Sea to a ‘suðwind’,⁴⁴⁶ giving further credence to an interpretation that the Israelites are crossing in a northerly direction. It seems difficult to see how this direction of travel can support an east to west ‘migration myth’.⁴⁴⁷ If any migration is being mythologised, it is the northerly journey of the Gregorian mission, through the

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. 449-59

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. 289b

⁴⁴⁷ Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 92

Merovingian kingdom, across the sea to Kent, and then on to Northumbria, bearing with them the promise of an unbounded paradise that ended that most beautiful of all boundary myths, the metaphor of the sparrow and the hall that Bede attributed to the pagan priest, Coifi.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁸ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, xiii, 182-4

Conclusion

In all, the word ‘mearcland’ appears six times in the Old English corpus: twice in *Andreas*, once in *Guthlac A*, *Exodus* and ‘Riddle 1’, as well as its solitary non-poetic occurrence, in a 982 charter from the early years of Æthelred’s rule, where, alongside the main parcel of land, it grants ‘ðæs mearclandes swa micel swa to rim hidon gebyrað’ (‘as much of the marshland as can be colonised for three hides’).⁴⁴⁹ The division of this real-life mearcland by its potential for cultivation has much in common with the ‘mearcþapas’ of ‘Riddle 36.’ Yet, when stumbling along the overgrown hedgerow-paths that enclose the west corner of this same mearcland space today, one quickly comes to realise that there is little of the poetic about the geography of charters. The mearcland is still visible, a small section of boggy marginal land fenced off on the western bank of the picturesque river Test, a few miles upstream from the village of Longstock. Comparison of this small strip of quiet marsh with the tempestuous coastal confusion of its poetic namesake can only illuminate the most abstract of comparisons. Likewise, it is not wound with murder, it has not been absorbed into or transformed by a political or religious centre, and it has not been annihilated by its booking. In fact, its inheritance ‘in perennem haereditatem’ actually marks out its use as commons, rather than bringing about its effacement by any Rousseauian spectre of enclosure. The survival of this real-life mearcland has been a necessity component of mixed agriculture for generations in the Test Valley, a consequence of the Cretaceous chalk that lies a few meters below the surface soil, the milky outcrops of which periodically break through the downland soils. As Charles Knight observed in his nineteenth century topographical survey of the area, “where a farm has a portion of water-meadow and a run for sheep on the downs, the occupier generally thrives.”⁴⁵⁰

For the most part, then, the poetic boundary does not map directly onto the physical world. This would largely confirm Jennifer Neville’s central contention that ‘the physical reality of the “natural world” could play a very small role in determining

⁴⁴⁹ S 840, *Electronic Sawyer*

⁴⁵⁰ Charles Knight, *Hampshire* (London: C. Knight, 1841), p. 9

what of it was represented and how it was represented.’⁴⁵¹ That is not to say that vernacular poetry ignored physical boundaries, but that it translated them indirectly through such topoi as the land/sea world-binary (itself a translation of classical geography), the ecumenical fantasy of an unbounded world, or the vision of an undivided and eternal Jerusalem. Only in the ‘eorðcræft riddles’ and the structurally complex *Exodus* do the physical and poetic worlds touch. The ‘fenland mistake’ in *Guthlac A* shows the dangers of bringing an unmediated landscape-historicism to such spaces. Nor can we regard the poetic *mearca* as the observably historicised or evolutionary products of particular cultural circumstances, excepting a few works such as ‘Seasons for Fasting’ and ‘The Menologium’. A comparative synchronic approach between vernacular literatures might allow us to understand why this is and whether the reasons for this might themselves be the products of very specific historical circumstances. For example, unlike its Frankish neighbours, in Anglo-Saxon England we find neither ornate table-maps,⁴⁵² nor anything like the ethnic and administrative complexity of the sprawling Carolingian or Ottonian marchlands that we can map the poetic landscape against; comparing the ravaged *mittilagart* of the *Muspilli* to its Old English apocalyptic equivalents might yield some clue as to the relationship between circumstances of production and textual product.

With this in mind, excepting the strategic deployment of disparate ideas from Weber, Bakhtin, Austin and Kristeva when necessary, and the more indirect use of the Hegelian idea of the ‘other’, I have tried to avoid any overreliance on critical or sociological theory, and in particular the various theories of space associated with Frederic Jameson and Henri Lefebvre, Gilles Deleuze, or Michel Foucault. More compelling, I thought, to create new theory from the now-marginal ‘in-house’ source of J. M. Kemble, however problematic ‘Mark theory’ has proved to be in constitutional and political history. In a recent piece on the use of contemporary theory in Anglo-Saxon studies, Andrew Scheil has claimed that ‘time, whether conceived diachronically or synchronically, has traditionally been privileged over space in disciplines such as

⁴⁵¹ Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, p. 7

⁴⁵² Cf. Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* in Phillip Jaffe (ed.), *Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum*, Vol. 4 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1867), xxxiii, p. 540

history or literary study'.⁴⁵³ This argument, derived partly from poststructuralist accounts of contemporary culture such as Fredric Jameson's idea of a hypermodern 'historical deafness',⁴⁵⁴ and David Harvey's plea 'that we recognise the multiplicity of the objective qualities which space and time can express, and the role of human practices in their construction',⁴⁵⁵ is utterly redundant when it comes to Old English poetry. In fact, conceptions of space and time have proved to be less important than the conception of their boundaries. Directly applying such theory to *Andreas* or *Exodus* is to be guilty of this same concept of historical deafness that Jameson is applying specifically to the cultural logic of pastiche in postmodern cultural production, and not to the dimly lit and consciously archaic world of Anglo-Saxon cultural production. This is not to say that we should prize works like *Exodus* and *Beowulf* only for elegiac 'remoteness', Ozymandian didacticism, or internal aesthetic 'unity.' The poetic mearcland is undoubtedly a cultural construction in debt to an 'outside of the text', but it differs from other textual sources in that it is a highly composite form, necessarily overdetermined and indeterminate in its signification. The poetical mearcland is polysemic and dialogic in a way that other textual sources are not. When Kemble's agglomerated the characteristics of various *mearca* into the all-encompassing institution of the 'Mark,' he failed to appreciate that this 'bundling' only occurs in poetic synthesis. Mearcland is not indivisible as a result of communal ownership, but because of its discursive hybridity, which in turn permits the synchronous conflation of land and sea, body and landscape, genealogy and topography. The unifying feature of these various mearcland is a common sequential narrative structure, which involves a transition from division to unity. Michelet has identified three strategies of spatial control in Old English literature, 'knowledge, othering processes, and narratives.'⁴⁵⁶ Thus, when the Mermedonians threaten to literally consume the missionaries, or when depictions of the Egyptian 'other' blur with those of the Israelite 'self', these crises of identity are resolved by anamnesis of hereditary lands, beating the boundaries, and fusing self with landscape. In the dramatic watery Aufhebens of *Andreas* and *Exodus*, these narrative forces centralise, domesticate and dissolve the formerly peripheral,

⁴⁵³ Andrew Scheil, 'Space and Place', in Stodnick & Overing (eds.), *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, p.198

⁴⁵⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), p. xi

⁴⁵⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 205

⁴⁵⁶ Michelet, *Creation, Migration and Conquest*, p. 27

hostile and divided mearcland. *Eorðcræft*, *anweald* and ecumenism all aim towards wiping away sources of division, be they natural, artificial, or human, with the boundary-obliterating tails of the lion and ox, the flood and Moses' rod. In his insightful meditation on place and memory, *Across an Inland Sea: Writing in Place from Buffalo to Berlin*, Nicholas Howe described how an old photograph of his Greek immigrant grandmother posing next to her old home in downtown Buffalo would inevitably recall in his mind the co-ordinating sense of place that gathered together three generations of family stories. When inadvertently travelling in the neighbourhood, he would drive past the house to see how it looked, because, despite being 'no longer ours, it remained in the family by the right of prior occupancy.'⁴⁵⁷ In the same way, these discursive gatherings are not, as Kemble thought, "fragments which bear the impress of former wealth and grandeur,"⁴⁵⁸ but unifying works that co-ordinate and bind together differing notions of boundary and world. In memorialising the triumph of *riht* within a single story of one mearcland, they thus lay claim to a 'right of prior occupancy' in all *mearca* and *mearcstede*, marginal land and wasteland, *westenstapolas* and *feldwestena*.

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⁴⁵⁷ Nicholas Howe, *Across an Inland Sea: Writing in Place from Buffalo to Berlin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 17

⁴⁵⁸ Kemble, *The Saxons in England, Vol. I*, p.57-8

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