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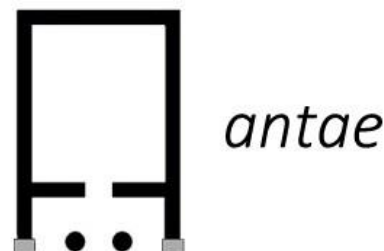
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Exile and Chosenness in the Old English *Exodus*

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Displacement can take many forms. Indeed, one may speak of geographical, social, political, as well as spiritual displacement. One form of displacement that recurs in Old English or Anglo-Saxon literature, however, dating back to the 10th century or earlier, is *wræc*, which is defined as exile or misery by Henry Sweet's Anglo-Saxon dictionary.[1] This simple definition belies a concept of significant cultural complexity, which manifests itself in poetry as diverse as the heroic *Beowulf*, contemplative elegies such as *The Seafarer*, as well as poetry adapting biblical, and specifically Old Testament, narratives.

Wræc—or exile—looms large over the final phase of *Beowulf*, which is marked by a prophecy of doom. Beowulf's people, deprived of their strong and virtuous leader, are condemned to collective exile. They will be displaced and dispossessed: the ultimate price paid for the wars instigated by Beowulf's predecessors:

> Þæt ys sio fæhðo ond se feondscipe,
>
> wælnið wera, ðæs ðe ic wen hafo,
>
> þe us seceað to Sweona leoda,
>
> syððan he gefricgeað frean userne
>
> eadlordleasne, þone ðe ær geheold
>
> wið hettendum hord ond rice
>
> æfter hæleða hryre, hwate Scildingas,
>
> eorlscipe efnde.'[2]

> (That is the feud and the enmity, deadly hatred of men, for which I expect the people of the Swedes will come looking for us, once they hear that our lord has lost his life- he who earlier held hoard and kingdom against those who hated us, after the fall of heroes furthered the good of the people, the bold Scyldings, and displayed still more heroism.)

In *The Seafarer*, a lone exile bemoans the loss of lord and companions. The sea and the cries of the sea-birds simultaneously echo and symbolise the speaker's loneliness. Moreover, his solitude is complemented by the theme of social degradation; the speaker relates that neither the kings nor the lords of his day compare with those of days gone by. In other words, glory

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[1] Henry Sweet, *The Student's Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1897), p. 212.
[2] *Beowulf Text & Facing Translation,* ed. and trans. by Michael Swanton, revised edn. (Manchester and New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 176, 178, lns. 2999-3007. The bracketed translation is lifted from this edition.

has been brought low.[3] This passage effectively rules out a return to the old life lost by the speaker, namely the life of the mead-hall. The mead-hall was effectively the court of the Anglo-Saxon period, where retainers would drink and celebrate together, and where they would affirm and re-affirm allegiance to their lord. Having lost this life, the speaker chooses to step out of his nostalgia by sailing across the sea. The sea, which in the poem's opening lines stands for the speaker's solitude; becomes a symbol of his journey towards fulfilment, as once he sets about the journey the speaker relates that: 'Forþon me hatran sind | Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif, | Læne on londe'.[4] (Thus the joys of the Lord are | Warmer to me than this dead life, | Transitory on land).This poem, therefore, interprets *wræc* spiritually, as the Germanic cultural concept is effectively transmuted into a *peregrinatio ad Deum*, which of course stands for Christian life.[5]

The poet thus makes use of a Germanic social situation, namely that of a retainer who finds himself without lord and companions, and consequently without purpose, in order to deliver the Christian meaning of exile and the journey towards God. It has to be borne in mind that the relation between a lord and his retainers was one of the most important bonds in Anglo-Saxon society; as a matter of fact, in *The Battle of Maldon* the poet only sings the praises of those who fight alongside their lord even if defeat and death are practically certain.[6] The same spirit permeates *Beowulf*, where Beowulf's retainers are harshly rebuked by Wiglaf for their cowardly escape as their lord was beset by the dragon.[7]

Whilst the notion of exile—along with its spiritual interpretation—is a recurring theme in the Anglo-Saxon literary corpus, such a notion neither originates with Anglo-Saxon literature, nor is it, by any means, confined to it. After all, exile, be it spiritual or physical, permeates for instance the biblical Book of Exodus, which may be described as the National Epic of the Israelites.[8] The Book of Exodus is characterised by its dichotomy, for as succinctly summed up by the Anglo-Saxon abbot Ælfric of Eynsham, in his letter to the secular landowner Sigeweard,[9] Moses led the Israelites from bondage by the power of God.[10] Pharaoh and Egypt therefore stand for slavery and exile, whereas the figure of Moses embodies liberation and the Covenant with God. As a matter of fact, immediately after the demise of the Egyptian army, in verse 14:31, the Book of Exodus relates that:

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[3] See 'The Seafarer', in *Old and Middle English c. 890-c. 1450: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Treharne, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 60-67, p. 64, lns. 80-5.

[4] ibid., lns 64-6. The bracketed translation is lifted from this edition.

[5] See Stanley R. Hauer, 'The Patriarchal Digression in the Old English *Exodus*, Lines 362-446', in *The Poems of MS Junius II,* ed. by R.M. Liuzza (New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 173-87, p. 179.

[6] See Joseph Harris, 'Love and Death in the Mannerbund: An Essay with Special Reference to the Bjarkamal and The Battle of Maldon', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period*, ed. by Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1993), pp. 77-114, p. 101.

[7] See *Beowulf*, p. 170, lns. 2846-72.

[8] See Samantha Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon Verse Becoming the Chosen People* (London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 48.

[9] See Paul G. Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 88.

[10] See 'Letter to Sigeweard', in ibid., p. 202.

Et viderunt Aegyptos mortuos super litus maris et manum magnam quam exercuerat Dominus contra eos, timuitque populous Dominum, et crediderunt Domino et Mosi, servo eius.[11]

(And they saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore and the mighty hand that the Lord had used against them, and the people feared the Lord, and they believed the Lord and Moses, his servant.)

The spiritual message intrinsic to the Book of Exodus enabled biblical exegetes to allegorise this narrative, whereby the journey of the Chosen People across the desert becomes the journey of the individual Christian towards God, this from the very moment he or she is baptised.[12] Moreover, the figure of Moses guiding the Israelites across the desert was seen to pre-figure Christ;[13] which argument was also made in relation to Noah, whose ark was said to stand for the Church, which offers salvation to those within it.[14] In this regard, it is worth noting that an illustration accompanying the Anglo-Saxon poem *Genesis*, which has been preserved in the manuscript Junius XI at the Bodleian, represents the ark as a church-like building on a dragon-ship.[15]

It is of course apt to remark that both biblical narratives discussed offer salvation through water, given that just as Noah saves those faithful to God from the Great Flood, so Moses guides his people across the dry bed of the Red Sea while the pursuing enemy is drowned by the returning waters. Such interpretations of the Book of Exodus should make it no surprise that extracts from it, including in particular the Crossing of the Red Sea, would have been read out during the course of the Easter Vigil, when catechumens would be baptised.[16] However, the Book of Exodus is ultimately as political as it is spiritual. It has already been pointed out, in fact, that this narrative functioned as a National Epic for the Israelites. This is the case not only because the Book of Exodus is about the liberation of a people from oppression, but also because it defines national identity through the concept of what is here termed "chosenness". This is probably best summed up by the service of the phase in verses 12:43-45, or the passage of the Lord, which is marked by exclusivity:

Dixitque Dominus ad Mosen et Aaron, "Haec est religio phase. Omnis alienigena non comedet ex eo. Omnis autem servus empicius circumcidetur, et sic comedet. Advena et merennarius non comedet ex eo."[17]

(And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the service of the phase. No foreigner shall eat of it. But every bought servant shall be circumcised, and so shall eat. The stranger and the hireling shall not eat thereof.")

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[11] 'Book of Exodus', in *The Vulgate Bible Vol. I The Pentateuch*, ed. by Edgar Swift (London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 275-500, p. 352. The bracketed translation is lifted from this edition.
[12] See James W. Earl, 'Christian Tradition in the Old English *Exodus*', in *The Poems of MS Junius 11,* ed. by R.M. Liuzza (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 137-72, p. 140.
[13] See Hauer, p. 180.
[14] See Earl, p. 160.
[15] See Zacher, p. 68.
[16] Remley, p. 170.
[17] 'Book of Exodus', pp. 340.

Such exclusivity could have significantly influenced the decision taken by an unknown Anglo-Saxon poet, at some point between the seventh and tenth century, to embark on a poetic adaptation of key episodes from the Book of Exodus, namely the death of the Egyptian firstborn (which prompts Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt), the departure from Egypt, and the miracle at the Red Sea.[18]Another factor that may have prompted the poet to adapt the Book of Exodus, or more specifically the mentioned episodes, is the theme of *wræc*, or exile. As a matter of fact the poem is built on the theme or premise of exile, as attested by its opening, in which the poet relates, in the first person, that God granted Moses a dwelling for the sons of Abraham; in other words a way out of the exile in Egypt.[19] The opening may also be said to set a framework for interpretation of the poem. The point is that the poet is not simply recounting a biblical narrative; after stating that Moses' judgements are known throughout the world, the poet pronounces that promises have been made to those in exile: heavenly rewards after a dangerous journey (see *E*, l. 1-7). The poem's audience is then told: 'Gehyre se ðe wille!' (*E*, l. 7) ('He who will, let him listen!'). Clearly, the poet is delivering a spiritual message in which exile is also understood to have a spiritual, beyond the strictly literal, significance.

A similar opening characterises *Genesis A*, a poetic adaptation of the first 22 chapters of the Book of Genesis, in which the poet pronounces man's duty to sing the praises of the creator. Bernard F. Huppé considers such an introduction to a poem treating the subject of Genesis exegetically appropriate, given that the Book of Genesis:

> not only describes man's fall, but forecasts his redemption as well; and the promotion of man's duty to praise God is the aim and logical conclusion of the traditional justification of God's ways in the story of the Creation, Fall and Redemption.[20]

Like the *Exodus*-poet, the *Genesis A*-poet appeals directly to his audience; in fact the first half-line of the poem reads 'Us is riht micel'.[21] (It is very right for us). Both poems therefore appeal directly to their audience; at the same time, the spiritual nature of the address by the *Exodus*-poet strongly suggests that the narrative to be recounted is not only the literal narrative of the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, but also a spiritual journey not quite dissimilar to that undertaken by the protagonist of *The Seafarer* in his highly Christianised account of liberation from exile, or what may be termed displacement. The Anglo-Saxon poet does not simply translate or reproduce the biblical narrative. Paul G. Remley, in his *Old English Biblical Verse*, attributes a two-part structure to the poem, the first of which involves all the elements of the poem derived from the Book of Exodus itself. Remley defines this part

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[18] See Remley, pp. 2, 209.

[19] See 'Exodus', in *Old Testament Narratives*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Anlezark (London: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 205-246, p. 206, lns. 14-8. Henceforth cited in text as (*E*, chapter, line number/s). Bracketed translations are here and throughout lifted from this edition.

[20] Bernard F. Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry* (New York: Quinn & Boden Company Inc., Rahway, N.J., 1959), p. 135. See also pp. 133-4.

[21] 'Genesis', in *Old Testament Narratives*, pp. 1-203, p. 2, ln. 1a. The bracketed translation is lifted from this edition.

of the poem—its bulk—as 'nonlinear and imagistic.'[22] The second part of the structure encompasses what is generally known as the Patriarchal Digression, which entails a 'sequential and discursive' treatment of material drawn from Genesis XXII, namely Abraham's interrupted sacrifice of his son Isaac, as well as a 'compressed account of the Flood'.[23]

The fact that *Exodus* has a digression is significant in itself. Interestingly, *Exodus* is the only Old English Old Testament biblical adaptation that directly refers to past narratives that will be shown to directly relate, on a conceptual level, to the main narrative. Whilst no such digressions are to be found in *Genesis A, Genesis B, Daniel* and *Judith*, digressions concerning past events that thematically or conceptually relate to the main narrative abound in *Beowulf*. Whilst it is not possible to explore the *Beowulf* digressions here, it is worth pointing out, by way of example, that Grendel's mother's attack on the Danes to avenge the death of her son follows the narration of a story—a digression—in which the Danes listen to their poet's recounting of the story of queen Hildeburh. The queen is a mother who has lost her son, and who has to helplessly watch as his corpse burns on the pyre. The juxtaposition of the two narratives, the one focusing on a character who is not in a position to take revenge, and the other on one who does, highlights the fact that revenge is Grendel's mother's sole motivation for striking at the Danes. According to Gale R. Owen-Crocker, in fact, Grendel's mother's motivation is 'all revenge'.[24] The *Exodus*-poet therefore employs a narrative technique that may be considered characteristic of poetry treating traditional or secular matters. Whilst this is not exceptional in and of itself, the fact that *Exodus* is the only extant Old English Old Testament poem to employ this specific technique makes it unique within its genre.

The two-part structure of the poem, or rather the inclusion of a Patriarchal Digression, is crucial to the interpretation of exile (or displacement) and chosenness (or placement) within the poem. The digression is therefore an integral part of the poem, and not an interpolation or an afterthought.[25] Indeed, even though the digression suddenly breaks the main narrative ahead of the poem's climax, namely the demise of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, it is ultimately spurred by a motif it shares with the main narrative:

> Niwe flodas Noe oferlað,
>
> þrymfæst þeoden, mid his þrim sunum,
>
> þone deopestan drence-floda
>
> þara ðe gewurde on woruld-rice (*E*, l. 362-65).
>
> ('Noah journeyed over new floods, the glorious chieftain, with his three sons, the deepest of drowning-floods that ever had happened in the kingdom of the world').

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[22] Remley, p. 194.

[23] ibid.

[24] Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf* (Manchester and New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 222.

[25] See Huppé, p. 222.

The two narratives are clearly linked by salvation through water; for the Israelites in the main narrative are saved by the temporary withdrawing of the waters in their path, whereas Noah and his family are saved by the ark, which floats amidst the Great Flood. The second patriarchal figure in the digression is Abraham, who is said to have lived in exile (see *E*, l. 383), which theme is evidently related to the main narrative. After all, his descendants are likewise said to be *wræc-mon* ('men in exile') (*E*. 1. 137). Clearly, this also relates to the message delivered to the poem's audience in the opening section. Moreover, Noah and Abraham are exemplars of 'abiding faith and its reward', which traits are mirrored by the Israelites in the main narrative, and who, according to Stanley R. Hauer, 'are praised for their steadfastness in abiding by their oaths'.[26]

In narrating the story of Abraham, who is willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's behest before God Himself interrupts, the poet inserts a reference to Solomon's Temple. In fact, according to the Patriarchal Digression, Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac on 'Seone beorh' (Mount Zion) (*E*, l. 386), the site of Solomon's Temple. James W. Earl considers that the Patriarchal Digression encompasses, along with the main narrative, the history of the Covenant between God and His Chosen People, for 'the history of the covenant in the Bible consists of the covenants made with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David'.[27] In this regard, it should be recalled that Solomon is not mentioned directly by name in the poem, but is rather referred to as 'se snottra sunu Dauides' ('the wise son of David') (*E*, l. 389).

The connection between the episodes in question is also sustained by the concept of the ark—be it as a Tabernacle or Ship—which in either case would have been translated as *earce* in Old English biblical commentaries and glossaries.[28] According to Samantha Zacher, in the main narrative of *Exodus*, as the Israelites are walking towards the Red Sea, the poet superimposes God's Cloud of Presence—which guides the Israelites through the desert—upon the image of the Tabernacle. The poem makes use of the phrase 'feld-husa mæst' ('mightiest tent') (*E*, 1. 81), and the image created here is a complex one, for after having described the Cloud of Presence as a billowing cloud, he relates that:

> […] hæfde witig God
>
> sunnansið-fæt segle ofertolden,
>
> swa þa mæst-rapas men ne cuðon,
>
> ne ða segl-rode geseon meahton,
>
> eorð-buende ealle cræfte,
>
> hu afæstnod wæs feld-husa mæst,
>
> siððan he mid wuldre geweorðode
>
> þeoden-holde (*E*, l. 80-87).

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[26] Hauer, p. 177.
[27] Earl, p. 161.
[28] See Zacher, p. 67.

(The wise God had veiled the sun's course with a sail, though in a way that people were unaware of mast-ropes, nor could the earth-dwellers, for all their skill, see how the sailyards, the mightiest tent, was tied, when he gloriously honoured the loyal nation.)

The Cloud of Presence is therefore a billowing cloud, as well as a tent and a ship's sail at one and the same time. Zacher argues that the terminology used in the cited passage could either refer to a ship's sail and rigging or to the velum that divided the altar from the Holy of Holies, wherein the Ark (of the Covenant) would have been housed.[29] This interpretation of the cited passage arises from the parallels offered by the Patriarchal Digression. After all, Noah saved those faithful to God by boarding them on his ark (a ship), whilst Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac at the same site, according to the poem, where Solomon was later to construct the Jerusalem Ark—the Temple.[30] The Cloud of Presence in the main narrative completes the circle, standing also for the Ark of the Covenant (which would have been placed within the Holy of Holies). In this regard, it is worth noting that an Anglo-Saxon illustration of the Ark of the Covenant housed within the Holy of Holies, which is clearly separated from the altar and the rest of the Temple of Jerusalem, survives in the Codex Amiatinus, which left Wearmouth-Jarrow in Northumbria for Italy in 716.[31]

However, the explanation of the abovementioned imagery set out so far does not account for the fact that the poet is also accumulating elements drawn from different Chapters of the Book of Exodus itself. It has already been pointed out that the poem is an adaptation of selected episodes from the Book of Exodus, as according to most scholars it is based on Exodus 12-15:1 (henceforth "Ex."), that is, the slaying of the Egyptian first born, the departure from Egypt, and the Crossing of the Red Sea.[32] Yet, the biblical book relates the construction of the Ark of the Covenant only in Chapter 25, well after the crossing of the dry bed of the Red Sea by the Israelites. This means that the poet is not only introducing elements drawn from the Book of Genesis, by way of the Patriarchal Digression, but also that he embellishes his narrative with elements lifted from other Chapters of the Book of Exodus itself. From a purely chronological viewpoint, the Old English poem should not be alluding to the Ark of the Covenant, given that the narrative ostensibly only goes as far as the Crossing of the Red Sea. It is however evident that *Exodus* is not a plain chronological rendition of the account in the biblical book. The point is that the poem is not so much about the letter as about the spirit of the biblical book. The allusion to the Ark of the Covenant, in combination with the Cloud of Presence that guides the Israelites through the desert, serves to draw attention to one of the most important messages in the biblical book, namely that of God as a guide for man in his journey from baptism to salvation. Moreover, the imagery employed in the poem highlights that the Covenant is that which joins God and His people—the *populus Dei*. In other words, the poet employs a complex image in order to compress, as it were, the central tenet of the biblical book, delivering it in a few intensive lines that operate in

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[29] See Zacher, p. 67.
[30] See ibid., p. 64.
[31] See Christopher De Hamel, *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), p. 62.
[32] See Zacher, p. 49.

conjunction with the other elements introduced to the narrative by the poem, specifically the Patriarchal Digression.

On the other hand, a selection of episodes to be found in Ex. 12-15:1 is omitted altogether from the poem, even if the narrative is ostensibly based on these Chapters. For instance, the poem makes no reference at all to the preparation and eating of the paschal lamb in Ex. 12, even if the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn in the same Chapter forms an integral part of the poem. Likewise, no reference is made to the paschal solemnity described in Ex. 13. The poet is clearly selective in his treatment of the narrative in the biblical book, as only those episodes that are directly relevant to the message that the poem seeks to transmit are included.

The selective stance adopted in respect of the episodes in the biblical book, coupled with the perception of Noah's Ark as the archetype for the Ship of the Church, which has been mentioned earlier on, brings us back to the spiritual interpretation of the Book of Exodus, whereby the journey of the Israelites represents the individual Christian's journey from baptism to salvation. However, this is by no means the only explanation offered by critics for the *Exodus*-poet's use of nautical imagery to describe a journey across the desert and a dry sea-bed. Indeed, the poem also features military imagery, amongst other kinds, that has elicited alternative interpretations.

The fact that the Egyptians are described in military terms is not surprising, for the Book of Exodus, in verse 14:7, describes the pursuing Egyptians as an army chosen by Pharaoh: 'Tulitque sescentos currus electos et quicquid in Aegypto curuum fuit et duces totius exercitus'.[33] ('And hetook six hundred chosen chariots and all the chariots that were in Egypt and the captains of the whole army').The word 'exercitus'—army—is actually also used in reference to the Israelites themselves, as in Ex.7:4 and 12:17; however, this description is not elaborated. Moreover, in Ex. 13:18, where it is stated that the Lord led the Israelites out of Egypt by the way of the desert; the biblical book relates that the Israelites left Egypt armed. For all that, it cannot be argued that the Book of Exodus represents the Israelites as a fully-fledged army, for Israelite military organisation would not have predated the Book of Numbers.[34]

However, the Old English poem describes an organised Israelite army complete with an elite vanguard:

> Siððan hie getealdon wið þam teon-hete
>
> on þam forð-herge feðan twelfe
>
> mode-rofra- mægen wæs onhrered.
>
> Wæs on anra gehwam æðelan cynnes
>
> alesen under lindum leoda duguðe

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[33] 'Book of Exodus', p. 348.
[34] See Remley, p. 184.

on folc-getæl fiftig cista (*E*, l. 224-29).

('Against the hateful malice they later marshalled the vanguard into twelve divisions of the brave hearted- strength was stirred up. From each one was chosen fifty of the best under the shield of that noble nation from among the populance, from the old guard of the people').

The poet then refers to the army's commanders, who chose the best experienced warriors to confront the enemy, relating also the preparations made for the Egyptian onslaught as the latter pursue the Israelites across the desert, or rather the deployment of warriors in a specific military formation:

Þæt wæs wiglic werod. Wace ne gretton

In þæt rinc-getæl ræswan herges,

þa þe for geoguðe gyt ne mihton

under bord-hreoðan breost-net wera

wið flane feond folmum werigean,

ne him bealu-benne geibiden hæfdon

ofer linde lærig, lic-wunde swor,

gylp-plegan gares (*E*, l. 234-40).

('That was a warlike host. The army's commanders did not welcome the weak into that muster, those who because of their youth could not yet protect with their hands the breast-net of men under the shield-wall against the hostile enemy, nor had yet experienced a grievous wound across the shield's rim, the scar of a flesh-wound, in a contest of the spear').

The army's composition is further described in the following lines, as the poet relates that those who were too old were likewise left out of the shield-wall (see *E,* l. 240-46); this is a military formation that has no counterpart in the Book of Exodus, but that was regularly employed in early Medieval battles, both by the Anglo-Saxons and their enemies. Of course, in the poem the two armies do not engage, for the Israelites cross the dry bed of the Red Sea, whereas the Egyptians are drowned by the returning waters as they pursue them.

Whilst the poem lacks a conventional battle scene, as opposed to the muster of the forces, it features a description of the tribes of Israel crossing the dry bed of the Red Sea which, like the aforementioned muster of the forces, is embellished with military detail. In particular, after having related that the fourth tribe crossed first (see *E*, l. 310), the poem relates that:

Hæfdon him to segne, þa hie on sund stigon,

ofer bord-hreoðan beacen aræred

in þam gar-heape, gyldenne leon-

driht-folca mæst, deora cenost (*E*, l. 319-22).

('They had as their standard, when they climbed onto the sea, a beacon raised up over the shield formation, a golden lion among the stand of spears- the greatest of lordly peoples, the keenest of wild beasts').

The lion as a symbol of Judah, the leader of the fourth tribe, is clearly derived from Genesis 49:9, where Judah is described as a 'Catulus leonis'(lion's whelp);[35] however, the Book of Genesis does 'not specifically account for the detail that the standard of the tribe bore a lion device'.[36] Indeed, whilst drawing on the Book of Genesis for the choice of animal device, the poet is likely to have derived the idea of an animal device from traditional, as opposed to biblical, sources. Charles D. Wright argues that the animal standard is a Germanic motif, which may also be encountered in the poem *Elene*, where Emperor Constantine displays the emblem of a boar prior to his conversion to Christianity. It can therefore be surmised that the passage in question, by combining traditional and biblical elements, would have enabled the poem's Anglo-Saxon audience to associate themselves with the Israelites. The same may of course be said of the military imagery preceding the Crossing of the Red Sea, which recalls early medieval military formations rather than the chariots referred to in the original biblical account.

Military imagery permeates the rest of the crossing as Judah himself is described as a battle leader, whilst his followers are said to have lifted their spear-shafts against any nation (see *E*, l. 323, 325-26). In a similar fashion, the men of the second tribe, the tribe of Ruben, are described as 'sæ-wicingas' (*E*, l. 333) ('sea-marauders'), who bore shields across the salt marsh. The same language informs the rest of what Samantha Zacher refers to as the Tribal Digression, which eventually segues into the Patriarchal Digression referred to earlier on.[37] Of course, the Patriarchal Digression relates selected episodes from the history of the ancestors of the Israelites who are crossing the Red Sea, and who like their descendants benefited from the Covenant with God.

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly when seen from a contemporary perspective, the poem also features Germanic pagan terminology. In his *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Richard North points out that 'the Egyptians in *Exodus* are imagined [...] as pagans' and 'as if they were Ingui's worshippers', arguing that the term 'Ingui' is a prefix to the name Freyr, a fertility god known from Norse literary sources.[38]

Incidentally, whilst the name Ingunar-Freyr is known from Norse sources, *Beowulf* also refers to the friends of Ing, as 'eodor Ing-wina' and 'frea Ing-wina'. In *Exodus* itself, as the

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[35] 'Genesis', in *The Vulgate Bible Vol. I The Pentateuch*, pp. 1-274, p. 264.
[36] Charles D. Wright, 'The Lion Standard in *Exodus*: Jewish Legend, Germanic Tradition, and Christian Typology', in *The Poems of MS Junius II,* ed. by R.M. Liuzza (New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 188-202, p. 189.
[37] See Zacher, p. 53.
[38] Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 58, 30-1, 39.

Israelites are preparing to leave Egypt following the death of the Egyptian first born, the Egyptian army is described as Ing's army—'inge[he]re'. The term is used again as the Egyptians are referred to as 'ingefolca', or Ingui's people (*E*, l. 142). Later in the poem, as the composition of the Egyptian pursuing army is being described, we are told that 'Wæron in-gemen ealle ætgædere', (*E*, l. 190) which Richard North translates as 'Ingui's men were all together'. The term 'inge' is used one last time as the poet tells of the location of the Promised Land, which lies between two seas and right up to the 'Ingui/gentile nation of the Egyptians'.[39] Even if it has to be said that North's interpretation of the four instances of 'inge' in the poem is not the only possible interpretation, particularly as the first and the fourth instances of this term (where it occurs as part of a compound) are emended, the argument made is a convincing one. Not only is the prefix in question also attested in *Beowulf*, but *Exodus* itself also features other passages that deliberately seek to make the biblical narrative more relatable to an Anglo-Saxon audience. Indeed, it could be argued that the poet, whilst condemning Germanic paganism, seeks to co-opt Germanic warrior culture by integrating it into the Biblical-Christian framework.

Moreover, North's interpretation of the poem is supported by other elements, including the aforementioned nautical imagery, coupled with the poet's description of the Egyptians as land-men and the Israelites as sea-men. The point is that North sees the re-imagining of the Egyptians as contemporary or near-contemporary pagans in the context of a wider allegory. The Egyptians are also seen as those who were left behind on the mainland when the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons moved over to Britain, for their descendants to be converted to Christianity. The cross-imagery of the poem—'wuldres beam' ('glorious pillar')—is adduced as justification for this interpretation.[40] The poet in fact relates that this 'beam' led the Holy troop under God's protection (*E*, l. 567-69). In this regard it would also have to be pointed out that the narrative of the arrival and settlement of Britain by their ancestors would probably have been common knowledge among the poem's Anglo-Saxon audience. This narrative, which sees Hengest and Horsa lead the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons to Britain, is related by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*,[41] which was translated from Latin into Old English as part of King Alfred's educational programme.[42]

Interestingly, this account also gives a biblical explanation for the displacement of the native Britons at the hands of the Anglo-Saxons. The Old English translation of Bede's Latin relates that:

> Ne wæs ungelic wræcc þam ðe iu Chaldeas bærndon Hierusaleme weallas □ hergedon □ ða cynelican getimbro mid fyre fornaman for ðæs Godes folces synnum. Swa þonne her fram þære arleasan ðeode, hwæðere rihte Gode dome, neh ceastra gehwylce □ land forheregeode wæron.[43]

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[39] See North, pp. 27, 62-4. See also *Beowulf*, lns. 1044, 1319.
[40] ibid., pp. 58-9.
[41] See *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People Part I*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Miller (London: N. Trübner and Co, 1890), p. 52.
[42] Elaine Treharne, 'Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*', in *Old and Middle English c. 890- c. 1450*, pp. 1-2, p. 1.
[43] Miller, p. 52.

> (Their vengeance was not unlike that of the Chaldees, when they burned the walls of Jerusalem and destroyed the royal palace by fire for the sins of God's people. So then here almost every city and district was wasted by this impious people, though it was by the just judgment of God).

The comparison with the biblical text effectively justifies the displacement, turning it into a divine verdict. Moreover, the passage from Bede's history demonstrates that the Anglo-Saxons' foundation myth would have been Christianised independently of the poem *Exodus*.

In this respect, the poem's concluding lines are also interesting. As the narrative draws to a close, it is related that the Israelites found an African woman by the shore, adorned with gold. Huppé interprets the reference to the African woman as a symbol of the bride of Christ, derived from the Song of Songs.[44] The episode is undoubtedly one of celebration, as the people now had the spoils of war and their captivity was well and truly over; following this, the Israelites share amongst themselves the said spoils of war, as they collect ancient treasures, clothing and shields from the shore. The Israelites are therefore represented as a victorious army, which has won freedom and prosperity, yet the treasure they have won is described as Joseph's treasure, meaning that it is theirs by right (see *E*, l. 583-8). Indeed, earlier in the narrative, the poet emphasises that the Egyptians were indebted to Joseph; yet they forgot about this debt, choosing instead to murder and injure his kinsmen (see *E*, l. 142-147).

The scene wherein the Israelites collect booty has no precise equivalent in the Book of Exodus; however, it is conceptually reminiscent of Ex. 12:36, wherein it is related that before they left Egypt the Israelites stripped the country of its wealth: 'Dedit autem Dominos gratiam populo coram Aegyptiis ut commodareteis, et spoliaverunt Aegyptios'.[45]('And the Lord gave favour to the people in the sight of the Egyptians so that they lent unto them, and they stripped the Egyptians'). The passage in the poem, like the cited passage from the biblical book, also asserts the status of the Israelites as the Chosen People by explicitly referring to God's favour, along with the justness of their cause. By analogy, the poem may be said to assert the chosenness of the Anglo-Saxons themselves. In contrast, as set out in the poem, those who followed the Pharaoh and remained behind lay dead (see *E*, l. 589-90).

Clearly, such interpretations tally with the spiritual interpretation of exile—or displacement—set out earlier on, when it was pointed out that exile is to be equated with a life away from God. In this regard, the poem's opening relates how God was to empower Moses to bring the Israelites back to Him from Egypt:

> Þone on westenne weroda Drihten,
>
> soðfaest cyning, mid his sylfes miht
>
> gewyrðode, and him wundra fela,
>
> ece alwada, inæht forgeaf.

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[44] See Huppé, p. 223.
[45] 'Exodus', p. 338.

He wæs leof Gode, leoda aldor,

horsc and hreðer-gleaw, herges wisa,

freom folc-toga (*E*, l. 8-14).

(The Lord of the hosts of heaven, the king firm in truth, exalted him in the desert by his own authority, the eternal ruler of all gave wondrous powers into his possession. He was beloved of God, a gifted and wise leader of his people, commander of the army and a bold general).

According to the allegorical interpretation offered by North, and by N. Howe before him, in the same way that the Israelites moved away from Egypt in search of and towards God, the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons sailed away from the mainland to what was to become England, for their descendants to be converted to Christianity.[46] Therefore, the political interpretation of the poem ultimately turns out to be spiritual as well, for it may also be said to speak of the baptism of the Anglo-Saxons as a people.

The Anglo-Saxons would therefore have seen themselves as a chosen people, or at least the poet appears to be encouraging his countrymen to think of themselves as such. This interpretation of the poem's imagery of course offers another reason as to why the poet would have employed nautical terminology as part of the complex image related in the poem (see *E*, l. 80-7). This terminology, in bringing together Anglo-Saxon ancestors and biblical patriarchs, makes the poet's countrymen, by analogy, descendants of the said biblical patriarchs and the Israelites.

It has to be said that such a concept is not confined to *Exodus*, for the imagery employed by the poet may be said to lead to, or perhaps to arise from, the concept of *translatio imperii*, coupled with the related concept of the *populus Dei*. According to these concepts the poet's contemporaries, as part of the *populous christianus*, would have been the descendants of the Israelites as the Chosen People.[47] Interestingly, the medieval *locus classicus* for the *translation imperii* is the second chapter of the Book of Daniel, which like the Book of Exodus is the subject of an adaptation preserved in Junius XI.[48] Therefore, in the same way as the Christians would have inherited the status of *populus Dei* from the Israelites, as part of a *translatio imperii*, so it could be argued that the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons inherited the land that was to become England from the Britons, which by association becomes their Promised Land.

However, the idea of descent from the biblical patriarchs was not exclusively symbolic, as such descent would also have been considered to hold true in a literal sense. At any rate, this idea has clearly informed Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, which, further to featuring euhemerised gods such as Woden, also traced the descent of the kings to Old Testament

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[46] See North, p. 59.
[47] See Earl R. Anderson, 'Style and Theme in the Old English *Daniel*', in *The Poems of MS Junius II*, pp. 229-60, p. 230.
[48] See Remley, p. 249.

figures such as Lamech, Methusalem, Enoh and others, down to Adam, the first man.[49] In this context, the Germanic names may well have conferred on the kings the right royal connections; however, the biblical figures would have justified their rule in the eyes of God.

The concepts of exile and chosenness in the poem therefore operate at different levels of meaning, bringing together the spiritual reality of the individual and the politico-religious reality of a people. In her *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, Jane Chance argues that early Greek patristic writers identified three levels of allegory, namely the tropological or moral, the allegorical, and the anagogical.[50] Chance considers these concepts with reference to Old English hagiographical poems and *Judith,* among other works in which women figure prominently. However, it should be evident that these three levels of meaning may be held to apply to *Exodus*, given that, in a tropological context, Pharaoh maybe seen as the devil, and the Israelites as the soul being guided by God and His messenger Moses from the moment of baptism. It is to be recalled that, as indicated earlier in this article, Moses was considered to pre-figure Christ. In this regard, it is also worth recalling the poem's emphasis on the theme of salvation in its opening lines.

On an allegorical level, *Exodus* may be seen as a politico-religious retelling of the audience's ancestors' settlement of England, which was to be followed by the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity; hence the element of chosenness. On an anagogical level, the Israelites could be seen as the Church itself, particularly given the connection with Noah's ark, which was in fact commonly considered to prefigure the Church.

These interpretations are in no way conflicting; they are much rather complementary. In each of the three scenarios displacement is exile from God, irrespective of whether the space between the exile and God is seen primarily as spiritual or physical. Indeed, it is hardly possible to distinguish between the two. In fact, in all three scenarios, the objective of the Israelites or, one might say the pilgrim, is to move closer to God, that is, salvation and fulfilment. In each scenario, this is to be done by overcoming the devil, evil and tribulations along the way, always with God's assistance and guidance, so long as one walks the path. This message is conveyed rather forcefully in the description of the 'niht-weard' ('night-watchman') who guards the Israelites at night just as the Cloud of Presence guides them during the course of the day (*E*, l. 116). The passage in question, in fact, appears to personify the fire guiding the Israelites at night, which divides its watch with the Cloud of Presence (see *E*, l. 93-7).

Each of the three scenarios is of course also built on the Covenant, or God's commitment to His Chosen People. Therefore, even if the poem explores exile and chosenness at multiple levels of meaning, as a physical and a spiritual space, it is at the same time characterised by one united vision of exile and chosenness.

The poem's message is therefore delivered through the utilisation of complex imagery and narrative techniques that may well have spoken to different sections of the poem's audience

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[49] See *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. by Rev. James Ingram (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912), p. 62.
[50] See Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), p. 36.

in different ways. It may well be that *Exodus* would have offered edification within the confines of the monastery; although its extensive use of military imagery would seem to point towards recitation in a more secular context. We will probably never know for certain precisely which audience the poem was primarily meant for; however, we can be fairly certain that it would have effectively related its messages of chosenness and exile—or placement and displacement—to different audiences, appealing to them in various ways.

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