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THE OLD ENGLISH PROSE HOMILY ON THE PHOENIX

by

Patricia Relf Hanavan

A Thesis
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THE OLD ENGLISH PROSE HOMILY ON THE PHOENIX

Patricia Relf Hanavan, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1997

The Old English prose homily on the phoenix, which is found in two manuscripts, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198 (eleventh century), and London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D. xiv (twelfth century), is the subject of this thesis. The study addresses the homily's imagery, sources, and context.

Comparison of the homily with two of its closest analogues, the Old English verse *Phoenix* and its source, the Latin *De ave phoenice* attributed to Lactantius, reveals that, in spite of similarities, the homily was based upon neither; its source likely was an overtly Christian Latin text unknown to us today. In addition, there are interesting points of coincidence between the homily and the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch.

Evidence suggests that the homily was intended to be preached to a general, rather than a monastic, audience, perhaps on an occasion such as St. John's (Midsummer) Eve, June 23, or perhaps on various occasions, as needed.

Of special interest is a list of sins found in a conclusion added only to the CCCC 198 version of the homily. The author sets out to list eight principal sins but actually names eleven, including poisoning. The selection of sins suggests the influence of penitential texts.

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Patricia Relf Hanavan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 1

The Phoenix Story 1

Manuscripts 5

Published Editions 7

Literature 8

Scope of the Present Study 9

II. TRANSLATION OF THE PHOENIX HOMILY FROM CCCC 198 12

III. THE DESCRIPTION OF PARADISE 17

The Inhabitants of Paradise 19

Connection With St. John 20

The Location of Paradise 25

The Absence of Earthly Woes 27

The Fountain of Life 31

The Trees of Paradise 33

The Brightly-Shining Sun 36

IV. ATTRIBUTES OF THE PHOENIX 38

Connection With the Sun 38

Similarities to the Eagle 41

Table of Contents—continued

CHAPTER

Uniqueness 44

Sex 46

Kingship 48

Colors 50

V. THE JOURNEY OF THE PHOENIX 55

Reason for the Journey 55

The Admiring Throng 58

The Wax Image 62

The Frequency and Duration of the Journey 65

The Homeward Flight 66

VI. THE DEATH AND REBIRTH 68

Preparation for Death 68

The Burning 70

The Birth of the New Phoenix 72

VII. A CATALOGUE OF SINS: THE CONCLUDING SECTION UNIQUE TO CCCC 198 74

The Phoenix and Sin 74

The Number of Sins 77

The Selection of Sins 81

VIII. CONCLUSION 87

BIBLIOGRAPHY 90

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Old English homily on the phoenix tells the story of the legendary bird that burns and is reborn from its own remains. The homily is written in prose with some verse components and is found in two manuscripts: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198 and London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D. xiv. The two versions are virtually identical in content except that the CCCC 198 version appends a short conclusion discussing sin.

The Phoenix Story

The story of the phoenix is extremely old and widespread. Tales that are strikingly similar to western stories of the phoenix appear in the mythologies of China, Assyria, and Egypt.[1] In ancient Egypt, a heron-like bird called the *benu* was revered as a sun bird; the story of its periodic appearances in Heliopolis very likely informed the Greek version of the phoenix story, according to R. van den Broek in *The Myth of the Phoenix*, an exhaustive study of the classical and early Christian accounts. Van den Broek says that "it must be considered probable that the Classical phoenix myth is a purely Greek product, i.e. the Greek variant of the mythical conception of the bird of the sun found in various cultures of the Near, Middle and Far East."[2]

The phoenix story that we know today can be traced to this classical tradition. The earliest known reference is a fragment from Hesiod (fl. eighth century B.C.) which

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[1] Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Bestiaire du Christ* (Bruges: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1940), pp. 405–8.
[2] *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), p. 398.

is preserved in Plutarch and which discusses the life span of the phoenix.[3] The phoenix story is found in many later works, including those of Herodotus (fifth century B.C.), Ovid (43 B.C.–c. 17 A.D.), Pliny (23–79 A.D.), Tacitus (c. 55–120 A.D.), and Claudian (c. 370–410 A.D.).

The story of the phoenix's death and rebirth was used very early by Christian writers as a parallel, and sometimes as evidence, for Christ's resurrection. The phoenix appears in the writings of Clement of Rome (c. 30–100 A.D.), Tertullian (c. 160–230), Ambrose (c. 340–397), Augustine (354–430), Gregory of Tours (c. 538–594), and many others.

The phoenix was also among the animals described in the popular *Physiologus*, the original of which is thought to have been written in Greek about the second century A.D.[4] This was, as Florence McCulloch describes it, "a compilation of pseudo-science in which the fantastic descriptions of real and imaginary animals, birds, and even stones were used to illustrate points of Christian dogma and morals."[5] In the usual *Physiologus* pattern, a chapter begins with a verse from scripture, describes the animal's habits, sometimes offers another scripture verse, then draws an explicit parallel between the animal and Christ or another holy model.[6] McCulloch shows that a Latin translation of the *Physiologus* existed by 388 at the latest. Latin versions circulated widely, and during the twelfth century the Latin *Physiologus*, with additions

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[3]Van den Broek, p. 76. Hesiod's frg. 304 is preserved in Plutarch's *De defectu oraculorum* 2:415; see Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), vol. 5, pp. 378–9.

[4]For the Greek text, see Francesco Sbordone, *Physiologus* (1936; rpt. Hildesheim: Olms, 1991). An Old English version of part of the *Physiologus* is found in the Exeter Book, immediately following the verse *Phoenix*, but it consists of only three short poems describing the panther, the whale, and the partridge. See Albert Stanburrough Cook, *The Old English "Elene," "Phoenix," and "Physiologus"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), pp. 75–81.

[5]*Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 15.

[6]Ibid., pp. 15–16.

from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, evolved into the bestiary form.[7] The *Physiologus* may not have been as well known in England during Anglo-Saxon times as it was on the Continent and later in England, for J. D. A. Ogilvy, in *Books Known to the English, 597–1066*, says that, among Anglo-Latin authors at least, "passages that look like it at first prove on investigation to come from Isidore, Solinus, or Pliny."[8]

One of the most famous, influential, and expanded versions of the phoenix story is found in the *Carmen de ave phoenice*, attributed to the African scholar Lactantius (c. 250–320 A.D.).[9] Assuming that the poem was written by Lactantius, an assertion that has been disputed over the years,[10] we still do not know whether he wrote the poem before or after his conversion to Christianity, for the poem does not contain any explicitly Christian reference. Lactantius may have written it before he converted, or perhaps he wrote it afterwards in an effort to make the idea of resurrection palatable to non-Christian Romans, drawing from classical tradition and using a refined style that they could appreciate. Indeed, much of Lactantius's elegant writing was aimed at converting educated pagans.[11]

Lactantius's poem was well known throughout the Latin-reading world, including Anglo-Saxon England.[12] It was the model for the Old English verse *Phoenix*, a Christian allegorical poem which likely dates to the ninth century and is

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[7]Ibid., pp. 21, 34–5.
[8](Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1967), p. 222.
[9]In J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff, ed. and trans., *Minor Latin Poets*, rev. ed., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935; reprint, 1982), pp. 641–65. Blake also prints the Latin poem.
[10]See Albert S. Cook's discussion of this dispute in *The Old English "Elene," "Phoenix," and "Physiologus,"* pp. xxxiii–xxxviii. Cook finds the arguments for Lactantius's authorship convincing.
[11]Mary Francis McDonald, trans., in Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), p. xiv.
[12]It appears, for example, in the eleventh-century Cambridge University Library MS Gg.5.35, which originated at St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, according to Helmut Gneuss in "A Preliminary List of Manuscripts Written or Owned in England up to 1100," *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981), p. 6, no. 12.

found in the Exeter Book.[13] The first half of the Old English poem tells the story of the phoenix, following the *Carmen* closely; it then adds a long section of Christian explication that is not found in the Latin version.

Two prose accounts in Old Norse, found in manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, closely parallel the Old English homily. They are so similar that they must have come from a common source, probably a vernacular source, according to David Yerkes.[14]

There are perhaps hundreds of accounts of the phoenix found in western literature from classical times up to now, and many have been the subjects of thorough study. Major works on the development of the phoenix myth include van den Broek's *The Myth of the Phoenix*, *Le Mythe du Phénix dans les littératures grecque et latine* by Jean Hubaux and Maxime Leroy,[15] and "The Legend of the Phoenix" by R. T. Rundle Clark.[16] This thesis does not attempt a comprehensive review of all of the sources for the myth of the phoenix. Instead, I will examine the Old English homily in its own context and perhaps identify some of its sources, which it may share with other versions of the story that we know to have been extant in Anglo-Saxon England. The *Carmen de ave phoenice* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* are two of the nearest surviving "neighbors" of the Old English homily's account of the phoenix; it is primarily with these that I will compare it.

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[13]Norman F. Blake, ed., *The Phoenix*, rev. ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990).
[14]"The Old Norse and Old English Prose Accounts of the Phoenix," *Journal of English Linguistics* 17 (1984): 24–28. Yerkes favors an Old Norse source; see discussion of literature below.
[15]Liège: Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1939.
[16]*University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 2 (1949–50): 1–29, 105–40.

Manuscripts

The Old English homily on the phoenix appears in two surviving manuscripts. The longer form, which includes an epilogue on sin, is found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198 (no. 48 in N. R. Ker's *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*), a collection of homilies, mostly by Ælfric. The anonymous homily on the phoenix (Ker's article 67) appears on folios 374v–377r and is titled "De sancto iohanne." Ker dates the original part of the manuscript (articles 1–32) to the early eleventh century. Several further groups of homilies were added soon afterwards (articles 33–64), and three more homilies were added in the second half of the eleventh century (articles 65–67), of which the phoenix homily is the third. On the basis of the spellings (such as *mon, beorend, weorod, heafð*) found in the three added homilies, Ker suggests that they were written in the west of England.[17] The fact that the entire manuscript is glossed by the "tremulous hand of Worcester," the scribe who is recognized by his "shaky, leftward-sloping handwriting," means that it must have been present at Worcester by the early thirteenth century.[18]

According to Ker and Pamela R. Robinson, MS CCCC 198 was composed, piecemeal, of self-contained "booklets" of homilies consisting of one or more quires. Robinson defines a "booklet" as a "small but structurally independent production containing a single work or a number of short works."[19] Robinson believes that folios 367–77 comprised one booklet, which included the phoenix homily and the homily immediately preceding it (Ker article 66, beginning *An anginn is ealra þinga . . .*).

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[17]P. 82.

[18]Christine Franzen, *The Tremulous Hand of Worcester: A Study of Old English in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 1. Franzen reports that the manuscript as a whole has been "attributed by [Elizabeth] McIntyre to Worcester on the grounds of 'Gen. appearance & script,'" and cites McIntyre's unpublished D.Phil. thesis, "Early-Twelfth-Century Worcester Cathedral Priory, with Special Reference to the Manuscripts Written There" (Oxford, 1978).

[19]"Self-Contained Units in Composite Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Period," *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978), p. 231.

Such a booklet could have been left unbound to the main manuscript but kept in a wrapper with it. It could be carried more easily than a large bound volume, and the main part of CCCC 198 is indeed very large. A separate, portable booklet would have been ideal for use as an exemplar or for a monk and mass-priest to take to a parish for preaching. Robinson does not, however, note any evidence that the booklet containing the phoenix homily was ever folded in half for convenient carrying, as certain booklets from other manuscripts clearly were.[20]

The phoenix homily, without the epilogue on sin, also appears in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D. xiv (no. 209 in Ker's *Catalogue*), a collection of homilies and other theological texts. The homily on the phoenix (Ker's article 51) appears on folios 166r–168r. Ker dates the manuscript later than CCCC 198, to the mid-twelfth century. He and Rima Handley both conclude that its style of handwriting indicates that the manuscript must have originated in Rochester or Canterbury, where a "prickly" script was used; Handley is convinced that it was produced at Christ Church, Canterbury between 1092 and 1106, while Mary Richards argues for Rochester as its place of origin.[21] Paul A. Johnston, however, suggests that the homily is not necessarily Kentish and that its dialect originates in Essex, possibly Suffolk, Hertfordshire, or London, based on such forms as /i/ for the Wessex /y/, which would have become /e/ in Kentish.[22]

According to Handley, "The compiler of the manuscript seems systematically to have selected and edited his material with a freedom and assurance not matched in any other collection of homilies from the period after the Conquest," as evidenced by many

[20]Ibid., pp. 236–8. See Chapter III for further discussion of the possible use of this booklet.
[21]Ker, p. 276; Handley, "British Museum MS. Cotton Vespasian D. xiv," *Notes and Queries* 21 (1974), pp. 247, 249; Richards, "On the Date and Provenance of MS Cotton Vespasian D.XIV ff. 4–169," *Manuscripta* 17 (1973), pp. 31–5, and *Texts and Their Traditions in the Medieval Library of Rochester Cathedral Priory*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 78.3 (Philadelphia: 1988), pp. 92–4.
[22]Personal communication, June 23, 1997.

simplifications, abridgments, amplifications, and thoughtful groupings of materials.[23] D. G. Scragg notes that the language is "consistently normalized."[24] Two prayers added near the beginning of the book (folio 4^r) in a late-twelfth-century hand indicate that the book may have belonged to a woman at that time.[25]

The two versions of the homily are nearly identical, except for the passage on sin added to the version in CCCC 198. They vary in orthography and, less frequently, in vocabulary and syntax. Albert Marckwardt and James Rosier say of the CCCC 198 version that "its syntax is occasionally clearer, and its orthography is more consistent" than the Vespasian D. xiv text.[26] Norman F. Blake says that although the CCCC 198 version "is possibly the more original of the two texts, it contains more textual corruptions and is not such an intelligible text."[27] Without attempting a detailed comparison of the linguistic qualities of the two texts, I have chosen to translate the text from CCCC 198 for this thesis (see Chapter II) as representing an earlier copy of the homily, and because it includes the additional passage on sin.

Published Editions

Both homilies have been edited by Friedrich Kluge in *Englische Studien* 8 (1885–6), pages 474–9. Corrections to these versions are given by Arthur S. Napier in *The Academy* 37 (1890), page 134.

The CCCC 198 version, with some emendations made and many of the variations found in Vespasian D. xiv noted, is included by Albert S. Cook as an appendix to his edition of the verse *Phoenix* in *The Old English "Elene," "Phoenix,"*

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[23]Handley, p. 243.
[24]"The Corpus of Vernacular Homilies and Prose Saints' Lives before Ælfric," *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979), p. 261.
[25]Ker, pp. 276–7.
[26]*Old English Language and Literature* (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 225.
[27]*The Phoenix*, p. 98.

and "Physiologus," pages 128–32.

The Vespasian D. xiv version of the homily is printed, with brief marginal notes of translation, by Rubie D.-N. Warner in *Early English Homilies from the Twelfth Century MS. Vesp. D. xiv* (Early English Text Society, o.s. 152, 1917; reprint, Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1971), pages 146–8. It is included by Norman Blake as an appendix to his edition of the Old English poem, *The Phoenix* (rev. ed.; Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990), pages 98–100; he provides notes on some of the variations found in CCCC 198. (Blake also includes as appendices the *Carmen* and the two Old Norse versions of the phoenix homily.) Marckwardt and Rosier print the Vespasian D. xiv version in their *Old English Language and Literature* (New York: Norton, 1972), and they, too, provide some notes on the variations of CCCC 198; they also footnote words and phrases that are especially difficult to translate.

Literature

Published work specifically on this homily has been scant. I have found no complete translation. Henning Larsen (1942)[28] and David Yerkes (1984) have both written articles comparing the two Old English versions of the homily with the two Old Norse prose accounts, with an eye to evaluating the Old English homily as a possible source for the Old Norse version (Larsen believes that it may be; Yerkes argues for the priority of the Norse). Brief comments accompany the editions by Kluge (1885–6), Cook (1919), Marckwardt and Rosier (1972), and Blake (1990) mentioned above, and scholars often give a brief summary of the homily's subject matter in descriptions of the manuscripts (see Ker, 1957, and Handley, 1974, for example). Max Förster (1920)[29]

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[28]"Notes on the Phoenix." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 41 (1942): 74–84.
[29]"Der Inhalt der altenglischen Handschrift Vespasianus D. XIV," *Englische Studien* 54 (1920): 46–68.

gives a somewhat more extensive discussion in his description of the contents of Vespasian D. xiv. Others have noted the prose homily briefly in the course of their discussions of the Old English poem; for example, Daniel G. Calder mentions it in a note to his article "The Vision of Paradise: A Symbolic Reading of the Old English *Phoenix*" (1972),[30] and Carol Heffernan touches on the homily in her book *The Phoenix at the Fountain* (1982).[31] Of course, much of the literature on the Old English poem incidentally sheds light on the homily through discussion of the phoenix legend, of the motifs shared by the two versions of the story, and of shared vocabulary.

There also exists a body of literature on the development of the myth of the phoenix. The exhaustive and valuable study by van den Broek (1972) follows the tradition from classical through early Christian times and so does not address the Old English versions of the story. Similarly, *Le Mythe du Phénix dans les littératures grecque et latine* by Hubaux and Leroy (1939), addresses the classical tradition, and in a lengthy, two-part article, "The Legend of the Phoenix" (1949–50), Rundle Clark investigates the Middle Eastern origins of the myth.

In short, while there is a rich treasury of related resources on which to draw, to date there has been relatively little work on the Old English phoenix homily for its own sake.

Scope of the Present Study

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct a closer examination of the text of the Old English homily than has been attempted to date. The modern English translation which is included should help to make the text more accessible and may also serve to

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[30] *Anglo-Saxon England* 1: 167–81.

[31] *The Phoenix at the Fountain: Images of Woman and Eternity in Lactantius's "Carmen de Ave Phoenice" and the Old English "Phoenix"* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1988).

highlight some passages whose interpretations are problematical.

Much has already been written about the sources of the phoenix myth in general and about the sources for the Old English verse *Phoenix* in particular. I do not intend to cite, much less to repeat, all of that work here, and I will not dwell on the Old English homily's many points of agreement with these and other versions of the phoenix legend from the familiar western tradition. It should, however, be instructive to note the homily's additions, omissions, and points of difference. This thesis will consider each section of the homily, comparing it with the closest analogues known to have been present in England during Anglo-Saxon times, the Latin *Carmen de ave phoenice* and the Old English verse *Phoenix*, and with other versions of the story as applicable. It will discuss plot elements, imagery, and vocabulary, especially with an eye to identifying possible sources for the homily. I will also speculate on the occasion and audience for which the homily was intended.

This thesis does not attempt a linguistic analysis of the homily, nor a stylistic analysis. Either subject would make an interesting separate study. Marckwardt and Rosier offer the brief assessment that the "dominance of alliteration and the frequency of rhythmical (or metrical) phrases and patterns of phrases suggest a close affinity between the style of this homily and Ælfric's style."[32] Scragg uses the style to date the homily as a probable eleventh-century composition because "it is written in an alliterative style imitative of Ælfric."[33] For me, the use of formulaic phrases and poetical metrics brings to mind not only Ælfric but the style of popular preachers right up to the modern day. Bruce A. Rosenberg's description of modern American oral chanted sermons could almost apply to the phoenix homily (with the exception that the Old English does alliterate):

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[32]*Old English Language and Literature*, p. 226.
[33]"The corpus of vernacular homilies," p. 241.

> The sermons almost never rhyme, they seldom alliterate, the imagery is meager, yet they are poetic. The lines are metrical, the language is ordered, and the effect is often pleasing. . . . [The sermon's] oral style echoes *Beowulf* or the *Nibelungenlied*; but it is usually not a conventional or sophisticated poetry.[34]

The phoenix homily, too, is spare but poetic, and its effect, as preached, must have been quite pleasing.

[34] *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 5.

CHAPTER II

TRANSLATION OF THE PHOENIX HOMILY FROM CCCC 198[1]

St. John observed across the sea what kind of land[2] it was. Then the angel took him and carried him to Paradise, that is, "neorxnawonge."[3] Paradise is neither in heaven nor on earth. Forty fathoms high was Noah's flood over the highest mountain that is in the world.[4] That mountain is called Armenia in written books.[5] Paradise hangs between heaven and earth wonderfully, just as the Almighty created it. Paradise is everywhere equally long and broad; there is neither valley[6] nor mountain there, nor is there snow or frost,[7] nor hail or rain, but the Fountain of Life is here, that is, life's spring. When the Kalends of January come, then the spring flows as softly and as gently as honey and no deeper than one may dip one's index finger.[8] Over all that land it flows each month only once. Then the month of January comes[9] and there is the fair grove that is called in books "Radiansaltus."[10] There each tree is so upright, so straight, and so tall that no one might ever see the like on earth, nor even know of what

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[1]Major variations of content found in the Vespasian D. xiv version of the homily are noted here. I have not attempted to catalogue variations of syntax, vocabulary, or orthography unless they affect the translation. I have enclosed with asterisks (*. . .*) the passages treated by Kluge as lines of verse; however, some metrical lines are found within passages that he has treated as prose. Further study of the prose and metrical components of the homily is needed.

[2]*land*: Albert Marckwardt and James Rosier read this as "island." See their edition of the text in *Old English Language and Literature*, pp. 227–30.

[3]Vesp. D. xiv uses *neorxenewange* throughout, never the Latin *Paradisus*.

[4]Vesp. D. xiv starts this sentence: "The Bible says that . . . ." For "world," CCCC 198 uses *woruldе*; Vesp. D. xiv uses *middenearde*.

[5]*bocleden*: lit., "book language." Vesp. D. xiv lacks this entire sentence.

[6]CCCC 198: *dæl*; Vesp. D. xiv: *denne*.

[7]Reversed in Vesp. D. xiv. to "frost or snow."

[8]I am grateful to Paul A. Johnston for suggesting this reading. Marckwardt and Rosier read *on forewarde* as "on the tip (of the finger)."

[9]Vesp. D. xiv: "When the month comes in the well begins to flow . . . ."

[10]Vesp. D. xiv lacks "in books" and spells the name *Radion saltus*.

kind it is.[11] There a leaf never falls, but it is always evergreen, *fair and delightful, of happiness untold.*

Paradise is directly above the east side of this world. There, there is neither food[12] nor hunger, and there night never comes but always it is continuously day. The sun shines there seven-fold more, and more brilliantly, than it does here.[13] There dwell eternally hosts of God's angels with the godly souls until Judgment Day. There dwells *a fair bird, called Phoenix. He is great and pure, as the Almighty created him.*

He is lord over all bird-kind. One time each week the fair bird bathes himself in the spring of life; and then the bird flies away and settles himself in the highest tree that is in Paradise,[14] towards the hot sun. Then he shines like a sunbeam, *and glitters as if he were pure gold.*

His feathers are like an angel's feathers; *his breast and his beak are bright, fair and gleaming, of every degree.[15] Behold! His eyes[16] are noble, as clear as crystal* and as bright as a sunbeam. His feet are *both blood-red and the beak white.

Behold! The fair bird flies off his roost, the bird that is fairly called Phoenix,* for truly he dwells in Egypt *fifteen weeks at a time. Then they come to him as if he were king; all bird-kind rejoice and wait on him.[17] Behold, all that bird-kind greet fair Phoenix.* They chirp and sing around him. *Each in his way, they praise the one.[18]

---

[11]Vesp. D. xiv: "higher than any earthly person has seen so high, nor can say what kind it is."
[12]*mete*; Vesp. D. xiv reads *hete*, "malice"; another possibility is that *mete* was a mistranslation of the Latin *metus*, "fear, anxiety." See Chapter III below.
[13]Vesp. D. xiv: "than on this earth."
[14]Vesp. D. xiv lacks "that is in Paradise."
[15]*æghwilces cynnes*: lit., "of every kind." I am grateful to Paul E. Szarmach and my thesis advisors for suggesting "of every degree," in light of Sophie van Romburgh's argument that the phrase refers to brightness, not hue (personal communication, June 13, 1997); see the discussion of the phoenix's color in Chapter IV. Vesp. D. xiv reads instead *feawe synden swylce*, "there are few such."
[16]Vesp. D. xiv reads "two eyes."
[17]In place of *fægniaþ and folgiaþ*, Vesp. D. xiv reads *fageninde swyðe*, "rejoicing greatly."
[18]Vesp. D. xiv reads "Each in his way, they all praise him."

Then that tribe travels from far and wide; they wonder and admire, they welcome the Phoenix: "Hail, Phoenix, fairest of birds, come from afar! You shine like red gold, king of all birds, called Phoenix."

Then they work in wax, inscribe "Phoenix," design[19] a Phoenix and praise him gloriously there with words, fairest of birds, called Phoenix.[20] Then all the birds rejoice there, fair and dappled, many together, fall at his feet, greet the Phoenix.

His voice is as clear as a trumpet and his neck like pure gold and his breast fair-formed as marble of the finest kind. And a red hue colors his back; like gold leaf the Phoenix glitters. Behold, the bird went properly to his realm after fifteen weeks; many birds all about went with him,[21] above and below and on each side. Then they should approach their king there.[22]

The Phoenix, called the fair bird, goes forth into Paradise, which is the most exalted place under heaven.* Then lived there in Paradise *the Phoenix, the fair bird all holy, and all that bird tribe went homeward, each to his own roost. They honored the Phoenix.*[23]

Now here says St. John with true words, *Christ as a sign of faith fore-ordained that there would be six thousand years here in the world.* Every thousand years *the Phoenix goes, the fair bird, radiant and wonderful.*[24]

It seems to him that he is grown old,[25] and then he gathers together from

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[19]*metað*: From *mētan*: meet, find out, design, paint; or possibly from *metan*: measure, mark off.
[20]After "inscribe 'Phoenix,'" Vesp. D. xiv continues: "and make it beautiful, where he is considered a treasure. Then all the birds rejoice . . . ." I am grateful to Timothy C. Graham and Paul E. Szarmach for their suggestions regarding this passage.
[21]*efne*, "evenly," "equally," "likewise"; I read this as meaning "likewise," "like the phoenix," and therefore "with him."
[22]In place of "Then they should . . . ." Vesp. D. xiv reads "until they reach paradise."
[23]For this paragraph, Vesp. D. xiv reads "Therein goes the Phoenix, fairest bird; and all the rest of the birds go to their own nests."
[24]I thank Timothy C. Graham, Paul E. Szarmach, and the other members of my thesis committee for their help with this problematic passage.
[25]Vesp. D. xiv lacks the most puzzling parts of the preceding paragraph and reads instead, "Now here says St. John with true words, and the Creator knows, that every thousand years it seems to the

throughout all Paradise all the precious branches and makes a great heap together, and through God's might the hot sun shines and through the heat of the sun and its rays, the heap which he--the holy bird Phoenix--has built is ignited.[26] He falls[27] then amid that fire[28] and is burned all to dust. Then on the third day arises *the fair bird Phoenix from death* and has become young again and goes to the spring of life and bathes himself therein and his feathers begin to grow as fair as even the fairest were, most fair.

And in this way, after every thousand years, he burns himself and being young again arises, and he has no mate,[29] nor does anyone know whether it is a male or female bird except Christ himself.[30] He is of that holy bird called Phoenix, fair and delightful, as the Almighty made him, and thus he must perform God's will.

Now to us--mankind--understanding is granted: Birds praise Christ; now it is fitting to us that we praise our Lord with almsgiving and with worship, prayer, and with all things; that we know that God is beloved and that we protect ourselves against the eight deadly[31] sins, that we not commit them; that is, murder and stealing, false oaths and wrongful greed, and adultery and gluttony, lying and poisoning, fornication, and deceit and pride. Let us guard ourselves against all these deadly sins and love our Lord with all our strength and with all our heart.[32]

The God who lives and reigns,[33] *he who in heaven is exalted and holy king of all kings. May Christ save us, that we may dwell in joy,* he who lives and rules truly

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Phoenix that he is grown old."

[26]Vesp. D. xiv: ". . . through God's might and the sun's rays the heap is ignited."

[27]*feallað*, "falls"; Warner also reads it this way (p. 147). An alternative reading is "dies"; see my discussion in Chapter VI below.

[28]Vesp. D. xiv: "that great fire."

[29]I am grateful to Timothy C. Graham for the translation of this phrase.

[30]Vesp. D. xiv: "only God."

[31]*heahsynna*: lit., "high sins."

[32]Vesp. D. xiv lacks this paragraph.

[33]Vesp. D. xiv lacks this phrase.

with the Father and Son and with the Holy Ghost, forever without end.[34] Amen.

[34]Vesp. D. xiv: " . . . with him who is beloved and rules forever without end."

CHAPTER III

THE DESCRIPTION OF PARADISE

The homilist's description of the beautiful land where the phoenix dwells, up to the first mention of the bird itself, occupies fully one quarter, by word count, of the CCCC 198 version of the homily, and proportionally more of the slightly shorter Vespasian D. xiv version. The Old English verse *Phoenix*[1] devotes about the same portion, just under a quarter of its lines, to the description of paradise, if one counts only the part of the poem that tells the story of the phoenix (the first 380 lines), without the explicatory section. (The description of paradise takes up 84 lines of a total of 677 for the poem as a whole, or about one eighth.) Both Old English versions of the story, then, devote proportionally more of their narrative to the description of the place than the *Carmen de ave phoenice*, in which the description of the setting takes 30 of the total 170 lines, or about one sixth of the narrative.

Daniel G. Calder has suggested that the beauty of paradise is central to the Christian interpretation of the phoenix story, that from the Augustinian viewpoint in particular the city of God is exquisitely beautiful because it is the image of its creator, and that this accounts for the emphasis on the beauty of paradise in both the Old English verse *Phoenix* and the phoenix homily.[2] The Old English verse *Phoenix* does rhapsodize on the beauty of paradise at greater length than either the Latin poem or the homily, and the rhapsody seems to be an expansion of the Latin description. Although Calder sees the "emphasis on the beauty of paradise and of the phoenix [as] the

[1]References to the Old English verse *Phoenix*, including line numbers, are to the edition by Norman F. Blake.
[2]"The Vision of Paradise," 168–9.

dominant tone in the twelfth-century 'Phoenix homily,'"[3] in fact the homily's description does not elaborate much on the beauty of Paradise. (The words "fair," describing the grove, and "fair and delightful, of happiness untold" are the only "beauty" expressions for which I could not find a parallel in the Latin description of the phoenix's home. The Old English verse *Phoenix* uses many more such epithets than the homily.) Instead, the homily draws elements from the book of Revelation and other scriptural sources which are not found in the description of paradise in the *Carmen* or the Old English verse *Phoenix*, and these, I think, account for most of its expansion beyond the Latin version.

Norman F. Blake has pointed out that the various pagan and Christian traditions of the earthly paradise not only share many features, but were often deliberately commingled in Christian allegory or accidentally confused.[4] The strains were already intertwined by the time of Lactantius, and whether the *Carmen de ave phoenice* is a "Christian" poem or not, its images are drawn from both classical tradition and "Judaeo-Christian eschatological ideas concerning the place in which the chosen are to enjoy eternal life."[5] In addition, as Hildegard L. C. Tristram has observed, "In Old English literature heaven is often confused with paradise."[6] Since so many traditions are involved and since sources for the imagery in the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* have been addressed elsewhere,[7] in the discussion that follows I will try to distinguish only those sources which predominate in the Old English homily.

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[3]Ibid., p. 169, n. 1.
[4]Introduction to *The Phoenix*, p. 15.
[5]Van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 312.
[6]"Stock Descriptions of Heaven and Hell in Old English Prose and Poetry," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 79 (1978), 106.
[7]For fuller discussions of earlier sources for paradise imagery, see Blake, van den Broek, Hubaux and Leroy, and Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995).

The Inhabitants of Paradise

The earliest accounts of the phoenix place the bird's habitation in India, Egypt, Lebanon, or other eastern lands; in later classical and Christian versions of the story, the bird generally dwells in a paradisiacal land, whether Elysium (e.g., in Ovid) or paradise itself.[8] The Old English homily actually calls the land of the phoenix "paradise," using the Old English term *neorxnawang* (both versions) and the Latin *paradisus* (CCCC 198 only). The term "paradise" (from the Old Persian *pairidaēza*, an enclosure or park) has, in various times and contexts, meant different things: the word may refer to the Garden of Eden, the earthly spot where all was good and innocent; sometimes it is construed as an earthly place where the souls of the good wait to be reunited with their bodies at the time of the resurrection (as in Luke 23:43); and sometimes it means--or, as Tristram points out, is confused with--heaven, the unearthly place where righteous souls dwell eternally with God.[9] The phoenix homily, although it contains much imagery connected to the Garden of Eden, clearly uses the second meaning, for it says, "There dwell eternally hosts of God's angels with the godly souls until Judgment Day." Thus, in the Old English homily, the phoenix shares its homeland with angels and the souls of the righteous--although these neighbors are not specifically mentioned again. Birds are frequently used as symbols of the soul (an image that will be discussed further in Chapter IV), so it seems appropriate for the phoenix to live in the same land as the souls of the good.

Apparently the phoenix is the only bird living in paradise, for, according to the homily, it is not until he travels to Egypt that he is attended by other birds. This differs from some accounts, e.g., that of Ovid, who says that other pious birds live in Elysium

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[8] See van den Broek, pp. 305–7.
[9] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1971, s.v."paradise."

with the phoenix.[10] The *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix*, however, depict no other birds living in the land of the phoenix, nor any angels or souls. This is the more common pattern; "ordinarily the phoenix lives entirely alone in its glorious abode," van den Broek says.[11] Its solitariness is closely connected with its uniqueness. In the Old English homily, though the phoenix shares its land with angels and souls, the bird's uniqueness is retained, for no other birds or animals are described, and the presence of angels and souls seems meant to establish the land as paradise rather than to describe companions of the solitary phoenix. That is, the angels and souls are, here, more a part of the landscape than a community in which the phoenix operates.

Connection With St. John

In CCCC 198 the homily on the phoenix is titled "De sancto iohanne," and although the Vespasian D. xiv version is untitled, both texts begin the same way: "Saint John observed across the sea what kind of land it was. Then the angel took him and carried him to Paradise." We should consider here whether the choice of a story identified with St. John means that the homily was written to be given on an occasion related to St. John.

The homily's position in the manuscripts offers little to confirm or deny that it may have celebrated the feast day of St. John. Although the texts in CCCC 198 progress chronologically through the church calendar for much of the manuscript, the order is lost after June, and, in any case, the phoenix homily is the third of three texts that, according to Ker, were added to the manuscript in the second half of the eleventh

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[10] *Amores* 2:6.
[11] P. 311.

century.[12] Of these three, a homily titled "De sancto bartholomeo" (feast day August 24) and a text on the hexameron precede the phoenix homily, providing little information about the date on which it might have been delivered. Similarly, the order of the texts in Vespasian D. xiv does not comprehensively follow the church calendar, and so we cannot immediately conclude much from the phoenix homily's position following the two texts which Warner[13] calls "The Old English Honorius" (identified by Ker as translations of the *Elucidarius* attributed to Honorius of Autun) and "On the Lord's Prayer," and followed by "The Annunciation of St. Mary" (March 25) and "Shrove Sunday."

The feast day of St. John the Evangelist is December 27, and certainly that is one possible occasion on which the homily might have been preached. A second possibility is the feast of St. John at the Latin Gate, which was, until about 1960, widely celebrated on May 6. This occasion memorialized the apocryphal story that St. John "came to Rome and there emerged unharmed when thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil."[14] The story behind the feast of St. John at the Latin Gate, with his emergence unscathed from a fiery death, fits thematically with the story of the phoenix. Recall, too, that St. John's symbol is the eagle, a bird that shares many traditions with the phoenix as described in this homily (see Chapter IV).

A third occasion associated with St. John seems to me the most likely possibility. According to a *Breviarium Apostolorum* found in an early eighth-century manuscript, another feast of John the Evangelist "is the 24th of June, when the feast of St. John the Baptist is also celebrated."[15] St. John's Eve, June 23, which is also

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[12]Ker, pp. 76, 81.
[13]Rubie D.-N. Warner, *Early English Homilies from the Twelfth Century MS. Vesp. D. xiv*, Early English Text Society, 152 (London: 1917; rpt. New York: Kraus, 1971), pp. 140–49.
[14]Donald Attwater, *A Dictionary of Saints* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), p. 189.
[15]Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), p. 38. Translated from *Liber*

Midsummer Eve, was traditionally celebrated with revelry and bonfires. The bonfire was one of the oldest of Midsummer's Eve customs and was usually made at the highest point in the village or parish.[16] In many places, new fires in each house were lit from the Midsummer bonfire. The customs regarding fire at Midsummer may have had their origins in sun charms or in purification and fumigation rituals, but in any case they were extremely widespread across Europe. In some places, agricultural ceremonies were observed at this time, including the planting of ashes from the bonfire along with the seeds. Herbs and other plants picked on Midsummer Eve were considered more potent, a saying that I have heard to this day. Interestingly, in most of western Europe, natural waters were also said to be especially healthful on Midsummer Day.[17] The imagery of the festival shares much with the phoenix story: the bonfire calls to mind the fire in which the old bird perishes and from which the new bird is born; the succession of new fire from old parallels the succession of the new phoenix from the old; the picking of herbs echoes the special branches that the phoenix picks for his nest; and the medicinal qualities of water at Midsummer have a match in the restorative Fountain of Life in which the phoenix bathes. The identification of the phoenix with the sun is fitting at the time of the summer solstice. (Of course, the sun image would be appropriate, too, for the end of December, when the sun has just been "reborn.") Certainly the admonition against sin found in the CCCC 198 version would be an apt warning before the revels of St. John's Eve. (The admonition, which warns

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Sacramentorum Romanae Aeclesiae ordinis anni circuli, ed. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg et al. (Rome, 1960), pp. 260–1. The feast day of St. John the Baptist is actually his birthday.

[16]Doris Jones-Baker, *The Folklore of Hertfordshire* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), p. 153.

[17]*Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, Maria Leach, ed. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1950), s.vv. "Midsummer Eve" and "Beltane"; and R. R. Marett, "Midsummer Beliefs and Practices," in *Manners and Customs of Mankind*, 3 vols. (New Delhi: Caxton, 1992), pp. 429–36. There is frustratingly little specific information on exactly where and when these customs were practiced, but they were apparently so widespread, so popular, and so persistent through time that I feel justified in speculating that some of these Midsummer Eve celebrations might have been practiced in Anglo-Saxon times.

against eleven sins, including stealing, fornication, and witchcraft, seems to be aimed at a general audience, including women; see Chapter VII.) And, finally, the celebration of St. John's Eve would have attracted an especially large lay audience for a homily such as this one. "Feast-days and relic-days, peak periods of pilgrimage, were opportunities for preaching to the gathered laity," as Gervase Rosser points out.[18]

The phoenix's bathing in the fountain of life suggests baptism and makes the homily particularly appropriate to celebrate a feast of St. John the Baptist. It is interesting to note, too, that the text immediately following the phoenix homily in Vespasian D. xiv ("The Annunciation of St. Mary," as Warner titles it) tells the story from Luke 1 of how John the Baptist leaped within his mother's womb when Mary came to visit, so the pair of homilies would be very appropriate for use before and upon the birthday of John the Baptist. In the same manuscript, the text that precedes the phoenix homily ("On the Lord's Prayer") exhorts its hearers to resist temptation, very much as the added section on sin does in the CCCC 198 version.

Of course, the homily would be quite appropriate for other occasions as well. The discussion of sin at the end of the CCCC 198 version of the homily might suggest that version's use as a homily for Lent. The resurrection theme would be suitable for the Easter season. Indeed, the homily's theme is so universal and its tone so popular that it may well have been preached on all sorts of occasions, as needed. Its position in CCCC 198 as part of an independent "booklet" means that it could have been carried to different churches at various times of the year (see Chapter I), and its companion homily in the booklet is titled *Sermo de initio creaturae, ad populum, quando volueris* ("Sermon on the Beginning of Creation, to the People, Whenever You Will").[19] The

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[18]"The Cure of Souls in English Towns Before 1000," in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), p. 277.
[19]I thank Timothy C. Graham for pointing out the important link between the two homilies.

two homilies are also linked by references to Noah and discussions of the avoidance of sin. So, although the phoenix homily's many possible connections with St. John's Eve suggest to me that it might originally have intended for use on June 23, it may very well have been preached on various occasions.

Although many thematic connections with John the Baptist can be found, the St. John referred to in the opening of the text is clearly the Evangelist, for the image of an angel taking John and carrying him to Paradise comes from Revelation: "And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God." (21:10 NRSV) Many other images in the homilist's description of paradise are drawn from this section of Revelation, and the invocation of the Evangelist's name adds authority to all that follows. In contrast, for attribution, the verse *Phoenix* starts out, "I have heard . . . ." The *Carmen* does not ascribe the story to another source at all, but presents it as a direct report.

St. John is invoked once more in the text of the homily, just after the birds have paid homage to the phoenix and the phoenix is making ready for his death.

> Nu sagað her Scs. Johannes soðum wordum wislice and wærlice swa se wertacen þæt six þusend her on worolde Crist forestihte ðone æfre embe an þusend geara farað Fenix . . . .
>
> (Now here says St. John with true words, Christ as a sign of faith fore-ordained that there would be six thousand years here in the world. Every thousand years the Phoenix goes . . . .)

The citation of St. John may refer again to Revelation, which does not include any six-thousand-year periods, but several times mentions thousand-year periods, for instance: "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (20:4) However, both the verse *Phoenix* and the *Carmen* report the thousand-year cycle without attribution.

The phoenix appears in numerous bestiaries; the early-thirteenth-century

bestiary of Pierre de Beauvais,[20] for example, uses the phoenix as an image of Christ to illustrate John 10:18, in which, speaking of his life, Jesus says, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." So, while the attribution of the phoenix story to St. John may stem solely from John's role as visionary traveler in Revelation, this verse from John might well have been connected with the phoenix story and thus provide another reason for the homilist's use of St. John as his authority.

The Location of Paradise

Just as the holy city in Revelation is found "coming down out of heaven," so, in the homily, paradise is found "neither in heaven nor on earth," but "hangs between heaven and earth wonderfully, just as the Almighty created it." Paradise, in nearly every tradition, is found in the east,[21] probably because of its association with the sun and light generally. The homily's statement that "Paradise is everywhere equally long and broad" parallels Revelation, in which the angel carries a gold rod with which to measure the holy city: "The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; . . . its length and width and height are equal." (21:16) This perfection of measurement is not mentioned in either the Old English verse *Phoenix* or the *Carmen*.

Common to these three versions of the phoenix story, and to many descriptions of paradise, is the location of the beautiful land in a very high place, especially at or above the top of the world's tallest mountain. The sacred mountain, the central and highest spot on earth, the point of connection between earth and heaven, is an almost universal image.[22] In scripture, John's view of the heavenly city is from the top of "a

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[20]The text of this bestiary, translated into Modern French by Gabriel Bianciotto, is found in *Bestiaires du Moyen Age* (n.p.: Stock, 1992).
[21]Blake, *The Phoenix*, p. 15.
[22]See Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972) and Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series 46 (New York: Pantheon, 1954).

great, high mountain." (Rev. 21:10) The book of Ezekiel describes a state of perfection and sinlessness in Eden, "on the holy mountain of God." (28:14) In the Syrian *Cave of Treasures*, "Paradise reaches three spans above the other mountains."[23] All three phoenix stories considered here, in fact, locate the bird's paradisiacal home higher than the earth's highest mountain and mention that it stood above the great flood. This, too, is a long-standing tradition in descriptions of paradise. For instance, "Ephraem the Syrian says in the first of his *Hymni de Paradiso* that the peaks of all other mountains lie below that of Paradise and that the waves of the Flood kissed the feet of the Paradise mountain in adoration but drowned all the other mountains."[24] In the *Carmen*, the flood is that of Deucalion: ". . . it rose above the waters on which Deucalion sailed, when the flood had whelmed the world in its waves."[25] The Old English verse *Phoenix* refers to the flood, presumably the biblical one, but does not mention Noah by name: "When long ago the torrent of water, the sea flood whelmed all the world, the circuit of the earth, then by God's grace the noble field stood secure from the rush of wild waves, no whit harmed, happy, undefiled."[26] Of the three, only the homily names Noah and specifies the height of the flood: "Forty fathoms high was Noah's flood over the highest mountain in the world. That mountain is called Armenia . . . ." Genesis, too, gives a measurement: ". . . the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep." (7:20) Ephraem the Syrian gave 25 ells as the depth

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[23] 3, 15, trans. C. Bezold in *Die Schatzhöhle* I (Leipzig: 1883), p. 5, cited by van den Broek in *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 316. See van den Broek, pp. 308–25, for further discussion of the high location of paradise.

[24] I, 4, trans. E. Beck, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 175, 1–2; cited by van den Broek, p. 316.

[25] Ll. 13–14. References to the *Carmen de ave phoenice*, including line numbers and English translations, are to the edition found in J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff, ed. and trans., *Minor Latin Poets*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), vol. 2, pp. 643–65.

[26] Ll. 41–49. Translations of the Old English verse *Phoenix* are by R. K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, rev. ed. (New York: Dutton, 1954).

of the flood over the highest mountain.[27] These measurements vary widely (about 240 feet, 22 feet, and 94 feet respectively) and so, while I can conclude that there was a tradition of giving an exact measurement for the depth of the flood, I cannot identify a source for the homilist's particular number.

Incidentally, the homilist's use of the word *Armenia* for the name of the mountain on which the ark came to rest is, as far as I can tell, unique in both Latin and Old English. It may be a misunderstanding by the homilist or an earlier author of *Ararat*, the mountain *in* Armenia (now in Turkey, near the Armenian border), which is the mountain usually named as the ark's landing spot.

Of the Latin and two Old English versions of the phoenix story, only the homily does not make an explicit connection between the position of paradise and its safety from the flood. That conclusion is merely implied by the statement, immediately following, that paradise hangs between heaven and earth and presumably therefore would have been immune. In *The Myth of the Phoenix*, R. van den Broek says, "The idea that Paradise was spared at the time of the Flood . . . goes back to Jewish sources," for some rabbinical texts held that the entire Holy Land was submerged in the flood and thus the dove must have brought the olive leaf from paradise.[28] The disconnected mention of the flood found in the phoenix homily, then, may have persisted from some earlier version of the story in which the connection between the flood and the safe position of paradise was explicit.

The Absence of Earthly Woes

After describing paradise as "everywhere equally long and broad," the homilist names three pairs of earthly features that are lacking in paradise: valley and mountain,

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[27]Cited by van den Broek in *Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 316.
[28]Ibid., p. 316.

snow and frost, hail and rain. Although these six are not inherently negative features, they do represent extremes that set the world apart from a kind of divine mean, and they certainly could be viewed as everyday obstacles for humans. The weather features also contrast with the Fountain of Life that is found in Paradise, a far more congenial water form which is described as flowing "softly and as gently as honey." The homilist goes on to describe the evergreen forest and the position of paradise in the east, then names three further features that are absent from paradise: food (*mete*--CCCC 198) or malice (*hete*--Vespasian D. xiv--see below), hunger, and night.

The tradition of woes that are absent from paradise is a long one. Such lists often include both what Jack J. Boies calls the "suspension of what are recognized as common earthly meteorological phenomena"[29] and the absence of human ills, both sins and sufferings. In the *Odyssey*, Homer describes Elysion, the delightful resting place of heroes, with a list that is mainly meteorological: "Snowfall is never known there, neither long / frost of winter, nor torrential rain . . . ."[30] Van den Broek cites a long list of early Christian writers, including Ambrose, Augustine, and Prudentius, who describe Paradise in similar climatic terms, clearly influenced by classical conceptions of the "abode of the Blessed."[31] The Book of Revelation, describing the city of God, emphasizes the absence of human suffering: "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more . . . . Nothing accursed will be found there any more. . . . And there will be no more night . . . ." (21:4; 22:3, 5) Thomas D. Hill[32] has discussed a similar tradition of enumerating seven joys to be found in heaven, which

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[29]*The Lost Domain: Avatars of the Earthly Paradise in Western Literature* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), p. 14.
[30]Book 4. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963). This and other such lists are discussed by Norman Blake, pp. 13–15.
[31]*Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 328.
[32]"The Seven Joys of Heaven in 'Christ III' and Old English Homiletic Texts," *Notes and Queries* n.s. 16 (1969), 165–166. I am indebted to Thomas N. Hall for bringing the article to my attention.

are often named in opposition to seven woes, as in Vercelli Homily 5:

> Ne his rices bið æfre ænig ende, ac he us eallum gifeð, gif we hit geearnian willað, rice butan ende 7 blisse butan gnornunge 7 smyltnesse butan gedrefednesse 7 leoht butan þeostrum 7 lif butan deaðe 7 hælo butan sare 7 ecnesse butan ende.[33]
>
> (Nor is there ever any end of his reign, but he gives to all of us, if we will earn it, reign without end, and joy without grief, and peace without disorder, and light without darkness, and life without death, and health without sickness, and eternity without end.)

Both the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* include lists of woes that are absent from the land of the phoenix; indeed, their lists are far longer than the homily's. The *Carmen* very early says that there is no hill or valley in the beautiful land; then, after describing the high location of the place and its safety from the flood and from Phaethon's flames, it says:

> Here neither bloodless diseases, nor feeble old age, nor cruel death, nor desperate fear is present; neither unspeakable crime nor raging desire for wealth, nor anger, nor frenzy aflame with the love of murder; bitter grief is absent, and want dressed in tatters, and sleepless cares, and violent hunger. There neither storm nor the savage force of the wind rages; nor does the hoar-frost cover the ground with icy dew; no cloud stretches its fleece over the fields, nor does the troubled moisture of rain fall from the heights.[34]

The main list is given in one continuous passage and names features of topography and climate as well as human ills, including human sufferings (hunger, care) and sins (anger, cupidity).

The Old English verse *Phoenix* gives its list in two parts, much as the homily does, but at greater length and in more detail than either the homily or the *Carmen*. A first section names features of topography and climate that are absent from paradise:

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[33]Quoted by Hill from *Vercelli Homilien*, ed. M. Förster, Bibliothek der Angelsächsen Prosa, XII (Hamburg, 1932), p. 130. Translation is my own.

[34]Ll. 15–24. This translation was adapted by me from that of the Duffs.

> There neither rain, nor snow, nor the breath of frost, nor the blast of fire, nor the fall of hail, nor the dropping of rime, nor the heat of the sun, nor unbroken cold, nor warm weather, nor wintry shower shall do any hurt; . . . No hills or mountains stand there steeply, nor do stone cliffs rise aloft, as here with us; nor are there valleys, or dales, or hill caves, mounds or rising ground; nor are there any rough slopes there at all.

The lines that follow describe the loveliness of the forest, the location high above the earthly mountains, the immunity of paradise from the great flood, and its evergreen loveliness until the time of the final resurrection. Then comes a passage very much like the *Carmen*'s list:

> There is no foe in the land, nor weeping, nor woe, nor sign of grief, nor old age, nor sorrow, nor cruel death, nor loss of life, nor the coming of a hateful thing, nor sin, nor strife, nor sad grief, nor the struggle of poverty, nor lack of wealth, nor sorrow, nor sleep, nor heavy illness, nor wintry storm, nor change of weather fierce under the heavens; nor does hard frost with chill icicles beat upon anyone. Neither hail nor rime falls on the ground there; nor is there a windy cloud; nor does water come down there, driven by the gust.[35]

Both the *Carmen* and the verse *Phoenix* include meteorological woes and human sufferings on their lists; the verse *Phoenix* names many more topographical extremes. The phoenix homily follows the tradition but, in comparison, its list is sketchy, naming a total of nine earthly concerns that are absent from paradise. Of these, four are weather woes, two are topographical extremes, one is a human suffering (hunger), and one is night or darkness. Darkness would not appear on the lists in the *Carmen* and the Old English poem, since both take some care to describe the rising of the sun as the cue for the phoenix to bathe. Only the homily describes the dwelling-place as eternally light, just as Revelation describes the city of God.

I have skipped one item on the homily's list of woes, and that is *mete* (food), as it appears in CCCC 198, or *hete* (hate, malice), as it appears in Vespasian D. xiv. It is

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[35]Ll. 50–62. Translation by Gordon.

paired with hunger, so *mete* makes some sense as an absence of any need for concern over such worldly things as food and hunger. However, I suspect that *mete* stems from either a misreading of *hete* or a mistranslation of the Latin *metus* (fear, anxiety), influenced in either case by its pairing with "hunger." *Metus* is on the list given in the *Carmen*, but it is not paired with hunger. The idea that *fear* and hunger would be absent in a paradise that has no night seems appropriate. This apparent slip of a scribe or translator might argue for the existence of an intermediate or separate Latin version of the phoenix story.

The Fountain of Life

In the land of the phoenix, the sweet and gentle water of the fountain of life (the homilist gives both the Latin *Fons Vitae*, and the Old English, *lifes welle*) contrasts with the less pleasant forms of water just named in the homily (frost, snow, hail, and rain), and, as Carol Falvo Heffernan points out, with the violent destruction of the great flood invoked near the beginning of all three phoenix stories.[36] The homily says that the fountain flows monthly, which corroborates the reports of the *Carmen* and the Old English *Phoenix*, both of which say that the fountain flows twelve times a year. However skeptical one may be regarding Heffernan's extensive reading of the Old English poem as an allegory for the reproductive process, it seems natural to associate this monthly flow with menstruation; in all three stories the monthly-flowing spring is situated in a perpetually fertile land associated with birth. Although a fountain or river appears in most early accounts of the phoenix, its monthly flow was an innovation by Lactantius, according to Heffernan.[37] If so, the homily's imagery here must ultimately derive from the *Carmen*, even if there were intermediate sources. But perhaps the

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[36]"The Old English *Phoenix*: A Reconsideration," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 83 (1982), 243.
[37]*The Phoenix at the Fountain*, p. 14.

Carmen and the homily's predecessor had a common source, unknown to us. in which the fountain flows monthly. Among earlier versions of the story, there is, for example, a kind of monthly pattern described by Hesiod, who says that the phoenix is reborn twelve times during the cycle of the world, once every "month" of the world "year."[38]

Monthly flow notwithstanding, the fountain is a womanly image, traditionally a place where women worked at getting water and gathered to socialize. The Bible depicts many women at wells, and the Song of Solomon (4:15) uses "a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams" as images of the woman's fertility and life-giving abilities. Heffernan says that by medieval times the Virgin Mary in particular was associated with the image of the fountain in the garden.[39] It is not difficult to draw a connection between the phoenix, which gives birth to its new self without a mate, and Mary, the virgin mother; the fountain may serve as a first suggestion of this connection.

The fountain of life in which the phoenix bathes also betokens baptism. In the homily, the bird bathes once each week, a period that parallels once-a-week attendance at church, a similarly cleansing ritual. The *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* depict the phoenix bathing, apparently daily, just as the sun rises (*Carmen*) or just before (Old English verse). One must assume that the "once-a-month" flow of the fountain is merely the beginning of a continuous flow, renewed again next month, otherwise it is difficult to understand how the bird bathes weekly or daily. As a side note, only the homily mentions that the fountain's monthly flow begins on the kalends of January, a formal kind of date that again suggests a Latin source other than Lactantius. One must also assume, then, that, in the homily's scheme, the fountain's flow begins at the beginning of January, continues throughout the month so that the

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[38]Van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 400.
[39]*The Phoenix at the Fountain*, p. 110.

bird can bathe weekly, is renewed at the beginning of each month, and is somehow specially renewed at the beginning of the next January.

The Trees of Paradise

The Old English phoenix homily describes a "fair grove" (*fægere wuduholt*) in paradise for which it also gives a Latin name, *radians saltus* (in CCCC 198, *radiansaltus*; in Vespasian D. xiv, *radion saltus*), or "shining woodland." Interestingly, this Latin term is not the one that appears in the *Carmen*, which instead calls the forest *solis nemus*, "grove of the sun" (l. 9), and so one again suspects a Latin source for the homily other than Lactantius.[40] The Old English verse *Phoenix* uses only the Old English *sunbearo*, "sunny grove," and, again, *wuduholt* (ll. 33–4).

Lactantius's image comes not from the biblical garden of paradise but from the tradition of the Wood of the Sun, according to Arturo Graf, who traces it to descriptions of paradisiacal lands in classical authors such as Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and Terence.[41] Calder[42] sees this as the main reason for the difference between the description of paradise in the *Carmen* and that of the Old English poem: the *Carmen*'s description is classical, seemingly unaffected by the Christian emphasis on the beauty of the place (see above).

Just as there is an absence of death in paradise, so the trees there are evergreen. All three versions of the story mention leaves that never fall, but the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* also speak of fruits that do not fall, whereas the homily does not. It is a curious omission in a description of such a fertile land, but perhaps the

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[40]Nor was the term *radians saltus* found in a search of the CETEDOC electronic Library of Christian Latin Texts (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996).
[41]"Il mito del Paradiso terrestre," in *Miti, leggende, e superstizioni del Medio Evo* (Turin: E. Loescher, 1892–3), p. 30.
[42]"The Vision of Paradise," 168–9.

homilist sought to emphasize a connection with the tree of life rather than the fruit-bearing tree of knowledge. The evergreen foliage appears in classical sources, as well as in biblical passages, but usually in connection with fruit; Ezekiel 47:12, for example, describes a new paradise where "leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail"; and Psalm 92:14–15 says of the righteous, "In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap, showing that the Lord is upright."[43]

As for uprightness, or righteousness, the homily speaks of each tree in the wood as being "so upright, so straight, and so tall that no one might ever see the like on earth, nor even know of what kind it is." The homily here places greater importance on the tallness of the trees than either the *Carmen* or the Old English poem; again, the influence is probably biblical, from passages such as Sirach 24:13–14, in which Wisdom says, "I grew tall like a cedar in Lebanon, and like a cypress on the heights of Hermon. I grew tall like a palm tree in En-gedi."[44] The height of the tree in which the phoenix roosts is emphasized in all three versions of the story. In the two poems, however, the reason the phoenix takes the highest possible perch is in order to be closest to and see the rising sun. There is no sunrise in the constant daylight described in the homily, so apparently the phoenix just wants to be as close as possible to the hot sun. The heat of the sun figures importantly later in the story, for in both the homily and the Old English verse *Phoenix*, it is the sun that ignites the bird's nest.

In the homily, the *Carmen*, and the Old English poem alike, the phoenix roosts in a tall tree after bathing. In the *Carmen* and the Old English poem, the bird travels to another land to die (see Chapter V), so the tree in which the bird makes his funeral nest

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[43]See also Psalm 1:3 and Jer. 17:8.

[44]The positive portraits of tall trees are, however, counterbalanced by the picture drawn in Ezekiel 31 of Assyria as a tall cedar, taller even than the trees of Eden, being destroyed by God for its pridefulness. The prideful are also depicted as fruitless trees in the apocryphal *Visio Sancti Pauli*; see Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924; rpt. 1955), p. 538.

is not the same as the one in which he roosted in his homeland, although both versions emphasize the tallness of this tree, too. The homily does not explicitly state where the phoenix builds his pyre. The image of the phoenix burning in his tree is so familiar that I noticed the homily's omission only after many readings; one simply assumes that he builds the nest in the same tall tree in which he roosts after his bath. The assumption is neither contradicted nor confirmed by the text, but I think that it can be justified by the fact that the sun's rays ignite the fire, for the homily does say that the phoenix roosts in the tallest tree in order to be close to the sun. Certainly the Christian symbolism is more complete if the phoenix dies in his tree.

The homily places great importance on the tree, and the image has obvious associations with biblical trees. First, the phoenix's tree is a pure and upright tree such as we do not see here on earth, a redemptive tree, calling to mind therefore the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. Second, assuming that the phoenix dies in the tree, it takes on a redemptive role, recalling the cross, the new tree of life. As Christ died upon the cross and was reborn, so the phoenix dies and is reborn. Just as the phoenix's tree is the tallest in the wood, Christ's cross is conventionally shown in art as the tallest of the three crosses on Calvary.[45] And, third, the tree of the phoenix, the bird who is heir to himself, recalls the tree of Jesse, from which both David and Christ sprang.[46] As Roger Cook describes the death of Christ on Calvary:

> Christ is sacrificed at the centre of the world, on the Cosmic Tree, which stretches from heaven to earth and stands at the midpoint of the horizontal radial cross of the four directions. This Cross is homologized with the Tree of Life, which according to the scriptures

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[45]See, for example, later artworks such as Master of Bohemia, *Christ between the Two Thieves* (c. 1350), Antonello da Messina, *Crucifixion* (1475), Altdorfer, *Christ between Two Thieves* (1528), and many others. Paintings listed here are included in Stephanie Brown, *Religious Painting: Christ's Passion and Crucifixion* (New York: Mayflower, 1979). According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913, s.v. *cross and crucifix*, St. John Chrysostom said that Christ's cross was tallest because his "crime" was the greatest in the opinion of the Jews.

[46]Heffernan, "The Old English *Phoenix*," p. 249.

> stands at the centre of the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time and at the centre of the Heavenly City of Jerusalem at the end of time.[47]

Of the three phoenix stories being considered here, the Old English homily is the best example of these symbolic connections, for it alone depicts the death of the phoenix as occurring in paradise, the description of which is drawn from biblical descriptions of both the Garden of Eden and the heavenly city.

The homily does not specify the kind of tree in which the phoenix roosts. Nor does it play on the word *phoenix* as the Greek name for the palm tree, as the *Carmen* does: *tum legit aerio sublimem vertice palmam, / quae Graium Phoenix ex ave nomen habet* ("Then she chooses a palm tree towering with airy crest which bears its Greek name 'Phoenix' from the bird," ll. 69–70). The homonyms appear, too, in Ovid's reference to the phoenix and elsewhere, sometimes in an analogy between the long life spans of the tree and the bird.[48] The words caused confusion for early scholars of scripture, who read "The righteous flourish like the palm tree" (Psalm 92:12) as "The righteous flourish like the phoenix."[49]

The Brightly-Shining Sun

Unique to the homily is the statement that the "sun shines [in paradise] sevenfold more, and more brilliantly, than it does here." Vaguely similar passages are found in scripture, e.g. in Isaiah 30:26 (". . . the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days, on the day when the Lord binds up the injuries of his people . . .") and Sirach 23:19 (". . . the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun"). However, the homily's statement also fits a pattern in Old English literature

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[47] *The Tree of Life: Image for the Cosmos* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 20.
[48] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15; see van den Broek, pp. 52–60, for a discussion of word-play and confusion involving the names for the palm tree and the phoenix.
[49] E.g., Tertullian in *De resurrectione mortuorum* 13, according to van den Broek, p. 57.

identified by Thomas N. Hall, in which certain things shine seven times more brightly than ordinarily bright things. Hall cites four distinct "sevenfold" passages in Old English with possible sources and analogues, including the phoenix homily. In the other examples, righteous souls shine seven times brighter than the sun (Three Utterances sermon in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Junius 85/86), righteous souls ascending to heaven shine seven times more brightly than the snow (Old English *Martyrology* entry for June 15, and Blickling Homily XIII on the Assumption), and the sun at creation shines seven times more brightly than the sun as we know it (Old English *Martyrology* entry for March 21, and Belfour Homily XI on the Transfiguration).[50] Hall sees an analogue for the homily's description in *The Vision of Mary*, an Ethiopic text in which Christ shows the Virgin Mary a house, a city, and the City of God, all of which shine seven times more brightly than the sun or the heavens.[51]

The Old English homily, then, generally follows in the same tradition as the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* in its description of paradise. Certain differences, however, suggest that the homily had a Latin source other than the *Carmen*--for example, the use of the Latin terms *Armenia* and *radians saltus.* Several motifs which are not found in the other two versions do occur in the homily's description of paradise: the angels and righteous souls dwelling there; the equilateral measurement of paradise; an emphasis on the tallness of the trees, but without a mention of fruitfulness; and the "seven times brighter" pattern. The homily's description owes much--and much that makes it unique--to scriptural sources, especially the Book of Revelation.

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[50]"'Their Souls Will Shine Seven Times Brighter Than the Sun': An Eschatological Motif and Its Permutations in Old English," article in progress.

[51]*The Vision of Mary: A Homily by John the Son of Zebedee*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Legends of Our Lady Mary the Perpetual Virgin and Her Mother Hannâ* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 258–65, cited by Hall.

CHAPTER IV

ATTRIBUTES OF THE PHOENIX

In the Old English homily on the phoenix, the Old English verse *Phoenix*, and the *Carmen de ave phoenice* alike, the first mention of the bird occurs only after the long description of the paradisiacal land that is his home. The setting that is singular, blessed, and outside of ordinary experience seems to be epitomized in the phoenix himself.[1]

Connection With the Sun

The description of the phoenix varies from version to version of the story, but, as van den Broek points out, "in all versions of the phoenix myth a connection between the bird and the sun was understood with respect to the bird's death and resurrection."[2] The connection is highly significant in the Old English phoenix homily's description of the bird.

Many scholars have seen a connection between the phoenix and the Egyptian *benu*, a heron that, because of its periodic appearances, was held sacred to the sun in ancient Egypt.[3] In particular, the account of the phoenix in Herodotus (fifth century B.C.) may have been influenced by stories of the *benu*.[4] Some versions of the phoenix

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[1] In this chapter's discussion of the description of the bird, I will not attempt to discuss in any detail the sources of that description if the homily shares them with the *Carmen* or the Old English verse *Phoenix*, since those sources have been studied elsewhere.

[2] *Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 233.

[3] For discussion of the *benu* and its connection with the phoenix, see Albert S. Cook, *The Old English "Elene," "Phoenix," and "Physiologus,"* pp. xlii–xliv; Hubaux and Leroy, *Le Mythe du Phénix*, p. 14; Rundle Clark, "The Legend of the Phoenix," 1–29 and 105–40; and van den Broek, ch. 2.

[4] Guy R. Mermier, "The Phoenix: Its Nature and Its Place in the Tradition of the *Physiologus*," in *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy*, ed. Willene B. Clark and Meradith

story make the bird the escort of the sun, accompanying it on its daily course across the sky. Van den Broek cites as examples the poem *Pterygion phoenicis* by Laevius (c. 100 B.C.), in which the phoenix rises with the sun,[5] and the Greek *Apocalypse of Baruch* (second century A.D.),[6] in which the phoenix spreads its wings to protect the earth from the intense rays of the sun. (See Chapters V and VII for two interesting correspondences between the *Apocalypse of Baruch* and the Old English phoenix homily.) In other versions of the story, the phoenix has a different affinity with the sun. In the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix*, for instance, the phoenix ascends the highest tree at sunrise and sings in the new day.

In the Old English homily, the connections with the sun are many. As we have seen, the grove where the phoenix lives is called the Shining Woodland, and the sun shines there seven times more brilliantly than it does on earth. After bathing, the phoenix flies to the highest tree, "towards the hot sun," where he "shines like a sunbeam." The homilist's description of the bird is packed with adjectives of brightness and comparisons with the sun: His "breast and beak are bright, fair and gleaming"; his eyes are "as bright as a sunbeam"; he shines "like red gold" and "glitters" like gold leaf. Even the word *fæger* (fair, lovely, beautiful), which is constantly reiterated in phrases such as *fæger fugol*, has connotations of brightness, more so in Old English than today (as in "fair hair," "fair weather").[7] The word *wlitig* (radiant, beautiful, fair) appears three times in the homily, twice in the phrase *wlitig and wynsum* and once in the phrase *wlitig and wundorlic.*[8] Both *fæger* and *wlitig* occur

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T. McMunn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 79–80, n. 12.
[5]Pp. 267–9.
[6]Excerpt from Greek text with French translation in Hubaux and Leroy, *Le Mythe du Phénix*, pp. xxvii–xxxi. English translation in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), vol. 2, pp. 533 ff.
[7]Paul A. Johnston, personal communication, May 15, 1997.
[8]The phrase *wlitig and wynsumlic* appears in at least two other Old English homilies. See William W. Ryan's study of alliterating matched pairs, "Word-Play in Some Old English Homilies and a Late Middle English Poem," in *Studies in Language, Literature, and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later,*

frequently in the Old English verse *Phoenix*, but their effect is diluted somewhat by the poem's generally more detailed, if not ornate, descriptions.

When the time comes for the old bird to die, the homily says that "through God's might the hot sun shines and through the heat of the sun and its rays, the heap which he--the holy bird Phoenix--has built is ignited." (The Old English poet agrees that the nest is ignited by the summer sun. The *Carmen*, in contrast, says that the heat of the phoenix's dying body produces the flame.) I am inclined to look for the source of the homily's emphasis on the sun in, again, some lost, probably Latin, version of the phoenix story, a version which must also have been the source for the term *radians saltus* (shining woodland), surely the same as the *Bosco del Sole* identified by Arturo Graf.[9]

The connection between the sun and the phoenix also forms a connection with Christ, who in early Christianity was identified with the sun. As Henry Chadwick writes,

> . . . Constantine was not aware of any mutual exclusiveness between Christianity and his faith in the Unconquered Sun. The transition from solar monotheism (the most popular form of contemporary paganism) to Christianity was not difficult. In Old Testament prophecy Christ was entitled 'the sun of righteousness'. Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 200) speaks of Christ driving his chariot across the sky like the Sun-god. . . . How easy it was for Christianity and solar religion to become entangled at the popular level is strikingly illustrated by a mid-fifth century sermon of Pope Leo the Great, rebuking his over-cautious flock for paying reverence to the Sun on the steps of St. Peter's before turning their back on it to worship inside the westward-facing basilica.[10]

It is not difficult to conjecture that a Latin antecedent for the homily, even if it were an

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ed. E. Bagby Atwood and Archibald A. Hill (Austin: University of Texas, 1969), pp. 265–278. Other pairs named by Ryan as appearing in at least two other homilies are *hehst and halgost* (phoenix homily has *heah and halig*) and *mære and micel* (phoenix homily has *mycel and mære*: Vesp. D. xiv version *mycel mære*).

[9] *Miti, Leggende*, p. 30.

[10] *The Early Church*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1993), pp. 126–7.

overtly Christian text (as the *Carmen* is not), might well be informed by the traditions of sun worship and the strong connection between the sun and Christ in Roman Christianity, and that these are the source of the strong sun imagery used in the Old English homily to describe the phoenix as a representation of Christ. James E. Cross pointed out that, in the Old English poem, the phoenix's "relationship with the sun is presented in a general way, but any indication of veneration or adoration [examples of which exist in the *Carmen*] is avoided,"[11] and the homily, to an even greater degree than the poem, uses the sun as a comparison, not as an object of worship.

Surely in England, the sun had every possible positive connotation. Ernest Ingersoll points out that in northern cultures the sun was seen as a source of comfort, while the winds tended to be feared.[12] And, indeed, the phoenix of the homily seeks a perch as close as possible to the warmth of the sun. Contrast this view with that of the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, for example, a story with Middle Eastern roots which shows the phoenix as the earth's protector from the intensity of the sun.

Similarities to the Eagle

The eagle is one of the most important animals in Christian iconography. Traditionally the symbol of John the Evangelist, the eagle is one of the four creatures seen by Ezekiel (1:10) and by John himself (Rev. 4:10).[13] The phoenix has many attributes in common with traditional portrayals of the eagle. For one, the eagle was strongly associated with the sun in many cultures, including Egyptian and Assyrian traditions; and Pliny wrote that the eagle tests the young in its nest by forcing them to

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[11]"The Conception of the Old English *Phoenix*" in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. Robert P. Creed (Providence: Brown University Press, 1967), p. 131.
[12]*Birds in Legend, Fable and Folklore* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1923), p. 203.
[13]Remarked upon in Charbonneau-Lassay's discussion of the tetramorph in *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, pp. 88–91.

stare directly into the sun without blinking.[14] Louis Charbonneau-Lassay writes that very old eastern tales, which showed

> the eagle rising towards the sun, into the abode of the gods, said that the bird came so close to the divine star that in its old age its feathers became charred, and its flesh dried up almost completely; but once it returned to the earth, it plunged itself three times in the spring water of a fountain and emerged regenerated, with all the youthfulness of its early years.[15]

Charbonneau-Lassay points out that this is such an ancient story that David refers to it in Psalm 103:5: ". . . your youth is renewed like the eagle's." This eagle story appears in full, with minor variations, in many places, including in the popular *Physiologus* (see Chapter I) and in later bestiaries. The tales of the eagle and the phoenix both appear, for example, in a Latin bestiary produced in the twelfth century (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ii.4.26; this was the bestiary translated by T. H. White), and the eagle story is included in a Middle English bestiary found in a thirteenth-century manuscript (London, British Library, Arundel MS 292).[16] The eagle story's correspondences with the story of the phoenix, especially as told in the Old English homily, are many: the closeness to the sun, the bird's old age, the burning by the sun, the bathing in the fountain, and the bird's renaissance.

In ancient Babylonian tradition, the soaring eagle was depicted as the bearer of souls to their celestial home, a conception that spread through Syria and was borrowed by the Greeks and Romans.[17] In Tarsus, according to Charbonneau-Lassay, "a live bird was placed on the summit of the funeral pyre" in honor of the city's patron.

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[14] *Historia Naturalis* . H. Rackham, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), 10:3 (vol. 3, p. 298). All of these associations are made by Charbonneau-Lassay, pp. 71–87.

[15] Translation by D. M. Dooling in *The Bestiary of Christ* (New York: Arkana, 1992), pp. 29–30. I am indebted to Timothy C. Graham for pointing out the similarity between the eagle of the *Physiologus* and the phoenix, and to Paul A. Johnston for referring me to the Middle English version of the eagle story.

[16] Richard Morris, ed., *An Old English Miscellany*, Early English Text Society o.s., 49 (1872; reprint, Milwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1988), pp. 3–4.

[17] Charbonneau-Lassay, p. 27.

Similarly, in the rite of apotheosis of the Caesars, a live eagle was set to escape from the top of the huge pyramidal funeral pyre, so that it might carry the soul upward to the land of the gods.[18] These eagle rituals bear striking resemblance to the image of the rising phoenix; note, too, that the eagle rises directly from the fire, presumably unharmed. In some versions of the phoenix story, including the Old English verse *Phoenix* and the *Carmen*, the burned remains of the phoenix first form some kind of conglomeration from which comes a worm and thence an egg (*Carmen*) or the fledgling (verse *Phoenix*) and thus the new phoenix; the homily, however, describes the phoenix rising straight from the ashes, more like the eagle rising directly from the funeral pyre.

Both the phoenix and the eagle, then, are depicted as rising from a fire. But, further, both are closely connected with the human soul. Birds in general have long been seen as symbols of transcendence. As Beryl Rowland says, "The idea that the bird represented the soul as opposed to the body, the spiritual in contrast to the earthly, seems to have been universal."[19] Birds are often identified with angels, too. Venetia Newall points out that, like angels, "In folk tradition birds are often messengers of the gods . . . . Christ Himself is occasionally represented [in Russian icons] with wings, signifying 'the great angel of the will of God' . . . ."[20] Given the traditional connections between birds, souls, and angels, and especially the Roman and eastern depiction of the eagle as the bearer of the souls of the dead, the phoenix seems particularly at home in paradise among the angels and righteous souls, as only the Old English homilist describes him.

The Christian interpretation attached to the story of the eagle in the Middle

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[18]Ibid., pp. 27–28.

[19]*Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), p. xiv.

[20]"Birds and Animals in Icon-Painting Tradition" in *Animals in Folklore*, ed. J. R. Porter and W. M. S. Russell (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1978), p. 186.

English bestiary is also instructive. The eagle is compared to a man who "before he becomes a Christian . . . is old in his sins."[21] His renewal comes from going to church, renouncing Satan and sinful deeds, and following Christ. His sight is restored by the knowledge of God's love, as the eagle's sight is restored by the sun. Just as the eagle plunges into the well and comes out "whole and sound," the man falls into the baptismal font and comes out new. Such an interpretation would fit the phoenix of the Old English homily equally well. The phoenix homily lacks only two major elements of the eagle story: the restoration of eyesight and a section of the story in which the eagle rectifies its distorted beak by pecking on a rock, after which he is able to eat once more. (The bestiary's interpretation compares the distorted beak to the man's mouth when it has not yet said the *Pater noster* or creed; but learning these allows him, by God's grace, to obtain the soul's food.)

Uniqueness

The *Carmen* emphasizes the uniqueness of the phoenix, calling it *unica Phoenix, / unica, si vivit morte refecta sua* ("peerless bird, the Phoenix, peerless since she lives renewed by her own death").[22] J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff point out that Ovid, too, uses the word *unica* to describe the phoenix[23] and take note of its various shades of meaning: "peerless," "alone of its kind," "unparalleled." The Old English verse *Phoenix* uses in place of the Latin adjective *unica* the noun *anhaga* (l. 87), "solitary being," "recluse,"[24] or, as Norman F. Blake prefers, "uniqueness."[25]

The Old English homily, at about the same point in the story, calls the phoenix

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[21]Translation notes by Morris, p. 4.
[22]Ll. 31–2.
[23]*Amores* 2:6, l. 54.
[24]J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960).
[25]*The Phoenix*, p. 72, note to l. 87.

ān fugel fæger, which could be read as just "a fair bird," or, alternatively, "a fair bird, alone." Either way, the homily's term seems a weaker statement of the bird's singularity than is found in the other versions. However, the CCCC 198 version of the homily later says that the admiring birds *ænne heriaþ* ("praise the one"; Vesp. D. xiv reads here *ealle hine heriaþ*, "they all praise him").[26] The homily further emphasizes the phoenix's uniqueness, saying, "he has no mate"; he is the only one of his species.

The alone-ness of the phoenix also connects the bird with virginity and, especially, with the Virgin Mary; the old bird gives birth to the new bird without the benefit of a mate. This interpretation cannot be ruled out as one of several levels of meaning in the Old English homily. (See also the discussion below concerning the sex of the bird.)

In yet another view, John Bugge sees the isolation of the phoenix as part of a monastic pattern in the Old English poem; he compares the description of the solitary phoenix with that of the solitary Guthlac.[27] This interpretation holds up less well for the homily; the solitude of the phoenix is less emphasized than its matchlessness (as it is in the *Carmen*), and several other monastic motifs found in the poem are absent from the homily (e.g., the image of the phoenix as "a warrior of the Lord").

The uniqueness of the phoenix also means that, at any given time, the individual also represents the entire species,[28] a fact which has implications for the phoenix's status as king of all birds. (See below.)

Sex

Van den Broek names several early Christian writers who used the phoenix as

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[26] I am grateful to Paul A. Johnston for pointing out this distinction.
[27] John Bugge, "The Virgin Phoenix," *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), pp. 334–335.
[28] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 389.

an exemplum for virginity and chastity, including Gregory of Nazianzus and Ambrose.[29] Bugge, writing about the Old English poem, reads the phoenix as a symbol of asexuality, a specifically monastic purity of the flesh.[30] There are details in the poem that support his interpretation, but I do not find much to support reading the homily in the same way. Rather, I see much to suggest that the phoenix of the homily has a dual nature, both male and female, with the masculine side predominating somewhat.

Consider first the surroundings of the phoenix. Far from providing an asexual setting, the fertile, evergreen land seems richly reproductive (fruit is the only expected fertility symbol missing from the scene; see Chapter III). George Long, writing about holy wells and magic springs of England, associates the wells and springs with the earth, the moon, life-giving, and femaleness. Nearly always, he says, a holy well is close to a sacred tree (see, for example, the tree of life and the river that waters Eden in Genesis 2:9-10), and Long associates the tree with the sun, strength, the phallus, and maleness.[31] If we accept that symbolism, we see that the phoenix partakes of both sides by bathing in the fountain of life and then perching in the tallest tree.

The homily makes one outright statement about the sex of the phoenix itself: ". . . nor does anyone know whether it is a male or female bird except Christ himself ["God alone" in Vesp. D. xiv]." This seems to assume that the phoenix is, in fact, one or the other sex, but that it simply is not within the powers of ordinary humans--nor, perhaps, of the phoenix itself--to know which one. The statement may say less about the sex of the bird than about the imperfection of man's knowledge when compared to the omniscience of God.[32] Likewise, the Old English verse *Phoenix* tells us, "Only

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[29]Pp. 386–7, citing Gregory's *Praecepta ad virgines*, 526–30, and Ambrose's *Expositio Psalmi*, 118.
[30]"The Virgin Phoenix," p. 333.
[31]*The Folklore Calendar* (1930; reprint Detroit: Gale Research, 1970), pp. 85–6.
[32]As Thomas N. Hall points out, the idea that "no one knows what God knows" appears elsewhere in

God, the Almighty King, knows what its sex is, female or male: none of mankind knows, save God alone, how wondrous are the rulings, the fair decree of old, concerning that bird's birth."[33] The *Carmen* suggests other possibilities, saying, "Female or male she is, which you will--whether neither or both, a happy bird, she regards not any unions of love . . . ."[34]

The language of the homily, however, undercuts this stated ambiguity and treats the phoenix as male, using the masculine pronoun, for example (and I have, unconsciously at first, continued the practice in this essay); it does so presumably because the noun *fenix* is masculine and perhaps, too, as a default, as when the sex of a pronoun's antecedent is unknown. (Like the homily, the Old English verse *Phoenix* uses masculine pronouns for the bird. The *Carmen*, however, takes the phoenix to be feminine, perhaps because *avis* is a feminine noun; *phoenix*, however, is masculine.) A further indication that the homily construes the phoenix as male is that he is called "king" (*cyning*) of the birds, and "lord" (*hlaford*) over bird-kind. And, finally, an obvious but perhaps moot point of natural history: his brilliant plumage is surely that of a male bird.

On the other hand, the homily includes suggestions that the phoenix has female attributes as well. As was already noted, the bird's baths in the monthly flow of the fountain call to mind the menstrual cycle (see Chapter III). Carol Falvo Heffernan takes this motif much farther, seeing the entire phoenix story as one of menstruation, conception, and birth.[35] Without going that far, it is clear that the old phoenix does give birth to the new, a virgin birth which, to a Christian audience, recalls the Virgin Mary.

Old English and Insular Latin literature. (Personal communication, June 4, 1997.)

[33]Ll. 355–360: transl. R. K. Gordon.

[34]Ll. 163–4: transl. J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff.

[35]*The Phoenix at the Fountain.*

There seems to be no simple conclusion regarding the sex of the phoenix in the homily. The homilist tends to treat the phoenix as a masculine figure, yet the story hinges upon important feminine imagery of fertility and birth. This duality permits, even encourages, multiple interpretations; the door is left open for seeing the phoenix as a masculine figure (Christ or a secular king), a feminine figure (a virgin, the Virgin Mary in particular, or perhaps *mater ecclesia*--see Chapter V), or a universal figure (Christians generally).

Kingship

With a great deal more certainty, we can discern that the homilist intends to depict the phoenix as a king. The phoenix is introduced as "lord over all bird-kind." The homily then uses the word *cyning* three times in reference to the phoenix, each time in the section of the homily in which an admiring throng of birds pays homage to him. The phoenix surrounded by the flock of attendants calls to mind a king with his court and, by extension, Christ in majesty, surrounded by heavenly choirs.[36] (For further discussion of this image, see Chapter V.) The connection between the phoenix and Christ the king becomes explicit in the homily's last, interpretive section when the homilist says, "Birds praise Christ; now it is fitting to us that we praise our Lord with almsgiving and with worship, prayer, and with all things."

Having depicted the phoenix as king, the homilist recalls the image at the end of the homily, using it to ensure that listeners know who the true king is: "The God who lives and reigns, he who in heaven is exalted and holy king of all kings." Thus the phoenix is a king but, like all lesser rulers, is subject to God's authority. The

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[36]A tenth-century English representation of Christ in Majesty with an admiring throng is found in the Athelstan Psalter, British Library, Cotton MS Galba A.xviii, f. 2v; see Michelle P. Brown, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pl. 25.

affirmation of the supremacy of God as king of kings is a theological commonplace, but following a story whose main character is a king with a retinue of loyal followers, it may also reflect Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the relationship between secular kings and the church. Writing about diplomas, a form which, in England, was introduced by and connected with the church, and which in Anglo-Saxon times did not bear seals, Brigitte Bedos Rezak concludes that "in the political ideology of the times, the hegemony of heaven took precedence over the terrestrial. Such a relationship is also inherent in contemporary manuscript iconography where emphasis is given to Christ as ruler, while the king is systematically shown in a position of subordination."[37] The homilist certainly identifies the phoenix with Christ the King, but in another sense the phoenix also represents the secular king.

The Church and the secular ruler were closely connected by the time of Ælfric, and the homilies of Ælfric, Wulfstan, and others often defined and promoted the king's special role. As P. A. Stafford says of Ælfric's writings: "The king is described in religious terms: he is Christ's messenger to the Christian people; . . . the role of the king as shepherd of the Christian flock is a direct parallel of that of Christ."[38] The phoenix homily fits the tradition of viewing the king as the worldly parallel of Christ.

The phoenix as a worldly ruler becomes a vivid symbol of inheritance. The phoenix, "heir to itself," was seen, at least in later medieval interpretations, as an important image of "the perpetuity of sovereignty."[39] This would have been a reassuring story of continuity of kingship in any time and place where royal succession

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[37]"The King Enthroned: A New Theme in Anglo-Saxon Royal Iconography: The Seal of Edward the Confessor and Its Political Implications" in *Acta*, vol. 11, *Kings and Kingship*, ed. Joel Rosenthal (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1986), p. 56. Rezak cites two tenth-century manuscripts linked to Winchester: British Library Cotton MS Otho B. ix and CCCC 183.
[38]"Church and Society in the Age of Ælfric," in *The Old English Homily and its Backgrounds*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Bernard F. Huppé (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1978), pp. 26–27.
[39]Rowland, *Birds with Human Souls*, p. 137.

might have been a concern. The phoenix, as the epitome and sole representative of his species, was immortal, even though each individual phoenix was mortal. In the same way, the crown and dignity of a king live on, though the king as a human being must die. Ernst H. Kantorowicz points out that, in law (according to Justinian's *Code* and subsequent legal thought) and in effect, a father and son could be considered virtually one and the same. This view had its basis in Aristotle's idea that the seed's power "derived from the soul of the father and impressed itself upon the son," making begetter and begotten identical in "form." Eventually it was combined with other arguments to lead to the conclusion that "a king's first-born son was even more than other sons the equal of his ruling father because he was, while the father was still living, one with the father in the royal Dignity."[40] The phoenix story was the perfect expression of continuous royal succession, for it emphasized "the personal identity of the dead Phoenix with his living successor."[41]

Colors

Finally, the most obvious attribute of the phoenix, its physical appearance, requires comment. The homily says nothing of the phoenix's size, though tradition makes him a large bird.[42] (The *Carmen* describes the phoenix as at least as big as an ostrich [ll. 145-6]; the Old English verse *Phoenix* says that he is "like a peacock of fair growth" [ll. 312-3].) In fact, the homily provides very little physical description of the phoenix apart from its brilliant colors and shininess.

The colors are a distinguishing characteristic of the phoenix. According to van den Broek,

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[40]Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 392.
[41]Ibid., p. 393.
[42]Van den Broek, pp. 251–3.

> The exquisite blazing colours of the phoenix are celebrated by all the authors who describe it. On this point it differs from all other birds, says Tacitus [*Annales*, 4:28]. Herodotus knew that it had gold and red feathers [2:73], and these colours recur in all the later descriptions. They are the colours of the sunrise . . . .[43]

The homily's description also emphasizes gold and red. The phoenix "glitters as if he were pure gold"; "his feet are both blood-red"; he shines "like red gold"; his neck is "like pure gold"; "a red hue colors his back"; and "like gold leaf the Phoenix glitters." The only other color name mentioned in the description is white, the color of the beak. Just two sentences before this, the homilist calls the phoenix's breast and beak "bright, fair and gleaming, of every degree." This reading for *æghwilces cynnes* (lit., "of every kind"), is preferable to a reading such as "of every color," for Sophie van Romburgh has pointed out that Anglo-Saxons' perception of color was different from our own. As van Romburgh says:

> When considering the colour of the Phoenix it is perhaps useful to realise that the sensation of colour actually consists of the three components hue (red, blue, etc.), saturation (admixture with black and white), and brightness (amount of light reflected). When we, people from modern western societies, speak of 'colour' we tend to focus almost exclusively on hue. The Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, rather emphasised different degrees in brightness or light and dark and seem to have considered hues of secondary importance only. They were by no means unique in this respect; anthropological surveys of colour perception have revealed that even nowadays "primitive societies" first of all distinguish between light/white and dark/black, and add (blood)red as a third colour to their vocabulary/perception. Incidentally, a light/dark/red pattern also seems to prevail in Homeric poetry.[44]

The homily's description contrasts with other versions of the phoenix story, which use many more colors to describe the bird. The *Carmen* describes yellow, red, rose, and

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[43] Pp. 253–4.

[44] Sophie van Romburgh, personal communication, June 13, 1997. I thank Paul A. Johnston for directing me to van Romburgh's work.

purple parts of the body and a white beak with emerald green. The Old English poem names green, purple, brown, crimson, and yellow. Some accounts of the phoenix attribute its name to, or otherwise play on, the Greek word *foinix*, which is translated as "purpled" or "crimsoned,"[45] but the Old English homily makes no such connection.

The homily places great emphasis on the gorgeous colors of the phoenix, but even colors seem to take second place to light. Verbs and adjectives related to shining and glittering create an overall picture of a luminous, even sun-like bird, and the colors that are named add to that picture. Van Romburgh has noted a similar pattern in *Beowulf*, in which the predominant imagery is that of light and darkness (though not necessarily associated with good and evil in the way that is conventional for modern readers); the few times that color names are mentioned, they are gold or the red of blood.[46] In the Old English homily, light ties the phoenix both to the sun and to Christ; specifics of color, such as those one would expect in a natural history's description of a bird, are less important than the light of God which the bird radiates.

Even the phoenix's eyes "are noble, as clear as crystal and as bright as a sunbeam," the homilist says, thus continuing the light imagery. The *Carmen* describes the eyes as "twin sapphires" which shoot out a bright flame (ll. 137-8). The Old English verse *Phoenix* says that the phoenix's eye is "strong . . . and in hue like a stone, a bright gem, when by the craft of smiths it is set in a golden vessel" (ll. 301-4). The homilist's "crystal" is something like the gemstones described in the other versions, but it is different enough to suggest that the image either came from a different tradition or was adapted by the homilist to provide a comparison with which he was more familiar.

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[45]Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, pp. 405–6.

[46]Sophie van Romburgh, "Coloring Beowulf: The Unconventional Use of Light and Dark," article in progress.

The phoenix's feathers "are like an angel's feathers," according to the homily, thus furthering the image of the phoenix as a heavenly kind of creature and recalling his neighbors in paradise, the angels and righteous souls. The homilist notes especially that, after the new phoenix is born and it bathes in the fountain of life, "his feathers begin to grow as fair as even the fairest were, most fair." Again, *fæger* implies "bright" as well as "fair," and, in view of the link between feathers and angels, the phoenix's feathers seem to be a badge of holiness.

Before concluding this discussion, it is interesting to note where within their accounts the different versions of the story place the description of the phoenix. Both the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* place the main physical description of the bird after its rebirth, during its trip home, accompanied by other birds and witnessed by humans. The homily reverses this order. The phoenix of the homily travels to Egypt, where the admiring throngs of birds see it, and it is at this point that the physical description is given. The bird returns to its home to die and be reborn, after which the homilist gives little by way of description. This reversal may be another indication that the homily has its source in a tradition separate from that of Lactantius. (See Chapter V for a fuller discussion of the phoenix's journey.)

Does the description suggest any real-life bird on which the phoenix of the homily was based? The homily does not make any overt comparison to any species. Symbolically, as noted above, it is similar to the eagle. The *Carmen* compares it to the pheasant, the peacock, and the ostrich (the last for size only). The Old English poet likens the phoenix to a peacock. But the gold and red colors described in the homily sound very much like the golden pheasant of Asia, and it is not inconceivable that trade might have brought the skin of a golden pheasant to Anglo-Saxon England.[47] Ernest

[47] I am grateful to Paul A. Johnston for this suggestion.

Ingersoll writes that trying to connect any of the fabulous birds--the phoenix, garuda, fung-whang, and others--to any real species, living or extinct, "is quite a waste of time," for they are products of the imagination for which "eagles and vultures and peacocks have served as suggestions."[48] Yet every author's imagination is informed by his reality, and it is interesting to speculate on whether the sight or report of a rare skin from far away might inform an author's description of the phoenix, no matter whether the author viewed the phoenix as real or symbolic.

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[48] *Birds in Legend, Fable and Folklore*, p. 203.

CHAPTER V

THE JOURNEY OF THE PHOENIX

The Old English homily tells of the phoenix's journey from paradise to Egypt, his fifteen-week sojourn there, his retinue of admiring followers, and his return to paradise accompanied by the faithful throng. Chapter IV noted that in the Old English homily the journey occurs first, then the phoenix returns home to paradise to die and be reborn, whereas in both the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix*, the bird makes a journey to Syria, dies and is reborn there, and afterwards the new phoenix returns to his paradisiacal home.

Reason for the Journey

Why does the phoenix make his journey? No explanation is offered in the Old English homily. During his sojourn in Egypt he receives the adulation of the birds, and a wax figure is made (see below); then he returns to paradise to start the death-and-rebirth process. The purpose of the trip is unclear. I believe that the journey may be a vestige from an earlier version of the story and, although it has lost its original narrative purpose, it has persisted because there is something important about showing the phoenix reigning as king among the multitudes of birds.

Van den Broek identifies two separate phoenix-story traditions: in one, the phoenix burns; in the other, the phoenix decomposes. Van den Broek hypothesizes that, of the versions in which the phoenix burns, the oldest was set entirely in India, with the phoenix making no journey at all. He suspects that the flight to another land was introduced in order to interpolate material from the other tradition, in which the

phoenix decomposed rather than burned, and in which the new bird carried the remains of its predecessor to Egypt, often to Heliopolis in reverence to the sun.[1] The *Carmen*, for example, combines both traditions, telling us that the bird travels to Syria to die; she dies and the decomposed body burns; a worm comes from the ashes and grows into a kind of egg, and the new bird hatches from this egg. Then:

> ante tamen, proprio quicquid de corpore restat,
> ossaque vel cineres exuviasque suas,
> unguine balsameo murraque et ture soluto
> condit et in formam conglobat ore pio.
> quam pedibus gestans contendit Solis ad urbem
> inque ara residens ponit in aede sacra.[2]

> (Yet ere she goes, she takes all that is left of what was her own body--bones or ashes and remains that were hers--and stores it in balsam oil, myrrh, and frankincense set free [i.e., dissolved], rounding it into a ball-shape with loving beak. Bearing this in her talons she speeds to the City of the Sun [presumably Heliopolis], and perching on the altar sets it in the hallowed temple.)

This version features both decomposition and burning, a journey with two stops, the delivery of the remains, and a connection with Egypt. The *Carmen* is, according to van den Broek, an "unmistakable attempt to combine the two main versions into a coherent whole."[3] In another "combined" version of the story that van den Broek considers to be separate from the tradition that gave rise to the *Carmen*,[4] Claudian (circa 370-410 A.D.) says that the bird lives in the east, is burned and reborn there, and brings the remains of the old phoenix to Egypt.[5] This version, then, describes burning only, a single journey, the delivery of remains, and a connection to Egypt. The Old English poem says that the phoenix flies from paradise first to the wilderness and then, having

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[1] Pp. 149–51.
[2] Ll. 117–22. Translation adapted by me from that of J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff.
[3] P. 157.
[4] Van den Broek, pp. 332–3.
[5] *Claudian*, 2 vols., trans. Maurice Platnauer (Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann, 1956), *Phoenix*, vol. 2, pp. 222–31.

gathered a following of birds, to Syria.[6] There it builds its nest, which is set on fire by the sun. From the ashes an apple forms; a worm grows from the apple, and the worm grows into the new bird. The new phoenix takes the bones and ashes of the old to its homeland and buries them. The overtly Christian author seems to recoil from having the phoenix make an offering of its predecessor's ashes; instead, he maintains the trip abroad but has the phoenix bring its remains home for a more proper, "Christian" burial. In summary, the death is by burning, there is a two-part journey and the delivery of remains, but there is no mention of Egypt. Thus varying combinations of the two basic traditions exist.

The Old English homily apparently is based upon a composite version of the story, retaining the elements in a somewhat illogical manner, but with attention to keeping important imagery intact. As in the basic "burning" version of the story, the phoenix originates in the east (in this case, in paradise) and is burned in his nest in that same land. Still following this tradition, the new bird arises directly from the ashes, without any intermediate step, such as a worm (which seems more logical in the decomposition stories). However, the "decomposition" tradition has infiltrated the homilist's sources, for the phoenix does make a trip to Egypt. Notice, though, that the usual purpose for the phoenix's trip--to deliver the remains of his predecessor--does not yet exist: the trip to Egypt and back takes place *before* the old bird dies. Thus the original narrative purpose for the trip is lost; but a symbolic purpose remains. For, as in other versions of the story that feature a journey, it is on the phoenix's trip to the "outside" world that the flock of admiring birds gathers round and that the phoenix is

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[6]Thomas D. Hill reads this trip as a parallel for Christ's journey from heaven to the desert of human life, and then literally from the desert to minister to Israel (understanding "Syria" as a generic term for the Holy Land at the time the poem was written), and finally back to heaven. By extension, the journey also stands for the journey of Adam and his descendants--that is, mankind--from Eden to the wilderness of this world, and then to the promised land and eventually, because of Christ's sacrifice, back to paradise. See "The 'Syrwarena Lond' and the Itinerary of the Phoenix: A Note on Typological Allusion in the Old English 'Phoenix,'" *Notes and Queries* 23 (1976): 482–4.

truly established as king. Perhaps at some point in the transmission of the story the vivid imagery of the flock of admirers associated with a place other than the phoenix's homeland became more memorable than the original logic of the trip. Or perhaps the homilist, as I suspect the Old English poet did, sought to avoid any suggestion of a pagan offering in Heliopolis; for the homilist or his source, this resulted in setting the trip apart from the death and rebirth. It is probably less important to explain the apparent lapse in logic than it is to note what the homilist did include: the admiring throng and what amounts to a coronation scene.

The Admiring Throng

Versions of the phoenix story that include a journey generally include also a throng of birds that pay homage to the phoenix and accompany him on part of his journey. As was noted in Chapter IV, the image recalls a king and his court as well as Christ in majesty attended by angels. The homilist says that in Egypt

> ðonne cumaþ to him swylce hi cyning wære, fægniaþ and folgiaþ eall fugolcynn. Hwæt þæt fugolcynn eall fægere Fenix gretaþ, writigað and singaþ onbuton him, ælc on his wisan ænne heriaþ.
>
> (Then they come to him as if he were king; all bird-kind rejoice and wait on him. Behold, all that bird-kind greet fair Phoenix. They chirp and sing around him. Each in his way, they all praise him.)

If birds bear a resemblance to angels, how like the heavenly choirs they are in this scene. The birds also bear a resemblance to the *comitatus*, the band of followers loyal to a secular lord, and the gathering of birds "from far and wide" seems to serve as a kind of coronation. These images fit the developing Anglo-Saxon views of Christ and of secular kings, views which influenced one another. In England by the ninth century, for example, Germanic and Christian views were well intertwined, according to Henry Mayr-Harting:

> . . . kings underwent a Christian ceremony of consecration and anointing, but they continued to trace their genealogies back to Woden. Kings gradually assumed a Christ-like character; yet Christ Himself took on some of the qualities of the old Germanic heroes, so that Christ and his apostles, for instance, could be seen as a lord and his thegns.[7]

On the Christian side, we can also note the similarities between the birds who come "from far and wide" to pay homage to the king and the wise men who come from afar to pay homage to Jesus as a newborn king. Thomas D. Hill, writing about the Old English poem, points out that the phoenix as king recalls the typological correspondence between Adam as ruler over the animals (Genesis 1:26; 2:19-20) and Christ as king (see Mark 1:13, in which Jesus, during his time in the wilderness, "was with the wild beasts," a phrase which Hill sees as a conscious use of Adamic typology).[8]

Van den Broek says that "the motif of the birds gathering from all directions at the appearance of the phoenix and accompanying it reverentially, was probably borrowed from traditional descriptions of the installation of a new ruler."[9] This makes perfect sense when the birds are accompanying a new phoenix. But note that in the Old English homily, the birds acclaim the old phoenix, then accompany him back to the border of paradise. As far as I can tell, the homily has this unusual order of events in common only with a passage written by Sidonius in 456 A.D.:

> sic cinnama busto
> collis Erythraei portans Phoebeius ales
> concitat omne avium vulgus; famulantia currunt
> agmina, et angustus pennas non explicat aer.[10]

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[7] *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 220; for this passage, Mayr-Harting cites K. Sisam and W. A. Chaney, and the poem *The Dream of the Rood*.
[8] "The 'Syrwarena Lond,'" p. 484.
[9] P. 228. As an example, van den Broek cites Suetonius's description of the inauguration of the Emperor Caligula (in *Caligula*, 13).
[10] *Carmina*, 7, ll. 353--6, found in *Poems and Letters*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. William Blair Anderson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955–56), pp. 148-9.

> (Even so the bird of Phoebus, when bearing the cinnamon to his pyre on the Erythraean hill, rouses all the common multitude of birds; the obedient throng hies to him, and the air is too narrow to give their wings free play.)

The poem celebrates the installation of Avitus, Sidonius's own father-in-law, as emperor, and the reference to the phoenix and its followers is used to highlight Avitus's charisma as a leader. Again, the phoenix is associated with a coronation. Sidonius does not tell the complete story of the phoenix but simply alludes to a familiar set of images for a particular purpose, so perhaps his lapse from the usual narrative order of the story is understandable.

But even in the homily's more complete telling, the unusual order makes sense from a Christian viewpoint, for the flock of birds accompanying the phoenix's return to paradise to die echoes the enthusiastic crowds at the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. If one looks at the "coronation" and return of the phoenix in that light, the absence of some expected coronation images is less troubling. An anointing of the phoenix is missing from the homily's "coronation" scene, for example. Anointing was practiced in Anglo-Saxon coronations, at least in some periods (see above), and it was originally "a sacrament comparable to the sacraments of baptism and ordination."[11] Although the application of oil or water is missing from the phoenix's ceremonial gathering, the journey does immediately follow his bath in the fountain of life. The "baptism" followed by a journey on which the phoenix is acclaimed as king recalls both a coronation ritual followed by a journey around the kingdom, and the baptism of Christ and his journey into the wilderness before he takes up his ministry (Luke 3-4).[12] The comparison between the ritual of coronation and the baptism of Christ was familiar to the Anglo-Saxons, for by the time of King Edgar's coronation in 973, writers made

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[11]Kantorowicz, p. 319.

[12]The Old English verse *Phoenix* offers a somewhat different parallel for Christ's journey; see note 6, above, and Thomas D. Hill's article "The 'Syrwarena Lond.'"

the comparison explicit, and the Church's role in coronations was well established. As Eric John says,

> The sources emphasize that he [Edgar] was in his 29th year when he was crowned; since the same sources get the year of grace wrong, they clearly knew Edgar's age as an ideological not a chronological fact. The reference is to Saint Luke, who says that Jesus began his public ministry in his 29th year. . . . The parallel between Edgar's coronation and Christ's entry into his public ministry implies that something was beginning, and that something can only have been Edgar's career as *Christus Domini*, the Lord's Anointed.[13]

It seems reasonable to imagine, then, that the phoenix's "coronation" might have been understood as such by Anglo-Saxons, and also that they would have seen its connection with both secular kingship and Christ the king.

The other obvious coronation image that apparently is missing from the story is the crown itself. No crown is mentioned in the homily. The phoenix, however, was traditionally represented in art with a nimbus about its head, either with or without rays. Van den Broek says that "even the oldest known representations of the phoenix show the nimbus and rays. They form such a fixed element in the iconography of the phoenix that the bird can almost always be recognized by their presence."[14] The nimbus shows the phoenix's connection with the sun, and it also serves as both a royal crown and a marker of holiness, since a nimbus is most often seen in representations of divine figures, saints, and kings. If the crown is an understood part of the phoenix, then it might be imagined as present, even if it is not actually *presented*, at the "coronation" of the phoenix in the homily.

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[13]"The Age of Edgar" in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1991), p. 188.
[14]Pp. 249–50; see pp. 233–51 for a full discussion of the phoenix's nimbus.

The Wax Image

In a passage whose meaning I find somewhat puzzling, the CCCC 198 version of the homily says that the admiring birds *ðonne wercað hio of weaxe, writiað Fenix, metað Fenix and hine mærlice þær wordum heriað, fugela fægerest Fenix haten.* (Then they work in wax, inscribe "Phoenix," design (or paint) a Phoenix and praise him gloriously there with words, fairest of birds, called Phoenix.) The Vespasian D. xiv version is slightly different; there the birds "work in wax, inscribe 'Phoenix,' and make it beautiful, where he is considered a treasure." What is it that the birds make? Evidently it is a wax image of some sort, but it also involves words.

Other versions of the phoenix story contain similar episodes. In the *Carmen*, for example, it is apparently the people of Egypt who gather to see the phoenix and who make a monument or marker to record the day of the bird's appearance:

> huc venit Aegyptus tanti ad miracula visus
> et raram volucrem turba salutat ovans.
> protinus exsculpunt sacrato in marmore formam
> et titulo signant remque diemque novo. (ll. 153-4)

> (Egypt draws nigh to greet the marvel of so great a sight and the crowd joyfully hails the peerless bird. Straightway they grave its form on hallowed marble and with a fresh title mark both the event and the day.)

The monument is made of marble and involves some kind of sculpture of the bird's image as well as an inscription. Similarly, the Old English verse *Phoenix* says:

> Ðonne wundriað weras ofer eorþan
> wlite ond wæstma, ond gewritu cyþað,
> mundum mearciað on marmstane
> hwonne se dæg on seo tid dryhtum geeawe
> frætwe flyhthwates. (ll. 331-5)

> (Then men throughout the earth marvel at its beauty and stature; and their writings set it forth. They shape it in marble with their hands, whenever the day and the hour reveal to men the splendours of the bird swift in flight.)

Again, it is people, not birds, making the monument to the phoenix, and they come from near and far, not just Egypt, as the *Carmen* has it. Notice, too, that the written record and the marble statue are separate objects in this version. In general, though, the sculpture and inscription in both the *Carmen* and the Old English poem, placed in the story following the death of the old phoenix, and involving marble, seem to have more in common with monuments or grave markers than does the homily's image, which is made of wax and created *before* the bird's death and rebirth.

Nonetheless, the statues in the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* seem to be the closest analogues to the wax image in the Old English homily. Other versions of the phoenix story mention written records of the appearance of the bird (e.g., Pliny, who lists reports of the phoenix's appearances and their dates, but does not mention a statue or monument)[15] and pictures of the phoenix (e.g., Herodotus, who says that his account of its appearance is based on pictures he has seen),[16] but I do not find the sculpture elsewhere.

An interesting occurrence of inscription is found in the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch, in which the traveler Baruch, led by an angel, sees a phoenix who has writing on his wing:

> And he expanded his wings, and I saw on his right wing very large letters, as large as the space of a threshing-floor, the size of about four thousand modii; and the letters were of gold. And the angel said to me, Read them. And I read, and they ran thus: Neither earth nor heaven bring me forth, but wings of fire bring me forth.[17]

Here, the writing is not only *about* the phoenix, it is actually *on* the phoenix. Van den Broek cites a similar inscription on the bird in the poem *Pterygion phoenicis* by Laevius, which leads van den Broek to speculate that the authors of both the Baruch

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[15] *Historia Naturalis* 10:2.
[16] 2:73.
[17] 6:6–9, trans. R. H. Charles.

Apocalypse and the *Pterygion phoenicis* may have known of a Greek poem, now lost, in which such writing appeared, on either a phoenix or an eagle.[18] I wonder if the somewhat confused description of the sculpture and inscription found in the homily, in which the image and the words seem to be combined in some way, could have its origins in a Latin source that was influenced by the conjectured Greek text.

The homily names wax as the material used for the image, a material not mentioned in any other version of the story to my knowledge. The homilist did not choose wax out of ignorance of marble, the material named in both the *Carmen* and the Old English poem, for immediately after this passage he describes the phoenix's breast as *fægre gehfwod swylce marmorstan mærost cynnes* (fair-formed as marble of the finest kind). Wax was used for writing tablets during Anglo-Saxon times, and perhaps the homilist imagined the visit of the bird being recorded in word and picture on such a tablet.[19] And certainly the word may have been chosen in large part for its alliteration with other words in the line: *wercað hio of weaxe, writiað Fenix.*[20] But the wax, from which is formed both an image and an inscription, also suggests to me a seal and, especially in the context of a coronation, a royal seal, a sign of the phoenix's full authority as king. Picturing the sculpture as a seal could also be the homilist's (or his source's) resolution of a confusing combination of image and word in an earlier source's description. Roman coins, amulets inscribed in Greek, medallions, and stone stamps that combine the image of a phoenix with words or letters survive from throughout Europe,[21] and many examples date from the second through fifth centuries. Any of these objects could have provided a model for a seal depicting the phoenix.

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18 *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 269.
19 I am grateful to Timothy C. Graham for this suggestion.
20 I thank Thomas N. Hall for pointing this out.
21 See plates VI – XI and XXXVI in van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*.

The Frequency and Duration of the Journey

Nearly every version of the phoenix story gives a specific time for the reappearance of the phoenix. His appearances are exceedingly rare, so the life span of the phoenix is taken to be exceedingly long. According to the Old English homily, the phoenix makes his journey, dies, and is reborn every thousand years. This figure may have its source in scripture (e.g., Rev. 20:4, "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years"); it also agrees with the thousand-year cycle described in the *Carmen* and the Old English poem. In view of this agreement among the main versions of the story being considered here, I do not intend to discuss the phoenix's life span in any detail, except to note that there is disagreement among other versions of the story. Van den Broek notes, "Even as early an author as Tacitus pointed out that there were different traditions concerning the age of the phoenix. . . . Tacitus says that according to the most widely accepted opinion the phoenix lived 500 years," and in fact, this is the life span most often named in phoenix accounts.[22] However, the thousand-year cycle is mentioned by the Greek writer Nonnus and in Latin by Martial and Pliny, and also applies to the phoenix and similar birds in Jewish, Coptic, Persian, and Turkish traditions.[23]

The symbolic meaning of the phoenix's life span also deserves note here. The duration of the cycle has been the subject of much study, for some versions of the phoenix story (e.g., Pliny, who cites Manlius) say explicitly that it coincides with the cycle of the Great Year, or Platonic year. This is the length of time it takes for the sun, moon, stars, and planets to complete their cycles and return to their original positions. The duration of the Great Year was disputed, its length said to be as many as 26,000

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[22]Van den Broek, pp. 67–8.

[23]Ibid., pp. 69–70. For a full discussion of the Great Year, see van den Broek, ch. 5.

ordinary years, but its arrival came to symbolize the ending of an old era and the beginning of a new, golden age, a return to the perfect state that had existed at the beginning of the previous Great Year. It is this return to a lost state of perfection that the phoenix embodied. Thus the phoenix's appearance, marking the beginning of a new Great Year and the reign of a new king, was a cause for celebration and the recording of the event for history, as discussed above. The connection with Christ, whose death introduced a new era of redemption, is clear. Secular rulers also liked to connect their accession with the return of a golden age and often used the phoenix image to do so. The reverse of coins struck for Hadrian in 121-122 A.D., for example, show him holding a phoenix on a globe and the words *saeculum aureum*.[24]

The other length of time mentioned in the homily is the duration of the phoenix's sojourn in Egypt. The homilist says that the visit lasts for fifteen weeks, and he mentions it in two places, so evidently he found that number memorable or important. So far, however, I have been unable to find a source for this figure. Neither the time span nor the number fifteen seems to have special meaning in scripture or in Old English literature.[25] This duration, unique to the homily's version of the phoenix story, may have its roots in a source that is unknown to us.

The Homeward Flight

When the phoenix's fifteen-week stay in Egypt draws to a close, he flies back to paradise, accompanied by his faithful bird followers, who fly *ufene and neoþone and on ælce healfe* (above and below and on each side) and turn back to their own homes when the phoenix reaches his home in paradise. The scene is almost identical to scenes

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[24]Ibid., plate VI:3.

[25]As evidenced by searches of *The NRSV Concordance, Unabridged*, ed. John R. Kohlenberger (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991) and *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*, ed. Antonette DiPaolo Healey and Richard L. Venezky (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1985).

in the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix*, except that in the homily, as we have seen, the return takes place before the phoenix's death and rebirth, not after. All three versions, then, share the images of coronation and the new king's journey under the protection and devotion of his *comitatus*, but the homily alone carries a special poignancy about the farewell at the border of paradise, for only in this version is the king returning home to sacrifice himself. Only in the homily, then, can this return trip be seen as a parallel for Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. The homily is alone, too, in placing the death and rebirth of the phoenix as a climactic ending to the narrative.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEATH AND REBIRTH

The death and resurrection of the phoenix are saved for last in the Old English homily's account of the phoenix, but this climactic episode is short and succinct in comparison to other passages in the homily, and in comparison to the same episode as described in the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix*. From the bird's preparation of the nest to his bathing in the fountain, the episode is recounted in 101 words, and it omits some vivid images found in the other versions.

Preparation for Death

The phoenix returns from Egypt to paradise after fifteen weeks have passed, and after his return he realizes that it is time for him to die:

> Þynceð him þæt he forealdod sy and gaderað þonne ofer eall Paradisum togædere ealle þa deorwurðan bogas and macaþ mycelne heap togædere . . .
>
> (It seems to him that he is grown old, and then he gathers together from throughout all Paradise all the precious branches and makes a great heap together . . .)

The scene in which the phoenix gathers branches to make his nest and funeral pyre is given much greater weight in the *Carmen* and the Old English verse *Phoenix* than it is here. Both the other versions emphasize the beauty of the plants that the phoenix chooses, and, most especially, their fragrant aromas. The *Carmen*, for example, names the aromatics cinnamon, balsam, cassia, acanthus, incense, spikenard, and panacea (ll. 83-88), which van den Broek points out is the most complete list found

in any version of the phoenix story.[1] Most versions of the story do describe the fragrant plants used for the phoenix's nest, with cinnamon named especially often. While the Old English poem does not name any of the plants--perhaps the names were unfamiliar to the author--it does describe at some length their sweetness and aroma (ll. 192-200).

According to van den Broek, the phoenix story's emphasis on aromatics reflects classical burial practices, in which the importance of the deceased was displayed in the costliness of the spices and herbs used in funeral rites.[2] That the aromatics are scarcely mentioned in the Old English homily may only mean that the homilist found them unfamiliar or insignificant, or that he viewed them as a pagan practice that he did not wish to include in the story. The other possibility is that his source, presumably in Latin, was an overtly Christian text which had already excised from the story any references that could be considered pagan, especially those that might be familiar to a Roman or Romanized audience. I am inclined to believe that the aromatics had already been excised from the homilist's source, for classical funerary practices probably would not have been as objectionable to an Anglo-Saxon writer; indeed, the homilist might have found them appropriately suggestive of holiness. Sweet aroma associated with tombs was a sign of sanctity to Anglo-Saxon Christians; for example, Bede reports that a sweet smell came from the tomb of the nun Earcongota when it was opened three days after her death[3] and a similar fragrance came from the burial place of the monks and nuns at Barking.[4] In contrast to this "odor of sanctity," horrible smells were associated with evil, hell, or demons, as in the vision of Drythelm, who smells

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[1] Pp. 163-4.
[2] Pp. 169-70.
[3] Bede, *Opera Historica*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. J. E. King (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979). *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* 3:8 (vol. 1, pp. 366-7).
[4] Ibid., 4:10 (vol. 2, pp. 58-9).

the *ignem putidum* ("foul-smelling fire") at the mouth of hell.[5]

The homily's word for what the phoenix builds with the branches is also quite different from the words used in the Old English poem. The verse *Phoenix* uses terms such as *eardstede* ("dwelling place," l. 195) and *hus* ("house," "home," ll. 202, 212, 217) and says that the phoenix *gewicað þær* ("encamps, dwells there," l. 203), as if the phoenix has built a real nest or home.[6] Calder sees great symbolic significance in the nest in the verse *Phoenix* as "a defence against every evil,"[7] a perfect dwelling-place. The *Carmen*, too, calls it *nidus*, a nest, but also a *sepulcrum* ("grave," "tomb," l. 77), another kind of ultimate dwelling-place. The homily does not describe the phoenix as dwelling in his nest and, in fact, calls the bird's construction only a *heap* ("heap," "pile"), which brings to mind not a nest or house, nor even a tomb, but something more like a bonfire or funeral pyre, not a dwelling-place but a transformation place. The imagery, so different from that of the Latin and Old English poems, once again points to a separate source for the homily.

The Burning

The homily's account of the phoenix's death is short and straightforward: the bird builds the heap of branches, the heap is ignited by the sun, the phoenix *feallað* in the fire, and he is burned to dust. If one reads *feallað* literally, that the phoenix *falls* into the already-burning fire, then the scenario is unique among phoenix stories, as far as I know, and the self-sacrifice of the phoenix is a more active one than in most versions. It is possible to read *feallað* as "fails, perishes," the equivalent of the Latin *cadit*, in which case the homily follows a more standard pattern: the bird sits in the nest,

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[5]Ibid., 5:12 (vol. 2, pp. 256-9).
[6]See Heffernan, "The Old English *Phoenix*: A Reconsideration," p. 251, for further discussion of terms used for the nest in the poem.
[7]"The Vision of Paradise," p. 178.

then the nest ignites; but *feallan* generally seems to be read literally as "fall" in the absence of some other cue such as a battle scene.[8] In some versions, the phoenix lies in its nest, dies, and decomposes; as we have seen (Chapter V), the *Carmen* is a variation on this tradition, for the bird first decomposes, and the heat produced from the bird's body starts a fire. In the Old English poem, the bird perches on his nest and, as he sits there waiting, the sun's heat ignites the nest.

God is invoked in the bird's death by the Old English verse *Phoenix* in that the beautiful plants gathered by the phoenix to build his nest are said to have been created by the *Wuldorcyning* ("King of Glory") and Father. But the homily invokes God later, saying that the sun shines and lights the fire *þurh godes mihte* ("through God's might"). Thus the power of the sun is ascribed to God, but, further, this phrase makes it clear that the sacrifice is a part of God's plan. As Jesus says (John 10:17-18): "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." We have already seen (Chapter III) that the phoenix story has been used to illustrate this passage, and when the homily says that the phoenix's nest is ignited through God's power, it says the same thing. Other versions of the story ascribe greater intention to the bird, saying, for example, in the verse *Phoenix*, that the bird has "great eagerness . . . through the urging of its mind to change old age for life, to lay hold on youth" (ll. 189-92). Except for the statement that "it seems to [the phoenix] that he is grown old," the homily does not describe the motivations of the phoenix; intention is ascribed not to the phoenix but to God, in the one small phrase, *þurh godes mihte*.

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[8] Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. T. Northcote Toller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), s.v. *feallan*, lists uses that nearly all are literal.

The Birth of the New Phoenix

The *Carmen* and Old English verse *Phoenix* tell more complex stories of the genesis of the new phoenix than the simple account found in the homily. In the *Carmen*, the ashes of the old phoenix meld together to form a seed; from this comes a worm that grows round until it is egglike; and the new phoenix hatches from this egg (ll. 99-108). The Old English poem has a slightly different, but still elaborate, account: among the ashes of the old phoenix, there appears an apple-like object; a worm grows from the apple; and the worm eventually turns into a young bird that grows into a sinless new phoenix (ll. 230-242). Compare these stories with the simple statement of the Old English homily: *Đonne on þone þriddan dæg ariseð se fægere fugol fenix of dæðe and bið edgung* . . . . ("Then on the third day the fair bird Phoenix arises from death and has become young again . . . .") According to van den Broek, the homilist is not alone: "Many authors have nothing to say about the way in which the phoenix acquires new life, limiting themselves to the statement that it arises rejuvenated from its ashes or from its pyre. . . . Most often, only the fact of the resurrection is of importance to their argumentation, the manner makes no difference," even in versions where the descriptions of the bird's preparations and burning are extensive.[9] The homily, having devoted very little description to the preparations and burning, also gives little description of the process of rebirth. Apparently the fact of resurrection is important to the homilist while the process apparently is not, an attitude which may derive from his source. If so, again the source seems to come from a tradition separate from the *Carmen*.

The fact that in the homily the phoenix's rebirth occurs on the third day after his death parallels, of course, the resurrection of Christ three days after his entombment.

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[9]P. 211. Van den Broek cites Martial, Lucian, Tertullian, Ambrose, and many others.

Interestingly, neither the *Carmen* nor the overtly Christian Old English poem mentions a three-day period for the rebirth. According to van den Broek, "Only the *Physiologus* and the texts related to it say that the worm developed into a phoenix in three days,"[10] and although the homily does not include any mention of the worm, the time fits the pattern. The three-day motif, according to van den Broek,

> was inserted into the existing tradition by the author of the *Physiologus* as a means of bringing out the typological symbolism of the phoenix: the events in the life of the phoenix are meant to reflect those in the life of Christ, who also rose from the grave after three days. It is also possible that this motif was influenced by a Classical tradition of what was assumed to be the spontaneous generation of the butterfly . . . . Aristotle, albeit incorrectly, was of the opinion that the larvae of butterflies developed into caterpillars in three days.[11]

The three-day motif in the homily may well have come from the *Physiologus* tradition; but the story of the phoenix is so clearly applicable to the Christian view of resurrection that, van den Broek's statement notwithstanding, the three-day interval between death and rebirth might have been added by any Christian writer, especially by one who wanted the message to be clear to a general audience.

The phoenix's bath in the fountain of life, which completes the process of rebirth and restores the bird's feathers to their original beauty, repeats the bath mentioned at the beginning of the story and serves as a parallel for baptism. In neither the *Carmen* nor the Old English poem does the phoenix bathe again after his rebirth; instead, the bird leaves on his journey (see Chapter V). In the homily, however, it is with the image of baptism, the phoenix having completed a perfect cycle, that the homily ends the story of the bird himself.

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[10] P. 214.

[11] P. 216; van den Broek cites Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* 5:19.

CHAPTER VII

A CATALOGUE OF SINS: THE CONCLUDING SECTION UNIQUE TO CCCC 198

A short passage on sin is unique to the CCCC 198 homily and is the only substantive difference between the two manuscript versions. Following the statement that the holy bird called the phoenix is *wlitig and wynsum* as the ruler of all made him, and so must do the Lord's will, the Vespasian D. xiv version concludes immediately with a short benediction. CCCC 198 diverges for the passage on sin before ending with an essentially identical benediction. Without the intervening discussion of sin, the Vespasian version ends rather abruptly, without any real explication of or commentary on the phoenix story.

Here, I will consider two questions about the passage on sin. First, why is a discussion of sin included in a homily on the phoenix? And, second, what were the sources of this particular list?

The Phoenix and Sin

Apart from the homily, there are versions of the story of the phoenix which associate the phoenix itself with sinlessness. For instance, among the woes that are not to be found in the paradise where the phoenix dwells, the *Carmen de ave phoenice*[1] mentions at least two sins of the kind that appear on Christian lists: . . . *nec Scelus infandum nec opum vesana Cupido / aut Ira aut ardens caedis amore Furor* ("neither

[1] The English translation given here owes much to the Duffs' translation, but has been adapted by me in places, usually in favor of a more literal reading. I am grateful to Timothy Graham for his help with the Latin translations.

unspeakable sin nor mad lust for riches, neither wrath nor rage burning with the love of killing"; ll. 17–18). And, when other birds gather around the reborn phoenix, they unite, free of ordinary strife, which, in a loose sense, might be construed as sin: . . . *nec praedae memor est ulla nec ulla metus* ("each mindful neither of prey nor of fear"; l. 156). The Old English poem explicitly mentions sin in four places. Again, we are told that sin is not found where the phoenix dwells (l. 54), and the reborn phoenix is said to be *synnum asundrad* ("freed or separated from sin"; l. 242). The poem's explicatory section draws together the images of the phoenix and Christ, saying that God's champion fashions a protective nest from glorious deeds, hastens forth, and *leahtras dwæsceþ, / mirce mandæde* ("extinguishes sins, dark evil deeds"; ll. 451–7).

The CCCC 198 homily is more specific on the subject of sin, but sin's connection with the phoenix is less clearly drawn. The homilist starts out, at least, to draw a moral from the story. First, the author calls up again the image of the crowd of birds praising the phoenix, saying that "birds praise Christ; now it is fitting to us that we praise our Lord with almsgiving, worship, prayer, and with all things." This parallels the "nest" built of glorious deeds, including almsgiving, in the Old English poem (ll. 451–3). Then the homilist reminds us that "God is beloved and protects us," which recalls the image of the phoenix as the birds' revered lord and ruler. Up to this point, the connection between the story of the phoenix and the Christian teaching is fairly clear.

However, when the author tells us next that we protect ourselves from the eight "high" or cardinal sins (*heahsynna*), the link with the phoenix story is less obvious. Sin, temptation, and repentance are not themes touched upon in the phoenix story as this author has just told it. Here, sins are not even named among the woes missing from paradise. If there is a connection in the author's mind, the text does not supply an

explicit link. Perhaps listeners are expected to supply it themselves, whether from their recognition of the phoenix as symbolic of Christ and thus redemption from sin; from the shining purity of the bird as described in the homily or a known tradition of its sinlessness; from the prospect of end times and their own resurrection evoked by the tale of the phoenix; or from a combination of these. Perhaps, however, the homilist simply added the list of sins as an afterthought, without a deep connection with the phoenix story in mind. The author of the list, who was not necessarily the writer of the original homily, might have added the warning against sin for the occasion on which the homily was to be preached--as a warning against the excesses of Midsummer Eve, if the homily was given on St. John's Eve, for instance (see Chapter III)--or because he perceived that his audience needed correction regarding particular sins.

I know of one other version of the phoenix story that contains a list of sins: the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch. The phoenix in the Baruch Apocalypse accompanies the sun on its course across the sky, protecting the earth from its too-intense rays. When the sun and the phoenix return from this trip, Baruch sees that angels take the sun's crown from its head, and that the phoenix is exhausted. Baruch asks why these things are so:

> And the angel said to me, The crown of the sun, when it has run through the day--four angels take it, and bear it up to heaven, and renew it, because it and its rays have been defiled upon earth; moreover it is so renewed each day. And I Baruch said, Lord, and wherefore are its beams defiled upon earth? And the angel said to me, Because it beholds the lawlessness and unrighteousness of men, namely *fornications, adulteries, thefts, extortions, idolatries, drunkenness, murders, strife, jealousies, evil-speakings, murmurings, whisperings, divinations*, and such like, which are not well-pleasing to God. On account of these things it is defiled, and therefore it is renewed. But thou askest concerning the bird, how it is exhausted. Because by restraining the rays of the sun through the fire and burning heat of the whole day, it is exhausted thereby. For, as we said before, unless his wings were

screening the rays of the sun, no living creature would be preserved.[2]

The list of sins is remarkably similar to the list in the Old English homily. However, even the combination of this striking resemblance with the other points of similarity between the two versions--the emphasis on the sun and the inscription on the bird--does not add up to a general similarity. The stories are quite different. But it is possible, assuming a Christian Latin source for the Old English homily, that the author of such a source drew from disparate phoenix traditions, perhaps including Baruch. The book of Baruch was known to Origen (c. 185–254), for example.[3]

The homily's list of sins does not match that of Baruch--or any other source that I have found--exactly. My impression that the particular catalogue of sins is the author's own extemporaneous invention, rather than a translation or adaptation of another text, is based on two features of the list: First, the discrepancy between the number of sins the author says he will list and the number actually listed; and, second, the unique selection of sins.

The Number of Sins

Although the author says that he is about to list *eahta heahsynna*, he actually goes on to list not eight but eleven sins. This discrepancy may not reveal anything at all about the author's arithmetic skills, for once lists of eight sins had been proposed and become familiar, the number eight may have been used symbolically rather than exactly.

Lists of eight sins appear in writings known to the English well before the eleventh century. In his first letter to Maecenas, Horace (65–8 B.C.) named eight vices

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[2]R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigapha of the Old Testament in English*, p. 538. Italics added by me.

[3]Noted by Charles, p. 527. Origen, *De principiis* II.3.6. See *Traité des Principes*, 2 vols., ed. and French trans. Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti (Paris: Cerf, 1978), pp. 268–9.

(*vitia*) or ills (*dolores, morbi*).[4] Among Christian writers, Cyprian (c. 200–258) catalogued eight sins;[5] Evagrius of Pontus (died c. 400) named eight vices that were special dangers to hermits and cenobites;[6] and John Cassian, writing circa 420 A.D., named in his *Institutes*[7] eight vices: *gastrimargia* or *gula* (gluttony); *fornicatio* (equivalent to *luxuria*, lust); *filargyria* or *avaritia* (avarice, covetousness); *ira* (anger, wrath); *tristitia* (sadness); *acedia* (sloth); *cenodoxia* or *inanis* or *vana gloria* (vainglory); and *superbia* (pride). Cassian seems to have compiled his list from eastern, especially Egyptian, sources.[8] He wrote from a monastic viewpoint; like the lists of other early Christian writers, his list comprised sins, or, more properly, chief vices, which, as temptations of the flesh or threats to the harmony of a religious community, as well as threats to the individual's spiritual health, were to be avoided by cenobites. His list, which became influential in Gaul and spread from there to the Celtic church, "established in the British Isles a persistent tradition of an eightfold scheme of sins."[9] Gregory the Great, who as pope gave the impetus for the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, supplied another highly influential list of chief vices, circa 595,

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[4] *Epistle* I.1, 33–42, dated to *circa* 20 B.C., in *Opera*, ed. Edward C. Wickham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901). He lists the vices of *avaritia* (avarice), *cupido* (covetousness), *laudis amore* (ambition, vanity), then continues with five types of vicious person, *invidus* (the envious), *iracundus* (the wrathful), *iners* (the slothful), *vinosus* (the drunken), and *amator* (the lewd, the sensual).

[5] *De mortalitate* IV. *PL* IV, 603ff.

[6] Evagrius listed *gula* (gluttony), *luxuria* (lust), *avaritia* (avarice, covetousness), *tristitia* (sadness, harshness), *ira* (anger), *acedia/accidia* (sloth), *vana gloria* (vainglory), and *superbia* (pride). Cited (and translated from Greek to Latin) by Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (n.p.: Michigan State College Press, 1952), p. 59.

[7] *Opera: De Institutis Coenobiorum et De Octo Principalium Vitiorum Remediis, Libri XII et De Incarnatione Domini Contra Nestorium, Libri VII* (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vol. 17), ed. Michael Petschenig (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1888). Each of books 5 through 12 deals with one sin.

[8] Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 71. References in this section to the history of Cassian's and Gregory's lists and other early lists of sins are based on chapters 2 through 4 of Bloomfield's invaluable book.

[9] Ibid., p. 71.

in his *Moralia*:[10] *vana gloria* (later replaced by *superbia*); *ira*; *invidia* (envy); *tristitia* (later replaced by *acedia*); *avaritia*; *gula*; *luxuria*; and, separately, at the root of all of these vices, *superbia*. Gregory's list was counted sometimes as eight (especially before the time of Peter Lombard)[11] and sometimes as seven sins, depending upon whether *superbia* was included. Although the *Moralia* was written for a monastic audience, "it achieved such general popularity that it was chiefly responsible for broadening the application of the Sins" beyond monastic use, according to Bloomfield.[12] St. Eutropius (fl. 363–378) included *superbia* on his list and thus counted eight sins in *De octo vitiis*.[13]

In Old English homilies and confessionals, a number of lists closely follow these models. Those closest to the Latin lists are, in fact, translations and adaptations of Latin originals, as in the Old English version of material from Alcuin's *Liber de virtutibus et vitiis*, Vercelli Homily XX,[14] which lists the eight vices that appear on Cassian's list, though in an order different from either Cassian's or Gregory's: *ofermodignes* (*superbia*), *gifernes* (*gula*), *forlýr* (*fornicatio*), *gytsung* (*avaritia*), *yrre* (*ira*), *sleacnes* (*accidia*), *unrotnes* (*tristitia*), and *idel wuldor* (*cenodoxia* or *vana gloria*). The number eight is given greater weight in the Old English homily, as Paul E. Szarmach points out: "Alcuin is aware that he is presenting *octo duces contra humanum genus* but the homilist emphasizes the number as a mnemonic device by introducing each and every sin as a number in a series."[15] Another important list of

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[10] *Moralia in Job*, Bk. 31.45, *PL* 76, cols. 620–22.
[11] Bloomfield, p. 106.
[12] Ibid., p. 72.
[13] *PL* 80, cols. 10ff.
[14] Paul E. Szarmach, "Vercelli Homily XX," *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973): 1–26. For an account of different Latin versions of the *Liber* and their connection to the Old English, see Szarmach, "Alcuin's *Liber de Virtutibus et Vitiis*, cap. xxvii–xxxv, with Special Reference to Vercelli Homily XX," *Mediaevalia* 12 (1986), 13–41.
[15] Szarmach, "Vercelli Homily XX," p. 6.

sins appeared in the *Capitula* of Theodulf (c. 750–821), a set of instructions to the parish clergy of Theodulf's diocese of Orléans. These were translated from Latin to Old English[16] and, according to Morton W. Bloomfield, were very popular in England by the eleventh century.[17] Theodulf's list of eight sins combined the lists of Cassian and Gregory. A similar list of eight, in different order, appears in a confessional text in MS Cotton Tiberius A. iii,[18] with some changes in terminology: *galnes* (lust, wantonness) instead of *forlyr*, *weamodnes* (anger) for *yrre*, *asolcennes* (sloth) for *sleacnes*, and *gilpgeornes* (desire for glory) for *idel wuldor*.

Even though the contents of these lists vary, a fact which will be discussed below, they have their "eightness" in common, testimony to the presence of a tradition of lists of eight sins. Evidently such lists were, at least by reputation, familiar to the author of the phoenix homily, and their eightness was an accepted convention. Furthermore, Morton Bloomfield points out that an actual count need only have approximated a symbolic number to be named as such: "If a Hellenistic or medieval writer used a representative number like seven, he might mean six, eight, or even ten, or, on occasion, exactly seven, but would rarely mean such numbers as thirteen or twenty-five."[19] The author who advertised eight and then listed eleven sins was undoubtedly less concerned with the exact number than with fitting the general idea of a systematized or comprehensive list of sins. What the discrepancy does tell us is that he probably did not have a reference list of eight sins in front of him but was trying either to recreate a list he had once heard or to formulate his own list based on the knowledge

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[16]Bloomfield cites *PL* 105. col. 191ff. and Old English translations in Oxford, Bodleian MS. Bodley 865, published in Arthur S. Napier, *The Old English Version of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang*, EETS, o.s. 150 (London, 1916), and in CCCC MS. 201, published in Benjamin Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England . . . also, Monumenta Ecclesiastica Anglicana*, 2 vols. (London: 1840).
[17]P. 109.
[18]Allen Frantzen, in *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 164, cites the edition by Hans Sauer, "Zwei spätaltenglische Beichtermahnungen aus Hs. Cotton Tiberius A. iii," *Anglia* 98 (1980), pp. 1–33.
[19]Bloomfield, p. 40.

that lists of eight sins did exist. It is not difficult to imagine that the author might have started out to list eight sins, in accordance with the Cassianic or Gregorian tradition, but then, once in the midst of naming sins, did not want to leave any out--especially the sins most pertinent to his listeners--and so wound up with more on his list than he had originally intended. The tendency to add to the list may have been a result of his conflating three separate traditions that would likely have been familiar to him, three different kinds of lists of human transgressions. If so, he was not alone in doing so.

The Selection of Sins

The author's particular selection of sins is unique in Old English writings; in fact, as far as I know, it is unique among writings of any kind. The sins named are *morþor* (murder), *stala* (stealing), *mane aþas* (false or evil oaths), *unrihtgitsunge* (wrongful greed, avarice), *unrihthæmedu* (fornication, adultery), *gifernesse* (gluttony), *leasunga* (lying), *attorcræftas* (poison-craft, probably equivalent to witchcraft), *dyrne ligera* (deceitful fornication), *twispæce* (deceit), and *ofermodignæss* (pride). Although this selection does not match the "authoritative" lists of the chief vices (e.g., Cassian's or Gregory's) from which the idea of a list of eight principal sins ultimately derived, it does fit a pattern of lists of sins in Anglo-Saxon homilies and penitentials.

Lists naming as many as twenty-nine sins are found in Old English writings,[20] and most, if they are not direct translations of the classical lists of chief vices, seem to be a combination of three categories of sins or vices. First, these lists nearly always include the breaking of one or more of the Ten Commandments, sins that would be considered truly "deadly" sins, those that would "inevitably lead to damnation and the

[20]Nearly identical lists of twenty-nine sins are found in the forms of confession and absolution in CCCC 190 (published in Max Förster, "Zur Liturgik der angelsächsischen Kirche," *Anglia* 66 [1942], 1–51) and BL MS. Royal 2 B. v (published in H. Logeman, "Anglo-Saxonica Minora," *Anglia* 11 [1889], 97–120).

death of the soul."[21] These are no mere monastic vices, though one--or two if we stretch a point--can be seen as overlapping the chief vices listed by Cassian and Gregory (*avaritia* corresponds with coveting the belongings of one's neighbor, and *luxuria* was sometimes read as sexual licentiousness, which might match adultery). The most common of the transgressions against Commandments found on the wider-ranging Old English lists are murder, stealing, fornication or adultery, and false oaths or false witness. Second, most of these lists include some of the seven or eight chief sins or vices from Cassian and Gregory. And, finally, the widest-ranging catalogues name transgressions that likely were added in view of local practices or individual needs, including such proscribed or antisocial practices as witchcraft, drunkenness, and the failure to keep fasts. In homilies, these appear most frequently in addresses for Lent or Rogationtide. One of Ælfric's homilies for mid-Lent,[22] for example, lists *oferfyll* (gluttony), *druncennyss* (drunkenness), *unclænnys lichaman* (uncleanness of body), *modes unstæððignys* (inconstancy of spirit), *ydel gaffetung* (vain scoffing), "and many other vices, from which sins come" other sins such as anger, insolence, and murder. One example of a list that contains sins from all three categories is an address for the beginning of Lent, dated by Neil R. Ker to the last third of the eleventh century;[23] its catalogue ranges from murder, false oaths, and stealing (commandments), to pride, anger, and gluttony (chief vices), to blasphemy, breaking fast, witchcraft, and soothsaying (forbidden practices).

Were all of these homilists, who set out to list eight chief vices and then

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[21]Bloomfield, p. 43.

[22]M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text.* EETS s.s. 5 (London, 1979), 124.495 and 124.512.

[23]Published in Neil R. Ker, "Three Old English Texts in a Salisbury Pontifical, Cotton Tiberius CI," in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1959), pp. 262–279. Incidentally, this text advertises *eahta hafodleahtras* (eight capital sins), then lists eighteen. Whether this discrepancy is a scribal error (eight for eighteen) or another case in which the idea of a list of eight sins was very loosely interpreted mathematically, I cannot say.

produced a mélange of items, neither all chief vices nor all transgressions of commandments, merely confused? It seems more likely that they drew their lists from a common tradition. I would suggest that all were at least influenced by the listings of sins and prescribed penances found in penitential handbooks. Penitential handbooks in England, starting with the influential eighth-century Latin handbook attributed to Theodore of Tarsus (Archbishop of Canterbury 669–90), "the first known handbook to have originated outside an Irish monastery,"[24] and continuing to the continental imports and exemplars of the tenth century, contained lists of transgressions more exhaustive than the lists of Cassian and Gregory. They varied wildly but usually included at least some sins from all three categories named above: chief vices, the breaking of commandments, and additional misdeeds--such as the breaking of fasts, slander, and the practice of witchcraft. If, when composing a list of the chief vices, precise memory failed, a homilist might well draw on those listed in familiar or dimly recalled penitentials, and once such mixed lists were heard or read widely, other homilists might construct similar lists, perhaps feeling more free than they might otherwise have done to name sins that fitted the spiritual needs of their own audiences.

Penitentials may also have served to confuse the issue of the number of sins. As Allen J. Frantzen points out, the lists in most penitential handbooks, though ultimately derivative of the classical lists of chief vices, "were not treatises on the vices and virtues and so lack the numerical patterns of organization found in such literature."[25] This fact may help to explain the number discrepancy in the phoenix homily: the author knew of the tradition of lists of eight sins, but he was also familiar with more inclusive, more formless lists.

From where, then, did the author of the phoenix homily draw his particular list

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[24]Frantzen. *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 64.
[25]Ibid., p. 51.

of sins? It is impossible to say exactly what his sources were. All the sins named can be found in penitentials, but I have not found these eleven in any one matching list. They fit the general categories outlined above. The list begins with murder, the same sin forbidden by the sixth commandment; stealing, as in the eighth commandment; and false oaths, which corresponds to the ninth commandment forbidding false witness. Sin number seven, lying, may also be related to this commandment. *Unrihtgitsunge* (wrongful greed) may be read as covetousness, forbidden in the tenth commandment, and it corresponds as well to *avaritia*, a traditional item on lists of the chief vices. *Unrihthæmedu* (fornication or adultery), and *dyrne ligere* (deceitful fornication) match the seventh commandment and also correspond to Cassian and Gregory's *fornicatio* or *luxuria*. Gluttony (number six) and pride (number eleven) are classic items from the seven or eight chief vices. The remaining two belong to the miscellaneous realm that I have termed forbidden practices: *twispæce* and *attorcræftas*. *Twisp(r)æc* appears in varying spellings on a list of nineteen sins in Vercelli Homily 10, for the Tuesday in Rogationtide[26] and in three confessional manuscripts.[27]

Attorcræftas (poison-craft or poisoning) seems at first glance an odd or possibly an extremely topical addition to a list of sins. However, the term also appears on lists in at least one other homily and in the three confessional or penitential texts mentioned above, always in conjunction with *lyblac* (witchcraft or black art).[28] In fact, one of the

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[26]D. G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS o.s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 196–218.
[27]Conf 1.2 4 penitential attributed to Theodore (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS. 320) Dictionary of Old English transcript, edited from MS; Conf 1.3 6 *Confessionale pseudo-Egberti* (London, British Library, MS Cotton Galba A. xiv): Dictionary of Old English transcript edited from MS; Conf 2.1 (Spindler A-Y) Additional Sections Printed by Spindler, Sections a-y: Spindler 1934, p. 171. Cited in Richard L. Venezky and Antonette diPaolo Healey, *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English* (Toronto: Publications of the Dictionary of Old English, 1985), which made possible much of this investigation of lists of sins.
[28]"De confessione," no. 56 of Homilies for Unspecified Occasions, printed in A. S. Napier, *Wulfstan* (Berlin, 1883; repr. 1967), pp. 289–91, as cited in *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*; and the three confessional manuscripts cited above.

definitions given by the *Dictionary of Old English* for *attorcræft* is "witchcraft," and a look at other, similar lists of sins shows that *attorcræft* does fit a pattern of prohibitions against witchcraft of all kinds, common in penitentials. Lists in at least three homilies name witchcraft (*wiccecræft, wiccedom*);[29] two of these also name soothsaying or augury (*wiglung[a]*);[30] *lyblac* (witchcraft or occult art) is named, without *attorcræft*, in at least two homilies and a penitential;[31] sorcery appears as *scincræft* or *scinscræftas* in two of these;[32] and incantations (*galdorsangas*) are listed twice.[33] The prohibition against sorcery and soothsaying accords with biblical injunctions; Deuteronomy 18: 9–14, for example, specifically prohibits such practices, and Revelation 21: 8 groups together "the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars," among others, as doomed to damnation. Was the homily's warning against the practice of witchcraft directed toward any particular group? Frantzen makes the point that although "women were not the exclusive targets of anti-witchcraft campaigns in England until the tenth century . . . there is no doubt that in the penitentials women and not men were expected to have performed these evil acts."[34] The appearance of *attorcræftas* on the list in the phoenix homily, then, argues for the possibility that its intended audience included women.

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[29]Cotton Tiberius C. i Text 3 in Ker. 1959; Ælfric, Homily 17, Dominica X post Pentecosten, in J. C. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, EETS 259, 260 (London, 1967–8), vol. 2, 547–59; and homily for the dedication of a church in R. Brotanek, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur altenglischen Literatur und Kirchengeschichte* (Halle, 1913), p. 97. Citations from *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*.

[30]Cotton Tiberius C. i and Ælfric, Homily 17.

[31]Vercelli Homily 10; Wulfstan's Homily for Tuesday in Rogationtide in A. S. Napier, *Wulfstan* (Sammlung englischer Denkmäler 4, Berlin; repr with appendix by K. Ostheeren, 1967), p. 52; and Pseudo-Egbert, Penitential, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 482, printed in J. Raith, *Die altenglische Version des Halitgarschen Bussbuches* (Hamburg: 1933; repr. Darmstadt: 1964). Citations from *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*.

[32]Vercelli Homily 10 and Pseudo-Egbert, Penitential.

[33]Vercelli Homily 10 and Wulfstan's Homily for Tuesday in Rogationtide.

[34]Frantzen, p. 11, n. 22, with reference to Jane Crawford, "Evidences for Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England," *Medium Ævum* 32 (1963), 385–428, for the fact that early anti-witchcraft campaigns also included men.

In summary, the source of the phoenix's connection with sin in the first place might be attributable to a connection, however distant, with the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch. The author of the passage on sin in the phoenix homily apparently knew that standard lists of eight sins existed; he was aware of the contents of other lists of sins, whether from penitentials or other homilies or both; and he felt either the necessity or the freedom to compose a unique list of particular sins within the existing general pattern.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The Old English homily on the phoenix differs considerably from the nearest analogues known to have existed in England in Anglo-Saxon times. It presents a simplified story of the phoenix with less ornate description than either the Old English verse *Phoenix* or the Latin *Carmen de ave phoenice.* There is little doubt that it had a Latin source and that that source was not the *Carmen.* for the Old English homilist quotes Latin words (*paradisus*, *Kalendas Januarii*, *radians saltus*, *Scs. Johannes*, and *Armenia*) that do not appear in the *Carmen.* In fact, the scriptural connections with some of these Latin words suggest that the source was a Latin version of the phoenix story that was written by a Christian author. This conclusion accords with Förster's, that there must be a Latin source that is, so far at least, unknown to us.[1]

Three points of similarity make me wonder whether the presumed Latin author drew certain details from an otherwise very different version of the phoenix story, the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch. The resemblances that caught my eye were the emphasis on the sun, the writing on the phoenix himself, and the extraordinarily similar (though not identical) list of sins associated with the story. For now, the connection remains speculative.

The conclusion that the homily had a Latin source does not rule out an intermediate vernacular source; in fact, such a source seems likely, in view of the close correspondence between the Old Norse and Old English versions, and it is not

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[1] "Der Inhalt der altenglischen Handschrift Vespasianus D. XIV," p. 64.

impossible that an Old Norse version preceded the Old English, as Yerkes argues.[2]

There is considerable evidence that the phoenix homily was preached to a general, rather than a monastic, audience. First, of course, is the fact that it is in the vernacular. Next, the list of sins appended to the CCCC 198 version is not the traditional list of monastic vices but a more general selection of sins of the kind that might be named in a penitential used for the pastoral care of the laity. The fact that *attorcræftas* (poisoning, sorcery) is on the list suggests that women were part of the intended audience. And, as Pamela Robinson points out, the CCCC 198 version of the homily was part of an independent "booklet" that could have been carried easily to a parish for preaching.

The homily seems especially well-suited to be preached on or just before Midsummer's Eve, June 23, which was also St. John's Eve. June 24, besides being the feast day of St. John the Baptist, was an alternate feast day for St. John the Evangelist. Although there is no proof that the phoenix homily was ever preached on that day, motifs such as baptism, coronation, and fire correspond well with the themes of the celebration. In addition, the homily is given the title *De Sancto Johanne* in CCCC 198, and the homily twice invokes the name of St. John. However, the homily's position in a separate "booklet" in CCCC 198, its pairing with a homily on the creation meant to be preached "whenever you will," and its universal themes of resurrection and avoidance of sin may indicate that it, too, was preached on various occasions, as needed.

Further work on the homily is certainly in order. An analysis of the homily's mixed prose and metrical style might reveal more about the author, his influences, and his audience; a comparison with the style of Ælfric would be instructive, for example.

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[2] "The Old Norse and Old English Prose Accounts of the Phoenix," p. 26–7.

A detailed linguistic comparison of the two versions, perhaps against the Old Norse versions, could tell us more about the homily's sources. And further investigation of the homily in the context of its manuscripts would also be of interest. While the phoenix homily is not especially elegant, either logically or stylistically, it offered a lively story to its hearers, and still offers much food for thought for the Anglo-Saxonist.

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