Concepts of Infectious, Contagious, and Epidemic Disease

in

Anglo-Saxon England

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Abstract

This thesis examines concepts of disease existing in the Anglo-Saxon period. The focus is in particular on the conceptual intricacies pertaining to pestilence or, in modern terms, epidemic disease. The aim is to (1) establish the different aspects of the cognitive conceptualisation and their representation in the language and (2) to illustrate how they are placed in relation to other concepts within a broader understanding of the world. The scope of this study encompasses the entire corpus of Old English literature, select Latin material produced in Anglo-Saxon England, as well as prominent sources including works by Isidore of Seville, Gregory of Tours, and Pope Gregory the Great.

An introductory survey of past scholarship identifies main tenets of research and addresses shortcomings in our understanding of historic depictions of epidemic disease, that is, a lack of appreciation for the dynamics of the human mind. The main body of research will discuss the topic on a lexico-semantic, contextual and wider cultural level. An electronic evaluation of the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* establishes the most salient semantic fields surrounding instances of *cwealm* and *wol* ('pestilence'), such as harmful entities, battle and warfare, sin, punishment, and atmospheric phenomena. Occurrences of pestilential disease are distributed across a variety of text types including (medical) charms, hagiographic and historiographic literature, homilies, and scientific, encyclopaedic treatises. The different contexts highlight several distinguishable aspects of disease, ('reason', 'cause', 'symptoms', 'purpose', and 'treatment') and strategically put them in relation with other concepts. Connections within this conceptual network can be based on co-occurrence, causality, and analogy and are set within a wider cultural frame informed largely though not exclusively by Christian doctrine.

The thesis concludes that Anglo-Saxon ideas of disease must be viewed as part of a complex web of knowledge and beliefs in order to understand how they can be framed by various discourses with more or less diverging objectives. The overall picture emerging from this study, while certainly not being free from contradiction, is not one of superstition and ignorance but is grounded in observation and integrated into many-layered systems of cultural knowledge.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this dissertation when referring to the publications listed below. Quotations from editions are provided in the text with line and/or page numbers in parentheses.

HE   Bede. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Ed. And trans. B. Colgrave & R.A.B. Mynors. Oxford Medieval Texts. Oxford, 1969.

OEHE   Miller, T. (ed. and trans.) *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. 4 Vols. EETS 95, 96, 110, 111. London 1890-98. Repr. 1959-63; nos. 95, 96 repr. 1978.

VCP   Bede's *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert.* Bede, and Anon. *Two "Lives" of St. Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*. Ed. And trans. B. Colgrave. Cambridge, 1940.

AVC   Anonymous *Life of St. Cuthbert*. Bede, and Anon. *Two "Lives" of St. Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*. Ed. And trans. B. Colgrave. Cambridge, 1940.

ÆLS   Ælfric. *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*. W.W. Skeat (ed.) 4 Vols. EETS 76, 82, 94, 114. London, 1881-1900. Repr. In 2 Vols. 1966.

LS Chad   *The Life of St. Chad. Ælfric. Ælfric's Lives of Saints*. W.W. Skeat (ed.) 4 Vols. EETS 76, 82, 94, 114. London, 1881-1900. Repr. In 2 Vols. 1966.

Felix   *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac.* Colgrave, Bertram (ed. and tr.) (1956). *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

OEG   *Old English Prose Life of St. Guthlac.* Gonser, Paul. (ed.) (1909). *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des heiligen Guthlac*. Heidelberg.

ESV   *English Standard Version*. Das Wissenschaftliche Bibelportal der Deutschen Bibelgesellschaft. Web. August 2017. http://bibelwissenschaft.de.

Dictionaries and other reference works are abbreviated as follows. Specific entries are referred to by the headword in single quotation marks.

DOE   *Dictionary of Old English: A to H* online (2016). Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey *et al*. (eds). Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project.

DOEC   Healey, Antonette diPaolo, Joan Holland, Ian McDougall, and Peter Mielke. *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus in Electronic Form, TEI-P3 conformant version, 2000 Release.* Toronto: DOE Project 2000, on CD-ROM.

OED   *The Oxford English Dictionary.* 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online.* www.oed.com.

Examples retrieved via an electronic search of the *DOEC* (cf. chapter 3) are referenced within the text by the short titles assigned by the *DOE*, page and line numbers.

Alex   Orchard, 1995 224-52; Orchard, Andy, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the 'Beowulf'-Manuscript* (Cambridge).

ÆAbus (Mor)   Morris, R. (1868). *Old English Homilies, First Series*, 2 vols. EETS 29, 34 (London) [repr. 1969]. 296-304.

ÆCHom I   Clemoes, P.A.M. (1997). *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series, Text.* EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford).

ÆCHom II   Godden, M. (1979). *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text*. EETS s.s. 5 (London).

ÆHom 22   Pope, J.C. (1967-8). *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols. EETS 259, 260 (London). 676-712.

ÆLS (PrMoses)   Skeat, W.W. (1881-1900). *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 4 vols. EETS 76, 82, 94, 114 (London) [repr. in 2 vols. 1966]. 282-306.

Bede [1-5]   Miller, T. (1890-98). *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 4 vols. EETS 95, 96, 110, 111 (London) [repr. 1959-63].

ChronA (Plummer)   The Parker Chronicle: Earle, J. and Plummer, C. 1892-9. *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols. (Oxford); based on an edition by John Earle; reissued by D. Whitelock, 1952.

ChronC (Rositzke) London, British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius B.I: Rositzke 1940, corrected against the MS by O'Brien O'Keeffe 2000. *The C-Text of the Old English Chronicles*, Beiträge zur englischen Philologie 34 (Bochum-Langendreer) [repr. 1967].

ChronD (Classen-Harm) London, British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius B.IV: Classen and Harmer 1926. *An Anglo-SaxonChronicle* (Manchester).

ChronE (Plummer)	Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud Misc. 636: Earle and Plummer 1892-9, as E *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols. (Oxford); based on an edition by John Earle; reissued by D. Whitelock, 1952.
GD 1 (C)	Hecht, H. (1900-7). *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*. Bib. ags. Prosa 5 (Leipzig and Hamburg) [repr. Darmstadt 1965]. 11-92.
GD 2 (C)	Hecht, H. (1900-7). *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester. Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*. Bib. ags. Prosa 5 (Leipzig and Hamburg) [repr. Darmstadt 1965]. 96-178.
GDPref and 4 (C)	Hecht, H. (1900-7). *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*. Bib. ags. Prosa 5 (Leipzig and Hamburg) [repr. Darmstadt 1965]. 260-350.
HomU 29.2 (Nap 35)	Napier, A.S. (1883). *Wulfstan*. Sammlung englischer Denkmäler 4 (Berlin); repr. with appendix by K. Ostheeren, 1967. 169-72.
HomU 35.1 (Nap 43)	Napier, A.S. (1883). *Wulfstan*. Sammlung englischer Denkmäler 4 (Berlin); repr. with appendix by K. Ostheeren, 1967. 205-15.
HomU 40 (Nap 50)	Napier, A. S. (1883). *Wulfstan*. Sammlung englischer Denkmäler 4 (Berlin); repr. with appendix by K. Ostheeren, 1967. 266-74.
HomU 46 (Nap 57)	Napier, A.S. (1883). *Wulfstan*. Sammlung englischer Denkmäler 4 (Berlin); repr. with appendix by K. Ostheeren, 1967. 291-9.
Lch I (Herb)	de Vriend, H.J. (1984). *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de quadrupedibus*. EETS 286 (London). 30-233.
LS 10 (Guth)	Gonser, P. (1909). *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des heiligen Guthlac*. Anglistische Forschungen 27 (Heidelberg). 117-34.
LS 29 (Nicholas)	Treharne, E.M. (1997). *The Old English Life of St. Nicholas with the Old English Life of St. Giles*. Leeds Text and Monographs New Series 15 (Leeds). 83-100.
Mald	Dobbie, E.V.K. (1942). *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*. ASPR 6 (New York). 7-16.

Max I   Krapp, G.P. and Dobbie, E.V.K. (1936). *The Exeter Book*. ASPR 3 (New York). 156-63.

Med1.1 (deVriend)   de Vriend, H.J. (1984). *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de quadrupedibus*. EETS 286 (London). 234-73.

Or 3   Bately, J. (1980). *The Old English Orosius*. EETS, s.s. 6 (London). 53-83.

PPs (prose)   Bright and Ramsay (1907). *Liber Psalmorum: The West-Saxon Psalms, Being the Prose Portion, or the 'First Fifty' of the So-Called Paris Psalter* (Boston). 1-122.

1 Introduction

From the earliest records of civilisation until this day, humanity has been grappling with realities as well as the idea of disease. The concept is not negotiated in isolation but is rather an element of a broad field of thought that has developed throughout history. Philosophical and scientific understandings of disease have undergone processes of change alongside, but not separate from, popular systems of imagining. Both the scholarly and the popular mind need to be explored when tracing a history of ideas of which we find manifestations even today. Popular imagination especially tends to adopt and hold on to past medical theories and conceptualisations long after they lose currency within professional discourse.[1] The history of ideas concerning health and disease stands as a field of interest that is complex synchronically as well as diachronically.

The Early Middle Ages were a period of radical changes that saw the Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxon kings under Pope Gregory the Great, as well as the unification of the seven kingdoms known as the Heptarchy into the Kingdom of England by King Alfred. This was a reaction to the expansion of the Danish enclave at York into the so-called Danelaw over the course of the ninth century, which eventually had brought half of England under Danish rule. The unification of the kingdom of England was complete only in the 10th century, following the expulsion of Eric Bloodaxe as king of Northumbria. After a period of independence from Scandinavian rule, renewed incursions eventually resulted in the ascension of the Danish king Cnut to the English throne in the

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[1] Cf. Mirko Grmek (1998), 'The Concept of Disease', Mirko Grmek, Bernardino Fantini (eds), *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, Antony Shugaar (transl.), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 241.

early eleventh century, England became part of the Scandinavian North Sea Empire once more in the final decades before the Norman Conquest.

With literary sources as main corpus of evidence, this study is interested in the text producing culture of early medieval England, its cultural substrates and its neighbouring cultures. The designation 'Anglo-Saxon' is used to refer to the culture, or cultural spectrum, of the described period and area, rather than to a specific ethnicity. While it is especially the vernacular Old English, the native language of the majority of the people and thus the language of popular thinking about disease, that merits attention, sources and analogues produced in Latin or other languages must be taken into account. The ideas about disease present in Anglo-Saxon England are assumed to be a conglomerate of neighbouring influences, cultural heritage, as well as knowledge acquired through scholarship and learning. The role of Christianisation and the subsequent influence of Christian learning on the literary production of Anglo-Saxon England from the seventh century onwards is a major factor to be considered. For a long time, the centres of literary production on the British Isles were the West Saxon and Northhumbrian monastic communities. A question pertinent to most discussions of Anglo-Saxon literature and culture regards the opposition and assimilation of pagan Germanic culture and beliefs with the teachings of Christianity. The field of medicine, health and disease is no exception as the development of scholarly discussion presented in the following will show.

1.1 Historical Development of Scholarship on Diseases and Medicine of the Early Medieval Period

In contrast to both the diseases and the medicine of the Middle Ages, a term generally used to refer to the twelfth to fifteenth century, the Anglo-Saxon period has received less scholarly attention up until recently. This may in part be due to the comparatively limited availability of written sources from the time before the Norman Conquest. However, in comparison to the rest of early medieval Europe, the corpus of English sources not just impresses with its size but also, and even more importantly, provides a variety of texts, including medical ones, written in the vernacular.[2] The study of Old English literature, using the term broadly, is one of the pillars of English studies and has since undergone changes following the general development of the subject and other disciplines, such as history and anthropology. Early on, Anglo-Saxon studies became a field of, if not yet interdisciplinary, at least multidisciplinary effort.

In the following chapter, I will outline how, starting off with the first scholarly editions of the Old English texts, Anglo-Saxon medicine and disease have come under philological scrutiny and has subsequently been treated by historians and anthropologists in the changing light of theoretical approaches that have guided the scholars of the twentieth and early twenty-first century. I have attempted to put together a chronological as well as thematic overview in order to illustrate changing interests and approaches, which, of course, overlap in reality. Necessarily, the discussion will focus on a limited selection of the most

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[2] cf. Debby Banham (2011), 'Dun, Oxa and Pliny the Great Physician: Attribution and Authority in Old English Medical Texts', *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 57-58; Peregrine Horden (2009), 'What's Wrong with Early Medieval Medicine?', *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 6-7.

influential and exemplary publications in the field of medieval, especially Anglo-Saxon, disease. Many of the volumes that deal with philological or nosological questions, as will be seen, do not necessarily focus on epidemic disease or, if they do, they specialize in the history of specific diseases, usually reconstructed from much later sources.[3] In a very condensed way, one might summarise scholarly interest in the medicine and diseases of the past based on Jo Hays' assessment:

> Because disease is, in part, a 'biological process,' […] questions about past epidemics have included 'what was the disease' (in a biological, ontological sense), what were its physical effects, how did it spread, how many died or were sickened by it. Convictions that diseases are social constructs have led to other questions: 'What did the society make of it?' and 'How did the society confront it or perhaps even use it?[4]

What is highlighted here is the twofold orientation of approaches that inform most of the scholarship not just on epidemic or infectious disease in Anglo-Saxon times but on the history of disease and medicine at large. Attempts on the classification and identification of specific outbreaks of disease clearly preceded investigations into the societal impact of disease. That line of questioning, which emerged from the political and social philosophy of the 1960s and '70s, has since influenced many disciplines within the arts and humanities. The corresponding theoretical approach, social constructionism, shares some basic ideas with the philosophy behind cognitive linguistics which may be applied productively when considering epidemic disease not from a modern historiographic but rather

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[3] Cf. on leprosy: Arnoldus Hille (1989), 'Old English *līcþrōwere* 'a leper' and Old Norse *líkþrá* 'leprosy'', in Leiv Egil Breivik (ed.), *Essays on English Language in Honour of Bertil Sundby*, Oslo: Novus Forlag, pp. 131-44; Cf. on the Plague: John Findley Drew Shrewsbury (1971), *A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles*, Cambridge: CUP.

[4] Jo Hays (2007), 'Historians and Epidemics: Simple Questions, Complex Answers', Lester K. little (ed.) *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541-750*, Cambridge: CUP, p. 33.

the contemporaries' perspective. Before I provide an outline of my own approach to the Anglo-Saxon concept of epidemic disease, the following review of previous research shall serve not only to summarize in what ways disease has featured in the scholarship of the past century and a half, but also to highlight the gaps and identify some questions not yet asked - or answered.

Etymology and the Vocabulary of Disease

The study of literature has historically developed from the study of historical linguistics. Philologists from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards did pioneering work in providing editions of Anglo-Saxon literature transmitted and previously studied in manuscript format, which allowed detailed study of the Old English vocabulary. For Anglo-Saxon medical texts, perhaps the most noteworthy publication is Oswald Cockayne's 1865 edition, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England.*[5] The names of diseases, however, have received attention even earlier within the broad discipline of Indo-European (or Indo-Germanic) studies. From the perspective of comparative linguistics, Adolphe Pictet analysed a collection of disease-names ('Krankheitsnamen') with the aim of establishing a 'pre-historic' nosology. He looked at mental illness, skin diseases, fevers and also plague and pestilences among others. His most interesting observations are to be found in the comparison of Old English *wol* with Irish *fuil* ('wound') and *féal* ('evil') and the etymological derivation of Latin *pestis* from *pettis* which is reflected in the Sanskrit words *â-patti* ('misfortune') and *vi-patti* ('disease, death'). In *patti,* from *pad+ire,* he analyses,

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[5] Oswald Cockayne (1865), *Leechdoms, Wortcunnings, and Starcraft of Early England*, 3 vols., London: Longman.

lies the 'begriff des gehens, wanderns,' so that *pestis* might have signified 'die wandernde krankheit,' i.e. 'the itinerant disease'.[6]

In a similar line of enquiry, Johan Geldner's 1906 dissertation on Old English disease-names[7] consists of a discussion of the meaning and etymology of some OE names of disease in alphabetical order from ranging from *acan* to *cyselstan*. Systematically, he lists words pertaining to the semantic field of 'disease, illness' including compounds and derivatives. Unfortunately, the study, however impressive it is considering the time of its publication, lacks any consideration of the context in which the vocabulary is used. The purely philological interest in the language of disease was maintained by some scholars more than three decades later as may be illustrated by Catherine Lambert's article 'The Old English Medical Vocabulary' published in 1940[8] which does not go much beyond Geldner's dictionary-like listings except that it includes not just words for disease but also the vocabulary of medicinal treatments. Apart from that, it is notable how, instead of a strong etymological interest, Lambert's study is more example-based and thus hints at the increasing interest in textual and historical contextualisation.

Historiographic Approaches to Disease(s) and Medicine

From approximately the 1930s onwards, disease came to be negotiated mainly in the form of histories of medicine as written by medics, not Anglo-Saxonists.

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[6] Adolphe Pictet (1856), 'Die Krankheitsnamen bei den Indogermanen', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiete des Deutschen, Griechischen und Lateinischen*, 5, 5, p. 351.

[7] Johan Geldner (1906), *Untersuchung einiger altenglischer Krankheitsnamen*, Braunschweig: Westermann.

[8] Catherine Lambert (1940), 'The Old English Medical Vocabulary', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 33, pp. 137-45.

The basic assumption underlying most of these publications is that medicine developed from archaic superstitious beliefs towards modern scientific medicine with the Middle Ages considered by many as a throwback, hence the term 'Dark Ages', preceding the triumph of the enlightenment. As an illustration, some sample chapter headings taken from Winslow's *The Conquest of Epidemic Disease: A Chapter in the History of Ideas*[9] should suffice: A teleological development of medical knowledge is outlined in broad strokes connecting 'The World of Demons' and 'The Wrath of God' with 'Primitive Concepts of Contagion' before highlighting 'The Great Sanitary Awakening' that enabled 'Three Pioneer Epidemiologists' to trailblaze humanity's way into the age of scientific knowledge. The same sentiment can be detected in Wilfrid Bonser's – in many ways extremely valuable – publication *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England.* While providing an overview of all mentions of epidemics or other large-scale outbreaks of disease on the British Isles, taking into account not only Old English but also Irish chronicles as his main sources, he also asserts that

> [t]he student of medieval medicine must always bear in mind that Pliny's book was its [SK: medieval medicine's] background and that knowledge had not progressed, but had rather deteriorated, since his day. Before the advent of modern science and the present outlook on natural phenomena, acquired by assessing and interpreting them rightly, man ascribed disease to the wrath of the Deity or to the malice of elves or of evil spirits, and not to the intricate physical cause now known.[10]

There is an undeniable air of superiority wafting from the pages of these mid-twentieth-century studies on Anglo-Saxon ideas about disease and medicine that,

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[9] C. E. A. Winslow (1943), *The Conquest of Epidemic Disease: A Chapter in the History of Ideas*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
[10] Wilfrid Bonser (1963), *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: OUP, p. 7.

more often than not, is linked to a frustration with the sources' suitability for evaluation along contemporary lines of thinking.

Equipped with the latest knowledge of disease, scholars attempted to match medieval descriptions of disease with the nosological classifications of their own time.[11] The medieval sources, from that perspective, were characterized by omission of detail, confusion and distractions in the form of unscientific elaborations which rendered it a difficult task to establish exactly which diseases plagued ancient populations. This treatment of Anglo-Saxon literature may rightfully be criticized for its rather obvious anachronistic tendencies. The underlying assumption guiding historiographers of the mid-twentieth century seems to have been that the reality of disease is to be sought in biology which remains constant over time but has not been understood fully or correctly by historic societies which consequently renders the textual sources less than reliable.[12] This approach may have been one of the main motivators for scholars to focus on the history of merely a small number of the 'most carefully documented' epidemics like the bubonic plague.[13] Indeed, even some of the most recent volumes like *Pestilential Complexities: Understanding Medieval Plague*, a collection of essays edited by Vivian Nutton,[14] are held together by the question of whether the Black Death of the late Middle Ages and later outbreaks

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[11] cf. W. MacArthur (1949), 'The Identification of some Pestilences Recorded in the Irish Annals', *Irish Historical Studies* 6, 1948/49, pp. 169-88; MacArthur (1950), 'Comments on Shrewsbury's "The Yellow Plague"', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 5 (2), pp. 214-15; MacArthur (1951), 'The Pestilence called *scamach*', *Irish Historical Studies* 7, 1950/51, pp. 199-200; John Findlay Drew Shrewsbury (1949), 'The Yellow Plague', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 4 (1), pp. 5-47.

[12] cf. Estelle Brodman (1953), 'Medieval Epidemics', *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 41 (3), p. 267.

[13] Brodman (1953), p. 2; cf. Shrewsbury (1971).

[14] Vivian Nutton (ed.) (2008), *Pestilential Complexities: Understanding Medieval Plague*, *Medical History*, Supplement No. 27, London: Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL.

of plague were caused by a common recently identified agent, *Yersinia pestis*, or not. And, if so, why it is that there seem to be so many discrepancies between the descriptions of the medieval pandemic and accounts from later periods.

Another prevalent characteristic of the scholarship from the mid-twentieth century into the 1980s is a shift away from looking at disease in favour of analyses of medieval medical treatment of the latter. One of the paramount publications is Grattan and Singer's book *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated specially from the Semi-pagan Text 'Lacnunga'*.[15] As a joint effort of a philologist and a historian of medicine with a background in science it is an example of how knowledge of twentieth-century medicine seems to have been viewed as a crucial prerequisite for anyone with the ambition of venturing into the diachronic study of disease and medicine. According to Charlotte Roberts, non-clinically trained researchers, especially anthropologists, were, in fact, actively discouraged from working in paleopathology.[16] Nevertheless, the work of Grattan and Singer as well as that of the latter's student Wilfrid Bonser received their fair share of criticism even from near contemporaries.

C. H. Talbot, whose aim it is to give the Old English medical texts discussed in the aforementioned studies 'a more rational appraisement and to examine them a little more closely,' criticizes that

> attention has been focused more on the folk-lore and magic contained in the relatively unimportant *Lacnunga* than on the purely medical texts. The result has been to emphasize the superstitious element that occurs in these writings and to give the general

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[15] J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer (1952), *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated specially from the Semi-pagan Text 'Lacnunga'*, London: OUP.
[16] Charlotte Roberts (1998/2001), 'Paleopathology and Archaeology', Robert Arnott (ed.), *Archaeology of Medicine*, p. 1.

impression that Anglo-Saxon medicine was nothing but a hotchpotch of incantations, charms, magic and old wives' recipes.[17]

In contrast, he proposes that the translators and compilers of the leechbooks collected source material with a confident rationale and that 'England was, in the ninth and tenth centuries, in no way inferior to its continental neighbours in the assimilation of classical medicine'.[18] This approach in some ways prefigures the anthropological concern with synchronic systems of thinking about medicine and disease.

Anglo-Saxon Medicine & Magic – The Anthropological Perspective

Coming from a background in social anthropology, Nigel Barley criticizes Grattan and Singer's lack of anthropological appreciation of the *Herbarium*. For him, '[t]he basic mistake hitherto made by Anglo-Saxonists is to deal with ultimate historical origins instead of looking at the synchronic system'.[19] While I would argue that the traditions and sources from which any synchronic system must have been influenced to some degree need not be neglected in a thorough study of the Anglo-Saxon conceptualization of epidemic disease, Barley's emphasis on the contemporary view of disease marks a significant shift of focus. He also describes how different ideas of disease interact with methods of treatment.

> There are, it seems, a number of logically possible ways of reacting to the problem of disease. Disease can be seen as caused by the invasion of the body by alien matter or force from without. Treatment then consists in removing it. It can be viewed as the loss, by a man, of something normally inherent to him. In this case, treatment consists in returning it to him. A third possible view would

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[17] C. H. Talbot (1967), 'Some Notes on Anglo-Saxon Medicine', *Medical History* 9, p. 156.
[18] Talbot (1967), p. 169.
[19] Nigel Barley (1972), 'Anglo-Saxon Magico-Medicine', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 67-8.

be to see disease as caused by a disruption of the natural order within the body. Here, treatment would entail re-establishing that order. While using this third approach, the Anglo-Saxons view disease as fundamentally an attack by the exterior on the cultural sphere and so may be fairly described as having opted for the first world-view.[20]

Keeping in mind these very interesting assertions, it remains to be seen whether or not Barley's proposition concerning the Anglo-Saxon view of disease may be supported from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

Another 'response to Grattan and Singer's characterization of its medicine as a 'mass of folly and credulity', without any theory of disease' can be found in Audrey Meaney's essay 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness'.[21] Published twenty years after Barley's work, it essentially reiterates many of the same points of criticism already raised by the anthropologist. Barley stresses 'the value of the application of the anthropological perspective to a people remote, not in place, but in time' which leads him to the conclusion that 'Anglo-Saxon ethnomedicine is far from being the unstructured mass that some authors have implied, but a rich symbolic system in no way inferior to those treated by anthropologists in other parts of the world'.[22] Meaney claims that 'scholars have been too ready to seize on residual elements of pagan superstition in Anglo-Saxon medicine,' overlooking 'the Anglo-Saxons' considered statements on the causes of illness […] based on scholarship, observation, and reasoning'.[23]

The new appreciation of the Anglo-Saxon medical texts, as illustrated by the publications discussed above, is not based on comparison of the medieval

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[20] Barley (1972), p. 68.
[21] Audrey Meaney (1992), 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness', Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall and David Klausner (eds), *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture*, New York: St. Martin's, p. 12.
[22] Meaney (1992), p. 76.
[23] Meaney (1992), p. 24.

sources with modern knowledge but rather views it as a self-contained system which has no more or less inherent value than other historical or contemporary systems. The scholarly ambition is focused on removing labels like 'superstitious' and 'irrational' from the description of Anglo-Saxon medicine and stressing the cultural value of the source material.

The 'Apologetic' Approach

The apologetic approach, a term I have borrowed from the 'Introduction' of Sally Crawford and Christina Lee's collection of articles *Bodies of Knowledge: Cultural Interpretations of Illness and Medicine in Medieval Europe*,[24] summarizes the efforts undertaken to prove that Anglo-Saxon medical recipes contain biomedically efficacious elements. While the anthropological approach argues within the scope of contemporary views of disease and medical practice, the apologists analyse the Leechbooks in a laboratory setting. What both approaches have in common, is the argument that the Anglo-Saxon medical ideas are more advanced than claimed by seminal works of the 1950s and '60s.

In 1993, Malcolm Cameron, a trained biologist, presented his book *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* as 'an attempt to explain the rational basis of Anglo-Saxon medicine in the light of modern physiology and pharmacology' instead of 'highlighting what is irrational and most unlike modern medical thought'.[25] After an evaluation of the therapeutic value of the substances prescribed in the recipes, it is clear to him that 'the Anglo-Saxons prescribed ingredients which should have

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[24] Sally Crawford and Christina Lee (eds) (2010), *Bodies of Knowledge: Cultural Interpretations of Illness and Medicine in Medieval Europe*, Oxford: Archaeopress.
[25] M. L. Cameron (1993), *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, Cambridge: CUP, p. xi.

been of benefit and are still recommended for the same ailments'.[26] More recent analyses of early English remedies, however, have cast a shadow over the apologists' optimistic evaluation, claiming that while some of the ingredients that individually have anti-bacterial properties are rendered useless in killing bacteria when combined as prescribed. Instead of looking into the biomedical effectiveness of the remedies, researchers should focus on what people in the time period believed to be useful in fighting disease[27] which takes us right back to the anthropologists' focus on synchronic views of disease – and simultaneously medicine - as the most fruitful subject for investigation. In questioning the supposed effects of contrasting the efficacy of medieval and modern medicine, Peregrine Horden comes to the conclusion that 'instead of looking for biomedical efficacy we should perhaps think, as anthropologists do, in terms of therapeutic success: a matter of overall patient satisfaction with the therapeutic encounter rather than altered pathology'.[28]

Recent Interdisciplinary Approaches

The beginning of the twenty-first century saw an increase in interdisciplinary approaches and research collaborations in the field of Anglo-Saxon medicine and the study of diseases. Archeology and material culture probably features most prominently in this new wave of scholarly endevours. This includes paleopathology as well as archeobotany. One project, for instance, is a

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[26] Cameron (1993), p. 129.

[27] Cf. B. Brennessel, M. Drout and R. Gravel (2005), 'A Reassessment of the Efficacy of Anglo-Saxon Medicine', *Anglo-Saxon England* 34, pp. 183-195. It is noteworthy, however, that a recent study on the efficacy of the same recipe replicated by Brennessel et al. has proven an astonishing success. Cf. F. Harrison, A. E. L. Roberts, K. P. Rumbaugh, C. Lee and S. P. Diggle (2015), 'A 1000 Year Old Antimicrobial Remedy with Anti-Staphylococcal Activity', *mBio*, 6(4), An open access journal published by the American Society for Microbiology, http://mbio.asm.org/content/6/4/e01129-15.full.

[28] Horden (2009), p. 20.

compilation of Anglo-Saxon *materia medica,* that is, the substances prescribed in the four collections of medical recipes included in the corpus of Old English texts, the Old *English Herbarium*, the *Lacnunga* and the *Leechbooks.* These texts that have been at the heart of the study of Anglo-Saxon medicine feature an overwhelming majority of plant products among the ingredients put forward for the treatment of a variety of specific ailments. In this work, Debby Banham compares the linguistic evidence of plant names with botanical remains discovered through archeological research as well as artistic depictions of plants, e.g. in the form of manuscript illuminations which might give an impression of the kinds of plants the Anglo-Saxons would have been familiar with and had access to.[29]

Another discussion of how the study of literary evidence may be combined with that of the material findings brought to light in archeological excavations is Crawford and Randall's essay 'Archeology and Documentary Sources; Two Approaches to Anglo-Saxon Medicine'. They stress that while there is plenty of evidence to be examined within each of the two individual disciplines and the combination of them might seem obvious, the situation is not as straightforward as it seems. Particularly '[t]he study of medicine in the past is one where the problems of interfacing history and archaeology, in addition to the specialist knowledge required in a study of medicine, are particularly severe'.[30] The

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[29] Debby Banham (2002), 'Investigating the Anglo-Saxon *Materia Medica*: Archaeobotany, Manuscript Art, Latin and Old English', Robert Arnott (ed.), *The Archaeology of Medicine. Papers given at a session of the annual conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group held at the University of Birmingham on 20 December 1998*, B.A.R. International Series 1046, Oxford: Archaeopress, pp. 95-99.

[30] S. Crawford and A. Randall (2002), 'Archaeology and Documentary Sources; Two Approaches to Anglo-Saxon Medicine', R. Arnott (ed.), *The Archaeology of Medicine: Papers given at a session of the annual conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group held at the University of Brimingham on 20 December 1998*, B.A.R. International Series 1046, Oxford: Archeopress, p. 101.

disciplines traditionally as well as for practical reasons 'have two distinct and methodologically separate approaches to Anglo-Saxon medicine. One investigates what Anglo-Saxon doctors thought they knew (or, following Greek and Roman authorities, what they thought they ought to know) about medicine at the millennium,' the other is 'limited to describing trauma and deformation of skeletal material using modern interpretation of disease, and reflecting a tradition of disease identification and diagnosis that would have been alien, or incomprehensible'[31] to an Anglo-Saxon individual. Most of the illnesses the written sources describe, such as wounds, eczema and other ailments afflicting the soft tissue are exactly the ones that do not show in the skeletal record of the modern archaeologist. On the other hand, presumably common ailments frequently encountered in the archaeological record are absent from the medical literature. The written accounts of the Anglo-Saxon period and modern archaeology are both limited in their scopes of insight, a fact which, instead of an overlap that would invite comparison produces rather more of a gap. Yet, I would argue, bringing together the two approaches might still allow us to paint a more complete picture of disease and medicine provided we stay clear of the trap of anachronism. In light of technological advances in genetics and microbiology that are starting to take hold in archaeological research, we are in danger of underestimating the value of textual sources that sometimes appear as 'interpretative challenges that are too quickly sidestepped'[32] in favour of what can be proven scientifically. For the study of infectious diseases that hardly leave any traces on the skeleton, archaeology cannot provide much evidence. Especially epidemic diseases which usually lead to a quick death of the

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[31] Crawfod and Randall (2002), pp. 101-2.
[32] Horden (2009), p. 7.

individual simply do not allow the time necessary for permanent physical effects to manifest, for example, in abnormal patterns of bone growth.[33]

What can be learned from previous scholarship on disease and medicine in the Anglo-Saxon period then, when it comes to the evaluation of epidemics? Approaches which are mainly relying on archaeology do not look promising in that regard. The assessment of the validity of medical treatments from a biomedical perspective has brought about rather debatable results so far. While many would agree that some of the salves and ointments prescribed would have provided some relief when it comes to minor injuries and infections of the flesh, a cure for the plague does not seem to have been within the grasp of the average leech. I would agree that 'given that ways of interpreting and responding to illness have a cultural dimension, in many ways illness and its treatment in the past is not well served by being compared to modern medical practice'.[34] Especially evidence of epidemic disease may be studied more rewardingly in its synchronic context which may differ between cultures removed from each other in place as well as in time. The medieval understanding of disease has to be viewed not as a naive precursor to modern scientific knowledge, but as an aspect of the contemporaries' perception and interpretation of the world they live in.

1.2 Definition of Terminology, Scope, and Research Questions

This thesis, as the title suggests, is interested specifically in concepts of infectious, contagious, and epidemic disease. A discussion of these constituent

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[33] Cf. Christina Lee (2011a), 'Body and Soul: Disease and Impairment', Maren Clegg Hyer and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (eds), *The Material Culture of Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World*, pp. 293 - 309.
[34] Crawford and Lee (2010), p. 1.

components shall clarify key terminology, outline the extent of what this study will include, and define the central questions it aims to pursue.

Concepts…of Disease

The first point to be discussed is what is meant by the expression 'concepts of disease'. A common definition of a 'concept', a product of mechanisms of thought and understanding, is to describe it as 'a general idea or notion, a universal; a mental representation of the essential or typical properties of something, considered without regard to the peculiar properties of any specific instance or example'.[35] In linguistics, the notion of concepts is widely debated, specifically in the disciplines related to cognitive science. In theoretical approaches formulated, for instance, by cognitive psychologist Lawrence Barsalou, the relationship between concepts and meaning is a central point of discussion. Concepts, here, are defined as 'people's psychological representations of categories (e.g., *apple*, *chair*); whereas *meanings* are people's understanding of words and other linguistic expressions (e.g. "apple", "large chair").' [36] According to Barsalou, conceptualisation is situated, with a concept being 'a dynamical distributed system in the brain that represents a category in the environment or experience, and that controls interactions with the category's instances (e.g., the concept of *bicycle* represents and controls interactions with bicycles).' Via such interactions, perceived information relevant to the concept

[35] *The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, www.oed.com;* 'Concept, n.', sense 2.

[36] L. W. Barsalou (1993), 'Concepts & Meaning', L. Barsalou, W. Yeh, B. Luka, K. Olseth, K. Mix & L. Wu (eds), *Chicago Linguistic Society 29: Papers from the Parasession on Conceptual Representations*, University of Chicago, pp. 23.

is isolated and subsequently integrated with information in memory, which suggests constant, dynamic development.[37]

Vyvyan Evans, whose research focuses on the roles of language and communication in cognition, further introduces a third level of theoretic distinction with what he calls 'lexical concepts', separate from 'cognitive models' (roughly equivalent to what psychologists term 'concepts') and 'meaning'. While words encode conceptual representations, these are not equivalent to 'meaning', which is a function of situated language use. The conceptual representations, the 'lexical concepts', provide acces sites to conceptual (or "encyclopaedic") knowledge, that is, complex 'concepts' which, in agreement with Barsalou's theoretical model, have the key functions of facilitating categorisation and being employed in reasoning processes. [38]

Accordingly, the choice of the plural form 'concepts' further indicates the expectation that more than one will be encountered in the context of represetations of 'disease'. It is, in fact, to be assumed that several will have held currency simultaneously and consecutively across the period. Equally, it is conceivable for various, potentially incongruent concepts to co-exist. While this thesis does not set out to follow and apply slavishly the distinction between 'lexical concepts' and 'cognitive models', or '(complex) concepts', what is important to keep in mind is the idea of distinguishing between the different aspects of 'disease' as what exists in the environment, what is encoded in

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[37] L.W. Barsalou (2016), 'Situated conceptualization: Theory and applications', Y. Coello & M. H. Fischer (eds), *Foundations of embodied cognition, Volume 1: Perceptual and emotional embodiment*, East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press, pp. 11-37.

[38] Vyvyan Evans 'Lexical Concepts, Cognitive Models and Meaning Construction' https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=ve-lexical-concepts.pdf&site=1. See also Vyvyan Evans (2006). 'Lexical Concepts, Cognitive Models and Meaning Construction'. *Cognitive Linguistics* 17(4), pp. 490-534.

language, and what is a structure in the mind, with language providing a bridge or point of entrance from the former to the latter.

The singular form 'disease' denotes the idea that it is not specific diseases but the abstract idea, indeed, the concept, which is to be at the heart of this investigation. Mirko Grmek's article 'The Concept of Disease', originally published in French as part of a compendium on aspects of Western medical thought, can help explain and contextualise this choice within the broader scholarly discussion surrounding terminological differentiation. Mirko Grmek was a Croatian and French scientist and, more inportantly, one of the pioneers in the field of history of medicine. His entire life's work promotes the historical research of medical knowledge and practices, especially the study of the formation of ideas in specific societies and periods. In the article's section on 'Defining Disease', Grmek summarizes major issues in expressing and differentiating certain aspects of this field of research. The first major issue I want to highlight is

> the confusion between 'disease' and 'diseases,' which is to say between the conceptualization of disease in general (definition of the pathological in the context of the physiological) and the conceptualization of specific diseases (definition of nosological entities). In the first case, the basic problem lies in the ambiguity of the concept of biological and social 'norms'; in the second case, the difficulties derive from the 'ontological status' of diseases.[39]

Disease, in essence, is something set apart from and negatively affecting the normal and acceptable in terms of health status. In contrast, when speaking about diseases, the reference is to subdivisions of individually identifiable entities or processes (one might think, for example, of separate strains of the influenza

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[39] Grmek (1998), pp. 242-43.

virus). Some schools of thought even propose that diseases, as in nosological entities, only exist in the world of ideas where they are defined and classified according to the knowledge of the day. Nonetheless, it is possible to assume a potential existence of disease in the abstract that may find temporarily visible manifestation in the form of actual pathological states.[40] Diseases, are interesting for this study only insofar as the system behind their classification may point towards differences between historical concepts of disease and the ones current in contemporary imagination. This study is, however, not an attempt at matching nosological classifications of the past with modern ones. Distinguishing specific diseases is not in itself relevant, as the focus is set firmly on historic conceptualisations within their period-specific context.

A further distinction which came to bear on the title choice is that between the labels 'disease' and 'illness'. As Grmek points out, '(t)hose writing in English have established a subtle and fundamental distinction between 'illness' and 'disease'.' Certain publications in German 'make the same distinction between *Erkrankung* and *Krankheit*', whereas 'French, Spanish, and Italian fail to supply this discrete terminology'. According to Grmek's suggestions based on current scholarly practice, '[t]he term 'illness' should be used to describe the immediate experience of a sick person, the 'experience' of disease, while the term 'disease' should be reserved for the conceptualization of disease by physicians.'[41] The present study adopts this distinction and terminology in principle, with the exception that the conceptualisation of disease is to be seen as a process in which

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[40] Cf. Grmek (1998), p. 243.
[41] Grmek (1998), p. 242.

every member of a society participates in, not only those who could be described as 'physicians'.[42]

Illness, that is, the individual experience of disease symptoms, is of interest for this investigation in as much as symptoms may inform the conceptualisation of disease on the end of what is observed and considered to be typical properties and characteristics underlying the abstract concept disease. However, this investigation is not primarily or explicitly interested in biological reality, micro-organisms, or fine-grained paradigms of nosological classification. Although different sorts of disease patterns might as well have been observed by historical populations as they are today, this study does not aim to connect historical classifications with modern counterparts more than is necessary to approach the material in the first place, that is, via patterns familiar and recognisable to the researcher. In practical terms, the descriptions to be selected and analysed as part of this study will necessarily have to be sufficiently recognisable as potential expressions of the disease concepts. For this, contemporary ways of thinking cannot be entirely removed from the equation.

Throughout this study, based on the philosophical and terminological considerations above, I intend to use the expression 'the disease' or the plural

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[42] Grmek further divides the 'state conceived as "disease"' into the *pathos* and the *nosos* as they are detected by the physician. He additionally introduces the suggestion of a third term, 'sickness', 'to indicate the perception of disease by the nonphysicians who come into contact with the person in question, thus distinguishing between "to feel sick" and "to be acknowledged as sick"' (cf. French *être malade* vs *être un malade*). Cf. Grmek (1998), pp. 242-43. I will not explicitly consider the above distinctions for the purpose of this study as that would require a clearly defined concept of the Anglo-Saxon physician as well as an investigation into questions of perceived health vs non-health in historical societies. While this is a very interesting topic which is currently being researched by my supervisor Christina Lee among others, it pertains more to the sphere of longer term afflictions, chronic 'disorders', impediments and potential resulting disability, not the here examined kind of disease patterns which are characterised by rapid deterioration and the death of an individual within the course of a very short period of time.

'diseases' to refer to specific occurrences and outbreaks, whereas 'disease', on an abstract level, is what causes 'illness', the manifest symptoms of disease on the body.[43] Today, when asked about causation, we might think primarily of pathogens, viruses and bacteria, since such have been made visible by the invention of microscopes and have thus become objects of scientific observation. From this perspective, conceptualisations of disease can be expected to include aspects such as knowledge and imagination, beliefs held about causes of illness, as well as explanations of reasons for and purposes of the existence of disease.

These considerations are especially interesting regarding diseases caused by pathogens invisible to the human eye. The origin and cause of such types of disease which may affect not just individuals, but groups and even large parts of a population seem to beg for explanations beyond a simplistic model of individual sin and punishment as it might popularly be associated with the Christian Middle Ages. It can be hypothesised that distinctive concepts of disease exist for phenomena that do not appear to affect merely individuals as other health problems such as chronic illnesses, pains, or injuries do. For that reason, it will be concepts of infectious, contagious, and epidemic disease in particular which this study aims to bring into focus.

Infectious, Contagious, Epidemic

The aforementioned modern perspective cannot be switched off if one wants to define a starting point for research into historic systems of thinking. The specific contemporary English words 'infectious', 'contagious', and 'epidemic' are anachronistic, as they did not exist in the Old English vocabulary. They are

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[43] 'The pestilence; pestilences' and 'pestilence' are to be treated in the same way.

nevertheless the labels we know and use to delineate certain ideas. What is important are the properties and characteristics of the types of diseases signified by the above set of words. The meaning of these specifiers will provide guidelines for what to look for in the Anglo-Saxon sources.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, none of the terms entered the English language before the very late fourteenth century. The word 'infection, *n.*' is partly a borrowing from French, partly from Latin. From its first recorded instance it came to be used in a variety of related senses.

a) First recorded use a1398 'Originally: contaminated condition or unhealthy quality (of air, water, etc.); an instance of this. In later use: *spec.* contamination (of water, soil, food, etc.) with the causative agent of a disease;'

b) First recorded use ?a1425 'Originally: disease, *esp.* infectious or communicable disease; an instance of this; an outbreak of disease; an epidemic. In later use also: invasion and growth of microorganisms or other parasitic organisms within the body (or an organ, wound, cell, etc.), esp. when causing disease; the condition produced by this;'

c) First recorded use 1548 'The transmission, communication, or (esp. in early use) acquisition of (a) disease; *spec.* transmission of a disease or its causative agent by indirect means, as by contaminated water, food, etc., rather than by close contact with an infected individual (cf. 'contagion' *n.* 1a).'[44]

Infectious disease is, accordingly, 'capable of spreading from one individual to another; occurring in epidemics; transmissible, communicable; *spec.* transmitted by indirect means, as by contaminated water or food, arthropod vectors, etc., rather than by close contact with an infected individual.' In later use 'infectious' typically refers to diseases caused by a micro-organism or other biological agent. Other senses of 'infectious' and 'infection' that are now obsolete but were active

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[44] Cf. *OED*, 'infection, n.', esp. senses 2, 4, 5, and 7.

for several centuries between the Anglo-Saxon period and modern times include 'venomous; poisoned; poisonous' (last recorded use 1658) and 'moral contamination; corruption of character or habits by evil influences' respectively.[45] The semantic ranges of 'infectious' as opposed to 'contagious' differ most markedly in the means of transmission of the disease thus described. The word 'contagion, *n*'has entered the Middle English language via the French *contagion*, or Latin *contagioem* 'a touching, contact, contagion' (*con-* 'together' + *tangere* 'to touch'). From the sixteenth century onwards, it has been used to describe 'the communication of disease from body to body by contact direct or mediate'. A contagious disease is characterised by the quality of being communicable or infectious by human contact.[46] Finally, an 'epidemic', in our modern understanding, is a disease characterised by being 'prevalent among a people or a community at a special time, and produced by some special causes not generally present in the affected locality'. The first attestation of the term is in T. Lodge's 1603 *Treat. Plague* i. sig. B2[v]: 'Epidemich. a sicknesse common vnto all people, or to the moste part of them.'[47]

Since 'infection', 'contagion', and 'epidemic' are all loan words, the question arises whether they were introduced into the vocabulary as new, alternative words for existing concepts, or if they are evidence of the introduction of concepts that did not previously exist in Anglo-Saxon culture. Completely novel conceptualisations of disease would have to have been introduced via scholarly imports and subsequently superseded existing concepts. Considering how illness

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[45] The earliest recorded instance of 'infection' in that sense is found in J. Trevisa tr. Bartholomaeus Anglicus *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (BL Add. 27944) (1975) I. iii. xiii. 101 'þe original infectioun' meaning 'original sin'.
[46] Cf. *OED*, 'contagion, n.' and 'contagious, adj.'
[47] Cf. *OED*, 'epidemic, n. and adj.'

was certainly experienced before the introduction of the above loanwords, it appears more likely for existing concepts to have shared characteristics with those designated by the new labels. The Old English language has a number of words pertaining to the field of illness, sickness, disease, and pestilence as the *Historical Thesaurus of English* attests. These words cover certain spectrums of situations. The latter might include similar characteristics as the ones highlighted in the semantic range of the English terms 'infectious', 'contagious', and 'epidemic' but are likely to focus on other aspects of disease and draw different lines of demarcation. Not every characteristic of the disease-type this study is interested in is necessarily going to be present in every expression and description of disease. Symptoms, mortality rate, and morbidity of the diseases mentioned are not always discussed in explicit terms or at all. It is rather to be expected that some elements of a loose bundle of characteristics will be selected in different contexts. What is necessary for me is sufficient impetus to count an occurrence of disease in the sources as potentially pertaining to the group outlined. Sometimes this might mean the absence of a description of characteristics that would contradict such an inclusion. From the outset, this study will regard the continuous spectrum of characteristics described by the modern set of specifiers, 'infectious, contagious, epidemic', as potentially present in the historical sources. The majority of research on Anglo-Saxon disease and medicine limits itself to an unnecessarily small and uniform corpus of sources. Scholars so far have largely missed out on the opportunity of evaluating depictions of disease that are not part of medical texts. Therefore, one aim of this thesis is to incorporate and compare a broad variety of sources instead of limiting itself to those readily thought of as medical texts.

Research Aims and Questions

As previous research has indicated, strategies of understanding disease came in the form of a variety of theoretical conceptualisations. These include prominent examples such as Galen's theory of the four humours, the elf-shots usually ascribed to the Anglo-Saxons' pagan Germanic ancestry as well as Christian, specifically biblical models. The latter, in themselves, are not uniform but variable, especially between the Old and the New Testament. Similarities as well as the peculiarities of each theory of understanding will become apparent when contrasted with earlier, or even simultaneously applied models of explanation.

Within the outlined scope of this study, the aim is to establish aspects of understanding disease, as they feature in the various discourse(s) run in the literature of Anglo-Saxon England and to illustrate how the concept of disease relates to other concepts the authors had on their minds. While academic discussion has previously isolated specific elements, overemphasising some while neglecting others, the objective of this study is to provide a more comprehensive portrayal of a complex field of ideas within the Anglo-Saxon mindscape.

In order to do that, I will follow most closely the anthropologists' and, in fact, the early philologists' approaches to the textual evidence, which are fruitfully combined with an awareness for theories of human cognition and the role of language. Based on the working hypothesis that linguistic evidence transmitted via the literature written in the Anglo-Saxon period might reveal common ways of thinking about epidemic disease, the following questions will be addressed:

1. How did people imagine disease before technology provided an insight into the world of micro-organisms? How might they have inferred their understanding from other observations and experiences?

2. In which contexts did questions of disease become relevant and which aspects of disease were discussed?

3. How were concepts of disease integrated into a wider system of cultural models and beliefs that existed during the time? How are approaches to medicinal treatment and alternative strategies of coping negotiated within such models?

2 Theoretical Background and Methodology

For the first part of this chapter, the views of social constructionism that have informed the discussion of epidemic disease over the past half century will be outlined. The main aim is to highlight areas of theoretical overlap with experientialist philosophy which underlies the cognitive linguistic approach kickstarted by Lakoff and Johnson's seminal publication *Metaphors We Live By.* This shall serve to illustrate how foundational principles of cognitive linguistics link up with earlier schools of thought rather than putting itself at odds with all that came previously. Today, cognitive linguistics is a cover term for a variety of related approaches with slightly different orientations and interests. Very basically, one might distinguish, as Greta Olson does,[48] the 'hard' cognitive approach of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson focusing on the neurological workings behind language and the more culturally relativist approach. One representative of the latter is Zoltán Kövecses, whose ideas on how language, the human mind and the surrounding cultural context interact appear to be promising additions to the work of Anglo-Saxonists and will be informative especially in subsequent chapters of this study.

At the heart of it all lies a concern with the language of disease that was first and most famously expressed by Susan Sontag in the introduction to her essay *Illness as Metaphor* in the late 1970s:

> My subject is not physical illness itself but the uses of illness as a figure or metaphor. My point is that illness is *not* a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness – and the healthiest

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[48] Cf. Greta Olson (2009), 'Metaphors and Cultural Transference: Mediating Cognitivist and Culturalist Approaches', Ansgar Nünning, Herbert Grabes, Sibylle Baumbach (eds), *Metaphors Shaping Culture and Theory*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 3-16.

way of being ill – is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking.[49]

In this publication as well as in its 1989 companion piece *AIDS and its Metaphors*, Sontag speaks out against the social and political dangers of using metaphorical descriptions of diseases such as cancer and tuberculosis. While conceding that '[n]ot all metaphors applied to illnesses and their treatment are equally unsavory and distorting,' the one Sontag is 'most eager to see retired […] is the military metaphor' and '[i]ts converse, the medical model of the public weal'.[50]

2.1 Social Constructionism

As one of the 'Emerging Themes in the History of Medicine', Allan Brandt describes how the rise of the new social history of medicine has recast the shape of medical historiography (particularly in the American context as illustrated by the work of Charles Rosenberg, which will be discussed below) in directing attention to the social construction of disease. 'No longer is medical knowledge and the rise of the profession at the center of attention; the focus has shifted decisively to the nature and meaning of disease and social responses to disease'.[51] His critical response to Susan Sontag's positivist utopia of purely scientific discourse of disease and medicine that is stripped of metaphoric language is to stress how 'disease is inevitably rife with meaning and values. Over time, these meanings may in fact *change*, but even science cannot 'purify' disease'. In the light of recent scholarship, he even goes as far as to say that

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[49] Susan Sontag (1978/79), *Illness as Metaphor*, London: Allen Lane, p. 2.
[50] Susan Sontag (1989), *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 94.
[51] Allan Brandt (1991), 'Emerging Themes in the History of Medicine', *Milbank Memorial Quarterly* 69 (2), p. 202.

'Sontag's ultimate mission – to free disease of its metaphors – appears in retrospect naïve, if not misguided'.[52] As suggested by Mirko Grmek, quoted in the introduction of this study, disconnecting scientific knowledge from the popular imagination would undermine any serious effort to consider disease in its bearings.

Developed out of a combination of poststructuralist Foucauldian criticism and feminism, the social constructionist shift from centering attention on medical knowledge to evaluating medicine and patterns of disease in a broad social context may open up useful perspectives for the social historians of medicine as it stresses the importance of ideas. The opportunities and challenges of this new approach have been summarized by Ludmilla Jordanova as follows:

> [W]e need a historiography capable of explaining the imaginative reach of ideas of health, healing and sickness. […] These ideas have a primal quality in two senses: they underpin experiences and actions, and they are deeply embedded in our consciousness, and hence only partly available for conscious manipulation. The challenge is to explain how such ideas change and to resist the temptation to attribute uniform beliefs to large groups of people.[53]

Some of the topics mentioned here, specifically the unconscious workings of the mind, the correlation of ideas and experiences and the discussion of uniformity and change, that is, variability of ideas will be encountered again below, in the introduction of cognitive linguistic theory. It is not the aim of social constructionism to favour one such idea over another but, instead, it points to the social forces that developed certain beliefs, for example about disease. According to Bryon Grigsby,

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[52] Brandt (1991), p. 204.
[53] Ludmilla Jordanova (1995), 'The Social Construction of Medical Knowledge', *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 375.

> medieval and modern medicine differ most markedly in the interpretation of disease. Disease for medieval doctors is caused by humoral imbalance, wheras modern doctors believe that most diseases are caused by an invading pathogen. For the medieval doctor, disease is caused by an internal problem, but for the modern doctor, disease is caused by external situations. The difference between internal and external causes for disease will dramatically change the medical interpretations as well as the social interpretations of people with specific diseases.[54]

Regardless of whether Grigsby is right in his assumptions about medieval medicine, it is not just a group of experts, comprised of doctors for instance, that participates in the construction of interpretative models. A social constructionist, following Deborah Lupton, should not limit himself to the one specific community in order to gain an understanding of how disease is interpreted within a culture but must pay attention also to all social communities and their discourse in order to form a more complete picture. According to the social constructionist perspective,

> medical knowledge is regarded not as an incremental progression towards a more refined and better knowledge, but as a series of relative constructions which are dependent upon the socio-historical settings in which they occur and are constantly renegotiated.[55]

Lupton's study is an examination of 'the use of metaphor and visual imagery' as 'features of the representation of medicine, illness and disease in western societies, including an historical dimension to demonstrate how linguistic and iconographic representations have changed together with wider socio-cultural and political shifts in understanding the world and maintaining social order'.[56]

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[54] Bryon Grigsby (2004), *Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature*, London, New York: Routledge, p. 11.
[55] Deborah Lupton (1994), *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease, and the Body in Western Societies*, London: Sage, p. 12.
[56] Lupton (1994), p. 54.

The interest in epistemology and language use is in line with other disciplines of the humanities and social sciences that saw an increasing interest in language and discourse from the late 1970s onwards with the common understanding within social constructionist approaches being that 'language does not exist in a social vacuum but is embedded in social and political settings and used for certain purposes'.[57]

In conclusion of this section, the focus will come back to questions of epidemic disease, which, as Charles Rosenberg claims, 'create[s] an imperative need for understanding and thus reassurance. […] explanatory efforts necessarily reflect a particular generation's cultural and intellectual assumptions, its repertoire of available intellectual tools'.[58] Elsewhere, Rosenberg explains his rejection of the label *social constructionism* with the approach's tendency to 'overemphasize functionalist ends and the degree of arbitrariness' in the creation of 'disease pictures' as well as its association with a 'particular style of cultural criticism and a particular period in time: the late 1960s through the mid-1980s.' He choses instead 'to use the less programmatically charged metaphor of the frame rather than the construct to describe the fashioning of explanatory and classificatory schemes for particular diseases'.[59] Cognitive linguistics also deals with 'the intellectual tools' or rather cognitive mechanisms behind human perception and understanding of the world. Additionally, the notion of arbitrariness of potentially infinite ways of constructing concepts such as disease finds a counterweight in experientialism and the basic assumption of the physical

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[57] Lupton (1994), p. 20.
[58] Charles Rosenberg (1992), *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine*, Cambridge: CUP, pp. 293-94.
[59] Rosenberg (1992), p. 307.

grounding that underpins metaphoric thinking and speaking. Rosenberg's more recent work illustrates some of the many parallels that suggest fluctuation of ideas from social constructionism to the more culturally oriented approaches within the larger current of cognitive linguistics. This cultural orientation avoids major drawbacks of previous approaches and holds advantages for areas of scholarship equipped with a fragmented and diverse yet fairly closed set of material to work with. In the following section I am going to give an overview of the main tenets of cognitive linguistics and elaborate on theoretical aspects as well as the more practical side of linguistic analysis that may be of use for the study of Anglo-Saxon concepts of epidemic disease.

2.2 The Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

The second half of the twentieth century has seen two general and, in many ways, opposing trends in the study of human cognition and language. In what is called the 'first cognitive revolution,' the most famous representative of which is Noam Chomsky, the mind is viewed as a computer working pretty much autonomously of the body. By contrast, the 'second cognitive revolution,' which has its roots in the 1960s, but was first put forward prominently by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson from the early 1980s onwards, is based on the 'embodiment premise.' In the latter approach, the mind is seen as depending on the human body and its interaction with the environment.

In the following, I briefly summarize basic assumptions on language and cognition that Lakoff and Johnson have laid out before the background of experientialist philosophy. It must be noted that not all questions that are discussed at the center of cognitive linguistic theory are immediately relevant

for the study of Anglo-Saxon concepts of disease. It is rather the general perspective on matters of language and meaning that provides a lens through which to look for clues on how disease, health and medicine figured in the Anglo-Saxon mind.

Language and communication are based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting. Therefore, language is an important source of evidence for what that system looks like. One might say that it provides an observable window into the workings of the invisible mind. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. In turn, metaphors are not primarily linguistic but cognitive. Metaphoric language is merely the linguistic expression of pre-existing concepts. Taking metaphor as not just a matter of language but of conceptual systems allows the cognitive linguist to study human aspects of reality, the perceptions, conceptualisations, motivations and actions that make up most of our experience. The idea that what is real is independent and objective has to be rejected in favour of emphasising the study of experiential reality as far more important since it comprises most of what matters to us as humans living within different cultures with different conceptual systems. Metaphors play a central role in the construction of social and political reality. Yet, they generally tend to be looked at as elements of imaginative or poetic language that distract us from reality in the sense of absolute objective truth. This sentiment, I would argue, may be detected not just in philosophy, but also in some of the older studies in the corpus of scholarship on Anglo-Saxon disease and medicine. Where the primary concern is the establishment of nosological categories or absolute historiographies, irrational language, such as metaphorical expressions,

was frequently lamented, ridiculed and discarded from the focus of scholarly analysis. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, however, what is real and true is contingent on human meaning-making, a cognitive process which can best be observed in language, especially in metaphoric expressions.

The perspectival nature of linguistic meaning 'implies that the world is not objectively reflected in the language: the categorization function of the language imposes a structure on the world rather than just mirroring objective reality. Specifically, language is a way of organizing knowledge that reflects the needs, interests, and experiences of individuals and cultures'.[60] The cognitive conceptualisations that find expression in language 'link up with the way in which human beings experience reality, both culturally and physiologically. In this sense, Cognitive Linguistics embodies a fully contextualized conception of meaning'.[61] Since many concepts that are important to us (like ideas, emotions, and time, to name a few prominent examples) are not clearly delineated in our experience, 'we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientations, objects, etc.)'.[62] The fundamental idea of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as it was introduced and developed by Lakoff, is the notion of *mapping* where structural features of one area of experience, called the source domain, is mapped onto another, the target domain. Conceptual metaphors are critical for the structuring role they can

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[60] Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens (2010), *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, Oxford: OUP, p.3.
[61] Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2010), p. 14.
[62] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980/2003), *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, p. 115.

play in Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) which organize knowledge about the physical world and its complexities by way of abstraction.[63]

In view of previous scholarship on ideas of disease in Anglo-Saxon England as well as some of the views on the use of metaphorical language when talking about disease, one of the most immediately interesting kinds of metaphor discussed in cognitive linguistics are ontological metaphors, i.e. ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances. One example of viewing a non-physical, abstract thing as an entity discussed in chapters 6 and 7 of *Metaphors We Live By* is INFLATION.[64] Conceptualizing the experience of rising prices as an entity, allows us to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect of it, see it as a cause, act with respect to it, and perhaps even believe that we understand it. A government can 'get a grip on inflation', which is conceptualized as a physical object in this example. In the previous paragraph, Lakoff and Johnson can be observed to conceptualize CONCEPTS as an entity and the understanding of them, accordingly as physically taking hold: 'we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientations, objects, etc.)'. Perhaps the most obvious ontological metaphors are those where the physical object is further specified as being a person. This allows us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with non-human entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities.

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[63] Cf. Alan Cienki (2010), 'Chapter 7: Frames, Idealized Cognitive Models, and Domains', Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, Oxford: OUP pp. 176-79. One exemplary and often cited case study in George Lakoff (1987). *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* shows the important structuring role that metaphor plays in the ICM of "anger".

[64] Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003); Small capitals are commonly used in cognitive linguistic discussion when referring to concepts as opposed to their linguistic expression in the form of words. This style will be followed in the sections of this theses which explicitly apply cognitive linguistic methodology.

This can be illustrated with expressions such as 'Inflation strikes again', which may well be found as a headline in the business section of a newspaper. The metaphorical concept is not merely INFLATION IS A PERSON, but more specifically INFLATION IS AN ADVERSARY.

While Lakoff and Johnson propose that concepts that are not clearly delineated in physical experience (target domains) are constructed and structured in terms of other concepts (source domains) the structure of which can be perceived more directly, '[t]he images that form the source domain of such metaphors do not arise out of nowhere and do not by mere chance suddenly become favoured suppliers of schemas to be mapped onto important target domains'. According to Ansgar Nünning, 'their choice is linked to changes of culture at large and in particular in technology, social formations, and practices.'[65]

2.3 Cognitive Linguistics and Cultural History

For the cultural historian, the study of metaphors is of interest as it can provide an insight into historical concepts and theories as understood by the contemporary speakers. Metaphor allows the researcher a glimpse of 'habits of mind or structures of ideas and attitudes'.[66] The history of metaphors is 'a genuine part of cultural history, the history of science and learning, as well as the history of philosophical thought'.[67] Influenced by the interests and

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[65] Ansgar Nünning, Herbert Grabes, Sibylle Baumbach (2009), 'Introduction: Metaphors as a Way of Worldmaking, or: Where Metaphors and Culture Meed', *Metaphors Shaping Culture and Theory*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr, p. xiv.
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] Nünning, Grabes, Baumbach (2009), p. xxi.

commitments of historically and culturally situated thinkers and speakers, metaphorical projections may serve ideological functions.[68]

One of the advantages of the cognitive approach is that it goes beyond the recording of *topoi* present in a certain range of texts as practiced in Foucauldian discourse analysis and moves away from its main focus of uncovering power relations and ways in which that power was asserted through language. Instead, metaphor theory provides the practitioners of cultural studies with an approach that allows for cultural patterns to be examined diachronically by examining the prevalence of certain metaphors and metonyms.[69] In spite of the potential merits of adopting said approach, metaphor theory is received with skepticism by some critics for some of its basic assumptions.

> The 'cognitive turn' causes theoretical discomfort to those who hold a material and historical view of culture and cultural variation because of its perceived determinism and essentialism. Moreover, the cognitivist approach to metaphor brings with it practical as well as philosophical difficulties. These concern in particular a reductionist approach to analyzing metaphors as well as the assumption of the primacy of universal, somatic, experiences.[70]

The main issue highlighted in the quotations above is the debate in how far the experiential basis of human cognition in terms of metaphorical concepts leaves room for cultural and historical variation. The properties of the human body and its functions have been the same for millennia and can therefore not be seen as the source of differing experiences. The physical environment is perhaps more

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[68] cf. Nünning, Grabes, Bauchmach (2009), p. xxiii; and Philip Eubanks (1999), 'The Story of Conceptual Metaphor: What Motivates Metaphoric Mappings?', *Poetics Today* 20.3, pp. 429-30.
[69] cf. Olson (2009), pp. 18-19.
[70] Olson (2009), p. 19.

geographically varied and historically unstable, but it may still be doubted if it would account for variation in the human conception of the world.

One way of mediating between the skeptics and the cognitivists is to make a distinction between what is sometimes called the 'hard' cognitive approach (of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson) and the more culturally relativist approach, outlined above, that emphasizes the impact of social and cultural norms and traditions. One representative of this 'soft' approach is the more recent work of Zoltán Kövecses whose 'idea of metaphor is a particular version of the view proposed by Lakoff and Johnson'.[71] The 'hard' variety of the cognitive sciences is preoccupied with the questions of 'What is metaphor?' and 'How does it work in the mind?' while research in the social sciences tends to focus on the issue of 'What does metaphor do in particular social-cultural contexts?'[72] In his book *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*, Kövecses discusses the question of whether the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor can simultaneously explain both the universality and diversity in metaphorical thought that he observes in his comparison of the metaphorical expressions in English, Hungarian and Japanese. His introduces his study as an 'attempt to make one possible version of the cognitive linguistic theory of metaphor more accessible to those who have an interest in studying the role of metaphor in complex social-cultural phenomena, such as emotions, politics, thought, and morality, as well as highly abstract cultural processes and entities such as time, life, and personhood'[73] while criticizing the general overemphasis of apparent

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[71] Zoltán Kövecses (2009), 'Metaphor and Culture', Ansgar Nünning, Herbert Grabes, Sibylle Baumbach (eds), *Metaphors Shaping Culture and Theory*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr, p. 3.
[72] Cf. Zoltán Kövecses (2005), *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*, Cambridge: CUP, p. xi.
[73] Kövecses (2005), p. xii.

universality in a limited number of metaphoric concepts that have made it to the forefront of cognitive linguistic enquiry. In cases where individual languages exhibit incongruent metaphors for the same concept, for example ANGER, the selection of different aspects of the physical experiences associated with it, like the aspect of pressure or alternatively heat, might be responsible for the divergence. Despite all the metaphors being more or less immediately based in physical experience, a complex interplay of cultural factors may influence the conscious or unconscious choice of one over the other.

As an example for a conceptualisation of disease which might be familiar to the modern reader, I will adduce the phrase 'outbreak of disease'. This contemporary English expression, denoting sudden appearance, and rapid spread of an infection in a population illustrates the cognitive metaphor of disease as a substance or entity that can be contained and controlled, but strives for freedom. The outbreak means the loss of control over the disease, the containment of which, not the eradication, being the implied goal. Underlying is the assumption that disease is generally controlled by the means of modern science and medicine. Significantly, this example highlights different aspect of the basic DISEASE IS AN ENTITY metaphor than for example expressions such as 'disease (plague/the flu etc.) attacks', which focus on the perceived characteristic of DISEASE as constituting a hostile, violent force. This latter idea will be encountered several times in the following survey of the Old English literary corpus.

Moreover, the application of different cognitive mechanisms to the same situation may produce alternative construals. Besides metaphor and metonymy, framing is a cognitive operation that can be responsible for alternative

conceptual systems and construals. Frames are mental representations of categories that encompass our knowledge of the world and are 'important in the study of almost any facet of life and culture – and not just language. The world as we experience it is always the product of some prior categorization and framing by ourselves and others'.[74] Introducing the idea of framing, albeit on a different level, Charles Fillmore claimed that in addition to employing cognitive frames to produce and understand language, we also use it to conceptualize the dynamics between the speaker and addressee or, in the case of literature, the writer and reader. His theory of 'interactional frames' was influenced by pragmatics and speech act theory and serves as a tool for talking about the background knowledge and expectations that go into the production, and interpretation, of oral or written discourse. Particularly, in relation to questions of the impact of genre types, this approach will be informative for the study of infectious disease in Old English literature. It will be shown in later chapters, how the knowledge of and expectations bearing on the understanding of certain text types may assist in a fuller interpretation of the scope of its meaning, including the meaning of descriptions of disease.[75] In recent years, the idea of framing was applied 'with increasing awareness of the persuasive effects that can be achieved by reframing, or using alternative framings, of an issue'.[76]

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[74] Kövecses (2009), p. 8.

[75] cf. Charles J. Fillmore (1982), 'Frame Semantics', Linguistic Society of Korea (eds), *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*, Seoul: Hanshin, p. 117.

[76] Alan Cienki (2010), p. 174; Similarly, many of Lakoff's publications since the mid-90s are dealing with how political views are shaped by selective use of metaphorical models. See, for instance, George Lakoff (1996), *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know that Liberals Don't*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Lakoff's research on the political landscape of the United States combines cognitive science with political analyses, arguing that differences in opinions and success between liberals and conservatives are due to the application of diverging metaphoric models of the relationship between the state and its citizens.

The cognitive linguistic idea of alternativity picks up on post-structuralist views on the nature of meaning. Similarities to the social constructionist approach to how meaning is constructed via discourse can be found in the assumptions about the way conceptual coherence is established from a selection of partial cognitive structures that are selected and used relative to some context that is subject to synchronic and diachronic variation.

Suzanne Fleischman uses Lakoff and Johnson's seminal Conceptual Metaphor Theory in her evaluation of 'Language and Medicine' in which she reiterates some of Susan Sontag's concerns. She agrees that the metaphoric concept MEDICINE IS WAR has long informed the thinking and discourse about cancer and infectious diseases, most recently that of HIV/AIDS. Consequently, the metaphor 'constitutes a major piece of the ideological underlay of the biomedical model' and it informs as well as sanctions actions guided by biomedicine's emphasis on 'fighting disease' rather than caring for the ill individual.[77] Another pervasive metaphor in contemporary discourse is THE BODY IS A MACHINE consisting of individual parts that can be removed or replaced. This approach underlying a lot of mainstream medicine's staple treatments finds opposition in more holistic approaches.

Another issue already addressed by Sontag, that of metaphors where disease is not the target but the source concept, is discussed by Fleischman under the metaphorical denomination 'Medicine's metaphorical "exports"'. As has been pointed out before, epidemic diseases offer wide possibilities for metaphorisation to the social body or body politic. 'The discourse of social

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[77] Suzanne Fleischman (2008), 'Language and Medicine', Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton (eds), *The Handbook of Discrouse Analysis*, Wiley-Blackwell, p. 485.

complaint is rife with allusions to poxes on, plagues to, and cancers of society, often expressed using inflammatory rhetoric'.[78] It may be noteworthy that according to the basic outline of the make-up of conceptual metaphors of the Lakoffian tradition the fact that 'the *epidemic* itself has become a metaphor'[79] might have to be seen as an anomaly, an exception to the rule of the unidirectionality of metaphoric mappings. One can speak, for example, of LOVE in terms of WAR but not the other way around. The more abstract concept is structured by the more concrete. With disease metaphors, both, for instances, DISEASE IS AN ADVERSE FORCE as its reverse AN ADVERSE FORCE IS A DISEASE may be found expressed in contemporary language. Apart from noting this theoretical curiosity, the other question that arises from the statement of 'epidemic becoming a metaphor' might be of a more diachronic variety. From the Old English texts that I am going to evaluate in the following chapter, tentative evidence emerges that disease has started to become a source domain over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period. It seems to be only later though, that conceptual metaphors of disease would have become sufficiently entrenched to form source domains in more complex conceptual blends integrated from multiple spaces as described by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's influential theory of 'conceptual integration' or 'blending'.[80]

Metaphoric connections throughout the history of the English language have only recently become more accessible and easier to trace thanks to the online

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[78] Fleischmann (2008), p. 488.

[79] *ibid.*

[80] Cf. G. Fauconnier and M. Turner (1998), 'Conceptual Integration Networks', *Cognitive Science* 22: 2: 133-187; G. Fauconnier and M. Turner (2002), *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*, New York: Basic Books.

deployment of the *Metaphor Map of English* by the University of Glasgow.[81] It is a visualised database of metaphoric links between a variety of semantic fields which may in the future serve as an entryway especially into comparative and diachronic research of metaphors in English. A book of case-studies, based around different semantic areas, which use the 'Mapping Metaphor with the Historical Thesaurus' project data was published in 2016. It illustrates the kind of studies which could potentially be carried out in the future. In a statement on the aim of the project, the researchers behind the database express their expectation that '[b]y using the *Metaphor Map* as a basis for research, we may begin to see innovations in metaphorical thinking at particular periods in history and in particular areas of experience.'[82] Notably though, the *Metaphor Map* of English data is separated into two maps, one for Old English and one for the other stages of language history.

In the userguide, the distributors explain a few peculiarities of the Old English part of the *Historical Thesaurus*. For one thing, the *Metaphor Map of Old English* has fewer categories than the *Metaphor Map of Old English*, as entire semantic areas such as the one pertaining to 'Air and space travel' did not exist in Anglo-Saxon times. Due to the smaller dataset, not every category of the *Metaphor Map of Old English* contains metaphorical links to other areas. Furthermore, date information (and, as a result, the so-called 'Timeline view') is not available for the Old English data as all lexemes are treated within the Historical Thesaurus of English as coming from one period, so that words are

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[81] Mapping Metaphor with the Historical Thesaurus (2015). *Metaphor Map of English*
Glasgow: University of Glasgow. http://mappingmetaphor.arts.gla.ac.uk; Wendy Anderson,
Ellen Bramwell and Carole Hough (eds) (2016), *Mapping English Metaphor through Time*,
Oxford: OUP.
[82] http://mappingmetaphor.arts.gla.ac.uk/old-english/metaphor-in-english/.

classified as Old English rather than given specific dates within that period.[83]

These difficulties may indeed be part of the reason why cognitive approaches to literary interpretation of the texts produced in Anglo-Saxon England are just starting to be appreciated by researchers interested in gaining a better understanding of the mental processes at work behind medieval literature.

Cognitive Studies provide a particular way of viewing the inter-relationship of literary text and socio-historical context which promises to yield interesting new insights for Anglo-Saxon scholarship and Medieval Studies more broadly. With a study of the conceptual metaphors for LIFE, BODY and MIND, Antonina Harbus ventures into this underexplored reservoir of opportunities for new research in the field. In summary, her main results are that

> fondness for metaphor was adopted and adapted in Anglo-Saxon England, as well as a native fluency in metaphor creation and conceptual blending. In extant Old English poetry, three particularly prevalent metaphors occur, the first two of which are also very common in Latin literature: LIFE IS A JOURNEY; THE MIND IS A CONTAINER and THE MIND IS A WANDERING ENTITY. The third is an interesting addition in this context because a version of it appear in variations in Latin texts, and it is combined in OE literature with the other two conceptual metaphors in interesting ways.[84]

As metaphor is being assigned a key role in the history of ideas, Harbus' predicts that this new approach will not just yield relevant results within Anglo-Saxon studies but may indeed strengthen the relevance of the discipline in current and future scholarly context, especially in light of 'the entrenched predisposition of Anglo-Saxonists for interdisciplinarity and [their] excellent track record in that respect, especially across the literary/cultural and linguistic divide'.[85] It seems

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[83] http://mappingmetaphor.arts.gla.ac.uk/old-english/how-to-use/user-guide-text/.
[84] Antonina Harbus (2012), *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, p. 31.
[85] Harbus (2012), p. 21.

from Harbus' very optimistic assertion that the adoption of some approach informed by the relativist current within cognitive linguistics can only be beneficial to and suits perfectly the interests of the medievalist.

In her study on Anglo-Saxon concepts of ANGER,[86] Caroline Geveart argues that the diachronic approach to metaphoric conceptualization must not be neglected beside cross-linguistic research mainly undertaken by cognitive linguists so far. In trying to detect the cultural influence on the evolution of the concept of ANGER in English, Geveart has been able to record flluctuation in the use of metaphors in Old English that cannot be attributed to a changed physique of the individuals experiencing anger. Her discussion of the motivation behind the conceptual field of ANGER engages with the question of embodiment vs culture in the mental conceptualization which highlights how the study of Old English material can not only itself benefit from cognitive approaches but may ultimately feed back into theoretical debates on the primacy of universality or relativity in human cognition.

Antonina Harbus praises cognitive poetics for its combination of

> Stylistics, Structuralism, Discourse Analysis, and even techniques familiar in New Criticism, with a fine-grained analysis of the way information is coded in poetic language, all with a focus on analysing linguistic choices for evidence of cognitive structures and processes.[87]

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[86] Caroline Geveart (2005), 'The Anger is Heat Question: Detecting Cultural Influence on the Conceptualization of Anger through Diachronic Corpus Analysis', Nicole Delbacque, Johan Van der Auwera and Dirk Geeraerts (eds), *Perspectives on Variation: Sociolinguistic, Historical, Comparative*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 195-208.

[87] Harbus (2012), p. 7.

Particularly the notion of the interrelatedness of embodied cognition and the impact of the cultural context on mental processing serves to 'produce a rich and flexible set of approaches to literary understanding'.[88]

2.4 Methods, Structure and Limitations of this Investigation

The theory outlined above suggests a certain sequence of methodological steps in approaching the research questions laid out in the introduction. Dirk Geeraerts points out how '[c]ognitive Semantics has a natural affinity with historical-philological semantics: its emphasis on the flexibility of meaning, its broadly encyclopaedic conception of meaning and cognitive orientation as such constitute an implicit return to the interests of prestructuralist types of semantics.'[89] The combination of philological analysis, specifically concerning historical lexico-semantics with basic principles of cognitive linguistic theory allows for a detailed consideration of the topic on the level of word choice and phrasing. It has the advantage of enabling a search for patterns while, at the same time, encouraging the evaluation of inconsistencies, imprecisions and possible contradictions, which are seen as regular features of meaning making. This is, firstly, due to the physical/physiological aspect of disease (cf. 1.1 'disease' vs 'illness') not being denied – cognitive metaphors are grounded in experience and embodiment. Symptoms such as increased body temperature, forming buboes, and swollen lymph nodes can be felt. Still, not all aspects of disease have been observable throughout history (e.g. invisible germs). It can be expected that this will find expression in more or less universal metaphors in conceptualising disease. Secondly, cultural cognitive approaches highlight people's and

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[88] Harbus (2012), p. 9.
[89] Dirk Geeraerts (2010), *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, Oxford: OUP, pp. 229-30.

societies' ability to chose from and strategically make use of diverging conceptualisations of disease to some degree. Depending on given cultural contexts, existing belief systems and argumentative agendas, certain aspects of a conceptual field may be integrated while others might be neglected. The perspectives and frames from and through which the conceptual field of disease could be regarded and presented may impact the understanding of agency (compare, for instance 'a disease attacks a person' vs 'a person contracts a disease'). These different ways of understanding disease may in turn feature distinctly in wider culture specific contexts, such as, for instance, negotiations of sin, blame, and punishment.

The first step of this investigation will be to establish prevalent cognitive conceptualisations, especially conceptual metaphors, pertaining to disease by way of identifying patterns of linguistic expression. Obvious sources would be descriptions of disease, symptoms and treatments in source texts that have already been labelled as of 'medical' content. However, this investigation aims to initially survey the entirety of linguistic evidence in the vernacular Old English in an attempt to garner a broad impression of where and how disease was discussed. Evidence will be gathered in two steps, employing two very different methods.

1) Corpus investigation:

The first step is to run searches of the complete *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* for words denoting 'pestilence, infection' according to the *Historical*

Thesaurus of Old English.[90] This method has the advantages of potentially yielding a significant amount of data that can subsequently be manually filtered for patterns and analysed in context.

2) Textual analysis:

The detailed analysis of texts which appeared conspicuous in the corpus search will provide a first idea of the contextual and cultural relevance of the identified occurences of disease in the literature. Additionally, this approach, while not as empirically methodical, could lead to 'chance finds', that is the identification of metaphoric expressions. To give an example for illustration: The metaphor 'Black Death' for the plague would not be found in a corpus search of texts from the fourteenth century onwards unless it was already part of the lexicon/thesaurus providing the search terms. Through close reading it could be identified in relevant contexts and perhaps analysed with regard to underlying observations. Likewise, in an Anglo-Saxon context, some words and phrases might not generally denote 'disease' but could in certain phrases be translated as such.

Both of these approaches are necessary in order to find instances of metaphoric conceptualisations and to establish how they are employed in different contexts. The above methods are designed to identify mentions of disease in the corpus as well as discernible patterns of phrasing and categorization, which will be the goal of chapter 3. Based on the findings, chapters 4 to 6 will be arranged around such previously identified patterns of expressing disease and how they feature in

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[90] For conducting the searches, I have used the open access search tool AntConc, which, apart from being free, has the advantage that it can be run offline.
http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/.

a wide range of text types, including charms, hagiography, prognostics, homilies, and scientific scholarship.

Chapter 4 will argue for the significance of DISEASE IS AN ENTITY/ADVERSARY in retracing an image of DISEASE that may have been on the mind of the original audience of Wulfstan's sermons (see ch. 6), but which is most impressively illustrated in the medical charms and even the epic *Beowulf*. The source material is among the earliest within the corpus and exhibits interesting similarities with evidence from neighbouring Germanic, Norse cultures while at the same time linking in with Christian ideas and ideology.

A set of Anglo-Saxon saints' Lives will be the focus of chapter 5's evaluation of the hagiographic genre. Contrary to what might be intuited, the saints' Lives tend to under-emphasize epidemic disease. The pestilences are rarely featured explicitly and tend to take a backseat behind terms referring more vaguely to illness and infirmity, especially towards the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. Different versions and translations of the same saints' Lives, most of which composed by Bede or Ælfric, will be compared with regard to their depictions and interpretations of larger scale outbreaks as well as individual afflictions with infectious disease along the lines of genre traditions up to the Benedictine reform of the tenth century.

In chapter 6, I will follow the path of enquiry indicated in chapter 3.5, when turning first to medical prognostications and then to disease as part of a devastating bundle of miseries, including not just warfare but also severe weather and famine. These are particularly abundant in homiletic texts concerned with sin, punishment and repentance. This will be followed by

considerations of how athmospheric phenomena and pestilences are dealt with in scientific tractats on nature, a genre which extends back to classical antiquity and has prominent representatives in the works of Bede and Isidore of Seville.

This diverse base of primary source material comes with certain advantages as well as limitations concerning its quantity and quality, which have an impact on what can be hoped to achieve in this study. First of all, the extent corpus of Old English literature while being relatively large compared to the often very fragmented evidence we have for contemporary languages, is rather limited in terms of the standards of linguistic investigations. It is to be expected that the material might not yield sufficient evidence across all types of texts in order to draw conclusions based on quantifiable data. For that reason, this investigation is going to focus on the description and qualitative analysis of the material as it presents itself.

Another limiting factor is the uneven spread of evidence over the several centuries that make up the Anglo-Saxon period. This, as well as the frequently debatable datability of the sources restricts diachronic comparison. While the evidence can and will be placed in its historical context as much as possible, it can not be a main priority to trace developments through the Anglo-Saxon period without accepting major gaps and uncertainties.

These challenges specific to the study of the Early Middle Ages may also be one of the most prominent obstacles in bringing together linguistic theory and cultural history, as the methodology pertaining to the former cannot always be employed directly to collect information about the latter. Nevertheless, it has to

be the aspiration of interdisciplinarity to use complementary approaches in an endeavour to shed light on the available evidence from all possible angles.

A Note on Citation and Translation

Citations of primary texts follow the editions specified in the footnotes and bibliography. However, for the sake of consistency, I have chosen to generally not mark vowel length. Punctuation and capitalisation are presented as suggested by the respective edition. Where I have used published translations of primary texts, bibliographical references will be included in the footnotes. All other translations are my own.

3 Linguistic Evaluation of the Primary Sources

In the following, I will attempt to highlight some of the recurring patterns in the linguistic expression of disease in Old English texts that might be indicative of the underlying conceptualizations. In cognitive linguistic studies of contemporary languages and cultures, such expressions are commonly pulled from the researcher's introspection as a native (or at least highly competent) speaker of the language in question or they are gathered, in a more systematic fashion, from thesauri. For historic research, the former method is clearly not a valid option so that the use of thesauri and corpora is inevitable. Scholars of Old English may consider themselves lucky in that respect as several electronic resources for the diachronic study of the English language have been made available over the past two decades.

For a list of words meaning or associated with *disease* and *pestilence* I have consulted Bosworth-Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* as well as the *Thesaurus of Old English* provided by the University of Glasgow.[91] The Thesaurus, however, does not include information on the context in which the expressions occur apart from indicating the use of a word being restricted to only one type of text, say poetry, or it being a *hapax legomenon*. The next step was, therefore, to search the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (*DOEC*) for the terms identified previously. The corpus comprises all extant material written in Old English (with the exception of some copies of texts that survived in more than one manuscript), including poetry, prose, glosses, glossaries and inscriptions in the Latin and runic alphabets.

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[91] Online editions: http://oldenglishthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/menutoe.html; and http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/.

To illustrate the potential of the material collected in this fashion I have selected two of the most frequent lexical items pertaining to the semantic field of pestilential disease, the nouns *cwealm* and *wol*. In the tradition of the earliest, philological studies of disease in Anglo-Saxon England, I am going to gradually work my way from the narrowest focus - that of looking at the meaning and etymology of the basic lexemes and the compounds derived from them - towards an increasingly broad view of the context in which these words are used. Specifically, the immediate context in the form of collocated verbs, and parallel constructions with other nouns, for example in accumulative constructions, will be at this section's centre of attention and will serve as keys to the Anglo-Saxons' conceptualization of epidemic disease. Considerations of the meaning of disease within the wider scope of a single text, its genre (however debatable the notion of 'genre' is in an historical context) as well as the tradition and source history behind either will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

3.1 Semantics and Etymology

The first of the two words to be examined in this chapter, *cwealm*, already comes with a range of meanings according to Bosworth-Toller's dictionary.[92] The English translations given are 'death, destruction, a violent death, slaughter, murder, torment, plague, pestilence, contagion'. For Latin texts it may be used to gloss *mors, pernicies, nex, caedes, homicidium, cruciatus, lues, pestis, pestilentia, contagium*. While all the meanings are clearly negative, they are also notably unspecific. The most general are probably 'destruction' and 'death'

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[92] The online version of the *Dictionary of Old English* has been consulted as far as it was available at the time of submission. Since a number of relevant entries (e.g. for *wol*) are still missing, I am using Bosworth and Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* as primary reference.

although it is apparent that *cwealm* does not just refer to any kind of but particularly unpleasant deaths. 'Slaughter, murder' indicate death by violent attack. The connotation of 'a hostile force' that brings death and 'destruction' may very likely cling to the word *cwealm* even when used to signify 'plague' or 'pestilence'. The *OED*, accordingly, lists three uses for the, now obsolete, derivative form '†qualm, n.1'.[93]

1. Death, esp. of a violent nature.

2. General or widespread death or mortality; pestilence plague.

3. In extended use: calamity, disaster.

Cognate words in other historic languages support the idea that the meaning of the etymon was 'violent death, murder' and that the specific meaning connected to the semantic field of disease was a later development. Compare, for example, Old Saxon *qualm* referring to 'death (especially of a violent nature), murder' and Old High German *qualm/quhalm* ('torment, torture, (rare) downfall, perishing').

Interestingly, some modern European languages still have similar looking and sounding words, for instance German *Qualm* meaning 'noxious vapour or miasma' or, in more contemporary use, 'dense smoke'. In the following, I would like to take this into consideration as a potential sense, or rather connotation, of *cwealm*. We find instances of words related to German *Qualm* and describing the negative quality of air in Danish *kvalm*, †*qvalm* (now regional) 'dense irritating smoke or vapour, stuffy unhealthy air' (18th cent.), and (now rare) *kvalme* 'stuffy unhealthy air' (18th cent.) as well as in Swedish *kvalm* , †*qvalm*

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[93] *OED*, 'qualm, n.1'.

'steam, vapour, miasma, dense smoke' (1626; also fig.; now obsolete), (now usually) stuffy unhealthy air (late 17th cent.) and Dutch *kwalm*.

It has been shown, however, that despite possible semantic entanglement the two sets of words can probably be traced back to two separate etymons.[94] In Pokorny's etymological dictionary, *gʷel-* and *gʷel-, gʷelə-, gʷlē-* constitute two separate entries. The second sense of the former is given as 'pain, death', '(stechender) Schmerz, Qual, Tod'. This etymon has developed into Old Norse *kvǫl* 'Pein, Qual', Old Saxon *quāla* 'Qual, Marter' and *qualm* 'Tod, Verheerung', and Old High German *qualā* 'gewaltsamer Tod' besides the Old English *cwealm*, *cwield* 'Tod' and *cwalu* 'Tötung, gewaltsamer Mord' (discussed in 5.3.2 as part of Wulfstan's phrase stalu ⁊ cwalu). Note also Pokorny's inclusion of Swedish *kvalm* despite its less severe meaning 'plötzliches Unwohlsein, Übelkeit' ('sudden feeling of discomfort, nausea'). Following Pokorny, Old High German verb *quellan* (*quall*) 'hervorquellen, schwellen', like Old English *(ge)collen* 'geschwollen', Old High German *quella* (see German *Quelle* 'well, spring') and Middle Lower German *qualm* ('*hervorquellendes' =) 'Qualm, Dampf, Rauch', have developed from the distinct etymon *gʷel-, gʷelə-, gʷlē-*.[95]

For the English language, the *OED* lists several words of the form <qualm>. 'Qualm, n.3' ('a pang of sickening fear, a scruple of conscience, a sudden fit of faintness or sickness', among senses) corresponds with the meaning of the second etymon above. The exact relationship with earlier 'qualm, n.1' is

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[94] For a case of conflation of the two etymons see 'cwalm' in Walter Skeat (1888), *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
[95] See 'gʷel-1' and 'gʷel-2, gʷelə-, gʷlē-' in Julius Pokorny (1959-1969), *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern: A. Francke.

described as 'unclear' in spite of some instances of 'qualm, n.3' in sixteenth/seventeenth-century use which could be interpreted in the sense 'pain', 'pang'. This might be viewed as a link to 'qualm, n.1', although 'evidence for a direct connection of the two words is lacking, and on chronological grounds it is unlikely that there is continuity between the two words.' [96]

Nevertheless, it will prove informative to quickly consider the etymology of the German cognates a bit more closely. The *OED* suggests 'qualm, n.3' to be a borrowing from Middle Low German *qualm* 'fog, vapour, smoke, stirred-up dust' which is itself of uncertain and disputed origin'. As demonstrated by Pokorny, it could be a deverbal formation from *quellen* which is formally and semantically plausible. However, a second theory suggests that both the Middle Low German and the German words denoting 'smoke' and similar senses could have developed from Middle Low German *dwalm* and Middle High German *twalm* respectively via a change of the Anlaut *tw* to *qu*. This follows Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's dictionary of the German language where *qualm* as in Old English *cwealm* is said to have either become obsolete or to have merged with the younger form *qualm* < *twalm* ('nhd. erloschen oder im folgenden qualm (1, a) aufgegangen'). From the modern period onwards, *Qualm* could mean 'vapor', '(betäubender) dampf, dunst, rauch' or (in *qualm*, sense 1, a)) *sopor* 'betäubung, ohnmacht, halbbewuszter oder bewusztloser zustand (schlaf, traum).[97] Such a kind of unconsciousness (potentially due to dazing, benumbing vapours), if regarded, perhaps, as a death-like state, might have been a factor in the

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[96] *OED*, 'qualm, n.3'.
[97] *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* (1854-1961), 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden, Quellenverzeichnis 1971, Leipzig, online. http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=DWB.

integration of two etymologically distinct forms <qualm>. Remember Pokorny Swedish *kvalm* 'plötzliches Unwohlsein, Übelkeit' 'sudden feeling of discomfort, nausea' which might have seen a similar development instead of being a direct cognate of 'gʷel-1'. In any case, it is not unthinkable that a previous experiential or cognitive connection might have facilitated the eventual merger of two etymons that share a resemblence but not as obviously a semantic field. However tentative the semantic connection between death, disease and substances that are, very generally speaking, 'in the air' might be from an etymological viewpoint, the contextual correlations are of central interest in a study of the conceptualization of disease (think of the widely spread idea of miasma which held currency until well into the nineteenth century). In this respect, the considerations brought up in the above paragraphs will be built upon towards the end of this chapter and further below in section 6.3, which presents sources dealing with the place of disease as an atmospheric phenomenon from late Antiquity to the time of Bede.

In addition to the headword *cwealm*, a collection of Old English disease terms, as analysed by Johan Geldner,[98] abounds in compound words formed with a generic word meaning 'disease, illness, pain' etc. and a specifier that serves to denote a particular disease pattern. Perhaps most frequently, the latter are words for body parts (e.g. *fot-adl*, 'foot-illness') which suggests a naming principle based on observation of the afflicted individuals' physical appearance. Another well discussed example is *lencten-adl* ('spring-illness') highlighting the time frame in which the disease was most virulent. This seems to correspond with modern language use, especially in non-expert discourse, where people might

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[98] Cf. Geldner (1906); described above (chapter 1.1).

speak of 'camp fever', 'kissing disease' or German *Legionärskrankheit*, focusing on the spatial location of an outbreak, the mode by which the disease is commonly transmitted (at least according to popular knowledge) and a group of people the disease is associated with, respectively.

Returning to *cwealm* then, one might expect to find compounds which specify circumstances of 'death' or 'murder' but also, potentially, kinds of pestilences. In Bosworth-Toller's dictionary we find, amongst others, *broðor-cwealm* ('fratricide'), highlighting the victim of violence, *beadu-cwealm* ('battle-/ war-death'), specifying the circumstances under which a killing occurs and *gar-cwealm* ('spearslaughter') identifying the murder weapon. Other specifiers, like *bealo-* ('woe-, harm-, evil-, mischief-'), give an indication of the (notably malicious) mindset of the perpetrator while *feorh-cwealm* ('death, slaughter'), which at first glance strikes us as redundant, appears to stress the result of the violence, i.e. death, especially when compared to *feorh-adl* 'mortal disease, fatal sickness, the last illness'). Compounds that are more unambiguously derived from *cwealm* as referring to 'pestilence' include *fær-cwealm* ('a sudden pestilence') and *man-cwealm* ('death of men, pestilence affecting men') in constrast to *orf-cwealm* ('pestilence among cattle, murrain'), an opposition encountered in the textual examples derived from the *DOEC*.

In summary, the mass of compounds with *-cwealm* seems to indicate an association with battle scenarios and fatal violence, ideas which may very well transfer onto the conception of *cwealm* when used for speaking about diseases that seem to attack rather unexpectedly and indiscriminately.

With that in mind, I am now turning to *wol*, another word for pestilence listed in the *Thesaurus of Old English*. The first thing to notice is that the semantics of *wol* seem to be a lot narrower than those of its partial synonym *cwealm*. *Wol* is translated as 'pest, pestilence, plague, murrain' and is used, according to Bosworth-Toller, 'in a physical sense in reference to men or animals' but also in 'figurative' (or metaphorical) sense referring to people or abstract ideas (e.g. heresy). Some of the examples listed are going to be discussed in more detail later. While there is a lack of compound nouns with *wol* as an element, the derived adjective *wolberend* merits discussion. The meaning is given as 'pestiferous, pestilential, pernicious' in both a physical and figurative sense. However, the literal translation, 'pestilence-bearing', seems to be a much more visual reflection of the conceptual image that might underlie the linguistic expression. If we take that to be the case, the obvious question would be: Who or what is the agent that 'bears' pestilence?

A search for <wolberend*> in the *DOEC* yields the following examples:[99] In the *Life of Saint Guthlac,* the saint is said to have withstood the *wolberendan geþohtum* ('thoughts') (LS 10 (Guth), 4.74). This example may illustrate a more figurative use of the word than in the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great* where a vessel containing *se wolberenda drync* is served after poison had been mixed with wine (GD 2 (C), 3.104.26 and 3.104.30). Here the *wol* is clearly connected with the physical presence of a poisonous substance.

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[99] For all my searches in the *DOEC*, the asterisk is used as a wild card to stand in for the possible inflectional endings depending on case and number of the noun. Quotations from the primary sources will be presented with their *Dictionary of Old English* short title as well as the line number according to the edition used by the compilers of the corpus. The translations from Old English are my own.

Perhaps the most telling examples, however, are those, that are neither clearly literal nor figurative. The tentative link of 'pestilence' with 'vapour, smoke' which I have touched upon in the discussion of *cwealm* appears to be reinforced when the sources inform us of the *wolberendan stence* ('stench') and *wolbeorendan lyfte* ('air') that brings about the death of many men (Alex, 21.1). As a final example, in the *Liber Psalmorum*, it is God himself who sends fire, extreme heat of the sun and *wolberende windas* over the sinful (PPs (prose), 10.7).

3.2 When is Disease Epidemic?

Before I continue with a more detailed discussion of the contexts in which pestilence, that is epidemic disease, occurs in the *DOEC*, I want to outline, albeit briefly, what makes an epidemic in the Anglo-Saxon context. As expounded in more detail in the introduction, the word 'epidemic', as a noun as well as an adjective, is probably understood by most speakers of modern English as a disease that a) affects a large number of people, not just a few individuals, b) spreads across a considerable geographic area, and c) spreads with significant speed, that is over and observable stretch of time (cf. 1.2). In Old English, however, the term 'epidemic' does not exist as such. Is there any evidence then, that *cwealm* and *wol* are employed for occurrences of disease which might be called epidemic in the common and most basic sense?

The first criterion is met by Ælfric's description of a *cwealm* that raged so wildly *þæt hundeahtatig manna,* '180 men', *on ðære anre tide feallende of life gewiton* (ÆCHom II, 9, 77.156) and the *moncwealm* that *wæs on Romanum full II gear* seems to have affected *ealle menn gelice* (Or 3, 3.56.27). These two examples

indicate that *cwealm* is used to denote diseases of noteworthy morbidity and/or mortality which do not discriminate but apparently affect all individuals alike.

When it comes to the question of geographic extension, one of the most remarkable narratives is to be found in the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* which tells the reader of pestilence and illnesses which attacked first the southern parts of Britain as well as Northhumbria before finally reaching Ireland (*wool 7 aðol forhergiende 7 forneomende ærest þa suðdælas Breotone, 7 swylce eac Norðanhymbra [...] Hibernia scotta ealond gelice wæle sloh 7 cwealmde.* Bede 3, 19.240.23 and 19.240.30). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, accordingly, record *micel mancwealm on Brytene igland* in the year 664 (ChronE (Plummer), 664.1). From the sources cited, it appears that people in Anglo-Saxon times were indeed aware of the proportions of particular outbreaks of disease which we might label as epidemics insofar as they ascribed the death of many people in different locations to the same pestilence.

3.3 Metaphoric Conceptualisation of Disease

How did the people make sense of their experiences of these pestilences? From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, part of the answer might be encoded in the metaphors they use when speaking of disease. I will show in the following that some of the most basic yet pervasive metaphors pertaining to the concept of epidemic disease in Old English are entity metaphors. The metaphors I will be discussing below are DISEASE IS AN OBJECT, a concept we have, in fact, already encountered in expressions like 'pestilence-bearing winds', and DISEASE IS AN AGENT or, more specifically, AN ADVERSARY.

In Wulfstan's eleventh century sermon *Sunnudæges Spell*, *cwealm* is one of the punishments God is threatening to send over those who refuse to put down their work on Sunday: *ic sende hæðen folc ofer eow, and þa eow benimað eowres eðles and eowres lifes; and ic sende on eowrum husum cwealm and hungor and untimnesse and fyr, þæt forbærnð ealle eowre welan* ('I send heathens over you who shall take your possessions and your lives; and I send on your houses pestilence and hunger and misfortune and fire that shall burn all your riches' (HomU 35.1 (Nap 43), 67). *Cwealm* (as well as hunger and misfortune) here is conceptualised as a thing or force under God's command that may be 'sent' to cause harm. It is paralleled with destructive physical entities such as fire and heathens. While the notion of heathens as instruments of God's will might strike the modern reader as odd, it was not uncommon in Early Medieval societies.[100] In light of Wulfstan's general concern with the decline of good Christian practice in England and the historical context of the Viking Age, which are both core themes in his most famous work *Sermo Lupi,* the co-occurrence of disease and heathens as expressions of divine punishment appears to be a tactically well motivated choice. Other instances of disease being sent at will may be found several times in Wulfstan's texts such as the *Sermo ad populum Dominicis diebus* which explicitly makes the distinction between *mancwealm* and *orfcwealm*, both of which may be employed to penalize contempt of God's commands (*ic asende ofer eow mancwealm and orfcwealm […] for minra beboda forsewennysse* (HomU 46 (Nap 57), 145). In other cases, pestilence is

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[100] Cf. Simon Coupland (1991), 'The rod of God's wrath or the people of God's wrath? The Carolingians' theology of the Viking invasions', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42, pp. 535-54.

conceptualized as an agent of its own volition as the following examples illustrate.

In *De falsis diis*, one of Ælfric's homilies, *com se cwealm sona and; mid færlicum deaðe þa philistheos acwealde* ('soon came the pestilence and killed the Philistines with sudden death', ÆHom 22, 245). The same idea of the pestilence physically moving around in space like some sort of itinerant entity is expressed in the poem 'Maxims I': *Meotud ana wat hwær se cwealm cymeþ, þe heonan of cyþþe gewiteþ* ('God alone knows where the pestilence goes that leaves here from our land' (Max I, 29)). The formula *meotud* (or *god*) *ana wat* which may be taken as an expression of uncertainty is also used, for instance, in 'The Battle of Maldon' as Byrhtnoð remarks: *god ana wat hwa þære wælstowe wealdan mote* ('God alone knows who will control the battlefield' (Mald, 91)). Only mentioned as a sidenote here, this may be another potentially interesting parallel in the discourses of disease and war and as such merits further research.

In the examples above, nouns denoting pestilence occur in close proximity with verbs of motion, *sendan* and *cuman.* In the former case, the disease is pictured as a passive entity controlled by another, i.e. God, whereas the latter quotations point towards a conceptualization of pestilence as an agent. In the following, I am therefore going to have a closer look at verbal collocations. These will provide further evidence for disease being conceptualized as an enemy, specifically in the context of battle and warfare.

Among the quotations rendered by my searches of the *DOEC* for <wol*> and <cwealm*> we find a *cwylde, þe nu for þrym gærum þas ylcan burh forhergode mid swyþlicum wole 7 cwealme* ('pestilence that for three years now has been

devastating the same town with severe pestilence and death', GDPref and 4 (C), 27.298.21). The verb *for-hergian* may be translated as 'to lay waste, destroy, ravage, devastate, plunder', glossing Latin *vastare, devastare, depopulare*. Judging by a cursory selection of examples found in Bosworth-Tollers *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, it seems to be commonly used in contexts dealing with raiding armies as in *Ceadwala eft forhergode Cent* ('Ceadwalla again ravaged Kent', ChronA (Plummer), 687.1). In what appears to be a similar line of thinking, the verb *onsigan,* meaning 'to come down on' when said of forces approaching to attack, is used to describe *ðam onsigendum cwealme* by Ælfric (ÆCHom II, 9, 75.109).

The verb *awedde* 'go mad, to rage' found in the aforementioned example *to ðam swiðe awedde se foresæda cwealm. þæt hundeahtatig manna on ðære anre tide feallende of life gewiton* (ÆCHom II, 9, 77.156) describes destructive action that is not guided by reason but is uncontrolled as well as uncontrollable. In the end it was only God's mercy that restrained *þone reðan cwealm* ('savage, wild, severe, cruel' 77.161). And if it is not God himself, one may still ask a saint that *he his adl eallunge afligde* ('put to flight his illness entirely', ÆCHom II, 10, 83.87), which, again, suggests the metaphor DISEASE IS AN ADVERSARY. Pestilence is personified as an enemy that moves in space and may be 'put to flight' or 'driven away' just as he is capable of sudden attacks after coming into the land from remote places.

3.4 Disease as Metaphor

While disease is the target concept in the above examples, one of the particularly interesting and unusual aspects of the concept of disease, especially epidemic

disease, is that it may also serve as the source in metaphoric expressions of other concepts. As Susan Sontag so insistently criticized, such metaphors are frequently used as a rhetorical tool. It appears that the Anglo-Saxons are no exception in that respect as two examples from the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* suggest.

Ðæt eft spryttendum þam twigum ðæs Pelagianiscan woles ('when the branches of the Pelagian pestilence sprouted again', Bede 1, 1.8.27) after *Germanus se biscop[...] to Breotene on scype cumende, ærest þæs sæs 7 æfter þam ðara Pelagianiscan hreohnysse mid godcunde mægene gestilde* ('Germanus the bishop, [...] coming to Britain by ship, first calmed the sea's and thereafter the Pelagian tempest with divine power/virtue', 1.8.15). In this example from the first book of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Pelagianism, a religious doctrine opposed to the canonical views of the Church concerning the effects of original sin on humanity, is expressed in terms of an epidemic as well as a living organism, specifically a tree of some variety In the same context it is also conceptualised as a storm paralleled by the rough weather that the bishop had to overcome at sea.

Another instance of the AN ADVERSE FORCE IS A DISEASE metaphor can be found in the fifth book of the same work, when we are told of a year that saw 'two stars around the sun, that are called comets in the books' (*æteowdon twegen steorran ymb þa sunnan utan, þa syndon on bocum cometa nemde,* Bede 5, 21.476.6; cf. 21.476.10) which is followed by *se hefigesta wol Sarcina þeode Gallia rice mid sarlice wæle ond earmlice fornaman 7 forhergodon;* (21.476.16). Here the *wol*

which is 'ravaging' (note the use of the previously discussed verb *forhergian*) the realm auf Gaul are the Saracens.

These two instances of DISEASE as the source domain of metaphorical conceptualization might be exceptions in the corpus of Old English literature as I have not yet come across further examples. The text of the *Ecclesiastical History* is after all a translation from an original written in Latin, albeit by an inhabitant of Anglo-Saxon England. It is possible that this use of metaphor reflects some Latin tradition rather than Anglo-Saxon conceptualizations. The issue of DISEASE functioning as the source instead of the target domain will be picked up again at a later point in this study insfar as potential examples come to attention.

3.5 Parallels and Co-Occurrences with Other Concepts

In the following section I am going to present a number of examples that illustrate how disease is frequently mentioned in context of other conceptual domains and might have been categorized in relation to them. The Old English literary corpus holds a remarkable number of reports on epidemics co-occurring with natural phenomena, such as comets in the quotation discussed above, as well as remarkable and unwelcome weather conditions. They seem to be interpreted as tokens foreshadowing imminent attacks by disease as well as enemy forces.

Apart from comets, cosmological phenomena include eclipses of the sun, *eclipsis solis, þæt is sunnan asprungennis* (Bede 3, 19.240.1) followed by attacks of a variety of pestilences and diseases (*semninga wool ⁊ aðol forhergiende*, 19.240.23) In one of *Aelfric's Catholic Homilies,* the 'Second Sunday in Advent'

the tokens are *on sunnan and on monan. and on steorrum* (ÆCHom 1, 40, 608.20) and there be *micele eorðstyrunga [...] and cwealm and hunger* (608.16).

De falsis diis describes the story of Adam who lived in Paradise *orsorh on blisse, and him nan gesceaft sceððan ne mihte, þa hwile þe he geheold þæt heofonlice bebod* ('prosperous and joyfully, and whom no creature could harm as long as he obeyed the divine command', ÆHom 22, 33). Neither fire could injure him nor water could drown the man (*Him ne derode nan fyr, þeah þe he mid fotum on stope, ne nan wæter ne mihte þone mannan adrencan, þeah þe he on yðum urne færlice*, 36). The same applies to wild animals (*wildeor*) and serpents (*wurmcynn*, 39). Not even *hungor ne þurst, ne hefigtyme cyle, ne nan swiðlic hæte, ne seocnyss ne mihton adam geswencan on þam earde, þa hwile þe he þæt lytle bebod mid geleafan geheold* ('hunger, thirst, extreme heat and sickness could not trouble Adam on earth as long as he adheres to that simple rule', 41). Sickness here is paralleled and grouped together with a range of dangers of nature including the elements, weather conditions and vicious animals. In his *Saints Lives*, Ælfrics adds to the affliction with *cwealm* and *hunger* the coming of a *hæðen here*, 'a heathen army' (ÆLS (PrMoses), 152).

In *Larspell*, Wulfstan lists raidings, sudden pestilences, bad weather, the failure of crops as things that may come over the people unexpectedly *hwæt færlices on þeode becymð beon hit hereræsas, beon hit færcwealmas, beon hit miswyderu oððon unwæstmas* (HomU 40 (Nap 50), 156). In the text 'Be mistlican gelimpan' he explains that if misfortune comes over the people in the form of *here oððon hunger, bryne oððon blodgyte, unwæstm oððon unweder, orfcwealm oþðon mancwealm þurh færlice uncoða, þonne sece man þa bote ana to gode sylfum.* ('armies or hunger, fire or running of blood, failure of crops or bad weather,

death of cattle or of men by sudden pestilence, then one shall appeal to God directly for assistance', HomU 29.2 (Nap 35), 2).

In Ælfric's *De duodecim abusiuis* we find once more the parallel mention of disease with warfare in the form of *heregunge* ('invasion, plundering'), with *hungre*, with *ungewyderum* and with *wildeorum* (ÆAbusMor, 244-246).

The evidence presented so far hints strongly at the concept of disease being associated with the conceptualization and maybe the perception and experience of other concepts of the physical environment. Pestilence is repeatedly grouped together with natural phenomena of a destructive or harmful kind, enemy forces and warfare, wild animals and remarkable cosmological events. The former two parallels have already emerged as themes probably linked with pestilence in the semantic and etymological considerations at the beginning of the analysis of disease metaphors (cf. 4.1). This suggests that some or all of these concepts, at least in certain contexts, belong in the same conceptual categories.

One last example of the connection with weather and climate shall give an impression of some of the concepts associated specifically with the etiology of disease, i.e. how it comes into existence and is transmitted in space.

> gewearð se micla moncwealm on þæm londe: nales, swa hit gewuna is, of untidlican gewideran, þæt is, of wætum sumerum, ⁊ of drygum wintrum, ⁊ of reðre lenctenhæte, ⁊ mid ungemætre hærfestwætan ⁊ æfterhæþan; ac an wind com of Calabria wealde, ⁊ se wol mid þæm winde.

> 'the great pestilence in the land became - not how it is usual - of unseasonable weathers, that is of wet summers, and dry winters, and sudden heat in the spring and with excessive wetness in the fall and drought after, but a wind came from the forests of Calabria and the pestilence with the wind' (Or 3, 3.56.20).

This quotation from the *Old English Orosius* is a translation from Latin that may serve to illustrate the influence certain traditions of thinking and contemporary medical theories may have had on the Anglo-Saxon conceptualization of disease. It appears, at first glance, as if there were causes of disease that were conceived of as more usual than others. The concern with weather conditions and the normal, balanced course of the seasons is central to the Galenic framework of the theory of the four humours. This theory is characterized by an analogical way of thinking, where widely divergent phenomena were fitted into the fourfold schema of the medical theory.[101] This line of enquiry, among others, will be at the center of attention in subsequent chapters of this study.

In the above chapter, I have presented selected mentions of disease found in the extant corpus of Old English texts. Many of these examples have been shown to be expressions rooted in basic and at the same time rather universal cognitive conceptualizations such as the DISEASE IS AN ENTITY/ADVERSARY metaphor. While these cognitive metaphors may not be entirely universal, i.e. to be found in every language community past and present, they are far from being restricted to an Anglo-Saxon context. Speakers of modern English, for instance, still 'fight disease', to give one of the most obvious and frequent expressions of such an underlying conceptualisation. What does that say about the understanding of disease in Anglo-Saxon England then? The results of the preliminary corpus analysis may be interpreted to stress similarity more than they explain peculiarities. On the one hand, that of the medievalist, this is a noteworthy claim as it counterbalances the popular belief that medieval people saw the world in a

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[101] Cf. Dirk Geeraerts and Stefan Grondelaers (2009), 'Looking Back at Anger. Cultural Traditions and Metaphorical Patterns', Dirk Geeraerts (ed.) *Words and Other Wonders: Papers on Lexical and Semantic Topic,* Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p. 233.

way entirely removed from our present day insight and understanding. On closer inspection, some of the linguistic expressions used in describing disease as well as the reflected cognitive images appear quite familiar. On the other hand and for good reason, the tendency to trace every expression back to basics and universals has been a point of criticism when it comes to the study of metaphor in cognitive linguistics. The danger lies in losing the particular features of a culture and language one has set out to study in a quest for the universal mechanisms working in the background. A more culturally relativist approach therefore cannot stop at highlighting similarity but has to take the next step in moving from universal basics to specific details. In the course of the following chapters I intend to revisit, elaborate and interpret these details in the descriptions of disease in their linguistic and literary context.

4 Monsters and Disease

In this chapter I am going to explore links and parallels between DISEASE IS AN ADVERSARY and other adversaries described in Old English literature. The preliminary results gathered in the study of the *DOEC* in chapter 3 above suggest a conceptualisation of disease which draws on battle imagery in which disease behaves and is acted towards much like a physical entity. As such, disease is chiefly characterised by its destructive quality and even more so its spatial mobility (cf. 'Maxims I': *Meotud ana wat hwær se cwealm cymeþ, þe heonan of cyþþe gewiteþ* ('God alone knows where the pestilence goes that leaves here from our land' (Max 1, 29)).

In the following, I will first have a closer look at the verbs collocated with words meaning 'disease, pestilence' that were the focus of the first, corpus-based part of this study. The use of these verbs, specifically *forhergian* ('to lay waste, destroy, ravage, devastate, plunder') and *afligan* ('to put to flight, drive out'), in other contexts may give an indication of how disease could be interpreted amongst a range of destructive forces that would have been dealt with in a similar fashion.

On the basis of these considerations, I will then analyse metaphoric expressions for concepts of DISEASE in a selection of Old English medical charms, primarily the 'Nine Herbs Charm' followed by a discussion of parallels in the conceptualisation of disease and the description of Grendel in *Beowulf*. The 'monster' as a personification of DISEASE can be detected and has been argued for not just in the context of Anglo-Saxon but also Norse culture of the early Middle Ages. Concluding this chapter, I will evaluate the evidence for diseases being understood, at least partly, as 'monstrous' entities.

Definition: 'Monsters'

To provide an all-encompassing definition of the term *monster* or *monstrous* could be the subject of an entire thesis in its own right. Indeed, an active field of scholarship has been dealing with the matter for a few dedaces. One of the most prominent names is Jeffrey Jerome Cohen who, as the editor of the influential volume *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ascribes great significance to humanity's monsters and proposes the reading of cultures from the monsters they engender. In the same publication, Ruth Waterhouse suggests that out of the variety of possibilities encoded in the semantic field of 'monster' characteristics such as deformity (physical and /or moral, large size, and non-natural- or non-human-ness are among the most salient. [102] Even vague definitions usually include two apparently central characteristics of a 'monster': It is a) a living entity which b) is in some way extraordinary and deviates from set norms - more often than not in an undesirable way.

For the purpose of my argument, rather than having one distinct image in mind, I am using 'monsters' as a hypernym for non-human entities in opposition to human enemy forces such as invading armies. 'Monsters' may include everything referred to as devils, demons, elves or giants, to name a few prominent examples which frequently crop up in the literature on medieval

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[102] The *OED*'s entry 'monster, n.' lists multiple senses of the word. Roughly, the range of meanings encompasses everything from a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance to the later, more general description of any imaginary (or corporeal) creature that is often extraordinarily large, ugly, and frightening. The term 'monster' is also applied to a person of repulsively unnatural character or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman as well as individuals (animals or things) who is merely regarded as being ugly or deformed. The original sense of the loan, 'something extraordinary or unnatural; an amazing event or occurrence; a prodigy, a marvel' has, however, become obsolete in the English language around 1710.

magic and medicine. Nevertheless, these entities are not *a priori* to be characterised as non-natural or supernatural, as ideas of what is natural and in pariculary the category of the supernatural in the Middle Ages are a matter of wide-ranging scholarly debate.[103]

The term 'monsters' might be regarded a somewhat anachronistic label with respect to the fact that as a thirteenth-century borrowing, originally from Latin, via French, into English. The Latin word *monstrum*, derived from the root *monere* ('to warn') points to the monster's ominous quality. This feature has already been pointed out by Cohen[104] and has been picked up by other scholars since. Stephen Asma, in a discussion of literal and symbolic monsters reads them from an etymological perspective as 'a display of God's wrath, a portent of the future, a symbol of moral virtue or vice, or an accident of nature'.[105] At the same time, he stresses the important role of metaphor, including metaphoric monsters, in shaping our thoughts and experiences, citing Lakoff and Johnson's CMT.

The concept of portents in relation to disease will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.3. The warning quality might be a similarity which facilitates the mapping of structures of the monster domain onto that of disease. With that in mind, instances of disease being discussed in terms of hostile entities are going to be set out at the heart of the present chapter.

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[103] Cf. C. S. Watkins (2007), *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*, Cambridge: CUP.
[104] J.J. Cohen (1996), p. 4.
[105] Stephen T. Asma (2009), *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*, Oxford: OUP, p.23.

4.1 Verbs: forhergian *and* afligan

To start off the discussion, I will return to the verbs *forhergian* and *afligan* as points of entrance to understanding how disease might be thought to affect a population on the one hand and how it would have been reacted to on the other.

We have already encountered a *cwylde, þe nu for þrym gærum þas ylcan burh forhergode mid swyþlicum wole 7 cwealme* ('pestilence that for three years now has been devastating the same town with severe disease and death', GDPref and 4 (C), 27.298.21). In this example, disease can be interpreted as not just the subject but also an instrument corresponding with the verb *forhergian*. Also note that it is a town, a place, which is described as the victim of the disease. This might be an instance of metaphor or metonymy in which the place stands for the community of inhabitants. It also sets up a possible parallel to the destruction caused by invaders and armies during wartime. I have found one example where hail, a weather phenomenon, is presented as the instrument of destruction in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (*forhergod mid onhreosendum hægle*, (GD 1 (C), 9.57.4)). The agent in this case is unclear. Apart from that, the chronicles frequently feature the word *forhergian* in connection with human agents as already witnessed in *Ceadwala eft forhergode Cent* ('Ceadwalla again ravaged Kent', Chron A (Plummer), 687.1). The following examples I have picked from the corpus should suffice to illustrate the pattern of a person or group of people as agents affecting a specified place or area.

> *On þam ylcan geare wæs Suðhamtun forhergod fram scipherige*
> 'Southhampton was ravaged by a naval army the same year'
> (ChronC (Rositzke), 980.1)

> *Þoreð Gunneres sunu, forhergode Westmoringa land.* 'Thored, Gunner's son, devastated Westmoreland.' (ChronD (Classen-Harm), 966.1)

> *Her on þissum geare se cyning ferde into Cumberlande and swiðe neah eall forhergode* 'This year the king marched into Cumberland and destroyed [it] almost entirely' (ChronD (Classen-Harm), 1000.1)[106]

The last example especially conveys a sense of mobility of the intruding force that comes into a place from the outside. The uses of the verb *forhergian* in the context of invasion again supports the idea that pestilential disease specifically was viewed in terms of an instrument in some instances but also as an entity that moves across space. The verb *afligan,* encountered above in *he his adl eallunge afligde* ('put to flight his illness entirely', ÆCHom II, 10, 83.87), presents a method of dealing with disease that appears to be in keeping with such a conceptualisation. Here, disease as an entity is not fought, or killed but removed, i.e. forced to go elsewhere. Where that is, again, is not certain. As with *forhergian*, I would now like to discuss a number of other instances of the verb *afligan* in the corpus of Old English that may point toward further lines of enquiry into the conceptualisation of disease. The primary focus in the analysis of the following examples is on the grammatical *patiens*, that which is put to flight and may therefore be seen as analogous to disease. Who is able to act as the agent in these constructions will also be taken into consideration as it may reflect upon the main question of 'What is disease?' via others like 'How is it cured?' and 'Who acts as the healer?'

In the *Life of Saint Nicholas* it is said that *he afligde ut of his biscoprice ealle þa hæþena godes and ealle þa drymen and þa wiccen* 'He drove all the heathens of God and all the sorcerers and the witches out of his diocese' (LS 29 (Nicholas),

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[106] Note that short titles and Cameron numbers given for these extracts do not match the bibliography on the *Dictionary of Old English* website, but are taken from the corpus files directly.

l.239). The stress here seems to be on the opposition of pagan elements within the Christian community of the *biscoprice*. Indeed, the term *afligan* features frequently in homiletic literature. A 'fiendish dragon' is put to flight in Ælfric's Homilies (*hi swa afligdon þone feondlican dracan* (ÆHom 11, 160)), an action perhaps mirrored in medical writing like the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* where a remedy that *afligeþ ða nædran* is put forward (Med1.1 (deVriend), 3.19). The *dracan* and the *nædran* could both be translated and interpreted as 'a serpent'. In a medical sense, a serpent might stand for poisons that are to be extracted from the patient's body. Another possibility is to take both expressions as referents to 'the serpent', that is, the Devil. The connection between healing and driving out devils and spirits may be observed in the *Catholic Homilies*.

> *ðises halgan weres. hu of he eaðelice. Adlige gehælde. And þa sweartan gastas. Symle afligde.* 'of this holy man who often easily healed ill people and ever drove out the dark spirits.' (ÆCHom II, 10, l. 90.304)

> *þæt we untrume gehælon and blinde onlihton hreoflige geclænsian. Deoflu afligan. Deade aræran.* 'that we heal the unwell and give sight to the blind, purify the leprous, drive out devils, raise the dead.' (ÆCHom I, 31, ll. 464.34)

> *wyrcende miccle wundra. onlihtende ða blindan. and deafum hlyst forgeafon. reoflige geclænsodon. and deoflu fram wittseocum mannum afligdon* 'working great miracles: give sight to the blind and restore hearing in the deaf, purify the leprous and drive devils out of lunatics' (ÆCHom II, 38, 284.152)

In the three examples above, the healing of the ill and the infirm, the blind and deaf and the purification of the leprous are specified as miraculous deeds along with the driving out of devils from an individual as the last excerpt specifically states, in order to cure, for example, mental illness. The final example, taken from the *Herbarium,* another medical text concerned with afflictions of health and their cures, recommends the preparation of a specific herb against 'the most

unrelenting fevers' for 'it drives out not only the fever but also devil-sickness'
(*Wiþ þa stiþustan feferas genim ðas sylfan wyrte 7 […] Heo afligð nalæs þone
fefer, eac swylce deofulseocnyssa* (Lch I (Herb), 20.2)).

The removal of devils appears to be the cure for afflictions which seem to be
characterised by the main symptom of devils being present in an individual. One
could say that devils are the disease that they are causing by their presence.
However, the devils, and the devil-sickness of the last example, appear to
continue their existence outside of the individual after he or she is cured. To
better explain why this is remarkable, I take blindness as a counter-example. In
the texts discussed, the blind are cured by the action of *onlihtan,* that is, by
adding light, not by removing blindness. Blindness is not conceptualised as an
entity or as being caused by an entity, although such a conceptualisation is not
unthinkable. In contrast, some diseases, like fever and *deofulseocnyssa*, can be
put to flight as they are conceptualised as, or at the very least in a way similar
to, dragons, serpents, dark spirits and devils.

The uses of the verbs *forhergian* and *afligan* point towards a connection of some
disease concepts not just with warfare but with what I label as monstrous entities.
I suggest personification of disease as a mechanism behind a number of less
straightforward references to infectious or, as I will argue, specifically epidemic
disease in Old English literature. When I say 'less straightforward', I am
describing the following examples in comparison to the examples yielded by my
previous, dictionary-based corpus-search for words meaning 'pestilence,
disease' etc. The former set does not show up in the results of such an enquiry.
Nevertheless, some of the more obscure and rather poetic references to disease
can be understood as expressions of the same conceptual metaphors, like

DISEASE IS A MOBILE ENTITY and DISEASE IS AN ADVERSARY that underlie the mentions of disease in the prose texts discussed in chapter 3.

4.2 Personification of Disease

The 'Nine Herbs Charm'

The 'Nine Herbs Charm' is one of several metrical charms recorded in the *Lacnunga* ('remedies'), a collection of miscellaneous medical aids and prayers. It is transmitted in London, British Library Manuscript Harley 585, an Anglo-Saxon compilation of medical texts dated to the late tenth or early eleventh century. The current standard edition of the metrical charms was published in Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie's volume *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* although a new edition was produced by Edward Pettit a few years ago.[107]

In their 1952 edition, Grattan and Singer divide the charm into three parts and treat the prose recipe following the metrical section separately. In their translation, they title the first 29 lines 'Lay of the Nine Herbs' followed by the 'Lay of the Nine Twigs of Woden' (ll. 30-51) and the 'Lay of the Magic Blasts' (ll. 52- 63). For my analysis of expressions denoting disease, I am first focusing on the former section of the poem. The latter parts will be drawn upon chiefly for comparison with other texts characterising disease in terms of monstrous beings further towards the end of this chapter. In that respect, the 'Nine Herbs Charm' will serve as a guiding line that I will turn back to repeatedly in the course of my argument. My breaking up of the charm along the marks Grattan and Singer proposed is not to be taken as a statement of opinion about the

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[107] Edward Pettit (2001), *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The 'Lacnunga'*, 2 vols, Lewiston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press.

coherence of the poem as a whole. It is not the aim of this investigation to argue in favour of or against any position one might take on that matter. What I am interested in for now are rather smaller portions of text at the level of words and phrases which provide further evidence for the personification of disease and which are to be found throughout the 'Nine Herbs Charm'.[108]

> Gemyne ðu, mucgwyrt, hwæt þu ameldodest,
> hwæt þu renadest æt Regenmelde.
> Una þu hattest, yldost wyrta.
> ðu miht wið III and wið XXX,
> 5   þu miht wiþ attre and wið onflyge,
> þu miht wiþ þam laþan ðe geond lond færð.
> Ond þu, wegbrade, wyrta modor,
> eastan openo, innan mihtigu;
> ofer ðe crætu curran, ofer ðe cwene reodan,
> 10   ofer ðe bryde bryodedon, ofer þe fearras fnærdon.
> Eallum þu þon wiðstode and wiðstunedest;
> swa ðu wiðstonde attre and onflyge
> and þæm laðan þe geond lond fereð.
> Stune hætte þeos wyrt, heo on stane geweox;
> 15   stond heo wið attre, stunað heo wærce.
> Stiðe heo hatte, wiðstunað heo attre,
> wreceð heo wraðan, weorpeð ut attor.
> þis is seo wyrt seo wiþ wyrm gefeaht,
> þeos mæg wið attre, heo mæg wið onflyge,
> 20   heo mæg wið ðam laþan ðe geond lond fereþ.
> Fleoh þu nu, attorlaðe, seo læsse ða maran,
> seo mare þa læssan, oððæt him beigra bot sy.
> Gemyne þu, mægðe, hwæt þu ameldodest,
> hwæt ðu geændadest æt Alorforda;
> 25   þæt næfre for gefloge feorh ne gesealde
> syþðan him mon mægðan to mete gegyrede.
> þis is seo wyrt ðe wergulu hatte;

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[108] I first became aware of the metaphoric expressions of disease contained in the 'Nine Herbs Charm' thanks to hearing James Paz's paper 'Words that Matter: Teaching Old English Literature and Science' delivered at the Teachers of Old English in Britain and Ireland (TOEBI) annual conference 2014. Parts of the paper have since been published in James Paz (2015), 'Magic That Works: Performing *Scientia* in the Old English Metrical Charms and Poetic Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45(2), pp. 219-243.
The Old English text of the charm is cited after Dobbie's 1942 edition which is also used in the *DOEC*. Some of Grattan's emendations will have a bearing at a later point in my argument and will be discussed in context.

> ðas onsænde seolh ofer sæs hrygc
> ondan attres oþres to bote.[109]

As pointed out above, questions of methods and instruments of curing as well as of the curing agent, may shed some indirect light on the conceptualisation of disease. The 'Nine Herbs Charm' clearly merits some discussion of such questions. In the charm, several herbs are put forward for their usefulness against more of less specific afflictions. In that sense, one might interpret them as instruments of curing, as ingredients for remedies that need to be prepared and administered by someone, for example a leech. Appropriate instructions on how to do that are provided in a prose section following the metrical section of the charm. At the same time however, some of the herbs are addressed directly and even reminded of their function of acting as a contender against disease: *Gemyne ðu, mucgwyrt* (l. 1), *Una þu hattest* (l.3), *þu, wegbrade* (l. 7), *attorlaðe* (l. 21), *þu, mægðe* (l. 23). The herbs that are not addressed personally are stune (l. 14), stiðe (l. 16) and wergulu (l. 27).

What is interesting to note is how the line between the agent and the instrument working against a disease are blurred in case of the herbs that are on the one

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[109] For a full translation see Grattan and Singer (1952): 'Have thou in mind, Mugwort, what thou didst reveal,/ What thou didst establish at the mighty denunciation./ Una is thy name, oldest of herbs./ Thou art strong against three, and against thirty./5 Thou art strong against venom, and against the onflight/ Thou art strong against that evil that fareth throughout the land./ And thou, Waybroad, mother of herbs,/ From eastward open, mighty within./ Over thee have chariots rumbled, over thee have queens ridden,/10 Over thee have brides cried out, over thee have bulls snorted./ All didst thou then withstand and dost confound:/ So do thou withstand venom and the onflight/ And that evil thing that fareth throughout the land./ Stune is this herb named, on stone hath she grown./15 She standeth against venom, pain she assaulteth./ Stithe is her name, venom she confoundeth,/ She driveth forth the evil things, casteth out venom./ This is the herb which hath fought against snake./ This is strong against venom, she is strong against the onflight,/20 She is strong against those evil things that fare throughout the land./ Rout thou now Attorlothe, the less rout the greater,/ The greater the less, until to him be remedy from both./ Have thou in mind, Maythe, what thou didst reveal,/ What thou didst bring to pass at Allerford,/25 That never for flying ill did he yield up his life/ Since for him Maythe was made ready for his eating./ This is the plant that Wergule is named,/ This did the seal send forth over the high sea,/ As cure for the wrath of another venom.'

hand medical ingredients, on the other hand pitched as cognisant opponents to diseases. The personification of plants by way of direct address may also be viewed as an indirect personification of the diseases they are supposed to cure. With the actors of the charm thus identified, I will, once more, have a look at verbs. It will be shown that it is again the image of combat that best describes how herbs and disease are thought to interact, before analysing the specific characteristics of the afflictions targeted by the nine herbs.

Two expressions in line 17, *wreceð heo wraðan* ('she expels what is grievous/evil') and *weorpeð ut attor* ('casts out poison'), could be seen as parallel constructions to *he his adl eallunge afligde*. There is merely one instance of the word *gefeohtan*, meaning 'to fight', in line 18, while the phrase *magan wið* 'to be strong, efficacious, to avail, prevail, be sufficient against' is employed several times (cf. ll. 4-6, 19-20). Just like the verb *wiðstandan* (ll. 11-12, 15-16) 'to stand against', it suggests resistance rather than offensive action. The herb in these cases would act more like a protective shield against attack as opposed to actively casting out invading forces that have already made it in. In any case, it appears that herbs work in different ways, perhaps depending on the kind of affliction they are meant to remedy.

Una and *wegbrade* are both powerful against *attre* and *onflyge*, and *þam laþan ðe geond lond færð*. (cf. ll. 5-6 and ll. 12-13). The verse dedicated to the herb called *stiðe*, which is said to have fought *wyrm*, distinguishes the plants abilities to withstand, cast out and generally be efficient against poison, itself mentioned three separate times. The *wraðan* that is also driven out by the herb and in that sense put parallel to *attor* might refer to a substance but as a word is rather unspecific. Nevertheless, whichever affliction it is meant to describe, it is

conceptualised as an object or entity that needs to be removed. Additionally, *stiðe mæg wið attre, heo mæg wið onflyge, heo mæg wið ðam laþan ðe geond lond fereþ* (ll. 16-20). This is the third time this line is used in the same or a very similar phrasing. It may be seen as a way of reinforcing a certain connection of the three items but also suggests a distinction being made, at least in the 'Nine Herbs Charm', between poison, 'on-flight' or 'on-flyers', usually translated as 'infection', and 'the evil that wanders over the land'.

I would like to draw closer attention to the latter two expressions, *onflyge* and *laþan ðe geond lond fereþ*, both of which have previously been understood as descriptions of infectious disease, although, it seems, rather intuitively.[110] In terms of conceptual metaphors, both fit the conceptualisation of DISEASE IS A MOBILE ENTITY. The most obvious difference would be the notion that one moves in the air as the other travels on land. While *onflyge* may also express the idea of disease being an object that is in and transmitted via the air, another corresponding expression in the 'Nine Herbs Charm' is less ambiguous. *Gefloge feorh* 'flying being or spirit' (l. 25) clearly indicates the conceptualisation of disease as a personified entity with the potential ability to move at will. The evil that wanders through the land, on the other hand, is characterised by the verb *faran* which suggests purposeful movement and thus another instance of personification. The underlying image might perhaps even be similar to those evoked by descriptions of human invaders as, for instance, *se cyning ferde into Cumberlande and swiðe neah eall forhergode* discussed above.

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[110] Cf. Barley (1972), p. 68.

Going back to the general distinction of flying and land-bound evils, another example, this time in prose form, will serve to solidify the binary, but also, hopefully, illuminate their place within the broad category of afflictions a person might wish to protect oneself from. The following prose charm referred to as 'A Celestial Letter' is found in the twelfth-century British Library MS Cotton Caligula A VII, fol. 140a.

> Se engel brohte þis gewrit of heofonum and lede hit on uppan
> Sanctus Petrus weofud on Rome.
> Se þe þis gebed singd on cyrcean, þonne forstend hit him sealtera
> sealma. And se þe hit singþ æt his endedæg, þonne forstent hit him
> huselgang.
> And hit mæg eac wið æghwilcum uncuþum yfele, ægðer ge
> fleogendes ge farendes.
> Gif hit innon bið, sing þis on wæter, syle hin drincan. Sona him bið
> sel. Gif hit þonne utan si, sing hit on fersce buteran and smere mid
> þæt lic. Sona him kymd bot.
> And sing þis ylce gebed on niht ær þu to þinum reste ga, þonne
> gescylt þe God wið unswefnum þe nihternessum on men
> becumað.[111]

The charm, or rather the prayer is said to be effective against *æghwilcum uncuþum yfele, ægðer ge fleogendes ge farendes*. The expression *æghwilcum uncuþum* ('every/any unknown') suggests a degree of uncertainty about the exact nature of the evil in question. Even more striking it is that the aspect that can be and is specified is the mode of movement. To take the description further, the evils are portrayed as affecting the body on the inside or the outside and

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[111] Text and translation follow G. Storms (1948), *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 272-73; 'The angel brought this letter from heaven and laid it upon St. Peter's altar in Rome. He who sings this prayer in church will profit (as much) by it as by the psalms of the psalter. And to him who sings it on his death-bed it is equivalent to receiving the Eucharist. And it is also effective against every unknown evil either flying or traveling. If it is an inner (evil), sing this over water, give him to drink; soon he will be well. If it is an external (evil), sing it on fresh butter and smear his body with it; soon he will become healthy. And sing this same prayer at night before you go to your rest; then God will protect you from dreams and nightmares that come upon men.'

therefore call for internal or external treatment. Again, disease is conceptualised as existing independent of a particular outbreak of illness in an individual while in transit, so to speak. The apparent distinction between flying and wandering evils may be due to the perception of two separate diseases or disease-types that are conceptualised in partially similar ways (that is mobile, but in different spheres of the environment) or may reflect two alternative conceptualisations of the same thing.

Another aspect of 'The Celestial Letter' that I find worth pointing out with respect to the categories of afflictions infectious disease may fall into is the multi-purpose application of the prayer. Not only could it stand in for a blessing, a sacrament even and is useful against afflictions of the body, it also helps calling upon God's power to shield the reciter from *unswefnum* 'bad dreams' that befall Man at night-time. Nightmares may in this case be seen as creatures who attack the sleeping person from the outside and may be kept away, rather than being a product of the dynamics of the mind within.

Judging by the material surveyed so far, the property of conscious mobility might be one of the chief aspects in the conceptualisation not just of infectious but specifically epidemic disease. The aspect of personification also establishes a tentative parallel to monstrous creatures, as evidenced in the uses of the verb *afligan* for serpents and devils and perhaps in the nightmares of 'The Celestial Letter'. Since air as the locus of disease (and monstrous beings) will be revisited in chapter 6.3, I will now focus on the *laþan ðe geond lond fereþ*. A very similar phrase can be found in the so-called 'Journey Charm', another one of the metrical charms:

> Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce and on godes helde bebeode

> wið þane sara stice, wið þane sara slege,
> wið þane grymma gryre,
> wið ðane micela egsa þe bið eghwam lað,
> 5 and wið eal þæt lað þe in to land fare.
> Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic me wege,
> wordsige and worcsige.[112]

The expression *eal þæt lað þe in to land fare* again implies an inside and an outside in relation to a certain physical space. The *lað* is seen as coming into that area from some place not specified. The 'sore stitch' and the 'sore bite' could be the same thing or two variants of the same type of thing reminiscent of the *fær-stic* that gives the title to another charm in the *Lacnunga*.[113] The *grymma gryre* and the *micela egsa þe bið eghwam lað* might be paraphrases referencing the same concept. What that might be, however, remains unidentified. In terms of disease, the qualifier *micel* and the characterisation as potential harm to everyone (*bið eghwam lað*) could be descriptive of an epidemic.

From the perspective of cognitive metaphor theory, the concept of epidemic disease would be grounded in experience. Such experiences might include the detection of symptoms in a considerable number of individuals up to virtually everyone. Coupled with the appearance of symptoms in different, perhaps geographically connected locations over an observable period of time, the characterisation as *micel* would be well motivated. The same observations could also be the motivation behind the conceptual metaphor DISEASE IS A MOBILE

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[112] Cited after E. V. K. Dobbie (ed.) (1942), *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, New York, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; 'I encircle myself with this twig and entrust myself to God's grace, against the sore stitch, against the sore bite, against the grim dread, against the great terror that is loathsome to everyone, and against all evil that travels into the land. A victory-charm I sing, a victory-twig I carry, word-victory and work-victory.'

[113] Heather Stuart also points out this parallel and suggests that 'færstice most probably refers to a form of elfshot which emerges physically as epidemic disease'; Heather Stuart (1981), '"Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce": The Structure and Meaning of the Old English *Journey Charm*', *Medium Ævum* 50, p. 266. However, she does not provide much of an explanation of how she gets to this particular conclusion.

ADVERSARY of which I propose 'the evil that travels across the land' and 'the evil that comes into the land' to be expressions.

Before moving on to more detailed answers to questions of the semantic range and other referents of the word *lað*, a look at the actions taken against the afflictions mentioned in the 'Journey Charm' shall serve to stress once more the importance of space in the conceptualisation of infectious and especially epidemic disease. Basically, the charm is entirely targeted towards prophylaxis, i.e. the prevention of harm coming onto the speaker saying: *Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce and on godes helde bebeode.* The preventative measures are twofold. They include the encircling of the person with a certain twig and then commending oneself to God's grace. While one might suppose that from a Christian standpoint God's grace is always a good place to be in, the act of surrounding oneself with a *gyrd* may seem less self-explanatory. The translation of *gyrd* with 'twig' is a choice I am making as I interpret the *gyrd* as signifying an herb or some other plant that might be used to surround oneself with just as herbs are used as ingredients in medical remedies.[114] An alternative translation would be 'rod', the selection of which would suggest the drawing of a circle with a rod rather than arranging the rod in circular shape, perhaps after breaking it into smaller pieces.[115] What is noteworthy is the establishment of what appears to be a material border which creates an in- and an outside with the intention to keep some things firmly out. If one imagines a disease or any harmful force, the

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[114] Compare a charm against the sudden death of swine (Lacnunga, entry no. CXLV, following Grattan and Singer (1952)) which recommends hanging a selection of herbs on all four walls and on the door of the barn after herding the animals inside.

[115] A great number of propositions how the enricling might be achieved physically have been put forward. The question is closely linked to interpretations of the charm as more of a pagan relic or a Christian prayer. Cf. Storms (1948), p. 221; Stuart (1981), pp. 264-5; Karen Louise Jolly (1996), *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context*, Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press.

lað, to be an entity moving in space, setting up a barrier to stop it from entering a designated area is following the logic of the conceptual metaphor and expressing it not just in word but physically, in deed.

Grendel and Other Monsters

Translations of the noun *láð,* according to Bosworth and Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, can be '*what is hateful* or *harmful, harm, evil, injury, hurt, trouble, grief, pain, annoyance, enmity'*. Clearly, this lexeme, like *cwealm* and *wol*, has a fairly broad range of meanings and consequently has the potential to extend to a host of individual referents of negative, disruptive quality. While in most instances referenced in the dictionary, which seems to be an accurate reflection of the extant corpus of Old English texts, *lað* remains rather abstract, there are exceptions that merit discussion.

As the long-standing beacon of Old English literature, *Beowulf* requires no lengthy introduction. For that reason, I will delve straight into the details of a close reading and work my way towards the most relevant literature guided by my observations. One intriguing detail of *Beowulf* are the numerous occurrences of the word *lað* – either as a noun or an adjective. In several of these, it describes or denotes a being especially with respect to its physical appearance. The beings in question can be either human, as in the first example below, or 'grendeloid'.[116]

In the speech to Beowulf and his retainers, the coastguard describes his duty of ensuring that on *land Dena laðra nænig/ Mid scipherige sceðþan ne meahte* ('the land of the Danes none of the hateful/ with a naval army may harm', ll. 242-

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[116] Cited following Klaeber's edition; cf. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D Niles (2008), *Klaeber's* Beowulf*, Fourth Edition*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

243). In this case, *lað* describes an enemy force specifically in form of a military invasion. Some translators even render *laðra nænig* as 'none of our enemies.[117] The evil here appears as transgressive in the border sphere between sea and land, the land of the Danes and what, apparently, is not part of their realm. This may be seen as a tentative parallel to the *lað se in to land fare*.

The compound *lað-bit* (l. 1122), literally 'harm-bite' or perhaps 'evil-bite', is used to refer to a wound. In the context of the 'Finnsburh Episode' embedded in the main narrative of Beowulf, it is specifically wounds inflicted upon warriors in battle that are described with that term. As a compound of two nouns, as opposed to one with an adjective as a specifier, *lað-bit* presents *lað* as an agent analogous to *dog-bite* referring to a wound inflicted by a dog. In that line of thinking, the less abstract translation 'enemy' might be a valid approximation to the meaning of *lað* including the connotations of physicality and activity.

The footsteps or traces left behind by Grendel after one of his attacks are referred to as *laþes lastas* (l. 841a), the 'harmful one's remnants'. Again, it is the physicality of the lað, the 'enemy', that is illustrated as well as its mobility. The visible track left by Grendel itself is also described with the adjective *lað* in the line *syðþan hie þæs laðan last sceawedon,/ wergan gastes* (ll. 132a-133a). However, this is almost certainly a case of metonymy and the word *lað* is meant to qualify the causer of the *last*, the 'cursed spirit', rather than the traces of it. In the same way, Grendel's mother is characterised as *lað* via the metonymy of her *laþan fingrum* (l. 1505b) with which she was unable to pierce through the hero's

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[117] Cf. H. D. Chickering (1977/2006), *Beowulf. A Dual-Language Edition*, New York: Anchor Books.

protective armour. In fact, *Grendeles maga ofer eorðan* (l. 2006b), all his kin on earth, are of *laðan cynnes* (l. 2008b), 'the evil race'.

The use of the word *lað* in the examples discussed above not only supports the idea of disease being conceptualised similarly to or an invading army, it also suggests some kind of conceptual association of disease, the *laþ ðe geond lond færð*, with Grendel and the monstrous descendants of Cain, *eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas, / swylce gi(ga)ntas* (ll. 112-13a; 'ogres and elves and the walking dead, also giants') among which he is said to have dwelled. Similarities in the description of Grendel and the views on disease in Anglo-Saxon times have occasionally been mentioned before but at large 'the metaphor of Grendel as disease-spirit has received little attention in *Beowulf* criticism,' as Earl Anderson surmises.[118] Indeed, the one reference I have encountered apart from Anderson's is made in the context of an article on disease and medicine, not one on *Beowulf*.

In his article 'Anglo-Saxon Magico-Medicine', Nigel Barley takes an anthropological perspective under the premise that the view or conceptualization of disease affects how it is reacted to including its treatment, medical or otherwise. That basic assumption is completely in line with the philosophy behind the theory of conceptual metaphors and illustrates how cognitive linguistics has roots in cognitive anthropology (cf. 2.3). To summarise briefly, Barley initially identifies three potential ways of seeing and accordingly reacting to disease. These include imagining disease as

> caused by the invasion of the body by alien matter of force from without. Treatment then consists in removing it. It can be viewed as the loss, by a man, of something normally inherent to him. In this case, treatment consists in returning it to him. A third possible view

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[118] Cf. Earl R. Anderson (2010), *Understanding* Beowulf *as an Indo-European Epic: A Study in Comparative Mythology*, Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, p. 78.

would be to see disease as caused by a disruption of the natural order within the body. Here, treatment would entail re-establishing that order. While using this third approach, the Anglo-Saxons view disease as fundamentally an attack by the exterior on the cultural sphere and so may be fairly described as having opted for the first world-view.[119]

This statement, of course, is a rather simplifying analysis of the matter at hand, a caveat which might be due to the limited scope of a ten-page article. I mainly disagree with Barley in that I would like to point out how not all kinds of illness need to be conceptualised the same way in any given culture. Barley then continues with an elaboration of the three different 'basic mechanisms' of attack from the outside. Those are, according to him, flying venoms, snakes and a third source of illness which 'lies in the lesser evil spirits, dwarfs, elves and Christian devils.' He notes that the 'solitary marsh-stalker' Grendel's habitat, like these monsters', is located in the liminal sphere beyond the reach of human culture. 'At this level of abstraction,' he concedes, 'those outdated interpreters who saw the poem as representing the ravages of disease and hostile elements are not far wrong. Structurally the model is the same and these nineteenth century interpretations are another – most enlightening – recension'.[120] Unfortunately, Barley does not provide any references that would allow a direct consultation of the sources in question. If one wanted to read *Beowulf* at 'this level of abstraction', which is probably supposed to indicate a metaphorical reading, Grendel could potentially be interpreted as representative of disease. A resulting question could be: Is Grendel an elaborate literary manifestation of the

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[119] Barley (1972), p. 68.
[120] Barley (1972), pp. 68-69.

conceptual metaphor DISEASE IS A MOBILE ENTITY, specifically, DISEASE IS AN ADVERSARY?

The parallels detected in the description of Grendel and the concept of disease include the shared properties of mobility and intrusiveness as well as a mutual link to monstrous creatures, the *laðan cyn* of devils, elves and giants. Grendel as the *mearc-stapa* (l. 103a) translated not 'marsh-stalker' but more literally 'mark- or border-stepper' could be an instance of the *eal þæt lað þe in to land fare.* 'All that evil' may include Grendel as well as disease. The speaker of the 'Journey Charm' uttering this phrase also wants to protect himself (or herself) against *þam laþan, se me lyfes eht* (l. 38). To keep away this 'evil that is after my life' the idea of *belocan*, 'encircling' the self in order to lock out harmful attackers is reiterated. Note how in the first of the two relative clauses, the aspect of movement of the harmful entity is highlighted whereas in the second the focus is put on the fatal quality, the murderous intentions of the attacker. In this context, one of Grendel's many epithets, *cwealm-cuma* (*Beowulf*, l. 791) deserves attention. The compound is attested only once in the extant corpus of Old English, in Beowulf. It is rendered as 'deadly guest, murderous visitor' in the *Dictionary of Old English*. The translations as 'guest' and 'visitor' are very specific interpretations of the basic 'comer', derived from the verb *cuman* 'to come'. The second element of the compound thus implies movement from one place to another. *Cwealm*, the first element, has already been discussed in some detail in chapter 3.1. It can have a range of more or less specific meanings like 'death, destruction, a violent death, slaughter, murder, torment, plague, pestilence, contagion'. Judging by etymological evidence and other compound formations with *cwealm* as the specifier, I have come to the conclusion, that the

connotation of 'a hostile force' that brings death is likely cling to the word
cwealm even when employed to denote disease. Likewise, it is possible for the
idea of disease to tint the meaning of the word in some occasions and contexts
that cannot be read as overt references to disease and its manifestations. An
alternative translation for *cwealm-cuma* could be 'pestilential visitor', in analogy
to 'murderous visitor', or more literally 'pestilence-comer'. The expression
cwealm-cuma thus couples the aspects of mobility and harmful intention
witnessed also in the description of the *lað* in the 'Journey Charm'. These aspects
central to the conceptualisation of infectious, epidemic disease and in the
characterisation of Grendel may serve to establish a link between disease and the
monster reflected in the denomination *lað* under which, I propose, both may fall.
Instead of claiming Grendel to be a metaphor for disease, I would therefore
regard the monster as related to DISEASE as a concept by way of conceptual
overlap that in some contexts can make the two fall into a shared category.

An overlap of the concepts of disease and monsters is also what I believe Earl
Anderson has in mind when he discusses Grendel as a disease-spirit.[121] In his
reading of *Beowulf*, '[t]he voice of the Beowulf poet is mythopoeic in ontology
and epistemology. This observation guides our understanding of […] the
metaphor of Grendel as a disease-spirit and Beowulf as a healing physician.'[122]
Anderson translates lines 280 to 285 of the poem as follows:

> if change ever will [come] in regard to this baleful affliction, [if] a
> remedy afterwards will come and the whelms of sorrow [ever will]
> grow cooler; or else [he must] always suffer a time of misery, dire

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[121] Cf. Anderson (2010), pp. 77-87.
[122] Anderson (2010), p. 87.

hardship, as long as the best of houses remains there on the high place.[123]

He points out the meaning of the word *bot* as 'remedy' in a medicinal sense and interprets the latter part of the quotation as an allusion to 'a folk-belief that once a demon haunts a house, one must either slay the demon or destroy the house'.[124]

At this point, I will not venture into a more detailed discussion of Anderson's interpretation. Whether or not one agrees with it is only of secondary importance with regard to the aim of my research which is focussed on disease. What has to be noted though is that Anderson does not argue for Grendel as a metaphor for disease, the directionality implied by Barley, but for disease as a metaphor for Grendel, i.e. the monster being described in terms of disease and Beowulf's fight against it as an act of healing. Regardless of potential reservations about the details of his interpretation, Anderson's explanation of the world-view that makes possible an interpretation of Grendel as disease is in accord with many of my previous findings about the conceptualisation of disease.

According to the ontology of Beowulf's 'intensional-collective' modality, 'universals exist independently of their specimens. […] This ontology', says Anderson, 'underlies the metaphor of Grendel as a disease-spirit, which implies that the disease exists separately from its symptoms. According to nominalism, in contrast, a disease exists as the name of a collectivity of symptoms'.[125] This

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[123] 280   Gyf him edwenden æfre scolde
Bealuwa bisigu,   bot eft cuman
ond þa cearwylmas colran wurðaþ;
oððe a syþðan earfoðþrage,
þreanyd þolað þenden þær wunað
    285   On heahstede husa selest.
[124] Anderson (2010), p. 78.
[125] Anderson (2010), p. 77.

may be seen as corresponding with 'the animist medical environment of Old English charms'. As an example of such a charm, Anderson puts forward *Wið Færstice* in which the disease seems to be treated as an entity separate from the symptoms of illness. The practitioner using the charm attends to symptoms and to 'disease-spirits'. An herbal salve is applied to the affected body parts while '[a]t the same time, the healer diagnoses the symptoms as the work of witches, *mihtigan wif* (l. 8a: mighty women), *hægtessen* (l. 19a: harm-doing hags), and offers an incantation that will protect the patient from these disease-spirits.' Anderson concludes that '[t]he charm combats symptoms and disease-spirits, aspects of a disease that are distinct and lexicalized separately'.[126]

This is reminiscent of the 'Nine Herbs Charm' which offers a prose recipe following a charm section in which disease is conceptualised as a mobile entity and is presented together with the remedial herbs as personifications of adversaries.[127] The prescribed singing of the charm not only on the herbs but also into the mouth and ears of the patient might be targeting the personifications of disease, the causing aspect of the overall concept.

From Anderson's point of view, 'the witches who cause *færstic* are classified with *æsir* and elves, just like Grendel is classified with the monstrous descendants of Cain'[128] and the evidence I presented earlier suggested that like sorcerers, dragons and devils they need to be driven out (cf. *afligan*). Disease

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[126] Cf. Anderson (2010), pp. 81f.

[127] 64 Mugcwyrt, wegbrade þe eastan open sy, lombescyrse, attorlaðan, mageðan, netelan, wudusuræppel, fille and finul, ealde sapan.
66 Gewyrc ða wyrta to duste, mængc wiþ þa sapan and wiþ þæs æpples gor.
67 Wyrc slypan of wætere and of axsan, genim finol, wyl on þære slyppan and beþe mid æggemongc, þonne he þa sealfe on do, ge ær ge æfter.
69 Sing þæt galdor on ælcre þara wyrta, III ær he hy wyrce and on þone æppel ealswa; ond singe þon men in þone muð and in þa earan buta and on ða wunde þæt ilce gealdor, ær he þa sealfe on do.

[128] Anderson (2010), p. 82.

may be seen as classified in the same category of evils. Indeed, in his article 'Three Anglo-Saxon Charms from the "Lacnunga"', J. H. G. Grattan proposes an emendation to the 'Nine Herbs Charm' which would support this classification. In Dobbie's edition, line 58 reads 'Crist stod ofer adle ængan cundes'. Grattan cites '[t]wo guesses at the word *ængancundes*' found in the manuscript. One of them is 'opposingly', put forward by Oswald Cockayne, the other is 'in a way that is unique', favoured by Toller. Grattan emends to *ængancunde* (adj., acc. pl.) and translates 'malignant'. He justifies this emendation by explaining that '[t]he preceding word in the MS. is *alde*. Cockayne, with his mind still on poisons and disease, altered to *adle*, and his alteration has provoked no criticism. But the meaning attached to *Crist stod* requires that *ofer* should be followed by an accusative rather than a dative.' His provisional reading of the line is therefore *Crist stod ofer alde, ængancunde*, translated as: '"Christ stood above the ancient ones, the malignant ones," who are, of course, the Powers of Evil'.[129] This is also the translation provided for the 'Nine Herbs Charm' by Grattan and Singer in their 1952 edition.

If one follows Grattan's reading, the afflictions enumerated over the course of the preceding verses and especially the 'onflyers' and 'evil that wanders over the land' could be understood as one of the 'ancient ones', the race of monsters. However, on the more practical side of healing, the conceptual distinction of disease entities in form of monsters that cause illness and physical symptoms felt by the patients may not be as clear cut. One recipe, for instance, recommends

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[129] J. H. G. Grattan (1927), 'Three Anglo-Saxon Charms from the "Lacnunga"', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 4.

the same ingredient as a remedy for a variety of problems including such mundane afflictions as head aches and typhus as well as 'night-goers' and incubi.

> Hi beoþ gode wiþ heafod ece 7 wiþ eagwærce 7 wiþ feondes costunga 7 nihtgengan. 7 lencten adle 7 maran 7 wyrtforbore. 7 malscra. 7 yflum gealdos cræftum. (Leechbook III, I)[130]

> They [little stones from the maw of young swallows] are good for head ache, and for eye wark, and for the fiends [sic!] temptations, and for night goblin visitors, and for typhus, and for the night mare, and for knot, and for fascination, and for evil enchantments by song.

This example does not suggest as sharp a distinction of causers of disease and symptoms of illness in practice as it might be argued for in theory. Instead, I suggest that what is evidenced here is a grouping together driven by the dynamics of cognitive association of disease and monstrous beings like 'nihtgenga', which sounds almost like it could be another epithet for Grendel. The recipe also reminds of a passage (ll. 41-44) in one section of the 'Nine Herbs Charm' not yet examined. Here also, the remedy is said to work against pain, *wærce*, as well as enchantment by wicked creatures, *manra wihta*.

> Stond heo wið wærce, stunað heo wið attre,
> seo mæg wið III and wið XXX,
> wið feondes hond and wið færbregde,
> wið malscrunge manra wihta.

The expression *wið feondes hond*, 'against the fiend's hand' can be seen as another instance of personification - even anthropomorphism - of disease together with the *manra wihta*, which Grattan and Singer translate with 'little beings'. This attribution of small size is perhaps due to a connotation attached to the word *wiht* (cf. German *Wicht*) but it should be considered that Grendel, who

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[130] Cockayne (1856), pp. 306-7.

is not generally described as being little, is also called a *wiht unhælo* (*Beowulf*, l.120b) (cf. German *Bösewicht*, OHG *bôsiuuiht*).

In the above I have attempted to illustrate the main linking elements that establish such an association based on conceptual metaphors underlying the conceptualisation of disease with special consideration given to the aspect of mobility grounded in the perception of infectious epidemic diseases. It has been shown, that relevant evidence in form of linguistic expressions can be detected in various pieces of Old English literature and that the performance and physical manifestations of the conceptualisation is at least hinted at in some of the medical recipes, particularly in the charms.

4.3 Disease and Monsters in Related Contexts: Two Old Norse Charms

As part of some broader considerations regarding a possible category overlap of monsters and disease in the area of healing practice, I would like to discuss two pieces of evidence from a Scandinavian context that have been brought forward by Alaric Hall as parallels to Old English charms against disease.[131]

In summary, Hall aims to investigate the conceptualisation of illness and healing in medieval Scandinavia. His main conclusions are (1) that illness and supernatural beings could be conceptualized as identical and that (2) myths of Gods and heroes fighting against monsters provided a paradigm for the struggle with illness. His core pieces of evidence are the Canterbury Rune-Charm and the Sigtuna amulet. The texts, 'medicinal charm[s] intended to counteract illness,

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[131] Cf. Alaric Hall (2009), '"Þur Sarriþu Þursa Trutin": Monster-Fighting and Medicine in Early Medieval Scandinavia', *Asclepio. Revista de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia*, vol. LXI, No. 1, Jan.-June, pp. 195-218.

and directed at beings called *þursar* (singular *þurs*)'[132] are recorded in an English manuscript and on an archaeological artefact, respectively, which, according to Hall, places them outside of the central corpus of Old Norse texts.[133]

For its association with an English context, the Canterbury Rune-Charm especially seems to recommend itself for consideration in terms of my research. As Hall explains, '[t]hough written in Old Norse and in runic form, the most relevant of these [healing charms] survives not in Scandinavia, but in a portion of the English manuscript British Library, Cotton Caligula A.xv, from Christ Church Canterbury and dates to around 1073x76; it is known accordingly as the Canterbury Rune-Charm. Linguistic evidence suggests that the charm is likely first to have been written down by about 1000, by a speaker of East Norse'.[134] This suggests that the text must have travelled to England probably in the first half of the eleventh century, i.e. in the last decades of the Anglo-Saxon period. The charm reads as follows:[135]

> **kuril sarþuara far þu nu funtin istu þur uigi þik þorsa trutin iuril sarþuara uiþr aþra uari ·**

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[132] Hall (2009), p. 197.

[133] This notion might be due to the circumstances of transmission. Texts similar to the ones discussed tend to be inscriptios in materials such as stone or bone rather than being collected in manuscripts. Since they are also recorded in runic script, the texts tend to fall within specialised fields of archaeologsts and runologists rather than literary scholarship. For publications dealing with the charms in that contexts see Helmer Gustavson (1998), 'Verksamheten vid runverket i Stockholm', *Nytt om runer* 13, pp. 19-28. Another artefact inscribed with what appears to be a 'medical' charm, probably against headache, is the Ribe Cranium, a skull fragment. The text there reads in transcription: *UlfuR auk Óðinn auk Hó-TíuR. Hialp buri es viðR þæima værki. Auk dverg unninn. Bóur(R)*. (Transl.: 'Ulfr/ Wolf and Óðinn and HótiwR/High-Týr. The hole/Buri is help against this ache (pain). And the dwarf overcome. Bourr.' See *Projektet Danske Runers database, Danske Runeindskrifter*. http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Ribe-hjerneskal; and Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees (2006), *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, pp. 25-26, who summarise that while 'the role of the dwarf as an agent of disease is also well attested in Germanic folklore, […] we have no sure guide as to exactly what form of 'dwarf-stroke' the Ribe charm was supposed to ward agains.'

[134] Hall (2009), p. 201.

[135] Cited after the Scandinavian Runic-text Data Base. Entries in the database include, a translitteration of the runic characters, normalisations oft he texts in East and West Norse and an English translation, in that order.

> *Gyrill sárþvara, far þú nú, fundinn ertu; Þórr vígi þik, þursa dróttinn, Gyrill sárþvara. Viðr aðra vari.*
>
> *Gyrill sárþvara, far þú nú, fundinn ertu; Þórr vígi þik, þursa dróttinn, Gyrill sárþvara. Viðr aðra vari.*
>
> Gyril wound-causer, go now, you are found. Thor hallow you (to perdition), lord of giants (demons), Gyril wound-causer. Against blood-poison (literally: blood-vessel pus).

I agree with Hall's statement that

> [t]rying to decide whether Kuril is to be classified in our own world-views as a being or an illnesses [sic!] will not greatly help us to understand this text: what will is to recognize that illness could in some sense be conceptualized as a being, and interacted with on that basis[136]

He does not say, however, in what sense exactly this conceptualisation is achieved. Hall merely infers from the charm that finding and attacking Gyril seem to be of paramount importance but does not comment, for instance, on the expression *far þú nú* which appears interesting with regard the idea of infectious disease characterised by mobility. It also implies expulsion of the disease entity as a mode of action.

Hall's other example, the Sigtuna amulet, a copper plate with inscriptions on both sides, was found during excavations in 1931. Hall imagines that the Canterbury Rune Charm might have been transmitted on a similar medium before it came to be recorded in a manuscript.[137] On side A it is again a presumably monstrous entity, the lord of *þursar*, that is commanded to flee after having been found. The full texts inscribed on each side, called A and B, read:

> §A **þur/þurs| × |sarriþu × þursa trutin fliu þu nu^| |^funtin is**
> §B **af þiR þriaR þraR ulf × ¶ af þiR niu noþiR ulfr iii ¶ isiR þis isiR auk is uniR ulfr niut lu¶¶fia**
> §A *Þor/Þurs sarriðu, þursa drottinn! Fliu þu nu! Fundinn es[tu].*

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[136] Hall (2009), p. 201-2.
[137] Cf. Hall (2009), p. 204.

> §B *Haf þæR þriaR þraR, UlfR! Haf þæR niu nauðiR, UlfR! <iii isiR*
> *þis isiR auk is uniR>, UlfR. Niut lyfia!*
> §A *Þór/Þurs sárriðu, þursa dróttinn! Fljú þú nú! Fundinn er[tu].*
> §B *Haf þér þrjár þrár, Ulfr! Haf þér níu nauðir, Ulfr! <iii isiR þis*
> *isiR auk is uniR>, Ulfr. Njót lyfja!*
> §A Boil/Spectre of the wound-fever, lord of the giants! Flee now!
> You are found. §B Have for yourself three pangs, Wolf! Have for
> yourself nine needs, Wolf! <iii isiR þis isiR auk is uniR>, Wolf.
> Make good use of the healing(-charm)!

Hall argues that different words for monsters, one of which is *þurs*, must not be regarded as mutually exclusive but as partial synonyms. The range of their meaning perhaps extends in such a way as to be able to denote concepts, 'which are in our world-views members of entirely different ontological categories – specifically illnesses'.[138] While Hall's article does not include much detail when it comes to an explanation of the dynamics behind this extension of meaning, the examples provided as well as the general thrust of ideas are very close to the material I have presented so far. A small detail I would like to point out before moving on to the second of Hall's main suggestions, the prominent role of gods and heroes in the struggle with disease, is another link connecting the Old Norse texts and Old English literature. The Old Norse word *þurs* is a cognate of Old English *þyrs* which is actually used for Grendel *þyrs* (*Beowulf*, l. 426), a fact which may serve as yet another small thread in the network of evidence linking monsters and disease.

Nevertheless, one detail of the 'Nine Herbs Charm' I have not yet paid attention to is the mention of the Germanic god Woden (l. 32), which is rather outstanding in the generally christianised environment of Old English writing. The invocation of Thor in the Canterbury Rune Charm, however, might be taken as

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[138] Hall (2009), 201.

a parallel. In order to support his claim of a connection between the god Thor's

fighting monsters and the healing of or protection from disease, Hall quotes from

book 4, chapters 26-27, of Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae*

pontificum, written around 1075.[139] In translation, the relevant passage reads as

follows:

> That folk has a very famous temple called Uppsala, situated not far
> from the city of Sigtuna. […] For all their gods there are appointed
> priests to offer sacrifices for the people. If plague and famine
> threaten, a libation is poured to the idol Thor; if war, to Wodan; if
> marriages are to be celebrated, to Fricco.

If this source is to be believed, Thor's significance as a protector from epidemic

disease seems to be well established at least for a specific time-period and place

in Scandinavia. Of course, this need not say anything about Anglo-Saxon

England. Furthermore, Thor is not Woden and it is the latter who the 'Nine Herbs

Charm' references for defeating the *wyrm*. The following quotes are from the

section of the charm that Grattan and Singer label as the 'Lay of the Nine Twigs

of Woden' which I have not included in my earlier discussion of the 'Nine Herbs

Charm'.

> 30   Ðas VIIII magon wið nygon attrum.
> Wyrm com snican, toslat he man
> ða genam Woden VIIII wuldortanas,
> sloh ða þa næddran, þæt heo on VIIII tofleah.
> Þær geændade æppel and attor,
> 35   þæt heo næfre ne wolde on hus bugan.

> These nine darts against nine venoms./ A snake came crawling,
> nought did he wound;/ Then took Woden nine twigs of glory/ Smote
> then that adder that in nine bits she flew apart./ There did apple and
> venom bring it about/ That she never would turn into the house.[140]

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[139] Cf. Hall (2009), p. 202.
[140] Grattan and Singer (1952).

If it is usually Thor who steps in against disease, one possibility is that in the 'Nine Herbs Charm' what we see is a case of confusion of the pagan gods in a culture that has been largely Christian by the time the charm was written down. On the other hand, the choice of god may, at least partially, have been motivated by the combat metaphor associated with the conceptualisation of disease. In that light, it may not seem too implausible, to assume the god of war to partake in a fight against the enemy that is fatal disease.

Apart from that, note the repeated stressing of the number nine in the section cited above and even more emphatically in lines 45 and 46: *Nu magon þas VIIII wyrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum,/ wið VIIII attrum and wið nygon onflygnum,* 'Now these nine herbs avail against nine spirits of evil,/ Against nine venoms and against nine onfliers'. The occupation with numbers is also hinted at in the inscription of side B on the Sigtuna Amulet and might be regarded as another potentially significant connection between the Old Norse and the Old English healing charms that could be explored further.

4.4 Summary

In closing this chapter, I would like to give a brief summary of the main ideas and conclusions based on my interpretation of the literature and primary evidence discussed so far. The linguistic expressions of disease I have presented stem from a variety of texts including prose as well as poetry. Evidence from chronicles, homiletic, Christian writing and medical texts has been evaluated from a linguistic viewpoint and has subsequently guided my consideration of a selection of Old English charms, most prominently the 'Nine Herbs Charm' and the 'Journey Charm'.

After having identified some conceptual metaphors that appear to be particularly salient in the corpus of Old English literature, noticeably creative or poetic expressions encountered in the charms have been shown to be instantiations of the underlying conceptualisation of infectious, especially epidemic disease in Anglo-Saxon culture which seems to possess no expression literally and exclusively meaning infectious or epidemic disease. Words like *onflyge* and variations of the phrase *lað þe geond/in to land fare*, however, both reinforce the image of disease as an intentionally harmful and mobile entity.

Ideas about disease appear to be divided into considerations of symptoms and explanatory frameworks for the causation of them. The causation aspect might be regarded as the abstract side of the concept's core element, the symptoms as the manifest side, subject to observation and the physical experience of illness. I agree with Anderson in that '[p]ersonification is possible because the disease is thought of as an essence separate from its symptoms.'[141] Anderson, however, applies a slightly boggled literary definition of metaphor when he interprets 'Grendel's profile as a disease-spirit [as] a metaphor', and at the same time states that 'Grendel is only *like* a disease-spirit, just as, in another metaphor, he is *like* a rebellious hall-thane'.[142] I would suggest then that this is not a case of conceptual metaphor but simile. The lack of a specific term for infectious disease and this 'likeness' Anderson refers to may together with linguistic evidence point towards disease not being a discrete concept but being integrated in a broader ontological category, the race of the ancient evils, the *laðan cyn*. The results of my investigation of the use of the word *lað*, suggests such a shared

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[141] Anderson (2010), p. 83.
[142] Anderson (2010), p. 89.

category much like the one Alaric Hall assumes to have existed in medieval Scandinavian culture. For Old English, *lað* could be seen as a cover-term that may be employed to include monsters like Grendel and disease.

From the complex web of metaphor, metonymy, similes, parallels and vague connotations that underlies such a categorisation, I have been able to disentangle expressions of disease conceptualisations which should not be dismissed as mere superstition. Close analysis of words and phrases used in descriptions of diseases and their remedies through the lens of basic cognitive linguistic theory supports what anthropological approaches could only intuit and corresponds with evidence of material culture. While the abstract conceptualisation of disease may exist separate from its symptomatic manifestations, according to cognitive linguistic philosophy of experientialism it is not entirely independent of them. Abstract conceptualisation is guided by physical experiences of the natural environment. Grounded in perception of the physical world, it is the same cognitive principles guiding Anglo-Saxon conceptualisations of disease that underlie human thought in general. This chapter has pointed out some of the mechanics behind such conceptualisations and categorisation which then find expression in culture specific ways. The comparative evidence of closely related Old Norse texts indicates the possibility of an expression of the underlying conceptualisations not just in word but in action, in the materiality of medical practice and protective objects. Traces of the connection between disease and ideas of vicious attacks by human and non-human enemies detected in the charms throughout the corpus of Old English literature and will be pointed out in a variety of contexts considered in the following chapters.

5 Saints and Disease

Saints, the holy servants of God on earth, are 'innumerable', as Ælfric states in the preface to his third homiletic volume, the *Lives of Saints* (l. 69).[143] Michael Lapidge supposes a total of about 300 saints were venerated in Anglo-Saxon England. However, a written record of their existence dating from the Anglo-Saxon period is only extant for a much smaller number. Anglo-Saxon writers had at their disposal a number of immensely influential compilations, such as, for example, Aldhelm's *De uirginitate*, which were extra-liturgical, meaning that they were 'intended as anthologies of edifying stories of sanctity'.[144] They provided patterns of what a *vita* or *passio* could and should look like. One question kept in mind must therefore be in how far the texts produced in Anglo-Saxon England reproduced established patterns of representing saintliness. This, of course, extends to the depiction of disease as a factor in a saint's life.

Parameters of Text Selection and Literature Review

What I am interested in are narrative representations of saints' lives and deeds, which could be grouped under the genre label of 'Saints' Lives'.[145] I do not at the outset wish to limit the pool of primary material by applying any strict definitions of genre. That being said, perceived differences in the style and agenda of predominantly hagiographical vs historiographical writing are frequently discussed in the literature on Saints' Lives and should not be ignored.

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[143] *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, W.W. Skeat (ed.), 4 Vols, EETS 76, 82, 94, 114. London, 1881-1900, repr. in 2 vols. 1966.

[144] Michael Lapidge (1991), 'The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England', Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Cambridge: CUP, 4th repr. 1998, p. 255.

[145] I will, henceforth, distinguish the historical reality of 'lives' versus their literary adaptation in 'Lives' (*vitae*) via capitalisation.

Thus, while I am not excluding material on the basis of genre, differences in text type and circumstances of their production and distribution will inform the analysis of and conclusions drawn from the material chosen.

The pattern of occurrence of disease words in the corpus of Old English texts, established at the outset of my study, suggests the Lives of native saints whose *vitae*, therefore, do not have direct pre-Anglo-Saxon models as the most interesting pieces of hagiographic writing. One significant advantage the thus identified set of primary sources examined in this chapter grants is chronological comparability. Though limited in number, the texts are of sufficiently similar character to be contrasted against each other while also being (fairly precisely) datable and in many cases even ascribed to a particular author.

As a group they contain the majority of instances within Old English hagiography of disease that could arguably be interpreted as epidemic or infectious, based on described characteristics and symptoms as well as historical data. This is notable in particular when considering how surprisingly little epidemic disease actually features in this genre, as will be be shown below. Furthermore, earliest versions of the Lives in question feature eyewitness accounts gathered first-hand. Therefore, it may be assumed that, while definitely positioned within a complex hagiographic tradition, the texts are also grounded in contemporary people's perceived reality. They cannot, however, fruitfully be analysed in isolation from questions of more general hagiographic traditions and ambitions. It will be shown in how far representations of Anglo-Saxon sainthood were informed and influenced by the *vitae* of earlier Christian saints and how the latter were emulated although in a way befitting the circumstances of the time. Behind this issue lies a certain tension between the idea that all of God's

saints are to be regarded as of the same stock and the unique challenges of the historical, ecclesio-political environment of different periods. Therefore, the guiding question in re-evaluating the Saints' Lives is that of how they negotiate the meaning and functions of illness in the lives of holy people according to Christian beliefs and learning as well as period-specific constraints.

Sources selected for discussion:[146]

- Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica de gentis anglorum* (HE)
- Bede's *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert* (VCP) as well as the anonymous Life of St. Cuthbert (AVC)
- The Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (OEHE)
- Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* (ÆLS)
- The *Life of St. Chad* (LS Chad)
- Felix's *Life of St. Guthlac* (Felix)
- Old English Prose *Life of St. Guthlac* (OEG)

These texts, spanning nearly three centuries reflect different stages of the Anglo-Saxon period. In contrast to some of the textual evidence presented in chapters above, specifically the charms and medical recipes, there is now the advantage of a much clearer chronology and relative certainty of the circumstances surrounding the texts' production.

I will not be discussing martyrologies and legendaries, which provide brief summaries of the saints' lives in a chronological arrangement according to the church year, since the narratives are usually reduced to the presentation of basic information like the working of miracles and the death of the saint regardless of individual circumstances. Apart from this consideration, early Anglo-Saxon

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[146] Translations of these texts are taken from the editions cited unless I am making explicit a contrast between a published translation and my own interpretation of the source.

calendars do not put much of an emphasis on indigenous saints, if they are included at all.

Considering the relative wealth of extant hagiographic literature, there are surprisingly few studies dealing specifically with the role of disease in Saints' Lives written in the Anglo-Saxon period. This is in spite of the fact that the frequent mentioning of epidemics and various outbreaks of diseases transmitted in other sources, such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, for instance, might suggest diseases to be a recurrent factor in hagiography as well, assuming that the Lives are not entirely detached from epidemiological reality.

With regard to the group of saints most relevant to this study, a pronounced interest in female saints, especially aspects of gender and agency in connection with the virginity *topos*, seems to have emerged in the mid-1990s.[147] This line of enquiry is clearly prevalent in the scholarship on Æthelthryth. With respect to disease, the overall effect is, that it is given attention as a secondary element that comes into focus only in light of questions about gender.

One notable exception is Pauline Thompson's doctoral dissertation *Pestilence and Skin Disease: Two Studies in the Vocabulary of Illness in Old English Saints' Lives and Their Sources*.[148] Later in her academic career, the author also

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[147] Cf. Virginia Blanton-Whetsell (1998), *St. Æthelthryth's Cult: Literary, Historical, and Pictorial Constructions of Gendered Sanctity*; State University of New York (Binghamton), doctoral dissertation; Phillip Pulsiano (1999), 'Blessed Bodies: The *Vitae* of Anglo-Saxon Female Saints,' *Parergon*, vol. 16, no. 2, January: 1-42; Wiesje Nijenhuis (2001), 'In a Class of their Own, Anglo-Saxon Female Saints,' *Mediaevistik*, vol. 14: 125-148; and Ruth Waterhouse (1996), 'Discourse and Hypersignification in Two of Ælfric's Saints' Lives,' Paul Szarmach (ed.), *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, Albany: State University of New York Press for examples regarding St Æthelthryth.
[148] Pauline A. Thompson (1986), *Pestilence and Skin Disease: Two Studies in the Vocabulary of Illness in Old English Saints' Lives and Their Sources*, University of Toronto, microfilmed thesis.

seems to have shifted towards a more feminist inspired line of enquiry[149] which I will come back to later, when discussing the different lives of St Æthelthryth in particular. In her much less well-known early work which, to my knowledge, is available only in microfiche copies, however, she analyses depictions of diseases in Saint's Lives. The sources she includes are largely congruent with those I have chosen although her selection has gone through a different set of filters. Due to its limited availability and for its being the only book-length study of the topic of Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives and pestilence Thompson's work merits introduction and detailed consideration.

The study, as its title suggests, is bipartite as it discusses pestilence and skin diseases separately from each other. For the purpose of this chapter, only the half on pestilence will be of interest. In this, Thompson's objective is 'a study of those saints' lives that provide contexts for plague words which, when looked at in conjunction with other related documents of the same period, make it possible to hazard some guesses about the identification of the pestilences referred to in them'.[150] She provides first a summary of previous scholarship on the pestilences of Anglo-Saxon times, followed by a discussion of the diseases identified from their historical contexts, including bubonic plague, their modes of transmission and characteristic symptoms. Following this, she approaches the subject of pestilence in the Saints' Lives by identifying relevant vocabulary in a fashion similar to what I have demonstrated in the opening sections of chapter 3. Subsequently, she compares the words for disease used in the Old English texts

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[149] Cf. Pauline Thompson (1996), 'St. Æthelthryth. The Making of History from Hagiography,' M.J. Toswell and F.M. Tyler (eds), *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely': Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, London/NY: Routledge, pp. 475-92.
[150] Thompson (1986), p. 126.

with the Latin terms found in their sources. Concerning the question what the Saints' Lives can contribute towards an identification of the pestilences described in them, Thompson concludes that the Old English versions offer generally less detail than the earlier Latin ones and that based on what little detail there is, bubonic plague cannot be excluded but is rather a likely candidate.This interest in the identification of diseases is one point in which Thompson's angle on the material differs markedly from my own.

From Thompson's perspective 'Saint's lives are interested in illnesses primarily because they are a possible means of grace: they provide the 'raw material' with which saints can demonstrate the power of God, either by healing other sick people –leading them by means of bodily healing to the salvation of their souls, or by patiently enduring their own illnesses and so demonstrating to others the grace of God in their own lives'.[151] Victims of pestilences feature rather little in the healing miracles compared to the blind or the lame. If one supposes such healings to be installed in the narratives as illustration of a saint's divine appointment, it seems that certain types of ailments serve the purpose better than others. Contagious diseases such as bubonic plague, which Thompson is most interested in identifying, often run their full course over only a short period of suffering for the patient after which comes death. It would leave neither enough time for pilgrimage to a saint's dwelling or resting place, nor, from the potential 'martyr's' perspective, an opportunity to exalt oneself by way of prolonged endurance of the affliction. In this, the biological reality of a particular disease might have had a certain influence on the composition of the texts which Thompson does not seem to take into consideration. Rather she apprehends that

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[151] Thompson (1986), p. 23.

'[a] study of disease terminology in saints' lives runs the risk of doing a certain injustice to the genre: saints' lives are not medical texts, and to treat them as such is to mine them for information which it was never their primary intention to give'.[152]

This marks another fundamental difference to my own aims and methodological approach. Thompson takes an essentially linguistic methodological approach in 'mining' the texts but questions only what the language used may reveal about the diseases prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon period, and not what it may tell us about the language user. This is particularly relevant for metaphoric language, in relation to descriptions of pestilence. While Thompson asks and also draws some conclusions regarding the question of 'what sense the Anglo-Saxon hagiographers made of their sources',[153] she excludes instances of metaphoric uses of disease words from the outset. She apparently thinks of metaphor in a more traditional literary fashion and remarks that words like *wol* and *wolberende* 'are sometimes used metaphorically, even though they never appear in poetry'.[154] Only in her final conclusion does she somewhat inadvertently enter the territory of questioning the Anglo-Saxons' own understanding of pestilences in life and concept.

Thompson suggests that the vernacular hagiographer seems to be interested in plague only as a metaphor for judgement.[155] This is, I assume, in opposition to an interest in the aetiology, the physical realities of disease. Nevertheless, she makes some very interesting observations on particularly Ælfric's apparent

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[152] Thompson (1986), p. 23.
[153] Thompson (1986), p. 266.
[154] Thompson (1986), p. 126.
[155] Cf. Thompson (1986), p. 272.

reticence concerning the overt inclusion of pestilences in his *Saints' Lives*. His silence, she offers, may be owed to a combination of factors, the least of which certainly is the need for brevity. Another, and more intriguing idea is that of decreased exposure to and knowledge of specific disease patterns in the later Anglo-Saxon period which may have led to occasional omission of detail. The possibility of a perceived interrelationship of plague and sin, put forward by Thompson as a third route of explanation, however, is what I find the most inspiring option due to the underlying cultural complexities. There are hints that the plague-as-judgement *topos* gained momentum during the tenth and throughout the eleventh century, based amongst for instance on metaphoric uses of pestilence vocabulary. The following discussion will therefore be in direct consideration of as well as in response to these most relevant aspects of Thompson's findings and conclusions. Thompson's study has begun to reveal interesting correlations in language use and the concepts attached to the Anglo-Saxon's depiction of disease in the Saints' Lives, which I hope to add to and to put into a broader context.

Connected to questions of how far the semantic range of certain vocabulary extends is the issue of defining what can be considered an instance of epidemic or even just infectious/contagious disease. In yet another step, it might also be worthwhile to enquire how often infectious or epidemic diseases feature in the Saints' Lives in proportion to other ailments. This basic issue of the specifity of word choice in the texts brought up by Thompson is therefore one that I would like to briefly review before looking at the sources in a broader context. Thompson claims the words chosen for descriptions of afflictions with disease in Old English texts are less precise than in their Latin models.

There is definitely a gradation in Old English from *wol* and *cwealm (cwild, mancwealm/-cwild)* towards *adl*, which is a fairly basic level disease-word, to *untrymnes* (*untrumnes*), which is regularly translated as 'weakness' and could be rendered more literally as 'un-firmness'. It has to be noted, however, that Latin *pestilentia* and *pestis* do not necessarily signify 'plague' in the *Yersinia pestis* sense but can be taken to mean 'infectious disease, contagious disease, plague, pestilence' and 'plague, pest, ruin, destruction', respectively. In some cases, which will be given due attention in the following discussion of individual Saints' Lives, even the words *mortalitas* ('mortality') and *infirmitas* ('infirmity, weakness', cf. OE *untrymnisse*) are used when it is apparent from context information that the author is likely talking about a disease outbreak.[156]

If there is a significant tendency towards unspecific vocabulary choices in the Old English texts, questions as to why need to be asked. Did people not recognize characteristic symptoms for what they were? Did they not realize the epidemic nature of a disease behind individual infections/outbreaks? It might, of course, be that the authors had simply no reason to be more specific. Nevertheless, the vagueness of at least some sources might well be due to more strategic objectives that would call for an effort to downplay the scale of an outbreak and to re-interpret its significance in the narrative (e.g. the plague-as-judgement-*topos*, see also 5.3.2). Even at word level, the interplaying meanings and functions of individual instances of illness may therefore be of crucial importance. I will in the following consider different takes on the Lives of saints Oswald, Chad, Cuthbert, Guthlac, Æthelburh and Æthelthryth for closer

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[156] Cf. respective entries in Bosworth-Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*; *Perseus Digital Library*, Gregory R. Crane (ed.), Tufts University, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu.

inspection. There are at least two sources for the life of each of them which may be compared. The emphasis, nevertheless, may vary, depending on the wealth of primary material available for discussion.

5.1 Martyrs and Patients – St. Oswald and St. Chad

St Oswald

Oswald, the first holy man to be discussed here as well as chronologically the first in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* proves distinct from the rest of the select group in certain aspects of his *vita*. The most obvious distinguishing factor is Oswald's death not of an illness but as a martyr who perishes at the hands of an enemy of Christ, Penda, king of the Mercians. The latter group had not yet been converted to Christianity at the time. Oswald himself was king and leader of an army against Cadwalla and brought about the conversion of his people with the help of teachers from Scotland such as bishop Aidan according to Ælfric's account of his life (cf. ÆLS, vol. II, xxvi).

Disease becomes a topic only after the saint's death and the discovery of his relics' healing power. In 642 CE, a scholar from Ireland who remains nameless *wearð geuntrumod* (ÆLS, l. 246) as a punishment for his many vices and neglect of a Christian lifestyle despite his exceptional learnedness. At the verge of death, he is granted recovery as he promises to change his ways for the better. While Ælfric's account remains silent as to the circumstances of the Irishman's affliction, Bede provides information that explains the scholar had been the victim of an epidemic.

> 'At the time of the plague', he [Bishop Acca] said, 'which caused widespread havoc both in Britain and Ireland one of the many

victims was a certain Irish scholar, a man learned in literary studies but utterly careless and unconcerned about his own everlasting salvation.' […] 'You see', he [the scholar] said, 'that I am getting worse and have now reached the point of death; nor do I doubt that, after the death of my body, my soul will immediately be snatched to everlasting death to suffer the torments of hell; for in spite of all my study of the scriptures, it has long been my custom to entangle myself in vice rather than obey God's commands.[157]

The Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* retains the information on the apparently widespread outbreaks of pestilence in translating that

in þa tid þæs miclan woles 7 monncwilde, þe Breotone ealond 7 Hibernia mid micle wæle fornom 7 forhergade, þa wæs geslegen betweoh oðre monige mid þy wæle þæs ilcan wóles sum leornungmon in scole Scotta cynnes. Wæs se mon wel gelæred in gewritum; ac ymb þa gemænne his ecre hælo wæs to sæne 7 to receleas.[158]

Notably, the affliction with pestilential disease is not causally linked to an un-Christian lifestyle in any explicit way. It is, however, described at some length how the experience of illness pushes the affected individual towards admitting their mistakes and effects a change of behaviour. Two analoguous examples, one from the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great and another one from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* can help illustrate how illness can be portrayed as a trigger for repentance.

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[157] HE, iii, 13, pp. 252-255; 'Tempore' inquit 'mortalitatis, quae Brittaniam Hiberniamque lata strage uastauit, percussus est eiusdem clade pestis inter alios scolasticus quidam de genere Scottorum, doctus quidem uir studio litterarum, sed erga curam perpetuae suae saluationis nihil omnino studii et industriae gerens […].
'Vides' inquit 'quia iamiamque crescent corporis molestia ad articulum subeundae mortis conpellor. Nec dubito me post mortem corporis statim ad perpetuam animae mortem rapiendum ac infernalibus subdendum esse tormentis, quia tempore non pauco inter studia diuinae lectionis uitiorum potius inplicamentis quam diuinis solebam seruire mandatis.'
[158] OEHE, III, 13, pp. 190-191; 'He said that at the time of the great plague and loss of life, which ruined and wasted the islands of Britain and Ireland with great mortality among many others there was smitten by the mortality a disciple in the school of Scotch descent. He was well read, but too slack and careless in regard for his eternal salvation.'

Gregory the Great (540 - 604), was one of the major patristic authorities for the Anglo-Saxons and had a crucial role in the conversion of the kingdoms via his envoy Augustine. The *Dialogues* contain several mentions of the plague which decimated the population of Rome in 590CE and will be brought into discussion where appropriate in the context of this study. I do not intend to suggest that the following episode is a direct source for the portrayal of the Irish scholar. It serves rather as a piece for comparison to illustrate possible interpretations of pestilence in saints' Lives.

> Theodore, a very restles young man, who entered the monastery with his brother under force of circumstances rather than of his own free will, He was always irritated when any spiritual lesson was brought home to him. He could not bear doing good or hearing about it. […] During the plague which recently carried off a large part of the population of this city [Rome], Theodore became dangerously ill, with the disease lodging in his abdomen. […] [159]

Like the Irish scholar, Theodore used to spurn spiritual teaching, in his case even in spite of having joined a monastic community. Only after falling ill and coming within a hair's breadth of death from which he was saved by the prayers of his brothers, Gregory informs his reader, did the young man change his ignorant ways. This stands in contrast to the example of the scholar in two aspects. Firstly, the Irishman is portrayed as being healed through the power of St Oswald's relic rather than a communal effort, secondly, he repents at an earlier point in the course of his illness. Where Theodore is saved before he turns to adopt a proper monastic lifestyle, the scholar shows remorse before being healed and promises to improve in the future if he was indeed granted to continue living. Theodore can be interpreted as a reminder to others that death may come quickly and that

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[159] *Dialogues*, Book IV, 40; A.W. Zimmerman and Odo John Zimmerman (eds and trans), Catholic Washington, D.C.: University of America Press, (2014).

it is necessary to be spiritually prepared to face judgement, even though he is ultimately shown to be lucky (and presumably grateful) to have been saved by the good example of his brothers. The episode about the Irish scholar, in contrast, emphasises the value of St Oswald's relics and thus his status as a saint. In the face of the disease, the sinful man repents and turns to the saint for help. In Gregory's example, the experience of being healed of the disease brings about the change, in the Anglo-Saxon Lives of St Oswald, it is the experience of the affliction which gives the impetus for repentance.

Another example that compares to the excerpt from Bede's Life of St Oswald can be found in the *Ecclesiastical History*'s description of the events of the year 664, the year of the great pestilence. During that time two young men, Æthelhun and Egbert, were guests in the Irish monastery of Rathmelsigi when all their companions were carried off by the plague unless they managed to leave the area first. Eventually, both of them were stricken by the same disease (*uel mortalitate rapti*) and fell dangerously ill.

> [Egbert,] at the point of death, went out of his chamber, where the sick lay, in the morning, and sitting alone in a convenient place, began seriously to reflect upon his past actions, and, being full of compunction at the remembrance of his sins, bedewed his face with tears, and prayed fervently to God that he might not die yet, before he could make amends for the offences which he had committed in his infancy and younger years, or might further exercise himself in good works. He also made a vow that he would, for the sake of God, live in a strange place, so as never to return into the island of Britain, where he was born; that besides the canonical times of singing psalms, he would, unless prevented by corporeal infirmity, say the whole Psalter daily to the praise of God; and that he would every week fast one whole day and a night.[160]

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[160] HE, Book iii, 27.

In this example, which obviously lacks saintly intervention but is otherwise quite similar to the one from a more hagiographically inspired context, Bede makes the change in the victim of diseases mindset even more explicit. He describes in detail the circumstances in which Egbert came to his insight ('alone', 'upon refelction') and the lifestyle of asceticism he wishes to pursue. He vows to live in exile from his native land, to spend more time on prayer than good monastic practice prescribes, and to fast regularly. Interestingly, Egbert recognises that poor health might occasionally hinder him in realizing his aspirations. The problems of balancing an ascetic, eremitic lifestyle against the implications of illness will be discussed further at a later point in this chapter in connection with Saints Cuthbert and Guthlac.

What is noteworthy in a direct comparison of the two versions of St Oswald's Life, that of the *Ecclesiastical History* and that of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, are firstly, the choices of vocabulary and, secondly, Ælfric's decision to leave out much of the detail about the nature of the scholar's illness. The Latin *mortalitatis* is rendered by the phrase *miclan wóles 7 moncwilde*. The Old English in this case, especially by employing somewhat repetitive doubling in the translation, does not appear less specific than the Latin. On the contrary, *wol* is a term much narrower in meaning than *mortalitas*. The qualifier *micel* further emphasises the scale of the pestilence. The term *manncwild* alone could have sufficed to adequately translate *mortalitas*, at least when taken out of context. One might speculate that the emphasis witnessed in the translator's word choice may have been due to a greater need for explication considering the centuries in between the time of the text's production and the events described. In light of that, it seems all the more puzzling to find the reference to a pestilence of such scale

edited out in Ælfric's version of the *Life of St. Oswald* entirely. This piece of information seems to have been unconducive, or at least irrelevant, to Ælfric's hagiographic agenda. For this example, however, it appears unlikely that a lack of knowledge of or experience with diseases would have been the driving factor behind the editor's decision making since both versions of the *Ecclesiastical History* make a point of commenting on the circumstances in which the individual protagonist fell ill.

On the one hand, it is conceivable that Ælfric's omission might have been motivated by the focus of his work, which is hagiographical, the main objective being the depiction of a saintly life. Bede, in contrast, acts predominantly as a historiographer and as such provides information that may be classified as 'additional' from a hagiographer's viewpoint. On the other hand, by not mentioning other patients, much less making explicit the scale of the pestilence, Ælfric highlights the individual protagonists' value and function as examples for Christian lives. Mentioning a large-scale pestilence at least implies the death of many good Christians. Ælfric avoids this, perhaps with the aim of not detracting attention and appreciation from the the Irish scholar's exemplary repentance and the significance of Oswalds relics.

Apart from this short episode, the Lives of St. Oswald are not a very rich source when it comes to disease narratives. The saint himself is not portrayed as plagued by any illnesses, which sets him apart from later Anglo-Saxon saints yet to be discussed. As Phillip Pulsiano remarks, the Lives of Anglo-Saxon saints differ from those of early and earlier Christian saints, 'the martyrs, where the focus can remain exclusively upon the passion narrative in which the display of steadfast faith (and typically virginity [for female saints]) is central' but 'when martyrdom

(and, for confessors, penitence) is not at issue – only a few saints in the period hold that distinction – the biographer's task becomes in many ways more difficult'.[161] While Oswald is one of the few alluded to above, one of the questions raised after Christianisation has been widely completed in the British Isles is: How to die, if not a martyr? Of course, saintliness is not only about death, but also a matter of leading a remarkable life. Once this cannot be established in terms of conversion, suffering and dying for the faith, other models are required – models which may hold specific meanings and functions for the element of disease.

St Chad

St Chad is a seventh-century ascetic buried in Lichfield where he led a largely monastic existence. His relics are attributed with remarkable healing powers which might have been a decisive factor in his *vita* being recorded not just in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (and Old English translation) but also in an anonymous homiletic Life transmitted in a manuscript written in the first half of the twelfth century. The text is extant in the Mercian dialect, however with specifically Late Old English features in spelling.[162]

Chad, unlike Oswald, died in '[a] plague sent from heaven […] which, through the death of the body, translated the living stones of the church from their earthly sites to the heavenly building.' On the question of the scale and epidemic nature of this illness it is to be noted that Chad only after 'many of the church of the most reverend bishop had been taken from the flesh, his own hour was at hand

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[161] Pulsiano (1999), p. 9.

[162] cf. R. Vleeskruyer (ed.) (1953), *The Life of St. Chad. An Old English Homily*, Amsterdam, pp. 13-14.

when he must pass from this world to be with the Lord'.[163] In accordance with epidemiological characteristics of plague infections, Chad dies after seven days of illness as the angels had promised to him and he had predicted to Owine.

The death of the saint is clearly not presented as an entirely private affair. It follows a pattern of events in which a vision or revelation about their own death and frequently that of other brothers and sisters, in a monastic context, plays out in the way foreseen and usually announced to one or more members of the community. This is regarded as proof of the individual's holy character and divine appointment. The death by disease is not imbued with co-notations of sin and punishment but rather interpreted as release of the soul from the body into the heavenly kingdom. This idea finds expression in the Old English version of the *Ecclesiastical History* as well.

> Þa cwom micel wæl 7 moncwild godcundlice sended, þæt þurh lichoman deað þa lifigendan stanas þære cirican of eorðlicum seþlum to þæm heofonlican timbre gebær.
>
> Þa wæs he sona gehrinen lichomlicre untrymnesse, 7 seo dæghwamlice weox 7 hefigade; 7 þa ðy seofoþan dæge, swa him gehaten wæs.[164]

However, in the *Anonymous Life of Chad*, as Jane Roberts points out, the homilist is not concerned to record the plague of 672 as explicitly as Bede did.[165]

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[163] HE, iv, 3, pp. 338-339; 'Superuenit namque clades diuinitus missa, quae per mortem carnis uiuos ecclesiae lapides de terrenis sedibus ad aedificium caeleste transferret. Cumque plurimis de ecclesia eiusdem reuerentissimi antistitis de carne subtractis ueniret hora ipsius, ut transiret ex hoc mundo ad Dominum, contigit die quadam ut in praefata mansion forte ipse cum uno tantum fratre, cui uocabulum erat Ouini, commoraretur, ceteris eius sociis pro causa oportuna ad ecclesiam reuersis.'

[164] OEHE, IV, 3, pp. 262-263; 'Then came a great mortality and loss of life divinely appointed, which by death of the body transported the living stones of the church from their places on earth to the building in heaven'; pp. 266-269; 'Then he was at once attacked by bodily infirmity, and it daily increased and grew worse; and on the seventh day, as promised to him'.

[165] Jane Roberts (2000), 'The English Saints Remembered in Old English Anonymous Homilies', Paul E. Szarmach (ed.), *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, New York/London: Garland, p. 439.

There are merely two clues that indicate Chad's death to have occurred at a time of pestilence: First, the use of the word *cwalme* (l. 68) to speak of Chad's death with its secondary meaning being 'pestilence' and second, the mention of the death of *monige broðere* (l. 70) at the same time. As previously noticed in Ælfric's account of Oswald's life, it is again the younger version of a saint's Live that holds pestilence in some degree of obscurity.

Ælfric's version of the *Life of St. Maur*, the late sixth century Benedictine monk and abbot,[166] is very similar in its depiction of the saint's vision of his own death as well as of the killing of his monks with 'diverse deaths'. At first, it was the devil speaking to Maurus, or rather threatening him. An angel subsequently verifies the devil's announcement of many deaths but adds that 'they all shall come to the eternal life, and thou thyself afterward shall blessedly follow them to God's kingdom through good deserts.'[167] Being thus warned, death came to Maurus.

> Him com ða se cwealm sea sea se engel gecwæð . swá þæt an hund muneca . and syxtyne munecas . binnan fif monðum . of ðam mynstre gewiton. And maurus se abbod . ge-endode siððan . swá se engel sæde him sylfum . on ær. (ll. 347-351).

Here, the previously mentioned 'diverse deaths' are specified as brought about by pestilence that came as predicted, took 116 monks within five months and afterwards also killed the abbot.

From the example of St Chad it seems that there were models of saintliness available which include illness and disease in a prominent position, at the end of

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[166] ÆLS, vol. I, vi.

[167] 'swa þæt se mæste dæl ðinre muneca sceal. of life gewitan. binnan lytlan fyrste . and hi ealle becumað to ðam ecan life . and þu sylf siððan . gesælig him fyligst . to godes rices . þurh gode geearnunga' (ll. 331-335).

the saint's life. While disease is assumed to be frequently interpreted as a punishment for moral transgressions in religious contexts, 'illness is the great source of glory for the Christian, nothing short of a martyrdom, at the hands not of empire but of nature,'[168] according to Andrew Crislip's assessment. Crislip specifically investigates how early Christian saints of the desert, that is ascetics and hermits are depicted. Of special significance in these narratives are the ways in which they negotiate illness as addition or hinderance to the ascetic endeavour as well as doubts about the aspect of moral transgression attached to illness.

In the Lives of saints, we might be witnessing interpretative friction due to contradictory positive and negative frames in which the saintly sufferer of illness can be regarded. Apart from having a smack of immorality and punishment which seems to rather more tarnish than promote an exemplary Christian repute, illness might require care that can only be provided by a community, in a monastic environment, for instance. This would necessitate an at least temporary suspension of the ascetic life in favour of seaking assistance in treatment and recovery. On the other hand, steadfast acceptance of illness might increase the severity of self-mortification and thus the penance achieved through the voluntary hermitism. Far-reaching as such considerations may be, however, it appears unlikely that one would contract a contagious disease and become a casualty of an epidemic to begin with, if a lifestyle in complete isolation from other people were strictly maintained. The following examples will illustrate aspects of the struggle of balancing ascetic aspirations with the necessities of community interaction in the saints' lives as well as in the hagiographical

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[168] Andrew Crislip (2013), *Thorns in the Flesh: Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 5.

agenda. While suffering illness might be a gate-opener on the way towards salvation, when it comes to achieving sainthood, witnesses are required!

5.2 Asceticism and Inspiration – St Cuthbert and St Guthlac

St Cuthbert

In the following analyses of the Lives of St Cuthbert and St Guthlac, the focus will be on the turn to and struggle with nature, that is, with wilderness, but also includes susceptibility to disease and other physical and mental afflictions, as an element of the solitary ascetic lifestyle outside of monastic communities.

The life of St Cuthbert is transmitted in a number of sources, including Bede's *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, the relevant section of his *Ecclesiastical History* and a poetic Life, as well as the anonymous *Life of St. Cuthbert*, and Ælfric's homiletic Life. The VCP (721 CE) and the AVC (698-705 CE) are the most extensive accounts of Cuthbert's life. They differ notably in their depiction of illness, especially outside of the enumeration of healing miracles. Perhaps most significantly, the affliction of the saint himself with what might be interpreted as the plague, as well as the long-term illness of the hermit Herbert, a spiritual companion of Cuthbert, are both included in Bede's lives, but omitted by the anonymous author of the AVC.

In the preface to his *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, Bede stresses the 'most rigorous investigation of the facts' (*certissima exquisitione rerum gestarum*) and the 'scrupulous examination of credible witnesses' (*subtili examination testium indubiorum*)[169] that had preceded the composition of his work. Accordingly, he

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[169] VCP, Pref., pp. 142-143.

quotes Herefrith as a witness to Cuthbert's own account of the time when 'he was stricken down with the plague which at that time carried off very many throughout the length and breadth of Britain'.[170] Neither the *Ecclesiastical History*, which frequently adapts passages from the VCP verbatim, nor the anonymous author of the slightly earlier account of Cuthbert's activities mention the saint's infection during the time of the pestilence. This might be due to the many abbreviations necessary in the former, and perhaps a lack of witness accounts, such as Herefrith's, in the case of the latter.

Furthermore, according to the VCP, Cuthbert's teacher Boisil prophesied that his disciple would not die of the pestilence then nor be stricken by the same disease again. Boisil himself died after seven days of the *acerbitatem pestilentiae* ('virulent pestilence')[171] as he had predicted three years earlier. From a medical perspective, the swelling ('tumor') which had appeared in Cuthbert's thigh could easily be read as a plague bubo. However, the symptom subsided and 'gradually left the surface of his body' from where 'it sank into the inward parts and, throughout almost the whole of his life, he continued to feel some inward pains'.[172] This episode transmitted only in the VCP constitutes one of the most detailed and thus diagnosable accounts of a potential plague epidemic not only in Anglo-Saxon hagiography but in the entire corpus of Old English literature. Another similar one is to be found in the Lives of St Æthelthryth which will be discussed in detail towards the end of this chapter.

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[170] 'Quo tempore sicut Herefridus familiaris eius presbiter et abbas quondam monasterii Lindisfarnensis ipsum referre solitum testatur, morbo pestilentiae quo tunc plurimi per Brittanniam longe lateque deficiebant, correptus est' VCP, VIII, pp. 180-181.

[171] VCP, VIII, p. 182.

[172] 'sed quia tumor qui in femore parebat, paulatim a superficie detumescens corporis, ad uiscerum interior perlapsus est, toto pene uitae suae tempore aliquantulum interaneorum non cessabat sentire dolorem' VCP, VIII, pp. 180-183.

The other available sources merely mention the death of Boisil, of unspecified cause, as it is the prerequisite to Cuthbert being made prior of the monastery in the former's stead.[173] Bede himself edits Cuthbert's own illness out of his abbreviated account included in the *Ecclesiastical History*. This gives the impression that, for the sake of suitable brevity, the recovery from an infection with the plague may be dismissed as an occurrence of minor importance in light of the saint's other various achievements. Acceptance of one's suffering might ultimately be valued over the potential merit of having overcome a disease and would therefore rather be stressed where editing is necessary. Such an agenda can perhaps be witnessed when Bede relates how, at the time of the saint's death, his spiritual companion of many years, Herbert accepts his fate of a prolonged illness in order to be able to depart from this life together with Cuthbert. Herbert, himself living as a hermit, used to come to Cuthbert every year to listen to his teaching. Cuthbert prophesies his own death to his companion who responds by asking to leave this world with him for he has

> 'always sought to live in accordance with [Cuthbert's] spoken commands and whatever I have done amiss through ignorance and weakness, I have taken equal care to amend at once according to [Cuthbert's] judgement and will'[174]

For a number of years after their last meeting, Herbert and Cuthbert 'did not see each other in the flesh but their spirits left their bodies on one and the same day, namely 20 March; […] But Herbert was first wasted by a long illness, as we may well believe, by the decree of the divine grade, so that if in any way he had less merit than the blessed Cuthbert, the punishment and pain of long illness might be counted worthy to depart from the body with him at one and the same hour,

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[173] Cf., for instance, HE, iv, 27, pp. 432-433.
[174] HE, iv, 29, pp. 440-441.

and also to be received into one and the same dwelling of perpetual bliss'.[175] The *Ecclesiastical History*, in this episode, follows Bede's *Prose Life* (ch. XXVIII) almost exactly. The AVC (ch. IX) also tells of the simultaneous deaths of Herbert and Cuthbert. It is noteworthy, however, that it omits any mention of purgatory suffering and illness on part of the saint's disciple.

While, in the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede conflates the episode about Herbert with a rather sparse description of the saint's own death, in his *Prose Life of Cuthbert*, he explicates in much more detail '[w]hat trials he endured while sick and what he commanded concerning his burial, when about to depart this life'.[176] According to the above mentioned Herefrith, Bede had consulted as a witness of Cuthbert's recovery from a possible plague infection, the saint was ill for three weeks after 'he was attacked by a sudden illness and began to be prepared by the fires of temporal pain for the joys of perpetual bliss' (*Arreptus infirmitate subita, temporalis igne doloris ad perpetuae coepit beatitudinis gaudia praeparari*).[177] On the morning of the first day of this new illness, he confirmed to Herefrith that illness (or, more literally, 'weariness') had attacked him during the night (*languor me tetigit nocte hac*). Herefrith assumed that 'he was speaking of his old complaint [*infirmitate*] which used to afflict him almost daily, and not of some new and unusual complaint'.[178] Cuthbert explained to his visitor: 'It happened through the providence and will of God that, destitute of human society and help, I should suffer some afflictions [*paterer adversa*]'.[179]

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[175] HE iv. 29, pp. 441-442.
[176] VCP, XXXVII-III.
[177] *Ibid*. pp. 270-71.
[178] VCP, XXXVII, pp. 272-273.
[179] *Ibid*. pp. 276-277.

Both for Herbert as, to perhaps a lesser degree, that is for less extended a period of time, for Cuthbert, trial by physical illness could be viewed as a means of suffering in preparation of the soul for eternal life. The *igne doloris*[180] could almost be seen as standing in for a preponed purgatory fire to cleanse the spirit even before death. For Herbert, his disease allows him to accumulate additional merit that eventually elevates him to a level of virtue comparable to Cuthbert, who had inspired his faith throughout his life. The theme of strength in weakness and suffering will be encountered again in a similar episode surrounding the death of the abbess and saint Æthelburh.

Cuthbert, while still ill himself, and very nearly dead, is accordingly said to have healed an attendant of his, who long suffered from diarrhoea which no physicians could cure.

> [H]e who had healed many before this while he was well and strong, should when at the point of death also cure this man in order that by this sign too it might be plain how strong the holy man was in spirit, though he was weak in body.[181]

How pestilence and illness might test the faith is likewise illustrated in Bede's as well as in the anonymous Life of Cuthbert. In Bede's rendering the focus is on providing information on the saint's activity as a missionary in remote regions which, riddled by pestilence, have fallen from the true faith. The anonymous author of the AVC, in contrast, has the saint work healing miracles of the body as well, as had been reported to him by the priest Tydi.

> Our holy bishop, during the plague which depopulated many places, was preaching the word of God to the people who survived [*in mortalitate illa, quae plures depopulauit regiones, praediccans uerbum Dei reliquis hominum*] in a certain village called *Medilwong*, when he turned to me and said gently: 'Is there anyone in the village

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[180] *Ibid*. pp. 270-71.
[181] VCP, XXXVII-VIII, pp. 278-283.

> still suffering from that pestilence [*pestilentia ista languens*] so that I may go forth and preach to him and bless him?' I pointed out to him a woman who was standing not far from us, weeping and wailing on account of her son who was lately dead, and holding another one in her arms, with his whole body swollen, half-dead and breathing his last. He straightway rose and approached her, and blessing the infant, kissed it, saying to the mother: 'Woman, do not weep; your son will be saved and no one of all your household, who is still alive, will perish by the plague.' And the mother and son who are still alive are witness of the truth of this[182]

After Cuthbert's own infection had eased off, according to the VCP, he travelled among the neighbouring people,

> [f]or many of them profaned the faith they held by wicked deeds, and some of them also at the time of the plague, forgetting the sacred mystery of the faith into which they had been initiated, took to the delusive cures of idolatry, as though by incantations or amulets or any other mysteries of devilish art, they could ward off a blow sent by God the creator.[183]

In times of *myclan woles 7 moncwildes*, as the Old English version of the *Ecclesiastical History* renders Bede's words, more recently converted Christians, further away from the hubs of religious activity, such as bishop's seats and monastic centres, have sought refuge in pre-Christian practices, it appears. The pestilence is described as 'a blow sent by God the Creator'. This choice of wording betrays a conceptualisation of the disease as an object that is instrumentalised to a certain end, known or unknown. What is to be noted in the case of the villages Cuthbert visits is that the epidemic is not, as might be expected, sent as a punishment in consequence of idolatry and other such malpractices. Rather, perhaps, although not made explicit, the pestilence was

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[182] AVC, VI, pp. 118-121.
[183] 'Nam et multi fidem quam habebant, iniquis profanabant operibus, et aliqui etiam tempore mortalitatis neglectis fidei quo imbuti erant sacramento, ad erratica idolatriae medicamina concurrebant, quasi missam a Deo conditore plagam per incantationes uel alligaturas, uel alia quaelibet demoniacae artis archana cohibere ualerent'; VCP, IX pp. 184-185; also HE, iv, 27, pp. 432-433.

meant to try the community of believers, who, left to their own devices, had failed the test and were thus in need of the kind spiritual guidance a man like Cuthbert can provide.

The remedies of pre-Christian idols, incantations and charms are portrayed as still being fairly fresh on the collective mind of the average population during the time of Cuthbert, if Bede can be trusted. This, compared to the relative wealth of charms transmitted from Anglo-Saxon times, a few of which have been discussed above, suggests a co-existence of Christian approaches to dealing with disease and other theories and practices amongst the laity. This pertains to mental, cognitive attitudes towards disease as a concept to be rationalised as well as practical remedies to cure the physical symptoms of an infection as can still be seen even in Ælfric's much later (late tenth/early eleventh century) work. Ælfric fails to include any detailed information on Cuthbert that relates to pestilences or illness in general beyond positing frequent healing of the ill amongst the many noteworthy acts performed by the holy man. Nevertheless, in 'On Auguries', transmitted as part of *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, it is said to be forbidden that anyone 'should enquire through any witchcraft concerning anything, or concerning any sickness, or seek enchanters to anger his Creator.'[184] Instead, 'Medicine is granted for bodily infirmity, and holy prayers, with God's blessing; and all other aids are hateful to God.'[185] One does not simply have to accept death when stricken by disease, medicinal cures as possibly provided by leeches, to a certain extent are acceptable alongside prayer. Recovery from

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[184] Mid lufe eow for-beode . þæt eower man ne axie þurh ænigne wicce-cræft . be ænigum ðinge . oððe be ænigrre untrumnysse . ne galdras ne sece . to gremigenne his scyppend; ÆLS, vol. I, xvii, ll. 75-78.
[185] Læcedom is alyfed fram lichamena tyddernysse. and halige gebdu mid godes bletsunge . and ealla oðre tilunga syndon andsæte gode; ibid. l. 213.

illness does not in itself seem to be and impermissible goal, but the means to

reach it need to be appropriate. This corresponds well with the warning example

of the apostate villagers of Bede's Lives of St. Cuthbert on the one hand, but also

the anonymous author's account of the miraculous healing of the young boy in

the village of *Medilwong*.

St Guthlac

The Old English *Prose Life of St. Guthlac*[186] is, at least in parts, closely based

on the Latin *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* by Felix. The latter, composing his *Vita* in the

first half of the eighth century, appears to model his Guthlac after Bede's

Cuthbert in the VCP in aspects regarding the saint's choice of an eremitic

lifestyle and death.[187] Guthlac, in the narrative, is impressed by stories of early

Christian anchorites who 'longed for the wilderness and hermitages for God's

name, and passed their lives there.'[188] Later in the narrative, Moses, Elijah and

even Christ himself are identified as Guthlac's models, for they all fasted in the

wilderness. In the fashion of 'the famous monks who were in Egypt and dwelt

there in deserts,' Guthlac 'slew and quelled in [himself] all corruption' through

abstinence.[189] In want of a desert, however, Guthlac, like Cuthbert, chose to

retreat to

> an island especially obscure, which ofttimes many men had
> attempted to inhabit, but no man could do it on account of manifold

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[186] Text quoted by chapter and line number. English translations follow Goodwin's edition.

[187] Cf. Gonser's commentary to his edition of the two manuscripts in comparison with Felix's *Vita* for a detailed analysis of the individual lives' textual history and models (1909), pp. 1-96; as well as Jane Roberts (2005), 'Hagiography and Literature: The Case of Guthlac of Crowland', in Michelle P. Brown and Carol Ann Farr (eds), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, London: Bloomsbury, p. 75.

[188] 'Mid þy he gehyrde secgan and he leornode be þam ancerum, þe geara on westene and on sundorsettlum for godes naman wunodon and heora lif leofodon, ða wæs his heorte innan þurh godes gifu onbryrdod, þæt he westenes gewilnode'; OEG 2, ll. 106-110.

[189] OEG 5, ll. 25-35.

horrors and fears, and the loneliness of the wide wilderness; so that no man could endure it, but every one on this account had fled from it.[190]

Cuthbert's island, likewise,

was utterly lacking in water, corn and trees; and as it was frequented by evil spirits, it was ill suited for human habitation; but it became in all respects habitable as the man of God wished, since at his coming the evil spirits departed.[191]

Either place is essentially uninhabitable, but both men deliberately accept the circumstances, if not indeed welcome them. While Cuthbert manages to drive out the *wergan gastas* and the land is made habitable as he willed, Guthlac is to be plagued by demonic attacks on his spirit for many years. The *menigfealdum brogum and egsum*, (cf. Felix; *monstra et diversarum formarum terrores)* Guthlac is faced with on the island may well not only include torments of the mind but also of the body in the form of disease and infection. Although the narrative exhibits elements which might point towards an affliction with mental illness, from a modern perspective, Guthlac steadfastly withstood these mental trials, to eventually succumb to an infection. The monsters and terrors quoted initially may be taken to include either or both these types of affliction.

At the end of his at least temporarily solitary life, Guthlac was *semninga mid adle gestanden.*[192] The sudden onset of his illness points towards an infection rather than to a chronic affliction. By his own declaration 'disease befell [him] on this night' (*Adle me gelamp on þisse nihte*).[193] This may call to mind Cuthbert's confirmation to Herefrith: *languor me tetigit nocte hac.*[194] Guthlac,

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[190] 'sum ealand synderlice digle, þæt oft menige men eardian ongunnon, ac for menigfealdum brogum and egsum and for annysse þæs widgillan westenes þæt hit nænig man adreogan ne mihte, ac hit ælc forþan befluge'; 2, ll. 16-20.
[191] HE, iv, 28, pp. 435-436.
[192] OEG 20, l. 6.
[193] OEG 20, l. 23.
[194] VCP, XXXVII, pp. 272-273.

also attacked (*gestod*) by the malady on a Wednesday, nevertheless, and in contrast to Cuthbert, was spared weeks of suffering as he was only 'seven days afflicted with the malady, and on the eighth day he was brought to the utmost extremity.'[195] Ultimately, Guthlac explicates the purport of his illness which is 'that the spirit must be taken away from this body; for on the eighth day there will be an end of my illness; therefore it behoves that the spirit be prepared, that I may go to God.'[196]

In the case of Guthlac, like in those of Cuthbert and his follower Herbert, the disease is presented in the role of an attacker, as verbs like *gestandan* suggest. Yet, it does not call for a struggle towards recovery. Neither is it interpreted as a punishment for misdeeds of any kind, but it is accepted, and to some extend even actively chosen by the hermits, as a means of preparation before the spirit can be elevated in death. The following section will show how similar themes and imagery find expression in the Lives of Anglo-Saxon female saints, specifically those of the abbesses Æthelburh and Æthelthryth.

5.3 Abbesses and Epidemics – St Æthelburh and St Æthelthryth

St Æthelburh

Æthelburh served as the abbess of the double monastery at Barking from its foundation by her brother Eorcenwold until her death. Barking was not his only foundation, as the future bishop had established another one for himself at

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[195] 'Wæs he seofon dagas mid þære adle geswenced, and þæs eahtoþan dæges he wæs to þam ytemestan gelæded. þa gestod hine seo adl þon wodnesdæg nehst eastron, and þa eft þan ylcan dæge on þære eastorwucan he þæt lif of þam lichaman sende'; 20, ll. 10-14.

[196] 'Þeos ongitenysse minre untrumnysse ys, þæt of þysum lichaman sceal beon se gast alæded; forþon þan eahtoþan dæg bið ende þære minre mettrumnysse; forþon þæt gedafenað, þæt se gast beo gegearwod, þæt ic mæg gode filian'; 20, ll. 27-31.

Chertsey by the river Thames.[197] In fact, Eorcenwold himself is said to have lived such an exemplary life that healing miracles still occurred in Bede's own times. Especially fevers, the *lenctenadl* which scholarship has taken to describe a form of malaria,[198] were frequently cured by his saintly intervention. From this rather brief mention of Eorcenwold's achievements, Bede moves on to relate a selection of the many signs and miracles witnessed at Barking, which were transmitted to him and succeeding generations in writing. Bede's narrative first focusses on the time of the great plague of 664 but flows rather seamlessly along a series of mortal sicknesses predicted and suffered - even after the death of the abbess herself.

The first section of Bede's account, the description of the pestilence outbreak threatening Æthelburh's community and her reaction to that particular crisis, can be seen as setting the scene for subsequent cases of dealing with illness at Barking under the guidance of the abbess. Bede begins his illustrations of the plentiful miracles that had been performed at Barking with a heavenly light that shone down upon the abbey grounds to indicate to the doubtful community where their final resting place should be located. This, according to Bede, was the abbess's main concern once the storm of 'the plague which has been so often referred to and which was ravaging the country far and wide had also attacked that part of the monastery occupied by the men.'[199] The pestilence in question is certainly that which, from the year 664 onwards first depopulated the southern

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[197] HE, iv, 6, p. 354.
[198] OEHE, IV, 7, p. 282.
[199] 'Cum tempestas saepe dictae cladis late concta depopulans etiam partem monasterii huius illam, qua uiri tenebantur, inuasisset, et passim cotidie raperentur ad Dominum, sollicita mater congregationis, qua hora etiam eam monasterii partem, qua ancellarum Dei caterua a uirorum erat secreta contubernio, eadem plaga tangeret, crebrius in conuentu sororum perquirere coepit, quo loci in monasterio corpora sua poni et cymiterium fieri uellent, cum eas eodem quo ceteros exterminio raptari e mundo contingeret'; HE, iv,7, p. 356.

parts of Britain, before spreading to Northumbria and even Ireland, according to book three, chapter 27 of the *Ecclesiatical History*.[200] Bede is explicitly couching his narrative of the miracles at Barking and pertaining to St Æthelburh in a broader context of clearly epidemic disease and death on a large scale. Other, later authors, as will be seen in the case of St Æthelthryth, edited such circumstances, perhaps in an attempt to highlight individual suffering over the inescapability of such devastating outbreaks. Bede's Æthelburh, however, appears to be certain of the impending demise of the majority of her female charges. She is most concerned not about saving her sisters lives in this world but accepts their common fate and pushes on towards preparation for all of their afterlives, beginning with the identification of the ideal burial grounds. The choices Bede appears to have made in terms of metaphorical highlighting of certain aspects of saintliness in confrontation with disease become more visible when contrasted with another, later, retelling of Æthelburh's live, composed by Goscelin of St Bertin and dated to the ultimate years, if not after the end, of the Anglo-Saxon era.

Goscelin first arrived in England in 1058 or soon after, having left St Bertin's Abbey and Flanders behind. From the late 1070s onwards Goscelin travelled Britain, staying at a series of different religious houses under the patronage of which he produced the bulk of his hagiographical work. Although Goscelin's most well-known piece today is probably the *Liber Confortatorius*, a predecessor of later advice literature for anchoresses similar to the *Ancrene*

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[200] 'Subita pesilentiae lues depopulates prius australibus Brittaniae plagis, Nordanhymbrorum quoque prouinciam corripiens atque acerua clade diutius longe lateque desaeuiens, magnam hominum multitudinem strauit…Haec autem plaga Hiberniam quoque insulam pari clade premebat'; HE, iii, 27, 310-313.

Wisse, the years after the Norman Conquest saw a renewed interest of monastic communities to keep record of their history and the lives of their local saints. In his hagiographical texts, Goscelin is, on the one hand, following revered models, including Bede, while on the other he is collecting not previously recorded oral traditions shaped by several centuries of post-Bede political as well as ecclesiastical history.[201]

Of Æthelburh's reaction to the plague of 664 Goscelin reports that faced with 'the tempest of death, laying waste everything far and wide […] The wisest of virgins understood that the same thing was menacing her people, according to that poetic saying "It becomes your affair when your neighbour's wall burns".' He continues by relaying how the saint would 'most attentively strengthen her fortress in the final struggle, so that they should stand clad in the invincible armour of faith in God against all the weapons of the hostile ambush'.[202] Goscelin, in contrast to his predecessor Bede, fashions Æthelburh's measures as fortification against an approaching enemy. He speaks of her *castra* and *armatura* of faith in which the abbess and her community are to face the disease. The late eleventh-century version of Æthelburh clearly invokes a much more confrontational image of the saint in anticipation of the final struggle (*ultimos agones*) rather than one of calm acceptance of the storm about to wash over the

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[201] Cf. Monica Otter (2004), *Goscelin of St Bertin.* The Book of Encouragement [Liber Confortatorius]. *Translated from the Latin with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretative Essay,* Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, pp. 1-5.

[202] Vera Morton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (2003), *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents,* Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, p. 144; 'etiam uirilem chorum sacerdotum et ministrorum monasterii beatae Ethelburgae passim ad beata abstulit secula. Intellexit prudentissima uirgo ideam imminere suae parti, secundum illud poeticum "iam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet."...Quantis tunc hortamentis ipsa mater intentissima in ultimos agones muniebat castra sua et fide inuicta Dei indutae armatura starent contra omnia insidiantis inimici tela'; Goscelin of St. Bertin, 'Texts of Jocelin of Canterbury which Relate to the History of Barking Abbey', ed. Marvin L. Colker, *Studia Monastica* 7 (1965), p. 404.

monastery. While the outcome in both versions of the Life is similar, it is worth to note how the focus, and with it the chosen metaphors, are set to highlight different characteristics of saintliness. Sound endurance and acceptance of one's fate, i.e. illness, stands against more of a fighting spirit. The latter is further exemplified by Goscelin in an episode which sees the abandoned monastery protected against Danish pillagers by the saint in the form of wild animals. This refers to an upsurge in raiding activity during the reign of King Æthelred the Unready in the late tenth and early eleventh century.[203] It seems likely that Goscelin's choices in portraying the saint facing a mortal disease, too, would have been informed by orally transmitted stories about miracles performed in situations of warfare and military attack - not least considering how Goscelin's Life would have been commissioned by a community that had witnessed the Norman Conquest.

The Old English version of the *Ecclesiastical History* is still following Bede's wording rather closely in the initial description of the epidemic as well as for relating subsequent cases of illness and death. Like the Latin original, it describes the storm (*hreonis*) of the often-cited pestilence (*wooles*) by which everything far and wide was devastated and ravaged (*forhergende*, *forneomende*). As the brothers from the men's house were *genumene* to the Lord, the sisters expected to be taken from this world by the same ruinous affliction

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[203] cf. Morton and Wogan-Browne (2003), p. 145ff.

(*gehrore*).[204] However, the struggles of individual sufferers with their illness are depicted as patient perseverance rather than active confrontation. Before it was time for the abbess herself to succumb to the pestilence, a young boy had died after he had been *hic praefata pestilentia tactus* (HE iv, 8, p. 358) or *gehrinen mid þa foresprecenan aðle* (OEHE iv, 9, p. 286; 'touched by the aforementioned disease'). In dying, he called out for Edith, one of the two sisters who were *adtacta infirmitate* and *tacta morbo* in the following hours. The choice of words underlines the physicality of the illness, perhaps in contrast to the spiritual realm of eternal life. Stricken, or touched, by the disease, members of the community died within just a few days with no attempts at curing their illness being made.

> [w]hen Æthelburh, the devout mother of that devoted community, was herself about to be taken from the world … [Tortgyth,] in order that her strength, like the apostle's, might be made perfect in weakness, […] was suddenly afflicted with a most serious bodily disease and for nine years was sorely tried, under the good providence of our Redeemer, ignorance or carelessness might be burnt away by the fires of prolonged suffering[205]

Despite being presented as virtually consecutive, Torhtgyth's illness – even more so than that of Æthelburh herself – stands out against the previously discussed examples. In her suffering, it was Torhtgyth who reported a vision of what turned out to be the abbess's ascension to heaven after her death. Bede is

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[204] 'Mid þy seo hreonis þæs oft cwedenan wooles feor 7 wide all wæs forhergende 7 forneomende, þa cwom he eac swylce in þone dæl þæs mynstres, þe ða wæpnedmen in wæron; ond dæghwamlice gehwær of weorulde to Drihtne genumene wæron. þa wæs seo abbudisse 7 seo modor þære gesomnunge bighygdig 7 sorgende, in hwylce tid þone dæl þæs mynstres, þe se þreat þara Godes þeowa in wifhada in wæs, þæt ilce wite gehrine, ða ongon heo gelomelice in gesomnunge þara sweostra secan 7 ascian, in hwelcre stowe þæs mynstres heo woldon, þæt heora liictun geseted wære, þæt heo mon bebyrgan meahte, þonne þæt gelumpe, þæt heo of middangearde genumene wæron þy ilcan gehrore, þe heo oðre gesegon'; OEHE, iv, 8, pp. 282-284.

[205] 'Cuius ut uirtus, iuxta Apostolum, in infirmitate perficeretur, tacta est repente grauissimo corporis morbo, et per annos nouem pia Redemtoris nostri prouisione multum fatigata, uidelicet ut, quicquid in ea uitii sordidantis inter uirtutes per ignorantiam uel incuriam resedisset, toum hoc caminus diutinae tribulationis excoqueret'; HE iv, 9, p. 360.

careful to describe Torhtgyth's slightly elevated position in the community for she was of somewhat mature age and had been living at Barking for many years. While not being portrayed in a light that would betray any sort of favouritism, it is implied that Torhtgyth was especially close to the saint and always 'endeavouring to help the mother to keep the discipline of the Rule by teaching or reproving the younger ones'.[206] Her already outstanding character it seems, is what earns her the blessing of not just the vision of Æthelburh's elevation but more so that of a drawn out period of suffering, which is in stark contrast to the sudden deaths experienced by other members of the community. She outlives her spiritual mother by several years even though she is afflicted with *grauissimo corporis morbo*, the severest of bodily illness. The purpose of her prolonged suffering is to be purified of any remaining *ingnorantiam* or *incuriam* before finally being received into the company of the saint once again, as the latter has promised in a vision only days before the sister's passing. Torhtgyth strength, like the apostle's, was to be made perfect in weakness. This is a reference to the second Epistle of St Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians in which he says about the thorn in his flesh:

> Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.[207]

Torhtgyth's trial by illness which lasts nine years is interpreted as a blessing, an opportunity to improve herself to a point that will allow her to be almost on par

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[206] HE, iv, 9, 361ff.
[207] Cf. Crislip (2013); English Standard Version (ESV), 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.

with the saintly model of Æthelburh, who was not just spiritual advisor during her life but also guide in illness and death. The abbess promotes preparation for the passing into eternal life, particularly in the face of disease. However, it can be argued that the saint's own suffering is rather downplayed while her role as an inspiration to her followers, who have to suffer in order to purge themselves of earthly blemishes is really at the core of the narrative. The most attention is given to the case of Torhtgyth, not herself saintly, but exemplary amongst the community of believers. The life, as written by Bede, can therefore be read as an encouragement to follow not directly in the footsteps of a saint, but rather in those of a most devout protégé. No part of the narrative is about finding a cure for the illness, but it is the disease that while coming over virtually everyone, can be used by the faithful as a remedy for afflictions of the soul. The example to be emulated may be found in Torhtgyth rather than Æthelburh. The case of Torhtgyth in many ways reads similarly to that of Herbert in relation to St Cuthbert, described above. Herbert, too, had been a close companion of his spiritual leader but in order to die with him, as he had wished, and be received into the same heavenly dwelling place, he first had to endure the pain of long illness as a punishment in order to be elevated to a level of merit comparable to Cuthbert.[208] Neither Torhtgyth nor Herbert become saints themselves even though their extensive suffering. They could find a purpose in their ailments and hope for an eternal life at their respective saint's side however, which may appear a much more attainable goal for the average audience of Saints' Lives who also may be struggling with prolonged and fatal diseases.

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[208] cf. HE, iv, 29, pp. 441-442.

The final case to be presented, that of Æthelthryth, proves interesting especially, but not exclusively, in the light of the example above as it is indeed the saint herself here who has to endure illness, so she can be purged from residual shortcomings of virtue.

St Æthelthryth

The first major point to be made on the Lives of St Æthelthryth is how she has foreseen not just her own illness but also the number of those to die of the same cause or rather at the same time according to Bede himself as well as the Old English translation of his *Ecclesiastical History*. There is a distinct emphasis on the saint being one of many, not only in dying but also in status as her burial requests suggest.

> There are indeed some who say that, by the spirit of prophecy, she not only foretold the plague that was to be the cause of her death but also openly declared, in the presence of all, the number of those of the monastery who were to be taken from the world by the same pestilence. She was taken to the Lord in the midst of her people, after holding the rank of abbess for seven years. When she died she was buried by her own command in a wooden coffin, in the ranks of the other nuns, as her turn came.[209]

> Sume men eac swylce sægdon, þæt heo þurh witedomes gast þa adle forecwæde, þe heo on forðferde; ond swelce eac þara Godes þeawa rim, þa ðe of heora mynstre of middangearde wæron to geleorenne, þæt heo sweotolice eallum cyðde.[210]

Æthelthryth here is not presented in an elevated position over other members of the community. In contrast, it is made clear that she sees herself as equal to her

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[209] 'Sunt etiam qui decant, quia per prophetiae spiritum et pestilentiam, qua ipsa esset moritura, praedixerit, et numerum quoque eorum qui de suo monasterio hac essent de mundo rapidendi palam cunctis praesentibus intimauerit. Rapta est autem ad Dominum in medo suorum post annos septem ex quo abbatissae gradum susceperat, et aeque, ut ipsa iusserat, non alibi quam in medio eorum iuxta ordinem quo transierat ligneo in locello sepulta'; HE, iv, 19, p. 392.
[210] OEHE, iv, 19, p. 318.

sisters and does not wish to be treated as a superior figure. Ælfric's account, however, omits that part of the saint's prophecy entirely which, in turn, casts a much more individual light on her affliction. While still she died and was buried in the midst of her household in her eighths year as an abbess, Ælfric only says that *heo wearð geuntrumod swa swa heo ær witegode.*[211] Apart from mentioning the tumour, a symptom we recognize as plague-like, Ælfric gives no indication that the disease might have been of an epidemic nature or been perceived of as such.

Generally, Ælfric and Bede present Æthelthryth in the role of the abbess and caregiver. What is stressed above all else, however, is her striving for a life of abstinence and asceticism.

> It is related of her that, from the time she entered the monastery, she would never wear linen but only woollen garments and would seldom take a hot bath […] and then last of all, after the other handmaidens of Christ who were present had washed themselves, assisted by herself and her attendants. She rarely ate more than once a day except at the greater festivals or because of urgent necessity; she always remained in the church at prayer from the time of the office of matins until dawn, unless prevented by serious illness.[212]

Pauline Thompsom put forward the idea that 'Æthelthryth was actually living out her understanding of a saint's life. For this reason, even within the hagiographical part of the story, there may well be more of Bede the historian than we think'.[213] Such an endeavour would explain her choices in fashioning her daily life within the community in a near eremitic style. In denying herself basic comforts, such as food and hygiene, not to speak of the luxuries of the finer clothes she would have worn in her youth as a princess and secular ruler, she

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[211] ÆLS I, XX, ll. 49-50.
[212] HE, iv, 19, p. 393.
[213] P. Thompson (1996), p. 477.

resembles Saints Cuthbert and Guthlac. Nevertheless, it is indicated in the text that her position and responsibilities as an abbess put some constraints on the extent to which she could put fasting and general negligence of the body into practice. She may have been trying to implement and integrate saintly ideals into the parameters set by her individual circumstances as the authors of her Lives would have attempted to situate her saintliness within the given historical framework. As has been demonstrated in the examples of Saints' Lives discussed in this chapter, there has been a shift from early Christian martyr saints (Oswald) towards a return to the asceticism of the desert saints after Christianity had been sufficiently well established in the British Isles. The main cause of death for the latter group of Anglo-Saxon saints, including Æthelthryth, is infectious disease, not the enemy's sword. In connection with these two types of saints, a potential reading of Æthelthryth in the tradition of early female virgin martyrs has also been discussed by Christine Fell and subsequently by Pauline Thompson in articles on the interplay of hagiographical and historiographical concerns in the Lives of St Æthelthryth.[214]

Bede does not seem to stress Æthelthryth's Englishness so much as her life as a near contemporary, she is of *nostra etiam aetate*.[215] '[T]he main reason for Æðelþryð's hold on the Anglo-Saxon imagination is clearly that she was the nearest they could produce to the virgin martyrs of the early church'.[216] There is no pagan father or suitor, no tyrant. Æthelthryth is, in fact, in the company of good if not exceptional Christians throughout her life. Her father, King Anna, as

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[214] Christine E. Fell (1994), 'Saint Æðelþryð: A Historical-Hagiographical Dichotomy Revisited', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* XXXVIII; P. Thompson (1996).
[215] Cf. Fell (1994), p. 20.
[216] Fell (1994), p. 21.

well as her second husband are supporters of the Church. Her aspirations to enter

the monastic life might even have been shaped by role models from within her

own immediate family, as Thompson suggests.[217] Fell has previously pointed

out how the tumour is not interpreted by Æthelthryth (if one believes the authors

of her *vitae*) as a punishment but as an opportunity for penance granted by

God.[218] This is perhaps comparable to the long-term illness which Cuthbert's

companion Herbert had to endure in order to have a chance to approach

Cuthbert's level of saintliness before departing into eternal life together. The

idea of release from guilt and into eternal life is expressed in *Ecclesiastical*

History as well as in the very close translation into Old English.

> It is also related that when she was afflicted with this tumour and by
> the pain in her neck and jaw, she gladly welcomed this sort of pain
> and used to say, 'I know well enough that I deserve to bear the weight
> of this affliction in my neck, for I remember that when I was a young
> girl I used to wear an unnecessary weight of necklaces; I believe that
> God in His goodness would have me endure this pain in my neck in
> order that I may thus be absolved from the guilt of my needless
> vanity. So, instead of gold and pearls, a fiery red tumour now stands
> out upon my neck.'[219]

The illness manifested in the tumour may be (and might have been) interpreted

as a chance at not only penance but martyrdom which in turn cements the

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[217] P. Thompson (1996), p. 481.
[218] Fell (1994), p. 23.
[219] 'Ferunt autem quia, cum praefato tumour ac dolore maxillae siue colli premeretur, multum delectate sit hoc genere infirmitatis, ac solita dicere: 'Scio certissime quia merito in collo pondus languoris porto, in quo iuuenculam me memini superuacua moniliorum pondera portare; et credo quod ideo me superna pietas dolore colli uoluit grauari, ut sic absoluar reatu superuacuae leuitatis, dum mihi nunc pro auro et margeretis de collo rubor tumoris ardorque promineat'; HE, vi, 19, pp. 394-397.
The relevant section of OEHE, IV, 19, p. 322 for comparison: 'Secgað eac men, þa heo þrycced wæs 7 swenced mid swile 7 sare hire swiran, þæt heo wære swiðe lustfulliende þisse untrymnesse cynne, 7 heo gewunalice cwæde oft: Ic wat cuðlice, þæt ic be gewyrhtum on minum sweoran bere þa byrðenne þisse aðle 7 þisse untrymnesse, in þæm ic gemon mec geo beran, þa ic geong wæs, þa iidlan byrðenne gyldenra siglia. Ond ic gelyfo, þætte me forðon seo uplice arfæstnis wolde mec hefigade beon mid sáre mines sweoran, þæt ic swa wære onlesed þære scylde þære swiðe idlan leasnisse, mid þy me nu for gólde 7 for gimmum of swiran forðhlifað seo readnis 7 bryne þæs swiles 7 wærces.'

saintliness of the afflicted. The disease would thus be construed as an adversary that brings about martyrdom in analogy to pagan oppressors of the past.

However, the aspect of guilt is not essential to the early martyrs' Lives and moreover, is not in any explicit way brought up in the Lives of the Anglo-Saxon saints discussed above. It may, perhaps in part, be seen as the hagiographers' response to the historical fact of Æthelthryth's past as wife of worldly rulers before becoming a bride of Christ. The vanity of her younger years, made emblematic in the wearing of necklaces quoted by herself, is interpreted as something deserving of being purged, or even punished – a positive or negative evaluation of an illness like that rather depends on the individual in question and whoever is assessing the situation. Æthelthryth's earlier misguided habits, which the abbess had since overcome, still is holding her back from eternal bliss. In the *Ecclesiastical History*, she has to be 'set free' to be 'liberated' from (Lat. *absoluar*, OE *onlesed*) the guilt of her past. Ælfric, taking a slightly different direction, emphasizes the aspect of purity from over the image of the bonds of sin, manifested perhaps in illness, choses the wording *me is nu geþuht þæt godes arfæstnyss þone gylt aclænsige*.[220] Æthelthryth's purity, including her virginity is put at the forefront of the audience's mind and apparently favoured over the styling of the saint as a martyr.

The celebration of female purity is also the expressed motivation behind Bede's *Hymn* on Æthelthryth,[221] which is conceived as a 'hymnum uirginitatis'. Written some years earlier than the main text, it directly follows Bede's account of the life of the saint which is concluded by a paragraph on the location of Ely. He

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[220] *ÆLS*, I, XX, ll. 57-58.
[221] HE iv, 20, pp. 396-400.

presents Æthelthryth as the most recent in a long line of virgins, including the Virgin Mary, martyrs, and combinations of both. The Old English version of the *Ecclesiastical History* omits this poetic insertion. Ælfric, in its stead, adds an *exemplum* of a man who after fathering children lived chastely within marriage, a model for imitation, instead of veneration which is to be directed towards the saint. Bede's *Hymn* seems to serve a different and perhaps broader purpose. One stanza towards the end also deals with the healing powers of the saint's shroud.

> 'Ydros et ater abit sacrae pro uestis honore;
> Morbi diffugiunt, ydros et ater abit.'

> Yields to those holy weeds each frightful plague;
> Disease aghast yields to those holy weeds.

The problem with the above translation as well as perhaps the original composition is the adherence to alphabetical order according to the initial word of each stanza. Leaving that kind of stylistic limitation aside, I am going to attempt a more literal translation.

- *ater* is related to *atrox* 'cruel, fierce, frightful'; its meanings include 'dull black' (as opposed to *niger* 'shining black') or 'dark', 'gloomy, sad, dismal, unlucky', and the poetic 'malevolent' and 'obscure'.
- *abit* 'he departs, goes away'
- *sacrae* 'sacred, holy, divine' gen. f. singular corresponds with *uestis* 'garment, vestment'.
- *pro honore*, pro followed by ablative singular can have several meanings including 'for, on behalf of, before, in front of, instead of, about, according to, as/like, as befitting'.
- *morbi diffugiunt* 'diseases scatter, disperse, flee, run away'

A closer translation might thus be 'Ydros (and) dark/malevolent departs before the sacred garment's honour, diseases flee, ydros (and) dark/malevolent.'

What remains to be interpreted and translated is the word *ydros* which Colgrave and Mynors apparently took to signify 'plague'. Perhaps determined by Bede's need for an initial 'y', he uses the variant spelling <ydros> for what is most likely

the Latin *hydrus*, meaning 'water-snake'. This suggests a literal translation of the line in question as 'the dark/malevolent water-snake departs' instead of Colgrave and Mynors' 'yields […] each frightful plague'. In the context of Æthelthryth's garments' healing power and the explicit mention of *morbi* in the second line of the 'Y-stanza' it seems reasonable, as it obviously has to Colgrave/Mynors, to assume the *ydros et ater* to point to a more specific kind among the variety of *morbi*. In the first full translation of the *Liber Eliensis*[222] into English, published in 2005, Janet Fairweather comments on the literal meaning of *ydros* ('water-serpent') and how the compiler of the manuscript evidently mistook the word for *ydrops* ('dropsy'). 'The word ydros [as used in Bede's *Hymn*],' she claims, 'does not come from any reference to the serpent [of] the Eden narrative in the Vulgate Genesis: it was chosen, rather, because of Bede's need for an initial word beginning with "y"'.[223] While the word may not have been copied from any biblical source, the connotations attached to the concept of the snake or serpent probably clung to it as much as to other lexemes used in such a context. Briefly compare the sixth-century historian Gregory of Tours for whom portents of disease may appear, amongst other forms of tokens, as serpents in a body of water as the following examples from the *Historia Francorum* (also called *Decem libri historiarum*) show:

> In the fifteenth year of king Childebert's reign […] A great school of water snakes swam down the river, in their midst a tremendous dragon as big as a tree trunk. […] As a result there followed an epidemic, which caused swellings in the groin. [224]

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[222] The *Liber Eliensis* is a 12th-century English chronicle and history, written in Latin. It covers the period from the founding of the abbey in 673 until the middle of the 12th century, building on earlier historical works.

[223] Janet Fairweather (2005), Liber Eliensis*: A History of the Isle of Ely. From the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, Woodbridge: Boydell, p. 66 (footnote 247).

[224] 'Anno igitur Quinto decimo Childeberthi […] Multitudo etiam serpentium cum magno dracone in modo trabis validate per huius fluvvii […] Subsecuta est de vestigio cladis, quam

> Before the great plague which ravaged Auvergne, prodigies terrified
> the people of that region … and the dead bodies were so numerous,
> that it was not even possible to count them. There was such a
> shortage of coffins and tombstones that ten or more bodies were
> buried in the same grave … Death came very quickly. An open sore
> like a snake's bite appeared in the groin or armpit, and the man who
> had it soon died of the poison, breathing his last on the second or
> third day. The virulence of the poison made the victim
> unconscious.[225]

In the first paragraph above, the snakes and the dragon (located in water not in the sky which is the case in examples to be discussed in 5.3.3), emerge as not just tokens, but, on closer reading, as causing factors of the following epidemic. The latter is further described as a pestilence causing swellings in the groin which sounds not entirely unlike Æthelthryth's neck tumour. In the second example, Gregory speaks of what appears to be a prime example of an epidemic along the definition that it killed very many and quickly. He also depicts bubo-like sores in areas where the lymphnodes are situated. The resemblance to snake-bites is an interesting detail emphasising the link between serpents and disease conceptualisations. An observed physical similarity of the symptoms is a likely factor in equating disease with poisons (of animals) which may induce an unconscious state, death-like, in a way that reminds of the vapours ('qualms') discussed in etymology excurse in 4.1 Therefore, I want to argue that, while Bede's choice of *ydros* may have been informed partially by the alphabetical order of stanza initials, the semantic selection of the snake, with the adherent concepts of attack and poisoning, could not have been entirely arbitrary. This particular way of envisioning disease seems well motivated. On the one hand

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inguinariam vocant.' Cf. B. Krusch and W. Levison (eds.) (1951), *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Libri Historiarum*, MGH Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum I, Book 10, chap. 1, Hannover: Hahn, p. 447; translation from Lewis Thorpe (1974), *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 543.

[225] Cf. Krusch and Levison (1951)*,* Book 4, chap. 31, p. 165; trans. Thorpe (1974), p. 226.

culturally, following an authority such as Gregory of Tours, on the other, experientially, with its grounding in observation of bodily symptoms. The conceptualisation of disease as a serpent may therefore be interpreted as another iteration of the more basic and abstract metaphor DISEASE IS A HARMFUL ENTITY.

Metaphoric representations of disease are an element of an extended range of disease vocabulary which has not been taken into account by previous analyses, such as Pauline Thompson's study discussed in the introduction of this chapter. However, the evidence gathered in this and previous chapters (cf. 3 and 4.1) clearly suggests that they should be considered when discussing the Anglo-Saxons' knowledge and understanding – or frequently presumed lack of understanding – of diseases. Understandings of and the resulting reactions to illness and disease are illustrated in surviving pre-Christian folk remedies and charms, religious texts and teachings, but also in the emerging sector of 'scientific' medicine, manifested in the *Leechbooks*, for example.

With regard to the latter approach to illness, it is again Æthelthryth's *vita* that stands out from the group of Lives discussed in this chapter for its inclusion of a leech's service. None of the other texts describe the work of such a medical practitioner. They are mentioned merely in passing, if at all, whenever their methods failed, thus calling for a healing miracle (cf. St Cuthbert and his attendant). In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* as well as in its vernacular adaptation, the leech, Cynefrith, recounts how he opened the swelling and the noxious matter, which was inside, came out of it (*incidere tumorem illum, ut*

efflueret noxius umor qui inerat; *þæt ic þone swile gesticade, þætte seo sceðþende wæte ut fleowe, seo þær in wæs*).[226]

Bede himself, as a polymath, would most likely have been familiar with classical medical writings describing such procedures. On the narrative level as well, a previous understanding that tumours of the kind found under Æthelthryth's jaw are usually filled with fluid that may be drained in order to relieve the patient in some way must be assumed. This suggests a certain familiarity with that particular symptom of the saint's illness. Who 'they' are, urging Cynefrith to proceed with the lancing of the tumour, is not entirely clear - probably Bishop Wilfrid or members of Ely's monastic community. In any case, they must have been convinced of the permissibility of that kind of medical treatment which apparently was not at odds with the Christian belief in gracious, passive suffering. Moreover, this episode suggests leeches were trained professionals with a certain amount of specialist knowledge and experience that members of the monastic community would not have had access to. Although it can be assumed that caring for the infirm was part of daily life at the monastery, none of the sisters or other clergy present at Æthelthryth's sickbed seem to have felt capable of performing the incision.

In Ælfric's Life of Saint Æthelthryth, however, the phrasing is slightly altered from the versions provided in the *Ecclesiastical History* and its Old English translation. First of all, the lancing of the tumour is not recounted in Cynefrith's first person narrative but remains within the narrator's perspective. We are told *þæt se læce sceolde asceotan þæt geswell* (l. 63), 'that the leech should pierce

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[226] HE, iv, 19, p. 394; OEHE, IV, 20, p. 320.

the swelling'. Again, the decision to open the swelling was not the leech's but rather that of an anonymous third party. Cynefrith followed his orders and *dyde he sona swa [a]nd þær sah ut wyrms* (l. 64) 'he did so right away and there flowed out corrupt matter'. Apparently, with the lexeme *wyrms,* Ælfric had available a single term for the previously circumscribed 'noxious matter'. This may be seen as speaking against the notion of Ælfric's (and his contemporaries') diminished knowledge about and experience with symptoms of infections compared to earlier authors.

The episode is of rather minor importance to the narrative's main aim of describing the life of a saint. It was certainly not the main priority to present an insight into the practical work of an Anglo-Saxon leech. Nevertheless, it proves informative with regard to the question of how much intervention by leeches would have been considered acceptable within the confines of Christian beliefs. Obviously, a clear distinction is made between leeches and 'their' medicine, the application of which is in keeping with the faith, according to Ælfric (cf. *On Auguries*, St Cuthbert, above), and devil's crafts, including charms and incantations.

5.4 Summary

The ninth and tenth centuries saw great monastic movements and reforms towards austerity and a stricter observation of rules. Communal life became more restricted in favour of a return to more eremitic lifestyles.[227] Nevertheless, monasticism plays a major role in the lives and Lives of saints in Anglo-Saxon times. Monasteries seem to attract saintly personalities or, putting it in more

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[227] Cf. Otter (2004), pp. 1-5.

economic words, they produce saints. This is true in more than one way since the monastic environment fosters saintly behaviour and provides the necessary structures of daily living. Secondly, it is from within the monastic communities that individual, oftentimes local saints, are promoted. The first aspect is noticeable especially in the *vitae* of female saints, for example the abbesses and founders of monasteries, such as Æthelthryth and Æthelburh.

The men enjoyed slightly more freedom to follow in the direction of the desert saints in choosing eremitic lifestyles. However, even their solitude is frequently compromised by visitors and more unwelcome responsibilities, such as being appointed bishop in the case of Cuthbert. Especially during episodes of severe illness, the saints are surrounded by attendants who will provide care even if it is just to a minimal extent. The factor of community is necessary not just from a medical perspective but also from the viewpoint of the hagiographer in need of reliable witnesses whose statements an individual's saintliness can be established on and illustrated with.

While Oswald in his role as a martyr makes an exception concerning his lifestyle as well as his death, being the only one not to die of an illness, the rest of the group of Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives discussed in this chapter show many parallels in their incorporation of disease narratives, as pointed out in the discussions of the individual Lives. Apart from the example of the Irish scholar, infectious disease, perhaps surprisingly, features mostly outside of healing miracles, the typical scenario for sufferers of other ailments to appear in the context of hagiography. In contrast, the saints themselves are attacked by diseases, as are some of their most devoted followers. Enduring the hardship of a severe and sometimes prolonged infection with disease is presented as a means

of purification and elevation on the journey into eternal life. Saints, specifically Cuthbert and Æthelburh, serve as model types to illustrate an approach to unavoidable suffering that may make it more bearable and provides sense and purpose to counter the perceived arbitrariness of infections. They do not merely act as models for the audience of the Saints' Lives directly, but even within the narrative they inspire certain individuals closest to them, to join them by way of suffering. These believers could be seen as more approachable exemplars for the audience to model oneself after than the chosen group of saints themselves. With the remarkable exception of Æthelthryth, illness is connected with purification rather than guilt and resulting punishment. Her case especially highlights how punishment and blessing are both possible interpretations of attacks by disease from either a backward looking (guilt as reason) or forward looking (achievement of a purified soul and eternal bliss as purpose) perspective.

In hagiographic literature, disease is not depicted as a phenomenon which is of interest in itself, as is generally the case in the previously discussed charms, but functions as an element within a broader narrative. From the author's viewpoint, although this is exceedingly difficult to make definitive statements on, historical circumstances and further reaching agendas may play a role in choosing which way to direct the emphasis of a text as has been illustrated by Ælfric's *Life of St Oswald*. An interesting observation on the dilemma of immorality as an explanation for epidemic disease has been made by John Maddicot. He notes that Bede's illustration of the pestilence raging in the years after 664 appear unfanciful and make no effort to draw a connection to undesirable behaviour.

> In the wake of the synod of Whitby and the huge advances the Church was making according to Bede's own beliefs, it seems plausible for him to not choose to depict disease as a direct

consequence of sinful/un-Christian behaviour regardless of any knowledge he might have had about the biology of disease.[228]

Bede's depiction of the pestilence afflicting Egbert does not expound on any such connection although the penitent man mentions unspecified transgressions of his youth, as shown above. This, indeed, rather illustrates Bede's care to chronologically detach the events surrounding the pestilence from the concept of sin, which is situated firmly in decades past. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is a good example of how concepts of disease, including causalities and tokens, can be interpreted flexibly depending on the author's objectives. This dynamic framing of disease is not to be confused for inventing *ad hoc* answers for difficult questions though, as will explained in more detail in 5.3.3.

The link between monastic communities and disease, however, is not just one of spiritual ideals or moral teachings but is relevant also on a more practical, physical level. Although 'one important function of convents was care of the sick, involving knowledge of herbs and the preparation of medicines and potions', as explained by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, '[m]onastic approaches to death allocated medicine for the body a somewhat conflicted place in the spiritual economy.'[229] A frequent theme in monastic writings, especially the guiding literature of the twelfth and early thirteenth century, is how too much concern for medical intervention can become impious. In contrast to that, earlier, Anglo-Saxon hagiography, in which guilt and punishment do not appear to be as prominent yet, allow for medical intervention as witnessed in the case of

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[228] John Maddicot (2007), 'Plague in Seventh-century England', Little (ed.) *Plague and the End of Antiquity. The Pandemic 541 – 750*, Cambridge: CUP, pp. 181f. Even more pointedly, Thompson speculates whether the synod of Whitby, held in 664, which drew monks and clerics from all over the British Isles, may even have been a facilitating factor in the spread of pestilential infectious disease; cf. P. Thompson (1986), p. 263 (footnotes).

[229] cf. Morton and Browne (2003), pp. 157-180.

Æthelthryth, even if such interventions are usually of little use. Neither Bede nor Ælfric discourage their audiences from seeking help in medicine but warningly point their finger at heathen practices manifest in charms and incantations, remnants or adaptations of which were still recorded and have been discussed in chapter 4 above. Still, some of the language and concepts of disease prominent in such charms can be detected in the fatal touches of attacking disease, the devils and serpents of hagiographic writing, in spite of the relative sparsity of pestilences in the saints' Lives.

6 Disease and the End of the Natural World

In this chapter, I would like to pick up on examples and ideas from where I left off at the end of 3.5. I will re-introduce some of the parallels and co-occurrences of pestilence with other concepts as found, for example, in Wulfstan's work. He groups together raidings, sudden pestilences, bad weather (*miswyderu*) and crop failure as things that may come over the people unexpectedly and against which to seek assistance from God directly (cf. HomU 40 (Nap 50), 156 and HomU 29.2 (Nap 35), 2). As Richard Raiswell and Peter Dendle note,

> 'Anglo-Saxon nosology seems to have built upon that of first-century Palestine, albeit, as it was known to them, refracted through the lens of scripture. Christ reifies diseases as sentient beings, casting them out largely without distinction: for instance, Luke describes him as 'rebuking' the spirit in the Capernaum demoniac ('a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon') with the same word used to describe him 'rebuking' a fever to depart and 'rebuking' wind to calm.'[230]

The choice of words, specifically verbs, parallels disease (here fever) not only with demons, 'sentient beings', which are to be combatted by Christ, but also with stormy weather in the form of wind. Aelfric, likewise, mentions disease not only in parallel with *heregunge* ('invasion, plundering'), a pathway of conceptualising which the chapter 'Monsters and Disease' followed up on, but also in combination with *ungewyderum* (literally 'un-weather') of various manifestations (cf. ÆAbusMor, 244-246). The example I gave at the end of chapter 3, a passage from the Alfredian *Orosius*, highlights the connection of disease with weather and climate. It hints at how people might have believed pestilence comes into existence and how it is transmitted.

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[230] cf. Luke 4:35, 4:39; Mark 4:39; Richard Raiswell and Peter Dendle (2008), 'Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon and Early Modern England: Continuity and Evolution Social Context', *Journal of British Studies* 47, p. 742.

gewearð se micla moncwealm on þæm londe: nales, swa hit gewuna
is, of untidlican gewideran, þæt is, of wætum sumerum, ⁊ of drygum
wintrum, ⁊ of reðre lentenhæte, ⁊ mid ungemætre hærfestwætan ⁊
æfterhæþan; ac an wind com of Calabria wealde, ⁊ se wol mid þæm
winde.

'the great pestilence in the land became - not how it is usual - of
unseasonable weathers, that is of wet summers, and dry winters, and
sudden heat in the spring and with excessive wetness in the fall and
drought after, but a wind came from the ?woods of Calabria and the
pestilence with the wind'[231]

As one of the Alfredian translations, the Old English Orosius is counted among the books that the preface to the Pastoral Care postulates to be *nidbeðyrfesta [...] eallum monnum to witanne* ('most needful for all men to know').[232] The text is an Anglo-Saxon 'paraphrase' of the Latin *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem* (*Seven Books of History against the Pagans*), a universal history written from a Christian perspective by the cleric and historian Paulus Orosius in the fifth century. The original text was composed at the prompting of Saint Augustine after the sack of Rome in 410, an event Orosius took care to sever from the rise of Christianity as a possible cause. Orosius' work enjoyed widespread popularity throughout Europe in centuries immediately following its composition and throughout the Middle Ages. The surviving Old English translation and adaptation was produced around the year 900. While the writer remains anonymous, they were likely inspired by the literary revival of King Alfred's reign. The author purposefully reshaped Orosius's narrative by editing out some detail in favour of adding explanations and speeches, as well as a

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[231] Fort he most recent edition and translation of the text cf. Malcolm Godden (ed.) (2016), *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon Rewriting of Orosius*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

[232] Henry Sweet (ed.) (1958), *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of the Pastoral Care*, 2 vols. Repr., London: EETS, p. 6.

section on the geography of the Germanic world.[233] As part of a translation from a Latin source text, some might argue that the ideas presented in the above passage are merely relics from other times and cultures that have little to do with Anglo-Saxon beliefs about their own environment and experiences. However, the literary culture not just of Anglo-Saxon England but the Middle Ages more generally was one of careful and highly learned copying, translation, adaptation, compilation and commentary.

This chapter will present a diverse range of source material in terms of chronology as well as 'genre'. At its core, this chapter will survey homiletic writings of Wulfstan and Ælfric as well as Bede in more detail than has been afforded above. None of this group of the few named and possibly most famous of Anglo-Saxon authors were physicians or medical specialists but instead primarily men of the church who were involved, to varying degrees, in the politics of their respective times. They were quite certainly not involved in the physical treatment of specific illnesses and their writings do not include compilations of remedies such as, for instance, the leechbooks. Nevertheless, they may easily be counted as some of the most influential thinkers not only of their own times but also as authorities impacting succeeding generations. Introducing Wulfstan and Ælfric, Milton McC. Gatch explicates how 'these writers are at the same time profoundly conservative, traditional, and (even) unoriginal. And yet so original that the knowledgeable reader can hardly mistake their authorship.' [234] Both employed existing source material to serve their

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[233] Cf. Mary Kate Hurley (2013), 'Alfredian Temporalities: Time and Translation in the Old English Orosius', Journal of English and Germanic Philology, Vol. 112, No. 4, p. 405; also Janet Bately (ed.) (1980), The Old English Orosius, London, New York: OUP, pp. lv, lx, xciii.
[234] Milton McC. Gatch (1977), Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxo England: Ælfric and Wulfstan, Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, p. 128.

specific objectives and audiences. However, the theological contributions of either author do not lie in their originality but their ability to select and compile existing material in such a way that would serve the purpose of commenting on the pressing issues of the day. One has to keep in mind that while most of the knowledge a person or a people has at any point in history is processed, that is partially pre-formed, this does not mean that it is any less their own, once it is incorporated into the wider system of ideas and beliefs. How this cognitive and, in consequence, literary compilation of ideas is achieved is what deserves our attention as it may illuminate structures of knowledge and beliefs that otherwise appear opaque and incoherent.

Perhaps even more so than Wulfstan and Ælfric, Bede stands as one of the most influential and respected scholars of his time. Yet, he evaluated and made use of existing literature when compiling his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* as well as his scientific treatises such as *De Natura Rerum*. Both of these will be relevant for the purview of this chapter in so far as they include observations and explanations on pestilential disease. I have suggested that the listing of 'afflictions' witnessed in the example from the Old English *Orosius* may point towards the concept of disease being associated with other conceptual domains. This could indicate the perception of coherence in the experience of what in modern terms would be regarded as non-related factors in the physical environment, especially with regard to harmful, destructive forces. In some contexts, I propose, they might even be thought of as belonging in the same categories. As will be shown, when reading disease in context of natural, especially meteorological /atmospheric phenomena, one has to pay attention to the differences between discussions of the causes (God's will?) of versus the

reasons (sin?) for outbreaks of pestilence as well as other kinds of disruptions in the natural environment. It will be highlighted how disease could be construed as natural and seasonably expected much like regular bad weather but might also be imbued with meaning in the context of tokens and portents. Seemingly contrasting aspects of disease, that of sin and punishment on the one hand and natural balance or imbalance on the other, will be traced throughout a selection of prominent texts of the Anglo-Saxon period and back to seminal works of late antiquity. The contrast, however, is not as clear-cut as a cursory glance might suggest. Thus, a primary aim of this chapter is to illustrate how the parallels and causalities of pestilence in Anglo-Saxon literature are neither haphazard imaginations nor copied mindlessly from foreign authorities. On the contrary, they are well embedded in the specific contexts in which they become apparent and are purposefully presented.

The first section of the present chapter will briefly introduce the text type of Anglo-Saxon prognostics. As a means of predicting the course of future events, they may indicate when illness is most likely to occur and how long it can be expected to last. Specific vocabulary encountered in Wulfstan's Sermo Lupi ad Anglos will then be evaluated in connection with instances of similar phrases in prognostic texts before evaluating how Wulfstan's construal of disease might interplay with his involvement in lawmaking. The third part of this chapter will then investigate how pestilence features in the field of 'natural science' as witnessed in Bede's treatise *De natura rerum*. Particularly in the latter section, the scholarly tradition is a major theme of this chapter which will conclude by tracing the influence of Isidore of Seville as well as pointing out remarkable, and

perhaps less known, aspects of Galenic thinking in relation to models of infection.

6.1 Prognostics

Prognostic texts as a type are a continuation of a classical tradition. They serve as a guide to predicting the course of events pertaining, for instance, to matters of agriculture, the weather, childbirth and illness and provide keys to the interpretation of dreams. With their focus on fairly mundane issues they give fascinating insights into the daily concerns of the people as well as monastic life, pastoral and medical care. Medieval prognostics may be seen as place of intersection of classical learning, Christian orthodoxy, popular belief and scientific observation. Prognostics survive in about thirty Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and dozens of continental manuscripts. Most appear in isolation or in small clusters, either copied among or added to texts on other subjects.

Lazló Sándor Chardonnens succinctly defines the genre of prognostics as 'a codified means of predicting events in the life-time of an individual or identifiable group of individuals, using observation of signs and times, or mantic divination'.[235] It is perhaps due to the focus on matters of daily life that scholars have continuously tried to place these texts within the realm of folklore and medicine. At the time of the publication of the first editions and translations of Anglo-Saxon prognostics by the Reverend T. O. Cockayne, Max Förster[236] and Heinrich Henel, that is during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, prognostics as a genre remained largely undefined.

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[235] László Sándor Chardonnens (2007), *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900-1100: Study and Texts*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, p. 8.
[236] Cf. for an example, Max Förster (1910), 'Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Volkskunde IV', *Archiv* 125, pp. 47-70.

Instead, it was discussed in terms of its status between folklore and superstition. Scholars such as Neil Ker classified as 'folklore' a heterogeneous group of texts including, among others, charms and different sub-types of prognostics. This categorization within modern scholarship emphasises the idea that charms as well as prognostics would have been rooted in the mind of the people, comprising traditional beliefs, legends, and customs, current among the common people.[237] While not being ignorant concerning the content of prognostic texts, 'scholars were preoccupied with the position of prognostics in low and high culture, rather than with the textual structure of prognostics or their intended purpose'.[238] In contrast to this long-held perspective, Roy Liuzza reminds that

> '[w]hile prognostication or prediction appears to be a universal human activity found in virtually all cultures, surviving Anglo-Saxon texts labelled 'prognostics' derive from continental Latin sources rather than native Germanic traditions; they are in that sense works of science and learning rather than folklore or popular belief.[239]

Close consideration of the Anglo-Saxon prognostic material within its manuscript context suggests that prognostication was not so much a staple of folklore but rather a scholarly activity pursued as part of learned monastic culture. Even though a few prognostications on the subjects of illness and the treatment thereof are transmitted in manuscripts dealing with issues of health and disease, the bulk of material does not appear alongside leechbooks or the aforementioned charms. Chardonnens notes the 'near absence of Anglo-Saxon prognostics in a medical context',[240] unless these prognostics are integrated into

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[237] Cf. *OED*, 'folklore, n'.
[238] Chardonnens (2007), p. 5.
[239] Roy M. Liuzza (2011), *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.iii*, Woodbridge: DS Brewer, p. 2.
[240] Chardonnens (2007), pp. 39-45.

longer tracts on bloodletting or the humours specifically. Against intuition and expectation, predictions on illness (*adl*), for example, may thus be found in a Christmas Day prognostication, which is generally copied alongside wind and sun prognostications.[241]

Despite the discernible interest of some prognostics with providing guidance on matters of illness and health, I have not found predictions concerning outbreaks of epidemics or explicitly wide-spread infectious disease. None of the texts consulted contain instances of *wol* and *cwealm* only features as a gloss for *mortalitas*.[242]

Prognostications dealing with the comparatively underspecified patterns of illness described by *adl*, which may include cases of infectious disease, are also, surprisingly, rather few. Bloodletting appears to be the main target of medicinal interest. The few instances of *adl* include the following ones found in an eleventh century *Alphabetical Dreambook* and a *Medical Lunarium*, respectively:[243] *Gif him þince þæt he æt woruldgeflitum si. Þæt tacnað him adl towerd* ('If it seems to him that he is in a dispute, that signifies that illness lies ahead of him') and *On anre nihte ealdne monan se þe hine adl gestandeð. se bið frecendlice gestanden* ('On a moon of one night old he who is attacked by disease will be dreadfully attacked').

The first example, which offers advice on how to interpret the imagery encountered in dreams, presents another iteration of the previously discussed

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[241] Cf. Marilina Cesario (2015), 'An English Source for a Latin Text?: Wind Prognostication in Oxford, Bodleian, Hatton 115 and Ashmole 345', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 112, No. 2, p. 223ff; for texts and translation: Liuzza (2011), pp. 186–87 and 194–95.

[242] 'Gif on forman nihte tide hit getacna(ð) cwealm. Si prima noctis hora; sign*ificat* mortalitatem.' Liuzza (2011) T7. Prognostic for Thunder by Hours of the Day, Latin, l. 2, p. 170; also T12. Thunder Prognostic for Days of the Week, English, p. 196.

[243] Both edited in Liuzza (2011).

notion that disease was conceptualised in relation to concepts of fighting and battle. Here, the (in dream) experience of being *æt woruldgeflitum*, a feeling of dissent or discord, is to be taken as a signifier of an affliction with illness in the future.

The second prognostication presents a correlation of possible courses of illness with the position of the moon. In that way, it places disease in relation to phenomena to be observed in the environment. Depending on the day of the lunar cycle on which one experiences the onset of an illness, diverging courses and outcomes of the affliction are to be expected. In this example, *adl*, once again, is described as 'attacking' the individual. The kind of disease denoted by the term *adl* thus is conceptualised in a similar way as the *cwealm* and *wol* of other texts which indicates that it might be a case of infectious disease within an outbreak of a larger scale. The *Medical Lunarium* continues the prognosis by stating that '[i]f disease attacks him on a two-night-old moon, he will soon be up. If sickness attacks him when the moon is three nights old, he will be confined to his bed and will die' (*Gif hine on .ii. nihta ealdne monan adl gestandeþ. sona he ariseþ. Gif hine on .iii. nihte gestandeð. Se liþ fæste* 7 *swylt*). The text, as typical for the genre, makes no attempt at an explanation as to why the same disease may generate such strikingly different outcomes but rather describes their circumstances as unavoidable facts of life. In accord with this line of thinking, the reader is left with the prognosis without any prescribtions as to recommended behaviour in the face of potentially devastating illness. It appears clear that the activity of prognostication did not aim at preventing or treating outbreaks, or 'attacks', of disease.

In the realm of monastic culture, which has been argued to be the locus of Anglo-Saxon prognostic writing, diagnosis and prognosis were of central importance. Distinguishing between demonic afflictions and angelic inspiration was crucial as was the ability to discern wether a disease (or illness) was within the bounds of the natural order or not. The task was to identify what the situation was in order to predict what to expect next. Thus, '[p]rognosis is a way of asserting knowledge about disease, not gaining power over it, a method of addressing illness which avoids questions of causation or cure, matters perhaps better left in the hands of God or His saints.'[244] The prognostications shown above do not discuss reasons for cases of people falling ill. Neither are the causes of illness explicitly discussed, although, for the second example, one could interpret attacks of disease (as an agent) as the cause of illness (the experience of symptoms). While the evaluation of the circumstances, if not the establishment of a precise chain of causation, of a specific case of illness was still relevant for accurate prediction of its course, strategies of intervention were not put forward in the context of prognostication. In this, I suggest, prognostics differ markedly from the (medical) charms. While these two types of texts tended to be grouped together under the label of 'folklore', it appears that they are neither products of the same cultural sphere, as pointed out earlier, nor do they highlight the same aspects of illness and health. While it has been shown that similar metaphors, that is basic conceptualisations of DISEASE AS AN ATTACKING FORCE, are employed in both sets of texts, the charms spin tales of active protection and

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[244] Liuzza (2011), p. 64; Andrew Crislip (2005), *From Monastery to Hospital. Christian Monasticism and the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 19.

defense which are entirely absent from prognostics which put the patient entirely at the receiving end of an apparently predetermined fate.

This observation may point back to the rift between monasteries as centres of knowledge about medicinal plants and procedures of treating the ill on the one hand and the Christian exhortation to accept God's will. Balancing appropriate intervention with patient acceptance has already come up as an issue within the context of the Saints' Lives discussed in chapter 5 and has implications not just for the physical treatment of but also the interpretation of causes and meanings of infections, specifically in terms of sin and punishment. Anglo-Saxon Christianity, like the pagan societies it superseded, did not operate without observing and gathering knowledge about their natural environment. However, as Faith Wallis points out,

> [Christians] differed from pagans in insisting that nature was neither divine nor the exclusive ruler of the human body. Hence the physician was obliged to acknowledge that some diseases – perhaps most – were caused by God rather than nature. The corollary was that resorting to medicine would not be in every case effective, or even ethical.[245]

What is implied is that illness and disease are parts of nature as by God's will and design. Physical treatment and medicine, therefore, had to be seen as ambiguous in that the physician or healer could at best act within the limitations of whatever God's ultimate intent might be. The cognitive construal of disease which is detected in the language of some prognostics as well as certain charms appears to be congruent. Nevertheless, the wider theoretical understanding of the world including disease and illness informs not just the practical application of

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[245] Faith Wallis (1995), 'The Experience of the Book: Manuscripts, Texts, and the Role of Epistemology in Early Medieval Medicine', Don Bates (ed.), *Knowledge and the Scholarly Medical Traditions*, Cambridge: CUP, p. 119.

treatments but also which questions around the issue are negotiated at all and in which contexts.

Prognostication provides relatively sparse information on most aspects of illness apart from the fact that it can be expected to occur and result in certain outcomes. Methods of intervention, as provided by charms and leechbooks, are hardly mentioned (with the exception of the general practice of bloodletting). Likewise absent are the contentious motives of sin and punishment which appear so prevalent in other texts, most prominently, perhaps, in Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Wulfstan's writing, at first glance, does not seem to have much in common with the prognostics apart from that he does mention disease in context of other phenomena within the physical environment, particularly weather conditions. His arguments, in contrast to that of the authors of the prognostics and also that of Bede, can be expected to be rooted less in the scholarship of antiquity and more pre-occupied with the application of Christian models of interpreting disease in the context of the socio-political environment of his time. While the prognostics regard illness at an individual level, Wulfstan places disease within a large-scale web of historical complexities.

6.2 The Homilies of Wulfstan and Ælfric

Wulfstan, bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York during the tumultuous years of the late tenth and early eleventh century, stands as one of the most prominent figures arising from the canon of extant Old English literature. He appears to have been using the pen-name Lupus ('wolf') throughout his career. However, his name and image are probably most closely linked to the Latin title given to one particular sermon of his, the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Despite the

Latin title, the three surviving versions of the text are composed in the vernacular Old English befitting the intended audience, the people of Anglo-Saxon England. At least one of the iterations of this sermon can be pinpointed to a certain date, that is, to the year 1014. The *Sermo Lupi* can be seen as somewhat of a rarity amongst the corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature in that it can not only be placed in a specific chronological but also cultural and perhaps personal context, given that the author is a named and a well-known figure. Wulfstans personal involvement in the religious and secular politics of his time, particularily in legislature will be discussed in more detail at a later point. For now, a brief, introductory glance over the historical events and circumstances preceeding the sermon's composition (and presumably delivery) will suffice to provide some background to the following close examination of some specific words and phrases encountered in Wulfstan's description of pestilence.

1014 was only one bad year in a succession of tumultuous events for the English people and kingdom over the course of the last decade of the long reign of King Æthelred. During Æthelred's exile in Normandy, the kingdom came under Danish rule after decades of recurring attacks by armies and fleets from about 980 onwards. King Svein's death in 1014 was quickly followed first by Æthelred's return and then Cnut's ascend to the throne in 1016. This series of events would likely have caused a considerable sense of destabilisation and chaos which may be witnessed in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's entry for the year of 1014.[246]

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[246] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, A.D. 1014. 'This year King Sweyne ended his days at Candlemas, the third day before the nones of February; and the same year Elfwy, Bishop of York, was consecrated in London, on the festival of St. Juliana. The fleet all chose Knute for king; whereupon advised all the counsellors of England, clergy and laity, that they should send after King Ethelred; saying, that no sovereign was dearer to them than their natural lord, if he would govern them better than he did before. Then sent the king hither his son Edward, with his

In addition to the disease outbreaks endured during the latter half of the tenth century ('a very great pestilence' and 'the great fever in London'[247]) the chronicle describes a 'great sea-flood, which spread wide over this land, and ran so far up as it never did before.'[248] It was in response to this period of wide-spread natural and political disruptions and unreliable leadership, that Wulfstan supposedly drafted his address of the English people. We have today three slightly different versions of varying length,[249] which have been transmitted in five separate manuscripts. The passage most immediately relevant to the purview of this study, due to its explicit inclusion of disease in an enumeration of various misfortunes, can be found in every copy of the *Sermo Lupi*.

> Forþam hit is on us eallum swutol 7 gesene þæt we ær þysan oftor
> bræcan þonne we bettan, 7 þy is þysse þeode fela onsæge. Ne dohte
> hit nu lange inne ne ute, ac wæs here 7 hunger, bryne 7 blodgyte, on
> gewelhwylcan ende oft 7 gelome. And us stalu 7 cwalu, stric 7
> steorfa, orfcwealm 7 uncoþu, hol 7 hete, 7 rypera reaflac derede
> swyþe þearle; 7 us ungylda swyþe gedrehtan, 7 us unwedera foroft
> weoldan unwæstma; forþam on þysan earde wæs, swa hit þincan

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messengers; who had orders to greet all his people, saying that he would be their faithful lord -- would better each of those things that they disliked -- and that each of the things should be forgiven which had been either done or said against him; provided they all unanimously, without treachery, turned to him. Then was full friendship established, in word and in deed and in compact, on either side. And every Danish king they proclaimed an outlaw for ever from England. Then came King Ethelred home, in Lent, to his own people; and he was gladly received by them all. Meanwhile, after the death of Sweyne, sat Knute with his army in Gainsborough until Easter; and it was agreed between him and the people of Lindsey, that they should supply him with horses, and afterwards go out all together and plunder. But King Ethelred with his full force came to Lindsey before they were ready; and they plundered and burned, and slew all the men that they could reach. Knute, the son of Sweyne, went out with his fleet (so were the wretched people deluded by him), and proceeded southward until he came to Sandwich. There he landed the hostages that were given to his father, and cut off their hands and ears and their noses. Besides all these evils, the king ordered a tribute to the army that lay at Greenwich, of 21,000 pounds. This year, on the eve of St. Michael's day, came the great sea-flood, which spread wide over this land, and ran so far up as it never did before, overwhelming many towns, and an innumerable multitude of people.'

[247] Cf. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, A.D. 961.

[248] Cf. Footnote 236.

[249] Editions by A. S. Napier (1883), *Wulfstan*, *Sammlung englischer Denkmäler* 4, Berlin, repr. with appendix by K. Ostheeren (1967); and Dorothy Bethurum (1957/1971), *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, Revised edition, Oxford: Clarendon.

mæg, nu fela geara unriht fela ⁊ tealte getrywða æghwær mid mannum.[250]

This passage captures rather succinctly the scope as well as the kind of misfortunes the nation had to face and was continuously confronted with. Wulfstan addresses the entire Anglo-Saxon, Christian community when he adopts an adhortative mode by consistently referring to a 'we' and 'us' as opposed to some at this point unspecified other. He identifies sinful behaviour, *unrihta* and *tealte getrywða*, as the reason for the repeated (*oft and gelomne)* attacks of a variety of afflictions on the entirety of the land (*gewelhwylcan ende*). These descriptors suggest an – in modern terms – epidemic quality of whatever misfortunes are listed. While the experience of warfare and bad weather, plundering, theft, starvation and death will certainly have been experienced on an individual level, Wulfstan's concerns clearly lie on the macro-level of society as a whole.

Wulfstan incorporates such a list of calamities in a number of texts. The original source of this, might be found, in his translation and elucidation of a passage from Leviticus, as Dorothy Bethurum notes. [251] In his genuine works variations on the list appear in *The Last Days*, one of the eschatological homilies and in *The Institutes of Polity*.

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[250] Bethurum XX(EI), ll. 53 – 61; 'For it is evident and plain in all our lives that we have previously sinned more often than we have improved, and therefore much is attacking this people. Things have not prospered now for a long time at home or beyond our land, but there has been warfare and famine, burning and bloodshed in every district time and again, and theft and murder, plague and pestilence, murrain and disease, malice and hate and plundering of robbers have harmed us very severely. And excessive levies of tribute have greatly afflicted us, and bad weather has very often caused bad harvests; because in this country there has been, as it may seem, for many years now many crimes and unstable loyalties everywhere among men.' See Kevin Crossley-Holland (trans.) (2009), *The Anglo-Saxon World. An Anthology*. First published 1982. Reissued.Oxford: OUP, p. 295.
[251] Cf. Bethurum (1957/1971), p. 360; cf. Leviticus xxvi. 3-12; Homily XIX of Bethurum's edition.

> Eac sceal aspringan wide 7 side sacu 7 clacu, hol 7 hete 7 rypera reaflac, here 7 hunger, bryne 7 blodgyte 7 styrnlice styrunga, stric 7 steorfa 7 fela ungelimpa[252]

> moreover shall arise far and wide, dissension and injury, slander and malice and plundering by robbers, warfare and famine, burning and bloodshed and harsh quakings, pestilence and death and many misfortunes

> And gif hit geweorðe þæt folce mislimpe þurh here oðþon hunger, þurh stric oððe steorfan, þurh unwæstm oððe unweder[253]

> and if it came to be that the people suffers through warfare or famine, through pestilence or death, through bad harvests or severe weather

Pestilence and disease make an appearance in Wulfstan's narrative as items on and extensive list of what might be called 'symptoms' of sinful misconduct. He uses several words and phrases to denote concepts pertaining to the field of disease. Nevertheless, on closer inspection, they are not necessarily or clearly semantically distinct from other concepts within the category of 'symptoms' linked to sin. The lexical items in question are the pairs of *orfcwealm* and *uncoþu*, and, even more interestingly, *stric* and *steorfa*. Orfcwealm, meaning 'murrain', and uncoþu, denoting unspecified 'disease' or 'illness' may be relatively unproblematic to interpret and translate. The proposed translation of *stric* and *steorfa* as 'plague and pestilence, however, merits discussion as the discernible meaning of the words, especially in combination, is not, in fact, immediately clear cut. The following is an investigation of potential meanings of the phrase in context, particularly with regard to the extent of semantic overlap between depictions of disease and violent altercations.

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[252] Cf Bethurum (1957/1971), V 'The Last Days (Eschatological Homilies)', pp. 123-7, ll. 102-104.

[253] K. Jost (1959), *Die* Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical, pp. 167-9.

The Phrase stric and steorfa

For the word *steorfa*, Bosworth and Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* provides links to its Old Saxon cognate. *man-sterƀo*, a compound reminiscent of Old English *man-cwealm* (in contrast to *orf-cwealm*) discussed in chapter 3.1. The related Old High German *sterbo*, accordingly, glosses *pestis*, *cladis*, and *pestilentia*. This may speak in favour of translating *steorfa* as 'pestilence'. In other contexts, *steorfa* can carry the less specific meaning 'death' or 'death by some kind of force', in addition to the more particular 'death by hunger', 'starvation' (cf. the contemporary English verb 'to starve'). In the flow of Wulfstan's list of misfortunes, none of the above variants of meaning would seem decidedly unfitting. Murder and bloodshed are mentioned before, as is famine, with murrain and disease being added to the alliterative couple *stric and steorfa*. Other texts by Wulfstan contain the element *steorfa* in combination with other items as demonstrated in the line *here and hunger, bryne and blodgyte, unwæstm and unweder, stalu and steorfa and fela ungelimpa* ('warfare and hunger, burning and bloodshed, bad harvests and weather, theft and pestilence/starvation and many misfortunes'). [254] It appears difficult to determine in how far the choice of particular words was motivated by a need for alliteration rather than semantic intention. A gradation of possible meanings within a general spectrum of, for instance 'death by adverse force', might have worked in a writer's poetic favour. Another example contains *steorfa* as an independent item in yet another listing of calamities that is brought forth as an explicit threat towards the people of Israel within the narrative. *And eow unwæstm þurh*

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[254] 'Larspel and scriftboc': Napier (1883), pp. 242-45.

unweder gelome gelimpeð, ⁊ *steorfa swyþe gehyneþ* ('and you shall repeatedly suffer bad harvests caused by bad weather and death by starvation shall oppress you exceedingly).[255] In this case, the specific meaning of 'starvation' suggests itself much more readily than it is the case for the example from the *Sermo Lupi*. The interpretation of the word appears to allow some leeway, depending on the specific phrasing and context.

In their respective editions of Wulfstan's homily, Dorothy Whitelock and Dorothy Bethurum both note the word *stric* as occurring only three times in Wulfstan's known work and only in combination with *steorfa*.[256] The immediate textual context is always a list of calamities similar to the one in the *Sermo Lupi*. As part of the alliterative formula *stric 7 steorfa*, *stric* is usually interpreted to mean 'plague'. In manuscript version H it is actually glossed *sekenes*, but this, as Whitelock remarks, may have already been a guess from the context. She further points out that, 'in *Leechdoms'*, referring to Cockayne's edition, the word appears as *gestric* (or gestricg and other spellings that are usually taken to be variants) glosses *seditionem* ('sedition, dissension').[257] The reference to *Leechdoms* perhaps, and misleadingly, suggests a distinctly medical context for the occurrence of a form of *stric* as a gloss. The quoted instances of *gastric* in fact appear in an 'Alphabetical Dreambook' in Latin with Old English interlinear glosses.[258]

It is transmitted in London, BL, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, a voluminous and varied manuscript compiling ninety-one items of text in Latin and Old English. It is one

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[255] 'God's Threat to Sinning Israel': Bethurum XIX (1957/1971), ll. 64-66.
[256] Cf. Whitelock (1980), footnote 57; Bethurum (1957/1971), p. 360.
[257] Whitelock (1980), p. 53.
[258] Liuzza (2011); T1 *Somniale Danielis*, p. 79ff.

of a few eleventh- and early-twelfth-century English manuscripts that collect

prognostic texts instead of featuring them as individual snippets. It is especially

significant, according to Liuzza in that the variety of 'texts collected there reveal

connections among manuscripts and religious houses that may allow us to

reconstruct the origin and use of these texts in Anglo-Saxon culture.'[259] The

manuscript features a number of illustrations of St Benedict, and other

authorities such as Dunstan and Æthelwold. It contains a glossed copy of the

Benedictine Rule and related texts as well as a glossed copy of the *Regularis*

Concordia in addition to a wide variety of homilies including abbreviated

versions of material composed by Wulfstan. This purposefully compiled series

of interrelated texts is followed by a collection of eighteen prognostics, the first

of which contains the only occurences of stric outside of Wulfstan's homilies.

(no. 174)   *Wíf tospræddum loccum hine gesihð gestricg[260] getacnað.*
             mulierem sparsis crinibus se uiderit, seditionem. Significat.
             if he sees a woman with loose hair, it signifies sedition.

While this first example does not appear meaningful with regard to possible

relations to either illness directly or any of calamities listed by Wulfstan, the

gloss *gestric* for *seditionem* appears in another, perhaps more relevant context,

within the same collection.

(no. 162)   *Leon wedan feondes gestric getacnað.*
             Leonem infestare, inimici seditionem Significat.
             To be attacked by a lion signifies dissension among
             enemies.

Here, gestric is used to explicate a situation of opposition which is said to find

expression in imagery of violent attack by a wild animal. In two further

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[259] Liuzza (2011), p.3.
[260] MS *gesriicg*, Cockayne's *gestriicg* and Förster's *gespriicg* are spurious, according to
Chardonnens (2007), p. 315 (notes).

prognostications, following closely in the manuscript, it is said that dreams of handling lanterns and of throwing stones signify illness.

(no. 164)   *Luminaria trectare. infirmitatem. Significat.*
               Leohtfatu handlian untrumnysse getacnað.
               To handle lanterns signifies illness.

(no. 166)   *Lapides mittere. egritudinem. Significat.*
               stanes asendan seocnesse getacnað.
               To throw stones signifies sickness.[261]

The word used in these examples is not *stric*, but the less specific and possibly less strong *untrumnes* and *seocness*. It might be noteworthy that *gestric*, in the 'Dreambook', while obviously glossing *seditionem* in two instances, appears in close proximity to prognostications about disease. Simultaneously, *stric* has at some point been glossed *seocness* in a copy of Wulfstan's homily. The evidence presented suggests that *stric* was not a very common word with fuzzy meaning in the Old English langague of the late Anglo-Saxon period. It seems to have been used only by Wulfstan and, in a variant form, in glossing prognostics transmitted in a compilation manuscript that features some of the latter's work as well. The use of the gloss *seocness* for and instance of stric in the formula *stric and steorfa* suggests, firstly, that the meaning of the word was not (anymore) instinctively understood and required interpretation. Secondly, it can be inferred that *stric* was taken as a reference to disease, when used in concert with *steorfa* as opposed to where it glosses *seditionem* in the variant form *gestric*. One might even argue that *stric* and *gestric* had at some point developed out of a common etymon to denote diverging aspects of its meaning. Based on the evidence at hand this can, however, only be a tentative suggestion. The

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[261] Liuzza (2011), pp. 102-3; Chardonnens (2007), p. 315.

translation of *stric and steorfa* as 'plague and pestilence', might be unnecessarily repetitive if *stric* is to signify 'sickness' with the element *steorfa* acting as a specifier denoting 'sickness with fatal outcome'. Remembering that Wulfstan addresses and has in mind an entire people when talking about afflictions with 'sickness with fatal outcome', the interpretation of what is described as a pestilence of possibly epidemic proportions finds itself substantiated by the evocative choice of words as well as in context of the paragraph.

Punishment and Penitence

In the following section of this chapter I will venture on to the next level of establishing meaning by highlighting the overall aims of the *Sermo Lupi* and placing them in context of Wulfstan's activity as a preacher and lawmaker.

The sermon, or homily, was the most productive genre in written prose during the tenth and early eleventh century. Beside Wulfstan, the second major figure who composed a significant share of the homiletic and hagiographical texts extant today is Ælfric of Eynsham. Although a contemporary of Wulfstan and therefore writing out of a similar historical context, Ælfric's habitat was the monastery, he did not hold a higher office comparable to Wulfstan's status as Archbishop of York and legislative advisor to the crown. Chapter 5 above has looked into the role of epidemic disease in the Lives of Anglo-Saxon saints including a number of Ælfric's adaptations which serve as model narratives for not just good, but exceptional Christian lives. The sermon, as a text type, is designed less for private contemplation and rather more geared towards pulpit delivery. While the sermons found in the corpus of Old English exhibit variety of theme and tone, there is a palpable immediacy in how they address the

audience, often concluding in exhortatory phrases calling for a change of behaviour. Compared to the Saints' Lives, homilies could be described as more demanding than inspirational. Nevertheless, with regard to their negotiation of pestilence, the *Sermo Lupi* as well as Ælfric's homiletic and hagiographical works overlap and are firmly embedded within a wider programme of preaching and pastoral care, as they draw from the Bible and the teaching of revered church fathers such as Gregory the Great.

The *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, though the most frequently studied of Wulfstan's works, can be said to be the least characteristic of him in subject-matter and style. It deals explicitly with specifics of the current state of affairs in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the late tenth and early eleventh century. 'For once', as Bethurum asserts, 'Wulfstan put aside his prejudice against the actual detail of life and made it the theme of his sermon, though it necessitated violating what he had always regarded as the decendies of public address.'[262] In style, he relies less on sound patterns and repetition than the enumeration of evils, presented in couplets such as *stric and steorfa*, that have befallen the population. Perhaps it is this departure from his usual modes of writing which puts all the more force behind Wulfstan's urging for repentance, which is in line with what appears to be a central concern of his life and of the time.

Orchard points out how scholarship on Wulfstan and his writings has been able to identify a host of manuals of rhetoric Wulfstan would have had access to. Rhetorical figures from his writings have been traced, among others, to authors such as Alcuin, Isidore of Seville and Hrabanus Maurus. Against this idea of

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[262] Bethurum (1957/1971), pp. 355-56.

Wulfstan being firmly rooted in the Latin rhetorical tradition might be set the comment of Dorothy Whitelock on the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, that 'no work smells less of the study'.[263] It is quite certainly not with the subtleties of learned rhetoric finesse that Wulfstan is hoping to persuade the listeners. Yet, the sermon is not the product of a spontaneous outburst either. It is designed to alarm the audience and is replete with apocalyptic imagery familiar from the Book of Revelation, thus drawing a direct connection between the state of the realm with the end of the world and judgement day. For delivering the message of the sermon most effectively, the themes of judgement and the consequences of a sinful life had to be laid out in a clear argumentative line as well as evocative phrasing.

The following passages illustrate the broader context and line of argument in which Wulfstan mentions disease and pestilence, the *stric 7 steorfa, orfcwealm 7 uncoþu*, found in the enumeration of miseries quoted at the beginning of this section:

> Leofan men, gecnawað þæt soð is: ðeos worold is on ofste, 7 hit nealæcð þam ende, 7 þy hit is on worolde aa swa leng swa wyrse; 7 swa hit sceal nyde for folces synnan ær Antecristes tocyme yfelian swyþe, 7 huru hit wyrð þænne egeslic 7 grimlic wide on worolde.[264]

> Dear men, understand that this is true: the world is in haste and it approaches the end, and because it is ever worldly, the longer it lasts, the worse it becomes; and so it must necessarily greatly worsen before the coming of Antichrist because of the sins of the people, and indeed it will become then fearful and terrible throughout the world.

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[263] A. P. McD. Orchard (2007), 'Crying wolf: oral style and the Sermones Lupi', *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 21, Michael Lapidge, Malcolm Godden and Simon Keynes (eds), Cambridge: CUP, p. 239.
[264] Bethurum XX(EI), ll. 4-11; Crossley-Holland (2009), p. 294.

In his introduction of the sermon to come, Wulfstan directly addresses his audience, a group of people, not an individual, and exhorts to believe his words. He captures the listeners' attention, by thus announcing pertinent information, that is, the condition of the world as it approaches the apocalypse. Signs of the world's decline are highlighted and exemplified as being present in the society of people Wulfstan addresses.

> 7 þæt is gesyne on þysse þeode þæt us Godes yrre hetelice onsit, gecnawe se þe cunne.[265]
>
> And it is obvious in this nation that the anger of God violently oppresses us, let him perceive it who can.
>
> Ful earhlice laga 7 scandlice nydgyld þurh Godes yrre us syn gemæne[266]
>
> Very loathsome laws and shameful exactions are common among us because of the anger of God

The current sufferings of the people are interpreted as a step on the way towards the end and are simultaneously explained as being caused by God who is angered by the various sins commited by the population. Wulfstan describes these sins throughout the sermon. They are the reason for God's anger which in turn is the causation for misfortunes such as outbreaks of disease, bad harvests, thievery and murder as well as invasion, specifically by the Danes.

> 7 flotmen swa strange þurh Godes þafunge […] eal for urum synnum.[267]
>
> and the Vikings are so strong by the consent of God […] all because of our sins.

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[265] Bethurum XX(EI), ll. 98-99; Crossley-Holland (2009), p. 296.
[266] Bethurum XX(EI), ll. 106-7; Crossley-Holland (2009), p. 297.
[267] Bethurum XX(EI), ll. 111-13; Crossley-Holland (2009), p. 297.

God allows the enemy to be victorious. Notably, the heathen army is not sent by God as the example from the sermon *Sunnudæges Spell* (cf. chapter 3.3) threatens. There, *cwealm, hungor, untimnesse, fyr* and *hæðen folc* are depicted as punishments activated by God for not putting down work on Sundays. In the *Sermo Lupi*, those misfortunes are rather something God has the power to prevent but choses to let run their course. In both cases, while this subtle difference exists, God is controlling the people's environment. Enemy forces, the weather, and pestilence are all regarded, in a way, as instruments of God's will. Specifically, their occurrence is symptomatic of His anger.

This and the initially discussed passage with its enumeration of evils compare closely to the following verses from the Book of Revelation which detail the opening of the first four seals and unleashing of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

> Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer. When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!" When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its riders name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill

> with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.[268]

The horsemen themselves are sometimes interpreted as Pestilence, War, Famine, and Death. However, the association of the first with pestilence does not seem to have been made before modern times.[269] It might have gained traction, amongst a number of other interpretations, as a result of analogy or confusion, for it would fit into the quartet of calamities with which the fourth Horseman, Death, wreaks havoc across a significant portion of the earth.

In the *Sermo Lupi*, Wulfstan likewise enumerates pestilence, hunger, warfare in his list of evils tormenting and decimating the population. He does not mention wild animals which suggests he faithfully describes the situation he could observe instead of preaching a compilation of excerpts copied form the Revelation of John and other model texts. Still, Wulfstan appears to have abandoned his usual restraint in favour of the harrowing language and detail of the apocalyptic vision he must have had in mind when he addressed the *Sermo*

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[268] ESV, Revelation 6:1-8; Biblia Sacra Vulagata (Vulgata), Revelation 6:1-8, 'et vidi quod aperuisset agnus unum de septem signaculis et audivi unum de quattuor animalibus dicentem tamquam vocem tonitrui veni et vidi et ecce equus albus et qui sedebat super illum habebat arcum et data est ei corona et exivit vincens ut vinceret et cum aperuisset sigillum secundum audivi secundum animal dicens veni et exivit alius equus rufus et qui sedebat super illum datum est ei ut sumeret pacem de terra et ut invicem se interficiant et datus est illi gladius magnus et cum aperuisset sigillum tertium audivi tertium animal dicens veni et vidi et ecce equus niger et qui sedebat super eum habebat stateram in manu sua et audivi tamquam vocem in medio quattuor animalium dicentem bilibris tritici denario et tres bilibres hordei denario et vinum et oleum ne laeseris et cum aperuisset sigillum quartum audivi vocem quarti animalis dicentis veni et vidi et ecce equus pallidus et qui sedebat desuper nomen illi Mors et inferus sequebatur eum et data est illi potestas super quattuor partes terrae interficere gladio fame et morte et bestiis terrae.'

[269] Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, for instance, provides an example of this interpretation in his 1916 novel *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (*Los Cuatro Jinettes del Apocalipsis*) translated by Charlotte Brewster Jordan: "The horseman on the white horse was clad in a showy and barbarous attire. [...] While his horse continued galloping, he was bending his bow in order to spread pestilence abroad. At his back swung the brass quiver filled with poisoned arrows, containing the germs of all diseases. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1484/1484-h/1484-h.htm#2HCH0005. This twentieth century take on the horseman spreading, if not necessarily personifying disease is wonderfully reminiscent of the elf-shot imagery encountered in Anglo-Saxon Charms.

Lupi to the English. In establishing a connection between the kinds of sins perpetrated in the kingdom and the many misfortunes, amongst which he counts pestilential disease, his purpose was to raise awareness and warn his audience of what might yet be to come. However, Wulfstan's intention is not merely to spread a panic in the face of the unavoidable. Instead, he exhorts the people to amend their misbehaviour and do right by God's law in the future, the goal is repentance. What oppresses the kingdom is God's anger, manifested in invasion, *orfcwealm* and *uncoðu*, *stric* and *steorfa*. Disease, here, functions not as much as a punishment but is in itself as a symptom, a sign which Wulfstan diagnoses and wants to see relieved.

> gif we ænige bote gebidan scylan, þonne mote we þæs to Gode earnian bet þonne we ær þysan dydan. Forþam mid miclan earnungan we geearnedan þa yrmða þe us onsittað, ⁊ mid swyþe micelan earnungan we þa bote motan æt Gode geræcan gif hit sceal heonanforð godiende weorðan.[270]

> if we shall look for any remedy then we must deserve better of God than we have done hitherto. Because with great deservings we have earned the miseries which lie upon us, and with very great deservings we must obtain the remedy at the hands of God if henceforth things shall become better.

This passage goes beyond the apocalyptic vision painted in the first part of the sermon and offers a strategy for improvement.

A very similar presentation of such an if-then-dynamic regarding misfortunes that may befall a people can be found in Ælfric's writing. If compared to Wulfstan in a broad and all-encompassing fashion, which is not my aim within the limitations of this study, Ælfric may easily be shown to be a very different type of writer in his preferences regarding both style and content. Nevertheless,

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[270] Bethurum XX(EI), ll. 18-23; Crossley-Holland (2009), p. 294.

looking specifically at the topic at hand, disease and environmental phenomena,

the initially quoted passage from the Old English *Orosius* and especially the

Sermo Lupi show striking similarities to Ælfric's *The Prayer of Moses*.[271]

> If cowl-wearing men observe God's service at set times, and live soberly, and if the laity live according to right, then know we for certain that God will provide for our prosperity, and peace among us, and, in addition thereto, give us the eternal mirth with Him.

> If then the head-men, and the cowl-wearing teachers, will not take care for this, but think of worldly things, and care neither for God's commands, nor for His worship, then will God manifest in them (their) contempt of Him, either by hunger or by pestilence […].[272]

> Well may we think how well it fared with us when this island was dwelling in peace, and the monastic orders were held in honour, so that our report spread widely throughout the earth. How was it then afterward when men rejected monastic life and held God's services in contempt, but that pestilence and hunger came to us, and afterward the heathen army had us in reproach?

> Concerning this spake the Almighty God to Moses in the wilderness, 'If ye walk in my statutes and keep my commandments, then will I always send you rain-showers in due time, and the earth shall yield you her fruits, and I will give you peace and reconciliation, that ye may enjoy your land without fear, and I will also put the evil beasts far from you. If ye then despise me, and cast away my laws, I will also very speedily wreak it upon you; I will cause that the heaven shall be to you as hard as iron, and the earth underneath it as if it were brass. Then shall ye labour in vain, if ye sow your land, then the earth shall yield no fruits; and if ye even then will not turn to Me, I will send the sword to you, and your enemies shall slay you, and then they shall cruelly lay waste your land and your cities shall be broken down and wasted. I will also send cowardice into your hearts, so that none of you dare withstand your enemies.'[273]

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[271] *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. 1, XIII.

[272] *ÆLS*, ll. 133-143; 'Gif ða gehadodan men healdað godes ðeowdom on gesettan timan . and syferlice libbað and gif ða læwedan men libbað æfter rihte . þonne wite we to gewissan . þæt god wile fore-sceawian ure gesundfulnysse . and sibbe mid us . and ðærto-ecan us syllan ða ecan myrhðe mid him . Gif ðonne þa heafod-men . and ða gehadodan lareowas þyses ne gymað . ac þencað embe woruld-þincg . and godes beboda ne his biggencga ne gymað . þonne wile god geswutelian his forsewennysse on him . oððe mid hunger oþþe mid cwealme.'

[273] *ÆLS*, ll. 147-174; 'Wel we magon geðencan hu wel hit ferde mid us . þaða þis igland wæs wunigende on sibbe . and munuc-lif wæron mid wurð-scipe gehealdene . and ða woruld-menn wæron wære wið heora fynd . swa þæt ure word sprang wide geond þas eorðan . Hu wæs hit ða

Whereas in some of his earlier homilies Ælfric recognizes different chains of reasoning as to why God might cause his people to be afflicted by devastating misfortunes, the emphasis on divine anger in *The Prayer of Moses* is pertinent to the homilist's interpretation of the current situation at the time of his writing.[274] Mechthild Gretsch has pointed out that

> a political and ethical motivation occasionally seems to have determined Ælfric's choice, especially with regard to the *uitae* and Old Testament pieces in the *Lives of Saints*, and that he decided to include pieces such as […] *The Prayer of Moses*, […] because of the parallels to contemporary political conditions which they provided, and because of their potential for serving as a vehicle for the political and ethical instruction of a lay audience.[275]

Ælfric applies God's words to Moses to Anglo-Saxon England which, after a period of peace and relative prosperity, was visited by pestilence, hunger, and suffered renewed attacks by Danish forces. This, he explains, was triggered by the rejection of the monastic life and a contempt of God. Hunger and pestilence are in fact portrayed as the manifestation of this contempt at God's will. For Ælfric, the aspect of punishment for society's development from properly Christian to sinful and corrupt is more prominent than it is the case for the *Sermo*

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siððan ða þa man towearp munuc-lif . and godes biggengas to bysmore hæfde . buton þæt us com to cwealm and hunger . and siððan hæðen here us hæfde to bysmre . Be þysum cwæð se ælmihtiga god , to moyse on þam wæstene . Gif ge on minum bebodum farað. and mine beboda healdað . þonne sende ic eow ren-scuras on rihtne timan symble . and seo eorðe spryt hyre wæstmas eow . and ic forgife sibbe and gesehtnysse eow . þæt ge butan ogan eowres eardes brucan . and ic eac afyrsige ða yfelan deor eow fram . Gif ge þonne me forseoð and mine gesetnyssa awurpað . ic eac swyðe hrædlice on eow hit gewrece . ic do þæt seo heofen bið swa heard eow swa isen . and seo eorðe þær-to-geanes swylce heo æren sy . þonne swince ge on idel . gif ge sawað eower land ðonne seo eorðe ne spryt eow nænne wæstm . And gif ge þonne git nellað eow wendan to me . ic sende eow swurd to and eow sleað eowre fynd and hi þonne awestað wælhreowlice eower land . and eowre burga beoð to-brocene and aweste . Ic asende eac yrhðe Into eowrum heortum . þæt eower nan ne dear eowrum feondum wið-standan.'

[274] Cf. Malcolm Godden (1994), 'Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England', Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray and Terry Hoad (eds), *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English. Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley*, Oxford: Clarendon, pp. 134f.

[275] Mechthild Gretsch (2005), *Aelfric and the Cult of Saints*, p. 4.

Lupi. Wulfstan, for all the shocking imagery he uses to illustrate to the people their wrongdoings, ultimately seeks to provide instruction for improvement.

Perhaps even more similar to Ælfric's discussion of God's warning words to Moses, is Wulfstan's sermon called *God's Threat to Sinning Israel*, mentioned previously as one of the texts containing an occurrence of the word *steorfa*. Wulfstan relates to his audience what God in Leviticus 'thus spoke in days of yore to Moses'. He recites most of chapter 26 in Latin, then, for those who 'are unable to understand Latin', relates God's promise to Israel concerning the people when they obey His commandments but simultaneously warns of the dreadful consequences that await the people of Israel should they not obey.[276] For both authors, I suggest, pestilence and the numerous other afflictions exist on an explanatory continuum from being judgement and punishment for past sins to representing reminders of God's watchful eyes and power, so that the people may seize their chance to repent before it is too late for their worldly, physical and, more importantly, spiritual salvation. Beside the literary models drawn from the Bible, Ælfric has recourse to the teachings of the church father and apostle to the English, Gregory the Great when interpreting the meaning of pestilence.

Ælfrics's *Life of St Gregory the Great* from the Second Series of *Catholic Homilies* is the first English-language rendition of the saint's *vita* and presents another instance of disease being portrayed as a physical tool under God's control and within the spiritual mechanisms of repentance, judgement and salvation.

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[276] Cf. Leviticus 26:14-46; Bethurum XIX (1957/1971).

The *Life of St Gregory* dates from the last decade of the tenth century and is transmitted in several manuscripts, one of which is Hatton 114 (s. xi). Its inclusion there is remarkable insofar as the other items in the compilation pertain either to the feast days of the Virgin Mary or Christ, or to those of the apostles and evangelists, or to All Saints. The above discussed 'Prayer of Moses', as a non-hagiographical text, is, in fact, the only item from the *Lives of Saints* which is included in the collection. As Gretsch observes, 'a collection of the Lives of 'ordinary' saints was clearly not the concern of the compiler(s) of Hatton 113 and 114. But St Gregory was of course no ordinary saint.' [277] Ælfric structured his *vita* in a manner that gives prominence to Gregory's role as the apostle of the English (highlighting contemporary relevance) and concentrates attention on Gregory's sermon to the Romans (and by interpretative extension the English) in an age of distress. These emphases make the *Life* fit in with not only Ælfric's *Prayer of Moses* but also suitable for inclusion in a homiliary which contains a substantial number of Wulfstan's exhortatory sermons, notably the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*.

As the *Sermo Lupi* does with the Apocalypse of John, Ælfric adapts the pastoral content of Gregory's ministry for the Anglo-Saxon audience. The saint's original congregation, the Romans of the late sixth century, were greatly afflicted by a disastrous outbreak of the plague which depopulated much of the city within mere days, leaving no time for the infected individuals to repent their sins. The parallels between this situation and the circumstances of Ælfric's own time appear fairly obvious and continued to hold currency when, a few years later Wulfstan composed the *Sermo Lupi* which is likewise rife with imagery of death

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[277] Gretsch (2005), p. 242.

and decay. As in Wulfstan's sermon, however, the affliction is not simplisticly declared a punishment, but is interpreted by Gregory 'as demonstrating a collective need for conversion in its sense of a continual turning to God in the form of prayer and repentance.'[278] The pestilence, in Rome's case, acts as a signal towards the gateway to renewed and improved Christianity. The homilist's wording in the Old English version of Gregory's *Life* and sermon is *Geopenige ure sarnys us infaer soðre gecyrrednysse* ('Let our affliction open up for us true conversion').[279]

Ælfric picks up Gregory's call to the men and women to persist in their prayers, so that God may, eventually, terminate the miseries which afflict them, as He did the pestilence for the Romans. Whereas, the Romans were decimated by a *swurde þæs heofonlican graman* ('a sword of heavenly anger'), the ravaging Vikings of the late tenth century may be substituted for the raging plague of the narrative, described as 'the sudden stroke that slays us' (*se færlice slege us astrecce*).[280] As Gretsch surmises, 'the sermon with its vivid descriptions of the effects of the disaster and the remedy it suggests would perfectly suit contemporary conditions'.[281]

Pope Gregory the Great himself, writing a few years after the events described, also referred to the plague in Rome several times in his own writings, specifically in the 'Dialogues'. However, in recounting the return of a man, Stephen, from (near) death, Gregory explains how Stephen died 'three years ago of the horrible

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[278] Clare Lees (2009), 'In Ælfric's Words: Conversion, Vigilance and the Nation in Ælfric's *Life of Gregory the Great',* Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (eds), *A Companion to Ælfric.* Leiden: Brill, p. 289.
[279] *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*: The Second Series. Text, II.9, Malcolm Godden (ed), EETS s.s. 5. London 1955-56, ll. 113-14.
[280] *ÆCHom*, II.9, ll. 115-16 and l. 127.
[281] Gretsch (2006), p. 56.

plague which devastated Rome. During that time arrows could be seen hurled down from the sky, carrying death to many individuals.[282] These arrows of Gregory's narrative as well as Gregory's reference to the Book of Jeremiah might have served as a model for Ælfric's adaptation of the metaphor.[283]

Notably, Gregory of Tours, who first put the events in Rome down in writing, provides a fairly extensive account which even includes Gregory's sermon in direct speech.

> Those scourges of God which we fear when they are still far off must terrify us all the more when they are come among us and we have already had our taste of them. Our present trial must open the way to our conversion. The afflictions which we suffer must soften the hardness of our hearts, for, as was foretold by the prophet: 'The sword reacheth unto the soul.'[284] Indeed, I see my entire flock being struck down by the sword of the wrath of God, as one after another they are visited by sudden destruction. Their death is preceded by no lingering illness, for as you know, they die before they even have time to feel ill. The blow falls: each victim is snatched away from us before he can bewail his sins and repent.[285]

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[282] *Dialogues*, Book IV, 37; Zimmermann and Zimmermann (eds).

[283] The much less well known Old English version of the *Dialogues*, produced at the request of King Alfred, also speaks of 'arrows': 'Eac hit gelamp nu for þrym gærum in þam mancwealme, þe þas burh mid micclum wole geswencte ⁊ forhergode, þa wæs in þære byrig gesewen eac mid lichamlicre gesihþe, þæt flanas comon of heofonum ⁊ ofslogon wel hwylce men;' Book 4, XXXVII; Hans Hecht (1900-7), *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, Bib. ags. Prosa 5, Leipzig and Hamburg: Georg H. Wigand, p. 318. Note that despite the title of the edition and though reported in Asser's *Life*, bishop Wærferth's responsibility for the translation of the *Dialogues* is not indicated in the two manuscript copies of the text. Cf. Malcolm Godden (1997), 'Wærferth and King Alfred: The Fate of the Old English *Dialogues*', Jane Annette Roberts, Janet Laughland Nelson, Malcolm Godden, Janet Bately (eds), *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of Her Sixty-fifth Birthday*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, pp. 35-52.

[284] Jeremiah 4:10.

[285] Thorpe (1974), p., 544; 'ut flagella Die, quae metuere ventura debuemus, saltim praesentia et experta timeamus. Conversionis nobis aditum dolor aperiat, et cordis nostri duritiam ipsa quam patimur poena dissolvat; ut enim profeta teste praedictum est, 'pervenit gladius usque ad animam'. Ecce! Etenim cuncta plebs caelestis irae mucrone percutitur, et repentina singuli caede vastantur; nec langor mortem praevenit, sed langoris moras ut cernitis, mors praecurrit. Percussus quisque ante rapitur, quam ad lamenta paenitentiae convertatur.' Krusch and W. Levison (eds.) (1951), Book 10, chapt. 1, p. 479.

Based on this quotation, it seems more likely that later writers, including Ælfric, followed Gregory of Tours diction and adopted the image of the sword in their depictions of the pestilence.

In the thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*, Jacob of Voragine interestingly furnished the story with additional details and specifications. He claims that, as a result of Gregory and the people's incessant prayer, the archangel Michael appeared with a flaming sword in his hand which he then sheathed and thus put an end to the plague.[286] By implication, the drawn sword would represent virulent pestilence with the flames only adding gravity to the image which bears resemblance to Ælfric's metaphor.

The imagery of weapons and attack employed when describing the pestilence is not only in line with the evidence of metaphoric conceptualisations of disease presented in chapters 3 and 4, but further emphasises 'the congruence between Aelfric, the English homilist […] and Gregory, Pope of Rome and Apostle of the English' which has been noted by scholars who read the sermon as a commentary on the 'plague of the Viking invasions in the late tenth century.'[287] While a direct equivalent to the phrase 'plague of the Viking invasions' is not to be found in the corpus of Old Enlish literature, the reversal of the metaphor DISEASE IS AN ADVERSARY, an attacker, apparently suggests itself, at least to the modern reader. Based on the textual evidence we have seen so far, this conceptual flip is certainly easy to make, especially remembering the

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[286] Cf. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (1998), *Legenda aurea*, 46, 4, Florence: SISMEL. For an overview of the source history of descriptions of the outbreak and Gregory's work in Rome see entry number 151 in the catalogue of pestilences and famines compiled by Dionysios Ch. Stathakopoulos (2004*), Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire: A Systematic Survey of Subsistence Crises and Epidemics*, 2nd edition, 2017. London/New York: Routledge.

[287] Lees (2009), p. 289.

comparable expression *se hefigesta wol Sarcina þeode*[288] ('the raging pestilence of the Saracens'). In the context of the sermons, pestilence and heathen invaders alike, are presented as entities which function as instruments under God's command. In the sequence of his writings, Ælfric's first mention of the continued attacks by the Danes of the early 990s in fact appears in the Latin preface to the second series of *Catholic Homilies*, which includes the *Life of Gregory*. The sudden onset of the renewed strikes of invasion after several decades of peace must have unsettled and disrupted the societal structure of Anglo-Saxon England during the years of Ælfric's and Wulfstan's literary productivity as much as any severe outbreak of epidemic disease.[289]

The last set of text examples for this section brings the focus back to biblical models. The Book Ezekiel is indeed referenced explicitly by Gregory of Tours in his account of the plague in Rome which is 'fulfiling what is written in the prophet Ezekiel: "And begin at my sanctuary"[290] for he [Pope Pelagius] died almost immediately. Once Pelagius was dead a great number of other folk perished from this disease.'[291]

As illustrated by the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, warfare, pestilence and famine (following the aforementioned calamities or severe, unseasonable weather) are what awaits a society that has given God reason to turn the natural environment against His people. This idea finds expression in *The Prayer of Moses* and the *Sermo Lupi* and is demonstrated even more succinctly in the Book

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[288] OEHE, Book 5, 21, l. 16.
[289] Gretsch (2005), pp. 56-57.
[290] Ezekiel 9:6.
[291] Thorpe (1974), p. 543; Krusch and W. Levison (eds.) (1951), Book 10, chapt. 1, p. 477.

of Ezekiel. The latter exhibits striking parallels to the above quoted passage of the Revelation:

> Thus says the Lord God: 'Clap your hands and stamp your foot and say, Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, for they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. He who is far off shall die of pestilence, and he who is near shall fall by the sword, and he who is left and is preserved shall die of famine.'[292]

> For thus says the Lord God: 'How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast!'[293]

This reads similar to the text of the Revelation about the calamaties following in the wake of the fourth rider's coming. People near and far are killed in wars and epidemics and even those few able to persevere will eventually fall victim the the famines that frequently occur in the aftermath of the above terrors.

In contrast, Gregory the Great, again through the quill of Gregory of Tours, points to the Book of Ezekiel a second time when he explains to the Romans that 'in our anguish He gives us renewed hope, in truth that is what He gives us when He makes the prophet say: 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live' (*Nolo mortem peccatoris, sed ut convertatur et vivat*). [294] A similar notion is reflected in the Book of Revelation: *ego quos amo arguo et castigo aemulare ergo et paenitentiam age* ('Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent').[295] In arguing that affliction with disease can also be interpreted as a sign of God's grace rather

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[292] ESV, Ezekiel 6:11-12. Vulgata, 'haec dicit Dominus Deus percute manu tua et adlide pedem tuum et dic eheu ad omnes abominationes malorum domus Israhel qui gladio fame peste ruituri sunt qui longe est peste morietur qui autem prope gladio corruet et qui relictus fuerit et obsessus fame morietur et conpleam indignationem meam in eis.'

[293] ESV, Ezekiel 14:21. Vulgata, 'quoniam haec dicit Dominus Deus quod si et quattuor iudicia mea pessima gladium et famem et bestias malas et pestilentiam misero in Hierusalem ut interficiam de ea hominem et pecus.'

[294] Ezekiel, 33:11.

[295] Vulgata/ESV, Revelation 3:19.

than anger, illness can be punishment but may simultaneously be regarded as a chance for good Christians to prove the strength of their faith.

Vivian Thompson stresses how Ælfric 'sees sin as only one of many causes of illness, although he understands disease and cure both as coming ultimately from God, like everything else.'[296] While it was clearly not the archbishop's intention to elaborate on disease as a topic in and of itself, Wulfstan, like Ælfric, his contemporary and occasional advisor,[297] runs a number of parallel discourses when he portrays pestilence as devastating but also beneficial, even just in that it can function as a wake-up call. The above cited sermons and homilies - prominent examples such as the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* and more unfamiliar ones alike - do not aim at individual accusation. The objective is adhortative, not just exhortative. By including himself, the preacher emphasis that the issues he holds against his audience are not merely concerns of the individual but of society at large - everyone can and should strife for betterment.

In his other key role, that of a writer of lawcodes, Wulfstan also had to integrate ideas of punishment and betterment with considerations of the individual and the community. The following section will provide a glimpse into the dynamics of disease, or rather illness, in schemes of punishment, evidence, penitence and salvation wich inform Anglo-Saxon legislature. Based on the work of Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, I will comment o the implications of Wulfstan's activity as a lawmaker for his understanding and explanations of disease in relation to

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[296] Victoria Thompson (2012), *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England*, Woodbridge: Boydell, p. 96.
[297] Cf. Malcolm Godden (2004), 'The Relations of Wulfstan and Ælfric: A Reassessment', Matthew Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*. Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 353-74.

negotiations of sin and punishment around the late tenth and early elevenths century.

Disease and the Law

Apart from and in extension of implications for the salvation of the eternal soul, the effects of disease and illness on the body are not just of medical concern but might also be viewed in the context of criminal punishment. As the body is the canvas on which symptoms of disease may be observed, the changing role of the body in the judiciary system over the Anglo-Saxon period may serve as a foil against which to compare interpretations of disease. The following section will lay out in some detail the most relevant arguments brought forward by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe concering the pivotal role of the body in late Anglo-Saxon law.[298] This shall open up another perspective on the understanding of widespread infectious diseases.

O'Brien O'Keeffe explores how the body was 'configured, regarded, regulated and read in late Anglo-Saxon England'.[299] The study hones in on the particularities of juridical discourse about the body which acquires an increasingly important role in the dynamics of inquiry and punishment towards the latter end of the Anglo-Saxon period. The chronological frame for this development is estimated as roughly encompassing the years between 970 and 1035. These dates mark the agreement to the *Regularis Concordia* resulting in the adoption of the practices of a reformed, continental monasticism, and the end of the Danish king Cnut's reign over England, respectively. These dates bracket

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[298] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), 'Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 27, pp. 209-232.
[299] O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), p. 209.

a time of both increasing regulation and chaos in England. The Benedictine revival and renewal of monastic culture, which had fallen into decline in previous decades, proliferation of literary productivity in Latin as well as in the vernacular Old English, as illustrated by the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan. These efforts constituted in many ways a counterpoint to the resumption of the Viking incursions on Anglo-Saxon territory, the natural disasters and pestilences of the time which were read as alarming heralds of the impending apocalypse, as illustrated by the sermons' ubiquitous imagery of devastation. Before this backdrop, the laws, in O'Brien O'Keeffe's opinion, encoded an evolving function and understanding of the individual body before the law. The regulation of the body in the law codes is of interest 'not simply for their cataloguing of crimes and punishments, but for the matrices they offer in which bodies and body parts are counters within an economy of pain, payment and value.'[300] This may compare to a somwhat a similar exchange on a spiritual level, that of illness experience and suffering, towards the goal of salvation and even elevation to the exemplary status of sainthood witnessed in the Saints' Lives, a notion that will be followed up later on in the discussion.

First, I want to offer a little more insight on the chronological development of the legal system regarding punishment and compensation traced by O'Brien O'Keeffe. 'An overview of the earliest English law codes shows them to offer an intricate and shifting system of exchange among rank, offence, bodily injury and money. Their interest is in satisfaction, and compensation lies within the family or social group.'[301] This older system would have included concepts such

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[300] O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), p. 212.
[301] O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), p. 215.

as wergild and feuds (cf. OE *fæhþ*), for instance. An interesting, although later, example for comparison can be found in the *Grágás*, an Old Icelandic law code.[302] In contrast, Æthelred's law code of 1008, the first such text that can be dated and attributed to Archbishop Wulfstan, offers a glimpse into the changing regulations enforced upon the Anglo-Saxon subject of law insofar as it specifically orders that the death penalty should be reserved for severe offenses. This signifies a shift away from settlement directly between damager and damaged, as well as away from death penalty towards non-fatal bodily punishments for relatively petty crimes and misdemeanors.

Within the selection of legal texts cited by O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'action on the body is reassigned meaning over time as compensation for wrongdoing shifts from an external, and in some ways communal, responsibility satisfiable by compurgation and fine (as is paramount in the late-ninth-century laws of Alfred), to an internal guilt in the eleventh-century codes'[303] Amongst the plethora of diseases, infections, injuries etc that were threatening the population of Anglo-Saxon England, epidemics with a high mortality rate might be seen as analogous to death penalty within a system that is generally familiar with the view of disease as punishment in certain contexts.

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[302] The *Law of Wihtred* is believed to date to the final decade of the seventh century and is the last of three Kentish legal texts, following the *Law of Hlothhere and Eadric* and the *Law of Æthelberht* which is the earliest written code in any Germanic language and first instituted a complex system of fines.The *Grágás,* although written after the Anglo-Saxon period, provides an interesting foil for comparison. It sits on the threshold between orality and written record, as well as exhibiting a moment of overlap between changing executive agents and actions in terms of retribution, compensation and punishment. First sections were put down in writing during the winter of 1117/1118 at the request of the Althing. The law code includes, amongst other topics, manslaughter and the classification of diverse types of assault and injuries and robbery. It details how to appropriately declare such criminal offences and how to claim compensation. Revenge can still be exacted personally, within set limitations, outside of which accusations must be brought before the Allthing in due time.
[303] O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), p. 217.

Mutilation penalties provide an alternative to death, although the exact types of these are rather underspecified in Æthelred's law code. Broadly speaking, the form of mutilations enacted on the bodies of those convicted ought to simultaneously serve as punishment and inscribe 'ineradicable memorials' of past criminal action. The mutilated bodies thus become texts 'which forever after forces the body to confess to its guilt' and its lawful consequences. [304] This visible display of guilt in a way prolongues the process of penitence by creating lasting memory spanning the entire length of an individual's lifetime beyond the actual acts of crime and punishment.

Two powerful notions in the late-tenth-century theory of guilt and punishment, firstly, that forensic action on the body serves as a text and, secondly, that a swift sentence of death endangers the soul of the criminal, bridge secular and ecclesiastical boundaries. As part of the ordeal, action on the body is evidentiary, not penal: 'the body is set up to confess its guilt, and punishment, if necessary, will follow'.[305] Likewise, illness is not always read as punishment but as we have seen in the Saints' Lives, can be an ordeal in which the extraordinary qualities of saintliness are to manifest themselves. This stands, of course, in opposition to the ascertainment of guilt which is the ultimate objective on the legal spectrum. Whereas in hagiography the set up, or frame, is designed to prove a desirable characteristic, the judicial system is looking for evidence of transgression. The theory and mechanics, however, are sufficiently similar to be considered in comparison.

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[304] *Ibid.*
[305] O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), p. 224.

Unlike death, mutilation is evidentiary. It is a continuous act of confession and thus produces knowledge about the criminal. Within the dichotomy of mutilation as trial vs mutilation as punishment, 'a judicious application of the law of comprehensive mutilation has the same end-product as the ordeal, even though each is effected at a different point in the process of accusation.'[306] When illness is portrayed as a chance to prove saintly character, ultimate death of infectious disease does not diminish saintliness, it is not in itself as meaningful as it was for the martyr saints of early Christianity. Apart from being the moment of elevation of the patient sufferer to a new and improved state of existence, death is not as productive a factor towards salvation as mutilation and illness, that is, ideally intense and/or prolonged suffering appears to be.

The formulation *per penas salvandi* [*sunt*], by construing juridical mutilation as a mercy, 'a happy alternative to eternal death, makes the criminal a partner in his punishment.'[307] A similar dynamic seems to be at work for instance in Æthelthryth's joyful embracing of her affliction and her outstanding willingness to confess to having committed the sin of vanity. This has to be seen as an extraordinary example from the collection of saints Lives. The neck tumour, a mark which, even if only for the limited time of one week, was not just declared as visible punishment for the sins of the abbess's youth but was also welcomed as a chance to cleanse herself from the guilt before entering into eternal life. Æthelthryth's Lives are a bit of an annomaly in that regard as they conflate within only a few lines positive and negative framings of her illness.

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[306] O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), p. 227.
[307] O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), p. 230.

The development that Wulfstan's reinterpretation of mutilation indicates may be even more interesting in comparison with his homiletic texts. Remember the pestilences of the homilies which acted as alarm bells and gateways to repentance and subsequent salvation. The addressed community are given chance to realize their mistaken ways and recover a good standing with the Lord by doing penitence. Note, however, that suffering through the pestilence, while sometimes described as a punishment, is not itself portrayed as an act of doing penance within the framework of Wulfstan's sermons. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe argues that Wulfstan's promotion of penalties such as scalping, blinding, and the severing of body parts as an alternative to death and a means of saving the souls of criminals by allowing them to expiate their sins with suffering. One caveat in O'Brien O'Keeffe's argument regarding late Anglo-Saxon understanding and design of law detected by Alice Cowen lies in the fact that, while 'O'Brien O'Keeffe's evidence is striking [it is] concentrated in only a few sources. Following observations by Victoria Thompson, [308] it is perhaps closer to the truth to think of the penitential interpretation of mutilation punishment as specific characteristic of Wulfstan rather than to assume a wider cultural shift extending the purview of the law to the criminal's soul. In response to this objection could be said that the scope of Wulfstan's influence, directly and via his writings, distributed orally and in manuscripts, throughout the Anglo-Saxon world can hardly be over-estimated. Disregarding for a moment, whether such connections between bodily marking as punishment and sign of guilt/sin were drawn by only a few or if they signify a shift in conceptualisations

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[308] Alice Cowen (2004), '*Byrstas* and *bysmeras*: The Wounds of Sin in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*', Matthew Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*. Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 404; Cf. V. Thompson (2012).

internalised by a wider community or an entire society even, it is worth pointing out potential transfer of ideas with interpretations of the visible symptoms of disease. It would not seem far-fetched to suggest that permanent evidence of punishment on the body, such as missing limbs, scars etc. and marks left behind by an illness, which an individual might have recovered from or still be suffering, could have come to be either confused or, perhaps subconsciously, interpreted similarly. A negative evaluation of acquired physical characteristics could be detrimental for individuals who carry such ambiguous marks. It might have, for instance, limited their range of social participation due to being mistaken for a criminal.[309]

To conclude, I want to consider the special case of large scale epidemic pestilences in contrast to the more individual-oriented interpretations at the forefront of this sub-section. From a perspective inspired by secular law, epidemic, pestilential diseases which kill quickly, rather than long-term infections or those the individual may recover from, would not serve to mark out the sinner. On an individual level such epidemics would have been remarkably unsuited for punishment, or even as a reminder of past misdemeanours, within a scheme of crime, guilt and punishment as the one described by O'Brien O'Keeffe. Nevertheless, in the context of the *Sermo Lupi*, which addresses not one individual as much as society at large, the sudden death of a great many

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[309] The pervasiveness of such a connotation becomes apparent if one considers for a moment how contemporary (pop-)culture tends to depict criminals with dramatic scars and other disfigurements. Every other Bond-villain or stereotypical Hollywood prison inmate may testify to that. *The Lion King* provides a particularly obvious example, as the main adversary is, in fact, named 'Scar'. For a comment on how different marks on and changes of the body, particularly in connection to disability/impairment, might have been confused with the results of crime and punishment in the Middle Ages, see Christina Lee (2015), 'Abled, Disabled, Enabled: An Attempt to Define Disability in Anglo-Saxon England', *Werkstatt Geschichte*, 65, p. 52.

could be seen as a communal punishment which would have provided tangible evidence of past sins in the demographics of generations to come. This might suggest a metaphoric connection of individual physical punishment (for criminal deeds as well as spiritual transgressions) and the punishment of the Christian community of Wulfstan's time with epidemic outbreaks of disease. The reason for and the aim of both would thus be recognised and conceptualised as analogous in a move from the immediately tangible to more abstract, large scale events.

Of course, this conceptualisation (as any view of disease) must not at all be understood to have been monolithic or one-dimensional even just within the scope of the present chapter. It is co-existing with and constantly negotiated against apocalyptic visions in which pestilence features as one of many players without being discussed in any kind of detail. It is subordinated, as is enemy invasion, bad weather, and unseasonal climate as a symptom in itself. The disruptions are caused or allowed by divine power as a reaction to a Christian society out of kilter with God's will.

The following section will add yet another perspective to the range of conceptualisations so far presented. Like the previously analysed texts and authors have done in their own way, Bede connects pestilence with the conceptual field of athmospheric phenomena, including meteorological and astronomical events. His writings employ strategies of situating pestilence within the natural world and of laying out explanations that come with their own genre tradition rooted in a source history going back to Antiquity. The next section will bring to attention the most relevant instances of Bede dealing with

pestilential disease in his scientific works and discuss his sources and possible aims in contrast to previously mentioned texts of a more religious orientation.

6.3 On the Nature of Pestilence

In the following section, the focus will shift towards the understanding of pestilence within the context of the scientific considerations on nature. This field of enquiry has a tradition stretching back to the scholarship of classical Antiquity. Nevertheless, the authors of treatises on nature working in the Early Middle Ages found ways to reconcile scientific observations with spiritual questions of punishment and guilt in their works. Bede, as an early Anglo-Saxon polymath and influential authority on both religious and scientific matters stands as the most prominent example for a negotiator between the two supposedly incompatible realms of knowledge. It will be shown how Bede integrates his scientific ambitions, demonstrated in his adaptation of Isidore of Seville's De natura rerum and drawing on the scientist-philosophers of ancient Greece, with eschatological interpretations of pestilences. The latter are witnessed in the homilies of Wulfstan and Ælfric, whose descriptions of warfare, famine and pestilence find parallels in Bede's major historiographic work, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

In Bede's account of the conversion and subsequent development of the English nation, a number of occurrences of epidemic diseases are standing out in particular. One instance, previously identified in chapter 3.2 and discussed in the context of St Æthelburh's *vita* (cf. 5.3) will serve to introduce disease in yet another light, that of natural phenomena portending dire times.

Eodem autem anno dominicae incarnationis DCLXquarto, facta erat exlipsis solis die tertio mensis Maii, hora circiter decima diei; quo etiam anno subita pesti/lentiae lues depopulates prius australibus Brittaniae plagis, Nordhymbrorum quoque prouinciam corripiens atque acerua clade diutius longe lateque desaeuiens, magnam hominum multitudinem strauit. […] Haec autem plaga Hiberniam quoque insulam pari clade premebat.[310]

In this year of our Lord 664 there was an eclipse of the sun on 3 May about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. In the same year a sudden pestilence first depopulated the southern parts of Britain and afterwards attacked the kingdom of Northhumbria, raging far and wide with cruel devastation and laying low a vast number of people. […] The plague did equal destruction in Ireland.

The notion that medieval societies adhered to superstitious beliefs ascribing meaning to astronomic and meteorologic phenomena is a common one in today's imaginations of the Middle Ages. Bede, indeed, might have assessed the situation similarly. It is notable that there is no direct causal or portentious connection drawn between the eclipse and the plague of 664, whereas in other instances such connections are made hauntingly explicit. The reticience exhibited in Bede's mention of the outbreak becomes apparent especially in contrast with other sources describing nature phenomena comparable to the eclipse of 664 as portents, a possibility which Bede, at most, hints at. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's description of the sacking of Lindisfarne in 793, for instance, reads as follows:

Her wæron reðe forebecna cumene ofer Norðhymbra land, 7 þæt folc earmlic bregdon, þæt wæron ormete þodenas 7 ligrescas, 7 fyrenne dracan wæron gesewene on þam lifte fleogende. Þam tacnum sona fyligde mycel hunger, 7 litel æfter þam, þæs ilcan geares on .vi. Idus Ianuarii, earmlice hæþenra manna hergunc adilegode Godes cyrican in Lindisfarnaee þurh hreaflac 7 mansliht.

Then were dreadful fore-warnings over the land of the Northumbrians, terrifying the people miserably: these were

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[310] HE, iii, XXVII, 310 ff.

excessive whirlwinds and lightning and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. These tokens soon followed a great famine and shortly after that, on the sixth day before the ides of January in the same year, terrible inroads of heathen men destroyed the church of God in Lindisfarne, by plundering and manslaughter.[311]

While in the case of Lindisfarne the calamity which ravages the population, and which is unmistakably foreshadowed by whirlwinds, lightning and fiery dragons, is not disease but a famine and the Viking invaders, similar dynamics might be assumed. Famine and warfare initiated by heathen enemies are the two main players in the apocalyptic triad frequently put forward by eschatology and would find completion in the addition of pestilence.[312]

The portentious connection of eclipses and comets with impending outbreaks of pestilential diseases is certainly modelled in an exemplary way by Gregory of Tours in his *Historia Francorum*:

> Before the great plague which ravaged Auvergne, prodigies terrified the people of that region […] Once, on the first day of October, the sun was in eclipse, so that less than a quarter of it continued to shine, and the rest was so dark and discoloured that you would have said that it was made of sackcloth. Then a star, which some call a comet, appeared in the region for a whole year, with a tail like a sword, and the whole sky seemed to burn and many other portents were seen.[313]

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[311] AS CHron MS D (same in E) 793 CE.

[312] It could be said that it should be a quartet, but it appears that, at least in examples containing mentions of pestilence, wild beasts tend to be left out of the discussion. They do not appear to play as prominent a part in Anglo-Saxon depictions of end-of-time calamities. At this point, it can only be speculated why that is. One possibility might be a lack of relevant experience with the local fauna, which might not have presented itself to be particularly beastly. Dragons, however, may perhaps be considered as substitute representatives of the wild beasts of the Apocalypse.

[313] 'Arvernam magna regionem illam prodigia terruerunt. […] In Kalendis Octobribus ita sol obscuratus apparuit, ut nec quarta quidem pars in eodem lucens remaneret, sed teter atque decolour apparens, quasi saccus videbatur. Nam et stilla, quam quidam comiten vocant, radium tamquam gladium habens, super regionem illam per annum integrum apparuit, et caelum ardere visum est, et multa alia signa apparuerunt.' Krusch and Levison (eds.) (1951), Book 4, chap. 31, p. 165; Thorpe (1974), p. 126.

Gregory describes in outstanding visual detail the eclipse as well as the comet which greatly alarmed the people before they were reached by the pestilence. The description of the comet's tail as sword-like taps into the metaphoric pool of warfare imagery and the burning of the sky, in addition to 'other' portents, reminds of the fiery dragons of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. This image of the dragon, apart from betokening future miseries, might point towards a conceptualisation of the natural phenomenon 'comet' as a mythological animal based on the aspect of fire.

The dragon's position in relation to disease appears to be fluctuating between token, trigger and symbolic incarnation and will be picked up again later in this chapter when discussing Isidore's *Etymologiae.* The examples reviewed so far indicate the atmosphere, the realm of air and winds as a common locus for the placing of disease and its forewarning tokens.

De natura rerum

As demonstrated above, Bede appears rather reluctant to subscribe to or support certain 'superstitious' interpretations of natural phenomena in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's entry for the year 793 and sources such as Gregory of Tours. Bede skilfully employs scientific understandings of natural phenomena in order to support his convictions and interpretations of Christian doctrine.

His scientific tract *De natura rerum* provides significant insight into Bede's understanding of science and nature. It is subdivided into 51 short chapters which are thematically organised around the four elements, fire, air, water and earth. This structural scheme is a convention of the natural history genre and previously found application in several works such as the *Historia naturalis*, a first century

encyclopedia written by Pliny the Elder. As a purposefully organised compilation of ideas and passages adapted from earlier authorities, Bede's *De natura rerum* presented a clear and concise alternative to existing literature such as the anonymous Irish tract *De ordine creatuarum* and *De natura rerum* by Isidore of Seville although the latter served as the most immediate source and model for Bede's *De natura rerum*.[314]

Saint Isidore of Seville, also called *Isidorus Hispalensis*, in the span of his lifetime from around 560 to 636, served as the Archbishop of Seville for over three decades and produced a vast corpus of scientific literature in the tradition of the scholars of the ancient world, many ideas of which would have been lost to modern scholarhip were it not for his summaries and collections.

Long before Isidore's importance for the history of scholarship garnered recognition from today's perspective, his works were received across medieval Europe. Isidore's reception in Anglo-Saxon England is evidenced by both the biblical commentators and the *Leiden Glosses*. The late seventh-century Canterbury school was familiar with at least four of the Church Father's most widely copied works, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, *De differentiis uerborum*, the *Etymologiae*, and *De natura rerum*.[315] The *Etymologiae* were read, excerpted, and glossed in medieval vernacular languages from around the year 700, comparatively shortly after its original composition. The number of copies

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[314] Cf. Peter Darby (2012), *Bede and the End of Time*, New York/London: Routledge, p. 97.
[315] The *Etmyologiae* and *De natura rerum* translated and edited respectively by Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (2006), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge: CUP; and in excerpts by William D. Sharpe (1964), 'Isidore of Seville: The Medical Writings. An English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 54, No. 2: 1-75;
J. Fontaine (ed.) (1960), *Isidore de Seville: Traité de la Nature*, Ferét: Bordeaux. A project for a critical edition of the entire twenty books of the *Etymologies* is in progress under Fonaine's supervision.

indicate the popularity enjoyed by Isidore's works throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, on the neighbouring continent as well as in England itself. Manuscripts are likely to have been available at King Alfred's court and Isidore was an esteemed influence on authors such as Ælfric of Eynsham throughout the cultural revival set in motion by the Benedictine Reform. *De natura rerum*, *Synonyma* and *Etymologia* were the first and the most widely received literary accomplishments of Isidore to reach Anglo-Saxon England and Bede's de *Natura rerum* 'can be considered a recasting of the Isidorian original'.[316]

In spite of Bede making extensive use of both the *Etymologies* and of Isidore's similarly titled work in his tracts *De natura rerum* and *De temporibus anni* Bede's attitude towards Isidore has in the past been an issue of scholarly debate. Bede's treatment of Isidore has sometimes been described as critical or even deliberately censorious. This view has recently been challenged by William McCready who, in the opinion of Di Scaccia, 'convincingly demonstrated that if Bede surpassed and at times explicitly corrected Isidore […] he treated Isidore the same way he did his other authorities'[317] McCready's review focuses on passages in which Bede has been taken to show signs of criticism of his source. McCready debases claims that, with regard to Isidore's legacy, we encounter an unusually disparaging Bede, who openly displays disagreement with the author of his source when making corrections of the perceived errors in Isidore's *De natura rerum* in one of the two major, final projects.[318]

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[316] Claudia Di Scaccia (2008), *Finding the Right Words: Isidore's* Synonyma *in Anglo-Saxon England*, Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, pp. 48-57.
[317] Di Sciacca (2008), p. 51.
[318] William McCready (1995), 'Bede and the Isidorian Legacy', *Medieval Studies* 57, p. 41.

As explained above, *De natura rerum*, covers much of the same issues as Isidore's treatise. In tandem with *De temporibus annii*, written in 703, it adapts most of the chapters suggested by Isidore.[319] McCready demonstrates that, contrary to previous scholarly opinion, Bede 'only infrequently [finds] anything to correct in Isidore's work; and when he does, rarely is there a serious and substantive point at issue.'[320] Bede corrects generally without drawing attention to Isidore's errors. Some imprecisions do not seem to undermine Isidore's value as an authority as Bede often draws information and wording directly from his writing. While he omits statements he does not seem to support, 'neither the number nor the weight of his corrections, however, suggests that Bede viewed Isidore in a particularly negative light.'[321] It can be said in conclusion of this brief interlude on source redaction that Bede did not copy from Isidore mindlessly, nor did he shy away from correcting details in accordance with his own knowledge and beliefs. At the same time, however, and particularly concerning the problem of the portentious significance of natural phenomena, Bede and Isidore apparently shared common goals beyond cataloguing scientific observations.

While Isidore's *De natura rerum* is 'an inventory of the material universe based on a venerable classical model', it also 'had an ethical purpose: to refute superstition by setting forth rational explanations of the nature of the universe in general, and its more awe-inspiring spectacles in particular (eclipses,

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[319] McCready (1995), p. 42.
[320] These minor corrections include sections on the colors of the rainbow, the tides, the number of days in a year, the beginning of the seasons and the shape of the earth as well as some omissions such as that of a chapter on the light of the moon. Cf. McCready (1995), p. 43.
[321] McCready (1995), p. 73.

earthquakes, thunder and lightning).'[322] Significantly, Isidore wrote *De natura rerum* in the aftermath of the lunar and solar eclipses of 611-612, with the intention to demystify their occurrance as a response to popular superstition correlating with eschatological speculation. It is insofar an attempt to counterbalance undesired interpretations of the events, reminiscent of Bede's treatment of the eclipse and pestilence in the wake of the Synod of Whiby. Both authors work towards smoothing out friction between scientific theory, the observable, and its eschatological interpretations although they are approaching the issue from opposing perspectives, as Peter Darby discerns:

> Isidore's understanding of the cosmos was essentially Graeco-Roman; in his *De natura rerum*, Isidore employed examples from the Bible to support the picture of the universe defined by the pagan scholars of classical antiquity. Isidore's work essentially aimed to demonstrate that Christian ideas about the unviverse were compatible with the picture of the natural world determined by the ancients. In contrast, Bede revolutionised cosmography, redefining the entire field of understanding in accordance with the priniciples of Christian doctrine. Bede's explanation of the natural world drew upon the concepts and language employed by the ancients, but it presented all of the different parts of the universe as a product of the divine creation.[323]

Coming to the problem with nuanced differences in motivation, Isidore wants to integrate Christian thought with the scholarship of classical antiquity, while Bede's trajectory rather goes in the other direction, they meet on a middleground where integration of scholarship and religion is achieved. In the following, I present for discussion the sections from Bede's *De natura rerum* and another influential work of Isidore's, the *Etymologies*, which are illustrative of this

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[322] Bede, *On the Nature of Things and on Times*, Translated with introduction, notes and commentary by Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, (2012), Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 1-2.
[323] Darby (2012), p. 98.

agenda of integration, particularly with regard to the framing, highlighting and inhibition of connections between pestilence and weather phenomena.

Within the internal structure of *De natura rerum*, divided by the elements of earth, fire, air and water, pestilence takes its place among atmospheric phenomena, that is, in the realm of air. Therein, explanations about comets are followed by sections on winds, thunder, lightning, rainbows, clouds, rains, hail, snow and finally pestilence before Bede turns to the waters as his next subject.

'The changeable moon and the anomalies of eclipses form a suitable transition to the realm of air, and', as Kendall and Wallis suggest, 'the zone of unpredictable, albeit natural, atmospheric phenomena, such as comets and pestilences.'[324] Throughout these chapters, Bede stresses the variability and local peculiarity of the phenomena in question. Concerning comets specifically, Bede's text emphasises their characteristically sudden appearance as well as their ominous role as precursors of significant events to come.

Bede's description serves as another example of the interconnectedness of seemingly unrelated phenomena like plague, war and severe weather, among others which we have already encountered in the homiletic writings of Wulfstan and Aelfric. While the latter authors frequently list them as signs of the last days and imminent apocalypse, in *De natura rerum*, pestilences and wars and winds are not portents themselves but characterised as disruptive events, the occurrence of which is foreshadowed by the same token, that of the comet:

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[324] Kendall and Wallis (2010), pp. 154-55.; Cf. air, chaps. 24-37.

> *Comets* are *stars* with *flames* like *hair.* They are *born suddenly,* portending *a change of royal power or plague or wars* or *winds or heat.* [...][325]

In view of Bede's reservations about the portentious nature of eclipses, the above reference to portents, drawn from Isidore's *De natura rerum*, is rather unusual in itself. Isidore and Bede alike tend to consciously downplay the idea that natural events are to be read as prophetic signs for reasons explained above.[326] Bede may have been reluctant to offer anything other than a natural explanation for eclipses and pestilences like those occurring in the same year as the English Church was making fundamental advances at the Synod of Whitby. In contrast, the comets of 729 are explicitly presented as threatening signs in the *Ecclesiastic History.* This year, also happens to be the year of the death of Egbert who, after shaking off the pestilence of 664, recovered and served as a priest for many decades.[327] In a later chapter of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede describes how that year saw the appearance of two comets near the sun, which foretold great destruction and caused terror in the people of the area where the phenomenon was visible. The comets appeared in January and continued for nearly a fortnight after which time the 'plague of Saracens' (*se hefigesta wol Sarcina þeode* discussed in previous chapters) ravaged France.[328] As part of the natural world, comets may have portentious significance for Bede, since they are ultimately directed by God, as everything in nature is. They point towards future change, often but not necessarily of an undesirable quality. In that respect, I would have to remark that there are really only a handful of comet sightings mentioned in

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[325] Italics indicate a direct adoption of phrases from source texts.
[326] Kendall and Wallis (2010), pp. 154-55.
[327] cf. HE, iii, XXVII.
[328] cf. HE, v, XXIII.

the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which might not be large enough a sample to draw firm conclusions from. In any case, comets may be tokens of pestilence as well as other dreadful events which are also at the heart of the apocalyptic visions of homiletic literature. Like Wulfstan's and Ælfric's homilies, Bede's writings contain well considered statements about the eschatological connotations of signs and portents. For Bede, though they were important, those portents 'were not assigned a specific place within the end-time sequence', according to Darby.[329]

One exception may be found in Book I of the *Ecclesiastical History*, where Bede reproduces a letter from Gregory the Great to King Æthelberht of Kent. He explains that, according to Holy Scripture, as the end of the world approaches a series of menacing changes are to occur, including unseasonable tempests, wars, famine, pestilence and earthquakes in diverse places'. The letter proceeds to state that such changes are 'signs of the end of the world' (*signa de fine saeculi*). Gregory continues his instruction by clearifying that these apocalyptic events will not happen in their time. For that reason, he cautions the king to not let his mind be confused in case any of the phenomena listed were to occur in his realm. Such signs are sent not to foretell of the world's end drawing near but to remind and exhort Christianity to be solicitous for their souls, suspicious of the hour of death, and prepared with good works to meet the Judge.[330]

Bede's replication of Gregory's instruction compares to homiletic exegesis. The eschatological considerations of Wulfstan, who writes against decline, and Gregory (as relayed by Bede) who seeks to strengthen the faith of the newly

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[329] Darby (2012), p. 95.
[330] HE i, XXXII.

converted, both aim to show their audience the correct way of behaviour by interpreting the natural phenomena these people are faced with. Gregory's mission is to prevent confusion through wrongful interpretation of signs which might otherwise lead to the rejection of Christianity and a return to paganism. Gregory and Bede have recognised this dynamic and write as a preventative measure. Wulfstan is faced with a different problem. During the time of the Viking invasions, good Christian practice had fallen into decline and requires adjustment. The portents of destruction are punishment in a way, but even more so function as alarm bells. Pestilence, warfare, and natural disasters are read in several contexts as tokens of the potentiality of future punishments of apocalyptic proportions. Insofar, they are meant to keep people on their toes. They are extreme but ultimately well-intended reminders under God's command. Notably though, comets are not specified on the list of apocalyptic tokens. They might be seen as second-order signs, in that they portend the kinds of calamities which, like pestilence, in turn call to mind images of the world's end.

In the section on 'Pestilence', *De natura rerum* treats the particular relationship of comets and epidemic disease outbreaks. What I would like to point out is how pestilence takes its place in the natural world among atmospheric phenomena linked by a causal chain which, again, can but need not be imbued with portentious significance.

> *Pestilence* is born *from air that has been corrupted on account of* the deserts *of men* either *by excessive drought* or *rains*. When the air has been absorbed by breathing or eating, it engenders pestilence and death. Hence we very often observe that the whole of the summer season is transformed into tempests and wintry blasts. These are

called 'storms' when they come in their own season, but when they come at other times they are called 'portents' or 'signs'.

Pestilentia nascitur aere uel siccitatis uel pluuiarum intemperantia pro meritis hominum corrupto, qui spirando uel edendo perceptus luem mortemque generat. Unde saepius omne tempus aestatis in procellas turbinesque brumales uerti conspicimus. Sed haec cum suo tempore uenerint, tempestates; cum uero alias, prodigia uel signa dicuntur.[331]

This interpretation of meteorological phenomena resonates with the passage from *Orosius*, quoted above, which so clearly distinguishes pestilences which occur due to the 'usual' disturbances of the weather in the course of the seasons and such which are carried by winds from far-away regions of the earth.

Bede constructs a relationship between cause and token when he discusses weather phenomena co-occuring with pestilences. 'Storms' meaning severe weather events happening in their own season are purely natural and are not to be considered tokens. Weather changes that happen out of order, at other times, are tokens as they are symptoms of the air's corruption which also breeds pestilence. This categorisation once more seems designed to leave room for interpretations in line with agenda of the day for whenever a pestilence might occur. One question, which is left somewhat open is how the air becomes contaminated in the first place, before it can cause severe weather and pestilences. What is said is that pestilence is born '*from air that has been corrupted* either *by excessive drought* or *rains*'. When the air has been absorbed by breathing or eating, it engenders pestilence and death in humans and animals. This explanation pertains to the cause of pestilence and explains the mechanisms of infection. It leaves a blank space though, when it comes to the exact change

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[331] Bede, *De natura rerum*, 37; Bede here is dependent on Isidore's *De natura rerum*, 39; J. Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville: Traité de la nature*, Bordeaux, Féret, 1960, pp. 303-305.

air undergoes when it is corrupted and how it is altered. In modern science, invasion by a subvisible microbe, virus or parasite might be seen as having filled that spot. According to Bede's explanation, pestilence comes into existence through an imbalance, excessive rains or droughts, corrupting air. Because air is absorbed by all breathing creatures, and also infiltrates the water and the food grown in the soil, many people are afflicted simultaneously. This compares to the idea of disease travelling in the air or on land, wandering from person to person and region to region, which has been shown to be prominent in the charms of chapter 4.

In contrast to the understanding of disease which informs the medical charms and prayers, Bede is careful to incorporate a view of pestilence as the consequence of sin into his explanation. The rains and droughts which corrupt the air do so '*on account of* the deserts *of men*'. In addition to scientific explanations of causation which may very well be based on observation of natural phenomena, Bede includes the aspect of reason. Natural phenomena can thus be ascribed meaning and purpose within a Christian world-view and a function in regulating behaviour according to Christian doctrine. Not every event of this kind needs to have a function though, sometimes, nature simply runs its expected course. Bede skilfully leaves his options open as to the extent to which pestilence must be interpreted as significantly alarming.

Divine will and natural processes were not regarded by Bede, as prime representative of the early medieval period, as mutually exclusive. Bede's treatment of tokens, natural phenomena such as comets, and pestilence shows that he intentionally left little room for superstition or 'what later theologians would categorize as "the supernatural".' Nevertheless, nature became significant

in as much as God's presence and power over creation was detectable in 'the preternatural acceleration of natural processes.'[332]

The importance of the insight described in *De natura rerum* that unusual meteorological conditions can be taken as explicit signs from God becomes apparent when it finds application in Bede's *In Ezram et Neemiam*. With a reference to the Book of Ezra 10:9, which describes an assembled crowd of people trembling in unusually heavy rain, Bede illustrates his lesson for the people of his time. His comments explain how signs and portents ought to be perceived:

> This was done as a lesson for those who, even when the elements are stirred up and weather deteriorates into violent winds, floods of rain, heavy snowstroms, parching drought or even the death of men and animals, and when the Judge himself threatens the force of his anger through open signs, do not at all seek to correct their behaviour so as to placate that Judge and escapte the destruction hanging over them, but instead merely busy themselves to find some means to avoid or overcome the adverse conditions raging outside on account of their sins.[333]

Understanding the natural world was a crucial skill. Without knowledge and close observation of nature it was impossible to know whether a storm should be regarded as a sign from God or not.[334] As a corollary of ignorance in that regard, inappropriate reactions would further anger God for the people's failure to correct their behaviour according to the demands communicated by the warning

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[332] Kendall/Wallis: 157-59. On the development of the idea of 'the supernatural', see also the aforementioned work by Watkins (2007) and Robert Bartlett (2008), *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: CUP.

[333] Bede, *In Ezram et Neemiam*, D. Hurst (ed.), CCSL 119A, Turnout. 1969. 'Hoc propter eos qui turbatis licet elementis et uel uentorum fragore uel inundantia pluuiarum uel niuium aceruis uel ardore siccitatis uel etiam exitio hominum siue animalium desuper ingrauescente atque ipso iudice per aperta indicia uim suae irae minitante nihil omnino de correctione morum qua iudicem placent plagam que impendentem euadant inquirunt sed tantum seduli pertractant qua arte aduersa quae exterius propter peccata desaeuiunt aut euitent aut superent.' Translation: S. DeGregorio (2006), *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah*, Liverpool, p. 146.

[334] Darby (2012), p. 99.

signs. Bede's teachings, much like those of Isidore which have been presented so far, target wrongful behaviour which might result from misinterpretation and confusion.

Isidore's Etymologies

Isidore's *Etymologies*, another source of Bede's and one of the most influential textbooks of the Middle ages, summarize and organize a wealth of knowledge from hundreds of classical sources into twenty books Their subject matter is extremely diverse, ranging from grammar and rhetoric to the earth and the cosmos, buildings, metals, war, ships, humans, animals, medicine, law, religions and the hierarchies of angels and saints. This encyclopaedic compilation of knowledge provides further text passages that might have had a bearing on Anglo-Saxon ideas about the ontology of pestilential diseases outside of what has been demonstrated in *De natura rerum*.

As part of the field of 'Medicine', the *Etymology*'s treat 'Acute Illnesses' as follows:

> Plague, pestilentia, is a contagion which, when it takes hold of one person, quickly spreads to many. It arises from corrupt air, *corrupto aere*, and by penetrating into the viscera settles there.

> Even though this disease often springs up from airborne potencies, *per aerias potestates*, nevertheless it can never come about without the will of Almighty God.

> It is termed 'pestilence' as though a 'little pasture', *pastulentia*, or because it feeds like a fire, as Vergil [Aeneid 5.683]: *Toto descendit corpora pestis*, 'The Plague fell upon the whole body.' Likewise, it is called 'contagion', contagium, from 'touch', contingere, for whomsoever it touches, it infects. It is also called inguinal because it attacks the groins, inguen.

> The same disease is also called lues, from 'destraction' and 'grief', luctus, since its course is so acute and rapid that one does not have

enough time in which even to hope for life or for death, but a feeling of faintness comes on suddenly, bringing death at the same time.[335]

Although this passage is a good example of why the modern philologist might cringe at Isidore's rather inventive etymological derivations, they might well be motivated by observation and experience of the natural environment with disease being transmitted via air and touch. Also, noteworthy is Isidore's attempt at reconciling natural science (that is, his version of it) and his Christian faith by making sure to emphasize that the 'airborne potencies' causing epidemics do not come into existence against the will of God, a notion which Bede has been shown to agree with.

Regarding the characterisation of these airborne agents of disease, I would like to add to the above considerations two passages from *Etymologies*, namely on demons and on dragons, for they may serve as further strengthen the linking threats within the conceptual triangle of disease, weather phenomena, and monsters.

> They say demons (daemon) are so called by the Greeks as if the word were *δαήμων*, that is, experienced and knowledgeable in matters, for they foretell many things to come, whence they are also accustomed to give some answers.

> Indeed, they have more knowledge of things than does human weakness, partly through a more subtle acuity of sense, partly through the experience of an extremely long life, and partly through angelic revelation at God's command. They flourish in accordance with the nature of aerial bodies.

> Indeed, before their fall they had celestial bodies. Now that they have fallen, they have turned into an aerial quality; and they are not allowed to occupy the purer expanses of the air, but only the murky

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[335] IV, vi., 17-19, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville,*. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (eds.), Cambridge: CUP, 2006.

regions, which are like a prison for them, until the Day of Judgement.
They are the prevaricator angels, of whom the Devil is the ruler.[336]

For Isidore, demons are creatures that behave similarly to aerial bodies and indeed used to be celestial beings before the fall turned them into inhabitants of the murky regions of the atmosphere. This coincides with the locus of disease previously described.

In another book of the *Etymologies*, Isidore discusses the world's fauna. The dragon (*draco*), belonging to the group called 'Snakes' (*De serpentibus*), according to Isidore's categorisation, 'is the largest of all the snakes, or of all the animals on earth. […] It is often drawn out of caves and soars aloft, and disturbs the air.'[337] This description of the dragon's habit of leaving his dwelling space, located in caves, to go on and disturb the atmosphere could be interpreted as connected to the causation of pestilence by way of corrupting the air. It also exhibits a parallel to the demons' realm of existence and the idea of contamination by disruption of the natural balance. The dragon would have to be seen as a causing agent who creates pestilence and thus triggers subsequent outbreaks. It will serve to bring back an example of such a way of thinking encountered previously in Gregory of Tours' description of pestilence resulting from a flooding of the river which washed ashore the carcasses of various serpents: 'A great school of water snakes swam down the river, in their midst a tremendous dragon as big as a tree trunk. […] As a result there followed an epidemic, which caused swellings in the groin.[338] In this case, the snakes and the

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[336] VIII; xi, 15-17.
[337] XII, iv.
[338] 'Anno igitur Quinto decimo Childeberthi […] Multitudo etiam serpentium cum magno dracone in modo trabis validate per huius fluvvii […] Subsecuta est de vestigio cladis, quam inguinariam vocant.' Krusch and Levison (eds.) (1951), Book 10, chap. 1, p. 447; Thorpe (1974), p. 543.

dragon are viewed as tokens, but also a potential cause of the pestilential outbreak. This might be either by carrying pestilential potencies, or by creating them in the water which becomes contaminated much like the air.

Even more pointedly, the dragon appears as a personification of pestilence in the description of the young monk Theodore's affliction in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*. Theodore's turn to a proper monastic life as a result of being freed of the disease has been discussed in the context of the Saints Lives pre-occupation with the meaning and purpose of illness. The exact treatment of Theodore's affliction, however, read nothing like the scarcely detailed examples from hagiography.

> 'I have been cast out to be devoured by the dragon. […]' 'I want to bless myself, but cannot because the dragon is holding me in his coils!' Hearing this, the brethren fell prostrate in prayer and, adding tears to their petitions, begged insistently for his release. Suddenly, with a sigh of relief, the sick brother cried happily, 'Thanks be to God! The dragon who tried to devour me has fled. He could not stand the attack of your prayers.'[339]

Theodore describes his illness in terms of being physically attacked by a dragon which is to devour him much like the *Etymologies* interprets 'pestilence' as feeding like fire and befalling the entire body. Only at the very last moment is the dragon put to flight by the power of the monk's brothers' prayers. This Gregorian imagination of pestilence as a dragon attacking Theodore is evidence of a conceptualisation similar to the one behind the 'onfliers' and 'creatures that roam the land' displayed in the discourse of the charms in chapter 4.

The dragon is an incarnation of the conceptualisation of disease as a hostile, mobile entity which hides, attacks and flees. In a similar vein of thinking,

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[339] *Dialogues*, Book IV, 40.

Peregrine Horden has shown that dragons in continental and Irish narratives can be read as symbols for miasma – the airborne spread of a disease. The dragon's breath is dangerous because it contains death-bringing particles.[340] Such particles, which travel in the air invisibly will be come back to shortly. Dragons themselves have been shown to be linked to disease and illness in several ways. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a dragon in the sky is a token of impending enemy attacks, Isidore possibly sees the dragon as a perpetrator behind the contamination of the air, while Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great even, to a lesser and greater degree, negotiate the concept of disease manifested in dragon-form. Bede would have been aware of such examples and he does make use of the image of the *ydros* in Æthelthryth's *Hymn* (see 5.3). The Old English translation of the *Dialogues* remains close to its source text in chosing the phrases *dracen to forswelganne, ic eom forseted ⁊ forðrycced mid þam scyllum þisses dracan*, and *draga nu fleah for eowrum gebedum*,[341] to report of Theodore's exemplary case. It appears that Bede consciously chose not to comment on possible monstrous creatures as the cause of illness. He is obviously reluctant to employ entity metaphors and emphasises instead the issue of balance of natural events in the environment in his *De natura rerum*. His *Hymn* on the virtues of St Æthelthryth, which is part of the *Ecclesiastical History* is an unusual piece of writing in the Anglo-Saxon hagiographical context as is demonstrated by its omission from the Old English translation as well as Ælfric's *Life*. This might have been due to the link to imagery and ideas too reminiscent of

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[340] Peregrine Horden (1992), 'Disease, Dragons and Saints: The Management of Epidemics in the Dark Ages', Terence O. Ranger and P. Slack, *Epidemics and ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*, Cambridge: CUP, pp. 45-76.
[341] Hecht (ed.), iv, XL, p. 324-325.

interpretations current in folklore, a connotation which was to be avoided in order to appropriately counter the dangers of superstition and confusion.

Isidore, on the other hand, in his *De natura rerum*, not only remarked upon aerial demons and dragons but also the existence of plague-bearing seeds (*pestifera semina*) which were carried into the air and transported onwards to eventually either drop to the ground in various places or they remained suspended in the atmosphere until they are breathed in with the air and thus absorbed into the body which then falls ill.[342] Bede, does not incorporate the image of seeds, even though seeds are an observable part of nature, in his explanations of disease. In fact, none of the Anglo-Saxon sources analysed above appear to make use of that specific metaphoric conceptualisation, although *wolberende* winds and other substances are mentioned (cf. chapter 3). Isidore's explanation goes back to the work of Lucretius which was also adapted in a small number of less known treatises by Galen.[343]

It is hardly possible to discuss the history of medicine, health and disease without coming across Galen's theory of the four humours. Unlike Bede, who observes imbalances and irregularities in the environment, Galen's focus is on the balance of fluids within the body. Galen is particularly interested in the individual experiencing illness, which stands in opposition to theories of miasma which may explain why many fall ill at the same time but not why some do not seem to be susceptible to such contamination. The following note on Galen's thoughts about epidemic disease will lead towards a discussion of individual treatment

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[342] Cf. Fontaine (1960), pp. 303-305.
[343] Cf. Vivian Nutton (1983), 'The Seeds of Disease: An Explanation of Contagion and Infection from the Greeks to the Renaissance', *Medical History*, 27, pp. 1-34.

strategies versus all-encompassing theoretical interpretations pertaining to the spectrum of infectious, epidemic diseases.

A Note on Galen: Theory vs Practice

Galen of Pergamon 129-216[344] was a prominent Greek physician, surgeon and philosopher in the Roman Empire. He stands as one of the most accomplished of antiquity's medical experts. The underlying principle of his medicine was the theory of humours which as a derivative of ancient medical works dominated western medicine up into the 19th century. The basic theory posits that within every individual exist four humours, black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. These fluids are produced by specific organs and ought to be maintained at a healthy in balance. However, every individual is regarded as possessing a unique humoural fingerprint, in which the composition of the humours has implications for a person's relative health and their character.

That being said, it deserves mention how Galen's lesser known works include ideas that portray a different pathogenesis of infectious disease and resembles both ideas presented by Bede and Isidore, as well as concepts of disease encountered in the medical charms of chapter 4. The following discussion of examples of Galenic writings summarizes relevant sections from Vivian Nutton's article on the history of the idea of 'Pestsamen', which in turn picks up on observations made by Karl Sudhoff in 1915.[345] I intend to use this material in order to comment on some detailed issues, as well as to illustrate the general

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[344] Vivian Nutton (2004), *Ancient Medicine*, London: Routledge, pp. 226–7 favours the late date for Galen's death instead of the estimation around the year 200 which sis arguably based on a manuscript error.

[345] Karl Sudhoff (1915), 'Vom Pestsamen des Galenos', *Mitteilungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften* 14, pp. 227-229.

existence of multifaceted, simultaneously held concepts of disease evidenced in Anglo-Saxon literature and Galen's theoretical treatises alike.

The Italian scholar Girolamo Fracastoro was the first to unequivocally propound a theory of contagion based upon airborne seeds in his *De contagione* of 1546.[346] The possibility of such seeds, however, has been discussed by several ancient philosophers and was picked up by Galen. The idea was never fully incorporated into the Galenic scheme of theorising disease but he did consider at some point during his research 'that some diseases were specific entities which propagated by means of their seeds.'[347] Why this ontological theory of disease never got developed further until Fracastoro has to do with the general philosophical views of Galen and his predecessors who sought for explanations which could be put into practical use. This chism between theory and practice will be elaborated on at the end of this chapter.

As Nutton correctly points out, '[i]t is important first to remember that in all this we are dealing with descriptions of the invisible, with hypothetical reconstructions of how things are or act, based only on the observance of "macrophenomena".' The ancient doctor and philosopher thus had to 'explain a relationship between particular phenomena by exploiting a range of analogies drawn from all aspects of life.'[348] In a line of argument resembling cognitive approaches to linguistics and cultural studies, Nutton states that 'each analogy carries a message of its own that may limit and define the speaker's own thoughts, depending, of course, on the extent of his awareness of the implications

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[346] *De contagione et contagiosis morbis et eorum curatione libri III*, Wilmer Cave Wright (ed. and trans.), New York/London, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930.
[347] Nutton (1983), p. 1.
[348] *Ibid.*

of his chosen analogy, his own verbal precision, and the context in which the analogy is used'[349] Galen, supposedly, would have been very conscious of the effects of his words and the wider implications theoretical nuances. The hypothetical conceptualisation DISEASE IS A SEED could be based on the observation of the spread and growth of symptoms, brought about by some thing that must, at least to begin with, be very small – so small in fact, that it is invisible. Notably, Galen utilizes the image of the seed in only three of his treatises, all of which were composed within a short period of time and tend to develop ideas successively. Galen uses the analogy in none of his earlier or later works on related issues of contamination and contagion, suggesting that he might have dismissed them as unfit for his overall agenda.

Nutton describes the contexts of each occurrence of the seed analogy in some detail. For the considerations at hand, a brief summary will suffice. The first mention of seeds appears in a short tract *On initial causes*, written about 175 CE. It is transmitted in a medieval, Latin translation form the Greek which reproduces the original wording almost exactly. One aim of the text is to present theoretical considerations on the causes of disease in a way more applicable in medical practice. For his purpose, the identification of the efficient cause was crucial for the doctor in order to target the harmful agent with the appropriate methods of treatment.

Choosing the example of heat-stroke or fever, Galen raises the question why, the sun and straining weather would affect a few people while not harming others who experience the same environmental conditions. Galen's explanation why

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[349] Nutton (1983), p. 2.

only a few suffered in this way was that not everyone had the 'seeds of fevers' in them. This suggests uncertainty as to whether the seeds were to be located primarily in the atmosphere whence they could affect anyone and everyone or if they were already present within the human body and activated by changes in the environment.[350] Indeed, Galen returned to the question in the first book of *On the different types of fever*. He shows awareness that some diseases could be transmitted via association with sufferers, for instance of certain skin disease, some eye diseases, and a variety of plagues, especially by way of air that is exhaled by an affected individual. Anglo-Saxon sources, remarkably, make no mention of contagion from human to human in the context of pestilential disease and epidemic outbreaks. Neither do they emphasise, as Galen does, any physiological characteristics the body of the person contracting the seeds or air of disease would exhibit that makes them a likely recipient. Nevertheless, in spite of Galen's conviction of the humours as the primary factors determining an individual's state of health or illness, he appears to have been compelled to consider the existence of entities, the seeds of pestilence, again in his commentary on the first book of the *Epidemics*. In this latest work of the group of texts discussing such seeds, Galen characterises them as typically located within the body.

The above summary sketches merely the outlines of Galen's thoughts on disease in terms of seeds which, as Nutton is careful to remind the reader, are 'a modern reconstruction from fragments' a theory of seeds is never all-encompassingly described by Galen. It is the 'close conjunction in time and the interrelations between the books in which they appear [that] justify this assemblage of the

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[350] 340 Nutton (1983), pp. 4-5.

various pieces into a coherent pattern of doctrine.'[351] Although Galen's foremost objective and achievement is the systemacity of his theory, his idea of disease seeds may well have sprung from an ad hoc argument that was swiftly discarded as unimportant in the grand scheme of things. Alternatively, the three texts referenced above may be evidence of Galen trying out another tradition which did indeed make use of seeds, the most extensive exposition of which is found not in a medical textbook but in Lucretius' philosophical poem 'On the nature of things', composed about 56 BCE.[352] This poetic treatment of pestilence and the causing seeds might well have been of sufficient interest for a scholar such as Galen to deserve consideration, even though the suggested ideas were ultimately dismissed in favour of other theories with a more practical orientation. One has to keep in mind, that Galen is not only a philosopher but works also from the viewpoint of the medical practitioner.

> [A]s it stood, the theory of seeds of disease was of little value to the doctor in his practical task of curing the patient. The deadly seeds could not be identified either in the atmosphere or in the patient, and the hypothesis of their existence in no way contributed, in Galen's time, to their elimination. Galen constantly affirmed the need to bring certitude into medicine, yet each time he mentions these seeds there is a, perhaps unavoidable, fuzziness of meaning.[353]

The air, much like the invisible seeds, could hardly be subjected to the control of the doctors seeking to alleviate their individual patients' suffering. As there was little hope of exacting control of what could not be seen, much less grasped, the only factor in this scheme of imagining disease which could be purposefully manipulated was yet again the human body itself and the humours it contains.

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[351] Nutton (1983), p. 7.
[352] Cf. Nutton (1983), p. 9 for the reference to Lucretius, 'On the nature of things', VI. 1090-1286.
[353] Nutton (1983), p. 14.

A theory of seeds is also conspicuously absent from the disease ontology of the early medieval period. Bede's *De natura rerum* does not mention seeds in his elaboration of the causes and significance of pestilences, though it is perhaps worth pointing out Nuttons observation that in general 'almost all discussions of contagious disease before Fracastoro confine themselves largely to what we would term non-epidemic diseases.'[354] Contagion, that is, the transmission from human to human via skin contact or respiration of shared air might have been a prevalent idea in cases of infectious skin disease, for instance. Of course, such a hypothesis would have to be researched separately and in significant detail before results could be compared with the here established picture of disease concepts pertaining to epidemics.

Pestilences of epidemic proportions come with a variety of causes in an Anglo-Saxon understanding of disease. Concepts include more or less vague explanations pointing to the corruption of air as an instrumental factor. In addition, where pestilential seeds of other periods suggest a conceptualisation of disease in terms of the conceptual field of plants metaphor, the Anglo-Saxon mind seems to have drawn on other domains, in particular monstrous creatures and warfare. Both metaphors follow a similar pattern of making the invisible imaginable based on experience and observation although they highlight different aspects of the latter.

Humoural theory, in contrast, was specialized medical information, as far as it was known, rather than the popularised standard mode of explanation it came to be over the course of the following centuries.[355] Significantly, the two medical

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[354] Nutton (1983), p. 9.
[355] Louis Ayoub (1995), 'Old English *wæta* and the Medical Theory of the Humours', *JEGP* 94, p. 344.

texts which owe the least to classical and postclassical traditions – *Lacnunga* and the third book of the Læceboc', according to Louis Ayoub, ' contain no clear-cut references to the humours, suggesting that humoral theory played a very minor role in native medical traditions' even though the author of *Bald's Leechbook* indicates a certain awareness of humoral theory.[356] To expand on this rather general assessment, I want to add that the Leechbooks largely ignore pestilence as a phenomenon. The treatments suggested at best target isolated symptoms such as fevers and swelling which might in some cases have been caused by pestilence. The illness experienced in cases of epidemic diseases, however, tends to evade treatment as in administering medicine to the afflicted individual. It pointed out in several of the sources discussed above that pestilence often brings about the swift death of the patient not long after first symptoms are even detected. In terms of medical intervention, there probably was not much to be done once the disease had been contracted. Galen does not play a prominent part in the Anglo-Saxon literary (or oral) tradition focusing on actual medicinal intervention, as represented by the leechbooks and collections of herbal remedies and charms, although the latter exhibit interesting commonalities with Galen's attempts at incorporating ontological metaphor in schemes of treatment. Later followers of Galen's popular general theory disregarded the three passages dealing with the seed theory outlined above, effectively eradicating them from the history of Galenism with comparatively few copies.[357]

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[356] Ayoub (1995), p. 341.

[357] Nutton (1983), pp. 16-17; 'The little theoretical tract *On initial causes* was forgotten until the early fourteenth century, when it was turned from Greek into Latin by the great South Italian translator, Niccolò da Reggio […] Even today its existence remains unnoticed by many historians of ancient medicine and philosophy. The fate of Galen's commentary on *Epidemics* was only slightly less unhappy […] On the different types of fever, by contrast, enjoyed a marked success.'

Galen's approach was ultimately 'physiological rather than ontological. A disease did not have an existence in its own right.'[358] Even in the texts toying with the idea of disease as seeds, the humoural constitution of the individual is consistently stressed as most influential factor. In the theory of the humours, the seeds of diseases were of minor importance, even if they existed and could be reconciled with a physiological approach to illness and medicine.

The doctor who was trained in humoural theory and corresponding methods of practice knew his patients' habits and their way of life as all was seen as contributing to or detracting from an individual's relative health. Galen was convinced that, provided a proper regimen was followed and a balanced constitution established, the body of the person in question would not be susceptible to any of the elusive seeds, the invisible threats of disease. This model is worth a bit of thought regarding its construction of responsibility for health and illness as falling ultimately to the individual. Available treatments are entirely aimed at modifying a patient's physical constitution determined by the four humours towards a state of balance in order to avoid or to cure illness.

In stark contrast to this system-oriented approach, the Anglo-Saxon medical charms with their reliance on ontological metaphors suggest a very different strategy of coping with illness and disease which may at first appear eclectic, to choose a more positive term than scholarship was wont to do. However, the charms' creatures fit well into a scheme of complimentary treatments which include the preparation and administration of medicinal substances, as well as prayer and the erection of physical barriers, material objects for defense. All of

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[358] Nutton (1983), p. 15.

these elements come together in the instructions for preparing herbal medicines, the prayers and incantations, the suggestions of encircling oneself with sticks and the amulets discussed in chapter 4.3. Even if some of those measures have more of a mental value, a placebo effect so to speak, they nevertheless combat disease in the minds of the people. A holistic definition of medicine such as Isidore's, put forward below, need not be stretched very far in order to arguably include medicines that work on a cognitive rather than purely physiological level.

1. Medicine, *medicina*, is that which either protects or restores bodily health: its subject matter deals with diseases and wounds.

2. There pertain to medicine not only those things which display the skill of those to whom the name physician, *medicus*, is properly applied, but also food and drink, shelter and clothing. In short, it includes every defence and fortification by which our body is kept [safe] from external attacks and accidents.[359]

6.4 Summary

Arranged around questions on the significance of natural phenomena in descriptions of pestilences, this chapter has presented a broad selection of sources. The main texts chosen for consideration, the medical prognostications, the homilies of Wulfstan and Ælfric, and Bede's *De natura rerum* would cover much ground, even if they had been regarded in isolation. The specific ways in which these texts negotiate pestilence, however, can only be appreciated fully if

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[359] *Etymologies*, book IV, 'De medicina'.

they are viewed in comparison with each other as well as their direct and indirect sources. Christian teaching, especially instruction on matters of eschatology, meets compilations of scientific knowledge and the practicalities of medical care. Overlaps of interests and areas of friction have been highlighted throughout this chapter and by frequently pointing back to examples from previous sections.

While the prognostications are extraordinary in that they discuss illness in a way that does not betray any concern with interpreting reasons for and the purpose of an individual's affliction, most of the texts presented are heavily pre-occupied with questions of sin and punishment, not on an individual but rather a societal level. Wulfstan and Ælfric present pestilences and other devastating phenomena as warning signs prefiguring the end of times in order to prompt a return to obedience after the tumultuous final decades of the tenth century. Bede's writings, in contrast, exhibit great care to moderate portentious interpretations of certain natural phenomena in the context of the England's conversion and the Synod of Whitby. The venerable churchman and scholar also serves as an example of how existing ideas of pestilences and disease were evaluated and could be adapted in context of a whole system of knowledge and in accord with particular beliefs and objectives.

7 Conclusions – A Complex Picture

This thesis has traced major currents and discussed subtle nuances in the conceptualisation of epidemic, infectious disease. This has been achieved by fine-grained analysis of individual words and phrases as well as investigations into the socio-historical developments of the period and culture which produced the texts under scrutiny. By regarding the identified concepts in their respective contexts and within the tradition of their classical and early medieval literary sources, sometimes puzzling beliefs and imagery come together to form a bigger multifaceted picture.

The main caveat, which affects most studies on historical cultures and the history of ideas, is that research on the early medieval period is at a disadvantage compared to that on later periods which have more texts by a broader variety of authors to consult. Where later sources offer information about institutions, such as hospitals and leprosaria, and the people populating these places, the Early Middle Ages are for the most part recorded in monastic scriptoria.[360] Furthermore, it has to be assumed that the vast majority of the Anglo-Saxons' literary production is lost to modern research. These gaps in transmission leads to difficulty in establishing chronologic developments of patterns, especially across the different strata of society. What can be learned about the understanding of the phenomenon infectious, epidemic disease from an Anglo-Saxon perspective has to be drawn from a relatively limited and unbalanced corpus of texts. Nevertheless, although it is spread thin over the corpus of Old English literature, the scarcity of evidence, is, at least in part, due to a perceived

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[360] Lee (2015), pp- 41-42.

imprecision of vocabulary used in a large variety of texts alongside instances of explicit description of epidemic characteristics which clearly suggest that the phenomenon of the epidemic was perceived and recognized.

The consecutive research questions formulated at the end of chapter 1 accordingly find resonance to varying degrees throughout the different parts of this investigation. In the following, the questions will be called to mind and serve s a guide along which to summarise the main findings.

1. How did people imagine disease before technology provided an insight into the world of micro-organisms? How might they have inferred their understanding from other observations and experiences?

In the theoretical background outlined in chapter 2, cognitive mechanisms of understanding abstract concepts, especially those which evade sensory perception in the way ivisible pathogens do, have been introduced. Subsequently, Conceptual Metaphor Theory in particular has been applied to textual evidence of disease mined from the DOEC chapter 3.

A major advantage of taking a generally cognitive approach to Anglo-Saxon culture, and Old English literature in particular is the focus on the value of language. Cognitive Linguistics can be linked in with previous research focusing on etymology and semantics. It opens up a window into the experience and the ideas of people of the past via their expression in language - and the language and texts make up a large part of what little evidence is transmitted to us from eras such as the Anglo-Saxon period.

Cognitive Linguistics constitutes part of a comprehensive approach to the body, the mind, language, and culture, all of which do their part when confronted with illness and the idea of disease. The former is experienced, the latter, more abstract aspect of disease is conceptualised through cognitive processes that find expression in language where evidence of metaphoric imaginations can be found. This understanding through images which lies at the heart of cognitive linguistic theory is a capacity inherent to all humans. Variety in the choice and elaboration of specific images, in an effort to make explicable ideas and phenomena that are abstract and therefore difficult to grasp, is due to different cultural systems in which human minds operate. As Gregory the Great has also pointed out, although in a very different context: 'We arrive at a true understanding through images.'[361]

The basic images, demonstrated in conceptualisation such as DISEASE IS AN ENTITY, are more or less universal and based in experience with discrete objects in the physical environment. At this level the Anglo-Saxons are not much different from other historical and contemporary cultures. More developed images, for instance DISEASE IS A MOBILE ATTACKER, are also grounded in the physical experience of the world, of movement and fight, but are influenced by culture in their specific expression.

Starting from the smallest unit of individual words and phrases, this study has thus analysed the linguistic and literary processing of ideas about disease within incrementally broadening contexts, the individual text itself, comparable source

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[361] *Dialogues,* Book 4, 38.

material and what might tentatively be called 'genre-tradition' as well as on the level of historical events and socio- political agendas.

2. In which contexts did questions of disease become relevant, which aspects of disease were discussed?

In addition to the identification of patterns on the level of words and phrases, chapter 3 provides answers in the form of starting points for further investigation of relevant contexts by identifying types of text which include mentions of disease. These gave structure to the second half of this thesis, the textual analysis chapters 4-6. Previously isolated examples are grouped along themes (monsters, saints, nature, and the apocalypse) and text types (charms, poetry, hagiography, historiography, homilies, scientific treatises).

Framed by doctrines of the Christian faith, the systematicity of encyclopaedic knowledge and the possibilities and limitations of practical approaches to treatment, the texts discussed have been shown to take different perspectives on disease, as was generally expect. They run a variety of parallel and intersecting discourse on matters of disease. Different kinds of authorities, medical, religious, scholarly, concern themselves with a group of complementary aspects of the conceptual field. These aspects and their interconnections are represented in Figure 1 below.
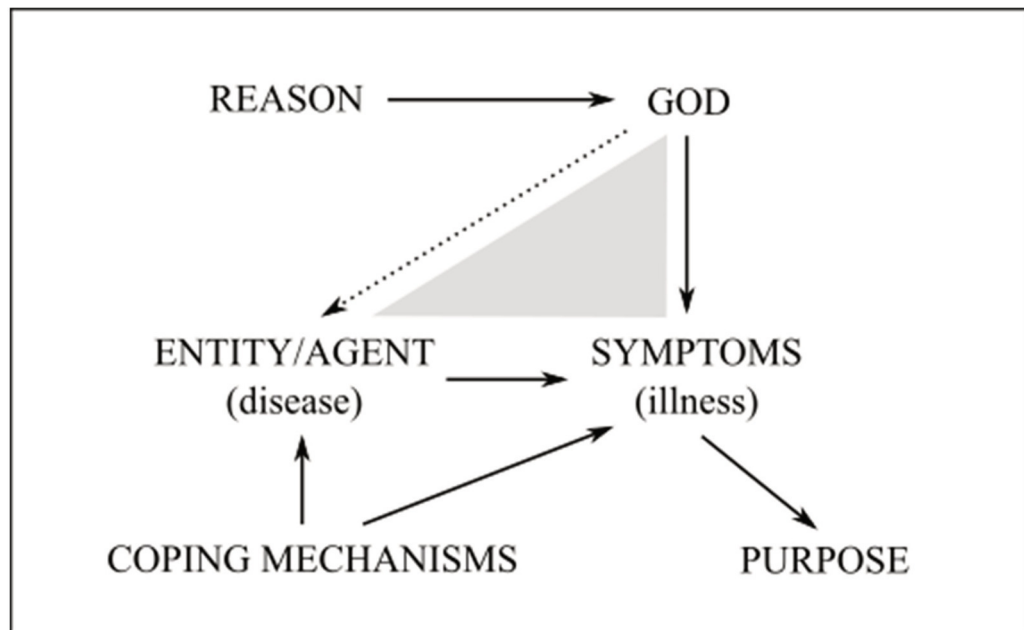
Figure 1.

The separation of abstract disease from experienced symptoms of illness according to philosophical considerations detailed in the introduction is necessary to establish the dynamic in which metaphoric cognitive conceptualisations of disease operate. Furthermore, reason and cause must be regarded as distinct since it is noticeable how some discourses focus heavily on the former while others negotiate causes independently. Meditations on causation, in an Anglo-Saxon Christian context, fall within the triangle of symptoms, God, and the abstract concept of disease which can, but need not be interposed in an explanation of disease moving from reason to purpose. Both the basic conceptualisation and wider speculations on meaning, witnessed in the aspects of purpose and reason are in turn linked directly or indirectly to strategies of coping with disease and its physical symptoms.

An overview of Anglo-Saxon discourses on epidemic disease in the main source types and texts presented chapter by chapter will once more highlight the

prevalent aspects of the system outlined above as well as the concepts which are repeatedly discussed in relation to infection and pestilence.

Chapter 4, concerned with 'Monsters and Disease' as well as chapter 5 dealing with the Lives of saints are by tendency oriented towards question of the individual sphere, individually administered remedies and disease agents on the one hand, and extraordinary, exemplary models of suffering and sometimes healing illness on the other. In contrast, the variety of texts discussed in chapter 6 are occupied with the general and with matters affecting a society at large. Pestilence is considered in terms of its classification within the phenomena of nature, its predictability and significance with regard to eschatology and the protection of the Christian faith in view of external challenges.

The medical charms and herbal recipes are products of an application-centred view of illness and medicine. They are mainly concerned with aspects of coping and target the symptoms of disease as much as they operate on a cognitive level. Conceptualisations of disease as physical beings that purposefully attack the human body draw on imagery of battle and fortification against a roaming enemy, the *laþ þe geond land fære*. Since the hostile creatures of disease are out there, spreading across the land and travelling through the air, coping with illness starts with prevention of the enemies' attacks. The demarcation of boundaries between inside and out, and tokens such as amulets may function on a conceptual level as prophylactic measures against the incursions of disease. The illness resulting from successful attacks would have to be treated by curative means which are also promoted in the Leechbooks' and *Lacnunga*'s herbal remedies. Christian beliefs find incorporation in form of prayers to be sung over patients and recited to put off the demons of disease. In targeting disease in several of its

aspects, and thus by all means imaginable, the texts describe a positively holistic approach to the field of illness and medicine.

In the saints' Lives of chapter 5, disease appears primarily in its aspect of illness and the links between reason, God's will and the purpose of Him willing disease to affect people good and bad. The depiction of epidemic diseases in Saints' Lives in contrast to other genres is, to the researcher's initial surprise, very much characterised by omission. Disease is not a topic of discussion in its own right but a plot element in narratives with overarching hagiographic agendas.

The double purpose of illness in the saints' Lives lies within the narrative, illness is a stepping stone towards salvation, as well as the text's function of building a *vita* necessary for acceptance and veneration of a person as being of saintly status. For the monastic environment producing such *vitae* for its local saint(s), this was not just of spiritual importance but also had economic implications attached to pilgrimage and the monastery's reputation.

Where disease is conceptualised as tool rather than an agent of its own volition, the real problematic issue is not grappling with the abstract concept of disease but lies in the interpretation of afflictions with illness in line with the overall positive presentation of the saintly character. Especially later works tend to censor out epidemics to some degree. In the saints' lives illness may either be overcome with the help of God or suffered patiently to death in order to prove exceptional qualities. Suffering from afflictions with disease is a form of penitence.

In chapter 6, which included perhaps the widest variety of texts, pestilence serves as kind of an alarm, as a symptom of God's anger caused by a societies' sinful

lifestyles. Suffering the affliction is not the way to salvation but alerts the people to necessary changes. This crucial difference certainly has to do with diverging *foci* – on the individual in the Saints' Lives, and on society as a whole in case of the homilies. Generally, however, and especially for epidemics with a high mortality rate, the warning is not to the infected individual but to the affected community, to the members not yet fatally struck by disease. Fitting the context of the examples presented regarding the dynamics of punishment and penitence, Gregory the Great comments that

> We should also keep in mind that sometimes people are given a glimpse of their future punishment while they are fully alive. In some cases, the person himself derives much benefit from the experience; in others, the good lesson is meant for the people who are present and observe what is taking place.[362]

In the eschatological homilies, the death of many, and the pestilence which brought it about, certainly serves its purpose in the lessons Wulfstan, his contemporary Ælfric, and the theological and biblical texts they use as models aim to administer.

Bede's writings, apart from his in many ways outstanding *Hymn* on Æthelthryth, are largely void of disease concepts linked with monstrous creatures. Alternatively, he sees the causes of disease as natural phenomena, located in the atmosphere and subject to God's command. Bede skillfully integrates scientific cataloguing of observable events with the possibility of them holding significance in accordance with his theological views, especially on eschatology.

The sources and alternating interpretations presented for comparison alongside Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and *De natura rerum* point back to the imagery

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[362] *Dialogues*, Book IV, 40.

encountered in other Anglo-Saxon texts throughout this study. This serves to highlight how certain images, like that of the dragon, could be included (Isidore, Gregory of Tours) but also omitted from (Bede) discussions of natural phenomena, portents, and specifically concepts relating to disease. Certain types of primary texts highlight some aspects while they neglect to discuss others, for reasons of ultimate aims of the texts, motivation behind their composition, or their practical use (Galen). Bede moves fluidly between scientific, historiographic and theological necessities, adapting and dismissing ideas, all the while managing to avoid major incoherences. The motives and themes that are picked up were a selection from a larger set of images which must have been familiar to Bede and other writers who had a keen awareness of the popular imagination and the source tradition in which Anglo-Saxon literature positions itself.

3. How were concepts of disease integrated into a wider system of cultural models and beliefs that existed during the time? How are approaches to medicinal treatment and alternative strategies of coping negotiated within such models?

The illustrated discourses, however similar, contrary, and flexible they may ultimately be, did not exist in isolation but were interacting, although not always without friction. The texts discussed not only deal with interrelating aspects of disease, they also serve as a bundle of spotlights illuminating different areas of the conceptual field of disease.

Figure 2 represents an attempt at a synopsis of how different elements of the contextual field around concepts of disease interact, according to the sources

evaluated. Within a system of phenomena that forms part of the perceived environment the constituent elements stand in three types of relation with each other: CAUSE, TOKEN, and CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR (via mechanisms of 'mapping' between domains). God stands outside of this sytem as a controlling instance with the power to trigger or interrupt the dynamics at work.

LIVING ENTITIES can function as both a source domain in conceptual metaphors for PESTILENCE and as a factor in the causation of illness either by themselves or by way of corrupting the AIR which then engenders PESTILENCES. Unseasonable WEATHER is often described as co-occurring with PESTILENCES, which appears to be coherent with the fact that corrupted AIR is posited as a shared causator. The WEATHER is itself not portrayed as a cause for disease but can, under certain circumstances described in chapter 6.3, function as a token signalling PESTILENCES. In the case of COMETS, the connection appears to be purely portentious in that the appearance of such may be significant to predictions on future PESTILENCES. It must be stressed that the links are not absolute but rather possible interpretations current in Anglo-Saxon literature. None of the phenomena had to be significant tokens of things to come but they could have been read and framed as such depending on the wider circumstances of their occurrence in the external world.

This leaves to consider PESTILENCES as a member of the category of phenomena which may themselves be tokens which signal the coming APOCALYPSE or, more usually, function as cautioning reminders of the concept. Here, PESTILENCES are grouped with unseasonable WEATHER, FAMINES, and HUMAN invaders, concepts which feature in parallel positions in the End of the World narrative.
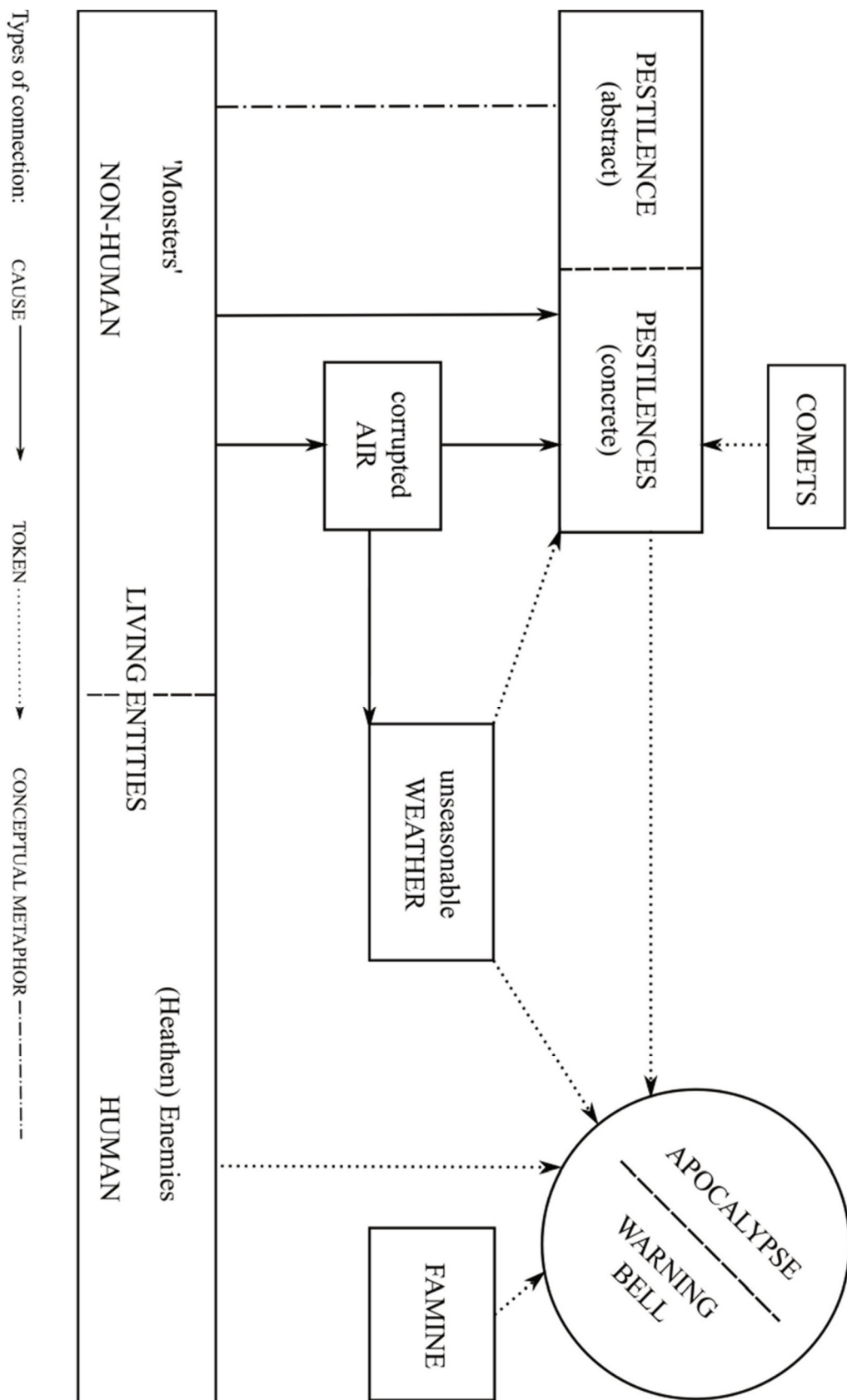
Figure 2.

A schematic illustration of such a complex and multidimensional interplay of ideas can necessarily only be a simplifying sketch of the most salient phenomena and concepts in order to remain readable. One must not forget that each concept would itself again be connected to others outside of the disease model. What could be shown is that different concepts were highlighted individually and put in different relations to the concept of disease across various genres of literary production, all of which include ideas relevant to the overall understanding of disease in Anglo-Saxon England.

The topic of disease lends itself to synchronic and diachronic study insofar as disease is a universal experience. Nevertheless, concepts of disease are variable over space and time. Descriptions of disease, as it is understood within a given culture, should be considered as the product of models for the explication of reality, rather than an objective record of parts of reality, as the present study has demonstrated. What can be learned by studying such descriptions and the underlying concepts pertains to the realm of the cultural history of ideas, elements of which inform our thinking about disease and influence our behaviour in the face of illness and towards its sufferers to this day.

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