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Codicological Clues: Reading Old English Christian Poetry in its
Manuscript Context

Students today are keenly interested in the performance of the work they
study. They want to know who the author, the scribe and the audience
were, when and how the poem was presented and what the text looks like
in its original form. Not all these questions can be answered when we
teach Old English Christian poetry, but there are ways in which we can
contextualize the works we teach and present them in their manuscript
environment.

Texts in Manuscript Context

Much has been done on the question of audience, readers and owners of
late medieval vernacular manuscripts, and we have records of book
ownership from wills and bankruptcy notices from this period. The mise-
en-page and the compilation of manuscripts from the thirteenth century
onwards provide hints as to use; for example, much evidence can be
gleaned if the page is intricately glossed for a scholastic audience or
elaborately illustrated for a courtly one. However, our knowledge of the
practical uses and audience of Old English texts is relatively slight and
the manuscripts yield fewer clues. There is little external evidence about
audience and use of the poetry we teach and so we must rely on internal
evidence.[1] Barbara Raw has shown how punctuation in the Junius 11
Manuscript, for example, is influenced by liturgical practices to aid oral
delivery and that the fifty-six numbered sections in this manuscript might
correspond to daily readings.[2]

Working with facsimiles

At any early stage of learning Old English, I believe that students should be presented with a manuscript facsimile of the work they are studying, if only to see the vast difference between the original and modern presentations of the same work. The text in the manuscript is not immediately accessible to the student with its unfamiliar script, lack of punctuation, perhaps holes, erasures and scribal corrections, while the printed edition is a sanitized, clean, reconstruction that is easy to read -- if not translate! Yet even though we cannot expect our students to read the text straight from the manuscript, they will immediately react to the presentation of the work on membrane. For example, the clarity of script, the careful preparation of the page and the meticulous work of the scribe reflect the prestige and sanctity of the work. The fact that vernacular Old English poetry is written in continuous lines, unlike Latin poetry of the same period, suggests that visual presentation for a reader was not important and that the work was intended for a listening audience. A similar conclusion might be drawn from the lack of illustrations accompanying religious verse, other than the line drawings in the Junius 11 manuscript, and from the fact that many poems are not separated from the preceding one. There seems to be no need to impress a reader or patron by having individual texts clearly and decoratively presented on separate folios. This, of course, can lead to problems, as seen in the debate surrounding Riddle 60 and The Husband's Message. Probably the formulaic introduction of some of the poems, for example, the Hwæt at the beginning of Vainglory or Juliana or the We gefrunan that begins Andreas, may have been sufficient to indicate aurally a new work.

By examining the facsimile the student will see that there are no titles preceding the poems: this both makes differentiation between the individual texts sometimes hard, but also allows the students to make their own decision as to the meaning of the text. To announce that a certain poem is called "The Wife's Lament" immediately raises expectations and suggests an interpretation of the work. There is also the opportunity with orally delivered works for the narrator to play an important, performative and interpretative role not recorded in the manuscript and to guide the listener's response.

This lack of contextual information, of course, gives the modern editor and reader an added responsibility and opportunity. We expect works to have titles and to see where one ends and the next begins. The editors of the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Corpus series, as well as S.A.J. Bradley in his translation of the corpus,[3] helpfully present the texts in their manuscript context and allow us to read them in sequence. It is probable that if one had been reading or listening to a series of riddles, the occurrence of a poem such as The Wife's Lament might make one consider it a riddle too, especially as it begins, like many riddles, with the first-person singular pronoun. A religious poem followed by an elegy would also influence one's reading of the latter work. Students will also see when examining the manuscript facsimile that works such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, generally considered 'companion poems', are not together in the manuscript.

The potential of teaching with electronic editions

The best way in which to convey the Old English poem in its context is by means of electronic editions with accompanying digitised facsimiles of the manuscript page. The student can choose any combination of presentations of the text from a translation of the text into idiomatic

modern English at one extreme to the manuscript facsimile at the other. In between these extremes there might be a transcription of the original text, a critical edition and/or a modernised edition. The facsimile and the transcription give the student the chance of being an editor and making decisions about punctuation, word division, sentence structure, titles, and links between poems. This then is as near as possible a reconstruction of the experience which the Anglo-Saxon listener or reader had including the decisions the first readers would have had to make. Such an approach avoids the danger of the poem being presented totally out of context, in splendid isolation and without any of the manuscript clues. The teacher might even prepare electronic version of the text accompanied by translations which changed as the student emended punctuation or inserted capital letters; for example, if *wyrd* or *frea* were capitalized, the translation could change from 'fate' and 'lord' to 'divine providence' and 'the Lord'.

Teaching non-canonical texts

I should like to examine the poems in one manuscript, namely CCCC 201 (hereafter MS C), in codicological context to see if any light can be shed on the connections between the poems, why they were included in this manuscript and if there are any clues that might point to readership or use in the eleventh century. All too often the familiar, 'canonical' poems are anthologised and traditional interpretations presented, while working with less common texts allows teacher and student to come with an open mind and fresh views. Questions raised by examining these poems in manuscript context might include: where does one poem end and the other begin and do such divisions matter in Old English verse? What is the significance of the large capitals in red?

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The five poetic texts are found on pp. 161-170 of MS C, namely Judgement Day II (hereafter Jdg II), An Exhortation to Christian Living (hereafter Exo), Summons to Prayer (hereafter Summons), Lord's Prayer II (hereafter LPII) and Gloria I (hereafter GloI)[4]

The most appealing work aesthetically is Jdg II and so it is generally separated from the other poems and discussed either in the context of eschatological literature or as an example of late Old English poetry. The fact that it appears with four other poems is rarely mentioned, and its manuscript context is usually overlooked. In retrospect I regret editing Jdg II in isolation and, if I were to practise what I preach, I ought to have included all five poems. I did, however, insert a section on the interdependence of the poems in this group in my edition,[5] but perhaps I can make amends in this article by suggesting a strong link between the first three poems and a possible link between all five and the 'Benedictine Office', a work that appears earlier in this manuscript.

Manuscript Corpus Christi College, Cambridge 201

The manuscript is mid-eleventh century and its provinence is unknown, although a strong case for a Worcester origin can be made.[6]

It was later bound with an Exeter manuscript, now pages 179-272 of MS C, which contains inter alia the Capitula of Theodulf. The original manuscript, pages 1-178, comprises two major parts: section A, lines 1-7 and 161-167, written in an early eleventh-century hand, contains a fragment of the Old English version of the Regularis concordia (pages 1-7) and Jdg II, Exo and Summons on pages 161-67. MS C was altered and paginated by Matthew Parker in the sixteenth century with notations in his familiar red marks. He created a list of contents by erasing the first thirty-eight lines of the Regularis Concordia on page 1. The bulk of the items in this manuscript are in section B, pages 8-160 and 167-76, the latter part containing the poems LP II and Glo I. As can be seen, the

poems are in two separate, albeit linked, sections, in different hands with section B later than section A. This makes a case for viewing the poems as interrelated difficult, but my argument is based on codicological evidence, namely the intention of the manuscript compiler. The scribe who write <u>LP II</u> and <u>Glo I</u> deliberately used the same page as the scribe of section A and indeed followed the last line of <u>Summons</u> without a gap, as if stressing the thematic link.

Judgement Day II

The poetic section begins with <u>Jdg II</u> on a new page and gathering and with large, green capitals announcing: <u>Incipit versus Bede presbiter. De die iudicii. Inter florigeras fecundi cespites herbas flamine uentorum resonantibus undique ramis.</u> The Bede poem mentioned is his <u>De die iudicii,</u> an extremely popular poem that is extant in over forty manuscripts. My reasons for selecting and editing the version in BL Cotton Domitian A1, folios 51^r-54^v·include the fact that it is a mid-tenth century, insular manuscript of Canterbury origins and which appears closest to the vernacular translation.[7] There has been some doubt as to its author, but most editors accept Bede as the poet.[8]

The vernacular poem appears to be the source of a late eleventh-century Old English homily in the Worcester manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian, Hatton 113, folios 68r-70v, which begins <u>Her is halwendlic lar.</u> It is possible that this later homily was based on a earlier, non-extant prose version which was the source of both the poem as well. [9]

Eschatological works in MS C

MS C. has been called a 'hodge-podge' of diverse items, 'a miscellaneous and not particularly careful compilation with no very evident sense of order.'[10] It contains the vernacular <u>Apollonius of Tyre,</u> the 'Benedictine Office', and an Anglo-Saxon translation of part of the <u>Regularis Concordia,</u> adapted for nuns. Many items, however, are by Wulfstan,

Bishop of Worcester and Archbishop of York, or are Wulfstanian in style. All of Wulfstan's homilies, including the intermediate version of Wulfstan's <u>Sermo Lupi ad Anglos,</u> appear in MS C, along with thirty-three other Wulfstanian homilies.[11] It is highly likely that Wulfstan had a commonplace book, a volume that contained texts and documents that he frequently required, and it is possible that MS C belonged to or at least was connected with such a work.[12]

The theme of eschatology also creates homogeneity throughout the manuscript. Five of the eight Wulfstan homilies are eschatological, as well as an anonymous homily on pages 78 - 80, beginning <u>Leofan men ælmihti god us singallice mana∂ and læra∂...</u>[13] and, of course <u>Jdg II</u>.

A final point of interest in this manuscript that concerns the poetry is the fact that section B contains the Old English prose sections of the work entitled <u>De ecclesiasticis officiis</u>, generally known as the 'Benedictine Office'. Unlike the version found in Oxford, Bodleian,. Junius 121 it does not contain works based on The Lord's Prayer, Creed and Gloria within the Office, but versions of the first and last of these liturgical poems significantly occur directly later in the manuscript with the other poetic texts.

As mentioned above <u>Jdg II</u> begins at the top of page 161 at the start of a new quire in the hand of scribe A, which has not been seen since page 7, and is clearly announced as a new work with the rubric <u>Incipit [sic]versus Bede presbiter. De die iudicii: Inter florigeras fecundi cespites herbas flamine uentorum resonantibus undique ramis,</u> 'This begins the poem by Bede, priest, "On the Day of Judgement"; "among the blossoms of the fertile earth, with the branches echoing on every side with the wind's breath"'.

This 'rubric' is in green ink, the colour frequently chosen to begin <u>new</u> items in MS C, and it ends equally decisively with the colophon: <u>Her</u> <u>enda∂ †eos boc †e hatte inter florigeras. Êæt is on englisc betwyx</u> <u>blowende †e to godes rice fara∂ and hu ∂a †rowia∂ †e to helle fara∂.</u> 'Here ends this book that is called "<u>inter florigeras</u>", that is in English, "amongst the blossoming ones" who go to God's kingdom and how those who go to hell fare.' This has indeed some finality about it, but I believe that it is a clear signal that at this point in the performance the direct translation of Bede concludes and the poet-narrator's own composition begins. The translator has produced a close and faithful translation of his Latin source, closer than one normally finds in Old English prose or verse, perhaps on account of the veneration in which Bede was held. The additions are generally fillers, intensifiers or synonyms in order to allow one hexameter to be translated by two vernacular alliterative lines. It is an exciting and frightening poem that leads the listener through hell and, to a lesser extent, heaven and would undoubtedly have created a sense of terror and awe.

An Exhortation to Christian Living

This next section, the poem generally called <u>An Exhortation to Christian</u> <u>Living (Exo),</u> commences with,'Now I shall teach you...':

Nu lære ic †e   swa man leofne sceal,
Gif †u wille   †æt blowende rice gestigan (1-2)

It begins with a red not a green capital, akin to those that begin sections throughout <u>Jdg II</u>. (<u>Summons to Prayer</u> also begins with a red capital and immediately follows <u>Exo</u>) This first line of <u>Exo</u> with its front-shifted <u>Nu</u> 'Now' implies a natural progression beyond <u>Jdg II.</u>, this time with a more didactic and less imaginative approach. 'Now I wish teach you, dear man, what you must do if you wish to ascend to that <u>blowende rice</u>

"blossoming kingdom"'. The vision of heaven at the end of Jdg II is full of references to flowers and indeed the poem in the intial rubric and final colophon is called "inter florigeras". The blessed are called blowende †e to godes rice fara∂,'blossoming ones who go to God's kingdom'. So having described heaven in floral term, the poet will now teach the individual, for the second personal singular form is used, how to be saved. The poem, as one might expect, is less interesting than Jdg II, and has hence received scant critical attention, but I believe it plays an important role in the didactic purpose of this group of poems. Fred C. Robinson suggested that Exo and Summons might be one and the same poem and I can see no reason to query this discovery.[14] The earliest editors decided to call them two separate works and few have been sufficiently interested in them to check the manuscript context.

 A Summons to Prayer

The theme of Doomsday recurs in Exo and Summons and thus creates another link between all three poems. Summons is also visually linked to the previous poem, Exo, with no space, no green initial letter and it begins with the connective Êænne.   A further link is the theme of penance that permeates all three poems, in this case the need to confess in prayer in the confiteor pattern.   Summons is macaronic and this fact may have made editors consider it a separate work, but other poems, such as The Phoenix, also conclude with a macaronic section -- after a Latin translation.

The first line of Summons is †ænne gemyltsa∂ †e, N[omen], mundum qui reget...   The abbreviation N leaves space for the penitent's name, and Gemyltsa∂ †e... echoes penitential homilies. As in the other poems the individual penitent is addressed by the singular †u, thus suggesting that

this work is intended for a priest's use in private confessional -- an important clue as to the use of the poetic section.

 Summons concludes the three penitential poems which began by creating the appropriate mood of introspection, fear and guilt in Jdg II, followed by a terrifying scene of Doomsday and a briefer image of a flowery heaven. Then the listener, or penitent, is immediately led forward to the next stage in the pilgrimage of penance that begins in Exo with the admonitory 'Now I shall teach thee ....', while Summons concludes with the necessary confession and what amounts to an absolution. The three poems, then, have the same didactic aim as a penitential sermon, namely of encouraging the sinner by fear and remorse to confess and be absolved.[15] As the church was increasingly stressing the need for private confession, there also arose a demand for works that would prepare the penitent for confession. These works were not part of penance per se, but might be called 'penitential literature, the aim of which was to instil the correct mood in the penitent.[16]

Some suggested uses of the poetry

It is interesting to note the use made by the homilist in the Hatton homily that shares much material with Jdg II. The homily begins: 'Her is halwendlic lar and ∂earflic læwedum mannum †e †æt læden ne cunnon', 'here is healing and necessary instruction to the laity who know no Latin'. The homilist's aim and audience are clear: it is to be an instructive work on the healing powers of confession for the laity. Healing is a major theme in Jdg II in which Christ appears as the Physician, healing the wounds of sin by poultices and plasters (Jdg II line 80).

The homilist changes the singular '†u' occurrences to the plural and omits the joys of heaven, content with the horrors of hell to create a penitential mood in his congregation. Significantly, he states that it is important to

know the Lord's Prayer and Creed, if one is to reach 'the blossoming kingdom',as an Old English version of the Lord's Prayer and Gloria (though not the Creed) immediately follow the three poems.

As mentioned above, these two poems are added at a later date in the rounded hand of Scribe B, who was responsible for most of the works in section B. If there is a link between this group of two poems and the preceding three, it can only be consciously achieved by the compiler of the manuscript. The use of macaronic poetry links both groups of poems, as Summons and the two final poems both have Latin and Old English half-lines.   The scribe or compiler begins LP II immediately after Summons with virtually no break.

These two poems are not simply versions of 'The Lord's Prayer' and 'The Gloria'; they are vernacular poems that elaborate and greatly expand the original lines. The thirteen lines of the Latin prayer are increased to an independent poem of 123 lines. These two poems are closely linked linguistically and thematically so that they might be called 'companion pieces by the same author written at the same time.'[17]   Both poems appear to be devotional exercises, simply based on the two Latin prayers. The longest section in LP II, based on et dimitti nobis debita nostra, is on Doomsday and the terror in the world and the revelation of all hidden secrets, just as in Jdg II. Bede himself claims to have translated The Lord's Prayer and Creed into English, although these works are lost.

The works as Penitential Literature

I believe that evidence for the unity of the poems can be found outside the poetic section and in an earlier part of the manuscript, namely in the 'Benedictine Office' on pp. 112-14 of MS C. James Ure suggests that LP II and Glo I were written as organic parts of the 'Benedictine Office', as

there are significant parallels that might aid an appreciation of the poetry, although some fifty pages separate the two sections.[18] In the Junius 121 manuscript the paraphrases of the Lord's Prayer and Creed appear within the 'Office'.

The 'Benedictine Office' is a misleading name, as it is not a liturgical work at all. It contains vernacular introductions to the set offices and has a didactic aim. The fact that it is in English suggests a non-clerical audience, as does the omission of the introductions to nocturns and matins, as the laiety would not be involved in the night offices. It has been suggested that the aim of this work -- like the poetry -- was to prepare the laity or lay brethren in a monastic institution for confession and for that reason the Lord's Prayer and Creed were included.

The fact that <u>LP II</u> and <u>Glo I</u> are in the same scribal hand as the 'Office' is no major evidence of linkage, as this hand was responsible for the majority of items in this manuscript. More significant is the fact that a version of the <u>De confessione</u>, appears twice in MS C -- first after the 'Office on pp. 115-17 and again directly after the five poems on pp. 170-71. The <u>De confessione</u> is a directive to priests on confession and its reappearance might suggest that the compiler of MS C viewed both the Office and the poems as penitential literature.[19]

Yet again the repeated theme of Doomsday unites both poems and 'Office'. For example, in the Introduction to Nocturns the poet stresses the need to be spiritually awake in preparation for the parousia. The 'Office' is now generally accepted as being written by Wulfstan, who, as archbishop, had a responsibility for the laity as well as the clergy. MS C reflects the breadth of Wulfstan's interests and responsibilities with law

codes, vernacular sermons and concern for social well-being, as seen in his <u>Sermo Lupi ad Anglos</u>.[20]

A suggested audience

Both the 'Office' and the collection of vernacular poetry might well have served, therefore, a similar, didactic function for a lay audience, in particular the secular clergy. They might well have been literature aimed at helping the reader to meditate in preparation for penance.

There is one final clue in the manuscript that might help our search for the use of the poems and their readers and it comes from within <u>Jdg II</u>. The poet, who keeps unusually close to his source for an Anglo-Saxon translator, greatly embellishes and expands the initial landscape scene in Bede's poem:

1	Inter florigeras fecundi cespitis herbas,
2	Flamine uentorum resonantibus undique ramis,
3	Arboris umbriferae maestus sub tegmine solus
4	Dum sedi, subito planctu turbatus amaro
5	Carmen prae tristi cecini haec lugubria mente (1-5)

[While I sat sad and alone under the covering of a shady tree, among the flowering grasses of the fertile earth, with branches echoing on every side from the wind's breath, I was suddenly disturbed by a bitter lament. I sang these mournful songs because my mind was sad....]

1 Hwæt! Ic ana sæt   innan bearwe
2 mid helme be†eht,   holte tomiddes,
3 †ær †a wæterburnan   swegdon and urnon
4 on middan gehæge   (eal swa ic secge);
5 eac †ær wynwyrta   weoxon and bleowon
6 innon †am gemonge   on ænlicum wonge
7 and †a wudubeamas   wagedon and swegdon
8 †urh winda gryre.   Wolcn wæs gehrered
9 and min earme mod   eal wæs gedrefed.
10 Êa ic færinga,   forht and unrot,
11 †as unhyrlican fers   onhefde mid sange

[Lo! I sat alone within a grove
concealed with sheltering cover in the middle of a
wood where the streams of water murmured and ran
midst an enclosure, just as I say.
Pleasant plants also grew and blossomed there
midst the throng in this unique meadow;
and the trees swayed and murmured
through the force of the wind. The clouds were
agitated and my poor mind was sorely disturbed.
Then suddenly, afraid and depressed, I raised up in
song this doleful poem]

Bede's introduction is compressed and obviously symbolic with allusions to garden, wind and disturbed trees, which his clerical audience would undoubtedly have understood. The vernacular poem expands on this section, probably to make sure that his lay audience is aware of the symbolic significance of the nature description. He adds a streams, a grove, an enclosure [gehæge], a plain and clouds. The first-person personal pronoun now appear at the beginning of the Old English poem (cf. sedi in line 4 of the Latin), thus stressing the importance of the persona.

The sense of maestus..solus as 'sorrowful and alone' in line 3 is not present so early in the translation (9-10), where a pleasant scene with overtones of paradise is evoked. The initial mood in Jdg II is one of protection and security. The persona sits within a grove, covered with a sheltering roof, and the grove in turn is enclosed in a meadow.   Such additions underline the symbolic nature of a garden that prefigures heaven. Man is surrounded by worldly beauty that reflects eternal joy, but such beauty should also remind him of the need to start on his spiritual pilgrimage from this world.   In addition the stirring of the branches þurh winda gryre (8) 'through the force or horror of the winds' reminds the persona and the reader that nothing in this world is perfect.

The trees and clouds are personified , both <u>gehrered</u> (8) 'shaken', 'agitated', or <u>gedrefed</u> (9) 'disturbed' like the mind of the persona. This disturbance of paradise leads him to remember the need to be ever-mindful of the Last Things and so begins his lamentations and the meditations on hell and heaven.

The spiritual journey

The vernacular poet wishes trace a spiritual journey from the initial state of enjoying this life to the disturbing, but necessary state of confessing sins and preparation for one's end. More hints are given to the lay audience than Bede's clerical audience, as the subtle allusions in the Latin might be missed by the laity. The sequence of events is not so far from a number of the Old English elegies in The Exeter Book, in which the audience's attention is caught by the graphic description of the persona's physical and spiritual dilemma before the more didactic section commences.

By comparing the Old English version of this Doomsday poem with its Latin source we can see that the changes the vernacular poet made were in order to accommodate a lay audience, just as the 'Benedictine Office' with its omission of night offices and use of the vernacular also seems to be adapted for the laity. The poetry in MS C and the 'Office' are probably intended for private use amongst the literate laity in and outside the monastery, for example, as devotional exercises recommended by a confessor. <u>Jdg II</u> was probably chosen, as in the later homily, for its vivid and personal account of how everyman, although enjoying the protective delights of this world, needs to think of his end-days. He needs to remember his sins, ask forgiveness from Christ the Physician when there is still time and before the Day of Judgement. The ensuing visions of hell and heaven should be enough to make wish to repent and

when in that penitential state the compiler of this devotional booklet concludes the imaginative poem and begins two works, <u>Exo</u> and <u>Summons</u> that give practical advice on how to reach 'that blossoming kingdom' of heaven. At a later stage the compiler of section B in the manuscript, responsible for pages 8-160 and 167-76, recognising the function of the three poems, added immediately after them two other devotional poems, <u>LP II</u> and <u>Glo I</u>, which were particularly fitting, given the importance of the Lord's Prayer in the act of penance. The first three poems might have circulated independently as a booklet before being copied by Wulfstan to his collection of useful works in a commonplace book and then the last two added at a later stage.

Conclusions

Some of the above suggestions for the use of the poetry must remain speculative, but I firmly believe that by a close examination of the manuscript that preserves the textual witness it is possible to glean clues and cues about the audience or readership, as well as the aims and function, of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry. The student can learn about problems facing an editor, of the importance of punctuation, capitalization and the giving of titles to works. The use of electronic editions with their potential for displaying manuscript facsimiles and transcriptions, as well as critical editions, modernisations, translations, notes and glossary, cannot be underestimated. It is now possible for the undergraduate student to experience the Old English poem in its original context.

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