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The Time is Now:
The Roles of Apocalyptic Thought in Early Germanic Literature.

by Donata Kick

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A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

to the Department of English Studies

University of Durham

2006

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The Time is Now: the Roles of Apocalyptic Thought in Early Germanic Literature.

Abstract:

This study investigates the different purposes for which apocalyptic thought was employed in early Germanic texts. The main focus lies on Anglo-Saxon sources. Both prose texts and poetry are taken into consideration, and cross-references to tenth-century material from the Continent are made wherever appropriate. The first three chapters provide an investigation of the ways in which Church authorities used apocalyptic material for purposes of instilling an urge to repentance and/or conversion in their audiences.

Chapter 1 discusses patristic and Anglo-Saxon responses to the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20 and finds a significant difference in the way the material was discussed by learned monastics and by populist preachers. Chapter 2 traces the Antichrist motif in Continental and Anglo-Saxon sources, with special regard to regional preferences in the treatment of the material. Chapter 3 broadens the view to consider Anglo-Saxon preaching in general. It discusses the different use of apocalyptic material by Ælfric, Wulfstan, and the Blickling homilists, before approaching the prose and poetry found in the Vercelli Book and manuscript Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201.

Chapter 4 discusses material in Old Norse since sources relating to late tenth- and early eleventh century Scandinavia offer a unique opportunity to hear the voices of the laity at whom apocalyptic material was directed. The chapter starts with an overview of the conversion of Norway and Iceland by King Óláfr Tryggvason and his missionaries before moving on to discuss skaldic verse from the conversion phase. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the curious mixture of pagan and Christian themes in the Eddic poem Völuspá.

Previous studies on the Judgement Day motif show either a regional focus (e.g. Anglo-Saxon England), limit themselves to a specific genre of texts (e.g. Old English poetry), or focus on the act of Judgement itself and/or discuss descriptions of the tortures of Hell or the joys of Paradise. In contrast to these, the present study's comparative and interdisciplinary approach provides a more detailed picture of early medieval ideas about the end of the world, and responses to them by the laity.

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Dedication:

The largest debt of all is due to my parents, Dr. Walter and Luise Kick, and to my brother, Tobias. They introduced me to the Middle Ages before I could even walk (and thus run away) by having me baptised in the oldest church in our diocese (the Romanesque Basilika St. Peter and Paul am Petersberg, dating from 1104). Dad taught me the first words in Latin before I could read or write the German language, and thanks to colouring books containing mythological themes, I knew who Zeus was before I started school. Throughout my life, my family continued to nurture my interest in obscure languages and all things early medieval. Eventually, they pushed me out of the nest by suggesting I should study abroad, and then stood by my side even when what was supposed to be one year at Durham turned into six.

To them, I dedicate this thesis.

Danke für die blaue Rose.

Introduction:

The idea for this thesis was born while the remnants of the Y2K panic were still lingering in our minds. As the media's attention turned towards the new millennium and people argued about whether it would truly begin in 2000 or 2001 and whether it would see an apocalypse of global proportions or only of the technological kind, my focus turned towards the question of what the Anglo-Saxons thought about Y1K. It quickly became obvious that this was both a doomed and doom-filled topic: the question of the year 1000 had already been thoroughly investigated with regard to the Continent; and there was simply not enough material in terms of Anglo-Saxon sources. Soon, my focus shifted outwards, and my topic grew, while the original idea shrunk into what is now chapter 1.

There has been a significant gap in scholarship concerning the use of apocalyptic material in Anglo-Saxon England, especially with regard to how the Anglo-Saxons drew on and developed apocalyptic material from the Continent and how the combined force of these ideas affected the Christianisation of Scandinavia. Previous studies of eschatological and apocalyptic thought have often been narrow in terms of geography, focusing only on Continental Europe but disregarding Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia;¹ or else they concentrated on England and disregarded the Continent and Scandinavia.² Some scholars have chosen to focus not only

¹ For example, R. Landes' work focuses on Continental Europe and social movements connected with the millennium; B. McGinn's Visions of the End does not discuss English or Scandinavian sources.

² e.g. M. R. Godden's "The Millennium, Time and History for the Anglo-Saxons" and E. Duncan's "Fears of the Apocalypse: The Anglo-Saxons and the Coming of the First Millennium."

on a particular geographic region but also on a specific genre, as Deering Waller's The Anglo-Saxon Poets on the Judgement Day and Graham D. Caie's study of the Judgement Day Theme in Old English Poetry attest. This thesis pulls together the different strands by investigating the interplay between Continental, Anglo-Saxon, and Scandinavian sources in both prose and poetry.

My main focus lies on the different purposes for which apocalyptic and eschatological material was employed in different sources. Thematically, the thesis falls into two parts: chapters 1-3 trace the point of view of the Church authorities and their use of the material in question. These chapters analyse the different themes and motifs employed in learned discussions of eschatological and apocalyptic material, as well as the different strategies employed by different preachers, depending on their individual goals as well as their target audiences.

The first chapter focuses on patristic and early medieval ideas about the millennium of Revelation 20,7 and whether these sparked off any particular fears connected with the approach of A.D. 1000. In the second chapter, the Antichrist motif will be discussed with regard to the different uses that were made of the material on the Continent and in England. The third chapter focuses on Anglo-Saxon England and investigates the different strategies employed by individual preachers such as Ælfric and Wulfstan, and the different purposes for which manuscript collections such as the Blickling and Vercelli Books, as well as Manuscript Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201, might have been compiled. The focus will lie on different strategies for instigating repentance and/or conversion in their respective audiences.

The final chapter switches to the point of view of selected members of the “target group”: newly converted Scandinavians provide us with a unique opportunity to study how the eschatological and apocalyptic material was received by lay people. Because of the late date of their conversion, the Scandinavian countries are the only places in north-western Europe from where we get to hear accounts of new converts in their own voices.

Setting the Background: Apocalypse as a Literary Genre in Scripture and Apocrypha:

Apocalypse as Literary Genre:

Apocalypsis Iohannis tot habet sacramenta, quot uerba (“The Apocalypse of John has as many secrets as words”), Jerome wrote in a letter to Paulinus, bishop of Nola.³ One of the work’s mysteries is its title. Writing in about A.D. 95, John was the first author to use the term “apocalypse” in the title of a literary work. The word itself (from Greek ἀποκαλυψις) means “revelation”, and is generally applied to the transmission of divine secrets. There has been considerable debate about the classification of the Book of Revelation in terms of genre: some scholars pointed out its affinity to the letter form, others called it a “prophetic book”.⁴ J. J. Collins strove to identify a specific literary genre of “apocalypse”. According to Collins, the genre of “apocalypse” consists of a body of writings

³ Liii.9 *Ad Paulinum Presbyterum*; Hieronymus, *Epistularum Pars 1: Epistulae I-LXX*, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 54, p. 463.

⁴ D. E. Aune, *Revelation*, I:lxxii. For Aune’s discussion of each of these categories, see lxxii-xc.

with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.⁵

This definition has become one of the most influential ones for scholars who have been working on The Book of Revelation and related literature in the last twenty years. Collins distinguishes between apocalypses which contain an “otherworldly journey” (type I) and those which do not (type II), as well as between texts which (a) focus on historical reviews and cosmological upheavals, (b) those which do not contain an overview of world history but do provide cosmic eschatology, and (c) those which focus only on personal eschatology (Collins Genre 13). The long list of generic features which he gathered from his analysis of Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian texts has invited much discussion and criticism (cf. e.g. Aune I:lxviii–lxxxi). His definition is deliberately vague to permit him to include Greek and Roman texts containing “revelatory journeys” (e.g. book XI of Homer’s Odyssey, book VI of Vergil’s Aeneid, Lucian’s Icaromenippus, or Cicero’s Somnium Scipionis (cf. Collins Genre 163–66). It is exactly this vagueness which prevents him from putting sufficient emphasis on crucial features such as the strong temporal dualism found in virtually all apocalyptic texts:⁶ the idea that the present situation of Israel (or even of the whole world at the given moment) is corrupted by evil and will eventually be replaced by another, better time – or even “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21,1; *caelum novum et terram novam*).⁷ Collins equally underrates the strong sense of

⁵ J. J. Collins, ed., Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre 9. Cf. also his The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity.

⁶ For a discussion of the importance of this dualism as the central element of apocalyptic texts cf. the „Zwei-Äonen-Lehre“ defined by P. Vielhauer and G. Strecker in Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) II:498.

⁷ All biblical quotations are taken from Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, ed. B. Fischer. All

determinism which pervades all apocalyptic texts: the when, how, and why of the end of the world has been decided by God before the beginning of history (cf. e.g. 4Ezra 6,1-6; 4,36-37).⁸

Although John's Revelation is the first work to appear under the title of "apocalypse", it is of course chronologically not the first work to feature apocalyptic elements. Its author was able to draw on a long tradition of revelatory writings.

Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Canon-Formation:

"Canon" and "canonical texts" are decidedly Christian terms, first used in patristic writings of the fourth century. Texts which are of canonical status show four characteristics: their divine authority is accepted; their number is fixed and the period of time from which they stem is limited; and their text is understood to be unaltered and any alteration was considered to be a sin.⁹

English translations of biblical quotes follow the Douay-Rheims translation.

⁸ The Septuagint Esdras A corresponds to the Vulgate 3 Esdras. The Greek Esdras B is listed as 1 and 2 Esdras by Jerome. These are referred to as Ezra and Nehemiah in Protestant versions after the Geneva Bible, which call 3 and 4 Esdras of Jerome 1 and 2 Esra. The Vulgate Bible adds 3 and 4 Ezra as an appendix. However, modern scholars (referring to later Latin manuscripts) understand chapters 1-2 of 4 Ezra to be a prologue to which they refer as 5 Ezra. Chapters 15-16 will be referred to as 6 Ezra (see J. H. Charlesworth II:516; 517n1). The work known today as 4 Ezra seems to stem from c. AD 100, with 5 and 6 Ezra being Christian additions of the third century. Those additions survive only in Latin. In particular, 6 Ezra must have been immensely popular in the early Middle Ages, since it survives in numerous Carolingian and Spanish manuscripts (cf. J. H. Charlesworth II:520; Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) II:581).

⁹ Cf. The Cambridge History of the Bible, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, I:114-16. (Henceforth referred to as CHB). Cf. also Flavius Josephus, Against Apion I.37-43, Josephus in 8 Volumes, vol. 1, ed. and trans. J. Thackeray, LCL 186, I:179-81; Cf. Deuteronomy 4,2: "You shall not add to the word that I speak to you, neither shall you take away from it" (*non addetis ad verbum quod vobis loquor neque auferetis ex eo*).

The Hebrew Canon:

The Hebrew Canon consists of three parts: the five books of Moses (Pentateuch), roughly stemming from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., the Prophets (c. third to second centuries B.C.) and the Writings (Hagiographa) – which did not constitute a “closed” category until the first century A.D.¹⁰ The fact that the Book of Daniel was counted among the Hagiographa instead of the Prophets confirms a “late” date of composition: it was written c. 165 B.C.¹¹ By that time the section of the Prophets was already “closed”. The tripartite division is emphasised by Jerome in his preface to the Book of Daniel:

[. . .] non haberi Danihelem apud Hebraeos inter Prophetas, sed inter eos qui Agiografa conscripserunt. In tres siquidem partes omnis ab eis Scriptura dividitur, in Legem, in Prophetas, in Agiografa, id est, in quinque et octo et undecim libros;

Among the Hebrews, Daniel is not reckoned with the Prophets, but with those who wrote the Hagiographa. For by them [the Hebrews] all scripture is divided into three parts, the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa, that is, into five, and eight, and eleven books.”¹²

This structure must essentially have been fixed by the time Luke’s Gospel was composed. In Luke 24,44 Jesus insists that *necesse est impleri omnia quae scripta sunt in lege Mosi et prophetis et psalmis de me* (“all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in

¹⁰ The Jewish canon placed the Song of Songs and the Psalms among the Writings. Cf. E. L. Greenstein, “Psalms”, M. Eliade, gen. ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, XII:38-45 and H. Graf Reventlow, “Hoheslied,” *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, gen. eds. G. Krause and G. Müller, XV:499-502 (henceforth referred to as TRE).

¹¹ cf. the clear references to the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean insurrection which began in 166; the death of Antiochus in 163, however, is not mentioned).

¹² *Vulgata*, ed. B. Fischer p. 1342, trans. CHB I:138

the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me”).¹³ However, critics still disagree about when the Hebrew Canon was closed.¹⁴

Canon-formation is as much an act of excluding writings as it is of deeming material worthy of inclusion. Regarding the extra-canonical texts of the Hebrew Bible, a distinction has to be made between “apocrypha” and “pseudepigrapha”: usually the term “apocrypha” is reserved for Jewish sources that are included in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles, but not in Jewish or Protestant Christian canons.¹⁵ This category sometimes overlaps with the body of writings called “pseudepigrapha”. The Jewish authors of these texts could not afford to write under their own name, since they lacked authority. Therefore they borrowed the name of an ancient sage (Moses, Enoch, Abraham, Baruch, etc.) to give credibility to their works.

¹³ G. W. Anderson suggests that Jesus’ reference to the “psalms” is either used *pars pro toto* or refers to “that part of the whole which had so far been compiled” (CHB I:131).

¹⁴ In particular, the importance of the Synod of Jamnia (held during the last decade of the first century AD) is still disputed. While the CHB sees in it the “last major stage in the delimitation of the Canon” (CHB I:133), more recent criticism rejects this view:

[t]his occurred for some rabbinic Jews near the end of the second or early third century AD, and even later for others. For the Christians, this final definition probably took place in the last half of the fourth century or following (L. M. McDonald and Stanley E. Porter, Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature 606).

¹⁵ J. H. Charlesworth states that a definition of Old Testament “apocrypha” and “pseudepigrapha” is difficult, especially in the light of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the gnostic Nag Hammadi codices. He suggests that the “apocrypha should include only the additional writings preserved in almost all Septuagint manuscripts, and not the additional documents in the Vulgate [. . .].” He lists thirteen texts: “2 Ezra (= 1 Esdras), Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, 1 Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah with the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees. Often two pseudepigrapha, 4 Ezra (= 2 Esdras) and the Prayer of Manaseh, are considered part of the apocrypha.” Charlesworth I:xxvii.

In Weissagungsform schreiben sie Geschichte von der Zeit des angeblichen Autors bis zum Ende der Welt. Oft entsteht um die Zeit des wirklichen Autors, die besonders genau behandelt wird, ein Bruch zwischen Darstellung vergangener und Konstruktion zukünftiger Geschichte, der einen Anhalt gibt für die Abfassungszeit.¹⁶

[They] write history in prophetic form from the time of the alleged author until the end of the world. About the time of the actual author, which is treated with special accuracy, there often occurs a break between representation of past history and construction of future history, which gives a clue to the time of composition.¹⁷

The prophecies up to the actual author's time are *ex eventu* prophecies. The sage whose name is borrowed is instructed to keep the message he receives secret (cf. e.g. Daniel 12,4) until the time when it should become relevant – the time of the actual author. In contrast to that, the author of the Book of Revelation claims to write under his own name, and for his own time. In addition to that, he is explicitly told to publish the message he has received.

The Hebrew writings were classified into texts open to the public and texts only to be used by the initiated. The apocryphal text of 4 Ezra 14 gives a hint at this distinction. Ezra asks the Lord to send the Holy Spirit to instruct him in the re-writing of the Law which had been burned during the persecution. Ezra subsequently writes ninety-four books and is instructed by the Lord to

[45] priora quae scripsisti in palam pone, et legant digni et indigni; Nouissimos autem LXX conseruabis, ut tradas eos sapientibus de populo tuo;

[45] Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people.¹⁸

¹⁶ P. Feine and J. Behm, Einleitung in das Neue Testament, rev. W. G. Kümmel, 331.

¹⁷ W. G. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, trans. A. J. M. and W. G. Kümmel 317.

¹⁸ 4 Ezra 14,45-46; Latin text according to R. L. Bensly, ed., The Fourth Book of Ezra 72. English text according to Charlesworth I:555.

The apocryphal Apocalypse of Paul makes the same distinction between knowledge fit for the public and that only for the initiated:¹⁹

[. . .] et audiui illuc uerba que non liceat omni loqui. Et iterum dixit: Adhuc enim sequere me et monstrabo tibi que hennarare palam et referre debeas.

[21] [. . .] and I heard there words which it is not lawful for a man to speak. And again he said: Follow me further and I shall show you what you ought to tell openly and report.

The New Testament:

With regard to the New Testament canon we find a similar classification of writings into “authentic”, “spurious” (those unfit for public reading but in some cases permitted for private reading), and “heretical” texts not to be used at all. Schneemelcher states that the contents of the New Testament were not fixed by some church decree, but that the body of texts seems to have grown naturally (Hennecke / Schneemelcher, 1968/89 I:26). This process seems complete in A.D. 367, when Athanasius wrote his thirty-ninth Festal Letter citing exactly those twenty-seven texts which have come down to us as the New Testament.²⁰ It is Athanasius who, for the first time, uses the term “canon” when referring to the collection of Holy Scriptures (cf. Feine /

¹⁹ Apocalypse of Paul 21, Nouv. acq. lat. 1631 10vb. The Latin text follows the Paris manuscript (ninth century A.D.) which belonged to the library of the abbey of Fleury-sur-Loire. Cf. Th. Silverstein and A. Hilhorst, eds., Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions 114. The English text is quoted according to Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) New Testament Apocrypha II:772. The Apocalypse of Paul stems from c. A.D. 388 and is extant in numerous manuscripts and fragments in Greek, Latin, Coptic and Slavonic. The Decretum Gelasianum lists it among the spurious works; Origen (d. 254) accepts it as canonical, Augustine rejects it (cf. Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) II:657; 644-48).

²⁰ For Athanasius’ list, as well as two other influential discussions of the canon – the Decretum Gelasianum, the first three parts of which are attributed to Pope Damasus I (366-84), and the Canon Muratori (dating from the end of the second century A.D.) – see Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) I:8-31.

Behm / Kümmel 366). However, already more than a century earlier, Origen of Alexandria (d. 253) had defined writings which were (a) accepted by the Church throughout the world, (b) disputed, or (c) held to be heretical forgeries (Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1989) I:16).

One of the texts whose canonicity continued to be disputed for a long time is the Book of Revelation. Irenaeus and Tertullian accept it as canonical, as do the Canon Muratori (end of the second century A.D.), Origen and Athanasius. On the other hand, the canon of the Synod of Laodicea (after 360), and Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390) regard it as spurious.²¹ The discussion does, however, seem to have continued into the seventh century: the Fourth Council of Toledo (A.D. 633) threatened anybody who regarded the Book of Revelation as extra-canonical, or who excluded it from readings in Church between Easter and Pentecost, with excommunication.²² In some places, such doubts seem to have continued into the ninth century. Generally, the Western church seemed more inclined to accept the Book of Revelation, whereas the Eastern church continued to question its authenticity.

The apocryphal writings of the New Testament refer to themselves as “gospels”, “acts” of various apostles, “revelations”/“apocalypses”, and epistles. However, the reader fairly soon notices that not all of the “apocalypses” belong to the literary genre as defined above. Similarly, we may find apocalyptic elements in the “gospels” or “acts”. The titles often do not provide clear insight into the content. This, however, only shows that, although there was some awareness of different literary genres, an exact definition had not yet been formed. By the time

²¹ For a more detailed discussion of the formation of the New Testament canon, see W. Schneemelcher, „Hauptleitung“, Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) I:1-61.

²² Cf. G. Kretschmar, Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Geschichte ihrer Auslegung im 1. Jahrtausend 122.

these texts were written, the act of writing under a pseudonym seems to have lost much of its original importance and credibility.²³

Returning to Collins' definition of "historical" and "cosmic" apocalypses, we notice that canonical and non-canonical texts of both types can be found from the earliest stages of apocalyptic literature onwards. Of the canonical texts, Daniel and Ezekiel are historical apocalypses; their main emphasis is on historical events which culminate in the extinction of Israel's enemies. In Ezekiel (written c. 597-73 B.C.), the judgement is accompanied by cosmic eschatological signs. These are even more detailed in Isaiah (eighth century B.C.), where the whole world is judged, not only Israel's enemies. The New Testament writings generally show less interest in history. Both the Book of Revelation and the "Little Apocalypse" of the Synoptic Gospels emphasise natural disasters and astronomical abnormalities accompanying the Judgement. The New Testament apocrypha exclude historical details altogether and only concentrate on the signs of the end.

It is striking that at the beginning of Revelation 21 it is stated "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth were gone, and the sea is now no more" (*et vidi caelum novum et terram novam primum enim caelum et prima terra abiit et mare iam non est*). George Bradford Caird finds a whole list of negative elements extinguished in the same way: sea, death, mourning, crying, sorrow (21,1; 21,4), all that was cursed by God (22,3) and night (22,5).

²³ Therefore a distinction between apocrypha and pseudepigrapha does not seem necessary. The term New Testament apocrypha will be applied to these writings throughout this thesis.

Literally or symbolically this list embraces the whole range of evil, and the first and all-inclusive term is the sea. [. . .] [T]he cosmic sea out of which that heaven and earth were made, the primaeval ocean or abyss which is an alias for the dragon Leviathan, a home for the monster, and a throne for the whore (4,6; 12,3; 14,1; 17,1).²⁴

The replacement of the old, morally corrupt world by “a new heaven and earth” is one of the key features found in almost all apocalyptic texts. While the early historical apocalypses can be explained from the political situation of the time of their composition (cf. references to the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes in the Book of Daniel), the apocalyptic material found in the prophetic books goes beyond that. Chapters 24-27 of Isaiah feature an important change in the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic literature: they mark

the transition from the nationalistic expectation of a revived kingdom of David to the apocalyptic visions of cosmic upheavals and rebirth of the whole world. [. . .] Through increasing deterioration, humanity as well as heaven and earth have reached a stage of decrepitude and are under a curse.²⁵

While Daniel was mainly concerned with the annihilation of Israel’s enemies, Isaiah goes beyond that. Not only individual kingdoms will be destroyed in God’s judgement, the whole world is ripe for extinction:

[24,18] [. . .] cataractae de excelsis apertae sunt et concutientur fundamenta terrae [19] confractioe confringetur terra contritione conteretur terra confractioe confringetur terra confritione conteretur terra commotione commovebitur terra [20] agitatione agitabitur terra sicut ebrius et auferetur quasi tabernaculum unius noctis et gravabit eam iniquitas sua et corruet et no adiciet ut resurgat [. . .] [23] et erubescet luna et confundetur sol cum regnaverit Dominus exercituum in monte Sion et in Hierusalem et in conspectu senum suorum fuerit glorificatus.

[. . .] for the flood-gates from on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth shall be shaken. [19] With breaking shall the earth be broken with crushing shall the earth be crushed, with trembling shall the earth be moved. [20] With shaking shall the earth be shaken as a drunken man, and shall be removed as the tent of one night: and the iniquity thereof shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall, and not rise again. [. . .] [23] And the moon shall blush, and the sun shall be ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Sion, and in Jerusalem, and shall be glorified in the sight of his ancients.

²⁴ G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* 262.

²⁵ R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* 442.

Already in Ezekiel, it is said that Gog's assault on Israel will be accompanied by natural disasters such as earthquakes which will cause the mountains to fall (Ezekiel 39,20), along with pestilence, rain, hail, fire, and brimstone (Ezekiel 39,22) but as in Daniel the main emphasis remains on the extinction of Israel's enemy.

The Main Differences Between Jewish and Christian Apocalypses:

However, the hope connected with the coming judgement has changed from Jewish to Christian texts: the apocalyptic context is now closely linked to the death and resurrection of Christ. No longer do the authors look forward to a Davidic military leader who will overcome Israel's enemies and establish an earthly kingdom. They are awaiting the *Parousia* of Christ which will not only bring an end to the persecution but also to history itself. In the persecution they have to endure, the Christians see a fulfilment of prophecies about the last, evil time, but this time manifests itself in a different way:

No longer are God's enemies confined to men of flesh and blood; they are demonic powers of darkness entrenched in God's vast universe and in men's hearts. No longer are God's battles to be fought with sword and spear; they now assume cosmic proportions and involve all created things.²⁶

The Christian texts slowly become more and more independent of their Jewish heritage. The authors keep some of the key elements found in apocalypses and prophecies, such as references to wars and natural disasters; they re-interpret Old Testament prophecies: the fourth beast of Daniel 7 is now seen as the Roman Empire; and they establish their own tradition of imagery.

²⁶ D. S. Russell, Apocalyptic: Ancient and Modern 34.

Judgement now includes the whole creation, heaven, earth, and the underworld. We no longer find frequent *ex eventu* prophecies, nor historical reviews from primeval times to the days of the writer.²⁷ Other writings are attributed to Apostles, like the apocalypses of Peter or Paul. Some authors, however, claim to write under their own name, for example the author of the Book of Revelation.

Calculating Time:

The historical apocalypses – both canonical and non-canonical ones – show considerable interest in calculating the time left before the end. The Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch 91,12-17; 93) divides the Biblical history from the antediluvian age onwards into ten “weeks” of years.²⁸ In the seventh, which constitutes the present time of the writer, “an apostate generation shall arise; its deeds shall be many, and all of them criminal” (1 Enoch 93,9; Charlesworth I:74). The judgement of the oppressors will follow in the eighth week. The ninth sees judgement for the whole world, and in the tenth “[t]he first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear” (1 Enoch 91,16). After that, there shall be “many weeks without number forever”,

²⁷ The only Christian historical apocalypse to contain an *ex eventu* prophecy is Jacob’s Ladder. The Ascension of Isaiah is the only apocalypse containing an otherworldly journey which also contains a short *ex eventu* prophecy (on the life, death and resurrection of Christ). Both texts will be excluded from this thesis, the former because its origins are too late and it only survives in Slavonic versions (cf. J. H. Charlesworth I:401-05), and the latter because it consists for the most part of otherworld journeys (J. J. Collins, Genre 65).

²⁸ The Apocalypse of Weeks is usually dated just before the Maccabean revolt, since it does not mention these events. This implies that it is older than Daniel 7 and the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch, though only by a few years. Cf. J. J. Collins, Genre 31-32, as well as J. C. VanderKam, Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition 149.

a time of peace when sin will have become extinct (91,17). The process of periodising history is providing comfort to the oppressed Jews: world history has been determined by God, and the judgement is near. The cruelty of Israel's enemies will not go on for very much longer.

The Signs Preceding the End:

In contrast to that, the canonical and non-canonical texts of the New Testament (with the exception of the Apocalypse of Thomas) spend less effort on the reckoning of time.²⁹ Almost all of them do, however, insist on a time of severe cruelty before the end. This idea, together with the traditional imagery of natural disasters that accompany the judgement, was taken over from Jewish apocalypses. But the emphasis in Christian texts, especially in apocryphal writings after the Book of Revelation, has shifted: the importance is no longer on the reckoning of time but on the recognition of the signs.³⁰

Jesus elaborates on these signs in the passages known as the "Little Apocalypse" of the synoptic gospels (Mark 13, Matthew 24-25, as well as Luke 21). He speaks of "signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars" (*signa in sole et luna et stellis*, Lk 21,25; cf. Mk 13,24; Mt 24,29;), earthquakes, famine and pestilences (Mk 13,8; Mt 24,7; Lk 21,11). Probably the best-known prediction Jesus makes is that "nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against

²⁹ This text survives in several Latin manuscripts of the fifth century AD, as well as in an Old English version in the Vercelli Homilies (cf. Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) II:675).

³⁰ Schon in der Verkündigung Jesu und der älteren Gemeinde (Paulus) hatten „die Zeichen der Zeit“ eine Rolle gespielt, allerdings mit dem Zweck der *Erkenntnis* der Zeit, nicht der *Berechnung* der Zeit [. . .]“ (Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) II.521, emphasis mine).

kingdom” (*exsurget enim gens super gentem et regnum super regnum*, Mk 13,8; cf. Mt 24,7; Lk 21,10). Yet Jesus refuses to let his disciples know when to expect the end. He insists that “of that day or hour no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father” (*De die autem illo vel hora nemo scit neque angeli in caelo neque Filius nisi Pater*, Mk 13,32; cf. also Mt 24,36 and Lk 12,46). He emphasises that these things will happen soon, and he does so with an urgency that matches that of Ezekiel:

7,2 The end is come, the end is come upon the four quarters of the land.
 7,6 An end is come, the end is come, it hath awakened against thee: behold, it is come.
 7,7 Destruction is come upon thee
 7,10 Behold the day, behold it is come
 7,12 The time is come, the day is at hand³¹

Within ten verses of chapter 7, the prophet piles up references which insist that the end is very close. This is a good example of how a Biblical source prefigures the same kind of urgency we find in early medieval sources about the nearness of Doomsday.

Further Definitions:

For the purposes of this thesis, I will follow a slightly modified version of Richard Landes’ definitions of “eschatological” and “apocalyptic”:³² I take “eschatological” to mean “concerning the Last Days in general”. “Apocalyptic” material is that which insists that the Last Days are imminent. Landes defines “millenarianism” as the belief that the end will be preceded by a

³¹ 7,2 finis venit finis super quattuor plagas terrae; 7,6 finis venit venit finis; 7,7 venit contractio super te [. . .]; 7,10 ecce dies ecce venit; 7,12 venit tempus adpropinquavit dies.

³² R. Landes, Lest 210-11.

period of peace on earth. In the first chapter, I follow this definition when discussing the patristic interpretations of Revelation 20. Because this definition is connected with the expectation of a period of peace, it is impossible to refer to “millenarian fears” when discussing any potential concerns about the approach of the year 1000. This terminology is often followed in scholarly studies, but will be avoided here because it appears to be contradictory to Landes’ definition. It seems illogical to imagine fears connected with the approach of a period of peace.

Methodology:

As I have pointed out above, this thesis will consider sources from Anglo-Saxon England, Continental Europe, and Scandinavia. Scriptural, apocryphal, and patristic sources which influenced Anglo-Saxon and Continental writers will be discussed in some detail to provide the background necessary for an understanding of the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of eschatological and apocalyptic material. When discussing tenth-century sources, prose texts in both Latin and the vernacular will be discussed, as well as poetic texts in the vernacular. Texts will be grouped together in terms of “learned” and “populist” sources, but both will be regarded as carrying equal weight. There will be no bias in favour of “learned” or Latin sources over “populist” or poetic material, as long as there is good evidence that the texts in question are contemporary and therefore reliable in the evidence they give. This is the case especially in the final chapter’s discussion of Scandinavian court poetry by non-literate skaldic poets.

The third chapter will focus on Anglo-Saxon material exclusively. It will begin by tracing the work of individual authors (Ælfric and Wulfstan) before proceeding to discuss various manuscript collections: the Blickling and Vercelli Books, as well as Manuscript Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201. The discussion will focus on the eschatological and apocalyptic themes which pervade these manuscript collections as a whole. Compilations which lack such a strong apocalyptic streak will not be a focal point of discussion. The thesis will therefore exclude the Exeter Book, Manuscript Junius 11, and individual homilies in other manuscripts that feature apocalyptic material – especially Easter day homilies which are scattered throughout various other manuscripts such as Manuscript Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41, and Oxford, Bodleian Library Junius 85 and 86.

The thesis will not discuss individual plot points connected with the Last Judgement itself; rather, the focus lies on the signs preceding Judgement Day and the belief that these signs were already being fulfilled in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. I will therefore focus mainly on texts which contain “reviews of history”, and will exclude material which features “revelatory journeys” (cf. Collins’ definition above). Detailed descriptions of heaven and hell, as well as the Harrowing of Hell motif will be excluded from this study.³³

³³ They are not necessarily connected with the Last Judgement in any immediate way – revelatory journeys depicting visions of heaven and hell are a well-known genre encouraging individuals to reform their lives (cf. e.g. the Visio Pauli and the Blickling version of it, as well as Bede’s story of Drythelm, monk of Melrose in his Historia Ecclesiastica V,12). The Harrowing of Hell is usually placed between Christ’s death and his resurrection (cf. e.g. the Gospel of Nicodemus), with no immediate connection to the Last Judgement.

Chapter 1:

Patristic and Anglo-Saxon Interpretations of the Millennium:

The Early Fathers:

Despite the thin Scriptural evidence – only Revelation 20 mentions it –, the idea of a thousand-year long reign of Christ has received much attention at the hand of patristic commentators. Until the third century AD, the belief in the Second Coming of Christ was of an apocalyptic nature, i.e. the *Parousia* was expected to be imminent. Christ's return would inaugurate the millennial kingdom, which would constitute an intermediate period between the time of the Antichrist and the Last Judgement. The early patristic writers understood it to be a time of peace in a rebuilt, earthly Jerusalem. The millennial reign would be preceded by natural disasters and the time of Antichrist with its great tribulation. Adherents of this belief were, among others, Papias of Hierapolis, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome, Commodianus, Victorinus of Pettau, and Lactantius.¹

One significant element of this brand of millenarianism is its materialistic nature: the belief that even nature will share in the utopian abundance. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. after 198), in his Adversus Haereses (c. 185), quotes the lost writings of Papias of Hierapolis (allegedly a disciple of John):

¹ The first Christian author who elaborates on this is Justin Martyr (d. c. 165). Cf. Justin Martyr, Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr with Trypho, a Jew, especially 80,4.

Venient dies in quibus vineae nascentur singulae decem millia palmitum habentes, et in unoquoque palmite dena | millia brachiorum, et in unoquoque brachio dena millia flagellorum, et in unoquoque flagello dena millia botruorum, et in unoquoque botro dena millia acinorum, et unumquodque acinum expressum dabit vigintiquinque metretas vini. Et cum [eorum] apprehenderit aliquis sanctorum botruum alius clamabit botrus: 'Ego melior sum, me sume, per me Dominum benedic.'

The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each [. . .] twig ten thousand shoots, and in each one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretes of wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another one shall cry out, 'I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me.'²

The kingdom is envisaged as a thousand-year long banquet prepared by the Lord (V,33,2).

Humans and wild beasts will be reconciled, resulting in a reversal of the enmity between them

which goes back to Genesis 3,15. Papias conjures up the mental image of a regained Paradise on

earth. Daniélou regards these mythical elements found in Papias/Irenaeus as a typical feature of

Asiatic millenarianism, which drew on Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 11,6-9; 30,26;

65,25 and Amos 9,13.³ Similar imagery is used by Caius Cerinthus (c. 200), who is quoted by

Eusebius (c. 260-341) in his Historia Ecclesiastica:

He declares that after the Resurrection the Kingdom of Christ will be on earth, and that carnal humanity will dwell in Jerusalem, once more enslaved to lusts and pleasures. And in his enmity towards the Scriptures of God, and his anxiety to lead men astray, he foretells a period of a thousand years given to wedding festivities.⁴

Cerinthus' name later became synonymous with this literal belief in a millennium of carnal

pleasures. The element of a thousand-year long wedding feast does not appear in Papias but

² The Latin text is taken from Irénée de Lyon, Contre les hérésies V,33,3, ed. and trans. A. Rousseau, Sources Crétiennes 153, p.414. The English translation is that of A. R. and W. H. Rambaut, ANCL vol. 9, 146. Cf. also 1Enoch 10,19; Charlesworth I:18.

³ J. Daniélou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity, trans. J. A. Baker, The Development of Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea vol. 1, 383.

⁴ Eusebius, The History of the Church, 3,28,4. In 7,25, Eusebius states that the Book of Revelation is sometimes ascribed to Cerinthus. Cf. R. Landes, "Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled" 150, cf. also 150n46.

was picked up by Commodian in the third century: the saints were to “receive blessings because they have suffered evil things; and they themselves marrying, beget for a thousand years.”⁵ It is not surprising that this view was soon condemned by orthodoxy. The specific number of a thousand years is not found in any of the Jewish texts that state an intermediate reign.⁶

It is clear [. . .] that in this context of ideas the chronological aspect of the millennium is secondary; what matters is that it points to a paradisaical state of existence.⁷

Chronology becomes important for the first time in the writings of Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235). His Greek Commentary on Daniel (c. 204) is the oldest extant Scriptural commentary. The author understands the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2 (the legs of iron of the statue), as well as the fourth beast of Daniel 7, to be the Romans.⁸ The stone breaking the statue is not a symbol of a Davidic military leader freeing Israel from its enemies, but represents Christ coming from heaven to bring judgement to the world. Hippolytus discusses when this will take place, and thereby introduces a new (and potentially dangerous) element to millenarianism: the countdown to the end. Combining the six days of Creation in Genesis with Psalm 89,4 (90,4), 2Peter 3,8 and the apocryphal Epistle of Barnabas (c. 120), and calculating the duration of the kingdoms in the Book of Daniel, the author arrives at the conclusion that the world will end 6,000 years after its creation. The passage from the Epistle of Barnabas is as follows:

⁵ Commodian, Instructions 44, ANF vol. 4.

⁶ Cf. the Syriac Baruch 30,1b-3: the Messiah features only briefly in this passage; in 4Ezra 7,28 he reigns for 400 years before he dies. Cf. TRE I:724-25.

⁷ J. Daniélou 391-92; 393

⁸ “The legs of iron are the dreadful and terrible beast, by which the Romans who hold the empire now are meant.” On Daniel 2.1, ANCL 6, p. 447.

Listen carefully my children to these words: 'God finished his work in six days ...' That means that in 6000 years God will bring all things to completion, because for Him 'a day of the Lord is as 1000 years ...' Therefore, my children, in six days, that is in 6000 years, the universe will be brought to its end. 'And on the seventh day he rested ...'⁹

The idea of the cosmic week merges traditions from Hellenism (the total age of the world being seven millennia), Judaism (the emphasis on the seventh day as a time of rest), as well as Christianity (the eighth day then constituting eternal life), and was developed in Syria and Egypt.¹⁰ Hippolytus explicitly links these ideas with the millennial reign of Revelation 20:

4. [. . .] And 6000 years must needs be accomplished, in order that the Sabbath may come, the rest, the holy day on which God rested from all his works. For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they shall reign with Christ, when He comes from heaven [. . .]: for a day with the Lord is as a thousand years. Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that 6000 years must be fulfilled.¹¹

This idea of a *Weltwoche* proved to be extremely influential throughout the early Middle Ages, as we shall see. We must, however, keep in mind that Hippolytus' commentary is anti-apocalyptic. It places Christ's birth in 5,500 *Annus Mundi* (On Daniel 4) and thus gives the world its first deadline: A.D. 500, far enough in the future for him to feel safe. He is thus the first writer to discard the belief that the *Parousia* was imminent.

In the third and fourth century, millenarianism flourished with writers like Victorinus of Pettau (d. 303), whose Scholia in Apocalypsin Beati Joannis is the earliest Latin commentary on the Book of Revelation. He expects the sixth age to last for a thousand years:

mille anni, id est quod reliquum est de sexto die scilicet de sexta aetate, quae constat mille annis

the thousand years, that is, what is left of the sixth day, namely, of the sixth age, which lasts for a

⁹ Quoted according to R. Landes, "Lest" 141-42.

¹⁰ Cf. J. Daniélou 398; 401-03.

¹¹ On Daniel 4.

thousand years.¹²

A century later, Jerome adapted Victorinus' commentary, editing out the passages Victorinus had interpreted in an excessively literal way. Jerome re-wrote chapters 20-21, introducing a spiritual rather than a literal interpretation of the millennium. This revision proved to be extremely influential throughout the Middle Ages.

Lactantius (d. c.320), in his Epitome institutionum divinarum, paints a vivid picture of the millennial reign which is influenced not only by Revelation but also by Classical ideas of the Golden Age (notably Vergil's "Fourth Eclogue") and by the Christian Sibylline Oracles.¹³ The passage is worth quoting in full:

et erit hoc regnum justorum mille annis. Per idem tempus stellae candidiores erunt, et claritas solis augebitur, et luna non patietur diminutionem. Tunc descendet a Deo pluvia benedictionis matutina et vespertina, et omnem frugem terra sine labore hominum procreabit. Stillabunt mella de rupibus, lactis et vini fontes exuberabunt, bestiae deposita feritate mansuescent, lupus inter pecudes errabit innoxius, vitulus cum leone pascetur, columba cum accipitre congregabitur, serpens virus non habebit, nullum animal vivet ex sanguine [. . .].

This kingdom of the saints will last a thousand years. During that same time the light of the stars will be magnified, and the sun's brightness be increased and the light of the moon no longer suffer diminution [or 'eclipse']. Then will come down from God showers of blessing, both morning and evening, while the earth will yield her fruits without toil on the part of mankind. Honey will drip from the rocks, fountains of milk and wine gush forth, wild beasts – laying aside their ferocity – will grow gentle, the wolf wandering harmless amid the flocks, the calf feeding with the lion, the dove consorting with the hawk, the snake losing its venom; no creature will then live by blood.¹⁴

¹² Cf. Sancti Victorini Episcopi Petavionensis et Martyris Scholia in Apocalypsin Beati Joannis, PL 5, p. 317-44. The quote is from 342B; the translation is mine. Cf. M. McNamara, "The Newly-identified Cambridge Apocalypse Commentary and the Reference Bible: A Preliminary Enquiry," with an appendix by D. Ganz, Peritia 15 (2001): 208-60. I am grateful to Professor Ganz for drawing my attention to this article.

¹³ The Sibylline Oracles are edited in J. H. Charlesworth I:317-472.

¹⁴ Lactantius' "Epitome of the Divine Institutes", ch. 72. Ed. and trans. E. H. Blakeney. Text p. 56; trans. p. 122-23.

Lactantius' millenarianism, "less materialistic than that of Irenaeus, was the one which endured in the West [. . .] down to Augustine" (Daniélou 400). It is striking that all the examples quoted above are anti-apocalyptic, i.e. the authors do not believe in the arrival of the millennial kingdom within their own lifetimes. Like Hippolytus, Lactantius placed Christ's birth in the middle of the final millennium, and thus retains a "breathing space" of about two hundred years.¹⁵

It did not take long for critics of millenarian ideas to voice their disagreement with an interpretation such as that of Cerinthus and Commodian.¹⁶ Lactantius' contemporary, Eusebius of Caesarea discusses the Book of Revelation in the seventh book of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. He vigorously condemns any millenarian ideas as "a crass materialistic error existing only among the simple-minded" (Landes, "Lest" 150). Furthermore, he states that any understanding of the work is beyond him, and therefore some deeper, allegorical meaning must be underlying the words on the page.

¹⁵ B. McGinn, ed. and trans., *Apocalyptic Spirituality* 23.

¹⁶ The Eastern church was generally less prone to embrace millenarian thinking, and often criticised the Western authors for their ideas. A good example can be found in Origen (d. c. 253) who insists on interpreting the Book of Revelation allegorically. To read the text in a literal way meant to understand it in a "Jewish sense" (*Iudaico sensu*). His criticism did not, however, have much impact on the West. Origenes, *De principiis*, ANCL 10; Latin text: *Vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, ed. and trans. H. Görgemanns and H. Krapp, see esp. *De principiis* II,11,2.

Augustine's Reinterpretation of the Millennium:

It is often stated that the crushing blow to millenarianism arrived with Augustine of Hippo (354-430):

Nach Daniélou markiert die Abkehr Augustins vom Millenarismus 'une moment capital de la pensée occidentale, celui où elle se détache d'un archaïsme qui la paralysait et s'oriente vers un construction autonome. C'est le moyen âge qui commence.'

According to Daniélou, Augustine's renunciation of millenarianism marked 'a crucial point in time for western thought, the moment when it detached itself from the archaism that had been paralysing it, and started heading towards an autonomous structure. It was the beginning of the Middle Ages.' (Translation mine.)¹⁷

While Augustine has left no commentary on the Book of Revelation, he discussed the millennium extensively in Books 20-21 of his De civitate Dei.¹⁸ However, Augustine's ideas are not entirely original. He draws heavily on the lost commentary of the African writer Tyconius, whose work can be reconstructed from passages cited by authors such as Victorinus of Pettau (d. c. 304), Augustine, Bede (d. 735), and especially Primasius of Hadrumetum (d. 553), and Haimo of Halberstadt (d. 855).¹⁹ Tyconius was the first Latin author who interpreted the millennium in a radically allegorical way. He regarded the first resurrection of Revelation 20,5 as taking place in baptism.

¹⁷ G. Maier, Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche 108. Maier is quoting J. Daniélou, "La typologie de la semaine au I^{er} siècle" 401.

¹⁸ Augustine of Hippo, De civitate Dei, Ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 48. The English translation is that of R. W. Dyson.

¹⁹ For more detailed information about Tyconius, his life, work and influence cf. G. Maier 108-29, and G. Kretschmar, Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Geschichte ihrer Auslegung im 1. Jahrtausend 95-107. For evidence of where manuscripts were located, cf. M. McNamara, "Cambridge Apocalypse Commentary" 211-12.

quod autem dicit, eos regnasse mille, praesens tempus intelligitur, in quo sancti iuste regnare dicuntur, quia se ita cum Dei adiutorio regunt, ut a peccatis victi non possint. Et ut haec evidenter ostenderet, secutus ait: Haec est prima resurrectio. Ipsa est enim qua resurgimus per baptismum ... Quod autem dicit, regnaturam ecclesiam mille annos, in hoc saeculo intelligitur usque in finem mundi.

But when he says that they were to reign for a thousand years, this is understood as the present age, during which the saints are said to reign justly since they are reigning with God's help, so that they cannot be overpowered by sins. And he adds, in order to state this clearly: this is the first resurrection. For this is the one through which we rise again through baptism. But when he says that the church will reign for a thousand years, this is understood to be in this age, until the end of the world.²⁰

This view is remarkably different from the millenarian beliefs that had dominated the previous centuries. Tyconius re-interpreted the millennium as the reign of the Church on earth, whose duration is from the death of Christ to his *Parousia*: [*. . .*] *a passione Domini usque ad secundum eius adventum* (quoted in Maier 118). For future generations, this opens new ways of interpreting Revelation 20: the end could be seen as being imminent, due to the lack of a separate thousand-year period of peace before the Judgement; alternatively, it could be moved to the indefinite future (since the Church will reign forever). Augustine picked up the latter interpretation and elaborated on it, and this, eventually, became the orthodox view.

Augustine wants to make sure the Book of Revelation is understood correctly (20,7: *quem ad modum scriptura haec accipienda sit, iam debemus ostendere* ("we ought now to show in what way this scripture is to be accepted").²¹ He condemns any of the materialistic ideas stemming from Asiatic millenarianism: they can "only be held by carnal people." (*nullo modo ista possunt nisi a carnalibus credi*).²² While he does adhere to the idea of the six ages of the world,

²⁰ Tyconius on Revelation 20,4; quoted in G. Maier 118. Translation mine.

²¹ *De civitate Dei* 20,7. CCSL 48, p. 709. R. W. Dyson 979.

²² *De Civ.* 20,7. CCSL 48, p. 709. However, Augustine has to admit that he himself once held

he rejects any belief that they are (a) of equal length and (b) constitute a literal 1000-year period. He moves Christ's birth from the middle to the beginning of the sixth age. The sixth age itself can be understood in two different ways: (a) what is left of the present age, or (b) the totality of years during which the world has been in existence:

Mille autem anni duobus modis possunt, quantum mihi occurrit, intellegi: aut quia in ultimis annis mille ista res agitur, id est sexto annorum miliario tamquam sexto die, cuius nunc spatia posteriora uoluuntur, secuturo deinde sabbato, quod non habet uesperam, requie scilicet sanctorum, quae non habet finem, ut huius miliarii tamquam diei nouissimam partem, quae remanebat usque ad terminum saeculi, mille annos appellauerit eo loquendi modo, quo pars significatur a toto; aut certe mille annos pro annis omnibus huius saeculi posuit, ut perfecto numero notaretur ipsa temporis plenitudo.

Now the thousand years, it seems to me, can be understood in two ways. First, it may mean that these things are coming to pass in the final thousand years: that is, in the sixth millennium, which is, as it were, the sixth day. The last hours of this day are now passing, and it is to be followed by the Sabbath which has no evening: that is, by the rest of the saints which has no end. Thus, using that figure of speech whereby a part is signified by the whole, John uses the expression 'a thousand years' to denote the last part of this millennium – or 'day' – which remains before the end of the world. Otherwise he certainly intended the thousand years to represent the whole number of years this world has been in existence, signifying the fullness of time by a perfect number.²³

This two-fold interpretation was to become the dominant view throughout the Middle Ages.

Augustine insists that those who give a specific date for the end of the world

[c]oniecturis quippe utuntur humanis, non ab eis aliquid certum de scripturae canonicae auctoritate profertur.

make use of human conjectures, and offer no firm evidence from the authority of canonical Scripture.²⁴

Quoting from Acts 1,6 he dismisses any attempts to calculate how much time is left:

Non est uestrum scire tempora, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate.

millenarian beliefs: cf. *Sermo* 259,2, Dyson 979n37, and *De civ.* 20,7, R. W. Dyson 979.

²³ *De Civ.* 20,7; CCSL 48, p. 710; Dyson 980.

²⁴ *De Civ.* 18,53; CCSL 48, p. 652; R. W. Dyson 903.

It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

He then addresses the two “sets” of a thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20: that of the devil’s imprisonment and that of Christ’s reign

eisdem sine dubio et eodem modo intellegendis, id est isto iam tempore prioris eius aduentus.

which are without doubt to be understood in the same way: that is the period beginning with Christ’s first coming.²⁵

However, they cannot be interpreted as literally taking up one thousand years. He sets out to prove this by asking whether the three and a half years of the Antichrist’s reign following his imprisonment are to be included in the thousand years of his imprisonment, or whether they are to be added to it. He rejects either interpretation as being impossible. How could the reign of Christ and the imprisonment of Satan take up the same period of time, if Satan’s imprisonment was to end three and a half years before the reign of Christ did? Alternatively, if the time of Antichrist was to be added to the thousand years, Christ and the saints would not reign during this time – a thought Augustine had already rejected earlier: they are reigning together even now in the form of the Church in this world (cf. De Civ. 20,9); the Church is the realised City of God on earth; this is, beyond doubt – *procul dubio* – what is meant by the nations that are not to be deceived by the devil. Augustine insists

Et tamen hic erit etiam illo tempore, quo soluendus est diabolus, sicut, ex quo est instituta, hic fuit et erit omni tempore [. . .].

that there will be a Church in this world even at the time, when the devil is to be loosed, just as there has been since the beginning and will be in all times to come [. . .]²⁶

²⁵ De civitate Dei 20,9; CCSL 48, p. 715; R. W. Dyson 987.

²⁶ (De civitate Dei 20,8; CCSL 48, p.712; R. W. Dyson 983. The conclusion Augustine arrives at is that

Critics argue that the transition from pre-millennialism, the crass, materialistic interpretation of Papias, Lactantius, and Commodian, to amillennialism – the belief that the millennial reign was a symbol for the Church – had been achieved. They state that the West did not gradually grow out of any attempts to calculate the end of the world, but that it was Augustine who systematically ended this discussion (cf. G. Kretschmar 106; Maier 78).

Die chiliastische Hoffnung auf ein Reich der Fülle und des Friedens vor dem Jüngsten Gericht überzeugt nicht mehr, einmal weil dies nun als "fleischlich" gilt, dann doch auch, weil eine Unterscheidung dieses Zwischenreiches von der Endhoffnung, dem Reiche Gottes, nicht mehr einleuchtet. Die Deutung des Tausendjährigen Reiches auf die Zeit zwischen Inkarnation und Parusie Christi zwingt zu neuen Allegoresen [. . .]

The chiliastic hope that a kingdom of peace and plenty was to take place before the Last Judgment is no longer convincing. This is because this view is now regarded as "carnal", but also because the distinction between this intermediate reign and the final hope, the kingdom of God, no longer makes sense. The interpretation of the millennial reign as the time between the incarnation and *Parousia* of Christ forces the writers to look for new allegorical ways of thinking [. . .].²⁷

The crass materialistic millenarianism of the previous centuries had been silenced by Augustine. However, the eschatological discussions had not been ended, and we still find occasional glimpses of a rather literal understanding of the Book of Revelation. Quodvultdeus, a contemporary of Augustine, regards the invasions by the Goths and Vandals as prophecies about Gog and Magog come true. He even goes as far as twisting Augustine's warning against such an interpretation to make it fit his purpose.²⁸

the sets of a thousand years either refer to periods of time appropriate to each party but of unequal duration, with the reign of Christ being longer than the imprisonment of the devil. Alternatively, he suggests that the three and a half years are such a short period of time that they can be neglected altogether and hence neither are included nor added to the millennium (*De Civ.* 20,13). .]

²⁷ G. Kretschmar 113; translation mine.

²⁸ Cf. *Dimidvm Temporis* 13,22, *Opera Quodvultdeo Carthaginensi Episcopo Tribvta*, CCSL 60, p.193, 39-41 (cf. Augustine, *De Civ.* 20,8). Cf. also G. Kretschmar 107-09.

At first sight, we find the dominant (i.e. Augustinian) view quoted in patristic commentaries throughout the West: Primasius of Hadrumetum (now Sousse, in Tunisia) draws heavily on both Augustine and Tyconius.²⁹ His commentary on the Book of Revelation is not only a vital source that enables scholars to reconstruct Tyconius' work and compare it to that of Augustine (G. Kretschmar 111-12), but it also greatly influenced Bede. Gregory the Great (d. 604) closely follows Augustine's interpretation of the millennium in his Moralia in Iob:

Millenario enim numero non quantitatem temporis, sed uniuersitatem qua regnat ecclesia, designauit

For by the number one thousand he was not indicating a length of time, but the universality in which the church rules.³⁰

Ambrosius Autpertus (d. 784) specifies the thousand years of Satan's imprisonment as taking up *totum tempus uitae praesentis*, ("the total time of the present life").³¹ He warns against people who insist that

[c]um finiti fuerint sex milium anni, tunc erit consummatio, quid aliud agunt, quam contra Domini interdictum tempora scire se iactant.

when the six thousand years will be finished, then it will be the consummation [of the world], for what else are they doing but pushing themselves forward as knowing the times even against the prohibition of the Lord.³²

This shows that, despite having become the dominant view of the Church, Augustine's re-interpretation of the Book of Revelation could not eradicate millenarian expectations.

²⁹ Primasius Episcopus Hadrumetinus, Commentarius in Apocalypsin, CCSL 92-92*. He, in turn, is stated as one of the sources of the newly discovered Cambridge Apocalypse Commentary (cf. M. McNamara 215).

³⁰ Gregorius Magnus, Moralia in Iob, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 143A, p. 42. Translation mine.

³¹ Ambrosius was born in Provence; around 740 he entered the Benedictine monastery of St. Vincent in Capua (cf. Kretschmar 129-30). His Expositio in Apocalypsin is edited in CCCM 27-27A by R. Weber (1975).

³² In Apocalypsin VI,13,18; CCCM 27A, p. 523. Also quoted by R. Landes, "Lest" 180, 180n176.

Augustine did manage to get rid of materialistic, carnal interpretations of the millennium, but people continued to be interested in the times and circumstances of the end of the world. Had he been utterly effective in eradicating millenarianism, would there have been an audience for Ambrosius Autpertus to address?

In addition, some commentaries which follow the Augustinian interpretation open up new ways of misunderstanding the thousand-year period: Caesarius, bishop of Arles (470-542), for example, sometimes reckons the millennium as beginning with Christ's birth, and sometimes with Christ's death (cf. Expositio in Apocalypsin 20,3b).

mille anni, qui ab adventu domini nostri aguntur; in istis ergo dominus diabolo interdixit ne seducat nationes [. . .] isti mille anni a passione domini aguntur, in quibus non permittitur diabolo facere quantum vult.

a thousand years which are reckoned from the birth of our Lord, for the Lord has forbidden the devil to seduce the nations during these years] [. . .] these thousand years are reckoned from the Passion of the Lord, during which [thousand years] it is not permitted to the devil to do as he wishes.³³

Indeed, Augustine himself had demonstrated that the date of the Incarnation and the Passion were often used interchangeably in calculations.³⁴ Caesarius of Arles had considerable influence on Anglo-Saxon homilists, and might have shaped their beliefs about the imminent end of the world.

³³ Ed. G. Morin, p. 265; 267.

³⁴ R. Landes, "Lest" 155n68 points towards Augustine's Epistola 199,20.

Computus and Calendar: Counting Down to the Year 6,000:

In pre-Christian times, calendar calculations were a way of describing the past and the present rather than the future. “Neither the Romans nor the Germans had any prospective era; they could only name the years in the present and past, by reference to consuls or kings.”³⁵ This changes drastically with the church’s need to calculate the appropriate date for Easter for future years.³⁶ This desire for calculating the future carries with it many a hidden danger: “to project the dates of Easter is to project the future” (Wallis lxxi). It was only a question of time until computists not only looked towards the past in an attempt to establish how many years had passed since the Creation, but began looking towards the future, trying to calculate the number of years left until the end of the world. In some cases, this enabled a revival of the millenarian speculations which the Church Fathers had desperately sought to eliminate. As we shall see, this was a danger especially to the uneducated, who ascribed a much more literal reading to the Book of Revelation than the Church authorities did.

The latter do not explicitly pronounce the imminence of the apocalypse once the year 6,000 draws near. They panic in more subtle ways, by revising the calendar system they are following.³⁷ As we have seen, Hippolytus was the first author to give the world the deadline of 6,000 AM (A.D. 500) in his Commentary on Daniel. In the later 5,800s (i.e. the 300s A.D.),

³⁵ F. Wallis, ed. and trans., Bede: “The Reckoning of Time” lxxi.

³⁶ On the tradition of Easter tables, as well as the different versions, see F. Wallis xxxiv-lxiii.

³⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the following cf. R. Landes, “Lest”.

this Annus Mundi calendar (i.e. AM I) was revised by Eusebius. He placed the beginning of Christ's ministry in 5228, i.e. his birth was in 5,197 or 5,198 AM (Wallis 356). In doing so, he rejuvenated the world by 272 years and inaugurated the AM II calendar. While Hippolytus had placed himself in the 5,700s of AM I, Eusebius now places his own time in the 5,500s AM II.

This system was again revised by Jerome in the 370s A.D. / 5870s AM I. He translated Eusebius' chronicle into Latin, updating it in the process, and placed the Incarnation in 5,199 AM. This became the conventional date for the Western Church. After some hesitation, Jerome's revision became universally accepted: "[i]n the 6th century, with the exception of the Byzantine-educated Jordanes, no Latin historian dated by the Hippolytan system (AM I)" (R. Landes, "Lest", 139). Thus, the Western Church made two major revisions in its calendaric system before ultimately giving up the AM system in favour of the Annus Domini calendar. Without making the imminence of the deadlines public knowledge, the writers had found ways of re-writing history in order to move the end of the world well out of their own lifetime.

Bede and the Anno Domini Calendar:

The last major revision of the calendar resulted from the work the Northumbrian monk Bede. He was heavily influenced by Augustine, who in turn depended on Jerome's system. In A.D. 725, Bede wrote his work De temporum ratione, the last chapters of which focus on the six ages of the world.

Wallis states that Bede is facing the “complex and paradoxical situation” of being “intent on pressing home the gospel message that no one can calculate the Second Coming, but at the same time, he is shackled to the concept of the Six Ages” (F. Wallis 369). Bede does not sound as if he had any trouble reconciling the two ideas; he can draw on generations of church authorities to argue his case. As long as we keep in mind that the six ages are of unequal length and the end of the sixth age is not meant to be known to mankind, there is no problem. He explicitly argues against the “pseudo-scientific” method mentioned above:

quia nulla aetatum quinque praeteritarum mille annis acta repperitur, se aliae plures annos, aliae pauciores habuere, neque ulla alteri similem habuit summam annorum, restat ut pari modo haec quoque, quae nunc agitur, incertum mortalibus habeat suae longitudinis statum, soli autem Illi cognitum, qui seruos suos accinctis lumbis lucernisque ardentibus uigilare raecepit, similes hominibus exspectantibus dominum suum, quando reuertatur a nuptiis.

because none of the five Ages in the past is found to have run its course in a thousand years, but some in more, some in less, and none had the same total of years as another, it follows that this [Age] likewise, which is now running its course, will also have a duration uncertain to mortal men, but known to Him alone who commanded His servants to keep watch with loins girded and lamps alight like men waiting for their lord, when he shall return for the marriage feast³⁸

In De temporibus (c. 708), Bede had placed the Incarnation in 3,952 AM I, which caused him to be blamed for spreading heretical ideas. His accusers claimed that he placed Christ’s birth outside the sixth age, basing this claim on 2 Peter 3,8. His response is a letter to Plegwin, a Hexham monk who is otherwise unknown. Bede asks him to clear his name before Wilfrid.³⁹

³⁸ C. W. Jones, ed., Bedae Opera de Temporibus. Chapters 66-71 are omitted in his 1943 but are included in his 1977 edition in CCSL 123B. The quote above is LXVII, 596, p. 537. The English translation is that of F. Wallis, here 240.

³⁹ The fact that Bede wrote his letter to Plegwin, asking him to advocate his case with Wilfrid on his behalf, suggests that, at the time, Bede could not get hold of Wilfrid himself. According to the Vita Wilfridi of Eddius Stefanus, Wilfrid was ill for part of 708, and away on business to Mercia before his death on October 12, 709. This would explain why Bede was unable to contact him directly. Alternatively, Bede might have been concerned that Wilfrid would not have lent him an ear, due to the fact that the community at Hexham and Ripon was inclined to be unreasonably suspicious about the rest of the Northumbrian church. Bede may have been a

He explains that he is using the “Hebrew Truth” (*hebraica videlicet veritate*), i.e. the Vulgate and not the Septuagint as a basis for his calculations. He refers to the authority of the Fathers to justify his choice: it has been

per Origenem prodita, per Hieronimum edita, per Augustinum laudata, per Iosephum confirmata
recorded by Origen, published by Jerome, praised by Augustine, confirmed by Josephus.⁴⁰

We can see from his letter how greatly upset Bede had been by the accusation:

exhorruī, fateor, et pallens percunctabar, cuius hereseos arguerer.

I confess, I was aghast; blanching, I asked of what heresy I was accused.⁴¹

He cites both the Vulgate and the Septuagint numbers to show that the ages are far shorter according to the Vulgate version, which he followed. He quotes from his earlier work, De temporibus, re-stating that

Sexta, quae nunc agitur, nulla generationum vel temporum serie certa sed, ut aetas decrepita ipsa, totius saeculi morte finienda.

the sixth age in which we are now, will end, not in a fixed sequence of generations and times, but, like extreme old age itself, with the death of the whole world”.⁴²

This would not occur 6,000 years after the Creation. Bede’s warning not to fall victim to this kind of heresy is explicit:

[. . .] tuam simplicitatem, dilectissime frater, admoneo ne opinione vulgari seductus quasi sex annorum millia speres saeculum praesens esse duraturum [. . .]

[. . .] I warn your simplicity, dearest brother, lest seduced by vulgar opinion you should expect

victim of this suspicion or misinterpretation. At any rate, De temporibus must have been read at Hexham and/or Ripon as soon as Bede had completed it in 708. Cf. The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave, especially ch. 62 and 65.

⁴⁰ The Latin text of the Epistola ad Pleguinam follows C. W. Jones’ 1943 edition. Here 314. The English translation is that of F. Wallis, here 414.

⁴¹ C. W. Jones (1943) 307. F. Wallis 405.

⁴² C. W. Jones (1943) 308. F. Wallis, 407.

that this present world will endure 6,000 years, as it were [. . .]⁴³

Furthermore, Bede mentions that, as a boy, he had come across an example of somebody counting down to the end of the world, and he condemns any such attempts;⁴⁴ we can see how strongly he feels about them.

Unde et ipse satis doleo fateor et quantum licet vel amplius irasci soleo quoties a rusticis interrogor quot de ultimo milliaro saeculi restent anni. Atque contra ipse ab illis sciscitari unde noverunt quod nunc ultimum agatur milliarium; cum dominus in evangelio non tempus adventus sui prope vel procul esse testetur, sed nos semper accinctis lumbis ac lucernis ardentibus vigilare ac se expectare donec veniat iubeatur.

On this matter I confess I am quite grieved, and often irritated to the limit of what is permissible, or even beyond, when every day I am asked by rustics how many years there are left in the final millennium of the world, or learn from them that they know that the final millennium is in progress, when our Lord in the Gospel did not testify that the time of His advent was near at hand or far off, but commanded us to keep watch with our loins girded and our lamps lit, and to wait for Him until He should come.⁴⁵

The accusation of heresy continued to vex Bede for the rest of his life. When he wrote De temporum ratione in 725, he felt the need to expand on the topic once more.⁴⁶ He effectively disarms the arguments of those who attempt to calculate when the end will occur, and he does so much more explicitly than in De temporibus:

et siue prolixiora seu breuiora transacti saeculi tempora signauerit, aut signata reppererit nullatenus tamen ex hoc longiora uel breuiora quae restat saeculi tempora putet, memor semper dominicae sententiae: quia de die ultima et hora nemo scit neque angeli caelorum, nisi pater solus. Neque enim ullatenus sunt audiendi, qui suspicantur huius saeculi statum sex milium annorum ab initio fuisse definitum, et ne contra sententiam domini uenire uideantur, addunt, incertum mortalibus quoto anno sextae millaenariae partis uenturus sit dies iudicii, cuius tamen Aduentus maximae circa terminum sexti millenarii debeat sperari. A quibus si queris ubi haec putanda uel credenda

⁴³ C. W. Jones (1943) 313. F. Wallis 412.

⁴⁴ C. W. Jones argues that Bede is probably referring to the Cologne Prologue. Cf. C. W. Jones (1943) 135n2.

⁴⁵ C. W. Jones (1943) 313-14. F. Wallis 413.

⁴⁶ Whereas De temporibus does not touch on anything beyond the six ages, De temporum ratione goes on to discuss the seventh and eighth age, eternity itself.

legerint, mox stomachantes, quia aliud quid respondere non habent: Annon legisti, inquiunt, in Genesi, quia sex diebus mundum fecerit Deus? Vnde merito credi debet eum plus minus sex milibus annorum esse staturum.

Whether he indicates the length of past time to be shorter or longer, or finds it so indicated, nonetheless let him not conclude from this that the time remaining in this World-Age is longer or shorter, remembering always that the Lord said that no one knows the last day and hour, not even the angels, but only the Father. No one should pay heed to those who speculate that the existence of this world was determined from the beginning at 6,000 years, and who add (lest they seem to deny the Lord's statement) that it is unclear to mortal men in what year of the sixth millennium the day of Judgement will come, though its arrival is generally to be expected around the end of the sixth millennium. If you ask them where they have read that such things should be thought or believed, they immediately become vexed, and because they have nothing else to answer they say: "Have you not read in Genesis how God made the world in six days? Hence it deservedly ought to be believed that it will exist for more or less six thousand years."⁴⁷

Bede is pointing out Scriptural evidence (Mark 13,32 and Matthew 24, 36) to underline the fact that the time of the end is unknown to man. He knows that the heretical claims cannot be backed up by Scripture or patristic texts. The *rustici* are truly clueless: they even fail to point to the most obvious sources for millenarian beliefs: Psalm 89,4 (90,4) and 2 Peter.

Bede's merit, however, does not only lie in combatting millenarian beliefs; he re-introduced the system of dating from Christ's birth, which had first been used in 525 in the Easter tables of Dionysius Exiguus. In the sixth century, the A.D. calendar had, however, failed to establish itself against the AM calendar (because of the lack of a threat posed by the imminence of the year 6,000?, we might ask). It was only through Bede that the A.D. system was made popular and eventually became universally accepted. Bede uses the A.D. calendar throughout his Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, and it was this date that he wrote in

⁴⁷ De temporum ratione LXVII, C. W. Jones (1977) p. 536. F. Wallis 239-40.

the first column of his Easter tables. Anglo-Saxon missionaries took it to the continent where we find it mentioned in the canons of the church council of A.D. 742 (early 5,940s AM II).⁴⁸

R. Landes argues that history continued to repeat itself as the church suppressed millenarian beliefs and eradicated them from official documents. He states that we can trace evidence for this throughout the Carolingian era – even if only *ex silencio*.⁴⁹

Even if the Carolingians tried to avoid defining the universal history of the world, one year receives more attention than any other: the year A.D. 800 – which, incidentally, coincides with 6,000 AM II: it was the year that saw the coronation of Charlemagne and his intention to restore the Holy Roman Empire. However, only one contemporary source, the Annales Augiensis, and one modern text note the relation between A.D. 800 and AM 6000.⁵⁰

Before modern medievalists express unquestioned confidence in the impossibility / unthinkability of a “conspiracy of silence” they must at the very least explain the disappearance of two year 6000s in the course of the first millennium of Christian historiography.⁵¹

Ultimately, the new method of reckoning posed a problem: whereas the AM calendar could be revised whenever the expected end of the sixth age drew too close, the A.D. calendar could not. The only way to rid oneself of the problem was to insist on the calendar being inaccurate, for example that the year 1000 after the birth of Christ was, in fact, either 979

⁴⁸ G. F. Browne, The Venerable Bede: His Life and Writings 219-20. Cf. also R. Landes, “Lest” 178.

⁴⁹ To find open discussions of the time remaining until the End, he turns toward the borders of the Carolingian empire and cites evidence from Spain, Lombardy, and Southern France, all instances giving the world only between 57 and 0 years before the end (cf. R. Landes, “Lest” 181-84).

⁵⁰ The coronation is dated in annals to 800 or the first day of 801. See R. Landes, “Lest” 197, esp. notes 228-29. He refers to the Annales Augiensis, Karlsruhe 167, c.814, MGH SS III, p. 136f.) and to J. Gil, “Los terrores del anno 6000” 217-47. R. Landes, “Lest” 198n235.

⁵¹ R. Landes, “Giants with Feet of Clay,” Center for Millennial Studies, Boston University. 18 April 2002. <<http://www.mille.org/scholarship/1000/AHR9.html>>.

(according to Abbo of Fleury) or 992 (according to Heriger of Lobbes).⁵² An alternative was to insist on reckoning not from Christ's birth but from his Passion; this, however, would only postpone the deadline for thirty (or thirty-three) years, though it could be referred back to such authorities as Augustine or Caesarius of Arles, as we have seen.

The Situation on the Continent in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries:

Two important commentaries on Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians survive from the ninth and tenth centuries: those of Haimo of Auxerre and of Thietland of Einsiedeln.⁵³ Haimo's work is interesting because it features a rather literal reading of Paul's epistle, whereas the rest of his work – especially his commentary on the Book of Revelation – is “*very Augustinian*” (S. R. Cartwright and K. L. Hughes 17, Hughes' emphasis). A surviving commentary on Matthew has not yet received the scholarly attention necessary to clarify

⁵² See R. Landes, “Feet”. Regarding Abbo's computistical work, he (n123) refers to A. Cordoliani, “Abbon de Fleury, Heriger de Lobbes et Gerland de Besancon sure l'ere de l'Incarnation chez Denys le Petit” 464-69.

⁵³ Both commentaries have been translated: S. R. Cartwright, and .K. L. Hughes, ed. and trans., Second Thessalonians: Two Early Medieval Apocalyptic Commentaries: Haimo of Auxerre, “Expositio in Epistolam II ad Thessalonicenses”, Thietland of Einsiedeln, “In Epistolam II ad Thessalonicenses”. There is currently no Latin edition of Thietland's commentary, although one is in preparation for CCCM. R. Cartwright based his translation on the only two surviving manuscripts, Einsiedeln MS 38 and Bamberg Msc Bibl 89.

Haimo was born in Francia around the beginning of the ninth century. He was a monk at St. Germain at Auxerre, and became abbot of Sasceium (Cessy-les-Bois) in or around 865 and remained there until his death in 875. Until recently, his work has been attributed to Haimo of Halberstadt. Hughes states, however, that the text of Migne's edition is reliable.

Thietland arrived at Einsiedeln, which is situated in Swabia (modern-day Switzerland), between 943 – 945, a little over a decade after it had been founded. He gradually gained importance at the monastery, which was favoured by the emperor Otto with gifts of land and money. Around 958, Thietland became abbot at Einsiedeln and retired in 964, a year before his death.

whether it can be attributed to Haimo. Hughes suspects that, if found authentic, it might feature a similarly literal reading for the little apocalypse of Matthew 24. This would make the discrepancy between the works even more interesting. Haimo's commentary on Paul will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Thietland's work is highly unusual in that, in midst of the discussion of the man of sin, it digresses to Revelation 20,1-3 and 20,7. He states that "the wicked one" would not be revealed/let loose until the thousand years are over. "A thousand years' – He calls this the last part of the world, and claims it is from the suffering of our Lord and our redemption to the coming of the Antichrist" (S. R. Cartwright 56). Within this section, the "thousand years" are mentioned five times; this might have been a deliberate pointer towards the year 1000. Thietland would then be anti-apocalyptic, i.e. moving the end out of his own (and his audience's) lifetime, but at the expense of a much more literal reading than Augustine would have liked. Cartwright's argument that Thietland attempted to place the apocalypse in 1000 or 1033 in order to suppress rumours pointing at a date some seventy to eighty years earlier sounds convincing. Thietland does mention the arrival of "heretics who would claim that the Day of the Lord is at hand" (2,1), possibly a comment on contemporary fears about the end.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ In his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, Thietland admonishes his monks to be steadfast in the face of persecutions suffered at the hands of locals or outsiders.

Debent etiam et nobis forma esse, hoc est ut si nobis vel a civibus vel ab extraneis illata fuerit persecutio, ad exemplum eorum patienter tollere curemus.

They [the Thessalonians] should even be a model for us; that is, if a persecution should happen to us, whether from fellow citizens or from outsiders, that we should take care to endure it patiently according to their example.

Cf. S. R. Cartwright, "Thietland's Commentary on Second Thessalonians" English text at p. 95; Latin at p. 104n16. The Latin follows Einsiedeln MS 38, fol. 177r.

The Anglo-Saxon Attitude Towards A.D. 1000:

The question of how the approach of the year A.D. 1000 impacted on Europe is of abiding interest among scholars. The general consensus is that the “terrors of the year 1000” are a myth based on a brief note in Cesare Baronio’s Annales Ecclesiastici,⁵⁵ which was handed down by generations of nineteenth-century French scholars. Later critics dismissed the notion of widespread panic on grounds of insufficient evidence.⁵⁶ Most of the scholarly work so far has focused on Continental sources. Few authors have commented on the situation in Anglo-Saxon England. L. Whitbread, Milton McC. Gatch, Dorothy Bethurum, and Joseph Traherne equally argue that the year 1000 passed without making “any great impression on the Anglo-Saxon mind.”⁵⁷ Only Dorothy Whitelock suggests that there was some concern in England.⁵⁸ However, their remarks are confined mostly to brief comments and footnotes. Malcolm Godden briefly addresses the topic in an article about the apocalyptic relevance of the Viking attacks, but he does not see the year 1000 as being particularly important. Edwin Duncan, too,

⁵⁵ C. Baronio was born in Sora, in the Kingdom of Naples, on 30 August 1538 and died in Rome on 30 June 1607. In 1597 Pope Clement VIII named him Librarian of the Vatican. He wrote the Annales between 1588 and 1607. The reference to the year 1000 is in vol. 11, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Cf. for example G. L. Burr, “The Year 1000 and the Antecedents of the Crusades”; B. Barbatti, “Der heilige Adalbert von Prag und der Glaube an den Weltuntergang im Jahre 1000”; Ferdinand Lot, “Le mythe des ‘Terreurs de l’an mille’”; D. Milo, “L’an Mil: Un Problème d’historiographie moderne”. For a full overview, see R. Landes, “Bibliography on the Year 1000,” <<http://www.mille.org/scholarship/1000/1000-bib.html>>.

⁵⁷ L. Whitbread, “The Doomsday Theme in Old English Poetry.” M. McC. Gatch, Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan, esp. 78ff; M. McC. Gatch, “The Unknowable Audience of the Blickling Homilies.” J. Traherne, “Fatalism and the Millennium,” Dorothy Bethurum, ed. The Homilies of Wulfstan 278-79.

⁵⁸ D. Whitelock, ed. Sermo Lupi ad Anglos, esp. 47n7.

argues against any sign for widespread concern among the Anglo-Saxons.⁵⁹ A thorough investigation of the Anglo-Saxon attitude towards the millennium has never been undertaken.

William Friedaux-Collins recently tried to fill the void.⁶⁰ His starting point is that

the years surrounding the millennium witnessed not only heightened apocalyptic anxiety, aroused by a belief in the profound eschatological significance of the year 1000, but also a corresponding interest in biblical prophecy and various chronology-based doomsday prediction schemes.⁶¹

His paper takes into consideration the whole spectrum of apocalyptic themes and imagery, from Antichrist-centred sermons to Viking attacks being interpreted as a sign of the imminence of Doomsday, and he regards all these sources as evidence for a culmination of apocalyptic concern connected with the year A.D. 1000.

In the present chapter, I will argue that the hardcore orthodox line was supported by highly learned men like Bede, Ælfric and Byrhtferth, while a more “literal” (but not heretical) approach was taken by Wulfstan and the Blickling homilist. Only the uneducated seem to have harboured any real fears about the apocalyptic year 1000 itself. I will attempt to offer some explanation for the motivation behind the more “literal” interpretation of the millennium.

Bethurum argues that the clergy followed Augustine’s prohibition against counting down to the end of the world, and that any discussion of such superstitious subject matter as predicting the end was found only among “not very learned priests and an illiterate public” (Bethurum, *Homilies* 278). Generally speaking, the clergy did, indeed, follow the Augustinian

⁵⁹ M. Godden, “Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England” 130-62. E. Duncan, “Fears of the Apocalypse: The Anglo-Saxons and the Coming of the First Millennium.” 15-23; 79-80.

⁶⁰ See his “Satan’s Bonds are Extremely Loose” 289-310.

⁶¹ W. Prideaux-Collins, 290.

viewpoint, but that did not stop some homilists from giving a slightly more “literal” slant to the topic.

It is only possible to align the year 1000 with the end of the sixth age if one combines Bede’s A.D. calendar with Revelation 20,7 and the “pseudo-scientific” idea that “if five ages had lasted approximately five thousand years, the Sixth Age would last a thousand,”⁶² a reading which Bede had vigorously condemned, as we have seen. Ælfric of Eynsham strictly follows the tradition of Augustine and Bede whenever he discusses the end of the world, and he clearly emphasises that no-one save God can know the exact time of the end.

[A]nd seo sixte yld þissere worulde stynt fram Criste astreht oþ domes dæg eallum mannum ungewiss, ac hit wat se Hælend.

So the sixt [sic] age of this world reacheth from Christ vnto the day of doome, which no man knowes, but the Lord himselfe.⁶³

A more detailed discussion of the idea can be found in his homily In Natale Sanctarum

Virginum (dated by Godden c. 992):

Media autem nocte clamor factus est. ecce sponsus uenit: exite obuiam ei; On middre nihte wearð clypfung gehyred. efne her cymð se brydguma. gáð him togeanes; Hwæt getacnað seo midniht. buton seo deope nytennys. for ðan ðe seo geendung þyssere worulde cymð þonne men læst wenað. swa swa se apostol cwæð; *Dies domini sicut fur in nocte. ita ueniet;* Drihtnes dæg cymð. swa swa ðeof on niht;

Media autem nocte clamor factus est, Ecce sponsus uenit: exite obuiam ei; ‘At midnight was a crying heard, Lo, here cometh the bridegroom: go out to meet him.’ What does the midnight betoken but deep ignorance? because the ending of this world will come when men least ween it, as the apostle said, *Dies Domini sicut fur in nocte ita ueniet*, ‘The Lord’s day will come as a thief in the night’⁶⁴

⁶² C. W. Jones (1943) 133.

⁶³ The Old English text follows S. J. Crawford’s edition of The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, EETS OS 160, lines 1185ff. Quoted in M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 78. Gatch gives William L’Isle’s translation (1623) on page 222 (note 12).

⁶⁴ CH II,39,104-11, In Natale Sanctarum Virginum, Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, ed.

Ælfric goes on to state his point even more emphatically: he explicitly mentions that people often fear that the end of the world is at hand. The signs and prophecies have been fulfilled, and the sixth age is over. Yet mankind cannot know when exactly the end of the world will occur:

Oft cweðað men. efne nu cymð domes dæg. for ðan ðe ða witegunga sind agáne. þe be ðam gesette wæron; / Ac gefeoht cymð ofer gefeohte. gedrefednys ofer gedrefednysse. eorðstyrung ofer eorðstyrunge. hungor ofer hungre. þeod ofer ðeode. and þonne gyt ne cymð se brydguma; Eac swilce þa six ðusend geara fram adame beoð geendode. and ðonne gyt elcað se brydguma; Hu mage we þonne witan hwænne he cymð? Swa swa he sylf cwæð. on middre nihte; Hwæt is on middre nihte buton þonne ðu nast. and þu his ne wenst ðonne cymð hé; Nis nan gesceaft þe cunne ðone timan þyssere worulde geendunge. buton gode anum.

Men often say “Lo, now doomsday comes,” because the prophecies are gone by, which were made concerning it. But war shall come upon war, tribulation upon tribulation, earthquake upon earthquake, famine upon famine, nation upon nation, and yet the bridegroom comes not. In like manner, the six thousand years from Adam will be ended, and yet the bridegroom will tarry. How can we then know when he will come? As he himself said, “at midnight.” What is “at midnight” but when thou knowest not and thou expectest him not? then will he come. There is no creature that knows the time of this world’s ending, but God only.⁶⁵

Ælfric draws on 1 Thessalonians (*on middre nihte*) to deflect the fears of the *rustici*, which seem to be based on the Little Apocalypse and 2 Thessalonians (the idea that the end will be preceded by certain signs). Godden has shown that Ælfric is closely following Augustine’s Sermo 93 in this passage. He argues that, whereas Augustine “presents these anticipations of the end as a positive feature of the faithful, using them to explain the phrase ‘they went to meet the bridegroom’”, Ælfric uses them to explain “midnight”, i.e. an unknown time.⁶⁶ This

M. Godden, EETS SS5, p. 330. English translation according to B. Thorpe, *The Sermones Catholici or Catholic Homilies of Ælfric* II:568-69. Line numbers are cited for Godden’s text, page numbers for Thorpe’s.

⁶⁵ CH II,39,111-21; M. Godden p. 330-31; B. Thorpe II:568-69.

⁶⁶ M. Godden, ed., *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS SS18, p. 658-59.

Aliquando autem dicunt sibi homines: Ecce iam dies iudicii venit, tanta mala fiunt, tantae tribulationes crebrescunt; ecce omnia quae prophetae dixerunt, pene completa sunt; iam dies

“perhaps presents millennialist expectations in a more negative light” (M. Godden, Commentary 658).

Later in the same homily, Ælfric goes on to say that

Nāt nan man þyssere worulde geendunge. ne furðon his gene geendunge; Menig man wolde þone maran dæl his lifes aspendan on his lustum. and ðone læssan dæl on dædbote. gif he wiste hwænne hé geendian sceolde; Us is bedigelod ure geendung. to ði þæt we sculon symle us ondrædan. ðone endenextan dæg. þone ðe we ne magon næfre foresceawian.

No one knows the end of this world, or even his own end. Many a man would spend the greater part of his life in his pleasures and the lesser part in penitence if he knew when he was to end. Our end is hidden from us, in order that we should constantly fear the last day, which we can never foresee.⁶⁷

It is easy to see how such a statement might fuel the fears of his audience, even though his main aim was to deflect any immediate concerns. A similar sentiment is expressed in a contemporary continental source, Thietmar of Merseburg (975-1018). In his Chronicon (1012-1013), he states that

Nemo ultimae diei adventum aut venire diffidat aut celeriter contingere exoptet, quia timendus est iustis ac multo magis corrigibilibus cunctis.

one should neither doubt the coming of the last day nor hope that it is close by, since it is fearful even for the righteous, and much worse for anyone worthy of punishment.⁶⁸

Implied in this passage, we find the same view that the exact time cannot be known, but we must not doubt that Judgment Day will occur eventually. Thietmar does not sound as if he is

judicii instat. Qui hoc dicunt, et fideliter dicunt, tanquam obviam eunt sonso cogitationibus talibus Sed ecce bellum super bellum, tribulatio super tribulationem, terrae motus super terrae motum, fames super famem, gens super gentem, et nondum venit sponsus.
Augustine, Sermo 93, §7, PL 38,576.

⁶⁷ CH II,39,207-12; M. Godden 333-34. Quoted in M. Godden, “The Millennium, Time and History for the Anglo-Saxons” 164.

⁶⁸ R. Holtzmann, ed., Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung, MGH SSRerGer. (Ns). tomus 9, p. 500; D. A. Warner, trans., Ottonian Germany: The “Chronicon” of Thietmar of Merseburg 365. Thietmar of Merseburg lived from 975-1018, and composed his Chronicle between 1012-1018. The entry cited is for 1018.

expecting the end of the world to occur within his (or his audience's) generation; once again, we find an anti-apocalyptic view. Godden argues the same is true for Ælfric's comment quoted above (M. Godden, Time 164).

In his Enchiridion (written probably between 1010-12, but certainly after 996), the monk Byrhtferth takes up the traditional idea that God's understanding of time is different from that of humankind. He is one of the few authors who explicitly combine Revelation 20,7 with Bede's A.D. calendar, but he does so to show that we are not meant to know when the thousand years are up and the end of the world will occur.

Iohannes ait: *Post mille annos soluetur Satanas*. Satanas iam millenarius peractus numerus secundum numerum humani generis, sed in praesentia Saluatoris est ipsum determinare. Millenarius perfectus est cuius perfectionem ille nouit, qui cuncta suo nutu potenter creauit.

Se halga Iohannes cwæð: Æfter þam þusende byð seo deofol unbunden. Nu ys þæt þusendfeald getæl agán æfter mennisclicum getæle, ac hyt is on þæs Hælendes andweardnysse, hwænne he hyt geendige. Þæt þusendfeald getæl is fulfremed. Se wát his geendunge, þe ealle þing mid his agenre mihte gesceop.

John says: *Post mille annos soluetur Satanas*. Satanas iam millenarius peractus numerus secundum numerum humani generis, sed in praesentia Saluatoris est ipsum determinare. Millenarius perfectus est cuius perfectionem ille nouit, qui cuncta suo nutu potenter creauit.

St. John has said: 'After the thousand years Satan will be loosed.' This thousand is already accomplished according to human numeration, but it is in the power of the Saviour, when he shall bring it to an end. The number one thousand is perfect. He knoweth its ending, who created the universe by his own power.⁶⁹

This not only shows how firmly Augustine's viewpoint was rooted in the minds of the educated, it also offers a good example of the use Bede would have wanted people to make of his calendar (as opposed to the way the *rustici* used it).

In addition to the information we can glean about the *rustici* from Bede, we find a more immediate comment in Abbo of Fleury's Apologeticus (written c. 994-96). He says that, as a

⁶⁹ Byrhtferth's Manual, vol 1, ed. and trans. S. J. Crawford, EETS OS 177, 240-41.

youth, he had heard a sermon in a Paris church, which announced that the end of the world would be in the year 1000.⁷⁰

De fine quoque mundi coram populo sermonem in Ecclesia Parisiorum adolescentulus audivi, quod statim finito mille annorum numero Antichristus adveniret, et non longo post tempore universale iudicium succederet: cui praedicationi ex Evangeliiis ac Apocalypsi et libro Danielis, qua potui virtute, resistiti.

Concerning the end of the world, as a youth (*adolescentulus*) I heard a sermon in a [the?] church in Paris that as soon as the number of a thousand years should come, the Antichrist would come, and not long thereafter, the Last Judgment would follow; which preaching I resisted with all my strength from the Evangels and the Apocalypse and the book of Daniel.⁷¹

Abbo states that, according to popular belief, the end of the world will occur when the feast of the Annunciation falls on Good Friday, and he goes on to show that this has been the case several times already, and the end still has not come. It might be, however, that the preacher referred to the year 1000 because, for him and his audience, it was at a “safe” distance outside their own lifetime. Abbo might have heard him preach around 965. By pushing the date of the end fifty years into the future, the preacher might have been trying to dispel any fears among his audience that the end was at hand during their own lifetime.

However, there are some sources which, at first glance, could be seen as circulating ideas that are close to heretical material. However, I would argue that these authors do follow the orthodox view; they simply give it a slightly more literal slant, cleverly playing on their audience’s fears.

⁷⁰ Abbo of Fleury, *Apologeticus ad hugonem et rodbertum reges francorum*, London, BM 10972, f.22v, PL 139 c.471-2. Cf. R. Landes, “The Apocalyptic Dossier: 967-1033,” <<http://www.mille.org/scholarship/1000/1000-dos.html>>.

⁷¹ Quoted and translated in R. Landes, “Dossier”.

The homilist of Blickling XI (On þa Halgan þunres Dei) first draws on Scripture to state the orthodox view:

'Non est uestrum usque ad potestatem. Nis þæt eower,' he cwæþ, 'þæt ge witan þa þrage & þa tide þa þe Fæder gesette on his mihte.' We leorniaþ þæt seo tid sie toþæs degol þæt nære næfre nænig toþæs halig mon on þissum middangearde, ne furþum nænig on heofenum þe þæt æfre wiste, hwonne he ure Drihten þisse worlde ende gesettan wolde on domes dæg, buton him Drihtne anum;

Non est uestrum nosse tempora vel momenta, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate. 'It is not yours to know the times and the seasons that the Father hath put in his own power.' We learn that the time is so secret that no man in this world, be he ever so holy, nor even any in heaven, has ever known when our Lord shall decree this world's end on Doomsday, except our Lord alone.⁷²

Quoting from Acts I,7, this homilist, too, makes it clear that the time of the end is not meant to be known to mankind. He is, however, acutely aware that the signs heralding Doomsday are happening in his own time; indeed, all of them have been fulfilled, apart from the coming of Antichrist. According to the homilist, this last sign is not far off either.

þes middangeard nede on ðas eldo endian sceal þe nu andweard is; forþon fife þara syndon agangen on þisse eldo. Þonne sceal þæs middangeard endian, & þisse is þonne se mæsta dæl agangen, efne nigon hund wintra & lxxi. on þys geare.

this earth must of necessity come to an end in this age which is now present, for five of the [fore-tokens] have come to pass in this age; wherefore this world must come to an end, and of this the greatest portion [already] has elapsed, even nine hundred and seventy-one years, in this (very) year.⁷³

Having quoted from Scripture, the homilist now not only makes sure he mentions that his own time falls into the sixth age, but also that the sixth age is well advanced, by giving the date

⁷² Blickling XI, On þa Halgan þunres Dei, The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century, ed. R. Morris, EETS OS 58, 63, 73, p. 116-19.

⁷³ Blickling XI, R. Morris 116-19.

971.⁷⁴ He does, however, quickly add the Augustinian view that the ages are not of equal length, and therefore the exact length of the sixth age cannot be known.

Nis forþon nænig mon þe þæt án wite hu lange he ure Drihten þas gedon wille, hwæþer þis þusend sceole beon scyrtre ofer þæt þe lengre. Ðæt is þonne æghwylcum men swiþe uncuþ, buton urum Drihtne anum.

Since there is no man who may know in how long a time our Lord will complete this [age], whether this thousand shall be shorter or longer than that, therefore it is wholly unknown to every one except our Lord alone.⁷⁵

The end of the sixth age will occur soon, but no-one can know how it will relate to the year A.D. 1000, because the exact length of the sixth age is known only to God. If there were any *rustici* among the audience who were convinced they had about twenty years left to go, they would probably have been disconcerted by this idea. People only hear what they want to hear, and the suggestion that there might be even less time, that God might have decreed the sixth age to have fewer than a thousand years, must have seemed terrifying to them. It is also worth keeping in mind that “Abbo of Fleury calculated the year 1000 after Christ’s passion, the most meaningful date in eschatological debates, as the ‘regular’ A.D. 1012; Christ was born 21 years B.C.”⁷⁶ If we calculate the thousand years from Christ’s birth, we arrive at 979, a mere eight years away from the date mentioned in Blickling XI.

If his audiences believed they were witnessing the Doomsday signs happening around them already, would not the homilist have fuelled rather than alleviated their concerns? Would

⁷⁴ R. Morris argues in his preface that the date 971 only gives us information about the date of the manuscript; it does not necessarily refer to the date of composition (cf. Morris v). But even if this is right, it shows that the scribe took the argument to heart literally enough to want to keep his readers up to date.

⁷⁵ R. Morris 118-19.

⁷⁶ Cf. J. Fried, “Recognizing Millennialism in the Middle Ages, A position paper for the Center for Millennial Studies” <<http://www.mille.org/scholarship/papers/fried.middleages.html>>.

the deliberate use of ambiguity and refusing to project a specific date in accordance with Scripture not have frightened the audience into repentance? Indeed, a little later in the homily, we find evidence of this strategy:

Ah wuton we þæt nu geornlice gemunan þa hwile þe we magon & motan; uton betan þa geworhtan synna & ælmihtigne Drihten georne biddan þæt he us gescylde wið þa toweardan; & uton we symle þæs dages fyrhto & egsan on ure mod settan; uton gemunan hu úncuþ bið æghwylcum anum men his lifes tid, æghweþer ge ricum ge heanum, ge geongum ge ealdum, hwilce hwile hine wille Drihten her on worlde lætan. Geseo we þæt oft swiþe manegum men færlice gelimpeþ þæt he hine wið þas world gedæleþ; forþon us is mycel ðearf þæt we simle teolian on ælce tid þæt we syn gearwe, þonne ure Drihten ure hwylces neosian wille.

But let us diligently reflect upon that, the while we may and can, and let us amend the sins that we have wrought, and earnestly beseech the Almighty Lord to shield us from those approaching events; and let us fix in our minds the fear and horror of that day; let us remember how the term of this life is unknown to each individual man, both to rich and poor, both to young and old, as also the time which the Lord will grant him here in the world. We see that very frequently to many a man it suddenly befalleth that He cuts him off from this world; wherefore it is very needful for us ever to strive at all times to be prepared, when our Lord will visit each of us.⁷⁷

The homilist combines the ambiguity of “not knowing” but “soon” with the theme of repentance in an effective way, very likely playing on existing apocalyptic fears of his audience, but without violating the Augustinian prohibition by attempting to cast a prediction for a specific date.

We find a strikingly similar strategy applied by one of the most influential men of the late tenth / early eleventh century: Wulfstan, archbishop of York. Wulfstan explicitly combines Revelation 20,7 with the A.D. calendar:

Nu sceal hit nyde yfelian swyðe, forðam þe hit nealæcð georne his timan, ealswa hit awriten is 7 gefyrn wæs gewitegod: *Post mille annos soluetur Satanas*. Þæt is on Englisc, æfter þusend gearum bið Satanas unbunden. Þusend geara 7 eac ma is nu agan syððan Crist wæs mid mannum on menniscan hiwe, 7 nu syndon Satanases bendas toslovene, 7 Antecristes tima is wel gehende, 7 ðy hit is on worulde a swa leng swa wacre.

⁷⁷ R. Morris 124-25.

Now things must necessarily deteriorate greatly, because it is getting very close to his [i.e. the Antichrist's] time, as it is written and was prophesied a long time ago: *Post mille annos soluetur Satanas*. That is in English, 'after a thousand years Satan will be unbound.' A thousand years and even more have now passed since Christ was among mankind in human shape, and now the bonds of Satan are loosened, and the time of Antichrist is very close, and things in the world are getting worse the longer it goes on.⁷⁸

Critics mostly just gloss over this passage, stating that: "there is [. . .] no evidence of a tendency to date the end save the single reference in Secundum Marcum to the fact that the millennium had passed", or arguing that Wulfstan's "brief flirtation with millennialism" was of no consequence because he changed his opinion after 1000.⁷⁹ Yet I think it is highly significant that he does mention the millennium in this context. However, I disagree with Prideaux-Collins who argues that "Wulfstan was indeed a millenarian" (296). Secundum Marcum must have been composed later than A.D. 1000, since he remarks that more than a thousand years have passed since Christ was among mankind. Bethurum places the eschatological homilies (Ia-V) during the time when Wulfstan was still bishop of London. That would give a date between 1000-1002 for Secundum Marcum (D. Bethurum, Homilies 278-79, 290), but she argues that V, the last text of this group might have been written after 1002, when he was already archbishop of York. Gatch agrees with Bethurum's assessment (Preaching 236n3). Recently, however, Malcolm Godden has re-dated the eschatological homilies to the period 1006-1012 and beyond, on grounds of Ælfric's influence on Wulfstan's preaching (cf. below, ch. 3).⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Secundum Marcum, Bethurum Homily V, 40-47, p. 136-37. Translation mine.

⁷⁹ M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 114. W. Prideaux-Collins, 297 is referring to M. McC. Gatch, Preaching

113-14.

⁸⁰ M. Godden, "The Relations of Ælfric and Wulfstan" 370.

Wulfstan is not an uneducated *rusticus* who would be likely to issue heretical statements.

He was a highly successful legal expert and statesman but we cannot be sure about the extent of his theological training prior to becoming bishop of London in 996 (Bethurum, Homilies 56).

He was, however, writing for *rustici* – all the more so if Secundum Marcum was written after 1002: some of the inhabitants of his archdiocese would have been converts to Christianity – even at the highest social levels (e.g. Eiríkr Hákonarson, earl of Northumbria from 1016 on; he was the son of Hákon jarl, a determined heathen).

I would suggest that Wulfstan consciously made the connection between Revelation 20,7 and the year 1000, and he did so in a very clever way, without contradicting Augustine. He was pointing out the obvious – that the millennium had passed. But he did not, in fact, make any predictions about a specific date for the end. It was a well-known fact that the end was close. If it had been close in 1000, it was “even closer” in, say, 1006 or 1012. Like the Blickling homilist, Wulfstan might have been playing on any pre-existing apocalyptic fears among his audience. He was telling them that they were running out of time. The end was very close (but he does not say how close), and they would need to repent. This gives a strong sense of urgency to Wulfstan’s homily, which is underlined by the very fact that the comment was made by the bishop of London/archbishop of York at a time when his audience was seeing the signs of Doom everywhere around them, especially in the Viking attacks, as we shall see in chapter 3 below.

It is striking that Ælfric, Wulfstan and Byrhtferth use the same starting point, i.e. that the six thousand years / last thousand years have indeed already passed. Yet whereas Ælfric

steers his audience away from the danger of counting down by emphasising the uncertainty of when the end will occur, Wulfstan sees the fact that the millennium has passed as a sign of the beginning of the end. Ælfric's main aim is to ensure that the people have "good instruction" (*godre lare*) in this last age, so they can avoid falling prey to the devil (Preface, B. Thorpe I:2).

Given that Wulfstan was very likely already at York when he wrote Secundum Marcum, it could be argued that his goal was not only to frighten his audience into repentance, like the Blickling homilist. He might have had an additional motivation: missionary zeal, directed at the newly Christianised Scandinavia and at Anglo-Scandinavians in his own archdiocese.

Chapter 2:

Dressing up the Scarecrow: Political and Penitential Features of the Antichrist:

While the discussion of the millennium seems to fall into two clear-cut categories of learned and populist approaches, it becomes obvious fairly quickly that matters are far more complicated when we come to the motif of the Antichrist. Scriptural and apocryphal sources frequently discuss a time of tribulation, which is usually depicted as the reign of nations who are hostile towards Israel or an individual evil ruler who is the enemy of God. These are usually described in terms of monstrous or bestial imagery. The texts frequently try to identify the nations or rulers in question; attempts are made at reckoning the duration of the time of tribulation. However, in Scriptural and apocryphal texts, there seems to be considerable confusion and/or vagueness about the exact nature of the relationship between these nations or rulers, the Antichrist, and Satan. Attempting to explain these motifs, patristic authors contributed to an ever-growing but incoherent mixture of myth and legend.

This chapter will give a brief overview of the most important Scriptural, Apocryphal and patristic motifs and explanations. I will then go on to investigate medieval responses from the Continent which helped to establish a consistent story pattern for the first time. Finally, I will concentrate on the Old English sources to shed some light on the different ways in which the Anglo-Saxon homilists and poets treated the material. While the Antichrist legend was highly popular in the ninth to eleventh centuries, writers on the continent used the material for entirely different purposes than the Anglo-Saxons did.

Kingdoms and Beasts: Attempts at Identifying the Diabolic Forces:

The Book of Daniel (c. 165 B.C.) features dreams about hostile nations and evil rulers in chapters 2 and 7. The imagery used in the latter bears striking parallels to the Book of Revelation. In chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar is the dreamer who is in need of an interpreter – Daniel. In chapter 7, Daniel himself is the dreamer, and the interpreter is an angel. Both dreams are concerned with the rise and fall of four kingdoms. In Daniel 2, they are described in the form of a statue which consists of metals of declining worth: the statue’s head is made of gold, its breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, feet of iron and clay. They are interpreted as four kingdoms of declining strength.

The explanation of the dream [. . .] implies a fourfold division of history. The number four is certainly traditional, for as O. Plöger points out, the author would have been more at ease if he could have apportioned history into five chapters [. . .]¹

The vision ends in the statue being destroyed by a stone “cut out of a mountain without hands” (*abscisus est lapis sine manibus*, Daniel 2,34), which will subsequently grow to the size of a mountain. Obvious in this passage is the determinism of history: it has been decided from the beginning that the earthly empires will eventually be destroyed by God’s kingdom which “shall stand for ever” (*stabit in aeternum*, 2,44).

The kingdoms were traditionally interpreted as Assyria, Media, Persia, and Greece. The Book of Daniel, however, replaces Assyria with Babylon. “It looks as though this substitution is due to the perspective of a Judean whose country had been conquered by Babylon and not by

¹ A. Lacocque, The Book of Daniel, trans. D. Pellauer, 49. He refers to O. Plöger, Das Buch Daniel 53.

Assyria" (A. Lacocque 50). The fourfold division of history is strongly reminiscent of the sequence of ages of gold, silver, bronze, and iron in Hesiod's Works and Days.² Christian commentators interpreted the kingdoms in a different way: they merged Persia-Mede into the second kingdom, and thus interpreted the fourth one as the Romans because of their own negative experiences with the Romans.³

In Daniel's dream in chapter 7, the four kingdoms are represented by four monstrous beasts rising from the sea, the fourth one having iron teeth and ten horns:

7,23 et [. . .] bestia quarta regnum quartum erit in terra quod maius erit omnibus regnis et devorabit universam terram et conculcabit et comminuet eam

the fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be greater than all the kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.

Again, the dream ends in the destruction of the kingdoms, with the last beast being "slain, and the body thereof was destroyed, and given to the fire to be burnt" (Daniel 7,11 *interfecta [. . .] et perisset corpus eius et traditum [. . .] ad comburendum igni*).

It is striking that the beast in Revelation 13,2 combines features of all four of Daniel's beasts: like them, it comes from the sea; it has the mouth of a lion (the first beast in Daniel 7 is a lioness), the feet of a bear (the second beast in Daniel), and is generally similar to a leopard (the third beast). It has ten horns and blasphemes like the fourth beast in Daniel (cf. Daniel 7,8; Rev 13,5). "In Babylonian astral geography, lion, bear, and leopard respectively symbolized

² Cf. Hesiod, Works and Days 106-201, ed. and trans. H. G. Evelyn-White; also noted by J. J. Collins Apocalyptic Imagination 74.

³ Cf. B. Kötting, "Endzeitprognosen zwischen Lactantius und Augustinus," 130-31.

the south (Babylonia), the north (Media), and the east (Persia)."⁴ Collins observes about Daniel

7:

The vision of terrible beasts rising out of the sea does not merely give factual information that four kings or kingdoms will arise. It paints a picture of these kingdoms as monstrous eruptions of chaos, in order to convey a sense of terror far beyond anything suggested by the flat statement of the interpretation. The impact is more profound when we recognize the mythological overtones of the imagery. The kings are not merely human but are manifestations of the primordial force of chaos".⁵

The idea that the sea is home to evil creatures, or that the sea itself is hostile to God pervades both the Old and New Testament: Collins puts the beasts of Daniel 7 into the long line of evil creatures which are associated with the sea (80): he makes mention of "dragons in the waters" (Psalm 73,13, *draconum in aquis*)⁶ and names "leviathan the [. . .] serpent, [. . .] the whale that is in the sea" (Isaiah 27,1 *Leviathan serpentem [. . .] cetum qui in mari est*).⁷

In Ezekiel 38,15 the leader of Israel's enemies, Gog of Magog, is said to come "from the northern parts" (*a lateribus aquilonis*) to lay siege to Jerusalem. In Revelation 20, John transforms this mysterious person into two hostile tribes, Gog and Magog. These are the soldiers of Satan, whose number is "as the sands of the sea" (*sicut harena maris*). They are spread out "over the four corners of the earth" (*super quattuor angulos terrae*, Revelation 20,7), but are gathered together in a fierce battle against the saints in the city of God. They will be

⁴ E. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* 10, as quoted in A. Lacocque 139.

⁵ J. J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination* 80.

⁶ The numbering of the Psalms follows the Vulgate version.

⁷ Leviathan is also mentioned in 1 Enoch 60,7: "one monster, a female named Leviathan, [. . .] in the abyss of the ocean over the fountains of water" (J. H. Charlesworth I:40). The earliest parts of 1 Enoch are taken to stem from pre-Maccabean times. The only extant version of the work is Ethiopic. However, fragments have been found in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin (cf. J. H. Charlesworth II:6).

devoured by fire from heaven. The devil, who deceived them, will be “cast into the pool of fire and brimstone, where both the beast / and the false prophet shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20,9-10, *missus est in stagnum ignis et sulphuris ubi et betia / et pseudoprophetes et cruciabuntur die ac nocte in saecula saeculorum*).

Calculating the Duration of the Tribulation:

The Book of Daniel not only aims to identify the kingdoms, but it also attempts to reckon the length of the time of tribulation: in chapter 7, the beast with seven heads and ten horns is said to blaspheme *usque ad tempus et tempora et dimidium temporis* (Daniel 7,25, “until a time, and times, and half a time”; cf. also Daniel 12,7). This period is generally understood to refer to the three and a half years of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (c. 167-64 BC). The same length of time, “a time, and times, and half a time” is mentioned again in the Book of Revelation with reference to the woman fleeing from the dragon and hiding in the wilderness (12,14), and this is equated with 1260 days (12,6). The 1260 days are also mentioned by John as the period of time during which Enoch and Elijah prophesy (11,3), and, a verse earlier, this is said to happen during the forty-two months in which the Gentiles shall trample over the holy city. In Rev 13,5, the beast from the sea is said to blaspheme for forty-two months. However, Daniel does not give 1260 days but 1290 (12,11) and 1335 (12,12). Gabriele Boccaccini attempts to solve the puzzle by arguing convincingly that Daniel used a

360+4-day sabbatical calendar made up of 12 months of 30 days each, plus four intercalary times (i.e. the equinoxes and solstices) that were added between seasons but not counted in the

reckoning of the days of the year.⁸

The numbers subsequently seem to have become traditional symbols referring to a three-and-a-half-year period.⁹

New Testament References to the Antichrist:

Because Scriptural evidence for the Antichrist is scarce, patristic authors tried to fill the gaps, often by drawing on apocryphal material and Jewish folklore and myth. Of the Scriptural texts, only the Johannine Epistles mention the Antichrist explicitly, first at 1 John 2,18:

Filioli novissima hora est / et sicut audistis quia antichristus venit / nunc antichristi multi facti sunt / unde scimus quoniam novissima hora est

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that Antichrist cometh, even now there are become many Antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last hour.¹⁰

⁸ G. Boccaccini, "The Solar Calendars of Daniel and Enoch," The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, ed. J. J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, Vol. 2, p. 325-26. However, matters seem to be far more complicated than this: if G. Boccaccini were right, three-and-a-half years or forty-two months should come to 1274 days, including equinoxes and intercalated days, not 1290. Three years and seven months would give 1290 days, but only without the intercalated days. If the Ascension of Isaiah is followed, one can get to 1331 days (or possibly 1332) by including the intercalated days – but 1335 would require us to assume a year of 365 days, not 364.

⁹ The number three and a half stands for utter incompleteness, since it is half of seven, the number expressing completeness. It is interesting that the lost apocryphal Testament of Hezekiah seems to have reckoned the time of the reign of Antichrist as being three years and seven months; this would correspond to 1290 days of 30-day months. The apocryphal Ascension of Isaiah understands the reign of Antichrist to be three years, 7 months and 27 days – 1335 days according to the Julian calendar. For these calculations, cf. H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation 159-160. Rowley argues that the number 332 is a mistake for 1335. The "thousand" seems to have fallen out accidentally and the scribe must have mistaken 332 for 335. The Book of Heavenly Luminaries (1 Enoch III.72-82) emphasises the use of a 364-day calendar over a 360-day one; cf. 1 Enoch III.82,6; J. H. Charlesworth I:60. Müller states that the earliest possible date for the Ascension of Isaiah is the second half of the second century AD. This Christian apocalypse survives fully only in Ethiopic but fragments of Coptic, Greek, Latin, and Slavonic versions are extant (Hennecke / Schneemelcher (1968/89) II:547-8).

¹⁰ The Little Apocalypse of the Gospels refers to "false Christs" (Mt 24, 24; Mk 13,22).

Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians contain a vague reference to the "man of sin, the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2,3, *homo peccati filius perditionis*). While Paul does not explicitly identify this figure as the Antichrist, the fact that this person will blaspheme against God and will seat himself in the temple is strongly reminiscent of the behaviour of the beasts found in Daniel and Revelation.

Paul's Epistles outline the two major categories of apocalyptic belief: the end would either come about unexpectedly, or after a series of signs culminating in the final apostasy:¹¹

1 Thessalonians 5,1-3 expresses the idea that the time of the Last Judgement will come when least expected, "like a thief in the night" (*sicut fur in nocte*), whereas 2 Thessalonians 2,1-3 emphasises it will not happen until the final apostasy has occurred, and the "man of sin" has been revealed.

Patristic and Medieval Responses: a Shift in Focus:

The main passage of interest to patristic and medieval writers is found in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians:

2,3	ne quis vos seducat ullo modo quoniam nisi venerit discessio primum et revelatus fuerit homo peccati filius perditionis [. . .]
2,6	et nunc quid detineat scitis ut reveletur in suo tempore
2,7	nam mysterium iam operatur iniquitatis tantum ut qui tenet nunc donec de medio fiat
2,8	et tunc revelabitur ille iniquus quem Dominus Iesus interficiet spiritu oris sui et destruet inlustratione adventus sui

¹¹ There is some dispute among scholars about the question of authorship, especially with regard to 2 Thessalonians. This debate, however, is of minor relevance to the present thesis, and will therefore be omitted. Medieval authors considered both epistles to be authentic and canonical.

- 2,9 eum cuius est adventus secundum operationem Satanae in omni virtute et signis et prodigiis mendacibus
- 2,3 Let no man deceive you by any means, for unless there come a revolt first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition
- 2,6 And now you know what withholdeth, that he may be revealed in his time.
- 2,7 For the mystery of iniquity already worketh; only that he who now holdeth, do hold, until he be taken out of the way.
- 2,8 And then that wicked one shall be revealed whom the Lord Jesus shall kill with the spirit of his mouth; and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming, him
- 2,9 Whose coming is according to the working of Satan, in all power, and signs, and lying wonders.

The “Restraining Power” of 2 Thessalonians 2,6:

The first patristic writer to comment on the restraining power was Tertullian (De resurrectione carnis 24,18). He combines 2 Thessalonians 2,6 with the ten kings of Revelation 17,12-14:

quis, nisi Romanus status, cuius abscessio in decem reges dispersa antichristum superducet?

What is it but the Roman state, whose removal when it has been divided among ten kings will bring on Antichrist?¹²

Tertullian’s ideas are picked up by Hippolytus in his Commentary on Daniel (4,21). As we have seen in the previous chapter, Hippolytus had been the first author who did not expect the *Parousia* to occur within his own lifetime. His anti-apocalyptic views explain how he was able to maintain a loyal attitude to the Roman State, and, at the same time, regard it as the climax of enmity towards God.¹³ After the conversion of Constantine in 313 and the subsequent end of

¹² De resurrectione carnis 24, 18, ed. Evans, p. 68. Translation quoted in F. F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Thessalonians 171. Chrysostom (Hom. 4 in 2 Thessalonians) is even more explicit:

[. . .] because he meant the Roman Empire, he naturally glanced at it, speaking covertly and darkly ... So ... when the Roman Empire is out of the way, then he [Antichrist] will come” (Bruce 171).

¹³ Cf. TRE I:267.

the persecutions, things became easier for the patristic writers. Lactantius, who wrote his Divinarum Institutionum in the crucial years of 303-14, was the first writer who was able to interpret the Roman Empire in an entirely positive way. He was convinced that

[E]tiam res ipsa declarat lapsum ruinamque rerum breui fore, nisi quod incolumi urbe Roma nihil istius uidetur esse metuendum. at uero cum caput illud orbis occideret et ρύμη esse coeperit, quod Sibyllae fore aiunt, quis dubitet uenisse iam finem rebus humanis orbique terrarum? illa est ciuitas quae adhuc sustentat omnia, precandusque nobis et adorandus est deus caeli, si tamen statuta eius et placita differri possunt, ne citius quam putamus tyrannus ille abominabilis ueniat, qui tantum facinus molitur ac lumen illud effodiat, cuius interitu mundus ipse lapsurus est.

The circumstances themselves make it clear that the slide into ruin will come soon, except that no part of it seems fit to fear as long as Rome is intact. But when the chief city of the world does fall, and the rush starts that the Sibyls predict, then the end will be there without doubt for deeds of men and for the whole world. Rome is the city which has kept everything going so far, and we must pray to God in heaven with due adoration – if, that is, his statutes and decisions can be deferred – that the awful tyrant does not come sooner than we think, that loathsome tyrant with his great task to achieve and the famous light to put out, at whose death the world itself will collapse.¹⁴

This interpretation was to become the orthodox view of the Church, and it continued to be so influential that it survived even after the breaking apart of the Roman Empire into West Rome and Byzantium, and, ultimately, beyond the collapse of the Western Empire in 476. With the Fall of the city of Rome, the centre of the Roman Empire was understood to have been translated to Byzantium, and later, by Charlemagne, to Aachen.

Haimo and Thietland:

There are no surviving commentaries on the Book of Revelation from the Carolingian era (cf. Landes, Lest 183-84). Instead, authors are writing commentaries on the Pauline Epistles,

¹⁴ Div. Inst. VII,25,6-8. Ed. Brandt, CSEL 19, 664-65. Trans. A. Bowen and P. Garnsey p. 437. Indeed, in VII, 26 he includes a direct address to Constantine as the “most holy Emperor”. This is missing from some manuscripts but Migne included it in his edition. It is missing from CSEL 19.

especially on 2 Thessalonians. These works are our main sources of information concerning the emergence of a coherent legend concerning the Antichrist.

Two important Continental commentaries on 2 Thessalonians survive from the ninth and tenth century: those of Haimo of Auxerre and Thietland of Einsiedeln. Haimo's exegetical works are "among the most innovative and learned in the Carolingian era";¹⁵ his sources include the major church fathers, Alcuin, Claudius of Turin, and Hrabanus Maurus. The author's work "represents the confluence of theological tradition and methodological innovation, thus [...] anticipating scholasticism by nearly three centuries" (Cartwright and Hughes 19n5). His theology is rigorously orthodox, as can be seen in his commentary on Revelation. He rarely gives direct quotes from his sources, but summarises the gist of their teachings. "This summary style permits him to contrast the plurality of interpretations among his authorities, but he rarely makes any attempt to resolve the conflict" (Cartwright and Hughes 15). Although his commentary on the Book of Revelation is highly Augustinian in its interpretation, his commentary on the Pauline Epistle features a literal rather than a spiritual reading. Haimo follows the patristic tradition that the "restraining power" of 2 Thessalonians 2,6 is the Roman Empire. Haimo's interpretation of the "restraining force" is highly remarkable: he matter-of-factly states that the Roman Empire had already fallen, and yet the Antichrist had still not appeared. This is remarkable for two reasons: Haimo does not regard Charlemagne's coronation as a translation of the seat of a renewed Roman Empire to Aachen; secondly, he emphasises that there is a temporal gap of unknown length between the Fall of Rome and the

¹⁵ S. R. Cartwright and K. L. Hughes 13.

appearance of Antichrist (cf. his commentary on 2Thess 2,8). He, thus, places his own time in “between two apocalyptic events” (S. R. Cartwright and K. L. Hughes 18).

Thietland’s commentary on 2 Thessalonians is remarkable in that, at 2,8, it features a digression on Revelation 20, thus combining an exegesis of two apocalyptic texts to great effect. Thietland opts for a more literal reading of the millennium than Augustine would have liked when he says that after a thousand years the devil is to be released for three and a half years (cf. on 2,8, and chapter 1 of this thesis).

Regarding the “restraining force,” Thietland states that he does not know what Paul meant – but rather than admit his own ignorance, he refers to De civitate Dei XX,19, where Augustine writes

scire illos dixit, aperte hoc dicere noluit. Et ideo nos, qui nescimus quod illi sciebant, pervenire cum labore ad id, quod sensit apostolus, cupimus nec valemus;

The Apostle says that they know; what he would not show to them openly in this epistle, therefore also remains hidden to us. We, on account of that, wish to arrive at his meaning with effort, but are entirely unable [. . .].¹⁶

Thietland goes on to say that ‘some’ say Paul might have meant the Roman Empire, and ‘some’ have seen Nero as the Antichrist. Thietland remains neutral on the issue, and does not offer his own interpretation either.

¹⁶ De civitate Dei XX, 19. Translation by S. R. Cartwright, 53.

Adso and the Myth of the Last World Emperor:

Haimo was a major source for Adso of Montier-en-Der, who is the first author to draw together the various strands of the Antichrist legend.¹⁷ We know that Adso personally owned a copy of Haimo's commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and he might have owned the rest of Haimo's commentaries on Paul as well.¹⁸ Konrad argues that Adso draws on Haimo's commentary on 2 Thessalonians and Jerome's commentary on Daniel, as well as Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl. He states that the writer probably did not know Haimo's commentary on Revelation, nor Lactantius' works (R. Konrad 17-53). He does not seem to have known Thietland's commentary, although the two authors must have been contemporaries.

Adso wrote his treatise De ortu et tempore Antichristi between 949 and 954 at the request of Queen Gerberga, wife of King Lothar and sister of Otto the Great. Unfortunately, the original letter of Gerberga is lost. Adso's text was extremely popular in the Middle Ages, and we find several revisions in which the work was attributed to Augustine, Alcuin or Anselm

¹⁷ Adso was born in Burgundy after 910; he died in 992 while on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He was involved in monastic and educational reforms at Montier-en-Der, Langres, Troyes and Châlons. For more information on Adso's life, see R. Konrad, "De Ortu et Tempore Antichristi": Antichristvorstellung und Geschichtsbild des Abtes Adso von Montier-en-Der, 16-19, and R. K. Emmerson, "Antichrist as Anti-Saint: The Significance of Abbot Adso's Libellus de Antichristo" 175-90, esp. 177.

¹⁸ His private collection also contained works by Aristotle, Cicero, and Terence; among others, he certainly knew the works of Augustine, Boethius, Eusebius, Jerome, Josephus, Isidore, Bede and Alcuin. A list of books that were in his private collection survives from Montier-en-Der, dated 992, i.e. just before he left for his pilgrimage to Jerusalem:

Hi sunt libri domni abb. Adsonis, quos in arca eius repperimus, postquam ipse Hierosolymam petiit. (Bibl. Paris, lat Hs. 5447. R. Konrad 22, esp. note 38).

of Canterbury – again, showing evidence of the continuing pseudepigraphical tradition connected with apocalyptic works.¹⁹

It is Adso who combines the different motifs of the career of Antichrist, the four world empires of Daniel, the *translatio imperii* and the myth of the Last World Emperor for the first time, and he does so to great effect. He arranges the elements of the Antichrist legend in chronological order, in the form of a vita and repeatedly draws parodic parallels between the Son of God and the son of the devil.

The originality of Adso's organization is particularly evident when it is compared with its closest source, Haimo's commentary on 2 Thessalonians ii.3-11. [. . .] As is evident, the content and structure of Haimo's commentary are based on the text rather than on Antichrist's life. It results in good exegesis but poor organization of the Antichrist tradition. This lack of organization is remedied by the *Libellus de Antichristo*.²⁰

In contrast to Haimo and Thietland, Adso explicitly mentions the idea of the *translatio imperii*.

This is not surprising, seeing he wrote at the request of a member of the royal house.

Hoc autem tempus nondum uenit, quia, licet uideamus Romanum imperium ex maxima parte destructum, tamen, quandiu reges Francorum durauerint, qui Romanum imperium tenere debent, Romani regni dignitas ex toto non peribit, quia in regibus suis stabit. Quidam uero doctores nostri dicunt, quod unus ex regibus Francorum Romanum imperium ex integro tenebit, qui *in nouissimo tempore* erit et ipse erit maximus et omnium regum ultimus.

This time has not yet come, because even though we may see the Roman Empire for the most part in ruins, nonetheless, as long as the Kings of the Franks who now possess the Roman Empire by right shall last, the dignity of the Roman Empire will not completely perish because it will endure in its kings. Some of our learned men say that one of the Kings of the Franks will possess anew the Roman Empire. He will be in the last time and will be the greatest and the last of all kings.²¹

¹⁹ For more detail on the different versions cf. D. Verhelst's edition in CCCM 45 (1976).

²⁰ R. K. Emmerson, "Antichrist as Anti-Saint" 179-80.

²¹ Adso Dervensis, *De ortu et tempore Antichristi: necnon et tractatus qui ab eo dependunt*, ed. D.

Verhelst, CCCM 45, p. 26. English translation according to B. McGinn, ed. and trans., *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, the Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola* 93.

His conclusion includes both a desire to move the time of Antichrist and the Last Judgement into the future, and to flatter the queen by ascribing such an important role to the Frankish Empire. It is rather surprising that Thietland's commentary does not make this connection. Einsiedeln was, after all, favoured by Otto with gifts of land and money. Why does he miss out on this opportunity of flattering the royal house?

Adso not only mentions the *translatio imperii* in the passage quoted above, he also expands on the idea of the Last World Emperor. This element of the Antichrist legend had originally been invented by Pseudo-Methodius.²² Following the tradition of pseudepigraphical writing, the Revelations were attributed to Methodius of Patara, a fourth-century martyr. The text was, in fact, written in Syriac in the sixth century and translated into Latin in the eighth. It was extremely influential throughout the Middle Ages, as can be seen from the vast number of manuscripts that survive.²³ The role of the Last World Emperor, according to Pseudo-Methodius, would consist in ending the Islamic conquests and in restoring the Christian Empire in Roman glory. This vision "incorporated the rise of Islam, the most important historical event since the conversion of the empire, into the Christian apocalyptic scheme of history" (B. McGinn, *Visions* 71). The Muslims, the enemies of God, were depicted as the tribes of Gog and Magog, which, according to legend were enclosed in the north by

²² G. J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser" 82-111.

²³ cf. Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* 70; 301n1. B. McGinn refers to an article by D. Verhelst: "La préhistoire des conceptions d' Adson concernant l' Antichrist" 52-103. Verhelst counted 190 mss. of the Latin version, with 21 pre-dating the twelfth century.

Alexander.²⁴ Reinink quotes the work of Johannan bar Penkaye (written in c. 687).²⁵ Johannan regards the Muslim raids of his days as signs of God's wrath, caused by the corrupt politics of the Christian Emperors of Byzantium. For him, the Arabs are the manifestation of Gog and Magog: they will overcome the Christian Empire, and the end of the world and the Judgement will follow. Pseudo-Methodius follows this idea, but in his opinion the Muslims were a punishment for the sexual sins of the Christians rather than for the corrupt power-politics of the Byzantine emperors (cf. G. J. Reinink 92-95). After defeating the Muslim invaders, the Last World Emperor would go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he would give over his crown to God and die. This would inaugurate the time of Antichrist.

There is no reference to the Last World Emperor in Haimo or Thietland's commentaries, but we do find it in Adso, for the political reasons mentioned above. It is not surprising that the myth of the Last World Emperor originated from the East, while the West adopted the more allegorical / spiritual readings featured by Augustine. The Byzantine Empire had a more immediate sense of being the continuation of the Roman Empire, and was therefore more inclined to identify the "restraining force". The legend of the Last World Emperor spread from the East through its Latin translations, and it only surfaced in the West in Adso's treatise.

²⁴ On the Alexander Legend cf. M. Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudo-Methodius" 273-96 and A. R. Anderson, Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations.

²⁵ G. J. Reinink 82-111.

Medieval Attempts to Identify Gog and Magog:

Thietland's commentary on 1 Thessalonians does not contain any direct mentions of Gog and Magog. It does, however, mention troubles caused by "outsiders" – possibly a hint at the Arab and Hungarian raids in tenth-century Swabia.

Debent etiam et nobis forma esse, hoc est ut si nobis vel a civibus vel ab extraneis illata fuerit persecutio, ad exemplum eorum patienter tollerare curemus.

They [the Thessalonians] should also be a model for us; that is, if a persecution should happen to us, whether from fellow citizens or from outsiders, that we should take care to endure it patiently according to their example.²⁶

Adso does not mention Gog and Magog, probably because he wants to concentrate on the Antichrist as a parody of Christ rather than as a military leader. We do find a curious mention of Gog and Magog in another Continental source, though: a letter from the bishop of Auxerre to the bishop of Verdun (dated to c. second half of the tenth century) mentions widespread fears among the population that the Hungarians were the tribes of Gog and Magog:

ac primum dicendum opinionem quae innumeros tam in uestra quam in nostra regione persuasit friuolam esse et nihil veri in se habere, qua putatur Deo odibilis gens Hungrorum esse Gog et Magog ceteraque gentes quae cum eis describuntur, propter hoc maxime quod dicitur: a lateribus Aquilonis uenies et post dies multos uisitaberis, in nouissimo annorum uenies ad terram quae reuersa est gladio. dicunt enim nunc esse nouissimum saeculi tempus finemque imminere mundi, et idcirco Gog et Magog esse Hungros, qui numquam antea auditi sint, sed modo, in nouissimo temporum apparuerint.

But the first thing to be said is that the opinion that has convinced many both in your area and in mine is ridiculous and has no truth in it, namely that the tribe of the Hungarians, hateful to God, is the tribes of Gog and Magog and the other nations which are described together with those, especially because it is said: that you will come from the northern parts and you will be seen after many days have passed; in the last of years you will come to a country which has turned to the sword. For they say that the last age is now and the end of the world is imminent, and this is why Gog and Magog are identical with the Hungarians, of whom no one had heard

²⁶ The Latin text follows Einsiedeln MS 38, fol. 177r, quoted by S. R. Cartwright in "Thietland's Commentary on Second Thessalonians," 104n16. Cartwright gives the English translation on page 95.

before, but who now appear, in the last days.²⁷

The author of the letter goes on to refute the idea that Gog and Magog are real tribes, citing the allegorical interpretations of such authorities as Augustine or Jerome. Yet he offers a curious interpretation for the name of the Hungarian tribe: it is a people stemming from the infertile regions of the east, driven out from their lands by hunger:

innumerabilis eorum crevit exercitus et a fame quam sustinuerant Hungri uocati sunt.

their army grew to uncountable numbers, and due to the famine which they suffered (because of that), they are called "Hungri".²⁸

The etymology used shows that the writer must have been a native speaker of a Germanic language; Huygens has also noted that he was most likely a German living in France (237), and he builds his argument for the bishop of Auxerre around this evidence. The author sternly upholds an anti-apocalyptic opinion. He goes to considerable length to refute the idea that the Hungarian raids during his lifetime had anything to do with the arrival of the Antichrist and the end of the world. This again shows that fears of this kind existed among the *rustici*, but that the educated did not hold any such beliefs. Another example has already been discussed in the previous chapter: Abbo of Fleury's mention of the priest in Paris who preached an imminent end of the world and arrival of the Antichrist. Abbo, armed with Scriptural evidence, did his best to refute such superstitious beliefs (cf. above, chapter 1).

On the Continent, the Antichrist legend seems to be a topic reserved for educated discussion following in the patristic tradition of exegetical comments on 2 Thessalonians. The

²⁷ R. B. C. Huygens, "Un témoin de la crainte de l'an 1000: la lettre sur le Hongrois" 225-39. Here 231, ll. 96-106. Translation mine.

²⁸ R. B. C. Huygens, 231.

rustici on the other hand, are more concerned with the tribes of Gog and Magog, for whom there is more Scriptural evidence, and whom they believe they can discern in contemporary Muslim raids. In addition, the Continental writers had a more imminent sense of living in a continued Roman Empire, and therefore incorporated the elements of the *translatio imperii* and the Last World Emperor into the Antichrist legend for reasons of political propaganda.

An exception is the Old High German poem Muspilli. The text of Muspilli stems from mid-ninth century Bavaria and is found scribbled in the margins of fols. 61r, 120v, 121rv, and in the bottom margins of fols. 119r-120r of an elaborate manuscript of Augustine's Sermo de symbolis contra Judaeos. The manuscript (now Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 14098) was supposedly presented to Ludwig the German by Bishop Adalram c. 824, while Ludwig was Duke of Bavaria. The hand is untidy and unusually clumsy, and this – as well as the complex and confusing mixture of different Old High German dialects – makes it impossible to give a precise date for the text. It is generally assumed that it stems from the late ninth century.²⁹ The beginning and end of the poem have been lost, presumably when the text of Augustine's Sermo was bound with another manuscript. Wolfgang Mohr states that the text might have been copied from another manuscript in haste, but this is speculation. There are no further clues as to who might have held this elaborate manuscript in such little regard that he defaced it by scribbling the poem in its margins. The theory that Ludwig himself was the scribe, is unconvincing.³⁰

²⁹ W. Mohr, and Walter Haug, Zweimal "Muspilli" 7; Steinhoff, "Muspilli" 822; Lebendiges Büchererbe 194; R. A. Bell, "'Muspilli': Apocalypse as Political Threat."

³⁰ Lebendiges Büchererbe 194.

The extant text begins with a description of the judgement of the soul after death, followed by an account of the battle of Elias and the Antichrist which brings about the end of the fiery end of the world. The second half of the fragment describes the Last Judgement, the resurrection of the dead, and the coming of Christ who will show his Cross and stigmata as signs of victory. Attempts have been made to explain the poem's disjointed imagery by separating the text into "Muspilli I" and "Muspilli II". The latter constitutes the middle section of the fragment and deals with the battle between Elias and the Antichrist (col. 256, lines 8 – col. 257, line 23). The evidence that "Muspilli II" is a later addition is insufficient, however.³¹

The poem actually mentions the Antichrist only twice. The first reference is a rather casual one: it simply states that it has been foretold that the Antichrist shall do battle with Elias (*daz sculi der antichristo mit Elias p̄agan*, lines 37-38).³² The importance of the battle is subsequently emphasized, and the poet lists the fighters on both sides – Elias and God on the one hand, the Antichrist and Satan on the other.

khenfun sint sô kreftic	diu kôsa ist sô mihhil.	the fighters are so strong	the cause is so great
Êlias strîtit	pî den êwîgon lîp,	Elias fights	for eternal life
uuli dên rehtkernôn	daz rihhi kistarkan:	he wants, for the righteous,	the kingdom to
			be strong
pidiû scal imo helfan	der himiles kiuualtit.	therefore shall give him help	the one who
reigns			in heaven
der antichristo	stêt pî demo altfrante,	the Antichrist	stands by the ancient fiend
stêt pî demo satanâse,	der inan varsenkan scal:	stands by (the) Satan;	he shall drag him down
			(lit.: "sink him down")
pidiû scal er in deru uuîcstetî	uunt pivallan	therefore shall he in the battlefield	fall wounded
enti in demo sinde	sigalôs uuerdan.	and in the struggle	be without victory. ³³

³¹ Cf. A. R. Bell, "Muspilli as Political Threat" 78.

³² Enoch is not mentioned in *Muspilli*.

³³ *Muspilli*, in W. Wackernagel, ed. *Altdeutsches Lesebuch*, col. 256, lines 14-29; translation mine.

Elias is wounded in the battle. His blood drips to the ground. This ignites the cataclysmic fire which will consume mountains, trees, water, and the moor; with the fire, Judgement Day will arrive.

sô inprinnant die perga, poum ni kistentit	therefore the mountains begin to burn ... no tree
ênîhc in erdu, ahâ artruknênt,	remains standing
muor varsuuilhit sih, suilizôt lougiu der himil,	not one in all the earth, the waters dry out,
	the moor swallows itself the sky is burning with
	fire
mâno vallit, prinnit mittilagart,	the moon falls, middle earth is burning.
stên ni kistentit, verit denne stûatago in lant,	no stone remains standing, the day of judgement
	will drive across the land
verit mit diu vuiru viriho uuisôn:	it will drive with fire to judge the people. ³⁴

The image of the moor swallowing itself seems to be unique to the poem. It provides a visual depiction of the cataclysmic chaos, a graphic image of nature turning against itself. Some of the themes and motifs (e.g. the fire, falling moon, and collapse of mountains) are found in Luke 16:19-31; 23; 24, Matthew 25:31-46, the Book of Revelation and IV Ezra. Arthur Groos and Tom Hill have located a Spanish parallel for the motif of the blood of Elias igniting the fire that consumes the world.³⁵ Beyond these examples, attempts to locate possible sources for the text's imagery range from the Syrian preacher Ephraem to the Old Saxon Heliand, the Sibylline Oracles, and the Old English Christ III. Steinhoff concludes, however, that the perceived parallels are too vague to provide much evidence.³⁶

³⁴ Muspilli, in W. Wackernagel, ed. Altdeutsches Lesebuch, col. 256, l.36 – col. 257 line 10; translation mine.

³⁵ A. Groos, and Th. D. Hill, "The Blood of Elias and the Fire of Doom: A New Analogue for Muspilli, vss. 52ff."

³⁶ H. Steinhoff, "Muspilli" 824-25.

Critics have tried to root the poem in Germanic mythology and Christian numerology or to regard it as a slander directed at Ludwig as a rebuke for his politics.³⁷ None of these attempts sounds convincing. The fragment of the poem which survives does not contain any instances of political propaganda; the *translatio imperii* or the Last World Emperor are not mentioned in Muspilli. The poem's origin, purpose, and its unique imagery remain elusive, and we must keep in mind that it is a fragment of a poem whose original length and scope are unknown to us.

The Anglo-Saxons and the Antichrist Material:

It is not surprising that the Anglo-Saxon sources do not mention the Last World Emperor, or the *translatio imperii*. The prominent homilists, Wulfstan and Ælfric, had different goals in mind when they preached on the coming of the Antichrist. Wulfstan, it will be argued, while relying heavily on Adso's treatise, is focusing on frightening his audience into repentance by using a unique mixture of urgency and ambiguity in his eschatological homilies.

The early stages of the Antichrist legend were rather confused, especially with regard to the relationship between the Antichrist and the devil.³⁸ The Western church generally followed Jerome's view that the Antichrist was a fully human being, albeit one in whom Satan is fully incarnate (cf. W. Bousset 139, who refers to Jerome, On Daniel vii.8). This view is supported by both Haimo and Thietland (cf. S. R. Cartwright, "Thietland's Commentary" 96-97).

³⁷ Cf. e.g. G. Baesecke, Kleine metrische Schriften 55-69 and C. Minis, Handschrift, Form und Sprache des "Muspilli".

³⁸ W. Bousset, The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore 138-45.

By Anglo-Saxon times it was common to identify Lucifer (the morning-star from Isaiah 14.12f) with Satan, and those with the devil, and all three with the serpent of Genesis and the dragon of Revelation. [. . .] The devil/Lucifer/Satan figure is usually distinguished from the Antichrist, although their association is always close (i.e. the Antichrist is his assistant, son, etc.).³⁹

However, the Anglo-Saxons seem to have far less of a desire to identify the Antichrist as an individual or his armies as tribes than their continental colleagues: we do not find attempts to identify Gog and Magog.

Wulfstan:

It is impossible to establish the precise order of Wulfstan's homilies. Bethurum has stated that the eschatological homilies are his earliest group of writings, composed probably while he was still bishop of London. She argued on grounds of Wulfstan borrowing his own phrases, and on grounds of his growing stylistic complexity.⁴⁰ Joyce Tally Lionarons agreed with her observation and supports the same order of homilies, but based her argument on the growing complexity in the use of source material.⁴¹ Most recently, Malcolm Godden has re-dated the eschatological homilies to the period of 1006-12 and beyond on grounds of Ælfric's influence on Wulfstan.⁴² The order of homilies seems to be as follows: II, III, Ia, Ib, IV, V. However, homily III, while it expands on the topic of the Last Days, does not mention the Antichrist

³⁹ P. Dendle, Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature 10-11.

⁴⁰ D. Bethurum, Homilies 101-03.

⁴¹ For the following, see J. T. Lionarons, ed. and trans., Wulfstan's Eschatological Homilies, February 2004. <<http://webpages.ursinus.edu/jlionarons/wulfstan/frameset1.html> >.

⁴² M. Godden, "The Relations of Wulfstan and Ælfric."

specifically. Secundum Matheum (II) “provides the simplest use of sources”, according to Lionarons. It closely follows Matthew 24, 1-42, and concludes with a brief exhortation to prepare for the coming of the Last Judgement. The Latin De Anticristo (Ia) seems to have been a brief outline for the Old English version of the same homily (Ib), but the translation does not follow it exactly. Lionarons observes that Ib was probably addressed to a clerical rather than a popular audience. Wulfstan admonishes priests to prepare their audiences for the time of tribulation and the Last Judgement. In the De Anticristo homilies, Wulfstan uses brief references to Augustine’s Homily III, to Gregory’s works, and to Bede’s Explanatio Apocalypsis. He also uses Adso’s treatise for the first time, and continues to do so in his later work. However, in Ia and Ib, Wulfstan does not use Ælfric’s Preface to CH I, of which he did make extensive use in De Temporibus Anticristi (IV). The last of Wulfstan’s eschatological homilies, Secundum Marcum (V), contains the most complex mixture of sources, including Biblical material, Adso and Ælfric.

While Lionarons refers to Wulfstan’s use of his sources in detail, I think it is equally important to see where he deviates from them, especially from Adso’s treatise. The most noteworthy difference is the absence of any reference to a *translatio imperii* and/or the Last World Emperor. Unlike Adso, Wulfstan had no political motive for including any of these ideas. Adso had good reason to state that the Frankish Empire was a direct continuation of the Roman one; his letter was written at the request of Queen Gerberga, to alleviate any fears she might have had that the Antichrist would appear within her own lifetime. While Wulfstan used Adso’s treatise, he does not seem to have known Thietland’s commentary on 2

Thessalonians. This is somewhat surprising, seeing there were strong links between Einsiedeln and England during Thietland's lifetime: the son of Edward the Elder, Gregory (d. 996), joined the abbey in 949 on his way back from a pilgrimage to Rome, and later became its abbot.⁴³

Wulfstan is not interested in the physical description of the Antichrist, or in any details of his career. Instead, he uses him as a scarecrow in order to frighten his audience into repentance. He does so by employing the same mixture of ambiguity and vagueness which he uses in his discussion of the millennium. He leaves most of what he says open to his audience's interpretation.⁴⁴ The Archbishop repeatedly alludes to the signs preceding the time of Antichrist, for example at the beginning of De temporibus Anticristi:

Leofan men, us is mycel þearf þæt we wære beon þæs egeslican timan þe towerd is. Nu bið swyðe raðe Antecristes tima, þæs ðe we wenan magan 7 eac georne witan, 7 þæt bið se egeslicesta þe æfre gewearð syððan þeos woruld ærost gescapen wæs.

Beloved people, it is greatly needful for us that we be aware of the terrifying time that is coming. Now it will very quickly be Antichrist's time, whom we may expect and also readily know, and that will be the most terrifying time that ever was since this world was first made.⁴⁵

Wulfstan not only emphasises that the time of Antichrist is very close at hand, but also that it will be "the most terrifying time" since the beginning of the world. He does not, however, elaborate on any details. A little later in the homily, he states that there will be persecutions which will serve the purpose of cleansing the faithful, but again, he does not go into much detail.

God geþafað þam deofle antecriste þæt he mot ehtan godra manna, forðam þe hi sculon, swa ic

⁴³ S. R. Cartwright, "Thietland's Commentary" 95.

⁴⁴ The use of ambiguity and vagueness in the wider context of Wulfstan's preaching will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

⁴⁵ Bethurum IV, lines 3-6, p. 128.

ær cwæð, ðurh ða ehtnesse beon geclænsode 7 syððan clæne faran to heofona rice.

God permits to the devil Antichrist that he might persecute good men, because they must, as I said before, be cleansed through the persecution and afterwards go clean into the kingdom of heaven.⁴⁶

He expresses similar thoughts repeatedly, for example in Secundum Marcum:

And gecnawe se ðe cunne, nu is se tima þæt ðeos woruld is gemæncged mid mænigfealdan mane 7 mid felafealdan facne, 7 ðæs hit is þe wyrse wide on worulde, [. . .].

And let him know it who can, now is the time that this world is involved with manifold crimes and with many evils, and it has become worse widely in the world, [. . .].⁴⁷

The culmination of this idea certainly takes place at the beginning of his Sermo Lupi, where the sense of urgency is almost overwhelming:

Leofan men gecnawað þæt soð is: ðeos worolde 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 [fram dæge to dæge], ær antecristes tocyme, yfelian swyþe, 7 huru hit wyrð þænne egeslic 7 grimlic wide on worolde.

Beloved men, know that which is true: this world is in haste and it nears the end. And therefore things in this world go ever the longer the worse, and so it must needs be that things quickly worsen, on account of people's sinning [from day to day], before the coming of Antichrist. And indeed it will then be awful and grim widely throughout the world.⁴⁸

Ælfric:

Following such patristic authorities as Augustine and Jerome, Ælfric regards the Antichrist as the human incarnation of Satan: the Antichrist is *mennisc man and soð deofol*, "human man and

⁴⁶ Bethurum IV, lines 37-40, p. 130.

⁴⁷ Bethurum V, 23-26, p. 135; translation mine.

⁴⁸ Bethurum XX, 7-11, p. 267. Translation mine. The phrase fram fram dæge to dæge is found in MS E, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Hatton 113, fol. 84v.

true devil".⁴⁹ (B. Thorpe I:4,14). It cannot be established for certain whether and/or to what extent Ælfric knew Adso's treatise,⁵⁰ but he did use Haimo's commentary on 2 Thessalonians. However, we do not find any references to the *translatio imperii* or the Last World Emperor in Ælfric's work, which is hardly surprising. It has been suggested that Ælfric might have found the political elements of the Antichrist legend too obscure for his audience, and that the political situation of his day was too far removed from imperial history.⁵¹

Given that the main aim of the Catholic Homilies was to provide his audience with *godre lare* in order to enable them to withstand the deceptions of the devil, it is hardly surprising that the abbot abstains from fleshing out the Antichrist legend by using apocryphal material. Ælfric prefers to adhere to Scriptural sources, and these, as we have seen, contain only scarce references to the Antichrist. While CH I shows a strong interest in the Last Things, Ælfric chooses to focus on more general themes such as the uncertainty of when Doomsday would arrive.⁵² He does not attempt to identify the tribes of Gog and Magog, either. In particular, he does not regard the Vikings as the armies of Satan.

⁴⁹ B. Thorpe I 4/14; quoted by M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 80 and translated in note 22 on page 224.

⁵⁰ cf. D. Bethurum 289, M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 223-24n21.

⁵¹ M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 223-24n21.

⁵² The themes featured in the Catholic Homilies and in Ælfric's work in general will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Wulfstan and Ælfric on the Viking Threat:

Wulfstan did not consider the Viking raids to be an independent external threat, but regarded them only in the context of divine punishment directed at a society that was already caught up in an unstoppable process of collapse. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that he never mentions the Vikings as agents of Satan. Calling to mind his growing political influence (especially after the accession of Cnut to the throne in 1016), it would have been impossible for him to preach along those lines. He would have been preaching to an audience that included first-generation Christian descendants of heathen Norse aristocracy (e.g. Eiríkr, the earl of Northumbria, son of Hákon jarl), as well as urban immigrants of the craftsmen class who would most likely have been pagans on arrival.⁵³ His listeners would have included new converts, as well as established Christians who happened to be descendants of Norse pagans; and he himself may have assisted in the instruction of Cnut in the Christian faith. He would, of course, not have been able to identify these people – or their ancestors – as in league with the devil. Besides, some of them were generous patrons of the church in his archdiocese.⁵⁴

In contrast to Ælfric, who was relatively shielded from the Viking raids at Eynsham, Wulfstan was situated in midst of the troubles. Ælfric's preaching on the topic of the heathen

⁵³ Cf. the place name and archaeological evidence collected by C. D. Morris, "Aspects of Scandinavian Settlement in Northern England: A Review," and C. D. Morris, "Viking and Native in Northern England: A Case-Study."

⁵⁴ Cf. P. H. Sawyer, Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography 454, nos. 1659-1661 name three grants of land to St. Cuthbert's Community, late tenth to early eleventh century, all from Anglo-Scandinavians.

here is centred around the duty of intercessory prayer by monastic communities in order to ward off the danger. While his early work (CH I) is concerned with the apocalypse, it does not mention the Vikings. His later work (the Preface to CH II, and the Saints' Lives) does feature Norsemen but does not mention the apocalypse.⁵⁵ Ælfric did indeed write primarily from a monastic point of view; when compared to Wulfstan, Ælfric's view "looks inward to the monastery not outwards to the larger kingdom."⁵⁶ His patrons Æthelweard and Æthelmær, however, were figures of political importance.⁵⁷ This is not to say that Wulfstan was not concerned with intercessory prayer. After all, he had "organized a whole nation into prayer" as a reaction to the Viking threat in 1009.⁵⁸ The three days of fasting and public prayer immediately preceding Michaelmas that year are sometimes regarded as a miniature version of the Continental "Peace of God", a social movement which never really took hold in England.

The people were to process barefoot to church, the votive mass 'Against the Heathen' was to be said in religious houses throughout the land, and all were to sing the psalm 'Why, O Lord, are they multiplied?'⁵⁹

While the Sermo Lupi is primarily to be seen in the context of penitential literature, it "does not preclude a physical defence against the invaders [. . .] The scorn of passivity expressed in

⁵⁵ Cf. M. Godden, "Apocalypse and Invasion," especially 132-33.

⁵⁶ J. Campbell, E. John, and P. Wormald, The Anglo-Saxons 202.

⁵⁷ Cf. B. Yorke, The Cerne Abbey Millennium Lectures, as well as S. Keynes, "Apocalypse Then: England A.D. 1000," 247-70.

⁵⁸ Cf. J. Wilcox, "Wulfstan's Sermo Lupi ad Anglos as Political Performance" 396.

⁵⁹ S. Keynes, "Apocalypse Then" 267. Cf. also J. A. Frantzen, Literature of Penance 141-2, 146; and Liebermann, Gesetze der Angelsachsen I:238-46 regarding this example from Æthelræd's 1008 code.

the sermon applies as much to physical passivity as to the failure to repent.”⁶⁰ This is not surprising, given how prominent the question of defending one’s country against invaders was at his time. Ælfric on the one hand preaches stoic endurance of the raids, but on the other hand declares that it is justified to defend one’s country against raiders; this is classified as *ribtlic gefeoht* (“justified warfare” / *iustum bellum*. Cf. his homily on the Maccabees lines 705-14).⁶¹

Interestingly, in Natale Quadraginta Militum (LS XI, 353-5), Ælfric reports that the divine anger is directed at the heathen Vikings, not at the English:

þa hæðenan hynað and hergiað þa cristenan
and mid wælhreowan dædum urne drihten gremiað
ac hi habbað þæs edlean on þam ecum wítum.

The heathens oppress and harry the christians and anger our lord with cruel deeds, but they will have their repayment for this in eternal torments.⁶²

There is a noteworthy difference in the discussion of the Vikings by Ælfric compared with that of Abbo of Fleury: while Ælfric only condemns the *heathen* Vikings, Abbo is opposed to the Northmen in general.

Denique constat iuxta prophetæ uaticinium quod ab aquilone uenit omne malum, sicut plus aequo didicere, perperam passi aduersos iactus cadentis tesserae, qui aquilonalium gentium experti sunt seuitiam: quas certum est adeo crudeles esse naturali ferocitate ut nesciant malis hominum mitescere, quandoquidem quidam ex eis populi uescuntur humanis carnibus, qui ex facto Greca

⁶⁰ A. Cowen, “Byrstas and bysmeras: The Wounds of Sin in the Sermo Lupi ad Anglos” 411.

⁶¹ W. W. Skeat, ed. Ælfric’s Lives of Saints II:113-14. Cf. a thoroughly different view expressed in the Old English Orosius ed. J. Bately, EETS SS 6, p. 83:

[. . .] hit is us nu swiþor bismre gelic þæt we þæ[t] besprecað, 7 þæt þæt we gewinn nu harað,
þonne us fremede 7 ellþeodge an becumað 7 lytles hwæt on us bereafiað 7 us eft hrædlice forlætað
[. . .]

It is disgraceful for us to complain, and call it warfare, when strangers and foreigners come to us and rob us of some little thing and immediately leave us again. Translation taken from M. Godden, “Apocalypse and Invasion” 131.

⁶² trans. Godden “Apocalypse and Invasion” 138.

appellatione Antropofagi uocantur. Talesque nationes abundant plurimae infra Scythiam prope Hyperboreos montes, quae antichristum, ut legimus, secururae sunt ante omnes gentes, ut absque ulla miseratione pascantur hominum cruciatibus qui characterem bestiae noluerint circumferre in frontibus. Vnde iam inquietando / Christicolae pacem cum eis habere nequeunt: maxime Dani, occidentis regionibus nimium uicini, quoniam circa eas piraticam exercent frequentibus latrociniiis. Ex eorum ergo genere predicti duces Hinguar et Hubba Nordanimbrorum primitus aggressi expugnare prouinciam graui depopulatione totam peruagantur ex ordine.

Furthermore, it is known according to the prophecy of the prophet that all evil comes from the north, as those in particular have come to understand who, because they have suffered the unfavourable cast of lots/dice, have been tried by the ferocity of the Northern peoples: it is certainly known that these are so cruel due to their natural ferocity that they do not know how to tame their human evil, since some among these peoples feed on human flesh, which is why they are called by the Greek term "Antropophagi" (man-eaters). Such nations greatly abound to the south of Scythia, near the Hyperborean Mountains; as we have read, these will be following the Antichrist before all other peoples, so that they will mercilessly thrive/feed on the misery of those people who did not want to carry the sign of the beast on their foreheads. Because of their iniquity, they do not want their Christian neighbours to have peace with them: in particular, the Danes, who are also very close to the Western regions, for they carry out acts of piracy around them through frequent robberies. Coming from among this nation, the chieftains Hinguar and Hubba, who were mentioned above, having first invaded the province of the Northumbrians, travelled through the whole of it, systematically conquering it with a serious destruction of its people.⁶³

Abbo explicitly affiliates the Northmen with the armies of Antichrist and refers to the tradition that all things evil are associated with the North. He might have had a general anti-Norman bias, given the fact that he came from the Loire area, a region heavily ravaged by Viking raids.⁶⁴

While Abbo condemns all Norsemen in one grand swipe of generalisation, Ælfric would have known that there were Vikings who had converted to Christianity, and that it was possible to live in peace with them. He could not have condemned them simply on grounds of their Viking descent: we know that Ælfric's patron, Æthelmær, was sent to negotiate with Óláfr Tryggvason prior to his conversion (cf. below, ch. 4).

⁶³ *Life of St. Edmund*, ed. M. Winterbottom, p. 71-72. Translation mine.

⁶⁴ Cf. N. S. Price, *The Vikings in Brittany*, especially p. 23 (341) – 53 (371). Viking attacks on the Loire began in 843 and continued until 960. Many of the later ones were launched from Normandy by men who were by this time presumably Christian. But in contrast to Wulfstan, Abbo did not have to reckon with a partly Scandinavian population.

The Anonymous Homilies:

In contrast to Ælfric and Wulfstan, the anonymous homilies do not discuss the theme of the Antichrist. Their accounts are populated by various unnamed demons and devils, especially in those sections that describe the tortures of hell. Perhaps the topic of the Antichrist was only deemed fit for discussion by the learned or within the walls of the cloister, but not thought to be a suitable topic for lay audiences. This could also explain Wulfstan's ambiguity and vagueness when discussing the topic.⁶⁵ If the anonymous homilies mention the Antichrist, it is only in passing. They are confused about him, sometimes identifying him as the devil, and they are uncertain of his character and parentage.⁶⁶ He is sometimes seen as the forerunner of the signs preceding the end; sometimes he is seen as the last sign (for example in Blickling XI). This suggests that the Anglo-Saxon homilists – or at least the compiler of the Blickling manuscript – were not concerned about the discrepancies concerning the various different strands of the Antichrist legend. There is no attempt to establish a consistent *vita*, nor do we find any physical description of the Antichrist.

⁶⁵ Nor was, of course, the Carolingian political propaganda connected with the Antichrist legend of any use to Anglo-Saxon lay audiences.

⁶⁶ Cf. Vercelli XV: among the signs of Doomsday, it lists a succession of ealdormen and kings who will precede the coming of the Antichrist. The homily does not dwell on the Antichrist's reign itself, and although the passage is somewhat reminiscent of the Antichrist legend, the homilist seems to be largely ignorant of the tradition. Cf. also M. McC. Gatch, "Eschatology", 152-53.

Conclusion:

We can thus conclude that, as on the Continent, the Antichrist was only discussed by learned men. The popular homilies mention him only twice: Blickling 11.117 states that he has yet to come, and Vercelli II.34-36 (II N 2.40-43) commits the grave error of identifying the Antichrist with the devil – something an educated writer like Ælfric or Wulfstan would never have done.⁶⁷

This seems to suggest that the Anglo-Saxons had different goals in mind when discussing the evil one. While Continental authors are aware of their place in imperial history, and thus use the Antichrist legend for political purposes, learned Anglo-Saxon writers discuss the Antichrist in order to instruct their audiences (Ælfric) or to frighten them into repentance (Wulfstan). They are neither interested in the physical description of the Antichrist, nor in his life and deeds (as Adso had been). Their emphasis lies on the Antichrist as tempter, leading Christians into unbelief and sin. Following the patristic tradition, they believe that the Antichrist is allowed to torment mankind in order to try and purge them of their sins (Godden, “Apocalypse and Invasion” 153). This reading steers popular beliefs away from seeing the Vikings as the armies of Satan (an interpretation which Wulfstan surely wanted to avoid) towards a more spiritual reading which regarded them as divine punishment (cf. ch. 3).

The poets do not discuss the Antichrist at all. They focus on the devil/Satan and various unnamed roaming demons instead, which seem to have appealed more to a popular audience, partly due to the fact that there is more Scriptural and apocryphal evidence for these

⁶⁷ See below, ch. 3, regarding the different versions of Vercelli homily II.

figures. This seems to suggest that even poetry by learned men like Bede was composed with a popular audience in mind, for whom such learned material as the Antichrist would have been too obscure. Furthermore, the surviving poetry deals with the events of Judgement Day itself, or elements like the Harrowing of Hell, rather than the signs preceding Doomsday. Dendle argues that the devil/Satan figure allowed the writers of Old English narrative literature to reflect on

mythology (his role in the larger cosmic battle) and, whether convincingly or unconvincingly, psychology (his causal agency in the inducement of human sin). Thus he is at once a character set in mythological narratives and a moral metaphor, but in both cases the emphasis is on his function rather than his personal character or activities.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ P. Dendle, Satan Unbound 11.

Chapter 3:

Context and Exploitation: Using Apocalyptic Material for Penitential Purposes:

This chapter will investigate the different purposes for which Anglo-Saxon writers employed eschatological and apocalyptic material in their texts and manuscript compilations. I will be argue that they used their texts primarily for instructional purposes for audiences consisting both of the religious in reformed monasteries and of lay people (some of the latter including new converts). The aim was to provide exegetical material and orthodox theological instruction stemming from the long patristic tradition, and to inspire repentance and/or conversion.

I will focus on the writings of Ælfric and Wulfstan, and on the homilies and poems found in some of the major manuscript collections – the Blickling and Vercelli books, and CCC 201. For the purpose of this thesis, I am defining “penitential literature” as a body of material that contains not only those texts which explicitly mention rituals of public or private confession and penance, but a wider body of texts aimed at inspiring a mood of repentance in their audiences by providing what was mostly catechetical preaching and moral instruction. I will compare the different strategies pursued by the individual authors or manuscript compilers, and will consider the question of how their strategies differed from those employed by Continental writers.

As I have argued, the Old English texts generally fall into two categories: the learned branch, associated by Gatch with the monastic revival, and the more populist branch

predominantly aimed at lay audiences.¹ Grant states that “it must be remembered that Ælfric and Wulfstan represent the intelligentsia, and the more dramatic Vercelli type of homily probably had great popular appeal.”² I will take a closer look at the different purposes of the Old English homilies, beginning with those of Ælfric and Wulfstan, and will attempt to reinterpret Wulfstan’s place in Old English preaching: rather than argue for two opposing ends of a scale (with Ælfric and Wulfstan at one end and the anonymous homilists at the other), it seems more apt to place Wulfstan somewhere in the middle between Ælfric and the anonymous homilists. While Wulfstan exercises great care in the selection of his material and is a master of rhetoric, the purpose of his preaching for predominantly secular audiences seems to put him closer to the Vercelli and Blickling types. This has already been shown above with regard to the problem of the year 1000; the present chapter finds it to be the case for the wider context of Wulfstan’s eschatological preaching, too.

I will then proceed to investigate how the immediate purpose of the Blickling Book differed from that of the Vercelli Book, yet how their respective compilers ultimately had the same wider goal: they wanted to establish a penitential mood in their audiences. They carefully selected eschatological and apocalyptic material which they deemed fit for the instruction of their audiences and for moving them to repentance and/or conversion.

¹ See e.g. M. McC. Gatch, *Preaching* 120.

² R. J. S. Grant, ed. *Three Homilies from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College* 41–48.

Ælfric's Preaching and Eschatology:

In his Pastoral Letter to Wulfsgie, bishop of Sherborne, Ælfric states that priests must

secgan Sunnandagum and mæssedagum þæs godspelles angyt on englisc þam folce.

preach the meaning of the gospel to the people in English on Sundays and feast days.³

This statement follows the instructions given in chapter 42 of the Rule of Chrodegang of Metz

(d. 766):

Cauendum nobis est ne in periculum pro nostra negligentia, ut ita dixerim, absque baptismo et confirmatione et confessione et predicatione in quadam securitate positus incurrat noster populus. Unde constituimus ut bis in mense per totum annum, de quinto decimo die in quinto decimo, uerbum salutis ei predicetur, qualiter ad uitam aeternam, Deo auxiliante, perueniat. Et si omnibus festis et Dominicis diebus assiduata fuerit predicatione, utilior est; et iuxta quod intelligere uulgus possit, ita predicandum est.

It is for us to take care that our people who have been placed in a certain state of security, as I should like to say, may not run into any danger because of our negligence, and (be) without baptism, confirmation, confession and preaching. Therefore, we have decided that twice a month throughout the whole year, from the fifteenth day to the fifteenth day, the word of salvation should be preached to them, so that they may attain eternal life through God's help. And if preaching were to happen assiduously on all feast days and Sundays, it would be more useful; and in addition to that, preaching is to be done in a way that the common people can understand.

Miclum is us to warnienne seo frecednys for ure gimeleaste, swilce ic swa secge, þæt ure folc ne wurðe losod þurh nane orsohnysse, butan fulwihte 7 bisceopunge 7 predicunge 7 andytnysse. For þi þonne we gesettað þæt tuwa on monþe, þæt is ymbe feowertine niht, man æfre þam folce bodige mid larspelle, hu hi þurh Godes fultum magon to þam ecean life becuman. 7 þeah hit man ælce Sunnandæge singalice 7 freolsdæge dyde, þæt wære betere. 7 do ma þa larbodunge be þam þe þæt folc understandan mæge.

There is great need for us to warn about the danger of our negligence (as I would like to call it), that our people will not be lost through any lack of care (and be) without baptism and confirmation and preaching and confession. For this purpose we have decided that twice a month, that is every fourteenth night, one should preach to the people with the gospel to them, how they through God's help may come to eternal life. And if one were to preach every single Sunday and feast day, that would be better. And one should do the preaching to the people in

³ Ælfric's letter to Wulfsgie, bishop of Sherborne, quoted in M. Godden, Commentary xxii.

such a way that they are able to understand it.⁴

Similar ideas were also expressed at the Synods of Tours (813) and Mainz (847) – the latter held under Rabanus Maurus -, which stated that bishops should preach on Sundays and feast days and at least twice a month, and that they should translate sermons into the vernacular, so that everybody can understand them.⁵ Ælfric's statement seems to imply that he was not preaching for purely monastic audiences, but must have served a wider lay audience as well. Godden suggests that Ælfric aimed his Catholic Homilies at both monastic audiences and laity, and at both listeners and readers. Included in the latter might be people who were using the homilies as devotional reading material, or non-Latinate priests who were to read the texts for themselves before reading them out to their audiences at mass.⁶

Ælfric was apparently dissatisfied with the content of previous collections of preaching materials in English, and thus set out to provide two extensive collections of homilies, which covered the entire church year. Written in the 990s, the collections provide forty homilies for all the major feast days of the year, mostly in form of exegeses on the gospel and homilies for the Sundays after Epiphany and Pentecost; the latter also contains a few Saints' Lives (e.g.

⁴ The Old English Version of the Latin Original, of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang, ed. A. Napier. EETS OS 150, pp. 49-50. The Old English version is slightly more demanding: the Latin text simply requires preaching on two occasions within the period from the fifteenth day of one month to the fifteenth day of the following month; there is no requirement to schedule the sermons at regular intervals, as there is in the Old English version.

⁵ Cf. also C. Hefele, and H. Leclercq, Histoire des Conciles, 11 vols., specifically, III:758, 764, and IV:89, 111, 126, 197, 513, 582. See also W. Hartmann, "Die Synoden der Karolingerzeit im Frankenreich und in Italien," Konziliengeschichte, Reihe A: Darstellungen, ed. W. Brandmüller 428.

⁶ M. Godden, ed. Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary, EETS SS18, pp. xxvi-xxvii. Cf. Old English Preface to CH I, l. 9-16; J. Wilcox, ed. Ælfric's Prefaces 108.

Cuthbert, Martin, Gregory the Great, Benedict). The Catholic Homilies “represent Ælfric’s first, and in many ways most ambitious, undertaking.”⁷ In the Latin Preface to the First Series, he counts Augustine, Bede, Jerome, Gregory the Great, Smaragdus and Haymo of Auxerre among his sources.⁸ As Smetana has shown, Ælfric knew most of his sources through the patristic anthology of Paul the Deacon.⁹ However, Ælfric’s collection surpasses the continental homiliaries of e.g. Alan of Farfa or Paul the Deacon – the latter having been commissioned by Charlemagne. These homiliaries were put together from excerpts of various Church Fathers and covered only the most important feast days; they were not used for Sunday preaching, but were part of the night office.¹⁰ Ælfric’s collections go far beyond the continental homiliaries, not just because they cover the entire church year.

His homilies, as he states in his prefaces, were intended for those who knew no Latin. He did not merely assemble patristic homilies as Paul had done, or compose homilies in Latin by refashioning material from various patristic sources as Haymo had done. Instead he made selections from the thought of a number of authorities and used the vernacular to re-express that thought.¹¹

The Catholic Homilies are strictly orthodox in their theology, drawing only on Scriptural and patristic sources. Ælfric laments the unreliability of many English books and one feels that he might well have been referring to such collections as the Blickling and Vercelli homilies. He

⁷ See M. Godden, Commentary xxi. See also H. Gneuss, Ælfric von Eynsham und seine Zeit, Sitzungsberichte 21. For more detail on the role of preaching in the Anglo-Saxon church, see M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 40-59.

⁸ J. Wilcox, ed. Ælfric’s Prefaces 107; Clemoes cites further possible sources. “Ælfric” 182-86.

⁹ C. L. Smetana, “Ælfric and the Early Medieval Homiliary”, as well as his Paul the Deacon’s Patristic Anthology.

¹⁰ See M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 27-39.

¹¹ P. Clemoes, “Ælfric” 183.

might have been thinking of their use of apocryphal material such as the widely-known *Visio Pauli* or the *Apocalypse of Thomas*, although he does not explicitly mention these texts in his Prefaces.¹²

Ða beárn me on mode, ic truwigedurh Godes gife, þæt ic ðas boc of Ledenum gereorde to Englisrce spræce awende. na þurh gebylde mycelre lare. ac for ðan ðe ic geseah 7 gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum Engliscum bocum. ðe ungelærede menn ðurh heora bilewitnysse to micclum wisdometealdon;

Then it occurred to my mind, I trust through God's grace, that I would turn this book from the Latin tongue into the English language; not from confidence in my great learning, but because I have seen and heard of great error in many English books, which unlearned men, through their simplicity, have held to be great wisdom.¹³

He is aware of the need to preach at an appropriate level, so as neither to overwhelm nor to bore one's audience:

Man sceal læwedum mannum secgan be heora andgites mæðe, swa þæt hi ne beon ðurh ða deopnysse æmode, ne ðurh ða langsumnysse ædryte.

One must speak to laymen according to the measure of their understanding, so that they are not dismayed by the depth of meaning nor bored by the length.¹⁴

Ælfric sees his role as that of providing knowledge not to learned people, but to those not capable of the Latin tongue, always keeping in mind his audience's limitations and their need for instruction in the Gospel. This is especially important in these troubled times, when mankind is in desperate need of *godre lare*, "good instruction", at a time when the end of the world is approaching rapidly.

and eac for ðam þe menn behofiað godre lare swiðost on þisum timan þe is geendung þyssere worulde, and beoð fela frecednysse on mancynne ær ðan þe se ende become ...

¹² J. Bazire and J. E. Cross suggest that he might be rejecting the *Visio Pauli* because it was sometimes used in Rogationtide homilies to provide descriptions of hell (Bazire-Cross xxiv).

¹³ *Old English Preface to CH I*, 5-9. J. Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces* 108. Translation mine.

¹⁴ quoted in Smetana, *Ælfric* 187, translation mine.

and also because men are in need of good instruction, especially at this time, which is the ending of this world, and there will be many troubles among mankind before the end comes ...¹⁵

I take *godre lare* to mean not only “good” or “careful” instruction in general, but specifically instruction in the sense of “orthodox” teaching. Armed with this kind of knowledge, the faithful would be able to withstand the snares of the Antichrist who would appear shortly.

Ælfric is convinced that he is living in the last age of the world. More explicitly so than the anonymous homilists, he employs the six-ages model to structure world history, as we have seen in the first chapter; yet he refuses to predict when the sixth age will end – in strict agreement with the Augustinian interpretation of the ages. For him, as for Augustine, history is a constant fulfilment of prophecy in the present. The judgement could happen at any given moment; therefore, his audience must constantly be aware of the need to repent and alter their ways. Gatch rightly states that there is “no sustained treatment in the Catholic Homilies or the Lives of Saints of the Last Times” (77). However, Ælfric’s Doomsday sermon will be discussed here in some detail, for it helps to shed light on his method of preaching and selection of source material.

De die iudicii:

The manuscript heading for Ælfric’s Sermo de die iudicii is *quando volueris*, assigning no firm place to the sermon in the liturgical year.¹⁶ Unlike the anonymous Doomsday homily of the

¹⁵ Ælfric, Old English Preface to CH I 14-17. J. Wilcox, Ælfric’s Prefaces 108.

¹⁶ J. C. Pope, ed. Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection, EETS OS 259; 260. De die iudicii

same title (i.e. the long version of Vercelli II), Ælfric's text is exegetical. R. Jayatilaka points out that Ælfric was heavily indebted to Bede's Commentary on Luke and Augustine's Quaestiones in euangelium secundum Lucam;¹⁷ Pope, however, has pointed out that Ælfric might also have used Jerome's Commentary on Matthew and Bede's On Mark.¹⁸ This selection of sources and the fact that it is an exegetical homily (focusing mostly on Luke 17 and Matthew 24) already prove that Ælfric's eschatology in De die iudicii is highly orthodox; this, of course, is again in line with his intention to provide *godre lare* to the people in a time of great need. Gatch suggests that Ælfric's purpose might have been to counter the apocryphally-inspired anonymous Doomsday sermons by using only Scriptural and patristic material, and that his is "an original exercise in exegesis."¹⁹

The title Sermo de die iudicii is, in fact, misleading: the text does not dwell on Judgement Day itself; nor does it dwell excessively on the signs preceding it, as the anonymous homilies do. Rather, Ælfric focuses on the unpredictability and suddenness with which Judgement Day will arrive; in the second half, he dwells on the motif of the Antichrist. Both themes are driving home the message that his audience is in dire need of repentance while there is still time.

is II:XVIII, pp. 584-612.

¹⁷ R. Jayatilaka, "The Sources of Ælfric's De die iudicii (Cameron B.1.4.19)", 1995, Fontes Anglo-Saxonic: World Wide Web Register. February 2005. <<http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>>. R. Jayatilaka points out that Ælfric might have consulted Augustine directly (i.e. as found in Paul the Deacon's homiliary) or through Bede's Commentary on Luke, which contains everything Ælfric refers to.

¹⁸ J. C. Pope, Supplementary Collection II:587-89.

¹⁹ M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 88-89.

In the first half of the sermon, Ælfric discusses Luke 17. His interpretations are rooted in patristic tradition, and he offers a strictly orthodox reading. The sermon begins with an explanation of the story of Lot, interpreting it as a precursor of the universal judgement at the end of the world: just as Sodom and Gomorrah were burned by fire and brimstone, so will the whole world be purged by fire at Judgement Day. The three different groups of people who will be surprised by Doomsday are, according to Ælfric, interpreted as three parts of humankind: monks, secular men, and pastoral clergy. Gatch points out that Ælfric was strongly biased towards the monastic profession, “even to the extent of believing that, if a monk were scrupulously faithful to it, it offered him preferential treatment on Doomsday;”²⁰ he did not, however, seem to hold the same view of the secular clergy.

The second half of the Sermo de die iudicii discusses the events that lead up to Judgement Day. It is mostly based on Matthew 24, but occasionally uses readings from Mark 13.²¹ The main focus in this passage is on the coming of false Christs who will deceive mankind by working miracles in the sun, moon, and stars. The Antichrist will seek to establish himself as God, seeking worship from humankind. His worship is compared to that of the heathen statue in Daniel. If God did not cut short the time of the persecution of the faithful – that is, end the reign of the Antichrist after three and a half years – no one would escape from the tribulations. Ælfric dwells only briefly on such signs as the darkening of the sun and the moon and the falling of the stars (l. 260-63). We do not find any of the drastic visual imagery

²⁰ M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 91.

²¹ As noted by M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 91 and 232n28.

displayed in the anonymous Old English homilies. Unlike the Blickling and Vercelli homilies, Ælfric does not refer to the Apocalypse of Thomas, either, when explaining the signs preceding Doomsday; he adheres to orthodox interpretations of the signs, rather than risk falling prey to circulating *gedwyld* (“error”).

Ælfric refuses to predict exactly how close the Day of Judgement is: as in Natale

Sanctum Virginum, he states that nobody knows when Doomsday will arrive, apart from God:

We habbað nu gehyred on þisum halgan godspelle þæt we ne magon na cepan, ne nanum menn nis cuð, hwænne ure Drihten cymð to demenne mancynne on þam endenyhstan dæge þysse worulde.

We have now heard in this holy gospel that we may not reckon, nor is it known to any human being, when our Lord will come to judge mankind on the last day of this world.²²

As has been pointed out already, Ælfric was far from being alarmed by the approach of A.D. 1000, even though he frequently insisted on the traditional theme of *mundus senescit* (“the world growing old”).²³ However, while his method of preaching in the Sermo de die iudicii is far closer to the highly orthodox, exegetical homilies of Bede than to any of the anonymous homilies (or those of Wulfstan, as I shall argue below), Ælfric was slightly more concerned about the imminence of the end than Bede or Byrhtferth. However, his sense of urgency feels different from that of Wulfstan’s homilies, for reasons which will be explained below.

²² De die iudicii, l. 43-46. Translation mine.

²³ See M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 222n14 for a detailed list of references.

Wulfstan:

We know very little about Wulfstan's activities prior to becoming bishop of London in 996. He must of course have undergone theological and rhetorical training of some kind, and he must certainly have been a Benedictine. "The religious temper in England in 1002 would have made the appointment of a secular priest to the archbishopric very unacceptable."²⁴

As I have shown above, Ælfric's eschatology in his Sermo de die iudicii does not depart once from giving an orthodox exegetical exposition of the events leading up to Doomsday. Not once does he use questionable source material; nor does he allude to contemporary history or politics. The case is strikingly different in Wulfstan's work. Wulfstan's thoughts concerning the Millennium and the Antichrist have already been discussed; this chapter will focus on the wider context of his eschatological preaching, and will discuss the eschatology of his later work.

Wulfstan does not show much interest in exegetical preaching. In the strictest sense, his writings are sermons rather than homilies: not explanations of the Gospel pericopes, but admonitions on larger religious themes to an audience which was predominantly secular, and most likely (at least during his time at York) composed to some extent of new converts.²⁵ His homilies were not intended for monastic audiences. Nor were they limited to Sunday

²⁴ D. Bethurum, Homilies 57. She refers to Darlington, "Ecclesiastical reform", EHR li. 385-428, and Knowles, "The Monastic Order in England", App. IV, and states that "of the 116 [bishops between 960 and 1066] only fourteen are known to have been secular priests, and no incumbent of York or Canterbury." (D. Bethurum, Homilies 57n6). The question remains, however, of how easy it would be to prove that a man was a secular priest. Records are generally more accurate for monastic priests, and would thus provide more reliable numbers for how many priests had a monastic affiliation.

²⁵ Cf. M. McC. Gatch, Preaching 18-22; and Hill, "Archbishop Wulfstan: Reformer?"

preaching: on a number of occasions he was preaching before the *witan*. Finally, the body of his homilies is much smaller than that of Ælfric. Wulfstan was not trying to provide homilies for every occasion within the church year. His focus was not on a programmatic education to provide his audiences with *godre lare* at a time when the end of the world was thought to be approaching rapidly; he was much more concerned with appealing to the hearts of his lay audiences, sometimes playing on their fears about the end, and fiercely urging them to repent. Wulfstan's work is often much more politically charged. As Joyce Hill has argued, he seems to be closer to the Carolingian statesman-preachers than to the abbot/teacher Ælfric.²⁶ This, together with his slightly more literal interpretation of Scripture, explains the much more "active", "urgent" style of his preaching. At the same time, his role as a Benedictine and a influential statesman prevents him from engaging in quite the dramatic display of the anonymous homilies or the sometimes literal, apocalyptic-political interpretation of some of the continental sources. Thus, Wulfstan's work should be located somewhat in the middle between the learned works of Ælfric and the populist Blickling and Vercelli homilies. All of these aspects, together with a remarkable set of rhetorical and thematic strategies help to explain the unique "feel" of Wulfstan's work. In the following, I will investigate these strategies to show how Wulfstan cleverly used them to appeal to the hearts of his audiences.

As we have already seen, the order of Wulfstan's five eschatological homilies is difficult to establish; Bethurum and Lionarons both suggest the order II (Secundum Matheum), III (Secundum Lucam), Ia (Napier XI, the Latin De Antichristo), Ib (Napier XII, the Old English

²⁶ J. Hill, "Archbishop Wulfstan: Reformer?"

De Antichristo), IV (De temporibus Antichristi), V (Secundum Marcum), and both place them towards the end of Wulfstan's time in London.²⁷ If this is correct, his immediate audience would only have included a small minority of new converts of Norse descent, if any²⁸. Most recently, Malcolm Godden has re-dated the homilies to the period 1006-12 and beyond. He argues that there is no evidence of contact between Wulfstan and Ælfric before 1006, yet that the eschatological homilies show some Ælfrician influence.²⁹ Among the homilies of Wulfstan's later career, De fide Catholica (Bethurum VII) contains material which echoes the Sermo ad populum (Bethurum XIII), and the famous Sermo Lupi (Bethurum XX) echoes Secundum Lucam. Napier L, a homily which was regarded as spurious by Jost (Wulfstanstudien 102), provides the most complex use of source materials ranging from Wulfstan's own work to Ælfric's pastoral letters, from the Institutes of Polity to legal codes. It will be discussed in more detail below.

In the eschatological homilies, Wulfstan rarely elaborates on the imagery of natural disaster, famine, and signs in the heavenly bodies. Unlike the homilist of Vercelli 2, he does not bombard his audience with long lists of Doomsday signs. He is much more subtle,

²⁷ D. Bethurum bases her argument on Wulfstan's increasing habit of borrowing of his own phrases, whereas J. T. Lionarons argues for growing complexity in the use of source material. Cf. D. Bethurum, Homilies 101-03 and J. T. Lionarons' website at <<http://webpages.ursinus.edu/jlionarons/wulfstan/frameset1.html>>. Cf. above, ch. 2.

²⁸ There was a small minority of moneyers in London at the time who had genuinely Norse names but this does not provide proof there was a significant Norse minority among the population there. Moneyers were specialist and therefore more likely to move about than most of the population. Cf. V. Smart, "Moneyers of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage," Commentationes de nummis saeculorum ix-xi in Suecia reperties (Stockholm, 1968) 191-276, esp. 242-50.

²⁹ M. Godden, "The Relations of Wulfstan and Ælfric," 353-74, especially 370.



combining urgent rhetoric with ambiguity and uncertainty to great effect. It is always in the eye of the beholder to decipher the signs around him. Wulfstan effectively makes this work to his advantage: he plays on fears that were probably already present in his audience, offering them enough bits and pieces of hellfire and damnation rhetoric to fuel their fertile imaginations. However, he refuses to engage in any speculation about how bad exactly the troubles will be, although he implies that they will be so bad that he is unable to express it. Nor does he engage in any attempts to predict when these events will occur.

Just as he makes ambiguous reference to the Millennium in Secundum Marcum, stating that more than a thousand years have already passed, he cites certain events connected with the Antichrist's time but veils the rest of what will happen in ambiguity. The themes of "soon, but nobody knows exactly when" and "it will be so bad that nobody can find words to express it" create what one might call a "psychological" rather than a "real" sense of imminence.³⁰ This not-knowing must have had a very powerful effect on the archbishop's audience. Wulfstan consciously creates an environment of not-knowing-and-therefore-worrying in order to frighten his audience and make them repent while there is still time. And, in his view, time is clearly running out for them.

In Secundum Marcum, Wulfstan stresses that the exact magnitude of evil and suffering, which will occur before the end of the world, is unknown:

Nis se man on life þe mæge oððe cunne swa yfel hit asecgan swa hit sceal geweorðan on þam deoflican timan.

³⁰ Cf. R. K. Emmerson, and B. McGinn, eds., The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages 13.

There is no one alive who can express how bad things will become in that devilish time.³¹

He expresses a similar idea in De temporibus Anticristi:

Ne can ic ne æfre ænig man oðrum asecgan fore ealne þone egsan þe ðurh þæne deofol on worulde geweorðan sceal.

Neither I nor any other person know how to express beforehand to someone else all the terror that shall happen in the world through the devil.³²

Whenever Wulfstan starts to elaborate on the details of the wickedness that must happen, he only chooses a few key elements, mostly focusing on explaining the Gospel message that nation will rise against nation, and that familial bonds will break down. These were elements to which his audience were able to relate, both because they were familiar to them due to Christ's words in the "Little Apocalypse" of Mark 13, and because they saw the them happening in the chaos brought on by the Viking attacks. This breakdown of the bonds of kinship was the worst fear of any Anglo-Saxon, resulting in betrayal of loyalty, and strife within their extended family. The intensity of the situation is heightened by Wulfstan's argument that the breakdown will be caused by both internal and external forces: brother will rise against brother, and nation against nation.

Ne byrhð þonne broðor oðrum hwilan, ne fæder his bearne ne bearn his agenum fæder, ne gesibb gesibban þe ma þe fremdan. And þeodscypas winnað 7 sacað heom betweenan foran to þam timan þe þis sceal geweorþan. Eac sceal aspringan wide 7 side sacu 7 clacu, hol 7 hete 7 rypera reafiac, here 7 hunger, brynne 7 blodgyte 7 styrnlíce styrunga, stric 7 steorfa 7 fela ungelimpa. And mænigfealde tacna beoð wide gesawene on sunnan 7 on monan 7 on mistlican tunglan, 7 fela cynna egesan geweorþað on eorðan folce to heortgryre 7 to egeslican fære on mænigfealde wisan.

Brother will not spare brother at times / sometimes, nor a father his child, nor a child his own father, nor a kinsman his kinsman any more than a stranger. And nations will strive and fight among themselves before the time that this will happen. Also, there will arise strife and

³¹ D. Bethurum, Homilies V, 1.97-98. Translation mine. Wulfstan uses exactly the same phrase again in Napier L, cf. A. Napier, Wulfstan 273, 30-32.

³² Bethurum, IV, 1.66-67, translation mine.

contention far and wide, and malice and hatred, *here* and hunger, burning and bloodshed and violent strife, stealing and slaying, and many troubles. And many signs will be seen widely in the sun and the moon and in various stars, and many kinds of terror will occur on earth to terrify people's hearts and to cause fearsome danger in many different ways.³³

In the chaos of the Last Days, there will be no distinction between friend and foe, kinsmen and stranger. In Secundum Lucam and Secundum Marcum, Wulfstan thus emphasises the two-fold collapse of society due to pressures from the inside (brother against brother), as well as because of outside forces (nation against nation):

And ðy us deriað 7 ðearle dyrfað fela ungelimpa, 7 ælþeodige men 7 utancumene swyðe us swencað, ealswa Crist on his godspelle swutollice sæde þæt scolde geweorðan.

And therefore many troubles harm us and injure us severely, and strangers and foreigners oppress us very much, as Christ clearly said in his Gospel must happen.³⁴

The decline of the microcosm of Anglo-Saxon family structures at once mirrors and ultimately allows the breakdown of society at large in the chaos of the Viking invasions. The Danish raids are thus at once both the cause and the effect of suffering for the English. Although Wulfstan does not explicitly mention the Vikings in either Secundum Lucam or Secundum Marcum, his references to “strangers”, “foreigners”, and the *here* leave little doubt that he had in mind the Norse raids. In the ASC, *here* nearly always describes the Viking armies, and in the few instances in Wulfstan’s usage when the term does not refer to the Danes, it does describe a heathen army.³⁵

In Secundum Lucam, the responsibility for these tribulations lies entirely with the English. Their faith in God and in his mercy, and their obedience to the Lord are too weak,

³³ Bethurum V, 98-108. Translation mine.

³⁴ Bethurum III.20-22. Translation mine.

³⁵ cf. A. Cowen, “Byrstas and bysmeras: The Wounds of Sin in the Sermo Lupi ad Anglos” 400.

and they anger him more often than they need to (cf. lines 15-20). Ælfric is lamenting the same fact in a lengthy passage of his Lives of Saints XIII, where he draws on an Old Testament parallel to illustrate his point:

Wel we magon geðencan hu wel hit ferde mid ús .
 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 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 behoda healdað .
 þonne sende ic eow rén-scuras on rihtne timan symble .
 and seo eorðe spryt hyre wæstmas eow .
 and ic forgife sibbe and gesehtnysse eow .
 þæt ge butan oðan eowres eardes brucan .
 and ic eac afyrsgige ða yfelan deor eow fram .
 Gif ge þonne me forseoð and mine gesetnyssa awurpað .
 ic eac swyðe hrædlice on eow hit gewrece .
 ic dó 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 .
 Þus spræc god gefyrn be þam folce israhel .
 hit is swa ðeah swa gedón swyðe neah mid us .
 nu on niwum dagum and undigollice.³⁶

³⁶ "We can well consider how well things fared with us when this island was living in peace, and monasteries were treated with honour and the laity were vigilant against their enemies, so that our fame sprang widely throughout this world. What happened then afterwards, when people overthrew the monasteries and treated God's services with contempt, but that disease and hunger came upon us, and afterwards a heathen army treated us with contempt. Almighty God spoke to Moses about this in the wilderness: 'if you walk in my commandments and keep my commandments, I will [always] send you rain at the right time and the earth will produce its crops for you, and I will give you peace and harmony, so that you may enjoy your land without fear and I will [also] drive the evil beasts from you. If you then scorn me and reject my laws, I will also very swiftly avenge it on you. I will cause the heavens to be as hard as iron to you, and the earth beneath it like brass. Then you will toil in vain if you sow your land, and the earth will produce no crops for you, and if you will still not turn to me, I

The implications could not be any clearer. History is repeating itself: just as the Israelites had turned away from God, so the Anglo-Saxons abandoned God; their punishment comes in the form of the *hæden here*, warfare and chaos, followed by famine. Ælfric thus directly regards the troubles of his own time as a result of the sinful behaviour of the people.

This theme of divine anger directed at the English is also a prominent *topos* in the work of Wulfstan. It finds its most expansive treatment in the Sermo Lupi of 1014. Jonathan Wilcox has pointed out the strong possibility that this homily was preached at the meeting of the *witan* in York on 16 February 1014, and that it was more or less directly responsible for their decision to invite the old king back, on condition that he would rule *rihtlicor* (“more justly”).³⁷ Again, the archbishop’s strategy was to emphasise the collapse of the Anglo-Saxon society from within. He cleverly intermingles the crimes and their punishments to the point where it is almost impossible to distinguish between them.³⁸ By pointing out their own sins to them, Wulfstan is shaming his audience into action. This must have been a powerful strategy for an archbishop who insisted on both private and public confession and repentance.³⁹ In

will send a sword to you and your enemies will strike you, and they will savagely lay waste your land, and your cities will be ruined and laid waste. I will also send cowardice into your hearts so that none of you will dare to resist your enemies.’ Thus said God of old concerning the people of Israel, but it has now very nearly happened to us, in recent times and quite openly.” De oratione Moysi, lines 147-77; ed. Skeat, EETS OS 76, II:294-97; translation based on M. Godden’s translation in “Apocalypse and Invasion” 135.

³⁷ J. Wilcox, “Wulfstan’s Sermo Lupi ad Anglos as Political Performance,” 375-96, esp. 396. If this is true, it is interesting that there is no criticism of the king in the Sermo. Perhaps this was for reasons of political tact.

³⁸ A. Cowen, 400.

³⁹ A. J. Frantzen, The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England 6.

Secundum Marcum, Wulfstan insists: *ure misdæda eac wregeað us gelome* (“our misdeeds also constantly curse us”).⁴⁰

In order to drive this message home to his listeners, Wulfstan bombards his listeners with long lists of sins and crimes. In these lists, he usually enumerates in detail all kinds of unchristian behaviour which could be summarised into the categories of murder, sexual misconduct, crimes against the church (including heresy and superstitious beliefs), violent crime (including theft and robbery), and crimes against one’s extended family (such as disloyalty). One reason for these lists is, of course, the juxtaposition of alliterating words that is so typical of his style; yet I believe that he also felt the need to include as wide a variety of crimes and sins as possible. He carefully differentiates between different types of crimes within the same broader “category”:

Manslagan, mansworan, æwbrecan, ða fulan forlegenan, wiccan, bearnmyrðran, ðeodscaðan, ryperas, reaferas, ealle þa God gremiað.

homicides, perjurers, adulterers, foul fornicators, witches, child-murderers, those who commit crimes against the community, thieves, robbers, all those who irritate God.⁴¹

De fide catholica further lists

mannslagan, manswican, æwbrecan, ða fulan forlegenan, mansworan, morðwyrhtan, gitseras, ryperas, reaferas, woruldstruderan, þeofas, ðeodscaðan, wiccan, wigleras, ealle þa manfullan þe ær yfel worhton 7 noldan geswican ne wið God þingian.

homicides, betrayers, adulterers, foul fornicators, perjurers, murderers, misers, robbers, plunderers, spoliators, thieves, those who commit crimes against the community, witches, sorcerers, all the wicked ones who have previously done evil and do not wish to stop nor reconcile themselves with God.⁴²

⁴⁰ Secundum Lucam, line 34; Bethurum III, p. 124.

⁴¹ from Sermo ad populum, Bethurum XIII, lines 93-95.

⁴² Bethurum VII, from lines 128-34.

The longest version of the Sermo lists the following crimes:

Her syndon mannsлагan 7 mægslagan 7 mæsserbanan 7 mynsterhatan; 7 her syndon mansworan 7 morþorwyrhtan; 7 her syndon myltestran 7 bearnmyrðran 7 fule folegene horingas manege; 7 her syndon wiccan 7 wælcyrian; 7 her syndon ryperas 7 reaferas 7 woroldstruderar.

There are homicides and killers of kin and killers of priests and those who despise monasteries; and there are perjurers and murderers; and there are prostitutes and child-murderers and many foul fornicating adulterers; and there are witches and valkyries; and there are thieves and robbers and spoliators.⁴³

These long, differentiated lists probably do not exist only because of his archiepiscopal needs to admonish his audiences; neither can we wholly attribute them to the specific requirements of Wulfstan's rhetorical style. I believe they are examples of those moments when Wulfstan's legal training invades his homiletic work.⁴⁴ As a legal expert, it would have been important to him to differentiate between crimes that could otherwise be summarised under "murder, theft, sexual misconduct, magic, disloyalty."⁴⁵

Generally speaking, these lists occur in two contexts: that of listing crimes and actions that offended secular social codes for the purpose of shaming his audience into repentance and action, and that of listing those who commit these crimes as being the people who will find themselves in the fires of Hell at Judgement Day. The Sermo Lupi is an example of the former context, whereas we find the latter in the Sermo ad populum (lines 92-97), and in De fide catholica (lines 128-34). These lists probably serve the two-fold goal of shaming people by

⁴³ Bethurum XX, from lines 161-65.

⁴⁴ Such lists of sins and crimes are also a feature of the penitential handbooks used by priests (cf. A. J. Frantzen, esp. 15-18).

⁴⁵ A similar list is found in miniature in Völuspá st. 39. Cf. also the crimes that are castigated in Lokasenna, which J. McKinnell grouped together as *ójafnað* (injustice) and *ergi* (sexual disgrace). See "Motivation in Lokasenna" 234-62, esp. p. 259. Most recent criticism places Lokasenna in the twelfth century. It is possible that the poem was influenced by penitential lists similar to those of Wulfstan.

telling them about their sins to their faces, and of frightening them by making it explicitly clear that there is only one place fit for those who indulge in such sinful behaviour: the fires of Hell. Wulfstan cleverly combines these two strategies in his work.

In contrast to the ambiguity which he employs when he speaks of when Judgement Day will occur, or how bad the time of the Antichrist will be, he goes into great detail when talking about sins, crimes, and the punishments in hell.⁴⁶ He is painting a vivid picture of the torments that await those who indulge in unchristian behaviour. Given the detail which he employs in listing the different kinds of sins/crimes he has in mind, a considerable portion of his audience must have recognised aspects of their own behaviour somewhere in the list. This would be the case especially since Wulfstan does not only include drastic crimes such as murder, robbery, or adultery, but also superstitious belief in wells, trees, stones, and astrology/computus. These superstitious beliefs are mentioned in Sermo de baptisate (Bethurum VIIIc) 165-68 and De cristianitate (Bethurum Xb) 52-76.⁴⁷ We know

very little about the informal education which went on in the settlements, in particular the kind of information for living which mothers passed on to their children, especially to their daughters. Within that system, beliefs and customs may have carried on a kind of semi-secret existence for centuries – in the four hundred years between Augustine of Canterbury and Wulfstan of York the old gods may have disappeared, but wishing wells and countryside sanctuaries were evidently still frequented.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. Sermo ad populum 84-87.

⁴⁷ A. L. Meaney argues that Wulfstan was not only referring to astrology but might have been thinking of superstitious monks engaging in computistical calculations, a by-product of the Benedictine Revival, disseminated especially from Winchester. Audrey L. Meaney, *And we forbeodað ælcne hæðenscipe*: Wulfstan and Late Anglo-Saxon and Norse 'Heathenism.'" A. L. Meaney also refers to R. M. Liuzza, "Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context" 181-230, esp. 195-96, 198, 206, 209-10.

⁴⁸ A. L. Meaney "Heathenism" 500. As archbishop of York, Wulfstan was dealing with a considerable portion of the population that had been heathen much more recently. The resilience of such superstitious beliefs can still be seen today in folk customs such as well-dressing (common in Derbyshire) and the blessing of wells

In Secundum Marcum, Wulfstan adds an external source for the unbelief of the people:

their sins are the result of trickery, sorcery, and deception at the hands of the Antichrist.

ገ se gesewenlica feond wyrð þurh deofles cræft fela wunderlicra tacna ገ þurh drycræft mænigfealde gedwimera. And feorðehealf gear he ricsað ofer mancynn ገ mid his scincræftum mæst manna beswicð þe æfre ær ðurh ænig ðing beswicen wurde. And þa ðe he elles mid his lotwrencum bepæcen ne mæg, þa he wile þreatian ገ ægeslice wyldan ገ earmlice pinian on mænigfealde wisan ገ neadunga nydan, þæt hy gebugan to his unlaran. He aginð leogan deoflice swyðe ገ ætsæcð Cristes ገ cweð þæt he sylf sy Godes agen bearn, ገ gebringð on gedwylde ealles to manege. And God him geðafað þæt for manna gewyrhtum þæt he sume hwile mot swa wodlice derian, forðam þe men beoð þurh synna swa swyðe forwyrhte þæt deofol mot openlice þonne heora fandian hu fela he forspanan mæge to ecan forwyrde.

And the visible fiend will work many wonderful signs by the devil's power and many false miracles through magic. And for three and a half years he will reign over mankind and by his devilish craft deceive most people, more than had ever been deceived before by anything. And all those whom he cannot deceive with his frauds, those he will threaten and suppress horribly and wretchedly torture in many ways and forcibly compel to bow down to his false teachings. He will begin to lie very devilishly and deny Christ and say that he himself is God's own son, and he will lead all too many people into error. And God will allow him to injure people so madly for a while because of the people's sins, because people will be so completely ruined by sin that the devil may openly try to find out how many of them he can seduce into eternal damnation.⁴⁹

The emphasis here is clearly on the Antichrist's powers of deception, which have their origin in his devilish parentage. His use of fraud and deception is the origin for the people's sins: because they are sinful in the first place and turn away from God, they are more prone to fall prey to his false teachings, and once they do, their sinfulness increases. Wulfstan uses the same theme: although he draws on Ælfric and Adso in his discussion of the Antichrist material, he emphasises lies, trickery, and deception far more than his sources do. The archbishop emphasises that

ne weorþeð on worulde ænig woruldsnotera ne on wordum getingra ne on heortan wyrsa and lytelice swicolra þonne he wyrðeþ

there will never be anyone in the world more worldly-wise nor more fluent in words nor worse in

associated with saints (e.g. St. Cuthbert's well and St. Oswald's well in Durham).

⁴⁹ Bethurum V.68-81, translation mine.

heart and more deceptively deceitful than he.⁵⁰

The question arises of whether Wulfstan's outlook on eschatological matters changed after the accession of Cnut to the throne in 1016 and the subsequent restoration of peace. If the Viking invasions were a major motivation for the urgency of his earlier preaching style, would not his outlook have changed after 1016? As Patrick Wormald has argued, Wulfstan's life was not shaped by a succession of career-paths "from herald of Antichrist to prophet and engineer of social reconstruction and political transition", but he carried out all these roles at the same time.⁵¹ Dorothy Bethurum has outlined his significance as "homilist and statesman", and most recently, Joyce Hill has added significantly to our understanding of his roles as both politician and theologian.⁵²

Wulfstan's view does change after 1016. At first sight, his preaching is still very much concerned with the Last Days and the role of the Antichrist. Yet, at the same time, he is primarily engaged in drawing up legal codes and assisting the instruction of Cnut in the Christian faith.⁵³ He is concerned with establishing a peaceful society based on the laws he

⁵⁰ *De septiformi spiritu*, Bethurum IX, p. 189. Quoted and translated in J. T. Lionarons, "Napier Homily L" 421ff.

⁵¹ P. Wormald, "Archbishop Wulfstan and the Holiness of Society" 191-224, here 207; see also his *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, vol. 1 *Legislation and Limits* 464.

⁵² Cf. "Archbishop Wulfstan: Reformer?"

⁵³ We cannot, however, know for certain whether Cnut was a pagan during the invasion of 1013-14. His father, Sveinn Forkbeard, traditionally was. He allowed the murder of archbishop Ælfheah in 1012, or at least may have been unable to prevent it. However, Cnut's paternal grandfather, Haraldr blue-tooth, was certainly a Christian convert, and Cnut may already have had some knowledge of Christianity as a result of his acquaintance with some of Haraldr's old followers. On Haraldr blue-tooth, see Jellinge stone 2. E. Moltke, *Runes and their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere*, trans. P. G. Foote p. 202-223, especially 210-13, and photographs 206, 208-09, 211.

writes. His legal writings suggest that he expected this regime to last for some time. Was the tone of his writing different, depending on whether he was writing law codes or homilies? Had his theological outlook changed? Or was he seeing one of the signs of the end-times as being in the process of fulfilment, i.e. the conversion of pagan nations?

Joyce Lionarons finds an example of Wulfstan's late eschatology in Napier homily L, dated to 1020 by Bethurum. While Jost regarded this text as spurious, Bethurum and Whitelock lean towards accepting it as genuine. Nevertheless, Bethurum excluded it from her collection, but argued that the text probably consists of "Wulfstan's notes, from which he intended to write a polished and well ordered address" (Homilies 41). Lionarons regards the text as genuine and suggests that Wulfstan might have preached it at the meeting of the *witan* in 1018, perhaps in the context of the imminent release of Cnut's summary legal code.⁵⁴ She states that, when Wulfstan was re-using material from his own works, he was most likely quoting himself from memory. Bethurum called the homily one of the "most puzzling" ones (D. Bethurum, Homilies 39), yet Lionarons suggests that this was partly because Bethurum tried to establish clear-cut distinctions between Wulfstan's homiletic and his legal work.

However,

The roles of homilist and statesman were rarely if ever separated in Wulfstan's mind or in his works: his law-codes become increasingly homiletic as the reign of Æthelred gave way to that of Cnut, while his homilies in turn became legalistic in terminology and method.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ J. T. Lionarons, "Napier Homily L" 416-17; see also P. Wormald, Making of English Law 463. P. Wormald suggests the homily might have been a source-text for I Cnut.

⁵⁵ Lionarons, "Napier Homily L" 413.

Napier Homily L is a composite homily, consisting of material taken from three of Wulfstan's eschatological homilies, as well as the Institutes of Polity, the Sermo Lupi, IV Æthelred, I Cnut, Ælfric's letters to Wulfstan, and Adso's treatise.⁵⁶ Even after the accession of Cnut and the restoration of peace, Wulfstan's concern for eschatological themes is still strong. The text deals with the dangers to the individual soul and to society at large, posed by such things as sins of the flesh, and especially by the deception, lies, and hypocrisy brought about by the snares of the Antichrist. Wulfstan argues that even after the restoration of peace, the English are still guilty of the same sins they had committed previously, the same sins which had been the cause of divine wrath manifested in the Viking invasions:

Forþam on þison earde wæs git is [. . .] unrihta fela [. . .]. Fela syn forsworene and swyðe forlogone and wedd eac abrocene oft and gelome.

Because in this land there were and still are [. . .] many wrongs [. . .]. Many are forsworn and greatly perjured and also oaths are broken time and again.⁵⁷

Lionarons argues that this direct reference to the Sermo Lupi would not have gone unnoticed by those members of the audience who recognised the allusion (Lionarons, "Napier Homily L" 420). Yet, she argues, while the themes are familiar, there is a change in Wulfstan's tone. He seems no longer convinced that the end of the world will occur during his lifetime: he admits *þæt gelimpe þæt men sume hwile syn her on worolde* ("it may happen, that people will remain here in this world for a certain time").⁵⁸ This is quite a different view from the one found in

⁵⁶ The homily is found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 421. It is N. R. Ker's item 69. N. R. Ker, Catalogue 118.

⁵⁷ Napier L, CCCC 421, p. 212-13; A. Napier, p. 268, lines 24-28. Quoted and translated in J. T. Lionarons, "Napier Homily L" 420.

⁵⁸ Napier L, CCCC 421, p. 219; Napier, p. 273, lines 11-12. Quoted and translated in Lionarons,

Secundum Marcum, where the archbishop states that the time of the Antichrist is very close at hand. Lionarons' conclusion is worth quoting in full:

When he concludes with his usual reminder that no one can possibly say how evil the world will become at the end (*Nis se man on life, þe mæge oððe cunne swa yfel hit asecgan, swa hit sceal gewurðan on þam deoflican timan*), the line seems less conventional than heartfelt. [. . .] the aging Archbishop of Napier L is no longer the firebrand preacher of Bethurum homilies I-V. If the homily contains his hopes for the social reconstruction of England and the creation of a 'holy society' governed by the laws that he had written, it also expresses his unshakable conviction of that society's end. One wonders if, in writing Napier L, Wulfstan believed that he would live long enough to see either his societal hopes or his eschatological expectations fulfilled.⁵⁹

The Anonymous Homilies:

The anonymous Old English homilies contain graphic, often dramatically visual descriptions of the signs preceding Doomsday, which are unparalleled in Ælfric's or Wulfstan's work. One reason, as several critics have pointed out, is that the anonymous homilies are less critical in the selection of their source materials, often relying on apocryphal texts which were rejected by the more learned clergy:

Ælfric avoids much of the apocryphal literature (definitely objecting to some of it) and never produces any of those dramatic Last Judgment scenes which one finds in the Vercelli Codex and the Pseudo-Wulfstan homilies; Wulfstan also avoids using material of this kind.⁶⁰

Ælfric's view of doctrinally suspect material has already been discussed above. The Blickling and Vercelli collections contain a number of references to apocryphal material, such as the Visio

"Napier Homily L" 426.

⁵⁹ J. T. Lionarons, "Napier L" 428.

⁶⁰ Grant, ed. Three Homilies from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41-48.

Pauli (found in Blickling IV), the Gospel of Nicodemus and its Harrowing of Hell motif (e.g. Blickling VII), and the Apocalypse of Thomas (Blickling VII, Vercelli XV, et al.).⁶¹

In terms of tone, the anonymous homilies are mostly hortatory, not strictly exegetical; often they are to be counted among penitential texts. A noticeably large number of them deal with eschatological and apocalyptic themes (indeed, most, if not all of the Blickling homilies have eschatological overtones).

The Blickling Homilies:⁶²

The Blickling homiliary contains 18 items, arranged roughly in chronological order according to the church year. Gatch separates the early medieval homiliaries into two types:

one for use in the monastic offices, represented by the collections of Paul [the Deacon] and Alan of Farfa, and the other for use at the Sunday Mass, such as the lost (or at least unedited) collection of Alcuin. The Blickling Book seems clearly to belong to the latter category, about which virtually nothing is known.⁶³

The individual texts are much older than the manuscript, which dates from the late tenth century; some of them may possibly date back as far as the reign of King Alfred.⁶⁴ Gatch attempted to find out more about the type of audience that might have been the target group of

⁶¹ Since this thesis is not concerned with apocalyptic texts which contain a “revelatory journey” to heaven or hell, the *Visio Pauli*, the Gospel of Nicodemus and the Harrowing of Hell motif will not be discussed here. The Apocalypse of Thomas will briefly be discussed below.

⁶² For this section, see especially M. McC. Gatch, “Eschatology in the Anonymous Old English Homilies,” 117-65.

⁶³ M. McC. Gatch, “Eschatology” 123n18.

⁶⁴ M. McC. Gatch, “The Unknowable Audience of the Blickling Homilies” 17.

the Blickling collection. Unfortunately, he has to conclude that the themes and motifs discussed in the four texts he studies (IV, V, X, XI) are treated in such a general way that they apply to us today as much as they would have to an eighth-century audience, or an eleventh-century audience. There is no way to date a given homily by means of reference to contemporary events. He concludes that “we have to accept that the audience for the Blickling sermons is ‘unknowable’[. . .].”⁶⁵

In the following, Blickling X will be discussed in some detail. Homily XI has already been discussed briefly in chapter 1; Homily VII and its use of the Apocalypse of Thomas will be discussed below, together with the other homilies which make use of this material.

Blickling X:

In Blickling X, the homily for Rogation Wednesday (To þam gangdæge), the homilist addresses one of those mysterious audiences: he urges

ge weras ge wif, ge geonge ge ealde, ge snottre ge unwise, ge þa welegan ge þa þearfan, þæt anra gehwylc hine sylfne sceawige & ongyte, & swa hwæt swa he on mycclum gyltum oþþe on medmycclum gefremede, þæt he þonne hrædlice gecyrre to þam selran & to þon soþan læcedome [. . .].

both men and women, both young and old, both wise and unwise, both rich and poor, - everyone to behold and understand himself and, whatsoever he hath omitted in great sins or in venial ones, forthwith to turn to the better and to the true medicine [. . .].⁶⁶

⁶⁵ M. McC. Gatch, “Eschatology”, 99-115, here 115.

⁶⁶ Blickling X, lines 2-6; ed. and trans. Morris, EETS OS 58, 63, 73, p. 106-07.

Following this opening, the homilist reminds his audience of the terrible signs that must precede the end of the world. While the list is packed with Doomsday signs, it lacks in concrete details which could be linked to any contemporary event. In fact, the list is so general that we might equally well recognise the troubles of our own times in the passage:

Magon we þonne nu geseón & oncnawan & swiþe gearlice ongeotan þæt þisses middangeardes ende swiþe neah is, & manige frecnessa æteowde & manna wóhdæda ond wonessa swiþe gemonigfealdode; & we fram dæge to oþrum geaxiað ungecyndelico witu & ungecynelice deaþas geond þeodland to mannum cumene, & we oft ongytaþ þæt ariseþ þeod wiþ þeode, & ungelimplico gefeoht on wólicum dædum; & we gehyraþ oft secggan gelome worldrica manna deaþ þe heora lif mannum leof wære, & þuhte fæger & wlitig heora lif & wynsumlic; swa we eac geaxiað mislice adla on manegum stowum middangeardes, & hungras wexende. & manig yfel we geaxiaþ her on life gelómlician ond wæstmian, & nænig gód áwunigende & ealle worldlicu þing swiþe synlicu; & colaþ to swiþe seo lufu þe we to urum Hælande habban sceoldan, & þa godan weorc wé anforlætaþ þe we for ure saule hæle began sceoldan.

May we then now see and know and very readily understand that the end of this world is very nigh; and many calamities have appeared and men's crimes and woes are greatly multiplied; and we from day to day hear of monstrous plagues and strange deaths throughout the country, that have come upon men, and we often perceive that nation riseth against nation, and we see unfortunate wars caused by iniquitous deeds; and we hear very frequently of the death of men of rank whose life was dear to men, and whose life appeared fair and beautiful and pleasant; so we are also informed of various diseases in many places of the world, and of increasing famines. And many evils, we learn, are here in this life become general, and flourish, and no good is abiding here, and all worldly things are very sinful, and very greatly cooleth the love that we ought to have to our Lord; and those good works that we should observe for our soul's health, we forsake.⁶⁷

While the message is the same, the tone could not be more different from that of Wulfstan.

The archbishop's unique style and urgency called to mind the contemporary troubles directly (as

in the Sermo) or indirectly (as e.g. in several of the eschatological homilies and Napier L). The

Blickling homilist's words are surely meant to evoke the same reactions from his listeners: fear,

and an urgent need to amend their ways. And yet, the emotive quality of the words seems

different, almost as if the preacher's words are less heart-felt and more commonplace. This

⁶⁷ Blickling X, ed. and trans. R. Morris, p.107 line 13-p.109 line 5.

could, of course, be partly because the Blickling homilist's rhetorical style is less polished than that of Wulfstan, as it lacks Wulfstan's particular sense of rhythm (cf. Bethurum, *Homilies* 93).

The rest of Blickling X focuses on the transience of all worldly things and the need to adhere to Christian virtues. The homilist is pursuing a strategy that feels entirely different from that of Wulfstan: rather than repetitively driving home the message that the end is *very* close and that time is running out quickly (and enhancing the threat by frequent mentions of the Antichrist) or listing the people's sins in legalistic language, he focuses on the things that mankind can do in order to save their souls. The people are told to perform deeds of charity (lines 29-30), teach their children well (31), praise God (35), observe their baptismal promises (39), avoid being boastful, over-confident, or prone to malice (40ff.); they are told that they must make peace with God and humankind (50), believe in the Trinity and trust in the Church (52-55), and believe in the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the dead on Doomsday (56). This is, again, reminiscent of the penitential handbooks. Towards the end of the homily, the author returns to the misery that is happening in the world:

Nu is æghwonon hream & wóp, nu is héaf æghwonon, & sibbe tolesnes, nu is æghwonon yfel & slege, & æghwonon þes middangeard flyhþ from us mid mycelre biternesse, & we him fleondum fylgeaþ & hine feallendne fuliaþ. Hwæt we on þam gecnawan magon þæt þeos world is scyndende & heononweard. Uton we þonne þæs geþencan, þa hwile þe we magon moton, þæt we us georne to gode þydon.

Now there is lamentation and weeping on all sides; now is mourning everywhere, and breach of peace; now is everywhere evil, and slaughter; and everywhere this world fleeth from us with great bitterness, and we follow it, and it flies from us, and love it although it is passing away. Lo! we may hereby perceive that this world is illusory and transitory. Let us then be mindful of this the while we may, so that we may diligently press on to what is good;⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Blickling X, ed. and trans. Morris, p.115 lines 15-21.

Again, it is impossible to pinpoint what exactly the author is referring to. The text is as elusive as the homiletic ending of the Seafarer.⁶⁹

Uton wē hycgan hwær wē hām āgen
 and þonne geþencan hū wē þider cumen,
 and wē þonne ēac tilien þæt wē to mōten
 in þā ēcan ēadignesse,
 þær is lif gelong in lufan Dryhtnes,
 hyht in heofonum. Þæs sý þām Hālgan þonc
 þæt Hē ūsic geweorþade, wuldres Ealdor,
 ēce Dryhten, in ealle tīd.

Amen.

Let us think where we have our real home,
 And then consider how we may come thither;
 And let us labour also, so that we
 May pass into eternal blessedness,
 Where life belongs amid the love of God,
 Hope in the heavens. The Holy One be thanked
 That He has raised us up, the Prince of Glory,
 Lord without end, to all eternity.

Amen.⁷⁰

Wulfstan's work, on the other hand appears much more concrete and tangible because it is rooted in its time; Ælfric's homilies "feel" different, too, because they are more rooted in exegesis and the teachings of the Fathers. This is not to say that the homilist of Blickling X is less serious, or less urgent in his teaching that the audience must amend their ways. It only shows that this particular preacher pursued a strategy which was entirely different from that of Wulfstan or Ælfric; yet their goal was ultimately the same: to provide moral and theological

⁶⁹ Blickling XI feels more urgent than Blickling X, too, due to its insistence that the end is very close (even though nobody can know how close exactly), and its reference to the current year of 971. Added to that is the sense of urgency due to the fact that five of the six signs preceding the end have already come to pass – and that the sixth sign (the appearance of the Antichrist) is not far off. Blickling XI's strategy of creating a sense of urgency has already been discussed above in chapter 1.

⁷⁰ The Seafarer lines 117-25. R. Hamer, ed. and trans., A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse 194-95.

instruction for their respective audiences and to move them to repentance before the coming of the end.

Augustine had stated that the world is being judged at every given moment:

Ideo autem, cum diem iudicii Dei dicimus, addimus ultimum uel nouissimum, quia et nunc iudiciat et ab humani generis initio iudicauit [. . .].

And so, when we say 'the day of God's judgement' we add 'final' or 'last', because God may also be judging now, and from the beginning of the human race he has been judging [. . .].⁷¹

It is therefore necessary, the homilists tell their audiences, to adhere to Christian virtues at each given moment of life, for nobody knows when the Lord will come:

forþon us is mycel ðearf þæt we simle teolian on ælce tid þæt we sýn gearwe, þonne ure Drihten ure hwylces neosian wille

wherefore it is very needful for us ever to strive at all times to be prepared, when our Lord will visit each of us.⁷²

Trask observes: "one can cram a lot of good life into these few lingering [moments] of earthly life!", and this is exactly what the message of Blickling homily X is. Its focus is not so much on the troubles that must happen before the end of the world.

In the same way, The Seafarer encourages men to do good deeds before one's death, because this ensures not only a lasting reputation among the living, but also a place in heaven for the deceased:

For þon biþ eorla gehwām æftercweþendra
 lof lifgendra lāstworda betst,
 þæt hē gewyrce, ær hē onweg scyle,
 fremum on foldan wið fēonda niþ
 dēorum dædum dēofle tōgēanes,
 þæt hine ealda bearn æfter hergen

⁷¹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20,1, CCSL 48, p.699; Text quoted by R. M. Trask, "Looking Forward to Doomsday: An Old English Pastime." 4, translation mine.

⁷² Blickling XI, ed. and trans. R. Morris, p. 124 lines 10-11.

and his lof siþþan lifge mid englum
 awa tō ealdre, ēcan lifes blæd
 drēam mid dugeþum.

Therefore for every warrior the best
 Memorial is the praise of living men
 After his death, that ere he must depart
 He shall by means of good deeds on earth against
 The malice of his foes, and by noble works
 Against the devil bring it about that the sons of men
 May after praise him, and his glory live
 For ever with the angels in the splendour
 Of lasting life, in bliss among those hosts.⁷³

The underlying message of the Blickling Homiliary is one of hope that there is enough time to amend one's ways. Marcia A. Dalbey claims that this is typical of the entire Blickling homiliary: "the most striking characteristic of the hortatory passages in the Blickling collection as a whole is their almost universal tone of benevolence."⁷⁴ Ingrid Ranum adds that

since the homilies were likely composed by several different authors, this observation is even more striking. It appears that these homilies must have been carefully selected to match each other in tone and mood by a compiler who valued encouraging the congregation with compassion over terrifying them with brimstone.⁷⁵

The Vercelli Book:⁷⁶

The Vercelli collection itself is roughly contemporary with the Blickling Book.

Speaking in very general terms, both compilers "valued encouraging the congregation with

⁷³ Seafarer lines 72-80, R. Hamer 190-92, translation mine, based on R. Hamer's.

⁷⁴ M. A. Dalbey, "Hortatory Tone in the Blickling Homilies: Two Adaptations of Caesarius," 642.

⁷⁵ I. Ranum, "Blickling Homily X and the Millennial Apocalyptic Vision" 45.

⁷⁶ The Vercelli Book, Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, CXVII (Ker 394), is known as A.

compassion over terrifying them with brimstone" (see above): on the one hand, the Vercelli Book's descriptions of the tortures of hell are more extensive than those of the Blickling Book, and they generally outnumber the references to the joys of heaven.⁷⁷ However, the latter are usually found at the close of the homilies, thereby reinforcing the positive message of hope rather than a terrifying image of damnation.⁷⁸ However, upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that the compilers followed vastly different strategies for achieving their common goal of leading their audiences to repentance.

The most obvious difference between the Blickling and Vercelli codices is in their immediate purpose: the Blickling Book was clearly intended as a homiliary. The Vercelli Book, however, was never intended as a homiliary, despite the fact that all its contents are religious. It does not offer a systematic cycle of homilies for the church year, and the homilies are interspersed with poetry. The manuscript seems to have been composed to serve as devotional reading material, possibly for a mixed lay audience (as suggested by Förster), or for nuns.⁷⁹ The manuscript was written "piecemeal" by a single, non-Latinate scribe who probably had to wait for considerable periods of time until texts became available to him for copying (Sisam 37). At first sight, the mixture of poetry and prose seems to be in random order. However, Ó Carragáin argues that we can discern distinct groups of texts within the manuscript.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Cf. also M. McC. Gatch, "Eschatology", 157-58.

⁷⁸ In the wider context of penitential literature, either ending would, in theory, be possible.

⁷⁹ C. Sisam, ed. *The Vercelli Book*, 44, 44n2; the reference is to M. Förster, *Die Vercelli Homilien I-VIII*, 144n37. See also D. Scragg on "The Compilation of the Vercelli Book" 189-207.

⁸⁰ É. Ó Carragáin, "How did the Vercelli Collector Interpret the *Dream of the Rood*" 63-104.

Vercelli II and XXI:

Homily II exists in A as “an exhortatory homily of the simplest kind” (D. Scragg, Vercelli Homilies 50). Lines 1-107 are also found in homily XXI; lines 1-66 are found in Napier XL, where they are expanded in the style of Wulfstan, with excerpts from Wulfstan’s own texts. The version of Napier XL found in CCCC 419 and 421 (“N”) is here referred to as the “long version” of Homily II, or II(N).⁸¹

The version of II that is found in A can indeed be described as a simple, stereotypical Doomsday homily which uses eschatological material to move its audience to repentance. The text does not have a heading in the manuscript. The title De die iudicij is found only in II(N), not in the shorter version of the homily. The text of the untitled homily opens with a list of Doomsday signs (lines 1-36). Lines 36-51 form what is probably the most impressive passage of the homily, due to the long list of nominal phrases. It is followed by a brief transitional passage on the despair of the sinful (51-55) and the omnipresence of death in this sinful world (56-58) is followed by an exhortation to repentance and the avoidance of sin (69-113). As is common in such hortatory homilies, the text concludes with a brief vision of heaven (113-118). What is remarkable is the dark tone of the homily: after 113 lines of doom, despair, and exhortation, the homilist ends with a mere six lines of hope for those who repent. Quoting even a part of the homily will show its powerful style:

⁸¹ CCCC 419 and 421 are N. R. Ker’s items 68 and 69, dating from the eleventh century. A version of II(N), as recorded in Napier XL, is found in CCCC 201 (Ker, Catalogue 49); this manuscript will be discussed below in some detail in the context of penitential literature.

On þam dæge us bið æteowed /
 se opena heofon 7 engla þrym
 7 eallwihtna hryre 7 eorþan forwyrht,

 treowleasra gewinn 7 tungla gefeall, /
 þunorrada cyrm 7 se þystra storm,
 7 þæra liga blæstm 7 graniendra gesceaft

 7 þæra gasta gefeoht
 7 sio grimme gesyhð 7 þa godcundan miht
 7 se hata scur 7 hellwarena dream,
 7 þara bymena sang,
 7 se brada bryne 7 se bitera dæg
 7 þara sawla gedal
 7 se deaðberenda draca 7 diofla forwyrð

 7 se nearwa seap 7 se swearta deap
 7 se byrnenda grund 7 se blodiga stream
 7 mycel fionda fyrhto 7 se fyrena ren
 7 hæðenra granung 7 hira heriga fyll,

 heofonwarena mengo 7 hiora hlafordes miht,

 7 þæt mycle gemot
 7 sio reðe rod 7 se rihta dom
 7 þara feonda gestal
 7 þa blacan ondwlitan 7 bifiendan word,

 7 þara folca wop
 ond se scamienda here 7 se synniga heap
 7 sio forglendrede hell
 7 þara wyrma gryre.

On that Day we will be shown
 the open heaven and the host of angels,
 and the ruin of all creatures and the destruction of
 the earth
 the battle of the faithless and the fall of stars,
 the clamour of thunder and the storm of darkness,
 the blast of the flames, and a universe of groaning
 ones,
 and the battle of spirits,
 and the fierce sight, and the power of God,
 and the shower of heat, and the joy of hell-dwellers,
 and the song of the trumpets,
 and the expansive burning, and the bitter day,
 and the separation of souls,
 and the death-bearing dragon, and the destruction
 of devils,
 and the narrow pit, and the dark death,
 and the burning ground, and the bloody stream
 and great fear of the fiends, and the rain of fire,
 and the lamentation of the heathen, and the fall of
 their shrines,
 the multitude of heaven dwellers, and the might of
 their Lord,

 and the great assembly
 and the stern Cross, and the just judgement,
 and the accusation of fiends,
 and the faces pale with fear, and the trembling
 word,

 and the weeping of peoples,
 the shameful ones' army and the troop of sinners,
 and the destructive hell,
 and the ferocity of snakes.⁸²

This homily lacks the subtlety and ambiguity employed by Wulfstan; instead, it bombards its audience with an excessive list of signs to paint a dramatic picture of the terrors of Judgement Day. The nominal phrases, the repetitive listing of “and ... and ... and ...”, as well as the vivid imagery must have had a powerful effect on the audience. The signs of fire, falling stars, the sound of the trumpet, the bloody stream, and the final battle can be found in Scriptural texts such as the Little Apocalypse and the Book of Revelation. The appearance of the Cross can be

⁸² Vercelli II, ed. D. Scragg, EETS OS 300, p. 56-58; translation mine, based on that of G. D. Caie, *Judgment Day Theme* 246-47.

traced to the apocryphal Apocalypse of Thomas. The imagery is thus mostly conventional, with only a few unusual additions such as the destruction of heathen shrines. As in the Blickling homilies, the signs are so general that we cannot infer any reference to contemporary events. *Scamienda here* is very likely simply an allusion to the Biblical references of warfare as one of the signs of the end-times, rather than any concrete hint at the Viking raids.

Vercelli XXI is a composite homily, assembled mostly by means of “cutting and pasting” material from Latin and English sources. “All but a few sentences are taken from material which has survived elsewhere”, as Scragg states (Vercelli Book 347).⁸³ Homily XXI, too, mentions the Antichrist but, again, the homilist is unaware of the legend connected with him. The Antichrist exists only as a name – yet another monstrous sign to be fulfilled before the coming of the end. As in Blickling X, the tone in the first half of Vercelli XXI is encouraging, focusing on suggesting ways of saving one’s soul by repenting and performing acts of charity, as well as by fasting. The second half of Vercelli XXI consists of a large portion of text taken from the version of Vercelli II found in A.⁸⁴ Despite this long passage of Doomsday signs, the text – as one would expect – ends with a vision of heaven and a promise of salvation.

⁸³ Among the sources and analogues are the St. Père homiliary, An Exhortation to Christian Living, and Napier XXX.

⁸⁴ None of the other versions of Homily II are as close to XXI as the version found in A. Cf. D. Scragg, Vercelli Book 348-49.

The Appearance of the Cross on Doomsday:

One of the prominent signs of Doomsday is the appearance of the Cross. This motif exists in a number of texts, both learned and populist – although in different context and thus different levels of orthodoxy: the best-known motif is the appearance of a blood-red Cross amidst the clouds; other examples mention Christ as showing the Cross to mankind as a sign of victory, or the Cross as emitting light.

Excursus: The Apocalypse of Thomas:

The Apocalypse of Thomas was immensely popular in the Middle Ages, as is evident from the vast number of extant manuscripts of it. Essentially, it claims to be a letter from Christ to his apostle concerning the signs of the last seven days, with Judgement Day occurring on the eighth day. Some of the manuscripts contain a lengthy historical section which contains cryptic references to events of the fifth century. This section has generally been regarded as an interpolation.⁸⁵ In addition, there exist versions which only contain the list of signs. This extreme complexity of the Latin textual tradition attests to the popularity of the Apocalypse of Thomas. The exact relation of the Latin manuscripts to each other continues to be a mystery. The Latin versions often occur in manuscripts which also contain computistical material, thus

⁸⁵ Cf. C. D. Wright, "The Apocalypse of Thomas": Some New Latin Texts and their Significance for the Old English Versions, 27-64, esp. 27-28; M. Förster, "A New Version of the Apocalypse of Thomas in Old English," 6-36; M. Swan, "The Apocalypse of Thomas in Old English"; see also Hennecke/Schneemelcher (1968/89) II:675-79.

emphasising a general interest in the tenth century in calculating time, the age of the world, and possibly the time left before Doomsday.⁸⁶

The relation of the Latin versions to Old English literature has been discussed by Förster, Swan, and, most recently, Wright. The influence of the Apocalypse of Thomas can be found in the following Old English homilies: Blickling VII, Vercelli XV, CCCC 41, and Bazire-Cross 3 (found in CCCC 162 and BL, Hatton 116). These versions show sufficient differences to allow us to conclude that they cannot have been based on each other, and no immediate Latin source manuscript for any of the Old English versions has been discovered to date.⁸⁷

Vercelli XV and CCCC 41 identify the days by their names, sometimes also numbering them. The Vercelli homilist fits the signs into seven days, making Judgement Day appear on Sunday. He omits the signs of the fifth day. The Blickling homilist crams the signs into six days, with Judgement Day occurring on Sunday (the seventh day). The homilist of CCCC 41 begins his list on Sunday rather than Monday, retains all seven days, and makes Judgement Day happen on the following Sunday. Bazire-Cross 3 makes both the signs of the seventh day and Judgement Day happen on the Sunday.

Vercelli XV (line 92ff.) makes reference to a blood-red Cross appearing between the clouds of the sky. In Vercelli II (line 7-8) and XXI (line 165-66), this sign is simply incorporated in the long list of nominal phrases;⁸⁸ in Homily XV, it is assigned to the third day.

⁸⁶ Cf. C. D. Wright, "New Latin Texts" for details.

⁸⁷ For the following paragraph, see the table in C. D. Wright, "New Latin Texts" 42.

⁸⁸ This seems to be the only motif in these homilies that can ultimately be traced back to the Apocalypse of Thomas. Vercelli II and XXI do not assign specific days to the Doomsday signs.

Unlike the Apocalypse of Thomas and Blickling VII, neither Vercelli II, nor Vercelli XXI assigns specific days of the week to the Doomsday signs.

Bazire-Cross 3 is a Rogationtide homily, probably “composed by a man of some knowledge, but for a less learned audience.” The style of this homily is reminiscent of Vercelli II, in so far as “within the descriptive passage [of the terrors of Doomsday and the sensual delights of the Heavenly City] mental images accumulate and words are used to excess.”⁸⁹ The homily does not mention the sign of a blood-red Cross in the sky. However, it does mention Christ showing the Cross to mankind, and *þær scineð leobt ofer ealne middanerd* (and light shines over all of middle earth).⁹⁰ As has been pointed out by Bazire and Cross, a similar motif also occurs in Fadda Homily I.277-78: *ond þonne for ðære rode beorhtnesse bið eall ðes middangeard aþyostrad* (and then, because of the brightness of the Cross will all of middle earth be illuminated).⁹¹

⁸⁹ Bazire-Cross page 41.

⁹⁰ Bazire-Cross Homily 3, lines 89-90.

⁹¹ A. M. L. Fadda, ed., *Nuove Omelie anglosassoni della rinascenza benedettina*, *Filologia germanica*, p. 27. This and the following references are cited by J. Bazire and J. E. Cross, page 46n16: Pseudo-Augustine *Sermo* 251 (PL 39,2210) and Pseudo-Ambrose *Sermo* 24 (PL 17,673) *in cuius lumine tenebrabitur totus mundus*, and W. H. Hulme, “The Old English Gospel of Nicodemus,” *Modern Philology* 1 (1903-04) 612 and *hio* [the Cross] *lyhteð ofer ealne þisne middangeard*, as well as Cynewulf’s *Christ II*, 1087-89. Cf. also Ælfric’s excerpts from Julian of Toledo’s *Prognosticon exercitus denique angelorum et archangelorum precedent eum, illud triumphale vexillum miro fulgore coruscans preferentes* (ed. M. McC. Gatch, *Preaching* 140), Pseudo-Augustine *Sermo* 155,§10 (PL 39,2051). The last two references state that the Cross outshines the sun (cf. Mt, 24:29). Further variations on the theme of Christ showing the Cross to mankind on Doomsday are found in Ælfric’s *Supplementary Collection* 11, 290-91 and Bethurum II.65-69, but in neither the Cross appears in the sky, nor does it emit light. Cf. R. DiNapoli’s *Index of Theme and Image* 29. The Cross appearing in the sky and emitting (or being made of) light also appears in Constantine’s vision (cf. Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine* I:28) which seems to be the ultimate source for the idea of the Cross as a victory symbol. Cf. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, p. 81.

The Importance of the Cross in the Vercelli Book:

The Cross as both Doomsday sign and devotional object is a recurrent motif in the Vercelli Book. Aside from the brief references to the appearance of a blood-red cross in the sky as part of the list of Doomsday signs (Vercelli II, XV, XXI), the Cross also features prominently in Elene, Andreas, and, of course, The Dream of the Rood. In the following, these texts will be discussed in some detail.

Part of The Dream of the Rood is also found inscribed in runes on the Ruthwell Cross, a monumental sculpted stone cross in Dumfriesshire. It dates from c. 730, but certainly cannot be earlier than 685, when Carlisle fell to the Northumbrians.⁹² The inscriptions on the front and back (North and South) sides of the Cross are in Latin and mainly in Roman letters; those on the East and West sides are in Old English and in runes only. All the inscriptions are carved into the frames around the edges of the panels and all the preserved inscriptions completely fill their panel-frames. The panels on the East and West sides contain inhabited foliage, whereas the ones on the North and South sides contain figures. The surviving runes are found on the lower East and West panels (E1 and W1). It is therefore possible to see how much text has been lost from the lower parts of the panel frames, where the inscriptions have been worn away,

⁹² Cf. J. Hawkes and J. McKinnell, "Ruthwell Cross," 622-29; J. McKinnell, R. Simek, and K. Düwel, Runes, Magic and Religion, 107-10; D. Mac Lean, "The Date of the Ruthwell Cross," The Ruthwell Cross: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, ed. B. Cassidy 49-70. Cf. also M. Swanton's "Introduction" to his edition of the Dream of the Rood.

presumably by animals rubbing against the cross during the centuries when it stood in Ruthwell churchyard.⁹³

East face:

Ruthwell Cross

Vercelli text, lines 39-48

Ondgeredæ hinæ god almehtig	39a-b	Ongyrede Hine þa geong hæleð þæt wæs God ælmihtig
þa he wolde on galgu gistiga,	40	strang and stiðmod; gestah He on gealgan heanne,
modig fore menn. Bug[a ic ni dorstæ]	41b, 40b	modig on manigra gesyhðe, þa He wolde mancyn lysan.
hwæðre bugan to eorðan	41a, 42b	Bifode ic þa me se beorn ymbclypte; ne dorste ic
		feallan to foldean sceatum, ac ic sceolde fæste standan.
Rod wæs ic arærid,] ahof ic ricnæ kyninc,	[44a,] 44b	Rod wæs ic aræred; ahof ic ricne Cyning.
heafunæs hlafard, hælda ic ni dorstæ.	45a-b	heofona Hlaford, hyldan me ne dorste.
þa dolg gesiene,		Þurhdrifan hi me mid deorcan næglum, on me syndon
sceððan.		opene indwidhlemmas. Ne dorste ic hira ænigum
Bismærædu unket ba ætgædre,	48a	Bysmeredon hie unc butu ætgædere.
ic wæs miþ blodi bistemid	48b	Eall ic wæs mid blode bestemed,
bigotæn [of guma sida hæfdæ gast onsendid.]	49a[-b]	begoten of þæs guman sidan siððan He hæfde His
gast onsended.		

Translation of the Vercelli text⁹⁴

Then the young hero (who was God Almighty)
 Got ready, resolute and strong in heart.
 He climbed onto the lofty gallows-tree
 Bold in the sight of many watching men,
 When He intended to redeem mankind.
 I trembled as the warrior embraced me.
 But still I dared not bend down to the earth,
 Fall to the ground. Upright I had to stand.
 A rood I was raised up; and I held high
 The noble King, the Lord of heaven above.
 I dared not stoop. They pierced me with dark nails;
 The scars can still be clearly seen on me,

⁹³ The reconstructed transcription of the Ruthwell text follows J. McKinnell, Runes 628. The square brackets indicate text which is not now legible on the cross, but would fit into the spaces available in the lower parts of the East and West frames

⁹⁴ Based on Hamer 163.

The open wounds of malice. I did not dare
 To harm any of them. They reviled us both together.
 I was made wet all over with the blood
 Which had poured out from the Man's side, after He had
 Sent forth His spirit.

West face:

Ruthwell Cross

Vercelli text lines 56b-64

	crīst wæs on rodi	56b		Crist wæs on rode.
Hwæþre þer fuse	fearran kwomu,	57a-b	Hwæþere þær fuse	feorran cwoman
æþþilæ til anum	ic þæt al biheald.		58a-b	to þam æðelinge; ic þæt eall beheold.
Sare ic wæs miþ sorgum gidræfid		59a	Sare ic wæs mid sorgum gedrefed,	
Hnæg [ic] þam secgum to handa.		59b	hnæg ic hwæðre þam secgum to handa	
			eaðmod elne mycle.	Genamon hie þær ælmihtigne God,
Ic wæs] miþ strelum giwundad.		62b	ahofon Hin of ðam heftan wite,	forleton me þa hilderincas
forwundod.			standan steame bedrifenne;	eall ic wæs mid strælum
Ælegdun hiæ hinæ limwærignæ,		63a	Aledon Hine ðær limwerigne,	
Gistoddun him bi his licæs hæfdum,		63b	gestodon Him æt His lices heafdum,	
Bihealdun hiæ þe[r heafunæs Dryctin,		64a	beheoldon hie ðær heofones Dryhten,	
ond He hinæ þer hwilæ restæ.]		64b	and He Hine ðær hwile he reste	

Translation of the Vercelli text⁹⁵

Christ was on the cross.
 And yet men came from afar,
 hastening to the Prince. I watched it all.
 With sorrows I was grievously oppressed,
 Yet I bent to those men's hands,
 Very humbly. They took up there Almighty God,
 And from the heavy torment lifted Him.
 The soldiers then left me standing drenched with moisture,
 I was wounded all over with the metal points.
 They laid Him down limb-weary; then they stood
 Beside his corpse's head, there they beheld
 The Lord of heaven, and He rested there for a while

It looks as if the two passages on the Ruthwell Cross are part of what was already a longer poem. This is supported by the fact that the excerpt found on the West face begins with the second half of a line that has no corresponding first half line. Old English poetry never begins

⁹⁵ Based on Hamer 165.

with the second half of a line, so we can conclude that this cannot have been the beginning of an older, independent version of the poem. The smaller panels on the upper sides (E2 and W2) certainly contained runes as well, but these are now illegible. The only phrase that is legible is found at the end (bottom right) of E2. It reads ...*dægisgæf*. This could be the remains of [*wæp*]de *gisgæf*[t] (cf. line 55b of the Vercelli text *weop eall gescaft*). If this is the case, the upper panels W2 and E2 would have contained a further two lines each of the poem – the lines which fall in between the two quotations given above. In the Vercelli text, these lines emphasise the cosmic signs which occurred at the death of Christ, especially the darkness covering the sky. However, E2 would still not have provided the first half of the line whose second half begins W1.⁹⁶

The Ruthwell Cross excerpts lack some of the more obviously apocalyptic themes which are found in the Vercelli text. Neither the signs which occurred at the death of Christ and will again occur at Doomsday (e.g. the earthquake mentioned in lines 35-37a), nor the darkness (lines 52b-55a), or the reference to Christ's Second Coming (lines 103b-109) are quoted on the Ruthwell Cross. The passages that do exist are fitting the object on which they are inscribed: as a stone object, the Ruthwell Cross is a silent witness commemorating the crucifixion. Yet the runes inscribed on it are more than simply decoration. Lines offering an objective description of the crucifixion are interspersed with a deeply personal account of the event by the Cross itself, an account in which the Cross is identified with Christ. The Ruthwell Cross thus

⁹⁶ It looks as if each face of the cross was designed to be read from bottom to top, so E2 would have come after E1 but before W1 (J. Hawkes and J. McKinnell 629).

becomes a meta-text, a stone cross bearing a moving poem about the crucifixion narrated by the 'original' Cross of the crucifixion.

While ultimately the Vercelli text is more relevant for the purpose of this thesis, the existence of part of the poem on the Ruthwell Cross shows that the cult of the Cross was not only a tenth-century preoccupation. In the Vercelli text, the Cross fulfils a number of complex roles: it is reminiscent of the Doomsday sign found in the Apocalypse of Thomas when it first appears in the sky, frightening the dreamer (lines 4-6);⁹⁷ it recounts its past as a tree that is cut down in order to be turned into an object of torture (lines 28ff); it is identified with Christ when it starts to bleed and is buried after the crucifixion; it becomes an object of victory when it is covered in gold and gems after being recovered from its grave;⁹⁸ and it is an instrument of salvation when it is venerated by the dreamer who not only hopes for spiritual salvation but, in fact, longs to be transported to heaven by the Cross at the moment of his death.

Of these roles, two are worthy of more detailed discussion: the Cross as a substitute for the person of Christ and the Cross as object of veneration and instrument of salvation. In lines 14-23, the dreamer states that the Cross starts bleeding from its right side. It is alternately covered in blood and gems. Swanton observes that trees were believed to have bled at the

⁹⁷ For the depiction of a Cross in the sky cf. also the mosaics at Ravenna, e.g. at Galla Placidia Mausoleum (fifth century) and the basilica of San Apollinare in Classe (sixth century). Cf. *Ravenna, Capital of Mosaic*, ed. G. Bustacchini 15, 147.

⁹⁸ This shows that the poet had some awareness of the traditional legend of the finding of the True Cross by Constantine's mother Helena on a visit to the Holy Land in 326. In 701, Pope Sergius I discovered a jewelled reliquary containing a fragment of the True Cross. Ceolfrið of Wearmouth-Jarrow was at Rome the same year and thus might have witnessed the celebrations (cf. Bede, *De temporum ratione* ch. 47); King Alfred is said to have received Cross relics from Pope Marinus in 885 (*Chronicon Æthelwardi*, ed. A. Campbell 46). Cf. M. Swanton 48.

crucifixion and that a similar sign would herald Doomsday. Thus, the audience would probably at once have recognised both the identification of the Cross with Christ and the reference to Doomsday (Swanton 64-65). The mosaic in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (sixth century) depicts the Cross in the sky,⁹⁹ and the mosaic in St. Apollinare in Classe contains a small portrait of Christ in the centre of the Cross, evidencing the long tradition of identifying the Cross with Christ (Ravenna 147). A further mosaic, in the Arian baptistry at Ravenna, shows the Cross covered in gems and purple draperies and resting on a purple cushion as it is surrounded by the Apostles (Ravenna 98). In this mosaic the Cross is a substitute for Christ who is not explicitly depicted at all. The Cross in the sky (surrounded by sun and moon) is also seen on the Lindisfarne headstone in a particularly interesting context: the opposite face of the stone shows a Viking army. Presumably the sculptor directly associated the Viking raids with the coming of the apocalypse. This would be the only Anglo-Saxon reference to the Viking attacks in a clearly apocalyptic context, rather than a penitential context such as the one we find in the Sermo Lupi. The carving on the Lindisfarne headstone is usually dated to shortly after the first Viking attack on Lindisfarne in 793 and it must date from before the abandonment of Lindisfarne by the Community of St. Cuthbert in 876.

A distorted version of two lines of the Dream of the Rood is also found on the Brussels Cross, also known as Drahmál's Cross, which is a liturgical object connected by Holloway with the *Adoratio Crucis* liturgy of Good Friday, details of which are mentioned in the Regularis

⁹⁹ The frequent references to the Cross being covered in gold and precious stones are again reminiscent of the vision of Constantine (cf. above, p. 34 and Elene 88-96).

Concordia (written c. 965 by bishop Æthelwold) and in the Book of Cerne (ninth century).¹⁰⁰

Drahmal's Cross is a processional cross which probably served as a reliquary for a portion of the True Cross. It dates from the tenth or eleventh century. The inscription is as follows:

Agnvs Dī
 Drahmal me worhte
 Rod is min nama geo ic ricne cyning
 Bær byfigynde blode bestemed

Lamb of God
 Drahmal made me
 Cross is my name. Once, trembling and drenched with blood, I bore the mighty King.¹⁰¹

The Good Friday ceremony of the *Adoratio Crucis* as described in the Regularis Concordia involved the adults singing in Greek and the *pueri* in Latin. The verses included the Pange Lingua by Venantius Fortunatus (bishop of Poitiers, died c. 606).¹⁰² The prayers contain pleas for forgiveness rather than condemnation at Judgement Day, and for a spirit of true repentance (*ueram paenitentiam*) and good perseverance (*bonam perseuerantiam*).¹⁰³ The Regularis Concordia specifies that the Cross is to be placed in a symbolic sepulchre after the veneration and guarded there until Easter Sunday. This is to be done “for the strengthening of unlearned common person and neophytes” (*ad fidem indocti uulgi ac neophytorum corroborandam*, Regularis Concordia ch. 46).

¹⁰⁰ J. B. Holloway, “The Dream of the Rood and Liturgical Drama,” 24-42. The Harrowing of Hell “play” found in the Book of Cerne may be eighth century, however. Cf. D. N. Dumville, “Liturgical Drama and Panegyric Responsory.”

¹⁰¹ Cf. E. Okasha, Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions 57-58. Cf. Dream of the Rood lines 44, 48.

¹⁰² The Regularis Concordia mentions the Pange Lingua explicitly. It does not specifically mention the Vexilla Regis, which contains thematic echoes of the Cross as tree of light.

¹⁰³ Regularis Concordia, ed. and trans. Dom Th. Symons, ch. 44-47, pp. 42-46.

In lines 103ff. of the Vercelli text, the Cross gives an account of how the Lord will seek mankind on Doomsday. It instructs the dreamer that he need not be fearful of the Judgement if he prepares for it by venerating the Cross:

ac ðurh ða rode sceal rice gesecan
of eorðwege æghwylc sawl,
seo þe mid Wealdende wunian þenceð.

Through the cross each soul
Must seek the kingdom from this earth,
Who with the Ruler thinks to dwell.¹⁰⁴

In the very next line, the point of view shifts back from the Cross to the dreamer who [*g*]ebæd [*. . .*] to þan beame bliðe mode (“prayed to the cross with joyous heart”). It cannot be proven whether this section of the text was already part of the poem in the eighth century. Huppé suggested, however, that the whole poem is a unified work.¹⁰⁵

However, the fact that we have three references to the Dream of the Rood shows that interest in the text continued to exist for about 250-300 years – a remarkably long period of time – and that the text was probably used in contexts of both public ceremony and private devotional reading throughout this period. The dreamer (and through him, the audience) is made aware of his own wounds of sin, and is *breowcearig*, “fiercely troubled” (line 25). In witnessing the transformation of the Cross from tree to instrument of torture to symbol of victory, the dreamer/audience come to understand that the Lord

us onlyside ond us lif forgeaf,
heofonlicne ham. Hiht wæs geniwad
mid bledum ond mid blisse

¹⁰⁴ Lines 119-21, trans. based on Hamer 169.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. B. Huppé, Web of Words 64-112.

redeemed us, and gave us life,
 a heavenly home. Hope was renewed
 with dignity and with joy¹⁰⁶

By cleverly leading the audience to identify with the dreamer, who then identifies with the Cross, the poet creates a powerful, awe-inspiring experience for the audience. To the devout reader of the Vercelli Book, the thematic echo of the Cross as sign of Doomsday and the “just judgement” in the Dream, and in Homilies II and XXI would have been obvious. This would most likely further have inspired a mood of repentance in the audience.¹⁰⁷

Because a considerable part of the poem is told as a dream vision and the text ends with the dreamer longing to be transported to heaven by the Cross, the text as a whole has a largely meditative and almost otherworldly feel to it. The dreamer expects the Cross to appear at the time of his death and to transport him from this transitory life to his new, eternal home. É. Ó Carragáin notices this and states that this role was usually reserved for angels; however, the Cross may be called “angel of the Lord” (*engel dryhtnes*) at the beginning of the poem (Ó Carragáin 73-74). Ó Carragáin suggests that there is a further thematic link between Soul and Body I, Homiletic Fragment I and the Dream of the Rood, and that the three texts were intended by the compiler to serve as a group (Ó Carragáin 87ff). All three deal with themes of “messengers” and “messages”, and the theme of time and the possibility of repentance. Soul and

¹⁰⁶ Lines 147-49.

¹⁰⁷ This is the case especially if we consider the physical makeup of the manuscript compilation: it must originally have consisted of three separate booklets. The references to the Cross are found in all three booklets: Homily II is part of the booklet A, The Dream of the Rood and Homily XXI are in booklet B (the latter being the last item of the booklet), and Elene is found in booklet C. Cf. É. Ó Carragáin 63-70.

Body I presents two possible outcomes for the soul after death, and paints a frightening picture of a time

between death and Judgement Day when conversion and choice will no longer be possible, when the reader will be frozen for eternity in the destiny that his deeds on earth have shaped for him.¹⁰⁸

The people in Homiletic Fragment I still have the option to repent, and the Dream of the Rood completes the cycle: repentance, presented as a freedom to choose between good and evil in Soul and Body, and as a possible means to achieve salvation, is actually achieved in the Dream. Thus the sequence of poems, if read together, presents the reader with a realised vision of salvation. This, too, explains the Dream's otherworldly feel in the context of the Vercelli Book. Holloway argues that the Ruthwell Cross is to be seen in the context of converting heathens by using their pagan runes to urge them to abandon their wrong beliefs (cf. Holloway 26). However, runes continued to be used by the Northumbrian church for a long time.¹⁰⁹

Further thematic links can be established between the Dream of the Rood and other poetic texts in the Vercelli Book: the Cross as an object of devotion and conversion also features in Elene, which gives Constantine's vision of the Cross as well as Helen's discovery of the true cross. The physical description of the Cross covered in gold and gems would not have gone unnoticed by the audience of Elene. A further connection is the fact that Andreas, Elene, and Fates of the Apostles (which is often seen as an epilogue to Andreas) all deal with the theme of conversion. St. Andrew was, according to the legend, a devout follower of the cult of the cross

¹⁰⁸ Ó Carragáin 89.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. R. I. Page, An Introduction to English Runes, 29 suggests that some Northumbrian inscriptions could be as late as the eleventh century, and gives a list of inscriptions of various dates.

– and although the Vercelli poem omits this, a reference is found in the Book of Cerne, which gives Andrew's prayer (see J. B. Holloway 34). The poetry and homilies of the Vercelli Book, then, have an obvious unifying penitential theme (indeed, Vercelli XI and XII explicitly refer to rituals of penance connected with Rogationtide). The compiler obviously selected his texts with great care, consciously choosing homilies and poetry which contain a great deal of apocalyptic, eschatological and penitential themes and imagery. These texts he deemed fit as devotional reading for an audience which was to be moved into repentance and/or conversion.

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 201:

Manuscript Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201 is a complex mid-eleventh century collection in three volumes.¹¹⁰ It has been described as a "hodgepodge" due to its curious mixture of "Wulfstanian" homiletic material, law codes, Biblical and romance-like prose pieces (Joseph and Apollonius), poetry, and liturgical material (an extract from the Regularis Concordia, the "Benedictine Office", and the Handbook for a Confessor).¹¹¹ As Anlezark has pointed out, Ker's classification of the manuscript into sections A (pp. 1-7, 161-67, early eleventh century), and B (8-160, 167-76, mid-eleventh century) can be misleading.¹¹² Any attempt at understanding the compiler's intentions for arranging the manuscript has to be based

¹¹⁰ Cf. N. R. Ker's item 49. D. Bethurum, Homilies 4.

¹¹¹ P. Clemoes, "The Old English Benedictine Office" 265-83.

¹¹² D. Anlezark, "Reading the Story of 'Joseph' in MS Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201." Forthcoming.

on the order in which he bound the texts. Several thematically arranged groups become evident in the collection.

The physical Arrangement of CCCC 201:

The manuscript opens with a fragment of the Regularis Concordia, which now begins with the Palm Sunday liturgy.¹¹³ The excerpt ends before the beginning of ch. 44, i.e. before the *Adoratio Crucis* ceremony of Good Friday. After this, we find homilies on Adam (Napier 1), the six ages of the world (Napier LXII), and Incipiunt Sermones Lupi Episcopi (Bethurum VI, an outline of salvation history).

Following this, there are Bethurum VII (on the Creed), and XIII (Wulfstan's Pastoral Letter), Napier 24(a) and 25, Bethurum VIIa (Translation of the Pater Noster and the Creed), Napier 23 and 27, part of Bethurum XXI (On evil rulers) and XIX (God's threat to sinful Israel), Napier 35 and 38. These texts focus on Christian duties such as the avoidance of sin, obedience to Church law, and the need to learn such key texts as the Pater Noster and the Creed.

They are followed by a group largely composed of legal texts,¹¹⁴ before the manuscript moves on to a group that consists mostly of eschatological homilies: Bethurum Xb and Xc lines

¹¹³ Archbishop Parker erased the first 38 lines, so that he could include a table of contents. Even so, P. Wormald argues, it looks as if the erased text had begun in mid-sentence. He assumes that one quire, and probably more, have gone missing from the beginning of the manuscript. The Making of English Law I:206.

¹¹⁴ VIIa Æthelræd; Ælfric's Brief II; Institutes of Polity II 145-36a, II 187-97, II 203, II II 205-06, II 213-19, II 209-11; the Northumbrian Priest's Law; II-III Edgar; V Æthelræd; Institutes of Polity II 223-26; Bethurum Xc, lines 20-38 and 62-71; I Æthelstan. Cf. P. Wormald, The Making of English Law I:204-05 for an overview of the table of contents.

1-26, 39-end (on Christianity), Bethurum XI to line 212 (Isaiah on the punishment of sin), Bethurum IX from line 69 (on the gifts of the Holy Spirit), Bethurum Ia and Ib (De Anticristo), Bethurum V (Secundum Marcum), Bethurum II-IV (Secundum Matheum, Secundum Lucam, De temporibus Anticristi), Napier XL, Bethurum XVIIb (Ezekiel on negligent priests), Napier XLI(b), Bethurum XX(C) (Sermo Lupi), Bethurum XXI (a reiteration of the homily on evil rulers).¹¹⁵

The next group contains legal material again,¹¹⁶ and is followed by homiletic and liturgical material again: two texts on Baptism (Bethurum VIIa and VIIc lines 1-155), Institutes XXIV 1-52, part of the “Benedictine Office”, followed by part of the “Handbook of a Confessor” (I-VI) and the Penitential of Pseudo-Theodore.

The next part contains Cnut 1018, Institutes II 130-34, 135-54, Apollonius, pieces on the English Saints and their “Resting Places” (Halgan, Secgan), and the Joseph story from Genesis 37:1-47:18. The final group of the manuscript consists of the five poems: Judgement Day II, the Lord’s Prayer II, An Exhortation to Christian Living, A Summons to Prayer, Gloria I, and part of the “Handbook of a Confessor” (I, lines 3-19).

The manuscript features the work of four different hands: scribe 1 (early eleventh century) wrote the excerpt from the Regularis Concordia. Scribe 2 (mid-eleventh century) wrote the homilies and legal texts up to Halgan and Secgan, at which point scribe 3

¹¹⁵ Both versions of Bethurum XXI (the homily on evil rulers) are in the hand of scribe 2, who seems to have considered it important to repeat the whole text at this point, after having copied an excerpt from it earlier. Perhaps the scribe had to wait for a full copy to become available.

¹¹⁶ Institutes I 1-5, 16-128, VIII Æthelræd, I Edmund, Canons of Edgar, Gebyncðu, Norðleoda laga, Mircna laga, Að, and Hadbot.

(contemporary to scribe 2) took over and wrote the now fragmentary Joseph story. After this, we find scribe 1's work again (Judgement Day II, Exhortation to Christian Living and Summons to Prayer), followed by scribe 2's Lord's Prayer II and Gloria I. Scribe 4 compiled the manuscript, after erasing part of the Handbook of a Confessor from scribe 2's work and adding it at the end of the manuscript instead.¹¹⁷

Thematic Strands:

Corpus 201 contains a large amount of Wulfstanian and Pseudo-Wulfstanian material. As I have pointed out above, the line between Wulfstan's homilies and his legal codes is blurred: his legalistic language bleeds into his homilies, and his law codes show homiletic influence in their focus on Christian duties. This must have been obvious to the compiler, and it is thus not entirely surprising to find both the Archbishop's legal work and his homiletic texts in the same manuscript. All of the homilies discussed earlier in this chapter – including De baptisate, De fide catholica, Sermo ad populum, De cristianitate, the Sermo Lupi – are found in Corpus 201.

The compilation also contains all of Wulfstan's eschatological homilies.

As I have shown above, Wulfstan's eschatological homilies, as well as his later legalistic-homiletic texts place a strong emphasis on penance, even though the Archbishop employs vastly different strategies when preaching to ordinary audiences as compared with his addresses to the

¹¹⁷ Cf. Wormald, The Making of English Law I:204-05 and Anlezark, "Reading the Story of 'Joseph'."

witan. There has been some debate about whether Wulfstan had any direct influence on a master copy of CCCC 201, or whether parts of the manuscript can be linked directly to York.¹¹⁸

Caie has focused mostly on the penitential character of the five pieces of poetry and their connection to the so-called “Benedictine Office” in CCCC 201. He rightly relates them to the penitential themes found in the homilies and traces sources and analogues of Judgement Day II, ranging from Bede’s Be domes dæge to a Latin Homily found in manuscript BL, Hatton 113.¹¹⁹ His argument for a group of penitential texts is supported by the fact that the last item in the manuscript is the Handbook for a Confessor.

Anlezark has shown that one of the key thematic strands of the collection is concerned with the question of righteous behaviour by rulers. He assigns a key position in the manuscript’s organisation to the Joseph story, with its themes of righteous rule, justice, repentance and forgiveness. These themes run through Joseph, Apollonius, the legal codes, Wulfstan’s homilies on evil rulers (Bethurum XXI), on God’s threat to sinful Israel (Bethurum XIX) and on Isaiah on the punishment of sin (Bethurum XI) as well.¹²⁰

The manuscript has been associated with Worcester by early scholars, but Ker and later Bethurum reject this.¹²¹ Wormald states that it is possible that the collection was assembled at

¹¹⁸ Wormald, The Making of English Law 208. Cf. also Mary Richards, “The Manuscript Contexts of the Old English Laws” 178. Richards suggests that the whole collection might have been arranged under Wulfstan’s supervision. This seems implausible, as the collection stems from about forty years after the Archbishop’s death.

¹¹⁹ Cf. especially G. D. Caie, The Old English Poem “Judgement Day II”, as well as “The Poems in MS CCCC 201 as Penitential Literature.” 72-78.

¹²⁰ D. Anlezark, “Reading the Story of ‘Joseph’.”

¹²¹ E.g. E. Feiler, “Das Benediktiner-Offizium” 8. N. R. Ker, Medieval Libraries of Great Britain does not

Winchester: scribe 4's hand can be traced to Winchester, Winchester had a strong connection to the Regularis Concordia liturgy, and the similarity between "Resting Places" and the Winchester Liber Vitae has been pointed out.¹²² Wormald puts the manuscript in the context of Winchester's role as a "nursery for monk-bishops", whose role would be to serve God in state and church.¹²³ Anlezark suggests Nunnaminster as a possible place of origin, suggesting that Ker's description of scribe 1 as a "delicate and unusual hand" seems to imply a female scribe, and pointing out that the use of female pronouns in the Handbook of a Confessor might also point at a female house such as Nunnaminster.¹²⁴

He thus suggests that the manuscript might have been a devotional reading book for a female house, possibly to be used in a Lenten context. This sounds plausible, if we keep in mind that the collection begins with Palm Sunday, then moves on to the sin of Adam (Napier I), the six ages of the world (Napier LXII), and a homily outlining salvation history (Bethurum VI). The legal codes outline righteous behaviour, and righteous rule is exemplified in the characters of Apollonius and Joseph. The collection frightens people into repentance through a dramatic Doomsday scene in Judgement Day II, and eventually ends with a piece specifically used in the context of confession and absolution (the Handbook).

list CCCC 201 among the Worcester manuscripts. D. Bethurum, Homilies 4 rejects the Worcester connection, too. The association with Worcester and/or York does, however, seem to have retained some popularity. Cf. W. Butt's "Zur Herkunft der Völuspá" in the following chapter.

¹²² P. Wormald, The Making of English Law I:209.

¹²³ P. Wormald, The Making of English Law I:210.

¹²⁴ D. Anlezark, "Reading the Story of 'Joseph'." N. R. Ker, Catalogue p. 90.

If the manuscript was intended as a devotional reading book rather than for teaching from the pulpit (as Mary Richards suggested),¹²⁵ it is a remarkably different devotional book from the Vercelli collection. As I have shown above, the Vercelli Book's main focus is on the hereafter. The collection aims to provide material intended to make the reader reflect on how s/he can attain eternal life by focusing on the devotion of the Cross. CCC 201's focus is much more centred on this life than the next. The collection provides guidelines taken from Scripture, romance, homiletic and legal material, and poetry – all of which outline righteous behaviour. The collection might be understood as a more or less systematically organised “book of rules” aimed at ensuring that the journey of the Christian community towards salvation is grounded in secular and religious law, righteous behaviour of rulers, and a mood of penance. This points towards a significant shift in Anglo-Saxon spirituality: while the earlier Vercelli Book – especially in texts of a very early date, such as the Dream of the Rood – focuses on an otherworldly element, the Benedictine Reform (and Wulfstan in particular) grounded the Christian Faith in this world by systematically organising public and private penance and a coherent system of secular and religious law.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the older Vercelli tradition still seems to have been highly popular, and echoes of it pervade Corpus 201: while Napier Homily XL has been considered spurious by Wilcox, it contains two lines from Vercelli II(N). In addition, a further echo to Vercelli XXI is found in the poem Exhortation to Christian

¹²⁵ M. Richards, “The Manuscript Contexts of the Old English Laws” 178.

¹²⁶ Cf. A. J. Frantzen, Literature of Penance, especially 146, 161-62.

Living.¹²⁷ Mary Richards finds thematic parallels between VIIa Æthelræd's focus on fasts, almsgiving, and prayers to ward off the Viking threat and the homilies of Ælfric on the one hand, and the Rogationtide homily Vercelli XIX on the other.¹²⁸

While each scribe seemed to have "a different agenda",¹²⁹ for selecting their material, the manuscript's compiler carefully chose texts which s/he deemed fit for devotional and penitential purposes. The collection is thus unified by its eschatological and apocalyptic themes, which are incorporated into the wider context of devotion, and penance, justice and absolution found in the homilies, legal texts, and poems.

Whatever the ultimate purpose of CCCC 201 was, the mixture of legal, legalistic-homiletic and eschatological-apocalyptic material in the same manuscript collection provides an exciting opportunity to study the mid-eleventh century compiler's interest in apocalyptic and penitential themes. Most of the strategies connected with the use of apocalyptic material that I have discussed in the previous chapters can be exemplified somewhere in the texts chosen by the compiler of CCCC 201.

¹²⁷ "The Dissemination of Wulfstan's Homilies" 206.

¹²⁸ "The Manuscript Contexts of the Old English Laws." 178.

¹²⁹ P. Wormald, The Making of English Law I:210.

Conclusion:

The wide range of texts and manuscript collections containing apocalyptic material, as well as the fact that eschatological themes were employed for a variety of reasons, attests to the high level of popularity of the apocalypse in early medieval England. The Anglo-Saxons showed great interest in the events connected with the Last Judgement. Writers such as the anonymous homilist of Vercelli II were almost obsessed with Doomsday signs, yet it is important to keep in mind that the homilists and poets were not possessed by fears of the end; there was no wide-spread panic connected with Y1K.

Instead, learned authors such as Bede, Ælfric, and Byrhtferth share their common goal of warning against a literal interpretation of Doomsday signs. They offer strictly allegorical interpretations. Ælfric, especially, sets out to educate his listeners, to arm them with *godre lare*, so that they can withstand the devil during the tribulations which are preceding the end. The anonymous homilists prefer a rather more emotive approach, in bombarding their audiences with graphic lists full of apocalyptic imagery. Yet despite all the frightening content, the anonymous homilists strive to emphasise that there is hope: nearly all homilies end with a promise of salvation. Apocalyptic themes are prominent in the Blickling homiliary, as well as in the devotional reading material contained in the Vercelli codex and the penitential matter in CCCC 201.

I have argued that Wulfstan occupies the middle ground between the strictly orthodox homilies of Ælfric and the sensationalist preaching of the Blickling and Vercelli authors. The

archbishop relies on the long patristic tradition, as well as on Ælfric's homilies; yet he often adapts his sources to fit the specific goals which he wants to convey to a particular audience at a given moment. On a number of occasions, his audience included people from the highest social levels, and he cleverly combined Scriptural and patristic references with just the right dose of contemporary events and legal matter to create a strong sense of urgency. At the same time, he is vague and ambiguous enough to leave gaps which the audience could fill with their own fears about the apocalypse.

Apocalyptic material, no matter how frightening, always contains a certain amount of entertainment. People enjoy listening to scary stories, especially if they are told that the events will come true, while at the same time being told that they will be safe on Judgement Day if they mend their ways through repentance and prayer. This mixture of entertainment and moral instruction probably explains the popularity of apocalyptic poetry in the early Middle Ages. It might also explain the great popular appeal of the anonymous homilies.

The results of the different strategies discussed in this chapter can be seen at all levels of Anglo-Saxon society: Wulfstan's *Sermo* might have caused the *witan* to invite the old king back, and the strong sense of urgency coupled with the vivid imagery of the anonymous homilies is likely to have fuelled missionary activity among priests and bishops. Only if we keep in mind all the different facets of apocalyptic material in Anglo-Saxon England, we can gain a fuller understanding of the environment which fuelled the missionary zeal directed at Scandinavia at the close of the tenth century.

The following chapter will consider the wider implications of the use of apocalyptic material - both at home and abroad - and the response with which the missionary efforts were met. The beginning of the chapter will give an overview of the conversion of individuals and nations when discussing Óláfr Tryggvason's conversion in England, his career as a missionary king, his fellow missionaries, and their strategies used in converting Norway and especially Iceland in the closing years of the tenth century.

Chapter 4:

Apocalypse Made Personal: Responses from the Margins:

In the previous three chapters, I have investigated the different purposes for which eschatological and apocalyptic material was employed: to facilitate the reckoning of the six ages and calendar calculation, to back up political propaganda, to provide instruction in orthodox thought, and to instil an urge to repentance and conversion. These messages were conveyed by coupling apocalyptic material with allegorical exegesis (Ælfric), legalistic language (Wulfstan), or sensational images taken from apocryphal material (e.g. the Blickling and Vercelli collections). The common trait of all these texts and authors is their authoritative voice – the voice of the Church.

In the last chapter of this thesis, I am investigating possible responses to those messages by their recipients. Examples from late tenth and early eleventh century Scandinavia will allow us a glance at how lay people absorbed eschatological and apocalyptic material during their transition from heathenism to Christianity. I will analyse instances of relapse into paganism, reluctant conversion, radicalisation of missionary zeal, and the clashing or creative merging of traditions.

I will begin by discussing Óláfr Tryggvason's conversion and career as missionary king, as well as the kind of religious environment he created at his own court, throughout Norway, and indirectly in Iceland during the conversion phase in the closing years of the tenth century. I will suggest that, during his stay in England, Óláfr had enough exposure to apocalyptic thought

to infuse a unique brand of missionary zeal coupled with apocalyptic fears in the recent convert. This explosive mixture is most likely responsible for Óláfr's violent methods of converting as many people as possible before his death in A.D. 1000.

Skaldic verse will be used to trace the confusion caused by Christianity among the heathens and new converts in Scandinavia; in particular, the verses of Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld will give voice to the story of a reluctant convert. The chapter will conclude with a reading of the Eddic poem Völuspá against the background of some of the apocalyptic material discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis. Völuspá provides evidence for a highly creative merging of the pagan and Christian traditions, and the question arises whether this text can be regarded as belonging to the genre of apocalypse as defined by Collins.

The Conversion of Óláfr Tryggvason According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

The information we have about the conversion of Óláfr Tryggvason stems from the contemporary Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as well as from the different versions of the later Old Norse Óláfr sagas. The ASC contains references to Óláfr in two of its versions: E (the Peterborough Chronicle) and A (the Parker Chronicle) – both West Saxon versions at this date.¹ E mentions that Óláfr and Sveinn forkbeard attacked London with 94 ships on 8th September 994 (the Nativity of St. Mary), and that their wide-ranging raid led to Æthelræd's decision to pay a settlement of 16.000 pounds to the vikings. Óláfr is met by bishop Ælfheah

¹ Cf. J. Bately, ASC vol. 3: MS A cxxvii, and S. Irvine, ASC vol. 7: MS E ciii.

and ealdorman Æthelweard – the patron of Ælfric – and escorted to Andover. There, he meets King Æthelræd who “receives him at the bishop’s hands”, i.e. becomes his godfather at baptism. Óláfr, in exchange, promises never to raid England again. The vikings subsequently take winter quarters at Southampton.

Her on þisum gearum com Anlaf 7 Swegen to Lunden byrig on Nativitas sce. Marie mid iiii 7 hundnigontigum scipum. 7 hi ða on ða burh festlice feohtende wæron. 7 eac hi mid fyre ontendan woldon. ac hi þar gefeordon maran hearm 7 yfel þonne hi æfre wendon. þ heom ænig burhwaru gedon sceolde. Ac se halige Godes modor on ðam hire mildheortnisse þære burhware gecyðde. 7 hi ahredde wið heora feondum. 7 hi þanon ferdon. 7 wrohton þ mæste yfel þe æfre ænig here don mihte on bærnette 7 hergunge 7 on manslihtum ægðer be ðam sæ rīman on EastSeaxum, 7 on Cent lande. 7 on SuðSeaxum. 7 on Hamtun scire. 7 æt nyxtan naman heom hors. 7 ridon swa wide swa hi woldon. 7 unasecgendlice yfel wircende wæron. Ða gerædde se cyng 7 his witan þ him man to sende. 7 him gafol be hete 7 metsunge wið þon þe hi þære hergunge geswicon. 7 hi þa þet under fengon. 7 com þa eall se here to Hamtune. 7 þær winter setle namon. 7 hi man þær fædde geond eall WestSeaxna rice. 7 him man geald xvi þusend punda. Ða sende se cyn[g] æfter Anlafe cyninge. Ælfheah biscop 7 Æðelweard ealdorman. 7 man gislade þa hwile in to þa scipum. 7 hi þa læddan Anlaf mid mycclum wurðscipe to þam cyng to Andeferan. 7 se cyng Æðelred his anfeng æt biscopes handa. 7 him cynelice gifode. 7 him þa Anlaf behet swa he hit eac gelæste. þ he næfre eft to Angel cynne mid unfrīde cumon nolde.

In this year Olaf and Swein came to London on the Nativity of St. Mary with 94 ships, and they proceeded to attack the city stoutly and wished also to set it on fire; but there they suffered more harm and injury than they ever thought any citizens would do to them. But the holy Mother of God showed her mercy to the citizens on that day and saved them from their enemies. And these went away from there, and did the greatest damage that ever any army could do, by burning, ravaging, and laying waste, both along the coast, and in Essex, Kent, Sussex, and Hampshire; and finally they seized horses and rode as widely as they wished, and continued to do indescribable damage. Then the king and his councillors determined to send to them and promised them tribute and provisions, on condition that they should cease that harrying. And they then accepted that, and the whole army came then to Southampton and took winter quarters there; and they were provisioned from throughout all the West Saxon kingdom, and they were paid 16,000 pounds in money. Then the king sent Bishop Ælfheah and Ealdorman Æthelweard for King Olaf, and hostages were given to the ships meanwhile. And they then brought Olaf to the king at Andover with much ceremony, and King Æthelræd received him at the bishop’s hands, and bestowed gifts on him royally. And then Olaf promised – as also he performed – that he would never come back to England in hostility.²

² E. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, Laud MS (E), I:127-29. Trans. based on D.

What is interesting is that the Peterborough Chronicle (E) refers to Óláfr as *cyning*, although he did not become king of Norway until 995.³ This shows that the Chronicle entry was not written in the immediate aftermath of the events of 994. The note in E that Óláfr kept his promise never to return to England might suggest that the chronicler was aware of Óláfr's death in A.D. 1000. This might suggest a date of composition of some five to six years after the events, which would be a sufficient temporal gap to explain the inconsistencies in the different versions of the ASC.

The Parker Chronicle (A) mentions Óláfr's conversion in its entry about the Battle of Maldon in 991. According to Plummer and Whitelock, the scribe ran out of space and had to mark out single-line entries, as well as resort to writing in the margin.⁴ There is a caret mark over 991 which shows that the scribe added the entry about Maldon after he had already written out the numbers from 989 to 992, but intended the Battle of Maldon to belong to 991 rather than to 993, which is the next marginal number. Furthermore, a marginal note adds that Óláfr accepted Christianity after the events at Maldon. Whitelock suggests, however, that this reference had been added as an afterthought after the writing of the entry for 994, which does

³ In fact, the Anglo-Saxons would have insisted on his conversion before supporting his claim to the Norwegian throne. It is also interesting that the ASC mentions Óláfr before Sveinn, although the latter was the commander of the army and Óláfr must have been serving under him. This suggests that Óláfr was regarded by the chronicler as the more important of the two – a view that could only arise in the light of his subsequent missionary career in Norway.

⁴ EHD I:234n1 and Two Saxon Chronicles 126n1.

not mention the Vikings at all.⁵ This would suggest that the chronicler of A, too, wrote after a temporal gap and not in the immediate aftermath of the conversion of Óláfr.

Óláfr Tryggvason's Conversion According to the Old Norse Prose Sources:

The tradition of Old Norse sources concerning Óláfr's life is extremely complicated. The *vita* exists in several different versions, all of which are of a much later date. The earliest source seems to be the anonymous Historia Norvegiae, dated by Carl Phelpstead to c. 1150.⁶ It was one of the sources used by Theodoricus monachus, who wrote his Latin Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium c. 1180. In c. 1190 Oddr Snorrason, a monk at the Benedictine monastery at Þingeyrar in northern Iceland, wrote a Latin version of Óláfr's life, which is only extant in an Icelandic translation dating from about 1200.⁷ Oddr seems to have used Theodoricus' Historia as a source. Soon after he wrote his work, Gunnlaugr Leifsson (died 1218), a fellow monk at Þingeyrar, composed a longer Latin version, parts of which survive in the Icelandic Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta. Snorri Sturluson wrote a life of Óláfr as part of his Heimskringla (c. 1225-35), which is mostly based on Oddr's *vita*. A later version is the anonymous Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta, dating from the end of the thirteenth century.

⁵ EHD I:234n2.

⁶ See C. Phelpstead's Introduction to A History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr, (HN), trans. D. Kunin. Also, cf. below, p. 9-10.

⁷ For the following, cf. R. Simek, Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur 270-71. This version of Óláfr's life also exists in late thirteenth-century Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts and fragments.

Its compiler used Snorri's life of St. Óláfr (Óláfs saga helga), his Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, material from Jómsvíkinga saga, Orkneyinga saga, parts of Gunnlaugr's lost Latin version, and Laxdæla saga. He also preserves Hallfreðar saga, the story of Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld, including some of his skaldic verse. Furthermore, Óláfr's conversion is mentioned in Ágrip af Nóregis konunga sögum (ch. 16-20; dated c. end of twelfth century) and in Fagrskinna (ch. 23-24; dated to c. 1230), which is partly based on Ágrip. As Theodore M. Andersson has shown, Historia Norvegiae and Ágrip share more features with each other than either of them does with Theodoricus monachus' Historia.⁸

Ultimately, Oddr's version is the source for almost all the other versions of Óláfr's life.⁹

Oddr, however, does not seem to have had any particularly reliable sources himself: his account is mostly based on oral sources. Simek states that Oddr's version emphasises miraculous events during Óláfr's life, as there were no miracles recorded after his death. The miraculous was mostly left out by Snorri, but was expanded in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta in the tradition of hagiographic writing (Lexikon 271). Oddr and Gunnlaugr are representatives of the North Icelandic school of historical writing which was more inclined to write quasi-hagiographic accounts of Óláfr's life, often taking over episodes from the Life of St. Óláfr Haraldsson. Ari and his successors represent the South Icelandic branch of history writing; they are much more careful about the selection of their sources, name them whenever possible, and

⁸ Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, ed. Th. M. Andersson 10-13.

⁹ I.e. both for the synoptic histories (HN, Theodoricus' work, Ágrip, Fagrskinna, Heimskringla) and the separate biographical sagas (Oddr's and Gunnlaugr's works and Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta) which preserve versions of Óláfr's life.

generally avoid the miraculous. Even though Ari has informants on both the pagan and Christian sides, he presents his accounts in an objective way, without any overt bias towards the Christian side.¹⁰

Given the late date of all the prose versions, the unreliability of sources will be kept in mind during the comparison of the events leading up to Óláfr's conversion and his missionary activity. The main focus will be on the development of a legend connected with Óláfr. Skaldic verse will be given preference over late prose sources, if the verse genuinely dates from the conversion phase.

Theodoricus (ch. 7) gives very little detail about Óláfr's conversion. The text mentions that he was baptised in the Scilly islands, rather than at Andover. While on a viking expedition in Denmark, Óláfr is cut off from his ships. He calls on divine help and vows to become a Christian if he is saved.¹¹ Subsequently, he travels to the Scilly islands, where he is baptised by an abbot named Bernard.

Oddr expands on Theodoricus' work and introduces a further element of the miraculous which was to become one of the central motifs in all the later accounts of Óláfr's conversion. He states that, when Óláfr arrived in the Scilly islands, he was met by a group of monks at the instigation of their (unnamed) abbot, who had the gift of prophecy. The abbot tells Óláfr:

Fírir scammu var mér synt huerr þu ert eða huilíkr þu mannt verða. oc til þess com ec at kenna þer retta tru oc boða þer nafn drottins Iesu Cristz skirn þa er þu mant af fa alla hialp. oc allir þeir er rett trua firir þitt boð.

¹⁰ Cf. below, p. 15. On the two Icelandic schools of history writing, cf. also E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Origins* 88-142.

¹¹ Cf. Oddr ch. 12.

A short time ago it was revealed to me who you are and what sort of man you will become. And I have come for the purpose of teaching you the true faith and preaching the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the baptism that will afford you, and all those who maintain the true faith at your behest, salvation.¹²

The motif of the prophet was expanded by later sources, such as Snorri, Ágrip, and Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta: they state that the prophet was a hermit in the Scilly islands. Óláfr is curious about the man's gift of prophecy, and sends one of his retainers dressed in royal robes, to learn about his future. The hermit sees through the disguise and issues a warning to the retainer to be faithful to his lord. Óláfr then meets the hermit himself, and is told that he will become a powerful king who will convert many to the Christian faith. The hermit also foretells that Óláfr will be injured during a fight and will be carried to his ship on a shield,¹³ but that he will recover after seven days.

The hermit's prophecy turns out to be true. Snorri makes Óláfr return to the Scilly islands, where he is instructed in Christianity by the hermit, baptised together with all his men, and where he remains until autumn. Ágrip gives less detail, simply stating that Óláfr was converted as a result of the prophecy, but without stating where this happened. Fagrskinna (ch. 23) mentions the Scillies but leaves out all details about the hermit or abbot. The anonymous Historia Norvegiae refers to small islands off Britain but does not name them (ed. Kunin, p. 19-20). It mentions a hermit and the prophecies about Óláfr's injury and his future as renowned

¹² Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar ch. 14, ed. Finnur Jónsson p. 45; trans. Th. M. Andersson, p. 56.

¹³ Snorri states that it will be during a mutiny of his own men, and Ágrip seems to indicate a fight at sea caused by treachery. There is, however, no further mention of the retainer. This suggests that he seems to have been part of an older tradition, the details of which were left out in the surviving texts.

king and missionary. The text then goes on to state that the prophecies came true but leaves out any details about whether Óláfr returned to the island or where else he was baptised.

Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta combines the different versions: Óláfr meets a hermit in the Scilly islands, who prophesies his injury and recovery. Óláfr then returns to the islands and meets the abbot of a famous monastery there, who, also through the gift of prophecy, already knows of his coming. The abbot sends his men to meet Óláfr at the shore and leads him to the monastery, where he is baptised.

Dualðiz Olafur þar lengi ok hans menn ok namu heilogh fræði ok goða siðu at þessum Guðs manni ok hans klaustra bræðrum. Aboti s(agði) Olafi at hann mundi konungr verða yfir Noregi. ok til þess valdr af guði at visa mǫrgum salum rettan veg til sins skapara.

Olaf remained there a long time with his men, being instructed in holy doctrine and good conduct by that man of God and the brethren of the cloister. And the Abbot told Olaf that he would become King over Norway, being chosen by God to direct many souls the right way to their Maker.¹⁹

Thus this late version of Óláfr's life combines the variant elements found in the earlier stories, such as the identity of the prophet as hermit or abbot and the different prophecies about the disguised retainer's fate, Óláfr's injury, the fact that the prophet had known about Óláfr's arrival on the island, the cryptic prophecy of "I know who you are and what sort of man you will become", as well as a clearer prophecy of his future as the king of Norway who will convert many to Christianity. Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta lists all these prophecies, whereas the earlier versions only state some of them. The motif of Óláfr's conversion in the Scillies is curious: most Norwegians would know little or nothing about the existence of these islands.

¹⁹ Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta ch. 79, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, p. 165; ch. 78-79 (here end of 79), trans. J. Sephton, p. 98-101, here 100.

There is, however, archaeological evidence for a monastic settlement on St. Helen's.¹⁵ The hermit or abbot motif was probably taken over from the life of St. Óláfr, who was also said to have met a hermit prior to his baptism.¹⁶ The ASC must be correct in placing Óláfr's baptism at Andover.

None of the Old Norse sources give the political background of Óláfr's conversion: they do not mention King Æthelræd's involvement at all, nor do they mention the fact that Óláfr promised to cease his attacks on England in exchange for money and supplies. This difference in the sources is not surprising when we keep in mind what the purpose of the writers was: the Old Norse sources want to present a *vita* of "the apostle of Norway", and they focus on the miraculous circumstances of Óláfr's conversion as the first step in his career as a missionary. The ASC presents a contemporary record from an English point of view. An alliance between Óláfr and Wessex would have been of political advantage to the Anglo-Saxons: a Christian king of Norway would on the one hand have limited the immediate viking threat coming from that country. On the other hand, Óláfr would have tried to keep Norway independent of Denmark. This, in turn, would have ensured that Sveinn forkbeard would have been too busy in

¹⁵ For the Celtic hermit site on St. Helen's and its excavation, see Mumford 57, 225-26; Gill 21-23 and photograph on p. 51. Gill (p.25) claims that there was a further military visit by "vikings" in 1155, but does not give his source for this – but it is *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 100 (ÍF 34, 272). The raiders on that occasion were three chieftains from Orkney. This shows that there was at least a little knowledge of the Scillies in the Norse world. The Orcadians also knew that there were monks there – ch. 79 of *Orkneyinga saga* records how Sveinn Ásleifsson captured a coy belonging to the monks of Scilly at sea off the south of Ireland (ÍF 34, 180). But this refers to the Benedictine daughter house of Tavistock Abbey that had been founded on Treviso, probably in 1114. See D. Knowles, C. N. L. Brooke, and V. C. M. London, *The Heads of Religious Houses, England and Wales 940-1216* 96).

¹⁶ Cf. E. O. G. Turville-Petre *Origins* 135-36, who points towards an account of Totila, king of the Goths, and his encounter with St. Benedict in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*. PL 77, col. 225B ff.

Scandinavia and thus would no longer have posed an immediate threat to England. The West-Saxons would also have remembered the mutually beneficial alliance they had with Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri. Æthelræd's plan worked out, and there were no more viking attacks on England until 1002, i.e. until after Óláfr's death.¹⁷

Óláfr is also mentioned in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (c. 1070).¹⁸ However, Adam only mentions Óláfr very briefly, and his details are confused:

Qui etiam in Norvegiam et Suediam progressi populum multum Ieso Christo collegerunt. A quibus traditur Olaph Trucconis filius, qui tunc Normannis imperavit, baptizatus ex ea gente primus fuisse christianus. [Olaph Trucconis filius expulsus a Norvegia venit in Angliam ibique suscepit christianitatem, quam ipse primus in patriam revexit [. . .].

They [the early missionaries to Scandinavia] also went on into Norway and Sweden where they gathered many people unto Jesus Christ. Tradition has it that they baptized the son of Tryggve, Olaf, who then ruled the Norwegians, among which folk he was the first Christian. Olaf, the son of Tryggve, when expelled from Norway went to England and there embraced Christianity, which he was the first to bring back into his fatherland [. . .].¹⁹

This excerpt contains several errors: Óláfr was baptised in England before he became King of Norway. He was converted while on a viking raid,²⁰ and, most importantly, he was not the first

¹⁷ Cf. Th. M. Andersson, "The Viking Policy of Ethelred the Unready", Brown, "The Viking Policy of Ethelred: a Response", and "Ethelred II, Olaf Trygvason, and the Conversion of Norway."

¹⁸ The Scandinavian churches were subject to the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen until 1103.

¹⁹ Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis* II.xxxvi, ed. B. Schmeidler, p. 97-98. Trans. F. J. T'schan p. 80.

²⁰ Óláfr did not come to England when he was expelled from Norway. Adam might be alluding to Óláfr's exile from Norway during his youth, but according to the Norse tradition, Óláfr went to Russia, not to England during that time. Cf. e.g. Snorri, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 6, ÍF 26, p. 230, HN ed. D. Kunin, p. 19, Theodoricus monachus, ch. 7. The Norse sources are probably more convincing: they provide a convincing political context, whereas Adam does not; and they are at least partly based on contemporary skaldic verse which gives a little information about Óláfr's career before his conversion: Hallfreðr says that he fought in Denmark, south of Hedeby (presumably under Sveinn against the Emperor; cf. *Heimskringla, Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* v. 128), in Saxony, Frisia and Flanders (vv. 129-30), and in England, Northumbria, Scotland and Man (v. 131), and the Hebrides, Ireland, Wales and Cornwall (v. 132). Þórðr Kolbeinson's *Belgskakadrápa* adds that Eiríkr

Christian in Norway. Before Óláfr, there had been unsuccessful attempts at Christianising Norway, with Hákon jarl as one of the most notable “short-term” converts – he relapsed into paganism fairly quickly after returning to Norway – if not before.²¹ Nor was Óláfr the first Christian king of Norway: Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri (d. between 962-65) was brought up as a Christian by king Æthelstan in England. While he did not make any efforts to impose Christianity in his kingdom, nor even at his court, there is evidence that he must have kept at least some aspects of his personal Christian beliefs.²²

However, Adam’s motives are at least partly political: he was the servant of Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen, who wanted to establish himself as patron of the north and placed strong emphasis on spreading a German-influenced brand of Christianity in Scandinavia. Thus, Adam might have been suspicious of the English influence provided by Óláfr and his companions. In addition to this, Adam speaks very favourably of Sveinn Ástríðarson, King of Denmark (1047-74), who was hostile towards Norway and had, indeed, been defeated by the Norwegians several times. In III.liv (liii), Adam praises Sveinn’s reputation as Christian king, as well as his wisdom and generosity and states that he personally knew him. This helps to explain some of Adam’s

Hákonarson fled from him after he arrived in Norway from the west (vv. 144-45). The unusual mention of the Cornish in a contemporary source may be the most interesting detail here, especially as they appear last on Hallfreðr’s list of raided countries.

²¹ Cf. Snorri’s account that he put the missionaries ashore before even leaving Denmark. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 27, ÍF 26, p. 260. Hákon only accepted Christianity under duress from Haraldr bluetooth and the German Emperor Otto in the first place. Once he was back in Norway, he encouraged heathen poetry at his Court (e.g. Eilífr’s *Þórsdrápa*, which was probably composed towards the end of Hákon’s reign because Eilífr lived long enough to compose a Christian-influenced verse. Cf. below).

²² Cf. Eyvindr Skáldaspillir’s *Hákonarmál*, which is discussed in more detail below.

anti-Norwegian bias. In II.lx (xxxviii), Adam questions the extent of Óláfr's faith and states that

Narrant eum aliqui christianum fuisse, quidam christianitatis desertorem; omnes autem affirmant peritum auguriorum, servatorem sortium, et in avium prognosticis omnem spem suam posuisse. Quare etiam cognomen accepit, ut Olaph Craccaben diceretur. Nam et artis magicae, ut aiunt, studio deditus omnes, quibus illa redundat patria, maleficos habuit domesticos eorumque deceptus errore periit.

Some relate that Olaf had been a Christian, some that he had forsaken Christianity; all, however, affirm that he was skilled in divination, was an observer of the lots, and had placed all his hope in the prognostication of birds. Wherefore, also, did he receive a byname, so that he was called Craccaben [crow-bone]. In fact, as they say, he was also given to the practice of the magic art and supported as his household companions all the magicians, with whom that land was overrun, and, deceived by their error, perished.²³

This depiction of Óláfr is very much at odds with the Old Norse sources who present Óláfr as a model Christian.²⁴ This is not surprising, given the quasi-hagiographic nature of the prose versions; however, the contemporary skaldic verse of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld presents an accurate picture of Óláfr's Christian beliefs, as we shall see below.

The anonymous Historia Norvegiae has only recently been re-dated to c. 1150. Carl Phelpstead cites Inger Ekrem's argument for possible connections between the composition of the work and the establishing of the first Norwegian archiepiscopal see at Niðaróss in 1152/53.²⁵

Phelpstead argues that Historia Norvegiae was influenced by Adam's Gesta Hammaburgensis.

The anonymous author does not mention Adam's work but

²³ Ed. Schmeidler, 100-101; trans. Tschan 82.

²⁴ Adam's story bears some resemblance to the much earlier story of Røgnvaldr rettilbeini, a son of Haraldr finehair who was burned in his hall by his half-brother Eiríkr bloodaxe (apparently before the latter became King of Norway c. 945), because Røgnvaldr kept a household full of sorcerers. Cf. Haralds saga hárfagra, ÍF 26, p. 138-39.

²⁵ C. Phelpstead cites I. Ekrem, Nytt Lys over "Historia Norvegiae".

Whereas Adam emphasised the role of Hamburg-Bremen in the Christianisation of Scandinavia in an attempt to maintain the archbishopric's hold on its northern dioceses, *Historia Norvegiae* implicitly supports Norwegian ecclesiastical independence and emphasises the English rather than the German involvement in the conversion of Norway.²⁶

If this is true and the work is indeed a response to Adam's *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, this ideological background would further help to explain the depiction of Óláfr as a model Christian king, which was expanded by the later versions of his life. The author of *Historia Norvegiae*, for example, refers to Óláfr as “blessed Óláfr”, probably in an attempt to advance his canonisation. St. Óláfr Haraldsson is referred to as *beatissimus*, “most blessed”.²⁷

Óláfr Tryggvason's Missionary Zeal:

All the Old Norse sources place equal emphasis on Óláfr's missionary activity. In the five years of his reign, he managed to convert five countries to Christianity. There is, however, considerable debate about which five countries those were. The sources agree only on Norway and Iceland. Beyond those, some add Orkney, Shetland, and Greenland. Oddr adds the Faroes, and even Russia.²⁸ This would, of course, have taken place before Óláfr's conversion and is thus more than improbable. The compiler of *Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta*, too, mentions Óláfr's missionary activity in Russia. He goes to great lengths to provide evidence from four

²⁶ Cf. C. Phelpstead, in *HN* trans. D. Kunin, p. xx-xxv, here xxi-xxii.

²⁷ Cf. *HN* 97n.

²⁸ Though it is hard to know what *Garðaríki* means here. Kiev had certainly been converted by Orthodox missionaries long before, but perhaps Oddr may be thinking of Novgorod. Cf. Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200*.

examples of ecclesiastical history to prove that God could use unbaptised men to spread the faith.²⁹ *Ágrip* (ch. 19) lists Norway, Iceland, the Shetland Islands, the Orkney Islands, and the Faroes.

From what we can conclude from the sources, Óláfr had several priests and bishops with him during his missionary crusades. Adam of Bremen provides the earliest extant list, which includes a bishop called John:

In Nortmanniam primus ab Anglia venit quidam Iohannes episcopus, qui regem conversum cum populo baptizavit. Illi successit Grimkil episcopus, qui tunc fuit ad Unwanum archiepiscopum Olaph regis legatus. Tercio loco advenit ille Sigafriidus, qui et Suedos et Nortmannos iuxta predicavit. Isque duravit usque ad nostram aetatem cum aliis aequae non obscuris in illa gente sacerdotibus.

The first bishop, a certain John, came from England to Norway, and he converted and baptized the king with his people. He was succeeded by Bishop Grimkil, who at that time was King Olaf's legate to Archbishop Unwan. In the third place came the Sigefrid who preached alike among the Swedes and Norwegians. And he lived to our own age along with other equally well-known priests among the people.³⁰

Adam is obviously dissatisfied with the fact that the first bishop of Norway was of English descent. In the *scholia*, he or one of his successors adds a comment stating that the real work of preaching and conversion was undertaken by his own people:

Licet ante illum ex nostris Lifdag, Odinkar et Poppo gentem illam predicaverint. Possumus hoc dicere, quod nostri laboraverunt, et Angli vero in labores eorum introierunt.

Although Liafdag, Odinkar, and Poppo, of our community, preached to this people before him, it can be said that ours labored, but that the English entered into their labors.³¹

²⁹ cf. B. Fidjestøl "Óláfr Tryggvason the Missionary" 206-07.

³⁰ *Gesta Hammaburgensis* iv.xxxiv (33). Schmeidler 268-69, Tschan 214.

³¹ Cf. *Scholia* 147 (142), B. Schmeidler 269, F. J. Tschan 214. Schmeidler divides the extant manuscripts of *Gesta Hammaburgensis* into three classes (A-C). Of the A class, the representative is Vienna 251. It was probably completed in 1076, and Adam presented it to his patron, archbishop Liemar of Bremen. Adam, however, retained a master copy, to which he added material until his death. These additional notes are referred to as the *Scholia*. Cf. Tschan xii.

There is some debate about the identity of the Iohannes mentioned by Adam. Generally, it is assumed that this is the Latin name of Sigefrid. Grimkil is also mentioned in ii.lvii (55). He reappears in England in 1042-46 (Tschan 94n205). Adam further mentions Rudolf (in ii.lvii (55)) and Bernhard.³²

Historia Norvegiae only mentions Johannes (Kunin 20 and 23), whom Óláfr took with him from England immediately after his baptism. It also mentions Þangbrandr, whom he sent to preach in Iceland (Kunin 20). Grimkell, Bernard, Ruðolfr, and Sigfrid are mentioned later, among the companions of St. Óláfr (Kunin 25). Johannes (Jón) is also mentioned by Oddr (ch. 26 (17)), and in Ágrip (ch. 19). Theodoricus (ch. 8) gives him the name of Sigeward or Sigurðr. Oddr later states that he had both names Jón and Sigurðr.³³ Oddr further mentions Þangbrandr and Þormóðr (ch. 26). Ágrip lists Þormóðr, bishop Sigurðr, and some unnamed deacons (ch. 19).

Despite the variant names found in the sources, it is evident that Óláfr had continental as well as Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-Norse) priests and bishops with him: if Sigfrid was really his name, he would have been German, but Norse sources sometimes call him 'Sigurðr', which would probably represent Old English Sigeward. 'Grimkell' looks Norse or Anglo-Norse, while Bernard and Ruðolfr are probably Germans or Normans. The origin of the missionaries helps

³² Tschan 100n225 states that Rudolf came to Lievizo after St. Óláfr's death and was sent to Iceland by him. Tschan 94n206 states that Rudolf subsequently must have returned to England, where he became abbot of Abington and died in 1052 (Tschan 94n206). F. J. Tschan cites Hist. Coenobii Abendonensis, an. 1050.

³³ cf. HN 97n. and Oddr, trans. Th. M. Andersson pp. 90-91.

to explain the influence of both Old English and Old High German material on Old Norse sources, as we shall see.

Þangbrandr, the Saxon Priest:

Þangbrandr is certainly the best-known companion of Óláfr Tryggvason. He is mentioned frequently,³⁴ and the sources develop something of a legend around him, probably not least because of his violent nature. Strangely enough, Adam makes no mention of him at all. Did Adam miss out on the opportunity to present a zealous missionary of Saxon descent? Or did he consciously omit him from his work because of his violent nature?

The earliest and most reliable mention of Þangbrandr stems from Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði's Íslendingabók. Ari was born at Helgafell in c. 1068 as the great-grandson of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, the heroine of Laxdæla saga. Ari's father probably died young, and Ari was brought up by his grandfather Gellir (the son of Guðrún, d. 1073) and later by his uncle Þorkell. When he was seven years old, he came to his foster-father Hallr Þórarinsson in Haukadahlr, where he spent the following fourteen years.³⁵

³⁴ The variant Þeobrandus given by Theodoricus monachus (trans. D. and I. McDougall p. 11) is unique, as is the variant Þorbrandr in the Þórðarþók redaction of Landnámabók. He is also mentioned in Íslendingabók ch. 7-8, Ágríp ch. 19, HN 115.8, Oddr's Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar 26 (17), and Hauksbók 138.5, 140. According to HN, Þangbrandr was Flemish, but according to Oddr, he was a Saxon. The later versions make him the son of a certain Count Willebald of Bremen, cf. Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta ch. 74, Kristni saga ch. 5 (Hauksbók 130), Njáls saga ch. 100. Cf. D. and I. McDougall 66n65.

³⁵ Cf. R. Simek, Lexikon 16.

In chapter 7 of *Íslendingabók*, Ari recounts the conversion of Iceland by Óláfr

Tryggvason. He states that

Hann sendi hingat til lands prest þann, es hét Þangbrandr ok hér kenndi monnum kristni ok skírði þá alla, es við trú tóku. [. . .] en þá es hann hafði hér verit einn vetr eða tvá, þá fór hann á braut ok hafði vegit hér tvá menn eða þrjá, þá es hann hefðu nitt.

He sent a priest called Þangbrandr to this country, and Þangbrandr taught people about Christianity here and baptised all those who accepted the faith [. . .]. And when he had been here for one or two years, he went away, after killing two or three men here who had slandered him.³⁶

This is the earliest reference to Þangbrandr's violent nature. Ari's work is generally considered to be the most reliable source about the conversion of Iceland. His work gives a secular outlook, avoids miracles and religious rhetoric, and situates the conversion in the context of the political history of Iceland and its development of a distinctive constitution.³⁷ Ari is extremely careful about his sources. Wherever possible, he names them, and relies on eyewitness-accounts wherever possible. Therefore, we can be fairly certain that his account of Þangbrandr is accurate. In chapter 9 of *Íslendingabók*, Ari states:

Ísleifr var vígðr til biskups, þá es hann var fimmtøgr; þá vas Leó septimus páfi. En hann vas inn næsta vetr í Norvegi, ok fór síðan út hingat. En hann andaðisk í Skálholt, þá es hann hafði alls verit biskup fjóra vetr ok tuttugu. Svá sagði Teitr oss. Þat vas á dróttins degi sex nóttum eftir hátíð þeirra Pétars ok Páls, átta tegum vetra eptir Óláfs fall Tryggvasonar. Þar vas ek þá með Teiti fóstura mínum, tolf vetra gamall. En Hallr sagði oss svá, er bæði vas minnigr ok ólyginn ok mundi sjálf þat es hann vas skírðr at Þangbrandr skírði, hann þrevetran en þat vas vetri fyrr en kristni væri hér í lög tekin. Enn hann gærði bú þritøgr, ok bjó fjótra vetr ens sjaunda tegar í Haukadali, ok hafði fjótra vetre ends tíunda tegar, þá es hann andaðisk, en þat vas hátíð Martens biskups á inum x. vetri eptir andlát Ísleifs biskups.

Ísleifr was consecrated bishop when he was fifty - Leo the Seventh was then pope - and he stayed in Norway over the next winter and then came out here. And he died at Skálholt when he had been bishop for a total of twenty-four years; so Teitr told us. It was on a Sunday, six days after

³⁶ *Íslendingabók* ch. 7, ÍF 1, p. 14. Ari mentions the priest Þórmóðr as well, but without giving further detail about him (ÍF 1, p. 15).

³⁷ C.f. E. Duke, "Late and Peaceful? Some Alternatives to Ari's Account of Iceland's Conversion," <http://www.skandinavistik.uni-bonn.de/saga-conference/abstracts/workshop-a/duke.doc>.

the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, eighty years after the fall of Óláfr Tryggvason (July 6, 1080); I was there with my foster-brother Teitr, and was then twelve years old. And Hallr, who had a good memory, was a truthful man and remembered it himself, told us about his baptism – how Þangbrandr had baptised him at the age of three, and that was a year before Christianity was incorporated into the law here. And he set up his farm at the age of thirty and then lived in Haukadalsr for sixty-four years, and was ninety-four when he died; and that was on the feast of Bishop Martin in the tenth year after the death of Bishop Ísleifr (i.e. November 11th, 1089).³⁸

Þangbrandr was “more successful at making (and in some cases slaying) enemies than converting heathens” (Kunin, HN 97n), and the details of his notoriously violent character are expanded in later sources. According to Snorri, the priest’s violence was too much even for Óláfr. The king did not want him at his court and thus sent him to Iceland, where Þangbrandr killed three men in the two years he was there, two of them because they had composed a satire about him (ch. 7).

Snorri probably puts Óláfr in too favourable (and peaceful) a light. Ari tells us that the king had a similarly violent disposition. Upon Þangbrandr’s return from Iceland and his account of the difficulties he encountered there,

hann varð við þat reiðr mjök, ok ætlaði at láta meiða eða drepa ossa landa fyrir, þá es þar váru austr. En þat sumar et sama kvómu útan héðan þeir Gizurr ok Hjalti ok þágu þá undan við konunginn ok hétu hönnum umbsýslu sinni til á nýjaleik, at hér yrði enn við kristninni tekit, ok létu sér eigi annars ván en þar myndi hlýða.

he (i.e. Óláfr) became very angry [. . .], and was planning to have those of our countrymen who were over there maimed or killed. But that same summer Gizurr and Hjalti came there from Iceland and dissuaded the King from that, and promised him their support in a new attempt to get Christianity accepted here, and said they expected nothing else but that it would succeed.³⁹

³⁸ Íslendingabók ch. 9. ÍF 1, p. 21. Hungrvaka says that Ísleifr was consecrated at Bremen on Whit Sunday, 1056, and this is probably right, since Adam of Bremen mentions him several times; but the pope is wrongly identified in the MS. – Leo IX (not VII, as Ari assumes) may have approved Ísleifr’s consecration, but he died in April 1054 and was succeeded by Victor II. Cf. Hungrvaka ch. 2. Ed. Jón Helgasson. Byskupa sögur I:76.

³⁹ Íslendingabók ch. 7. ÍF 1, p.15.

After this aborted mission by Þangbrandr, Óláfr apparently made another attempt at Christianising Iceland by sending Þormóðr, an English priest (though probably of Norse descent).⁴⁰

Óláfr's and Þangbrandr's violent methods of converting people:

Ari gives the date of the conversion of Iceland as “a thousand years after the birth of Christ according to the common reckoning” (cf. *Íslendingabók* ch.7).⁴¹ That summer, Christianity was officially accepted at the Alþingi on Lawspeaker Þorgeirr's advice. His main motivation was to avoid enmity among the people if they abided by different laws, which would ultimately end in warfare as seen in the battles between the Norwegian and Danish kings, he states. Again, Ari is most likely correct in his assessment of the situation. One of his named informants is Þóriðr, the daughter of Snorri goði. Snorri was directly involved in the negotiations and seems to have transferred to the Christian side.⁴² Ultimately, Iceland seems to have been lucky: Þorgeirr's advice is heeded, and violence is avoided.

The sources agree that Óláfr's methods of converting people were at least as violent as those of Þangbrandr. Snorri's account of the conversion of Norway is full of references to

⁴⁰ R. North, “Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Attitudes towards 999/1000 A.D.” 28. Cf. also *Kristni saga* ch. 14-30 and *Laxdæla saga* ch. 41 for references to the missionary efforts in Iceland. ⁴¹ A.D. 1000 is the traditional date of the conversion of Iceland. Ólafía Einarisdóttir has argued that the events took place in 999. Cf. “Olaf Tryggvason, Rex Norvegiae 994-999: Christian Ethics versus Teutonic Heroism.”

⁴² Ari thus had informants on both sides: Snorri, who originally was a heathen, as well as his own foster-father, who was a Christian.

Óláfr's habit of torturing or killing people who refused to convert. The king declared that he would make all of Norway Christian, or die (ch. LIII, ÍF 26, p. 303). Those who accept Christianity at the assemblies consistently ask him why he breaks the law and forces them to adopt customs which are against the old law (e.g. chs. LV, LXV, the episodes at Rogaland and the Trøndelag, ÍF 26, pp. 305-06, 314-15).⁴³

Ultimately, Óláfr's obsessive missionary zeal seems to have brought about his death during the battle at Svölðr in A.D. 1000, shortly after he had had a hand in converting Iceland. The legend that he survived the battle and became a hermit in Jerusalem will not be discussed here. While it is found throughout the late prose sources, the only contemporary and therefore credible source – the poet Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld – rejects it as false:

Samr vas þórr, of ævi,
 oddbraks, hinns þat sagði,
 at lofða gramr lifði,
 læstyggss sonar Tryggva.
 Vesa kveðr þld ór éli
 Óleif kominn stála,
 menn geta máli sönnu,
 mjök es verr an svá, ferri.

The honourable warrior said this about the life of the son of Tryggvi (who was slow to deceive), that the prince of praises lived. People say that Óláfr escaped from the hailstorm of steel; what men say is far from the truth – it is much worse than so.⁴⁴

Instead, my focus will be on the possible motivation for Óláfr's journey which ended in ambush, battle, and with his death. The sources are vague about the exact location of the battle, creating considerable discussion among modern scholars. The general consensus seems to be

⁴³ According to B. Fidjestøl, the Christian demands of resting on Sunday and of fasting were at odds with the old law: the people believed that land could not be lived in if work was forbidden, and that work was impossible if they were not allowed to eat. Cf. B. Fidjestøl, "Óláfr Tryggvason the Missionary" 214.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 112, esp. verse 167. ÍF 26, 368-69.

that Óláfr was on his way to Wendland.⁴⁵ While he had spent part of his childhood there, at this time there would have been no plausible reason to go back there – unless it was for another military or missionary effort. The sources are silent about any possible motivation the king might have had for his journey.⁴⁶ Óláfr must have known that it was a difficult and dangerous trip because he would have to face the combined forces of Sveinn forkbeard, Eiríkr, king of Sweden, and Eiríkr Hákonarson. Sveinn wanted to reassert Danish overlordship over Norway, Eiríkr Hákonarson wanted to avenge the death of his father, Hákon jarl (and probably establish regency of Norway under Sveinn's overlordship), and the Swedish king was hostile towards Óláfr due to the failed marriage negotiations with his sister Sigríðr the Proud. Given this overwhelming presence of hostile forces, Óláfr must have had strong reasons to undertake the journey at all. The events only seem to make sense if seen against the background of aggressive missionary activity: Óláfr might have felt a moral obligation to convert the people in Wendland. His three enemies were at this time still heathen, so Óláfr's aggressive missionary activity might have contributed further to their hostility.

Given the aggression with which Óláfr carried out his missionary activity in Norway, as well as the fact that violent conversions had not been the norm in any of the Germanic

⁴⁵ Possible locations are either just off the coast of Wendland (where, according to *Knytlinga saga*, there was a river called Svǫlðr), or in Øresund. If the latter is true, however, the question arises of why Óláfr did not avoid being ambushed by taking an alternate route, e.g. through the Great Belt. Cf. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ÍF 26, *Formáli* pp. cxxxiv-cxxxvi, and *Knytlinga saga* ÍF 35, pp. 98, 101, 297, 304.

⁴⁶ The account given in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta* ch. 254, that Óláfr was coming from the south suggests that that the ambush happened on his way back from Wendland, seems implausible. Assuming he had made it to Wendland, the sources would mention something regarding the purpose of his journey. The absence of an account of Óláfr's attempt to convert Wendland makes it improbable that he had actually been there in A.D. 1000.

countries, and the extremely dangerous circumstances of the journey towards Svǫldr, the question arises whether Óláfr's missionary zeal was not at least partly driven by a fear of the approaching millennium. The ASC (Peterborough Chronicle) states that Óláfr and his crew took winter quarters at Southampton. Presuming he was baptised in about October, he would have had around six months of exposure to preaching and instruction in Christian thought. Given that Óláfr was a serious convert, I would suggest that he was probably interested in further instruction in the faith, or at least was a regular participant at Mass. This would have given him plenty of opportunity to hear readings from Scripture, as well as sermons. While we cannot know for certain what kind of preaching he would have been exposed to in Southampton, it is safe to suggest that it would either have been the populist branch of preaching exemplified by the Blickling and Vercelli homilies, or the Ælfrician orthodox and often allegorical tradition. Ælfric was probably still writing the Catholic Homilies at the time – at least the Second Series. The First Series might have been in circulation already, and this collection was largely concerned with the Last Things.⁴⁷ It seems plausible that Óláfr's missionary zeal might partly have been caused by a literal understanding of the apocalyptic and eschatological material used in preaching. It might further have been fuelled by Easter and especially Pentecost services.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ P. Clemoes, "Chronology" 224 gives 991 as the date for CH I and 992 for CH II, but M. Godden, gives a slightly later date for the collections: between 990-994 for CH I, and after that for CH II. Cf. Commentary xxix-xxxv.

⁴⁸ It is unlikely that he would have left England before Easter, and he might possibly have stayed as late as Pentecost. Easter Sunday was on 21 April in 995, and Pentecost on 9 June (A Handbook of Dates p. 216).

We cannot know either what kind of preaching Óláfr's priests used in Norway and Iceland. Þangbrandr's Saxon or Flemish origin suggests that he might have been aware of Adso of Montier-en-Der's treatise on the Antichrist, which was dedicated to Gerberga, wife of Louis IV of West Francia (ruled 936-54) and the sister of Otto I (963-73).⁴⁹ If Þangbrandr grew up in the Carolingian Empire during the 960s or 970s, it seems probable that he would also have been aware of Otto I's mission to convert Haraldr bluetooth and – less successfully – Hákon jarl. Þangbrandr's missionary zeal might thus be partly explained due to the environment in which he grew up. His, like Óláfr's understanding of apocalyptic material would have been a literal one. *Njáls saga* ch. 100 gives an account of Þangbrandr's conversion of Hallr of Síða: when the priest is celebrating Mass on the Feast of the Archangel Michael, his host Hallr asks to be placed in the protection of Michael. Þangbrandr consents on the condition that Hallr and his household are baptised. Three of the four Scriptural mentions of the Archangel Michael occur in the context of the apocalypse and the final battle (Daniel 10:13 and 12:1 detail Michael's fight against the Antichrist, and Revelation 12:7 mentions him as the leader when war breaks out in heaven between the angels and the dragon). Richard North regards this as one piece of evidence that Þangbrandr might have been using the specific references to the Book of Revelation during his missionary efforts.⁵⁰ He further states that the quarrel between the priest and Steinunn Refs (Dálks)dóttir (*Njáls saga* ch. 102) draws a more obvious parallel between Þangbrandr's preaching and the Book of Revelation: Steinunn asks the priest

⁴⁹ Cf. also R. North, "Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Attitudes" 28-29.

⁵⁰ Cf. "Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Attitudes" 30.

'Hefir þú heyrt þat ... er Þórr bauð Kristi á hólm, ok treystisk hann eigi at berjask við Þór?'

'Have you heard that Þórr challenged Christ to a duel and Christ did not dare to fight him?'

To which Þangbrandr replies

Heyrt hefi ek þat,' segir Þangbrandr, 'at Þórr væri ekki nema mold ok aska, þegar guð vild; eigi, at hann lifði.

'I have heard,' said Þangbrandr 'that Þórr would be nothing but dust and ashes as soon as God did not want him to live.'⁵¹

This exchange parallels Revelation 13:3-8, which states that God permitted the dragon (i.e. the devil) to confer his powers on the beast (i.e. the Antichrist):

[3] Et admirata est universa terra post bestiam [4] et adoraverunt draconem quia dedit potestatem bestiae et adoraverunt bestiam dicentes quis similis bestiae et quis poterit pugnare cum ea [5] et datum est ei os loquens magna [. . .] [7] et datum est illi bellum facere cum sanctis et vincere illos et data est ei potestas in omnem tribum et populum et linguam et gentem [8] et adorabunt eum omnes qui inhabitant terram [. . .]

[3] And all the earth was in admiration after the beast. [4] And they adored the dragon, which gave power to the beast: and they adored the beast, saying: Who is like to the beast, and who shall be able to fight with him? [5] And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things, and blasphemies [. . .] [7] And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them. And power was given him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation. [8] And all that dwell upon the earth adored him [. . .]

Njáls saga is, of course, a much later source (written c. 1290), but we have possibly contemporary evidence for Steinunn's preference for Þórr and her hostility towards the Saxon priest in some of her verses. It does not seem entirely implausible that an exchange like the one given in Njáls saga might have taken place or that Þangbrandr was drawing on a literal understanding of apocalyptic material, possibly the Book of Revelation in particular, to defeat heathenism.⁵²

⁵¹ Njáls saga, ÍF 12, p. 265.

⁵² The episode is also mentioned in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta, ch. 216. Cf. also Kristni saga ch. 9 (ÍF 15, p. 2,24-25), which mention her two verses about the wrecking of Þangbrandr's ship, though not this verbal exchange.

Individual voices: heathen reactions to the new religion:

The late prose sources about Óláfr's life all stem from the north Icelandic school of history writing (cf. above, p. 6). Due to their hagiographic bias, they put strong emphasis on the greatness of Óláfr's missionary achievements. Even if they mention the initial resistance of the local population to Óláfr's threats, the sources generally make it sound as if the act of conversion was a relatively simple process and an almost instantaneous event: the locals agree to accept the new religion, are baptised on the spot, and the region's population is Christian. In reality, however, we must allow for a lengthy phase of transition. It probably took a few generations until Christianity really took root in the newly-converted regions. Given Óláfr's method of spreading the faith in Norway, and the fact that he covered extremely large geographic areas in very little time, the question arises of how thorough an instruction in Christianity was provided for the locals. The prose sources, of course, do not mention anything about any initial difficulties and setbacks. Even in the episodes which display Óláfr's and Þangbrandr's violence, the locals are rarely given a voice – and if they are, their story is only used as a backdrop to the greatness of Óláfr's achievement of converting even the most stubborn and reluctant people.

However, in contemporary skaldic verse, we occasionally hear the voices of heathens commenting on the new religion, or of new converts trying to come to terms with the changes that occurred in their religious life. Because they may be of contemporary date,⁵³ these are

⁵³ We cannot assume that all skaldic verses are genuinely of the age to which they are attributed, though many clearly are.

credible sources exemplifying the individuals' reluctance to abandon their old beliefs, their struggles to come to terms with the concept of monotheism, and their confusion about and misunderstanding of the new religion in general. The Scandinavian countries are the only Germanic regions where we find accounts from the point of view of the converts.⁵⁴

Generally, the heathens seem to have been highly tolerant of individual religious beliefs. Families could choose which one(s) of the gods they wanted to worship, and, in theory, one could even be an atheist without anybody objecting to it. At the Alþingi of A.D. 1000, a concession was made to heathens, that they were allowed to continue their heathen rituals as long as no Christians objected to it. It seems that during the transition from heathenism to Christianity, Christ was often simply another addition to the pagan pantheon.

Most notably, Landnámabók states that Helgi inn magri worshipped both Christ and Þórr, but he preferred Þórr when he was at sea.⁵⁵ Presumably, he believed that the pagan god had more experience in seafaring. Such a mixture of beliefs does not seem to have been uncommon: a soapstone mould from Trendgården in Denmark was clearly intended to accommodate pagan and Christian beliefs, since both crosses and hammers could be cast from its mould.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ While Bede's HE mentions several conversion stories, we do not get any account of the converts' feelings connected with conversion, at least not a credible account given in their own words. The story of king Rædwald's simultaneous belief in Christ and pagan gods (HE II.xv) comes closest to what the Norse sources show us; however, it remains uncertain how credible Rædwald's story is and we do not get to hear his own voice regarding his motivation for accepting Christ but keeping the old gods as well. The same is true for Bede's account of the pagan priest Coifi (II.xiii). There are no comparable sources from the Continent.

⁵⁵ Cf. Landnámabók ch. 218, H184, ÍF 1, p. 250-53. Helgi named his estate *Kristnes* (Christ's Headland), and it retains this name until today. Cf. E. O. G. Turville-Petre, Origins 3.

⁵⁶ For an image of the soapstone mould, see Magnus Magnusson, Hammer of the North 41.

In contrast to Helgi's simultaneous belief in Þórr and Christ, Steinunn Refs (Dálks)dóttir (c. 999) shows a clear preference for Þórr over Christ. She rejoices at the thought that pagan god is stronger because he caused Þangbrandr's shipwreck:

1. Þórr brá Þvinnils dýri
Þangbrands ór stað lǫngu,
hristi búss ok besti
barðs ok laust við jörðu;

munat skið of sæ síðan
sundfært Atals grundar,
hregg þvít hart tók leggja
hǫnum kent í spǫnu.

2. Braut fyr bjǫllu gæti
(bǫnd rǫku Val Strandar)
mǫgfellandi mellu
mǫstalls visund allan;

hlífðit Krístr, þás kneyfði
knǫrr, malmfeta varrar;
lítt hykk at goð gætti
Gylfa hreins at einu.⁵⁷

1. Þórr cast Þangbrandr's longship out of its place; he shook and dashed the ship and hurled it against the land; the ship will never again be in a state to journey over the ocean, for the mighty storm that he caused has broken it in pieces.
2. Þórr thoroughly broke up the ship for the priest (lit. "bell-keeper"); the gods caused the ship to be wrecked; Christ did not protect the ship when it was wrecked – I think that God gave little protection to the ship (lit. "Gylfi's reindeer").⁵⁸

This example is interesting for a number of reasons: like Helgi, Steinunn associates Þórr with seafaring and even credits him with being able to control the sea by conjuring up a storm.

While it is clear that she does not believe in Christ, she does not dispute his existence either.

Steinunn shows no acquaintance with the new religion beyond her knowledge of Christ's name.

⁵⁷ Ed. Finnur Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning* 1B, 127-28.

⁵⁸ The translation follows Finnur Jónsson's Danish translation, *Skjaldedigtning* 1B, 127-28.

Her idea that Christ is powerless when confronted with a sea storm would have seemed ridiculous to a Christian listener, since it was he who calmed the storm on the lake (cf. Luke 8:23-25). Steinunn's verses are thus a good example of unfamiliarity with Christian story lines. However, the new, monotheistic religion also caused much more severe confusion and misunderstanding among pagan skalds. A good examples can be found in a piece of verse by Eilífr Goðrúnarson, a late tenth-century skald.

Setbergs kveða sitja
 sunnr at Urðar brunni,
 svá hefr ramr konungr remðan
 Róms banda sik lǫndum.

They say that he sits in the south by the spring of [the norn] Urðr; thus has the strong King of Rome [God] strengthened himself with the lands of the gods of the flat, sea-like rock [giants].⁵⁹

The translation of this verse is difficult, mostly because it is unclear where the genitive form *setbergs* belongs: Finnur Jónsson took *setbergs banda* to mean “giants”. This translation is problematic – the “lands of giant” ought to mean rocks and mountains, or possibly the frozen Arctic, as opposed to habitable lands; the statement would thus not really make sense. Alternatively, *setbergs banda* might mean “gods who were worshipped on mountains”, thus offering a translation of “the strong King of Rome strengthened himself in the lands of the gods of the saddle-shaped mountain; they say he sits in the south by the well of Urðr.”⁶⁰ Or we

⁵⁹ Cf. also Finnur Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning* 1B, 144. As translated by Whaley, “Conversion Verses” 242.

⁶⁰ There is placename evidence for a pre-Christian belief that associates gods with mountains: the name Roseberry Topping seems to stem from *under Óðines beorg*. Cf. E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Place-Names* 392. For the worship of Óðinn on mountains, cf. also Ælfric's *De falsis diis* 138, ed. J. C. Pope, *Supplementary Collection* II:684.

might read *setbergs banda Róms konungr*: “the strong king of the gods of the saddle-shaped mountain of Rome”, which might be a reference to the saints.⁶¹

Eilífr would have been composing in a pagan environment (or in a newly Christian one that he did not understand), and he himself would have been a heathen, trying to describe what he thought he knew about Christianity. He apparently understands the Christian God to be intruding on pagan ground – coming from the south, he is occupying a space near Urðr’s well and is taking over the northern regions formerly belonging to the pagan gods. Whaley correctly points out the echo of *Urðar brunni* in *Völuspá* (st. 19) as an emblem for heathen holy ground, and states that Eilífr seems to regard the Norns as synonymous with the ancient pagan religion (D. Whaley 242). The tone of Eilífr’s verse seems to indicate an understanding of Christianity as a religion which did not allow for a peaceful co-existence of the Christian God alongside the pagan deities; the “King of Rome” who is already “strong” is further strengthening himself by conquering the northern regions. If this reading is correct, then Eilífr not only shows a remarkable misunderstanding of Christianity, but he also seems to feel threatened by its intrusion on his own homeland.

Eyvindr Skáldaspillir’s *Hákonarmál* offers an example of a pagan poet applying Christian terminology to describe his own religion – however without understanding the underlying connotations. He refers to Óðinn as *heiðin goð*, the heathen god, but it seems as if he is simply adopting a term he must have heard at Hákon’s court, without using it to describe Óðinn in negative terms. He states that “since Hákon went with the heathen god, many people have

⁶¹ Cf. also W. Weber, “Die Christus-Strophe des Eilífr Goðrúnarson”.

suffered hardship” (*siz Hókon / fór með heiðin goð – mǫrg es bjóð of þéuð*).⁶² Eyvindr is aware of the fact that Hákon did not believe in the old gods, but he apparently assumes that Óðinn is tolerant enough to welcome the king after his death despite his unbelief, due to the king’s military prowess. This, of course, also carries the assumption that Hákon’s faith in Christ was a mistake in the first place.

Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld: the reluctant convert:

The most interesting verses on the theme of conversion stem from Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld, a poet at the court of Óláfr Tryggvason. He claims that the king caused him to convert to Christianity and became his godfather at baptism:

Hlautk þanns æztr vas einna
– ek sanna þat – manna
und niðbyrði Norðra
norðr goðföður orðinn.

I gained a godfather who was the greatest of all men in the north under the burden of Norðri’s kin [dwarfs → sky]. I vouch for that.⁶³

Hallfreðr’s “conversion verses” survive in Hallfreðar saga, which is preserved as an independent saga, and is part of Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta.⁶⁴ The saga puts the stanzas about his

⁶² Eyvindr Skáldaspillir, Hákonarmál 21. Finnur Jónsson, Skjaldedigtning 1B, 60. This is the first recorded occurrence of the word *heiðin*, “heathen”, as referring to the pre-Christian gods.

⁶³ Óláfsdrápa (Erfidrápa) verse 26. As quoted and translated by D. Whaley, “Conversion Verses” 248–49. Cf. also Finnur Jónsson, Skjaldedigtning 1B, 156.

⁶⁴ They are preserved as verses 9–13 in the Möðruvallabók (M, AM 132 fol.) version of Hallfreðar saga (ch. 6), and as verses 7–11 in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta (O), and are also printed as *lausavísur* (occasional verses) by Finnur Jónsson, Skjaldedigtning 1B, 158–89. Versions of O are also found in AM 61 fol., Holm papp. fol. nr. 22 (Húsafellsbók), AM 53 fol., AM 62 fol., AM 432IX, 1b 4to, AM 557 4to (Skálholtsbók), Holm perg. fol.

conversion into a dialogue between the poet and the king, which forms a kind of contest: Hallfreðr composes verses showing his reluctance to convert, Óláfr rebukes him and makes him amend his work. It is because of his stubbornness that the poet obtains his nickname *vandræðaskáld*, “troublesome poet”. However, the prose story is undoubtedly later and will therefore be disregarded as spurious here. My focus will be on Hallfreðr’s own words in his verse.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Fyrr vas hitt, es harra
Hliðskjalfr gat’k sjalfan
– skipt es á gumna gítu –
geðskjótan vel blóta. | It was [?thus] in former days, that
I could worthily sacrifice to the mind-swift
– there is change in the fortunes of men –
Lord of Hliðskjölf [Óðinn] himself. |
| 2. Öll hefr ætt til hylli
Óðins skipat ljóðum
(algilda man’k) aldar
(iðju várra niðja);
en traudr, því’t vel Viðris
vald hugnaðisk skaldi,
legg’k á frumver Friggjar
fjón, því’t Kristi þjónum. | The whole race of men to win
Óðinn’s grace has wrought poems
(I recall the exquisite
works of my forebears);
but with sorrow, for well did
Viðrir’s [Óðinn’s] power please the poet,
do I conceive hate for the first husband of
Frigg [Óðinn], because I serve Christ. |
| 3. Höfum, hólða reifir,
hrafnblóts goða nafni,
þess’s ól við lof lýða
lóm, ór heiðnum dómi. | I am neutral, patron of heroes,
towards the name of the priest of raven sacrifice
of him who nourished, to repay men’s praise,
fraud, from heathen times. |
| 4. Mér skyli Freyr ok Freyja
– fjörð lért’k af dul Njarðar;
líknisk gröm við Grímnir –
gramr ok Þórr enn rammi.
Krist vil’k allrar ástar
– erum leið sonar reiði;
vald á frægt und foldar
feðr – einn ok goð kveðja. | Against me Freyr and Freyja
– last year I abandoned Njörðr’s deceit;
let fiends grant mercy to Grímnir [Óðinn] –
should bear fury, and the mighty Þórr.
From Christ alone will I beg all love
– hateful to me is the son’s anger;
he holds famous power under the
father of earth – and from God. |
| 5. Sá’s með Sygna ræsi
siðr, at blót eru kviðjuð;
verðum flest at forðask
fornhaldin sköp norna.
Láta allir ýtar | It’s the custom of the Sogn-men’s
sovereign [Óláfr] that sacrifices are banned;
we must renounce many an
anciently held decree of norns.
All mankind casts Óðinn’s |

Óðins ætt fyr róða;	clan to the ?winds;
verð'k ok neyddr frá Njarðar	and I am forced to leave Njörðr's
viðjum Krist at biðja.	kin and pray to Christ. ⁶⁵

In the past, Bjarni Einarsson called Hallfreðr's verses "too good to be true", whereas Einar Ól. Sveinsson accepted them as genuine.⁶⁶ After a thorough examination of the verses on grounds of mythological and religious content, metre, and style, Diana Whaley has recently concluded that the verses are, indeed, authentic. They offer a credible glance at the reaction of a reluctant convert to Christianity. He reminisces about his old beliefs, but men's fortunes have changed (*skipt es á gumna gitu*), and Óláfr Tryggvason has banned heathen sacrifices and the belief in the Norns – a direct contrast to Adam of Bremen's allegations that Óláfr was heavily involved in the practice of magic and divination. Hallfreðr's verses show that conversion took time, it was not an instantaneous process: "last year" he abandoned his belief in Njörðr, and he went from grieving for his old beliefs to being "neutral" to the old gods, to solely seeking love from Christ and God.⁶⁷ Finally, he states that "all mankind cast's Óðinn's clan to the winds" and "let fiends grant mercy to Grímnir [Óðinn]" (*líknisk grøm við Grímní*). Whaley interprets the meaning of the latter phrase to be either "let Óðinn go to hell" or "demons can go on worshipping Óðinn, but I cannot". While there is no outright renunciation of the pagan gods, the fact that Hallfreðr calls Njörðr full of deceit (*dul Njarðar*), might be an early stage of the poet

⁶⁵ As quoted and translated by D. Whaley, "The 'Conversion Verses' in *Hallfreðar saga*" 235–36. The verses are dated by Finnur Jónsson to A.D. 996 (1B 158–59).

⁶⁶ Bjarni Einarsson, "The Last Hour" 218, and Einar Ól Sveinsson, ed. *Hallfreðar saga* lix–lx.

⁶⁷ On the interpretation of verse 3., see D. Whaley 235: the opening word *bæfum*, "to moderate, deal out justly" seems the best option, but AM 61 fol. gives the reading *bøfium*, "reject", which would make excellent sense but is unsupported by the prose context of the saga. The verse is unfortunately lacking from AM 62.

demonising his old beliefs (cf. D. Whaley, “Conversion Verses” 243). He also refers to the traditions of Óðinn as deceiver (v. 3,3-4), which actually have a genuine aspect of heathenism – whereas deceit by Njǫrðr is not as far as we know. Whaley concludes that

Overall, then, the old religion of the north receives more, and more complex, coverage in these verses than Christianity, and the view of it blends nostalgia with denunciation and renunciation. The stance remains essentially polytheistic, in the sense that there is no outright statement of disbelief in the Æsir and Vanir, though there is a recognition that the perfidy of the old order must give way to the power and love of the new, and there may be hints of demonization of the old gods.⁶⁸

Hallfreðr’s understanding of Christianity seems to be pretty basic. The main suggestion seems to be that he is aware of the fact that Christianity is a monotheistic religion which does not tolerate simultaneous belief in the old gods. There is no evidence for any deeper understanding of Christian concepts such as Christ’s death and resurrection, or judgement and salvation. The poet mentions being afraid of the old gods’ anger, and his motivation for converting seems to be at least in part a fear of the Christian God. The question that remains is, however, whether his fear of king Óláfr surpassed the fear of the deities.

Hallfreðar does not take the final step of renouncing the heathen gods completely – as any fully converted Christian would have had to do at baptism, as is shown in Saxon (ninth century) and Frankish (late eighth century) baptismal vows:

I. (Saxon baptismal vow)	
Forsáchistu diabolae?	Do you forsake the devil?
<i>Et respondeat</i> ec forsacho diabolae.	<i>And let him reply</i> I forsake the devil.
End allum diobolgeldæ?	And all worship of the devil?
<i>Respondeat</i> end ec forsacho allum diobolgeldæ.	<i>Let him reply</i> And I forsake all worship of the devil.

⁶⁸ D. Whaley, “Conversion Verses” 245. The notion that pagan gods were either natural objects or forces, or wicked historical beings who persuade others to venerate them as deities was a wide-spread in the early Middle Ages and is probably best exemplified in Ælfric’s *De falsis diis*, an old Norse version of which exists in *Hauksbók*. A. Taylor, “*Hauksbók* and Ælfric’s *De Falsis Diis*.” J. C. Pope II:284-612.

End allum dioboles uuereum?

Respondeat end ec forsacho allum dioboles uuereum

and uuordum, thunaer ende uuoden
ende saxnote ende allum them unholdum,
the hira genotas sint.

Gelobistu in got, alamehtigan fadaer?

Ec gelobo in got, alamehtigan fadaer.

Gelobistu in crist, godes suno?

Ec gelobo in crist, gotes sunu.

Gelobistu in halogan gast?

Ec gelobo in halogan gast.

II. (Frankish baptismal vow)

Interrogatio sacerdotis. Forsahhistu unholdun?

Ih fursahu.

Forsahhistu unholdun uuerc indi uuillon?

Ih fursahhu.

Forsahhistu allem them bluostrum indi den
gelton indi den gotum, thie im heidene man
zi geldom enti zi gotum habent?

Ih fursahhu.

Gilaubistu in got, fater almahtigan?

Ih gilaubu.

Gilaubistu in christ, gotes sun, nerjenton?

Ih gilaubu.

Gilaubistu in heilagan geist?

Ih gilaubu.

Gilaubistu einan got almahtigan
in thrinisse intu in einisse?

Ih gilaubu.

Gilaubistu thuruh taufunga sunteono forlaznessi?

Ih gilaubu.

Gilaubistu lib after tode?

Ih gilaubu.

And all of the devil's work?

Let him reply And I forsake all of the
devil's works

and words, Thunaer and Woden
and Saxnot and all the demons
who are their companions.

Do you believe in God, the Almighty Father?

I believe in the Almighty Father.

Do you believe in Christ, the Son of God?

I believe in Christ, the Son of God.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit.

Questioning by the priest: Do you forsake
the devil?

I forsake.

Do you forsake devilish work and will?

I forsake.

Do you forsake all the blood sacrifices and the
offerings and the gods that among the heathens
are held to be offerings and gods?

I forsake.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?

I believe.

Do you believe in Christ, the Son of God,
the Saviour?

I believe.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe.

Do you believe in God the Almighty
in the Trinity and the Unity?

I believe.

Do you believe that through baptism
there will be forgiveness?

I believe.

Do you believe in life after death?

I believe.⁶⁹

These baptismal vows seem to indicate that the convert must have had a much more detailed understanding of Christian doctrine than is shown in Hallfreðr's verses. Especially the concept of the Trinity and how it differs from a polytheistic belief must have been hard to grasp for any

⁶⁹ "Taufgelübde bekehrter Heiden," W. Wackernagel, ed. *Altdeutsches Lesebuch* col. 197-200. Translation mine.

new converts. The priest requests the convert to reject not only a belief in and practice of sacrifices to the devil, Othón, Wotan, and Saxnot, but to all devilish beings in their company, whom the heathens took to be gods. The Frankish vow is much more detailed about the renunciation of pagan practices.

Hallfreðr's conversion verses show nothing of the deeper understanding of Christianity required by the baptismal vows quoted above. One might ask whether the missionaries to Norway/Iceland had the time to instruct people in that much detail – especially concerning such concepts as the Trinity/Unity of God.⁷⁰ If the missionaries really felt the time pressure of the approaching millennium as acutely as I have argued, they would have aimed at quantity rather than quality in their efforts to convert people. It would thus make sense that Hallfreðr's understanding of Christianity is – at least initially, and maybe even at the time of his baptism – below basic. Given that the last two verses cited on the following page are generally accepted as genuine, I think we can trace a considerable “learning curve” in Hallfreðr's poetry. Given his close acquaintance with the king, it would not be surprising that his education in Christian doctrine ended up being somewhat more thorough than the average convert's. However, as one would expect, his understanding of Christianity seems to have improved over time: his last verse, counted by Jónsson among the *lausavísur* and dated to A.D. 1000,⁷¹ shows the poet's concern for his soul after death:

⁷⁰ The skaldic verses seem to mention mostly Christ as God. Skapti Þóroddsson (law-speaker 1004–30), for example, calls Christ “lord of monks” (*máttir es munku dróttins / mestr*) and praises him as the creator of the whole world (cf. D. Whaley 242–43). The Father and the Son might be argued to be present in Hallfreðr's verses, but the Holy Spirit is certainly absent.

⁷¹ *Skjaldedigtning* 1B, 163, verse 28.

Ek munda nú andask,
 ungr vask harðr í tungu,
 senn, ef sǫlu minni
 sorglaust, vissak borgit;
 veitk, at vetki of sýtik,
 valdi goð hvar aldri,
 (dauðr verðr hverr) nema hræðumk
 helvíti, skal slíta.

I would now die at once without sorrow if I knew my soul was saved – when I was young I was harsh in my tongue; I know that I fear nothing except hell – everyone dies – but let God decide where my life shall finish up.⁷²

Shortly after that, in verse 29 of his Óláfsdrápa (Erfidrápa), composed soon after Óláfr's death,⁷³

we find a prayer for Óláfr's soul which seems to indicate an understanding of the concept of resurrection:

Fyrr mun heimr ok himnar,
 hugreifum Áleifi,
 (hann vas menskra manna
 mest gótt) í tvau bresta,
 áðr an, glíkr at góðu,
 gæðingr myni fœðask;
 kœns hafi Krístr enn hreini
 konungs ǫnd ofar lǫndum.

First must heaven and earth break in two, before there arise another king like cheerful Óláfr (he was the most excellent among mankind). May Christ the Pure preserve the king's soul above the earth.⁷⁴

These verses are generally assumed to be genuine (cf. Whaley 251). Together with the “conversion verses” discussed by Whaley, they give a unique outline of the conversion story of an individual in late tenth-century Norway, showing his initial reluctance to reject his old beliefs,

⁷² Translation according to Finnur Jónsson's Danish translation.

⁷³ Finnur Jónsson dates it to 1001. Skjaldedigtning 1B, 150.

⁷⁴ Finnur Jónsson, Skjaldedigtning 1B, 156. Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta ch. 256.

and an increasingly detailed understanding of Christian concepts such as the demonisation of the old gods, the belief in an afterlife in heaven, and the fear of damnation in hell.

Rhetorical flourishes of the kind just quoted (X cataclysmic event must happen before there will be another king as great as Y) do not seem to have been uncommon.⁷⁵ The same tradition of “X must happen before there will be another king as great as Y” is continued in *Þórfínnsdrápa* by Arnórr jarlaskáld (c. 1012 – after 1073), which commemorates Þórfinnr Sigurðarson who died c. 1064. Whereas the oral formulae mostly seem to focus on the breaking asunder of heaven and earth, Arnórr introduces black sunshine and the earth sinking into the sea. These are very clear echoes of *Völuspá*:

Björt verðr sól at svartri, sökkur fold í mar dökkvan, brestr erfíði Austrá, ⁷⁶ allr glymr sær á fjöllum, áðr at Eyjum friðri – indróttar – Þórfinni – þeim hjalpi goð geymi – gæðingr myni fæðask.	The bright sun will turn black, earth will sink in the dark sea, Austri's burden [the sky] will break, the sea thunder on the fells, before in the Isles a finer chieftain than Þórfinnr (may God help that guardian of his retinue) will be born. ⁷⁷
<i>Vsp.</i> 57, 1-2 Sól tær sortna, sígr fold í mar,	The sun will start to darken the earth will sink in the sea
<i>Vsp.</i> 41,5 Svart var þá sólskín	The sunshine was then black ⁷⁸

⁷⁵ L. Lönnroth considers the “heaven/earth” pair to be part of the oral formulaic tradition. See his discussion of the *þorð/upphiminn* formula in *Speculum Norrœnum*. Cf. esp. his reference to the Skarpåker stone in Sweden (11th century): *Gunnar reisti stin þenna at Lýðbjörn sun sinn. / Þorð skal rifna ok upphiminn* (Gunnar erected this stone in memory of his son, Lýðbjörn. Earth shall crack and heaven above.” (*Speculum Norrœnum* 318). Hallfreðr's *heimr ok himnar* pair might be a variation of the theme.

⁷⁶ Austrí is one of the dwarf names in *Völuspá* 11.

⁷⁷ *Þórfínnsdrápa* 22, as quoted and translated by J. McKinnell, “*Völuspá* and the Feast of Easter”, forthcoming in *Alvismál*. Cf. also D. Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskald* 265.

⁷⁸ The stanza numbering of *Völuspá* follows the traditional order established by Neckel-Kuhn.

Apart from continuing the tradition established in Hallfreðr's verses, these "exciting eschatological references to the sky splitting are a superb example of continuity between pagan Ragnarøk and Christian Doomsday" (Whaley, 251). Even if the references were already part of the oral formulaic tradition in pre-Christian times, they might have been reinforced by Christian accounts of the apocalypse found in apocryphal or apocryphally-inspired texts such as the Apocalypse of Thomas or Vercelli homily II (cf. above, chapter 3).

Völuspá:

The echoes of Völuspá in the verse from Þórfínnsdrápa just quoted allow us to establish a *terminus ante quem* of 1064 for the Eddic poem. Völuspá's stanza 57 is central to the poem, with its description of Ragnarøk imagery. Arnórr is using the apocalyptic images only as a rhetorical flourish. It seems unlikely that a figure of speech would get borrowed into Völuspá as a crucial plot point. This makes the *terminus ante quem* more certain than the *terminus post quem*, which seems to be established by Hákonarmál (c. 962-65): in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's poem, the two valkyries Gøndul and Skøgul have been sent to choose which warriors shall join Óðinn in Vallhöll. In verse 12, Skøgul is called Geir-Skøgul ("Skøgul with a Spear"):

Hví þú svá gunni
skiptir, Geir-Skøgul,
órum þó verðir gagns frá goðum?
Vér því vøldum,
es velli helt
en þínir fiandr flugu.⁷⁹

'why did you thus
decide the battle, spear-carrying Skøgul,
Although (I) had deserved victory from the gods?'
'We are the cause
that you hold the field/have been victorious
And (that) your enemies fled.'

⁷⁹ Finnur Jónsson, Skjaldedigtning 1B, 58-59.

The poet of *Völuspá* st. 30 obviously mistook this as a reference to a different being and thus names Skögul and Geir-Skögul as two valkyries. We thus get a probable timeframe of c. 962-1064 for the composition of *Völuspá*.⁸⁰

In the past, scholars regarded the poem either as a purely heathen text and denied any Christian influence on it, or they read it as the work of a Christian who looked back at the old religion in a somewhat nostalgic – or, on the contrary, condemning – way.⁸¹ They tried to rearrange the order of the stanzas, to chop down on what they believed to be spurious material (Müllenhoff, for example, believed 16 of the 66 stanzas to be later interpolations), and argued over which manuscript offered a more reliable text.⁸² Jan de Vries regards the poem as a text documenting the transition between the “time of Óðinn” and the “time of Baldr”, and states that the heathen poet was able to identify the former as sinful only because he had had some knowledge of Christianity, which influenced his description of the peaceful “new heaven and earth” after Baldr’s return.

Das Gedicht ist das erschütternde Bekenntnis einer Seele, die zwischen zwei Weltperioden lebt; mit seinem Herzen hängt er an dem Alten, aber sein Verlangen führt ihn schon dem Neuen entgegen.

The poem is a moving confession of a soul living on the cusp of two epochs; he clings to the former with his heart while at the same time he is longing for the new one.⁸³

While stanza 57 is central to the poem, stanza 30 has sometimes been suspected of being a later interpolation, as it is found in the *Codex Regius*, but not in *Hauksbók*. The list of valkyrie names would then mirror the list of dwarf names, which are generally accepted to be a later addition.

⁸¹ Cf. e.g. K. Müllenhoff, *Deutsche Altertumskunde* V 3-73; Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie* I:132ff.

⁸² S. Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*. See Sigurður Nordal, “Three Essays on *Völuspá*” 83ff. Cf. also Butt, “Zur Herkunft der *Völuspá*.”

⁸³ Jan De Vries. *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte* I:61-62.

There have been attempts to find not only Christian but also Indian-Iranian-Indo-European echoes in *Völuspá*.⁸⁴ Olrik, too, found parallels in Eastern mythology, and attempted to establish clear distinctions between the pagan and Christian elements in the poem.⁸⁵ Since Sigurður Nordal's work, however, most scholars have accepted that the poet was a pagan who was influenced to some degree by Christianity.⁸⁶ He argued against tampering with the manuscript text, especially as recorded in the *Codex Regius* manuscript, and stated that the poem forms a coherent unit despite its complex and complicated imagery.⁸⁷

The question of *Völuspá*'s place of origin has elicited similar debates: Norway was suggested by Müllenhoff.⁸⁸ Wolfgang Butt made a case for Northumbria, especially the Danelaw area, probably even York itself. Butt argued that *Völuspá* was directly influenced by Wulfstan's homilies and by the Old English poem *Judgement Day II*.⁸⁹ His argument and methodology will be discussed in more detail below.

Sigurður Nordal convincingly argues for Iceland as the place of origin. His textual evidence includes

⁸⁴ A. von Ström, "Indogermanisches in der *Völuspá*."

⁸⁵ A. Olrik, *Ragnarök: Die Sagen vom Weltuntergang*.

⁸⁶ For discrepant voices cf. e.g. M. Schulte, "Numerical Structure in *Völuspá*." Schulte regards the poem as being entirely based on Christian numerology. Cf. also K. Samplonius, "Imago Dei in *Völuspá*?" Samplonius' view is less dogmatic than Schulte's, but he still denies any pagan influence on the poem.

⁸⁷ Sigurður Nordal, "The Author of *Völuspá*"; "Three Essays on *Völuspá*". The latter offers detailed discussions of the methodological problems of previous scholarship.

⁸⁸ See Sigurður Nordal, "Three Essays on *Völuspá*" 84.

⁸⁹ W. Butt, "Zur Herkunft der *Völuspá*".

- a) the poem's references to imagery connected with volcanic activity, earthquakes, and hot springs – all of which can be found in Iceland but not in Norway or anywhere else in Scandinavia,

Fylliz fjörvi
 feigra manna,
 rýðr ragna sjöt
 rauðum dreyra;
 svart var þá sólskin
 of sumr eptir
 veðr öll válynd.
 Vituð ér vann – eða hvat?

He will bloat himself on the blood of doomed men,
 redden the homes of gods with red gore;
 the sunshine was black the summer after,
 the weather all treacherous. Will you know more – or what? (st. 41).⁹⁰

The first two lines are sometimes regarded as a depiction of sunset imagery, rather than volcanic activity. The idea that the earth will be engulfed by the sea (cf. st. 57) is common in low flatlands, such as found in southern Iceland.⁹¹ The clearest instance of Icelandic landscape imagery is the reference to *hveru lundi* (st. 35,2), which probably refers to hot springs. In the Norse-speaking world, these are found only in Iceland. This half-stanza is not in Hauksbók, which has its own alternative (now usually called st. 34); but although Snorri knew the Hauksbók version, it is more dubious (cf. Nordal and Dronke).

⁹⁰ Alternatively, the first line might be translated “she becomes drunk (from *fullr* ‘to get drunk’) on the blood of doomed men”. It would then refer not to the wolf, but to the mother of Fenrir’s kin (*in aldna* in the previous stanza). This might be another echo of the Book of Revelation (17,6).

⁹¹ However, Iceland is not the only country which features such landscape. Parts of Denmark are equally flat. Norway, on the other hand, is not. Thus, Sigurður Nordal’s arguments against Norwegian provenance are not necessarily always evidence for Icelandic origin.

b) the poet's misconception of the mistletoe as a tree (st. 31: *stóð um vaxinn / völlum hæri / mjör ok mjök / mistilteinn* "there stood, full-grown, high over the fields, / slender, most lovely, the mistletoe twig"), and the conditions surrounding the earth's creation: the absence of sandy beaches, the sea, and vegetation (*vara sandr né sær ... en gras hvergi*, st. 2) would not have occurred to Norwegians as being unusual.

He underlines the poem's affinity to court poetry which, by the end of the tenth century, had become restricted almost exclusively to Icelanders (Sigurður Nordal, "Three Essays on *Völuspá*" 107, 111-13).⁹²

Having dealt with the when and where of *Völuspá*, the question arises of how such a poem could have been composed. Sigurður Nordal believes that *Völuspá* originated in a climate rife with the fear of the approaching year A.D. 1000, stating that "it was a common belief, or at least fear, among Christians that the last and worst times would begin in the year 1000" ("Three Essays on *Völuspá* 114). He refers to Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Björn Magnusson Ólsen, who – independently of each other – had expressed similar opinions in the 1880s: "The apprehension of the near crack of doom points to a date near 1000 A.D.", Ólsen states.⁹³ Neither of them elaborates further on what caused them to arrive at this conclusion, and one could be tempted to accuse them of the same romanticised view of history that was found among the nineteenth-century French scholars who first argued that Europe was paralysed by

⁹² This is, at least, the impression we get from the material that has survived. There might be, however, a bias towards Iceland because of the fact that the surviving manuscripts are Icelandic. Cf. M. Townend, "Whatever Happened to York Viking Poetry? Memory, Tradition and the Transmission of Skaldic Verse."

⁹³ Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* lxvii; Björn Magnusson Ólsen. *Um Völuspá* 372. Ólsen does not refer to Guðbrandur.

fears of the millennium (see above, chapter 1). Sigurður Nordal places *Völuspá* in the historical context of the late tenth century by referring to Abbo of Fleury's *Apologeticus ad Hugonem et Rodbertum reges Francorum* (cf. above, chapter 1) and to the pilgrimages that followed the year 1000. He also refers to the traditional belief that the end of the world was transferred to 1033 when the apocalypse did not happen in the year 1000 ("Three Essays on *Völuspá*" 115). In light of my argument in esp. chapters 1, 3 and 4, this view needs some revision. While on the whole Europe was not gripped by paralysing panic during the period of c. 950–1050, traces of such fears seem to have existed among the uneducated. The clergy seem to have played on these concerns in their sermons – albeit without preaching heretical material – in order to make people repent and/or convert. I agree that the most convincing context for the composition of *Völuspá* is to be found in the conversion phase of Iceland around the year 1000, and that fears connected with the millennium might have been heightened at that particular time in that particular place. But if this is true, it is not because the whole of Europe was paralysed on the eve of the year 1000; it is because the circumstances surrounding the conversion of Norway and Iceland are unique: Óláfr Tryggvason's missionary zeal which was probably brought about by a misunderstanding of eschatological and apocalyptic preaching, coupled with whatever populist preaching material his English and Saxon priests imported from their home countries,⁹⁴ might well explain a climate in which a poem such as *Völuspá* could have been composed. Of course, in most instances we cannot know for certain what kind of preaching material the missionaries used. Nor are there

⁹⁴ Sigurður Nordal also discusses Þangbrandr's methods of preaching and conversion. "Three Essays on *Völuspá*" 117–18.

any direct references to the millennium in the poem itself which could help us to place the text in this particular framework. However, we might be able to appreciate the poem's themes and imagery better if we view the text against a background of forced conversion, possibly apocalyptic firebrand preaching, hasty conversions and mass baptisms in late tenth and early eleventh century Iceland.

However, we can probably be even more specific about the circumstances surrounding the composition of the poem: recently, John McKinnell has convincingly shown that the poem's Christian imagery could well stem from the context of an Easter vigil.⁹⁵ In order to conduct trade with Christians, serve Christian kings, or simply live on friendly terms within Christian communities, heathens had to agree to be prime-signed – a ritual by which they, at least theoretically, became catechumens, although many seemed to continue practising their old beliefs.⁹⁶ If the poet was preparing to become a Christian, he would have had access to the part of the Easter vigil that contained the readings from Genesis 1:1-19, which would have been explained to catechumens in the vernacular. One good example of such an explanation might be found in the Wessobrunner Gebet, which shows close verbal echoes to Völuspá:

Dat ero ni uuas noh ufhimil,	The earth was not, nor heaven above
noh paum, noh pereg ni uuas,	nor tree, nor mountain there was
ni sterro nohheinig, noh sunna ni scein,	no star, nor the sun shone
noh mano ni liuhta, noh der maræo seo.	no moon gave light, nor (was there) the famous sea
Dat dar niuuíht ni uuas enteo ni uuenteo	Then nothing existed, neither beginning nor end. ⁹⁷

⁹⁵ J. McKinnell, "Völuspá and the Feast of Easter." Forthcoming in Alvissmál, 2005.

⁹⁶ Cf. Egils saga 50, Rimbertus, Vita Anskarii ch. 24. Both are quoted in J. McKinnell, "Völuspá and the Feast of Easter."

⁹⁷ Wackernagel, Altdeutsches Lesebuch 45-46, trans. Mine. The Wessobrunner Gebet dates from the ninth century. The dialect is Bavarian, but with Old Saxon and/or Anglo-Saxon influence.

Ár var alda þat er ekki var⁹⁸
 vara sandr né sær né svalar unnir;
 iðrð fannz æva ne upphiminn,
 gap var ginnunga, enn gras hvergi

It was in ancient times, when nothing was,
 there was neither sand nor sea nor cold waves;
 no earth existed, nor heaven above,
 magic space was void, and no vegetation.⁹⁹

Even if some of the phrases (the *ero/ufhimil* pair, followed by other natural elements such as *paum*, *pereg*, *sterro*, *sunna*, *mano*, *seo*) were part of stock formulae used by early Germanic poets to describe the creation, the Wessobrunner Gebet is still the closest parallel we have to Völuspá in both phrasing and context.¹⁰⁰

In the Easter Vigil, the poet would furthermore have witnessed the lighting of the new fire. While the context is, of course, different – in contrast to the *Surtar logi*,¹⁰¹ the all-devouring fire at the end of the world, the Easter fire is not a destructive one –, the imagery must have been impressive enough to linger on the poet's mind. It is not hard to imagine a catechumen-poet being impressed by the imagery of darkness and light, the foreign language (which had to be explained to them in the vernacular),¹⁰² and the solemn atmosphere of the Easter service. The close echoes between Genesis (1:1-2, 1:9-15), the Wessobrunner Prayer, and the early stanzas of the poem pointed out by McKinnell cannot be disputed, and the Easter

⁹⁸ Völuspá st. 3. The textual variant is that of Hauksbók and Snorri's Edda.

⁹⁹ Völuspá st. 3.

¹⁰⁰ L. Lönnroth came to the same conclusion. See his "*Iðrð fannz æva né upphimmin. A Formula Analysis.*"

¹⁰¹ The term is found in Vafþrúðnismál st. 50-51.

¹⁰² J. McKinnell points towards the Gelasian Sacramentary, esp. the Scrutiny of the Creed, which shows that catechumens were asked at the beginning of their instruction, "in what language do they confess our Lord?" (trans. in E. C. Whitaker, Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy 175-76), and to the Red Book of Darley (CCCC 422), which gives rubricated Old English instructions to the priest for use during the baptism service.

Vigil is the most plausible context in which a pagan poet might have come across this Christian material.

Unfortunately, the case is not as simple when we try to find specific sources for the apocalyptic elements in *Völuspá*. The Gelasian Sacramentary, as well as the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, includes a prayer just before the point of the Easter Vigil at which catechumens who were not being baptised were required to leave.¹⁰³

Nec te latet satanas imminere poenas imminere tibi tormenta. imminere tibi diem iudicii. diem supplicii. diem qui uenturus est uelut clibanus ardens. in quo tibi atque uniuersis angelis tuis aeternus ueniet interitus.

Be not deceived, Satan: punishment threatens thee, torment threatens thee, the day of judgement threatens thee, the day of punishment, the day which shall come as a burning furnace, when everlasting destruction shall come upon thee and all thine angels.¹⁰⁴

The general themes of judgement, punishment, and fiery inferno can be found in *Völuspá* easily enough. Critics have pointed out that many of the poem's apocalyptic themes seem to stem from Scriptural sources such as the Little Apocalypse of Mark 13:7-27, Revelations 21:1-8, perhaps 6:14-16, as well as Revelations chapter 8, 19, 20, and 22.¹⁰⁵ Richard North recently offered a detailed analysis of the parallels between *Völuspá* and the Book of Revelation. Like Sigurður Nordal before him, he linked the poem's use of apocalyptic imagery in general, but of the Book of Revelation in particular, to prevailing fears about the year 1000. He points towards

¹⁰³ The Missal stems from a religious house in the Danelaw, most likely either Peterborough or Ely. It was written before 1016. Cf. *The Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, ed. H. A. Wilson, xxiv-xxvi.

¹⁰⁴ *Missal of Robert of Jumièges* 96-97; trans. from Gelasian Sacramentary in E. C. Whitaker 183. Also quoted in J. McKinnell "Völuspá and the Feast of Easter."

¹⁰⁵ Cf. A. Olrik, *Ragnarök*, Sigurður Nordal, "Three Essays on *Völuspá*" 110n67, R. North, "Völuspá and the Book of Revelation", J. McKinnell, "Völuspá and the Feast of Easter" and *Both One and Many* 123-24, as well as the detailed comparison charts in "Völuspá and the Feast of Easter: Summary and Examples".

Wulfstan's reference to Revelation 20,7 in Secundum Marcum, to Abbo's Apologeticus, and to Adso's Libellus.¹⁰⁶ He concludes that

[. . .] the likelihood of Völuspá's composition c. 1000 is strengthened by the poet's apparent use of Revelation, which by this time was understood to refer to Armageddon at the end of 1000 years.

The problems connected with this approach have already been pointed out above (p. 40-41).

We must not over-emphasise the apocalyptic fears in late tenth-century Europe as a whole.

There is no firm proof that Revelation was preached by the missionaries in Iceland, apart from the episode in Njáls saga, which of course is not a contemporary source. Richard North does not point towards a concrete example of the circumstances under which a pagan, illiterate poet with no knowledge of Latin would have been able to come across the detailed imagery which he traces back to the Book of Revelation.

Other sources for the Christian apocalyptic imagery have also been suggested: Ursula Dronke points out parallels between Völuspá and the Cantus Sibyllae, which was known in Anglo-Saxon England and formed part of the Christmas service.¹⁰⁷ However, Dronke makes the same methodological error committed by North: she fails to point out the specifics of how a pagan poet could have come across a Latin text in this specific context. We do not know how much (if anything) of the Latin Cantus Sibyllae was explained in the vernacular. And, as

¹⁰⁶ R. North, "Völuspá and the Book of Revelation" 409.

¹⁰⁷ U. Dronke, "Völuspá and the Sibylline Traditions" 6. Dronke points towards the text edited by B. Bischoff, "Die Lateinischen Übersetzungen und Bearbeitungen aus den Oracula Sibyllina." Of the three extant manuscripts, two date to the ninth century. One of them was located at Tours or a place affiliated with Tours. The close connections between Tours and York via Alcuin lead U. Dronke to believe the Cantus Sibyllae might have been known in the Danelaw area. She also points towards a different version of the Cantus Sibyllae, first recorded in Latin by Augustine in De civ. XVIII, 23, which seems to have been known to Aldhelm (d. 709) in a variant Latin version.

McKinnell points out, in order to gain access to the Christmas service, the poet would have had to be prime-signed – i.e. he would have witnessed an Easter vigil already. Thus Dronke believes the figure of the *vǫlva* to be derived from a Christian source. However, *vǫlur* were part of an existing pre-Christian story pattern, the oldest surviving example of which is found in Ynglingatal, which is about a century older than Vǫluspá. The poet thus seems to have adapted a traditional pagan story pattern in a highly original way: usually, the *vǫlva* prophesies against an unjust patriarch who is a descendant of the Vanir, the race of the gods connected with fertility. The poet puts a highly original spin on this theme by substituting an unjust (human) king with the chief god Óðinn. Thus, we have a switch between human and god, and between the two races of the gods.¹⁰⁸

While Dronke does not specify the geographic origin of Vǫluspá, she seems to imply that the poem might have been composed in the Danelaw area, as she points out that the Cantus Sibyllae might have been known in York. She seems to follow a line of argument already established by Wolfgang Butt, which claims that the poet might have lived at least for part of his life in the Danelaw area.¹⁰⁹

Butt claimed to have found specific verbal echoes of Wulfstan's homilies and of the Old English poem Judgement Day II in Vǫluspá. Like Richard North, Butt had exemplified Secundum Marcum's alleged millenarian content as evidence that the Vǫluspá poet experienced

¹⁰⁸ Cf. J. McKinnell, Meeting the Other 101-04, Ynglinga saga chs. 13-14, and Ynglingatal 3-4. ÍF 26, 28-29, and Finnur Jónsson, Skjaldedigtning 1B, 7.

¹⁰⁹ W. Butt, "Zur Herkunft der Vǫluspá."

apocalyptic paranoia in or around the year 1000.¹¹⁰ Butt, however, attempts to explain the circumstances under which the *Völuspá* poet might have become aware of such paranoia by postulating that the poet might have lived – or even been born – in the Danelaw area, possibly even in Wulfstan’s own Archdiocese (“Zur Herkunft der *Völuspá*” 102). Inspired by one, admittedly somewhat close Wulfstanian echo, Butt sets out to try and find verbal, thematic, or even rhythmic sources for several stanzas of *Völuspá* in the Archbishop’s work. The one parallel I can agree with is found in stanza 39. Wulfstan’s *manswican ne mansworan* finds a close parallel in *menn meinsvara*, and Wulfstan’s *morðwyrhta* seems to have been the origin of Old Norse *morðvargr*. As I have pointed out above (chapter 3), *Völuspá*’s mini-list of sinners is thematically reminiscent of the longer, much more detailed lists of evil-doers found in Wulfstan’s homilies. However, striking as the parallels might be at first sight, linguistically they do not hold up, as has been shown in detail by John Lindow.¹¹¹

Even if the verbal echo were evidence for a direct Wulfstanian influence, we would have no way of knowing how – or where – it came about. It is insufficient evidence for a Northumbrian provenance of the poem. Besides, a poet who was able to retain a striking amount of imagery from Genesis and something like the *Wessobrunner Gebet*, which he most likely heard only once, would surely have picked up a great deal more material from Wulfstan’s

¹¹⁰ W. Butt even gives A.D. 1001 as the *terminum post quem* for the poem’s composition, based on *Secundum Marcum*’s reference that the millennium had already passed. He further concludes that 1033 seems to be a likely *terminus ante quem*, because after the millennium of Christ’s death, the apocalyptic paranoia would have been likely to subside. Cf. “Zur Herkunft der *Völuspá*” 102.

¹¹¹ J. Lindow, “Norse Mythology and Northumbria: Methodological Notes”, especially 31-32.

preaching than one doubtful verbal echo – especially if he had been exposed to the Archbishop’s unique style on a fairly regular basis, e.g. because he was living in York.

Similarly, Butt’s argument for close verbal echoes between Vǫluspá and the Old English poem Judgement Day II does not hold up. One reason why Butt is tempted to point towards Judgement Day II is that the poem occurs in a manuscript full of Wulfstanian material: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201. He rightly states that the collection dates from the last quarter of the eleventh century, and is generally associated with Worcester. However, he claims that it might equally well have been assembled at York (“Zur Herkunft der Vǫluspá” 96). While he rightly points out that we cannot assume that Wulfstan had any direct influence on the collection – the manuscript dates from about 40 years after the Archbishop’s death – Butt speculates whether Wulfstan might have known Judgement Day II. The existence of both the Wulfstanian material and the poem in a manuscript associated with northern England is enough for him to conclude that the Vǫluspá poet might have been living in Northumbria around the year 1000. However, his methodology is flawed again here. The examples he cites- the crashing of mountains, black sunshine, falling stars, the earth sinking into the sea do not show any verbal echoes, as can be seen from a brief sample of his comparison:¹¹²

Judgement Day II

Vǫluspá

Eall eorðe bifað,
 dreosað and hreosað,
 and beorga hlida
 and se egeslica sweg
 eall manna mod
 Eal bið eac upheofon

eac swa þa duna
 bugað and myltað,
 ungyrdre sæ
 miclum gedrefeð.

52,5-6 griótborg gnata, / en gífr rata
 57,2 sígr fold í mar

41,5-7 svart var þá sólskin / of sumur eptir

¹¹² W. Butt, “Zur Herkunft der Vǫluspá” 97-99.

105	sweart and gesworcen, deorc and dim hiw, þonne stedelease	swiðe gewuxsað, and dwolma sweart. steorran hreosað	57,1 57,3-4	veðr ǫll válynd. Sól tér sortna, hverfa af himni / heiðar stjörnur ¹¹³
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These images, as well as the themes of fire, of people being afraid, and of the dragon flying overhead (cited by him in further tables of comparison) are stock images found in a large variety of apocalyptic texts – of both poetry and prose.¹¹⁴

If we go looking for direct verbal influence on *Völuspá*, we need to look elsewhere. As pointed out above, the echoes of the *Wessobrunner Gebet* are hard to refute, as is one extremely close verbal parallel in the Old High German poem *Muspilli*. The title “Muspilli” was assigned by Johann Andreas Schmeller, who first edited the poem in 1832. Schmeller argued that poem might have been written down by Ludwig himself, and this argument has been picked up again occasionally by other critics. Ultimately, however, there is no proof for this theory.

Simek lists the occurrences of the Old High German word *mutspelli* (nom. sg., *Muspilli*) and its recorded forms *mutspelles* or *mudspelles* (gen. sg., in the Old Saxon *Heliand*), *mutspille* (dat. sg., *Muspilli*), as well as the Old Norse genitive *Muspellz* recorded in the phrases *Muzpellz lýðir* (“Muspell’s people”, *Völuspá* st. 51), *Muspellz synir* (“Muspell’s sons”, *Lokasenna* st. 42, *Gylfaginning* chs. 12, 36, 50), *Muspellz heimr* (*Gylfaginning* chs. 4, 7, 10), *Muspellz megir* (“Muspell’s powers”, *Gylfaginning* chs. 12 and 50), and the nominative and dative singular forms

¹¹³ G. D. Caie, ed. *The Old English Poem Judgement Day II* 90-91. “All the earth will shake, / and the hills too will fall and perish, / and mountain slopes will fall down and dissolve, / and the terrifying noise of the raging sea / will greatly trouble all men’s minds. / All the heavens will also become black and darkened, extremely overcast, dark and murky with the blackness of chaos. / Then the stars, displaced, will fall”.

¹¹⁴ Besides, the image of black sunshine is one of the pointers towards an Icelandic origin of the poem.

Muspell and *Muspelli* (*Gylfaginning* 3, 4, 42).¹¹⁵ In the Old High German and Old Saxon texts, the word seems to mean roughly “fiery end of the world”, whereas in Old Norse it is probably the name of a giant. Snorri at one point uses it as a placename for the fiery region south of Ginnungagap (*Gylfaginning* chs. 3-4), and at another point as the name of the giant owner of the ship Naglfar (ch. 42). He is probably thinking of the fire giant Surtr as the ruler over *Muspellz heimr*, but this identification is unique (Simek 223). *Völuspá* st. 51 names Loki as being at the helm of Naglfar and crossing the sea together with Muspell’s sons, but it is ambiguous whether he is their leader. In any case, the word *mutspelli* seems to be connected with the idea of the end of the world, and with fire.

Thus the word is attested in two widely separated German sources which both attach the same meaning to it: an impersonal noun, probably meaning “fiery end of the world”. In Old Norse, the meaning is much vaguer, and found only on *Völuspá* and *Snorra Edda*. It is likely that Snorri derived it directly from *Völuspá* but that he had to guess its meaning. The word does not occur in Old English at all. Thus, the occurrence of the word *Muzpellz* in *Völuspá* is strong evidence for German influence on the poem – possibly even stronger than the echoes found in the *Wessobrunner Gebet*. Critics have argued for verbal echoes between *Muspilli* and Cynewulf’s *Christ III*, but these echoes are – once again – confined to stock apocalyptic imagery (cf. also Mohr and Haug 9; 17).

A German influence in *Völuspá* is hardly surprising, given the list of missionary priests and bishops given above, some of whom were from Saxony or Flanders. It would be tempting

¹¹⁵ R. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* 222-23.

to attribute the the word *mutspelli* directly to Þangbrandr's work, but there is, of course, no proof for this. However, the occurrence of the word in *Völuspá* provides evidence for a misunderstanding (or possibly a deliberate adaptation) of a German source.

Beyond these German echoes, it is extremely difficult to point out any direct sources for the imagery in *Völuspá*. The fact that the themes in *Völuspá* do not occur in the same order as they do in the Book of Revelation points towards the strong possibility that the poet came across the material indirectly and/or aurally.¹¹⁶ Once again, we can point towards the context of Easter to find a possible solution: catechumens would have had access to parts of the first Mass of Easter Sunday – including the Easter sermon. Given the fact that it was not uncommon for Easter sermons to contain eschatological and apocalyptic material (cf. Blickling VII, for example), it would not be hard to imagine where and when the poet would have had ample opportunity to collect the imagery he used in *Völuspá*. However, if this theory is correct, the specific source homily is unlikely to have survived. Among the body of extant apocalyptic sermons, we do not find a single text which combines *all* the imagery used in *Völuspá*. It certainly cannot have been Blickling VII: the text is based on the apocryphal Apocalypse of Thomas, rather than on canonical material, and *Völuspá* does not show any clear echoes of this sermon.

Thus, while it is impossible to pinpoint the exact source or sources for the apocalyptic imagery in *Völuspá*, it does not seem unlikely that it could stem from a homily that was along the lines of Vercelli II, whose long version II(N) was, after all, titled *De die iudicii*. While there

¹¹⁶ Cf. J. McKinnell, "*Völuspá* and the Feast of Easter."

is no proof that it was Vercelli II which the poet heard, the parallels in the sermon are certainly much closer than those Butt claimed to have found in Judgement Day II. Looking at the quotation from above, chapter 3, the verbal echoes between Vercelli II and Völuspá can easily be seen. The closest parallels are italicised in the Old English text:

Vercelli II, lines 39-51

On þam dæge us bið æteowed /
se opena heofon 7 engla þrym
 7 *eallwihtna bryre* 7 *eorþan forwyrht*,
 treowleasra gewinn 7 *tungla gefeall*, /
 þunorrada cyrm 7 se *þystra storm*,
 7 *þæra liga blæstm* 7
graniendra gesceaft
 7 *þæra gasta gefeobt*
 7 sio grimme gesyhð 7 *þa godcundan miht*
 7 se hata scur 7 *hellwarena dream*,
 7 *þara bymena sang*,
 7 se brada bryne 7 se bitera dæg
 7 *þara sawla gedal*
 7 se *deaðberenda draca*
 7 *diofla forwyrð*
 7 se nearwa seap 7 se swearta deap
 7 se byrnenda grund 7 se *blodiga stream*
 7 mycel fionda fyrhto 7 se *fýrena ren*
 7 *hæðenra granung* 7 *hira heriga fyll*,

heofonwarena mengo 7 hiora hlafordes miht,
 7 þæt mycle gemot
 7 sio reðe rod 7 se rihta dom
 7 þara feonda gestal
 7 *þa blacan ondwlitan* 7 *bifiendan word*,
 7 þara folca wop
 ond se scamienda here 7 se synniga heap
 7 sio forglendrede hell
 7 *þara wyrma gryre*.

On that Day we will be shown
 the *open heaven* and the host of angels,
 and the *ruin of all creatures*
 and the *destruction of the earth*,
 the battle of the faithless and the *fall of stars*,
 the clamour of thunder and the *storm of darkness*,
 the *blast of the flames*,

Echoes in Völuspá

enn himinn klofnar (52,8)
 troða halir helveg (52,7), sígr fold í mar (57,2)
 hverfa af himni / heiðar stöjnur (57,3-4)
 svart var þá sólskin / of sumur eptir (41,5-6)
 geisar eimi (57,5),
 Gnýr allr Jötunheimr (48,3)
 skeggöld, skálmöld / skildir ro klofnir (45,7-8)
 þá kómr inn ríki (65,1)
 gýgjar hirðir / glaðr Eggþér (42,3-4)
 hátt blæss Heimdallr / horn er á lopti (46,5-6)

dreki...berr sér í fjöðrum...Niðhoggr nái (66,2,5,7)
 en gífr rata (52,6)

þár sá hon vaða / þunga strauma (39,1-2)
 fellr eitrdropar (38,5)
 þá kómr Hlíнар – harmr annarr fram (53,1-2)
 þá mun Friggjar – falla angan (53,7-8)
 þar skulu dyggvar / dróttir byggja (64,5-6)
 and the great assembly
 and the stern Cross, and the just judgement,
 and the accusation of fiends,
 hræðaz allir / á helvegum (47,5-6)

Sá er undinn salr / hryggjum (38,7-8).

and heaven will split (52,8)
 men will tread the road to death (52,7)
 earth will sink in the sea (57,2)
 bright stars will leave the sky (57,3-4)
 sunshine was black the summer after (41,5-6)
 fire will rage (57,5)

and a universe of groaning ones,
 and the battle of spirits,
 and the fierce sight, and the power of God,
 and the shower of heat, and the joy of hell-dwellers,
 and the song of the trumpets,
 and the expansive burning, and the bitter day,
 and the separation of souls,
 and the death-bearing dragon, and

the destruction of devils,
 and the narrow pit, and the dark death,
 and the burning ground, and the bloody stream
 and great fear of the fiends, and the rain of fire,
 and the lamentation of the heathen,
 and the fall of their shrines,
 the multitude of heaven dwellers,
 and the might of their Lord,
 and the great assembly
 and the stern Cross, and the just judgement,
 and the accusation of fiends,
 and the faces pale with fear, and the trembling word,
 and the weeping of peoples,
 the shameful ones' army and the troop of sinners,
 and the destructive hell,
 and the ferocity of snakes.

all Giant-word makes a noise (48,3)
 axe-age, sword-age, shields are split (45,7-8)
 Then the mighty one will come (65,1)
 ogress' herdsman, ceerful Eggþer (42,3-4)
 loud blows Heimdalr, the horn is aloft (46,5-6)

the dragon Niðhoggr bears corpses in his feathers
 (66,2,5,7)

and ogresses stumble (52,6)

There, she saw, wading the grievous streams (39,1-2)
 venomous drops fell (38,5)

Then comes Hlin's second grief (53,1-2)

then Frigg's delight will fall (53,7-8)

the bands of trusty men will dwell (64,5-6)

all will be afraid on the roads to Hel (47,5-6)

That hall is woven from snakes' backs (38,7-8)¹¹⁷

It is not hard to imagine the effect such an impressive list must have made on any audience – especially through its expansive use of alliteration. Early medieval poets were trained to retain a great deal of information from oral delivery. It seems plausible that the *Völuspá* poet might have gathered his imagery of falling stars, the crashing of mountains, fierce battle, fearful people treading the path to hell, the death-bearing dragon, fire, the coming of the “mighty one”, and the “new heaven and earth” from a sermon very much like Vercelli II. If the poet was indeed an Icelander (cf. above) and might have witnessed volcanic eruptions, the familiar landscape imagery would surely have acquired a heightened sense of danger when he found out that the same themes were connected with the Christian apocalypse.

¹¹⁷ Vercelli II, ed. D. Scragg, p. 56-58; cf. also J. McKinnell, “*Völuspá* and the Feast of Easter: Summary

However, as McKinnell points out, the events of the judgement of the wicked and reward of the righteous are confused in their chronology and show a lack of understanding of Christianity on the poet's part:¹¹⁸ the judgement of the wicked takes place long before the reward of the righteous, and indeed before most of the cosmological upheaval occurs which precedes Judgement Day in the Christian tradition. The wicked are punished before the end of the world, whereas the coming of *inn ríki*, "the mighty one", who will rule over all and who is clearly a Christ-figure, is deferred until after the end of the world and the resurrection of the righteous (st. 65). However, this stanza only occurs in *Hauksbók* and is therefore rejected as an interpolation by some critics. However, it certainly existed in *Völuspá* early enough to be echoed in *Hyndluljóð* 44, and the fact that it also echoes Mark 13:26 also suggests the same origin as other stanzas in the poem.

There is no indication that the poet had any understanding that the souls of the wicked were also immortal and would suffer eternal punishment. They are only briefly mentioned in stanza 39 but we do not hear of their fate again afterwards. Given that the judgement of the wicked takes place on earth, before the world the place of punishment is necessarily destroyed by fire. This shows that the *Völuspá* poet seems to have no understanding of the Christian concept of eternal punishment. However, this could just as easily be a deliberate adaptation of Christian ideas by a heathen poet.

and Examples," R. Símek and J. Meurer 366-72.

¹¹⁸ Cf. J. McKinnell, "*Völuspá* and the Feast of Easter."

Völuspá as an apocalypse?

Finally, the question arises whether Völuspá fits the paradigms of “apocalypse” as a literary genre, as defined by Collins (cf. above, Introduction). At first glance, the Norse poem can be seen as fulfilling a few key roles required by Collins: it is a text

with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹¹⁹

However, when we take a closer look at Völuspá, we see that it deviates from the pattern in significant ways, mostly because of its peculiar mixture of pagan and Christian material. One of the most obvious deviations from the usual pattern is found in the pairing of messenger and recipient in the poem: the prophecy is delivered by a female speaker, and the recipient is Óðinn. As I have pointed out above, the *völva* can be traced back to a traditional, pre-Christian story pattern. She reveals very little about herself. Her memory reaches back to a time before the creation of the earth and of Fate, and she shows some affiliation with the giants – as she was either born from them or at least brought up by them:

Ek man jötna
ár um borna,
þá er forðum mik
fædda höfðu;
níu man ek heima,
níu íviðjur¹²⁰
mjötvíð mæran
fyr mold neðan

¹¹⁹ J. J. Collins, ed., Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre 9.

¹²⁰ The Codex Reginus appears to read *íviði*. But Stéfan Karlsson has shown that under ultra-violet light it can be read as *íviði²* = *íviðjur*, so that the two manuscripts agree, and Nordal's text must be emended. Cf. Stéfan Karlsson, “Íviðjur” 227–28.

I remember giants, engendered of old,
 who in former ages had brought me forth;
 Nine worlds I remember, nine troll-women,
 the glorious measure-tree under the mouldy ground.¹²¹

Óðinn is not just the passive recipient of the prophecy:¹²² in a curious deviation from what seems to have been the traditional story pattern, the *völva* – who appears to be speaking from the grave –, seems to be the one who is using *seiðr* to summon Óðinn. Thus, it is the dead who is summoning the living, in order to make him question her. Given the god's obsessive quest for knowledge, this might actually suit him quite well at first sight.

Ein sat hon úti
 Þá er hinn aldni kom
 Yggjungur Ása
 ok í augu leit.
 Hvers fregnið mik?
 Hvi freistið mín?
 Alt veit ek, Óðinn,
 hvar þú auga falt,
 í enum mæra
 Mímisbrunní;
 drekkur mjóð Mímír
 morgin hverjan
 af veði Valfóðrs.
 Vituð ér enn – eða hvað?

She sat out alone when the old one came,
 Yggjunger of the Æsir, and looked her in the eye.
 What are you asking me? Why do you test me?
 I know it all, Óðinn, where you hid your eye
 in the famous fount of Mímir;
 Mímir drinks mead every morning
 From Valfóðr's wager. Will you know more – or what?¹²³

¹²¹ *Vsp.* st. 2.

¹²² He has a history of actively, and aggressively, seeking out *völur* to gain knowledge. In *Baldurs draumar* (st. 4-5), Óðinn is using black magic to summon a *völva*.

¹²³ *Vsp.* 28.

However, the situation seems to backfire: there is some suggestion in Old Norse texts that the *vǫlva* has a role in determining Fate: Fate seems to be mere potential until it is verbalised, therefore activated, and therefore fixed.¹²⁴

The *vǫlva* clearly is hostile towards Óðinn. She seems to be annoyed with him because of his incessant curiosity about the end of the world and his own fate. This is most evident in the hostile tone of the poem's second refrain *Vituhð ér enn – eða hvat?* (“Will you know more – or what?”) which is repeated at the end of stanzas 27, 28, 35, 39, 41, 62 and 63. It would thus make sense that she is employing *seiðr* to summon him and make him question her, so that she can deliver her message of doom to him. While the poem ends in a vision of a new earth rising from the sea, Óðinn will not be part of it. In the cryptic last stanza of the poem, the seeress recounts a death-bearing dragon flying overhead. This image is generally interpreted as a return to the present time within the poem, heralding the beginning of Ragnarøk.¹²⁵ The *vǫlva*'s goal, then, is to keep Óðinn busy until the end of the world is about to begin, and thus prevent him from escaping from it. Thus, contrary to the apocalyptic texts of the Judaeo-Christian tradition (and the vernacular homilies discussed in chapter 3 above) the underlying message for the recipient of the prophecy is one of doom, not of salvation. Sigurður Nordal believes that the tone of the second refrain, *Vituhð ér enn – eða hvat?*, changes as the poem progresses. Initially,

¹²⁴ Cf. J. McKinnell, “Mantik” 251, Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* 325, and J. McKinnell, *Meeting the Other* 106. It is a useful suggestion for explaining the young protagonist's anger against the *vǫlva*.

¹²⁵ J. P. Schjødt, however, has argued for a cyclic nature of history: after their return, the gods will have to face the same struggles again. This view is problematic, as we do not find any suggestion for the cyclic nature of history anywhere else in Germanic mythology. Cf. *Völuspá*—cyclisk tidsopfattelse i gammel-nordisk religion.”

the *völva* can be seen as taunting Óðinn and trying to frighten him out of wanting to know more, and when this doesn't work, she switches to pleading with him. She begs Óðinn to stop questioning her because she does not want to prophesy about the “new heaven and new earth”, which is an image of salvation for Óðinn's descendants (“Three Essays on *Völuspá* 101).

The complex imagery of *Völuspá* can be attributed to material inherited by the poet from traditional beliefs, and to a misunderstanding or conscious adaptation of elements found in the new Christian religion. The poem's apparent inconsistencies are in themselves evidence of a strong sense of creativity on the poet's part. The unique mixture of pagan and Christian themes and imagery, as well as the strong possibility of German and English influence on the poem can best be explained through the circumstances surrounding the poem's creation. The text's origin can be situated within the period 950-1050, which not only saw a heightened interest in eschatological and apocalyptic material – even without accompanying millenarian paralysis – but also a renewed missionary zeal directed at Scandinavia. Given the Old Norse sources' lists of missionary priests and bishops from both the Continent and Anglo-Saxon England, it does not seem surprising that echoes such as the use of the word *mutspelli* came about through missionary activity, though there is no ultimate proof for this theory. Ultimately, it is exactly this confluence of different traditions that makes *Völuspá* such a literary masterpiece.

Conclusion:

This thesis set out to investigate the different purposes for which apocalyptic thought was employed in early Germanic sources. The findings can be summarised as follows:

- 1) While the Anglo-Saxons held the belief that the end of the world was close at hand, there was no widespread panic connected with the year 1000. The uneducated seem to have harboured some fears, which were exploited by populist preachers in order to instil in their audiences an urge to repent while there was still time. On the Continent, we find a larger number of sources in which an attempt to pinpoint the end of the world was made. Among them, Abbo's account of the Paris preacher (who made a direct reference to the year 1000) and Thietland's commentary on 2 Thessalonians (which makes indirect reference to the year 1000) have been analysed in detail. Besides these, the Synod of Mainz (847) mentions a female pseudo-prophetess named Thiota who preached that the end of the world would be in that year. The source mentions that not only did she cause great disturbance among the *rustici*, but – much more alarmingly so, as the source states – also among some of the clergy, who believed her words to be divinely inspired.¹ These sources give evidence for the same

¹ Cf. MGH Conc. III, 151. While this is, of course, not pointing at the year 1000, it does attest to the same kind of division between the learned and the *rustici* discussed above in chapter 1. Thiota's sentence was flogging, and afterwards she became insane.

Per idem tempus mulier quaedam de Alamanniae partibus nomine Thiota pseudoprophetissa Mogontiacum venit, quae Salomonis episcopi parroechiam suis vaticiniis non minime turbaverat. Nam certum consummationis seculi diem aliaque perplura dei solius notitiae cognita quasi divinitus sibi revelata scire se fatebatur et eodem anno ultimum diem mundo imminere praedicabat. Unde multi plebium utriusque sexus timore perculti ad eam venientes munera illi

split between learned, populist, and uneducated sources which we have seen in Anglo-Saxon sources.

- 2) On the Continent, apocalyptic material was directly linked to the justification of imperial political power, as we can see in the date of the Coronation of Charlemagne in 6,000 Annus Mundi (AD 800) and in Adso's treatise on the Antichrist. In Anglo-Saxon England, on the other hand, such political references are absent as there was no interest in establishing an imperial legend. The Antichrist was only discussed by Ælfric (in an allegorical way) and Wulfstan (as a scarecrow when emphasising the closeness of the end and the fact that nobody is able to foretell how bad the tribulations will be). Some attempt was made on the Continent to identify the armies of Satan as the Danes (Abbo) or the Hungarians (unnamed uneducated people in Gaul), but no such attempts survive from England.

offerebant seque orationibus illius commendabant; et, quod gravius est, sacri ordinis viri doctrinas ecclesiasticas postponentes illam quasi magistram caelitus destinatum sequebantur. [. . .] Quapropter synodali iudicio publicis caesa flagellis ministerium praedicationis, quod inrationabiliter arripuit et sibi contra morem ecclesiasticum vindicare praesumpsit, cum dedecore amisit suisque vaticiniis tandem confusa finem inposuit.

At the same time a certain woman from the Allamannian regions, a supposed prophetess named Thiora, came to Mainz and very greatly disturbed the archiepiscopal see of Salomon with her prophecies. For she maintained that she knew with certainty the day of the ending of the world and other things which had been made known to her by many signs from God as if by divination, and she preached that the last day of the world would arrive in that year. As a result of this many ordinary people of both sexes, struck with fear, came to her and offered her gifts and commended themselves to her with prayers; and what is more serious, educated ecclesiastics in holy orders followed her as if she were a destined mistress of the heavens [. . .]. On account of that, the ministry of preaching, which she had unreasonably seized and presumed to have a right to against church custom, sent her away with confused disgrace by decision of the synod to be cut with public flogging and put an end to her prophecies at last.

The source's main concern, however, seems to be that it was a lay person who was preaching – despite the fact that preaching by the laity was not explicitly forbidden (cf. 151n6).

- 3) Apocalyptic preaching was used primarily for instructional purposes by the Anglo-Saxons. Ælfric uses eschatological material to provide his listeners with *godre lare*, whereas Wulfstan on the one hand cleverly combines ambiguity and vagueness to scare his audiences into repentance, and on the other hand uses detailed legalistic language to shame them and cause them to amend their ways. Populist collections such as the Blickling Book often used apocalyptic preaching in a Rogationtide context, and the Vercelli Book shows strong apocalyptic and penitential themes connected with the cult of the Cross. CCCC 201 combines different features such as legal material focusing on penance and intercessory prayer, populist Wulfstanian and Pseudo-Wulfstanian firebrand preaching and legalistic-homiletic material, poetry, and liturgical material connected with confession and absolution to form a collection which is pervaded by strong penitential themes.
- 4) Populist apocalyptic firebrand preaching seems to be a likely source for the missionary zeal of King Óláfr Tryggvason. The violent method of converting Norway and Iceland employed by Óláfr and his German and English missionary priests and bishops seems to have been based on a misunderstood reading of apocalyptic material in a literal sense, probably coupled with a misguided fear of the approach of the year 1000. This might especially be the case with the Saxon priest Þangbrandr who might well have been familiar with such apocalyptic material as Adso's treatise. An apocalyptically-charged environment seems to be the most plausible background against which the creation of the Eddic poem *Völuspá* can be explained.

The Anglo-Saxons generally had a strong interest in methods of peaceful conversion, probably because of their own conversion history (cf. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* I:26). They object to the use of violence as a means of conversion, as we can see from Alcuin's letter to Charlemagne. Alcuin rebukes the Emperor for his conversion of the Saxons by force.² He states that conversion should be a gradual but peaceful process. The heathens should first be instructed in such concepts as the immortality of the soul, salvation of the righteous and damnation of the wicked, and then in the particular sins for which eternal punishment was the reward. Next should follow the more complicated concepts of the Trinity and the Second Coming, the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ and the resurrection of humankind at Judgement Day.³

It is not hard to see how apocalyptic firebrand preaching might have been applied to teach the first few items on this list – the immortality of the soul in both eternal reward and eternal punishment. This might explain Óláfr's understanding of Christianity, as well as the various misunderstandings I have pointed out when discussing skaldic verse from the conversion phase, for example Hallfreðr's fear of the wrath of both the old and new deities. It might also explain the absence of any reference to the immortality of wicked souls in *Völuspá* (st. 39) as a conscious adaptation of a Christian concept rather than a misunderstanding.

² I would argue that his violent approach might be based on variations of the same kind of missionary zeal that fuelled Óláfr Tryggvason – a strong desire to spread the Faith coupled with apocalyptic beliefs (in Óláfr's case a fear of the year 1000, in Charlemagne's case the expansion of the renewed Holy Roman Empire).

³ Alcuin, letter to Charlemagne, Epistola XIII, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH *Epistolae Karolini aevi* II, p. 157. Alcuin cites Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus* as his source.

Previous studies on the apocalypse in the early Middle Ages often focused on Continental literature, and on a particular genre – mostly on poetry. Hardly any work has been done on the situation in Anglo-Saxon England, and even less so on the role played by apocalyptic thought in the conversion of Scandinavia. The present thesis has attempted to fill these gaps by discussing the interplay of different literary genres both within a given country and across national borders. It thus provides a much more detailed view of the different – and undoubtedly complex – roles of eschatological and apocalyptic material in both prose sources and poetry in Latin as well as the vernacular languages. Given the amount of cross-fertilization of material from different Germanic backgrounds, it becomes evident that one cannot treat a specific country or a specific literary genre in isolation. Continental, Anglo-Saxon, and Scandinavian writers of the tenth and eleventh centuries were preoccupied with the apocalypse, even if they – for the most part – did not hold particular fears of the year 1000. Anglo-Saxon and Continental attitudes towards apocalyptic and eschatological material certainly played a considerable role in the rise of missionary activity directed at Scandinavia. Their combined force helps explain the unique references to the end of the world in Scandinavian sources. This thesis has focused on the signs preceding Doomsday, and a further study will be necessary to determine how the motifs of the joys of heaven and the tortures of hell were used in learned and populist sources to achieve the same goals of inspiring repentance and/or conversion, and how these motifs survived from the Old English period into the literature of Scandinavia.

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