Synonyms and Synonymous Expressions in the Old English Semantic Field ‘Hospitality, Harbouring, and Entertaining’

Hiizu MORIYAMA

Abstract

This essay will examine some of the Old English words, together with their Latin equivalents in manuscripts where available, which are included in the Old English semantic field ‘hospitality, harbouring and entertaining’. The Old English words (both in simplex and in compound lexemes) to be investigated include (ge) beorscepe, drincan, feorm, (ge) feormian, feormung, fiemena firmp, fjirmþ, onfþ, and underfon. It is my concern, in this paper, to examine the use of such synonymous terms in various contexts. One way to observe the meaning of words is to examine the semantic areas in which near synonyms overlap. The source of information for the present survey is Jane Roberts et al’s Thesaurus of Old English. The Bosworth-Toller dictionaries (the dictionary and its supplement with A. Campbell’s addenda and corrigenda), conventionally abbreviated to BT and BTS respectively, are old-fashioned and in many ways dated in their descriptions of word meanings. They are, however, still useful research tools in surveying the meanings of those words that are not included in the so-far published fascicles of the Toronto Dictionary of Old English. The Clark Hall-Meritt dictionary and the second volume of the Thesaurus of Old English, which contains a very accurate word-list of the entire Old English vocabulary and which is mainly based on the entries in the Clark Hall-Meritt dictionary, are also important research tools. Through the discussions that follow, I will try to explain in what ways the original senses, viz. ‘to feed’, ‘to sustain’, and ‘to entertain’ indicated by the use of the feorm words have been transferred to such senses as ‘harbouring of a fugitive’ in the legal context.
1. Holofernes’ feast in Ælfric’s retelling of the story Judith

Ælfric’s version of the story Judith (ÆHomM 15 (Ass 9))¹ is based mainly on the apocryphal Old Testament Judith, with an instructive epilogue. In Assmann’s text of the homily,² lineated as verse, the description of Holofernes’ feast occurs between lines 282 and 297. This section corresponds to the Vulgate version (Idt.) 12.10-13.2. Ælfric has reduced the original contents to a simpler form by drastic contraction together with a number of omissions. It is also to be observed that he has altered various concepts which might have been alien to the Anglo-Saxons.

Ælfric’s narrative begins with an introductory passage:

Da on þam feorðan dæge feormode se ealdorman
his heahþegnas on his getelde
on micelrē blisse and bebead his burðegne,
þæt he gebringan sceolde into his gebeorscipe
þa foresædan Judith, and he swa dyde.³ (282-86)

The corresponding verses in the Vulgate read:

Idt. 12.10: et factum est in quarto die Holofernis fecit cenam servis suis
et dixit ad Bagao eunuchum vade et suade Hebraeam illam ut sponte
consentiat habitare mecum; 12.12: tunc introivit Bagao ad Judith.⁴

The verb feormian (the past tense third person singular form feormode in the text) does not require a term denoting ‘meal’ or ‘feast’ as a grammatical object. It regularly takes a noun (phrase) in the accusative case, indicating who is (are) invited to the feast and entertained by the host. In order to express the same activity of the host the Latin uses the phrase cenam (or convivium) facere (‘to invite someone to a feast, entertain’), which is usually glossed as fērma (feorme) don in the gloss to the gospel texts of the Lindisfarne Gospels (LiGl) and in the gloss to the Rushworth Gospels (RuGl), with a noun (phrase) in the dative case to indicate the guest(s). I can cite two examples of this parallel sentence construction between Old English and
Latin from Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies below:

ÆCHom I 32 480.27: herodes ··· his witan gefeormode (cf. Mc 6.21: Herodes ··· cenam fecit principibus); ⁵

ÆCHom II 33 253.136: he feorme ealle his witan (cf. Dn. 5.1.: Balthasar rex fecit grande convivium optimatibus sui mille). ⁶

It is interesting to note that the verb wyrcean (‘to prepare, make’) can also collocate with feorm in order to translate the Latin phrase cenam facere. It is possible to detect that the use of wyrcaen might have been influenced by the biblical use of the phrase cenam facere. The phrase feorme wyrcaen (‘to prepare a meal’, in the past tense feorme worhte) occurs, as in:

Lk (WSCp) 14.16: sum man worhte mycel feorme & manega galaðode
(Hferme, Lfarma, glossing cenam, Rfeorme, glossing caenum); ⁷
(cf. Lc 14.16: homo quidam fecit cenam magnum et vocavit multos). ⁸

In Ælfric’s homily (The Third Sunday after Pentecost) the material is taken mainly from Lc 14.16-24 (and perhaps from its commentaries), ⁹ and the use of feorm here refers to the heavenly banquet. In this example too, the collocation feorme wyrcan (in the past tense) occurs. The phrase seems to be a translation of the Latin cenam fecit (‘prepared a meal’ in the past tense) in the (possible) originals:

ÆCHom II, 26 213.21: Gregorius papa us sæde. þæt se man ðe ða micclan feorme worhte. is ure hælend crist. ¹⁰
(cf. GREG. MAG. Hom. evang. PL 76.36.1266D: Homo quidam fecit caenam magnum, et vocavit multos); ¹¹
(cf. BEDA. Comm. Luc. 4.14.16: Homo quidam fecit caenam magnum et vocavit multos); ¹²
(cf. HYMOM. Hom. temp. PL 118.112.601C-D: Homo quidam fecit cenam magnum, et vocavit multos). ¹³
It is interesting to note that Ælfric here, unlike his version of Judith (feormode se ealdorman his heahpegnas), does not use the verb feormian, even though the phrase fecit cenam occurs in the (possible) original Latin sentences as in the Vulgate Idt: fecit cenam. It may be assumed that Ælfric tends to use feormian when his original Latin has the construction ‘cenam (or convivium) facere + a dative noun phrase’ (including who are invited to a feast), as we have examined in the two examples cited from the Catholic Homilies above, but this assumption is not always true. Ælfric uses the collocation feorme wyrcan (in the past tense) again, even when the original has the construction ‘convivium facere + a dative noun phrase’ in the following example:

ÆHomM 14 (Ass 8) 29: heo [Vasthi] worhte eac feorme mid fulre mærde eallum þam wifmannum.14
(cf. Est 1.9: Vasthi quoque regina fecit convivium feminarum).15

Similarly, Ælfric uses the phrase feorme gewyrcan (‘to prepare a meal’) when the original Latin has the construction ‘convivium facere + a dative noun phrase’, as in:

ÆHomM 14 (Ass 8) 9: he [Asuerus] het gewyrcan wundorlice feorme ⋯ eallum his ealdormannum and his eþelborenum þegnum and eallum his folce.16
(cf. Est 1.3: fecit grande convivium cunctis principibus).17

It seems likely, therefore, that for Ælfric it was his custom to use the phrase feorme (ge) wyrcan, when the originals have the phrase cenam (or convivium) facere, with or without a dative noun phrase indicating the guests who are invited to a feast.

Ælfric’s heahþegen (literally heah ‘high’ + þegn ‘thane, servant’, thus ‘chief officer, captain’), for the Vulgate seruus (‘servant’), denotes more closely the group of subordinates invited by Holofernes to his feast, his officers. Ælfric normally uses the term heahþegen to refer to a foreigner of noble birth, or he employs it when he intends to describe his character as
such a person. At any rate, he uses in his retelling of the story terms that might have evoked such a group as the English ealdorman Beorhtnoth and his heordwerod, his faithful ‘body of retainers’, in the heroic verse Battle of Maldon. It may be that, in the use of heahpēnas (in the accusative plural), together with se ealdorman referring to Holofernes, Ælfric intended to create a certain tinge of irony, since what follows in the narrative is a scene of drunken disorders by drunken Assyrian army officers. It seems likely that the term feormian too (with an adverbial phrase on micelre blisse (‘in great merriment’), which has no corresponding expression in the Vulgate) is used to create such a sense of irony, at least in this particular interpretation of the event in the Vulgate offered by Ælfric. It is assumed, therefore, that the term feormian, when used in a certain context, may evoke a certain sense of noble lavishment, which is perhaps desirable in banquet scene in which distinguished people are involved.

The Vulgate goes on: ‘[Holofernes] said to Bagao his eunuch: Go, and persuade that Hebrew woman to consent of her own accord to dwell with me’. In these clauses Ælfric has altered much of the contents. The messenger’s name, Bagao, is omitted and his status, as described as eunuchum, is changed to his burðegne (bur-ðegn ‘page, chamberlain’; in the dative singular in the text); Holofernes’ direct speech is changed to an indirect command; the noun phrase Hebraeam illam is changed to pa foresæde Judith (‘the aforesaid Judith’); and, most importantly, the expression gebrīngan ··· into his gebeorscipe (‘bring to his feast’) is used to render sponte consentiat habitare mecum, in order, presumably, to disguise such a somewhat direct explication of Holofernes’ desire in his summoning Judith, although Ælfric’s use of (feormode ···) on his getelde (‘tent, pavilion’) may implicitly suggest the same intent of seduction. It is not certain, however, why, apart from the alliteration required in this verse, Ælfric has chosen the term gebeorscipe, because there is no corresponding word in the Vulgate and because the Latin sentence expresses a totally different idea, which the Old English word could not have conveyed.

The term gebeorscipe is a native Anglo-Saxon word and its meaning is transparent, having a descriptive pattern of word-formation, as Professor
Wrenn has said ‘drinking of beer together’,²¹ which was readily understood by Ælfric’s contemporaries. By contrast, the use of *feormian* occurring in the construction ‘*feormian* + an accusative noun phrase’ appears to have been invented by translating the Latin expression ‘*cenam facere* + a dative noun phrase’. Ælfric has freely altered the contents of the Vulgate, such as syntactic structure and vocabulary, but he intends to preserve the idea which is conveyed by the use of *cenam facere*, as he does in his first sentence. Moreover, the scene described here is an activity of foreign people in a foreign land. So, the word *gebeorscipe* is used not only to recapitulate the preceding phrase *feormode* ⋯ *his beahþegnas*. It is used also to give a native name to Holofernes’ activity, and thus to give an easily assimilated form to the idea that the *feormian*-construction conveys. It is arguable, however, whether or not the expression *feormode* ⋯ *his beahþegnas* sounds more formal or ‘exotic’ than the native word *gebeorscipe*, since it is not known for certain to what extent the verb *feormian* and, in particular, the construction ‘*feormian* + an accusative noun phrase’ rendering the Latin ‘*cenam facere* + a dative noun phrase’ had become customary by the time of Ælfric’s composition.

There is another example of *gebeorscipe* in the passage that follows in the narrative:

> Heo com þa geglenged for nanre galnyssé  
> and stod him ætforan swiðe fægres hiwes,  
> and his mod sona swiðe weard ðon tend  
> on hire gewilnunge to his galnyssé  
> and het hi beon bliðe on his *gebeorscipe*,  
> and heo him behet, þæt heo swa wolde.  
> Þa weard Holofernis wundorlice bliðe  
> ealne þone dæg and fordræntæ hine sylfne  
> mid þam strangum wine ofer his gewunan.  
> And ealle his þegnas eac wæron fordræntæ  
> and hi efston on æfnunge to heora mane swiðe.²² (287-97)

In this passage, before the drunken feast, Holofernes ‘ordered her [Judith] to be cheerful in his banquet’ (hæt hi [Iudith] beon bliðe on his
gebeorscipe), which corresponds to the Vulgate Idt. 12.17: et dixit ad eam Holofernis bitte nunc et accumbes in iucunditate. The expression bitte (‘drink!’) is a firm invitation to join in the feast and, as Holofernes himself shows later in the feast (i.e. fordrænte hine sylfne / mid þam strangum wine ofer his gewunan; cf. Idt. 12.20: bibitique vinum nimis multum quantum numquam biberat in vita sua), the mode of drinking is probably close to that which gebeorscipe can express. However, here again, there is a word which cannot be readily translated into Old English. The Latin term accumbere indicates the Roman style of banquet, where the guests ‘recline at tables’. It is also noted that the drink lavishly served is not beer but wine. In this passage, the term gebeorscipe does not necessarily indicate ‘drinking of beer together’ but perhaps ‘drinking of wine together’.

(Ge) beorscipe in the Dictionary of Old English [DOE] entries

The DOE has the following separate entries for beorscipe and for gebeorscipe:

beor-scipe (Noun, m., cl. 3. 11 occ.)

DOE definition:
Feast at which (alcoholic) drink is served; cannabis

ge · beor-scipe (Noun, m., (1x f.), cl. 3. ca 80 occ.)

DOE definitions:
1. feast at which (alcoholic) drink is served; cannabis
   1. a. referring to the Last Supper
   1. b. referring to the heavenly banquet
   1. c. figurative, referring to the feast of holy doctrine
2. company or group arranged for drinking and eating
3. anomalous glosses
   3. a. glossing conviviae (=conuiuiæ) ‘guests’ as if a form of convivium
   3. b. glossing continua ‘continuous’ perhaps as if convivia ‘feast’
2. Drunken disorders in Anglo-Saxon Laws

The very ‘native’ usage of *gebeorscipe* is found in one of the law-codes by King Ine, which well implies that the people those days drank beer to excess, often causing drunken disorder in public. The laws of the West-Saxon king Ine (reigned 688-726) contain the following clause concerning drunken disorders:

LawIne 6.5: gif ðonne on gebeorscipe hie geciden, & oðer hiora mid geðylde hit forbere, geselle se oðer XXX scillinga to wite. (cf. Quadr.: *Si quilibet in potatione decertent, et alter eorum cum patientia sustineat, reddat alius XXX sol. wite (forisfacti)*).

(cf. If, however, they quarrel at their drinking, and one of them bears it with patience, the other is to pay 30 shillings as a fine).

(cf. If, however, two men quarrel over their cups and one endures it patiently, the other [who has recourse to violence] shall pay a fine of 30 shillings).

In the *Quadripartitus* the phrase *on gebeorscipe* is translated as *in potatione*. Liebermann in his glossary defines the phrase *on gebeorscipe* as ‘bei Biergelage, Zechgenossenschaft’ (*at beer-feast, carouse*). The use of *gebeorscipe* here appears to have the most basic sense of the word, referring to a situation where people gather together and drink beer, and they are often too intoxicated to behave themselves in public, which is regarded as a breach of the peace.

Another reference to a case of drunken disorders occurs in a clause of the laws of Hlothhere and Eadric, kings of Kent. The code is dated between 673 and 685 by Whitelock and between 685 and 686 by Liebermann. This clause, as Loyn explains, is concerned with the procedure to be taken ‘when violence breaks out in a drunken brawl’. In this example the word *drincan* (*drincen* in the text) is used to indicate what actually happens in a *gebeorscipe* in public:

LawHl 1.12: Gif man ōþrum steop asette ðær man *drincen*, buton
scylde, an eald riht scilling agelde þam þe þæt flet age, & VI scillinga þam þe man þone steep aset, & cynge XII scillinga.\(^{38}\)

(cf. If anyone removes a cup from another when men are drinking, without provocation, he shall according to ancient law pay a shilling to him who owns the house, and six shillings to him whose cup was removed, and 12 shillings to the king).\(^{39}\)

(cf. If, where men are drinking, one man takes away the stoup of another, who has committed no offence, he shall pay, in accordance with established custom, a shilling to him who owns the house, 6 shillings to him whose stoup has been take away, and 12 shillings to the king).\(^{40}\)

As BT puts it, ‘the Anglo-Saxons often drank to excess’ (see the entry \textit{drincan}, under definition II),\(^{41}\) which attitude towards drinking convivially seems to have led them to violence and public disorders not infrequently.

It seems likely that a king often held a drinking feast with his subordinates at their residences. Drunken disorders and other offensive actions might have happened even in his presence. A clause in the laws of Ethelbert, king of Kent, contains a reference to a precautionary measure to be taken for such occasions. The code is dated between 602 and 603 by Whitelock\(^{42}\) and between 601 and 604 by Liebermann.\(^{43}\) In this example too the term \textit{drincan} (\textit{drincæp} in the text) is used to describe the major activity on a feasting occasions:

\textbf{LawAbt 3.1:} Gif cyning æt mannes ham \textit{drincæp}, \& ðær man lyswæs hwæt gedo, twibote gebete.\(^{44}\)

(cf. If the king is drinking at a man’s home, and anyone commits any evil deed there, he is to pay two-fold compensation).\(^{45}\)

(cf. If the king is feasting at anyone’s house, and any sort of offence is committed there, twofold compensation shall be paid).\(^{46}\)

BTS’s entry \textit{drincan} cites this clause as an example for the definition ‘to drink intoxicating liquors convivially, to feast’ (under I. (3)). Liebermann
in his glossary defines the meaning of *drinæþ* here as ‘beherbergt wird, 
Gast ist’\textsuperscript{47} (‘is entertained, is feasted’). A similar definition ‘to drink, 
be entertained’ is given for the present example in DOE’s entry *drincan*, 
under definition A.2. All these definitions seem to include such sense 
components as ‘entertainment’ and ‘hospitality’ in the use of *drinæþ*. It 
is assumed, therefore, the king was not only drinking beer or wine but also 
feasting, possibly with plenty of food supplies. In this ‘feasting’ context, the 
phrase *lyswæs hwæt* (‘any kind of evil deed’) refers most likely to violence 
occurring in excessive drinking, although the word *lysu*, which is defined as 
‘What is depraved’ in BT, does not specifically indicate it. BT (see the entry 
*lysu*) cites the clause and translates it as ‘if the king be entertained at a man’s 
house, and any evil be done there, let a double fine be paid’. Liebermann 
in his glossary defines the term *lyso* as ‘Schlechtigkeit’ (‘badness, evil 
deed’) and for the present example *lyswæs* he gives a definition ‘Missetat’ 
(‘misdeed’).\textsuperscript{48}

3. Hospitality and the act of harbouring of a fugitive

The word *feorm* is a polysemous word, denoting ‘food, sustenance, 
meal, and feast’ as its most essential meanings. It is used in the ‘hospitality’ 
context too,\textsuperscript{49} but when it is used in such a context the word *feorm* seems to 
have a slightly different connotation: it is not necessarily related to the senses 
‘food’ and ‘sustenance’ in the ‘feeding’ and ‘entertaining’ context. The 
sense ‘hospitality’ appears to be associated in sense more with those Latin 
*hospitalitas* and *suscipere* and with those of Old English *onfôn* (‘to receive, 
accept’) and *underfôn* (‘to receive, accept’),\textsuperscript{50} as they are used with *feorn* 
as its originals from which it has been rendered and as its synonyms which 
occur either within collocations or as textual variations. It may be useful to 
look briefly at several examples of the use of the *feorn* words which translate 
Latin sources.

3.1 Old English *feorm* and Latin *hospitalitas*

In a passage taken from the *Old English Bede*, for instance, the form 
*feorme* appears to render *hospitalitatem* in the Latin passage:
Bede 1 (T) 16.64.13: ⋯ an ærest bioscope & his heorode for feorme & onfongnesse gæsta & cumena, oðer dæl Godes þeowum, þridda þearfum, se feordə to edneowunge & to bote Godes ciricum.\textsuperscript{51} (cf. BEDA.Hist.eccl. 1, 27.80: una uidilicit episcopo et familiae propter hospitalitatem atque susceptionem, alia clero, tertia pauperibus, quarta ecclesiis reputatis).\textsuperscript{52}

Here it is observed that there is almost a one to one relationship between the terminology of the Old English passage and that of its Latin original, with

for feorme & onfongnesse gæsta & cumena

standing against

propter hospitalitatem atque susceptionem

In the \textit{Old English Bede}, the use of the technique of word pairs as a stylistic device (i.e. two Old English words for one Latin word) is commonly observed, e.g. Bede 4 (T) 32.378.17: in sæ wæscan & feormian\textsuperscript{53} (cf. BEDA. Hist.eccl.4.31.444: in mari lauasset),\textsuperscript{54} but that does not apply here, since the original has two words for the old English words linked feorme & onfongnesse. The term feorm does not collocate with onfangenes elsewhere in the MCOE and thus the phrase feorme & onfongnesse is a free combination. It is therefore likely, considering these stylistic and lexical facts, that the Old English phrase is a word for word rendering of the original Latin phrase.

3.2 The derivational relationship between \textit{feormung} and \textit{feormian} ‘to sustain’

At the syntactic level we have a piece of firm evidence that the verb feormian meaning ‘gastlich aufnehmen’ (‘to accept hospitably’) is cognate with a deverbal noun feormung, which is morphologically transparent in that its derivational relationship to feormian can be easily detected. The suffix –ung (or –ing) is ‘used to form feminine abstract nouns, especially from consonantal [i.e. weak] verbs of Cl[ass] II’.\textsuperscript{55} This ‘rule’ applies to
feormung, since feormian is a weak verb of Class 2. In the following passage from the laws of King Alfred there occurs a free combination ‘feormunge (susceptam) + (wrecena oððe his manna)’:

LawAf 14: gif hwa ymb cyninges feorh sierwe, þurh hine oððe þurh wrecena feormunge oððe his manna, sie he his feores scyldig & ealles þæs ðe he age.56
(cf. Quadr.: si quis per se uel susceptam uel suspectam personam de morte regis tractet).57

The term feormung used here in a law code has a specialised legal sense ‘harbouring or protecting or sheltering (of a fugitive)’: Liebermann glosses the phrase ‘wrecena feormunge’ as ‘Beherbergung (Schutz) Verbanunter’.58 BT (see feormung, under definition I, ‘a harbouring, an entertaining’) cites this example as ‘Prurh wrecena feormunge’ and translates: ‘by the harbouring of exiles’. As Liebermann points out, this activity of giving protection to a fugitive is also seen essentially as ‘aiding of criminals’ (‘Begünstigung von Verbrechern’).59 In the TOE the word feormung is one of the words to be found under the heading 04.01.02.04.05.01 Hospitality, harbouring, entertaining.60

3.3 Feormung-underfangeness and feormian-underfon used as textual variations

Another example of feormung, derived from feormian meaning ‘to feed, sustain, entertain’, is used in a version of Wærferth’s Old English translation of Gregory’s Dialogues. The use of feormung here, unlike the example occurring in the law code above, appears to indicate a (perhaps) genuine sense of ‘hospitality’, i.e. the activity of receiving a guest which is not a criminal offence at all, although, as the story tells us, the host has invited the wrong kind of guest with the wrong kind of intention, about which Gregory makes some critical remarks. The devil, disguised as a foreigner, claims that Bishop Fortunatus has expelled him from his house, thus leaving him on the street with no place to stay in the evening. A certain man, married with a young son living in the city, takes this false message at its face value and
innocently invites him to his hearth and house. Soon the boy is possessed by the evil spirit and throws himself into the fireplace. In this way the family loses their beloved son. Gregory comments on the real nature of the ‘hospitality’ which the host offered to the guest in this incident:

GD 1 (C) 10.76.202: soðlice þæt æfterfylgende wite þæt cyðe, þæt seo æerre feormung næs na butan scylde & gylte (H underfængennys).  
(cf. GREG.MAG.Dial. 1.10.7: nam poena subsequent innotuit, quia praecedens illa susceptio sine culpa non fuit).

The Latin original has susceptio for feormung. In this passage a textual variation is as significant a clue as the Latin original in the investigation of the meaning of feormung. Instead of feormung in the text of MS C, the text of the revision (MS H) has underfængennys, which is a deverbal noun from underfon and can be viewed as a synonym of onfængennes. BTS (see underfængennes) cites the present example and gives a definition ‘reception’ for underfængennys. The Clark Hall dictionary gives, under underfang-enes, the senses ‘reception’ and ‘hospitality’ for this example. It is therefore sensible to interpret the Dialogues instance of feormung as ‘hospitality’. In the same story Gregory describes the activity of the man who has wrongly invited the evil spirit to his house as:

(MS C) þone awyrgdan gast on gestlipynysse onfeng.  
(MS H) þone awyrgedan gast on cumliðnysse underfeng.  
(cf. malignum spiritum in hospitalitate suscepit).

In these citations the two verbs onfon and underfon are used synonymously, semantically bridged firmly by two synonymous prepositional phrases on gestlipynysse and on cumliðnysse, which render the phrase in hospitalitate.

In the same story in the Dialogues, the verb feormian is used to describe the activity of the man who gave hospitality to the devil. This example will show that the use of feormung which indicates the activity of accepting a guest out of hospitality is derivationally closely related to the use of feormian.
denoting the same activity. In the following passage, the man finally realises (but, sadly, it is too late) what sort of guest he has invited – or whom Bishop Fortunatus has formerly expelled from his house – as soon as he loses his son:

GD 1 (C) 10.75.26: & he þa sona se earma man swa astyped & swa bereafod his suna ongæt hraðe, hwæne he sylfra feormode, ge eac hwane se biscop ær ut adraf (H underfeng). (cf. GREG. MAG. Dial 1.10.6: qui · · · quem ipse susceperit · · · agnuit).

It should be noted that instead of feormode (MS C) the revision (MS H) has underfeng, whose lexical meaning seems to fall into definition III (1), “to receive for the purpose of entertaining, sheltering, harbouring, etc.” in BT (see under-fon).

3.4 Feorm ‘hospitality’ and words of similar meaning

Within the texts so far examined in this section, we can make the following sets of comparison between the Old English and the Latin terms (citing word forms as appeared in the texts above):

(a) feorme – hospitalitatem (Bede)
(b) feormung – suspectio (GD (C))
(c) feormunge – suspectam (LawAf)
(d) onfongnesse – suspicionem (Bede)
(e) underfangennys – suspectio (GD (H))
(f) on gestlipynsse onfeng – in hospitalitate suscepit (GD (C))
(g) on cumliðynsse underfeng – in hospitalitate suscepit (GD (H))
(h) feormode – susceperit (GD (C))
(i) underfeng – susceperit (GD (H))

In this summary table we can observe the following features of the use of these lexical items (citing words mainly as base or lexical entry forms):
(i) The activities which the terms *feormung* \((b) + (c)\), *onfangennes* \((d)\), *underfangennes* \((e)\), *onfon* \((f)\), *underfon* \((g) + (i)\), and *feormian* \((h)\) indicate can be seen as comparable to the range of activities that the Latin term *suścipere* can denote. The idea that these Old English terms have in common seems to be that of receiving or accepting someone (stranger or guest).

(ii) *feormian* \((h)\) and *underfon* \((i)\) are used as synonyms, as they occur as textual variants.

(iii) *onfon* \((f)\) and *underfon* \((g)\) are used as synonyms, as they occur as textural variants.

(iv) From the observations in items (ii) and (iii) above, we can deduce that the three words, viz. *feormian* \((h)\), *underfon* \((g) + (i)\), and *onfon* \((f)\), can be used synonymously.

(v) The deverbal nouns from these verbs, viz *feormunge* \((b) + (c)\), *underfangennes* \((e)\), and *onfangennes* \((d)\), are also viewed as potentially synonymous. For example, the interchangeability between *feormung* \((b)\) and *underfangennes* \((e)\) is seen in GD (in MS C and in MS H respectively).

(vi) It may be suggested that the activity which \((h)\) *feormode* indicates can be paraphrased as \((f)\) *on gestlīpynysse onfeng* or as \((g)\) *on cumliðynysse underfeng*, since these expressions are used to indicate the same agent’s activity in GD (i.e. the activity of the man who invited the evil spirit in).

(vii) It may also be suggested that the activity which the pair \((d)\) *onfongenesse – suśceptionem* in the *Old English Bede* indicates can be described by the expression *on gestlīpynysse onfeng*.

So, considering the contents of items (i) – (v) and those of items (vi) and (vii) in particular, it is likely that in the pair \((a)\) *feorme – hospitalitatem* in the *Old English Bede* too there is in essence an idea (or connotation) of receiving a person (as a guest), although we cannot connect the use of *feorme* \((a)\) to that of *feormode* \((h)\) directly in the same way that the deverbal noun *feormung* \((b) + (c)\) is derivationally related to the verb *feormian* \((h)\), where their semantic relationship can be readily understood.
3.5 The collocation ‘(ge)feormian ‘to sustain, entertain’ + cuman’

It was worth noting, moreover, that although the noun feorm does not collocate either with gaest (‘guest’) or with cuma (‘guest, stranger’), there are six instances of (ge)feormian (‘to feed, sustain, entertain’) which collocate with cuma and they are all used in ‘hospitality’ contexts, including one example in legal usage (LawHl 1.15) with the meaning ‘beherbergen’ (cf. LawAf 1 4: feormunge above), for example:

LawHl 1.15: gif man cuman feormæþ III niht an his agenum hame cepeman oþþe oðerne þæ sio ofer mearce cuman & hine þonne his mete fede, & he þonne ænigum mæn yfel gedo, se man þane oðerne æt rihte gebrenge oþþe riht forewyre.68

Bede 1 (Ca) 7.34.25: ða sona þæs þæ hi coman to þæs martyres huse, þa Sanctus Albanus for ðam cuman, þe he gefeormade, gegeyrede hine ða his munucgegeyrelan; & eode him on hond (B geformode).69
(cf. BEDA. Hist. eccl. 1.7.28: se sanctus Albanus pro hospite ... ipsius habitu ... indutus).70

Bede 1 (Ca) 7.34.31: Mid þy þæ he gesæah Sanctum Albanum, þæ wæs he sona yrre geworden, forþam he mid his sylfes willum geþristade, þæt he hine sylfne on geweald sealed swylcere frecedynyssse for þam cuman, þe he on gestliðnyssse gefeormode.71
(cf. BEDA.Hist.eccl. 1.7.30: pro hospite quem susceperat).72

The last example in Bede is particularly interesting, since it contains the expression for þam cuman, þe he on gestliðnyssse gefeormode (cf. pro hospite quem susceperat), which can be comparable to those in GD above, i.e. on gestliðnyssse onfeng (MS C) and on cumliðnyssse underfeng (MS H) (cf. in hospitalitate suscepit). The underlying grammatical pattern that these examples exhibit is ‘(ge)feormian + cuman’, in which the noun in the accusative case serves as grammatical object of the verb. It may be suggested, therefore, that in the Bede example the phrase for feorme (& onfongnesse gaesta &) cumena can be seen as equivalent in sense to such a verbal expression as
'cuman (on gestlîpnyss / cumliðynss) + feorman', for instance. In this case, the noun feorme is viewed as taking an ‘objective’ genitive (gesta &) cumena, as in the use of onsfongnesse in the same phrase. An underlying meaning of the combination ‘feorm + (gesta &) cumena’ seems to be, for instance, ‘(the activity of) receiving guests out of hospitality’.

3.6 Fliemanfeorm and (fliemen) fyrmd

This term is used in the ‘hospitality’ context with the specialised legal sense ‘harbouring of a fugitive’ (cf. LawAf 1 4 and Law Hl 1 5 above). The combination occurs in one context only, in multiple manuscripts, but not invariably:

LawIne (E) 30: gif mon cierliscne monnan fliemanfeorme teo, be his agnum were geladige he hine; gif he ne mage, gielde hine his agne were; & se gesiðomon swa be his were (xmed; H flymon feormie, xii1; B flymanfeormienne, xi/xii, altered to flymanfeorminge, xvi).74

MS H: Gif mon cierliscne mon, flymon feormie, & hine mon teo, be his agenon were geladige he hine ∞ [not in MCOE]

MS B: Be þam þe cyrlis man foermige flyman. Gif man cyrliscne mannan flymanfeormienne teo, be his agenon were geladige <he> hine ∞ [not in MCOE]

(cf. Quadr.: si cyrlicus homo forsbanniti fîrmanonis accusatur, per suam ipsius weram neget).75

The verb teo (i.e. present subjunctive 3rd person singular of teon ‘to accuse someone of something’) takes an accusative noun indicating a person who is accused (here cierliscne monnan) and a genitive noun indicating the charge (cf. BT, see teon). The form fliemanfeorme is regarded by some as one syntactic unit and by others as a genitive noun phrase. It is possible to take flieman and feorme as separate words, where feorme (genitive) indicating the charge is modified by another genitive noun flieman. This syntactic interpretation will imply that the term flieman feorm corresponds semantically to the construction ‘feorman + flieman (accusative)’. Clark Hall explains ‘flieman-feorm, -feorming’ by ‘offence of, or penalty for,
sheltering fugitives from justice’. Liebermann’s glossary (see flīemanfeorm) has ‘Beherbergen, Schutz eines Geächteten’.  

76 BT’s entry flīeman feorm gives the sense ‘the harbouring of a fugitive’, referring to LawIne 30. BT’s entry flyman fyrmþ includes the form flīeman feorm also as headword (“A fugitive’s food or support, the offence of harbouring a fugitive, the penalty for such an offence”) and cites the present example with a translation: ‘if a man accused a churlish man of harbouring a fugitive’. It is assumed that BT takes fyrmþ and feorm as synonymous words when used with flīeman. The sense of flīemanfeorm is closely related to that of (flīemen) fyrmþ, both indicating the activity of (or offence of or penalty for) harbouring of fugitives. It should also be noted that BT takes the essential meaning of the elements feorm and fyrmþ in the compound (or perhaps ‘collocation’, i.e. ‘flīeman (genitive) + feorm / fyrmþ’, as its citation of the headwords indicate) as ‘food’. This interpretation implies that the morphological formation ‘flīeman + feorm’ is not an alternative expression of the construction ‘feormian + flīeman (accusative)’. This assumption is supported by Holthausen’s Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch (see fyrmþ 1, ‘Unterbringung, -halt’), which suggests that this lexeme is derivationally related to the noun feorm, not the verb feormian (‘to feed, sustain’), although it is doubtful that the combination ‘flīeman + feorm’ originally has a sense ‘fugitive’s food’.

We now turn to the textual variations for this law of Ine. The later variations in MS H and in MS B have the construction ‘flīeman (accusative) + feormian’ to express the idea conveyed in the noun phrase flīeman feorm. A particularly interesting feature of the use of this construction is found in MS B. In order to keep the syntactic structure with the use of teon, the drafter employs an inflected infinitive feormienne,77 which serves as the genitive noun required in the sentence. Since this word is a form of the verb feormian, the syntactic relationship between flyman and feormienne is transparent. We may add to these examples the heading of the same manuscripts:

LawIneRb 30: be dóon þe cierlisc mon flīeman feormige (B feormigeflyman)78 (cf. Quadr.: si quis homo cyrliscus forisbannitum firmet). 79
It would seem to be unsafe to suggest any definitive (chronological) derivational relationship between the verb *feorman* and the substantive *feorm* used in the ‘hospitality’ context from the examination of the fairly limited number of examples. It may be suggested, however, considering the comparison between the morphological structure of *flieman feorm* and the syntactic structure of the combination ‘*feorman + flieman* (accusative)’, together with the semantic similarity they exhibit, that the element *feorm* in the compound will express the idea of receiving a person (who could, for that matter, be an outlaw) and that the noun element *feorm* takes *flieman* as an ‘objective’ genitive noun. The essential idea that the use of *fliemanfeorm* conveys is not ‘fugitive’s food’ (BT) but ‘hospitality for a fugitive’, which is regarded as a criminal offence in the law codes.

4. Conclusion

We have seen some of the interesting words and phrases denoting ‘(drunken) feast’, ‘drunken disorder’ and ‘hospitality’ occurring in the extant manuscripts in the Old English period that are recorded in the MCOE corpus. In Ælfric’s homilies, both the noun *feorm* and verb *feorman* (in the construction ‘*feorman + an accusative noun phrase*’ rendering the Latin ‘cenam (or convivium) facere + a dative noun phrase’) are regularly used to evoke some feast scenes in foreign or ‘exotic’ lands. Therefore, Ælfric, in his retelling of the story Judith, uses the *feorman* construction once at the beginning, reminding the reader of the fact that the story is of foreign origin, and soon makes the scene rather familiar to him, adopting the ‘native’ word *gebeorscipe* twice in describing the same banquet. A very ‘native’ usage of *gebeorscipe* is found in one of the law-codes by King Ine, which well implies that the people those days drank beer to excess, often causing drunken disorders in public. In some particular legal contexts, the people who are involved in drinking and feasting are regarded as committing a breach of peace by drunken disorder. On other occasions the activity of inviting a guest itself may be viewed as a breach of peace, where someone invites the wrong kind of guest such as a fugitive and an outlaw, giving him food and shelter for a night. In order to describe the activity of accepting and harbouring of a fugitive in Anglo-Saxon Laws, the derivative nouns *feormung* and *fyrmþ* (the latter
regularly collocating with *fliema* and the verb *feormian* are regularly used. We have examined in what ways the original senses, *viz.* ‘to feed’, ‘to sustain’, and ‘to entertain’ indicated by the use of the *feorm* words have been transferred to such senses as ‘harbouring of a fugitive’ in the legal context.

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1. Unless stated otherwise, all Old English citations are from *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English* [MCOE].
3. Assmann, *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, p. 111. Transl.: Then on the fourth day, the nobleman [ = Holofernes] entertained his retainers in his pavilion in great merriment, and he ordered his page that he should bring the aforesaid Judith to his tent and he did as he was ordered.
13. Heymo of Auxerre, ‘Dominica tertia post pentecosten’ (Homilia 112) in *Homiliae de
tempore, PL, 118, cols. 11-746, cols. 604-608, at col. 601C-D.


15 Weber *Biblia Sacra*, i. 713.


18 See, for instance, ÆLS (Maccabees) 330: *mid anum heahþegen liasias gehaten* (W. W. Skeat, ed. Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints, Being a Set of Sermons on Saints’ Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, edited from British Museum Cott. MS Julius E. VII with Variants from Other Manuscripts, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114, Oxford: Pickard Hall and J. H. Stacy, 1881-1900; repr. in 2 vols, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, ii. P. 88). BTS (see heahþegen) notes: ‘Lysias a nobleman and one of the blood royal, I Macc. 3, 32’. The prophet Daniel is described as *Godes heahþegen* (ÆHom II 22 301, i.e. J. C. Pope, ed., *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection, Being Twenty-One Full Homilies of his Middle and Later Career for the Most Part Not Previously Edited, with Some Shorter Pieces, Mainly Passage Added to the Second and Third Series*, 2 vols, EETS o.s. 256, 260, London: Oxford University Press, 1967-68, ii. P. 693). His ancestry was noble (Dn. 1.3-7). A slightly different sense of ‘noble’ may be applied to the twelve apostles who were selected by Jesus as witnesses of His life, ÆCHom II 40 299.3: *weran gecorene twelf heahþegenas* (Godden, Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies*, p. 299).


20 The Latin term *eunuchus* might have been alien to the Anglo-Saxon people. Thus, Ælfric describes, for instance, Eugenia’s male servants as eunuchs and gives an additional explanation: ÆLS (Æ Eugenia) 41: *Eu genia ·· gespræc hire twægen cnihtas þære naman wæron protus et iacinctus ·· and wæron eunuchi þet synt belisnode* (Skeat, Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, i. pp. 26-28) (cf. [Æ Eugenia] dicit ad eunuchos pueros nomine *Protum et Hyacinthum* (Anon, *Vita sanctae Eugeniae*, PL, 73, cols. 606-20, at col. 607). Isidore of Seville defines the word as *spado* and gives the following explanation: *Eunuchus Graecum nomen est, quod est spado. Horum quidam coeunt, sed tamen virtus in semine nulla est. Liquorem enim habent et emittunt, sed ad gignendum inanem atque invalidum. Effeta ab eo, quod sit frequenti fetu exahusta. Partus enim eam adisidus debilem reddit* (Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sivii Originum*, Libri XX, ed. W. M. Lindsay, Oxford Classical Texts, 2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911, Book 10, section E, subsection 93-94 [no page numbers are provided]).

21 C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature*, London: Harrap, 1967, p. 95. The term *gebeorscepe* occurs several times in the Old English version of Bede’s story of Cædmon, an illiterate cattleman at Whitby, found himself capable of composing poetry by divine inspiration. Cædmon and his co-workers in the estate of the monastery gather together to share an evening meal and drink. As Professor Page says, the scene can be seen as ‘the working class in relaxation’ (R. I. Page, *Life in Anglo-Saxon England*, London:
Batsford, 1970, p. 159). The word *geboerscepe*, with its connotation of joviality, seems to be a particularly apt word, as Professor Wrenn points out as follows: ‘Bede’s word *convivium* … is Englished, as it were, as well as translated by the Alfredian version’s term *geboerscepe*, which means literally “drinking of beer together” and this would be the natural kind of party for the herdsman Cædmon to have attended’ (Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature*, p. 95).

22 Assmann, *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, p. 111. Transl.: She [=Judith] then came without any false desire and stood in front of him [=Holofernes], beautifully adorned with colourful ornaments, and his temptation quickly became extremely inflamed in her willingness to obey his wantonness and he ordered her to be cheerful in his banquet, and she promised him that she would do so. Then became Holofernes wonderfully cheerful all that day and he drank himself unconscious with the strong wine beyond his custom. And all his retainers were also drunk and in the evening at sunset they hastened to their wickedness swiftly.


28 F. Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols, Halle an der Saale: Niemeyer 1902-16, i. p. 92. The MCOE citation is based on MS E, i.e. Corpus Christi College, MS 173, fol. 33-53, dated ‘s. ix/xi’ by Ker (*Catalogue*, no. 39: item 2); see also Ker’s note to item 2: ‘Art. 2 is in a hand (6) of s. xmed.’ (ibid. p. 59).

29 Lebermann, *Gesetze*, i. p. 93.
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30 Whitelock, _EHD_, p.400
32 It is so called by the author himself. In Norman times, especially in the reign of Henry I, many manuscripts containing pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon law-codes were translated into Latin. This Latin *Quadripartitus* is a work of about 1114 and, together with the *Textus Roffensis*, it is a highly significant compilation of sets of codes, both historically and linguistically. For more detailed explanations of the Latin legal documents in Norman times see Whitelock, _EHD_, pp. 357–69 and Patrick Wormald’s contribution to the _Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England_, see the entry ‘LAWS’ at pages 279–80.
33 Cf. Lewis and Short’s _Latin Dictionary_ defines the term _potatio_ as ‘a drinking, toping, a drinking-bout, potation’.
34 Liebermann, _Gesetze_, ii. p. 87.
35 Whitelock, _EHD_, p. 394.
36 Liebermann, _Gesetze_, i. p. 11.
38 Liebermann, _Gesetze_, i. p. 11.
42 Whitelock, _EHD_, p. 391.
43 Liebermann, _Gesetze_, i. p. 3.
44 Liebermann, _Gesetze_, i. p. 3.
45 Whitelock, _EHD_, p. 391.
46 Attenborough, _The Laws of the Earliest Kings_, p. 5.
48 Liebermann, _Gesetze_, ii. p. 137.
49 See TOE, under the heading 04.01.02.04.05.01 Hospitality, harbouring, entertaining: feorm, feormung, fyrmþ, luffeorm. In its subheadings include: At night: nihtfeormung, For royal household: cyningfeorm, Giver of hospitality: feormend, To give food and lodgings to: (ge) feormian (TOE, i. p. 200).
50 See TOE’s heading 08.01.02.04 Hospitality, and its subheadings. To receive, welcome: onfon, underfon, and Reception, welcoming of guests:
onfangennes (TOE, i. p. 439)

T. Miller, ed. and trans., The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People, EETS o.s. 95, 96, 110, 111, 2 parts, London: Trübner, 1890–98, i. p. 64. [Old English Bede] MS T, i.e. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner 10, dated ‘s.x1’ by Ker (Catalogue, no. 351).


Miller, Old English Bede, i. p. 378.

Liebermann, Gesetze, i. p. 50.

Liebermann, Gesetze, i. p. 51.

Liebermann, Gesetze, ii. p. 69 (see feormung, under definition 2).

Liebermann, Gesetze, ii. p. 302.

TOE, ii. p. 939.

H. Hecht, ed., Bischof Wærferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen, Bibliothek der angelsächsischn Prosa, 5, 2vols, Leipzig: Georg H. Wigland, 1900-1907, i. p. 76. Hecht prints the text of MS C and that of MS H in his edition. MS C, i.e. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 322, dated ‘xi2’ by Ker (Catalogue, no. 60), is one of the two surviving manuscripts of Wærferth’s original translation (D. Yerkes, The Two Version of Wærferth’s Translation of Gregory’s Dialogues: An Old English Thesaurus, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979, p. xvi). MS H, i.e. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton MS 76, fols. 1-54, dated ‘s. xi1’ by Ker (Catalogue, no. 328A), is the revision of the original translation (Yerkes, ibid. p. xvi). For discussion on the discrepancy between the date of the original (‘xi2’) and that of the revision (‘xi1’), see Yerkes, The Two Versions, p. xvi (in particular note 2).


Hecht, Bischof Wærferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen, i. p. 77.


It is interesting to note that Bede 4 5.278.18 (Miller, Old English Bede, p. 28), which refers to one of the canons proposed by Theodore at the synod held at Hertford on 26 September 672, the use of feormian (occurring twice) has a specialised sense ‘to harbour a fugitive (from ecclesiastical law)’: both a cleric, having forsaken his own bishop, arriving at another monastery, and a bishop receiving him into his own institution shall be under excommunication, which must be a very serious punishment, perhaps comparable to the ‘life and all possessions’ in the secular law-codes.

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67 Gregory the Great, Dialogi, vol. 260, p. 98.
68 Liebermann, Gesetze, i. p. 11.
69 Miller, Old English Bede, i. p. 34. MS Ca, i.e. Cambridge, University Library MS Kk. 3.18, dated ‘s. xi” by Ker (Catalogue, no. 23). MS B, i.e. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41, dated ‘xi’ by Ker (Catalogue, no. 32).
70 Bede, HE, p. 28.
71 Miller, Old English Bede, i. pp. 34-36.
72 Bede, HE, p. 30.
73 For the use of this type of genitive (or ‘objective genitive’) see, for instance, Quirk and Wrenn, An Old English Grammar, § 101; see also Bruce Mitchell, Old English Syntax, 2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, i. § 1283.
74 Liebermann, Gesetze, i. p. 102. MS E, i.e. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173, fols. 33-52, dated ’ix/x-xi” by Ker (Catalogue, no. 39, item 2); see also Ker’s note to item 2: ‘Art. 2 is a hand (6) of s. xmed’. MS H, i.e. Rochester Cathedral, Textus Roffensis, dated ‘s. xii” by Ker (Catalogue, no. 373). MS B, i.e. Cambridge Corpus Christi College 383, dated ‘s. xi/xii’ by Ker (Catalogue, no. 65).
75 Liebermann, Gesetze, i. p. 103.
76 Liebermann, Gesetze, ii. p. 72.
77 A reviser changed the ending; see Liebermann’s textual note: ‘im 16 Jh. Geänd. – minge’ (Liebermann, Gesetze, i. p. 102).
78 Liebermann, Gesetze, i. p. 22.
79 Liebermann, Gesetze, i. p. 23.

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3. Other Works


