

WORDS FOR WOOD: THE LEXIS OF TREES IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

by

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Introduction

This thesis had its origins in an attempt to discover and consider the role and significance of the tree in the Old English poetic corpus. There are references to some aspect of trees in the majority of the poems that survive, but research revealed that the tree occupies a diverse variety of roles and there is no single significance to its use. A different approach was thus required. Indeed, the use of the natural world as a whole in Old English poetry is full of contradictions and ambiguities. Neville concludes that it is largely used to ‘define the state and place of humanity’ in a ‘thematic not decorative’ way, and that it ‘means nothing in itself but can be used to mean almost anything’.¹ In its inconsistency lies the strength of its associations; the natural world can be, and is, used to demonstrate, to symbolise, to embody, to reveal, to exemplify. Trees in particular are used in all these ways. They are especially flexible as points of reference in the poems because the idea of ‘tree’ encompasses not only the living plant but also the timber which is obtained from it and the artefacts which are made from that timber. Indeed, in the Old English poetic corpus, neither the distinction between the wood and the tree nor that between the wood and the artefact is always clearly defined, a consideration which is addressed in later chapters.

It therefore became clear that what was needed was a detailed examination of the words used for wood and trees, the meanings that each came to encompass and the ways in which they were used. The form and function of the individual poems can dictate the latter consideration: trees can appear as trees or as a source of timber or as rune names or in more complex, abstract ways. They can be used as symbols, in kennings, to describe people, places and artefacts, and to refer to ideas and concepts.

¹ Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.204.

How the poems use and develop all these possibilities and the layers of meaning and associations added thereby can only be revealed when this process is complete.

Methodology

Hence the first stage of this research was the compilation of a corpus of words connected with trees in Anglo-Saxon poetry. The *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (ASPR)* was the first starting point, since this includes the entire corpus, but other editions were also checked so that editorial intervention could be taken into account. The information was compiled in a database, the contents of which are provided here as an Appendix. From this preliminary survey the decision was taken to exclude both the *Metres of Boethius* and the *Metrical Psalms* from the study. Since the *Psalms* are translations into Old English rather than indigenous compositions they reflect neither the trees that were familiar to the Anglo-Saxons nor their usage within the communities of Anglo-Saxon England. In the case of the *Metres of Boethius* the exclusion was due to the fact that the Old English *Metres* are not the only version of this text; there is also the prose *Boethius* in Old English and the Latin version. It seemed a fruitless exercise to consider any one of them individually without the context of the other two and such a task is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The database was then checked against the Old English Corpus of the *Dictionary of Old English Online* to ensure that no instances had been missed and then each occurrence was translated and checked against as many other translations as could be consulted. This body of material formed the basis for the investigative research which followed into both the words themselves and the concepts which they were used to convey.

As the material is spread unevenly across the corpus it has been necessary to draw examples from the various texts as they arise in the course of the discussion rather than considering each poem individually. This necessitates precision in referencing, bringing to the fore one of the difficulties of dealing with Old English poetry - the way in which it is preserved in the manuscripts. The poems are untitled and, with few exceptions, are written in a manner indistinguishable from prose with very little pointing.² While there is general consensus among editors about appropriate modern titles there is no universal agreement,³ and there is considerable variation in the numbering of the riddle sections of the *Exeter Book*.⁴ In order to avoid confusion all titles, punctuation, and riddle numbers used here are those of *ASPR* unless otherwise stated, and line numbers are given in parentheses. Translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

The Context of the Old English Poetic Corpus

Despite the enormous body of critical work on these texts, close study of specific words and concepts (in this case those concerned with trees) remains an essential tool in the understanding and interpretation of Old English poetry.⁵ The manuscripts in which the poems are preserved lack much in the way of punctuation, capitalization, or line separation and thus present editors with particular problems in their attempts to make these texts accessible to modern readers. Since there is no help to be found in

²For details of the exceptions see Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 'Orality and the Developing Text of Cædmon's *Hymn*', in *Old English Literature*, ed. by R.M.Liuzza (New Haven, N.J.: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 79-102 (p.79 and notes).

³ The poem on ff. 92v-94r of the *Exeter Book*, for example, is 'The Order of the World' in *ASPR* but 'The Wonder of Creation' in Bernard F. Huppe, *The Web of Words* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970), pp.29-33.

⁴ Williamson, for example, gives a list of seven variant numbers for each riddle as assigned by previous editors. Craig Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the 'Exeter Book'* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p.125.

⁵ There is so much study available that there are now critical studies of the critical studies, see for example Joyce Hill, 'Confronting "Germania Latina": Changing Responses to Old English Biblical Verse', in *The Poems of MS Junius II*, ed. by R.M.Liuzza (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-19.

how the text is set out, such matters as form, function, style, rules and traditions of composition have to be extrapolated. Briefly, it appears that the metre of Old English poetry is based on the half-line and uses a combination of stressed and unstressed syllables with alliteration, which is balanced between the two halves of the line.⁶ Leslie points out that there is still no absolute consensus on the form itself, ‘although scholars will agree that such things as variation and parallelism exist, they will not always agree about the particular application of them.’⁷ Much work has been done on form and style by many different scholars; Cable, for instance, considers that ‘the greatest part of the structure of the verse, its skeleton, is provided by the word stress’, while Stanley sees further implications of patterning in precisely how that stress is applied.⁸ This highly mannered verse form depends on ‘what now seems the Germanic poet’s stock-in-trade of repeated formulas, echo-words, and envelope patterns’.⁹ It requires, as Orchard implies and scholars have shown, rhetorical tropes, wordplay and variety in vocabulary, if it is to be effective.¹⁰ Words for trees and wood are scattered so widely over the poetic corpus and employed in such diverse ways that they assist in developing the understanding of the Old English poetic traditions.

Then there is the question of audience: at whom were these effects aimed and were they conceived of as being made in an oral or literary context? The Anglo-Saxon

⁶ For a brief but comprehensive summary of Old English metre see Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, revised 5th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp.161-167.

⁷ Roy F. Leslie, ‘The Editing of Old English Poetic Texts: Questions of Style’, in Liuzza *Old English Literature* pp. 271-283 (p.272).

⁸ Thomas Cable, ‘Type D Verses as Evidence for the Rhythmic Basis of Old English Meter’, in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period*, ed. by Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), pp. 157-170 (p.162) and Eric Stanley, ‘Some Observations on the A3 Lines in *Beowulf*’, in *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. by Robert B. Burlin and Edward B. Irving Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 139-164.

⁹ Andy Orchard, ‘Intoxication, Fornication, and Multiplication: The Burgeoning Text of *Genesis A*’, in *Text, Image, Interpretation*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp.333-354 (p.335).

¹⁰ For example see Carol Braun Pasternack, ‘Stylistic Disjunctions in *The Dream of the Rood*’, in Liuzza *Old English Literature* pp.404-424.

centuries saw England moving to an increasing dependence on what Kelly calls ‘the ecclesiastical gift of the written word,’¹¹ and even if Clanchy’s contention that ‘lay literacy grew out of bureaucracy’¹² is right, there was an influence there to be felt in the production of the written record for things other than bureaucracy. Orchard and Renoir, among others, have demonstrated the relationship of the manuscript versions that survive to the oral tradition which lay behind them.¹³ There are brief glimpses of this in *Beowulf* (89-91, 867-913, and 1063-1159), where not only are there references to singing and reciting but also summaries of the content and a reference to improvisation (871b-874a):

secg eft ongan
 sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian
 ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
 wordum wrixlan.¹⁴

This happens during the return from the lake the morning after Beowulf has vanquished Grendel, and the party is riding, even racing, wildly in triumph. The spontaneous outpouring of the recitation as part of the celebrations shows poetry in a social context: binding society together, giving people heroes to emulate and creating the ongoing story of the community.

The oral context was very much a part of reading in Anglo-Saxon England; even where the written word was involved it was usually spoken aloud, and hence was an aspect of communal rather than solitary activity. Howe, in discussing the semantic

¹¹ Susan Kelly, ‘Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word’, in Liuzza *Old English Literature* pp. 23-50, (p.26).

¹² M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.19.

¹³ Andy Orchard, ‘Oral tradition’, in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. by Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.101-123, and Alain Renoir, *A Key to Old Poems: The Oral-Formulaic Approach to the Interpretation of West Germanic Verse* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988).

¹⁴ ‘Again the man began by his art to relate Beowulf’s exploits and to tell an apt tale, varying his words’, Michael Swanton, ed. and trans. *Beowulf* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.77.

development of the verb ‘rædan’ (‘to read’) points out that it has cognates in various languages, all with basic meanings of giving advice, exercising control, and explaining the obscure; meanings that have connotations of speech and interaction between individuals. In Anglo-Saxon England that is what reading was; in the monasteries counsel and interpretation were essential concomitants of the ‘reading aloud of a work of scriptural or didactic value written in a code accessible only to the initiated.’¹⁵ Howe concludes that ‘no Anglo-Saxon learned to read in order to read alone,’ and that “‘rædan” originally referred to a public, spoken act within a community.’¹⁶ The extension of this meaning to include simply deciphering symbols on the parchment occurs only in Old English.

Riddles are basically a communal activity, a contest between individuals, yet the appearance of runic characters in the manuscript of the riddle sections of the *Exeter Book* does suggest a blurring of the boundaries between the aural concept of listening and the visual one of reading. *Riddle 42* is particularly complex because it requires the audience to hear or see the words ‘nyd’, ‘æsc’, ‘ac’, and ‘hægl’ (8, 9, 10, 11), then to turn them into their runic forms, then to understand these runes as an anagram of the answer. The familiar concept of ash and oak as trees has to be abandoned in the search for the solution. The riddle demands that the audience conceives of them in the entirely different form of rune names. There is an underlying assumption that the audience will be familiar with both runic forms and anagrams.

These contexts (social, monastic, and communal) are the ones in which Old English poetry was conceived. This in itself argues against the modern idea of authorship, since a composition which is performed or read, discussed, copied, recited and remembered becomes itself a communal undertaking, not the product of one

¹⁵ Nicholas Howe, ‘The Cultural Construction of Reading in Anglo-Saxon England’, in Liuzza *Old English Literature* pp.1-19 (p. 10).

¹⁶ Howe, pp. 15 and 18.

person's mind. It becomes instead an accretion of received wisdom, something especially evident in the poems *Maxims I* and *II* (as their modern titles imply). There are so many things that we simply do not know about Old English poetry; even the plausible assumption that the extant corpus is no more than a fragment of what once existed remains an assumption, so in considering Old English poetry in the textual versions that have survived we are to some extent creating our own context. The text is fixed, and the gathering together of poems in order to study Old English poetry as a genre involves putting together texts from different manuscripts, places and times.

The Context of Life in Anglo-Saxon England

Trees and their products were very important to the Anglo-Saxons. They provided building materials, food, fodder, fuel, weapons, medicine, tools, utensils and furniture. They were used for roads, bridges, hedges and boundary markers. Consequently the Anglo-Saxons knew how to grow and manage them, and how best to use their products. Trees also occupy an important place in the Christian religion, from the tree in the Garden of Eden which was instrumental in the fall of man to the tree in the form of the cross which was the instrument of redemption. In the pagan religions which Christianity supplanted the tree was also significant; in *Gylfaginning* the great ash Yggdrasil is the 'holy place of the gods,'¹⁷ and Bondarenko has shown how important a part the tree played in the ideal of kingship in early medieval Ireland.¹⁸ The Anglo-Saxons were therefore not alone in seeing trees as of special significance. Trees are important both practically and symbolically in many societies and cultures. Rival sees trees as 'natural symbols' and gives examples of their use in rites and

¹⁷ Anthony Faulkes, ed. and trans., *Snorri Sturluson Edda* (London: Dent, 1987), p.17.

¹⁸ Grigory Bondarenko, 'Conn Cetchathach and the Image of Ideal Kingship in Early Medieval Ireland', *Studia Celtica Fennica*, IV (2007), 15-30 (pp.25-6).

rituals connected with humanity from Bali to North America and many places in between; even the title of her article suggests a huge range of possibilities.¹⁹ Dowden, examining the connections between trees and religion, explains why oaks are especially sacred in so many different cults.²⁰

Even given this universal appeal of trees, the constant appearance of them in the Anglo-Saxon way of life, both practically and spiritually, was undoubtedly a factor in ensuring that there are so many words connected with wood and trees, and also in making it possible to use them in a variety of ways. The tree is both a source of fuel and a symbol of sacred significance in both Christian and pagan contexts, combining the pragmatic and the transcendental.

Indeed, the tree may have played a pivotal role in the process of conversion to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England which seems to have been a ‘top-down’ process: where the king led, everyone followed.²¹ In such circumstances the tree’s sacred importance provided a bridge to the new religion for some, although the blurring of boundaries seen in the persistence of tree worship seems also to have been a problem; the tree is only symbolic in Christianity, not to be worshipped in itself.²² Hence trees are simultaneously special and ordinary, and are treated as such in the poetic corpus; ‘beam’ for instance, refers to the cross in *The Dream of the Rood* (122) but to driftwood in *Riddle 10* (7).

In considering the trees in the Old English poetic corpus we also need to consider what effect they produced at the time, what a contemporary audience would have been able to make of them. Old English poetry is notoriously allusive. The assumption that the audience would be able to fill in the background of a passing

¹⁹ Laura Rival, ‘Trees, from Symbols of Life and Regeneration to Political Artefacts’, in *The Social Life of Trees*, ed. by Laura Rival (Oxford: Berg, 1998), pp. 1-36.

²⁰ Ken Dowden, *European Paganism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.222.

²¹ See, for example, Bede on the conversion of Edwin, *Historia Ecclesiae*, II chs 12-14.

²² For examples see Dowden, pp. 71 and 76.

reference because they already knew the story or event it referred to can be seen in the wealth of passing references in *Widsith* and *Deor*. Both poems assume considerable familiarity on the part of the audience with historical or mythical tales; *Deor* mentions five different tales briefly in the first twenty-six lines.²³ Similarly the mention of woods of ‘fewer cynna’ in *Riddle 55* (2) assumes that the audience will be familiar with the tradition that the cross on which Christ was crucified was made of four different kinds of wood; if they were not then the reference would be useless as either clue or misdirection.²⁴ The tree references therefore need to be examined not only in the context of the individual poems but also in the context of the whole of the poetic corpus and the context of external allusions; the core of general knowledge which is assumed.

The study of trees also enables a partial transcendence of the different origins of the manuscripts as to time and place, since regardless of where or when the manuscripts were written trees and wood were a major constituent of daily life. The depth of meaning that the poems encompass can be revealed, and these words demonstrate the subtlety with which some ideas can be represented and allow the Anglo-Saxon fondness for wordplay to be given full rein. Indeed, the whole of *Riddle 30* can be considered as a ‘pun on the Old English word “beam.”’²⁵ Words for trees and wood show considerable variety of usage and the functions that wood serves within the poems is often complex and multi-layered. The words are as varied as the ways in which trees were used, and because of this flexibility lend themselves readily to the form of Old English poetry, with its stylistic devices and its emphasis on stress and alliteration.

²³ For a fuller discussion of this see Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of ‘Beowulf’* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951).

²⁴ For a discussion of this tradition see William O. Stevens, *The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1977), pp.12-15.

²⁵ Kevin Crossley-Holland, ed and trans. *The Exeter Book Riddles* (London: Penguin, 1979), p.116.

The Critical Context

Criticism is invariably informed, to some extent at least, by other critics, by the context of the times, by prevailing critical trends, and by what has already been done. There are studies which look at trees from a particular viewpoint, as Olgren does,²⁶ but in general trees are discussed only as a part of a larger argument. Thus Earl, for example, can refer to the image of trees losing their leaves in *Maxims I* as illustrating the natural order of things, without going further into the words used or any additional allusions which may be there.²⁷ The possible links with paganism may also be shown by reference to trees, since, as has been mentioned, sacred trees were a feature of many different religions. Hall considers the 'actreo' in *The Wife's Lament* from this angle, where he finds 'striking analogues not only from Nordic prose and Middle English, but the Bible and Poetic Edda'.²⁸ There are others: scholars have approached Old English poetry from many different angles, including straightforward attempts to clarify puzzling or difficult passages.²⁹ This dissertation is an attempt to consider only the trees and the words used for them within the poetic corpus and to see where this leads and what it can reveal.

Structure of this thesis

In this thesis the results are assembled and presented in three main chapters. The first chapter examines the words for wood: they are identified, and analysed to draw out their use and the variety of meanings which are attached to them. The second and

²⁶ Thomas H. Olgren, 'The Pagan Iconography of Christian Ideas: Tree-lore in Anglo-Viking England', *Mediaevistik*, I (1988), 145-173.

²⁷ James D. Earl, 'Maxims Part I,' *Neophilologus*, 67 (1983), 277-83 (p.279).

²⁸ Alaric Hall, 'The Images and Structure of *The Wife's Lament*', *Leeds Studies in English*, ns 32 (2002), 1-29 (pp. 9 and 11).

²⁹ See, for example, Stanley B.Greenfield, 'Gifstol and goldhoard in *Beowulf*,' in Burlin and Irving, pp.107-117.

third chapters are case studies of individual words. Chapter two focuses on one particular tree, the 'æsc', and demonstrates how it can come to embody the abstract concepts which form the basis of heroic society as represented in Old English literature. Chapter three investigates the ways in which the much more general term 'wudu' is used for both the material obtained from trees and the trees themselves as features of the landscape. Since it is impossible to discuss every word connected with trees or wood in the poetic corpus within the scope of this work these two case studies have been chosen to function as specific examples of two different kinds of word usage: the particular and the general. As a whole this thesis will show how Old English poetry uses the centrality of the tree to both practical and spiritual aspects of the communities of Anglo-Saxon England to develop ideas and concepts that go beyond the physical reality of the growing organism.

Chapter One: Words for Wood

This chapter considers the individual words connected with trees and wood as they are used in the poetic corpus. The range of words will be discussed first, and then the chapter will look at the devices that Old English poetry uses to exploit both the words and their meanings, such as rhetorical tropes, formulaic constructions and context. Included in this exploitative aspect are the associative ideas and references which a contemporary audience would have probably understood immediately but which from a modern perspective we must laboriously discover. The interlocking complexity that results from this, as well as the fact that some words and meanings are apparently interchangeable, reveals the pervasiveness of trees in language and modes of thought within the poetry. Trees and their products were so integral to the communities of Anglo-Saxon England that the vocabulary connected with them can represent every aspect of life within those communities.

The words that are considered here are: ‘beam’, ‘bearu’, ‘bord’, ‘holt’, ‘lind’, ‘timbran’, ‘treow’, and ‘weald’; all of these show complexity of meaning and usage in Old English poetry. There are other words relating to trees in the poetic corpus, but these have consistent meanings; for example, ‘tan’ always means shoots or branches, and ‘wyrtrum’ is used of treeroots only.¹ Other related terms found elsewhere in Old English do not appear in the poetic corpus. The list of woodland terms given by Hooke includes ‘leah’, ‘graf’, ‘fyrhð’, ‘cæd’, ‘sceaga’, ‘hyrst’, ‘hangre’, and ‘strod’.² These all mean some variant of ‘group of trees’, but in a rather specialised sense; for instance ‘strod’, which Hooke defines as ‘a piece of marshy land overgrown with brushwood.’ These may be more appropriate for legal use than as part of everyday

¹ ‘Tan’ in *Azarius* (84), *Christ and Satan* (480), *Phoenix* (430), *Riddle 53* (2), *Resignation* (106), and the *Rune Poem* (52). ‘Wyrtrum’ in *Daniel* (515, 558, and 580), *Fortunes of Men* (24), and the *Rune Poem* (37).

² Della Hooke, *Anglo-Saxon Landscapes of the West Midlands: the Charter Evidence* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), p.160.

vocabulary, and this specificity of reference may be one of the reasons why none appear in the poetry; as may be the fact that so little poetry survives. Moreover what poetry was preserved in manuscripts is not primarily concerned with the wonders and beauties of nature but with humanity; trees are a constituent of poetry only in so far as they are a component of human society.³

Collective terms

Collective nouns for trees in the poetic corpus are ‘holt’, ‘bearu’, and ‘weald’ but they do not appear to have any of the subtle and indefinable gradations that occur in modern English usage where copse, grove, thicket, wood and forest all mean ‘a group of trees’ but all infer some indication about the size of the group. The size of the group is only rarely significant in Old English poetry. When *The Seafarer*, for example, speaks of the blossoming woods as a sign of Spring: ‘bearwas blostmun nimað’ (48), any of the modern English terms would be an adequate translation because it is the season that is invoked by way of trees in general; numbers are irrelevant. In most cases the question of the size of a group of trees is a problem of translation rather than a difference of concept within the Old English poetic corpus. *Judgement Day II* starts ‘Ic ana sæt innan bearwe’ and there are different subliminal associations which are invoked to modern ears if the ‘bearwe’ is translated as ‘grove’ or ‘forest’, but these are neither relevant nor meaningful in the context of the poem. ‘Wulf on weald’ appears in *The Battle of Brunanburh* (65), *Elene* (28), and *Judith* (206), but there is variation in *Elene* (112-3) where ‘wulf sang ahof/ holtas gehleða’ (112-3) appears. In *Maxims II* a list ascribing things to their proper place has ‘wulf sceal on bearowe’ (18). ‘Bearu’, ‘holt’ and ‘weald’ would therefore all seem to be

³ See for comparison the early Welsh and Irish compositions in Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany* (London;Penguin, 1971), pp. 63-66.

terms meaning ‘group of trees’ and only a study of the context of each occurrence can show the relative size of the group concerned.

There are, however, a few occasions when size does matter, not in the comparative sense but because the emphasis is on great size. The advancing Egyptian army is described thus in *Exodus* (155-160):

siððan hie gesawon of suðwegum
fyrd Faraonis forð ongangen,
oferholt wegan, eored lixan,
garas trymedon, guð hwearfode,
blicon bordhreoðan, byman sungon,
þufas þunian⁴

‘Oferholt’ is the starting-point for the description, and it marks a shift in the narrative stance from omniscient narrator to Hebraic view; the audience now sees the Egyptian army as if from within the Hebrew camp. The first, crucial impression of the impending threat is that it is ‘oferholt’; the details that comprise it (troops, spears, shields, trumpets, and banners) are all specified afterwards. In this context ‘ofer’ signifies ‘more than’ whether the sense is conveyed in translation as ‘over’, ‘beyond’ or ‘above’. ‘Oferholt’ (see below, note 4) could also be translated as ‘overforest’ or ‘abovewood’ and therefore a reference to shields overlapping to form a shieldwall, but this interpretation would result in an emphasis on the shields since they are mentioned later, ‘bordhreoðan’ (159). Since shields are defensive weapons, yet the concern here is with the impending threat the Egyptians present, such an emphasis on shields would be inappropriate. Rather, the prominence of ‘oferholt’ to give an immediate

⁴ ‘When they saw, from southern ways, the army of Pharaoh advance forwards; the beyond-forest moving, the company gleaming, they prepared spears, battle approached, shield companies shone, trumpets sang, banners standing out.’ Note *ASPR* encloses lines 158-159 in parentheses.

impression of the size of the Egyptian army intensifies the threat by the sheer weight of numbers, suggesting that an entire forest is advancing towards the Hebrews.⁵

A similar image appears in *Beowulf*; when Beowulf promises to help Hrothgar in the future he says that he will bring ‘þusend þegn’ (1829) and ‘þe to geoce garholt bere’ (1834)⁶: a forest of spears will be the extent of the help. The ‘holt’, both here and in *Exodus*, is a metaphorical forest, composed of the trees of spear and shield. ‘Holt’ therefore would appear to have a tendency towards connotations of a large group of trees. It may also have particular associations with this image of power through overwhelming numbers (although since we only have these two examples it is impossible to be certain).

‘Weald’ as a collective noun for trees has particular associative references within the poetic corpus unconnected with size. The collocation of ‘wulf on weald’ is, partly at least, driven by alliterative considerations, but ‘weald’ as the habitation of wolves has overtones of wilderness as well as forest since wolves live outside the confines of human society or control. In *Beowulf* (1403) the forest paths, ‘waldswaþu’, are part of the route to the monster’s mere, a route which takes the protagonists from the normality of Heorot to the secret land described earlier by Hrothgar where Beowulf will encounter the supernatural hall under the lake. This transitional function of ‘weald’, as the link between wilderness and community, danger and protection, is also evident in *Genesis B* (839, 841, 846). There Adam and Eve, realising the extent of their disobedience, need a refuge and find it in the forest.

⁵ Not all critics see it like this. Bradley takes ‘oferholt’ as a scribal error or an unusual spelling of ‘eoforholt’ and translates the phrase as ‘bearing boar-javelins’. While the boar, with its aggressive nature, was used as a symbol of fierceness and strength, (for example the boar on the Benty Grange helmet), it is not likely that one would be put on a spear which is an unsuitable shape for this kind of decoration. Gordon is more prosaic and translates as ‘bearing their shields’. This appears unlikely since there is no other instance of ‘holt’ being used for shield. S.A.J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J.M.Dent, 1982), p.52 and R.K.Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J.M.Dent, 1926), p.126.

⁶ ‘Bring a spear-forest to help you.’

Adam's speech to Eve finishes 'Uton gan on þysne weald innan/ on þisses holtes hleo' (839-840). Here, 'weald innan' is a parallel to 'holtes hleo', indicating that they may find shelter there, but there is also an inference that retreat into the forest marks the beginning of separation from God and the life they have previously known. They are still in the garden, but now slightly apart from it, an inference reinforced by the explanation that they 'weredon mid þy wealde' (846); they are literally clothed by the forest as well as being clothed in the sense of hidden or protected. The 'weald' has become the interface between their physical bodies and the world. By accepting and using the protection of the forest in the form of clothes they have crossed the metaphysical boundary between the innocent perfection of the garden and the knowledge of sin which reveals to them their nakedness. This foreshadows the break in the community of the garden when they will actually be thrust, unprotected, out of Eden as exiles. This sense of transition is also present in the only other occurrence of 'weald' in *Genesis*. It comes when Abraham, having instructed his companions to stay behind, takes Isaac to sacrifice him, (as he thinks), at God's command. The two go off 'wadan ofer wealdas' (2887), to do what effectively destroys one of the primary social relationships, that between father and son. Like Beowulf, and like Adam and Eve, they leave a known place where social conventions apply, for somewhere beyond both confines and rules of society as they know it. In each case 'weald' is the liminal space through which they move from one to the other.

The forest, as represented by the 'weald', is neither good nor bad in itself. As Kabir notes, in the earlier *Genesis* passage, 'weald and holt denoting vegetation and topography' are part of a 'formulaic system for the ideal landscape' and in

Christianity 'paradise has always connoted ideal natural beauty'.⁷ The 'weald' in *Genesis B* (841) is 'grenan weald,' and the only other time it is so described is in *The Phoenix* (13): 'þæt is wynsum wong, wealdas grene'. This is part of the long description of the landscape which opens the poem, and the 'weald' is the first feature to be specified. It is forest wilderness but one in which there is only joy and delight; the following lines go on to delineate its pleasures in a series of 'rhetorical flourishes', including 'anaphora, antithesis, rime (initial, medial and end), isocolon'.⁸ The joyful 'weald' of *The Phoenix* is defined as a place beyond the confines of human communities (3-6) despite its existence within creation and time (the phoenix can fly to Syria from it and it will eventually come to an end (83-84)). It retains the ideas of refuge and protection for the bird that it has for Adam and Eve while simultaneously being a place of obedience to the commands of God, as it was for Abraham. In this way 'weald' signifies that place beyond the human community which is not the heavenly kingdom but what Kabir calls an 'interim paradise'.⁹ The 'weald' remains a liminal space beyond humanity but now acts as as part of the metaphorical transition to the mystical environs of the phoenix. Trees in the form of 'weald' provide a means of transition to places and things beyond the bounds of normality.

Individual terms

The tree is the individual unit of which the forest is composed and 'treow' at base, means simply that. It is rarely used so simply in Old English poetry; even those portions of *Genesis* concerning the garden of Eden, where trees are the central feature, use 'treow' only twice (644 and 892), and *The Phoenix*, another poem where trees are

⁷ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.146 and 142.

⁸ Bernard Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, 2 vols (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), II, p.459.

⁹ Kabir, p.164.

a major component of the narrative, uses it only three times (76, 175 and 200). Far more frequently it is a metonym for the cross, appearing as such eighteen times in *Elene* alone.¹⁰ ‘Treow’ is also a suitable epithet for the cross, (the phrase ‘rod treow’ for instance occurs five times), since, as Donoghue points out ‘treow’ is

‘a homograph for two Old English words, one of which means “tree” and the other “troth, fidelity”. The overlap is not ... a mere phonological coincidence because the two senses of “treow” share a common Indo-European root meaning “to be firm, solid, steadfast.”’¹¹

Also significant in this context is the importance of a sacred tree to many religions other than Christianity.¹² These two elements result in a fusion of concepts: tree worship, the cross and faith itself are all inferred by ‘treow’. Constant emphasis on the physical nature of the cross provides a bridge between the old religion and the new, in which the old worship of the tree becomes acceptable if redirected to the tree in the form of the cross. It is a way of seeing the new faith in terms of the old; this is less conversion from one to the other and more diversion of existing belief into new channels.¹³ The tree-faith homonym is developed further in *Maxims I* (158-160), so that faith itself can be seen as living thing:

Licgende beam læsest groweð.

Treo sceolon brædan ond treow weaxan

sio geond bilwitra breost ariseð.¹⁴

¹⁰ See appendix for details.

¹¹ Daniel Donoghue, *Old English Literature: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.14.

¹² For the place of the sacred tree as a ‘vehicle of power’ see Dowden, p.34.

¹³ For a discussion of the lingering tradition of sacred trees see John Blair ‘A Saint for every Minster?’ and Catherine Cubitt, ‘Universal and Local Saints’, in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 455-494 and 423-453 respectively.

¹⁴ ‘A felled timber grows least; trees must necessarily spread themselves and faith flourish, for it burgeons in the breast of the innocent’, trans. Bradley, p.350.

Here the comparison between the flourishing tree and the flourishing of faith is paralleled by the words as well as the construction of the line; as Franks comments, the Old English poet was ‘adept at putting similar-sounding words together.’¹⁵ Knowledge of the natural world is accurately portrayed, since prostrate trees can continue to grow but not very vigorously. Any possibility of confusion is removed by the use of ‘beam’ for the fallen tree in the first line; in this instance the versifier required not ambiguity but clarity to be expressed through the homonym. A remarkably similar construction appears in *Maxims II* (32b-34a):

Treow sceal on eorle
 wisdom on were. Wudu sceal on foldan
 blædum blowen.¹⁶

The tree of faith is also evoked in *The Riming Poem* (34) through its use of ‘treow telgade’, where the verb appears to be derived from the noun ‘telga’ (branch or twig), so that the tree of faith branches. The growth of the tree is an exemplar for mankind; trees naturally grow, branch, develop, and fruit; faith should do the same, but the prevalence of sin within human communities has a very similar metaphorical growth. In *Genesis* the evil that will follow inexorably from Cain’s murder of his brother Abel is described in terms that relate specifically to a tree. From that first misdeed, the ‘twig’ (988) will sprout terrible fruit ‘reðe wæstmē’ (990) and its branches of sin ‘wrohte telgan’ (991) will result in shoots of sorrow, ‘hearmtanās’ (992) for the children of God. The tree of death and its fruit, which was considered to be an actual tree in the Garden of Eden, is transformed in this passage into a metaphorical tree which is now outside Eden and spreading over all the earth. There is no mention of the tree of death or Eden in this passage but it comes so closely after

¹⁵ Roberta Frank, ‘Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse’, in Liuzza *The Poems of MS Junius II*, pp. 69-78 (p.69).

¹⁶ ‘Faith must be in a noble, wisdom in a man. On earth a wood must flourish with fruits.’

the account of the events in the garden (Adam and Eve only settled outside Eden in line 961) that it inevitably recalls it. This is a truly metaphorical tree, but here it is based on what in the context of the poem is an actual tree; the two reflect each other and are linked in their effect on mankind since both are a source of misery and hardship.

Trees are implicitly a metaphor for life itself in *Maxims I* (25-6): ‘beam sceal on eorðan/ leafum liþan leomu gnornian’;¹⁷ here the natural cycle of trees is used as an ‘image of mortality’.¹⁸ This sentence comes between the assertion that men and women must bring children into the world (23-25) and the passage concerning the inevitability of death and its necessity if the world is not to be over-run by humankind (27-35). People are effectively leaves on the tree of humanity. Faith, sin and death, difficult ideas to grapple with, are made explicable by this comparison with what is familiar, in which the material world supplies ‘coded information about spiritual realities’.¹⁹ The metaphorical tree of sin can be transformed into the metaphorical tree of faith in the community of believers if the exemplar provided by real trees is correctly interpreted.

‘Beam’ is used for tree more frequently than ‘treow’; the trees in the garden of Eden, for instance, are rarely anything else, but ‘beam’ is itself used with a very wide range of meanings. Like ‘treow’ it is often used to refer to the cross but unlike ‘treow’ it also carries the meanings of a branch of a tree or a shaft, the latter of either wood or light. This enables its use with enormous flexibility within the poems and makes possible the essential duality of the ‘beama beorhtost’ in *The Dream of the Rood* (6); since the dreamer has just talked of a tree wrapped in light, the phrase carries the

¹⁷ A tree on earth must be bereft, branches mourn for leaves.’

¹⁸ James W. Earl, ‘*Maxims I*, Part I’, p.279.

¹⁹ Santha Bhattacharji, ‘An Approach to Christian Aspects of *Wanderer* and *Seafarer*’, in *Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Paul Cavill (Woodbridge: D.S.Brewer, 2004), pp.153-162 (p.158).

sense of ‘the brightest of trees’ and ‘the brightest of lights’ simultaneously. The same formula in *Exodus* (249) is a metonym for the battle-standard of the Israelites as they prepare to cross the Red Sea; it links the standard as a reliable guide with the pillars of fire and cloud that guided them through the desert and were also ‘beam’, (94, 111 and 121).

‘Lind’ refers to a particular species, the linden tree: the boundaries to Cofton Hackett include ‘ðonan in ane linde’ in a charter of 849.²⁰ The word comes to mean a shield rather than the tree because it is the wood from which shields were usually made and, in the poetry at least, shields are a more frequent occurrence than linden trees. Linden wood was used for shields for practical reasons: it is light to carry and yet tough enough not to shatter at a blow. It is not the only suitable wood and in fact the archaeological record shows rather more shields of alder, willow and poplar surviving than of linden wood; since the survivors are few this may, of course, be an unrepresentative sample.²¹ In any case, ‘lind’ certainly came to stand for shield so commonly in the poetry that the warriors in *The Battle of Finnsburh* (11) can be commanded to ‘habbað eowre linda’ with no further qualification.

‘Timbran,’ and its associative noun ‘timber’ are used of building in the poetry, though explicitly connected with wood in the prose,²² thus bearing out Rackham’s assertion that the Anglo-Saxons were ‘carpenters rather than masons’.²³ Wood was so important a resource for the Anglo-Saxons that it became a synonym for ‘the material from which things are made’; thus descendants are ‘magotimber’ ‘child-material’ in *Genesis* (1115 and 2237) and *Maxims I* (33). In *Juliana* (550), when the

²⁰ Della Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1990), p.138.

²¹ Richard Underwood, *Anglo-Saxon Weapons and Warfare*, (Stroud: Tempus 1999), p.78.

²² See, for example, the tenth-century instructions to the reeve, which include the direction to ‘timber cleofan’ cleave timber, in the winter. A translation of this appears in Michael Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1975), pp. 25-27.

²³ Oliver Rackham, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape* rev. edn. (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1993), p.43.

devil has not only failed to tempt Juliana but has actually been captured by her, he pleads for his release, saying that she is ‘þweorhtimbran,’ literally cross-built, or cross-timbered, because she is unlike other women in that she does not want to be tempted. The way in which she is made ensures that he is having to work against the grain of her nature, rather than with it as is the case with most people; she is naturally, as far as he is concerned, cross-grained.

Development and usage: some examples

Wordplay of all kinds is a major distinguishing feature of Old English poetry. In this it has much in common with Old Norse poetry with its extensive use of kennings and ellipsis rather than direct explanation or straightforward narrative. There was ample opportunity for this tradition to have been available to the Anglo-Saxons; the existence of the Danelaw and the writing of skaldic verse at the court of Cnut in London at the end of the period are the most obvious points of contact.²⁴ The ‘innate verbal playfulness’ of Old English suggests to Bhattacharji an ‘Anglo-Saxon taste for both hidden meanings and multiple meanings’ which are ‘mini-riddles’ since they rely on the audience knowing, guessing, or working out these meanings using a common body of knowledge.²⁵ The audience is expected to be active not passive; an interactive community of text and audience is assumed.

The variety of words available for wood and trees also allows for the use of anaphora. *Riddle 1* (8-9), for instance, provides clues to the solution through its description of the effects of the storm on trees: ‘wudu hrere/ bearwas bledhwate beamas fylle.’ All possible aspects of wood are represented here, trees, forests and timber, but no word is repeated. It does not, in this case, matter whether ‘wudu’ refers

²⁴ For a fuller examination of this and the complex pagan/Christian relations of it see Judith Jesch, ‘Scandinavian “Cultural Paganism” in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in Cavill pp.55-68.

²⁵ Bhattacharji, pp.153-162 (p.157).

to the trees and 'beamas' to the timber or the other way round, or whether 'wudu' refers to forests and 'bearwas' to groves; what does matter is the cumulative effect of being able to use three different nouns in as many half-lines, the words, in this context at least, are completely interchangeable. A similar construction is used in *Juliana* where the compound 'wudubeam' is followed by 'holt' to intensify the meaning. The saint is to be tortured by being placed in a vat of lead with a fire kindled beneath it of 'wudubeamum/ holte' (576-577), which itself suggests collectively wood, trees and forests; the size of the fire is indicated by such totality of expression, even before we are told that it is 'bælfira mæst' (579).

Once the principle of referring to artefacts by the use of metonym alone has been established then it is possible to employ them when talking about those who use the artefact, or the places where they do so. This results in such expressions as 'lindwiegend' for warriors in *Judith* (42), which defines them specifically in terms of the shield; similarly 'lindcrodan', 'shield-press', in *Genesis* (1998) acts as synecdoche for the battle.

Used on the battlefield, shields were more than a personal defensive weapon, they were a communal one. The role of the individual (shield or person) within the community on the battlefield is subsumed by the wider demands of that community for united action. It is the breaking of the shieldwall in *The Battle of Maldon*, (242) caused by fleeing deserters, which precipitates the defeat; by their actions they have broken the bonds of comradeship by ceasing to uphold their part of the communal defensive system and it fails as a consequence. It is this sense of community, the importance of being able to rely on one's comrades and act in unison, that is invoked by 'lindgesteallan,' shield comrades, in *Andreas* (1344). The beings thus referred to are not people at all but devils who, incited by Satan, have attacked Andreas. They

may be devils, but there is still a sense of communal action invoked by the term; they are standing together just as humans should. The only other occurrence of this compound is when it describes Beowulf's relationship to Hygelac (1973). As applied to both hero and devils 'lindgesteal' is representative of how strong and important the bonds of community were to the Anglo-Saxons; they were unable to imagine any group, even devils, not bound by such conventions.

Conventions of form and function rather than those of the social code apply to the riddling tradition. Riddles rely on misdirection and wordplay. It is a commonplace of the genre that the information given must be both accurate and misleading, so any words which can be used in an unusual way or with secondary meanings are of value to riddlers. Since we have so many riddles in the vernacular it is clear that this form of wordplay was understood and indulged in, at least among the literate of the monastery scriptorium. There is no point in telling riddles if the audience cannot be expected to guess the answer or they do not understand how the genre works, and the complexities of the riddles of the *Exeter Book* strongly suggest that the Anglo-Saxons did enjoy wordplay and can therefore be expected to have grasped all the subtleties and implications. Ink, for instance, is 'beamtelge' (literally wood-dye) in *Riddle 26* (9), which is an ambiguous term. Wood dye could be the paint that was sometimes applied to spears or shields.²⁶ However, the riddle is using prosopopoeia to describe the making of a book, probably a gospel book or Bible, hence the interpretation of the word as 'ink'. Once this is understood the connection with wood becomes clear; this is a product of wood, not a way of treating it; the dye is from wood, not for it. The meaning is ambiguous until seen in the context of the answer.

²⁶ Underwood, p.79. This also mentions the possibility of coloured leather as a protective covering which could also be construed as 'beamtelge'.

The Anglo-Saxons were also skilful in using one word in such a way as to suggest multiple meanings, a form of pun in which the object is not humour but depth and range. This appears to be what is happening in *Maxims I* (63), in which it is claimed that ‘fæmne æt hyre bordan geriseð.’ Bradley gives ‘woman belongs at her embroidery’ for this²⁷ and Shippey also translates ‘bordan’ as ‘embroidery’,²⁸ but Gordon gives ‘it is meet that a woman be at her table.’²⁹ From the usual meaning of ‘bord’, which includes furniture, it would seem that the stretch to embroidery is unnecessary; the text goes on to contrast this ideal woman with one who roves abroad, gives rise to gossip and loses her looks. However, there is the problem of the ending; ‘an’ is not among the possible case endings for the neuter noun ‘bord’ although it is possible for another noun ‘borda’.³⁰

‘Borda’ is a weak masculine noun, for which the ‘an’ ending is usual, but it appears to have two different applications. All occurrences apart from that in *Maxims I* are in glosses. There are five which gloss the Latin *clava* or *fustis*, meaning a ‘stick, staff or cudgel.’ The remaining four entries all gloss *lesta*, *meandro* or *ornatus uestimentorum* and therefore refer to ornamental embroidered borders, and the *Dictionary of Old English* goes on to suggest *borda* as not only pertaining to the ‘act or art of embroidery’ but also ‘perhaps a sense of *borda I*, a descriptive term for a staff-shaped ornament.’ In the latter case it could easily be descriptive of a distaff or spindle. For translation of the *Maxims* this has the advantage that it would apply to all women; spinning and weaving would have been an important part of all households, while embroidery would not, it is too specialised and time-consuming. The reference could echo *Proverbs* 31:13 where the good wife ‘chooses wool and flax and toils at

²⁷Bradley, p.348.

²⁸T.A.Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English*, (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1976), p.67.

²⁹Gordon, p.342.

³⁰Information about the use and occurrences of *borda* are taken from the *Dictionary of Old English online* [http:// tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/entries](http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/entries).

her work.’³¹ Since both spindle and distaff are made of wood then the meaning of ‘bord’ could be understood as well as those of ‘borda’; in this way poem can imply all three possibilities: spindle and/or distaff, embroidery, and furniture. The furniture does not have to be a table; a bench or loom would be equally appropriate. What is important is the sense that a woman belongs indoors, with all these things, not outside. A good woman will attend to her household duties and occupy herself with them. For its full effect the poem relies on the audience recognising this, even if such recognition is instinctive and subconscious rather than the result of deliberate thought. ‘Bord’ here is symbolic of the rightful place of women in society, when the rules and conventions of that society are properly followed.³² The role of the woman is as much shaped by the community as the wood is shaped by man to make it fit for purpose within that community.

This shaping of wood in Anglo-Saxon society was so multi-faceted that a progression in semantic range from the trees themselves to the wood obtained from them to the objects made of that wood is perhaps to be expected. Anything made of wood or with a wooden component may be referred to metonymically by the wood alone. Thus the ‘beam’ in the *Charm for Unfruitful Land* (48) is actually the handle of the plough, while the ‘gleobeam’ of *Christ* (670) is a musical instrument; ‘yðbord’ in *Gifts of Men* (57) is a ship, the ‘ceoles bord’ of *Christ* (861) is, rather more precisely, the gunwale, but the ‘bleobord’ in *Fortunes of Men* (71) is a games board. The ark is referred to as a ‘nailed board’ ‘nægledbord’ in *Genesis* (1418 and 1433); it would be possible also to refer to it as a ‘protecting board’ but ‘hleobord’, found in *Riddle 26* (12) is not used in *Genesis*. In fact, ‘hleobord’ does not refer to a ship at all; since *Riddle 26* is about a book the ‘hleobord’ refers to the cover.

³¹ *New English Bible* 1970.

³² See Carolyne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p.134 on the concentration of *Maxims I* on people and behaviour, especially as compared with *Maxims II*.

These wooden references are almost a microcosm of society; work, trade, transport, and recreation can all be referred to in terms of wood; it is an essential concomitant of a community which would hardly be possible without it.

Formulas

Study across the corpus reveals the significance of the formula. 'Hean beam,' which is used nine times, spread across four poems, demonstrates the way that the formula can be not a restrictive device but rather a liberating one. *Christ* contains a list of God-given talents of men, including the ability to climb trees (678); later (1446) Christ refers to the cross on which he was hung. In *Juliana* (228) the saint is tortured by being hung up by the hair; later the devil boasts of his influence in causing Saint Andrew to be executed (309). The phoenix watches the sunrise (112) and later, in Syria, builds its nest (171, 202); in the exegesis which comprises the second half of the poem (447) the righteous live safely in the tree of faith. One of the possible *Fortunes of Men* is to fall out of a tree (21). The phrase 'hean beam' is used for all of them. Juliana, Andreas, and Christ are linked by suffering on it, the phoenix turns it into a place of joy and renewal, reflecting the joy of renewed life in heaven, attained through that suffering; men can climb the metaphorical tree of faith by way of good deeds as they can climb actual trees. The formula is sufficiently flexible to incorporate these different types of 'hean beam' but because it is a formulaic phrase it has connotations which raises certain expectations in the audience; these can then be developed, refuted, or inverted. The ideas of the tree, the cross, faith, and reward in heaven are made associative by the formula 'hean beam', but it is only by considering the poetic corpus as a whole that the connections are revealed.

Conclusion

The study of words for wood as they are used in Old English poetry reveals complex layers of meaning and suggests that there were considerable demands made of the audience by way of understanding, in some cases decoding, these meanings. By the creative use of words for wood in formula and rhetorical tropes the Old English poetic corpus provides glimpses of the way in which the Anglo-Saxons viewed the world around them. They utilized the prevalence of wood in their physical world to provide exemplars for the understanding of concepts of life, death, spiritual realities and the vital cohesive bonds of the community.

Chapter Two: Case Study of ‘æsc’

This case study follows a single Old English word, ‘æsc’, through the developments of its meaning within the poetic corpus, showing how successive layers of meaning are added which progress from the physical tree to the abstract qualities of pride, fame, and glory that were the ideal of the heroic ethos. How ‘æsc’ came to accrue these meanings can be discovered through a close study of how and when the word is used. Despite the fact that this development probably happened over a period of time, every stage can still be found in Old English poetry; the later stages did not obliterate the earlier ones. This sequence will be considered in detail in the rest of this chapter. The ‘æsc’ is unusual among wood words in the Old English poetic corpus in that it is the only case where incremental development of meaning can be shown by its usage to have resulted in the tree name coming to symbolise abstract qualities.¹

The Ash Tree

‘Æsc’ is a species of tree which is indigenous to England.² It was probably as common a sight in the countryside in the Anglo-Saxon centuries as it is today, since it is both mentioned in charters and used as an element in place-names.³ Instances of ‘æsc’ occur twenty-five times in the poetic corpus, (excluding the rune symbol used in the anagrammatic answer to riddles and personal names), but only the *Rune Poem* refers simply to the ashtree as a living plant.

It is extremely difficult to portray a tree in purely verbal terms so that the species is recognisable and the *Rune Poem* (81-3) makes no attempt to do so:

¹ ‘Æsc’ is used in the Old English poetic corpus solely for the tree or the spear although in the prose it can also refer to other artefacts or to fire-ashes.

² Oliver Rackham, *Ancient Woodland* (London: Edwin Arnold, 1980), p. 203.

³ Oliver Rackham, *The Illustrated History of the Countryside* (London: Seven Dials, 2000), p. 91.

Æsc biþ oferheah, eldum dyre,
stiþ on staþule, stede rihte hylt,
ðeah him feohtan on firas monige.⁴

To say it was a tree, or to describe it once named, was unnecessary since trees, as discussed in the introduction, were so much a part of everyday life for the Anglo-Saxon that it appears likely that any individual who was old enough to speak would have known exactly what it was.⁵ From this description, however, the associations made with the ash become apparent. Tall, strong, and firmly rooted, it thus presents a challenge to those who wish to cut it down and use it; this is the tree viewed from the practical standpoint, part of every-day life. It is a part of the natural world that men find useful and therefore have to overcome and subdue before it can be turned to their own use.

The notion of mankind in conflict with trees also appears in *Riddles 21, 23, 53, and 73*, all of which describe wooden objects as if they are enslaved by men and subservient to them.⁶ *Riddle 21* (4) refers to ‘hlaford min’ thus aligning the object with human society, not altogether willingly; it was ‘brungen of bearwe, bunden cræfte’ (7).⁷ The bow in *Riddle 23* speaks of its owner as ‘se me þæt wite gescop’ (6)⁸ and the battering ram of *Riddle 53* is even more explicit; earlier the ‘treow wæs on wynne’, (2) but later (5b-7) it is seen at the hand of man:

aglachade
deope gedolgod, dumb in bendum,⁹

⁴ ‘Ash is very high, beloved by men, firm in position, holds its place erect, although many men fight against it.’

⁵ As was the case with Victorian country children who had ‘learned these unconsciously’ and ‘could not remember a time when they did not know an oak from an ash, wheat from barley, or a Jenny wren from a tom-tit’, Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford* (London; Penguin, 1973), p. 20

⁶ The subjects are plough, bow, battering ram and spear respectively.

⁷ ‘Brought from the wood, skilfully bound.’

⁸ ‘He that made this torture for me.’

⁹ ‘In misery, deeply wounded, silent in chains.’

The legible parts of *Riddle 73* again describe an object which was once a tree but now must ‘on bonan willan bugan hwilum’ (7).¹⁰ So the idea of trees being subjugated to man through their shaping into wooden objects is not uncommon, and the *Rune Poem* stanza fits in well with this concept. Men fight with trees to use them for their own purposes; trees are seen as a separate race. The *Charm for Unfruitful Land* refers to ‘ælc treowcyn’ (7) differentiating them from the ‘ælc namcuþ wurt’ in the following line; in his Homily for the first Sunday after Easter Ælfric also talks of ‘eal treowcyn’, and ‘on wurt ond on treow’, as if they are different orders of things.¹¹ Prosopopeia is a common feature in Old English poetry, especially in the *Riddles*, and the concept of trees as a separate race is an extended use of this. Trees, in both *Rune Poem* and *Riddles* are treated as if they are animate beings with their own joys and sorrows. Shaped into artefacts, they effectively enter into the service of man thus becoming companions in the daily round and partly owing to this proximity, as well as the use of prosopopeia, are vehicles for conveying or symbolising ideas and concepts beyond the physical reality of objects. The trees, like the rest of creation, are personified in *Christ* (1174-1183) where they weep bloody tears in grief for the suffering of Christ.¹² Their sympathy also leads to their description as the noblest of earth’s species; ‘æþelast sind eorðan gecynda’ (1180). The ash tree as described in the *Rune Poem* conforms to these different ways of seeing trees; it is beloved and used by men but also in conflict with them.

¹⁰ ‘At times bow to the will of killers.’

¹¹ Quoted in Milton McC.Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 86.

¹² An idea rendered more succinctly in *Dream of the Rood* (55), as ‘weop eal gesceaft’. For a more detailed consideration of the passage from *Christ* see Thomas D. Hill, ‘Literary Landscape and Old English poetry: The Case of *Christ I, II and III*’, in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. by Paul E.Szarmach (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), pp.3-22 (pp. 16-18).

The Ash Wood

‘Æscholt’ or ‘ash wood’ appears twice in the corpus, in *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*. In both cases the ashwood referred to is the spearshaft, but both also rely on a secondary layer of meaning deriving from the ‘holt’ part of the compound.

Beowulf’s reference to ‘æscholt ufan græg’ (330) is, at first sight, simply a development of ‘garas stodon’ (328); it is a factual description of the spears, including both metal and wooden components, to produce a striking image of the weapons which the Geats leave outside Heorot. ‘Holt’ is a collective noun and ‘garas’ is a plural form, so this is ‘a metaphor for spears, wooden-shafted and with iron points, standing straight up as if they were a grove of trees.’¹³ Despite the actual numbers of the troop (we have already been told that there are fifteen of them (207)), the impression here conveyed is of a mighty army coming to the aid of Hrothgar. The ‘æscholt’ is being used in the same way as the ‘garholt’ later in *Beowulf* (1834) and the ‘oferholt’ in *Exodus* (157), which were discussed in chapter one. Here are also the beginnings of the association with heroism; the ‘æscholt’ is not only a metonym for the spear but also a symbol of the power which Beowulf brings to the beleaguered Hrothgar. The emphasis is on ‘holt’ rather more than ‘æsc’ as far as the power goes but that power derives from the fact that the ‘æscholt’ is part of a weapon.

There is one other instance of ‘æscholt’ in the corpus, in *The Battle of Maldon* (230) where ‘Offa gemælde æscholt asceoc’;¹⁴ it appears in the narrative just after the sons of Odda have fled. Here the primary and obvious meaning is that of a single spearshaft, one spear in the hand of one man, but the more usual meaning of ‘holt’ is particularly relevant to the context of this part of the poem. The deserters have not only fled the field, they have specifically ‘þone wudu sohton’ (193). This provides a

¹³ *Beowulf: A Student Edition*, ed. by George Jack, rev.edn, repr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 47, note.

¹⁴ ‘Offa spoke, shook (his) ashwood.’

comparison with the start of the poem when Offa's kinsman lets his hawk fly 'wið þæs holtes' (8). The fact that the hawk was freed suggests that its owner did not expect to return from the fight and he therefore returns it to the wood. The woodland is the right place for the hawk to be, but it is the wrong place for men to be. The 'holt' of the earlier line has turned into the 'æscholt' of the later one and in the transformation it has changed from being a group of sheltering trees to being something that has its place on the battlefield, with the brave and loyal ones. Men should be using the wood appropriately in the form of offensive weapons rather than ignominiously seeking to hide in it. There is an implicitly ironic contrast between the plain 'holt' which is the proper place for the hawk to inhabit and the 'æscholt' which by the addition of 'æsc' has become an artefact that properly belongs with the men who remain on the field. The 'æscholt' that Offa shakes impotently stands as representative of him; it symbolises his determination to remain active and to continue using the wood correctly as a weapon despite the hopelessness of the situation.

The audience would have been aware of exactly what that situation was since *The Battle of Maldon* is unusual in that it commemorates an actual event; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 991 records: 'In this year ealdorman Bryhthnoth was slain at Maldon and in the same year it was decided for the first time to pay tribute to the Danes on account of the atrocities they wrought along the sea coast.'¹⁵ The poem was, of course, written late in the Anglo-Saxon period but it uses to the full the ethos and ideals of a society based on the heroic model, despite the fact that it was 'by then an anachronism'.¹⁶ The proper use of the 'æscholt' as a weapon and the fame and glory to be gained thereby are integral parts of that society; *The Battle of Maldon* exploits these ideals to, most unusually, celebrate a defeat. Offa and his 'æscholt' are

¹⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. by G. N. Garmonsway 2nd edn. (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1953), p. 126.

¹⁶ Bernard J. Muir, *Leof: Six Old English Poems* (London: Gordon and Breach, 1989) p. 84.

both in complete accordance with the rules of heroic society; ‘æscholt’ is less a weapon here and more of a symbol of the right use of wood.

The Artefact

Spear is the next layer of meaning for ‘æsc’, deriving from the use of the wood for the shaft. This was implicit in the ‘æscholt’ references discussed in the previous section, but there is nonetheless an increase in the breadth of meaning. Ash is a springy, resilient wood, and this makes it ideal for spearshafts. The archaeological record shows most surviving shafts were indeed made of ash, although there are instances of others.¹⁷ ‘Æsc’ is used in this way in *Elene* (140) where its connection with spears is made explicit in the phrase ‘darodæsc flugon.’¹⁸ *The Wanderer* (99-100) uses it as a metonym for spear, where it is ‘asca þryþe/ wæpen wælgifru’.¹⁹ In this light the last line of the *Rune Poem* stanza can also be interpreted as referring to spears; many men fight with or against ash in the form of spears rather than contending with the tree. The enmity noted in the preceding discussion as being between tree and man can be transferred, by this approach, to that between man and man; the noun in the first line has become a metonym by the third. This gives the stanza a riddle-like quality, since the object is described in terms of two different things that yet yield the same answer; other stanzas of the *Rune Poem* do likewise, most notably the stanza on ‘ac’ (77-80). Niles attempts to make a case for these final lines referring to ships not spears,²⁰ but replacing spear with ship merely gives a different second meaning, not a third.²¹

¹⁷ Underwood, p. 39.

¹⁸ ‘Spear-ash flew.’

¹⁹ ‘The force of ash, a weapon greedy for slaughter.’

²⁰ John D. Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 281-3.

²¹ For a more conventional reading of the *Rune Poem* see Maureen Halsall, *The Old English Rune Poem: A Critical Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

‘Æsc’ is not used of ships in the poetic corpus, with the possible exception of the description of the Vikings as the ‘æschiere’ in *The Battle of Maldon* (69), but it does have this meaning elsewhere; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* Manuscript A (the Parker Chronicle) includes ‘mid ðæm æscum þe hie fela geara ær timbran’ in the entry for 896.²² ‘Æsc’ also glosses the Latin ‘dromo’,²³ one of the meanings of which is ‘a kind of vessel rapidly propelled by many oars’.²⁴ This is cognate with use of the Old Norse word for ash, ‘askr,’ for a specific type of small ship in two of the sagas.²⁵ This, as the title of Sayers’ article suggests, provides other possible interpretations for ‘æschiere’ than the straightforward ‘spear-army’. Marsden comments that ‘ash-wood was used for spear shafts and for building boats, and ‘æsc’ can be used as a metonym for either.’²⁶ Further complexity arises since ‘æscmen’ also glosses the Latin ‘piratici’.²⁷ Since these alternatives are not mutually exclusive, in *The Battle of Maldon* ‘æschiere’ encompasses every possibility; the attackers did come from the sea in ships and they were armed with spears. The type, source and extent of the threat are encapsulated in the single syllable ‘æsc’ which is now representative of humans as well as ships and spears. This in turn enables the next stage in the incremental development of its meaning.

The People

‘Æsc’ is used in descriptions of people who carry or wield the spear; hence the ‘æscberend’ (ashbearers) of *Andreas* (47, 1076, and 1537), and *Genesis* (2041). The

²² ‘With those ships that they built many years previously.’ *The Parker Chronicle 832-900*, ed. by A.J.Smith (London: Methuen, 1935) rev. edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press 1980), p.50.

²³ Gloss in Plantin Moretus Ms 32 and BM Additional 32246, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/oec.htm> consulted 8 April 2009.

²⁴ Charlton D.Lewis and Charles A. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1917), p. 612.

²⁵ William Sayers, ‘Æschere in *The Battle of Maldon*: Fleet, Warships’ Crews, Spearmen or Oarsmen?’ *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 107 (2006), 199-205 (pp. 201-2).

²⁶ Richard Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 257 note.

²⁷ Gloss in BM Cotton Cleopatra A.III, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/oec.htm> consulted 8 April 2009.

Andreas references do not necessarily mean warriors or soldiers; these are citizens, an angry armed mob in the first two cases ('eorre æsberend') who are intent on violence. Bearing the ash means to carry a spear, not necessarily to be armed for war or fighting a battle; the *Andreas* references make clear that the mention of 'æsc' infers an armed man but not necessarily an arena of conflict. It is individuals who carry spears, and the context of a battle or battlefield is not necessary. This is reinforced by the third of the *Andreas* references to 'ealde æsberend'; here it describes a man who, despite bearing a spear, is in fact past fighting by virtue of his age. Such old men can only lament when *Andreas* calls forth a flood to drown their city, they cannot do anything to help save it; their spear-bearing is not a present threat but a mark of identity of their own past. The 'eald æscwiga' in *Beowulf* (2042) is similarly a veteran; unable to fight himself he is yet bent on provoking others to fight by remembering past grievances.

In the context of pitched battle, of course, an 'æscberend' is an armed warrior. In *Genesis* warriors are being picked for their experience and skill 'He þær wigena fand/ æsberendra,' (2040-1) while the splendidly-equipped army accompanying Elene (259) are also 'æscwigan,' and the same troops are described a little later (275) as 'æscrof' (ashbrave). Constantine himself is described as 'æscrof' contrasting with the litotes of 'unslaw' which immediately follows it (202). By defining him in terms of 'æsc' the poem aligns Constantine with his own troops as well as those of Elene; it emphasises his qualities as a leader of ash-bearers. Similarly, the victorious Hebrew army returning laden with booty at the end of *Judith* (336) is 'æscrof.' The 'æsc' is now being used to describe people, and once it can come to mean that, it can move half a step beyond to indicate the qualities possessed by people. Here we have people who carry spears, those who fight with spears, those who are brave with spears; in the

case of Constantine those who are famed for their bravery. The meaning of ‘æsc’ is moving towards the abstract here; ‘æscberend’ is a simple practical description but ‘æscrof’ signals a step beyond that. In *Elene* and *Judith* it is part of the formula ‘eorl æscrof’ inferring nobility as well as bravery; in both cases they are the best of the troops with an earned reputation of experience and skill. Fighting with spears as described in *The Battle of Maldon* is a painful, bloody and strenuous business in which men need to act to support and help each other; ‘æscrof’ is a way of describing the qualities it demands of them.

The place and the action

Battles can be described using compounds with ‘æsc’: the ‘æscþræsc’ (ash-violence) in *Genesis* (2154) and ‘æscplegan’ (ash-play) in *Judith* (216). The ‘æsc’ is moving away from being a metonym for spear in these instances, and becoming part of a synecdoche for the violence of battle. The initial concept of a particular species of tree has been overlaid by more complex meanings here; even the specific nature of the artefact is receding into the background. ‘Æsc’ becomes a metaphor for intellectual strife in *Vainglory* (17), with the appearance of ‘æscstede,’ (ash-place):

witan fundiaþ
 hwylc æscstede inne in ræcede
 mid werum wunige, þonne win hweteð
 beornes breostsefan²⁸

This is a metaphorical place of conflict; as the men in hall drink and debate, strife and contention arise. The ‘æscstede’ is not a literal battlefield but represents the divisions which occur in such situations. It is the space in which an intellectual battle is fought

²⁸ ‘They strive to know what ash-place remains inside among men in hall when wine incites the mind of man.’

with words, fuelled by wine. The battlefield is within the protagonists, in the combat between minds and ideas, and hence the ‘æsc’ here essentially is standing for the idea of antagonism; it has ceased to be even a metaphorical spear. There is a possible unconscious association with more pragmatic meanings too here, since ‘æscstede’ could literally mean the hearth that the men are sitting by; the connotations of hall, wine and discussion, all infer an indoor gathering, focussed on the fireplace.²⁹ The metaphorical ‘æscstede’ is fought beside an actual one.

The Attributes

Skill in fighting and the use of weapons were highly prized attributes of heroic society. No less valued were the bravery and loyalty that fighting demanded and the fame and glory that could be won by the combination of skill and courage. In *The Battle of Brunanburh* Æthelstan and Eadmund are said to have won everlasting glory: ‘ealdorlangne tir’ (3). Pride and delight in martial accomplishments shine through much Old English poetry, and since it was an essential concomitant of battle the ‘æsc’ inevitably came to acquire connotations of pride and glory.

Hrothgar uses it symbolically when he says that for fifty years he has defended his people by ‘æsc ond ecg’, by ash and edge, in *Beowulf* (1772). The defence of his people is one of the principal duties of a king and these duties are symbolised by the weapons with which he has given his people prosperity and victory over their enemies. ‘Æsc ond ecg’ is clearly, as a phrase, connected with pride in achievement by feats of arms, and the glory and renown which accrue from that, but there are also phrases which indicate that that pride and glory come to be transferred to the ‘æsc’ in and of itself.

²⁹ There is no instance in the Old English corpus as it remains to us of ‘æscstede’ being used for ‘ashplace’ in the sense of hearth but there is no reason to suppose that such a usage would have been an impossibility in Old English.

The battle can confer glory on a skilful wielder of the spear, so much so that it appears the glory comes from the 'æsc', as if the spear alone was a glorious thing. When the Vikings have crossed the causeway in *The Battle of Maldon*, the poem tells us not only that the fight is imminent but so is the glory: 'þa wæs feohte neh/ tir æt getohte' (103-4).³⁰ *Genesis* contains two references which make explicit the connection between the 'æsc' and glory; the 'æsctir wera' (ashglory of men 2069) and when Melchisedec speaks of 'þe ða æsca tir/æt guðe forgeaf' (2108-9).³¹ The glory of ash, the ash-glory of men, are both earned and displayed on the battlefield, in the context of fighting. The 'æsc' is now both the source and the symbol of the attribute it has come to represent.

Another reason for the importance of spears can be found in the fact that the right to carry spear and shield was one of the signifiers of a free man, part of his 'basic equipment'.³² A description of a person as 'æscterend' is thus a sign of status. Any society which includes the unfree values freedom highly and therefore anything which indicates free status is a mark of honour, something to take pride in. This is evident in the use of the phrase 'æsc deall' which occurs twice in the poetic corpus, used in very different circumstances to quite different effect.

The first occurrence is *Riddle 22*; this is one of the few occasions when 'æsc' appears where there is no context of fighting or battle, the 'men' are merely travelling. Indeed the presence of weapons is irrelevant to the solution; whether the answer to the riddle is taken to be 'the month of December' or one of the constellations does not make any difference, neither days nor stars are armed.³³ In the riddle these protagonists are variously described as 'mon', 'magorinc', 'eorl', 'beorn', and 'wer',

³⁰ 'Then was the fight near, glory from the battle.'

³¹ 'Those who were granted the glory of ash by the battle.'

³² Nicholas Brookes, *Communities and Warfare 700-1400* (London: Hambledon, 2000), p. 142.

³³ For a discussion of possible solutions see Williamson, pp. 201-202.

so no emphasis is placed on warrior status. They are, however, ‘eorlas æscum dealle’ (11), and this pride seems to be directly connected to the ‘æsc,’ they are not proud men who simply happen to have spears about them. The ‘æsc’ has here acquired the connotations of the free man with the pride of bearing and delight in arms which are associated with that. In the form of the spear ‘æsc’ can be both a symbol and a source of pride; it is a mark of status and an indicator of the pride and glory of the fighting man. In this way it can come to imply the abstract concepts of pride and glory as well as the actual weapon and the decidedly non-abstract action of fighting.

The same phrase occurs in *Andreas* (1097). It is, at first sight, a similar context to the previous one. The whole passage runs:

beornas comon
 wiggendra þreat, wicgum gengan
 on mearum modige, mæðelhegende
 æscum dealle.³⁴

This conjures up a picture of aristocratic society which has the same type of emphasis as the stanza on horses from the *Rune Poem* (55-8):

Eh byþ for eorlum æþelinga wyn
 hors hofum wlanc, ðær him hæleþ ymbe
 welege on wicum, wrixlaþ spræce
 ond biþ unstyllum æfre frofor³⁵

In neither of these two passages is there any notion or inference of fighting or a battle context, just as there was not in *Riddle 22*. In all three passages, in fact, what is being described is a group of men who have time and leisure to ride along together, discussing things as they go: the epitome of free, wealthy men not over-burdened with

³⁴ ‘Men came, a troop of warriors going on horses, deliberating on spirited horses with pride in ashes.’

³⁵ ‘The horse is the joy of princes among nobles where warriors, wealthy in horses, exchange speech about proud-hoofed horses; (the horse) is ever a comfort to the restless.’

tedious daily tasks. The 'æsc' is associated with freedom, and, to some extent, nobility. These poems give a verbal picture of a group of men who could easily have appeared under the command of Hrothgar, or Beowulf, or some other heroic figure; they have pride in bearing their arms, they are apparently potential fighters with all the right equipment. They are, in fact, the sort of people who in this way are shown to exemplify the ideals of Anglo-Saxon secular society. In context, much is shown by the formula 'æsc deall.'

The formulaic nature of Old English poetry is widely acknowledged, so much so that Tyler considers 'the notion of the formula is foundational to our understanding of Old English poetry.'³⁶ A formula works because it is repeated and therefore leads to certain expectations on the part of the audience.³⁷ The 'æsc deall' formula is used to raise expectations about the kind of people that the poem is dealing with; in *Riddle* 22 it is misdirection, a detail put in which does not aid the seeker towards a solution. In *Andreas* it is also misdirection but of a different kind.

The *Andreas* passage describes the Mermedonians, who have already been portrayed as a cruel, cannibalistic people (11-39); there is a shift in the narrative viewpoint here, although not in the narrative voice. The audience is presented with the Mermedonians as the latter see themselves; to them the ways and customs of their community are normal and acceptable, but they have to be represented in terms that an Anglo-Saxon audience can appreciate. Hence the focus shifts to the context of Mermedonian society, but expressed in terms of the ideals of Anglo-Saxon secular society. 'Æsc deall' is one of the formulas for creating the impression of a community that is admirable. The passage then returns to its former narrative viewpoint to

³⁶ Elizabeth M. Tyler, *Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2006), p. 101.

³⁷ Alain Renoir, 'Old English Formulas and Themes as Tools for Contextual Interpretation', in *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature*, ed. by Phyllis Rugg Brown and others (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986, pp. 65-59 (p. 69).

describe the purpose of the gathering, which is to cast lots for which of them should be eaten by the others. In this context they are a heathen mob, carrying out vile and evil customs. The shock and horror of this revelation is considerably heightened by the proximity to the apparent praise of the lines quoted above. The poem carefully creates a certain expectation in the minds of the audience, by the use of the formulaic phrase 'æsc deall', which it then proceeds to destroy; because there is no alteration to the narrative voice the change in narrative viewpoint is not immediately obvious. It all adds to the drama and tension of the scene, by building one apparent impression only to demonstrate its complete falsity. The fact that this impression can be created, and largely by the use of 'æsc deall', shows how much the 'æsc' is bound up with notions of pride, glory and honour. It can be used in this way because the spear is such a familiar object and all its associations centre on fighting and freedom: in the context of the heroic society as portrayed in Old English poetry these are central.

All these ideas lie behind the use of 'æsc' in *The Battle of Maldon*. There is a lot of spearplay in the surviving text; there are some twenty-eight occasions when spears are mentioned but only two of them use 'æsc', (if the 'æschiere' and 'æscholt' discussed above are discounted). All the others use one of several available alternatives for spear, such as 'gar', 'daroð', 'francon', or 'spere'. This is less surprising than it is significant; both times that 'æsc' is used alone it is at a nodal point in the narrative when the course of action is not fixed and decisions are about to be made. In each case, too, it is in the context of prefacing a speech by one of the characters on the Saxon side, firstly by Bryhtnoth and later by Bryhtwold. The speech on the battlefield is a formulaic scene, comparable to that known as 'The Hero on the

Beach’.³⁸ It is a standard convention and brandishing the shield or spear before the speech is a part of the formula: ‘the ritualistic brandishing of weapons accompanying each uttered pledge or threat.’³⁹ This is exploited within the poem by using the formula twice. The first occasion, when Byrthnoth repudiates the Vikings’ demands, foreshadows the later one, when Byrthwold continues that defiance in the face of defeat. The later one echoes the first one and so emphasises the continuing unity of purpose among the Saxon warband; as Frese puts it ‘the opening scene prophesies its own ending.’⁴⁰

Both situations are ones in which the speaker is about to declare defiance, continuing resistance, and his desire to maintain absolute loyalty to his lord, living or dead. These virtues, which are about to be displayed verbally, are displayed symbolically by each speaker brandishing his spear as he begins to speak. Byrthnoth and Byrthwold do the same thing: ‘Byrthnoð mapelode bord hafenode/ wand wacne æsc wordum mælde’ (42-3) and ‘Byrthwold mapelode bord hafenode/ se wæs eald geneaht æsc acwehte’ (309-10).⁴¹

The ‘æsc’ is associated with fame, pride and war-glory, and all these attributes are demonstrated to the full by the Saxons at Maldon, but with the added poignancy that comes from inevitable defeat. The results of the battle must have been known to all long before they heard the poem, so there is nothing to be concealed about it; the certainty of the ending is inevitable in that sense alone. ‘Æsc’ is actually used to foreshadow the defeat in that the spear that Brythnoth flourishes as he prepares to

³⁸ Alain Renoir, ‘The Hero on the Beach: Germanic Theme and Indo-European Origin’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 90 (1989), 111-16.

³⁹ Muir, *Leof* p. 84.

⁴⁰ Dolores Warwick Frese, ‘Poetic Prowess in *Brunanburh* and *Maldon*: Winning, Losing and Literary Outcome’, in Brown pp. 83-99 (p. 94).

⁴¹ ‘Byrthnoth spoke, grasped (his) shield, brandished (his) frail ash, declared with words.’ ‘Byrthwold spoke, grasped (his) shield, that was an old comrade (who) brandished the ash.’ For consideration of the implications of ‘mapelode’ in this formula see Alexandra Hennessy Olsen, *Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1984), pp. 58-60.

answer the Viking demand for tribute is described by the adjective ‘wac’ (43). ‘Wac’ has three shades of meaning, ‘pliant’, ‘weak’ and ‘mean’ (the latter in the ‘of low value’ sense).⁴² These are unlikely attributes for a weapon normally held in high esteem and here belonging to a man who is equally highly praised in the surviving text. Yet in context all three aspects of meaning are appropriate. Ashwood is literally pliant and Brythnoth is about to be pliant in his dealings with the Vikings by allowing them to cross the causeway, but ash as the Saxons’ weapon is shown to be weak and of little value in the fight that follows. The weapon Bryhtnoth is so defiantly waving is, in the end, unavailing; it is as ineffectual as is his warband. It symbolises the Saxon force, who have all the heroic virtues which the ‘æsc’ has come to stand for, yet by being ‘wac’ it also symbolises their defeat; the ‘wac æsc’ prefigures the failure of Bryhtnoth and his men in their attempt to resist the Viking challenge.

By the time that Byrhtwold prepares to speak the battle is all but lost. The Saxons have now no real option, in practical terms alone, but to sell their lives as dearly as possible. In heroic terms, they retain their pride in themselves, their loyalty to their lord and their hope of (posthumous) fame through their actions on the battlefield; the core values of the old heroic tradition are still there and still valid. The ‘æsc’ that Byrhtwold shakes is not ‘wac,’ that point does not need making now, but it does link him with his fallen leader; it reminds the audience of the earlier line when Byrthoth defied the Viking demands, and it brings the poem almost full circle.⁴³ To the mind of a hero what matters are the qualities that ‘æsc’ symbolises and these are shown to endure among the remnants of the Saxon warband.

⁴² <http://beowulf.engl.uky.edu/~kiernan/BT/bosworth.htm>.

⁴³ It is always worth remembering, in this context, that we lack both the beginning and ending of *The Battle of Maldon*; thus it is not possible to speak of the end of the poem, only the end that we have.

Conclusion

That the 'æsc' comes to symbolise a range of attributes is shown by the way in which it is used, not only in *The Battle of Maldon* but in the other poems discussed above. The fact that in *The Battle of Maldon* 'æsc' is used only at crucial points in the narrative, and thus links the beginning with the end and the retainer with his lord, is a demonstration of how much more than the original ashtree the meaning can encompass. These additional layers of meaning for 'æsc' can be seen as a logical progression, moving step by step from the tree, to the wood, to the artefact made of it, to the people who use that artefact, to the place where they use it, to what they use it for, to the qualities called for by this use. The tree remains within the total concept of 'æsc,' as shown by the 'æscholt' wielded by Offa. The ashtree has not been removed, or even buried beneath the accruing layers, but it has been given the possibility of being transformed. As a part of the natural world the ashtree is a useful resource, but within the Anglo-Saxon community it can also be symbolic of the attributes which that community values.

Chapter Three: Case Study of ‘wudu’

‘Wudu’ has been chosen as the subject of a second case study because it operates so differently to ‘æsc’. The previous chapter showed how ‘æsc’ refers to a particular species of tree and is used metonymically to mean only one type of artefact: the spear. ‘Wudu’ by contrast is extremely non-specific in meaning, and can be applied to almost anything connected with trees or wood in some way, including an individual tree, or a group of them. Encompassing as it does such a rich variety of possibilities ‘wudu’ can represent of every aspect of trees as they appear in the Old English poetic corpus. This multiplicity of meaning enables considerable flexibility of usage within a poetic style that is ‘deeply rooted in convention’.¹ ‘Wudu’ has no fixed connotations, either positive or negative. It is a word that can be shaped to numerous purposes and is as easily used for misdirection, confusion and ambiguity as it is for clarity or simplicity.

There are four main aspects to the use of ‘wudu’ within the Old English poetic corpus. Firstly, it is especially prominent in the poetry since it combines so well with other words: ‘wudu’ occurs frequently as one of the elements of a compound. There are forty-five instances of it being used in this way if the placenames ‘hrefnawudu’ (*Beowulf* 2925) and ‘wistlawudu’ (*Widsith* 121) are included, compared with only thirty occasions when it is used alone. Of the latter, moreover, five have accompanying adjectives for qualification or definition.² Secondly, it is particularly important as a constituent feature of the landscape which is largely defined and bounded by trees and woods: actual landscapes as depicted in the *Menologium* or *The Wife’s Lament* for instance include trees, but so do the ideally harmonious land in *The Phoenix* and the unpleasant land around the monsters’ mere in *Beowulf*. The material

¹Tyler, p.1.

² See below, pp. 55, 59 and 60. The one which is not discussed below is the description of a ship as ‘curved-prowed wood’ (‘wudu wundenhals’ *Beowulf* 298).

wood of which the trees are composed is the third area; both as a naturally occurring material, part of the cycle of nature, and as a resource for humanity. The fourth aspect is the wordplay that results from these multiple meanings, particularly its prominence as a metonym.

Since trees are so common a sight in the landscape and so frequently used by humankind they provide a convenient connection with the mental world; ideas, concepts and emotions can all be portrayed by analogies with trees and wood. Trees are also used to convey emotion, both from the perspective of the tree and as a reflection of the emotions felt by the human protagonists. The multiplicity of possibilities suggested by the word 'wudu' is utilized in the poetry to create additional layers of meaning and reference as well as the ambiguity which makes it such a prominent feature of many of the riddles.

Compounds

Many of the words which appear as compounds in modern editions of the texts do not appear as compounds in the manuscripts. The 'brim wudu' of *Guthlac* (1331), for instance, clearly refers to a ship so that the sense is not 'sea wood' but 'seawood'; 'sea' is not functioning as an adjective but works with the metonym to create a metaphor. The words considered here are compounds in sense even where they are not literally so in the manuscripts.

Printing the words as a compound is an aid to interpretation for the modern reader but it also reflects a difference in perception of the purpose of writing. For the Anglo-Saxon the text was something to be interpreted communally and more frequently heard than seen, as discussed in the introduction; modern readers rely on

conventions such as compounds and punctuation to guide their own interpretation in what has become a solitary occupation.

The form of Old English poetry enables compounds to be part of the ornamentation of the verse; an emphatic flourish that ensures that stresses fall in the right place and the alliteration is maintained without necessarily supplying additional information. This can be seen in *Andreas*: ‘hwa me wyrðmyndum on wudubate’ (905),³ where ‘wudu’ embellishes and balances the line but is redundant in terms of the sense of the whole. However, this is not always the case.

Elene describes the advancing army of Constantine thus: ‘þonne rand dynede/ campwudu clynede’ (50-51).⁴ *Finnsburh* uses a similar construction as a foretaste of what will happen in the forthcoming fight: ‘guðwudu hlynneð/ scyld scefte oncwyrð’ (5-6).⁵ The separate elements of ‘guðwudu’, spearshaft and shield, are specified here as they were not in *Elene* but the sense is the same. The battlescene is invoked by the sound of wood striking wood; the essential connection of spear and shield in battle is conveyed by the personification of shield ‘answering’ shaft. The ‘wudu’ is extended by ‘camp’ and ‘guð’ to become a synecdoche for the whole scene: battlefield, combatants and weapons.

Two different applications of the compound ‘holtwudu’ are discernable in *Beowulf*, demonstrating subtle differences in meaning. When the stag ‘holtwudu sece’ (1369) it could be translated as the stag seeking either the forest or the trees of the forest but the general effect is the same; the stag is seeking refuge from the hunt and that is the point that is being made. However, when Beowulf is preparing to fight the dragon he has an iron shield made because ‘wisse he gearwe/ þæt him holtwudu helpan ne meahte/ lind wið lige’ (2339-41). In all other cases where the words are

³ ‘Who me, to my honour, in the wooden boat...’; a boat was of necessity made of wood at this period.

⁴ ‘Then shield rang and warwood resounded.’

⁵ ‘Warwood resounds, shield answers shaft.’

compounded, (in whatever sequence), the sense is simply ‘forest’ but here the sense is much more that of ‘forest wood’ as Swanton translates it.⁶ It is not that the forest would not help him, it is the wood from it that he is concerned about, so in this case the compound encompasses elements which need to be understood separately. The resource from the forest, specifically wood, even more specifically limewood, will be ineffectual in this crisis. The woodenness of the trees is not an issue for the stag; it is a mark of the extreme danger facing Beowulf that the normal reliance on the forest is unavailable. ‘Holtwudu’ as a compound can thus be understood to have subtly different meanings depending on what emphasis is being placed on the elements of which it is composed.

Even with compounds context can still be the major factor in deciphering what is being signified. In *Genesis* Noah is told to take every species into the wooden stronghold ‘þæt wudufæsten’ (1312). The wooden ark is to be their refuge just as the forest which surrounds Durham is a refuge and home to many wild animals; in *Durham* (6) it too is a ‘wudufæstern’. Neither example is puzzling taken in context of the poem in which it occurs; it is only when the words are considered together, out of context, that the possibility of ambiguity arises and the wider applications of the word become apparent. A word which signified a vessel in *Genesis* refers to the landscape in *Durham*; both can be described in terms of wood.

Both ‘holtwudu’ and ‘wudufæsten’ are providing protection but principally to animals; both as forest and material. The normal protection that wood as material affords men is only in context of human society as a defence against other men. The danger facing Beowulf comes from the natural world outside that society so the usual

⁶ ‘He knew very well that forest wood could not help him – limewood against flame’ *Beowulf*, ed. and trans. by Michael Swanton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.147.

reliance on wood will be insufficient; the natural qualities of both dragon and wood render the man-made artefact ineffectual.

Wood in the landscape

Trees are a part of the world around mankind; they are always there in the background as both a feature of the landscape and a resource. However, as Hall says, 'it is important in this context to recognise that images focussing on landbound natural scenes are very rare in Old English poetry.'⁷ 'Wudu', whether as a tree or a forest, can be utilised not only to delineate what landscapes there are but also to reflect the emotions, positions and perceptions of humanity within it.

The mental landscape of the dream is the setting for the trees in *Daniel* and *The Dream of the Rood*. The tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, recounted in *Daniel* (495-522), is variously 'wudubeam', 'beam', and 'treow', but it appears as a physical entity. Only when the prophet's analysis of the dream is supplied (551-584) is it revealed as a metaphorical tree, in the sense that it is a metaphor for the fate that awaits the king. The tree is a visible image of the power of Nebuchadnezzar, which will wane and return like the sprouting tree stump; an image which is based closely on the Biblical account in Daniel 4: 4-27. It is described in terms that are very similar to the descriptions of the tree in the early part of *Dream of the Rood* when its identity as the cross has yet to be revealed. In *Daniel* 'on foldan fægre stode/ wudubeam wlitig' (497-498) which 'hlifode to heofontunglum' (500)⁸; while in *Dream of the Rood* the tree is 'syllicre treow/ on lyft lædan leohte bewunden' (4-5)⁹ and the 'best of woods' ('wudu selesta' 27). In both cases a wonderful shining tree reaches up to the heavens,

⁷ Alaric Hall, p.6.

⁸ 'Shining tree stood fair on earth', and 'Towered to the heavenly stars.'

⁹ 'Marvellous tree raised in the air wrapped in light.'

connecting earth and heaven and overshadowing the whole earth.¹⁰ Only later is the true nature of each tree revealed; the visual metaphor in *Daniel* and the symbol of Christ's victory in *Dream of the Rood*.

The tree that has been cut down to make the cross in *Dream of the Rood* retains its essential connection with other trees despite this use. It suffers with Christ but is rewarded for its obedience by being raised above other woods just as Mary was raised above other women (90-94):

Hwæt, me þa geweorðode wuldres Ealdor
ofer holmwudu, heofonrices Weard,
swylce swa he his modor eac, Marian sylfe,
æلميhtig God for ealle menn
geweorðode ofer eall wifa cynn.¹¹

Exactly what other woods it is raised above is made difficult to discern by 'holmwudu', which is the manuscript reading and would normally be translated as 'seawood', hence 'ship' - a somewhat incongruous intrusion of the sea into an otherwise landlocked poem. Swanton remarks that 'most editors emend to read the known poetic compound *holtwudu*', but as this involves a scribal error from 'holt' to 'holm' which is 'not paleographically credible' he goes on to offer a possible alternative meaning of 'hill'.¹² In the latter case the cross is raised above other trees of the hill, either in general (thus inviting comparison with the 'wudige moras' of *Azarius* (120) discussed below), or specifically above the other crosses on that

¹⁰ For a discussion of the origins of the cosmological tree see Eleanor Simmons Greenhill 'The Child in the Tree', *Traditio*, 10 (1954), 323-371 (p. 331).

¹¹ Listen, the Prince of Glory, Guardian of the heavenly kingdom, honoured me over the trees of the wood in the sight of all men, just as he, Almighty God, also honoured his mother, Mary herself, over all the race of women.'

¹² *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. by Michael Swanton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), p.128. For a defence of retaining the sense of 'ship' see Sandra McEntire 'The Devotional Context of the Cross before AD 1000', in Szarmach pp.345-356 (p.351).

particular hill of Calvary. There is certainly a demonstration of its superiority to the other crosses in *Elene*, where the true cross is ascertained by its ability to raise a man from the dead (884-889). Since the cross is of such great importance in the Christian faith, the passage could be construed as meaning above both trees in general and the crosses in particular, rather than one or the other. It retains its superiority but is still connected with the ordinary trees of the ordinary landscape.

‘Wudu’ in *Resignation* is just such an ordinary tree, the life of which is contrasted with that of man; but in this instance it is less a metaphor for the life of men than a cause for envy.¹³ *Resignation* is a somewhat inchoate poem which expresses contrition for unspecified past misdeeds and laments the protagonist’s currently unhappy state of a friendless exile. The image of life as a voyage (59-60) becomes the longing for an actual but unrealisable voyage of return to friends and homeland (100-104). Immediately following this is the image of the tree; ‘wudu mot him weaxen wyrde bidan/ tanum lædan’(105-106).¹⁴ The natural state of the ‘wudu’ is free and unfettered growth; apprehension about what is to come because of past misdeeds and erroneous decisions does not afflict trees as it does people. There is a tacit acknowledgement of the superiority of natural law when the hand of man does not interfere. Such harmony also appears in relation to the ‘wudu’ in the ordinary landscapes of *Azarius* and the *Menologium*; God created the wooded hills, the ‘wudige moras’ of *Azarius* (120) and in the spring trees and plants appear shining and lovely according to the *Menologium* (76-77): ‘smicere on gearwum/ wudum ond wyrtum cymeð wlitig scriðan’. The natural state of the tree is one of content; the tree in *Riddle 53* is happy when growing freely in the wild, it is only made unhappy when it is turned into an artefact in its old age:

¹³ The poem is re-named as *Contrition* and taken as three fragments in Muir ed., *The Exeter Anthology*. The lines considered here are Fragment B (36-7) in this edition.

¹⁴ ‘A tree may flourish, spread with branches, await its fate.’

‘þæt treow wæs on wynne/ wudu weaxende’ (2-3).¹⁵ The wood is the rightful place for the tree to be if it is to be a part of this happy natural state.

The landscape of *The Phoenix* is one in which not only the trees but the whole land is filled with joy; a happy harmony pervades the entire land to create an ideal landscape, a type that Magennis calls a ‘Latin landscape theme..... the *locus amoenus*’.¹⁶ As a landscape it is unchanging but not timeless; the phoenix marks off the hours during his thousand-year lifespan (146-147a) ‘symle he twelf siþum tide gemearcað/ dæges ond nihtes.’ It is described in *The Phoenix* largely in terms of what is absent; extremes of weather together with pain, poverty, sorrow and death (14-18, 21-26 and 50-59). In fact it contains surprisingly little; grass, water, trees and light are the only constituents of the landscape, with the emphasis and most of the positive detail of the description being reserved for the trees. The forests symbolise the land, being, despite the passing of time, always green and festooned with blossoms and fruit (71-74):

Sindon þa bearwas bledum gehonge,
wlitigum wæstmum, þær no waniað o
halge under heofonum, holtes frætwe.¹⁷

The complete harmony of the land is also symbolised by the trees through the hapax legomenon ‘sunbearo’ in the phrase ‘sunbearo lixeð/ wuduholt wynlic’¹⁸ (33-34a). In this the trees are not only seen as joyful but also in complete accord with their surroundings; they shine because of a fusion of the element and the plant which is

¹⁵ ‘That tree was in joy, growing in the wood.’

¹⁶ Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.138.

¹⁷ ‘Those trees are hung with blossoms, with bright fruits, the adornment of the forest, holy under the heavens, never decays there.’

¹⁸ ‘Sunwoods shine, a joyous forest.’

symptomatic of the whole landscape. Light and forest are combined by this compound to create a unity of delight which is consequent upon their obedience to God (34b-36):

Wæstmas ne dreosað,
beorhte blede, ac þa beamas a
grene stondað, swa him god bibeað.¹⁹

The emotion of the ‘wuduholt wynlic’ is symptomatic of the whole landscape; the joyful wood has joyful springs within it ‘wæter wynsumu of þæs wuda midle’ (65) where the phoenix bathes. The ideal harmony of the land is expressed by, as well as contained in, the ‘wudu’.

The landscape surrounding the lair of Grendel’s mother in *Beowulf* is the opposite of this ideal happy natural state. It is described twice (1357-1376 and 1413-1417) and although there are similarities in the two descriptions it is the differences between them which are significant. The first passage, spoken by Hrothgar, invests it with hellish and unnatural qualities: it is a place of fear and terror involving both ice and fire.²⁰ The trees in it are frost-covered, clinging to the banks ‘hrinde bearwas/wudu wyrtrum fæst wæter oferhelmað’ (1363-4), and the water is combined with fire ‘fyr on flode’ (1366). This is a perversion of the idyllic landscape since nothing is in harmony here. It is supernatural in the mix of fire and water, elements which do not naturally co-exist, and it is made more frightening by the inclusion of the trees which do not, apparently, have anything unnatural about them. They are ordinary trees in a place which is a bad situation for them, caught between fire and flood; the phrase ‘wyrtrum fæst’ gives the impression that the trees are held captive by their roots. They are unable to grow, branch, or flourish as they are seen doing naturally in the rest of

¹⁹ ‘Fruits do not fall, nor the bright leaves, but those trees always stand green, as God commanded.’

²⁰ For a summary of possible origins of this type of landscape see Hugh Magennis, pp. 133-143 and Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.106-117.

the poetic corpus. They can be seen as symbolic of Hrothgar, caught as he is (and has been for the past twelve years) in unhappy events which he is powerless to change, and unable to fulfil the natural duty of a king and protect his people.

The second, and much shorter, description is what Beowulf sees when he actually arrives at the mere. Beowulf is much less apprehensive than Hrothgar, as he has reason to be. He is eager for adventure and glory, he is much younger, and he has very recently triumphed over Grendel. He sees only 'fyrgenholt', 'harne stan' and 'wynleasne wudu' (1415-6), and mountain trees growing on grey stone have no supernatural connotations; it appears to be an ordinary place. The wood may be cheerless, but it is dreary rather than terrifying. The landscape is not personified in any way, but it is described in such a way as to bring out the differences in the mental attitudes of the two men. Their viewpoints are projected onto it by means of the descriptive technique employed, without ever directly transferring emotion or making the connection explicit.

'Wudu' is part of the landscape; whether the ideal one of *The Phoenix*, the unnatural one of the monsters' mere or the ordinary one of the *Menologium*. Within the poetic corpus of Old English poetry 'wudu' also functions as the place beyond the world of the human community. Once within the untamed natural world of the 'wudu' the ability of the individual to carry out normal human and social functions ceases; since they are no longer a part of that society the conventions no longer apply. 'Wudu' is paradoxically a place of both sanctuary and exile.²¹ It provides shelter and sanctuary but at the cost of companionship. Hence the protagonist in *The Wife's Lament* may be safe in the 'wuda bearwe' (27), but she is still a friendless outcast there; likewise the deserters in *Maldon* (193) will be safe from the battle in the wood

²¹ See Michael D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp. 109-110 on the dangers of exile.

they seek, but at the cost of disloyalty and consequent dishonour. Adam and Eve rush sadly into the shelter of the forest when they hear the voice of God ‘gewitan him þa gangan geomerode/ under beamsceade’ *Genesis* (858-9),²² but it does not help their plight; they do have to emerge and face God’s wrath and expulsion from Eden, since the sanctuary of the forest is a mark of their failure to fulfil the expectations of the community of the garden. The consequences for those who have hidden, panic-stricken, in woods is shown in the final episode of *Beowulf*. Beowulf’s followers are safe in the wood while he fights the dragon, but when they emerge Beowulf is dead and they are oathbreakers ‘treowlogan’ (2847) and ashamed ‘scamiende’ (2850).

The implications of this duality of significance - safety and separation - are invoked by the ‘wudu’ in *Wulf and Eadwacer*. This is a poem which is ‘extremely cryptic, perhaps impenetrable’ as a text.²³ In fact almost the only things we can be certain of are the features of the landscape in which the action takes place; marshes and woods. Fen as well as wood is associated with outcasts; in *Beowulf* Grendel, the ultimate outcast, is a denizen of the swamp ‘se þe moras heold/ fen ond fæsten’ (103-104).²⁴ If taken to be human the ‘hwelp’ (16) of *Wulf and Eadwacer* is thus doubly outcast: exiled from the fen to the wood. Yet if taken to be a wolfcub the ‘wudu’ is the place where it rightfully belongs; the woods provide comparative safety and separation from the human community in a positive way rather than the negative one of exile. Whatever tale is being played out in the poem it is at least clear that by going to the ‘wudu’ as exiles or outcasts Wulf and the offspring no longer have any role left to them within human society.

²² ‘Then they went in sorrow under the shelter of the treeshade.’

²³ Muir, ed. *The Exeter Anthology* p.571.

²⁴ ‘He who held the morass, (both) fen and refuge.’

Wood as material

As material wood is most naturally susceptible to fire; the ‘fyre wudu meltan’ of *Maxims I* (71) is one of the plainest and most prosaic statements to be found in any poetry. ‘Wudu’ is used in this sense in *Beowulf* (3113) as ‘bælwudu’ for the hero’s funeral pyre; similarly the ‘wudu’ in *Daniel* (244) is material for the furnace in which Nebuchadnezzar is attempting to destroy the three Jewish youths. Wood not touched by fire eventually crumbles and rots away; so the fate of the thief in the *Charm for Theft of Cattle* is to perish as wood does: ‘eall he weornige, swa syre wudu weornie’ (16). This is part of the natural order of created things; the personified creation which is the subject of *Riddle 40* is fair and adorned with gold (46) but also bad as rotten wood: ‘ic eom wyrsliecre þonne þes wudu fula’ (48). Knowledge of the natural world and the perception of how it operates is being used as a metaphor for the fate of the thief as well as to create ambiguity in the riddle; creation is beautiful but it contains within it the seeds of its own destruction. Disintegration of life is as essential as bringing forth new life to flourish.

In its capacity as flammable material wood is a source of heat and light for men. The natural collocation of ‘wudu ond wætres’ appears in *Maxims I* as a formula for encapsulating the comforts of life within the community. The passage deals with the return of the seaman, running from line 93 to 110, but the immediate context of the phrase (107-110) is:

Ceapeadig mon cyningwic þonne
leodon cypeþ, þonne liþan cymeð;
wuda ond wætres nyttað, þonne him biþ wic alyfed,
mete bygeþ, gif he maran þearf, ærþon he to meþe weorþe.

This could be a backwards look at the Frisian wife washing the returned seaman's clothes, as she does earlier (98), so it may simply mean the enjoyment of home comforts, summed up as clean clothes, and a fire to sit by. The one who enjoys the wood and water is clearly a traveller; Shippey sees in these lines a reference to the law which required travellers to go to the king's town to pay the requisite dues before buying food, and translates as 'the rich man then buys his men quarters from the king, when he comes sailing in, makes use of wood and water, once he is allotted quarters, buys food, if he needs more provisions, before he becomes too faint.'²⁵ By this interpretation the collocation of 'wood and water' is the language of officialdom; a formal acknowledgement that once the dues have been paid then the traveller is at liberty to enjoy the comforts that wood and water can bring, cleanliness of clothes and person, furniture to sit at and a fire to sit by. 'Wudu ond wætres' are the basic constituents of life in the shorebound community available to be partaken of once the formalities of paying dues and settling the men have been completed; but they are only available to those who abide by the laws and thus become an accepted part of that community.²⁶

The *Dictionary of Old English*, however, suggests 'a wealthy man will sell or buy property [ceap], the king a dwelling for his people,'²⁷ for the first part of the sentence, and this could then be construed as meaning that when the time comes for him to go travelling, 'þonne liþan cymeð', he can enjoy the voyage, 'wuda ond wætres' being the ship and the sea, presumably because he knows his people are provided for during his absence. Sensible provision for those left behind is an act of

²⁵ Shippey, translation p.69, notes p.133.

²⁶ Voyaging was sufficiently important and familiar to be a widely used metaphor in Old English poetry; see, for example, James W.Earl, 'Christian Tradition in the Old English *Exodus*', in Liuzza *The Poems of MS. Junius II*, pp.137-171, (especially pp. 159-161), and McEntire, pp. 345-356.

²⁷ 'Since no other compound is recorded with *-eadig* as second element with a concrete first element, *ceap eadig* may be taken as two words, as also *cyning wic* [elsewhere unrecorded as a compound]' tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict. Consulted 12 February 2009.

prudence; a reasonable man will take precautions before embarking on the hazards of a lengthy sea-voyage. The dangers of sea-travel are emphasised in the preceding lines (103-106) and in the context of the passage these precautions are the reciprocal actions to the duties of those who remain; ‘wif sceal wiþ wer wære gehealdan’ (100) and ‘lida biþ longe on siþe’ (104).²⁸ Whether as symptomatic of civilised comforts or a metonym for ship ‘wudu ond wætres’ is clearly being used with a completely different application in *Maxims I* to that in *Riddle 93*. In the latter ‘wudu ond wætre’ (25) is swallowed by the inkhorn that is the answer to the riddle and therefore refers to ink.²⁹ The collocation is appropriate in both cases but in *Maxims I* it is symbolic while in the riddle the purpose is obfuscation. Wood as material is brought in to serve the community not only as a physical entity but also as a source of amusement.

It can also be a source of pleasure as a physical entity. In *Beowulf* emotions are directly attributed to both the musical instrument characterised as the joyful wood, ‘gomenwudu’ (1065 and 2108) and the rejoicing wood of a ship ‘wudu wynsuman’ (1919). The singing wood, ‘gleobeam’, which appears in *Beowulf* (2263), *Christ* (670) and *Gifts of Men* (50) sings as the wood resonates with the strings but it does so at the hand of man. It is not the wood that is joyful but the men around it: the musical instruments are part of life in the hall, either when celebrating because adventures have been successfully concluded, or simply as a constituent of enjoyment and pastimes when the working day or the journey is over. The wood reflects the mood of the human protagonists that surround it; indeed, in the case of the instrument it helps to induce that emotion which the transferred epithet grants it. The wood responds to, and is in sympathy with, the people around it.

²⁸ ‘Woman shall keep faith with a man’, and ‘A sailor is long on a journey.’

²⁹ Ink is also mentioned as ‘wood-dye’ in the ‘beamtelge’ of *Riddle 26* (9), see chapter one, above.

Wood and wordplay

‘Wudufæsten’, ‘gomenwudu’, and ‘guðwudu’, discussed above, are all metonyms and it is in this way that ‘wudu’ shows most flexibility and variety in meaning, simply because it is such a commonly-occurring component of so many things. Of other metonyms containing ‘wudu’ by far the majority, thirteen out of twenty-two, are used for ships. Most of them are transparently obvious; ‘flodwudu’ in *Christ* (855), for instance, could hardly be taken to be anything else, in or out of context. Some are less so: ‘wudu bundenne’ *Beowulf* (216) is obviously a ship in context, less obviously so out of context especially if compared with the ‘scyld gebunden’ of *Maxims I* (93). The ‘wudu’ that Beowulf’s men are instructed to leave outside Heorot (398) is evidently not a ship but it still needs the qualifying ‘wælsceafts’ to make clear that the ‘deadly wooden shafts’ are not the shields referred to in the previous line. ‘Wudu selesta’ in *Dream of the Rood* (27) referring as it does to the cross as ‘the best of woods’ manages to include the whole domain of wood as material, trees and the artefact which is the cross within its range.³⁰ It is the best of wood in all three senses of the word.

This lack of precision in the possible meaning of ‘wudu’ is especially exploited by the *Riddles of the Exeter Book*. The ‘hlud wudu’ of *Riddle 3* (24) is any ship caught in a storm, not a particular one, while the ‘lipendum wuda’ of *Riddle 10* (5), which appears to mean a ship when the riddle is first read, could in the context of the answer, be any piece of flotsam; Williamson sees this lack of specificity as integral to the text, so that ‘part of the game of the riddle is to pick the right *wudu*’,³¹ a comment that applies to several other instances of ‘wudu.’ The incomplete *Riddle 88* adds to the confusing possibilities by using it twice. When the inkhorn which is the

³⁰ For a discussion of the poem as ekphrasis see Paul E. Szarmach ‘*Dream of the Rood* as Ekphrasis’ in Minnis and Roberts, pp. 267-288.

³¹ Williamson, p.163.

answer is still attached to the animal and therefore part of a pair of antlers, they stand sheltering in the wood, ‘full oft unc wrugon/ wudubeama helm’ (12-13):³² when it has become an inhorn it stands on wood which has been made into furniture of some kind ‘Ic on wuda stonde/ bordes on ende’ (19-20).³³ To reach any kind of understanding the audience has to separate the different uses of the word and the different concepts of trees and the material wood obtained from them. Such a multiplicity of possibilities can render a solution very difficult to reach; it is still a matter for debate as to what ‘wudu’ is a metonym for in *Riddle 55*, where the final injunction to the audience is to say ‘hu se wudu hatte.’³⁴

Riddle 56 begins:

Ic wæs þær inne þær ic ane geseah
winnende wiht wido bennegean
holt hweorfende; heapoglemma feng
deopra dolga. Daroþas wæron
weo þær wihte, ond se wudu searwum
fæste gebunden.³⁵

This relies on the audience discerning multiple applications of ‘wudu’ in order to arrive at a satisfactory solution.³⁶

³² ‘Very often the forest defended us two, the covering of the trees.’

³³ ‘I stand on wood, at the edge of the board.’

³⁴ ASPR vol. 3 give a variety of suggested solutions for this in notes on the *Riddles*, pp.349-50. For more recent ones see Niles, pp. 61-84 and Keith P.Taylor, ‘Mazers, Mead, and the Wolf’s-Head tree: A Reconsideration of Old English *Riddle 55*’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 94 (1995), 497-512.

³⁵ ‘When I was in the house there I saw alone a toiling creature wounding wood, a moving forest, it received battle-wounds, deep scars. Spears were then a misery to the creature and the wood with skill securely bound.’

³⁶ Satisfactory to us, that is. We have no way of knowing whether the conclusion we come to is the one the Anglo-Saxon riddler had in mind.

Holt (3) cannot mean a group of trees (as is always elsewhere the case when it is used alone and not as part of a compound), because this 'holt' is indoors so it is often taken to mean a piece of wood.³⁷ There is also the reference to 'se wudu' (5) which appears to mean the one single thing that is the subject of the riddle, but in context also appears to be the same as the 'holt' and therefore a collective rather than a singular noun. However, if the solution is taken to be 'loom' then these apparent anomalies become clear. The Anglo-Saxons used a vertical loom which was not a single piece of machinery. This is evident from the fact that the various parts of a loom are listed as some of the articles that the reeve must supply in *Bege Scedwisan Gerefan*, a tenth-century document on how to run a manor.³⁸ They are listed separately, indicating that the reeve had to supply it in parts; with a vertical loom, the various parts were assembled as and when required, with the wooden uprights leaning against a wall for support.³⁹ As there are two wooden upright posts their description as a 'holt' is acceptable; they may be an extremely small group of trees, but they are plural. 'Se wudu' as a singular item becomes understandable too; the warp threads are fastened only to the top beam so to refer to it as singular is correct. The misdirection comes partly from the metaphorical use of 'holt' and partly from the confusion that arises because the 'holt' and 'se wudu' are not the same thing. This is compounded by the metaphorical treow (9), which in the context of the rest of the riddle can be interpreted as a wooden distaff, with flax prepared for spinning, or ready for weaving. The 'wudu' here adds considerably to the confusion and misdirection that are at the heart of the riddling tradition since it is not being used in a metaphorical sense but literally, while both the 'holt' and 'treow' are metaphorical. Here 'wudu' is an actual piece of wood placed in a metaphorical forest.

³⁷ See, for example, Crossley-Holland p.78.

³⁸ For a translation of this see Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose* pp. 25-27.

³⁹ Kevin Leahy, *Anglo-Saxon Crafts* (Stroud:Tempus, 2003), p.68.

Conclusion

‘Wudu’ was the material on which Anglo-Saxon society depended, yet it was a resource which came from outside that community. Shaped and worked by men, it becomes a part of society with a place and role to fulfil, just as people are shaped by the demands of society to fulfil allotted roles and perform specific tasks. ‘Wudu’ in the form of trees represents a space beyond the human community; within the wood individuals cease to have a role or function since the rules no longer apply. People are both protected and exiled from communities that could help or harm them by the wood. ‘Wudu’, with its ability to represent artefacts within society, features of the landscape and the external aspects of community life, offers enormous variety in meaning and usage; these possibilities are realised and utilised in the poems to achieve both clarity and ambiguity.

Conclusion

There are many different terms for trees and the wood from them; these have meanings that overlap within the poetic corpus so that the distinctions between them are sometimes blurred. This enables them to be used with considerable flexibility both in the ideas that they can convey and their function in the rhetorical tropes which add depth and subtlety to the texts. The form of the poetry demands variety of vocabulary but the Old English poetic corpus exploits the demands of alliteration, stress and balance to create nuances of meaning that extend the implications far beyond the original ones of tree, wood or forest. The words acquire further connotations built up by the use of metaphor, metonym and formula.

Words such as 'beam', 'bord' and 'wudu' have a generality about them which enables their use as metonyms for a wide variety of objects and artefacts. Their very lack of specificity is of particular value within the poetic corpus since they can be used in any situation that is appropriate for the design of the poem. That situation can be a domestic setting as in parts of the *Maxims* and some of the riddles or an external one as in the voyage of the ark in *Genesis* or a landscape like that in *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

The ubiquitous nature of wood in Anglo-Saxon life facilitated its use in various contexts, including the metaphorical and spiritual. It was a material they were thoroughly familiar with; hence the conceptualisation of the struggle between good and evil in the hearts of men is defined in terms of the wooden items used in earthly battles. When the devil is explaining his methods to Juliana he states that the only thing that can prevail against him is the raising of 'haligne scyld gæstlic guðreaf'¹ (389-387). This is a metaphorical shield, raised against the devil by the power of

¹ 'Holy shield, spiritual armour.'

prayer and the sign of the cross but it is still a 'bord' (385).² What the spiritual 'bord' is raised against is seen in terms of wood in *Christ*; the painful wooden darts of the devil, the 'biter bordgelac' (769) shot from his crafty bow 'brægdobogan' (765). Later in the poem wood functions as both instrument of torture and symbol of salvation, as the sins of humanity become a cross upon which Christ is as unwillingly fastened as he was willingly fastened to the original one (1489-1491):

nu is swærra mid mec þinra synna rod
þe ic unwillum on beom gefæstnad
þonne seo oþer wæs þe ic ær gestag³

Despite its translation into metaphor and symbol the cross is a 'beom'; the connection with the tree remains.

The context of the poetic corpus and the core body of knowledge which the audience is expected to possess both become relevant when considering specific instances of tree imagery, such as the appearance of a tree in a dream in *Elene*, *Dream of the Rood*, and *Daniel*. The nature of this tree is hidden initially, except by hints, to the audience or the protagonist of the poem, sometimes to both. *Riddle 55* plays upon the assumed knowledge of the audience similarly, though no dreams are involved: the subject might be the cross or a cross-shaped artefact; the audience has to use this knowledge to find an answer. The actual meaning and function of the tree in *Daniel*, where it is a visual metaphor for Nebuchadnessor's fate, would only gradually become clear to a Christian audience because of its perceptions of the tree as a symbol of the cross. Each poem can be seen as interacting with and referencing the others,

² See David F. Johnson, 'The *Crux Usalis* as Apotropaic Weapon in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Catherine Karkov (Woodbridge; Boydell, 2000), pp.80-95 for other examples of the power of the sign of the cross.

³ 'Now is the cross of your sins grievous to me, so that I am reluctantly fastened to that tree as yet the other that I mounted before was by my desire'.

creating an intertextual wealth of potential shared meaning much greater than that which any individual poem contains.

Despite their apparently restrictive nature even formulas contribute to the flexibility in meaning of the tree. The 'hean beam' formula discussed in chapter one is used literally, metonymically and metaphorically. In its literal sense it is simply a tall tree in *Christ* (678) and *Fortunes of Men* (21). In the *Phoenix* (112) it is the high branch from which the bird watches the sunrise; later in the poem it is the special tree in which the bird nests (171 and 202), but this actual tree later develops into a metaphorical tree of faith (447). As a metonym the 'hean beam' formula refers to the cross in *Christ* (1446) and in *Juliana* to the scaffold on which Juliana is tortured (228) and the gallows on which Andreas is said to have been executed (309).

In addition, words for wood and trees have been shown to have developed particular significance in relation to human society. They can function as either symbolic of human convention and constrained by it or as an indication of its limitations and boundaries. Chapter two showed how the ash is a metonym for only one artefact, the spear, but because of this it was able to accrue incremental layers of meaning. These eventually resulted in 'æsc' symbolising the qualities found admirable in men; pride in freedom, courage and loyalty on the battlefield, and the glory to be won there. The demands of society on the warrior are epitomised by the 'æsc'; both man and tree have roles delineated by the conventions of that society.

Maxims II is insistent on the rules and conventions of society as reflecting the order of the natural world around them. A king must give rings just as a wood must yield fruit: 'cyning sceal on healle/ beagas dælan' (28-29) and 'wudu sceal on foldan/blædum blowan' (33-34). In both cases there is an equal lack of alternative possibilities; neither kings nor trees have a choice. Their relative roles and positions

are inevitable and immutable. Thus as constituent features of the landscape trees provide exemplars for mankind yet they are also a resource to be exploited. Once shaped and worked into artefacts the proximity of trees to mankind can be used for many things, including reflecting the emotions of the human protagonists of the poems by transferred epithets such as the ‘gleobeam’ of *Christ* (670). As a musical instrument the ‘beam’ has a specific function. ‘Bord’ is used with four different applications in *Maxims I* (63, 94, 182 and 186),⁴ but in each case the wood can now serve no other purpose in the community than that for which it has been shaped; similarly, the role of the woman (63) is equally constrained by what society demands of her.

Trees define and limit the boundaries of human society; beyond these boundaries its rules and conventions no longer apply. ‘Wudu’ as material is a major component of daily life, a resource developed and used by men but as an entity woods also mark the edge of human control and endeavour. A person who has sought the wood, whether outcast or exile, is bereft of all purpose, as shown by the protagonist of *The Wife’s Lament*. The safety and sanctuary of the wood that the deserters in both *The Battle of Maldon* and *Beowulf* seek is not denied them, but they achieve it at the cost of dishonour and disloyalty. Once within the wood they have shed all the conventions of behaviour that their society demanded of them and abandoned their place within the community. The physical safety that the trees offer is not without its price in human terms.

‘Weald’ represents a space beyond the human community just as ‘wudu’ does, but in this case it is not so much a boundary as a luminal space which can be passed through. In *Genesis* Adam and Eve as well as Abraham take the route through this

⁴ Meaning respectively ‘spindle’ or ‘embroidery’, ‘shield’, ‘gamesboard’ and ‘ship’s gunwale’.

space; in both cases they go beyond the bounds of normal behaviour as they know it. Beowulf traverses the 'waldswapu' to get to the secret supernatural land where the monsters dwell, again a place outside the normal world of human society. The trees of the 'weald' offer a route out of normality, a passage away from human society and convention: trees are a means of transition to whatever lies beyond. The 'weald' is a space between places. It is in this space that the phoenix lives; a part of the earth which is beyond humanity and prefigures heaven in the complete harmony of its landscape, inhabitant, and elements albeit still subject to the laws of time.

The Anglo-Saxons understood and used words for trees and wood in both complex and straightforward ways. The meanings and interpretation as well as the varying nature of this usage only become evident through a study of the corpus of Old English poetry as a whole rather than solely within the context of the manuscripts in which individual poems appear. Even within a manuscript texts can interact with one another; as Robinson comments, 'medieval books often constituted composite artefacts in which each component text depended on its environment for part of its meaning.'⁵ So to some extent the context of Old English poetry as a corpus is one that modern scholars have created to satisfy current criteria for study. However, examining the corpus can yield results that would not be available if study were restricted to the manuscript context, since it provides an overview of how the Anglo-Saxons saw, interpreted and spoke of the world around them.

Studying Old English poetry as an entity reveals the centrality of trees and wood to every aspect of the daily lives of the Anglo-Saxons. Since so many of the objects they saw and handled had at least a wooden component it is perhaps not surprising that words for wood permeated the language to the extent that they did. The

⁵ Fred C. Robinson, 'Old English Literature in Its Most Immediate Context', in *Old English Literature in Context*, ed. by John D. Niles (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980), pp. 11-29 (p. 11).

objects they used in the house, the implements for working the land, and the weapons they wielded could naturally be referred to in terms of wood. As a material wood was an essential concomitant of the community; it is implicitly recognised as such in the many riddles which rely on the audience ascertaining the right 'wudu' and the variety of objects which are thus indicated. The trees from which this wood comes are a symbol of faith and a resource to be exploited; as forests they not only define the boundaries of the human community but they also provide sanctuary for those who are exiled from it. The many roles of wood and trees in daily life are comparable to the many meanings of wood and trees in the poetic context; the texts that survive reveal just how wide-ranging and fully exploited those meanings were.

Appendix

In this appendix the meanings are listed under each Old English word, with the compounds for that word following. Any instances where the meaning is uncertain or disputed are followed by a question mark and where both elements of a compound refer to wood, such as ‘holtwudu’, it appears under both headwords. Line references are separated from the poems in which they appear by a comma, and variant spellings have been ignored. To avoid confusion all collective terms are designated ‘forest’ with ‘wood’ being reserved for the material. Words for wood have many alternatives and complexities in their usage which often results in blurred or dual meanings within the texts: the meanings given here are the basic ones to enable references to be easy of access but they are not necessarily the sole meaning that the word has in the context in which it appears.

AC

ac: oaktree (Riddle 42, 10; Rune Poem, 77 – **as rune**)
oakwood (Riddle 55, 9; Rune Poem, 80)

actreo: oaktree (Wife’s Lament, 28, 36)

ÆSC

æsc: ashtree (Rune Poem, 81 – **as rune**)
spear (Andreas, 1097; Beowulf, 1772; Genesis, 2107; Maldon, 43,
310; Riddle 22, 11; Wanderer, 99)

æscberend: person – **lit.** spear-bearer (Andreas, 47, 1076, 1537; Genesis, 2041)

æschere: ship/spear/Viking army? (Maldon, 69)

æscholt: spear (Maldon, 230)
(**see also** holt) spear forest (Beowulf, 330)

æscplegan: battle (Judith, 216)

æscrof: spear-brave (Elene, 202, 275; Judith, 336)

| | |
|-----------|--|
| æscstede: | battlefield (Vainglory, 17) |
| æscstir: | spear-glory (Genesis, 2069) |
| æscþrace: | battle (Genesis, 2154) |
| æscwiga: | person – lit. spear warrior (Beowulf, 2042; Elene, 259) |
| ðaroðæsc: | spear (Elene, 140) |

BEAM

| | |
|-------------|---|
| beam: | tree (Charm: Unfruitful Land, 8; Christ, 678, 1174; Daniel, 507, 518, 544, 553, 562; Elene, 91, 1012; Fortunes of Men, 21; Genesis 235, 460, 468, 478, 483, 492, 528, 593, 646, 891, 902, 1468; Guthlac, 847; Maxims I, 25, 158; Phoenix, 35, 112, 122, 171, 177, 202, 402, 447; Riddle1, 9; Riddle 53, 1; Riddle 55, 7; Riddle 92, 1; Solomon and Saturn, 296) cross (Christ, 729, 1089, 1093, 1446, 1490; Christ and Satan, 508, 547; Dream of the Rood 97, 114, 122; Elene, 217, 424, 850, 864, 886, 1073, 1224; Judgement Day I, 66; Menologium, 84; Seasons for Fasting, 22) cross/light (Elene, 1254) light/tree (Dream of the Rood, 6) gallows (Fortunes of Men, 41; Judith, 228, 309) piece of wood (Husband's Message, 13; Riddle 10, 7) pillar (Exodus 94, 111, 121, 568) plough-handle (Charm: Unfruitful Land, 48 Riddle 72, 13) standard-shaft (Exodus, 249) |
| beacmscead: | tree-shade (Genesis, 859) |
| beamtelge: | ink (Riddle 26, 9) |
| cwicbeam: | quickthorn (Charm: Unfruitful Land, 18) |
| deaðbeam: | death-tree (Genesis, 638) |
| elebeam: | olive tree (Genesis, 1473) |
| fyrgenbeam: | mountain tree (Beowulf, 1414) (see also fyrgeholt) |
| garbeam: | spear-shaft (Exodus, 246) (see also garwudu) |

- gleobeam: harp (Beowulf, 2263; Christ, 670; Gifts of Men, 50)
(see also gomenwudu)
- sigebeam: cross (Dream of the Rood, 13, 127; Elene 420, 444, 665, 846, 860,
964, 1027)
- werbeam: person – **lit.** man-tree (Exodus, 487)
- wudubeam: tree (Daniel 498, 504, 515; Fortunes of Men, 24; Genesis, 881;
(see also wudu) Judgement Day II, 7; Phoenix, 75; Riddle 88, 13)
firewood (Juliana, 576)
- wynbeam: cross (Elene, 843)

BEARU

- bearu: forest (Andreas, 1448; Beowulf, 1363; Daniel, 499; Genesis, 902,
1480, 2554, 2841; Guthlac, 148, 429; Husband's Message, 23;
Judgement Day II, 1; Maxims II, 18; Phoenix, 71, 80, 122,
148, 432; Riddle 1, 9; Riddle 21, 7; Riddle 27, 2; Riddle 30a,
4; Riddle 30b, 4; Riddle 53, 1; Riddle 80, 6; Seafarer, 48;
Wife's Lament, 27)
- sunbearu: sun-forest (Phoenix, 33)
- wudubearu: forest (Azarius, 83; Phoenix, 152, 169)
(see also wudu)

BEORC

- beorc: birch/poplar (Rune Poem, 51 –**as rune**)

BORD

- bord: shield (Andreas, 1205; Beowulf, 2259, 2524, 2673; Elene, 24, 114, 235, 1186;
Exodus, 253; Finnsburh, 29; Gifts of Men, 40; Judith, 192, 213,
317; Juliana, 385; Maldon, 15, 42, 62, 101, 110, 131, 245, 270,
283, 284, 295, 309; Maxims I, 94; Riddle 93, 24?)
ship (Elene, 238; Genesis, 1333, 1354, 1357, 1369, 1403, 1481)
gunwale (Christ, 861; Maxims I, 186)
furniture (Maxims I, 182?; Riddle 14, 9; Riddle 88, 20, 21;
Riddle 93, 31)
- bordgelac: wooden darts (Christ, 769)

bordhaga: shieldwall (Elene, 652)

bordhæbbend: people –**lit.** shield-havers (Beowulf, 2895)

bordhreoðan: shield phalanx (Andreas, 128; Beowulf, 2203; Elene, 122; Exodus, 159, 236, 320;)

bordrand: shield (Beowulf, 2559)

bordweal: shieldwall (Beowulf, 2980; Brunanburh, 5; Maldon, 277; Riddle 33, 6?)

bordwudu: shield (Beowulf, 1243)
(**see also** wudu)

bleobord: games board (Fortunes of Men, 71)

guðbord: shield (Genesis, 2694; Maxims I, 201)

hildebord: shield (Beowulf, 397, 3139)

hleobord: book cover (Riddle 26, 12)

nægledbord: ship (Genesis, 1418, 1433; Riddle 58, 5)

wægbord: ship (Genesis, 1340)

wigbord: shield (Beowulf, 2339; Exodus, 467)

yðbord: ship (Andreas, 298; Gifts of Men, 57)

BORDA

borda: spindle/distaff/embroidery? (Maxims I, 63)

EOH

eoh: yew (Riddle 55, 9; Rune Poem, 35, 84? –**as rune**)

HLIN

hlin: maple (Riddle 55, 9)

HOLEN

holen: holly (Maxims I, 79; Riddle 55, 10)

HOLT

holt: forest (Beowulf, 2598, 2846; Daniel, 573; Dream of the Rood, 29; Elene, 113; Fortunes of Men, 21; Genesis, 840; Judgement Day II, 2; Juliana, 577; Maldon, 8; Maxims II, 19; Phoenix, 73, 81, 171, 429; Riddle 21, 3; Riddle 56, 3; Riddle 88,12; Riddle 92, 1; Solomon and Saturn, 82)

holtwudu: forest (Beowulf, 1369, 2340; Dream of the Rood, 91?; Phoenix, 171;)
(see also wudu)

æscholt: spear (Maldon 230)
(see also æsc) spear forest (Beowulf, 330)

fyrgenholt: mountain forest (Beowulf, 1393)
(see also fyrgenbeam)

garholt: spear forest (Beowulf, 1834)
(see also æscholt)

oferholt: beyond-forest? (Exodus, 157)

wuduholt: forest (Phoenix, 34, 362,)
(see also wudu)

LEAF

leaf: leaf (Beowulf, 97; Elene, 1226; Genesis, 845, 868, 878, 1458; Maxims I, 26; Rune Poem, 54)

LEOMU

leomu: branch (Beowulf, 97; Maxims I, 26)

LIND

lind: shield (Andreas, 46; Beowulf, 2341, 2365, 2610; Charm: Sudden Stitch, 7; Exodus, 228, 239, 251, 301; Finnsburh, 11; Genesis, 2044; Judith, 191, 214, 303; Maldon, 99, 244; Maxims I, 94)

lindcrodan: people –**lit.** shield bearer (Andreas, 1220; Genesis, 1998)

lindgeborga: people- **lit.** shield protector (Elene, 11)

lindgelac: battle (Fates of the Apostles, 75)

lindgesteall: people –**lit.** shield companions (Andreas, 1344; Beowulf, 1973)

lindhæbbend: people –**lit.** shield-havers (Beowulf, 245, 1402)

lindplegan: battle (Beowulf, 1073, 2039)

lindwered: people –**lit.** shield troop (Elene, 142; Judith, 297)

lindwiga: people –**lit.** shield man (Beowulf, 2603)

lindwigend: people –**lit.** shield fighter (Elene, 270; Judith, 42)

heaðolind: shield (Brunanburh, 6)

TAN

tan: branch (Azarius, 84; Christ and Satan, 480; Phoenix, 430; Resignation, 106; Riddle 53, 2; Rune Poem, 52)

TELGA

telga: branch (Christ and Satan, 480; Daniel, 503, 514, 555; Genesis, 892, 991, 1470; Phoenix, 76, 188; Riming Poem, 34 **as verb**; Rune Poem, 52)

TIMBRAN

timbran: build (Andreas, 667, 1633; Charm: Against a Wen, 2; Elene, 1009; Exodus, 391; Genesis, 1057, 1692, 2841; Phoenix, 188, 202, 430; Riddle 29, 5; Solomon and Saturn, 74)

TIMBER

- timber: building (Beowulf, 307; Genesis, 135, 276; Guthlac, 18, 250, 485; Riddle 84, 45)
- boldgetimber: building (Solomon and Saturn, 414)
- heahtimber: building (Christ, 973, 1181; Christ and Satan, 29; Genesis, 739; Gifts of Men, 45; Guthlac, 584)
- heofontimber: framework (Genesis, 146)
- magotimber: progeny –**lit.** descendant material (Genesis, 1115; Maxims I, 33)
- þweorhtimber: cross-built (Juliana, 551)

TREOW

- treow: tree (Christ and Satan, 415, 480; Daniel, 510, 555; Dream of the Rood, 4, 14, 17, 25; Elene, 89, 165, 757; Genesis, 644, 892, 1458, 1470; Maxims I, 159; Phoenix, 76, 175, 200; Riddle 53, 2; Riddle 56, 9; Riming Poem, 34; Rune Poem, 35)
cross (Elene, 107, 128, 147, 206, 214, 429, 443, 664, 701, 706, 827, 840, 855, 866, 1026, 1251; Juliana, 447; Phoenix, 643)
- treowcyn: race of trees (Charm:Unfruitful Land, 7; Husband's Message, 2)
- treofugel: tree birds (Guthlac, 735)
- gealgtreow: cross (Dream of the Rood, 146)
gallows (Beowulf, 2940)
- palmtreow: cross? (Solomon and Saturn, 167)
- wudutreow: artefact (Riddle 55, 3)
(see also wudu)
- wulfheafedtreow: gallows (Riddle 55, 12)

TWIG

- twig: branch (Daniel, 503, 514; Genesis, 1473)

WEALD

- weald: forest (Brunanburh, 65; Elene, 28; Genesis, 839, 841, 846, 2887; Judith, 206; Phoenix, 13)
- waldswaþu: forest path (Beowulf, 1403)

WUDU

- wudu: forest (Azarius, 120; Beowulf, 1364, 1416; Charm: Swarm of Bees, 10; Maldon, 193; Maxims II, 33; Menologium, 77; Phoenix, 37, 65, 85; Riddle 1, 8; Riddle 53, 3; Riddle 81, 7; Resignation, 105; Solomon and Saturn, 193; Wife's Lament, 27; Wulf and Eadwacer, 17)
wood as material (Charm: Theft of Cattle, 16; Daniel, 244; Genesis, 2887; Maxims I, 71; Riddle 10, 5; Riddle 40, 48; Riddle 56, 5; Riddle 88, 19; Riddle 93, 25)
ship (Beowulf, 216, 298, 1919; Riddle 3, 24)
spear (Beowulf, 398)
tree/cross/material (Dream of the Rood, 27)
artefact (Maxims I, 109; Riddle 55, 16)
- wudubat: ship (Andreas, 905)
- wudubeam: tree (Daniel, 498, 504, 515; Fortunes of Men, 24; Genesis, 881; (see also beam) Judgement Day II, 7; Phoenix, 75; Riddle 88, 13)
- wudubearu: forest (Azarius, 83; Phoenix, 152, 169)
(see also bearu)
- wudubled: forest fruits/blossom (Panther, 47; Phoenix, 194)
- wudufæsten: refuge (Durham, 6; Genesis, 1312)
- wuduholt: forest (Phoenix, 34, 362)
(see also holt)
- wudurec: woodsmoke (Beowulf, 3144)
- wudusuræppel: crab-apple tree (Charms: Nine Herbs, 65)
- wudutelga: tree-branch (Solomon and Saturn, 423)
- wudutreow: artefact/cross? (Riddle 55, 3)
- bælwudu: firewood (Beowulf, 3113)
- bocwudu: beech forest (Riddle 40, 106)

bordwudu: shield (Beowulf, 1243)
(see also bord)

brimwudu: ship (Elene, 244; Guthlac, 1331)

campwudu: shield (Elene, 51)

flodwudu: ship (Christ, 853)

garwudu: spear (Exodus, 325)
(see also garbeam)

gomenwudu: harp (Beowulf, 1065, 2108)
(see also gleobeam)

guðwudu: spear/shield (Finnsburh, 6)

healwudu: hall timbers (Beowulf, 1317)

holtwudu: forest (Beowulf, 1369, 2340; Dream of the Rood, 91?;
(see also holt) Phoenix, 171)

mægenwudu: spear –**lit.** mighty wood (Beowulf, 236)

sæwudu: ship (Beowulf, 226)

sundwudu: ship (Beowulf, 208, 1906; Christ, 677)

þrecwudu: spear –**lit.** violent wood (Beowulf, 1246)

WYRTRUM

wyrtrum: treeroots (Beowulf, 1364; Daniel, 515, 558, 580; Rune Poem, 37)

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