

7 Isidore of Seville in Anglo-Saxon England

The *Synonyma* as a Source of Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci*¹

Claudia Di Sciacca

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that Isidore was, together with Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory, one of the four major patristic authorities for the Anglo-Saxons, and his *Etymologiae*, *De natura rerum*, *Synonyma*, and *De ecclesiasticis officiis* belonged to the 'small core of staple patristic texts' housed in a typical Anglo-Saxon library.² Isidore undoubtedly proved an influential source for a variety of fields of Anglo-Saxon literary culture, ranging from grammar to computus, from history to homiletics and hagiography, from exegesis to charters.³

This chapter focuses on the *Synonyma*⁴ and investigates, in particular, their role as a source for one of the founding and most popular Anglo-Saxon hagiographies, the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* (henceforth *VSG*), authored by the elusive Felix in the first half of the eighth century.⁵ The *Synonyma* have not been enlisted among the rich network of source texts underlying Felix's work until very recently.⁶ The case study in this chapter will hopefully contribute valuable insights into the early dissemination of the *Synonyma* in Anglo-Saxon England and enhance our understanding of the subtle 'source-layering' which can be considered Felix's most distinctive compositional technique.⁷

1 My sincere thanks to Prof. P. Lendinara for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper and to Ms. M. Cinninger for her bibliographical help. I also gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the US-Italy Fulbright Commission and the Medieval Institute of the University of Notre Dame, where most of the research for this essay has been conducted.

2 Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 127 and 309-313.

3 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 47-55.

4 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi.

5 *BHL*, no. 3723; *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave. On the tenuous evidence concerning Felix's life, see below, pp. 140-141.

6 Bremmer, 'The Reception of Defensor's *Liber Scintillarum*'; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 99-103.

7 Downey, 'Intertextuality', pp. 25-66.

The *Synonyma*

Generally grouped with Isidore's minor and juvenile works, the *Synonyma* enjoyed an 'immense' popularity and were the third most copied work by Isidore after the *Etymologiae* and the *Sententiae*.⁸ Alternatively classified as a grammatical, ascetic, and dogmatic text, the *Synonyma* resist any clear-cut categorisation.⁹ They consist of two books, one decidedly different from the other as to theme, tone, and sources employed. The first contains an effusive and pathetic lamentation (*lamentum paenitentiae*) expressed by a sinful man overwhelmed by guilt and despairing of redemption, while in the second book Reason draws a very detailed *norma uiuendi* for the penitent, consisting of pragmatic prescriptions and precepts to pursue a virtuous lifestyle and resist temptations. The penitential lament and hortatory consolation are distinctively combined with a most idiosyncratic style, the so-called *stilus ysydorianus*, a rhymed, rhythmical prose making pervasive use of synonymical variation and paraphrase, which was to become one of the four major kinds of Latin *Kunstprosa* in the Middle Ages.¹⁰ It was this characteristic blend of *eloquium* and *uotum*, to put it in Isidore's own words,¹¹ that secured the *Synonyma* an exceptionally vast and enduring popularity throughout the Middle Ages in the Latin West, firstly as a spiritual primer and, secondarily, as a grammatical handbook.¹²

The editor of the recent critical edition of the *Synonyma* has identified two recensions, Λ and Φ, which apparently stemmed from the independent revision of two parallel versions of a primitive text carried out by Isidore himself. Contaminations of the two recensions started as early as the first half of the eighth century and are so numerous and extensive that they represent the most distinctive and recurrent feature of the manuscript tradition of the *Synonyma*.¹³ As has been shown, both recensions circulated

8 Elfassi, 'Les *Synonyma* d'Isidore de Séville: un manuel de grammaire ou de morale?', p. 167; Elfassi, 'Trois aspects inattendus', p. 109.

9 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 19-20; Elfassi, 'Les *Synonyma* d'Isidore de Séville: un manuel de grammaire ou de morale?'; Elfassi, 'Les *Synonyma* d'Isidore de Séville (VIIe s.)'.

10 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 24-31; Elfassi, 'Genèse et originalité'.

11 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. 5. 21

12 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 34-36 and 176-180; Elfassi, 'Les *Synonyma* d'Isidore de Séville: un manuel de grammaire ou de morale?'; Elfassi, 'Los centones de los *Synonyma*'; Elfassi, 'Trois aspects inattendus'; Elfassi, 'Les *Synonyma* d'Isidore de Séville (VIIe s.)'.

13 Elfassi, 'Una edición crítica de los *Synonyma*', pp. 110-113; Elfassi, 'Isidorus Hispalensis ep.', p. 222; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. lvi-lxx; Elfassi, 'Une nouvelle hypothèse'.

in Anglo-Saxon England, itself a symptom of the variety and complexity of the Anglo-Saxon reception of this Isidorian text.¹⁴

Isidore and the *Synonyma* in Anglo-Saxon England

Knowledge of Isidore's texts in Anglo-Saxon England was both early and plentiful. The first testimonies can be dated to the renowned Canterbury school of Archbishop Theodore (d. 690) and Abbot Hadrian (d. 709 or 710),¹⁵ and to the 'first Englishman of letters', Aldhelm (c. 640?-709 or 710), himself a student of Theodore and Hadrian and eventually abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne.¹⁶ From the evidence afforded by the two major witnesses to the syllabus of the Canterbury school, namely the Canterbury Biblical Commentaries and the Leiden family of glosses, as well as by Aldhelm's corpus, it can be inferred that by the beginning of the eighth century at least the *Etymologiae*, *De natura rerum*, *Synonyma*, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, *De ortu et obitu patrum*, *De differentiis uerborum*, and the dubious *Liber numerorum* were known to the Anglo-Saxons.¹⁷ In particular, the literary and manuscript evidence shows that the *De natura rerum*, the *Etymologiae*, and the *Synonyma* were the first Isidorian works that reached Anglo-Saxon England and the most abundantly attested in Anglo-Saxon centres, both insular and continental.¹⁸

Anglo-Saxon England was particularly receptive to the *Synonyma*. Anglo-Saxon libraries, whether in England or on the continent, were well stocked with copies of the *Synonyma*: no fewer than eight manuscript witnesses were written or circulating in pre-Norman times and another six codices are associated with Anglo-Saxon foundations on the continent.¹⁹ Also, another copy of the *Synonyma* is recorded in the list of books sent by Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester (d. 984), to the monastery of Medeshamstede c. 970.²⁰

14 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 68-76; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. cx-cxiii.

15 *Biblical Commentaries*, ed. by Bischoff and Lapidge; *Archbishop Theodore*, ed. by Lapidge.

16 *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, trans. by Lapidge and Herren, p. 1; Lapidge, 'Aldhelm'; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*.

17 Di Sciacca, 'Isidorian Scholarship'; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 47-50.

18 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 55-76.

19 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 68-76; Hussey, 'The Franco-Saxon *Synonyma*'; Hussey, 'Ascetics and Aesthetics', pp. 38-140; Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris'.

20 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 164-165; Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 54-55 and 134-136.

As mentioned above, both recensions of the *Synonyma* are attested in Anglo-Saxon England. Indeed, the earliest witnesses of both Λ and Φ are either of definite Anglo-Saxon origin or have strong Anglo-Saxon connections. Two Southumbrian codices of the first half of the eighth century, St Petersburg, Russian National Library, Q. v. I. 15,²¹ and Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M. p. th. f. 79,²² first attest to the Λ recension, while one of the earliest witnesses of the Φ recension is Fulda, Domschatz, Bonifatianus 2,²³ an eighth-century continental manuscript with ‘insular symptoms’²⁴ and links to Boniface (c. 675-754),²⁵ the renowned Anglo-Saxon missionary and, together with Aldhelm and Felix, one of the earliest named readers of the *Synonyma* in pre-Conquest England.²⁶ Furthermore, source-studies of both the Old English and the Anglo-Latin corpus have shown the variety of uses the Anglo-Saxons made of the *Synonyma*, ranging from the homiletic to the devotional and the didactic, and it can be concluded that the *Synonyma* were ‘the Isidorian text most abundantly attested in pre-Conquest England after the *Etymologiae*’.²⁷

It has been argued that the Anglo-Saxon reception of the *Synonyma* was idiosyncratic in that, while most of Isidore’s other works would have reached both South- and Northumbrian England chiefly thanks to Irish transmission,²⁸ the *Synonyma* would have arrived in Southumbria via France and their influence would have been concentrated in south-west

21 Ms. L: *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. xxxvii; Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 845; *CLA*, xi, no. 1618; Hussey, ‘Ascetics and Aesthetics’, pp. 102-110; Hussey, ‘*Transmarinis litteris*’, pp. 158-161.

22 Ms. W: *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. xliii-xliv; Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 946; *CLA*, ix, no. 1426; Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 400; Hussey, ‘Ascetics and Aesthetics’, pp. 87-102; Hussey, ‘*Transmarinis litteris*’, pp. 156-158.

23 Ms. F: *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. xxviii-xxix; *CLA*, viii, no. 1197; Hussey, ‘The Franco-Saxon *Synonyma*’; Hussey, ‘Ascetics and Aesthetics’, pp. 111-134; Hussey, ‘*Transmarinis litteris*’, pp. 161-163.

24 Haseloff, ‘Der Einband des Ragyndrudis Codex’, pp. 42-46; McKitterick, ‘The Diffusion of Insular Culture’, p. 415; Hussey, ‘The Franco-Saxon *Synonyma*’, pp. 235-236; Hussey, ‘Ascetics and Aesthetics’, pp. 122-124.

25 Orchard, ‘Boniface’.

26 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 51-52, 72-74, and 151-155; Hussey, ‘The Franco-Saxon *Synonyma*’; Hussey, ‘Ascetics and Aesthetics’, pp. 77-140; Hussey, ‘*Transmarinis litteris*’, pp. 150-151 and 166-168.

27 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, p. 54.

28 The routes of transmission of Isidore’s texts from Visigothic Spain to the British Isles and the role of the Irish in it are two vexed and still largely unresolved questions; for a summary of the scholarly debate, see Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 37-47 and 55-68.

Mercia and Wessex.²⁹ In fact, manuscript evidence indicates two major routes of transmission of the *Synonyma*, an insular and a French one, the former pertaining to recension Λ and the latter to recension Φ , respectively.³⁰ However, the insular and continental paths of dissemination can hardly be kept discrete.³¹ If Λ has got an unquestionably insular trademark – six out of the nine Λ -witnesses collated by Elfassi originated either in Anglo-Saxon England or on an insular centre on the continent, and the Λ -text of the *Synonyma* was likely the one first known in both England and Ireland³² – the evidence concerning its actual route from Visigothic Spain to Anglo-Saxon England is inconclusive. In particular, although the manuscript evidence suggests that recension Λ reached England directly from Spain, a dissemination across the English Channel via France cannot be excluded.³³

In sum, the transmission of the two recensions of the *Synonyma* as envisaged by their modern editor as well as the frequency of contaminations and interpolations between Λ and Φ suggests that the dissemination of the Isidorian text to the British Isles was probably the result of more than one route or one group of mediators, as the scope of the cultural contacts and exchanges that linked Spain, France, Anglo-Saxon England, Ireland, Italy, and Germany was wider and more complex than it has often been acknowledged.³⁴

Although the *Synonyma* seem to have been less influential than other Isidorian texts in Ireland,³⁵ still it should be reminded that they feature among the sources of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (c. 725). Also, the most distinctive product of seventh-century Irish Latinity, the *Hisperica Famina*, betrays the stylistic influence of the *Synonyma*, as well as of the contemporary Spanish *Reimprosa* more generally.³⁶

Furthermore, the diffusion of the *Synonyma* within Irish circles is indirectly attested by two miscellaneous continental manuscripts, Munich,

29 Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', pp. 146-155.

30 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. cviii-cxii.

31 *Ibidem*.

32 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. lxxi-lxxix and cix-cxi.

33 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. cxii-cxiii; Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', pp. 152-153.

34 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. cx-cxiii; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 66-68. On the circulation of Isidore's texts in early medieval Ireland, see Marina Smyth, 'Isidorian Texts in Seventh-Century Ireland', above, pp. 111-130.

35 Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', pp. 146-148.

36 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 38-40 and 46-47; cf. Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', pp. 147-148.

Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6433,³⁷ and St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek 908.³⁸ The former is a codex written at Freising in the second half of the eighth century and is the only surviving witness of the *Florilegium frisingense*, a veritable compendium of distinctively Irish exegetical, theological, and homiletic literature which draws extensively on both authentic and pseudoepigraphical Isidorian texts, including the *Synonyma*.³⁹ The *Florilegium frisingense* is anonymous but was possibly compiled by the scribe of the Munich manuscript, namely the Northumbrian-trained Anglo-Saxon scribe Peregrinus,⁴⁰ a circumstance which, incidentally, would challenge the argument that the early circulation of the *Synonyma* in Anglo-Saxon England was confined to Southumbria. Also, the *Frisingense* is immediately followed in the manuscript by the second book of the *Synonyma* and by the *Liber scintillarum*,⁴¹ one of the most popular biblical and patristic *florilegia* of the early Middle Ages, especially widespread in Anglo-Saxon England,⁴² and also heavily indebted to the Isidorian text.⁴³ In sum, both the textual and codicological evidence suggests that the Munich miscellany was put together in a milieu thoroughly au fait with and appreciative of the *Synonyma*. The fact that the *Frisingense* was composed in an insular foundation on the continent is a welcome reminder that 'continental' and 'insular' should not necessarily be read as mutually exclusive terms, since insular agents of transmission were active also on the continent, and insular foundations on the continent, such as Bobbio, were undoubtedly centres where Isidore's texts were well known and zealously copied from very early on. The St Gall codex 908 is another case in point: written 'in a centre of insular cultural influence', probably in the Milan area or Bobbio, it contains three excerpts from the *Synonyma* and one from Isidore's *Sententiae* alongside the only

37 Ms. M: *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. xxxviii; *Florilegium frisingense*, ed. by Lehner, pp. xiii-xiv and xxxvi.

38 Ms. h: *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. xlix-l; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 35 and 64.

39 *Florilegium frisingense*, ed. by Lehner, pp. 1-39; see also pp. xv, xxxv, and 137-138; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. xxxviii.

40 O'Byrne, 'Peregrinus of Freising'.

41 *Defensor Liber scintillarum*, ed. by Rochais. The traditional attribution of the *Liber scintillarum* to the monk Defensor of Ligugé about 700 has recently been challenged in favour of a later dating (s. viii¹) and an origin in Germany, possibly in the Trier or Würzburg area: Elfassi, 'Defensor de Ligugé'; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. cxii-cxiii; Elfassi, 'Les *Synonyma* d'Isidore de Séville dans l'oeuvre de Raban Maur', p. 249, n. 9.

42 Bremmer, 'The Reception of Defensor's *Liber Scintillarum*'. An Old English interlinear version of the *Liber scintillarum* is attested in ms. London, British Library, Royal 7.c.iv: *The Old English 'Liber scintillarum'*, ed. by Rhodes.

43 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 34-35; Elfassi, 'Defensor de Ligugé'.

copy of the Commentary on the Creation and Fall – the fourth item in Bischoff's (in)famous catalogue of Hiberno-Latin Biblical commentaries and itself indebted to Isidorian sources – as well as a number of texts of apocryphal content which were distinctively popular with the Irish.⁴⁴

The *Synonyma* as a Hagiographic Source

Both manuscript- and source-studies have shown that throughout the Middle Ages the *Synonyma* were increasingly perceived as a moral treatise. In particular, it has been argued that they proved especially popular with authors of moral *florilegia*, prayers, and devotional texts, homilies and hagiographies, as well as canonical collections.⁴⁵ As regards hagiographic literature in particular, the *Synonyma* have been identified as a source (albeit often an indirect one) of at least eight continental saints' lives up to the beginning of the thirteenth century,⁴⁶ and they are associated with hagiographic texts in no fewer than five manuscripts collated for the modern critical edition of the *Synonyma*.⁴⁷

Of these five codices, one, that is Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Clm 15817,⁴⁸ is particularly relevant, because here the *Synonyma* follow the earliest (if incomplete) surviving copy of the *Vita S. Cuthberti*, written by an anonymous monk (or perhaps, monks) of the Lindisfarne community c. 699–705.⁴⁹ This manuscript has been dated to Archbishop Aldaram of Salzburg's period of office (821–836), but it probably derives from an early exemplar in insular script, whose distinctively Northumbrian spellings were largely preserved by the conservative, if often careless, scribe of the Munich manuscript.⁵⁰ Another hint supporting the insular origin of this manuscript is the fact that the copy of the *Synonyma* it contains belongs to the A recension, which, as has been mentioned above, had a predominantly insular circulation. Also, although the circumstances of the arrival of the anonymous *Vita S. Cuthberti*

44 Wright, 'Apocryphal Lore and Insular Tradition', pp. 124–127 and 144–145, quotation at 125

45 Elfassi, 'Los centones de los *Synonyma*'; Elfassi, 'Trois aspects inattendus'; Elfassi, 'Defensor de Ligugé'.

46 Elfassi, 'Trois aspects inattendus', pp. 124–132.

47 The five manuscripts in question are Elfassi's S, U, V, X, and b: *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. xli–xlvi.

48 Ms. S, *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. xli–xlii; Bullough, 'A Neglected Early-Ninth-Century Manuscript', pp. 107–108.

49 *BHL*, no. 2019; *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 60–139.

50 Bullough, 'A Neglected Early-Ninth-Century Manuscript', pp. 108–110 and 130.

in Salzburg by the early ninth century are still obscure, a possible context for it and perhaps also for the association of the Anglo-Saxon hermit-saint's life with the *Synonyma* might be provided by Virgilius, the erudite Irish bishop of Salzburg in the second half of the eighth century (d. 784). During Virgilius's episcopate at least two popular Isidorian pseudo-epigrapha, the *Liber de numeris* and *De ortu et obitu patriarcharum*, were compiled. Another text that can be associated with Virgilius's entourage is the question-and-answer dialogue *Prebiarum de multorum exemplaribus*, which draws on at least three of Isidore's texts, the *Etymologiae*, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, and *Sententiae*, and on the pseudepigraphical *Liber de numeris*.⁵¹

To my knowledge the only Anglo-Saxon saint's life where the *Synonyma* have been drawn on is the *VSG* and, thereby, the two derivative Old English prose texts, the so-called *Vespasian Life* and *Vercelli Homily xxiii*. The following pages will analyse the borrowing from the *Synonyma* in the *VSG*, identify the possible antecedent consulted by Felix, and map out the context in which such a borrowing could have taken place.

Felix and the *Vita S. Guthlaci*

A generation younger than the Northumbrian Cuthbert, Guthlac is the second earliest and most popular Anglo-Saxon hermit saint. The *VSG* provides a comprehensive account of Guthlac's life, from his youth as a successful warlord of aristocratic descent, to his conversion and tonsure at the monastery of Repton, Derbyshire,⁵² and, finally, to his withdrawal to Crowland, a small island (in fact, a promontory linked to the mainland by a gravel ridge), haunted by demons on the fenland marking the border between the Mercian and East Anglian kingdoms, where he spent the last fifteen years of his life as an anchorite.⁵³ Guthlac soon attracted attention from the most prominent ranks of society: his visitors included Hædda, bishop of Lichfield (d. 716-727), who ordained Guthlac as priest, and Æthelbald (716-757), future king of the Mercians. His rapidly growing

51 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 41 and 43.

52 Biddle & Kjølbjæ-Biddle, 'Repton'.

53 Mayr-Harting, 'Guthlac'; *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 2-7; Meaney, 'Felix's Life of St Guthlac: Hagiography and/or Truth'; Meaney, 'Felix's Life of Guthlac: History or Hagiography?'; *The Guthlac Poems*, ed. by Roberts, pp. 1-7; Roberts, 'Hagiography and Literature', pp. 72-76; Roberts, *Guthlac of Crowland*, pp. 7-11; Roberts, 'Guthlac, St', p. 227.

popularity and saintly reputation was commemorated and reinforced by the highly-literary Latin *uita* by Felix.⁵⁴

Over time, a vernacular tradition developed and lasted throughout the Anglo-Saxon period and beyond the Norman Conquest.⁵⁵ Though Guthlac – somewhat surprisingly – found no place in the two major Anglo-Saxon *sanctoralia*, those of Bede and of Ælfric, respectively,⁵⁶ he is one of the few native saints to be added to the originally continental collection of the so-called Corpus-Cotton Legendary, the major hagiographic collection circulating in late Anglo-Saxon England and the chief source of Ælfric's *sanctorale*.⁵⁷ But more importantly, Guthlac is the Anglo-Saxon saint most celebrated in Old English and the only one commemorated in vernacular poetry. There are five major pre-Conquest vernacular texts on St Guthlac:

- 1 Anonymous, Old English Martyrology (prose; s. ix²; *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. by Rauer, pp. 80-81 and 252)
- 2 Anonymous, *Vespasian Life* (prose; s. ix^{ex-xⁱⁿ}; *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben*, ed. by Gonser, pp. 100-173)
- 3 Anonymous, Vercelli Homily xxiii (prose; before c. 975; *The Vercelli Homilies*, ed. by Scragg, pp. 383-392; corresponds to Felix's VSG, chpts. xxviii-xxxiv)
- 4 Anonymous, *Guthlac A* (verse; uncertain dating; *The Guthlac Poems*, ed. by Roberts, pp. 83-107; corresponds to Felix's VSG, chpts. xxviii-xxxii)
- 5 Anonymous, *Guthlac B* (verse; uncertain dating; *The Guthlac Poems*, ed. by Roberts, pp. 108-124; corresponds to Felix's VSG, chpt. 1)

While the relationship between the vernacular texts and the Latin life is not always unequivocal (especially in the case of the entry in the Old English Martyrology and the poem *Guthlac A*),⁵⁸ the VSG represents the

54 The VSG is attested in thirteen manuscripts in total, of which nine were written or owned in England up to c. 1100: see Gneuss, *Handlist*, nos. 88, 103, 215, 344, 434-5, 456, 484, 781, and 804.

55 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. by Colgrave, pp. 7-15; Roberts, 'An Inventory'; *The Guthlac Poems*, ed. by Roberts; Roberts, 'The Old English Prose Translation'; Roberts, 'The Old English Saints', pp. 441-445; Roberts, 'Hagiography and Literature', pp. 77-84; Roberts, 'Guthlac, St'.

56 Bede's knowledge of Mercia has been defined as 'patchy': Roberts, *Guthlac of Crowland*, p. 7. As to Ælfric, his reliance on Bede as a favoured source for Anglo-Saxon saints is probably the reason behind his omission of Guthlac: see Di Sciacca, "'concupita, quaesita, ac petita solitudinis secreta'", pp. 174-175.

57 Lapidge, 'Ælfric's *Sanctorale*'; Jackson and Lapidge, 'The Contents'; *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, ed. by Love, pp. xviii-xxxiii; Zettel, 'Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources'; Zettel, 'Saints' Lives in Old English'.

58 Roberts, 'An Inventory', pp. 201 and 203-204; *The Guthlac Poems*, ed. by Roberts, pp. 19-29; Roberts, 'Guthlac A'; Roberts, 'Hagiography and Literature', pp. 77-80 and 82-84; Roberts, 'Guthlac,

cornerstone of this vast and enduring hagiographic tradition. Unfortunately, we are in the dark as to the exact circumstances of its composition. Felix's dedication of the *VSG* to Ælfwald, king of the East Angles (c. 713-749),⁵⁹ and his use of Bede's prose *Vita S. Cuthberti* (c. 721)⁶⁰ as a source provide a fairly definite chronological range for the text. Otherwise, the details of Felix's life and schooling and of the place where he composed the *VSG* are unknown. Even his nationality is uncertain and he may not even have been Anglo-Saxon,⁶¹ although he must have spent at least a substantial portion of his life in England, presumably in East Anglia, since in the prologue to the *VSG*, Felix addresses the East Anglian King Ælfwald as *dominus meus* and later on refers to King Aldwulf without mentioning that he was king of the East Angles.⁶² Ælfwald is an equally elusive figure.⁶³ According to the *VSG* (chpts. xlviiii and l), Ælfwald's sister, Ecgburh, an abbess, was in touch with Guthlac, and this family connection with the saint may have been at the origin of Ælfwald's commission to Felix⁶⁴. More relevant for the purposes of this study, however, is that the king can be counted in among Boniface's correspondents, since Ælfwald addressed a letter to the missionary in the late 740s promising prayers from the seven monasteries in his kingdom.⁶⁵

It is possible that Felix was a monk at one of these seven East Anglian foundations. Otherwise, the only evidence concerning Felix and his environs is that provided by the *VSG* itself. In spite of its heavy debt to previous saints' lives and the author's frequent concessions to hagiographic topoi, the *VSG* reveals a closeness to the events related and the characters portrayed.⁶⁶

St', p. 227; Wieland, *Aures Lectoris*, p. 177, n. 43; Whatley, 'Guthlacus, vita', pp. 246-247; Hall, 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity', pp. 208-210; *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. by Rauer, pp. 80-81 and 252. On the Latin literary sources of Felix's *Vita* and their interaction with native oral tradition, see Wieland, *Aures Lectoris*, pp. 170-177.

59 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 16; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 59, 63, and 66-71.

60 *BHL*, no. 2021; *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 140-307.

61 Lapidge, 'Aldhelm', p. 186; Higham, 'Guthlac's Vita', p. 85; Roberts, *Guthlac of Crowland*, p. 5.

62 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 16 and 60.

63 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 16; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 59, 63, and 66-71.

64 *VSG*, chpt. xlviiii: *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 146-149 and 191. According to the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, Ecgburh was abbess of Repton, Guthlac's own motherhouse, but this is 'probably pure guess-work': Meaney, 'Felix's Life of St Guthlac: Hagiography and/or Truth', pp. 30-31; cf. *The Guthlac Poems*, ed. by Roberts, p. 5; Roberts, 'Guthlac A', p. 70.

65 *Epistola lxxxi: Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius*, ed. Tangl, pp. 181-182; English translation in *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, trans. by Emerton, pp. 149-150.

66 Meaney, 'Felix's Life of St Guthlac: Hagiography and/or Truth', p. 30.

Hence the impulse to connect Felix with the very same foundations to which Guthlac himself had been attached. In fact, the *VSG* mentions only one monastery, namely Repton, the double house in Derbyshire where Guthlac received his (Petrine) tonsure and from where he set off for the fens after two years of monastic training. What is more, Repton was associated with the Mercian royal house and Æthelbald (d. 757), king of Mercia in Felix's lifetime and a devotee of St Guthlac, was buried there.⁶⁷ From the account of Guthlac's eremitic life in Crowland, however, it is clear that the saint must have relied on the logistic support of a neighbouring foundation, which is never named by Felix. According to Meaney, the most likely candidate for the role of Guthlac's base was Medeshamstede (Peterborough today), a monastery only about seven miles south of Crowland and one of the most influential and thriving foundations in the area at the time.⁶⁸

Why Felix should have kept quiet about Medeshamstede's putative role as Guthlac's logistic base is a matter of speculation,⁶⁹ as is the question of whether Felix himself could have been a member of either Repton or Medeshamstede. What seems certain is that he cannot have been a monk of Crowland, since it is unlikely that the local abbey predates the tenth-century Benedictine reform movement.⁷⁰ Thus, all that can be concluded at this stage is that Felix must have been active in a Southumbrian, presumably East Anglian, centre endowed with a library of remarkable size.⁷¹ Indeed, the wide range of sources and their subtle integration and layering as well as the ornate, flamboyant Latin displayed by Felix reveal that he was a well-read, sophisticated author who must have benefited from a high standard of Latin training and access to a well-stocked library.⁷² In particular, Felix seems to have been thoroughly conversant with and heavily influenced by Aldhelm,⁷³ who, notably, is also the earliest literary witness to the circulation of the *Synonyma* in Anglo-Saxon England.

67 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 6-7, 15-16, 19, 40, 131, 139, 176, and 188; Keynes, 'Æthelbald'; Kelly, 'Ceolred (d. 757)'; Roberts, 'Hagiography and Literature', p. 76. Æthelbald's interaction with Guthlac is the subject of much of the so-called Guthlac Roll: *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 12-14; Roberts, 'An Inventory', p. 208.

68 Meaney, 'Felix's Life of Guthlac: History or Hagiography?', pp. 78-79.

69 *Ibidem*.

70 Roberts, 'Hagiography and Literature', pp. 70-71; Roberts, 'Guthlac, St', p. 227.

71 Meaney, 'Felix's Life of Guthlac: History or Hagiography?', p. 75.

72 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 16-18; Downey, 'Intertextuality', pp. 25-66; Meaney, 'Felix's Life of Guthlac: History or Hagiography?', p. 75; Lapidge, 'Aldhelm', p. 186.

73 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 17-18; Lapidge, 'The Anglo-Latin Background', p. 13; Lapidge, 'Aldhelm', p. 186; Wieland, 'Aures Lectoris', pp. 171-172.

The *Synonyma* as a Source of the *Vita S. Guthlaci*

The borrowing from the *Synonyma* occurs in one of the central chapters of the *VSG*, that is in a section of the life which recounts the early stages of Guthlac's anachoresis and his strenuous fights with the evil spirits infesting the barrow he had chosen as his hermitage. In particular, the chapter in question tells how two devils in human form suddenly materialise in front of Guthlac while the saint is meditating and deceptively try to tempt him to fast to excess by admonishing him about the examples set by the illustrious hermits of the past – Christ himself, Moses, Elijah, and the Egyptian monks – who had all excelled in their abstinence.⁷⁴ The quote from the *Synonyma* is embedded within the lengthy address by the two demons and reads:⁷⁵

Quanto enim in hoc saeculo frangeris, tanto in perpetuum solidaris: et quanto in praesenti adfligeris, tanto in futuro gaudebis.
(‘For insofar as you are broken down in this world, you shall be made whole and firm in eternity; and to the degree that you are afflicted in this present life, so much shall you rejoice in the future’.)

The principle that the more one suffers in this life the more one will rejoice in eternity can be considered a commonplace tenet of Christian ethics. However, a comparison with the *Synonyma* (i. 28) shows a verbatim debt to Isidore, in that Felix's phrasing and wording are basically identical with the source-text:⁷⁶

Quanto enim in hoc saeculo frangimur, tanto in perpetuum solidamur; quanto in praesenti adfligimur, tanto in futuro gaudebimus.
(‘For insofar as we are broken down in this world, we shall be made whole and firm in the eternal world; to the degree that we are afflicted in this present life, so much shall we rejoice in the future’.)

74 On the psychological or physical nature of such demonic apparitions, see Meaney, ‘Felix's Life of St Guthlac: Hagiography and/or Truth’, pp. 36-40; Vos, ‘Demons Without and Within’, Almond, *The Devil*, pp. 111-117 and 206-216.

75 *VSG*, chpt. xxx: *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 99. 24-26, translation at 100.

76 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. 23; my translation.

The only notable discrepancy is that, while in the *Synonyma* the verbs are in the first person plural, in the VSG they are in the second person singular, which can be explained by the dialogical context of Felix's text.⁷⁷

The quote from the *Synonyma* is a brief extract from a longer passage uttered by Reason and devoted to the principle of inverse proportion ruling the destiny in the afterlife (*Synonyma* i. 27-30). In view of the concision of the borrowing, on the one hand, and of the frequency with which the *Synonyma* were abstracted and epitomised throughout the Middle Ages, on the other, it could be expected that Felix had known the Isidorian sentence second-hand and picked it from a *florilegium* or a devotional collection. Indeed, the sentence in question occurs in the *Liber scintillarum* (chpt. i. 29):⁷⁸

Quantum enim in hoc saeculo frangimur, tantum in perpetuo solidamur. Quantum hic in presente adfligimur, tantum in futuro gaudebimus.

(‘For insofar as we are broken down in this world, we shall be made whole and firm in the eternal world; to the degree that we are afflicted here in the present, so much shall we rejoice in the future.’)

This passage from the *Liber scintillarum* has been classified as Felix's direct source in the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database,⁷⁹ while more recently Bremmer has argued that it is not possible to determine whether the VSG draws directly on Isidore or on Defensor's excerpt.⁸⁰

What is certain, however, is that Felix and Defensor ultimately relied on two different recensions of the *Synonyma*, at least as far as the quote in question is concerned. This sentence features in both Λ and Φ , but while the VSG shares four distinctive readings with the Λ recension, namely *quanto* (x2) and *tanto* (x2), Defensor's text as we know it from Rochais' edition features the corresponding Φ -readings, namely *quantum* and *tantum*; also,

77 The passage from the *Synonyma* was eventually translated into Old English in both the Vespasian Life and Vercelli Homily xxiii, while it has no counterpart in *Guthlac A* and *B*: see Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 99-103.

78 *Defensor Liber scintillarum*, ed. by Rochais, p. 173; my translation. On the *Liber scintillarum*, see above n. 41.

79 Love, 'The Sources of Felix'.

80 Bremmer, 'The Reception of Defensor's *Liber Scintillarum*', pp. 83-84.

Defensor adds the adverb *hic* in the phrase *hic in presente* which is not recorded in any of the witnesses collated by Elfassi.⁸¹

This circumstance is consistent with the general picture of the Anglo-Saxon manuscript tradition of the *Synonyma*, according to which the Λ recension was the first to reach Anglo-Saxon England and had the widest circulation there. Felix predictably knew this text of the *Synonyma*, while the compiler of a continental *florilegium* such as the *Liber scintillarum*, whether from Ligugé or not,⁸² presumably drew on the predominantly continental Φ recension.

Now, at least two Southumbrian witnesses of the Λ recension are contemporary with the VSG, namely the St Petersburg and Würzburg manuscripts. In particular, Felix's text seems to be closer to the latter codex, in that both read *futuro* while the corresponding reading in the St Petersburg manuscript is *futurum*.⁸³

The St Petersburg manuscript has been traced to a south-west English scriptorium, but it was eventually moved to the insular foundation of Corbie by the middle of the eighth century; indeed part of the contents, including the final part of the *Synonyma*, were added at Corbie.⁸⁴ In addition to its early date and Southumbrian origin, the St Petersburg *Synonyma* are especially relevant to us for their links with two Anglo-Saxon *literati* that, together with Felix, are the earliest named readers of the *Synonyma* in England, namely Aldhelm and Boniface, and whose writings, especially Aldhelm's, were current in the milieu where the VSG originated. Indeed, in the St Petersburg codex the *Synonyma* are bracketed by an acrostic poem on St John, *Iohannis celsi rimans mysteria caeli*,⁸⁵ which has been attributed, albeit not universally, to Boniface, and by Aldhelm's *Enigmata*.⁸⁶ What is more, it has been argued – again not unanimously – that one of the hands at work on the codex was that of Boniface himself, whose handwriting has apparently been detected in the two texts preceding the *Synonyma*, namely

81 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. 23. Indeed, according to Elfassi, the *Liber scintillarum* relies on a contaminated Φ -text of the *Synonyma* similar to the text transmitted by an early ninth-century south German manuscript, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6330 (Elfassi's ms. m): Elfassi, 'Defensor de Ligugé', pp. 246-248; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. li-lii.

82 See above, n. 41.

83 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. 23.

84 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 69 and 72; Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', pp. 158-161; cf. Dobiaš-Roždestvenskaja and Bakhtine, *Les anciens manuscrits latins*, p. 66.

85 Schaller and Könsgen, *Initia carminum latinorum*, no. 8331; ptd. PLS, iv, col. 2192.

86 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 69 and 72.

a copy of the Athanasian creed (*Quicumque uult*) and the St John poem.⁸⁷ If the St Petersburg manuscript really is a Bonifatian autograph, then it must be dated before 718, when Boniface set off for the continent. Boniface could even have played a role in the arrival of the codex itself on the continent because the St Petersburg manuscript could have been part of an exchange of gifts between Boniface and Grimo, abbot of Corbie (741-751).⁸⁸

There is also a Bonifatian dimension to the Würzburg *Synonyma*. The bishopric of Würzburg was established by Boniface in 741 or 742 and the *Synonyma* seems to have been 'besonders [beliebt] in Würzburg'.⁸⁹ At least five manuscripts of the Isidorian text dating up to the first half of the ninth century are associated with Würzburg and the codex M. p. th. f. 79 is the earliest of them.⁹⁰ Dating to the first half, possibly the first quarter, of the eighth century, this manuscript has been traced to a Mercian or southwestern centre with Frankish cultural contacts, probably Worcester, on the basis of both the palaeographical evidence and the dialectal features of a number of Old English drypoint glosses roughly contemporary with the production of the manuscript.⁹¹ The codex reached the Rhine-Main area by the end of the eighth century or beginning of the ninth and finally arrived at Würzburg, likely via Mainz, Boniface's see, by the mid-ninth century.⁹² Once in Germany, a number of drypoint glosses in an east Frankish dialect were entered in a hybrid minuscule which has been dated to the early ninth century and classified as 'nachbonifatianisch' and 'deutsch insular'.⁹³

It would be tempting to speculate that Felix consulted one of these two manuscripts, especially the Würzburg one with which it shares the reading *futuro*. However, if the dating of the two codices is consistent with this hypothesis, their putative places of origin (a southwestern English scriptorium for the St Petersburg codex, and a Mercian or southwestern centre, possibly Worcester, for the Würzburg one), do not correspond with the proposed East Anglian place of composition for Felix's *VSG*. Here Felix

87 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 72 and 244-245, nn. 429 and 431.

88 Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', pp. 160-161; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. xxxvii.

89 Bischoff and Hofmann, *Libri Sancti Kyliani*, p. 96.

90 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 72-74; Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', pp. 164-165; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, pp. xlii-xliii (ms. U), xliiii-xliv (ms. W), xlv-xlv (ms. X), lvii (ms. w), and lviii (ms. y).

91 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 68-69 and 71-72; Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', pp. 164-165; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. xlv.

92 *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. xlv.

93 Thurn, *Die Handschriften*, III.1, p. 66; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, p. 72; Hussey, 'Transmarinis litteris', p. 158; *Isidori Hispalensis Synonyma*, ed. by Elfassi, p. xlv.

must have had access to at least one copy of the *Λ*-text of the *Synonyma* (whether in its entirety or in excerpts); in particular, this copy probably contained a text closer to the one preserved in the Würzburg codex. As mentioned above, Felix's putative East Anglian mother-house must have been provided with an extensive library, where hagiographic sources as well as Aldhelm's works must have featured prominently. The final part of this chapter will attempt to sketch out the contents of such a library and the original milieu of the *VSG*.

The Literary Milieu of the *Vita S. Guthlaci*

Quellenforschung on the *VSG* has shown that Felix relied on an ingrained knowledge of scripture as well as on an extensive hagiographic library ranging from the lives of the two archetypal Desert Fathers, Antony and Paul the Hermit, to the two most influential hagiographies of the western Middle Ages, Sulpicius's *Vita Martini* and Gregory the Great's *Vita Benedicti*, to the lives of two of the earliest insular saints, Fursey and, especially, Cuthbert.⁹⁴ Indeed Bede's prose *Vita S. Cuthberti* is the saint's life to which Felix is most indebted, so much so that 'it is difficult to imagine that Felix was not in some way attempting to create an East Anglian counterpart to Cuthbert'.⁹⁵ Finally, Felix was familiar with Virgil and the *VSG* is frequently scattered with Virgilian echoes,⁹⁶ as is the case with the chapter in which the borrowing from the *Synonyma* occurs.

Guthlac's vision of the two devils and their long address to the saint on the spiritual benefits of extreme fasting where the quote from the *Synonyma* is embedded do not have an exact antecedent. In general, the whole passage could be described as Antonian, in that, although Antony himself does not experience an equivalent vision, in a long speech recorded in Evagrius's Latin version of the *Vita Antonii* (chpt. xvi),⁹⁷ the saint warns his disciples against the devil's mischievous attempt to lure monks to ascetic excesses

94 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 16-18; Downey, 'Intertextuality', pp. 25-66.

95 Downey, 'Intertextuality', p. 59; see also Wieland, 'Aures Lectoris', p. 171.

96 *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 17.

97 *BHL*, no. 609; ptd. PL, lxxiii, cols. 125-170. On the *Vita Antonii* in Anglo-Saxon England, see Whatley, 'Antonius, vita'; Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 119, 175, 179, 196, 229, 234, 238, and 281. On the *Vita Antonii* as a source of the *VSG*, see Downey, 'Intertextuality', pp. 33-39.

only to throw them into despair.⁹⁸ The Antonian resonances are corroborated at the end of the relevant chapter of the *VSG*, when Guthlac dispels his demonic antagonists who ultimately vanish like smoke from his presence into thin air.⁹⁹ As Downey has demonstrated, this sentence represents ‘a particularly complex moment of source-layering’,¹⁰⁰ because it conflates a phrase possibly from Virgil’s *Aeneid* (XII, 591-592),¹⁰¹ but more likely from Bede’s prose *Vita S. Cuthberti* where it describes the saint’s dispelling of a false devilish fire,¹⁰² with a biblical echo of Psalm lxvii. 2-3.¹⁰³ Notably, the same psalm is chanted by Antony in a similar context of demonic harassment and it is probably through the *Vita Antonii* that the scriptural quote filtered into Felix’s text, where it is in turn echoed three more times, always to describe Guthlac’s chasing away of devilish tormenters.¹⁰⁴

The sophisticated integration of sources and multiple criss-crossing of intertextual and intratextual borrowings has been shown to be the most characteristic of Felix’s compositional techniques.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, in view of this practice, I would suggest that the above-quoted *fumus*-simile might provide a further link, albeit an indirect one, between the *VSG* and the *Synonyma*, particularly with the most popular and elaborated-on passage from the Isidorian text, namely the *ubi sunt*.¹⁰⁶ The *ubi sunt* passage of the *Synonyma*

98 Similar admonitions are also found in classics of medieval monastic literature: *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 184.

99 ‘velut fumus a facie eius vacuas in auras evanuit’: *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 100. 10-11, translation at p. 101.

100 Downey, ‘Intertextuality’, pp. 63–65, quotation at p. 63.

101 The sentence in question likens panicking townspeople to bees smoked out of their hive: ‘Voluitur ater odor tectis, tum murmure caeco / Intus saxa sonant, vacuas ut fumus ad auras’ (a terrible reek rolls through their house, and then the rocks resound within with their blind buzzing, and smoke goes into the empty air): translation by Downey, ‘Intertextuality’, p. 63, n. 230.

102 ‘fugator auctor fallaciarum ficta secum incendia uacuas reportaret in auras’ (‘the author of lies, having been put to flight, took his feigned fire back into the empty air’): *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 198. 22-23, translation at p. 199. Bede’s text offers a more pertinent antecedent than Virgil context-wise: cf. *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 100; Love, ‘The Sources of Felix’; Downey, ‘Intertextuality’, pp. 63–64.

103 ‘Exurgat Deus et dissipentur inimici eius et fugiant qui oderunt eum a facie eius; sicut deficit fumus deficiant’ (‘let God rise up, and let his enemies be scattered, and let those who hate him flee from his face; let them fade away just as smoke fades away’): Downey, ‘Intertextuality’, pp. 38–39, translation at p. 38, n. 123.

104 *VSG*, chpts. xxxiii, xxxiv, and xlix: *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 108. 17–18, 110. 15–17, and 150. 2; Downey, ‘Intertextuality’, pp. 30 and 38–39.

105 Downey, ‘Intertextuality’, pp. 25–66.

106 Isidore’s *Synonyma* represent the major source for the *ubi sunt* topos in the western Middle Ages: Gilson, *Les idées et les lettres*, pp. 14–15 and 33. As concerns Anglo-Saxon England in

itself does not mention any smoke – the two concluding similes read ‘quasi umbra transierunt, uelut somnium euanuerunt’ (‘they passed away as if they were a shadow, they vanished like a dream’)¹⁰⁷ –, but no fewer than six Anglo-Saxon *ubi sunt* passages, four in Latin, namely Aldhelm’s *Epistola ad Acircium*, Boniface’s Epistles ix and lxxiii, and the anonymous sermon *In nomine Domini* in ms. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 190, and two in Old English, namely the anonymous homilies Napier xlix and Irvine vii, feature a smoke-simile and they are all demonstrably derivative of the *Synonyma*.¹⁰⁸

As has been shown, the ultimate source for the *fumus*-simile itself in these Anglo-Saxon *ubi sunt* passages is biblical, that is Wisdom V. 13-15. In particular, in Aldhelm’s and Boniface’s *ubi sunt* passages, this scriptural echo was spontaneously triggered by and conflated with the *Synonyma*, a text which itself often echoes the Old Testament.¹⁰⁹ Given Felix’s scriptural know-how and familiarity with Aldhelm’s corpus, on the one hand, and his distinctive multi-layering of sources, on the other, it is possible that his image of the devil vanishing like smoke might betray, besides Virgilian or Bedan antecedents, also an echo of the Aldhelmian elaboration of the *fumus*-simile in the *Epistola ad Acircium*.

As to Boniface, although no firm evidence exists concerning Felix’s knowledge and use of his writings, Boniface exchanged letters with at least two royal personages mentioned in the *VSG* who were contemporaries of Felix himself, namely the very dedicatee of the *uita*, the East Anglian king Ælfwald, and the Mercian king Æthelbald. The former was probably a subject king to the latter, and indeed Æthelbald features prominently in the *VSG* as a pious devotee of the saint, who frequently visited Guthlac for counsel and encouragement during his youth as an exile and who generously enriched Guthlac’s shrine after he had finally ascended to the throne.¹¹⁰

Notably, Æthelbald is the addressee of one of the two above-mentioned epistles by Boniface featuring the *ubi sunt* motif and the concluding

particular, Cross demonstrated that the Isidorian text is ‘quite the favourite individual source’ for the *ubi sunt* passages in Old English prose and poetry: Cross, ‘“Ubi sunt” Passages in Old English’, p. 25; Di Sciacca, ‘Il topos dell’*ubi sunt*’; Di Sciacca, ‘The *ubi sunt* Motif’; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 105-159.

¹⁰⁷ My translation.

¹⁰⁸ Di Sciacca, ‘An Unpublished *Ubi Sunt* Piece’, pp. 226-238; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 116-124, 128-129, 134, and 149-156.

¹⁰⁹ Di Sciacca, ‘An Unpublished *Ubi Sunt* Piece’, pp. 237-238; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 20-22 and 152-155.

¹¹⁰ *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 6-7, 15-16, 19, 40, 131, 139, 176, and 188; Keynes, ‘The Kingdom of the Mercians’, pp. 7-8; Keynes, ‘Æthelbald’; Kelly, ‘Ceolred (d. 757)’; Roberts, *Guthlac of Crowland*, pp. 5-7; cf. Higham, ‘Guthlac’s *Vita*’.

fumus-simile, namely Epistle lxxiii.¹¹¹ Here the Mercian king is depicted in far less flattering terms than in the *VSG*, as Boniface sternly reprimands Æthelbald for his depraved mores and violations of church privileges and property. With its emphasis on the transience of any worldly grandeur, the *ubi sunt* paragraph perfectly fits Boniface's admonition to the king to amend his wicked ways. Indeed, this letter can be considered as a veritable manifesto of church reform. It was authored by Boniface but nominally signed by seven other Anglo-Saxon bishops. Given the public dimension of the epistle, it is reasonable to suppose that such a well-read contemporary as Felix, possibly even in personal contact with the king targeted by Boniface, was aware of it and its flamboyant *ubi sunt* passage featuring the *fumus*-simile. Also, stylistic parallels seem to link the Bonifatian *ubi sunt* paragraph and the *VSG*, in that like the latter, the former is of 'derivative, repetitious and innately formulaic nature'.¹¹² Like Boniface's, Felix's own style and compositional techniques also employ a complex network of intertextual and intratextual resonances, and such a network could well have included Boniface's Epistle lxxiii and its *fumus*-simile.

Finally, a further connection between Boniface's Epistle lxxiii and Felix's *VSG* can be identified in the negative portrayal both authors give of Ceolred, king of the Mercians (709-716), predecessor and distant cousin of Æthelbald.¹¹³ According to Felix, Ceolred had cast Æthelbald into exile and persecuted him further. Indeed, shortly before Guthlac's death, Felix has the saint prophesise to Æthelbald the death of wicked Ceolred and Æthelbald's long-awaited accession to the Mercian throne.¹¹⁴ Boniface does not touch upon the dynastic controversy implied in Felix's account, but fully agrees with the latter's depiction of Ceolred as a dissolute king who ultimately died raving mad at a banquet (only, unlike Felix, Boniface uses Ceolred as a cautionary example for the equally depraved Æthelbald).

Notably, Boniface had already chastised Ceolred decades earlier, when, recounting the otherworldly vision of the monk of Much Wenlock within his epistle to Eadburg (717-719), he had depicted the soul of the evil king falling prey to a host of demons.¹¹⁵ This very vision too could provide a further connection between Boniface and the *VSG*, especially the episode of Guthlac's

111 *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius*, ed. by Tangl, pp. 146-155; English translation in *English Historical Documents*, trans. by Whitelock, pp. 751-756.

112 Orchard, 'Old Sources, New Resources', p. 36.

113 Kelly, 'Ceolred (d. 716)'.

114 *VSG*, chpt. xlix: *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 150 and 192.

115 Epistle x: *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius*, ed. by Tangl, pp. 8-15 at p. 14; English translation in *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, trans. by Emerton, pp. 25-31. See also Sims-Williams, *Religion*

descensus ad inferos, when at the height of a demonic assault, the saint is carried by a host of devils to the gates of hell and there he is made to witness the torments inflicted on the damned souls and threatened to be cast down into the hellish abyss, but is eventually rescued due to his faithfulness and the intercession of St Bartholomew.¹¹⁶ Although to my knowledge no specific debt of the VSG to Boniface's account of the Wenlock vision has been pinpointed, it is nevertheless significant that Guthlac's *descensus ad inferos* has been associated with other early Anglo-Saxon visions, including those of Drythelm¹¹⁷ and Fursey,¹¹⁸ as making up 'a visionary tradition in early Anglo-Saxon ascetic circles in which the Latin and literary and the vernacular and oral intermingled'.¹¹⁹

In sum, although the evidence concerning Felix's knowledge of Boniface's texts remains largely circumstantial, I think there is a strong possibility that they too circulated in Felix's circle, where – it must be remembered – the works of Boniface's great model, Aldhelm, proved so influential. Not unlike Aldhelm, Boniface, one of the earliest Anglo-Saxon admirers of the *Synonyma* and an enthusiastic propagator of the Isidorian text in the Anglo-Saxon missions on the continent, could have endorsed a broader appreciation of the *Synonyma*.

Conclusion

Analysis of the *Synonyma* excerpt in the VSG contributes interesting data as to the circulation of this Isidorian text in Anglo-Saxon England, in that it confirms that by the mid-eighth century the *Synonyma* were already widely disseminated in Southumbrian England. In particular, the text circulating at this stage seems to have been that of the A-recension. The St Petersburg and the Würzburg manuscripts of the *Synonyma* are the earliest witnesses

and Literature, pp. 243-272; Sims-Williams, 'A Recension of Boniface's Letter to Eadburg'; Bolintineanu, 'Towards A Poetics of Marvellous Spaces', pp. 32-35.

116 VSG, chpts. xxxi-xxxiii: *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 100-109.

On Guthlac's *descensus ad inferos*, see the recent study by Giliberto, 'The *Descensus ad inferos*'.

117 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, V.12: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 488-499. See also Giliberto, 'The *Descensus ad inferos*', pp. 245-254.

On the influence of a seventh-century Spanish text, the *Prognosticon* by Julian of Toledo, on the depiction of the otherworld in the visions of the monk of Much Wenlock and Drythelm, see Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 77-140; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 177-179.

118 Whatley, 'Furseus, vita'; Giliberto, 'The *Descensus ad inferos*', pp. 241-245; Roberts, *Guthlac of Crowland*, pp. 18-24.

119 Clemons, *Interactions of Thought and Language*, pp. 25-26.

of this recension and Felix also seems to have consulted a Λ -text, indeed a version of the text which was apparently close to the Würzburg *Synonyma*. The locales to which Felix and the Würzburg manuscript have been traced, an East Anglian foundation and a southwestern centre, possibly Worcester, respectively, do not seem to be compatible and the circumstances of both Felix's life and the itinerary followed by the Würzburg *Synonyma* from its original scriptorium to the continent are just too hazy to posit a definite association between them. It is therefore safer to suggest that Felix must have had access to another Λ -copy of the *Synonyma*, possibly related to the Würzburg codex, thereby virtually expanding our estimates of the Anglo-Saxon manuscript tradition of the *Synonyma*. Alternatively, it could be speculated that what Felix consulted was an excerpt or a *florilegium*, based on a Λ -text or even on the Würzburg *Synonyma*.

Previous scholarship has pointed out that the *Synonyma* proved especially popular with Anglo-Saxon anonymous homilists, and that in pre-Conquest England the Isidorian work contributed to the definition of a specifically Anglo-Saxon stock of eschatological, penitential, and devotional motifs. As an eschatological and devotional source, the *Synonyma* were often associated with that corpus of texts, mostly of eastern origin and Irish-transmitted, which shaped Anglo-Saxon cosmology and vision literature as well as spirituality and devotion.¹²⁰

Within the wide pre-Conquest readership of the *Synonyma*, there are at least two distinctive intellectual environments from the early Anglo-Saxon period where the *Synonyma* were particularly appreciated, namely Aldhelm's entourage and, in turn, that of Aldhelm's great epigone, Boniface. Not only did Aldhelm and Boniface demonstrably draw on the Isidorian text in their own writings, but Boniface and his fellow missionaries also actively promoted the diffusion of the *Synonyma* in the area of the Anglo-Saxon missions on the continent.¹²¹

The evidence from the VSG both confirms and augments this picture. Through Felix's work we can glimpse a milieu that, besides holding Aldhelm in high esteem and demonstrating an extensive scriptural and hagiographic proficiency, nurtured an interest in eremitic values and had a detailed knowledge of some of the key hagiographies concerning the founders of eastern monasticism, namely Antony and Paul the Hermit, as well as

120 Di Sciacca, 'The *ubi sunt* Motif'; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 159-164.

121 Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 51-52, 72-74, and 151-55; Hussey, 'The Franco-Saxon *Synonyma*'; Hussey, 'Ascetics and Aesthetics', pp. 77-140; Hussey, '*Transmarinis litteris*', pp. 150-151 and 166-168.

Guthlac's own 'predecessor' as native Anglo-Saxon hermit-saint, namely Cuthbert.¹²² Thus, the *VSG* affords precious evidence as to the association of the *Synonyma* with hagiographies specifically devoted to hermit-saints, which confirms the ascetic component of the Isidorian text and helps to illustrate and explain its fortune as a classic of monastic spirituality in the western Middle Ages.¹²³ More specifically, analysis of the *VSG* brings into sharper focus the literary corpus to which the *Synonyma* probably belonged in pre-Norman England and to sketch out a more detailed picture of the Anglo-Saxon library to which they virtually belonged.

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122 It should be reminded that Cuthbert and the *Synonyma* are also joined up in the above-mentioned Munich manuscript Clm 15817 – itself a continental codex but probably derived from an insular antigraph – where the Isidorian text follows the earliest surviving copy of the anonymous *Vita S. Cuthberti*: see above, p. 137.

123 Fontaine, 'Isidore de Séville auteur "ascétique"', p. 164; Elfassi, 'Trois aspects inattendus', p. 197; Elfassi, 'La réception des *Synonyma*', pp. 112-117.

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