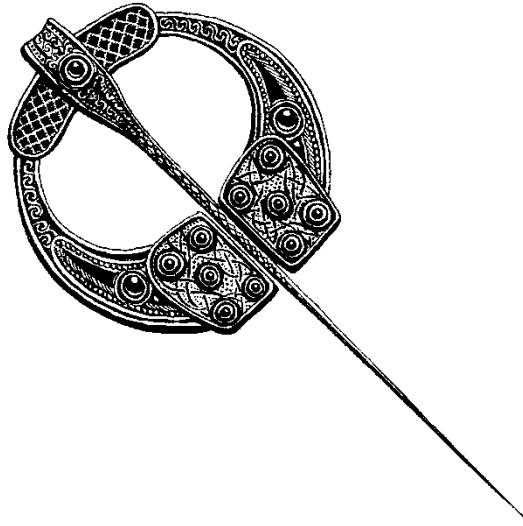


The Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic is a yearly spring conference organized by postgraduate students of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
CCS	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
<i>CMCS</i>	<i>Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>JBAA</i>	<i>Journal of the British Archaeological Association</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
MGH Auct. antiqu.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores antiquissimi
MGH Epist.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae Aevi Karolini
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>PBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PL	Patrologia Latina
<i>SBVS</i>	<i>Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Scandinavian Studies</i>

PREFACE

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the fourteenth number of *Quaestio Insularis*, the journal of the annual Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic (CCASNC). Both the journal and the Colloquium, established in 1999 on the initiative of the postgraduate community of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, have maintained an admirably high standard, driven by the enthusiasm and commitment of successive cohorts of students. The 2013 conference was a very successful and well-organised event which saw what is thought to have been the largest CCASNC attendance to date. Headed up by Barbara Yorke's insightful exploration of cultures in collision and yet in reconciliation, the papers published in this volume aptly embody the cross-cultural nature not only of the Colloquium, but also of the lively graduate community that gives it shape every year. The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic is delighted to continue its association with the CCASNC and its published proceedings. *Quaestio Insularis* 14 and all back numbers of the journal can be ordered directly from the Department's website (www.asnc.cam.ac.uk).

Dr Rosalind Love

Head of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic
University of Cambridge

COLLOQUIUM REPORT

The 2013 Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, ‘Brave New World’, was held in Room GR 06/07 of the English Faculty on Saturday 16 February. Eleven papers were presented throughout the day, comprising a plenary talk by Professor Barbara Yorke and papers from postgraduates at the universities of Cambridge, Glasgow, Harvard, Toronto and York. The colloquium was extremely well attended and witnessed much stimulating and friendly discussion. We would like to thank all the speakers and attendees for contributing to the success of the event—and a special thanks must go to our team of wonderfully enthusiastic helpers: David Callander, Rachel Fletcher, Emilia Henderson, James McIntosh, Maura McKeon, Laura Parkin, Hannah Rose, Page Sinclair, Rebecca Try and Gabrielle Watts.

Session I (*Chair: Myriah Williams*)

Georgia Henley, ‘Ethnicity and Ethnography: Classical Sources in Gerald of Wales’s *Topographia Hibernica*’
Eoghan Ahern, ‘Bede and the Influence of Irish Science’

Session II (*Chair: Tony Harris*)

Tam Blaxter, ‘Digital Explorations of the Sociolinguistics of the *Íslendingasögur*’
Guto Rhys, “‘How Many Goodly Creatures are There Here?’”
Kenneth Jackson and the Pictish Language’

Plenary Speaker (*Chair: Robert Gallagher and Alice Hicklin*)

Professor Barbara Yorke, ‘Ingeld and Christ: Some Problems in the Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxon Laity’

Session III (*Chairs: Eleanor Heans-Głogowska and Alexandra Reider*)

Elizabeth Anderson, ‘Ireland in the *Mabinogion*; a Vicious Circle of Brave New Worlds’

Jo Shortt Butler, 'Balancing the Books in the Brave New World, or,
Getting Uneven in *Vatnsdæla Saga*'

Cameron Laird, 'Speaking Objects: Aldhelm and the Anglo-Saxon
Riddle Tradition'

Session IV (*Chair: Rebecca Merkelbach*)

Stefany Wragg, 'The New Bravery: Cynewulf's *Fates of the Apostles*'

Jessica Hancock, 'No Longer "as Little as a Leaf": *Völsunga Saga*'s
Alternative Construction of Guðrún'

Christine Voth, 'Creating a New World or Reforming the Old?
Monastic Reform in Tenth-Century England and the Cultural
Context of Royal 12. D. xvii'

The members of the colloquium committee for 2012–13 were:

Robert Gallagher, Tony Harris, Eleanor Heans-Głogowska, Alice
Hicklin, Rebecca Merkelbach, Alexandra Reider and Myriah Williams.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Quaestio Insularis 14 was edited by Robert Gallagher, Tony Harris, Eleanor Heans-Głogowska, Alice Hicklin, Rebecca Merkelbach, Alexandra Reider and Myriah Williams. The editors wish to acknowledge the assistance of Charlotte Everitt, Lauren Kennedy, Dr Rosalind Love, Professor Paul Russell, Jo Shortt Butler and our peer reviewers. Editorial design is by Alistair Vining and the *Quaestio Insularis* logo was drawn by Katharine Scarfe Beckett. The production of this volume and the successful running of the conference have been made possible through the generosity of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic and the support of the Faculty of English.

Ingeld, Weland and Christ

Barbara Yorke

University of Winchester

(1) Verba dei legantur in sacerdotali convivio. Ibi decet lectorem audiri, non citharistam; sermones non carmina gentilium. (2) Quid Hinieldus cum Christo. Angusta est domus: utrosque tenere non potuit. (3) Non vult rex caelestis cum paganis et perditis nominatenus regibus communionem habere; quia rex ille aeternus regnat in caelis; ille paganus plangit in inferno. (4) Voces legentium audite in domibus tuis, non ridentium turbam in plateis.¹

The central part of this passage from a letter from Alcuin to an Anglo-Saxon bishop, perhaps Unwona of Leicester (d. 801x3),² is well-known in Anglo-Saxon studies as one of the few references from the Christian clerical world to a pre-Christian heroic figure, namely

¹Alcuin, Letter 124, in *Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Epist. 4 (Berlin, 1895), 181–4, at p. 183. Numbering is my own: ‘(1) Let the words of God be read at the episcopal banquet. There it is fitting for a reader to be heard, not a harpist; the discourse of the fathers, not the songs of the pagans. (2) What has Ingeld to do with Christ? Narrow is the house; both it cannot hold. (3) The heavenly king does not want to associate with pagans, damned so-called kings; for that king who is eternal rules in the heavens, the other, the damned pagan, laments in hell. (4) Hear the voices of your readers in your dwellings, not the crowd of laughing people in the courtyards’, translation taken from M. Garrison, ‘Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?’, in *Latin Learning and English Lore. Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, 2 vols., ed. K. O’Brien O’Keefe and A. Orchard (Toronto, 2005), I, 237–59, at p. 241.

²D. Bullough, ‘What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?’, *ASE* 22 (1993), 93–125.

Ingeld. Yet though often cited and discussed,³ the context for the link between Ingeld and Christ to which Alcuin objects has never been explained adequately. The passage belongs in an established rhetorical tradition of the antithetical trope that can be illustrated from the works of many of the Fathers of the Church, such as, for instance, Jerome's celebrated rhetorical riff, 'Quid consensus Christo et belial? Quid facit cum psalterio Horatius? Cum evangeliiis Maro?'.⁴ It has usually been assumed that in referring to Ingeld Alcuin was amplifying his earlier condemnation of *carmina gentilium* ('pagan songs') that might be heard at episcopal banquets. However, Mary Garrison has argued cogently that 'the passage is an example of rhetorical amplification without tautology'.⁵ That is, the rhetorical conventions that Alcuin was following required that the reference to Ingeld appeared in a related, but different context, to avoid repetition of a condemnation that had been made already about *carmina gentilium*. Garrison's translation, reproduced at the head of this paper, marks the different phrases into which, she believes, this section from the letter falls. Contemplation of them allows a number of points to emerge about what Alcuin may have felt was inappropriate within an episcopal hall.

Garrison's solution for phrase (3) was to suggest that Alcuin was referring to the construction of the pre-Christian sections of genealogies and king-lists.⁶ Genealogies would certainly fit with the general tenor of what Alcuin was saying in that they represented an

³ For example, R. Levine, 'Ingeld and Christ: a Medieval Problem', *Viator* 2 (1971), 105–28; M. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry*, Studies in English Literature 74 (The Hague, 1972).

⁴ Jerome, Letter 22, in *Hieronymus Epistularum Pars I, Epistulae I–LXX*, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 54 (Vienna, 1994), 188–9: 'What concord is there between Christ and Belial? What has Horace to do with the Psalter? Or Vergil with the gospels?', trans. Garrison, 'Quid Hinieldus', p. 246.

⁵ Garrison, 'Quid Hinieldus', p. 242.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 246–51.

amalgamation of biblical and Germanic tradition. In the first instance, they were a convenient way of allowing a foothold for supernatural beings whom the elite were reluctant to abandon completely if they accepted conversion. Isidore summed up what was a well-established tradition by the time the Anglo-Saxons were converted as ‘quos pagani deos asserunt, homines olim fuisse produntur’,⁷ that those whom the pagans claimed to be gods had once been men. Isidore was prepared to see these former gods as men of heroic reputation whom the devil had misled men to see as gods, and so provided a more positive spin on euhemerisation than in Augustine’s emphasis on their demonisation.⁸ Such positive realignments were so successful and significant in Anglo-Saxon England that in the *Historia ecclesiastica* Bede, who has very few references to the pre-conversion world of the Anglo-Saxons, felt able to reproduce a genealogy for the Kentish royal house containing several probable former gods, including Woden: ‘de cuius stirpe multarum provinciarum regium genus originem duxit’.⁹ By the mid-ninth century the West Saxon kings had a far more elaborate genealogy in which King Æthelwulf’s lineage was

⁷ Isidore, *Etymologiae* viii.11, in *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911).

⁸ D. F. Johnson, ‘Euhemerisation Versus Demonisation: the Pagan Gods and Ælfric’s *De Falsis Diis*’, in *Pagans and Christians: the Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe: Proceedings of the Second Germania Latina Conference held at the University of Groningen, May 1992*, ed. T. Hofstra et al., *Germania Latina* 2 (Groningen, 1995), 35–69, at pp. 38–40.

⁹ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), i.15, pp. 50–1: ‘from whose stock the royal families of many kingdoms claimed their descent’. Both Hengest and Horsa, whom Bede depicts as founders of the kingdom of Kent, and Hengest’s supposed son Oisc, after whom the royal house took its name (ii.5), were probably also euhemerised deities. See N. Brooks, ‘The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent’, in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. Bassett, *Studies in the Early History of Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 55–74, at pp. 58–60.

ultimately traced back to Noah and so to Adam himself.¹⁰ This linking of denizens of the pre-Christian Germanic past with biblical figures allowed the former to be located in time and place in World History. It is a modest bringing together of these disparate worlds compared to the more complex and detailed alignments achieved within Ireland, which allowed the Irish to retain much pagan myth within an ostensibly Christian context.¹¹ So the upper reaches of genealogies could be seen by a reformer like Alcuin as filled *cum paganis et perditis nominetenus regibus* ('with pagans, damned so-called kings')¹² (though a more benign view would see honourable ancestors aligned with virtuous pre-Christians of the Old Testament).¹³

Alcuin can be expected not to have approved of this mingling of the biblical and pagan pasts, but the linking of Christ and Ingeld would seem to be referring to something else again, as Garrison's argument would seem to require. Neither Christ nor Ingeld appear together in any surviving Anglo-Saxon genealogies or poetry. Arguably they have been picked out in a distinct phrase alluding to circumstances in which they might be expected, or were known, to occur together. Ingeld was not a former god, but a Germanic hero whose story is briefly alluded to in the poems *Beowulf* and *Widsith*.¹⁴

¹⁰ K. Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *PBA* 39 (1953), 287–346, discussing in particular the genealogy for Æthelwulf that was entered in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 855 and related texts; C. R. Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *ASE* 21 (1992), 23–36.

¹¹ K. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth, 1990); C. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. pp. 13–45.

¹² Garrison, 'Quid Hinieldus', p. 241.

¹³ C. Donahue, 'Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good', *Traditio* 7 (1949–51), 263–77; D. Cronan, 'Beowulf, the Gaels and the Recovery of the Pre-Conversion Past', *Anglo-Saxon* 1 (2007), 137–80.

¹⁴ *Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment*, ed. C. L. Wrenn, revised ed. W. F. Bolton (London, 1973), ll. 2020–69; *Widsith*, in *Old English Minor Heroic Poems*, ed. J. Hill, 3rd ed. (Durham, 2009), pp. 31–36, at l. 48.

Ingeld was said to be a prince of the Heathobards,¹⁵ betrothed to Hrothgar's daughter to heal a feud between the two peoples, but the sight of the triumphant Danes wearing trophies which they had taken from Heathobard warriors was too much for the defeated side. Ingeld led his men in the burning of Heorot, and then he and the Heathobards were decisively vanquished by Hrothgar and his nephew Hrothwulf in revenge.¹⁶ Heroes of the same type as Ingeld were certainly included within Anglo-Saxon genealogies; the humanisation of the gods had brought heroes and former gods closer together as a conceptual category by the ninth century. Offa of Angeln, an ancestor of the Mercian royal house in the Mercian genealogies in the Anglian collection,¹⁷ is referred to immediately before Ingeld in *Widsith*.¹⁸ Finn, whose revenge story in the *Finnesburg Fragment* resembles that of Ingeld, was an ancestor of the royal houses of Bernicia and Lindsey.¹⁹ The genealogy of Æthelwulf of Wessex incorporated several of the heroes who appear in *Beowulf*, including a version of the name of Beowulf himself.²⁰ Ingeld would therefore have been at home in such company, but is not known to have been claimed as an ancestor by

¹⁵ Hill, *Minor Heroic Poems*, p. 110; the exact location and, indeed, existence of the Heathobards is unknown.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁷ D. N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *ASE* 5 (1976), 23–50; B. A. E. Yorke, 'The Origins of Mercia', in *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. P. Brown and C. A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London, 2001), pp. 13–22.

¹⁸ *Widsith* 35–49.

¹⁹ Hill, *Minor Heroic Poems*, pp. 27–9 and 42–3; Dumville, 'Anglian Collection', pp. 31–7.

²⁰ The genealogy includes the names Scyld, Sceaf and Heremod, as well as 'Beaw' (Beowulf?) and Geat. Variant versions are given in the *Chronicle* of Æthelweard. See Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies', pp. 314–22; A. Meaney, 'Scyld Sceafing and the Dating of *Beowulf* – Again', in *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England. Thomas Northcote Toller and the Toller Memorial Lectures*, ed. D. Scragg, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 1 (Cambridge, 2003), 24–73.

any of the Anglo-Saxon royal houses, perhaps because of the obscurity of his people, the Heathobards. Ingeld was used though as a personal name by the Anglo-Saxon elite of the seventh and eighth centuries, borne, for instance, by Ine's brother who was the ancestor of King Æthelwulf,²¹ by the father of Ealdorman Æthelmund of the Hwicce,²² and by an abbot of a community in the vicinity of Glastonbury.²³

Christ, of course, also had a genealogy that gave him Old Testament antecedents that may have served as a model for Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies,²⁴ but he himself did not usually appear in conjunction with Germanic heroes or former gods.²⁵ The conventions of heroic verse were, as is well-known, adapted to portray the story of Christ, as for instance in *The Dream of the Rood*, but Christ and heroic figures do not appear together in individual poems in the surviving corpus of Old English verse. In *Beowulf*, although there are references to the Christian God and other biblical and

²¹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 718 (recording his death): *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 3: Manuscript A*, ed. J. M. Bately (Cambridge, 1986), p. 34.

²² Ingeld is described as an ealdorman of King Æthelbald of Mercia (716–57); M. Hare, 'A Possible Commemorative Stone for Æthelmund, Father of Æthelric', in *Intersections: the Archaeology and History of Christianity in England, 100–1200: Papers in Honour of Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjolbye Biddle*, ed. M. Henig and N Ramsay, BAR British Series 505 (Oxford, 2010), 135–48, at p. 142.

²³ S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Glastonbury Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 15 (Oxford, 2012), 24–6.

²⁴ Luke III.36–8; F. P. Magoun Jnr, 'King Æthelwulf's Biblical Ancestors', *MLR* 46 (1951), 249–50.

²⁵ However, the genealogy for Æthelwulf in the *ASC A*: ed. Bately, p. 46, for the year 855, ends with the statement 'Adam primus homo et pater noster id est Christus' ('Adam the first man and our father that is Christ', my translation); Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation', p. 30.

Christian allusions, there are no references to Christ himself.²⁶ Beowulf and the other heroes, in the alignment of heroic and Old Testament worlds, lived well before Christ (even though they were also found in an association with apparently historically attested kings such as Hygelac). However, Alcuin's letter seems to refer to a situation in which Ingeld and Christ might appear together. Can we identify any possible context in which this might have occurred in mid-Saxon England?

While no such appearance for Ingeld is apparently known, there is a famous example where a Germanic hero and Christ appear literally side by side. This is the Franks Casket, whose front panel depicts the story of Weland's revenge on his captor King Nithhad alongside the visit of the three magi to Christ and his mother.²⁷ Weland was not a prince, but a smith, albeit of a rather superior sort, but he undoubtedly belonged to the same world of heroic revenge-narratives as Ingeld and Finn.²⁸ At first sight, the image of Weland at his forge making cups from the skulls of Nithhad's sons, and on the point of raping his daughter Beadohild, makes an incongruous pairing with the visit of the magi to the new-born Christ. Much ingenuity is

²⁶ T. D. Hill, 'The Christian Language and Theme of *Beowulf*', in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. H. Aertsen and R. H. Bremner Jr (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 63–77.

²⁷ L. Webster, *The Franks Casket*, British Museum Objects in Focus (London, 2012). A huge bibliography could be compiled on the Franks Casket which would be inappropriate to provide here. For a detailed recent study with full critical apparatus see R. Abels, 'What has Weland to do with Christ? The Franks Casket and the Acculturation of Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 84 (2009), 549–81.

²⁸ In Anglo-Saxon versions of the Weland story any supernatural elements associated with Weland in other Germanic traditions are subordinated to the story of his vengeance on King Nithhad who had captured and hamstrung him to prevent his escape, as is brought out in Abels, 'What has Weland to do with Christ?'. For an encapsulation of the Anglo-Saxon version, see *Deor*, in *Minor Heroic Poems*, ed. Hill, pp. 37–8, at ll. 1–14.

needed to discern any common ground, and a representation of contrasting good and bad exemplars has often been assumed.²⁹ However, an analysis of the back of the casket by James Lang may help provide a further solution (though it is likely that there are many different levels of meaning and interruptions on the Casket, so this should be seen as just one among many readings that need not be mutually exclusive). Lang has identified a second appearance of Weland towards the middle of the bottom scene on the back panel.³⁰ Weland sits beneath Nithhad on his throne and hands him one of the skull-cups that he is shown manufacturing on the front; he is further identified by a crutch and the leg, which Nithhad had lamed to stop him escaping and which is stretched out before him. To the viewer's left of this scene is the word *dom* ('just judgement') in runes. *Dom* is always applied to a judgement that can be approved,³¹ thus suggesting, contrary to what a modern viewer might assume, that the judgement visited by Weland on the enemy who had entrapped him was to be admired.

Equally important is that the theme of just judgment visited on the enemy ties in Weland's story with that of the top of the back panel of the Casket, where the Roman general Titus is shown sacking Jerusalem, an act interpreted by Christian commentators as a revenge upon the Jews for the death of Christ.³² Titus, like Weland, was not himself a Christian, but he could be seen as God's instrument. So on the front of the casket the stories of Weland and the birth of Christ

²⁹ For a review of interpretations, see Abels, 'What has Weland to do with Christ?'; L. Webster, 'The Iconographic Programme of the Franks Casket', in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. J. Hawkes and S. Mills (Stroud, 1999), pp. 227–46, at pp. 230–4.

³⁰ J. Lang, 'The Imagery of the Franks Casket: Another Approach', in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. Hawkes and Mills, pp. 247–67.

³¹ Cronan, 'Beowulf, the Gaels', pp. 173–4.

³² Webster, 'Iconographic Programme', pp. 236–9; Lang, 'Imagery of the Franks Casket', pp. 249–51.

are shown with a horizontal division side by side, and on the back Titus and Weland are shown as avengers one above the other with a vertical divide, while what is probably a representation of the Temple (Christ?) intrudes into and subdivides both levels. There is not just one solution to what is being expressed in the four main scenes, but approval, if not equation, seems to be shown for two acts of revenge, a theme that played such a key role in the recorded lives of Germanic heroes in the Old English poetry that is our main source of knowledge for them in Anglo-Saxon England. Vengeance for Christ's death is not perhaps the element of his story that we (or Alcuin) would privilege over others, but one can see its appeal to an audience who enjoyed heroic verse and aspired to its ideals.

The Franks Casket is not the only positive reference to Weland. In the *Old English Boethius* Weland is praised for his *wisdom* and *cræft*,³³ both virtues that are repeatedly cited in that work and in other productions of the circle around King Alfred, who is seen as embodying them himself.³⁴ When we recall the unusual emphasis in Old English commentary of Christ as a *smiþ* and the son of a smith (rather than a carpenter),³⁵ the possibility of an equation of Weland and Christ on the Franks Casket begins to seem less outlandish. It may even be representative of a more extensive typology than surviving evidence might at first suggest and that may have been developed further in Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture, though in that

³³ *The Old English Boethius: an Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philisophiae*, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine, 2 vols (Oxford, 2009), I, xix, 283.

³⁴ N. Guentha Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany NY, 2005), especially pp. 87–114; D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 67 (Cambridge, 2007). I explore this connection in more detail in my Toller lecture 'Alfred and Weland', forthcoming as a publication.

³⁵ J. Bradley, 'St Joseph's Trade and Old English *Smiþ*', *Leeds Studies in English*, New Series 22 (1991), 21–42; V. Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 4 (Woodbridge, 2004), 165–6.

medium the emphasis was on Weland's escape after his revenge in his flying apparatus.³⁶ This aspect of Weland's story may also be alluded to on the front of the Franks Casket. The outlines of the flying frame may be visible behind the woman accompanying Beadohild to Weland's smithy, while to the right a figure, apparently strangling birds, may be gathering feathers for use with it.³⁷ On Anglo-Scandinavian crosses Weland is shown ascending in flight, and a recent find depicting Weland in flight from Uppåkra in Sweden may suggest that it was an image already established in Scandinavia.³⁸ In England that image may have received a reinterpretation that built on an existing link between Weland and Christ in Anglo-Saxon culture, but in which it was the ascension of both figures to escape earthy predicaments that was emphasized.

The Franks Casket is a unique artefact, probably produced in Northumbria c. 700,³⁹ but its assured iconography of the Germanic scenes may imply an established tradition which may not otherwise have survived because it was more commonly reproduced in more perishable materials. Whalebone boxes like the Franks Casket may have been rare, deluxe items, but one could imagine comparable wooden carvings of boxes or furniture that have not survived (with the exception of St Cuthbert's coffin, though that has only Christian and much simpler imagery).⁴⁰ Another medium that we know was of great importance, but of which little remains, was textiles. Wall-

³⁶ J. Lang, 'Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England', *JBA* 48 (1976), 83–94; R. N. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture* (London, 1980), pp. 103–16; L. Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: the Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture*, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages* 25 (Turnhout, 2012), 3–56.

³⁷ Kopár, *Iconography*, pp. 7–10.

³⁸ *Credo. Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, ed. C. Stiegemann et al., 2 vols (Petersberg, 2013), II, Katalog nos. 280, 331.

³⁹ Webster, 'Iconographic Programme', pp. 249–50.

⁴⁰ *The Relics of St Cuthbert*, ed. G. F. Battiscombe (Oxford, 1956); *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. G. Bonner et al. (Woodbridge, 1989).

hangings in particular must have lent themselves to extended depiction of narrative scenes, as we know from the later example of the Bayeux Tapestry.⁴¹ Gold-embroidered wall-hangings adorned the walls of Heorot,⁴² and decorative textiles were among the prestige items left in wills.⁴³ So it is conceivable that the mixture of Germanic, classical and Christian scenes depicted on the Franks Casket could have also appeared in other media in the halls of the elite of mid-Saxon England, including in the halls of bishops who would have entertained and had in their entourages laymen as well as clerics.

But if Weland might appear alongside Christ as a possible heroic type for him, did Ingeld? We have no positive evidence to that effect, but can note Weland linked to other heroes by their joint appearance, or allusions to them, in the repertoire of heroic poetry and the popular theme of revenge that honour required had to be taken whatever the consequences.⁴⁴ ‘Selre bið æghwæm / þæt he his freond wrece þone he fela murne’, as Beowulf says to Hrothgar.⁴⁵ Weland can be recognised on the Franks Casket because of his distinctive craft as a smith,⁴⁶ and from the depiction of elements of his story as told in *Deor*, and, with some regional variations, in German and Scandinavian versions of his legend.⁴⁷ In less detailed depictions of

⁴¹ C. R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art: a New Perspective* (Manchester, 1982), pp. 129–69.

⁴² *Beowulf* 994–6.

⁴³ The tenth-century *testatrix* Wynflaed, for instance, bequeathed several tapestries as well as bed-hangings, but unfortunately these are identified, as seems to have been the custom in wills, by size or by the rooms in which they were placed rather than by their subject matter: *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. D. Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930), no. 3, pp. 10–15.

⁴⁴ Abels, ‘What has Weland to do with Christ?’

⁴⁵ *Beowulf* 1384–5: ‘It is always better / to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning’, S. Heaney, *Beowulf: a New Translation* (London, 1999), p. 46.

⁴⁶ D.A. Hinton, ‘Anglo-Saxon Smiths and Myths’, in *Textual and Material Culture*, ed. Scragg, pp. 261–82.

⁴⁷ H. R. Ellis Davidson, ‘Weland the Smith’, *Folklore* 69 (1958), 145–59.

smiths in Anglo-Scandinavian sculptures, and in various depictions from the Scandinavian homelands, he can be less easy to distinguish from the Sigurd cycle or, indeed, from depictions of other smiths.⁴⁸ For Ingeld we do not have a distinct iconography nor know if there ever was one. Depictions of warriors in various media such as metalwork, coins and the occasional sculpture cannot be readily identified today, but could have been intended to recall Ingeld or other heroic leaders. Among the Gotland picture-stones are various complex warrior scenes which could well be allusions to heroic revenge legends.⁴⁹ These are particularly worth noting because on the Gotland picture-stone Ardre VIII there is a representation that seems to recall that of Weland on the Franks Casket.⁵⁰ If the iconography of Weland could have spread from England to Gotland (or possibly vice versa or via a common Scandinavian source) through any of the portable media that have been discussed, then it is possible that other heroic scenes on Gotland stones that are less easily decoded could also be evidence for a genre of Anglo-Saxon iconography that has been lost.

Alcuin's letter to the Anglo-Saxon bishop deplores life in his hall which, he believed, included the type of feasting and entertainments that presumably were also to be found in secular halls of the period. It was part of Alcuin's wider message to the Anglo-Saxon clergy that they should distinguish themselves more fully in dress and general behaviour from laymen.⁵¹ As he says at the end of the opening

⁴⁸ Kopár, *Iconography*, pp. 3–56.

⁴⁹ For example, I. Hammars, E. Nylén and J. Peder Lamm, *Stones, Ships and Symbols* (Stockholm, 1988), p. 63.

⁵⁰ Jörn Staecker, 'Heroes, Kings and Gods: Discovering Sagas on Gotlandic Picture-Stones', in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspective: Origins, Changes and Interactions*, ed. A. Andrén et al., *Vägar till Midgård* 8 (Lund, 2006), 363–8.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Alcuin's letters to Archbishop Eanbald of York (no. 114) and to Bishop Higbald of Lindisfarne (no. 20), in *Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Epist. 4 (Berlin, 1895), 166–70 and 56–8.

passage (section 4), the bishop's hall should be a place of quiet contemplation away from the hurly-burly of the outside world.⁵² He suspects though that in the halls of the bishop one might be more likely to eat and drink to excess,⁵³ be entertained by various performers and hear the singing of pagan songs. It may not just be with amplification of the general inappropriateness of secular entertainments in the hall of a man of God that he continues, but with allusion to some more specific examples. One allusion may be to genealogies that could be recited or composed which celebrated the descent of rulers, and perhaps other members of the elite, from great 'kings' of the past, some of whom were thinly disguised gods, the pagan *perditis nominetenus regibus* ('damned so-called kings').⁵⁴ Another appears to be to Christ and a Germanic hero being linked together in an inappropriate way, possibly with Ingeld portrayed as some sort of heroic type of Christ. Alcuin unfortunately does not spell out exactly the form such a pairing might have taken, but the Franks Casket demonstrates that such an alignment could have occurred on various visual media. Although it is tempting to suggest that Alcuin may have had in mind the textile hangings of an episcopal hall, the paragraph as a whole, beginning and ending with what it was appropriate to have read aloud at an episcopal banquet would rather suggest something spoken and heard. However Alcuin believed the pairing of Christ and Ingeld to have been made, he points us towards a creative form of reconciliation of the heroic and Christian worlds which must have been essential for the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon elites,⁵⁵ but which has left relatively little evidence in the surviving corpus of

⁵² See Garrison, 'Quid Hinieldus', p. 255, n. 27 for the meaning of *plateis*.

⁵³ As Alcuin indicates immediately before the passage cited at the beginning of this paper: Letter 124, ed. Dümmler, p. 183.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; trans. Garrison, 'Quid Hinieldus', p. 241.

⁵⁵ P. Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. S. Baxter (Oxford, 2006), pp. 106–34.

Ingeld, Weland and Christ

Anglo-Saxon texts. For that reason, it has seemed worth trying to pursue what might have lain behind his brief but resonant question, 'What has Ingeld to do with Christ?'

Balancing the books in the brave new world: getting uneven in
Vatnsdæla saga

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Vatnsdæla saga can be counted amongst the sub-genre of *Íslendingasögur* known as regional sagas. The story does not focus on a protagonist; rather, it follows several generations of a single family, whom the saga traces from their ancestral home in Norway before the time of Haraldr hárfagri to their establishment as one of the most eminent dynasties in northern Iceland. *Vatnsdæla saga* has been called ‘unique’ for the reason that it gives a similar attention to detail to all five of the generations involved.¹ Often the *Íslendingasögur* focus on one or two generations, squeezing ancestors and descendants of the protagonists into short narratives at the opening and close of the saga; *Vatnsdæla saga* assigns broadly similar lengths of narrative to each generation. The structuralist critic Tommy Danielsson characterized the saga as one in which chaos and darkness are overcome by stability and light through the events of the five individual generations.² Notwithstanding *Vatnsdæla saga*’s uniqueness, this is to some degree in accord with Richard Gaskin’s observation that the action of any family saga must begin with a disruption of the initial state of social equilibrium: “The narrative action is centered on individual characters whose behavior disturbs the hazy social equilibrium with which each saga begins—that “once-upon-a-time” aspect of literary beginnings’.³

The saga does not survive whole in a medieval manuscript any longer, owing to the loss of the fourteenth-century compilation

¹ T. Danielsson, *Om den isländska släktsagans uppbyggnad* (Stockholm, 1986), p. 61.

² *Ibid.*

³ R. Gaskin, ‘Network Dynamics in Saga and Society’, *SS* 77 (2005), 201–16, at p. 205.

Vatnshyrna, which was destroyed in the 1728 fire of Copenhagen. Nevertheless, a transcription of the text of *Vatnsdæla saga* was made from the medieval manuscript prior to its loss, and this copy is thought to preserve the fourteenth-century language and outlook of the original.⁴ This copy of Vatnshyrna and its related manuscripts form the basis of most editions, including the *Íslenzk fornrit* used here.⁵

This article focuses on a series of events that occur a little before the saga's mid-point and cover the overlap between the second and third generations. The events affecting the early generations in the saga are, unsurprisingly, characterized by folkloric elements and viking raids, before a heavy preoccupation with sorcery paves the way for the more familiar subject matter of the family sagas: power struggles, feuds inspired by illicit relationships and legal settlements. The second generation of the saga is the one that sees the family's move from Norway to Iceland. After supporting Haraldr hárfagri, the first king to attempt to unite Norway, Ingimundr Þorsteinsson is told by a seeress that his future lies in Iceland. Although he is reluctant to leave his established home and position as a close ally of the king,

⁴ Björn M. Ólsen, *Um Íslendingasögur: Kaflar úr Háskólafyrirlestrum*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal and Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Safn til Sögu Íslands og Íslenzkra Bókmennta* 6 (Reykjavík, 1937–9), 246. Björn here also seeks to prove the existence of an earlier written version of the saga through a comparison with other narratives. This approach has been shown by Gísli Sigurðsson to be frequently misleading in the light of our modern understanding of oral traditions: Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition, a Discourse on Method*, trans. N. Jones, Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature 2 (Cambridge, MA, 2004) [originally published as *Túlkun Íslendingasagna í ljósi munnlegrar hefðar: Tilgáta um aðferð*, *Rit* 56 (Reykjavík, 2002)], 309–20.

⁵ *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslenzk fornrit* 8 (Reykjavík, 1939), lvi–lvii. All references to the text are from this edition, hereafter referred to as *Vatn*, following the conventions of the Skaldic Poetry Project, <<http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=default&table=text&list=&val=Vatnsd%C5%93la+saga&type.x=-444&type.y=-97&type=search>>, accessed 16 July 2013.

Ingimundr is eventually coerced into moving to the brave new world where his contemporaries have already begun to settle. After a disagreement over fishing rights, a man named Hrolleifr kills Ingimundr and brings the story of the second generation to a close.

The third generation does not have a single protagonist, but rather follows the contrasting but complementary personalities of Ingimundr's sons: wise, patient Þorsteinn and impetuous, brave Jökull. The other sons of Ingimundr also feature (Þórir and Högni), but the text downplays their importance in favour of Þorsteinn and Jökull. The brothers avenge their father's death then confront and defeat three more adversaries, during the course of which they lose one of their number.

EPISODIC CONFLICT

Vatnsdæla saga is an oddity in a number of ways; in tone it is unusual, with striking portrayals of the near-prescient noble heathen and references to its characters' mental processes.⁶ Its structure is also unconventional when we think of the usual tit-for-tat nature of feud in the *Íslendingssögur*. In the 1960s Theodore Andersson proposed a six-point conflict scheme for the sagas that required a climactic death or battle as part of the narrative, but *Vatnsdæla saga* (along with a number of other sagas) as a whole does not fit this scheme.⁷ Tommy Danielsson's analysis of the minutiae of events in the saga makes it clear that rather than featuring a single crescendo, we might say that *Vatnsdæla saga* has a climactic arc to each mini-conflict or disruptive

⁶ See Þorsteinn Ingimundarson's eulogy for his father: *Vatn*, p. 62 and Þorsteinn Ketilsson's doubt when seeking the robber Jökull: *Vatn*, p. 8.

⁷ T. M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: an Analytic Reading*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 28 (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 221. Andersson has since acknowledged the limitations of this structural approach in his *The Partisan Muse in the Early Icelandic Sagas (1200–1250)*, *Islandica* 55 (Ithaca, NY, 2012), 3.

episode.⁸ As a result of this, the actions of a single troublesome individual at the start of the saga tend not to have repercussions later in the narrative. The powerful characters that Gaskins saw shaping the action of *Njáls saga* and *Sturlunga saga* are not generally present outside the main family in *Vatnsdæla saga*.⁹ Disruptive figures appear briefly then are dealt with—there is rarely any prolonged conflict.

What usually drives prolonged conflict in the sagas is the one-upmanship inherent in the notion of ‘getting even’. This manifests itself as revenge and counter-revenge. Once one side has made their move, the other side must reciprocate if the elusive concept of ‘honour’ is to be maintained. Neither side wants to be the first to fail to respond to provocation. As William Ian Miller has noted, once a conflict has begun, in order for peaceful equilibrium to be restored, one side must come out so decisively on top that the other side cannot make another move.¹⁰ It must also be stressed that the word ‘equilibrium’ does not describe symmetry of equality, either at the beginning of the narrative, or at the end: what is considered to be a balanced state of affairs by many sagas is in fact the state whereby certain characters hold a position of honour, whilst others do not (at least to the same degree). Either through monetary compensation, the outlawry of their enemies or committing a killing that will not be avenged (or indeed conceding/voluntarily relinquishing a viable claim to compensation), a party can restore the uneasy balance of society by making sure there is a definitive winner and a loser. ‘Getting even’ in the sagas is about bringing stability back to the society rather than about making sure that everyone emerges from a conflict as equals.

Thus it is easy to see how prolonged conflict in many family sagas involves ever-increasing numbers of distant relatives on each side of a feud, dragging in allies and interested parties from all

⁸ Danielsson, *Isländska släktsagans uppbyggnad*, pp. 51–61.

⁹ Gaskins, ‘Network Dynamics’.

¹⁰ W. I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990), p. 302.

around. In *Vatnsdæla saga* no single conflict is extended throughout the narrative; when other characters or family members are brought into a disagreement they tend to have very small roles and they tend not to be too far removed from the central players. Given that this is the case, it must be asked whether there is something different in the nature of the conflicts in *Vatnsdæla saga*—something that does not lead to an extended feud. We can surmise that it must be easier to reach a conclusive resolution in these conflicts, that is one that restores a social balance that is not at risk of disruption by a future counter-move.

This likely has much to do with who is involved in the conflicts. It is frequently stated that of all the family sagas, *Vatnsdæla saga* shows the clearest polarization in its characterization of good *vs.* evil, because its narrative purpose is to glorify the chieftains of the region and their family.¹¹ However, whilst the characterization of the disruptive figures in *Vatnsdæla saga* is somewhat unsubtle, the motivation of the heroes in dealing with them is not as straightforward as it might appear. In order to explain this, it is necessary to return to the language of equilibrium in the sagas.

The language of imbalance

A common term for the sort of character who provokes or prolongs a period of conflict in the family sagas is *ójafnaðarmaðr*, literally ‘uneven man’, though perhaps better translated as ‘inequitable man’. The concept of ‘evenness’ suggested by this term meshes with an underlying concern about social balance, a concern that is embedded within the language of the sagas themselves. As Miller puts

¹¹ See, for example, Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas, Iceland's Medieval Literature*, trans. P. Foote (Reykjavik, 2007), p. 233; Danielsson, *Isländska släktsagans uppbyggnad*, p. 91; J. Büschens, ‘*Vatnsdæla saga* and Onomastics: the Case of Ingimundr Þorsteinsson’, in *Pre-print papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th–15th August 2009*, ed. A. Ney et al., 2 vols. (Gävle, 2009), I, 160–66, at p. 163.

it, ‘the notion of balance itself [is] one of the key organizing symbols of the culture’.¹² With this in mind, Miller has drawn special attention to the relationship between the word *jafn* (‘even’) and the context of feud, observing the inherent ambiguity in processes such as the *mannjafnaðr* (‘equalling of men’) and how the *ójafnaðarmaðr* embodies such a threat to saga society.¹³

Whether it is in initiating a conflict or leading to a settlement, it is ‘evenness’ that is at stake. Problems arise when a man is deemed to be ‘uneven’, either in the context of a verbal reckoning, or as an individual who has removed himself from society’s rules. Problems are resolved when parties agree to even out their losses by counting insults, damage, theft and bodies off against one another. Paradoxically, the balance of compensation is often reached when the loss of one man is deemed to be so great that the loss of two or three ‘lesser’ men is equivalent. This is the contradiction at the heart of ‘evenness’ in the sagas: to get even is to restore stability and have the final say in a conflict; it is good to get even and to be seen to be getting even. But one person’s definition of ‘even’ is not another’s; the one who makes the first move in a conflict runs the risk of being considered ‘uneven’ if they threaten the position of another individual. Those who intend to ‘get uneven’ rather than get even with their enemies may be considered to play outside the rules of saga society. Of course, it is clear that ‘evenness’ and stability in the sagas are matters of perspective; the *ójafnaðarmaðr* most commonly works against the protagonists and is no doubt defined as ‘uneven’ because of this.

Thus, as noted, the settlement of conflict ends in one-upmanship, just as the initiation of conflict often begins with one-upmanship; it is just that the resolution ideally restores the social balance to what it was beforehand. So what is to be made of the man who starts all the problems? Although a familiar concept to saga

¹² Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, p. 277.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 301–2.

scholars, the *ójafnaðarmaðr* as depicted by the sagas is rarely discussed in any detail or specific nature; passing references have been made to *ójafnaðarmenn* and they are generally characterized as the throw-away baddies of the saga world. This is most evident in Andersson's dismissal of the issue: 'it should ... be clear that the frequently recurring figure of the *ójafnaðarmaðr* is always harshly judged in the sagas. To document this at length would involve overkill'.¹⁴ The fact that the sagas generally condemn these figures is not to be argued with in this short paper; rather I am interested in what makes them 'uneven' men in the first place.¹⁵ Miller has observed that during the initiation of conflict 'the burden of categorization fell to the wrongdoer'.¹⁶ What this means is that depending on the social status and family connections of the 'wrongdoer', in relation to those whom he is perceived to have wronged, he could be categorized in different ways by society. Given what we know of the polarization of morals in *Vatnsdæla saga*, it might be assumed that the central family would judge any 'wrongdoer' as socially inferior to them. Thus it is the central family of the saga who choose how to categorize and hence

¹⁴ T. M. Andersson, 'The Displacement of the Heroic Ideal in the Family Sagas', *Speculum* 45 (1970), 575–93, at p. 508. See also Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, p. 67; J. Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Family Saga* (Los Angeles, 1982), p. 30; P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortalling og ære: Studier i Islændingesagaerne* (Aarhus, 1993), pp. 195–7.

¹⁵ The condemnation of such figures raises the question of who terms them *ójafnaðarmenn*: the saga, a character in the saga, or the reports of opinion at large. When one character addresses another with such a term we must take the situation at hand into account, as with Ingimundr's view of the prospective conflict with Hrolleifr. When the saga introduces a character as such we may ask whether the saga supports the view of a particular set of characters over another, as *Vatnsdæla saga* clearly takes the side of the Ingimundarsynir. Finally, although not relevant to this saga, when it is presented as the view of people at large we may ask why the saga may wish to distance itself from making such an overt judgement, and whether it is at odds with the saga's own professed attitude towards the person in question.

¹⁶ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, p. 67.

deal with disruptive figures in the saga—it is they who decide what makes a man ‘uneven’ and they who judge that the social equilibrium has been altered.

VATNSDÆLA SAGA

There are two instances where words including the element *ójafn* (‘uneven’) are used in *Vatnsdæla saga*, both of which are connected with the second generation. Whilst one of these refers outright to an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, the other is used by Ingimundr, the chieftain and patriarch of the Vatnsdalr family, to describe the ‘uneven’ nature of a conflict between his sons and their opponent, Hrolleifr. Through an interpretation of that passage we can unlock the saga’s clear message about what makes a man ‘uneven’ in the eyes of the central family. First, at this point it will be helpful to give an idea of the order of events, as described in Figure 1.

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| <p>Ch. 14: Ingimundr arrives in Iceland.</p> <p>Ch. 15: Ingimundr settles in Vatnsdalr.</p> <p>Ch. 16: Ingimundr travels to Norway and back for building materials. Others in the neighbourhood are introduced, including Þórólfr heljarskinn, an <i>ójafnaðarmaðr</i>.</p> <p>Ch. 17: Ingimundr tricks a Norwegian merchant into giving him a valuable sword.</p> <p>Ch. 18: Hrolleifr and his sorceress mother Ljót seek accommodation with their kinsman Sæmundr, an old acquaintance of Ingimundr.</p> <p>Ch. 19: Hrolleifr causes trouble and kills a local man’s son.</p> <p>Ch. 20: In order to avoid the death of his kinsman in a vengeful attack, Sæmundr sends Hrolleifr to live with Ingimundr.</p> <p>Ch. 21: Hrolleifr and the Ingimundarsynir do not get on; Hrolleifr and his mother are moved to their own farm across the river.</p> <p>Ch. 22: In a dispute over fishing rights, a dispute likely to result in <i>ójafn</i>, Hrolleifr kills Ingimundr.</p> |
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Chs. 23–7: The Ingimundarsynir seek revenge for their father’s death and eventually overcome Hrolleifr and his mother.
Ch. 28: A sorcerer, Þórólfr sleggja, is defeated by the brothers.
Ch. 29: A kinsman of the brothers and a sorcerer called Þorsteinn skinnhúfa become embroiled in trouble with the brothers. Although the brothers defeat them in a battle, Hogni Ingimundarson is killed.
Ch. 30: Þórólfr heljarskinn, mentioned earlier, starts to cause trouble; the brothers kill him.

Figure 1: Summary of events discussed in this paper. Chapter numbers are from the *Íslenskt fornrit* edition.

Þórólfr heljarskinn is the *ójafnaðarmadr* of the saga and on his introduction—as per the coded language of the sagas—we might expect him to cause trouble immediately. Instead, the saga delays his episode in favour of three other encounters that revolve around similar themes of balance and reciprocity. Of these four incidents, two involve fairly pathetic villains, both of whom are called Þórólfr, whilst two are a little more complex. The first episode, involving Hrolleifr and his mother, does not quite merit being called a ‘prolonged conflict’ or a feud, but it is perhaps the closest that *Vatnsdæla saga* gets to this form of narrative.

Hrolleifr is the nephew of Ingimundr’s foster-brother Sæmundr. Sæmundr’s biological brother, it appears, conceived this son with the sorceress Ljót but does not feature in the saga himself. Sæmundr judges that Hrolleifr does not have many favourable traits and blames Ljót and her side of the family for this.¹⁷ Although Hrolleifr is not popular, he is tolerated because of his kinship with Sæmundr until he kills the brother of a woman he has been seeing outside wedlock. Whilst Sæmundr appears to be ambivalent about the prospect of reprisals against Hrolleifr, the local men wisely predict that he would

¹⁷ *Vatn*, p. 50.

feel differently were they actually to kill his nephew. In response to this, Sæmundr calls on his old friend Ingimundr and passes his troublesome relatives on to him.¹⁸

Ingimundr's sons and Hrolleifr get on terribly; the sons feel that Hrolleifr is a bully who does not pull his weight around the farm. Eventually Hrolleifr and his mother are given their own patch of land across the river from Ingimundr's farm. A dispute over fishing rights results in Hrolleifr killing Ingimundr. Before he dies, the old patriarch manages to warn Hrolleifr to leave the district before Ingimundr's sons come in search of revenge. Sæmundr is dead by this time, so Hrolleifr imposes himself upon Sæmundr's son. Eventually the sons of Ingimundr catch up with both Hrolleifr and his mother and manage to overcome them.

Hrolleifr

Before Ingimundr's death, when his sons complain about Hrolleifr denying them their fishing rights, Ingimundr advises them to settle with him peacefully: 'gerið þér svá vel, at þér sættizk á, því at þér eiguð ójofnu til at verja'.¹⁹ Ingimundr's desire to reach a peaceful settlement stems from a combination of factors. In the first place, he is a noble heathen, but unlike most noble heathens he even manages to rise above the desire for revenge.²⁰ He is also an established man amongst the first generation of settlers; he knows Hrolleifr's uncle well and presumably knew his father; thus there is nothing for Ingimundr to prove—and indeed something to lose—by pursuing Hrolleifr aggressively. What Ingimundr stands to lose differs from what his sons stand to lose in a conflict with Hrolleifr; the outward expression of his grand generosity and the thanks that he receives for

¹⁸ *Vatn*, pp. 53–6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59: 'It would be well for you to look for a settlement, because you have uneven amounts to expend,' my translation. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

²⁰ Büschens, 'The Case of Ingimundr', p. 163.

this are Ingimundr's *raison d'être*. This can be seen most clearly in his encounter with the Norwegian merchant, Hrafn, where it is stated that Ingimundr habitually had first choice of goods from newly arrived merchants in exchange for his hospitality.²¹ Ingimundr extracted what he considered to be his reward for this hospitality from Hrafn and, in the case of Hrolleifr, one must assume that he is happy to play the long game in search of eventual gratitude for the help he has offered Hrolleifr and Ljótr. This susceptibility to calls upon his generosity can be seen in his initial conversation with Sæmundr concerning the troublesome pair: 'synsemi mun þér í þykkja ok eigi stórmannligt, ef ek synja'.²² He then goes on to mention his equally proud and volatile sons, showing awareness of the different reception Hrolleifr will receive from them.

Ingimundr's sons are not as settled in their position as Ingimundr feels he is; they are first generation Icelanders who have a wary eye on their father's generous parcelling out of land to newcomers. Compared to Ingimundr's stubborn notion of generosity, perhaps harking back to his grander lifestyle in Norway, the Ingimundarsynir have more pressing worries concerning land and power. Predictably, their attempt to negotiate with Hrolleifr on behalf of their father goes poorly. When Ingimundr arrives to calm things down, he warns Hrolleifr: 'gakk ór ánni, Hrolleifr, ok hygg at, hvar þér hæfir'.²³ This is translated by Andrew Wawn as 'leave the river, Hrolleif, and think about what is right and proper for you'.²⁴ Wawn's translation here conceals Ingimundr's apparently knowing word-play: the verb *hæfa* can mean 'to be fitting' or 'to be due', but it also means 'to hit'—

²¹ *Vatn*, p. 47.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 56: 'You will think me disobliging and ungenerous if I refuse'.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁴ A. Wawn, 'The Saga of the People of Vatnsdal', in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders Including 49 Tales*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, 5 vols. (Reykjavik, 1997), IV, 1–66, at p. 29.

‘leave the river, Hrolleifr, and think about what you might hit’, Ingimundr says, just before Hrolleifr’s spear strikes him.²⁵

The assertion in the earlier passage, Ingimundr’s warning to his sons, is that what they will need to expend and what Hrolleifr will need to expend in a dispute are not even amounts. It is not specified whether money, goods, honour or lives are referred to here, nor who has more to expend. It might be thought that Ingimundr is advising against aggression because Hrolleifr will need to exert himself so much to cause any real trouble that he is not worth bothering with, whilst the brothers’ position is never in danger. However, it is more likely that Ingimundr is warning his sons that they have more to lose in a dispute, whereas Hrolleifr has little to lose. This interpretation chimes with two more passages from the episode: Þorsteinn Ingimundarson warns Hrolleifr ‘ef vér nám eigi réttu af þér; þá má vera, at fleiri gjaldi’²⁶ and Ingimundr’s slave boy admonishes Hrolleifr for killing his master ‘þú hefir þat gort, at vér munum aldri bœtr bíða’.²⁷ By pursuing an aggressive agenda against Hrolleifr, the brothers provoke him into throwing a spear which kills their father. This effectively signs Hrolleifr’s own death warrant, but his death could never be considered equal payment for the death of Ingimundr.

Now that we see how ‘unevenness’ was perceived to exist in a conflict with Hrolleifr, we may also observe that words connected with evenness and the notion of reciprocity permeate this whole section of the saga. It does not need to be stressed that Hrolleifr is a troublesome individual and commits a number of anti-social deeds and crimes, yet even so, the language used to characterize both him and his mother is surprisingly specific and consistent throughout this

²⁵ G. T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (Oxford, 1910, rpt. New York, 2004), cf. *hæfa*.

²⁶ *Vatn*, p. 60: ‘If we don’t get our rights from you ... [i]t might be the case that more shall pay’.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61: ‘You have done that thing for which we may never ask for compensation’.

episode, both before and after he kills his first victim. Here is how he is introduced: ‘Hrolleifr var allra manna sterkastr ok fór illa með afli sínu við sér minni menn, var hann glettinn ok ágangssamr ok launaði illu gott með ráði móður sinnar’.²⁸ The warning about Hrolleifr’s abuse of his strength might naturally make us think of the chieftains who become *ójafnaðarmenn*, such as Hrafnkell Freysgoði. In some cases it has been assumed, for example by Jesse Byock, that this is the essence of ‘unevenness’; the *ójafnaðarmaðr* is someone who abuses his power and lords it over poorer, weaker men.²⁹ However, that is not exactly the case, or at least that is not the whole of it, with the characters in *Vatnsdæla saga*. Rather than emphasising Hrolleifr’s strength, the saga continues with the idea that he is a man who repays good with bad, and the themes of repayment and reciprocity occur time and again in connection with Hrolleifr. A number of examples of the manner in which he is characterized are given below:

Sæmundr and his son Geirmundr discuss Hrolleifr’s conduct as their guest

‘Þessi frændi okkarr leggur fram vistarlaun þau, sem hann mun nægst til hafa, en qðrum sé óhaldkvæm, þat er heitan ok harðyrði með óþyrmiligum meðferðum’.

‘Sæmundr kvað hann víst verr launa vistina en stofnat var’.³⁰

Ingimundr comes to the same conclusion

‘Illa gerir þú, Hrolleifr, er þú stillir eigi skap þitt ok launar eigi góðu gott’.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50: ‘Hrolleifr was the strongest of men and misused his power against weaker men, he taunted and was aggressive and returned evil for good under his mother’s influence’.

²⁹ Byock, *Feud*, p. 30.

³⁰ *Vatn*, p. 50: ‘This kinsman of ours gives out his board-wages, with that which he must have enough of, but would not be useful in others, that is threats and hard words with a lack of forbearance’; ‘Sæmundr said he [Hrolleifr] had certainly repaid his lodgings worse than expected’.

As do his sons and farm workers

‘Synir Ingimundar tóku því stórilla, er Hrolleifr sat í kostum þeira, en miðlaði illt eina í mót’.

‘Illa gerir þú þat, svá mikils góðs sem Ingimundr er makligr frá þer’.³²

‘Ef vér nám eigi réttu af þér; þá má vera, at fleiri gjaldi’.³³

‘Þú hefir þat gort, at vér munum aldri bætr bíða’.³⁴

Reciprocity is key in the society of the family sagas, and not just in gift-giving; the parallels with ‘getting even’ in a blood feud are clear. No one wants to let the other person have the last say, either in vengeance or in public displays of generosity. *Vatnsdæla saga* presents Hrolleifr as an ingrate who gives nothing worthwhile back to his family or to society in general, and it is not too much of a stretch to equate this unevenness with the behaviour of the ‘wrongdoer’ in the set-up of a feud. It typifies behaviour that is viewed as unacceptable by saga society. One may think back again to Ingimundr’s insistence on having payment for his hospitality towards Hrafn: Hrafn tries to imply that Iceland is a backwater and Ingimundr’s power is insignificant, to which Ingimundr responds by decisively showing Hrafn who wields power on his farm.³⁵ In this instance, Hrafn tries to position himself as somehow above the chieftain, as Hrolleifr implicitly does by refusing to acknowledge others’ generosity as anything more than what is due to him. This is closer to the truth of Hrafnkell’s behaviour in his own saga: he is a chieftain who does not pay compensation, and this is not just an abuse of power, but a

³¹ *Vatn*, p. 56: ‘You do ill, Hrolleifr, when you do not calm your mood and don’t repay good with good’.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 58: ‘The sons of Ingimundr took this extremely badly, that Hrolleifr sat amidst their good stores, but shared only evil in return’; ‘That is badly done, when Ingimundr is deserving of so much good from you’.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 60; see translation above, p. 26, n. 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61; see discussion and translation above, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 47–9.

refusal to acknowledge the status of those he is dealing with, as he puts himself above and beyond the social norms.

Hrolleifr assumes that his behaviour should not matter because his family is obliged to take him in. When he is disabused of this notion he takes to insulting those who expect better behaviour from him, and the words that he uses show that he thinks himself greater than other men; for instance, *þrall* ('thrall') is an insult he distributes liberally. As well as the language of repayment, the language of balance inevitably comes into this episode: 'Hrolleifr kvazk nú launat Oddi þat,—“er hann ... kvað mik at öllu ósamjafnan dugandi mönnum”';³⁶ 'Helt Hrolleifr sik í öllu til jafns við sonu Ingimundar'.³⁷ It thus becomes clear that despite the fact that he misuses his strength, Hrolleifr is insecure about his status in society and is not a politically powerful man in the vein of a tyrannical chieftain. Ingimundr's sons fear that his ambitions are to oust their family from the chieftaincy and take it as his own, although all we know is that Hrolleifr refuses to share the river with anyone. To some extent it does not matter whether it is his intention to become chieftain; rather it matters that Ingimundr's sons assume that to be his intention. Hrolleifr the wrongdoer is thus categorized as a man getting above his station by the fact that in a 'balanced' world his social status is perceived to be below that of the sons of Ingimundr.

The language of this episode is notable because even without it we would know that Hrolleifr was troublesome: he beats farmhands, seduces an unmarried woman, kills her brother and has a sorceress for a mother. Individually some of these may be excusable, but together they paint a definitive picture. Yet what seems to perturb the saga's heroes, rather than any of these physical manifestations of ill-nature, is the fact that he does not value the generosity of others. This

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55: 'Hrolleifr said he would now repay Oddr for that—“when he said I was not worthy of comparison to all brave men”'.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57: 'Hrolleifr considered himself equal in all ways with the sons of Ingimundr'.

is ultimately his downfall—he does not assign significance to Ingimundr’s warning and by thinking neither of what is proper, nor what he might hit, he makes himself a certain target for the sons of Ingimundr.

It is of course obvious that this would be a central problem in any society. How can you live in a society with a man such as Hrolleifr, who takes but never gives—or who only repays good with bad? The second generation in *Vatnsdæla saga* takes it for granted that Hrolleifr will respect their word because their power is established. Ingimundr and his foster-brother Sæmundr bring their past with them to Iceland and the saga implies that, although reduced in status somewhat, Ingimundr seeks to replicate his life as it was in Norway.³⁸ The next generation of Icelanders does not have such close ties or such complacency about their position in society—as demonstrated by the brothers’ anxiety about Hrolleifr’s intentions towards the chieftaincy. Thus the third generation of the central family in *Vatnsdæla saga* recognizes that Hrolleifr will never back down and they perceive him as a threat to their position in a way that their father would not have done.³⁹

The next few episodes in the saga that take place during the rule of the third generation—Ingimundr’s sons—continue to emphasize the importance of reciprocity and compensation as the brothers cement their position in the district. Nevertheless, the lesson has been learnt from their encounter with Hrolleifr: something needed to be done, but not at the expense of their father’s life. If they enter into a conflict, they must be sure that they can get even, or make things even once more, with antagonists who make things uneven.

³⁸ *Vatn*, p. 40.

³⁹ This could also be due to the ambitions and strong wills of the Ingimundarsynir, as suggested by Gaskins, ‘Network Dynamics’, p. 211. This is a topic for future research in my thesis, however, so it will not be explored in this article.

Other conflicts

The next trouble-maker to upset the balance in the district is Þórólfr sleggja, an isolated figure guarded by an army of supernaturally enhanced cats. Unlike Hrolleifr, Þórólfr has no followers or family to help him—just his cats. He is said by locals to be ‘inn mesti óspekðarmaðr, bæði var hann þjófr ok þó um annat stórilla fallinn’, and they go to their chieftain looking for help.⁴⁰ Þorsteinn initially refuses, saying that he would rather spare his men than pit them against Þórólfr. Clearly he feels that this may be another contest with ‘uneven’ stakes. Nevertheless, his honour is invoked and he is persuaded, along with his brothers, to go to Þórólfr’s dwelling. Eventually the villain is smoked out and Þórólfr kills himself and a Norwegian follower of the brothers. Þorsteinn claims Þórólfr’s silver as compensation—in contrast to Ingimundr’s death, for which, as the saga states, no compensation could be sought. ‘Stórilla hefir nú tekizk, er Austmaðrinn minn hefir týnzk, en þat mun bóta, at endask mun fé Þórólfs at bæta hann’.⁴¹ The implication nevertheless remains that a life for a life in this instance (nameless minor character though the Norwegian is) would not have been satisfactory to Þorsteinn: only with the silver can he feel that the loss was worthwhile.

The episode that comes next involves another magician, called Þorgrímr skinnhúfa. Þorgrímr incites a relative of the brothers, Már, to hide the discovery of a fertile patch of land that borders the

⁴⁰ *Vatn*, p. 72: ‘the most imprudent man, he was both a thief and yet in other ways disposed to great evil’. *Ibid.*, p. 73: ‘Fóru menn nú til Þorsteins ok sǫgðu honum sín vandráði ok létu til hans koma um alla heraðsstjórn, sǫgðu Þórólfr frá mǫrgum stólit hafa ok gǫrt svá mart ómannligt annat’ (‘Men now went to Þorsteinn and told him of their trouble, and allowed that all the district government was in his hands, and said that Þórólfr had stolen from many people and done much else that was unbecoming’).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75: ‘A great evil has now occurred, that my Norwegian companion has been killed, and it will have to suffice, that ultimately Þórólfr’s money will be compensation for him’.

property of Ingimundarsynir. They see this deception as tantamount to robbery and the language of repayment surfaces again—‘Sagði Jökull þat mikil firn, ef menn skyldu ræna þá þar í dalnum, — “ok dregsk sú mannfýla mjök óþarfi til, hann Þorgrímr skinnhúfa, at reita oss, ok væri hæfiligt, at hann tæki gjöld fyrir”’.⁴² In another example of a mini-arc of events typical of longer feuds, with another self-contained set of aggressors and conclusions, matters lead to a battle between the two sides, during which one of the sons of Ingimundr, Hogni, is killed. Following this, an equalling of compensation takes place via a *mannjafnaðr*; as one would expect, Hogni’s death merits a great deal of balancing out and compensation.

Bernadine McCreesh has noted that in *Vatnsdæla saga* the accusation of sorcery can be interpreted as a simple excuse for murder—later in the narrative an inconvenient bid for the chieftaincy is put down because its instigator is said to be a sorcerer, so no one will mind if he is killed.⁴³ The same phenomenon might well be behind the events described in this passage. Þorgrímr provides the justification for the brothers to become involved in a dispute with a family member and although he does not die, it is he who calls for the brothers to be given self-judgement. This allows Þorsteinn to ensure that they have adequate compensation for the loss of their brother—and to make sure that everyone else involved knows who makes the decisions in the district.

Er þat nú gørð mín, at jafnt skal víg Høgna, bróður míns, ok ákvámur þær, er fengu menn Más, smár ok stórar. Hrómundr skal sekr vera milli Hrutafjarðarár ok Jøkulsár í

⁴² *Vatn*, pp. 76–7: ‘Jökull said that was an utter abomination, that men should rob them right there in the valley—“and this worthless rascal, Þorgrímr skinnhúfa, adds to his gratuitous irritation of us, and it would be fitting if he were rewarded for this”’.

⁴³ B. McCreesh, ‘The Structure of *Vatnsdæla saga*’, *SBVS* 34 (2010), 75–86, at pp. 81–2.

Skagafirði fyrir víg Høgna, en hafa ekki fyrir ørkuml sín. Már skal eiga Hjallaland, því at ór hans landi at eins má upp ganga, en gjalda oss bræðrum hundrað silfrs. Þorgrímr skinnhúfa skal ekki hafa fyrir sína ákvámu, ok er hann þó verra verðr.⁴⁴

In terms of the ‘evenness’ of the stakes here, the fact that Þorsteinn obtains self-judgement after the battle is evidence enough that the brothers picked this fight well. Even though one of them is killed in battle, his death means that the other brothers feel no need to answer for the injuries that they inflicted on others. In a typically one-sided result of the *mannjafnaðr*, Høgni’s death is equivalent to every injury suffered by the opposing side, it justifies two outlawries and although the contentious land that began the dispute stays with Már, he must nevertheless pay the Ingimundarsynir for it. The loss of a brother thus seems to be considered worth the benefits of self-judgement; the sons of Ingimundr became involved in the conflict for personal gain and they feel that despite a death on their side, they have achieved their goal.

Finally, we come to the saga’s only explicit *ójafnaðarmaðr*, initially introduced even before Hrolleifr reared his ugly head: ‘Þórólfr hét maðr ok var kallaðr heljarskinn; hann nam land í Forsæludal; hann var ójafnaðarmaðr mikill ok óvinsæll’.⁴⁵ When the narrative returns to him, his lack of popularity sees Þorsteinn Ingimundarson—the

⁴⁴ *Vatn*, p. 81: ‘It is now my judgement, that the killing of Høgni, my brother, shall be equal to the wounds that were received by Már’s men, both big and small. Hrómundr shall be banned from the land between Hrútafjarðará and Jökulsá in Skagafjörðr for the killing of Høgni, and he shall receive nothing for his disfigurement. Már shall have Hjallaland, because one might only reach it via his land, but he shall pay us brothers one hundred of silver. Þorgrímr skinnhúfa shall have nothing for his injury; indeed he deserves something worse’.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46: ‘Þórólfr was the name of a man and he was known as heljarskinn; he took land in Forsæludal; he was an extremely inequitable man and unpopular’.

responsible chieftain—remove him from his farm and drive him out of the area. This obliges Þórólfr to turn to thievery—‘[Þórólfr] lagðisk á fé manna ok gerðisk inn mesti þjófr’—and he accumulates a band of criminals around him.⁴⁶ Thus Þorsteinn’s troubles are increased, but he now has the justification needed to besiege Þórólfr and his compatriots, which results in the anticlimactic and somewhat pitiable death of Þórólfr, sobbing in a bog under Jökull’s blade.⁴⁷

It is notable that in the previous episodes the brothers acted on provocation or because of the promise of material reward, but in this case Þorsteinn needs no encouragement. As soon as Þórólfr is said to arrive in the district, Þorsteinn tells him to leave and when Þórólfr sets up a band of robbers elsewhere, the brothers immediately besiege the fortress. Unlike a later episode in the saga, in which the treasure recovered from a band of thieves is mentioned, this episode ends with no reward except the ‘cleansing’ of the district.⁴⁸ To recall the language of the dispute with Hrolleifr, in terms of the stakes involved, the brothers have judged that they have more to lose in allowing him to live in their district than in attacking him.

CONCLUSIONS

In his interpretation of the saga, Tom Shippey points out that on balance the disputes discussed in this article all lead to a land-gain for the sons of Ingimundr, in the form of the farms emptied of sorcerers and ne’er-do-wells.⁴⁹ They also all involve robbery of one sort or

⁴⁶ *Vatn*, p. 82: ‘[Þórólfr] took men’s goods and became a great thief’.

⁴⁷ The scene is somewhat reminiscent of the siege on the den of thieves in *Eyrbyggja saga*, which is planned with the intention of killing Óspakr Kjallaksson, another *ójafnaðarmaðr*. *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslensk fornrit 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), 157–68.

⁴⁸ Danielsson, *Isländska släktsagans uppbyggnad*, p. 91; *Vatn*, pp. 107–9.

⁴⁹ T. Shippey, ‘Towards an Interrogation of *Vatnsdæla saga*’, in *Wannarstræti (alla leið til Íslands) lagt Andrew Wawn 65 ára 27. október 2009*, ed. R. Cook et al. (Reykjavík, 2009), pp. 68–71.

another—Hrolleifr denies the brothers their fishing rights, Þórólfr sleggja is said to be a thief, Þorgrímr skinnhúfa encourages Már to keep all of the profits from the new pasture and Þórólfr heljarskinn is also a thief. In the later law-code of Iceland, *Grágás*—although it is far removed from the time in which *Vatnsdæla saga* purports to be set—the seriousness of theft as a crime is clear. Just as medieval societies condemned concealed killings over openly announced killings, so the concealed removal of property could not be abided.⁵⁰ A false accusation of theft was slander according to *Grágás*, demonstrating just how damaging it was to be known as a thief.⁵¹ Theft is an act that flagrantly ignores the reciprocal nature of saga society, as Hrolleifr’s actions ignore the generosity of those around him.

Miller described the elusive concept of honour in the sagas as ‘relations of reciprocity with other honourable people’.⁵² In these terms it might be said that Ingimundr assumes that other people will see how honourable he is and try to rise in honour to meet his generosity; meanwhile his sons assume the worst of their opponents, that they must be less honourable than them and are therefore untrustworthy. That the Ingimundarsynir are correct in this where their father is mistaken is perhaps a product of his romantic, viking background compared to the necessity that they face of holding onto the land their father claimed against other ambitious settlers. Ingimundr may have claimed the land, but his sons must cleanse it before later generations can consolidate their political power. During the course of cleansing the land—or acquiring new property depending upon one’s perspective—the Ingimundarsynir become acutely aware of the importance of compensation and balance. From the time that they take over the chieftaincy from their father, they

⁵⁰ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, p. 89.

⁵¹ *Early Laws of Iceland, Grágás: The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from Other Manuscripts*, ed. and trans. A. Dennis, P. Foote and R. Perkins, The University of Manitoba Press Icelandic Studies 3 and 5, 2 vols. (Winnipeg, 2000), II, 177–82.

⁵² Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, p. 303.

learn to pick their fights better and to ensure that any losses on their side will be covered by what they stand to gain.

The link between *ójafnaðarmenn* and compensation has long been recognized in terms of the elite *ójafnaðarmenn*—a chieftain who does not pay compensation for his killings is usually an *ójafnaðarmaðr*—but compensation is not just something sought by the þingmenn from their chieftain; rather, it is linked to the reciprocal dealings of everyday life and an *ójafnaðarmaðr* can be someone who denies anyone repayment for any good deed or gesture.⁵³ *Vatnsdæla saga* provides ample evidence for the way in which characters of lower status could be defined as *ójafnaðarmenn* and it is my intention to examine the connection noted in this saga in an interpretation of other *ójafnaðarmenn*. This forms the basis of my ongoing thesis research and findings from other sagas, however, are so far preliminary. Nevertheless, an emphasis on the importance of reciprocity might be observed in *Grettis saga* at the mention of *ójafnaðr*, specifically where Þórir Rauðskeggi and Hallmundr are concerned, as well as Grettir himself.⁵⁴ Similarly, the actions of Sigmundur Þorkelsson and his father in pursuit of land and power in *Víga-Glúms saga* justify a fear reminiscent of that felt by the Ingimundarsynir for Hrolleifr's intentions.⁵⁵

Sometimes it is not clear why one individual, such as Þórólfr heljarskinn, may be singled out as an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, but in the wider context of *Vatnsdæla saga* we gain a clearer picture of what sort of a threat he represented to those who termed him as such. In terms of

⁵³ Chieftains who do not pay compensation and are *ójafnaðarmenn* include Hrafnkell (as mentioned above), Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson in *Eyrbyggja saga* and Þorbjörn Þjóðreksson in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*.

⁵⁴ *Grettis saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík, 1936), 117: 'Illt mun af illum hljóta, þar sem Glámr er' ('Evil begets evil where Glámr is concerned'); p. 181: 'Nú er því illt illum at vera' ('Now it is no good to be bad'); p. 205: 'Gefsk illa ójafnaðr' ('Inequitable behaviour is poorly rewarded').

⁵⁵ *Víga-Glúms saga*, in *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslensk fornrit 9 (Reykjavík, 1956), 20 and 29–30.

characterizing the *ójafnaðarmaðr*, this study has provided several insights into how we might identify these figures as distinct from other trouble-makers. First, the language of reciprocity demonstrates the uneven nature of any conflict with an *ójafnaðarmaðr*: if he is more powerful than his opponents, it is easy to see how this may arise. However, *Vatnsdæla saga* shows the fear that the chieftain classes felt when confronted with men who did not acknowledge the reciprocal nature of society and implicitly (or explicitly) challenged their power. Additionally, this links into the role of disposable villains such as Þórólfr heljarskinn within the *Íslendingasögur*: the episode involving Þórólfr provides an entertaining battle from the point of view of the saga's audience, whilst in the internal politics of the saga Þórólfr is a conveniently easy to dispatch speed-bump on the path to increased land and increased power. Getting rid of an *ójafnaðarmaðr* like Þórólfr is a simple way for us to identify the heroes of the sagas, especially here where the distinction between good and bad is so clear-cut.

The New Bravery: Cynewulf's *Fates of the Apostles*

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Cynewulf's short verse martyrology, *The Fates of the Apostles*, preserved in a single copy in the Vercelli Book, has attracted far less attention than most Old English religious poems. Typically treated as merely a poetic catalogue or as useful evidence for establishing the date of its author,¹ it is rarely read as a poem in its own right. In this article, I re-evaluate the poet's adaptation of traditional Germanic heroic verse to serve his Christian faith, focusing on his celebration of the bravery of religious teachers.²

Fates introduces its subject matter as the courageous actions of the twelve apostles. It then elaborates the lives and deaths of each of the twelve apostles and invites consideration of how each demonstrates bravery by spreading across the earth and teaching the law of the Lord. Cynewulf's short narratives for each saint probably derive from fuller *uitae* and/or *passiones*.³ But Cynewulf domesticates these traditions within his own Anglo-Saxon culture by adapting themes, motifs and poetic techniques of secular Germanic heroic verse to a world realigned by the incarnation and revelation of

¹ E. R. Anderson, *Cynewulf: Structure, Style and Theme in His Poetry* (London, 1983), pp. 68–83; P. Conner, 'On Dating Cynewulf', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. R. Bjork, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England 4 (London, 2001), 23–56; R. D. Fulk, 'Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, Date', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, pp. 3–21, esp. pp. 15–8; J. M. McCulloch, 'Did Cynewulf Use a Martyrology? Reconsidering the Sources for *The Fates of the Apostles*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 67–83.

² The first version of this paper was read at CCASNC 2013. I am grateful to the organizers and to all the participants for the feedback I received, and especially to Alexandra Reider, Tony Harris and Francis Leneghan.

³ J. E. Cross, 'Cynewulf's Traditions about the Apostles in *The Fates of the Apostles*', *ASE* 8 (1979), 163–75, at p. 164.

Christ.⁴ Like the secular heroes of Germanic tradition, Cynewulf's apostles are brave warriors who travel to foreign lands in service of their lord; but they display their *ellen* ('courage, bravery') and attain *lof* ('praise, glory') by spreading the Christian faith rather than by overcoming earthly foes. By drawing on the other works attributed to Cynewulf, *Christ II*, *Juliana* and *Elene*, as well as a range of other Old English and Latin contexts, I will demonstrate how *Fates* mediates between Germanic heroic and Christian traditions, reflecting the lived experience of Christians in Anglo-Saxon England.

GOING ON A JOURNEY

Heroes typically leave behind the familiar and venture into new lands to prove their worth and the Germanic heroes of Old English verse are no exception.⁵ The Old English *Waldere* fragments celebrate the deeds of Walter of Aquitaine, attested in a number of later continental sources. The first fragment is a speech addressed to Walter, perhaps by his betrothed, Hildegyth, reminding him how, as a hostage at the court of Attila the Hun, he 'symle furðor feohtan sohtest / mæl ofer mearce';⁶ much of the legend is concerned with the period following Walter's escape from Attila and his long and difficult journey home. Similarly, the wanderings of the legendary poet *Widsith* ('wide travel') constitute a tour of the courts of migration-era Germania and its neighbouring kingdoms:

⁴ *Fates* is treated briefly in K. Sisam, 'Cynewulf and his Poetry', in his *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 1–28, at pp. 15–7; S. Greenfield, *A Critical History of Old English Literature* (London, 1964), pp. 107–10; C. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (London, 1967), p. 128.

⁵ J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato, 2008), pp. 26–8; V. Propp, *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1927), 2nd ed., trans. L. Scott, revised ed. L. A. Wagner (Austin, 1968), pp. 19–24.

⁶ *Waldere*, ed. F. Norman, Methuen's Old English Library, 2nd ed. (London, 1949), ll. 18–19a: 'always sought out fighting abroad, battle over the border'. All translations are my own, unless otherwise attributed.

Swa ic geondferde fela fremdra londa
geond ginne grund, godes & yfles
þær ic cunnade, cnosle bidæled,
freomægum feor, folgade wide.
Forþon ic mæg singan & secgan spell
mænan fore mengu in meoduhealle
hu me cynegode cystum dohtum.
Ic wæs mid Hubnum & mid Hreðgotum,
mid Sweom & mid Geatum & mid Suþdenum.
Mid Wenlum ic wæs & mid Wærnum & mid Wicingum.⁷

Most famously, Beowulf bravely sets out on a number of journeys, many of them over the sea: first in his swimming competition with Breca, then to the court of Hrothgar, then returning to Hygelac's court, and later accompanying Hygelac on his raid on Frisia, from which he swims home with thirty suits of armour, before setting out on his final journey to face the dragon.⁸

Anglo-Saxon historical tradition also commemorated the migratory journeys of mythical, heroic founder figures from the Continent to the island of Britain.⁹ For example, the *Anglo-Saxon*

⁷ *Widsith*, ed. K. Malone, revised ed. (Copenhagen, 1962), ll. 50–9: 'So I travelled throughout many foreign lands / beyond the gaping ground, / there I experienced goods and evils, deprived of kin / far from family, I followed widely. / Therefore I may sing and tell the tale / relate before many in the mead-hall / how many noble choices were before me. I was with the Hubna and with the Hrethegoths, / with the Swedes and the Geats and with the South-Danes. / With the Wendles I was, and with the Wærnas and with the Wicingas'.

⁸ See J. M. Hill, *The Narrative Pulse of Beowulf: Arrivals and Departures* (Toronto, 2008).

⁹ D. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72–104, esp. pp. 85 and 91; C. R. Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *ASE* 21 (1992), 23–36.

Chronicle records that in 495, ‘Her cuomon twegen aldormen on Bretene, Cerdic 7 Cynric his sunu, mid .v. scipum in þone stede þe is gecueden Cerdicesora 7 þy ilcan dæge gefuhtun wiþ Walum’.¹⁰ The sea journey, especially that from the Continent, was an important part of the cultural identity of the Anglo-Saxons. Indeed, Mercedes Salvador Bello has commented on the prominence of the theme of sea journeys in both royal genealogies and heroic poetry.¹¹ Nicholas Howe has discussed how the Old English verse *Exodus* exploits the cultural memory of the *adventus Saxonum*, implying parallels between the migratory Anglo-Saxons and the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea.¹² Perilous or arduous journeys (often involving a sea-crossing) thus constitute an important authorizing feature of both Germanic and Judeo-Christian traditions. The undertaking of such a journey requires a brave traveller, willing to risk his own life in the service of a lord.

In Old English heroic poetry, bravery, strength and manhood are often denoted by the term *ellen*.¹³ For example, once Beowulf has

¹⁰ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 495: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 3: Manuscript A*, ed. J. Bately (Cambridge, 1986), p. 19: ‘In this year, two ealdormen, Cerdic and Cynric, his son, came to Britain with five ships at the place which is called Cerdicstowe, and the same day they fought against the Welsh’.

¹¹ M. Salvador Bello, ‘The Arrival of the Hero in the Ship: a Common Leitmotif in OE Regnal Tables and the Story of Scyld Scefing in *Beowulf*’, *Selima* 8 (1998), 205–21.

¹² N. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking* (Notre Dame, 2001), pp. 61–2 and 72–4.

¹³ ‘elne | ‘ellen, n.’. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. J. Simpson and E. Weiner, 2nd ed., 20 vols. (Oxford, 1989), V, 146. OE *ellen* is cognate with OS *ellen*, *ellien*, OHG *ellan*, *ellen*, *ellin*, Gothic *aljan*, ON *eljan*, *eljun*, terms for strength and manhood which sometimes appear as glosses for the Latin *virtus*. ‘ellen, n.’. *Dictionary of Old English: A to G online*, ed. A. Cameron et al. (Toronto, 2007), <<http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/indices/headwordsindexe.html>>, accessed 12 October 2014.

completed his sea journey to the Danish court to face Grendel, he proclaims that he will perform a manly or noble deed of bravery:

... Ic gefremman sceal
eorlic ellen, oþðe ende-dæg
on þisse meadu-healle minne gebidan.¹⁴

Old English religious poets drew on the same poetic vocabulary in celebrating their saintly protagonists. For example, the verse life of St Andrew preceding *Fates* in the Vercelli Book, itself probably indebted to *Beowulf*,¹⁵ describes the hero's brave acceptance of the challenge God has set before him to rescue his fellow apostle:¹⁶

...ne wæs him bleað hyge,
ah he wæs anræd *ellenweorces*
heard ond higerof, *nalas hildlata*
gearo, guðe fram, to Godes campe.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. Bjork and J. Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, Toronto Old English Series 21, 4th ed. (Toronto, 2008), ll. 636–8: 'I shall perform / a noble deed of bravery, or await my final day / in this mead hall'. Emphasis my own.

¹⁵ See A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 163–4.

¹⁶ For discussion of the prevalence of travel, both physical and spiritual, in the Vercelli Book, see P. McBrine, 'The Journey Motif in the Poems of the Vercelli Book', in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, ed. S. Zacher and A. Orchard (Toronto, 2009), pp. 298–317; on the connections of *Andreas* and *Fates* to the idea of a travelling preacher, see F. Leneghan, 'Teaching the Teachers: the Vercelli Book and the Mixed Life', *English Studies* 94 (2013), 636–42.

¹⁷ *Andreas*, in *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. K. R. Brooks (Oxford, 1961), ll. 231–4: 'He was not at all cowardly of thought, / but *resolute of heroic deed*, / hard and brave, not at all a coward, / ready, strong in battle for God'. Emphasis my own.

The opening of *Fates* similarly establishes the apostles' performance or achievement of *ellen* as its central theme:

... hu þa æðelingas *ellen* cyðdon,
torhte and tireadige.¹⁸

Editors of the poem have noted how this opening also echoes that of *Beowulf*: 'hu þa æþelingas *ellen* fremedon'.¹⁹ Cynewulf uses a poetic word drawn from the lexis of secular heroic verse to characterise the deeds and deaths of the apostles. In the short accounts that follow of each apostle's martyrdom, Cynewulf exemplifies his own conception of Christian bravery.

As Nicholas Howe notes, 'the belief that from journeys comes knowledge serves as the governing poetic fiction of *Widsith* and also of *The Fates of the Apostles*, as Cynewulf designates the place where each of the twelve died in the course of enlarging Christendom'.²⁰ The introduction identifies the apostles as heroes whose glory spread far and wide over the earth because they journeyed into foreign lands and taught bravely.²¹ In the central narrative, the apostles are briefly singled out as specifically 'brave' or 'bold' travellers: Peter and Paul are identified as heroes who gave up their lives *frame fyrðhwate* ('bold and warlike');²² Andrew risks his life on his mission to Achagia; John achieves martyrdom as a teacher in Ephesus; James dies among the Jews;²³ Philip in Hierapolis; Bartholomew in Albanapolis. Cynewulf

¹⁸ *Fates* 3–4: 'how the noble ones made known *bravery* / bright and eager for glory'. Emphasis my own.

¹⁹ *Beowulf* 3: 'how the noble ones performed bravery'. Brooks, *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, p. 61; R. Bjork, *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf* (London, 2013), p. 252. See also Orchard, *Critical Companion*, pp. 165–6.

²⁰ Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 144.

²¹ *Fates* 6–8.

²² *Ibid.*, l. 12.

²³ The only apostle who is not given a specific geographical location for his martyrdom is James the brother of John, whom Cynewulf relates died among

devotes extra space to Thomas for his bravery in travelling to those parts of India not visited by Bartholomew, spreading the word of God and illuminating the hearts of his listeners before suffering martyrdom. Thomas, therefore, serves as a paradigm of the evangelical bravery celebrated in *Fates*:

Swylce Thomas eac þriste geneoðde
on Indea oðre dælas,
þær manegum wearð mod onlihted,
hige onhyrded, þurh his halig word,
syððan collenferð cyninges broðor
awehte for weorodum wundorcræfte,
þurh dryhtnes miht, þæt he of deaðe aras,
geong ond guðhwæt, (ond him wæs Gad nama);
ond ða þam folce feorg gesealde,
sin æt sæcce. Sweordræs fornam
þurh hæðene hand, þær se halga gecrang,
wund for weorudum, þonon wuldres leoht
sawle gesohte sigores to leane.²⁴

In the final part of the martyrology, Cynewulf commemorates the bold pair, Simon and Thaddeus, who both sought Persia: ‘Him

the Jews before Herod, logically associated with Jerusalem. However, since his martyrdom is the only apostle’s recorded in the New Testament, Cynewulf may have been less anxious about including this detail: *Fates* 34–6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 50–62: ‘Just so, Thomas also ventured boldly / to another lot in India. / There, many became illuminated in heart, / their minds encouraged, through his holy word. / After he raised from death the king’s brother, / young and proud (and Gad was his name), / raised him before the multitudes by miraculous power, / through the Lord’s might, and then gave life to that people, / then they were at dispute. Sword-attack / by heathen hands took him, where the holy one died / wounded before the multitudes; then his soul sought / the light of glory, the reward of victory’.

wearð bam samod / an endedæg'.²⁵ Cynewulf explains their bravery in terms of eagerness for battle by litotes ('Næron ða twegen tohtan sæne'),²⁶ and then relates their passion, in which they suffered torment through *wæpenhete* ('armed hate') and rejected the idle treasures of this world, finally alluding to the death both traditionally received by axe. Their eagerness in risking death in foreign lands and their brave willingness to fight the good fight in preaching the gospel earns special praise, rounding off the central narrative catalogue of the poem.

As well as the debt to the wandering heroes of Germanic secular poetic tradition outlined above, Cynewulf's travelling saints are also to be understood in the context of the practice of *peregrinatio pro amore dei*. This Irish tradition, in which a Christian might leave behind his homeland in the service of God, was followed by insular saints such as Fursey, Columba, Wilfrid and Boniface.²⁷ Cynewulf identifies this tradition with Christ's own invocation to his disciples to spread the word. In the Exeter Book poem *Christ II*, a meditation on the Ascension, he expounds a prophecy in the Song of Solomon:

Bi þon Salomon song, sunu Dauibes,
giedda gearosnottor gæstgerynum,
waldend wer-þeoda, ond þætte word acwæð:
'Cuð þæt geweorðeð, þæt cyning engla,
meotud meahum swið, munt gestylleð,
gehleapeð hea dune, hyllas ond cnollas
bewrið mid his wuldre, woruld alyeð,
ealle eorð-buend, þurh þone æþelan stylle.²⁸

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 78–9: 'one final day found them both together'.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 75–6: 'There were two not slow to battle'.

²⁷ K. Hughes, 'The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage', *JEH* 11 (1960), 143–51.

²⁸ *Christ II*, in *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: an Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, ed. B. Muir, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Exeter, 2000), I, 712–19:

Cynewulf interprets this as the *hlyp* ('leap') of Christ, the spirit of which Cynewulf urges Christians to imitate:

Pus her on grundum godes ece bearn
ofer heah-heloþu hlypum stylde,
modig æfter muntum. Swa we men sculon
heortan gehygdum hlypum styllan
of mægene in mægen, mærpum tilgan
þæt we to þam hyhstan hrofe gestigan
halgum weorcum, þær is hyht ond blis,
geþungen þegn-weorud.²⁹

Just as Christ left his high home to redeem mankind, so too should men strive to perform great deeds in the name of Christ, so that they might be redeemed. By depicting Christ as a heroic traveller, Cynewulf aligns the actions of Christ himself with Germanic heroic tradition. This subtle transformation is clearest in Christ's final invocation to his disciples in *Christ II*, in which Cynewulf has amalgamated various sayings of Jesus,³⁰ but also in an Old Testament

'Solomon, David's son, / readily cunning in lay-songs and spiritual mysteries, / and spoke these words about the ruler of mankind: / "Know that it happened, that the king of angels, / the ruler of great might, jumps upon the mountain tops, / leaps on the high hills, covers the knolls and dunes / with his glory, frees the world, / all earth dwellers, through that noble leap'.

²⁹ *Christ II*, I, 744–51: 'Thus here on the ground the eternal Son of God / leapt over the high hills, / courageous upon the mountains. So we men ought to / raise leaps from strength to strength, / to strive after greatness / so that we might ascend to that highest roof / by holy deeds, where there is joy and bliss, / the excellent troop of thanes'.

³⁰ cf. 'ic þæt wundor onwripen hæfde / ymb þone beorhtan beam, swa ic on bocum fand/ wyrda gangum, on gewritum cyðan', *Cynewulf's Elene*, ed. P. Gradon, Exeter Medieval English Texts, revised ed. (Exeter, 1977), ll. 1253–5 ('I have made known the glory about that bright beam, as I found in books, the goings of fate, I made known in written words').

commandment which positions him within the paradigm of a Germanic *blaford* ('lord'):

Gefeoð ge on ferððe. Næfre ic from hweorfe,
ac ic lufan symle læste wið eowic,
on eow meahht giefe ond mid wunige,
awo to ealdre, þæt eow æfre ne bið
þurh gife mine godes onsien.
Farað nu geond ealne yrmenne grund,
geond widwegas, weoredum cyðað,
bodiað ond bremað beorhtne geleafan,
ond fulwiað folc under roderum,
hweorfað to heofonum. Hergas breotaþ,
fyllað ond feogað, feondscype dwæsað,
sibbe sawað on sefan manna
þurh meahhta sped. Ic eow mid wunige
forð on frofre ond eow friðe healde
strengðu stapolfæstre on stowa gehware.³¹

Christ commands his companions to go and spread fame and glory, similar to Christ's commands at the conclusion of Matt. XXVIII.19-20, interspersed with references to the concept of the Paraclete in John XIV. However, his command to destroy the idols, 'Hergas breotaþ / fyllað ond feogað',³² adapted from the Pentateuch, either

³¹ *Christ II*, I, 476–89: 'Go forth glad in heart. I shall never turn from you, / but I shall always accompany you with love, / and give might to you, and dwell with you, / always in life, so that you never be lacking in good. / Go now throughout all the whole earth, / beyond the wide ways, / speaking words, preaching and making famous the bright faith, / and baptize the people under the skies, / turn them to the heavens. Destroy idols, / cast them down and persecute them, extinguish heathen worship, / sow peace in the hearts of men / by the excellence of your might. I will dwell with you / forth in comfort and hold peace with you, / firm strength in every place'.

³² *Ibid.*, ll. 486–7: 'Break idols, destroy and persecute [them]'.

God's command to Moses in Ex. XXXIV.13 or the law recorded in Deut. XII.2–3, realigns the character of the lord of the disciples with the *blaford* of a retinue of warriors worthy of performing *ellen*. Cynewulf thereby sets Christianity in dialogue with the inherited Germanic heroic tradition of travelling and performing great deeds for one's lord. However, as suggested by Christ's instructions to his disciples, the manner in which Cynewulf's heroes achieve *lof* is distinctively Christian, conquering with the word rather than the sword.

BEING BRAVE

By drawing upon traditional heroic and poetic terms of bravery and references to battle and martial prowess, Cynewulf emphasizes the heroism of the apostles. This domesticates Christian tradition within the heroic conventions of the medium Cynewulf has chosen, but also radically transforms how Anglo-Saxon culture might conceive of performing bravery, from battle to teaching and preaching. Cynewulf signals this shift by immediately following his statement in *Fates* that his heroes performed deeds of bravery with an enumeration of how:

... Twelfe wæron
dædum domfæste, dryhtne gecorene,
leofe on life. Lof wide sprang,
miht ond mærdō, ofer middangeard,
þeodnes þegna, þrym unlytel.
Halgan heape hlyt wisode
þær hie dryhtnes æ deman sceoldan
reccan for rincum.³³

³³ *Fates* 4–11: 'They were twelve / mighty of deeds, chosen by the Lord, / loved in life. Glory sprung widely / over middle-earth, mightily and famously, / the thanes of the King, with might unlittle. / The holy troop led a lot / where they should teach the covenant of the Lord, / tell it before warriors'.

By introducing the twelve as brave teachers, Cynewulf shifts the site of heroism from the battlefield to the rostrum. Thomas, one of the apostles singled out for his bravery in the catalogue, typifies this association: he travels to the foreign land of India, where he teaches many and manifests the Christian faith by performing miracles before being martyred.³⁴ Cynewulf highlights Thomas's teaching, which turns the hearts and minds of his listeners, by placing it first among the deeds he recounts; likewise, John, the only apostle who died a natural death, 'In Effessia ealle þrage / leode lærde'.³⁵ Cynewulf further honours Peter and Paul's *apostolhad* ('apostolic office') as messengers and teachers (ll. 14–5), and describes the fruits of Matthew's evangelism:

dages or onwoc
leohtes geleafan, land wæs gefælsod
þurh Matheus mære lare.³⁶

Cynewulf transmutes the feats of strength usually associated with bravery in Germanic heroic tradition into teaching and preaching as he adapts the language of secular heroic poetry to express his new, Christian bravery.

Cynewulf also propagates the notion of teaching as the new bravery within the language of secular Germanic heroic poetry in his other poems.³⁷ His longest extant work, *Elene*, recounts St Helena's pursuit of the True Cross, journeying from Byzantium to Jerusalem, teaching Judas Cyriacus and the Jews and converting them to Christianity. In *Juliana* he alters his source text strikingly, a *passio*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 50–62.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 30–1: 'in Ephesus all the time / taught the people'.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 65–7: 'The dawn, belief in the light / was awakened / the land was cleansed / through Matthew's renowned teaching'.

³⁷ Indeed, the theme of teaching may have been the organizing theme in the compilation of the Vercelli Book: see Leneghan, 'Teaching the Teachers'.

similar to that now in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 10861 (southern English, possibly Christ Church, Canterbury, s.ix¹),³⁸ presenting the heroine as preaching to a crowd, rather than a small group of the faithful, just before her martyrdom. Although the authorship of *Guthlac B* is uncertain,³⁹ the attitude of his attendant, Beccel, towards Guthlac as *þone leofestan lareow* ('the dearest teacher') accords with the emphasis on teachers in Cynewulf's other works.⁴⁰ In each of these poems, Cynewulf utilizes the conventions of heroic poetry to elevate teaching as the kind of *ellen* which the new Christian hero ought to perform.

The use of martial imagery to celebrate Christian heroism is not unparalleled in contemporary Christian works. A letter of Boniface to Daniel, bishop of Winchester, laments:

Sunt enim nobis iuxta dictum apostoli non solum 'foris pugne et intus timores', sed etiam intus pugnae simul cum timore, maxime semper per falsos sacerdotes et hypochritas, qui et Deo adversantur et sibi perduntur et populum per

³⁸ M. Lapidge, 'Cynewulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*', in *Unlocking the Wordbord: Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.*, ed. M. Amodio and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (Toronto, 2003), pp. 147–71; M. Brown, 'Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 10861 and the Scriptorium of Christ Church, Canterbury', *ASE* 15 (1986), 119–37.

³⁹ The ending of *Guthlac B*, where Cynewulf's runic signature might have appeared, has been lost in the Exeter Book. However, many scholars are inclined to favour Cynewulf's authorship of *Guthlac B*: see ASPR III, xxxii–iii; M. Drout, M. J. Kahn, M. D. LeBlanc and C. Nelson, 'Of Dendrogrammatology: Lexomic Methods for Analyzing Relationships among Old English Poems', *JEGP* 110 (2011), 301–336; R. D. Fulk, 'Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, Date', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, pp. 3–22; J. Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 52 and 56–63.

⁴⁰ *Guthlac B*, in *The Guthlac Poems*, ed. Roberts, l. 1004.

plurima scandala et varios errores seducunt dicentes populis
iuxta dictum prophetae.⁴¹

Earlier, Aldhelm too had likened the efforts of the community of nuns at Barking to cultivate faith and virtue as a battle against vice, in which the nuns were soldiers of Christ:⁴²

Ac nullatenus timidorum more militum horrorem belli et
classica salpictae muliebriter metuentium saevissimus
hostibus scapularum terga pro scutorum umbonibus segniter
praebeamus.⁴³

Such rhetoric draws on a tradition of Athanasius of Alexandria's *Vita S. Antonii*, best known in the medieval West in the Latin translation by Evagrius. While Martin of Tours gave up his career as a soldier to pursue monasticism, Antony initiated a monastic life conceived of in terms of battle. Athanasius describes Antony's good fight in response to the devil's assaults:

⁴¹ 'Letter of Boniface to Daniel, Bishop of Winchester', in *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, MGH Epist. select. 1 (Berlin, 1955), no. 129: 'For we have not only, in the apostle's words "combats without, fears within" but also fights within as well as fear, especially through fake priests and hypocrites, who both oppose God and ruin themselves and lead astray the people', *English Historical Documents, c. 500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, English Historical Documents 1, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), no. 175, pp. 813–14.

⁴² S. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, 1992), p. 82.

⁴³ Aldhelm, *De Virginitate*, in *Aldhelmi Malmesbiriensis Prosa de Virginitate: cum Glosa Latina atque Anglosaxonica*, ed. G. Scott and R. Ehwald, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2001), I, 131–3: 'Let us not sloppily offer the backs of our shoulder-blades to these enemies after the fashion of timid soldiers effeminately fearing the horror of war and battle call of the trumpeter, but boldly offer our foreheads armed with the banner of the Cross', *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*, ed. M. Herren and M. Lapidge (Ipswich, 1979), p. 68.

... tunc itaque in armis suis fidens quae sunt per umbilicum ventris et glorians de ipsis – hoc enim sund obsesas ipsius circa iuniores – his armatus processit adversus iuniorem, nocte quidem turbans eum, per diem vero ita molestabat eum ut videntes sentirent certamen amborum.⁴⁴

As Stephanie Hollis notes, the early Church exploited the parallel between the heroism of the *miles Christi* and the warrior followers of earthly lords as a means to convert the laity.⁴⁵ The Christian heroes and heroines of Cynewulf's poetry are a product of this meeting of traditions. In *Juliana*, Cynewulf employs an extended metaphor of siege warfare as the devil's *modus operandi* which has no parallel in its Latin source to advance the notion of the Christian as a sort of *miles Christi*:

Gif ic ænigne ellen-rofne
gemete modigne metodes cempan
wið flan-þræce, nele feor þonan
bugan from beaduwe, ac he bord ongean
hefeð hyge-snottor, haligne scyld,
gæstlic guð-reaf, nele Gode swican,
ac he beald in gebede bid-steal gifeð
fæste on feðan, ic sceal feor þonan
hean-mod hweorfan, hroþra bidæled,
in gleda gripe.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Evagrius, *Vita Antonii*, ch. 5, in *Vita di Antonio*, ed. G. Bartelink, 5th ed. (Milan, 1991), p. 16: 'then he [the Devil] attacked him by day with weapons that were so obviously his that no one could doubt that it was against the devil that Antony was fighting', *Early Christian Lives*, ed. C. White (London, 1998), p. 11.

⁴⁵ Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 83.

⁴⁶ *Juliana*, ed. R. Woolf (London, 1955), ll. 382–91: 'If I meet any extremely courageous / warrior of the Ruler, / high-spirited against the flight of arrows, I will not move far / from that battle. But he, wise in thought, begins / to heave a board, a holy shield, / spiritual armour, does not at all wander from God, /

The devil conceives of the Christian as *metodes cempan* ('warrior of the Ruler'), whom he must turn to his own devices. In this way, Cynewulf creates the possibility that all good Christians might take up the traditional role of the hero.

The bravery of Cynewulf's apostles, however, surpasses that expected of other Christians, and is rewarded with the glory of martyrdom. Like the loyal tree-thane of *The Dream of the Rood*, the apostles must face violent death without themselves giving battle. Waging their fight with words rather than swords and shields, the apostles restrain themselves in compliance with the Lord's will:

... Ealle ic mihte
feondas gefyllan, hwæðre ic fæste stod.⁴⁷

The apostles' deaths in *Fates* echo the language of secular heroic poetry as well as conforming to the image of the *miles Christi*: the bite of a sword which parts James the Lesser's life from his flesh;⁴⁸ Bartholomew's beheading; the execution of Thomas in a *swordræs* ('sword attack');⁴⁹ Matthew's destruction by weapons;⁵⁰ and Simon and Thaddeus's deaths *ðurh wapenhete* ('armed hate').⁵¹

Despite the distinctively Christian character of Cynewulfian bravery, *Fates* retains the violent character of the secular heroic tradition to which his poem is stylistically indebted. The appeal of the old traditions of monster-slaying heroes had not entirely passed

but he, bold in though, makes a stand / fast in his heart, then I shall move far from there, / humiliated, deprived of comfort, / into the grip of the burning coals?

⁴⁷ *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. M. Swanton, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies, revised ed. (Exeter, 1996), ll. 37–8: 'I might have / felled all those enemies, however I stood fast'.

⁴⁸ *Fates* 34–7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 59.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 69.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, l. 80.

away.⁵² Germanic and Christian tradition found common ground in the concern with heroic self-sacrifice in service of a higher goal. The apostles' courageous preaching and teaching still required traditional courage in the face of death: eleven of the twelve are martyred. Crucially, however, the new model of courage also values restraint over vengeance. Like the cross-thane of *The Dream of the Rood*, Cynewulf's apostles are challenged *not* to defend themselves, *not* to attack, and to accept their fates as God has deemed. Thus Cynewulf's new bravery, though formally indebted to secular heroic tradition, addresses the Christian calling to evangelize and exemplify Christian belief in action.

CONCLUSION: THE LAST APOSTLE

Cynewulf presents the apostles in *Fates* as models of a Christian bravery in terms drawn from heroic tradition recast to suit the needs of the new Christian message, which valued venturing to new places to teach rather than to slay. However, Cynewulf extends the opportunity for Christians to manifest similar bravery by casting himself in the same role of these heroes. He too has to undertake a long and arduous journey in the service of his Lord:

Hwæt, ic þysne sang siðgeomor fand
on seocum sefan.⁵³

⁵² Most scholars would date Cynewulf to the late eighth or ninth century, including K. Sisam, 'Cynewulf and his Poetry', in his *Studies in Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 1–28; R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, PA, 1992), pp. 351–68; *idem*, 'Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, Date', pp. 3–22. The main dissenting voice is Patrick Conner, who sees Cynewulf as a product of the Benedictine Reforms in the tenth century: 'On Dating Cynewulf', pp. 23–56; *idem*, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: a Tenth-Century Cultural History*, *Studies in Anglo-Saxon History* 4 (Woodbridge, 1993), 163–4.

⁵³ *Fates* 1–2: 'Lo, I sing this, found weary of the journey / and with troubles in my heart'.

Cynewulf later introduces the journey as a metaphor for death in his account of the demise of John;⁵⁴ he then returns to it again in his appeal for prayers in the poem's epilogue:

... Ic sceal feor heonan,
an elles forþ, eardes neosan,
sið asettan, nat ic sylfa hwær
of þisse worulde; wic sindon uncuð,
eard ond eðel. Swa bið ælcum men,
nempe he godcundes gastes bruce.⁵⁵

Cynewulf presents death as an opportunity to display Christian heroic bravery. In the very act of composing this poem, Cynewulf himself imitates the brave teaching of his exemplary apostles, casting himself as a present-day teacher and brave hero. The model lives of his brave apostles have inspired Cynewulf, who in turn seeks to inspire his audience to be brave in the face of death. Cynewulf represents an early incarnation of the individual Christian as a *miles Christi*, drawing on a tradition inaugurated in the letter of Paul to Timothy and exploited in such diverse areas as romance, crusading and chivalry.⁵⁶ Well before the Norman Conquest, the Anglo-Saxons had already adapted their heroic heritage to serve Christianity and in so doing, embraced the idea of being a warrior for Christ.

⁵⁴ *Fates* 31–2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 109–14: 'I shall depart far hence, / go forth elsewhere alone to seek out a land, / set out on a journey from this world, / I know myself not where. The place is unknown, / the land and homeland, as it is to each man, / unless he enjoy the spirit of God'. The poem has two versions of the epilogue; for brevity's sake I refer here only to one.

⁵⁶ Timothy II.3–4. See C. Kostick, *The Social Structure of the First Crusade* (Leiden, 2008), esp. p. 62; C. Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. M. Baldwin and W. Goffart (Princeton, 1977), esp. pp. 202–3 and 340–2.

The Influence of Irish Learning on Bede's Cosmological Outlook

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The Venerable Bede has been rightly lauded for his original and defined cosmological outlook. In this paper, I will look at how traditions from Irish learning influenced the development of Bede's celebrated 'scientific achievement'.¹ Bede's attitude towards the Irish people and the Irish church has been explored in depth and there can be little doubt that it was a positive one. In the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, he portrayed the Irish missionaries to Northumbria as Christian exemplars and he smoothed over and explained away their heterodoxy—a contrast to the attitude taken by others in the contemporary Northumbrian church.² With this in mind, what can we say of Bede's attitude to Irish learning and his use of the same? Ireland in the seventh and early eighth centuries was a producer of grammatical texts, Saints' Lives, scientific treatises and biblical commentaries, many of which made their way to Anglo-Saxon

¹ The title of Wesley Stevens' Jarrow lecture: W. M. Stevens, 'Bede's Scientific Achievement', in *Bede and his World: the Jarrow Lectures 1958–1993*, ed. M. Lapidge, Variorum Collected Series, 2 vols. (Aldershot, 1994), II, 645–88.

² See especially T. Charles-Edwards, 'Bede, the Irish and the Britons', *Celtica* 15 (1983), 43–53; C. Stancliffe, 'British and Irish Contexts', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. S. DeGregorio, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 69–83; A. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', in *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald, *Mediaevalia Groningana* 19 (Groningen, 1996), 31–59; W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History AD 550–800: Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 235–328.

England and to Bede's monastery of Jarrow.³ I hope to show how Bede's worldview was a deftly constructed patchwork of influences and traditions of thought, in which he brought together information gleaned from many different sources to create the wide-ranging, but completely orthodox, outlook on Creation that we find in his writings. Within this framework, cosmological ideas from an Irish learned background were an important influence on the development of Bede's cosmological understanding.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS IRISH LEARNING

Two writers provide us with evidence of attitudes to the learned culture of Ireland as seen from Anglo-Saxon England in this period: these are Bede and the slightly earlier monk, abbot and scholar, Aldhelm of Malmesbury. From the references in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede clearly understood there to be a vibrant learned culture in Ireland. He tells us throughout the *Historia* of Englishmen who went to learn there. There is a particularly evocative example in book three, chapter twenty-seven:

Erant ibidem eo tempore multi nobelium simul et mediocrium de gente Anglorum, qui tempore Fiani et Colmani episcoporum, relicta insula patria, uel diuinae lectionis uel continentioris uitae gratia illo secesserant. Et quidam quidem mox se monasticae conuersationi fideliter mancipauerunt; alii magis circuendo per cellas magistrorum

³ For a very small selection of scholarship on early Irish learning, see *Biblical Studies: the Medieval Irish Contribution: Papers Read at the Annual General Meeting of the Irish Biblical Association, April 1974*, ed. M. McNamara, Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association 1 (Dublin, 1976); D. Ó'Cróinín, *Early Irish History and Chronology* (Dublin, 2003); M. Smyth, *Understanding the Universe in Seventh-Century Ireland*, Studies in Celtic History 15 (Woodbridge, 1996); V. Law, *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge, 1995).

lectioni operam dare gaudebant. Quos omnes Scotti libentissime suscipientes, uictum eis cotidianum sine pretio, libros quoque ad legendum et magisterium gratuitum praebere curabant.⁴

We can even name a prominent individual who benefited from Irish learning: the Northumbrian King Aldfrith (fl. 685–704/5) was described by Bede as being ‘in insulis Scottorum’⁵ and ‘in regionibus Scottorum’⁶ for the love of learning (a statement which may disguise the political reasons behind such a sojourn).⁷ The Irish annalistic

⁴ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1969), iii.27, pp. 314–5: ‘At this time there were many in England, both nobles and commons, who, in the days of Bishops Finan and Colman, had left their own country and retired to Ireland either for the sake of religious studies or to live a more ascetic life. In course of time some of these devoted themselves faithfully to the monastic life, while others preferred to travel round to the cells of various teachers and apply themselves to study. The Irish welcomed them all gladly, gave them their daily food, and also provided them with books to read and with instruction, without asking for any payment’. All references in this article to Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica* are taken from Colgrave and Mynors’ edition, hereafter referred to as *HE*. Cf. *HE* iv.4.

⁵ Bede, *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 24, in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 236–7: ‘among the islands of the Irish’. Henceforth *VCP*.

⁶ *VCP*, ch. 24, pp. 238–9: ‘in the territories of the Irish’.

⁷ On Aldfrith and his Irish connections, see B. Yorke, ‘Adomnán at the Court of King Aldfrith’, in *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, Lawmaker, Peacemaker*, ed. J. M. Wooding et al. (Dublin, 2010), pp. 36–50; C. Ireland, ‘Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Learning of a *Sapiens*’, in *A Celtic Florilegium: Studies in Memory of Brendan O’Hehir*, ed. K. A. Klar et al. (Lawrence, MA, 1996), 63–77; C. A. Ireland, ‘Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies’, *Celtica* 22 (1991), 64–78.

evidence substantiates Bede's portrayal of Aldfrith as a lover of learning, particularly Irish learning.⁸

This movement to Irish territories in pursuit of learning was also alluded to by Aldhelm in two letters.⁹ But Bede's overwhelmingly positive attitude to Irish learning is seemingly at odds with the sentiments expressed by the abbot of Malmesbury. The latter, in a letter to his pupil Heahfrith, decries the esteem in which Irish scholars are held. Heahfrith, it is related in the letter, had just returned from Ireland, where he had spent six years 'uber sofiae sugens'.¹⁰ But Aldhelm is unhappy with this emphasis on Irish learning; 'cur ... Hibernia, quo catervatim istinc lectitantes classibus advecti confluunt, ineffabili quodam privilegio efferatur'¹¹ he asks, when in Britain there exist excellent scriptural teachers from Greece and Rome. Here he has in mind Theodore and Hadrian in Canterbury, whose learning he compares to the brightness of the sun and the moon; the Irish scholars, on the other hand, are simply twinkling stars.¹² Aldhelm is even more forceful in his condemnation of Irish learning in a letter to Wihtfrith, another student of his. In this case, Wihtfrith is not returning from Ireland but is planning to

⁸ He is referred to in the *Annals of Ulster* as *sapiens* ('a wise man') and in the *Annals of Tigernach* as *ecnaid* ('a scholar'), while the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* describe him as *an t-eagnaíd ambra* ('the splendid scholar'). This last source also claims that during his period among the Irish, Aldfrith was actually the *dalta* ('pupil') of Adomnán, ninth abbot of Iona: *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, 704.2, ed. and trans. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983), pp. 161–2; 'Annals of Tigernach', ed. and trans. W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896), 119–263, at p. 219; *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, ed. and trans. J. N. Radner (Dublin, 1978), pp. 54–5.

⁹ Aldhelm, Letters 3 and 5, in *Aldhelmi opera*, ed. R. Ehwald, MGH Auct. Antiq. 15 (Berlin, 1919), 479–80 and 488–94.

¹⁰ Aldhelm, Letter 5, p. 489: 'sucking the teat of wisdom', in *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*, trans. M. Lapidge and M. Herren (Ipswich, 1979), p. 161.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 492: 'why ... is Ireland, whither assemble the thronging students by the fleet-load, exalted with a sort of ineffable privilege?', p. 163.

¹² *Ibid.*

journey there soon. Aldhelm opines, ‘absurdum enim arbitror, spreta rudis ac veteris instrumenti inextricabili norma per lubrica dumosi ruris diverticula, immo per discolos philosophorum anfractus iter carpere seu certe aporriatis vitreorum fontium limpidis laticibus palustres pontias lutulentasque limphas siticulose potare, in quis atra bufonum turma catervatim scatet atque garrulitas ranarum crepitans coaxat’.¹³ Not only is the type of study Wihtfrith might pursue in Ireland maligned as muddy and dark when compared with the clear springs of English learning, Aldhelm also implies that it has a secular and worldly bent, and goes on to harshly condemn any such scholarly interest in Greek and Roman pagan culture. As Lapidge and Herren have noted, this charge is an odd one and does not reflect what is known of Irish intellectual interests in the period.¹⁴

This difference of opinion is curious because we know that Aldhelm, despite positioning himself as a critic of Irish learning, was actually, to some extent, a product of it.¹⁵ Malmesbury itself was an Irish foundation (founded by the Irish monk, Maeldub)¹⁶ and it produced glossaries which show clear Irish influence.¹⁷ Aldhelm may have received his earliest instruction from Maeldub himself;¹⁸ he

¹³ Aldhelm, Letter 3, p. 479: ‘I think it absurd to spurn the inextricable rule of the New and the Ancient Document and undertake a journey through the slippery paths of a country full of brambles, that is to say, through the troublesome meanderings of the (worldly) philosophers; or surely, (it is absurd) to drink thirstily from briny and muddy waters, in which a dark throng of toads swarms in abundance and where croaks the strident chatter of frogs, when there are clear waters flowing from glassy pools’, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*, trans. Lapidge and Herren, p. 154.

¹⁴ Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*, pp. 139–40.

¹⁵ The Irish associations of Aldhelm and Malmesbury are discussed in M. W. Herren, ‘Scholarly Contacts Between the Irish and the Southern English in the Seventh Century’, *Peritia* 12 (1998), 24–53.

¹⁶ *HE* v.18, pp. 512–16. For the contrary view, cf. Lapidge and Herren, in *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*, pp. 6–7.

¹⁷ Herren, ‘Scholarly Contacts’, pp. 45–52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

enjoyed a close personal relationship with the scholar of Irish learning, King Aldfrith;¹⁹ he corresponded with an Irishman, Cellanus, who spoke of the fame of Aldhelm's learning;²⁰ he was also familiar with computus material, grammar and poetry of Irish origin.²¹

Perhaps the respective times of writing can account for the two authors' differing viewpoints. Both of Aldhelm's letters cited above have been tentatively assigned by Michael Lapidge to the period before Aldhelm became abbot of Malmesbury around the year 686.²² While Bede's attitude towards the Irish, writing his *Historia* at the start of the 730s, was an overwhelmingly positive one, Aldhelm's letters were much closer in time to the Easter controversy and the divisive Council of Whitby (held in 664). Nevertheless, both writers let us know that there was a level of cross-cultural intellectual pollination at work throughout the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Alternately, the reason may be that Bede felt confident in the fame and position of Wearmouth-Jarrow as centres of learning, while Aldhelm felt a need to fight to establish Canterbury's credentials in the face of ubiquitous Irish dominance in the 680s. In any event, Bede expresses no such qualms about the Irish schools in his *Historia*. Instead, ever the diplomat, he lauds both the Irish authorities and the Canterbury school, describing Theodore and Hadrian in glowing terms: 'Et quia litteris sacris simul et saecularibus, ut diximus, abundanter ambo erant instructi, congregata discipulorum caterua scientiae salutaris cotidie flumina irrigandis eorum cordibus

¹⁹ N. Wright, 'Aldhelm, Gildas and Acircius', in his *History and Literature in Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West: Studies in Intertextuality*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 1–28.

²⁰ Aldhelm, Letter 4, in *Aldhelmi opera*, ed. Ehwald, pp. 480–6.

²¹ On computus: Ó'Cróinín, 'Irish Provenance', pp. 242–4; on grammar: Herren, 'Scholarly Contacts', pp. 41–3; on poetry: *ibid.*, pp. 43–4.

²² M. Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *ASE* 36 (2007), 15–69, at pp. 67–8.

emanabant'.²³ But to what extent is this positive attitude reflected in his own scholarship?

THE IRISH TEXTS USED AND BEDE'S METHODOLOGY

Although the Irish are frequent and celebrated guests in Bede's histories and hagiographies, references to specific Irish texts in his works are less frequent (with the noted exception of Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*). However, the efforts of scholars over the past century have gone some significant way towards shedding light on the wide array of Bede's sources which were of Irish origin or came to him through Irish manuscripts.

Bede's acquaintance with early Irish exegetical texts was referred to by Bernhard Bischoff in a groundbreaking study which identified the characteristics of the early Irish style of exegesis.²⁴ This acquaintance has been shown quite conclusively by Bischoff's student Robert McNally in the case of the Pseudo-Hilary *Expositio in septem epistolas catholicas*.²⁵ This Irish commentary on the seven Catholic epistles was drawn on by Bede for his own *In epistulas septem catholicas* (composed sometime after 708),²⁶ though he was unimpressed with the pseudonymous author's description of inspiration through the Holy Spirit as 'more fistulae'.²⁷

²³ *HE* iv.2, pp. 332–3: 'Because both of them were extremely learned in sacred and secular literature, they attracted a crowd of students into whose minds they daily poured the streams of wholesome learning'.

²⁴ B. Bischoff, 'Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Middle Ages', trans. C. O'Grady, in *Biblical studies*, ed. M. McNamara, pp. 74–160, at pp. 89, 91 and 143.

²⁵ R. McNally, *Scriptores Hiberniae minores Pars I*, CCS 108B, (Turnhout, 1973), xii–xvi.

²⁶ P. Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, Studies in Early Medieval Britain (Farnham, 2012), pp. 67–8.

²⁷ Cited in Bischoff, 'Turning-points', p. 143: 'like a pipe'.

More recently, Jean-Michel Picard has demonstrated that Bede used the *Epitomae* of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus in the compilation of his *De orthographia* (although he appears to have missed the esoteric grammatical humour of many of the passages he quoted),²⁸ while Damian Bracken has argued that the etymologies used by Bede in his *De temporum ratione* were also derived from Virgilius' text.²⁹ In addition, although Bede does not seem to have known Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, scholars agree that it certainly influenced the anonymous Lindisfarne *Vita Cuthberti*—this influence was then felt in Bede's prose and metrical reworkings of the latter Life.³⁰

Quite apart from the many texts of Irish character known to Bede, he was familiar with texts from a variety of origins through the mediation of Irish copies and compendia. A number of the books of the Bible, for instance, were known to Bede from Irish exemplars, including the Psalms, the Catholic Epistles and Revelation.³¹ The important work of Charles W. Jones and Dáibhí Ó'Cróinín has demonstrated that much of Bede's computistical lore came via Irish scholarly activity. In 1937, Jones showed that Bede's computus drew heavily on the lost exemplar of a family of manuscripts known as the Sirmund group, after its most prominent example, Oxford, Bodleian

²⁸ J. Picard, 'Bede and Irish Scholarship: Scientific Treatises and Grammars', *Ériu* 54 (2004), 139–47, at pp. 144–7.

²⁹ D. Bracken, 'Virgil the Grammarian and Bede: a Preliminary Study', *ASE* 35 (2006), 7–21.

³⁰ D. Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 79–80.

³¹ R. Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*, *CSASE* 15 (Cambridge, 1995), 141–2.

Library, Bodleian 309 (Vendôme, s. xi), 62r–73v.³² This Sirmond computus material, originally compiled in Ireland, was a collection of numerous texts related to paschal reckoning and likely formed the basis of Bede’s computistical library. Ó’Cróinín later posited that this work was compiled in southern Ireland in 685, before travelling to Northumbria.³³ The Sirmond exemplar contained, amongst much other computus-related material, the *Argumentum titulorum paschalium* of Dionysius Exiguus, whose method for Easter reckoning was adapted and popularised by Bede. There was also material related to Victorius of Aquitaine’s competing method of calculation. Significantly, all the material included is related to the Alexandrian nineteen-year cycles and not the incorrect eighty-four-year cycle which Bede associates with the northern Irish and which was still in use in Iona until 715.

As well as these various compiled sources, the Sirmond exemplar also included three items of Irish authorship which Jones referred to collectively as the ‘Irish computus’. These items, a prologue and *capitula* (62r–v), *Sententiae sancti Augustini et Isidori* (62v–64v, also known as *De computo dialogus*) and *De diuisionibus temporum* (64v–73v), are all anonymous and, although the Sirmond material is extant at its

³² C. W. Jones, ‘The “Lost” Sirmond Manuscript of Bede’s “Computus”’, *EHR* 52 (1937), 204–19. For further discussion by Jones of the Sirmond computus see his *Bedaes pseudepigrapha: Scientific Writings Falsely Ascribed to Bede* (Ithaca, NY, 1939), pp. 48–51; *idem*, *Bedaes venerabilis opera, Pars IV, 2: opera didascalica*, CCS 123B (Turnhout, 1977), 105–113; D. Ó’Cróinín, ‘The Irish Provenance of Bede’s Computus’, *Peritia* 2 (1983), 229–247; *idem*, *Early Irish History and Chronology*, pp. 201–12; E. Graff, ‘The Recension of Two Sirmond Texts: *Disputatio Morini* and *De diuisionibus temporum*’, in *Computus and its Cultural Context in the Latin West, AD 300–1200: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Science of Computus in Ireland and Europe, Galway, 14–16 July 2006*, ed. I. Warntjes and D. Ó’Cróinín, *Studia traditionis theologiae* 5 (Turnhout, 2010), 117–125.

³³ Ó’Cróinín, ‘Irish Provenance’.

earliest in an eighth-century Frankish recension,³⁴ they represent a pre-Bedan computus source.³⁵ The Irish Computus (and surrounding compilatory material) was consulted by Bede and was drawn on extensively in his works on the reckoning of time.³⁶

There has never been any question that Bede drew upon a text called *De ordine creaturarum*.³⁷ However, this work was long considered a composition of Isidore and only relatively recently, in 1953, was it assigned a seventh-century Irish provenance.³⁸ Bede's use of this text began in the very earliest stages of his development as a thinker; *De ordine creaturarum* was used in his scientific treatise *De natura rerum*, dated to about 703. Both Jean-Michel Picard and Marina Smyth have discussed in detail the debt Bede's work owed to *De ordine creaturarum*—many chapters quote verbatim from or deftly rearrange the explanations found in the Irish work.³⁹ Many of the ideas which Bede drew from *De ordine creaturarum* ultimately derive from *De*

³⁴ I. Warntjes, *The Munich Computus: Text and Translation: Irish Computistics between Isidore of Seville and the Venerable Bede and its Reception in Carolingian Times*, Sudhoffs Archiv beehrte 59 (Stuttgart, 2010), xxii, n. 37, xxviii, n. 55 and l, n. 115.

³⁵ These two Irish computus texts were printed by J. P. Migne in *Venerabilis Bedae, Anglo-Saxonis presbyteri: opera omnia*, PL 90 (Paris, 1861), 647–65, but this does not represent the earliest and most complete forms of the text. A short title-description of the texts in Bodleian 309 was printed in Jones, *Beda's opera de temporibus*, pp. 393–4.

³⁶ F. Wallis, *Bede: On the Reckoning of Time*, Translated Texts for Historians 29 (Liverpool, 1999), xxiii–xxvi and lxxii–lxxviii.

³⁷ *Liber de ordine creaturarum: Un anónimo irlandés del siglo VII*, ed. M. Díaz y Díaz, Monografías de la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela 10 (Santiago de Compostela, 1972). Henceforth *DOC*.

³⁸ On the dating and provenance of *DOC* see M. Díaz y Díaz, 'Isidoriana I: sobre el *Libre de ordine creaturarum*', *Sacris Erudiri* 5 (1953), 147–66; *idem*, *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, pp. 20–24; D. Ó'Cróinín, 'Bischoff's *Wendepunkte* Fifty Years On', *Revue Bénédictine* 110 (2000), 115–75, at pp. 216–18; M. Smyth, 'The Date and Origin of *Liber de ordine creaturarum*', *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–2004), 1–39.

³⁹ J. Picard, 'Bede and Irish Scholarship', pp. 139–144; M. Smyth, 'Date and Origin', pp. 17–20.

mirabilibus sacrae scripturae, a mid-seventh-century work by Augustinus Hibernensis, the ‘Irish Augustine’, and are original to this tradition. In other words, Bede could not have found these interpretations elsewhere and his use of *De ordine creaturarum* was a critical point which ensured the transmission of these concepts into the mainstream of medieval science.

Lastly is a source which, along with its author, was explicitly discussed by Bede in the pages of his *Historia*.⁴⁰ *De locis sanctis*, by Adomnán of Iona, is a travelogue of the Holy Land written in the late seventh century supposedly relayed to Adomnán by a Frankish bishop called Arculf, who had travelled there.⁴¹ Again, we know that Bede used this work from the earliest stages of his career and, moreover, that it continued to exert an influence throughout his career. He wrote his own summary of *De locis sanctis* in 702/703, adding material from Pseudo-Eucherius, Hegesippus and other sources.⁴² He then referenced it in a number of his homilies, which have been dated to the 720s.⁴³ And, at the very end of his career, he excerpted a few chapters from the work in the fifth and final book of his *Historia ecclesiastica*.⁴⁴ Adomnán and *De locis sanctis* also represent the

⁴⁰ *HE* v.15, pp. 506–8.

⁴¹ Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. D. Meehan and L. Bieler, *Scriptores de Latini Hiberniae* 3 (Dublin, 1958). Henceforth *DLSA*. Although the historical existence of Arculf remains a matter for debate, there is no doubt that *DLSA* is a work which reflects the thinking of Adomnán the theologian. See T. O’Loughlin, ‘Adomnán and Arculf: the Case of an Expert Witness’, *Journal of Medieval Latin* 7 (1997), 127–146; *idem*, *Adomnán and the Holy Places: the Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama* (London, 2007); R. G. Hoyland and S. Waidler, ‘Adomnán’s *De Locis Sanctis* and the Seventh-Century Near East’, *EHR* 129 (2014), 787–807.

⁴² Bede, *De locis sanctis*, in *Itineraria et alia geographica*, ed. F. Fraipont, CCS 175 (Turnhout, 1965); trans. W. T. Foley and A. Holder, *Bede: a Biblical Miscellany*, *Translated Texts for Historians* 28 (Liverpool, 1999). Henceforth *DLSB*.

⁴³ Bede, *Homiliae euangelii*, ed. D. Hurst, CCS 122 (Turnhout, 1955), i.7, i.10 and ii.10.

⁴⁴ *HE* v.16–17, pp. 508–12.

clearest evidence we have of the transmission of Irish learned works to Northumbria. We know that Adomnán travelled to Northumbria on diplomatic missions and possibly at other times as well. The *Vita Columbae* mentions two such visits, one in 686 and another two years later. On one of these visits he presented the king with a copy of *De locis sanctis* which, Bede tells us, the king had copied and distributed: ‘Porrexit autem librum hunc Adamnan Aldfrido regi, ac per eius est largitionem etiam minoribus ad legendum contraditus’.⁴⁵ In this way an Irish work was transmitted to Jarrow and into Bede’s hands; through his adaptation it went on to enjoy no little popularity in medieval Europe.⁴⁶

This raises the question of how Bede approached these various texts of Irish provenance. His positive depictions of Irish learning in the *Historia ecclesiastica* do little to indicate what kind of study he associated with the Irish monasteries, apart from the fact that it was religious in nature. Neither can we be sure that Bede knew the provenance of the Irish works he consulted. The exception is *De locis sanctis*: Bede certainly knew of Adomnán’s background and thus of the Irish nature of the work he was using. He also had a high opinion of the abbot of Iona, saying of him: ‘Erat enim uir bonus et sapiens et scientia scripturarum nobilissime instructus’.⁴⁷ With regard to the rest of the works, there is no evidence that Bede knew of their Irish character. It is difficult to imagine that Bede would not have considered any of the texts he used, with the exception of one work from Iona, to have an Irish background. Regardless, we cannot know with any certainty from where Bede saw these works as originating, nor whether it would have made any difference to him. We must take the presence of these works in Bede’s library, therefore, as indicating

⁴⁵ *HE* v.15, pp. 508–9: ‘Adomnán gave this book to King Aldfrith and, through his kindness, it was circulated for lesser folk to read’.

⁴⁶ O’Loughlin, *Adomnán and the Holy Places*, pp. 177–203.

⁴⁷ *HE* v.15, pp. 507–8: ‘He was a good and wise man with an excellent knowledge of the scriptures’.

the inter-related nature of Irish and Northumbrian learned culture at the time, rather than anything specific about Bede's attitude towards Irish scholarship (which nevertheless, seems to have been positive).

In Bede's time, both *De ordine creaturarum* and the Sirmond computus material would have circulated anonymously (anonymity and pseudonymity were common traits of Irish works of the time).⁴⁸ How would this have affected their authority in Bede's eyes? It is my view that although a work ascribed to an *auctoritas* such as Augustine or Gregory would doubtless hold more weight for Bede, his intellectual curiosity led him to give equal consideration to all his sources, no matter their background. Even if he was not always of the opinion that a source was unquestionable, he was still happy to use it in part. In his opinion, not even the works of the Church Fathers were immune to the possibility of error and he possessed the intellectual confidence to disagree with them on matters of theology.⁴⁹ As Roger Ray has remarked with regard to Bede's attitude to Jerome, '[he] did not hesitate to raise his voice against the translator of the Vulgate, of which he was a champion throughout his career'.⁵⁰ Famously, he seems to have had an uneasy relationship with the works of Isidore of Seville.⁵¹ As recounted by Cuthbert, one of Bede's last projects was a refinement of the works of the Spanish bishop that would correct some of the mistakes found therein.⁵² Nevertheless, he

⁴⁸ *De ordine creaturarum* was later wrongly ascribed to Isidore of Seville, but this was not until later in the eighth century: Díaz y Díaz, *Liber de Ordine Creaturarum*, pp. 16–18.

⁴⁹ The leading study here is R. Ray, 'Who Did Bede Think He Was?', in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. S. DeGregorio, Medieval European Studies 7 (Morgantown, 2006), 11–35.

⁵⁰ Ray, 'Who Did Bede Think He Was?', p. 23.

⁵¹ On Bede's mixed (and variously interpreted) attitude to Isidore, see W. D. McCready, 'Bede and the Isidorian legacy', *Mediaeval Studies* 57 (1995), 41–74; *idem*, 'Bede, Isidore and the *Epistola Cuthberti*?', *Traditio* 50 (1995), 75–94.

⁵² *Epistola Cuthberti de obitu Bedae*, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 580–586.

drew widely on Isidore for scientific writing, exegesis, grammar and rhetoric throughout his career.⁵³ He was happy, then, to draw on parts of a work, while also excising useless or incorrect information found in the same source; his approach was to strip-mine texts for relevant information, discarding that which he did not need. A look at the composition of two of Bede's works—*De natura rerum*⁵⁴ and *De locis sanctis*⁵⁵—will demonstrate how Bede worked with anonymous Irish sources.

For *De natura rerum*, Bede relied heavily on three main sources: Isidore of Seville's work of the same name, Pliny's *Historia naturalis* and *De ordine creaturarum*. Throughout the work, Bede drew equally on all three, sometimes privileging the Irish treatise, sometimes his continental sources. For instance, the chapters on rain, hail and snow in *De natura rerum* all draw on chapter seven of *De ordine creaturarum*.⁵⁶ Bede artfully rearranged the facts he had gleaned from the Irish work, fitting them to a chapter-structure taken from Isidore's *De natura rerum*. He then added further information drawn from Isidore and Pliny. Discussing rains (*imbres*), Bede begins, 'Imbres ex nubium concreti guttulis, dum in maiores stillas coeunt, aeris amplius non ferente natura, nunc uento impellente, nunc sole dissolvente pluuiatiter ad terras dilabuntur',⁵⁷ a rearrangement of the information

⁵³ See the discussion in *Bede: On the Nature of Things and On Times*, ed. C. B. Kendall and F. Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians 56 (Liverpool, 2010), 13–20.

⁵⁴ Bede, *De natura rerum*, in *Bedae venerabilis opera, Pars I: opera didascalica*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCS 123A (Turnhout, 1975), 189–234; trans. Kendall and Wallis, *Bede: On the Nature of Things*. Henceforth DNR.

⁵⁵ DLSB.

⁵⁶ As demonstrated by Picard, 'Bede and Irish Scholarship', pp. 141–2.

⁵⁷ DNR 33, pp. 221–2: 'Rains are formed from the little drops of the clouds. As they coalesce into bigger drops, no longer supported by the nature of the air, sometimes driven by the wind, sometimes dissolved by the sun, they fall down in the form of rain to the earth', p. 93.

he found in *De ordine creaturarum*.⁵⁸ He follows this with a sentence derived from Isidore's *Etymologiae*: 'Sed pluuias uocamus lentas et iuges, nimbos autem repentinos et praecipites'.⁵⁹ The next chapter (*De grandine*) opens with another fact drawn from *De ordine creaturarum*—'Grandinis lapilli ex stillis pluuiiae, frigoris et uenti rigore conglaciati, in aere coagulantur',⁶⁰ and supplements it with further information, this time drawn from Pliny: 'sed citius niue soluuntur, et interdium saepius quam noctu decidunt'.⁶¹ At times an explanation for a natural event from *De ordine creaturarum* is privileged above the information he found in these other sources; at other times Bede prefers to use the interpretations found in his continental material. Throughout, there is no sense that the *De ordine creaturarum* is treated differently because of its Irishness or lack of attributed author. It is another source from

⁵⁸ *DOC* vii.5, p. 130: 'cum uexante uentu illae guttulae in maiores stillas coeunt, aeris amplius natura non ferente, pluuiialiter imbres ad terram dilapsi cadunt' ('But when, tossed about by the wind, these small particles gather into bigger drops which can no longer be borne up by the nature of air, they fall to the earth as pouring rain', p. 181).

⁵⁹ *DNR* 33, p. 222: 'But we call gentle and steady rains "showers" and sudden and violent ones "storms"', p. 93; cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIII.x.3, in *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911).

⁶⁰ *DNR* 34, p. 222: 'Hailstones are coagulated in the air from drops of rain, and frozen by the harshness of cold and wind', p. 93; cf. *DOC* vii.6, p. 130: 'Si uero ipsas quas praedixi stillas, uentu in maiusculas moles coagitante, conlatas antequam deorsum pluant gilu in nubibus arripuerit, in grandinis lapillos coagulatas frigoris uiolentia constringit' ('On the other hand, if those drops of which I spoke are tossed together by the wind into somewhat larger masses, and frost seizes them in the clouds after they have been brought together but before they pour down, the violence of the cold forces them to harden into the stones of hail', p. 181).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222: 'But they are melted more quickly than snow, and they fall more often during the day than at night'; cf. Pliny, *Historia naturalis* ii.60, in *Naturalis historiae libri XXXVI*, ed. L. Ian and C. Mayhoff, 5 vols. (Leipzig, 1892–1909), I, 97–8.

which information can be gleaned, neither more nor less worthy than the Plinian and Isidorean material.

In *De locis sanctis*, the main source for the title, much of the information and the basic structure is an Irish work by the abbot of Iona. Again, however, Bede does not privilege this work, nor does he denigrate it. He splices Adomnán's narrative with information drawn from Hegesippus, Pseudo-Eucherius and Jerome's works on Hebrew etymology. His admiration for Adomnán's learning is clear but this does not stop him from adding to it from his own vast library. However, in adapting *De locis sanctis* Bede modified Adomnán's style, which he describes as *lacinoso* ('wordy' or 'convoluted').⁶² Furthermore, it is his own edited version of the text, rather than Adomnán's original, from which Bede quotes in the *Historia ecclesiastica*; in the latter work he also says that he kept the meaning intact 'sed breuioribus strictisque comprehensa sermonibus'.⁶³ This is as far as Bede goes towards a criticism of Adomnán—and it shows his willingness to take the best from his sources and discard that which he found to be extraneous (i.e. Adomnán's wordy prose style).

THE INFLUENCE OF IRISH SOURCES ON BEDE'S COSMOLOGY

What can we say of the influence these works exerted on Bede's developing cosmology, one of the most celebrated and coherent worldviews of the early Middle Ages? It is important to remember that, for Bede, exegesis, history and hagiography were not isolated from what we would now distinguish as his scientific writing.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, some of Bede's writings divulge more about his cosmological thinking than others. I shall be focusing on five works: his twin treatises on natural science and time-reckoning, *De natura*

⁶² *DLSB* xix.4, p. 280.

⁶³ *HE* v.17, pp. 512–3: 'but put more briefly and concisely'.

⁶⁴ Cf. F. Wallis, 'Si Naturam Quaeras: Reframing Bede's 'Science'', in *Innovation and Tradition*, ed. DeGregorio, pp. 65–99, at pp. 65–70.

rerum and *De temporibus*; his expanded work on time, *De temporum ratione*; the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*; and his commentary on Genesis. Explicit evidence of the Irish influence can be most clearly apprehended in the earliest of these texts but it continues throughout his life.

I have detailed above the specific arguments made by scholars for Bede's use of Irish works; with regard to the wider influence these works had on the evolution of Bede's scientific thought, Faith Wallis has provided the most comprehensive comments in her discussion of Bede's computus.⁶⁵ Immo Warntjes has made the point that Bede's reputation as an innovator has led to a downplaying of the Irish contribution to the field of computus.⁶⁶ As I shall argue below, I believe that we can extend this point to his cosmological and geographical works as well. In her study of Irish scientific works of this period, Marina Smyth described Bede as 'the high point of a tradition of learning which was already well advanced in Ireland in the middle of the seventh century'.⁶⁷ In order to explore whether we can place the monk of Jarrow in this continuum of learning, as argued by Smyth, I will examine three streams of Irish learning from which Bede drew—*De ordine creaturarum*, the Irish computus and *De locis sanctis*—and discuss in turn the influence they exerted on his cosmological outlook.

De ordine creaturarum

Bede wrote *De natura rerum* shortly before *De temporibus*, a text which we know was completed in 703.⁶⁸ I have looked above at Bede's use of *De ordine creaturarum* in his composition of the chapters

⁶⁵ Wallis, 'Si Naturam Quaeras', pp. 86–8; and see especially her introduction and notes to her translation of *De temporum ratione: Bede: the Reckoning of Time*, pp. xxii–xxvi, lxxii–lxxviii and lxxxv.

⁶⁶ Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, pp. xlvii–xlviii.

⁶⁷ Smyth, *Understanding the Universe*, p. 304.

⁶⁸ Kendall and Wallis, *Bede: On the Nature of Things*, pp. 2 and 188–90.

in *De natura rerum* on rain and hail,⁶⁹ but there are a number of other examples of ideas and theories lifted by Bede from *De ordine creaturarum*, such as the idea that the waters above the firmament mentioned in Gen. I:6–7 were used in the Flood.⁷⁰ Its influence is most readily apparent in his early writings, particularly *De natura rerum* where direct quotations abound, but the particular marriage of Christian theology and scientific learning present in the Irish work had more far-reaching effects on Bede's corpus as a whole.

Isidore and Pliny provided much scientific information otherwise unavailable to Bede; their contribution to his intellectual growth should not be underestimated. Bede's *De natura rerum* obviously owes a huge debt to Isidore's work of the same name, a text that provided the basic model on which Bede built. However, Bede changed considerably the main thrust of Isidore's treatise. Wallis has made the following important point: the structure of the original work was basically the same as a secular work of classical science. 'To be sure, the information included was that which had been deemed not in conflict with Christian beliefs, but the basic structure was unchanged. Bede's text has a shift in emphasis. He begins with 'The Fourfold Work of God' and the creation of the world, working downwards through the heavens and the heavenly waters, the stars and the planets, the winds, the Ocean and the earth. It is very much a Christian work.'⁷¹

As Wallis has observed, Bede 'reconceptualized the notion of Christian cosmography. Where Isidore was content to tack biblical parallels onto essentially Graeco-Roman material, Bede wanted to demonstrate how the Christian understanding of creation and classical science constituted a coherent account of a created

⁶⁹ See above, pp. 69–70.

⁷⁰ *DOC* iii.5, pp. 102–4; Bede repeats this idea in *DNR* 8, pp. 198–9.

⁷¹ F. Wallis, 'Bede and Science', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. S. DeGregorio, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 113–126.

cosmos'.⁷² I would argue that a major inspiration for this Christianized take on classical natural science was *De ordine creaturarum*. *De ordine creaturarum* was part of a tradition of Irish texts which understood the natural world through the lens of Created and Creator ('in creaturis et creatore', as *De ordine creaturarum* explains in its opening line).⁷³ This tradition was concerned with showing the glory of God through exploring His creation and information was culled from Pliny, Augustine, Jerome and Isidore and used towards this goal. The resulting works were, in the words of Clare Stancliffe, 'theology and cosmology rolled into one'.⁷⁴ A celebrated example of this outlook is the work of the 'Irish Augustine', whose *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* took as its starting point the idea that the miracles of scripture did not operate outside of the laws of nature laid down by God at Creation. There was no division between the natural and the *super*-natural; instead, all of creation was seen as a miraculous creation.⁷⁵ According to Augustine of Hippo, miracles within creation were caused by hidden but inherent *seminatae* ('causes' or 'seeds') in

⁷² Wallis, 'Bede and Science', p. 116. On the adoption of classical cosmographical ideas by Christian authors up to the seventh century, see the exhaustive study of H. Inglebert, *Interpretatio Christiana: les mutations des savoirs (cosmographie, géographie, ethnographie, histoire) dans l'Antiquité chrétienne, 30–630 après J.-C.*, Collection des études augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 166 (Paris, 2001), particularly 36–72.

⁷³ For the following discussion, cf. Smyth, *Understanding the Universe*; C. Stancliffe, 'Creator and Creation: a Preliminary Investigation of Early Irish Views and their Relationship to Biblical and Patristic Traditions', *CMCS* 58 (2009), 9–27; J. Carey, *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings*, revised ed. (Dublin, 2000), pp. 22–5.

⁷⁴ Stancliffe, 'Creator and Creation', p. 14.

⁷⁵ R. Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages: the Wiles Lectures given at the Queen's University of Belfast, 2006*, The Wiles Lectures (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 1–33.

nature.⁷⁶ The Irish Augustine pursued this idea to its fullest extent, discussing the way in which scriptural miracles were in line with natural laws. For instance, he considered the miracle in which Moses turned his staff into a snake to be an accelerated version of the natural process by which serpents were produced from rotting wood. *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* was, in a sense, a work of natural science but all of creation was interpreted first and foremost in a religious context.

De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae was a major influence on the author of *De ordine creaturarum* and the structure of the latter work reflects this influence, being laid out according to a deliberate plan. Opening with creation, *De ordine creaturarum* then describes in turn the celestial realm, the waters above the firmament, the firmament itself and the earthly world, ending with a discussion of the ‘new heaven and new earth’ (Rev. XXI:1) to come (which the author sees as the current universe reborn, rather than a completely new one). In exploring God’s creation from the top down, the author was engaged in a thoroughly Christian exercise, albeit one which still drew on the indiscriminate fact-gathering of the encyclopaedists. These early scientific Hiberno-Latin texts represent the beginnings of a tradition of learning which was original to the Christian Middle Ages. Knowledge gleaned from classical and Late Antique authorities was boldly reformatted to fit the needs of a new Christian intellectual approach. Where continental Christian intellectuals of Late Antiquity such as Isidore were content to allow scriptural and classical learning

⁷⁶ J. A. Hardon, ‘The Concept of Miracle from St Augustine to Modern Apologetics’, *Theological Studies* 15 (1954), 229–57, at pp. 230–1; B. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event, 1000–1215* (London, 1982), pp. 3–4; M. E. Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders: the Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150–1350*, Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 13–4; L. Daston, ‘Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe’, *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991), 93–124, at pp. 95–6.

to co-exist without fully integrating them,⁷⁷ these early Hiberno-Latin authors created a thoroughly synthesized meeting of the two. The Bible was the ultimate authority through which the world must be understood and, as such, knowledge gleaned from classical works had to be bent to fit this shape, or else discarded.

Of Bede's three major sources for *De natura rerum*, therefore, *De ordine creaturarum* is the only one in which the inherited learning of the classical world had been reformatted into an inherently Christian work. More specifically, it is also the only source which portrays the world through the lens of God's creation. Indeed, over six decades ago George Boas listed it (under the misapprehension that it was an Isidorean work) as one of the important texts in the development of the Primitivist image of the current world as a degeneration from the perfection of creation.⁷⁸ *De ordine creaturarum*'s influence on Bede is most keenly felt in the deeply Christianised approach to cosmic knowledge exhibited in *De natura rerum*.

Later in Bede's career, this way of approaching natural science through the narrative of the creation came to the fore in his commentary on Genesis,⁷⁹ where the perceived imperfection of the physical world was explicated as a direct result of the spiritual Fall. Another later work, Bede's celebrated *De temporum ratione*,⁸⁰ owes its discussion of the world to come after Judgement Day to *De ordine creaturarum*. He follows the Irish work in envisioning this post-Apocalyptic world as a reborn and improved version of the current

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Wallis' comments on Isidore in 'Bede and Science', pp. 116–7, and Inglebert's comments on the same in *Interpretatio Christiana*, pp. 47–8, n. 79.

⁷⁸ G. Boas, *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, MD, 1948), pp. 67–9.

⁷⁹ Bede, *In principium Genesis*, in *Bedae venerabilis opera, Pars II, 1: opera exegetica*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCS 118A (Turnhout, 1967); trans. C. B. Kendall, *Bede: On Genesis*, Translated Texts for Historians 48 (Liverpool, 2008).

⁸⁰ Bede, *De temporum ratione*, in *Bedae: opera de temporibus*, ed. Jones; trans. F. Wallis, *Bede: the Reckoning of Time*. Henceforth DTR.

universe.⁸¹ Even though direct citations from *De ordine creaturarum* fall away in Bede's work after *De natura rerum* in 703, its influence on his thought was formative. The hexaemeral and eschatological bent of Bede's scientific thought owes its origins to this influence.

The Irish computus

In terms of Bede's computus, the influence of the Sirmond material was considerable. We have seen how Bede came to know the work of Dionysius Exiguus, among other important sources, through the mediation of the Irish compilation. The material included which was of Irish authorship (*De diuisionibus temporum* and *Sententiae sancti Augustini et Isidori*, collectively designated the 'Irish computus') was also instrumental throughout his career. Bede followed these sources in the structure and much of the content of his computistical works. He drew on them in the composition of *De temporibus*, in 703, and its expanded sequel, *De temporum ratione*, in 725.

The genre of the computus textbook was one which, unlike works of natural history or geography, was original to the Christian Middle Ages. The impetus behind its formation lay in the religious importance of Easter to Christianity; the specific time and place of Jesus' Passion and humanity's salvation was theologically significant—it was the axis around which all of history rotated. Furthermore, this religiously-motivated genre was an Irish innovation; in the seventh and eighth centuries, a group of Irish computistical textbooks were created around the kernel of the chapters on time-reckoning from Isidore's *Etymologiae* and supplemented with material from Macrobius, Dionysius Exiguus and others.⁸² As well as the two texts from the Sirmond manuscript, there are three extant works—the *Computus Einsidlensis*, the Munich Computus and *De ratione computandi*—all of which represent a pre-Bedan computus tradition which arose in an Irish context in the seventh and early eighth

⁸¹ Wallis, *Bede: the Reckoning of Time*, pp. 373–4.

⁸² Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, p. liii.

centuries.⁸³ The deep importance of correct Easter-reckoning in the insular world at this time was not simple disagreement over differences in practice, but a question which was of central importance to Christian cosmology and theology. The universe and time had been laid out by God, as demonstrated in the *Computus Einsidlensis* by a quotation from the Book of Wisdom: ‘You have arranged all things in measure, number and weight’.⁸⁴ *Computus*, then, had a calendrical function but also a deeper cosmological one.⁸⁵

The structure of *De diuisionibus temporum* and *Sententiae sancti Augustini et Isidori* is similar to these other Irish computistical works of the period in organizing the chapters according to divisions of time in ascending order of magnitude.⁸⁶ These same divisions are used in the first sections of *De ratione computandi*, the *Computus Einsidlensis* and the Munich *Computus*.⁸⁷ They are based on the divisions found in Isidore’s *De natura rerum*; Isidore’s scheme has been expanded, however, from nine to fourteen divisions of time.⁸⁸ Thus, the *Capitula* preserved on fol. 62 of Bodley 309 and reproduced by Jones in the

⁸³ *De ratione computandi*, in *Cummian’s Letter De controversia paschali and the De ratione computandi*, ed. M. Walsh and D. Ó’Cróinín, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies 86 (Toronto, 1988), 115–213. The Munich *Computus* is edited in Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*. The *Computus Einsidlensis* remains unedited; for background see I. Warntjes, ‘A Newly-discovered Irish *Computus*: *Computus Einsidlensis*’, *Peritia* 19 (2005), 61–4; J. Bisagni and I. Warntjes, ‘The Early Old Irish Material in the Newly-Discovered *Computus Einsidlensis* (c. AD 700)’, *Ériu* 58 (2008), 77–105.

⁸⁴ Wis. XI.20. Cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* xxii.IV.3–6.

⁸⁵ On the theological importance of correct Easter-reckoning in an Irish context, see T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 391–415. In a more general medieval context, see C. W. Jones, *Beda’s opera de temporibus*, pp. 55–104; Wallis, *Bede: the Reckoning of Time*, pp. xv–lxiii.

⁸⁶ See the clear discussion in Graff, ‘The Recension of Two Sirmund Texts’, pp. 117–125.

⁸⁷ On the common use of this scheme in these three Irish *computus* textbooks cf. Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, pp. cvii–cviii.

⁸⁸ Graff, ‘The Recension of Two Sirmund Texts’, p. 120.

Appendix to his *Bedae opera de temporibus* gives a breakdown of *De diuisionibus temporum* which begins with a chapter on the atom (the smallest division of time) and moves upwards through chapters on *momenta* ('moments', a quarter of a minute), minutes, *puncti* ('periods'), hours, *quadrantes* ('quarters'), days, weeks, months, seasons, years, *aetas* ('ages'), *saecula* (a period of generations) and *mundus* (the world/cosmos).⁸⁹ This tradition is certainly the inspiration for Bede's own divisions of time in *De temporibus* and *De temporum ratione*, although Bede has his own take on the breakdown advanced by the author of *De diuisionibus temporum*. Bede begins with 'De momentis et horis' ('On moments and hours') in *De temporibus* and 'De minutissimis temporum spatiis' ('On the smallest intervals of time') in *De temporum ratione*.⁹⁰

As with *De ordine creaturarum*, these computistical works reformatted the structure and chapter divisions they found in Isidore's *De natura rerum* and his *Etymologiae* into a model which was of more use to the Christian monastic culture of the insular world. The conception of *De natura rerum* and *De temporibus* as separate texts has generally been seen by scholars as a Bedan innovation, dividing the chapters of Isidore's *De natura rerum* to create two individual works.⁹¹ However, as we have seen, this is in effect what the Irish works read by Bede had already done—the computistical works inheriting the chapters on the divisions of time, *De ordine creaturarum* the chapters on the universe, the earth and celestial and natural phenomena. It must have seemed quite natural for Bede to split his books in this way, as this is what his sources did.

⁸⁹ It should be noted that the Munich Computus (and subsequent computistical texts influenced by it) presents these divisions of time in a slightly different order, switching the positions of *aetas* and *saecula*.

⁹⁰ Bede, *De temporibus*, ch. 1, in *Bedae opera de temporibus*, ed. Jones, p. 295; *DTR* III, pp. 276–8.

⁹¹ For instance, Kendall and Wallis, *On the Nature of Things*, p. 12; Wallis, 'Bede and Science', p. 116; Wallis, '*Si Naturam Quaeras*', p. 73; J. Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville: Traité de la nature*, Témoins de notre histoire (Bordeaux, 1960), p. 7.

The influence of *Sententiae sancti Augustini et Isidori* on the conception of *De temporum ratione* has been identified by Wallis, who sees its influence particularly in the conception of computus (*ratio numerorum*) as a discipline with metaphysical and theological resonances.⁹² The Irish tradition framed computus not as a dry, mathematical exercise, but as a deeply resonant genre in which was encompassed all of Christian space and time. Like *De ordine creaturarum*, the Irish computus material furnished Bede with verbal borrowings but also yielded more abstract inspiration—its unique blend of calendrical, encyclopaedic and theological concerns provided Bede with a model for his influential *De temporum ratione*, an overarching Christian take on time.

Smyth's depiction of Bede as the 'high point' of a tradition of Irish learning is certainly true within the field of computistics, then. By the same token, Bede's achievement was also reliant on the work done by these anonymous Irish computists.⁹³ Works such as *De diuisionibus temporum*, *Sententiae sancti Augustini et Isidori*, *De ratione computandi*, the *Computus Einsidlensis* and the Munich computus were the foundational texts of a tradition of which Bede's works on time-reckoning represented simply the latest and grandest iteration.⁹⁴

De locis sanctis

As we have seen, *De locis sanctis* was drawn on by Bede from the beginning to the end of his career. Adomnán's work was a geographical aid to the Holy Land to assist in exegesis and Bede's own version happily takes on this mantle, mixing in further information from Hegesippus, Pseudo-Eucherius and Jerome's works

⁹² Wallis, *Bede: the Reckoning of Time*, pp. xxiii–xxvi.

⁹³ Cf. Walsh and Ó'Cróinín, *De ratione computandi*, p. 105.

⁹⁴ A fact which has been overlooked due to an over-emphasis on Bede as innovator: Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, pp. xlvii–xlviii.

on Hebrew etymology.⁹⁵ Bede even went so far as to include extracts from *De locis sanctis* in the history of his church and people, the *Historia ecclesiastica*, completed circa 731. As has been convincingly argued by Thomas O’Loughlin, Bede’s attitude towards Adomnán was one of utmost respect and admiration. The reference to Adomnán’s *lacinioso sermone* is explained by the ‘schoolmaster tradition’ in which Bede was working—he wanted to produce a beginner’s text, ‘Adomnán at a glance’.⁹⁶ Bede’s *De locis sanctis* is, in fact, a testament to his respect for Adomnán and his desire to spread his learned work. The same sentiment lies behind Bede’s inclusion of extracts from *De locis sanctis* in the *Historia ecclesiastica* and even explains his choice of passages. The extracts he includes are short descriptions of the Lord’s birthplace, the place of the Lord’s passion and resurrection, the place of the Lord’s ascension and Hebron and the tombs of the patriarchs. O’Loughlin identifies these as extracts which show off the information in *De locis sanctis* that ‘could be used in the solution of exegetical conundrums’.⁹⁷ Bede, then, was displaying what he felt to be the strengths of Adomnán’s work. More than this, however, *De locis sanctis* provided Bede with geographical and theological material which he would use to bolster the Christian universalist narrative of the *Historia ecclesiastica*.

Adomnán’s *De locis sanctis* represents the view of the Holy Land, considered to be the centre of the world, from an island which was imagined to be on the very periphery of the world.⁹⁸ In the same way

⁹⁵ On the religious and exegetical purpose behind *De locis sanctis*, see T. O’Loughlin, ‘Res, Tempus, Locus, Persona: Adomnán’s Exegetical Method’, *Innes Review* 48 (1997), 95–111; *idem*, ‘The Exegetical Purpose of Adomnán’s *De Locis Sanctis*’, *CMCS* 24 (1992), 37–53; *idem*, *Adomnán*.

⁹⁶ O’Loughlin, *Adomnán*, pp. 191–6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁹⁸ This image of Iona is expressed in Adomnán’s *Vita Columbae* iii.23, in *Adomnan’s Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (London, 1961), pp. 540–1: ‘in hac parva et extrema ociani ... insula’ (‘in this small and remote island of the ... Ocean’).

as the other Irish works we have seen, *De locis sanctis* fused knowledge and tropes which had come down from classical works with a Christianised worldview which had thoroughly absorbed biblical cosmology. The view of the islands of the North Atlantic as being on the very edge of the world was common in continental and insular texts of the period and is strongly felt in Adomnán.⁹⁹ It arose from classical geography, which placed Ireland and Britain on the very edge of the *orbis terrarum*.¹⁰⁰ This peripheral location was then understood in light of ideas about Christian universalism and the foreordained spread of the faith from the centre of the world, where it began (Jerusalem and the Holy Land), out to the very extremities, the ‘islands of the gentiles’ of Genesis X.5.¹⁰¹ This image of salvation spreading from the centre of the earth to the edges was a well-established trope and one which was popular with insular writers.¹⁰² According to this understanding, a meticulous and divine plan lay behind geography and history. The discerning Christian reader would be able to glimpse the outline of this plan in the details of the physical

⁹⁹ T. O’Loughlin, ‘The View from Iona: Adomnán’s Mental Maps’, *Peritia* 10 (1996), 98–122; *idem*, ‘Living in the Ocean’, in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, ed. C. Bourke (Dublin, 1997), pp. 11–23. Cf. Patrick, *Confessio* 1, in *Libri Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi*, ed. L. Bieler, *Clavis Patricii* 2 (Dublin, 1993), 57; Gildas, *De excidio Brittonum* 3, in *Gildas: the Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. M. Winterbottom (Chichester, 1978), pp. 89–90; Cummian, *De controuersia pascali*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Pliny, *Historia naturalis* iv.102–104, ed. Ian and Mayhoff, I, p. 178; Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* 22, in *C. Julii Solini collectanea rerum memorabilium*, ed. T. Mommsen (Berlin, 1895), pp. 99–103; Orosius, *Historiae aduersus paganos* I.ii.75–80, in *Orose: Histoires (Contres Les Païes)*, ed. M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet, Collection des universités de France, 3 vols. (Paris, 1990–1), I, 31–2; Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIV.vi.2–6.

¹⁰¹ J. O’Reilly, ‘Reading the Scriptures in the Life of Columba’, in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, pp. 80–106.

¹⁰² For instance, Patrick, *Confessio* 3; Columbanus, Letter 5, in *Sancti Columbani opera*, ed. and trans. G. S. M. Walker, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 2 (Dublin, 1970), 36–57.

world—a providential plan which unfolded right up to Judgement Day, at which point the purpose of history would be fulfilled and the temporal world would give way to the eternal kingdom. As world geography was part of the same divine plan as time and history, Jerusalem became, for Adomnán, not only the spiritual centre of the world, but also the literal and physical centre; book one, chapter eleven describes a column in the centre of Jerusalem which, at midday on the summer solstice, casts no shadow.¹⁰³ This image is rooted in the classical model of the world, which understood the earth as a globe, with the three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe) arranged in a circle of lands in the northern hemisphere.¹⁰⁴ In the Christian era, this model was adopted and modified, and Jerusalem was envisioned as being situated at the very centre of this circle of lands, the inhabited world.¹⁰⁵ For Adomnán, this story proved that Jerusalem was situated at the very centre of the *orbis terrarum*, using classical geographical knowledge to give literality to biblical images of the holy city. Adomnán links the story of the column to Psalm LXXIII.12, stating ‘unde et psalmigrafus propter sancta passionis et resurrectionis loca quae intra ipsam Heliam continentur uaticinans canit: Deus autem rex noster ante saeculum operatus est salutem in medio terrae’.¹⁰⁶ He then goes on to say that Jerusalem is known as ‘umbilicus terrae’ (‘the navel of the world’), echoing a tradition which

¹⁰³ *DLSA*, i.11, p. 56.

¹⁰⁴ For an overview of medieval geographical ideas, see A. H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th series 64 (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁰⁵ J. O’Reilly, ‘Idols and Islands at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*’, in *Bède le Vénérable entre tradition et postérité*, ed. S. Lebecq et al., Histoire de l’Europe du Nord-Ouest 34 (Lille, 2005), 119–45, at p. 119.

¹⁰⁶ *DLSA* i.11, p. 56: ‘Hence the psalmist, because of the holy places of the passion and resurrection, which are contained within the Helia itself, prophesying sings: “God our king before the ages hath wrought our salvation in the centre of the earth”’, Meehan, p. 57.

goes back to Jerome.¹⁰⁷ The image Adomnán presents of Jerusalem at the very centre of the earth would be given visual form in the *mappae mundi* which came later in the medieval period.¹⁰⁸

O'Loughlin has recently described Bede as the *discipulus* to Adomnán's *magister*, and the latter's influence can certainly be strongly felt in Bede's geographical understanding. Though he modified and added to Adomnán's text, Bede's *De locis sanctis* inherited the Irish abbot's classico-Christian geographical sense. Like Adomnán, Bede viewed his own people and their geographical placement through the lens of Scripture—gentiles from the islands converted to the faith in accordance with the foreordained unrolling of history.¹⁰⁹ The Holy Land again was seen as the centre from which Christian history emanated; in his commentary on the Song of Songs, Bede placed Britain on the edges of the world ('extra orbem'), far from the first places of the world ('in primis orbis partibus').¹¹⁰ He followed Adomnán in the account of the shadowless column in Jerusalem, saying 'putant ibi mediam esse terram et historice dictum: deus autem, rex noster, ante saecula operatus est salutem in medio terrae'.¹¹¹ For both writers, the world was seen as being imbued from the moment of Creation with a divine purpose. Both the Holy Land, at the centre of the earth, and the islands of Ocean, at its very edge, had a significant role to play in the unfolding of history. The Atlantic islands were identified in the *Historia ecclesiastica* with the 'multitude of

¹⁰⁷ Jerome, *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem libri XIV*, in *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera, Pars I: opera exegetica*, ed. F. Glorie, CCS 75 (Turnhout, 1964), ii.5.

¹⁰⁸ E. Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World*, British Library Studies in Map History 1 (London, 1997), passim.

¹⁰⁹ J. Davidse, 'The Sense of History in the Works of the Venerable Bede', *Studi Medievali* 23 (1982), 647–95, at pp. 664–8.

¹¹⁰ Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum*, in *Beda venerabilis: opera exegetica 2B*, ed. D. Hurst and J. E. Hudson, CCS 119B (Turnhout, 1983), prol. 508–513, p. 180.

¹¹¹ *DLSB*, ii.76–81, pp. 258–9: 'they reckon that the centre of the earth is at that spot and that literally true is the saying: But God our king, before the ages, effected salvation at the centre of the earth', Foley, p. 10.

isles' of the Psalms, a correspondence which immediately sets Britain and Ireland within the narrative of salvation history.¹¹² The islands of Ocean were a symbol in the Old Testament of the very edges of the world, where it was prophesied God's power would extend. For Christian writers, and particularly for Bede, such passages referred clearly to the foreordained spread of the faith to Britain and Ireland.¹¹³

The section in the *Historia ecclesiastica* which drew on *De locis sanctis* could quite easily be dismissed as being out of place, irrelevant to the main narrative of British Christianity, but Bede clearly felt it was worth including, stating that it would be useful for his readers.¹¹⁴ It is for the reasons of providential history outlined above that the extract from *De locis sanctis* in the *Historia ecclesiastica* is so apt. Rather than an irrelevant, if learned, aside, it is a thematically appropriate section which further reinforces the message of the *Historia*—that providence has ordained the spread of Christianity from the centre of the earth to an island at the very edge of the world.¹¹⁵ Bede was concerned with preaching and the spreading of the gospel and the narrative of his history reflects this—the spread of the faith amongst the peoples of Britain stands as both a fulfilment and a microcosm of the universal spread of Christianity.¹¹⁶ And suitably, a work about the origin point of Christianity by an abbot on far-west Iona is used to lead up to the climax of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, namely the conversion

¹¹² *HE* v.23, p. 560; Ps. XCVI(XCVII).1.

¹¹³ O'Reilly, 'Idols and Islands', pp. 124–134.

¹¹⁴ *HE* v.15, p. 508.

¹¹⁵ Davidse, 'Sense of History', pp. 664–5; *idem*, 'On Bede as Christian Historian', in *Beda Venerabilis*, ed. Houwen and MacDonald, pp. 1–15, at pp. 12–13; D. Scully, 'Location and Occupation: Bede, Gildas, and the Roman Vision of Britain', in *Anglo-Saxon Traces*, ed. J. Roberts and L. Webster, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Studies* 4 (Tempe, AZ, 2011), 243–72; O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols'.

¹¹⁶ L. Martin, 'Bede and Preaching', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, pp. 156–169.

of Iona to the true Easter rule by the Northumbrian Ecgbert in 716.¹¹⁷

CONCLUSION

We cannot tell whether Bede knew anything about the background of the texts he used. Nevertheless, as I have argued above, his approach to the anonymous Irish texts would have remained intellectually open-minded. Indeed, as we have seen, he sometimes privileged information taken from these sources over other authorities. In the case of Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*, we see that Irish background did not prejudice Bede's use of the text. His diplomatic and positive depiction of Irish learning in the *Historia ecclesiastica* reflects a genuine intellectual curiosity and openness to ideas from different backgrounds. Bede was happy to take from Irish writers and use them in conjunction with his other sources—classical, biblical, patristic and contemporary materials—and forge his own unique works from them.

The three works of cosmology, time-reckoning and geography dealt with above had more influence on Bede than simple citation-counting might suggest. In all these works, inherited learning and scientific curiosity were melded and rearranged into an integrated, wide-ranging and, most of all, Christian take on the scientific textbooks of Antiquity. Bede has been rightly celebrated as a synthesizer of a great variety of sources, which were combined in his works to create a coherent and theologically sound worldview. Without wishing to devalue this achievement, I would also suggest that the seeds of this approach can be detected in his early use of these Irish sources. Two of Bede's most celebrated works, both written near the end of his life, are *De temporum ratione* and the *Historia ecclesiastica*. *De temporum ratione* opens (after some chapters on technical

¹¹⁷ For the conversion of Iona as the narrative high point of the *HE* see, for example, Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', p. 41–2.

preparations) with an Irish-influenced scheme of ascending divisions of time. It ends with a vision of the Eighth Age of the world to come, inspired by *De ordine creaturarum*. The *Historia ecclesiastica* uses Adomnán's *De locis sanctis* to place the history of the British Isles within a grand cosmological narrative. Taken together, these two works give us an insight into Bede's cosmological outlook. They also show that his cosmology was profoundly influenced by Irish scientific texts.