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eDIL	*eDIL: Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, edited by Gregory Toner, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Sharon Arbuthnot, Marie-Luise Theuerkauf and Dagmar Wodtko (www.dil.ie, 2020)
CLA	Codices Latini Antiquiores
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina
GPC	Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: A Dictionary of the Welsh Language Online

The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic is proud to be associated *with Quaestio Insularis*, the journal of the annual Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic (CCASNC). The Colloquium and *Quaestio* were established in 1999 and 2000 by the department's lively postgraduate community, and successive generations of students have maintained the superb quality of both the event and its proceedings volume. The 2022 conference, on the theme of Marvels and Miracles, was another very successful event, even though it had to be moved online at the last minute, due to concerns about Covid. The papers published in this volume exemplify innovation in Medieval Studies, for example by bringing Monster Theory into dialogue with didactic literature or foregrounding the spiritual concerns of Old Norse literature. As ever, they showcase the cross–disciplinary ethos which distinguishes CCASNC, combining research into the peoples and cultures of early medieval Northern Europe from literary, historical, linguistic and material perspectives. *Quaestio Insularis* 23 and all back numbers of the journal can be ordered directly from the Department's website (www.asnc.cam.ac.uk).

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COLLOQUIUM REPORT

The 23rd Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic took place online on Saturday 5 February 2022. Although we had initially hoped to hold the conference at least partially in person, as we came closer to the conference date, we took the decision to hold it online for the second year in a row. We were pleased to invite Professor Alison Finlay from Birkbeck University of London, who was our keynote speaker. Although we had hoped to welcome Professor Finlay and our other speakers to Cambridge, we were still delighted by the range of papers brought together under the theme of 'Marvels and Miracles', and by the rich discussions that followed each paper.

We were grateful to the previous Colloquium's co-presidents, through whose efforts previous issues of the Colloquium's journal, *Quaestio Insularis*, have been digitised, and are now freely available online at https://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/publications/quaestio/index.html.

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The members of the colloquium committee were Beatrice Bedogni, Pau Blanco Ríos, Anna Chacko, Emily Clarke, Nina Cnockaert-Guillou, Roan M. Runge, and Davide Salmoiraghi.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dragons, Wolves and Spectral Armies: Signs of Wartime in Early Medieval Annals

James Burns
University of Leicester

INTRODUCTION

Annals from early medieval Europe contain many curiosities for modern readers. Take the following record, found in all extant manuscripts of the various *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*: 'Her oþiewde read Cristesmęl on hefenum æfter sunnan setlonge. 7 þy geare gefuhton Mierce 7 Cantware æt Ottanforda, 7 wunderleca nędran wæron gesewene on Suþseaxna londe'.[1] Commenting on Twitter on this reference to a red cross in the sky, marvellous snakes in Sussex, and a battle at Otford, the historian Marc Morris joked, 'So, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, if you could preserve only three facts about 776 for posterity, what would they be?'[2] Laconic annal references like these may seem to be a source of difficulty — as well as humour — for the historian. We may struggle to comprehend how events that seem so peculiar to us could pass with so little comment from the annalist. But once we explain apparently inexplicable annal entries, they become more than curiosities. They reveal the significance early medieval observers attached to the natural world. It is likely that, like the cross in the sky, the snakes appealed as an astonishing manifestation of God's creation: the adders were 'wunderleca' —

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[1] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. by David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983-), 17 vols., s.a. 773A; 'In this year a red cross appeared in the sky after sunset. And that year the Mercians and the people of Kent fought at Otford. And marvellous adders were seen in Sussex', in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', trans. by Dorothy Whitelock, in *English Historical Documents: Volume 1, c. 500-1042*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1979; repr. London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 149–259 (p. 183). Hereafter, the edition is referred to as *ASC*.
[2] Marc Morris (@Longshanks1307), Twitter, 9 November 2017.

a term for divine marvels.[3] Perhaps, then, the snakes were seen as a sign of divine approval, but what of is even less clear. It could have been the Battle of Otford, but probably not given the annalist was not invested in it enough to give the outcome. However, in many other annals made during or after violent conflicts, bizarre and natural phenomena have explicit or implicit ominous connotations. These form some of our most distinctive and diverse sets of annalistic records. Historians such as Nicholas Brooks have seen annals as a 'secular' genre of historical writing.[4] Yet their treatment of natural phenomena reveals the annalists' strong concern with highlighting divine judgement. War led to grave reflections on the behaviour of beasts and celestial bodies as portending the crises which Christians were to suffer for their sins.

Some occurrences annalists recorded are immediately recognisable as real-world phenomena, such as diseases, eclipses, and comets. But many are not, like ships in the sky, spectral armies, and dragons. Indeed, Janet Nelson recently wrote that 'the experience of finding the Early Middle Ages strange' poses a greater problem for the historian than the supposed paucity of evidence.[5] Yet some of what appears as strange to us also appeared strange to early medieval annalists, who explicitly labelled certain phenomena as out of the ordinary. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* called the adders seen in Sussex marvellous.[6] The *Annals of Ulster* referred to a 'horribilis et miribilis' sign at night.[7] The *Annals of Fulda* said that a sudden disappearance of dogs was

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[3] Anna Fadda, 'Constant Ergo Inter Nos Verba Signa Essa: The Understanding of the Miraculous in Anglo-Saxon Society', *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church*, ed. by Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, Studies in Church History, 41 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), pp. 56–66 (pp. 60–61).

[4] Nicholas Brooks, 'Why is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle about Kings?', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 39 (2010), 43–70 (p. 47).

[5] Janet Nelson, *Charlemagne: King and Emperor* (London: Penguin Books, 2020), p. 27.

[6] *ASC*, s.a. 773A.

[7] *The Annals of Ulster (To A.D. 1131)*, ed. and trans. by Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), s.a. 744; 'horrible and wonderful'. Hereafter *AU*.

remarkable.[8] Appreciating that phenomena like these were considered unusual in their own time is our first step in understanding why they were recorded by annalists.

The second is acknowledging that medieval writers were not the first to be interested in bizarre portents. References to strange natural events abound in classical writings: Tacitus wrote that lightning flashes, a comet, and a calf with its head growing on its leg portended the disasters of Nero's reign.[9] But the Bible was as, if not more, influential on later European historiography. The Gospels and Revelation explain how the Apocalypse will be prefigured by signs in the sky.[10] Furthermore, patristic, late antique world chronicles that were sometimes incorporated into early medieval annals referenced natural phenomena.[11] The medieval annalists, then, were heirs to an established tradition of including strange events in historiography.

Still, their annals have a special interest. First, there is novelty in their content. Annalists recorded phenomena which are not necessarily found in older works. Even when there was precedent, this does not account for why the annalist included the natural phenomenon in their historical record. As we shall see, the varying attitudes among annalists show that their inclusion of phenomena was not simply a function of genre. Furthermore, the year-by-year format of annal entries means their records of phenomena can be understood with reference to extremely precise historical contexts. So, despite the frequent anonymity of annalists, and often laconic style of their records, annals can reveal more about early medieval attitudes to the natural world than we might expect.

Yet studies of annalistic records of natural phenomena have traditionally focused on parsing their scientific value rather than their

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[8] *Annales Fuldenses*, ed. by Friedrich Kurze, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum Separatim Editi*, *MGH SS Germ.*, 7 (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1891), s.a. 878. Hereafter *AF*.

[9] Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales*, ed. by Henry Furneaux, Henry Pelham, and Charles Dennis Fisher, 2 vols, 2nd rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press), II, 15, 47.

[10] Luke 21.10-11, 21.25-28; Mark, 13.8; Revelation, 6.12–14, 12.1–3; 2 Samuel 22.1; I Chronicles 21.11.

[11] Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, ed. by Karl Zangmeister (Leipzig: Teubner, 1889), V. 6, 18.

meaning for contemporaries. Robert Newton's study *Medieval Chronicles and the Rotation of the Earth* assessed the reliability of eclipse and comet records.[12] He said little about the significance of comets for the medieval Europeans that recorded them, beyond the occasional statement that they were 'superstitious' about them.[13] When annalists described phenomena in fantastical terms, both historians and scientists have tried to work out to what scientific process the annal was referring.[14] Speculation along these lines can quickly seem futile. In trying to explain a particularly puzzling Welsh annal, one scholar writes, 'Beavers … were rare and probably too large for a tornado to carry far'.[15] Being overly concerned with the scientific plausibility of annalistic entries has led historians to overlook cultural explanations. David Woods argued that the *Annals of Ulster*'s record of ships in the air in AD 748 must, barring 'alien visitation, time travel' and 'mass hallucination,' be an error of textual transmission.[16] But 'ships in the air' may well have been in the annalist's conceptual framework for interpreting the natural world; it certainly was for other early medieval Europeans.[17]

However, historians have started addressing the cultural interest of annalistic records in studies of early medieval attitudes towards nature.[18]

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[12] Robert Newton, *Medieval Chronicles and the Rotation of the Earth* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1972), p. v.

[13] Ibid., p. 103.

[14] For example, Hisashi Hayakawa and others, 'The Celestial Sign in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in the 770s: Insights on Contemporary Solar Activity', *Solar Physics*, 294.4 (2019), 1–30 (p. 1).

[15] Erik Grigg, "Mole Rain' and Other Natural Phenomena in The Welsh Annals: Can *Mirabilia* Unravel the Textual History of the *Annales Cambriae*?', *Welsh History Review*, 24.4 (2009), 1–40 (p. 24).

[16] David Woods, 'On 'Ships in the Air' in 749', *Peritia*, 14 (2000), 429–30 (p. 429); *AU*, s.a. 748.

[17] Agobard of Lyons, *De grandine et tonitruis*, ed. L. Van Acker in *Agobardi Lugdunensis Opera Omnia, in Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediavalis*, 52 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), pp. 3–15.

[18] Sarah Foot, 'Plenty, Portents and Plague: Ecclesiastical Readings of the Natural World in Early Medieval Europe', in *God's Bounty? The Churches and the Natural World*, ed. by Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon, Studies in Church History, 46 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), pp. 15–41.

Aidan Breen, Daniel McCarthy, Sarah Foot, Mark Williams and others have understood the references made by annals to the natural world as deriving from 'Apocalyptic' thought.[19] That explanation works for many records, which exposes Michelle Yoon's interpretation of the natural phenomena in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* as reaching back to Germanic paganism as being extremely unsatisfactory. [20] But there are marvels that do not conform to biblical schema. Moreover, the surveys of Scott Ashley and Paul Dutton of portents in the Carolingian Empire have argued that whether or not natural occurrences were viewed as portents depended on the individual annalist, and the immediate political context.[21] Ashley did not engage much with the annalistic material, finding it too ambiguous, and Dutton misjudged some of it, but their emphasis on political interpretations of natural phenomena was well-placed. Expanding on their analysis, I argue that wartime events significantly politicised records of heavenly signs and animal behaviour from Anglo-Saxon England, early medieval Ireland, and Carolingian Europe.

Originating in Wessex, the Winchester manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, known as A, was written from the end of the ninth century AD. For the 'common stock' of records for years before AD 891, which A shares with later manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, its compilers drew on

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[19] Aidan Breen and Daniel McCarthy, 'An Evaluation of Astronomical Observations in the Irish Annals', *Vistas in Astronomy* 41.1 (1997), 117–38 (p. 117); Sarah Foot, 'Annals and Chronicles in Western Europe', in *Oxford History of Historical Writing II: 400-1400*, ed. by Sarah Foot and Chase Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 346–67 (p. 365); Mark Williams, *Fiery Shapes: Celestial Portents and Astrology in Ireland and Wales, 700 to 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 6–7; James Palmer, 'Climates of Crisis: Apocalypse, Nature and Rhetoric in the Early Medieval World', *Viator*, 48.2 (2017), 1–20 (p. 20).

[20] Michelle Yoon, 'Origin and Supplement: Marvels and Miracles in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*', in *Global Perspectives on Medieval English Literature, Language and Culture*, ed. by Noel Harold Kaylor Jnr and Richard Scott Nokes (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. 195–228 (p. 196).

[21] Scott Ashley, 'The Power of Symbols: Interpreting Portents in the Carolingian Empire', *Medieval History*, 4 (1994), 34–51 (p. 38); Paul Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 126.

genealogies, notes recorded in Easter tables, and the writings of Bede.[22] Editions of each individual extant manuscript of the *Chronicles* have directed historians to pay greater attention to variations between them.[23] Of particular importance for this study are the eleventh-century 'northern recension' chronicles: D and E, which incorporated material probably derived from eighth- and ninth- century archetypes at York.[24]

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* may have been partly inspired by annalistic writing in contemporary Francia.[25] The Carolingian period saw an expansion of history writing.[26] Foremost among the annals produced at the Frankish court were the *Royal Frankish Annals*.[27] Within its manuscripts, sets of years seem to have been written in batches by members of the royal chapel, eventually under archchaplain Hildiun, soon after the events they describe, with a reviser at Charlemagne's court later adding to earlier entries.[28] Its entries date from AD 741. Most manuscripts of the *Royal Frankish Annals* end in AD 829, when a rebellion dispersed the members of Louis the Pious' court. Archchaplain Fulco, however, soon oversaw a continuation: the *Annals of St-Bertin*.[29] Written in the Western half of the Carolingian Empire, these annals cover and were written during the years AD 830 to 882.[30] In the mid–830s,

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[22] Kenneth Harrison, *The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History to A.D. 900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 140.

[23] Dumville and Keynes, *ASC*, 17 vols.

[24] Pauline Stafford, 'The Making of Chronicles and the Making of England: The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles After Alfred', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 27 (2017), 65–86 (p. 78).

[25] John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Franks and the English in the Ninth Century: Some Common Historical Interests', *History*, n.s., 35.125 (1950), 202–28 (p. 212).

[26] Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 36.

[27] *Annales Regni Francorum*, ed. Georg Pertz, *MGH SS Germ.*, 6 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1895). Hereafter *RFA*.

[28] Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 103.

[29] *Annales Bertiniani*, ed. Georg Waitz, *MGH SS Germ.*, 5 (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1883). Hereafter *AB*.

[30] Janet Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 8–10.

Prudentius, after he became chaplain at the royal court of Louis the Pious and later Charles the Bald, took over their production until his death in AD 861. He was succeeded by Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims (from AD 845 to 882). The *Annals of St-Bertin* can be compared to another continuation of the *Royal Frankish Annals*, the East Frankish *Annals of Fulda.* Friedrich Kurze suggested that Charlemagne's biographer Einhard authored the shorter set of these annals until AD 838; then Rudolf of Fulda until AD 863; then his student Meginhard until the 880s, when multiple, difficult-to-identify authors may have become involved.[31] However, Kurze's identifications were heavily disputed by Siegmund Hellman, and I agree with Timothy Reuter that the debate has not been satisfactorily resolved.[32] As Reuter noted, given that the entries from the 840s often referenced Mainz, the annalists may actually have been based there.[33] I prioritise the *Annals of Fulda* and *Annals of St-Bertin* in my analysis of Carolingian annals, since this allows for interesting comparisons of records of natural phenomena by contemporary annalists in East and West Francia.

My final set of annals are the misleadingly named *Annals of Ulster*. From the mid-sixth century AD, the common source of these annals was written at the monastery of Iona, until it was moved to Ireland around AD 740.[34] The *Annals of Ulster* and the other main Irish annal compilations of the 'Clonmacnoise group' that were based on this archetype closely agree in terms of content until AD 913.[35] Almost all the *Annals of Ulster*'s entries were chronologically dislocated by one year as they were copied, including its records of natural phenomena. This, as Nicholas Evans argued, suggests that

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[31] Kurze, *Annales*, p. v.

[32] Siegmund Hellmann, 'Einhard, Rudolf, Meginhard. Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Annales Fuldenses', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 34 (1913), pp. 40-64; Timothy Reuter, *The Annals of Fulda* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 7–8.

[33] Ibid., pp. 8–9.

[34] Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to Sources* (London: Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1972), p. 142; Daniel McCarthy, *The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), p. 167.

[35] Nicholas Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), pp. 113–114; Thomas Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 7.

they were included at the same time as the rest of the annals, and were not, as McCarthy argued for the phenomena of the years AD 538 to 773, retrospectively added from another source around AD 777.[36]

From this range of annals, I have selected a few case studies which reveal the influence of conflict on depictions of natural phenomena. First, I analyse how the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* shares with the *Annals of Ulster* and *Annals of Fulda* explicit and implicit associations between comets and violent political change. Then I centre my analysis on the insular annals. I consider how attacks by the Vikings influenced records of eclipses found in the northern recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, and the relationship between the recension's reference to dragons and those in the *Annals of Ulster*. Afterwards, I move my focus to the Carolingian annals and highlight how the *Annals of St-Bertin*, despite containing fewer references to natural phenomena than the other annals, offers some of the most striking evocations of war via accounts of spectral and wolf armies. Finally, I note that extreme natural phenomena did not always have negative connotations for our annalists — at least when storms and diseases afflicted the wartime enemies of Christians. Across these annals, we read a rhetoric that was both shaped by war and an interpretation of war.

COMETS

Our first wartime marvel is the comet. Sometimes its portentous qualities of comets are left to be inferred. The *Annals of Ulster* recorded comets in AD 677 and 1018, when battles were listed as taking place, without explicitly calling them portents.[37] But for other comets recorded by the annalists, the portentous qualities were made clear. The writer of the *Annals of Ulster* recorded for AD 916 that 'Airdi graindi olchena. Cometis celum ardere uisum est'.[38] What the comets portended was probably the Viking fleet that landed

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[36] Evans, *The Present and the Past*, p. 230; McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, p. 188–9.

[37] *AU*, s.a. 677, 1018.

[38] *AU*, s.a. 916; 'Horrible portents also [appeared]: the heavens seemed to glow with comets'. Trans. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals*, p. 367.

that year, and the subsequent Viking victory in which kings, nobles, and bishops apparently fell.[39]

In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, we also see variety in how comets are presented: earlier records of comets, in line with the overall trend in their annals, are less descriptive. In AD 729, the northern recension recorded a comet in the year of the death of King Osric and Saint Egbert, but did not call it a sign within the annal.[40] Yet Bede did label comets in AD 729 as portents, implicitly of Egbert's death.[41] Bede was a keen observer of astronomical sights generally, due to their importance for calculating the date of Easter, but, influenced by the writings of Pliny and Isidore, he was also interested in comets as signs of war and changes of royal power.[42] Since the northern recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* almost certainly derived its record of comets in AD 729 from Bede, it is quite probable that its chroniclers shared his understanding of their symbolism. Another record of a comet, in AD 891, though it cannot be linked with an obvious calamity, indicates that the annalist had a particular interest in comets.[43] An annalist of A noted that 'æteowde se steorra þe mon on boclæden hæt cometa: sume men cweþaþ on englisc þæt hit sie feaxede steorra, forþæm þær stent lang leoma of, hwilum on ane healfe, hwilum on ælce healfe'.[44] Their reference to 'sume men' calling the comet the long-haired star may hint at the presence of astronomers at the royal court, around which some of the chronicles were written.[45] Meanwhile,

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[39] Evans, *The Present and the Past*, p. 39.

[40] *ASC*, s.a. 729DE.

[41] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (London: The English Historical Society, 1838), v. 23.

[42] Bede, *De natura rerum*, ed. by Charles W. Jones, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), 123A, p. 216; Calvin Kendall and Faith Wallis, *On the Nature of Things* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 7, 189.

[43] *ASC*, s.a. 891A.

[44] 'There appeared the star which is called in Latin *cometa*. Some men say that it is in English the long-haired star, for there shines a long ray from it, sometimes on one side, sometimes on every side'. Trans. by Whitelock, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', pp. 205–206.

[45] Simon Keynes, 'Manuscripts of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume 1, c. 400-1100*, ed. by Richard Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 537–52 (pp. 541–544).

the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*' records of a comet in AD 975 are very suggestive: D states that 'æteowde cometa se steorra, 7 com þa on ðam æftran geare swyðe mycel hungor 7 swyðe mænigfealde styrunga geond Angolcynn'.[46] A, in its poetic account of that year, even more heavily implies that the comet was a sign of God's vengeance in the form of a famine and other troubles: 'þa wearð ætywed uppe on roderum | steorra on staðole, þone stiðferhþe, | hæleð higegleawe, hatað wide | cometa be naman, cræftgleawe men, | wise soðboran. Wæs geond werðeode | Waldendes wracu wide gefrege, | hungor ofer hrusan'.[47] But ultimately it was the dramatic overthrow of the Anglo-Saxon regime in AD 1066 that finally saw the annalists' explicitly label a comet as a sign, 'tacen' — of the Norman Conquest.[48] The records for 1066 in the C and D *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, then, are the climax of a longstanding fascination by the Anglo-Saxons with comets as portents of war since at least the time of Bede.

The annalists of the *Annals of Fulda* labelled comets as portents from an earlier date: for AD 839, it recorded that 'Eodem quoque anno stella cometes in signo Arietis apparuit et prodigia alia in caelo visa sunt'.[49] What the portended events were was not made explicit, but it might have been the division of the Frankish realm among the sons of Louis the Pious that year and/or the resulting revolt launched by Louis the German the year after. A record of a comet in AD 875 gives slightly more information: the comet foretold deaths from a flood, 'adhuc peccatis nostris exigentibus graviora significare timeatur'.[50] The comet, then, was presented as a warning about

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[46] *ASC*, s.a. 975D; 'there appeared the star "comet", and in the next year there came a very great famine and very manifold disturbances throughout England'. Trans. by Whitelock, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', pp. 230–231.

[47] *ASC*, s.a. 975A; 'Then was also revealed up in the skies a star in the firmament, which men firm of spirit, wise in mind, skilled in science, wise orators, far and wide called "comet" by name. The vengeance of the Ruler was manifested widely throughout the people, a famine over the earth'. Trans. by Whitelock, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', pp. 230–231.

[48] *ASC*, s.a. 1066CD.

[49] *AF*, s.a. 839; 'a comet appeared in the sign of Aries and other portents were seen in the sky'. Trans. by Reuter, *Annals*, p. 16.

[50] *AF*, s.a. 875; 'for our sins it may be feared that it symbolised still more serious matters'. Trans. by Reuter, *Annals*, p. 76.

sin; the grave matters the annalist saw it as symbolising might have been the invasion it described later in the annal of Italy by Charles the Bald, who the annalist labelled a tyrant. Referencing the comet as an ominous symbol of divine judgement allowed the annalist to show God's disapproval of the leader of the Carolingian kingdom which rivalled his own. By contrast, neither Prudentius nor Hincmar recorded comets in the *Annals of St-Bertin*, perhaps because they were suspicious of their association with pagan authors. We know there was an active discussion in Carolingian circles over what counted as portents: Louis the Pious famously asked 'the Astronomer' if what was thought to be a comet in AD 837 portended his death and concluded that it was at least a sign that God wanted Christians to repent.[51] The Carolingian writer Lupus of Ferrières observed that while holy scripture did not mention comets, non-Christian writers such as Virgil and Josephus said they portended pestilence and war.[52] The differences between the *Annals of Fulda* and *Annals of St-Bertin* imply a disagreement among the Carolingian elite over the meaning of comets. Amid the rediscovery of antique learning in the Carolingian period, the authors of the *Annals of Fulda*, but not their West Frankish contemporaries, may have drawn a portentous reading of comets from classical writings, which conflict encouraged them to apply to their own times.[53]

ECLIPSES AND DRAGONS

One particular pattern of records of astronomical phenomena in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* points to the importance of war with the Vikings. Four

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[51] Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici Imperatoris*, ed. by Ernst Tremp, *MGH SS rer. Germ.*, 64 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1995), 58, pp. 518–522; Scott Ashley, 'What did Louis the Pious see in the Night Sky? A New Interpretation of the Astronomer's Account of Halley's Comet, 837', *Early Medieval Europe*, 21.1 (2013), 27–49 (pp. 28–29). See also, discussion of Charlemagne's question to Alcuin on whether the movements of Mars were prodigious, in Mary Garrison and Tom McLeish, 'Reversals in Wartime: Alcuin and Charlemagne discuss Retrograde Motion', *Interfaces (Milano)*, 8 (2021), 14–53 (p. 25).

[52] Lupus of Ferrières, *Epistola*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH Epistolarum tomus 6: Karolini aevi IV*, 20, p. 28.

[53] Ashley, 'Power of Symbols', p. 35.

eclipses were recorded within a few years of each other in the northern recension for the years around the start of the ninth century AD.[54] By contrast, the other manuscripts mention no eclipses during this period and otherwise record between one and two eclipses for each century from the seventh to the tenth.[55] This indicates that there was a particularly strong interest in astronomical events in Northumbria at this time. As noted above, historians have shown how early medieval writers took careful note of astronomical observations because of their implications for calculating the date of Easter.[56] Computistics did almost certainly influence records of eclipses in Easter tables which some annals drew upon.[57] However, concerns with Easter computistics do not satisfactorily explain why Northumbrians should have recorded a spate of eclipses which their southern contemporaries did not, over 100 years after King Oswiu endorsed the 'Roman' method of dating Easter at the Synod of Whitby. Instead, I suggest it is not a coincidence that these years saw the earliest Viking raids in the north of England. Indeed, the recension recorded that, in the year of the AD 806 eclipse, the king of Northumbria was driven from his kingdom.[58] When church and kingdom appeared to face imminent destruction, perhaps ecclesiastics looked to the night sky and noted signs that the Bible indicated would signify the end of the world: 'There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars'.[59] Ecclesiastics may have associated the Vikings with the enemies of the people of God that the Bible had told them would come from the North.[60] So in Northumbria, it is very likely that they saw the eclipses as confirmation that the attacks of the Vikings constituted divine retribution. Yet the loss of so many writings from this period means we cannot be sure of the extent to which this was a widely-

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[54] *ASC*, s.a. 796DE, 800DE, 802DE, 806DE.

[55] *ASC*, s.a. 664A, 733A, 734A, 827A, 879A, 904C.

[56] Faith Wallis, *On the Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. lxvii.

[57] Joanna Story, 'The Frankish Annals of Kent and Lindisfarne', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 34 (2005), 59–109 (pp. 99–100).

[58] *ASC*, s.a. 806DE.

[59] Luke 21:25.

[60] Jeremiah 6.22–3.

held belief nor whether ecclesiastics used the eclipses to prompt the laity to pay heed to God's words as well as his warnings.

But a connection between unusual phenomena and Vikings attacks is made explicit in what is possibly the most famous record of the northern recension, that of AD 793:

> Her wæron reðe forebecna cumene ofer Norðhymbra land, 7 þæt folc earmlic bregdon, þæt wæron ormete þodenas 7 ligrescas, 7 fyrenne dracan wæron gesewene on þam lifte fleogende. Þam tacnum sona fyligde mycel hunger, 7 litel æfter þam, þæs ilcan geares on .vi. idus Ianuarii, earmlice hæþenra manna hergunc adilegode Godes cyrican in Lindisfarnaee þurh hreaflac 7 mansliht. 7 Sicga forðferde on .viii. kalendas Martius.[61]

With the whirlwind and lightning, the dragons were labelled as a portent of the famine and Viking attack. But dragons are not a stock omen within the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*. They are mentioned nowhere else within them, including in connection with other famines.

We can, however, find a source for the use of dragons as an annalistic motif in the *Annals of Ulster*, which has two references to dragons, for the period when their archetype was at or had shortly before left Iona.[62] If the author of the lost eighth- or ninth- century Northumbrian chronicle was familiar with Ionan annals, that may help explain why it is only the northern recension's record for the attack on Lindisfarne which refers to a dragon in all the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*. There were strong connections between Iona and Northumbria: Lindisfarne priory was founded by Saint Aidan, who came from Iona; Kathleen Hughes and Clare Stancliffe have demonstrated that

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[61] *ASC*, s.a. 793DE; 'In this year dire portents appeared over Northumbria and sorely whirlwinds frightened the people. They consisted of immense flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine immediately followed those signs, and a little after that in the same year, on 8 June, the ravages of heathen men miserably destroyed God's church on Lindisfarne, with plunder and slaughter. And Sicga died on 22 February'. Trans. by Whitelock, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', p. 186.

[62] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 142.

links persisted after Northumbria broke with the 'Irish' method of dating Easter at the Synod of Whitby; and Colin Ireland has highlighted the enduring Gaelic influence on eighth-century Northumbrian literary culture.[63] Most importantly for our present inquiry, Archibald Duncan has noted that several unusual battle locations featured in earlier annals of the northern recension suggest its source used Ionan annals.[64] There are similarities between the dragon references in the *Annals of Ulster* and northern recension which support this theory. Like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*' northern recension's record for AD 793, the *Annals of Ulster*'s record for AD 745 refers to dragons in the sky: 'Dracones in caelo uissi sunt'.[65] Meanwhile, the record for AD 734, though it refers to a singular dragon, matches the northern recension in pairing a dragon with a storm: 'Draco ingens in fine autumni cum tonitruo magno post se uisus est'.[66]

Yet while one could infer that the *Annals of Ulster*'s dragons may have been considered portents because they featured in years of battles between groups in Ireland, the dragons are not explicitly called portents in the annals, unlike in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.* So despite the possible Ionan influence, we go back to the trauma of the attack on Lindisfarne as the most important context of the northern recension's dragon reference. A letter of Alcuin of York clearly conveys the sense of horror and disbelief ecclesiastics felt at the attack: pagans had 'fuderunt sanguinem sanctorum in circuitu altaris,

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[63] Kathleen Hughes, 'Evidence for Contacts Between the Churches of the Irish and English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age', in *England Before the Conquest*, ed. by Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 49–67 (p. 49); Clare Stancliffe, 'The Irish Tradition in Northumbria after the Synod of Whitby', *The Lindisfarne Gospels: New Perspectives*, ed. by Richard Gameson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 19–42 (p. 19); Colin Ireland, *The Gaelic Background of Old English Poetry Before Bede* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2022), pp. 2–3.

[64] Archibald Duncan, 'Bede, Iona and the Picts', in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Ralph Davis and John Michael Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 1–42 (p. 16).

[65] *AU*, s.a. 745; 'Dragons were seen in the sky'. Trans. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals*, p. 201.

[66] *AU*, s.a. 734; 'A huge dragon was seen, with great thunder after it, at the end of autumn'. Trans. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals*, p. 189.

vastaverunt domum spei nostre'.[67] Alcuin also wrote that 'Aut hoc maioris initium est doloris aut peccata habitantium hoc exigerunt. Non equidem casu contigit, sed magni cuiuslibet meriti indicium est'.[68] His letters confirm that the Viking attack on Lindisfarne prompted ecclesiastics to spread a purposeful, self-serving, but likely sincere message that God was warning Christians needed to improve their behaviour. The dragons were probably taken as a further sign of divine judgement and the troubles to come. This would have been approximate to the significance of the dragon in John's vision in Revelation, which prophesised that, near the Apocalypse, 'another sign appeared in heaven: a great red dragon […]'.[69] Indeed, while Yoon sees the marvels of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* as reaching back to a Germanic paganism, the AD 793 dragons sit easily within the Christian culture of Northumbria, with the Irish influences on the Church and concern with divine judgement.[70]

Still, the most famous dragon from Anglo-Saxon England is *Beowulf*'s — and it is tempting to speculate that the Vikings reminded contemporaries of the 'gúðsceaða' that 'ongan glédum spíwan, | beorht hofu bærnan'.[71] Such tales may have been regaled during the aristocratic youth of the ecclesiastics who recorded the attacks, or perhaps even at Church banquets: Alcuin, indeed, felt it necessary to reprimand those who sung pagan songs at the episcopal dinner table.[72] While the date of composition for *Beowulf* is notoriously contentious, we may wonder if it struck the annalist that both the

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[67] Alcuin, *Epistola*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH Epistoralum (Epp.) tomus 4: Karolina aevi II* (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1895), 20, p. 57; 'poured out the blood of saints around the altar, [and] laid waste to our house of hope'. Trans. by Stephen Allott, *Alcuin of York: His Life and Letters* (York: William Sessions Ltd, 1974), pp. 36–38.

[68] Ibid.; 'Either this is the beginning of greater tribulation, or else the sins of the inhabitants have called it upon them. Truly it has not happened by chance, but is a sign that it was well merited by someone'. [Allott, *Alcuin*, pp. 36–38.]

[69] Revelation 12:3.

[70] Yoon, p. 196.

[71] 'Beowulf', ed. and trans. by Benjamin Slade, in *Beowulf on Steorarume* <https://heorot.dk/beowulf-rede-text.html> [accessed 8 December 2022], XXXIII. 2312–2316; 'war-scather', 'began to burn bright-houses'.

[72] Alcuin, *Epistola*. 124, p. 183,

Vikings and the *Beowulf* dragon were from northern lands and appeared to hunger for gold and treasure.[73] In both *Beowulf* and the Bible, the dragon was the ultimate enemy. It was an apt metaphor for the sudden, violent disturbance of a century of monastic living. So, the record of a dragon in the northern recension seems to have reflected epic, biblical and Ionan traditions combined with the extraordinary horror of the Viking sack of Lindisfarne. To repurpose Tolkien for the northern recension's record of AD 793, 'Nowhere does a dragon come in so precisely where he should'.[74]

SPECTRAL AND WOLF ARMIES

Recordings of red lights, sometimes associated by historians with the Northern Lights, were implied to be portentous in early medieval annals.[75] Such sightings may have been seen as portents of important deaths by Anglo-Saxon chroniclers: they recorded fiery sky lights and the death of Sihtric of Northumbria for AD 927.[76] But it was Carolingian annalists who described red sky lights in the most telling and vivid terms: for AD 807 the *Royal Frankish Annals* described them as 'acies' in the sky, and in its record for AD 827 noted that people thought that this sight foreboded the Frankish defeat against the Saracens.[77] This latter reference suggests that an idea of portentous spectral armies had entered that tricky sphere we call popular belief. It is conceivable that Christian Franks could have associated it with the Bible's description of the angels' victory over Satan in the war in Heaven, but this is a poor match for the negative connotations of spectral armies in the *Royal*

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[73] Roberta Frank, 'A Scandal in Toronto: The Dating of "Beowulf" a Quarter Century On', *Speculum*, 82.4 (2007), 843–64 (p. 863).

[74] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 33.

[75] For association of Northern Lights and historical records of red fiery lights, see Montgomery James, 'Spectral Armies, Snakes and a Giant from Gog and Magog: Ibn Fadlan as Eyewitness Among the Vulga Bulghars', *The Medieval History Journal*, 9.1 (2006), 63–87 (p. 78).

[76] *ASC*, s.a. D927.

[77] *RFA*, s.a. 827; 'armies' [my translation].

Frankish Annals.[78] Moreover, the references to spectral armies have clearest precedent in non-Christian classical works: Tacitus, Josephus and Plutarch all referenced sightings of battle-movements in the sky as portents.[79] We also have a vivid eyewitness account from the tenth-century AD Islamic traveller Ibn Faḍlān, who described how he prayed in fear when, among the Bulghars, he saw spectral armies.[80] The idea of armies in the sky, then, appears in a wide range of sources.

However, differences between the *Annals of Fulda* and *Annals of St-Bertin* suggest that contemporary politics was the main factor affecting Carolingian records of spectral armies. The *Annals of St-Bertin* inherited the motif of *acies in caelo* as a portent of conflict from the *Royal Frankish Annals*. Twice it described armies in the sky. In AD 839, 'Acies quoque in caelo igneas colorumque aliorum mensis Februarii'.[81] In AD 859, 'Acies in caelo mense Augusto, Septembri et Octobri nocturno tempore visuntur, ita ut diurna claritas ab oriente usque septentriunem continue fulserit, et columnae sanguimeae ex ea discurrentes processerint'.[82] Yet Prudentius' contemporaries who wrote the *Annals of Fulda* did not use *acies* in its references to portentous astronomical phenomena in AD 839, including the comet discussed above,

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[78] Revelation, 12. 7–10.

[79] Cornelius Tacitus, 'Histories: Books 4-5', in *Histories: Books 4-5. Annals: Books 1-3*, ed. and trans. by Clifford H. Moore and John Jackson, Loeb Classical Library, 249 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), v. 13; Plutarch, 'Caius Marius', in *Lives, Volume IX: Demetrius and Antony. Pyrrhus and Gaius Marius*, ed. and trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library, 101 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), XVII; Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War, Volume III: Books 5-7*, ed. and trans. by H. St. J. Thackeray, LCL, 210 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), VI. 298–300; James, 'Spectral Armies', p. 78.

[80] Ibn Faḍlān, 'Mission to the Volga', ed. and trans. by James Montgomery, in *Two Arabic Travel Books: Accounts of China and India and the Mission to the Volga*, ed. by Philip Kennedy and Shawkat Toorawa (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), pp. 190–266 (pp. 223–225).

[81] *AB*, s.a. 839; 'Then in February an army of fiery red and other colours could often be seen in the sky'. Trans. by Nelson, *Annals*, p. 42.

[82] *AB*, s.a. 859; 'In August, September and October, armies were seen in the sky at night: a brightness like that of daylight shone out unbroken from the east right to the north and bloody columns came streaming out from it.' Trans. by Nelson, *Annals*, p. 90.

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and did not mention any like phenomena for AD 859.[83] This seems surprising as the *Annals of Fulda* was usually more descriptive about marvels than the *Annals of St-Bertin*. But then, unlike the *Annals of Fulda*, for AD 859, the *Annals of St-Bertin* referred directly to conflict between Louis the German and Charles the Bald, and the Viking plundering of Amiens and the surrounding area. Similarly, while the *Annals of Fulda*'s entry for AD 839 was a brief if foreboding description of the division of the kingdom by Louis the Pious, the West Frankish *Annals of St-Bertin* dwelt in detail on the tensions and hostilities between Louis and his sons, and described Louis the German as an undutiful son launching a wretched revolt against a righteous father.[84] Indeed, other West Frankish writers made an explicit link between battles in the sky and the conflicts of that year.[85] Nonetheless, for AD 840, the *Annals of Fulda* did elaborate more on the war between Louis the Pious and Louis the German — and, indeed, here the *Annals of Fulda* vividly described the sky as having the appearance of 'coagulati sanguinis', though the annalist did not use the language of armies and battles.[86] Both the *Annals of St-Bertin* and *Annals of Fulda*, then, described the heavens as bloody in annalistic records about civil war, albeit in slightly different terms. So, while fiery armies and red skies were widespread motifs, these annals show the Carolingians projecting their own conflict onto the night sky as they recorded foreboding astronomical sights. This means there are severe limits to Dutton's argument that gazing upwards could allow the Carolingian elite to transcend the worries of their day.[87]

War shaped how Carolingian annalists saw phenomena on land as well in the sky. For AD 846, Prudentius described how large groups of wolves devoured people in Western Gaul, using the language of war: they gathered together 'in modum exercitus', 'facto agmine', and charged at those they

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[83] *AF*, s.a 839, 859.

[84] *AB*, s.a. 839.

[85] Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, p. 109.

[86] *AF*, s.a. 840; 'a clot of blood'. Trans. by Reuter, *Annals*, p. 17.

[87] Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, p. 127.

encountered.[88] Wolves slaughtering men was presumably horrifying to that ecclesiastic as an inversion of man's dominion over animals. It probably spoke to his anxieties about an age when the wider natural and political order was being perverted: when, as Prudentius wrote, devout emperors were undeservedly deposed, Saracens ransacked the basilica of St Peter in Rome, and a man had intercourse with a mare.[89] Indeed, the wolves were perhaps emblematic to Prudentius of the breakdown in law and administration that resulted from the conflicts between the sons and grandsons of Charlemagne, as well as the Viking raids in the ninth century AD. One of Charlemagne's capitularies lists eliminating wolves as a responsibility of the stewards on his estates.[90] Charlemagne himself hunted into his old age.[91] To quote Dutton, Charlemagne was 'universal master of both men and animals'.[92] But in Prudentius' account, the conflict among his grandsons had created a vacuum in authority that had collapsed man's mastery over beast. Yet there may be still more to Prudentius' anthropomorphising of the wolves, given the proximity of wolves and violent men in other medieval texts. For example, in medieval Irish sources, marauding bands of young men were sometimes depicted as werewolves.[93] While Prudentius does not seem to have been describing werewolves, he may have been inviting his readers to compare the wolves with warring armed bands — a frequent subject of Prudentius' criticism.[94] The Vikings are the most obvious parallel, since Prudentius wrote about the wolf behaviour directly after he described a Viking attack (albeit in Frisia). Moreover, the Vikings had raided Aquitaine, where Prudentius wrote

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[88] *AB*, s.a. 846; 'in the manner of an army', 'they formed a sort of battle-line'. Trans. by Nelson, *Annals*, p. 62.

[89] *AB*, s.a. 835, 846.

[90] *Capitularia Regum Francorum tomus 1*, ed. by Alfred Boretius, *MGH Legum sectio* II (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1883), pp. 32, 69.

[91] Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, *MGH SS rer. Germ.* 25 (Hanover; Leipzig: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1911), p. 30.

[92] Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, p. 43.

[93] Kim McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, Díberga, and Fíanna: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *Cambridge Medieval Studies*, 12 (1986), 1–22 (pp. 15–16); John Carey, 'Werewolves in Medieval Ireland', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 44 (2002), 37–72.

[94] *AB*, s.a. 841, 843.

that the wolves were the strongest, two years before, and settled in Saintonge the previous year.[95] Though speculative, the possibility that Prudentius may have been making an association between wolves and the Vikings is especially tantalising as multiple Carolingian writers viewed Northmen as dog-headed; closer to beasts than Christian folk.[96] As they associated man and beast, so Prudentius' annals associated their attacks on the Carolingian realm.

FAVOURABLE PHENOMENA

The phenomena analysed so far had negative connotations for the writers of early medieval Europe. During periods of crisis, the churchmen who wrote annals perhaps saw it as best to err towards pessimistic interpretations — lest their kings and flock miss a warning to repent of their sins and regain the approval of God. Yet there were some natural events recorded in the annals which gave the annalists cause for hope: storms and diseases which struck their enemies. After stating how Vikings ravaged Loch Éirne, Loch Cuan, and killed the heir to the province, the *Annals of Ulster* then reveals that nine-hundred Vikings drowned when their fleet foundered.[97] Similarly, the northern recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* noted that in AD 794, a storm wrecked a Viking fleet — one year after the attack on Lindisfarne.[98] In both these instances, the Viking fleet was destroyed shortly after the Vikings had killed Christians, and, in the case of the latter, assaulted a house of God. It is highly likely that the annalists included Viking misfortune as an example of divine retribution. Moreover, both Prudentius and Hincmar seem to have interpreted diseases that befell Frankish enemies as divine punishment. Prudentius said that the Vikings went blind or insane in AD 845 so that they

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[95] *AB*, s.a. 845.

[96] Ian Wood, 'Categorising the Cynocephali', in *Ego Trouble: Authors and their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Corradini, Matthew Gills, Rosamond McKitterick, and Irene van Renswoude (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), pp. 125–36.

[97] *AU*, s.a. 923.

[98] *ASC*, s.a. 794DE.

might not go unpunished.[99] Hincmar gave a humiliating account of how, in AD 865, Northmen became mad, ill and discharged their guts through their sphincters — heavily implying that that was retribution for their raid of Saint Denis.[100] Here, Hincmar evidently went against the tendency raised by Simon Coupland for medieval writers to present the Vikings as 'supermen'.[101] Indeed, while it has been noted that Carolingians labelled the Viking raids as God's judgement against them, the emphasis Hincmar and his predecessor put on the natural travails that befell the Vikings indicates that they were also looking to reassure their readers, and perhaps themselves, that God did not favour pagans.[102] The contrast Dutton and Palmer make between Prudentius' annals, 'in which the natural and human worlds so intimately intersect', and those of Hincmar, works much less well for how those annalists approached disease than astronomical phenomena.[103] Overall, Hincmar's treatment of natural phenomena supports John Wallace-Hadrill's argument that Hincmar saw the Old Testament as exemplary history.[104] His omission of astronomy but inclusion of pestilence afflicting pagans followed the model of the Books of Kings. The *Annals of St-Bertin*, then, highlights the importance of individual annalists, and their varying political and religious attitudes, in determining what phenomena was recorded during wartime.

CONCLUSION

War prompted the expression of a range of ideas about strange and natural phenomena in the Early Middle Ages. So much for the idea that the

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[99] *AB,* s.a 845.

[100] *AB*, s.a. 865.

[101] Simon Coupland, 'The Vikings on the Continent in Myth and History', *History*, 88.290 (2003), 186–203 (p. 186).

[102] Simon Coupland, 'The Rod of God's Wrath or the People of God's Wrath? The Carolingian Theology of Viking Invasions', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 42.4 (1991), 535–54 (p. 539); *AB*, s.a. 881.

[103] Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, p. 110; Palmer, *Climates*, p. 17.

[104] John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, 'History in the Mind of Archbishop Hincmar', in *Writing of History*, ed. Davis and Wallace-Hadrill, pp. 42–70 (p. 49).

marvellous was 'repressed' during this period.[105] As they processed the devastating ramifications of the first Viking raids in Northumbria, the writers who informed the northern recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* displayed a much stronger interest in foreboding sights — eclipses and dragons — than its other manuscript traditions. In the *Annals of Ulster*, phenomena were recorded on a much more frequent basis than in the other annals studied here, but these annals more often left their portentous qualities to be inferred. Like Bede and authors of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, the authors of the *Annals of Fulda* saw comets as portending calamity. In the West Frankish kingdom, Prudentius of Troyes dwelt on troubling events — ravenous wolves and spectral armies — that mirrored the uncertainties and conflicts of his time. His successor as author of the *Annals of St-Bertin*, Hincmar, consigned himself to highlighting the afflictions that befell the enemies of Charles the Bald.[106] Their differences in interpretation show how annalists recorded marvels according to their own priorities and perspectives in wartime. Such variety belies the argument of Woods that annalists were 'extremely conservative', recording things simply to conform to traditions of genre.[107] Yet common to all annals studied here was a sense that through strange and natural phenomena God signified his judgement. Their interest in natural phenomena was driven by concern with divine retribution and wartime politics, rather than Easter computistics. Some of the marvels were recorded in the context of wars between Anglo-Saxons, Irish groups, and Carolingian royals. But the Viking attacks had a particularly dramatic effect on annal writing, as ecclesiastics looked to record corresponding signs of destruction. John Michael Wallace-Hadrill's observation seventy years ago, that both the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* and *Annals of St-Bertin* were 'built against the background of common experience […] experience of war against the *pagani*, the sea-raiders', is supported by the eclipses and dragons in the northern recension of *ASC*, and the wolf armies in the *Annals of St-*

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[105] Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 29.

[106] Nelson, *Annals*, p. 37.

[107] David Woods, 'Acorns, the Plague, and the "Iona Chronicle"', *Peritia*, 17/18 (2004), 495–502 (p. 495).

Bertin.[108] Following Peter Sawyer, an influential strain of historiography tends to emphasise other aspects of Viking conquest to their violence.[109] But the dramatic associations annalists made between nature, the heavens, and the Vikings return us to the tensions and fears that accompanied their raids. At least storms and diseases provided reassurance to the fearful Christians that God was not leaving their enemies unpunished.

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[108] Wallace-Hadrill, 'Franks', p. 213.
[109] Peter Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd edn (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), pp. 202–3.

Sense and Perceptibility: Grammar as a Guide for Spiritual Interpretation in Tatwine's *Enigmata*

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Since Classical Antiquity, literary riddles have enjoyed a reputation as valuable teaching tools of grammar, versification, and logic, and it is widely accepted that their key purpose is to train textual interpretation.[1] An important innovation of the early Middle Ages in this regard is the clear emphasis on biblical exegesis, as explained by Cassiodorus in his *Commentary on the Psalms*:

> Aenigma, id est obscura sententia, quando aliud dicit, et aliud vult intelligi. Dixit ignem, dixit fulgura, dixit montes, dixit coelos; et per haec omnia unum votum est annuntiare Dominum Salvatorem.[2]

For Cassiodorus, the purpose of a riddle is ultimately to point towards God and enable a better understanding of His divine plan as concealed in Creation — an aim that has often been observed, for instance, in the riddles of Aldhelm.[3] But Aldhelm was certainly not the only riddle poet who endeavoured to teach his audience the skills necessary to practice enlightened

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[1] See Irina Dumitrescu*, The Experience of Education in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 103; Čecilia Milovanović-Barham, 'Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and Byzantine riddles', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 22 (1993), 51–64 (p. 62).

[2] Cassiodorus, *Magni Aurelii Cassiodori Opera Omnia*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1847), *Patrologia Latina*, 70, col. 685C–D: 'The riddle is an obscure statement, because it says one thing, but wants to signify another. It said fire, said lightning, said mountains, said heavens: and through all this its one and only intention is to announce the Lord [and] Saviour'. Translation from Winfried Rudolf, 'Riddling and Reading: Iconicity and Logogriphs in Exeter Book Riddles 23 and 45', *Anglia — Zeitschrift für englische Philologie*, 130 (2012), 499–525 (p. 501).

[3] See Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier, *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), p. 63; Emily V. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 54–55.

reading. To what extent this spiritual dimension was implemented in other Anglo-Latin riddles, however, remains to be examined, and this is the purpose of the following case study of the *Enigmata Tatuini*.[4]

The *Enigmata* of Tatwine are a somewhat obscure collection of Anglo-Latin verse from the early eighth century. In forty hexametrical poems bound together by a double acrostic, the author weaves an elaborate tapestry inhabited by an almost mythological cast of characters personifying inanimate objects and abstract phenomena, gem-studded with references to Classical literature.[5] Despite their literary merits, these riddles have received little attention from scholars and have usually been treated in passing, primarily as imitations of Aldhelm.[6] In the past decade, however, several scholars have pointed out that Tatwine's riddles, far from slavishly following Aldhelm, reflect his deep and independent philosophical thinking, particularly in relation to linguistic theories.[7] This article aims to demonstrate

[4] The *Enigmata* were first edited by Adolf Ebert, *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlich Sächsischen* (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1887), pp. 31–42. Ebert's edition has since been revised by François Glorie, 'Aenigmata' in *Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis*, ed. by Maria De Marco and François Glorie, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 133 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968), pp. 165–208, and helpful corrections to Glorie's readings can be found in Mary J. Williams, 'The Riddles of Tatwine and Eusebius' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Michigan, 1974), pp. 101–56. All citations in this article are based on the most recent edition by Andy Orchard, *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), pp. 110–139 (hereafter *OEALRT*). Unless stated otherwise, translations are also by Orchard, from this edition.

[5] See Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 43–4.

[6] For example, Lapidge and Rosier, *The Poetic Works*, p. 3: 'The *Enigmata* [of Aldhelm] inspired imitations by the Anglo-Latin poets Tatwine, 'Eusebius' and Boniface'; Andy Orchard, 'Enigma Variations', in *Latin Learning and English Lore (Volumes I & II): Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 284–304 (p. 284): 'Many influential Anglo-Saxons […] chose to compose *enigmata* in Latin, including Aldhelm, Boniface, Tatwine, Eusebius, and Alcuin'.

[7] Rosalind Love, 'Insular Latin Literature', in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. by C. A. Lees (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 120–57 (p. 145); cf. Emily Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, p. 55; and Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-*

this by highlighting the ways in which the *Enigmata* not only play upon the inconsistencies of earlier grammatical works but engage with more complex theological problems.

The riddles' usefulness for both the elementary classroom and more advanced philosophical study is reflected in the history of their transmission. The *Enigmata* are preserved in two large poetic anthologies, both copied at Canterbury sometime in the eleventh century and now known as London, British Library, Royal 12. C. XXIII and Cambridge, University Library Gg.V.35.[8] The London manuscript may be described as an educational miscellany. It is comprised of didactic poetry, such as Julian of Toledo's *Prognosticon* (fols 1ᵛ–79ᵛ) and two anonymous monitory poems (fols 127ʳ–132ʳ and 132ʳ–137ʳ), as well as a badly damaged poem entitled *Versus cuiusdam Scotti de alfabeto* (fols 137ᵛ–138ᵛ) and a selection of Latin riddles that includes Aldhelm (fols 79ᵛ–103ᵛ) and the late antique poet Symphosius (fols 104ʳ–113ᵛ). It thus appears that the *Enigmata* (fols 121ᵛ–127ʳ) was considered by the compiler to be primarily a didactic text playing on subjects in elementary education, connected to Aldhelm's riddles in its usefulness for the study of poetic composition and to the *Versus cuiusdam Scotti* in its linguistic themes.[9] The Cambridge manuscript, on the contrary, places Tatwine alongside texts for more advanced readers. In this codex, the *Enigmata* are preceded by a selection of philosophical works which include Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* (fols 171ʳ–210ᵛ) and Aldhelm's verse *De virginitate* (fols 281ʳ–327ʳ), as well as Prudentius's *Psychomachia* (fols 149ʳ–165ʳ). The *Enigmata* themselves

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Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 264–65.

[8] For the London manuscript, see George F. Warner and Julius P. Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections,* 4 vols (London: The Trustees, 1921)*,* II, pp. 35–36; cf. Neil R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), no. 263. For the Cambridge manuscript, see Henry R. Luard, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1858), pp. 201–05; cf. M. R. James, *The Ancient Libraries of Canterbury and Dover* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

[9] See Tatwine's riddle 4 on 'Letters' (*OEALRT*, p. 114).

(fols 374ᵛ-377ᵛ) are accompanied here not by the pagan Symphosius but by the more theologically inclined riddles of Boniface (fols 382ʳ-384ᵛ).[10]

In both codices, the collection is introduced as '*enigmata Tautuni*',[11] and once the letters of the poet's name are placed in the correct order, he appears to be the same Tatuinus who was the ninth archbishop of Canterbury, briefly mentioned by Bede as 'vir religione et prudentia insignis, sacris quoque litteris nobiliter instructus'.[12] Bede records little else about Tatwine, apart from the fact that before his ascension to the archiepiscopal see in 731, he was a priest in the Mercian house of Breedon-on-the-Hill.[13] Although Bede provided no list of Tatwine's writings, we can safely assume that the *Enigmata* are the work of the same author as the grammatical treatise known as *Ars Tatuini*, to which the riddles must have initially been appended, as Aldhelm's *Enigmata* were to his treatise on metrics, as a kind of exercise book to a textbook, where the verse illustrates the ideas set out in the prose.[14]

Tatwine was undoubtedly familiar with Aldhelm's riddles, the influence of which manifests itself in a variety of ways, but for the present discussion the most interesting similarity is the two poets' fascination with

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[10] In both codices, the *Enigmata* of Tatwine are immediately followed by a further set of sixty riddles attributed to an 'Eusebius'. The relationship between these two collections has been the subject of scholarly debate for several decades and cannot be analysed here in any great detail. The connections between the two are discussed in Williams, 'The Riddles of Tatwine and Eusebius', passim, and a helpful structural comparison is given by Mercedes Salvador-Bello, 'Patterns of Compilation in Anglo-Latin Enigmata and the Evidence of a Source Collection in Riddles 1–40 of the Exeter Book', *Viator*, 43 (2012), 339–74 (p. 349).

[11] London, British Library, Royal 12. C. XXIII, fol. 121ᵛ; Cambridge, University Library Gg.V.35, fol. 374ᵛ.

[12] *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), vol. 23, p. 559: 'A man renowned for his devotion and wisdom and excellently instructed in the Scriptures'.

[13] Ibid. For a complete list of Bede's *testimonia*, see M. De Marco, 'Introductio' to *Tatvini Opera Omnia*, in *Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis*, p. xiii.

[14] The first to make this connection was John Leland, *Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicis* (Oxford: The Sheldonian Theatre, 1709), p. 131. See also De Marco, 'Introductio', p. v; Love, 'Insular Latin Literature', p. 144; Lapidge and Rosier, *The Poetic Works*, p. 3. The *Ars* is edited by De Marco, in *Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis*, pp. 3–141 (hereafter *Ars Tatuini*). All translations from *Ars Tatuini* are my own.

the semantic boundaries of language. As Thornbury notes, in Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, 'creation manifests itself to readers through the filter of the Latin lexicon […] Scholars have often noted Aldhelm's focus on the inner workings of things, their *uiscera*. Words, in his view, are a vital part of these workings: one understands a thing by knowing the right words for it'.[15] Thornbury concludes that 'this profoundly logocentric view of the world made [Aldhelm's] *Enigmata* philosophically, as well as practically, ideal for introducing readers to the interpretation of Latin texts'.[16] Tatwine, as this article aims to show, takes Aldhelm's logocentrism one step further, not only expecting from his readers a significant proficiency at textual interpretation but also questioning the very suitability of human language for scrutinising God's Creation.

The linguistic focus of the collection is hardly surprising, considering that Tatwine was, in Lockett's assessment, 'a highly innovative contributor to Insular grammatical discourse,'[17] extremely well-versed in earlier grammatical works.[18] In particular, Lockett observes, both the grammar and the riddles reveal Tatwine's preoccupation with the grammatical notions of *corporeality* and *incorporeality* as he playfully invokes 'the relationship between corporeality and sensory perceptibility to create the paradoxes upon which the "enigmatic" character of the poems depends.'[19] The following section of

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[15] Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, p. 55.

[16] Ibid., p. 55.

[17] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 263.

[18] Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 43–44: 'His *Ars grammatica* shows heavy but intelligent use of the following grammatical works: Asporius, *Ars grammatica* (GL viii. 39–61), Consentius Gallus, *Ars de nomine et uerbo*; Donatus, *Ars maior*; Eutyches, *Ars de uerbo*; Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, book iii ('*De grammatica*'); Isidore, *Etymologiae*; Pompeius, *Comm. in artem Donati*; and Priscian, *Institutio de nomine, pronomine et uerbo*; in addition, Tatwine probably drew on Cledonius, *Ars grammatica*; Phocas, *Ars de nomine et uerbo*; Probus, *Catholica*; and Sergius, *Explanationes in Donatum*. In his collection of forty *Enigmata*, Tatwine reveals knowledge of a number of Latin poets, including Vergil, *Aeneis*, *Bucolica*, and *Georgica* (*Aeneis* is also quoted several times, directly, in Tatwine's *Ars grammatica*); Horace, *Carmina*; Juvencus, *Euangelia*; and Caelius Sedulius, *Carmen paschale*'.

[19] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 263.

this article aims to extend Lockett's analysis of Tatwine's grammatical theories, showing not only how Tatwine played on the inconsistencies of earlier grammars, but also why it was essential for a Christian author to correct them.

Like virtually all other users of Latin during this period, Tatwine would have had to memorise, and later to teach, some version of the following definition of a noun, found in the grammar of Donatus: 'Nomen quid est? Pars orationis cum casu, corpus aut rem proprie communiterue significans'.[20] This definition to a certain extent reflects the modern distinction between concrete and abstract nouns, with the crucial difference that these are not just grammatical but also empirical categories, which have their origins with Stoic philosophers. The Stoics attributed true existence only to *bodies*, that is, entities which can be perceived by the senses, and grammarians building on Donatus expounded on his definition accordingly, distinguishing between *bodies* and *things* on the basis of sensory perception.[21] For instance, Isidore gives the following examples: 'Corporalia dicta, quia vel videntur vel tanguntur, ut "caelum", "terra". Incorporalia, quia carent corpus; unde nec videri nec tangi possunt, ut "veritas", "iustitia"'.[22] But as the Stoic teachings on the nature of the universe became irrelevant to the later grammarians, they began to doubt this rigid division. In his fourth-century commentary, Servius

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[20] Donatus, '*Ars minor* 2', in *Donat et la tradition de l'enseignement grammatical: étude et édition critique*, ed. by Louis Holtz, (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1981), p. 585: 'What is a noun? A part of speech with case, signifying a body or a thing, specifically or generally' (translation from Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 263).

[21] See Anneli Luhtala, *Grammar and Philosophy in Late Antiquity: A Study of Priscian's Sources,* Studies in the History of the Language Sciences, 107 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005), pp. 85–90; cf. Anthony A. Long, 'Language and Thought in Stoicism', in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. by Anthony A. Long (London: Athlone Press, 1971), pp. 75–113.

[22] Isidore, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum libri XX* (hereafter *Etymologiae*), ed. by W. M. Lindsay, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), I.7.3-4: 'The corporeal nouns are so called because they are either seen or touched, as "sky", "earth". The incorporeal nouns, because they lack a body, so that they cannot be seen or touched, as "truth", "justice"', trans. by Steven A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 42.

hinted that Donatus's categories may be purely linguistic and not applicable to the real world, saying that 'corporale autem nomen uel incorporale *grammatici* ita definierunt',[23] and Pompeius went so far as to add to Donatus's definition a rhetorical question: 'Quid autem dicant philosophi de istis rebus, quid ad nos?'[24]

In his grammatical treatise, Tatwine also notes the inconsistency of Donatus's Stoic theories with actual sensory perception, as evidently the wind is not corporeal in quite the same way as the earth. The *Ars Tatuini* therefore replaces the binary distinction between corporeality and incorporeality with a spectrum, in which the difference between bodies and things is one of degree rather than kind – that is, the degree of their perceptibility by the senses:

> Item omne quod nomine significatur *corpus* est aut *corporale*, uel *incorporale*: *corpus* est quicquid tangi et uideri potest, ut 'terra'; *corporale* quod tangi et non uideri, ut 'uentus', uel uideri et non tangi, ut 'caelum'; *incorporale* uero quod nec tangi nec uideri ualet, ut 'sapientia'.[25]

This 'common-sensical model', as Lockett observes, is better able than the earlier ones to accommodate problematic objects observed in nature, 'such as *aer*, which is incorporeal according to Cledonius but corporeal according to the *Ars Ambrosiana*; Tatwine's model also permits a distinction between *caelum* and *terra*, both of which meet Isidore's criteria for corporeality, even

[23] Servius, *Commentarius in Donati artem minorem*, ed. by Heinrich Keil, Grammatici Latini, 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 406: '*The grammarians* define a corporeal noun or an incorporeal noun in this way' (my translation and emphases).

[24] Pompeius, *Commentum artis Donati*, ed. by Heinrich Keil, Grammatici Latini, 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 137: 'And what do we care what philosophers have to say about these matters?' (my translation).

[25] *Ars Tatuini* 1.4.25–9: 'Everything that is signified by a noun is either a *body* or a *bodily thing* or an *incorporeal thing*. A *body* is whatever can be touched and seen, such as *earth*. A *bodily thing* is that which can be touched and not seen, such as *wind*, or seen and not touched, such as *sky*. But an *incorporeal thing* is that which can be neither seen nor touched, such as *wisdom*' (my emphases).

though they are not equally perceptible'.[26] Tatwine then makes a further distinction between the ordinary incorporeals (which we would describe as abstractions) and the *spiritalia*, or incorporeal beings:

> Corpus quidem est quicquid tangi aut videri potest, incorporale vero quod nec tangi nec videri valet, sed spiritale per se ipsum naturaliter est ut Deus et omnis caelestis creatura animarumque substantia et quicquid ab his in officio agitur spiritaliter.[27]

The distinctions between corporeals and incorporeals clearly inform the content of the riddles. The opening riddle of the collection, solved in both codices as 'Philosophia', depicts its subject in terms of sensory perceptibility:

> Sum Salomone sagacior et velocior euro,
> *clarior* et Phoebi radiis, pretiosior auro,
> *suavior* omnigena certe modulaminis arte,
> *dulcior* et favo gustantum in faucibus eso.[28]

Yet these qualities belong to an incorporeal being, and the speaker reveals its true nature by paraphrasing Tatwine's definition of the incorporeal noun as one which cannot be touched or seen: 'Nulla manus poterit nec me contingere uisus'.[29]

The polemic on preceding grammarians is even more obvious in the concluding riddle, 'Rays of the Sun':

> Summa poli spatians dum lustro cacumina laetus

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[26] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 254.

[27] *Ars Tatuini*, 1.5.40–4: 'The body is whatever can be touched or seen, but incorporeal which cannot be touched nor seen; but it is naturally spiritual by itself, as God and the substance of every heavenly creature and souls, and whatever is done by them in their spiritual capacity'.

[28] *OEALRT*, p. 110: 'I am wiser than Solomon and swifter than the east wind, / and *brighter* than Phoebus's rays, more precious than gold, / *more pleasant* surely than all kinds of musical craft, / and *sweeter* than honey tastes in the mouths of those who eat it' (my emphases).

[29] Ibid.: 'No hand nor gaze seize me'.

Dulcibus allectis dapibus sub culmine curuo
Intus ludentem sub eodem temporis ortu
Cernere me tremulo possunt in culmine caeli.
Corporis absens plausu quid sum pandite sophi![30]

Making emendations to the first edition of the *Enigmata*, Williams noted that *corporis absens* is 'a strange and unidiomatic expression', but in light of the grammatical notions discussed above it is clear that the semantic opposition which grants this riddle its enigmatic nature is based on the uncertain position of sunlight in Donatus' neat categories.[31] The rays of the sun are, indeed, perceptible to the senses ('cernere me […] possunt') and can even be described in terms of movement which are usually reserved for animate beings ('spatians'), yet they cannot be touched, and human eyes do not perceive them in quite the same way as they do a stone or an animal, because sunshine is what allows other things to be seen but is not itself, strictly speaking, visible. By characterising itself in this way, Lockett notes, the speaker paraphrases Tatwine's definition of the *corporale*, that which is only partly accessible to the senses.[32]

But Tatwine's challenge to his readers does not end with them memorising the appropriate definitions from the *Ars*. Instead, the riddles help the student to develop a more advanced reading technique that can be described as 'spiritual discernment' and requires the reader to maintain awareness of multiple levels of interpretation.[33] As a result, 'pious rumination

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[30] Ibid., p. 138: 'While I wander, happily traversing the lofty heights of the sky, / those who are allured by sweet food under the curving vault / can see me playing inside and at the same point of time / also in the shimmering vault of heaven, / far from a body's touch: you sages, reveal what I am!'.

[31] Williams, 'Tatwine and Eusebius', p. 155. Lockett interprets this expression as 'free from contact with the body'; see *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 265.

[32] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 265.

[33] On the presence of multiple levels of interpretation in the medieval riddle tradition, see Mercedes Salvador-Bello, 'The Sexual Riddle Type in Aldhelm's Enigmata, the Exeter Book, and Early Medieval Latin', *Philological Quarterly*, 90 (2011), 357–85; John F. Adams, 'The Anglo-Saxon Riddle as Lyric Mode', *Criticism*, 7.4 (1965), 335–48; and Rudolf, 'Riddling and Reading'.

of the riddle exercise enables the erudite and faithful guesser to transcend the secular interpretations of the text and to add to those a dimension of profound spiritual reading'.[34] It seems unlikely that Tatwine, an author concerned with having to 'teach students engaged in the study of Donatus a grammatical definition of corporeality that would later be unfit for use in their study of scripture', was unaware of this method of training textual interpretation.[35] The remainder of this article therefore proposes to reopen the question of how Tatwine's *Enigmata* should be interpreted, and in doing so, it aims to show that the distinctions between *corporalia* and *incorporalia*, as well as an awareness of the difficulties of sensory perceptibility, become an essential faculty for expounding a Christian text. 'This expounding', Rudolf explains, 'would necessarily require historical and typological knowledge of the Scriptures (one could also call this a specific medieval sense of inter-textual erudition) as much as a positive and pious attitude towards the "correct" Christian way of reading'.[36]

Using these principles as the basis of our own interpretation, let us re-examine the functions of sensory criteria in Tatwine's opening riddle (quoted above, p. 31) in order to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the text. While the two codices' solution, 'Philosophia', seems entirely plausible, a number of conspicuous words and glosses in this text merit further scrutiny.[37] First, the numerological significance of Philosophy's 'seven wings' requires some explanation. While it seems logical to view it as a metaphor for the Seven Liberal Arts, a concept which would have been familiar to Tatwine from Isidore's *Etymologies* (I.2) as well as Aldhelm's *De metris* (3), the number

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[34] Rudolf, 'Riddling and Reading', p. 521.

[35] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 242.

[36] Rudolf, 'Riddling and Reading', p. 517.

[37] Orchard notes that two other riddle collections open with a riddle about philosophy, see *A Commentary on the Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), p. 137; and Mercedes Salvador-Bello points out that 'Tatwine clearly structured his collection on an encyclopedic basis', whereby 'this first riddle functions as a topic that encompasses all the following ones', being the sum of human knowledge, in *Isidorean Perceptions of Order: The Exeter Book Riddles and Medieval Latin Enigmata,* Medieval European Studies Series 17 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2015), p. 224.

seven clearly also echoes the seven pillars of Wisdom of Proverbs 9:1. This link, in turn, sheds some light on the antepenultimate line, where Philosophy states: 'Mordentem amplector, parcentem me viduabo', thus repeating the motif of learning as nourishment which is so crucial to Proverbs 9.[38] The combined themes of food and restricted access to it also form an obvious link to Tatwine's riddle 8.4–5, whose subject similarly states: 'Quosque meis dapibus dignos satiare solesco; / indignis potumque cibumque referre negabo'.[39] The solution to this riddle appears to be 'Altar', and the 'food and drink' denied to the unworthy are the Holy Communion. Bearing this connotation in mind, one might perhaps wonder who, apart from Tatwine's Philosophy, gladly offers their body to be bitten into — and it seems like Tatwine's medieval readers have already answered it for us.

Commenting on the two riddles that follow, 'The Theological Virtues' and 'The Four Types of Biblical Exegesis' (which incidentally form a set of three and four respectively), Orchard points out that their subjects are related to a *mater* and *dominatrix*, who is glossed in both manuscripts as *trinitate* or *trinitas*, 'but seems just as likely to be Wisdom (Sapientia) or Philosophy (Philosophia)'.[40] In light of the biblical parallels noted above, however, it seems that the exact opposite claim can also be justified, which provides this poem with a plausible answer that should be accepted as *one* of several cogent interpretations in the future: that is, the Trinity, or by an even further extension, God.[41]

The question of sensory perceptibility, then, becomes even more acute. While the series of sense-related words clearly plays on Tatwine's ideas about sensory criteria for corporeality, for the more advanced reader capable of reaching a spiritual solution, Tatwine's description of his subject in sensory

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[38] *OEALRT*, p. 110: 'I embrace the one who gnaws me; I shall bereave the one who spares me'.

[39] Ibid., p. 116: 'And I habitually satisfy the deserving with my food, / and I shall refuse to offer the undeserving food and drink'.

[40] Ibid., pp. 138–9.

[41] This interpretation would also render more meaningful the riddle's concluding line: 'Quemque meo natum esse meum sub nominee rebor' ('And everyone born under my name I shall think of as my son'), *OLEART*, p. 110.

terms would have evoked the long-standing question of the human ability to perceive God. 'Learning how to perceive the divinely-given signs in this world,' Rudolf notes, 'and reaching the heights of understanding them in the appropriate spiritual senses that would eventually point beyond worldly transience, was the primary interest of many a medieval scholar'.[42] But perhaps the most important discussion of this problem can be found in a well-known passage from Augustine's *Confessions*:

> Quid autem amo, cum te amo? non speciem *corporis* nec decus temporis, non *candorem lucis* ecce istum amicum oculis, non *dulces melodias* cantilenarum *omnimodarum*, non florum et ungentorum et aromatum *suaviolentiam*, non *manna et mella*, non *membra acceptabilia carnis amplexibus*: non haec amo, cum amo deum meum.[43]

Although Lapidge has not included Augustine in his list of the *Enigmata*'s sources cited above, it is plausible that Tatwine was familiar with the *Confessions*, which were certainly known to his contemporary, Bede.[44] Undoubtedly a master of his craft, Tatwine did not lift any of Augustine's phrases directly,[45] yet his poem clearly echoes this passage from the

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[42] Rudolf, 'Riddling and Reading', p. 502.

[43] Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, ed. and trans. by William Watts, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912), II, X.6, p. 87: 'What now do I love, whenas I love thee? Not the beauty of any *corporal thing*; not *the brightness of the light* which we do behold, so gladsome to our eyes: not *the pleasant melodies of songs of all kinds*; nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointment, and spices: not *manna and honey*; nor any fair *limbs that are so acceptable to fleshly embracements*. I love none of these things whenas I love my God' (my emphases).

[44] For the availability of the *Confessions* in England in the 700s, see the evidence of Bede discussed in Rosalind Love, 'The Library of the Venerable Bede', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. by Richard Gameson, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), I, pp. 606–32 (p. 606).

[45] Alternatively, it may be that Tatwine did not have a manuscript of the *Confessions* in front of him when writing, but instead relied on 'remembered reading', see Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 8 (Cambridge, 1994), p. 126.

Confessions by reworking its vocabulary with the help of inversions and synonyms:

Augustine	Tatwine
Confessiones X.6	*Enigmata* I
[...] non candorem lucis [...]	[...] clarior et Phoebi radiis [...]
[...] *dulces* melodias cantilenarum *omnimodarum* [...]	[...] *suavior omni*gena certe *modu*laminis arte [...]
[...] non manna et mella [...]	[...] dulcior et favo [...]
[...] non membra acceptabilia carnis amplexibus [...]	[...] nulla manus poterit [...] me contingere [...]

These parallels thus act as yet another hint at Philosophy/Trinity's double solution, and this Augustinian interpretation, besides its value as a test of the reader's theological knowledge, would contain an indirect warning of the dangers of relying on human senses alone when dealing with the spiritual realm.

The link between corporeality and spiritual discernment becomes even more important in riddles 31 and 33, which are solved as 'Spark' and 'Fire' respectively. The latter opens with an oxymoron, as its subject proclaims: 'Testatur simplex triplicem natura figuram / esse meam'.[46] That fire has a threefold nature was a fact familiar to the readers of the *Etymologies* of Isidore, who distinguishes between ordinary fire suitable for human use and a 'divine' kind of fire which appears in the form of lightning or lava:

> Habet quoque et aliam in se diversitatem ignis. Nam alius est qui usui humano, alius qui iudicio apparet divino, sive qui de caelo fulmen adstringit, sive qui de terra per vertices montium eructuat.[47]

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[46] *OEALRT*, p. 134: 'My single nature bears witness that I have / a triple form'.

[47] Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XIX.vi.4: 'Fire also has another variation, for there is one fire that is for human use and another which appears as a part of divine judgment, whether contracting as a lightning-bolt from the sky or bursting forth from the earth through the mountain peaks', trans. by Stephen A. Barney and others, p. 376.

In a similar manner to the riddle on Philosophy, however, the numerological significance of the number three demands a solution that transcends the merely literal level. As Orchard notes, 'the juxtaposition of *simplex* and *triplicem* naturally brings to mind the notion of the Triune god of Christianity', and there is no reason to doubt that Tatwine had this association in mind.[48] The implicit notion that flame and lightning are not perceived by the senses in the same way as lava, then, forms part of the paradox of fire's triple yet unitary nature which evokes a similar conundrum in our perception of the Trinity, thus requiring the reader once more to stay alert to the problems of corporeality and sensory perception.

But the strongest suggestion that a good understanding of corporeality was necessary for spiritual interpretation lies hidden in the earlier riddle, 'Spark' ('Scintillia'). This poem is curiously Aldhelmian in its language, and its second line, 'Iam nasci gelido natum de uiscere matris', borrows a formula by which Aldhelm often presents his subject as being born from the 'cold womb' of its mother.[49] Thus, his riddle on the same subject reads: 'Frigida dum genetrix dura generaret ab alvo'.[50] It is all the more surprising to see that Tatwine's poem owes little beyond linguistic influence to its earlier counterpart. Aldhelm builds the enigmatic paradox by emphasising the spark's small size in contrast with its great destructive power, whereas for Tatwine the paradox is based on the birth of the 'living' spark from the flint which 'numquam sensit spiramina vitae'.[51] The spectrum model of corporeality appears once again to be the key to this puzzle, as part of the mystery here is that the fully corporeal flint produces the only semi-corporeal spark, which always lies buried inside it (*in uentre sepultus*), resulting in a curious hybrid of bodily and bodiless.

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[48] Orchard, *A Commentary*, p. 166.

[49] *OEALRT*, p. 132: 'I was born from a mother's chilly innards'.

[50] *Aldhelmi Opera Omnia*, ed. by Rudolf Ehwald (Berlin: Weidmann, 1919; repr. 1961), p. 141: 'When my cold mother brought me forth from her hardened womb' (transl. by Lapidge and Rosier, 'The Poetic Works', p. 90). On Aldhelm's use of formulas, see Lapidge, 'Aldhelm's Latin Poetry and Old English Verse', *Comparative Literature*, 31, no. 3 (1979), 209–31, esp. p. 226.

[51] *OEALRT*, p. 132: 'never felt the breath of life'.

While there is nothing obviously scriptural in this poem, no clear biblical reference or number with divine symbolism, a few irregularities of expression catch the careful reader's attention. First, the opening line has the speaker proclaim: 'Testor quod crevi, rarus mihi credere sed vult'.[52] Tatwine's choice of *testor* as the main verb, seemingly insignificant, carries an echo of its derivative *testamentum* – a connotation reinforced by Tatwine's use of the same verb, *testatur*, in the same position in the riddle on 'Fire'. The concluding line, moreover, departs from its Aldhelmian source with the speaker's indication that 'ipse tamen mansi vivens in ventre sepultus', claiming that this spark, unlike the one in Aldhelm, was alive before its birth.[53] Given that this is by no means a commonplace trope in riddle poetry, the medieval Christian mind engaged in a spiritual reading must have extended the search for possible solutions in the Biblical canon, finding the most obvious correspondence in the New Testament – that is, 'Christ unborn'.[54]

Just as the opening riddle would have alerted the reader to the Augustinian problem of perceiving divinity with human senses, so the two fire-related riddles touch upon the long-standing doctrinal debate concerning the embodiment of Christ. Unlikely as it may be that Tatwine's library had a copy of the writings of Boethius, a passage from his treatise against Eutyces and Nestorius could explain *why* it was so important to develop a sturdy definition of corporeality and incorporeality, which would fit the orthodox teachings on the nature of Christ while also making linguistic sense. In response to the heretical claims that Christ's divine nature changed into a human one at birth, or vice versa, Boethius explains the workings of corporeals and incorporeals in the following words:

> Non enim omnis res in rem omnem uerti ac transmutari potest. Nam cum substantiarum aliae sint corporeae, aliae incorporeae, neque

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[52] Ibid., p. 132: 'I bear witness that I emerged, but few want to trust me'.

[53] Ibid., p. 132: 'Though I myself remained living, buried in her womb'.

[54] Orchard also points out that 'the gender of the title/solution seems belied by the forms *ipse* and *sepultus* in [line] 4,' and wonders whether 'fire' (*ignis*) or 'forge' (*caminus*) is intended instead (*A Commentary*, p. 164). This conundrum is likewise resolved by the interpretation of the subject as 'Christ'.

corporea in incorpoream neque incorporea in eam quae corpus est mutari potest, nec uero incorporea in se inuicem formas proprias mutant… Corpora vero in incorporea nulla ratione poterunt permutari, quoniam nulla communi materia subiecta participant quae susceptis qualitatibus in alterutram permutetur. Omnis enim natura incorporeae substantiae nullo materiae nititur fundamento; nullum vero corpus est cui non sit materia subiecta.[55]

Whether Tatwine had access to any of Boethius's writings has been a matter of debate for several decades, with some scholars crediting him with the 'rediscovery' of the *Consolation of Philosophy*[56] and others strongly rejecting any possibility that an English author could have read Boethius before Alcuin.[57] Without attempting to make an argument in favour of either side, it is nevertheless interesting to note that in his poem on the library of York, Alcuin places the name of Boethius amid a group of elementary texts on

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[55] Boethius, *Contra Eutycen*, VI.19–24, ll. 53–58: 'Things cannot be promiscuously changed and interchanged. For since some substances are corporeal and others incorporeal, neither can a corporeal substance be changed into an incorporeal, nor can an incorporeal be changed into that substance which is body, nor yet incorporeals interchange their proper forms […] But bodies will not in any way be changed into incorporeals because they do not share in any common material substrate which might be changed into this or that thing by taking on its qualities. For the nature of no incorporeal substance rests upon a material basis; but there is no body that has not matter as a substrate'. Trans. by H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester, in *Theological Tractates, Consolation of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 109, 112–13.

[56] See Fabio Troncarelli, *Tradizioni Perdute* (Padova: Antenore, 1981), esp. pp. 113–14; idem 'Boethius in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Noel H. Kaylor Jr. et al. (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2012), pp. 519–49 (esp. p. 534).

[57] For example, Diane K. Bolton, 'The Study of the *Consolation of Philosophy* in Anglo-Saxon England', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen Age*, 44 (1977), 33–61 (p. 34); Margaret T. Gibson, 'Boethius in the Carolingian Schools', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 32 (1982), 43–56, p. 45; objections to Troncarelli's argument specifically have been expressed by Guido Milanese in his review in *Maia*, 34 (1982), 270–73 (esp. pp. 272b–3a), and by Gibson in '"Tradizioni Perdute" of the "De Consolatione philosophiae": Comments on a Recent Book', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 30 (1984), 274–278.

grammar, metrics, dialectic and rhetoric, perhaps pointing to a presence of the *Tractates* rather than the *Consolation* in England at the time.[58] Without surviving codices or stronger textual evidence, it is impossible to say when the York manuscript could have arrived in England, so Tatwine's familiarity with *Contra Eutycen* must remain no more than an intriguing possibility.

Whether he had access to Boethius's writings or not, Tatwine's spectrum model helps to resolve the issue that ultimately arises from the grammatical definition of Donatus: that some entities appear more or less corporeal than others, which, as Boethius asserts, is not possible. By arranging the subjects of his riddles into a spectrum based on sensory perceptibility, rather than two entirely distinct groups, Tatwine is better able than earlier grammarians to explain the problematic objects observed in nature. At the same time, the paradoxical qualities of the riddle genre allow him to play on these linguistic notions, and the addition of 'spiritual' solutions to the *enigmata* warns the reader that their sensory perception is not always reliable.

Thus, Tatwine's riddles prove that he was not merely a schoolmaster trying to entertain his pupils but also a scholar and a skilled poet, well aware of the major trends of theological thinking, for whom the riddle is a device that helps to train his readers in the kind of spiritual reading that would be essential for advanced textual interpretation. Tatwine's riddles invite pious rumination and reflection on the Scripture, thus responding directly to Bede's contemporary definition of the enigma as an exercise in biblical exegesis:

> Aenigma est obscura sententia per occultam similitudinem rerum, ut psalmo LXVII: Pennae columbae deargentatae, et posteriora dorsi ejus in specie auri: cum significet eloquia Scripturae spiritualis divino lumine plena, sensum vero ejus interiorem majori coelestis sapientiae gratia refulgentem; vel certe vitam sanctae Ecclesiae praesentem virtutum pennis gaudentem, futuram autem, quae in coelis est, aeterna cum Domino claritate fruituram.[59]

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[58] See Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 230.

[59] *Venerabilis Bedae Anglosaxonis Presbyteri Opera Omnia*, in *PL*, vol. 90, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1850), col. 184B–C: 'The riddle is an obscure statement because of a hidden similarity of things, as for example in Psalm 67[:14] the wings of a dove are covered with

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that Tatwine was praised by Bede for his intellect and piety, and that his riddles found a place both in a codex for elementary grammatical education and a collection of theologically inclined poetry. Without doubt there is a great deal more work to do on Tatwine's *Enigmata* as a tool for training scriptural interpretation, and many other riddles in the collection could yield conclusive spiritual interpretations. Subsequent research may reveal still other uses of interpretational multivalence in Anglo-Latin riddles, and close spiritual reading of our own is certainly an important part of that pursuit.

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silver, its tailfeathers with the splendor of gold. This signifies that the messages of the spiritual writings are filled with divine light, but that their deeper sense shines with the even greater grace of heavenly wisdom; in other words, that the present life of the Holy Church rejoices in the feathers of virtue, but the future life in the heavens enjoys the eternal brightness of God'. Trans. by Rudolf, 'Riddling and Reading', p. 517.

'[V]ar hann svartr ok ljótr eftir skapan sinni': disabled and racialised bodies in the fourteenth-century *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*[1]

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This article examines the plasticity of the dwarf Möndull Pattason's body, his fluctuating status in courtly society, and his impact on the embodiment of others through the dual lenses of disability studies and critical race theory. The seminal monster theorist Jeffrey Cohen has noted that monstrous Others are often configured with multiple layers of alterity so that a foreign Other may also be, for example, a sexual Other.[2] In this way, the monster becomes a body upon which multiple cultural mores can be read and, through violence and conflict with that body, boundaries of the Self and permissible behaviour within civilised society can be established.[3] I argue that the social concerns and anxieties of the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* writer are etched onto Möndull's body in layers of foreign, race and impairment. I utilise the concept of intersectionality first coined by the black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe 'interlocking forms of oppression' which act

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[1] All quotations from *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* in the original Old Norse are taken from the following edition: 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', in *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda,* ed. by Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols (Reykjavik: Islendingasagnautgafan, 1959), III, pp. 161–280 (p. 230) hereafter 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga'; all English translations of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* are taken from *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga: A Viking Romance*, ed. and trans. by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1980), p. 84 ('he was 'just as dark and ugly as he'd been created'). I am grateful to a number of people who have offered insightful comments and corrections throughout the drafting process including Dr Vicky Flood, Dr Megan Cavell and Dr Chris Callow at the University of Birmingham, and Dr Christina Lee at the University of Nottingham. This work has been supported by the Arts and Research Council through funding by the Midlands4Cities Consortium.

[2] Jeffrey Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Mineapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp. 37–56 (p. 43).

[3] Ibid., pp. 41, 51.

concurrently on a person's ability to thrive within an 'in-group'.[4] The language used to describe bodies in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* is grounded in such interlocking discourse and, through careful analysis, can reveal the boundaries of the accepted norms in medieval Icelandic society.

THE DWARF

Göngu-Hrólfs saga is a fourteenth-century *fornaldarsaga* or legendary saga.[5] The *fornaldarsögur* were a popular saga genre which mixed fashionable courtly narratives with the paranormal in order to create a 'safe space' to explore socio-cultural concerns.[6] They display a 'generic hybridity' and overlap significantly with the *riddarasögur,* or chivalric sagas.[7] This article departs from early saga scholarship which often dismissed the *fornaldarsögur* as mere entertainment with little historical value.[8] Instead, this article follows the important work of scholars like Ármann Jakobsson who explore the ways

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[4] Subini Ancy Annamma, Beth A. Ferri, and David J. Connor, 'Disability Critical Race Theory: Exploring the Intersectional Lineage, Emergences and Potential Futures of DisCrit in Education', *Review of Research in Education*, 42 (2018), 46–71 (p. 47).

[5] Philip Lavender, '"Sumar Eptir Fornkvæðum Eðr Fróðum Mönnum Ok Stundum Eptir Fornum Bókum": Some Observations on the Sources of *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga*', *Scandinavian Studies,* 1.90 (2018), 78–109 (p. 85).

[6] Rebecca Merkelbach, '"The Coarsest and Worst of the Íslendinga sagas": Approaching the Alterity of the Post-Classical Sagas of Icelanders', in *Margins, Monsters, Deviants: Alterities in Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rebecca Merkelbach and Gwendolyne Knight (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), pp. 101–27 (p. 114).

[7] Massimiliano Bampi, 'The Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Genre: a Polysystemic Approach', in *The Legendary Saga: Origins and Developments,* ed. by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), pp. 185–99 (p. 189).

[8] Miriam Mayburd, 'Between a Rock and a Soft Place: The Materiality of Old Norse Dwarves and Paranormal Ecologies in Fornaldarsögur', in *Supernatural Encounters in Old Norse Literature and Tradition*, ed. by Daniel Sävborg and Karen Bek-Pederson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 189–214 (p. 190).

in which paranormal beings act as physical manifestations of psychic stress and social anxieties.[9]

When Möndull first approaches Jarl Þorgnýr's court in Jutland, Denmark, he is introduced as Möndull Pattason, an unknown man who is 'lágr á vöxt ok mjök riðvaxinn, fríðr at yfirlitum', who has been travelling 'víða um útlönd', and wants to share his stories with the Jarl.[10] Þorgnýr welcomes him in and soon becomes so intrigued by Möndull's entertaining tales that he neglects matters of state. When Björn, the Jarl's most trusted counsellor, tries to intervene, he is rebuffed and, after some intricate trickery involving a missing belt, Björn is imprisoned and his whole estate is given to Möndull. Möndull uses his magic to bewitch Björn's wife, Ingibjörg, whom he rapes and turns 'blá […] ok mjök bólgin'.[11] Later, the Norwegian hero Hrólfr Sturlaugsson returns to Þorgnýr's court after having his legs cut off at the knee by his duplicitous servant, Vilhjálmr. Hrólfr attacks Möndull and, in exchange for his life, Möndull reveals that he is a dwarf and has healing powers. As he heals Hrólfr's legs and returns Ingibjörg's skin to its original whiteness, his own body transforms, revealing himself to be 'svartr ok ljótr eftir skapan sinni'.[12] Möndull promises to serve Hrólfr and faithfully does so, earning his safety by providing magical aid to Hrólfr during his adventures around Eastern Europe. Once Möndull fulfils his promise and acts as a loyal servant rather than the high-status counsellor he tried to be, his body returns to a more benign state, described as 'lágr ok digr'.[13]

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[9] Ármann Jakobsson, '"I See Dead People": The Externalization of Paranormal Experience in Medieval Iceland', in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland, 1150–1400*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), pp. 9–19 (p. 10).

[10] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 220; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga,* p. 75 ('very short, but sturdily built, with a handsome face and bulging eyes'); 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 220; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga,* p. 75 ('widely in foreign parts').

[11] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 229; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga,* p. 83 ('black' and 'swollen all over').

[12] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 230; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 84 ('dark and ugly as he'd been created').

[13] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 237; trnas. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 90 ('short and sturdily built').

I argue that *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* reflects a medieval Icelandic world view and group identity which Möndull, as a foreign and embodied Other, challenges.[14] It is evident from other saga genres that Icelandic saga writers were invested in Scandinavian political spaces. For example, medieval Icelandic genealogies demonstrate that they valued descendance from Norwegian migrants. Furthermore, the Icelandic *konungasögur* or Kings' sagas, demonstrate an interest in the political climate of Scandinavia. After the country was brought under Norwegian rule in 1262–1264, a flourishing interest in courtly literature and a desire to emulate their values developed in Iceland.[15] I argue that, while Hrólfr is Norwegian and Þorgnýr is Danish, the national differences would not preclude Icelandic audiences from identifying with the microcosm of a chivalric society that Jarl Þorgnýr's court represents. Borrowing Thomas Hylland Eriksen's terminology, they may act as a kind of 'analog' Other, one that differs from the 'Us' of the Icelandic audience but remains knowable and identifiable. In contrast, Möndull is a 'digital' Other, one that exhibits a foreign Otherness that threatens to disrupt the social structures of the courtly space.[16]

Additionally, I argue that Möndull's foreignness is wrapped up in contemporary fears around the intrusion of racial and impaired or non-normative bodies into Christian society. Medieval scholarship has often avoided discussions of race in Old Norse sagas, preferring terms such as '"otherness"' and '"difference"' for fear of inflicting modern prejudices on the medieval past.[17] However, recent scholars such as Otaño Gracia have noted that, by refusing to engage with the racialised formation of difference in the period, medieval scholarship is 'compatible' with, if not explicitly 'complicit' in, the white supremacist view that the Medieval North was a 'pre-racial, pre-

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[14] While the provenance of the earliest manuscripts is unknown, the sixteenth-century witnesses were written by Icelanders, see Lavender, p. 80.

[15] Sirpa Aalto, 'World View', in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), pp. 318–26; Henric Bagerius, 'Romance and Violence: Aristocratic Sexuality in Late Medieval Iceland', *Mirator,* 2.14 (2013), 79–96.

[16] Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 66.

[17] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 4.

political […] warrior-class white culture'.[18] While race is now rightfully considered to be a pseudo-scientific social construct, close reading across saga genres has demonstrated that Old Norse speakers displayed a kind of 'pre-racial thought' or 'proto-racism' which acted on the same understanding that 'the content of one's character, one's moral fibre, intellect, and other human traits are predetermined' by one's physiology, making violence against those people permissible.[19] Take for example, the courtly knight Blavus from *Viktor saga ok Blavus* who is described as 'kyniadur úr Affrika', but never described as having dark or black skin.[20] Instead, his sensibility and chivalric nature is linked to a 'fætur kominn'.[21] In contrast, the *fornaldar* and *riddarasögur* are populated with a variety of *berserkir, serkir, trǫll,* and other paranormal figures whose iniquity pairs with the darkness of their skin.[22]

Through a critical race theory perspective, I explore how Möndull's transformation from 'fríðr at yfirlitum' to 'svartr ok ljótr' and Ingibjörg's change from *hvít,* ('white'), to *blá,* ('black'), signals fears around the loss of sexual control of women to foreign and racialised Others.[23] Following on from Basil Arnould Price's post-colonial analysis of race and ethnicity in the

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[18] Ibid., p. 27; Nahir I. Otaño Gracia, 'Towards a Decentralized Global North Atlantic: Blackness in *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*', *Literature Compass*, 16 (2019), 1–16 (p. 3).

[19] Arngrímur Vídalín, 'The Man Who Seemed Like a Troll: Racism in Old Norse Literature', in *Margins, Monsters, Deviants*, ed. by Merkelbach and Knight , pp. 215–38 (pp. 221, 225); Richard Cole notes the use of contemporary terms such as *kyn, ætt, folk* and *þjóð* by Snorri Sturluson, homilists and writers of *konungasögur* to create a racialised concept of the Other, see 'Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature: The Case of the *Blámaðr*', *Saga-Book*, 39 (2015), 21–40; while Arngrímr Vídalín does note a small selection of neutral and positive depictions of black people in Old Norse Sagas, he notes that dark skin commonly had negative connotations: 'Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions: The Somatic History of Blámenn From the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century', in *Paranormal Encounters*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Mayburd, pp. 203–26 (p. 211).

[20] *Saga af Viktor ok Blavus: A Fifteenth Century Icelandic Lygisaga,* ed. and trans. by Allen H. Chappel (Paris: Mouton, 1972), p. 56, translation at p. 42 ('native from Africa').

[21] Ibid., p. 57, translation at p. 43 (a 'fine appearance').

[22] See Arngrímur Vídalín, 'Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions', pp. 203–26; Arngrímur Vídalín, 'The Man Who Seemed Like a Troll', pp. 215–38.

[23] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', pp. 220, 230; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 75 ('with a handsome face'); p. 84 ('dark and ugly').

fourteenth-century *Íslendingasaga Kjalnesinga saga,* I take K. Anthony Appiah's concept of 'badge of colour' to examine the racialised meanings of the signifiers *svartr* and *blár*.[24] Appiah used 'badge of colour' to refer to racial identities that dominant social groups force onto marginalised groups to erase elements of individuality and imply inherited characteristics. These then determine not only what other people expect of them in terms of behaviour and life outcomes but what they expect of themselves.[25] Price applied Appiah's 'badge of colour' to the hierarchies of race and ethnicity in *Kjalnesinga saga,* using this theory as an analogy for understanding the 'plural racialised meanings' of linguistic labels such as *blár* and the intertextual understandings of the term that the saga author and audience would have had. Price shows how *blár* becomes a kind of shorthand for the expectation of the audience, a 'badge of colour' that modifies the status of *blámenn,* ('black people'), in comparison to white characters.

To signal the supposed danger of the foreign Other to the audience, the saga author applies 'badges of colour' *and* 'badges of impairment' to Möndull's body and the bodies of those around him. Foreignness, racial and embodied Otherness are often used simultaneously by saga authors to emphasise the threat of certain characters. For example, the fourteenth-century *riddarasaga Sigurðar saga þögla* uses descriptors of foreignness, racial Otherness and physical deformity or impairment to create a generalised 'out-group' for the hero to defeat. The African Prince Ermedon arrives with an army made of: 'blamenn og berserk duerga og dularfole Risa og Regintroll. hann hafdi fole af Jndia lande er Cenoefalj het. Þeir gou sem hunndar og hófdu hunndz hófud'.[26] This saga echoes the tradition of monstrous races as

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[24] Basil Arnould Price, 'Búi and the *blámaðr*: Comprehending Racial Others in *Kjalnesinga Saga'* in *Postmedieval: a Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies,* 11.4 (2020), 442–50; K. Anthony Appiah, *Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections,* The Tanner Lectures on Human Values 1993–1994 (San Diego, CA: University of California, 1994), pp. 53–136.

[25] Ibid., p. 105.

[26] 'Sigurðar saga þögla', in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances,* 5 vols, ed. and trans. by Agnete Loth, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ 20–24 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), II, pp. 95–257 (p. 177) ('negroes and berserkers, dwarves, giants and trolls, warriors from India called *cenoefali* which bark like dogs and have dogs' heads').

expostulated by Herodotus, Pliny, St Augustine of Hippo and Isidore of Seville which depicted foreign peoples as having deformed or non-normative bodies.[27] Another example of this can be found in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla:* 'þar eru ok margs konar þjóðir ok margar tungur. Þar eru riser, ok þar eru dvergar, þar eru blámenn, ok þar eru margs konar undarligar þjóðir'.[28] This grouping of physical Otherness not only symbolises the immorality of the foreign Other, but also reassures the saga audience as to their own comparable normalcy. By ascribing foreign peoples somatic characteristics such as dark skin or bodily impairment, the social elite who wrote and enjoyed these sagas could comfort themselves with their own comparative physical and moral wholeness. [29] It is possible that the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* author was expressing just such a thought in depicting Möndull's dangerous presence in court and the way that he spreads his Otherness to others.

To fully appreciate the multiplicity of meaning behind Möndull's body, I turn to the cultural model of disability to propose that his impairment, restricted growth, acts as a visual signifier for potential danger to the cohesion of courtly society. Seminal disability studies scholar Irina Metzler has questioned whether medieval dwarfs can be used as evidence for contemporary attitudes to physical impairment, arguing that: 'using the dwarfs of myth and legend as examples to gain an understanding of "real" medieval disabled people is like studying modern garden gnomes in comparison to contemporary people of short stature'.[30] I agree that it is untenable to suggest that Möndull's behaviour and treatment reflects the lived experience of people with restricted growth in medieval society. However, it is not outlandish to suggest that depictions of these short-statured paranormal

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[27] Arngrímur Vídalín, 'From the Inside Out: Chronicles, Genealogies, Monsters, and the Makings of an Icelandic World View', in *Supernatural Encounters*, ed. by Sävborg and Bek-Pederson, pp. 143–74 (pp. 151–53).

[28] Cole, p. 29 ('there are many kinds of races and many languages. There are giants, and there are dwarves, there are *blámenn,* and there are many kinds of bizarre races').

[29] Arngrímur Vídalín, 'From the Inside Out', p. 161; Bagerius, p. 80.

[30] Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 87–88.

figures were used to depict cultural attitudes – if not specific historical practices – towards people with similarly embodied impairments.[31] Old Norse dwarfs in the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* are short and exist in an ambiguous and liminal state, simultaneously existing as humans within medieval concepts of reality while holding supernatural power and abilities.[32] Mikučionis has noted that the terms *dvergr,* ('dwarf'), and *maðr,* ('man'), are blurred in the *fornaldarsögur*, often used to refer to the same figures, leading him to suggest that *dvergr* could have been considered 'a type of human people rather than as a separate species'.[33]

The cultural model of disability provides a framework and language to explore the connection between saga dwarfs and impairment sensitively. This model defines impairment as bodily 'variation encountering environmental obstacles and socially mediated differences that lends […] phenomenological perspective' and disability as perceived bodily difference that leads to 'social discrimination'.[34] This paper examines the 'socially mediated' language used to describe Möndull's body in order to investigate the construction of normative and non-normative bodies.[35] Möndull's sexual aggression and the violence used against him to reintroduce the status quo can be read as a disabling impulse in Old Norse speaking societies. By examining the intersectionality of the 'badges' of race, foreignness and impairment as

[31] Though the size of eddic dwarfs is a matter of debate, Werner Schäfke has noted that saga dwarfs are always small: 'Was ist eigentlich ein Zwerg? Eine prototypensemantische Figurenanalyse der Dvergar in der Sagaliteratur', *Mediaevistik*, 23.1 (2010), 197–299 (p. 296).

[32] Both Ármann Jakobsson and Schäfke have noted that this ambiguity is more present in saga dwarfs than eddic dwarfs and so have argued for a division between them, see Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Hole: Problems in Medieval Dwarfology', *Arv. Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 61 (2005), 53–76 (p. 53); Werner Schäfke, 'Dwarves, Trolls, Ogres, and Giants', in *The Handbook of Medieval Culture: Fundamental Aspects and Conditions of the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), pp. 347–83 (pp. 369–71).

[33] Ugnius Mikučionis, 'The Family Life of the Dwarfs and its Significance for Relationships between Dwarfs and Humans in the Sagas', *Maal Og Minne*, 2 (2014), 155–91 (p. 159).

[34] Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 10.

[35] Ibid.

presented in Möndull's body, one can read in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* contemporary fears around the stability and safety of their imagined civilised society and interpret potentially racial and ableist attitudes towards embodied Others.

MÖNDULL'S BODY

I argue that part of Möndull's Otherness is the use of disguise and deceit. He begins by being described as an unknown *maðr* ('man') and it is not until he is violently subdued by Hrólfr that his 'badge of colour' and impaired status as a dwarf reveals itself.[36] Before this, he 'passes' as human, even going so far to adopt a last name which is completely unprecedented for an Old Norse dwarf. Appiah describes passing as 'a gap between what people ascriptively are and the racial identity they perform'.[37] Möndull's insidious use of his ability to pass as human, his manipulation of this 'gap', suggests a cultural anxiety over Christian society being infiltrated by the unknown. Ármann Jakobsson has well noted the fluidity of paranormal bodies, and how sorcerers, trolls, ghosts, dwarfs and elves are not solidly defined but blur into one another.[38] This fluidity and plasticity of the paranormal Other appears to be a source of anxiety in the saga as it allows foreign agents of social disruption to hide in plain sight. This particular fear is also present in *Stjórn,* the Old Icelandic translation of the Old Testament, which depicts a white woman giving birth to a child 'sua sem blalendzkan burð'.[39] Arngrímur Vídalín notes that monstrous births like this were a key element of the writings of the earliest Church fathers to show how evil can come from within and that women especially need to be guarded from corruption to

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[36] 'Göngu–Hrólfs saga', p. 220.

[37] Appiah, p. 107.

[38] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Taxonomy of the Non-existent: Some Medieval Icelandic Concepts of the Paranormal', *Fabula* 54.3–4 (2013), 199–213.

[39] *Stjórn: tekst etter håndskriftene,* ed. by Reidar Astås, Norrøne tekster, 8 (Oslo: Riksarkivet, 2009), pp. 269-70; trans. by Arngrímur Vídalín, 'From the Inside Out', p. 158 ('in the liking of an Ethiopian birth').

maintain the integrity of Christianity.[40] When Möndull rapes Ingibjörg and turns her skin *blá*, Möndull introduces the same potential for racial Otherness to spread and be propagated from within the court. Möndull's covert ability to invade courtly society and rape Ingibjörg, potentially replacing Björn's heirs with his own racialised and impaired ones, implies a cultural fear of the Other usurping the rights and power of the 'in-group'.

For the saga author, Möndull's sexual aggression acts as a logical conclusion to an impaired Other penetrating courtly society. Indeed, Möndull's status as a jilted 'unsuitable suitor' and then sexual aggressor is tied to his physical status as a dwarf, possibly indicating that 'badges of impairment' were interpreted by Old Norse audiences in a disabling negative light. Möndull's sexuality echoes other dwarfs who similarly pursue women of a high social status such as Alvíss of the thirteenth-century eddic poem *Alvíssmál*.[41] In *Alvíssmál*, the dwarf Alvíss demands Þórr's daughter in marriage and declares his intention to take her home even without her father's permission. At first, he flouts Þórr's authority over who his daughter marries; this results in the god's mockery and the dwarf's death.[42] While Ármann Jakobsson notes that the 'unsuitable suitor' is a 'role more often filled by a giant or berserk' and Clunies Ross suggests that Alvíss' aggressive sexuality is 'undwarflike', alongside Möndull, there are a small number of dwarfs who are equally sexually aggressive and target unwilling women.[43] These may suggest that sexual violence was an intertextual meaning behind the 'badge of impairment' carried by dwarfs. For example, in *Sigurðar saga þögla* the titular hero punishes the maiden-king Sedentiana for rejecting him by raping her in the guise of different marginalised figures including a dwarf. Though the hero himself is not a dwarf, part of the supposed comedy of the situation and

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[40] Arngrímur Vídalín, 'From the Inside Out', p. 158.

[41] Paul Battles, 'Dwarfs in Germanic Literature: Deutsche Mythologie or Grimm's Myths?', in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. by Tom Shippey (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 29–82 (p. 79).

[42] *The Poetic Edda,* ed. and trans. by Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 105.

[43] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Hole', p. 61; Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 1994), p. 168.

the humiliation for Sedentiana is due to his dwarfish disguise: 'ser hun einn liotann og lijtinn dverg […] hann var digur og hófudmikill. ein eigi lengri enn einnar stiku har'.[44] The comparatively detailed description of his dwarfish body makes it evident that his physicality plays a role in her humiliation and punishment for rejecting the gendered hierarchy.[45] These comparisons show that Old Norse speakers may have associated 'badges of impairment' and especially, though not exclusively, short-statured bodies, as spaces for exploring frightening or humiliating sexual acts against women, and thereby demonstrating the dangers of foreign men.

Möndull's status as a dwarf provides further context for his incompatibility with court. Most saga dwarfs live in distant nature, and only engage with human heroes after being bribed or violently forced to do so.[46] In an extensive study of twenty-two dwarfs, Werner Schäfke found that only four are seen in court: Möndull from *Göngu-Hrólfs saga,* Reginn from *Egils saga einhanda,* Túta from *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* and Reginn from *Norna-Gests þáttr.* The rarity of a dwarf intruding on society implies both a devaluing of impaired bodies, suggesting that they belong to marginalised geographies and the limits of society, and hints at a particularly worrying aspect of Möndull's character. Unlike other dwarfs who keep themselves safely to the margins of society, he subtly insinuates himself into the fabric of courtly life with the express desire to 'heilla Þóru jarlsdóttur eða Ingibjörgu ok hafa þær burtu með mér'.[47]

Even in the few moments when dwarfs engage with courtly society, they display a subserviency which contrasts with Möndull's aggressive and domineering behaviour. Both Reginn in *Egils saga einhanda* and Túta from

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[44] 'Sigurðar saga þögla', p. 205 ('she sees an ugly little dwarf […] he is fat and has a large head but is no taller than a *stika* [two ells?]').

[45] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 122.

[46] Werner Schäfke, 'The Extorted Dwarf: Cognitive Motif Analysis and Literary Knowledge', in *Skemmtiligastar Lygisögur: Studies in Honour of Galina Glazyrina*, ed. by Tatjana N. Jackson and Elena A. Melnikova (Moscow: Dimitriy Opzharskiy University, 2012), pp. 163–88.

[47] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 230; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 83 ('bewitch Thora, the Earl's daughter, or Ingibjörg, and take one of them away with me').

the thirteenth-century *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* are depicted as passive figures who act as craftsmen for the average-heighted protagonist or as entertainment.[48] Túta performs an abject clown-like role at the court of King Haraldr *harðráði* and is humiliated by those around him. King Haraldr dresses Túta in his own armour after which he is described as 'hlæja menn at honum ok þótti maðr undarligr'.[49] Túta's powerlessness as a subject of the court is clearly seen in the mocking way he is referred to. The warrior-poet Halli praises Túta's prowess in battle: 'hjalmfaldinn kurfaldi. | Flœrat eld í ári | úthlaupi vanr Túta; | sék á síðu leika | sverð rúghleifa skerði'.[50] By playing on martial language, Halli derides Túta and questions his utility in the martial space of the court.

Out of the three other dwarfs identified by Schäfke, only Reginn of *Norna-Gests þáttr* achieves a similar status to Möndull. This Reginn is the dwarf familiar to readers of Old Norse from the Völsung legend who mentors Sigurðr Fafnisbani. *Norna-Gests þáttr* depicts Reginn as having positive relationships with others at the court of King Hjalprekr of Frakkland as well as having a *hús* at some unexplained location in or near Hjalprekr's court.[51] However, he leaves the court very quickly after his introduction to journey

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[48] Reginn is mentioned very briefly as preparing a weapon for the titular Egill. Though he presumably lived at court as he is so readily available, this is only expressed in the gaps of the narrative: 'Egils saga einhanda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana', in *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda,* ed. by Gúðni Jónsson (Reykjavik: Islendingasagnautgafan, 1959), III, pp. 323–65 (p. 362).

[49] *Morkinskinna I,* ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, Íslenzk Fornrit 23 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 2011), p. 273; all English translations from *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157),* ed. and trans. by Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), p.245 ('he…look[ed] very strange, and people laughed at him').

[50] *Morkinskinna I*, p. 273; trans. by Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, p. 245 ('the helmet-clad dwarf prances among the retinue. Túta, accustomed to furtive raids, is unwilling to flee the kitchen fire in the morning; I see a sword dangling by the side of the cleaver of rye loaves').

[51] George L Hardman, 'Norna-Gestr Saga', in *The Complete Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda/Legendary Sagas of the Northland in English Translation* (2011) <http://www.germanicmythology.com/FORNALDARSAGAS/NornaGestrSagaHardman.html> [accessed 21 June 2022].

with Sigurðr and most of his presence involves adventuring and fighting away from the court.

In contrast, Möndull remains at Jarl Þorgnýr's court for an extended period and even appears to settle, taking on land and property. Not satisfied with the Jarl's favour, he schemes to have Björn arrested and claims Björn's *garðr,* ('estate'), which is described as a 'hús í borginni nær jarls herbergi, en annan garð utan borgar'.[52] By taking such an unprecedentedly central position in court, Möndull gains access to power both over the Jarl and Björn's wife, becoming a great source of anxiety in the text. The contrast to his peers across the corpus may have made his presence in the saga seem even more concerning to the saga audience as a previously unanticipated threat.

However, despite Möndull's attempts to fool the court, the saga author uses physical 'badges' to reveal his true paranormal and racial self, possibly signalling the incompatibility of racial and impaired Others with courtly society. When Möndull first arrives at court, he is described as 'lágr á vöxt ok mjök riðvaxinn, fríðr at yfirlitum; utaneygðr var hann mjök'.[53] Though he is handsome, his alterity is revealed through the physical 'badge' *utaneygðr,* ('out-eyed'). The dictionary of Old Norse Prose identifies this term as a ghost word, and so apparently not in common usage. However, Schäfke notes that the dwarf Dimus from *Viktors saga ok Blavus* is described as *úteygr,* ('out-eyed').[54] The ONP identifies the only other source of this word as the fourteenth-century *Svarfdæla saga* in which Klaufi, the violent *berserkr* and *aptrganga* or revenant, is described thusly: 'hann var úteygr ok ennisbrattr, mjök munnljótr […] skolbrúnn ok skarpleitr […] manna var hann svartastr bæði'.[55] Klaufi's 'grotesquely distorted body' acts as a visual signifier of his

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[52] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 221; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 76 ('town house by the Earl's residence, and a mansion in the country too').

[53] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 220; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 75 ('stranger […] he was very short, but sturdily built, with a handsome face and bulging eyes').

[54] 'úteneygðr', in *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o82863>; *Saga af Viktor ok Blavus,* p. 98.

[55] Fredrik J. Heinemann, '*Svarfdæla saga:* The Norwegians Versus the Swedes', in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience/ Sagaene og Noreg: 10th International Saga Conference, Trandheim, 3-9 August 1997,* ed. by Jan Ragnar Haglard (Trondheim: Senter for Middelalderstudier,

inner immorality.[56] He is the antithesis of his father, Thorsteinn the settler hero, as he destabilises the social cohesion of Svarfaðardalur by feuding, and monstrously attempts to rape his wife as an undead *aptrganga*.[57] Klaufi's physical description acts as a visual 'badge' to express social fears around the violence and sexual aggression of *berserkir*.[58] While I am not suggesting that the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* author was specifically referring to either *Viktors saga* or *Svarfdæla saga,* the fact that the description 'out-eyed' is used by two other supernatural figures, another dwarf and a *berserkr* soon to become *aptrganga,* may indicate a generally known physical motif or 'badge' used by saga authors to indicate a lack of trustworthiness. If so, Möndull's iniquity is stamped onto his body to be read by anyone in the know despite his attempts to disguise himself, implying a disconnect between physical Others and civilised society.

INGIBJÖRG'S ILLNESS AND THE DISREGARD FOR FEMALE CONSENT

Göngu-Hrólfs saga uses Möndull as an explicit threat to the contemporary Church's mandates around female consent. From the thirteenth-century onward the Church moved to uphold and protect women's rights to choose who they marry in medieval Iceland. This is reflected in the thirteenth-century law code *Jónsbók* which emphasises the need for marriage to be consensual and public to prevent coercion.[59] This matched with foreign chivalric views that men should protect women, which became internalised

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1997), pp. 237–48; 'Svarfdæla Saga', in *Eyfirðinga Sögur,* ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslenzk Fornrit 9 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1956), p. 162 ('he was 'out-eyed' and had a steep forehead, a very ugly-shaped mouth […] was brown-skinned and sharp-featured […] he was the blackest of both' [translation mine]); for 'út·eygr' see *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o82944>.

[56] Merkelbach, p. 118

[57] Ibid., pp. 116–17.

[58] Ibid., p. 119.

[59] Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property and Virginity: The Christianisation of Marriage in Medieval Iceland, 1200–1600* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010), p. 94.

in the indigenous *riddara* and *fornaldarsögur*.[60] The same viewpoint is presented in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* by Hrólfr who defends the princess Ingigerðr, saying 'þá skal hún ok ónauðug af hverjum manni, ef ek má ráða', and sleeps with a sword between them to protect her chastity.[61] Hrólfr could be read as a literary foil for Möndull as 'manna mestr, bæði at digrð ok hæð' who protects the sexual freedoms of women.[62] Indeed, such 'sexual norms served as markers to distinguish the chivalrous from the common, the human from the monstrous' in chivalric sagas.[63] By ignoring these ideals, Möndull demonstrates violent behaviour that is incompatible with civilised societies.

The saga author emphasises the monstrosity of Ingibjörg's rape by using the conspicuous 'badges of colour' *svartr* and *blár*. Despite her vocal lack of consent, Möndull uses his magic to bewitch and rape her. As a result, 'Ingibjörg, kona Bjarnar, tók krankleika nokkurn undarligan um vetrinn. Hún gerðist öll blá sem hel, en sinnaði um engan hlut, sem hún væri vitstola'.[64] When Hrólfr sees her with Möndull, she is again described as 'blá at yfirlit sem klæði ok mjök bólgin'.[65] It is as if Möndull's impaired body has infected her, modifying her status in society through the 'badge of colour' *blár.* This transformation suggests fears around the loss of sexual control of women to embodied Others, and the destabilisation of the status quo that this can lead to.

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[60] Carolyn Larrington, 'A Viking in Shining Armour? Vikings and Chivalry in the Fornaldarsögur', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 4 (2008), 269–88 (p. 281); Jenny Jochens, 'Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 58.2 (1986), 142–76.

[61] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 236; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 89 ('she's not going to be forced to do anything against her own will if I can help it').

[62] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 173; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 36 ('an exceptionally big man, tall and sturdy').

[63] Bagerius, p. 82.

[64] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 222; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 76 ('that winter Ingibjorg, Bjorn's wife, caught some strange illness. She grew black as death and paid no attention to anything, just as though she'd gone insane').

[65] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 229; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 83 ('dark-skinned and wearing dark clothes, and she was swollen all over').

Though critics tend to approach Möndull's sexuality in a lighthearted way, with Davíð Erlingsson calling him a 'great fornicator and lover', the saga makes it abundantly clear that Ingibjörg's rape is distressing and traumatic.[66] Both *svartr* and *blár* were commonly used to describe paranormal others, such as witches and revenants in the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*.[67] When the saga author depicts Ingibjörg as 'blá sem hel' after her rape, they are using a common formula for describing paranormal and undead figures such as the undead revenants Þorolfr bægifótr from *Eyrbyggja saga* and Glámr from *Grettis saga*.[68] It is as if Möndull's impaired body acts as a contagion, exerting its necrotising power over Ingibjörg's humanity. There is an implication here that Möndull, an impaired and foreign other, has somehow transformed Ingibjörg, a woman of high social status, into some undead thing devoid of agency. This is evident in the fact that she initially rebuffs Möndull's advances *hæðiliga*, ('contemptuously'), and then never speaks in the saga after her rape.[69] The author depicts her as an automaton, completely losing her selfhood and agency: 'hann tók Ingibjörgu ok lagði í sæng hjá sér hverja nótt, Birni ásjánda, ok hafði hún allt blíðlæti við hann, en mundi ekki til Bjarnar, bonda síns.'[70] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir has noted that sagas which depict sexual assault on women may be reflecting 'underlying female anxieties'.[71] Perhaps it served as a warning to women in the audience about unknown men, or a

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[66] Davíð Erlingsson, 'Fótaleysi göngumanns: Atlaga til ráðningar á frumþáttum táknmáls í sögu af Hrólfi Sturlaugssyni. –Ásamt formála', *Skírnir,* 170 (1996), 340–56 (p. 354); translated and cited in Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enabling Love: Dwarfs in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances', in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. by Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 183–206 (p. 204).

[67] For example, the witch Ögmundr Eyþjófsbani is 'svartr ok blár' in Örvar-Odds saga: Ármann Jakobsson, 'Vampires and Watchmen: Categorizing the Mediaeval Icelandic Undead', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 110.3 (2011), 281–300 (p. 286).

[68] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Vampires and Watchmen', p. 297; Arngrímur Vídalín, 'Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions', p. 216.

[69] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 221; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 76.

[70] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 224; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 78 ('he took Ingibjorg to bed every night, before Bjorn's very eyes, and she showed Mondul every affection, not even remembering her husband Bjorn').

[71] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, p. 122.

generalized expression of the fear of foreign Others attacking vulnerable women through the image of the paranormal; in either case, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* shows Möndull as a disabled rapist who pollutes Ingibjörg, removing her personhood and humanity.

Möndull's destructive force is implicitly wrapped up in his paranormal nature and impaired physicality as a dwarf, implying a disabling association between the two in the saga author's mind. Though the connection between dwarfs and illness is not as widespread in the extant Old Norse medical treatises, it is well established in four separate medical charms in the Old English corpus in which dwarfs are named as the causer of a wide variety of illnesses from fever to warts.[72] It is very possible that the illness 'elf-shot' in the Old English charms is reflected in the Old Norse social imagination, exemplified by Möndull's infection of Ingibjörg and his use of poisoned arrows when fighting alongside Hrólfr.[73] In fact, Möndull himself identifies healing as part of his dwarfish nature: 'dvergsnáttúru hefi ek á kynstrum til læknidóms ok hagleik'.[74] This supernatural ability to heal or to harm people is grounded firmly in Möndull's physicality as part of his *dvergsnáttúra*, dwarfish nature. Mayburd has identified that saga authors and audiences had a Non-Cartesian view of the body and soul, and saw the human body as porous and 'vulnerable to intrusions from outside'.[75] In line with this, Mayburd has explored how dwarfs are able to '"otherize" those who come into contact with' them by causing illness.[76] When Ingibjörg is described as 'mjök bólgin', the saga author implies that his touch has infected her as this word is often used in compounds related to illness, such as *stokk-bólginn,* ('a

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[72] Mayburd, 'Between a Rock and a Soft Place', pp. 193–95; Battles, pp. 32–35.

[73] Alaric Hall, 'Calling the Shots: The Old English Remedy "Gif Hors Ofscoten Sie" and Anglo-Saxon "Elf-Shot"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen: Bulletin of the Modern Language Society*, 2. 106 (2005), 195–209.

[74] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 230; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 83 ('I possess the dwarf's magical skills both as healer and smith').

[75] Miriam Mayburd, 'It was a Dark and Stormy Night: Haunted Saga Homesteads, Climate Fluctuations and the Vulnerable Self', in *Paranormal Encounters*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Mayburd, pp. 21–37 (p. 23).

[76] Mayburd, 'Between a Rock and a Soft Place', p. 195.

hard swelling'), or *eitrbólginn,* ('swollen with poison'). [77] Möndull's presence is a deeply frightening one: forcibly entering human society and forcibly entering Ingibjörg's body as both a sexual abuser and as a vector of illness. This horrific image suggests a host of disabling attitudes in Old Norse speaking societies and suggests a fear of the integration of Otherness into society.

Moreover, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* combines 'badges of colour' alongside 'badges of impairment' to depict Möndull's sexual act as particularly shameful and frightening, racializing this paranormal hostile takeover. Once Möndull owns up to his dwarfish nature, he becomes 'svartr ok ljótr eftir skapan sinni'.[78] The phrase 'eftir skapan sinni' suggests that his darkness and ugliness is his authentic self, as if it is truer to his nature than his previous handsomeness.[79] Möndull's change to *svartr,* ('black'), and Ingibjörg's change to *blá* is racially significant. The term *blár* is loaded with a whole host of cultural significance which scholars continue to unpack. Though not explicitly called a *blámaðr,* Ingibjörg's 'badge of colour', *blá*, not only implies a layer of paranormal alterity as described above, but also modifies her status from the *white* woman that she was formerly. Arngrímr Vídalín provides an extensive study into the meaning of *blámaðr* in Old Norse sagas, concluding that the term had a wide range of meanings from paranormal creatures to black Africans, but always 'conflated' with negative qualities.[80] It also shines a different light on Möndull's 'badge', *svartr*, implying he too carries a black racial otherness. Indeed, *svartr* and *blá* are often used interchangeably. [81] The fourteenth-century *fornaldarsaga Sörla saga sterka* and the fourteenth-century *riddarasögur Dínus saga drambláta* and *Ectors saga,* refer to *blámenn* as *svartir,*

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[77] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 229; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 83 ('swollen all over'); 'bolginn', in *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose,* <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o9911>.

[78] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 230; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 84 (he was 'just as dark and ugly as he'd been created').

[79] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 230; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 84 ('as he'd been created').

[80] Arngrímur Vídalín, 'Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions', pp. 205, 208–09, 211.

[81] Arngrímur Vídalín, 'Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions', p. 206; Arngrímur Vídalín, 'The Man Who Seemed like a Troll', p. 227.

('black'), *suarter sem byk*, ('blacker than pitch'), *suørtu riddarar*, ('black knights'), and *iorðu svartari* ('blacker than the earth').[82] Though it has been suggested that black skin is usually a *berserkr* or giant trait, there are other instances of short-statured figures with black skin. This suggests that 'badges of impairment' and 'badges of colour' were connected in the minds of Old Norse speakers.[83] For example, Nípr from *Sigurðar saga þögla* is described as 'svartur og litill uexti'.[84] Though not explicitly labelled a dwarf, he shares many dwarfish traits such as magic and the role of 'reluctant donor' of magical weaponry to the hero.[85] Furthermore, *Ectors saga* shows a *svartálfr*, ('a dark elf'), who attempts to rape a dwarf woman.[86] The connection between *svartálfar* and dwarfs is notoriously uncertain, with the main body of evidence coming from Snorri Sturluson's *Poetic Edda*, in which he often conflates the two.[87] However, the description of this *svartálfr* echoes the descriptions of dwarfish bodies that we have already come across: 'hann ser huar madur war litjill og liotur. hann uar suartur sem kol hófudmikill og baraxladr rangnefiadr'.[88] It is also worth pointing out that Klaufi, the sexually aggressive foreign *berserkr* and *aptrganga* who shared the descriptor *úteygr*, is also *skolbrúnn*, ('brown-skinned'), and *svartr*. These texts depict a confluence of paranormal others who are racialised and/or impaired and sexually aggressive. This suggests that Old Norse speakers recognised and reused connections between non-normative bodies, black skin, and sexual aggression to vocalise racialised and disabling attitudes towards foreign others engaging in sexual acts with local women.

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[82] Cole, p. 35; Arngrímur Vídalín, 'Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions', pp. 219, 210; Arngrímur Vídalín, 'The Man Who Seemed like a Troll', p. 230.

[83] Schäfke, 'Dwarves, Trolls, Ogres, and Giants', p. 372.

[84] 'Sigurðar saga þögla', p. 165 ('black and little').

[85] Schäfke, 'Was ist eigentlich ein Zwerg', p. 278.

[86] 'Ectors Saga', in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, ed Loth (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1962), I, pp. 79–189 (p. 107).

[87] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enabling Love', p. 192.

[88] 'Ector's saga', p. 107 ('he saw an ugly little man, as black as coal, with a large head, prominent shoulders').

Ármann Jakobsson notes that dwarfs are 'losers': 'they are small, they disappear, they do not propagate'.[89] Möndull is an uncomfortable example of a dwarf who almost wins. Though beaten by Hrólfr, he rapes Ingibjörg and transforms her into a racialised, undead thing, threatening to replace Björn's line of inheritance with one constituting foreignness. I argue that the disruption to Björn's inheritance is a great source of anxiety in the saga which manifests itself in the grotesque paranormal and culturally concerning racial and impaired elements of Möndull's character. The thirteenth century saw a change in Icelandic society away from a 'kin-based principle' towards a 'household oriented principle' in which the conjugal unit was valued highly as the vector for inheritance.[90] As summarised by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'when Iceland joined the Norwegian monarchy, and with the adoption of new inheritance laws based on primogeniture' as found in *Jónsbók,* 'husbands needed to make sure that they were the only men who had sexual and thus reproductive access to their wives' bodies'.[91] As the wife of the Jarl's closest counsellor, Ingibjörg is symbolic of social power. In taking possession of her, Möndull inserts himself into the line of inheritance and, like the revenants of the *Íslendingasögur* who haunt and make barren valuable property, interrupts the 'law[s] of economics' at the court.[92] This depiction of foreign, racialised and disabled bodies may reflect cultural concerns around the stability of the increasingly patrilineal aristocratic class and inheritance system.

The need to prevent the insinuation of the foreign Other into Icelandic society is brutally brought home by the violence done to Möndull in order to reinstate the status quo in which Möndull follows the role set out for dwarfs across the saga corpus as servant and not master.[93] Hrólfr catches Möndull gloating over his victory and so 'Hrólfr færist nú á stúfana upp í sætinu ok

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[89] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Hole', p. 69.
[90] Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, p. 100.
[91] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, p. 124.
[92] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Vampires and Watchmen', p. 294.
[93] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enabling Love', pp. 194–99.

tekr báð um höndum um háls Mönduls […] kipper honum niðr undir sik, svá at kvárar niðr í honum'.[94] In order to save his life, Möndull must become completely subservient and loyal to Hrólfr and fulfil the 'extorted dwarf' motif. This is a common saga motif in which a dwarf is physically overpowered by the saga hero and is made to provide wisdom, support or magical objects.[95] Möndull's dwarfishness provides him with a subservient social position to which he can mould himself to avoid punishment for his acts.

Crucially, at this point, Möndull no longer tries to be a part of human society but returns to the liminal spaces appropriate for a saga dwarf: he explains that he belongs underground, 'ek er dvergr í jörðu byggjandi', and returns 'heimkynna', for a time after Hrólfr attacks him.[96] The saga author projects a sense of rightness and equilibrium in Möndull's new subservient position by healing Ingibjörg and Hrólfr. This act itself has various disabling and racializing implications as Möndull heals Hrólfr's legs, returning him to his original height, and uses an ointment on Ingibjörg 'en hvítnaði hörundit, ok tók þá heilsu sína ok týndi allri ást við dverginn'.[97] The saga further implies a sense of wholeness after Möndull is violently forced into the role of a servant as it describes his body as 'lágr ok digr' once he begins to serve Hrólfr.[98] Never again is Möndull described using the 'badge of colour' *svartr,* implying that once the hierarchy is reinforced and Möndull accepts the low status indicated by his 'badge' of impairment, he is no longer such a cause of anxiety.

Otaño Gracia has argued that 'North-Atlantic European courts in particular were pre-occupied with their inclusion in the feudal Christian

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[94] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 229; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga* p. 83 ('Hrolf stood up on the stumps of his legs, and grabbed Mondul's throat with both hands […] then he forced Möndull down under him till he gurgled').

[95] Schäfke, 'The Extorted Dwarf', pp. 163–88.

[96] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 230; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 83 ('I'm a dwarf, an earth-dweller').

[97] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 230; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 84 ('whereupon her skin became white again, her good health was restored, and she lost her love for the dwarf').

[98] 'Göngu-Hrólfs saga', p. 237; trans. by Pálsson and Edwards, *Göngu-Hrolfs Saga*, p. 90 ('short and sturdily built').

boundaries of Europe' and in order to demonstrate their value and justify their inclusion into the dominant group, Icelanders used romance narratives to show 'willingness to participate in the destruction of the "other"'.[99] By depicting Möndull's black and dwarfish body infiltrating and infecting courtly society and the horrific consequences of this act, the saga author seeks to define his culture and society in opposition to imagined racialised and disabled others. As this article has shown, the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* author is not alone in this; indeed, he is tapping into a large network of interconnected, intertextual 'badges' of impairment and colour that depict *berserkir*, *aptrganga*, *blámenn* and dwarfs as the frightening Other by which their audience must define themselves.[100] By depicting Möndull harming others when transgressing the social hierarchy at court, but healing those around him when enacting the subservient role of supernatural helper to the hero, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* reflects the rigid social hierarchy that Old Norse speaking audiences wished to build, in which embodied Others know their place or are violently corrected.

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[99] Otaño Gracia, p. 4.
[100] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Hole', pp. 69–70.

Approach with Caution: Rejecting 'Monstrosity' in *The Marvels of the East*

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Human-adjacent bodies found in early medieval literature are often labelled as 'monstrous' in modern scholarship, with no critical consideration about the use of the term.[1] Yet designating something as 'monstrous' imposes modern ideas of normality — and deviance from said normality — onto medieval sources without necessarily considering the textual, historical or cultural evidence for such a definition. Scholars such as Asa Simon Mittman and Debra Higgs Strickland have challenged this leap from 'abnormal' to 'monstrous' in the context of postcolonial theory, arguing against the use of the term 'monstrous races' as it 'invites contemplation of race as monstrosity'.[2] Furthermore, the assumption that all medieval Europeans were racist, or that medieval Europe was almost entirely white, are 'both dangerous and non-factual', and conceptualisations of race were far more complex than many assume.[3] But in addition to race, this paper will show that the foreign or otherwise marginalised body, as represented in medieval manuscripts, is *also*

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[1] For two particularly influential and uncritical works, see: John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000); Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

[2] Debra Higgs Strickland, 'Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Ages', in *Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. by Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle (London: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 365–86 (p. 367). For more on race and monstrosity, see: Asa Simon Mittman, 'Are the Monstrous Races "Races"?', in *Postmedieval,* 6 (2015), 36–51; Richard H. Godden and Asa Simon Mittman, eds., *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[3] Richard Fahey, 'Monstrous Ethiopians? Racial Attitudes and Exoticism in the Old English "Wonders of the East"', University of Notre Dame Medieval Research Blog, <https://sites.nd.edu/manuscript-studies/2017/09/15/monstrous-ethiopians-racial-attitudes-and-exoticism-in-the-old-english-wonders-of-the-east/> [Accessed 17 June 2022].

grounded in a curiosity about — not condemnation of — disability and 'deviance to an accepted bio-medical norm'.[4]

Manuscripts from early medieval England provide both visual and textual representations of humanoid beings. The text known as *The Marvels* (or *Wonders*) *of the East* offers especially varied depictions of foreign bodies — particularly as it survives in three comparable but unique versions: London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius B V/1 (eleventh–twelfth century, with text duplicated in both Old English and Latin); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614 (twelfth century, Latin only); and London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius A XV (eleventh–twelfth century, Old English only).[5] As the only bilingual manuscript, all quotations in this paper are from Tiberius B V/1 unless stated otherwise. By exploring presentations of 'deviant' bodies in *The Marvels of the East*, this paper seeks to challenge the commonly used labels of 'inhuman' and 'monstrous' and demonstrate the value of approaching these texts from an interdisciplinary perspective, using art-historical, linguistic, literary, and disability studies. To avoid weighted terminology, I will also refer to the entities depicted within *The Marvels of the East* as 'marvels' — not a completely neutral term, as it still implies an 'Othering' distance between the viewer and the viewed, but better than 'monster' or its ilk. Not capitalising the term 'marvel' is also my attempt to further reduce that distance. It is also important to note that I am not seeking to classify or retrospectively diagnose any of the marvels discussed here, but rather prompt a conscious re-consideration of exactly how 'monstrous' their differences really are.

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[4] Floris Tomasini, *Vulnerable Bodies: New Directions in Disability Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 22.

[5] London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius B V/1, fols 78ᵛ–86ᵛ <www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1_f078v> (hereafter Tiberius B V/1); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614, fols. 36ʳ–52ʳ <digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/a43be554-c5b0-42f0-94e0-70222bb2a964/> (hereafter Bodley 614); and London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, fols. 98ᵛ–106ᵛ <www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_vitellius_a_xv_f098v> (hereafter Vitellius A XV). All accessed 17 June 2022. All quotations are my own transcriptions and translations. Foliation follows URLs.

It is necessary to first address the current historiography regarding disability studies and its application within the field of medieval studies. The two predominant disability models are well summarised by Jude Seal: the medical model is based on 'the systematized view of the body common in medicine', while the social model claims 'it is society's attitudes and structures which are disabling, not the condition per se'.[6] But both models are descriptive and based on modern society, not 'designed with historical analysis in mind'.[7] Like Seal, I believe these models form an unhelpful binary — they are not antithetical, nor are they useful for considering early medieval sources. Similarly, I do not support a Cartesian mind-body dichotomy; physical and mental disabilities are not mutually exclusive, nor were the mind and body even seen as distinct in the Middle Ages.[8] While it is important to acknowledge invisible disabilities, this study explores illustrated manuscripts and visible characteristics, and as such I will not seek to generalise any of my claims across all types of disability. For all these reasons, I am using Floris Tomasini's definition of disability, 'deviance to an accepted bio-medical norm', as this acknowledges both socially 'accepted' and 'bio-medical' elements in dialogue.[9] Through this framework, I will briefly outline evidence for attitudes towards disability in medieval England, discuss exactly how 'Other' the marvels are in their original contexts, and explore the effect of the entire mise-en-page on the marvels' presentation and reception. Finally, I will consider the impact of modern attitudes when encountering *The Marvels of the East* today, and propose an alternative approach to considering the marvels in a more productive fashion than as simply 'monsters'.

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[6] Jude Seal, 'Medicine, 'Miracle, and Muddled Methodology' (forthcoming), p. 2. For more on medieval disability studies, see Godden and Mittman (2019), and Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c.1100–1400* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

[7] Seal, p. 2.

[8] Seal, p. 5.

[9] Tomasini, p. 22.

Most scholarship at the intersection of disability and medieval studies examines hagiographic or scientific works: miracles or medicine. But the cultural attitudes towards disability that are demonstrated within these texts also shape the presentations of humanoids in other, less explicit contexts, such as *The Marvels of the East*. There is no shortage of literature which indicates that the human status of non-normative bodies was front of mind throughout medieval England, so identifying contemporary approaches across different media and genres can illuminate the artistic and textual choices made in the manuscripts containing *The Marvels of the East*.

When sources are read superficially it is tempting to think that disability in the medieval period was 'believed to be inherently related to moral culpability' and that external disfigurement was seen as a reflection of internal corruption.[10] The reality is far less binary. Hagiographies present disability in both positive and negative lights: in the *Book of St Gilbert*, for example, Gilbert's blindness is a symbol of his piety, yet in the *Miracles of St Kenelm*, blindness is a god-sent punishment.[11] Disability *can* be used to reinforce someone's moral, social, or religious standing, but it is not inherently weighted in a single direction. There are also occasions where it is not used in this way at all. Physically impaired individuals maintain agency in narratives such as the *Miracle of St Swithun*, wherein a paralysed man demonstrates authority, makes his own decisions, and incites actions in others — not in spite of requiring assistance, but regardless of it.[12] Marit Ronen also observes the discrepancy between modern and medieval attitudes to disability: receiving assistance is seen by most modern eyes as disabling, but in early medieval England it was more often a sign of social capital.[13] A modern reader would tend to read a disabled protagonist as far more socially

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[10] Seal, p. 7.

[11] Seal, p. 9.

[12] Michael Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[13] Marin Ronen, 'Dependency or Authority? Disability or Ability? Care Givers and Receivers in Early Medieval England', paper given at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, 10 July 2020.

limited than the narrative actually suggests — and, as will be demonstrated, the same interpretations happen with scholarship that explores the marvels in *The Marvels of the East.*

Scientific and legal texts, meanwhile, demonstrate a preoccupation with the human status of 'deviant' bodies. Peter of Abano writes in 1310:

> si enim caput habuerit plene ut generans figuratum etiam si in multis aliis partibus sit monstruosum post dici nostrum quod et doctores legis nostrae considerantes precipiunt baptizari tamquam recipiendum sit in speccie nostra.

> if it has a fully formed head, even if in many other parts it be monstrous, it can be said to be one of us. Our doctors of law, considering this, grant baptism to such being. [14]

Legal and religious status were dependent on human status, and while lawyers were preoccupied with external similitude, the Church prioritised the internal presence of a soul. This resulted in many discourses that tried to define who had the right to baptism (and could therefore be regarded as human). Similarly, the twelfth-century text *On the Secrets of Women* is concerned with embryology and teratology, and uses the term 'monstrum' to refer to birth defects.[15] The text is often found in manuscripts alongside herbal remedies, suggesting its use for lay readers and midwives, but it also cites philosophical authorities and would be relevant for lawyers, scholars, and clergy contemplating whether 'deviant' beings have souls or legal rights. Further afield, infant abandonment due to disfigurement was an established practice in Iceland and Norway that continued (despite post-Christianisation bans) well into the twelfth century, evidenced in law codes like *Borgarþing* and

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[14] Peter of Abano, *Expositio Problematum Aristotelis* (Venice: Johannes Herbort, de Seligenstadt, 1482), p. 115; trans. by Friedman, p. 181.

[15] Tim Wingard, 'Monstrous Births in the Middle Ages', Wellcome Collection Research Seminar, 17 November 2020.

literature such as *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and *Sturlunga saga*.[16] However, *Sturlunga saga* also features protagonists 'unimpeded socially by cleft palates, withered hands, or slack feet' — demonstrating, like the hagiographic tradition explored above, a complex conceptualisation of disability that lacks inherent moralistic value.[17]

These examples may be later than *The Marvels of the East*, but they reveal a continuity of thought starting in the ancient world: infant abandonment, for example, was a popular practice in ancient Rome, occurring as early as 450 B.C. when it features in the *Laws of the Twelve Tables*.[18] The marvels themselves are also part of a wider tradition originating in classical antiquity; *The Marvels of the East* is 'a composite work of long and complicated pedigree [… including] Isidore of Seville, St Augustine, Virgil and Pliny'.[19] It is for this reason that the marvels are often called the 'Plinian races' and occur in numerous sources. For example, marvels such as Sciopods (Fig. 1a) also feature in marginalia (Fig. 1b) and even decorative church stonework, increasing exposure to and normalisation of such forms throughout early medieval Europe.[20]

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[16] Katherine Olley, '"Svartir ok furðu ljótir": Unusual Bodies in Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns and Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka', paper given at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, 10 July 2020.

[17] Sean Lawing, 'The Place of the Evil: Infant Abandonment in Old Norse Society', *Scandinavian studies*, 85 (2) (2013), 133–50 (p. 133).

[18] 'A father shall immediately put to death a son recently born, who is a monster, or has a form different from that of member of the human race', trans. by Samuel Parsons Scott, *The Civil Law, Including the Twelve Tables* (New York: AMS Print, 1973), p. 65.

[19] Sarah J. Biggs, 'Monsters and Marvels in the Beowulf Manuscript', British Library Medieval manuscripts blog (6 March 2013) <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2013/03/monsters-and-marvels-in-the-beowulf-manuscript.html> [accessed 17 June 2022].

[20] Friedman, p. 135. For an image of a sciopod in church stonework, see <https://vialucispress.wordpress.com/2015/11/15/bigfoot-in-the-nievre-amuse-bouche-25-albert-pinto/> [accessed 2 October 2023].

Figure 1a. Sciopod. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614, f. 50r.
<digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/a43be554-c5b0-42f0-94e0-70222bb2a964/surfaces/ad21af86-b7a1-43f6-8cb2-0776793afc2b/>

Figure 1b. Sciopod, The Rutland Psalter. Courtesy of the British Library Board, Additional MS 62925 f. 14r.
<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_62925_fs014r>

The different sources I have covered here suggest, at the very least, that encountering 'deviant' bodies was not uncommon in the early medieval period, both in literature and reality. And most importantly, in all these varied contexts, these bodies are not innately negative. When this perspective is applied to 'deviant' bodies in *The Marvels of the East*, the genre is recast as a tradition that is not inherently 'monstrous', as Andy Orchard and John Block

Friedman would argue, but instead simply an exploration of what it means to be human.[21]

<center>THE DUBIOUS 'OTHER'</center>

For inclusion in *The Marvels of the East*, each marvel must have been deemed noteworthy by the compilers. But rather than a fear of the unknown, I believe that their significance stems from an interest in everyday 'human-ness'. Curiosity about 'deviant' bodies was not anchored in being unencountered, as 'direct personal observation of the East did not result in a corresponding reduction in the legends of the monstrous races said to live there'.[22] The marvels push at the boundaries of being human, but in a present, immediate way. As Susan Kim and Asa Simon Mittman note, 'the very status of the Wonders as wonders implies at once the stretching of possibility, and an insistence on the viability of the same possibility'.[23] Thus their presentation is not an inherently negative or defensive 'us vs them' outlook upon outsiders, but rather a curiosity about the different ways that humanity can manifest.

This perspective is demonstrated by the way in which the marvels' distinctive features are explicitly grounded within a human framework, rendering them familiar first. Two separate marvels are both named Homodubii ('doubtfully human'): the first, a people with long hair and beards who eat raw fish (Fig. 2a); the second, a centaur-like hybrid of man and ass (Fig. 2b). Yet both are initially described as 'hominis' and 'men'.[24] This is a common construction in all three versions of the text — using humanity as a frame of reference before describing deviance from this template. This deviance is a gradient rather than a binary, registered in relation to — but, crucially, not in *opposition* to — an 'accepted norm'.[25]

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[21] Orchard; Friedman.

[22] Friedman, p. 24.

[23] Susan M. Kim and Asa Simon Mittman, 'Ungefrægelicu deor: Truth and the Wonders of the East' *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art*, 2 (2010), pp. 1–22 (p. 1). <doi.org/10.17613/epr5-2n17> [accessed 17 June 2022]

[24] 'Hominis' and 'menn', fol. 80ʳ; 'homines' and 'men', fol. 82ᵛ.

[25] Tomasini, p. 22.

Figure 2a. First Homodubii (fish eater). Courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton MS Tiberius B V/1, f. 80r.
<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1_f080r>

Figure 2b. Second Homodubii (centaur). Courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton MS Tiberius B V/1, f. 82v.
<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1_f082v>

Figure 3. Lion–headed giant. Courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton
MS Tiberius B.v, f. 81v.
<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1_f081v>

Figure 4. Panotus. Courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton MS Tiberius
B.v, f. 83v.
<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1_f083v>

Sometimes this framework becomes explicit: the lion-headed giants (Fig. 3) 'putant[ur] homines fuisse' / 'beoð menn gewenede' ('are thought to be human'), and the Panotii's (Fig. 4) 'corpore sunt q[ua]si lacteo homines' ('bodies are like milk-white men') / 'beoð anlice homan swa hwite sa meolc' ('are like humans as white as milk').[26] However, the comparative simile — *like* men — and the subjective affirmative 'thought to be' prohibit them from fully occupying a human identity. This relational framework simultaneously includes and 'Others' these marvels, highlighting their ambiguity without attempting to reach a resolution. Similarly, the fish-eater Homodubii is culturally and behaviourally different, and the centaur physically, but neither is cast in a morally negative or 'monstrous' light. All these cases introduce uncertainty, but none reject the marvels outright. Instead, their very existence prompts a conscious consideration of the categorisation and ontology of the body.

It is worth noting that the Old English entries more explicitly explore the marvels' humanity than the Latin. The Old English entries are usually longer than the Latin, providing more space to explore the Latin names and elaborate upon a marvel's 'deviant' features. In this very act of translation, it is also possible to gain insight into the translator's own biases. For example, the name 'Homodubii' is expounded as 'þ[aet] bioð twylice' ('that is, doubtfully') and 'þ[æt] beoð twimen' ('that is, doubtfully-human').[27] Superficially, these are simply glosses, and modern editions often translate 'twimen' as 'maybe-people' to match its Latin pair.[28] However, 'maybe-people" is not as accurate a translation for 'twimen' as it is for 'homodubii'. The Old English is semantically wider, with more connotations than the Latin. For instance, all entries for the Old English prefix 'twi-' in Bosworth-Toller mean 'double', apart from 'twi-ferlaecan' which glosses the Latin

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[26] Giants, fol. 81ʳ; Panotii, fol. 83ᵛ.
[27] Tiberius B V/1, fol. 80ʳ; Vitellius A XV, fol. 100ᵛ.
[28] R.D. Fulk, *The Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 21.

'dissociant' ('dissociate'), and 'twi-hycgan' for 'dissentiendo' ('dissent').[29] 'Twi-' is only interpreted as a *negation* when it is used to gloss a split between two things or, crucially, variance from an established focal centre. Where the Latin 'dis-' is often a binary, 'twi-' encompasses a gradient of discrepancy that, like the marvels themselves, is not exclusively negative. 'Twimen' is one such case, carrying connotations of doubling as well as doubt. This strongly supports Karen Bruce Wallace's argument that in early medieval England the Old English 'unhælu' — literally, 'un-whole' — was used to reference disability and disease, and encompasses excess as well as deficiency (Fig. 5).[30] Many of the marvels are 'unhælu' in both directions: the famous Blemmyæ, for example, are extremely tall but missing their heads, and describing Homodubii as 'twimen' implies the same simultaneous excess and lack. This implicit equivalence between the marvels and contemporary conceptualisations of disability may on the one hand imply the monstrosity of disabled people, but on the other it places the marvels again within a human framework, decreasing their 'Otherness'.

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[29] Joseph Bosworth, 'twi-férlǽcan', in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, ed. by Thomas Northcote Toller, Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014) <https://bosworthtoller.com/31261> [accessed 17 June 2022]; Bosworth, 'twi-hycgan' <https://bosworthtoller.com/31290> [accessed 17 June 2022].

[30] Karen Bruce Wallace, 'Grendel and Goliath: Monstrous Superability and Disability in the Old English Corpus', in Godden and Mittman (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25458-2> [accessed 17 June 2022], pp. 107–26.

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monstrosity                    hælu                    monstrosity

<-------------------------------------------------------------------------------->

unhælu                         hælu                    unhælu

(lack)                      (wholeness)                (excess)
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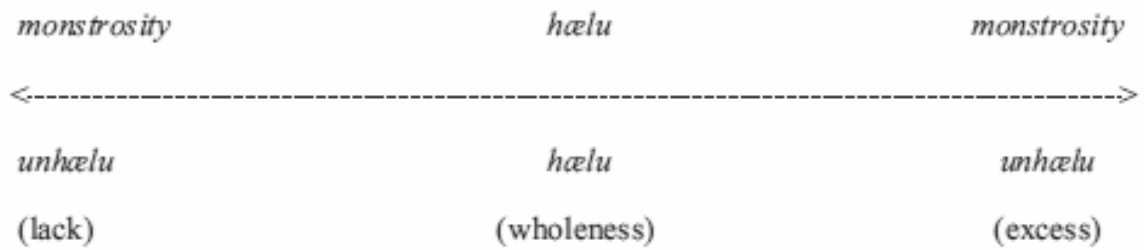
Figure 5. "[Monsters] police the contours of the acceptable body and define limits for somatic form and functionality, and yet also threaten the possible collapse of existing categories and concepts of hælu and unhælu."

Wallace, Karen Bruce, 'Grendel and Goliath: Monstrous Superability and Disability in the Old English Corpus' in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, ed. by Richard H. Godden and Asa Simon Mittman (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) <doi.org/10.1007/978–3–030–25458–2> [Accessed 17 June 2022] p. 126

The degree of a marvel's inhumanity is not declared but is instead open to interpretation. And while these connotations may only be present in the translator's own Old English interpretation of the Latin, what is clear in both languages is that the text is more interested in pushing boundaries than defining them.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE MISE–EN–PAGE

The extent to which marvels push these boundaries is dependent on the entire mise-en-page. The texts must be considered alongside their respective images as users encounter the images first, creating a preconception before the corresponding entry is read. I use the term 'user' here as it is more inclusive than 'reader' or 'audience' and more interactive than 'viewer'. It encompasses the variety of different ways that individuals interact with manuscripts as physical objects, not just the texts that they contain. Considering this 'user experience' is particularly important in the context of this study, as the images included in all three *The Marvels of the East* manuscripts often feature details

not in the text, influencing a user's impression of each marvel. To take Cynocephali as an example, they are described as having

> iubas equoru[m], ap[er]rum dentes, canina capita, igne[s] & flamma[m] flantes […]
> horses manan 7 eoferes tucxas 7 hunda heafda 7 heora oruð byð swylce fyres lig.
>
> horses' manes [and] boars' tusks [and] dogs' heads and breath like fire. (fol. 80r)

Yet their bodies are drawn as humanoid in all three manuscripts, despite the text not once referencing humanity in any form (Figs. 6a–c).

Figure 6a. Cynocephalus. Courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton MS Tiberius B.v, f. 80r.
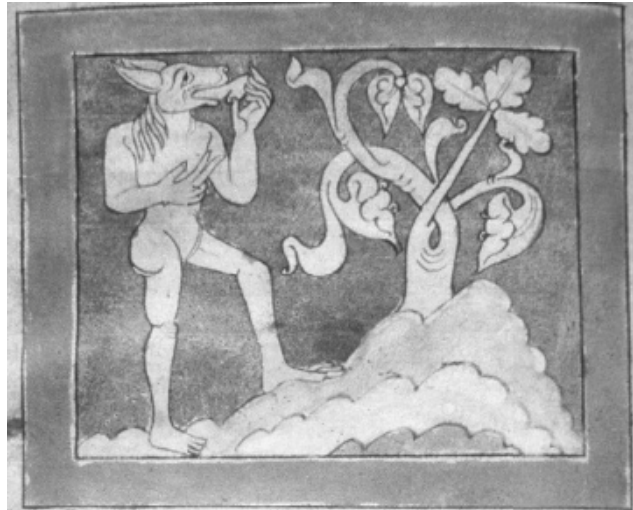<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1_f080r>

Figure 6b. Cynocephalus. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614, f. 38v.
<digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/a43be554–c5b0–42f0–
94e070222bb2a964/surfaces/f91354af–189d–4a0b–8e0b–5b50f5bea0be/>

Figure 6c. Cynocephalus. London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius A XV,
f. 100r.
<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_vitellius_a_xv_f100r>

This follows the human-centric framework established above, but it also reveals the presence of external influences that create preconceptions for the illustrators that outweigh the influence of the text that the images are accompanying. The most dominant of these sources would have been Pliny, who is the first to describe the Cynocephali as 'genus hominum capitibus caninis' ('a tribe of *humans* with dogs' heads', emphasis mine).[31] In this instance, the visual representations of Cynocephali in the manuscripts of *The Marvels of the East*, while not overruling the text itself, do supplement it with paratextual information that makes the initial impression of the marvel as human as possible.

Most crucially in this exploration of wider influences on the images, it is important to point out that in Vitellius A XV, *The Marvels of the East* immediately follows the Old English text *The Passion of St Christopher*, in which St Christopher is presented as a Cynocephalus. I contend that this narrative proximity between *The Passion of St Christopher* and *The Marvels of the East* is why the Vitellius A XV Cynocephalus image (Fig. 6c) is clothed and shod, rendering him more human than the Tiberius B V/1 and Bodley 614 Cynocephali, who are naked. This is a central theme to which we will return: human images in *The Marvels of the East* are always biped, clothed, and shod, while most marvels usually lack at least one of these features. The images are therefore reliant on the audience to recognise established signifiers of humanity. It is clear that the images in *The Marvels of the East's* manuscripts are informed by both the artists' and users' idiocultures, as well as the entire context of text, paratext, and other works within a manuscript. Even when the specific *The Marvels of the East* text does not reference humanity, the Vitellius A XV Cynocephalus image, likely influenced by its 'neighbour', *The Passion of St Christopher,* firmly draws the marvel back into a human context and seemingly rejecting any interpretation of them as 'inhuman'.

However, sometimes these declarative human signifiers serve to emphasise a marvel's deviance, rather than adherence, to humanity. The inclusion of men directly beside marvels in some illustrations provides a direct

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[31] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History, Volume II: Books 3–7*, trans. H. Rackham, vol. 2. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 520.

comparison between the two states of being. For example, both Tiberius B V/1 and Bodley 614 show a sequence of a Donestre hunting a person (Fig. 7a–b), with explicit contrast made between the man wearing 'recognisably Anglo-Saxon clothes including pointed shoes' and the naked marvel.[32] In Tiberius B V/1, genitalia are even added to the Donestre (and other naked marvels) by a later hand; exploring the ramifications of this is beyond the scope of this study, but it does further emphasise their naked primitiveness. In all three manuscripts (Fig. 7a–c), the marvel also clearly lacks a neck in comparison to the human — this is another consistent, repeated difference between man and several other marvels.

Figure 7a. Donestre, London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius B.v, f.83v. <www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1_f083v>

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[32] Simon C. Thomson, 'The Two Artists of the Nowell Codex Wonders of the East', *Selim*, 21 (2015–2016), 105–54 (p. 120).
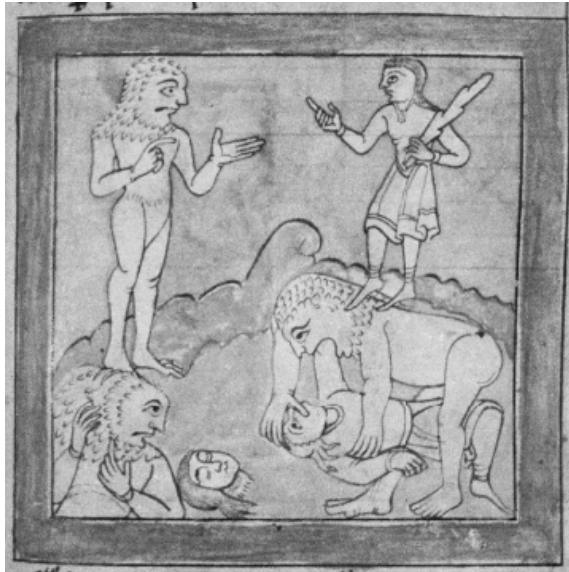
Figure 7b. Donestre, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614, f. 43r.
<digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/a43be554–c5b0–42f0–94e0–
70222bb2a964/surfaces/f91354af–189d–4a0b–8e0b–5b50f5bea0be>

Figure 7c. Donestre, London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, f.
103v.
<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_vitellius_a_xv_f103v>

Even in the rudimentary work of the Vitellius A XV artists,[33] the human's neckline is (for want of a better word) sweetheart; meanwhile the Donestre's is square, and could easily be mistaken for a rudimentary, dog-like ear. Interestingly, it is this site of difference — the neck — which is the mode of death for the human, who is decapitated by the Donestre. It is perhaps made implicit that the Donestre attacks the human due to their different natures, either because of a recognition by the Donestre of an invasive, colonial race, or because of an implicit jealousy of that race's humanity. In either case, presented in close proximity to men who are biped, clothed, shod, and of familiar anatomy, it is easier for a user to identify where a marvel deviates from an expected 'bio-medical norm'.[34]

Yet I would argue that it is these 'deviant' features that actually emphasise the Donestre's progression towards humanity, as can be demonstrated in the differences between each of the vignettes in the Tiberius B V/1 and Bodley 614 Donestre images. Both manuscripts display, within a single outlined frame, a narrative sequence where the Donestre and a man appear to converse and fight before the Donestre kills the man. The final vignette in the bottom left of the frame depicts the Donestre looking at the man's dead body and showing remorse, with their hands held against their distraught face.[35] In Bodley 614 (Fig. 7b) they also now have cuffs on their wrists, as though they have become clothed in a similar fashion to the man. These cuffs are clearly absent from the previous vignette in the bottom right corner of the frame and, combined with their regretful expression, this implies that the Donestre has become fundamentally more human both internally and externally. Bodley 614 is almost certainly a copy of Tiberius B V/1, but Bodley 614's images bring marvels and humans closer together in

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[33] I agree with Simon Thomson's assessment (2015–2016) of two artists, teacher and apprentice, illustrating Vitellius A XV.

[34] Tomasini, p. 22.

[35] As this paper investigates modern assumptions about medieval marvels, I am attempting to avoid passing any unconscious or unaddressed assumptions on them myself. I am therefore using gender neutral pronouns when talking about any of the marvels from these texts.

their similarities.[36] This is not just by making the marvels more human, but also by making the humans more like marvels: unlike Tiberius B V/1, the human in Bodley 614's Donestre illustration holds a club, just like the centaur Homodubii on the recto of the same folio. The club is a crude weapon traditionally associated with marvels and in this context, wielded by a human, it further narrows the gap between human and marvel. As with the Cynocephalus variations discussed above, the majority of the details in these images are not present in the text itself. The visual contrast between man and marvel is instead a supplementary tool that prompts a user to more consciously compare and contrast the actual differences between the two states of being, consequently calling into question the degree of familiarity or monstrosity that a marvel actually possesses.

It is worth considering the implications of the very existence and construction of a marvel itself. For example, the centaur Homodubii (Fig. 2b) is explicitly half ass rather than half horse. In this case, physical difference *could* be seen as 'defectivity' due to the negative associations with the animal. However, the medieval ass has a complex range of associations, synonymous with idiocy and sloth whilst also evoking positive Christian connotations.[37] This marvel could be read as a physical manifestation of any of these attributes; as a result, it is therefore open to interpretation and neither inherently positive nor negative. As with the man–dog hybrid of the Cynocephalus discussed above, this compilation of existing creatures is reliant on an audience to recognise established signifiers, and there may be no need for explicit opinion or didactic judgment in neither text nor image as the wider connotations would be evident to a contemporary reader.

Finally, it would be remiss to not address the fact that there are plenty of marvels that are, in all modern senses, not monstrous or even marvellous in

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[36] Digital Bodleian acknowledges this relationship in Bodley 614's metadata <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/a43be554–c5b0–42f0–94e0–70222bb2a964/> [accessed 27 October 2022]. For more on Tiberius B V/1 as Bodley 614's prototype see, among others, A. J. Ford, *Marvel and Artefact: The 'Wonders of the East' in its Manuscript Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

[37] See: Kathryn Smithies, *Introducing the Medieval Ass* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020).

the least, and easily conform to twenty-first century expectations of an 'accepted bio-medical norm'.[38] In both their visual and textual representations, these marvels sit clearly within our established human-as-default framework and, like the Vitellius A XV Cynocephalus, are biped, clothed, and shod. The 'Wife-Givers' in particular 'have no apparent physiological points of difference from the putatively "normal" or racially "European" bodies of the Anglo-Saxons responsible for producing and initially using [these manuscripts]'.[39] So, too, are the 'Honest Men', whose entry reads 'sunt ibi homines honesti' with no further detail about the men themselves, only their geographical location (fol. 84^v). They are not man-*like*, unlike the Panotii and lion-headed giants considered previously, nor are they 'homodubii'. There are two crucial differences to the 'Honest Men' entry: the first is that their difference is cultural or social, not physiological. Because the text only describes a marvel's notable and deviant qualities, and these marvels have no physical deviances, there is no physical description of them whatsoever — which is likely why they are clothed and shod in the illustrations, yet again resorting to humanity as the default. Paradoxically, these images then further reinforce their humanity, as the user encounters the images first.

The second difference between the majority of the marvels and the 'Honest Men' text is that the emphasis in the entry is actually on the geographical landscape rather than the humanoid itself. There is a tendency in modern scholarship to assume that all the marvels are humanoid or chimeric, but in fact several entries are botanical, and many of the Old English passages begin by defining the land: 'ðonne is sum ea-lond' (f. 84r, then there is a certain island), 'ðonne is oþer rice' (fol. 84^v, then there is another kingdom) etc. There is no reason to suggest that a location may not be a marvel, too. I firmly believe that the interest in geographical, cultural, *and* physical deviance to the user's 'accepted bio-medical norm' shows that *The Marvels of the East* is fundamentally a curious text — one which reveals previously unknown lands and peoples to the user as a literally marvellous,

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[38] Tomasini, p. 22.
[39] Mittman (2015), pp. 42–43.

interest-piquing delight. It is evident that physical difference is seen as noteworthy and foreign in *The Marvels of the East*, but no more so than cultural and behavioural difference, and even geographical differences in the landscape. Much like the hagiographies explored earlier, disability is not explicitly nor exclusively negative. It is only post-medieval analysis that has labelled this deviance as monstrous in the modern, negative sense of the word.

REJECTING MODERN MONSTROSITY

It was Kenneth Sisam in 1953 who first called Vitellius A XV a 'liber de diversis monstris' ('book of diverse monsters') on the basis that all its texts feature 'deviant' bodies.[40] But Sisam's classification does not do justice to the complexity of Vitellius A XV's texts, as it simply labels all non-normative bodies 'monstrous' without first considering if they were viewed as such when the texts were compiled. As we have seen, the marvels depicted within *The Marvels of the East* present a multifaceted conception of physical and social difference that reflects wider cultural attitudes to disability and Otherness. Passages are usually succinct and encyclopaedic, images are firmly grounded in a human framework, and any moralistic interpretation is the reader's own.

Despite the lack of judgment in-text, early claims such as Sisam's colour how the marvels are viewed today. Subsequent scholarship easily adopts this perspective of Vitellius A XV as an 'extended exploration of monstrosity', and Friedman's influential work *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* reinforced an equation of 'deviance' with 'monstrosity'.[41] Scholars rarely challenge their own idiocultures when approaching *The Marvels of the East*, in turn perpetuating the assumptions that they make. This occurs in both art historical and literary contexts across race, disability, and gender studies: for

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[40] Kenneth Sisam, 'The Compilation of the Beowulf Manuscript', in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, ed. by Kenneth Sisam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 65–96 (p. 96).

[41] Susan M. Kim and Asa Simon Mittman, 'The Wonders of the East', in *Demonstrare*, ed. by Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018), pp. 67–70 (p. 67).

example, Simon Thomson says that a female marvel's 'breasts are added in far too low down, presumably to ensure they could be seen' (Fig. 8).[42]
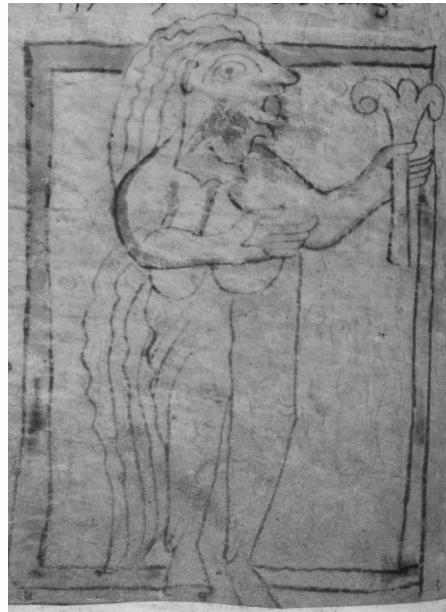

Figure 8. Woman with ox tail and camel feet.
London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, f. 105v.
<www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_vitellius_a_xv_f105v>

While the artistic practicalities may have somewhat influenced the composition of the image, I would argue that her breasts' height (or lack thereof) is actually one of the most realistic and unsurprising parts of the image. Thomson does not challenge his own assumptions about the average female body, or that which modern media and society now present as the norm. Much like the way in which modern medical diagnostics are based predominantly on how symptoms present in white males, erroneous conclusions can be drawn — even in fields such as medieval studies — when conclusions are based on presumptions.[43] Abnormality is subjective, and it is

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[42] Thomson, p. 109.

[43] Caroline Criado-Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London, England: Chatto & Windus, 2019).

only modern expectations of physicality that imply there is anything 'wrong' with the marvels.

However, it is important to note that my argument here is also a result of my own perspectives. I am a queer, disabled, white woman, and while this study has not focussed on gender or sexuality, all these descriptors influence how I experience the world. The way in which I classify the marvels, both when first encountered and when analysed further, is a result of my own idioculture. For example, I initially, instinctively categorised the lion-headed giant (Fig. 3) as 'more human' than the second Homodubii (Fig. 2b) due to the former's four limbs and bipedal posture. I also categorised the Vitellius A XV Cynocephalus as 'more human' than the Tiberius B V/1 or Bodley 614 Cynocephali due to their clothing. I have had to make such judgments for the purposes of this study, but I attempt to remain aware of my own biases and reasoning. After all, the aim of this work has been to use multiple disciplinary perspectives to discourage automatic categorisation, and to re-think how we should approach medieval depictions of entities that are deviant to our own conception of able-bodied people.

In this vein, Mittman rightly asks 'are the monstrous races "races"?' — but I suggest a more pertinent question would be, are they even 'monsters'?[44] If we take J.R.R. Tolkein's categorisation of monsters as '"adversaries of God", and so begin[ning] to symbolize (and ultimately become identified with) the powers of evil', we clearly see that the marvels are not monstrous.[45] While the three creatures in Beowulf may well be 'adversaries of God', the marvels lack this explicit characterization.[46] Both *The Marvels of the East* and Vitellius A XV's subsequent *Letter of Alexander* are not meant to depict monsters but wonders, as attested by Alexander's description of 'swa fela wundorlicra þinga' ('so may wondrous things').[47] There is no malice in these texts. Rather than an 'extended exploration of monstrosity', I would reframe Vitellius A

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[44] Mittman (2015), p. 36.

[45] John R. R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', in *The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays*, ed. by John R. R. Tolkien (London: Harper Collins, 2006), pp. 5–48 (p. 20).

[46] Tolkien, p. 20.

[47] Fulk, pp. 34–36, ll. 7–8.

XV as an extended exploration of *humanity*, attempting to provoke an awareness of the way that non-normative bodies blur the boundaries of the term.[48] And this reframing applies to all three manuscripts, and to *The Marvels of the East* itself. I would strongly argue that the marvels were not seen as monstrous in contemporary society so much as curiosities. Even in the original context of the word 'monster' — from the Latin *monstrum*, etymologically derived from *moneo* 'to warn' and often used in the context of warnings or ill omens — the marvels are still just marvels, with their entries encyclopaedic rather than foreboding.

Using disability studies as a mechanism through which to explore the perception and status of these marvels forces us to question pre-existing assumptions, both of other scholarship and of ourselves. The exercise makes us challenge *why* we think what we do — which, incidentally, is exactly what *The Marvels of the East* does, too. This study has made it clear that we bring far more to this text as users than the text gives to us in the first place. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims that 'the monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read'.[49] This is certainly true of deviant bodies — but it is in our reading, and our application of our idioculture upon that act of reading, that makes the body 'monstrous'.

And the marvels exist to be read and to function equally as well in different contexts and genres. The inclusion of *The Marvels of the East* in *computus* manuscripts (Tiberius B V/1 and Bodley 614) creates a level of verisimilitude, validating the existence of the marvels in a non-fiction context. Indeed, marvels also feature in *mappaemundi* such as British Library Additional MS 28681 (f.9r) and the Hereford Mappamundi, as well as other collections such as Getty MS Ludwig XV 4 and British Library Cotton Vitellius D I — providing yet more evidence of their presence (and social or cultural acceptance) in wider medieval society.[50] It is striking that *The Marvels of the*

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[48] Kim and Mittman (2018), p. 67.

[49] Jeffry Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffery Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 4.

[50] Cat Crossley, 'Monstrous Men, MSS, and a Macrobian Model? The Iconographical Influence of the Westminster Mural Map on "Marvellous" Mappaemundi and Illuminated

East fits in this non-fiction genre as well as it does Vitellius A XV. In the different, though no less useful context of medievalism in science fiction, James Paz and Carl Kears suggest that 'scientific rigour [acts] as a means of providing verisimilitude for fabulous, perhaps otherwise incredible, reports of far off places'.[51] This certainly applies to the manuscript context of these three extant copies of *The Marvels of the East* from early medieval England. All three *The Marvels of the East* manuscripts are fundamentally miscellanies — a collection of noteworthy but not necessarily frightening beings. From the conversion narrative of St Christopher in Vitellius A XV to the metrical calendars in Tiberius B V/1 and Bodley 614, they explore what it means to live as a human in the compilers' contemporary society. Far from being monstrous, the marvels simply operate under this framework of curiosity.

Manuscripts', paper given at the North West Medieval Studies Seminar, 26 November 2021.

[51] Carl Kears and James Paz, *Medieval Science Fiction* (London: King's College London, 2016), p. 8.

Experiencing the Miraculous at Shrines in England c. AD 600–850

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INTRODUCTION

Early medieval hagiographies and histories inform us that miracles and marvels abounded at the shrines of the saints. These powerful places were both loci for the manifestation of divine favour and displays of some of the most impressive architecture, sculpture, metalwork, and textiles to be found in early medieval England. This article uses archaeological and sculptural evidence, as well as texts, to reconstruct the experience of visitors to shrines. The focus is primarily on those shrines which contained the whole bodies of individuals venerated as saints rather than the smaller reliquaries containing partial remains or secondary relics. The evidence is drawn largely from areas which are now part of the modern country of England, but which were then variously part of the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, and Wessex, with some comparisons drawn to sites in Northern Britain. The chronological scope is determined by the establishment of the institutions of the church in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the seventh century and the increasing political and cultural impact of Scandinavian raiding and settlement in the later ninth century. Within this limited time period and geographic range, it is nonetheless remarkable that the cult of the saints appears to have had a range of changing regional expressions, and material manifestations. The cult of the saints created a shared cultural phenomenon throughout early medieval Europe, whilst simultaneously allowing the devotional practises associated with saints to take different forms and characters depending on their social and material context.[1]

The article is structured around the experience of visiting a church which housed the grave of a saint. We begin outside the minster and move

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[1] Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 27 and 35.

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through the enclosure to the cemetery before entering the church itself. An important aspect of this experience was the accessibility or exclusivity of shrines. The intended audience of the cult, as well as the status of the visitor, determined how accessible the miracles and marvels of the shrine were. Details from hagiographies, insights from excavations, and interpretation of sculpture suggest that shrines were much more accessible to ecclesiastics, and to noble or royal patrons and guests, than they were to laity in general, especially poor and marginalised individuals. Shrines could be carefully managed to attract the attention of some while excluding others. The richest and most high-profile shrines are overrepresented in both the written and archaeological evidence. It is possible, therefore, that more modest shrines without surviving hagiographies or sculpture were more accessible to local communities, although reconstructing these places presents a greater challenge. Saints' bodies were presented in a variety of ways in early medieval England and the experience of miracles and marvels at shrines depended not only on the architecture and material culture of the church but also on the status of the visitor and their relationship to the community who created and managed the shrine.

This article contributes to the discussion in recent scholarship of the role of material practice in religious life.[2] The material and experiential themes that have emerged in recent studies of late antique and early medieval religion have led to a reappraisal of the role of objects in constituting religious experience, not simply reflecting belief.[3] The continuing influence of Peter Brown's work on religious life, and the cult of the saints in particular, can be traced in this approach. Brown's study of the functions of religious activities, and his criticism of the perceived dichotomy between elite religion and

[2] Gabor Thomas and others, 'Religious Transformations in the Middle Ages: Towards a New Archaeological Agenda', *Medieval Archaeology,* 61 (2017), 300–29 (p. 301); Nancy Edwards, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Roy Flechner, 'Reflections and Reconsiderations', in *Transforming Landscapes of Belief in the Early Medieval Insular World and Beyond,* ed. by Nancy Edwards, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Roy Flechner (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), pp. 493–513 (p. 498).

[3] Jaś Elsner and Rachel Wood, 'Introduction', in *Imagining the Divine: Art in Religions of Late Antiquity across Eurasia*, ed. by Jaś Elsner and Rachel Wood, Research Publication (British Museum), 234 (London: British Museum Press, 2021), pp. 1–4 (p. 1).

popular practice, shifted the focus from doctrines in texts to the experiences of the individual in society.[4] The experiences of individuals in the church have continued to provide new perspectives on changing ecclesiastical institutions and cultures throughout the medieval period.[5] Study of the experiences of saints' cults in early medieval Britain is greatly enriched by engagement with sculptural and archaeological evidence. There has long been an awareness in scholarship of the limitations of surviving textual evidence from this period. David Rollason noted that the authorship and audience of hagiography gives the impression that cults were almost entirely the concern of ecclesiastics and ruling families.[6] Yet Alan Thacker argued that a landscape of local cults had begun to develop from the 'golden age of sanctity' described by Bede in the second half of the seventh century.[7] It seems unlikely that all these cults catered only to elites. However, as John Blair has pointed out, we have no idea what the majority of these local shrines were like before AD 1100.[8]

The investment in both hagiography and architecture at pre-eminent cult centres during periods of ecclesiastical reform and centralisation between the tenth and twelfth centuries led to the creation of a more rigid and uniform understanding of what a shrine was. Before the tenth century, texts, sculpture, and funerary archaeology suggest that shrines were part of a spectrum of special burials, and the distinction between commemoration and veneration was often unclear. However, as Blair has stated, when looking back to the

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[4] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 1; Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp. 18–20.

[5] Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), p. 12.

[6] David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989), p. 95.

[7] Alan Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum: The Significance of Place in the Study of Saints', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Richard Sharpe and Alan Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–43 (p. 38).

[8] John Blair 'A Saint for Every Minster? Local Cults in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Local Saints*, ed. by Sharpe and Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 455–94 (p. 486).

formative centuries of the cult of saints in England, the perceptions created by tenth century hagiography have been difficult to break.[9] When comparing miracle collections compiled in the later eleventh and twelfth centuries with earlier hagiographies, Anne Bailey noted that most shrines were not expected to draw general crowds until the later tenth or eleventh century, and that miracles recorded in texts before this date principally involved members of the religious communities that housed the relics.[10] There would appear to have been a change in either the accessibility of major shrines or the intentions of hagiographers, or both, from the tenth century. The character of saints' cults before this period, therefore, requires reassessment. The written evidence from before AD 850, however, is uneven: surviving texts are mostly from the end of the seventh and start of the eighth centuries. Whereas hagiography from the ninth century is sparse, the sculptural evidence is both rich and plentiful, suggesting a period of increased investment at shrines. Archaeological and sculptural evidence helps to form a more complete picture of the process by which the landscape was populated with saints and the role that these saints had in society (fig. 1). It also reveals the variety of types of shrines that existed and the close relationship between the cult of the saints and wider funerary practice.

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[9] Blair, 'A Saint for Every Minster?', in *Local Saints*, ed. by Sharpe and Thacker, p. 459.

[10] Anne E. Bailey, 'Reconsidering the Medieval Experience at the Shrine in High Medieval England', *Journal of Medieval history,* 47 (2021), 203–29 (p. 222).

Figure 1: Locations of documented saints' cults (white triangles) and sculpture associated with shrines (black dots) c.AD850 in Britain. (Map by Megan Bunce)

ENCLOSURES

Shrines were part of larger ecclesiastical sites, which varied in character from small hermitages, like Crowland (Linconshire), to large minsters with industrial and agricultural buildings and supporting secular settlements, like Whitby (North Yorkshire) (fig. 2).[11]

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[11] Michael Chisholm, 'Crowland in Guthlac's Time', in *Guthlac: Crowland's Saint,* ed. by Jane Roberts and Alan Thacker (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2020), pp. 316–25 (p. 323); Tony Wilmott, 'The Anglian Abbey of Streonæshalch-Whitby: New Perspectives on Topography and Layout', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History,* 20 (2017), 81–94 (p. 92).
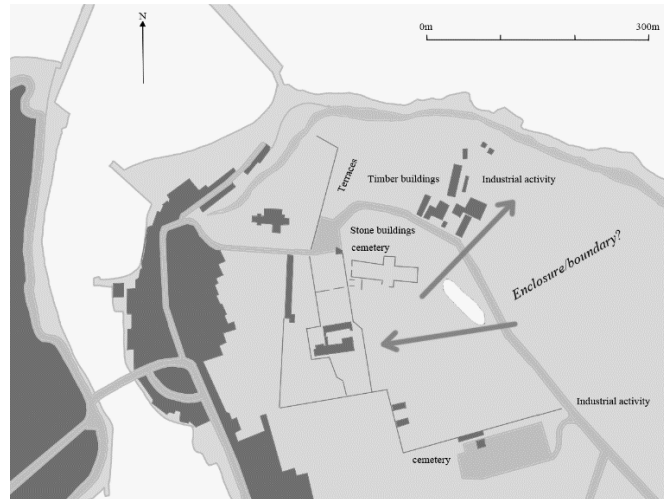
Figure 2: The headland at Whitby (North Yorks.) showing locations of early medieval activity discovered during excavation and conjectured line of minster enclosure. (Map by Megan Bunce)

Different sites had different facilities to welcome guests and repel unwanted visitors. Minster sites were generally enclosed. Before the tenth century, physical enclosures boundaries were one of the features that distinguished minsters from secular settlements in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[12] Written evidence indicates that although the enclosure was intended to maintain the exclusivity of minsters, the reality was that these sites and their clerical and monastic communities, were permeable, especially to royal and noble laity.[13] Minsters regularly welcomed royalty and nobility. Hilda at Whitby, Cuthbert at Lindisfarne (Northumberland), and Wilfrid at Ripon (North Yorkshire) received royal entourages for political, legal, and ecclesiastical reasons.[14]

[12] John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 196; Rosemary Cramp, 'New Perspectives on Monastic Buildings and Their Uses', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History,* 20 (2017), 27–42 (p. 30).

[13] Sarah Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, C. 600-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 171; Bede, 'Letter to Egbert', in *Bede's Historical Works,* ed. by J. E. King (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 471–72 (ch. 12).

[14] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 408–09 (book IV, ch. 23); Ibid., pp. 176–77 (book IV, ch. 28); Stephen of Ripon, *The Life of Wilfrid,* ed. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), pp. 36–37 (ch. 17).

Guest-houses formed part of the minster complex at Ripon and Lindisfarne, where Wilfrid and Cuthbert, respectively, were enshrined.[15] Cuthbert himself had been guest-master while at Ripon and his duties required him to leave the inner buildings of the monastery early in the morning to reach the guest house. Bede also records the name of a monk, Baduthegn, who served as a guest-brother at Lindisfarne.[16] Hospitality was an important feature of monastic discipline as well as a habitual part of early medieval elite lifestyles. Less hospitable were the guards who were employed at Lastingham.[17] Many minsters were repositories of great wealth, including both precious objects, and agricultural and industrial products gathered from their large landholdings and many tenants. Over the eighth and ninth centuries minsters became increasingly embedded in developing economic networks and communities had reason to fear incursion by thieves and hostile groups. At Lindisfarne a watchtower overlooked the maritime routes to the island and the high-status secular settlement at Bamburgh on the facing coast (fig. 3).[18] Minsters typically occupied prominent but not remote positions in the landscape, as a result shrines were often found on coastal or fenland islands (for example Minster-in-Thanet, Ely, Crowland, and Lindisfarne), or on hills overlooking riverine, maritime, or land routes (such as at Wearmouth, Whitby, and Breedon). Access to minsters was carefully managed and so the shrines they housed were also poised between being removed from worldly activities and immersed in them. In this way the character of the site and its relationship to local settlements impacted the audience of the cult and the accessibility of the shrine.

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[15] Deirdre O'Sullivan and Robert Young, *English Heritage Book of Lindisfarne, Holy Island* (London: Batsford, 1995), p. 42; Bede, 'Life of St Cuthbert', in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: a Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life,* ed. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 141–308, (p. 177).

[16] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 444–47 (book IV, ch. 31).

[17] Ibid., pp. 344–45 (book IV, ch. 3).
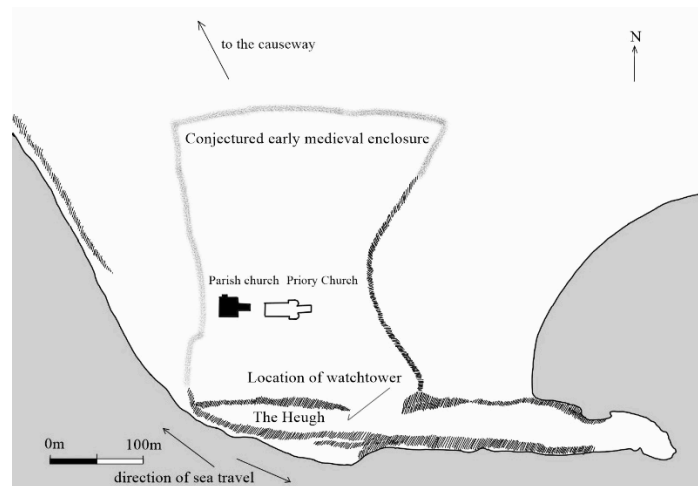
[18] O'Sullivan and Young, p. 42.

Figure 3: Lindisfarne (Northumberland) showing locations of modern parish church, medieval priory church and conjectured early medieval enclosure and location of watchtower. (Map by Megan Bunce)

ENTRANCES

At minsters, architecture had the dual function of controlling access and impressing visitors. A free-standing tower was added to the Old Minster at Winchester (Hampshire) in the eighth century, 20 metres from the west end of the nave.[19] This structure was later recorded as dedicated to St Martin. It probably functioned as a gatehouse and provided an impressive entrance way as well as commanding views of the minster precinct from the upper windows. The dedication of the building suggests that it may also have had a liturgical function, perhaps as an additional chapel or funerary church, given its proximity to the cemeteries of the Old Minster (fig. 4).

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[19] Martin Biddle and Simon Hayfield, *The Search for Winchester's Anglo-Saxon Minsters* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2018), p. 46.
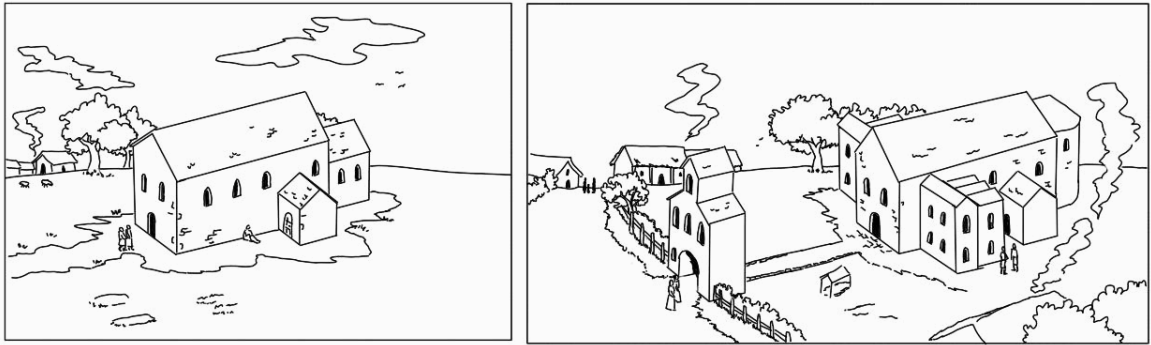
Figure 4: Artist's impression of the gatehouse at Old Minster, Winchester (Hants.) (Drawing by Megan Bunce)

Figure 5: Processional route to the church at Iona (Inner Hebrides) showing location of crosses, cemeteries, and enclosure ditches. (Map by Megan Bunce redrawn from Ewan Campbell, and Adrián Maldonado, 'A New Jerusalem 'at the Ends of the Earth': Interpreting Charles Thomas's Excavations at Iona Abbey 1956–63', *Antiquaries journal*, 100 (2020), 33–85 (p.56.))

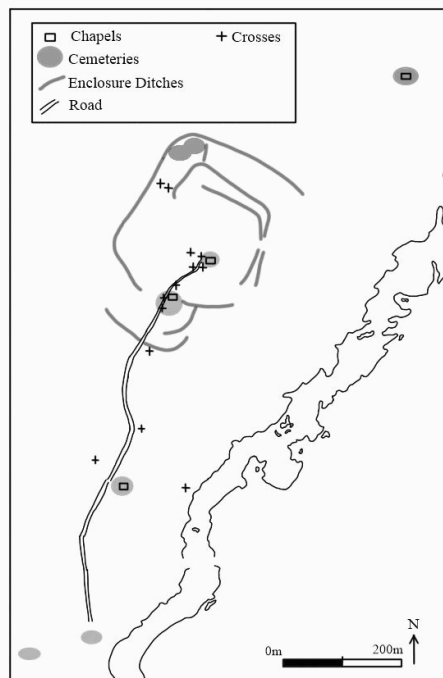Entrances to minsters could also be managed by the creation of processional routes with ritual foci. At Iona, in the Inner Hebrides, the route from the beach to the monastic church, via several cemeteries, was flanked by at least seven monumental crosses (fig. 5).[20]

It is possible that similar arrangements existed in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the eighth century. William of Malmesbury recorded that Bishop Ecgwine set up stone crosses every seven miles along the route that he transported Aldhelm's body from Doulting to Malmesbury (Wiltshire) after he died in AD 709, and that the crosses themselves were known for their miraculous healing properties.[21] Sculpture could be used to create secondary foci for saints' cults that were more accessible to those outside monastic communities. For example, the infant Willibald was taken by his parents, in search of a cure for the ailing child, to a monumental cross standing outdoors rather than in a church.[22] Minsters in England were usually multi-focal sites that presented networks of sacred places rather than concentric rings of holiness.[23] Sculpture and architecture were used to create and manage this ritual topography.

CEMETERIES

Entering the minster enclosure as a visitor to a shrine might have required processing along a supervised route, passing through a gate-house, and encountering guards. For those not permitted or able to enter the church,

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[20] Ewan Campbell and Adrián Maldonado, 'A New Jerusalem "at the Ends of the Earth": Interpreting Charles Thomas's Excavations at Iona Abbey 1956-63', *Antiquaries journal,* 100 (2020), 33–85 (p. 55).

[21] William of Malmesbury, 'Gesta Pontificum Anglorum' in *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum. The History of the English Bishops. Vol 1: Text and Translation* ed. by Michael Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 576 (book V, ch. 230.1–2).

[22] Charles. H. Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany: Being the Lives of Ss. Willibrord, Boniface, Sturm, Leoba, and Lebuin, Together with the Hodoeporicon of St. Willibald and a Selection from the Correspondence of St. Boniface* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954), pp. 154–55.

[23] Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 275.

cemeteries might, out of necessity, have been the location of miracles and marvels. An eighth-century poem records that at Whithorn, a minster on the border between Northumbrian and British political and cultural influence, a woman attained a cure from St Ninian by laying in a hollow cavity. This was most likely the original rock-cut gravesite of the saint, whose remains had been translated into the church.[24] At Lastingham (North Yorkshire), the original gravesite of St Chad was elaborated with a wooden monument which became known for miraculous cures. However, Bede mentions that it is only because of a lack of vigilance on the part of the guards that a mentally distressed man was able to spend the night there.[25] Bede also recorded that the wife of a nobleman visited the cemetery of the minster at Barking in order to attain a cure for her blindness.[26] This last example, in which the high status of the visitor is explicitly mentioned, shows that saintly intercession was considered as potent in the cemetery as it was in the church itself, for nobility as well as for marginalised people like the wandering man who snuck into Lastingham.

Saints' bodies were presented outside churches as well as inside, especially in areas where substantial stone monuments were displayed at sites with small churches. A number of carved components from monuments like the St Andrew's sarcophagus, usually called corner-post shrines, have been found on the Shetland Islands and dated to the eighth or ninth centuries.[27] The surviving carved posts from St Ninians Isle, Shetland, are from two different monuments and the pieces from Papil, Shetland, represent three separate monuments. It has been suggested that the shrines must have been successive rather than contemporary because only one would have fit inside a church the size of that excavated on St Ninians Isle.[28] However, the shrines

[24] D. V. Clarke, Alice E. Blackwell, and Martin Goldberg, *Early Medieval Scotland: Individuals, Communities and Ideas* (Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland, 2017), p. 43; Thomas Owen Clancy and others, *The Triumph Tree: Scotland's Earliest Poetry 550-1350* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998), pp. 135–36.

[25] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 344–45 (book IV, ch. 3).

[26] Ibid., pp. 364–65 (book IV, ch. 10).

[27] Ian G. Scott and Anna Ritchie, *Pictish and Viking-Age Carvings from Shetland* (Edinburgh: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 2009), p. 5.

[28] Ibid., p. 5.

could have been contemporary if they were not placed inside the church. Ian Scott and Anna Ritchie have suggested that the oversized base of the slab from Gungstie, Shetland, could show that it was bedded in sand rather than built into a stone floor (fig. 6).[29] The sculptural evidence from Shetland suggests that at these smaller church sites shrines could be found outdoors.

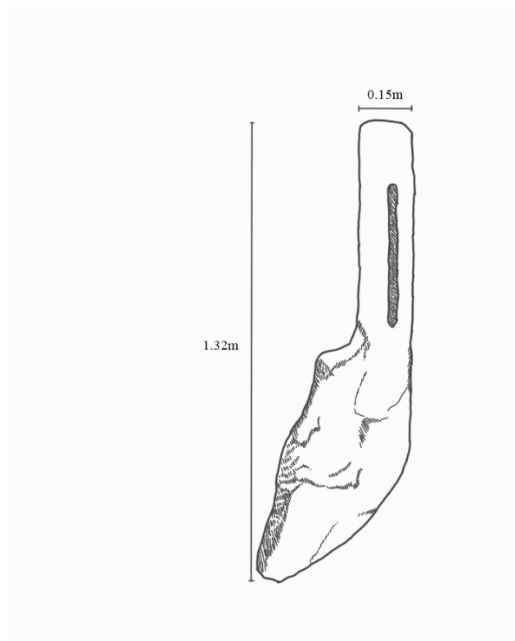Figure 6: Corner-post from Gungstie (Shetland) eighth century. (Drawing by Megan Bunce)

However, it was not just in Pictland that saints' bodies were venerated in cemeteries rather than churches. Recent excavations at Lindisfarne have revealed a raised stone grave monument in the cemetery to the east of the later priory church which was the focus of finds and burials suggesting

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[29] Ibid.

devotional activity continuing into the eleventh century.[30] Outdoor shrines could also be found much further south. After walking through the gatehouse at Winchester, visitors in the late AD 860s would have encountered the grave monument of Bishop Swithun before reaching the west end of the church. The terminology used to describe this structure, *tugurium* (hut or cottage), and *tumulare sacellum* (tomb shrine) with *culmine tectum* (high roof), suggests a roofed structure.[31] It was clearly a substantial monument and yet the lid of the sarcophagus it contained could still be touched.[32] This structure seems to anticipate the development of a cult, or at least prioritise both prominence and proximity in its presentation of the bishop's remains. Even as burial inside churches was becoming increasingly common for ecclesiastics and royalty in the eighth and ninth centuries, shrines could still be found in cemeteries and provided more accessible and nonetheless impressive foci for devotion.

CHURCHES

Inside the church there were several locations that a visitor might encounter a shrine. There are multiple references to shrines being at the south side of the altar, including those of Aidan, Edwin, and Wilfrid.[33] This has often been interpreted to mean that shrines were situated at the east end of the church. However, excavation of seventh- and eighth-century churches in Northumbria shows that most chancels would have been somewhat cramped by this arrangement. The main churches at Monkwearmouth, Jarrow, and Hexham were all similar sizes, about 5.5 m wide internally, and the ends of

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[30] David Petts and Brendon Wilkins, 'Early Medieval and Medieval Burials and Industries on Lindisfarne', *Medieval Archaeology*, 66:2 (2022), 476–81.

[31] Lantfred of Winchester, 'Translatio et Miracula S. Swithuni', in *The Cult of St Swithun*, ed. by Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 252–333 (p. 268); Wulfstan of Winchester, 'Narratio Metrica de S. Swithuno', in *The Cult of St Swithun*, ed. by Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 372–551 (p. 425).

[32] John Crook, *English Medieval Shrines* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), p. 83.

[33] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 264–65 (book III, ch. 17); [Anon.], *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* ed. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 104; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 528–29 (book V, ch. 19).

chancels were narrower, less than 4.3 m internally at Jarrow.[34] A similar ratio and layout can be seen in the chancel and nave of the later church at Deerhurst (Gloucestershire) in Mercia.[35] The nave of the Old Minster at Winchester in its earliest phase gives a sense of the dimensions of the largest churches of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, measuring 22 m long and 11 m wide externally.[36] The width of surviving stone grave covers and sarcophagi from Northumbria and Mercia is roughly 0.5 m to 1 m. In order to fit next to the altar in the chancel, shrines of this size would have had to have been flush against the wall. The decorative scheme of the Wirksworth grave cover, dated to the late eighth century, which was intended to be viewed from one long side, shows that it could have been displayed in this position. However, many pieces of shrine sculpture are decorated on all sides and were clearly intended to be viewed in the round, including the grave covers from Kirkdale, Hackness and Filey, solid coped monuments from Bakewell and Peterborough, and the sarcophagus from Derby (figs. 7, 8, and 9).
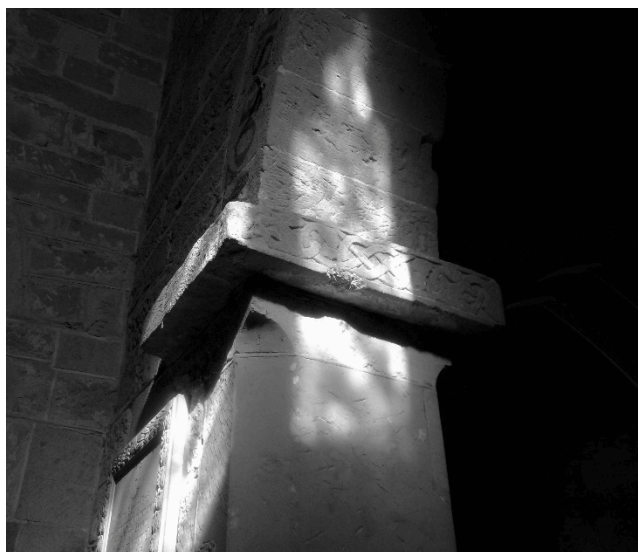
Figure 7: Grave cover cut down and reused as impost at St Mary's Church, Hackness (North Yorks.), seventh or eighth century. (Photo by Megan Bunce)

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[34] Gittos, p. 156.

[35] Maitland Bradfield, *Early Monastic Sites in Mercia: Newent, Deerhurst and Breedon-on-the-Hill, 675–874* (Duffield: Bradfield, 1999), p. 10.

[36] Biddle and Hayfield, p. 38.

Figure 8: The 'Hedda stone' from Peterborough Cathedral (Cambs.), late eighth century. (Drawing by Megan Bunce)

Figure 9: Sarcophagus from St Alkmund's church, Derby (Derbs.), ninth or tenth century. (Drawing by Megan Bunce)

Furthermore, the east end was not necessarily accessible or even visible to the congregation, especially lay congregations who would have been in the nave, west of the monastic community in the choir. The east end of the church may hav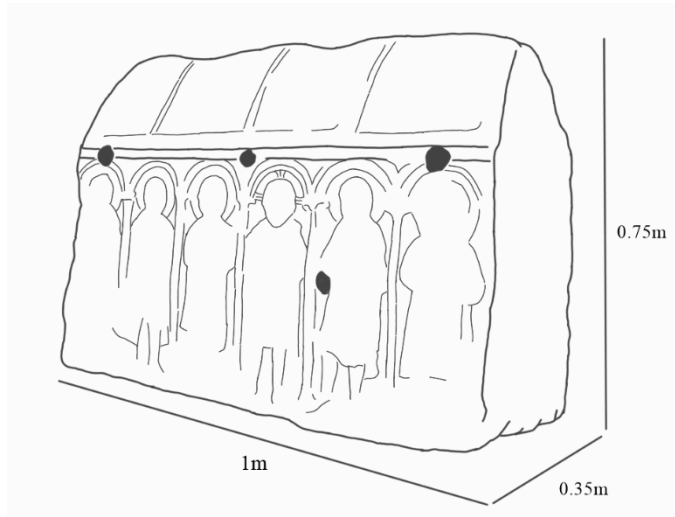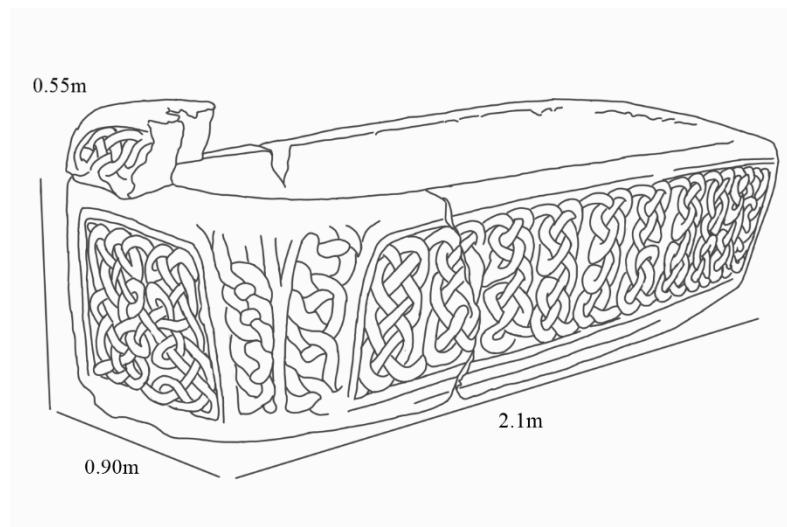e been closed off by divisions of wood or textiles, like those described at Kildare in Ireland in the middle of the seventh century.[37] At Wearmouth, images of Mary and the Apostles brought back from Rome by Abbot Biscop were arranged across the opening between the chancel and the nave.[38] The east end of the church then did not necessarily offer the most prominent or convenient location for shrines.

The position of shrines on the south side of the altar often referred to subsidiary altars in places other than the east end of the chancel. For example, the *porticus* of St Gregory at St Augustine's Canterbury, where the archbishops were buried, had an altar in the middle.[39] The church at Whitby in which Edwin's remains were enshrined had at least two altars. Edwin's relics were to the south of the altar of St Peter and to the east of the altar of St Gregory, which shows that not all altars were against east walls.[40] Excavation revealed that the base of the altar in the Old Minster, Winchester, was at the east end of the nave, in front of the entrance to the chancel. However, there were more foundations down the centre line of the church which could have been more altars or monuments such as crosses.[41] The shrine of St Ninian at Whithorn seems to have been in its own space, probably a *porticus* or separate chapel, closed off by a gate.[42] Shrines could be in a *porticus* or in the nave of the church as well as in the east end, and these spaces would have had different levels of accessibility and different liturgical implications.

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[37] Lisa M. Bitel, 'Ekphrasis at Kildare: The Imaginative Architecture of a Seventh-Century Hagiographer (the Irish Monk Cogitosus and the First Vita of Saint Brigit)', *Speculum,* 79 (2004), 605–27 (p. 616).

[38] Bede, 'Vita Sanctorum Abbatum', in *Bede's Historical Works,* ed. by J. E. King (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 404 (ch. 5).

[39] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 144–45 (book II, ch. 3).

[40] [Anon.], *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, p. 104.

[41] Biddle and Hayfield, p. 44.

[42] Clarke, Blackwell, and Goldberg, p. 43.

Shrines could also be found in separate chapels or crypts. These kinds of additional spaces proliferated at minsters in the eighth century and created new contexts for the display of holy remains. The crypts built at Hexham and Ripon were bewildering spaces, with narrow corridors and sharp turns. These spaces were evocative of the late antique hypogea of Gaul and the Roman catacombs, but they also managed access to relics.[43] Crypts could not physically accommodate crowds, and descent into these constricted spaces necessitated slow and careful approach. Crypts were not only found at churches in Northumbria: a crypt may have been a feature of the earliest church at Portmahomack (Ross and Cromarty), and external eastern crypts became popular in Mercia in the ninth century.[44] Some shrines were located in purpose-built chapels. Abbess Eadburh built a new church at Minster-in-Thanet between AD 740 and AD 746 and St Mildfrith was translated into it.[45] Chapels dedicated to Mary were added to several sites in Northumbria in the eighth century when the Marian feasts were popularised.[46] The Hovingham slab, a panel with scenes from the life of Mary dated to the late eighth or ninth century, fits into this liturgical context, as does the Lichfield angel, part of another panel dated to the same period, which is probably one half of an annunciation scene.[47] The annunciation and the funeral of the virgin are also found on the Wirksworth shrine (fig.10).[48]

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[43] John Crook, 'The Enshrinement of Local Saints in Francia and England', in *Local Saints*, ed. by Thacker and Sharpe, pp. 189–224 (p. 207); Edward Gilbert, 'Saint Wilfrid's Church at Hexham', in *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham,* ed. by D. P. Kirby (Newcastle upon Tyne: Oriel Press, 1974), pp. 81–113 (p. 85).

[44] M. O. H. Carver, *Portmahomack: Monastery of the Picts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 83–85; Gittos, p. 165.

[45] Richard Gem, 'Architecture of the Anglo-Saxon Church, 735 to 870: From Archbishop Ecgberht to Archbishop Ceolnoth', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association,* 146 (1993), 29–66 (p. 33).

[46] Gittos, p. 112.

[47] Warwick Rodwell and others, 'The Lichfield Angel: A Spectacular Anglo-Saxon Painted Sculpture', *The Antiquaries Journal,* 88 (2008), 48–108 (p. 80); James T. Lang, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Vol. III York and the Eastern Yorkshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 147.

[48] Jane Hawkes, 'The Wirksworth Slab: An Iconography of Humilitas', *Peritia,* 9 (1995), 246–89 (pp. 252, 259).

Figure 10: Grave cover, St Mary the Virgin, Wirksworth (Derbs.), late eighth century. (Photo by Megan Bunce)

We might imagine these monuments in *porticus* or chapels celebrating the growing liturgical and devotional interest in the mother of Christ. In the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, there was experimentation with architectural responses to the cult of the saints. The need to manage access and the liturgical functions of different spaces were factors in the use of *porticus*, crypts, and chapels as places for shrines.

SHRINES

A challenging aspect of bringing together archaeological, sculptural, and written evidence of shrines is there are many well-documented cults in areas which do not seem to have produced any stone sculpture before the middle of the ninth century. Stone sculpture was not a ubiquitous feature of ecclesiastical material culture in early medieval England. The well-attested cults of saints in Kent, Wessex, and East Anglia must have had physical

manifestations that did not involve stone sculpture. Details from hagiographies and histories can help us to understand what these more perishable shrines might have looked like. For example, Oswald's body was enshrined at Bardney (Linconshire) beneath his purple and gold banner, in a *theca*, presumably a wooden sarcophagus like the *levis theca* (light chest) of Cuthbert which is preserved at Durham Cathedral.[49] When Chad was translated from the cemetery at Lastingham into the church, the site of his original grave was marked by a wooden *domuncula* (little house).[50] The wooden container in which Aethelthryth was buried was kept after her body was translated into a stone sarcophagus at Ely. These mentions of wooden *thecae* used for display, not just burial, and the construction of a wooden monument for Chad's grave show that shrines could be made of wood, rather than stone. As well as being carved and incised with designs, like Cuthbert's *levis theca*, these wooden shrines could have been painted and decorated with metal fittings. Funerary archaeology provides evidence for this kind of object. The wooden box from the Prittlewell chamber grave in Essex, was painted with designs similar to those found on metalwork, and coffins with metal fittings have been found in Northumbria, Kent, and East Anglia.[51] The rich graves of the seventh and eighth centuries provide the best material for understanding the first shrines of England, especially in those areas without stone sculpture.

In addition to wood and metalwork, textiles were an important, and now invisible, component of many shrines. Textiles were deposited in many richly furnished burials in the seventh century, often used to cover or decorate the coffin or body. The coffin of the Prittlewell chamber grave was covered with at least four different kinds of cloth.[52] One of the boat burials at Snape

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[49] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 246–47 (book III, ch. 11); Ibid., pp. 444–47 (book IV, ch. 31).

[50] Ibid., pp. 346–47 (book IV, ch. 3).

[51] Lyn Blackmore and others, *The Prittlewell Princely Burial: Excavations at Priory Crescent, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, 2003* (London: Museum of London Archaeology, 2019), p. 153; E. Craig-Atkins, 'Chest Burial: A Middle Anglo-Saxon Funerary Rite from Northern England', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology,* 33 (2012), 317–37 (p. 318).

[52] Blackmore and others, p. 108.

was partially filled before being covered or lined with a textile.[53] Seventh-century east Kentish burials used coverlets, pillows, and hangings.[54] The depositing of luxury textiles in burials continued into an ecclesiastical context as seen by the gifts of fine shrouds given by high-status women.[55] Textiles were often given to churches as gifts and bequests throughout the early medieval period, sometimes specifically for the adornment of shrines. For example, Alcuin sent a silk covering to Whithorn for St Ninian's shrine, and Lull, the archbishop of Mainz, sent several silk palls to recipients in England in the middle of eighth century, including one to the abbot of Wearmouth for the relics of Bede.[56] The decorated sides of the grave cover from Kirkdale (North Yorkshire) seem to represent the tasselled and embroidered edge of a pall covering the monument (fig. 11).[57]

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[53] William Filmer-Sankey and others, *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery: Excavations and Surveys 1824-1992* (Ipswich: Environment and Transport, Suffolk County Council, 2001), p. 102.
[54] Sue Harrington, 'Soft Furnished Burial: An Assessment of the Role of Textiles in Early Anglo-Saxon Inhumations, with Particular Reference to East Kent', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History,* 14 (2007), 110–16 (p. 115).
[55] Kelley M. Wickham Crowley, 'Buried Truths: Shrouds, Cults and Female Production in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Aedificia Nova: Studies in Honor of Rosemary Cramp,* ed. by Catherine E. Karkov and Helen Damico (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), pp. 300–24 (p. 307).
[56] Alcuin, 'Alcuini Epistolae', in *Monumentae Germaniae Historica Epistolae Vol IV,* ed. by Ernst Dümmler (Berlin: Monumentae Germaniae Historica, 1895), pp. 431–32 (ep. 273); Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents, C. 500-1042* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 886.
[57] Lang, p. 163.

Figure 11: Grave cover, St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale (North Yorks.), eighth or ninth century. (Photo by Megan Bunce)

The shrines of Kent, Wessex, and East Anglia, at which stone monumental sculpture was largely lacking, presumably employed wooden screens and structures, canopies, curtains, and palls as well as painted wooden containers embellished with metalwork. In the eighth-century penitential of Theodore, it is specified that a candle should always be burning before the shrines of the saints but concedes that the poverty of the church might prevent this.[58] This shows that there was a spectrum of shrines from very rich to impoverished. Sculpture was not a feature of all areas, and in those areas where it is absent, the material culture of funerary practice provides the best clue as to what shrines looked like.

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[58] Foot, p. 323.

Shrines were not just a static presentation of material culture but part of the ritual space of the church. Understanding the experience of visiting a shrine requires awareness of the activities that were the context for encounters with miraculous bodies. The imagery of shrines suggests their role in liturgy. Stone sarcophagus panels from Drainie (Moray) and Papil (Shetland) feature images of processions, as does the Wirksworth grave cover (figs. 12 and 13).[59]

Figure 12: Shrine panel from Papil (Shetland), on display in Lerwick Museum, ninth century. (Photo by Megan Bunce)

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[59] Scott and Ritchie, p. 19; Mary Byatt, George Henderson, and Claire Herbert, *The Pictish and Early Medieval Carved Stones in Elgin Museum*, 2nd edn (Elgin: Elgin Museum, 2016), p. 22; Jane Hawkes and P.C. Sidebottom, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Vol. Xiii Derbyshire and Staffordshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 245.

Figure 13: Shrine panel from Drainie (Moray), on display in Elgin Museum, eighth or ninth century. (Photo by Megan Bunce)

Processions were a common feature of liturgy in early medieval Europe and in England the practice of processing between churches could have influenced the creation of church groups.[60] The Papil panel, dated to the early ninth century, shows figures moving towards a square-based cross and the same imagery is carved on an upright cross slab from the same site.[61] These carvings show the importance of stone monuments in the ritual landscape of Pictish churches. The idea that shrines, and perhaps other honoured graves, functioned as stations for processional liturgies from at least the ninth century is supported by the imagery of the Papil panel and the evidence for processional routes mentioned above.

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[60] Gittos, pp. 144–45.
[61] Scott and Ritchie, p. 18.

The presence of graves inside a church building designated some spaces as especially appropriate for certain liturgies, such as masses for the dead. Bede records that masses for the dead were said weekly in the *porticus* of St Gregory at the church of St Peter and St Paul in Canterbury where the grave of Augustine of Canterbury, who was certainly considered a saint by the ninth century, was located.[62] The arrangement of the figures on Cuthbert's *theca* mirrors their organisation in the litany of the mass, which could mean that it provided a visual aid during the eucharistic liturgy.[63] However, the eucharistic liturgy was also quite an exclusive event. Bede complained that the more devout among the laity only received communion three times a year.[64] Eucharistic liturgies may have been the context for encounters with shrines but probably more often for members of monastic communities than for visiting laity.

The Hedda stone from Peterborough (Cambridgeshire) and another solid, coped grave monument from Bakewell (Derbyshire), both dated to the eighth century, also feature series of figures which could serve as visual prompts during the mass or offices. The Hedda stone has dowel holes along the sides which may have been fittings for candles or a rail, perhaps holding a curtain, which could allow the figures to be concealed and revealed at appropriate times.[65] However, they may simply indicate that the sculpture was made of reused Roman building stone with pre-existing holes. The attitude of the figures on the coped monuments from Peterborough and Bakewell suggests they were raised to eye-level.[66] No bases or stands for this purpose have so far been identified but a relatively plain block or slab could be easily missed. An alternative explanation is that the shrines were intended to be viewed from a kneeling position. If this were the case, then the

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[62] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 144–45 (book II, ch. 3); Susan Kelly, 'The Anglo-Saxon Abbey', in *English Heritage Book of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury,* ed. by Richard Gem (London: Batsford/English Heritage, 1997), pp. 33–49 (p. 45).

[63] Rosemary Cramp, 'The Anglo-Saxon Sculpture of Peterborough and Its Region', in *Peterborough and the Soke: Art, Architecture and Archaeology,* ed. by Ron Baxter, Jackie Hall, and Claudie Marx (London: Routledge, 2019), (unpaginated e-book).

[64] Bede, 'Letter to Egbert', pp. 478–81 (ch. 15).

[65] Cramp, 'The Anglo-Saxon Sculpture of Peterborough', (unpaginated e-book).

[66] Ibid; Hawkes and Sidebottom, p. 141.

decorative scheme prompted bodily reverence as well as invoking well-known prayers. The form and decoration of shrines shows that they were encountered through the multi-sensory experience of participation in liturgical and extra-liturgical ritual.

A belief in the miraculous power of relics is central to a saint's cult. This belief is also one of the features that could distinguish acts of commemoration from acts of veneration. In many cases the pastoral ministry of minsters combined with their function as cult foci to promote belief in the miracles that took place at shrines. The skill and resources of the community might enable them to support injured, ill, and disabled people who might recover or enjoy a better quality of life in this setting. This could create a reputation for miracles and so win them more influence and patronage. This cyclical system created well-funded communities, with access to medical expertise, where many sought healing miracles at the shrines of saints. For example, doctors were on hand at Ely and Hexham and a youth was brought from another minster to see a doctor at Lindisfarne.[67] John of Beverly, who was educated at Whitby, was particularly noted for his medical knowledge and skill.[68] At some shrines contact relics were used in cures. Dust from the wooden shrine over Chad's grave was mixed with water to make medicines.[69] Often the creation of such miraculous medicines was overseen by an ecclesiastical authority. The sister of Guthlac, Pega, who was later venerated as a saint herself, took a blind man into the church housing the saint's body and mixed consecrated salt with consecrated water and then applied it to the eyes of the man herself.[70] In Alcuin's poem *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, an abbess takes dust from St Oswald's tomb and uses it to cure a man.[71] Sometimes contact with the tomb itself might suffice: a boy in the monastery

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[67] Stephen of Ripon, pp. 46–47 (ch. 23); Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 394–95 (book IV, ch. 19); Bede, 'Life of St Cuthbert', p. 229 (ch. 45).

[68] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 456–63 (book V, chs. 2 and 3).

[69] Ibid., pp. 346–47 (book IV, ch. 3).

[70] Felix, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac,* ed. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 168 (ch. 53).

[71] Alcuin, 'The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York', in *Alcuin: the Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York,* ed. by Peter Godman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 36–39.

of Bardney sat next to the tomb of Oswald, touching it, to attain the cure of a fever.[72] The eighth-century poem *The Miracles of St Ninian the Bishop* includes an episode in which a boy was cured after he was left alone overnight at the saint's shrine.[73] These stories reveal that people often encountered shrines at a time of need. Pain or disability was the context of their encounter with the miraculous. Cures were usually attained under supervision and corporeal relics were often used in combination with medical skill and long-term care. Direct contact with the shrine for healing miracles could also create or confirm relationships. It is notable that the two boys who were healed by contact with the shrines at Bardney and Whithorn both became members of the communities, while temporary visitors were usually administered cures made from secondary relics.

CONCLUSIONS

Bringing together written evidence with sculpture and archaeology reveals the variety of different experiences that could be had at the shrines of early medieval Britain. This article has presented an illustrative but by no means exhaustive account of this variety. In Northumbria, and Easter Mercia, stone sculpture was an important component of some shrines, as it was outside the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in Pictland. In these areas, grave covers, grave-markers, and sarcophagi were created to celebrate holy bodies. In East Anglia, Kent, and Wessex, stone sculpture was not a common feature of ecclesiastical sites until later, and shrines of the seventh, eighth and early ninth centuries seem to have been without it. Here, funerary practice, especially the material culture of high-status graves of the seventh century, can help us to visualise how holy bodies may have been enshrined. Rather than a specific kind of monument being used only to house the bodies of saints, the distinction between a shrine and another special grave may have come down to the aspirations of those who created the monument and its reception by the community. An even greater difficulty is presented by areas of Western

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[72] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 250–51 (book 3, ch. 12).
[73] Clancy and others, pp. 133–34.

Britain where there is neither stone sculpture nor written evidence, yet there is reason to believe that these areas had some of the earliest saints' cults in Britain because church sites had been proliferating in Wales and the southwest since the sixth century.[74] In these areas the focal graves of early medieval cemeteries could help historians to understand how the cult of the saints developed and how holy bodies were presented.[75]

Differences in the material culture of shrines were not just regional but depended on the nature of the site and the cult. Different cults had different intended audiences: some were especially famous among wider high-status ecclesiastical circles, some were 'in house' monastic cults, and some were family cults of local ruling families. Certain types of cults are overrepresented in the surviving evidence as the poorer, more informal, and more local cults fell below the notice of contemporary writers and have little archaeological visibility. However, there are hints in the written evidence that members of the laity, even poor and marginalised individuals, were involved in cults and that all kinds of church sites had shrines. The experience of a visitor to a shrine not only depended on the identity of the saint and the character of their cult but also on the status of the visitor. Some visitors were only permitted to access the cemetery, some might participate in processional or eucharistic liturgies, guests were welcomed by members of the community, and guards supervised the crowds.

The corporeal relics of saints were presented in a variety of ways, both inside and outside churches, beneath floors or in raised monuments, and were both concealed and celebrated by painted stone, wooden panels, metalwork, banners, and curtains. These architectural decisions affected the accessibility or exclusivity of the relics and changed the sensory experiences of those coming to the shrines. There were prescribed places and times for singing, kneeling, touching, and swallowing. Encountering a saint's body was a

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[74] Richard Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints in Late Antique Britain', in *Local Saints*, ed. by Sharpe and Thacker, pp. 75–154 (p. 148).

[75] David Petts, 'Variation in the British Burial Rite Ad 400-700', in *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in Burial Archaeology in Honour of Heinrich Härke*, ed. by Duncan Sayer, Howard Williams, and H. Härke (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 207–21 (p. 214).

physical experience which involved cluttered candlelit churches, hefty stone monuments, sumptuous silk palls, salt, dust, water, and soil. This variety of configurations reflects both the experimental nature of saints' cults and elite funerary practice in the seventh and eighth centuries and the different characters of church sites throughout England. It also demonstrates the creativity with which groups and individuals negotiated access to saints' bodies, showing the need to balance a desire for physical proximity with the architectural and liturgical formality of the church buildings. From the well-documented sites of Lindisfarne and Crowland to the enigmatic sculptural survivals of Bakewell and Hovingham, the evidence suggests a crowded and colourful landscape of cults presenting a range of different experiences to ecclesiastics and laity, rich and poor, powerful and marginalised.

Speaking Words of Wisdom: The Voice and Presence of the Virgin Mary in Christian Skaldic Verse

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Judith Jesch opens her landmark study *Women in the Viking Age* by stating that the Vikings are 'irredeemably male' in the popular imagination.[1] To this it can be added that, within the popular imagination, the Vikings and their later medieval descendants are almost irredeemably pagan. Scholarship of Norse poetics has to a certain extent bolstered this notion, with the study of Old Norse poetry being dominated by that of eddic verse telling of the deeds of gods and heroes in a dim and distant pre-Christian past. The majority of eddic verse is contained within a single manuscript, the Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4°), whereas there are over five hundred manuscripts containing skaldic verse, spanning a period of composition of approximately five hundred years.[2] Nevertheless, there is far less scholarship on skaldic verse, partly because editions and translations which have opened up the field to academic study have been published only comparatively recently, in the Skaldic Project's editions and website.[3] Literary scholarship has tended to focus on pre-Christian skaldic verse composed by court poets for royalty and nobles, generally preserved in a fragmentary or disjointed state in prose sagas.[4] However, the largest number of kennings attributed to any one individual do not refer to any king, god or hero, or indeed any man, but to the Virgin Mary.

Christian skaldic verse tends to be preserved in a more complete form, lending itself to studies of poetic style and ornamentation; nonetheless, it has

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[1] Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1991), p. 1.

[2] Diana Whaley, 'Skaldic Poetry', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by R. McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 479–502 (p. 481).

[3] <https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=skaldic> [accessed 16 June 2022].

[4] For instance, Erin M. Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration: Skaldic Verse and Social Memory, c. 890–1070* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) and Tom Grant, 'Þórr the War God', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 12 (2016), 41–60. Skaldic verse has been

received comparatively little scholarly attention.[5] The only two scholars to date who have examined Marian skaldic verse in any detail are Hans Schottmann (in a lengthy study of Icelandic Marian verse from the middle ages and onwards),[6] and Kellinde Wrightson (who published an edition of five fourteenth-century skaldic poems and several articles commenting on their literary style and possible audience).[7] This paper will examine two Marian skaldic poems, *Drápa af Máríugrát* (an extended poem where Mary narrates her experiences of the crucifixion to St Augustine and relates her five

examined in the light of a historical source (e.g. Matthew Townend, 'Contextualising the *Knútsdrápur*: Skaldic Praise Poetry at the Court of Cnut', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), 145–79) and in terms of literary developments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001)).

[5] Scholarship has tended to focus on earlier verse, such as Arnorr jarlaskald's (Diana Edwards, 'Christian and Pagan References in Eleventh-Century Norse Poetry: The Case of Arnórr jarlaskáld', *Saga-Book*, 21 (1982–1985), 34–53) and twelfth-century skaldic verse, see Katrina Attwood's 'The Poems of MS AM 757a 4to: An Edition and Contextual Study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1996); 'Intertextual Aspects of the Twelfth-Century Christian Drápur', *Saga-Book,* 24 (1994–1997), 221–39; 'Leiðarvísan and the "Sunday Letter" Tradition in Scandinavia', in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience: 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim, 3–9 August 1997: Preprints*, ed. by J. R. Hagland (Trondheim: Norges tekniske universitetsbibliotek, 1997), pp. 33–46.

[6] Hans Schottmann, *Die isländische Mariendichtung: Untersuchungen zur volkssprachigen Mariendichtung des Mittelalters*, Münchener germanistische Beiträge, 9 (Munich: W. Fink, 1973).

[7] Kellinde Wrightson, *Fourteenth Century Icelandic Verse on the Virgin Mary* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001). Publications by Wrightson on Marian poems not specifically referenced in this article are: 'Changing Attitudes to Old Icelandic Marian Poetry', in *Old Norse Studies in the New World: A Collection of Essays to Celebrate the Jubilee of Teaching Old Norse at the University of Sydney, 1943– 1993,* ed. by G. Barnes, M. Clunies Ross and J. Quinn (Sydney: Department of English, University of Sydney, 1994), pp. 138–53; 'The Jilted Fiancée: the Old Icelandic Miracle Poem Vitnisvísur af Maríu and its Modern English Translation', *Parergon*, 15 (1997), 119–36. Margaret Clunies Ross' 'Love in a Cold Climate – with the Virgin Mary', in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, Islandica, 54, ed. by K. Wolf and J. Denzin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 303–16 analyses *Brúðkaupsvísur*; however, *Brúðkaupsvísur* is thought to be later than the poems analysed here.

joys to an anonymous monk) and *Máríuvísur I* (a miracle poem which tells of a murdering widow who is saved from execution). Both are thought to have been composed around the fourteenth century and survive in manuscripts dating to 1500–50 associated with the diocese of Hólar.[8] The following article will consist of a close literary analysis of *Máríuvísur I* and *Drápa af Máríugrát* and pay particular attention to portrayals of emotions as connected with the didactic purposes of the poems; it will also assemble new evidence on their possible audiences.[9] More broadly, this paper seeks to illuminate the literary artistry and complexity of Marian skaldic verse and prove it to be thoroughly entertaining and sophisticated poetry.

Background

There is no shortage of art, literature, theology and scholarly works on the cult of the Virgin Mary which developed from the second century onwards and became particularly popular in Western Europe during the Benedictine reform.[10] Icelandic sources record that some of the first settlers to the island were Christians, and so the cult of Mary may have been present in Iceland during its settlement, but, like the faith of the first Christians of Iceland, may have faded over time.[11] There is a wealth of evidence pertaining to a later

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[8] Wrightson, *Verse Virgin Mary*, pp. xii–xiii.

[9] Sif Ríkharðsdóttir in *Emotion in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts, Studies in Old Norse Literature* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2017) has examined presentations of emotions in sagas and French influence on presentations of emotions; however, her book pays less attention to Christian influences.

[10] For a summary of Marian theological writings over time see Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985). Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Picador, 2013) examines Mary's roles thematically (mother, bride, intercessor and queen of heaven); Miri Rubin's *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 100–18 and 121–57, gives a comprehensive view of the spread of Mary's cult in Europe and the British Isles.

[11] *Landnámabók* describes Christian settlers, such as Auðr djúpúðgr (*The Book of Settlements: Landnámabók*, trans. by Hermann Pálsson and P. Edwards (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1972), pp. 51–52 and 55.

Marian cult in Iceland; however, scholarship is relatively scarce.[12] Evidence of Marian feasts is present in the earliest lists of feast days in *Grágás* (1122–33),[13] and the Icelandic *Hómilíubók* (c. 1200), containing five homilies and one prayer dedicated to Mary.[14] Mary was one of the most popular saints in Iceland, as she was throughout Europe, with over 300 churches dedicated to her, the next most popular saints having only 70 to 110 each.[15] This is hardly surprising given that she is the mother of Christ, who follows him throughout his life and is assumed into heaven after his resurrection and ascension.

As well as being the most frequently referenced saint in skaldic verse, the Virgin Mary is also the most frequently referenced female saint in Old Norse prose.[16] Mary has her own saga, *Maríu saga*, which tells of her life and miracles, although it should not be assumed that Mary's life and miracles always travelled together.[17] The text's authorship remains unclear;[18] Christelle

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[12] Historical scholarship such as Orri Vésteinsson's *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change, 1000–1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Jesse Byock's *Medieval Iceland* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1988) tends to focus on interactions between clerics and chieftains, rather than the development of saints' cults.

[13] Margaret Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1994), p. 14.

[14] Ibid., pp. 127–28.

[15] Ibid., p. 29.

[16] Margaret Cormack, 'Christian Biography', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by R. McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2005), pp. 27–42 (p. 39).

[17] Daniel C. Najork, *Reading the Old Norse-Icelandic "Maríu Saga" in its Manuscript Contexts*, The Northern Medieval World (Kalamazoo: Medieval Publications, 2021), pp. 7, 9.

[18] Saga tradition is that *Maríu saga* was written by Kygri-Björn Hjaltson (d. 1237/8). Laura Tomassini finds the vita section of the saga fairly homogenous, lending support to the notion that this section was originally created by a single author in the mid to later thirteenth century ('Attempts at Biblical Exegesis in Old Norse: Some examples from Máríu saga', *Opuscula,* 10 (1996), 129–35 (p. 129). However, Ole Widding (Hans Bekker-Nielsen, with Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen and Ole Widding, *Norrøn Fortællekunst Kapitler Af Den Norsk-islandske Middelalderlitteraturs Historie* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1965), p. 129) and Margaret Cormack ('Christian Biography', p. 32) questioned whether the saga was composed by one person, Cormack on the grounds that the sources which

Fairise suggested the author may have been deliberately aligning the text with Pope Innocent III's lack of direct statement on the assumption of Mary, although her argument tends to equate absence of commentary with agreement.[19] Nevertheless, Fairise's comment highlights that the cult of Mary was a source of contemporary theological debate into the later middle ages.

In the present day, there are nineteen manuscripts,[20] more manuscripts than there were ever religious houses at one time in Iceland, suggesting churches,[21] or families, may have had copies of the saga and that the text was popular in lay and clerical circles. Laura Tomassini concludes that there are three redactions of the saga, possibly drawing on different sources: redaction A, preserved in AM 234 (c. 1340), redaction St, in Stock. Perg. 4° 11 (c. 1325–75), and redaction E, in Stock. Perg. 4° 1 (1450–1500), all dating to the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.[22] Tomassini's doctoral thesis argues that each redaction was intended for a different audience. Redactions A and St both expand on the text. Redaction A concerns itself with patristic comments, moral teachings and liturgical explanations; it attempts to rationalise prayers and emphasises obedience and humility, additions which lead Tomassini to suggest that this redaction was intended for a monastic audience.[23] Additions to redaction St pay greater attention to liturgical instruction, from which Tomassini deduces that this redaction would have been most relevant for a lay audience.[24] Redaction E has an abbreviated version of the saga but

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the saga author employed must have been available in Iceland much earlier than previously thought.

[19] Christelle Fairise, 'Relating Mary's Life in Medieval Iceland: Máríu saga: Similarities and Differences with the Continental Lives of the Virgin', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi,* 129 (2014), 165–96 (pp. 193–94).

[20] Najork, *"Maríu Saga" Manuscript Contexts*, p. 6.

[21] Ibid., p. 4.

[22] The edition cited most often is R. Carl Unger, *Mariu saga: legender om jomfru Maria og hendes jertegn* (Oslo: Tryckt hos Brøgger & Christie, 1871), using Stock. Perg. 4° 11 primarily, but also drawing on other variant manuscripts.

[23] Laura Tomassini, 'An Analysis of the Three Redactions of Maríu saga, with Particular Reference to their Style and Relation to their Latin Sources' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Copenhagen, 1997), p. 240.

[24] Ibid., p. 241.

contains the largest collection of miracles (189 to be exact) in which Mary appears as a paragon of all female virtues.[25] The prologue of AM 240, a fragmentary manuscript of redaction E, is addressed to 'systr minar kæruztu' ('my dearest sisters'), attesting that at least this one text of the redaction was intended for a nunnery.[26] As *Maríu saga* appears to have been used in lay, clerical and monastic circles for a variety of purposes and given the popularity of the Virgin Mary's cult, this paper, supported by evidence from archaeological and art historical sources, will argue that Marian skaldic verse could have performed similar functions.

MÁRÍUVÍSUR I

Máríuvísur I is twenty-nine stanzas long and in *dróttkvætt* metre. It tells of a widow who learns of scurrilous rumours about herself and her son-in-law. She reacts by orchestrating the son-in-law's murder, and later confesses this to a priest. He tells the son-in-law's family, who bring the widow to a trial where she is found guilty. The widow prays to the Virgin Mary before being sent to her execution pyre. The fire does not touch the widow and a second pyre is also unsuccessful; this is taken as a sign of Mary's intervention and the widow is released. The story derives originally from *Auctarium ursicapinum* (Sigebert of Gembloux), but also corresponds with the *Liber de laude Sanctae Mariae* (Guibert de Nogent).[27] *Maríu saga* contains two versions of the miracle: one has significant plot differences compared with the narrative in the poem (e.g. the woman's husband is alive),[28] the other has several verbal similarities and appears to have been the skald's source.[29] This section of the article will explore the ways in which the skald uses the widow's emotions to

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[25] Ibid., p. 243.

[26] Ibid., pp. 243, 247.

[27] From the introduction to the edition and translation by Kari Ellen Gade, '*Máríuvísur I*', in *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 2 vols, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), II, pp. 678–700 (p. 678).

[28] *Maríu saga*, pp. 277–79.

[29] For example, see stanzas 10, 19, 21 22, 24 and corresponding passages of MS in Gade's edition.

illustrate good and bad behaviours and how the nature of the Virgin Mary's power as an intercessor is presented.

Máríuvisur I opens by describing the virtuous widow: 'siðlátust hielt sætalsæm miskunnar dæmi',[30] who marries her daughter to a wealthy man, ensuring that her daughter will be provided for:

> Unni ærlig kvinna
> auðgætanda mætum
> sætt af sinni dóttur
> syndlaust var það yndi.[31]

The widow loves her son-in-law on account of her daughter, and here the skald takes the opportunity to state that the widow's relationship with her son-in-law is sinless, 'syndlaust', stating this in a whole separate clause. However, when rumours begin to spread that the widow is having an affair with her son-in-law, she becomes infuriated and quells the rumour:

> Brann í brjósti
> hennar bæði grimd og æði
> fyld, er húsfrú vildi
> forðaz slíku orði,
> svá að af sorgum nýjum
> sáran dauð með fári
> — urðu illar gjörðir —
> affíni rieð sínum.[32]

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[30] *Máríuvisur I* 3 'the most virtuous female followed fitting examples of mercy', p. 681.
[31] *Máríuvisur I* 5, 'The honest woman loved the splendid wealth-guardian [MAN] sweetly because of her daughter; that pleasure was sinless', p. 682.
[32] *Máríuvisur I* 8, 'Both ferocity and pent-up frenzy burned in her breast when the housewife wanted to save herself from such a rumour, so that because of renewed sorrows she plotted the bitter death of her son-in-law with wrath; wicked actions ensued', p. 684.

The opening of the stanza uses an impersonal construction: the woman is filled with anger and frenzy. This construction presents her feelings preying upon her, like external forces. Despite the widow's previous virtuousness, she is not safe from falling prey to sudden, irrational, sinful feelings. Kari Ellen Gade notes in her edition of the text that the adjective *fylr* would usually take the genitive which, in this instance, would make the syntax unclear, and instead favours the interpretation that the phrase takes the dative instrumental.[33] While this interpretation has interesting literary implications, it is not certain as skaldic metres and conventions place significant restrictions on the number of syllables available to express an idea.

The verb *brenna* can be commented on with more certainty as it presents the widow's emotions igniting within her, becoming all-consuming, a sudden change from her previous state of mind. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir's research into the presentation of the anatomical origins of emotions shows that emotions in Old Norse tend to originate from the chest or the heart, rather than the mind or brain.[34] Peter Mackenzie finds that the heart features more prominently in the Icelandic *Hómilíubok*,[35] and so the skald may be drawing on Christian or homiletic traditions to depict the widow's anger. The opening of the stanza is constructed to suggest that the widow is burning with love or desire (which she has been accused of feeling for her son–in law); indeed, *grimd* ('ferocity') in the second line of the stanza would alliterate with *girnd* for 'desire', possibly leading the audience to expect this solution. Instead, the skald reveals the widow's burning anger. Her rage stems from wishing to save herself from dangerous rumours, a natural reaction for a widow with limited means for defending herself. However, her actions only make matters far worse. Thus, the widow's self-made plight illustrates that anger and vengeance are some of the worst motivations to act

[33] *Máríuvisur I* 8, p. 684.

[34] Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'The Head, the Heart, and the Breast: Bodily Conceptions of Emotion and Cognition in Old Norse Skaldic Poetry', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 15 (2019), 29–64 (pp. 33–48).

[35] Peter Mackenzie, 'Vernacular Psychologies in Old Norse-Icelandic and Old English' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2014), p. 149.

on and highlights that even those who previously led exemplary lives are not immune from temptation.

Once it is discovered that the widow orchestrated the murder of her son-in-law she is arrested and tried for his murder. Before her execution, she asks to pray in a church. The skald pauses the narrative over the widow's prayer, itself an example of how to approach the Virgin Mary. This prayer is not quoted in either version of the miracle in *Maríu saga*. In *Máríuvisur I* the widow's prayer is quoted as direct speech. The dramatic effect is that the audience hears her plea as if it is being uttered for the first time.

> Fór, sú er flóði í tárum;
> fann musterið svanni;
> sína griet með greinum
> gjörð og kraup að jörðu.
> Þar sá flóðið fríða
> feskasta líkneskju,
> þá er Máríu meyju
> mynduð var til yndis.
> Flóði á frúinnar klæði
> fári spent í tárum,
> og með angri nógu
> ófæltiliga mælti:
> 'Sjáðu, in mjúka móðir,
> mína þörf og pínu;
> mig skulu meinum kvelja
> menn og eldi brenna.'[36]

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[36] *Máríuvisur I* 15, 'She who was flooded with tears went; the woman found the church; she wept for her deed with explanations and bent to the ground. There the fair lady saw the most beautiful effigy, which was fashioned for the pleasure of the Virgin Mary', pp. 689–90. *Máríuvisur I* 16, 'Surrounded with danger, she was flooded with tears [which ran] onto the lady's robe, and she spoke fearlessly with abundant grief: "See, gentle mother, my need and anguish; men are going to torture me with injuries and burn me with fire"', p. 690.

Across these two stanzas, the widow is twice described as flooded with tears ('flóði í tárum'), emphasising that she is overflowing with emotion. The image of people swelling in anger has been commented upon in Old English and Old Norse scholarship (this is discussed in more detail in footnote 43 and the associated text); however, didactic presentations of remorse have been less commented on. Here, the widow's previous burning with anger has only led to overwhelming remorse, an example to the audience. What is more, the pattern of repeated ideas across the text does not occur in prose versions of the miracle, and in the poem it appears to be used to emphasise that the widow's tears are a mark of her true repentance. The poet adds to the dramatic image of the widow praying before the statue of the Virgin Mary by stating that she weeps 'fearlessly' and 'with abundant grief'. Hans Schottmann comments that this adds a sense of urgency to the narrative.[37] The image of the woman praying courageously before Mary whilst weeping adds depth to her character and demonstrates that although she has sinned, the widow is capable of remorse and, therefore, is redeemable.

The widow is about to be led to her death, but at no point does she ask Mary to save her from harm nor does she ask forgiveness – possibly because God is unlikely to forgive murder. Furthermore, the widow does not make a detailed confession of her transgressions, although Schottmann reasons that this is because her confession is mentioned at her trial, leaving the widow's prayer as an expression of her innermost thoughts and feelings.[38] The widow, instead of pleading for earthly delivery, offers her soul to Mary, showing concern for her spiritual life rather than her bodily welfare on earth. As a Christian, the widow need not fear death, providing that God will accept her soul, which, in this case, may be uncertain. By commending her soul to Mary without expectation of being saved, the widow emulates Jesus, who commends his soul to God whilst being crucified, suggesting that the widow's speech is a didactic motif showing an instance of true contrition. Furthermore, the Virgin Mary is presented as a saint who can be called upon

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[37] Schottmann, *Mariendichtung*, p. 367.
[38] Ibid., pp. 364–65.

no matter how greatly the supplicant has sinned, provided that they are truly repentant.

The widow's words and intentions are matters which could be imitated easily by the poem's audience; likewise, so could her action of praying to a statue of Mary. The motif of a sinner praying before a Marian statue features in *Máríuvísur II*, *Vitnisvísur af Máríu* and also the later *Brúðkaupsvísur*, as well as in *Máríuvísur I*. However, two of these poems (*Máríuvísur I* and *Máríuvísur II*) refer to statues not present in surviving Norse prose accounts, suggesting that they may have been added by skalds. There are several possible reasons which may explain why skalds would have chosen to do this. For one, the statues themselves are physical representations of the presence of Mary and are able to act as links between supplicants and Mary. While *Máríuvísur I*, *Máríuvísur II* and *Vitnisvísur af Máríu* do not appear to be set in Iceland, evidence from *máldagar* suggests that there were over 2,000 statues in 1,060 churches in Iceland, amounting to one statue for every twenty-five people and suggesting that some churches had more than one statue.[39] An Icelandic letter dating from the early fourteenth century describes contemporary methods of carving and gilding wooden polychrome statues and implies that Icelandic statues were of a similar quality to those in Norway and Europe.[40] Therefore, praying before a decorated statue is an image most Icelanders would have been able to emulate.

Secondly, Jón Helgason and Stefán Karlsson both propose that manuscript AM 713 4° (dating to 1500–50 and in which *Máríuvísur II*, *Vitnisvísur af Máríu* and *Drápa af Máríugrát* survive) was compiled by the priest Ari Jónsson and his sons Tómas and Jón, from Staður, a northern Icelandic religious centre with a strong tradition of Marian worship, as a reaction against a wavering in the veneration of saints which was caused by

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[39] M. D. Marincola and L. Kargère, 'Chapter 1: An Introduction to Medieval Polychrome Wooden Sculpture', in *The Conservation of Medieval Polychrome Wood Sculpture: History, Theory, Practice* (Los Angeles, 2020), pp. 1–24 (p. 8).
[40] U. Plahter, 'Líkneskjusmíð: Fourteenth Century Instructions for Painting from Iceland', *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung*, 6.1 (1992), 167–73.

the spread of Lutheranism.[41] Poems such as *Máríuvisur I* may have been selected for compilation as they portray penitents praying before figures of the Virgin Mary, a practice which is more Catholic than Lutheran. The depiction of the widow in *Máríuvisur I* praying to Mary could be connected with the poet's didactic messages about veneration and praying in the presence of physical representations of a saint, something which could have been put into practice by many Icelanders. Hence, exploration of the imagery and purposes of Marian skaldic verse provides a window into wider Icelandic Marian and Christian devotional practices.

The final passage of *Máríuvisur I* that this article will comment on is the Virgin Mary's rescue of the widow from her execution pyre. Once the widow has prayed to Mary, she is led out to be burnt alive. Rather than perishing, the widow is unscathed, to the frustration of the crowd who are described as 'Öld af fjandskap fyldiz|fljótt'.[42] Previously, the widow was depicted as burning with anger; here the crowd are referred to as 'filled' or 'bloated', a description used elsewhere in Old English and Old Norse literature.[43] This suggests that negative emotions, if allowed to become overpowering, can harm others. Having failed to do any damage on their first attempt, the crowd decide that the reason for the widow's preservation is that they have put too little wood on the fire. The crowd build a second, larger pyre, and are described as 'af harmi sveldir'.[44] In most cases, *harmr* means 'sorrow' or 'grief'; however, Gade translates it as 'anger', which seems

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[41] Wrightson, *Fourteenth-Century Icelandic Verse*, pp. xii–xiii; Kellinde Wrightson, 'Marian Miracles in Old Icelandic Skaldic Poetry', in *Treasures of the Elder Tongue: Fifty Years of Old Norse in Melbourne: The Proceedings of the Symposium to Celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Old Norse at the University of Melbourne, 14 May 1994*, ed. by K. Burge and J. S. Martin (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1995), pp. 87–99 (p. 88).

[42] *Máríuvisur I* 21, 'People were quickly filled with animosity', pp. 693–94.

[43] Sarah Baccianti comments upon presentations swelling in rage in *Beowulf*, in homilies to describe the wrath of God, and in eddic poetry for gods' anger ('Swelling in Anger: Somatic Descriptions in Old English and Old Norse', in *Emotion and Medieval Textual Media*, ed. by Mary Flannery (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 51–75). Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (*Emotion Old Norse Literature*, pp. 76–77) also comments upon presentations of swelling in anger in Norse prose.

[44] *Máríuvisur I* 22, 'bloated with anger', p. 694.

probable given that the malicious onlookers harbour animosities. Another possibility is that the poet is referring to their grief and disappointment that the widow will not burn. Thus, the emotional state of the crowd is mirrored by the size of the pyre: as one grows, so does the other. The size of the pyre can be symbolic of the crowd's fury and also of the blazes of hell, the widow's expected destination. The poet juxtaposes the spectators' emotions of destructive intent with the powerlessness of the widow.

The widow would not be able to contend against these forces alone, but they are no match for Mary:

> Hvergi rann á hennar
> hár í loganum sárum;
> klæðin fögr á fljóði
> fölna eigi nie völna.[45]

To the bafflement of the spectators, the widow is protected by the Virgin Mary. The situation has a comical side to it, as no matter how high the pyre, the widow remains unscathed. This is emphasised by the contrast between the descriptions of the emotions of the crowd and those of the widow: while the crowd grows angrier, Mary grants the widow 'þrótt',[46] and she walks out of the flames unsinged, 'hæg og kyrr'.[47] The proof of the miracle is equally in the widow's bodily preservation and in her spiritual composure, illustrating that the widow's ordeal was as much spiritual as physical. The skald's depiction of the widow's innermost thoughts and feelings allows the audience to experience her emotional journey as it takes place.

The skald's detailed descriptions of the widow's feelings, in addition to an account of her physical experiences, provide the audience with scope for learning from her spiritual experiences, which are possibly more readily relatable than the widow's tribulations on the pyres. The Virgin Mary is portrayed as protecting the widow despite her having acted wrongly,

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[45] *Máríuvísur I* 24, 'Her hair was not at all touched in the bitter flame; the fair clothes on the woman neither fade nor shrivel', pp. 695–96.

[46] *Máríuvísur I* 23, 'fortitude', p. 695.

[47] *Máríuvísur I* 24, 'calm and quiet', pp. 695–96.

something else which makes the miracle more relatable to ordinary people. The widow is protected physically and spiritually, through Mary's use of her powers to alter the course of the world and divert the usual course of moral justice. Mary's presence and power are discernible both personally (in the widow's adventures) and publicly (visible before vast crowds, so that masses of people may turn to Mary with greater faith than previously), something accentuated by the poem's contrast of inner emotions and outward actions. Having explored some of the literary and didactic motifs in a Marian miracle poem, the article will now examine *Drápa af Máríugrát*.

DRÁPA AF MÁRÍUGRÁT

The title *Drápa af Máríugrát*, unlike the titles of the skaldic Marian miracle poems, appears in the poem's manuscript, AM 713 4°, and occurs in the poem itself, stanza 52.8. The poem consists of fifty-two stanzas in *dróttkvætt*. Being a *drápa*, it follows a specific structure with an opening (*upphaf*), a refrain section (*stefjamál* or *stefjabálkar*) and a concluding section (*slæmr*).[48] The opening of the poem contains the skald's petition to the Virgin Mary for mercy and it moves on to her apparition to St Augustine where she explains her experiences of the crucifixion, punctuated at regular intervals by the skald's refrain. The concluding section of the poem comprises Mary recounting her five joys to an anonymous monk and the skald's final prayer. The poem stands out within the skaldic corpus in that it contains sustained sections of monologue in a voice other than the skald's, namely that of the Virgin Mary. The result is that the audience can hear how Mary uses skaldic language and stylistic features to give a personal and emotional account of the events on Good Friday.

The poem's unusually emotional tone is partly derived from its roots in a far wider tradition of Marian laments, early fragments of which possibly date from as early as the tenth century.[49] *Drápa af Máríugrát* derives from a

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[48] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Technical Terms Used in the Volume', in *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, I, pp. xxxiii–xxxvi.

[49] Sandro Sticca, *The Planctus Mariae in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Joseph. R. Berrigan (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), p. 150.

Norse adaptation of the *Planctus siue lamentacio beate* at the end of *Maríu saga*, which itself stems from Ogerius de Locedio's (1136–1214) *Liber de passione Christi*. Adaptations of this text spread as part of a general increase in Marian meditative literature across twelfth-century Europe, and vernacular Marian poetry and liturgical dramas continued to flourish over the subsequent two centuries.[50] Early Marian laments tended to be solemn and dignified (e.g. *Stabat mater* poems written in the third person) and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were more commonly in the first person with the Virgin Mary speaking with more urgency, sometimes to the cross, accusing it of slight and trickery, and sometimes with Mary having to retreat, defeated, to the domestic sphere.[51] Alongside these developments, the reference in Luke 2.19 to Mary pondering events in her heart led to Mary being presented as wise and articulate in other poems.[52] Thus, *Drápa af Máríugrát* is part of a wider tradition of Marian poetry; it is a rich and complex poem which strikes a careful balance between Mary expressing her emotions whilst maintaining her dignity. The poem contains far more literary and theological features than can be covered in this article, but to illustrate something of its unique style, the following analysis will examine the different ways in which repetition is used to present the Virgin Mary's personal perspective and enlighten the audience.

The first stanzas of the Virgin Mary's monologue are used to establish Mary's pain and her connection to Christ. In stanza 12, Mary describes how she and the other women present followed Christ after his sentencing and as he was led away ('að fylgja').[53] The same verb occurs again in stanza 13, when Mary says that she is eager to follow ('að fylgja') Christ to Golgotha, and in stanza 14 where Mary helps Christ to bear his cross.[54] Earlier skaldic verse

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[50] Ibid., pp. 120, 158.

[51] Sarah McNamer, 'Marian Lament and the Rise of a Vernacular Ethics', in *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), pp. 149–73 (pp. 155–56, 165, 167–68).

[52] Georgiana Donavin, *Scribit Mater: Mary and the Language Arts in the Literature of Medieval England* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2011), p. 4.

[53] *Drápa af Máríugrát* 12, 'to follow', edited and translated by Kari Ellen Gade, '*Drápa af Máríugrát*', in *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, II, pp. 758–95 (pp. 768–69).

[54] *Drápa af Máríugrát* 13, 14, pp. 769–70.

expresses the same idea in as many ways as possible to avoid verbatim repetition; however, here, repetition of 'að fylgja' draws attention to Mary's faithful following of Christ, an image also seen in the description of Mary helping to carry the cross, an event which also occurs in a passage of *Maríu saga*.[55] Schottmann suggested that this is based on a misunderstanding of the Latin *Vita Christi*, but it may also be informed by Matthew 16.24.[56] Schottmann argued that the *drápa*, by placing Mary's sorrow next to Christ's, misses the concept of her universal motherhood implied in the prose; however, the depiction of Mary's motherhood from a personal perspective presents a more intimate lament.[57] By repeating that she follows Christ, Mary shows her enduring emotional and physical connection to her son as she shares in his suffering and humiliation, and she follows him to the very end. Throughout the poem, Mary speaks in the first person, and so her story is played out before the audience as if it is happening for the first time. Therefore, Mary's narration of her personal experiences provides an emotional and spiritual link to the pivotal series of events in salvation history.

Mary's use of repetition is also used to draw attention to her parental grief. In stanza 14, Mary states that her grief is so great that she cannot move, 'að eg mátta ei ganga'. Mary's grief is depicted as having a physiological effect: paralysing her and making her heart tremble. As part of her study on the development of compassion as a means to connect with Christ, Fulton finds visual representations of Mary swooning with compassion for Christ in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century artwork.[58] It is possible that the poet here, and elsewhere, echoes developing ideas surrounding compassion. More specific to the poem is the fact that the phrase is repeated in stanza 35 at Jesus' burial. The repetition may be explained by the phrase's happening to fit nicely into the metrical and alliterative patterns of these stanzas. More interestingly, the repeated phrase also creates a symmetry between the start

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[55] *Maríu saga*, p. 1006; *Drápa af Máríugrát*, p. 769.

[56] Schottmann, *Mariendichtung*, p. 506.

[57] Ibid., p. 510.

[58] Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 210–11.

and end of the crucifixion, meaning that Christ's burial comes with a sense of final resolution, which is dramatically dispelled at his resurrection.

In stanza 17, the Virgin Mary describes her grief and pain by likening it to a sword standing in her chest:

> 'Því líkast var mier, sem mækir
> mundi bjartr í gegnum hjarta
> standa mitt'.[59]

Likewise, in stanza 22:

> 'er mier, sem stálið stinna
> standi bjart í gegnum hjarta'.[60]

Wrightson notes that this motif does not appear in *Maríu saga*, but it does feature widely in Christian literature as a common representation of Mary's sorrows.[61] The image derives from Simeon's prophecy at the temple (Luke 2.35), alluded to in stanza 6. The Virgin Mary's pain shows her empathy with Christ's: he cannot suffer without her suffering too. The image of a sword can also relate to the bloody deaths of the martyrs: indeed, Bernhard of Clairvaux (to whom the above-mentioned *Liber de passione Christi* was falsely attributed) suggests that Mary's suffering was an inward martyrdom; similar ideas may be playing out in *Drápa af Máríugrát*.[62] It is likely that Mary's inward martyrdom of losing her child would have been more relatable than those of the virgin martyrs, or the sufferings of Christ himself.[63] Furthermore, the

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[59] *Drápa af Máríugrát* 17, 'It was for me just as if a bright sword were to stand through my heart', pp. 771–72.

[60] *Drápa af Máríugrát* 22, 'it is for me as if the rigid steel stands bright through my heart', p. 775.

[61] Kellinde Wrightson, '*Drápa af Maríugrát*, the Joys and Sorrows of the Virgin and Christ, and the Dominican Rosary', *Saga-Book*, 24 (1994–1997), 283–92 (pp. 284, 286).

[62] Sticca, *Planctus Mariae*, p. 108.

[63] This idea occurs elsewhere in Marian literature, e.g. Anselm's *Libellus* instructs Matilda of Tuscany to suffer with Mary, rather than Christ. Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, pp. 226–27.

allusion to the prophecy coming to fruition signals to the audience that the events playing out before them are part of a grander scheme within salvation history. Therefore, the Mary's use of repeated motifs and images emphasises her pain and grief, presenting her as a relatable human figure.

The third and final instance of repetition which will be examined is the reiteration of the Virgin Mary's weeping, closer examination of which unlocks the poem's broader theological schematic. Weeping is the most prevalent repeated motif in the poem: tears are mentioned thirteen times and weeping is mentioned five times. Mary's human, maternal grief may have made her a more relatable figure. However, Mary is also a figure to be revered and someone whose feelings are in part unfathomable. She states that she loved her son more than any other woman could:

> 'Er það vón, að unni eg meira
> eingietnum syni Kristi hreinum
> en þau sprund, er ala með syndum
> eldi sín með harm og pínu'.[64]

Since the Virgin Mary conceived Christ immaculately, she loves him more purely and more deeply and suffers more severely at his loss. Marian laments show that because Mary cared for Christ from childhood, this has given her greater time with him on earth than all others; she has known more joy with Christ, her sorrow is all the greater.[65] Thus, Mary's sorrow is relatable, but only up to a point, as she knows that she is losing not just her son, but God's presence on earth. Since Mary has a better comprehension of this than most of those present at the crucifixion, her sorrow is unique.

Drápa af Máríugrát portrays how Mary's emotions sink to greater depths than those of ordinary mortals, but also demonstrates how they soar to greater heights. After the resurrection, Mary asks forgiveness for her tears:

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[64] *Drápa af Máríugrát* 25, 'It is to be expected, that I should love my only-begotten son, the pure Christ, more than those women who bear their children in sins with sorrow and torment', p. 777.

[65] Fulton, 'Praying to the Mother', p. 205.

'Grátinn minn,' kvað jungfrú ítrust,
'öld várkynni mier,' með tárum. [66]

Upon comprehending God's plan, Mary understands that any despair, as distinct from sorrow, was misplaced. Moreover, all the speakers in the poem (Mary, Augustine, and the skald), apart from Christ, who tells Mary to stop weeping in stanza 18, refer to washing cheeks or eyes with tears as a mark of true repentance necessary for forgiveness. The Virgin Mary's tears, like those of the widow in *Máríuvisur I*, are a mark of her genuine emotions; her experiences lead to a new understanding of God's plan for creation, and her tears could also be symbolic of the waters of baptism. In wider Marian literature, Mary is sometimes left having to end her lament and retreat from the stage in defeat at the inevitable death of her son.[67] In contrast, *Drápa af Máríugrát* offers a much more positive message. Mary's weeping is closely connected with the didactic nature of the poem, as without her tears of sorrow, she would not shed tears of joy. Her grief, which initially makes her seem vulnerable, is caused by her bond with Christ which ultimately grants her the strongest position of any saint. The purpose of Mary's repeated mention of weeping is not simply to create a sombre atmosphere: it is inseparable from her joy and encourages the audience to follow her to a greater spiritual joy and closer connection to God.

The three instances of repetition illustrate Mary's bond with Christ and indicate that her suffering at his loss is part of a wider scheme of divinely planned events. Mary's grief is an inseparable counterpart to her everlasting joy at Christ's resurrection. Thus, repeated phrases and motifs in *Drápa af Máríugrát* are used to emphasise aspects of her relationship with Christ which lead to her glorification in heaven. The Virgin Mary's experiences can also be learnt from by the poem's audience: through feeling compassion, closely following Christ and empathising with Mary's emotions, the audience can come towards a better understanding of humanity's relationship with God. In this way, *Drápa af Máríugrát* illustrates the flexibility of skaldic verse as an

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[66] *Drápa af Máríugrát* 39, '"May mankind forgive me for my weeping," said the most splendid Virgin with tears', pp. 786–87.
[67] McNamer, 'Marian Lament', p. 168.

art form, using repetition (something previously scarce in skaldic verse) and the voice of Mary to draw the audience to a better understanding of some of the most profound divine mysteries. Having analysed *Drápa af Máríugrát* and *Máríuvisur I* from a literary perspective and considered their didactic purposes, the final section of this article will consider the different audiences at which their messages could have been directed.

AUDIENCE

Wrightson sees *Drápa af Máríugrát* as a text written by a man, and for men alone.[68] Her argument is supported by several mentions of learned men within the text, although some of these could be taken more generally as referring to holy people.[69] However, as mentioned previously, Tomassini notes that a manuscript of redaction E of *Maríu saga* is addressed to a group of 'sisters', and she suggests that this particular manuscript may have been intended for the nunnery at Reynistaður, known for its comparatively large library.[70] As noted previously, manuscript AM 713 4°, containing *Máríuvisur II* and *Drápa af Máríugrát* amongst other poems, is thought to have been compiled at Staður, which was closely connected to Reynistaður. Thus, it is possible, although not provable, that the manuscript was somehow connected with the nunnery, and also that copies of the poems were made by nuns. This provides scope for consideration that some Christian skaldic verse may have been composed by women.[71] Evidence concerning the location of AM 713

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[68] Kellinde Wrightson, 'The *lærðir menn* of the Old Icelandic Marian Lament *Drápa af Máríugrát*', in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience: 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim, 3–9 August 1997*, ed. by J. R. Hagland (Trondheim: Norges tekniske universitetsbibliotek, 1997), pp. 685–92 (p. 691).

[69] Wrightson, 'The lærðir menn', p. 686.

[70] See footnote 26; Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'What Icelandic Nuns Read: The Convent of Reynistaður and the Literary Milieu in Fourteenth-Century Iceland', in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: the Kansas City Dialogie*, ed. by V. Blanton, V. O'Mara, P. Stoop (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 229–48 (pp. 232–35).

[71] Sandra Straubhaar assembles quotations of skaldic verse from the sagas of Icelanders in *Old Norse Women's Poetry: The Voices of Female Skalds* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer,

4°'s compilation strongly suggests that Marian skaldic poetry may not have been composed and consumed only by holy men, but also by holy women.

Considering the poems themselves more generally, by the standards of skaldic poetry Marian skaldic verse has comparatively straightforward syntax. This may have made it more readily comprehensible and accessible to a wider audience, rather than to a select few only. Secondly, the poems' depictions of emotions (grief, anger, regret and joy) and doctrines (concerning the nature of repentance, prayer and steadfast faith) would all have been relevant to a lay audience, as well as a monastic or clerical one. Furthermore, as *Maríu saga* appears to have been popular amongst lay people (see above), Marian skaldic verse may also have been circulated amongst the laity.

It should also be considered that Marian skaldic verse may have served different functions at different times, as has been proved concerning Middle English lyrics composed around the same time which were sometimes read from pulpits and sometimes written out for the private use of lay patrons.[72] It would be wise to consider Marian skaldic verse in a similar light, as an art form which could be used in multiple ways for multiple audiences.

Evidence from beyond the textual and codicological corpus also suggests that Marian skaldic verse may have spread beyond monastic and clerical circles. Karoline Kjesrud's research draws together images on Norwegian altar frontals which depict events in *Maríu saga*: twelve Norwegian altar frontals (1250–1350) show images from the Virgin Mary's life, and four depict miracles; presumably once there were more.[73] This strengthens the case for Marian miracles being accessible to lay populations in forms other than the written word. Likewise, Marian skaldic verse was not necessarily transmitted via manuscripts alone, but also via oral recitation.

2011) to explore presentations of women who speak skaldic verse; however, the poetry was not likely composed by the women themselves.

[72] Georgiana Donavin, *Scribit Mater*, pp. 222, 227.

[73] Karoline Kjesrud, 'Conceptions of the Virgin Mary in Medieval Western Scandinavia', in *Words and Matter: The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Parish Life*, ed. by J. Carlquist and V. Langum (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia, 2015), pp. 87–103 (pp. 93–94).

Finally, excavations at Skriðuklaustr, in eastern Iceland, have provided new evidence that lay, clerical and monastic groups did not necessarily exist in isolation from each other, as previous scholarship may have presented them. Concerning monasticism specifically, prevailing trends in scholarship, connected with nationalist and anti-Catholic movements, depicted monasteries and nunneries as isolated institutions which contributed little to wider society.[74] However, Steinunn Kristjansdóttir observes that the Icelandic religious orders of Benedictines and Augustinians (an order founded on work in lay communities) suited its rural economy.[75] Her excavations also revealed that the graveyard at the Augustinian community at Skriðuklaustr contained 298 burials, many more than would be expected for a community operating from 1493 to 1554.[76] Steinunn Kristjansdóttir argues for the presence of an infirmary and a guest house, supported by evidence of plants non-native to Iceland with healing properties being grown on the premises.[77] These findings suggest close connections between religious institutions and lay society, and channels of communication between the two. Thus, even if Marian skaldic verse may have begun life in a monastic setting, it cannot be assumed that it remained there.

The voice and presence of the Virgin Mary expands the purpose of skaldic verse to act as a didactic art form which provides a unique insight into some of the most profound mysteries of the divine. The poems analysed here yield much in terms of depictions of emotions, thoughts on the nature of prayer and forgiveness, and the connection between the two, in creating a stronger relationship with God. All of this, and more, would have been relevant to a wide audience in Iceland. Emerging evidence from related fields provides new perspectives on the closely interconnected relationships between lay, monastic and clerical groups and also opens up new ways of viewing the audience and function of Christian skaldic verse. The poetic voice and presence of Mary in these two entertaining and dramatic poems

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[74] Steinunn Kristjansdóttir, 'No Society is an Island: Skriðuklaustur Monastery and the Fringes of Monasticism', *The Journal of Monastic Studies*, 4 (2015), 153–72 (pp. 161–62).
[75] Ibid., p. 160.
[76] Ibid., p. 166.
[77] Ibid., p. 166.

should not be thought of as cloistered in monasteries and nunneries but weeping, wailing and shouting for joy throughout the whole of Iceland.