

# Anglo-Saxon Writers and their Use of Latin Sources

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This paper examines the different ways in which Anglo-Saxon writers made use of Latin sources in their secular and religious writings. It begins by surveying the availability of these Latin sources in Anglo-Saxon England, which ranged from classical and patristic works to medieval homiletic and biblical texts (principally of Carolingian provenance). It then examines the issue of literacy / illiteracy with regard to Latin to exemplify that reading and writing had distinct functions in a medieval context. The final part focuses on how Anglo-Saxon writers made use of and incorporated Latin sources by analysing three specific homiletic texts from the Blickling manuscript, which is the earliest extant example of Old English prose writings — dating from the late tenth century.<sup>1</sup> The Venerable Bede (c. 672 - 735), for example, who wrote solely in Latin, consciously modified pre-Christian classical sources with biblical and patristic exempla.<sup>2</sup> A later writer like Ælfric of Eynsham (c. 950 - c. 1010) intuitively used his Latin sources to create a distinctive and original alliterative prose style — earning him the esteemed title ‘Father of English Prose’.<sup>3</sup>

The influence of Latin sources on Anglo-Saxon literary culture

is complex to decipher, given the tendency of some Anglo-Saxon Christian authors to disguise their use of sources from a pre-Christian past. Moreover, many of the Patristic texts that Anglo-Saxon writers used originate from the classical tradition. The Venerable Bede, when composing his treatise on Latin metre *De arte metrica liber ad wigbertum levitam* (PL 90, cols. 149-176A), carefully replaced his highly derivative text of illustrative examples from classical poets with those from Christian authors such as Coelius Sedulius (c. 400 - c. 450) and Ventantius Fortnatus (c. 530 - c. 600/609).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, his work on rhetorical principles *De schematibus et tropis sacrae scripturae* (PL 90, cols. 176-186D) used paradigms from scripture, in particular from the gospel accounts of St Mathew and St John which are among the most authoritative writings in the New Testament corpus.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite Bede's best efforts to suppress traces of classical secular learning, it is evident from his own verse that he had an in-depth familiarity with the poetry of Virgil, whom he perpetually echoes, and who was clearly an essential mentor for his writings.<sup>6</sup> Love (1998) has presented a comprehensive and informative account of the classical library that would have formed a central part of Bede's monastic schooling and formation as a monk scholar.<sup>7</sup> The works of Virgil (*Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid*) would have been an indispensable part of his grounding in classical erudition.

Other Anglo-Saxon writers were less reticent about their reliance on the classical tradition. The first great English scholar Aldhelm (c. 639 - c. 709), a West Saxon of noble birth who was successively abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne, was familiar with a variety of classical poets, notably Virgil and Lucan; it is probable that he also had a knowledge of some of the poetic works of Horace, Ovid and Statius. He was a scholar of immense learning and the earliest native to have composed a substantial corpus of Latin writings in both prose and verse;

in the realm of diction, Winterbottom (1977) argues that he was the most influential Anglo-Saxon author. Likewise, Alcuin (735 - 804), in his versified catalogue of the books owned by his mentor Ethelbert of York (d. 780), includes Virgil, Statius and Lucan among the Latin poets, together with (more surprisingly) Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC) (presumably via Boethius), Cicero (106 BC - 43 BC) (notable his *De inuentione* and *De oratore*) and Pliny (23 - 79) among prose authors.<sup>8</sup> The possibility that some of the works of Cicero were extant in Anglo-Saxon England is particularly intriguing, since the influence of classical rhetoric on Anglo-Saxon writings is generally accepted, but has proved difficult to exemplify on occasions. Clearly, however, the classical world exerted a considerable fascination for Anglo-Saxons throughout the period, and knowledge of the works of a large number of classical and late Latin authors seems likely in certain fields.

This was especially relevant for preaching and hagiographical texts, which comprised of homilies, sermons and vitae (saints' lives). These texts represent the largest corpus of extant Old English prose writings; most of which derive directly from Latin sources and exempla. Are these mere textual translations of their Latin sources or do they possess a certain originality of their own? The answer to this question is rather complex. Early collections like *The Blickling Homilies*, which date from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, have a certain textual rigidity in Old English that would indicate that the Anglo-Saxon homilists were more or less translating their Latin sources. However, Old English grammar, syntax and lexicography have distinct qualities, bequeathing the Blickling texts with a certain distinctiveness of their own. The second part of the paper discusses specific examples of how the Blickling writers made use of Latin source texts, which they mainly accessed from the Carolingian Church that had developed a very sophisticated scriptoria tradition renowned for producing

scholarly works.

Secular writings also were reliant on Latin source material. These include medical herbals (where, for example, there is evidence of the influence of Pliny the Elder and Cassius Felix), astronomy (where some familiarity with Gaius Hyginus's *De Astronomia* seems probable), and, above all, grammar (where the works of authors such as Charisius, Donatus and Triscian were studied). Classical myth, history and legend shared a similar ethos to literary works. The Old English translation of the Latin *Epistole Alexandri ad Aristotelem* (Alexander's Letter to Aristotle), Ælfric's Glossary (which was first discovered by Sir Thomas Phillips in the archives of Worcester Cathedral in 1838) and the ubiquitous references to classical learning made by Byrhtferth in his *Enchiridion* are testimony to the enduring appeal of classical works to the Anglo-Saxons, especially in the heyday of their literary and cultural prowess from the tenth century onwards.

Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England was a rather multifaceted issue to determine because reading and writing did not always have the same purpose.<sup>9</sup> The medieval concept of the Latin *litteratus-illitteratus* affords some assistance in contextualising literacy, but it is constrained due to the social parameters of how the idea may be applied: Grundmann (1958) has expounded how the term *litteratus* was delimited to a number of the clergy who could read and write Latin.<sup>10</sup> Its contrasting term, *illitteratus*, which denoted both the laity and religious who could not read in that language, can offer no insight in the cases where religious could read but not write, or could read only the vernacular, or with regard to literate lay people.<sup>11</sup> A second contrasting pair, literate-oral, deriving from a more modern understanding of literacy, provides limited insight into Anglo-Saxon literacy. The dichotomy in this pair sets off the ability to read and write against ignorance of these skills, but it ignores the fact in the early

Middle Ages reading and writing were not one and the same, and the people who were non-readers could function in a textual culture through the mediation of others. The circumscribed denotations of these pairs of terms suggest that a historically nuanced definition of literacy and its conditions in Anglo-Saxon England must take into account the language(s) of literacy, the clerical and lay status of a possible reader, and the specific features of early medieval literate culture.

Latin was the *linguae sacrae* of the liturgy (Mass and Divine Office which are centred on the Missal and Psalter), of ecclesiastical law (Canon Law) and of monastic schools (curriculum of study) of the Roman Rite.<sup>12</sup> Primarily a textual language, it was as well the medieval language of scholarly influence. The learning process for literacy in Latin, however, had a considerable admixture of oral processes: the boy was expected to memorize the psalter and hymns (without necessarily understanding what he would speak). Only afterwards would he learn the grammar and proceed to read increasingly complicated passages. Through his life, he would hear texts as well as read them. The processes of literacy in Latin were inflected throughout with memory techniques from earlier centuries of oral learning. Works written in Latin were expected to be heard as well as read (e.g. the Preface to Bede's *Historica ecclesiastica*). While the evidence for Latin literacy in England is primarily for the male clergy, there are clear indications that a number of women had also achieved high degrees of literacy. The community of Abbess Eadburg was asked to provide for Boniface, the great English missionary of Mainz and Apostle of Germany, a copy of the epistles of Peter; Aldhelm composed the *De virginitate* for the nuns of Barking Abbey, Essex. Hygeburg, an English nun at Heidenheim in Germany, wrote the *Vita SS. Willibaldi et Wynnebaldi*. There is restricted evidence as well for lay literacy. Bede indicates that Aldfrith, king of Northumbria (685 - c. 705) was a learned

man who studied with the Irish scholar-monk Adomnán;<sup>13</sup> and Alfred, king of Wessex (871 - 899) initiated the translations of Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*, Boethius's *De consolation Philosophiae*, Augustine's *Soliloquia*, and the first fifty psalms.<sup>14</sup> While it is clear that Alfred could read, it is not wholly clear that he could write freely. The evidence of Asser's biography (c. 893) suggests that it was he himself who copied passages into Alfred's Enchiridion.<sup>15</sup>

Whenever the earliest identification of literacy in England with learning in Latin may have been, King Alfred, perhaps around the year 887, launched his project to translate those books into English because '... me ðyncð betre, gif iow swæ ðyncð, ðæt we eac sumæ bec, ða ðe niedbedearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne, ðæt we ða on ðæt geðiode wenden ðe we ealle gecnawan mægen.'<sup>16</sup> In his Preface to the translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*, Alfred comments on the sad state of learning in England following upon the Viking depredations. In the now famous lines, Alfred notes that 'Swæ clæne hio wæs oðfeallenu on Angelcynne ðæt swiðe feawa wæron behionan Humbre ðe hiora ðeninga cuðen understondan on Englisc, oððe furðum an ærendgewrit of Lædene on Englisc areccean; & ic wene ðætte noht monige begiondan Humbre næren.'<sup>17</sup> Finding the account somewhat exaggerated, Parkes has distinguished between two forms of literacy: professional — the ability to read and write to monastic standards; and practical — the ability to use writing for commercial purposes such as trading and commerce.<sup>18</sup>

Alfred's Preface has further implications for the social conditions of literacy, since it outlines an ambitious educational schema for young free men who had the opportunity (*speda*) to study and who were required for no other tasks. They would be educated to read English. Further study in Latin was intended for the clergy. While there is no conclusive evidence

that Alfred's programme was ever formally implemented, manuscript evidence from the tenth and eleventh centuries indicates that English developed as an important written language for study and learning.

Preaching in the vernacular was one of the most widespread uses of English for biblical and moral instruction in the late Anglo-Saxon period not just for a lay but also a clerical audience where several of its members such as lay brothers would not have known Latin well. The earliest extant collection is *The Blickling Homilies*; anonymous homiletic texts which date from the late tenth century. The manuscript forms part of the Scheide Collection at Princeton University's Firestone Library. The volume is known as Princeton, John H. Schiede Library, s. xli.

This manuscript is the only major Anglo-Saxon homiletic collection to be privately owned. Before John H. Scheide acquired the manuscript in 1938 and subsequently passed it on as part of his estate to his son, William H. Scheide, it formed part of the collection of rare books and documents of the house library at Blickling Hall in Norfolk, England, from where it derives the first part of its name.

To briefly document its recent history, after the death of the 10<sup>th</sup> Marquis of Lothian in 1930, a selection of rare books and manuscripts from the Lothian libraries at Blickling Hall and Newbottle (including *The Blickling Psalter* and *The Blickling Homilies*) was sent to New York for sale at auction at the American Art Association/Anderson Galleries.<sup>19</sup> The Lothian family was essentially broke. Blickling Hall has been in the care of the National Trust since 1940. They were auctioned as 'Illuminated Manuscripts, Incunabula and Americana from the famous libraries of the Marquess of Lothian, C.H.' on 27 January 1932. *The Blickling Homilies* manuscript was according to *The New York Times* sold for US\$55,000 as lot 2. The buyer was not named; John H. Scheide was the underbidder.<sup>20</sup> It eventually came into the possession of C. F. Bishop (1870-1935), a

renowned book collector. The codex is listed in the Addenda to De Ricci's *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*, vol. II, p. 2323, as no. 55 of the Bishop Library. After Bishop's death in 1935, the American Art Association/Anderson Galleries (which Bishop had owned) put the manuscript on the market for sale again.<sup>21</sup> The chronology suggests there was some unknown owner for three years until Abraham Rosenbach, a specialist book dealer, bought it for US\$38,000 on 5 April 1938 as lot 285, pt. I. Rosenbach was acting on behalf of John H. Scheide of Titusville, Pennsylvania; it still remains as part of the Scheide library.<sup>22</sup> *The Blickling Homilies* and *The Blickling Psalter* are the only two major Anglo-Saxon manuscripts to be permanently in the USA.

The present foliation of the manuscript dates from June 1955 when it was decided to take the manuscript out of its mid nineteenth-century binding. This decision was taken due to the inaccuracy of this binding, known as the Lewis binding. It was, in fact, virtually impossible to find one's way through certain parts of the codex. The leaves of the Oath Gospels were also incorrectly arranged as 2, 3, 5, 1, & 4. The Blickling manuscript was accordingly taken out of its binding at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York by Marguerite Duprez-Lahey on 23 June 1955. The manuscript was photographed on microfilm before it was undone. The original negative is part of the Scheide collection at Princeton University's Firestone Library and there is a copy in the Pierpont Morgan Library.

With the gatherings in the correct order and the leaves in proper sequence, a new foliation of the manuscript was made in pencil. The Calendar and the Oath Gospels are numbered in Roman numerals (I-XI) and the homiliary in Arabic numerals (1-139), thereby maintaining a distinction between the original codex and the late medieval additions of the Calendar and the Oath Gospels. The new foliation is entered in



the upper right margin of the recto of each folio, near but not at the top, to avoid confusion with the remains of any other marks of foliation and pagination that might be present there. As a result, the position of the folio numbers varies from leaf to leaf in its present format. The historical order of parts that existed in the Lewis binding (Calendar, Oath Gospels, and Homiliary) was adhered to when Duprez-Lahey commenced to make a new binding for the codex in December 1956, which was completed in 1957. When I saw the manuscript for myself in 2005, the hardcovers were once again removed in order to enable the manuscript to undergo further professional restoration and to be digitally photographed as part of Princeton University's online digital library. Certain leaves at the beginning and end of the manuscript were in a fragile state and I could clearly see why further professional restoration work was essential.

The Blickling homiletic collection in its present form consists of eighteen preaching texts, which correspond to important liturgical days sequentially within the calendar of the liturgical year:

I	Incarnation
II-VI	Lenten
VII	Easter
VIII-X	Rogationtide
XI	Ascension
XII	Pentecost
XIII	Assumption
XIV	Nativity of St. John the Baptist
XV	SS Peter & Paul
XVI	St Michael
XVII	St Martin
XVIII	St Andrew

The order, with one exception, is that of the liturgical year: the text for the Assumption (*Transitus Mariae*) is placed before the Nativity of St John the Baptist (June 24). Normally, it would be placed between the feasts of SS Peter & Paul (June 29) and St Michael (29 September).

The first surviving Blickling homiletic text focuses on the incarnation of Christ. The beginning of the text is now lost; the extant text begins with the words ‘...gecynd onwriġen ond seo syn adilegod...’ and expresses the themes of the incarnation.<sup>23</sup> The Latin title ‘In Natali Domini’ was supplied later by an early twelfth-century hand. The text is not a commentary on one precise Gospel lection; yet it is heavily reliant on the opening chapters of St Luke’s Gospel, where is recounted the role of Mary in the incarnation of Christ. A possible source is a pseudo-Augustine sermon entitled *In Natali Domini* (iv).<sup>24</sup> This source seems to indicate that just one folio or so may be missing from the Old English text, as paragraph 1 and a few words at the beginning of paragraph 2 of the Latin source are non-extant. There is no other known version of Blickling I, so it is unique to *The Blickling Homilies*. Though later, Ælfric in his *Catholic Homilies*, Series I & II, made copious provision for the feasts of the Annunciation and Nativity, of which numerous manuscript copies survive.<sup>25</sup>

The beginning of the Blickling manuscript is now damaged, with possibly as many as four quires missing; Clemoes (1962) has convincingly argued that ‘it is reasonable to assume that they contained homilies for any, or all, of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany’.<sup>26</sup> The liturgical season of Advent was certainly established in the Anglo-Saxon Church by the late tenth century as a preparatory season for the feast of the Nativity. Yet early medieval mass books like the Old Gelasian Sacramentary (MS *Vaticanus Reginensis* 316), ll. 80-4, copied at Chelles, near Paris, c. 750, when Gisela, the sister of Charlemagne, was abbess (5 *formulae*), and the Epistolary of Würzburg (c. 600), nos. 170-74, which contain the earliest

extant references to Advent, do not refer to it as an established liturgical season.<sup>27</sup> *The Hadrianum*, the papal mass book that Pope Hadrian I (772-795) sent to Charlemagne towards the end of the eighth century, nos. 185-93, places the table of lessons for a six-Sunday, five-Sunday, and four-Sunday Advent at the end. The lectionary tables generally begin with the Christmas Vigil. In the light of such evidence, it is plausible that this Blickling text may be closer to the actual beginning of the extant collection which follows the yearly liturgical cycle than previously considered; in addition, preaching texts that more or less adhered to the structure of the liturgical year would have been generally based of the format of such lectionaries. Even more significant is that the final extant text of *The Blickling Homilies* is a piece for the feast of St Andrew, November 30, which comes after the beginning of the Advent season even if it were only a four-week period. The content of the four lost gatherings from the beginning of the manuscript may be less extensive than what Clemoes has indicated. It certainly may have contained further texts for Christmastide as well as the possibility of some guidance and instruction for preachers using the collection, but provision for Advent with such material seems unlikely. If Advent were provided for, it would most probably have been placed at the end, as was a practice in several Mass books at the time.

Despite the manuscript's lost beginning, Blickling I functions as an appropriate entrée to the texts that follow, since it deals with both the Annunciation and the Nativity; that is to say, it focuses in the entire incarnation event, from Christ's conception on 25 March to His birth on 25 December. The festival of Christmas, more than perhaps any of the other liturgical feasts, seemed from its origins in the early fourth century to have been a type of combined feast that looked back as well as forward: celebrating the completion of the nine-month gestation period from 25 March, and looking forward to the life of the incarnate Christ on earth.

Blickling I appropriately recapitulates this context, thereby giving focus and purpose to the subsequent seventeen texts that follow it.

While it can be said that Blickling I follows the structure and content of its Latin source rather faithfully, the homilist does occasionally enhance his text with extra emphasis of his own. An instance of this comes near the beginning when he expands further the mystery of the Immaculate Conception by simply repeating it using slightly different wording. Such instances of expansion and variation (which are common throughout the Blickling collection as a whole) puts certain modification to the argument put forward by Fiedler (1904) that the Old English texts are merely translations from Latin sources. However, Blickling I has a certain awkwardness of style when rendering its source into English, which indicates that here is a language of translation in the process of maturation. The Old English homilist at times even misunderstood his source; for example, he failed to comprehend the Latin construction of the second sentence ('Quid dixerit, quid audierit, referat: Ave, inquit, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.') in the third paragraph of the Latin source, and rendered it with the translation, 'Hwæt cwæþ he to hire, oþþe hwæt gehyrde heo, Ðær he cwæþ, 'Wes þu hál, Maria, geofena full Drihten is mid þe...' He also mistook the Latin verb 'incipit' (incipiō -i'ere -ē'pī -e'ptum *vt.* & *i.* begin) for 'concepit' (concupiō -i'pere -ē'pī -e'ptum *vt.* (*women*) conceive) in the sentence immediately following. Even though these Latin verbs appear similar, such linguistic inaccuracies together with its general parabolic style constitutes oral delivery to a general and not overly sophisticated audience.

Blickling XIII expounds the *Transitus Mariae*.<sup>28</sup> A later hand, possibly late-eleventh/early-twelfth century, entered the Latin title 'S[an]c[t]a Maria Mater D[omi]ni' in the space left blank; a still later hand, possibly mid-fourteenth century, wrote 'N[ost]ri Ie[s]u CR[ist]i' on the

next line as a pious reverence. The source is from a Latin version of the *Transitus*, edited by Wilmart (1933): 323-62. There is one later copy of this Old English *Transitus* text in MS CCCC 198 (Ker 48, item 54). A comparison of the two texts shows that at fol. 350v in the Cambridge manuscript that about a half leaf is missing after fol. 85v in the Blickling text, but nothing is missing after fol. 86r.

According to the Old English Martyrology and the Irish Martyrology of Aengus, the feast of the *Transitus* of Mary is celebrated on 15 or 15-16 August. The text in the Blickling manuscript is placed after the Pentecost text and before the one on the Birth of John the Baptist (24 June), so it seems misplaced in the Blickling collection.

Can any satisfactory explanation be offered as to why the text is positioned here in the Blickling manuscript? Could it be that the compiler misplaced the text? This is highly unlikely as the remainder of the Blickling texts (as well as the ones that precede it) do not seem to be misplaced; in fact, they indicate that the compiler had thorough knowledge of the important anchor points of the liturgical year. When *The Blickling Homilies* were compiled, the festival of the Assumption (15 August) was not yet universally celebrated in the English Church on a fixed day, and the compiler, therefore, may have decided to appropriately place the text dealing with the *Transitus Mariae* at the beginning of those dealing with the lives and miracles of various saints, as she is the genesis of all saints. We cannot assume that the text has been misplaced by the binder in that its beginning is on the same folio (fol. 84v) as the text for Pentecost, and its ending is on the same folio (fol. 89v) as the text for the feast of the Birth of John the Baptist. The Blickling text opens with a specific reference to the Ascension of Christ and how Mary remained in constant vigil since then waiting for her own transition. *The Transitus Mariae* parallels the Ascension of Christ in a number of important respects, such

as the receiving of the palm-twigh from Mt Olivet (the original site of the Ascension), her remaining in the tomb for three days, her ascending body and soul into Paradise, Christ's advent to her (signifying the *Parousia*). The prominent presence of the apostles throughout the text recalls the preceding Pentecost text with its emphasis on evangelization, and sets the context for the various *vitae* that follow in the collection which recount specific instances of apostolic evangelization and conversion. This text seems to function as a crucial transition text in *The Blickling Homilies*, thematically linking the material intended for the *Temporale* and the *Sanctorale*.

Concerning the tradition of the *Transitus Mariae*, the Irish material (both Latin and vernacular) is of special importance. The Irish *Transitus* texts in MS RIA 23 0 48 and MS Bodl. Laud Misc 610 (vernacular) and MS TCD F. 5. 3 (Latin) date from c. 700 and are derived from the fifth-century Syriac versions of the work which was first pointed out Seymour (1922) who noted the close affiliations of the Irish text with the Syriac *Obsequies of the Holy Virgin*. Later research agreed with him. It is noteworthy that in the Syriac authors also *referred* to the *Apocalypse of Paul* which is also known as the *Apocalypse of the Virgin* which dramatically recounts the events surrounding the *Transitus*.

Blickling XIII expounds the conventional narrative sequence of the *Transitus*. The clear characterization and sequential narrative personalizes the content, expressing with effect its Marian thematic significance. The style of expression is straightforward yet refined. The exemplum of the conversion of the Jews at the end of the piece was possibly intended not only to dramatically enlighten an Anglo-Saxon congregation but also motivate them to realize a renewal of their own Christian faith. The ultimate purpose of all preaching is *metanoia* (μετάνοια) — an ancient Greek term meaning 'to change one's mind', which in Christian theology

came to mean 'conversion' and 'renewal'.

Blickling XIV is a sermon for the feast of the Birth of St John the Baptist (24-25 June).<sup>29</sup> The rubricator entered no title; a later eleventh-century hand wrote the Latin title 'S[an]c[t]e Iohannes Baptista Spel' in rather casually formed letters. The source is a pseudo-Augustine sermon, *In Natali Joannis Baptistæ*, PL XXXIX, cols. 2117-8, no. 199. The birth of John the Baptist is recounted in Lk 1: 57-68, which tells of the birth, circumcision and naming of John the Baptist. This text is unique to the Blickling manuscript; though later, Ælfric made provision for this feast in his *Catholic Homilies*, Series I & II, of which numerous manuscript copies survive.<sup>30</sup>

St John the Baptist was the focus of great devotion in the Medieval Church as he was regarded as the prophet who bore witness to the imminent advent of the Messiah. John's preaching is an integral part of the course of events that promulgate the incarnation; and his baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan is taken, following the tradition of Mt 3:13-17, as anticipating the baptism of all Christians.

He was a particularly popular saint in the Celtic Church in Ireland, where there are two different kinds of material concerning John the Baptist: 1) traditional material, apocryphal and otherwise; 2) this traditional material combined with Irish legends on *Mog Ruith*.<sup>31</sup> After the crucifixion of Christ, the greatest horror in human history to the medieval mind was the decapitation of John the Baptist. The Irish believed that they bore a special guilt for John's death, because they maintained that a druid known as *Mog Ruith* was responsible for executing him. Therefore, the decapitation of John the Baptist, not his birth, was the central focus in the Irish Church; in fact, an Irish vernacular of the birth of John is found only in BL, MS Egerton 91, beginning at fol. 46r '[D]o geinemain Eoin baisti annso mar a der Legendauria.'<sup>32</sup> This tradition stands in contrast to

the Blickling text, which recounts the birth and not the decapitation of this saint.

This Blickling text appropriately follows the *Transitus* text. It begins by stating the special place John the Baptist has in relation to Christ and how he is the only saint to have his birthday honoured by the Church — all other Christian saints are honoured on their death. The text (as does its Latin source) adheres closely to the Lukan account of the birth by expounding its significance as heralding the incarnation of Christ. The homilist begins by focusing on the parents of John the Baptist, telling how they were of noble lineage and the essence of piety and goodness. It is fitting then that John should be brought forth by God's grace from such parents, made all the more wondrous by the fact that Elizabeth was beyond childbearing age. There is a clear emphasis throughout the text that God had a central role in his life and works; therefore, everyone should honour this saint. The homilist skillfully makes the parallel between the births of John the Baptist and Christ, for both were in their own way miraculously conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. The use of such emphatic adverbs as 'uton' and 'eala' further enhance this theme by giving it a certain emotional intensity. The text concludes by reiterating the greatness of this saint and how he was the fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies. Salvation history advanced a pace through the birth of John the Baptist. This is reaffirmed through a rapid series of direct questions addressed to the audience on the nature of the saint. The piece ends with the obvious answers: model one's Christian life on the example set by St John the Baptist so that through him one will come to know Christ and merit eternal salvation when the Day of Judgement comes.

Blickling XIV is conventional in both theme and content. It adheres closely to its pseudo-Augustine source; it reiterates and expounds the biblical significance of the birth as a fulfilment of Old Testament



prophecies and prefiguring the birth of Christ; and it guides its audience throughout on the need for mimesis. Moreover, it is an appropriate complement to the preceding Blickling text on the *Transitus*: Mary being the genesis of sainthood and John the Baptist being the first and the greatest in that saintly line, ratified by the homilist quoting the words of Christ: 'Ac Pæt hwæPere be Ðara nænigum gecweden beon ne mihte, Pæt se Hælende Drihten Crist be Þyssum Iohanne gecwæþ, Pæt næfre betuh wifa gebyrdum nænig mærra ne sylra geboren nære.'<sup>33</sup>

The important notable fact is that the use of Latin writings in both verse and prose formed the bedrock of educating Anglo-Saxon scholars of the calibre of Bede, Adhelm, Alcuin, Wulfstan and Ælfric. They not only had an in-depth knowledge of such works; classical style and content influenced their own textual composition.

General scientific and grammatical writings in Latin formed the basis of Anglo-Saxon herbals, grammars and glossaries. In fact, formal grammatical structures in Old English were modelled on Latin grammatical paradigms, which is a similarly inflected language. Old English strong and weak nouns and adjectives are declined by gender, number and case; pronouns and pronominals are similarly declined, but have no strong or weak form. Old English verb tenses and moods are less complex than its classical counterpart with just perfect and present tenses and no future tenses — the future was contextually implied by using the present tense. Old Irish, one of Europe's most complex vernacular languages, also evolved its grammatical structures from Latin grammatical paradigms. However, it should be noted that the Latin grammatical model did not fit perfectly to either Old English or Old Irish in that the functions of the languages were not the same. Classical Latin had been primarily a language of reading and writing; whereas, the vernacular tongues had both oral and written communicative contexts.

Reading and writing were not always one and the same entity in Anglo-Saxon England in that one could function in reading without necessarily have a fluent writing skill. In the monastic context, while private reading for meditation and study was central, oral reading also featured; it was done by a lector at mealtimes and in liturgical worship making it essentially a listening activity for the brethren. There were different levels of literacy: scholarly literacy for the monastic context and functional literacy for commercial contexts.

Preaching texts conveyed moral and religious instruction to clerical and lay congregations, and are an early concrete example in Anglo-Saxon England of an attempt at a standardized form of instruction. The homilies, sermons and vitae were composed by scholarly preachers to be copied and read out by less skilled clergy to their congregations. The Blickling homiletic collection is one such collection. The texts are derived from Latin exemplars generally of Carolingian origin; Carolingian homiletic collections similar to the Blickling series of texts were familiar to Anglo-Saxons homilists and several have survived in the corpus of manuscripts from the period which have been meticulously catalogued by Ker. The first homiliary of Hrabanus, the homiliary of St Père de Chartres and the homiliary of Landpertus of Mondsee are the most comparable as they make a similar provision for the cycle of the liturgical year integrating the *Temporale* and *Sanactorale*.<sup>34</sup> This early collection of Old English preaching texts exhibits a certain rustic and awkward rendering of its Latin source texts. Nevertheless, they mark the beginning of erudite preaching in the Old English vernacular and paved the way for a refined linguistic style. Ælfric and Wulfstan best typify this in their skilled use alliterative prose.<sup>35</sup> Their writings bear proud witness to the levels of stylistic and literary sophistication achieved in Old English towards the end of the Anglo-Saxon era in the late eleventh century.

## Notes

- 1 For an edition, translation and concordance of the Blickling homiletic collection, see Kelly (2003) and Kelly (2009).
- 2 The earliest complete edition of the writings of the Venerable Bede with a full *apparatus criticus* is Giles (1843).
- 3 The earliest edition and translation of Ælfric's *Sermones catholi* is Thorpe (1846); recent editions are Clemoes (1997), Godden (1979), Pope (1967) and Pope (1968).
- 4 Examples are: 7. De synecdoche. Συνεκδοχή est significatio pleni intellectus capax, cura plus minusve pronunllai; aut enim a parte totum ostendit, ut Joan. i: Verbum caro factum est. Et, Act. xxvii: Eramus vero in nave, un versæ animæ ducentæ septuaginta sex. Aut contra, ut, Joan. xix: Ergo propter Parasceven Judæorum, quia juxta etat Monumentum ubi posuerunt Jesum. (PL 90, col. 182) / 13. De homœosi ...et, Matth. vi: Respicite volatilia coeli, quoniam non serunt, neque metunt, neque congregant in horrea, et pater vester cœlestis pascit illa Deterrentis, ut, Matth. xxiv : Illa hora qui fuerit in tecto, et vasa ejus in domo, non descendat tollere illa; et qui in agro, similiter non redeat relro. Memores estote uxoris Loth. Et sic habentur tredecim generales tropi sacræ Scripturæ. (PL 90, col. 186)
- 5 Examples are: Tertius modus est syllabæ communis, cum verbum aliquod in vocalem desinens correptam excipitur a duabus consonantibus, quarum prior sit s. Est enim natura brevis in hoc Fortunati: Ordinibus variis alba smaragdus inest. (PL 90, col. 153) / Observandum est autem in carimine elegiaco ne quid unquam de sensu versus pentametri remaneat inexplicitum, quod in sequenti versu hexametro reddatur, sed vel uterque sensibus suis terminetur versus, ut Sedulius: Cantemus socii Domino, cantemus honorem, Dulcis amer Christi personet ore pio. (PL 90, col. 163)
- 6 The standard edition of the works of Virgil is Cooper (1827).
- 7 Love (1997) is a definitive study on the erudition of Bebe.
- 8 The birth year of Ethelbert of York is uncertain. On the scholarly significance of Alcuin, see Dumville (1990).
- 9 The standard study on the uses of literacy in early Medieval Europe is McKitterick (1990).
- 10 Grundmann (1958).
- 11 For an in-depth account on literacy and the laity, see Parkes (1973).
- 12 The three sacred languages (*tres linguae sacræ*) in Christianity are Hebrew, Greek and Latin. On the Roman Liturgical Rite, see Jungmann (1951; repr. 1986).
- 13 On King Aldfrith, see Higham (1993) : 140-1; and on Adomnán, see Anderson (1991) and MacDonald (1984).
- 14 A standard biography on King Alfred the Great is Ables (1998); and on the writings of King Alfred, see Whitelock (1980) and Whitelock (1981).

- 15 For an edition of Asser's *Vita Ælfredi regis Angul Saxonum*, see Stevenson (1904).
- 16 'Therefore it seems better to me, if you think so, for us also to translate some books which are most needful for all men to know into the language which we can all understand.' From King Alfred's English Preface to his translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*. For an edition and translation, see Sweet (1871).
- 17 'There were very few on this side of the Humber who knew how to understand the divine service in English or further who could translate a letter from Latin into English; and I expect there are not many beyond the Humber.' From King Alfred's English Preface to his translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*. For an edition and translation, see Sweet (1871). An authoritative historical analysis of the importance of Gregory the Great is Homes Dudden (1905).
- 18 See Parks (1973): 555-6.
- 19 These are the only Anglo-Saxon collections in the USA, The Blickling Homilies being the only one still in private ownership.
- 20 The sales records of the manuscript, which are part of the Scheide Library at Princeton University's Firestone Library, indicate this.
- 21 De Ricci, (1935-1940).
- 22 On the contents of the Scheide Library, see Boyd (1947). William H. Scheide died on 23 November 2014. It has been officially announced that the Scheide Library has been willed to Princeton University. The collection is estimated to be worth in the region of US\$300 million — making it the largest monetary donation ever bequeathed to an American University.
- 23 This Blickling homiletic text is at fols. 1r, l. 1-6v, l. 12 of Princeton, John H. Schiede Library, s. xlii (Ker 382, item 1; Cameron - Frank B.3.4.18).
- 24 PL 39, cols. 1984-7, no. 120.
- 25 For editions of these Ælfrician texts, see Clemoes (1997); Godden (1979 and (2000); Pope (1967) and (1968); Thorpe (1884; repr. 1971) and 1846; repr. 1971).
- 26 Clemoes (1962): 62.
- 27 *The Gelasian Sacramentary* is edited by Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer and Siffrin (1960), and Wilson (1894); *The Epistolary of Würzburg* is edited by Morin (1910).
- 28 This Blickling homiletic text is at fols. 84v, l. 7 - 98v, l. 9 of Princeton, John H. Schiede Library, s. xlii (Ker 382, item 13; Cameron - Frank B.3.3.20).
- 29 This Blickling homiletic text is at fols. 98v, l. 10 - 104r, l. 16 of Princeton, John H. Schiede Library, s. xlii (Ker 382, item 14; Cameron - Frank B.3.3.12).
- 30 For editions of these Ælfrician texts, see Clemoes (1997); Godden (1979 and (2000); Thorpe (1884; reprinted 1971) and 1846; reprinted 1971).
- 31 For an edition of *Texte zur Mog Ruith Sage*, see Hazard and Färber (2010).
- 32 'The birth/conception of John the Baptist according to legend.' On BL, MS Egerton 91, See O'Grady and Flower (1926-53). Vol. II, (1926): 438-51.

- 33 Kelly (2003): 114.  
 34 See Clayton (2000).  
 35 The homiletic writings of Ælfric and Wulfstan typify their authorial skill. Editions of Ælfric's writings are cited in Note 25 above. For an edition of the homiletic writings of Wulfstan, see Bethurum (1957).

## Abbreviations

BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
c.	circa
Camb.	Cambridge
cat.	catalogue
CCCC	Corpus Christi College Cambridge
ch/s	chapter/s
ed./s	editor/s
edn.	edition
fol./s	folio/s
lib.	library
ms/mss	manuscript/manuscripts
n.	note
no.	number
p./pp.	page/pages
PG	<i>Patrologiae Graeca</i> , Cursus Completus. Ed. J.-P Migne. 161 vols. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1857-66.
PL	<i>Patrologiae Latina</i> , Cursus Completus. Ed. J.-P Migne. 221 vols. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1844-64.
pl.	plate
pt.	part
r	recto
rept.	reprinted
rev.	revised
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
RS	The Royal Society
TCC	Trinity College Cambridge
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
trans.	translation
UCC	University College Cork
UL	University of London

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