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Chapter 5

The Vercelli Book as a Context for *The Dream of the Rood*

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The *Dream of the Rood* tradition consists of three distinct poems on the death of Christ, all of which have versions of the same striking narrative.[1] Two of these poems survive as inscriptions which form integral parts of major works of art: the eleventh-century Brussels Cross and the early eighth-century Ruthwell Cross (Figs 2.7, 4.6). Varieties or epitomes of this narrative, then, were chosen for inscription by two commissioners who lived three centuries apart and at opposite ends of Anglo-Saxon territories. Each commissioner was able to collaborate with a designer and artist(s) of the highest quality. This suggests that the heroic narrative was known over a long period, at least in clerical and monastic circles: that its vividness and theological originality continued to be appreciated, perhaps widely, for some three centuries. The incorporation of elements of this narrative into visual works of art of the highest quality suggests that the visual qualities of the narrative were particularly valued, and that some of these visual qualities may have inspired, not simply the vernacular inscriptions of the Ruthwell and Brussels crosses, but other visual elements in these crosses. The following discussion will concentrate on the manuscript context provided for the longest version of this narrative, in the Vercelli Book. In that manuscript, the narrative has its own 'internal' dream-vision frame: the dream-vision frame would inspire the charming nineteenth-century title, *The Dream of the Rood*. But before turning to the Vercelli Book, I wish briefly to enquire what versions of the narrative lay behind the Brussels and Ruthwell crosses? Do the designs of these crosses indicate that the commissioners knew aspects of the poem not directly incorporated into the crosses by actual quotation or verbal reminiscence of passages in the poem? Both the Ruthwell and Brussels poems take the form of an ekphrastic inscription: narrative verse which reminds onlookers what is signified by the cross on which it is inscribed, in order to encourage them to react seriously to it. The designer of each of these crosses must have edited the ekphrastic inscription from a longer, perhaps orally transmitted,

song. Did the versions of the narrative sung at Ruthwell and much later in Wessex (where the Brussels Cross was made) at all approximate to *The Dream of the Rood* as it has been preserved for us in the Vercelli Book?

The Brussels Cross preserves the latest of the three surviving versions of the narrative to have come down to us, and the shortest (van Ypersele de Strihou 2000; Ó Carragáin 2005, 339–354). The cross was probably made in Wessex about AD 1025–1050: the most promising context for the cross is the Benedictine Revival, an ecclesiastical reform-movement which found support among the Wessex nobility. The poem is inscribed on narrow strips of silver, altogether ten distinct pieces, nailed to form a continual band that adorns the narrow sides of an oaken cross (54.9 × 27.7cm). At the crossing of the oak, a smaller cross-shape slot was hollowed out, at least 1cm deep, measuring 7cm vertically and 14cm horizontally. This empty hollow once held a relic (described as late as 1925, but now lost) evidently believed to have come from the True Cross. The presence of such a fragment, however small, would have made the reliquary itself a relic, by contact, of Christ's Cross (Webster 1984, 90; van Ypersele de Strihou 2000, 35). Drahmal, the metal-worker who produced the cross, inscribed his name prominently on its silver-gilt back. The strips of silver on the narrow sides tell us that the cross was commissioned by two Wessex noblemen, Æþelmær and Aþelwold, for the welfare of the soul of their dead brother Ælfric. The brothers are not now otherwise identifiable, and therefore we do not know which Wessex church the reliquary cross was intended for, or kept in. The reliquary cross was taken to the Continent, possibly during the disturbances of the reign of Stephen in the mid-twelfth century. It was in Brussels from the early seventeenth century, and about 1650 came into the possession of the Cathedral of St Gudule in Brussels, where it is still preserved. In 1793 French revolutionary troops, in need of hard cash to supplement their swiftly-devaluing paper *assignats*, looted the jewels which, as we know from earlier descriptions of the reliquary, decorated its front.

The Brussels Cross was intended to be carried in procession. The vernacular inscription on the narrow sides was designed to make it easy for any cleric who participated in a religious ceremony in which the cross was displayed, to read it, realise that the reliquary contained a portion of the True Cross, and respond to the donors' request for prayers for the soul of their dead brother Ælfric. The inscription could not usually be read during the ceremony itself; but when clerics gathered around the cross, say in a sacristy before or after the ceremony, one of them could ask the cross-bearer to tilt the cross forward, so that the jewelled front faced downwards. In this way the reliquary would, in the words of the *Dream* (line 59b), 'bow to the hands of the men'. Any of the gathered clerics could then easily read the distych, and the two-stress phrases which followed it, by moving around the cross from left to right. Æþelmær and Aþelwold are likely to have intended that the community of reformed monk-clerics, to whom they had presented the cross, would pray continually for their dead brother. Dr Griffin Murray (2014, 151-2) has recently shown that the designers of the Irish processional Cross of Cong, one of the great treasures of Irish twelfth-century

art, formatted its inscription in a similar, easily legible and hence practical, format. The designer of the Brussels cross, Drahmal, inscribed his own name, and achievement, on the transom of the silver-gilt back of the cross:

+ DRAHMAL ME WORHTE :-
+ Drahmal made me :-

Drahmal gave a voice to the reliquary, ensuring that it would proclaim his skill. It did this in eschatological terms: his name is just to the left of the image of the Lamb of God, helpfully labelled ('agnu/s dī'), at the crossing. Drahmal's name is placed so that it can be read just 'before' the glorified lamb and 'after' the angel-symbol of the Evangelist St Matthew, at the beginning of the 'line' of words and images which covers the horizontal beam of the cross. The phrase which describes his achievement ('me worhte') can be read just 'after' the *Agnus Dei* and before the lion-symbol for St Mark which comes, like a *positura* mark, at the end of the right arm, and so of this 'sentence' of words and images. Senior clerics or (perhaps) noble laity who followed close behind the cross-bearer in a procession, for example, could read Drahmal's name, note his skill, and perhaps think of future work for him to do. It might even be suggested that Drahmal stole a march on his noble patrons, making his own implied bid for remembrance and prayer easy to see, and placing it in a position of honour amidst images of Christ's second coming (the Evangelist-beasts and the *Agnus Dei*, as in Revelation 4:1–11). In contrast, as we have noted, the names of the commissioners could only be read with ease by those clerics who examined the reliquary in detail, either before the ceremony or on their return to the sacristy.

The designer of the Brussels Cross (perhaps Drahmal himself? Or a cleric who advised him?) epitomized the *Dream of the Rood* narrative in a memorable distych:

ROD IS MIN NAMA GEO IC RIICNÆ KYNING
BÆR BYFYGENDE BLODE BESTEMED
'Rood' is my name: long ago,
trembling and drenched with blood, I bore a powerful king.

The designer supplemented this distych with further explanatory phrases, not in verse but in rhythmic prose. Such rhythmical prose, made up of two-stress phrases, is like that which we find, for example, in Vercelli Homilies II and XXI (see below, p. 117). In the following transcription I have demarcated the two-stress phrases by laying it out as verse and inserting extra spaces between each phrase:

ÞAS RODE HET ÆÞLMÆR WYRICAN
OND AÐELWOLD HYS BEROÞO[R] CRISTE TO LOFE
FOR ÆLFRICES SAULE HYRA BEROÞOR.
Æþelmær ordered this cross to be made,
and Aðelwold his brother: to the honour of Christ,
for the soul of Ælfric, their brother.

What can the Brussels inscription tell us about the longer version of the narrative from which it was edited? It was certainly edited with care. Like the Drahmal inscription, it makes the oaken reliquary speak, as the *Dream* has its tree/Cross speak. The first word of the Brussels distych (*ROD*), and the second verse of its first line (*GEO IC RICNE CYNING*), is designed to recall the initial dilemma of the Cross in the *Dream*, when Christ advances towards it:

> Rod wæs ic aræred . ahof ic ricne cyning
> Heofona hlaford . hyldan me ne dorste . [105r19–20; *Dream* 44–45][2]
> I was raised up, a Cross: I raised aloft a mighty king,
> Lord of the heavens; I dared not bow down.

It also recalls the moment, a little later in the *Dream*, when all creation laments Christ, 'the powerful king', a shining figure amidst the darkness, who like a king reigns from the Cross:

> weop eal gesceaft
> cwiðdon cyninges fyll crist wæs on rode [105r 28–29, *Dream* 55b–56].
> All creation wept,
> Lamented the death of the king: Christ was on the Rood.

The second line of the distych creates a startling new unity between the beginning of the *Dream*'s crucifixion narrative and its end. It fuses the moment when Christ first embraces the instrument of his death,

> . bifode ic þa me se beorn ymbclypte . [105r 17; *Dream* 42a]
> I trembled as the warrior embraced me,

with the moment when, after Christ is dead, his right side is pierced with a spear so that the upright or tree of the Cross is drenched in his blood. In the *Dream*, this is the moment when the Cross, having overcome its terrible dilemma and borne its Lord to his death, achieves its most intimate union with Christ:

> bysmeredon hie unc butu ætgædere eall ic wæs mid blode bestemed .
> begoten of þæs guman sidan . siððan he hæfde his gast onsended .
> (105r 22–24. *Dream* 48–49).
> They mocked the pair of us together: I was all drenched in blood
> poured from the man's side, after he had sent forth his spirit.

In this new reworking of the *Dream* narrative, the cross trembles, not when Christ first embraces it, but when Christ's blood, drenching it, baptizes it (as it were) for its role as a central Christian symbol throughout future ages, until Christ returns in glory and the end of the world's history.

The Anglo-Saxon clerics who were able to examine the Brussels Cross are likely, initially, to have admired the jewels which adorned its front. These symbolized the glory which they and their society accorded to the Cross, as the instrument of Christ's heroic death:

> Eall þæt beacen wæs
> Begoten mid golde gimmas stodon
> fægere æt foldan sceatum. swylce þær fife wæron
> uppe onþam eaxle ge spanne [104v 9–12; *Dream*, 6–9].
> All that shining symbol was
> encrusted with gold: gems stood out
> beautiful over the ends of the earth; likewise there were five
> above on the shoulder-span ...

Clerics, who could examine the cross closely, are likely to have appreciated the abrupt contrast between the jewelled front, representing the honour in which the Cross was rightfully held in the present age, and the narrative of long-past suffering ('*GEO*') epitomized in the distych inscribed on the narrow right side[3] of the Brussels Cross. On the back of the cross, a vast historical pattern was brought to completion. At the second coming of Christ in glory, the prayers of the donors and artificer would be fulfilled. Then, Ælfric would be reunited with his brothers; and all three, with Drahmal himself to make a fourth, would be united in adoration of the glorified Lamb of God.

To interpret the Brussels verse distych in isolation from the rest of this unified artefact is to misunderstand the function, within the reliquary, of the distych and its supplementary two-stress phrases. The designer epitomized the crucifixion-narrative of the *Dream*, not just in the verse distych, but in the symbolic structure of the whole reliquary. The jewels which adorned its front symbolised the present glory in which the Cross is held (cf. *Dream* 1–27); on its right side, the distych epitomized the suffering of the first Good Friday (cf. *Dream* 28–94); on the other narrow sides, the implied request by Æþelmær and Aðelwold for prayers for soul of their dead brother Ælfric provides a close parallel for the Dreamer's awareness of the death of his friends, and his hope of salvation through the Cross (*Dream* 122–135); the back of the cross provided a visual epitome of the Dreamer's faith in the future coming of Christ in glory (cf. *Dream* 95–149). The parallels between the integrated structure of the Brussels reliquary and that of the Vercelli *Dream* are too strong to be coincidental. It seems likely that the Brussels designer knew and valued a poem which was quite close, in phrases, themes and structure, to the Vercelli *Dream of the Rood*.

The earliest of our three texts comes from Northumbria in the age of Bede and forms an original, and equally integral, element in the design of the Ruthwell Cross. In the brief description which follows, I assume that the Ruthwell Cross was originally erected out of doors, and that it was originally oriented as the Bewcastle Cross still is, that is, the two-panel sequence common to both crosses (Christ acclaimed by the

beasts and, directly above it, John the Baptist standing, holding the *Agnus Dei* in his left arm, while he points across his body to it with his right forefinger)[4] originally faced west. If this hypothesis is correct, the first half of the poem faced north, towards cold and darkness. It was appropriate that the designer of the cross should place the grim verses describing the terrible dilemma of the Cross, and its mockery by its enemies, on the narrow side which, inauspiciously, faced north:

> [*Ahof*] ic riicnæ kyninc .
> heafunæs hlafard hælda ic ni dorstæ
> [*b*]ismæradu unket men ba æt[*g*]ad[*re*] [lines 5-7[5]]
> I lifted up a powerful king.
> The lord of heaven I dared not tilt.
> men mocked the pair of us together ...

Central to the Ruthwell narrative, as to the Vercelli *Dream*, is the terrible challenge the Cross had to face on the first Good Friday: to become the killer of its Lord, to bear him to his heroic death. The first Good Friday was believed to have happened on 25 March, the Spring Equinox in the Julian Calendar (which in Northumbria, following Rome, had just begun to be celebrated as the Feast of the Annunciation). The layout of the poem on the narrow sides urges us to move from the first column of verse (on the right) to the second column (on the left): that is, from right to left, sunwise. Continuing this direction, we come from the narrow north side to the broad east side, on which the morning sun would have shone. As we move from north to east, the terrible dilemma posed in the opening lines of the poem is followed by the fruitful dilemma of Mary the Virgin: 'How can this happen, as I know not man?' (Luke 1:34). In Luke's gospel, the Annunciation, at which the angel Gabriel greets Mary as 'blessed among women' ('benedicta tu in mulieribus', Luke 1:28), is directly followed by the Visitation, in which her aged cousin Elisabeth also affirms that Mary is 'blessed among women' ('benedicta tu inter mulieres', Luke 1:42). The Annunciation and Visitation scenes together celebrate the implied growth of Christ in Mary's womb. However, the Ruthwell designer placed two figural panels between the Annunciation and the Visitation scenes. These interpolated panels bring together two basic Christian turning points, faith and repentance. Faith is represented by the healing of the man born blind; immediately above that panel, in a moving image of repentance and love, the woman who was a sinner (identified in the period with Mary Magdalen) washes the feet of Christ with her tears and dries them with her hair. The designer's master-stroke was to place these icons of faith and repentance within an envelope-pattern formed by icons of the Annunciation (below) and Visitation (above). The four panels, read in sequence from the foot of the shaft to the upper stone, encouraged the audience to understand that the conception and growth of Christ in Mary's womb were models for the conception (in faith) and growth (in repentance) of every woman and man in the baptismal womb of the Church. It was not simply that, during Lenten ceremonies (the 'scrutinies'), the Church was described as pregnant, longing to bring

both her catechumens and her repentant sinners to new birth at Easter; in addition individual Christians, male or female, were encouraged to grow (in Lent and in life) towards spiritual maturity so that, like Mary, they could each bear Christ to others in speech and action, and in this way become 'brother and sister and mother' to Christ (Matthew 12:50; see Ó Carragáin 2005, 120-79). The designer established a close unity between the four-icon sequence and the archer-panel which he placed just above the Visitation icon. This panel encourages onlookers to see the unborn babies, hidden as yet within the wombs of Mary and Elisabeth, as 'chosen arrows' hidden in God's quiver. These two chosen ones will appear, fully visible in the glory of the heavenly liturgy, on the opposite side of the upper stone, where John the Baptist points at, and thus acclaims, Christ as the *Agnus Dei* (Ó Carragáin 2009).

When we continue to follow the hint provided by the poem's sunwise layout, and move from the broad east side to the narrow south side, we find that the second half of the Ruthwell poem, inscribed around the vine-scroll on that side, provides remarkable contrasts to the horrors of the north side. On the north side, the Cross and Christ were together mocked by their enemies; now on the south side, the followers of Christ come to the Cross from afar, eager and noble. The Cross which, in the narrative of the north side, 'could not tilt, but had to stand fast' now bows down to the hands of the men: it hands on to them the dead body (*lic*) of Christ to contemplate. This unique narrative was inspired, not directly by the gospel narratives, but rather by eighth-century Good Friday ceremonies in which, at the ninth hour on Good Friday, Northumbrian Christian communities gathered to worship the Cross, and (increasingly, from the early eighth century onward) receive the Eucharist. I know of no other place, in Christian writings, nor in Christian art, where the Cross bows down in this way to hand on Christ to his followers. The startling Ruthwell (and Vercelli) narratives have clear Eucharistic overtones. At Ruthwell, the Eucharistic implications are resolved when, again following the hint provided by the poem's layout, we complete our circuit of the Cross, and come to the second broad side. On this west side we find the most powerful sequence of Eucharistic icons in early medieval art: Christ is 'handed on' to the Ruthwell audience in human form (in the icon of the flight into, or perhaps return from, Egypt) as the fulfilment of the manna which sustained the Israelites in the desert; he is recognized in symbolic form in the loaf broken by the monks Paul and Anthony. At the top of the lower stone, Christ is acclaimed once more in human form by the converted beasts in the desert. On the upper stone, he is once more acclaimed in symbolic form, as the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, by the pointing finger of John the Baptist. On the (now lost) transom of the cross, we may assume that Christ was again represented: surrounded and adored, in the heavenly liturgy, by the four Evangelist-beasts of the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse 4:1–11). Because the transom of the cross is missing, we cannot be sure whether, surrounded by the Evangelist-beasts, he was adored in human form (as in a bust-portrait) or in symbolic form (as the *Agnus Dei*): the nearby monastery of Hoddom provided analogues for either image (Ó Carragáin 2005, 34–35).

The Ruthwell poem was carefully edited so as to encourage its monastic or clerical audience to react to the dynamic programme of the cross in the course of each day and each year. The sun shone only indirectly on the poetic images of dilemma and mockery of the narrow north side: terrible verbal images which nevertheless, paradoxically, surround a great image of the vine-scroll, the Tree of Life. Each day, the sun first shone directly on the catechumenal images of growth and repentance of the first broad (originally east) side. By midday, the sun shone on the southern narrow side, another great Tree of Life around which the second half of the poem is inscribed, telling of how the Cross, on Good Friday evening, handed on the dead body (*lic*) of Christ to his gathered followers. As set out on the Ruthwell Cross, the second half of the poem posed an urgent challenge to any Christian community at Ruthwell. On the first Good Friday evening, the followers contemplated the 'limb-weary' body of Christ. How can Christ, now resurrected and living, be adored and contemplated at present and at Ruthwell? The answer was to be found in the uniquely-rich set of icons on the west side. They all refer to the recognition of Christ in the Eucharist, and they culminate (on the upper stone) in icons of the heavenly liturgy (the *Agnus Dei* and the Evangelists with their beasts), of which earthly liturgies were a foretaste.

From what sort of text was the Ruthwell poem edited? The designer had each half of the poem inscribed around an inhabited vine-scroll, the noblest visual images of the Tree of Life to survive from Anglo-Saxon England. It is reasonable to suppose that the designer was inspired by an early version of the opening vision of the *Dream*, in which that Tree of Life is a central image. The unified programme of the first broad side makes it clear how Mary's courageous response to the challenge of Gabriel, *fortitudo Dei* (his name meant 'the strength or courage of God'; Ó Carragáin 2005, 84–85), led her to bear Christ into human life and provide a model for the growth of faith and repentance in all men and women. The idea that the Virgin Mary is 'blessed among women' is central both to the Annunciation (Luke 1:28) and to the Visitation (Luke 1:42). It is likely that the designer knew a version of the poem which already compared the honour given to the Cross, who on 25 March, faced with the courage of Christ, obediently bore him to his death, with the honour given 'for the sake of all humankind' to Mary, who, in response to the angel who personified the courage of God, bore Christ into life:

> Hwæt me þa geweorðode wuldres ealdor
> ofer holmwudu heofon rices weard .
> swylce swa he his modor eac marian sylfe
> ælmihtig God . for ealle men
> geweorðode ofer eall wifa cynn . (105v 23–26; *Dream* 90–94)
> Indeed the Lord of Glory honoured me
> the Guardian of the heavenly kingdom [honoured me] above hill-trees,
> just as he likewise honoured his mother, Mary herself,
> above all women, for the sake of all humankind.

The Ruthwell Cross programme culminates, on the upper stone of the west side, in a vision of the heavenly liturgy. Its iconographic programme is, for Anglo-Saxon sculpture, uniquely faithful to the themes of early Christian art in combining the ideas of divine justice and divine mercy: a theme particularly explicit in the two panels common to the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses (Christ acclaimed by the beasts and, directly above, John the Baptist acclaiming the *Agnus Dei*: on the theme, see also Ó Carragáin 2012). As it is a public monument, Ruthwell has nothing that directly corresponds to the Vercelli Dreamer's description of his isolation and the death of his friends (lines 124–144: the related Bewcastle Cross, with its request for prayers for souls, presumably of dead local aristocrats, is closer to this aspect of the *Dream*). However, texts describing the fates, after death, of just and unjust souls were circulating in Northumbrian clerical circles with which the commissioner of the Ruthwell Cross may well have been in contact, in particular, the circle which included Bishop Pehthelm of Whithorn, Bishop Acca of Hexham, and Acca's great admirer, Bede (Ó Carragáin 2012, 380). It is reasonable to think that all major elements of the *Dream*, including major themes of the second part of the poem (in particular, the comparison between the Cross and Mary; and the Cross as psychopomp at death and protector at the Last Judgement), formed part of the *Dream of the Rood* tradition almost three centuries before the Vercelli Book was compiled.

This brings us to the manuscript which preserves for us the most extended version of the narrative, the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS CXVII). All the texts of the Vercelli book are written by a single scribe, 'in a stylish and distinctive Anglo-Saxon minuscule of the late tenth century' (Sisam 1976, 20; see now also Scragg 2012, no. 1032). He seems to have preserved some headings and some features of layout from his exemplars. It seems to have been the scribe himself who, when he considered the collection to be complete, determined the present sequence of quires by providing the quire signatures: a roman numeral at the head of the first page of each of the nineteen quires, and a capital letter at the foot of the last page of each. Both Donald Scragg (Scragg 1973) and Celia Sisam (Sisam 1976, 37–44), demonstrated that the scribe made unintelligent errors in copying: errors which suggest that he did not understand Latin, and which were not corrected. Nevertheless, I hope to demonstrate that the collection shows signs of intelligent editing and of the thematic grouping of texts, sometimes amounting to large-scale planning. We are left with a paradox: the scribe seems to have been relatively unlearned, to have copied 'mechanically' a collection which nevertheless shows signs of intelligent large-scale editing. The paradox is best resolved by suggesting that the neat and dogged scribe was working under the direction of an intelligent collector of religious texts in prose and verse. This Collector had clear ideas of what sort of texts he wanted for the collection. The Collector would not have been too troubled to correct the occasional errors the scribe made, because he intended to use the book for his own personal spiritual reading, rather than for communal use. He may already have been familiar with the

homilies and verse, as he himself had chosen them from various exemplars as these became available to him, and as he himself had decided to bring them together in the present sequence, in the present manuscript. I shall refer to this directing editor as the 'Collector'. In this discussion I will be concerned to get inside his (or her) mind. It is best, I think, to preserve a certain deliberate ambiguity in attributing certain features of the manuscript to the 'scribe' or to the 'Collector': we cannot be precise about where the 'strategic' responsibilities of the 'Collector' left off and the 'tactical' responsibilities of the 'scribe' came into play.

There have been a number of excellent analyses of the makeup and contents of the Vercelli Book. Those by Donald Scragg (Scragg 1973) and Celia Sisam (Sisam 1976) are the classic accounts. These have been supplemented by two further fine accounts in recent years. Peter Lucas (Lucas 2011) has provided a first-rate fresh analysis of the palaeographic features of the manuscript. Since this lecture was delivered in Manchester in 2012, Francis Leneghan has published his important paper (Leneghan 2013) on the themes of action and contemplation in the Vercelli Book. Francis Leneghan follows in the path of, and complements, Mary Clayton's classic account (Clayton 1985) of the range of pre-Ælfrician preaching in England. I have learned much from these studies, but my approach differs from all of them. I am concerned with the ways in which, within the Vercelli collection, certain groups of texts (which often combine prose and verse lections) were designed to be read in sequence. I shall argue that the Collector included some texts in order to complement or even to counterbalance the companion-texts with which he had grouped them. If this is so, the placing of a text within a coherent group of texts can provide hints of why the Collector valued it, and how he used it. We can to a certain extent judge a text by the immediate company it keeps in the collection. In this way, the Vercelli collection can provide a primary critical context for the reception-history of *The Dream of the Rood:* its reception by the Collector himself, by other early readers of his collection (however few they were) and by the unnamed person who brought the book, perhaps on pilgrimage, to Vercelli.

We cannot know whether the Vercelli Collector was a man or woman: to save time I will use the pronoun 'he', but scholars have argued strongly that she might have been a woman (for a balanced review of the question, see Zacher 2009a, 209–210; 2009b). We can be certain that he was single-minded in the spiritual reading he chose, whether in prose or verse. The Collector had clear principles in choosing texts for this collection: he only chose explicitly religious texts, and ensured that, every so often, when reading through the collection, he would be reminded of the approach of death and Judgement. The Collector collected some thirty-five lections of verse (sixteen unnumbered lections in *Andreas* and *Fates;* fifteen (numbered) lections in *Elene;* and four unnumbered lections which culminate in *The Dream of the Rood*), but he always arranged these lections so that, reading the collection, he could move smoothly from text to text within a group. Some of the groups are entirely in prose. In others, the

reader is encouraged to move smoothly from verse to its neighbouring prose, or from a prose lection to one in verse.

The last two quires of the manuscript provide a good example of the Collector's methods. They form a unified group of quires or, to use the term which Malcolm Parkes and Pamela Robinson have made popular (see Robinson 1987), a separate 'booklet'. As it is the third such independent group of quires in the manuscript, it shall be referred to as 'Booklet C'. The whole of the first quire, and most of the second, is occupied by the fifteen lections which we now know as the poem *Elene.* It is concerned with the finding of the Holy Cross by the Empress Helena. The poem tells how the Empress Helena induces Judas/Cyriacus to reveal the secret hiding place of the True Cross by inflicting on him a regime of forced starvation, imprisoning him in a deep pit for a full week:

> Heht þa swa cwicne corðre lædan
> Scufan scyldigne scealcas ne gældon
> in drygne seaþ þær he duguða leas
> siomode in sorgum .vii. nihta first
> under hearmlocan hungre geþreatod (127v 25–28, *Elene* 691–695)
> She ordered him to be led away by her soldiers,
> and to be thrust alive, in his guilt – her followers did not hesitate –
> into a dry pit; and there, in shame,
> he remained in sorrow for seven days and nights,
> in painful bonds, afflicted with hunger [...]

In the end, worn out by this extreme, if supervised, starvation diet, Judas gives in. He repents of his opposition to Elene, and promises to conceal no longer where the True Cross is hidden:

> Ic adreogan ne mæg,
> Ne leng helan be ðam lifes treo,
> þeah ic aer mid dysige þurhdrifen wære,
> Ond ðæt soð to late seolf gecneowe :- (128r2–4; *Elene* 705–708, end of lection VIII).
> I cannot endure it,
> nor conceal any longer [the truth] about the tree of life,
> although up to now I was embued with folly,
> and have come too late to realise that truth.

In quire XIX, now the last quire of the collection, the final numbered lections of the poem are followed immediately by an additional lection. This last lection is unnumbered: but otherwise its layout is similar to that of any of the fifteen preceding lections of *Elene.* The last lection comprises an excerpt from an Old English translation of Felix's prose life of the hermit saint, Guthlac. This excerpt begins abruptly with an account of the barrow in which Guthlac took up his life as a hermit, and undertook his heroic struggles against the devils who would tempt him:

> Wæs þær in þam sprecenan iglande sum mycel hlæw of eorþan geworht þone ylcan hlæw iu geara men bræcon *ond* dolfon for feos þingum ða wæs þær on oðre sidan ðæs hlæwes gedolfen swylce mycel seaþ on þæm seaþe ufan se eadiga wer guðlac him hus *ond* eardung stowe getimbrode
>
> (133v 7–11, Homily XXIII, 1–5)

> There was in the aforementioned island a great barrow made of earth; long ago men had broken into and dug that barrow for the sake of treasure; likewise, on the other side of the barrow a great pit was dug: over that pit the blessed man Guthlac constructed a house and dwelling-place for himself.

It is of interest that this barrow is equipped with a deep pit, and that it is in this pit (presumably constructing a roof over it) that Guthlac endures his heroic siege against the devils. The word for pit here, *seaþ*, is the same word which, as we have seen, was used in *Elene* (693a) to describe the pit in which the Empress imprisons, and starves, the recalcitrant Judas. In his desert *seaþ*, Guthlac is attacked by devils, who tempt him to pride. They suggest to him that a mere one- or two-day fast is not enough. One should fast for a whole seven days. Only such a fast would make Guthlac like God himself, who took six days to create the world and then permitted himself to rest on the seventh day:

> Þin fæsten ne sceal beon þæt a twega daga fyrst [...] ac on seofon nihta fyrste fæsten bið to clænsigeanne se man swa on syx dagum ærest god ealles middangeardes fægernesse gehiwode *ond* on þam seofeðan hine ræste swa þonne gedafenað þane man gelice syx daga fæsten þone gast frætewigean *ond* þonne þy seofeðan dæge mete þycgan *ond* his lichoman ræstan
>
> (134v 7–13, Homily XXIII, 68–74)

> Your fast must not be just for one day [...] but a fast needs to last seven days to cleanse a person. Just as at the beginning God created all the beauty of creation in six days, and rested on the seventh, so a man should adorn his spirit by six days' fast, and then eat and rest on the seventh day.

The close parallels to, and contrasts with, *Elene* are hardly a matter of coincidence. It is likely that the Collector added the Guthlac excerpt deliberately, as the sixteenth section in his two-quire booklet C, to remind himself, and other possible readers, that extended fasts, when not undertaken under the close supervision of a spiritual director, could be a temptation to pride and could lead a person (in particular, a solitary hermit?) to spiritual disaster. It is worthwhile noting in passing that, within Booklet C, the epilogue to *Elene* (numbered as lection XV) provides us with good evidence of how the Vercelli Collector himself is likely to have read the verse and prose of that booklet (and others) as a unity. In the epilogue, Cynewulf describes how he has striven hard, with the help of divine grace, to penetrate into the spiritual meaning

of those writings he has found on the cross. For Cynewulf, this effort of prayerful reading was urgent, because his life and the world itself is coming to an end, and the day is soon coming when the Lord himself will give his definitive judgement on each person's activities. Cynewulf's urgent efforts to sift out what is valuable from his texts are intended to prepare himself and his readers for the coming act of the divine intelligence which, in its Judgement, will tell every being the truth about their actions (see Ó Carragáin 2001, 187-91; also Ó Carragáin 1981). We can be sure that the Vercelli Collector agreed with Cynewulf. The Collector preserved another text which summed up the tradition with memorable brevity:

> swa swa isidorius cwæð mid þam gebedum ge beoð geclænsode *ond* mid þam readingum ge bioð intimbrede
>
> (15v1–3, in Booklet A; Homily III, 127–128).

> [...] as Isidore said: with prayers you are cleansed and with readings you are built up.

Let us now turn to the booklet in which this brief epitome of meditative reading occurs. The first three quires of the Vercelli Book form another independent group of quires. This first booklet in the collection is also an impressive example of the Collector's editorial interests. The booklet begins with a close paraphrase of the Good Friday lection, the Passion of Christ according to St John. Then, at a later date (see Sisam 1976, 37), the Collector decided to add Homilies II and III to this Passion narrative. Homily II provides a vivid account of the Last Judgement, partially in rhythmic prose. The Collector evidently felt that the imminent return of Christ in Judgement provided him with an urgent motivation for meditating on the Passion of Christ. At the Last Judgement, the instruments of the Passion, including the Cross itself, would be seen by sinners as a Judgement against their sins:

> *ond* on þam dæge bið dryhtnes rod blode flowende betwox wolcnum . *ond* in þam dæge bið dryhtnes onsyn swiðe egeslicu *ond* ondryslicu *ond* on þam hiwe þe he wæs þa hine iudeas swungon *ond* ahengon *ond* hiora spatlum him on spiwon
>
> (9v 8–14; Homily II, 7–10).

> On that day the Lord's Cross will be flowing with blood in the clouds, and on that day the Lord's countenance will be very terrible and dreadful, and will appear as He was when the Jews scourged and crucified him, and spat their spittle at him.

In Homily III, we return to the present life, a life devoted to ascetic practices (including, as we have seen, reading and prayer). But the Collector felt that the best motivation for the ascetic life was the approach of Judgement: Booklet A ends with Homily IV, which Don Scragg has justly called 'one of the most dramatic and successful of all the addresses of the soul to the body in Old English literature'

(Scragg 1992, 88). Homily IV does not repeat the vivid images of the Last Judgement in Homily II. Instead, it relates the coming Judgement much more thoroughly to the reader's life than Homily II had done. Homily IV describes how the devil 'each day bends his bow at us and wants to shoot his arrows [of temptation] at us' (Homily IV, 319–320). Homily IV encourages in the reader a full interiorization of the eschatological perspective dramatized, in general scenes, in Homily II. That progression is important in understanding the Collector's methods: we will see it again in the ordered progression between the second and sixth homilies in Booklet B (Homilies VI–X), five lections for which the scribe (perhaps under the instructions of the Collector, or perhaps to remind himself of the importance of preserving texts in the right order) provided roman numerals at the end of each homily (Homily VI, the first homily in the booklet, did not need any such mnemonic numbering).

The Vercelli Collector had an interesting attitude to the liturgical year. He cannot have intended his collection of texts to provide any system of homilies or readings 'per annum', throughout the year, of the kind a monastic community would require. In looking at Booklet A (Homilies I-IV) we have begun to appreciate the indirect way in which the liturgical year was valued by the Collector. Homily I paraphrased the Gospel for Good Friday: the central feast in Lent and Passiontide. But then, instead of providing more readings for Lent and Passiontide, the Collector chooses homilies which enabled him to explore, for himself and perhaps for other readers, and at any season of the year, the eschatological and ascetic implications of that penitential season. After all, as Homily II makes clear, the instruments of the Passion will be seen again when Christ returns in Judgement: the necessity of reforming one's life is correspondingly urgent.

In short, the Collector used the atmosphere, and the central gospel narrative, of Lent and Holy Week as a devotional stimulus to repentance. Arranged in sequence as they are, the four lections of Booklet A could be used for spiritual reading at any season. No doubt the Vercelli Collector would have agreed with St Benedict of Nursia, who felt that his life should always be Lenten in character (Benedictine Rule, Ch. 49.1; Fry 1980, 252): though, as we shall see, it is unlikely that he was a monk in the late tenth-century sense, living in community with an elaborate round of liturgical observance. This tendency to conjure up the themes of a particular liturgical season, but then to subordinate the liturgical reminiscences to ascetic themes which could be used at any time, is clearly seen in Booklet B, Quires Four to Seventeen, the largest booklet in the collection. The booklet begins with an extremely ambitious piece of editing (Homily V-*Andreas*-*Fates*-Homilies VI–X). Like the gathering of Booklet A, the collecting of this part of Booklet B was accomplished in various stages, no doubt as suitable materials came to hand. The heading to the first homily in the Booklet, Homily V, firmly establishes the relevance of the liturgical season of Advent: the heading to Homily V proclaims 'TO MIDDAN WINTRA. OSTENDE NOBIS DOMINE', 'At Midwinter: Show us, O Lord, thy mercy [and grant us thy salvation]'. Versions of the chant 'Ostende nobis domine' (based on Psalm 84/85:8) were sung, particularly, on

the first Sunday of Advent (for Mass chants see Hesbert 1935, nos. 1a, 6 and 8, also no. 199a; for Office chants see Hesbert and Prévost 1963–79, vol. 1, 6 and vol. 4, 335).

The homily tells of the Nativity, and of the significance of the *Pax Romana* within which the Nativity took place. Next follows the long poem *Andreas*, with its added epilogue *The Fates of the Apostles*: the added lection of *Fates* generalizes the theme of *Andreas*, placing that saint's pilgrimage in the context of the martyrdoms of the other apostles. The Feast of St Andrew falls on 30 November, always on or near the First Sunday of Advent. Just after the sixteen verse lections of *Andreas* and *Fates*, their framing is completed by Homily VI: that homily returns us to the Advent season, as its heading makes clear: 'INCIPIT NARRARE MIRACULA QUE FACTA FUERANT ANTE ADUENTUM SALUATORIS NOSTRI DOMINI NOSTRI IESU CHRISTI'. Although we have returned to the themes and atmosphere of the Advent season, this heading is not a rubric: it provides no indication of any particular feast in Advent on which the lection could be read to a congregation.

The Vercelli Collector seems to have felt that liturgical seasons were of devotional importance, but that this importance was overridden by the necessity for ascesis, which he valued as the most sensible preparation for the imminent end of his own life and of the world itself. After the ascetic material of Homily VII, the source of which has recently been brilliantly set forth by Samantha Zacher (2009b), the Collector completed his Advent Booklet with no less than three eschatological homilies: first, a vivid general account of the Last Judgement in Homily VIII, followed by even more extended and searching analyses of the Last Judgement in Homilies IX and X. Again we start with a liturgical season, Advent, and end with a resounding statement of the importance of preparing for the last things, Homilies VIII to X: the scribe emphasized the progression between the homilies by placing a roman numeral after each: as these numerals indicate, Homily X, the last in the sequence of eschatological homilies, is the sixth homily in Booklet B.

Homilies XI–XV provide another clear example of the Collector's preoccupation with eschatology, with preparing for the last things. The four homilies seem to have come from a single exemplar: three Rogationtide homilies, no doubt included for their ascetic themes, plus a more general ascetic homily: as its heading indicates, the Collector valued it as 'an educational homily' (*lar spel*) 'to be used at any time one wishes' (Homily XIV, fo. 76v 8–9). In the liturgical year, the Rogation Days were a prelude to the major feast of the Ascension: but if the Collector had access to an Ascension homily, he omitted it: a good indication that his primary interest was in the ascetic life, not in liturgical celebration. Instead, the Collector supplements the ascetic Rogation-set of XI–XIV with another dramatic account of the end of the world. The scribe clearly labelled it as such: 'ALIA OMELIA DE DIE IVDICII' (80v 7; Homily XV). The scribe may have copied this heading from his exemplar; or, perhaps under the guidance of the Collector, he may have adapted it, for instance by the addition of the word 'ALIA', 'another'. Whether the heading was adapted or simply copied, the heading makes perfect sense within Booklet B of the Vercelli Book: this heading

marks a return to Last Judgement material, i.e. to the concerns last fully developed in Homilies VIII–X.

Booket B had begun with a well-planned Advent section, which, with its complementary eschatological material, stretches down to Homily X. It made sense for the Collector to add to the booklet more material related to the season after Christmas, as that material came his way: Homilies XVI (OMELIA EPYFFANIA DOMINI, fo. 85v 8) and XVII (DE PURIFICATIONE. SANCTA MARIA, fo. 90v 22). But, immediately after these, the scribe copied Homily XVIII, DE SANCTO MARTINO CONFESSORE, fo. 94v 24. Once more, the devotional progression from Homily XVI to Homily XVIII is devotional rather than liturgical. The St Martin homily may, of course, have been included because the compiler, as a cleric, had a particular veneration for the great Gaulish saint. It may also have had something to do with the fact that St Martin, like St Andrew, was associated with the mid-winter season of Advent: the Gallican Advent began after Martinmass, 11 November (Martimort 1986, vol. 4, 92). But the eschatological preoccupations of the Collector lead me to suspect that he was above all attracted to the St Martin homily because of its emphasis on the proximity of death and the presence of threatening devils, who are ready to swallow souls in just the way that greedy diving birds, cormorants or mergansers (*scealfras*, Homily XVIII, 231) gulp back fish. A striking feature of the St Martin homily is its long account of his edifying and happy death, surrounded by his monks, the fitting end to his life of heroic saintliness.

But this long account of a saintly death posed a practical problem for the Vercelli Collector: how could the homily be applied to the spiritual condition of a less perfect Christian? We have seen that, when *Elene* described the efficacy of supervised fasting as a path to enlightenment and conversion, the Collector was uneasy with that idea, and countered it with the Guthlac excerpt which presented excessive fasting as a temptation of the devil. Now, he refused to allow himself (or other possible readers) to relax too comfortably into thoughts of a happy death. Instead, he provided a salutary shock when at the end of the St Martin homily, the reader turned over the page. The homily ends on fol. 104r. Overleaf, on fol. 104v, the less-than-saintly reader received a sudden urgent warning to think of their own perilous situation in the here and now. After the optimistic conclusion of Homily XVIII, the abrupt change of tone was calculated to brace any reader to the task in hand:

> Huru ðæs behofað hæleða æghwylc
> þæt he his sawle sið sið sylfa geþence
> hu þæt bið deoplic þonne se deað cymeð
> asyndred þa sybbe þe ær samod wæron
> lic *ond* sawle (101v 1–4, *Soul and Body I*, 1–5a)
>
> Indeed it behoves every man
> to meditate on his soul's journey: journey:
> how terrible it will be when death comes,
> and broken is the former relationship between
> body and soul.

The new sequence of four verse lections, which begins with *Soul and Body* and ends with *The Dream of the Rood*, provides a psychological counterweight to St Martin's peaceful death. Ordinary men and women must prepare actively for death, so as to avoid the damnation that faces the evil soul. The damned soul visits its body at midnight, and berates it for the sins which has led its soul to damnation: the lection ends with the terrifying image of the work of the eager worm Gifer, biting into flesh, eyes, bone (fo. 103r 13–20; *Soul and Body I*, 116–126). The second lection in the sequence, in which a saved soul visits its body to praise it because it was ascetic during its life, presents the other side of the stark choice, damnation or salvation, which the reader is encouraged to face. The two *Soul and Body* lections imagine a time when choice is no longer possible: a time when the body is frozen in death, a prey to eager worms, and when the soul's eternal fate is already determined.

A missing folio has deprived us of the end of the praise of the good soul for its body and the beginning of the third verse lection in the sequence, which modern scholars have labelled *Homiletic Fragment I*. With this third lection we move back from the time after death to a time when, before death, choice is still possible. But the vision of the poem is still pessimistic and gloomy: the theme of this third lection is that, in these evil times near the end of the world, one can trust nobody. People nowadays speak fair to one's face but have treachery in their hearts. They are like bees, in that they have honey in their mouths but a sting in their tail. It would be difficult to imagine a more abrupt and consoling counterweight to this grim vision of universal treachery and untrustworthiness than the opening of the fourth and final lection in the series:

> Hwæt ic swefna cyst secgan wylle [104v 7, *Dream* line 1]
> Now: I will tell of the best of dreams [...]

The *Dream* provides exactly what a clerical reader, working his way through the sequence of four verse lections, needed at this point: a vision that is trustworthy, a patron that can be relied upon. The vivid images of treachery and betrayal in the preceding lection prepared readers for the pun at the beginning of the *Dream* (line 4) between the neuter noun *treo*, 'tree, wood' and the feminine noun *treow*, 'fidelity, faith, pledge, grace'. This final lection provides what the reader needs: consolation, something to trust.

It is not impossible that the Collector himself, or someone in his circle, may have composed the two central lections (lection two, 'the good soul speaks to its body' and lection three, the vision of universal untrustworthiness) so as to link the terrifying images of the midnight visit of the Bad Soul to its body (the first lection) with the fourth lection, the midnight vision of *The Dream of the Rood*. After all, both the first lection and the fourth are explicitly placed at night (*Soul and Body I*, 10; *Dream*, 1–3). The manuscript presentation of each lection is similar: an opening paragraph sets the scene, and both in the case of *Soul and Body I* and of the *Dream*, each opening paragraph is, unusually, set off by a *positura* mark before the text continues with a prominent capital letter (compare fo. 101v 10, *Soul* 14–15 with the layout of fo. 104v

16–17, *Dream* 12–13). What is certain is that, at this stage in Booklet B, the Collector was editing carefully and consistently. The scribe recopied lines 22 and following of the *Dream*, on to what is now the beginning of Quire XV (Sisam 1976, 39). In effect, the scribe did a careful job of splicing, recopying all of Quire XV so as to link Quires XVI and XVII to the preceding material in Booklet B, that is, so as to splice Homilies XIX–XXII on to this long and complex booklet.

Homilies XIX-XXI are a unified set of Rogation homilies, with a close unity: they begin with the creation of the world, and end with a vivid account of the Last Judgement (an account which incorporates the account in Booklet A Homily II (on this, see Zacher 2009a, 63-105). Once more, this set of Rogation homilies lacks any homily for the feast of the Ascension. Once more, they are followed by eschatological material, yet another 'Soul and Body' text. Don Scragg (Scragg 1973) demonstrated that this text, though we call it Homily XXII, is not really a homily, but a series of excerpts edited from the *De Lamentatione Animae Peccatricis* by Isidore of Seville. Once more, as in Homily IV and the first part of the verse *Soul and Body*, we are in the presence of a sinful soul and its lamentations. The Collector clearly felt that this grim theme was important to his spiritual life and to that of any other readers who might use the collection.

This new Soul and Body text is the last item in Booklet B. The end of the lamentations of the sinful soul occupies the first two folios of a new quire. Perhaps the rest of the new quire remained blank; perhaps it contained other texts. If it did, these texts were cut away and, as at present bound, the end of Homily XXII (the lamentations of the sinful soul), lead directly to the next quire and to Booklet C, the fifteen lections of *Elene* and the unnumbered sixteenth lection about Guthlac's temptations and happy death. As we have already seen, the Guthlac text, though now labelled Homily XXIII, was also a set of edited excerpts. It is possible that, when compiling this part of the collection, the Collector was running out of suitable homilies, and was therefore instead choosing excerpts from longer literary works, such as Isidore's *De Lamentatione* and Felix's *Life of Guthlac*. It is also possible that at this stage in gathering his spiritual reading, the Collector was becoming more independent-minded, more sure of himself, more determined to provide texts (excerpts if necessary) that reflected his recurrent preoccupations.

Let us sum up the ways in which *The Dream of the Rood* contributes to the Vercelli Collection. An interest in the Cross is found throughout the Vercelli Book: that book begins with an extended account of the Passion and Good Friday (Homily I), contains several homilies in which the Cross reappears in the heavens at the end of the world, contains the *Dream of the Rood* in which the Cross appears at midnight and is promised as a saving symbol at the Last Day, and ends with Booklet C, in which the major text is *Elene*, which recounts the finding of the True Cross by the Empress Helena. In the first place, the *Dream* not only provides a consoling fourth lection to counterbalance the gloomy *Soul and Body* poem, set in a world in which repentance is no longer possible, and of the *Homiletic Fragment*, a treacherous world in which you can trust nobody. It

also provides a much more consoling image of the role of the Cross on the Last Day than is found elsewhere in the collection. When the dreamer in *The Dream of the Rood* is first of all frightened by the visionary tree, saying 'Syllic waes se sigebeam ond ic synnum fah, forwundod mid wommum' ('beautiful was the victorious tree and I was stained with sins, grievously wounded with the marks of sin', *Dream* 13–14) he is reacting in the way the average reader of the Vercelli homilies might be expected to when faced with such a vision, familiar as he would already be with the terrifying appearance of the Cross on the Last Day in judgement against sinners. Only gradually will the poem reveal to the Dreamer that in this case the visionary Cross brings, not Judgement but salvation: that it will take care of him even if he is at a loss for words on the Last Day, and indeed that it will come and fetch him here on earth, bring him to heaven, and set him down in eternal happiness. The idea of being brought physically to heaven was certainly important for the Vercelli Collector, because in the Guthlac excerpt, Homily XXIII, he has St Bartholomew fetch Guthlac in precisely the same way, save him from the attacking devils, and bring him to heaven (fo. 105v 19–28; Homily XXIII, 142–152). The comparison between the Cross and St Mary in *The Dream of the Rood* is likely to have been also important to the Vercelli Collector: he expected that St Mary would be one of the patrons who, like St Peter, would save a third of the sinners from damnation on the Day of Judgement (Homily XV, 141–149). When the vision of *The Dream of the Rood* has come to an end, the Dreamer immediately plunges into prayer: that was important to the Vercelli Collector, who saw reading and prayer as a dialogue: when we pray we speak to God, when we read God speaks with us. The epilogue to the poem *Elene* has a similar view of spiritual reading: the effort of chewing over a text is rewarded by spiritual illumination, freedom from depression, an ability to express oneself in prayer. In short, the Vercelli Collector is likely to have valued *The Dream of the Rood*, not just for the beauty of the opening vision or Good Friday narrative, but equally for reasons less popular with modern readers or, indeed, editors: the comparison between the Cross and Mary, the role of the Cross as patron and psychopomp, the role of the Dreamer as model for the reader's own prayer to the Cross.

A final question, to end this discussion: Why did the Vercelli Book end up in the Cathedral library of Vercelli, a small city on the plain of Lombardy, half-way between Milan and Turin? In a recent, and characteristically brilliant, article, Elaine Treharne (Treharne 2007) has assimilated the Vercelli Book to the Benedictine revival, and has even suggested that it might have been a bishop's book: an anthology compiled for personal use by a bishop of that reformed version of Anglo-Saxon clericalism. The article is both learned and persuasive; however, I fear I am not convinced by it. There is not a single item in the Vercelli Book that is specifically monastic, and it has no texts by the major authors of the revival, such as Ælfric or Wulfstan. As long ago as 1972, when I told him about the recurring and personal devotional preoccupations I was discovering in the collection, Malcolm Parkes directed me to the important article by Eric John (John 1966). It was Malcolm Parkes who pointed out to me that

the crucial difference between canons, and monks strictly so called, was that canons could have personal property; and therefore that it was likely to be a canon, rather than a monk, who could plan a personal devotional collection like the Vercelli Book. This was the line I followed in my doctoral thesis of 1975: that, while the Vercelli Collector certainly practised spiritual reading in forms recommended (by Cynewulf and others) within the dominant monastic spiritual tradition of the age (and that therefore the collection could in general terms be called 'a monastic *florilegium*'), the Collector was much more likely to be a canon rather than a monk (Ó Carragáin 1975, vol. I, 47–49). As Professor Charles Wright and earlier scholars have pointed out, the Vercelli Book contains texts which seem critical, if anything, of the revival, with references to the interference of the King and other laity in the affairs and property of the Church (Wright 2002).

The Vercelli Book seems to have languished, not much read, for perhaps two generations in England, perhaps kept by the ecclesiastical community within which the Collector had lived. If during this period the community was reformed, and became an up-to-date Benedictine house, the book must have come to be seen increasingly as not very useful, and as old fashioned. Its original compiler, as we have seen, had a taste for texts which by his time (in the late tenth century) were being replaced by the new prose of the Benedictine Revival. The book was not suitable for communal use. After all, it mingled prose and old-fashioned verse in a frustrating way, which required readers to read prose and verse in sequence and work out for themselves the ways in which the juxtaposed texts complemented each other. In a very irritating manner, it provided no headings or descriptions for the majority of its texts: no one could page casually through the manuscript and easily work out where he was in it. The book was too idiosyncratic; too much of a once-off compilation made for the needs of a single person: a senior canon, perhaps.

Perhaps the Vercelli Book reached Italy because of two factors: a reformed English community (now more strictly monastic) was happy to get rid of an increasingly old-fashioned book, and some cleric who felt that, at least, the book would provide good reading for a group of English pilgrims on their way to Italy, perhaps to Rome. There is no reason for us to think that the Vercelli Book was compiled for use on an actual pilgrimage. Nevertheless, the longer it lay around in the local collection of English books, the possibility of using it for reading on a pilgrimage is likely to have become more evident. It contains two extended and vivid accounts of journeys into foreign countries, the verse account of St Andrew's perilous expedition among the cannibalistic Mermydonians and the account, also extended and also in verse, of St Helena's voyage to discover the secret location of the True Cross and to bring back some of its relics to Rome. The fact that, in the poem *Andreas*, Christ himself appears, disguised, to act as a companion and guide to Andrew on his perilous expedition, would also have appealed to a pilgrim. Such verse texts as *Andreas*, *Elene* and *The Dream of the Rood* were clearly designed for reading aloud, or indeed

perhaps for a form of chanting. But the homiletic form of most of the prose texts, with their exhortations to an audience as 'Dearly Beloved brethren', would also have made the prose texts suitable for reading out to a group of pilgrims on their long and arduous way to Italy. The emphasis throughout the collection on the nearness of death and the fragility of life, was particularly suitable for physical pilgrimage, which acted out the Christian idea that we have here no lasting dwelling, but must seek that which is to come.

If, perhaps having left the Vercelli Book at Vercelli for safe keeping, the pilgrimage got as far as Rome, the pilgrims would not only be able to contemplate and pray at the relics of the Passion which St Helena had brought to Rome and which were kept in the chapel of St Helena at the basilica of Holy Cross in Jerusalem, the so-called Sessorian basilica. Indeed, it was to that basilica that the pope and his followers came at the ninth hour on Good Friday to worship the relics of the Cross, in the way that, in *The Dream of the Rood*, the followers of the Cross come from afar to receive the body of Christ from the Cross. Quite apart from Holy Cross in Jerusalem, pilgrims would at Rome have been able to see several apse mosaics in which the Cross appears on the Last Day in the clouds of heaven, such as the apse mosaic of the Lateran basilica and that of Santa Pudenziana (Ó Carragáin 2005, Ó Carragáin 2012).

But why did the Vercelli Book end up, not at Rome, but at Vercelli? In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the cathedral town of Vercelli had one outstanding claim to fame. In its cathedral Church it contained the body of St Eusebius, the fourth-century bishop of Vercelli. He was famous as the founder of the way of life of canons: he had encouraged the priests of his diocese to live in community, to recite the Office in common, but without embracing poverty. In other words, his canons could still have individual possessions, such as individual manuscripts, for their own private use. St Eusebius of Vercelli represented an older form of communal clerical life: he lived a century before St Benedict of Nursia. The spiritual traditions handed on from St Eusebius came from a rather different spiritual world from the reformed Benedictinism of St Benedict of Aniane in the ninth century, or of that monk's tenth-century English followers such as Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald. I would like to suggest that the man who persuaded an Anglo-Saxon library to part with this vernacular anthology of prose and verse, to allow him to bring it away for reading in sequence to his companions on pilgrimage, was a sympathizer with the older spirituality associated with canons (Ó Carragáin 1998). I like to think that he may have been an old man, like the Dreamer of *The Dream of the Rood*. It would be fitting if such a man, feeling himself somewhat of a misfit in one of the highly organized monasteries of the Benedictine Revival should, by bringing the manuscript on pilgrimage, have preserved for us one of the great poetic triumphs of early Christian England, of the world of Theodore of Canterbury, Aldhelm of Malmesbury, Pehthelm of Whithorn, Acca of Hexham and Bede of Wearmouth-Jarrow: *The Dream of the Rood*.

Notes

1. This lecture is dedicated to the memory of two friends who have died in recent years. Professor Malcolm B. Parkes kindly discussed the contents of the Vercelli Book with me in detail, on a number of occasions, in the early 1970s. I owe very much to him, including the suggestion that the book was a canon's book. Gerald Roberts provided, over forty years, hospitality, friendship, and lively debate on a wide variety of topics; at their hospitable table Gerald listened patiently while Jane Roberts and I discussed matters Anglo-Saxon (the only subject he balked at was the Ruthwell Cross). In addition I wish particularly to thank Professors Jane Roberts and Samantha Zacher for their generous assistance and encouragement.
2. When quoting from texts in the Vercelli Book, I give the punctuation and capitalization of the manuscript. I refer in the first instance to the manuscript folio, and the place of the quotation on the manuscript page. However, for the reader's convenience I set poetry out as Old English verse is usually set out in modern editions, and also give the line references found in modern editions. I set prose out as continuous prose, giving references to the folio of the manuscript, and to the place of the quotation in the manuscript page. I follow this with a reference to the page and lines of Donald Scragg's edition (1992) of the Vercelli Homilies; I also give the modern number of the homily, where this is not clear from the context.
3. From the perspective of the onlooker, the distych is on the left side of the cross. But if we think of the form of the reliquary as analogous to that of a human body, with the jewelled side as its front and the *Agnus Dei*, surrounded by the Evangelists, as its back, the distych runs up its right side. The Brussels Cross can thus be said to 'bleed' on its right side, like the visionary tree/Cross in the *Dream* ('swætan on þa swiðran healfe' [104v 22; *Dream* 20a]). The initial letter 'b' of the verse 'blode bestemed' is placed several centimetres below the crossing, and followed by interlace ornament; the rest of the word '[b]lode', with its alliterating companion 'bestemed', covers the terminal of the right arm. Divided thus between upright and arm-terminal, all of the verse 'blode bestemed' can be seen at once, when looked at from the right side of the cross. The layout gives a particular intensity to the phrase, '[b]lode bestemed', by placing it startlingly close to the eye of the onlooker. The verse, laid out thus, encourages the onlooker to recall at once the spear-wound in Christ's right side, and also the nail-wound in his right hand. For the layout of the distych, see Ó Carragáin 2005, 340, fig. 55 and discussion at 346. On the imagery of this verse, see also Ó Carragáin 1983.
4. Paul Meyvaert repeatedly argued (most recently in Meyvaert 2011) that in the *Agnus Dei* panels the human figure is seated, and that in his right arm he holds a book. Meyvaert never looked at the Ruthwell or Bewcastle crosses, and based his observations on photographs. I follow the unanimous accounts of these panels by the following five scholars, each of whom has closely and repeatedly examined both monuments, and each of whom has kindly discussed the panel with me: Rosemary Cramp, Richard Bailey, Jim Lang, Jane Hawkes and Catherine Karkov.
5. In quotations from the Ruthwell poem I give a somewhat simplified form of the transcription, punctuation and lineation to be found, together with photographs, in Ó Carragáin 2005, xxii–xxix.

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