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TRANSFORMATIONS: READING *THE DREAM OF THE ROOD* WITHIN MONASTIC TRADITIONS

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Cover image: The Ruthwell Cross, South Face, Visitation (public domain).

Editorial Preface

Éamonn Ó Carragáin (28 May 1942 – 18 October 2024) was Professor of Old and Middle English at University College Cork. When his health declined in August and September 2024, he realised it would not be possible to write the short book he had recently started working on. As he wrote at the time, at the core of the book was a hypothesis that, 'because of the state of my health, I can neither develop nor substantiate':

> The hypothesis is that two closely related poems, the Ruthwell Cross Crucifixion Poem and *The Dream of the Rood*, when seen as coherent, and understood within their immediate contexts (the Ruthwell high cross and the Vercelli Book), contain original and closely related theologies. These theologies correspond to themes found in Bede's early commentaries, in particular his commentaries on the Song of Songs and on the gospel according to Luke.

The book was to have had a preface, five chapters and an epilogue. The five chapters, as described, centre on:

1. Transformations: Reading *The Dream of the Rood* within Monastic Traditions (this document comprises a draft of part of this chapter)

2. Theological and Liturgical Developments A.D. 650–750 (on the *Versiculi familiae Benchuir,* liturgy and religious services in Rome, and Bede's circle in the early eighth century)

3. Transformative Gift Exchange (on the Ruthwell Cross and its Crucifixion Poem)

4. The Bewcastle Cross-Shaft and Northumbrian Runes (to which Tom Birkett had agreed to contribute)

5. The End of the Tradition (on the Brussels Cross and resonances in homilies for Palm Sunday). The final chapter was to have explored 'the Vercelli context of the poem to see if any elements in the poem would have caused its survival until the tenth century' and thus its inclusion in the Vercelli Book.

In the summer of 2024, Éamonn began work on the first chapter, the core argument of which he summarised as follows:

> For the first time [this chapter reads *The Dream of the Rood*] in the light of Bede's Commentary on Luke. It shows the vital importance of Bede's treatment of Christ's encounter with the women of Jerusalem. This brings in the Green Tree and, close to it, 'Father Forgive them for they know not what they do'.
>
> The vital moment in *The Dream of the Rood* is the confrontation between the Green Tree and Christ the Hero hastening to complete his expedition. The Green Tree in obedience to the Lord's Word stands fast and avoids its own justified hatred of the woodcutters, its enemies. By standing fast in obedience to the Lord's Word, it bears him to his death and in the meantime is transformed into the Palm Tree, which itself becomes the rood and which hands on Christ's dead body to his faithful followers who came to him from afar.
>
> At the beginning of my work on *The Dream of the Rood* I had two insights: the link with [Pope] Sergius (Exaltation of the Cross, Marian Feasts, Agnus Dei) and Crucifixion as Annunciation. Bede's Commentary on Luke brings together Mary's response to the courage of Christ both in the Annunciation by Gabriel and the moment of Crucifixion.

> In Bede's commentary on the encounter with the women of Jerusalem the most striking feature is Bede's analysis of 'Father Forgive them for they know not what they do'. Don't forget the Latin wording Bede used, Iesus Dicebat, is past continuous. 'Forgive' is the unanimous Word of the Lord, whether the Lord be God the Father or God the Son: it is a unanimous command of the Trinity.
>
> *The Dream of the Rood* and the Ruthwell Cross have both suffered from fragmentation [in scholarship]. It is perhaps not surprising that the fragmentation has centred on the dismissal of lines 76–94, the comparison the cross makes between itself and Mary. [In the case of Ruthwell there has been] continued opposition to seeing the structural significance to the cross of the three Marian scenes: see especially the refusal to see that the Visitation scene, leading to John the Baptist and the Agnus Dei, is central to the upper stone.
>
> Bede's Commentary on Luke suggests that the poet of the first version of *The Dream of the Rood* came from the Circle of Bede and was inspired by the emphasis on women in that commentary. It enables us to see the Ruthwell Cross as a careful editing and elaboration of that poem. At Ruthwell we move from the crucial obedience of the Cross to the Lord's Word to understanding the fruits of that obedience in Baptism and the Eucharist.

What follows is Éamonn's incomplete commentary on the first 43 of the 156 lines of the *Dream of the Rood*. This partial commentary, offering additional details and insights, should be considered in tandem with three lectures he delivered in 2024, recordings of which are available here:

- Ó Carragáin, É. (2024) '*The Dream of the Rood* and of Three Trees: The green tree, the palm tree, and the tree of life', Original lecture title: 'The Green Tree, 'dryhtnes word', and a page (282v) in the Book of Kells', A lecture to the Seminar for Medieval Studies (SAMS), University College Cork, 31 January 2024, Cork Open Research Archive (CORA), https://hdl.handle.net/10468/15570

- Ó Carragáin, É. (2024) 'Ruthwell and Bangor on Loch Laíg: compatible monastic self-images', A lecture to the Patristics Symposium, Faculty of Theology, St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth, 6 April 2024, Cork Open Research Archive (CORA), https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17733

- Ó Carragáin, É. (2024) 'Bede and his scholarly circle: *The Dream of the Rood* and the Ruthwell Cross', A lecture to the Seminario di Studi Comparati sulle Religioni (SAKRA), 10 June 2024, Cork Open Research Archive (CORA), https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17734

It was Éamonn's hope that, even in this incomplete form, his commentary might prove useful to other scholars.

This document, along with over fifty of his publications and other outputs, is available in the Cork Open Research Archive (CORA). The permanent URL for the Éamonn Ó Carragáin collection is https://hdl.handle.net/10468/15242

CHAPTER ONE

TRANSFORMATIONS: READING *THE DREAM OF THE ROOD* WITHIN MONASTIC TRADITIONS

as of Sunday, 2024.09.01 @ 15.17

A ruminative reading of a monastic poem

In the first part of this chapter, I attempt to read *The Dream of the Rood* as far as possible in the way a monastic reader might have done. First, I give a facsimile of lines of the manuscript text, and then transcribe it. The transcript is intended to help a modern reader to make sense of the facsimile passage which it follows. It is followed in turn by a literal translation.

In my transcript, I reproduce the pointing or pause-marks of the manuscript; below I lineate the text following editions and discussion and giving their line numbers. I add an occasional dash (–) to help the modern reader understand variations or formulae. As Daniel Donoghue has shown,[1] Anglo-Saxon readers acquired a skill of identifying such formulae and separating them out from their immediate context.

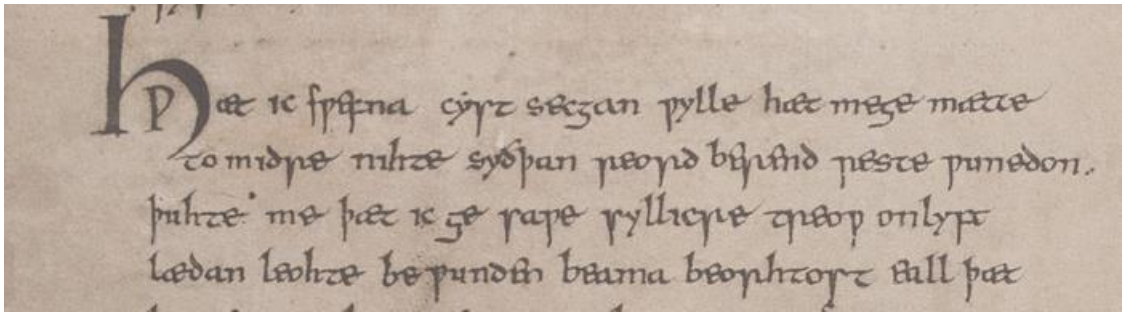
The transcript and translation include lines or phrases of the facsimile which have already been discussed, or will be discussed later. To help the reader, I include such short passages within braces {}. This will remind the reader of the facsimile that they have already studied this opening phrase or will meet the closing phrase in the next section of text.

The transcripts and translations might help readers to become familiar with the Vercelli manuscript. Between facsimile, transcript, translation and commentary, this chapter encourages a slow, ruminative reading of the manuscript text itself.[2] The Vercelli text is, after all, the hard evidence we have of *The Dream of the Rood*. The rest is speculation.

The enigmatic midnight vision of the Tree of Life:

Calling for silence and attention (‘Hwæt’) the singer intones ‘the best of dreams’, of ‘a most beautiful tree’, ‘raised aloft’ in midnight silence (‘when all voice-bearers were at rest’).

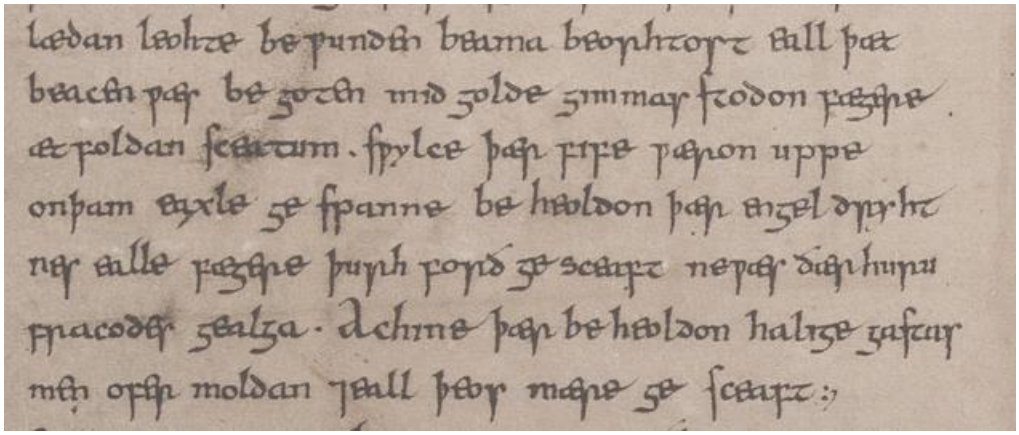
[1] Daniel Donoghue, *How the Anglo-Saxons Read Their Poems* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).
[2] The poem begins on fol. 104v/7.



Hwæt ic swefna cyst secgan wylle
hæt mege mætte | to midre nihte
syðþan reord berend reste wunedon • | 3
þuhte me þæt ic ge sawe syllicre treow
on lyft | lædan leohte bewunden 5
beama beorhtost eall þæt | {beacen wæs} 6

So:[3] I want to tell of the best of dreams
which I dreamed near midnight
after voice-bearers were at rest •
It seemed to me that I saw a most wonderful tree
towering aloft surrounded by light – 5
the brightest of beams – all that {beacon was}

In the silence the tree is ‘suffused with light’: this beam of wood brings light (the pun on ‘beam’ works in Old as in modern English). This ‘beacon’ brings light in midnight darkness.



{on lyft} | lædan leohte bewunden
beama beorhtost eall þæt | beacen wæs 6
begoten mid golde gimmas stodon
fægere | æt foldan sceatum • swylce þær fife wæron 8
uppe | on þam eaxle ge spanne beheoldon þær engel dryht|nes
ealle fægere þurh forð gesceaft newæs ðær huru | fracodes gealga • 10
Ac hine þær beheoldon halige gastas |
men ofer moldan 7eall þeos mære ge sceaft **:,**

[3] I reproduce Seamus Heaney’s brilliant modern equivalent for the Old English call for silence as the opening word in his translation of *Beowulf*, from the Irish oral storytelling tradition. Heaney, S. *Beowulf translated by Seamus Heaney.* Faber and Faber. 1999.

{the brightest of beams – all that beacon was}
encrusted with gold – gems stood out
beautiful over the surfaces of the earth • Likewise there were five
up on the shoulder-span –
all[4] fair things throughout future-creation – indeed that was not a criminal's gallows •
But there looked upon it holy spirits,
men over all the earth and all this glorious creation **:,**

This tree is not green and growing but 'covered with gold'. Beautiful gems surround it 'at the surfaces of the earth'. 'Foldan sceatas' (8a) can connote the vast expanses of the earth.[5] We might think of gems scattered widely over the earth's surface. That would imply that this vision is cosmic: spreading not only aloft towards the sky, but also towards the ends of the earth. Five gems are singled out 'at its shoulder-span' (8b–9a). 'Shoulder-span' fits the intersection of a cross rather than the branches of a living tree. On the Cross Christ bore five wounds (four in his limbs, and the spear-wound on his side). In the Irish kingdom of Osraige, each of a pair of ninth-century high crosses at Ahenny bears the image of the five wounds at their shoulder-span, arranged as a quincunx around their crossings. On both of these Irish crosses, interlace patterns recall fine metalwork: bosses of gold and precious metals rather than gems. A similar quincunx survives on a high cross at Iona. In the context of a cross-tree such references to 'five' (verbal in the *Dream*, visual at Ahenny and Iona) recall St Peter's lapidary phrase, 'by his wounds you have been healed'.[6] In its gems, this silent vision brings images of healing joy.

[4] In this verse the word 'all' is redundant. Some scribe, whom I have called the 'eall-revisor', added the word 'eall', no doubt to add devotional intensity. Ó Carragáin, É, 'Crucifixion as Annunciation: the relation of *The Dream of the Rood* to the liturgy reconsidered', *English Studies* 63 (1982), 487–505 at 498–500. Alfred Bammesberger came independently to similar conclusions: 'Hidden glosses in manuscripts of Old English poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England* 13 (1984), 43–49 at 47–48.

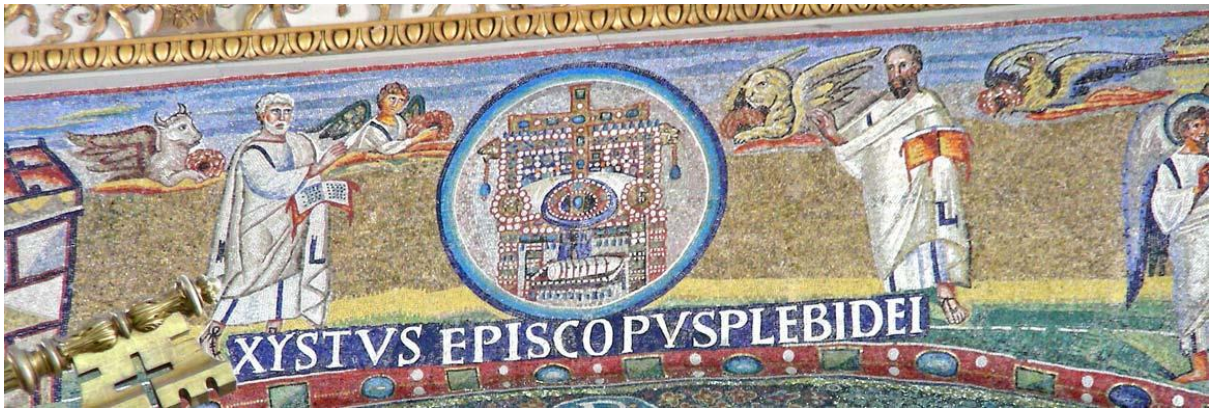
[5] See *The Seafarer*.

[6] I Peter 2:24b. On early devotion to Christ's wounds see Jennifer O'Reilly in Carol A. Farr and Elizabeth Mullins, (eds), *Early Medieval Text and Image 1. The Codex Amiatinus, the Book of Kells, and Anglo-Saxon Art* (London: Routledge, 2019). Chapter 1, pp. 48–54; Chapter 5, pp. 143–6; Chapter 11, *passim*.



The high crosses at Ahenny, Co. Tipperary

The vision spans history as well as space. The poetic compound ‘forð-gesceaft’ (10a), literally ‘forth-creation’, blends space (creation) with future time (*forð-*). The glorious tree-cross prepares us for a new age: the end-times or Parousia, when Christ will himself return in glory.[7] But the very same line (10b) interrupts this optimistic vision with a jarring note: the cross-tree is no ‘criminal’s gallows’. Later in the poem, a criminal’s gallows-tree is exactly what the tree will be required to become (31). For the moment, all human beings throughout the earth contemplate the vision (12b) and share its nobility (12a). In silent unity, humans together with ‘holy spirits and all fair things throughout future creation’ contemplate ‘the angel of the Lord’. Gazing on this vision, humans on earth are already united with the holy spirits of heaven (11b).



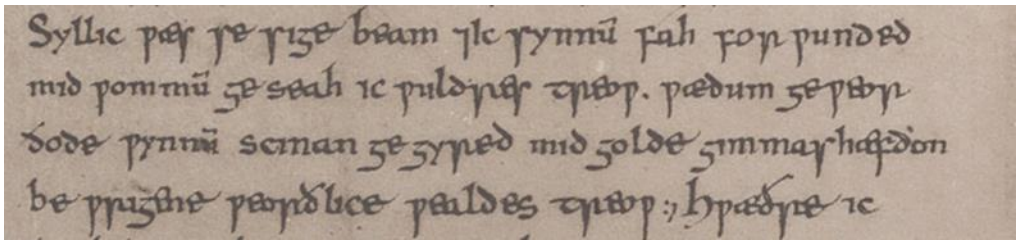
‘Hetoimasia’ or ‘preparation’ tableaux above the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (see Note 7; image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10515225)

[7] The idea can perhaps be understood as a verbal equivalent of the visual ‘hetoimasia’ or ‘preparation’ tableaux, in which the Cross (sometimes accompanied by other instruments of the Passion, such as crown of thorns, nails and spear) are enthroned as ‘preparatory signs’ of the appearance of Christ himself at the Parousia. There is a splendid fifth-century version in mosaic just above the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore on the Esquiline, Rome.

In the monastic culture of the early Middle Ages the Church was still understood as the body of Christ, a spiritual reality spanning heaven and earth – and not yet primarily in juridical terms. All creation (‘mære gesceaft’, 12) would be redeemed and glorified by becoming part of that divine body. Through baptism, human beings had become members, together with those who dwelt in heaven, of Christ. While still on earth, humans were in exile, until they joined the ‘holy spirits’ (11b) in heaven, their true homeland. These lines look forward to the final sections of the *Dream* (135–56), where they will be echoed. Lines 10–12 also echo one of the earliest Christian texts to survive, the cosmic hymn to Christ in Philippians 2:5–11.[8] It ends as follows:

> Therefore God also highly exalted him,
> And gave him the name that is above every name,
> So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
> In heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> And every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> To the glory of God the Father.

The ‘five gems’ image (8b–9a) has already presented the visionary tree as a symbol of the wounded but glorified body of Jesus. In Bede’s commentaries Jesus was often referred to as ‘the angel of the Lord’, that is, ‘the messenger of God the Father’: he alone had revealed to humans the triune divine nature, and his participation in it.[9] In lines 10–12 the recollection of the Pauline hymn is enigmatic: differences are as significant as similarities. Though the name ‘Jesus’ is hinted at by the images of the vision, it is not given openly. The ‘fair beings’ (10a) contemplate the Cross-tree, but they do not speak, confess or bend the knee. Instead, they keep an expectant silence. It is the Cross-tree itself, the angel or messenger of the Lord, who will soon speak to tell of the stages through which it was transformed into close unity with the incarnate Word. But we are first told more about this tree of life and the strange reaction of the Dreamer to it.

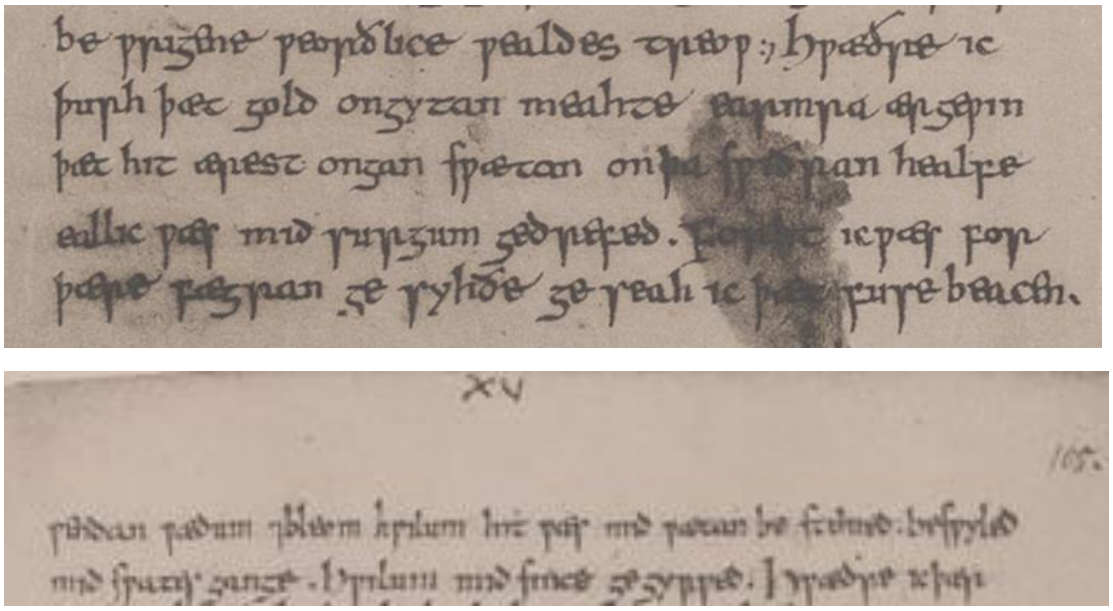


Syllic wæs se sige beam ⁊ic synnu*m* fah
for wunded | mid wommu*m* geseah ic wuldres treow •
wædum geweor|ðode wynnu*m* scinan
gegyred mid golde gimmas hæfdon |
be wrigene weorðlice wealdes treow **:,**

Glorious was the victory-tree and I stained with sins –
deeply wounded with stains – I saw the tree of glory •
honoured in its garments shining with joy
geared out in gold – gems had
clothed in glory the tree of power **:,**

[8] This hymn, recorded by St Paul, is among the earliest surviving Christian chants. It was intoned as the Epistle for Mass on the Sunday before Easter, and verses from it echoed throughout Holy Week.
[9] References in Bede, *passim*.

The Dreamer tends to get things wrong. Although the five gems were an image of healing and forgiveness, he failed to understand this. To him, the gems only revealed his own shame and guilt. If his sins gleam, it is only to make him hateful: depending on context,'fah' can mean 'brightly-gleaming' (like gold or gems) and 'hateful' or 'shunned', and it is clear that the second meaning is paramount here.[10] While the Cross-tree is 'honoured by its garments' (15a) of gold and gems,[11] the Dreamer is 'terribly wounded' by his stains. Although the Dreamer understands the vision as one of glory (14b) and power (17b), he does not yet see that its power is to heal, nor that he will be invited to participate in it. The manuscript establishes a close link between 'tree of glory' ('wuldres treow', 14b) and 'tree of power' ('wealdes treow', 17b). A reader of the manuscript, especially if savouring the text *sotto voce* or getting it by heart, will find it easy to switch between murmuring 'wealdes treow' ('the tree of power', 17b), and the metrically satisfactory 'wealdendes treow' ('the ruler's tree'). That 'emended' phrase echoes 'engel dryhtnes' (9b), and strengthens still further the idea that this vision is a symbolic messenger of the Lord. Manuscript readers can keep both possibilities alive in their imagination, and alternate between them as best suits their spiritual needs. The editor of a printed edition is forced to be 'superior' to the scribe, as well as judgemental. By forcing a 'definitive' reading, a modern editor is forced to narrow the ruminative experience that reading the manuscript can provide.



{… be wrigene weorðlice wealdes treow }
Hwæðre ic | þurh þæt gold ongytan meahte
earmra ærgewin | þæt hit ærest ongan
swætan on þa swiðran healfe | – eallic wæs mid surgum gedrefed •
Forht ic wæs for | þære fægran ge syhðe geseah ic þæt fuse beacen • |
wendan wædum 7bleom hwilum hit wæs mid wætan be stemed •
beswyled | mid swates gange • hwilum mid since gegyrwed •
{**H**wæðre ic þær }|

[10] *A Thesaurus of Old English*, <https://oldenglishthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk>.
[11] Barbara Raw has seen this image as an echo of the purple garments which honour crosses in early Byzantine and Roman art (see the lower church of San Crisogono in Trastevere, and Santa Maria Antiqua in the Forum). Raw, B. '*The Dream of the Rood* and its connections with early Christian art', *Medium Ævum*, 39 (1970), 239–56, at 245–46 and n. 32.

However through that gold I could make out 18
ancient-strife of wretched ones in that it first began
to sweat on the right side – I was all cast down by sorrows • 20
Frightened I was by that fair sight – I saw that shape-changing symbol
switching its garments and colours – at times it was drenched with wet • 22
swilled with the dripping of sweat • **A**t times geared out in treasure •

As the Cross-tree 'begins to sweat on the right side' the Dreamer begins to 'see through the gold' to 'the ancient struggle of wretched ones' (19a). The coinage 'ærgewin', indicating that the strife is past, contrasts with the optimistic 'forðgesceaft' (10a) which had hinted at the beginning of a new age. In heroic poems such as *Beowulf* 'battle sweat' was occasionally used as a kenning for 'blood', an example of litotes or heroic understatement.[12] It implies that battle is hard work, and being killed can make you sweat blood. The Dreamer responds to the 'battle-sweat' metaphor, but fails to understand the wider visionary reality before him.[13] Any monastic reader, and in particular any monastic singer, would have been alive to the predominant role in the passage, not of 'blood' images, but images of 'water', 'flowing' and 'wet'; and in particular to the image, 'sweat on the right side' (20a). That echoes two important scriptural passages, one in the Tanakh, the other in the New Testament. The book of Ezekiel culminates in an extended vision of the Temple that would be restored (Ezekiel 40–47). Towards the end of the vision, the angel of the Lord brings the prophet back to its entrance:

[1]Et convertit me ad portam domus et ecce aquae egrediebantur subter limen domus ad orientem
facies enim domus respiciebat ad orientem
aquae autem descendebant in latus templi destrum ad meridiem altaris
[2]et eduxit me per viam portae aquilonis
et convertit me ad viam foras portam exteriorem viam quae respiciebat ad orientem
et ecce aquae redundantes a latere dextro [emphasis mine]

[1]And he brought me again to the gate of the house, and behold waters issued out from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the forefront of the house looked toward the east: but the waters came down to the right side of the Temple or the south part of the altar. [2]And he led me out by the way of the north gate and he caused me to turn to the road outside the outer gate, to the way that looked toward the east: *and behold there ran out waters on the right side.* [Ezekiel 47:1–2] [emphasis mine]

In Ezekiel's vision, the water from the right side of the temple grows into a vast river: wherever that river flows, salt water is converted to fresh, and all beings enjoy full life. The trees on its banks bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit provides food, and their leaves healing (Ezekiel 47:3–12). This vision of salvation is taken up at the beginning of the final chapter of St John's Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation):

[1]Et ostendit mihi *fluvium aquae vitae splendidum tamquam cristallum*
procedentem de sede Dei et agni [2]in medio plateae eius
et in utraque parte fluminis *lignum vitae*
adferens fructus duodecim
per menses singula reddentia fructum suum
et folia ligni ad sanitatem gentium
[3]et omne maledictum non erit amplius

[12] *Beowulf,* lines 1459, 1606, 1693, 2964.
[13] Later in the poem (48) the poet will use the unambiguous 'mid blode bestemed'.

et sedes Dei et agni in illa erunt
et servi eius servient illi
[4]et videbunt faciem eius
et nomen eius in frontibus eorum
[5]et nox ultra non erit
et non egebunt lumine lucernae neque lumine solis
quoniam Dominus Deus inluminat illos
et regnabunt in saecula saeculorum (Apocalypsis, 22:1–5) [added emphasis mine]

[1]And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. [2]In the midst of the street thereof, and of both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [3]And there shall be no curse any more: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it. And his servants shall serve him. [4]And they shall see his face: and his name shall be on their foreheads. [5]And night shall be no more. And they shall not need the light of the lamp, because the Lord God shall enlighten them. And they shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:1–5)

All four Evangelists believed that at the moment of Christ's death on the Cross, he became the temple of the new covenant, the person in and through whom the divine could henceforth be encountered. John's gospel announced the theme very early in his narrative. He tells of Jesus, at the Passover on the first of his three visits to Jerusalem, whipping the merchants and moneychangers out of the Temple forecourt (John 2:13–25). When asked for a sign to explain this shocking though prophetic action, Jesus answers:

[19]Destroy this temple; and in three days I will raise it up. [20]The Jews then said: six and forty years was this temple in building; and wilt thou raise it up in three days? [21]But he spoke of the temple of his body.

John gives the theme full expression just after he narrates the moment of Christ's death. At the request of the Jewish authorities, Pilate sends soldiers to break the legs of the three crucified malefactors, so as to ensure their deaths (by suffocation) before nightfall (when the sabbath began) so as not to defile the sabbath:

[32]The soldiers therefore came: and they broke the legs of the first, and of the other that was crucified with him. [33]But after they were come to Jesus, when they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. [34]But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side: and immediately there came out blood and water. [35]And he that saw it hath given testimony: and his testimony is true. And he knoweth that he saith true: that you also may believe. [36]For these things were done that the scripture might be fulfilled: *You shall not break a bone in him* [Exodus 12:46]. [37]And again another scripture saith: They shall look on him whom they pierced [Zachary 12:10].

John's gospel emphasises that in the death of Jesus the paschal lamb of the new covenant is sacrificed: all previous paschal sacrifices are now superseded. Christian tradition saw in the blood and water that came forth from Jesus's side an image of the Church, born from the side of the second Adam as he slept in death; and in particular of the mysteries central to the Church: Baptism (water) and the Eucharist (blood). As we shall see, such imagery is central to the *Vidi aquam* antiphon which inspired the poet of *The Dream of the Rood*. Following such scriptural and liturgical texts, most visual representations of Christ on the Cross would represent him as wounded on the right side, not (as physiology might suggest) on the left.

The synoptic gospels also emphasized that the Temple cult of the divine was superseded at the moment of Christ's death. God would henceforth be encountered in and through Christ crucified. Mark, Matthew and Luke all emphasize that, when Christ died, the veil of the temple was rent open:

> [44]And it was almost the sixth hour: and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. [45]and the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. [46]And Jesus crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. And saying this, he gave up the ghost. (Luke 23:44-45)

Bede explains this passage in his commentary on Luke:

> **And the curtain of the temple was torn in half.** This happened as the Lord was expiring, as Matthew and Mark attest, but Luke related it by prolepsis. For wishing to join miracle to miracle, after he said *the sun was darkened*, he immediately thought it necessary to add, *and the curtain of the temple was torn in half.* The curtain of the temple is torn, in order for the ark of the Covenant *and all the sacraments of the Law, which were formerly hidden*, to appear and to pass to the Gentiles. Previously it had been said: *In Judaea God is known, his name is great in Israel*, but now he says, *Be exalted, God, above the heavens, and your glory above all the earth*, but after the passion he says, *Going therefore, teach all nations*.
> **And Jesus crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. And, saying this, he breathed his last**. By calling on the Father, he declares that he is the Son of God. But by commending his spirit, he reveals not a defect of his own power, but his confidence in his Father's power. For he loves to give glory to the Father, in order to instruct us to give glory to the Creator. And so, he commends his spirit to the Father, in accordance with what is said with a glad heart and joyful lips in another psalm: *Because you will not leave my soul in hell, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption*.

The antiphon *Vidi aquam* was a synthesis of such ideas. It was sung at solemn Vespers on each day in Easter week. On each of those evenings, the neophytes or newly-baptized Christians were required to re-enact the stages of their Baptism during the Easter Vigil. The surviving documents which preserve the antiphon imagine the ceremonies which took place at the Lateran basilica at fifth-century Rome, though we must think of these elaborate settings being adapted to individual and less splendid settings throughout Europe, and to infant baptism where the baby-neophytes would have been carried by their godparents. As during the Easter Vigil, the Vespers ceremony began in the basilica itself. Then, again recalling the Vigil, the neophytes, accompanied by clergy, proceeded to the nearby baptistery complex. More psalms were sung at the font. The neophytes, having recalled the scene of their baptism, finally proceeded from the baptistery itself, along a short open pathway, and turned left into the Chapel of the Cross. It was in that chapel that, during the Easter vigil, the bishop had conferred on them the gift of the Spirit, the culmination of Baptism (an act that in later centuries would be understood as a distinct sacrament, Confirmation). The centrality of the cross to baptism was expressed with memorable clarity by St Ambrose:

> Aqua enim sine praedicatione dominicae crucis ad nullos usus futurae salutis est; cum vero salutaris fuerit crucis mysterio consecrata, tunc ad usum spiritalis lavacri et salutaris poculi temperatur.[14]
>
> Water ensures the future salvation of no-one without preaching the Lord's cross; when it is made life-giving by being consecrated by the mystery of the cross, it can be made into a spiritual washing and a life-giving cup.

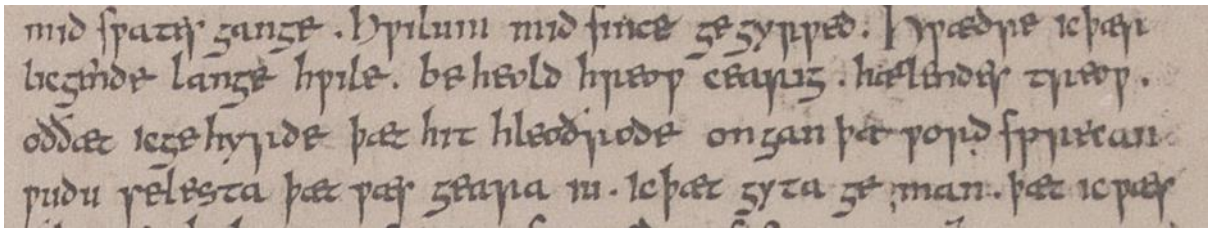
The choir accompanying the neophytes sang the antiphon during the short procession from the baptismal font to the Holy Cross. Proceeding from font to Cross made it clear that the new birth of Baptism was a participation in Christ's death and resurrection. It was by his death on the cross that Christ had now become the source of salvation. From his side, the right-hand side as in Ezekiel's vision of the Temple, salvation flowed to all the earth:

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[14] Ambrose, *De mysteriis*, par 12-16, Sources chrétiennes 25bis, pp. 162–4. Romans 6:1–4. *Liturgia horarum* Matins Tuesday fifteenth week per annum; LH III, p. 433.

Vidi aquam egredientem de templo, a latere dextro, Alleluia,
et omnes ad quos pervenit aqua ista salvi facti sunt,
et dicent Alleluia, Alleluia.[15]

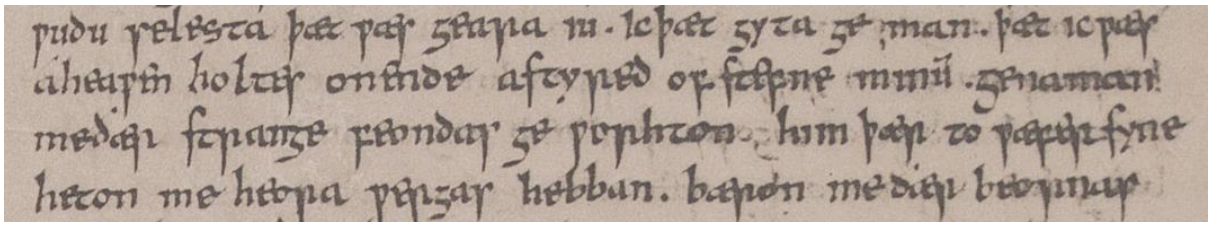
I saw water coming from the temple, from its right side, Alleluia,
and all those to whom the water has come are saved:
and they sing 'Alleluia, alleluia'.



{mid swates gange • **H**wilum mid since ge gyrwed} •
Hwæðre ic þær | licgende lange hwile •
beheald hreow cearig • hælendes treow • | 25
oððæt icge hyrde þæt hit hleoðrode
ongan þa word spræcan | wudu selesta • 27

{with the dripping of sweat • At times geared out in gold • }
However I lying there for a long while •
gazed deeply sad at the saviour's tree • 25
Until I heard it talking –
the best of wood then began to speak • 27

The Dreamer has twice misread the joyful midnight vision. The gems which symbolized victory and salvation reduced him to sadness and guilt: thus, at line 25 he is 'deeply sad' or 'troubled' ('hreow cearig', 25a) by 'the saviour's tree' ('hælendes treow', 25b). If his sad bewilderment is to be transformed, the tree itself must speak to him:

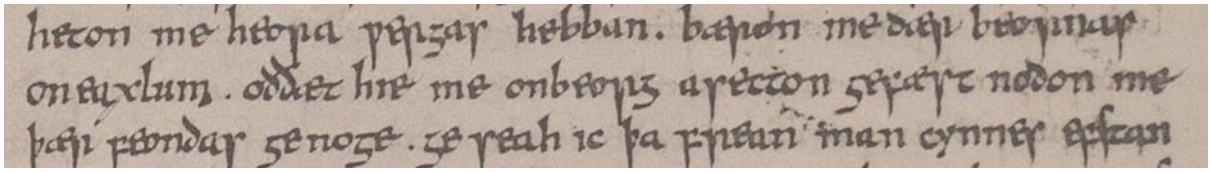


{wudu selesta}
Þæt wæs geara iu • icþæt gyta ge man • 28
þæt ic wæs | aheawen holtes onende
astyred of stefne minu*m* • genaman | meðær strange feondas 30
ge worhton him þær to wæfersyne | heton me heora wergas hebban •
{bæron me ðær beornas}

[15] *Corpus Antiphonalium Officii*, edited by R.-J. Hesbert and R. Prevost, 6 vols (Rome, 1963–79), I, 184. The antiphon summarizes the account of saving water flowing from the visionary temple in Ezekiel 47:1–12; see Ó Carragáin, É, 'Vidi aquam: the liturgical background to *The Dream of the Rood* 20a: "swætan on þa swiþran healfe"', *Notes and Queries*, n. s., 30 (1983), 8–15.

{the best of wood}
That was long ago • I still remember it •
that I was hewn down at the edge of a wood
torn up from my roots • strong enemies seized me there
made me into a spectacle for themselves | ordered me to bear aloft their criminals •
{the warriors carried me}

The tree's own story is a strange one. Long ago, it was growing at the edge of a wood (the natural place for woodcutters to search for accessible trees) when woodcutters cut it down, tore it from its roots. The tree naturally sees them as its 'strong enemies' (30b). The word 'feondas', here translated 'enemies', can even mean 'demons', depending on the context. The tree stresses the violence and shame it suffered: uprooted and made into a 'spectacle' ('wæfersyne', 31a), something to be mocked. The enemies 'seize' (30b) the tree and 'order' it ('heton me', 31b) to raise aloft their criminals. In effect at 31b they 'sentence' it to serve as a gallows-tree, a tree of death. This story echoes that of Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise, but there are major contrasts: the tree was innocent and never transgressed against a divine command. Its anger at its enemies is normal, even human. One of the images the tree uses in its fury, 'spectacle' (31a), was also used of Christ on the way to Calvary.[16] But an Anglo-Saxon reader is likely to have appreciated that the tree's journey into exile contrasted with Christ's unique way of the cross. Some woodcutters cut down a growing tree, carry it off, and efficiently set it up (33a) as a gallows. The woodcutters act normally, even professionally. The story is told from an unusual point of view, that of a silent but sentient creature. The poet has done an unusual thing: imagined humans injuring a sentient tree, which excites in the tree a natural desire for vengeance.



{heton me heora wergas hebban •}
bæron meðær beornas | on eaxlum • oððæt hie me onbeorg asetton
gefæst nodon me | þær feondas genoge • {ge seah hic þa frean man cynnes efstan}|

{they ordered me to raise their criminals aloft}
the warriors then carried me | on their shoulders • until they set me up on a barrow[17]–
they fastened me | there a good number of the enemies • {then I saw the lord of humankind hastening}

The woodcutters, carrying out their 'sentence', transform the living tree into a tree of death. The detail that 'they carried me on their shoulders' (32a) may have recalled Christ carrying his Cross to Calvary helped (as in the synoptic gospels) by Simon of Cyrene; but a monastic reader would have seen a strong contrast between the present narrative and that of the gospels. The woodcutters inflict violence and shame on the tree; they set it up on a burial mound or barrow ('beorg', 32a). In contrast with Calvary ('the place of the skull') this is an

[16] See Augustine on the spectacle of the procession to Calvary: Lectures or tractates on the Gospel according to St John, Tractate 117 (John 19:17–22).
[17] = grave-mound.

Anglo-Saxon landscape with native burial-mounds. Around the eighth century, a gallows-tree was set up on one of the Sutton Hoo barrows.[18]

The tree's enigmatic narrative was inspired by Bede's commentary on the gospel of Luke. The poem moved swiftly from the visionary tree of life sweating from its right side (20a) to the story of the green tree (28). Bede also links a green tree and Christ, the wood of life. He does so when commenting on the episode, unique to Luke, where on the way to Calvary Christ turned and spoke to the women of Jerusalem:

> And there followed him a great multitude of people and of women, who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them, said: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me; but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days shall come, wherein they will say: Blessed are the barren and the wombs that have not borne and the paps that have not given suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us. And to the hills: cover us. For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry? [*Quia si in uiridi ligno haec faciunt in arido quid fiet?*] (Luke 23:27–31).

Bede sees Jesus's prophetic warning to the women as referring to Titus' destruction of Jerusalem (and the temple) in A.D. 70. In this context it is likely that the phrase 'earmra ærgewin' (*Dream*, 19a), 'the ancient strife of wretched people', refers specifically to that terrible event:

> [Jesus] signifies the days of siege and captivity by the Romans that are going to come. […] And specifically Josephus reports that as the Romans were pressing upon them, the Jews eagerly sought the caves of the mountains and hills […].[19]

Bede emphasizes how important it is that Luke's scene centres on weeping women. Their anguish contrasts with and condemns the heartless enjoyment of the powerful men who brought Jesus to death:

> A great crowd followed the cross of the Lord together, but not with one and the same mind. For the people who brought about his death happily followed to see him die; but the women followed to weep for him whom they wanted to live as he was about to die, as he was dying, and when he was dead. It was not that the women's lamentation alone followed him, because a small crowd of believing men was also very sorrowful about his passion; rather it is that the lamentation of the female, as it were the more despised sex, was able more freely to display to the chief priests and rulers who were present what it felt towards them. But because *the Lord knows who are his* [2 Tim 2:9], ignoring the crowd of raging people, he turns his eyes and mouth to the lamenting women, saying[20]

Bede includes among those whom Jesus saw to be 'his own' the followers, women as well as men, who had come with Jesus from Galilee (these would have included Jesus's mother, Mary, as well as Mary Magdalen). Just like Isidore of Seville, whom we discussed in the Introduction.[21] Bede makes it clear that a person who wants to understand the scene aright must ask for the gift of contrite, humble and remorseful openness to divine grace:

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[18] M. Carver, *Sutton Hoo. A seventh-century princely burial ground and its context.* (London: British Museum Press, 2005), 347–49.

[19] Bede, *In Lucam* VI, lines 1490–91, 1496–8; trans. Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, Bede: Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, translated with an introduction and notes (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023), 617.

[20] Bede, *In Lucam* VI, lines 1456–69, p. 399; trans. Kendall and Wallis, p. 616 (op. cit. note 19).

[21] The relevant passage on reading and prayer is from Isidore's *Sententiarum libti tres*: 'Doctrina sine adjuvante gratia, quamvis infundatur auribus, ad cor nunquam descendit; foris quidem perstrepit, sed interius nil proficit. Tunc autem Dei sermo infusus auribus ad cordis ultima pervenit, quando Dei gratia mentem interius, ut

> It should be noted, when he addresses the daughters of Jerusalem, that not only the women who had come with him from Galilee, but also citizens of that same city adhered to him. And now as well, a double-minded crowd accompanies Jesus who is about to be, as it were, sacrificed; for some read, hear, and reflect upon the narrative of his passion as if it were a tale worthy of laughter, and others, as is fitting, with eyes shedding tears. The former see the mysteries of his flesh and blood as if they were cheap and common fare; the latter perceive them with feelings worthy of so great a matter. But when he sees a contrite and humble heart, and in addition the grace of salvific remorse, the Lord, the diligent teacher and agreeable comforter, bestows the means by which the heart should weep more willingly, sweetly, and fully.[22]

In Bede's commentary, Jesus explicitly links the 'green wood' of Luke 23:31 to himself, the fruitful 'Tree of Life' of the final chapter of St John's Apocalypse (and of Ezekiel's vision):

> **Quia si ni uiridi ligno haec faciunt, in arido quid fiet?** Viride lignum seipsum suosque electos aridum uero impios et peccatores significat. Si ergo ipse, inquit, qui peccatum non feci qui lignum uitae merito appelatus fructus gratiae deodenos per singulos menses adfero sine igne passionis a mundo non exeo, quid putas eos manere tormenti qui fructibus uacui ipsum insuper uitae lignum flammis dare non timent? Si nunc est tempus ut incipiat iudicium de domo Dei et omnes qui uolunt pie uiuere in Christo persecutionem patiuntur, qui finis eorum qui non credunt euangelio Dei?[23]

> **For if in the green wood they do these things, what will be done in the dry?** Green wood signifies himself and his chosen ones, but dry wood the unfaithful and sinners. Therefore, if I myself, he says, - I, who did not make sin, and who, deservedly called the wood of life, bring the fruits of grace throughout each of the twelve months [Ezekiel 47:12, Rev. 22:2] – if I do not leave life without the fire of suffering, what kind of torment do you think awaits those, who being without fruits themselves, do not fear to give the wood of life to the flames as well? If now is the time that the judgement of the house of God begins [John 2:19–21; 19:34–37; Luke 23:45] and all who want to live godly in Christ suffer persecution [2 Tim. 3:12], what is the end of these who do not believe in the gospel of God?[24]

Inspired by Bede's reading of Luke's unique 'green wood' image, the poet has invented the story of an arboreal 'Everyman', an 'Everytree'. It is green, not only in the sense that it has been newly cut down, but that, to paraphrase Bede, it is potentially one of Christ's chosen ones. The woodcutters chose it to be a gallows-tree, but no criminal was ever hanged from its branches. Instead it is immediately chosen by the Lord to bear him to his death. Poet and monastic audience would both have been aware that in Latin the word 'lignum', stands both for 'wood' and 'tree': this may have made it less startling to omit all mention of Christ being nailed to the Cross, and of the two malefactors crucified on his right hand and on his left (Luke 23:33–34). In this new narrative Jesus the hero advances swiftly, and in freedom chooses his death. The poet creates a sudden confrontation between the 'green wood' and Christ who in his great courage ('elne mycle', 34a) hastens to climb upon it.

This is the turning point of the 'green wood' story, the moment when it begins to be transformed towards greater things. The tree makes its own choice, to obey the 'word of the Lord':

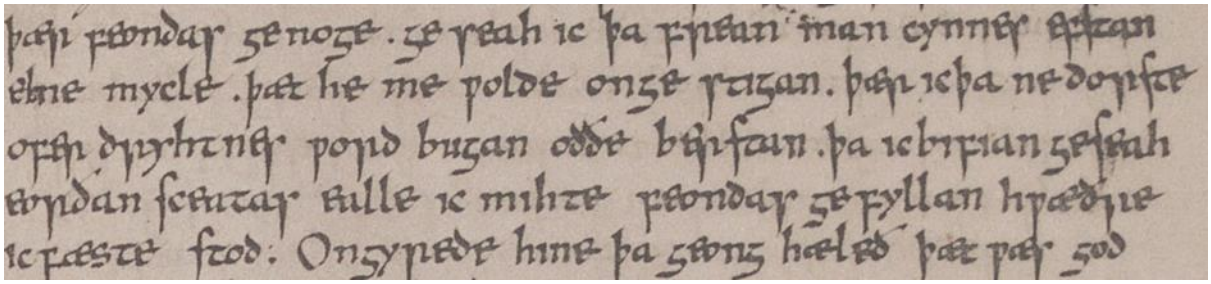
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intelligat, tangit.' (Learning, unless helped by grace, even if it is poured into our ears, never gets into the heart. It shouts and roars outside, but does not benefit the inner person. Therefore the word of God, heard by the ears, comes to the depths of the heart when God's grace, touches the mind within, so that it may understand.)

[22] Bede, *In Lucam* VI, lines 1476–86, p. 400; trans. Kendall and Wallis, p. 617 (op. cit. note 19).

[23] Bede, *In Lucam* VI, lines 1509–18, pp. 400–401.

[24] Trans. Kendall and Wallis, p. 618 (op. cit. note 19), with some scriptural references added.



{gefæst nodon me] þær feondas genoge •} ge seah ic þa frean man cynnes 33
efstan | elne mycle • þæt he me wolde onge stigan •
þær icþa ne dorste | ofer dryhtnes word 35
bugan oððe berstan • þa ic bifian geseah |
eorðan sceatas ealle ic mihte
feondas gefyllan hwæðre | ic fæste stod • 38
{**O**ngyrede hine þa geong hæleð þæt wæs god | [ælmihtig]}

{… they fastened me there] a good number of the enemies •} I saw the lord of humankind 33
hasten | with great courage • As he resolved to climb upon me •
Then I dared not | against the word of the lord 35
bow or break • though I saw tremble |
the expanses of the earth – I could have
felled all the enemies however | I stood fast • 38
{Stripped himself then the young hero – that was god [almighty …]}

The important but enigmatic detail of the hero's haste ('efstan', 34a) will be resolved in the final lines of the poem (148–56). Only then will the poet state explicitly that God 'the Son', 'the Sun of Justice with healing in his wings' (Malachy 4:2), has completed his victorious cosmic expedition to rescue humankind from the power of hell and death. The tree, at the moment of confrontation with Christ, and in obedience to the Lord's word, abandons its impulse to take vengeance on its 'enemies', though it is ready and able to kill them all (37b–8). Instead it stands fast. This is in contrast even to 'the expanses of the earth' (36b–7a) who tremble at the moment in which the Lord of all humankind chooses his death. One might suggest that in obedience to the Lord's word the tree rejects the demons of vengeance that had until this moment possessed it.

It is becoming clear, the poet is especially interested in passages unique to the gospel of Luke. It is likely that she or he was familiar with, and inspired by, a gospel-book equipped with Eusebian sections. The Eusebian system grouped all sections or verses common to all four gospels into Canon I, 'the first list' of ten placed at or near the beginning of the four gospels. Canon One was followed by canons or lists detailing the sections found (in various combinations) in three gospels or in two. The tenth and final list, Canon X, brought together passages unique to one gospel. In Canon X, the green tree (Luke 23:31) is juxtaposed to a divine command (Luke 23:34). The two intermediate verses (Luke 23:32–33), common to all four gospels, are the verses omitted in *The Dream of the Rood*:

[Canon X:] ***for if they do this to the green tree, what will be done to the dry*** (v.31)
Sec. 317, Canon I: **However they were leading two other criminals with him to be executed** (v.32)
Sec. 318, Canon I: **And after they came to the place called 'of the skull', they crucified him there** (v.33a)

> Sec. 319, Canon I: **And the thieves, one on his right hand and the other on his left** (v33b)
> [Sec. 320, Canon X:] ***But Jesus kept saying 'Father forgive them, for indeed they know not what they do'***. (v.34)

In the Latin text of Luke, the verb in Luke section 320 (23:34) is the past continuous *dicebat*. This is in marked contrast to almost all modern translations, which use a simple past tense. Thus we should translate the Latin, not as 'Jesus said', but as 'Jesus went on saying: Father forgive them for they know not what they do'. As Bede makes clear in his commentary, in this unique verse Jesus prays continuously to his Father. As all prayer was inspired by the Holy Spirit, this verse tells of a unanimous consensus of the Trinity. Bede's comments on the verse are subtle. He emphasizes that the verse was one of several that showed Christ acting as priest, a theme central to Luke's gospel and embodied in Luke's symbol, the calf:

> **Iesus autem dicebat: Pater dimitte illis ; non enim sciunt quod faciunt.** Quia Lucas per uituli typum sacerdotium Christi scribere disposuit recte apud eum dominus et pro persecutoribus suis iure sacerdotis intercedit et eodem munere latroni confitenti ianuam pandit.
>
> **And Jesus said: Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do**. Since Luke who is represented allegorically as a calf determined to write of the sacerdotal office of Christ, it is right that in his account the Lord not only intercedes for his persecutors with a priest's privilege, but also by the same office opens the gate of Paradise to the confessing robber.

Bede emphasizes that Christ's prayer that his torturers be forgiven was not in vain. But he emphasizes it was not a prayer for those who, knowing Christ to be the son of God, preferred to crucify him rather than honestly confess his divinity. That was a mortal sin against the Holy Spirit (Bede refers to I John 5:14–17). Christ's prayer asked forgiveness for those who may have acted from religious zeal but had imperfect knowledge of what they did (such as the executioners, for example). The Bedan passage concentrates on the relevance of Christ's prayer 'for those who after his Passion believed', that is, for Christians past and present:

> Neque enim putandum est eum haec patrem frustra orasse sed in eis nimirum qui post eius passionem credidere quod orabat impetrasse. Notandum sane quod non pro eis qui liuoris ac superbiae stimulis accensi quem filium Dei intellexere crucifigere quam confiteri maluerunt sed pro eis utique qui zelum Dei habentes sed non secundum scientiam nesciere quod fecerunt patri preces obtulerit. Sed et Johannes apostolus dicit : Est peccatum ad mortem, non pro illo dico ut roget quis [I John 5:16].
>
> For it must not be thought that he prayed to his Father for these things in vain, but that without doubt he obtained what he prayed for, namely for those who after his Passion believed. Indeed, it should be noted that he offered prayers to the Father not for those who, incited by the goads of envy and pride, preferred to crucify rather than confess the one whom they believed to be the Son of God, but rather for those who, possessing a zeal *for God, but not according to knowledge,* [Romans 10:2] did not know what they did. But the apostle John also says: *There is a sin to death. I do not know that anyone should pray for it.* [I John 5:16]

Then, in a remarkable passage, Bede advises his readers to imitate the Lord's forgiveness and to train themselves in the difficult task not only of forgiving their enemies but praying for them:

> Imitare ergo dominum tuum pro inimicis intercede et, si necdum potes, saltim caue ne conta illos orare presumas. Sic etenim cotidianis profectibus auctus et ad illud quandoque domino iuuante peruenies ut etiam pro illis intercedere possis.[25]

[25] Bede, *In Lucam* VI, lines 1583–99, pp. 402–3.

> Therefore, imitate your Lord, intercede for your enemies, and if you are not yet able to do so, at least beware, lest you dare to pray against them. Thus indeed, strengthened by daily progress and with the help of the Lord, at some time or other you will reach the point where you can even intercede for them.[26]

This is the classic expression of Bede's opposition to vengeance. Christians are bound to learn to pray for their enemies, not to take vengeance on them. The passage provides a striking analogue for the 'Lord's word' that forbad the green tree to fell its enemies.

In the third chapter of the first book of his commentary Bede comments on another episode unique to Luke (and therefore listed in Canon X), Bede writes of a woman who encountered the courage of God. He draws on a homily by Gregory the Great, who had explained that in heaven the angels need no names. Only when they represent God on earth are they given names, to indicate the divine action they have been sent to announce:

> **In mense autem sexto missus est Gabrihel a Deo in ciuitatem Galileae cui nomen Nazareth**. Idcirco angeli priuatis nominibus censentur ut signetur per uocabula etiam in operatione quod ualeant. Neque enim in illa sancta ciuitate quam de uisione omnipotentis Dei plena scientia perficit idcirco propria nomina sortiuntur ne eorum personae sine nominibus scire non possint sed cum ad nos aliquid ministraturi ueniunt apud nos etiam nomina a ministeriis trahunt. Ad Mariam ergo uirginem Gabrihel mittitur qui Dei fortitudo nominatur. Illum quippe nuntiare ueniebat qui ad debellandas aerias potestates humilis apparere dignatus est de quo per psalmistam dicitur : Dominus fortis et potens Dominus potens in proelio ; et rursum : Dominus uirtutum ipse est rex gloriae. Per Dei ergo fortitudinem nuntiandus erat qui uirtutum dominus et potens in proelio contra potestates aerias ad bella ueniebat.[27]

> [Luke 1:26] **And in the sixth month, the Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth …** The angels are known by individual names for the purpose of signifying by their names what they are able to do in their work. And for that reason, personal names are not assigned in the holy city which is made perfect by the full knowledge of the vision of almighty God – as if their characters cannot be known without their names! – but when they come to administer something to us, they also take on names derived from their services among us.[28]
>
> Therefore Gabriel, whose name means 'the strength [or courage] of God, is sent to the virgin Mary. Indeed, he came to announce the one who deigned to appear humble in order to vanquish the powers of the air, about whom the Psalmist says: the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle', and again, 'the Lord of heavenly armies, he is the King of Glory [Psalm 23:8–10 (24:8–10)]. He, the Lord of heavenly armies and mighty in battle, who was coming to war against the powers of the air, had to be announced, therefore, by the strength of God.[29]

Mary's confrontation with the courage of God was the moment when God became human. The Mass that began Holy Week (the sixth Sunday of Lent) and provided a powerful statement of the theology of the ensuing week presented the Incarnation as forming a single action of kenosis with the Crucifixion. This was memorably summed up in the ancient Collect or opening prayer, which spoke of Christ's decision 'to take on flesh and undergo the cross'. That lapidary phrase summed up the Epistle that immediately followed: the ancient hymn, Philippians 2:5–11, especially verses 7–8:

> [7][Christ Jesus] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, and in habit found as a man. [8]he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.

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[26] Trans. Kendall and Wallis, p. 620 (op. cit. note 19).
[27] Bede *In Lucam* I, lines 425–39, p. 30.
[28] Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelio*, 2.34.8, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (CCSL)*,* 141.36.192–98.
[29] The passage is taken from Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelio*, 2.34.9, CCSL 141.307.213–21. Trans. Kendall and Wallis, pp. 129–130 (op. cit. note 19).

Bede's commentary is, unsurprisingly, consistent with the Holy Week liturgy. He also emphasizesthat the unity of Incarnation and Crucifixion is reflected in the shape of the year. Both events happened near the Spring equinox, when the light of the sun triumphs yearly over winter darkness:

> You should understand that the sixth month is March, on the twenty-fifth day of which our Lord is said both to have been conceived and to have suffered, just as he was born on the twenty-fifth day of the month of December. If we believe that the vernal equinox occurred on the former day, as many think, and that the winter solstice occurred on the latter, it is fitting that *the one who enlightens every man that comes into this world* [John 1:9] be conceived and born with an increase of light. But if anyone should prove that light either increases or overcomes the dark before the time of our Lord's birth and conception, we still say both that *John* was then preaching, *before his coming*, the kingdom of heaven [Acts 13:24], and also that the command is now given to preachers: *make a way for him who ascends upon the west* [Psalm V67:5 (H68:4)]. And the reason why John was conceived around the autumnal equinox and born around the summer solstice, he himself teaches, who speaks either of himself or of the Old Testament (as many assert): He must increase, but I must decrease [John 3:30].[30]

The Dream of the Rood reshapes unique Lucan passages (all listed, of course, in Canon X) in order to present the story of the green tree as providing a close parallel to the encounter between the courage of God (Gabriel) and Mary at the Annunciation. At all stages, the poem's logic is consistent with Bede's commentary on these passages. The poet, like Bede, places at the centre of the new crucifixion narrative a rejection of vengeance, the importance of obedience to the divine word in the humility shared both by Mary and her divine son:

> [Luke 1:38] **And Mary said: behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to thy word**. How great with devotion was the humility which both desires that the angel's promise be fulfilled, and calls herself, who is chosen as mother, a handmaid, thus making known in the clearest manner that she claims no merit for herself for being obedient to the commands of the Lord. Let it be done, she says, let the one conceived in a virgin without the seed of man be born of the Holy Spirit with spotless flesh; let the Holy which is born of a human mother without a human father be called the Son of God.[31]

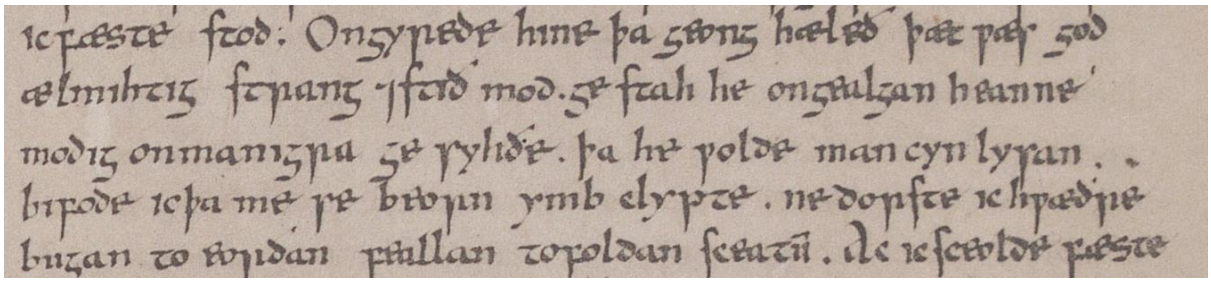
The Dream of the Rood poet was inspired by the strong emphasis on women in Luke's gospel. As we shall see in Chapter Three, this emphasis is shared by the *Dream* and the Ruthwell Cross. Of the evangelists, Luke alone narrates the moment of Incarnation, that is, the moment when Mary assented to God's challenge expressed through the words of Gabriel (Luke 1:26–38). Luke immediately goes on to narrate the story of the Visitation, when Christ was first acclaimed as Messiah by John the Baptist who leapt in the womb of his mother Elizabeth. The Visitation culminates with Mary's canticle the 'Magnificat', which celebrates the reversal of Israel's history and God's care for the humble and powerless: we shall find the Magnificat adapted to the situation of the cross in lines 77–94 of the *Dream*. Luke in Chapter seven tells of the forgiveness of the woman who was a sinner (common to all four gospels, and therefore listed in Canon I); he immediately follows this account with a list of the women who followed Jesus: they include Mary Magdalen, from whom demons had been cast out (8:1–3: Canon X, unique to Luke). In Luke Chapter ten, a long unique section (Canon X, section cxxii, from 10:29 to 10:42) combines the story of the Good Samaritan with that of Martha and Mary of Bethany. We have already seen that Jesus's encounter on his way to death with

[30] Kendall and Wallis, p. 130 (op. cit. note 19), translating Bede *In Lucam*, Book I, lines 439–54. p. 30. Note that Bede, who himself placed the equinoxes before the 25th or 24th of each month (the eighth day before the Kalends of April or of January), finds an allegorical way of defending the traditional liturgical feasts (celebrated on the eighth Kalends) modern preachers should imitate John the Baptist and prepare the way for the Lord's coming in the preceding days.

[31] Kendall and Wallis, p. 136 (op. cit. note 19).

the women of Jerusalem is also unique to Luke. Such passages, and this last passage in particular, is the most likely explanation why in the Papal liturgy of Rome the Passion according to Luke (22:1–) was read out on the Wednesday of Holy Week. On that day the papal station was at Santa Maria ad Praesepe on the Esquiline hill (later Santa Maria Maggiore), the oldest and most famous basilica in Latin Christianity dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The moment the green tree rejects vengeance is the moment that begins its transformation:



{ic fæste stod • |}	38b
Ongyrede hine þa geong hæleð þæt wæs god | ælmihtig	39
strang 7stið mod • ge stah he ongealgan heanne |	
modig onmanigra ge syhðe • þa he wolde man cyn lysan • |	41
Bifode ic þa me se beorn ymb clypte • ne dorste ic hwæðre | bugan to eorðan	
feallan tofoldan sceatu*m* • Ac ic sceolde fæste [stondan •]	43

{I stood fast • |}	38b
Stripped himself the young hero: That was God | Almighty	39
strong and courageous • He climbed on to the high gallows |	40
brave in the sight of many • when he wished to set humankind free •	41
I trembled when the warrior embraced me • I dared not however	42
bow to the earth – fall to the surfaces of the earth • But I had to [stand] fast •	43

The heavy punctuation of this passage encourages careful reading of its transformative narrative. The passage is framed by two expressions of what the tree's obedience entailed: 'I stood fast' (38b) and 'I had to stand fast' (43b). Both statements imply 'and not take any vengeance'. There are important shifts in atmosphere: in particular, [there are] several sexual references. The tree trembles at the warrior's embrace (42). The young hero strips himself and climbs onto the gallows-tree, 'brave in the sight of many' (41a). Nowhere in the Passion narratives does Jesus strip himself or climb onto a tree or gallows, which is here said to be 'high' or 'tall' (40b).[32] Yet, when we come to look at the Ruthwell poem we will find that Almighty God indeed stripped himself in the person of Jesus, 'ongyrede hine god ælmihtig'. There the primary reference is to the moment of Incarnation (it paraphrases the phrase 'exinanivit seipsum', 'he emptied himself', of Philippians 2:7). In both poems, while standing fast, the tree itself 'trembles when the warrior embraced me' (41a). The sexual imagery hints

[32] As well as having the 'wretchedness' appropriate to a gallows (possible pun in 40b).

that we are now looking at a transformed tree: the palm tree of Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs 7:8:[33]

> **'I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches'.** Unless the Lord goes up in the palm tree and lays hold of its fruit […] we are unable to have any good things, whether large or small. Now the most victorious tree of the cross [***victoriosissima*** […] ***crucis arbor*****]** can also be aptly designated by the name of the palm tree
>
> **BEDE, ON THE SONG OF SONGS**, PART V, ON *SONG* 7:8
>
> **I have said, I will go up in the palm tree and I will lay hold of its fruit** […] Unless the Lord goes up in the palm tree and lays hold of its fruit […] we are unable to have any good things, whether large or small. Now the most victorious tree of the cross [***victoriosissima*** […] ***crucis arbor*** can also be aptly designated by the name of the palm tree, and the bride's stature [that of the Church] rightly compared to it [***iure statura sponsae assimilatur {palmae}***], because it is through the passion of her Redeemer that holy church is able to raise herself up to stand so upright, stable and immoveable [***{erigitur} ut recta stabilis et immobilis consistere possit***] […]

[On July 25 2024 Éamonn wrote, before being overtaken by greater illness: 'Today I have been sorting out 34b–38 of the poem . . . After this point things should get a lot less tricky, but I feel I want another twenty lines or so . . .']

[33] CCSL 119B:330, lines 530-33; trans. Holder, A. *Venerable Bede, The: On the Song of Songs and Selected Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011), 213.