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## Chapter Twelve

**Water in Saints' Lives: A Study of the Old English Corpus***Hugh Magennis*

Water, though hardly ubiquitous in hagiographical narratives, has a significant role in many of them. Most commonly, water plays a part in miracle scenes; water also provides a medium of travel (often with miraculous occurrences incorporated here too); in some saints' lives water is presented as a means of cleansing and healing, particularly in baptism; and water can feature in reports of abstinence and self-denial. In deploying these narrative water themes hagiographers were influenced primarily by the Bible, adapting and recasting biblical models in their work, though in some cases the influence of ancient romance is also discernible.

**The Bible**

Water figures widely in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, as in some saints' lives discussed below, water is a powerful element under the control of God, who uses it as an instrument of his divine judgement, bringing danger and death through flood and storm, as fearfully acknowledged in the exclamations and prayers of the psalmist (for example, at Psalms 17(18):16, 31(32):6, 45(46):3 and 92(93):3-4)) and realised most spectacularly in Noah's Flood (Genesis 6-9) and in the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exodus 13-14). Also, as again taken up in hagiography, in the Hebrew Bible water enables cleansing, in the ritual ablutions of priests, for example (as in Exodus 29:4, Leviticus 16:4 and Numbers 19:7-9), and in the removal of ceremonial defilement from all men (as at Leviticus 11:40, Leviticus 15:5-12 and Deuteronomy 23:11).

Above all, water is essential to life. Living in an arid region, nothing is more serious to the people of the Bible than the absence of water (see, for example, Jeremiah 14:3, Joel 1:20, Haggai 1:10). Water – most notably, flowing water, wells, rain and dew – is symbolic of God’s blessing and of spiritual refreshment (as at Psalms 22(23):2, Isaiah 32:2 and Isaiah 35:6); God himself is ‘the fountain of living waters’ (Jeremiah 2:13). This theme of the preciousness of water is taken up in hagiography in episodes where saints bring forth water miraculously or experience or make use of its soothing powers, and, inversely, in the stories of self-mortification in which ascetics exist with little of it.

These strands of significance are also apparent in the New Testament. The danger of water is exemplified strikingly in the Revelation’s prophecy that there will be no sea in heaven (21:1) and in the miraculous episode of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41) to the relief of his terrified disciples, and again in the miracle of Jesus walking upon the waters (Matthew 14: 22-3) (while Peter is too afraid of the danger to attempt the same). The emphasis in these gospel episodes is on miracle, presenting a lead for writers of saints’ lives, whose protagonists perform similar wonders. The Old Testament theme of cleansing appears in the New Testament as baptism, the ‘water of repentance’ (Matthew 3:11), in the ministry of John the Baptist, who baptises Jesus himself. The idea of water as refreshment is reflected in Jesus’s image of giving cold water to drink to the least of those who are needy (Matthew 10:42, Mark 9:41) and in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, where the rich man in hell begs to receive a drop of water from the tip of Lazarus’s finger (Luke 16:24). Water as representing life and God’s blessing is powerfully taken up in spiritual terms in Jesus’s account, in the episode with the Samaritan woman at the well, of the salvation he brings: ‘The man who drinks the water I give him will not know thirst anymore. The water I give him will be a spring of water within him, that flows continually to bring him

everlasting life' (John 4:13–14). Water also figures in another miracle of Jesus, that of the changing of water into wine at the marriage feast at Cana.

A separate strand of significance for water is found especially in the Acts of the Apostles, where water, specifically the sea, becomes a medium of travel, as the apostles, obedient to Christ's instruction to go forth and teach all nations (Matthew 28:19), carry out their missionary activities voyaging across the Mediterranean. Such travels include the motif of storms at sea, as experienced by Paul when being taken to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27:9–44); his ship is tossed by the waves and ends up being blown ashore and wrecked on an island that 'was strange to them' (it turns out to be Malta) (Acts 27:39).<sup>1</sup>

Travel across the Mediterranean, a sea of economic and cultural 'connectivity',<sup>2</sup> is also a staple theme in ancient romance and indeed the writer of Acts may have been guided by the example of romance in incorporating it.<sup>3</sup> Ancient romance also influenced some hagiographical texts directly in the deployment of plots involving sea travel<sup>4</sup> but the essential

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<sup>1</sup> References to travel by boat appear occasionally elsewhere in the Bible, in the story of Jonah, for example (Jonah 1-3), and in Jesus's crossing of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-6), but such travel becomes a recurrent theme in Acts.

<sup>2</sup> On the 'connectivity' of the ancient (and medieval) Mediterranean, see Horden P. – Purcell N., *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: 2000) 123-172.

<sup>3</sup> See Pervo R.I., "Early Christian Fiction", in Morgan J.R. – Stoneman R. (eds.), *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context* (London: 1994) 240.

<sup>4</sup> As in 'Pseudo-Clementine' literature, discussed, for example, by Pervo in his survey of early Christian fiction: see Pervo, "Early Christian Fiction" 250-251; see also Heffernan T.J.,

lead followed by hagiographers in their treatment of voyages of missionaries is that of Acts. Such voyages may be seen as instances of *imitatio apostolorum*, just as the performance of miracles (including those involving water) are instances of *imitatio Christi*.

The theme of travel is a common one in hagiography but is particularly relevant to the early insular missionary saints and the ascetics who were engaging in the practice of *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*, journeying away from their homeland to bring the gospel to the European mainland or withdrawing from worldly society altogether. The most spectacular journey of an insular saint is the one described in *The Voyage of St Brendan*,<sup>5</sup> in which the sixth-century abbot sails across the ocean to the Promised Land of the Saints, but plenty of less fanciful saints' lives (and other writings) relate stories of voluntary exile undertaken by insular monastics, including some of the most celebrated of them.<sup>6</sup>

Water in the Bible is extensively discussed in patristic and medieval exegesis, where it has a range of non-literal significations, often denoting the Holy Spirit, for example, or

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*Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York - Oxford: 1988) 142-144.

<sup>5</sup> Selmer C. (ed.), *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (Notre Dame, IN: 1959); O'Meara J.J. (trans.), *The Voyage of Saint Brendan: Journey to the Promised Land* (Dublin: 1976; repr. Buckinghamshire: 1991).

<sup>6</sup> See Mullins J., "Herimum in mari: Anglo-Saxon Attitudes towards *Peregrinatio* and the Ideal of a Desert in the Sea", in Klein S. – Schipper W. – Lewis-Simpson S. (eds.), *The Maritime World of the Anglo-Saxons* (Tempe, AZ: 2014) 239-254.

Christian teaching;<sup>7</sup> the sea, in particular, is a powerful symbol in Christian thought.<sup>8</sup> And, following biblical custom, water has an important role in the liturgy.<sup>9</sup> Such traditions of thought and practice have only tangential relevance for most hagiographers, however, who generally in their narratives focus on water as a physical entity.<sup>10</sup> Certainly as far as prose saints' lives are concerned – and the vast majority of saints' lives are in prose – only rarely does water have an intended non-literal significance in narrative episodes. Spiritual cleansing represents one example of such significance, and river or sea crossings can symbolically signal moments of transition or change, but prose hagiography is for the most part a literal-minded genre and this is reflected not least in its deployment of water themes. Water almost invariably functions instrumentally rather than having any kind of non-utilitarian interest of itself.<sup>11</sup> As demonstrated below, it is a different story with saints' lives in verse, in which poetic imagination and the rich resources of poetic tradition can be drawn upon.

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<sup>7</sup> With particular reference to Old English literature, see DiNapoli R., *An Index of Theme and Image to the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (Hockwold cum Wilton, Norfolk: 1994) *s.v. river, sea, water*.

<sup>8</sup> Christian interpretations of the sea are well summarised by Sobecki S.I., *The Sea in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: 2008) 34-41.

<sup>9</sup> For the liturgy, see Gaillard J., "Eau", in Viller M. – Cavallera F. – de Guibert J. (eds.), *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité chrétien*, IV (Paris: 1960) 8-29.

<sup>10</sup> On symbolic understandings of the sea in Old English literature, see Mullins, "Herimum in mari".

<sup>11</sup> Non-utilitarian approaches to water (and other elements of nature) are explored in the burgeoning field of ecocriticism: see, with particular reference to Old English, Estes H., *Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes: Ecotheory and the Environmental Imagination*

### Saints' Lives in Old English

In exploring the significance of water in hagiography this chapter will concentrate on writings in Old English, since Old English saints' lives provide a manageable corpus of material for a chapter-length study and have the attraction of both being firmly representative of the genre of hagiography as a whole, but also, especially in the poetry,<sup>12</sup> presenting distinctive cultural features.<sup>13</sup> Saints' lives in Old English prose and verse, which range in length from a single sentence (as in some entries in the compilation known as the *Old English*

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(Amsterdam: 2017) esp. 35–59; see also Siewers A.K., *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape* (New York: 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Below, all references to and quotations of Old English poetry, with the exception of *Beowulf*, are taken from Krapp and Dobbie (eds.), *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, 6 vols (New York: 1931-1953), abbreviated below as ASPR; for *Beowulf*, references are to Fulk R.D. – Bjork R.E. – Niles J.D. (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: 4th ed. 2008). Translations follow Bradley S.A.I., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Anthology of Old English Poems in Prose Translation with Introduction and Headnotes* (London: 1982) (with occasional modification, as indicated). Unattributed translations below are my own.

<sup>13</sup> On saints' lives in early England, see, for example, Lapidge M., "The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England", in Godden M. – Lapidge M. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge: 2nd ed. 2013) 251-272; Magennis H., "Approaches to Saints' Lives", in Cavill P. (ed.), *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching* (Cambridge: 2004) 163-183.

*Martyrology*) to more than 10,000 words, are almost invariably based on Latin originals, often closely translated but often too reworked in creative ways. They comprise material on the saints of the universal church and also treatments of native saints, all adhering to the conventions and archetypes of hagiographical tradition as developed in the early Christian centuries.<sup>14</sup> In the present survey only writings on the Virgin Mary are excluded from consideration, as these do not follow the hagiographical pattern found in other saints' lives.<sup>15</sup>

The cultural distinctiveness of Old English verse saints' lives in their treatment of water derives from the fact that the very medium of Old English traditional poetry brings with it a rich repertoire of imagery, formulas and themes concerning water, particularly to do with voyaging over the (often dangerous) sea, which imparts a strong emotional dimension to narrative and description. In Old English poetry water enables travel and communication; it offers defence against enemies but also the possibility of sudden attack; and it works as an agent of separation.<sup>16</sup> Such ideas doubtless reflect the real-life experience of the Anglo-

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<sup>14</sup> The most influential early lives are collected and translated by White, *Early Christian Lives* (Harmondsworth: 1998). For a comprehensive introduction to hagiography and the veneration of saints, see Bartlett R., *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: 2013).

<sup>15</sup> On the Virgin Mary in Old English literature, see Clayton M., *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 2 (Cambridge: 1990) and *Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 26 (Cambridge: 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Old English poetry brings the dangers and benefits of travel by water compellingly to life, as in the accounts of voyages in *Beowulf* (ed. ASPR IV, 3-98) and descriptions of the cruelty of the sea in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* (ed. ASPR III, 134-37, 143-147). The



Saxons and other northern European peoples in the early Middle Ages,<sup>17</sup> but they find particularly imaginative expression in traditional poetry, in which water also figures as an object of wonder.<sup>18</sup>

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possibility of attack from the sea is recognised by the warriors in *The Battle of Maldon* (ed. ASPR VI, 7-16), who (mistakenly) allow the Vikings to come ashore at a place of the defenders' choosing, while in *Exodus* (ed. ASPR I, 91-107), the sea is a *sæfæsten*, 'sea-stronghold' (line 127), stopping the progress of the Israelite tribes. The theme of separation by water is an especially potent one for Old English poets, secular and religious, who draw upon the expressive language of the theme of exile in treating it. Water entails separation and exile in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament* (ed. ASPR III, 179-80, 210-211), and it brings hope of coming together – but only when good weather comes in spring – in *The Husband's Message* (ed. ASPR III, 225-227).

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of the sea in 'real-life' in Anglo-Saxon England, see Carver M., "Travels on the Sea and in the Mind", in Klein S.S. – Schipper W.V. – Lewis-Simpson S. (eds.), *The Maritime World, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 448, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Studies* 5 (Tempe, AZ: 2014) 21-36.

<sup>18</sup> On water in general in Old English poetry, see Discenza N.G., *Inhabited Spaces: Anglo Saxon Constructions of Place* (Toronto: 2017) 164-78; Mullins, "Herimum in mari"; Frederick J.A., "From Whale's Road to Water under the Earth: Water in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", in Hyer M.C. – Hooke D. (eds.), *Water and the Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Liverpool: 2018) 15-32; Sobceki, *The Sea in Medieval English Literature* 41-44: Sobceki, who writes of the 'deafening presence of the sea in pre-Conquest writings in English' (45), lists the relevant studies of Old English literature (43, n. 80). Water as an object of wonder is notably evident in the Exeter Book riddles: see *Riddles* 3 (storm at sea),

Though culturally distinctive and highly interesting in literary terms, verse lives represent a small proportion of the surviving corpus of Old English saints' lives, amounting to just over 5,000 lines of poetry altogether, across five narrative poems celebrating different types of saint: *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* (on an ascetic saint), *Juliana* (on a virgin martyr), *Andreas* (on a missionary expedition by an apostle) and *Elene* (on the finding of the true cross by St Helena).<sup>19</sup> There are also two catalogue-type poems, *The Fates of the Apostles* and *The Menologium*,<sup>20</sup> which are brief in the extreme in treating their saints, though *The Menologium* does have one mention of water, when it relates that Saint Augustine brought the Christian faith to Britain *ofer sealtne mere*, 'over the salty sea' (line 103).

The vast majority of Old English lives are written in prose and include those by the prolific Ælfric of Eynsham, writing at the end of the tenth and beginning of the eleventh century, who produced more than fifty separate items,<sup>21</sup> nearly all in his two volumes of *Catholic Homilies* and his collection *Lives of Saints*.<sup>22</sup> There also survive about thirty

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41 (water), 84 (water) (*Riddles*, ed. ASPR III, 180-210, 224-43); on water in the riddles, see Frederick, "From Whale's Road" 25-27.

<sup>19</sup> *Guthlac A*, ed. ASPR III, 49-72; *Guthlac B*, ed. ASPR III, 72-88; *Juliana*, ed. ASPR III, 113-133; *Andreas*, ed. ASPR II, 3-51; *Elene*, ed. ASPR II, 66-102.

<sup>20</sup> *Fates of the Apostles*, ed. ASPR II, 51-4; *Menologium*, ed. ASPR VI, 49-55.

<sup>21</sup> Numbers are given as approximate since works may be identified and demarcated according to differing criteria.

<sup>22</sup> *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. P. Clemoes (Oxford: 1997); *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. M. Godden (Oxford: 1979); *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. and trans. W.W. Skeat (London: 1881-1900; reprinted as 2 vols, 1966); Skeat also includes at the end of vol. II of this edition a separate life by Ælfric, that of Saint Vincent.

anonymous prose lives, mostly contemporary with Ælfric, as well as the 230 or so short entries that make up the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology*<sup>23</sup> and the 115 miracle stories associated with St Benedict and other Italian saints found in Wærferth's late ninth-century translation of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (there are eighty-five stories if we exclude the accounts of the deaths of holy people in Book IV, the final book of Gregory's work).<sup>24</sup> The *Dialogues* and *Old English Martyrology* are particularly useful for our purposes in that they tend to concentrate on the most noteworthy things about the saint(s) they are commemorating.

Taken together these individual hagiographical items in Old English make up a sizeable corpus, which can conveniently form the basis for my discussion in the rest of this chapter. The chapter will identify all of the water themes found in the corpus<sup>25</sup> and will go on

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These collections are abbreviated in references below as *CH I*, *CH II* and *LS*, respectively, and are cited below by item number. Ælfric also has a few additional pieces here and there, such as the story about Saint John in the *Letter to Sigeward*, ed. R. Marsden, *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo: Vol. I* (Oxford: 2008) 224-227.

<sup>23</sup> *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. C. Rauer (Cambridge: 2013); abbreviated in references below as *OEM*: referred to by page number.

<sup>24</sup> *Bischofs Wærferth von Worcester Übersetzung des Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. H. Hecht (Leipzig: 1900); abbreviated in references below as *Dial*.

<sup>25</sup> Instances noted below reference only 'actual' H<sub>2</sub>O; thus mentions of tears or sweat are not included.

to focus on one life in particular, the anonymous (prose) *Life of St Mary of Egypt*,<sup>26</sup> in which water may be seen as having a symbolic significance of a kind not discernible elsewhere in the material surveyed; finally, it will highlight the distinctive treatment of water in the verse lives.

## Water Themes

### *Miracles*

The most frequently-occurring miracles involving water in our sample are those in which the holy person is thrown into water (most commonly the sea) to die, on the orders of a persecutor. Often the saint is tied to a heavy weight, only for the bonds to break, however, with the saint either surviving unharmed or having their body washed ashore or otherwise preserved for veneration. The former outcome is exemplified in the cases of Saint Eugenia (*OEM*, 36; *LS* II, lines 389-95: the river Tiber), Saint Christina (*OEM*, 140: the sea) and Saint Pantaleon (*Life of Saint Pantaleon*,<sup>27</sup> lines 274-90: the sea). The latter outcome is exemplified in the cases of Saints Ananias, Petrus and companions (*OEM*, 52: the sea), the ‘Four Crowned Ones’ (*OEM*, 212: the sea), Saint Vincent (*Ælfric*, *LS* XXXVII, lines 255-275: the sea) and Saint Clement (*OEM*, 218; *CH I* XXXVII, lines 100-6: the sea), whose miracle is

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<sup>26</sup> Ed. and trans. Skeat, *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints* XXIII B. This anonymous *Life*, along with another mentioned below, the *Life of Saint Eustace*, is one of four non-Ælfrician items copied into the manuscript of *Lives of Saints*; for *Eustace*, see *LS* XXX.

<sup>27</sup> Pulsiano P. (ed.), “The Old English Life of St Pantaleon”, in Hall T.N. (ed.), *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J. E. Cross* (Morgantown, WV: 2002) 61-103.

particularly spectacular: Clement (Pope Clement I) is tied to an anchor but his body is found to be preserved, along with the anchor, ‘in a stone house made ready by the Lord’ (*OEM*, 218; trans. Rauer, 219) in the middle of the sea, where the surrounding waters have temporarily dried up for thirty miles around and dry up again every year on Clement’s feast day for seven days, to allow people to visit the church.

In other variants of this type of miracle, the saint is thrown into water without a heavy weight: the Forty Soldiers are thrown into an icy lake, where the waters warm up as they die (*OEM*, 62-64; *LS XI*, lines 142-199); Saints Rufinus and Secunda (*OEM*, 136) are thrown into the Tiber but they float; Saints Nazarus and Celsus are thrown into the sea but they walk on the water (*OEM*, 146); the head and body of Saint Crysogenes are thrown into the sea but are later washed ashore together to be buried (*OEM*, 218-220); similarly the body of Saint Antoninus is cut up and thrown into a river (or canal) but discovered later (*OEM*, 208); the body of Saint Quentin is thrown into the Somme but discovered fifty-two years later (*OEM*, 208); Saint Caesarius is thrown to his death into a torrential river but his persecutor is killed the same day (*OEM*, 210). Saints Ananias and Petrus, as well as being thrown into the sea, had previously also been put into a boiling bath, only to emerge unharmed (*OEM*, 52), a miracle also associated with Saint Cecilia (*OEM*, 216; *LS XXXIV*, lines 342-51) and Saint Margaret (Tib, Chap. 18, 128-130; CC, Chap. 18, 168-170).<sup>28</sup>

In these miracles God intervenes to glorify his saints rather than the saints themselves performing wonders, though one example of the latter is the rescue by Saint Machutus of his

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<sup>28</sup> The *Life of St Margaret* in British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A. iii, Clayton M. – Magennis H. (eds. and trans.), *The Old English Lives of St Margaret* (Cambridge: 1994) 109-139 (Tib); the *Life of St Margaret* in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 303 (eds. and trans.) Clayton – Magennis, *The Old English Lives* 149-171 (CC).

servant who has been thrown into the sea with bound hands and feet (*Life of Machutus*,<sup>29</sup> 59, lines 8-13). God also acts when he causes persecutors of saints to come to a watery end after their evil deeds: Eleusius, the persecutor of Saint Juliana is drowned at sea in a shipwreck (*Juliana*, lines 671-682), while the (unnamed) persecutor of Saints Ananias and Petrus is devoured by wild beasts in the sea (*OEM*, 52).

Other instances of divine favour towards saints involving water are less gruesome. In an episode about Saint Maurus, the iron head of a billhook, which has fallen into deep water, miraculously ascends through the water to join the handle held by Maurus (*Dial.*, II.6, 113-114); in the story of Saint Adrian and his wife Saint Natalia, Natalia, blown off course on her voyage, is guided over the sea by the appearance of her dead husband to the place where his body is buried (*OEM*, 60); the church of Saint Zeno is preserved from a flood that engulfs everything else, even though its door is open (*Dial.* III.19); Saint Fulgentius is made to stand in a small circle in the open and when a sudden rain storm occurs, frightening his enemies, not a drop falls in Fulgentius's circle (*Dial.* III.12); in the *Life of Saint Guthlac*,<sup>30</sup> when a raven makes off with the document of a guest of the saint, dropping it into a lake, Guthlac assures his guest that all will be well with the help of God, and the document is found hanging undamaged on a reed (Chap. 9, lines 1-22); the miracle of Saint Clement being cast into the sea and then discovered in a shrine in the middle of the sea, mentioned above, is followed by another miracle, in which a woman visiting the shrine one year forgets her sleeping child and goes home without it, leaving it to be engulfed by the returning waters.

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<sup>29</sup> Yerkes D. (ed.), *The Old English Life of Machutus* (Toronto: 1984).

<sup>30</sup> Gonser P. (ed.), *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac* (Amsterdam: 1909); translations below are taken from Swanton M. (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (revised ed. London: 1993) 88-113.

‘Then after a year had passed, when the people arrived there on Clement’s feast day, they found the child alive and sleeping in the church, and it went away with its mother’ (*OEM*, 218; trans. Rauer, 219; compare *CHI* XXXVII, lines 128-147).

Instances of objects being divinely transported across the sea occur in two lives in the Old English corpus: two doors given to Saint Giles by the pope in Rome appear at his monastery, having somehow crossed the sea (*Life of Saint Giles*,<sup>31</sup> lines 501-529), and a psalter is miraculously transported by sea to Saint Machutus (*Life of Saint Machutus*, 9, lines 7-14).

Miracles in which the saint is the agent rather than the beneficiary are exemplified in *imitatio Christi* episodes, such as Saint Cuthbert turning water into wine (*OEM*, 68) and holy people walking on water: Saint Mary of Egypt walks across the Jordan (*LS* XXIIIB, lines 684-685); Saints Nazarus and Celsus walk on the sea, having been cast into the deep in a death sentence (*OEM*, 146); Saint Maurus walks on the sea to rescue a drowning monk (*Dial.* II.7); and Saint Martin of Tours tells fishermen where to cast their nets, whereupon they catch an enormous salmon (*LS* XXXI, lines 1268-1276; cf. Luke 5:1-11, John 21:1-14). Saint Martin also makes an evil river-snake depart, it having swum threateningly towards his monks (*LS* XXXI, lines 1259-1266). As mentioned in the next section, saints also intervene miraculously to help travellers caught up in storms at sea, emulating Christ on the Sea of Galilee.

Among other miracles performed specifically by the saint (though some of these might also be seen as divine interventions), a popular one is the bringing forth or discovery of water in a waterless place. The biblical parallel here is that of Moses producing water from

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<sup>31</sup> Treharne E.M. (ed. and trans.), *The Old English Life of St Nicholas with the Old English Life of St Giles* (Leeds: 1997) 131-47, with translation 148-162.

the rock at Horeb (Numbers 20:11), though it has also been argued that Anglo-Saxon occurrences were also influenced by pagan practice.<sup>32</sup> Saint Clement causes water to well up where there had been no spring (*OEM*, 218; see also *CHI XXXVII*, lines 78-80); Saint Cuthbert finds a spring of pleasant water in a waterless island (*CH II X*, lines 171-176); Saint Alban prays for water at a pleasant hill and a well-spring appears at his feet (*LS XIX*, lines 107-115); in response to a prayer of Saint Benedict, a fountain springs forth at the top of a mountain (*Dial.* II.5); and in the cave of Saint Martinus water springs up, giving him just as much for his needs (*Dial.* III.16). In a somewhat analogous miracle Saint Machutus brings it about that a single drop of water serves a whole group without decreasing (*Life of Saint Machutus*, 13, lines 12-16); elsewhere the same saint finds a miraculous spring (25, line 3-17, line 1). A final spectacular variation on the motif of bringing forth water is to be seen in the episode of Saint Andrew drowning the wicked Mermedonians when he calls forth water from a pillar in their city, causing a great flood (*Andreas*, lines 1492-1582; prose *Acts*,<sup>33</sup> lines 261-291).

A motif reflecting God's miraculous protection of his saints is the lifting of oppression from fire as though it were refreshing dew. Thus, Saint Martin emerges from a conflagration feeling 'as if he were in a pleasant dew' (*on wynsumum deaw*, *LS XXXI*, line 888); Saint Eustace and his family, undergoing the ordeal of martyrdom by fire, pray that the fire's heat may be turned to liquid dew (*LS XXX*, line 441), whereupon the heat cools as they

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<sup>32</sup> See Hooke D., "Rivers, Wells and Springs in Anglo-Saxon England : Water in Sacred and Mystical Contexts", in Hyer M.C. – Hooke D. (eds.), *Water and the Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Liverpool: 2018) 107-135.

<sup>33</sup> *The Acts of Matthew and Andrew in the City of the Cannibals*, ed. Cassidy - Ringler, *Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader* 205-219.



give up their souls; Saint Agatha taunts her persecutor that if he tortures her by fire God will send a healing dew from heaven (*LS VIII*, line 88).

### *Travel*

Travel by sea as a theme in Christian story goes back as far as the Acts of the Apostles and it figures widely in hagiography. Saints themselves travel and they help those who travel, while God watches over the voyages of the righteous and unrighteous as they cross the unpredictable sea, intervening as appropriate to protect the good and punish the ungodly (the latter exemplified in the deaths of the persecutors of Saint Juliana and of Saints Ananias and Petrus, mentioned above). Mention of river crossings, on the other hand, is very infrequent, though there are occasional examples in the Old English material: Saint Eustace crosses a river with his two sons but loses them to wild animals (*LS XXX*, lines 173-174), and later he crosses another river on a military expedition (lines 308-9); Saint Giles crosses the Rhone (*Life of Saint Giles*, lines 176-177); in the story of Saint Mary of Egypt, both Mary and the monk Zosimus, and indeed his brethren, cross the River Jordan, as discussed more fully below. Travel by river is exemplified in the episode of Saint Martin's body being taken from Poitiers to Tours (*LS XXX*, lines 1472-1480; *CH II XXXIV*, lines 323-327 [though in the *CH II* version Ælfric does not explicitly mention that the ship journey is by river]).

Travel by sea has a range of purposes and reasons, from the noble to the mundane. Like the apostles, saints travel as missionaries, as (in our sample) Saint Germanus sailing to Britain (*OEM*, 150), 'where he performed many miracles both on sea and on dry land' (trans. Rauer 151), Saint Andrew voyaging to Mermedonia (*Andreas*, lines 235-836; prose *Acts*, lines 72-101), Saint Fursa, who travels from Ireland, first to Britain and then on to King Clovis of the Franks (*OEM*, 48), Saint Giles travelling in stages from Greece until he reaches

Marseilles (*Life of Saint Giles*, lines 101-132) and Saint Machutus, making a circuitous journey to preach in Brittany (*Life*, 35, line 2-43, line 2).

Some travellers in hagiography embark on journeys that we might view more specifically as quests. Before his time in Brittany, Machutus had been a companion of Saint Brendan in his search for the Promised Land of the Saints, encountering many wonders on the way (*Life of Saint Machutus* 7, line 17-31, line 3); after the martyrdom of her husband Adrian, Saint Natalia boards a ship from Nicomedia to travel to Byzantium ‘where Christians had taken the body of Adrian’ (*OEM*, 60; trans. Rauer 61); Saint Helena sails to the Holy Land to find the True Cross (*Elene*, lines 225-275); in the story of Saint Guthlac, Guthlac’s servant goes by boat across the fens on a quest to bring back the saint’s sister (*Guthlac B*, lines 1326-1343; prose *Guthlac*, Chap. 20, lines 119-121); Guthlac himself had travelled by boat to reach his fenland retreat (prose *Guthlac*, Chap. 3, lines 23-25). Even the voyage of Mary of Egypt from Alexandria to Jerusalem can be seen as a kind of perverted quest as Mary goes in search of sexual partners (*LS XXIIIB*, lines 376-392).

Sea travel can also be for reasons of necessity, where the saint needs to escape or is forced to depart: Saint Natalia escapes an unwelcome suitor (*OEM*, 60), Saint Erasmus escapes the persecution of Maximianus (*OEM*, 112), Saints Vitus and Modestus also escape persecution (*OEM*, 116), Saint Eustace and his family flee their homeland after conversion (*LS XXX*, lines 163-172), Saint Clement is compelled by Trajan to go into exile by ship (*CH I XXXVII*, lines 53-62).

Hagiography also has instances of travel to and fro for official, commercial and personal reasons, particularly again travel across the Mediterranean Sea. Such voyages are usually of interest to hagiographers, however, only when something unexpected has happened on them, most commonly a storm. Storms at sea affect saints on their travels, as is the case with Saint Andrew on his way to Mermedonia (*Andreas*, lines 360-468; prose *Acts*,

lines 75-83), Saint Natalia on her voyage to Byzantium (*OEM*, 60), Saint Agazatha travelling from Pannonia to Rome (*Dial.* IV.59) and the devout Nathan, who, in the quasi-hagiographical *Legend of Saint Veronica*<sup>34</sup> is providentially blown off course by high winds on his way to Rome, leading to the cure of the cancer-stricken lord of the city of Lybia (lines 17-20).

More typically, however, it is other people going about their business that are afflicted by storms, from which they are then miraculously saved by a saint. Saint Agazatha, having safely made land in his storm, prays for a mariner who has become separated from the ship and thus saves him (*Dial.* IV.59) and Saint Martin of Tours is invoked by a sailor during a storm, which suddenly abates (*LS* II, 290, lines 1135-1142; *OEM*, 214). Storms threatening ships are also calmed by Saint Giles (*Life of Saint Giles*, lines 64-85), Saint Machutus (*Life of Saint Machutus* (97, line 21-99, line 10) and Saint Nicholas (*Life of Saint Nicholas*,<sup>35</sup> lines 186-200), while Nicholas also prays that a fleet driven into his harbour by a storm may sail safely to its destination (lines 342-345, 418-419). Bishop Maximianus's ship, returning to Italy from Constantinople, is filled with water in a storm but makes its way safely to port over the course of eight days, sinking only when the holy man has disembarked (*Dial.*, II. 36): God has granted this miracle 'through Maximianus, his servant'.

#### *Cleansing, Healing and Self-Denial*

Mentions of baptism, referred to in Ælfric's *Life of Saint Eugenia* as a 'cleansing of all filth' (*LS* II, line 337), are included in many saints' lives, though usually writers feel no need to say anything concerning the administering of the sacrament, not even mentioning water.

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<sup>34</sup> Assmann B. (ed.), *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben* (Kassel: 1889) 181-192.

<sup>35</sup> Treharne (ed.), *The Old English Life of St Nicholas* 83-100, with translation 101-117.

Exceptions to this rule occur only when there is something remarkable about the baptism, as in the account of the young Saint Athanasius baptising children in the waves of the sea at Alexandria (*OEM*, 92) and that of Saint Christina being immersed three times in the sea by Christ, who has appeared to her walking over the waves (*OEM*, 140). Saint James the Greater asks for water at his execution and baptises the pharisee Josias (*CH II XXVII*, lines 171-179; *Concerning James, the Brother of John*,<sup>36</sup> 24, lines 30-36); similarly, Saint Laurence blesses a jug of water and baptises a believing Roman soldier in the midst of his own tortures (*CH I XXIX*, lines 175-178). A perversion of baptism appears in Ælfric's *Life of Saint Stephen* when a widow dips her hair in a font vessel and curses her children (*CH II II*, lines 114-117).

Water is also used to cleanse or heal people from affliction. Saint Machutus washes the eyes of a blind king and thus gives him his sight (*Life of Saint Machutus*, 65, lines 2-8); Saint Guthlac cures an insane man by bathing him in consecrated water after others have failed (prose *Guthlac*, Chap. 12, lines 17-46); Saint Cuthbert heals a woman with holy water (*CH II X*, lines 273-275); healing water also occurs in a legend of Saint Michael retold in one of the Blickling homilies (*Blickling XVII*, 209).<sup>37</sup> The sinner Mary of Egypt washes her hands and face in the waters of the Jordan (*LS XXIIIB*, line 502). The miracle of fire turning to pleasant dew, mentioned earlier, may also be seen as an instance of healing; indeed in one of the examples cited (*LS VIII*, line 88) Saint Agatha refers to dew as *halwendlic*, 'healing'.

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<sup>36</sup> Warner R.D.N (ed.), *Early English Homilies of the Twelfth Century MS Vesp. D. XIV* (London: 1917) 21-25.

<sup>37</sup> Morris R. (ed. and trans.), *The Blickling Homilies* (Oxford: 1874, 1876, 1880; reprinted as one vol., 1967): according to this legend, in a grotto-church dedicated to Saint Michael there is a stream issuing from the roof; many people suffering from illness and affliction are healed by drinking this 'heavenly liquid'.

The consumption of water is referred to in hagiography in the lives of ascetic saints, the emphasis being on how little water these saints drink. Saint Paul the Hermit drinks only a little water ‘from his hollow hand’ (*OEM*, 46; trans. Rauer, 47) while Saint Antony goes without food or water for two or three days in a row and when he does break his fast it is to take some bread and salt and ‘just a little water’ (*OEM*, 50; trans. Rauer, 51). Saint Guthlac lives on barley-bread and water, breaking his fast only after sunset (prose *Guthlac*, Chap. 4, lines 24-32). Saint Mary of Egypt is very thirsty ‘on account of the want of water in this wilderness’ (*LS XXIIIB*, lines 537-538; trans. Skeat 37), living only on plants (line 569); when the monk Zosimus brings her a few lentils soaked in water, she touches the lentils with her fingers and puts only three in her mouth (lines 714-716). In the monastery of Zosimus he and the other monks subsist on bread and water alone (lines 93-94). Most extreme is Saint Mary Magdalen, who during her thirty years in the desert ‘never ate human food, or drank’ (*OEM*, 142; trans. Rauer 143). There is one example in Old English of the deprivation of food and water as part of the affliction imposed on a saint by a persecutor: Saint Anastasia, deprived of bread and water in her prison cell, is fed with heavenly food by a spirit (*OEM*, 34).

The other ways that water figures in the lives of ascetic saints are as an instrument of self-mortification and by providing a location for withdrawal from the world. In self-mortification Saint Cuthbert stands in the sea at night (*CH II X*, lines 78-81), Saint Neot prays standing in a pond (*Life of Saint Neot*,<sup>38</sup> 130, lines 31-32) and Saint Æthelthryth denies herself the indulgence of bathing ‘save at high festivals’ (*LS XX*, line 45; trans. Skeat 435). With respect to location, saints retreat to isolated places surrounded by or beside water. Saint Eadberht of Lindisfarne spends each Lent and Advent in a secret place ‘surrounded by sea

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<sup>38</sup> Warner, *Early English Homilies* 129-134.

currents' (*OEM*, 98; trans. Rauer 99), Saint Cuthbert retreats to Farne Island, *on flowendre yðe*, 'amid the flowing waves' (*CH II X*, lines 163-164), and Saint Guthlac withdraws to a tiny island in the watery Fens, 'where there are immense swamps, sometimes dark stagnant water, sometimes foul rivulets running; and also many islands and reeds and tummocks and thickets' (prose *Life*, ed. Gonser, Chap. 3, lines 3-6; trans. Swanton 91). It is notable that these holy people in our corpus who retreat to watery places are insular saints engaging in their version of withdrawal to the desert as they emulate in a new environment the ascetics of the earlier church who dwelt in arid places.

### **Saint Mary of Egypt**

One such ascetic from the earlier church is Saint Mary of Egypt, as celebrated in the anonymous Old English *Life* that tells her story. The Old English *Life of Saint Mary of Egypt* is a generally faithful translation, though with frequent rhetorical augmentation, of a Latin *vita*, in which Mary withdraws to the Syrian desert after a life of debauchery in Alexandria and after many years is encountered there by the monk Zosimus, who is following the practice of his monastery in spending the season of Lent alone in the desert; Mary tells Zosimus her story and brings spiritual enlightenment to him. The *Life of Saint Mary of Egypt* is of particular interest with regard to water, uniquely so indeed among Old English hagiographical writings: here is a saint's life that is far from literal-minded in its use of water themes.

The *Life* does have the familiar motifs of travel by sea – Mary making her way to Jerusalem – and the miracle of walking on the water – Mary crossing the river to meet the monk Zosimus – but otherwise water operates symbolically in this life. The focus of this symbolism is the River Jordan, 'holiest of all waters' (lines 63-64; trans. Skeat 7), the river that separates the desert, a place of isolation but also spiritual enlightenment, from the

‘world’ on the other side. In the desert Mary asks Zosimus about life in the world – ‘tell me how nowadays Christ’s people are governed in the world and how the emperor’s [matters stand]; or how the flock of Christ’s right-believing congregation is now being looked after’ (lines 252-225; trans. Skeat 17-19, modified) – and later (lines 684-685) she walks across the river to ‘the side of the Jordan pertaining to the world’ (lines 624-625; trans. Skeat 43). The ‘world’ is a place of activity, crowds and consumption, the desert on the other side a place of solitariness and contemplation, without the most basic necessities for life. Mary suffers ‘on account of the want of water in this wilderness, scarcely enduring the terrible necessity’ (lines 537-538; trans. Skeat 37). When Zosimus comes across her it is at the site of a dried-up stream (lines 196-197). Water must have been present in it in the past, but presumably only very rarely; the stream is still dried-up when Zosimus returns there two years later (line 740).

Zosimus’s monastery is on the side of the Jordan that belongs to the world but it is appropriately *near* the holy river and its monks go across to the other side each Lent:

When they had gone over the river Jordan, then each one sundered himself far from the others, and none of them joined himself again to his companions; but if any one of them saw another afar [coming] towards him, immediately he turned out of this [chosen] direction, and went another way, and lived by himself, and continued in perpetual prayers and fasting. (lines 133-138; trans. Skeat 11)

Crossing the river is an act of spiritual resolution.

Mary’s moment of conversion comes when she is in Jerusalem (where she has gone for immoral purposes) and is mysteriously prevented from entering the great church on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Suddenly ‘knowledge of salvation (*hælo andgit*) touched her mind’ (lines 424-425; trans. Skeat, 29) and she repents her former life. Soon afterward

she hears a voice calling from far away, saying, ‘If you cross the waters of the Jordan, there you will experience and find good repose’ (lines 483-484; trans. Skeat 33, modified). Mary makes her way to the Jordan, where, spiritually cleansing herself, she first visits the church of John the Baptist and then washes her hands and face in the holy water of the river, before returning to the church to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist (lines 501-506).

The next morning Mary crosses the Jordan and begins her life of self-mortification in the desert, alone, until she is encountered by Zosimus forty-seven years into her sojourn (line 515). After telling Zosimus her story, she instructs him to wait for her one year later ‘on the side of the Jordan that pertains to the world’ (lines 624-625; trans. Skeat 43) so that she may receive the sacrament from him, and the monk duly waits for her there, though not understanding how she will get across to him, ‘now that there is no ship wherein she may come to me’ (lines 674-675; trans. Skeat 45). It is then that Mary walks upon the water, both to get to him and then to return to the other side: ‘She went towards him, walking on the soft waves (*uppan þa hnescan yða*) as if on dry land’ (lines 684-685; trans. Skeat 47). At this meeting she asks Zosimus to cross the river again the following year and return to the dried-up stream where they first met. He does so and finds her body there laid out properly for burial (line 742).

In the *Life of Saint Mary of Egypt* the River Jordan functions as a boundary, both in a literal sense and symbolically. The Jordan and its waters represent a key narrative fulcrum in the story of Mary. The Jordan is a physical reality but also a powerful symbol of the theme of advancing to spiritual perfection and also that of cleansing from sin, that are at the heart of the message that the *Life* conveys. It is in this anonymous *Life* that the theme of water finds its fullest development among Old English hagiographical writings. It should be emphasised, however, that there is nothing distinctively Anglo-Saxon in the treatment of water in the *Life*. The Old English text is a thoughtful rendering that frequently contributes rhetorical



heightening to emphasise the meaning of its Latin original, but it is notable that such heightening is not very evident where water is concerned.<sup>39</sup> With respect to water, the Old English version faithfully transmits rather than elaborates the content of its original, and it is examined here as an example of hagiography in general, rather than as a specifically Old English work. For a distinctively Anglo-Saxon approach to hagiography we need to turn to lives in Old English verse.

### Verse Saints' Lives

The surviving verse saints' lives display most of the same range of water themes as found in Old English hagiographical writings as a whole: water figures in miracles, is a medium of travel and represents cleansing; the one category identified above that is not represented in the poetry is that of water as contributing to ascetic practice, water as a means of self-mortification. The themes are the same as those found in prose but can be developed in the verse saints' lives with considerable imagination, exploiting the resources of Old English poetic tradition. And, though water is *used* by people in the verse lives, it can also take on an interest in and of itself. As Heide Estes, suggests, for example, 'The expression of joy in journeying on the sea [. . .] might be read as celebrating, in its own terms, a landscape in which humans cannot build or live, and unstructured by human intervention'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For example, the descriptive phrase *uppan þa hnescan yða*, 'on the soft waves', quoted above, reflects (slightly simplifying, indeed) the Latin *super liquidum equoris fluctum*, 'on the limpid waves of the surface' (see *Vita Sanctae Mariae Egiptiacae*, ed. and trans. Magennis, *The Old English Life of St Mary of Egypt* 140-209), quoted phrase at line 761.

<sup>40</sup> Estes, *Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes* 38.

*Guthlac A and Guthlac B*

The theme of water as a means of self-mortification is entirely absent from the (small) corpus of verse lives, even though we have two poems on an ascetic saint, Saint Guthlac, who retreated to a watery wilderness accessible only by boat. We might especially expect this theme to play a part in *Guthlac A*, which tells of Guthlac settling in his place of solitary retreat, where he fights against demons for ownership of it. The Latin *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* by Felix of Crowland<sup>41</sup> and its Old English prose translation<sup>42</sup> describe the saint's island abode in atmospheric terms. According to Felix, to get there Guthlac makes his way through 'a most dismal fen of immense size [. . .] now consisting of marshes, now of bogs, sometimes of black waters overhung by fog, sometimes studded with wooded islands and traversed by the windings of tortuous streams' (trans. Colgrave 87).<sup>43</sup> Travelling in a fisherman's skiff, the saint arrives at an island in the middle of the marsh, 'which on account of the wildness of this very remote desert had hitherto remained untilled and known to a very few' (trans, Colgrave

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<sup>41</sup> Colgrave B. (ed. and trans.), *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (Cambridge: 1956).

<sup>42</sup> See **n. 30**, above.

<sup>43</sup> Chap. 24, 'immensae magnitudinis aterrima palus . . . nunc stagnis, nunc flactris, interdum nigris fusi vaporis laticibus, necnon et crebris insularum nemorumque intervenientibus flexuosis rivigarum anfractibus' (Colgrave 86). On Guthlac's life in the fens, see Wickham-Crowley, 'Living on the *Ecg*: The Mutable Boundaries of Land and Water in Anglo-Saxon Contexts', in Lees C.L. – Overing G. (eds.), *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes* (University Park, PA: 2006) 85-110; see also Wickham-Crowley's chapter "Fens and Frontiers" in Hyer M.C. – Hooke D. (eds.), *Water and the Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Liverpool: 2018) 68-88.

89).<sup>44</sup> On the island Guthlac finds ‘a sort of cistern’ (*velut cisterna*), which supplies him with ‘muddy water’ (*lutulentae aquae*), though he restricts himself to drinking this water and eating a small amount of barley-bread along with it only after sunset, ‘for the needs of this mortal life’ (*mortalis vitae*) (ed. and trans. Colgrave, Chap. 28 94-95).

These details are faithfully reflected in the Old English prose translation of the *Vita* (ed. Gonser, Chap. 3, lines 1-31; Chap. 4, lines 1-32) but are conspicuously absent from the account of Guthlac’s place of retreat in *Guthlac A*. In *Guthlac A* there is no mention of the fens, the island, or water, muddy or otherwise. Instead, the poem re-presents Guthlac’s territory as a pleasant green landscape, though one infested by evil spirits when he first arrives, thus both attractive and foreboding, ‘a place of contradictions’, as Nicole Guenter Discenza refers to it.<sup>45</sup> The territory is dominated by a hill (*beorg*), a key spiritual symbol in the poem that has been much discussed by critics.<sup>46</sup> Here Guthlac has ‘the most cherished abode on earth’ (*þam leofestan eard on eorðan*, lines 427-428). Having established

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<sup>44</sup> Chap. 25, ‘quae ante paucis propter remotioris heremi solitudinem inculta vix nota habebatur’ (ed. Colgrave 88).

<sup>45</sup> Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces* 154; see also Michelet F.L., *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford: 2006) 172-173, on the ‘ambiguous’ nature of the place.

<sup>46</sup> Most notably, Guthlac’s *beorg* has been interpreted as a barrow (Shook L.K., “The Burial Mound in *Guthlac A*”, *Modern Philology* 58 (1960) 1-10), a heathen tumulus (Wentersdorf K.P., “*Guthlac A*: The Battle for the *Beorg*”, *Neophilologus* 62 (1978) 135-142) and a mountain (Reichardt, “*Guthlac A* and the Landscape of Spiritual Perfection”, *Neophilologus* 58 (1974) 331-338).

ownership of the land where he wishes to live,<sup>47</sup> he becomes the *bytla*, ‘builder’ (lines 148, 723), of a home, a place of joy that anticipates the joy of the heavenly home to come.<sup>48</sup> The poet of *Guthlac A* has strikingly rejected all references to water in line with the poem’s emphasis on Guthlac’s abode as a desirable piece of land which the saint wrests from evil hands. As Catherine Clarke has explained, in describing this desirable place, the *Guthlac A* poet draws upon traditions of the *locus amoenus* (describing an idealised landscape), familiar particularly in Latin literature.<sup>49</sup> I have suggested elsewhere that the absence of water in *Guthlac A* may also serve to strengthen correspondences between Guthlac, with his *beorg*, and the archetypal desert saint Antony, whose dwelling place was mountainous (and who fought demons for possession of it), and Paul, who lived at a ‘rocky mountain’ (*saxeum montem*).<sup>50</sup>

Reference to water as a means of self-mortification is also absent from *Guthlac B*, a poem on the death of Guthlac. *Guthlac B* describes the saint’s retreat as being ‘in a wilderness’ (*on westenne*, line 935) but mentions that it was on an island only once, towards

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<sup>47</sup> See Clark S., “A More Permanent Homeland: Land Tenure in *Guthlac A*”, *Anglo-Saxon England* 40 (2012) 75-102.

<sup>48</sup> On building and home, see Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces* 151-156; also Jones C.A., “Envisioning the *coenobium* in the Old English *Guthlac A*”, *Mediaeval Studies* 57 (1995) 259-291.

<sup>49</sup> Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England* 45-66: Clarke focuses particularly on lines 732-748 of the poem.

<sup>50</sup> Magennis H., *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: 1996) 183. For the *saxeum montem* reference, see *Vita Sancti Pauli primi eremitaе*, Chap. 5, ed. J.-P. Migne col. 21B.

the end of the poem, when it is declared that at the death of Guthlac, as his place of retreat is filled with sweet odours and angelic singing, ‘the island trembled, the flat ground convulsed’ (lines 1325-1326, trans. Bradley 282; *Beofode þæt ealond, / foldwong onþrong*).

*Guthlac B* lacks the theme of water as a means of self-mortification but it does have a description of travel by water, in the closing episode of the poem, in which Guthlac’s servant embarks on a journey by boat to inform the saint’s sister of his death. Concerning this boat trip Felix’s *Vita*, followed by the Old English prose version, simply recounts that the attendant ‘took a boat and, leaving the landing-place, then began the journey which the man of God had commanded him’ (trans. Colgrave 159).<sup>51</sup> *Guthlac B* develops this detail at some length, turning what would have been a paddle through marshy shallows into a speeding voyage across the waves. Steeped in the formulaic language of traditional poetry, the lofty description of the voyage in *Guthlac A* would have resonated familiarly with Anglo-Saxon audiences:

gewat þa ofestlice  
 beorn unhyðig, þæt he bat gestag,  
 wæghengest wræc, wæterþisa for,  
 snel under sorgum. Swegle hate scan  
 blac ofer burgsalo. Brimwudu scynde,

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<sup>51</sup> Chap. 1, ‘arrepta naviculam portum reliquit ac deinde, quo vir Dei praeceperat, coepto itinere perexit’ (ed. Colgrave 158); the Old English prose version has ‘eode þa on scip, and þa ferde to þære stowe, þe se godes wer ær bebead’ (ed. Gonser, Chap. 20, lines 120-121), ‘he went onto a boat and travelled to the place that the man of God had instructed’ (trans. Swanton 110).

leoht, lade fus. Lagumearg snyrede,  
 gehlæsted to hyðe, þæt se hærnflota  
 æfter sundplegan sondlond gespearn,  
 grond wið greote. (lines 1327-1335)

Then, unhappy, he went hastily on until he boarded a boat and launched the wave-steed – the ship moved off – brisk beneath his sorrows. The sun was shining hotly, shimmering above the dwellings. The light timber vessel sped along, striving forward on its way. Into the landing-place the laden water-steed hurried so that after tossing on the open water the buoyant boat trod upon the sandy shore and grated on the gravel.  
 (trans. Bradley 282, modified)

In these lines the *Guthlac B* poet daringly presents a version of what may be seen as a recurrent motif or type scene of Old English poetry, that of the journey of the hero by ship. This motif occurs in *Beowulf*, twice (lines 205-228 and 1896-1913), and also in the verse saints' lives *Elene*, *Juliana* and *Andreas*. It is characterised by the mention of a number of definitive descriptive details, expressed in formulaic terms.

The definitive details mentioned both in the above passage from *Guthlac B* and in *Beowulf* (parallels in *Elene*, *Juliana* and *Andreas*, respectively, are discussed separately below) may be listed as follows:

Embarkation, often with mention of the shore (though the latter detail does not occur in *Guthlac B*): *he bat gestag* (line 132), 'he boarded a boat'. *Beowulf* parallels: *on stefn stigon* (line 212), 'boarded onto the stern', *Gewat him on naca* (line 1903), 'departed on the ship'.

Urgency and (wind-driven) speed: *ofestlice* (line 1327), ‘speedily’, *snel* (line 1330), ‘quick’, *snyrede* (line 1332), ‘hastened’. *Beowulf* parallels: *winde gefysed* (line 217), ‘sent forth with the wind’, *wind ofer yðum* (line 1907), ‘wind above the waves’, *lyftigeswenced* (line 1913), ‘impelled by the wind’.

Sea and/or waves: *wæghengest* (line 1329), ‘wave-steed’, *sundplegan* (line 1334), ‘play of the sea’. *Beowulf* parallels: *flota wæs on yðum* (line 210), ‘the boat was on the waves’, *Gewat ofer wægholm* (line 217), ‘departed over the billowy sea’, *fleat famigheals forð ofer yðe* (line 1909), ‘floated foamy-necked forth over the waves’.

Cargo: *gehlæsted* (line 1333), ‘loaded’. *Beowulf* parallels: *on bearm nacan beorhte frætwe* (line 214), ‘bright treasures into the hold of the ship’, *hladen herewædum* (line 1897), ‘loaded with battle-armor’.

The hero/leader, specifically highlighted: *beorn unhyðig* (line 1328), ‘unhappy man’. *Beowulf* parallel: *se goda . . . sundwude sohte* (lines 205-208), ‘the good man sought the sea-wood’. In *Guthlac B*, however, this feature is deployed ironically, as the traveller is not a leader but a servant, who before the voyage is described as lacking in courage – *ða afyrht wearð / ar elnes beloren* (lines 1326-1327), ‘then the messenger, dispossessed of courage, grew frightened’ – and is portrayed elegiacally as *unhyðig* (line 1138), ‘unhappy’, rather than displaying heroic resolution.

Most insistently, the ship on which the voyage is made: the ship is referred to in descriptive alliterating compound words, including kennings. There are five such compounds in the *Guthlac B* passage: *wæghengest*, ‘wave-steed’, *wæterpisa*, ‘water-rusher’ (both line 1329), *brimwudu* (line 1331), ‘sea-wood’, *lagumearg* (line 1332), ‘sea-steed’, *hærnflota* (line 1333),

‘wave-floater’. *Beowulf* parallels: *wegflota* (line 1907), ‘wave-floater’, *sæwudu* (line 226), ‘sea-wood’, *sundwudu* (lines 208 and 1906), ‘sea-wood’.<sup>52</sup>

Destination harbour or landing place: *to hyðe* (line 1333), ‘to the landing-place’, *sondlond* (line 1334), ‘sea-shore’, *wið greote* (line 1335), ‘on the gravel’. *Beowulf* parallels: *on wang stigon* (line 225), ‘went ashore’, *ceol up geprang* (line 1912), ‘the ship drove ashore’, *on lande stod* (line 1913), ‘stood on the land’.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Of the compounds found in *Guthlac B*, *lagumearg* and *hærnflota* are *hapax legomena*, though formulaic parallels are *sæmearh* (*Andreas* line 267, *Elene* line 245), *ægflota* (*Andreas* line 258), *sæflota* (*Andreas* line 381), *scipflota* (*The Battle of Brunanburh* line 11) and (as referred to in the main text, above) *wægflota* (*Beowulf* line 1909, *Andreas* line 487, and *Elene* line 246). *Wæghengest* is also found in *Elene* (line 236) and has formulaic parallels in *merehengest* (*Meters of Boethius* 26.25), *brimhengest* (*Rune Poem* lines 47 and 66, *Andreas* line 513), *sæhengest* (*Andreas* line 488) and *fearoðhengest* (*Elene* line 226). *Wæterþisa* appears in *The Whale* (line 50), while *brimwudu* appears in *Elene* (line 244) and is paralleled in *flodwudu* (*Christ* line 853), *sæwudu* (*Beowulf* line 226) and *sundwudu* (*Beowulf* lines 208 and 1906, *Christ* line 667) (the last two *Beowulf* occurrences are also mentioned in the main text, above).

<sup>53</sup> A further detail, that of the comparison of the ship to a bird, is confined to *Beowulf* and *Andreas* and is best taken as a direct borrowing by the *Andreas* poet (see n. 61, below): *fugle gelicost* (*Beowulf* line 218); *fugole gelicost* (*Andreas* line 497).



Structurally the motif moves towards this reference to arrival by means of an *until/so that* pattern: in *Guthlac B*, ‘so that . . . the buoyant boat stood upon the sandy shore’.<sup>54</sup>

Other discernible components of the motif of the journey of the hero by ship, not included in the *Guthlac B* version, are:

Sight of land at the end of the voyage: *land gesawon* (*Beowulf*, line 221), ‘saw the land’, *þæt hi Geata clifu ongitan meahton* (*Beowulf*, line 1911), ‘that they could perceive the cliffs of the Geats’.

Reference to the admirable crew/warriors travelling with their leader: *weras on wilsid*, (*Beowulf*, line 216), ‘men on their desired journey’.

These latter details are perhaps not considered relevant by the *Guthlac B* poet, since the boat is never far from land and the servant is travelling alone, without a crew. The curious detail of the sun shining over the dwelling places (in what seems to be an uninhabited wilderness) may also reflect the fact that the journey is not really a sea journey.

Edward B. Irving refers to the spirit of heroic endeavour evident in the *Beowulf* sea journeys, observing that ‘[the] voyages in *Beowulf*, in actuality, become resonant renderings of heroic power’.<sup>55</sup> Such a spirit is missing in *Guthlac B*. Instead, as suggested above, in including the phrases *beorn unhyðig* (line 1328), ‘unhappy man’, and also *snel under sorgum* (line 1330), ‘brisk beneath his sorrows’ (an ironic variant is the upbeat *snel under segle*, as found in *Andreas*, line 505, ‘brisk beneath the sail’), the *Guthlac B* poet has injected an element of elegiac colouring, appropriate to the servant’s mournful mission. The

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<sup>54</sup> This point is made by Ogilvie J.D.A. – Baker D.C., *Reading Beowulf: An Introduction to the Poem, Its Background, and Its Style* (Norman, OK: 1983) 150.

<sup>55</sup> Irving E.B., *A Reading of Beowulf* (New Haven, CT: 1968) 51.

incorporation of the voyage motif has allowed the poet to emphasise the urgency and speed of the journey and through its elevated register to suggest its importance, while also maintaining an elegiac tone. In including this passage the poet is attempting something ambitious, doing so (to quote the editor of the standard edition of the poem) in ‘a high style, with ornateness its most distinctive feature’,<sup>56</sup> and thereby presenting the hagiographical theme of travel by water in a distinctively Anglo-Saxon manner.

### *Elene and Juliana*

Voyages by sea also feature in *Elene* and *Juliana*, two poems on female saints by the named author Cynewulf. In *Elene* the sea-voyage passage is even more elaborate than that in *Guthlac B*, extending over thirty-three lines (lines 225-258), and whereas the *Guthlac B* passage was prompted by a brief mention of a boat journey in the Latin original, there is no reference at all to a sea voyage in the *Acta Quiriaci*, a version of which is thought to have been the source for Cynewulf in *Elene*.<sup>57</sup> Elene and her ‘mighty army’ (Chap. 3, trans. Allen and Calder, 61) must have travelled by ship in order to get to Jerusalem but this is not thought worthy of mention in the Latin work. In the Old English poem, however, a fully-fledged journey-by-sea motif is developed, executed in the same elevated style and with the same identifying components as we saw in *Guthlac B*, except that the detail of the accompanying admirable warriors (understandably, not in *Guthlac B*) is also included, and, as in *Beowulf*, the mood of the passage is cheerful and optimistic.

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<sup>56</sup> Roberts J. (ed.), *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford: 1979) 57.

<sup>57</sup>Henschenius G. – Papebrochius D., *Acta Sanctorum, Maius, Tom. I*, 445-8 (Antwerp, 1680); trans. Allen M.J.B. – Calder D.G., *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: 1976) 59-69.

The *Elene* passage begins,

Ongan þa ofstlice eorla mengu  
 to flote fisan. Fearoðhengestas  
 ymb geofenes stæð gearwe stodon,  
 sælde sæmearas, sunde getenge. (lines 225-228)

A throng of men, then, quickly hastened down to the sea. Ships, the horses of the ocean, lay ready along the seashore, sea-steeds moored afloat upon the sound. (trans. Bradley, 171)

These lines signal the appearance of the sea-journey motif and begin to highlight its constituent features, identification of which builds up further as the description develops. Thus, mention is made of embarkation at the shore (*gehlodon . . . werum ond wifum*, lines 234-236, ‘loaded with men and women’); urgency and speed (*ofer fifelwæg famige scriðan*, line 237, ‘slip spuming over the ocean wave’; *breacan ofer bæðwæg, brimwudu snyrgan, / under swellingum, sæmearh plegean, / wadan wægflotan*, lines 244-246, ‘scudding over the waterway, the timbered vessel sweeping along under swelling sails, the sea-steed racing, the wave-skimming ship forging onwards’); sea and/or waves (*ofer fifelwæg*, line 237, ‘over the ocean wave’; *ofer earhgeblond yða swengas*, line 239, ‘the buffeting of the waves over the surging of the sea’; etc.); cargo (*þa gehlodon hildeseccum, / bordum ond ordum*, lines 234-235, ‘loaded with battle-coats, with shields and with spears’); the hero/leader (*idese siðfæt*, line 229, ‘the woman’s expedition’; *sio guðcwen*, line 254, ‘the warlike queen’); the ship(s) (*fearoðhengestas*, line 226, ‘horses of the sea’; *sæmearas*, line 228, ‘sea-steeds’; *brimwudu*, line 244, ‘timbered ships’; *hringedstefnan*, line 248, ‘ring-prowed ships’; etc.); destination

harbour and landing place (*to hyðe*, line 248, ‘to the harbour’; *æt sæfearoðe, sande bewrecene*, line 251, ‘at the sea-shore whipped with sand’); admirable warriors (*wlanc manig*, line 231, ‘many a high-mettled man’; *mægen fægere*, line 242, ‘[no] finer-looking force’).

In *Elene* the resources of traditional poetry are deployed here to bring a sense of urgency and resoluteness to the saint’s military expedition to Jerusalem and to magnify Elene as a heroic figure. The expedition is recreated in Germanic terms as the voyage of the hero, who, accompanied by a retinue of noble warriors, confidently travels with the aim of carrying out a mighty exploit. The exploit here is the glorious one of discovering the true cross, and the enemies to be faced are not powerful armies but the spiritually obstinate Jews, who must be cowed into revealing the location of the cross. Through this description the heroic stature of Elene is emphasised. As she sets out on her mission to the Holy Land she is established for Anglo-Saxon audiences as a formidable leader, admirably purposeful and determined to succeed.

*Elene* also has two references to baptism: Elene’s chief opponent, Judas, ends up converting to Christianity and is baptised (*gefulwad*, line 1043), receiving ‘the bath of baptism’ (*fulwihtes bæð*, line 1033). In an earlier episode in the poem, however, in the account of Judas’s opposition to Elene, it is the absence of water that is highlighted, when Judas is terrorised by the implacable Elene by being confined for seven days in a dry well or pit – *in drygne seað* (line 693). The *seað* may be seen as symbolic of the spiritual aridity of Judas before his conversion.

The motif of the journey of the hero by sea also makes a brief, and highly ironic, appearance in *Juliana*, a poem on the martyrdom of the eponymous saint at the hands of the evil Heliseus. In his account of the final voyage of Heliseus after he has had Juliana executed, Cynewulf subverts the motif by associating it with an unheroic persecutor and including

elegiac imagery where a cheerful mood is normally to be expected. The Latin original has the simple statement that when the persecutor was sailing to his estate ‘a mighty tempest came and swamped his boat’ (Chap. 22, trans. Allen and Calder 132), killing all on board.<sup>58</sup> The hagiographical/romance theme of the storm at sea is deployed, and there is no elegiac imagery.

In the Old English we encounter the familiar sea-journey tropes of the hero/leader (who is, however, *sceohmod*, line 672, ‘craven-hearted’) going to sea (*ehstream sohte*, line 673, ‘sought the ocean stream’), with his band of warriors (*sceapena preate*, line 672, who are, however, *heane mid hlaford*, line 681, ‘abject with their lord’), speeding across the sea (*leolc ofer lagufloed*, line 674, ‘bounded over the water-flood’), the swan’s way (*on swonrade*, line 675), in their ship (*to scipe*, line 672), seeking the harbour or landing place (*ærþon hi to lande geliden hæfdon*, line 677, ‘before they had voyaged to land’), but, in contrast to other journeys of the hero by sea, they never arrive there. And instead of the optimistic outlook of such purposeful voyagers as Beowulf and Elene, Heliseus and his followers are unhappy in the ‘welter of the waves’ (*wæges wylm*, line 680) as they go to their deaths: they are *heane* (line 681), ‘abject, suffering’, *hroþra bidæled / hyhta leas* (lines 681-682), ‘deprived of comforts, destitute of hopes’.

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<sup>58</sup> The source of the Old English poem is best represented by the variant of the *Passio Sanctae Iulianae* in Lapidge M. (ed.), “Cynewulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*”, in Amodio M.C. – O’Brien O’Keeffe K. (eds.), *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr* (Toronto: 2003), edited text at 156-171. For translation (though not specifically of the Lapidge variant), see Allen and Calder, *Sources and Analogues* 121-132. The Old English here presents a literal translation of ‘venit tempestas valida, et mersit navem ipsius’ (ed. Lapidge, Chap. 22, 165).

Though it is not explicitly stated in the Latin original, Cynewulf portrays the deaths of Heliseus and his men as a punishment inflicted upon them: *þurh þearlic þrea* (line 678), ‘by way of severe punishment’. Another layer of irony is apparent here, since earlier in the poem, in his argument with Juliana in her prison cell, the devil had boasted of visiting destruction on sea travellers as one of his stratagems in his onslaught against humanity:

Sume on yðfare

wurdon on wege wætrum bisencte,

on mereflode, minum cræftum

under reone stream. (lines 478-481)

Some on a sea journey were by my powers engulfed in the waters on their way to the ocean, beneath the dismal tide. (trans. Bradley, 313-314)

After being drowned in the sea Heliseus and his men join that devil in hell: *helle sohton* (line 682), ‘they sought hell’. It is remarked sardonically that Heliseus’s followers share none of the joys of fellowship with their lord *in þam neolan scræfe* (line 684), ‘in that deep pit’.

### *Andreas*

Michael Bintley observes that ‘*Andreas* is unusually wet, even for an Old English poem’.<sup>59</sup> It is certainly the hagiographical poem that makes the most use of water. *Andreas*, which tells

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<sup>59</sup> Bintley M., “*Aquas ab Aquis: Aqueous Creation in Andreas*”, in Twomey C. – Anlezark D. (eds.), *Meanings of Water in Early Medieval England*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 47 (Turnhout: 2021) 159.

of the apostle Andrew's mission to rescue Saint Matthew from the cannibalistic Mermedonians and then to convert them, has an extended account of the saint's sea journey to Mermedonia; it also has an episode in which Andreas miraculously calls forth a destructive flood from a marble pillar in the city and a short report of his departure by sea, after he has converted the city's inhabitants. Taken together these passages amount to over seven hundred lines in a poem of 1722 lines (though it should be said that a large portion of the account of the voyage to Mermedonia is taken up by speeches).

These story elements have been inherited from the poem's Latin source.<sup>60</sup> In *Andreas*, however, the story elements involving water are presented with vastly greater elaboration, as the poet creatively develops the imagery and symbolism of water, exploiting the rich water-related language of traditional Old English poetry in general, and of *Beowulf* in particular, to

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<sup>60</sup> The immediate source is no longer extant but it must have been a version of the *Acts of Saint Andrew and Matthew* closely related to that found in the 'Casanatensis' recension and similar too to that used for the separate translation into Old English prose: the Casanatensis version is edited by Blatt F. (ed.), *Die lateinischen Bearbeitungen der Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud Anthropophagos* (Giessen - Copenhagen: 1930); for a translation, see Allen and Calder, *Sources and Analogues* 4-34. For the Old English prose version, see n. 33, above. The original Greek *Praxeis Andreou kai Mattheia* is also regarded as having significant correspondences to the hypothetical source of *Andreas*; for a translation of this, see Elliott J.K. (trans.), *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: 1993) 283-299. For a succinct discussion of *Andreas*'s source and analogues, see North R. – Bintley M.D.J. (eds.), *Andreas: An Edition* (Liverpool: 2016) 4-6.

do so.<sup>61</sup> The *Beowulfian* overtones may be seen as imparting a level of heroic grandeur to the narrative, though it has recently been suggested that in *Andreas* the language of *Beowulf* is also used with irony to undercut the pagan world of *Beowulf*.<sup>62</sup>

The voyage to Mermedonia is treated much more descriptively in *Andreas* than in the analogues. This voyage becomes an extended version of the sea journey of the hero/leader, as seen above in other poems, with the ‘small boat’ of the analogues being rewritten as a *widfæðme scip* (line 240), ‘broad-beamed ship’, and Andrew’s disciples as noble retainers, *collenfyrðe, / ellenrofe* (lines 349-350), ‘bold in spirit and strong in courage’, who will not countenance the ignominy of ever deserting their lord: if they do so, they exclaim, *We bioð laðe on lande gehwam, / folcum fracode* (lines 408-409), ‘In every land we shall be despicable and contemptible to people’.

The constituent features of the motif of the sea journey of the hero/leader are all present in the *Andreas* instance, some of them several times, indeed, over the course of a long

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<sup>61</sup> The debt of the *Andreas* poet to *Beowulf* is now well established in scholarship: see Riedinger A., “The Formulaic Relationship between *Beowulf* and *Andreas*”, in Damico H. – Leyerle J. (eds.), *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (Kalamazoo, MI: 1993) 283-312; Powell A.M., “Verbal Parallels in *Andreas* and its Relationship to *Beowulf* and *Cynewulf*” (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge: 2002); Orchard A., “The Originality of *Andreas*”, in Neidorf L. – Pascual R.J. – Shippey T. (eds.), *Old English Philology: Studies in Honour of R. D. Fulk* (Cambridge: 2016) 331, 352; North – Bintley, *Andreas* 62-81.

<sup>62</sup> See North R., “Meet the Pagans: On the Misuse of *Beowulf* in *Andreas*”, in Cesario M. – Magennis H. (eds.), *Aspects of Knowledge: Preserving and Reinventing Traditions of Learning in the Middle Ages* (Manchester: 2018) 185-209.



passage (lines 235-828) interspersed with an extended dialogue between Andreas and the captain of the ship, who, unknown to Andreas, is really Jesus. Thus there is mention of the shore and embarkation (*gangan on greote*, line 238, ‘to walk on the shingle’; *in ceol stigon*, line 349, ‘climbed into the ship’); urgency and speed over the sea/waves (*færeð famigheals, fugole gelicost / glideð on geofone*, lines 497-498, ‘foamy-prowed it forges onwards, glides over the flood most like a bird’); cargo (literally, the passengers) (*ceol gehladenne / heahgestreonum*, lines 361-362, ‘a ship laden with noble treasures’); the hero or leader specifically highlighted (*briste on geþance*, line 237, ‘bold of mind’); ship compounds, including kennings (*sæhengeste*, line 488, ‘sea-horse’); destination or landing place (*on land becwom*, line 827, ‘came to land’); sight of land at the end of the voyage (*wang sceawode*, line 239, ‘surveyed the landscape’); admirable crew/warriors travelling with their lord (*beornas beadurofe*, line 848, ‘men brave in battle’).

There is even a short voyage description within this account of a voyage, as the sea captain tells Andreas about his journey to the place where they meet:

Us mid flode bær  
 on hranrade heahstefn naca,  
 snellic sæmearh, snude bewunden,  
 oðþæt we þissa leoda land gesohton,  
 wære bewrecene, swa us wind fordraf. (lines 265-269)

The high-stemmed ship, the speedy sea-horse, lapped in swiftness, carried us with the tide upon the whale-road until, swept on by the sea, we reached the land of this people according as the wind drove us. (trans. Bradley 118)

This passage is unparalleled in the analogues, as is the mention of a sea journey at the end of the poem as Andreas departs from Mermedonia (lines 1706-1714). In *Andreas* the people bring the saint to a ship at a headland (*æt brimes næsse / on wægþele*, lines 1710-1711), watching as he sails away *on yðum, ofer seolpaðu* (lines 1713, 1714), ‘among the waves’, ‘along the seal’s paths’. Francis Leneghan identifies this passage as an instance of what he refers to as the motif of the departure of the hero by ship, which may be viewed as a sub-type of the motif of the journey of the hero by sea.<sup>63</sup>

In *Andreas*, however, the main description of the sea journey of the hero is not without its incongruities. For one thing, Andreas is initially distinctly unheroic about going to Mermedonia at all: later he is described in heroic terms but at first he makes excuses to avoid the mission and even complains that the *herestræta ofer cald wæter* (line 200-201), ‘highways across the cold water’, are unfamiliar to him; for another, although Andreas is in command of his men, it is the captain of the ship (who is really Jesus) who is the leader on board, a youth but clearly the superior figure on the voyage; and, though loyal, Andreas’s men prove to be fearful and in need of reassurance when they experience a storm at sea: *Nu synt gepreade þegnas mine / geonge guðrincas* (lines 391-392), ‘now the young soldiers, my thanes, are dismayed’, laments Andreas. Such incongruities arise, in my view, from the unwieldiness of the poem’s source when approached in the terms of traditional Old English poetry. The Old English poet evidently wishes to remain faithful to the spirit of the source but some of the details of that source cannot be accommodated easily in the course of ‘Germanicising’ it.

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<sup>63</sup> See Leneghan F., “The Departure of the Hero in a Ship: The Intertextuality of *Beowulf*, Cynewulf and *Andreas*”, *SELIM* 24 (2019) 105-132.

The journey by sea in *Andreas* is also complicated by the occurrence of a storm during it, vividly described. Storms at sea are a familiar theme in hagiography but do not feature in other instances of the sea journey of the hero in Old English poetry; storms at sea are associated in Old English poetry with suffering, as in the poems referred to as elegies. In fact there are two storms at sea in *Andreas*, the one on the voyage to Mermedonia (lines 369-468) and the biblical storm on the Sea of Galilee, as described by Andreas in his dialogue with the sea-captain (lines 438-460); there is also a short passage (lines 511-525) in a speech by the captain describing storms at sea and comparing God's control of the sea (*se ðe brimu bindeð, brune yða / ðyð ond preatað*, lines 519-520, 'he who binds the waters and rebukes and checks the brown waves') with his control of men, a comparison that by implication evokes the metaphor of the voyage of life.<sup>64</sup> The words are spoken, of course, by one who is a literal helmsman on the voyage to Mermedonia but also the divine controller of all things.

The storm on the Sea of Galilee is miraculously calmed by Jesus, and the captain informs Andreas that it is because the sea has recognised the grace of the Holy Spirit in him (*gife . . . haliges gastes*, lines 530-531) that the storm on the way to Mermedonia has subsided: the miracle has occurred through God's protection of his saint (lines 533-536), whom the captain praises as *cyninges . . . / þegen gebungen* (lines 527-528), 'the excellent thane of the King'.

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<sup>64</sup> On the idea of the voyage of life in the poem, see North – Bintley, *Andreas* 89-90; Bintley, "Aguas ab aquis" 162-316; McBrine P., "The Journey Motif in the Poems of the Vercelli Book", in Zacher S. – Orchard A. (eds.), *New Readings in the Vercelli Book* (Toronto: 2009) 298-317.

The episode in which Andreas calls forth a flood from a pillar in his prison cell in waterless<sup>65</sup> Mermedonia may be seen as a kind of fulfilment of this pronouncement of the sea-captain. Critics of *Andreas* have rightly viewed the flood as bringing cleansing to Mermedonia and thus as a figure of baptism,<sup>66</sup> but the flood also links with the earlier storm at sea. The analogues do not explicitly develop this link but in *Andreas* the flood becomes a raging sea (*beatende brim*, line 1543), terrifying the people with its storms (*stormas*, line 1576). Andreas has miraculously precipitated this storm and miraculously he stills it, demonstrating power over water. Through this miracle he emulates Jesus on the Sea of Galilee and bears out the observation of the sea-captain that he has special favour with God as his *þegen gebungen*.

Michael Bintley goes further in a recent essay, seeing water in *Andreas* as having an overarching symbolic function in which it signifies divine creation but can also be associated with the role of the author transmitting Christian teaching. In accordance with John 7:37-9, Christ is understood to be the source of living water (cf. John 7:37-9), and the poet, as Bintley puts it, ‘having drunk at Christ’s wellspring, like the stone in Andrew’s cell, becomes a

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<sup>65</sup> On Mermedonia as a waterless place, see Bintley, “*Aquas ab aquis*” 163-164: Bintley sees Mermedonia as a place of blood.

<sup>66</sup> On the flood in *Andreas* as a figure of baptism, see Hill T.D., “Figural Narrative in *Andreas*”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969) 261-273; Heatt C.B., “The Harrowing of Mermedonia: Typological Patterns in the Old English *Andreas*”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 77 (1976) 49-62; Walsh M.M., “The Baptismal Flood in the Old English *Andreas*: Liturgical and Typological Depths”, *Traditio* 33 (1977) 137-158 ; Anlezark D., *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: 2006) 174-240.

conduit for living water, that is the Holy Spirit'.<sup>67</sup> This is an attractive reading, suggestive of the artistic possibilities of water symbolism in hagiography. I would also stress, however, the insistent association of water with miracles in *Andreas*: water as controlled by God and water as controlled by Andreas.

## Conclusion

*Andreas* is the Old English poem in which water themes are explored most richly. In *Andreas* water provides a means of travel, is instrumental in miracles (at sea and on land) and represents the spiritual cleansing of baptism. Water may also be seen as marking the boundary of the waterless land of Mermedonia, an *igland/ealand* (lines 15, 28, 'island;'),<sup>68</sup> and, as argued by Bintley, *Andreas* may be read as drawing biblical ideas of the water of life. The traditional poetic language cultivated by the *Andreas* poet enables the creative expression of such themes, as is the case with travel in *Guthlac B*, *Elene* and *Juliana*; only *Guthlac A* (surprisingly?) eschews water themes altogether.

Images of travel, miracle and cleansing are developed in the Old English prose *Life of Saint Mary of Egypt* as well, a work that is also concerned with water, and with the lack of it, in ascetic practice. The Old English text is a close translation of a Latin original (which is itself a translation from the Greek) and is therefore, like most of the several hundred items trawled earlier in the chapter, representative of hagiography as a whole rather than being

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<sup>67</sup> Bintley, "Aguas ab aquis" 171.

<sup>68</sup> For discussion of *ealand/iglond*, which has also been taken to mean 'land beyond the waters', see Grosz O.J.H., "The Island of Exiles: A Note on *Andreas* 15", *English Language Notes* 7 (1970) 240; Bolintineanu A., "The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*", *Neophilologus* 93 (2009) 153-154; North – Bintley, *Andreas* 218-220.

distinctively Anglo-Saxon. In general, the saints' lives and shorter pieces surveyed here are remarkably consistent in the ways in which water features in them: travel (including storms), miracles, cleansing and self-denial provide an inventory of themes in hagiographical writings from the simple to the complex. Water is life-giving and powerful but always under the power of God; in hagiography it can also be under the power of the saint.

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