

‘Id est, crux Christi’: tracing the Old English Motif of the Celestial Rood

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ABSTRACT

The celestial cross is a prominent motif in Old English texts, and, rather than deriving from a single specific source, the figure provides a case study with implications for understanding the variety of backgrounds that often contribute to Anglo-Saxon conceptions of specific literary images. Tracing the development of the motif from its early Christian origins to its role in Anglo-Saxon England reveals a persistent correlation to eschatology, the importance of the liturgy in its dissemination, and a complex matrix of associations that must be accounted for in considering the Old English settings in which the image exists. An examination of these literary settings further helps to interpret the ways in which Anglo-Saxon authors used this matrix of associations for the celestial cross in their conceptions of the Judgement Day.

The image of a celestial cross appears in no less than thirteen separate texts in the corpus of Old English literature:¹ the account of St Hild in the *Old English Martyrology* (253.8–16);² Vercelli Homilies II (7–8) and XXI (165–7);³ The Dream of the Rood (4–6a);⁴ Cynewulf’s *Elene* (83–9);⁵ Blickling Homily VII (91.23);⁶ Christ III (1061–8 and 1081–102);⁷ Exeter Book *Riddle 30a*;⁸ Ælfric’s homilies *Sermo ad populum in octauis Pentecosten dicendus* (290), *Inventio Sanctae Crucis*

¹ Unless otherwise noted, texts are cited by line numbers corresponding to editions; for Old English texts, punctuation has been modernized; translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

² *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. G. Kotzor, 2 vols., Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Kl., ns 88 (Munich, 1981) II, 252–3, by page and line number.

³ *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. D. G. Scragg, EETS os 300 (Oxford, 1992), 48–69 and 347–65.

⁴ *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. M. J. Swanton (Exeter, 1996).

⁵ *Cynewulf’s Elene*, ed. P. O. E. Gradon (Exeter, 1977).

⁶ *The Blickling Homilies*, ed. R. Morris, 3 vols., EETS os 58, 63, 73 (Oxford, 1874–80), repr. in 1 vol. (Oxford, 1967), 82–97, by page and line number.

⁷ *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 27–49.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 195–6.

(11–13)⁹ and *Exaltatio Sanctae Crucis* (90–2);¹⁰ Rogationtide Homily X (96–8);¹¹ and Vespasian Homily II (239.22–6).¹² Despite the commonalities between some of these texts, as a whole they present a diverse group; yet in all of these representations, the cross is described in a position not standing on the earth, but in the sky above its witnesses – distinguishing it from images of the cross as crucifix, cosmological symbol, or *crux gemmata*.¹³ Because of the diversity of literary settings, the celestial cross presents an instance with important implications for source study – an instance in which no single source may be ascribed for a specific Christian image and the details related to it in Old English texts. Instead, the image evokes a matrix of associations drawn from a variety of biblical, apocryphal, exegetical, visual and liturgical materials.

The following examination is in some ways a case study for the concerns recently expressed by Éamonn Ó Carragáin: ‘the more a poet or storyteller penetrates to the core of Christian tradition, the more his or her poem will echo central Christian traditions of every other period . . . [W]e must beware of arguing that [a particular] echo constitutes a source.’¹⁴ This study will, therefore, examine the backgrounds of the celestial cross from the earliest development of the image through to the incorporation of these intellectual traditions in Old English texts. From the evidence, a plausible history may be established as follows: the ultimate origin of the motif as an ambiguous sign of the Judgement Day in Matthew XXIV.30, the interpretation of this image

⁹ *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, vol. 1, ed. J. C. Pope, EETS os 259 (London, 1967), 407–52; and *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies. The Second Series. Text*, ed. M. Godden, EETS ss 5 (London, 1979), 174–9.

¹⁰ *Ælfric’s Lives of the Saints*, ed. W. W. Skeat, 4 vols., EETS os 76, 82, 94, 114 (London, 1881–1900), repr. in 2 vols. (Oxford, 1966) II, 144–58.

¹¹ *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, ed. J. Bazire and J. E. Cross (Toronto, 1982), pp. 125–35.

¹² *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, ed. R. Morris, 2 vols., EETS os 29, 34 (London, 1867–8), repr. in 1 vol. (Oxford, 1988), 230–41, by page and line number. Thanks to Stephen Pelle for pointing out this description to me.

¹³ For studies on these images of the cross in Old English literature, see R. E. Kaske, ‘A Poem of the Cross in the Exeter Book: “Riddle 60” and “The Husband’s Message”’, *Traditio* 23 (1967), 41–71; T. D. Hill, ‘The Theme of the Cosmological Cross in Two Old English Cattle Theft Charms’, *N&Q* 25 (1978), 488–90; S. McEntire, ‘The Devotional Context of the Cross Before 1000’, *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. P. E. Szarmach and V. D. Oggins, *Studies in Medieval Culture* 20 (Kalamazoo, MI, 1986), 347–56; repr. in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (New Haven, 2002), pp. 392–403; and B. Mize, ‘The Mental Container and the Cross of Christ: Revelation and Community in *The Dream of the Rood*’, *SP* 107 (2010), 131–78, at 163–78.

¹⁴ ‘Sources or Analogues? Using Liturgical Evidence to date *The Dream of the Rood*’, *Cross and Cruciform in the Anglo-Saxon World: Studies to honor the Memory of Timothy Reuter*, ed. L. Keefer, K. L. Jolly and C. E. Karkov, *Medieval European Studies* 11 (Morgantown, WV, 2010), 135–65, at 136.

as the cross in early Christian apocrypha and patristic exegesis, and the widespread dissemination of this Judgement Day sign through assorted sources, especially liturgical materials. In tracing this development, it is the aim of this study to examine the floating cross in a variety of sources known (or likely known) to the Anglo-Saxons – rather than a survey of the image throughout early medieval Europe – in order to understand the array of associations that Anglo-Saxons would have identified with the celestial cross and its presence in Old English literature.

Despite the prevalence of the celestial cross motif in Old English texts, its presence has received little attention in source studies, and, consequently, its origins and dissemination have been largely unexplored.¹⁵ Scholarly interpretation of this image explains it largely by way of Anglo-Saxon knowledge of legends of the Holy Cross, in which the celestial cross appears in a vision of the Emperor Constantine.¹⁶ We know that Anglo-Saxon authors knew of the Invention by the eighth century at the latest, and of the Exaltation by the tenth century,¹⁷ while Cynewulf used the legends as the basis for *Elene*,¹⁸ as did Ælfric in his homilies.¹⁹ On the other hand, no such definite sources have

¹⁵ Sources previously proposed for the texts in question do not adequately explain the depiction of the celestial cross: see esp. entries in *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk>, accessed June 2010; and citations in the following notes.

¹⁶ See *The Christ of Cynewulf*, ed. A. S. Cook, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1909; repr. Hamden, CT, 1964), pp. xlv–vi and 189–93; M. J. B. Allen and D. G. Calder, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: the Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 59–69; *Elene*, ed. Gradon, pp. 15–22; F. M. Biggs, *The Sources of Christ III: a Revision of Cook's Notes*, OEN Subsidia 12 (Binghamton, 1986), 20–1; *Dream of the Rood*, ed. Swanton, pp. 42–52; E. G. Whatley, 'Jesus Christus, Exaltatio Sanctae Crucis', *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture Volume 1: Abbo of Fleury, Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and Acta Sanctorum*, ed. F. M. Biggs, T. D. Hill, P. E. Szarmach and E. G. Whatley (Kalamazoo, 2001) [hereafter *SASLC 1*], pp. 259–63; and F. M. Biggs and E. G. Whatley, 'Jesus Christus, Inventio Sanctae Crucis', *SASLC 1*, pp. 264–7.

¹⁷ See entries for the *Inventio* and *Exaltatio* (esp. under the name Rabanus Maurus [Hrab.Maur.] in *Fontes*, Biggs and Whatley, 'Inventio'; and Whatley, 'Exaltatio'). On the Holy Cross legends more generally, see S. Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross was Found: from Event to Medieval Legend, with an Appendix of Texts*, Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae: Kyrkovenstkapliga Studier 47 (Stockholm, 1991); L. van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross: toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy*, Liturgia condenda 11 (Leuven, 2000); M. Edwards, *Constantine and Christendom: the Oration to the Saints, the Greek and Latin Accounts of the Discovery of the Cross, the Edict of Constantine to Pope Silvester* (Liverpool, 2003); and B. Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: the Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. L. Preedy, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern Peoples 22 (Leiden, 2004).

¹⁸ See Allen and Calder, *Sources and Analogues*, pp. 59–69; and S. Rosser, 'The Sources of *Elene* (Cameron A.2.6)', 2000, *Fontes*.

¹⁹ See R. Jayatilaka, 'The Sources of Lives of the Saints 27 (Exaltation of the Cross, Cameron B.1.3.27)', 1997, *Fontes*; M. R. Godden, 'The Sources of Catholic Homilies 2.18 (Cameron B.1.2.22/23)', 1998, *Fontes*; *idem*, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Text, Commentary and*

been discovered for *The Dream of the Rood*;²⁰ and the sources for the *Old English Martyrology*, Vercelli II and XXI, Blickling VII, *Christ III*, *Riddle 30a*, Ælfric's *Sermo*, Rogationtide X and Vespasian II are composite, often indefinite and rooted in multifarious traditional Christian origins.²¹ Furthermore, while the Holy Cross legends are accepted as the origin of the celestial cross in *Elene* and Ælfric's homilies on the Invention and Exaltation, the relationship of this image to eschatology in Old English texts is unaccounted for by merely attributing the legends as the sources for all of them. Although the Holy Cross accounts certainly hold a place of importance in the use of the floating cross in Old English, these legends should be viewed as one aspect of many interrelated associations surrounding the motif. There are, in addition to the Holy Cross legends, many aspects of devotion to the cross in Anglo-Saxon England, and several of these cultural elements will be taken into account in this examination.²²

Prominent in this discussion is the continuity in depictions of the celestial cross from early Christian apocalypse to medieval eschatology, an issue not

Glossary, EETS ss 18 (Oxford, 2000), 513–16; Whatley, 'Exaltatio'; Biggs and Whatley, 'Inventio'.

²⁰ See Allen and Calder, *Sources and Analogues*, pp. 51–8. It is noteworthy, however – especially in relation to *Elene* – that 'the *Inventio* has also been cited as a possible source for two passages in *The Dream of the Rood*, including 'the vision of the cross in the sky (4–7) and the discovery of the cross (76–8)': Biggs and Whatley, 'Inventio', p. 266.

²¹ See J. E. Cross, 'A Lost Life of Hilda of Whitby: the Evidence of the *Old English Martyrology*', *The Early Middle Ages, Acta* 6 (1982 for 1979), 21–43; C. Rauer, 'The Sources of OE Martyrology, Hild (Cameron B.19.226)', 2000, *Fontes*; C. Rauer, 'The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*', *ASE* 32 (2003), 89–109; *Vercelli Homilies*, ed. Scragg, pp. 48–51 and 347–50; N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), no. 382, item 7; *Christ*, ed. Cook, pp. xlv–xlvi and 170–225; Allen and Calder, *Sources and Analogues*, pp. 84–107; Biggs, *Sources of Christ III*; F. M. Biggs, 'Christ III and "Apparebit repentina dies magna Domini"', forthcoming; *Supplementary Collection*, ed. Pope, pp. 407–14; R. Jayatilaka, 'The Sources of Supplementary Homilies 11 (Cameron B.1.4.11)', 1995, *Fontes, Rogationtide Homilies*, ed. Bazire and Cross, pp. 125–9; M. Atherton, 'The Sources of Bazire and Cross Homily 10 (Cameron B.3.2.32)', 1996, *Fontes*; M. Richards, 'MS Cotton Vespasian A.XXII: the Vespasian Homilies', *Manuscripta* 22 (1978), 97–103; and M. Swan, 'Preaching Past the Conquest: Lambeth Palace 487 and Cotton Vespasian A.XXII', *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, ed. A. J. Kleist, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages* 17 (Turnhout, 2007), 403–23, at 414–22.

²² See W. O. Stevens, *The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, Yale Studies in English 22 (New York, 1904; repr. Hamden, CT, 1977); McEntire, 'Devotional Context'; essays in *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. H. Gittos and M. B. Bedingfield, HBS Subsidia 5 (Woodbridge, 2005), 143–84; and the volumes produced by the *Sancta Crux/Halig Rod* project: *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. C. E. Karkov, S. L. Keefer and K. L. Jolly, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 4 (Woodbridge, 2006); *Cross and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies in honor of George Hardin Brown*, ed. K. L. Jolly, C. E. Karkov and S. L. Keefer, Medieval European Studies 9 (Morgantown, WV, 2007); and *Cross and Cruciform*, ed. Keefer, et al.

only of generic distinctions but also of religious intellectual history. The genre of apocalypse is associated with a broad category of prophetic visions derived from Hellenistic Judaism seeking to mediate between the worlds of the human and the divine.²³ At least eight early Christian apocalypses were composed before the middle of the fourth century, and this type of literature continued to flourish into the Middle Ages.²⁴ While many Christian eschatological descriptions are rooted in apocalyptic texts, eschatology in general is not relegated only to apocalypses, and may be found in a variety of writings concerned with Christian piety.²⁵ Medieval writers were continually preoccupied with eschatology, especially in Anglo-Saxon England, and much of their eschatological imagery derives from apocalyptic apocrypha, which in turn derive from biblical sources.²⁶ Throughout this paper, then, the continuity of the role of the celestial cross from early Christian to Anglo-Saxon sources will be both invoked and explored.

The most comprehensive overviews of the celestial cross in Old English are the notes to the edition of *Christ III* by A. S. Cook, supplemented by the extensive revision and update of these notes by Frederick M. Biggs.²⁷ Biggs's study (like Cook's) provides an overview of texts that 'provide a general background for *Christ III*',²⁸ although, as he points out, some of these analogues are irrelevant or ambiguous, and none may be taken as a definite source for the motif. The major source singled out by Cook, for example, is a Latin rendering of the

²³ See J. J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: the Morphology of a Genre*, *Semeia* 14 (Missoula, MT, 1979); and *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 1: the Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. J. Collins (New York, 2000). For bibliographical overviews, see J. H. Charlesworth and J. R. Mueller, *The New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: a Guide to Publications, with Excurses on Apocalypses*, ATLA Bibliography Series 17 (Metuchen, NJ, 1987); and L. DiTommaso, 'Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part I)', *Currents in Biblical Research* 5 (2007), 235–86; and *idem*, 'Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part II)', *Currents in Biblical Research* 5 (2007), 367–432.

²⁴ See Charlesworth, *Guide to Publications*, pp. 34–8. For studies of apocalypticism in the Middle Ages, see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, rev. ed., *Studies in Jungian Psychology* 24 (Oxford, 1970); W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen, ed., *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, *Mediaevalia Lovaniensia Series 1, Studia* 15 (Leuven, 1988); R. K. Emmerson and R. B. Herzmann, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia, 1992); and B. McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., *Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies* 96 (New York, 1998).

²⁵ For distinctions between apocalypse and eschatology, see McGinn, *Visions of the End*, pp. 214.

²⁶ See P. Vielhauer and G. Strecker, 'Apocalyptic in Early Christianity', *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols. (Louisville, 1991–2) [hereafter *NTA*] II, 569–91.

²⁷ *Christ*, ed. Cook, pp. 189–94; and *Sources of Christ III*, pp. 19–21.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 20.

sermon *De iudicio et compuntione* by Ephraem Syrus,²⁹ although the circulation of this work in Anglo-Saxon England is doubtful. Only one manuscript containing works by Ephraem is extant from before 1100 – a manuscript that includes Latin translations of six of his sermons, none of them *De iudicio*;³⁰ and there is no certainty about which Latin translations of his other works circulated during this time period.³¹ The analogues presented by Cook and Biggs, therefore, are tentative, and the motif deserving of further examination.

Other than Biggs's summary, the main source discussions of the cross as a specifically celestial emblem appear generally in scholarship on *The Dream of the Rood*. In his edition, Michael J. Swanton notes analogues with the *Gospel of Peter* concerning the idea of a speaking cross.³² This observation prompted A. D. Horgan to propose the *Gospel of Peter* as the ultimate source of *The Dream of the Rood*; but, although he discusses the importance of a 'living Cross of light' in both texts, he makes no clear reference to the motif of the rood as celestial.³³ It should be noted that there is no evidence for the knowledge of the *Gospel of Peter* in Anglo-Saxon England, and Horgan's argument has not been largely accepted.³⁴ From another approach, Elaine Treharne has more convincingly demonstrated a connection of the image of 'a visionary cross of light' through Cyril of Jerusalem's *Letter to Constantine* to the *Acts of John*³⁵ – a work more likely to have been accessible to Anglo-Saxons.³⁶ Treharne's main emphasis, however, is on the 'vision of the transmutational cross embodying all aspects

²⁹ *Christ*, ed. Cook, pp. 189–93; see also Calder and Allen, *Sources and Analogues*, pp. 86–93.

³⁰ Cambridge, University Library Ee. 1. 23 (s. xi/xii). See H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 241 (Tempe, AZ, 2001), no. 2.8; for a description, see *A Catalogue of Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1856–67), no. 912.

³¹ No entry exists for Ephraem Syrus in *Fontes*; see T. H. Bestul, 'Ephraim the Syrian and Old English Poetry', *Anglia* 99 (1981), 1–24; P. Sims-Williams, 'Thoughts on Ephrem the Syrian in Anglo-Saxon England', *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 205–26; and M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 152 and 301.

³² *Dream of the Rood*, ed. Swanton, pp. 66 and 75.

³³ 'The Dream of the Rood and Christian Tradition', *NM* 79 (1978), 11–20.

³⁴ To my knowledge, Horgan is the only scholar to suggest the presence of the *Gospel of Peter* in Anglo-Saxon England; no entry exists for the Gospel of Peter in either *Fontes*, or *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: the Apocrypha*, ed. F. M. Biggs, *Instrumenta Anglistica Mediaevalia* 1 (Kalamazoo, 2006).

³⁵ "Hiht was geniwad": Rebirth in *The Dream of the Rood*, *Place of the Cross*, ed. Karkov et al., pp. 145–57, at 149–50.

³⁶ See R. Bremmer, Jr., 'The Reception of the Acts of John in Anglo-Saxon England', *The Apocryphal Acts of John*, ed. J. N. Bremmer (Kampen, 1995), pp. 183–96; no entry exists for the *Acts of John* in *Apocrypha*, ed. Biggs.

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of the human and divine Christ',³⁷ and not on the cross as celestial, an aspect lacking in this apocryphon. It is significant that, in discussing the motif, these scholars make recourse to material found in early Christian apocrypha – an aspect of Christian tradition to which we will turn shortly.

Most recently, Britt Mize has discussed 'a tradition of aerial apparitions or visions of brilliantly radiant crosses' in which Old English texts participate, and has noted several instances.³⁸ Mize's focus, however, is on the role of the image as treasure in relation to *The Dream of the Rood*, and his examples conflate the two aspects of aerial nature and jeweled radiance.³⁹ What this analysis portrays is the ease of associating images of the cross with a variety of ideas, and Mize aptly summarizes this intricacy as 'the complex mode of signification that operates in the shifting image' of the cross.⁴⁰ Indeed, for medieval Christians, the cross transcends any specific moment, as it symbolizes all of salvation history, including the Tree of Life, Crucifixion, Invention, Exaltation and the Last Days.

As with many questions of medieval source study, examination of the historical evolution of the celestial rood begins with the bible. Biggs follows previous scholarship in noting the ultimate source in Matthew XXIV.30,⁴¹ part of a larger passage in which Jesus enumerates signs of the Judgement to his disciples. The verse reads: 'et tunc parebit signum Filii hominis in caelo et tunc plangent omnes tribus terrae et videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nubibus caeli cum virtute multa et maiestate.'⁴² This messianic description of the Second Coming (the Greek *parousia*) presents the earliest mention of this celestial sign in an apocalyptic context,⁴³ although it echoes a similar prophetic advent

³⁷ "Hiht wæs geniwad", p. 150.

³⁸ 'Mental Container', p. 164, esp. n. 79.

³⁹ Mize's definitions of the motif, sources and focus, therefore, are divergent from my own, although they provide another informative perspective. I am grateful for his discussion of these issues with me via personal correspondence.

⁴⁰ 'Mental Container', p. 173.

⁴¹ *Sources of Christ* III, p. 18; following *Christ*, ed. Cook, esp. 192. Unless otherwise noted, biblical references are to *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. R. Weber, 4th ed. (Stuttgart, 2005); translations are from *The Holy Bible: Douay Version Translated from the Latin Vulgate* (London, 1956); psalm numbers follow the LXX and Vulgate in *Biblia sacra*, ed. Weber.

⁴² 'And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. And then shall all tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty.' No Old Latin variants for *signum Filii hominis* exist: see *Biblicorum sacrorum Latinae versiones antiquae, seu Vetus Italica*, ed. P. Sabatier, 3 vols. (Rheims, 1743; repr. Turnhout, 1976) III, 148.

⁴³ Parallel passages in Matt. XXVI.64, Mark XIII.26 and Luke XXI.27 do not refer to this *signum*.

(lacking the *signum*) in Daniel VII.13.⁴⁴ Old English glosses of the Gospel of Matthew directly follow the Latin, rendered as ‘and þonne ætywð mannes suna tacn on heofonan’.⁴⁵ To a lesser degree, a passage in Apocalypse VII.2–3 also contributes to the motif of the celestial cross: ‘et vidi alterum angelum ascendentem ab ortu solis habentem signum Dei vivi et clamavit voce magna quattuor angelis quibus datum est nocere terrae et mari dicens nolite nocere terrae neque mari neque arboribus quoadusque signemus servos Dei nostri in frontibus eorum.’⁴⁶ Yet it is noteworthy that this depiction is aligned with the sign of the cross as ‘a manual performative gesture’ of the *crux usualis*,⁴⁷ and these verses factor into the development of the floating cross motif only once, in a commentary by Bede; this passage, therefore, will not feature prominently in the present study.⁴⁸ The questions at hand, then, are how the general image of a Judgement Day *signum* in the Gospel of Matthew evolved into the specific figure of the celestial rood, and how this image became appropriated into Anglo-Saxon eschatology.

These early Christian beginnings to the celestial cross tradition present two major reasons for exploring the origins and sources of the image beyond the Holy Cross accounts. First, the figure in each Old English text (other than Ælfric’s Holy Cross homilies; the case for *Elene* will be argued below) is

⁴⁴ ‘aspiciebam ergo in visione noctis et ecce cum nubibus caeli quasi filius hominis veniebat et usque ad antiquum dierum pervenit et in conspectu eius obtulerunt eum’ (‘I beheld, therefore, in the vision of the night, and lo, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the ancient of days: and they presented him before him’).

⁴⁵ *The Old English Version of the Gospels: Text and Introduction*, ed. R. M. Liuzza, EETS os 304 (Oxford, 1994), 50: ‘and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven.’

⁴⁶ ‘And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the sign of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying: Hurt not the earth nor the sea nor the trees, till we sign the servants of our God on their foreheads.’

⁴⁷ For this term, see U. Lenker, ‘Signifying Christ in Anglo-Saxon England: Old English Terms for the Sign of the Cross’, *Cross and Cruciform*, ed. Keefer *et al.*, pp. 233–75; on this gesture, see also Stevens, *Cross*, pp. 26–37; McEntire, ‘Devotional Context’; K. L. Jolly, ‘Cross-Referencing Anglo-Saxon Liturgy and Remedies: the Sign of the Cross as Ritual Protection’, *Liturgy*, ed. Gittos and Bedingfield, pp. 213–43; C. E. Karkov, ‘The Sign of the Cross: Poetic Performance and Liturgical Practice in the Junius 11 Manuscript’, *Liturgy*, ed. Gittos and Bedingfield, pp. 245–69; K. L. Jolly, ‘Tapping the Power of the Cross: Who and for Whom?’ *Place of the Cross*, ed. Karkov *et al.*, pp. 58–79; and D. F. Johnson, ‘The *Crux Usualis* as Apotropaic Weapon in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Place of the Cross*, ed. Karkov *et al.*, pp. 80–95.

⁴⁸ See below. For more on this passage in Anglo-Saxon England, esp. in relation to Ælfwine’s Prayerbook (London, BL, Cotton Titus D. xxvi and xvi; s. xi), see B. C. Raw, *Trinity and Incarnation in Anglo-Saxon Art and Thought*, CSASE 21 (Cambridge, 1997), 185–6; and C. E. Karkov, ‘Abbot Ælfwine and the Sign of the Cross’, *Cross and Cruciform*, ed. Keefer *et al.*, pp. 103–32, at 107.

accompanied by eschatological elements born out of early Christian apocalyptic imagery, suggesting that the sign is traditionally linked to texts concerning the Last Judgement – while the Holy Cross legends contain no such eschatology. Second, while the Holy Cross legends may be the primary source of Cynewulf's *Elene* and Ælfric's homilies, they do not account for the interpretive use of the rood specifically for the more ambiguous sign of Judgement Day found in Matthew. Turning first to early Christian texts and then to medieval representations provides a sense of how these associations developed.

Despite the ambiguity of Jesus' words in Matthew (composed c. 70),⁴⁹ the *signum* developed into the image of the celestial cross initially in Christian apocalyptic apocrypha around the turn of the second century.⁵⁰ Oliver Nicholson has traced some of the apocryphal elements of the celestial cross in Latin legends of Constantine,⁵¹ and observes that "The earliest allusion by a Christian writer to the Sign of the Son of Man, after those in the New Testament, is to be found in the *Didache*,"⁵² dated to the first or early second century,⁵³ this text relates that 'then shall the signs of the truth appear'.⁵⁴ While the image remains an indefinite symbol in the *Didache*, Nicholson notes the presence of this sign as a celestial cross in the *Apocalypse of Peter I* (c. AD 135) and the *Apocalypse of*

⁴⁹ B. M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN, 2003), p. 116.

⁵⁰ See G. Q. Reijnders, *The Terminology of the Holy Cross in Early Christian Literature as based upon Old Testament Typology*, Graecitas Christianorum Primaeva 2 (Nijmegen, 1965), pp. 118–48; and O. Irshai, 'Cyril of Jerusalem: the Apparition of the Cross and the Jews', *Contra Iudeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews*, ed. O. Limur and G. G. Stroumsa, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 10 (Tübingen, 1996), 101, n. 51. Reijnders discusses this development in patristic works, but fails to observe the image of the celestial cross in early apocrypha; Irshai notes the image initially in second-century apocrypha, and my discussion follows him in diverging from Reijnders's observations and acknowledging an earlier date for the development. On the influence of the Gospel of Matthew on early Christian texts, see É. Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, trans. N. J. Belval and S. Hecht, ed. A. J. Bellinzoni, 3 vols., New Gospel Studies 5 (Macon, GA, 1990–3).

⁵¹ 'Constantine's Vision of the Cross', *Vigilae Christianae* 54 (2000), 309–23, at 313–14.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 313. For discussions about the reliance of the *Didache* on Matthew, or vice versa, see Massaux, *Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, III, 144–82, esp. 167–73; J. A. Draper, *The Didache in Modern Research* (Leiden, 1996); H. van de Sandt and D. Flusser, *The Didache: its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity*, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 3.5 (Assen, 2002), *passim*; and H. van de Sandt, ed., *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (Assen, 2005).

⁵³ Unless otherwise noted, dates of apocrypha hereafter are given according to Charlesworth, *Guide to Publications*, pp. 55–8; further discussions of dates are provided in the introductory matter for each text in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY, 1983–5) [hereafter *OTP*]; and *NTA*.

⁵⁴ XVI.6: Vielhauer and Strecker, 'Apocalyptic in Early Christianity', pp. 589–90.

Elijah III.2 (late first to early fourth century).⁵⁵ Along with the *Epistle of the Apostles* XVI (mid-second century),⁵⁶ which is not noted by Nicholson, all of these apocrypha depict the celestial cross accompanying Christ at the *parousia*. Perhaps the clearest example is in the first chapter of the *Apocalypse of Peter*:

For the coming of the Son of God will not be manifest, but like the lightning which shineth from the east to the west, so shall I come on the clouds of heaven with a great host in my glory; with my cross going before my face will I come in my glory, shining seven times as bright as the sun will I come in my glory, with all my saints, my angels, when my Father will place a crown upon my head, that I may judge the living and the dead and recompense every man according to his work.⁵⁷

The use of quotations from Matthew XXIV – and especially verse 30 – is particularly important in this passage. While knowledge of these apocalypses in the medieval West is questionable, and there remains no conclusive evidence for their circulation in Anglo-Saxon England,⁵⁸ this stage does represent a significant development in the interpretation of the *signum* accompanying Christ's *parousia*.

From this same transitional period, the apocalyptic apocryphon *IV Ezra* (c. AD 100)⁵⁹ also plays a prominent role in medieval eschatology and associations with the floating cross. Like many of the previously mentioned apocalypses, *IV Ezra* offers a series of prophetic signs that were later understood as ushering in the Judgement Day. Chapter V is especially relevant, as it begins,

⁵⁵ Nicholson, 'Constantine's Vision', p. 313. For the *Apocalypse of Peter* I, see C. D. G. Müller, 'Apocalypse of Peter', *NTA*, II, 620–38, at 625–6; for the *Apocalypse of Elijah* III.2, see O. S. Wintermute, 'Apocalypse of Elijah', *OTP*, I, 721–53, at 744. The composite *Apocalypse of Elijah* contains both Jewish and Christian elements and is therefore difficult to date; nonetheless, Wintermute observes that it must postdate the biblical Apocalypse (c. AD 68–95), and remarks that 'it is possible to set a reasonable date somewhere between AD 150 and 275 for the final composition of the present work': *ibid.* I, 730. Because the passage in question relies upon Matthew, it must post-date that work: *ibid.* I, 744, n. g.

⁵⁶ See C. D. G. Müller, 'Epistula Apostolorum', *NTA*, I, 249–84, at 258; for the date of this apocryphon, see *ibid.* I, 251.

⁵⁷ Müller, 'Apocalypse of Peter', pp. 625–6. Biblical quotations and allusions are signaled here according to Müller: cf. Luke XVII.20 and Matt. XXIV.27; Mark XIII.26; Matt. XXIV.30; Luke IX.26 and Matt. XVI.27; I Pet. IV.5 and I Tim. IV.1; Matt. XVI.27; and Ps. LXI.13.

⁵⁸ See, for example, 'Apocalypse of Peter', *Apocrypha*, ed. Biggs, p. 71; no entry exists for the *Didache*, *Apocalypse of Elijah* or *Epistle of the Apostles*. Although there is no evidence that the *Didache* was known in Anglo-Saxon England, Latin versions of the first six chapters (titled *De doctrina Apostolorum*) survive in two Continental manuscripts dating from the ninth/tenth and eleventh centuries: see J. Campos, 'La Versión Latina de la Didaché', *La Ciudad de Dios* 184 (1971), 110–14; and van de Sandt and Flusser, *Didache*, pp. 113–20, with an edition of the text at 114–16.

⁵⁹ References are to *Biblia Sacra*, ed. Weber, pp. 1931–74; translations are from B. M. Metzger, 'The Fourth Book of Ezra', *OTP*, I, 516–59. Like the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, *IV Ezra* is a composite work, and presents the same problems of dating: *ibid.* I, 520.

'Id est, crux Christi': tracing the Old English Motif of the Celestial Rood

'De signis autem',⁶⁰ and among these signs the visionary offers the image that 'de ligno sanguis stillabit',⁶¹ interpreted as the cross in Anglo-Saxon texts.⁶² Despite what Biggs observes is 'little firm evidence for the knowledge of . . . IV Ezra in Anglo-Saxon England' and issues of intermediary sources,⁶³ several motifs that ultimately derive from *IV Ezra* have been observed in Old English texts.⁶⁴ As will be discussed, the conception of the bleeding wood is intimately tied to the celestial cross in Old English, and presents yet another aspect of the matrix of imagery connected to the motif.

The most likely mode of transmission for the interpretation of the *signum* as the cross is through biblical exegesis. In patristic exegesis, commentators interpreted Matthew XXIV.30 as an outgrowth of traditions surrounding signs found in the Old Testament, and, as Barbara Baert observes, 'the association of the "sign of the cross" with the "sign of Christ" occurs via a typological movement, in which the eschatological significance (the Cross as the End of Time) had already paved the way for the transfer.'⁶⁵ In this mode of explanation, then, images of the rood are widespread in both Greek and Latin patristic works,⁶⁶ though many were not known in Anglo-Saxon England. A few of the patristic works containing the celestial rood, however, present interpretations especially relevant to Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the image.

An abbreviated Latin translation of John Chrysostom's *Homilia prima de cruce et latrone*, I (once attributed to Augustine) reads, 'apparuerit signum Fillii hominis in coeli. Considerasti quanta virius sit signi, hoc est, crucis . . . ita Domino descendente de coelis praecedet exercitus Angelorum, qui signum illud, id est, triumphale vexillum sublimibus humeris praeferentes.'⁶⁷ While

⁶⁰ V.1: 'Now concerning the signs'.

⁶¹ V.5: 'Blood shall drip from the wood.'

⁶² See *Dream of the Rood*, ed. Swanton, pp. 64–5.

⁶³ 'An Introduction and Overview of Recent Work', *Apocryphal Texts and Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. K. Powell and D. Scragg, Publ. of the Manchester Centre for AS Stud. 2 (Cambridge, 2003), 1–25, at 5.

⁶⁴ See entries for 'BS' ('4 Esr') in *Fontes*; Biggs, 'Introduction and Overview', pp. 4–5; and '4 Ezra', *Apocrypha*, ed. Biggs, pp. 14–15.

⁶⁵ Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, pp. 19–20; see also Reijners, *Terminology of the Holy Cross*, pp. 118–48.

⁶⁶ See Reijners, *Terminology of the Holy Cross*, pp. 118–73; and Joseph Szövérfy, 'Tuba mirum spargens sonum. Some Peculiarities of a Holy Cross Hymn', *Aevum* 32 (1958), 38–50, at 42–8.

⁶⁷ Sermo CLV, PL 39, cols. 2047–53, at 2051: 'The sign of the Son of man shall appear in heaven. Consider how excellent this sign is, which is the cross. . . . When the Lord descends from heaven, a host of angels shall go before him, carrying forward that sign, which is a victorious banner carried high upon their shoulders.' Cf. the sermon in Greek in PG 49, cols. 399–408. See M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, 5 vols. (Turnhout, 1974–2003) [cited by no.], 4338; J. J. Machielsens, *Clavis Patristica Pseudepigraphorum Medii Aevi*, 5 vols. (Turnhout, 1990–2004) [hereafter *CPPM*, by no.] I, 940; and E. Dekkers and E. Gaar, *Clavis Patrum Latinorum*, 3rd ed. (Turnhout, 1995) [hereafter *CPL*, by no.], 368.

there is limited evidence for the works of Chrysostom in Anglo-Saxon England (and no direct evidence for the *Homilia prima cruce*),⁶⁸ in tracing the dissemination of this passage, we find that the Latin abbreviated sermon is quoted by Julian of Toledo in his *Prognosticon futuri saeculi*,⁶⁹ part of which, in turn, is the source for Ælfric's *Sermo*.⁷⁰

Another example, Jerome's *Commentarii in euangelium Matthaei*, provides the most direct interpretive link between Matthew XXIV.30 and the celestial cross: 'Signum hic aut crucis intellegamus ut uideant iuxta Zachariam et Iohannem Iudaei quem compunxerant, aut uexillum uictoriae triumphantis.'⁷¹ In addition to being the clearest exegesis of the celestial cross for the *signum* of Matthew, Jerome's commentary was widely disseminated in the Middle Ages. For example, in commentaries on Matthew, both Sedulius Scottus and Rabanus Maurus (whose commentary was once attributed to Bede) quote this passage verbatim,⁷² and Pascasius Radbertus offers a variation on the same interpretation.⁷³ Jerome's commentary is contained in two manuscripts present in England by the ninth century at the latest,⁷⁴ and there is much evidence for its

⁶⁸ See M. Lapidge, 'Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England', *Learning and Literature*, ed. Lapidge and Gneuss, pp. 33–89, nos. 1 and 13; Gneuss, *Handlist*, nos. 457, 581 and 819; and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 32–3, 143–7, 177, 218, 230 and 316–17.

⁶⁹ See *Sancti Iuliani Toletanae sedis Episcopi opera, pars I*, ed. J. Hillgarth, CCSL 115 (Turnhout, 1976), 84–6; on the influence on Julian's *Prognosticon*, see J. P. Bouhot, 'Une homélie de Jean Chrysostome citée par Julien de Tolède', *Revue de études augustiniennes* 23 (1977), 122–3; and *CPPM*, I, 176.

⁷⁰ See E. M. Raynes, 'MS. Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 and Ælfric', *MÆ* 26 (1957), 65–73; M. McC. Gatch, 'MS Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 and Ælfric's First Series of *Catholic Homilies*', *JEGP* 65 (1966), 482–90; *Supplementary Collection*, ed. Pope, pp. 407–9; M. McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 95–101 and 129–46; and Jayatilaka, 'Sources of Supplementary Homilies 11'. Cf. Julian's *Prognosticon* III.iv–v, *Sancti Iuliani Toletanae*, ed. Hillgarth, pp. 9–126, at 83–6; and Ælfric's *Excerpts* from the *Prognosticon* in Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 129–46, at 140, lines 202–5.

⁷¹ *Sancti Hieronymi presbyteri opera, pars I: opera exegetica* 7, ed. D. Hurst and M. Adriaen, CCSL 77 (Turnhout, 1969), 230, lines 561–4; translation from *St. Jerome: Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, *The Fathers of the Church* 117 (Washington, DC, 2008), p. 277: 'The sign here refers either to the cross, just as according to Zechariah and John, the Jews will look upon the one they have pierced; or it is the banner of victory of the triumphant one.'

⁷² *Sedulius Scottus: Kommentar zum Evangelium nach Matthäus*, ed. B. Löfstedt, 2 vols. (Freiburg, 1989–1991), II, 534, lines 36–9; and *Hrabani Mauri Expositio in Matthaenum (V–VIII)*, ed. B. Löfstedt, CCCM 174A (Turnhout, 2000), 632, lines 84–6. On the latter, see *CPPM*, II, 2033.

⁷³ *Pascasii Radberti Expositio in Mattheo Libri XII (IX–XII)*, ed. B. Paulus, CCCM 56B (Turnhout, 1984), 1182, lines 1081–2: 'Quod profecto signum crucis est signum' ('Now truly the sign of the cross is the sign').

⁷⁴ Shrewsbury, Shropshire Record Office 1052/1 (s. viii²); and Worcester, Cathedral Library Add. 2 (s. vii). See Gneuss, *Handlist*, nos. 755 and 770.5.

widespread existence throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.⁷⁵ Rabanus Maurus' commentary is contained in one manuscript present in England by 1096,⁷⁶ and is cited by Ælfric in his homilies.⁷⁷ The presence of commentaries by Sedulius Scottus and Pascasius Radbertus, however, is uncertain.⁷⁸

In addition to the commentaries influenced by Jerome, his mode of interpretation also appears in two works with Irish associations: the Pseudo-Jerome *Expositio quatuor euangeliorum*⁷⁹ and a Pseudo-Augustine Judgement Day homily, *De iudicio extremo*, III.⁸⁰ On Matthew XXIV.30, the *Expositio* comments, 'id est, crux Christi',⁸¹ and the homily *De iudicio extremo* comments, 'quod est crux Christi'.⁸² These interpretations thus follow the model found in patristic writings, with only slight variations in details. In their associations with Irish traditions, and along with previous observations about analogues in Old English literature,⁸³ both of these works provide examples of how patristic interpretations of the celestial cross may have been disseminated to medieval learning, and to Anglo-Saxon authors in particular.

Where commentary on the *signum* of Matthew XXIV.30 is absent in influential texts is also relevant. The works of two figures especially stand out: Isidore of Seville and Bede. Whereas both are known for following patristic traditions,

⁷⁵ See entries for Jerome (Hier.) in *Fontes*; and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*.

⁷⁶ Durham, Cathedral Library, B.III.16 (s. xi ex.). See Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 243.

⁷⁷ See entries for Rabanus Maurus (Hrab. Maur.) in *Fontes*; and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 261.

⁷⁸ No reference to either commentary appears in Lapidge, 'Surviving Booklists'; Gneuss, *Handlist*; or Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*. In *Fontes*, no entry for Sedulius Scottus's commentary exists, but Pascasius Radbertus's commentary is listed as an analogue for Ælfric's Homily of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: M. Clayton, 'The Sources of Assman 3 (Homily for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Cameron B.1.5.8)', 1990, *Fontes*.

⁷⁹ PL 30, cols. 531–90. See B. Bischoff, 'Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Middle Ages', trans. C. O'Grady, *Biblical Studies: the Medieval Irish Contribution*, ed. M. McNamara, Proc. of the Irish Biblical Assoc. 1 (Dublin, 1975), 74–160, nos. 11A–C; C. D. Wright, 'Hiberno-Latin and Irish-Influenced Biblical Commentaries, Florilegia, and Homily Collections', *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: a Trial Version*, ed. F. M. Biggs, T. D. Hill, and P. E. Szarmach, with the assistance of K. Hammond, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 74 (Binghamton, NY, 1990) [hereafter *ASLC: Trial Version*], pp. 87–123, at 100–1; *idem*, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, CSASE 6 (Cambridge, 1993), 61, n. 67, and 71–2; *CPPM*, II, 2364–5d; and *CPL*, 631.

⁸⁰ Sermo CCLI, PL 39, col. 2210. See C. D. Wright, 'Apocryphal Lore and Insular Tradition in St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek MS 908', *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 124–45; F. M. Biggs, 'The Fourfold Division of Souls: the Old English "Christ III" and the Insular Homiletic Tradition', *Traditio* 45 (1989), 35–51, at 49–50; Wright, *Irish Tradition*, p. 218; *CPPM*, I, 1036; and *CPL*, 368.

⁸¹ PL 30, col. 558: 'that is, the cross of Christ'.

⁸² PL 39, col. 2210: 'which is the cross of Christ'.

⁸³ Wright, 'Apocryphal Lore', pp. 134–6; Biggs, 'Fourfold Division', pp. 49–50; and Wright, 'Hiberno-Latin and Irish-Influenced Biblical Commentaries', pp. 106–7.

neither provides a connection between the *signum* in Matthew and the cross: surprisingly, Matthew XXIV.30 is cited nowhere in Isidore's two influential compendia, *Etymologiae* and *Sententiae*, nor anywhere in Bede's corpus. In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore's discussions of the cross centre on philological and historical accounts, related to the two subjects of language and Christ's Passion.⁸⁴ Following patristic sources, Bede's own explications of the cross rely mainly on allegorical and typological explanations in his commentaries on the Old and New Testaments.⁸⁵ Only once, to my knowledge, does Bede mention the floating cross, in his *Explanatio Apocalypsis* on Apocalypse VII.2, in which he describes the return of Christ heralded by angels 'vexillum crucis, quo suorum frontes signaret, adferens'.⁸⁶ This imagery, however, is rare among Bede's uses of the cross, which generally foreground its presence throughout salvation history as a symbol of redemption.

Common to the apocalyptic apocrypha as well as patristic works (such as those by Chrysostom, Jerome and their subsequent medieval followers) are three aspects that remain important for this study. First, a tradition begins early in Christianity that links the specific motif of the cross with the general *signum* of Judgement Day. Most of the apocrypha discussed (with the possible exception of the *Apocalypse of Elijah*) were composed around the middle of the second century,⁸⁷ and we find the celestial cross as a patristic exegetical trope shortly thereafter. Second, the sources generally portray two similar modes of representation for the celestial cross: as both passive banner and active agent. In the former, the cross is carried by angels at the Judgement as a symbol of victory; in the latter, the cross itself floats ahead of Christ as an animate entity – though these two types are not mutually exclusive, and often converge (as in Jerome's explanation). Third, the celestial cross remains closely associated with apocalyptic visions even outside of the Bible; the motif, in fact, seems to illuminate understandings about a central sign of the Second Coming influential in subsequent conceptions of the Judgement. All three of these elements carry through to the Middle Ages and use by Anglo-Saxon authors.

As indicated at the start of this examination, one body of material important

⁸⁴ See *Etymologiae* I.iv.14, V.xxvii.33, VII.ii.48 and IX.i.3. Curiously, Isidore uses the word *signum* for celestial bodies such as stars and constellations, but he discusses these only in relation to pagan practices: see *Etymologiae* III.xiv.2, III.lxxi.4 and III.lxxi.22.

⁸⁵ See G. H. Brown, 'Bede and the Cross', *Cross and Culture*, ed. Jolly *et al.*, pp. 19–35; mainly focused on Bede's Old Testament commentaries, Brown includes numerous references to examples throughout his article.

⁸⁶ *Bedae Presbyteri Expositio Apocalypseos*, ed. R. Gryson, CCSL 121A (Turnhout, 2001), 309, lines 22–3: 'bearing the banner of the cross, with which to seal His own on their foreheads'.

⁸⁷ See Charlesworth, *Guide to Publications*, pp. 55–8. On problems with dating the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, see above, n. 55.

for the dissemination of conceptions of the celestial cross in Anglo-Saxon England is that of Latin hymns.⁸⁸ In particular, the earliest and most influential are the hymns of the sixth-century Gallic poet Venantius Fortunatus.⁸⁹ His works were well known in England from an early period, since Bede, Aldhelm and Alcuin directly quote him, and his hymns appear in manuscripts from the end of the tenth century onward.⁹⁰ The hymns of Fortunatus have even been cited as analogous to *The Dream of the Rood* in several respects.⁹¹ The most pertinent hymns by Fortunatus for the present study are those in the series composed for the *adventus* at the Poitiers convent of the relics of the Holy Cross given by Emperor Justin II in 569⁹² – which, according to Szövérfy, is the moment at which the history of hymns to the cross begins.⁹³ The two most famous of these hymns are the *Pange lingua gloriosi proelium certaminis* and *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, both of which are found in Anglo-Saxon liturgical manuscripts;⁹⁴ but of these hymns only the *Vexilla regis* presents an image of the celestial cross related to the interpretive issues at hand. Fortunatus begins the *Vexilla regis*

⁸⁸ See G. M. Dreves, C. Blume and H. M. Bannister, *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, 55 vols. (Leipzig, 1886–1922) [hereafter *AH*]; J. Szövérfy, *Hymns of the Holy Cross: an Annotated Edition with Introduction*, Medieval Classics: Texts and Studies 7 (Brookline, MA, 1976); and J. Szövérfy, *A Concise History of Medieval Latin Hymnody: Religious Lyrics between Antiquity and Humanism*, Medieval Classics: Texts and Studies 19 (Leiden, 1985).

⁸⁹ On the life and works of Fortunatus, see J. W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: a Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford, 1992); for an edition of his works, see *Venanzio Fortunato, Opere*, ed. S. Di Brazzano, CSEA 8 (Rome, 2001).

⁹⁰ R. W. Hunt, 'Manuscript Evidence for Knowledge of the Poems of Venantius Fortunatus in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 8 (1979), 279–95, containing an appendix by M. Lapidge on the evidence for the earlier period (pp. 287–95), repr. as 'The Knowledge of the Poems of Venantius Fortunatus in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899*, vol. 1 (London, 1996), pp. 399–408; S. Coates, 'The Construction of Episcopal Sanctity in Early Anglo-Saxon England: the Impact of Venantius Fortunatus', *Hist. Research* 71 (1998), 1–13; Gneuss, *Handlist*, nos. 2, 120, 142 and 284; I. B. Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross: Contexts for the Reception of *Vexilla regis prodeunt*', *Place of the Cross*, ed. Karkov *et al.*, pp. 43–57; S. L. Keefer, 'The Performance of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England', *Cross and Culture*, ed. Jolly *et al.*, pp. 203–41, at 212–14; entries for Venantius Fortunatus (Ven.Fort.) in *Fontes*; and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 169, 187–8, 225, 231, 233, 249 and 335. See also the version of the *Vexilla Regis prodeunt* in I. B. Milfull, *The Hymns of the Anglo-Saxon Church: a Study and Edition of the 'Durbam Hymnal'*, CSASE 17 (Cambridge, 1996), 274–8.

⁹¹ H. R. Patch, 'Liturgical Influence in the *Dream of the Rood*', *PMLA* 24 (1919), 233–57, at 251–2; Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross', pp. 46 and 51; Ó Carragáin, 'Sources or Analogues?', pp. 136–7; and H. Damico, 'Writing/Sounding the Cross: *The Dream of the Rood* as Figured Poetry', *Cross and Cruciform*, ed. Keefer *et al.*, pp. 166–203, at 180–1.

⁹² Szövérfy, *Hymns*, pp. 7–10; Szövérfy, *Concise History*, 21–4; George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 30–1; and Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross', pp. 43–4.

⁹³ *Hymns*, pp. 7–20; see also Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross', pp. 43–4.

⁹⁴ Milfull, *Hymns*, pp. 274–8; Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross'; and Keefer, 'Performance of the Cross', pp. 212–14. See also D. Schaller and E. Könsgen, *Initia carminum Latinorum saeculo undecimo antiquiorum* (Göttingen, 1977) [hereafter *ICL*, by no.], nos. 11583 and 17180.

with the following image:⁹⁵ ‘VEXILLA REGIS PRODEUNT, / fulgent crucis mysteria.’⁹⁶ In the Durham Hymnal (Durham, Cathedral Library B. III. 32; s. xi),⁹⁷ the Old English interlinear gloss on these lines presents a close literal translation: ‘gubfanan cynges forþstreppaþ / scinað rode geryne.’⁹⁸ In this hymn, then, we find the cross not as a crucifix but as a symbol of victory, the interpretive image of Christian apocalypses and patristic commentaries inculcated into the very image of Christ’s advent at Judgement. Although there is no explicit indication of reliance on Matthew XXIV.30, the *Vexilla regis* portrays the logical development of the indefinite early Christian concepts of *signum* and *vexilla* to the more distinct *crux* of the *parousia*.

Two other hymns are also relevant for this study. The earlier of the two is Rabanus Maurus’s *De fide catholica rythmo carmen compositum*, which contains imagery of the celestial cross in stanza 74.⁹⁹ Along with the Advent of Christ *de caelis* at the Second Coming, Rabanus also places emphasis on the ‘signum crucis et vexillum’.¹⁰⁰ While there is no manuscript evidence for the presence of Rabanus’ carmina in Anglo-Saxon England,¹⁰¹ given the manuscript dissemination of his works and influence on authors such as Ælfric and Byrhtferth of Ramsey, knowledge of this poem is not inconceivable.¹⁰² Second, the celestial cross appears in an early tenth-century anonymous hymn titled *Ab ore verbum prolatum*,¹⁰³ sung in observation of the Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday and probably influenced by Fortunatus.¹⁰⁴ Szövérfy has observed that stanza fifteen contains an eschatological passage depicting the Second Coming and the celestial rood motif, which he traces to patristic

⁹⁵ References to the *Vexilla regis* – both Latin and Old English glosses, as well as translations of the Latin – are to the version edited in Milfull, *Hymns*, pp. 274–8 (although I have consulted and profited from Di Brazzano’s edition), as this text contains divergent readings from the standard edition, provides the Old English gloss, and most closely represents the version known in Anglo-Saxon England. Cf. *Vexilla Regis prodeunt* in *Venanzio Fortunato*, ed. Di Brazzano, I, 156–8.

⁹⁶ Milfull, *Hymns*, p. 274: ‘The standards of the king advance, / the mystery of the cross blazes forth.’

⁹⁷ Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 244.

⁹⁸ Milfull, *Hymns*, p. 274: ‘The banners of the king go forth / the mystery of the rood shines.’

⁹⁹ MGH PLAC, II, 202.

¹⁰⁰ ‘the sign of the cross and banner’.

¹⁰¹ No reference to these works appears in Lapidge, ‘Surviving Booklists’; Gneuss, *Handlist, Fontes*; or Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*.

¹⁰² Fourteen surviving manuscripts from Anglo-Saxon England contain the works of Rabanus Maurus: see Gneuss, *Handlist*, nos. 12, 59, 5.5, 73, 131, 140, 178, 243, 258, 398, 644, 749, 779 and 919.3. More generally, see Lapidge, ‘Surviving Booklists’, nos. 5, 8 and 13; William Schipper, ‘Hrabanus Maurus’, *SASLC: Trial Version*, pp. 130–3; entries for Rabanus Maurus (Hrab.Maur.) in *Fontes*; and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 261 and 270–1.

¹⁰³ AH, LI, 82–4. See also *ICL*, no. 43.

¹⁰⁴ Szövérfy, ‘*Tuba mirum spargens sonum*’, pp. 40–2.

'Id est, crux Christi': tracing the Old English Motif of the Celestial Rood

works.¹⁰⁵ This stanza relates that, at the Judgement, 'Praeferentes signum crucis / angelorum agmina',¹⁰⁶ the motif again portrayed as a victorious banner carried by the angels, although the *signum* links the image more closely to the biblical model than the *vexillum* of other hymns. According to Clemens Blume, this hymn survives in only two extant eleventh-century Spanish manuscripts,¹⁰⁷ but whether or not it was known elsewhere is unknown. Despite the lack of evidence for these hymns in Anglo-Saxon England, both portray the widespread existence of the celestial cross in materials integrally linked with the liturgy.

Closely connected to these hymns in subject matter are two liturgical items in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. The first is a prayer to the cross in the ninth-century Vespasian Psalter (London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. i), 158v–59r,¹⁰⁸ titled *Salve crux sancta et veneranda*. The prayer describes the cross at the *parousia* as a symbol of salvation:

'& in ultimo aetne beatitudinis loco. tuo auxilio fultum collocari. & quando in fine scli cunctis astris splendidior. & sole clarior angelicus inuecta obsequiis apparueris; non sinas me cum infidelib: dampnari. sed cum benedictis aeterni patris filii in regnum facias introduci.'¹⁰⁹

The second item is a liturgical invocation to the cross in London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii (s. xi), folio 59v.¹¹⁰ The Latin items in this series of prayers (from a collection of various liturgical texts)¹¹¹ are accompanied by Old English directives, and the manuscript reads: '7 cwæþþas preces. hoc signum crucis erit in celo cum dominus ad iudicandum uenerit. Per signum' (58–61).¹¹² As with previous materials, these two prayers depict the cross in two ways – the first as carried by angels, and the second as an active agent.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 42–9; and *Hymns*, pp. 21–4.

¹⁰⁶ 'The host of angels shall carry the sign of the cross.'

¹⁰⁷ *Die Hymnen*, ed. Blume, p. 84.

¹⁰⁸ Gneuss, *Handlist*, 381. See *The Vespasian Psalter*, ed. S. M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor, MI, 1965), pp. 318–20; cf. C. T. Vaccaro, 'Crux Christi/Cristes Rod: Interpreting the Anglo-Saxon Cross' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, The City Univ. of New York, 2003), pp. 163–6.

¹⁰⁹ *Vespasian Psalter*, ed. Kuhn, p. 318; trans. Vaccaro, 'Crux Christi', pp. 165–6, lines 25–30: 'And in the end, I am placed in eternal beatitude, placed by the support of your aid, and when in the end of the age you appear, carried by obedient angels, more splendid than all the stars and brighter than the sun, do not allow me to be damned with the unbelievers but allow me to be introduced with the blessings of the eternal Father into the kingdom of the Son.'

¹¹⁰ Gneuss, *Handlist*, 363. References by line numbers are to, and translations of the Latin are from, Vaccaro, 'Crux Christi', pp. 187–91.

¹¹¹ For discussion of the manuscript, its contents, and the order of the items, see Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 186.

¹¹² 'And say the *preces*: "This sign of the cross will be in the sky when the Lord in judgement will come. Through this sign."'

More important for understanding the image in Anglo-Saxon England, the direct evocations of this image in a prayer and an invocation to the cross point to the pervasiveness of the motif in texts of both communal liturgy and personal sanctity.

The implications of the prevalence of the celestial cross in liturgical materials is especially important for understanding the dissemination of the motif. As studies of Anglo-Saxon hymns by Inge B. Milfull and Sarah Larratt Keefer demonstrate, hymns to the cross were central in the liturgy by at least the late tenth century.¹¹³ Furthermore, the presence of these hymns in liturgy is important for not only the obvious feast days of the Invention, Exaltation and Adoration of the Cross but also (and most especially) for Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Week and even the Passion.¹¹⁴ In these liturgical uses there are remarkable connections between the Easter season and eschatology, as the focus is on not only the historical events of Christ's Passion and Resurrection but also the future eschatological event of Christ's final Advent and the general resurrection at the Last Judgement. The Lenten liturgical presence of the *Vexilla regis* marks this connection, emphasizing the need for the audience to focus on the eschatological in seeking personal sanctity. These liturgical hymns, then, were available in Anglo-Saxon England to every church-going person – including priests, monks, and laity – and, subsequently, the conceptions of the celestial cross as a sign at Judgement became centrally located within Christian culture, providing an important means of dissemination.

Moving away from the textual and toward the visual culture of crosses in Anglo-Saxon England further provides material related to the *signum crucis*. While the amount of material on Anglo-Saxon crosses is vast, it is worth noting some of the most prominent placements of the cross. It is clear, for instance, that the image of angels carrying a standard of the cross at the Second Coming is not foreign to later Anglo-Saxon manuscript iconography, as Barbara C. Raw has identified two such Anglo-Saxon visual depictions.¹¹⁵ The earlier of the two representations is in the Benedictional of Æthelwold (London, British Library, Add. 49598), produced 971x984 at Winchester.¹¹⁶ The illumination appears on folio 9v, on which is depicted the Second Coming, including Christ

¹¹³ Milfull, *Hymns*, pp. 274–8; S. L. Keefer, 'The Veneration of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England', *Liturgy*, ed. Gittos and Bedingfield, pp. 143–84; Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross'; and Keefer, 'Performance of the Cross'.

¹¹⁴ Szövérfy, '*Tuba mirum spargens sonum*', pp. 40–2; Keefer, 'Veneration of the Cross'; Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross', pp. 46–55; and Keefer, 'Performance of the Cross'.

¹¹⁵ '*The Dream of the Rood* and its Connections with Early Christian Art', *M&E* 39 (1970), 239–56, at 242 and 247.

¹¹⁶ Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 301. See F. Wormald, *The Benedictional of St. Ethelwold* (New York, 1959); R. Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold* (Princeton, 1995); and A. Prescott, *The Benedictional of Saint Æthelwold: a Masterpiece of Anglo-Saxon Art: a Facsimile* (London, 2002).

in Judgement surrounded by a mandorla and holding a cross-staff, as well as a host of angels holding the spear, sponge and cross of the Crucifixion.¹¹⁷ The illustration accompanies the blessings for Advent, preceded by the first and second (6r–9r) and followed by the third and fourth (10r–11v); it is, therefore, closely associated with the Advent season and related Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the Second Coming.¹¹⁸ The second representation that Raw identifies is described as 'an eleventh-century ivory carving of the Last Judgment'.¹¹⁹ This image also portrays Christ in Judgement, surrounded by a mandorla, and angels carrying the cross. The cross as a celestial complement to Christ's *parousia* in both of these representations joins them to the literary and visual tradition of Judgement scenes derived from Matthew XXIV.30.

The images identified by Raw are also paralleled by various images in the eleventh-century Harley Psalter (London, British Library, Harley 603), folios 4v, 5r, 51r, 52v and 57r.¹²⁰ All of these images portray hosts of angels bearing staffs or banner staffs topped with crosses, in scenes evocative of eschatological imagery through the inclusion of traditional images such as Christ sitting in or on a mandorla (fols. 4v, 5r, 51r, 52v), holding scales (fols. 5r, 57r), a book (fol. 51r) and an open scroll (fols. 52v and 57r). Thomas H. Ohlgren notes that these scenes of Christ in majesty accompanied by angels bearing cross staffs relate to verses about God's exaltation in heaven from the psalms that the images illustrate.¹²¹ While there is no explicit connection with materials related to Matthew XXIV.30, these representations of the Judgement Day cross in later manuscript art recall the *signum as vexillum*, and follow the same eschatological tradition as the textual sources – although similar scenes are rare among extant Anglo-Saxon illustrations.¹²² While Raw also identifies a number of analogous Continental depictions, she observes, 'There is very little in Anglo-Saxon art . . . which would have formed a model for' the image of the celestial cross.¹²³

What is most outstanding in visual liturgical examples of the cross in Anglo-

¹¹⁷ See Prescott, *Benedictional*, fol. 9v.

¹¹⁸ See Deshman, *Benedictional*, pp. 62–9; and Prescott, *Benedictional*, pp. 11 and 20.

¹¹⁹ 'Early Christian Art', p. 242. See M. Longhurst, *English Ivories* (London, 1926), pp. 71–2 and pl. 15, no. 7.

¹²⁰ Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 422. See T. H. Ohlgren, *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration: Photographs of Sixteen Manuscripts with Description and Index* (Kalamazoo, 1992), pp. 154, 155, 210, 212 and 219.

¹²¹ See descriptions of the Harley Psalter illustrations in Ohlgren, *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration*, pp. 18–41. For relevant passages, see Ps. VIII.2, IX.8–9, CII.19–20, CIV.7–8 and CX.7–8.

¹²² I have found no other explicit representations of the celestial cross in Ohlgren, *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration*. For another possible representation of the (celestial) cross in relation to the Last Judgement (though less directly connected), see 6r–6v of London, BL, Stowe 944 (s. xi), in *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey Winchester*, ed. S. Keynes, EEMF 26 (Copenhagen, 1996); and Karkov, 'Abbot Ælfwine', pp. 117–22, esp. 120.

¹²³ 'Early Christian Art', p. 241.

Saxon England is a shift in the conception of the *signum crucis* away from the celestial cross as a visual object and toward the kinesthetic gesture of crossing oneself – what William O. Stevens calls ‘the cross in its invisible or imaginary form, the “sign of the cross” or *crux usualis*’.¹²⁴ There are, therefore, few visual sources for crosses in the sky. Stevens has provided a wide-ranging overview of the cross in Anglo-Saxon England, but much of his evidence about physical crosses pertains to the static placement of the cross in relation to crucifixion scenes.¹²⁵ While he does discuss the two feast days on which the cross is venerated – the Invention and Exaltation – in his examples the cross stands largely as a symbolic representation of the Crucifixion, death and burial of Christ rather than his triumphant return at Judgement.¹²⁶ For example, Stevens discusses the raising of the cross at the Exaltation, but it is to be hidden under a shroud, and soon after laid as if in burial, representative of the death and burial of Christ.¹²⁷ Similarly, symbolic analogues to the Crucifixion are also the main emphasis in the later Anglo-Saxon Good Friday Veneration of the Cross, which Keefer has discussed in detail.¹²⁸ These visual liturgical venerations, then, foreground the cross as historically linked with Christ’s past salvific actions, not eschatologically linked with his future *parousia*. Such images, in other words, are not very promising cultural sources for the celestial cross.

Moving beyond the many contexts of the celestial cross in early and medieval Christianity, the remainder of this essay traces this matrix of associations into Old English literature by providing an overview of the eschatological elements surrounding the motif. Looking beyond the Holy Cross legends as the source of the celestial cross motif, and as a way of examining the implications for this study, the following discussions are not given according to strict chronological history of the texts, but grouped into three categories: texts based directly on legends of the Invention and Exaltation; texts explicitly depicting Judgement Day scenes; and texts that noticeably blend elements from the previous two categories.

The only relevant work in the first category is Ælfric’s *Inventio* homily, based closely on the Invention narrative – although not the standard account used by earlier authors. Instead, Ælfric bases his homily on the account given in the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Rufinus, but mistakenly attributes this narrative to Jerome.¹²⁹ About Constantine’s vision, we read, ‘Ða geseah he on swefne, on ðam scinendan eastdæle, drihtnes rodetacn, dweorwurðlice scinan’ (1113).¹³⁰

¹²⁴ *Cross*, pp. 26–7. For further references, see above, n. 48.

¹²⁵ *Cross*, pp. 15–62.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 23–5. More generally, see Whatley, ‘Exaltatio’; and Biggs and Whatley, ‘Inventio’.

¹²⁷ *Cross*, p. 23–4.

¹²⁸ ‘Veneration of the Cross’; and ‘Performance of the Cross’.

¹²⁹ See Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, pp. 513–16.

¹³⁰ ‘Then he saw in a dream, shining in the east, the rood-sign of the Lord, shining splendidly.’

Although the homily does not explicitly indicate the celestial nature of the cross, Ælfric's reliance on Constantinian legends generally and the *Inventio* specifically portrays the text's alignment with the tradition. In this case, the historically based narrative of the homily does not promote either the interpretive connections with Matthew XXIV.30 or the eschatological nature of the celestial cross.

In contrast to his historically based Invention homily, Ælfric also uses the sign of the celestial cross in depicting Judgement Day in his *Sermo*,¹³¹ providing a thematic contrast between Old English works based directly on the Holy Cross legends and those explicitly depicting the future Judgement. In his *Sermo*, Ælfric relates that when Christ comes from heaven, 'Engla werod berað þa beorhtan rode him ætforan' (290).¹³² As already noted, this homily is directly related to the *Prognosticon* by Julian of Toledo, which portends,¹³³ 'Exercitus denique angelorum et archangelorum precedent eum, illud triumphale vexillum miro fulgore coruscans preferentes. *Tunc plangent omnes tribus terre videntes ipsam crucem, cognoscentesque peccatum suum.*'¹³⁴

Ælfric's *Sermo* and the sources underlying it exemplify the full progression of the development of the celestial cross from the bible to Anglo-Saxon motif: Matthew XXIV.30 as the ultimate basis, Chrysostom's exegetical interpretation of the cross for the *signum*, and the mediation of this patristic interpretation as a Judgement sign in Julian's *Prognosticon* before its manifestation in Ælfric's eschatological description. This homily, therefore, portrays the rich matrix of dissemination and meanings accumulated from the bible, through early Christian exegesis and into the widespread eschatological imagery of Anglo-Saxon authors.

Anonymous homilies also offer especially valuable cases for analysis of Old English Judgement themes; for example, eschatological themes pervade the

¹³¹ On eschatology in Ælfric's homilies, and the *Sermo* in particular, see Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, esp. 95–101.

¹³² 'The host of angels shall bear the bright rood before him.'

¹³³ References are to Ælfric's *Excerpts* from the *Prognosticon* edited in Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 129–46 (although I have consulted and profited from Hillgarth's edition), as this text contains condensed and divergent readings from the standard edition and most closely represents the version known directly by Ælfric. In Hillgarth's edition, for example, it is clear that Julian relies on an abbreviated Latin translation of Chrysostom's *Homilia prima de cruce* in referring to the cross in *Prognosticon* III.iv–v, yet this specific image does not appear in Ælfric's excerpts (cf. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 140), and thus does not explain his interpretation of the celestial cross. Cf. *Sancti Iuliani Toletanae*, ed. Hillgarth, CCSL 115, pp. 83–6.

¹³⁴ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 140, lines 202–5: 'Finally a host of angels and archangels shall go before him [Christ], carrying forward that wonderful victorious banner in shining glory. *Then shall all tribes of the earth mourn* [Matt. XXIV.30] seeing the cross, and shall know their sin.'

contents of the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, CXVII; s. x²).¹³⁵ Homilies II and XXI provide two of the most obviously eschatological pieces in the manuscript,¹³⁶ as D. G. Scragg observes, ‘relying for [their] effect on repetition of the theme of the terror of doomsday and the need for present repentance’.¹³⁷ For example, Vercelli II (39–51) and XXI (188–202) contain a related passage of alliterative verse enumerating Judgement Day signs, since the second portion of Homily XXI relies on Homily II.¹³⁸ Even before this shared passage, Vercelli II begins, ‘Men ða leofestan, þæs myclan domdæges worc bið swiðe egeslic 7 andryslig eallum gesceaftum’ (1–2).¹³⁹ Both homilies proclaim the eschatological torments leading toward this event in a series of warnings beginning ‘on that day’ (*in þam dæge* or *on þam dæge*), evocative of the eschatological tradition of the ‘Iudicii signum’.¹⁴⁰ Many of the signs listed in Homilies II and XXI, of course, derive from traditional Christian imagery, including biblical, apocryphal and patristic texts. In the middle of such portents, the poet presents the ‘dryhtnes rod blode flowende betweox wolcnum’ (II.7–8; XXI.165–7).¹⁴¹ This image of the cross presents a synthesis of associations with the cross at the

¹³⁵ For the manuscript, see Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 941. For the eschatology of the contents, see M. McC. Gatch, ‘Eschatology in the Anonymous Old English Homilies’, *Traditio* 21 (1965), 117–65. More generally, see G. D. Caie, *The Judgment Day Theme in Old English Literature* (Copenhagen, 1976); Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 60–116; T. N. Hall, ‘Old English Religious Prose: Rhetorics of Salvation and Damnation’, *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. D. F. Johnson and E. Treharne (Oxford, 2005), pp. 136–48; and S. Zacher, *Preaching the Converted: the Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto, 2009),.

¹³⁶ See Gatch, ‘Eschatology’; E. G. Stanley, ‘*The Judgment of the Damned*’ (from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201 and Other Manuscripts), and the Definition of Old English Verse’, *Learning and Literature*, ed. Lapidge and Gneuss, pp. 363–91; *Vercelli Homilies*, ed. Scragg, pp. 48–51 and 347–50; C. D. Wright, ‘More Old English Poetry in Vercelli XXI’, *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. E. Treharne and S. Rosser (Tempe, AZ, 2002), pp. 245–62; and Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, pp. 63–105.

¹³⁷ *Vercelli Homilies*, ed. Scragg, p. 50.

¹³⁸ See D. G. Scragg, ‘The Corpus of Vernacular Homilies and Prose Saints’ Lives before Ælfric’, *ASE* 8 (1979), 223–77, at 229, 232, 251 and 260; and *Vercelli Homilies*, ed. Scragg, pp. 48 and 347–50; on the poetic qualities of these homilies, see D. R. Letson, ‘The Poetic Content of the Revival Homily’, *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds*, ed. P. E. Szarmach and B. F. Huppé (Albany, 1978), pp. 139–56; Stanley, ‘*Judgment of the Damned*’, *Vercelli Homilies*, ed. Scragg, pp. 50–1; Wright, ‘More Old English Poetry’; and Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, pp. 63–105.

¹³⁹ ‘Most beloved men, the affliction of the great doomsday shall be very terrible and fearsome for all creatures.’

¹⁴⁰ On this tradition in the medieval West (esp. in Anglo-Saxon and Irish sources), see W. W. Heist, *The Fifteen Signs before Doomsday* (East Lansing, MI, 1952); M. McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church* (Dublin, 1975), pp. 128–39; Caie, *Judgment Day Theme*, pp. 235–47; M. McNamara, ‘The (Fifteen) Signs before Doomsday in Irish Tradition’, *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 20 (2007), 223–54; and ‘Fifteen Signs before Judgment’, *Apocrypha*, ed. Biggs, p. 76.

¹⁴¹ ‘rood of the Lord flowing with blood among the clouds’.

Judgement, including the motifs of both the bleeding wood in *IV Ezra* V.5 ('de ligno sanguis stillabit')¹⁴² and the cross in the sky. In the multiple connections rendered by such fusion, this instance offers an example of the myriad possible associations contained in the single image of the celestial rood, and of the complex matrix suggested by the author and for the audience.

In the Blickling Homilies (Princeton, Princeton University Library, W. H. Scheide Collection 71; s. x/xi),¹⁴³ Homily VII relates that *se dom nealaceþ* (91.19: 'the judgement draws near'), and, shortly thereafter, 'seo rod ures Drihtnes bið aræred on þæt gewrixle þara tungla' (91.23).¹⁴⁴ Like the homilies of the Vercelli Book, this eschatological vision is presented to readers as an exhortation to repentance before the Judgement. After all, this homily is headed by the title *Dominica Pascha* in the Blickling manuscript, conjuring up both penitence and redemption, advanced all the more by the thematic culmination in Christ's return. It is in such a context that the cross becomes especially central, as Easter stands as the pivotal moment of Christian history: both preceded by the cross at the Crucifixion and followed by the cross again at the Judgement.

Like Ælfric's *Sermo* and the Vercelli homilies, Rogationtide X and Vespasian II also provide enumerations of the details of the Judgement Day. In the description of signs 'on þæm micclan domesdæge' (97) in Rogationtide X is found the image of 'seo rod þe ure Drihten on þrowede, seo byð æteowed ofer Cristes gesyhðe' (97–8).¹⁴⁵ Vespasian II describes a similar scene of terror derived from biblical traditions: 'wic geie, wic drednesse wurð þer, þan þat fer to for him abernð þat middernad, þan si eorðe alle cwaced, þan þe sterren falled, si sunne and se mone aþestred for godes brictnesse, þe wlcne to gað, and si hali rode tacne mid þe spere and mid þe neiles þurh angles beoð forð ibrocht' (239.22–6).¹⁴⁶ These passages again portray close reliance on Matthew XXIV,¹⁴⁷ although the ways in which the two homilies portray this reliance are telling. The homilist of Rogationtide X superimposes the cross over the *signum*, rather than translating it as *tacn* as in the Old English Gospels.¹⁴⁸ The homilist of Vespasian II, on the other hand, uses the more ambiguous *tacn*,

¹⁴² 'Blood shall drip from the wood.'

¹⁴³ Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 905.

¹⁴⁴ 'The rood of our Lord shall be raised in that turning [i.e. course] of the stars.'

¹⁴⁵ 'on that great doomsday . . . the rood on which our Lord suffered, which shall be seen over the vision of Christ.'

¹⁴⁶ 'What awe, what dread shall be there, when that fire shall burn the earth before them, when all the earth shall quake, when the stars shall fall, the sun and moon shall darken before the brightness of God, the heavens shall vanish, and the sign of the holy rood with the spear and with the nails shall be brought forth by the angels.'

¹⁴⁷ See *Rogationtide Homilies*, ed. Bazire and Cross, pp. 125–9; and Atherton, 'Sources of Bazire and Cross Homily 10'.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Old English Version of the Gospels*, ed. Liuzza, p. 50.

but also specifies that this image should be interpreted as the *rode* carried by angels. Although divergent in practice, both homilies reflect the eschatological associations of the celestial cross and fit into the interpretive pattern of the previously discussed texts.

Turning to Old English poetry also offers a wealth of Judgement Day scenes depicting the celestial cross. In the Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library 3501; s. x²),¹⁴⁹ *Riddle 30a* describes the cross¹⁵⁰ as *wedre gesomnad* (2b)¹⁵¹ and tells the audience that ‘Þonne ic me onhæbbe’ (7a);¹⁵² the riddle’s description is also found in conjunction with eschatological images of penitential fire, described as *legbysig* (1a), *fyre gebysgad* (3b) and *byrnende gled* (4b). Here the eschatological elements are drawn from apocalyptic images of fire associated with the Judgement; the riddle’s description thus conforms to the associations outlined previously. Furthermore, while the riddle offers descriptions that allow the audience to answer correctly, meditation on these images in relation to the cross also urge personal penitence through reminders of the Judgement Day.

In the same manuscript, *Christ III* presents a short case study that summarizes the arguments presented so far about the matrix of meanings associated with the single motif of the celestial rood. *Christ III* depicts the vision of Christ’s *parousia* with elements drawn largely from Matthew XXIV–XXV¹⁵³ and traditional patristic sources,¹⁵⁴ as the entire poem presents a stark description of the events that will occur on the Judgement Day. Leading up to and including the image of the celestial cross, the poet describes the following:

Donne sio byman stefen ond se beorhta segn,
ond þæt hate fyr ond seo hea duguð,
ond se engla þrym ond se egsan þrea,
ond se hearda dæg ond seo hea rod,
ryht aræred rices to beacne. (1061–5)¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 257.

¹⁵⁰ My interpretation of *Riddle 30a* conforms to the most widely attested solution of the cross, as summarized in *Exeter Book*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie, p. 338; for extended discussion of this riddle, see A. Talentino, ‘Riddle 30: the Vehicle of the Cross’, *Neophilologus* 65 (1981), 129–36. The cross in the Exeter Book riddles has been most recently examined by Jill Frederick, ‘At Cross Purposes: Six Riddles in the Exeter Book’, *Cross and Culture*, ed. Jolly *et al.*, pp. 49–76.

¹⁵¹ ‘united with the sky’.

¹⁵² ‘Then I raise myself.’

¹⁵³ These biblical passages have been argued as more probable than the previously proposed anonymous Latin hymn ‘Apparebit repentina dies magna Domini’ in Biggs, ‘*Christ III* and “Apparebit repentina dies magna Domini”’; Biggs’s discussion also emphasizes many of the traditional eschatological motifs found throughout *Christ III*.

¹⁵⁴ See *Christ*, ed. Cook; and Biggs, *Sources of Christ III*.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Then the voice of the trumpet and the bright sign, / and that hot fire and the high multitude, / and the host of angels and the terrible rebuke, / and the hard day and the high rood, / raised upright as a symbol of power.’

'Id est, crux Christi': tracing the Old English Motif of the Celestial Rood

The cross in *Christ III* is so integral, in fact, that it is the controlling theme of a digression in lines 1081–127, in which several traditional Judgement themes are further enumerated. Further into this description, the poet relates:

usses dryhtnes rod ondweard stondeð,
beacna beorhtast, blode bistemed,
heofoncyniges hlutran dreore,
biseon mid swate þæt ofer side gesceaft
scire scineð. (1084–1088a)¹⁵⁶

A little later, the image appears of 'sio reade rod ofer ealle / swegle scineð on þære sunnan gyld' (1101b-1102).¹⁵⁷ It is significant for this study that these passages containing the celestial cross in *Christ III* have often been related to similar imagery in Matthew XXIV.30, Vercelli II, the *Inventio, Elene* and *The Dream of the Rood*.¹⁵⁸

What is most striking about these images is the complex imagery evoked, creating a multi-layered portrayal drawn from a variety of sources. For example, in lines 1061 and 1064 are the juxtaposing nouns *segn* and *rod*, signifying both the *signum* of Matthew XXIV.30 and the cross that superseded it. Whether these nouns refer to the same image in this enumeration is unclear, but they are linked at least by tradition – and, in a Latin–Anglo-Saxon glossary, the Old English *segn* is used to gloss the Latin word *signaum* (*sic*).¹⁵⁹ A number of other cumulative references help to create a detailed picture of the portent. Descriptions of the *rod* as *bea* (1064) and *rybt aræred* (1065) are not unlike descriptions of the cosmological cross stretching from the ground to the sky and to the four corners of the world,¹⁶⁰ also contributing to the visual description of the cross looming over the people from above. As a token of authority ('rices to beacne', 1065), the cross is not merely a standard, but an agent imbued with power from God. Its ability to shine (*scineð*, 1088, 1102) manifests this power, taking on the role of the sun as the life-giving light of the heavens. The descriptors *blode bistemed* (1085) and the colour *reade* (1101) are suggestive of the Crucifixion and parallel to the bleeding cross in *IV Ezra* V.5. When taken together, these elements create a sophisticated accumulation of

¹⁵⁶ 'the rood of our Lord shall stand present, / the brightest of signs, moistened with the blood, / of the Heavenly King, bright with gore, / seen with blood, so that over the wide creation / it shall shine brightly.'

¹⁵⁷ 'the red rood over all / the sky shall shine instead of the sun.'

¹⁵⁸ See *Christ*, ed. Cook, pp. 189–94; and Biggs, *Sources of Christ III*, pp. 19–21.

¹⁵⁹ *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*, ed. J. H. Hessels (Cambridge, 1890), p. 108, no. 362. See Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 36, in which it is dated c. 1000; and Gneuss, *Handlist*, no. 45, in which it is dated to the early ninth century.

¹⁶⁰ See McEntire, 'Devotional Context of the Cross'.

details. That is, they demonstrate the complexity of attributing a single source to an image evocative of a matrix of associations from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Finally, the following analyses focus on Old English works that cannot be placed into the previous two categories, as they both combine and diverge from the themes discussed so far, interacting with the tradition of the celestial cross in innovative ways. For example, in his *Exaltatio* homily, Ælfric blends the historical basis of the Exaltation legend with the imagery of eschatological judgement. The celestial rood appears in his description of the procession of the Cross into Jerusalem by the Emperor Heraclius, and when they enter the city:

Hi wurdon þa afyrhte, for þam færlican tacne,
and beheoldon sarige sona to heofonum,
and gesawon drihtnes rode deorwurðlice þær scinan,
and godes engel hi bær bufan þam geate . . . (90–3)¹⁶¹

This homily is based on a variety of sources, most prominently an anonymous version of the *Exaltatio* legend appended to a sermon by Rabanus Maurus and the anonymous *Passio Sanctae Longini*.¹⁶² This section of the text is based on the Pseudo-Rabanus *Exaltatio*: ‘Cumque mirarentur attoniti, nimio terrore constricti, respicientes in altum, viderunt signum sanctae crucis in coelo, flammeo fulgore resplendere. Angelus enim Domini aspiciens illud in manibus, stetit super portam. . . .’¹⁶³ Despite the basis in historical events, however, Ælfric’s scene (like the Latin source) describes the same vocabulary of suddenness and terror that often accompanies Judgement Day depictions of the celestial rood, emphasizing the fear of the people (*wurdon þa afyrhte*), the suddenness (*færlican*) of the appearance, and that the event is unforeseen (*sona*). Furthermore, the presence of *godes engel* bearing the cross parallels the imagery of the *signum* as a standard carried before Christ, and in the following scene, both the Pseudo-Rabanus *Exaltatio* and Ælfric’s homily include the people’s response to the suspended cross in the form of laudation, the language of which is similar to the hymns to the cross previously discussed.¹⁶⁴ Although the account follows the legend and (like the *Inventio*) is meant to depict a historical moment, the scene

¹⁶¹ ‘Then they [the people] were afraid, because of the sudden sign, / and immediately looked sorrowfully to the heavens, / and saw the rood of the Lord splendidly shining there, / and the angel of God bore it above the gate. . . .’

¹⁶² Jayatilaka, ‘Sources of Lives of the Saints’; Whatley, ‘Exaltatio’; and *idem*, ‘Longinus’, *SASLC* 7, pp. 297–8.

¹⁶³ Homilia LXX, PL 110, cols. 131–4, at 133: ‘As they marveled in terror, excessively bound by fear, looking on high, they saw the holy cross in the sky, radiating shining flame. For the angel of the Lord held that in hand, standing above the door. . . .’

¹⁶⁴ See PL 110, col. 134; and Ælfric’s *Exaltatio*, lines 115–21.

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also typologically transcends time by pointing toward the terror and veneration that accompanies the celestial rood as a *signum* of divine judgement.

The entry for Hild of Whitby in the *Old English Martyrology* mainly gives the account of Hild's death and entrance into heaven. During this scene, the account relates:

And hyre Godes þeowa sum geseah hu englas hyre gast to heofenum læddon, and heo glytende on þæra engla mydle swa scynende sunne oððe nigslycod hrægl. And seo ylce Godes þeowen gehyrde, on þa ylcan tyd þa heo gewat, wundorlicre bellan sweg on þære lyfte, and heo geseah eac þæt englas hofon up ongean hyre gast swyðe mycle and wundorlice Crystes rode, and seo scan swa heofenes tungol. (253.8–16)¹⁶⁵

Although this scene is not concerned with the Second Coming, it is concerned with eschatology on an individual level, through stress on particular judgement. Because eschatology is, at its base, 'concerned with "the four last things: death, judgement, heaven, and hell"',¹⁶⁶ Hild's account is eschatological in dealing with three of these elements in the saint's life: her death, personal judgement, and her ascension to heaven. Curiously, the eschatology in the story of Hild's ascension emphasizes the presence of the floating cross and its associations with medieval conceptions of Christian judgement.

As Catherine E. Karkov has observed, 'the fate of the soul at the moment of death . . . is also a feature of devotion to the cross',¹⁶⁷ and it is not incongruous to find particular judgement and images of the cross paired together in Anglo-Saxon materials. The account of Hild's death combines various traditions of the cross and personal sanctity in evoking the eschatological, as this scene enacts a microcosmic, typological representation of the Judgement Day: Hild's soul represents the souls of all believers, the ascension of the saint represents the resurrection of all Christians into heaven, and the celestial cross signals the central act of divine judgement – both over Hild's soul in this scene and over all souls at the Second Coming. Typical of saints' lives, then, this account in the *Old English Martyrology* enables the audience to relate their own lives to Hild's in imitation of the saint and, by extension, in imitation of Christ. Furthermore, the presence of the celestial cross prompts the audience toward the need to strive for their own sanctity in preparation for the Last Judgement.

If any Old English poem evokes myriad contexts for the cross, it is *The*

¹⁶⁵ 'And a certain one of her nuns saw how the angels carried her [Hild's] spirit to heaven, and she glittered in the midst of the angels as the shining sun or a glossy dress. And the same nun heard, at the same time that she went, the sound of a wonderful bell in the air, and she also saw that the angels raised up along with her spirit a very great and wonderful rood of Christ, and it shone as a star of heaven.'

¹⁶⁶ 'Eschatology', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com>, accessed June 2010.

¹⁶⁷ 'Abbot Ælfwine', p. 105.

Dream of the Rood, as Mize has most recently observed.¹⁶⁸ Throughout the poem, the cross is described variously as crucifix, cosmological symbol, *crux gemmata*, and celestial sign,¹⁶⁹ while the narrating rood relates its formation into a cross (28–31), the Crucifixion (33–56), the burial (65b–77), its veneration (78–94), the Resurrection (101b–102), the Ascension (103a), and the Judgement (103b–121). As Daniel F. Pigg has demonstrated, this entire narration is also related as an apocalyptic dream vision (1: *swefna cyst*; 96: *gesyhbðe*), aligning it with early Christian apocalypses; symptomatic of this genre, the author combines apocalyptic discourse with the themes of eschatological Judgement, using the celestial cross as the central figure of this fusion.¹⁷⁰ In the midst of this apocalyptic vision, the poet provides the following description of the celestial cross in lines 4–6a: ‘Puhte me þæt ic gesawe syllicre treow / on lyft lædan, leohte bewunden, / beama beorhtost.’¹⁷¹

Later, the poem presents several images that especially ground this poem in the eschatological tradition. Like Vercelli Homilies II and XXI and *Christ III*, echoes of *IV Ezra* V.5 are present when the cross is described as bleeding: ‘hit ærest ongan / swætan on þa swiðran halfe’ (19b–20a).¹⁷² The most eschatological passage in *The Dream of the Rood*, however, is found after the Crucifixion and Ascension, in lines 103b–121. The eschatology is so clear, in fact, that the cross evokes the Second Coming by proclaiming, *Hider eft fundað* (103b),¹⁷³ and using the terms *domdage* (105a), *deman* (107a) and *domes* (107b) to summon up the vision of the Judgement Day intimately associated with the cross in this poem. Like the early Christian apocalyptic works from which the *signum crucis* and its eschatological associations ultimately derive, the Old English poem reveals the vision of the Last Judgement through signs: for example, his being accompanied by *his englas* (106) and the gathering of *þære manige* (112). Yet the most important sign present at the Judgement is *ða rode* (119a), which is inscribed on

¹⁶⁸ ‘Mental Container’, pp. 131–4 and references there.

¹⁶⁹ See above, p. 2, n. 13.

¹⁷⁰ ‘*The Dream of the Rood* in its Discursive Context: Apocalypticism as Determinant of Form and Treatment’, *ELN* 29 (1992), 13–22. See also J. Canuteson, ‘The Crucifixion and the Second Coming in *The Dream of the Rood*’, *MP* 66 (1969), 293–7; Raw, ‘Early Christian Art’; R. C. Payne, ‘Convention and Originality in the Vision Framework of *The Dream of the Rood*’, *MP* 73 (1976), 329–41; C. L. Chase, ‘“Christ III”’, ‘The Dream of the Rood’, and Early Christian Passion Piety’, *Viator* 11 (1980), 11–33; É. Ó Carragáin, ‘How Did the Vercelli Collector Interpret *The Dream of the Rood*?’, *Studies in English Language and Early Literature in Honour of Paul Christopherson*, ed. P. M. Tilling, Occasional Papers in Linguistics and Language Learning 8 (Coleraine, 1981), 62–104; M. Brzezinski, ‘The Harrowing of Hell, the Last Judgment, and *The Dream of the Rood*’, *NM* 89 (1988), 252–65; and Mize, ‘Mental Container’, pp. 173–4

¹⁷¹ ‘It seemed to me that I saw a most wondrous tree raised in the air, wound in light, the brightest of beams.’

¹⁷² ‘It first began / to bleed on the right side.’ See *Dream of the Rood*, ed. Swanton, pp. 64–5.

¹⁷³ ‘He [God] shall come here again.’

believers who 'in breostum bereð beacna selest' (118)¹⁷⁴ and provides the way of salvation (1201). *The Dream of the Rood* thus uses the cross itself as a symbol of Christian salvation history, emphasizing its apocalyptic and eschatological elements to turn the attention of the audience from Crucifixion to Judgement Day, when the cross will again be the foremost sign of the Second Coming.

The Old English poem for which the associations of the celestial cross have the greatest implications is *Elene*. Like the other works previously discussed, the floating cross in this text is also associated with eschatological imagery, although this association is not as greatly acknowledged. Despite his reliance on the *Inventio*, it follows that Cynewulf was also aware of the matrix of associations related to the celestial cross and eschatological contexts: materials derived from Matthew's gospel, apocrypha, exegesis, visual art and liturgy. Furthermore, the associations of the celestial cross derived from Matthew and the subsequent tradition should be considered just as important as those derived from the *Inventio* tradition in order to offer greater understanding of *Elene*.

The image of the celestial rood appears in lines 87–9, as the Emperor Constantine 'up locade swa him se ar ahead' (87), and 'geseah he frætwum beorht / wliiti wuldres treo ofer wolcna hrof' (88b–89).¹⁷⁵ This is comparable to the Latin, which relates in the A-text, 'Et expergefactus Constantinus, intendens in caelum, uidit signum crucis Christi ex lumine claro constitutum.'¹⁷⁶ This symbol thus helps to establish the prominence of the cross as a figure in the narrative. Although this cross is initially presented as celestial, in the Old English poem it is nearly 1200 lines before any explicitly eschatological elements appear in Cynewulf's epilogue (1270b–1321).¹⁷⁷ While much of *Elene* corresponds to the Latin *Inventio* as related in the *Acta Cyriaci*,¹⁷⁸ Cynewulf's

¹⁷⁴ 'bear in [their] breasts the best of signs'.

¹⁷⁵ 'looked up, as the messenger commanded him . . . he saw in bright adornments / the beautiful tree of glory raised over the clouds.'

¹⁷⁶ Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found*, pp. 201–78, lines 10–12; translation from Edwards, *Constantine and Christendom*, p. 64: 'And gazing up into heaven, he beheld the sign of the cross of Christ, formed out of brilliant light.' References are to the A-text, the oldest and most complete version; see also the B-text in Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found*, pp. 279–88.

¹⁷⁷ On eschatology in *Elene*, see *Elene*, ed. Gradon, pp. 20–2; E. R. Anderson, *Cynewulf: Structure, Style, and Theme in His Poetry* (Rutherford, NJ, 1983), pp. 146–59; R. B. Bosse and N. D. Hinton, 'Cynewulf and the Apocalyptic Tradition', *Neophilologus* 74 (1990), 279–93; and É. Ó Carragáin, 'Cynewulf's Epilogue to *Elene* and the Tastes of the Vercelli Compiler: a Paradigm of Meditative Reading', *Lexis and Texts in Early English: Studies presented to Jane Roberts*, ed. C. J. Kay and L. M. Sylvester (Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 187–201.

¹⁷⁸ For the sources, see Gardner, 'Cynewulf's *Elene*'; Calder and Allen, *Sources and Analogues*, pp. 59–69; *Elene*, ed. Gradon, pp. 15–22; Rosser, 'Sources of *Elene*'; Biggs and Whatley, 'Inventio'; and E. G. Whatley, 'Quiriacus (Judas)', *SASLC* 1, pp. 401–3.

signature (1236–1270a) and the following eschatological epilogue (1270b1321) are unique to the Old English poem. Again, we find the traditional imagery of the Judgement Day: *tionleg* (1279b), the *dom* (1280b), an *engla weorude* (1281a), the *Demæn* (1283b), the *domes fyr* (1314b), as well as the division of souls to their eternal punishments or rewards (1286b–1314). As Ó Carragáin has observed about this section of the poem, Cynewulf portrays the Last Judgement to urge readers toward their own meditation, preparation and repentance through traditional biblical and patristic imagery; in this manner, Ó Carragáin has especially noted the connections of the refining fire to apocalyptic passages in the bible.¹⁷⁹

While much of *Elene* is implicitly focused on the cross through the narrative of the Invention and Exaltation, Cynewulf ends the poem with an eschatological vision nowhere present in his source. Subsequently, in his epilogue, the emphasis and imagery of the cross that has pervaded the poem is now inherently linked, as in *The Dream of the Rood*, with the Judgement Day. Given the contexts of the celestial cross in other Old English texts discussed, it is fair to assume that Anglo-Saxon readers would have recognized the associations between the celestial rood at the beginning of the poem's narrative and the Judgement depiction at its end. Furthermore, the general eschatological background is continually manifested throughout the Vercelli Book – and, more specifically, the celestial cross in *The Dream of the Rood* as well as Homilies II and XXI – thus allowing for a reader to identify such intertextual elements.¹⁸⁰ In portraying these dual visions at opposite ends of his poem, Cynewulf appropriately draws on their common eschatological contexts in order to connect these moments of imagery. The effect is that these two passages enclose his poetic narrative of the Invention of the Cross with an eschatological 'envelope pattern'¹⁸¹ that imitates the dual markers of salvation history in the Crucifixion and the Judgement.

Although the earliest Christian contexts of the celestial cross are deeply rooted in apocalypticism, in turning to Old English literature we find the celestial cross within more diverse literary settings. Nonetheless, much of the imagery presented derives from Matthew XXIV–XXV, *IV Ezra* and a general

¹⁷⁹ 'Cynewulf's Epilogue', p. 188–9, esp. n. 3.

¹⁸⁰ See the list of contents in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. Celia Sisam, EEMF 19 (Copenhagen, 1976), 13–17, at 17.

¹⁸¹ On this term, see A. C. Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, Columbia Univ. Stud. in Eng. and Comparative Lit. 12 (New York, 1935), 9; C. B. Heatt, 'On Envelope Patterns (Ancient and – Relatively – Modern) and Nonce Formulas', *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: a Memorial for Milman Parry*, ed. J. M. Foley (Columbus, OH, 1987), pp. 245–58; and J. Steen, *Verses and Virtuosity: the Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto, 2008), p. 32. For 'envelope patterns' in the Vercelli Book generally, see Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, pp. 65–6 (esp. n. 12), 103–5 and 121–2.

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tradition of apocalyptic and patristic thought. What this examination reveals is that the image of the celestial rood derives from early Christian apocalypses and biblical interpretation, and was disseminated to Anglo-Saxon England through a variety of materials, especially widely accessible liturgical hymns. As the image spread, its use in Christian materials continued to augment the motif to create a matrix of associations that affect its use in Anglo-Saxon settings; yet, as it manifests in Old English depictions, the motif retains its deep-seated eschatological connections. Tracing sources, therefore, reveals not a single basis from which Anglo-Saxon authors worked but a number of cultural backgrounds informing the importance of such an image in Old English texts. As critics, the goal must be to take all of the elements of a single image together in order to understand the wide variety of meanings evoked by authors for their audience, since, as Thomas D. Hill has reminded scholars, "The very fact that a poet chose a specific source gives us some information about the tastes and interests of that particular poet."¹⁸² Similarly, that Anglo-Saxon authors chose to use the motif of the floating rood, evocative of a complex matrix of ideas, also indicates important details about those authors and their views of eschatology.¹⁸³

¹⁸² "Literary History and Old English Poetry: The Case of *Christ I, II, and III*, *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. Szarmach and Oggins, p. 8.

¹⁸³ I would like to thank Frederick M. Biggs, Lindy Brady, Robert J. Hasenfratz and the readers for *ASE* for input at various stages of this article. I presented earlier versions of this article to the Yale/UCConn Medievalists' Working Group on October 30, 2009, and the 45th International Congress on Medieval Studies on May 15, 2010, and am indebted to the questions and discussions that arose at both.