

THE CROSS AS TREE: THE WOOD-OF-THE-CROSS LEGENDS IN
MIDDLE ENGLISH AND LATIN TEXTS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

by

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Dissertation Abstract

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The medieval wood-of-the-cross legends trace the history of the wood of Christ’s cross back to Old Testament figures and sometimes to paradise itself, where the holy wood was derived from the very tree from which Adam and Eve disobeyedly ate. These legends are thought to have originated in Greek, afterwards radiating into Latin and the vernacular languages of Western Europe. The earliest witness of these narratives (the “rood-tree” legend) is extant in English fragments of the eleventh century, with full versions found in one twelfth-century English manuscript and several Latin ones originating in England. In this study I examine both the setting into which the rood-tree legend arrived, as well as the later, more elaborate wood-of-the-cross legends that inspired adaptations into Middle English writings.

The opening chapter establishes the development of the wood-of-the-cross narrative and its manifestations in both the Latin West and the Eastern languages. Chapter two characterizes the strong devotion to the holy cross in Anglo-Saxon England, and its manifestation in literature, theological writings and art, while chapter three details

the Latin and Middle English versions of the wood-of-the-cross legends in manuscript form in England. The fourth chapter traces the concept of the “cross as tree,” beginning with medieval glosses on important biblical tree references, followed by the use of the cross-tree image in Christian writings from patristic times through the medieval period. The penultimate chapter examines key narrative motifs from the legends and provides important parallels of these motifs in other genres, including romance, hagiography and travel writing.

I conclude that the wood-of-the-cross legends would have been welcomed into Anglo-Saxon England by a pre-existing reverence for the holy cross, and that this devotion probably bolstered their reception in that country. However, the most significant reasons for the legends’ popularity are not specific to England, but rather are common throughout Western Europe in the Middle Ages: the adaptability of the tree as a symbol, the familiarity of the narrative motifs used, and the significant appeal of the legends’ typological structure which tied the wood of Christ’s cross to the very tree whose violation had brought about the Fall of man.

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*Dedicated to my husband and family,
and especially to my father,
Nick Quickert, Ph.D. (University of Toronto, 1970),
who, although he studied in a completely different field,
nevertheless knows the effort involved.*

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Chapter 1: Overview of Wood-of-the-Cross Legend Development and Past Scholarship

The wood-of-the-cross legend is actually a group of narratives that trace the pre-history of the wood used to make Christ's cross back to Old Testament figures, or in some cases back to paradise itself.¹ While these legends probably originate in the time period AD 500–1000, extant forms are dateable to no earlier than the eleventh century, and the legends enjoyed their greatest popularity beginning in the thirteenth century. The original wood-of-the-cross legends were likely composed in Greek, from which language they radiated into Slavonic, Armenian and Coptic versions in the East and into Latin in the West. Once available in Latin, the legend was translated into almost every European vernacular language.

1.1 Focus of This Study

To date, there has been no comprehensive study of the wood-of-the-cross legends in England; this thesis will rectify that lack. The situation in England is particularly intriguing as the “tree of the cross” motif appears there in three phases or traditions. The first of these is the native Anglo-Saxon tradition of devotion to the holy cross, as exemplified, for example, in the Old English poems *The Dream of the Rood*, and *Elene*,

¹ A note on terminology: the phrase “wood-of-the-cross legends” or “wood-of-the-cross material” will be used to describe any narratives that recount all or part of the pre-history of the wood of Christ’s cross; as such, the phrase encompasses many variants, some of which trace the holy wood back to paradise, others that begin the narrative with other Old Testament figures (for example, Moses or David) or still others that recount only particular episodes of the wood’s prehistory, such as its attempted use in the building of the Temple by Solomon. The term “rood-tree legend” in this study applies specifically to one strain of the wood-of-the-cross legend extant in Old English (one manuscript and two fragments) and Latin (ten manuscripts: see appendix for my edition), and associated primarily with England. The other two most influential versions of the wood-of-the-cross legend (in addition to the rood-tree legend) are known as the *Post peccatum Adae* and that appearing in the *Vita Adae et Evae* (see below and also chapter 3). There are many derivatives and translations of these latter two, which shall be referred to as such.

or in the monumental sculpture of the great crosses (e.g. the Ruthwell cross) with their foliate decoration. The second is the early appearance in England of the rood-tree legend tracing the holy wood back to Moses, the earliest fragmentary witnesses of which are from the first half of the eleventh century. Finally, there is the elaborated version of the narrative popularized by the *Post peccatum Adae* and the *Legenda aurea*; these Latin texts are extant in a large number of manuscripts, and these in turn influenced major Middle English works such as the *Cursor mundi*, and even radiated into English drama and art.

This first chapter gives an overview of the development of the wood-of-the-cross legends and of past scholarship on them. Chapter 1 also summarizes the key manifestations of the legend in Eastern texts as well as Western, Latin ones. Turning to the first of the three “strands” of the cross-tree tradition in England, Chapter 2 examines the strong Anglo-Saxon devotion to the cross, manifest in poetry, homilies, riddles and art. Chapter 3 considers the derivatives of the main Latin texts that recount the wood-of-the-cross legend in England in both the Latin and English languages, providing an overview of all relevant Middle English manuscript texts that incorporate all or part of the pre-history of the cross.

Chapter 4 takes a broader view of the cross-tree connection, tracing the vivid symbolic use of the cross as tree from early Christian writings, beginning with biblical passages concerning great trees and their associated medieval commentaries. The dual patristic notions of the *arbor vitae* and the *arbor crucis* are fully explored, as are key medieval texts, including apocryphal sources, that preserve and expand these traditions. Finally, the availability of these potential source texts in medieval England is assessed.

The penultimate section, Chapter 5, finds parallels to particular narrative motifs in the wood-of-the-cross legends in other literary genres, specifically medieval romance, hagiography and travel writing. These motifs include the “child in the tree” of Seth’s glimpses of paradise, instances of unseasonable and miraculous plant growth and marvelous trees associated with the earthly paradise. Important parallels in the Arthurian romances, the tradition of Joseph of Arimathea in England and the tales of Alexander the Great are discussed. The closing section following Chapter 5 draws important conclusions regarding the cross-tree tradition and the popularity of the wood-of-the-cross legends in medieval England based on all of the foregoing. The thesis finishes with an edition of the Latin rood-tree legend compiled from the ten extant manuscripts, only two of which have been previously published; this edition may be found in the appendix.

1.2 Overview of the Development of the Legend of the Wood of the Cross

I here present an overview of the evolution of the wood-of-the-cross legend so as to facilitate the more detailed descriptions of the texts that will follow in subsequent chapters. My discussion is also set out in tabular form beginning on p. 18 below.

1.2.1 The Quest of Seth

The wood-of-the-cross legend in its elaborated forms of the thirteenth century and beyond actually consists of two previously distinct narratives: the quest of Adam’s son Seth for the oil of mercy, and the independent pre-history of the holy wood. The quest of Seth is an ancient Jewish apocryphal tale influenced by both the Enoch literature and

other eastern motifs,² and considerably ante-dates Christianity. The earliest extant version of this narrative appears in the Greek *Apocalypse of Moses* of the first century AD, itself a translation of an Aramaic original composed by an Alexandrian Jew.³ This work is perhaps inaptly titled because it is actually an account of the lives of the protoplasts after their expulsion from paradise. In the early fourth century the *Apocalypse* was translated into the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae*.⁴ There is debate as to whether the extant *Apocalypse of Moses* or *Vita* better represents the original text.⁵ The *Vita* is slightly longer (51 versus 43 sections); the two also diverge on a few details significant to the study of the wood-of-the-cross legends: in the *Apocalypse of Moses*, Adam takes some herbs of paradise with him at the time of the expulsion, while in the *Vita*, Eve and Seth return to paradise and come back bearing herbs, an incident which may have inspired the insertion of the cross legend material at that point in the narrative.

Scholars in the late nineteenth century knew only two versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, the short Greek version and the short Latin version. English texts of both of these in a synoptic arrangement can be found in Johnson.⁶ The *Life* is now known to be extant in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic and some Coptic and Arabic

² Esther Casier Quinn, *The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 17–31.

³ There are six manuscripts in total. A text based on four of these can be found in Constantius Tischendorf, ed., *Apocalypses Apocryphae* (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1866), 1–23. For a translation of the text, see the “Revelation of Moses” in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325*, 24 vols., eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), vol. 16, 454–467. Other studies include Marcel Nagel, “La Vie Grecque d’Adam et d’Eve: Apocalypse de Moïse,” 3 vols. (PhD diss., Strasbourg, 1972) and Daniel A. Bertrand, *La Vie Grecque d’Adam et Eve: Introduction, Texte, Traduction et Commentaire* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1987).

⁴ Wilhelm Meyer, “Vita Adae et Evae,” *Abhandlungen der philosophisch-philologischen Classe der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 14 (1879): 207.

⁵ Meyer believed the Latin better represents the original text, while Wells favoured the Greek: Meyer, “Vita Adae et Evae,” 198, 207; Leonard St. Alban Wells, “The Books of Adam and Eve,” in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2 vols., ed. Robert Henry Charles, 128–129 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913).

⁶ Marshall D. Johnson, “Life of Adam and Eve,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 249–295.

fragments. Anderson and Stone give a synoptic arrangement of the Greek, Latin, Armenian, Georgian and Slavonic texts, with an English translation.⁷

The old theory was that the Greek and Latin short versions were derived from a lost Jewish Adambook, but Stone argued convincingly that the presence of the Jewish material does not definitively prove a Jewish origin over a Christian one.⁸ A longer work has now been discovered that combines material from both of the shorter versions; there is disagreement among scholars as to whether this longer text represents the original more closely than the shorter two. Some scholars embrace the view that the Greek text was composed first, and that the longer version was extended by the later addition of elements,⁹ while others hold the opposite view.¹⁰ Taking these two opposing views together suggests that the short version is condensed from a no-longer-extant long version, while the extant long version represents a reinsertion of previously deleted material.

The *Vita Adae et Evae* is a secondary work that was condensed from a longer account of the life of the protoplasts. Pettoirelli discussed two of the manuscripts of the longer Latin version that have survived.¹¹ Some manuscripts of the shorter version show

⁷ Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*, Second Revised Edition. Early Judaism and its Literature, vol. 17 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999). Tromp's recent study of the Greek *Life* provides the latest information on textual relationships: Johannes Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve in Greek. A Critical Edition*. Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece, vol. 6. (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

⁸ Michael E. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 58.

⁹ Marinus De Jonge, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of the Christian Literature*. Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha, vol. 18 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 181–200 ; Tromp, *Life of Adam*, 3–16, 96–103.

¹⁰ Jean-Pierre Pettoirelli, "Essai sur la structure primitive de la Vie d'Adam et Ève," *Apocrypha* 14 (2003): 237–256, citing note 14 from Jean-Daniel Kaestli, "Le mythe de la chute de Satan et la question du milieu d'origine de la Vie d'Adam et Ève," in *Early Christian Voices, Essays in Honor of François Bovon*, ed. David H. Warren, Ann Graham Brock and David W. Pao (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 341–354.

¹¹ Jean-Pierre Pettoirelli, "La Vie latine d'Adam et Eve, Analyse de la Tradition Manuscrite," *Apocrypha* 10 (1999): 195–296. These manuscripts are called by him Ma (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, O 35 sup.) and Pr (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 3832); see especially p. 260–265.

evidence of correction from the longer, although from better manuscripts than Ma and Pr; therefore, other manuscripts of the longer version must have existed. The English manuscripts of the *Vita* (Pettorelli's *rédaction anglaise*¹²) show the most additions. As a result, it used to be thought that the correction process had taken place in England; however, continental manuscripts of the longer Latin version have now been discovered, so there is no longer a need to hypothesize a British origin for the correction process.

The old classification system for the *Vita* established by Meyer¹³ has now been superseded by Pettorelli's,¹⁴ which identifies five groups, with some groups being subdivided into redactions. These are: 1) the South German Group (redactions G1, G2, G3; equivalent to Meyer I), 2) the Rhenish Group (R1, R2, R3; equivalent to Meyer II and IV), 3) the Bohemian Group (equivalent to Meyer II), the British Group (a sub-class of Meyer II; also discussed in Mozley, 1929) and 5) the Late Redactions, which contain the wood-of-the-cross legend (F1, F2; equivalent to Meyer III). He also identified two manuscripts of the long Latin life (Ma and Pr, mentioned above). In summation, we have 106 manuscripts of the short *Vita Adae et Evae* extant; those containing interpolations provide evidence of the original long Latin life, for example the interpolations in Insular manuscripts, or the extra details present in the Adam and Eve story as told in the tenth-century Irish work, the *Saltair na Rann*.¹⁵

In the *Apocalypse of Moses*, the story of the quest of Seth may be summarized thus: Adam, now aged 930, is ill and Seth offers to return to paradise to get some fruit for his father, an offer which Adam refuses. Instead, Adam bids both Seth and Eve go to

¹² Pettorelli, "La Vie latine," 252–265.

¹³ Meyer, "Vita Adae et Evae."

¹⁴ Pettorelli, "La Vie latine."

¹⁵ David Greene, Fergus Kelly and Brian Murdoch, *The Irish Adam and Eve Story from Saltair na Rann*, 2 vols. (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976).

paradise to beg for something from the tree out of which oil flows. On the journey they encounter a beast, but it flees upon seeing the “image of God” in Seth. Upon arriving at paradise, they are refused the oil by the Archangel Michael, but are instead given a promise that it shall be given to the righteous at the end of time. As mentioned above, the *Vita* account of Seth and Eve’s journey is much the same, except that the two bring back not only Michael’s promise that the oil of mercy will one day be granted, but some herbs of paradise as well. The significance of this detail will be made plain below.

Both the *Apocalypse of Moses* and the *Vita* may have originally been Jewish documents, but the story of the quest of Seth was brought into the realm of Christian literature early, when it was incorporated into the portion of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* known as the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* which describes Christ’s harrowing of Hell. It used to be thought that the *Gospel of Nicodemus*,¹⁶ extant in both Greek and Latin, was composed in Greek. There are still scholarly debates over the *Descensus* portion of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, particularly concerning its language of composition, its date and its connection to the two preceding parts of the text. The old theory was that the *Descensus* was a Greek text that once circulated independently, a view that is supported by the relationship of the *Descensus* to eastern writings, which recount Christ’s descent to hell in a way quite similar to that in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Some scholars cite these homilies as evidence that a now lost Greek text recounting Christ’s descent to hell once

¹⁶ See the edition of H. C. Kim, ed. *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, Toronto Mediaeval Latin Texts (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973). Earlier scholarship on the Latin texts can be found, for example, in Constantius Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1876) or M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924). For the modern perspective on this work see Zbigniew Izydorezyk, *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997).

existed; however, it is more likely that these homilies and the *Descensus* simply draw on the same literary and theological tradition.¹⁷

There is evidence that the *Descensus* was in fact composed in Latin rather than Greek; for example, the story of Seth's journey was directly imported from the *Gospel of Nicodemus* into the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae*, but not into the Greek form of the life. Therefore, there is no need to assume that the *Descensus* in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is a translation of a now-lost Greek original; on the contrary, the evidence favours the idea that the *Descensus* was composed in Latin, even if its author did draw on some material of Greek origin.¹⁸

The *Descensus*, found in chapters 17–27, does not occur in the oldest witnesses of the *Gospel*, which begs the questions as to when it was composed. A variety of types of evidence can be used to refine the dating of the *Descensus*. For example, a number of themes in the text reflect theological controversies and doctrine of the fifth century, or the fourth century at the earliest. In addition, the particular biblical verses used also narrow the date. Taken together, the evidence points to a date not earlier than the mid-fourth century.¹⁹ However, when Gregory of Tours (540–594) references the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, he makes no allusion to the *Descensus*, making it likely that the addition of this portion was not before the sixth century. Despite the fact that the *Descensus* portion is an addition to the existing work, the *Gospel* continues on seamlessly between it and the first two portions of the texts, which suggests the probability that a learned Latin writer in the sixth century conceived of the *Descensus* as a deliberate completion for the *Gospel*.

¹⁷ Rémi Gounelle and Zbigniew Izydorczyk, *L'Évangile de Nicodème* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 112. See also Rémi Gounelle, "L'Enfer selon l'Évangile de Nicodème," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 86 (2006): 313–333.

¹⁸ Gounelle and Izydorczyk, *L'Évangile*, 113.

¹⁹ Gounelle and Izydorczyk, *L'Évangile*, 115–116.

Many contemporary works of the Latin faith mention Christ's descent to hell between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection; therefore, such an addition would have been in keeping with the tastes of the time.²⁰ In conclusion, chapters 1–16 of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* were composed in Greek in the first three quarters of the fourth century. During its transmission in the Latin world, a narrative of Christ's descent to hell (the *Descensus*) was composed as a completion of the events of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, sometime after the mid-fourth century, and maybe as late as the sixth.²¹

The Seth narrative appears in chapter 19: Christ has entered Hell and John the Baptist has just recounted his baptism of Christ in the Jordan. Adam chimes in and asks Seth to recount his journey to paradise for the oil of mercy, at which time Seth relates a condensed account of his journey to paradise, but with one critical difference: whereas in the *Apocalypse of Moses* and the *Vita* Seth receives only a general promise from the angel that the oil of mercy will be granted at the end of days, in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* Seth is told that in precisely 5,500 years the son of God shall come and baptize Adam, anoint him with the oil of mercy, and bring him to the tree of mercy in paradise. What we see here is a significant development in the history of the Seth narrative: it has been adopted into a Christian text and has been given a specifically Christian tone. This Christianized version of the Seth narrative was widely dispersed via the popularity and near-canonical status of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, and its Christianized account of Seth was subsequently interpolated into the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae*.²² The date of this

²⁰ Gounelle and Izydorczyk, *L'Évangile*, 117.

²¹ Gounelle and Izydorczyk, *L'Évangile*, 118–119.

²² Chapter 19 of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* interpolated into Chapter 42 of the *Vita*.

interpolation is uncertain, but it does appear in the earliest extant manuscript of the *Vita*, which has been dated to the eighth century.²³

1.2.2 Holy Wood Traced Back to Old Testament Figures

The earliest versions of the narratives chronicling the pre-history of the wood that became the cross of Christ are separate from the Seth story and instead trace the wood back to various Old Testament figures. The oldest complete extant version of such a narrative appears in late Old English in the twelfth-century collection of homilies in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343.²⁴ This version, named the rood-tree legend by Napier (a name that will also be used in this study), begins the history of the holy wood with Moses, and ends with an account of the finding of the true cross by Helena (the *Inventio*). Based on linguistic grounds alone, Napier hypothesized that the Bodley 343 text was a copy of an eleventh-century Old English version, itself a translation of an unknown Latin original.²⁵ Napier's assumptions were validated more than half a century later by two significant discoveries of eleventh-century fragments in Old English of this very text.²⁶ The Latin rood-tree legend is extant in ten manuscripts, which I have edited in the appendix; however, the earliest witnesses of the Latin rood-tree legend (being

²³ Meyer, "Vita Adae et Evae," 202–203, 235–236.

²⁴ Arthur S. Napier, ed., *History of the Holy Rood-Tree*, EETS, vol. 103 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co: 1894). For further information on the Bodley 343 manuscript, see the section on Worcester in N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain, A List of Surviving Books*, 2nd edition (London: Royal Historical Society, 1964), 210–215. For a discussion of the manuscript's scribe see Christine Franzen, "On the Attribution of Additions in Oxford, Bodleian MS Bodley 343 to the Tremulous Hand of Worcester," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 19.1 (2006): 7–8.

²⁵ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, lviii–lix.

²⁶ Neil Ripley Ker, "An Eleventh-Century Old English Legend of the Cross Before Christ," *Medium Aevum* 9 (1940): 84–85, and Bertram Colgrave and Ann Hyde, "Two Recently Discovered Leaves from Old English Manuscripts," *Speculum* 37 (1962): 60–78.

twelfth-century) post-date the Old English.²⁷ A second eleventh-century wood of the cross legend (c. 1040-1080) is the Latin *Historia* of Franco of Liège,²⁸ which starts not with Moses, but during the reign of King David, when a Jew finds a remarkable tree with three types of leaves and shows it to the king, who recognizes in it an allusion to the Trinity.

1.2.3 Holy Wood Traced Back to Paradise (Without Seth)

Two different twelfth-century wood-of-the-cross legends exist which do not involve the quest of Seth, yet nevertheless trace the origin of the wood of the cross back to paradise via another agent. The notion that wood was taken from paradise goes back to Jewish tradition. For example, the *Vita Adae et Evae* had Eve and Seth bring herbs back from Eden; another tale recounts how Adam and Eve took wood with them at the time of the expulsion, which was later used as a rod by Moses and was eventually incorporated into the Tabernacle. A third account tells how Moses went to paradise personally and cut his staff there from the tree of life.²⁹ In the wood-of-the-cross legends recounting the wood's paradisaical origin (without Seth), can already be seen the roots of the two competing traditions that will continue in later versions of the legend: that the holy wood derived on the one hand from a twig(s), and on the other from a seed(s). In

²⁷ For editions see Napier, *Rood-Tree*, 41-53; John Henry Mozley, "A New Text of the Story of the Holy Cross," *Journal of Theological Studies*, O. S. 31 (1930): 113-127, and the appendix of this study. See also Andrew Robert Miller, "German and Dutch Versions of the Legend of the Wood of the Cross," 2 vols. (PhD diss., Oxford, 1992), 74-86.

²⁸ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 87-90. Editions include Wilhelm Meyer, "Geschichte des Kreuzholzes vor Christus," *Abhandlungen der philosophisch-philologischen Classe der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 16 (1882): 107 and Adolfo Mussafia, "Sulla Leggenda del Legno della Croco," *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der Kaiserlich Akademie der Wissenschaften* 63 (1869): 202. For an English translation see John Wilkinson, Joyce Hill and W.F. Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099-1185* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1988).

²⁹ See Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 71, 92-93.

the *Pantheon* (c. 1180),³⁰ Godfrey of Viterbo relates the story of how Noah's post-diluvian (and apocryphal) son Ionitus³¹ was transported to paradise and there obtained three twigs which later became the wood of the cross. In an interpolation into the *De imagine mundi* of Honorius of Autun (c. 1154–1159)³² we find the first incorporation of Adam into the story of the holy wood. Here Adam is buried by an angel at Calvary and in his mouth the angel plants a seed from the tree of knowledge, from which the holy wood later springs. This introduces a direct typological connection between the tree that led to original sin and the tree of the cross through which that sin is subsequently redeemed.

1.2.4 The Seth Legend and Wood Pre-History Merge

The first combination of the quest of Seth motif and the story of the holy wood's pre-history likely occurred at the end of the twelfth century via the re-interpolation of a manuscript of the *Vita Adae et Evae*. Eight such manuscripts (labelled Class III by Meyer) exist, but they are fourteenth century or later in date.³³ In these, Seth journeys to

³⁰ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 108–114. Excerpts can be found in Meyer, "Die Geschichte," 112–114. An early edition is Johannes Pistorius, *Rerum Germanicarum Scriptores*, 3 vols. (Ratisbon: J.C. Peezii, 1726): vol. 2, 242–244.

³¹ Ionitus, fourth son of Noah, is a popular figure, especially in early Eastern texts. For a discussion, see Michael E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to the Patriarchs and Prophets* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), 166–167. For details about how the twelfth-century writer of the *Liber floridus* incorporated the figure of Ionitus into the genealogy of Adam and the division of the world among the sons of Noah (a section which interestingly occurs within a cluster of texts concerning Alexander), see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), chapter 2, "From Jerusalem to India."

³² See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 91–99 (Miller discusses the issue of authorship for the interpolation, p. 94). The relevant text is printed in Meyer, "Die Geschichte," 108. For more on Honorius and his works see the work of Valerie Flint, e.g. "The Chronology of the Works of Honorius Augustodunensis," *Revue Bénédictine* 82 (1972): 215–242 and "Anti-Jewish Literature and Attitudes in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 39–57; 183–205.

³³ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 115–117. For the relevant text see Wilhelm Meyer, "Die Geschichte," 120–122 (IV, 6) and also his study of the *Vita Adae et Evae* itself, op. cit., however, there is no complete edition of Class III manuscripts. For Latin incunabula of the *Vita*, see Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 118–119.

paradise and is given a twig with three types of leaves by the angel. He drops the twig in the Jordan on his way back, but when Adam requests that he go back for it, he does so. While the combination of the wood's pre-history with Seth's journey is thought to have occurred in an interpolated *Vita*, the earliest extant combination of these story motifs is found in Johannes Beleth's *Rationale divinorum officiorum* (c. 1170),³⁴ a version in which Seth also returns with a twig from paradise. Quinn postulates that Seth's quest for a branch/twig from paradise, rather than the oil, may have been the more primitive version.³⁵ Although of late date (1552), the only extant Hebrew version of Seth's quest, found in the *Gali Razia*, has Seth journey for a branch, not the oil of mercy.³⁶ An interpolation (post-1120) into the *Liber floridus* of Lambert of St. Omer³⁷ has Seth translated (rather than journeying himself) to paradise where he receives a branch, and a branch is the usual object of Seth's quest in Slavonic and Armenian versions. Therefore, the combination of narratives may have occurred thus: the stories of Seth and the branch and Seth and the oil combined in Greek with the result that he journeyed for the oil but returned with a branch. The combination of Seth's journey and the holy wood's pre-history also likely took place in Greek, and the resulting narrative was transferred to the west either directly from Greek or via a Slavonic intermediary.³⁸

³⁴ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 100–101. For an edition see Heribert Douteil, *Beleth, Johannes. Summa de Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis 41, 2 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976).

³⁵ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 90.

³⁶ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1941), 283, 415, n. 124.

³⁷ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 143. For an edition see Julius Zacher, "Lamberti Floridus," *Serapeum; Zeitschrift für Bibliothekwissenschaft, Handschriftenkunde und ältere Litteratur* 10, 11 (1842): 145–154; 161–172. For a study of this encyclopedic work see Albert Derolez, *The Autograph Manuscript of the Liber Floridus: A Key to the Encyclopedia of Lambert of Saint-Omer*, Corpus Christianorum Autographa Medii Aevi, vol. 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998).

³⁸ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 92–95.

Thus, in the West, two distinct streams of the wood-of-the-cross legends developed: the rood-tree legend, which begins with Moses and whose earliest representative is the Old English Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343, and that which extends the wood's pre-history before Moses by incorporating Seth's journey, represented by the *Vita Class III* manuscripts. However, by far the most elaborate and successful fusion was accomplished by an unknown Latin author in the thirteenth century who wrote the *Post peccatum Adae*.³⁹ The *Post peccatum Adae*, which is extant in over eighty manuscripts, was translated into almost every European language. Drawing on the narratives of the *Vita Class III*, Viterbo's *Pantheon* and Jacobus of Voragine's *Legenda aurea*,⁴⁰ the *Post peccatum Adae* uses a flowing narrative style with greater characterization and more vivid description than any of its sources. Leaving Eve out of the quest, the *Post peccatum Adae* has Seth follow the traces of his parents' footprints, which left the grass withered, back to the edge of paradise where he is granted three wondrous glimpses into paradise before returning, not with a twig, but with three seeds of the very tree, the "forbidden fruit" from which Adam and Eve had disobediently eaten. The popularity of this synthesized version was to bring about the triumph of the seed over

³⁹ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 129–142. For an edition see Meyer, "Die Geschichte," 131–149. For the Latin text of the *Post peccatum Adae* with an accompanying English translation, see Carolyn E. Jones, "Cursor Mundi and Post Peccatum Adae: A Study of Textual Relationships" (PhD diss., University of Miami, 1976), 32–46. For further discussion of this version of the wood-of-the-cross legend, see section 1.3 below and chapter 3.

⁴⁰ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 120–126. The *Legenda aurea* (written c. 1260), which was itself enormously popular, recounts the "twig" version of Seth's journey to paradise. The story of the holy wood appears in ch. 68: *The Finding of the True Cross*. For an edition of the Latin text see Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, ed. *Iacopo da Varazze, Legenda Aurea*, 2 vols. (Sismel: Edizione del Galluzzo, 1998). For an English translation see William Granger Ryan, trans., *Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Maggioni lists Jacobus' sources for the wood-of-the-cross legend in the *Legenda aurea* as the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Bartholomew of Trent's *Liber Epilogorum in gesta sanctorum*, Etienne de Bourbon's *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*, John Beleth's *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, and Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*. Brief descriptions of the wood-of-the-cross legends in these sources can be found in Table 1 below; for bibliographic information, see section 1.2.5 immediately below.

the twig motif and to spread widely the author's newly added details (such as Seth's vision) which characterize all *Post peccatum Adae* derivatives.

1.2.5 Latin Versions of the Wood-of-the-Cross Legend

There are a total of twenty-six Latin versions of the wood-of-the-cross legend that date to the early fourteenth century and earlier.⁴¹ Bob Miller has already discussed the Latin versions at great length in his dissertation, and there is no need to duplicate his extensive work here. Most of the significant Latin texts, e.g. Franco of Liège's *Historia*, Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon*, and John Beleth's *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, have already been mentioned in the overview of the legend development immediately above. For the reader's convenience, a brief description of the material relevant to the wood-of-the-cross legend in each of the Latin works discussed is presented in Table 1 below; bibliographic references to the said works may be found in the footnotes appended to the mention of the texts above.

One text worthy of special note is the *Interrogatio Iohannis*.⁴² This text, extant in four Latin manuscripts, is a translation of either a Greek or Slavonic exemplar that purports to be a revelation of the Bogomil doctrine to John by Jesus. The text relates how Satan presented three pieces of wood to Moses with the express condition that they be used for the Crucifixion; a gloss to the text adds the additional detail that these pieces of

⁴¹ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 67–148, discusses the 33 Latin texts (some post-dating the fourteenth century) that recount all or part of the pre-history or the wood of the cross. One work unmentioned by Miller, the version of the legend found in Etienne de Bourbon's preaching handbook *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, one of the sources used for the cross legend in the *Legenda aurea*, has been added here (see Table 1).

⁴² See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 68–73. For an edition see Edina Bozóky, *Le Livre Secret des Cathares. Interrogatio Iohannis. Apocryphe d'Origine Bogomile. Édition Critique, Traduction, Commentaire* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980). For an English translation see James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 187–193.

wood constituted the staff of Moses, used both to part the Red Sea and to bring water forth from the stone at Raphidim.⁴³ The main importance of this Latin translation is that it can be dated to 1190,⁴⁴ and is therefore the only certain dateable event in the transmission of the wood-of-the-cross legend from East to West.

The wood-of-the-cross legend made its way into a number of broadly read Latin texts, which became sources for further Latin works, whose extensive distribution spread the tale widely. For example, Belet's *Rationale* was the main source for the *Hortus Deliciarum*,⁴⁵ while Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*⁴⁶ provided the material for Peter Riga's versified biblical paraphrase *Aurora* (c. 250 MSS),⁴⁷ Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale* (more than 240 MSS),⁴⁸ and Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia*.⁴⁹ The legend was also adopted into tracts specifically designed for preaching: Etienne de Bourbon's *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*,⁵⁰ and Peregrinus of Oppeln's *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis*.⁵¹

⁴³ Gloss to lines 150–151, quoted in Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 70.

⁴⁴ Dating determined in Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated*, Records of Civilization Sources and Studies, vol. 81 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 449; Bozóky, *Le Livre Secret*, 27, concurs.

⁴⁵ See Miller, , 102. For an edition see Rosalie Green, *Herrad of Hohenbourg. Hortus Deliciarum. Reconstruction and Commentary*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979).

⁴⁶ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 103–105. For an edition see J. P. Migne, ed. *Petrus Comestor. Historia Scholastica*, Patrologia Latina 198 (1855): cc 1370; 1578–1579.

⁴⁷ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 146. For an edition see Paul E. Beichner, *Aurora. Petri Rigae Biblia Versificata. A Verse Commentary on the Bible*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1965).

⁴⁸ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 106. A reprint of the 1624 Douai edition can be found in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Quadruplex; Sive Speculum Maius*, 4 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964–1965), vol. 4.

⁴⁹ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 145. For an edition with an English translation see S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns, eds. *Gervase of Tilbury. Otia Imperialia*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

⁵⁰ A. Lecoy de la Marche, *Anecdotes Historiques: Légendes et Apologues Tirés de Recueil Inédit d'Etienne de Bourbon Dominicain du XIII^e Siècle* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1877).

⁵¹ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 127. See Meyer, "Die Geschichte," 127–128. For further information see Thomas Kaeppli, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi*, 4 vols. (Rome: Ad S. Sabinae, 1970–1993), vol. 3, 211–212.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the rood-tree and *Post peccatum Adae* versions of the legend were sometimes synthesized. One example of this group is the early-fourteenth-century Harley compilation legend (London BL MS Harley 3185),⁵² a monastic homily that follows the rood-tree legend narrative but adds to the beginning the tale of Seth's quest and the wood's early prehistory from *Post peccatum Adae*, and incorporates a reworked version of the Maximilla and Sybilla episodes, also from *Post peccatum Adae*.

⁵² See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 144. Edited by Napier, *Rood-Tree*, Appendix I: 54–63 and also used in my edition of the Latin rood-tree legend: see the appendix to this study.

Table 1: Latin Versions of the Wood-of-the-Cross Legend

Text	Dates and Manuscripts	Relevant Features
Latin Rood-Tree Legend (RTL)	Existed by 1000–1050; 10 MSS (12 th -15 th C)	A homily; begins with Moses; David dreams of rods' location and significance; encircles with silver bands; Solomon's time: wood too long/short; Sabilla sits on tree, is burned, prophecies, put to death, angel calls her Susanna; time of Crucifixion: beam cannot be moved, 10 ells cut off; wood remains in Temple, Helena finds it: cuts in four pieces, sent to Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople
Franco of Liège's <i>Historia</i>	Dated 1040–1080; 18 MSS; Meyer's I, 1	Passage of ~150 words; 3 recensions; David's time: Jew finds tree with 3 kinds of leaves; David and Solomon venerate wood; Queen of Saba declares wood's destiny: a man will hang on it and the Jewish kingdom will fall; wood thrown in "piscina" and causes miracles; pool dries up, wood used for cross
Honorius of Autun's <i>Speculum ecclesiae</i>	1095–1100; 29 12 th C MSS, many later ones; Meyer's I, 2	Only relates episode of wood in "piscina;" angels descend once a year to wood; wood found by soldiers
Interpolation in Lambert of St. Omer's <i>Liber floridus</i>	Interpolation between 1120–1460; 2 MSS (1460 and 1512 AD); Meyer's IV, 4	Seth is transported (does not journey) to paradise; is given a branch; branch refreshes Adam before he dies
Interpolation in Honorius of Autun's <i>Imago mundi</i>	1154–1159 AD; 2 MSS; Meyer's I, 4	Single seed placed in Adam's mouth at death; contains list of events that took place on Mt. Calvary; Saba (Ethiopian queen and sibyl with goose-feet) visits Solomon and adores tree, reveals that tree will be redemption of the world, writes to Sol.; tree felled, used as table; used as bridge during the exile; Esdras later returns wood to Temple; wood thrown into pool by Sol's porch, visited daily by angels, makes miracles; carpenter (Jesus' cousin) takes wood from pool

Table 1: Latin Versions of the Wood-of-the-Cross Legend (Cont.)

Johannes Belet's <i>Rationale divinorum officiorum</i>	Pre-1165 AD; 153 MSS; Meyer's III, 1	In Ch. 151: <i>De exaltatione sanctae crucis</i> ; Adam sends unnamed son to paradise, retrieves branch, plants it; tree useless for Temple construction; made into bridge over city moat; Saba refuses to cross bridge, venerates it (no prophecy); wood later in "piscina," much like Honorius
Herrad von Hohenburg's <i>Hortus deliciarum</i>	Produced 1159-1180; original destroyed 1870, copy exists	Wood-of-the-cross legend in <i>Hortus</i> extracted from <i>Rationale</i>
Petrus Comestor's <i>Historia scholastica</i>	Pre-1179; Meyer's I, 3	Two relevant chapters; Ch. 26 (on I Kings 10:10): Queen of Sheba writes to Sol. after visit regarding tree's fate and downfall of Jewish kingdom; Sol. hides wood deep in earth, sick cured in pool above; Ch. 81 (on John 5:1-4): repeats above info. in condensed fashion; adds statement that this story is not authentic
<i>Interrogatio Iohannis</i>	Latin version c. 1190: only certain dateable event in transmission of legend east to west ; 4 MSS	Purports to be revelation of Bogomil doctrine to John by Jesus; Satan has an angel present 3 woods to Moses to be used for Christ's Crucifixion; a gloss adds that wood became Moses' staff used to part Red Sea and bring water from stone at Raphidim
Godfrey of Viterbo's <i>Pantheon</i>	3 editions between 1185–1191; Meyer's II, 1	37 stanzas on the wood of the cross + 23 stanzas on the 30 pieces of gold (sic); G. claims sources as an "Athanasius" and an Armenian apostle, Bartholomew; Ionitus (post-diluvial son of Noah) asks the Lord to show him paradise; takes 3 seeds (fir, palm, cypress), become one tree with 3 sorts of leaves; David proclaims tree's triune significance and role in redemption; Sol. attempts to use wood in Temple but never right length, places it on Temple porch; Queen of the East (Nicaula Sibylla) prophecies re. wood; citizens sink wood in pool of Siloe (= <i>probatrica piscina</i>), angels visit, miracles occur; Christ's time: wood removed, placed by pool; states that cross had three species of wood

Table 1: Latin Versions of the Wood-of-the-Cross Legend (Cont.)

Petrus Riga's <i>Aurora</i>	1170-1200 AD; c. 250 MSS; Meyer's I, 3	Wood-of-the-cross material appears in this versified Latin biblical paraphrase; main source is Comestor's <i>Historia scholastica</i> (Ch. 26)
Latin <i>Vita Adae et Evae</i> (Class III)	12 th or 13 th C; 8 MSS (oldest extant MS is 14 th C); Meyer's IV, 6	Life of Adam and Eve story interpolated with wood-of-the-cross material; angel brings Seth twig with 3 leaves from tree of knowledge, but is dropped in Jordan; Adam tells Seth to retrieve twig; planted at head of Adam's grave; Solomon's hunters find tree; tree gilded and placed in treasury; Queen of the South prophecies concerning wood; Sol. strips wood of decoration and throws it in <i>probatica piscina</i> ; narrative ends; text states that the redeemer was hung on the wood at Calvary and his blood fell onto Adam's head, embedded in tree's roots
Gervase of Tilbury's <i>Otia imperialia</i>	c. 1212 AD; Meyer's IV, 1	Chapters 54 and 105; Adam takes apple/twig from paradise and plants it; wood always too short/long for Temple; Solomon buries wood after Sheba's prophecy, <i>probatica piscina</i> built there; at time of Crucifixion wood floats up; wood used for Christ's cross; main source is <i>Historia scholastica</i> (Ch. 81)
Bartholomew of Trent's <i>Liber epilorum in gesta sanctorum</i> ⁵³	c. 1240	Ch. 155, <i>De inventione sanctae crucis</i> ; Adam sends Seth to paradise for a remedy for his health; unnamed angel gives branch to Seth, orders it planted on Mt. Lebanon; Solomon buries wood after Sheba's prophecy, waters of Syloe made there, motion of waters, healings; at time of Crucifixion wood floats up; wood used for Christ's cross
Vincent of Beauvais' <i>Speculum historiale</i>	1244–1259 AD; 242 MSS; Meyer's I, 3	Derives from <i>Historia scholastica</i> (Ch. 26)

⁵³ Emore Paoli, *Bartolomeo da Trento. Liber Epilogorum in Gesta Sanctorum*, Edizione Nazionale dei Testi Mediolatini Serie I, I. (Sismel: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001), Ch. 155, *De inventione sanctae crucis*, p. 113.

Table 1: Latin Versions of the Wood-of-the-Cross Legend (Cont.)

Etienne de Bourbon's <i>Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus</i>	Died 1261	Wood-of-the-cross material appears in this collection of exempla; Seth given a twig by an unnamed angel; Adam plants twig; no place for wood in Temple construction, so used as <i>reclinatorium</i> for praying; Solomon buries wood after Sheba's prophecy, <i>probatica piscina</i> wells up there; at time of Crucifixion wood floats up; Jews use it for Christ's cross
Jacobus de Voragine's <i>Legenda aurea</i>	1260s; more than 1000 MSS extant; Meyer's V, 1	Wood-of-the-cross material introduces <i>Inventio</i> ; Jacobus names several sources and acknowledges different versions of episodes; characteristic feature: angel gives twig to Seth telling him that when it fruits Adam shall be made well, but Adam is dead on Seth's return
Peregrinus of Oppeln's <i>Sermones de tempore et de sanctis</i>	Pre-1300 AD; more than 350 MSS; Meyer's V, 10	Sermon on the <i>Inventio</i> ; uses nearly all the <i>Legenda aurea</i> narrative on wood's prehistory
<i>Post peccatum Adae</i> (PPA)	c. 1220; 74 MSS; Meyer's VI	Appears to be the conclusion of the evolution of the wood-of-the-cross legend; distinctive additions: Seth follows his parents' footprints, withered into the grass, back to paradise; Seth is granted 3 glimpses into the garden
Harley Compilation Legend	1 MS, early 14 th C	Monastic homily combining <i>Post peccatum Adae</i> and the rood-tree legend: Seth's quest and wood's prehistory up to Moses added to rood-tree material; Maximilla and Sibilla episodes rewritten from <i>Post peccatum Adae</i> ; ends with Helena material

1.3 Summary of the Rood-Tree Legend and *Post peccatum Adae*

Before going on to consider Eastern manifestations of the wood-of-the-cross legends, perhaps a summary of the two main streams of the narrative in the West would be helpful, so the reader has something with which to compare them.⁵⁴ The rood-tree legend as told in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343 purports to relate the story of the

⁵⁴ These two strains of the wood-of-the-cross tradition, along with their English derivatives, will be further discussed in chapter 3.

“tree of which the rood was wrought on which our Lord suffered for the salvation of all mankind, how it first began to grow.”⁵⁵ It is Moses who discovers the three rods at the spot where he is lying: one at his head, and one on either side. The next day the rods follow him, repeating this pattern, and Moses recognizes in them a token of the Trinity. Moses takes up the rods and with them sweetens the bitter waters. Next, David sees the rods burning, but miraculously not being consumed. David too cleanses water with them and this water restores a man to health. David then hears a voice telling him that the rods signify the Trinity: the Father (cypress), the Son (cedar) and the Holy Spirit (pine). David performs further miracles with the flaming rods, such as curing a leper. In Jerusalem the three rods grow together into a single tree with three kinds of branches (cypress, cedar, pine) and can no longer be moved. David places a silver ring around this tree every year for thirty years; the rings are later made into plates by Solomon, and eventually become the payment for which Judas agrees to betray Christ. During the time in which Solomon is having the Temple constructed, his workmen cut down the tree to use it, but it performs shape-shifting miracles such that it is always too long or too short to fit the desired space.

Solomon instead has the holy wood, now in the form of a beam, placed in the Temple where it remains until the time of Christ’s Crucifixion. One day a harlot sits on the wood and it bursts into flame, causing her to prophesy that the saviour of the world will hang on the tree. The Jews beat and imprison her, and eventually put her to death for her blasphemy. While in prison, an angel visits her and calls her “Sibilla” and later “Susanna.” At the time of the Crucifixion the holy wood cannot be moved, but men cut off a portion of it and this piece is fashioned into the cross (no specific details about the

⁵⁵ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, 3.

cross's construction are given), which is carried from the Temple by Christ himself.

Some 330 years later, Helena comes to Jerusalem in search of the holy rood. The true cross is distinguished from that of the robber when it restores a dead man to life.

As mentioned above, the *Post peccatum Adae* differs in style from earlier wood-of-the-cross legends and adds several compelling details to the narrative. A summary of this version's contents is as follows. Upon the expulsion from paradise, Adam begs for God's mercy and God promises that at the end of time he will be granted the oil of mercy. Later, at the advanced age of 932, Adam is weary of life and asks Seth to go back to paradise to beg for the promised oil. Adam directs Seth to head eastward to the head of the valley and to follow the path marked by the footprints, burned into the vegetation by Adam and Eve when they left paradise long before. Upon reaching paradise, Seth is awed by its splendour, and an angel allows him three glimpses inside. At first he sees the beautiful garden filled with fruits, flowers and singing birds. A fountain stands in the centre, from which flow the four rivers: the Phison, the Gihon, the Tigris and Euphrates. Over the fountain stands a tree, but it is bare of leaves and bark. Seth's second vision shows him the same bare tree, but this time there is a serpent twined around its trunk. Finally, Seth's third glimpse shows him the tree reaching all the way up to heaven, and an infant in its heights. Its roots reach down to Hell, where Seth recognizes his brother Abel. The angel explains to Seth that the infant is the Son of God, who will come in the fullness of time to redeem the sin of the first parents, and He will be the oil of mercy. The angel then gives Seth three seeds from the very apple from which Adam disobeyed, and bids him plant them under the tongue of Adam at his death. These seeds will become three trees: a cedar which will signify the Father by its height, a

cypress which will recall the Son by its fragrance, and the pine whose plentiful seeds will represent the Holy Spirit. Seth returns to Adam and recounts all he was shown and told and Adam rejoices. At Adam's death, Seth places the seeds in his father's mouth as instructed and they grow into three seedlings.

Moses finds the three twigs growing in the vale of Hebron, after he has crossed the Red Sea. Moses announces their Trinitarian significance and uproots the twigs, carrying them about with him in the desert for the next forty years, and performing miracles with them. Just before his death, Moses buries the twigs at Mt. Tabor. Years later, the Holy Spirit directs David to this very spot, where he rejoices to discover the twigs; he uses the twigs to cure many of disease. David takes the twigs back to Jerusalem with him and places them in a well overnight. By morning they have grown into a single trunk and cannot be moved, so David builds a wall around the tree and adorns it with a silver ring each year for thirty years. David composes the penitential psalms under this tree and soon begins building the Temple, but God explains that he will be denied the honour of completing it, as he is a man of blood. David's son Solomon takes over the Temple construction and during this time his builders cut down the tree and attempt to use it, but again it shape-shifts and is always too long or too short. Solomon orders that the wood be placed in the Temple instead.

One day a woman called Maximilla inadvertently sits on the holy wood and it bursts into flame, causing her to cry out to Jesus as Lord and God. The Jews stone her to death for blasphemy, thus making her the first Christian martyr. Next, the wood is thrown into the *probatica piscina*; an angel periodically stirs the waters of the pool and those who bathe in it are cured. The Jews observe the miracles at the pool and cause the

wood to be removed and placed over the river Siloe to be used as a bridge and hopefully to have its power destroyed by the stamping of feet upon it. The wood remains as a bridge until the Queen of the South, Sybilla, comes to visit Solomon. The queen perceives the wood's power and will not walk upon it; instead she crosses the water in her bare feet, and prophesies Christ's coming. At the time of the Crucifixion, a third of the beam is cut off to form the cross, and on this wood Christ dies to redeem mankind. Hence, the seedlings that grew up from Adam's mouth and became a single tree in the time of King David, have now been used to make the instrument of mankind's redemption.

It is useful to compare the narrative elements of the rood-tree legend versus the *Post peccatum Adae*. The *Post peccatum Adae* relates an in-depth account of Seth's quest for the oil of mercy. This version includes the added details of how he followed his parents' footprints to paradise and was granted three glimpses into the garden; how the angel then gave him three seeds and explained how their seedlings (cedar, cypress and pine) will represent the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Seth's quest is entirely absent from the rood-tree legend, which begins with Moses. The two traditions are fairly consistent in their description of Moses' role: he discovers the rods, perceives the Trinity in them and performs various miracles with them. The *Post peccatum Adae*'s main addition is geographical: the twigs were discovered in the vale of Hebron, and Moses brought them to Mt. Tabor before his death. In the rood-tree legend David first encounters the rods burning but not being consumed. He takes them up and cleanses water with them, which heals a man. A voice then tells David that the rods represent the Trinity and relates to him the significance of the three types of trees (cypress, cedar, pine), much as the angel

told Seth. David also cures a leper with the rods. In the *Post peccatum Adae* it is specifically the Holy Spirit who directs David to Mt. Tabor where the twigs await him; he later cures people with their power.

Both versions are again similar in relating the fate of the twigs when they first arrive at Jerusalem. There they grow into a single tree which will not be moved, and David adorns its trunk with a silver ring each year for thirty years; the rood-tree legend adds the information that these thirty rings become the thirty pieces of silver given to Judas to betray Christ. The *Post peccatum Adae* further recounts how David composed the penitential psalms under the tree and that, while he began the construction of the Temple, God forbade him, as a man of blood, to finish it. The miraculous behaviour of the wood of the tree in refusing to fit into the construction is present in both accounts and the placing of it in the Temple instead. Both narratives also contain the incident where a certain woman sat on the tree, and it burst into flames. In the rood-tree legend she is called a harlot, and in *Post peccatum Adae* she is named Maximilla. In both cases the prophecy she cries out regarding the Saviour leads to her death at the hands of the Jews for blasphemy. In the rood-tree legend an angel refers to her as “Sibilla,” and later “Susanna.”

The *Post peccatum Adae* narrative continues with three incidents that are absent from the rood-tree legend: namely, the throwing of the wood into the *probatica piscina* where the sick are then cured, the placing of it as a bridge over the Siloe to negate its power, and the refusal of the Queen of the South (Sibilla) to walk on it, along with her prophecy. The two narratives have similar accounts of how the wood ends up being used for the Crucifixion: a portion of the beam was cut off (*Post peccatum Adae* says one

third, while the rood-tree legend gives a figure of ten ells) and used to make the cross; the rood-tree legend adds that the wood could not be moved from the Temple until Christ himself carried it out. At this point the *Post peccatum Adae* narrative finishes, while the rood-tree legend goes on to relate the *Inventio*.⁵⁶

1.4 Eastern Versions of the Wood-of-the-Cross Legends⁵⁷

In this section I provide a brief overview of the Eastern manifestations of the narrative material concerning the wood of the cross so that the reader may be able to place the Western versions, which are the focus of this study, in their overall context. In considering the Eastern versions of the wood-of-the-cross legend, I have adopted the assumptions of Miller, namely that, lacking any evidence to the contrary, the Slavonic legends are translations from the Greek, not the Latin, and where motifs are present in both the Slavonic and Latin, these derive from a lost Greek prototype.⁵⁸

1.4.1 Greek Versions

There are four relevant strains of the legend in Greek. The first to be discussed is the legend as found in the Greek *Palaea historica*.⁵⁹ This text, written after 800

⁵⁶ For the comparison between the rood-tree legend and *Post peccatum Adae* see also Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xxxv–xliii.

⁵⁷ I will not repeat here the extremely thorough list of manuscripts, editions, translations and literature provided by Bob Miller in his dissertation. Readers interested in a fuller treatment should refer to his Ch. 2: Greek and Slavonic Versions, p. 31–66, and its accompanying references for further details.

⁵⁸ Miller, “German and Dutch Versions,” 31–32.

⁵⁹ Miller, “German and Dutch Versions,” 34–35. For an edition see Afanasii Vasilevich Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantia* (Moscow: Imperial University, 1893). For further discussion of the *Palaea* see Moses Gaster, *Ilchester Lectures on Greeko-Slavonic Literature and its Relation to the Folk-lore of Europe During the Middle Ages* (London: Trübner, 1887) and David Flusser, “*Palaea Historica* — An Unknown Source of Biblical Legends,” in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*, Joseph Heinemann and Dov Noy, eds. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1971), 48–79.

(probably in the ninth century), is extant in a Slavonic translation of the twelfth century. The *Palaea* version contains the common element present in most Slavonic and Greek versions of the legend, namely the involvement of Abraham and Lot (characters not present in western versions), the latter of whom must do penance for his sin of incest by watering a tree(s) of paradisaical origin. Here, Abraham sends Lot to the Nile to retrieve three charred stakes, one cypress, one pine and one cedar. Abraham orders Lot to plant the stakes and water them until they bud; one month later the stakes have grown into a single trunk with three distinct roots. At the time of Solomon, the tree is cut down but not used until it is employed as the cross of Christ.

The second Greek text containing some of the cross legend, including the wood's prehistory, Constantine's vision of the cross and the *Inventio*, appears in a twelfth-century Greek synaxary, extant in two manuscripts.⁶⁰ Meyer believed this Greek version of the wood-of-the-cross legend to be a translation from the Latin, but Napier disagreed: he believed it represented an earlier stage than any Latin text.⁶¹ The section involving the wood's prehistory is the same as that underlying the *Palaea*: here the story of Abraham and Lot contains one additional episode involving Solomon and the Erythraean Sibyl. In the synaxary Lot (here referred to only as a shepherd), is instructed by Abraham to water the stakes, which results in them fusing into a single trunk (although they remain distinct at root and crown). The wood is taken to be used in the Temple, but is always too long or too short; it remains there as a seat until the Erythraean Sibyl comes to visit Solomon. She sits on it and is compelled to prophesy, which moves Solomon to set up the wood

⁶⁰ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 36–39. For an edition see Jacob Gretser, "De Sancta Cruce," vols. 1–3 in *Opera Omnia*, 17 vols. (Ratisbon: Sumptibus Conradi Peez & Felicis Bader, 1734). For further discussion see Meyer, "Die Geschichte," 156; Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xxxix–xli.

⁶¹ Meyer, "Die Geschichte," 156; Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xl.

facing East. He adorns it with thirty silver crowns, the same which were later given to Judas. Here, the emphasis has shifted to Solomon: the wood's origin, Lot's name and the reason for his penance are not specified.

A third Greek source for the wood-of-the-cross legend is the *florilegium* (*anthos*) of Iannikios Cartanus (c. 1540).⁶² Seven chapters of this work are relevant to the story of the holy wood; some of them are reminiscent of the *Post peccatum Adae* (such as when Moses brings the rods to Mt. Tabor).⁶³ In fact, Cartanus' *florilegium* is late and derivative: it has been shown to have some passages that are word for word translations of the Italian *Fioretti della Bibbia*, itself a reworking of Provencal chronicles that incorporated previous Provencal and Catalan translations of Latin texts, including the *Post peccatum Adae*. This means that the *florilegium* is contaminated by the Latin traditions and does not provide an original Greek source of the *Post peccatum Adae*.⁶⁴

The final Greek text to consider, which also appears in a Slavonic recension, is the *Apocalypse of Baruch*.⁶⁵ This text, originally a Jewish pseudoepigraphon dated to before 300 AD, had evolved into two recensions by about 1200. Both recensions claim that the archangel (Samael in Greek, Satanael in Slavonic) planted a vine in paradise which was the forbidden "tree." The Greek text states that the tree was forbidden to man

⁶² Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 40–41. For an edition see Leo Allatius, *SUMMIKTA: sive opusculorum, graecorum et latinorum, vetustiorum ac recentiorum, libri duo*, ed. Bartoldo Nihusio (Colonia Agripina: Apud Iodocum Kalkovium, 1653), 229–232. For further discussion see Carl Hopf, *Chroniques Gréco-Romanes inédites ou peu connues publiées avec notes et tables généalogiques*. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1873), xxxii–xxxiii.

⁶³ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 40.

⁶⁴ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 40–41. For an edition see Miquel Victoria Amer, *Genesis de Scriptura Trelladat del Provençal a la Llengua Catalana, per Mossem Guillem Serra, en l'any MCCCCLI, y que per Primera Vegada ha fet Estampar En Miquel Victoria Amer* (Barcelona: Llibreria d'Alvar Verdager, 1873).

⁶⁵ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 42–44. For an edition of the Greek text see Jean-Charles Picard, *Apocalypsis Baruchi Graece edidit J-C.P. Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece II*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967). For a translation see James H. Gaylord, "3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha I. Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1983), 653–679.

because of Samael's rebellion, but that after the Flood Noah was encouraged to cultivate the vine and drink its fruit in moderation because its bitterness had been made sweet and its fruit would be the blood of God. In the Slavonic recension, each of the archangels (including Satanael) planted one tree in paradise; Baruch learns that the tree of Satanael was both the vine and the sinful desire that he provoked in Adam and Eve; the tree became cursed after Satanael used it to lead the protoplasts into sin.

1.4.2 Slavonic Versions

The Slavonic versions of the wood-of-the-cross legends fall into two broad categories: the Slavonic *Life of Adam and Eve*, which is extant in a long and short version (SLAE long and short), and the Slavonic wood-of-the-cross legend, which is extant in four variants (SWOC A, B, C, D).⁶⁶

The SLAE long version⁶⁷ is a translation from the Greek likely dating to c. 1000–1200, and forms part of the *Life of Adam and Eve* complex; it is intermediate in form between the Greek *Apocalypse of Moses* and the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae*.⁶⁸ The Slavonic versions have Seth and Eve journey to paradise but relate only a brief exchange between Michael and Seth: the angel tells Seth to return to Adam, whose death is approaching, and gives him three shoots, one each of pine, cedar and cypress. Upon seeing the shoots, Adam instantly recognizes them, sighs deeply and makes himself a wreath to wear on his

⁶⁶ A recent study on the Slavonic Adam and Eve literature appears in L. Turkalj, "Život Adama i Eve," *Slovo* 56-57 (2006-07), 579–93. The author gives a brief but good bibliography of recent work on the *Vita Adae et Evae*.

⁶⁷ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 45–46. There are nine extant manuscripts of the SLAE long version, but none earlier than the sixteenth century. For an edition see Jordan Ivanov, *Bogomilski knigi i legendi* (Sofia: Bulgarska Akademiia na Naukite & Pridvorna Pечатnitsa, 1925), 198–204. For further discussion see Daniel A. Bertrand, *La vie grecque d'Adam et Eve*, 17–22.

⁶⁸ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 45.

head. This sighing and recognition are also present in Armenian versions, where Adam waves the branches around his head to refresh himself instead of making a wreath.

The Slavonic wood-of-the-cross legend A (SWOC-A, known as Jeremiah)⁶⁹ may have been written by a Jeremiah in the second half of the tenth century, but modern scholars do not accept that the author was the Bogomil known as Pope Jeremiah.⁷⁰ The narrative begins with Moses and also relates the construction of the Temple. The latter part of the text recounts Christ's life, ending with his death. The episodes relevant to the wood-of-the-cross legends are as follows. At the beginning of the account, Moses laments to God about the bitter waters of Mara; angels show him three boughs (cedar, cypress and pine), which Moses braids together and plants in the water's source, making it sweet. The angel then reveals to Moses a number of significant details about the three boughs: they symbolize the Trinity; they will become the tree of salvation, the tree of life and the tree of peace; on this wood the Lord will be killed by the Jews, and the Judge of all will be judged.⁷¹ This holy wood is the same wood used by Moses to display the brazen serpent (Num 21: 8–9).

In the SWOC-A (Jeremiah) the transition from the time of Moses to that of David is treated in a completely different way than in the rood-tree legend: it introduces the involvement of two thieves (Ambrosius and Jesrom) with the holy wood, one in the time of Moses, the other in the time of David; David himself has no contact with the rood tree in this version. Also significantly different is the assertion that Solomon employed

⁶⁹ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 47–51. See also Aurelio de Santos Otero, *Die Handschriftliche Überlieferung der altslavischen Apokryphen*, 2 vols. Patristische Texte und Studien 20 & 23 (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1978-1981), 131–132.

⁷⁰ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 48.

⁷¹ In the historiated Bible known as the *Tolkavaya Palaea* the episode concerning Moses at Mara relates that the wood of Mara is: the tree of mercy, an image of the Trinity, the tree of life, and the wood on which the One will be crucified. See the edition by Nikolai S. Tikhonravov, *Paleia Tolkovaia* (Moscow, 1892).

demons, both in the Temple construction generally, and to fetch the holy wood once Solomon hears of it; however, the wood is never the right size, and is therefore laid in front of the Temple. A unique episode relevant to our study (reminiscent of the harlot who sits on the holy wood), concludes the narrative: after Solomon's death a couple named Jason and Jaroja encounter the wood in the Temple and the wife Jaroja is compelled to exclaim that this tree of the forest should be well guarded, for on this same tree Christ wishes to be crucified. Like the rood-tree legend, this text involves only Moses, David and Solomon; the Adam/Seth and Abraham/Lot narratives are absent. This similarity, and the text's attribution to Bogomil Pope Jeremiah, have led to the suggestion that the rood-tree legend was transmitted to the West via the Bogomil heretics, but this notion has been largely rejected by modern scholars.⁷²

The second strand of the SWOC is known as B, Gregorius. It is almost always transmitted in the manuscripts along with the SLAE-B (short recension).⁷³ This version appears to draw on SWOC-A (Jeremiah) and SWOC-C (Severianus) or their Greek sources. The interest in B (Gregorius) lies in the fact that it includes the stories of Lot, Seth and Moses; instead of one holy tree, the histories of three trees are chronicled, one of which ("God's tree") becomes the cross of Christ, while the other two ("Adam's tree" and "Eve's tree") are used to crucify the good and bad thieves, respectively. The tree called in the story "God's tree" results from the quest of Seth and becomes the cross of Christ. In this narrative, when Adam is near to death, he sends Eve and Seth to paradise

⁷² For example, Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 53–56, embraces the Bogomil transmission theory; Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 51, rejects it. The argument presented by Georgi Vasilev in *Heresy and the English Reformation: Bogomil-Cathar Influence on Wycliffe, Langland, Tyndale and Milton* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008) ignores most modern research on the wood-of-the-cross legends and is therefore unconvincing.

⁷³ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 52–56. For an edition see Anisava Miltenova, "Tekstologicheski Nabliudeniia Vurchu dva Apokrifa (Apokrifei Tsikul za Krustnoto Durvo, Pripisvan na Grigorii Bogoslov, i Apokrifa za Adam i Eva)," *Starobulgarska Literatura* 11 (1982): 50–55.

for a fruit. The angel instead gives Seth three twigs⁷⁴ and tells him that this tree will bring redemption and resurrection. Adam recognizes the twigs, sighs and reveals that they come from the tree of knowledge; he uses them to make a wreath, as in the SLAE long version. The twigs grow into a single tree (“God’s tree”) whose trunk splits into three then reunites further up; the three distinct roots are also preserved. Meanwhile, another part of the wood has fallen into the Tigris, and is taken to Madian by the angel. Seth uses it to build a commemorative funeral pyre for Adam. Lot later takes one of the firebrands and waters it until it grows into a tree; this is Adam’s tree, which becomes the cross of the good thief. The flood carries a third part of the wood to Mara, where Moses discovers fragments of it and uses them to sweeten the bitter waters; the fragments later grow into a single tree, “Eve’s tree,” which is used to make the cross of the bad thief.⁷⁵

Later, Solomon, using the power of God's signet ring, employs demons to assist him in the Temple construction. Eve’s tree, having been lost in the Jordan, is recovered and the builders attempt to use it in the Temple roof; it cannot be made to fit so is used in the altar instead. Adam’s tree is brought to Jerusalem where it works miracles and is supposed to be a tree that will bring salvation. It is laid on the floor before the altar where Sebila sits on it. Her clothes burst into flame and she feels transported to heaven, crying out, “O thrice-cursed tree!” Solomon has both of the woods raised up for display and, realizing there is a third part, sends demons to retrieve it. The third tree, God’s tree, is brought to the outskirts of the city, where the trunk is cut off. The stump, containing

⁷⁴ Three recensions exist: one has Seth retrieve a single twig, another three twigs and a third epitomizes some episodes and expands others; see Miller, “German and Dutch Versions,” 53.

⁷⁵ This passage is a version of the exchange between Baruch and Phanuel in *3 Baruch*, 4 in which part of the tree of knowledge is given to Seth, Adam’s part is washed away in the Tigris and is found by Lot, and Eve’s part is washed away by the Flood and is discovered by Moses; see Miller, “German and Dutch Versions,” 54.

Adam's skull (apparently miraculously large) lodged in its roots, is left there. The skull is used as a shelter by one of Solomon's hunters; Solomon later orders each citizen of Jerusalem to throw a stone at the skull because of Adam's sin, thus forming the hill of Golgotha. When Christ is crucified, his blood falls down onto the first father's skull, thus original sin is redeemed by the Saviour's sacrifice.

Two last Slavonic texts may be mentioned briefly. The "Severianus" text (SWOC-C), the oldest extant manuscript of which is dated c. 1600, is a literal translation of the legend as found in Greek *menologia*.⁷⁶ The oldest extant manuscript is c. 1600 AD, but the Greek original is approximately 300 years older. This version has no connection with the *Palaea* and always circulated as an independent homily. The last version, SWOC-D, is dated to 800–1200 AD. Originally classified along with C, it is now recognized as a separate translation from the Greek *Palaea*.⁷⁷

1.4.3 Relevant Armenian Texts

There are three main groups of relevant texts in the Armenian that, although undateable, seem to preserve a primitive character.⁷⁸ The first is known as the *Words of Adam to Seth* (WAS), which, as the title makes plain, is an interview between the two characters. Adam tells Seth about the Fall; in response, Seth fasts for forty days.

⁷⁶ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 57. For a list of editions see Santos Otero, *Die Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, 132–133. Miller states that the Greek original of this recension is at least 300 years older than the oldest extant Slavonic manuscript.

⁷⁷ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 58, who lists two nineteenth-century editions. For further discussion see Emile Turdeanu, "La Palaea Byzantine chez les Slaves du Sud et chez le Roumains," *Revue des Études Slaves* 40 (1964): 195–206.

⁷⁸ See Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 59–61, who describes these texts as undateable but primitive, p. 59. For an edition of all of these Armenian texts see W. Lowndes Lipscomb, *The Armenian Apocryphal Adam Literature*, University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 8 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990). For further discussion, see the works of Michael E. Stone, for example, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha with Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

Following Seth's fast an angel appears to him with a "branch of joy" with which to comfort his father. When Adam receives it he places it on his eyes, which are opened; he tells his son that the branch is from the forbidden tree. Adam dies and the further fate of the branch is not related; however, Seth explains everything to Enoch, who then fasts and plants a garden. In another Armenian text, the *History of the Repentance of Adam and Eve*, Eve takes Seth along with her to pray the Lord to give her a branch of the tree that yields oil, in order to heal her husband. Although reminiscent of other versions of Seth's quest, the outcome is different: Gabriel comes to the pair and announces Adam's death; Eve dies three hours later.

Finally, the group of texts known as the *Armenian Adam Fragments* are similar in scenario to the WAS but with different emphases.⁷⁹ Here the branch Seth receives is of wondrous appearance and is brighter than the sun. Adam calls it "a sign for you from your dwelling and from the tree of life."⁸⁰ Seth wonders how bright must be the tree of life if this mortal tree shines so strongly. Seth and Adam's other children promise not to eat of the fruit, at which point the text breaks off.

1.5 Past Scholarship on the Wood-of-the-Cross Legends

The wood-of-the-cross legends began to receive serious scholarly attention in the 1860s. Early studies of relevance here include Piper's *Der Baum des Lebens* (1862),⁸¹

⁷⁹For an edition see Michael E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha*, op. cit.

⁸⁰ Quoted by Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 60; it is not clear from which translation he is quoting.

⁸¹ Ferdinand Piper, "Der Baum des Lebens," in *Evangelischer Kalender-Jahrbuch für 1863*, 77–94 (Berlin: Weigandt & Grieben, 1862) which was translated into English as "The Tree of Life," *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record New Series (Fourth Series)* 4 (1864): 376–393, 6 (1865): 27–50, 8 (1866): 57–74.

Mussafia's 1869 work *Sulla Legenda del Legno della Croce*,⁸² and Morris' *Legends of the Holy Rood* (1871); this last focused on English versions.⁸³ The following decades brought several more important treatments, including two that will be fundamental to this study: Wilhelm Meyer's *Die Geschichte des Kreuzholzes vor Christus* (1882) and Arthur S. Napier's *History of the Holy Rood-Tree* (1894).⁸⁴ Meyer was the first to attempt a comprehensive classification scheme for the legends, encompassing sixty five texts. Unfortunately, some of Meyer's conclusions were flawed, because he was unaware of the earliest extant version of the wood-of-the-cross narrative, that contained in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343. It was this version, representing an entirely new branch of the tradition, that Napier edited in 1894.

Despite Napier's discovery and further challenges to Meyer's dating, for example that by Wilmart in 1927,⁸⁵ Meyer's classification scheme has never been revised. One reason for this, as Miller rightly points out, is that, although an Eastern origin has been supposed for the wood-of-the-cross legends, there remains much confusion among Western scholars as to exactly what the Greek and Slavonic versions of the legend contain.⁸⁶ Instead, mid- and late-twentieth-century scholarship on the topic has shifted away from an emphasis on an overall classification scheme. Esther Casier Quinn's 1962 work *The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life*, a study of the legend's evolution in the school of R. S. Loomis, seems to have renewed interest in the subject. Important works since Quinn have moved towards analysis of the wood-of-the-cross legends in particular

⁸² Adolfo Mussafia, "Sulla Leggenda," op. cit.

⁸³ Richard Morris, *Legends of the Holy Rood, Symbols of the Passion and Cross, Poems in Old English of the Eleventh, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, EETS, vol. 46 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1871).

⁸⁴ Meyer, "Die Geschichte," and Napier, *Rood-Tree*, op. cit.

⁸⁵ André Wilmart, "La Légende du Bois de la Croix," *Revue Biblique* 36 (1927): 226–236.

⁸⁶ Miller, 15.

regions or languages. Among these are Overgaard (1968),⁸⁷ Prangsmā-Hajenius (1995)⁸⁸ and A. R. (Bob) Miller (1991), whose work examined Icelandic, French and German/Dutch versions, respectively.

As I noted in the opening passage of this chapter, the focus of this thesis is the cross as tree in medieval England. I will begin with the Anglo-Saxon heritage of devotion to the holy cross, and then proceed to examine the wood-of-the-cross legends present in England in both Latin and English; I will conclude with a look at relevant patristic and medieval texts that embody the cross-tree connection as well as works in other genres, such as romance, that also demonstrate some of the key motifs found in the wood-of-the-cross legends. The following chapter turns to the strong reverence for the holy cross found in pre-Conquest England.

⁸⁷ Mariane Overgaard, *The History of the Cross-Tree Down to Christ's Passion: Icelandic Legend Versions* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1968).

⁸⁸ A. M. L. Prangsmā-Hajenius, *La Légende du Bois de la Croix dans la Littérature Française Médiévale* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1995).

Chapter 2: The Anglo-Saxon Heritage Devotion to the Cross and the Cross as Tree

Although this study is primarily concerned with the wood-of-the-cross legends and their derivatives and adaptations in England, it is vital to view these manifestations as part of a larger tradition of devotion to the cross and the cross as tree. This chapter traces the three strands of this larger tradition, beginning with the Anglo-Saxon period. The first texts manifesting devotion to the cross of Christ in Britain predate the earliest extant text specifically about the wood-of-the-cross legend, the rood-tree legend, the earliest fragments of which have been dated to the early to mid-eleventh century. However, examination of the evidence from Anglo-Saxon England, including historical, liturgical, literary and artistic sources, reveals a pre-existing strong devotion to the holy cross in that country, as well as a definite conception of the cross as tree.¹

2.1 Evidence from Old English Poetry: *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*

When one considers the Anglo-Saxon perception and veneration of the cross, the great work of Old English literature, the *Dream of the Rood* naturally comes to mind.² This magnificent example of Old English poetry survives as a 156-line poem in the tenth-century Vercelli Book, though the poem itself likely dates to the first half of the eighth

¹ An excellent collection of specific studies on the cross in various aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture can be found in Catherine E. Karkov, Sarah Larratt Keefer, and Karen Louise Jolly, eds., *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2006).

² Quotes of the original Old English from *Dream of the Rood* are from Michael Swanton, ed., *The Dream of the Rood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970) who provides a good bibliography of editions, translations and studies of the poem. All modern English translations are by myself. For a published translation see Richard Hamer, ed., *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 159–171, or Elaine Treharne, *Old and Middle English: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 108–115.

century³ and is closely related to the Cynewulf canon. The poem relates two wondrous visions: the first a midnight vision of a dreamer, who beholds a “rather wondrous tree growing up on high” (ll. 4–5)⁴ covered with gold and studded with jewels, “wound about with light, brightest of beams” (ll. 5–6).⁵ Yet this “tree of victory” (l. 13)⁶ with five jewels arrayed upon its shoulder span, is changeable in its appearance, at one moment adorned with treasure, the next drenched in flowing blood (ll. 21–23).⁷ The tree then begins to speak, taking over the narrative and telling how it was felled to make the cross of Christ, after which it shared in Christ’s suffering, humiliation, wounds and burial. The cross concludes its speech by commanding the dreamer to tell others of his vision, “reveal with words that it is glory’s tree that Almighty God suffered on for mankind’s many sins” (ll. 95–99).⁸ So moved is the dreamer, the lordless man who has “not many powerful friends on earth” (ll. 131–132),⁹ that he prays to the tree with great zeal and looks forward eagerly to the day when the cross will carry him off from this life to perpetual bliss with the Lord’s people in heaven (ll. 135–144).¹⁰

In the *Dream of the Rood* the instrument of Christ’s suffering is at once the cross and a great tree. In fact, it is not referred to as “cross” (*rōd*) until line 44 of the poem;

³ A version of the poem appears as a runic inscription on the Ruthwell Cross, dated to this period (see further discussion below).

⁴ Swanton, *Dream*, 93: “syllicre trēow / on lyft lǣdan.”

⁵ Swanton, *Dream*, 93: “lēohte bewunden, bēama beorhtost.”

⁶ Swanton, *Dream*, 93: “sigebeām.”

⁷ Swanton, *Dream*, 93–95: “Geseah ic þæt fūse bēacen / wendan wǣdum ond blēom; hwīlum hit wæs mid wǣtan bestēmed, / beswyled mid swātes gange, hwīlum mid since gegyrwed.”

⁸ Swanton, *Dream*, 99: “Nū ic þē hāte, hǣleð mīn se lēofa, / þæt ðū þās gesyhðe secge mannum, / onwrēoh wordum þæt hit is wuldres bēam, / se ðe ælmihtig god on þrōwode / for mancynnes manegum synnum.”

⁹ Swanton, *Dream*, 100: “Nāh ic rīcra feala / frēonda on foldan.”

¹⁰ Swanton, *Dream*, 100: “Ond ic wēne mē / daga gehwylce hwænne mē Dryhtnes rōd, / þe ic hēr on eorðan ǣr scēawode, / on þyssan lǣnan līfe gefetige / ond mē þonne gebringe þǣr is blis mycel, / drēam on heofonum, þǣr is dryhtnes folc / geseted tō symle, þǣr is singāl blis, / ond hē þonne āsette þǣr ic syþþan mōt / wunian on wuldre, well mid þām hālgum / drēames brūcan.”

before that the reader infers that it is the cross that is spoken of, but the words used to describe it are *treow* and *beam*, both commonly used to refer to the cross, but also simply meaning “tree” or “wood.”¹¹ The poem betrays no knowledge of the legends with which we are concerned that relate the pre-history of the wood of the cross, or its connections to Old Testament figures and to paradise.¹² This tree, by its own account, was of humble origins; it was simply cut down from the edge of the wood and removed from its trunk, to be carried off and commanded to raise criminals aloft (ll. 28–31).¹³ The poem may, however, show familiarity with the *Inventio* legend when the cross describes being buried deep in a pit after the Crucifixion, to be discovered later and magnificently adorned by the Lord’s servants. Such a statement recalls the legend of the finding of the true cross by Helena, and the subsequent distribution of fragments of it as relics, which were often housed in reliquaries of precious metals and jewels.

Although the *Dream of the Rood* betrays no knowledge of the wood-of-the-cross legends and their version of the cross’s illustrious pre-history, nevertheless, both the *Dream of the Rood* and the wood-of-the-cross narratives belong to the typological tradition that parallels the agents of the Fall with those of the Redemption: Eve and Mary, Adam and Christ, the tree of knowledge and the tree of the cross. One instance of this typology in the *Dream of the Rood* is unique in that the rood compares itself with the Blessed Virgin Mary: “Behold, the world’s master, heaven’s protector, honoured me over

¹¹ For example, the *Dictionary of Old English* (www.doe.utoronto.ca) defines “bēam” as a tree, a timber or beam, an object made out of wood, or a gallows, specifically the cross on which Christ was crucified.

¹² In *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, Mary Clayton contends that the poem deliberately avoids the tradition that the cross had a noble, paradisaical origin: *Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 207. This view is upheld by Eamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 2, 314.

¹³ Swanton, *Dream*, 95: “Þæt wæs gēara iū, (ic þæt gýta geman) / þæt ic wæs āhēawen holtes on ende, / āstyred of stefne mīnum. Genāman mē ðæ̃r strange fēondas, / geworhton him þæ̃r tō wæ̃fersýne, hēton mē heora wergas hebban.”

the trees of the forest, just as Almighty God exalted his mother, Mary herself, over all woman-kind, for all men” (ll. 90–94).¹⁴ Scholars have interpreted this passage in a variety of ways, for example as influenced by the description of the cross in Venantius Fortunatus’ *Pange lingua* as “inter omnes arbor una nobilis,”¹⁵ or Gabriel’s words to Mary at the Annunciation, “blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28). This association of the Crucifixion and Annunciation may be explained by their timing in the liturgical year, as the feast of the Annunciation became associated with March 25th, the traditional date of Christ’s death.¹⁶ However, I believe that Andrew Breeze rightly contended that this self-association by the cross-tree in *Dream of the Rood* is more properly understood in light of the patristic teachings on the roles of the Virgin and cross in the plan of the Redemption, a tradition common from the second century onwards. A few examples of patristic texts representing this tradition that would have been known in Anglo-Saxon England should suffice to illustrate the point here. For example, Ambrose, commenting on Luke 4:1–2 states, “Through a woman foolishness, through a virgin wisdom, death through a tree, life through the cross,”¹⁷ a sentiment echoed in Ambrose’s Eastern contemporary St. John Chrysostom, who sums up this typological tradition eloquently: “A virgin, a beam, and a death were the symbols of our defeat. The virgin was Eve; the beam, the tree of knowledge; the death, the punishment of Adam. But wait; a Virgin, a beam and a death are also the symbols of victory. In the place of Eve is Mary; for the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the beam of the cross; and for the death of

¹⁴ Swanton, *Dream*, 98–99: “Hwæt, mē þā geweorþode wuldres Ealdor / ofer holmwudu, heofonrīces Weard, / swylce swā hē his mōdor ēac, Marian sylfe, / ælmihtig God for ealle menn / geweorðode ofer eall wīfa cynn.”

¹⁵ Swanton, *Dream*, cited in Andrew Breeze, “The Virgin Mary and *The Dream of the Rood*” *Florilegium* 12 (1993): 55. For more on Fortunatus’ hymns to the cross, see chapter 4.

¹⁶ Ó Carragáin, *Ritual*, 85–93.

¹⁷ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundam Lucam libris x comprehensa, Liber quartus*, PL 15, col. 1614B: “per mulierem stultitia, per virginem sapientia, mors per arborem, vita per crucem.”

Adam, the death of Christ. Do you see now how the devil has been defeated by the very things with which before he triumphed?”¹⁸

Barbara C. Raw found the visual imagery of the first vision of *Dream of the Rood* (specifically the jeweled cross looming up into the heavens and adored by angels) so potent that, according to Raw, it must have been dependent on artistic conventions of the time; such parallels, however, she found scarce in Anglo-Saxon and even Continental art of the period.¹⁹ Instead, she discovered analogues in Mediterranean art, including some ampullae from the Holy Land, which depict a cross covered with foliage and bedecked with jewels at the end of its arms, accompanied by worshipping angels. Most ampullae like this carry an inscription indicating something like, “oil of the tree of life of the Holy Places of Christ.”²⁰ In such an image Raw finds the same complex links as those in the *Dream of the Rood* (and indeed in the wood-of-the-cross legends as well): the tree is simultaneously the tree of life from Eden, the tree of the cross, the sign of the Son of Man that shall appear in the sky at the Second Coming, and finally, a symbol of the actual relics of the true cross.

The *Dream of the Rood* is not the only major poem in the Old English corpus to deal with the cross. The other, more solidly attributed to Cynewulf because of the runes spelling out his name embedded into the epilogue of the poem, is *Elene*.²¹ This work

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 49, col.396.

¹⁹ Barbara C. Raw, “The Dream of the Rood and its Connections with Early Christian Art,” *Medium Ævum* 39 (1970), 239–253.

²⁰ André Grabar, *Les Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza-Bobbio)* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1958): 26–27, 32–34; plates 16, 18, 32 and 33.

²¹ See A. S. Cook, *The Old English Elene, Phoenix and Physiologus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919). The modern translations here are by myself. For a published translation see Lucius Hudson Holt, *The Elene of Cynewulf* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1904), or, for the Old English text with a facing-page, modern English translation, see Marie Nelson, *Judith, Juliana, and Elene: Three Fighting Saints* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 113–187.

relates the story of the Invention of the holy cross by Helena,²² mother of the emperor Constantine, a shorter narrative of which also appears in the latter part of the rood-tree legend. Like the *Dream of the Rood*, *Elene* demonstrates no direct knowledge of the wood-of-the-cross legend, nor does it relate any paradisaical or miraculous origin of the holy wood. Also like the *Dream of the Rood*, it does often refer to the cross throughout its more than 1300 lines as “tree of glory,” “holy tree,” and “tree of victory” as well as “rood.”²³ For example, in the first appearance of the cross in the poem, during Constantine’s vision, the symbol that appears to the dreaming emperor, “the radiant tree of glory, over the roof of the heavens, decked with gold; the gems shone,” (ll. 89–90)²⁴ is highly reminiscent of the jewel bedecked cross-tree from *Dream of the Rood*. In the conclusion to *Elene*, when Helena bids the people commemorate the day on which the holy rood was found (essentially, establishing the feast of the *Inventio*) she refers to the cross as “most wondrous tree of them that have grown up from the earth, laden with leaves” (ll. 1225–1226),²⁵ which clearly echoes the sentiment in *Dream of the Rood* (or perhaps simply echoes the *Dream* itself) whereby the tree of humble origins has become “honoured over all the trees of the forest by the Guardian of Heaven” (*Dream of the Rood* ll. 90–91).²⁶

²² It is Cyril of Jerusalem who first mentions the discovery of the cross around 350. He tells of the dissemination of pieces of the holy wood, and also notes the miraculous appearance of a great cross of light in the sky above Golgotha; no mention is made of Helena at all (PG vol. 33, cols. 468–9, 776–7, 1168–9). However, the Invention tradition involving Helena was well-known by the end of the fourth century (Cf. Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii oratio*, 45–51, PL 16. 1400C–1403B; Rufinus, *Historiae ecclesiasticae libri duo*, Book 1, Caput 7–8, PL vol. 21, cols. 475C–477).

²³ For example, see ll. 89, 107–108, 128, 666, 828, 861, etc.

²⁴ Cook, *Elene*, 6: “wliti[g] wuldres trēo ofer wolcna hrōf / golde ge[g]lenged; gimmas lixtan.”

²⁵ Cook, *Elene*, 43: “mærost bēama / þāra þe of eorðan ūp āwēoxe / geloden under lēafum.”

²⁶ Swanton, *Dream*, 98: “wuldres Ealdor / ofer holmwudu, heofonrīces Weard.”

2.2 Anglo-Saxon Homilies on the Cross

Of the extant Anglo-Saxon homilies, only four deal specifically with the cross; these were edited by Allan Robb for his doctoral dissertation in 1975.²⁷ Among these four homilies, the only one to treat the miraculous pre-history of the wood of the cross is the rood-tree legend, discussed in detail above, and found in the twelfth-century manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343. This homily was, of course, ably edited by Napier in the late nineteenth century, but Robb re-edits it with the inclusion of the three eleventh-century fragments discovered in the twentieth century,²⁸ reproduced in full at the appropriate parts of Napier's base text. The other three extant cross homilies are an *Inventio* homily by Ælfric, an *Inventio* homily by another, unknown author, and an *Exaltatio* homily also by Ælfric.

The *Inventio* homily by Ælfric was previously edited by Benjamin Thorpe in 1846,²⁹ but this was by no means a critical edition, relying almost solely on a single manuscript (Cambridge, University Library MS Gg. 3.28), with a second manuscript (London BL MS Royal 7. C. XII) consulted to supply deficiencies in the first. Robb furnishes a critical edition of this homily based on a total of five manuscripts, including Cambridge MS Gg. 3.28.³⁰ Ælfric chiefly employs Rufinus' version of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* as a source for this homily, and closely follows Rufinus between ll. 5–33.³¹ This version of the *Inventio* story is characterized by its lack of attention to the

²⁷ Allan Phillipson Robb, "The History of the Holy Rood-Tree: Four Anglo-Saxon Homilies" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1975).

²⁸ See chapter 1, section 1.2.2.

²⁹ Benjamin Thorpe, ed., *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (London: Printed for the Ælfric Society, 1847), vol. 2, 302–306.

³⁰ Robb, "Anglo-Saxon Homilies," 110–139. The accepted modern addition of the *Inventio* homily is found in Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, EETS s. s., vol. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 174–176.

³¹ Robb, "Anglo-Saxon Homilies," 4.

role of Helena, with most of the emphasis being placed on the actions of Constantine. However, the homily still provides evidence for devotion to the cross in Anglo-Saxon England. One sentiment of particular note occurs where Ælfric describes how even the likeness of the cross ought to be revered, on account of the holiness it gained through Christ's redemptive actions: "Christians must truly revere the sanctified cross in the Lord's name, because we do not have the one on which he suffered, but its likeness is holy nevertheless, to which we bow in prayers constantly to the great Lord who suffered for mankind, and the cross is the remembrance of his great Passion, holy through him, although it grew up in a forest."³²

In contrast to the focus of Ælfric's work, the other, anonymous *Inventio* homily focuses much more on the role of Constantine's mother. This homily was edited previously by Morris in *Legends of the Holy Rood*,³³ from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F.4.32; Robb produces a critical edition employing this manuscript and the only other extant version in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 303. The principal source for this homily is the *Acta Cyriaci*, on which Cynewulf also drew for his poem *Elene*.³⁴ In fact, the two are closely related in content, organization and emphasis.³⁵

The fourth and final Anglo-Saxon cross homily is Ælfric's work on the *Exaltatio*. The *Exaltatio* was edited first by Walter Skeat in his *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* using only

³² The modern English translation is from M. Bradford Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2002), note 58, p 129; the Old English can be found in Robb, "Anglo-Saxon Homilies," ll. 47–52, pp 136–137.

³³ Morris, *Legends of the Holy Rood*, 2–17.

³⁴ Mary-Catherine Bodden, *The Old English Finding of the True Cross* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), 28–29. In this publication Bodden re-edited the homily from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F.4.32 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 303.

³⁵ Robb, "Anglo-Saxon Homilies," 5.

three manuscripts;³⁶ Robb provides a critical edition of all four known variants.³⁷ For this homily, which recounts the recovery of relics of the cross by Heraclius in AD 628, Ælfric's main source appears to be some version of Rabanus Maurus' *Homiliae de Festis Praecipuis*,³⁸ with the discussion of the merits of the cross deriving from Augustine's *De Symbolo Passio*.³⁹

2.3 Anglo-Saxon Cross Riddles

The Anglo-Saxons cultivated a rich tradition of riddle-writing that stretches back to the late seventh century when Aldhelm adapted the form from late Latin examples and defended the riddle form as a legitimate religious form.⁴⁰ Many influential Anglo-Saxon writers composed in this genre, including Aldhelm, Boniface, and Alcuin, among others. There are a dozen surviving pre-twelfth-century manuscripts written or owned in England that contain groups of riddles in Latin and the vernacular.⁴¹

A number of the Anglo-Saxon riddles are on the cross. For example, Hwætberht, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow (who wrote under the pen-name Eusebius) composed a Latin cross riddle c. 716:

Per me mors acquiritur et bona vita tenetur;
Me multi fugiunt multique frequenter adorant;

³⁶ Walter W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, EETS (O.S.) vols. 76, 82, originally published 1881 and 1885 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

³⁷ Robb, "Anglo-Saxon Homilies," 207–247; manuscripts used were: London, BL, MS Cotton Julius E. VII, fols. 157v–160v; London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius D. XVII, fols. 74r–75v; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ii. I. 33, fols. 203r–206v; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 367, pt. II, f 28rv.

³⁸ Robb, "Anglo-Saxon Homilies," 6; PL 110, cols. 131–134.

³⁹ Augustine, *De symbolo passio*, PL vol. 40, col. 664.

⁴⁰ Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium, sive liber de septenario, et de metris, aenigmatibus, ac pedum regulis*, PL vol. 89, cols. 170–171.

⁴¹ Andy Orchard, "Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition," in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge* ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 284–304.

Sumque timenda malis, non sum tamen horrida iustis;
Dampnavique virum, sic multos carcere solvi.⁴²

Only slightly later, Tatwine of Mercia, archbishop of Canterbury in the 730s, also did:

Versicolor cernor nunc, nunc mihi forma nitescit.
Lege fui quondam cunctis iam larbula servis,
Sed modo me gaudens orbis veneratur et ornat.
Quique meum gustat fructum iam sanus habetur,
Nam mihi concessum est insanis ferre salutem.
Propterea sapiens optat me in fronte tenere.⁴³

Both these Latin cross riddles emphasize opposites: the cross once brought death, now it brings eternal life; where once it was reviled, now the whole world adores it. This balancing of opposites is reminiscent of the typological relationship of the tree of knowledge and the tree of the cross: one brought about original sin, the other was the instrument of the Redemption. The physical description of the cross in Tatwine's riddle recalls the changeable appearance of the cross in *Dream of the Rood* and its brightly shining form. The image of fruit here refers simultaneously to the fruits of the tree of life, the Eucharist and Christ himself. Finally, the saving power of the sign of the cross, commonly made on one's forehead, is echoed in this poem.

In addition to these Latin riddles, several Old English riddles in the Exeter Book, numbers 30a, 55 and 67,⁴⁴ have been interpreted as referring to the cross.⁴⁵ Riddle 30a

⁴² Maria De Marco, ed. *Tatwini opera omnia*, CCSL (Turnholt: Brepols, 1968), vol. 133, 227. "Through me is death acquired and the good life obtained; many flee from me and many commonly adore me; I am to be feared by the wicked, but nevertheless am not horrid to the just; I damned a man and thus absolved many from prison."

⁴³ De Marco, *Tatwini*, CCSL vol. 133, 176. "Now I seem to be changing colours, now my form grows bright. Once by law I was a demon to all servants, but now the world praising me worships and adorns me. Each one who tastes of my fruit is now made whole, for it is granted to me to bring salvation to the sick. On account of this the wise man chooses to keep me on his forehead."

⁴⁴ This numbering of the riddles is that used in George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, A Collective Edition, vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

has been interpreted as a pun on the Old English word “beam” and its various meanings.

This riddle is solved by applying notions contained in the term “beam” to different sections of the riddle. It reads:

I’m surrounded by flames and sport with the wind,
 I’m clothed with finery and the storm’s great friend,
 Ready to travel, but troubled by fire,
 A glade in full bloom and a burning flame;
 Friends often pass me from hand to hand,
 And I’m kissed by ladies and courteous men.
 When I raise myself, with reverence
 Proud men must bow before me; I bring
 Man’s happiness to full maturity.⁴⁶

Thus, the meaning “tree” applies to ll. 1b–2 and 3b–4a; “ship” answers 3a, “log” 1a and 4b, and “cup” 5–6. The last three lines represent the cross, which speaks in the first person, as in *Dream of the Rood*.⁴⁷

Riddle 55 has been solved variously as shield, scabbard, gallows, sword-rack, harp and cross.⁴⁸ Line five refers specifically to the item as “a symbol of his cross,” which may rule out cross as the riddle’s answer, yet the overall description applies beautifully to the cross itself, a great tree adorned with precious jewels and metals, and made of four types of wood.

⁴⁵ Swanton, *Dream*, 67, note 5.

⁴⁶ Kevin Crossley-Holland, trans., *The Exeter Book Riddles* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1978), 51. The Old English text can be found in Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, 195–196. It reads:

Ic eom legbysig, lace mid winde,
 bewunden mid wuldre, wedre gesomnad,
 fus forðweges, fyre gebysgad,
 bearu blowende, byrnende gled.

5

Ful oft mec gesipas sendað æfter hondum,
 þæt mec weras ond wif wlonce cyssað.
 þonne ic mec onhæbbe, ond hi onhnigaþ to me
 monige mid miltse, þær ic monnum sceal
 ycan upcyme eadignesne.

⁴⁷ Crossley-Holland, *Riddles*, 116.

⁴⁸ Crossley-Holland, *Riddles*, 124.

I saw in the hall (where visitors were drinking)
 A wondrous tree, of four timbers, brought
 On to the floor; it was adorned with twisted gold,
 Plated with silver, most skillfully inlaid
 With jewels, a symbol of His cross who for us
 Established a ladder between Heaven and Earth
 Before He harrowed Hell. I can easily
 Tell you of this tree's origin:
 The hard yew and shining holly,
 The maple and the oak serve their Lord
 Together and together share one name -
 An outlaw's tree it was that frequently offered
 A weapon to its lord, a treasure in the hall,
 The gold-hilted sword. Now tell me the answer
 To this riddle, whoever will hazard
 A guess as to what this tree is called.⁴⁹

Also important to note in this riddle is the Anglo-Saxons' familiarity with the story of Christ harrowing Hell, and the idea of the cross as ladder, both of which will be discussed further below.

The final riddle that may be interpreted as "cross" is riddle 67, defective though it is at ll. 3–8. Crossley-Holland solves the riddle as "bible,"⁵⁰ but the solution "cross" also

⁴⁹ Crossley-Holland, *Riddles*, 77. Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, 208. The Old English reads:

Ic seah in healle, þær hæleð druncon,
 on flet beran feower cynna,
 wrætlic wudutreow ond wunden gold,
 sinc searobunden, ond seolfres dæl
 5 ond rode tacn, þæs us to roderum up
 hlædre rærde, ær he helwara
 burg abræce. Ic þæs beames mæg
 eaþe for eorlum æþelu secgan;
 þær wæs hlin ond acc ond se hearda iw
 10 ond se fealwa holen; frean sindon ealle
 nyt ætgædre, naman habbað anne,
 wulfheafedtreo, þæt oft wæpen abæd
 his mondryhtne, maðm in healle,
 goldhilted sweord. Nu me þisses gieddes
 15 ondsware ywe, se hine on mede
 wordum secgan hu se wudu hatte.

⁵⁰ Crossley-Holland, *Riddles*, 129.

21) all fall into this category; of these, riddle 73 (though fragmentary) is particularly noteworthy. Read as a whole, riddle 73 seems to suggest a wooden weapon as the solution: the lance, as mentioned above. However, the first seven lines translate as:

I grew up in the field, lived where ground
And heaven-cloud fed me, until foes
Plucked me from earth in my prime,
Changed me from the living thing I was,
Transformed me, forced me
Against my nature to be governed
For a while by a killer's will.⁵³

This statement by the object is highly reminiscent of the cross in the *Dream of the Rood*, which describes being cut down, torn from its trunk at the edge of the wood by enemies, and made to raise up criminals (ll. 28–31; see section 2.1 above).

2.4 The Anglo-Saxon Cult of the Cross

As attested by the homilies mentioned above, the *Inventio sanctae crucis* relating Constantine's miraculous vision and victory and his mother's successful search for the true cross was well-known in England. Helena herself was adopted by the Anglo-Saxons and claims arose that she was actually British.⁵⁴ The origins of the legend of Helena as a British princess seem to have been in circulation since at least the eighth century, and may have arisen from a misunderstanding that Constantine was born in Britain. Certainly

⁵³ Thank you to Prof. Andy Orchard for directing my attention to this riddle. Translated by John Porter, *Anglo-Saxon Riddles* (Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1995), 81–82; Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, 233–234. The Old English reads:

Ic on wonge aweox, wunode þær mec feddon
hruse ond heofonwolcn, oþþæt me onhwyrfdon
gearum frodne, þa me grome wurdon,
of þære gecynde þe ic ær cwic beheold,

5 onwendan mine wisan, wegedon mec of earde,
gedydon þæt ic sceolde wiþ gesceape minum
on bonan willan bugan hwilum.

⁵⁴ See the excellent book on this topic: Antonina Harbus, *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend* (London: D. S. Brewer, 2002).

Constantine had been linked to York from Anglo-Saxon times because of his proclamation as caesar there.⁵⁵ The earliest reference to a local connection for Helena appears in Aldhelm's late seventh-century *De virginitate*,⁵⁶ which places Constantine's birth in Britain (though Helena's origins are not mentioned).⁵⁷ This location of Constantine's birth in England may have helped fuel the legend that Helena was herself British. Various rival cities on the continent argued over Helena,⁵⁸ but Hautviller's claim to her was strengthened by the *vita* composed by the monk Altmann in the ninth century, which stimulated a cult to Helena there.⁵⁹ Remarkably, however, the claims of York eventually won out and the sees of Reims and Trier officially accepted her British origins, though England never claimed to have her relics.⁶⁰ From the tenth century onwards, the Welsh, too, appropriated Helena as "Elen," and made her the wife of another co-opted historical figure from Roman history, Magnus Maximus; this neatly claimed for themselves imperial ties and a Christian connection much older than that of the Anglo-Saxons.⁶¹ Later British historians, such as Henry of Huntingdon and Geoffrey of Monmouth, link Helena to Colchester, portraying her as the heir to King Cole's throne who married Constantius, thus providing a direct link between Britain and imperial

⁵⁵ Harbus, *Helena of Britain*, 28.

⁵⁶ This work has been dated to the period before Aldhelm became abbot, c. 682–686; see Michael Lapidge, "The Career of Aldhelm," *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 67.

⁵⁷ Harbus, *Helena of Britain*, 37–38. The late ninth-/early tenth-century Old English translation of Bede's *Historia* departs from the source text and also makes this claim, erroneously attributing the information to Eutropius. The translator seems to have misconstrued the Latin word *creatus*, which referred to Constantine's having been made emperor in Britain, as meaning "born" in Britain, thus inadvertently establishing Britain as the legendary birthplace of the emperor due to a mistranslation (Harbus, *Helena of Britain*, 40–42).

⁵⁸ Trier claimed to be her birthplace, while the monastery of Hautvillers near Reims, as well as the cities of Constantinople, Venice and Rome claimed to have her relics.

⁵⁹ Harbus, *Helena of Britain*, 47.

⁶⁰ Harbus, *Helena of Britain*, 49–50.

⁶¹ Harbus, *Helena of Britain*, 52–62.

Rome.⁶² Clearly, both Constantine and Helena were important figures in medieval Britain.

However, the Anglo-Saxons could also claim a miraculous victory of their own, won in the name of the cross. This is the story of King Oswald and the battle of Heavenfield, related in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, III.2.⁶³ According to Bede, there occurred to Oswald an incident closely reminiscent of Constantine's use of the cross symbol and subsequent victory at the battle of the Milvian Bridge. In the year 634, having taken over the rule of the Kingdom of Bernicia following the death of his brother Eanfrid, Oswald prepared to engage the heathen king Cædwalla. Cædwalla had been ruling tyrannically over the kingdoms of Northumbria ever since he had defeated both Eanfrid of Bernicia and Osric of Deira, each of whom had foolishly renounced the Christian faith. Before the battle, Oswald had a wooden cross erected, holding it with his own hands as earth was filled in around its base. He summoned the whole army to kneel with him in prayer before the cross, and the next morning his Christian forces were victorious against the pagan Cædwalla. Bede further relates how innumerable healing miracles took place at this spot, for "even to this day many people are in the habit of cutting splinters from the wood of this holy cross and putting them in water which they then give to sick men or beasts to drink or else they sprinkle them with it; and they are quickly restored to health."⁶⁴ Later, the brothers of the nearby church of Hexham, who yearly made a pilgrimage to Heavenfield, built a church on this spot. Bede tells of another miracle, worked on a brother from Hexham by the name of Bothelm, who was

⁶² Harbus, *Helena of Britain*, 66.

⁶³ The translation consulted here is Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 215–219.

⁶⁴ Colgrave and Mynors, *Ecclesiastical History*, 215–217.

still living in Bede's own day. Having fractured his arm after slipping on ice, and in great pain, Brother Bothelm asked a fellow brother who was travelling to Heavenfield to bring him back a piece of the revered cross there. This brother returned with a piece of moss that he had taken from the surface of the cross, which the grateful Brother Bothelm tucked into his garment, next to his breast. Awakened that night by a great chill he felt at his side, he discovered his arm had been completely healed.⁶⁵

For William O. Stevens, the impact of Oswald's victory on the English nation's feeling for the cross cannot be overestimated: "It was the victory of Constantine repeated in England, and probably the obvious points of similarity in the two stories helped to make the legend of Constantine as popular as it evidently was."⁶⁶ Furthermore, the story of Oswald's victory through the cross he erected emphasizes the extension of Christ's spiritual empire even to the ends of the earth, placed as it was close to the wall that the Romans had once built to gird the north of Britain, from sea to sea.⁶⁷ An additional impetus to the cross cult in Northumbria followed shortly after Oswald's victory. Arculph's *De locis sanctis*, which described the relics of the cross at Byzantium, the memorial cross at Jerusalem and the wooden cross affixed in the Jordan at the spot where Christ was baptised, was translated by Adamnán; King Aldfrith of Northumbria (685–704), to whom it was dedicated, ordered copies to be distributed throughout the kingdom.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Colgrave and Mynors, *Ecclesiastical History*, 217–219.

⁶⁶ William O. Stevens, *The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, Yale Studies in English, vol. 23 (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1904), 82.

⁶⁷ Jennifer O'Reilly, "The Art of Authority," in *Short Oxford History of the British Isles* ed. Thomas Charles-Edwards, 141–189 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 151.

⁶⁸ For Adamnán's translation, see *De locis sanctis ex relatione Arculfi episcopi Galli libri tres*, PL vol. 88, 779–814D; see also Swanton, *Dream*, 45.

Throughout medieval Europe legends would occasionally spring up about miraculous appearances of the cross, echoing the tradition of Constantine's vision. An early incident is described by St. Cyril, whereby in the year 351, during Pentecost, a luminous cross of huge dimensions appeared over Golgotha and remained for several hours, shining brighter than the sun. The spectacle inspired both fear and joy in believers, and motivated throngs of non-believers to convert.⁶⁹ The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records two miraculous appearances of the cross in England. In the year 773, a fiery crucifix appeared in the heavens after sunset, while in early June of the year 806 a cross was seen to appear in the moon.⁷⁰ An inscription on a cross-slab at Jarrow, which declares "in this unique sign life is given back to the world"⁷¹ also recalls Constantine's vision and subsequent victory under the sign of the cross and is reminiscent of the inscription on the monument Constantine had set up to commemorate his vision, as described by Rufinus.⁷²

As mentioned above, liturgical devotion to the holy wood of the cross is attested as early as the fourth century. For example, in her pilgrimage journal, Aetheria/Egeria relates that in 335 a holy cross day was already being celebrated at Jerusalem.⁷³ She described how pilgrims came from all over for a ceremony in which all people, both faithful and catechumens, came forth to kiss the wood, kept safe in a gilded silver casket,

⁶⁹ Quoted in William Wood Seymour, *The Cross in Tradition, History, and Art* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1898), 109. He references St. Cyril *Opera*, p. 247, Paris ed. 1640 and notes numerous further instances, 109–112, referring the reader to Jakob Gretser, *De Cruce*, lib. iii, cap. 7 for many more examples.

⁷⁰ For a modern translation of the Chronicle, see Michael J. Swanton, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J. M. Dent, 1997).

⁷¹ Quoted in O'Reilly, *Authority*, 150.

⁷² See W. Levison, "The Inscription on the Jarrow Cross," *Archaeologia Aeliana* S4, 21 (1943): 121–126.

⁷³ Egeria, *Peregrinatio ad loca sancta*, in *Itinera Hierosolymitana saeculi III – IV*, ed. P. Geyer, CSEL, vol. 39 (Prague: F. Tempsky, 1898), 37–101; for a translation see George Gingras, trans., *Egeria: The Diary of a Pilgrimage* (New York: Newman Press, 1970).

and closely guarded by the deacons, lest there be a repeat occurrence of an alarming situation where someone actually took a bite and absconded with a piece of the holy cross!⁷⁴

Two feasts were specifically dedicated to the holy cross: the *Inventio* and the *Exaltatio*, traditionally celebrated on May 3 and September 14, respectively. It has already been demonstrated that these feasts were known in England during the Anglo-Saxon period. The *Exaltatio*, a major festival in the Eastern Church, is the older of the two; it owed its inception to the dedication of the Holy Sepulchre in 335. It is included in all early western martyrologies (for example those of Jerome, Bede, Rabanus Maurus) and was taken up into both the Gelasian and Gregorian sacramentaries.⁷⁵ The *Inventio* feast appears listed for May 3 in Gallican and Mozarabic service-books and was likely added to the Gelasian and Gregorian sacramentaries in the eighth century.⁷⁶

Further devotion to the cross was practiced in conjunction with Easter. The ritual of the *Adoratio crucis*, celebrated on Good Friday, goes back at least to the fourth century,⁷⁷ and was known throughout the church by the tenth century, although there are no full surviving accounts of the *ordo* before the ninth. Bedingfield notes that the elaborate and dramatic liturgical ritual for the Good Friday *Adoratio crucis* (in which both clergy and laypeople participated) is preserved in the tenth-century *Regularis concordia* of Winchester, a form which is echoed in another valuable source for Anglo-Saxon liturgical practices, Ælfric's *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*.⁷⁸ Julia Bolton

⁷⁴ Gingras, *Egeria*, 111.

⁷⁵ Swanton, *Dream*, 44.

⁷⁶ Swanton, *Dream*, 45.

⁷⁷ Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 45–47.

⁷⁸ See Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, section on Good Friday, 123–139. For the *Concordia* see Dom Thomas Symons, *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1953). For Ælfric's letter see Christopher A. Jones, ed.,

Holloway, citing the Anglo-Saxon monumental crosses and the *Dream of the Rood*, suggested that the *Adoratio* moved from Jerusalem to Britain via the Irish. Much of her argument was based on the assumption that the prayers to Christ on the cross known as *adoro te* prayers (more on which below) demonstrate the existence of a version of the *Adoratio crucis* which is both longer and earlier than that in the *Concordia*.⁷⁹ While her view has not been adopted generally, her argument “does illustrate to what degree the themes and images of the Adoration of the Cross, with its corollary theme of the Cross as infused with the power of Christ, were natural to the Anglo-Saxon church from at least the eighth century.”⁸⁰

As for prayers directed to the cross, evidence is scarce in Anglo-Saxon sources before the eleventh century. Eighth- and ninth-century prayer books have prayers to the crucified Christ, but only one example of a prayer directed to the cross itself, that based on part of the *Passio s. Andreae* in the Book of Cerne.⁸¹ The *Regularis concordia* preserves three prayers, but these, again, are directed to Christ, with only one simple appeal that the cross may free the believer from the assaults of the devil.⁸² Based on these examples, Raw concluded that the author of *Dream of the Rood* must have had contact with the cult of the cross from outside England, stressing that it is only in the eleventh

Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, vol. 24 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁷⁹ Julia Bolton Holloway, “*The Dream of the Rood* and Liturgical Drama,” in *Drama in the Middle Ages*, second series, ed. Clifford Davidson and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1991), 24–42.

⁸⁰ Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, 126 and note 42.

⁸¹ See A. B. Kuypers, *The Prayer Book of Ædelwald the Bishop, Commonly Called the Book of Cerne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 161. For a translation of the *Passio s. Andreae* see Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), 56–57.

⁸² Symons, *Regularis Concordia*, 43–44; e.g. the first prayer begins, “Lord Jesus Christ, I adore Thee ascending the Cross; I beseech Thee that the Cross may free me from the thrusts of the devil. Lord Jesus Christ, I adore Thee wounded on the Cross; I beseech Thee that Thy wounds may be unto the healing of my soul.”

century that “one encounters the ideas and tone of writing of *The Dream of the Rood*.”⁸³

As evidence of the new timbre that appears in these later prayers to the cross she cited an unpublished collection of prayers and antiphons to recite before a cross contained in a manuscript of the second quarter of the eleventh century, which once belonged to Ælfwine, abbot of New Minster.⁸⁴ The language directed to the cross here is simple yet elegant, and the passage from Raw is worth quoting in full:

O crux splendidior cunctis astris, mundo celebris atque in
multum amabilis, plurimum et suavis, que sola fuisti digna
portare talentum mundi.
Dulce lignum, dulces clavi, dulcia ferens pondera.
Salva me tuum famulum, in tuis laudibus omni die devotus.
Amen.⁸⁵

At about this time four prayers to the cross were also added to the eighth-century manuscript known as the Vespasian Psalter.⁸⁶ In these private, devotional prayers, the cross is referred to as the banner of the unvanquished king that shall lead men to paradise, adored by angels and more noble than the tree of paradise, a symbol to which one should commit one's soul until Judgment Day, at which time the cross shall reappear, shining more brightly than either sun or stars. The *Portiforium Wulstani*, belonging to the second half of the eleventh century, contains not only prayers for private use, but examples of public prayer dedicated to the cross, for example an office for the feast of the Exaltation as well as a votive office to the cross for use on Fridays. In these examples, it is said that

⁸³ Raw, “Dream of the Rood,” 250.

⁸⁴ London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus D.27, fols. 66–73v.

⁸⁵ Unpublished prayer to the cross, quoted in Raw, “Dream of the Rood,” 250. English translation: “O cross more splendid than all the stars, famous and greatly loved by the world and very pleasant, you who alone was worthy to bear the weight of the world. O sweet wood, sweet nails, bearing your sweet burden. Save me your humble servant, devoted every day to your praises. Amen.”

⁸⁶ See the facsimile version in David H. Wright, ed., *The Vespasian Psalter*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, vol. 14 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967).

not only will the cross lead the faithful to heaven, but it will be the key to heaven. By the end of the century, Anselm writes the following prayer to the cross:

O crux, quae ad tam ineffabilia bona est electa et praeparata, laudant et exaltant te non tam humana sive angelica mens aut lingua, quam opera quae per te sunt facta. O tu, in qua et per quam est salus et vita mea; o tu, in qua et per quam est totum et omne bonum meum...Sit itaque per te et in te gloria mea, sit per te et in te vera spes mea...Fac obsecro, fac ut, sicut me in baptismo mundasti a peccatis, in quibus sum conceptus et natus, ita me remundes ab eis quae contraxi, postquam sum renatus, ut per te ad ea bona perveniam, ad quae homo est creatus.⁸⁷

In this eloquent prayer, as in the *Dream of the Rood*, the cross is a separate entity, which, as a result of the great deeds accomplished through it, deserves praise and exaltation. It has become the key to heaven because it is through the cross that each person may be washed from all sins, both those he is born with and those which he himself commits. By placing all his hope in the cross, he may be reborn and obtain entrance to the heavenly kingdom.

The personal devotional ritual of making the sign of the cross on one's forehead (as attested, for example, in Tatwine's cross riddle) seems to have reached Britain fairly early. This sign could be used to preserve oneself against the snares of the devil, as in Bede who recommends it to Bishop Egbert's flock for this purpose,⁸⁸ or to expel him

⁸⁷ Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1946), vol. 3, p. 12. "O cross, who was chosen and prepared for such unspeakably good things, human and angelic minds and tongues praise and exalt you as much as the works which are made through you. O you, in which and through which is my salvation and my life; O you in which and through which is each and every good thing of mine...Thus may my glory be through you and in you, may my true hope be through you and in you...Make it, I pray, make it that I am cleansed in baptisms from the sins, in which I was conceived and born, in this way may you cleanse me anew from those things I have done, afterwards I am reborn, so that I through you may arrive at those good things for which man was created."

⁸⁸ James A. Giles, *Venerabilis Bedae Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, 8 vols. (London: Whittaker and Co., 1843), vol. 1, 134–135.

from one's presence, as Ælfric suggests.⁸⁹ Making this sign could even have miraculous healing powers, as in Bede's account of how John of Beverley cured a dumb boy by making the sign of the cross on his tongue.⁹⁰ It seems that not only actual fragments of a holy cross (as with those taken from Oswald's cross at Heavenfield), but the mere sign of it was believed to perform miracles.

This evidence of the Anglo-Saxons' devotion to the holy cross, along with references to the cross as gilded and bejeweled (as in *Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*), is suggestive of the presence of relics of the true cross in England. Was not Venantius Fortunatus inspired to write his famous hymns in response to the arrival of relics of the cross in Poitiers in AD 569?⁹¹ Ceolfrith of Wearmouth-Jarrow was in Rome in 701, the same year that a vision led Pope Sergius I to discover a reliquary with a fragment of the true cross large enough to rival Byzantium in relic worship. The excitement of this event even reached northern England: Bede comments extensively on it.⁹² Historical evidence confirms that such relics were indeed present in England: according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Pope Marinus sent Alfred a piece of the cross in the year 883, and another in 885. In fact, Dickens and Ross have suggested that the cross reliquary now known as the Brussels Cross⁹³ may have been the actual work that contained the second of these two gifts.⁹⁴ In the year 926, Æthelstan too received a cross fragment (along with other Constantinian relics) from Hugh, Duke of the Franks.⁹⁵ Although it was at the very end

⁸⁹ Thorpe, *Homilies*, vol. 1, 467.

⁹⁰ Colgrave and Mynors, *Ecclesiastical History*, 457–459.

⁹¹ Swanton, *Dream*, 49.

⁹² Bede, *Chronicon sive de sex hujus saeculi aetatibus: sexta aetas*, PL vol. 90, col. 569.

⁹³ This cross reliquary is inscribed with a short passage related to that on the Ruthwell cross and the *Dream of the Rood*, on which more below.

⁹⁴ Bruce Dickins and Alan S. C. Ross, eds. *The Dream of the Rood* (London: Methuen, 1963), 15.

⁹⁵ See the report by William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum libri quinque, De Ethelstano filio Edwardi*, PL vol. 179, cols. 1102–1103.

of the Anglo-Saxon period, it is noteworthy that King Edward the Confessor may also have possessed a fragment of the true cross, housed in a Byzantine *encolpion* (pectoral cross). This cross, which may have contained the relic, is now lost, having been removed from Edward's grave in 1685 and given to James II, who was later robbed of a ring and crucifix of Edward the Confessor (presumably this *encolpion*) when he tried to escape England by ship in 1688.⁹⁶

2.5 The Cross as Green Tree in the *Vindicta salvatoris* and Art

A further strain of the cross as tree in the Anglo-Saxon tradition was explored by Thomas Hall.⁹⁷ He was inspired by a particular passage in the apocryphal text the *Vindicta salvatoris*, a medieval appendix to the *Gospel of Nicodemus* which relates the miracle of Veronica's handkerchief, the death of Pilate, and Jerusalem's destruction by Titus and Vespasian.⁹⁸ The text is preserved in three Old English manuscripts: two long versions (one complete, the other fragmentary) and one shorter, corrupt version.⁹⁹ These are the earliest extant adaptations of the *Vindicta salvatoris* in any vernacular language.¹⁰⁰ Worthy of note for our purposes is a passage that appears when Velosianus, having been dispatched by Tiberius to obtain a cure for him from Christ, returns to make his report to the leprosy-ridden emperor. Since Christ was already dead and Jerusalem

⁹⁶ For the complete story see Krijnie Ciggaar, "England and Byzantium on the Eve of the Norman Conquest (The Reign of Edward the Confessor)," in *Anglo-Norman Studies 5: Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, ed. R. Allen Brown, 78-96 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1982), especially 90-95.

⁹⁷ Thomas N. Hall, "The Cross as Green Tree in the *Vindicta Salvatoris* and the Green Rod of Moses in *Exodus*," *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 72.4 (1991): 297-307.

⁹⁸ For an edition of these texts see J. E. Cross, *Two Old English Apocrypha and Their Manuscript Source: The Gospel of Nicodemus and the Avenging of the Saviour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁹⁹ The complete Old English translation is found in Cambridge, University Library, MS li.2.11, fols. 193-202. The second translation, which lacks the beginning and end, is preserved in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 196, pp. 111-122. The shorter, corrupt version occurs in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D.XIV, fols. 100v-102r.

¹⁰⁰ Hall, "The Cross as Green Tree," 298.

destroyed by the time Velosianus arrived there, he was able only to bring back the miraculous cloth of Veronica bearing Christ's likeness; this relic immediately heals the emperor of leprosy. Velosianus relates how an angel had commanded Titus and Vespasian to avenge Christ's death on the Jews by the same means as they had killed the Saviour. This they did, stating, as they meted out the punishment: "Quomodo fecerunt de Christo, ita et nos faciamus illos. Suspenderunt dominum nostrum *in lignum uiride*,¹⁰¹ et nos suspendemus eos in arido."¹⁰² This episode is compressed in the Old English versions, but Velosianus still relates, "And the Jews killed Him even though He had committed no sin and hanged Him *on a green tree*" (italics added).¹⁰³ While it is not at all uncommon to read of Christ being crucified on a tree, the qualification that the tree was green appears nowhere else in Old English literature, or indeed any literature of the period.¹⁰⁴

More remarkably, Hall found this detail of the cross as green tree documented in several early English artistic representations of the Crucifixion. Three Anglo-Saxon manuscript illuminations illustrate the cross unequivocally as a green tree. The earliest appears in the so-called "Judith of Flanders" or "Weingarten Gospels,"¹⁰⁵ dated to the second quarter of the eleventh century, though the miniature in question may have been executed slightly later, in 1051. In this Crucifixion scene, Christ hangs on a typical Anglo-Saxon, T-shaped, rough-hewn cross that preserves no foliage, only the stumps of

¹⁰¹ Note the lack of agreement in case here: *lignum* is accusative, while *uiride* is ablative.

¹⁰² Hall, "The Cross as Green Tree," 299, here quotes from Prof. Cross's transcription of the text from St. Omer, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 202 (Cross, op. cit.). "As they did to Christ, just so let us do to them. They hung our Lord on a green tree, and we shall hang them from the dry."

¹⁰³ Quoted in Hall, "The Cross as Green Tree," 299: "And þa Iudeas hyne þa acwealdon buton ælcum gylte and hyne on grenum treowe ahengon."

¹⁰⁴ Hall, "The Cross as Green Tree," 299.

¹⁰⁵ New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS 709.

lopped off branches along its lengths.¹⁰⁶ The important detail is that the tree is rendered throughout in a greenish brown, “as if to recall its appearance as a living plant before it was hewn down.”¹⁰⁷ The second example occurs in the Red Book of Darley, a missal produced c. 1061 for use at Sherbourne Abbey.¹⁰⁸ Here too Christ is suspended on a T-shaped cross which has lost its branches, but unusually, Christ is portrayed alive and the cross is shown putting out fresh foliage in the form of green buds growing all along the sides of the horizontal beam.¹⁰⁹ The third and final instance is found in a Crucifixion miniature facing the text of Psalm 1,¹¹⁰ which appears in a manuscript executed at Winchester in the second half of the eleventh century.¹¹¹ Here the cross is more stylized, and stretches between heaven and earth,¹¹² but it still maintains the rough-hewn characteristics with lopped branches and wood-grain effects on its surface. As in the first example, the cross is devoid of foliage, but is nevertheless distinctly painted green.¹¹³

Although Hall acknowledged that these three examples hardly constitute a well-defined tradition, they do all echo the notion presented in the *Vindicta salvatoris* of Christ crucified on a green tree.¹¹⁴ Many more examples of the motif can be found in later medieval art, including some of English origin, for example the lushly foliate and blooming cross in a Crucifixion scene in the early thirteenth-century Psalter of Robert

¹⁰⁶ This miniature is discussed and reproduced in Jennifer O'Reilly, “The Rough-Hewn Cross in Anglo-Saxon Art,” in *Ireland and Insular Art: A.D. 500-1200*, ed. Michael Ryan, 153–158 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1987), 153–157 and pl. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Hall, “The Cross as Green Tree,” 300.

¹⁰⁸ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422.

¹⁰⁹ This miniature is discussed and reproduced in Barbara C. Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 151–152 and pl. 12b.

¹¹⁰ For more on Psalm 1 and its relationship to the tree of life, see chapter 4.

¹¹¹ London, British Library, MS Arundel 60.

¹¹² For a discussion of the cross as *axis mundi*, see ch. 4.

¹¹³ O'Reilly, *Rough-Hewn Cross*, 153 and pl. 4; Raw, *Crucifixion Iconography*, 130–131, 150, 159, and pl. 9.

¹¹⁴ Hall, “The Cross as Green Tree,” 301.

Lindsey, Abbot of Peterborough,¹¹⁵ two instances (also early thirteenth-century) painted on nave piers in St. Albans Abbey,¹¹⁶ and an early fifteenth-century depiction of Christ crucified on a green palm tree¹¹⁷ in a window in the chapel of Queen's College, Oxford.¹¹⁸ As Hall asserted, it is not that difficult to explain such representations, considering the strong typological association of the cross and the tree of life since patristic times (a full discussion of which follows in chapter 4). In Hall's view, this conception of the cross as green also helped explain the much-debated description of Moses' rod as *grene tacen* in the Old English *Exodus*.¹¹⁹

2.6 The Monumental Crosses

Fundamental to the examination of the devotion to the cross in Anglo-Saxon England is a discussion of the intricately carved, monumental stone crosses, some over five metres in height, of that period.¹²⁰ Of the approximately 1500 that survive,¹²¹ the greatest concentration is in Northumbria, with perhaps the best known being the Ruthwell

¹¹⁵ Ursula Rowlett, "A Flowering Cross in the Robert de Lindsey Psalter c. 1220–1222," *Folklore* 110 (1999): 95–106.

¹¹⁶ Described and reproduced in W. Page, "The St. Albans School of Painting, Mural and Miniature: Part I. Mural Painting," *Archaeologia* 58 (1902): 283 and pl. 18, figs. 2 and 3.

¹¹⁷ The use of the palm is common in crusader iconography; see Penelope Mayo's thorough analysis of the abundant drawings of plants and trees in the *Liber floridus* in "The Crusaders Under the Palm: Allegorical Plants and Cosmic Kingship in the *Liber Floridus*," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 27 (1973): 29–67.

¹¹⁸ See W. L. Hildburgh, "An Alabaster Table of the Annunciation with the Crucifix: A Study in English Iconography," *Archaeologia* 74 (1925): 213.

¹¹⁹ Hall, "The Cross as Green Tree," 305–307.

¹²⁰ Some general references include: William Gershom Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1927), Rosemary Cramp, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), and Richard N. Bailey, *England's Earliest Sculptors*, Publications of the Dictionary of Old English 5 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1996).

¹²¹ Swanton, *Dream*, 47, stresses that many other crosses made of wood likely existed but have not come down to us; for example, underneath the tenth-century church of St. Bertelin, Stafford, were found the remains of a large wooden cross which might have the preaching cross of Bertelin himself, c. 700. See Adrian Oswald, ed., *The Church of St. Bertelin, Stafford, and its Cross* (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1955): 15–18; 26–27.

Cross on the Solway Firth.¹²² Although scholars have variously dated the crosses in the past, the general consensus now is to place them in the eighth century,¹²³ with that at Ruthwell likely having been constructed in the period AD 730–760.¹²⁴

The Ruthwell Cross is highly pertinent to our discussion here, since it also preserves a text of the story told in the *Dream of the Rood*, carved in runic inscriptions on its surface. The Ruthwell version of the poem is so similar to that preserved in the Vercelli book that it has been used to emend the Vercelli text, yet it is different enough to be considered a separate poem. It is, in fact, a “special epigraphic edition of the narrative.”¹²⁵ A third, highly epitomized version, extant as a distych, can be found on the processional cross *cum* cross reliquary known as the Brussels Cross, which declares: “Cross is my name: long ago/ trembling, stained with blood, I bore a powerful King.” These three versions ought to be considered the extant witnesses to an Old English *Dream of the Rood* tradition.¹²⁶

The monumental size and exquisite workmanship alone of these stone crosses testify to the strong devotion to the cross in this region. However, it is a particular feature of the carving of many of these crosses that further increases their relevance for this study: the predominance of the populated vine scroll motif that has been interpreted as representing the tree of life. The vine scroll motif was widespread in late antiquity and was charged with Christian symbolism. In John 15: 1–7, Christ had declared himself to

¹²² Brenday Cassidy, ed., *The Ruthwell Cross: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 8 December 1989* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹²³ See Bailey, *Earliest Sculptors*, 42–45.

¹²⁴ Ó Carragáin, *Ritual*, 7, 283. For a dissenting view regarding style and dating of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses see Fred Orton, “Northumbrian Identity in the Eighth Century: The Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments; Style, Classification, Class, and the Form of Ideology,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34.1 (2004): 95–145.

¹²⁵ Ó Carragáin, *Ritual*, 7.

¹²⁶ Ó Carragáin, *Ritual*, 7–8.

be the vine, and his followers the branches, but equally relevant are passages from the Psalms that speak of great trees of the Lord that served as shelter to birds and beasts alike. Ernst Kitzinger was the first to point to analogues for the eighth-century Northumbrian crosses in the Mediterranean, in such locales as the Byzantine East, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque of Damascus.¹²⁷ Even artifacts directly linked to the cult of the cross in Rome, such as the sixth-century cross of Justin II, one of whose sides is covered with vine scroll, offer potential models for the motif in Northumbria.¹²⁸ Bailey remarks on the “confident and adventurous manner” with which the English sculptors manipulated their models, such that even where specific, close analogues for a particular piece of carving can be found, the result is still decidedly English.¹²⁹ Furthermore, although late eighth- and ninth-century English stone carving does begin to show influence of the Carolingian Renaissance on the continent, the scroll work continues to be distinctly Anglo-Saxon in character, “whose ancestry goes back to the Dome of the Rock.”¹³⁰ What we see is a body of monumental cross sculpture that borrowed from Mediterranean sources, yet developed into a confident, adaptable style that can be considered truly English.

The notion that the vine scroll motif on the monumental crosses represents the tree of life has been supported by numerous scholars over the past two centuries. The German scholar Dietrich, drawing on the ideas of Ferdinand Piper, who wrote an

¹²⁷ Ernst Kitzinger, “Anglo-Saxon Vine-Scroll Ornament,” *Antiquity* 10 (1936): 61–71.

¹²⁸ Bailey, *Earliest Sculptors*, 52–53.

¹²⁹ Bailey, *Earliest Sculptors*, 54.

¹³⁰ Bailey, *Earliest Sculptors*, 56.

extensive work on the tree of life in the Christian tradition,¹³¹ concluded the following about the vine scrolls on the Ruthwell Cross:

Designs in the arabesque manner fill the centre of each side: that is, a graceful tree from the bottom to the top. It sends forth various flowers and shoots, and ascends in volutes in which birds and four-footed animals dwell, feeding on the fruits. These items can hardly be interpreted as mere ornaments designed to fill the available space. They are to be understood as symbolic. They signify something like a flowering tree which grows joyfully and is of use to many creatures.¹³²

He later adds, “Our image of the vine *is certainly to be recognized as the tree of life* (italics added) which, putting forth various flowers and fruits, gives life to living creatures of all kinds. It is difficult to say whether this is to be thought of as the Tree of Future Life with its twelve different kinds of fruit, or the Cross, which gives eternal life to those who partake of it.”¹³³ As shall be demonstrated in a later chapter, choosing whether the vine scroll here represents the tree of the cross or the tree of life to come (as described in Revelation 22:2), is not required: they are typologically linked, and in the timeless realm of God's existence become one and the same.

A more recent interpretation of the vine scroll at Ruthwell reveals a further dimension to its associations with biblical trees. Jennifer O'Reilly stated that, “in a single unifying image the sculptural decoration of the narrow sides [of the Ruthwell Cross] reveals Christ to be the Tree of Life, that is, the axis at the centre of the world joining heaven and earth and providing spiritual food and healing for all.”¹³⁴ Ó Carragáin, the prolific scholar of

¹³¹ Ferdinand Piper, “The Tree of Life,” op. cit.

¹³² Translated by Ó Carragáin, *Ritual*, 48–49, from Franz E. C. Dietrich, *De Cruce Ruthwellensi et de Auctore Versuum in illa Inscriptorum qui ad Passionem Domini Pertinent* (Marburg: Elwert, 1865), 6.

¹³³ Ó Carragáin, *Ritual*, 48–49.

¹³⁴ O'Reilly, *Authority*, 153.

the Ruthwell Cross, agreed. For him, the vine scrolls on the narrow sides of the Ruthwell Cross must be taken together with the carved panels on the cross's broad sides; in fact, their presence serves to yield a unified sculptural program, for “they emphasize that *the cross is fundamentally a tree* (italics added): an image, central to pre-Christian Germanic religion, which in Christian culture became the *arbor vitae*, an image of the *mysterium fidei*.”¹³⁵

2.7 The Pagan Background of the World Tree

That the Anglo-Saxons frequently considered the cross as a great tree, akin to the tree of life, has been amply illustrated above. In chapter 4, I trace the rich patristic tradition of this association and the key patristic sources which were or could have been known in Anglo-Saxon England. There remains to be discussed, however, another possible influence on the Anglo-Saxons' conception of the cross-tree, namely the pagan worship of trees, and in particular, the great world-tree.

That pagan worship of trees continued to plague areas that had been converted to Christianity in England and on the continent is attested in a variety of sources. For example, Boniface, in his mission to convert the Germans, destroyed a great “oak of Jove” (*robor Iobis*) in Hesse, c. 723–4. Later in the same century, Charlemagne cut down *Irmingsûl*,¹³⁶ the Saxon “world pillar.”¹³⁷ Penitential handbooks also provide witnesses to the continued problem of tree-worship among the people. For example, an

¹³⁵ Ó Carragáin, *Ritual*, 285–287.

¹³⁶ For a discussion of the word *Irmingsûl* and its role in Germanic mythology see Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, James Steven Stallybrass, trans. 4 vols. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882), vol. 1, 115–119.

¹³⁷ Wilhelm Levison, *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii Episcopi Moguntini* (Hanover: Hahn, 1905), 31, 135; Friedrich Kurze and Georg Heinrich Pertz, *Annales Regni Francorum* (Hanover: Hahn, 1950), 35.

eighth-century text likely by the pupils of the seventh-century Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore, forbids the making of offerings on trees or wells or stones or railings or anywhere besides a church, calling such practices “sacrifice to demons.”¹³⁸

The eleventh-century Old English translation of Halitgar’s penitential elaborates on this decree as follows: “Some men are so blinded that they take their offerings to a stone made firm in the earth and also to trees and wells, just as witches teach them, and such a man will not understand how stupidly he acts or how this dead stone or that dumb tree can help him or give him health, when these things, for their part, can never move from that place.”¹³⁹ That some of this notion of the healing power of wood passed into a Christian context, is illustrated by the example quoted above of popular belief in the healing powers of small pieces of St. Oswald’s cross. A similar instance is related by St. Willibald, who tells how, growing up as a sickly child in Wessex, his parents took him and placed him before the holy cross of the Lord, as was the custom of the Saxon nation, thereby restoring him to health.¹⁴⁰

In his imaginative book *Heathen Gods*, Richard North cited such examples as proof that “a close relationship between the cult of the cross and popular tree-superstition seems to have continued throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.” North noted also the preference for the Old English words *rod*, *beam*, and *treow* to describe the cross, rather than the rarer Latin loanword *cruc*. This “deep-rooted conceit” led him to seek for a pre-

¹³⁸ Benjamin Thorpe, ed., *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, 2 vols. (London: G. E. Eyre and A. Spottiswoode, 1840), vol. 2, 34. For more on Anglo-Saxon penitential documents see John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Hand-Books of Penance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1979), 179–248. For superstitious practices reflected in the penitentials see John T. McNeill, “Folk-Paganism in the Penitentials,” *Journal of Religion* 13.4 (1933): 450–466.

¹³⁹ Translated in Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 276.

¹⁴⁰ O. Holder-Egger, ed. *Vita Willibaldi Episcopi Eichstetensis*, MGH, *Scriptores* 15.1 (Hanover, 1887): 86–106, especially 88: “sumentes filium suum, obtulerunt illum coram illam dominicam sanctamque crucem Salvatoris...sicut mos est Saxanice genis.”

Christian background for the notion, in the oldest pagan traditions of Norway and Iceland.¹⁴¹

As will be shown more fully below, the description of the Norse world-tree *Yggdrasill* resonates closely with Christian patristic depictions of the tree of the cross cum tree of life. Two early references to *Yggdrasill* survive in *Grímnismál* and *Völuspá*.¹⁴² In *Grímnismál*, Odin describes the ash *Yggdrasill* as the location of the Æsir's judgment (*Grim* 29, 30). He elaborates with further information on the tree's appearance: this cosmic ash tree has three roots, extending down to Hel, the frost-giants and the dwelling-place of mankind (*Grim* 31). A squirrel runs up and down the trunk bearing tidings from the eagle at the top to the dragon down below (*Grim* 32); harts gnaw at its boughs and the dragon at its roots (*Grim* 33–35). *Yggdrasill* thus “endures hardships greater than men can understand,” and “is the best of trees” (*Grim* 35, 44).

The *Völuspá*-poet called *Yggdrasill* a “splendid measuring tree,” the home and symbol of fate (*Vsp* 2, 19), which trembles and groans when the world comes to an end (*Vsp* 47). In the 1230s, the Christian Snorri Sturluson drew on earlier, pagan works when he describes *Yggdrasill* as the gods’ holy place: “the ash is the biggest and best of all trees. Its limbs are spread over the entire world and extend across the heavens. The tree's three roots hold it up and extend extremely widely”¹⁴³ (from *Gylfaginning*, ch. 15).

North’s argument in his Chapter 9: “Ingvi's Death: The World-Tree Sacrifice,” all the aspects of which cannot be discussed in detail here, is that the *Dream of the Rood* “described the crucifixion using words with which an Anglian myth of [the dying and

¹⁴¹ North, *Heathen Gods*, 275–277.

¹⁴² See the article by Lotte Motz, “The Cosmic Ash and Other Trees of Germanic Myth,” *Arv* 47 (1991): 127–141.

¹⁴³ From Snorri Sturluson’s *Gylfaginning*, ch. 15. For an edition see Anthony Faulkes, ed. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

resurrecting god] Ingui may once have been told,” and that the *Dream of the Rood* poet “used the language of this myth of Ingui in order to present the Passion to his newly Christianized countrymen as a story from their native tradition.”¹⁴⁴ Drawing evidence from the *Yggdrasill* tradition, as well as the interpretation of the heroic figure Heimdallr’s name as “world-tree” or “world-pillar,”¹⁴⁵ North reasoned that Heimdallr might be interpreted as the father of mankind, with *Yggdrasill* the support of the world. In a stage earlier than that preserved in the surviving Scandinavian records, “older Germanic counterparts of Heimdallr and the ash *Yggdrasill* may have coexisted as aspects of the world tree: positive and benign in the Heimdallr case, malign or suffering where the *Yggdrasil* motif was concerned. Both aspects can be found in the cross in *The Dream of the Rood*.”¹⁴⁶ The further details of North’s argument and his reading of the *Dream of the Rood* in this light need not concern us here; it is his conclusions that are most relevant. First is North’s interpretation of the inhabited vine scroll motif of the Ruthwell cross, also accepted by Ó Carragáin: while the vines, foliage, birds and animals can be explained as products of Italian models, “it might have helped if laymen saw in them images which might now be described as Anglian versions of the Norse eagle, squirrel and goats that appear about the leaves and branches of *Yggdrasill* in *Grimnismal*. By legitimizing a need for leaves and branches on the cross, Roman vine scroll could assist the transition from superstition to doctrine.”¹⁴⁷ Making sure to stress that his argument should by no means be understood to suggest that the *Dream of the Rood* is a heathen poem with a mere Christian veneer, North concludes that later Scandinavian evidence

¹⁴⁴ North, *Heathen Gods*, 273.

¹⁴⁵ North, *Heathen Gods*, 282–284.

¹⁴⁶ North, *Heathen Gods*, 287.

¹⁴⁷ North, *Heathen Gods*, 290.

argues for the possibility of an Anglian world tree and dying god, the vernacular heritage of which may explain why Christ's Crucifixion in *Dream of the Rood* in some ways appears to be presented “as if it were the sacrifice of a young Anglian hero for whom nature mourned.”¹⁴⁸

This chapter has provided ample evidence for the Anglo-Saxons' strong devotion to the holy rood as manifested in literature and art, as well as the pre-Christian traditions of tree-worship that may have underlain it. It is into this milieu that the rood-tree legend, whose earliest extant witness is the early eleventh-century Old English version in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343, entered when it arrived in England. The rood-tree legend, as well as the wood-of-the-cross material contained in the *Post peccatum Adae*, the *Vita Adae et Evae* and their Middle English derivatives, is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁴⁸ North, *Heathen Gods*, 303.

Chapter 3: The Wood of the Cross Before Christ in Latin and English Texts Found in England

3.1 The Rood-Tree Legend in English and Latin

As mentioned above in chapter one, the 1894 publication of A. S. Napier's *History of the Holy Rood-Tree* brought to light an entirely new branch of the wood-of-the-cross legend, unknown to previous scholarship. Napier called this version, edited from the Old English manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343, the rood-tree legend (RTL). This manuscript "R," dated to the third quarter of the twelfth century, is comprised of 205 leaves and contains mainly English homilies, and a few other short Latin and English pieces. The majority of the works by Ælfric (51 homilies, saints' lives and his *Pastoral Epistle*); nine are by Wulfstan. Three other homilies have been edited by Assmann and the remaining fourteen appear in Belfour.¹

Napier knew of related versions of the rood-tree legend in a variety of texts: the Cambridge and Harleian Latin prose versions (Ca, H),² the Andrius fragments (A), the Dutch *Dboec van den Houe* (Db) and its Low German translation, the Middle English *Cursor mundi* (CM), and an Old French poem (F). Of these, all but H, Db and CM lack the story of Seth's journey to paradise, which led Napier to surmise that the original for this "rood-tree group," called by him X, also lacked this narrative element.³ Therefore,

¹ B. Assman, *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, Bibliothek der Angelsächsische Prosa 3A (Hamburg, 1889). O. Belfour, *Twelfth-Century Homilies in ms. Bodley 343*, EETS vol. 137 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1909). For a recent study of the manuscript, see Aidan Conti, "Preaching Scripture and Apocrypha: A Previously Unidentified Homiliary in an Old English Manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 343" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2004).

² For the reader's convenience, the naming of the manuscripts in this part of the discussion follows that of Napier, in case some may wish to consult his edition directly. However, please note that I have also employed these two Latin manuscripts in my edition of the Latin rood-tree legend found in the appendix to this study. There, I have used only single-letter designations for the manuscripts, therefore while the Harleian manuscript remains "H" in my edition, Napier's "Ca" has been shortened to "C" in my edition.

³ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xii.

he reasoned, those texts which do contain Seth's journey (H, *Db*, and *CM*) must have been influenced by some version of, or be related to, *Post peccatum Adae*.

Napier edited the Cambridge Latin prose version (Ca; Cambridge, University Library MS Mm. 5.29, fol. 157) together with the Andrius Old French prose version (A).⁴ Unfortunately, the twelfth-century text in the Cambridge manuscript breaks off near the end, so for this portion Napier turned to the Harleian Latin version (H; London, British Library, Harley 3185), which (as mentioned in chapter 1 above) is actually a composite legend, whose scribe must have used two sources: a copy identical to Ca and another closely related to *Post peccatum Adae*.⁵

Andrius (A), the late thirteenth-century Old French prose text (Paris, BNF, MS 95, fol. 386) takes its name from the monk who names himself on fol. 380. This manuscript, which also contains a French translation of the *Vita Adae et Evae*, appears to be a faithful translation of a copy very closely related to Ca.⁶ While Napier referred to the Andrius text as fragmentary and focused mainly on the material in Andrius related to the rood-tree legend, Quinn's 1980 study of the manuscript revealed that it is actually a three-part narrative with significant interest in its own right. The Andrius text relates the apocryphal *Penitence of Adam and Eve* and the second temptation, the rood-tree legend beginning with Moses, and the Harrowing of Hell.⁷

⁴ The text ends abruptly at §15, l. 250; see my edition of the Latin rood-tree legend, which includes this manuscript, in the appendix to this study.

⁵ Sections 1-b, 3, 4, 10, 14 and 15-2 agree with *Post peccatum Adae* but have different wording; section 8-b does not match either Ca or *Post peccatum Adae*: the tree's growing circumference causes the rings to burst; these fall into the cistern, but are later drawn out and hung in the Temple.

⁶ However, Ca could not have been the exemplar because Andrius does not contain the material present in §12 or the Ca manuscript; see Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xiii.

⁷ Esther C. Quinn, *The Penitence of Adam: A Study of the Andrius MS. (Bibliothèque Nationale Fr. 95 Folios 380r–394v)* (University, MS: Romance Monographs Inc., 1980).

The *Cursor mundi* (CM)⁸ is a fourteenth-century poem that chronicles the whole of history from Creation to the Second Coming. It incorporates the wood-of-the-cross legend into its narrative in pieces, corresponding to the chronology of each section. The following elements appear in it: Seth's mission to paradise (ll. 1237–1432), Moses' dealings with the wood (ll. 6301–6368; 6659–6666; 6937–6946), David and Solomon (ll. 7973–8978); Judas and his mother (l. 15, 961 fols.), the Crucifixion (l. 16, 543 fols.), the burying of the three crosses of Calvary by the Jews (l. 16, 861 fols.) and the finding of the cross (l. 21, 347 fols.). Despite the fact that the wood-of-the-cross episodes are inserted in chronological order, they remain quite distinct from the surrounding material. This led Napier to conclude that the *Cursor mundi* author likely had before him a text dealing exclusively with the cross legend when he wrote his longer narrative. Napier found this source text in the form of an Old French poem (F) found in BNF MS Francais 763,⁹ and demonstrated that a large portion of the wood-of-the-cross material in the *Cursor mundi* corresponds nearly line for line with the French poem, in some cases actually retaining the rhyming words of the original.¹⁰ The poem, however, does not contain *Post peccatum Adae* influences as the *Cursor mundi* does.¹¹ Interestingly, the *Cursor mundi* adds the detail (taken from its Old French source) that, after the Crucifixion, the cross bloomed from noon until evening.¹²

⁸ Richard Morris, *Cursor Mundi: A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century*, EETS vols. 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99 and 101 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1874–1893).

⁹ This Old French poem is now known as the *Traduction Anonyme*. For more on the *Traduction* and the relationship of the *Cursor mundi* to it, see section 3.2.4 below.

¹⁰ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xxiv–xxv.

¹¹ For example, in the Old French poem the tree remains in the Temple until the time of the Crucifixion rather than being thrown into the *piscina probatica* and later being used as a bridge.

¹² *Cursor mundi*, ll. 16859–68: “þe rode it was wit leif and bare/ florist ful selcuthli/ Fra þe middai to complin/ þat mani thought gret ferli/ Bot þof þe Iuus þat it sagh/ thought selcut noght for-þi/ Noiþer þai gaf man, ne tok/ emsample gode þar-bi/ Bot on þe morn o þat grening/ þe tre als ar was dri.”

3.1.1 The Date of the Rood-Tree Legend

While Bodley 343 is twelfth-century in date, Napier assigned the composition of the rood-tree legend itself to the first half of the eleventh century, primarily on linguistic grounds. Specifically, he found the language too archaic for the twelfth century, and considered the obsolescent linguistic conventions to be reproduced too accurately, even for a scribe well-versed in copying Old English manuscripts. Furthermore, a comparison with the other homilies in the manuscript revealed no difference in language. These observations, coupled with the fact that other homilies in Bodley 343 are also transcriptions from Old English originals of the eleventh century, support Napier's dating.¹³ In addition, Napier concluded that the eleventh-century Old English original from which the Bodley 343 text was copied was itself a translation from a Latin original.¹⁴ Thus, the rood-tree legend as it appears in Bodley 343 was written c. 1150–1175 and is separated from the original of the whole rood-tree group (X) by at least one intermediate link. Therefore, that original cannot have been composed later than the early twelfth century. Napier concluded that a fully developed cross legend, which traced the wood's history from Moses to Christ, must have existed in the first half of the twelfth century, or perhaps early in the eleventh century, and that this cross legend was as early or earlier than Meyer's first simple stages.¹⁵ The fragments discovered by Ker and Colgrave/Hyde in the twentieth century confirmed Napier's conclusions.

This episode is now only extant in two manuscripts: London, British Library Cotton Vespasian A iii and Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. theol. 107r.

¹³ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xlvii–lix.

¹⁴ See Napier, *Rood-Tree*, lix and section 9 for linguistic forms which support this.

¹⁵ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xli.

3.1.2 Relations Among the Members of the Rood-Tree Group

The original of the rood-tree group (X) probably contained the Judas story, since it appears in both the Old French poem and *Cursor mundi*. In Napier's scheme, the Latin original of Andrius (A), the Latin original of Harley (H) and the existing manuscript Ca would all have derived from a text (ka) nearly identical to the rood-tree group's original (X). The younger versions, the Dutch *Dboec van den Houe* (Db, a poem of 780 lines preserved in manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) and the thirteenth-century Old French poem (F) are independent of each other and preserve the main outlines of X only with considerable alteration, including the modification or omission of episodes, the replacement of some sections by borrowing, and an overall shortening of the narrative. *Dboec van den Houe* took the Adam-Seth story from *Post peccatum Adae* and prefixed it to X; the author probably also borrowed from Jacob de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*. In the Old French poem we find a detailed description of the Ethiopians who were made white by the holy wood wielded by David, and the Judas legend, which may have been an appendix in X, appears in its proper place chronologically. The *Cursor mundi* is a translation of F that also employed the *Post peccatum Adae* for the Adam-Seth episode, the incidents following Sabilla's martyrdom and the name "Maximilla."

Analysis of the rood-tree group as a whole allowed Napier to determine that while the Bodley 343 text follows X more closely than *Dboec van den Houe* or *Cursor Mundi* and its Old French source, it has also undergone the most radical changes, including the modification of most episodes and in many cases their considerable expansion via the addition of details, the introduction of new characters and insertion of dialogue where

there was once only bare narrative. Napier reasoned that these changes are not the work of the author of the Bodley 343 text, but were present in his Latin original.¹⁶ Hence, Napier presumed the existence of a Latin version with Bodley 343's peculiarities that was intermediate between the rood-tree group's original (X) and the Old English source used by the Bodley 343 scribe.

The Bodley 343 legend lacks the Judas story (A retains it), but this was likely because this tale was just an appendix in the rood-tree group original and was therefore copied into some manuscripts derived from it and not into others.¹⁷ The Judas story is found independently in several manuscripts. Napier prints a late twelfth-century version from Oxford, Jesus College, MS 4, with two variant readings from other manuscripts.¹⁸ In these texts, as in Andrius, the Judas story is prefixed by an abstract of the pre-history of the cross (beginning *Mirabiliter cepit oriri*), epitomized from the rood-tree group's original.

In 1930, J. R. Mozley, unaware of Napier's work, re-edited the Cambridge Latin rood-tree legend (Napier's Ca), collating it with another version (deemed better by him) from Hereford Cathedral Library P.2.IV item 6, folios 133–139.¹⁹ Bob Miller, with assistance from Zbigniew Izydorezyk, compiled a list of nine manuscripts which contain what he refers to as the "Cambridge Latin rood-tree legend."²⁰ These include the Cambridge text edited by Napier (and re-edited by Mozley, 12th century), the Hereford Cathedral Library text (Mozley, mid-12th century), the Harleian version (a combination of

¹⁶ More on this below in section 3.1.5.

¹⁷ *Db* and *Ca* also omit Judas; *CM*, *F* and *H* have it or show traces of it, Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xlvi–xlvii.

¹⁸ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, 68–70; variants from the fourteenth-century Cambridge, University Library, MS Douce 88 and University Library, Ff. 2.8.

¹⁹ J. R. Mozley, "Story of the Cross," op. cit.

²⁰ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 74. The tenth manuscript in my edition is the Harleian text (London, British Library, MS Harley 3185), which Miller does not list here but discusses elsewhere (p. 144).

the rood-tree legend and *Post peccatum Adae*, early 14th century) and seven others. These are: Cambridge, Magdalen College F.4.15 (cat. 15; 13th–14th century; a compilation of the rood-tree legend and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*), Lincoln Cathedral 98 (A.4.6): fols. 161–167 (13th century), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 556 (s. c. 2340; fols. 13–20 (early 13th century), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Fairfax 17 (s. c. 3987; fols. 54, 59–64, late 12th century), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson D 1236 (s. c. 13968; fols. 49–51, 13th century), Paris BNF lat. 3338: fols. 27–30 (c. 1300, damaged at front), and Paris BNF lat. 6755: fols. 47r–56r (13–14th century; a compilation of material from the rood-tree legend, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *Cura sanitatis Tiberii*).²¹ My critical edition, incorporating the previously edited versions (Napier and Mozley) and transcriptions from the other manuscripts can be found in the appendix, while a more detailed comparison of the Latin and English versions of the rood-tree legend follows below in section 3.1.4.

3.1.3 The Influence of Rood-Tree Legend on Vernacular Versions

The Latin rood-tree legend had two definable bursts of influence on the vernacular. The first was confined to the insular and Anglo-Norman regions, and yields the following: the eleventh- and twelfth-century Old English rood-tree legends (Bodley 343 and the Ker and Colgrave/Hyde fragments), the Latin legend of Judas and the Cock (manuscripts are insular, twelfth-century), the thirteenth-century Andrius text (Picard and Anglo-Norman versions), the thirteenth-century Old French *Traduction Anonyme*, the Middle English *Cursor mundi* (c. 1320), and the fourteenth-century Irish text, *Leabhar Breac*.

²¹ For further details on the manuscripts, see my edition in the appendix.

The second burst of influence of the rood-tree legend is in combination with the *Post peccatum Adae*. It is confined to the North Sea littoral zone, and may have occurred via a single exemplar of a rood-tree legend combined with *Post peccatum Adae*. This wave included the early fourteenth-century London, British Library Harley 3185 text (insular), the fourteenth-century Dutch *Dboec van den Houe* and its Low German translation, a fifteenth-century Latin block-book from the Netherlands, Veldener's 1483 text *Geschiedenis* (Dutch and Middle High German), and a fifteenth-century Dutch Life of Christ. This distribution led Miller to remark that not only is the rood-tree legend first attested in Britain, but it "seems to have been diffused in its original form only from and originally largely within the insular and Anglo-Norman cultural sphere."²²

3.1.4 A Comparison of the Rood-Tree Legend As Found in Extant English and Latin Manuscripts

My edition of the Latin text of the rood-tree legend from all known extant manuscripts can be found in the appendix. However, I will here summarize this version of the story so that it may be compared with the English version in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343.

After the Israelites left Egypt, they camped in the desert. One morning, Moses woke to see three shoots around him: one at his head, another at his right side and a third on his left. They were a cypress, a cedar and a pine. Although amazed, Moses did not attempt to touch them. At Helim the rods appeared again and he understood that they signified the Trinity: the cypress the Father, the cedar the Son, and the pine the Holy Spirit. At Raphidim the waters were so bitter that the people could not drink them; there

²² Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 76.

the rods appeared a third time. Moses called out to the Lord about the bitter waters and was inspired to place the rods in them; the waters were miraculously sweetened. Moses took the rods with him into the region of Mt. Sinai. Having placed them in water, Moses ascended the mountain, and after forty days he returned with the stone tablets. When Moses died the Lord Himself buried him and therefore the location of Moses' grave remains unknown even to this day. Before his death Moses planted the rods in the region of Moab. There they stood for many years, neither growing nor losing their leaves, until the time of David.

An angel appeared to King David and told him to journey beyond the Jordan where the Lord would show him the three holy rods which Moses had set there. The angel revealed that the rods signified the Holy Trinity and that through them the whole world would be illuminated. The next day David set out with a great host of companions. One morning he awoke and saw that three shoots had arisen around him: one at his head, another at his right side and a third at his left. David prayed to the Lord to tell him whether these were the holy rods the angel had spoken of. A voice from heaven confirmed this and told David to take up the rods because they were full of sacred mysteries and through them the world would be redeemed. David cured many sick people with the rods and afterward brought them to Jerusalem.

David heard of a certain powerful man called Ioxilus, who was infirm in all his limbs. When David brought the rods to him he was completely healed. After David had crossed back over the River Jordan, four Ethiopians came to meet him. When they saw the holy rods, they adored them and exclaimed that the rods were full of mysteries and that the whole world would be illuminated through them. Miraculously, all blackness

and deformity vanished from their bodies and they were made completely white and beautiful. The people who saw this were amazed and happy at such a miracle. Soon after David caught sight of a certain leper, who had been living on a mountain for 160 years. The leper prophesied that one had come who would heal him of his infirmity. Immediately David's horse stopped and he extended the hand holding the rods. A flame shot out of them towards the leper's cave and consumed his leprosy. Now restored to perfect health, the man was made a companion of King David.

Having arrived back at Jerusalem in the evening, David placed the rods in the fountain beside his garden, planning to move them into his garden in the morning, but they became so rooted overnight that no one could pull them out. Therefore, David had the garden enlarged by placing a strong fence around the fountain. There the rods grew and in thirty years became a great tree. In the first year they were already united but remained distinct at the summit, so David ordered that a silver ring be made to gird the tree and make it into one. But in the summit the shoots were always allowed to remain divided in significance of the Holy Trinity and to demonstrate their species. After one year, David enlarged the ring so that the tree could grow larger and attached another ring above, so that it might grow taller; he continued this for thirty years. The tree attained such a marvelous magnitude and beauty that it was nobler than any tree of Lebanon. The tree grew for the next thirty years and the king frequently went to it to pray. Eventually, David began to gather together the resources to build the house of God, but the Lord appeared to him and told him that he, as a warlike man, would not be permitted to build the Lord's house, but that his son Solomon would. When he heard this, David called

together all the princes of Israel and told them what the Lord had said. David then gave Solomon all the plans for the temple.

During the temple construction, the workmen were lacking one beam and could find no suitable tree in the whole region. They persuaded the king to let them cut down the holy tree in David's garden. The king ordered that they take the thirty silver rings off the holy tree and hang them in the temple as a memorial to his father. Later, at the time of the Passion of Christ, the Jews gave those same silver rings to Judas as payment for his betrayal of Christ. When the holy tree was cut down and carried to the temple and hoisted on high to be used in the construction, it seemed to become two cubits shorter. But once put down and measured again, it seemed two cubits longer. It was frequently removed and again put down but continued to increase and decrease until the workmen gave up trying to use it. It had been predestined for the cross of Christ since before the making of the world and miraculously thwarted all attempts to build it into the temple. Solomon ordered the workmen to go seek another tree, and they found one that very same day. Afterwards the holy tree lay in the Lord's temple until the time of the Passion. Solomon completed the Lord's house in seven years.

Many miracles were performed through that tree. Once a certain priest by the name of Ciritius wanted to possess the holy tree, so he sent one hundred men to carry it off for him. When they were not able to move it, the priest himself came to help with a multitude of people. Still they were unable to move it, so they tried to cut it into three parts. But a great fire shot out from the holy beam and burned the priest and sixty of his men. After such a sign the tree was left to lie intact in the Lord's temple until Christ's

cross was made out of it. Another time a certain woman, Sabilla,²³ came into the temple and sat down on the holy beam. Immediately a fire rose up and burned her clothing, causing her to exclaim: “O holy and glorious tree, how happy and blessed are you because on you shall be crucified Christ, who is the life and salvation of us all.” When the Jews heard that she had named Christ, they whipped her and threw her into prison. There an angel came to console her and renamed her Susanna. When she was executed her soul migrated to heaven.

When the time of Christ’s Passion was at hand, the Jews could find no tree suitable to make the cross. Therefore, Caiphas sent three hundred men to take the holy tree from the temple, but they were not able to move it, so Caiphas ordered them to cut off ten ells and to make Christ’s cross out of that. The men did as Caiphas ordered and the cross was quickly prepared and was carried out of the temple by Christ himself.

When Constantine had become emperor, he sent his mother Helena to Jerusalem to find the cross. When she had done so, Helena saw the other part of the holy tree and asked about it. She was told that this was what remained of the tree from which Christ’s cross had been made. Helena prayed for guidance and was told to cut the tree in four parts and send them to the four corners of the world. She left one part to Jerusalem, sent another to Rome, and the third to Alexandria; the fourth she took herself to Constantinople, along with the middle portion of Christ’s cross.²⁴ The holy tree can rightly be spoken of as the cross because the cross was made from that same tree which

²³ This name occurs in a variety of forms, for example Sabilla, Sibilla, Sibila. See the critical apparatus of my edition of the Latin rood-tree legend in the appendix for the variant spellings I encountered. For consistency, I employ the spelling “Sabilla” throughout the main body of the discussion here.

²⁴ Literally “illam sancte crucis Christi medietatem;” see l. 273 of my edition in the appendix.

miraculously grew and showed many signs even before it was dedicated to the body of Christ.

After Christ's cross was identified through the resurrection of a dead man, the holy nails were found. An angel told Helena to make a bit from them and put it in the bridle of the king's horse, which she did. The emperor always put that bridle on his horse and a flame of fire shot forth from his horse's mouth, a sight which converted many thousands. The flame and flash could be seen for the distance of one milestone. After three years an angel told him to remove the holy nails from his bridle and affix them back into the wood of the holy cross. Here the history of the wood of the cross ends.

As the table below illustrates, the Latin and English versions of the rood-tree legend agree consistently in terms of the overall narrative, and in most cases differ only in small details. Having said that, the English text is considerably longer: most of the incidents in the story have been significantly expanded by the addition of new details, the introduction of new characters and the tendency to replace the sparse narrative that the Latin text shows with expansive dialogues. There are three major new incidents introduced in the English, namely the meeting of Moses and David, David's visit to the houses of the Ethiopians, and the continuation of the Sabilla episode with details about her burial.

In the Latin rood-tree legend, Moses plants the rods before his death and years later the angel instructs David as to where to find them, which he does. In the English narrative, Moses and David actually meet! David encounters Moses, knowing he is to ask after a particularly special treasure, but is not aware as to what it is. Moses allows his servant Robii to show David all his treasures except the holy rods. Robii takes it upon

himself to reveal the secret to David and they are both miraculously rendered speechless for a time upon seeing the rods. David prays to the Lord for guidance and an angel appears, ordering him to look at the rods which are burning like tapers. On the angel's orders, David asks Moses for the rods, but Moses has them secretly conveyed away by his servant, with the result that the servant's hands are burnt by the fiery rods. Moses repents of his actions and begs God for forgiveness. David prays to God again and the servant's health is restored. A voice from heaven instructs David to ask Moses again for the rods; he does this and is finally granted them.

The second extended episode is the miracle of the Ethiopians. Instead of encountering a total of four Ethiopians as in the Latin, David meets only two, who recognize the rods and are made beautiful and white through their power. In a new episode, these men invite David to spend the night at their houses, and the king accepts. At first the Ethiopians are not recognized by their wives, so much have their faces been altered. David reveals the holy rods to corroborate the husbands' story of their transformation and their two sons come forward to look at them. The two Ethiopian sons are also miraculously made white, thus bringing the total number of men to four, in agreement with the Latin version.

The final scene of note in the English text is the continuation of the Sabilla story. Here, after her execution at the hands of the Jews, Sabilla's body is to be burnt, but a rich lady rushes forward and takes it by force in order to give the martyr an honourable burial in her home. The Jews, angered at her actions, threaten to burn down her house, but the building in which the body is housed catches fire of its own accord, frightening away the would-be arsonists. Once the house is safe from attack, the flames immediately vanish.

The rich lady tells her son that this miracle was wrought by virtue of the holy tree, and then has a church erected over the coffin in which Sabilla/Susanna's body rests.

Table 2: A Comparison of the Narrative Motifs in the Latin and English Versions of the Rood-Tree Legend²⁵

Motif Number	Description of Motif (bold type indicates a structural motif)	Latin Rood-Tree Legend	English Rood-Tree Legend
17a	The three branches appear to Moses. He recognizes them as symbols of the Trinity.	Y	Y
17h	The second time he recognizes them as symbols of the Trinity.	Y	Y
17j	The three branches appear at Moses' head in the desert of Sur, at Elim and at Raphidim, where the water is bitter.	Y	
17m	At Elim the Jews find water; there are 70 palms and 12 springs.	Y	
17n	At Raphidim Moses sweetens the water with the branches.	Y	
*17o	Moses sweetens thirty springs at Delemia. He has a vessel made and fills it with this water to keep the rods moist.		Y
18a	After having uprooted the branches, Moses carries them with him throughout his wanderings in the desert.	Y	Y
18d	Moses carries the branches with him for 40 years.	Y (implied)	Y
*18g	Moses places the shoots in water before ascending Mt. Sinai	Y	
21a	Before his death Moses plants the branches.	Y	
21g	The branches planted by Moses before his death neither grow nor dry up.	Y	
*21k	Moses plants the branches in the region of Moab.	Y	
22c	No one knows where Moses is buried.	Y	
22e	God buried Moses with his own hands.	Y	
23a	David goes to find the branches. He brings them to Jerusalem.	Y	
*23aa	An angel appears to David and tells him to go beyond the Jordan, where the Lord will show him the three rods Moses placed there, which represent the Trinity.	Y	
*23m	Moses awaits David in Robathi. David journeys eight days to get to Moses. Moses tells his servant Robii to show		Y

²⁵ The motifs in this table are taken from Prangsmä-Hajenius, *La Légende du Bois*, op. cit.

	David all his treasures, but not the rods; Robii shows him secretly. Their power of speech disappears momentarily while seeing the rods.		
*23n	When the shoots appear to David, he prays that the Lord reveal whether these are the holy rods the angel spoke of; a voice from heaven confirms this and tells him to take up the rods.	Y	Y
*23o	David sees the rods burning like tapers.		Y
*23p	David asks Moses for the rods. Moses orders a servant to take them away secretly; the servant's hands are burnt by the fiery rods. David prays; the servant is healed and David acquires the rods.		Y
24a	David cures illnesses with the help of the branches.	Y	
24d	David understands that the three branches symbolize the Trinity.		Y
24e	David heals a rich man with the aid of the branches.	Y	Y
24f	David changes the colour and faces of the Ethiopians who know the power of the branches.	Y (2)	Y (4)
*24ff	David visits the Ethiopians' houses where he also turns their two sons white.		Y
24h	David heals a hermit with leprosy, who dreamt that he would be healed by a branch that David carried. Having been healed, the man joins David's entourage.	Y	Y
24i	David and the people cross the Jordan with the aid of the branches.		Y
25a	At Jerusalem the branches take root and become a single tree.	Y	Y
25b	They take root in a cistern/fountain	Y	Y
25g	After 30 years the branches have become a single tree.	Y	
25h	The branches become a single tree, after which David binds them together with a silver ring.	Y	Y
26a	David surrounds the tree with a wall/fence	Y	(Y)
26b	Each year David encircles the tree/branches with a ring of silver, for 30 years.	Y	Y
*26i	At the tree's summit, the branches remain	Y	

	distinct to demonstrate the Trinity and their three species.		
*26j	David enlarged the silver rings as the tree grew.	Y	
*26k	The tree was greater and more noble than any tree of Lebanon.	Y	
*26l	David planted the tree at Jerusalem in the tenth year of his reign.	Y	
27e	David often sits under the tree.	Y	
28b	David does not have the right to construct the temple; Solomon will do it in his place.	Y	
29f	Solomon has the rings taken to the temple. Later they are given to Judas.	Y	Y
*29h	Solomon has the rings placed in the temple as a memorial to his father.	Y	Y
30a	When there is no success in finding a beam that can be utilized to finish the construction of the temple, the king's tree is cut down; however it refuses to be so used.	Y	Y
30d	On the ground the beam is longer than it is on high.	Y	Y
30k	The carpenters immediately find another tree.	Y	Y
30m	Solomon accomplishes the temple in 7 years.	Y	
*30p	The beam increased and decreased because it was predestined for the cross.	Y	
31a	The tree, unsuitable for the construction of the temple, is venerated in the temple.	Y	Y
*32d	A priest, Ciritiuus/Cericius, sends 100 men to carry off the tree but they cannot move it; he then comes with a multitude of people and they try to cut it. A great fire shoots out of the tree and burns him, along with many of his men.	Y	Y
33a	In the temple a woman (Sabilla) sits on the tree; her clothes catch on fire.	Y	Y
34a	The woman prophesies.	Y	Y
*34g (similar to 34d)	The woman prophesies: "O holy and glorious tree, how happy and blessed are you because on you shall be crucified Christ, who is the life and salvation of us all."	Y	

*34h	The woman prophesies: “Lo, thou blessed tree, on which the Saviour of all the world shall hang!”		Y
35e	Maximilla is thrown into prison; an angel consoles her and calls her Susanna. Later she is killed.	Y	Y
35f	An angel transports her to heaven and calls her “Christian”.		Y
*35g	A wealthy lady takes Susanna’s body and buries it in a stone coffin in her house. The Jews threaten to burn down her house; the lady prays to God. The building miraculously catches fire, frightening the Jews; the fire is then quenched. The lady has a church erected over the holy body.		Y
41a	Miracle of Caiphas.	Y	Y
42a	At the time of the Passion, the miraculous wood is used to make the cross.	Y	Y
42c	The tree serves as the cross on the counsel of an old Jew.		(Y)
42e	To make the cross the tree is cut in two pieces.	Y	Y
*45a	Helena sees the remaining part of the holy tree and asks about it. She is told it is the tree from which the cross was made.	Y	Y
*45b	An angel instructs Helena to cut the wood in four parts and send them to the four corners of the world.	Y	Y
*45c	Helena takes one piece to Constantinople, along with part of the holy cross.	Y	Y
*45d	The whole of the holy tree can truly be thought of as Christ’s cross.	Y	
*45e	Christ’s cross is identified by resurrecting a dead man.	Y	Y
*45f	The Jew who shows Helena the cross is Judas Ciriacus. He is baptized by Pope Silvester. Judas takes the pieces of the holy wood to Jerusalem and Alexandria, while Silvester takes the third to Rome.		Y
*46a	Helena instructed to take the holy nails and make a special bit for Constantine’s horse.	Y	Y
*46b	Constantine always uses the bit on his horse; a flame shoots out of his horse’s	Y	Y

	mouth and many are converted.		
*46c	The flames are visible for a distance of one milestone.	Y	Y
*46d	After three years Constantine is instructed to remove the nails from the bridle and place them back in the holy cross.	Y	Y

* Indicates motifs added to Prangma-Hajenius' original scheme. (Y) indicates that the motif is present in a form that is similar but not identical to that described

3.1.5 Authorship of the Additions and Expansions Found in the English Version of the Rood-Tree Legend

The question remains as to whether these additions were made by the English author or were already present in the Latin original. Napier speculated that there was a Latin version intermediate between the original of the rood-tree group (X) and the version in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343 (R), which already possessed these peculiarities. His argument is well supported by the survival of numerous Latin word-forms that occur in the expanded episodes themselves. For example, Roxilus is addressed by Moses as Roxile (p.14, l. 22);²⁶ the phrase “to Arabiam” presupposes the Latin “ad Arabiam” (p.4, l. 28) and Sabilla is referred to as a “meretrix,” (p. 26, l. 12).²⁷ Although Napier’s argument that a Latin original with R’s peculiarities must have existed, no such manuscript of the Latin rood-tree legend has yet been found.

Napier also suspected that the episode concerning Judas and the miracle of the cock, which is preceded by an epitome of the rood-tree legend, probably appeared in the rood-tree group’s original immediately following the cross legend.²⁸ However, since it

²⁶ All page and line references are to Napier’s edition.

²⁷ Other Latin forms noted by Napier include: *quingaginta finicas* (p. 2, l. 6; p. 10, l. 4), *montem oliveti* (p. 20, l. 23), *carcerem* (p. 26, l. 22), *Constantinopolim* (p. 32, l. 22), *Ciriaceum* (p. 34, l. 1), *Alexandriam* (p. 34, l. 4), *iudas/iudam* (nominative on p. 34, l. 7; accusative on p. 32, l. 33), *helena* (nominative, vocative on p. 32, l. 8, p. 34, l. 10, and dative on p. 34, l. 8, and p. 32, l. 33).

²⁸ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xlvii–xlviii.

was a separate story, it was not included in all the manuscripts derivated from it.

Hence, the Judas narrative (or traces thereof) is present in *Cursor mundi*, its Old French source and the Harleian Latin prose version, while it is absent in Bodley 343 and *Dboec van den Houte* (it is naturally absent in CUL Mm. 5.29, since the manuscript breaks off before the end). The Latin version of the Judas story occurs in a number of independent manuscripts, one of which was edited by Napier.²⁹ Similar tales of a cock brought back to life but with no reference to Judas also exist.³⁰

3.1.6 *Post peccatum Adae* and the Geographical Distribution of its Manuscripts

Miller listed a total of 81 manuscripts of the *Post peccatum Adae*, of which eight are uncertain,³¹ seven are epitomes and one is a compilation.³² As we have seen, the *Post peccatum Adae* has three distinctive features: Seth's three-fold vision of paradise, the gift to Seth of three seeds, and the doubling of the female character who encounters the wood into Maximilla and Sheba/Saba. Meyer had dated the *Post peccatum Adae* (called by him the *Legende*) to the second half of the thirteenth century;³³ Quinn suggested a slightly earlier date based on the existence of some French texts dated before 1250 that appeared to use *Post peccatum Adae* as a source.³⁴ Although no manuscripts of the *Post peccatum Adae* are older than the thirteenth century, Miller cites several other French texts of the late twelfth to early thirteenth century which might push the date of *Post peccatum Adae*

²⁹ See Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xlvii for mention of several other editions of the Latin Judas story; Napier's own edition, printed from Oxford, Jesus College MS No. 4 (late twelfth century) appears on pp. 68–70.

³⁰ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xlvii.

³¹ My understanding is that Miller was not able to verify personally that these eight manuscripts were actually *Post peccatum Adae* texts.

³² Miller, "German and Dutch Veresions," 129–132.

³³ Meyer, *Geschichte*, 123, 130.

³⁴ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 160–161.

slightly earlier.³⁵ He concludes that “this is only compatible with the early date of the French works mentioned above on the assumption that the text originated in France and was spread from France, where many translations were made but hardly any MSS survive, to England and Germany. If the text had originated in England, it could be expected to be represented among the surviving twelfth-century compilations of Latin apocrypha, which are relatively numerous.”³⁶ The earlier date for *Post peccatum Adae* would mean that it pre-existed Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, although that collection does not evidence familiarity with *Post peccatum Adae*. This may have been because of a dearth of manuscripts of *Post peccatum Adae* in Italy, which would support the idea that the text was of north-west European origin, and may have diffused south and east only slowly.³⁷

Given the current data, Miller concluded provisionally that the substance of the *Post peccatum Adae* text derives from two translations from the Greek: one a rood-tree legend and the other a work containing Seth's vision; whether the fusion occurred in Greek or Latin cannot be determined. While the earliest extant vernacular forms come from Northern France, most of the extant Latin manuscripts are insular, which suggests that *Post peccatum Adae* circulated in the Franco-Norman sphere from about the period 1180–1220. There is not enough evidence to determine whether the Greek sources for the rood-tree legend and *Post peccatum Adae* arrived around the same time (c. 1000) or whether they were transmitted independently from one another.³⁸ Of the published wood-of-the-cross texts, Meyer's are the simplest in form. Later texts increase in

³⁵ Miller, “German and Dutch Versions,” 134–135.

³⁶ Miller, “German and Dutch Versions,” 136–137.

³⁷ Miller, “German and Dutch Versions,” 137.

³⁸ Miller, “German and Dutch Versions,” 138.

complexity through Horstmann's, Suchier's, and Lazar's, and end with that of Hill, the most elaborate.³⁹ However, the simplest may not represent the earliest form: an intermediate form could have been the original, from which others were expanded and contracted.⁴⁰

Of the 81 manuscripts of *Post peccatum Adae*, more than half (57%) are preserved in Britain.⁴¹ Of the rood-tree legend and Judas legend (*Mirabiliter cepit oriri, MCO*), 64% of the manuscript copies are held in Britain, with the remaining 36% split evenly between Central/Northern Europe and France. As a control, Miller also calculated the distribution for three other apocryphal texts, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the *Vita Adae et Evae* and the *Revelations* of Pseudo-Methodius; of these, Britain holds only one-fifth to one-third of the manuscripts, with the bulk found in Central/Northern Europe in all three cases.⁴² Clearly, the wood-of-the-cross legends reverse the trend that favours preservation of apocryphal texts in Europe. However, Miller does note that the disproportionately low number of *Post peccatum Adae* manuscripts in France is more than countered by the high number of its vernacular derivatives in that country.⁴³

³⁹ Meyer, "Die Geschichte"; Carl Horstmann, "Nachträge zu den Legenden 10. Vita Prothoplausti Adae et de Ligno Cruce," *Archiv* 79 (1887): 459–470; Hermann Suchier, *Denkmäler Provenzalischer Literatur und Sprache. Erster Band* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1883); Moshe Lazar, "La Légende de 'l'Arbre de Paradis' ou 'Bois de la Crois.'" Poème Anglo-Normand du XIIe Siècle et sa Source Latine, d'Après le Ms. 66, Corpus Christi College Cambridge," *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 76 (1960): 34–63.

⁴⁰ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 139.

⁴¹ Miller calculated these totals in his dissertation, p 140. He appears to have added the numbers slightly wrong. The correct totals should be: Britain, 46 (57%); Central Europe, 24 (30%); France, 4 (5%); Scandinavia, 3 (4%); Spain, 2 (3%); Italy, 1 (1%).

⁴² *Gospel of Nicodemus*: 19% Britain, 49% C/N Europe; *Vita*: 21% Britain, 71% C/N Europe; Ps-Methodius: 33% Britain, 41% C/N Europe; Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 141.

⁴³ Miller, "German and Dutch Versions," 142.

3.1.7 *Post peccatum Adae* and its Relationship to the Rood-Tree Legend

The Latin *Post peccatum Adae* is the source of most of the Middle English cross legends and is evidently related to the rood-tree group. Several important English versions derive directly from *Post peccatum Adae* and preserve its characteristic features. Napier labeled these the “*Legend Group*” (drawing on Meyer’s name of *Legende* for the *Post peccatum Adae*), but here it will be called the “*Post peccatum Adae Group*.” Some of the relevant texts include: *The Story of the Holy Rood*,⁴⁴ the *Canticum de creatione*,⁴⁵ and the version in long lines from the *South English Legendary*;⁴⁶ see section 3.2 and its subsections below. Reminiscences of the wood-of-the-cross legends are also found in the English Mystery Cycles, more on which below in section 3.3.

Clearly, the *Post peccatum Adae* and the rood-tree legend are related. Meyer had considered Andrius, *Cursor mundi* and *Dboec van den Houe* as later developments of the legend, but Napier (who knew more texts than Meyer) concluded that neither the *Post peccatum Adae* nor the rood-tree legend tradition borrowed from the other, but rather that their common features indicated a common source. As described in chapter 1 above, there are many points of agreement between the rood-tree legend and *Post peccatum Adae*. In both accounts Moses finds the rods, takes them with him and performs miracles. David, commanded by God, seeks out the rods and brings them back to Jerusalem where they are placed overnight in a spring or tank where they take root. In both traditions the rods grow together into a single tree, around which a silver ring is fastened each year for thirty years. In the time of Solomon the tree is cut down but

⁴⁴ Edited by Morris, *Legends of the Holy Rood*, from MS Harley 4196, p. 62–86. This is actually one of the manuscripts of the Expanded Northern Passion; see section 3.2.2 below.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the *Canticum de creatione* and editions of the text, see below section 3.2.6.

⁴⁶ Edited by Morris, *Legends of the Holy Rood*, from MSS. Ashmole 43, Harley 2277 and the Vernon MS.

proves unsuitable for use in the construction of the Temple and is laid in the Temple instead.

Both accounts relate the encounter of Sabilla/Maximilla with the holy wood. Finally, at the time of the Crucifixion, a portion of the beam is cut off and used to make Christ's cross. We need not go over again in great detail the main differences in the two traditions;⁴⁷ the main points of divergence are the lack of the Seth narrative, the piscine and the bridge episodes in the rood-tree group and the inclusion, absent in *Post peccatum Adae*, of the finding of the cross by Helena. Of these discrepancies, Napier found the most significant to be the fate of the wood following the Maximilla episode: how it remains in the Temple until the Passion according to the rood-tree legend while the *Post peccatum Adae* recounts how it is thrown into the pool and later used as a bridge which Sabilla refuses to cross.⁴⁸ In this case Napier believed that the rood-tree legend represented the original more faithfully and that the accounts of the two different women (Maximilla and Sabilla) in *Post peccatum Adae* represented a doubling of what was originally a single episode. The repetition of the character may have occurred with the amalgamation of two distinct versions of the story, one in which the wood was seen in the Temple, the other in which it was encountered as a bridge.⁴⁹ Because the rood-tree legend preserves an earlier form of the legend than *Post peccatum Adae*, it could not have

⁴⁷ See section 1.3 in chapter 1 above.

⁴⁸ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xxxix.

⁴⁹ As support for this theory Napier (*Rood-Tree*, xxxix) cited what he saw as an earlier version of the episode, preserved in a Greek version of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, entitled *De sancta cruce*. Here the holy wood, when found unsuitable for construction purposes, is placed in the Temple as a seat; it is there that the Queen of Sheba sees it, refuses to sit upon it and makes her prophecy. Solomon then has the wood set up facing east and there it stays until the Passion. Here the prophetess is still the Queen of Sheba and her refusal to sit parallels Sybilla's refusal to cross the bridge.

derived from it; this conclusion is further confirmed by the absence of the Adam-Seth narrative in the rood-tree legend.⁵⁰

The story of the rods under Moses also varies in detail in the rood-tree group as compared with *Post peccatum Adae*. It may be that their common source provided few details in this section and the separate authors expanded it differently. For example, the *Post peccatum Adae* author may have incorporated the Adam-Seth episode from another source, while the author of the rood-tree group's original borrowed more heavily from the Bible, connecting Moses' finding of the rods with the Israelites' search for water in the desert.⁵¹

Clearly, when the Latin rood-tree legend, the oldest representative of the wood-of-the-cross legend in any language, arrived in England in the early to mid-eleventh century, it was welcomed by a country whose devotion to the holy cross was already strong. It was translated into Old English, Anglo-Norman and Old French, later radiating into the great Middle English history of the world, the *Cursor mundi*. Alone and in combination with the *Post peccatum Adae*, the rood-tree legend was distributed around the North Sea littoral zone, finding its way into fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Latin, Dutch and German texts. As noted above, the *Post peccatum Adae* enjoyed a disproportionately high popularity in Britain; more than half of the extant manuscripts originated there. In England, the *Post peccatum Adae* went on to appear in numerous English compilations, and its narrative may even have infiltrated the English Mystery Play cycles.⁵² The latter part of this chapter specifically details these English adaptations.

⁵⁰ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xl.

⁵¹ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xlii.

⁵² See section 3.3 below.

3.2 English Derivatives of the Main Latin Wood-of-the-Cross Narratives

Most of the manifestations of the wood-of-the-cross legend discussed below are English derivatives of the two main Latin texts relating the wood-of-the-cross narrative, namely the *Post peccatum Adae* and the interpolated *Vita Adae et Evae*. Only two of these English texts are members of the rood-tree group: the English rood-tree legend in Bodley 343 and the monumental Middle English poem *Cursor mundi*; although, in the case of the latter the cross legend material includes details derived from the *Post peccatum Adae* tradition, specifically Seth's quest for the oil of mercy (see section 3.2.4 below). These English derivatives, comprising both prose and metrical examples, are mostly late medieval in date (fourteenth- and fifteenth-century), and range from texts surviving in unique manuscripts to widespread and influential works extant in many manuscripts. A flowchart illustrating the relationships of the main texts appears below on page 125.⁵³

3.2.1 The *South English Legendary*

The *South English Legendary*,⁵⁴ a metrical collection of saints' lives and readings on the feasts of the church, was composed by an unknown author writing in Middle English in the southwest of England c. 1270–1285. The first edition was published in the late nineteenth century by Horstmann.⁵⁵ This edition was supplemented and superseded

⁵³ Please note that this flowchart was conceived as a visual aid to the main relationships among the texts and cannot fully illustrate every relationship and influence (for example, postulated intermediary texts are not shown).

⁵⁴ No. 302 in J. Burke Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, 11 vols. (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1970), vol. 2.

⁵⁵ Carl Horstmann, *The Early South-English Legendary*, EETS vol. 87 (London: Trübner, 1887).

by that of D'Evelyn and Mill in 1956.⁵⁶ Today the text is known in more than 60 manuscripts, causing it to rank as one of the most popular texts of the Middle English period.⁵⁷ See Manfred Görlach's important study for a discussion of the difficulties in determining the end users of the South English Legendary based on the scarcity of medieval records of provenance for the manuscripts.⁵⁸

The cross legend in the *South English Legendary* extends to approximately 520 lines and covers all three main parts of the story: the Early History of the wood, the *Inventio* and the *Exaltatio*. The Early History occurs in a total of twenty-one manuscripts, twenty manuscripts plus the abbreviated version in the Brotherton Manuscript (Brotherton 501). Two manuscripts (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 1486 and Winchester Cathedral 33a) are arranged differently in that they begin with the Invention and insert the Early History between incidents.⁵⁹ The Early History in the *South English Legendary* follows the *Post peccatum Adae* for the most part but begins with a thirty-line prologue on Adam's life. There is no Maximilla in this version, but the motifs of the bridge, the visit of the Queen of Saba and the throwing of the wood into the piscine following the Queen of Saba's prophecy are present.

⁵⁶ Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, *The South English Legendary*, EETS vol. 235 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956). D'Evelyn and Mill's edition employs Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 145 and London, British Library, MS Harley 2277, with variants from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 43 and London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius D.IX.

⁵⁷ Klaus P. Jankofsky, ed. *The South English Legendary: A Critical Assessment* (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 1992), ix.

⁵⁸ Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, Leeds Texts and Monographs, New Series 6 (Leeds: University of Leeds School of English, 1974), pp. 45–50. See also M. E. Wells, "The Structural Development of the South English Legendary," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 41 (1942): 320–344.

⁵⁹ The legend is here titled *Historia sanctae crucis*.

The main editions of the cross legend material from the *Legendary* are by Morris,⁶⁰ who printed two versions of the cross story on facing pages, titling them “Þe Holy Rode” (edited from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 43) and “Hou Þe Holy Cros Was Y-Founde,” printed from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Vernon Manuscript.⁶¹ The cross legend text also appears in D’Evelyn and Mill’s EETS volume.⁶² The Brotherton manuscript was edited in an MA thesis by J. P. Toomey.⁶³

3.2.2 The Northern Passion and the Northern Homily Collection

The *Northern Passion*,⁶⁴ an important source for the English Mystery Plays,⁶⁵ was written in the north of England by an unknown author in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in order to instruct the laity in religious matters. It presents stories in a popular form, much like the *Cursor mundi* or the *Southern Passion*. This work, actually titled *Passio domini nostri ihesu christi* in the manuscripts, was dubbed the *Northern Passion* by Horstmann in order to distinguish it from the *Southern Passion*. There are eleven manuscripts of the “original version” of the *Northern Passion*, plus three others which lengthen the story, for a total of fourteen.

The *Northern Passion* is a translation into octosyllabic verse of an Old French original. The unknown English author did make some editorial changes to his source by

⁶⁰ Morris, *Legends of the Holy Rood*, 18–47.

⁶¹ Shelf mark: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet.a.1.

⁶² D’Evelyn and Mill, *The South English Legendary*, 167–174.

⁶³ J. P. Toomey, “An Edition of a Middle English Metrical Version of the Legends of the Holy Cross” (MA diss., University of Leeds, 1959).

⁶⁴ Severs, *Manual*, No. 303. The primary editions of the Northern Passion are found in volumes of the Early English Text Society. Frances A. Foster, *The Northern Passion: French Text, Variants and Fragments, etc.*, EETS original series vols. 145 and 147 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1913–1916) edited the work from Cambridge, University Library, Dd. 1.1, Gg. 1.1, Ii. 4.9 and Gg. 5.31 as well as London, British Library, Addit. 31042. W. Heuser and F. A. Foster later produced a supplemental volume: *The Northern Passion Supplement: Cambridge University MS. Gg. 1. 1. Oxford MS. Rawlinson poetry 175* (London : H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1930).

⁶⁵ See below, section 3.4.

rearranging some of the narrative, omitting some extra-Biblical material while inserting several new, popular traditions, and in general becoming freer with his source as he progressed through the work.⁶⁶ The Old French *Passion* itself was written by an unknown author about a century before the English translation, at the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century; it is extant in twenty manuscripts.⁶⁷ This narrative, which recounts the death of Christ from the conspiracy of the Jews through the Resurrection, occurs separately or in combination with the Harrowing of Hell based on the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. The Old French *Passion* employed the Bible itself as its main source and likely drew its legendary material from the *Historia scholastica* and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. For the legend of the cross, the Old French poem employed Belet's *Rationale divinorum officiorum* and Herman de Valenciennes's *Bible*. The *Northern Passion* author drew on the Old French *Passion* for his material on the wood of the cross, but also employed the *Post peccatum Adae*, and possibly a text from the rood-tree group.⁶⁸

Five manuscripts of the *Northern Passion*, dated to the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries, include the Early History of the wood of the cross. This part of the narrative, which begins the story with David, is 142 lines in length, expanded from 26 lines in the Old French *Passion*. This version contains the bridge and pool episodes, but no mention of Maximilla or Sabilla; consequently, Sabilla's prophecy is also missing. This led Foster to describe the cross legend in the *Northern Passion* as a "mere patchwork."⁶⁹ However, two manuscripts of the *Northern Passion* lengthen the cross story: Cambridge,

⁶⁶ Foster, *The Northern Passion*, vol. 147, 2.

⁶⁷ See Foster, *The Northern Passion*, vol. 147, 49–58.

⁶⁸ Foster, *The Northern Passion*, vol. 147, 67.

⁶⁹ Foster, *The Northern Passion*, vol. 147, 70.

CUL Gg. 5.31 (fols. 161v–164v), dated to the second half of the fourteenth century, has 299 lines relating the *Post peccatum Adae*, but omits Seth’s visions into paradise as well as the silver rings used to decorate the tree. The fifteenth-century Thornton Manuscript (London, British Library Addit. 31042 [fols. 40v–45v]) has a version that is longer still: there are 90 lines on the early life of Adam, a lacuna of about 100 lines, followed by 595 lines recounting the visions of Seth and the rest of the story from *Post peccatum Adae*. However, having said that, there are a number of odd features to this version in the Thornton Manuscript. The most interesting for our purposes two. First, in Seth’s third vision, instead of seeing his brother Abel’s soul in the roots of the great tree, reaching down to hell, he sees him sitting on the tree of joy.⁷⁰ Second, the Jews are given a secondary motive for placing the wood across the stream as a bridge: not only do they want the trampling feet to stamp out the beam’s power, but they hope that men will “mys fare” who tred on it with “feete bare!”⁷¹

The *Northern Passion* also exists in an expanded version with about 1000 lines more; this is extant in three manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library Bodley 14667 (Rawlinson Poetry 175), dated c. 1340–60 (Early History at fols. 65v–70v), London, BL Cotton Tiberius E. vii, dated c. 1390–1410 (Early History at fols. 174v–179r), and Harley 4196,⁷² dated to the beginning of the fifteenth century (Early History at fols. 76v–81r). This *Expanded Northern Passion* was written c. 1350 by an unknown author who was also responsible for expanding the *Northern Homily Collection*.⁷³ The cross story in the *Expanded Northern Passion* was composed quite independently from that in the original

⁷⁰ Foster, *The Northern Passion*, vol. 145, p. 151, lines 117–121.

⁷¹ Foster, *The Northern Passion*, vol. 145, p. 166, lines 618–619.

⁷² Morris, *Legends of the Holy Rood*, EETS vol. 46 also printed this expanded version of the cross legend from the Northern Passion, under the title “The Story of the Holy Rood,” pp. 62–86.

⁷³ Foster, *The Northern Passion*, vol. 147, 3–5; Severs, *Manual*, 304.

poem; it utilizes the *Post peccatum Adae* but also employs numerous details from the *Vita Adae et Evae* tradition. These include the sickness of Adam, the account of the Fall, the angel's promise to Seth at the gate of paradise, and the burial of Adam. There are also significant omissions from the *Post peccatum Adae* material: the names of the four rivers of paradise (*PpA* §6), Seth's second vision (*PpA* §8), the words of God to Moses (*PpA* §16), the speech of the men whom David healed (*PpA* §18), the lights and guards left to watch over the rods in the cistern (*PpA* §18), David's speech at finding the rods rooted (*PpA* §19), the name of the pool into which the wood is thrown (*PpA* §25), and the name of the water over which the beam is used as a bridge (*PpA* §26). This combination of *Post peccatum Adae* and *Vita* material was likely not made by the author of the *Expanded Northern Passion*, but was already present in his Middle English source.⁷⁴

The *Northern Homily Collection*, which is extant in twenty manuscripts, was also adapted from an Old French original and is contemporary with the *Northern Passion*. This work contains sermons for the Sundays of the church year. The *Northern Homily Collection* appears in two manuscripts that also contain the *Northern Passion*, namely Cambridge, University Library Gg. 5.31 and Dd. 1.1. As mentioned above, the author of the *Expanded Northern Passion* is the same author responsible for the *Expanded Northern Homily Collection*. The expanded version of the *Northern Passion*'s cross legend occurs in two manuscripts of the *Northern Homily Collection* under the discourse for Good Friday: London, BL Cotton Tiberius E. vii and Harleian MS 4196. The most recent edition of the *Northern Homily Cycle* is by Anne Thompson.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Foster, *The Northern Passion*, vol. 147, 80.

⁷⁵ Anne B. Thompson, *The Northern Homily Cycle*, Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008).

3.2.3 The *Cursor mundi* and its Old French Source the *Traduction Anonyme*

The *Cursor mundi*⁷⁶ comprises approximately 30,000 lines of verse in short rhyming couplets. It exists in nine surviving manuscripts, of which the three oldest are all of northern origin and are dated paleographically to the first quarter of the fourteenth century. However, the manuscripts bear witness to even earlier versions of the poem.⁷⁷ Structurally, the poem presents a providential view of history, organized according to the Augustinian view of seven ages.

The 270-line prologue allows one to gain a sense of the poem's audience and socio-literary milieu. For example, in lines 231–250 the *Cursor*-poet claims to be writing for the common English people, particularly those who do not understand French, but this is likely a formulaic convention.⁷⁸ In all, the prologue outlines the poem's contents, structure, its nature and title, the poet's intention in writing the piece and its expected impact on the audience. The poet may have been influenced to write in English rather than Latin or French due to a combination of "socio-linguistic awareness, professional enthusiasm and nationalistic pride"; he was also keenly aware of French biblical narratives and may have wanted to compete with popular vernacular romances.⁷⁹

The number and nature of the surviving texts indicate that the *Cursor mundi* attracted the attention of a geographically and socially diverse English audience.⁸⁰ The three oldest manuscript witnesses, Edinburgh, Royal College of Physicians (E), British Library, Cotton Vespasian A iii (C) and Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats-und

⁷⁶ For a good overview of the poem and its context, see John J. Thompson, *The Cursor Mundi: Poems, Texts and Contexts*, Medium Ævum Monographs, new series vol. 19 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1998).

⁷⁷ Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 1.

⁷⁸ Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 8.

⁷⁹ Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 10-12.

⁸⁰ For a detailed description of the manuscripts see Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 30–46.

Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. theol. 107r (G), are dated to 1300-1325 and show dialect features from the West Riding of Yorkshire. Cambridge, Trinity College, R. 3.8 (T), London, College of Arms (Herald's College), Arundel Press LVII (H) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Fairfax 14 (F) date to the fourteenth century, with the first two possibly copied near Lichfield and the last having Lancashire associations. The last three manuscripts, London, British Library, Additional 31042 (Add.; North Riding, Yorkshire), British Library, Additional 36983 (B; Bedfordshire/Warwickshire area) and British Library, Laud Misc. 416 (L; unknown provenance), are all fifteenth century in date. The physical appearance of the less-expensively produced early manuscripts suggests that they were made for entertaining and instructing their English listeners; G is more lavish. Textual evidence in C, G and F suggests continued accretion of material in the *Cursor mundi*. In B and Add. the text is reduced considerably.

There are two modern editions of the *Cursor mundi*. The first is Richard Morris' parallel-text edition for the Early English Text Society (1874–1893). He knew of eight of the nine extant manuscripts (London, British Library, Additional 31042 was unknown to him), and used four in his edition, presented in parallel columns (C, G, F, T). An edition of the so-called “Southern Version” has been prepared by Sarah Horrall and a team at the University of Ottawa using T, H, L and B, with H as the base text. Horrall describes this version as “not a corrupt copy of a northern poem, but a new poem, substantially changed in language and scope from its original.”⁸¹ The sources for the legend of the wood of the cross in the *Cursor mundi* are the *Post peccatum Adae* (for Seth's vision and quest) and the second part of the Old French *Traduction Anonyme de la Bible: Le Roman de la*

⁸¹ Sarah M. Horrall, ed. *The Southern Version of the Cursor Mundi*, 5 vols. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1978–2000), vol. 1, p. 12.

Création du Monde ou des Oeuvres de Dieu (what Napier had referred to as the Old French poem).⁸²

The *Traduction Anonyme* was one of two French biblical versions used by the *Cursor mundi* poet, the other being the *Bible* of Herman de Valenciennes. The *Traduction Anonyme* is not really a “Bible” but rather a collection of heroic stories from Genesis and Exodus, with the addition of the legend of the wood of the cross and New Testament material on the Passion. The most complete manuscript is the fourteenth-century Paris, BNF f. fr. 763 edited by Julia Szirmai. This manuscript was once assumed to contain two separate works: an Old Testament biblical history (Part I) and the legend of the wood of the cross (Part II): for example, Napier treats *Traduction Anonyme* II as a separate work,⁸³ while Bonnard (note 34) describes I and II as a single work.⁸⁴

The *Traduction Anonyme* poet comments on his source for the wood-of-the-cross legend at lines 7756–7759, stating that he was working from a Latin source that traced the legend from the death of Adam. However, manuscript BNF f. fr. 763 does not preserve this opening part of the narrative, nor do the other fragments of Part II; instead, line 7168 commences with the story of Moses and the rods. Fragments of *Traduction Anonyme* II are found in Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS f. fr. 3516 (thirteenth century) and BNF f. fr. 12555, a fifteenth-century copy of BNF f. fr. 763.

The version of the wood-of-the-cross legend in the *Traduction Anonyme* ultimately derives from the rood-tree group. One *Traduction Anonyme* manuscript, the

⁸² Julia C. Szirmai, ed. *La Bible Anonyme du MS Paris BN f. fr. 763* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1985). For a visual representation of the cross-related portions of the *Cursor mundi* as derived from these two sources, see the table in Thompson, 138. For a full list of vernacular source texts for the *Cursor mundi*, see Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 100–101.

⁸³ Napier, *Rood-Tree*, xxiii–xxxi.

⁸⁴ Jean Bonnard, *Les Traductions de la Bible en Vers Français au Moyen Age* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1884), note 34; see also Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 122.

fourteenth-century Montpellier, Bibliothèque de l'Ecole de Médecine, MS f. fr. 437, seems to be derived from a text that had already been influenced by Herman's *Bible*. Therefore, it must be kept in mind that the version used by the *Cursor*-poet might not have resembled any one of this work's surviving manuscripts very closely; the poet may have had a source that was an even more ambitious combination of the *Traduction Anonyme* and Herman.⁸⁵ The *Cursor*-poet's main purpose in mining the *Traduction Anonyme* may have been to enhance a pre-existing *Cursor mundi* version of Bible stories.⁸⁶

Herman de Valenciennes appears to have had little to no interest in the wood-of-the-cross legend. The pre-history of the cross is in no other known source of the *Cursor mundi* except the *Traduction Anonyme*. Borrowings from the *Traduction* for the cross history occur at lines 6301–68, 6657–66, 6937–46, 7973–8508, 8757–8978, 15961–98, 16543–610, 16859–68, 16913–22 and 21347–802. It is perhaps worthy of note that the *Cursor*-poet lists only the Invention material (ll. 21407–802) as a separate item in his list of contents in the work's prologue. He clearly intended to integrate the wood-of-the-cross material smoothly into the pre-existing Middle English biblical narrative; the result shows varying degrees of success.⁸⁷

It is likely that the *Traduction Anonyme* poet's comments about how his Latin source for the wood-of-cross legend began with the story of the death of Adam alerted the *Cursor*-poet to the fact that the *Traduction* did not preserve the complete early history of the cross. Lines 1237–430 of the *Cursor mundi*, which tell of Seth's quest, are

⁸⁵ Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 126.

⁸⁶ Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 127.

⁸⁷ See Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 128 for comments on the poet's success in weaving the rood-tree material into the biblical history.

ultimately derived from *Post peccatum Adae*; however, the *Cursor*-poet may have found this *Post peccatum Adae* passage in an emended version of the *Traduction*. This suggestion is supported by the fact that the episode of Seth's quest is the only known borrowing the *Cursor*-poet made from *Post peccatum Adae*.⁸⁸

The *Cursor*-poet's main contribution to the form of the story as found in the *Traduction Anonyme* was to disrupt the narrative sequence. He may have realized that inserting wood-of-the-cross legendary material at appropriate points would give readers the impression that they were being led on a predetermined route through the ages, from Creation to the Passion; however, the brief narrative comments the poet inserted "make transparent the practical effects of embedding *Traduction Anonyme* II translated material in a pre-existing *Cursor mundi* narrative."⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the presence of the legendary material related to the cross in the *Cursor mundi* serves its purpose as a common thread that helps weave together the vast expanses of biblical history in this extended poem.

3.2.4 The Middle English Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's *Bible en François*

Another English work that contains a short account of the wood-of-the-cross legend is the Middle English translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's *Bible en François*.⁹⁰ This thirteenth-century Old French didactic work combines both narrative and exposition and was written in order to instruct literate laymen. About two thirds of the work recounts biblical, legendary and apocryphal tales, while the remaining third is expository in nature. The French work is extant in eleven manuscripts, seven unabridged and four

⁸⁸ Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 136.

⁸⁹ Thompson, *Cursor Mundi*, 137.

⁹⁰ Phyllis Moe, *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en François ed. from Cleveland Public Library, MS W q091.92-C468* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977).

abridged, while excerpts containing the Veronica legend and the *Destruction of Jerusalem* are found in five further manuscripts.⁹¹

The extant Middle English translation is found in a unique manuscript in the John G. White Collection of the Cleveland Public Library, MS W q091.92–C468. This example, which also contains an abridged version of the *Brut* and 34 lines of *Cur mundus militat*, is fifteenth century, but the *Bible en François* was certainly known in England before this date.⁹² The English version in the Cleveland manuscript is a fairly faithful rendition of chapters 5–24 of the *Bible*; the translator often not only duplicated his French source's sentence structure but even chose words similar to the French when possible.⁹³

The sources for the *Bible en François* include Latin biblical histories, devotional treatises and a narrative of the Passion, perhaps something similar to Pseudo-Anselm's *Dialogus beatae Mariae et Anselmi de passione domini*. The author also employed, among other texts, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the *Tractatus de planctu beatae Mariae virginis* and possibly Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*.⁹⁴ For the legend of the cross, the *Bible*'s author wove together details from the *Post peccatum Adae* with elements from *La Queste del Saint Graal* or the *Estoire* (most likely the latter⁹⁵). The holy wood's sweet odour, the prophecy regarding the Crucifixion, the decoration of the tree with silver, its use as a bridge and eventually the cross are all elements derived from *Post peccatum Adae*, while the information that the tree was taken by Eve from paradise,⁹⁶ its red leaves and inability to bear fruit,⁹⁷ its association with Noah,⁹⁸ and the

⁹¹ See Moe, *Roger d'Argenteuil*, 13–14.

⁹² Moe, *Roger d'Argenteuil*, 9.

⁹³ Moe, *Roger d'Argenteuil*, 31–32.

⁹⁴ Moe, *Roger d'Argenteuil*, 20.

⁹⁵ Moe, *Roger d'Argenteuil*, 29–30.

⁹⁶ From chapter 6: "And Eve bare in hir hand a braunch of the appultre, and Adam sette it in the erth."

way it bled when cut⁹⁹ all come from the Grail romance. The portion of the text relating to the cross material can be found in Moe's edition, chapter 6 (p. 46, ll. 25–28) and chapter 13 (p. 61, l. 18 to p. 62, l. 8).

3.2.5 Middle English Prose Adaptations of the *Post peccatum Adae*

There are two different known prose adaptations of the *Post peccatum Adae* in Middle English. The first version occurs as an appendage to the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and is eight folios long.¹⁰⁰ It follows the *Post peccatum Adae* from the quest of Seth to the point when Simon takes up Christ's cross, and is a close rendering of the Latin text. It exists in a single manuscript: Worcester Cathedral Library, MS.F. 172 (fols. 13r–16r), which was compiled in the third quarter of the fifteenth century by a scribe active in London during the reign of Edward IV.¹⁰¹ The only edition is that of Betty Hill.¹⁰² The manuscript seems to have been designed as a work for consultation, possibly for a religious community whose members had limited Latin literacy, or for lay members of a church or guild.¹⁰³ Hill found the cross narrative in the Worcester manuscript significant because, at the time, it was not only the only known extant independent prose version of the *Post peccatum Adae* in Middle English (that is, it is not presented simply as one

⁹⁷ From chapter 6: "And it wexid a gret tre and bare large levis crossid with rede and yaue good savoure, but it bare no frute."

⁹⁸ From chapter 13: "And Noe found it and kept it in much and gret deinte al the while that he lyued for the good sauoure."

⁹⁹ From chapter 13: "And thei sought & founde an olde planke that lay ouer a dicke by the which men passid ouer, and thei toke it and bare it into the cite & made therof a cros. And as thei hue & dressid it, there sprang out of it dropis of blood."

¹⁰⁰ Severs, *Manual*, No. 310.

¹⁰¹ The scribe is known as the Hammond scribe. For more information on him, see Linne Mooney, "John Shirley's Heirs: The Scribes of Manuscript Literary Miscellanies Produced in London in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century," *Yearbook of English Studies*, Special Number 33 (2003): *Medieval and Early Modern Literary Miscellanies and Anthologies in Manuscript and Print*, ed. Phillippa Hardman, 182–98.

¹⁰² Betty Hill, "The Fifteenth-Century Prose Legend of the Cross Before Christ," *Medium Aevum* 34 (1965): 203–222.

¹⁰³ A. I. Doyle, "An Unrecognized Piece of *Piers the Ploughman's Creed* and Other Work by Its Scribe," *Speculum* 34 (1959): 428.

legend among a larger scheme), but was also the only Middle English version known to be a direct translation of the Latin;¹⁰⁴ this statement must now be amended following the discovery of a second Middle English prose translation of the Latin *Post peccatum Adae* (see below). The appearance of the cross legend following the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, as was likely the case in the Latin source of the Worcester version,¹⁰⁵ is not uncommon.

The second Middle English prose adaptation of the *Post peccatum Adae* was first published in the last decade by Taguchi, who edited the text alongside the Latin and an Anglo-Norman translation.¹⁰⁶ Taguchi's new Middle English text is taken from a collection of fourteenth-century devotional treatises written down in the West Midland dialect in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, and preserved in Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2125. Taguchi chose to collate this with the Latin text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 288 and an Anglo-Norman rendition using Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg. 1.1 as a base text.¹⁰⁷ The Anglo-Norman text (beginning "Qui vodra saver et oyer") had already been discussed by Prangmsma-Hajenius under the title of *Penitence Adam* (beginning "Ki voudra oier e saver"), although Taguchi was unaware of Prangmsma-Hajenius's work.¹⁰⁸

The Pepys text is significant in that it has been significantly lengthened (it is approximately 40% longer than the Latin text) and altered to suit its audience, which may

¹⁰⁴ Hill, "Fifteenth-Century Prose Legend," 204. However, scribal errors indicate that the Worcester text is actually a copy of the original manuscript that translated the Latin (p.205).

¹⁰⁵ Hill, "Fifteenth-Century Prose Legend," 205. For her edition of the Middle English version, Hill employs for comparison the Latin text of *Post peccatum Adae* from Cambridge, University Library, MS. Gg. 4.25, fols. 83r–85v, which also follows a *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

¹⁰⁶ Mayumi Taguchi, "The Legend of the Cross before Christ: Another Prose Treatment in English and Anglo-Norman," *Poetica* 45 (1996), 15–61.

¹⁰⁷ Taguchi collated the base text with four other fourteenth-century manuscripts (Cambridge, Trinity College MS O.1.17; London, British Library, MS Arundel 507; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce d.6; and Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique MS II 282).

¹⁰⁸ Prangmsma-Hajenius, *Légende du Bois*, 28. Prangmsma-Hajenius knows this work in seven manuscripts, four of which are Anglo-Norman (including the five texts used by Taguchi).

not have been well educated. Information is repeated for clarity and explanatory details added: for example, when Seth signs himself with “theta” as Adam had told him, a passage relating Adam’s instructions is inserted.¹⁰⁹ A few other changes in the narrative are more interesting and significant, although only two of these affect the wood-of-the-cross part of the story. The first of these is the sign Seth makes at Adam’s instruction. In the Latin text it is “thet(h)a” or “t(h)au,” but the Pepys narrative gives “techil” instead; Taguchi speculates that this may be a version of the word “tekel,” one of the mysterious words that appear in Daniel 5:25–27, in the well known “writing on the wall” incident, perhaps chosen because it was believed to have talismanic significance.¹¹⁰ The second change occurs during Christ’s Crucifixion, when he is given help to carry his cross. The Latin names the man as Simon of Cyrene (as in the New Testament: Matt. 27:32, Mark 15:21 and Luke 23:26), but Pepys leaves him unnamed. Taguchi notes the emphasis in Pepys on the pain and blood of Jesus, as well as the hastiness of the Jews in their zeal to crucify him, details also echoed in *Cursor mundi* (ll. 16595–98), the *Northern Passion* and the Towneley and York plays of the *Procession to Calvary*; Taguchi suggests that the scribe of Pepys may have been influenced by religious drama.¹¹¹

Two other notable differences occur not in the wood-of-the-cross part of the narrative, but in the Cain and Abel episode. The first is that Abel’s offering to God is shown to be more pleasing than Abel’s because the smoke from the offering went upward while Cain’s went down; this detail also occurs in the English texts of the Vernon narrative (a prose adaptation of the *Vita Adae et Evae*; see section 3.2.7 below), the *Northern Passion* and (in slightly altered form) in the Towneley and N-Town plays of the

¹⁰⁹ Taguchi, “Legend of the Cross,” 19–20.

¹¹⁰ Taguchi, “Legend of the Cross,” 23, 30.

¹¹¹ Taguchi, “Legend of the Cross,” 24.

Murder of Abel.¹¹² The second detail is that the weapon Cain uses to murder Abel is described specifically as the jaw-bone of an ass. The *Cursor mundi* (ll. 1073–74), the Vernon narrative, and the *Northern Passion* all name the weapon as the cheek-bone of an ass, while the Towneley Play of the *Murder of Abel* simple calls it a cheek-bone. The jaw-bone as murder weapon was commonly illustrated in medieval English art,¹¹³ and the earliest literary reference occurs in *Solomon and Saturn*.¹¹⁴ While these details may seem small, their presence is an important observation, given the connections between the wood-of-the-cross material and the visual and dramatic arts (see section 3.3 below).

3.2.6 The English Metrical Versions of the *Vita Adae et Evae*: the Auchinleck Couplets and the *Canticum de creatione*

Both the Auchinleck *Life of Adam* and the *Canticum de creatione* are fourteenth-century Middle English poetical adaptations of the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae*. The Auchinleck *Life* (sometimes called the Auchinleck Couplets),¹¹⁵ is a poem consisting of 780 lines that was written in the Northern Midlands c. 1300–1325. It recounts the Fall of Man and Adam and Eve’s penance in the first part, and in the second includes an account of Seth’s journey for the oil of mercy. There are a number of nineteenth-century editions of the Auchinleck *Life*, namely that by David Laing, who printed selections of poetry from that manuscript for the Abbotsford Club in 1857, calling the poem *The Liif of Adam*, and Carl Horstmann’s edition published in his *Sammlung Altenglischer Legenden* of

¹¹² Taguchi, “Legend of the Cross,” 21–22.

¹¹³ Meyer Schapiro, “Cain’s Jaw-Bone that Did the First Murder,” *Art Bulletin* 24 (1942): 205–213.

¹¹⁴ J. M. Kemble, *The Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis* (London: Ælfric Society, 1843). For further references to the discussion of the jaw-bone motif in art and vernacular literature, see Taguchi, note 24.

¹¹⁵ Severs, *Manual*, No. 297.

1878,¹¹⁶ which also included a version of the *Canticum de creatione*. In the same year Horstmann also edited the *Canticum de creatione* for *Anglia*.¹¹⁷ Finally, Friedrich Bachmann's doctoral dissertation in 1891 referred to both poems as versions of a single work that he called the *Canticum de creatione*.¹¹⁸ The most current edition, which includes both metrical works, is that of Murdoch and Tasioulas.¹¹⁹

The Auchinleck poem is found in the Auchinleck Manuscript in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, where it is known as Advocates' MS 19.2.1. Unfortunately, the initial parts of the manuscript have been lost and the miniatures removed; other folios were once lost but have been recovered. Two of these reclaimed fragments are part of the *Life of Adam*: these bifolia had been used as book covers in St. Andrew's in the eighteenth century, but are now preserved as MS 218 in the Edinburgh University Library. A full-size facsimile of the manuscript and its fragments was produced in 1977.¹²⁰

The Auchinleck Manuscript is a miscellany of religious and romance material dated, on paleographic evidence, to 1330–1340. It contains the unique text of several medieval English works and the earliest text of others. A total of forty-four texts remain; a further eight are now missing. The manuscript itself is large, and, while not deluxe, was certainly expensive to produce; it was likely a collection for a private reader. The *Life of Adam* text is fragmentary: its beginning is lost (c. 120 ll.), but it probably began

¹¹⁶ C. Horstmann, *Sammlung Altenglischer Legenden* (Heilbronn: Verlag Von Gebr. Henninger, 1878), pp. 124–147.

¹¹⁷ C. Horstmann, "Canticum de Creatione," *Anglia* 1 (1878): 287–331.

¹¹⁸ Friedrich Bachmann, *Die beiden Versionen des mittelenglischen Canticum de Creatione*, diss. Rostock: 1891; Hamburg: Lütke und Wolff, 1891.

¹¹⁹ Brian Murdoch and J. A. Tasioulas, eds. *The Apocryphal Lives of Adam and Eve: Edited from the Auchinleck Manuscript and from Trinity College, Oxford, MS 57*, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).

¹²⁰ Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham, eds., *The Auchinleck Manuscript. National Library of Scotland Advocates' MS 19.2.1* (London: Scolar Press, 1977).

with the Creation. The extant text commences with Lucifer's refusal to worship Adam, his attempt to set himself above God, and his subsequent expulsion from heaven. There is also a later gap of approximately 170 lines of text.

While the Auchinleck Manuscript is dated to 1330–1340, the *Life of Adam* is no later than the early part of the fourteenth century, and may be earlier. The manuscript itself contains only texts in English, with a few Anglo-Norman macaronic verses and occasional Latin insertions; however, the Middle English is diverse and represents dialects from Essex, Worcester, Gloucester and London. The scribe, identified as Scribe 1, who wrote the *Life of Adam*, employed a London-Middlesex border dialect of the early fourteenth century.

The *Canticum de creatione* is found in Trinity College, Oxford 57, now in the Bodleian Library. The manuscript, dated in the text to 1375, is a religious compilation which contains part of the *South English Legendary*, the *Canticum de creatione* (157v–164v), the *Romance of Robert of Sicily* and the *Lamentacio sancte Mariae et beati Bernardi*. The language of the *Canticum de creatione* is in the Sussex dialect, and both the dialect and the hand support the date in the manuscript.¹²¹ The cross legend material takes up about a third of the poem, and recounts all the main events in the wood's history: Seth's journey and glimpses into paradise, the finding of the rods by Moses, as well as their fate under David and Solomon, including the scenes with Maximilla and Sabilla.

The Auchinleck *Life of Adam* and the *Canticum de creatione* are the only English metrical lives of Adam and Eve. Their immediate source was likely a *Vita Adae et Evae* text belonging to Meyer's Class II. The *Canticum de creatione* is close to Mozley's

¹²¹ Horstmann, "*Canticum*," 287–289.

Arundel Group,¹²² with the narrative concerning the pre-history of the cross probably already integrated in its source.¹²³

3.2.7 Middle English Prose Adaptations of the *Vita Adae et Evae*

There are two known “groups” of prose Middle English prose adaptations of the *Vita Adae et Evae*. The first (the *Vernon Prose Narrative*) is represented solely by the version in the Vernon Manuscript, dated c. 1385.¹²⁴ It is extant in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 3938 (English Poet. a 1), fols. 393r–394v, and was edited by Horstmann in the late nineteenth century, and Blake in the twentieth.¹²⁵ In this prose, the ailing Adam bids Seth and Eve go to paradise, and instructs Seth to follow the path where no grass grows, because of his parents’ sin. After marveling at the wonders of paradise, Seth, weeping, asks the angel for the oil of mercy, as his father bade him do. The angel delivers the promise to Seth that God’s son will come in 5100 years to be baptized in the Jordan, and help Adam and all his offspring. The angel then gives Seth both an apple and three seeds of the apple, and instructs him to put the seeds in Adam’s mouth and nostrils when he is dead; he also gives Seth sweet spices. Adam eats the apple and soon dies, and the skies darken at his death; after, the angels Saints Michael and Uriel help Eve and Seth to bury Adam together with Abel in the vale of Hebron. Seth obeyed the angel’s instructions and placed the seeds in his father’s mouth and nose, from which afterward sprang three shoots from these seeds, “on which Jhesus schedde his blod vpon for

¹²² See below, section 3.3.

¹²³ Murdoch and Tasioulas, *Apocryphal Lives*, 27.

¹²⁴ Severs, *Manual*, No. 299. For a facsimile edition of the manuscript see A. I. Doyle, *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. poet. a.1* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987). See also Derek Pearsall, ed., *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990).

¹²⁵ The Horstmann edition (Horstmann, *Altenglischer Legenden*, pp. 220–227) was used here. N. F. Blake’s edition can be found in: *Middle English Religious Prose* (London: E. Arnold, 1972), 103–118. Blake argues against one theory that postulated a rhymed origin for the work, p. 103.

monnes sunne.”¹²⁶ The retelling of the story is well done, with biblical additions and the integration of the wood-of-the-cross material made artfully. Murdoch regards the *Vernon Narrative* as a significant version of the *Vita Adae et Evae* apocryphon in its own right.¹²⁷

The second group of prose texts is extant in two versions: the standard and the expanded versions.¹²⁸ The standard version is extant in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 596 (c. 1430), as well as Cambridge, Trinity College R.3.21.¹²⁹ The narrative in the standard version stays very faithful to the English Latin “Arundel” version of the text. However, here the promise Michael gives to Seth is that the oil of mercy cannot be obtained until 5,228 years have passed; also, Seth sees only a child (rather than the Virgin and Child) in the tree during his vision. The expanded version of this prose group was printed from London, British Library, MS Harley 4775 by Horstmann.¹³⁰ The expanded version is extant in eleven manuscripts, five of which are appended to the *Gilte Legende*, which means that in those manuscripts, the wood-of-the-cross story appears both in the *Gilte* chapter on the invention of the cross, as well as the appended narrative of Adam and Eve.¹³¹ This version, while expanded, is nearly identical to the standard version in

¹²⁶ Horstmann, *Altenglischer Legenden*, 226.

¹²⁷ Murdoch, *The Apocryphal Adam*, 96. Brian Murdoch’s most recent book, *The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe: Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of the Vita Adae et Evae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), was released only in May of this year, and University of Toronto has not yet acquired a copy. However, I was able to consult some of the text electronically. Therefore, the full impact of the work cannot be taken into account here. Murdoch’s discussion of the *Vernon Prose Narrative* appears on pp. 90–96.

¹²⁸ Murdoch, using the base manuscripts as the names, calls these the “Bodley Version” and the “Wheatley Version,” respectively. The terminology “standard” and “expanded” is that of R. E. Lewis, N. F. Blake and A. S. G. Edwards in *Index of Middle English Prose* (New York: Garland, 1985), 11.

¹²⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 596 (titled *The lyfe of Adam* in the manuscript; it is called *A tretys of Adam and Eue oure former fadir and modir* in Wheatley) was edited by Horstmann in *Archiv für das Studium der Neuern Sprachen und Litteraturen* 74 (1885): 345–353. The Cambridge manuscript is listed by Lewis, Blake and Edwards, *Index*, 11.

¹³⁰ Edited by Horstmann in *Archiv für das Studium der Neuern Sprachen und Litteraturen* 74 (1885): 353–365.

¹³¹ The independent manuscripts of the expanded version are found in: London, British Library, Harley 1704 and Harley 2388, and the Wheatley Manuscript (Addl. 39574), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 244, Ashmole 802, and Douce 15, all of which are fifteenth century, except for Ashmole 244 (c.

many places. Murdoch concludes that both the standard and expanded versions probably derived from a single English-language source, but with reference to a Latin source as well.¹³²

3.2.8 The Wood of the Cross in Middle English Manuscript Adaptations of the *Legenda Aurea*

There are two main Middle English manuscript adaptations of the *Legenda Aurea*: the *Gilte Legende* and John Mirk's *Festial*. The *Gilte Legende* is a faithful translation of Jehan de Vignay's *Legende Dorée*, itself a close translation of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*. In a colophon to one of the manuscripts of the *Gilte Legende*, the anonymous author provides precise information on the work's date of composition, claiming that the English version was "drawen out of Frensshe into Englisshe the yere of oure lorde, a M1 CCCC and xxxviii bi a synfulle wrecche."¹³³

The *Gilte Legende* has recently been edited in its entirety for the Early English Text Society by Hamer, who had previously published selected lives from the compilation; the first two volumes of Hamer's new edition contain the text, while a projected third volume will contain the introduction and commentary.¹³⁴ The *Gilte*

1610) and Ashmole 802 (c. 1559). The instances of the expanded version appended to the *Gilte Legende* occur in: London, British Library, Harley 4775 (Horstmann's edition), Egerton 876, Lambeth Palace, 72 and Addl. 35298, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 372 (mistakenly listed by Horstmann as Douce 872 in the note to his 1885 edition, p. 353). The Wheatley manuscript has been edited independently by Mabel Day, *The Wheatley Manuscript: A Collection of Middle English Verse and Prose*, EETS vol. 155 (Milford: Oxford University Press, 1921).

¹³² Murdoch, *The Apocryphal Adam*, 101.

¹³³ The colophon appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 372. For a discussion of possible authors see Richard Hamer, *Three Lives from the Gilte Legende* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1978), 16–18.

¹³⁴ Richard Hamer, *Gilte Legende*, EETS vol. 327, 2 parts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Hamer's previous publications of *Gilte Legende* material appear in: *Three Lives* (mentioned above) and Richard Hamer and Vida Russel, *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the Gilte Legende*, EETS vol. 315 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Legende is extant in eleven manuscripts, all of the fifteenth century; see Hamer (1978) for a description of the manuscripts and their affiliations.¹³⁵

The wood-of-the-cross story appears in chapter sixty one, entitled “Finding of the Cross.”¹³⁶ The *Gilte Legende* begins immediately with the main narrative of the cross’s history, omitting the “etymological” opening of the *Legenda Aurea* in which Voragine describes how the cross was “found” numerous times throughout history: by Seth in paradise, by Solomon in Lebanon, by the Queen of Sheba in the temple, by the Jews in the pond, and finally by Helena on Mount Calvary. Otherwise, the rendering is quite faithful to the Latin original (despite being transmitted via the French), but for a few minor changes. When Michael tells Seth that the oil of mercy may not be obtained for 5,500 years, Voragine adds the editorial comment that “it is believed that only 5,199 years elapsed from Adam’s day to Christ’s Passion.”¹³⁷ The *Gilte Legende* makes a slightly different calculation, stating “that is to wete from Adam vnto the passion of Ihesu Crist, of whiche .v. thousand and .vC. yere were thanne passed but .CC.xxxiiij. yere.”¹³⁸ Solomon’s “forest house” is called the “hous of Sauxe,” while the *Historia Scholastica* (one of the sources to which Voragine refers) is titled the “Maister of Stories” in the English. The final minor alteration is in the description of the *probatica piscina*: Voragine describes it as the spot where the Nathineans bathed the sacrificial animals; the English of the *Gilte Legende* simply calls the Nathineans “men.” The story of the wood of the cross is followed by the four types that made up the cross, the *inventio* by St. Helena, and the final exemplum of the notary, who uses the sign of the cross to ward off

¹³⁵ Hamer, *Three Lives*, 26–33, 40–48.

¹³⁶ Hamer, *Gilte Legende*, vol. 1, 309–318.

¹³⁷ Granger Ryan, *Golden Legend*, 277.

¹³⁸ Hamer, *Gilte Legende*, vol. 1, 309.

temptation by devils, exactly as in the Latin. This close rendering of Voragine's original homily is in contrast to the adaptations clearly made for the audience in the second *Legenda Aurea*-derived sermon collection to be considered.

Mirk's *Festial* was edited from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Gough Eccl. Top. 4 for the Early English Text Society by Theodor Erbe.¹³⁹ Judy Ann Ford provides a comprehensive study of the *Festial* and its place in the society of late medieval England.¹⁴⁰ The *Festial*, considered the most widely read vernacular sermon collection in late medieval England, is extant in twenty six fairly complete manuscripts, while a further twelve contain some *Festial* sermons. The main work on this collection in the past few decades has been undertaken by Alan Fletcher and Susan Powell.¹⁴¹ Mirk's collection, drawn primarily from the *Legenda Aurea*, contains a total of seventy four sermons, suitable for both Sundays and feast days (*temporale* sermons) and saints' days (*sanctorale* sermons). His intended audience was parish priests not educated enough to write their own sermons (a fact expressed in his prologue),¹⁴² while his secondary audience would have been the sort expected in parishes presided over by less-skilled priests: uneducated, rural folk who were largely illiterate.¹⁴³

In keeping with the intended audience, the *Festial* sermons are very simply structured, and avoid the customary theme, protheme and anti-theme of more

¹³⁹ Theodor Erbe, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk)* (London: K. Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1905). He had intended to publish a companion volume containing introductory matter, but died before it could be completed.

¹⁴⁰ Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk's Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006).

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Alan J. Fletcher, "John Mirk and the Lollards," *Medium Aevum* 56.2 (1987): 217–224; *Preaching, Politics and Poetry in Late-Medieval England* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998); Susan Powell, "A New Dating of John Mirk's *Festial*," *Notes and Queries* n. s. 29 (1982): 487–489; "John Mirk's *Festial* and the Pastoral Program," *Leeds Studies in English* n. s. 22 (1991): 85–102.

¹⁴² The prologue is found in eight manuscripts and (in London, British Library, MS Cotton Claudius A.II, fol. lv) reads thus: "I haue drawe this treti sewyng owt of *Legend Aurea* with more addyng to, so he that hathe lust to study therein, he schal fynde redy of all the principale festis of the yere a schort sermon."

¹⁴³ Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, 12.

sophisticated homilies; instead, their focus is on *exempla*, sometimes set off from the text by the title *narratio*, that would both appeal to and instruct the simple parishioners. As a result, the legend of the wood of the cross in the *Festial* is culled from the *Legenda Aurea*, but has been considerably simplified.¹⁴⁴ For example, instead of opening with an etymology, as Voragine does, it instructs the “good men and woymen” on how and why they should observe such a day: “such a day þe shull haue þe Holy-rode-day. þe wech day þe shull not fast þe euen, but comyth to þe chyrch as cristen pepull, in worschip of hym þat deyed on þe rode for saluacyon of mankynd.”¹⁴⁵ The basic story outline is the same, but editorial remarks, such as Voragine’s references to his sources (for example, Belet or the *Historica Scholastica*) are left out. A few episodes are missing: the wood is not used as a bridge, nor is the Queen of Sheba’s visit related; instead of burying the wood deep in the earth as a result of Sheba’s prophecy, it is so disposed of after proving useless in the temple construction project. While the *Legenda Aurea* and *Gilte Legende* accounts related the four types of wood comprising the cross, the *Festial* omits this information. In its place we find a simple concluding statement: “and þen þys tre bare þys blesset frute, Cristys body, of þe weche wallut mercy to Adam and Eue, and to all hor ospryng.”¹⁴⁶

The *Festial* version of the legend does continue with the story of the invention of the holy cross by Helena, but the concluding moral stories, which follow the *inventio*, are different. The *Legenda Aurea* and the *Gilte Legende* both relate the *exemplum* of a notary, who used the sign of the cross to ward off temptation by devils. The *Festial* replaces this narrative with two miraculous tales: the first about Beritus and the cross

¹⁴⁴ Erbe, *Festial*, chapter 34: *De inuencione sancte crucis*, 142–146.

¹⁴⁵ Erbe, *Festial*, 142.

¹⁴⁶ Erbe, *Festial*, 143.

unknowingly hidden in his home, and the second, an account relating the fate of some Jews who encountered buried crosses during their rebuilding of Jerusalem, and were burnt to “colys and asks” when they failed to properly revere them.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps these two stories were deemed more appealing or more appropriate for the *Festial*’s audience. Nevertheless, despite its simplified form, altered for the needs of a rural population, the inclusion of the history of the wood of the cross in such a widely used sermon collection would have further disseminated the legend among the common people.

3.2.9 Brief Overview of Relevant Anglo-Norman Texts

There are currently four known Anglo-Norman derivatives of the wood-of-the-cross legend. I only give the briefest overview here to stress that the cross’s prehistory is by no means absent in this language. The first two groups of Anglo-Norman texts are derived from the *Post peccatum Adae*: a prose version and a verse adaptation. The prose version is that named the *Penitence Adam* by Prangsmas-Hajenius (beginning “Ki voudre oier e saver”), which is extant in seven manuscripts, four of which are Anglo-Norman (see section 3.2.5 above). The verse adaptation exists in a single manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 66, and was also known to Prangsmas-Hajenius.¹⁴⁸ I have only recently been made aware of two other relevant Anglo-Norman texts. The first is a fragmentary Anglo-Norman version of the Andrius text (see section 3.1 above), extant in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 79; this text will be published shortly by Miller.¹⁴⁹ Finally, there is an Anglo-Norman text entitled *De ligno crucis* that combines elements

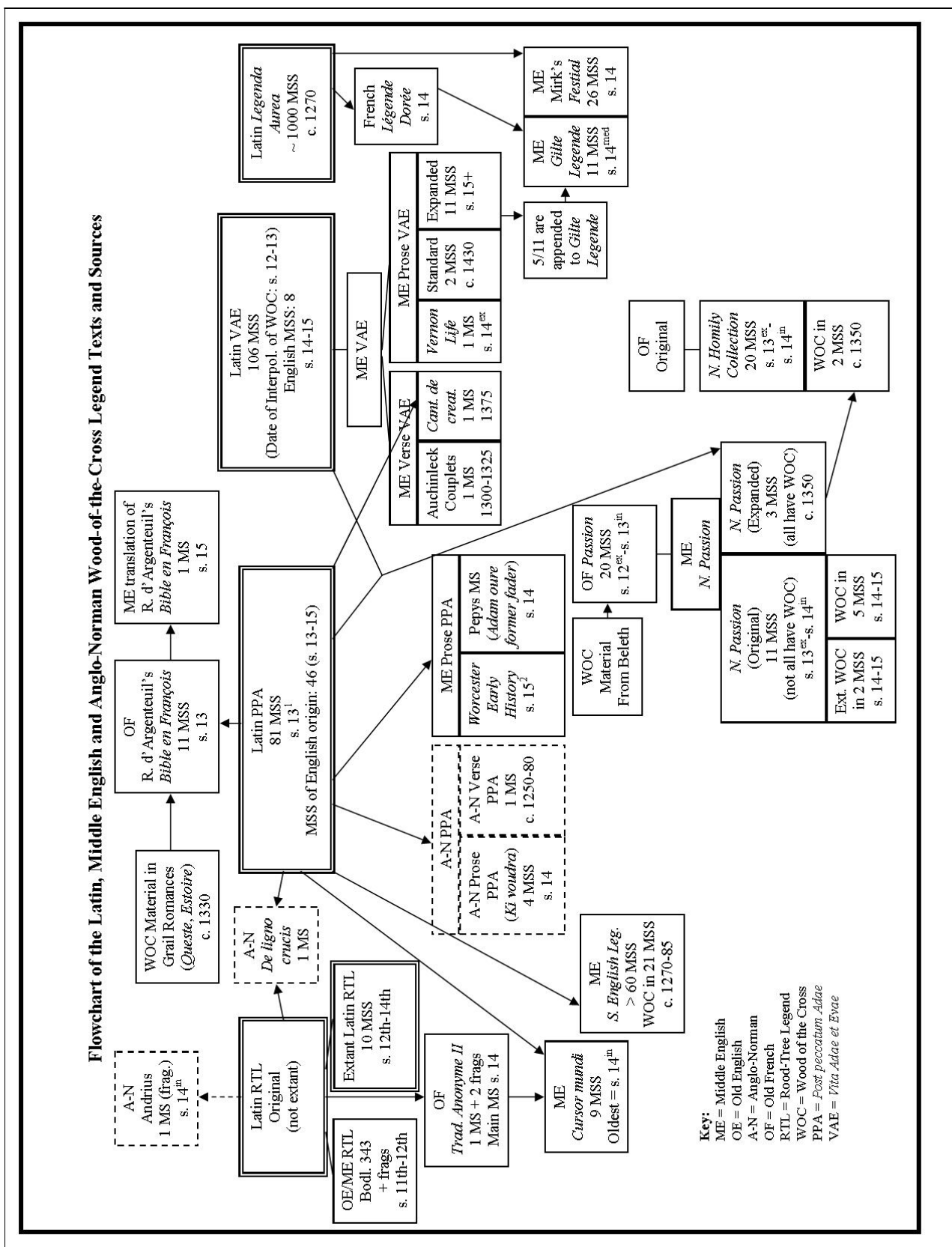
¹⁴⁷ Erbe, *Festial*, 145–146.

¹⁴⁸ Prangsmas-Hajenius, *La Légende du Bois*, 29–30.

¹⁴⁹ Bob Miller, “MS Douce 79 and MS Bodley 556: An Anglo-Norman Manuscript and a Latin Source of the Old French ‘Andrius Compilation’ (*Andrius Manuscript* or *Penitence of Adam*),” forthcoming.

from the rood-tree legend and the *Post peccatum Adae*. The text was edited in the early twentieth-century from London, British Library, Cotton Domitian XI, fols. 43b–80a by Becker, but I have not been able to personally consult this version.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Rudolph Becker, *Das 'La Genesi de Nostre Dame Seinte Marie' betitelte Gedicht des Britischen Museums der Handschrift Cotton Domitian XI, fol. 43b-80a* (Griefswald: Hans Adler, 1908).



3.3 Manifestations of the Wood-of-the-Cross Legends in Drama and Art

Despite the fact that the *Northern Passion*, which contains the wood-of-the-cross legend, was a significant source for the Townley, Coventry and York cycles,¹⁵¹ the mystery plays in English have very few references to the cross legend. Of the four main cycles, Townley, Coventry, Chester and York, all but the Townley cycle do portray such related material as the fall of Lucifer and the temptation of Adam and Eve, and all four have the Harrowing of Hell.¹⁵² The Chester cycle (Play 12, line 73) has Seth giving an account of his journey to paradise, much as he does in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. In addition, the Coventry and Townley cycles each have a Procession of Prophets that includes Moses, David, Isaiah and Solomon, and, notably, Sabilla. Townley's *Play of Noah* (line 46) and Coventry's Play 28 (line 901) refer to the "oyle of mercy," and the York cycle relates that the cross was made of the "kyngis tree" (Play 34, lines 63–66).

Other than these few hints, the plays in English do not deal with the wood-of-the-cross legend. However, two plays written in medieval Britain do make extensive use of this material, although they are written in Cornish, rather than English.¹⁵³ The earlier of the two is the three-day play cycle from the late fourteenth century known as the *Ordinalia*, written probably at Penryn. The second, written in the following century and known by its English title, is the incomplete *The Creacion of the World* (the Cornish title is *Gwreans an bys*).¹⁵⁴ The *Ordinalia* goes beyond most medieval dramatic works in that

¹⁵¹ See Foster, *The South English Legendary*, vol. 147, ch. 6.

¹⁵² For a thorough discussion of the Fall and Redemption in medieval drama, see Brian Murdoch, *Adam's Grace: Fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 126–151.

¹⁵³ The cross legend material is also absent from the medieval Welsh drama; see Murdoch, *Adam's Grace*, 143.

¹⁵⁴ For the *Ordinalia* see Markham Harris, *The Cornish Ordinalia: A Medieval Dramatic Trilogy* (Washington, Catholic University of America Press, 1969) for a prose translation, or the recent verse translation by Alan M. Kent, *Ordinalia: The Cornish Mystery Play Cycle* (London: Francis Boutle, 2005). For a few extracts from the *Ordinalia*, including the legend of the cross see F. E. Halliday, *The Legend of*

it employs the holy rood's history as a structural element beyond the tale of Adam and Eve; instead, the wood-of-the-cross story binds the other episodic elements into a narrative unity.¹⁵⁵ The later Cornish drama in the *Creacion* seems to draw on different sources for its holy rood material.¹⁵⁶ The most noteworthy detail in this second play is Seth's vision of the child in the tree when he looks into paradise. Most versions of the cross legend relate that Seth sees a newly-born child wrapped in swaddling clothes, which the angel interprets for him as the son of God who will come in the fullness of time. However, in the *Creacion* Seth actually sees the Virgin and Child together in the tree, a detail otherwise only present in a few interpolated manuscripts of the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae*, described by Mozley and dubbed by him the Arundel Group.¹⁵⁷ The English stage directions for this scene actually refer to two trees, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life: "Ther he vyseth all thingys, and seeth two trees: and in the one tree sytteth Mary the Virgyn, and in her lappe her sonn Jesus, in the tope of the Tree of Lyf, and, in the other tree, the Serpent which caused Eva to eat the appell" (At 1804).¹⁵⁸ The motif of the "child in the tree," including this specific variant with Seth seeing the Virgin and Child together, will be discussed at length in chapter 5 below.

The legend of the cross is a fairly common subject in European art. The two best known depictions are two great fresco cycles in Italy: the wall paintings executed circa 1380 by Agnolo Gaddi in the choir of the Franciscan church of Santa Croce in Florence,

the Rood, with the Three Maries, and the Death of Pilate, from the Cornish Miracle Plays (London: Duckworth, 1955). For the *Creacion* see Paula Neuss, *The Creacion of the World: A Critical Edition and Translation* (New York: Garland Pub., 1983).

¹⁵⁵ See Murdoch, *Adam's Grace*, 144–147. Murdoch even equates Maximilla's martyrdom at the end of the first day's play to an imitative prefiguration of Christ's death to come (p. 146).

¹⁵⁶ Murdoch, *Adam's Grace*, 147.

¹⁵⁷ J. H. Mozley, "The 'Vita Adae,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1929): 121–149. For the Arundel Group, see especially p. 123, 125.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Murdoch, *Adam's Grace*, 147.

and those of about a century later by Piero dell Francesca in Arezzo, circa 1460.¹⁵⁹ The Italian cycles show a clear adherence to Franciscan ideas in the way they depict the legend of the cross as a micro-history of salvation. The Italian cycles are also iconographically linked; for example, the Florence cycle went on to influence the iconographic programs in Volterra and Empoli.¹⁶⁰ There are also eight significant visual cycles (all fifteenth-century) of the cross legends in Germany and Switzerland. The northern cycles, however, do not show influence from the Italian ones, and in fact, “lack any geographic, iconographic or contextual cohesion”; Baert does note that all the northern churches with such iconographic programs were dedicated to the Holy Cross and show evidence of local devotion to the cross or a relic of the cross.¹⁶¹

In Britain there are only two main artistic representations of the wood-of-the-cross material, and both are late in date. The first is a series of wall paintings in the chancel and nave of the Guild Chapel of the Holy Cross in Stratford-upon-Avon, executed shortly after 1496.¹⁶² This subject matter was appropriate to both the guild and the town of Stratford itself, which held fairs on both of the main feast days associated with the cross: the Invention of the Cross on May 3, and the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14. It is possible that such veneration grew out of the possession of a local relic, but there are no records to support this.¹⁶³ Unfortunately, the original chapel paintings do not survive, because they were painted over in accord with the Royal Injunctions of 1559 which commanded the removal of all signs of superstition and

¹⁵⁹ For an extensive treatment of the cross legends in art see Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood : The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. Lee Preedy (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁶⁰ Baert, *Heritage*, 350–403, 447–448; a convenient table showing the episodes portrayed in each of the Italian cycles appears on 404–405.

¹⁶¹ Baert, *Heritage*, 406–444, 448–449; a table of the northern programs appears on 444–446.

¹⁶² Clifford Davidson, *The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 3.

¹⁶³ Davidson, *Guild Chapel*, 4.

idolatry.¹⁶⁴ In 1804 the wall paintings were rediscovered during restoration of the chapel and careful drawings were made by Thomas Fisher, after which those in the nave were covered over again and those in the chancel destroyed. Davidson reproduced Fisher's drawings. Of particular interest here is his figure 3, which shows the Queen of Sheba visiting Solomon, with the holy wood spread out as a plank over the stream between them. Figures 4–6 show Constantine's vision of the cross and scenes of the Invention by St. Helena, while episodes from the Exaltation legend appear in figures 7–9.

The only other instance of the cross legend in art in England is in the stained glass of St. Neot's Church, Cornwall.¹⁶⁵ The present church was built between 1480 and 1530, and the windows date from close to the time it was built, namely the early sixteenth century. The one window that pertains to the wood-of-the-cross legend is the fourteenth scene illustrated in St. Neot's Creation Window, the "death of Adam."¹⁶⁶ Here, Seth leans over the dying Adam as he reclines in his bed and places a small round object in his father's mouth; this must surely be one of the seeds Seth brought back from his journey to paradise. Even more interesting is that behind the father and son can be seen a great tree in which a naked child lies. This undoubtedly represents the Christ Child seen by Seth in the tree during one of the glimpses he is allowed into the garden.

¹⁶⁴ Interestingly, the man in charge of having the paintings covered over in 1563–64 was the then Chamberlain, John Shakespeare, father of the playwright; see Davidson, *Guild Chapel*, 10.

¹⁶⁵ Evelyn S. Newlyn, "The Stained and Painted Glass of St. Neot's Church and the Staging of the Middle Cornish Drama," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24 (1994): 89–111. Newlyn attempted to find hints of staging and costuming methods used in the performance of the Cornish plays by studying the images in the stained glass. Baert briefly mentions St. Neot's in *Heritage*, 450.

¹⁶⁶ Newlyn, "Stained and Painted Glass," figure 3.

3.4 Characteristics of the Wood-of-the-Cross Texts in England

Miller's statistical analysis of the geographical distribution of manuscripts dealing with the legend of the cross indicates a disproportionately high incidence of the story in England. Indeed, the rood-tree legend appears to be unique to England and the immediate areas around it in the North Sea littoral zone. However, even in England, the most influential version of the narrative was the *Post peccatum Adae*, which, along with the interpolated *Vita Adae et Evae*, influenced the vast majority of Middle English derivatives of the wood-of-the-cross story.

Most of these Middle English derivatives are found contained in large collections of saints' lives and readings for the church year; the Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343 manuscript that contains the Old English rood-tree legend is also such a volume. This inclusion in such texts no doubt facilitated the popularity and widespread distribution of the legend among the clergy and laity alike. However, the question remains as to why the history of the holy wood was such a popular tale in medieval England. I have already established in chapter 2 that devotion to the holy cross and the notion of the cross as tree were strong in Anglo-Saxon England, a fact that surely assisted the reception of legends dealing with the holy tree of the cross. It remains to examine whether or not other early (namely patristic) sources that embrace the cross-as-tree symbolism were known or particularly current in England. This is the topic of chapter 4.

Finally, while the wood-of-the-cross legends in England were dependent on European, mainly French, sources, there are a few unique features that can be studied further. This is the focus of chapter 5. The first of these features is the interesting variant of Seth's vision into paradise in which he sees not just a child, but the Virgin and Child in

the tree. This motif is fraught with symbolism and has important echoes in medieval romance, particularly the Arthurian romances. Another unique motif presented in the *Cursor mundi*'s version of the cross story, the detail that the cross bloomed at the Resurrection, may be linked to other tales of unseasonable blooms, such as in the English tale of *Sir Cleges* or the legend of Joseph of Arimathea's blooming staff and its link to the famous Thorn of Glastonbury. Finally, the popularity in England of certain key figures in the cross legends, specifically Helena and Joseph of Arimathea, must certainly have facilitated the legends' eager reception in that country. This too will be dealt with later on in the penultimate chapter.

Chapter 4: The Christian Tradition of the Sacred Tree in Patristic and Medieval Writings

4.1 Trees in the Biblical Tradition

Sacred trees figure prominently in nearly every major world religion, from the ancient Syrians and Mesopotamians, to the *Bo* tree under which Buddha meditated, the *Lote* tree of Islam which guards the boundaries of spiritual knowledge, the trees sacred to the Greek gods (like the laurel), and the Scandinavian world tree *Yggdrasill*.¹ Roger Cook traces the specific image of the tree of life through world mythologies, illuminating a remarkable continuity of the symbol across time and culture.² Frazer's *Golden Bough* is perhaps the most monumental example of the attempt to attribute what he saw as a relatively consistent set of rituals related to the sacred tree and vegetation-fertility cults in civilizations separated by wide gaps of culture, time and geography.³ Regardless of modern criticism of Frazer's comparative approach to anthropology, there is no doubt that relics of rituals involving trees and vegetation persist, even today, over much of Europe in the folk traditions of the maypole, the Jack-in-the-Green and the Christmas tree.⁴

The ancient Israelites were by no means immune to the influence of the pagan Near Eastern cults and their sacred trees. Frazer discusses at length the suite of dying and resurrecting gods: Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis and Attis, all of whose rites involve tree

¹ Nima Smith, P. L. R. Smith and Helen Luckett, "The Tree in World Mythologies," in *The Tree of Life: New Images of an Ancient Symbol* (London: South Bank Centre, 1989); H. C. Barlow, "Sacred Trees," *Journal of Sacred Literature*, n.s. 1 (1862): 273–292.

² Roger Cook, *The Tree of Life: Symbol of the Centre* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974).

³ James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1900).

⁴ E.g. see Mary Désirée Anderson, *History and Imagery in British Churches* (London: John Murray, 1995).

worship.⁵ The Tammuz cult was adapted to the Syro-Palestinian regions where El was replaced by Baal, the dominant god of the Canaanite pantheon. Asherah, consort of Baal, was represented by the trunk of a tree with branches lopped off, this sacred pole (an *asherah*) became a prominent feature in Semitic sanctuaries.⁶ These sacred *asherim* were allowed to remain in the Canaanite temples appropriated by the Israelites up until the reformation by Josiah in 621 BC.⁷ After all, said James, “it is not surprising...when the Israelites settled in Palestine that they continued the *cultus* already established at sacred trees, wells and springs...sometimes directing the worship to their own desert god, Yahweh.”⁸ The Yahwists also resorted to sacred trees and springs to receive oracles from their own god: for example, Abraham received divine communications at the terebinth of Morah at Shechem and at Mamre, and planted a tamarisk for the same purpose at Beersheba (Gen. 12:6; 13:18; 21:33); Deborah dispensed judgment under a palm tree (Judges 4:5), and David sought God’s guidance before battling the Philistines by listening for a sign in the rustling of the mulberry trees (II Sam. 5:24). The entrance of the temple itself, built by Solomon from the forests of Lebanon and sometimes referred to as the “forest house,” was flanked by the pillars Jachin and Boaz, which may be interpreted as sacred trees, originating in the cult-posts of the *asherah* type.⁹

References to trees, both figurative and literal, abound in the Bible. In Genesis the two most important trees are introduced: the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, both standing in the midst of paradise (Gen. 2:9). Although the tree of knowledge is not mentioned again after the account of the Fall, a tree of life occurs in

⁵ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, see especially chapters 9–11, 28–35, 38, 40, and 67.

⁶ E. O. James, *Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), 16–17.

⁷ James, *Tree of Life*, 19.

⁸ James, *Tree of Life*, 18.

⁹ James, *Tree of Life*, 37.

Proverbs, being equated with Wisdom (Prov. 3:18),¹⁰ the fruit of the just man (Prov. 11:30) and a peaceable tongue (Prov. 15:4); similarly, “the just shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow up like the cedar of Libanus” (Ps. 92 (91):13).¹¹ This tradition is echoed in the New Testament where it is stated that a tree shall be known by its fruit, good trees make good fruit, bad trees, evil (Matt. 7:16–17, 12:33; Luke 6:43–45). Psalm 1, echoing Jeremiah (17:8) tells us: “Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly...he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit, in due season. And his leaf shall not fall off: and all whatsoever he shall do shall prosper” (Ps. 1: 1–3). Also evident in the Bible is the Jewish tradition of equating mighty rulers with great trees;¹² hence when Nebuchadnezzar envisions a tree of exceedingly great height, whose branches are laden with fruits and provide shelter to the birds and the beasts, he is told by the prophet Daniel that it is himself that the tree represents. Nebuchadnezzar is told that the tree will be hewn down, leaving only the stump and its roots in the earth, but that the tree, his power and kingdom, will regenerate, once he acknowledges that his power comes from God (Dan. 4:7–23).

Ezekiel’s passage on the green tree and the dry is worth quoting at greater length for its vivid imagery:

Thus saith the Lord God: I myself will take of the marrow of the high cedar, and will set it: I will crop off a tender twig from the top of the branches thereof, and I will plant it on a mountain high and eminent. On the high mountains of Israel will I plant it, and it shall shoot forth into branches, and

¹⁰ One book on biblical wisdom literature is actually named after the tree of life: Roland Edmund Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002).

¹¹ All quotes from the Bible in English are taken from the Douay-Rheims translation: William H. McClellan, ed. *The Holy Bible: The Catholic Bible, Douay-Rheims Version, Translated from the Latin Vulgate and Diligently Compared with the Hebrew, Greek and Other Eds.* (New York: Benziger, 1941).

¹² See also Ezek. 31:5, in which the Assyrian is compared to a great cedar.

shall bear fruit, and it shall become a great cedar: and all birds shall dwell under it, and every fowl shall make its nest under the shadow of the branches thereof. And all the trees of the country shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, and exalted the low tree: and have dried up the green tree, and have caused the dry tree to flourish. I the Lord have spoken and have done it (Ezek. 17:22–24).

Christ seems to refer to this tradition with himself as the green tree when, after his cross has been taken up by Simon of Cyrene and he passes through the multitude of bewailing onlookers, he asks “For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?” (Luke 23:31). Even in the Old Testament we find Job seeming to profess a belief in a resurrection via the metaphor of a tree saying, “A tree hath hope: if it be cut, it groweth green again, and the boughs thereof sprout. If its root be old in the earth, and its stock be dead in the dust: At the scent of water, it shall spring, and bring forth leaves, as when it was first planted” (14:7–9).

The final references to the tree of life, which first appeared in the opening book of the Old Testament, Genesis, come in the closing book of the New, Revelation. John writes that “to him, that overcometh” shall be given to eat of the tree of life in paradise (Rev. 2:7), and he concludes his apocalypse with a grand vision that recalls Ezek. 47:12: “And he shewed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1–2).

While the wood-of-the-cross legends clearly connect a great tree (usually derived from paradise) to the cross, and by extension to both Christ’s redeeming act and Christ himself, the question remains as to whether medieval theologians interpreted any of the above biblical tree passages as references to Christ or his cross. An examination of some

of the most important medieval biblical commentaries shows that they did.¹³ A few examples will serve to illustrate the point. The *Glossa ordinaria* (quoting Augustine) glosses the tree of life in Genesis 2:9 as wisdom (*sapientia*) and further on as “Christ through whose Passion on the cross fills us with spiritual water;” it concludes that Christ as wisdom is the tree of life in the spiritual paradise.¹⁴ When God expels Adam and Eve after the Fall lest they eat of the tree of life, the *Glossa* asserts that this is a just punishment which God imposes so that when man does reach out for the tree of life it will be the cross, through which he will regain eternal life.¹⁵ Even Aaron’s rod, which buds and yields almonds to single him out from the other Israelite princes, is interpreted figuratively as Christ, the cross and Mary.¹⁶

The commentary in Hugh of St. Cher on the great tree of Ezekiel 17, which shot forth branches and sheltered the birds, leaves no doubt that this is Christ who put forth leaves by his preaching, yielded fruit in his Passion and became a great cedar in the mission of the Holy Spirit, by which many were converted. The birds may shelter under the tree’s branches because Christ stretched out his arms on the cross in order to protect us all from the heat of the sun, that is, the anger of the Father.¹⁷ The related passages of

¹³ The two medieval biblical glosses consulted here are: Karlfried Froehlich and Margaret T. Gibson, eds., *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria : Facsimile Reprint of the Editio princeps, Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480/81*, 4 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992) and Hugh of St. Cher, *Opera omnia in universum vetus et novum testamentum*, 8 vols. (Venice: Nicolaus Pezzana, 1732).

¹⁴ Froehlich and Gibson, *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 1, 21, Gen 2:9: “christus per ligni passionem aqua spirituali nos satiet,” and “Sic sapientia id est Christus lignum vitae est in spirituali paradiso.”

¹⁵ Froehlich and Gibson, *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 1, 30, Gen 3:22: “Ut aliquando porrigat manum ad arborem vitae id est ad crucem: per quam vita reparatur aeterna.”

¹⁶ Froehlich and Gibson, *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 1, 315, Numbers 17:6–10 (quoting Origen): “Virga arida germinat: cum corpus extinctum reviviscit”; and quoting Gregory: “Virgam: carnem Christi: quae de radice lesse succisa et mortificata cito revixit.” In Hugh of St. Cher, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, 139, the same passage is explained thus: “Item vel Amygdalum est Crux...item Amygdalum, Christus...Item virga, vel Amygdalum est Beata Virgo.”

¹⁷ Hugh of St. Cher, *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, 67, Ezek. 17: 23: “Vel Christus erumpit in germen, quando aliquos convertit in sua praedicatione...fructum fecit in Passione, sed in cedrum magnam crevit postea in

Jeremiah 17:8 and Psalm 1:3 are both glossed with reference to Christ. In Jeremiah, the tree that shall be evergreen and never cease to bring forth fruit, shall do so as one believing in Christ, he who once was dead and after returned to life. In Psalm 1, the tree planted by running waters is Christ, its fruits eternal life, and its leaves that never fall off, his words which will never become obsolete.¹⁸ The Job passage speaking of a tree having hope of growing green again even after being cut down yields a nearly identical interpretation in both Hugh of St. Cher and in Gregory's *Moralia in Job*. The tree is Christ, cut off in *Passione*, but which grows green again in *Resurrectione*. Its boughs that sprout anew represent the faithful who multiply, its root is preaching (*praedicatio*); although it might languish in the dust (that is, in the hearts of the Jews), nevertheless at the scent of water it will bring forth leaves because "through the virtue of his divinity the dead flesh came back to life."¹⁹

The New Testament provides a parallel to the great tree of Ezekiel or the tree that grows by running waters in Jesus' parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31–32); from the least of seeds it too grows into a huge tree in which the birds of the air come and dwell. Not surprisingly, the medieval commentators saw Christ himself in this parable: in the smallness of the seed we may understand Christ's humble birth, and the birds that dwell

Spiritus Sancti missione, quando multi conversi sunt"; "Christus in cruce expandit ramos suos, idest, brachia sua, et totum corpus suum ad protegendum nos ab aestu solis, idest, ab ira Patris."

¹⁸ Froehlich and Gibson, *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 3, 128, Jeremiah 17:8: "Sed semper afferet fructum. credens in eum qui semel mortuus est et ultra non moritur;" and vol. 2, 458, Psalm 1:3: the *lignum* is "Christus viridior ceteris," *fructum suum* is "vitam aeternam," and *folium eius* is "verbum eius not erit irritum cum celum et terra transibunt."

¹⁹ Hugh of St. Cher, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, 415, Job 14:7–9: "per virtutem divinitatis caro extincta ad vitam rediit"; see also the translation of Gregory the Great in J. Bliss, trans., *Morals on the Book of Job*, 3 vols. (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844–1850), 47–51.

in his branches are the preachers which carry his teachings throughout the world.²⁰ Of Christ's cryptic comment in Luke in which he refers to the green tree and the dry, the *Glossa* tells us that Christ and his elect are the green tree, while the dry one represents the impious and the sinners; Hugh of St. Cher adds that this green tree was consumed in the fire of the Passion, just as the saints are green trees who undergo similar tribulations on His behalf.²¹ The final biblical appearance of the tree of life in Revelation is once again equated with Christ himself. In the *Glossa*, the tree of life is Christ, its fruits the reward of immortality, and its healing leaves Christ's precepts, which serve to ornament the fruits; in another sense, the twelve fruits represent the twelve apostles.²²

Although none of these glosses refer to the apocryphal tradition that the wood of the cross actually came from a paradisaical tree, they do clearly equate Christ himself with the various biblical trees, and in one case (the gloss on Gen. 3:22) mankind is said to reach for the cross when he puts his hand forth to the *lignum vitae*. Therefore, the biblical commentaries provide abundant evidence that medieval theologians did see the *lignum vitae* and other great biblical trees as types of Christ and his Church.

4.2 Sacred Tree Symbolism in the Patristic Tradition

A good number of nineteenth and twentieth-century scholars have studied the relationship between the cosmological tree and the Christian cross; these include Jacob

²⁰ Froehlich and Gibson, *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 48, Matt. 13:31–32: “Potest in grano sinapis humilitas dominicae incarnationis intelligi...Expandit ramos in quibus volucres caeli requiescent. Quia praedicatores dispersit in mundum in quorum dictis et consolationibus fideles ab huius vitae fatigatione respirarent.”

²¹ Froehlich and Gibson, *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 218, Luke: 23:31: “Viride lignum Christus et sui electi. Aridum impii et peccatores.” Hugh of St. Cher, *Opera omnia*, vol. 6, 268, on the same passage: “Hoc lignum igne passionis combustum est. Similiter omnes sancti, qui sunt ligna viridia similiter igne tribulationis uruntur in mundo.”

²² Froehlich and Gibson, *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 577, Rev. 22:2: the *lignum vitae* is “Christus,” the *fructus* “mercedem immortalitatis,” and the *folia* “id est precepta Christi que tegunt et ornant fructum.”

Grimm, Arturo Graf, A. Jacoby, and Hugo Rahner.²³ More recently, an extensive study of the role of the sacred tree in early Christian writings was undertaken by Stephen Reno.²⁴ He confines himself to early Christian writings (AD 125–451) outside the New Testament, including the Fathers, the apocrypha and acts of martyrs (but excluding any Gnostic material or that written in languages other than Latin and Greek). Reno concluded that all patristic writings on the sacred tree participate in either the “tree of life” or “cosmic tree” motif, but that a wholly new set of meanings became available with the identification between the sacred tree and the cross, which brought about the peculiarly Christian symbol of the *arbor crucis*. Reno divided the pattern of meanings that accrued to the patristic symbol of the sacred tree into two streams. The first, the *arbor vitae*, emphasizes the natural and vegetative qualities of the tree, and draws analogies between the tree of life and Christian initiation, redemption, life and community experience. As the *arbor vitae*, trees might represent newly baptized individuals planted by God (the holy gardener) in a garden that prefigures a future paradise. The tree of life watered by a mysterious source is equated with Christians who receive the life-giving waters of baptism through the streams of the gospels and sacraments; Christ himself, as tree, yielded spiritual fruits for the faithful. Finally, the imagery of the tree and branches symbolizes the union of Christ with his Church.²⁵

Reno’s second stream, called the *arbor crucis*, identifies the tree of the cross with the tree of life (specifically that in the Genesis narrative) based on particular

²³ Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, 4th ed. (Gütersloh: Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, 1876), 664–666; Arturo Graf, *Miti, Leggende, e Superstizioni del Medio Evo*, 2 vols. (Turin: Loescher, 1892), 83; A. Jacoby, “Kreuzbaum,” in *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols., ed. Hanns Bachtold-Stäubli (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1933), vol. 5, 487–489; Hugo Rahner, *Griechische Mythen in Christlicher Deutung* (Zürich: Rhein-verlag, 1945), 77–89.

²⁴ Stephen Reno, *The Sacred Tree as an Early Christian Literary Symbol* (Saarbrücken: Home et Religio, 1978).

²⁵ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 79–123.

characteristics: material, shape, location and function. Thus the *arbor crucis* became the Christian equivalent of the cosmic tree by means of the early Fathers' perception of cosmological qualities in the cross itself. In the *arbor crucis* we have the Christian equivalent of the cosmological tree, located at the cosmic centre, serving as a link between heaven and earth, encompassing the whole world with its dimensions. Through the Christian notion of the *lignum redemptionis*, the *arbor crucis* and *arbor vitae* share a common material. The first fruit of the *arbor crucis* is Christ and subsequent fruits are individual Christians. Finally, the *arbor crucis*, source of the awareness of good, is set opposite the tree of knowledge through which man first knew evil.²⁶

The symbolisms can be understood in the following way: the *arbor vitae* has a meaning which is at once soteriological (symbol of Christ, source of Redemption), sacramental (individuals redeemed through baptism), and ecclesiological (denoting the relationship between Christ and his Church), while the *arbor crucis* is anthropological (the crucified Christ and the four dimensions of *caritas* in him), typological (symbolic of the instrument of redemption), mythological (pertaining to the completion of the Divine Plan from Adam to Christ), cosmological (representing the universal scope of the Redemption), and eschatological (as symbol of the Resurrection and promise of the Second Coming).

4.2.1 The *Arbor Vitae*

Reno defines the symbol of the *arbor vitae* as that “in which primary attention is given to the life functions of the tree insofar as these provide analogies for the Christian

²⁶ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 124–186.

experience,”²⁷ and distinguishes three symbolic themes associated with it, namely the tree of life as a symbol of individual Christians, as a symbol of Christ, and, as the sacred vine, a symbol of Christ’s relationship to his followers.²⁸ Christianity drew on the Jewish belief in the navel of the earth and the existence of a sacred tree there,²⁹ as manifested in both biblical and apocryphal writings.³⁰ The physical characteristics of this tree make it representative of the whole earth: its roots reach down into the depths of the earth, its height surpasses all other trees, rivers flow from it to other trees, and all manner of creatures make their home under its protection.³¹ The earliest form of the patristic *arbor vitae* was the date palm, which was later associated with the palm of victory; these themes find expression, for example, in the apocryphal *Liber de infantia* or *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, in which Jesus blesses the palm tree after it nourishes the holy family on their flight into Egypt.³²

In addition, the *arbor vitae* came to represent the individual, often newly-baptized Christian; similarly paradise was identified with the Church, God with the holy gardener.³³ Hence, the community of baptized Christians forms a garden, and they draw spiritual nourishment from the trees of life and knowledge planted in their midst. This imagery can be found, for example, in the mid-third-century seventy-third Epistle of Cyprian of Carthage, and the early third-century *Commentary on Daniel* by Hippolytus of

²⁷ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 79.

²⁸ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 80.

²⁹ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 82-86.

³⁰ For example, Ezek. 5:5, 17:22-24, 31:3-10 and 38:12, the Ethiopian *Book of Adam and Eve*, and the Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures*.

³¹ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 85.

³² Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 91-93.

³³ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, cites the fourth-century text *De Schismate Donatistarum* by Bishop Optatus of Milevis, and the late-second to early third-century Greek *Epistle to Diognetus* of unknown authorship, pp. 94-95.

Rome.³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa's *In diem luminum sive in baptismum Christi* expounds Psalm 1:3 to develop the blooming and leaf-bearing aspects of the *arbor vitae* symbol; here the foliage represents virtues that develop in the Christian after baptism.³⁵ Finally, the fourth-century *Commentary on the Psalms* by Asterius the Sophist deals extensively with the theme of the tree planted by running waters; he not only equates the Word with the tree planted by the water's edge, but contrasts Christ as the tree of life with the Devil, the tree of death.³⁶

Other patristic texts use the tree of life to symbolize Christ the Word, for example Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, and Book Five of the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria; the latter specifically associates the tree with the crucified Christ.³⁷ Further examples include the *Commentary on the Book of Daniel* by Hippolytus, Origen's *De oratione*, Clement's Book Three of the *Stromata*, and the so-called *Epistle of Barnabas*.³⁸ In these examples, the tree of life represents Christ, planted in the centre of Paradise or the Church; the tree of life as Christ is the source of wisdom, and yields spiritual fruits which are food for believers, while the tree planted by running waters is the source of the waters of baptism.³⁹

A final form of the *arbor vitae* patristic symbol is found in its association with the sacred vine. Important biblical vine images, such as Isaiah 5 and Psalm 79:8–11, make

³⁴ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 96–98.

³⁵ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 99–100. Other cited texts include: the *De trinitate* by Didymus of Alexandria, who likens the baptized to water plants and draws a parallel between the font and the Jordan; Eusebius of Caesarea's *Commentary on the Psalms* (early 4th century), which identifies Christ with the waters that sustain newly-planted trees; Methodius' late 3rd century work *The Symposium of the Ten Virgins* (inspired by Psalm 1:3), which speaks of the tree of life blooming again for everyone in the Church and the waters of redemption, pp. 101–103.

³⁶ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 104–105.

³⁷ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 106–107.

³⁸ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 108–111.

³⁹ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 111–112.

the vine and vineyard of Yahweh symbols of Israel; in John 15:1–7, the true vine is Christ and the image of the vine and its branches symbolizes the union of Christ with his followers.⁴⁰ This imagery appears in numerous patristic sources, including Ignatius of Antioch's *Letter to the Trallians*, Clement's *The Rich Man's Salvation*, Asterius' *Homilies on the Psalms*, Hippolytus' *On the Benedictions of Isaac, Jacob and Moses*, the paschal tract of Zeno of Verona, and Didymus of Alexandria's *Commentary on the Psalms*.⁴¹ In this way the image of the vine and its shoots was brought together with that of the tree and its branches; both analogies represented the union of Christ and the church.

4.2.2 The *Arbor Crucis*

Patristic literature also contains a detailed symbolic system which derived from the gradual identification of the tree symbol with the cross of Christ, in which the motifs of decline and rejuvenation so often associated with the sacred tree in world religions became linked to the death and Resurrection of Christ.⁴² The symbol of the cross was already associated with the cosmological concepts of space, the sky, the sun and the figure of the king in pre-Christian times.⁴³ It is worth noting that the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the taw, was written as a cross mark and came to mean “mark” or “sign”; it occurs twice in the Old Testament (Job 31:35 and Ezek. 9:4–6), and in the latter passage the taw mark is placed on the foreheads of the faithful to denote loyalty to

⁴⁰ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 112–115.

⁴¹ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 115–121.

⁴² Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 124–125.

⁴³ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 126–128.

Yahweh.⁴⁴ The Hebrew tau became associated with the Greek tau and also acquired the importance assigned to chi, which became a monogram for Christ. Chi was already a symbolic letter in Plato: in the *Timaeus* it represented the world soul. Justin Martyr took over this symbol from Plato, claiming that it represented the cross of Christ.⁴⁵

Patristic writers saw many types of the cross in the Old Testament, including: the tree of life from Genesis, the tree of execution from Deuteronomy (21:22–23), and the brazen serpent raised by Moses in the desert.⁴⁶ New Testament writers took up the theme of the tree of execution from Deuteronomy and the decree that anybody who was hanged upon a tree was accursed, hence the references to Christ redeeming us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse himself (Galatians 3:13), the idea that the curse that Christ took on was the sins of men (I Peter 2:24), and other references to Christ hanging on a tree (Acts 5:30, 10:39 and 13:29). The second important New Testament tree is the tree of life in Revelation.⁴⁷ Paul's epistle to the Ephesians (3:17–19), which referred to charity's length, breadth, height and depth came to be associated with the dimensions of the Cross.⁴⁸ Finally, there is Paul's opposition of Adam and Christ, that is in I Cor. 15 and Romans 5:18–19, which allows further parallels between the forbidden tree and the tree of the cross.

There are several important non-patristic sources which illustrate the theme of the *arbor crucis*. The Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures*⁴⁹ expressly links the tree of life

⁴⁴ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 129–130.

⁴⁵ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 131–134.

⁴⁶ Numbers 21; here the Fathers saw the serpent as both a symbol of Christ (life) and Satan (death), which also forged a link between the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of the cross via the brazen serpent symbol; see Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 136–139.

⁴⁷ Rev. 2:7, 22:2, 22:14.

⁴⁸ Greenhill, "Child in the Tree," 357.

⁴⁹ E. A. Wallis Budge, trans. *The Book of the Cave of Treasures Translated from the Syriac* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927).

at the centre of Eden and the cross of Christ on Golgotha, and recounts how after Adam's death, his son Shem, guided by the Lord, took his body to the centre of the earth, Golgotha; when Shem laid Adam's body down, the earth opened in the shape of a cross to receive it.⁵⁰ In another account in the *Book of Adam and Eve* (also known as *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*) Adam asks Seth to bury his body at the middle of the earth after the Flood subsides, from which place God would come and "save all our kindred."⁵¹ Just as the tree was located at the centre of paradise, so the cross was set up at the centre of the world (these being the same place), and just as sin entered the world through a tree, so was it overcome. Adam and Christ, both associated with Golgotha, are in a parallel relationship of committing and overcoming sin, and Adam's burial place has cosmological significance in that it is the place where the four quarters are united, and as such Golgotha is the locus for both the promise and completion of the Redemption. The wood-of-the-cross legends take these parallels one step further, making the tree of the cross the actual material product of the tree in Eden.

The *arbor crucis* is further developed as a cosmological principle by means of its shape. Inspired by Paul's dimensions of the cross, the cross (and Christ on it), with its length, breadth, height and depth, forms the shape of the cosmological *chi* and hence represents the universality of the redemptive death of Christ. As a result, "characteristics usually associated with the cosmological tree in its own right, have become predicated of the *arbor crucis* by way of the cross shape itself primarily, and by way of the tree only

⁵⁰ Budge, *Cave*, 62–63, 126–127.

⁵¹ S. C. Malan, *The Book of Adam and Eve, Also Called the Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 114–115.

secondarily.”⁵² Finally, patristic writers set the *arbor crucis* as an antithetical complement to the tree of knowledge, as seen in: Irenaeus’ *Adversus haereses*, and his *Demonstratio praedicationis apostolicae*, in which the knowledge of evil brought about by the tree of knowledge is countered by the knowledge of good brought about by the tree of the cross.⁵³

4.2.3 Influences of Greek Patristic and Semitic Thought on the Christian Cross-Tree Connection

A number of key features of Greek patristic and Semitic thought had significant influence on Christianity’s dual concept of the cross as a cosmological principle (retaining its cross shape), and as the *arbor vitae*, in which it was envisioned as a great fruit-bearing tree. Eleanor Greenhill’s important study of the Christian concept of the cosmological tree neatly summarizes these features.⁵⁴ For example, the Greek fathers made the important identification (already in Irenaeus) of the four dimensions of the cross with the four dimensions of the cosmos. Further, they identified the Logos with the cross; therefore, by extension, the dimensions of the cross refer to the Godhead. Also

⁵² Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 173–174. Some relevant texts illustrating this phenomenon are: Irenaeus’ *Demonstratio praedicationis apostolicae*, Gregory of Nyssa’s *Catechesis magna*, the *Apologia* of Justin Martyr (who spoke of the shape of the cross expressed in humble things), and others (see Reno, 172–178). A further development in the tradition occurs when the very shape of the crucified body is linked to the cosmic pattern as in the *Epistle* of Pseudo-Barnabas, and *the Odes of Solomon* (see Reno, 178–180). The attitude of the crucified Christ becomes a source of cosmic consolidation in Athanasius of Alexandria’s *De incarnatione*, Lactantius’ *Divinae institutiones*, Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catechesis*, and Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. 91 (see Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 180–182).

⁵³ Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 182–184.

⁵⁴ Greenhill, “Child in the Tree.”

present is the conception of Golgotha as both centre and pole, and the notion that the cross is an instrument or machine by which the soul ascends to heaven.⁵⁵

The first scholar to show how early Christian writers drew on Semitic cosmological concepts of the structure of the universe in their accounts of the cross was Jacoby, on whose work Greenhill draws heavily. The first of these important aspects of the Semitic tradition is a belief in the “navel of the earth,” which serves as the centre of the universe, a means of communication between earth and the upper sphere, and a means of distributing food over the earth. Biblical tradition locates the navel either at Mt. Zion or Jerusalem (*e.g.* Ezek. 5:5, 38:12) and early Christian writings locate it at Calvary.⁵⁶ Second is the Old Testament tradition that locates cosmological trees at the centre of the earth, where these trees often represent royal rulers and their kingdoms, as in Ezek. 17: 22–24 and Dan. 4: 7–14. Both these passages are connected with prophecies of the Messiah and the *lignum humile* and *aridum*, that is the House of David. As a result of this connection with trees localized *in medio terrae*, “it is easy to see how, once the tradition of the navel of the earth was transferred to Golgotha, these trees – one of them dry and later to bear leaf; the other cut down but to put out new shoots – came to have special significance for the Cross.”⁵⁷

Finally, Semitic belief included various forms of link between heaven and earth: a tree whose top touches the heavens, a cosmological ladder (as in Gen. 28: 12–13), and a cosmological column, like the two seen by Ezekiel standing before the New Temple

⁵⁵ Summarizing from Rahner and Bousset, Greenhill lists several important features of Greek patristic thought, “Child in the Tree,” 332–333.

⁵⁶ For example, in the Ethiopic *Book of Adam*, and the Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures*, the tree of life, fixed at the middle of the earth, prefigures the cross; Bede mentions this in his *De locis sanctis*. See Paul Geyer, ed. *Baadae, Liber de locis sanctis*, CSEL vol. 39 (Prague: F. Tempsky, 1898), 307.

⁵⁷ Greenhill, “Child in the Tree,” 336–337.

(Ezek. 40:48). Jewish legends also envisioned the cosmological tree as a ladder, *e.g.* in the description of Gan'Eden in the *Midrash Kohen* in which the tree of life, which is five hundred years high, is like a ladder on which righteous souls may ascend and descend.⁵⁸

4.3 Specific Patristic and Medieval Texts Illustrative of the Cross-Tree Tradition

This section traces the continuance of the Christian tradition of the sacred tree and its relation to the cross from key patristic texts into the medieval period. This selection of works is by no means exhaustive, but is representative of the persistence of the concept over large spans of time.

4.3.1 The *Carmen de pascha*

One of the richest accounts of the *arbor crucis* is the fourth-century work *Carmen de pascha*,⁵⁹ attributed to St. Cyprian. This poem, consisting of sixty nine hexameters, describes a tree identical with the Saviour and the Church; it unites the Jewish notion of the *umbilicus terrae* as applied to the cross with the biblical theme of the cosmological tree. The poem tells of a cutting taken from a sterile trunk that is planted on Golgotha: “There is a place which we believe to be the centre of the whole world, [which] the Jews call by the ancestral name of Golgotha. Here, I recall that wood cut down from a sterile tree trunk was planted and produced wholesome fruits.”⁶⁰ This shoot grows into a cross-

⁵⁸ See Greenhill, “Child in the Tree,” 335–337.

⁵⁹ W. Hartel, ed. *S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani, Opera Omnia*, CSEL 3.3 (Vienna: C. Geroldi, 1871), 304–308.

⁶⁰ S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani, *Opera Omnia*, 305, ll. 1–4: “Est locus ex omni medius quem credimus orbe,/ Golgotha Iudaei patrio cognomine dicunt:/ Hic ego de sterili succisum robore lignum,/ plantatum memini fructus genuisse salubres.”

tree,⁶¹ whose first fruit is a man (the Incarnation). This man falls to the earth but rises in three days and is resurrected in the form of a great cosmological tree: “The man who this wood bore, as from the first ripe seed, fallen, the earth received; whence soon, amazing to relate, the light of the third day brought out again to earth and heaven an awe-inspiring branch blessed with the fruit of life.”⁶² The tree’s branches encompass the whole earth, under which all the nations may gather to partake of the fruits of salvation,⁶³ possibly an allusion to the Eucharist. At the base of the tree is a fountain of clear waters,⁶⁴ the fountain of baptism, which rids the throngs, including young, old, married, unmarried, man, and woman, of the vestiges of their journey.

The tree thus corresponds to the death and Resurrection of Jesus, and echoes the practice of the Jewish scriptures of associating trees with royal rulers. At the same time the tree represents the Church itself, and its fruit the Eucharist; it is also likened to a cosmic ladder by which the baptized may reach heaven.⁶⁵ The poem contains implicit biblical images, including the tree located at the centre of the universe, the messianic prophecy of the sapling (Isaiah 53:2), the parable of the mustard seed, the tree of life in Revelation, and the cosmic ladder. The tree and cross symbols are thus joined together by equation of their location, shape, material and function.⁶⁶

⁶¹ S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani, *Opera Omnia*, 305, ll. 7–8: “This is the appearance of the tree: it rises from one stem and soon extends its arms into two branches,” (“Arboris haec species: uno de stipite surgit/ Et mox in geminos extendit brachia ramos”).

⁶² S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani, *Opera Omnia*, 305–306, ll. 11–14: “Quem tulit hoc primo maturo semine lapsum,/ concepit tellus: mox hinc (mirabile dictu),/ tertia lux iterum terrae superisque tremendum,/ extulerat ramum uitali fruge beatum.”

⁶³ S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani, *Opera Omnia*, 306, ll. 19–20: “totum spargens porrexit in orbem,/ gentibus ut cunctis uictum uitamque perennem.”

⁶⁴ S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani, *Opera Omnia*, 306, ll. 27–28: “Fons erat: hic nullo casu turbante serenum,/ perspicuis inlimis aquis.”

⁶⁵ S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani, *Opera Omnia*, 308, l. 68: “Inde iter ad caelum per ramos arboris altae.”

⁶⁶ Greenhill, “Child in the Tree,” 354.

However, it is unlikely that the *Carmen de pascha* was widely known in the middle ages, because the poem ceased to be copied with the works of St. Cyprian after the ninth century, and only emerged again with the Humanists in the fifteenth.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, although the poem itself was not popularly known, certain aspects of it (what Greenhill calls the *De pascha* tradition), persisted. This tradition may be summarized as follows: both Church and Saviour were depicted by means of a cosmological tree; that tree goes through phases which represent the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ; the tree is truly cosmological (it stands at the centre of the earth, it reaches the heavens, it covers the earth with its branches, its fruit is universal nourishment, its leaves and seeds give universal healing) and acts as a ladder to heaven. The tree's first fruit is identical with the *virga ex radice Jesse*, ripens on the cross, falls to earth at the Crucifixion, and ascends to heaven in the form of a tree. These features will be noted in the discussion of later works below.

4.3.2 Quodvultdeus' Sermon *De cataclysmo ad catechumenos*

Another important patristic work is the sermon *De cataclysmo ad catechumenos*,⁶⁸ now attributed to Bishop Quodvultdeus of Carthage, pupil of Augustine, although it was at first wrongly ascribed to Augustine himself.⁶⁹ Quodvultdeus' sermon was inspired by the third-century Easter homily by Hippolytus of Rome, a tract which

⁶⁷ Greenhill, "Child in the Tree," 342.

⁶⁸ Quodvultdeus, *De cataclysmo ad catechumenos* (PL 40, cols. 693–700).

⁶⁹ See Greenhill, "Child in the Tree," 344. Attributed to Quodvultdeus by Desiderius Franes, *Die Werke des hl. Quodvultdeus, Bischofs von Karthago, gestorben um 453* (München, 1920), 32–33; 78–79.

demonstrates a very early appearance of the cosmological cross-tree in Christian writings and identifies that tree with Jacob's ladder.⁷⁰

Quodvultdeus' sermon identifies the cross with the shoot from the stock of Jesse, as well as the rod of Moses: "the cross itself, the very shoot which flourished out of the root of Jesse; that same rod which Moses carried...with which he performed many miracles."⁷¹ In a passage of beautiful imagery, Christ is the great architect, who carries the rod as well as hanging from it, and performs miracles with it. The rod is Mary, the cross and Christ himself, while the cross becomes a great tree, one that serves as a ladder to heaven:

I see you, the great architect, carrying the rod, hanging on the rod, and with that very rod performing many miracles. I very much fear the showing forth of this rod, beloved ones, when I examine the places of holy scripture. The rod is St. Mary, the rod is Christ himself, the rod is the cross. And with that rod what great and wonderful things did this architect do! He made the tree of the cross, and a stairway to heaven through which man, fallen, rose to the Father. What a miracle, brothers, of this architect, that he made from his rod a stairway of such a kind that he placed its top in heaven, and through it he himself both ascends and descends.⁷²

Thus, in Quodvultdeus' sermon, which may have been more widely known because of its mis-attribution to Augustine, we have the association of the cross with the shoot out of the rod of Jesse, Mary, and Christ himself as well as a clear reference to the cross as both

⁷⁰ See Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 156–163.

⁷¹ Quodvultdeus, *De cataclysmo*, 5.6, PL 40, col. 696: "Ipsa illa virga crux, ipsa illa virga quae floruit ex radice Jesse; ipsa illa virga quam portabat Moyses...in quo multa miracula faciebat."

⁷² Quodvultdeus, *De cataclysmo*, 6.8, PL 40, col. 698: "Magnum te architectum video, virgam portantem, in virga pendentem, et de ista virga multa miracula facientem. Multum expavesco expositionem virgae hujus, dilectissimi, dum loca divinarum Scripturarum considero. Virga Maria sancta, virga ipse Christus, virga crux. Et de ista virga quam magna et mira fecit hic architectus! et arborem fecit crucis...et scalas coeli per quas hominem lapsum ad Patrem levavit. Quale miraculum, fratres, hujus architecti, ut de virga sua faceret scalas, et tales quarum caput in coelum poneret, et per eas ipse et ascenderet et descenderet."

tree and ladder. As will be illustrated below, later writers continue some (though rarely all) of these associations.

4.3.3 Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*: Parable of the Mustard Seed

In his analysis of the Book of Job, Gregory the Great launches into a brief discussion of the parable of the mustard seed from Matthew 13:31–32. In this passage Gregory identifies the tree with the Saviour and the church, and although he does not explicitly equate tree and cross, the imagery is there. The tree that springs from this small grain goes through phases (death, burial, resurrection, glorification); its branches are the holy preachers on which the souls of the blessed perch like birds to take refreshment:

For Christ himself is indeed the mustard seed which was planted in the garden and arose as a great tree. For truly the seed, although it died, rose again as a tree. A seed through the humility of his flesh, a tree through the power of his majesty. A seed because “we have seen him and there was no sightliness (Isaiah 53: 2); moreover a tree because “thou art beautiful above the sons of men” (Psalm 44:3). The branches of this tree are the holy preachers...For what is said about them? Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world (Psalm 18:5). In these very branches winged creatures rest, because the holy souls, which raise themselves up from earthly thought by means of their feathers of virtues, in their words and consolations they breathe again from the weariness of this life.⁷³

⁷³ Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, 19.1, caput 28, verse 21, PL 76, col. 97A–B: “Ipse [Christ] quippe est granum sinapis qui in horti sepultura plantatus, arbor magna surrexit. Granum namque fuit cum moreretur, arbor cum resurgeret. Granum per humilitatem carnis, arbor per potentiam majestatis. Granum, quia vidimus eum, et non erat aspectus (Isaiah 53:2); arbor autem, quia speciosus forma prae filiis hominum (Psal. 44:3). Hujus arboris rami sancti praedicatores sunt... Quid enim de eis dicitur? In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum, et in fines orbis terrae verba eorum (Psal. 18:5). In istis ramis volucres requiescunt, quia sanctae animae, quae quibusdam virtutum pennis a terrena cogitatione se sublevant, in eorum dictis atque consolationibus ab hujus vitae fatigatione respirant.”

The interpretation of this parable according to the *Glossa ordinaria* was that we might understand the humbleness of Christ's birth in the tiny seed, and identify the preachers that carry his teachings throughout the world as the birds sitting in its branches.⁷⁴ However, in Gregory's passage the seed dies and is resurrected as a great tree, a clear reference to Christ's death on the cross; so again we have the equation between the cross and a great tree. Gregory's work was widely copied and quoted in subsequent centuries.

4.3.4 Venantius Fortunatus' Hymns to the Cross

While Venantius Fortunatus wrote numerous lyrics on the holy cross, two in particular are notable here for their relevant imagery.⁷⁵ The first, known by its opening words as *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, was composed by Fortunatus to commemorate the sending of a relic of the True Cross from Emperor Justin II to St. Radegund. The hymn was sung as the relic was carried from Tours to Radegund's monastery at Poitiers in the year AD 569. Its original processional use, according to the Roman Missal, was on Good Friday, when the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession to the high altar.⁷⁶ Its principal use, however, was in the Divine Office: the Roman Breviary prescribes it for daily Vespers from the Saturday before Passion Sunday until Maundy Thursday, and also for Vespers on the feasts of the Holy Cross, including the *Inventio* (3 May), and the *Exultatio* (14 September).⁷⁷

⁷⁴ See section 4.1 above.

⁷⁵ For the Latin text (along with a French translation) see Marc Reydellet, *Poemes: Venantius Fortunat*, 3 vols. (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 1994).

⁷⁶ Hugh Henry, "Vexilla Regis Prodeunt," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 17 vols., ed. Charles G. Herbermann, vol. 15, 396–397 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912).

⁷⁷ For the Roman Missal see: Dom Leduc and Dom Baudot, *The liturgy of the Roman Missal: Le Catechisme Liturgique* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1920). For the Roman Breviary see C. F.

Verses four through six in particular are worth closer examination:

That which the prophet-king of old
hath in mysterious verse foretold,
is now accomplished, whilst we see
God ruling the nations from a Tree.

O lovely and refulgent Tree,
adorned with purpled majesty;
culled from a worthy stock, to bear
those limbs which sanctified were.

Blest Tree, whose happy branches bore
the wealth that did the world restore;
the beam that did that Body weigh
which raised up Hell's expected prey.⁷⁸

Here Fortunatus clearly describes the cross as a great and noble tree, from which God rules the nations. The tree is called glorious and shining, and while no paradisaical origin is claimed for it, it is said to derive from noble stock and to be adorned with regal purple; the branches of the tree bear the wealth that restores the world and delivers us from hell.

A second hymn, known as the *Pange lingua gloriosi* is also generally ascribed to Fortunatus. The Roman Breviary assigns this hymn to Passion Sunday and the ferial

Brown, *The Roman Breviary: Restored by the Sacred Council of Trent; Published by Order of S. Pius V, Supreme Pontiff; and Carefully Revised by Other Popes; Reformed by Order of Pope Pius X: An English Version*, 4 vols. (London: Burns, 1936–1937).

⁷⁸ English translation by Walter Kirkham Blount, *The Complete Office of the Holy Week, with Notes and Explications Translated Out of Latin and French* (1687). The Latin text from Reydellet, *Poemes*, vol. 1, 57–58:

Inpleta sunt quae concinit
David fideli carmine,
dicendo nationibus:
regnavit a ligno deus.

Arbor decora et fulgida,
ornata regis purpura,
electa, digno stipite
tam sancta membra tangere!

Beata cuius brachiis
pretium pependit saeculi!
statera facta est corporis
praedam tulitque Tartari.

offices down to Wednesday of Holy Week; it is also designated for use at the feasts of the *Inventio*, the *Exaltatio*, the Crown of Thorns and the Five Wounds, as well as the Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday.⁷⁹ Again the cross is described as a noble tree, more noble in fact than any other tree in its foliage, blossoms and fruit: “Faithful Cross! above all other, one and only noble Tree!/ None in foliage, none in blossom, none in fruit thy peer may be.”⁸⁰ It is so noble, that it alone was worthy to bear the world’s ransom; in this saving aspect, the cross is like the ark that saves the world and harbors it from the shipwreck.⁸¹ In a passage reminiscent of the *Dream of the Rood*, the cross-tree bends down its lofty branches and relaxes its natural rigidity to gently embrace its precious burden.⁸² This hymn even carries a possible reference to the wood-of-the-cross legends when it describes the pitying Creator who has prepared this second tree to right the evil done when the first parents ate of the forbidden tree: “God, His Maker, sorely grieving that the first-made Adam fell,/ When he ate the fruit of sorrow, whose reward was death and hell,/ Noted then this Wood, the ruin of the ancient wood to quell.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Hugh Henry, “Pange Lingua Gloriosi,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 17 vols, ed. Charles G. Herbermann, vol. 11, 441–444 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911).

⁸⁰ English translation by John Mason Neale, *Collected Hymns, Sequences and Carols of John Mason Neale* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), 7–9. He also translates “Vexilla Regis Prodeunt,” 9–10. Latin text in Reydellet, *Poemes*, vol. 1, 50–52, verse 8: “Crux fidelis, inter omnes, arbor una nobilis;/ nulla talem silva profert, flore, fronde, germine.”

⁸¹ Reydellet, *Poemes*, vol. 1, 50–52, from verse 10: “Sola digna tu fuisti, ferre saeculi pretium,” and “atque portum praeparare, nauta mundo naufrago.”

⁸² Reydellet, *Poemes*, vol. 1, 50–52, verse 9: “Flecte ramos, arbor alta, tensa laxa viscera,/ et rigor lentescat ille, quem dedit nativitas.”

⁸³ Reydellet, *Poemes*, vol. 1, 50–52, verse 2: “De parentis protoplasti, fraude Factor condolens,/ quando pomi noxialis, morte morsu corrui,/ ipse lignum tunc notavit, damna ligni ut solveret.”

4.3.5 Rabanus Maurus' *Carmen de laudibus sanctae crucis*

Rabanus Maurus' *Carmen de laudibus sanctae crucis*⁸⁴ gives an account of the cosmological tree of the cross and the four cardinal virtues. In Book 2, Rabanus calls the cross a *rota de infimis ad superiora nos trahens* and describes it as a means of ascent to heaven, a wheel and a series of steps (*gradus*). However, it is the vivid description of the cross as a great tree that is most noteworthy here:

So many and of such a kind are the fruits that the tree of the holy cross offers in its offshoots that it is fitting indeed to commemorate it now in this sacred poem. Its fruit is eternal and its root perpetual; its scent fills up the world and its savour nourishes the faithful; its splendour overpowers the sun, and its brightness obscures the snow; its top exceeds the pole, and its lowest point penetrates the depths of the earth... Clearly this tree was planted by him about whom the Prophet says, making a comparison to a tree: "And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters" (Psalm 1:3).⁸⁵

The tree's fruit is eternal and its root perpetual; its fragrance fills the whole world and its flavour fills up the faithful. As a tree of true cosmic proportions, its splendour outshines the sun, its brightness the snow, its peak exceeds the heavens and its lowest roots reach down to the infernal regions. Rabanus, here drawing on the now familiar verse from Psalm 1, describes the tree as like the one which was planted by running waters. This description closely recalls that in the *Carmen de pascha*; a direct influence would not be

⁸⁴ Rabanus Maurus, *De laudibus sanctae crucis* (PL 107, cols. 173–174).

⁸⁵ Rabanus Maurus, *De laudibus*, PL 107, col. 173A–B: "Quantos ergo et quales fructus lignum sanctae crucis germine suo proferat, dignum est etiam in hoc sacro carmine modo commemorare, cuius fructus aeternus est et radix perpetua; cuius odor mundum replet, et sapor fideles saginat; cuius splendor solem superat, et candor nivem obfuscet; cuius cacumen polum excedit, et cuius infimum inferna penetrat... Hoc videlicet lignum ab ipso plantatum est, de quo dicit Propheta, ligni comparationem faciens: *Et erit tanquam lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum.*"

impossible, since three manuscript copies of Pseudo-Cyprian's poem do survive from various parts of the Carolingian empire.⁸⁶

4.3.6 Peter Damian's *De exaltatione sanctae crucis*

Advancing a few centuries in time from Rabanus Maurus, we find another homily equating the cross and tree in Peter Damian's eleventh-century *Homilia de exaltatione sanctae crucis*.⁸⁷

O blessed cross, who merited to suspend with a new balance that one whom heaven and earth could not sustain! O cross purer than glass, more shining than gold, who, as much as with burgeoning gems and pearls, is adorned with the limbs of the Saviour! O cross, gleaming more than the moon, more splendid than the sun, who surpasses the greatness of the divine light, the radiance of the stars and all the heavenly bodies! You alone among all the trees of the forest were chosen for the office of mankind's redemption. You merited to bear that weight by means of whose virtue heaven is turned and the earth is suspended, and entire mechanism of the world is balanced and will never fall...O truly noble tree, you indeed who, having arisen, proceed from the earthly ground but extend your happy branches above the stars of heaven!... You are the salvation of the lost world, a light to one lost in the shadows, medicine for the weary, a strength to the convalescents, a harbour to those in danger, a refuge to those evading the jaws of death... Since indeed through you banished man is returned to his homeland, and the number of angels, which had diminished, is restored.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ See Greenhill, 351–352.

⁸⁷ Peter Damian, *Homilia de exaltatione sanctae crucis* (*Sermo 48.2*) (PL vol. 144, cols. 766–777).

⁸⁸ Peter Damian, *Homilia de exaltatione*, PL 144, col. 775D–776D: “O beata crux, quae illum meruisti nova libratione suspendere, quem coelum et terra nequeunt sustinere! O crux purior vitro, rutilantior auro, quae tanquam vernantibus gemmis et margaritis, membris ornata es Salvatoris! O crux luna micantior, sole splendidior, quae prae divini magnitudine luminis, stellarum jubat, et omnia coeli astra praecedis! Tu sola inter omnia ligna silvarum electa es ad humanae redemptionis officium. Tu pondus illud sustinere meruisti, cujus virtute coelum volvitur, terra suspenditur, et universa mundi machina nunquam casura libratur... O vere nobilis arbor, quae de terreno quidem cespite orta procedis, sed super astra coeli felices ramos expandis!... Tu salus mundi perditum, tu lux in tenebris constitutum, tu medicina languentium, tu convalescentium virtus, tu periclitantibus portus, tu evadentibus de fauce mortis aufugium... Per te siquidem ad patriam exsul homo revertitur, et angelorum numerus, qui diminutus fuerat, instauratur.”

Here again in glowing language is the familiar assertion that the cross is greater and more splendid than all else: it is brighter than the sun, moon and stars. It alone was found worthy of all the trees in the forest to bear the saviour of the world. The tree demonstrates its cosmic proportions by growing forth from the earthly turf to reach its branches above the stars. As a true tree of life, the cross-tree is a light in the darkness and medicine to the sick; like the ark, it is a harbour to those at risk and an escape from the jaws of death, the sole means mankind has to return to the Father.

4.3.7 Writings of Honorius of Autun

The writings of Honorius of Autun are interesting in that they illustrate the co-existence of a number of the aspects of Christian sacred tree imagery in the works of a single author. Honorius' *Sermo in dominica in quinquagesima*⁸⁹ presents the cross as a tree of virtues. This tree grows from the greatest virtue, charity, just as branches proceed forth from a tree. Again, the tree is like that planted by running waters, whose foliage never fades and whose fruit never fails. Its leaves are good intentions and its fruits good works. It is like the tree planted by running waters because we are continually instructed by the scriptures, just as the tree is nourished by charity.

Charity surpasses all other virtues; nay, rather all virtues proceed from it as branches from a tree, and all tend towards it, as pathways towards a road... This ladder is compared to a tree which is planted near the running waters, whose leaf shall not fall off, nor shall it cease to bring forth its fruit (Psalm 1:3). The root of the tree which finds firm footing affixed in the earth is the love of one's neighbours which extends to friends and enemies. Furthermore, the love of God is understood in that which is erected and growing to the heights. The branches which go

⁸⁹ Honorius of Autun, *Sermo in dominica in quinquagesima* (PL vol. 172, cols. 869–876).

forth thence on all sides are the diverse virtues which proceed from charity. The leaves with which the tree is decorated are the good will by which the faithful are adorned. This foliage shall not fall away, because for the sake of good will each one receives mercy from God. The apples of this tree are good works. The seed in its fruit, from which another tree is born, is preaching, through which the listener is nourished and the fruitful branches of the tree of charity are sown. This tree shall never fail to bear fruit, because charity will never languish from good work. This tree is planted upon the running waters, because through the flow of the Scriptures we are instructed on how charity ought to be implemented.⁹⁰

An image of the cosmological tree occurs in Honorius' *Expositio in psalmos selectos: primus psalmus de incarnatione Christi*,⁹¹ unsurprisingly, in his exposition on Psalm 1: 3. Here, the tree of the cross is the tree of life planted in paradise, that is the church, near the flowing waters of the holy scriptures:

“And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters” (Psalm 1:3). That is: he himself will be like the tree of life planted in paradise, about which it is said: “to him, that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in paradise” (Rev. 2:7). Paradise is called the garden of delights and it signifies the Church, in which are the delights of the Scriptures...The tree of the cross is the tree of life in paradise, that is in the Church, planted near the running waters, that is next to the flow of the Scriptures: because the passion of the cross is completed according to the proclamations of the prophets.⁹²

⁹⁰ Honorius of Autun, *Sermo in dominica*, PL 172, col. 872D–874A: “Karitas omnes virtutes praecellit; immo cunctae virtutes ab ea ut rami de arbore prodeunt, cunctaeque in eam, ut semitae in viam, tendunt...Haec [scala] arbori comparatur quae secus decursus aquarum transplantatur, cujus non defluet folium, nec aliquando desinet facere fructum (Psal. 1). Radix arboris quae deorsum in terra fixa firmatur est dilectio proximi quae per amicos et inimicos dilatatur. Porro qui in altum crescens erigitur dilectio Dei intelligitur. Rami qui undique inde prodeunt sunt diversae virtutes quae de karitate procedunt. Folia quibus arbor decoratur est bona voluntas qua fidelium plebs perornatur. Hoc folium non defluet, quia pro bona voluntate quisque mercedem a Deo percipiet. Hujus arboris poma sunt opera bona. Semen in fructu de quo alia arbor nascitur, est praedicatio, per quam auditor pascitur et arbori karitatis fructificandus ramus inseritur. Haec arbor numquam ferre fructum desinet, quia karitas numquam a bono opere languet. Haec super rivos aquarum plantatur, quia per fluentia Scripturarum instruimur qualiter karitas impleatur.”

⁹¹ Honorius of Autun, *Expositio in psalmos selectos: primus psalmus de incarnatione Christi* (PL vol. 172, cols. 274D–279B).

⁹² Honorius of Autun, *Expositio*, PL 172, col. 276C–277B: “Et ideo erit tanquam lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum. Hoc est: ipse erit comparabilis ligno vitae in paradiso plantato, de quo dicitur:

The fruit of this cross-tree is Christ himself, and all who eat from his body (through the sacrament of the Eucharist) will achieve eternal life.⁹³ Yet the tree is also that which gives fruit in its own time, namely the time of the Passion:

Concerning the tree it is said that it “shall bring forth its fruit, in due season” (Psalm 1:3). The tree of the cross gave fruit in its season, during the time of the Passion it bore Christ for the benefit of human redemption. Christ too gave his fruit in his own time, on the day of the Resurrection, he brought the joy of eternal rejoicing to the faithful; he gave fruit in his own time, on the day of the Ascension, he bestowed heaven on all mankind.⁹⁴

With roots reaching downwards and its trunk upwards, the tree puts forth branches under whose leaves fruits hang, filled with seeds. The tree is also love: its roots are the love of one’s neighbour and its high-reaching trunk the love of God. Much like the tree of virtues described in Honorius’ *Sermo in dominica in quinquagesima*, the tree’s branches are virtues, its leaves good words, its flowers good will, and its fruits and seeds good works and sound doctrine:

The tree sends its roots downward and its trunk upward, from which branches proceed, out of which leaves go forth: under these fruits hang down, in which seeds lie hidden. To this tree love is compared, through which the multitude of the faithful try to climb to the heights. The root which is fixed in the earth is the love with which one’s neighbour is loved on earth. The trunk rising to the heights is love loving God. The branches of the tree are the various

Vincenti dabo edere de ligno vitae quod est in paradiso (Apoc. II). Paradisus dicitur hortus deliciarum, et significat Ecclesiam, in qua sunt deliciae Scripturarum... Arbor crucis est lignum vitae in paradiso, id est in Ecclesia, plantatum secus decursus aquarum, id est juxta fluentia Scripturarum: quia passio crucis impleta est juxta praeconia prophetarum.”

⁹³ Honorius of Autun, *Expositio*, PL 172, col. 277B: “Hujus arboris fructus est Christus in ea pendens: de cujus corpore qui comederit, non morietur in aeternum.”

⁹⁴ Honorius of Autun, *Expositio*, PL 172, col. 277B–277C: “De quo ligno subditur quod *fructum suum dabit in tempore suo*. Arbor crucis fructum in suo tempore dedit, dum in tempore passionis, sustinuit Christum pro salute humanae redemptionis. Christus quoque fructum suum in tempore suo dedit, dum in die resurrectionis, fidelibus attulit gaudium aeternae exultationis; fructum in tempore suo dedit dum in die ascensionis hominibus coelum contulit.”

virtues of charity, the leaves are good words; the flowers
good will, the fruits good works, the seeds right doctrine.⁹⁵

In the *De inventione sanctae crucis*⁹⁶ we find a description of the cosmological cross that relies less overtly on arboreal imagery. Note that it is in this same sermon that Honorius relates a bit of the wood-of-the-cross legend, namely the part where the holy wood caused miracles in the *probatica piscina* and floated up at the time of the Passion to be used as Christ's cross.⁹⁷ Honorius first equates the cross to the tree of life planted in the middle of paradise: "Indeed the tree of life he commanded to grow in the middle, concerning whose fruit man was not to eat, happily remaining in one state and never able to die... On the other hand the tree is understood as the holy cross of life, from which the fruit of eternal life is drawn. From which he who shall have deservedly eaten, "shall not see death forever" (John 8:51)."⁹⁸ Again, the tree is like that in Psalm 1: "This is the tree planted near the running waters (Psalm 1:3), because the holy cross is proclaimed through all the flow of Scripture."⁹⁹ Honorius continues by recounting a series of other "woods" that appear throughout the Bible, each a type of the cross. Abel was killed by wood and to wood Christ was affixed on the cross. The wood of the ark preserved all the species of

⁹⁵ Honorius of Autun, *Expositio*, PL 172, col. 278C–278D: "Arbor mittit radicem deorsum et stipitem sursum, de quo rami prodeunt, ex quibus folia exeunt: sub his fructus dependent, in quibus semina latent. Huic arbori dilectio comparatur, per quam multitudo fidelium ad alta scandere conatur. Radix quae terrae infigitur, est dilectio qua proximus in terra diligitur. Stips ad alta surgens est dilectio Deum diligens. Rami arboris sunt variae virtutes charitatis, folia sunt bona verba; flores bona voluntas, fructus bona opera, semen sana doctrina."

⁹⁶ Honorius of Autun, *De inventione sanctae crucis* (PL vol. 172, cols. 941–948).

⁹⁷ Honorius of Autun, *De inventione*, PL 172, col. 944B–944C: "Fertur quod istud lignum Hierusalem sit allatum atque in piscinam probaticam jactatum. Ob cuius reverentiam angelus singulis annis in piscinam descendit, aquam movit, et quicumque languidus primus in aquam descendit, sanus exiit. Tempore autem Dominicae passionis piscina siccitate exaruit et illud lignum apparuit. Militibus vero quaerentibus lignum ad crucem habile, inventum est per omnia aptabile. Hoc ergo sumpto, crucem inde fecerunt, humeris Christi portandam imposuerunt, eumque ad salvationem populi ut serpentem in deserto in ipso exaltaverunt."

⁹⁸ Honorius of Autun, *De inventione*, PL 172, col. 943A: "lignum etiam vitae in medio pullulare imperavit, de cuius fructu si homo [non] comedisset, in uno statu feliciter permanens numquam mori potuisset... Porro lignum sancta crux vitae intellegitur, de qua fructus aeternae vitae tollitur. De quo qui digne comederit, mortem in aeternum non videbit (John 8)."

⁹⁹ *ibid.*: "Hoc est lignum quod juxta aquas transplantatur (Psal. 1), quia sancta crux per omnia Scripturae fluentia praedicatur."

animals from the flood just as the cross supports those making their way through the dangerous waves of earthly existence.¹⁰⁰ The cross is also like the rod of Moses which transformed into a serpent and devoured those of the Pharaoh's mages; it is the rod with which Moses divided the waters and the one which he used to bring forth water from a rock and change the bitter waters into sweet:

The rod of Moses is changed into a serpent by which the serpents of the mages are devoured. This rod is the holy cross which destroyed the flesh of Christ by his own will, whose death overcame our two deaths, namely of the body and of the soul. With this rod the sea is divided... With this rod the rock is struck twice and water flows forth... When the people went out from Egypt and into the desert and were not able to drink the water on account of its bitterness, the Lord showed a tree to Moses, which when he placed it in the water, made it sweet (Exod. 15:23–25).¹⁰¹

The cosmological cross reaches out to the four directions, just as Christ's kingdom extends through all four parts of the world. The erected cross is affixed in the earth, but looks up towards the sky, its two arms stretching out to left and right. It does so because through the triumph of the cross heavenly things are restored and through the sign of the cross evil things are destroyed, and just as the arms of the cross reach to right and left, so shall the righteous and damned, respectively, be arranged:

The cross if inclined in the earth, is acknowledged to stretch itself out to the east, the south, the north, and the west, because the four parts of the world signify Christ's kingdom. He himself said: "And I, if I be lifted up from

¹⁰⁰ Honorius of Autun, *De inventione*, PL 172, col. 943B: "Abel ligno occiditur, et Christus ligno crucis affigitur. Genus animantium ligno de undis diluvii sublevatur, quia Ecclesia adminiculo ligni crucis de periculosis fluctibus mundi ad astra exaltatur... ita fidelis populus sub ramis crucis per fidem stat."

¹⁰¹ Honorius of Autun, *De inventione*, PL 172, col. 943D–944A: "Virga Moysi in draconem mutatur, a qua dracones magorum devorantur. Virga haec est sancta crux quae supplicio suo carnem Christi mortificavit, cujus mors nostras duas mortes, scilicet corporis et animae, superavit. Hac virga mare dividitur... Hac virga bis petra percutitur et aqua producitur... Cum populus de Aegypto transiret atque in heremo aquam propter amaritudinem bibere nequiret, Dominus Moysi lignum ostendit, quod in aqua missum eam in dulcedinem convertit (Exod. 15)."

the earth, will draw all things to myself” (John 12:32). In short, he was raised up from the earth on the cross, and the four-fold world was drawn to him by the sign of the cross. If however the cross is erected, affixed in the earth, part of it is seen to look at heaven, part to penetrate the earth, part to show forth on either side to the right and left of the world. Part of it looks towards heaven, because through the triumph of the cross the celestial bodies are restored. Part penetrates the earth because through the banner of the cross terrestrial things are renewed. Part even penetrates hell, because through the sign of the cross the infernal regions are destroyed. Part also shows forth on both sides to the right and left of the world, because through the virtue of the cross the good shall be brought to glory at his right hand and the bad shall be given their punishment at his left.¹⁰²

4.3.8 Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae*

The *Lignum vitae*,¹⁰³ by the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure, was written in the thirteenth century, exactly when the rood-tree legends were flourishing throughout western Europe. Although Bonaventure makes no mention of the apocryphal cross legends in this work, he is nonetheless drawing on the same tradition of equating Christ with the tree. This treatise is essentially a meditation on the virtues of Christ as

¹⁰² Honorius of Autun, *De inventione*, PL 172, col. 946B–946C: “Crux si in terra inclinatur, ad orientem, meridiem, septentrionem, occidentem se protendere comprobatur, quia quatuor partes mundi cruce ad regnum Christi signantur. Ipse enim dixit: *Ego si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad me* (John 12). Denique in crucem a terra est elevatus, quadruplus mundus signo crucis est ad eum tractus. Si autem crux terrae infixa erigitur, pars ejus coelum spectare, pars terram penetrare, pars utrinque in dextrum et sinistrum mundi ostentare cernitur. Pars coelum spectat, quia per crucis triumphum coelestia instaurantur. Pars terram penetrat, quia per crucis vexillum terrestria reparantur. Pars etiam tartara penetrat, quia per crucis signum infernalina destruuntur. Pars quoque utrimque dextrum et sinistrum mundi ostendit, quia per crucis virtutem boni a dextris ad gloriam, et mali a sinistris ad poenam judicabuntur.”

¹⁰³ Bonaventure, “The Tree of Life,” in Ewert Cousins, trans., *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) 117–175. See also Rab Hatfield, “The Tree of Life and the Holy Cross: Franciscan Spirituality in the Trecento and the Quattrocento,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson, 133–60 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990) and Amanda Donna Quantz, “Bonaventure’s Tree of Life in Image and Word: An Interdisciplinary Study of Transformation Through Christ,” diss., Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto, 2003.

demonstrated through incidents in his life, but is organized into twelve sections,¹⁰⁴ each one a metaphorical “fruit” of the tree of life. In this way, the tree of life (here directly personifying Christ himself) is reminiscent of the medieval tradition of representing the seven virtues and vices as fruits or branches on a tree (*Arbor bona* or *Arbor mala*).¹⁰⁵

Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae* also has a close relationship with the *Carmen de Pascha* tradition. His tree too goes through phases of birth, passion, burial, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. The tree, with the fountain of baptism at its root, has twelve branches, each of which denotes one of the mysteries of the Redemption and the virtues and attributes corresponding to it; in fact, a ladder to heaven is implied in this tree of virtues. Bonaventure has clearly been influenced by the *flos* and *fructus* imagery of Isaiah 11:1: Bonaventure’s *flos* is like the first fruit of the *De pascha* which is brought forth, then falls to earth. Although the *De pascha* tree is not associated with the virtues as is Bonaventure’s, nevertheless their similarity seems noteworthy.¹⁰⁶

4.4 The Dimensions of the Cross and the Tree of Virtues

Already in the early centuries of this era, Christian writers seized upon Paul’s definition of the four dimensions of charity in Ephesians 3:18 and began interpreting the meaning of the dimensions of the cross.¹⁰⁷ Jerome, Rabanus Maurus, and Honorius of Autun are but a few of those who wrote upon the subject. A second tradition of the

¹⁰⁴ In this respect Bonaventure follows the tradition of Revelations 22:2, which attributes twelve fruits to the tree of life.

¹⁰⁵ Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval Art* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1964), 63–68.

¹⁰⁶ Greenhill, “Child in the Tree,” 354.

¹⁰⁷ “That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that being rooted and founded in charity, You may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth: To know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3: 17–19).

dimensions of the cross derived from Augustine's discussion of the cross's dimensions in his sermons 165 and 53. Augustine labeled the four parts thus: the *latitudo* was the good works of charity, the *longitudo* perseverance; the *altitudo* represented the hope of heavenly rewards and the *profundum* either the inscrutability of God's judgment, the grace of God or the secret of the sacrament.

The *profundum*, that part of the cross buried in the ground, was given special significance by Augustine and others. Through the analogy of root and tree, it was called the *radix crucis* and identified with *humilitas*, humility being the root of all virtues on the *arbor virtutum*.¹⁰⁸ The *profundum crucis* was originally *fides* and *fortitudo*, but in the late eleventh or early twelfth century *humilitas* had come to be the preferred term. This was a logical shift, since there was already a biblical connection between humility and the cross via the *lignum humile* in Ezek. 17:22, which symbolized the house of David and was to be exalted. As we have seen,¹⁰⁹ Honorius of Autun links the cross with the *arbor virtutum* in his sermon *In dominica in quinquagesima*, then goes on to equate this ladder/tree of virtues with the tree in Psalm 1:3. In this sense, the main purpose of the tree of virtues is to provide to the soul a means of climbing to heaven.¹¹⁰

4.5 Apocryphal Texts

Another fruitful source of relevant imagery can be found in a few key apocryphal texts, in some cases these even offer important parallels to the wood-of-the-cross legends themselves. The *Book of the Cave of Treasures*,¹¹¹ also known as the *History of the*

¹⁰⁸ Greenhill, "Child in the Tree," 363.

¹⁰⁹ See section 4.3.7.

¹¹⁰ Greenhill reminds us that the intent of the *arbor virtutum* was that it be climbed (p. 366).

¹¹¹ Translated into English by Budge, op. cit.

Patriarchs and the Kings Their Successors from the Creation to the Crucifixion of Christ, was written in Syriac in the fourth or fifth century and has been attributed to Ephrem the Syrian. The work was translated into numerous other languages: Arabic, Ethiopian and Georgian translations exist, but there are none extant in Greek or Latin. The early sections of the work deal extensively with Adam and Eve's post-lapsarian life and are closely related to the *Life of Adam and Eve*. As mentioned above (in section 4.2.2), the *Cave of Treasures* expressly links the tree of life with Christ's cross on Golgotha, and recounts how after Adam's death Shem took his body to Golgotha on God's instructions and the earth miraculously opened in the shape of a cross to receive it:

That Tree of Life which was in the midst of Paradise prefigured the Redeeming Cross which is the middle of the earth...[After Adam's death, his son Shem took his body] and went forth by night from among his people and an angel of the Lord guided them. And when they arrived at Golgotha, which is the center of the earth, an angel of the Lord showed Shem the place for the body of Adam. And when Shem had deposited the body of our father Adam upon that place, the four quarters of the earth separated themselves from each other, and the earth opened in the shape of a cross, and Shem deposited the body of Adam there. As soon as he had laid it therein, the four quarters of the earth drew quickly together, and enclosed the body of our father Adam, and the door of the created world was shut fast.¹¹²

Even before this event the *Cave* recounts how the spot where Adam first stood upright was in the exact spot where Christ's cross would stand millennia later, and when the time of the Passion does arrive, the *Cave* relates how Christ's blood shed on the cross drips down into Adam's mouth below, thus redeeming him.¹¹³ The *Cave of Treasures* then is yet

¹¹² Budge, *Cave*, Part 1, "The First Thousand Years: The Creation of Adam, 52–53 and Part 3, "The Third Thousand Years: Shem Carries the Body of Adam to Golgotha," 126–127.

¹¹³ Budge, *Cave*, Part 6, "The Five Hundred Years from the Second Year of Cyrus to the Birth of Christ: The Crucifixion," 231–232.

another source that transmits the idea of Golgotha as the centre of the earth. It also makes the typological connection between Adam and Christ, original sin and the Redemption, and it has Adam's burial take place at the very spot where Christ would make his redeeming sacrifice, the blood of whom falls down to anoint the first father.

Also worth mentioning are the apocrypha related to Enoch, *1 Enoch* and *2 Enoch*.¹¹⁴ *1 Enoch* was composed in Hebrew or Aramaic between 200 BC and AD 100 and while the work was translated into other languages, it is uncertain whether or not a complete Latin translation ever existed.¹¹⁵ In this text Enoch is translated to paradise where he receives a vision of the future. This method of getting to paradise is quite different from the physical journey that Seth makes in the wood-of-the-cross legends; however, while *1 Enoch* does not offer a close analogue for the motif of Seth's journey, the work probably did influence the Seth legend as it appears in the early *Apocalypse of Moses* at other points.¹¹⁶ For example, in *1 Enoch* the archangel Michael makes a promise regarding the tree of life, which is similar to the promise given to Seth in the *Apocalypse of Moses*.

More significant parallels can be found in *2 Enoch*, also called the *Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch* or the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, a text likely composed c. AD 100 and which exists in two recensions, both Slavonic. This text provides an important parallel for the unusual motif of the "oil of mercy," which is the object of Seth's quest in the wood-of-the-cross legends. In one recension (the A text), the tree of life sends forth

¹¹⁴ Daniel C. Olson, *Enoch: A New Translation. The Ethiopic Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch* (North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 2004); George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); W.R. Morfill, trans. and R.H. Charles, ed. *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896).

¹¹⁵ See Frederick M. Biggs, ed. *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: The Apocrypha* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 9.

¹¹⁶ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 23–24.

oil from its roots, while in the other (the B text), oil is produced by its fruits. Further, 2 *Enoch* equates the “oil of mercy” with the “dew of light,” which is a sign of the Resurrection.¹¹⁷ It is likely that the apocalyptic adventures of Enoch in general were transferred to Seth, an occurrence that may have been facilitated by the fact that Seth’s son was called Enos, a name very close to “Enoch.”¹¹⁸ Taking into account both 1 and 2 *Enoch*, the Enoch legends did have significant influence on the legend of Seth in the following areas: the journey to paradise, the promise of reward in the life to come, the concept of oil from the tree of life, and the portrayal of Seth as a hero in general.¹¹⁹

The final apocryphon to be discussed here offers no direct narrative parallels to the wood-of-the-cross legends; rather, it makes abundant use of arboreal imagery and as such is an important example in the Christian tradition of the sacred tree. This text is the *Shepherd of Hermas*,¹²⁰ a second-century work that claims to be written by Hermas, an ex-slave leader of the early church; whether or not the text is actually autobiographical is irrelevant for our purposes. The *Shepherd* comprises three sections: five *Visions*, twelve *Mandates* and ten *Similitudes* or *Parables*. It is in the *Similitudes* that the most striking tree imagery is found.

In *Similitude* 3, Hermas relates the following:

¹¹⁷ 2 *Enoch* 6: 1, 22: 9; Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 26–27.

¹¹⁸ Charles Mills Gayley, *Plays of our Forefathers and Some of the Traditions upon Which the Plays Were Founded* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908), 267, quoted in Quinn, *Quest*, 29–30.

¹¹⁹ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 30.

¹²⁰ The English translation reproduced here is from J.B. Lightfoot, trans. and J.R. Harmer, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers : Comprising the Epistles (genuine and spurious) of Clement of Rome, the Epistles of S. Ignatius, the Epistles of S. Polycarp, the Martyrdom of S. Polycarp, the Teaching of the Apostles, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle to Diognetus, the Fragments of Papias, the Reliques of the Elders preserved in Irenaeus* (London : Macmillan, 1891), who also provides a short introduction to the text, 159–164. For an edition of the Greek manuscripts of the *Shepherd* see Molly Whittaker, *Der Hirt des Hermas* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956) or Robert Joly, *Le Pasteur*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Cerf, 1968). See also I. Mazzini and E. Lorenzini, “Il Pastore di Erma: Due Versioni Latine o Due Versioni?” in *Civiltà Classica e Cristiana*, 14 vols. (Genova: Istituto di latino, Università di Genova, 1981), vol. 2, 45–86.

He [the shepherd] showed me many trees which had no leaves, but they seemed to me to be, as it were, withered; for they were all alike. And he saith to me; "Seest thou these trees?" "I see them, Sir," I say, "they are all alike, and are withered." He answered and said to me; "These trees that thou seest are they that dwell in this world." "Wherefore then, Sir," say I, "are they as if they were withered, and alike?" "Because," saith he, "neither the righteous are distinguishable, nor the sinners in this world, but they are alike. For this world is winter to the righteous, and they are not distinguishable, as they dwell with the sinners. For as in the winter the trees, having shed their leaves, are alike, and are not distinguishable, which are withered, and which alive, so also in this world neither the just nor the sinners are distinguishable, but they are all alike."¹²¹

Here is an example of what Reno would classify under his *arbor vitae* category of Christian sacred tree imagery: the trees are the individual Christians planted in the world. In the *Shepherd*, however, all trees are withered and indistinguishable, as "this world" is like winter to the righteous. It is implied that in the life to come they will be distinguished, and this is indeed what we find in the far more extensive arboreal image sequence in *Similitude* 8.

Similitude 8 describes a willow tree, clearly a cosmological tree of life in the tradition of the great biblical trees. It overshadows both plains and mountains, and under its shadow all who are called by the name of the Lord gather. By the willow stands a glorious angel of the Lord, wielding a sickle with which he lops off branches from the tree, giving rods of about one cubit in length to those sheltering there; yet even after the rods had been cut off, the tree remains sound.¹²² The angel then demands the rods back, carefully examining each. Some are withered, cracked or grub-eaten to various degrees,

¹²¹ Lightfoot, *Shepherd*, Sim. 3, 202.

¹²² Lightfoot, *Shepherd*, Sim. 8.1, 213.

the majority are returned much the same as they were received, while others still, though few in number, are found to be not only green, but putting forth shoots and fruit. The people are rewarded according to the state of their rods, the ones with sound and green rods have seals set upon them and are given white garments and crowns of palm leaves.¹²³ The angel then departs, but the shepherd instructs Hermas to take even the withered rods to be planted and watered, in the hopes that they might show some signs of life; those whose rods improve to varying degrees are separated from those whose rods do not. The greening of the rods indicates those who have repented.¹²⁴

The rest of the similitude is a lengthy explanation about what the state of each type of rod represents about the life of that person, the differing extents to which they remained faithful to the word of God and suffered for Him. Amazed at the process and at the wondrous willow tree, Hermas asks the shepherd to reveal just what the tree is, to which he receives the following response:

This great tree which overshadows plains and mountains and all the earth is the law of God which was given to the whole world; and this law is the Son of God preached unto the ends of the earth. But the people that are under the shadow are they that have heard the preaching, and believed in Him; but the great and glorious angel is Michael, who hath the power over this people and is their captain. For this is he that putteth the law into the hearts of the believers; therefore he himself inspecteth them to whom he gave it, to see whether they have observed it. But thou seest the rods of every one; for the rods are the law. Thou seest these many rods rendered useless, and thou shalt notice all those that have not observed the law, and shalt see the abode of each severally.¹²⁵

¹²³ Lightfoot, *Shepherd*, Sim. 8.1–8.2, 213–214.

¹²⁴ Lightfoot, *Shepherd*, Sim. 8.2–8.5, 214–217.

¹²⁵ Lightfoot, *Shepherd*, Sim. 8.3, 215.

The *Shepherd* author has here deftly woven together several of the strands of the Christian sacred tree tradition. The great sheltering tree is here, but instead of its branches representing Christ's preachers reaching out into the world, the tree's entire structure embodies God's law; and just as the archangel Michael was set to guard the gates of paradise, thus ensuring that mankind would have no further access to the tree of life in Eden, here he guards the tree of God's law. However, it is the New Testament notion of good fruit and bad fruit¹²⁶ that the *Shepherd* author has really exploited, although altering it significantly for his purposes. Here, it is the rods cut from the inexhaustible tree that wither or flourish according to the deeds of a person's life; they may become cracked and grub-eaten as a result of a life lived in denial of God's law, or sprout foliage and even fruit for those who continually serve and suffer for Him. Finally, echoing the sentiment in Job that "a tree hath hope: if it be cut, it groweth green again...at the scent of water, it shall spring, and bring forth leaves, as when it was first planted."¹²⁷ *The Shepherd of Hermas* assures us that even those who live a less than perfect life have a chance at repentance: their rods will be given a final chance to grow green again in the earth, provided that their penitence is sincere.

4.6 Availability of Texts in England

While all of the above patristic, medieval and apocryphal texts are open to scrutiny by modern scholars, it is important to determine which would actually have been available in western Europe during the Middle Ages, specifically in Anglo-Saxon England. The reason I focus on that early period in England is because of the existence

¹²⁶ Matt. 7:16–17, 12:33; Luke 6:43–45.

¹²⁷ Job 14: 7–9.

of a fully developed wood-of-the-cross legend there at that period, namely the rood-tree legend extant in Old English in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343. My goal is to establish the presence of other texts related to either the cross legend or the Christian sacred tree tradition, since this might suggest an appetite for such works in early medieval Britain. The recent additions to the scholarship on the literary culture of England have been most helpful in this regard, in particular Lapidge's *Anglo-Saxon Library*, the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database and the volumes in the *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* series.¹²⁸

Of the three patristic works mentioned, certain evidence of knowledge exists for only one, namely Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*. That the Anglo-Saxons had access to Gregory's tract is proven by the fact that, not only is the work cited by numerous Anglo-Saxon authors, but sixteen manuscripts of English provenance are extant, and others are listed in various inventories.¹²⁹ Based on citations and a single manuscript, we can conclude that the English were acquainted with two of Quodvultdeus' sermons; however, the specific sermon with which we are concerned (*De cataclysmo ad catechumenos*) is not one of them.¹³⁰ Greenhill, however, suggests that because this sermon was originally attributed to Augustine himself, it may have been more widely known.¹³¹ As for the *Carmen de pascha* itself, probably the most striking patristic account of the cross-tree, no evidence of knowledge of it in early medieval England has been attested, although the existence of three Carolingian manuscripts of the poem holds out a faint possibility that Anglo-Saxon theologians may have encountered it. Of the

¹²⁸ Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Biggs, op. cit.; *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*: <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>.

¹²⁹ Lapidge, *Library*, 304–307.

¹³⁰ Lapidge, *Library*, 331.

¹³¹ Greenhill, "Child in the Tree," 344.

other two pre-Conquest works discussed, namely Venantius Fortunatus' two hymns and Rabanus Maurus' *De laudibus sanctae crucis*, support for access to them is strong. Numerous manuscripts of Fortunatus' *Carmina* exist in England itself, and several others of Continental origin are known to have English provenance; the *Carmina* are also cited by numerous Anglo-Saxon authors.¹³² Proof of the knowledge of Rabanus' *De laudibus* is less overwhelming, but the work was cited twice in an anonymous Anglo-Saxon charter.¹³³

Turning to the apocryphal works, the *Cave of Treasures* has been cited as an influence on a number of Old English works, therefore some availability of the text in Anglo-Saxon England is probable.¹³⁴ *1* and *2 Enoch* also seem to have influenced several Old English titles and a fragment of *1 Enoch* in Latin actually exists in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript.¹³⁵ Evidence regarding the final apocryphal work, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, is quite definite. The *Shepherd* exists in two versions, the Vulgate and the Palatine. The Palatine version, though dated to the fourth or fifth century, is extant in only two manuscripts, both from the north of England, but these are late (fifteenth-century) in date. However, an extract of the Vulgate *Shepherd* exists in an eleventh-century manuscript of English provenance, and the *Shepherd* itself is cited by a number of Anglo-Saxon authors, including Bede.¹³⁶

Thus it may be shown that at least some of the above texts were available in England before the Norman Conquest, and, as such, may provide a background of

¹³² Lapidge, *Library*, 169, 187, 225, 231, 233, 249 and 335.

¹³³ *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database; charter is item S473.

¹³⁴ See Biggs, *Sources*, 6.

¹³⁵ Biggs, *Sources*, 8–10.

¹³⁶ Biggs, *Sources*, 63–66. J. Rendel Harris also found evidence for an acquaintance with the *Shepherd* in the story of St. Kentigern, patron saint of Glasgow: "The Shepherd of Hermas in the West," *The Expository Times* 39.6 (1928): 259–261.

traditions about the wood of the cross and Christian imagery of sacred trees to the fully-developed rood-tree legend that was already present in that country. While the presence of these sources alone by no means proves that the English had an unusual predilection for material with the cross-tree motif, this evidence, coupled with the many examples of the Anglo-Saxon devotion to the holy cross, and particularly the propensity to portray the cross as tree in both literature and art,¹³⁷ certainly makes it unsurprising that the oldest extant wood-of-the-cross legend in any language comes from that country.

The next and final chapter will turn from ecclesiastical writings to the romance genre in order to demonstrate how certain motifs present in the wood-of-the-cross legends, namely the “child in the tree” and the miraculously blooming tree, also appear frequently in medieval romance. In addition, I will examine several legends unique to England, including the story of Joseph of Arimathea’s coming to Britain, the connection of his blooming staff to the Glastonbury Thorn, and the “unseasonable blooms” motif as present in the Christmas story/romance, *Sir Cleges*. Finally, I will touch upon the wood-of-the-cross narrative and other miraculous trees as they appear in such travel literature as *The Book of Sir John Mandeville*.

¹³⁷ See chapter 2, which is devoted to this topic. I am speaking specifically of the *Dream of the Rood* tradition and the monumental crosses.

Chapter 5: Shared Motifs: The Wood-of-the-Cross Legends and the Romance Tradition

Anyone familiar with the work of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, who developed the AT-number system by which folkloric motifs are often classified,¹ would not be surprised that the wood-of-the-cross legends share narrative elements with tales in other genres. This chapter traces a number of these shared elements in the romance tradition. I begin with the “child in the tree” motif, then move on to a parallel version of the history of the descendants of the tree of life, note instances of miraculous plant growth in general (with specific reference to tales found in medieval England), and finally provide analogues of marvelous trees and the journey to the earthly paradise in the Alexander material and the *Book of Sir John Mandeville*.

5.1 The Child in the Tree

As I noted in chapter 3 above, the elaborated versions of the wood-of-the-cross legends in the late thirteenth century trace the wood’s history back to Paradise itself, where Adam’s son Seth journeys to Eden and is permitted to look inside the garden. Seth’s three glimpses into Paradise constitute a wondrous vision of the infant Christ seated in the top of a great tree, at first bare, then flourishing. The motif of the “child in the tree” also appears in certain Grail romances, namely Wauchier’s Second Continuation of Chrétien, the Didot-Modena *Prose Perceval*, and *Durmart le Galois*. Past study of the motif has focused chiefly on these secular texts, rather than on Seth’s vision. I here present an overview of the various “child in the tree” episodes, provide a critical survey

¹ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature : A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-books, and Local Legends*, 6 vols. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1955–1958).

of previous scholarship on the topic, and offer a new interpretation of the motif. In contrast to the active child in the Grail romances, the more static image of the infant Christ in the wood-of-the-cross legends is closely linked to religious iconography, and is much more similar symbolically to the medieval image of the suffering Christ Child; both traditions show the same compression of time and conflation of the Eucharist and Passion with Christ's infancy.

The reader should recall how the unknown thirteenth-century author of the *Post peccatum Adae* added a number of creative details to the story, one of which is the "child in the tree" motif. Our focus here is the three-part vision into Paradise granted to Seth when he arrives at the gate:

When Seth had put his head in at the gate, he saw there such beauty as the human tongue is unable to explain. There was abundance of fruits and of flowers of diverse kinds and a harmonious singing of birds. Everything gleamed and an inestimable fragrance filled the air. In the middle of Paradise he saw the clearest of fountains from which flowed four rivers: the Phison, the Gihon, the Tigris and the Euphrates, which supplied the whole world with waters. Over that fountain a certain tree of very many branches stood, but denuded of bark and leaves. Seth began to reflect on why the tree was thus denuded. Recalling, however, the withered footprints caused by his parent's sin [which he had followed as a path], by the same conjecture he began to wonder if the tree might also have been made bare on account of their sins.

When he returned, he diligently related to the angel what he had seen. The angel ordered that he return again to the entrance that he might see other things. And Seth, looking back in, saw a serpent wound around the bare tree. When he had seen this, Seth was struck dumb and pulled his head out, but the angel commanded him to go and look in at the gate a third time, which he did. The third time he saw the aforementioned tree reaching all the way up to heaven and in the top of the tree an infant, as if newly born, wrapped in swaddling clothes. Amazed by what he had seen, he cast his eyes toward the ground and saw the roots

of that same tree penetrating the earth all the way to hell, where Seth recognized the soul of his brother Abel.

Thus he returned a third time and related everything to the angel. And the angel began to explain to Seth about the child he had seen, saying: ‘The child which you saw is the son of God, who laments the sins of your parents, sins which he shall destroy when he comes in the fullness of time. He now weeps for your sins, which he will wipe away completely. He is the oil of mercy promised to your parents. And he shall bring mercy to them and to their descendants. This is the true piety of love.’ When Seth had been thus instructed by the angel and wished to leave, the angel gave him three seeds of that apple (tree) from which his father had eaten, saying to him: ‘When you have returned to your father he will die within three days. Put these three seeds under his tongue and from them shall grow three seedlings: one will be a cedar, another, a cypress, the third a pine.’ In the cedar we understand the Father, in the cypress the Son, and in the pine the Holy Spirit.²

In Seth’s glimpse into Paradise, he sees a child in the tree, but not just any child – this is a newly born infant wrapped in swaddling clothes that is clearly identified by the angel as the son of God. This child, says the angel, is the “oil of mercy” which Seth is

² I have translated this passage from the Latin text provided in Meyer, “Die Geschichte,” 134–38: “Quod factum est. intromisso capite tantam intuitus est amenitatem, quam lingua humana enodare non posset. amenitas illa erat in diuersis generibus fructuum florum cum armonia auium, et multum fulgebat inaestimabili odore adiuncto. in medio paradisi fontem lucidissimum intuebatur de quo quatuor flumina emanabant: Physon, Gygon, Tygris et Eufrates, que flumina totum mundum replent aquis. super ipsum uero fontem quaedam arbor stabat nimis ramosa, sed foliis et cortice nudata. meditari ipse cepit, quare arbor illa ita nudata esset. recolens autem passus marcidos per peccatum parentis, eadem coniectura cepit meditari arborem illam esse nudatam propter peccata eorum. Reversus ergo ad angelum quae uiderat diligenter narrauit. cui precepit angelus, ut iterum ad hostium redirect et alia uideret. qui reuersus intuitus est serpentem circa arborem nudatam inuolutum. quo uiso stupefactus iterum rediit. precepit ei angelus tertio, ut ad hostium rediret. Unde ad hostium tertio reuersus est. uidit arborem iam dictam usque ad cellos eleuatam et in summitate arboris quasi paruulum iam natum et pannis inuolutum. quo uiso stupefactus cum reclinaret lumina uersus terram, uidit radicem eiusdem arboris terram penetrantem usque in infernum pertingere, ubi recognouit animam fratris sui Abel. Sic regressus tertio ad angelum, quae uidit, diligenter narrauit. Cui angelus de puero uiso diligenter disserere cepit dicens: puer, quem modo uidisti, filius dei est, qui deflet peccata tuorum parentum, quae et delebit, quando uenit plenitudo temporis, deflet iam peccata tua, que et delebit cum plenitudine, hoc est oleum misericordiae promissum parentibus tuis. qui et faciet parentibus tuis et posteritatibus eorum misericordiam. et haec pietas dilectionis uera. Seth ita edoctus ab angelo cum uellet discedere, dedit ei angelus tria grana pomi illius, de quo manducauerat pater eius dicens ei: Infra triduum cum ad patrem tuum redieris ipse exspirabit. Haec tria grana infra eius linguam pones, de quibus surgent tres uirgulae arborum. una arbor erit cedrus, alia cypressus, tertia pinus. in cedro intelligimus patrem, in cypresso filium, in pino spiritum sanctum.”

seeking, who will come in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4) to destroy the sins of all mankind. The angel then proceeds to give Seth three seeds from the very tree from which Adam had eaten, and which caused the Fall. These seeds would imply the Trinity by their number alone, but the angel is specific on this matter too: the three seeds will grow into three types of trees—a cedar, a cypress and a pine, which represent the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, respectively. It is worthwhile noting that the content of the vision is unmistakably Christian; the child seen is the infant Christ and is implicitly named as such. Secondly, what Seth sees is truly a static vision, in the sense that it is non-interactive: although the scene has changed each time he looks back into the garden, each individual glimpse shows something unmoving, fixed. Only the angel interacts with Seth; the child in the tree does not. As we shall see, these features, particularly the latter, significantly distinguish this vision from the occurrences of the “child in the tree” motif in the Arthurian Grail romances.

5.1.1 The Child in the Tree in the Arthurian Romances

The “child in the tree” motif appears in three of the Arthurian Grail romances, namely Wauchier’s Second Continuation of Chrétien’s *Perceval*, the Didot-Modena *Prose Perceval*, and *Durmart le Galois*.³ It is well known that King Arthur emerged as a popular literary figure in the latter half of the twelfth century, largely as result of Chrétien de Troyes’ composition of five long romances in octosyllabic couplets, one of which was

³ For Wauchier, see *The Continuations of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. William Roach, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1971), vol. 4. For the Didot, see *The Didot Perceval According to the Manuscripts of Modena and Paris*, ed. William Roach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941); and, for an English translation, *The Romance of Perceval in Prose: A Translation of the E Manuscript*, trans. Dell Skeels (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961). For Durmart, see *Durmart le Galois: Roman Arthurien du Treizième Siècle*, ed. Joseph Gildea, 2 vols. (Villanova, PA: Villanova Press, 1965).

Perceval, or as Chrétien called it, *Le Conte du Graal*.⁴ This poem, however, ends abruptly, a fact which inspired numerous continuations of the Perceval story by later writers; the Second Continuation, to be discussed below, is attributed to Wauchier and was likely written down between 1190 and 1200.⁵ The *Didot Perceval* is a prose rendering of the third branch (now lost) of another Grail cycle, that of Robert de Boron. Because Boron's work spanned the years 1190–1212,⁶ the *Didot* most likely postdates Wauchier's Second Continuation. The third relevant Grail romance, *Durmart le Galois*, written in the decade 1240–1250 by an unknown author, chronicles the adventures not of Perceval but of the knight Durmart while he attempts to prove his worthiness to his love, the queen of Ireland; he later journeys to Rome to discover the meaning of the wondrous vision he has of a wounded child in a tree. While notably more Christian in content, the “child in the tree” episode of *Durmart* is usually considered to be based on that in Wauchier.⁷

Upon examining the Second Continuation of Wauchier, we see that there are actually three relevant “tree episodes.” In the first, the hero Perceval is at a loss as to which road to take, and a voice from a tree instructs him concerning his dilemma: he should put down the dog he is carrying and follow where it leads. The speaker is not identified, but is simply a voice coming from the tree. Later, as Perceval seeks the Grail Castle, he comes to a tree on which is seated a fair child holding an apple. Perceval asks the way to the castle, but the child will not tell him. Instead, the child advises Perceval to

⁴ “Perceval, or the Story of the Grail,” in *Medieval Romances*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis (New York: Modern Library, 1957), pp. 3–87; please note that this is an abridged version of the story. For a full English translation of the Old French see Nigel Bryant, trans. *Perceval: The Story of the Grail* (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2006).

⁵ Roach, *The Continuations*, xiii–xiv.

⁶ Roach, *The Continuations*, 125–30.

⁷ Gildea, *Durmart le Galois*, 26–68; 85–95.

go to the pillar on Mont Dolorous where he will hear something to his profit. When he has spoken, the child climbs up through the branches and vanishes. After the hero has completed the adventure of Mont Dolorous and is on the right road to the Grail castle, he encounters at night an oak tree whose branches are lit with candles. At Perceval's approach, the illuminated tree disappears.⁸

In the Didot-Modena *Prose Perceval* we find a very similar "child in the tree" episode, but this time a few more overtly Christian details have been added. Perceval is seeking the Grail castle when he arrives at a crossroad. There stands a cross and a beautiful tree in whose branches two naked children are playing. Perceval begs them in the name of the Trinity to speak to him. One of the children answers: they have come from the earthly Paradise from which Adam was expelled. The child advises Perceval to take the right-hand road, and then children, tree and cross all vanish.⁹

The most Christianized manifestation of the motif occurs in *Durmart le Galois*. Early in his series of adventures, Durmart encounters at night a tree blazing with candles, in which is seated a naked child. The tree vanishes suddenly but a voice tells him that the next time he sees the tree and child he must heed the advice given. It is not until the latter part of the tale that the tree again appears to Durmart. This time he sees that the candles are burning unevenly, some bright, some dim. The child in the tree has five wounds, and is placing the bright candles at his right hand and the dim ones to his left. The vision vanishes; a voice tells Durmart that he has seen Christ, and commands that he make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land where the pope will fully explain these portents. When the pontiff hears of Durmart's experience, he reveals that the tree represents the

⁸ Roach, *Continuations*, vss. 31421–31505; 32070–32091.

⁹ Skeels, *The Romance of Perceval*, 43–44; Roach, *The Didot Perceval*, MS E vss. 1115–1145; MS D vss. 1007–1026.

world, the candles of differing brightness the varying states of illumination of the world's peoples, and the child Christ himself.¹⁰

5.1.2 Past Interpretations of the Child in the Tree Motif

Modern scholarly attention began to be given to these episodes in the 1920s, and was followed by renewed interest in the mid-twentieth century. Jessie L. Weston was the first to give the matter serious consideration.¹¹ Weston dismissed the lighted tree as having nothing to do with the “child in the tree.”¹² She objected to the lack of attention usually given to *Durmart* and the general consensus that the Didot *Perceval* episode was simply derived from Wauchier; rather she asserted that the ultimate source text for all three variants could be found imbedded (as a passage of approximately 1200 lines) in *Le Pelerinage de l'Ame* (1355) of Guillaume de Deguileville, a work which she went on to summarize in some detail.¹³

Despite its late date, the *Pelerinage* does indeed demonstrate themes present in the Grail stories and Seth's vision, though the latter was not considered by Weston. This narrative of the soul's journey after death relates the soul's encounter with the green tree and the dry, under which other naked souls are observed playing with an apple. The journeying soul's angelic guide explains that this is not the apple of Adam, but rather a form of solace to those playing with it. Then follows a lengthy debate between the dry tree, whose apple was unfairly taken from it (thus reducing it to its present barren state), and the green tree (at first described by Deguileville as guarded by the figure of

¹⁰ Gildea, *Durmart le Galois*, vss. 1501–1548; 15555–15637; 15813–15865.

¹¹ Jessie L. Weston, “The Apple Mystery in Arthurian Romance,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9 (1925): 417–30.

¹² Weston, “The Apple Mystery,” 417.

¹³ Weston, “The Apple Mystery,” 418–25.

“Virginity,” then later identified as the Virgin), which refuses to give up its beautiful apple, even though its sacrifice will restore the dry tree. The divine counsel of the Trinity agrees that no angel can make this sacrifice; a man must make amends for Adam’s disobedience, but that man must be free from sin. The Son elects to take up this burden and become man: the apple falls to the ground of its own volition, without harm to the green tree. The dry tree, now in full leaf again, tells the green not to lament, for from now on the apple which endured suffering will be free from torment and death.

Admittedly, the presence of the naked souls playing with an apple bears some resemblance to the child holding an apple that Perceval encountered, but Weston’s conclusion regarding the role of the *Pelerinage* seems to require a substantial leap in logic: “we have here the text, more or less complete...of a Mystery Play, dealing with the doctrine of the Atonement...[from which] the authors of the Grail romances derived the imagery of a Child in a Tree.” Each author, she continued, selected those elements which appealed to him most, thus Wauchier portrays the individual soul holding the apple, the Didot *Perceval* employs two children and reveals that the tree came from Paradise, and *Durmart* has the Christ Child with the sacred wounds.¹⁴ The fact that the meaning behind the “child in the tree” imagery was not elaborated in the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century romances, but is extensively explained in the mid-fourteenth-century *Pelerinage* led Weston to conclude that at the earlier date the “mystery play” whose existence she postulated was familiar to the general public, but by 1355 had become a mere literary survival.¹⁵

¹⁴ Weston, “The Apple Mystery,” 425–26.

¹⁵ Weston, “The Apple Mystery,” 427.

Weston's next assertion, that this portrayal of the Atonement through an apple/tree allegory was an attempt by the Church to Christianize a pagan ritual dealing with the fertilisation of the orchards, is even less persuasive. As support for her theory she cited folkloric evidence of the "wassailing of the apple-trees," rituals that took place on the eve of the Epiphany and which involved importuning the apple tree to be fruitful by offering it libations of cider, nailing a roasted apple to its trunk, or having a young boy climb into its branches to be symbolically shot or beseeched for an abundant harvest. These folk customs have some interesting parallels with the Deguileville account of the green tree and the dry; Weston's conclusions, however, have little relevance to Seth's vision in the wood-of-the-cross legends. Furthermore, as we shall see, there is no need to resort to folk tradition to explain the notion of Christ as the fruit of a great tree. Having said this, we must concede that Weston did perform a service in drawing greater attention to the "child in the tree" episode in *Durmart le Galois*, and in pointing out the distinction between the mysterious child (like the one in Wauchier and the Didot) versus the Christ Child (like the child in *Durmart*).

Rose Jeffries Peebles' analysis of the "child in the tree" incident in the Grail romances followed Weston's by just a few years, and is valuable because it looks at the motif as part of a larger adventure, what she calls the "adventure of the perilous chapel."¹⁶ Focusing on Wauchier, the Didot and the continuations of Manessier and Gerbert, Peebles summarized the adventure thus. In Wauchier, after Perceval has encountered the child in the tree, accomplished the task at Mont Dolorous, and seen the lighted tree, he enters a chapel where he finds a dead knight. A light burns on the altar,

¹⁶ Rose Jeffries Peebles, "The Children in the Tree," in *Medieval Studies in Memory of Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis*, ed. R. S. Loomis (Paris: H. Champion, 1927), 285–99.

but this is extinguished by a black hand. A damsel later informs Perceval that the child in the tree, the chapel and the black hand all pertain to the Grail. Finally the hero arrives at the Fisher King's castle.¹⁷ Wauchier also relates a similar experience of Gawain's: he too comes to a crossroad, finds a chapel and sees the candle on the altar extinguished by a black hand. The chapel shakes and a voice is heard lamenting, but Gawain makes the sign of the cross and the storm abates; soon after, Gawain reaches the Grail Castle.¹⁸

In the Didot *Perceval*, Peebles also noted additional narrative elements relevant to the "child in the tree" and other tree episodes. These include their association with Christian motifs such as a chapel or a cross, and even their location at a crossroad, a place often imbued with magical significance in folklore. For example, in the Didot narrative, Perceval, Gawain and their fellow knights come to a crossroad at which stand a chapel, a tree and a cross; later Perceval comes to a crossroad again and sees a cross and the beautiful tree in whose branches he encounters the two children.¹⁹ Further, Peebles drew attention to the explanation of the lighted tree given in Manessier's text: it is described as a fey tree whose lights are meant to deceive and waylay.²⁰ She also cited an incident in another continuation of Chrétien, that of Gerbert, which although it contains neither the "child in the tree" nor the lighted tree, does have Perceval arrive at a crossroad where a speaking cross directs him to the Fisher King's castle.²¹ The speaking function of the child/children in the tree seems here to have been transferred to the cross itself.

¹⁷ Peebles refers to the first edition of the *Perceval* continuations: Charles Potvin, *Perceval le Gallois ou, le Conte du Graal*, 6 vols. (Mons: Desquesne-Masquillier, 1866–1871); Potvin, ll. 33764 ff.; Peebles, 285–86.

¹⁸ Potvin, *Perceval*, ll. 19913 ff.; Peebles, "The Children in the Tree," 286.

¹⁹ Peebles, "The Children in the Tree," 286–88.

²⁰ Potvin, *Perceval*, ll. 35348 ff.; Peebles, "The Children in the Tree," 286.

²¹ Potvin, *Perceval*, 6: 255; Peebles, "The Children in the Tree," 286.

For Peebles, the chapel and the dead knight represented death and those who have died in sin; it is here that the hero is tested. When he has overcome these trials he is ready to meet the Fisher King, representative of life. The children in the tree are thus guides to the otherworld in the tree of life and, along with the cross and lighted tree, are symbols of light and life.²² As I will discuss further below, this dichotomy of death and life is also vital to the interpretation of Seth's vision of the Christ Child. Drawing a further parallel, Peebles noted similarities between the Grail romances and the adventures of Alexander: for example, she compared Perceval's encounter with the children in the tree to Alexander's visit to the speaking trees of the sun and moon.²³ While such comparisons hold greater relevance for the study of the "child in the tree" episodes within the Arthurian romances than they do for Seth's vision in the wood-of-the-cross legends, one loose analogy may be drawn. All of the entities, the children in the tree, the speaking trees of the sun and moon, and the infant Christ Child seen by Durmart and Seth, foretell the future for the hero. Perceval is told where he should venture next on his quest, Alexander learns of his impending death, while Durmart and Seth receive even more profound revelations: assurances of the Redemption and the Second Coming of Christ.

The first scholar who specifically related the "child in the tree" episodes of the Grail romances to Seth's vision of the Christ Child was Ernst Brugger.²⁴ Brugger divided the tree episodes of the romances into separate "tree adventures": the voice heard coming from the tree, the child/children in the tree, and the illuminated tree. As is evident from

²² Peebles, "The Children in the Tree," 288–95.

²³ Peebles, "The Children in the Tree," 297–99.

²⁴ Ernst Brugger, *The Illuminated Tree in Two Arthurian Romances* (New York: Publications of the Institute of French Studies, 1929). Incidentally, Loomis postulates a natural phenomenon that may provide an explanation of the lighted tree, namely the sudden appearance and disappearance of fire on branch tips known as St. Elmo's Fire. See Roger Sherman Loomis, "Arthurian Tradition and Folklore," *Folklore* 69 (1958): 1–25, particularly p. 8.

his title, Brugger's main focus was the last of these, his goal being to explain and find analogues of the illuminated tree. This he did, emphasizing Celtic tales of fey trees, and parallels in folklore which portray souls as lights or candles; he even found a Mallorcan tale which contains a lighted tree whose candles represent human lives, like the lights in the tree in *Durmart*.²⁵ Brugger strongly disagreed with Weston and devoted an entire appendix to refuting her theory of an apple mystery play.²⁶ For Brugger the child/children in the tree in the accounts of Wauchier and the Didot *Perceval* were of Celtic, not Christian, origin and reminded him of the dwarf-king Alberich-Oberon.²⁷ He did note the progressive Christianization of the episodes: the Didot detail that the children come from the earthly Paradise from which Adam was banished, and the overtly Christian tone in *Durmart* with the child implicitly (via the five wounds) and explicitly (via the pope's explanation to the hero) identified as the Christ Child. Brugger's conclusion, though, that this Christianization was due to assimilation of the Christian legend of Seth's vision to the Grail romance is refuted by the dates of the works.²⁸ Seth's vision, in fact, postdates the Grail episodes and therefore could not have influenced them. While the Grail romances in question are from the late twelfth century, according to Meyer the Seth narrative was not even merged into the wood-of-the-cross legend until that time, and the most highly-developed version, the *Post peccatum Adae* which introduced Seth's vision, belongs to the thirteenth century.²⁹

Eleanor Simmons Greenhill's work (already mentioned in chapter 4 above), which exposed Brugger's chronological error, is highly valuable to our discussion,

²⁵ Brugger, *The Illuminated Tree*, 17, 40–41, 50–55.

²⁶ Brugger, *The Illuminated Tree*, 77–93.

²⁷ Brugger, *The Illuminated Tree*, 25.

²⁸ Brugger, *The Illuminated Tree*, 20–32, 93.

²⁹ Meyer, "Die Geschichte," 108, 131.

because it traces trends in Christian thought that may have inspired the “child in the tree” motif.³⁰ Greenhill documented extensively the Christian tradition’s use of images of a tree, cross and ladder as symbols of heaven from patristic times through the Middle Ages, and showed how this use of imagery fused early on with existing Greek patristic and Semitic cosmological notions. Dismissing the need for a Celtic or folkloric source for the “child in the tree,” Greenhill concluded that the child Perceval sees really signifies a young soul climbing the cosmic tree of life or “ladder of virtues” to heaven.

Furthermore, as evidence that the contemporary audience would have understood Wauchier’s tree as the cross, Greenhill cited *Durmart*, where the connection of Christ with the “child in the tree” is explicit.³¹ The tree of Seth’s vision then is cosmological, not paradisaical, “except in the sense that it grows in the center of that paradise of which Eden was the mystical prefiguration — the Church.” Seth does not see the historical Eden or the historical tree of life; rather, he glimpses the garden of Christendom, the tree of the cross and fountain of the Eucharistic sacrament.³² In Greenhill’s view, then, the physical trappings of Eden are symbols of the instruments of the Redemption: the cross, the Eucharist, and (inherent in the flowing waters) baptism. Following this allegorical vein of thinking, and observing the powerful confluences of meaning between the weighty symbols of the tree, the cross and the infant Christ Child, allows a fuller understanding of Seth’s vision.

³⁰ Greenhill, “The Child in the Tree,” 323–71. On tree imagery in medieval religious devotion, see further Sara Ritchey, “Spiritual Arborescence: Trees in the Medieval Christian Imagination,” *Spiritus* 8 (2008): 64–82.

³¹ This argument too is somewhat anachronistic in that Wauchier is writing a half-century before the author of *Durmart*. Greenhill’s reasoning is that “according to all scholars,” the episode in *Durmart* is based on Wauchier. Greenhill, “The Child in the Tree,” 370.

³² Greenhill, “The Child in the Tree,” 371.

Nearly a decade after Greenhill's, the latest significant study of the motifs of the wood-of-the-cross legend appeared: Esther Casier Quinn's work *The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life*, which primarily chronicles the Seth narrative and its incorporation into the overall tale of the origin of the cross.³³ Naturally, Quinn also considered the romance works discussed above.³⁴ She rightly remarked that it is *Durmart*'s vision that is closest to Seth's, but since *Durmart* is unlikely to have influenced the *Post peccatum Adae*, both must have drawn independently on the same tradition. It was Quinn also who first made the simple, yet vital observation alluded to at the beginning of this chapter: that while the "child in the tree" incidents in Wauchier and the Didot *Perceval* are *episodes* in which characters interact with the hero, those in *Durmart* and the Seth narrative should be called more properly *visions*, and it is this exclusively visual nature which "suggests the possibility of iconographical influence."³⁵

5.1.3 The Influence of Iconography on the Child in the Tree Motif

Quinn turned, rightly I believe, to the medieval representations of the Jesse Tree as a possible source for analogues of the tree of Seth's vision with the Christ Child in its branches. In both cases we are dealing with expansive trees that have a figure at the bottom (Jesse, Abel) and Christ or the Virgin and Child at the top.³⁶ Nor should we be surprised at the suggestion of mutual influence between Jesse Tree iconography and the wood-of-the-cross legends. Watson, in his seminal work on the early examples of the Jesse Tree, stated that although Jesse's recumbent, dreaming posture most likely owes its

³³ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, op. cit.

³⁴ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 117–27.

³⁵ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 120.

³⁶ The best work that focuses solely on the iconographic tradition of the Jesse tree is Arthur Watson, *The Early Iconography of the Tree of Jesse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934).

form to the story of Jacob and his dream of the ladder, the emergence of the tree from Jesse's body finds its closest analogue in the cross legends with the tree that grows from the seeds placed in the dead Adam's mouth.³⁷ Furthermore, just as the prophets that often people depictions of the Jesse Tree look upward at the Christ Child in anticipation of his Incarnation, so does Seth look up at the infant Christ in the tree when he gazes through the gate of paradise.

Quinn reluctantly dismissed any further consideration of the influence of the Jesse Tree on Seth's vision because, to her knowledge, Christ is only ever portrayed as a baby at the top of the Jesse Tree when accompanied by his mother; otherwise he appears as an adult. It seems that Quinn was unaware of a version of the vision in which Seth does indeed see both the Virgin and Child in the tree. As mentioned in chapter 3, this example can be found in an interpolation of the vision into the *Vita Adae et Evae* (Mozley's Arundel Group), where we are told that Seth saw both a virgin (*virgo*) and a child (*puer*) in the tree's summit. Upon Seth's reporting this sight to his father, Adam exclaims, "Blessed are you, O Lord, for now I know truly that a virgin will conceive a son who will die on the cross, whence we shall all be saved."³⁸ To my mind, this variant of Seth's vision suggests that Jesse Tree iconography likely had significant influence on the vision

³⁷ Watson, *Early Iconography*, 52.

³⁸ "Et aspiciens Seth in paradisum uidit in summitate arboris uirginem sedentem et puerum crucifixum in manibus tenentem...[to which Adam replies] Benedictus es Domine...quod nunc scio uere quod uirgo concipiet filium qui in cruce morietur, unde omnes salui erimus." This interpolation is to be found in London, British Library, MS Arundel 326, said by Mozley to have derived from a manuscript of the thirteenth century, and its close copy, London, British Library, MS Sloane 289, dated to the fifteenth century. See J. H. Mozley, "Documents: The Vita Adae," 123. The translation of this passage is ambiguous and can be interpreted in two fundamentally different ways. We shall return to this important point again. As mentioned in chapter 3, this detail of Seth seeing the Virgin and Child in the tree also occurs in the fifteenth-century Cornish drama *The Creacion of the World*, and a depiction of a child in the tree appears in a sixteenth-century stained glass window in St. Neot's Church, Cornwall.

of Seth. Further work is needed, however, to determine if there are other instances of Seth seeing both the Virgin and Child in the tree.

In art, there are, of course, other entities symbolizing Christ that commonly appear at the top of a tree of life, such as the ram or the phoenix.³⁹ Another tradition, grounded in religious practice and sometimes depicted in art is that of the dendrite saints, holy men who are depicted living in tree tops, much like the stylites who lived on top of pillars. Eastern examples of the dendrites, a phenomenon which arose and was concentrated in early Christian Syria, include Hosios David, Maron and St. John of Rila, while St. Bavo of Belgium, Boniface and St. Anthony of Padua are Western examples.⁴⁰ The iconographical tradition of the dendrite evidently influenced the illustration of the Grail romances as well, as shown for example in a miniature from a manuscript (c. 1300) of the Lancelot cycle that depicts Lancelot consulting a hermit abiding in a tree (fig. 1).⁴¹

³⁹ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 123.

⁴⁰ See Constantine P. Charalampidis, *The Dendrites in Pre-Christian and Christian Historical-Literary Tradition and Iconography* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1995).

⁴¹ This miniature occurs in a French manuscript (c. 1300) of the Lancelot cycle in the Bodleian Library (MS Douce 215, f. 14r) and can be seen on the cover of the Penguin edition of *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: Penguin, 2005).



Fig. 1 – Lancelot consults a holy hermit shown as a dendrite, who makes his home in a tree (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 215 f. 14r). Image courtesy of the Bodleian Library (used with permission).

Refuting Greenhill, Quinn asserts that the tree of Seth's vision may not solely, or even primarily, represent the cross, a statement with which I agree.⁴² However, Quinn adds that Seth's vision does not suggest the Crucifixion, because here we are dealing with an infant, not a crucified Christ; on this topic we will have much more to say below. One of Quinn's most significant ideas was that Seth does indeed see the Christ Child with his mother, but that the Virgin is represented not in human form, but as the tree itself.

⁴² Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 124.

Indeed, Mary was often referred to as the *lignum vitae*, with Christ the *fructus vitae*.⁴³

Symbolically speaking, Quinn asked, what could be more natural, if the tree of life represented the Virgin Mother, than to place the infant Jesus in the foliage?⁴⁴ In fact, there is a medieval representation of the Jesse Tree that exactly illustrates this point (fig. 2). In this wall-painting (c. 1200), rather than the usual portrayal of a recumbent Jesse with a tree growing from his side, Jesse stands holding the *virga* of Isaiah 11:1 that will spring from his line. Beside him is a towering figure of Mary crowned by curving fronds of foliage, herself the tree from which the nimbus-crowned Christ Child springs, almost like a fruit.

⁴³ Mary is hailed as the tree of life in mediaeval hymns: ‘Ave, virgo, lignum vite / Quae dedisti fructum vitae / Salute fidelium’ (Hail virgin, luscious tree, which gives the fruit of life for the health of the faithful) or ‘Ave, Virgo, vitae lignum’; see *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, ed. Guido Maria Dreves, vol. 35 (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1961), 137, 172.

⁴⁴ Quinn, *Quest of Seth*, 125.



Fig. 2 – In this wall painting (c. 1200) found in the Chapelle du Liget, Chemillé-sur-Indrois, Jesse stands holding the *virga* that will issue from his line (Isaiah 11:1), while beside him the Christ Child springs like a fruit from the towering, tree-like Mary. Image courtesy of Art Resource (used with permission).

The notion of Jesus as the fruit of the tree of life is well attested. A poignant early example of the allusion occurs in the *De pascha*, formerly ascribed to St. Cyprian, third-century bishop of Carthage, which we have already met above in chapter 4. I quote it more fully here to emphasize its highly relevant imagery:

Here, I recall that wood cut down from a sterile tree trunk was planted and produced wholesome fruits....This is the appearance of the tree: it rises from one stem and soon extends its arms into two branches....The man who this wood bore, as from the first ripe seed, fallen, the earth received; whence soon, amazing to relate, the light of the third day brought out again to earth and heaven an awe-inspiring branch blessed with the fruit of life. But it grew

steadily...and touched heaven with its topmost point...while yet it put forth twice six branches of huge weight and spread them out, stretching into the whole world, that they might offer to all the nations sustenance and everlasting life, and teach that death can die.⁴⁵

Here pseudo-Cyprian describes the dry tree made green again in the tree of the cross, whose first fruit, Christ, falls to the ground but in three days rises as the immense tree of life, whose branches spread throughout the whole world, offering shelter and nourishment to all. Thus, Christ is both the first fruit of the tree of life, and the tree of life itself which grows again on the third day. A thousand years later, the importance of the tree of life imagery and Christ as both tree and fruit is related in Bonaventure's *Lignum vitae*: "this most beautiful flower of the root of Jesse, which had blossomed in the Incarnation and withered in the Passion, thus blossomed again in the Resurrection so as to become the beauty of all." The closing prayer of this work beseeches God that he send us the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit "that we may taste of the life-giving flavours of the fruit of the tree of life, which you truly are."⁴⁶

5.1.4 The Child in the Tree Motif and the Suffering Christ Child

The above survey of the literature shows that scholars have in the past interpreted the "child in the tree" in highly diverse ways: as a relic of an "apple mystery play" now lost (Weston); as a motif with themes similar to incidents in the Alexander romances (Peebles), or influenced by Celtic legend and folktales (Brugger); as part of a tradition stretching back to the early Church's view of the tree of life as a ladder along which

⁴⁵ This English translation is taken from Reno, *Sacred Tree*, 150–51. The Latin can be found in *S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani Opera Omnia*, ed. William Hartel, CSEL 3.3 (Vienna: C. Geroldi, 1871), 305–308.

⁴⁶ Ewert Cousins, trans., *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 160, 174.

righteous souls may ascend to heaven (Greenhill); as part of the universal archetype of the deity in the tree and as heavily influenced by iconography, particularly that of the Jesse Tree (Quinn). As to the relationship between the motif in the rood-tree legends and that in the Grail romances, Brugger believed that the Christian elements in the romance episodes owed their character to partial assimilation to the Seth legend; Greenhill later refuted this claim because of the later date of Seth's vision. No definitive answers can yet be given regarding this relationship, nor is it my goal here to make a firm determination regarding the motif's ultimate origin. Instead, I now provide a new (and, I hope, thought-provoking) way in which to understand what Seth saw when he looked in at the gate of Paradise.

Seth's vision takes on new depths of meaning when examined in the light of the tradition of the suffering Christ Child. This tradition, present in medieval legend, lyric and drama, portrays Christ as a baby rather than an adult, with the instruments of torture used at the Passion and his body sometimes inflicted with wounds.⁴⁷ The most striking manifestation of this tradition may be the child-host miracles, in which the Eucharistic wafer held in the priest's hands is miraculously transformed into a living child; this child is then brutally dismembered before the congregation, thus vividly conflating the Incarnation and the Passion. In depictions of the suffering Christ Child and the child-host miracles, time — past, present, future — is layered, and events commingled. Theresa Kenney provides a comprehensive discussion of this important topic in her doctoral dissertation, dividing the medieval perceptions of time, and salvation history in particular,

⁴⁷ For a thorough study of the medieval suffering Christ Child see the doctoral thesis of Theresa Kenney, "Aeternity Shutt in a Span': Time in the Medieval and Renaissance English Nativity Lyric," PhD diss., Stanford University, 1993.

into four types: linear, liturgical/cyclical, eschatological, and sacramental time.⁴⁸ It is the last of these that will help us more fully understand Seth's vision. "Any contact with eternity," says Kenney, "any attempt to represent the eternal, will tend to affect the Christian writer's depiction of time." While liturgical and eschatological time represent two ways of dealing with the difficult concept of the eternal, a third mode exists in sacramental time, that seen from the perspective of the Incarnation or the Eucharist.⁴⁹ Furthermore, conflation of the Incarnation and the Passion is logical due to their natural interdependence (as stated clearly during the debate between the green tree and the dry in the *Pelerinage*): man's sins must be atoned for, but only a completely pure man can accomplish this, therefore Christ must be incarnated in order to suffer the Passion for us. God's mercy, shown to man via the Incarnation, is present throughout time, which may explain why the Christ Child appears where he might not otherwise be expected.⁵⁰ Perhaps this notion will help us understand the Christ Child's appearance in the tree of Seth's vision.

Seth's first look into the garden truly reveals paradise to him: its great abundance of fruit and flowers, melodious bird-song and sweet fragrance. In the centre he sees the clear fountain, dividing itself into the four rivers that water the entire world, but above this he spies the immense tree, entirely bare of both bark and leaves. Seth begins to wonder if, like the traces of his parents' footprints withered into the grass that marked his way, the tree might have been rendered thus by his parents' sin. His second glimpse confirms this: the serpent, agent of the first pair's downfall, is now wound around the

⁴⁸ Kenney, "Aeternity Shutt in a Span," ch. 1. Kenney employs these notions of time to explain the image of the suffering Christ Child found in Middle English lyrics.

⁴⁹ Kenney, "Aeternity Shutt in a Span," 22–23.

⁵⁰ Kenney, "Aeternity Shutt in a Span," 34.

bare trunk. Seth's final vision completes the multiple layers of meaning; it shows him the infant in the top of the tree, whose branches now reach all the way to heaven and down to hell. The angel reveals to Seth that the infant is Christ, the oil of mercy, who will come in the fullness of time to redeem mankind. Surely, what Seth first saw was the tree of knowledge, the violation of which caused Adam and Eve to be expelled from Eden; however, it is also the dry tree made green again, the cosmological tree of life connecting heaven, earth and hell, and, via the shoots that the legend tells us grow from its seeds, the tree of the cross. Moreover, the tree is (following Quinn) the *virga* Jesse, and the *virgo* Mary herself, the fruit of whose womb, the infant Jesus, sits in her "lap."⁵¹

Furthermore, in this series of visions we see the same conflation of events and compression of time evident in medieval depictions of the suffering Christ Child, an effect brought about by the unknown author's vivid use of sacramental time: the serpent coiled around the tree recalls the Temptation and subsequent Fall of man;⁵² the Incarnation is represented by the infant child wrapped in swaddling clothes; the Eucharist is inherent in the tree of life, known from the earliest Christian writings as a tree that provides universal shelter and nourishment as the host nourishes the faithful,⁵³ the sacrament of baptism is prefigured by the streams issuing from the clear fountain, and even the Passion is invoked, not literally but surely through implication by the rood-tree itself, whose legend this is. This garden is the garden of Christendom "mystically

⁵¹ The word-play between *virgo* and *virga* was common in the Middle Ages, and Mary is often referred to as both the virgin (*virgo*) and the shoot/rod that came out of Jesse (*virga lesse*). This association was asserted near the beginning of the third century: 'Virga ex radice Maria ex David, flos ex virga filius Mariae.' See *De carne Christi*, in F. Oehler, *Quinti septimi florentis Tertulliani quae supersunt omnia* (Leipzig T. O. Weigel, 1854), 921. While this trope is very frequent in the twelfth century and afterwards, earlier authors (e.g., Ambrose, Jerome and Rabanus Maurus) also employed the *virgo/virga* terminology.

⁵² Although not part of Seth's visions, the detail of the withered footprints which Seth follows to paradise calls to mind the Fall and its effect on all creation.

⁵³ See chapter 4, section 4.2.1.

prefigured,” as Greenhill concludes, whose existence is brought about by the Passion and whose community flourishes through the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist; but (an idea Greenhill rejects) it is also simultaneously the Garden of Eden, where some 930 years before,⁵⁴ the sin of Seth’s parents caused the tree to become bare. Sacramental time allows the juxtaposition of the two realities, distinct in the linear time of mankind, yet co-existent in the eternal present of God. Because of this collapsing of time, the tree is able to be the tree of knowledge, the tree of life, the tree of the cross and Jesus himself, all at once.⁵⁵

One could argue that the evocation of the Passion is weaker in Seth’s vision (as it is a pre-figuration) than, for example, in a child-host miracle account, and it is fair to ask whether the contemporary audience would have recognized the notion of the Passion in the tree with the infant in its heights. This question is answered with a resounding affirmative when one looks again at the variant form of Seth’s vision found in the thirteenth-century interpolated *Vita Adae et Evae*. What Seth saw “in summitate arboris” was a “uirginem sedentem et puerum crucifixum in manibus tenentem.” This sentence may be translated in two distinct ways for the following reasons: first, the gender ambiguity of the participle *tenentem*, and second, the fact that *crucifixum* may be the accusative of either the adjectival past participle derived from *crucifigo* (to crucify) or of the noun *crucifixus* (“crucifix”).⁵⁶ Hence, Seth either sees a seated Virgin with a little boy holding a crucifix in his hands, or the Virgin is sitting and holding a crucified child in

⁵⁴ 930 years is the usual age of Adam in the wood-of-the-cross legends at the time he sends Seth back to Eden for the oil of mercy.

⁵⁵ The tree may even represent the Virgin herself, when the infant Christ is seated in the tree’s branches.

⁵⁶ See the definition of *crucifigo* (to crucify) in R. E. Latham and D. R. Howlett, eds. *The British Academy Dictionary of Medieval Latin From British Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), vol. 1, 522.

her hands. Either translation would clearly call to mind the Passion, albeit the latter much more vividly!

Certainly, there is no shortage of depictions of the infant Christ with instruments of his Passion; however, the question remains as to whether there are any relevant illustrations of such a Christ Child in a tree. Thus far, the unaccompanied “child in the tree” has proven elusive in medieval art, yet a little-discussed image showing the infant Christ in a tree confronted with the tortures of his Passion does, in fact, exist (fig. 3). Although late (c. 1500), this striking painting on a panel of the Buxheim altarpiece shows the naked Christ Child sitting in a thorny rose tree, from which spring not only the lance (upon which the child sits), the crown of thorns, the nails and other instruments of the Passion, but the cross itself, as if growing directly from the tree. The child declares in Middle High German, “I will pick roses and (bring) much sorrow upon my (Mother),” a statement which demonstrates clearly the infant’s foreknowledge of the Passion. Below kneels Mary while the adult Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane, thus conflating Christ’s infancy with his future self-sacrifice. Gertrud Schiller, in her fundamental study of medieval Christian iconography, attests to the possibility that this image was influenced by Seth’s vision in the wood-of-the-cross legends.⁵⁷ Given the rarity of the infant Christ, alone, in a tree and the way in which the cross is shown growing from the

⁵⁷ Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 2: *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1972), 195–96, pl. 669. Schiller cites R. Berliner, “Arma Christi,” *Müncher Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 6 (1955): 35–152, for the suggestion that the wood-of-the-cross legend influenced this image. For a different interpretation of this image, see the recent essay by Barbara Newman, ‘Love’s Arrows: Christ as Cupid in Late Medieval Art and Devotion,’ in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 263–86, particularly 272–73. Newman argues that the phallic shaped lance between the Christ Child’s legs (angled the same as the arrow piercing St. Augustine’s heart) marks him as “an avatar of the god of love” similar to Cupid, the “arboreal sniper.” Newman contends that, though Gothic in style and iconography, this image looks forward to Baroque eroticism, as portrayed in Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*. As the late Middle Ages is characterized by the accumulation of motifs, there is no reason to suppose that suggestions of the “child in the tree” of the wood-of-the-cross legends and Arthurian romances and the Christ as Cupid are both present in this image.

very wood of the tree itself, this assertion seems very likely. The Crucifixion imagery associated with the Christ Child in the text of the interpolated *Vita Adae et Evae* above further supports such a suggestion.



Fig. 3 – The Christ Child sits surrounded by the instruments of his Passion in “The Tree of Suffering” in this panel of the Buxheim Altar, Ulm by Daniel Mauch (ca. 1500). Image courtesy of the Ulmer Museum (Inv. No. 1922.5109; used with permission).

Furthermore, the possibility that Seth saw a crucified Christ Child in the tree instantly recalls the infant with the five wounds seen by the knight Durmart. That child sat in an illuminated tree, placing the bright candles to his right and the dim ones to his left, thus adding a future event to the mix of sacramental time: Judgment Day.⁵⁸ Highly relevant to this point is another image of the Christ Child in a tree, which illustrates perfectly not only the conflation of Christ's infancy with his Passion, and the Crucifixion with the tree of life, but the judgment that will accompany Christ's Second Coming (fig. 4).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Compare the description of the Last Judgment in Matt. 25: 31–46.

⁵⁹ Mention of this wall-painting (without a photo) is made in by Otto Lauffer, 'Geister im Baum,' in *Volkkundliche Gaben: John Meier zum Siebzigsten Geburtstage Dargebracht* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter and Co., 1934), 104–20. For a basic description of the work see Friedrich Schlie, *Die Kunst- und Geschichts-Denkmäler des Grossherzogthums Mecklenburg-Schwerin*, 5 vols. (Leipzig: K. F. Köhler, 1898), vol. 2, 105–7.



Fig. 4 – In this wall-painting from the second half of the fourteenth century in St. George's Church, Wismar, Germany, the Christ Child is nestled in a lily atop a great tree, surmounted by his crucified adult self. In this context, the tree may be considered a conflation of the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. Image reproduced from F. Schlie, *Die Kunst- und Geschichts-Denkmäler des Grossherzogthums Mecklenburg-Schwerin*, vol. 2, Schwerin: Bärensprung'schen Hofbuchdr, 1896–1902.

While the connection of the previous image of the Christ Child in a tree with the wood-of-the-cross legend was a supposition, the contents of this fourteenth-century wall-painting from Wismar, Germany leave no doubt about such a link. Here we see a visual

amalgamation of the Fall, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Last Judgment, all entwined by a wondrous, grape-laden tree. This tree springs forth, just as the wood-of-the-cross legends relate, from the sleeping Adam below and is crowned by the tree of the cross with the crucified Christ at its apex. Yet supporting this rood-tree is unmistakably the infant Christ Child, resting asleep, not in a manger but in a lily-like flower, which itself blossoms into another flower, from which springs the cross. Mary herself, of course, is traditionally symbolized by the lily, which is often seen in Annunciation scenes. The fact that the infant Christ lies in a lily flower is therefore appropriate. Although a century later than the elaborate tale of the wood of the cross related in the *Post peccatum Adae*, this painting leaves no doubt about the important link between the cross legends, specifically Seth's vision of the Christ Child in the tree, and medieval iconography.

In studying narratives of this sort, it is natural to want to discover origins and analogues of various motifs. Thus, for the "child in the tree" encountered by the Grail heroes, a number of interpretations have been suggested: the child is a Celtic dwarf, is related to the speaking trees of the sun and moon, is a soul climbing the ladder to heaven, or is a manifestation of the universal concept of the deity in the tree. The "child in the tree" of the wood-of-the-cross legends, while potentially shaped by these traditions, is probably most heavily influenced by depictions of the Jesse Tree with the Virgin and Child at its summit. The existence of at least two medieval images of a Christ Child in a tree, and their likely relationship to the cross legends, gives significant motivation to conduct further research in the area of iconographic connections. As for the child Seth sees in his vision, it is unequivocally the Christ Child sitting in the tree of life, the tree which engenders the wood of the cross in order to make the dry tree and mankind whole

again. The dense multivalency of this narrative image, brought about by the juxtaposition of sacramental time, provides not only Seth but the whole audience with a neatly encapsulated vision of the Temptation, the Fall, the Redemption, and ultimately, the Last Judgment, all mediated by a tree, which triumphantly becomes not only the cross but the tree that bears the “fruit” that is Christ himself.

5.2 Descendants of the Tree of Life and Solomon’s Ship in the Grail Romances

There occurs in the grail romances another intriguing parallel to the wood-of-the-cross legends, namely the tale of the descendants of the tree of life and their use in constructing the bed on Solomon’s “ship of faith.”⁶⁰ The earlier manifestation of this story appears in the early thirteenth-century French romance *Queste del Saint Graal*.⁶¹ Chapter 11 relates the “legend of the tree of life,”⁶² how Eve, when she plucked the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, also plucked a small branch from the tree, adhering to the fruit. When she gave the fruit to Adam, the branch remained in her hand, and she unknowingly held onto it even when God expelled the pair from the garden. Then, remarking the branch’s presence, Eve noted how it still retained its vibrant green colour, and she decided to plant it in remembrance of all that they had lost through their disobedience in regards to that tree. By the Lord’s will, the branch quickly took root and grew. The *Quest* is quite specific about the significance of this twig: it is a reminder that

⁶⁰ See Esther Casier Quinn’s study of the Solomon’s Ship episode in Malory: “The Quest of Seth, Solomon’s Ship and the Grail,” *Traditio* 21 (1965): 185–222. Another valuable study was made by James Dean who sets these tales of the tree of life into the context of the concept of the “world grown old” (*senectus mundi*): “Vestiges of Paradise: The Tree of Life in *Cursor Mundi* and Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 13 (1985): 113–126.

⁶¹ The translation used here is P. M. Matarasso, ed. *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: Penguin, 2005).

⁶² Matarasso, *Quest*, 222–235. The legend of the tree of life occurs as an interlude in the story at the point when Galahad, Perceval and Bors have encountered the miraculous ship and are amazed by the bed upon it with its posts which appear to be naturally coloured and not painted.

the inheritance of mankind has not been lost eternally; furthermore, the fact that it was Eve, not Adam, who removed the twig betokens how, although life was lost through a woman, it is also regained through a woman, namely the Virgin Mary.⁶³ As the branch grew up into a tree, it was all white, indicating the virginal state of Eve when she planted it.

The tale continues to relate how one day Adam and Eve were weeping with sadness under the tree and Eve remarked that it was no surprise that they were sad, since they were sitting under the tree of death; just then a voice comforted them saying that the tree had more of life than of death in it. Feeling heartened by this, the pair planted many slips from that tree, and each one flourished, retaining the parent tree's colour.⁶⁴ Soon after, when they were sitting again under the tree, God commanded Adam and Eve to unite as man and wife; their union and the conception of Abel caused the tree to turn entirely green and to bear flowers and fruit, and all slips planted from it thereafter were green in colour.⁶⁵ Later, when Cain killed his brother Abel, it was under this very same tree. God cursed the earth as a result of the first murder, though not the tree of life and its offspring; however, the tree's colour was again miraculously transformed into red in remembrance of Abel's blood that had been spilled beneath it. All slips now taken from the tree withered and died, although the original continued to flourish and was revered by all the descendants of Adam and Eve. It was so special that neither it nor its descendants deteriorated in any way, even after the flood.⁶⁶

⁶³ Matarasso, *Quest*, 223-224.

⁶⁴ Matarasso, *Quest*, 225.

⁶⁵ Matarasso, *Quest*, 226.

⁶⁶ Matarasso, *Quest*, 229.

The tree flourished even up to the time of Solomon. One day when the king was lamenting the cunning nature of his wife, the Holy Spirit comforted him by telling him of the coming of the Virgin and the child she would bear, who would be descended from Solomon's own lineage. Solomon agonized over how he could convey to future generations how he had been given foreknowledge of this event until his wife offered a solution: Solomon must build a ship of the best and most durable wood. He commanded his carpenters to build it, and his wife adorned the ship with a great bed, on which was placed Solomon's crown at the head and David's sword at the foot. Seeing that the bed still lacked something, Solomon's wife ordered the carpenters to cut three beams: a red one from the tree of life, which bled when cut, and one each of white and green from the tree's descendants. The red and white posts were affixed vertically to either side of the bed, and the green one, mounted horizontally, joined the other two.⁶⁷ That night Solomon witnessed a strange man descend to the ship with a throng of angels and inscribe it with a message. Solomon approached in wonder, the ship slid into the water and sailed away, but a voice assured the king that the last knight of his lineage would lie on this bed and have tidings of him.⁶⁸ An abbreviated version of the tale occurs in Malory's fifteenth-century work, *Le Morte d'Arthur*.⁶⁹ The narrative, here recounted to the three knights by the maiden, Perceval's sister, is the same as in the *Queste*, except the adornments made from the three different colours of wood are specifically called spindles rather than posts, and the detail that the tree of life and its descendants experienced no degradation after the flood is omitted.

⁶⁷ Matarasso, *Quest*, 232-234.

⁶⁸ Matarasso, *Quest*, 235.

⁶⁹ Jane Cowen, trans., *Sir Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur*, 2 vols. (London: Penguin, 1988), vol. 1, 337-341.

This version of the fate of the holy wood has important parallels to the wood-of-the-cross legends. Here it is Eve, rather than Seth, who takes the twig from the garden and plants it outside. In the romance rendition the twig is definitively from the tree of knowledge (as it was originally obtained because it clung to the fruit Eve plucked), yet it is thereafter referred to as the tree of life. However, based on the discussion in previous chapters, the reader should not be surprised at the conflation of the trees of knowledge and of life, nor indeed by the conflation of these trees with the tree of the cross. In both accounts of the tree of life's descendants (the Arthurian romance version and that in the wood-of-the-cross legends) the tree that springs from the branch of paradise flourishes all the way up to the time of Solomon, when he uses the wood in an important construction project: the temple in the wood-of-the-cross legends and the adornments for the bed on the ship of faith in the Arthurian rendition. The wood-of-the-cross legends lack the specific colour symbolism present in the Arthurian tale.

The strongest parallel in both histories of the descendants of the paradisaical tree are the overt connections they make between the Fall and the Redemption. In the wood-of-the-cross legends, Seth plants the twig from paradise on Adam's grave and the marvellous tree grows out of the very body of the first sinner. Seth received a revelation concerning the future coming of Christ from the archangel who gave him the twig. Furthermore, the location of Adam's grave is the very place on which Christ is later crucified; the wood of the cross was derived from the same tree whose violation brought sin into the world. In the Arthurian version, in the *Queste* specifically, it is Abel who is the type of Christ. When Eve conceived Abel underneath the tree it turned green and began to bear flowers and fruit, symbolic of "the life that was to be ever green in Jesus

Christ, quickened, that is to say, by pious thoughts and love for Him who made it.”⁷⁰

Abel met his death by means of treachery on a Friday, under that very tree, which was “a symbol of Christ’s death upon the Cross, for Abel signified Our Lord, and Cain prefigured Judas.” The text further asserts that, “there are then many points where these deaths correspond, not in degree, but in their outward signs.”⁷¹ The tale of the tree of life in the Arthurian romances clearly uses the tree to link the deeds of the first men to the future redemption through Christ, even if the link is not quite so tangible as that provided by the wood-of-the-cross legends in which the cross’s very material is derived directly from the tree of Eden.

5.3 Miracles of Unseasonable Growth

Another meaningful, though less overt, parallel to a motif in the wood-of-the-cross legends is found in the instances of miraculous and unseasonable growth found in many cultures and time. Just as the wood-of-the-cross legends tell of a great tree with three types of foliage that miraculously grew from the stalk Seth planted on Adam’s grave, and further relate that the cross itself bloomed from noon until evening after the Crucifixion,⁷² other medieval tales tell of miraculous plant growth. The following sections will examine in detail two particular examples of such stories current in medieval England.

⁷⁰ Matarasso, *Quest*, 226.

⁷¹ Matarasso, *Quest*, 227–228.

⁷² *Cursor mundi*, ll. 16859–68. See chapter 3, section 3.1.

5.3.1 *Sir Cleges* and Other Miraculously Blooming Cherry Trees

The Middle English tale of *Sir Cleges*,⁷³ preserved in two early fifteenth-century manuscripts, tells the story of a spendthrift knight, who was so generous that he fell into poverty. He laments his situation at Christmas time under his favourite cherry tree; the tree then miraculously blooms and bears fruit. Cleges recognizes that a miracle has taken place and rushes to show the unseasonable fruit to his wife, Clarys. At Clarys' suggestion, Cleges takes the bough as a gift to King Arthur where he eventually receives a reward for his generosity.

The motif of the miraculous nativity cherry tree also occurs in two other English examples, namely the fifteenth play of the *Ludus Coventriae* cycle⁷⁴ and the popular ballad known as the *Cherry-Tree Carol*.⁷⁵ In the play Joseph and Mary, heavy with child, encounter a cherry tree on the road to Bethlehem which suddenly blooms and bears fruit. Joseph attempts to gather some of the fruit but it is too high up for him, and he remarks harshly that the person who got Mary with child should get it; the tree then miraculously bends down so that Mary can reach it herself, which causes Joseph to immediately repent of his remark. The event is nearly identical in the *Cherry-Tree Carol* except that in the latter source it is the baby Jesus, still in the womb, who requests that the tree bend down to let his mother have some cherries. Sherwyn Carr traced the nativity cherry motif back to an episode in the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, in which the Holy Family encounter a palm tree during their flight into Egypt. Taking rest under the tree, Mary

⁷³ See the edition in Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

⁷⁴ K. S. Block, ed. *Ludus Coventriae, or the Plaie Called Corpus Christi*, EETS e. s. 120 (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁷⁵ Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (New York: Folklore Press, 1956), vol. 2, 1–6. This carol is undatable, but “certainly early” according to Sherwyn T. Carr, “The Middle English Nativity Cherry Tree: The Dissemination of a Popular Motif,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1975): 133–147, p. 133.

spies the fruits high above and asks Joseph to retrieve some. When he remarks that they are too high up, the infant Jesus asks the tree to bend down; the tree obeys and the family is able to feed on the fruit.⁷⁶ This episode of the “Pseudo-Matthew tree” became popular in the vernacular, and, by the beginning of the fifteenth century was “something of a favourite in the north and northern areas of the Midlands,” and the cherry-tree motif was first established and made popular via its incorporation into the *Ludus Coventriae*.⁷⁷ The fact that the tree was made a cherry may be explained by the incorporation of local details for an audience not likely familiar with date palms.⁷⁸ The timing of the cherry miracle has also changed in the *Ludus Coventriae* (and the *Cherry-Tree Carol*): it now occurs just before the nativity, rather than during the flight into Egypt.

Carr pointed out key similarities between the cherry tree episode as portrayed in the *Ludus Coventriae* and the *Cherry-Tree Carol* compared to that in *Sir Cleges*. In both cases the blooming is miraculous in both its suddenness and its unseasonableness, it occurs at Christmas time (the time of the nativity), it responds to a particular need, and finally, the tree is specifically a cherry. These points, along with geographical and chronological considerations, led Carr to cite the *Ludus Coventriae* as the only probable source for the cherry episode in *Sir Cleges*.⁷⁹

Certainly, the relationship between the miraculously blooming cherry tree and the wood-of-the-cross legends is a thematic, rather than a direct or textual one. Just as the cherry tree bends down to signify even the unborn Christ Child’s power and refreshes his

⁷⁶ Constantin von Tischendorf, “Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium” in *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlag, 1966), 87–88. For a more recent edition of the Pseudo-Matthew gospel, see Jan Gijssels, *Libri de nativitate Mariae: Pseudo-Matthaei evangelium*, 2 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

⁷⁷ Carr, “Nativity Cherry Tree,” 138–139.

⁷⁸ Carr, “Nativity Cherry Tree,” 141.

⁷⁹ This despite the problem of dating; see Carr, 146–147. C. Grant Loomis traced examples of unseasonable growth in Celtic legends and hagiography in “Sir Cleges and Unseasonable Growth in Hagiology,” *Modern Language Notes* 53 (1938): 591–594.

blessed mother, and just as God hears Cleges' prayers and rewards the generous knight, so too does the branch granted to Seth in the wood-of-the-cross legends bring solace to the ailing Adam. The marvelous tree of three types of foliage, signifying the Trinity, acts as a wonderful example of God's divine providence, whereby the very tree that brought about the downfall of mankind provides the material by which the instrument of the Redemption is made. Although later than the wood-of-the-cross legends which are the focus of this study, the cherry-tree episodes prevalent in late-medieval England demonstrate the continued popular familiarity with, and appetite for, such plant-related miracles as a means of demonstrating God's power over nature.

5.3.2 Joseph of Arimathea and the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury

It has already been shown in chapter 2 how the English tried to link important early Christian figures to England, such as Helena, who was a popular figure in Anglo-Saxon times and was even purported to be a British princess!⁸⁰ Another such figure was Joseph of Arimathea, who legend claims visited Britain in the year AD 63, at the request of St. Philip (who himself was evangelizing Gaul), and who established the first Christian church in Britain at Glastonbury.⁸¹ The legend I wish to discuss briefly here concerns the

⁸⁰ See chapter 2, section 2.4 above.

⁸¹ This claim is first made in an addition made by another hand to the introductory chapter prefixed to William of Malmesbury's *On the Antiquity of the Church of Glastonbury*. For a discussion of the Joseph of Arimathea legends as they relate to Glastonbury, see J. Armitage Robinson, *Two Glastonbury Legends: King Arthur and St. Joseph of Arimathea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926). Valerie M. Lagorio also traces the evolution of the Joseph of Arimathea legends in "The Evolving Legend of St. Joseph of Glastonbury," in *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*, ed. James P. Carley (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 55–81. Lagorio gives only a brief mention of the Glastonbury Thorn as a late accretion to the legend, p. 80. Deborah Crawford's two-part article presents a valuable historiographical overview of scholarship on the Joseph of Arimathea legends and his association with Britain, in which she stresses the need to reevaluate the prevailing view that the legends were fabricated by the Glastonbury monks to increase the reputation of their establishment. See "St. Joseph in Britain: Reconsidering the Legends, Part I," *Folklore* 104 (1993): 86–98; Part II can be found in *Folklore* 105

Holy Thorn of Glastonbury, a hawthorn tree that miraculously flowered at Christmas.

The Holy Thorn is a late accretion to the legend: it was first mentioned in the verse *Lyfe of Ioseph of Armathia*, composed c. 1502 and printed by Wynkyn de Worde c. 1511 and Pynson in 1520.⁸² The *Lyfe* has the following to say:

Thre hawthornes also, that groweth in werall,
Do burge and bere grene leaues at Christmas
As fresshe as other in May, whan the nightyngale
Wrestes out her notes musycall as pure as glas;
Of all wodes and forestes she is the chefe chauntres.
In wynter to synge yf it were her nature,
In werall she myght haue a playne place,
On those hawthornes to shewe her notes clere.⁸³

The connection of Joseph and the Thorn was an even later development, and may have been first made by James Montague who was responsible for planning an entertainment for James I's Catholic wife Anne of Denmark, and had the character of Joseph present her with two boughs from the Thorn as part of the festivities. Gifts of blossoms from the Glastonbury Thorn were not unusual; for example, Thomas Cromwell, Vicar-General to Henry VIII, had received such a gift in 1535.⁸⁴

A post-medieval elaboration of the legend of the Holy Thorn was that it had sprung up miraculously when Joseph of Arimathea stopped with his companions to rest on Wearyall Hill, and planted his staff there.⁸⁵ That the staff of a saint should suddenly

(1994): 51–59. Brief mention of the Holy Thorn and related tales of Celtic saints who make flora miraculously flourish out of season is made on p. 51.

⁸² Walter W. Skeat, *Joseph of Arimathie: Otherwise Called the Romance of the Seint Graal, or Holy Grail*, EETS vol. 44 (London: Oxford University Press, 1871, reprinted 1924), 37–49. For printings of this text see W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and Katharine F. Pantzer, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640*. First Compiled by A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, 2nd edition, 3 vols. (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–1991), STC number 14806.

⁸³ Skeat, *Joseph of Arimathie*, II 385–392.

⁸⁴ Hugh Ross Williamson, *The Flowering Hawthorn* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962), 1.

⁸⁵ For this phase of the legend's development see Alexandra Walsham, "The Holy Thorn of Glastonbury: The Evolution of a Legend in Post-Reformation England," *Parergon* 21.2 (2004): 1–25.

take root and burst forth in leaves and blossoms is by no means unknown. Loomis describes this motif as one of the “most familiar phenomenon of folklore” and lists several dozen examples of such an occurrence in hagiographical sources.⁸⁶ The motif likely owes its origin to the biblical story of Aaron’s rod in Numbers, when God commands that each of the twelve tribes provide a rod as a means by which to select the tribe from which priests will be chosen thenceforth. Aaron supplies his rod as a representative of the tribe of Levi, and the following day his rod had “bloomed blossoms, which spreading the leaves, were formed into almonds” (Numbers 17:8). The *Legenda Aurea* relates how Joseph was chosen as the husband for the Virgin Mary by a similar method. When Mary reached the age of betrothal she had vowed herself instead to God, and the high priest asked the Lord to instruct him as to how to proceed. A voice advised him that all marriageable men should bring a branch to the altar, and that the branch of the man who should wed Mary would bloom and the Holy Spirit would perch upon it in the form of a dove. All but Joseph, who thought himself too old, did as instructed, but the branches remained unchanged. Consulted a second time, the heavenly voice advised that the man who had not supplied a branch was to be Mary’s spouse; when Joseph finally complied by offering a branch, it immediately flowered and a dove landed on it.⁸⁷ A parallel was drawn between the Numbers episode and the Glastonbury Thorn itself, when Bishop Goodman, writing to Oliver Cromwell of the Thorn’s destruction in 1653, said:

Certainly the Thorn was very extraordinary, for at my being there...I did consider the soil and all other circumstances; yet I could find no natural cause. This I know, that God

⁸⁶ C. Grant Loomis, *White Magic: An Introduction to the Folklore of Christian Legend* (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1948), 94.

⁸⁷ Granger Ryan, *Golden Legend*, vol. 2, ch. 131: The Birth of the Virgin, p. 153.

first appeared to Moses in a bramble-bush, and that Aaron's Rod, being dried and withered, did bud...it may well be that this White Thorn did spring up and begin to blossom on Christmas Day to give a testimony to religion that it doth flourish in persecution; as the Thorn doth flourish in the coldest time of winter.⁸⁸

Certainly, the tale that it was the staff that Joseph of Arimathea planted on Wearyall Hill which bloomed and became the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury was a late development, well after the time that the wood-of-the-cross legends flourished. However, the fact that such an example of miraculous and unseasonable plant growth continued to hold sway even in post-Reformation England speaks to the continued popular acceptance of such marvels.

A final significant detail in the medieval repertoire of the Joseph of Arimathea legends is the tree imagery found in the conversion of King Evalak in the mid-fourteenth-century *Joseph of Arimathie*.⁸⁹ After leaving Jerusalem with his wife, son and a company of about fifty others, Joseph arrives at Sarras, where he tries to convert the king, Evalak. Evalak listens to Joseph, but is doubtful about several points of Christian doctrine, namely the mysteries of the Trinity and of Christ's immaculate Incarnation. That night, Evalak is converted by two visions. In the first he sees three stems growing from one trunk and appearing to coalesce into one, clearly an emblem of the Trinity.⁹⁰ In the second he sees the Christ Child pass through a solid wall without damaging it in any way, aptly illustrating how Christ was born from a virginal mother.⁹¹ This tree seen by Evalak is reminiscent of the "three trees in one" that grew from the three seeds of paradise that

⁸⁸ Quoted in Williamson, *The Flowering Hawthorn*, 94.

⁸⁹ Skeat, *Joseph of Arimathie*, 1–23.

⁹⁰ Skeat, *Joseph of Arimathie*, "Þenne he seih in his chaumbre-flor. Þreo [treos] souht vp at enes. Þe braunches on heiȝ weoren. alle of o lengþe," (ll 181–182). The king could not tell whether he saw three trees or one: "Þe kyng nuste wel forte seye. bi whit þat he hedde, wheþer þat he seȝe. was on forte sigge, oþer two, or þreo. or what he miȝte telle" (ll. 199–201).

⁹¹ Skeat, *Joseph of Arimathie*, ll 204–211.

Seth planted in Adam's mouth and which also signified the Trinity. It is perhaps also noteworthy that Evalak's vision of the tree is followed immediately by the apparition of the Christ Child, a coincidence that cannot help but call to mind Seth's glimpses into the garden in which he sees first the great tree, and later the infant Christ Himself. I have not come across any scholarship that suggests an influence of the Seth story on this part of Joseph legend, but it may be worth future inquiry.

5.4 Wonders of the East: Marvellous Trees and the Earthly Paradise in Mandeville and the Alexander Romances

This section is intended not as an exhaustive treatment, but rather as a brief overview of two other traditions that have aspects related thematically to the wood-of-the-cross legends, namely the *The Book of John Mandeville* (hereafter called the *Book*)⁹² and the tales of Alexander the Great. Mandeville's *Book*, originally written in French, began circulating in the mid-fourteenth century. By 1400 it had been translated into most European vernaculars, and approximately 300 manuscripts are extant today.⁹³ The author of the *Book* claims to be an English knight by the name of Sir John Mandeville; despite the fact that his true identity is unknown, the case for English authorship is not unreasonable, and this provenance was popularly accepted until the nineteenth century. The oldest English translation of the *Book* dates to c. 1385 and is known as the Defective version. This name is based on the fact that missing pages in the manuscript form a

⁹² Also commonly known as the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, numerous modern scholars now agree that the correct title of the work should be *The Book of Sir John Mandeville*. The original argument supporting the adoption of this title can be found in Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The 'Travels' of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 17–27.

⁹³ C. W. R. D. Moseley, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (London: Penguin, 2005), 9. Moseley provides an easily accessible modern English translation based on the English translation of the *Book* in London, British Library, MS Egerton 1982, with chapter divisions following those in the fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman manuscripts London, British Library, MS Harley 4383 and MS Royal 20 B.X.

lacuna in the narrative concerning Egypt (the “Egypt gap”) that must have been present in its purported Anglo-Norman source, the “Insular version,” although no extant copy of the Insular version with this lacuna survives.⁹⁴ The Defective version of the *Book*, written in the first half of the fifteenth century, was the dominant form in medieval England and survives today in thirty-three manuscripts and six fragments.⁹⁵

The *Book* draws on more than fifty sources, including encyclopedias, romances, hagiography, histories and accounts of the wonders of the east, to make up its account of the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land and the sights to see. Among the many marvels related in the *Book* is the story of Seth’s journey to paradise, found in chapter two (of the Defective version), *A Way to Ierusalem*. Here, Mandeville discusses the four types of wood from which the cross was made (pine, cedar, cypress, olive),⁹⁶ then adds how the Greeks have a legend which claims that the wood came from the tree from which Adam ate; he then goes on to tell the origin story for the wood of the cross.⁹⁷ Interestingly, and likely done in order to harmonize with the foregoing description of the four woods, Seth receives four (rather than three) seeds from the angel at the garden,⁹⁸ from which “sprang .iiii. treys of whilk a croys was made þat bare good fruyt, Ihesu Crist.”⁹⁹ Two further episodes from the cross’s prehistory are found further on in the text in chapter seven,

⁹⁴ The Defective version was edited in M. C. Seymour, *The Defective Version of Mandeville’s Travels*, EETS o. s. vol. 319 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See xi; xi, n. 5 and xiv for a discussion of the “Egypt gap.”

⁹⁵ Seymour, *Travels*, xvi–xxvi. Extensive discussions of the *Book*’s textual history can be found in M. C. Seymour, *Sir John Mandeville* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 1–26 and also his “The Early English Editions of *Mandeville’s Travels*,” *The Library* 5:19 (1964): 202–207, as well as in Higgins, *Writing East*, 6–62. Yeager also gives a clear and concise overview of the text and its reception by the English medieval audience in Suzanne Yeager, “England’s Quest for Jerusalem: Fourteenth-Century Literature of Crusade and Pilgrimage” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2004), 190–260; see especially pp. 223–226. Her dissertation has now been published as *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁹⁶ Seymour, *Mandeville*, 7/20–8/15.

⁹⁷ Seymour, *Mandeville*, 8/16–9/5.

⁹⁸ Seymour, *Mandeville*, 8, l. 26.

⁹⁹ Seymour, *Mandeville*, 9, ll. 2–3.

Ierusalem. First is an account of the *probatrica pissina*, where “was woned an aungel to descende and stere þe water,”¹⁰⁰ so that the first person to enter the water thereafter would be cured. Mandeville does not mention anything about the presence of the holy wood in the pool, only the pool’s healing properties, which are related in John 5: 2–4. Later in the same chapter we hear of a fair church in Jerusalem toward the west “whare þe tree grew of whiche þe cros was made to oure lord,”¹⁰¹ and a brook known as the *torrens Cedron* in the Vale of Jehosaphat lying between Jerusalem and Mt. of Olivet, over which “lay a tree, of whiche þe crosse was made, þat men ȝeode on ouer þe ryuere.”¹⁰² The full story of the cross’s prehistory is not told, nor are the episodes that are present connected in a coherent fashion; rather, portions of the wood-of-the-cross legend are scattered piecemeal through the text. Nevertheless, the considerable popularity of the *Book*, in both England and Western Europe in general, would have served to further distribute the already popular legend of the cross’s distinguished origin.

Mandeville also refers on several occasions a certain wood of paradise called the *lignum aloes*. This wood is found in the rivers of paradise, such as the Nile, and has healing properties. For example, in describing the city of Alexandria, Mandeville states: “at þat cytee entreth the ryuere of Nyle in to the see as I to ȝou haue seyde before. In þat ryuere men fynden many precyouse stones + meche also of lignum aloes. And it is a manere of wode þat cometh out of paradys terrestre the whiche is good for manye dyuerse medicynes. And it [is] right dereworth.”¹⁰³ The wood is said to be carried out of

¹⁰⁰ Seymour, *Mandeville*, 36, ll. 16–17.

¹⁰¹ Seymour, *Mandeville*, 39, ll. 12–13.

¹⁰² Seymour, *Mandeville*, 39, ll. 22–25.

¹⁰³ P. Hamelius, *Mandeville's Travels: Translated from the French of Jean d'Outremeuse*, EETS vol. 153–154 (K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1919–23), 37, ll. 3–9. This description is absent from “Defective” as it is part of the so-called “Egypt gap,” the part of the text that is missing from this version.

paradise in seasonal floods, and is characterized by a sweet smell; the Great Chan, Mandeville reports, even had a chariot and a certain inlaid table made from the paradisaical wood.¹⁰⁴ These examples serve to illustrate the miraculous properties attributed to relics from the earthly paradise: in this case even fragments of wood thought to have originated from that locale are of great worth.

The romances of Alexander the Great were also enormously popular in Britain, as elsewhere. Mary Lascelles details the numerous histories and romances of Alexander that circulated in medieval England, including those in Latin, French and Scots.¹⁰⁵ Among these are *Kyng Alisaunder*¹⁰⁶ from the early fourteenth century (c. 1300), the alliterative versions: *The Romance of Alisaunder* (Alexander A)¹⁰⁷ c. 1340–1370, *Alexander and Dindimus* (Alexander B),¹⁰⁸ and *The Wars of Alexander* (Alexander C),¹⁰⁹ the *Prose Life of Alexander* c. 1440,¹¹⁰ the *Buik of Alexander*,¹¹¹ dating to 1438 and attributed to John Barbour, and the Middle Scots *Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour* by Gilbert Hay, 1499.¹¹²

The Alexander legends are of note here for two main reasons: first, they provide an analogue, albeit quite different in detail, of the earthly journey to paradise. Alexander sets off towards paradise like Seth, but not for the purpose of obtaining the oil of mercy;

¹⁰⁴ Hamelius, *Mandeville's Travels*, 142, l. 29; 159, ll. 3–8. The detail about the Great Chan's table made of *lignum aloes* is absent from "Defective"; however, the description of his chariot made from that wood does appear, although its sweet smell is not mentioned (Seymour, *Mandeville*, 102, ll. 15–17).

¹⁰⁵ Mary Lascelles, "Alexander and the Earthly Paradise in Mediaeval English Writings," *Medium Ævum* 5 (1936): 31–47, 79–104, 173–188, p. 79–83.

¹⁰⁶ G. V. Smithers, *Kyng Alisaunder*, EETS o.s. vols. 227, 237 (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

¹⁰⁷ W. W. Skeat, *The Romance of Alisaunder*, EETS e.s. vol. 1 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1867).

¹⁰⁸ W. W. Skeat, *Alexander and Dindimus*, EETS e.s. vol. 31 (London: Oxford University Press, 1878).

¹⁰⁹ W. W. Skeat, *The Wars of Alexander*, EETS e.s. vol. 47 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1886).

¹¹⁰ J. S. Westlake, *The Prose Life of Alexander*, EETS o.s. vol. 143 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1913).

¹¹¹ R. L. Graeme Ritchie, *The Buik of Alexander*, STS (new series) vols. 12, 17, 21, 25 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1921–1929).

¹¹² Priscilla Bawcutt and Felicity Riddy, *Longer Scottish Poems: Volume One, 1375–1650* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press Limited, 1987).

he just has the intention of demanding tribute from its inhabitants. After outfitting his ship, Alexander sails upriver until he reaches the high walls that surround paradise. When he finally locates an entrance and is able to speak with someone within, they offer him nothing but a mysterious stone that is incredibly heavy despite being about the size and shape of a human eye. It can be moved only when it is covered with a coat of dust, which has the effect of making it of almost no weight at all. The moral of this parable is that the uncovered stone is like the king's eye, never satisfied unless it is continually conquering the world and coveting its treasures, but once that eye is covered by dust, that is death, it will be happy with almost nothing.¹¹³ Obviously, Alexander's journey to paradise is quite different from Seth's, but the popularity of both indicates the appetite for such tales in the contemporary audience.

More relevant to the wood-of-the-cross legends are the miraculous trees that appear in the Alexander material. We have already seen in section 5.1.2 above how Peebles saw the oracular trees of the sun and moon that Alexander visited as a possible influence on the "child in the tree" episodes in the Grail romances. What we find when we examine such material as that in the Alexander tales, Mandeville's *Book* and the wood-of-the-cross legends, is that there is considerable confusion regarding the various marvelous trees contained therein: the dry tree (*arbor sicca* or *arbre sec*), the trees of the sun and moon, the tree in which the phoenix perches, the trees of knowledge and of life from paradise, and the tree of the cross; this point is thoroughly discussed by Lascelles.¹¹⁴ For example, the *Buik of Alexander the Conqueror* equates the dry tree with the phoenix tree in the grove of the sun and moon: Alexander is told that in the grove he will see the

¹¹³ See Mary Lascelles' study on Alexander and the Earthly Paradise referenced above. For the story in English romances in particular, see p. 83–104.

¹¹⁴ Lascelles, "Alexander and the Earthly Paradise," 175–188.

dry tree “quhilk never sen Adam synnyt burgioun bare,” and which will not grow green again until “ane madyn bare ane childe.” On that tree, Alexander is further instructed, he will see “ane fenix...sittand tharevpoun.”¹¹⁵ In another popular medieval travelogue, that of Marco Polo, the *arbre sol* is confused with the *arbre sec*. Polo recounts how “in the province which is called Tonocain...[there is] an immense plain on which is found the *arbor solis*, which is commonly called the *arbor sicca*.”¹¹⁶ However, Marco Polo’s work was not nearly as popular as Mandeville’s story nor the tales of Alexander. This is demonstrated clearly in England, where Marco Polo circulated only in the Latin.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, of the seventeen extant manuscripts of Marco Polo’s work in England, fourteen are the Latin translation and adaptation of Polo’s work made by the Dominican Francesco Pipino known as *De mirabilibus mundi*, written between 1314 and 1324.¹¹⁸ Pipino’s translation was edited in the early twentieth century by Prásek, and it is this text that should be consulted to ascertain the way in which the English medieval audience would have been exposed to Polo’s narrative.

Turning back to Mandeville, we find a conflation of the dry tree and the oak of Mamre, which sometimes behaves just like the tree Seth sees in his vision into paradise, denuded as a result of Adam’s sin:

And a litel fro Ebron is þe mount Marbre, of whiche þat
vale toke his name. And þer is a tree of oke þat þe
Sarasyns clepiþ *dirpe* þat is of Abrahams tyme, þat men

¹¹⁵ John Cartwright, *The Buik of King Alexander the Conqueror by Sir Gilbert Hay*, Scottish Text Society, series 4, vols. 16, 18 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986–1990), vol. 18, 107, ll. 13485–13489.

¹¹⁶ Justin V. Prásek, ed. *Marka Pavlova Z Benátek: Milion* (Prague: Nákladem České Akademie, 1902), 29. The Latin reads: “Post hec peruenitur ad regnum tymochayn...ibi est panicies magna, in qua est arbor solis, que uulgariter dicitur arbor sicca.”

¹¹⁷ Suzanne Yeager, “The World Translated: Marco Polo’s *Le Devisement dou monde*, *The Book of Sir John Mandeville*, and Their Medieval Audiences,” in *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West*, eds. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Amilcare Iannucci, 156–181 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 157–162.

¹¹⁸ For the edition of Pipino’s translation see note 114 above.

clepiþ þe drie tree. And þei say it haþ þe fro þe bigynnyng of þe world, and þat it was somtyme grene and bare leeuës vnto þat tyme þat oure lord deyde, and þanne it dried. And so dide alle trees in þe world or ellis þei fayled in here hertes or ellis þei fadid, and ȝit beþ many of þese in þe world. And somme prophecie seiþ þat a lord, a prince of þe west side of þe world, schal wynne þe lond of promyscioun, þat is þe holy lond, wiþ help of cristene men, and he schal do synge a masse vndir þat drie tree and þanne schal þat tree wexe grene and bere fruyt and leeuës. And þurȝ þat myracle many Sarasyns and Iewis schal be turned to cristene feiþ. And þerfore þei do grete worschip þerto and kepen it riȝt besily. And if alle it be drie, it beriþ a grete vertu, for certenliche he þat haþ þerof a litel vpon hym it heeliþ of þe fallyng yuel, and many oþer vertues [hit hase and] þerfore it is yholde riȝt precious.¹¹⁹

Mandeville's source here is not the wood-of-the-cross legends but Odoric of Pordenone's Latin account of the Holy Land, *De terra sancta*;¹²⁰ nevertheless, this dry tree has much in common with that of Seth's vision: its bare state the result of mankind's fall, the promise of its future restoration, the association of a prophecy with the tree's return to vitality (the coming of a great western lord in Mandeville; the coming of Christ in the cross legends), and the ability to perform healing miracles. Interestingly, Mandeville fails to mention Seth's vision of the tree in his abbreviated account of Seth's journey to paradise in chapter two, but he does include this description of the dry tree in his sixth chapter. Lascelles speculates that he may have recognized the similarity of the two trees

¹¹⁹ Seymour, *Mandeville*, 25, ll. 2–17. This prophecy is related to the tale known as *The Last King of Rome*, which recounts an English king's successful crusade (and death) in the Holy Land, a story that was popular from the thirteenth century and was even applied to Edward II and III; see Hamelius, *Mandeville's Travels*, 55. See also chapter 4 of this study for further discussion of the green tree and the dry tree and the biblical passages on which this motif draws, e.g. Ezek. 17:22–24.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Hamelius, *Mandeville's Travels*, notes, p. 54. The Latin reads: "A Ebron incipit vallis Mambre, quae protenditur fere usque Jerusalem. Non remote ab Ebron est mons Mambre, et in ipso monte stat arbor, scilicet quercus arida, quae ab antiquitate sua speciale sibi nomen meruit habere in universo mundo, et vocatur arbor sicca. Sarraceni dicunt eam dirp. Haec creditur stetit a tempore Abrahæ, et quidem ab initio mundi, virens, donec passionis Christi tempore siccaretur." Hamelius is quoting from J. C. M. Laurent, ed., *Peregrinatores medii aevi quatuor* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1864), 154.

and, already having in mind to use Odoric's story of the oak in a later place, left it out of Seth's quest.¹²¹

One possible explanation for the conflation of the trees in the Alexander material with the tree of the cross may have resulted from the similarity of the descriptions of the wondrous places containing them: the grove of the sun and moon in the former, and paradise itself in the latter. In both cases the location is described as a garden of flourishing trees surrounding one barren one. In the account of Seth's vision it is the Christ Child he sees in the top of the tree, in Alexander's encounter at the grove it is the phoenix, a bird whose ability to rise from its own ashes had long caused it to be associated with Christ's death and Resurrection.¹²² Furthermore, this similarity between the grove of the sun and moon and paradise is not the only one: medieval tradition also describes both locales as places which provide food with life-extending properties. In the *Epistola ad Aristotelem*, Alexander writes how the inhabitants of the grove of the sun and moon feed on the balm from the trees; this detail recalls how, in the *Iter ad Paradisum*, those living downstream from paradise are said to live on a spice made from leaves that wash down to them.¹²³ Two later passages alter the nature of the grove's source of sustenance making it even more "paradisical": in these accounts it is not leaves but fruit, specifically apples (*pomis*), that prolong the lives of the inhabitants.¹²⁴ Gervase of

¹²¹ Lascelles, "Alexander and the Earthly Paradise," 181.

¹²² Lascelles, "Alexander and the Earthly Paradise," 183. See also Cook, *Elene*, xlv, xxxiii–xxxviii and Hamelius, *Mandeville's Travels*, 30. The version of the Alexander material here being referred to is that in the *Historia de Preliis* (see R. Telfryn Pritchard, *The History of Alexander's Battles: Historia de Preliis, the JI Version* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992).

¹²³ Vincent of Beauvais adds how the priests of the grove not only feed on the balm, but drink the waters and live 300 years (*Speculum Historiale* IV lvi, lvii).

¹²⁴ *Geographia Universalis*, appendix to J. R. Lumby's *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis*, 9 vols. (London, Longman, 1865–86), I 435; and Mandeville: "And men seiþ þat folk þat kepþ þese treez and etiþ of þe fruyt of ham lyueþ .iiii. hundrid ȝere þur[ɜ] vertu of þe fruyt," Seymour, *Mandeville*, 127, ll. 21–23.

Tilbury's account of the tree of life in the *Otia Imperialia* is an apt illustration of just how closely the traditions of the two locales were associated: one moment he is talking of the tree of knowledge and the tree of life in paradise, and the next he recalls from the *Epistola ad Aristotelem* the land in India where those partaking of the trees' leaves have their lives prolonged, as well as Alexander's visit to the oracular trees.¹²⁵ In this way some of the characteristics of the earthly paradise were transferred to the grove where the trees of the sun and moon grew.

This digression serves to demonstrate that late medieval audiences were familiar with an assortment of wondrous trees, the characteristics of which at times were integrated, or became confused with each other. Furthermore, the association of Alexander, a very popular figure, with the earthly paradise (both via the actual tale of his journey there and by the conflation of the grove of the trees of the sun and moon with it) would have fueled the appetite for such tales, and in this way, incidentally may have bolstered the popularity of the wood-of-the-cross legends about a hero who journeyed on a quest to paradise and encountered a wondrous tree there.

In substance, the wood-of-the-cross legends are typological tales that link the Fall of mankind to the Redemption by means of the great tree derived from paradise that becomes the cross. In addition, they also contain narrative motifs like the "child in the tree" and episodes of sudden and miraculous plant growth shared by stories in other genres: romance, hagiography, folktale and travelogue. This illustrates is, on the one hand, the general malleability and adaptability of these motifs and, on the other, the particularly dense multi-valence of the universal symbol that is the tree. This

¹²⁵ F. Liebrecht, *Des Gervasius von Tilbury Otia Imperialia in einer Auswahl neu herausgegeben und mit Anmerkungen begleitet* (Hanover, 1856), *De ligno vitae*, Prima Decisio, Cap. xiv, 82–85.

interconnection no doubt facilitated the spread of the wood-of-the-cross legends and analogous tales not only in medieval England, but also throughout Europe.

Chapter 6: Concluding Thoughts and Future Avenues of Research

This study has traced the medieval legends of the pre-history of the wood of the cross in England in both the English and Latin languages. Versions of this same story, which is thought to have originated in Greek, enjoyed an immense popularity and radiated into nearly every European vernacular. However, the situation in England is unique in that the earliest extant text of the wood-of-the-cross legend in any language, the rood-tree legend, is found in Old English manuscript fragments dating to the first half of the eleventh century, while the ten representatives of the Latin rood-tree legend (here edited together for the first time) also originated in that country.

In my second chapter I demonstrated the strong devotion to the cross that pervaded Anglo-Saxon England, manifested most eloquently perhaps in the Old English poetic masterpiece, *The Dream of the Rood*. Yet this poem is by no means the only evidence of the Anglo-Saxon predilection for the cross: other literary examples include homilies, riddles and prayers, as well as the story of St. Helena's finding of the true cross recounted in the Old English *Elene*. The tale of St. Oswald's miraculous victory over the pagan king Cadwalla at Heavenfield in the seventh century, accomplished as a result of the holy cross, became a favourite of the Anglo-Saxons, because it vividly invoked the wondrous vision of the cross (and subsequent triumph in battle) by the emperor Constantine himself.

Both text and iconography indicate clearly that the Anglo-Saxons viewed the cross as a tree, specifically a green one. The Old English *Vindicta Salvatoris* explicitly calls the instrument of Christ's Crucifixion a green tree, and (as detailed in chapter 2)

three Anglo-Saxon manuscript illuminations unequivocally illustrate the cross in this colour. Later English iconographic examples continue this tradition. Perhaps the most vivid is the lushly foliate and blooming cross in the early thirteenth-century Psalter of Robert Lindsey, which recalls the detail from *Cursor mundi* that the cross was said to have bloomed from noon until evening after the Crucifixion. Arguably, the most patent examples of the Anglo-Saxon conception of the cross as tree are the monumental stone crosses, many of which are carved with intricate foliage, of which perhaps the best known example is the great Ruthwell Cross, which also contains a runic inscription recounting a version of the *Dream of the Rood* poem.

Drawing on the fact that tree worship is well attested in pre-Christian European cultures, Richard North¹ suggested that a link between the cult of the cross and popular tree-superstition may have continued in England into the Anglo-Saxon period. Furthermore, when he considered the Scandinavian analogues, North suggested that there had been an Anglian version of the dying and resurrected god sacrificed on the world tree, and that the early evangelizers of England may have drawn on this myth in order to present the story of Christ's Passion in terms the natives could understand. While I do not accept all of North's arguments, two matters are clear: first, the importance of the place the cross held in Anglo-Saxon Christianity, and second, the strength of the connection between the symbol of the cross and that of the tree. Whether the utilization of the cross-tree imagery was a conscious choice on the part of Anglo-Saxon churchmen in order to appeal to vestiges of pagan sensibilities among the populace cannot be proven conclusively, but it seems logical to assume that the clergy would employ whatever native traditions were at hand in trying to convey the mysteries of Christian doctrine to

¹ North, *Heathen Gods*, op. cit.

the laity. What can be said decisively is that the popularity enjoyed by the wood-of-the-cross legends in Anglo-Saxon times continued after the Conquest, since versions of the tale appeared in a variety of Middle English texts (as detailed in chapter 3). Their incorporation into legendaries and homiliaries, such as the Northern Homily Cycle and the South English Legendary, and into dramatic works ensured that the cross legends reached a wide audience through both preaching and the performance arts.

While the early presence of the rood-tree legend in Anglo-Saxon England may be explained by the reasons discussed immediately above, I contend that the most significant reasons for the legends' popularity are not specific to England, but rather are common to western Europe in the Middle Ages. These reasons can be grouped into three categories: the adaptability of the tree as a symbol, the familiarity of the narrative motifs used, and the significant appeal of a typological structure. First of all, as demonstrated in chapter four, the tree is a symbol employed in many of the world's religions. Drawing on Greek and Semitic thought, as well as the Bible itself, Christian writers have employed the tree symbol in diverse ways since patristic times, using it, for example, to represent the cosmos, the connection between the earthly and heavenly realms, the Christian word and community, and even individual Christians themselves. The use of the tree as a symbol was therefore familiar, and that brings us to the next point.

The wood-of-the-cross legends also employ narrative motifs that were common to other literary genres, such as romance. In chapter five I discussed several of these motifs, such as the "child in the tree," the green tree and the dry, miracles of unseasonable plant growth and journeys to the earthly paradise, that appear not only in the cross legends but in medieval romance, hagiography, and travel writings. Proverbially, familiarity may

breed contempt, but in this case, the familiarity of the narrative motifs employed in the history of the holy wood no doubt served to recommend it to its audience.

Finally we turn to the immense draw that a typological structure has to the human psyche. In the case of the Fall and the Redemption, Christianity teaches that God's divine providence foresaw the events that led to original sin and provided a resolution for it via the Incarnation and subsequent sacrifice of Christ. The wood-of-the-cross legends in their fully developed form explicitly bring things full circle, making the very tree that brought about the Fall furnish the wood by which mankind is later redeemed. The typological notion on which this is based is not a medieval invention (although it was much elaborated in that time period): it was Paul in his epistles that specifically cited the Fall of Adam as the cause which created the need for redemption through Christ. Following the line of argument that Christ is an anti-type to Adam, the redeemer who must repair the wrong done by the first sinner, it would seem only logical that the wood of the cross be derived from the very tree from which Adam ate, thereby bringing sin into the world. As such, the wood of the cross, whose story extends across the entire span of biblical time, incorporating many important biblical figures, acts as a vital link between Old Testament and New (as well as a fulfillment of the former in the latter); in fact, texts such as *Cursor mundi* make use of the tale for precisely this purpose, to string together the events of sacred history. As I also argued in chapter five, Seth's three-fold vision into paradise in the wood-of-the-cross legends, where he sees the great tree first bare then flourishing, with the Christ Child at its apex, ties the legend into the medieval tradition of the Suffering Christ Child, a tradition in which the notion of sacramental time allows the

conflation of past, present and future events into a single “present” whereby the true mystery of the Redemption is revealed.

The evidence presented in this dissertation, and the conclusions derived from it, by no means conclude this area of research. Three areas worthy of further investigation are as follows. First would be the close connection between the cross legends and medieval iconography (an area pioneered by the work of Barbara Baert²), particularly depictions of the Christ Child in the tree as discussed in chapter five. A second avenue would be the possible role of relics in the creation and diffusion of the wood-of-the-cross legends. Just as the arrival of a relic of the cross in France inspired Venantius Fortunatus to compose his moving hymn to the cross, the receipt of such a relic or relics in England may have occasioned the arrival of an accompanying legend about the holy wood. It is my understanding that Bob Miller is currently examining evidence for the presence of various relics of the holy cross in England, and I eagerly await the outcome of that research. Finally, and some of this work has been undertaken by Prangmsma-Hajenius,³ would be a detailed assessment of the Anglo-Norman versions of the cross legends and their relationship both to Continental French versions and other strains of the tradition in England in the Latin and English languages.

FINIS

² Baert, *A History of Holy Wood*, op. cit.

³ Prangmsma-Hajenius, *Legende du Bois*, op. cit.

Appendix: Edited Text of the Latin Rood-Tree Legend

The following edition of the Latin rood-tree legend was made from the ten manuscripts in which it is extant. All but two are here published for the first time: Cambridge UL Mm. 5.29 (C) was previously edited by Napier,¹ and later by Mozley,² whose edition was done in ignorance of Napier's work, but which collated the Cambridge manuscript with Hereford Cathedral Library P.2.IV (D).

The text has been divided into nineteen chapters following Napier's edition. I have also divided it into lines; the line divisions were originally made following Napier, but have been altered when necessary because of additions to the text, or for purposes of length. Not all of the manuscripts preserve the entire text. Please see the table below that illustrates which chapters are represented in each manuscript. For the reader's convenience, a list of the manuscripts corresponding to each chapter also appears on every page of the edited text in the critical apparatus. Biblical references have not been noted here; the reader is referred to either Napier or Mozley, who both include this information.

¹ Napier, *Holy Rood Tree*.

² Mozley, "A New Text."

Description of the Manuscripts

L = Lincoln Cathedral 98

In Latin, on parchment, written in the thirteenth century and comprised of 185 folios.³ Contains the following: *Daretis historia Troianorum*, *Prophetia Sibylle*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Hystoria britonum*, Nennius' *Gesta britonum*, a computation of times from Adam, the *Libellus Bemetoli quem beatus Ieronymus de greco in latinum transtulit uel composuit*, a tract on the Frankish kings, a portion of Henry Huntingdon's *History of Britain*, the *Gesta Alexandri regis magni Macedonum*, Alexander's letter to Aristotle, a description of the holy places, the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 161–167), a sermon of St. Jerome *De persecutionibus*, notes on *trium magorum nomina inuenimus*, *tribus modis diabolus securitatem*, and *De prevaricatione Salomonis regis*. The rest of the book, which is in different hands of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, contains such things as: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetia Merlini exposita*, the Brut chronicles of England and odd notes on topics such as the geography of England and the names of the archangels.

F = Oxford Bodleian Fairfax 17 (Summary Catalogue 3897)

In Latin, on parchment, written in England in the late twelfth century and comprised of 85 folios.⁴ Contains the following theological and devotional treatises: Hugh of St. Victor's *De arra anime*, *Sententia sancti Ambrosii episcopi de amicitia*, four homilies of St. Bernard on *Missus est*, a sermon on *Cum esset desponsata* (Matt. 1:18), a

³ Reginald Maxwell Woolley, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 63–65. The most recent catalogue is R. M. Thomson, *Catalogue of the manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1989), 73–75.

⁴ F. Madan, H.H.E. Craster and N. Denholm-Young, eds., *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), vol. 2, part 2, 780–781.

sermon on *Intrauit Jesus in quoddam castellum* (Luke 10:38), the *Gospel of Nicodemus* in an abbreviated version, the *Cura sanitatis Tiberii*, the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 54v; 59–64), the first half of Lanfranc’s *Sentences for Monks*, *Lamentacio Gervasii abbatis quam fecit paulo antequam moreretur*, a life of Gervase, a letter of Gervase, a miraculous story attributed to Bruno, bishop of Toul, a letter from “S. presbyter indignus” to Symeon and a letter from “Aleuus seruus fratrum de Mailros” to M. canon of Kirkham.

B = Oxford Bodleian Bodley 556 (Summary Catalogue 2340)

In Latin, on parchment, written in the early thirteenth century and comprised of 25 folios.⁵ Contains the following: the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 13v–20), and a sermon *De miraculis Christi*.

D = Hereford Cathedral Library P.2.IV

In Latin, on parchment, written in the mid-twelfth century and comprised of 144 folios.⁶ Contains the following: Petrus Alfonsi’s *Dialogi contra Iudeos*, Hugh of St. Victor’s *De sapientia animae Christi*, William of St. Thierry’s *Commentarius in canticum canticorum*, Richard of St. Victor’s *De eruditione hominis interioris*, the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 133–139), and Pseudo-Athanasius’ *In imagine Berytensi Christi crucifixi*.

P = Paris BNF Lat. 3338

⁵ F. Madan and H.H.E. Craster, *A Summary Catalogue*, vol. 2 part 1, 317.

⁶ R. A.B. Mynors and R.M. Thomson, *Catalogue of the manuscripts of Hereford Cathedral Library* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), catalogue item 5, 75–76.

In Latin, on parchment, written circa 1300 and composed of 194 folios.⁷ Contains the following: exempla excerpted from the *Vitas patrum*, the *Historia monachorum*, the *Vita s. Johannis Eleemosynarii*, etc., the *Vitae ss. Barlaam and Josaphat*, the *Miracula B. V. Mariae*, various *Evangelia apocrypha* and *visiones*, *Caroli Magni Expugnatio terrae sanctae*, and the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 27–30).

C = Cambridge UL Mm.5.29

In Latin, on parchment, written in the twelfth century and comprised of 159 folios.⁸ Contains the following: *Hystoria Daretis historia Troianorum*, *Prophetia Sibyllae*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Hystoria britonum*, Nennius' *Gesta britonum*, a chronology chiefly from Bede, the *Libellus Bemetoli quem beatus Ieronymus de greco in latinum transtulit uel composuit*, a portion of Henry Huntingdon's history of Britain, the *Gesta Alexandri regis magni Macedonum*, Alexander's letter to Aristotle, *Alexander... et Dindimi...de philosophia per litteras facta collatio*, a *Recapitulatio de eodem Alexandro et de suis*, a description of the holy places, and the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 156r–159). The manuscript ends imperfectly, thus cutting off the rood-tree legend and any contents that may have followed. Note the nearly identical contents between this manuscript and L.

H = London BL MS Harley 3185

⁷ Philippe Lauer, *Catalogue Général des Manuscrits Latins*, 7 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1939–1958), vol. 5, 216–228.

⁸ Charles Hardwick and Henry Richards Luard, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1856–1867), 336–359.

In Latin, on parchment, of Insular origin, written in the early fourteenth century and comprised of 92 folios.⁹ Contains the following: *Infantia Jesu Christi*, *Gesta quaedam eiusdem que Theodosius M. inuenit pretorio Pontii Pilati*, a text on the twelve cardinal virtues, the fifteen signs before Judgment Day according to Jerome, the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 47v–68v), *Quae trahunt ad superos et quae ad inferos*, the letter of Prester John, and *Salutatio Angelica ad ciuitatem Constantinopolitanam*.

R = Oxford Bodleian Rawlinson D 1236

In Latin, on parchment, of Irish origin, written in the thirteenth century and comprised of 75 folios.¹⁰ Contains the following texts: a *Vita s. Marie*, an *Epistola Cromacii et Elyodorii episcoporum ad beatum Ieronimum presbiterum*, a text *de ortus sancte Marie uirginis*, *de natiuitate atque infancia nostri Saluatoris*, another tract on the infancy of Christ and his miracles, the *Epistola s. Melitonis de assumptione B. V. Mariae*, part of the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 49v–51r): *de edificacione templi Domini et origine ligni crucis Domini nostri Jhesu Christi*, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and a fragment of *De confusione Iudeorum*.

N = Paris BNF Lat. 6755

In Latin, on parchment, dated partly to the thirteenth and partly to the fourteenth century.¹¹ Contains the following texts: Aristotle's *Liber de secretis secretorum*

⁹ David Casley, et al., *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 4 vols. (London: G. Eyre and A. Strahan, 1808–1812), vol. 3, 8.

¹⁰ William D. Macray, *Catalogi Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae*, 11 vols. (Oxford: Oxford, 1898), part 5, fasc. 4.

¹¹ Anicet Melot, *Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Regiae*, vol. 3 (Paris: e Typographia regia, 1739–44).

translated by Phillip, cleric of Tripoli, *Ambrosii Autperti tractatus de conflictu uitiorum et uirtutum*, collected *Flores e scriptoribus cum sacris tum profanis*, an anonymous tract *De musica*, a description of the holy places of Jerusalem, a description of the city of Antioch, a catalogue cities acquired by Charlemagne in Spain and Gaul, *Sancti Bernardi meditationes*, part of the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 47r–56r), Methodius’ *Oratio de Antichristo et de consummatione saeculi*, and an anonymous dialogue *De vitae felicitate*.

M = Cambridge, Magdalen College F. 4. 15

In Latin, on parchment, written in many hands during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and once having belonged to the friars of Stamford.¹² Contains the following: *Tractatus domini pape innocencii de contemptu mundi*, *In nomine domini* by Defensor of Ligugé, *Qui bene presunt* attributed to Richard Wethersett and others, Pseudo-Melito’s *De transitu virginis*, the story of the cross and the *Acta Pilati*, including part of the Latin rood-tree legend (fols. 86–91), the *Liber Methodii*, and other thirteenth century texts, including *Inc. speculum ecclesie*, *De sacramentis ecclesiasticis*, *Cur deus et quando homo fit uel quomodo pando*, etc., and a number of sermons.

¹² Montague Rhodes James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the College Library of Magdalene College, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), catalogue number 15 (Haenel 20), 40–43.

Notes on Orthography

The following table shows examples of the types of spelling variations found among the manuscripts:

Spelling Variant	Examples
t/c	planitie/planicie; diucius/diutius
c/ch	pascantur/paschantur
h/ch	mihi/michi
y/i	cypressina/cipressina; mysterium/misterium
t/d	caput/capud
p/pp	reperientes/repperientes
m/mm/dm	amirans/ammirans/admirans
n/m	menbris/membris
ss/sc	abscessit/abscescit
beginning “h”	hortulo/ortulo
c/k	caritas/karitas
mn/mpn	somnis/sompnis
x/ct	resurrexionem/resurrectionem

Spelling variants of ordinary words, such as those in the examples above, were not noted in the critical apparatus. Whenever such variations were encountered, my editorial policy was to determine the most frequent spelling variant present in that instance and to use that variant in the edited text. A similar policy was used for numbers. Often, several manuscripts would have the number written out in word form while others employed Roman numerals; whichever form was more prevalent in each case is the one represented in this edition. The only exception to the above policies was the representation of proper names, for example Moyses, Sinai, or Sabilla. In these cases, the edited text shows the most commonly represented form of the name in that location of the text, but the other spellings are indicated in the critical apparatus.

Table: Chapters of the Rood-Tree Legend by Manuscript

Ch.	L s.13	F s. 12 ^{ex}	B s. 13 ⁱⁿ	D s. 12 ^{med}	P c. 1300	C s. 12	H s. 14 ⁱⁿ	R s. 13	N s. 13-14	M s. 13-14
1				N. T.						
2										
3							DIFF.			
4							DIFF.			
5							X			
6										
7										
8										
9										
10							DIFF.	PART	PART	PART
11										
12							X			
13							X	PART	PART	PART
14							DIFF.			
15						PART	DIFF.			
16										
17										
18		PART								
19			PART							

Legend:

N.T. = not transcribed (by Mozley)

DIFF. = chapter very different in wording from rood-tree text; not included

PART = only part of the chapter is represented; details found in critical apparatus

L = Lincoln Cathedral 98 (A.4.6) (fols. 161–167)

F = Oxford Bodleian Fairfax 17 (fols. 54v; 59–64)

B = Oxford Bodleian Bodley 556 (fols. 13v–20)

D = Hereford Cathedral Library P.2.IV item 5 (fols. 133–139)

P = Paris BNF Lat. 3338 (fols. 27–30)

C = Cambridge UL Mm.5.29 (fols. 156r–159)

H = London BL MS Harley 3185 (fols. 47v–68v)

R = Oxford Bodleian Rawlinson D 1236 (fols. 49v–51r)

N = Paris BNF Lat. 6755 (fols. 47r–56r)

M = Cambridge, Magdalen College F. 4. 15 (fols. 86–91)

The Latin Rood-Tree Legend

1	§ 1. Sancta et diuina eloquia, fratres, iugiter immo et cotidie nobis salubriter recitantur, ut anime nostre paschantur et in futuro seculo eternis epulis saginentur, dicente propheta: ‘Satiabor, dum manifestabitur gloria tua.’ Det nobis dominus per spiritum
5	sanctum hac uirtute in ipso corroborari, ut, cum apostolo, nobis absit gloriari, nisi in cruce domini nostri Iesu Christi. In qua enim si gloriemur, profecto scientia ueteris ueritatis a deo replebimur, ut sciamus unde arbor sancta oriri ceperit et quomodo crescere inchoauerit uel qualiter ad operationem salutifere crucis
10	peruenerit, in qua salus mundi pependit. Incipit enarratio de cruce Christi quomodo inchoauit et quomodo uenit ad Ierusalem et facta est crux. § 2. Post egressionem autem filiorum Israel ex Egypto, cum eos dominus per manus Moysi a seruitute Pharaonis eduxisset, rubrumque
§ 1: <i>LFBPCH</i>	
	1 immo et] admonet <i>F</i> 2 recitantur] recitare <i>F</i> , recitemur <i>B</i> anime nostre] anima nostra <i>F</i> seculo] <i>om. LBC</i> 3 saginentur] sanentur <i>L (post corr.) F</i> satiabor] satientur <i>HP</i> 4 dominus] deus <i>B</i> spiritum] suum <i>add. LC</i> 5 sanctum] <i>om. CP</i> 7 profecto] perfecto <i>ante</i> <i>corr. P</i> 8 ceperit] cepit <i>FP</i> 9 crescere inchoauerit] inchoauerit crescere <i>P</i> 10 peruenerit] peruenit <i>F</i> , peruenerint <i>P</i> 11/12 Incipit...crux] <i>om. LFCHP</i> Egypto] Egipto <i>LDCH</i>
§ 2: <i>LFBDPCH</i>	
	13 autem] <i>om. HP</i> Egypto] uidelicet .lx. millia preter mulieres et parulos <i>add. H</i> 14 manus] manum <i>H</i>

15	mare siccis uestibus transire fecisset, primo egressi sunt in desertum Sur; ambulaueruntque tribus diebus per solitudinem et non inuenerunt aquam. Fixis autem tentoriis in planicie campi, tota nocte manserunt ibi. Facto igitur diluculo, Moyses surrexit a sompno, et ecce uidit ad caput suum unam repente exortam
20	uirgulam, et in dextera lateris parte aliam, atque in sinistra terciam; et demonstrabatur genus singularum tenerum ostensione foliorum. Nam prima uirgula erat cypressina, atque alia cedrina, et pini speciem habebat tercia. Obstupefactus igitur Moyses repentina uirgularum uisione, nullatenus ausus est illas contingere,
25	nec in illo loco diutius quiescere, sed conscite profectus inde, uenit in Helim cum omni plebis multitudine; ibique reperientes septuaginta palmas et .xii. aquarum fontes, castrametati sunt iuxta aquas. Factoque autem mane, dum euigilasset Moises, ecce iterum repperit circa se in terra fixas illas tres quas prius uiderat uirgulas, et non
§ 2: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	15 uestibus] uestigiis <i>B D H P</i> egressi] ingressi <i>H P</i> 16 Sur] Syn <i>H</i> ambulaueruntque] admouere <i>C</i> , ambulauerunt <i>H</i> solitudinem] solitudinem <i>P</i> 17 non] <i>om. C</i> autem] tamen <i>L</i> , tandem <i>D C</i> 19/20 repente exortam uirgulam] exortam uirgulam repente <i>B</i> exortam] ortam <i>P</i> 20 sinistra] parte <i>add. H</i> 21 demonstrabatur] demonstrabat <i>P</i> singularum tenerum] singulorum tenerorum <i>H</i> 22/23 Nam...tercia] <i>om. H</i> 23 Obstupefactus] Obstupescens <i>H</i> 24 uirgularum uisione] uisione uirgularum <i>P</i> illas contingere] contingere illas <i>F</i> 25 sed] si <i>P</i> conscite] concite <i>B</i> , concitetur <i>corr. ex coneite P</i> 26 Helim] Helym <i>B</i> , Helum <i>ante corr. P</i> reperientes] reperient <i>F</i> , repperiente <i>C</i> 27 palmas] palmites <i>H</i> 28 Factoque] Facto <i>L F</i> autem] <i>om. B P</i> dum] cum <i>D</i> Moises] Moyses <i>F B P</i> 29 se] <i>om. H</i> in] <i>om. D H</i> terra] <i>om. D H</i> , terram <i>L C</i> illas] <i>om. L C P</i> , easdem <i>B D P</i> tres] uirgulas <i>add. F P</i> uiderat] uidit <i>H P</i> uirgulas] <i>om. F B D P</i> non] necdum <i>B D P</i>

30	ausus est amouere illas, sed ualde admirans prophetauit dicens: ‘Vere istarum ostensio uirgularum sanctam significat trinitatem. Cypressus itaque patris habet significationem, cedrus uero significat unigenitum dei filium, pinus etiam portendit paraclitum spiritum sanctum.’ Et hec dicens, profectus est inde, et uenit in Raphidim
35	cum omni plebe, ibique reperte sunt aque tam amare, ut populus ex eis nullatenus posset bibere. Moyses igitur cum populo magnam sustinens tribulationem propter aquarum amaritudinem dormiuit post solis occubitum. Et exorto die euigilans item illas tres quas supra retulimus, iam tercio penes se uidit astare uirgulas. Vnde
40	admodum admirans, et quid ageret, prorsus ignorans, clamauit ad dominum pro amaritudine aquarum; qui etiam exaudiuit eum, talem sibi inspirando cogitatum, ut erueret uirgulas et poneret eas in aquarum fonticulis. Moxque amaritudo aquarum in maximam uersa est dulcedinem; et letatus est populus dulces bibendo aquas.
§ 2: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	30 ausus est] est ausus <i>F H</i> , presumpsit <i>B P</i> ualde admirans] ammirans ualde <i>B</i> admirans] ammitas <i>P</i> 31 istarum ostensio] ostensio istarum <i>P</i> significat] significant <i>F B</i> 32/34 Cypressus...sanctum] <i>om. H</i> 33 filium] protendit et <i>add. P</i> etiam portendit] <i>om. P</i> 34 hec] hoc <i>C H P</i> profectus] profertur <i>H</i> Raphidim] Raphadini <i>P</i> est] <i>om. F H P</i> 35 aque] atque <i>D</i> 36 ex] ab <i>H</i> 38 item] iterum <i>D</i> illas] <i>om. H</i> 39 iam] ita <i>D</i> astare] astantes <i>H</i> Vnde] Vna <i>L C</i> 40 admodum] modum <i>L C</i> ageret] agere <i>H</i> 41 pro] per <i>ante corr. P</i> 43 aquarum] earum <i>D</i> 44 dulcedinem] dulcedine <i>F</i> dulces] <i>om. F</i>

<p>45</p> <p>50</p> <p>55</p>	<p>§ 3. De istis etenim uirgulis dicitur hoc, quod in Exodo ita legitur:</p> <p>Moses igitur clamauit ad dominum pro amaritudine aquarum, qui etiam ostendit ei lignum. Quod cum misisset in aquam, uersa est in dulcedinem. In Grecorum etenim commentariis lignum pro ipsis ponitur uirgulis. Mense igitur tercio egressionis filiorum</p> <p>Israel de terra Egypti profecti sunt de Raphidim, et uenerunt in solitudinem Sinay; tulitque secum Moyses iuxta uerbum domini uirgulas supradictas, uirtute sacri misterii plenas. Profecti autem filii Israel de Raphidim castrametati sunt in regione montis Synai; ibique dominus manna cibauit eos quadraginta annis. Moyses igitur,</p> <p>repositis in aqua uirgulis, ascendit montis summitatem, fuitque ibi quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus nichil manducans neque bibens; unde et hoc sacro quadragenario ieiunio legem domini meruit ab ipso accipere domino. Cumque de monte Sinai descendisset Moyses portans duas tabulas lapideas digito dei scriptas, ita ex uisione dei</p>
	<p>§ 3: <i>L F B D P C</i></p> <p>45 etenim] enim <i>P</i> Exodo] Exordio <i>B</i>, Exordro <i>ante corr. P</i> ita] <i>om. L C</i> 46 igitur] ergo <i>B</i> ei] <i>om. B</i> 48 etenim] etiam <i>D</i> 48/49 pro ipsis ponitur] ponitur pro ipsis <i>B</i> 50 terra] <i>om. B</i> sunt] <i>om. F</i> Raphidim] Raphadim <i>P</i> 51 Sinay] Sinai <i>L</i>, Synai <i>B P</i> 53 in] e <i>B</i>, ex <i>P</i> 53 Synai] Sinay <i>F</i>, Sinai <i>D</i> 54 ibique] et <i>B</i> 55 montis summitatem] summitatem montis <i>F B P</i> 57 ieiunio] ut <i>add. F</i> legem] leges <i>D</i> 57/58 meruit ab ipso accipere domino] ab ipso domino meruit accipere <i>P</i> 58 domino] domini <i>L</i> 58/59 Cumque...dei] <i>om. P</i> 59 dei] domini <i>D</i></p>

60	resplenduit facies eius, ut filii Israel non possent respicere eius uultus claritatem. ¹³ Ibique mortuus est iuxta preceptum domini, et ipse dominus propriis manibus sepeliuit eum, et propterea hoc eius sepulchrum omnibus hominibus manet incognitum usque in presentem diem.
65	§ 4. Ille siquidem Moyses, dum regionem Moab intrauit, mox in terra posuit, sicut ei dominus mandauit, illas supradictas tres sanctas uirgulas quas in diuersis repperit locis circa se ortas per tres continuas noctes, sicut supra diximus; et in eodem loco, nemine sciente, ualde multis steterunt annis, id est usque ad
70	tempora sancti Daud regis, nichil crescentes neque tenera folia perdentes, sed per omnia ita erant in terra consistentes, sicut idem Moyses sanctus posuit eas. Postquam igitur imperium sumpsit Daud, rex gloriosus, in nocturna uisione apparuit ei angelus domini ita dicens: ‘O Daud, dei dilecte, iam nunc expergiscere et, exorta
§ 3: <i>L F B D P C</i>	
	60/61 eius uultus claritatem] claritatem uultus eius <i>F</i> 60/64 resplendit...diem] <i>om. P</i> 62 preceptum domini] domini preceptum <i>F B</i> 63 propriis manibus] in ualle Moab <i>B</i> et] qua <i>F</i> propterea] propter <i>F B D</i> hoc] et <i>F B, om. D</i>
§ 4: <i>L F B D P C</i>	
	66 terra] terram <i>F B P</i> dominus mandauit] mandauit dominus <i>F</i> sicut...mandauit] <i>om. P</i> tres] <i>om. P</i> 67 sanctas] <i>om. P</i> repperit locis] locis repperit <i>F</i> 67/68 quas...diximus] <i>om. P</i> 69 ualde] <i>om. P</i> id est] idem <i>L C</i> usque] <i>om. F</i> 71 in terra] <i>om. P</i> consistentes] consicuit <i>D</i> sicut] <i>om. D</i> 71/72 idem Moyses] Moyses idem <i>L</i> 72 sumpsit] <i>om. P</i> 73 rex gloriosus] regis gloriosi creuit <i>P</i> angelus domini] domini angelus <i>B P</i> 74 dicens] dicendo <i>F, bis scripsit ante corr. P</i> dilecte] electe <i>B P</i>

¹³ A short passage was not included here, following Napier's edition of *C*. The passage is a short account of the doings of the Israelites in the desert, consisting of quotations from Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Psalms. No allusion is made to the rods. After Aaron's death the Israelites come to the land of Moab and Moses ascends Mt. Nebo.

75	luce, ultra Iordanem profiscere. Ibi enim dominus tibi est ostensurus illas tres uirgulas sanctas quas olim Moyses in illis posuit locis. Habent sane significationem sancte trinitatis et per eas totus illuminandus est mundus. Hec autem dixit domini angelus et postea reuolauit ad celos. Facto igitur mane surrexit
80	Dauid sanctus et magno cum comitatu iter arripiens, tertia die transiuit flumen Iordanis. Et ultra progrediens in campestribus castrametatus est in planitiis cum magna multitudine plebis. Cumque mane surrexisset a sompnis, ecce circa se uidit tres exortas uirgulas, unam uidelicet ad caput suum, et in dextera
85	lateris parte aliam, atque in sinistra terciam. Moxque in terra se prosternens magno cum gemitu orabat dicens: ‘Domine deus creator omnium, ostende mihi per ineffabilem clementiam tuam, si iste sint ille sancte uirgule de quibus ab angelo sancto in nocturnali audiui requie.’ Hoc igitur dum orauit, de supernis audire
§ 4: <i>L F B D P C</i>	
	75 tibi] <i>om. D</i> uirgulas sanctas] sanctas uirgulas <i>F B P</i> 77 sane] <i>om. P</i> 78/79 domini angelus] angelus domini <i>F</i> 80 Dauid sanctus] sanctus Dauid <i>B</i> 82 in] <i>om. F B P</i> planitiis] planicie <i>P</i> magna] <i>om. P</i> 83 ecce] mane <i>add. P</i> 84 uidelicet] <i>om. P</i> 85 lateris parte] parte lateris <i>D</i> lateris] <i>om. P</i> sinistra] sinistram <i>F</i> in terra se] se in terra <i>L</i> terra] terram <i>F</i> , unreadable <i>P</i> 86 magno cum] cum magno <i>F</i> 88 sint] sunt <i>F D P</i> sancte] tres <i>B</i> , <i>om. P</i>

90	meruit: ‘Iste sunt ille sancte uirgule, et ideo eas summo cum gaudio tolle et tecum illas porta cum maximo honore, quia sacris misteriis sunt plene, et per eas redempturus est orbis terre.’ Tunc Daud, omni dubitatione et timore sublato, extraxit sanctas uirgulas de loco illo et secum portauit magno cum gaudio, multique 95 infirmi receperunt sanitatem per sanctam illarum uirtutem, antequam uenirent ad ciuitatem sanctam Ierusalem. § 5. Nam quidam uir prepotens, nomine Roxillus, ita erat omnibus menbris infirmatus, ut in eo uix remaneret alitus. Cumque Daud eius audisset infirmitatem, properanter cum sanctis uirgulis uenit 100 ad eum. Moxque infirmus recepit sanitatem per illarum presentiam uirgularum, et sanissimus exurgens, benedicebat auctorem sue salutis. § 6. Post hec igitur Daud sanctus profectus est uiam suam gaudens, et ecce antequam transiret flumen Iordanis obuiam ei ueniebant quatuor Ethiopes; moxque ut sanctas uiderunt uirgulas,
§ 4: <i>L F B D P C</i>	
	90 ille] ipse <i>add. D P</i> sancte] tres <i>B</i> , <i>om. P</i> summo cum] cum summo <i>P</i> summo] sume <i>F</i> 91 gaudio] eas <i>add. P</i> tecum] ideo <i>P</i> 92 redempturus] rederenturus <i>L</i> , redimendus <i>C</i> orbis] mundus <i>D</i> terre] <i>om. D</i> 93 dubitatione et timore] timore et dubitatione <i>B</i> et timore sublato] cum timore sublata <i>P</i> 94 magno cum] cum magno <i>F</i> 95 sanctam] uirtutem <i>F</i> illarum] uirgularum <i>add. D</i> uirtutem] uirgarem <i>F</i> 96 ciuitatem sanctam] sanctam ciuitatem <i>D C</i>
§ 5: <i>L F B D P C</i>	
	97 Roxillus] Ioxilus <i>L C</i> , Roxilius <i>D</i> , Roxilus <i>P</i> erat] in <i>add. P</i> 99 audisset infirmitatem] infirmitatem audisset <i>F</i>
§ 6: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	102 hec] <i>om. L</i> , hoc <i>P</i> Daud sanctus] sanctus Daud <i>L C</i> profectus] hec <i>add. ante L</i> est] <i>om. B P</i> , in <i>add. F B</i> 102/103 Post...gaudens] <i>om. H</i> 103 et] set <i>H</i> 104 ueniebant quatuor Ethiopes] quatuor ueniebant Ethiopes <i>F B H</i> , quatuor Ethiopes fuerunt <i>P</i> uirgulas] uirgas <i>H</i>

105	exclamauerunt dicentes: ‘Magna enim sunt admiranda in his sacris uirgulis misteria, necnon et omnis terra per eas est illuminanda.’ Et accedentes propius, prostrati adorabant eas. Moxque abscessit de illorum corporibus omnis nigredo et deformitas; et facti sunt ualde albi et speciosi, qui paulo ante fuerunt nigri et
110	horridi. Cumque hoc uidisset populus, ualde fuit letificatus, quia in conspectu eorum tam stupendum factum est miraculum per sanctarum uirgularum uirtutem.
115	§ 7. Cum ergo Daud transisset flumen Iordanis, ecce aspexit eum quidam leprosus, qui erat in illo monte habitans centum et sexaginta annis. Moxque prophetauit dicens: ‘Hodie igitur ad me ueniet, qui me de hac infirmitate saluabit.’ Ita enim leprosus dixit, et statim equus substitit, in quo sanctus Daud sedit, et extensa est manus sua, cum qua uirgas tenuit. Et ardens flamma de illis uirgulis ascendit, et uersa est ad speluncam, in qua
§ 6: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	105 Magna] procul dubio <i>add. D</i> enim] autem <i>B</i> sunt] et <i>add. H P</i> 106 necnon] nec <i>F</i> 109 ualde albi et speciosi] albi et ualde speciosi <i>F</i> albi] negri <i>H</i> fuerunt] ualde <i>add. F B</i> 110 hoc uidisset] uidisset hoc <i>P</i> uidisset] audisset <i>H</i> 112 sanctarum] sacrarum <i>D</i>
§ 7: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	113 ergo] igitur <i>H P</i> transisset] est transgressus <i>D</i> , transiuit <i>H</i> 116 ueniet] uenit <i>H</i> enim] autem <i>B</i> 117 substitit] subsistit <i>F</i> , sustitit <i>B P</i> , subsubstitit <i>C</i> sanctus Daud] Daud sanctus <i>P</i> sedit] sedebat <i>L C</i> 118 est] <i>om. H</i> manus] manu <i>H</i> 119 flamma] illa <i>add. C</i> ad] in <i>F</i>

120	supradictus erat leprosus. Moxque illuc omnis perrexit populus, cunctisque illis uidentibus, flamma illa consumpsit lepram illius hominis, et protinus surrexit sanissimus atque comes factus est regis Dauid. § 8. Dauid autem inde rex progrediens uenit in Ierusalem in uesperis; moxque tres sanctas uirgulas in illo fonte posuit qui
125	iuxta suum hortulum fuit. Facto itaque mane uoluit illas extrahere et in hortulo suo reponere; sed ita erant in illa nocte radicate, ut nullus posset eas euellere. Et iccirco iussit rex suum dilatare et ampliare hortulum, fortem ponendo sepem circa illum fontem. Erantque sancte uirgule ibi iugiter stantes et ita crescentes, ut in
130	triginta annorum curriculis efficerentur arbor grandis. Erant etiam primo anno simul conglutinate et unite, sed tamen semper in summitate fuerunt penitus disiuncte, quapropter et ipse Dauid iussit unum argenteum facere circulum et cum eo circumcingere illius arboris summitatem, ut sic constricta in unum esset conglutinata.
§ 7: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	120 erat leprosus] leprosus erat <i>L D C</i> Moxque] Tunc <i>B D</i> omnis] <i>om. C</i> omnis perrexit] perrexit omnis <i>H P</i> 121 illa] illam <i>H P</i> consumpsit] combussit <i>H P</i> 122 sanissimus] sanus <i>D</i> regis Dauid] Dauid regis <i>P</i>
§ 8: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	123 inde rex] rex inde <i>F B P</i> rex] <i>om. H</i> in] ad <i>F</i> 125 Facto itaque] Factoque <i>F H P</i> , Facto igitur <i>B</i> illas] eas <i>D</i> 126 reponere] ponere <i>L D C</i> in illa] ea illa <i>H</i> radicate] radificate <i>H</i> in illa nocte] <i>om. P</i> 127 posset] <i>post corr. L</i> posset eas euellere] eas euellere possit <i>D</i> , eas euellere <i>C</i> dilatare] dilaniare <i>F</i> 128 ampliare] amplificare <i>B</i> sepem] spem <i>post corr. C</i> illum fontem] fontem illum <i>B P</i> 129 Erantque] Erant <i>L C</i> , Erant igitur <i>B</i> 130 curriculis] circulis <i>B</i> efficerentur] efficiuntur <i>H</i> etiam] autem <i>D</i> 131 unite] iuncte <i>H P</i> semper] <i>om. B</i> 132 penitus] <i>om. B</i> quapropter] quam propter <i>D</i> 134 illius] sancte <i>add. F</i> esset] <i>om. F</i> conglutinata] congregatus <i>H</i>

135	Sic ergo cypressus radicata cum cedro et pino, cedrus etiam et pinus cum cypresso, argenteo adunate cum circulo, arbor una sunt effecte; licet semper in summitate in tres fuissent partes diuise ob significacionem sancte trinitatis, uel ad demonstrationem cuius essent generis. Cum ergo unus transisset annus, eundem
140	circulum dilatauit rex gloriosus, ut arbor inde grossior esset; aliumque circulum superius innexuit, ut excelsior fieret. Sic ergo rex gloriosus per triginta faciens annos, et argenteos dilatauit, ut arbor dilataretur, eosque adauxit, ut illa extenderetur. Concreuerunt ergo in latum et in longum simul in una radice et in
145	una arboris commixtione cypressus, cedrus, et pinus, facteque sunt arbor mire magnitudinis, frondifera, fructifera, salutifera, omnibusque lignis Libani excelsior, fronde, flore, et germine nobilior. Daud autem rex quadraginta annis super Israel regnauit et decimo regiminis sui anno istud salutare lignum in Ierusalem plantauit, et triginta residuis annis
§ 8: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	135 Sic] Sicut <i>C</i> cedro et pino] pino et cedro <i>D</i> , et pino cedro <i>post corr.</i> <i>C</i> 136 cum cypress] cipresso <i>B</i> adunate] adiuuante <i>H P</i> cum circulo] circulo <i>F P</i> 137 sunt effecte] effecte sunt <i>P</i> fuissent partes] partes fuissent <i>F</i> 138 uel] ut <i>H</i> 139 unus] annus <i>P</i> annus] <i>om.</i> <i>P</i> 140 arbor] <i>om.</i> <i>C</i> 141 alium que circulum] alium circulumque <i>P</i> superius] inferius <i>add. inter lineas H</i> innexuit] nexuit <i>add. inter lineas H</i> ergo] audaxit <i>add. D</i> 142 argenteos] circulos <i>add. P</i> 142/143 rex...adauxit] <i>om. D</i> 143 arbor] <i>om. L C</i> adauxit] aduxit <i>B</i> , adduxit <i>H</i> , adausit <i>P</i> Concreuerunt] Cum creuerunt <i>F</i> 144 latum et in longum] longo et in latum <i>H</i> 145 et] <i>om. P</i> facteque sunt] facte sunt <i>H</i> , facte <i>L C</i> 146 arbor] <i>om. F</i> magnitudinis] frondofolia <i>add. P</i> fructifera] <i>om. P</i> omnibusque] omnibus <i>C P</i> 147 lignis] lignisque <i>C</i> 148 super] supra <i>P</i> 149 salutare] salutifere <i>B H</i>

150	creuit, et rex frequenter illuc perrexit, ibique diu extensis manibus in oratione perstitit.
155	§ 9. At ubi arbor sancta ceperat fructificare, mox et Daud cepit impensas congregare, ut ualeret domum dei edificare. Cumque omnes impensas haberet congregatas, apparuit ei dominus dicens: ‘Tu mihi quidem domum non edificabis, sed Salomon, filius tuus, quia tu uir bellator es et sanguinem fundens.’
160	§ 10. Daud autem, ut hoc audiuit, continuo omnes principes Israel conuocauit, tribunos etiam et centuriones, et omnes filios suos, dixitque ad eos, “Audite me, fratres mei et populus. Ecce cogitauit, ut edificarem domum, in qua requiesceret archa federis domini. Cunctisque ad edificandum preparatis, dixit mihi dominus, ‘Tu quidem mihi domum non edificabis, eo quod uir bellator sis et sanguinem fuderis; sed Salomon, filius tuus, edificabit domum meam, quia ipsum elegi mihi in filium, et ego ero ei in patrem et firmabo
§ 8: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	150 illuc] illud <i>F</i> 151 perstitit] persistit <i>F</i>
§ 9: <i>L F B D P C H</i>	
	152 At ubi] Cum <i>H</i> mox et] moxque <i>P</i> 153 dei] domini <i>F</i> 153/154 ut...congregatas] <i>om.</i> Adunauit uero omnia que sunt tante domui necessaria infra .xiiii. annos, uidelicet gemmas, aurum compositum, argentum purgatum, structuras lapidum, ligna et quecumque essent necessaria. Cumque incipere uellet opus suum. <i>add. H</i> 155 mihi quidem] quidem mihi <i>F B</i> <i>H</i> 156 quia...fundens] <i>om. H</i> fundens] fondens <i>P</i>
§ 10: <i>L F B D P C</i>	
	157 hoc] haec <i>D</i> 158 etiam] <i>om. F B</i> 159 dixitque] et dixit <i>P</i> Audite...populus] <i>om. F</i> 161 preparatis] paratis <i>B</i> 162 sis] es <i>F D</i> 163 fuderis] fundens <i>F</i> 164 mihi] <i>om. B</i> ei] illi <i>F P</i>

165	regnum eius in eternum.”” Dixitque ad Salomonem, filium suum, Si in perceptis meis ambulauerit et iudicia mea sicut hodie custodierit: ‘Nunc ergo Salomon fili mi si quesieris dominum inuenies eum. et si dereliqueris eum proiciet te in eternum. Elegit enim te dominus, ut edificares domum suam; quapropter 170 confortare et perface illam.’ Post hec igitur dedit Daud filio suo Salomoni descriptionem porticus et templi et cellariorum. ¹⁴ Perfecta est igitur domus domini septem annis in omnibus utensilibus suis, et undecim annis est perfecta domus regis cumque ergo trabes ponerentur in domo domini per 175 circuitum forinsecus, ut non hererent templi muris. Experti sunt operarii unam defuisse trabem, moxque totam illam circumibant regionem, inquirentes aliam, sed minime tantam inuenientes arborem, reuersi sunt uacui ad regem. Cumque rex super hoc maximam haberet tristitiam, suaserunt eum magistri operum, ut salutiferam
§ 10: <i>L F B D P C</i> ; <i>R N M</i> (beginning l. 172)	
	<p>165 regnum eius] eius regnum <i>D C</i> 165 Dixitque...suum] <i>om. F B D P</i> 166/168 Si...eternum] <i>om. L D C</i> 166 sicut] <i>om. P</i> 167 dominum] <i>om. P</i> 170 dedit] <i>om. B</i> 170/171 Post...cellariorum] <i>om. P</i> 171 Salomoni] dedit <i>add. B</i> cellariorum] celauorum <i>F</i> 172 Perfecta] [P]erfecta <i>M</i> domini] <i>om. B</i> 173 et] cum <i>add. D</i> est] <i>om. N</i> est perfecta] perfecta est <i>M</i> cumque] ergo <i>add. B N</i> annis...cumque] <i>om. L F D C P</i> 174 ponerentur] posite sunt <i>C</i> 175 forinsecus] extrinsecus <i>P</i> hererent] inherent <i>R, om. P</i> ut...muris] <i>om. B</i> 176 operarii] operari <i>F</i> unam] una <i>D N</i> moxque] per <i>add. R</i> circumibant] circuibant <i>D N</i> 177 inquirentes] inquirantes <i>P</i> aliam] unam <i>F R, eam D</i> tantam] <i>om. R N</i> 178 reuersi sunt uacui] uacui reuersi sunt <i>N M</i> 178/179 Cumque...salutiferam] <i>om. R N M</i> 179 eum] ei <i>D</i></p>

¹⁴ A short passage, consisting mainly of quotations from the bible, was omitted here following Napier. It recounts the collection of materials and the building of the temple.

180	succideret arborem in hortulo Daud, patris sui, stantem, eo quod non haberet aliam. Tunc iussit rex arborem illam succidere, et ad necessitatem operis facere, atque triginta argenteos precepit de illa sancta arbore tollere et in templo domini suspendere, patri suo ad memoriam sibique ad honorem. Appropinquante igitur
185	passione Christi, Iudei tulerunt illos ipsos triginta argenteos circulos de domo domini et dederunt infelici Iude pro eisdem Christi tradicionem. § 11. Illa enim sancta arbor antequam succideretur, cunctis trabibus longior uno cubito uidebatur et duobus cubitis postquam succidebatur. Formata igitur trabes ad templum portabatur et,
190	dum sursum trahebatur, duobus cubitis breuior uidebatur, et ideo statim deponebatur, et deposita, dum iterum mensurabatur, duobus cubitis longior uidebatur. Post hec igitur frequenter extrahitur et iterum deponitur, quia semper in terra uidebatur duobus cubitis longior et dum sursum erat, duobus cubitis breuior.
§ 10: <i>L F B D P C R N M</i>	
	180/181 succideret...aliam] <i>om. R N M</i> 181 haberet] haberent <i>P</i> illam] preciosam <i>add. N M</i> 182 facere] parare <i>R</i> , ponere <i>N M</i> atque] ipse quoque <i>N M</i> , ipse quorum et <i>R B</i> argenteos] circulos <i>add. ante L D</i> 183 sancta arbore] arbore sancta <i>B M P</i> suspendere] ponere <i>N</i> 184 sibique] et <i>D C</i> honorem] sibi (<i>post corr.</i>) <i>add. L</i> , sibique <i>add. D C</i> Appropinquante] [A]ppropinquante <i>M</i> igitur] ergo <i>D</i> 185 illos] eos <i>B</i> ipsos] <i>om. R D N M</i> argenteos] <i>om. R</i> 186 pro] per <i>F</i> Christi tradicionem] traditionem Christi <i>F</i> , traditione Christi <i>N M</i>
§ 11: <i>L F B D P C H R N M</i>	
	187 enim] <i>om. R</i> , autem <i>H P</i> , ergo <i>N M</i> sancta arbor] arbor sancta <i>H</i> 187/188 cunctis trabibus] trabibus cunctis <i>B</i> 188 longior] erat <i>add. H</i> uno cubito] cubito uno <i>H</i> 189/190 Formata...trahebatur] <i>bis scripsit ante corr. P</i> 190/191 breuior...duobus] <i>om. L</i> 190/192 et ideo...uidebatur] <i>om. D</i> breuior...uidebatur] <i>om. C</i> 191 dum iterum] <i>om. P</i> , iterum dum <i>N M</i> 192 longior] <i>om. F R B</i> uidebatur] <i>om. H</i> hec] hoc <i>P</i> igitur] ergo <i>L C</i> extrahitur] extrahebatur <i>P</i> 193 quia...longior] <i>om. L F D C H P</i> uidebatur] <i>om. M</i> breuior] uidebatur <i>add. L H</i>

195	Sic et sic arbor sancta creuit et decreuit, quia nichil ad illud opus pertinuit, sed ante mundi constitutionem predestinata est ad Christi crucem. His ita gestis iussit rex Salomon quamtotius ire et aliam arborem requirere, et inuenta est alia ipsa die, et preparatur sine ulla dilatazione et ponitur in murorum summitate, 200 fuitque ualde conueniens cunctis aliis trabibus. § 12. Postea ergo iacuit arbor sancta in templo domini usque ad passionem domini nostri Iesu Christi. Salomon autem perfecit domum domini septem annis cum omnibus utensilibus suis, sicut antea diximus; eiusque dedicationem celebrauit quatuordecim diebus et 205 postea dimisit populos. ¹⁵ § 13. Regnauit autem Salomon quadraginta annis et postea dormiuit cum patribus suis. Semperque postea in templo domini iacuit arbor sancta, de qua superius audiuit caritas uestra, donec ex ea formata est crux sancta, de qua floruit redemptio nostra.
§ 11: <i>L F B D P C H R N M</i>	
	195 Sic ¹] Sed <i>B</i> sic ²] <i>om. M</i> arbor sancta] sancta arbor <i>D N</i> nichil ad illud] ad illud nichil <i>L R D C</i> 196 opus] <i>om. L F C</i> constitutionem] predestinationem <i>add. ante corr. P</i> 197 His] Hiis <i>N M</i> ita] itaque <i>H N M</i> gestis] dictis <i>F</i> iussit] <i>om. H</i> rex] <i>om. F R</i> quamtotius] quamcitius <i>F N M</i> 198 aliam arborem requirere] requirere aliam arborem <i>P</i> requirere] querere <i>H</i> alia] illa <i>F B N P</i> , ea <i>H</i> ipsa] <i>om. R N M</i> die] quedam arbor eadem <i>add. ante R</i> , quam <i>add. ante M</i> 199 preparatur] preparata est <i>R N M</i> , preparata <i>B</i> dilatazione] dubitatione <i>L C</i> ponitur] ponita <i>R</i> , posita <i>B N M</i> 200 fuitque] fuit <i>F R B N M</i> ualde] autem <i>add. ante R B N M</i>
§ 12: <i>L F B D P C R N M</i>	
	201 ergo] autem <i>R</i> , uero <i>D</i> , <i>om. P</i> arbor sancta] sancta arbor <i>N</i> 202 domini nostri] <i>om. P</i> Salomon] [S]alomon <i>M</i> 202/205 Salomon...populos] <i>om. P</i> 203 sicut] sic <i>F</i> 204 quatuordecim] .xii. <i>L D C</i>
§ 13: <i>L F B D P C</i> ; <i>R N M</i> (these three MSS end with l. 209 after <i>redemptio nostra</i>)	
	207 postea in templo domini iacuit] iacuit postea in templo domini <i>F</i> domini] <i>om. B N</i> postea] <i>om. P</i> 209 floruit] refluoruit <i>R</i>

¹⁵ A brief account of Solomon's wealth (mainly quotations from the bible) was left out, following Napier.

210	Multaque per illam arborem facta sunt miracula, de quibus nunc pandere libet aliqua. Erat autem quidam sacerdos nomine Ciritius, illam sanctam arborem habere desiderans; misitque centum uiros, ut illam tollerent et ad se deferrent. Cumque illi centum non possent illam mouere, cepit ipse sacerdos illuc uenire cum innumerabili
215	plebis multitudine. Sed dum illi omnes non possent adhuc illam mouere, conati sunt illam in tres partes succidere; sed mox magnus exortus est ignis in circuitu sancte trabis, et exiliens ipsum combussit sacerdotem et cum eo sexaginta hominum ex eis qui uoluerunt illam sanctam succidere arborem; et reliqui fugiendo uix
220	euaserunt mortem. Tale quidem signum per hoc factum est lignum, et ideo in templo domini iacebat intactum, donec gloriosum Christi patibulum ex illa erat formatum. § 14. Adhuc ergo libet amplius narrare de eadem sancta arbore. Erat igitur quedam femina, Sabilla, que etiam dum templum
§ 13: <i>L F B D P C R N M</i>	
	210 arborem] <i>om. D</i> 211 nomine Ciritius] Ciritius nomine <i>D</i> Ciritius] Cyrinus <i>B</i> , Curricius <i>P</i> 212 sanctam] <i>om. L C</i> habere desiderans] desiderans habere <i>P</i> 213 deferrent] afferent <i>P</i> possent] ad huc <i>add. F</i> 215 Sed dum] Cumque <i>B</i> illi] <i>om. L</i> adhuc illam] illam adhuc <i>B D</i> 216 illam] <i>om. B</i> 217 circuitu] cirumitu <i>L</i> 217/218 combussit sacerdotem] sacerdotem combussit <i>L</i> , cumbussit ipsum sacerdotem <i>P</i> 218 uoluerunt] uolebant <i>P</i> 220 lignum] ligno <i>P</i>
§ 14: <i>L F B D P C</i>	
	223 ergo] uero <i>D</i> eadem] <i>om. F</i> 224 igitur] <i>om. B</i> femina] femima <i>B</i> Sabilla] Sibilla <i>F D P</i>

225	domini esset ingressa, negligenter super illam sanctam trabem resedit. Moxque ignis de illa trabe ascendit et uestimenta eius retro combussit; illaque, ualde ardens, exclamauit dicens: ‘O, arbor sancta et gloriosa, quam felix es et benedicta, quia in te crucifigendus est Christus, qui est omnium uita et salus.’ Nesciuit
230	enim, quid dixit, sed ita prophetare debuit. Moxque ignis ab ea discessit et penitus euanuit. Audientes igitur Iudei quia nominasset Christum, pene usque ad mortem flagellabant eam, et postea missa est in carcerem. Angelus autem domini adueniens consolabatur eam dicens: ‘Confortare et penas imminentes noli timere,
235	quia tibi parata est corona leticie, et iam non uocaberis Sabilla, sed Susanna, quia a domino ualde es dilecta et post modicum tempus celica percipies gaudia.’ Et hec dicens reuolauit ad celos, et postea sancta Susanna gladio percussa migrauit ad dominum; ibique nostri memor sit in eternum.
§ 14: <i>L F B D P C</i>	
	225 trabem resedit] resedit trabem <i>F P</i> sanctam] <i>om. B</i> 226 trabe] trabem <i>F</i> eius] illius <i>D</i> 227 combussit] cumbussit <i>P</i> 230 ita] <i>om. F</i> ea] <i>eo D, post corr. L</i> 231 quia] quod <i>F D P</i> quia] illa <i>add. B</i> 232 et] <i>om. F</i> 233 autem] autem autem <i>F</i> 234 noli] nolite <i>F</i> 235 leticie] leticieque <i>P</i> Sabilla] Sibilla <i>F D</i> , Sibila <i>P</i> 236 a] <i>om. B</i> ualde es] es ualde <i>B</i> a domino ualde es dilecta] ualde es a domino dilecta <i>P</i> 237 hec] hoc <i>P</i> celos] celosque <i>P</i>

240	§ 15. Post hec igitur, transactis multis annorum curriculis, dum instabat tempus Christi passionis, infelices Iudei nullam poterant inuenire arborem, in qua uellent suspendere ipsum mundi saluatorem. Quapropter Caiphas trecentos misit Iudeos, ut sanctam arborem de templo domini tollerent et ad se quanto citius deferrent. Illi 245 autem festinantes illuc uenerunt, sed nullatenus illam sanctam arborem mouere potuerunt. Tunc Cayphas precepit, ut iterum pergerent, ut ex ea decem ulnas absciderent et de illa parte Christi crucem componerent. Fecit ergo populus, sicut precepit Cayphas, et festinanter crux Christi preparatur, et ab ipso domino 250 Iesu Christo de templo portatur, ipseque dominus Iesus Christus in ea crucifigitur, sicut in lectione euuangelica dicitur.
	§ 16. Sic enim sancta crux Christi erat operata de illa arbore sancta; et in templo domini iacuit reliqua pars illius sancte arboris usque ad tempus Constantini imperatoris. Ipse autem
§ 15: <i>L F B D P C</i> (<i>C</i> breaks off at l. 250 after <i>Iesus Christus</i>)	
	240 hec igitur] hoc uero <i>D</i> curriculis] circulis <i>B</i> 241 Christi passionis] passionis Christi <i>F</i> poterant] <i>om. L C</i> inuenire] inuenere <i>L D C</i> 243 Caiphas] Cayphas <i>F P</i> , Chaiphas <i>B</i> 246 mouere] inuenire <i>F</i> 246 Cayphas] Caiphas <i>B</i> 247 ut] et <i>P</i> 249 Cayphas] Caiphas <i>B</i> crux Christi] Christi crux <i>F</i> preparatur] erat parata <i>B</i> 250 templo] domini <i>add. B</i> portatur] portata <i>B</i> ipseque] nam et idem <i>B</i> dominus] noster <i>add. B</i> 251 crucifigitur] crucifigatur <i>L F D</i> Sicut] Sic <i>D P</i> lectione euuangelica] euuangelica lectione <i>P</i>
§ 16: <i>L F B D P H</i>	
	252 sancta ¹] <i>post corr. L, om. H</i> sancta ²] sacra <i>D</i> de...sancta] <i>om. H</i> 253 sancte arboris] arboris sancte <i>D</i> et...arboris] relique uero pars illius sancte arboris in templo portabatur et ibi iacuit <i>H</i> 254 Constantini] Costantini <i>P</i>

255	Constantinus, dum imperatoriam susceperat dignitatem, misit ad Ierusalem sanctam matrem suam, Helenam, que etiam inquisiuit sanctam Christi crucem constanter, unde meruit et illam uidere ouanter, sicut sermo diuinus testatur, qui in eiusdem sancte crucis inuencione recitatur. Postquam igitur sancta crux Christi erat inuenta,
260	ingressa est templum domini beata Helena, moxque ut sancte arboris partem uidit, interrogauit quid hoc esset, aut unde uenisset et responsum acceperat, quod ex illa arbore remaneret, de qua crux Christi facta erat. Tunc beata Helena cepit deum rogare, ut dignaretur sibi manifestare, quidnam deberet
265	facere de illa sancta arbore. Et ecce apparuit ei angelus domini in sompnis ita dicens: ‘O beata Helena, iam nunc exaudita est oratio tua, quapropter diluculo precipe sanctam illam arborem in quatuor partes succidere, illasque quatuor sectiones diuidere per quatuor partes orbis terre.’ Fecit ergo beata Helena sicut in sompnis est
§ 16: <i>L F B D P H</i>	
	255 susceperat] susciperet <i>D</i> 256 matrem suam Helenam] Helenam matrem suam <i>B</i> 257 Christi crucem] crucem Chrisit <i>D</i> 258 sicut] sic <i>D</i> diuinus] diuinit <i>F</i> qui] quum <i>D</i> in eiusdem] <i>om. D</i> sancte] de <i>add. ante D</i> 259 igitur] ergo <i>L H P</i> erat inuenta] inuenta est <i>F</i> 260 est] <i>om. L</i> 262 acceperat] accepit <i>D</i> 264 deum] dominum <i>D</i> 265 angelus domini] domini angelus <i>B P</i> domini] <i>om. F</i> 266 ita dicens] dicens ita <i>D</i> Helena] Elena <i>P</i> exaudita est] <i>bis scripsit L</i> 268 succidere] diuidere <i>P</i> sectiones] partes <i>D</i> 268/269 succidere...partes] <i>om. L</i> 269 orbis] <i>om. F</i> terre] diuidere <i>add. L</i> ergo] <i>om. P</i> Fecit...est] <i>om. D</i>

270	<p>amonita; nam unam partem dimisit in Ierusalem, et alteram</p> <p>misit ad Romam, terciam partem misit ad Alexandriam, atque quartam secum</p> <p>portauit ad Constantinopolim, dum detulit ad filium suum Constantinum</p> <p>illam sancte crucis Christi medietatem. In ipsa etenim cruce sancta</p> <p>tria fuerunt ligna: unum erectum, et aliud transuersum est et tertium super</p> <p>275 caput Christi positum, in quo etiam fuit scriptum: ‘Hic est Iesus rex Iudeorum.’</p> <p>Nunc ergo illud unum est in Ierusalem, et aliud in Constantinopolim,</p> <p>queque adhuc in illis locis sunt ita integra sicut fuerunt operata; nobis</p> <p>autem manet incognitum ubi sit tertium, quod erat scriptum.</p> <p>De istis autem duobus sanctis lignis pauci habent homines uel</p> <p>280 nullus; sed de illa arbore multi habent homines, et in diuersis</p> <p>est locis, quam angelus domini iussit in quatuor partes diuidere et</p> <p>per quatuor mundi partes mittere, et dicitur quod sit de sancta</p> <p>Christi cruce, et recte dici potest ita, quia crux Christi de arbore</p> <p>illa erat facta, et arbor illa de cruce Christi sanctificata uere</p>
§ 16: <i>L F B D P H</i>	
	<p>270 amonita] sic enim factum est <i>B</i> dimisit in Ierusalem] in Ierusalem dimisit <i>D</i> alteram] aliam <i>D</i> 271 terciam] autem <i>add. B</i> partem] <i>om. L F H</i> ad] <i>om. L</i> atque] <i>om. B</i> quartam] partem <i>add. P</i> 272 portauit] et <i>add. P</i> dum] deinde <i>P</i> detulit] attulit <i>L</i>, tulit <i>P</i> suum] <i>om. F</i> 273 medietatem] mediatorem <i>L</i> In ipsa etenim] <i>om. H</i> ipsa] medietatem <i>add. P</i> cruce sancta] sancta cruce <i>L F</i> 274 et¹] <i>om. P</i> est] <i>om. B</i> 274/275 <i>om. H</i> 275 caput Christi] Christi corpus <i>P</i> Christi] <i>om. L D</i> etiam fuit] fuit etiam <i>F</i> etiam] <i>om. P</i> 276 ergo] igitur <i>D H P</i> est] <i>om. P</i> aliud] <i>om. F</i> Constantinopolim] Constinopolim <i>L H P</i>, Constantinopoli <i>B</i> 277 queque] quamquam <i>F</i>, que <i>H</i> 277 illis locis] <i>om. P</i> locis] adhuc <i>H</i> sunt] <i>om. B</i> ita] locis <i>D</i>, illa <i>P</i> integra] integer <i>F</i> integra...operata] <i>om. D</i> 279 istis] illis <i>B</i> duobus sanctis] sanctis duobus <i>H</i> sanctis] scissis <i>D</i> homines] <i>om. B P</i> uel] aut <i>D H</i> 279/280 uel...homines] <i>om. L</i> 281 est] sunt <i>L</i>, <i>om. D</i> est locis] locis est <i>P</i> quam] quia <i>D</i> diuidere] mittere <i>D</i> et] <i>om. D</i> 282 mundi] <i>om. L</i> mundi partes] partes mundi <i>H</i> per...mittere] <i>om. D</i> sit] sint <i>L</i>, <i>om. D</i> 283 recte] bene <i>F</i> 284 cruce Christi] Christi cruce <i>D H P</i> uere] uero <i>H P</i></p>

285	mirabiliter oriri cepit, et mirabilius creuit, atque per eam multa facta sunt signa, antequam esset corpore Christi dedicata, et ideo ueraciter potest credi quod tota sit crux Christi. § 17. Postquam igitur inuenta est crux Christi, et declarata per resurrexionem mortui, inuenti sunt et sancti clauī, 290 cum quibus affixum est corpus Christi. Et ecce iterum angelus domini ad beatam Helenam uenit in sompnis ita dicens: ‘Accipe caluos sanctos, et fac de illis saliuares, et in freno equi regis pone illos, quia magnas habent uirtutes et multum ualent contra omnium hostium incursus.’ Tunc beata Helena fecit, sicut ei angelus 295 domini precepit, et sic preparatum frenum deduxit ad ciuitatem Constantinopolim et tradidit filio suo uenerando imperatori Constantino. Ille igitur imperator quocumque iuit, semper illud sanctum frenum in equo suo posuit, et exiliuit de ore eius equi tanquam flamma ignis, unde et omnes qui hoc uidebant miraculum
§ 16: <i>L F B D P H</i>	
	285/286 multa facta sunt signa] multa signa facta fuerunt <i>L</i> 286 antequam...ideo] <i>om. D</i> esset] in <i>add. L</i> 287 ueraciter] quod <i>add. ante D</i> potest credi] credi potest <i>H</i> quod...Christi] <i>om. D</i>
§ 17: <i>L F B D P H</i>	
	288 igitur] <i>om. F</i> Christi] <i>om. H</i> 289 mortui] mormortui <i>P</i> et ¹] <i>om. F</i> et ²] <i>om. L</i> sancti clauī] clauī sancti <i>D P</i> 290/291 angelus domini] domini angelus <i>B P</i> 291 Helenam uenit] uenit Helenam <i>B H P</i> uenit] <i>om. F</i> 292 illis] ipsis <i>P</i> et ²] <i>om. B</i> 293 habent] <i>om.</i> <i>H</i> ualent] ualet <i>D H, om. P</i> 294 hostium incursus] incursus hostium <i>P</i> ei] <i>om. L F D</i> 295 domini] <i>om. D</i> et sic] sicut <i>H</i> 296/297 imperatori Constantino] Constantino imperatori <i>H</i> 297 quocumque iuit] <i>om. D</i> 298 exiliuit] exiuit <i>L H</i> , exiluit <i>D</i> , exilium <i>F</i> eius equi] equi eius <i>F D P</i> , equi regis <i>B</i> 299 unde et] et unde <i>P</i> hoc uidebant] uidebant hoc <i>H</i>

300	conuersi sunt ad dominum propter illius uisionis horrorem. Rex ergo, ut tantum uidit miraculum, totam illam circuit regionem, omnesque conuertit ad dominum sanctorum terrore clauorum, et postea rediit Constantinopolim. Et post explicionem trium annorum et secundum ammonicionem angelicam sanctos clauos de suo abstulit
305	freno illosque affixit in sancte crucis ligno; ibique habentur magno honore. § 18. O quam clara beate Helene merita, cui a domino tanta concessa est gratia, ut per eius studiosam inquisitionem thesaurus esset inuentus, quod diu fuit absconditum, crux uidelicet sancta, crux gloriosa et adoranda, lignum preciosum et admirabile
310	signum, per quod salutis sumpsimus sacramentum et confractis tartareis claustris, aperta est nobis ianua regni celestis. Ipsa etiam felix et uere beata Helena post inuencionem sancte crucis meruit sanctos inuenire clauos, cum quibus dominicum confixum erat corpus; fecitque eos saliuares, et posuit eos in freno equi regis,
§ 17: <i>L F B D P H</i>	
	300 illius uisionis] uisionis illius <i>H</i> illius] <i>om. L</i> horrorem] honorem <i>D</i> 301 tantum] iterum <i>P</i> illam circuit] circuiuit illam <i>L H</i> circuit] circuiuit <i>B</i> , circumiuit <i>D</i> 303 Et ¹] <i>om. F H P</i> explicionem] autem <i>add. B</i> et ²] <i>om. B H</i> 304 abstulit] abstulisset <i>P</i> 305 sancte] sancto <i>H</i> ligno] lignum <i>L</i> magno honore] honore magno <i>B P</i>
§ 18: <i>L B D H; F</i> (ends at l. 314 after <i>corpus</i>)	
	306 clara] preclara <i>F</i> beate Helene] beata Helena <i>F</i> a domino] <i>om. D</i> 308 thesaurus] thesaurum <i>B D H</i> inuentus] inuentum <i>B D</i> quod diu] diu quod <i>F</i> diu] domini <i>D</i> quod] qui <i>H</i> absconditum] absconditus <i>H</i> 309 sancta] <i>om. D</i> preciosum] preciosium <i>H</i> 311 tataris] tartaris <i>F H</i> etiam] enim <i>H</i> 312 uere] <i>om. H</i> post] pro <i>D</i> inuencionem] inuencione <i>B</i> 312/313 sanctos inuenire] inuenire sanctos <i>H</i> 313 confixum erat corpus] infixum erat corpus <i>L</i> , est confixum corpus <i>F</i> , confixum est corpus <i>B</i> , corpus confixum est <i>D</i>

315	sicut supradiximus. Veniens autem beata Helena ad filium suum Constantinum, dedit ei frenum sanctis clauorum magnaliis adornatum; et rex ipse quocienscumque equitabat, semper illud sanctum frenum in equo suo ponebat, sicut ab angelo sancto ei preceptum fuerat. Si enim hoc angelus domini non perciperet,
320	nequaquam rex sic facere presumeret. Maximum ergo habebant timorem et stuporem omnes qui uidebant regem equitantem, quia plus quam per unum miliarium quaqua uersum poterat uideri flamma et choruscatio, que procedebat de ore illius equi. O uere felicem et beatum
325	imperatorem, qui tantam sortitus est gratiam prerogatiuam, ut nullus mereretur ante eum nec post tam sanctum habere frenum. Nam in spacio trium annorum multa milia hominum conuersi sunt ad dominum per sacrum illius freni fulgorem atque choruscacionem. Expletis igitur trium curriculis annorum, angelus domini ad
§ 18: <i>L B D H</i>	
	315 filium suum] suum filium <i>H</i> 316 sanctis] <i>om. D</i> 318 sanctum] <i>om. D</i> 319 Si] Nisi <i>L</i> enim hoc] hoc enim <i>L</i> domini] non <i>add. L</i> Si...perciperet] <i>om. D</i> 320 <i>om. D H</i> 321 ergo] uero <i>H</i> 322 omnes] omnis <i>B</i> plus quam] <i>om. D</i> 323 quaqua] <i>om. H</i> , quacunque <i>B</i> uersum] <i>om. D</i> poterat uideri] uidebatur <i>H</i> 324 de] ex <i>D</i> 325 sortitus] fortitus <i>B</i> est] gratiam <i>add. D</i> prerogatiuam] dignitatem <i>add. B</i> 326 mereretur] meruit <i>H</i> post] eum <i>add. B</i> 327 hominum conuersi sunt] conuersa sunt hominum <i>D</i> 328 sacrum] sacri <i>B</i> 329 igitur] uero <i>B</i> , ergo <i>D</i> curriculis] circulis <i>B</i>

330	eundem dixit imperatorem: ‘Nunc ergo habes expletam dei uoluntatem iamque prope est tempus tuum. Quapropter rediens uenire debes ad Constantinopolim.’ Audiens igitur hoc imperator Constantinus fecit sicut ab angelo est ammonitus, iussit clauos dominicos de freno equi sui tollere et in sancta Christi cruce 335 reponere, ibique usque hodie maxima habentur ueneracione. § 19. Hec ergo, fratres karissimi, ideo repetere curauimus, ut magis nota essent omnibus audientibus. Mirabiliter etenim cepit oriri arbor sancta, de qua facta est crux Christi adoranda; et mirabilius apparuit Moysi, famulo dei, per tres continuas 340 noctes. Atque adhuc mirabilius in terra stetit usque ad tempus Dauid regis nichil crescens neque uiriditatem uel foliorum uel teneritudinem perdens, sed per omnia sic permansit, sicut Moysi primo apparuit, donec Dauid sanctus meruit illam de loco suo transferre et in ortulo suo reponere. Ibi enim erat crescens ita ut in triginta annis
§ 18: <i>L B D H</i>	
	330 Nunc ergo] Nec uero <i>D</i> dei uoluntatem] uoluntatem dei <i>H</i> dei] domini <i>D</i> 332 igitur] ergo <i>D</i> hoc] hec <i>H</i> 333 iussit] iussitque <i>B</i> 334 Christi cruce] cruce Christi <i>B</i>
§ 19: <i>L B D H</i>	
	336 ergo] igitur <i>B</i> ideo] <i>om. B</i> 337 essent] ab <i>add. D</i> audientibus] odientibus <i>ante corr. L</i> 338 etenim] <i>om. D</i> , ergo <i>B</i> sancta] sacra <i>D</i> 339 mirabilius] mirabiliter <i>D</i> dei] domini <i>D</i> 339/340 continuas noctes] noctes continuas <i>H</i> 340 mirabilius] <i>om. B</i> , mirabiliter <i>D</i> 341 uel ¹] <i>om. B</i> uel ²] <i>om. L</i> uel foliorum uel teneritudinem] <i>om. D</i> 342 sed] sic <i>D</i> sic] <i>om. D</i> Moysi] Moisy <i>H</i> 344 ortulo] loco <i>D</i> erat] ita <i>add. B</i> ita] <i>om. D</i>

345	efficeretur arbor grandis. Daudid autem illam plantauit, et Salomon filius eius illam succidit, eo quod non haberet unam trabem, dum construeret gloriosum Christi templum. Illa siquidem arbor sancta, dum fuisset succisa, nullo modo potuit ad opus decretum aptari, quia prefinita est ad crucem Christi ante mundi constitutionem,
350	sicut superius audistis, fratres karissimi. Ista ergo lectio iam nunc sit ita terminata, ne forte audientibus uideatur esse fastidiosa; et nunc in hac leccionis clausula magna ad dominum clamemus instancia omnique diligencia et perseuerancia, ut dignetur nos purgare sua consueta clemencia ab omni peccatorum inmundicia,
355	et cuncta ministrare sancta et prospera, nunc per omnia seculorum secula. Amen. Explicit.
§ 19: <i>L D H; B</i> (ends l. 345 after <i>efficeretur arbor grandis</i>)	
	346 illam] eam <i>H</i> trabem] tuberem <i>D</i> 349 aptari] <i>post corr. L</i> mundi constitutionem] constitutionem mundi <i>D</i> 351 sit ita] ita sit <i>D</i> audientibus uideatur] uideatur audientibus <i>L</i> 353 clamemus] conclamemus <i>D</i> 355 prospera] et <i>add. H</i> 356 Explicit] <i>om. D</i>

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